Summary

In which Sollux Captor, troll of many curses including the most cursed love life, falls hard in pale pity for Dayvhe, apparently the planet's least romanceable troll. In which Dayvhe himself is basically more secret vault than troll at this point and generally wishes that everyone else would just chill the fuck out for once.

Contains slow burn 'will they/won't they' pale rom, frankly scandalising pale displays, a best friendship for the ages, highly illegal non-quadrant romance, polyamorous non-quadranted romance, inadvisable body mods, poor decisions and revolutionary content. Contains more plot than strictly needed comprising of shocking revelations, intergenerational hoofbeastshit, and outright rebellion. Unsuitable for trolls seven sweeps and under.

Notes

The playlist for this fic can be found here
https://open.spotify.com/user/meunda/playlist/1u0p3JWLliYayRu5hVMetoSw?
si=VcMgCwb4TMCqVgzv_2ibaQ

If you want to follow my twitter and see other things I post it's @UndaNewNeon
You hear about Dayvhe long before you meet him. He’s Karkat Vantas’ full time crush, not that your best friend can decide whether he wants to kiss the guy or whether he wants to bite his face off. Honestly the guy flip flops on the matter so much you think there should be a way to connect him to the power grid, that level of vacillation could keep your whole city alight.

[carcinoGeneticist began trolling twinArmageddons]
CG: SOLUX PLEASE HELP ME OUT HERE.
CG: MY STUPID DUMBASS DATE FOR IDIOTS WHO COULDN’T PLAN THEIR WAY OUT OF A WET PAPER BAG RAN ON TOO LONG AND NOW ME AND DAYVHE ARE GOING TO GET FRIED IF YOU DON’T LET US IN.
TA: you’re running pretty close two unup can’t you ju2t get a hotel? paiil your 2tupiid cru2h iintwo at lea2t one quadrant already?
CG: DON’T TAUNT ME.
CG: IF YOU MUST KNOW I BLEW ALL BUT MY COMMUNAL SCUTTLEBUGGY FARE TRYING TO IMPRESS HIM IN SOME STUPID RIGGED GAME. AND HE SAYS HE DOESN’T HAVE ANY MONEY EITHER AND I DON’T KNOW WHERE HE LIVES.
TA: how do you not know where the guy live2? haven't you been talking two hiim for liike a 2weep or more?
CG: HE’S SECRETIVE AS ALL HELL, OKAY?!?
TA: you don’t even know roughly how far out from here he liive2?
CG: NO AND AS FUN AS PROVING HOW LITTLE I KNOW ABOUT MY CRUSH IS CAN YOU LET US IN OR NOT?!
TA: yeah, geez, buzz when you get here and i’ll let you two up.
CG: THANK YOU.
[carcinoGeneticist ceased trolling twinArmageddons]

When Karkat and Dayvhe fall through your door panting and laughing to themselves you get a good look at him.

“That was majorly fucking close, dude.” Dayvhe laughs, shoving his shoulder against Karkat and combing his hand through his hair. It’s pretty neatly styled, not in a slick formal way but in the way of someone trying very hard to look like they’re not trying at all. His horns are a spiral/counter spiral set that remind you of Aradia, not helped by the rust symbol on his chest. Only on one side of his head the horn has been sliced clean through, cutting right through the spiral halfway. You’d think maybe it was just supposed to be flat ended if the other so blatantly didn’t match it and if the amputated one didn’t clearly have the ghostly afterimage of horn core in the middle of it. He’s skinny all over but unlike you he has apparently decided to go with a totally skintight shirt that sticks to him entirely.

Both pitiful and ‘fuck you’, you’re starting to see why Karkat has his problem.

“You’re lucky I’m so nice.” you say instead of staring more and shut the door behind Karkat.
“Your generosity is appreciated, I’ll very much consider giving you my stuff when I’m dead.” Karkat gasps, leaning against the wall.

“Thanks, I guess.” you snort.

“So, Sollux, right? Heard a lot about you.” Dayve says, suddenly a lot more impassive.

“Oh?” you ask, eyeing Karkat side on.

“Holy shit you sack of bulges what are you about to say even?” Karkat hisses at him.

“You can’t stop a guy from spitting mad truth.” Dayve protests.

“Yeah, Karkat, don’t stop him.” you grin evilly.

“See?” Dayve sneers and looks at you.

“He says you’re basically the best at computers, which given Karkat’s skills isn’t hella insightful but you’re apparently some kind of super genius. Plus, his very best friend who he’d clearly kill for and routinely bemoans how you don’t deserve to have people treat you the way they do.” Dayve says seriously.

You look over at Karkat who looks like he’s considering leaping out of your window in mortification to either let gravity or daylight do its job in finishing him off. Aw, Dayve is telling the truth, Karkat has all kinds of warm mushy feelings for you. This is hysterical.

“I like you.” you snicker.

“I HATE YOU BOTH.” Karkat insists loudly and everyone ignores him.

“Nah.” Dayve says with a half grin that flashes fang.

“I’m going to sleep, you two suck!” Karkat insists, stomping out of the room. Dayve watches him, a fond little smile on his mouth for the second it lasts before he wipes it off. Presumably remembering he’s in company.

“Can I ask, and feel free to tell me to fuck off, but what’s the deal with you and Karkat?” you ask, walking over to your cupboard and getting a glass out and filling it with water. You start drinking and realise that you should have maybe offered him something too.

“What isn’t the deal with him and me, man?” Dayve shrugs.

“What about you? Karkat mentioned that you’ve been friends for forever and that some of his creepier friends were up in your grill.” Dayve says curiously.

“Red, black, both. I don’t know. It’ll work out or it won’t.” Dayve shrugs. Not much else to say on that, it sounds like Karkat just needs to get his shit together.

“What about you? Karkat mentioned that you’ve been friends for forever and that some of his creepier friends were up in your grill.” Dayve says curiously.

“Hmm.” you say with a roll of your eyes.

“Not as well as he wants to know me, nah. My buddy Rohhzee set him straight when he wouldn’t take sixteen no’s and twenty fuck offs for an answer.” Dayve snorts.

“Is- are they your moirail then?” you ask with a frown. Dayve’s eyes go so wide behind his stupid
shades that you actually see an edge of yellow around them.

“What? Augh, gross no. Rohhze and me are just old friends. Don’t get me wrong she’s crazy enough to need a moirail but it ain’t me.” Dayvhe says with a shake of his head.

“So you and Karkat are bff’s, Eridan’s a creep. That it?” Dayvhe asks curiously and you’re not sure if he’s angling for a particular answer here.

“I have a matesprite.” you say.

“Had.” you correct.

“Oh, that sucks.” Dayvhe says sympathetically.

“Or maybe still have? I don’t know. Do you want a drink? I didn’t ask.” you mutter, turning around to get another glass out for him.

“You don’t gotta, man. It’s nice enough that you’re letting me crash here, even if it’s probably just because of Karkat.” Dayvhe says quickly.

“I think I can stretch to water.” you assure him and hand him the full glass, he takes it gratefully and drinks. He’s shorter than you and slighter too, he probably weighs about twenty pounds soaking wet. Okay, exaggeration there but still. Something in your chest twinges a little to see him.

“Sorry about your breakup.” he says gently, ouch, that would have hurt less if he hadn’t sounded so sympathetic there.

“She died.” you say instead because you’re, you know, an asshole.

“Oh. Oh shit.” Dayvhe says clearly mortified.

“It’s- it was a long time ago. She was alive, we were a thing, she and Vriska got into this revenge cycle and-” words fail you.

“Oh! I’ve heard about this. From TZ I mean, we had a thing before- well, that’s how I met Karkat and him trying to smother me with a scalemate on her porch about up and killed that chance either of us had with her. But she told me about Vriska and the girl she killed by…” Dayvhe trails off and sets his drink on the counter by his hip.

You know what he’s about to say. The girl she killed by controlling you to make you kill her.

“I’m real sorry.” Dayvhe says and hooks his foot around the back of your knee. Your knees bang the cabinets below the counter he’s on and your hands are on either side of his legs now.

“It’s ancient history.” you tell his knees. God they’re basically painted on skinny jeans with rips here and there. Is he trying to advertise how easy he would be to snap in half over the knee of anyone with a healthy bmi?

“Don’t sound like ancient history.” Dayvhe points out.

“She’s sort of haunting me. Literally, as a ghost. And Equius keeps putting her ghost in a robot and when he does that they’re flush instead. I don’t know. It’s… complicated.” you say.

“Dude,” his hand is on your neck now, “I think anyone else who says their shit is complicated owes you formal letter of apology and maybe a blowjob.”
A startled laugh escapes you and Dayvhe flashes a prickle toothed smile, clearly pleased at having made you feel better.

“I’ll see how that works for me.” you snort.

“Put the word out for ya if you want.” he grins.

His head jerks to the side at the sound of distant swearing and a thump.

“Did you forget how to take your own clothes off, dumbass?” Dayvhe calls, leaning back a little to make sure his voice carries around the corner.

“CHOKE ON MY BULGE, GLOBELICK!” comes the distant yell.

“Don’t do that in my coon.” you groan.

“Naw, man, I was dragged up with better manners than that. Besides I feel bad enough that the troll incarnation of a loudspeaker took your coon without going and defiling it. Not that he and I are even… you know.” Dayvhe’s skin goes a little darker and he tries to convey through hand gestures just how much he and Karkat are terrible at actually getting their shit together.

“I have a second side to it, you can sleep there. I was probably going to stay up all day coding anyway.” you say instead of teasing him.

“No way, man. I’m perfectly happy to kick it on your loungeplank. I kick it at friends places so often I’m barely even used to sopor anymore, and besides you look pretty tired. Maybe you should sleep there and I’ll sleep out here.” he insists.

Dayvhe hops off of the counter and fixes you with a no nonsense look over his shades and ducks under your arm to walk across the room and throw himself on your loungeplank. It’s not like you can stay up in here without keeping him awake so you’re kind of forced to go into your room.

Karkat’s clothes are in a heap by the blue half of your coon and half of his arm is hanging out as he pillows his head on it and snores. He’s probably not a deep enough sleeper that you can just sit here on your husktop, you guess you have to go to sleep. You change, peer at your bees to check they’re okay and then go to sleep.

When night comes you wake up and find yourself alone. You go out into the main room to find Karkat eating your food at your table, idly scrolling on his palmhusk.

“Hey. Thanks for letting us stay, I owe you.” he says around his spoon.

“You owe me cereal. Where’s Dayvhe?” you ask, you can’t see him around.

“Gone.” Karkat shrugs. He seems to catch your baffled look at sighs.

“He does that. He crashes at people’s places sometimes but he’s always gone before anyone gets up. Like I said he’s a secretive fucker, don’t take it personally.” Karkat explains.

“ Weird. Are you eating that dry?” you ask him suspiciously.

“Fuck you I like it crunchy.” Karkat snaps.

What a goddamn weirdo. You snatch the box up with your psi and grab yourself a bowl, you pour it in and walk to the fridge to grab milk because you’re not a weirdo like some people. You pause when you see a note stuck there with tape written in one of your gold pens.
You stare at the note in your hand for a moment, that’s… it’s sweet. Thoughtful, even. You tuck the note away, pour your milk and return to the table opposite Karkat.

“Did you actually sleep? You don’t look like shit for once.” Karkat says as he looks you up and down.

“Well your crush turned down the offer of half my coon and claimed the space out here so I kind of had to sleep. Gotta be the first time I’ve gone to bed at a reasonable hour since…” you trail off as you try to remember.

“Longer than I’d care to admit.” you finish lamely.

“How do you two know each other anyway? I know you tried to smother him with one of TZ’s scalemates but I know you didn’t meet him there, that was just… in person or something, right? But I don’t remember if you told me how you did meet him.” you ask and shovel cereal into your mouth.

“That blabbermouthed- AUGH. No, that wasn’t how we met first. Remember that game we played, all twelve of us? Before… before Gamzee, you know.” Karkat trails off.

Yeah you remember that game, some stupid thing you’d partially helped code that all fell apart in the end. Your team in particular fell apart when your friend Gamzee lost his shit and tried to murder a couple of your friends and so Kanaya had to chainsaw him in half. A bunch of social shit in your friend group blew up too with the seadwellers (along with any chance you had with Feferi) and the whole thing was a class A shitshow.

“Right?” you say.

“Well some of us kept playing after you and a bunch of the others dropped the game. Dayvhe and his friends joined our party. The whole beta fell apart after that anyway but we kept talking to them. One of Dayvhe’s friends is Kanaya’s matesprite, you know, Rohhze?” Karkat explains. Oh, oh shit you DO know about that girl. The name just hadn’t clicked when Dayvhe said it to you earlier. You and Kanaya don’t talk about her love life all that much but you knew she was dating someone. Small world.

You think about the note that you have and how the guy seemed nice. Or not nice, kind of an asshole in the way that all of your favourite people are. But he asked about your life, said kind things. You’d kind of like to get to know the guy.

“Do you have his trolltag?” you ask awkwardly.

“I… that is how I talk to him.” Karkat says and fixes you with a suspicious look. You’re trying to think of a good way to assure him that you’re not about to gank his crush out from underneath him, you’re not interested in his heart or his spade.

“Tell me,” Karkat groans, “please for the love of all that is holy that you’re not about to ask me if he
has a moirail.”

“Does he?” you ask after a second. Karkat slams his head onto the table, narrowly missing his bowl.

“OH MY FUCKING CHRIST IT’S GOT TO BE PHEROMONES OR SOMETHING.” he yells into the table, his voice slightly muffled.

“Uh.” you say.

“Every fucker that Dayvhe so much as treats like a person falls ass over rumblesphere trying to get into his diamond. What the fuck is wrong with- okay, no I’m just going to do you a favour and add you to the group.” Karkat rants, sitting up and jabbing angrily at his palmhusk.

Your palmhusk pings and you float it over to you, opening trollian right away. You’ve been added to a group.

Dayvhe’s Broken Diamond Club<<>
Pinned note -- What happens in the chat, stays in the chat.
carcinoGeneticist added twinArmageddons
CG: @TENTACLETHERAPIST @GARDENGNOSTIC @ECTOBIOLOGIST
@GALLOWSCALIBRATOR @ADIOSTOREADOR
CG: HE GOT ANOTHER ONE.
CG: FOR THOSE WHO DON’T ALREADY KNOW THIS ASSHOLE, THIS IS SOLLUX.
TT: < コ:彡 Karkat there is really no need to insult the poor guy~
GC: OH NO IF YOU KNOW H1M L1K3 W3 DO YOU KNOW H3 1S 4N 4SSHOL3
TA: gee tz thank2 2o much what the fuck ii2 thii2 board?
EB: haha i thought the title made it pretty clear!
GG: yeah! this is all of the people that we could find who feel ruff about having unrequited pale feelings for dayvhe!
TA: what.
CG: LIKE I JUST TOLD YOU, THIS HAPPENS TO PEOPLE WHO MEET DAYVHE A LOT. CONSIDER IT A SUPPORT GROUP FOR MORONS.
TT: < コ:彡 Why, Karkat, aren’t you also in the group?
CG: YEAH, YEAH, SELF BURN. HAHA LAUGH IT UP LALOND. YOU STILL WANT HIM, I AT LEAST HAVE MOSTLY MOVED ON TO OTHER QUADRANTS.
TT: < コ:彡 So, Sollux, I know a little of you through Karkat and Kanaya~ Why don’t you tell us how you know Dayvhe?

You eye Karkat over the top of your screen but he isn’t looking at you. Whatever.

TA: ii ju2t met hiim when he and karkat cra2hed at my place overlay, that’2 all.
TT: < コ:彡 Ah, did you tell him meaningful things about yourself? Was he a perfect guest? Did he leave you feeling like he understood your problems and then vanish on you?
EB: rohhze you’re being kind of a tool!
GG: dont mind her sollux her bark is worse than her bite
TT: < コ:彡 It absolutely is not~
TT: < コ:彡 But, still, perhaps that was a little cruel~
TT: < コ:彡 Nevertheless, our purpose is both mutual support which is semi joking as we’re all friends anyway~
GG: and the rest is to serve as a warning to others
EB: don’t try to go after dayvhe’s diamond, it doesn’t exist.
TA: thi2 ii2 2tupiid, you're all 2tupiid and kiind of 2hiitty friiend2 two have a memo liike thii2 about hiim. iim out.
You close out of the memo and glare at Karkat who lowers his own palmhusk, though it continues to buzz now and then.

“They’re not trying to be mean about him. People just fall for him a lot and he always seems super willing to listen to all of your problems and he’s easily pitiable like that but… okay, tell me one thing that you know about him. One thing about himself that HE told you, not me.” Karkat challenges you.

“He-” you try, but everything you can think of is about someone else. Karkat looks at you sympathetically.

“I took him on an actual date yesternight and I know a bunch about him but I still don’t know his real last name, even after all this time. I’m not even angling for pale with him. He’s not trying to lead you on, or anyone, he just has this issue with his pale quadrant and apparently that makes him irresistible which probably sucks for him, actually.” Karkat says unhappily.

You don’t ask for Dayvhe’s details, you probably shouldn’t. Karkat thanks you for your hospitality and shows himself out later with enough time for him to get home. You watch the moons set and wonder where Dayvhe lives and then feel highly stupid for doing so.

You put him out of your mind.

It works for a perigee until you see him on the street, just sat on the corner with a bunch of electrical musical instruments that you don’t know the names of. He’s busking. You hesitate but your curiosity pulls you closer.

“Hi Dayvhe.” you greet him and are suddenly struck with the worry that he won’t remember you.

“Sup, Sol?” Dayvhe asks, his head bobbing to the beat he pulls one headphone back so it rests against his ruined horn, he’s clearly listening to you.

“I didn’t know you were a musician.” you comment. Looking at the huge amount of cash that has been dumped in a bowl in front of him everyone seems to think he’s a really good one. Even now there are people watching him from around the street, just enjoying the music.

“Aren’t we all musicians of life? Playing the big old harmonica in the sky?” Dayvhe says deadpan.

“Does being full of shit make being a musician easier?” you ask dryly and he grins.

“It’s like you don’t even KNOW any musicians.” he snickers and looks up at you properly, letting his music fade out.

“I’ve never seen you around here before.” you say, like a desperate dumbass.

“Ah, sometimes that’s how it is. I go where I gotta.” Dayvhe says mysteriously.

“Why do you ‘gotta’?” you question him curiously.

“Reasons.” Dayvhe answers and you feel like you just smacked your face into a brick wall. What was it that Karkat warned you about with him? One sidedness? Yeah, that’d be it.

“What’cha been shopping for?” Dayvhe asks, not letting the conversation hang. He inclines his head to your bags and you look at them as well like you’ve forgotten what you put in them.

“Oh. Right. It’s… just stuff for my bees. I run an apiary mainframe and some of them are getting
mites which can be really bad and it fucks with my code, besides I should look after them.” you say.

“Aw, that’s nice. I know a dude who’s big into computer shit and I think he has some apiary stuff at his matesprit’s place, it’s all techno wizardry to me but- but it’s cool that you’re into that. Karkat said you were the best.” Dayvhe says, though is posture stiffens and his voice stutters partway through. To his right an oliveblood who has to be almost at ascension age walks over, paper in hand.

“Uh. Nice music?” he says uncertainly despite Dayvhe not playing any music right now. He awkwardly fingerguns at Dayvhe and walks away. You stare at the substantial sum of notes he just dropped at Dayvhe’s feet there and watch as Dayvhe snatches them up, unfurls them and peers at some white paper within.

“Fuck. I gotta bounce.” Dayvhe hisses and starts grabbing his stuff up hastily.

“Oh. Do you live around here or…” you trail off. Dayvhe stands up, his attention solely on his palmhusk.

“AUGH. FUCK- fuck of all the times for the goddamn A train to be down. I- shit.” Dayvhe looks around desperately and then stops when his focus falls on you. He seems uncertain but you’re sure he needs help.

“What’s wrong?” you ask him carefully and watch the way he recoils a little at the mere question.

“Nothing, it’s all, peachy-keen. Uh, say, you don’t happen to have any transport of your own around here do you?” he asks you.

“I AM my own transport.” you tell him, floating off of the ground.

“Yeah, I can float too but not- oh snap, I forgot you have hella powerful psi! Could- fuck, I hate to ask but could you fly me over to the B line at Thresh and Strafe?” he asks hopefully. You’re not too far over from Thresh Street but it doesn’t intersect with Strafe for ages, you don’t exactly get the trains a lot but you know your street directions enough.

“I can do that.” you nod and hold out a hand.

Dayvhe seems to hesitate but takes it and you pick the pair of you up off of the ground.

“Where do you need to go?” you shout over the wind as your speed picks up.

“I- fuck, I’m not gonna make it.” Dayvhe curses, looking at his palmhusk.

“Where do you need to go?” you demand.

“The… the coast. Right past the end of the train line, but I can’t-” he starts to say.

“Shut up, I’ll take you. Come here, less wind resistance for me to block.” you tell him, pulling him close against you. You form a small cone of psi ahead of the two of you to stop you from being buffeted by the wind. You streak above the train tracks as the city falls away below you and suburbs take its place, ahead the ocean starts to rise into view.

“Shit, there, there, there!” Dayvhe gasps, pointing to a stretch of coastline. You swoop down and drop him on the beach. He stares up into the dark sky, scanning for something. He pulls his palmhusk out and taps away hurriedly at something only to break off into a sprint to the left. You follow behind him. He was telling the truth about having his own psionics but they’re obviously
not all that strong, he just seems to use them to boost his regular movement. Jumping higher over rocks on the beach or running faster. A distant thrum makes you look up, it looks like a delivery drone but it’s flying really weirdly and seems to be in a tailspin to the water.

“Fuck!” he yelps and throws out a hand. The box glows with red psi for a moment but Dayvhe’s grip either slips or he’s not strong enough.

“You want that box it’s got?” you shout.

“YES!” Dayvhe yells back.

You grab hold of the crate but the deranged drone isn’t letting it go like they usually do. Below the drone the ocean bubbles and you stare in horror as a giant sea monster breeches the surface.

“Fuck off!” Dayvhe shouts and flings rocks at it.

“Are you crazy!” you demand but he ignores you. Unfortunately with your lapse of concentration the monster breeches the water fully and snags the box and drone in one. Your eyes widen at a flash of white on the back of it’s head. There’s a THING attached to it and you’ve seen pictures of things like that with their fake arms and legs for disguise, the smiling face that’s not a face.

“Oh come ON!” Dayvhe shouts in frustration.

A troll bursts from the water and lands on the rocks by you. You see gills and think seadweller, right up until you see bronze on their edges and on his shirt. He looks like an adult, maybe moreso than the olive guy that you saw earlier and he’s already got a sword in his hand.

“Where’s the crate!?” he shouts at Dayvhe.

“That thing ATE it and Cal’s-” Dayvhe starts to explain but the barely subadult snarls at him and leaps into the water.

“Yeah well, fuck you too.” Dayvhe mutters.

“What the hell is going on here Dayvhe? Is that a- is that a mind leech on that monster? They turn people into zombies!” you say, waving a hand at the thrashing sea monster.

“Yeah I know!” Dayvhe shouts over the noise. The bronzeblood with inexplicable gills suddenly breeches the creature and stabs the creature in the chest, to much wailing.

“Help me distract that thing or Dirkka’s gonna die! Or if you won’t help then just go!” Dayvhe shouts and hauls a large rock off of the ground and flings it at the monster, clearly trying to aim for what you’re sure is a mind leech. You didn’t know they could get that big and you’ve never seen one that’s white before. It’s almost lusus white.

The bronze blood, Dirkka you suppose, does his best to gut the creature while it’s still alive. You focus and part the flesh that he’s cut for him, enough that he can reach in and grab the box with one hand as he parries off the desperate defense attempts of the monster. He hauls the box free and falls back into the water, the monster screeches and tries to attack him but it’s too weakened.

Dirkka leaps out of the water once more to land on the rocks by you two, dropping the crate at Dayvhe’s feet. He turns when the creature and the white mind leech on it suddenly dive.

“I’ve gotta- wait, are you injured at all?” the guy asks and grabs Dayvhe by the face, his leather gloved hands cradling Dayvhe’s jaw on either side. Your insides go cold, so he is with someone
then. Dayvhe huffs and squirms out of his touch.

“I’m fine. You need to get a better messaging service you paranoid lunatic, your matesprit found me all of fifteen minutes ago and it’s only because my friend here has outrageous psionics that I was able to get here in time. If not for him you’d be crateless and we’d all be fucked.” Dayvhe snaps.

Dirkka turns his gaze on you, he’s wearing shades as well but his are sharp and pointed. The sign on his chest is definitely bronze and now you’re up close you can see that the gills are technological body mods.

“I told you about trusting people.” Dirkka says lowly.

“It’s not like I’m going to tell anyone about this because I have zero clue what the fuck just happened!” you shout.

Dirkka makes a thoughtful noise and his sword twitches. Dayvhe wasn’t in front of you and now he is, his body between you and Dirkka.

“Don’t kill him!” he snaps.

“He knows too much.” Dirkka points out.

“He just said he doesn’t know shit. Besides he’s good at keeping secrets, a bunch of my friends have shit they want to keep on lock and he knows all about it and never blabs. Ok? Besides if you kill him you’ll ruin my whole social life and don’t you want me to have a normal one of those? Wasn’t that your thing?” Dayvhe negotiates.

“I don’t have time for this.” Dirkka hisses and glances at the ocean again.

“So fuck off after Cal then, I’ll burn the box and he won’t say a word to anyone. Ok? Go.” Dayvhe tells him, gesturing at the water.

“Don’t go home, it’s too dangerous. Get somewhere safe, let me know where you are.” Dirkka says softly, pats Dayvhe’s hair and then takes two running steps and leaps into the water, sword first.

“Sorry.” Dayvhe sighs and shakes his head and fusses with his sylladex until a mask pops out.

“Dirkka’s not usually that crazy, shit like this just gets him amped up.” Dayvhe says apologetically, turning to look at you.

“He’s basically an adult.” you point out.

“Yeah, he’s a good guy though. Weird, but good.” Dayvhe nods.

“Well thanks, for protecting me from your moirail at least. I’d like to say I could have handled him but I don’t know him well enough to be sure.” you say, you’ve never fought an adult before. Much less one crazy enough to give himself gills.

“AUGH! What?! No he’s not my- ick, no!” Dayvhe recoils, nearly dropping the mask in his hands.

“But…” you trail off. The way he touched Dayvhe, how he was giving him instructions to protect him, fighting a whole sea monster for him, the way he was territorial and took a dislike to you. Is he not…?

“No. It’s complicated. Stay here, I’ve only got the one mask.” Dayvhe says and slips the red thing over his head, it has darkened eye slots and a vent around the mouth, it’s a gas mask of some kind.
“I thought you said other people shouldn’t say their shit is complicated.” you say but Dayvhe makes a gesture for you to be quiet and creeps towards the crate. He pulls a thick pair of gloves on and projects a barrier of red psi in front of him before splitting the crate open. There’s a loud bang as the sides fall down and shrapnel explodes out of it, you catch some of it before it hits you and you find that what you’re holding is several very sharp looking shuriken. Dayvhe looks over at you and seeing that you’re fine he peers in the box and then steps back.

“Can you turn around?” he asks you, his voice muffled by the mask.


“Because I need to burn these clothes.” he answers flatly, he’s already squirting some kind of fluid into the crate. A puppet tumbles out and Dayvhe jumps a foot in the air and stays there, floating in horror. He starts to tug at his shirt and you turn around.

“Uh… you want these back too?” you ask and float the shuriken over to him.

“Yeah just drop em.” he says and you hear fabric shuffling.

Dayvhe lands at your side in clean clothes but no shoes, he pulls his helmet off without touching it and gingerly puts it away in his sylladex.

“I’m guessing you probably have a lot of questions.” Dayvhe says awkwardly and flings a lit match at the crate that goes up in a whoosh of flame.

“I’m guessing your secretive ass isn’t going to tell me anything.” you counter.

Dayvhe sighs and pulls his shades off, peering at the lenses and rubbing at them although you suspect it’s a diversion so he doesn’t have to look at you.

“Would it make me a total tool to ask you not to tell anyone about any of this?” he asks.

“Why don’t-” you hesitate and rub at your temples where you can feel a stress headache building, “why don’t you tell me what you’re okay with me knowing? Rather than me asking you shit that you’re gonna get cagey about?”

“And what if what I tell you doesn’t cover what you want to know?” Dayvhe says, raising an eyebrow at you.

“I guess I have to live with that?” you shrug.

Dayvhe seems surprised by your answer but finally catches your hand and pulls you up the sandy, rocky slope to the grass above.

“Me and Dirkka have something in common. It’s kind of a shitty thing so we’re working together and he kind of gets my situation so that’s why he’s all… like that. But that’s all. He’s almost more my lusus than my friend, I swear. I didn’t mean to get you dragged into this.” he insists.

“But-” wait, no you weren’t going to ask questions, “anything else?”

“I… should probably get you somewhere safe. Rohhze’s place isn’t far from here, she invited me to her party anyway so we’ll be cool there. Anywhere not out in the open is good.” Dayvhe says, looking upwards dubiously and tugging you along towards a direction he apparently knows about.

“So you’re not going to tell anyone, then?” Dayvhe asks, looking back at you.
“You already asked me that.” you point out as the two of you get off of the grass and onto upscale paving.

“Yeah but you didn’t actually swear not to tell.” he says, looking uncomfortable.

“As long as keeping your secret isn’t going to kill me or my friends I won’t tell anyone.” you swear. Dayvhe nods, seemingly satisfied with your word and pulls you down the street with his hand still in yours.

A few minutes pass as you look the neighbourhood over. It’s a nice place, serious highblood money with giant mansions spaced out along the well manicured lawns and fancy roads. You try to remember what text colour his friend Rohhze wrote in but it escapes you.

“You’re really not going to ask questions? I kind of anticipated questions.” Dayvhe says suddenly.

“I have plenty of questions but I did say I wasn’t going to ask.” you say. Dayvhe opens his mouth and then hesitates, seemingly uncertain about what to say. Finally he just eyes you side on suspiciously.

“That’s not what I’m doing.” you groan. Does he really need all of this subterfuge? But then again his life seems pretty weird and as Karkat has pointed out it’s really hard to find things out about him.

“How about I ask you a question?” Dayvhe asks, hopping up onto a small ornamental wall and walking on top of it with his bare feet silently gracing the tile.

“How strong are your psionics? You flew us here like it wasn’t a thing, you don’t even look tired at all and I heard about… well, the shit with Aradia. That’s stronger than any psionic I’ve ever met.” you tell him. Dayvhe stops and watches you, a slight frown between his eyebrows starting to form.

“But doesn’t that mean that when you have to leave Alternia you’ll end up being a helmsman for a really high powered ship? Like you won’t even get a choice about it.” he says softly.

That right there is your whole depressing future. You’ve gone all over the place thinking about it but who knows how you’re actually going to feel about it when the time does come. You hardly want to be enslaved as a tortured battery for life so you’ll probably run when the time comes, most likely you’ll get hunted down and either killed in that process or jammed into a helm anyway. There’s not really much point in thinking about it.

“It sucks, huh? That expiry date, like you’re milk and not a person.” Dayvhe says. You want to ask him what he knows about that because that didn’t sound like someone imagining your situation, it sounded like someone who’s in a pretty damn similar one.

He walks on, finally turning up the driveway to a massive mansion. Every feasible surface is covered with eldritch tentacle creatures which is finely balanced between creepy and obscene, that’s probably deliberate. Dayvhe raps his knuckles on the door and then heaves a dramatic sigh and pulls on a fancy golden rope, from inside a cacophony of large ominous bells ring.
“Wish I knew why she was like this.” Dayvhe mutters.

You’re about to ask who he means when the door swings open, revealing a fishtroll that you can only describe as terrifyingly regal. Her jaw length sleek black hair is parted by violet ear fins on either side, her neck slit with delicate gills. Her clothing is dramatic, bright violet and entirely what you would expect of someone stylish enough to date Kanaya.

“Dayvhe? I didn’t expect you, you said you wouldn’t be able to make it. And you brought… a guest.” Rohhze says, looking you up and down.

“Yeah this is Sollux, don’t be a tool, thanks for the invite I gotta make a call ok bye don’t kill him love you.” Dayvhe says rapidly, pushing past her and rushing up the stairs.

Leaving you alone.

On the steps of a mansion of a seadweller you don’t know.

Thanks a lot Dayvhe.

Rohhze smiles, her teeth showing and her earfins flattening.

“Sollux, so nice to finally meet you in person. I’ve heard so much about you.” she purrs. She has? From who? Karkat? Kanaya? …Dayvhe?

“Uh.” you flounder.

“Do tell me,” she says leaning in and hooking you in closer with a claw in your collar so her lips are nearly at your ear when she speaks, “how’s pale flirting with Dayvhe working out for you?”

“I’m not.” you snap and spark at her enough to get her to move away. She laughs but walks into her mansion and waves for you to follow. With little other choice you follow her in. You suppose you could leave Dayvhe here but you don’t really want to do that, so following it is.

Her mansion is as pointlessly extravagant as you would expect and it makes your poor yellowblood sensibilities itch to see it up close. It’s not even like it is with Equius or Vriska, they’re both loaded but they at least have the decency to have such terrible taste that you don’t want anything they own. Rohhze has the latest tech just scattered about and, paintings of wizards notwithstanding, she seems to have a decent theme going. A spooky one but still.

“Please, do follow me through to the entertainment centre, we were having a party but it’s no trouble at all to make room for two more.” she says politely.

You follow her into a room that’s filled with the cushiest sofas, armchairs and even some of the really large designer splaysacs. There’s two trolls in there already, a girl and a guy and they both perk up to see you.

“Oh my god! Your eyes!” The guy gasps, leaping to his feet and pointing at you.

“Oh my god. Your manners.” you reply flatly before clocking that, hey, he is also a highblood and you should maybe keep your mouth shut. You don’t know these people.

“Yes, seriously try to have a little tact. However, this is not actually your first meeting. Everyone, this is Sollux. Sollux this tactless fool friend of mine is John, or at least that’s what he demands that we call him but you have been introduced to him before as ectoBiologist.” Rohhze explains, gesturing to him. Oh, right, from that board about Dayvhe’s diamond.
“I wasn’t being an ass Rohhze, geez. I meant that Karkat has told me about him and I recognised his
description of his eyes. I mean how many people look like that who also have mutual friends with us,
huh?” John asks.

“Is John short for something?” you ask curiously. If it’s not you’re at a loss for how to spell it.
Johhhn just looks dumb.

“No.” says John.

“Johnny.” say Rohhze and the other girl at the same time. John shoots them a wounded and betrayed
look.

“Well, it’s nice to meet you, I was also in the memo, I’m gardenGnostic. I’m Jayded.” the girl says,
holding out a hand for you. She seems perky and overly enthusiastic in a way that makes you think
of Nepeta. But instead of Nepeta’s olive or the jade that her name would suggest her sign is bright
lime. You manage to keep your mouth shut on any smart comments like ‘you’re clearly not jaded’
but only just.

“So, uh, did Dayvhe come here with you or…?” Jayded asks, tilting her head in a slightly canine
way that fully matches her horns.

“Yes, he burst in and rambled about needing to make a call and ran up the stairs because he is
perpetually sure that he owns the place.” Rohhze sighs with a shake of her head.

“So, you came here with Dayvhe. Where were you before here?” Rohhze asks, turning her attention
to you again.

“Uh. I bumped into him on the street near my place.” you say.

It’s technically true, there was just a dramatic monster fight, a demented adult and a bomb between
that and now.

“And you came all the way out here.” Rohhze says.

“Unless I’m dreaming this, yeah.” you nod.

“Rohhze!” Dayvhe calls, sticking his head around the door.

“Hey! John, Jayded! Aw hell yeah, it’s a party.” Dayvhe cheers, seeing his other friends.

“Rohhze was just asking how you two got here.” John says, you bet he’s trying to catch Dayvhe out
on what you said.

“Walked, duh.” Dayvhe says flatly and heads over to John to bump his fist and then leans over to
ruffle Jayded’s hair.

“And you did that without shoes? Dayvhe why do you not have shoes?” Rohhze asks
disapprovingly, her hands on her hips.

“Reasons.” Dayvhe answers flatly.

“And what situation led to these reasons, Sollux?” Rohhze asks, peering at you accusingly. You
didn’t expect this inquisition to turn on you.

“Uh. Shenanigans.” you say with a nod.
Dayvhe laughs and lets himself fall over the back of one of the armchairs so he can sprawl out upside down. Rohhze rolls her eyes and takes a seat of her own.

“Come on, man. John has terrible taste in movies, it’s great.” Dayvhe insists. Something in his expression suggests that the two of you aren’t just here so that he can be safe from whatever the hell happened back there, you suspect it’s for your safety too. And you don’t know if it’s from more packages like the one that just showed up or from Dirkka who didn’t seem pleased to see you at all. With little other choice you drop into the splaysac near him and try to relax.

John does, it turns out, have terrible movie taste. Though to his credit he has good taste in friends. Jayded reminds you more than a little of Nepeta and she’s really easy to get on with. Rohhze is trickier but she seems nice enough, sane for a fishtroll even.

Eventually it gets late enough that Rohhze informs you that she has plenty of spare rooms and coons with sopor aplenty. Evidently this is normal enough because the others have already started heading upstairs, that is except for Dayvhe who has wandered off into the meal preparation block.

“Are you coming with me so I can show you where you’ll be sleeping?” Rohhze asks.

“What about-” you start, looking over at Dayvhe who is pouring himself a glass of water.

“He’ll sleep on the sofa, he always does. I’d swear he was allergic to sopor for all he seems to avoid it.” Rohhze sighs with a worried pinch to her brow. Right, she had pale feelings for him too.

Not that you- ah fuck.

You let Rohhze lead you to a fancy guest room, you thank her for her hospitality and silently curse her for being so rich and then you’re left alone. There’s even unopened toiletries in here. You brush your teeth and worry about Dayvhe, there’s so many unanswered questions but he was very clearly unhappy with you seeing all that you did. If he is as phobic about closeness as he appears to be and as much as everyone says he is then it won’t make him feel better for you to get on his case about it.

You reluctantly climb into the coon and fall into a restless sleep.

You awake to a note taped to your coon, written in purple glitter pen.

hey sollux
sorry for dragging you into all that shit yesterday and sorry for bailing too but ive got shit i need to take care of
don't worry about rohhze john and jayded they're cool
i mean obviously they're cool they're my friends but i get that being left at a strange hive with a bunch of highbloods you barely know might not be your scene but for what its worth karkat trusts them so that should count for something right
anyway i owe you big time and ill see you around
sorry again
dayvhe

You keep the note in your sylladex with the first note. Hanging out of the coon by your armpits you hold your arms clear of the sopor and open a message to Karkat.

[twinArmageddons began trolling carcinoGeneticist]
TA: ii'm not going two join your 2tupiid group agaiin but ii thiink ii have a thiing for dayvhe.
CG: I WOULD SAY JOIN THE CLUB BUT YOU DID JUST SAY YOU WEREN'T GOING TO.
TA: 2iigh.
CG: LOOK, I’VE SEEN THIS BEFORE. HE USED TO HANG OUT WITH TAVROS A BIT
AND THEN THE GUY GOT A CRUSH ON HIM AND KEPT LEANING INTO THE
WHOLE PITYING HIM THING AND IT FREAKED DAYVHE OUT COMPLETELY.
CG: IF YOU WANT TO AT LEAST BE HIS FRIEND TRY AND BE COOL ABOUT IT AT
LEAST.
TA: liike you are, you mean?
CG: BITE ME.
TA: can ii a2k a que2tiion? why haven’t you made a move on hiim yet? ii know you’ve taken hiim
out on 2ome thing2 that you could po22iibly deny beiing date2 iif ii went bad but you two 2tiill
aren’t dating. Why?
CG: IT’S COMPLICATED.
TA: becau2e you can’t piick a quadrant? becau2e hone2tly he diidn’t 2ound 2uper bothered about
which one you went for when ii 2poke two hiim about ii.
CG: OH YEAH, I’VE KNOWN HIM FOR AGES BUT YOU HANG OUT WITH HIM A
COUPLE OF TIMES A SUDDENLY YOU’RE THE EXPERT.
TA: that’2 not an an2wer.
CG: UGH. FINE, THE QUADRANT THING IS PART OF IT. I DON’T THINK IT’S FAIR
FOR ME TO TIE UP HALF OF HIS QUADRANTS BECAUSE I CAN’T KEEP MY SHIT
STRAIGHT.
TA: why not let hiim make that call? tell hiim you want both or at lea2t you know you'll want both
often enough that the two of you block tho2e off from other people.
CG: THAT’S A LOT TO ASK OF SOMEONE.
TA: 2o?
CG: YOU’RE FORGETTING MY OTHER PROBLEM.
TA: what other problem?
CG: THE FACT THAT IF WE GET IN A RELATIONSHIP WE’RE PROBABLY GOING TO
END UP PAILING, AT LEAST I HOPE SO. THE GUY DRIVES ME CRAZY AND I SPEND
MORE TIME THAN I WANT TO ADMIT TO THINKING ABOUT GOOD WAYS TO SHUT
HIM UP THAT INVOLVE US BOTH BEING NAKED.
TA: that wa2 more informatiion than ii wanted or needed.
TA: that 2ound2 liike the oppo2iite of a problem for you though.
CG: REALLY, YOU CAN’T THINK OF ANY OTHER THING RELATED TO THAT
WHICH MIGHT… COLOUR HIS OPINION OF ME?

You frown as you try to think, colour clearly was the hint there but what- oh shit Karkat’s a mutant.
You forget sometimes because unlike your mutations Karkat’s aren’t visible, unless he’s bleeding or… well, unless someone was getting really friendly with him. So to speak. If Karkat actual nails
Dayvhe down into his quadrants and then, uh, nails him then that factor will be pretty obvious.

TA: do you think that’d matter two hiim, though?
CG: IT’S JUST COMPLICATED IS ALL.
TA: you’re the only one out of the two of u2 wiith any chance of beiing wiith hiim, apparently.
you’ve got hiim right wiithiin the gra2p of your grea2y liittle frond2. you miight a2 well 2ee iif ii
can work.
CG: UGH.

Needless to say Dayvhe was absolutely gone when you got up. It was awkward saying goodbye to
everyone and flying back to your hive alone but at least Dayvhe’s friends are polite and honestly
friendlier than they needed to be.
You don’t see Dayvhe again for a perigree and a half, not that you measure your time out by how long it’s been since you saw a guy you’ve met twice. Either way you don’t have to bump in to him, he comes right to your hive. Unfortunately for everyone you’re not feeling so hot right now. Your whole place is a depression mess and you can’t remember when you last slept, man, fuck insomnia.

You’re pointing to these mitigating factors as the reason why Dayvhe showing up at your door with a small plant in a pot is enough to confuse you into just staring at him.

“Uh, hey. Should I have buzzed downstairs? Someone left and I just came in the door but maybe-” he starts to say, clearly uncertain.

“No, you’re fine. Why do you have a plant?” you ask in bafflement.

“It’s for you.” Dayvhe answers cheerfully. You step aside and motion for him to come in, he does so, walking past you with the thing still in his hands.

“I’m not really a keep plants alive kind of guy.” you say, because you’re an asshole. God, why are you like this?

“Well, you’ll want to keep this one alive. I have a list of instructions about it from Jayded.” Dayvhe says and sets the plant on the side in its pot and puts a little card on the side.

“It’s not full grown yet, it’s too distinctive when it is I guess and it’s an illegal plant so I didn’t really want to bring it here like that. But the thing is when it gets flowers on it you can make a tea from them. Or not a tea, does it have to be an actual tea plant for that? I don’t know. Whatever, flowers in boiling water and drink them.” he explains and you scrub at your sleep crusted eyes, not that you’ve been able to sleep.

“Why did you bring me an illegal plant?” you yawn.
“Are… hey are you ok? You look pretty rough and everything looks kind of…” Dayvhe trails off, looking around at your messy place.

“Don’t worry about it. Why’s the plant illegal?” you ask again.

“Right. So the tea or maybe not tea that you make from the flowers it can almost completely suppress psionic powers.” he says with a smile.

“And why do I want that?” you ask.

“Because at some point they’re going to test your psionics and if you don’t want to be a battery that’s a test you wanna fail, but they’ve got it set up so you can’t just choose not to use them, they make you. I asked someone. But with this it caps your ability for like a day, as far as they know you’ve got enough psionics to maybe bend a spoon and have cool eyes. Then you get to be whatever else you want after that. No more expiration date for you.” Dayvhe explains.

You… wait. You won’t have to be a helmsman? There’s a way around this? Holy shit no wonder that plant’s illegal, you’d just have to hide your psionics after the test but you can do that. Okay, a shitty job in empire tech support isn’t great but it beats being tortured for power.

“H-how did you…?” you gasp, reaching for the plant and touching its delicate leaves.

“Well, I owed you from last time. That was some real uncool shit I dragged you into. So I asked another friend about evading the tests and she said that there used to be a way ages ago. She told me what she knew and I went and tracked down Jayded who has the same interest in gardening as Kanaya which is why they’re so close and between them we were able to track down some seeds and grow this for me. To… give to you.” he says, his explanation trailing off at the end.

You don’t have to be a helmsman. You’re not going to get burnt out and die. Dayvhe just brought you a ticket out of that.

“Whoa, Sollux, you’re crying! It’s- hey, no it’s ok.” Dayvhe says desperately and touches your face.

“I don’t have to be a helmsman.” you whisper and Dayvhe beams.

“Nah, man, you don’t!” Dayvhe agrees.

Your legs seem to give out a little in shock and the two of you slide to the floor against the counter. You hiccup a little as a sob of sheer relief gets tangled with your breathing. Dayvhe’s warm thumbs rub over your cheekbones and movies could really have never prepared you for this.

“It’s ok, man.” he whispers to you and you blink to clear your vision a little and look up at him.

“Why are you… I don’t even know your name.” you say hoarsely.


“Not the whole thing, just your first. And- and I don’t even have you on trollian but you still, if that does what your friend says it does then you just saved my life. Why- why would you-” you stammer out.

“Hey, no. Shh.” Dayvhe says softly, his thumbs running over your cheekbones again. That… that was almost a shoosh.
He takes his hands from your face and you miss them immediately, the needy, stupid, idiot that you are. A pen falls into his hand from his sylladex and he grabs your arm and starts to write.

“I gotta bounce, I need to go home. I haven’t been back in forever.” Dayvhe says as he writes on your skin.

“How long is that?” you ask quietly.

“Since… since you saw me last.” Dayvhe answers, pulling his pen back and abandoning it on your floor.

“What? Isn’t your lusus worried? Or do you not have one? Shit, I’m sorry.” you say, tripping over your own words.

“I have one, sort of. That’s actually the thing me and Dirkka have in common, my lusus used to be his before he ran away from him. I try to avoid my place as much as possible.” Dayvhe explains. From the way the two of you slid down to the floor he’s now sat between your legs facing away a little, enough that your knee is gently pressed against his back.

“I’ve never told anyone about him but, technically you’ve already seen him.” Dayvhe adds with a flat laugh that suggests he finds no humour in the situation at all.

“What?” you ask.

Wait.

“That… that white thing that looked like a mind leech? The one that was stuck on that sea monster? THAT’S your lusus?” you ask in horror. Dayvhe nods ever so slightly.

“Holy shit, Dayvhe are you sure you want to go back there?” you ask reaching for him to… you’re not sure what. Pap his face, pet his hair? Something, some kind of contact to show him that you care about him and want him to be okay. Before you can get close he’s on his feet on the other side of the room.

“It’s fine, like I said I gotta go. Sorry. Look after the plant, ok? Jayded’s deets are on there if you got questions, ok, bye.” Dayvhe says hurriedly and the front door shuts behind him, leaving you wide eyed on the floor with no idea what just happened.

You look at your arm and then in black pen reads:

turntechgodhead
dayvhe strydr

That’s… that’s his full name. He told you his full name didn’t Karkat say he didn’t do that? You hurriedly add him to your contacts and open up a message.

[twinArmageddons began trolling turntechGodhead]
TA: dayvhe?
TG: thats me

Oh. Oh it’s… something to see Aradia’s colour on your screen again, even though it’s not her and just someone else with her blood colour.

TG: sollux?
TG: dude are you there
TA: yeah, sorry it’s nothing just been a while. It’s been a while since I’ve run text.
TG: oh right Aradia was rust wasn’t she
TA: yeah, but it’s fine, thank you for the plant. I’m not sure ‘thank you’ is enough but, yeah.
TG: no sweat
TG: I gotta go though I’ve got to get through the whole train system and I might go harass Karkat in person before I head home so
TA: have fun with that.

You nurture your stupid plant religiously, you set timers for when to water it and keep it in the right light. You look after it better than you look after yourself. You harass Jayded with questions about it and find out that she’s a pretty nice girl all things considered. But whenever you see you think of Dayvhe. You message him sometimes and he’s really hot and cold about whether he answers, sometimes he’ll even play games online with you if they’re the kind his meagre on the go husktop can run. You’re starting to get the impression that he almost never goes home, that he just drifts from hive to hive seeing his friends, but he has a lot of unaccounted for time which makes you think he has friends in separate circles that you don’t have contact with. You also figure that sometimes maybe he doesn’t answer you because he’s going about the kind of crazy shit that he was the second time you met him.

You get more confirmation of that then you wanted when you spot him at an illegal market for outlawed tech. You’re there for parts, naturally and you spot him across the way, his snapped horn and the slender cut of his frame. He looks around, clearly lost and your pumpbiscuit stutters so hard it nearly hurts.

It physically aches when you see him look past you and then look back with obvious recognition only to wrench his gaze away and duck his head. He ignored you! Normally you’d take the sting of his rejection and go away with your bruised ego but actually you don’t want to do that so you cut through the market, past stalls with illegal chips in them until you catch him in the crowd again.

“Dayvhe!” you call out after him but Dayvhe still doesn’t look around at you.

Properly irked you shove past a bronzeblood and catch Dayvhe by the wrist.

“Hey, Dayvhe, what gives?” you ask and Dayvhe finally looks around at you, his expression tense. Only he’s not the only one who does, the tall guy in front of him turns and you recognise the deranged bronzeblood from the encounter with the sea monster. The one with the gills implanted into his neck that you can see clearly under his hood.

“What are you?” Dirkka growls but Dayvhe cuts in.

“He was just leaving. He wanted to say hi, he did now he’s gonna say bye. Right, Sollux?” Dayvhe says insistently and you realise that he was probably ignoring you so you wouldn’t run into Dirkka again. That was thoughtful of him, too bad you’re a moron.

“That’s not-” Dirkka starts but the guy at the stall bursts into hysterics, laughing in the face of a tall girl about Dirkka’s height who is bundled up in a tight hood and a scarf. Dirkka’s attention drops from you and focuses on the interaction going on there.

“This isn’t going to do what you say it will, I know what I’m talking about with tech!” the girl snaps.

“Hey, take it or leave it. The price is the price.” the olive sneers at her.

“I’m not trying to haggle here, I’m saying that this totes won’t do what you’re saying it will!” she
Dayvhe squeezes your hand and with his other hand gently pushes against your chest.

“Dude you should go, you don’t wanna be here.” Dayvhe whispers. You eye the argument behind him and decide that you don’t want to leave him here with this escalating situation and Dirkka there.

“Come with me then, or tell me what’s going on.” you whisper back.

Whatever Dayvhe was about to say is lost when the guy at the stall finally loses it.

“DON’T CONDESCEND TO ME YOU DUMB BITCH! IF YOU WANT PARTS TO PIMP OUT YOUR PET YOU’RE GONNA GET THEM ELSEWHERE!” he snarls at her.

“Watch your mouth!” Dirkka snaps, his sword suddenly in hand. In reaction to the drawn weapon the stall owner suddenly pulls a gun and you drag Dayvhe closer and throw up a wall of psi around you both that could deflect any bullet.

You needn’t have bothered because the girl draws her own rifle, the barrel so long that it presses right into the olive blood’s cheek. The movement dislodges her hood and it slips back with inky black curls falling out of it and between them earfins slide free. Another seadweller, only it’s not just any seadweller, the colour on those fins is straight tyrian. She’s an heiress.

“I think you owe my moirail an apology.” she says sternly. All around you sensible people scatter and though you try to pull Dayvhe away with you he won’t go so you don’t either.

“She’s an heiress? A near ADULT heiress?” you hiss at Dayvhe, eyeing her height and skintone. She could challenge the Empress for the throne, probably die doing so but she could.

“She’s a good person!” Dayvhe insists.

“Now tell me what chip here will actually give me proper 180 oscillation for my encrypted output or else I will start to get very annoyed mister.” she demands. Unfortunately the olive blood is just answering in babbled pleas for his life.

“Wait, hold on.” you murmur and lean past Dayvhe to peer at what’s on the table, eying the chips and boards that are laid out.

“What’re you doing? Don’t get involved!” Dayvhe urges you, his hand coming up to your side. He’s not shoving you away but you can still feel the hand shaped warmth radiating through you.

“If you need exactly 180 nothing there will do that.” you blurt out nervously.

She pauses and looks right at you, her gaze pinning you in place.

“Dirkka, make sure this guy doesn’t go nowhere. Dayvieeee who is this?” she asks with an intrigued trill, lowering her rifle and walking towards you. Dayvhe twists, jamming his back in your front and stepping you both back slightly.

“Leave him alone Roxxie, he’s not- he’s just a- back off!” Dayvhe argues, trying to be the barrier between you both. The heiress, you assume her name is Roxxie, smiles and shows off razor sharp fangs in doing so.

“Dayvhe, you’re so cute. I just wanna talk to him, you never let us meet your friends.” Roxxie laughs.
“Gee, wonder why.” Dayvhe snaps at her.

“He’s the one from before that I told you about.” Dirkka says flatly, his sword pointed at the olive blood who is still trembling. Roxxie’s eyes go wide and she looks at you again with keen interest.

“Ohhh, maybe not a friend then? And you shore seem awfully protective of him…” Roxxie says and your digestion sac clenches in a sad little diamondless way.

“We’re friends.” you tell her.

“Also nothing there really will do 180,” you say because you can’t just linger on that with Dayvhe right here and so you go on, “if you want that you ought to use a sillicombe slice, the ones designed to run HAXE would work best and then link it to… to one of these.”

You float a chip over to her off of the table and she takes it, her eyebrows raising in surprise.

“Ohhh, yeah that makes sense. Oh I feel like such a doof, I’m really more of a software gal than hardware but usually I think I know my stuff.” she says, bonking her head with her palm.

“I told you to switch to apiary systems.” Dirkka grouses and you realise that this the the guy Dayvhe was most likely talking about before who also had the same system.

“They glubbin’ drown, Dirkka!” Roxxie exclaims.

“So build it on land!” Dirkka argues back.

“OMG how many times have we- you know what? No. I will take this chip and pay you for it mister, how much was it?” Roxxie asks, turning her attention from Dirkka to the still terrified guy who can’t choke out a price. Roxxie rolls her eyes and drops triple what the chip is worth on the table.

Dayvhe twists around, catches you by the arm and breaks into a run now that Dirkka and Roxxie are distracted. You stumble along after him, eventually having to fly an inch off of the ground because Dayvhe can run far faster than you it seems.

He dodges past buildings, ducks through alleyways, you can’t tell where he’s headed. Not even when he leaps up onto a roof with a blast of psi that he only just makes.

“What are we- are they chasing us?” you gasp as Dayvhe parkours off of a roof and onto the next one then down some ledges.

“I don’t know, but I don’t want them to know where we’re going.” Dayvhe insists and pulls you through some alleyways.

“And that is?” you ask but you get your answer when Dayvhe sticks his head out of an alley and you see your building. He drags you both over to the doors and you let you both in. When he piles into the lift with you he’s breathing a little hard.

“I thought you said they were cool, why did we bail then? Also what the fuck you know an heiress?” you hiss.

“It’s… they’re fine. They’re cool, they just meddle. Dirkka worries about me for reasons you know about she’s his moirail and always up in everyone’s grill about their shit. You don’t want her curious about you, she’ll pester you about shit forever.” Dayvhe says, waving a hand dismissively. The door pings open and you both walk to your front door and he goes in when you open it.
“Besides,” Dayvhe adds from the window as he peers down at the street, “aren’t you friends with one? That girl who played the game with you before most of you left it.”

“Feferi? Yeah, but we haven’t talked in a long time.” you sigh. Another not quadrant in your past, another failure. You look at Dayvhe as he scans the streets, he said you were friends which is true but he keeps protecting you. But then you’d protect Karkat if someone was any threat to him and your affection for him is nothing but platonic, you’re just fishing for hope like a dumbass.

“Well, thanks for your protection from that terrible fate.” you say flatly and he turns to look at you.

Dayvhe’s mouth opens but before he can spit anything out he seems to think better of it and closes it.

“I should go.” he mutters and leaves before you’re able to swallow your pride enough to ask him to stay.

You wind up kicking yourself for it when he doesn’t answer the next message that you send him.

You should have asked him to stay with you, to watch a movie or something. How often do you see him and you turn down the opportunity because he’s mysterious.

[twinArmageddons began trolling carcinoGeneticist]
TA: fucking 2ecrective bull2hiit.
CG: GEE, HI SOLLUX. SO NICE OF YOU TO GREET ME SO SWEETLY.
TA: oh 2hove off bulgeliicker you know what ii mean!
CG: LET ME GUESS, DAMN NEAR THE ONLY THING YOU TALK ABOUT LATELY AND THE MENTION OF SECRECY. I’M GOING TO GUESS YOU’RE TALKING ABOUT DAYVHE.
TA: he wa2 here the other day beiing all tiight liipped about thiing2 that ii 2wear would have been no problem two talk about or giive me 2ome fuckiing context on but he ju2t wouldn’t. and then he ju2t left and ii wa2 too pii22ed two 2top hiim.
TA: now he’2 not an2weriing my me22age2.
CG: I DID WARN YOU ABOUT PUSHING HIM.
TA: ii wa2n't trying two!

Your screen suddenly flickers and you tab out of the window to obsessively save all of your work.

CG: YEAH, I KNOW HE HAS KIND OF A HAIR TRIGGER WITH THAT. HE’LL PROBABLY STILL TALK TO YOU IF ALL YOU DID WAS ACT KIND OF PISSED.
CG: ARE YOU REALLY WORRYING A LOT ABOUT THIS?
CG: YOU SEEMED REASONABLY FINE ABOUT IT BEFORE.
TA: 2orry ii wa2 2aviing thiing2 ii thiink we ju2t got a power 2urge, ii'm going two go iinve2tiigate.
CG: OH SHIT

You get up and check on your bees, they’re all still fine. You peer out of your window but there’s no power problems happening to other buildings. When you look at the power feed for your machine it all seems stable. Out of paranoia you run a virus check but nothing untoward comes up. Odd.

TA: weiird, ii can't figure out what cau2ed ii.it.
CG: I’M SURE THAT WON’T BOther YOU FOREVER.
TA: you're 2uch an a22hole ii don't know why dayvhe liike2 you.
CG: WAIT DID HE SAY THAT EXACTLY?
TA: who know2. ii'm 2ure that won't bother you forever.
CG: OH FUCK YOU.

You and Karkat trade insults for a while and eventually he has to excuse himself to go do other shit.
and you settle for illegally streaming a movie. You evidently need to update your adblocker because when you pull up your streaming site there’s a porn ad in the sidebar. Some smutty pale porn with-

Oh, wow, it’s not Dayvhe but for a second it looked like him. That same skinny frame, short hair and curled horns. Only this guy’s ones are curled less tightly and go the other way and the shape of his nose is different. The text reads “WATCH SKINNY RUSTIE PAPPED TO SLEEP!!!” the picture animates so that you can see the hand coming in for the pap and the rustblood’s eyes fluttering shut.

It’s dumb and stupid and you’re never really been into porn anyway, regardless of quadrant. All the same it’s far FAR too easy to imagine Dayvhe there instead and-

You shake your head and spend half an hour updating your adblocking script before playing the movie uninterrupted. When you eventually sleep hours later you dream of things having gone differently, where the fight between Roxxie and the olive blood had escalated and you got injured in the struggle. You dream that the race back to your hive was Dayvhe trying to look after you, he pulls shrapnel from a cut and shooshes you through the pain. When you wake up you still remember feeling wanted, that how even though you don’t know everything about him you had been sure that he cared. It stings, to say the least.

You shower and change and sit down at your screen again, it’s not flickering now but something still feels off. You cock your head to listen to your bees, maybe they’re buzzing at a slightly different pitch or maybe you’re just imagining it. You run a sweep for malware, viruses, you clear your cache and history of things, restart and still the bees sound somewhat off to you. The strain on your bandwidth is all within normal tolerances but… ugh.

You start poking through your files only to find that ones you know you haven’t been in for a while have been recently accessed. Either you’re losing your mind (totally possible) or someone is in your machine without you knowing about it. But nothing you look at is turning up any trace of anyone else.

You start going through your apiary mainframe, honey dribbles over your fingers as you work and you make very very sure to never get it anywhere near your face holes like some kind of dumbass. Blow a hole in your wall once, shame on Vriska but blow a hole in your wall twice… shame on you. The closer you look it seems that they are behaving strangely, working on some function you’re not familiar with but yet nothing seems to be objectively wrong with them.

There’s a buzz at your door from the buzzer and you wipe honey off of your hand onto a rag as you walk over there. You open the door with psi rather than risk touching anything. Dayvhe steps inside right away and claps a hand over your mouth and holds a finger up to his own lips. He raises a hand and makes a palmhusk shape by his ear and quirks a curious eyebrow at you. Hastily wiping off the last of the honey you pull your palmhusk out only for Dayvhe to fling it inside your block and then start pulling you through into your tiny laundry room where he shuts the door behind you both. He presses buttons on the machines until they start making noise and then slumps against the door in relief.

“What the fuck?” you demand, hands on your hips.

“Sorry, I just needed to talk to you alone. Karkat mentioned you were having computer problems and I don’t think that’s it. I wanted to check if I’m right about what it is before everything goes wrong.” Dayvhe explains.

“What do you mean ‘goes wrong’? What’s going wrong?” you ask him. He wraps his arms around himself and looks away, clearly miserable.
“Do you ever get involved with someone and you know it’s never gonna work but you really
REALLY want it to so you try anyway and then, shockingly, shit all goes wrong?” he asks in a
small voice. You pretty much figure that Dayvhe himself is an example of that for you, everyone told
you to stay away from his diamond but you can’t help who you like.

“What happened?” you ask instead of saying that. It’s pretty concerning that Dayvhe has just
suddenly decided that things between him and Karkat can’t go on anymore, especially given
Karkat’s… unique concerns about Dayvhe finding out about his blood colour. You were sure
Dayvhe wouldn’t think anything shitty but what if you were wrong?

“It doesn’t matter, but I blew it.” Dayvhe says miserably. That sounds far more like something he did
than anything about Karkat.

“Hey… I’ve known Karkat a long time and even if he’ll flip shit for me saying it but he’s really into
you, I’m sure you didn’t break anything.” you assure him.

Dayvhe shakes his head sharply and then pushes his glasses up into his hair and presses the heels of
his hands into his eyes.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about. I just came here to talk to you about your machine
because you’re more Karkat’s friend than mine so we’re probably never gonna talk again after this!”
he insists, getting more and more upset.

“What? No, that’s not how that works. Come on, man.” you say, you reach for his face not to- to
actually pap him that’d be wrong but just to hold him close. He’s upset, you can’t just do nothing.

Only what you actually do is worse. You reach for him just as he pulls his hands away from his eyes
and shakes his head which results in you accidentally poking him in the eye and him yelping in pain.

“Oh SHIT!” you say in horror, recoiling away from him. Good job, dumbass! You just stabbed your
crush in the eye!

“AUUUUGH!” Dayvhe hisses, clapping a hand over his eye and backing up.

“I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to!” you say as mortification creeps up your spine.

“Aaaaah, fuck, way to distract me from whining about Karkat. Augh, that fuckin’ stings.” Dayvhe
hisses.

“I’m the worst, the actual worst.” you whine, hiding your face in your hands. You grimace as you
realise that your hand is still slightly sticky. Your hand that you just poked Dayvhe in the eye with.

“Shit, that burns.” he hisses and dread fills you.

“Oh shit, let me see your eye I think I fucked up worse than I thought.” you say as you scramble
closer to him.

“What?” Dayvhe asks and grimaces. There’s a pop and a hint of ozone and the shelf with all of your
cleaning products on tumbles to the floor.

“I think I got mind honey in your eye.” you say in muted terror. Dayvhe’s psionics are pretty low
level and if you did get mind honey in his eye it was just a trace from the underside of your claw, so
he’s unlikely to do any serious structural damage which means your priorities are stopping this from
worsening rather than spiriting him up to the roof for safety.
“What?!” Dayvhe yelps.

“Come on!” you insist and psionically grab him up from the floor and rush out into your nutrition block and flick the tap on. You scrub under your claws and over your hands with a scrub brush and soap as fervently as if you were going in for surgery.

“There should be a bottle of water in the cooler, grab it.” you instruct Dayvhe and no sooner have you said it than the door on the cooler blows open in a flash of red, flinging stuff across the floor.

“Fuck, sorry, augh it stings.” Dayvhe says through gritted teeth. You whip a clean towel from a drawer and dry your hands pulling Dayvhe closer by his shirt. You float the water to you and crack open the top, Dayvhe still has a hand over one eye.

“You’re gonna smear it in like that and make it worse, I’ve got to wash it out.” you tell him.

“What? No this is dumb.” he insists and yet more stuff around the room skitters about the floor from random pulls of psi.

“Trust me.” you plead with him. The moment you say it you can hear how cliche a pale statement it is, the kind of things you see in Karkat’s romance movies or in pale porn before shit gets real. You expect him to shut down or run out of here. But instead he stays there, two paces across from you on the cheap linoleum staring at you with his one uncovered eye. The moment hangs in the air and you watch him swallow, the movement shifting in his narrow neck, then he steps closer to you.

“What do I…” he says quietly and you can’t find the words so you just get him in front of the sink and push him gently to bend sideways.

“Take your hand away, I’ll pour the water. Try to open your eye in it, it’ll be weird but it’s safe.” you breathe and steady him with one hand on the back of his neck. You pour the water, slowly and as gently as you can as close to his eye as you can. He doesn’t complain but his claws screech on the metal of your sink.

“It’s- ah- it’s really weird.” Dayvhe gasps a little.

“I know, I’m sorry. It was my fault. Stupid… tried to make you feel better and managed to stab you in the eye and drug you.” you curse yourself.

“Didn’t mean to. Fuck, we’re both a mess. I fucked things with Karkat for good and you did this without meaning to.” he laughs hollowly. The last drips of water run out and Dayvhe scrunches his eyes shut. You help him up and pass him a clean towel which he presses to his face with a grimace.

“Look, I don’t know what went down but Karkat is the champion of overreacting. If he said something that made you think it’s all over he’s probably regretting it right now.” you tell him gently.

“It’s not that, I know that. It’s… we were finally getting somewhere, I mean… you know.” he mumbles, looking away with his one good eye and you watch his cheeks darken. Oh, hey, Karkat finally getting somewhere with Dayvhe, huh? Good for him.

“So what happened?” you ask.

“Nothing happened, that’s the point. I couldn’t, no I can’t do that.” Dayvhe says in blatant frustration.

“It’s not like he’s had a problem with you two going slow so far, so what’s the problem with not rushing ahead?” you say in bafflement.
“No, not like that! I mean- it’s not that I don’t want to. Fuck I want to. But- I can’t. It’s complicated.” Dayvhe says firmly in a way that tells you nothing. You’re pretty sure that you should drop this now, he’s obviously not going to tell you what’s really wrong.

“Let me see your eye.” you say instead. You reach forward and gently take the towel away. A bunch of his hair is damp and stuck to his forehead.

“I can’t see through your eyelid.” you point out and Dayvhe’s eyes scrunch up only for him to open them, blinking quickly as he does so. You mean to look at his eye to see if you can see any trace of the honey only to have that train of thought entirely derailed.

His eye is bloodshot from the honey, you poking it, and the water poured over it.

But it’s bloodshot not with rustblood, but neon red. Bright red streaks of it flare across the orange of his eyes and your breath stutters in your chest. He’s a mutant. This is why he acts like he doesn’t expect to get off of the planet, why he’s so secretive, why he helped you get free because he knew how you felt. This is why he doesn’t let people too close, why he can’t go as far as he wants to with Karkat. But oh, Karkat, if only he knew.

“That’s not a good look, how bad is it?” Dayvhe asks worriedly.

You crush down the urge to stroke his cheeks, to kiss the delicate bridge of his nose and tell him you’ll keep him safe. Instead you focus on words you can say.

“It’s fine, just bloodshot.” you tell him.

Dayvhe eyes widen and everything that’s not nailed down suddenly flies at you both, it’s a dumb attack because it’d hurt him as much as you. Thankfully you’re stronger and you stop everything before it comes anywhere near you.

“I’ll never tell anyone, I swear. I never would. And I know for a fact that Karkat wouldn’t have a problem with it either or tell anyone. Not in a million sweeps.” you tell him seriously.

“I’m a MUTANT! Why would you say that? I- you should be trying to cull me for this. Even if you’re slightly mutated you’re the good kind, you can survive but I can’t.” he shouts at you but he sounds more hurt and bewildered than he does angry. Like he expected you to try to kill him and it not going like how he thought is so upsetting that all he can do is complain at you, like you short changed him somehow.

“You’ll survive.” you insist.

“How?” Dayvhe scoffs.

“You found a way for me, there’ll be a way.” you tell him and gently pluck his shades off of his head and slide them onto his face for him.

The whole situation feels like someone blowing a bubble gum bubble bigger and bigger. Your hands hover on either side of his face after replacing his shades there and even with them on his expression is emotionally intense. With every second the tension grows and grows, surely soon it has to burst into something, right?

“I’ve never told anyone. Dirkka found out, he told Roxxie, but I’ve never…” he whispers.

Technically he didn’t tell you, you found out, but here you are anyway.
“I won’t say anything.” you promise again because it feels important.

“Ok.” Dayvhe says hoarsely and the tension pops and fades away. He’s trusting you.

Dayvhe looks away and fusses with his damp hair a little and you take the chance to pick up some of the mess and at least shove it back in the general direction that it belongs in. Dayvhe must feel bad about it because he starts helping too.

“I didn’t come here for all of this. I wanted to warn you about your computer system.” Dayvhe says as he just decides to dump your knives in the sink, they’ve been all on the floor so they need cleaning now anyway most likely.

“What do you know about it?” you ask with a frown.

“Has it been a little slower, maybe? Files open that you didn’t open? Everything looking like you’ve been hacked but you can’t find a trace of it?” Dayvhe asks and you freeze then nod.

“It’s Dirkka, he’s convinced you’re dangerous, that you know too much. And yeah you might know more than anyone else does but you still know basically fucking nothing and he needs to chill his paranoid ass out. He’s probably trying to see if you told anyone anything.” Dayvhe says despairingly. You bite your tongue on asking if Dirkka knows that he’s not Dayvhe’s moirail because it doesn’t look like he knows that at all.

“How’s he doing it? I looked everywhere I could think of.” you ask. It’s not often someone outmaneouvers you but evidently it has happened and you’re not pleased.

“Roxxie is his moirail and she has access to the mandatory schoolfeed channel that everything has to have. He sneaks in through there because virus scanners don’t-” he starts to say.

“They don’t look at it because the whole thing pings as a virus, which it is, so it’s the perfect place to hide an actual hack if you can get the access.” you finish for him. That’s not skill, that’s just cheating!

You snarl and march into your block, throwing the door open and dropping into your chair. You hastily edit a virus scanner to show you everything that’s in the official imperial channel and- there, right there. Just where Dayvhe said it would be! You quash the program and jam a virus back through it for good measure. Normally doing that to an imperial program would be a fast track to getting a drone to blow you up but as this was illegal you’re pretty sure you’re fine.

On your screen a trollian message pops up from a handle you don’t know but you bet you know just who it’s from.

[timeausTestified began trolling twinArmageddons]

TT: ▶️ ◽️ Nice virus, did you code it all by yourself?

TA: iif ii ever catch you iin my 2y2tem agaiin ii’ll 2end you 2omethiing that ii put actual effort iintwo, fucker.

TT: ▶️ ◽️ I’ll remember to be scared.

Dayvhe sighs and leans across you.

TA: hey asshole its dayvhe knock it off

TA: cause i bet roxxie didnt give you permission to do this

TT: ▶️ ◽️ Dayvhe, why are you there? I told you to stay away from that guy and yet he keeps
showing up and now you’re there?
TA: leave him alone!
TT: (◣▃◢) I haven’t finished going through all of his logs yet but he talks about you. I could tell you what he says.

The back of your neck prickles in fear, you really don’t need him reciting about your obvious crush. Much less the chat full of Dayvhe’s friends who all feel the same, you didn’t even want to be in that one but Dirkka likely isn’t above using it against you.

“Oh, fuck this.” Dayvhe snarls and pulls back. He yanks his palmhusk out and starts typing as he paces back and forth.

“Over controlling, hyper-paranoid, jackass.” he mutters.

TA: what make2 you 2o conviinced that ii’d do anythiing two hurt hiim?
TT: (◣▃◢) Oh, I’ve got you back again, have I?
TT: (◣▃◢) Wait, where did Dayvhe go?
TT: (◣▃◣) Oh Dayvhe you asshole!
[timaeusTestified ceased trolling twinArmageddons]

“What did you do?” you ask, looking at Dayvhe who is still typing away.

“Told on him to Roxxie, apparently she told him not to do this and he did it anyway and now his ass is grass. There’s a bunch of reasons I don’t introduce him to my friends but this is one of ‘em.” Dayvhe grumbles, finally putting his palmhusk away.

“What an asshole.” you complain.

“He’s actually not. Not really. He just loves his friends so much it’s gross and he feels responsible for everything with our lusus and… Dirkka’s very ‘us’ and ‘them’. And if you’re not part of his ‘us’ then you can basically fuck off and die for all he cares. He needs Roxxie to reign him him when it comes to literally everyone.” Dayvhe assures you.

“Sounds pretty assholish to me.” you mutter.

“Hah, maybe. Just keep checking that official channel or whatever and make sure he’s not sneaking on you. If he does just hit me up and I’ll get Roxxie to smack him.” Dayvhe says with a smile, the kind that makes your chest flutter inside.

“You’re offering to protect me from him, huh?” you blurt out and Dayvhe’s mouth falls open slightly in surprise but then he covers it up with that pokerface again.

“I guess. I mean, you’re being super cool about not freaking out on the whole mutant thing.” Dayvhe shrugs, like he couldn’t care less even though you know he cares very much indeed.

“I won’t tell. And Dayvhe? Go back to Karkat, I swear he won’t be of any danger to you either.” you urge him.

Dayvhe doesn’t look like he believes you, a lifetime of paranoia would do that to a guy you suppose. Sweeps ago you found out about Karkat because you were having a LAN party at his house and the dumbass hit himself in the face with a frying pan when he was trying to wrestle it off of you and smacked himself in the snifffnode so hard he bled. He bled the same bright mutant red as Dayvhe’s eyes. When he saw that you had seen he just dropped to the ground, exhausted at finally being found out and expected you to end him.
The whole thing was horribly awkward but you swore not to tell and you never did, the two of you formed a weird kind of mutant solidarity about it. He’s still your best friend so the least you can do is help him along with the guy he’s clearly desperate for who unknowingly is in exactly the same situation. Not that you can tell Dayvhe that because you swore to Karkat not to tell a soul, so you’ve got to be underhanded. These dumbasses.

“I guess if I’m gonna risk death why not risk it for the ornery jackass that I’ve been obsessed with forever?” Dayvhe sighs.

“Yes. Go, do that.” you nod and shove him towards the front door. He goes along willingly if a little petulant about it. You open the door and let him out only for him to linger in the doorframe.

“Uh, thanks. I mean, for everything. For my eye and not… you know.” he mumbles to your feet.

“It’s cool.” you tell him.

“Yeah, it is.” Dayvhe nods and shuffles awkwardly in the doorway. He flicks a glance down the hallway to see if anyone else is there and then floats up slightly. He sinks his claws into your shirt, jerks you forward and smears an awkward kiss on your cheekbone. Dayvhe drops to the floor and sprints off without a backwards glance, leaving you standing in your doorway smiling like an idiot.

You clear up your messed up hive, still smiling to yourself. You even listen to happy music as you do so. Then as night turns to day you scour for any lingering trace of Dirkka and set up a program to scan for any trace of him using the same system. You load up a really nasty virus but have the good sense to get it to ask you permission before sending it just in case your program falsely identifies some imperial propaganda as Dirkka and sends a virus that’ll get you culled.

You’re just about ready to go to sleep like the dumbass with the fucked up sleep schedule that you are when someone trolls you.

[carcinoGeneticist began trolling twinArmageddons]
CG: OH MY FUCKING GOD I WILL SINCERELY PROSTRATE MYSELF ON THE FLOOR BEFORE YOU IN WORSHIP YOU BRILLIANT MOTHERFUCKER.
TA: ah, 2o you'v2 eeen dayvhe then.
CG: DO YOU JUST HAVE THIS SKILL FOR FINDING MUTANTS OR SOMETHING? HOW THE FUCK HAVE YOU DONE THIS TWICE? ALSO HOW THE SHIT DID YOU CONVINCE HIM TO COME TO ME AGAIN AND TRUST THAT I WASN’T LIKE MOST NORMAL PEOPLE AND INTENT ON CULLING HIM?
TA: ii diidn't tell hiim about you iif that'2 what you'zre a2kiing.
CG: NO, SEE I WORKED THAT OUT FROM THE LOOK OF BLIND SHOCK ON HIS FACE AFTER HE JAMMED HIS HANDS INTO MY PANTS AND SAW WHAT COLOUR IT CAME BACK AS. I GOT A PRETTY GOOD CLUE THAT IT WAS A SURPRISE FROM THAT.
CG: I WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU SAID TO HIM. NOT THAT I’M UNGRATEFUL BECAUSE HOLY SHIT YOU JUST TURNED THE WORST NIGHT OF MY LIFE INTO THE BEST ONE SO THANKS FOR THAT ACT OF FRANKLY INSANE ALCHEMY, I’M JUST PUZZLED IS ALL.
TA: ii ju2t 2aiid that ii knew for 2ure you wouldn't react badly. whiich ii2 a biit of a 2tretch giiven your tendency two flilp 2hiit at the 2liigt2t provocatiion.
CG: WELL, PRECISELY.
TA: hey don't do that, iit'z not a burn iif you agree.
CG: ALL THIS TIME LOW SELF ESTEEM WAS THE ONE WEAKNESS IN YOUR STRATEGY, IF ONLY I'D KNOWN.
TA: ha ha.
CG: IT’S JUST CURIOUS, IS ALL. THAT HE SEEMS TO HOLD YOUR OPINION AND WORD IN HIGH REGARD, BUT MORE CURIOUS THAT YOU’RE NOT FREAKING OUT ABOUT IT. GIVEN YOUR GIANT CRUSH.
TA: fuckiing hell kk, 2ee iif ii help you out agaiin iif you're gonna be a 2u2piiciiou2 ungrateful fucker.
CG: HAH! YOU’RE TRYING TO DISTRACT ME!
CG: ALRIGHT, NOT THAT I DON’T CARE ABOUT THIS BUT MY MATESPRITE IS HOT AND I THINK I NEED TO GO RUIN SOMETHING ELSE STAINABLE IN MY HIVE WITH HIM NOW.
CG: AT LEAST I THINK HE’S MY MATESPRITE, WE DIDN’T REALLY DISCUSS QUADRANTS OR ANYTHING.
CG: FUCK I’M NOT GOING TO THINK ABOUT THIS.
TA: have fun, you gro22 weiirdo. ii’m goiing two 2leep.
CG: OH. I WILL.
[carcinoGeneticist ceased trolling twinArmageddons]
Til Him

‘My existence bordered on the tragic
Always timid, never took a chance
Then I felt his magic
And my heart began to dance
I was always frightened, fraught with worry...
Til him
I was going nowhere in a hurry
Til him
He filled up my empty life
Filled it to the brim
There could never ever be
Another one...like him’
‘Til Him - The Producers

Nathan Layyne and Mathew Brodik won joint pale performance award at its debut

A week after Dayvhe and Karkat solidified their relationship in… whatever it was they were in you see him again. All you know from Karkat is they’d both agreed to block off both pitch and flush for each other and let it flip, vacillate and wander as it went. With their mutations it was hardly likely either of them would be open to anyone else anyway so it seemed to work. You had been worried that Dayvhe might act weirdly around you after you finding out about him being a mutant and taking the chance to trust you with that information. But a week after that all went down you found Dayvhe sat outside of your building busking again, acting all chill about it. When you come back from the shopping you’d needed to do he’s still there. You invite him up and he comes along easily, you wonder if that’d been what he was hoping for.

You watch a movie of his choice with him and find that he talks the whole way through movies that he likes but his commentary is entertaining enough that you don’t mind. He’s not leaning against you the whole time but he’s close enough that you can feel how warm he runs.

He sleeps over but insists on sleeping on your loungeplank again. When you awake he’s gone and, unsurprisingly, there’s a note again.

hey man thanks for the movie
thanks for everything youve been really cool
see ya
dayvhe

This time it’s in bright red ink, just like his blood. You save the note, you’re a sentimental fucker it seems.

He does it a few times, dropping by without really dropping by. You wonder if he can’t work up the nerve to knock on your door since he kissed you. One time he’s started slumping against your side and his claws are picking a hole in his jeans at his knee, the sound is distracting you and he probably shouldn’t ruin his clothes anyway.

You reach out and catch his wrist, feel the warm, hammering pulse there.

“His name is Dionte Strydr.” Dayvhe says as if the act of touching him startled the words out, he seems as surprised as you to hear them.
“Who?” you ask in bafflement but you can guess from the same last name that it’s someone with a connection to him.

“Mine and Dirkka’s ancestor. He’s an adult, off world. Our lusus… Cal, still has control over him. He’s the one who sends us those boxes.” Dayvhe says, staring dead ahead. Your fingers linger on the soft skin of his inner wrist and something tells you that if you push too hard on this he’ll pull away. He’s like one of those fingertrap toys, if you try to go too hard you’ll be stuck forever but be gentle and it’ll be okay.

“What does he want from you?” you ask carefully.

“Fuck if I know, that guy’s motives are shady as all hell. Part of it’s supposed to be training but I don’t-” Dayvhe cuts off by shaking his head.

“That sucks.” you comment, resting your head on the backrest of your loungeplank.

“It really fucking does.” he agrees.

“You know you can stay here whenever, you know?” you offer after a moment, still tracing a vein in his wrist with your finger.

“I’m not a stray meowbeast.” he protests, pulling away.

“I know, I know, but I also know you avoid your hive plenty and you crash with friends. I’m just saying you can do that here whenever. I’ll message you all the codes to the doors, sometimes if I’m too absorbed in things I don’t notice to answer so…” you pause, looking at him. Dayvhe half looks like he’s going to bolt.

“You don’t have to use them, it’s just the door isn’t locked to you. You don’t have to knock.” you offer.

That might have been too far.

You switch you gaze back to the tv and feel regret roil hot inside you like snakes. You had just thought about being slow and careful with him and then offered him the key to your home. What the hell?

“Come with me if you want to live.” the robot on screen says in a stiff accent.

“Where is he even meant to be from?” you mumble, sinking lower down.

“The future.” Dayvhe says after a second or two of silence.

“That’s not a place with an accent.” you argue. Dayvhe huffs a quiet laugh and slides against your side again. Your bloodpusher swells fit to burst when his fingers slide in between yours.

He’s gone by moonrise as always but he leaves a note thanking you for the company. You send him the keys to your place anyway.

You don’t expect him to use them so soon and you certainly don’t expect him to bring anyone with him. You’re partway through your code compiling when your front door bangs open. You leap up, psionics at the ready and rushing out into the main room only to see Dayvhe struggling to haul a bigger, older troll into your home.

“Help!” he yelps and you pull the guy from him and drop him on the floor, you quickly shut the door.
behind him.

“What happened? Are you hurt?” you ask desperately, stepping over the prone troll to get to Dayvhe. You catch him by the shoulders and look him over, he seems mostly fine.

“I’m fine, a few bumps and scrapes, it’s him I’m worried about.” Dayvhe insists, pointing at the troll on the floor.

You give him a look and realise that he’s the oliveblood you saw before who gave Dayvhe the message to go to the sea. He’s bleeding all over and has three shuriken sticking out of one thigh.

“What happened to him?” you ask as you help Dayvhe haul the guy onto your loungeplank now it’s apparent that Dayvhe wants this guy helped and not hurt.

“One of my fucking ancestor’s crates. Adventure moron here decided to open it on his own and it literally blew up in his face.” Dayvhe complains.

“Right, well, I can help you patch him up.” you nod.

“Thanks.” Dayvhe sighs gratefully and you walk off to get your medical kit as you try to supress the delighted internal squeal about him trusting you enough to come to you for this.

“Come on, Jayekh! Wake up! Stay with me here!” Dayvhe urges the guy as he shakes him.

“Did he hit his head?” you ask, kneeling on the floor.

“We… may have both fallen down a lot of stairs in an attempt to avoid the worst of the explosion. I’m just better at not landing on my head.” he answers and takes the antiseptic and a strip of adhesive sticking wound dressers from you and starts to tend to the smaller wounds.

“More head trauma is probably not the answer to that problem then.” you point out and Dayvhe seems to concede your point.

You tug Jayekh a little further down so his stabbed leg is well and truly away from your stainable furnishings and you carefully rip the fabric of his green pants away from the wound. They’re in deep but not too deep, not deep enough that removing them will cause life threatening gushing from the wounds. You pull them out all at once, douse them in antiseptic and that sure gets a reaction from the guy even if it’s just a moaned protest. You staple the wounds up quick as you can and wrap a tight bandage around while trying not to cut off the circulation and inadvertently tourniquet the guy’s leg off.

“I’ve gotta troll Roxxie about this in a sec, Jayekh only came with me because Dirkka was too sick to go. He and Dirkka are matespirits, and if I don’t tell her what happened they’re both gonna get hella worried.” Dayvhe explains as he scrubs at Jayekh’s scraped up elbow.

“I’m not gonna get that lunatic showing up here, am I?” you groan.

“Fuck no, he’s way too sick for that. Roxxie isn’t even letting him out of her room, she’s waiting on his sick ass prong and nub. That’s the thing with giving yourself artificial gills, any illness that affects your chest just devastates the dude. What a dweeb.” Dayvhe sighs and shakes his head.

“Well, he should be fine. I’m gonna get him something in case he throws up from the head injury.” you tell him and go to do just that.

“Sick.” Dayvhe comments as he types away on his palmhusk, managing to be both gross and
unhelpful. You find a large bowl that Aradia brought around one time she tried to bake a cake with you and proved that neither of you could do that. You shove down the sting and place it on the floor by the loungeplank and usher Dayvhe out of the way so that you can get Jayekh laid out properly.

“She says to keep her updated but she’s glad he’s mostly okay.” Dayvhe informs you, evidently done with messaging.

“Good. He’s really out, isn’t he?” you note, snapping your fingers in front of the face of the passed out older guy.

“Yeah, he landed pretty hard on his head. He was incoherent already when I scooped him up and started on my way here but by the time I even got to your door…” Dayvhe shakes his head.

“We can’t really do much else for him, you did everything you could.” you tell him quietly and crouch down by Dayvhe on the floor. The way he’s curled in on himself tells you everything about how guilty he feels that the guy is hurt.

“He’s a good guy, I like him. When I was little he tried teaching me how to shoot a gun.” Dayvhe says softly.

“I didn’t know that was your specibus.” you say in surprise.

“Ah, it’s not. He just let me borrow it to see if it’d suit me but I’m a sword guy like Dirkka, well, and psionics. If I wanna hit something far away I’ll just throw stuff with my brain.” Dayvhe shrugs.

“Not that I’ve really seen you do that either, you seem to just use it to boost your dumbass ninja moves.” you say flatly.

“It’s a good use for it.” Dayvhe argues. It’s really not but it’s also hardly your place to say.

“Besides, you’re the only person I know with the same kind of telekinesis so it’s not as if I could do anything but work it out myself.” he says.

“Well if you ever want to be humiliated in a contest of strength by the best psionic my door is always open.” you tease him and he elbows you.

“Were you doing something before I got here? You don’t need to entertain me or anything, I’m the one imposing on you here.” Dayvhe says seriously.

“It’s fine. And I was just compiling some code, it’s probably done now.” you answer.

“Well, go on then!” Dayvhe snorts and shoves you away. You hold up your hands in surrender and walk back to your block.

Fuck, your code isn’t compiling at all, you must have some kind of error in there. You scowl at the screen like it insulted your lusus and drop into your chair so you can try to hunt down the mistake and kill it. That evidently takes you some time because Dayvhe appears in your doorway blocking the light coming in from the main room.

“Oh, whoa.” he breathes in awe, making you look up. He’s not looking at you or your beenary mainframe but rather the chalkboards on your walls, the scrawled code ideas that you write out longhand sometimes to think them through. You’re pretty sure it makes you look like a crazy person which, while not wrong, isn’t something you want him to think of you.

“So you’re kind of a genius then.” Dayvhe says, turning around to look at all of it.
“It’s not-” you choke out, your face burning. Why does he have to be so nice to you? Doesn’t he know he’s going to kill you if he keeps up with that? Your bloodpusher will just explode, it will be both tragic and gross.

“Shut up. Can I sit here? Jayekh isn’t exactly the best company.” Dayvhe asks. You nod and Dayvhe settles happily down onto your floor and pulls out his husktop. Unsure of what else to do you get back to your own work. Dayvhe’s making music but he’s doing it with his headphones on, still the mumbling and quiet humming that comes from him as he does his thing is a pleasant kind of background noise.

After a while Dayvhe shuffles over so that he can lean his back against the legs of your desk instead of just hunching over on the floor. You’re pretty sure that he’s not making music any longer, he didn’t pull his turntables over with him and his headphones are around his neck instead.

“I meant to say…” Dayvhe says slowly, “thanks for the Karkat thing.”

“Oh, it’s fine. It was starting to be like watching a bug fly into a window over and over, plus it seemed dumb to let you snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.” you tell him.

“Yeah, but you knew about him. Being… like me, I mean.” Dayvhe says seriously and you look down.

“Yeah?” you say.

“But you still didn’t tell me and you hadn’t told him about me when I got there.” Dayvhe points out. You stop typing and turn your chair around a bit to face him properly.

“When I found out about him ages ago I swore I wouldn’t tell, same as I did with you. I wasn’t gonna break that promise but it made me pretty fuckin’ sure that the two of you would be fine with each other when you found out.” you explain.

Dayvhe taps his fingers on the keys of his keyboard, not typing anything but more like it’s a nervous habit. He’s frowning and chewing on his lip.

“It’s just… no one knows about my ancestor, or Dirkka. Dirkka, Roxxie, Jayekh and Jayhne don’t know about my other friends and they don’t know about them. I mean, Karkat, Rohhhze, John and Jayded know that my lusus sucks so I don’t go home much but they don’t know why. I keep all that shit separate, secret. Not cause I have to but it’s just… easier? Safer? Whatever. But you know, and you knew about me being a mutant and you knew it was safe to tell but you didn’t.” Dayvhe says slowly.

You don’t know what to say. You had suspected that no one else had that connection between his separate groups but it wasn’t confirmed, and of course you don’t know what he does and doesn’t say to Karkat. The outright stating that as a fact is just… you can hardly wrap your thinksponge around it. And he knows how much you know but still comes back to you.

“That’s cool of you.” Dayvhe finally says and you nod, swallowing thickly. Dayvhe nods like that’s settled the whole thing and goes back to actually messaging someone, the hint of grey you can see from this angle suggests Karkat.

“I should have a shower. Don’t touch my shit.” you tell him, getting up.

“I’ll order pizza when you go, what do you like?” Dayvhe asks, not even looking up.

“Not fish. Spicy is good.” you say.
“Got it.” Dayvhe nods and you escape from your own block to go hide in your ablution block.

[twinArmageddons began trolling carcinoGeneticist]
TA: two be upfront iif you breathe a word about thi2 two anyone el2e ii will fucking burn your hiive down with you inn2iide. Clear?
CG: SEE I GOT THE SCHOOLFEEDING FOR WIGGLERS WHO WEREN’T REPEATEDLY BOUNCED HEADFIRST ON THE FLOOR AND WE GOT THE SOCIAL MODULES THAT EXPLAINED THAT OPENING A CONVERSATION WITH OVERBLOWN THREATS OF ARSON ISN’T POLITE.
TA: fuck polite and all2o, relatedly, you.
CG: LOOK, DUMBASS. OVER THE SWEEPS WE’VE KNOWN EACH OTHER WE HAVE BOTH SAID SOME TERRIBLY MORTIFYING SHIT. ANY ATTEMPTS AT DOUBLE CROSSING EACH OTHER AT THIS POINT WOULD PROBABLY BE MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION.
CG: BESIDES I LIKE YOU MOST OF THE TIME AND I’M UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT YOU’RE ENTIRELY TO BLAME FOR ME CURRENTLY DATING DAYVHE SO THE FONT OF MY GENEROSITY HERE RUNNETH OVER.
TA: wow getting laid really doe2 wonder2 for your mood, huh, kk?
CG: NOT THAT YOU’D KNOW. HOW HARD IS IT TO GET ALL THAT YELLOW OFF OF YOUR PALMS ANYWAY? SURELY REPEATED AND SAD EXPOSURE STAINS THEM?
TA: wow go fuck your2elf.
CG: I’VE RECENTLY OUTSOURCED THAT, ACTUALLY.
TA: you're the actual wor2t, but ii'm going two ignore that becau2e ii 2eriou2ly need two talk about thi2.
TA: ii think ii’ve contracted 2ome kiind of fatal diii2ea2e here. iif dayvhe ii2 2weet and piitable and perfect inn my pre2ence much more ii think ii will actually kiill me. ii wiill diie from thi2.
CG: I WARNED YOU ABOUT THIS. I TOLD YOU IT’D HAPPEN.
CG: FUCK DAYVHE’S STUPID MEMES ARE RUBBING OFF ON ME, WHAT THE FUCK.
TA: what am ii 2uppo2ed two do here?
CG: HOW THE HELL SHOULD I KNOW? DAYVHE WAS THE ONE WHO MADE THE FIRST MOVE ON ME AND HE ONLY CAME BACK BECAUSE OF YOU. DON’T GET ME WRONG IF HE MAKES A MOVE ON YOU AND THEN COMES TO ME ABOUT IT I WILL ABSOLUTELY POINT HIM BACK YOUR WAY BUT OTHERWISE I DON’T REALLY SEE WHAT I CAN DO FOR YOU.

You mash your palmhusk into your face for a moment. You don’t want to tell him about the kiss, or you do but… it feels like a violation of trust. It was private and Dayvhe never spoke of it again and he’s not done anything like it since. It was probably just an impulse thing. You sigh and look at your chat again.

TA: ii know, ii’m ju2t piity2truck ii gue22.
CG: I KNOW THE FEELING.
CG: BUT IF IT’S ANY CONSOLATION HE SEEMS TO LIKE YOU A LOT, DAYVHE DOESN’T SPEND TIME WITH PEOPLE HE DOESN’T LIKE. YOU’RE FRIENDS AT LEAST.
TA: ii don't really want two think of that a2 a con2olatiion. ii ju2t wii2h ii wa2 hii2 moiiraiil.
CG: I KNOW.
TA: ugh. ok. ii 2hould actually 2hower liike ii 2aaid ii would inn2tead of hiidiing inn here from him talkiing two you.
CG: WAIT, HE’S WITH YOU RIGHT NOW AND YOU’VE LOCKED YOURSELF IN A DIFFERENT ROOM? YOU’RE A GODDAMN HOPELESS DISASTER! GO TALK TO HIM!
TA: no, ii wiill. ii'm not 2cared of hiim or 2omethiing 2tupiid liike that. but ii 2aiid ii wa2 going two 2hower 2o ii 2hould.
TA: al2o ii'm not 2ure ii can remember when ii la2t actually 2howered 2o ii probably 2hould do that anyway.
CG: WOW, ALSO GROSS. BUT HEY, HIS MERE PRESENCE IS SHAPING YOU INTO A FUNCTIONAL FUCKING TROLL ALMOST FIT FOR RESPECTABLE SOCIETY AND YOU’RE NOT EVEN TOGETHER. MAYBE IT IS A MATCH MADE IN THE STARS.
TA: oh fuck off you wa2te of 2kiin.
CG: HAHA!
[twinArmageddons ceased trolling carcinoGeneticist]

You throw your palmhusk in the sink and shuck off your gross clothes and shower. You try to keep it short, given that you’ve wasted a bunch of time already in talking to Karkat. You feel more like a person when you step out and you can’t help but laugh that you find a message from Karkat asking if you’re still friends.

When you come back out into your block Dayvhe isn’t there. You distantly hear the sound of the front door shutting and you have a dumb moment of worry that he’s somehow bailed. Ignoring that you go back into the main room to find Dayvhe balancing a pizza box in one hand and leaning over Jayekh.

“Do you think if I dropped a slice on his face he’d wake up?” Dayvhe wonders aloud.

“I think that you’d be dropping one of YOUR slices on his face for that experiment.” you answer, flicking the box open. Dayvhe makes a sound that suggests that he’s curious but not sacrifice a slice of his own pizza kind of curious.

It’s a pretty weird combination of toppings, you’re reasonably sure Dayvhe just picked whatever thing he thought sounded interesting but you’ve certainly had worse. You must have been pretty hungry because you’re three slices down when you realise that he’s wearing different clothes, in fact that’s one of Karkat’s sweaters he has on.

“That’s not yours.” you say in surprise.

“Terezi assures me that possession is nine tenths of the law. Also Karkat ripped one of my shirts so I stole one of his to make it fair. Besides, what I was wearing when I came here had Jayekh blood on it.” Dayvhe grimaces a little at that last part.

You’re not going to ask how or why Karkat was ripping Dayvhe’s clothes, you don’t want to know. Especially given how agreeable Karkat is being, more or less anyway.

“I have a laundry machine you know.” you point out.

“I know, you nearly blinded me next to it recently.” Dayvhe says in response because he’s a little shit, you flip him off in response and keep talking.

“You can throw ‘em into my laundry machine. Not like you’re going anywhere with him any time soon.” you say, waving at Jayekh’s still passed out body on your loungeplank.

“You don’t gotta go doing my laundry. I usually just go bum around Dirkka and Roxxie’s until one of them feels bad for me and does it for me.” Dayvhe says.

“Wasn’t offering to do it FOR you, I just said you could use mine. And wow, really, an heiress to the whole empire washes your gross sweaty clothes?” you say in disbelief.
“I know, and I’m a mutant too. It’s downright heretical, I’m just the most subversive there is.” he brags with a flash of a toothy grin.

“I think you’re just kind of lazy.” you snort.

“Ouch.” Dayvhe says.

“Truth hurts.” you snicker.

The two of you finish off the pizza together in companionable conversation and the friendly kind of insulting back and forth that all your closest friends are good at. You both check on your guest’s wounds, then Dayvhe actually does do some laundry though you suspect it’s just to prove to you that he can and isn’t just waited on prong and nub by the heiress. He showers and you wrestle your code some more. Then you then end up stealing a bunch of cushions from various chairs and make a DIY loungeplank (it’s not a pile, it’s not) and sit on that against the outside of your bifurcated coon and watch troll Ninja Warrior together on your husktop.

Dayvhe starts yawning and at first you don’t say anything but you can’t help but do so when he starts slumping against your side more and more and his shades slip down his nose enough that you can see how slow his blinks are becoming, like each time it’s harder to open his eyes again.

“Okay,” you say shutting your husktop, “time to sleep.”

“Mmm, ok.” he yawns.

“Red or blue?” you ask, standing up and offering him a hand up. Dayvhe just looks up at you in sleepy confusion.

“Which side do you want? I switch all the time, unsurprisingly, so I don’t mind.” you explain, gesturing to your coon and the tinted slime within.

“Oh. OH! Aw, nah man I’ll just sleep here.” Dayvhe says with a shake of his head and pats the cushions that he’s already sat on.

“You’re going to sleep on the floor. Next to my coon? The coon that has TWO totally separate sides to it and one would be completely free.” you say.

Dayvhe looks at it and then back to you.

“It’s cool. You know, you sleep deeper in sopor is all.” he shrugs.

“Yeah, idiot, that’s the point.” you exclaim.

Wait.

Oh, no, there might be something there. Dayvhe sleeps at other people’s hives all the time but never in sopor always out of it, so he sleeps lightly and probably restlessly enough that he gets up before anyone else and leaves. He’s sleeping on high alert, aware and prepared to defend himself.

“I wouldn’t hurt you.” you tell him and he almost jumps at the words, like he didn’t expect you to be so outright about it.

“We’re friends and you’ve helped me so much already, why would I? And even if I wanted to I could kill you with my brain in second, I sure as shit don’t need to wait for you to be asleep to do it.” you add.
“Laying out how you’d kill me is supposed to be reassuring, huh?” Dayvhe asks.

“My point is that if you think you not sleeping in sopor is going to help with that, you’re wrong. So you may as well sleep well and make me not feel like a shitty host. So, red or blue?” you ask again.

Dayvhe stares you down but one of the perks of having eyes like yours is it makes you hard to beat in that kind of contest. He opens his mouth but no words come out, even though you can all but see the excuses flying through his mind. Or worse yet the actual reasons he doesn’t feel alright enough to trust you and no answer that he says could possibly not make you pity him more.

The sleeping out of sopor, the quick exits… he feels he has to do that. You’re not actually his moirail, you shouldn’t be trying to gently push him into things that are good for him.

“You don’t have to. I’m gonna… go brush my teeth.” you say awkwardly and back off.

You slope away and lock yourself in your ablution block and curse at yourself for being such a dumbass. You glare at your reflection as you scrub your disastrous dentition. You can hear the soft sound of Dayvhe muttering to himself from the other side of the door and when you shamefully emerge you’re surprised to see Dayvhe down to his boxers and sat on the edge of your coon on the red side. He’s looking down at the sopor slime like it might eat him alive and he startles to hear you come in.

Well, okay then. You peel off your shirt but you must confess that you’re less concerned with him seeing you and more of what you can see of him. His back is covered with dusty coloured scars and old bite marks that don’t match any troll mouth, your money is on his lusus. Far more recently there’s more scratches on his skin, faint red scratches that are basically healed over but given the placement of them and how they’re very obviously from someone’s claws you’re pretty sure you know who he got those from. The same goes for the darkened bite on his collarbone.

Dayvhe bites his lip and cautiously puts his foot in the sopor as you clamber gracelessly out of your jeans.

“It’s been a really long time since I’ve had sopor.” Dayvhe explains and you slide into your half without any of the trepidation Dayvhe has.

“You don’t have to, it just seemed dumb for you to be on the floor when there’s space in here.” you say.

It seems that a good way to get Dayvhe to do something is apparently to tell him that he shouldn’t or doesn’t need to do it because he drops himself in all at once at your words, nearly dunking his head under in the process. He scrambles wildly for the edge and throws one arm over the side.

“Augh, deeper than I thought it was.” Dayvhe gasps.

“Well maybe you should just, like, go jam your bulge in your sillicombe server with the bees. And they’d be all ‘hey this is probably honey what with the colour and all’ and then eat it off and you’d be… be bulgleless and that’d… bees don’t eat honey do they? I- wow this is strong.” Dayvhe rambles, his words becoming woozy as he talks.

“It really isn’t you’re just not used to it.” you laugh and reach out to his intact horn and press it just enough so that his head lolls over onto the arm he has out over the side. You don’t want him going
facedown in this stuff. He turns his head a little and ends up with a smear of blue from your arm on
his temple.

“Will you wake me when you get up?” he asks with a yawn, you nod in response. Even if he could
do with the sleep he’s probably not cool with being out cold when others are awake.

You slip a little deeper into your sopor. Dayvhe’s pupils have blown wide in his eyes and he’s
obviously struggling to stay awake.

“D’ya think I’m a jerk?” Dayvhe slurs slightly, shuffling closer to your side.

“What?” you say in bafflement.

“I jus’ kissed you and bailed and then I was gone an when I’m here I’m all- I’m stupid. An’ you
know ‘bout Cal an’ Dirkka an’ Roxxie an… I’m not just- just doing this to keep you on my side or-
or make you…” Dayvhe mumbles, struggling to articulate his thoughts. You stare at him, the
thought that he could have been manipulating your probably obvious affections for him in order to
keep his secrets hasn’t even occurred to you.

He’s starting to talk again but before he can get anything even close to coherent out you press your
hand to his mouth.

“You’re tired. And clearly kind of high, you’ll probably thank me tomorrow for shutting you up.
And I didn’t think that.” you tell him.

You take your hand away and wonder of wonders the nonsense has stopped. Dayvhe just gives you
a sleepy kind of half smile and slumps down over his arm. His arm which is now more or less
hanging into your blue side. You instead settle down against the back of your coon and let yourself
drift off to a dreamless sleep.

Unlike Dayvhe who is unused to sopor and sleeps like the dead you’ve always been a relatively
restless sleeper anyway, prone to insomnia and light sleep. There’s a reason you write all up your
chalkboard and your walls, because you’re awake when you shouldn’t be and you refuse to get
sopor all in your computer keys.

So needless to say you snap awake when your door is kicked open and you reflexively have the
intruder slammed up against the ceiling before you’re even properly awake. You clock the pistols
pointed at you and fling them far away, leaving your attacker unarmed. It’s Jayekh and he is not
pleased at all.

“I- Dayvhe?” Jayekh asks, craning his neck to look behind you.

“Oh. OH. Oh fuck, I rather feel I may have made a hoofbeast’s ass out of myself here. I didn’t realise
you two were- that he was- I mean… oh dear.” Jayekh babbles, his demeanour instantly changing.
You drop him to the ground which makes him yelp loudly in pain, those injuries aren’t fun after all, and then you psionically shove him back into the main room and slam the door after him. Turning on your heel you face the still blissfully asleep Dayvhe. You reach out and grab his bare shoulder, jostling him gently to wake him up. And then a fair bit harder because he really is out cold.

“Dayvhe! Wake up!” you finally shout and his eyes sleepily flutter open.

“Hn?” Dayvhe grunts.

“Wake up.” you tell him again, wrapping your arms around his chest and hauling him up. Dayvhe’s head lolls down and he jolts in alarm, you feel the startled suck of breath rush into his chest and you suddenly click. Red. Like Karkat he’s hid his colour his whole life, seeing something damn close to it must be startling.

“It’s just sopor, you’re not hurt.” you assure him gently.

“Hah, I- I didn’t think it was blood. You don’t know that. Maybe I thought it was jizz.” Dayvhe laughs weakly. Ok, fine, he’s awake. You let go and he drops back into the sopor with a yelp.

“Reported. Block.” Dayvhe says, his mouth only just above the sopor.

“Shut up, your stupid guest is here and he tried to shoot me.” you argue and that at least gets Dayvhe taking you seriously. He pushes up out of the sopor himself and swings a leg over the side.

“Really? Shit, we should have left him a note or something. You’re not hurt, right? He didn’t break anything? Hurt your bees?” Dayvhe asks and drops onto the floor.

His genuine worry for you and your home takes the edge off of your irritation and you relax slightly.

“My reflexes are faster than that, besides he’s about as subtle as a bomb.” you sneer at the mere memory of Jayekh thinking he could outdraw you.

“Ain’t that the truth. I should-” Dayvhe starts to say, making to walk out into the main room.

“Not track sopor through my hive and instead go shower.” you say flatly.

“It’s like you just read my mind.” Dayvhe replies innocently, hastily altering the path that he’s taking and veering towards the shower.

When he’s in there you keep an ear out for Jayekh but he doesn’t seem to be making any noise out there. With nothing else to scrutinise you can’t help but see the places on your skin where the two colours of sopor have mixed together which is a pain and half the reason you have to replace the stuff as frequently as you do. Dayvhe returns dressed in his own shirt again and then you shower as fast as you can. It’s not fast enough though because as you’re shoving your legs into your jeans and tripping over the rolled over cuffs you can already hear the two of them talking.

You come out just in time to hear some argument between them coming to its peak.

“-we’re just friends!” Dayvhe snaps at him.

Oh, ouch. It’s true, but still.

Jayekh seems to spot you coming in and pulls his attention off of Dayvhe and onto you.

“I’m terribly sorry for the inconvenience, I had a fine way of thanking you for the help that you gave me. I do apologise. Please let me introduce myself properly, I’m Jayekh Nglish.” he says, getting to
his feet and favouring his undamaged leg to do so. He holds out his hand but you don’t take it, instead sticking by your block door and vaguely waving at him.

“Yeah, hi.” you say.

“I should really be getting back. I’m sure Dirkka is going to be worried about me.” Jayekh says.

“Shit, yeah. I’ll come with you on the train, your ass might be old but you’re obviously hurt. Don’t want some opportunistic fuck taking a shot at you and then you know Roxxie, Dirkka and Jayhne will go full on murder squad.” Dayvhe says sensibly.

“Alright.” you nod. Dayvhe turns to look at you, even with his glasses on you know he is. He frowns a little but it’s- it’s whatever.

“Actually before I go could I get my guns back?” Jayekh asks hopefully and you turn to pull them psionically towards you. You drop them into Dayvhe’s hands rather that Jayekh’s, you trust him with weapons in your hive but not exactly your new guest.

“Right, we should bounce. Thanks again, Sollux.” Dayvhe thanks you.

“Yes, it really was right gentlemanly of you. I’ll just… here if you ever need a favour or somewhere to crash for the day and you’re down on the eastern forested peninsula just give me a shout and I’ll happily settle up with you.” Jayekh says, fishing some paper out and scribbling his trolltag on there and handing it to you.

“Oh. Thanks, I think I know someone else who lives out there too but I thought it was pretty empty down that way.” you say slowly. Jayded lives that way as far as you know, you’ve spoken to her more since you got your plant and she’s nice. Sometimes she reminds you of Aradia in a bittersweet sort of way but she’s different enough that you can deal with talking to her and not feel too bad about it.

“It is, and that’s just how I like it! Lots of lovely outdoors, friendly wildlife, adventure, that’s the ticket!” Jayekh says brightly and you figure that yeah this is someone bonkers enough to be one of Dirkka’s quadrants.

Dayvhe shoos him out and with a final goodbye to you he goes as well. You scrub at your face with your hands and try to remember that you’re supposed to keep your shit together. That you know you’re not his moirail and you like being his friend you-

There’s a knock from the door.

Confused as to who it might be seeing as Dayvhe only just left you open to door to find Dayvhe there on his own. He slips inside and leans against the door.

“Uh, hey, so… that sopor thing…” he says quickly.

“Yeah?” you say.

“It made me a little…” he trails off.

“High?” you suggest and Dayvhe laughs, just one breathy little quiet thing but it makes you glow to hear it.

“Yeah, I guess. I remember you making me shut up though because I started on that whole word vomit thing of dumbassery which was actually pretty cool of you? So thanks. But I wanted to- I like
you, okay?” Dayvhe blurts out and he looks as startled as you to have said it but before you can get a
word in he steamrolls on with the conversation.

“And it’s total bullshit because you help me out all the time with that shit with my lusus and Dirkka,
not to mention not saying anything about them and Roxxie to anyone or my crazy goddamn ancestor
and it’s just like fuck what if he thinks I- you know, just to keep him quiet like fuck man that’s
fucked up.” he babbles.

“I’d never even considered it.” you say firmly.

“Even though you know about me being a mutant? I mean people do dumber shit to survive. You
didn’t think I’d done that?” he challenges you, like he wants you to think the worst of him. To
validate his fears or something. Shit, you know what that feels like. You’ve felt unlovable and lashed
out at people until you made them despise you.

“You saved my life, it’s not like this is one sided.” you point out.

“I talked to a few people about a plant, that’s not the same.” Dayvhe mutters.

“Dayvhe…” you say quietly.

“I should go.” he says, shaking his head but then doesn’t move or go anywhere.

You open your mouth to comment but your ability to bring words into existence is rudely halted
when Dayvhe reaches out a hand to you. His claws skim the column of your throat, feather light and
curl into the collar of your shirt. When he pulls it’s so gently that he moves himself just as much as he
pulls you to him. He kisses your cheekbone in the same place that he did last time but it’s not rushed
or hit-and-run like the last one, he lingers for a full few beats of your delighted bloodpusher. He pulls
back, his face dark and his gaze cast down at the floor.

“I should- yeah.” he mumbles and hurriedly slips out of your front door and he’s off.

You press your hand to your cheek and grin like a loon. Dayvhe just made it really clear that he’s not
doing anything just because he owes you and then went and kissed you anyway. He likes you back,
that has to be what this means! You punch the air in delight and only suppress cheering in joy
because he might still be within hearing range. The euphoria is so strong that it’s a wonder you’re not
barfing rainbows right where you stand. It’s hard resisting the temptation to contact Karkat, he
knows Dayvhe best and confirmation from someone else that Dayvhe really does mean what you
think he does would be great. But you know how much he values his privacy so you restrain
yourself.

Just.
"That was us"

'Don't be afraid
I swear I'm unarmed
And you've been betrayed
But I mean you no harm
Don't have much to say
Just hoping you'll know
It will be okay
As long as you don't give up on me
Just don't give up on me'

Juliaa Newnes - That Was Us - Pale Indie Chart Topper for 3 Weeks

Four nights later Dayvhe trolls you. Well, he’s trolled you every night because, like Karkat, Dayvhe is a torrent of words and wildly unconnected thoughts. But specifically four nights later is different.

[t urntechGodhead began trolling twinArmageddons]
TG: yo man you're awake right
TG: i know how you like to be all nocturnal circadian rhythms are for losers imma remix those rhythms into my own sick beats and pass out face down on my keyboard like a dumbass
TA: ba2ele22 accu2ation2.
TG: oh shit are you gonna get litigious on my ass should i be expecting a visit from tz huh
TA: 2he'd jump at the chance, you know it.
TG: cept one of us is her fave colour and it aint you
TG: i will for sure rig this trial you just watch me
TA: how could you do thii2 two me?
TA: dayvhe?
TA: diid you drop your palmhusk or 2omethiing?

He’s just suddenly stopped typing. You take your prongs off of the keys but you can still hear a faint tapping sound, it doesn’t stop after a few seconds so you get up to investigate. It’s louder in your main room but you can’t think what would be- what is that at your window?

You open it and the thing flies wildly in, dropping onto the loungeplank. Picking it up you see that it’s a stick of candy, the kind you get as souvenirs in some places. It has purple and black stripes on it and on the ends of the long stick there’s a slightly warped picture of a bee laid into the candy that presumably runs through it. It’s a stick of bee themed candy rock.

Confused as fuck you lean out of the window and spot Dayvhe on the street below looking up at you. He smirks and flashes you a peace sign. The person next to him looks up and spots you too and you realise that he’s with Rohhze.

TA: what are you doiing? ii mean thank2 for the cool candy but why are you down there? you have acce22 two the buiilding.
TG: ah i cant stay i need rohhzes help for something
TG: things that are all ills of legal
TG: shes gonna be scary so i can sneak in somewhere and steal a thing
TA: wait, ii can help.
TG: aw naw man its cool not that i dont appreciate the lowblood solidarity and all but i kinda need her highblood intimidation moxie for this stunt
TG: plus i promised wed hang at hers after and i will save you from the spooky girl shenanigans i
mean just look at me jumping on this grenade for you bro
TA: 2uure. but what wa2 the candy for?
TG: for you man
TG: didnt the postal drones have that i saw this and thought of you campaign a while back although
thinking on it thats kinda rude of me to reference them and then just straight up cut the postal service
out man that was cold ouch
TA: that'2 really 2weet.
TG: oh fuck is it too sweet and you dont like it?
TA: ii didn't mean the candy, ii haven't tried that yet. al2o two 2weet ii2n't a thiing wiith candy
unle22 you're weak. ii meant that wa2 2weet of you.
TG: oh!
TG: i gotta ollie outtie ok peace
[turmttechGodhead ceased trolling twinArmageddons]

You lean out of the window again and see Dayvhe duck his head and quickly walk off, but Rohhze
lingers behind him looking up at you. She’s too far for you to get a good read on her expression but
you’re too consumed with the fluttering in your chest to care much. That is until she messages you.

[tentacleTherapist began trolling twinArmageddons]
TT: <コ:彡 Sollux, this is Rohhze. I realise we have not chatted individually before now, perhaps an
oversight on my part. But I got your handle from the group that you so rudely left.
TA: your group wa2 bad and you 2hould feel bad.
TT: <コ:彡 I am ignoring your meme.
TT: <コ:彡 Why did Dayvhe just detour us some distance out of our way to float a stick of candy up
to your window at considerable mental strain to himself?
TA: well who doe2n't liike candy? e2peciially bee themed candy.
TT: <コ:彡 So the fact that it is bee themed is relevant to you somehow?
TT: <コ:彡 Making this a thoughtful personal gift. To you. From Dayvhe.
TA: 2o?
TT: <コ:彡 Would you say that the two of you are close?
TA: ii would 2ay ii2n't none of your bu2ine22.
TT: <コ:彡 Oh, how interesting. You’re defensive. Now is that because you’re not close and you’re
sore about it but grasping at a nice gesture as proof of how close you are or is it that you’re closer
than I realised and you realise that you have something to hide?
TA: it i222222…
[twinArmageddons blocked tentacleTherapist]

You shut the window and still find yourself smiling like a dumbass all night and when you do eat the
candy you ration it very carefully. You still have some left when you get an unexpected message
from Terezi the next night.

[gallowsCalibrator began trolling twinArmageddons]
GC: H3LLO V4LU3D T3CH N3RD
TA: hii tz. nothing per2onal but from that opening ii have two a2k what you broke and need
fixiing.
GC: H4H! YOUR3 FUNNY BUT NO 1TS NOT M3 WHO 1S 1N N33D OF YOUR SK1LLS
RIGHT NOW
[gallowsCalibrator added ectoBiologist to the chat]
GC: CONS1D3R M3 TH3 1NT3RM3D14RY B3TW33N YOU 4ND 4 BLU3 W33N13 WHO
N33DS YOUR H3LP
EB: terezi! no!
TA: what exactly am ii beiing iinvolved iiin here?
GC: TH1S DUMB4SS W4S COMPL41N1NG 4BOUT HOW H1S HUSKTOP W4S NO GOOD
FOR G4M3S BUT K3PT R3FUS1NG TO DO 4NYTH1NG 4BOUT 1T WH1CH 1 PERSON4LLY F1ND 4BHORR3NT

EB: i said i was going to buy a new one at some point!
GC: 4 P3R1G33 4GO! 4DM1T 1T YOU JUST DONT KNOW WH4T YOUR3 DO1NG 4ND YOU 4R3 3V4D1NG TH3 ISSU3!
TA: alright before thi2 get2 really weirdly per2onal and make2 me leave, are you wantiing adviice on buying one or do you want 2omethiing cu2tom made? ii2 that why ii'm here?
EB: you can make custom things like that? that would be super cool and i would totally pay you for all of it of course
GC: 4ND FOR H1S T1M3 OF COURS3!
EB: of course for that too what kind of monster do you take me for?!
GC: >:]
TA: okay thii2 ii2 offiiciially two weiiird and blackfiirtyr for me two 2tay here. eb hiit me up when you want two talk about the kiind of machiine you want.
[twinArmageddons left chat]

John does message you back later and as the two of you hammer out specs for his machine it becomes increasingly obvious that he doesn’t know anything about technology at all and he has about Karkat’s understanding of coding, though he less frequently fills his shit with viruses or blows stuff up. When you get to the point where you’re supposed to tell him how much his expensive machine will be you have to step back and think.

[twinArmageddons began trolling turntechGodhead]
TA: hey, you and ectobiologii2t are clo2e, riight?
TG: what john yeah we are why
TA: ugh. okay fiine.
TG: i am so confused
TG: context is a thing you know
TA: buiildiing a hu2ktop for him and he know2 jack 2hiit about them. any other hieighblood a2kiing me two do thiis kiind of thing when they're not my friiend get2 my a22hole hieighblood rate.
TA: but 2iince you're friiend2 ii won't.
TG: thats nice but trust me john has the manners to tip well
TG: youll be fine dude

You quote the accurate but still substantial price for the machine and your time which John happily sends across to your account with no fuss at all. You get a happy thrill up your posture pole at seeing so much money in your account, even though most of it is going to go into the machine itself. You return to your chat with him to tell him.

TA: great, iit all arriived. ii'll get 2tarted now. depending on part2 iit 2hould take a week or two at mo2t.
EB: excellent!
EB: so uh have you seen dayvhe much lately?
TA: why do you want two know?
EB: just making conversation about our mutual friend is all
TA: liike your liittel group?
EB: okay i think you’ve got the wrong idea about that it’s just a chat between friends is all
EB: it’s not some secret competition message board to be the first to sweep Dayvhe off of his feet or anything! we just all found it funny that we all got the same crush and made it as a joke and a place to vent is all.
TA: 2ure.
EB: anyway it’s not like you’ve held it against jayded she says you two talk a lot about plants or something
EB: and rohhze uh well ok maybe let’s not talk about rohhze.
TA: let2 not.
TA: anyway i'll troll you iif i have any que2tion2 for you or iif i need you two make any
deci2ion2 on any part2.
[twinArmageddons ceased trolling ectoBiologist]

It turns out that you don’t need John’s input on anything else and your interest in the project speeds things up so you’re done in half a week. Part of the deal was you setting this thing up for him on account of him knowing nothing at all. So you fly to the highblood neighbourhood he lives in but when you’re there you have to land before you find his hive. Apparently his area doesn’t have hive numbers like normal places and the directions he gave you are from ground level. He couldn’t even point his hive out on an aerial shot from Goregle maps because he’s, and you quote, never seen his hive from above so how should he know what it looks like. So this is why you’re stuck walking around like some lame ass normal person. You have to say you don’t care for it. The highbloods in the area certainly don’t care for guttertrash like you walking around and especially people like you who aren’t scuttling around in fear.

The best excuse you have is that you’re too involved in trying to work out John’s stupid directions and looking down as you do it. You think the place up ahead with the mailbox with the red flappy arm dealy is his. You hear a yelled “GO BACK HOME, PISSBLOOD!” and don’t even have time to turn around before you’re face down on the ground. Your cheek digs into the paving as you blink stars from your eyes.

Unsteadily you push yourself up, hand landing on a brick as you go up. Then feet, running, the door and John.

“Whoa, are you okay there?” John as you as he lets you in.

“I’m… yeah. Some assholes out there. Husktop, where?” you ask, panting from exertion.

“Aw man that sucks I hope they didn’t say anything too mean. But yeah, right this way. Don’t mind my dad.” John says and you turn your head to see a large gecko lusus draped on the floor by the TV. John takes you upstairs to his block, he’s already cleared his desk off for you so you get to work.

Your head is swimming as you work and you can hardly focus at all, you keep having to go back to tasks to be sure that you’ve done them. It doesn’t help that your vision is going weird too, when you try to plug things in you keep missing the plug.

You palmhusk buzzes and you drop the cable with a sigh.

You squint at the rust red text and find that you can’t read it, it’s too blurry. You do your best to explain that you can’t really see right now because your head hurts and you think maybe you got hit in the head. Either way you have a husktop to install.

The installation is slow going, especially as the only way you’ve worked out to read anything on the screen is closing one eye and getting real close but you kill a good deal of time futzing with the screen settings in case it’s not you. And then you remember that it is just you and realise you wasted time for no reason.

“Oh my God your head.” Dayvhe’s voice says from behind you. You turn your chair around and nearly fall out of it. Dayvhe and John are standing there, but you don’t know how he got here. Dayvhe that is, John lives here obviously.

“He doesn’t look hurt.” John says dubiously.
Dayvhe reaches out for you and wraps his hand around the back of your neck and then pulls it back, stained in yellow. You blink hazily at it as he warps from having five fingers on one hand to ten and back to five.

Abruptly, and without any memory of moving you’re leaning over a big, white, clawfooted ablution trap. There’s water running over your head and the water that is rushing down the drain is tinted yellow.

“If his head was caved in wouldn’t he be dead?” John asks worriedly.

“I’ve seen weirder shit. I just need to know how bad it is.” Dayvhe answers him.

God, your head is ringing like hell. You jump in alarm as pain blooms in the back of your head. You lash out instinctively with your psionics and hear things shatter around you. John yells in alarm and you turn to see him totally soaked and holding the shower head and Dayvhe braced against the wall and ceiling with a crackle of red psi shielding him.

“What…” you mumble and slump against the ablution trap. Dayvhe slowfalls down to the floor and cautiously approaches you.

“Hey, Sol. It’s just me. I need to see the back of your head now, see how badly hurt you are. It’s gonna hurt but stay put, ok?” he says soothingly and without waiting for permission grabs one of your horns to hold you still and crouches down at your side. He twists your head to the side and you feel his fingers snake through your hair.

You can hear the pathetic sound that you make when his fingers brush a certain spot on the back of your head but you really hope it didn’t actually come from you. Your head is swimming and though you can hear John and Dayvhe talking you can’t focus on their words.

“Sol, wake up, you’re not allowed to sleep.” Dayvhe reprimands you and flicks your nose.

“How’d I- where am I?” you mumble, looking around a totally different room. You’re draped over the arm of a plush loungeplank in a… a movie room or something? John is standing nervously and his lusus is sat nearby, his fat tail curled around John’s legs.

“You don’t remember me bringing you down here?” Dayvhe asks worriedly.

“That’s definitely a symptom of a concussion.” John informs you both.

“Of course he has a concussion! One of your fucking neighbours attacked him!” Dayvhe snarls at him.

“All I’m saying is we should work out how bad off he is and if it’s really bad we should take him to the hospital.” John says.

“I’m not taking him to a hospital! He’s a mutant, are you crazy?” Dayvhe snaps.

“Don’t be stupid, Dave. A little cosmetic mutation in yellowbloods is so common, most of them have eyes like Twelfth perigees Eve lights for god’s sake! It’s not like he’s got a real dangerous mutation with anything inside him. Besides, no one culls yellowbloods with psionics like that for a little mutation.” John insists.

Nothing wrong with anything inside you? You’d argue that point, but what if there was something really wrong with you? Like your blood, like Dayvhe and Karkat’s blood? What would John say?
“Yeah, a psionic like him will get tested if I take him there. And then they’ll be all ‘oh your head’s already damaged let’s put some more holes in it and plug you into a spaceship ok bye!’ I’m not letting that happen!” Dayvhe argues.

“Why don’t we see how bad his concussion is and then we make a choice on what we’re going to do?” John suggests.

“Fine, go for it.” Dayvhe sighs.

“Ok, my tablet says… first check to see if his pupils are the same size.” John says.

Dayvhe turns his flat expression on you and then back to John who suddenly seems to click that your eyes aren’t like that.

“Oh! Right, stupid, sorry of course. Did he lose consciousness when he hit his head?” John continues, his cheeks going dark. At this Dayvhe turns back to you and climbs onto the loungeplank next to you.

“Did you black out?” he asks you.

“What?” you say in confusion.

“This isn’t helpful John.” Dayvhe sighs.

“You say that but it tells me he’s confused or disoriented and we know he already keeps forgetting how he got places.” John points out.

“Yeah, and he had double vision and couldn’t see properly earlier too. I already know he has a head injury. What are the signs it’s going to kill him?” Dayvhe asks, drumming his claws on your chest.

“Seizures, I think. It just says go to a doctor if you have these, so maybe we should-“ John tries again.

“No. I’ll just make sure he doesn’t fall asleep. He’ll get better on his own.” Dayvhe insists.

John sits down on a nearby chair and starts to talk to Dayvhe about other things. Eventually they move you back up to John’s room and you’re left sitting in his desk chair while Dayvhe finishes setting up the husktop for you. You’d help but aside from Dayvhe growling at you whenever you try you also can’t really read the screen. Your vision is just too blurry. Thankfully Dayvhe is actually pretty damn competent and evidently gets everything working just fine without you. Eventually you end up back on a loungeplank in a movie room again with your head in Dayvhe’s lap as they talk to each other above you.

“I still can’t believe that you’re dating Karkat, though. I know you said you go back and forth but what are you now?” John asks.

“Flush.” Dayvhe answers.

“You used to say you didn’t want anything to do with the guy!” John laughs.

“Because he’s as annoying as shit? Yeah, hence the pitch parts. We swap a lot, all the time really.” Dayvhe shrugs and idly runs his thumb against one of your smaller horns. You forget to breathe a little.

“I couldn’t hack that amount of vacillation. Think you’re going to settle on just one for him? I bet
pitch if you are, I mean don’t get me wrong Karkat’s my friend but the yelling!” John laughs.

“Karkat’s great, fuck off.” you mumble and John flashes you a toothy smile.

“Aw.” Dayvhe says teasingly.

“Hey, are him and Karkat… you know?” John stage whispers and even with your blurry vision you can see the diamond sign he flashes Dayvhe. Dayvhe makes a choked sound and you feel his leg tense under your cheek.

“What? No! They’re just best friends is all.” Dayvhe answers.

“Haven’t they been friends for forever though?” John says.

You know what John is doing! He’s trying to- to make Dayvhe think you’re involved with Karkat or pining after that dumbass instead of after Dayvhe himself. And you know that John has an interest in Dayvhe too!

“People can be friends forever without dating. I mean, I’ve been friends with you forever and we’re not dating.” Dayvhe points out.

HAH! Burn!

“This is true. Say, I’m gonna cook us up some pizzas. I’ll uh, be back in a minute.” John says and excuses himself out of the room.

“You know,” you mumble into the fabric of Dayvhe’s jeans, “he likes you. Pale-ways.”

“Yeah, I know.” Dayvhe replies softly.

“I think all your friends do.” you add because you’re a moron.

“Yeah. I know.” Dayvhe sighs and pets your hair.

“Does that make you hate them? For liking you I mean?” you ask.

“No.” Dayvhe says simply.

You’re not really sure what to make of that and the rest of the night passes in fits and starts. Not so much memory loss anymore but still haziness. Sometimes you’re just laying there with your head on Dayvhe’s lap and him checking that you’re awake but really you’re just mindlessly staring at nothing. Eventually he herds you into an ablationblock and stands next to you and you both brush your teeth, you’ve had enough gaming nights at Karkat’s overrun and you’ve had to crash there overday to know to keep a toothbrush on you all of the time. It’s a level of preparedness that Dayvhe seems to approve of, not that he says much as he brings you back down to where you were both camped out earlier.

“Alright, you can sleep now but I’m gonna keep waking you up every so often to check that your thinkspoon has’t turned to pudding. Ok?” Dayvhe says. You’re sat up on the sofa and you take the thick fuzzy throw that Dayvhe gives you.

“Okay?” Dayvhe prompts you again.

You can smell the mint on his words, the same taste that’s in your mouth right now.

“You kissed me before.” you say without thinking and Dayvhe freezes.
“I did.” he finally says.

“Twice.” you add. The fact that it was a two thing as well is pleasing to you on a deep level.

“Yeah.” Dayvhe agrees.

“Can I kiss you?” you ask, your claws kneading at the throw. He’s close enough that you could, just tilt your head up a little and lean and you could kiss him just where he got you. You look up at him and he in turn looks down at you, you can feel the weight of his assessing gaze on you and you’re hoping against hope that he finds something there that he wants.

Dayvhe’s mouth opens but no sound comes out. He pinches the bridge of his nose and shakes his head.

“I like you.” you add, hoping it’ll help your case.

“I like you too, you and your bruised thinksponge. This isn’t something we should be talking about when you’re like this.” he says finally.

“So… no?” you guess. You’re pretty sure he said no.

“No.” Dayvhe clarifies.

Oh. That’s disappointing. A worrisome thought occurs to you but thankfully it comes packaged with a solution you and Karkat worked out a long time ago.

“Are we still friends?” you ask him and Dayvhe laughs, sudden and startled.

“Of course we are, dumbass.” Dayvhe laughs and gets up from the arm of the loungeplank.

You settle down under the throw, you wish he’d said yes so badly. You know you’re not the greatest but you could be something, you’re a good listener at least. But he said no so that’s that. Sulking won’t do anything, just make you both feel shitty.

Dayvhe kicks a splaysac over to a place near the loungeplank and drops into it and looks at you thoughtfully. Or as thoughtful as someone can look half consumed by furniture filled with tiny beans.

“I gotta say, you take no a lot better than most people. And you asked.” Dayvhe says, but you’re not sure what response he wants from you.

“And,” he continues, “if I find who managed to hit you I’m going to rip their arms off.”

Oh. That’s nice of him.

You open your eyes and stare across a room you don’t recognise at all, over the sleeping form of Dayvhe. You have perhaps the worst headache of your life and it gets no better when you sit up.

“Fuuuuuuck.” you hiss, clutching your temples as the movement makes your thinksponge slap about inside your pan like a dehydrated ball of spam. Not literally, you hope. Dayvhe stirs and looks over at you, perking up as he does so.

“Feeling better?” Dayvhe asks.

“From what?” you hiss in pain as you feel around a bandage that’s suddenly on your head to a spot on the back of your head that throbs with pain.
“What do you mean ‘from what’?” Dayvhe asks, scrambling out of his little nest.

“I mean what hit me? And where are we?” you ask.

“You don’t remember? Oh shit, this is bad. You know your name, right? Your age? Who the Empress is?” Dayvhe asks in a panic, scrambling up onto the loungeplank with you.

“Of course I do.” you sigh, rubbing at your temples.

“So tell me.” he demands.

“Sollux Captor, I’m almost nine and don’t make me say her name, that bitch can choke for all I care.” you snarl on principle.

“I will accept those answers. But still, you remember nothing from yesternight? Not even where you are?” he asks, gesturing around the fancy place that you’re in.

You try and think what the last thing you remember is.

“I was… I was going to give John his husktop.” you say slowly. This place does look blueblood fancy.

“Right! You did, but you got attacked right near his hive. Then you messaged me.” Dayvhe explains.

“Did I?” you say and quickly pull your palmhusk out, scrolling back to your last conversation. It’s not long and technically Dayvhe was wrong. He trolled you.

[turntechGodhead began trolling twinArmageddons]

TG: settle a debate for me im arguing with jayded
TG: a calzone is not a sandwich
TA: dayvhe? ii can't really 2ee what youre 2ayiing myvii2iion2 all wrong
TG: wait what why
TA: a22hole hiighblood2 jkiioiimped me and hiit me wiith a briick or 2omethiingiin the head evrynthing2 moviing
TG: holy shit are you badly hurt? are you safe? what the FUCK?!
TA: cant read and iti2 makiing puttinmg john2 hu2ktwo[p on really hard two g2g
[twinArmageddons ceased trolling turntechGodhead]
[turntechGodhead began trolling twinArmageddons]

TG: what the fuck no get back here!
TG: *SOLLUX*
TG: fuck this im trolling john
[turntechGodhead ceased trolling twinArmageddons]

Well, no wonder he was worried.

“I don’t remember this at all. How bad was I?” you ask, looking back at Dayvhe.

“I was worried. Am worried, memory loss is still bad. Can you stand on your own?” he asks and gets up to give you room.

You can and do stand on your own, you still have a blistering headache but you’re worked with migraines before so you’re not unused to this.

“Well, that’s something. Now I just need to get you to Karkat’s.” Dayvhe says and paces back and
forth as he thinks.


“Because you need supervision after a head injury that bad and just me probably isn’t enough and we both trust Karkat. Plus there’s so much about your life that I don’t know that Karkat does so he’d be a better test of seeing if you have more memories missing than we already know.” Dayvhe explains.

“I’m fine.” you insist.

Dayvhe shakes his head and snarls, a furious rumble building in his chest.

“This is so f*cked. I’m so off the scale pissed right now. You weren’t even doing anything to anyone, not that it would have been cool if you had but you weren’t and these fuckers just come up and attack you. And they shouldn’t even have been able to hit you with all your psi but these dirty bastards must have jumped you and they have the nerve to call US low?! I swear I’m gonna find them and- and- RRRGH!” Dave hisses and waves his arms angrily as he speaks. You shrink back from his anger. If you’d not been so careless this wouldn’t have happened.

“I’m sorry, alright? I didn’t mean to get hit, I don’t even remember it. And I’m sorry for the stupid badly typed messages I sent you too, you shouldn’t have had to come here.” you tell him apologetically.

Dayvhe stares at you, the rage evaporating from him like water on the pavement at midday.

“What? No. No, this isn’t your fault. I’m glad you told me at least I could help. It isn’t like John picked up on what was wrong. I’ve been his friend for forever but he’s not exactly perceptive you know? I just hate assholes like those highbloods, attacking you just because you’re warmblooded. It just makes me want to track them down.” Dayvhe corrects you.

“Don’t do that. Even if you kill them the drones will be right after you and that’d suck.” you warn him.

“I know, I know. But they don’t care if mutants and lowbloods die, do they? I’ll be over the damn moons when this whole thing is scrapped and changed.” he complains. You don’t think that’s likely but you’re also not going to yank what little hope he has away and jump on it.

“Come on, let’s get our shit together and go.” Dayvhe sighs.

You check on the husktop that Dayvhe basically installed for you and it’s running perfectly and John is more than happy about it and, like Dayvhe said, he insists on pushing a more than generous wad of cash into your hand as a tip.

“And,” he says regretfully, “to apologise for whatever jerk attacked you.”

“That’s not your fault.” you point out.

“No, but they’re probably one of mine, right?” John says, tapping the blue sign on his chest. Well, if he wants to get rid of highblood guilt this way you’re not one to complain.

John cheerfully walks you both to the station, unsurprisingly with John between the two of you the area is as pleasant as can be. He happily starts talking up this little indie mystery game that he’s been playing and it sounds interesting enough that you tell him you think you’ll get it. John offers to gift the game to you on Spleen, which always struck you as a stupid name for gaming software but you
didn’t make it so you don’t get to pick the name. John leaves you both at the station entrance and Dayvhe slides slickly through the crowd to a ticket machine and buys a single to Karkat’s district. When he moves out of the way you go to buy your ticket but Dayvhe presses the one he just bought into your palm and pulls you wordlessly towards the ticket barriers.

“But.” you say.

“I’ve got a card of my own. Come on.” Dayvhe says and taps his wallet against the gate which springs open. Unused to being reduced to transport like this you’re stuck with feeding the paper ticket chip through the machine and rushing through before it tries to add to your head injury.

Dayvhe navigates through the tunnels like a trained squeakbeast in a maze, eventually doubling back to grab your hand and pull you along behind him. He ushers you into one train and stands in the doorway area of it with you.

“There’s no direct line to Karkat’s place from John’s so we’re on this for two stops, then we change and walk.” Dayvhe informs you.

“This is way more complicated than flying.” you tell him and then nearly fall on your ass when the train starts moving.

“We can’t take the easy way.” Dayvhe says with a flash of white fangs.

True enough you shortly change onto another train and this time you two get seats by the window. Dayvhe takes the aisle as you watch the scenery fly by. Eventually Dayvhe gets caught up in conversation with a stranger, a rustblood who’s a bit younger than you both. They’re happily talking about music equipment which devolves into a collaborative slam poetry match.

You squeeze your eyes shut because the whooshing of hives by the window is starting to make you feel dizzy. You slowly slump against Dayvhe’s side until your head is on his shoulder and you can feel his rhymes reverberating through his body as much as you can hear them. You’re dizzy, tired and your head hurts. You’d really rather not be here at all and dozing is better than being fully awake.

“Is he sleeping?” the guy asks, a phrase guaranteed to make you more awake. You hold still all the same and feel Dayvhe shift a little as he turns to look at you without moving his shoulder.

“I think.” Dayvhe answers.

“What happened to him?” the guy asks, probably meaning the bandage you have on your head.

“Highbloods.” Dayvhe hisses in quiet anger.

“Ouch. I hope he feels better.” the guy says nicely. That’s nice of him. You’re… very tired and not feeling great.

“Yeah, me too.” Dayvhe agrees.

“How long have you two…” the guy trails off significantly and Dayvhe jumps enough at his words to dislodge you. The motion does no favours for your poor injured thinkspunge, leaving you sitting up and groaning as you hold your head.

“We’refriends.” Dayvhe says quickly and quietly like you won’t hear.

You blink hazily and take in Dayvhe embarrassed face and the stranger’s slightly pitying look at you
“How’s your head?” Dayvhe asks you quickly.

“I don’t feel like I’m going to throw up or pass out so it’s fine. Aren’t we nearly there? I recognise this area, I’m sure I could get out and fly there.” you say as you glance outside, you absolutely recognise that grocery depot.

“From this MOVING TRAIN. Into the sky, when your psi may short out at any moment thanks to your head injury, dropping you to the ground from who knows how high up?” Dayvhe says incredulously and the stranger is giving you both the kind of look that you’ve seen Karkat give his tv when the characters are going to end up together or something.

“Or we could wait.” you say.

“We’re a couple of minutes away from the stop.” Dayvhe tells you flatly. Good job, you’re a moron and he knows it.

“If you ever want to collab, you should hit me up.” the stranger says mercifully, turning his palmhsk to face Dayvhe so that he can see the guy’s trolltag and copy it into his own palmhsk.

“Yeah, we should.” Dayvhe agrees and adds him to his chumproll.

Dayvhe then herds you off to the door, waves at the guy and then the train stops just on time and he shoves you out of the door. At least you know the way to Karkat’s from here. It’s not exactly a highly populated lawnring and the surrounding area is just as isolated. Which is how he likes it.

As you’re leaving the station you have to contend with the ticket barrier of doom again and Dayvhe easily taps out after you.

“What is that?” you ask. You weren’t aware that the trains did long term tickets but also you can write what you know about the train system on the back of a five ceager bill.

Dayvhe makes a thoughtful sound and pulls his wallet out again, he unfolds it and claws at a hidden flap in the back of it.

“I don’t exactly show this off and it works just by touch so I don’t need to but…” Dayvhe says, pulling a card out and handing it to you. You half expect it to be some technology hack thing, a way to trick the machines into letting you through, but it’s not. It’s a travel card and it’s white and royal tyrian with a picture of Dayvhe in the bottom right.

BY ROYAL DECREED OF ROXXIE LALOND
UNLIMITED TRAVEL PASS
HOLDER: dayvhe strydr
DENIAL OF THIS PASS IS GROUNDS FOR CULLING

In the back Roxxie’s symbol is emblazoned in holographic foil that shifts as you move it.

“She can do that?” you say in wonder as Dayvhe takes it back and hides it away again.

“Telling Roxxie she can’t do something is always fun. Dirkka has enough work for him there. But there’s all sorts of shit she can do. She made it work on private hire scuttlebuggies too but it’s wasted because they won’t stop for me if I try to flag them down.” Dayvhe snorts.

“That checks out.” you say, shaking your head.
“Karkat knows we’re coming, right? It really annoys him when people just show up.” you say as you walk up the path to his house.

“Oh, I know that.” Dayvhe says cheerfully.

“I didn’t think you didn’t, I was just asking.” you amend.

“I know. And, yes I know it annoys him when people just show up. Which is why I didn’t tell him, because it’s hilarious and I never do.” Dayvhe grins and bangs on the door. You groan, right, they’re pitch a lot too. Great.

The door is suddenly whipped open and a scowling Karkat stands there, armed and angry. His expression softens a touch at the sight of you two and he shifts his weight down one leg and leans against the door, his sickle casually held in his other hand that rests on his hip.

“How many goddamn times do I have to tell you to message me before you show up?” Karkat groans and shakes his head.

“What? You’ve never told me that in my life, Karkat.” Dayvhe lies.

“I absolutely HAVE!” Karkat snaps.

“I’m sure I’d remember it if you did.” Dayvhe says.

“I’m going to kill you. I’m going to gut you and lay all the bits in you out on the ground end to end so I can be sure I jump up and down on all of them.” Karkat hisses at him.

“I’m right here.” you complain. You don’t need to hear this.

“What the hell is wrong with you? Besides the normal I mean.” Karkat asks, pointing at you vaguely with his sickle. The amusement fades from Dayvhe’s face and is replaced with the cold anger from before.

“Some highbloods attacked him near John’s place he was bleeding like hell when I got there and- and he doesn’t even remember it, he had all these awful symptoms of concussion that I checked him for. And I made sure he didn’t sleep for ages and when he did I kept waking him up to be sure he was fine but now he doesn’t remember ANYTHING that happened and I don’t know if he’s missing other memories either and you know him better and-” Dayvhe’s voice is rising in panic as he talks, his cool shell flaking off in chunks.

“Alright, I get it. Come on in.” Karkat says and steps out of the way.

You go into his hive and Karkat pushes you down into a chair and then turns the shade on the window all the way up, then flicks the light off. The only thing lighting the room now is you.

“What are you doing?” Dayvhe asks, bless him for asking the questions you want to but also don’t want to get chewed out for asking.

“I’m checking his eyes.” Karkat says and leans in close to you.

“Yeah man, we were going to but you can’t.” Dayvhe points out.

“You can. When he’s sick with the flu or something they go duller, when he’s manic they’re way brighter, and if it’s dark enough you can see his pupils.” Karkat explains and gently grabs your chin.

“Wait, what?” you ask but you’re ignored.
“What, how?” Dayvhe asks.

“You see it all the time, it’s how you know what he’s looking at but- Sol take your glasses off already, but you just don’t notice it. It’s subtle. They’re ever so slightly brighter in the middle here. See?” Karkat says and brings his claw dangerously close to your eyeball. If he wasn’t your best friend since forever you’d never let him do this. He could blind you right now.

“I don’t think I see it.” Dayvhe comments, peering over Karkat’s shoulder.

“You will. Sollux, follow my finger with your eyes, okay?” Karkat instructs you. You roll your eyes but then do what you’re asked, following his finger this way then that.

“OH! I can see it! That’s so cool!” Dayvhe gasps and you put your glasses back on.

“There’s nothing wrong with his eyes, the light’s not flickering either so his psionics are probably gonna be fine when the headache goes.” Karkat says and fiddles with the window shades.

“That’s good.” Dayvhe sighs and sits down on the edge of the table.

“You said he had memory problems?” Karkat asks, turning back to you after he flicks the light back on.

“He can’t remember yesternight. Not the attack or me getting there or anything.” Dayvhe answers worriedly.

“So you want me to ask him about long term stuff.” Karkat concludes. Dayvhe nods and Karkat seems to think.

“Alright. Don’t tell me them but can you think of your password to Goregle?” Karkat asks, you nod.

“Spleen?” he asks.

“I have an authenticator for that but still yeah.” you say.

“Do you remember the first video game I bought you?” Karkat asks.

“Enslaved monsters ruby, for my wriggling day. I already had sapphire but you knew I wanted both. I still have that.” you say. It was really nice, actually and one of the things that made the two of you grow closer when you were little. You’d sit there and play together, trading the little creatures back and forth between you.

“His memory’s fine. You remember all of this night, though, right?” Karkat asks and you nod.

“So he’s… better now?” Dayvhe asks uncertainly.

“Probably, yeah. He’s pretty thickheaded, I suppose it turns out that’s not in just a metaphorical sense.” Karkat teases.

“Hey!” you protest and Karkat laughs.

“Oh, oh good. I was worried, you know, like anyone would be. There was a lot of blood and then him not remembering things, you’d have freaked out too.” Dayvhe says hurriedly.

“Yeah, but he’s fine. I maybe wouldn’t leave him unsupervised for a while but he’s not going to die.” Karkat scoffs.
“Right, yeah that’s what I was thinking. So you, uh, do that. I have to go, I just wanted to bring you here first and get Karkat to see you were ok. I’ll see you both later.” Dayvhe says quickly and walks backwards to the door.

“What the hell? You just got here, where do you have to go that urgently?” Karkat demands.

“Places.” Dayvhe answers cryptically and opens the door only to immediately duck out of it and slam it shut behind him.

“Fucking rude.” Karkat grumbles.

Why did he go? He never said anything about just dropping you at Karkat’s and bouncing right after. Not unless you actually are still forgetting things. You can’t remember of what happened the previous 24 hours though but… but did you do or say something? Oh God, with all of the things you think and feel about him who knows what your addled self might have said or done. And he probably just took you here because he was concerned but now he wants as far away from you as possible.

Or maybe- no, no, you can’t do this. If you do you’re just going to get freaked out over nothing, you need to figure this out right now. You pull Karkat’s front door open and rush out there. Dayvhe is already walking down the road but you run to catch him up.

“Dayvhe!” you shout after him and he freezes.

“Did I do something?” you ask, coming to a stop behind him.

“Did you what?” Dayvhe says in confusion, turning around.

“It’s just… you seem weird. You seem weird and now that we’re at Karkat’s you’re bailing right away like you’re trying to get away and I don’t remember a lot of what happened recently so if I said something or-” you start.

“Are you worried you- that you said or did something that’s upset me or pissed me off or something?” Dayvhe asks with a frown.

“I’m pretty good at pissing people off by accident, it’s not unreasonable.” you point out. Karkat is pretty much the only one to reliably put up with your shit. Even when Aradia was alive she’d often have to have a lot of pretty delineated ‘her time’ because sometimes you’re too much. The fact that her personal time was basically digging shit up in the desert or FLARPING, neither of which you wanted to do, made things work out well but the point still stands.

“You got attacked because you were going to see one of my friends, you got a huge gash in the back of your head and concussed the sense right out of you. You’re still hurt, even if you’re going to be okay. And you’re worried that I’m pissed at you or something any not any of that?” he asks in disbelief.

Does he mean you’re being self centred? You probably are. Shit, you’re the worst.

“No. I mean yes but- if it’s something I did at least I can apologise. If it’s unrelated shit like Dirkka telling you about more murder boxes falling from the sky then that’s cool but if I can fix it…” you trail off.

Dayvhe shakes his head, but you’re not sure what that means.

“Everything’s fine. You didn’t do or say anything bad, aside from bleeding from your head and
thinking installing a husktop was more important anyway. Go heal up. I just need to see one of Dirkka’s friends is all.” Dayvhe says and steps closer. For a second you think he’s going to kiss you on the cheek like he did before but he hesitates and then gently pushes you towards Karkat’s hive.

“Go on.” he urges you and walks off, leaving you on the street. You look up the path to see Karkat standing in the door, he must have seen all of that. With nothing else to do you walk back up to him and the look he gives you is sympathetic. Your obvious crush is so obvious it can probably be seen from space, the damn Empress is probably looking down on you shaking her head.

“Hey, you wanna watch a movie?” Karkat asks gently.

“Sure, just make sure I really do have damage to my thinkspoon.” you sigh and Karkat correctly interprets your meanness as ‘yes, sure, that’s a good idea and thank you for suggesting it Karkat’.

You’re halfway through your second movie and past your second shared bowl of grubcorn when you realise that despite being different genres neither this movie nor the previous one have any pale romantic subplots in them at all. He’s trying to take your mind off of Dayvhe. You slide a little lower in your seat and consider that’s pretty sad but it is a good indication of why you’re friends.

Karkat lets you sleep in his coon and he reverts back to the same thing you two used to do when you were little. He has a sleeping bag for camping that has a waterproof outside, only that also means it’s waterproof inside and if Karkat hops in his coon and then straight into that he has some liquid sopor on his skin all night. Not as good as the real thing but better than nothing. You clearly didn’t sleep in sopor last night which probably at least partially contributes to why you feel so crappy today. Well, beyond the head trauma. Speaking of the setup of Karkat’s coon has the back of your head submerged which, with the bandages off, is going to help you heal faster. You figure that you’ll go home when you wake up and you figure you can just hope that you see Dayvhe again soon.
Chapter Notes

Just a reminder I have all of the chapter songs in a spotify playlist here if you're interested!
https://open.spotify.com/user/meunda/playlist/1u0p3JWLiYaRu5hVMeToSw?si=JoeQKRGDRNKPHUbsGKvXxQ

‘Movies and magazines
Filling our heads with dreams
Love is the little things
...Like diamonds’

Little Things - Pomplamoose

Top five pale confession songs as voted by readers

Dayvhe does indeed talk to you again, but he seems to be busy a lot. But that’s fine, you’re happy to play messenger tag with him. Leaving him a video clip of some show or another only to wake up to a similar reply or a written out rhyme. Your head heals fine and life continues as normal, including persistent drones trying to deliver you things that you didn’t order.

“I didn’t order anything.” you try to tell it as its metal arms shove the box it’s carrying towards you. It scans the sign on your chest and flies away, thankfully not requiring any payment.

The box is a little smaller than a pizza box and maybe three times as deep, it’s not super heavy but it’s not light either. You’ve never been good at repressing your curiosity so with nothing better to do you take the box inside and open it. Inside is a cake it’s… interesting. The top is shiny and red but you can see a few places where the icing has been dented by someone accidentally touching it. The sides are iced blue and that’s kind of patchy, some places it’s thick and smeared on and in others you can see the actual cake underneath just about coming through. It’s definitely homemade and though you don’t want to be unkind, not by someone with a lot of baking skill.

Still, it’s a red and blue cake and obviously intended for you. Fishing in the box you find a card with teal print on it.

Jayyne Krkker’s Cakes!

It proclaims cheerfully, the tiny cake depicted on the card is for some reason smoking a pipe and wearing a detective style hat. Flipping the card over only reveals the sunglasses emoji but this is drawn on in pencil. Now, who do you know who leaves notes but never has his own pens around and also knows you and sends you sweet things?

[twinArmageddons began trolling turntechGodhead]
TA: did you 2end me a cake?
TG: that depends did you like it?
TA: ii haven't eaten iit and ii generally don't eat random food that 2how2 up at my hiive iif ii don't know that iit'2 coming from 2omeone who ii2n't tryiing two poii2on me.
TG: who would want to poison you man
TA: you have no iidea how many people ii pii22 off onliine.
TG: people you pwn in games
TG: i have heard that you are kind of a big deal
TA: 2ee, you do know.
TG: well you do kick my ass in games but im not trying to poison you with cake that i sent
TG: now put me out of my misery and tell me if its good or not

You lower your palmhusk and eye the cake, you should probably get a proper plate for this and not just eat it out of the box like an animal. You grab the proper equipment and cut yourself and pleasingly bicoloured slice. Despite the decorating being less than professional the inside is actually really nice and it actually tastes pretty damn good. You don’t know why you’re even critiquing the outside at all, this isn’t Bake Or Be Culled, you’re not the head judecimator and executioner Maarry Berrie.

TG: dude im dying here
TG: help meeeeee
TA: you're the mo2t dramatiic per2on ii know.
TG: false we both know karkat
TA: good point.
TA: diid you make thii2 whole thiing?
TG: welcome to the dayvhe choose your own adventure novel if you liked the cake skip to a if you did not like the cape skip to b
TG: a: yeah man i made the whole thing myself barely had any guidance at all and its my first ever cake arent i impressive
TG: b: i was clearly massively sabotaged by Jayyne who gave me directions and supervised me blame her instead
TA: option c: the t2unamii 2wallow2 your party whole, 2tart agaiin.
TG: oh no
TA: iit'2 really good cake though. but you know iiit'2 not my wriigggliing day though, right? although iiif you diidn't know that you 2tiill can't take the cake back, ii've liicked iiit now iiit'2 miine.
TG: the law as old as time
TG: also i knew that i just wanted to send you one.
TA: can ii a2k why?
TG: wow man can’t a guy just hit up a friend that runs a baking business get lessons on how to bake then make and ship a custom cake to another guy just because he wants to or something i didnt know itid be nine million questions or whatever
TG: maybe i just know you like sweet things
TG: maybe i had a secret desire to bake thats never been mentioned before now did you think of that huh
TG: maybe i was possessed by like cake baking woodland faeries or something man
TG: cake what cake
TA: tl;dr
TG: man thats cold
TA: ii liike the cake

Your palmhusk pings and vibrates on the counter and you frown when you see that it’s another chat messaging you instead of Dayvhe.

[carcinoGeneticist began trolling twinArmageddons]
CG: IT’S A REALLY GREAT DAY TO BE ME, OR IT’S SUPPOSED TO BE AT LEAST. WHY IS THAT, KARKAT, I HEAR YOU ASK? WELL IT’S BECAUSE I WAS ABLE TO GET MY MATESPRIT TO AGREE TO STAY OVER FOR A WHOLE TWENTY FOUR HOURS.
CG: WE’RE GOING TO WATCH MOVIES, PLAY GAMES, EAT TOGETHER. AND NOW
THAT I’VE BEEN ABLE TO NAIL HIS OVERLY SOCIAL ASS DOWN FOR SOME TIME WITH ME I MAY EVEN NAIL HIM TOO. BUT THEN WHY AM I TROLLING YOU, YOU ASK?

CG: GEE I FUCKING WISH I KNEW. YESTERDAY I WAS BOMBARDED WITH QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR TASTE IN FOOD AND THE WHOLE TIME HE’S BEEN HERE HE’S BEEN DISTRACTED AND NOW YOU’RE TROLLING HIM AND HE IS LITERALLY PACING AROUND MY RESPITEBLOCK MUTTERING NERVOUSLY TO HIMSELF. NOW HE APPEARS TO BE DOING A LITTLE JIG OF WHAT I PRESUME IS WHAT PASSES FOR JOY IN MORONS.

CG: SO I ASK YOU, WHAT THE FUCK HAVE YOU DONE?
TA: the 2peed you can ragetype at never 2top2 two amaze me.

CG: SHOVE IT UP YOUR SEEDFLAP, CAPTOR. ANSWER MY QUESTION!
TA: ii diidn’t do anything, dayvhe ju2t 2ent me 2omethiing ii2 all.

CG: HOW FRUSTRATINGLY VAGUE. WHAT DID HE SEND YOU AND WHY?
CG: YOU KNOW WHAT? I’M JUST GOING TO ASK HIM.

Karkat and Dayvhe are both silent and in the temporary peace you eat more of the cake slice that you cut out. It’s a gift, for you, from Dayvhe. The third gift he’s given you in fact. The first is on the side, a plant that’ll save your life. The second was the candy stick and the third is this cake. Two of those are food and that’s a pretty standard pale gift to get someone, a gesture to look out for someone’s survival.

But… what if he’s just being nice? What if you’re reading into it too much? But then there was the kiss, or both of them. That’s got to be a clear sign of interest, doesn’t it? That he likes you back and you’re not just projecting what you want to see?

CG: WHY THE FUCK IS HE BAKING YOU THINGS? HAVE YOU SEEN THIS DISASTER COOK? I’VE SEEN HIM BURN PASTA. IN WATER.
TA: ii diidn’t know he wa2 goiing two. ii don’t know why he diid, iit could be anythiing.

CG: UH. THAT’S A PRETTY WEIRD THING TO SAY.
CG: HAVE YOU BEEN FLIRTING WITH HIM OR SOMETHING?
TA: probably, ii’m 2ure my worthle22 feeling2 are ju2t ooziiing out of every dii2gu2tiing pore on my body. ii’m lucky he 2tiill talk2 two me at all, let alone 2end2 me thiing2.

CG: THANKS FOR THE SUDDEN HANDBREAK TURN INTO SELF LOATHING TOWN.
TA: fuck you.
CG: IT’S JUST THAT HE’S SENDING YOU FOOD. FOOD HE MADE HIMSELF WHEN THAT’S SOMETHING HE’S BAD AT. IT’S JUST NOTABLE IS ALL. YOU ARE STILL INTERESTED IN HIM PALEWAYS, RIGHT?
TA: ii have no iintentiion of mu2cliing iin on your flu2h, thank2.
CG: I WASN’T ACCUSING YOU OF THAT, ALSO GROSS I DIDN’T NEED TO PICTURE THAT. I MEANT MORE LIKE ARE YOU STILL INTERESTED IN HIM AND YOU’VE NOT GOT OVER YOUR CRUSH OR ANYTHING. BUT I THINK IT’S PRETTY CLEAR THAT YOU’VE GOT OVER JACK SHIT.
CG: INTERESTING.
TA: well great, now you 2ound liike rohhze.
CG: WHY WOULD YOU INSULT ME LIKE THAT, THAT’S JUST UNCALLED FOR.
TA: diid you have a point you were gettiing two?

Dayvhe messages you again and you feel safe enough flicking away from whatever torrent of bullshit Karkat is going to unleash on you to check the other message.

TG: aw hell yeah im glad you like it
TG: you should go to town on that thing im sure hella psionics like yours burn through so many
Calories, I mean, I know if I do enough of my *ninja shit* as you called it I end up a black hole of hunger.

Well, shit, that’s concern for you. He’s nudging something tasty and high calorie your way because he’s concerned that you don’t eat enough to sustain your awesome powers. That’s pale as fuck!

Ah, shit, Karkat is still messaging you. Ignore him, talk to Dayvhe instead.

TA: yeah I’ve probably paid for the local pizza place two outfits theiir whole current fleet of delivery drone two Tbh
TG: they do good pizza though
TG: ah shit I gotta go karkat is wringing out his whole rage gland in the audio equivalent of one of those splatter paintings
TG: I should really sample one of his tirades at some point for my music
TA: how would that even work?
TG: hey man idk but I gotta find a way to work a clip of him saying that your head is so far up your own nook that every time you talk your freak tongue perforates your fetid seedflap
TG: direct quote there
TA: ii guess ii’ll stay with my cake and you can enjoy your imminent hearing loss.
TG: nah man I’m glad you like it

You grin to yourself, maybe you can actually be active in this thing now. Make a real move, ask him to be your moirail. But, well, if you’re going to do that you should also respect his other quadrants too.

TA: ii didn’t read any of what you just sent me, ii just scrolled down. But you can have your mate2print back now, ii’ll leave you two alone.
CG: YOU’RE THE WORST BUT THANKS FOR THAT I GUESS.
CG: FUCKER.
[carcinoGeneticist ceased trolling twinArmageddons]

The next night you eat cake and think of how to approach Dayvhe about your feelings, the feelings you suspect may well be reciprocated. After hours and hours of back and forth with yourself you finally message him.

[twinArmageddons began trolling turntechGodhead]
TA: hey thank2 again for the cake, ii’t2 really good.
TA: are you doing anything tonight? maybe we could hang.

Kind of needy, kind of forward but you’re going to risk it. You wash up your plate and cover the cake up in its box again but when you return to your palmhusk Dayvhe hasn’t replied. Well, whatever. You distractedly play a game of Mutual Cooperative Group Base 2 which you have absolutely maxed out all of the skins for. You’re focused enough on your open chat with Dayvhe that you end up losing.

TA: ii guess you’re busy.
TA: you can come over whenever though, door2 always open after all.

Hours pass with still no word from Dayvhe and you’ve gone from anxiety to self loathing to irritation at him and back around to anxiety again. So naturally you cave and message Karkat.

[twinArmageddons began trolling carcinoGeneticist]
TA: what2 going on wiith dayvhe?
CG: UGH, HE’S SO DUMB SOMETIMES I DESPAIR.
TA: what?
CG: I MEAN THE THING IS THAT HE’S NOT ACTUALLY STUPID, HE’S SMART WHEN
YOU TALK TO HIM ENOUGH. AND I SAY THAT AND THEN HE GOES AND PULLS A
STUPID MOVE LIKE THAT, IT’S ABSURD.
TA: pull2 what? ii have no iidea what’2 going on! ii've not heard from hiim at all 2iince ii told you
ii'd leave you two alone for the night.
CG: REALLY?
TA: ye2! and ii've been trolliing hiim ever 2iince ii woke up and he'2 not an2weriing me at all.
CG: HUH. THAT’S… WEIRD.
CG: WELL MAYBE HE DIDN’T REPLY BECAUSE HE’SA DUMBASS. WE WENT
AROUND TO JOHN’S TO PLAY GAMES AND LONG STORY SHORT THOSE IDIOTS
ENDED UP ON ONE OF JOHN’S BALCONIES WITH A BACK AND FORTH ARGUMENT
ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT THEY COULD BOTH MAKE A JUMP FROM ONE TO
ANOTHER.
CG: JOHN IN A RARE DISPLAY OF REASON AND CRITICAL THINKING SAID NO, I
SAID NO AND DAYVHE EVIDENTLY TRIED TO IMPROVE THE MUTATION RATE OF
THE GENE POOL AND JUMPED ANYWAY.
CG: HE MISSED AND LANDED BAD ON HIS ARM, HE DIDN’T BREAK ANYTHING
THROUGH A SHEER GODDAMN MIRACLE BUT HE SAID HE KNEW A FRIEND WITH
MEDICAL SKILLS WHO’D PATCH HIM UP SO HE LEFT EARLY.
TA: holy 2hiit, ii2 he okay?
CG: UNFORTUNATELY HE’S STILL A DIPSHIT BUT YEAH, I THINK HE USED HIS
STUPID BRAIN POWERS TO BREAK HIS FALL. HE’S FINE, REALLY.
TA: 2hiit, okay ii'm going two troll him agaiin then.
CG: ALRIGHT. NOT SURE WHY YOU’RE TELLING ME BUT OK, HAVE FUN WITH
THAT.
[twinArmageddons ceased trolling carcinoGeneticist]

Fuck, fuck. He’s hurt, of course he is just when you’re thinking something bad of him it turns out
that something is really wrong. Also you may just strangle him when you see him next. He’s a
mutant, he can hardly go to a regular mediculler or he’ll be found out. He shouldn’t be risking his
health just for dumb stunts like that.

TA: hey, karkat ju2t told me about you falliing off of john’2 hiive. are you okay? me22age me back,
alright?
TA: al2o don't jump off of people’2 hiive2, holy fuck what ii2 wrong wiith you??

You figure you’ll leave your messages there, there’s starting to be an awful large build up of yellow
in this box and desperation is hardly a good look. In fact you know it’s ruined people’s chances with
him before so you’ll try to be cool. Karkat wouldn’t be so relaxed about it if he was badly hurt, he’d
be calling himself terrible names for not stopping him and blowing up how awful things were going
to go. The fact that he’s just calling Dayvhe a moron reassures you that everything is really okay.

When daybreak comes you try to go to sleep, you really do but you keep dozing and then jerking
awake to the imagined sound of notifications from trollian. But each time you look there’s no
message. You give up on sleep but wait until normal people waking hours before sending him
another message but you still get silence back in response.

Okay, he’s ignoring you for sure now. Did you misread things after all? But you didn’t come on to
him, you had decided to ask him out but unless he’s got more psionics than you knew about there’s
no way you simply deciding that could drive him off. When you message Karkat again it’s obvious
that Dayvhe is talking to him because they’re playing a game together online, in fact Karkat tells you
that before you even ask if he’s heard from him.

Well, fine, he can work his own shit out. You’re not his moirail, not yet at least and Dayvhe appreciates not being controlled for pretty obvious reasons. So if he wants space you’ll give him space. You can do that. You manage a couple of nights before you send him a message again.

TA: hey, ii hope you're feeliing better.

You try to keep it simple. But… well, you’re starting to not be surprised by the lack of response.

You give it another night, and then some more, messaging him occasionally but every time getting absolutely nothing back. You leave your hive and walk around the city, hit the places that you’ve seen him playing music but he’s not there. You even fly to the place at the edge of the ocean where he burnt that crate before but he’s not there. If you knew where his hive was you’d fly there yourself and see if he’s okay.

Nevertheless you’ll distract yourself. You finish some code that someone commissioned you to write, you change the sopor in your coon, throw out anything gross in your cupboard. All of the jobs that you tend to put off because of either laziness or depression. You promise not to check your messages when you do that stuff, only when you come back. It’s only when you’re doing maintenance on the apiary network that the idea occurs. You watch as one of your bees crawls over the back of your hand. You had assumed that the problem had been you, or Dayvhe perhaps. That’s the sensible answer, but not the only one.

You wipe your hands off and wash them under the tap as you try to reason with yourself. Your computer is working fine, you’d know if you’d been hacked, right? But you had thought that last time. You run your computer through the same checks with the virus scanner, getting it to sweep the imperial channels. And yeah, there’s something there, snucked in through the back doors in your system and you can see the program it’s fucking with. Trollian.

Theory one: someone official is wiretapping your conversations. Possible, but unlikely. You’ve not done anything to warrant that kind of attention and there’s simply too many trolls talking too much to watch everyone.

Theory two: someone with ACCESS to those official channels is interfering with your trollian. It could be in any number of ways but you’re sure that looking at the code itself would set off some kind of alert, but blocking messages to one particular account like Dayvhe’s isn’t out of the range of possibility.

You lean back in your chair and think for a moment, if you’re to assume that Dirkka or Roxxie are in your computer then they’re obviously in your palmhusk too. Which means that no communication from either of those is safe. Shit. You walk to your window and eye the sky, you easily have time to get to Karkat’s place. You throw the window open and fly.

You land outside of Karkat’s hive and knock loudly on his door. It takes a minute for Karkat to open the door but he does, just by a hair at first but when he sees you he opens it properly. His sickle was in his hand ready but he lowers it right away.

“Sollux? What’re you doing here?” Karkat asks in surprise.

“Is Dayvhe here?” you ask hopefully.

“Uh… no? Is he supposed to be?” Karkat says in confusion.

“No, it just would have helped. Look, I need you to message him for me, tell him to come here.” you
say to him and push past him into the hive.

“Whoa, hey, no way. I don’t know what you two are fighting about but don’t drag me into it, thanks.” Karkat says after you but shuts the door anyway because he’s far nicer than he lets himself think. But still, what he said is troubling.

“Dayvhe said that we’re arguing?” you ask him.

“As much as I like helping people’s romance problems I really don’t want to touch this one, I don’t want to risk my relationship with him.” Karkat says regretfully, rubbing the back of his neck as he talks.

“We’re not fighting! Or- or at least I’m not! I’ve been trying to get in contact with him for a week and he’s not answering any of my messages!” you insist.

“No, no that’s not- here, look.” Karkat says, shaking his head and after a moment or two of scrolling he hands you his palmhusk with trollian open.

TG: what if i killed him with my cake
CG: YOU KNOW YOU DIDN’T, I TOLD YOU I TALKED TO HIM.
TG: yeah but hes not talking to me
TG: ive sent him like fifty billion messages
CG: HE GETS LIKE THIS SOMETIMES, HE GETS INTO THESE MOODS AND JUST WANTS TO BE LEFT ALONE. KIND OF SHITTY OF HIM NOT TO TELL YOU THAT’S WHAT’S GOING ON BUT HE’S DONE THIS TO ME BEFORE TOO.
TG: but hes not doing it to you this time
CG: WHAT’RE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
TG: hes ignoring me but you said you talked to him so hes not ignoring everyone just me
CG: WAIT DAYVHE I DON’T THINK THAT’S EXACTLY RIGHT.
TG: no its my fault man i think i fucked up
TG: crossed a line or something
TG: ill work it out dont worry about it just dont message him for me or anything
TG: i gotta go
CG: DAYVHE DON’T JUST GO
-turntechGodhead is offline-
CG: YOU FUCKER.

“I knew it, he’s not getting my messages and I’m not getting his. That motherfucker!” you hiss and scroll right to the bottom. Dayvhe is online right now so you start typing.

CG: DAYVHE IT2 2OLLUX, II’VE NOT BEEN IGNORING YOU. II’M HAVIING TWO ME22AGE YOU FROM KK’2 PALMHUSK BECAU2E THAT THING THAT HAPPENED TWO MY COMPUTER BEFORE HA2 HAPPENED AGAIIN.
TG: wait what
TG: so you didnt just get that message to your account just now?

You check your palmhusk and nothing, your chat with Dayvhe is a yellow wasteland.

CG: NO THERE’2 NOTHIING THERE AT ALL. YOU 2OULD COME TWO KARKAT’2, THAT’2 WHERE II AM. WHATEVER’2 HAPPENING TWO MY ACCOUNT II2 HAPPENIING TWO YOUR2 TWO 2O TROLLIIAN MIIGHT NOT BE GOOD RIIGHT NOW.
TG: if he is in my system too i am going to do an acrobatic pirouette off of the handle and into a rage canyon i swear to fuck
TG: im not that far away give me half an hour
It wasn’t you. You’re not paranoid, you didn’t drive him away, it was Dirkka fucking with you. You’ve never been so relieved to be hacked in your life. You hand Karkat his palmhusk back.

“Oh gee, thanks am I allowed this back? No, by all means just make yourself comfy here, break into my hive, steal my palmhusk, message my matesprit on my devices. Go for it. What the fuck are you two on about anyway?” Karkat bitches, glaring at his palmhusk. As he reads his frown only deepens, at this point you’re starting to get worried about his eyebrows damaging his actual eyeballs because they look ready to climb in there.

“What the actual fuck are the two of you talking about? What’s wrong with your computer and trollian? Who’s the person Dayvhe’s talking about?” Karkat demands.

“I can’t- ask Dayvhe, see if he tells you.” you say with a helpless shrug. You said you weren’t going to tell people about Dirkka so you’re going to stick to that. But given that Dayvhe has gone offline and you’re not going to budge it makes the half hour before Dayvhe arrives pretty goddamn tense and awkward. You thank your lucky stars that crabdad isn’t around lumbering about the place and setting you on edge. Your lusus is dead but Karkat’s is still around sometimes, he checks in now and then to see that Karkat is okay but you know that Karkat suspects he’s looking for a new grub to raise now that Karkat is basically entirely independent. You didn’t think that was likely back when Karkat was the only guy with his blood colour that you knew, but now you’re wondering if they’re more common than you first thought.

Either way it’s just the two of you until a hammering sounds from Karkat’s front door. Karkat opens it, it’s getting close to daylight but not so much that you’re worried for him but enough that you’re glad he wasn’t further away. Dayvhe strides into the room but halts when he sees you.

“Dayvhe.” you say dumbly, scrambling to your feet.

“Sollux.” he replies.

“Karkat!” Karkat interjects angrily, “And now that we all know who we are tell me what the FUCK is going on!”

“Dude, shut up. Give me your palmhusk, man.” Dayvhe says to Karkat and then you, he holds his hand out and so you unlock your palmhusk and hand it to him.

Dayvhe scrolls through both, looking from one device to the next as he presumably compares your messages through time. He starts to pace and you can hear a mean growl working up in volume as he goes.

“He did this, deliberately. He probably read all this.” Dayvhe hisses and the hair on the back of your neck starts to prickle and as Dayvhe paces you can see a haze of neon red starting to trail from behind his shades and little pops of colour flare in the air around him. You’ve never seen his usually minimal psionics flare up like this.

“He’s such a fucking HYPOCRITE I can’t even.” Dayvhe snarls and throws your palmhusk back at you with a little more force than he probably meant, which thankfully is no problem for you but it’s still alarming.

“Hey, Dayvhe, no it’s ok. We worked it out.” you say soothingly, reaching out towards him.

“IT’S NOT OKAY!” Dayvhe shouts.

He draws in a huge breath and covers his face with his hands. If he was Karkat you’d be expecting a screech of rage but instead he breathes out again slowly and when he lowers his hands his face is
completely blank. He sits down and pulls his husktop out and starts rapidly typing. You and Karkat exchange a confused look.

“Dayvhe, what’re you doing?” you ask warily.

“Can’t hack him back, I’m not good at that like you. Shouting at him won’t get me anywhere, not like Karkat. So I’m taking this outta someone else’s playbook, I’m doing this Rohhze’s way.” Dayvhe says darkly.

“Ooh.” Karkat hisses with a wince. You glance at him for an explanation.

“Rohhze doesn’t usually do the whole violent highblood thing, she doesn’t believe in getting mad, she believes in getting even. With interest, usually. Specifically fucking someone’s life over with all their own mistakes.” Karkat explains.

Oh. Ohhh. That’s… probably a bad plan.

“Dayvhe…” you say warningly and crouch down and shift over until you can read over his shoulder.

[turntechGodhead began pestering tipsyGnostalgic]
TG: hey rox
TG: fun time based fact of the day dirkka will die well before you do and probably sooner than he should have considering that he mutilated himself to be with you
TG: also your matesprit once told me you were more fun when you were on soporifics

“Holy shit, Dayvhe you can’t do that.” you gasp but Dayvhe is already opening another window.

[turntechGodhead began trolling golgothasTerror]
TG: hey man i think you should probably talk to jayyne about how much weve been hanging out lately
GT: Why?
TG: i just dont think its fair for dirkka to ask me to grubsit you just so that you stop bothering jayyne all because she wants to spend time with roxxie
TG: like the three of them shuttin you out isnt cool ya know

[turntechGodhead began trolling timaeusTestified]
TG: come find me when youre done dealing with that shitshow you fuckin coward

Before any of them can message him back enough to get his attention he stabs his husktop with a sword that he rips from his strife deck and then glares at it furiously.

“What the fuck?” Karkat gasps.

“See how he fucking likes it. Fuck with my life I’ll fuck with his. I’ll be on the roof.” Dayvhe says and breezes past you both and heads up the stairs.

“What just happened? Who is he talking about? What’s going on? Answer me you waste of skin!” Karkat demands, rounding on you now that Dayvhe is out of his rage range.

“A guy he knows hacked me and presumably him too to stop us messaging each other.” you explain, you should tell him something at least rather than showing up and having this drama at his place with no explanation.

“Someone hacked YOU? In what universe does someone manage to hack you of all people?!”
Karkat scoffs.

“Not that I don’t like you jerking off my ego, please do so more often, but yeah that’s exactly what happened.” you say unhappily.

“I think you jerk off and jerk your ego off more than either of us want to think about. Either way I’m surprised you’re not waxing black for someone who managed to best you in hacking.” Karkat says with a raised eyebrow and you grimace at the thought.

“No way. My loathing for this guy is entirely platonic. Besides, you saw how much it’s upset Dayvhe.” you point out.

“Yeah, I’ve never seen him react like that.” he nods and toes at the poor broken husktop.

“You didn’t see what he was writing. I should go talk to him.” you sigh and head towards the stairs but Karkat catches you by the arm and stops you.

“Hey, look, not that I’m not supportive of you trying to flirt with him because he at least seems to be reacting better than he’s done with other people and he even sent you that cake so I’m willing to say that maybe you have an iota of a shot here. But he’s clearly really pissed off and upset and you aren’t actually his moirail so you can’t just go up there and pap him.” Karkat warns you.

You should be processing what Karkat actually meant but all your stupid brain is giving you is the Sollux Captor imagined future where you do get to go up there and do just that. Calm him down from what will clearly prove to be some high tier social self destruction and maybe help him fix things. You know, like an actual moirail. You could be that for him and since he wasn’t ignoring you it’s totally possible that he might let you.

“Hey! Get your bifurcated brain back down on this planet you shitweasel! This isn’t the time for fantasy, it’s reality hour here!” Karkat snaps.

“Yeah, ok, thanks for the warning but I’m still going.” you insist but Karkat feels like he’s suddenly three times heavier than usual as he puts all of his weight into holding you down. You could lift him with your psionics but you do actually like the guy and it’s pretty rude to psionically bounce a guy around his own hive. You look desperately up the stairs that Dayvhe left up and then back at Karkat who is honestly just trying to help you out.

“He kissed me.” you confess.

“What?” Karkat yelps.

“Before, super pale-like and I… look, I need to go up there.” you tell him, pointing up the stairs.

Karkat stares at you, his eyes as wide as dinner plates, he seems completely frozen until he roughly shoves you towards the stairs.

“GO, GO, GO, GET UP THERE ALREADY YOU SCRAWNY BRAINLESS IDIOT!” he hollers at you.

You don’t need telling twice. You literally fly up the stairs, it takes a little navigating to find the way out onto Karkat’s roof but you manage it and find Dayvhe sat on the edge of the roof with his legs hanging off of the edge.

“Hey, it’s just me.” you call out incase he mistakes you for Dirkka and leaps at you with a sword or something.
“I’m cool man, don’t worry about me.” Dayvhe says flatly.

“Didn’t say you weren’t cool.” you reply and sit down on the edge next to him.

“Well good, at least we have that squared away. Can’t have misrepresentations like that flying around.” Dayvhe mumbles.

“So that whole thing was…” you trail off, trying to find a way of describing this that isn’t just saying he was acting really weird.

“You really went after his friends, huh?” you settle on.

“You really are not as nice as you think I am.” Dayvhe says sullenly and hunches his shoulders up so they’re almost at his ears.

“So there’s more to this than just him hacking us this one time.” you counter.

Dayvhe bounces his feet off of the outside of Karkat’s hive for a moment or two.

“It’s always one rule for me and one rule for him, I know I’m a mutant and some shit’s different but he always does shit like this. I’m sick of his rules and now he’s actively fucking my shit up and I can’t even- RRGH!” Dayvhe flops back onto his back, grinding the heels of his hands into his eyes. His sunglasses clatter onto the roof above his head and you pick them up so he doesn’t break them.

“Have you tried actually talking to him about how he’s a huge tool?” you ask, hanging his shades from the collar of your shirt.

“He’s not actually a huge tool. Well he is but he’s not.” Dayvhe says with a sigh.

“Clear.” you scoff and he kicks you in the knee.

“He’s trying to help, he means well. I know that. But this is just too much, I’ve had enough. Ugh, now I feel kinda guilty for what I said to the others. Roxxie didn’t deserve that, she helped look after me when I was little almost as much as Dirkka did.” he says regretfully.

“Apologise to them later, maybe?” you suggest.

“Yeah.” Dayvhe sighs and relaxes against the roof, spread limbed and calmer than when you came out here. You did that, you helped him feel better. Your throat catches a little as you swallow.

“I’m glad you’re not ignoring me.” you say quietly and Dayvhe looks over at you immediately, his brows drawn into a worried pinch.

“Same, man. I thought I’d fucked up. Thought I’d said something or- or the cake was too much and…” he trails off.

“No! No it wasn’t, I’d thought that I’d said something. Or you’d come to your senses and worked out that I’m not the kind of person you wanted to have anything to do with.” you mutter that last part because it’s something you’d given a lot of thought to. Because why would Dayvhe ever want to be your moirail, you’re so much work with your broken brain and he’s not even seen the worst of what your mind can throw at you by a long shot. You’re all that work for little fucking reward, even when you’re stable you’re still an asshole. It wouldn’t be unreasonable for him to just suddenly clock that, or for someone to warn him.

“Hey, what? No. Don’t say that.” Dayvhe says insistently, sitting up and smacking you on the
shoulder.

You don’t really have anything to say to that except arguing the point about your worth with him which is, frankly, unattractively desperate. You look at him as surreptitiously as you can. He seems concerned, which makes sense. You’re being weird and he’s a good friend worrying about you. You should tell him, you should tell him how you feel. Fuck, you know how shitty it feels to have thought you lost him, shouldn’t that make you appreciate having him more? Shouldn’t it make you willing to take that risk?

But, well, then you’re back to whether you’re worth that. There’s a whole slew of people with the same kind of fluttery pale feelings that you have for him. Shit, they’ve all known him longer than you have and they’re probably a better fit for him. Goodness knows that he hangs out with enough highbloods to be in a position to pacify their rages and they have the means to help him financially if he needs that. At the very least they could give him a long term roof over his head. But no, you’ve done that and you’ve been the first to convince him to sleep in sopor, you could have a shot. Maybe. Possibly.

You look at him again, with his shades hanging from your shirt instead of on his face you can catch you concerned narrowing of his eyes as he makes eye contact with you.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” Dayvhe asks.

Shit, no, you can’t do this. You certainly can’t do this now, not with everything that’s happening now in his life. This isn’t a movie, there’s a time and a place for this sort of thing.

“You’re asking me that when we’re on Karkat’s roof because you’re waiting to fight a guy?” you ask incredulously.

“Like you said man, I’m just waiting. You look kind of like your thinkspoon just blew out.” Dayvhe says, raising an eyebrow.

“Blew.” you echo. Hey, there’s something you hadn’t considered until now, another reason not to do anything with Dayvhe. What if Vriska took you over again? Doesn’t Terezi have a pale thing for Dayvhe? Wasn’t she in that group? You’ve long suspected that Vriska had pale designs on Terezi so what if she pulled her old trick on you, got Dayvhe out of her way and made you miserable by taking you over again, by making you vaporise him. You know she still hates you for people hating her for what she used you for. Not that you did anything to turn that tide of loathing to her but she’s always been one to blame her problems on others.

But, no, the thought of coming back to yourself again and seeing a smoking hole in the ground where Dayvhe was is just- you can’t do that again.

“Uh. Anyone in?” Dayvhe interrupts you by asking, snapping his fingers in front of your face.

Right, yeah, he’s still here. This is a bad plan.

“Don’t uh… worry about it.” you mutter, squeezing your eyes shut and trying to clear the image of that crater in the ground from your head.

Dayvhe gets this expression on his face a kind of defiance but protective, maybe? You’re not sure.

“I think that you know me enough to know that you know like… by and large I’m real fucking bad at doing what people tell me.” Dayvhe tells you. You’re pretty skeptical of that, Dayvhe goes along with Dirkka’s plans for most of the time as far as you’re aware, he trusted you when you injured him and when he slept in sopor with you.
“So you may as well tell me.” he adds.

Only you telling him about what you fear is really pale, is just the kind of thing you shouldn’t be doing if you’re wanting to keep him safe from the disaster that is you.

“Why do you think Dirkka blocked us?” you ask. You’re pretty sure that you already know, Dirkka no doubt knows how pale you are for for Dayvhe. He must have seen it in your messages to Karkat and he obviously doesn’t approve.

“Cause I’m breaking his rules.” Dayvhe says irritably. That’s not the answer you had thought of, and you’re about to ask what rules they are when you hear it. You look up wide eyed at the sky and see the very distinct shape of something rocket powered flying towards Karkat’s hive. Dayvhe stands up and draws his sword leaving you to scramble to your feet. You look up at who you can only assume to be Dirkka approaching, the guy who stopped the two of you talking and who apparently would have got away with it too if you hadn’t thought you check his secret channel again. He tried to keep you and Dayvhe apart and you can’t shake the feeling that maybe whatever happens here will do will do the same. Dayvhe’s known Dirkka for his whole life near enough, you couldn’t be at all surprised for him to side with that guy instead of you, nor would you blame him. So you’ve not got time left to debate about whether you should subject Dayvhe to the frankly bad deal that is your whole being, subtle is for people who don’t have a mad man on a rocket flying at them.

“Dayvhe,” you say hurriedly grabbing his arm, “I pity you.”

Dayvhe stares at you in shock. Fuck, not the overjoyed reaction you were hoping for.

“I’m… embarrassingly pale for you I just- I know you don’t-” you hesitate, looking up at the incoming living missile. You can make out Dirkka’s face now just about.

“Do you want me to stop him? I can stop him if you want, alive and unharmed even. You don’t have to fight him.” you assure him.

“No, I gotta fix this, man. And maybe then we can- do you really feel- ah shit, no I gotta do this. Get out of here, and don’t get in the middle either. I’m not that sure I can defend both of us.” Dayvhe says, shaking his head.

You don’t point out that you don’t NEED his help defending yourself, but you’re also not going to leave him alone up here. All the same you can stay out of his way. You back up towards the door and when you get level with the wall you just wait. Dirkka swoops in, leaping from his board at the last second land flying towards Dayvhe with his sword drawn.

You hold your breath and watch as they fight, swords clashing together and coming apart. Behind you there is the thundering sound of short angry troll sprinting up too many stairs. You throw your arm out and basically clothesline poor Karkat as he comes out onto the roof, sickles drawn.

“Who the fuck is that?! GET THE FUCK OFF OF MY ROOF!” Karkat hollers at him.

“That’s the guy who hacked me.” you answer, not taking your eyes off of the fight. You’re pretty sure the guy isn’t trying to kill Dayvhe but he sure is mad, but if he’d wanted to kill him there were numerous opportunities already that he hasn’t taken. But you’d been quietly guarding them, focused on his blade and ready to halt the fucking thing in mid air if he tried.

“Why the fuck aren’t you stopping him??” Karkat demands.

“Dayvhe told me to stay out of it.” you answer distractedly, nudging Dayvhe slightly in the back as he wobbles too close to the edge of the roof.
“You whipped— I’m pretty sure this is a case where you should just help! The guy’s basically an adult! And he’s— he has gills but he’s bronze, what the grub shitting fuck it going on?!” Karkat demands.

“They’re… they’re mechanical. Are you ruining my concentration for nothing or what? Shut your face hole I need to focus.” you hiss and cheat a little, sticking one of Dirkka’s feet to the ground for a split second longer than it should have done so that Dayvhe can get to higher ground.

“I oughta cut off your fucking head you controlling, paranoid, lunatic!” Davyhe accuses from a higher ledge.

“I’m not paranoid when I’m right!” Dirkka shouts and leaps up after him but Dayvhe’s psionics are certainly adept at aiding his ninja shit and so he’s not there when Dirkka lands.

Then all of a sudden the moonlight goes off and the only light is from your psionics and the light from Karkat’s hallway behind you. Karkat whimpers in horror next to you and you look up to see the stark three pronged outline of an imperial ship floating above the hive and descending towards it. Even Dayvhe and Dirkka have frozen. The ship hangs in the air and a figure leaps down from it, landing on the roof between Dayvhe and Dirkka.

It’s Roxxie.

She straightens up from her landing, pulling on the double ended official trident to pull her up to her full intimidating height.

“That’s Dirkka’s moirail.” you say under your breath.

“Sword fucker is Dirkka?” Karkat asks in a desperate and hushed whisper. You nod. Dayvhe backs up two steps towards you and Karkat and drops his sword, holding his hands up.

“Roxxie, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean what I said, I was an asshole. I was just trying to hurt Dirkka and you were— I’m sorry.” he says sincerely and Roxxie narrows her eyes at him, her gills flaring.

“Yeah, kind of a bulge move but I figured somefin was wrong for you to just throw that at me and bail.” Roxxie says, not looking at all impressed.

“And then I come all the way here where Dayvhe’s emergency shellphone tracker says he is because I knew somefin was fishy and who do I find but you, Dirkka. And fighting no less so maybe you two should both get you shit together and tell me what’s going on.” Roxxie says firmly.

“How does Dayvhe know these people?” Karkat whispers.

Luckily for you there isn’t time for you to answer because at the tiniest hint of Karkat’s voice Roxxie’s head whips around to stare at you both.

“Sollux, nice to sea you again. And who’s this with you?” she asks and takes a step towards you. Dayvhe quickly rushes between the two of you and her and holds his arms out wide.

“He’s no one, leave him alone. It doesn’t matter.” Dayvhe says hurriedly.

“No one looks awfully offended at being called that Dayvhe boy, betta get your story straight!” Roxxie cackles and scoops Dayvhe up with one arm and dangles him upside down, her arm slung across his hips at her shoulder height. Before you can pull him from her grasp to defend him she swoops in where his shirt has slid up his chest and presses her lips to his belly and blows, making a loud, wet, embarrassing noise. Ah, apparently the only harm she intends to inflict on Dayvhe is to his
dignity.

“That’s just Karkat, one of Dayvhe’s friends from a sweep ago. He’s no one.” Dirrka answers for Dayvhe, dropping down onto the main roof level again.

“Oh, is that right Mr Know-It-All?” Karkat shouts angrily.

“Karkat no!” Dayvhe yelps but there’s not stopping a Vantas tirade midway through.

“Sorry, kid, you’re pretty insignificant.” Dirkka shrugs. Ah, but Dirkka sees fit to meddle in your relationship with Dayvhe. You’d feel flattered if you weren’t so fucking pissed.

“Goes to show what you know, you vomitous cretin, I’m his matesprit!” Karkat yells at him.

Roxxxie gasps and in her surprise drops Dayvhe, you catch him before he lands although by the way he twisted in the air you’ll bet that he would have landed on his feet anyway. You pull him back to you just a swiftly and watches as Dirkka’s posture stiffens. Dayvhe’s sword flies across to the roof and into his hand as Dirkka starts to walk menacingly towards you three.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, hold your hoofbeasts there Dirkka!” Roxxxie admonishes him.

“Karkat, get inside and hide.” Dayvhe hisses.

“No one’s going anywhere! You two are going to tell me what’s goin’ on right now!” Roxxxie insists, pressing one hand into Dirkka’s chest to hold him back.

“He can’t have a matesprit, Roxxxie. You know why.” Dirkka says patiently, gesturing towards Karkat with his sword. You’ve never felt pale for Karkat ever but he’s your oldest friend and you’re more than prepared to launch this fucker into the stratosphere to keep him safe.

“Ohhh.” Roxxxie says with a wince.

“Yeah, surprise! Another one of your fucking rules!” Dayvhe snarls.

“Sweetie, I think there’s something to that one though. Or at least putting a limit on things if you get me.” Roxxxie says, cringing a little as she talks.

“Oh, oh, in case he finds out that I’m a mutant you mean? Nah, he already found that out shortly before taking a ride on the fuckin’ crimson snake in my pants! He knows and yet the sun hasn’t fallen from the sky, the moons haven’t exploded and I ain’t been culled because Dirkka’s a goddamn crazy person!” Dayvhe argues back.

“And now I’m going to have to kill him.” Dirkka sighs and tries to push past Roxxxie.

“Ah! Dirkka, no. No murdering, calm down, shoosh.” Roxxxie says and paps him swiftly on the face.

“Shoosh, shoosh, shoooooosh.” she says silkenly, papping at his cheeks until his sword clatters to the ground and he slumps against her side. She balances his weight against her hip.

“Dayvhe, you know how much I love you, but are you sure you can trust that buoy? Mutation is a big secret to keep.” Roxxxie asks.

“They’ve both known for ages.” Dayvhe insists.

“Doesn’t mean they won’t turn on you. I’m just saying that if they get reason to give you up why wouldn’t they?” Roxxxie asks gently.
“I’d never!” Karkat protests.

“Why?” Roxxie asks, turning her attention to him.

“Because I’d only be- because- we’re the same!” Karkat says in a strangled voice. To your knowledge he’s never told anyone without his actual blood outing him by being visible, but as far as you can see Roxxie might actually try to hurt or kill him if he doesn’t offer some reason for not being a threat to Dayvhe.

Roxxie seems to silently consider this and then turns to you.

“How long have you known about this?” she asks you.

“Sweeps.” you answer and Roxxie sighs.

“Look, Dayvhe, I’m gonna take Dirkka back. Tell him to stop interfering, that you’re not in danger. But just ‘cause you’re not doesn’t mean…” Roxxie trails off and looks at you significantly. Dayvhe looks back at you in concern.

“Dirka’s my moirail, it means I know how he thinks and the dumb things he’ll do to protect the people he cares for. He’s mine and those are my responsibilities now. Just… know what you’re asking for, yeah? And think about if you’re really being fair, alright, kiddo?” Roxxie says, cradling the side of Dayvhe’s face with her hand. She gives you one last look and then bends down to catch Dirkka’s legs under one arm so she’s carrying him against his chest. She presses something on a remote and the two of them float up towards her ship, a moment after they vanish from view the ship moves on.

“What the fuck.” Karkat whispers.

“That could have gone worse.” you comment.


“I can explain!” Dayvhe says defensively.

“GOOD YOU DO THAT!” Karkat shouts.

“Can we maybe do that indoors before the sun comes up and cooks us all?” you suggest, looking up at the rapidly brightening sky. Karkat hisses furiously and shoves you both inside, slamming the door after you.

“You, fuck off. You START TALKING.” Karkat demands, pushing you toward the stairs and then grabbing Dayvhe by the neck of his shirt.

Ohhh fuck you’re not getting in the middle of THAT argument. You scuttle downstairs and try not to listen to the muffled strains of arguing that drift down to you, though it’s Karkat’s voice that carries. You sit on Karkat’s loungeplank and clasp your hands together nervously. From the muffled yells of ‘YOU SECRETIVE GLOBE FONDLING BASTARD’ and ‘KEEP ME OUT OF THE LOOP WHY DON’T YOU?’ you’re guessing that you can pinpoint Karkat’s particular grievances with this whole situation. Though you cringe whenever you hear your own name echo down the stairs.

You try distracting yourself on your husktop, combing it to be sure it’s free from Dirkka’s influence
but you’ve still got an ear on the dispute above. Right about when you think it’s getting circular you hear a loud bang of furniture being knocked over and a yelp of alarm.

You’re on your feet before you can think better of it but when you catch the sound of a strangled ‘oh GOD’ coming from up there your face darkens and you figure that the two of them landed on a better way to settle their grievances. Karkat always did like Dayvhe pitch as well as flush. From then on you really try to distract yourself, even going so far as to put earphones on now you know that no one’s likely to be booted out of the hive and into the sun, not that Karkat would ever do that.

Instead you focus your attentions on Dirkka. You’ve always tried not to pry but evidently Dayvhe’s personal life is going to show up no matter what. You search the government systems that you can get into for records on him, you assume his last name is spelt like Dayvhe’s and you’re right. His old address is out in the centre of a dead neighbourhood but even he is listed as no longer living there. Instead the current resident of that hive is listed as… Dayvhe. Curiously you peer at Dayvhe’s very obviously doctored record showing him as a tested rustblood, either Dirkka hacked his records or Roxxie used her sway to alter them or perhaps both. Either way Dayvhe doesn’t live as far from here as you’d thought he might. What is curious is how far away from any other living person his hive is but he’s not out in the middle of nowhere like Tavros is, no it’s a suburban lawnring just like Karkat’s only no one else lives there now. Even the next lawnring over is running at only about a quarter full.

You’d bet that his lusus is behind that.

Above you there’s a slamming door and half a minute later Dayvhe comes down the stairs tugging his shirt down.

“It’s inside out.” you point out, noting the tag sticking out of the back.

“Aw, fuck.” Dayvhe hisses and pulls it off. You can see quite a few bright red claw marks on his skin but none of them seem to be actually bleeding. Karkat was frustrated obviously but he knows the lines not to cross. You’re glad that the two morons in your life settled on something reasonably healthy with each other.

“So, uh, did you hear all that?” Dayvhe asks awkwardly and you tap one earphone to prove that you were trying very hard not to.

“Oh good.” Dayvhe sighs and drops onto the loungeplank next to you.

“I got kicked out. He’s still hella mad at me for not telling him about Dirkka, Roxxie and my lusus. So I gotta sleep down here.” Dayvhe says unhappily.

“Don’t you always sleep down here?” you ask, raising an eyebrow.

“By choice! Being banned is totally different.” he argues.

You close your husktop and set it aside. Dayvhe looks upset but you doubt that he wants to talk about it, or at least not yet.

“It’s really bright in here.” Dayvhe mumbles and gets up again. He’s right, no one drew the blinds and thankfully Karkat has the filters on his windows that keep the worst of the light out it’s still really bright out there. He starts fiddling with them and darkening the room, clearly nervous and antsy as he does it.

“Want to watch something?” you offer and his shoulders sag in relief. He nods and you put on something mindless, Takesh’s feudal building of games. It’s a dubbed East Alternian game show
where contestants have to survive stupid obstacles to reach the final level and storm the final fortress
to win. It’s fun and stupid so when Dayvhe settles at your side the two of you can just chill a little.

Before too long Dayvhe slumps against your side and your body thrills at the contact of his soft
cheek pillowed on your shoulder. You remember your confession earlier and you itch at how
nothing has come of it.

“About… what I said earlier.” you say hesitantly, staring forward at the screen. You feel Dayvhe
tense against your shoulder.

“You didn’t mean it?” he asks and honestly his tone gives you no clue as to whether he wants you to
have meant it or not.

“I meant it,” you say pulling away from him and looking him in the eye, “I pity you.”

Dayvhe looks wounded, like you just pulled a knife from his bloodpusher. He’s not wearing his
shades, you realise belatedly, he’s not wearing them because you still have them.

“I’m not- I wasn’t supposed to ever have quadrants.” Dayvhe says softly.

“What?” you ask.

“It was one of Dirkka and Roxxie’s rules. He rescued me from Cal when I was only a few sweeps,
raised me. He really is basically my lusus and Roxxie was always there too. They told me what I
was, that I shouldn’t trust people with it because they want to cull me. Only Karkat is unexpectedly
fine because he’s the same as me.” Dayvhe says and you watch as his claws dig into the fabric of the
loungeplank.

“But I’m not.” you conclude.

“Roxxie was saying about responsibilities and asking for things and- and I can’t do that. I can’t be
your moirail.” Dayvhe says miserably.

Just hearing those words is like a punch in the gut, you want him so badly so to be so plainly turned
down is unbearably painful and humiliating. But… but you have to know. You’re sure that he can
see the pain on your face and he looks no happier about it than you are, he even turns away from
looking at you like he can’t stand to.

“Why not?” you press him and Dayvhe looks up at you. He sighs and shuffles around until he’s sat
completely on the loungeplank, one leg tucked under himself and the other bent so his knee is
pressed to your thigh.

“Look, I’m mutant trash.” he begins.

“Hey, don’t talk about yourself like that.” you interject and Dayvhe shakes his head and waves you
concern off.

“I don’t hate myself for it, it’s just a fact. Most people would cull me for it and that’s just how it is.
Point is I’m never getting off of this planet. Roxxie and the rest of them are planning a revolution,
overthrowing Condy and the fuckin’ hemospectrum. That’d get me off planet if only she manages it
and I’m not dead by then. And I don’t just mean from the drones and undead and shit that’s waiting
to kill me when I age out and have to go into hiding here but who even knows what my natural
lifespan is. Dirkka will probably be dead by the time the hemospectrum is if not before.” Dayvhe
explains.
“Depressing.” you say.

“Ain’t it just? But point is I’ve got that whole expiration date and through sheer luck I run into the other guy with the same one and we’ve not talked about it but he’s as fucked as me and sooner or later he’s gonna be hiding from drones just like me. We’ll probably stick together, or I hope so at least.” Dayvhe says that last part uncertainly.

“He won’t abandon you.” you tell him and Dayvhe looks away but smiles softly. Unfortunately that smile fades pretty quickly.

“I was never meant to have quadrants. But Karkat’s an exception, I can’t fuck his life up by being in it because he’s automatically as fucked as I am. But you…” Dayvhe trails off. He looks over at you again and his look is soft and full of pity.

“You can leave. You can get off this stupid rock and you won’t be a battery either. And you’re brilliant, you’re so hella smart you can do anything. And if you’re still around if and when Roxxie breaks the hemospectrum then there’s nothing you can’t be. But you’ve gotta leave the planet to do it and I can’t go there. And I can’t ask you to stay, I’m not going to ruin your life. So… so I can’t be your moirail.” Dayvhe says, his voice getting tighter and tighter as he talks. There’s a pop as his claws go right through the fabric of the loungeplank.

“I shoulda stayed away.” Dayvhe mumbles, looking down at the sofa.

“I’d never felt like that for anyone an’… shoulda backed off and just bounced but I wanted to- and you got me and Karkat together and- and I was never SUPPOSED to-” he babbles, his voice hitching in parts.

“Hey, no, shoosh.” you urge, realising too late what you’re saying. Only you suddenly have a lapful of Dayvhe, his face pressed against your neck and his claws prickling through your shirt. You curl your arms around him because your pale crush of the century just LITERALLY threw himself at you.

“I can’t ask you to do that, junk your whole life for me. And I wanted to be happy when I gave you that plant because thinking of you as some battery just- I couldn’t do that. You don’t deserve that. You deserve better even if what I want is… is what I can’t ask you for.” Dayvhe adds that last part bitterly.

“You can ask me. To be your moirail, I mean. And the answer would be yes, if you did.” you say helpfully as you stroke Dayvhe’s sides. He makes a frustrated noise against your skin and reaches up to flick you in one of your smaller horns.

“Don’t say shit like that.” he reprimands you, turning his head so his face is no longer against your neck.

“You’re supposed to not be a battery, to go and be amazing.” he tells you.

“I think you’re giving me too much credit, I’m not as good as you think I am. At… anything.” you warn him and Dayvhe huffs and sits up in your lap.

“Fuck off.” he snorts and something in your chest flutters. He’s just flat out refusing to engage with your negative shit, which is probably what you need. Logically you know that but your mouth chooses to double down on your own hoofbeast shit.

“I’m an abrasive, antisocial, bipolar, condescending prick. As much as I appreciate you getting me out of service as a battery I’m not sure I’d be happy in imperial tech support for stupid, hemocastist,
assholes. I’d probably mouth off to some blueblood in my first perigee and get culled. Honestly my survival rate is probably better with you.” you tell him.

“No.” Dayvhe says firmly.

“You can’t just say no to that.” you protest.

“Can.” he insists.

“You can’t just ignore what I said. You’ve not seen me at my worst, you don’t know how terrible I am. They’ll cull me just as sure as… as…” your words derail as Dayvhe presses his fingers to your cheek and almost drums his fingers there. He switches from papping your cheek to stroking it, sliding his fingers along your skin like your the record and buttons on his turntables. He certainly plays you just as well. Your thinksponge fizzes and the two of you slump down onto your sides on the loungeplank as soothing calm fills your system.

“I thought… thought you didn’t wanna be my… moirail.” you say, slow and sleepy.

“I want to. Really want to, just can’t. I’m sorry.” Dayvhe apologises, his fingers stilling on your skin. You blink at him in a daze and he really looks conflicted.

“Kinda mixed messages.” you mumbles and turn your head to kiss the delicate inside of his wrist. You could bite him, sink your teeth in and spurt his mutant blood everywhere. It’d probably kill him. And yet he’s letting you press your lips to the thin skin there even as your fangs brush there too, he trusts you and you’d rather die than hurt him.

“Sorry.” Dayvhe whispers. You abandon his wrist in favour of very carefully papping his face back, reveling in the way he goes loose and pliant for you. He could say no or push you away but if anything he’s squirming closer to you. You don’t know what this is. Undeniably pale of course but if he doesn’t want- if he refuses to be your moirail is this a one off or a friends with pale benefits situation? It’s hard to hold the worry in your head with Dayvhe being so pale with you and it all gets lost in your fingers on his face and his on yours, drowned out by the trusting thud of his pulse against your mouth, your teeth and claws.

The two of you sleep tangled together, blissfully dreamless and peaceful. But it does wake you when he squirms out of your grasp late in the day.

Without sopor to keep you down you wake up fast, sticky eyed and confused sure, but fast.

“Whasss- where’re you goin’?” you ask as you watch Dayvhe pulling a hoodie on, wriggling his wrists through the sleeves and pulling the hood around the holes for his horns and buttoning it into place. The peak of the hood extends pretty far and when he turns to look at you it’s clear to see that he took his shades back.

“I’ve gotta go home. Don’t worry about it.” he answers.
“Yeah, no you can’t stop me doing that. You’re going back to your lusus?” you say in disbelief and stand up.

“I have to.” he says unhelpfully. He’s so closed off from you, it’s like none of what happened between you was real.

“Hey. Yesterday, or well I guess today since the sun hasn’t even set, that wasn’t nothing to me you know. You might not want to be my moirail and if that’s how it is that’s how it is but I still mean it. I pity you, I’m stupidly pale for you and you can trust me. You know that, right?” you tell him seriously. He’s almost inscrutable behind his bandana and shades but not so much that you can’t see the pained pinch of his eyebrows at your words.

“I know.” he mumbles. He turns to the door and then pauses with a great sigh then proceeds to tug his bandana down and look back at you.

“My lusus, Cal, he was Dirkka’s lusus before. He was our ancestor’s lusus before that. Neither me nor Dirkka knows what Cal considers a desirable result but he tortures his charges and mind controls them to get what he wants, everything from chucklevoodoos to straight up puppetry. Dirkka bolted pretty soon after he met Roxxie, she gave him somewhere better to stay and pitied him for what’d happened. I guess as an heiress she gets the whole monster for a lusus thing,” Dayvhe explains. You knew most of this but you’re guessing Dayvhe is getting to a point so you stay silent.

“Thing is without a kid Cal goes out and gets another grub and I don’t know how many he went through before he settled on me but I’ll bet anything I wasn’t the first since Dirkka. He eventually came back when I was a few sweeps old and realised that Cal was still doing his thing. He explained to me about what Cal was doing and he started hatching a plan to get me free, he felt awful that him leaving the way he did got me in the same position. So he finally figured he’d just attack Cal, kill him and rescue me.” Dayvhe continues.

“I can tell that didn’t work.” you say, it’s obvious as his lusus is still alive.

“You know how protective Dirkka is of me, he was way more like that when I was actually little and pretty helpless. But the thing is you can’t just kill Cal, he mind controls you. Cal had already put Dirkka down as a failed grub where I was still a potential success but if I was gonna side with Dirkka I was a failure too and he’d abandon me to start tormenting more grubs. Putting more people through the same shit. I couldn’t let that happen so I told Cal I wanted nothing to do with Dirkka, begged him to stop. Cal… I don’t know, it wasn’t mercy but he let us both live.” Dayvhe says sadly.

“Just like that?” you ask feeling skeptical.

“He made it clear to Dirkka that if he ever came back he’d kill me and then him, in that order. That’s how this happened, it was a warning. He made him do it.” Dayvhe says, raising his hand to his partially amputated horn. Sparks shower from your clenched fists. There’s no way Dirkka could have stayed around to repair that injury so tiny Dayvhe must have had to take care of himself.

“After that I came up with a pattern. As long as I go back every perigee or perigee and a half Cal doesn’t go looking for more grubs. I tried staying away with Dirkka for longer but I came back and had to rescue a grub and then stay put for nearly two weeks to stop him looking for it. If Dirkka goes there we both die and I can’t kill Cal on my own, he takes control of me if I act against him at all.” Dayvhe shrugs.

“So let me help, I could-” you start but Dayvhe rounds on you, his expression fierce.

“Don’t you DARE come anywhere near my hive. If I take anyone there he’ll think I’ve brought
them there to kill him and he’ll kill us both. The more experience you have with that kind of control the weaker you are to it and I won’t do that to you.” he hisses.

“But I don’t have to get near to him to laser him!” you argue.

“You don’t always know where he is, he’s sneaky and fast. And he doesn’t always need to touch you either, he’s just as strong as Vriska. And I won’t do that to you. I won’t let you wake up by another crater in the ground covered in red blood.” he says sharply.

His words are like a punch right to your bloodpusher but there’s no malice in Dayvhe’s expression, only pity. He grabs a handful of your shirt and leans in to kiss your cheek, right where he had before and where he had repeatedly earlier.

“Don’t do that shit, alright? Cal will try to fuck you up with whatever you’re most afraid of, so just… stay away from him. Now, I gotta go. I’ll see ya.” Dayvhe says backing off. He tugs his bandana back up over his nose and then with most of his skin covered or shaded he opens Karkat’s front door and walks out into the blistering sunlight.

You touch your cheek and groan, stumbling back to the loungeplank and falling down face first on it. Your mind churns over everything Dayvhe told you, about Dirkka rescuing him only to have to let him go back to Cal all over again. No wonder the guy is crazy, his head was fucked with for who knows how many sweeps and then he basically becomes lusus to this kid only to maim him when he tries to free him. You’re pretty sure Dirkka is protecting Dayvhe out of guilt as much as anything else these days. But you hate that Dayvhe is in that situation and you simply can’t deal with it.

Well… well you won’t!

You try dredging up the self confidence that mania gives you and failing that you can still hear Dayvhe’s assertion that you’re brilliant. So yeah, you are, and you’re not going to take this. Surely murdering something isn’t hard work, people murder things all the time. There’s got to be a solution that you can think of for this.

Lusii are animals, right? So maybe you could ask Tavros to just walk the thing into a bomb or something. But maybe being able to mind control things gives it immunity and then it’d take it out on Dayvhe when he got back. So… bad plan. More direct, then. Unfortunately due to you being mostly sane you don’t have a shitload of weapons at your disposal, but you do know someone who does.

You grit your teeth and remind yourself of Dayvhe’s broken look when he talked about Cal, of the pain it causes him. You pity him so much there’s nothing you wouldn’t do for him. Unfortunately that means there’s a whole lot of things you would do for him that you’d really rather not do. But in the situation you see no other choice.

You slide your husktop open and look over the map of Dayvhe’s neighbourhood again, a straight mile around his hive is uninhabited. You dread to think of what happened to the people who used to live there. You’d need something that could detect motion and preferably video, hidden cameras maybe? Nothing great, just enough to tell if something was there. Could Dayvhe plant them? Or maybe you shouldn’t involve him, if his lusus can read minds then anything he knows Cal can know.

Right, ok. You never thought you’d be doing this but here goes.

[twinArmageddons began trolling arachnidsGrip]

TA: ii think after all of the 2hiit you've pulled we can both agree that you owe me, 2o ii have 2omethiing you can do for me that you can repay me wiith.

TA: ii a22ume you're 2tiill makiing your awful doom2day deviice2, and even iif you're not 2tiill in
that business ii need you two make one for me.
TA: ii don't need a big range, in fact a mile radius ii the most ii want. but iit need two be powerful enough two destroy absolutely all life in that zone. two f**king du2t.
TA: and iit need two be able two get there and go off without anyone being anywhere near it.
TA: that’s what ii want.

You close the chat with her, no way she’s awake at this time of day. Instead you start thinking about problem number two. Actually, problem number two requires coffee and you’re going to need to get some before you can think clearly. You warm up Karkat’s coffee machine, it’s actually one you gave him as a twelfth perigees eve present a sweep or two ago because one of the things you’ve both had in common is a love (or at least a need) for caffeine. With coffee brewed you take a seat again with a mug in hand and turn over the real problem number two in your head.

Dayvhe and Karkat are going to need somewhere to live and maybe Dirkka has some plan that he’s not told Dayvhe about but you’re not going to assume that. If he doesn’t it’s pretty plain to see that both Dayvhe and Karkat are refusing to think about it so you will. You need somewhere for them to hide. Kitting that place out is a way easier task, it’d just require hijacking some delivery drones to get hive building supplies but you know at least one heiress who’d be willing to help there.

What you need is somewhere out of sight of the drones but also out of the usual range of the general population, somewhere with cover from the sun and the undead. So you’re looking at either an isolated island, which is risky and gives nowhere to run, or the mountains or deserts. Deserts are pretty full of the undead but forests aren’t great either. Mind leeches make zombies but the ones in the forest don’t tend to live long, or, well, “live”. They’re bad at navigating obstacles and local fauna is more than happy to eat them still. But the desert where it’s big and open and they can pursue prey until they’re too tired to run is perfect.

So mountains maybe. A cavern or cave system ideally. You could make your own but that’d draw attention but then it wouldn’t be on a map like an abandoned jadeblood colony would. Decisions, decisions. You lean back against the loungeplank and start scrolling over maps as you try to read and decipher the data but eventually it becomes too much for you to process.

Eventually you just start to write an algorithm and get your husktop to do the work. Distance from nearest troll hive equal to or greater than forty miles. Fresh water or snow within one mile. Then you work to rainfall, average temperature, frequency of natural disasters.

“The fuck are you doing?” Karkat asks and you leap in alarm, sparking wildly and nearly flipping your third mug of coffee.

“I-” you stutter, turning to look at him.

The great thing about being Karkat is that his hair always looks the same no matter what he’s done to it. Hours of combing and product is indistinguishable from freshly rolled out of his coon. You probably still look a mess, like someone had been running their fingers through your hair for ages. Because, you know, Dayvhe did that when you were on the edge of sleep.

“I’m working on something.” you tell him.

“Ok, what?” Karkat asks and then glares, you track where he’s looking at and see Dayvhe’s note written in grey pencil on the back of some junk mail.

“That pus filled weasel, I’m gonna strangle him.” Karkat hisses as he reads the note.

“So how’s pitch working out for you?” you ask, sitting down. Karkat whaps you in the ear with the
junk mail and glares.

“Don’t get cute with me, you’re still in the shit for knowing half of that bugfuck nuts stuff and not telling me.” he warns you.

“I told you shit when they got here.” you point out. Before then he didn’t need to know, at least not enough that you’d risk betraying Dayvhe’s trust for what at the point would be just gossip.

“What’re you doing?” Karkat asks again.

“It’s… something I’m working on. There might be a few bugs to work out first but it could work.” you hedge.

“Descriptive.” Karkat snorts.

Shit, you did keep him in the dark for too long before, the least you can do is tell him now. Part of this is to help him too.

“Well, you’re a mutant. Have you thought about what’s going to happen to you when the ordeals come to leave Alternia and you can’t do them?” you ask. Karkat glares at you over the mug of coffee that he’d poured himself from what you’d left on the warmer.

“Consider it a mark of how much I like this coffee that you’re not wearing it right now.” Karkat growls at you.

“I’m serious.” you tell him.

“Me too.” he snaps back at you.

“You must have planned for it at least a little.” you press.

“Yeah, fine, my plan is probably die horribly very quickly. Thanks for the reminder, fuck face.” Karkat says harshly.

“Well I’m working on something that should change that for you.” you tell him. Karkat looks surprised for a moment and then rolls his eyes.

“But not just me, right? The other mutant you know?” Karkat scoffs.

“Well, yeah, but it’s not like I wouldn’t have thought about this sooner or later for you anyway. You’re… you’re my best friend.” you add that last part with strangled awkwardness. Even though insulting each other and grossly making up has been the status quo for the two of you since forever it’s always agonising reminding each other of how much you do in fact like each other.

“Do whatever you want, I’m not exactly hopeful though.” Karkat shrugs.

“Aren’t you interested in trying to survive?” you demand.

“Sol, up until Dayvhe showed up, and yes he told me about the plant, your plans for the future were either a) be a battery b) blow your brains out or c) run and hide. You weren’t exactly looking for solutions either so don’t come in here filled with ideas acting like I should fall to my knees and fellate your disgusting anatomy in gratitude.” Karkat sneers.

“I’ll pass on that even when it does work, thanks.” you retort.

Karkat looks at you suspiciously and then at the low amount of remaining coffee. His gaze travels to
your husktop and then he slowly looks you up and down.

“Are you feeling ok?” he asks carefully.

“I’m fine.” you say.

“You’re not acting- actually, nevermind. It’s hard telling regular you crazy from the kind I need to be concerned about. Just don’t do anything drastic. Or I can tell Dayvhe it’s his problem since you clearly pity him so hard.” Karkat chuckles. You know what he means, he thinks you’re going manic. Which is dumb. Sure you didn’t sleep much but that was because Dayvhe woke you up. And you care about him and Karkat so you’re trying to fix things, this isn’t some high energy project that you took up for no reason, it’s all sensible and normal.

“I’m not going to do anything reckless.” you assure him. Having just, uh, contacted Vriska to make you a bomb.

“Ok, great, it’s like Dayvhe’s shitty music to my auricular sponge clots. I’m gonna go shower now, I’m gross.” Karkat nods and wanders off.

Behind you trollian chimes and you sit back down and look at it, it’s your least favourite person.

AG: I neeeeeeever thought I’d see you trolling me.
TA: yeah, well you’re the only 2ociopath wiith a bomb2 that ii know.
AG: 8ig words from a guy who needs my help. I thought you were all aabout never talking to me al over stupid stuff in the past, that and making everyone h8 me.
TA: fiir2t of all ii never told anyone two hate you, ii ju2t told them what you diid. iif our friiend2 hate you iir’t a 2iign that they have at lea2t *2ome* 2en2e.
TA: and 2econd: you u2ed me two murder aradiia. that doe2n’t ju2t go away.
AG: I said I was sorry, geez!
TA: and yet 2he’2 2tiill dead.
AG: She seems perfectly happy with that last time I talked to her, actually.
TA: ju2t 2top iit. al2o you diidn’t ever apologii2e, not two me.
AG: I didn’t?
TA: no.
AG: Oh. Well, I’m sorry I guess?
TA: go fuck your2elf. do you have the kiind of explo2iive ii want or not?
AG: Why do you even want it? If you're trying to kill someone we 8oth know you're capa8le of it on your own.
TA: do you have the bomb?
AG: UUUUUUUUGH! Yes, I can make you something like that if it means we can call this whole stupid thing square. That's my deal. I make you this 8om8, you stop holding what I did over me.

You take your prongs off of the keyboard and look at her message. She’s asking for your forgiveness as her price? Surely you can’t do that, and that wasn’t what you were offering really. She murdered Aradia. She USED YOU to do it. But… it was so long ago. It was so long and Aradia isn’t gone, not totally. And yet she also is. As much as you hate to admit it Vriska is right in a way, when you’ve spoken to Aradia as a ghost or even in the creepy as fuck form that Equius puts her in she doesn’t seem angry about what happened to her. She’s over it. But even if Aradia has forgiven her for the murder it’s not just that.

She used you to do it.

You’re probably never going to get over that and it’s not ever going to be okay. But… well, you think of how dead Dayvhe looked when he talked about Cal, about what that monster did to him and
to Dirkka as well as countless other kids. If this is a problem you can solve for him by agreeing to not hold Vriska accountable for her actions then maybe that’s a price you’re willing to pay. You don’t have to actually forgive her, just stop outwardly hating her. It’s not like you were super close before anyway.

You scratch your claws through your hair and hiss in agitation. For Dayvhe.

TA: fine.
AG: Holy crap, I did not expect you to actually say yes! Man, what has got you in such a 8ind that you’re this desper8?
TA: i'm not talking two you about that. ju2t make 2ure thii2 thiiing can be 2hot where iit need2 two go from a really long way away.
[twinArmageddons ceased trolling arachnidsGrip]

Ugh, now YOU feel like you need a shower.

You flick over to the program looking for places for Dayvhe and KK to live and it’s just coming up with so much that it’s unusable. You chew on your thumb claw for a minute as you think. This isn’t something you know much about and since you’re already reaching out for help you may as well reach out a little further to someone you actually like. As opposed to, you know, Vriska.

[twinArmageddons began trolling arsenicCatnip]
TA: hey, nepeta. are you around toniight?
AC: :33 < oh! hey pawlux! i haven't heard from you for a while.
TA: 2orry about that.
AC: :33 < aww, no don't be. effuryone gets busy sometimes. and yes i'm around tonight, why do you want to know?
TA: ii need 2ome adviice from you but in per2on would be better. you 2tiill liiviing iin the 2ame cave?
AC: :33 < owo i'm furry intrigued at your question! yes, i still live in the same place and i'll even stay in all night if you want to drop by and ask me this very secret question!
TA: great, i'll leave now. thank2 again.
[twinArmageddons ceased trolling arsenicCatnip]

You send Karkat a message that you’re going because unlike Dayvhe you don’t need to leave people paper notes. It’s a strange little quirk of his but you’ll be damned if you’re not hoarding every note he left you like a desperate tool. You corrall your stuff together and leave Karkat’s hive behind.

Nepeta lives a fair distance away, being a girl that values her privacy and the wilderness. You’ve also been there maybe twice in your life so you have to land every so often, catch you breath and fight with the map software on your palmhusk. But just under two hours away you’re walking around the forest as you look around for the entrance to Nepeta’s hive/cave. Or really even any signs of it at all. You’re about to give up and message her when a voice comes from above you.

“The mighty huntress stalks her prey.”

You jump and spin around to see Nepeta crouched on a tree branch above you. You try to calm your hammering bloodpusher and remind yourself that only stupid people look at her and Equius and assume that he’s the deadlier of the two of them. If Nepeta wasn’t your friend she could have leapt down and killed you before you even knew she was there, psionics be damned.

“Hi.” you say a little breathlessly.

Nepeta giggles and drops eerily silently to the ground. When she stands up you realise that she’s as
tall as you are now and also, damn she has some guns.

“Come on, I’m so excited to hear about whatever you have to ask me!” Nepeta chirps and walks off, you follow her and she leads you into a hidden cave with paint and shipping grids all over the walls. Nepeta drops into an animal hide stuffed chair and gestures to another for you, you get a little closer and realise it’s made from the stuffed skin of a cholerbear. Fucking hell.

“So, uh, I was hoping you could look at something for me.” you say and open up your husktop. You close down anything you don’t want her to see, including your trollian with your recent chat to Vriska. Instead you pull up your mapping program and hand it to her.

Nepeta crosses her legs and pulls a lock of hair into her mouth which she chews on as she thoughtfully looks your program over. Her claws tap on the metal of your husktop as she thinks and you hear the scrape of them as she moves over the trackpad. You’re suddenly conscious of how much shorter your keep yours so that you’re able to deal with your bees properly, Nepeta’s are all for survival.

Your eyes roam over her walls and you look at the area for confirmed ships. Vriska <> Terezi, Nepeta <> Equius, Equius <3 Aradia… your heart sinks a little at that one. You’re also surprised to see other people on there too though. Rohhze <3 Kanaya, Karkat <3 Dayvhe and right next to that Karkat <3< Dayvhe. When you get over to theoretical ships you note that she has Dayvhe pale with damn near everyone, not you though but then how would she know? You’re not bitter. Maybe a little.

“Something tells me you’re not going camping.” Nepeta says quietly and you look back to her in alarm.

“I…” you hesitate.

“You’re looking for somewhere to live, for somewhere to hide. Avoiding the drones is a crime, you know.” Nepeta says slyly and your blood freezes. Did you make a mistake by coming here? Oh fuck, you’re fucked if you did. Even if you have to kill Nepeta to escape there’s a 100% chance that you’ll spend the rest of your short life trying to run from Equius who will be determined to punch your skeleton clean out of your body. There’s no way she didn’t tell him you were coming. You are FUCKED.

“Relax. I’m just curious as to what’s so important you’d risk that.” Nepeta says, waving a hand airily.

“Uh…” you falter, but this is Nepeta so you just flat out tell the truth, “true love?”

Nepeta makes a delighted squeak, her grin taking up half of her face.

“Tell me what you need! Tell me EVERYTHING!” Nepeta demands, flapping her hands excitedly and reaching out for her paints as she nearly knocks your husktop to the floor as she tries to scramble to her wall to write your name down.

“I need a place for two people to hide, maybe three. Almost certainly three.” you tell her.

“Oh, but you and who?” she asks, scribbling away.

Well, you’re already in this deep.

“Dayvhe.” you groan, dropping your head into your hands.
“So the third is- oh Karkat, of course. If Dayvhe is staying he will. So- wait is this you and him pale or are you ashen here?” Nepeta asks looking around at you. She laughs suddenly and you guess you must have made a face at that kind of insinuation.

“Pale it is then. Wow, I never thought I’d have him in a confirmed pale ship!” She says gleefully. Confirmed. Your face falls and hers does as well at least enough to take the shine off of her enthusiasm.

“It’s not like that we’re… friends. And it doesn’t matter, I just need to know he’s going to be somewhere he can survive.” you tell her.

“Ohh.” Nepeta says, pushing off from the wall and lowering her paintbrush. She walks over to you and crouches down to be eye to eye with you.

“That might be the sweetest thing I’ve heard. But… you know he’s kind of a diamond breaker, right? Not meanly or anything, people just go all out for him.” Nepeta tells you.

“I’m not doing this to get him to like me.” you tell her with a hiss of offense. Besides, he already likes you enough that you know he wants to be your moirail.

“I hope he does like you back.” Nepeta says and boops your nose with her brush. She returns to her drawings and fills in the details, still putting you and Dayvhe as pale.

“It’s nice that Dayvhe is wanting to stay with Karkitty though, very romantic.” Nepeta remarks as she finishes up the paint work. Wait, stay with Karkat?

“You must know if you’re here, right? Did he tell you or did Terezi?” Nepeta asks.

“UH.” you say blankly, stalling for time.

“About his blood? You do know, right?” she asks, turning back to you and giving you a worried look.

“I know, how do you know?!” you demand. As far as you knew you and Dayvhe were the only people who knew at all.

“Well, Terezi has a very good sense of smell and he nicked himself before when he was squabbling with Dayvhe. Between that and the grey text… she is a very good legislacerator you know. But she figured that he wanted it kept secret since he never told anyone but she, um, well she had that pitch fling with Gamzee before Kanaya got to him and she got very high on sopor and accidentally told me. But she’s never told anyone else and I haven’t either!” Nepeta rushes to say.

“He didn’t really tell me on purpose, it was an accident too.” you say.

You look down at your husktop on the floor and pick at the seam of your jeans. She doesn’t know about Dayvhe, she thinks he’s just staying with Karkat because they’re together. He’s safe. You’re going to have to tell Karkat later about Terezi and Nepeta knowing but that’s something you can deal with then, though you have no doubt that he’ll be annoyed. For the sake of your hearing you might not tell him in person.

“You know the most about surviving in the middle of nowhere. I tried to find somewhere but I obviously don’t know what I’m looking for. Just somewhere big enough for the two of them. And… and me if they’ll let me stay.” you add that last part with a grimace.
“I’ll find somewhere. And how about we both make lists of the supplies we think they’ll need and then when we meet up again we’ll talk it over.” Nepeta suggests, setting her brush down and flashing you a bright smile.

“Yeah probably best to not talk about this over the internet.” you nod.

“And, ah, maybe don’t mention this to Equius. He’ll just worry and it’s not like I’m going to change my mind on doing this anyway!” Nepeta says and you nod. Like hell you’re doing to damage your own chances of success here. And other people’s relationships are none of your business but you think that is Dayvhe did become your moirail that you would lose your shit if he was as controlling as Equius is to Nepeta, or at least as much as he tries to be to her. Nepeta has always walked the fine line between straight up ignoring his bossiness or seeing sense when it’s reasonable and giving in. You’re sure you need a firm smack in the head now and then but that kind of micromanaging would make you lose your shit.

“Thanks, Nep. I really appreciate it.” you say instead as you stand up.

“Work on that list and don’t worry about it. I want my friends to be safe, you know. We’ll do this.” Nepeta smiles brightly.

You leave her literal neck of the woods and head home. You take the time to care for your plant. It occurs to you that letting it die on purpose would somewhat solve the problem of Dayvhe insisting that he can’t be your moirail because you have to go have some bright future. But it would also be manipulative as fuck and entirely throw all the effort he made and risk he took to get it right back in his face. You want him to want you there, not just feel obliged to keep you around because he’d rather that than have you be dead.

Heading back into your block you drop down in front of your computer and take a minute to really think. Nepeta said to make a list of everything they, and maybe you, will need. You open a file and start to make a list.

You cover basic things like somewhere to sleep that isn’t just the rocky floor, you work out how much they’ll need in terms of clothes and then despairingly realise that you have no idea how much they’ll grow when they properly become adults. You factor in some larger clothes and figure that if they’re too big then they can use the spare for repairing other clothes. Oh, hey, maybe you should include a sewing kit and ask Kanaya about how to make repairs and maybe if she could include that information in some kind of written format too.

You consider basic survival needs of food and water and trawl through websites devoted to trolls crazy enough to find hiking and wilderness exploring to be fun. Which honestly is crazy because you only do that sort of thing if you’re dangerously unhinged or unbelievably hardcore like Nepeta is.

By the time your next mealtime comes around you’ve changed tactics to working out just what they’d need to keep on them to survive if they had to flee from a drone and leave their hideout behind. What’s the basic minimum that they would need to carry?

It hurts sometimes, thinking of the two of them like this. Of Dayvhe and Karkat surviving together. You understand Dayvhe’s wish for you to drink the tea from your plant and skirt under the empire’s radar onto their ships as some regular yellowblood. You’d have work, you’d never have to worry about where your next meal is coming from. Maybe you could even make friends or quadrantmates up there and there’s nothing to say you wouldn’t still be in touch with the rest of your friends too.

Sure, your life would be dangerous around strange adult highbloods but you’re a lowblood, that’s nothing new. But you don’t need to be talking from your bloodpusher to know that you really aren’t
down for serving an empire that upholds this system. Fuck them. You’d rather take your chances with Dayvhe and Karkat.

But what if they don’t want you? If you’re just the third wheel to their little arrangement. Karkat used to have pale feelings for Dayvhe and what if they never completely merged into red? What if they just decide that all they need is each other and you burn your whole future, bad though it may be, just to be an unwanted extra to them? What if, what if?

But what if it does work? What if Dayvhe does become your moirail and you get to look after each other and spend the rest of your life with him and with your best friend? What if you get to see them happy together and be happy with them yourself? The three of you bouncing off each other as you survive in your own personal fuck you to the empire.

You shake the thoughts from your head and settle on a chair, looking out the screened windows of your hive. It’s day now and no one is outside, obviously. You hope Dayvhe is okay with his lusus and vow to yourself not to go there, you’ll only cause more problems. He told you to stay away, you’ll do it.
This is For Real - Motion City Soundtrack

‘I had some nightmares,
Clawing at my skin and bones
I nearly did explode
You smoked the demons
Gave me back my feelings
Now I am good to go
Before, my face hits the floor
There’s just one thing you should know’
This is For Real - Motion City Soundtrack

Live performance of this song was interrupted by the lead singer mauling a roadie harassing his moirail. Five stars, would see again - Outglut Music Evaluation Column

A week of planning passes and still no Dayvhe. It’s possible that he’s staying with someone else but he’s not answering your messages. You don’t message anyone else about him, though. It’s clear that Dirkka doesn’t approve of you at all and you hardly want to give him the impression that you can’t respect boundaries. You focus on your plans instead. You really want a way of getting cameras into Dayvhe’s hive so you can be sure that his lusus and JUST his lusus is there when you blow the place to hell.

If your life was a movie you’d be sitting by the window looking down on the baking city as Dayvhe stumbles towards the base of your building but you’re actually in your nutrition block throwing expired food out and tossing crusted dishes into the washer. As such you’re caught off guard when Dayvhe throws your front door open and slams it behind himself.

“Dayvhe!” you exclaim, rushing out into the main room and finding him slumped against the door.

He wordlessly hisses at you when you get close, his cracked lips pulling back to flash his sharp teeth. You come to a halt a few steps away from him. His skin is raw and sun scorched, not so bad that you’re worrying about him dying but that’s surely got to hurt. His bandana that covered his face before is gone.

“No, you might be dealing with an entirely different condition here. Mind leeches make zombies, the shambling undead that curse your world and Cal is one. Is it possible that he… that he did that?

“Dayvhe? Come on, talk to me.” you plead. Dayvhe lurches forward towards you and you jerk back in fear, only for him to stumble past mindlessly towards your block. Seeing no other option you follow him, wincing as he bounces off of the door frame and barely catches himself on his feet. He swerves into your ablution block and slumps over the counter.

“What’s wrong? You’re really weird Dayvhe, are you hurt or…?” you trail off as Dayvhe lashes out an uncoordinated hand to slap the knob on your sink to fill it with water. In the process he knocks a bunch of shit on the floor and, naturally, backhands your toothbrush right into the loadgaper because
of course he does. Looks like you’re not brushing your teeth today.

Dayvhe dunks his head into the water for a solid second or two and just when you’re about to grab him to pull him out he jerks back and you catch him making eye contact with his reflection and you see a flicker of recognition in his eyes. Dayvhe might not be all here for reasons that elude you but you’re sure he’s in there somewhere.

“Alternia to Dayvhe, are you in there?” you say, trying to keep your voice as bright and nonthreatening as you can. The last thing you want to do is to alarm him. He turns around and whatever awareness he had is gone, his eyes skip over you and it’s as if the lights inside have gone off.

Dayvhe blindly grabs for the hem of his shirt and goes to pull it up from the bottom, only it catches somehow and he yowls in pain.

“Hey, hey, careful!” you warn him, rushing forward and grabbing his wrists. He snaps out of of your grip and goes to claw you but you carefully restrain him with your psionics.

“Are you hurt?” you ask, not really expecting an answer. You move yourself between his legs so he can’t kick you and carefully move to peel his shirt up by yourself. Dayvhe hisses sharply and struggles so you hold him a little tighter. His shirt is stuck to something so you have to get your hand in there to feel.

It’s tape.

He has tape on his skin. You pull it away from the shirt and then lift it up more and realise just what it is you’re looking at. Dayvhe’s black bandana is folded up a few times into a rectangular kind of shape and it taped onto his skin around his side, the tape around the edges even goes up to his grubscars at the top and down to a few inches above his hip on the bottom. There’s then a big X of tape across the middle of it. You have a horrible feeling you already know what you’re going to find but when you reach out and touch it your fingers come away wet and mutant red.

“Okay… we… we need to get this off, clean you up and put something better on. So this shirt has to go.” you tell Dayvhe who is snarling at you threateningly but still not quite seeing you. Though your hands shake you keep your voice calm and rip his shirt in two down the middle right through his false rust sign and pull it off of his back, though he snaps at you for getting that close. You explain what you’re doing as you’re doing it, telling him that it’ll all be okay, that you’ve got him.

Getting the tape off is no easy feat. With every pull Dayvhe makes a terrible pained sound and you finally have to conclude that you’re just going to have to rip the thing off in one go. You slide closer to him so your hips are pressed to his and keeping him in place against your counter and not attempting to run off somewhere. You tug your first aid kit close by and open up some bandages as you do so knowing that you’ll probably have to patch him up really quickly.

“This is probably going to suck, I’m sorry.” you whisper and press one hand to the skin to the left of the tape and with the other you grip the tape that you’ve managed to peel up so far.

Steeling your nerves you rip the tape off. Dayvhe screeches and you lean into him to stop him trying to escape and forget that although you’ve restrained his arms that’s all you’ve restrained. Dayvhe lunges forward and sinks his teeth into the meat of your shoulder and you’re a skinny fuck you don’t have a lot of body mass there to begin with. You scrabble for a square of bandage and press it to the wound, trying to keep pressure on it but it clearly hurts him because he just sinks his teeth in further.

“It’s ok, come on Dayvhe. Snap out of it.” you plead, dropping your head to his shoulder as you
fight your own pain reflex to claw him up and get away. It’s all you can do to keep that repressed and keep his hands away from you.

“I don’t- augh, I don’t want to hurt you man but… shhhhhhit.” you hiss out. You reach up with your free hand and find his face, hoping that you can just push him away from you and he won’t take a chunk of your shoulder with him. The moment your careful fingers tap on his cheek almost all of the pressure goes out of his bite, he’s not letting you go but he’s also not biting in harder anymore.

You’re pretty sure that you’re dealing with… what, the lowest part of his brain right now? He was hurt so he went somewhere he felt safe which is something you’ll delight about when there aren’t teeth in your shoulder. He was in pain so he lashed out and now you almost papped him and he relaxed. He’s clearly not with it enough for you to reason with him and you’re trying to help him but you can’t until he lets you go. You don’t have any real choice.

“Shhh. Shoosh.” you whisper, patting his face and- yes, he lets you go. You pull back and naturally you’re bleeding but there’s no terrible gush of arterial spray so you’ll likely be fine. Dayvhe’s eyes are shut and his face is pushed into your palm.

Peering at his wound tells you that he already tried to dress this himself. There’s adhesive stitches and bandages stuck there but they’re so drowned in blood that they’re not sticking anymore. You pull them off and press yet another new bandage there. It’s not actually bleeding that fast or as badly as you might have thought, it’s just clearly been going a while and there’s a lot of bruising which either means he was pretty badly hurt when he was cut or he got hurt again after he patched himself up.

Dayvhe’s teeth scratch the inside of you palm and you rapidly change your focus. You’re not exactly cool with him biting your shoulder but you use your fucking hands for your computer. How can you code or destroy people at video games if Dayvhe decides he’s going to take some of your fingers? But he’s not looking like he intends to bite you, instead his mouth is open in a grimace and his eyes are screwed shut.

One of his eyes slides open and finally, FINALLY it looks like it’s Dayvhe looking back at you.

“Sollux?” he rasps, blinking weakly at you.

“Oh thank fuck.” you say, blessedly grateful that someone up there decided to finally give you a fucking break.

“How’d I- I was on a train.” Dayvhe says, looking around.

“Shh, just stay still and let me stop this fucking bleeding.” you tell him, crouching down now that you know he’s not going to claw your face off or kick your torso inside out. The bandage you had is sodden already so you toss it on the pile of the others. The wound isn’t bleeding out fast but it’s not stopping.

You remove your hand from Dayvhe’s hip to reach out to the shirt, bandana and bandages on the floor but as soon as you do Dayvhe starts to topple downwards. You catch him just before he smacks his head on anything but it’s close. You eye the bloodied things on your floor and mentally estimate the amount of liquid they’re holding. Even if this is all that he’s bled out that’s quite a bit and Dayvhe isn’t a big guy and there’s only so much blood someone can lose and still be okay.

“Right, we’re moving.” you tell him and pick him up bodily with your psionics and set him on the floor right by your coon. It’s not the easy to clean tile of the ablution block but the carpet out here at least means that he won’t do himself any harm if he decides to sit up and then faints and hits his
head. Which knowing Dayvhe’s track record with good ideas is… well, it’s likely.

“You need to tell me how you got this.” you tell him. You don’t say that you need to know before he passes out.

“I don’t- I was with Cal. He does his head fuckery and things go kind of sideways. I lose time after.” Dayvhe says, rubbing at his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Yeah, you weren’t exactly yourself when you got here.” you nod. So you were right that it was something to do with the mind leech, some kind of temporary mental zombification.

“How did you get this?” you ask and put pressure on the wound with another clean part of bandage.

“AUGH FUCK!” Dayvhe yips and nearly knees you in the ribs.

“I- aaaaah that hurts, I was fighting him so I could go. And… I don’t remember. I remember patching up and wanting to get out asap but… then I was on the train and I think I popped a stitch or…” Dayvhe isn’t making much sense.

So assuming the train ride from Dayvhe’s place is a few hours and the walk to the train is at least half an hour… so that means he must have managed to stop the bleeding enough that he thought he could make the train ride. He must have made it worse somehow on the way. Clearly he doesn’t recall what that was but if you find out someone did this to him you’re going to DESTROY THEM.

Still, you need to stop this bleeding.

“I’ve got blood in my mouth.” Dayvhe says in quiet horror and you look up in alarm. If he’s coughing up blood then this is a new problem that you have to fix. But no, he’s just looking at his hands with your blood on them.

“It’s mine, you’re fine.” you tell him and paw through your medical kit. You’re not sure stitches will help right now, not the kind you have here at least. They’re the same sticky kind that Dayvhe tried that failed him.

“Why is YOUR blood in my- holy shit what happened to you?” Dayvhe demands sitting up sharply and making the gash on his side spit blood halfway up your wrist. But it’s like he doesn’t even notice as he tries to touch the bite wound on your shoulder.

“Stay still, stupid!” You snap at him and shove him back down.

“Ah, ah fuck it hurts.” Dayvhe whimpers, his hand reaching for his agitated injury. You smack it away, he doesn’t need to make it worse.

“I’m sorry, showing up here. Shit’s ridic, man.” he adds.

You need to disinfect this actually, or else he might just die later on down the line. You fumble for antiseptic and, with a regretful look, pop the bottle open and just pour it on the wound. Dayvhe howls and his claws scrape along the floor.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” you apologise. You want to wipe the stuff away but you also need to make sure it’s got everywhere.

“You- uh- you should talk. Distract yourself.” you suggest as you fumble for more gauze.

“Yeah, ok. Yeah, running my mouth is my thing. My jam. Jams. Hey so I’ve seen porn like this.”
Dayvhe gasps, his breathing sharp and fast.

“What?” you say, looking up at him as your hand totally misses your medical kit.

“Pale porn. Guy shows up, ‘oh look how hurt I am, take care of me’ and I guess that’s what I’m doing. Show up here out of my mind needing you. AUGH.” he breaks off into a snarl as you dab the antiseptic away.

“I take it back, shouldn’t have asked you to talk.” you mutter. Damnit this wound hasn’t stopped bleeding even a little.

“I’m right though, we’re like… one ‘shut up’ ‘make me’ from the good shit that bumps the rating up.” Dayvhe laughs slightly wildly.

“But seriously, shut up. I need to think.” you say shaking your head and trying to close the damn cut.

“Hah, fuck that hurts. Oh, yeah, my line. Make me.” Dayvhe says breathlessly.

“You’re delirious with pain and whatever Cal did to you.” you tell him firmly.

Come on, think of a way to close this. Think, THINK. Dayvhe is still talking but you’ve tuned him out, you can’t listen to the things he says and focus on saving his life. It’s not like you have a lot of medical skills here, your skills lay more in destroying shit with psionics.

Oh. Oh that could work but it’s not going to be good. You kneel up and fumble for your belt.

“What the fuck?” Dayvhe says in total confusion as you pull your belt out.

“You might want to bite that and not your tongue. This is… this is gonna suck.” you tell him, shoving your belt into his hands. You hold your hand up and focus until you have a perfectly neat arc of red and blue going between your index and middle finger.

“I trust you, I really really do.” Dayvhe babbles and grabs your good shoulder with one hand. You see his eyes focus on your arc of psionics and understanding clicks on his face.

“But, like, just don’t tell me. Just do it when you’re gonna.” he tells you. You nod and Dayvhe flops back fully and you hear your belt clink. You wipe the blood away from the wound again and watch it, you can see where most of it’s coming from and so without warning him you press your fingers to that point.

You can’t make out Dayvhe’s muffled cursing but if you could you’re pretty sure Karkat would be jealous of it. You quickly hold the rest of the wound shut and burn it closed with psi, your fingers pressed to his skin. When you take your hand back there’s just an angry red scar there with thin dark lightning webbed patterns coming out of it.

“You still here?” you ask, shuffling up until you’re face to face with him. Dayvhe throws your belt off to the side weakly and you can see the bite indents in it and figure that he’s apparently got bite strength for days. You should probably warn Karkat sometime, or let him work that out for himself next time they’re pitch for each other. It actually sounds like distinctly not your problem.

“I’m- I’m cool.” Dayvhe says a little breathlessly.

“No shit.” you laugh, wild and high off of the joy that he’s not dead.

“Was it real bad?” Dayvhe asks.
“I wouldn’t have done that if I could have just slapped a My Little Hoofbeast adhesive bandage on it and called it a night.” you snort and wipe your hands on your shirt.

“Please tell me you have those. I can die happy if I know that.” Dayvhe giggles slightly deliriously.

You pull your now ruined shirt off and scrub at your claws until you give up and throw the balled up thing at Dayvhe’s head. He laughs and pushes it off and you watch the smile fall off of his face. He tries to sit up and you help him out of reflex, making sure he doesn’t pull too much on his sealed injury.

“Did I…” Dayvhe trails off and you watch him run his tongue over his teeth, “did I really do that?”

“Like I said you weren’t yourself, you were like a zombie. And you were hurt and I made it feel worse when I was trying to help, it was reflex.” You assure him. Dayvhe’s jaw drops and he gives you the most incredulous look you’ve ever seen.

“You thought I was a zombie and you let me get close enough to you to BITE you?!” he squawks in outrage.

“No I just… I thought I saw you in there. You-you not just you on autopilot zombie mode you I mean.” you explain.

“Have you never WATCHED a horror movie? Everyone thinks that, that’s half of the way zombies get close to people is dumbasses with no genre savvy thinking they can help their pale crush and getting bit!” Dayvhe shouts.

“It was worth the risk.” you say like you’d even considered the risk at any length or seriousness. All you’d seen was him needing your help and you’d flung yourself in headfirst.

“If I ever go zombie you shoot me on sight, you hear?” he orders you and drags your first aid kit closer with his own psionics, though the effort makes him sway a little and you have to steady him a bit.

“Sorry, you’re just gonna have to eat me. I’ll still try to help.” you tell him sincerely and the worst part is that even though you’re saying it jokingly you know it’s true. You are bought and owned by Dayvhe at this point, you’re beyond stupid for him, it’s critical by now.

Dayvhe tears open an antiseptic wipe with his teeth and glares reprovingly at you as he presses it to some of the teeth marks in your shoulder. You cringe back from the pain but he doesn’t let you and so instead you just sit there, awkwardly astride one of his legs as he fixes up the mess that he made of your shoulder. It seems that now he’s not gushing blood and you’re not burning him he’s stabilising, you’re hardly going to look that gift hoofbeast in the mouth. But… still…

“You don’t have to, you should probably be sleeping this off after you drink something. It’s just a bite.” you tell him and he flicks you in one horn and continues to ignore your words. Evidently he’s set on at least partially returning the favour.

You stay there and bite your tongue on all the things you could say, that you want to.

Hey, so, I know you said we couldn’t be morails but- wild idea, how about we do that? So fun fact it looks like there’s very little I wouldn’t do for you, please let me stay with you.

Please? Please?
It’s all so stupidly desperate, needy and demanding things from him and if you know anything about Dayvhe you know that is just the sort of thing that drives him away. But there’s got to be a point at which not asking for things back is going to kill you somehow, from grief or possibly spontaneous combustion. But it’s not like Dayvhe isn’t giving back, right now he’s looking after you even after you said you’d rather get him in sopor for his own good.

He’s doing what’s best for you, even if you’re too dumb to know to ask for it.

That’s basically the difference between a moirail and a matesprit. Karkat might do things that aren’t great for his own wellbeing and certainly Dayvhe would be likely to express concern, he’s not an asshole. But if he’s faced with a situation where what Karkat needs is to talk about something that’ll make him unhappy and cause a fight but ultimately make him better then Dayvhe probably won’t do that. He might try for it but when what would make Karkat happier NOW is something else then that’s the path for red romance. It’s loving someone for who they are and all the things that make them pitiable. Pale is loving someone for who they are and who they can be, to love someone hard enough that you’re willing to suffer that rough part to get to something better for them. Like making you sit here with your thoughts as Dayvhe ensures you won’t get infected from his mouth germs getting in your shoulder. To know you well enough to go ‘yeah I should probably get in sopor at some point but maybe you shouldn’t get sepsis’.

But you’re not moirails.

Somehow.

“I’m sorry I bit you.” Dayvhe says entirely and thankfully ignorant to your thoughts.

“Don’t worry about it.” you tell him and he tosses the antiseptic wipe off to the side. You stand up and psionically pull him to his feet. Being vertical makes his dizziness worse and you have to hold him up with your mind as you help him out of his shoes because he can’t get his stupid skinny jeans off easily at the best of times, much less with shoes on. But soon enough he’s there in his boxers which appear to be covered in little meowbeasts which you have questions about but that’s for later. Figuring he’s had enough red for now you dump him in the blue side and poke him in the face with a bottle of sports drink until he takes it. They’re the ones with electrolytes and shit that claims to be healthy, the kind you buy when you’re lying to yourself about how many energy drinks you have and how good for you they may be.

By the time you’ve thrown everything salvageable in the washing machine and thrown out anything that’s not, including your poor toothbrush, it’s about time for you to sleep as well. When you make your way back to your coon Dayvhe is out cold with one arm dangling over the side and the other one pillowing his face against the rim of the coon. You climb into the red side and lean against the divide. Looking at him like this is kind of hard and tinged with a hint of good/bad ache inside your thoracic cavity. You literally have no clue how Karkat dealt with having feelings for Dayvhe for so long before anything came of it. Though goodness knows if they’d have ever got their shit together if you hadn’t intervened.

You sleep restlessly with nightmares of zombies jerking you awake well before you should be. You give up on sleep and haul yourself out of the red half of your coon and go shower. Your shoulder is tender to the touch and little swollen where you got bitten so you mostly try to leave that alone and try to pick a shirt where the seam doesn’t sit just there. Dayvhe is still out cold, his sunburnt face slack with sleep. You reach into the blue sopor and gently spread a thin layer on his skin to help him heal from the burn.

You sneak out to your main room and sit down on your loungeplank and think, balancing your husktop across your knees.
You know where Dayvhe’s lusus is, you will soon have a weapon to take him out. You can tell if Dayvhe is there or not if he is with you at the time but it’d be really bad if you failed to kill Cal and he hunted you and Dayvhe down for it. Or if you did kill him but also some other innocent troll, especially one Dayvhe cares about like Dirkka. So you need a way to see in there without going there yourself. Drones are a no go, the mind leech would surely spot that. And going there to set up cameras is both stupid and breaking your promise to Dayvhe.

You go online and focus on finding the smallest cameras that you can that can transmit but they’re all still too big. Augh, hardware is not your thing. Or at least not to this extent. Building husktops or networks is your deal but inventing tiny cameras is well out of your wheelhouse. You’re pretty sure that it’s not Equius’ jam either, the guy lacks fine motor control and precision, even if he is better than he used to be when you were kids. Think, think, think, who else do you know?

Who else is good with tech?

You groan and sink a little lower but you have no choice here.

TA: let’s just say upfront that we can take it a2 read that neither of u2 ii2 happy about thi2 conver2a2tion takii2g place.

TT: A sensible assumption.

TA: right, 2o let’2 pretend that we’re people who can have a normal conver2ati2on de2piite you tryi2ng two kill me recently.

TT: Lucky for you Roxxie was there.

TA: yeah you’re right, if 2he wa2n’t there thi2ng2 would have got bad for me. ii2i imagine day2ve2h2 would have been up2et at me turni2ng you ii2ntwo a heap of a2h.

TT: Just where are you going with this?

TA: don’t make that2tuipiid outrage emot2e face at me. ii’d rather cut my bulge off than have iiit anywhere near you.

TT: Consider the feeling mutual.

TT: Sooner cut yours off that is.

TA: ha.

TA: ii have a quest2tion for you, 2iince dayvhe 2ai2d that you’re good wi2th tech and your moii2rail 2eemed two know her 2tuff. ii’m more of a 2oftware guy, ii need robotiic2 expertii2e and the guy ii know won’t be any help.

TT: Oh, robotics is actually my thing. But why, did you piss off your normal guy or something?

TA: con2ider2ing the 2hiit that guy ha2 pulled ii think he’d do me a favour no matter what at thi2 point. no he’2 not exactly i2ntwo deliicate work and ii need 2omethi2g 2mall made.

TT: I’m not offering to help, but I am curious. What, exactly, do you need made and why?

TA: ii think what ii want ii2 a bunch of 2mall camera2 but what ii really 2eeli need ii2 a way of fiindi2ng out if there2 any other liivi2ng movi2ing thi2ng wi2ithi2 a certain range.

TT: That doesn’t answer my why question.

TA: gotta be hone2t, ii don’t really tru2t you enough two tell you.

TT: Sensible. I don’t trust you either.

TA: gue22 ii’m gonna need another plan.

TT: Alright.

TT: Do I need to threaten you again? To reiterate that I don’t trust you around Dayvhe and if you hurt him I’ll destroy you and all you hold dear etc.

TT: The only reason I haven’t so far is because Dayvhe would be upset and Roxxie would be annoyed.

TA: and that ii think you’re a controlli2ng jumpy weirdo who ii ba2iically don’t tru2t at all. yeah, ii think we’re both clear.

TT: Well, okay then. With the unpleasantries out of the way I suppose all that’s left to say is
hit me up if you come to a decision on that robotics project, if you can give me a non creepy reason for wanting that I might be able to help you.
TA: 2ure, whatever.

You close your husktop and rub at your temples.

“Cold!” Comes a startled shout from the other room and if you strain your ears you can hear the sound of running water. Dayvhe must have got up without you hearing him and gone to shower.

“Turn it the other way!” You shout.

“Bite me!” Dayvhe shouts back to you.

“Oh then we’d be even!” You call back. You don’t want him to actually feel bad but annoying people for fun is probably ingrained in your dna.

Figuring that you should also be nice you go to your washer only to find that the stupid thing got confused and didn’t dry anything. You set it going but he’s not going to have anything to wear. Unless he has more clothes in his sylladex, which given how he lives on the move a lot he probably does. You’re probably ok, right?

Your question is sort of answered when Dayvhe comes out of your room wearing bee patterned sweatpants, red and blue socks and a solid gold hoodie the metallic surface of it rustles when he flips the hood up.

“You have some fantastically terrible clothes.” He says with a grin.

“They’re not terrible.” You tell him and Dayvhe holds his arms out and gives you a rustling twirl as if to prove his point.

“I wear most of that a lot.” you point out and walk right up to him.

“I stand by my point.” Dayvhe sasses you.

“Except for this.” you say and poke at the rustling gold hoodie.

“Too hideous even for you?” Dayvhe gasps.

“Aradia gave it to me.” you say and Dayvhe’s face freezes. Like he can somehow rewind time through sheer force of will.

“You’d have liked her, same bullshit sense of humour. Also it never fit, I’m not as small as you.” you laugh and jerk on the drawstrings until it’s closed around his face so much that only the tip of his nose and his mouth are exposed.

“You asshole.” he says accusingly. He wriggles free of the prison you trapped him in, negotiating his horns out of the hood, they were never meant to fit through the cut out holes that were designed for your thinner double set.

“That’s me. How’d you feel, anyway?” you ask and reach gently for his side.

“Kind of like I got stabbed a lot, fell down a lot of stairs and then got electrocuted I guess. The shower made me feel more troll again but I still feel like reheated garbage.” Dayvhe groans.

“You should eat something, if you’re injured you need food to repair yourself.” you inform him.
“Oh, that’s a good idea. So you’ve already eaten then, huh, mr I got bit?” Dayvhe challenges you.

“Shut it.” you mutter and walk off. Ok so you hadn’t thought about feeding yourself until he asked, big deal. Only it kind of is a big deal because he cares and also he’s poking you into taking care of yourself. You try not to react to THAT thought as you stare at the food you have in the hunger trunk.

You make stuff to eat and then give Dayvhe food and painkillers as the two of you sit down on the loungeplank before the TV together. You stopped the bleeding alright but he’s still hurt pretty badly. Not so bad that he can’t run his mouth constantly but bad enough to make you be the one to get up and get him things. Though you can’t help but notice that the one time he asks you to get something that makes you reach and use your bad shoulder he suddenly decides that he doesn’t want it and calls you back.

“I have a question about Cal.” you say quietly, combing your fingers through the short hair at the base of his neck. Dayvhe melted a little over time and now he’s slumped over your lap.

“Ugh. Fine.” Dayvhe says into your jeans.

“His mind control thing, just how does it work? Is it like Vriska’s?” you ask.

“She’s never used it on me so I can’t straight up compare but he just makes your body do stuff without you wanting to. You’re still aware which is… worse, really.” Dayvhe explains.

“That’s different to Vriska.” you say.

“You don’t remember being controlled?” Dayvhe asks in surprise.

“I remember… parts. Without meaning to.” you correct yourself.

“I think that’s just repressing the memory.” he says carefully. Well, he may be right. You know Tavros was aware when Vriska made him leap off of a cliff.

But all the same if Cal’s mind control is just the same as Vriska’s then that’s far easier if so. How to smartly clarify that…

“Is that what you meant before when you told me that he fucks with your head?” you ask as casually as you can manage and Dayvhe tenses all over. He pushes himself up with a hiss of pain and turns to face you.

“No. Well, yes. Kind of. I mean that does fuck with your head and honestly when he does that shit I just sort of… check out. Problem is that it can stick a little and it’s made worse by the other thing he does.” Dayvhe says and his fingers tighten against your leg.

“He also does this thing it’s- the closest thing to it is chucklevoodoo or something. Dirkka said he just makes your brain drown itself in fear hormones or something, you see things that aren’t there, get terrified from nothing. And if you’re thinking to yourself ‘oh boy I hope it’s not my friends dying’ or something specific that’s just what he’ll make you see. He reads all your surface thoughts to make everything suck super hard.” Dayvhe says with a shudder. Your hand freezes, so Cal really can read his mind too. So if Dayvhe goes back to him thinking about what you’re planning to do then it’ll all go wrong, he can’t know. You can’t tell him.

“I’m sorry.” you whisper. You pet his hair a little more and think real hard about how dead you’re going to make Cal soon, just as soon as you work out the flaws in your plan.

“You don’t… have anything there that you’d miss if you couldn’t get it again. Do you?” you ask as casually as you can manage and Dayvhe tenses all over. He pushes himself up with a hiss of pain and turns to face you.
“Don’t you dare go there.” he hisses at you.

“I promised I wouldn’t.” you assure him.

“Yeah, yeah you did but you’re asking shit like that so I’m not sure I buy that.” Dayvhe says sharply.

“I promise I will never set foot there. I will never confront your lusus. Honest.” you swear being perhaps a little careful with your wording.

“I mean it.” Dayvhe says and sets his hands on either side of your face.

“I know and I promised, didn’t I?” you say.

“Yeah but- man, I know how smart you are and I know how strong you are but you can’t win against him in a fight. By the time you’re close enough to see him it’s already too late, this isn’t a problem you can solve with sick eye lasers. I’m not underestimating you, you’re underestimating him. So just… please don’t break that promise. Ok?” Dayvhe begs. You bite your tongue and nod. You’ll hold to what you agreed to but at least part of you knows that you’re only sticking to the letter of what you promised, not the spirit. Terezi would probably applaud your cunning but it makes you feel pretty shitty. If asking Dayvhe for permission for this wouldn’t make it impossible you’d do just that. But you can’t.

“I’d hate to see you die.” he adds and you’re pretty sure your bloodpusher clenches so hard that it almost turns inside out.

“Me too.” you say dumbly and Dayvhe stares at you for a second before bursting into startled laughter at your stupid reply. The laughing agitates his injury and he ends up flopped out in your lap again grinning up at you. He reaches up and catches the side of your face in an uncoordinated but unmistakable pap.

Oh shit he’s going to kill you if he keeps on like that.

Things somewhat cool down after that, Dayvhe is still hurt so it’s no surprise that being comfortable and having you continuously pet his hair makes him drift back off to sleep. You glance down at him when his breathing evens out to something slow and calm and wonder if you’ll be in this halfway limbo forever. Not his moirail but not just his friend either. His concern for you is selfless, trying to give you the best shot at a good life. Or maybe he’s trying to let you down easy. But he did say he pitied you, right? Or are you just imagining that?

You’re in way too deep here, you need some help.

You hesitate with your palmhusk in hand for far too long before sending the message.

TA: aa ii think ii need your help.
AA: oh y0u d0nt 0ften c0me t0 m3 f0r h3lp anym0re
TA: yeah, u2ually becau2e whenever ii talk two you about thiing2 when you're 2tiill iin that 2tupiid 2oulbot all you want two talk about ii2 equiiu2 becau2e he'2 ba2iically the only thiing you're allowed two care about.
AA: i feel c0mpelled t0 menti0n that equius is simply the best there is and that is all there is t0 say 0n the matter
TA: now ii'm 2tartiing two remember why ii don't do thii2 anymore.
AA: are y0u at least g0ing t0 tell me what y0ur pr0blem is because its n0t as if i c0uldnt use the entertainment i am very b0red
TA: ii ju2t wanted your adviice on 2omethiing becau2e you know me be2t.
AA: except you have pointed out that I am an unreliable judge and have been since I died
AA: surely someone like Karkat would be a more sensible choice not that I am complaining
TA: ordinarily you'd be right but he's not exactly a neutral party here. I have feeling2 for someone.
AA: for Karkat 0_0
TA: what? no! look, there2 a guy, ok?
AA: 0k
TA: he's dating Karkat flu2h and I'm prong over Nub for him pale way2. 2o obviou2ly Karkat2 view on the whole thing ii2 biia2ed becau2e of hii2 feeling2 toward2 the guy.
AA: 0h y0u mean Dayvhe
TA: wait, you know him?
AA: no but Nepeta talks about quadrant drama all 0f the time and Dayvhe is the source 0f a lot of it I kn0w these things just but 0sm0sis by n0w I think
TA: well, great.
AA: a lot of people have pale crushes on him it seems and even Nepeta had a flush crush on him a while back when she was secretly still playing the game with him
TA: I thought her character died in the glitch that made most of us give up.
AA: she remade one and Equius was not pleased about it when he found out
TA: huh, I didn't know that.
TA: look, I just wanted your advice. there2 something I could do two make hi2 liife a lot better but ii2 dangerou2 and for rea20n2 that are two complicated two explain ii can't tell him about it until afterward2. ii'm not expecting anything from him a2 liike payment or anything, ii'm not a creep.
TA: ju2t... you know me. am I rati0nally trying two help out a friend I care about and al2o have feeling2 for or am I being a 2tupiid fuck who2 ju2t thinking wiith hii2 piity gland?
AA: that is an interesting questi0n
TA: I have no idea if that2 2iincere or not.
--AradiaBot exploded!--
TA: uh oh.

You contemplate how likely it is that Equius will try to fight you if he thinks this is your fault but given that he did steal your girlfriend and jam her into a robot programmed to love him you think he's well aware that no matter what you do he's doing worse. Still Aradia didn't exactly help you sort out your thoughts which is not entirely unlike how she used to be, the girl tended to either get TOO INVOLVED in your problems or often just not really get them.

You look down at the sleeping Dayvhe and run a finger over one of his horns. You try to consider if you are doing things for the right reasons. You care about him, obviously and yes you also pity him no denying that. But he's also in a godawful situation where he has no options and he's clearly so resigned to it that he's not even trying to figure how to fix it. You want to argue that killing his lusus to free him is the right thing to do, the best thing for him.

But are you doing it for the wrong reasons? Is the hope that if you kill his lusus he might change his mind on being with you?

Well... yes. Kind of. Or, that is to say that generally you hope that he'll change his mind no matter what. The thing that gets him to do so is incidental to you. You certainly don't think he'll 'owe' you or any creepy shit like that, not like that whole trainwreck with Eridan and Feferi. You haven't talked to him in forever, you wonder if he ever worked out that you can't just gamify people, throwing the right act at them until they cave and be what you want.

Alright, different test. If you killed Cal and it all went well, if Dayvhe was finally free of him (and Dirkka too you suppose but you care less about him) but Dayvhe took it badly what would you do?
Say he understood why you did it but world’s worst lusus or not Dayvhe decides he can’t be near you because you killed his lusus. What would you do? You’d be… sad? Yes, you’d be sad.

You resist the temptation to scream, you’re trying to do emotional soul searching and the best you can come up with is sad things would make you sad. Well done you.

Try again. You help him out but he chooses to cut all ties with you, do you feel like you did the wrong thing?

You scowl at the ceiling as you think and finally look down at Dayvhe. He’s got a few other injuries here and there, a bruise by his shades, scuffs on his knuckles and of course that giant cut you sealed for him. If you do something that means he never has to go back to Cal and be controlled like this then you’ll do it, even if he were to never talk to you again.

So you’re doing it to help, not to get something. And you can’t tell Dayvhe until it’s done. And though you can do it without breaking your promise you have the squirmy feeling that he’s not going to see that so charitably. 

This is fine.

Ok, no you lied this is not fine. This is kind of very terrifying.

Still.

TA: 2o ii need you two 2wear two 2ecrecy for thii2 and for a very good rea2on.
TT: (◣‸◢) I find all absolutely not sketchy requests for surveillance tech start with very innocent secrecy clauses, I’m very reassured.
TA: you don’t go anywhere near your lu2u2 anymore though, riight?
TT: (◣‸◢) What.
TT: (◣‸◢) Why are you asking me that? And how do you know?
TA: dayvhe told me iit’2 ju2t him who goe2 and he al2o told me that cal can read thought2.
TT: (◢◤) He will kill you if you go there, you clearly think you’re hot shit but you’ll die and he’ll probably involve Dayvhe in it too and I’m not okay with seeing him hurt. I raised that kid!
TA: yeah ii know all of that two, ii’m not planning on phy2iically beiing anywhere near that place. that’2 why ii want remote 2urveiillance.
TT: (◣‸◢) Alright, say theoretically that I agree to this, which I don’t. But why do you need my secrecy? And why do you want cameras there? You can’t kill him if you’re nowhere near him, your psionics don’t have that kind of range. No one’s does when it comes to lasers.
TA: yeah, well ii know a girl who build2 doom2day deviice2 for fun and owe2 me. what 2he’ll giive me ii2 2omethiing that ii can 2end off from out of cal’2 range and iit ought two reduce the 2quare miile around dayvhe’2 hiive two nothiing but melted rubble.
TA: ii need the 2urveiillance two make 2ure that cal ii2 definitiely there and that no one el2e ii2.
TT: (◢◤) And if Dayvhe finds out, Cal finds out. No more plan and likely no more Dayvhe.
TA: withii2 why ii need your help for the camera2 and your 2iilence untiil thii2 ii2 done.
TT: (◢◤) If this is some big romantic gesture on your part to him you’ve got another think coming. The older he’s got the less he’s liked anyone interfering in his life.
TT: (◢◤) Even including me, evidently he’s been keeping a lot from me. That much is clear from the last time we met.
TA: cal need2 taking out. he hurt2 dayvhe and what’2 the plan when he get2 older and cal deciide2 that he 2hould go off inttwo 2pace liike your ance2tor but can’t? ii2 he ju2t going two turn intwo you and adopt 2ome other poor wiiggler who ii2 going two 2uffer the 2ame thing? he ha2 two die. 
TA: if dayvhe won’t talk two me after that but doe2n’t have two go back two cal then that’2 that. 
TT: (◢◣) …
TT: (ActivityIndicator) I’ll see what I can do to help.
TT: (ActivityIndicator) If you’re planning on smuggling surveillance in there then it’ll need to be on Dayvhe. I’ll work on some designs. Just don’t fuck this up.
TA: right.

Well, you either just did something very dumb or made a valuable ally in this fight. You really hope it’s the second one.

You let Dayvhe sleep for a good few hours until he wakes up on his own, he’s got a lot of healing to do after all. You float off when he does wake up so you can go cook something for you both, you’re pretty goddamn hungry yourself. And you would walk over there but Dayvhe’s horn was apparently digging into your leg real bad and now you have the worst case of pins and needles ever and like fuck are you walking if you don’t have to.

“You’ll look after it, right?” Dayvhe says suddenly from behind you. You turn and see him stroking his fingers over one of the leaves of the plant he brought you. He’s leant on the counter, one hand cupped over his injured side.

“I said I would.” you point out.

“How’re you feeling?” you ask as you upend some chopped poultry of dubious quality and origins into the pan.

“Like I got stabbed, bled out a lot and wildly underestimated how bad I was hurt only to have my dumb ass saved by your laser brain.” he answers with a smirk.

“Thanks for the recap, dumbass. I already knew that, I was asking how you actually felt.” you sigh and stir the sizzling meat and vegetables. Look at you being healthy. You know it’s only for him, you wouldn’t be making something so good for you if he wasn’t here. The treasonous voice in your head reminds you that him making you better is pale, that you looking after him like this is pale. Except he’s NOT your moirail.

“You know when you’ve been really ill for a while and you feel all sweaty, gross and shaky? I feel like that.” Dayvhe answers you honestly. You step away from the cooker and press a hand to his forehead, he’s a little clammy but he’s also notably cooler than you are right now. You hope some of that is just your hands being warm from cooking but you doubt it is. Dayvhe is a mutant and you run hotter than most yellows from the demands of your psionics, most psionic yellowbloods run at around rustie levels of warmth and even though he’s off of the spectrum he’s always been a touch warmer than you. For him to feel cooler than you isn’t a good sign.

“Yeah, you need more rest. And food too.” you agree and return to your job of cooking.

“So, uh, I was like… thinking about that.” Dayvhe says hesitantly.

You make a noise to let him know that you’re listening but you don’t want to give him anything to tangentially ramble off of, you’re interested in where this is going.

“I meant what I said about me being stupid when I looked at how bad I was hurt.” Dayvhe says uneasily. He’s not looking at you but rather down at his middle where his hand is over his sealed wound.

“You weren’t stupid, you were obviously out of your mind thanks to Cal. It’s not your fault.” you correct him. You rip open a pack of noodles with your teeth and dump them in with the cooked meat.
“Details, that’s not my point.” Dayvhe says, shaking his head.

“I mean that I really probably would be dead if you hadn’t have helped me. And I say helped but I guess I mean fixed me all by yourself because I was less than helpful, I actually hurt you.” Dayvhe says frowning deeply.

“Don’t worry about it.” you say tightly. Hopefully he won’t have to worry about any of this soon. As soon as you can nail down Dirkka and Vriska’s designs and get those sensors around Cal you can make sure Dayvhe never has to worry about it again.

Clearly Dayvhe didn’t interpret your response the same way because he pulls on the neck of your shirt until he can peer in at the bite mark he left you.

“I’m fine.” you insist, waving him away.

“Uh huh.” Dayvhe says, obviously not buying it. He goes back to leaning against the countertop and your focus strays to the place where you know he’s hurt underneath that gold hoodie. He really is hurt, you could have lost him. Karkat could have lost the one person he can have a relationship with. His friends would have missed him. If you hadn’t been there…

“There was something I wanted to tell you.” you say because you have to now.

“Oh?” Dayvhe asks, not really paying much attention and instead psionically pulling an empty tin of sauce over to himself. Even his psionics are weak now because of what he’s been through.

“I know Roxxie and Dirkka are probably planning on challenging the Empress, and even if their friends aren’t joining they’ll be gone soon too.” you say carefully, turning the heat down.

“Thanks for the cheery update.” Dayvhe says, shaking his head.

“And you and Karkat aren’t going anywhere because of your mutation, so the two of you will be here alone.” you continue.

“Yeah, alone, because you’re leaving the planet like we agreed because you’re supposed to go be awesome.” Dayvhe says firmly. You hesitate but nod, weakened by the glare that Dayvhe is fixing you.

“I was looking for somewhere for you two to stay, somewhere to hide from the drones but you could still get food, had shelter, all that. And then I realised that I’m really not an outdoors person.” you admit.

“I am shocked by this information. Shocked, I tell you.” Dayvhe snorts.

“Shut up.” you huff and tug him out of your way from the cabinet with your crockery in. You pull out bowls and give the remorseless Dayvhe a scolding look for mocking you.

“So,” you continue unabated, “I went to go see a friend who knows more about that stuff than me.”

“Who?” Dayvhe asks curiously.

“Nepeta.” you answer.

“Oh, I know her. We used to hang back when I still hung out with Tavros. But I sorta stopped seeing her so much cause her moirail’s not my kinda guy and so now it’s just like group shit. But she’s a
cool girl, I like her.” Dayvhe explains.

“Yeah I have similar feelings to Equius.” you say stiffly. The fucker stole your dead girlfriend and crammed her into a robot.

“I bet.” Dayvhe agrees and clumsily levitates an orange ground root into his mouth.

“So I told her what I wanted and, uh, it turns out she already knew about Karkat and why he’d be staying on the planet.” you say.

“She knows about him being a mutant?” Dayvhe asks in wide eyed surprise.

“Yeah.” you tell him. Actually you still haven’t told Karkat about that yet and he needs to hear about this from you rather than from Dayvhe or he will try to strangle you with an ethernet cable.

“She actually got worried that she’d accidentally blabbed before I said that I knew too. But she doesn’t know about you, she thinks you’re just staying with him because you’re just that good of a matesprit.” you assure Dayvhe, petting his hair as you talk and then realising how weirdly pale that comes off. Shit, pretend you weren’t doing that! You push Dayvhe out of the way to get stuff you weren’t intending on using from the hunger trunk. Great, a good cover story, he’ll never notice.

“Well, I am the best. I’m sure Karkat talks about how wonderful I am all the time.” Dayvhe brags.

“You sure you didn’t hit your head?” you ask and he smacks you on the arm.

“You’re just the absolute worst and this is all mine now.” Dayvhe says, hurriedly dumping all of the food you cooked in one bowl and scampering out of the room with it. You eye the forgotten fork on the side and roll your eyes, somehow you suspect the fucker with your food in the giant gold hoodie won’t be too hard to track down.

You do find him, though you are surprised that Dayvhe had his own utensils stored away and has managed to inhale a good deal of the food before you corner him. Not that you mind, he clearly needs it.

He sleeps a lot over the next two days and nights. He’s not awake when you do tell Karkat that Nepeta and Terezi both know about him and entertaining or not you’re not going to wake him up to watch Karkat flip flop from panic to anger in a circular tantrum. He really has nothing to worry about. You’d bet that Nepeta keeps a fair deal of secrets from Equius and she’s blatantly not told him, as for Terezi she might be deranged but she is certainly loyal and fair. If she was going to sell Karkat out she would have done it right away, ergo, she won’t do it.

As he sleeps you work more on your list of supplies, trying to be as detailed as you can. Not just thinking of things that he will need to survive but what Karkat will too. Without you. You try to avoid thinking about it, hoping that he’ll change his mind or failing that knowing that you’ll probably hide and stay too no matter what he says. He can be mad at you if he wants, as long as he’s mad and alive.

On the third day you blink awake to see him sitting on your bedroom floor dressed and doing his shoes up. He’s leaving!

“Dayvhe!” you gasp, nearly aspirating sopor in your alarm. Smooth, Sollux, smooth.

“Hey, I’m cool, go back to sleep. I gotta bounce, Roxxie needs me to help her with something.” Dayvhe says, getting up with a grunt and walking to the edge of your coon.
“You're still hurt.” you insist, climbing out.

“Nah, man, I don’t even look hurt when I walk. Besides this isn’t the dangerous kinda job. She just needs someone small to get behind some old machines and plug things in for her, everyone else she knows is too big.” Dayvhe assures you.

“But…” you’re trying to think of something you can say to convince him not to go because ‘hey dumbass you nearly bled to death a few nights ago’ is evidently not good enough.

“Dude, chill.” Dayvhe reminds you and something raw and pale tugs in your chest. He reaches out and catches you by the side of the face, one sharp clawed thumb slips down over the sopory column of your throat and you stay still. He could hurt you, but he wouldn’t.

“I’ll be fine. Like super expensive highblood wine, the very finest.” he tells you. You nod, suddenly mute and he flashes you a smile. He lets you go and steps back.

Wait, shit he can’t go just yet!

“Dayvhe wait, you need this.” you call out and psionically throw your list of survival gear at him. He catches it in his non-sopor covered hand and peers at it in confusion.

“Is this… I know you said you were thinking about what me an’ Karkat would do after but this is…” he flicks his hand clean and wipes what doesn’t come off onto his jeans.

“It’s just a first draft, I wanted to run it by you first before I showed it to Nepeta. If she finds you somewhere really close to a stream then you might not need so much but then if you have to move then you’d be limited so I don’t know. I was thinking of hidden caches too, you’d be fucked otherwise if all your stuff was in one place and it got set on fire or stolen or something.” you explain. You’ve put a LOT of thought into this.

Dayvhe stands there flicking through the pages in silence.

“This is a lot. It’s a lot of money too.” he says slowly.

“So Roxxie can pay, she’s an heiress she’s gotta be loaded and if she won’t I’ll just-” you hesitate and shake your head.

“Writing viruses that just skim banking info or blackmailing shitty highbloods is kinda stupid and not why I make viruses but if that what I-” Dayvhe interrupts you with a hand over your mouth.

“That is the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard. You’re not doing that, cause I know you’re smart enough to know it’s a really bad idea, the kind that’ll get some saltwater psycho showing up at your door with a score to settle. Now imma take my hand off your stupid trap and the next words that come out of it betta be ‘I’m not gonna do anything that stupid, Dayvhe.’ Alright?” he takes his hand off and stares at you.

“I don’t want to do that.” you offer.

“Try again.” Dayvhe says flatly.

“Maybe get Roxxie to pay then.” you suggest.

“Try. Again.” Dayvhe repeats and tosses the list on the floor and grabs you by the shoulders.
“Look, if you want me to agree to go or even think about it you can’t- I can’t do that if I don’t know that you’re gonna be okay.” you say. Although, admittedly, your intentions of going are still not fully set they’re more… 50/50 at best.

“I’m gonna ask her but if you get your dumb ass caught doing this shit then what do you expect me to do? Probably hunt down and lose a fight to a highblood is what.” Dayvhe says, clearly irritated.

He’d do that? If someone killed you he’d hunt them down? Like… like a moirail would?

You can almost see the second that he thinks that same thought because he lets you go and looks away.

“Can you agree to not do anything stupid with this at least until I ask Roxxie?” he asks… well not you but from the tilt of his head you suppose he’s kind of directing his question to your desk chair.

“I can agree to that.” you say quietly.

“You didn’t have to do any of this you know.” Dayvhe mumbles and picks up the paper and spirits it away into his own sylladex.

You lean on your elbows and look at him for a moment. Fuck it.

“You know how I feel.” you point out and that makes Dayvhe look right at you, his cheeks go dark which speaks good things about the amount of blood in his body now. He’d been looking anemic before.

“I mean, I want- shit, just don’t say it ok? I feel enough like I’m taking advantage already with you being there with all the shit with Dirkka and then literally saving my life and…” he shakes his head.

You resist pointing out that these problems could all be solved by him actually being your moirail, including him having the obviously pale impulse to curb your dumb decision making and to avenge you. But just as he knows how you feel you know that his answer is clearly still no and you’re not going to harass him over it.

But then he still doesn’t know about your plans for Cal and you’re not going to tell him.

“Just read the list.” you tell him.

“Just stay out of trouble.” he tells you back.

“Just keep all your blood inside your body this time.” you retort and Dayvhe doesn’t manage to stifle his laugh quick enough and you catch it before he starts talking again.

“Just GO TO SLEEP, you big fuckin’ nerd.” he counters and shoves you, dunking you under the sopor. When you surface he’s walking off, tugging a different bandana over his face and pulling his hood down. You grin and, for once, do what you’re told.
Nothing is going right. Vriska still hasn’t made your bomb or at least she hadn’t last time she was pestering you and that means that Dirkka can’t put the tracking devices on Dayvhe yet because the small size of the ones he showed you means their battery life isn’t great. You really need him to go there wearing them and leave right before the bomb goes off.

On top of all that you’ve been thinking too much about how Dayvhe doesn’t want you to stay with him and you’re having to think real hard to remind yourself that you’re not deluding yourself, he does like you back. And now your upstairs neighbour has got a kismesis and they’re hatefucking on every vaguely horizontal poorly sound insulated surface in their unit and it’s disturbing your sleep.

Not that you’ve been getting much sleep at all. Nothing makes you sleep and so you drink caffeine to function which fucks up your sleep cycle even more, which means you don’t sleep which means you drink more caffeine.

So you’ve been avoiding people, mainly because you’re an insufferable prick right now and if anyone was to talk to you then you’d make them hate you so much that they’d never talk to you again. Not that you want to talk to them either, those bastards all sleeping and functioning and shit. Fuck them.

You’re on the floor considering the merits of blasting your ceiling off, taking the fucker upstairs out in the process. Of course when the sun rose you’d die from the light but right now you’re cool with that too. It takes far too long for you to react to the door opening and the sound of footsteps coming towards you. Dayvhe swims into your vision, you don’t know where your glasses are but it means your distance vision is shit. Actually it means all of your vision is shit but whatever.

“Sol? You awake?” he asks you.

Are you awake? ARE YOU AWAKE?! You laugh but the sound is broken and comes out halfway like a sob. Dayvhe grimaces and pulls back, you tip your head to see him typing real quick on his palmhusk. He’s probably going to leave now. Now he knows what you’re like. Maybe he should have seen this first then if you’d ever expressed the palest thought to him he could have just crushed you.

“Hey, you need to get off of the floor.” Dayvhe tells you but you have nothing to say to that. It turns out that he’s going to pick you up whether you want it or not. He dumps you onto your loungeplank and throws the snuggle plane over you. He ignores the beeping of trollian as he shoves your windows open.

“Don’t.” you rasp out, god your throat is dry.
“Why? You need fresh-” Dayvhe pauses, his ear twitches as you hear the tell tale slam of furniture and overly loud filthy trash talking. It flicks abruptly to banging and, well, BANGING with all the soundtrack involved.

“That’s… new.” Dayvhe says, raising an eyebrow. You shove the window and the sound muffles slightly but nowhere near enough.

“The two of them been doing that a lot?” Dayvhe asks, he’s smart.

“I swear I don’t know how they’re not twenty pounds lighter in jizz alone.” you groan.

“When was the last time you slept?” Dayvhe asks you. The only answer you have is a despairing shrug.

“They’re keeping you awake.” he concludes.

“And my garbage thinksponge on its own, why is it always like this? I can’t-” you whine.

“Shh, go shower and I’ll deal with the rest.” Dayvhe says and walks off after patting your shoulder.

Your front door bounces on the latch and swings open again, you stare vacantly at it. All you want to do is sleep. It’s all you want.

You hear banging, new banging that is. You frown, it’s the door, but your door is… oh it’s not your door. Through your ceiling you can hear irritated arguing and them stomping as the banging on the door doesn’t let up.

“What?” filters down from the ceiling but also through the open door.

“Hey man, you mind keepin’ the fuckin’ noise down, huh?” Dayvhe asks.

Wait.

Oh shit he’s gone up there!

“Fuck off!” your neighbour snarls and… huh, you’d expected Dayvhe to get the door slammed in his face but-

“What the?” they demand.

“Yeah, I ain’t going. Keep the noise down or better yet off entirely or this won’t be so polite.” Dayvhe says flatly.

“Listen, rustie, you don’t want me mad at you so hows about you fuck right off before I end you?” your neighbour snarls.

You scramble to your feet, you’re not going to let any of them lay a hand on Dayvhe! A pained yell and a lot of crashing makes you rush to the door. You can still hear Dayvhe’s voice but it’s quiet now and you can’t make out his words. As you lean out into the stairwell you see him coming down the stairs stone faced with a smear of olive on his forehead.

“You’re supposed to be showering, you smell like ass.” Dayvhe informs you and shoves you back inside.

He opens the windows again and takes off his shades just to shoot you a glare and point in the direction of your block and the shower on the other side. Bewildered you go where you’re herded
and end up standing in your ablution block tired and confused.

With nothing else to do you strip and shower. You’ve tried it enough yourself, trying to go through the routine of going to sleep in the hopes you’ll trick your stupid thinkspoon into doing what it’s told and actually sleeping. You doubt it’ll work though.

You stare blindly at the water rolling down the drain. Your thoughts are like gum right now, they just stretch rather than progressing on at regular beats to form coherent ideas. Why is Dayvhe here? You didn’t message him. You’d been… ignoring him. Like everyone else. Only now he’s here. What?

Dumbly you shut off the water and dress in the clean clothes that are- wait how did clean clothes get in here? You locked the door.

You stare at the lock, it’s locked again now. You flick a finger at it and it unlocks. Oh, yeah, Dayvhe can do that too and then float clothes in here. They’re sweatpants and a far too big promotional shirt that came with some game you beat in half a night.

You go back into your room damp and dressed again. There’s a big shallow dish on the floor by your sillicombe server and a whole mess of your bees are around the edges drinking it, there must be sugar in there. Oh, shit, you kept all the windows shut which made it harder for them to get out. You know they have some ways out through the comb itself but not enough which is why you usually leave windows ajar. Your poor bees. To your right your coon is buzzing and vibrating slightly as the cleaning motor works, you’d not done that in a while.

Your room actually looks a lot better and it’s only when Dayvhe comes back in with a trashbag in hand that you spot the one by the door.

“You don’t need to do that.” you say as he starts picking up empty drink cans on your desk and throwing them in the bag.

“I don’t actually care how messy your place is. I mean, my block at Roxxie’s place is a mess even though I don’t stay there much anymore. And the only reason I don’t do that much now is because I basically just live out of my sylladex in other people’s hives. But if it’s not helping you sleep it’s gone.” Dayvhe says and grabs another can.

“Wait, I just opened that one a few hours ago.” you say, reaching for it.

Dayvhe looks you right in the eye and drops it right in the trash. Evidently you’re not drinking it.

“When was the last time you ate anything anyway? Because your nutrition block ain’t looking too hot neither.” Dayvhe asks.

“Uh…” you say, your perception of time and also what qualifies as ‘food’ might be a little wonky right now.

“Right. Ok, I’ll deal with this later, come on.” Dayvhe says and takes the two trash bags and leaves the room. For some reason you follow him like some lost little baabeast.

He drops the bags by the door and walks into your nutrition block and washes his hands in your sink around all the dishes you tossed in there despite having a perfectly good washer for that. You’re psionically poked towards a chair and you sit down just because it’s easiest.

“I’m gonna make you something from what’s still in here and by then your coon’ll be clean and ready and you’re gonna sleep.” he informs you as he sticks his head in your food cupboard. You can hear him rummaging around in there and pausing as he looks things over.
“You don’t need to do this.” you tell him.

“I was worried about you. I know you got bad but I’ve never seen…” Dayvhe falls silent. Yeah, he never knew how bad you were. You’re too much to deal with, you know that. At least he does now.

“Just let me do this for you. If you want me to go tomorrow I will, if you ask me to. Okay?” Dayvhe says quietly as he emerges from the cupboard with multiple packets of food in his arms.

You stare at him. He wants to be here?

Dayvhe chews on his lip and turns away from you to the counter and dumps his scrounged food down. He pulls out his palmhusk and starts some music playing softly. There’s no words to it and it’s only when he starts quietly doing his slam poetry thing as he cooks that you realise it’s probably his music.

You rest your face on the table and zone out, lulled into a kind of zombie state by his soft syllables and the rhythmic beats from his speakers. You’re only pulled from it when a bowl is set in front of your face. You sit up and peer at it. Inside is three different kinds of pasta, probably from bags you almost used all of and then never threw out. There’s a red sauce over it all which smells nice and there’s green things in there that remind you of the frozen ironleaf that you bought a bag of when you once were convinced that you’d be healthy. Amidst all of that is some kind of… meat? You think it’s meat, it’s spicy when you bite into it but you’re not gonna lie and say it’s good quality. You can’t think of where he got this from, though you suspect he scrounged a fair few things together.

You look up to ask if he’s gonna eat only to see him at the stove shoving a spoon into his mouth as he tosses some things in the trash and other things in the dishwasher.

“Eat.” Dayvhe reminds you and you do.

It’s not the greatest food you’ve ever had but it’s certainly not bad and far better than what you’ve been eating lately. The process of eating kind of skips past you, you had a full bowl and then you don’t. Dayvhe is pulling you to your feet and he leads you to your room and stops by your coon.

“You’re gonna try and sleep.” he tells you and pulls your shirt off.

His hand falls onto the teeth marks on your shoulder, they’re healed but you can still see them. You’re tired, so tired, but you’re not stupid. This is pale, outrageously so. This is the flush equivalent of making out with someone at their hive to… to one of Karkat’s stupid romance movies when you’re already on a date.

But Dayvhe isn’t going to be your moirail. And yet he’s here. You don’t know what the deal is, if he’s changing his mind or if this doesn’t mean anything. Maybe it just doesn’t mean anything to him. But it means something to you and you’re too tired to not be selfish about it.

“Stay?” you ask him hopefully. He looks at you and nods, then reaches out to hang his shades on the rim of the blue side of your coon and peels his shirt off. You can still see the slightly red hued scar you put on him when you stopped him bleeding out.

You get down to your boxers and you clumsily climb into the red side figuring Dayvhe has the blue one. The sopor hits your skin and you shiver, it’s not really cold. It’s room temperature but you’re so sleep deprived that you’re at the stage where you get cold and achy like you’re sick.

“Cold?” Dayvhe asks, perched on the edge of the coon. You make a vaguely affirmative sound, you’re not going to explain exactly how you feel. You watch as he curiously dips his foot in your side. Damnit he’s gonna make your blue side purple if he does that and then goes back to-
Hello sudden armful of Dayvhe.

You have two sides, why is he-

“You’re gonna- stay still, stupid. Here.” Dayve huffs irritably, raising his red sopor covered hand to your face. You freeze and he smears the stuff over as much of your skin as he can. You slip a little lower in the sopor with your legs tangled with his and you’re pretty goddamn content with that until Dayvhe pulls you back towards the other rim of the red side so that it’s his head against the edge and yours pulled to his shoulder. Luckily for you both sopor is neutrally buoyant so you’re just hazily drifting there together.

“You good?” Dayvhe whispers.

You try to formulate an answer that isn’t ‘I can die happy’ but the best you get is something that’s all consonants and weakly patting his ribs through the sopor.

“Gonna pretend I understood that.” Dayvhe laughs breathily.

“Go to sleep.” he tells you.

It’s not that easy, you can’t just do that. Dayvhe threads his fingers through your hair and starts rubbing at your scalp and working the sopor around every strand and around the beds of your stupid double horns. When you’re boneless and purring but, and this part is important, still awake you wonder if he’ll give up. Honestly you’re surprised he’s still awake given how sensitive you know he was to your sopor before.

Wait, Dayvhe is holding his breath. No sooner than you notice it do you realise that he’s now breathing in time with you in such a way that when your useless thorax expands with air he breathes out and then breathes in again just as you’re going the other way. It’s strange but weirdly hypnotising in a way. It’s like you’re the same thing or like you’re part of him.

Your eyes are heavy and you’re convinced that you’re not going to sleep, but even if you’re not there are certainly worse ways to spend your time. You could listen to the sound of his pulse in your ear forever, feel his warm frame against yours happily and without complaint indefinitely.

Needless to say you’re surprised when you open your eyes to find yourself staring at the ceiling alone with the warm light of the sunset filtering in your room. You sit upright and shake your head. You’d be convinced that you imagined that whole thing if it wasn’t for your room being as clean as he left it before and the fact that your hair is sticking up in eight different directions and is sopor stiff. So he was here, did he just… leave?

You haul yourself out of the red side and slick off as much sopor as you can. You land on the floor and go back out into the main room. You fear that it’ll be empty, that he’ll have come and gone without so much as a goodbye. You’re not sure you can take that.

But that isn’t what you see. What you see is Dayvhe staggering under the weight of several huge grocery bags, he can’t even see you over them. You realise it must have been the front door shutting that woke you. He’s obviously been up for a while though because he’s dressed and been and come back all while you were out cold, that and your nutrition block is SPOTLESS.

Dayvhe drops the bags on your table and jumps when he sees you.

“Sollux!” he exclaims.

“Did you buy all of this?” you ask, looking at the many bags.
“Well I sure as shit ain’t good enough to bag things that I shoplift. You got my note, right?” Dayvhe asks worriedly.

“What note?” you ask.

Dayvhe looks panic stricken and lifts up one of the bags to reveal a square of paper with ‘BRB’ written on it in gold sharpie. You don’t remember owning a gold sharpie, did he buy one for you? How many tacky pens does he have?

“I only just woke up.” you explain and he relaxes.

“Aw man I’m so relieved to hear that, I mean, uh, I wasn’t worried. Shut up. Your hair looks like your got electrocuted, you should shower or something.” Dayvhe babbles and you feel the grin creeping onto your face.

“Can I have that?” you ask, pulling it from his hand psionically anyway.

“Why’d you want it? I’m back now anyway. It’s not like you’re gonna keep it.” Dayvhe points out.

You stand there awkwardly for a second and then put it in your sylladex with every other note he’s ever left you.

“I’m gonna shower.” you tell him, desperate for any excuse to get away from him when he’s staring at you and his skin is so dark with- with what? Mortification? Either way he’s so flushed you could almost mistake him for an adult. You abscond, rapidly.

Standing under the shower spray you try to scrub the dried sopor out of your hair and recall Dayvhe putting it there, his fingers rubbing your hair to soothe you. A shudder goes up your posture pole at the thought of it, it really isn’t a grey area. It’s not like him confiding in you is a grey area where you could say it’s just friend shit, that was not a friend thing. You want to go out there and ask if he’s your moirail but, as you’ve already concluded, if he says no you might just die.

Part of you figures that you’re just going to have to accept whatever he gives and keep going on your own, playing a silent game of pale cluckbeast. But that gives you the opportunity to accidentally cross a line or to aggravate him by pushing things when he’s made his position on not dating you clear.

You don’t want him to not talk to you. And- oh shit, he’s done that before hasn’t he?

You scramble from the shower and grab a towel before opening a message on your palmhusk.

[twinArmadeggons began trolling carcinoGenticist]

TA: kk ii need you two tell me what happened between dv and tv
CG: YOU KNOW THAT GODDAMN MESSAGE IS INDECIPHERABLE TO ALMOST EVERYONE, RIGHT? WHAT THE HELL DID I DO TO BE THE PERSON WHO SPEAKS SOLLUX?
CG: AND ON TOP OF THAT WHY AM I YOUR CONSTANT DAYVHE PORT OF CALL FOR INFORMATION HUH? I DO HAVE OTHER INTERESTS BESIDE HIM YOU KNOW AND I KNOW YOU DO TOO.
CG: ALSO HI FUCKFACE I’VE NOT HEARD FROM YOU FOR A WEEK FUCK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THAT. ALSO YOU GHOSTING EVERYONE MEANT THAT DAYVHE IMMEDIATELY FREAKED OUT WHEN YOU DIDN’T ANSWER HIS MESSAGES BECAUSE ‘SOLLUX ALWAYS ANSWERS’ YOU THIRSTY BIFURCATED DUMBASS.
You think of how Dayvhe was surprised at the beach when you didn’t keep pressing him for details, when you just accepted his denial of information. Of how he always makes sure his coming and going is when he wants. He’s touchy about his boundaries and he really does have a lot of cues that he’s not happy with something. He’ll change the subject or just go quiet sometimes he’ll even just go. You’ve made dumb jokes over trollian that he didn’t like so much and sometimes he’ll just go...
and then when he comes back it’s like nothing ever happened. All that is a huge sign to say not to do something or to drop it. And Tavros who is as spineless as he is legless thought that the right way to deal with Dayvhe was just to bluster past all of that.

You’re not sure if you’re furious at him or despairing. What a moron.

TA: no wonder dv doe2n't talk two hiim anymore.
CG: YEAH IT WAS REALLY BAD. I WARNED HIM BUT HE DIDN’T LISTEN, DUMBASS.
CG: IT TOOK FOREVER BEFORE HE’D EVEN TALK ABOUT TAVROS WITHOUT BEING WEIRD ABOUT IT.
TA: iit’2 not being weird, iif one of my friiend2 tried that on me ii'd be pii22ed off two. and iit'd be awkward a2 hell.
CG: OH YEAH, I’D FLIP MY SHIT TOO BUT THIS IS DAYVHE.
CG: FOR THE RECORD I SHOUTED AT TAVROS A LOT FOR THIS, IN PERSON. AND EVERYONE ELSE GOT THEIR OWN WORD IN. I MEAN, UH, ROHHZE HAS CHUCKLEVOODOS.
TA: what? 2he’2 a fii2htroll how the fuck?
CG: WEIRD GENETICS I GUESS? SHE’S JUST THAT CREEPY, WHO KNOWS. ALL I KNOW IS YOU SURE AS SHIT DON’T NEED TO GO BLOW HIS HUSKTOP UP FOR SHIT THAT HAPPENED AGES AGO.
CG: BUT WHY’D YOU ASK?

Your fingers still as you try to think of an answer. Honestly, you don’t want to be the same guy. You don’t want Karkat to be explaining to someone else a sweep down the line why Dayvhe doesn’t talk to that Sollux guy. Tavros didn’t listen to all the ways that Dayvhe subtly says that he’s not interested. But he’s a guy who’s been under literal mind control for far too much time, you’re not about to ignore any chance he has to decide things for himself.

Dayvhe told you he couldn’t be your moirail. Straight up honestly said no.

You’d be lying if you said that he wasn’t ACTING that way though, he slept with you for fucks sake but if that’s all he can deal with then that’s it. It probably makes sense. Floating in your sopor with him over day you were barely on the same planet you were so out of it. Which is fine, you’re pale for the guy, you trust him. But Dayvhe… well, you saw him when he showed up almost zombielike before. Being out of his head clearly isn’t a good thing for him.

So… so drop it.

TA: he came up in conver2ation he 2aaid about how they diidn't hang out anymore. ii'm not exactly clo2e two the guy, not 2iince aradiia diied but he never 2eemed liike the kiind of per2on you'd go two the trouble of droppiing, you know?

It’s an answer. True but not true.

TA: he came up in conver2ation he 2aaid about how they diidn't hang out anymore. ii'm not exactly clo2e two the guy, not 2iince aradiia diied but he never 2eemed liike the kiind of per2on you'd go two the trouble of droppiing, you know?

It’s an answer. True but not true.

CG: YEAH, WELL, LIKE I SAID IT’S A SHITSHOW.
CG: WHY DID YOU THINK THEY WERE MORE THAN THEY ACTUALLY WERE AND GET JEALOUS OR SOMETHING?
TA: why are you wriitiing 2ome torriid pale romance book and looking for dramatic iin2piratiion?
CG: ONE OF THESE DAYS I’M JUST GOING TO STRANGLE YOU. AND WHEN I DO I’LL DANCE UP AND DOWN ON YOUR UNGRATEFUL TOAST RACK OF A BODY AND LAUGH.
TA: yeah, good luck with that.
CG: STOP HIDING IN YOUR ABLUTION BLOCK.
You close the chat and dry off, silently wondering how long it’ll be until either you or he gets anxious about that conversation and sends the other a message asking if you’re still friends. Dressed and reasonably presentable you head out again to find Dayvhe sat on your loungeplank with his feet on your coffee table as he types away on his husktop. He looks up when you come in the room though, immediately dropping his attention from everything else.

“Hey, how’d you feel? Did you sleep ok?” Dayvhe asks as if he wasn’t there with you the whole time.

“I actually slept which was… something. I didn’t think I was going to.” you admit and Dayvhe looks instantly pleased with himself.

“How long did you even go without sleeping anyway?” he asks.

“Uh… what day is it?” you ask.

“That’s a bad answer to that question. Sit down, I’m gonna grab food for us.” Dayvhe insists and he does. He gets up and makes food and fusses when he brings it to you as if you were going to not eat it. You gather that he has something on his mind though.

“So you… mentioned this before. And Karkat might have said something when I, uh, wouldn’t stop asking.” Dayvhe adds that last part quick and quiet but you heard him.

“Just that when you don’t sleep a lot or when you’re like… this that things get bad. Is that what’s going on or is it just your neighbour keeping you up?” Dayvhe asks carefully. You imagine Karkat didn’t say whatever he said so carefully and gently. You sigh and float your bowl over to the sink in the nutrition block and drop it in the water. Your head still feels thick from tiredness, great though sleeping was you can’t erase however much sleep debt you have with one day’s rest. You pinch the bridge of your sniffnode right where your glasses usually sit and sigh.

“I don’t know. Both, probably.” you admit.

“Of course, I give you and either or option and you say both.” Dayvhe laughs.

“Truth hurts.” you shrug, the corner of your mouth pulling into a slight smile despite you not telling it to do that.

“Well,” Dayvhe says more seriously as he reaches over and runs his claws through your wet hair, “would it help if I stayed?”

You hold your breath. He said he didn’t want- but this is him offering so…

“You don’t have to.” you hedge.

“Man, I know I don’t have to. I’m asking if you want me to. I don’t wanna be here if being around people is going to make shit worse but if me hogging your trollflix account and occasionally pelting you with fresh vegetables is gonna help then I will.” he argues.

“That- if you’re cool with that. Then yeah, stay. Just don’t throw things at me.” you say.

“I make no promises.” Dayvhe declares with a wicked grin.

Dayvhe decides that he is going to take you up on that freeloading your trollflix account right then
and there and decides that he’s going to scroll through things until he settles on one thing that you’re going to binge. He eventually settles on a show you’ve not seen called “In which a lowblooded private investigator with blatant soporific addiction and psionically boosted strength continues through life avoiding the advice of her moirail only to find herself face to face with her ex-matesprit a blueblood with mind controlling psionics of an absurdly high strength.” You somewhat figure that he wouldn’t be cool with the subject matter of this at all but he literally chose it so you settle in.

So you watch the show. The main character Jesica is interesting, you kind of like her ‘fuck you’ attitude and it’s nice to see a lowblood like that being the main character and not getting karmically punished for her defiance of normal convention. Several people who made this had to have been culled for that by now but it’s nice all the same.

“I’ve never watched this.” Dayvhe tells you partway through.

“Me neither.” you say slumping over onto his shoulder.

It’s an interesting show and you’re pretty invested in it right up until the moment the psionic lowblood gets mind controlled into killing a rustie girl. The main character Jesica stands there staring at the rust blood on her hands and you just stop breathing.

“Shit, shit, shit. I didn’t- fuck, hey how about we watch something else?” Dayvhe says hurriedly, clicking away from the show as you try to remember how breathing works. In then out right? You’ve been doing it forever. Dayvhe fumbles, clicking blindly at things until some wildlife documentary comes on and when he turns back to you he finds you rubbing your hands together. You’re trying to banish the phantom sensation of blood on your palms, Aradia’s blood.

“Ah, fuck. It’s- here, give me those.” Dayvhe hisses, in irritation at himself you realise and not at you. He takes your hands in his and squeezes, buzzes his psi over your palms. He must know how this feels, phantom sensations.

You’re not crying, thank fuck. But you’re still not breathing right. It startles you when he kisses your cheek, right where he papped you that one time at Karkat’s. But his hands are occupied with yours so what else can he do? It makes sense in a strange way. You untangle one hand from his and grasp a handful of his shirt with it and this time when he does pap your face and whisper for you to shoosh you just go with it and take the sweet chance for someone to turn your thinksponge off for a change.

It’s not so much a dream as it is the background radiation of your mind existing, tiny fired memos from synapses giving you sensations of touch, scraps of advertising jingles, ideas that make no sense. Your head jolts slightly and you open your eyes to find that the surface you have your head on is juddering slightly, you hear stifled laugh and realise that you’re face down on Dayvhe’s stomach, as much as you can say he has one at least. He’s on his back, one arm pillowed under his head so he can see the tv and the other loosely woven in your hair, one of his legs is wrapped over your middle so his foot rests on your thigh and the other leg is stopping you from rolling off of the loungeplank. You’re facedown on him and clearly have been for some time. Looking over to see what Dayvhe is watching you see the nature show still rolling, it’s following the walking migration of some arctic flapbeasts. They waddle across the ice, three sets of flippers flapping to keep them balanced as their blubbery bodies navigate the slippery-

Dave snorts as one falls right onto its face and slides down a small slope, unharmed but probably embarrassed. That’s what woke you.

“They’re more graceful in the water, right?” you yawn.

“Man, I hope so.” Dayvhe remarks and pets your hair.
There’s a distant buzz, not of one of your bees but something technological, and Dayvhe groans in irritation when he hears it.

“Your palmhusk fell out of your pocket earlier and it’s been going crazy the last few minutes.” Dayvhe sighs.

“Oh, who is it?” you ask.

“I ‘unno, it’s over there. I can’t reach.” Dayvhe says demonstrating by waving his hand in the direction of your coffee table but not quite reaching your palmhusk that you can see hidden under it.

“You have psionics.” you say disbelievingly.

“Yeah but your tech is probably expensive and important and my fine control isn’t great. Also, and this is really important, I’m super lazy.” Dayvhe says seriously.

“So practice then.” you challenge him and let your head fall back down against his stomach again.

“But what if I break it? When I get nervous with my psionics I get clumsy. It’s fine if I’m moving me or something kinda big that I’m lifting myself too but when it’s something little unless I know I can’t break it or I don’t care it’s- don’t just look at me like that!” Dayvhe exclaims but you’re just patiently watching him. He seems to waver for a moment but then sighs deeply as if you’ve massively inconvenienced him.

“Don’t blame me if I break it.” he mutters and holds out a hand.

Your palmhusk judders on the floor and skids closer to him in fits and starts. You know he’s stronger than this so he’s right, it must just be really hard to move light things with precision and he’s undershooting it rather than-

The device whips past his hand and clangs into the leg of the loungeplank with a loud thunk, making Dayvhe wince.

“Ah, fuck.” he curses, twisting to reach down and grab it. He holds the device up and inspects it.

“It works! And… what the fuck? Why is Vriska messaging you?” Dayvhe says, his voice turning to a hiss as he spots Vriska.

You push yourself up and grab your palmhusk from him, thankfully it doesn’t preview the message until you open it but it says what you hoped it would.

[arachnidsGrip began trolling twinArmageddons]
AG: Your 8om8 is fiiiiiiinally ready.
AG: Uh, hello?
AG: Ugh, figures, I try to do you a favour and this is what I get. Typical.
AG: Answer me! >:::(
TA: hold your fuckiing hoofbea2t2 vrii2ka, ii wa2 a2leep.
AG: In the middle of the night?
TA: ii couldn't giive le22 of a crap about your judgement on my 2leep 2chedule. you 2hould be worried about your own timekeeping you u2ele22 2ociiopath, everyone el2e on thii2 project ha2 been waiting on you. 2o are you ready now or not?
AG: EEEEEEEEsh, yes I'm ready. I'm ready to give you the 8om8 so you can go 8low shit up.
TA: actually, no you're going two be the one pre22iing that button. iit'2 not that ii don't tru2t you, except iit ii2 exactly that, but the 2afe2t place for me ii2 going two be 2tandiing right next two you. ii don't want two get caught in 2ome "acciidental" mii2calculatiion of bla2t radiiu2 and end up
AG: Well fine! That doesn’t change my plans at all, because I wasn’t going to betray you but it’s nice to know how little faith you have in me.

TA: it’s all earned. I’ll tell you when and where to meet me, I need to get the other guy going.

AG: Whatever.

You lower your palmhusk to see Dayvhe still sprawled back on the loungeplank with a frown on his face, he nudges you in the hip with his knee.

“Hey, that’s not a good look on your face. Why is Vriska messaging you? After what she did I figured you’d never talk to her. Is she being a bitch because Rohhze still owes me a favour and if you need her scared out of her mind or perhaps drowned I can do that.” Dayvhe offers.

“No, it’s fine.” you lie.

“Dude it’s not fine, at all. I mean—” he gestures around the both of you and it occurs to you that the whole reason you were using Dayvhe as your own personal pillow earlier was that you had a real shitty flashback about Aradia’s blood on your hands. Which only got there thanks to Vriska. Dayvhe’s own palmhusk buzzes but he ignores it.

“Okay, it’s not fine. Talking to her makes me want to barf but… I need her for something and I’ve no intention of ever talking to her again after that. And if it stops her acting out about how I’m so terrible for not forgiving her for what she did then all the better.” you say, that’s more truthful at least. Dayvhe’s palmhusk buzzes a few more times.

“My offer with Rohhze stands, you know. Pretty sure Rohhze has some kind of rivalry going with her anyway so honestly we’d be doing HER a favour.” he offers.

“Thanks, but I’d rather stay clear of starting revenge cycles. Are you gonna get that?” you ask as Dayvhe’s palmhusk demands his attention again. Dayvhe rolls his eyes at it but picks it up nonetheless, he read it, shakes his head and then discards it again without replying.

“It’s just Dirkka, he’s going on about Cal but I was there pretty fucking recently. He’s just being paranoid.” Dayvhe answers you.

It occurs to you how things are going to play out now, you see it unfurling before you like one of your terrible doomed voices. Here’s how it goes.

Dayvhe gets the message from Dirkka obviously designed to get him to wherever Dirkka is so that he can put the trackers on him. Dayvhe is sent on to Cal’s, dispenses the trackers without realising it, potentially gets hurt doing so because Cal is the worst. Then after that he leaves and when you can confirm that Cal is there and no one else is you obliterate that fucker and then…

And then you have to tell Dayvhe what you did.
You have to admit that you went behind his back to do this, lied to him, and absolutely went against what he wanted when he made you promise not to go near Cal.

And he may not want to ever see you again. You’re going to have to live with that.

You carefully put your hand on his stomach to the side where you know he’s scarred and still sore. He might never talk to you after this but he won’t get hurt by Cal again either.

“Hey, are you ok?” Dayvhe asks worriedly.

“I’m fine, I was just tired.” you insist. Dayvhe’s mouth twists like he doesn’t believe you but he doesn’t press you on it more.

You ought to encourage him to go, to answer Dirkka and let him go but Dayvhe is set on enforcing his rule of ensuring the two of you eat and making you both binge watch tv shows and play video games. He even plays the Thresh Prince of Bel Air at one point just so he can live chat his reactions to Karkat which about has your best friend spitting fire at Dayvhe disrespecting his show.

When day rolls around again Dayvhe drags you back to your coon even though you don’t feel tired. He drags you into the red side with him again. Your insomnia puts up more of a fight this time and Dayvhe drifts off before you do but you still eventually sleep with your face tucked under his chin.

You wake with him pulling himself out of your coon and you groan miserably and paw at him.

“Sorry, man, Dirkka’s really flipping shit about this Cal thing and he’s staying with Roxxie right now which means me going all the way out to the coast and then underwater so I gotta leave early.” Dayvhe whispers, not that there’s anyone here to wake up but you.

Right, the plan. He has to go.

“I’m gonna shower and then I have to bounce. Are you feeling ok?” Dayvhe asks and you nod.

Dayvhe grins and heads off to shower. The white noise of the water and the muttered raps that you can’t make out lull you back to sleep with your face pressed awkwardly to the edge of your coon. When you wake you find that Dayvhe has indeed gone but has left you a note.

Pierced on one of your horns. Like a receipt at the order window of a restaurant, but, you know, ON YOUR HEAD. As you pull the note free you think that it’s lucky for Dayvhe that you pity him as much as you do or you might have to tell him he’s not as funny as he thinks he is.

Fuck, who’re you kidding? You still think it’s endearing.

The note, in all gold again, reads this:

ill be back
look after yourself
if that dumbass upstairs starts up again then tell rohhze to fix it and that im calling in that favour and same again if vriska is a shit
also if you erase my spyro save ill eat your bees
(just kidding i like your bees)
dayvhe

You keep the note with all the others and hope against hope it’s not the last one you get.

Some time after lunch you get a message from Dirkka.

[timaeusTestified began trolling twinArmageddons]
TT: (■■) Dayvhe is heading off to our lusus now, he has the trackers.
TT: (■■) Meet me at these coordinates as soon as you can.
TA: wait, how long do you think he'll be in there? ii don't want two call the giirl wiith the bomb out before ii have two.
TT: (■■) I'll be able to give you an estimate when you get here and I can see how Cal is behaving.
TA: fine, ii'll head out now.
[timeausTestified ceased trolling twinArmageddons]
TA: you are the wor2t per2on two have a conver2atiion wiith.

You grab your husktop and a few other things you might conceivably need, along with your now much depleted medical kit just in case something does go wrong. You have his fluttering anxiousness in your gut and you hope it’s not some premonition of things to go wrong. You to reassure yourself that you only hear the voices of the imminently dead, nothing else. That does whatever the opposite of reassuring you is. It de-assures you.

You open the window by your loungeplank and fly out into the sky, pushing it shut behind you. The coordinates that Dirkka sent you are for the town right next to where he grew up, the one that’s well out of the blast radius of the bomb Vriska has made for you. It’s a decently long flight but instead of going right there you fly up when you get to the town. You and Aradia used to do this sometimes, fly together and go high enough that you’d both shake from cold and get light headed. You soar upwards and then hang there, the town below you just a smudge of light in the darkness. Branching away from it are lit roads, other buildings, the train line, industry. And there, like a dark bruise on the land is the barren place that Cal lives.

And it’s where Dayvhe is right now.

You drop out of the sky in a controlled fall that still makes your ears pop and when you land you have to wander a bit before you find where Dirkka was directing you. Soon enough you come to the conclusion that he was directing you to a bar. You walk inside to find it more or less deserted. There’s two shady looking olives sitting to the side together quietly discussing something or other and Dirkka sat in the corner with his hood up and mostly covering his artificial gills.

“Would you care for refreshment?” a large robot asks you.

You look up at it, the thing is certainly not a standard droid. It has a big cloak on for one as well as a baseball cap and the same stupid sunglasses Dirkka wears. Dirkka waves at the robot who nods.

“You will care for a refreshment.” it amends and trundles off.

It clanks around behind the bar and then slams down a glass of what you assume is orange juice or is a drink at least based in part on it.

“I don’t want this.” you tell it.

“If you want to not have a refreshment you can challenge me to a rap battle.” the robot offers.

Somewhere your life went very wrong, you think.

“I’ll take the drink.” you decide and pick it up.

“Sicknasty.” the droid declares and proceeds to continue polishing a spot in the bar that it has worn a sizable dent into.

“Did you build that metal moron?” you ask Dirkka as you sit down at his table.
“In my defense I didn’t build him for this and he’s the smartest of the two robots that I built when I still lived with Cal and that wasn’t great for my head.” Dirkka says defensively.

“So now you just have him run a bar?” you ask incredulously.

“No, I set them free. And Sawtooth and Squarewave don’t really run the place, that’s the other guy. They just decided that they wanted to do this for ironic reasons I assume.” Dirkka amends.

“What other guy?” you ask in confusion.

“Forget I mentioned it.” Dirkka says with a shake of his head.

“If I didn’t have to talk to you to fix this Cal problem for Dayvhe I’d sooner brain myself with a frying pan than talk to you. I feel like I know less than I started with whenever we talk.” you say despairingly.

“Sounds like a you problem.” Dirkka says. He frowns at his screen and you peer around to see what he’s looking at.

Dirkka’s display is split into several parts. One part shows Dayvhe’s location as well as his pulse, another shows a map of the area with little white dots scattered over it which pulse white every so often. Finally on the bottom right is a tally of life, it currently reads ‘2’.

“You were able to get it to ignore wildlife then?” you guess.

“There ain’t much of that around there to be fair, not too hard of a job.” Dirkka shrugs.

You watch the screen carefully, the little dot that indicates Dayvhe (it’s the only one in red) is moving and orbiting the hive.

“What’s he doing?” you ask.

“Running. Cal didn’t expect him back and there’s nothing around to control to make Dayvhe fight so he’s just… making him run. Just for the sake of doing it I guess, I don’t know how he thinks. I’ve never understood it. I don’t know how long it’ll be until he lets Dayvhe go.” Dirkka explains.

Well that sucks but comparatively it’s not that bad. You wish Dayvhe could just run away though.

“Is he… under his control?” you ask.

Dirkka falls silent and you don’t know if he’s trying to work it out himself or what.

“I can’t tell. Not that it matters, he can’t leave until Cal lets him. If he tries to go before Cal allows he’ll just come right back and end up staying longer.” Dirkka says.

That also means you don’t know when to call Vriska, you’ll just have to wait and see. You lean back in your chair with your drink and wait, keeping your eyes on Dayvhe’s red dot.

“Why are you doing this?” Dirkka asks after a while.

“You mean this?” you ask, pointing to the screen so you’re clear that he’s asking about that and not the way you’re drinking your drink or something. Dirkka nods and though you can’t see his eyes you know he’s watching you.

“I can’t stand seeing him come back hurt again. I also can’t deal with the idea that when you leave Dayvhe is eventually going to get old enough that Cal will realise that he’s not going to be useful for
whatever he wants him for, he’s not getting off world like your ancestor and so Cal will throw him aside or kill him. Then he’ll just do this to a new kid all over again and best case scenario Dayvhe does what you did and some other kid lives Dayvhe’s life, which sucks.” you say.

“That’s not going to happen. Roxxie is going to overthrow the empress and then Dayvhe will leave and be with us. But I take your point about Cal and whatever horrifying next generation would come after Dayvhe.” Dirkka says.

“Dirkka, Roxxie seems—” you hesitate, aware that the very stab happy man next to you is her moirail, “she seems nice and the fact that there’s an heiress who likes lowbloods and mutants makes me happy, it does. But heiresses come up like… what one in every ten million? There’s a fair few each generation or so, I mean I’ve met two now so it’s not like they crop up every hundred sweeps.”

“What’s your point?” Dirkka asks coldly.

“It’d be great if Roxxie became the empress, she’s cool. And Dayvhe would be set, so that’s great. But how many heiresses have there been since Her Imperious Condescension came to power? None of them have made it.” you tell him.

“You don’t know Roxxie. She’s a dark hoofbeast, no one will see her coming. She’s going to do it.” Dirkka says firmly.

She won’t. You’d bet anything on it and he’s probably gonna go down with her still believing. Wrenching his faith from him just seems cruel, especially given how much of his life she obviously takes up. So you let the matter drop but Dirkka seems mad at you for even suggesting it.

“He’s going to be pissed at me for this, for lying to him and going behind his back. But he’ll forgive me, I raised him but you…” Dirkka trails off menacingly. Yeah, you get his point. You’re somebody Dayvhe can just drop.

“I know. And I promised I wouldn’t go near Cal too, he was worried. I’m well aware that he’s probably going to hate me for this but no one will ever have to deal with Cal again. And, hey, maybe Roxxie wins too and he and Karkat can go off with all of you and see the universe and Karkat can get some admin job shouting at everyone and ruthlessly organising things and Dayvhe can make official slam poetry broadcasts or something. As long as he’s not bleeding out and- and-” you grit your teeth and try to get control of yourself.

“If the price I have to pay for him being good forever is him never speaking to me again then that’s what it is. Besides, you won’t have to deal with me again either so you’ll be winning here too.” you sigh.

You hope he’ll talk to you again, you don’t deserve it given that you’re breaking a promise you made to him on the most dire of vows but a second chance would be amazing. Silence falls between you and Dirkka, you guess he maybe wasn’t expecting such a rant from you.

“I’d do that for Roxxie.” Dirkka says quietly.

You’re not sure if it’s approval or him one upping you but either way it’s not going to change whether Dayvhe talks to you or not.

“Whoa.” Dirkka says suddenly.

“What?” you ask. Dirkka points to his screen and you see that Dayvhe’s dot is still moving but he’s leaving, headed towards the town you’re in.
“Cal let him go.” Dirkka says.

“I guess he didn’t expect him back so quickly.” you say, that really was fast.

“I’ll get the girl who made the bomb to come here.” you say and Dirkka makes an affirmative kind of sound.

[twinArmageddons began trolling arachnidsGrip]

TA: i’ve 2ent you 2ome coordinate2, ii need you two come here wiith the bomb, we’re ready two go.

AG: Oh, well, maybe I’m sleeping now. How about that?

TA: we had a deal.

AG: God, I know, I know, I was just 88ing you. Don't flip out and call Terezi on me or something. I'm gra88ing the 8om8 now.

TA: ju2t be here!

[twinArmageddons ceased trolling arachnidsGrip]

Oh god you hate her so much, she’s just the actual worst. Dirkka on the other hand suddenly stands up and grabs his husktop.

“We need to go, now.” Dirkka says urgently.


Dirkka spins his husktop around and taps his claw on the part of the map that you are currently in, only there’s a red dot heading right for you. You wonder how he can move that fast but it’s probably the same reason you can fly that fast.

“Upstairs now!” Dirkka urges you and the pair of you scramble around tables and chairs towards the bar.

“Refreshment?” the robot asks, perking up to see you.

“No, Sawtooth!” Dirkka snaps and drags you through a door and up some stairs. It looks like a hive up here. If a hive was built by someone very drunk off of soporifics and designed through a shitty video game. Normal furniture is arranged in ways that make it unusable. There’s a loadgaper sat in the ablution trap for some strange reason.

“Why is he coming here?” you hiss as you and Dirkka both watch the red dot hone in on your position. Dirkka pulls you into what would be a normal troll’s respiteblock and shuts the door. The dot hones in right on you and straining your ears you hear a door open and then footsteps on the stairs.

“Goddamn no Sawtooth, that shit’s nasty.” Dayvhe’s voice floats up to your ears and both you and Dirkka hold your breaths. The room on the other side of the wall you’re leant on was the completely wrong ablutionblock, but evidently the taps still work in the sink. You think he might be drinking? That makes sense if Cal’s been making him run for ages.

Clunky metal footsteps come down the hall.

“Dayvhe!” a synthetic voice cheers.

“Hey Squarewave, like what you’ve done with the place.” Dayvhe says wryly.

“It’s rad, I know you love radness. We should throw down, slam poetry battle! Sick fires!” the
robotic voice declares.

“Dude, no, I always beat you and then we both feel bad after.” Dayvhe sighs.

Okay, this isn’t so bad. Dayvhe’s had his drink now he’s going to decline the invitation to rhyme with a robot and leave. Then Vriska will show up, you blow up his lusus, job done. It’s going to be fine.

And then Dirkka’s palmhusk pings with a message. Dirkka throws you his husktop which you hastily jam in your sylladex as you both then desperately flick your devices to silent.

“Did…” Dayvhe trails off.

You gesture to the window and Dirkka nods. You grab it, pulling it open carefully and trying to avoid it squeaking.

“Did you hear that?” Dayvhe asks from behind the wall. Shit. SHIT.

“It was a message alert, like this alert that I will schoolfeed you in rhyme!” Squarewave answers. You climb out of the window and hold it open for Dirkka.

“Is Dirkka here? DIRKKA?” Dayvhe shouts that last part and you pull the man in question through the window and fly up onto the roof with him.

You hold Dirkka to your side and listen as Dayvhe goes into the room you just escaped from. Dirkka is quickly typing and you catch a glimpse of it as you duck behind an air conditioner.

TT: (◣_◢) Yeah I’m here but I’m probably not where you are. Not unless you’re with Roxxie too and also invisible.
TG: youre not at the bar
TT: (◣_◢) That is what I said.
TG: ok weird
TG: uh bad news about your bracelet thing i didnt mean to break it but all those beads came off of it and i couldn’t see them after
TT: (◣_◢) Don’t worry about it, just go stay with one of your friends. I’ll see you soon.
TG: ...alright?
TG: you seem weird tonight but whatever [turntechGodhead ceased trolling timaeusTestified]

You silently wait until you hear Dayvhe leave and then reunite Dirkka with his husktop and you can see Dayvhe heading towards the train station. With a sigh of relief both of you head down again by jumping off of the roof, Dirkka insists that no one wants to be caught up in a rap battle with Squarewave. You certainly don’t want to watch that either so you agree.

“That was too close, and what the fuck is up with that hive?” you ask, jerking your head towards the upper floor of the bar.

“Sawtooth and Squarewave like pretending they’re people, or that they’re organic people at least. They just don’t really get it, or they don’t care. I don’t know.” Dirkka shrugs.

After that you only have to wait at the door for ten minutes, not eight as she would like, before Vriska shows up.

“This is her.” you tell Dirkka as she comes closer. She comes closer, eying you suspiciously.
“Who’s this?” Vriska asks as she looks Dirkka up and down.

“I’m the guy making sure we shoot the right target.” Dirkka says stiffly, boy in contrast his words to you almost seem friendly. Almost.

“Oh…kay… where are we doing this? I saw an abandoned troll Denny’s out that way, we could use the back of that.” Vriska suggests and Dirkka agrees.

This might be it, the thing that you do that makes Dayvhe never talk to you again. You’re about to do it. You blindly follow Vriska and Dirkka as you mind churns. Should you really do this? Will he understand? Why do you call it troll Denny’s? What else would it be?

“Sollux, look.” Dirkka says, snapping you back to reality. He’s sat on the floor with his husktop on the ground.

You pull yourself together and look. The screen is reading the life count at one now, something moving near one of the sensors.

“Is it him? Can you be sure?” you ask.

Dirkka pulls a cable out and you realise it was headphones. You can hear footsteps and rustling and then-

“Haa haa hee hee.”

You and Vriska both recoil in horror. That’s no troll voicebox making that sound but it’s definitely speech, it’s the same uncanny valley as when tropic green flapbeasts mimic speech. Only this thing is laughing.

“I’m sure.” Dirkka states coldly.

“We’re aiming for that?” Vriska asks with a shudder.

“Yeah.” Dirkka says and turns his husktop towards her. She pulls out an explosive device that reaches to about your knee in its stand, it doesn’t look too powerful but you’re not an expert in these things. Vriska is typing the coordinates into the controls for the bomb, or you suppose it’s a missile. Her metal arm shines as she moves. You know what made her need it and honestly she deserved worse but here you are.

“Alright, I’m ready.” Vriska announces.

Dirkka looks at his screen one more time and then nods, no other troll has wandered in and Cal hasn’t left. You watch as Dirkka picks up his husktop as the bomb- not the rocket blasts off and walks over to the wall of the troll Denny’s. That’d be smart and a good way to protect from any blast but you maintain that you’re safest next to Vriska and besides that building doesn’t look too stable. You focus on Dirkka though, killing Dayvhe’s lusus and then not stopping a building from crushing Dirkka would really make him stop talking to you.

Vriska’s smile goes terrifyingly wide as she presses the big red button on the controls. You don’t know what it does though, it already launched but maybe that’s to arm it in case it hit something before it got to Dayvhe’s hive and blew you up too. You hope it’s that kind of safety procedure.

“Come on Sollux, cool guys watch the explosions.” Vriska cackles.

“That’s the dumbest thing I’ve-”
You don’t get to finish your sentence because you’re suddenly knocked on your ass and a bang sounds so loud that you can’t hear anything at all. Everything is hot, too hot. You throw your psionics up to protect yourself but there’s too much going on to focus. It stops as suddenly as it started and you wobbly sit up with your ears ringing. Half of the troll Denny’s is demolished but Dirkka is fine, clinging to the wall in alarm. Above him a hunk of the building teeters and topples and you blast it away from him in an uncoordinated swipe but when you look back he’s not there anymore. He looks from you to the wall and you see him say something but you can’t hear it.

“What?” you shout.

Dirkka says something else but you still can’t hear over the ringing, fuck you hope you’re not deaf now. Dirkka shakes his head and opens his mouth wide, pointing to it. What? At your nonplussed expression he crouches down and grabs your face in his hand and squeezes your cheeks in a way that forces your mouth open. He presses harder and then one of your ears pops and sound comes back.

“Oh!” you gasp and Dirkka releases you. You work your jaw a few times until your other ear pops as well.

“I said thanks. I didn’t need your help but thanks.” Dirkka says and pulls you up.

You both look around at the devastation. Vriska clearly overamped her bomb, half of the things around you are on fire and most buildings have some kind of damage. Which means that Dayvhe’s hive…

“Come with me.” you say and hold out a hand. Dirkka stares at you for a moment and then takes it.

You rocket the both of you up in the air to see where the bomb hit and… whoa. Vriska does not do things by halves. The place where Dayvhe’s hive used to be is now a crater in the ground at least five hundred foot deep that gets shallower and shallower as it reaches the edge of this town. There’s no sign of life at all within it, not even plant life. There’s nothing in there to burn but the raw rock in the deepest parts is still glowing a hot red.

“Holy shit.” Dirkka breathes and you drift back down to the ground.

“Well?” Vriska asks when you land, clearly having worked out the hearing problem on her own.

“Yeah, you did it.” you nod.

“Good, then you better hold up your part of our deal. Stop telling people you hate me and that I’m the worst, maybe even put in a good word for me so people stop being so overdramatic about the whole thing.” Vriska says.

“I do hate you and you are the worst but I’ll do what I agreed.” you nod.

“Eh, I’ll take it. Now I’m gonna go throw things in that crater.” Vriska says gleefully and rushes towards the crater edge in the distance. You and Dirkka walk over that way as well and you can see the cloaked figure of Sawtooth curiously ambling towards it as well as scared trolls who live nearby wondering what happened. The road is broken at the edge of the crater, the blast having lifted up slabs of tarmac and further in the road surface has melted down to an almost mirror gloss.

“You made it stronger than I asked for.” you call out to Vriska who is tossing rocks into a puddle of molten road.

“Better too strong than not strong enough.” Vriska laughs. Dirkka shoots you a look that seems to
question your sanity for knowing Vriska at all. Honestly though you question that yourself. Still, over destructive or not it doesn’t look like anyone was hurt. The crater only comes to the edge of town and there’s no obvious rubble of hives there and you don’t recall there being any there before.

But were you wrong? You calculated for the blast radius you asked Vriska for and the sensors only covered that. She went too far as she always does so maybe… but no you would have heard them, wouldn’t you?

“You killed him.”

Vriska shrieks and Dirkka leaps a foot away from you and arms himself but you know that voice.

“AA.” you say, turning your head to see her ghostly form floating there.

“I suppose I wasn’t supposed to be here in time to stop you. But if you’re wondering, you killed him.” Aradia sighs in her hollow voice.

“You mean Cal, right? The mind leech?” you ask, momentarily terrified that maybe she somehow meant Dayvhe. That perhaps he doubled back when no one was looking and got killed. But Aradia nods her head and you relax.

“No one else?” you check.

“No. But I checked on your boy, though.” Aradia tells you.

“On Dayvhe?” you ask.

“Mmm. He’s never killed anyone. But it’s funny… you know how I know who killed who?” Aradia asks, looking at you with blank eyes.

“You used to say that they told you who did it but also that someone’s guilt binds them to the people they kill.” you say. Vriska looks viscerally uncomfortable in the distance but she clearly doesn’t dare move at the risk of drawing attention to herself.

“No one blamed him for their deaths so I looked at his guilt.” Aradia says.

Dayvhe never killed anyone.” Dirkka says confidently.

“Also,” Dirkka continues, “why are you talking to a ghost?”

“Oh. This is Aradia, she’s my-” you begin.

“We’re friends.” Aradia finishes for you. Oh, ouch. That’s that old flame well and truly snuffed out.

“The thing is Dayvhe had guilt, so I followed it. And I found a whole mess of tiny ghosts, little wigglers. But he didn’t kill them, he just feels that it’s his fault they’re dead. A boy who blames himself for deaths he didn’t cause.” Aradia says thoughtfully.

You stare out at the molten slag of the crater ahead of you and think of all the grubs that came between Dayvhe and Dirkka, of the ones that came after Dayvhe left and before he worked out that he needed to stay however infrequently. Blame sounds like his kind of thing there.

“But that won’t happen now that you’ve shifted the tides of fate. And sorry about your face.” Aradia says and fades away into nothingness.

“Did that ghost just tell you facts I could have told you about Dayvhe and then insult your face?”
Dirkka asks. You shrug helplessly, that’s Aradia for you.

Still she would have told you if you’d killed anyone but Cal with this. So, no casualties, no injuries, the only death was Cal’s.

You did it.

“You.” Oh, oh no.

You turn around to see Dayvhe facing you, he looks scuffed up but his face is- you’re not sure you can pinpoint what emotion that is but there’s a lot of it for sure.

“What…” Dayvhe trails off and pushes past you, standing at the edge of the crater and staring inwards to the place that used to be his. You open your mouth to explain when you realise that the expression on Dayvhe’s face is horror. Horror coloured with grief.

It occurs to you that you may have made a very big mistake.

“You did this… you…” Dayvhe whispers.

Dirkka is standing stock still nearby, watching Dayvhe and clearly unsure at how this is going to play out and unwilling to show his hand until he figures that out. Dayvhe looks at you, not that you can be sure with his shades on. Still, his statement warrants a response. And what can you say? An excuse? A justification?

In the end you can’t bring words to bear in this situation and you just nod. You did this.

“You killed my LUSUS!” Dayvhe shouts at you and he’s right, you did. Cal was terrible, deserved to die but maybe you had no right to be the one to do it. Maybe Dayvhe wasn’t ready for this, maybe you could never comprehend a bond as fucked up as theirs was and should have stayed out of it.

“You promised me you wouldn’t- and- and here you are!” Dayvhe accuses you.

“I’m sorry.” you croak and for that you really are.

You see the punch coming, psionically boosted or not. You could stop him. You could throw him ten feet in the air, freeze his body where he stands, you could rip a fucking moon from the sky and obliterate you all if you chose but you don’t. You don’t do any of that. When his punch connects you fall to the floor, blood streaming down your face.

“Stay the fuck away from me!” he snarls at you.

And like that Dayvhe is gone, rushing away from you into the crater. Dirkka looks from you to Dayvhe, clearly conflicted but he runs after Dayvhe. You press your sleeve to your face to stem the blood flowing from your sniffnode, sorry about your face, huh?

“You did this to kill someone’s lusus?” Vriska asks you and you look up at her in alarm. She’s staring down at you and for a moment you realise she may well not be alright with that.

“It’s complicated.” you answer.

“In my experience, people aren’t good with complicated.” Vriska says and pulls you to your feet.

“Don’t forget our deal. Later Captor.” Vriska says and walks off with a wave.

And just like that you’re alone. Well, not alone really because there’s the residents of the town...
around and two robots nearby but in all the ways that matter you’re alone. You got what you aimed for, Dayvhe is safe and he’s never going to talk to you again. You should at least have the decency to go.

You kick off from the ground and fly home, crawling in through your window and kicking it shut after you. You sit on the floor and cover your eyes with your hands, you can still see his snarl as he told you to stay away. Looking at your palmhusk you see that he’s offline, which more likely means that you’ve been blocked. You don’t dare find out and besides that he told you to leave him alone. You can do at least that much.

What’re you going to do now?

Well, the best thing you can do is finish the last of your plans to keep him and Karkat safe. Turn your work over to Karkat and let him talk to Nepeta instead of you. And… and you can do what you promised Dayvhe you’d do too, you can pass the tests as the world’s least interesting psionic and have a shit job in tech support. He wanted you to live when he got you that plant, the least you can do is respect that.

You hold onto your palmhusk a little tighter as your vision goes misty with tears you’re not going to shed as you try to just… accept it. You were prepared for this. You knew that saving Dayvhe from his lusus might burn your bridges totally but it was a risk you were willing to take.

But still… you can see him now. The narrow frame of his body and all that facade he hides behind, the shades, the attitude. Except he let you behind them, he let you see him and he cared about you too. He put his life in your hands, trusted you instinctively even when he was out of his mind with pain and Cal’s fading control.

“Fuck,” you whisper aloud, dropping your palmhusk and holding your head in your hands.

“I’m never going to pity someone like him ever again. I fucking… I lost him.” you hiss. You’re outraged at the unfairness of it all, not angry at yourself because you’d still do what you did and you’re not mad at him because you understand. It’s just… not fair in a universal kind of way. Why did you have to be shown just how deep you could fall for the guy only to lose him forever?

Your palmhusk buzzes and you aren’t even ashamed to admit how desperately you grab for the thing, hoping and pleading that it’s Dayvhe. It’s not, though. You’d know his rustie smokescreen anywhere, but the text is grey. It’d make sense for Karkat to come and talk to you, or yell at you, if Dayvhe told him what you did you bet he has something to say. But no, not him either. It’s a grey trolltag you don’t know.

[autonomicResponse began trolling twinArmageddons]

AR: I have to say that I am glad to get to talk to you.
TA: who the fuck are you and why do you type liike diirkka? only your face at the begiinniing doe2n't have a mouth.
AR: Word to the wise, kid. Don’t compare me to Dirkka.
AR: As for who I am consider me an interested party in this whole affair, until recently my hands have been tied with regards to interfering in Dayvhe’s life in any way other than where I have explicit permission.
AR: Specifically I was told that I am not to interfere in Dayvhe’s life beyond notifying Dirkka when he’s at Cal’s. However, as Cal is now dead it stands to reason that I can interpret such a rule to mean that I CAN now interfere all that I like.
TA: you 2tiill haven't told me who you are but leave dayvhe alone, he'2 been through enough.
AR: Hah, that’s cute. Now that I’m looking through your system, and thanks for letting me in by accepting my message prompt that was really nice of you. It really seems like your motivations for
helping Dayvhe were what you said, even if you did lie to him.

You leap to your feet and sprint to your computer only to see multiple windows flashing open and closing as the files are read. SHIT! You drag the seat out and start trying to wrest control back but nothing works, trollian helpfully opens in the middle of the screen.

AR: ◣◢ Calm down, I’m a polite guest I won’t break anything.
AR: ◣◢ As it happens I have an offer for you, Mr Captor. And don’t bother typing, I have your mic on, I can hear you.

“Who the fuck are you?” you hiss furiously.

AR: ◣◢ Oh, right I didn’t introduce myself. Where are my manners? You can call me Hal, we’ve not met but Dirkka’s passingly mentioned me somewhat ominously as ‘the other guy’ and you’ve been in my bar.
AR: ◣◢ Either way I think it’s my offer that you’ll find more enticing. You see, I’ve known Dayvhe as long as Dirkka has. He listens to me just as much as he does Dirkka.
AR: ◣◢ And, honestly, I can see why you did what you did with Cal and I agree that it was the right thing to do. Unfortunately I was too bound up to offer the same solution to Dirkka before, which I will be pointing out to him. It’s lucky you came along really.
AR: ◣◢ My offer is this. As a thank you of sorts for what you did I can repair your relationship with Dayvhe, make him understand what happened and give you a second chance. What do you say?

“What?” you say in disbelief.

AR: ◣◢ It’s nothing nefarious, I’ll just talk him around. I think you’ve been unfairly persecuted here is all.

You rub at your eyes, so much for your vow against tears. The prospect of Dayvhe back is more than tempting but you know it wouldn’t be right.

“I want Dayvhe back more than you can imagine but-” you shake your head.

“He’s been the puppet of other people for too much already. I knew he might hate me for this, I deserve it. If he changes his mind then great but not if someone else changes it for him. Leave Dayvhe alone.” you say roughly.

AR: ◣◢ But you did nothing wrong.

“I lied to him! I broke my promise and I killed his LUSUS! Leave him alone!” you snap.

AR: ◣◢ Oh, I like you. Have control of your system back, I’ve not done anything to it.

And just like that your screen flickers back to normal, like nothing ever happened. You still spend a good while shoring up any possible holes in your security because the frequency that you’re getting hacked these days is honestly embarrassing. The focus takes your mind off of Dayvhe, somewhat at least.
Unpack Your Heart - Philip Filips

“Bring all that you’re scared to defend
And lay it down when you walk through my door
Throw all of it out on the floor
Your sorrow, your beauty, your war
I want it all, I want it all
Bring your secrets, bring your scars
Bring your glory, all you are
Bring your daylight, bring your dark
Share your silence
And unpack your heart”
Unpack Your Heart - Philip Filips

You continue on with your life after Dayvhe kicking you out of his. You had been falling into a depressive episode before this and that didn’t just stop being a thing but it’s almost the cliche of it that helps you drag yourself out. Lying about pining for Dayvhe is just sad and it’s not that you don’t miss him, God you do, but it won’t help. You made your coon so you have to marinade in it.

It’s obvious that Dayvhe has told Karkat what happened though because you are the frequent target of well meaning concern.

CG: I CAN TALK TO HIM ABOUT IT IF YOU WANT, YOU KNOW. DAYVHE FAMOUSLY HAS LESS SENSE THAN A WET BAG OF SAND BUT HE CAN BE PERSUADED INTO SANITY AND INTELLIGENCE NOW AND THEN.
TA: he told me two 2tay away from hiim, 2o ii'm going two.
CG: YOU’RE REALLY JUST GOING TO GIVE UP LIKE THAT?
TA: ii'm not 'giiviing up' he told me two 2tay away from hiim and 2o ii am.
CG: SINCE WHEN DO YOU *EVER* DO WHAT YOU’RE TOLD? MAYBE HE DIDN’T MEAN IT AND HE WAS JUST PISSED OFF.
TA: iif he diidn't mean iit he would have 2hown up agaiin or trolled me and he ha2n't. iit'2 pretty clear two me.
CG: UGH. LOOK, BETWEEN YOU AND ME AND BECAUSE YOU’RE MY BEST FRIEND I’M GOING TO TELL YOU SOMETHING.
CG: HE’S FUCKING *MISERABLE* WITHOUT YOU.
TA: pretty 2ure he wouldn't want you telling me that.
CG: PRETTY SURE I’M TRYING TO HELP YOU TWO MORONS.
TA: and ii think ii't2 more likely that he’2 mi2erable becau2e ii lied two hiim, broke a promii2e and kiilled hi2 lu2u2. iiif iiit wa2 from hiim mi22iing me he know2 where ii am, iiit'2 not liike ii would turn hiim away ii in a miiliion 2weep2.
TA: ii made him mi2erable. that'2 all the more rea2on two 2tay away.
CG: YOU PESSIMISTIC DUNDERFUCK, LISTEN TO ME WHEN I TELL YOU THAT’S NOT IT. YOU TWO WERE BASICALLY FATED MOIRAILS, YOU CAN’T LET ONE FUCK UP AND A MURDER GET BETWEEN YOU.
TA: iif ii recall correctly you were the one telling me two 2tay away from hiim iiin the fiir2t place.
CG: THAT WAS BEFORE YOU ACTUALLY MANAGED TO BE THE MAGICAL ONE HORNED HOOFBEAST THAT GOT DAYVHE TO PITY YOU BACK. I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU PITED HIM, YOU TWO WERE GOOD FOR EACH OTHER, YOU GOT ME AND HIM TOGETHER FOR FUCK’S SAKE! SO YOU HAD A FIGHT, GET BACK TOGETHER ALREADY!
TA: we weren’t ever together kk, he 2hot me down. we were ju2t friiend2.
CG: FRIENDS MY HEFTY SHAME GLOBES. YOU WERE MOIRIALS. PEOPLE COULD SEE YOUR PALE CRUSH FROM SPACE, DON’T YOU LIE TO ME!
TA: fine! i pitiied hiim more than ii thought iit wa2 po2ible two piity another per2on and lo2iiing hiim ii2 hell, ii2 that what you what two hear? ii knew he miight hate me for what ii diid and ii diid iit anyway. iit’2 over, that’2 iit. 2o ju2t drop iit.
CG: STOP CRAMMING IDIOCY DOWN MY EYEBALLS LIKE A VENDOR OF SUSPECT MEATS GETTING RID OF HIS TAINTED WARES BEFORE THE DRONES ARRIVE AND GET OVER YOURSELF ALREADY!
[twinArmageddons has blocked carcinoGeneticist]

Of course you unblock him eventually and you can probably measure the nights by the intervals between him harassing you about Dayvhe. But you figure when he messages you telling you that his husktop is filled with viruses and won’t you pretty please fix it that at least in person when he’s annoying you can just stick him to the ceiling.

So you fly over there and see him waiting on his roof where he flags you down.

“Hey, it’s just in here.” Karkat says, leading you inside.

“I know where your room is, dumbass.” you sigh and follow him anyway.

“Are you scrawnier than the last time I saw you?” Karkat asks, shooting you a look over his shoulder. You shrug apathetically. You’ve been determined to not let losing Dayvhe send you into a spiral but it’s hard keeping on top of EVERYTHING. You’re awake at a normal time, dressed, showered and socialising. So maybe you’re not keeping on top of groceries so well, you’re not perfect.

Karkat hovers awkwardly near his husktop as you wake it up and inspect the damage, the very moment you move the cursor the screen glitches and popups for all kinds of thing flash up on the desktop. You raise an eyebrow and look over at him.

“Did you have some kind of seizure and download all of the viruses on the internet?” you ask slowly.

“Something like that. Just, ugh, stay here and fix it. Okay? I’m going to go get… yeah, sorry.” Karkat mutters and backs away in shame. You hear him head downstairs and you shake your head.

You pull out your palmhusk and plug your eargrubs into your ears, you’re going to be here a while for sure. You start going into the registry and deleting what you can, just culling this shit left and right until it’s well enough for you to eventually plug your own well protected machine into it to drag his back to health.

It’s dull tiresome work and you don’t even stop when you hear the front door slam downstairs. The last thing you want to deal with is an unintelligible conversation with Karkat’s lusus or whatever he’s dragged in with him. You keep working instead, pointedly ignoring the photograph of Karkat and Dayvhe on Karkat’s desk that he’s no doubt left there to remind you of him. He’s probably going to exploit this you helping him thing so that he can rant to you in person about getting in touch with Dayvhe again. You’re onto his schemes.

You sigh and reboot his machine, hoping the poor abused thing will run better when it restarts. The song playing in your ears ends and in the quiet before the next one begins you hear the floor creak behind you.

“It is nowhere near done yet KK, don’t even ask. What the fuck you did to this thing I don’t know.” you grumble and peer at the thing as it whirs into life again.
You jump at the buzz of psi over your skin and your eargrub pops out. Karkat doesn’t have psi.

You whirl around in Karkat’s chair to find that it’s not Karkat behind you but Dayvhe. You stare at him, dumbfounded and you drink in the sight of him like a man lost in the desert for days. The slight but athletic lines of his figure, the thin scars on his skin, you look him over desperately to see if he’s okay. And then you remember that it’s not supposed to be your problem anymore because you’re staying away from him.

The chair clatters to the ground behind you as you leap to your feet, you blindly scramble for your palmhusk with one hand.

“I’m sorry.” you blurt out and Dayvhe opens his mouth but you continue on.

“I didn’t know you were here. KK asked me to fix his… but I guess he set this up. I didn’t know, I wasn’t trying to-” you rush to say and oh no, Dayvhe is frowning.

“Yeah, I guessed that.” he says and oh fuck you’ve missed his voice, but hearing it is a punch to the gut. You want to beg to stay, to plead forgiveness, but you don’t.

“I’ll go. Fuck KK’s machine.” you mumble and hurriedly store your palmhusk in your sylladex.

“You talked to Hal about me.” Dayvhe says without tone.

The name throws you for a second until you recall.

“Wh- oh. Hal, the AR person. I didn’t mean- they said they already knew, that they knew you and Dirkka. I only talked to them once.” you insist.

“Yeah, yeah, see I knew that already.” Dayvhe says as he taps on his own palmhusk and holds it up, putting you abruptly face to face with yourself. Or a recording of yourself anyway. It’s from when Hal asked you if you wanted him to get you back with Dayvhe again, you can hear your own answers to his questions and see how pained you were about it.

“You should really cover your camera with a sticker or something. But you told Hal no, you never tried to contact me, and I’m guessing that since Karkat lured you here and locked us in his hive that you’ve been turning down his matchmaking attempts. So what the hell, man?” Dayvhe demands, jamming his palmhusk back in his pocket.

“You told me to stay away from you.” you say quietly and you can hear the distressed buzz of your tense thorax humming into your words.

“And you just did.” Dayvhe says flatly.

Wait, what?

“Isn’t that… isn’t that what you wanted?” you ask in bewilderment.

“No. I wanted you to come after me and harass me and insist that you knew what you were doing and shit.” Dayvhe says. You’re… pretty sure that he’s being sarcastic but his tone is so dead that you can’t tell so you stay frozen in panic.

“You want to be my moirail, I know you do. You said so. Isn’t that right?” Dayvhe asks, stepping closer to you. Mutely you nod.

“See? I knew that. And I told you not to go anywhere near Cal but you went off behind my back and
did it anyway, instead of listening to me because I know more about the situation than you. But no it’s some big gesture, some ‘look, I saved you’ hoofbeast shit. So that now I have to be your moirail and you’d be just like everyone else but worse.” he hisses at you.

“That wasn’t why-” you protest but he claps his hand over your mouth and you clam up.

“And Karkat swears you’re not like that and I’d thought you weren’t but I’ve been wrong before and he’s biased. But then I get Dirkka telling me that your motives were all noble and shit, that you had known I’d kick your ass to the kerb but wanted to help me anyway. Dirkka just fighting your corner like that. Then Hal reveals he’s been meddling and that he offered you an in to my good goddamn graces again and you say no because you don’t want me being anyone’s puppet. And you don’t try to troll me, not even once and it’s like…” Dayvhe trails off.

“Do you know how stupid what you did was? You knew barely anything about Cal, you just assumed you were at a safe range. And that bomb of yours could have blown you up just as easily and you trusted VRISKA of all people for help, you know she’s a fucking sociopath, she could have killed you! She killed your matesprit, why would ever trust her again? Shit like this is why you need someone to stop you from-” Davhe shakes his head. You know what he was about to say there. It’s why you need a moirail, someone to stop you being so thoughtlessly self destructive. You squirm out from under his hand.

“You ever going to finish one of those sentences?” you say before you think better of it.

Dayvhe scowls, his eyebrows drawing sharply down behind his shades and he shoves his hand over your mouth again so hard that your head tilts back. Your instincts flash up worry about being manhandled like that, and having so much of your throat exposed but you know it’s Dayvhe and so the panic calms.

“The problem is that you did all that and accepted no reward. You got game over and didn’t argue about it. And if you’d been a douchebag who did argue I could have ignored you forever but you didn’t and… and you were stupid and reckless but you wanted to help me. Even if it meant me never talking to you again.” he says slowly and his hand slips from your mouth over to your cheek.

You’d like to say that it was some picture perfect movie moment but instead of him stroking your cheek all pale like what happens is your dumbass system gets the slightest hint of it and your legs forget how to do their job and you fall down onto the floor. Dayvhe is staring down at you, his hand frozen in the air.

“You’re just so stupidly pitiful it hurts, did you really just fall on your ass?” he asks incredulously and leans over you.

“Pitiful?” you echo as a dangerous sense of hope starts to fill you.

Dayvhe nods slowly and kneels down on the floor of Karkat’s block with you.

“You didn’t pull that shit to manipulate me. But I’m serious, if you lie to me about something that big again or break a promise that monumentally important again then your ass is grass, you hear me?” Dayvhe asks and you nod hastily.

“So are we… friends… again?” you ask, hardly daring to hope.

“I hope not.” Dayvhe says quietly and leans forward, resting one hand on your bony thigh as he gets into your space. His nose brushes your cheek. Oh, maybe you have to work up to being his friend again then. That’d be fair.
“I missed you.” you confess and feel him laugh against your skin.

“I missed you too.” he tells you. He leans in and winds his arms around your neck and presses himself to you, hugging you tight.

“It might have been stupid as all fuck but what you did was obviously pretty selfless. Stupidly selfless even. I couldn’t do that and I’m about to be real selfish.” he mumbles into your shirt. You run your hands down his back and feel him shiver slightly at the touch. You don’t know what he could ask you for that you’d think of as selfish.

“Be my moirail?” he asks.

You stare up at his uncertain face as your pulse pounds in your ears, you’re not dreaming, you’re awake. He wants you to be his moirail and it’s all you’ve wanted for basically the whole time you’ve known him. And yet doubt is creeping in and the expression on his face is rapidly filling with worry.

“I’m so much worse than you’ve seen. My mood swings I mean. I don’t think you know what you’re signing up for.” you warn him, your voice hoarse. Surprise flashes over Dayvhe face only to be chased off by clear pity.

“I’m cool with that, we’ll work it out. You’ve survived this long, you can teach me. Properly schooled me on your wild brain shennanigans, I’ll be the best student, I promise.” he says as a grin spreads across his face slow as moonrise.

“Be my moirail?” he asks again, softer this time. You tried to warn him and you’re only a mortal troll, you can only be selfless for so long.

“Yes. Yes, yes, yes.” you breathe out and nod sharply.

Dayvhe’s hands are suddenly in your hair and his fingers lacing between both sets of horns as he jerks your head backwards. The panic you should feel is gone because he’s your moirail, yours, and he wouldn’t hurt you. And he doesn’t. Instead he just rushes in and kisses you, straight on the mouth and gracelessly enough that your fangs clack against his. He giggles deliriously and moves to kiss your cheek. His laugh is contagious, at least to you anyway so the pair of you end up on Karkat’s floor laughing like utter tools and yet you couldn’t care less.

There’s a pop of red psi and Karkat’s chair falls over in time for the pair of you to lean on the seat and back of it.

“I think…I don’t know man I’m still working out what I should do.” Dayvhe sighs into your shirt.

“What?” you ask.

“Karkat set this up like, obvs. And one the one hand hell yeah dude excellent clearly worked out, hella thanks and sexual favours for life for him. BUT.” Dayvhe rambles.

“It could have not.” you supply.

“Right, and also he lied to me and y- and to my moirail.” Dayvhe adds that last part with a tone of wonder that sends a thrill up your posture pole.

“So, kicking his ass, maybe.” you conclude.

“I’ll see how I feel.” he mutters. You could comment on that but you hardly want to get dragged into anything ash if they flip black, no way.
Dayvhe shifts a little uncomfortably against you and the fallen chair and then holds a hand out to Karkat’s bookshelf. With a flash of red he… basically trashes it. Books fly out onto the floor with a smack and several gifted scalemate plushies on top that you know are from Terezi and Kanaya topple off.

“Your fine control sucks.” you tell him flatly.

“Only on things that aren’t me. I just use mine for sicknasty ninja stunts but I don’t see you being impressed with that, do I? No it’s all, Dayvhe stop accidentally flinging things across the room when-oh for fuck’s sake.” he groans and drops his head onto your shoulder as an attempt to coordinate the fallen books into a mass that he can pull over just instead slams them all together and blasts one up in the air. You catch it effortlessly.

“I am impressed by that, but your fine control still sucks. What’re you even trying to do?” you ask.

“Just- just bring it all here.” he huffs and you do just that and, because you’re a shit, you return the books to him in alphabetical order. You watch him realise it only for him to grab a scalemate out of the air and bean you with it. He shoves you out of the way with his hands and then just starts pulling things from the air and shoving them up against the fallen chair. There’s no order to what he’s doing they’re just all in a big piiiiiOH. Oh you’re stupid, this is a pile, with your moirail. Oh shit.

Your face is about as dark as his but you’re going to power through this awkwardness, you by ignoring it and Dayvhe by clotheslining you down when he’s done.

“I know Aradia and you were flush but have you-” he begins.

“Nope.” you answer hurriedly. Oh good, neither of you knows what you’re doing.

“How about…” you begin slowly, “I could tell you something I’ve never told anyone?”

You were going to suggest that he start but you’re going to be nice.

“Something good, though. Not like something you’ve not told anyone because they wouldn’t understand, like I’m sure a pun you slipped into code is hilarious but I’m not gonna get that. That doesn’t count. Something embarrassing.” he responds eagerly.

“You sure? That’s a double edged sword because you’re gonna have to as well.” you remind him and reach over to pull his shades off.

“You don’t see me doing that to you, look.” he says and pulls your glasses off and becomes a fuzzy Dayvhe like blur.

“Because I need them to actually see, just because they look cool doesn’t mean they’re FOR looking cool.” you groan. There’s some motion and then some more, you can make out the colour of your glasses.


“I have NO IDEA.” you groan.

“Not surprised, fuck you’re almost as blind as Terezi. I’m getting panache just wearing them, here.” Dayvhe says and he slides them back onto your face with care and he comes into focus again. His expression is too fond for you to stay irritated at him, luckily for him. You don’t let people touch your glasses because you’re basically toast without them. You can use your psionics to get around by touch a bit and you’re sure you could learn, after all look at Terezi, but you’d rather not have to. And
you have backups because you’re not stupid, but still.

“Something embarrassing.” Dayvhe prompts you.

You lean back a little more against the pile and think. Right now Dayvhe isn’t actively touching you, for all that his side is plastered to yours. He’s awkward probably so, fine, you’ll bear your metaphorical throat first. An idea comes to you.

“When I was younger, I can’t remember when, I was short. I hadn’t met Karkat in person just then but I think it was that same few perigees.” you begin slowly.

“Oh! I think I’ve seen a picture of you then with Karkat. You were shorter than him and kind chubby and you had those bangs that made it look like you cut your own hair with zig-zag scissors.” Dayvhe says with a laugh.

You don’t correct him that your hair was that way for A WHILE after that.

“I did not, but yeah around then. But yeah I was chubby back then, that’s important to remember.” you nod.

“Did you actually put on any weight since then or did you just gain several feet in height and kind of stretch?” Dayvhe asks and pokes you in the side. You shrug, he’s probably not far wrong.

“Anyway, my psionics were getting stronger still then and so I practiced a lot to get control. Unlike some people. I’d throw small shit around and make sure not to break it, that kind of thing. I never needed weapons because I was powerful enough on my own but Karkat sent me a blank kind abstratus before we met for the first time, I think he got one free in a book or something I don’t know. So I had this thing and I didn’t know what to do with it so I just threw the only weapon I had in there.” you continue.

“You have… I think throwing stars are the only thing I’ve seen in your hive.” Dayvhe says after a moment’s thought and obligingly you pop a few out of your strife specibus to show him, they’re red and blue tinted of course.

“I didn’t have these then, just some replica shit from some East Alternian cartoon. And I’d never used the cards before so I accidentally launched them wildly across the room, stabbed my server, my wall and I panicked and tried to grab some of them midair with what I’ll admit wasn’t the best control of psi.” you tell him.

“Holy fuck what did you do?” Dayvhe gasps.

“I… managed to accidentally throw them again across the room in all directions. And stabbed myself. I still have the scar I think.” you say and sit up. You pull the back of your shirt down a bit and work your hand over to your shoulder, feeling for- there! The slight ridge of the scar.

“I can’t see… oh, there.” Dayvhe says, replacing your fingers with his as he feels out the line of your old scar.

“Didn’t do any real damage, most of the destruction was to my pride.” you say despairingly. You’d been determined to never tell anyone, but here you are. You stop breathing when you feel Dayvhe kiss the scar, like he can kiss better the injury that happened sweeps ago and like he doesn’t have a hundred scars worse than yours.

Dayvhe pulls you back down against him and when he starts talking you can feel the vibration of his words through your back. He wraps an arm around your middle and begins.
“So there’s this girl I know. She’s tangled up with Dirkka and Jake and she’s Roxxie’s matesprit. That whole group is hella messy man, you don’t even know what their drama used to be like. Anyway, the girl, Jayyne, she has basically two interests. She’s teal so the fact that she’s into the whole private detective thing isn’t super shocking, she does some private legislacerator-y, detective-y, mumbo jumbo. AND she’s into baking, desperately into baking.” Dayvhe says and you feel careful pressure as he touches one of your horns. You push your head into his hand like an affection starved meowbeast.

“The cake girl from the one you sent me?” you guess, angling your head so he can get his fingers at a nice angle around your horn.

“Right, that’s her.” Dayvhe agrees.

“Ok.” you say, as he’d fallen silent.

“I knew that I liked you then and I kept going back and forth on if I should do anything about it like some demented yo-yo. I mean, I’m being selfish. No. Now I’m being selfish because I don’t think I can- I can’t deal with you going off into space without me and that’s your whole chance to be normal and-” Dayvhe cuts off when you blindly reach back and pap him on the cheek. He sucks in a startled little breath but seems to settle, you feel him exhale and continue his tale.

“So at this point I’m thinking, yeah, I’m gonna do something about this. So I go to Jayyne and beg her to teach me how to make a cake and I wanted to make it myself and not just hire her. I guess beg is a strong word, she’s desperate to get other people into baking. So I make this thing with her help and I’m swearing her to secrecy mostly because, uh, the cake you got wasn’t the first one I designed.” Dayvhe admits. You’re about to ask about that when Dayvhe charges on and you know he’s nervous then because stuff like that causes these run on kinds of speeches.

“Because, hah, don’t laugh at me but like the first one I designed was gonna be a… it’s called a white cake. It’s some complicated old recipe but it’s a really pale looking cake inside and then you ice it outside all pristine pale white and then if you’re me and you have as little shame and or thinkspoon cells as I do you also plan to cut it into a giant diamond and then throw white glitter all over it. And I was designing this out with her and she was like ‘uh dude are you sure because this is hella forward and you don’t even know if he’s gonna say yes’. And she’s right, it woulda been subtler to, like, break into your hive when you were out, fill your hunger trunk with food and then drag everything you own into a giant pile and then sprawl over it in, like, cutely oversized sleep clothes with a fuckin’ white rose between my teeth and then wait for you to open the door and just waggle my eyebrows at you all impudently and launch into a spiel about my feelings.” Dayvhe blurts out in one long stream of thought. You’re choking a little at the idea of a kind of cake that you seen in movies for moirails who have been together for a decade.

You turn around in Dayvhe’s hold and look at his face stained dark with embarrassment.

“I think I would have got the picture.” you say carefully.

“You think?” Dayvhe groans.

“I might have also died from my pumphiscuit exploding from shock and/or delight.” you add.

“See this is why I kept these sicknasty plans to myself, don’t wanna bust my crush’s thorax open with a fatal case of feels.” Dayvhe nods.

“Yeah, just went for a handmade cake for me in my favourite colours which was pretty much as effective.” you counter and delight at the startled grin that spreads over his face.
“Also,” you ask as you lean in again and prop yourself up on your elbow, “you said you knew you liked me then but you changed your mind on that after. But when did you actually start… you know.”

“I don’t know. I’m kind of… stupid. With that stuff I mean. I spent ages ranting to my friends and also to myself about how I both liked and also really didn’t like Karkat until they pointed it out to me a few times that I was either red or black for him. Or as it happens, both. I think I started realising after the first time I kissed you. Which, yes, I heard the words I said and I too think they’re dumb but I just did it because I wanted to and then spent ages like ‘hmm why DID I do that? I don’t usually kiss my friends or want to do it again. Oh shit he keeps helping me out, swoon’, I mean I did mention I’m dumb.” he says despairingly.

“You’re not dumb.” you counter.

“Well, when did you realise?” he demands.

“The… first time I met you I started getting a crush on you.” you tell him.

“Augh, see! See what I mean? I’m emotionally pandamaged! I’m-” he starts to rant.

“Shoosh.” you whisper and pap him right on the cheek. You think you’re getting good at this, or at least you assume so from the way his expression goes a little glassy.

“Is… it like that for you? Like you’re just actually melting?” Dayvhe questions you and paps you back to test his point. You nod and plaster yourself to him. The pair of you dazedly petting each other’s horns and faces and getting tangled in each other until it feels like there’s nothing wrong in the whole universe at all.

Time passes, but you don’t know or care how much but it’s Dayvhe who jolts in alarm. He pulls an arm out from underneath you and you bonelessly slide down his side a little further. There’s an annoyed little huff and the sound of Dayvhe being anything less than happy sharpens your mind somewhat. You blearily open your eyes only to find that it doesn’t really help, your glasses are off.

“Dayvhe, can’t see.” you mumble.

“I got you, man. Here.” Dayvhe’s voice says and you see red and blue come into focus close to your face. You reach up and take your glasses and slide them on. Dayvhe is on his palmhusk and frowning as he types.

“What’s wrong?” you ask and reach up to push your thumb against the furrowed part between his eyebrows from him frowning so hard. Dayvhe hisses and hands his palmhusk over to you, he’s talking to Karkat.

TG: if you could stop being smug for one goddamn minute thatd be great because honestly youre making it hard to breathe up here by sucking all of the air out of the building to fuel your burning fire of self satisfaction

TG: which bee tee dubs self satisfaction is all youre gonna get if you keep pissing me off

CG: SHOCKINGLY THE WORLD DOES NOT REVOLVE AROUND YOUR MUTANT BULGE, DAYVHE. IT WAS A SIMPLE GODDAMN REQUEST, RIGHT UP THERE IN GREY. JUST TO KNOW IF THE PAIR OF YOU ARE DECENT OR NOT OR IF I WALK UPSTAIRS INTO MY BLOCK I’M GOING TO BE TREATED TO LIVEACTION PALE PORN. A SIMPLE GODDAMN REQUEST.

TG: well maybe its none of your business and i dont see why i should tell you anything seeing as you lied to both of us to get us here
“You told him about Cal, though, right? The night that Roxxie and Dirkka were here. And he knew about me killing Cal so what doesn’t he know?” you ask patiently, sitting up and facing Dayvhe. He’s still not wearing his shades so it’s obvious how he avoids your gaze.

“Didn’t… really tell him about what Cal could do, not in much detail. Or… what he has done. Or…” he trails off and his hand falls down to the place that you fused his skin back together, the injury that started this whole drama. Karkat still had your back then, even with what was evidently a super tenuous reason for doing what you did from what he knew. Karkat’s loyal as fuck, you should probably appreciate him more.

“Want me to talk to him? Tell him things?” you offer.

“I should- I just don’t tell people things. Not real shit. And he knows about Roxxie and Dirkka sort of and Cal a little. But I don’t know how to just say shit. The only person I’ve ever really told stuff to is… you.” he mumbles and you can feel your face heating up.

“I don’t wanna ruin shit with him.” he adds quietly.

“Karkat’s pretty patient with other people’s shit, I doubt you’re anywhere near that at all.” you assure him. Shit, he put up with Gamzee right up until Kanaya ended that problem. You think the guy even still talks to Eridan sometimes. He’d wait for Dayvhe for a long ass time, you know it.

“Could you talk to him? I know it’s a completely lame thing to ask of you and-” Dayvhe starts but you just reach out and pet his hair between his horns and stand up.

“No problem.” you tell him and bask in the relieved and grateful look Dayvhe gives you. You leave his palmhusk with him and head downstairs looking for Karkat. He’s not hard to find, pacing back and forth across his whole ground floor. His eyebrows drawn down like they’re trying to meet up with each other to gouge him in the eyes as he taps out angry messages on his screen which you bet Dayvhe is ignoring.

“Hey.” you call down as you descend the last few steps.

“Hey.” Karkat says in surprise, lowering his palmhusk and looking at you. You don’t really feel bad about what he did, or as it happens, anything much at all. Karkat looks you up and down and then barely manages to stifle a laugh.

“Are you even on this planet anymore? You’re so happy I think I’m going to barf just looking at you.” Karkat teases, grinning himself.

“Shut up, you’re ruining it.” you groan as you float past him and drop onto his loungeplank.

“Feel free to thank me any time.” he argues and sits down with you.

“What am I thanking you for again? Setting this up with Dayvhe or finally fucking your husktop up so much that I’m going to have to take it out back and shoot it as an act of mercy?” you scoff and genuine panic flashes across Karkat’s face.
“Wait, you’re not really going to are you? You can fix it, right? I just knew if there was nothing wrong with it you’d go before I could trick Dayvhe into going up there.” Karkat says in mounting terror.

“Of course I can fix it, I can fix anything.” you tell him confidently. You will still reserve the right to mock him for whatever you find downloaded on his husktop but that’s what best hatefriends are for.

“Dayvhe isn’t talking to me still, is he… should I go up there?” Karkat asks, looking up with worry as if he could see through the ceiling or something.

“Nah, he wanted me to talk to you about- uh, everything I guess.” you say.

Honestly you can’t remember what you have and haven’t told him, let alone what Dayvhe has said so you figure you need to cover it all. So you do. You start with Cal, explaining everything about him that you know. You cover why he was so dangerous, why Dayvhe avoided him so much and what he was like when you got him back from Cal.

“I knew that was where most of his scars came from but he didn’t talk about that new one, wouldn’t tell me anything when I asked him. The obtuse fuck. But he went to you even when he was that hurt? That’s…” Karkat whistles lowly, you know what he’s thinking, that it’s a really strong pale relationship you two have even if it just officially started this evening.

“But I could have helped kill him though, you could have said something to me! He’s my matesprit you know.” Karkat adds irritably. You doubt that Karkat could have practically provided any skills, though he could have potentially distracted Dayvhe but even that would have been suspicious.

“I nearly trashed my relationship with Dayvhe over that, I knew it was a risk. You think I wanted you two breaking up as well?” you ask. Karkat nods, a little misty eyed, if this was a movie he’d be all over the romantic tensions flying around and dramatic twists.

You continue, covering everything about Roxxie and Dirkka that you know and why Dayvhe usually keeps sections of his life so hermetically sealed from others and why talking about it is probably really weird for him. You just happened to blunder into that part of his life the second time you met him.

“It was luck, I guess.” you say with a shrug.

“Fate.” Karkat counters, starry eyed. Fuck, this is a stupid conversation to have with a romantic. After a moment though the starstruck look fades from his face and he slouches forward despondent.

“So, to conclude your incredibly long lecture,” Karkat says.

“I can’t believe you’re lecturing me on talking too much.” you snipe but Karkat just backhands your arm and continues talking like you hadn’t even said anything.

“To conclude, Dayvhe’s probably furious at me for manipulating him into a situation even if I was trying to help him. Because he obviously gets enough of that everywhere else and I just went and-and-” Karkat trails off.

“I’m not furious.” Dayvhe’s voice comes down to you. You look up to see him leaning over the stair rail, his feet ever so slightly off the floor explaining why you heard no footsteps. He’s balancing perfectly, his control over himself really is fantastic for all that his control on other things isn’t great. He hops over the rail and slows his fall with a trail of red and lands between you and Karkat. He lands with his knees drawn up towards his chest and his arms loosely wrapped around them. He’s
wearing his shades again.

“It wasn’t cool, though.” Dayvhe accuses him.

“You were both just so miserable without each other, I had to do something! But, ugh, I obviously
fucked up the how of it.” Karkat admits.

“I’m not trying to make you feel bad, man, that’s not going to make me feel better is it?” Dayvhe
counters.

You shift back a little and watch the two of them talk things out, it’s clearly awkward but still
painfully sincere. It occurs to you that if you’re really staying with Dayvhe and not going off planet
then your future will likely be similar to this. You’ll be balancing your friendship with Karkat with
your moirallegiance with Dayvhe as he does the same for his relationships with both of you. You’re
all probably gonna fuck it up along the way but you’re feeling strangely optimistic about it.

By the time you’re all cool with each other again it’s way too late for you to go home unless you feel
like being extra crispy deep fried on the way so instead the three of you throw something together
from what you can find in his cold box and play racing games until Karkat tires of losing so much
that he tries to strangle you with the cord of the controller.

Just like last time Dayvhe sleeps downstairs with you. He’s basically velcroed to your side only
when you wake up it’s to Karkat stomping down the stairs in search of coffee.

“Holy shit, he’s still here.” Karkat remarks as he spies Dayvhe tucked under your chin.

You’d figured that Dayvhe was asleep until he lazily flips Karkat off.

When you go home he comes back with you, trusting you to fly him there. Walking through your
door he looks around in surprise.

“What?” you ask.

“Your place looks nice.” he notes and you catch the surprise in his tone.

“Yeah, well,” you say as you turn your back to him and walk into your nutrition block for a drink, “I
didn’t expect you to come back again and I know we weren’t together before but it still meant… I
knew you liked me then and it seemed like a shitty way to repay that by just ruining my life like it’d,
I don’t know, prove that I needed you. Me living in week old clothes with everything broken or
unusable wouldn’t bring you back.”

“And you kept the plant alive too.” Dayvhe says, touching the leaves.

“I promised I would.” you reply.

Dayvhe smiles at you and you glow inside to see it.

He’s around a lot after that and he stays with you more often than he doesn’t, sleeping in whichever
half of your coon he pleases. But the best thing to do is still to just leave things open to him rather
than trying to hold him in place. Sometimes he slips into your room in the middle of the day having
been gone for nights and sometimes you awake to him gone again. He always leaves you notes
when he leaves, which get added to your growing collection. And most times he’ll tell you where he
is, either outright or by messaging you something like ‘i just watched John scarf an entire soft serve
grubcream in one bite to prove bluebloods dont get thinkspoon freeze - spoilers they do’
So you’re not surprised when you had a shower in a Dayvhe-free hive to come out to find him in your deskchair as he looks at his palhusk. Shit like this is why you’ve started taking your clean clothes into the ablutionblock with you. You don’t want to walk around naked when your moirail is a ninja.

“Karkat’s a dumbass.” Dayvhe announces as you enter the room.

“Water also still wet, cholerbears also still shit in the woods. The world continues as normal.” you reply.

“So you know his secret plan to set us up?” Dayvhe continues.

“The one that worked?” you ask.

“Shut up. So he had a backup plan and then forgot to cancel it.” Dayvhe explains. You have no idea what that might be though.

“He’s having a party, but it’s near Rohhze’s and I don’t know how he swung that one but still. He was going to invite us both and- I don’t know. But he basically invited everyone he’s ever met. Shit’s crazy.” Dayvhe protests.

You try to consider the shape of Karkat’s plan here.

Invite matesprit to party
Invite best friend to party
????
PROFIT!!! Romance!!!

“Alright, but we are together though, so it just means that he’s invited us to a party.” you say, trying to be reasonable.

“I don’t want to go, it’s obviously hella nefarious.” Dayvhe pouts.

“Unless you think he’s planning something else I don’t see how it’s nefarious.” you say reasonably.

“I’m not going.” Dayvhe protests.

“Well, who is going?” you ask.

Dayvhe mutters under his breath and wakes your husktop up and opens your email, you want to note that he’s the only person you’d ever allow to do this, and clicks on some new email from Karkat that you hadn’t even seen yet. He opens a link that shows up a guest list with you and Dayvhe being the last people unconfirmed. Holy shit, out of your original group of twelve everyone but Gamzee is going and he’s dead so you suppose that’s allowed. Though that said Aradia has said that she’s going, though you wonder if it’s with Equius. But, shit, even Feferi and Eridan are going. But on top of them there’s Dayvhe’s little group of friends, Rohhze, John, Jayded, they’re all confirmed.

You lean over Dayvhe and confirm yourself as going. Dayvhe makes an offended little noise and you look down pointedly at him.

“You don’t have to go.” you tell him. But he should go and he knows it.

“If you’re worried about Eridan or Tavros…” you start to say but Dayvhe shakes his head.

“I can handle myself.” Dayvhe answers easily.
“I know. Just let me know if- oh. Unless that’s the problem.” you say as you pull back. You’ve not been keeping your relationship with Dayvhe a secret but you’ve also not actually told anyone. Partially because you don’t consider it anyone else’s business and partly because you know how private a person Dayvhe is. Not to mention the laundry list of people with a pale crush on him.

“If what’s the problem?” Dayvhe asks, looking up at you.

“Us. People knowing about us.” you say.

“What? No. I just don’t know if I can be around Vriska and not, like, stab her.” Dayvhe hisses, a furious little rattle building in his chest.

“Huh? What did Vriska do?” you ask, entirely baffled.

“YOU!” Dayvhe snaps and launches himself out of your seat and starts pacing back and forth. You definitely don’t remember that.

“Uh?” you say but Dayvhe is already off again.

“You told me what the price was for her helping you which was, and I’ve said it before, real goddamn stupid. You know Vriska’s deranged and you should never have agreed to let her work with you. And if you had you should have said the price had to be something firm! I mean, agreeing to help her change her well deserved reputation is so- so wooly! And what happens when she changes her mind and decides that you didn’t hold up your end of the deal? What’s she going to do to you?” Dayvhe rants as he paces.

You consider Dayvhe’s own past with mind control and carefully word your next question.

“You’re worried about me?” you ask.

“Of course I am you useless tool! And- and I know her mind control works on you. So she could- I should just preemptively off her.” Dayvhe hisses.

And now this has veered into the topic of murder. You step a little closer to him and catch his face in your hands.

“Calm down, Dayvhe. Shoosh.” you say softly and his outraged hiss muffles to a discontented growl.

“If she even goes near you I’ll-” Dayvhe says.

“You’ll give her the idea that I’ve been doing the opposite of what I agreed to, like I’ve been talking shit about her behind her back. That’s probably more dangerous.” you remind him and- there, all the range in him goes.

“I didn’t think that- fuck. Fine, I’m going with you. Just try and stay away from that psycho, please?” Dayvhe asks you, looking up at you with his dark eyes. He hardly wears his shades in your hive anymore and you halfway suspect it’s because he knows that you’re kind of weak to it.

“Sure I’ll hang out with the other definitely normal and stable people I know instead.” you promise and Dayvhe rolls his eyes at you but accepts that for the promise it actually is. You press your forehead to his for a breath or two, feeling him relax under your hands.

“I’ll go.” Dayvhe says again softly.
“You don’t have to.” you remind him.

“Yeah I do if you’re going. I’ll see you there, though. It’s Jayekh’s wriggling day the night after so I gotta go buy him a present the night before so I can just bounce straight over there.” he says.

“What’re you going to get him?” you ask and let go of him.

“Movies or movie stuff probably, he’s big into that.” Dayvhe says.

“Really? What kind?” you ask.

“Bad ones mostly.” Dayvhe laughs.

“Sounds like he’d get on with Karkat then.” you snicker and Dayvhe grins too.

“Now that’d be interesting.” he says.

Dayvhe replies to Karkat’s invitation that he’s going and you two let the subject drop. When the night of the party rolls around you fly yourself over there, landing outside Rohhze’s lavish hive. Karkat gave walking directions to get to where you need to go to. You follow them on your palmhusk down to the curve in the street and then off of the road towards some trees that give way to sand dunes and then the beach and ocean. It’s sandier here apparently than where you first met Dirkka which was mostly rocks and cliffs.

You don’t even have to follow the directions as when you get close to the trees you can hear Karkat’s loud voice and so you just follow that. He’s standing inside the grove of trees that are strung with twinkling lights. Tables are scattered here and there with candles on them and chairs all over the place. A large table at the end is bowing with food in covered dishes and bowls. Across the other side of the clearing are the dunes that you can just see a flash of the sea through. It certainly a fancy and classy party.

“Hey, Sollux you found us!” Nepeta calls out over Karkat’s rant about some tv show.

“Followed Karkat’s voice and here I am.” you answer quickly.

“Fuck back off where you came from then, nookmunch.” Karkat says without venom.

“Sollux!”

You look around to see Dayvhe abandoning a table with his music stuff on it to cross the clearing to you, walking right past Rohhze as he does so.

“I was starting to think you got lost or something.” he says.

“I’m just fashionably late.” you say.

“Only thing about you that is.” Dayvhe mocks you with a laugh.

“I’ll be crying into my coon for weeks now, hope you’re happy. But I’m not even late really, I’m about on time and loads of people aren’t here yet.” you point out.

“But Sollux, the party don’t start ’til you walk in.” Dayvhe says in flawless deadpan. You kind of hate that you’ve heard so much music from him being around you that you know the song he’s referencing.

“Well, I’m leaving. Bye Karkat, bye Nepeta.” you say and turn around to walk off. Only Dayvhe
laughs and snags his hand on one of your horns and pulls you back with a laugh, you can hear Nepeta making a quiet noise of excitement.

“Come on I want to show you my music.” he says and pulls you in the direction of his previous spot, not dragging you the whole way or anything he lets you go after just one careful pull in the right direction. You still follow him like iron to a magnet. Glancing over your shoulder you see Nepeta and Karkat exchanging surreptitious smiles and launching into whispered conversation that you suspect is less about the romantic lives of fictional people and instead you and Dayvhe.

Dayvhe starts showing you the songs that he’s got queued up, mixes that he’s made and all of that. All of that is in preparation for moment when he’s not at his turntables mixing things live, after all he wants to be at the party too not just doing work for it. It’s interesting, it really is, but you find your eyes drawn to Karkat and Nepeta again.

“And then after that track is finished playing my husktop will transform into a rocket and fly into the sky and blow up because you’re not listening.” he says flatly.

“I am listening. It’s just them, I think they’re talking about us.” you say, nodding in the direction of Karkat and Nepeta who are mid debate.

“I figured that out too.” Dayvhe replies unimpressed.

“Do you want me to tell them to cut it out?” you ask, watching as Nepeta gestures excitedly in your direction and talks rapidly.

Dayvhe takes his hands off of his husktop keys and sets them on the table with a sigh.

“Why are you- do you think I don’t want people to know about you? Like I’m embarrassed or something?” he challenges you. You look away from Nepeta to see that Dave looks actually annoyed.

“I didn’t think you were embarrassed. You’re just private, you don’t share everything with pretty much anyone. Besides your friends all have pale feelings for you so I get how it’d be easier not to say. I can keep a secret if it’s better for you.” you tell him.

“But you don’t want to, right?” he demands and you’re not sure what the right answer is.

“I-” you hesitate.

“It’s awkward, yeah. And I know about how they feel and that’s always been weird but they’re over it, I doubt they’re all even into me like that anymore or that they even ever were.” Dayvhe says oblivious to the fact that they absolutely were and still are.

“It’s hard to bring it up naturally and it’s awkward but I’m not hiding but you’re always thinking about me instead of ever doing what you want.” he says in exasperation.

“I’m... sorry?” you venture but it must be the wrong answer because Dayvhe groans and facepalms.

“Hey, hey Rohhze!” Dayvhe says looking up and spotting his friend. Rohhze raises an eyebrow but leaves her conversation with Vriska (when did she show up, you wonder) to walk over to you.

“Yes?” Rohhze asks.

“I’m-” Dayvhe hesitates, “I’m dating Sollux. He’s my moirail.”
“Oh.” Rohhze says, her eyebrows raising in surprise

“And I thought I should tell you.” Dayvhe adds.

“Me specifically?” Rohhze asks curiously and you watch at Dayvhe’s skin flushes darker and darker.

“Yes. Well, no. I mean yes cause we’re friends, like best friends, but not because only you needs to know. It’s just that I’m not hiding it because I’m actually super happy about the whole thing. And, uh, him.” Dayvhe adds in awkward bursts of speech.

“I think she gets it. God, Dayvhe you really don’t need to do this. Really.” you assure him.

Oh wait, shit, the worst thing to do with Dayvhe is to try to control him. Telling him he doesn’t have to do this means you basically dared him.

“No, no, I do. I could write it on my forehead and I’ve been pale for you since basically forever and if I could do the mirror writing thing I would. Oh god I’m going to have to do this with everyone, aren’t I?” Dayvhe says in dawning horror.

“You really don’t. I don’t care what people think. And if you really wanted to tell everyone you could just do it all at once with a- Dayvhe what are you-” you trail off as Dayvhe boosts himself up in the air by pushing off of your shoulders.

“With a memo or something!” you hiss up at him but Dayvhe has committed himself to his dumbassery so evidently he’s going to follow it through.

“ATTENTION FRIENDS, FANS, MEMBERS OF THE PRESS.” Dayvhe yells. You lock eyes with Rohhze and she communicates through a mere eyebrow raise that Dayvhe’s idiocy is your problem now.

“SOLLUX IS MY MOIRAIL NOW. WELL, uh, not now. For a while. I mean also now, we didn’t break up this second or anything. So he has been for some time and will be for, I don’t know, hopefully forever?” Dayvhe says, clearly starting to flounder.

“Why is this happening?” you whine. Also, forever? Holy shit you think you might need to lie down.

“WERE MAKING THIS HAPPEN BRO!” Dayvhe yells.

“I’m going to throw you in the sea.” you threaten and pull him down.

“Oh shit, that was a terrible idea. Why did you let me do that?” Dayvhe gasps as he lands.

“I specifically told you not to do that!” you hiss.

Across the clearing of baffled onlookers Karkat and Nepeta break out into semi confused applause with stifled laughing from Karkat. Distantly you hear John call out “Wait, seriously?”. Dayvhe is still looking like he’s going to spontaneously combust.

“Why Dayvhe I thought you were allergic to emotional sincerity.” Rohhze purrs.

“I am, I’m dying. Throw me a bitching corpse party.” Dayvhe whines.

Well… it’s not like everyone doesn’t know now so… you reach you and gently pap Dayvhe’s face. Just once, you are still in public after all.
“You’re not going to die.” you tell him.

“What, ever? You’re gonna fight death as a concept or something?” Dayvhe asks.

“Sounds like a plan.” you agree.

“Aw.” Dayvhe says, his embarrassment ceding ground to being genuinely swooned at your words or at least a little swooning is happening.

“So, show me about this stuff then.” you ask him, gesturing to his setup.

“I knew you weren’t listening!” Dayvhe accuses you without malice but touches the trackpad on his huskstop to wake it up. Before Dayvhe launches back into his explanation Rohhze reaches over and touches your arm. You look up and see that she’s smiling.

“Genuinely, congratulations. He seems very happy.” Rohhze says, more to you than Dayvhe. She’s accepting that you’re together, even that you’re good for him.

“Thanks. I- I want that.” you say and Rohhze smiles brightly and then walks off leaving you two alone again.

“Did she mean that I don’t make you happy?” Dayvhe wonders.

“You definitely don’t need to worry about that.” you tell him immediately. Dayvhe smiles again even though he quickly tries to smother it, he’s still around other people who are probably operating under the delusion that he’s cool.

Dayvhe takes you through his music and this time you do pay full attention, enough so that when he’s done you notice that just about everyone is here. Even Aradia’s ghost is floating near a very unsettled looking Vriska. You and Dayvhe end up going separate ways, Nepeta leaping on Dayvhe to quiz him and you very selfishly letting him throw himself on that grenade alone so you can get food. Because fuck, free food!

You consider going back to talk to Dayvhe when you have a plate of food but given that Jayded is standing next to him with her face in her hands as a confused looking John talks to Dayvhe you figure that you maybe won’t go over there.

“But… Sollux?” John asks skeptically. Alright, yeah, you’re not going over there but you will flip John off as you walk by.

“Yes, really.” Dayvhe says stiffly.

“But you’ve known him for five minutes!” John argues.

“I’ve actually talked to him a bunch, John, and he’s perfectly sweet and also right there.” Jayded says sharply and smacks him in the arm. The three of them look over at you and you take the chance to flip John off and walk over to Nepeta and Karkat.

“Eee! Congratulations! I’m so happy, my ship is canon! I knew you liked him so much!” Nepeta says gleefully and hugs you.

“Thanks Nep.” you say happily.

“They’re so disgustingly pitifully pale for each other, you really need to see them up close.” Karkat informs her and leans against your shoulder for the purpose of stealing food from your plate.
“I can’t wait!” Nepeta laughs.

There’s movement that catches your eye and you see Terezi and Vriska walking over to you. You keep your cool, you can do that. Though, as she passes Dayvhe it’s evident that he can’t. His claws are gouging dents into the can of drink in his hand and you know he’s staring right at Vriska as she sails past him.

“So it seems congratulations are in order.” Vriska says, flicking her hair over her shoulder.

“Glad to see someone finally got diamonds on that boy, and Karkat you two are what these days? Pitch? Flush?” Terezi asks, turning her head to Karkat a little.

“Both pretty much.” Karkat answers.

“Scandalous!” she cackles.

“Still, last I heard he wasn’t talking to you after what you did.” Vriska presses on, not one to slow an interrogation down for pleasantries.

“He wasn’t, then he changed his mind.” you say simply.

“I guess you partly have me to thank for that, huh? Did I tell you Terezi that me and Sollux are even now?” Vriska asks and slaps a hand on your shoulder. You manage to lift Dayvhe off of the ground before he can lunge for Vriska for the terrible crime of touching you. He might be fast but his psionics are nowhere near your strength and if you’ve got him he’s not going anywhere, but you still need to keep him quiet so you carefully buzz the slightest hint of psi over his cheeks.

“We’re not even, we’re never going to be even for what you did. But... but you did really help me out when I needed it. You didn’t try to stab me in the back either, you did what you said. So- so we’re good.” you tell her and it feels bitter to say it but you are. You don’t like her and you’ll never forgive her for killing Aradia and using you to do it. You don’t like her and you’ll never forgive her for killing Aradia and using you to do it but she came out to bat for you to save Dayvhe and didn’t fuck you over for it. You can refuse to forgive her for the terrible things that she’s done AND recognise that she helped you.

“See? We’re good, he said so himself.” Vriska says, taking her hand from your shoulder to gesture at all of you for emphasis. Behind her back you carefully set Dayvhe down and hope he gets the message about staying cool.

“I never thought I’d hear that.” Terezi says, sounding impressed.

“Me too.” Nepeta nods.

“Just like I told you, we’re aaaaaaaaall good. Let’s eat.” Vriska says, whisking Terezi away. You guess she’s doing it so that you can’t utter some detail that makes her seem less heroic or noble.

Dayvhe is by you in a flash, as if Vriska might have done something terrible in the half a second that she obscured his view of you. Seeing that you’re fine he twists to glare over his shoulder at Vriska as she walks off.

“Cut that out.” you tell him, tugging him closer by his shirt.

Dayvhe just complains under his breath and growls but allows himself to be at least somewhat soothed by your presence. You try to ignore the several pairs of eyes you can feel on you and remain
grateful that Karkat has pulled Nepeta off to a less close distance to eyeball you from.

“There, that was the big thing you didn’t want to happen and it’s fine.” you reason.

“After what she did you shouldn’t have to do anything for her, much less play nice. She should be grateful that you’re not dismantling her with your psionics, not getting you to tell Terezi about how you forgive her.” Dayvhe snarls thankfully quietly.

“I don’t forgive her, I told her that. But I needed her to help me destroy your lusus and protect you and she did that. I’m not going to go over to her hive and braid her hair but I’m also not going to murder her the moment a consequence free opportunity presents itself.” you tell him.

Dayvhe still looks… well, displeased is underselling it but at the very least you don’t think he’s about to go confront Vriska about anything.

“Don’t you have beats that need dropping?” you suggest and Dayvhe perks up a little.

“They won’t drop themselves. Well, actually they are because I set them up to but I should go slam dunk some in person, can’t keep my adoring fans waiting.” Dayvhe agrees with some more cheer than before. He leads you back to his music station and you settle yourself on a sand dune a little lower down from him and drink your drink as he does his thing.

“Hello Sollux.” Aradia says, appearing out of nowhere and making you choke on your drink a little.

“AA, I didn’t see you- I mean, it’s good to see you. Can’t remember the last time that I did in person without you being in a robot.” you choke out and she drifts down to sit next to you.

“Aside from when you killed Dayvhe’s lusus it has been an awfully long time.” she says and her hair shifts in a breeze that isn’t there, locks of it shifting over the scorched holes in the shoulder of her shirt. Your psionics did that, you’re the one who- no, don’t think about it. You feel the phantom sensation of her blood on your hands and so you float your drink in the air and rub your palms on your jeans to dispel the feeling.

“Hey, Aradia, right?” Dayvhe asks, appearing at your side and dropping down onto the sand by you. He threads the fingers of one of his hands through one of yours and runs the static of his psionics over your skin and the feeling goes.

“That’s me.” Aradia nods.

“I’ve never met a ghost before.” Dayvhe tells her.

“There are a lot of us.” she says and shrugs as if she doesn’t care, which is probably the case.

“Really?” Dayvhe says.

“Nepeta wishes that I was more upbeat and entertaining, if you like I can tell you a fun fact about ghosts.” Aradia says, looking over at Dayvhe.

You try to silently communicate with Dayvhe that ghost Aradia’s definition of ‘fun’ is wildly disproportionate to that of normal people. You need to work on your signals because Dayvhe is looking interested enough that Aradia continues.

“You are the opposite of most people.” she tells him.

“Oh?” Dayvhe says.
“Most people are responsible for the deaths of other people but don’t consider most of them to be because of them or to be their fault. The ghosts tell me whose fault it is, who killed them, who is the reason they died. Most people have more dead and less guilt.” Aradia says conversationally.

“Aradia…” you try to interrupt.

“You are backwards. You hold yourself responsible for the deaths of five grubs but none of their deaths were your fault and I could not find a single spirit who harboured any ill will to you at all. I checked you out when Sollux messaged me about you and I knew he was going to do something dumb.” Aradia explains.

Dayvhe is frozen, clearly in shock and probably horrified at her words.

“Dayvhe, don’t listen. She’s forgotten how interacting like a normal person-” you start, trying to defuse the situation.

“They don’t blame me? But… but I…” Dayvhe says, barely above a whisper.

“They don’t. You’re a nice boy Dayvhe, I’m glad you’re with Sollux he needs pity from someone with a good pusher.” Aradia says and Dayvhe beams.

Oh, God, your face is burning up with something between embarrassment and a fluttering rush of feelings. Who knows how dark your face must be right now. It’s not helping that Dayvhe has noticed and is laughing at you.

“Oh man, Aradia, you should absolutely tell me embarrassing and dorky things about Sollux and/or Karkat for- uh, the greater good!” Dayvhe laughs loudly.

“Or you could not!” you protest.

“The things I could tell you go on for some time.” Aradia smiles and… you’ve not really seen her ghost smile like that before. Suddenly you don’t really have the heart to stop her from talking, even as she tells Dayvhe about the time when you were younger where you accidentally soldered a necklace you were wearing that she had given you to a husktop part and got yourself stuck. You let them trade stories back and forth about you and Karkat both and add your own ones about him when you get the chance. It’s… it’s nice.

Feferi and Eridan arrive a while later, trampling over the dunes. By that point the conversation has moved away from Dayvhe’s quadrants cringeworthy history and into what it feels like for Aradia to be a ghost. She explains about her ability to see how some of how the future will play out which you’ve always thought was kind of a crock of shit but whatever. For reasons that escape you Dayvhe is more interested in her other ghostly powers, namely the spookier kind.

“But you can possess machines and not people?” Dayvhe asks excitedly, leaning on your bent leg as he talks to her.

“That’s right.” Aradia nods.

“But you can possess machines and not people?” Dayvhe asks excitedly, leaning on your bent leg as he talks to her.

“I wouldn’t do that just for fun but if his legs have a neural component into his actual thinkspoonge I could, perhaps. But I think Tavros’ legs and Vriska’s arm work off of muscle signals, not that it matters. I’d need something directly into the thinkspoonge and even then it’d be hard. Anyway, I don’t care to try people but a soulbot or even more complex computer systems are a good home for my soul.” Aradia says.
“You know you don’t have to keep going back into his bots.” you say, not for the first time.

“I won’t be anymore, it’s not meant to happen now. But I’ll still work with machines.” Aradia says cryptically. You’re about to investigate that when Eridan and Feferi make their appearance. Feferi slides down a dune and multiple people at the party rush over to see her.

Shit, it has been more than a little while since you’ve seen Feferi. Ever since that shit with Eridan blew up she’s been absent from your life. She’s still unfairly pretty. Your feelings for her were pretty red but there was a decent dash of pale in there too, though nothing in comparison to Dayvhe. You watch as she spins Nepeta around in a hug and then picks Karkat up in a squeeze that probably separated his vertebrae. You should talk to her, after all how many chances are you going to get to do that?

“Man, it is weird seeing that colour.” Dayvhe says under his breath and you suppose it must be for him, Roxxie’s the only heiress he’s seen before her you guess. As far as you know at least. Heiresses don’t tend to spend time around each other without trying to kill each other.

“You like her.” Aradia says, and she may as well have doused you with ice water for all it cools you off.

“What?” you say looking at Aradia.

“Feferi. You like her, you were flushed for her after I died. Maybe before even.” Aradia says, her voice flat.

“No, not when we were- and you can’t talk, you and Equius!” you choke out.

“It’s alright, I don’t care.” Aradia assures you.

“Same as always then.” you mutter. Aradia doesn’t care about anything and, you learned a while ago but keep having to relearn, she doesn’t care about you either.

A scream wrenches your attention away from you ex-matesprit. It’s loud and terrified and Dayvhe is already on his feet and armed, he’s not the only one either. It’s no one in your group which is some small mercy at least but it doesn’t solve the mystery of whose scream it was. Suddenly a terrified fishtroll bursts into the clearing of trees that you’re all in and freezes. Shouting and the sound of weapons on weapons clanging from behind him makes him jump and he clearly decides that whatever he’s running from is scarier than the rest of you. He sprints past you and up in the direction of the street. He’s not even out of sight when someone else rushes into sight, only this guy you know.

“Dirkka!” Dayvhe exclaims, lowering his sword.

Dirkka is standing there dripping wet, armed, and half of his shirt is drenched in purple. Needless to say he looks caught off guard to see Dayvhe at all.

Terror and screaming roll around in your brain. Death, a premonition of it. And here’s you surrounded by people you don’t want dead. Well, them as well as Vriska and Eridan. You don’t know the voice, or you don’t think so at least.

“Someone’s gonna die.” you gasp, trying not to be too loud to talk over screams only you can hear right now.

“Sol?” Dayvhe says worriedly.
“Dayvhe. What’re you doing-” Dirkka cuts himself off and jumps back into alertness when the sound of fighting rapidly comes closer. A troll hits the peak of the largest dune near you, she’s a fishtroll too but she’s an heiress and she’s hurt too. You don’t know this one but you know of her. She is Ezzran Gilter, her distinctive half shaved head and pink tipped hair is enough to tip you off. She basically controls the next city across from you and she’s a merciless bitch, clearly gunning for the Empress’ position you’d expected imperial drones to get an order that overrode hers and end her publicly. It’s happened before with tyrians that make too much of a show of ruling.

A figure leaps on top of her, feet landing either side of Ezzran’s torso. The woman raises her double ended trident high in the air, her whole form silhouetted in the pink moonlight. With a shout she brings her weapon down with a crunch, impaling the now ex-heiress. Holy shit.

“Oh look, we got a twoferone.” Roxxie says from atop the dune and slides down it, past the still bleeding body if Ezzran, towards Feferi who is hissing and has her own trident drawn.

“Dirkka?” Dayvhe asks and you turn to look at him to see that Dirkka isn’t looking at the murder on the dune at all, he’s facing Feferi and Eridan. Eridan hisses and raises his rifle to the slowly approaching Dirkka.

“Oh look, we got a twoferone.” Roxxie says from atop the dune and slides down it, past the still bleeding body if Ezzran, towards Feferi who is hissing and has her own trident drawn.

“Feferi’s one of the good ones, right? That’s why you like her, right?” Dayvhe asks hurriedly.

“I- yeah she’s good, why are you-?” you start but it’s too late, Dayvhe is already leaping into the action and landing between Feferi and Roxxie. You psionically grab Feferi’s hand as she reflexively goes to stab Dayvhe right in the back. Roxxie has murder glinting in her eyes and it’s clear more blood will be spilt here.

“Mom, no!” Davyhe shouts and Roxxie freezes as she seems to finally process him being there.

“Dayvheeeee! Water you doing here? Oh! You havin’ a party? Why’ve you got an heiress at your party?” Roxxie asks, that last part turning into a hiss.

“It’s not my party, it’s my friends. And- and they say Feferi’s good, Sollux says she’s good. You could talk to her instead of-” Dayvhe tries.

“Feferi… Feferi Peixes? Direct descendant of HER? No way, she’s gonna die.” Roxxie snarls.

“Unlikely!!” Feferi snaps at her.

You watch as Eridan’s attention drops from Dirkka for just a second to glance at Feferi and Roxxie and that’s all it takes for a flash of steel to separate the gun in Eridan’s hand and the hand itself from his body. Eridan screeches and doubles over his arm.

Shit, shit, this is bad. Dayvhe is trying to reason to Roxxie that Feferi is good but Dayvhe doesn’t know her enough to make the argument. But Roxxie is a mutant loving rebel, so what would she consider good?

“She hates the hemospectrum, right, Fef?” you shout out.

“Yeah, when I rule things are going to be different. That for one and for a second you’ll be dead.” Feferi hisses, jabbing her trident in Roxxie’s direction.

“What about mutants?” Dirkka asks, his sword lowering slightly.

“Fuck off, no coddamn way those gills are natural you- agh, you science project.” Eridan hisses from the ground.
“I don’t understand why anyone thinks it matters, they’re not hurting anyone. Why is that the wrong answer for you, huh?” Feferi snarls at her, challenging her to disagree. Roxxie just hisses back, her lip curled back showing all of her fangs.

Dirkka bolts past Eridan and gets right up in Roxxie’s space, wrapping his hand around her trident and setting the other on her face.

“Roxxie, listen to what she’s saying. She’s what you’ve been looking for, she’s on your side.” Dirkka says smoothly. Feferi moves slightly, whether to attack him or not you don’t know but Roxxie is already trying to retaliate even through Dirkka shoooshing her. This isn’t going to go anywhere when they’re both armed so you carefully pick Dayvhe up and pull him out of harm’s way and then pull the tridents away from both heiresses, holding them high up in the air.

“Roxxie come on. Are you- are you shore you want to do this?” Dirkka asks, sighing and grudgingly saying the pun. You watch Roxxie’s expression change into a startled laugh.

“Did you just-?” she giggles.

“Good, you’re listening. This one hates the hemospectrum and doesn’t want to kill mutants, maybe you should talk.” Dirkka says, his tone not leaving room for argument. Evidently this moirallegiance really does go both ways, it’s not just Roxxie stopping Dirkka being a lunatic. But you suppose it makes sense, nice or not Roxxie is still highblood, as high as it gets actually, so losing herself to anger isn’t unexpected.

“Are you really good? I’ve been looking for anyone else like me for forever and I’ve been wiping out any other heiresses that are terrible. Even if I don’t manage to make it to Empress myself I can at least make things better here and change the odds of some other beach being the next one up there to ruin people’s lives. Like her.” Roxxie says, jerking a thumb at the corpse atop the dune.

“She was awful. But what’s your plan, just challenge her yourself? You’ll never win.” Feferi argues.

“Well what’s your plan then?” Roxxie challenges her.

“Consolidate power here, that’s what I’ve been starting to do. Then when I have enough I take over Alternia bit by bit. Change things for people, teach people to be betta. If the trolls leaving Alternia are better things will change, bottom up not top down.” Feferi counters.

“She’ll just wipe you out when she realises what you’re doing, nix an entire generation of trolls.” Roxxie argues back.

“But what about both?” you interrupt and they both look up at you.

“Very on brand, Sollux.” Dayvhe groans.

“Shut up. I mean if Feferi was to cause problems down here, change things and you were up there taking out vital people and making it harder for the Empress to fuck Alternia over then she couldn’t stop her. Then you could eventually take the Empress down in a fair fight.” you suggest.

“I like those odds better.” Dirkka agrees.

Roxxie makes a thoughtful noise and you carefully lower their weapons back to the sand though neither of them moves to pick them up. The rest of the party has basically stopped, people are watching the heiresses with trepidation and confusion. The lowerbloods clearly concerned that this might go sour with a lot of casualties and the higher up ones looking on with political interest. Rohhze in particular is keenly tracking what’s going on.
Eridan for his part is curled around his cut wrist as Nepeta holds his detached hand. Eridan looks like he might throw up or pass out.

“It would have to be a new hand, Nepeta. Reattaching something that complicated is ludicrous.” Equius says and you can hear his quirk.

“Stop being such a weenie, Eridan. It’s just a hand.” Vriska snorts and pointedly shows off her metal arm to demonstrate.

“Yeah, I, uh, can’t help but feel you’re overreacting.” Tavros agrees, and as he’s half cybernetics you don’t blame him.

You return your attention to the heiresses who are talking to each other more quietly, still obviously prickly and suspicious but civil now for sure. Dayvhe looks up at you and mouths thank you at you. You point your finger to indicate a cautious Jayded, John and Rohhze coming up behind him.

“Dayvhe, who are these people? You know them?” Jayded asks.

“Uh. Well, that is… it’s complicated.” Dayvhe says hesitantly.

Dirkka watches this with mild interest and then hops up the dune to stand at your side, still overlooking Roxxie and Feferi’s political parlay.

“Thanks for that. If this plays out well it’ll be a huge win.” Dirkka says with a nod.

“And a girl I used to be friends with and still like doesn’t get forked through the chest which is always a plus.” you say flatly.

“Used to be friends with?” Dirkka asks, maybe worried about how good of a person Feferi really is if you’re not vouching for her so much.

“We nearly had a thing, then her supposed moirail that you just unhanded pitched a fit over it which ended that. That’s the short version.” you explain, cutting out a lot of dramatic bullshit but it’s the general cut of how that deal went.

“Oh. You’re welcome then.” Dirkka says, flashing you a grin that’s all fang and blink-and-miss-it fast. It’s a weirdly Dayvhe expression on him, you try not to find it endearing.

“I should go.” Aradia says from behind you and suddenly you realise that she was there that whole time. You look around at her and, as always, her expression is flat and emotionless. You were just talking about a girl you nearly dated flush in front of matesprit that you technically never broke up with (but what about Equius then?).

“Wait, AA, don’t go.” you plead.

“Don’t worry Sollux, I’m meant to go now. I’ll see you after a while.” Aradia says, blinking her white eyes at you. She puts her hand through your hair, literally through it, the tip of one finger ghosts through the larger horn on your right side.

“But…” you try to argue with her but she simply ignores you and flies off. Damnit, is that girl ever going to stop breaking your heart?

“Ouch.” Dirkka says, deadpan.

“Has anyone ever told you that you have a very punchable face?” you ask Dirkka, turning on him.
“Shockingly you are not the first to tell me this.” Dirkka replies, sounding not at all surprised.

Dayvhe glances back at you from the base of the dune with his friends who are quizzing him on why the hell he’s hanging around with near adults who are in the murder and dismemberment business and more importantly why he never told them. Why did he call that one heiress Mom? Yes, you did, Dayvhe, we all heard you. All that shit. You’re just glad that no one has latched onto the fact that neither you nor Karkat are incredibly surprised by any of this.

“I uh…” Dirkka trails off, looks in every direction but you and scratches his ear for a moment.

“I should, no, I want to apologise for being an ass to you. Dayvhe is someone lots of people like and I want him to be social and have a normal life but him being too close to people always seemed too dangerous with me, it was too much risk. I tried to keep you apart because even if your feelings were real and intense I couldn’t be sure they’d last and then you’d be too much of a threat.” Dirkka explains.

“Thank you for the filler recap voice over intro man, but I watched those episodes so can we skip to something different?” you snark at him.

Dirkka glares at you, or you assume he does behind his shades. Actually, you know that Dayvhe wears his shades both because he thinks they’re cool but also so that if his eyes go bloodshot people won’t know he’s a mutant like you did when you saw his eyes. Dirkka has nothing to hide, he’s just a dork.

“Fine. I was an ass but I actually kind of like you and respect your integrity, I know Hal tested you after all, and Dayvhe is clearly happy with you in his life. So. Sorry.” Dirkka says with a shrug. The kind Dayvhe does when he doesn’t care about what you think but very obviously does care a great deal.

“We’re cool, don’t worry about it.” you tell him.

“I actually don’t know that much about you outside of how you cheat to hack me, but I also know that you couldn’t do that without knowing your ass from your elbow in coding. I’d be interested to see how good you are when you’re not exploiting Roxxie’s loopholes.” you say, a peace offering and also genuine curiosity.

“Oh, I’m good. But I’m up for a little friendly competition.” Dirkka says and your skin prickles at the thought of having a friend that can actually code. Not that you are friends but you don’t intend on cutting ties with Dayvhe ever and you bet that Dayvhe is always going to be close to Dirkka so you’ll have contact with him one way or the other. May as well make it an interesting relationship, right?

“Hey Dirkka, we’re gonna bounce. Me and Feferi have swapped deets but I think we might have somethin here!” Roxxie announces, bounding over to you both.

“That’s great to hear.” Dirkka smiles at her, so obviously smitten. Not that you’re any better around Dayvhe.

“Dirkka, you been talking to Sollux here? Have you been a jerk again? Has he been a jerk, Sol? If he has let me know, okay?” Roxxie says, looking suspiciously at an offended Dirkka.

“Nah, we’re good. Probably gonna have a hack off at some point.” you tell her.

“Oh, I’d trash you both. Just ask Dayvhe who’s the best if you don’t believe me.” Roxxie brags.
On the subject of Dayvhe you look over to see him crouched on the ground by Eridan, holding his wrist aloft.

“Keep it above your heart, man. It’ll slow the bleeding. Here, give me that.” Dayvhe sighs and takes Eridan’s scarf and winds it around the end of the amputated limb. Eridan glubs pitifully and presses his face into Dayvhe’s side, sniffling loudly.

“Wow, right in front of his moirail too.” you sigh.

“That doesn’t bother you.” Dirkka’s not asking, he’s observing.

“That Eridan’s a shitty moirail because he just wants all of Fef to himself? Yeah, a little I guess but it’s not my problem.” you say, looking back to Dirkka.

“I didn’t mean him, I- hey Dayvhe.” Dirkka says and you jump when you find that Dayvhe is suddenly right by you.

“Hey. Everything cool here?” Dayvhe asks, looking between you and his surrogate lusii.

“What’s with all the suspicion? It’s like the two of you don’t trust me to interact with another troll for two goddamned minutes.” Dirkka protests.

Dayvhe and Roxxie say nothing. They very loudly and pointedly say nothing.

“I know I walked into that one but fuck you both.” Dirkka groans.

“The only thing you should be doing is fucking off.” Karkat loudly announces, wading into the situation with, presumably, no context for what’s going on.

“That doesn’t even properly follow from what he said, dude.” Dayvhe points out.

“Fuck you too then.” Karkat barks at him. Dayvhe smirks and does something with his eyebrows and general facial expression in Karkat’s direction that’s pretty much obscene. Dirkka valiantly manages not to laugh, Roxxie however is not so restrained.

“Alright, well, you have fun with that. Remember Jaykeh’s thing tomorrow, ok?” Dirkka reminds him.

“Actually can I catch a ride with you now? Usually when a party gets to the dismemberment and nearby corpse stages I bounce.” Dayvhe says and, yeah, there is a dead heiress over there and Eridan is currently being carted off by Equius with Feferi begrudgingly following behind. He’ll get a new hand just fine, Equius has done bigger jobs before.

“Sure, if you really wanna go.” Roxxie agrees. Dayvhe nods and turns back to look at Karkat. He catches Karkat’s face in his hands and pulls him in for a kiss than has considerably more bite in it than could be considered flush but it does achieve the miraculous feat of rendering Karkat silent. With your best friend mentally incapacitated Dayvhe walks the few steps over to you and gently bumps into your side.

“See you soon, yeah?” he offers quietly.

“My hive is your hive.” you tell him truthfully.

“You’re the best, later.” Dayvhe says and quickly kisses you on the cheek before talking off with Roxxie and Dirkka, only pausing to shout back ‘PEACE OUT’ at your highly confused mutual
friends.

“Hey, KK, wanna ditch your party and kill time in an old school arcade?” you suggest.

“Before people have eight million questions for us? Fuck yes, let’s go.” Karkat says hurriedly and pulls you off back in the direction of town.

You have a feeling it’s going to be a good night.
I won’t let you down - OkGo

“But maybe all you need is someone to trust
Maybe all you need is someone
Maybe all you need is someone to trust
Maybe all you need is someone
And I won’t let you down, no I won’t let you down
I won’t let you down, my love
I won’t let you down, no I won’t let you down
I won’t let you down, my love”
‘I won’t let you down’ - OkGo

You’re not really an unbiased judge when it comes to Dayvhe. You’re not unbiased at all, in fact. But you think that he’s great, he’s the best actually and he deserves the best. Sadly for him what he has is you which is absolutely not the best but the least you can do is show your appreciation for him. Your moirolliance with him is still relatively new and you want to give him something. Nothing crazy big just a sign that you care for him and want him to have nice things, a gift.

It’s a nice idea in theory but in practice it’s proving unreasonably hard. You find some nice white diamond candies in one shop but you’re not asking him out with them and it’s nowhere near Pale Moon Night, or as you and Karkat have bitterly called it before ‘Moirail-less awareness night’. The thought that this year you could well have a moirail to shower with affection is nice but it doesn’t help you now. As far as you know he’s not especially into sweets so it seems too impersonal a gift to get.

You dip into a clothing store and ignore the little bot that’ll stitch or print a troll’s sign onto anything you buy, but nothing that you can see there especially screams Dayvhe. There’s not even anything outrageously trashy that you think he might love ironically so you pass that by. You suppose that you could custom order something from Kanaya but then that seems like such a cop out, ‘here’s something I used someone else’s skill to get you’ so weak.

You try your local video game store and this one carries enough rare collectible stuff and unusual games that it’s actually manned by a troll and not a bot of some kind. There’s plenty of classic games you’d like to get him into and it might be nice to share a passion of yours with him by giving him one of your favourite games. Pretty much all of those are console or husktop games and you don’t know if he has a console at Roxxie’s place but you do know he mostly lives out of his sylladex so he likely wouldn’t have any use for it. Sure he could play it at yours but then it’s just you buying a double of something you already have to secure his time with you, it’s selfish and stupid.

You dip into a music store and this too is run by a person, a hipster looking limeblood drinking coffee at the cash desk. It’s kind of wild to see one in person like that but you’re not here to stare. You pass all the physical instruments on the wall and aside from a curious flick through you leave the records alone too. At the back to the right they have more of the tech that you’ve seen Dayvhe using before. Your knowledge of tech here is… patchy. That is to say you could probably troubleshoot basic problems with these things and get anything here plugged and and working but getting the nuance of what they’re for other than ‘this stores music samples’ and ‘that applies effects to things’ you’re lost. Which of these are good ones and what is better than what Dayvhe has already? You’re a little more at home with speakers but not much more.

It’s hard not to feel the judgemental eyes of the guy running the shop and when you turn around to
look at him he’s staring at you just like you knew he would be. He heaves a sigh and strolls over to you.

“Can I help you?” he sighs, like even speaking to you is a chore.

“I- uh… I’m trying to buy a gift.” you admit.

“But you don’t know anything about this stuff, huh?” the guy scoffs.

“Get good business mocking potential customers, fuckface?” you snap at him.

“Music is just one of those things the gifted among us have to just feel. Besides, if you have to ask, you’ll never know. Needless to say, you don’t know and I don’t need to make money by selling to anyone but the best.” the guy says with a sneer.

The guy suddenly brightens and smiles, showing all of his fangs as he looks over your shoulder.

“Speaking of worthy customers, hello!” he chirps.

You turn around to see Dayvhe walking towards you both with his hands in his hoodie pocket.

“Hey there.” Dayvhe greets, his voice all deep and rumbling in a way it usually isn’t.

“My goodness, your voice! What happened?” the shopkeeper asks, entirely ignoring you now in favour of Dayvhe. You try to back away from the obviously Dayvhe related equipment nearby. Maybe he’ll believe that you just happened to be in here for no reason.

“Ah, I think I’m coming down with something. I just wanted to check to see if you had my stuff before I headed out to get some sleep.” Dayvhe answers, his voice all scratchy.

“How long have you been sick, you don’t sound like you should even be out.” you say in concern.

The guy running the shop looks at you in outrage.

“Where do you get off butting in on a private conversation between me and my dear friend Dayvhe here, huh? You know nothing about music and clearly nothing at all about manners! Get out of my shop and don’t come back!” the guy hisses at you.

“Ah, you know what? Forget about the cables.” Dayvhe says with a shrug.


“Nah, I don’t shop in places my moirail is banned from.” Dayvhe says casually and reaches past him to pull you over by the wrist.

“M-moirail? You have a moirail and it’s him?” the guy splutters and because you’re petty you tuck yourself against Dayvhe’s side and can’t resist looking smug as you do. That lasts until your face brushes against Dayvhe’s and you catch just how warm he’s running. Concerned, you touch his forehead to feel that yeah he really is sick.

“Oh, we need to get you back to mine. You’re really not doing good.” you tell Dayvhe, no longer caring about acting blatant about being Dayvhe’s moirail when it’s so clear what that guy wants. Everyone really does have a crush on him it seems.

“I did say I was on my way, I just happened to look in here and see you.” Dayvhe defends himself.
“Right, well now we’re going.” you inform him and steer him out of the shop and into the street.

“What were you doing in there anyway? Are you thinking of learning to play something?” Dayvhe asks curiously as you lead him along. Oh fuck, you don’t want to admit how much you were failing to buy him something.

“Doesn’t matter, how long have you been sick?” you ask instead.

“Hashtag: woke up like this.” Dayvhe answers you with a snicker.

“Well it’s coming on fast then because you have a fever.” you inform him and feel his forehead again to be sure.

“I have a little bit of a temperature.” he corrects you, baton your hand away.

“Whatever makes you feel better. Come on, we’re flying.” you tell him. You turn around and hitch him closer to you until he takes the hint and wraps his arms around your shoulders and you can take off. You don’t know if it’s the change in temperature from not being on the ground or general layer of city smoggyness, maybe it’s just that he’s sick but either way he ends up coughing more or less right in your face before he can duck his face into your shirt.

“It’s probably a sign that you pity me a lot if I can basically cough germs right in your face and you still like me.” he says through your shirt with a touch of hopefulness.

“Yeah, I guess. And I also guess that whatever you’ve got I’m probably going to get now too.” you grumble as you fly closer to your building. He didn’t mean to obviously but still, gross.

“We share everything!” Dayvhe giggles into your shirt. Hm, he sounds a little delirious.

You take him through the window and drop him onto your loungeplank and take a chance to look him over properly. He looks a little bad to be honest, he’s kind of clammy and his hair is sticking to him a little. His skin looks a little too pale except for where his cheeks are all dark and when you pull his glasses off his eyes are even a little bloodshot.

“Am I ready for my closeup?” Dayvhe asks and ruins it by coughing on the last bit, although at least into his hand this time.

“You’re kind of a hot mess right now.” you tell him and head off to get him something to drink. You should probably also get him food and some blankets or something. See, you don’t know enough about music to buy him a good present like that but looking after your moirail you can do.

Dayvhe takes to being fussed over pretty well, maybe too well. You know him well enough to know that he’s playing up how sick he is when it comes to choosing between a movie you want to watch and one he wants to watch. But him nearly falling on his ass when he gets up to go to sleep is certainly not something he’s playing up.

“Ugh, I need to shower but I don’t want to crack my pan open doing it.” Dayvhe whines, he’s as unsteady as a baby antlerbeast right now.

“You can shower and I can just… stay.” you offer.

Is that weird? It’s not- look, it’s not like you’re red for him. You’re not desperate to see him without his clothes on, besides you see him in just his boxers when he sleeps anyway. But right now if you want him to not slip and hurt himself you have to be there, he needs you. That’s plenty pale. This kind of thing varies from relationship to relationship. It’s not like vulnerability isn’t a big thing in pale
relationships and sure you’re not big into porn of any stripe but you do live on the internet and there’s no shortage of pale kinks out there. Making sure your moirail doesn’t bust his head open in the shower doesn’t even qualify. But, you know, maybe Dayvhe doesn’t-

“Great, then I can feel less UGH all over.” Dayvhe says with a grimace, entirely unaware of your thoughts.

You follow him to your ablution block and steer him away from pinballing off of your walls and furniture on the way, his balance is fucked so you’re guessing that as well as messing with his throat this illness is affecting his ears and therefore his balance.

“I’m so cold.” Dayvhe complains as you get the water going.

“You’re so not.” you reply, steading him with a hand on his side as he pulls his shirt off. He’s hotter than rust by far now.

You’re more focused on stopping Dayvhe swaying and then slipping when he gets in and under the water than on really registering the lack of clothes.

“Does this not go hotter?” Dayvhe whines.

“Nope.” you tell him as you try to psionically pick up the bag of clothes of Dayvhe’s that have migrated here over time. Every so often you’ll offer to throw his stuff in the laundry with yours and then it just ends up staying here. It’s hard to pick it up when you can’t see it while also paying attention to Dayvhe’s balance but you manage. At one point when you’re not looking he manages to knock everything off of the shelf in your shower, though he swears blind he never touched any of it.

Coaxing Dayvhe out of the shower actually proves harder but you know he shouldn’t stay like that for too long. He’s drying his hair, leant over the sink to peer in the mirror as you take your towel and idly dry off his shoulders for him. You stop when you get to his back. His grey skin is normally criss crossed with scars and other marks from Cal but now there’s something else altering its appearance. His back is dotted here and there with bright, mutant red, blotches. It’s like an insect bite or something. They’re all down his back, not hundreds but a dozen or so.

“Dayvhe stand up.” you urge him and turn him around. His chest is speckled with them too and he seems to notice just what you’re looking at.

“The fuck?” he rasps and scratches at one. You smack his hand away.

“It’s some kind of rash, I think. No scratching.” you insist.

You dump him into one side of your coon and then force him to drink some water. Because he’s cold you relent and get in the same side with him, if he’s going to get you sick you’ve probably already got it and if you haven’t you ought to look after him.

It’s funny how you can be used to something. You’ve technically never been completely in the dark because your eyes glow and you’ve probably never seen the true colours of anything because to you everything that you look at is probably slightly illuminated with red or blue. But that said you’re used to the balance of colours and it’s too red in here.

Looking around you try to find the source of the light only to see that it’s Dayvhe. His eyes are glowing ever so faintly red, the colour of his psionics, and every so often there’s a little crackle of psi in the air near him.

“What’s with the lightshow?” you ask, petting sopor into his hair and over his neck and shoulders
where all the red marks are.

“Dunno, my pan aches something fierce.” he whines.

It takes a while to soothe him into sleep but the worry keeps you awake for a while longer after that.

When you wake up you’re pretty sure that something must have run you over in your sleep. Your head is thrumming like a rung bell and you’re pretty sure you’re two minutes away from hypothermia you’re so cold. You open your mouth to call out to Dayvhe who has already got up but all you manage to do is break out into a coughing fit.

“Sol?” he says, peering around the door at you. His voice is still rumbly but at least he can talk.

“Oh, oh no you’re really not well.” he mumbles and rushes to you. He cradles your face in his palms and you purr weakly at the feeling of it, he’s so warm.

“Just stay calm.” Dayvhe urges you and wipes one hand off on his jeans. He takes hold of his palmhusk and actually calls someone, jamming the device between his ear and shoulder as he holds your face again.

“Yeah, Kar, hey I have a- yes I know but my hands are occupied ok. NO NOT LIKE THAT. Remember how you said Sollux’s eyes were different when he’s sick? Yeah like real sick. Can you tell me what that looks like?” Dayvhe says and leans in to peer closely at you, almost sniffnode to sniffnode.

“No it’s worse than that. I can see pupil AND iris in both, the glow is really wrong. That’d be-alright yeah I mean that’d be great but I got him sick I don’t want you to- well, thanks, that tells me nothing at all. Hello? Hello? That fucker hung up on me!” Dayvhe complains and drops his palmhusk to the floor.

“Come on, you gotta shower. How the turn tables, huh?” Dayvhe jokes and pulls you out of your coon all slimy and dripping sopor.

“I’m dying.” you whine as Dayvhe drops your sopor drenched boxers to the floor.

“You’re not dying.” he snorts and trollhandles you into the glass box that is your trap. There’s still stuff on the floor but you just stand there shuddering under what feels like cold water but you’re pretty sure is hot water from the steam around you.

“My head feels like it’s gonna…” you mumble and before you can finish your sentence there’s a snap of blue light and you feel like sneezing without having sneezed. What actually happens is one of the glass walls explodes outwards fast and hard enough that a shard the length of your arm embeds itself into the far wall.

“THE FUCK WAS THAT?!” Dayvhe yelps and drags you out. He wraps you in a towel and you stand there shivering in your block.

“Did you do that?” he asks, turning on you.

“I didn’t do anything. It’s like I sneezed.” you say roughly and cough a little.

“You don’t have any of the marks like I do.” Dayvhe says, pulling your towel back to look at your chest and walking around to peer at your back.

“Maybe… maybe not everyone…” you mumble and press your hand to your head. GOD it feels like
it’s going to burst. There’s that not a sneeze thing again which gives you momentary relief until your clothes explode out of your wardrobe, ripping the door off and then raining down everywhere.

“Oh this is bad. Let’s… let’s get you away from your very precious husktop, servers and bees. Come on, clothes are here and let’s go.” Dayvhe says, scrambling to get clothes up off of the floor and then herding you into the rest of the living area of your hive.

You have to sit down on the loungeplank to dress because your head’s still spinning.

“Oh shit, there’s got to be a way to fix this. Maybe try consciously using your psionics, maybe that’ll stop them firing off randomly!” Dayvhe suggests, climbing up onto the loungeplank with you. There’s a shatter as something in your nutritionblock bounces off of the ceiling.

You try to focus on lifting the chair by the dining table, or rather the table where your junk routinely gets dumped. It bounces about on the floor a little but it won’t lift up at all.

“I… I can’t.” you tell him with mounting horror. You could do that sort of thing as a grub so to not be able to do it now is terrifying.

“What? Just pick it up or something, nothing fancy.” Dayvhe says, leaning over with an offer of a plastic cup of water in his hand.

“I CAN’T.” you wail and even hold out a hand to try to encourage the furniture to rise but it just shakes a bit.

Dayvhe sensibly picks up on your distress and puts the drink to the side and focuses on shooshing you calm, but it’s hard to stay calm when a power you’ve had your whole life is suddenly gone. The more alarmed you get the harder it is to breathe which just sets you off coughing more and now more and more things are exploding.

“The plant! Stay there!” Dayvhe urges you and then comes back and pushes you under the table and runs off again. It’s a good idea to have some protection with stuff flying everywhere. He returns a few minutes later with a mug in his hand.

“Your psionics are misfiring, I think mine are too but it’s nothing compared to this. You could hurt yourself, if this gets worse you could kill someone. I know you don’t want that so you gotta drink this, man.” Dayvhe insists, pushing the mug into your hand.

Fuck it, your throat hurts anyway so who cares if it’s hot. You raise the mug to your lips and down the contents in three or four large gulps. Ugh, there’s stuff in it, bits of something floating in the water and the whole thing tastes like grass.

“Wow you’re just going to drink unknown substances that I give you without asking what that’s- alright, gonna flip out on that trust later but hopefully it’ll work. The plant’s not mature yet so it might not be that strong but anything to tone this down is good, right?” Dayvhe says, taking the empty mug from you.

“What the fuck do we have?” Dayvhe asks. The air around him crackles a little and distantly a door blows off of one of your cupboards. You don’t have an answer for him and after a few minutes Dayvhe sneaks out from under the table and flips your loungeplank over. He pulls you into the padded triangular hollow under it and you both hide from the danger of your own thinkspones.

Over time it subsides a little as the hastily improvised tea kicks in, but obviously it’s not doing entirely the job it should be because you can still hear things being dragged around out there.
Your front door clicks open and at first your hazy mind thinks that maybe one of your neighbours has come to complain. The door latches again and there’s a pause, you’re too woozy to open your eyes or even move.

“What the fresh fucking hell happened here?!” Karkat demands loudly and Dayvhe pushes his way out.

“Karkat! You shouldn’t be here, I don’t want to get you sick too!” Dayvhe says.

“That’s why I have these. But besides it’s clearly some sort of psionic based illness, there’s a bunch of them and I’m guessing you didn’t do this and Sollux did.” Karkat says, his voice vaguely muffled.

“I don’t know what’s going on, it was crazy before I gave him some of that plant. You should see the glass in his shower, it’s this deep in the wall! I’m just getting this snap, crackle, hoofbeastshit but he-” Dayvhe starts.

“Is the most high powered psionic that he or probably anyone else knows. Let me see him so I can work out what you two disease bags have caught this time, you sorry excuses for trolls.” Karkat scoffs.

Dayvhe flips the loungeplank and you grimace at the brightness. You’re panting for air, having gone from feeling far too cold to far too hot. You blearily look up at Karkat, you don’t have your glasses on so he’s more of a Karkat shape but as he crouches down to look at you he comes into focus more. He is… wearing some sort of scarf around his face over his nose and mouth and appears to have rubber washing up gloves on his hands.

“Wow you look like shit.” he says and whistles almost as if he’s impressed, you have questions about his appearance too but talking is hard so you just put your middle finger vaguely in the direction of his face.

“Alright, give me your symptoms. I’m going to try narrowing this down.” Karkat says, sitting down by you. He then seems to realise that he can’t operate his palmhusk with the gloves on and takes them off.

“Fever but mine’s mostly broken now, my whole head hurts, everything-ache really. Some dizziness, my throat hurts and my voice is fucked, his too. And this whole involuntary psionics thing too.” Dayvhe lists off.

“That narrows it down a little but I’ve seen Sollux have less control of his psi when he’s sick anyway, this could just be a bad flu.” Karkat argues.

“Oh! I have this too!” Dayvhe says and you hear a rustle of fabric, when you tip your head to look you can see pale grey skin on show.

“That narrows it down a little but I’ve seen Sollux have less control of his psi when he’s sick anyway, this could just be a bad flu.” Karkat argues.

“I… think that narrows it down to just one thing let me check.” Karkat says worriedly and you hear his claws tapping on the screen of his palmhusk.

“You didn’t get your vaccinations, right? I didn’t because they test your blood and, well…” Karkat trails off.

“Yeah, mutuant. Seemed like a good way to get culled.” Dayvhe agrees.

“Sollux, you got yours, right?” Karkat asks, tapping you on the shoulder.

You grimace and focus on the question. Wigglerhood vaccinations?
“I got some. The ones you don’t need needles for. I’m… I’m allergic to something in the needle ones. Dad said I stopped breathing when they did one.” you recount.

“Fucking- great. You caught PsiPox and gave it to Sollux who by sheer chance wasn’t vaccinated for it because it looks like that vaccination only happens by needle.” Karkat groans. He takes his scarf/mask off and dumps it on the floor by your head.

“I thought no one got that anymore. I don’t even know anything about it.” Dayvhe says, his voice quiet.

“No one gets it anymore because people are vaccinated, except for people who dodge it like you and me and people who can’t be vaccinated like him. Besides, in non-psionics like me there’s no symptoms, people like me are carriers and we can get loads of people sick. Look, I’ll read it out.” Karkat says and lifts his palmhusk up a little.

“PsiPox or blah blah scientific name is a serious communicable disease, communicable by all trolls but symptomatic only in psionic capable trolls. Mostly eradicated now reported numbers are- ok, skip that part. PsiPox presents itself with fever, sweating, body aches, head pains of both aching and stabbing kinds, loss of psionic control, inner ear infection and the characteristic pox typically presenting on the back and chest. The disease feeds off of the psionic energy of the patient, as such infection severity scales with psionic power.” Karkat reads.

“Oh shit.” Dayvhe says quietly.

There’s a pause and from where your head is almost touching his folded legs you can see a troubled expression cross Karkat’s face.

“What?” Dayvhe prompts.

“I- treatment typically involves a week’s rest and isolation in hive from other trolls with or without psionics. However… however more severe infections to more powerful psionics may require antiviral medication to reduce the risk of complications.” Karkat says.

He stops talking and his voice had been heading in a tone that you really don’t like.

“What complications?” Dayvhe presses. You also want to know what complications.

“Complications include, chest infections, pneumonia, infection of the cerebrospinal fluid and… and void rot. In the summer of- ugh whatever- an entire generation of first class psionics was lost to void rot developing from PsiPox which institutionalised the mandatory PsiPox vaccination programme.” Karkat says weakly.

Void Rot. You could get Void Rot. Dayvhe is making Karkat read that article for it out now in case that has a cure but you and every other decently powered psionic has stared at that page in fear before. There’s no cure for it, none at all and it’s not like they haven’t tried. The whole psionic generation part of your system essentially registers the rest of your body as a foreign invader and tries to defend itself. It drains your body of its energy. You go blind and then in an effort to cut off nonvital parts to conserve energy you lose your eyes themselves and your whole system shuts down part by part. There’s no cure and no physical way to consume enough energy to stay alive, they’ve tried keeping people on drips of all sorts of things and nothing works. You can leech off of someone else’s psionics but that only prolongs the inevitable and you doubt that there’s anyone else out there with psionics enough for themselves and for you. Regardless of how quick you go, Void Rot is 100% fatal. From the sounds of things the higher powered psionic you are the worse your odds are of contracting it. You could die.
“We need to get him to a docterrorist right now.” Dayvhe insists, pulling you up. He pushes you into Karkat’s arms and rushes off, returning with your glasses. He tries to grab you back from Karkat but Karkat pushes his hands away.

“Correction: I need to get him to a docterrorist right now. You’re obviously sick with the same thing and they’ll know how he could catch it, they won’t know how you did. Then they’ll blood test you and you’re dead meat. I’ll go, I’m not sick so they won’t test me.” Karkat says firmly.

“But-” Dayvhe protests, reaching for you.

“Shoosh.” you say with a cough and pat his face.

Karkat pulls you out. You feel horrible leaving Dayvhe behind but Karkat’s logic is sound. Thankfully the nearest clinic is within walking distance even for someone as sick as you. Karkat all but kicks the door down and announces that he has a mouth full of yelling, an armful of psionic and diagnosis of PsiPox so everyone had better just get the fuck out of his way.

Karkat even manages to bluster his way past the medibot and into a room with an actual adult docterrorist, she’s a jadeblood. You suppose that makes sense, their job is to ensure the future of your species, protecting people who will become adults falls under that you guess. Besides an unusual diagnosis like this is probably interesting for her. She bids you to hop up onto the examination table and takes her time examining your eyes, your tongue, feeling at your throat. She listens to your bloodpusher and then to the wheezing way that you’re breathing.

“You did miss the vaccination, it was a very small risk but still…” she hums thoughtfully as she looks over your medical history. You cough into your fist as you listen to her talk. When you straighten up she sticks a sticky pad on each temple.

“Open up please and put your tongue just here.” she says and opens her own mouth to demonstrate, the tip of her tongue just about touching the back of her bottom teeth. You do as she asks, though you’ve no idea what’s happening. Perhaps she wants to see down your throat but then why the things on your head?

“Yes just like- oh, your tongue is split too, how interesting. This will hold your tongue down, try not to move. She jams the thing between your teeth and pushes at your jaw so you bite down on it, whatever it is holds your tongue down.

“Uh, what is that going to do exactly?” Karkat asks sensibly as unlike you he doesn’t have medical things in his mouth.

“Tests his psionics.” she says calmly and flicks some switches.

Oh shit, you don’t want your psionics tested at all. Dayvhe made you tea but he was right, the plant is still growing and it’s supposed to be the adult ones that really have the full effect. It certainly helped you but you don’t know if it’s enough.

There’s a prod within your thinkspoon, a polite tap as it were but you don’t want to give your psionics over to this. The docterrorist sighs and flicks a switch. You’re flung back on the bed, your back arching up into an almost C shape and if not for whatever’s in your mouth you’d either have teeth like Equius right now or be missing part of your tongue. It’s short but agonising. When your own brain stops electrocuting you at her command you drop back down onto the bed and roll over to paw the stuff out of your mouth. You gag but consider it a victory that you don’t throw up on yourself or anywhere else for that matter.
Karkat pulls you upright, slipping one hand behind your back. He supports you as you get your balance back and you feel when his sickle presses against your ribs. He’s not threatening you but rather using you to hide the weapon, if this goes south he’s prepared to fight her. An adult jadeblood with you barely any use at all. It’s dumb as fuck but, ugh, good Karkat. Best friend.

“Interesting… something is messing with the results some, probably the pox itself but even factoring that in you’re at least a second class psionic. Very sought after. No doubt you have a promising career ahead of you in the empire,” the jadeblood says.

“Not if he gets void rot though.” Karkat points out.

“Oh that’s not likely. I’ll give him antivirals and a few other things. But void rot always sets in with PsiPox before the pox part of it does and he already has that rash.” she comments, typing away at her desk.


“Here, I saw them when I listened to your bloodpusher.” she says and taps at her own chest.

You pull the front of your shirt down a little and, yeah, you’re starting to get covered in yellow blotches. You’re not going to die after all.

“Here, take this down to the counter. The antivirals twice a day before food, the others just follow the instructions on the box. Both of you and anyone else you’ve had any real contact with should stay indoors, you don’t know how many other people without vaccinations you might run into.” she explains.

You’re too busy coughing but Karkat reaches out and takes the prescription, he’s since hid his weapon away now so he’s fine to do that. He scowls and reads over the list of medications.

“How long do we need to be isolated?” Karkat asks.

“A week, you can still order from the grocer drones but there’s worse things to do than spend a week with your moirail, right?” she says with a smile.

Yeah, your moirail and Karkat. Wait, how did she know about Dayvhe?

“He’s not my moirail!” Karkat chokes out. Oh, wait she meant that.

“He’s not!” you agree loudly.

“Mmm-hm, sure. Enjoy your week!” the jadeblood smiles sharply and ushers you both out.

“So,” you say as you’re shoved into the hallway with Karkat, “we both agree that never happened.”

“Agreed.” Karkat nods sharply.

“You mean ‘what never happened? I’ve already forgotten’” you point out.

“Stop being smug and let your moirail know you’re not going to get void rot and die, I’ll cash your prescription.” Karkat says and walks off. You trail behind him with a sniffle and eye the other trolls in the waiting room. Wow that one guy is bleeding out.

“You don’t have to pay for that.” you tell Karkat as you get your palmhusk out.

“It’s fine. You bought pizza last movie night and it was my diseasebag kismesis that got you sick.”
Karkat shrugs.

“Ugh, don’t hatefuck on my furniture this week please? It’s trashed enough already.” you whine.

“I have SOME class you know. Besides you made a pile in my block the first time you got with Dayvhe so don’t you get up on your high hoofbeast.” Karkat reminds you.

“Putting stuff in a pile doesn’t stain, Karkat.” you point out. Whatever, you’re messaging Dayvhe.

[twinArmageddons began trolling turntechGodhead]
TA: gue22 who ha2 two thumb2 and ii2n't dyiing!
TG: please be you please be you
TA: iit ii22222222 me. ii 2tiill feel liike hot 2hiit and not iin the good way and we're al2o quarantiined for a week, but apparently void only 2et2 iin before you get the fun randomly generated dot the dot 2kiin.
TG: BUT YOU’NT HAVE THOSE!
TA: ii do now. they mu2t have ju2t come up.
TG: oh ok
TG: i wasnt freaking out or anything
TA: ii tru2t you completely. what fun 2ymptom2 do ii have two look forward two?
TG: behind symptom door number one…
TG: just kidding youd never open door number one
TG: behind door number two is UNCONTROLLABLE ITCHING

Karkat returns with a bag of assorted medication, you paw through it and take a picture of something meant to stop just that.

TA: hey remember how you piity me?
TG: yeah
TA: ii2 ii more now?
[twinArmageddons sent image “aaaaah feel2 good”.jpg]
TG: holy shit yes
TG: <-
TG: im very very glad that youre not dying though if id got you sick and you died from it id
TG: man i dont know what id do
TA: you're not going two have two fiind out.

“You’re planning on sharing that? God, if you hadn’t already got each other sick and this wasn’t something you only get once you two would be stuck like that forever. A whole feedback loop of stupid pity and recurring infections.” Karkat snorts and drags you back out into the street.

The walk back to yours is quick and you’re not thankful for all of the stairs going up to your place, why do they keep happening? You’re too hot and dizzy to climb them quickly but you both persevere. When you get to the top Karkat shoves the door open and all but throws you inside.

“Guess who gets to spend a week with not one but two charming quadrantmates.” Karkat announces and Dayvhe peers at him from his place in your nutrition block.

“Did my ‘charming quadrantmates’ bring new dishes because otherwise this is gonna be an interesting week.” he replies.

It is, in fact, an interesting week. The damage stops when you start taking the psionic inhibitors in the stack of medication, that certainly stops your aching head and it stops things exploding. The majority of your sicknesses clear up in a night or two, except for the spotted rash that sticks around far longer.
You also suspect that Karkat is getting some sort of sick glee in smacking your hands away when either of you scratches at them without paying attention. Also, your recuperacoon was not meant for three people but by god it’ll take three.

One kind of interesting thing about spending so long in close quarters with Dayvhe and Karkat together is getting to see just how they swirl between red and black. It really is a heavily blended thing rather than a straight flip. Dayvhe can be curled up on the loungeplank with his head in Karkat’s lap and be bickering with him as Karkat sweetly pets his hair and kneads at his horns. It’s weird but they’re both so happy you could puke rainbows for seeing them. At the same time it’s great for you, your two favourite people are disgustingly happy and what makes them happy is each other. You think over your plans with Nepeta and consider that, yeah, you could deal with a lifetime of this.

Well, maybe not a lifetime of being stuck in the same small apartment not being able to leave, but still.

When the week ends both Dayvhe and Karkat get out of your hair but you’re not surprised at all to find drones delivering you boxes and who take no payment, just like the one that sent you a cake. You’re also not surprised to find replacements of everything you broke. The day after that a little construction drone shows up and repairs everything broken and shattered in your hive, including your broken glass walls in your ablutionblock.

[twinArmageddons began trolling turntechGodhead]
TA: 2o all of my broken thing2 have been replaced.
TG: isnt life mysterious who knows what goes through the minds of those lil drone buddies gifting you things like santa and all of his distressingly airborne antlerbeasts
TA: nothing two do with you then?
TG: im sure i dont know what you mean
TA: hmm
TG: hey so heres a thing i was going to go pick up some cables i needed only im boycotting my favourite shop on account of them being tools to you
TA: ii don't know how that guy got any bu2iene22 iin the fiir2t place
TG: well he was always nice to me
TA: that’2 becau2e everyone liike2 you <>
TG: not touching that one
TG: but heres my question that didnt really occur until now because i was worried about you being sick and also being sick as a barkbeast myself but why were you even in there for him to be such a sack of globes to you in the first place
TG: sollux?
TA: rea2on2. legitiimate one2.
TG: that was a huge pause man
TA: that’2 2ubjectiive, ii don't thiiink ii wa2 that long.
TG: still cant come up with an excuse huh?
TG: which means you have something to hide and im now a million times more interested
TA: ii wa2 looikiing two exchainge money for item2
TG: yeah man thats what shops do but i cant see you buying anything in there its my kind of shop not yours
TA: yeah 2o the owner made ii t real clear
TG: wait were you looking for something for me??

Ugh, busted. But also double question mark there at the end, either he’s picking up on your duality quirk or he’s trying to get you more sympathetic to telling him what he wants.
TA: ii didn't get two.
TG: but why were you trying to in the first place its not like its my wriggling day coming up and we are an age from twelfth perigees

TA:

Your cursor blinks on the screen. You need some words to describe just why you wanted to buy him something to make him happy. The obvious ‘to make you happy’ would work but it’s hard to express that you wanted to make him happy because you know he could be with anyone he liked and he chose you. Seriously you think Dayvhew would have to only lower his shades and flutter his lashes at anyone on the street and they’d be professing their desire for him.

Well, you might be exaggerating a little, but you know all of your mutual friends would die for the chance. So you’re grateful for one. But it’s more than that, you want to show him just how much better things are going for you since he came into your life (contagious diseases aside of course). Hell, you’ve had shifts in your mood since you’ve known him but compared to some of your past they’ve been minor. He’s not some cure obviously but it’s a hell of a lot easier knowing you have help that’ll smack you in the ear if you dare not ask for it.

It meant that you wanted to show him some sign of your affection, is that so wrong? But you know nothing about music and it was a stupid idea. But…

TG: did you drop your palmhusk or something man
TG: Hey
TG: solluxxxx
TA: Hey 2o you ju2t have your hu2ktop rright the mobiile one not a proper tower liike miine on my de2k rright?
TG: meh roxxie got me a flashy one that she put in my room but i dont really use it much cause i cant carry it around these sick beats gotta roam
TG: also this is not answering my question
TA: ii2 that 2o. on an unrelated note next tiime you’re here can ii look at that thiing for you becau2e ii’m 2ure ii can make you 2omethiing that work2 better, e2peciially for what you u2e iit for.
TG: you can look plenty but i know how much johns rig cost him and i dont really have that kinda cash even including some kind of moirail discount
TG: and like im not asking roxxie for cash for someone else to build me a husktop shed be hurt i wasnt asking her
TG: and yeah i could ask roxxie for the scratch and not tell her what it was but this isnt like getting her to help fix my mistakes like your stuff getting trashed because i infected you with psipox
TA: ii wouldn't charge you dv
TG: oh i see
TG: then hell fucking no man im not taking that money out of your account which is what id be doing if i let you build me something for *free*
TG: free for me is decidedly not free for you
TA: but ii want two.
TG: but i dont care
TG: were you trying to buy me something in that shop
TA: which an2wer ha2 the better outcome here?
TG: the honest one genius
TA: ii ju2t wanted two giive you 2omethiing nice, but ii pretty obviou2ly 2uck at iit.
TG: hey i buy that stuff i know its expensive and i know your work is too thatd be too much even for a holiday or wriggling day or whatever
TA: ii don't care about money
TG: im coming over

[turntechGodhead ceased trolling twinArmageddons]
You aren’t sure if you’ve somehow actually made him mad or not but if he’s coming over you may as well make something to eat and you’ll find out when he gets here. You cook and before you’re done Dayvhe just walks through your door like he owns the place.

“Hey.” he says quietly and then walks off into your block. Uh, ok? Maybe he needed to use your ablution block or something.

You doubt that’s it because he comes back far too quickly and it looking around at everything as he goes. Eventually he comes up to you and peers right at you.

“How do you feel?” he asks seriously.

“Confused, mostly. Kind of hungry. What’s wrong?” you ask and go back to stirring the vegetables you have in the pan while making sure that the meat isn’t sticking to the bottom. You should replace this one, it’s less non-stick these nights than it is just a stick pan.

“How long did you sleep overday?” Dayvhe asks insistently.

“I don’t know.” you say and think on it a little as Dayvhe shifts anxiously.

“Maybe six hours? I got sucked into a binge of Robot Strife reruns so I stayed up a little late I guess. Why?” you ask and figuring that something else is going on here you turn the heat off and focus on Dayvhe.

“Have you been remembering to eat?” he questions instead of answering you. You look at the food you were just cooking moments ago and Dayvhe moves on.

“What about hooking up with anyone?” Dayvhe asks.

“Hooking up?” you repeat with a snort.

“You know what I mean! Flush or pitch it doesn’t matter. Have you?” Dayvhe says quickly.

“I know zero people that are willing to sleep with me that I want to pail too or that I’m willing to put in the effort to get that close with anyway. What’s with the questions?” you ask and you won’t be brushed off this time.

“What about your money, you buying lots of shit?” he asks and it clicks.

“Why, do you think I’m manic?” you ask, folding your arms.

“You’re acting like you don’t care about money, suddenly wanting to buy me things and do stuff for me. It’s a warning sign, isn’t it?” Dayvhe says. He’s really worried, you can see it in the little pinch of his eyebrows.

You shake your head and float his shades off of his face and walk him backwards into a counter.

“I’m not throwing money away. I just wanted to get you something nice and I don’t know enough about music stuff to do that but I can make you the best husktop.” you explain.

“But it’s expensive and there’s no reason to.” Dayvhe protests.

You have Dayvhe leant against the counter, your arms on either side of him so you’re more than close enough to look right at him.
“I pity you, that the only reason I had.” you say.

Dayvhe chirps quietly from somewhere deep in his chest and his skin flushes all dark and pretty.

“But…” he starts to protest again. He really thought that it made more sense that you were ill than that you wanted to do something nice for him because he’s worth it. He’s so… pitable.

You sneak close to him and let a fang scrape over his hammering pulse in his neck.

“I pity you.” you repeat.

He wraps his arms around you and purrs.

You manage to upgrade the shit out of his husktop just with stuff you already have around and he agrees that he’ll let you do more come some genuine major event that you’d expect presents at. You’ll accept that, you make him a better husktop even if he gets you sick sometimes. You pity him, what else are you going to do?
Anyone Else But You - The Moldy Peaches

“Up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B A start
Just because we use cheats doesn’t mean we’re not smart
I don’t see what anyone can see
In anyone else but you
You are always trying to keep it real
I’m in love with how you feel
I don’t see what anyone can see
In anyone else but you”
Anyone Else But You - The Moldy Peaches
A pale love song in two chords

“So just- I’m trying a new thing. Or, well, it’s an older thing but I’m refining it I guess. Not what I’d play on the streets, I mean I needed John’s piano for it so.” Dayvhe says, opening up his music player and plugging in his headphones. They’re the expensive ones that Roxxie bought him and Dayvhe has gushed about the quality of sound in ways that you only somewhat understand, probably how he feels when you talk too in depth about your favoured tech.

“I didn’t know that you played the piano.” you say in surprise.

“An instrument is an instrument, it’s not hard.” Dayvhe says dismissively and you’re very sure it does not work that way.

He slides the plush earphones over your ears and manages to settle the band of them between your two sets of horns. He worries at his teeth with his fangs and taps at his device.

The piano kicks in first, gentle and delicate. Dayvhe’s voice follows next, just in your left ear and your breath stutter stops when you catch that this isn’t slam poetry, he’s singing. His voice is deeper than his speaking one, rich and resonant, before you can think on it more he’s suddenly in your right ear too, echoing what came before even though that first voice is already ahead of the second. A third comes, inexplicably, from in front of you. You don’t know how he’s done that, there’s no way for sound to be from there but you feel it. You are surrounded by Dayvhe, by his music, his voice.

And wow, that voice. You’re finding it hard to breathe. Every resonant hum, every self harmony, all of them reach within you. They strike some hidden frequency in your bone marrow, some oscillation in the life cycle of your cells, what other reason is there for how this music so layered breaks you so? And it does, it breaks you, jams its hands in you and reassembles you back to life.

It’s a fucking religious experience. It’s too bad he’s dead because you finally get Gamzee’s talk of miracles. If this is what he meant by miracles and messiahs you understand the drive to drop everything else and sign your life over. Not that you haven’t already, you’d lay down your life for Dayvhe in a millisecond, do anything he asked at all, you’d-

The song ends and you shudder slightly as you adjust to normality again.

“Holy shit, Dayvhe.” you whisper, pulling the headphones off.

“The good kind of holy shit?” Dayvhe asks worriedly.

“Hell yes the good kind! You’re so good at this.” you assure him and gently pap his perfect face.

“I think I’m going to try experimenting more then.” he says and leans into your hand.
“You’re clearly great at it.” you say.

He does focus more on his music after that. You often find him nestled up in blankets or stolen clothes in your hive as he works and does his thing. He plays you snippets and you listen and do work of your own, sometimes even the paid kind. You manage to land a reasonably decent sized commission, designing the front and back end of a business’ website and the system they’re going to use to manage their inventory. It’s complex because they want a system that allows them to categorise all of the art that they sell and for your system to intelligently work out the preferences of someone viewing the site and then show them more of what they’re likely to buy.

Well, you think it’s interesting at least. And it’s legit work rather than crafting viruses for fun and sometimes profit.

Unfortunately the end result is that you end up ignoring your new moirail more than you’d like. Pleasingly though Dayvhe doesn’t seem to mind and often he’ll just sit in your room leant against your desk or something else as he does his own thing too. He wanders around your hive, watches tv, keeps himself busy. That’s when he’s not dropping out to see his friends or Karkat. But he is up to something and you don’t know what.

“Whatcha eaten today?” Dayvhe asks, draping himself over your back and resting his chin on your head.

“Hm… sandwich.” you answer distractedly and keep hunting for the error in your program

“Ok…” Dayvhe mutters and types on his palmhusk for a moment or two.

“And I’m assuming you’re not like all about walks out in the fresh air whenever I’m not here, right?” he guesses.

“Everyone sucks with very few exceptions, outside is full of people. So no.” you tell him.

“Uh huh, uh huh.” Dayvhe mumbles and walks off. What was that all about?

He leaves your hive a while later and doesn’t come back the next night, but he does send a delivery drone to you with dinner even though he’s not there. That’s nice of him, a little odd, but nice. When he does come back the night after he insists that he has editing work to do, some scrub’s been chomping his musical flavour and Dayvhe needs to show them how it’s done. Whatever any of that means. So he sits on the floor, leant against your desk and focuses on his thing as you focus on yours.

You reach for your mouse a while later only to find that it is no longer the right shape and also rustles. Blinking you look down and see that it’s a candy bar, two of them actually. Your mouse is off to the side safe and sound but you’re curious now. You reach down and drum on one of Dayvhe’s horns with a candy bar.

“You lost this?” you ask as he looks up.

“For you.” Dayvhe mumbles and waves you off with a hand and keeps on working.

Oh, well then. You weren’t hungry but you’re also not likely to turn down a gift from your most pitied troll. You eat the first candy bar and then the second before going back to work.

It’s not the only food based change that starts to happen. Unsurprisingly given that he’s camping out at yours a lot the amount of food in your hive goes up by almost double and unlike you Dayvhe orders new things in religiously. He starts demanding that you teach him how to cook what little you
know and you suppose that since he’s mostly just been bouncing from hive to hive for forever he may well not have had the experience, especially as you’ll bet that Roxxie coddles him. So, sure, when you have the time you give him a taste of food based self-sufficiency. And the nice result of that is that sometimes proper hive-cooked meals show up before you without you having had to do anything.

Of their own accord snacks migrate into your desk and proper drinks show up too. In hindsight it’s pretty obvious but you’re not that smart, it seems. On the night that your project finishes and you send everything off you gleeefully watch your bank balance go up, only you’ve no one to celebrate with because Dayvhe is… somewhere else. You crack your neck and open up trollian.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]
TA: hey, ii2 dv wiith you?
CG: HAVE YOU LOST HIM? HAVE YOU TRIED LOOKING DOWN THE BACK OF THE LOUNGEPLANK THAT’S WHERE THINGS I LOSE END UP.
TA: eheheheheh ii haven't but ii'm pretty 2ure he'2 out. iif he'2 not wiith you do you wanna hang out?
CG: I’VE SEEN BARELY HIDE NOR HAIR OF YOU SINCE YOU WERE A BAG OF PLAGUE AND NOW YOU WANT TO HANG OUT? WHAT IF I’M BUSY, HUH?
TA: *are* you bu2y?
CG: NO BUT THAT’S NOT THE POINT.
TA: ii ju2t got done wiith thi2 huge project and ii'm going out of my miind at the thought of beiing able two do 2omethiing, anything, that ii2n't codiing for every wakiing 2econd.
CG: SOME PEOPLE DO THINGS IN MODERATION, YOU KNOW.
CG: ADMITTEDLY I DON’T KNOW ANYONE WHO DOES BUT I’VE HEARD IT’S POSSIBLE.
TA: liie2
CG: ALL A CONSPIRACY, I’M SURE. WANT TO WATCH SOME CRIME MOVIES? I’VE BEEN ON A CRIME MOVIE KICK LATELY.
TA: iiin moderation ii’m 2ure.
CG: YOU ARE CORDIALY INVITED TO SHUT THE FUCK UP. ARE YOU COMING OR NOT?
TA: 2ure, ii'll briing 2nack2, ii've got load2 ii'm 2ure. be over 2oon.
twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]

You stand up, sniff yourself and conclude that showers are needed. After that you dress and raid your considerable food stash and leave Dayvhe a message to let him know where you’re going. The flight there feels good, freeing, and you actually make far better time than usual without even trying. Maybe the wind was blowing favourably or something.

You land outside Karkat’s hive and knock on the door. It opens pretty promptly but it’s not Karkat, it’s his lusus.

“SCREEEEE!!!” it bellows at you. You stick a finger in your ear and rub, ow, no wonder Karkat is always so loud.

“Hi Crabdad.” you greet him. The large lusus leans over and snuffles at you, little mouthparts touching your hair. He pulls back and a giant claw pats you on the shoulder, he’s always liked you. He bustles aside to let you in just as Karkat thunders down the stairs and look at you and his lusus in exasperation.

“I said I was going to get it.” Karkat sighs.
“REEEE!” Crabdad replies, you take a step away from him.

“Yeah, yeah, ok thanks I guess.” Karkat mutters and ducks under Crabdad’s claw to get to you. He looks at you and his eyes widen.

“What the shit? What did you do?” Karkat asks in awe as he looks at you.

Dumbly you look behind you and see nothing then and then look down but you’re just wearing your normal clothes.

“You! Dumbass, I mean you! You look good, what did you do?” Karkat asks, looking you up and down.

“Nothing? I don’t even know what you’re talking about.” you say.

“You’re kidding me, you had to have done something. I mean look! I wouldn’t exactly kick you off of a concupiscent platform now. I mean, I would, obviously because that’d be weird and Dayvhe but YOU GET MY POINT.” Karkat says loudly and awkwardly.

You evidently look bewildered enough for Karkat to groan and grab you by the wrist and drag you upstairs.

“When was the last time you looked in a mirror, nerdlord?” he demands.

“I don’t know.” you answer. You actually try not to do that if you can help it, your self esteem is low enough as is when it comes to your appearance. The only time you normally would is to cut your own hair but Dayvhe did it for you last time so… a perigee or two.

Karkat shoves you in his ablution block and clicks on the light, trollhandling you before the mirror. You look at yourself and you jaw drops. It’s still obviously you in there but your face is fuller and for the first time since you molted your skin isn’t gross and awful (seriously, fuck hormones). But the rest of you is fuller all over too, somewhere between just ‘normal’ and ‘slim’ rather than the scrawny that you usually sit at. You pull your shirt up, that at least is the same but you’ve always ordered the things big. Underneath your skin is smooth and soft and there’s even the slightest hint of a stomach, you can still see your hip bones but nowhere near as much.

“What the fuck happened?” you wonder aloud.

“No way can you have gained this much weight and not known, your jeans aren’t even tight and they would be. Look.” Karkat says and pulls at the belt loop of your jeans. He’s right, that doesn’t make sense, not unless…

“What size are they? What does the label say?” you ask, twisting around but there’s no way you can see.

Karkat catches you by the arm and keeps you still, tugging on the back belt loop to read the tag.

“M leg - skinny, Medium one. Is that not what you thought?” Karkat asks.

You drum your claws on the countertop and consider whether you’re annoyed or not, pulling your palmhusk out out you figure that you’re still going to mull it over and decide based on what Dayvhe says. He’s not replied since your note to him about where you were going, which isn’t unusual for him if he’s dealing with other people in person.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]
TA: 2o ii'm at karkat'2 place and apparently ii look pretty diifferent.
TA: and ii go look at my2elf and what do you know ii do.
TG: uh hi
TA: oh *there* you are. 2o ii fiigure liike huh liiviing wiith dayvhe probably ha2 changed what ii eat
ii gue22 2o whatever. only *miraclou2ly* iiit 2eem2 two have made my clothe2 come two liife and
change 2iize two. wiithout me buyiing any new one2. or notiiciing.
TG: ahhhh youre mad aren't you
TA: why don't you tell me what'2 going on and then ii'll let you know huu?
TG: uh ok so i can explain
TG: youre with karkat right?
TA: yeah
TG: great well hes a normal lowblood right or at least he runs that range so like
TG: how much do you think he needs to eat
TA: what do you mean liike caloriie2 or actually what kiind of food?
TG: god lets not get into like actual nutrition or anything i mean calories
TA: ii don't know, what'2 your point?
TG: around 2k hes kinda short but its around there and hes got no psi
TG: you know what i need?
TA: ii get a feeling you're going two tell me.
TG: i worked it out with hal for how much i walk about and use my psionics about 2700 or so
TG: you know how much someone with *your* psionics needs???
TA: uh. more than that?
TG: actually no one knows
TG: BECAUSE THERE IS NO ONE AROUND WITH PSI AS STRONG AS YOURS
TA: alriight enough wiith the cap2, karkat iimper2onator. 2o what diid you do?
TG: ugh fine
TG: i talked to hal and he ran the math for me if youre just at your hive doing not much were talking
about 4k and if youre flying places or lasering shit youd basically better double that shit

You lower your palmhusk and sigh.

“What’d he say? I’m guessing that’s Dayvhe you’re talking to.” Karkat asks.

“It is, I think he just freaked out over nothing. I’ve still not got the whole story but I get the gist of it.”
you say, shaking your head and looking down again.

TA: you act liike ii wa2n't eatiing, and you ju2t 2aiid your number2 were gue22work. dv ii piitty you
ii do but you're paniickiing over nothiing.
TG: uh huh
TG: whens the last time you had a migraine

Wait, when was the last time?

TG: or whens the last time you were too tired to get up
TG: got sick at all lately
TG: hows your *everything* dude
TG: i figured if i could just fix this for a bit you wouldn't be able to be all bluh bluh theres no problem
so what if my bodys eating itself

Karkat is laughing at you and you suspect that he’s reading over your shoulder but evidently just
reading your face is enough to give him an idea of what’s going on.

“How dare that fucker know me that well?” you say in offence.
“The gall, right?” Karkat cackles.

TA: am ii really that 2tupiid and 2tubborn?
TG: you are both the smartest and dumbest guy i know yes <>
TA: ...thank2?? <>
TG: eat food regularly or ill throw it at your head
TG: now if youull excuse me i was helping jayded track down her sneaky lusus through this jungle so i gotta bounce
TA: alright, ii'm gonna go watch a moviie wiith kk
TG: …
TA: ii brought 2nack2?
TG: <>
TA: <>
twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

“Well, I feel stupid.” you tell Karkat as you pocket your palmhusk.

Karkat reaches out and lays his hand on your shoulder and rubs, comfortingly you think at first.

“So do I now.” he whispers.

Wait, he’s feeling you and- that fucker! You snap your teeth at him and shower sparks, not enough to hurt him but enough to make him back off. He slaps the light off and drags you downstairs, giggling the whole way. You sit down together and watch dumb movies together and drown in grubcorn and stupid laughter. When it has been light long enough that you’re both yawning and struggling to stay awake Karkat says the kind of thing that you only say in the tired, stupid hours near midday.

“He’s really good for you, you know.” Karkat mumbles, his head on your shoulder. On the screen a romcom that Karkat had snuck in plays mostly unwatched.

“I know.” you say.

“You’re good for him too and not just the whole blowing his lusus and hive up thing I mean.” Karkat adds.

You’re not sure about that. Oh, you’re not BAD for Dayvhe, you know that. And you listen to his problems and you don’t get annoyed with his rambling or disappearing act and you know that’d annoy other people. You’re good for him in that you’re not inclined to do things that would be bad for him. Still, you’re definitely getting the better end of this arrangement. Karkat must hear the uncertain noise you make because he sits up and fixes you with a firm look.

“You are! He’s not so twitchy anymore. Even after he and I got together he was touchy about things and would just lose the famed chill that he claims to have in abundance. He’s happier too, and my whole thing with him has got better since you and him finally made things official and stopped being dumb.” Karkat insists.

“I…” you think of Dayvhe and feel yourself smiling like a moron, “I think I’d actually do anything for him.”

“Augh!” Karkat falls over backwards onto the loungeplank with a crunch of candy wrappers.

“The two of you are so perfect for each other I think I could just throw up!” Karkat says giddily, the romance dork that he is.
“Could be the gummy grubs.” you suggest.

Karkat grimaces and rubs at his stomach.

“Yeah, definitely those too.” he agrees and after a moment’s thought, burps loudly. You wish you were mature enough to not laugh at that but you know what you’re about.

“Right with that I’m going to sleep.” Karkat declares and drops to the floor and rolls to standing.

“Kay.” you agree and shove the wrappers off of the loungeplank and settle into a soporless sleep.

When you and Karkat awake it’s to the same message board invite and single message.

[twinArmageddons [TA] added to memo ‘were making this happen’]
TG: fef and rox have a plan but keep chatter offline meeting at Jayekhs place this evening at 5
[memo locked]

You squint suspiciously at your palmhusk, this is dubious to say the least but they were keen on allying themselves together before and it has been a while since then. Perhaps they did actually come up with a good plan.

Above you, Karkat thunders down the stairs hissing like someone crammed a bunch of furious meowbeasts and bowling balls into a sack and just tossed it down there.

“Have you seen this shit?” Karkat demands.

“I am presently seeing this shit.” you confirm, not looking up.

“We’re just supposed to go where he says? And who the fuck is Jayekh?” Karkat rages ineffectually.

“He’s Dirkka’s matesprit, olivblood I think. I patched him up when he was out cold once and he woke up and tried to shoot me and because I’m very nice I didn’t throw him out of the window.” you explain.

“What? When was this?” Karkat asks, leaning over you.

“Ages back, before we were even together.” you say. Karkat scowls at you judgmentally and you wonder if he’s going to get on your case about being uncharacteristically nice wherever Dayvhe is concerned, he’d have a point if that was what he was getting at. When Dayvhe is concerned you’re nothing but one big soft spot for him.

“And this is the first you’re telling me of this? Right now when we’re supposed to go and meet him today? You didn’t think to mention this sooner to your best bulgebuddy Karkat? No, you’d presumably far rather flutter around your hive back then getting the vapours over Dayvhe than relay information about bleeding, violent and suspicious trolls being brought to you!” Karkat snarls at you.

“It was Dayvhe’s secret, not mine!” you say defensively but Karkat just scoffs and stomps off.

“I’m telling you now aren’t I?” you call after him as you sit up properly.

“And just where does this deranged green fuck who looks at that artificially gilled psychopath and thinks ‘hot damn’ live anyway?” Karkat asks as he smacks his coffee machine to get it working.

You kind of want to protest the name calling on Dirkka. Dayvhe was right about him, that as far as Dirkka is concerned the world is split into two groups of people: those he cares about and those he does not. Except when he doesn’t care he either just doesn’t give a shit or is openly hostile like he
used to be with you. When he does care however he really does care. You’ve done little more than show off viruses you’ve each coded and had a small hacking competition or two but even now you get the feeling that if you trolled Dirkka saying that you needed his help hiding a body he’d come out and help. It’s weird as shit but you do respect a guy committed to duality like that.

Still, where does Jayekh live anyway?

“He lives near Jayded, I think.” you say, drudging the fact up from your memory.

“Jayded lives in a giant forest with no neighbours for miles, are you suggesting we just wander around near her hive hoping to find this dumbass? Actually, why did my empty-headed quadrantmate tell us to meet there if we don’t know where it is?” Karkat says exasperatedly.

He keeps complaining but your time is better used elsewhere.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]
TA: hey, we don't know where jayekh liive2.
TG: oh
TG: oh shit you dont do you duh
TA: can you 2hare a map liink or 2omethiing, any diirection2 at all?
[turntechGodhead shared map file ‘j-mans nerd hive’]
TG: its a tall white building all covered in vines but you cant see it until youre nearly right up on it because the trees are super tall
TG: theres also shitloads of wild lusii running around over there so maybe you two want to fly
TA: ii think my chance2 of conviicing kk two let me fly hiim are low or at lea2t they are untill we're a22 deep iin jungle.
TG: public transportation ho
TA: wonderful, ii agree two come two your 2ecret thiing and you call me a publiic tran2portatiion ho. ii'm very offended.
TG: oh snap the most offended
TG: a single tear rolls down your cheek how could i do this to you
TG: wait no *two* tears roll down your cheeks
TA: <>
TG: <>
TA: ii 2hould go, kk ii2 makiing me coffee and ii2 al2o ornery liike iit'2 going out of 2tyle 2o ii 2hould pay attentiion two hiim.
TG: cool see you later
twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

Your guess about Karkat proves to be entirely correct and after breakfast and remembering to eat more than you normally would you find yourself beholden to the beast that is public transport. Your memory of your last time on this is a little hazy what with that head injury you had at the time but you remember things being light and friendly, actually Dayvhe made a friend on the train. That’s never happened to you.

“Does everyone like him when they meet him?” you ask idly, resting your chin on the top of the seat in front of you.

“Dayvhe? I don’t know. I hated him when I first met him, that changed but everyone seems to feel something pretty strong right away. I don’t know what it is.” Karkat says, not looking up from his book as he talks.

“He acts pretty chill and he’s funny, that probably makes him easy to approach and like.” you speculate.
“Sticking with my pheromones theory.” Karkat mumbles and turns the page.

A hulking olive girl glares at you and Karkat, marching over to where you’re sat. She looms over you both and cracks her knuckles threateningly. You curl your lip in a silent snarl and let your psionics crackle obviously, Karkat pockets his book and though he hasn’t drawn them yet his hands are free for his weapons.

“I’ve had a real bad day and you two are pissing me off, talking too loud. So shut the fuck up or I’ll make you.” she snarls.

“Do you think your day is going to be better or worse if I throw you out that door?” you ask calmly and with a pop of psi the doors slam open.

“Sol, let’s just go.” Karkat hisses at you. In fairness he’s got more to lose here than you do, if this girl manages to hit you then you might get a little hurt. Karkat can’t afford to let anyone see him bleed.

“Yeah, too fucking cluckbeastshit to do anything. So put up or shut up!” the girl snaps.

“How about a compromise? Give me a sec KK.” you say standing up. You float off of the ground easily and with scarcely a thought so does she. You burst free of the open door and soar up into the sky with your aggressor towed behind you screaming fit to burst. You really can notice a difference in your power levels now that you’re eating right, it’s no sweat at all to streak so high up into the atmosphere that you feel the air get thin and cold.

Floating the terrified olive up to your face you take in her wide eyed shock. Oh psionics are expected of goldbloods but you are beyond all compare, you’re not even working hard to do this.

“Wh- wh- hh-” she gasps out, caught by the thin air and the colder temperature. Of course she’s colder than you, she’s not psionic yellow hot, she has less body heat to buffer her from the chill.

“You know recently I’ve got into caring about what happens to me, not being so reckless. Maybe you should too, maybe you shouldn’t go around threatening people just for talking. You never know when you’re going to run into someone like me who really doesn’t want to explain to his moirail why there’s blood on his clothes, much less wants to let his best friend get hurt.” you say coolly.

“I- ok, okay, shit don’t drop me!” she wails.

“You seemed pretty willing to drop me back there, but fine.” you say with a shrug. You twist in the air and look down, you can see the shape of the coast from here, the patterns of the cities around.

“Why’re you even pulling this psycho highblood shit anyway, you’re olive.” you say, drifting lower. You don’t actually care to hear her answer so you speed up a little more and wait until you can see the train again.

“Are you going to be cool?” you shout up to the flailing olive girl.

She’s still screaming, you assume that’s an affirmative scream. Jeez, you already said you weren’t going to drop her. You nip back inside the train without any difficulty, although you have to break suddenly to avoid running into Karkat at the door. You drop the olive girl on the floor where she rolls over and immediately retches, gross.

“You insufferable bastard! No more train, we’re leaving before she or anyone else gets any ideas!” Karkat snaps and grabs your arm.
“I don’t think she’s going to be-” you begin but Karkat leaps from the train, still holding you and you have to react quickly to stop either of you from being a blended neon orange stain on the ground. You sweep the pair of you up in a bubble of red and blue and float up in the air as the train streaks on by.

“What if she had friends, huh, douchewad?” Karkat demands as you catch his arm and fly upwards again, just not so high this time.

“You had your sickles and I was coming back. I’m not your lusus and besides I couldn’t see anyone else looking like they meant any harm. Chill.” you tell him. You fish your palmhusk out and check your map seeing how far it is from here to Dayvhe’s directional waypoint. You’re not that far out and you’ll certainly get there faster with you flying than the damned train system.

You construct a barrier of psionic energy around you both and fling yourself in the right direction in speeds that would cause serious damage to living flesh if you were outside of it. Karkat just jams his face in your shoulder and informs you that, despite this being his idea, he hates flying, he hates the wind, he hates you. The list goes on.

Reaching something close to the right point in the forest you are forced to slow down, bobbing just above tree level you find that you can see very little of the jungle floor below as the tree canopy is thick and broad. The thick circular overlapping patterns of leaves as dense enough that you suspect that someone around here could wander about at midday and probably be just fine.

“We need to get lower, right?” Karkat asks, peeking over your shoulder. Right now he’s basically riding your back like you’re some kind of flying carpet.

“Why would you say that KK? The total lack of hive visible around here? Nah, you’re right I’ll just drop you right- AAAGH!” you yelp as Karkat digs his claws in.

“Your goddamn humour gland needs checking.” you hiss, slapping his hands away and pulling him off of you.

“YOURS DOES!” he snaps.

Ignoring him you find a thinner patch in the canopy and psionically push the branches aside to lower you both down through the canopy. As Dayvhe warned it’s barely any time at all until you descend past a sleeping sloth lusus who doesn’t so much as twitch at your presence.

The trees around here are all bone white wood and now that you’re below the leaves it’s dark enough down here that the place is weirdly monochromatic. Cautiously you land on the floor but no sooner do your feet make contact with the ground than it lights up in a muted green that ripples out. You take another step and another little wave of green bioluminescence spreads away from you.

“Look.” Karkat says in a hushed whisper and ahead of you there’s a giant wolf lusus biting at a flat mushroom that is growing out from the trunk of a tree, it oozes neon green as the creature bites into it. You’ve never seen anything like it, it’s obviously a lusus but it’s a carnivore eating plant life.

You try to step around it but the flare of green on the ground alerts it to your presence, it’s giant canine head whipping around to face you. It opens its mouth which is lurid green. It barks once and loudly before vanishing in an inexplicable green flash.

“What the fucking fuck? Why does this guy live here? Why is everyone Dayvhe knows deranged?!” Karkat hisses, clinging to your arm.

“No idea.” you whisper back and pick you both up off of the ground again. You fly through the
trees, glad that if you had to then you could just fly upwards and out because it would be so easy to get lost here. You’re starting to think that your GPS is playing you because there’s no hive in sight anywhere around here. At least that’s what you think until you damn near fly right into a giant orange gourd. It’s growing in an obviously cultivated little patch.

“I think we must be close.” you tell Karkat.

“Sollux, I don’t think that’s a flapbeast scaring device.” Karkat says and points out a dark figure that you hadn’t even seen before. You catch a glimpse of triangular shades as the thing lunges at you, but it’s not Dirkka. When you catch the figure in the air you find that it’s a little like Sawtooth, if Sawtooth was a steel replica of Dirkka without a mouth.

“Hey, we were invited here.” you tell the struggling robot.

“This is the worst thing, why does it look like DIRKKA of all people!?” Karkat demands, like you know any goddamn answers here.

“He makes robots. Hey, do you have a name?” you ask the robot.

“It doesn’t have a mouth!” Karkat points out, but it could have had a speaker or something. You guess not as it gives you no answer.

“Are you going to be cool?” you ask and the robot pulls a sword out and makes a good attempt at stabbing you. You guess it’s not going to be cool.

“I think that’s a hive there, not a tree. Look there’s a round thing on the top.” Karkat says as he points off to the side. You look and see that he’s right, it’s just so covered by glowing green vines and spread with leaves at the top that it blended in really well.

You look uncertainly at the robot which is still making a valiant effort to murderize you and you figure that there’s no way you can put him down or he’ll just try to stab you again. So that means you’re just stuck levitating this angry android until… until you’re not, you suppose. This is just how your life is now. You follow Karkat towards the building, which as you get closer you can see that it’s a building. That was a good spot by Karkat, really. You levitate the furious robot along with you. There’s an obvious door ahead and as you’re otherwise occupied it’s Karkat who knocks.

A few moments and muffled shout later the door slides open to show Dayvhe who perks up at the sight of you both.

“Hey! You made it. Uh, Sol, man why are you floating Brobot about?” Dayvhe asks, pointing at the robot.

“It tried to attack us.” you explain and the robot takes another swipe at you.

“Yeah, he does that. Jayekh wanted a training partner to ambush him so Dirkka made Brobot, gimme that sword you dumbass.” Dayvhe says as he walks over to the robot and holds out his hand. The robot, Brobot, willingly hands the weapon over and and watches Dayvhe.

“You can let him go now. Hey, Brobot, I’m dating these two. No attacking them, got it?” Dayvhe says. The robot nods so you let him go, he twists in the air and lands gracefully on his feet. He leans down and gently bumps his face on Dayvhe’s forehead, if he’d had a mouth it would have been a little kiss. Then with a blur of motion he launches himself off into the woods.

“So Dirkka is actually crazy then? Like batshit, full on, out of the bellfry fully mad?” Karkat shouts, throwing his hands up in the air. He’s facing away from the front door which means he doesn’t see
Dirkka appear in the doorway.

“Who builds a deranged murderbot for their matesprit? Who sets that robot to just attack anyone going around minding their own fucking business? He’s crazy, utterly shithive maggots!” Karkat rants.

As Karkat’s best friend you should probably tell him that Dirkka is, you know, right there listening to this with mild amusement but… well, you never claimed to be a good friend. Also you can’t help but note that Dayvhe isn’t saying anything either. In fact when you sneak a look at Dayvhe you can see that his pokerface is strained, you would guess with repressed laughter.

“You should say that to my face.” Dirkka says casually.

Karkat spins around to face Dirkka and, to his credit, he doesn’t back down. Instead he jabs his finger in Dirkka’s direction and unleashes another tirade just for him.

“You insult me by acting like I wouldn’t! I don’t care if you’re basically an adult with an heiress for a moirail! I’ll declare to anyone with the spongeclots to listen that you’re completely Looney Tunes crazy, that you’re three sandwiches short of an outdoor basket meal! If you got one of the dictionaries for morons, the ones with pictures, and looked up ‘crazy’ in it there wouldn’t be a picture of you because crushing the dreams of young trolls that badly with be unethical by the Empress’ standards!” Karkat rages.

Dirkka maintains unceasing eye contact through silly pointed shades, long enough to just about make Karkat uncomfortable.

“Cool. If you’re done I’ve been told Jayekh has snacks and what all for you guys.” Dirkka says calmly and then turns and vanishes inside.

“Don’t mind him.” Dayvhe says consolingly to Karkat.

“I DO mind him!” Karkat hisses but nevertheless follows Dayvhe inside. You follow behind Karkat and press a button that obviously seals the door.

The inside of Jayekh’s place is pretty old, you’d bet that his lusus just found the place rather than him having to get it built. As for the place itself despite its hard to find location it’s clear that the building is spacious, if inconveniently shaped. Each level has transportalizers to get about and what is stored on each layer seems to be largely an assortment of random crap. More guns than you’ve seen in anyone’s hive thus far, though many of them are clearly antique. Scattered about them are statues, paintings, and ‘artifacts’ that remind you of how AA used to bring weird shit back from her digs and adventures to display in her hive. It’s not so much a curated collection as it is a single building where all this shit has been thrown.

It’s only when you get to the final room do you see any semblance of organisation. There’s a widescreen TV that is, no joke, the size of your entire block wall at home. Floor to ceiling, end to end glorious high definition that is currently displaying two people duking it out on Super Smash Littermates. More accurately it’s displaying a real curb stomp of a match up and from the mean girlish laughter you’re going to bet it’s Roxxie who is winning. Despite the game going the rest of the room is overwhelmed with movies as the obvious interest, it makes Karkat’s block look tame as every spare inch of wall is covered in posters for movies.

“Nooooo!” Jayekh wails as his character is kicked off of the map, Roxxie leaps to her feet and does a little victory dance. Your assessment was accurate it seems.
“This game is way too hard.” another familiar voice complains. You peer around a lifesize movie statuette of troll Indiana Jones holding a crystal thinkpan to see a put out Feferi with a controller in her hand sat next to a put out looking Eridan.

“Hey Fef.” you call out and she looks over to you and flashes a bright smile.

“Hello Sollux, hey Karkat!” she chirps.

“Hey Feferi.” Karkat sighs and walks over to them, jumping over the back of the chair to land on the seat next to her and Eridan.

“Well no one say hello to me then.” Eridan sulks.

“Whatever you say.” you say brightly.

“Ignore him. How’s the hand, Eridan?” Karkat asks because he genuinely does care about everyone. You genuinely don’t so you tune out his complaining about it being missing and instead focus on the shared look of irritation between Jayekh and Dirkka. With his body tilted so that Eridan can’t see him Jayekh mimics shooting himself in the head and you’re close enough still that you can hear the almost silent huff of laughter and see the way his shoulders shake.

“Sollux, capital to see you again! So sorry about the last time.” Jayekh apologises, leaning over the back of the loungeplank.

“You woke up in someone else’s hive with no memory of getting there and you were hurt, it’s whatever.” you shrug. You feel a lot less raw about it now that you’ve not been woken up by being attacked recently.

“I told you he was a stand up guy, you should have listened to me.” Jayekh says, wagging his finger at Dirkka.

“Yes, yes, I know.” he groans.

“For the record I was in your corner in that whole debacle with you and Dayvhe, and Dirkka if you recall I proved the victor in that particular little drama.” Jayekh says.

“Don’t say it like he hates the idea of them being together now. But you’re right Jayekh, everyone can’t always be early adopters like us, hoo hoo hoo!” A troll giggles from the snug embrace of a plush splayzac on the floor. From the teal on her chest and your knowledge of Dayvhe and Dirkka’s social circle you’re going to guess that this is the baker and private investigator girl. You think her name was Jayyne or something like that. Either way she and Jayekh are both looking smug, apparently about you and Dayvhe being together at all.

“Too right! Anyway, come on in and sit down! We’re all here now.” Jayekh says and pats the seat near him. Dayvhe is already pulling Karkat over to the spot by Jayekh which leaves a gap on his other side between him and Feferi which you take. Eridan predictably glares at you for doing so and because you’re an asshole you flip him off with both hands, something he can’t yet do back. The wrist on his missing hand is capped with the same plate covering internal wiring that you’ve seen at Tavros’ waist and you presume is at Vriska’s shoulder too. Equius for all his flaws is a very good engineer and does tidy work in keeping the biological away from the mechanical as much as is practical, it allows for easy upgrades and minimises infection. You’ve seen and heard of other trolls with fake eyes like Vriska’s one but she’s had many upgrades over the sweeps and none of them to your knowledge have ever rejected, not like some of the horror stories you hear. When the time comes you don’t doubt that Equius will work in a helmsblock. Whatever poor bastard is tortured for
the rest of their life into being a helmsman will at least find careful, dilligent and considerate work in Equius. A kind sort of cruelty.

“Did you see that robot outside?” Feferi asks you.

“Yeah, it tried to attack us.” you nod.

“The Dirkka guy over there made it back off but it’s some pretty sea-rious security, huh?” Feferi says, sounding impressed.

“It’s crazy.” you agree.

Your conversation falls to the wayside when Roxxie stands up and claps her hands together to get the attention of all of you.

“Alright, we’ve got a lot of planning to get down so we oughta get started.” Roxxie declares.

“I had thought that there weren’t any other heiresses around worth their salt and it seems like Feferi here had thought the same but having talked to each other a lot I think we’re both cool to say that we were wrong on that score, right?” Roxxie says.

“Absolutely! But it’s also pretty clear that we’re not going to achieve our goals separately, working together seems the best way forward.” Feferi nods.

“Neither focusing on just taking Condy down or taking over Alternia will really work here so we need another plan.” Roxxie continues. That’s pretty much what you’d said to them both before at the party.

“We figured that the fact that we can work together is probably our greatest strength and the greatest proof that we’re the right kind of people. I need to stay on the planet to keep my lusus happy, to stop it murdering all trolls and to sway its loyalty from my ancestor to me directly. Eventually Roxxie is going to have to leave the planet though and that’s not good.” Feferi explains.

“If I was the Empress I’d have a record of just how old each living heiress was, sure you’d have some die and not know about it but most you’d know about. You’d never convince the jades to stop breeding them and it’d look weak to tell them to so the only answer is for her to know just when Roxxie would be forced to leave Alternia.” Jayyne concludes, showing that predictable cold teal thinking.

“But doesn’t that mean that Roxxie goes to fight her as Feferi causes hell down here? Wasn’t that the plan?” Dayvhe asks with a frown forming on his face.

“It’s too big of a risk. But with me and Roxxie finding each other it tells us that there are other heiresses who can be reasoned with. If we both put our heads together to finding the rest of them, making alliances with them and dispatching those who can’t be trusted we can set up a democratic network of heiresses who can be trusted to run things a certain way. It’d be harder for my ancestor to dismantle and give Roxxie more of cloak of distraction. If we focus all our efforts on finding these heiresses by any unscrupulous hacking methods you can manage, Sollux, then we up our chances.” Feferi explains.

“You can’t trust them.” Eridan protests and you don’t know if he means the people in this room or other heiresses as a group. Possibly both.

“Most I can’t, but obviously some I can and it’s our best shot to take her out.” Feferi argues, Eridan does not look convinced.
They want you to find heiresses for them? There’s probably ways of doing that. You’ll leave aside scalping forums and the like for people writing in the right colour which would be dubious for people faking being an heiress when they’re not. You could write a virus that looks for a correlation of information, personal wealth in online banking, text colour, of course, location and whether that’s underwater or not, any hint of their sign. Perhaps there’s even a method of running a kind of frequency analysis on the signs and names of old heiresses over time to see if there’s a way of predicting the likelihood of any other name belonging to someone tyrian.

“I can show you what we were working with already.” Dirkka offers, cutting through your thought process.

You look up to see him cuddled up to Jayekh’s side, the other troll’s arm slung casually around his middle. It’s odd seeing his defences so obviously down.

“That might help, no point running over the same methods again if you’re on a limited time scale until Roxxie ages out.” you agree.

“We’ve a little while yet but Jayekh is the oldest among us four and we all want to go together, I’m the youngest. Him and Dirkka can hide on the ship for a while and I can go early but we’ve not got that long.” Jayyne explains.

“I still can’t believe you’re going without me.” Dayvhe mutters bitterly in the tone of someone who has had this argument many, many, times before.

“You need to help Feferi.” Dirkka states with no room for debate.

You lean back in the seat, catching the curious look that Dayvhe gives you. You pull your glasses off and rub the bridge of your nose where the frames rest and you can already feel a tension headache starting to build.

“This ship,” you say as you put the glasses back on, “it’s the same one you showed up to Karkat’s hive in? That’s the one you’re taking to space to fight it out with the Empress?”

“Yeah. And it’s not that big so don’t even think about it, Dayvhe.” Roxxie says warningly.

“I didn’t say anything!” Dayvhe says defensively.

“You don’t have a helmsman in there.” you say. No way it does, not at that size and you highly doubt that Dayvhe would have in any way allowed her to have one. Or at least if Roxxie had a helmsman in her ship despite his protests you bet he’d have told you about it.

From Roxxie’s horrified expression you have your answer about that.

“Of course not! I mean we’d looked into ways to do it that weren’t so flipping terrible, like all you have to do it wear some lame-o TRON helmet and a stupid suit for eight hours and that’s your shift but it doesn’t work like that.” Roxxie says.

“No, it doesn’t. You need a whole thinksponge, a whole neural system with a working mind that processes data for you and is far more plastic than anything anyone can make. Not to mention the capability to generate psionics in the first place. You need a helmsman, there’s no substitute for it.” you say gravely.

“If you open your mouth to volunteer I will flip right off of the handle.” Dayvhe says harshly and you know you’d be in for a serious talk and a good bout of explaining yourself if you said that.
“Hardly. My point is that without a helmsman you’re all going to die. The Empress makes no bones about how her ship is the best in the universe and any troll would be lucky to serve directly under her. And a bitch as paranoid as that isn’t going to let anyone else have a faster or better ship than her. Her ship is going to be the fastest and strongest and its helmsman may even be powered by a psionic better than me so even if you did helm me against my will that might not save you either. And it’s not like you could stealth because GOOD stealth takes power that you don’t have. You go up there in that ship as is you may as well just save yourselves the trouble and blow your brains out down here.” you tell them.

“That’s what I said.” Jayekh says, surprising you.

“But you’re all for this plan?” you say.

“I’m modifying the ship. Well, me and Dirkka both. Large-scale engineering is more my thing, finicky robot parts are more Dirkka’s wheelhouse. There’s a way to harness radiation as power, uranium specifically. There are deposits of it deep below the ground here, it’s part of the reason the forest here is so strange.” Jayekh explains.

“I thought radiation was just something that made people sick.” Karkat says suspiciously.

“That’s what I said! But there’s apparently ways to guard against it.” Roxxie says.

“I’ve been working with my neighbour on the project, not telling her about the ship of course, just using it as a power source and me and Jayded have made great progress.” Jayekh says proudly.

There’s a beat of silence and then you, Karkat and Dayvhe all burst into questions. Most of them are along the lines of ‘how the crotch blistering fuck do you two know each other?’. Well, that phrasing might be Karkat’s. Jayekh seems equally confused that the three of you know Jayded too.

“Why didn’t you tell me they knew each other?” Jayekh asks Dirkka.

“Because I have better things to do than invade his privacy all of the time? I only looked into those two because it was obvious that was going somewhere. Even if I did look her up why would I guess she’s the same girl as your neighbour who I don’t even remember being told about by name anyway.” Dirkka says defensively.

“I mean, don’t get me wrong Jayded is wicked smart and you live pretty close by but that’s a hell of a coincidence.” Dayvhe points out.

“True, but both of your quadrantmates know me and you know Roxxie. That’s a bit unbelievableabubble don’t you think?” Feferi points out.

“God, don’t say that to him. He’ll start to think that the world really does revolve around him.” Karkat sneers.

Jayekh proceeds to explain that he generates incredible energy by splitting atoms, which you’d thought was something not possible. As far as you knew atoms were the smallest divisible part of… stuff. Look, physics was never your greatest schoolfeeding subject, not once you got part inertia and wind resistance and things that applied to you. Eridan insists that it’s not possible and Jayekh drags him on a tour of his tech that you tag along to and stare blankly at.

It turns out that what they want you to do is to take up all of Dirkka’s work on finding heiresses and improve upon it, leaving him time to go out with Roxxie to hunt them down. Now that she has Feferi and Eridan on side they can double their speed, especially with Eridan’s connections to other fishtrolls which you know is a large part of why Feferi keeps him around in the first place. That and
stopping him from going all genocidal on landdwellers. Karkat’s job is to help mediate a compromise about what Feferi and Roxxie want out of their presumably shared empire and what the deal will be if they manage to bring any new heiresses into the mix. Though your once failed attempt at a game with those guys is long past it seems that everyone remembered that though people may not always enjoy his leadership Karkat is damn good at knowing how people tick. It was, in fact, Feferi and Eridan who made that suggestion which Dayvhe cheerfully backed up.

It’s nice that they want you for your thinksponge and not in a ‘drill holes into it and rig you into a ship’ sort of way.

The point is that you modify Dirkka’s methods of searching, improve them and flex them to fit the intel that Jayne gives you from her investigation work. It works reasonably well, actually. It’s hard to do but you even send Dayvhe out to check minor leads for you and you’re reassured to know that he’s plenty experienced at being an unassuming observer sitting on a street corner making music. Besides, pretty much everyone who talks to Dayvhe likes him and for those that don’t has has a sword to defend himself. He brings you good information that leads to the two royal teams squaring off against more heiresses in a perigee than they had before in half a sweep.

Every week or so you’re back at Jayekh’s place, catching each other up on progress and thoughts about how things are going. Jayekh explains his progress and Jayde’s unwitting help, though he’s starting to feel bad about keeping her in the dark. Feferi tells of the rageful heiresses who want nothing more to do with her, most of whom attack before she does. Regardless, her hold on Alternia is growing with each win. Territory is consolidated and held by highbloods loyal to her and Eridan.

It’s clear as day to you that Feferi is not happy with this at all.

You find her one night in one of Jayekh’s greenhouses, on a rare occasion she arrived before him as they travelled separately and her expression is glum as she runs her finger over a leaf.

“There you are,” you say as you enter the room, “Eridan’s not here yet but I think they want to start when he gets here right away.”

“Right, thanks Sollux.” Feferi says softly. She turns a pot around in her hands and sets it down again.

“Did I ever say sorry for all of that before? I think I did but I suppose it doesn’t mean all that much, right?” Feferi asks, looking over at you.

“All of what?” you ask, hesitating at the doorway.

Feferi sighs and shakes her head, she folds her arms and leans her hip against the table with the plants on it.

“Everything with Eridan. I know why he’s important, he’s an ally and I need to stop him from hurting people and he does help me with mom but…” Feferi trails off into a frustrated hiss. You hesitate and walk closer.

“No, I knew about that. You explained to me then why you were with him, you don’t have to apologise. It obviously sucks for you, it’s not like I blame you.” you point out. No, you blame Eridan but you don’t say that. You also don’t say that if he wasn’t so blatantly hogging both Fef’s flush and her pale this wouldn’t be a problem but it is what it is.

“See, I always liked that about you. You’re sweet.” she says with a smile.

“I’m not that-” you start to protest because that’s what you do when a girl you like says something nice about you, you correct her. She laughs, bright and clear like a bell.
“Ah, sea? I bet that if the world was in danger and the only way to save everyone on the planet was to lay down your life you’d do it in second, right?” she challenges you.

One life for however many million are on Alternia? Especially when among that number is everyone you care about, when among that number is Dayvhe. Hell, sometimes you’ve been on the edge of taking yourself out for no benefit to anyone else at all! Your face must communicate something along those lines because Feferi grins, serrated fangs on display.

“There you are, you’re sweet Sollux. I like that. I always felt bad about everything, you deserve better. Better than me for shore but I guess I’m a little shellfish like that.” Feferi shrugs, leaning a little closer to you.

You’re halfway through asking her what she means when she leans all the way in and kisses you. It’s- good. Nice. Fuck, those are stupid words, it’s great. She’s colder than you but instead of being cold and clammy the difference in temperature sends a thrill through you. Cautiously you rest your hands on the soft and squishy curves of her waist, her figure speaks to both the need for insulating in diving so deep in the waters to see her lusus but also of the delicacies that she can afford to consume that you can’t buy. She kisses you a little harder and her hand tightens in your shirt, a reminder that plush though she may be she is an underwater nightmare for some. She spends enough time waterbound to look like that, unlike the comparatively land based Roxxie, Dirkka or Eridan who you know doesn’t favour deep ocean water like Feferi does.

Feferi backs you into a different table, your hip banging into the wood as you stumble back still kissing Feferi back just as enthusiastically as she is to you. One of her razor sharp teeth nicks your lip and you’re reminded that Feferi actually hunts and kills a lot of her own food, the most dangerous thing you’ve bitten recently is airborne popcorn that Karkat threw at you. Sure you have psionics and you’re dangerous as hell but Feferi could snap you in half and you are weirdly into that. Why are you into that? You’re not pitch for her, this is red as hell but you’re fucked up as per usual.

There are claws prickling your hips and you can hear a pathetically needy little warble that you can feel is coming from your chest. Behind you the door to the greenhouse swings open and bangs on the wall. Feferi’s claws dig in as she pushes away from you in alarm.

“Oh shit sorry!” Dayvhe gasps and the door slams again but the moment is broken.

Your face is about the same surface temperature as the sun and pleasingly Feferi looks just as flustered.

“He- he won’t tell, will he?” Feferi asks, tucking her hair behind her earfin on one side.

“Keeping secrets comes pretty easily to Dayvhe, he’ll be quiet if you want him to be.” you tell her. Is that what she wants?

“That’d be best I think, if Eridan found out things would be unmanageable.” Feferi sighs unhappily.

“I get that.” you nod.

“Thanks, Sol. We reely should get going.” Feferi tells you and slides past to the doorway. You follow her like you’re attached by elastic. Halfway down the stairwell you nearly run into the back of Feferi who’s stopped as Dayvhe is in the way.

“Eridan was looking for you, told him I hadn’t seen you up there so maybe pick somewhere else to tell him you were. Sorry about bursting in on y’all like the Cruel Aid man.” Dayvhe says coolly.
“It’s fine, don’t worry about it Dayvhe. Thanks for being cool with Eridan, you’re a sweetie. I should go find him.” Feferi says brightly and flashes a sharp toothed smile at him. She shimmies past him leaving you and Dayvhe alone. Dayvhe looks up at you from the lower step that he’s on and shoots you a suggestestive expression with an eyebrow raise that ought to be illegal.

“Shut up, it was just a kiss.” you say quickly.

“Hey I’m not judging, Feferi’s a babe, super hot, rumblespheres for days. But that wasn’t just a kiss, dude. That was at least second base and also…” Dayvhe trails off and reaches out, catching your chin in his hand he swipes his thumb over your lip.

“You’re bleeding a little. Girl’s got fangs like whoa, huh?” Dayvhe laughs.

“Alright, yes, it was great but shut up. If Eridan finds out he’ll lose his shit and shoot me.” you tell him seriously and the amusement drains from Dayvhe’s face.

“I know he wouldn’t be pleased but are you really serious about him actually trying to hurt you?” Dayvhe asks. He’s obviously concerned and you really do need him to understand the gravity of this situation.

“Yeah, he tried before. She’s got him on a tighter leash now but if he found out…” you trail off meaningfully.

“If he tries to hurt you there won’t be enough of him left to bury.” Dayvhe hisses, his voice dipping into a dark snarl that momentarily pings you as Gamzee-like before it fades.

“Easy, I don’t even think this is a thing. It was just a kiss, it’s not like she asked me out.” you say soothingly. You smooth your hands over his cheeks and he pushes his face into your touch. From his place on the lower step you can see his eyes from behind his shades as he looks up at you.

“Do you want her to ask you out? You deserve that if you want it, she shouldn’t just be allowed to mack on you because she’s a hot heiress.” Dayvhe insists.

“I don’t know, I didn’t even think about it until she kissed me.” you say honestly.

“Ok, well, if you need interference run on Eridan I can totally do that. I also have a robot that’s a big fan of punching people and also doing what I ask it to so that’s a thing.” Dayvhe offers.

“You say the sweetest things.” you snicker, only half joking. Either way there’s a meeting that you both need to get to.

So, yeah meetings happen, progress continues. Jayekh and Jayded make so much progress on splitting the atom one week that they accidentally blow the power grid for thirty miles. Admittedly thirty miles in ass end of nowhere jungle isn’t too bad but still. Other heiresses get culled and the list grows shorter each week. Also unrelatedly each week after that Feferi manages to catch you on your own somewhere to kiss you breathless and leave your head spinning.

You’re not sure if the two of you are a thing. You don’t know if she’s your matesprit or not and despite Dayvhe’s very good advice to just grow a pair and ask you’ve still not done so. You still haven’t done so even when she breaks the pattern and shows up at your hive. You have enough intelligence to troll Dayvhe and tell him to not come over tonight, you really don’t need him walking in on you. Not when Feferi is kicking her skirt off and throwing your palmhusk onto the counter next to Dayvhe’s plant.

You should ask her to be your matesprit, preferably before she manages to get her hand in your
pants. Oh, suddenly that time has passed and now you miraculously don’t care about saying anything that might sidetrack Feferi at all. Funny how that works.
“We can talk here on the floor
On the phone, if you prefer
I'll be here until you're okay
Let your words release your pain
You and I will share the weight
Growing stronger day by day
It's so dark outside tonight
Build a fire warm and bright
And the wind it howls and bites
Bite it back with all your might”

Talk To Me - Cavetown

Explicit pale content, not suitable for trolls six sweeps and under

“I should go.” Feferi whispers, nudging your arm that’s pinning some of her long hair to the ground. You move your arm and she sits up and then gets to her feet.

“But it’s,” you glance at the window to see that it’s dangerously light outside, “it’s way too close to day.”

“I have a ride coming, don’t worry.” she says and hunts around for her skirt.

“You can stay, you know. I have a second half of my coon that’s separate and even if I didn’t you wouldn’t have to leave, I’d sleep on the loungeplank if you needed me to.” you offer.

“That’s sweet, but you don’t need to do that. You should get some sleep though.” she says gently.

“Why do you have to go? Did… did I do something wrong?” you ask, feeling certain that the answer is yes.

Feferi looks at you with her big eyes behind cute glasses. Her mouth opens slightly to say something and even now you’re still stuck looking at her lips and feeling the temptation to kiss her.

“Oh, no, Shoal-lux not at all. I had fun and I like you, I don’t want you to feel bad! I’ve just got to get back or-” she begins.

“Eridan.” you say at the same time that she says it.

“Yeah, that.” Feferi sighs. She pulls her swimsuit on and shimmies her skirt over her hips.

You stay put on the floor where she’s left you as she slips her shoes on and you feel cold everywhere that she’s touched you in a way than has nothing to do with her cooler temperature or the drying pink staining your skin. You want to ask what this means for you both, if you’re still together, if you ever were. This isn’t like it was with Dayvhe where there were reasons that things were complicated and you understood, this feels different and worse.

Feferi calls out a goodbye and your front door clicks shut. Your chest feels too tight and you sit there feeling ambiguously shitty until you get your act together enough to grab your palmhusk.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]
TA: are you busy?
TG: when you ask me that it’s always either something really serious that you’re playing off as not serious or you’re about to send me about two hundred memes so the answer is always I’m totally free for both of those
TA: right
TA: 20 paining ii2n’t all ii’2 cracked up two be then.
TG: oh shit
TG: also all respect to fef and that but it absolutely is all its cracked up to be either that or karkat needs more credit
TA: ii don’t want two know that
TG: so it wasnt just a kiss then huh

You wrap an arm around yourself and realise that you’re probably not doing so hot right now. Ugh, fuck this. Wait, no, poor choice of words.

TA: ii know ii’2 late but ii2 there any way you can get here?
TG: oh shit sol are you hurt?
TA: no no ii mean not phy2iically
TG: *what*
TA: no, ii’2 not liike that. don’t fly off the handle. ii ju2t think that
TG: think what
TA: ii think 2he miight have been u2iing me two ii don’t know, get back at ed or dii2tract her2elf from hiim. ii don’t know what 2he wanted. but ii thiink u2ed ii2 the operatiive word here.
TG: right im already out the door give me twenty
TG: go shower if you can and ill be right there
TA: <>
TG: <>

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

You peel yourself up off of the floor and wander into the trap and fiddle with the settings until you’re under the spray. Yeah, you definitely don’t feel good about this. You liked Feferi and you know that she knew that. It’s not like she ever talked to you outside of the meetings and sneaking off to see you, you’d put that down to Eridan maybe snooping but it’s a weak excuse and you know it. You don’t blame her for wanting to feel like someone likes her for her without blackmailing her into something but you really wished she hadn’t used you to make her feel better. And there’s that word again. It’s not like she did anything wrong, not really, you wanted all of this it’s just you maybe had a different understanding of what ‘this’ was before you got involved.

Ugh, you should have listened to Dayvhe and asked her what her intentions were. Stupid. It was stupid of you. You have enough experiences with getting your heart broken with Aradia and you know that Dayvhe looks out for you and basically gets the whole romance schoolfeed 24/7 in his ear from Karkat.

The door clicks open but doesn’t swing all the way in, a gloved hand curls around the door.

“It’s just me.” Dayvhe says quietly.

You turn the water off and grab a towel wrapping it around everywhere that’s now grey and no longer stained two different colours. You do that sort of wrap, twist, knot thing that gets a towel to sit at your hips for a while. You’ve certainly never done that and stayed like that all night, no, never you are a very functional troll yes sir. You pull at the door and reveal Dayvhe who is taking his hood
down, the lower half of his face is bandana covered and at some point he lost the gloves. It’s his ‘inadvisably running around in the daytime’ get up.

“You caught the sun.” you say dumbly, pointing to a little angry coloured patch of skin on the bridge of his nose.

“I’ll live. I brought Ben and Jerries because I have been subjected to enough romcoms to know that’s what you do.” Dayvhe assures you and grabs another towel and dumps it on your head and starts ruffling it around to dry your hair.

“Is this that kind of romcom?” you ask and your voice sounds… uh, bad. It sounds like you might cry, god this is so stupid, you’re so stupid.

Dayvhe grits his teeth and pushes his shades into his hair.

“You’re gonna dry off, get dressed and get in a pile and talk to me and it might be that kind. The kind where you forget the dumb girl that didn’t deserve you. Or you tell me something and it turns out it’s a revenge flick, we’ll see.” Dayvhe says, his voice hard.

He leaves and you can hear him rummaging for clean clothes. It occurs to you that Dayvhe has just spent a considerable amount of time actively engaged with you in the process of hunting down heiresses. It occurs to you that he’s been around Dirkka and Roxxie far longer and it’s clear that though their relationship to him is different they are just as devoted to him as you are.

It occurs to you that if Dayvhe decides that Feferi deserves to die she’s not going to make it long.

The only reassuring thing about this is that you’re bad at lying to him and he’s not so irrational as to go for that for no reason. Aradia said he had no actual blood on his hands and you know he is in practice very merciful. He’s not going to end her for hurting your feelings but he probably would if she’d done you actual harm.

You dry off, you change into the clothes Dayvhe leaves you and get into a pile made of your desk chair, several large loungeplank cushions and a lot of boxes and packaging for husktop parts that you never threw away after making John’s machine. Dayvhe pulls you down and digs his fingers into your hair and sets about making sure it’ll dry looking really goddamn stupid, not that you mind one bit.

You go through the cursory assurances that no it wasn’t that bad, Feferi didn’t push you into anything and you weren’t unwilling at all. Dayvhe relaxes somewhat after that and you can almost feel him shelving his future murder plans.

“All right man,” Dayvhe says as he hooks one leg under yours and nudges the underside of your jaw with his bisected horn, “tell me what was so bad about it.”

“I don’t tell me what your first time with Karkat was like. That was your first time pailing anyone at all, right?” you ask. Dayvhe leans back and pulls a face, you can tell he’d rather not talk about it at all.

“All right so, fine, as a preface me and Karkat had been playing like concipient cluckbeast for ages. So glad I wear black boxers and jeans because damn that whole thing was fuckin’ hell and I’d have been throwing away clothes left and right from that if they were lighter.” Dayvhe rambles. Gross, but probably true.

“And something happened to make you back out enough that you thought to come to me and fix my Dirkka problem before vanishing because Karkat would definitely hate you.” you prompt.
“Right. Yeah. I don’t know what either of us were thinking because as far as we both knew it was going to escalate from buck nakedness to murder but I guess both of us were dumb and horny enough to be like ‘don’t care gonna get laid even if it kills me’. God I’m stupid. An’ we got down to just underwear and Karkat was about to give little Dayvhe, not that he’s little, a friendly hello handshake and I had a sudden bolt of sanity and bailed. Which I figured he was gonna kick my ass to the kerb for and then you saved us both, thanks again. So I’m just saying up front that this is how smooth we both were going into that whole thing.” Dayvhe rambles.

“But the actual first time was… it was good. I mean it was also a total fail. We had that joint moment oh ‘oh shit you’re a mutant too!’ and then it was getting in each other’s way trying to get clothes off ASAP. One of us fell over. It wasn’t smooth or soft focus or anything it was lots of cursing, some happy crying, uncoordinated groping and a complete failure to remember the whole ‘pail’ part of pailing in time. And it was sticky and probably not as, uh, long lasting as either of us would have wanted to admit but I didn’t want anyone else there. And afterwards I was stupidly happy and he was too and we laughed like morons and Karkat nearly slipped on all the red around and it was great.” Dayvhe explains. His expression is sentimental with more than a touch of embarrassment.

“And you?” he prompts.

“I don’t know.” you mutter and look away from him.

“I’ve liked Fef ever since AA… well since it was clear that that shit wasn’t getting better. She was having troubles with Eridan and my matesprit was a robot who was technically either cheating on me or had dumped me. She got it. And she’s really hot, really really hot.” you add that last part with emphasis.

“So you weren’t exactly mad when she kissed you after not seeing you for ages.” Dayvhe prompts, not taking the bait to comment on Feferi’s hotness.

“Right. And I know you said to ask if it was going to be a thing when it kept happening but I didn’t want to which was stupid of me, I know. I’m so fucking-” you begin but there’s suddenly a hand over your mouth.

“Sorry the Strydr service is not accepting any more insults about Sollux today, only exposition.” Dayvhe says and lets you go. Fine.

“Maybe I suspected that if I had asked she’d have stopped having anything to do with me because she wasn’t as into it as I was.” you admit and just speaking that out loud feels like draining the grossness out of an infection. It’s bad and it sucks and absolutely hurts but it’s probably better for you to do it. Dayvhe says nothing but just watches you with patient sympathy.

“I mean it felt good and all but not really more than…” you trail off meaningfully.

“Yeah, generally you want an improvement on your own hand, at least emotionally.” Dayvhe agrees.

“That’s what it felt like. She just showed up and no ‘hey how are you?’ or anything just- I mean I wanted to make it good for her but I’m pretty sure I could have been anyone to her. Like I was just some toy or whatever that she could put away and- and she just left right after! The most she talked to me was turning down my offer for her to stay!” you say finally starting to feel angry. If nothing else you had thought you were friends with her still, right?

“I’m sorry man, you deserved better.” Dayvhe tells you and paps your face gently.
“She’s an heiress, I don’t think there’s supposed to be better.” you mumble into his palm.

“Fuck that hemocasteist shit, heiresses are no better than anyone else and you know how much I love Roxxie. But she and Feferi ain’t better than us, especially not Feferi.” Dayvhe says fiercely, pushing up away from the pile to glue you into place with the force of his stare until he feels satisfied that you’re not buying the idea of Feferi being better than you for her blood. You still mildly believe that everyone is better than you on account of you being the worst but that’s a deeper issue that Dayvhe can’t fix by giving you a no nonsense stare.

Dayvhe sighs and sits down again, sitting astride your leg. His hands are splayed over your middle and he’s idly petting your sides as he looks down glumly.

“You don’t have to go to the meetings anymore you know. I can just catch you up.” he offers.

“It’s fine, it doesn’t matter.” you tell him.

“It’s not fine and it does matter.” he counters you stubbornly.

“Okay, it’s not fine but I’ll deal and I care more about helping to bring down the Empress and help fix things than I do avoiding Feferi.” you say, being more accurate this time.

“And I’m not allowed to punch her or, I’m guessing, tell her just what I think of her?” Dayvhe asks.

“Please don’t, I’d rather just forget it all happened. I don’t want to drag out all of the weirdness and I’m not going back to her again, I promise.” you vow.

You eat the deserts Dayvhe brought and listen to him talk about the things he’s been doing since you saw him last and you feel better, soothed. When you can barely keep your eyes open Dayvhe pulls you over to your coon and peels your shirt off with care, sure he catches it on your horn and snort laughs at how dumb you look but you know that you couldn’t swap out with anyone else he knows. He wants you there, it’s different than it was with Feferi.

So you show up like you said you would at the next meeting and though Dayvhe says nothing to Feferi he does have his shades off when he sees her next. You wonder if it’s just so she can get the full effect of the look he gives her, it’s harsh enough that it could strip paint from the walls.

“Dayvhe.” you remind him softly and he smother a hiss and shoulders his way up against your side and turns his attention to the talk Roxxie is starting to give.

It turns out that Jayyne found a real goldmine. Condy wants to keep track of the heiresses around so she’s basically doing your work for you. There’s currently a data centre a few hours flight from here, which is several thousand miles as it happens, which looks like it may hold data on all the heiresses and people of interest on the planet. You’ve done your own research and all you’ve determined is that it’s guarded to shit by clown cultists and pre-adult paramilitary forces keen to get a fast track into the higher echelons of the Empire upon ascension.

“This is way too risky.” Eridan says, flexing his new metal hand. He’s not had it long and you guess he’s adjusting. It says something that you’d rather pay attention to that than the concerned way that Feferi is trying to catch your eye.

“It’s going to need some serious planning but the reward would be wild.” Roxxie says breathlessly.

“Nothing ventured, nothing gained.” Jayekh agrees.

“I’ve got the basic building plans but I need better before I’d feel comfortable with this.” you say.
“I could fly a drone over.” Dirkka suggests.

“Good idea.” you nod.

“I’m not comfortable with any of this!” Karkat argues.

“Yeah I have to agree with Karkat here, all this snuffing out other heiresses is fine by me but this is putting Fef’s life in way too much danger.” Eridan protests, his voice warbling on his w’s still.

“You don’t get to decide that! This is important.” Feferi snaps at him.

“As your moirail it is my job to-” Eridan begins.

“I DIDN’T ASK!” Feferi snarls at him.

The air is heavy with awkwardness and you side eye Dayvhe to see him watching with the mild interest of someone invested in either way this could go shittily. In fact you think you would need an electron microscope to get small enough to see the tiniest of fucks that Dayvhe gives about this imploding relationship.

“Go on.” Feferi says firmly, looking back at your group.

Everyone looks at each other as if to hope that someone else might do the talking but it is eventually Dirkka who powers through pretending this is all normal.

“We looked at hacking the system but though data goes in it’s not stored in any way that we can access it, it seems they manually enter things on site and it isn’t connected to the internet outside. The data is sent off planet on imperial channels that even the heiresses don’t have access to and I can’t hack my way around. Given that I have more experience dealing with those channels than Sollux…” Dirkka trails off.

“Yeah, I don’t think getting caught and having drones raze my hive is a good plan.” you agree.

“We also can’t grab the data going in because it’s encrypted in different random ways each time. The only way to do this is to break in and get the data manually.” Dirkka explains.

“Not to go out of my way to agree with Eridan or anything but this does sound really dangerous and these are cultists and near adults we’re going up against. You four might be that age and Sollux has psionics out the ass but are the rest of us really up to that kind of fight? I don’t think I…” Karkat bites back the last of what he was going to say but you get it, he doesn’t think he can do this fight.

“Actually we were hoping you could do something else for us.” Roxxie says with cheer and not even a hint of being patronising.

“What?” Karkat asks suspiciously.

“If this plan blows we’re gonna need to get out of there so fast, not to mention needing to keep an eye on the plaice from the air. We could train you to fly my ship.” Roxxie offers. Karkat sits up a little straighter and looks at her with wide eyes.

“You’d trust me with your ship?” he asks.

“Shore! You’re part of the team and it’s a vital job. It’d still be my ship of course but at least temporarily you could be Captain Vantas, has a nice ring to it, right?” Roxxie says cheerfully.

You feel but don’t hear the laugh that Dayvhe chokes down but you can see how his face has gone
completely neutral poker proof in its expression. No, no reactions to that particular phrase there, no sir. Suspiciously you look at Karkat who has a dark hot flush creeping up the back of his neck. So they’re both…

Oh, ick. You really don’t want to think of circumstances that would lead to the uttering of the phrase ‘Captain Vantas’ to cause that reaction in them both. Dayvhe is barely keeping his giggling contained and Karkat is desperately pretending all is normal.

“Yes, ah, I’d love to learn to fly the ship. Anything I can do to help at all, really.” Karkat says quickly.

On the topic of awkward sexual tension the rest of the meeting breaks up into more specific plans and you end up having to ditch Dayvhe to glue yourself to Dirkka in order to discuss plans and avoid Feferi who seems keen to talk to you in private. Presumably about what went down between the two of you and also why Dayvhe keeps occasionally throwing her looks like he wants her head on a pike. Thankfully avoiding her is easy as she’s doing her level best to dodge interactions with Eridan.

The details of the plan get finalised. You’re to meet with Dirkka a few times closer to the date and go over data from his drones. Barring any change in information from that you’re all agreed to go storm this data centre, which seriously needs a cooler name, on the 17th.

You stop being able to avoid Feferi when you’re waiting to leave at Jayekh’s front door. You’ve started flying at least Karkat to and from Jayekh’s place after that first train ride and frequently you end up taking Dayvhe with you too.

“I bet he’s playing games with Roxxie, I’ll go drag his dumb ass back here.” Karkat grumbles and starts stomping off which is quite effective on the solid stone flooring of Jayekh’s hive.

“Sure thing, Captain Vantas!” you call after him and Karkat screeches to a halt, reels around and flips you off before marching away with his face so dark as to be almost pitch.

You’re blaming laughing so hard as the reason you didn’t hear Feferi sneak up on you.

“Sollux.” she says, setting a hand on your shoulder and making you jump.

“Ah! Fuck, Feferi you scared me.” you say with a nervous laugh. She pouts a little and looks at you suspiciously.

“What’s going on with you? Your moirail keeps giving me the evil eye and you’re definitely avoiding me.” Feferi says. Her hands are on her hips now and she’s waiting for your answer, it’s just not fair that she’s so unreasonably pretty as she does it. But it’s not hard to dredge up how not great the last time you were with her felt and stick to Dayvhe’s advice to stay away from her. You know she didn’t mean any harm, there’s not a mean bone in Fef’s body it’s just sometimes harm happens anyway.

“Nothing’s going on.” you shrug.

“Are we still friends? Did something change after…” Feferi doesn’t really need to finish that sentence.

“We’re still friends. I mean, as much as we were before. Which- it’s not like we’d talked much before the party for, what, sweeps?” you say calmly.

“I know, but it’s been-” she starts.
“Complicated?” you ask. God, what was it that Dayvhe first said when you talked about your life being complicated? That anyone else who used that word to you should blow you to apologise or—ok, no, bad train of thought to have when looking at Feferi. Damnit Captor stop thinking with your bulge.

“Yeah, it is.” Feferi agrees.

“Well, I hope everything we’re doing helps with that.” you tell her.

“So why’s your moirail giving me that look, then?” Feferi asks.

“He’s just—” out for Feferi’s blood because she made you cry? “Protective.”

“Protecting you from— did I hurt you or something Sollux? I really wasn’t trying to. I like you, I was enjoying myself and you seemed to as well and—” Feferi protests.

Two things happen at once, because of course they do. Firstly you open your big mouth.

“It’s cool, Feferi. We weren’t dating, it was just pailing.” you say loudly, and dumbly.

The second thing that happens at that moment is one of Jayekh’s many transportalizer pads activates and instead of returning your best friend or indeed your moirail it instead delivers Feferi’s moirail. Right in time for him to hear everything you just said. You stare at him and he stares back at you, his gills flaring widely.

“That… sounded better in context.” you say weakly.

“REALLY?” Eridan snarls with a handful of sudden and unwelcome gun. Ah, shit.

“Oh glubbing hell, Eridan this is none of your business!” Feferi snaps.

“IT IS ENTIRELY MY BUSINESS!” Eridan shouts at her.

“No it’s not! I’m sick of you interfering in everything and I love you, I do, but you’re just so exhausting sometimes! I just wanted something of my own!” Feferi argues.

“Something.” you repeat quietly. Ouch.

“You’re mine, I’m just trying to look out for you and this fucking landweller is talking about you like that like he’s anything to you!” Eridan snarls and waves his rifle at you.

Alright, mental math time. You can, in theory, stop projectiles. Hell even Dayvhe’s done it before. The downside of that is they tend to fly off wildly if they just hit a wall of psi around you and you’d sooner not be responsible for Feferi getting shot. So if you want to really stop the thing you’re going to have to catch the actual bullet in the air. He’s maybe six feet from you, okay now five as he’s stepping off of the transportalizer to wave one hand angrily at Feferi and the gun angrily at you with the other. So given the distance and how fast that bullet is going to travel you’re looking at fun new hopefully non fatal hole in your body or risking bystanders, no way can you catch that. Better talk him down then.

“I am WELL aware of how you feel about me! You just want my diamond and my heart all to yourself and meanwhile I’ve got to stop you going genocidal if I want your help changing the world and, honestly, it’s exhausting!” Feferi yells.

Oh god, they’re breaking up aren’t they? This is not lowering your getting shot odds.
“What’re you saying?!” Eridan demands.

Maybe you can just leave? You take a step back and Eridan’s focus snaps to you so sharply and you see his trigger finger twitch. Fuck, not that then.

“I’m saying I’m sick of this, I’m sick of you controlling my life. I don’t want to be your anything anymore!” Feferi says furiously, her hands suddenly filled with trident. Why is this happening to you? You’ve probably done a lot of things to deserve this kind of shit but you’d really rather it wasn’t happening.

The transportalizer flashes again and suddenly Dayvhe and Karkat are there.

“Holy shit, Eridan no!” Karkat shouts and Eridan’s grip on his gun tightens, you can see right down the barrel and it is not a good feeling at all.

Dayvhe darts forward and grabs the front of Eridan’s rifle and tries to force it up and in a direction that isn’t you. Panic floods you, he’s more in the way of it than you are right now and if anything happens to him you’ll just-

“Stop it, let it go.” Dayvhe hisses.

Eridan hisses back at him but it weirdly lacks bite. He’s the one with the weapon, and the high ground, Dayvhe is below him but still Dayvhe is trying to disarm him.


He’s not got highblood strength but somehow he gets control of the gun. You realise as Dayvhe pulls it free that Eridan let go. To your side Feferi’s trident clangs to the floor and Eridan falls to his knees crying. Dayvhe stands there with his hands wrapped around the barrel of it.

“Get. Out. If I- man if I see you again you’re dead. You’re lucky I’m so motherfucking merciful, get OUT!” Dayvhe snarls.

Eridan crawls backwards and Karkat hauls him to his feet. He stands, uncertain looking from Dayvhe to Feferi.

“OUT!” Dayvhe yells, the gun in his hands is shaking and Eridan probably has Karkat shoving him to the door to thank for not being smacked in the face with that rifle. Or shot. Eridan runs past you and out into the glowing jungle. Your bloodpusher is still in your throat, that was far too close.

“I’m sorry about-” Feferi begins.

“Just shut up. I don’t care about you or him. I mean it, if I see him again he’s dead and the only reason the same doesn’t go for you too is because you’re helping Roxxie get to a place where shit’s not going to suck. Where Sol isn’t gonna get helmed. But you’re not that goddamn useful so how about you fuck off?” Dayvhe snaps at her.

Feferi’s earfins flatten and she too makes her exit out of the open front door. Dayvhe is just sort of standing there, staring out the door after them with Eridan’s rifle clenched in his hand. He’s not moving or saying anything, he’s not even growling. Which would be a good thing except it makes you monumentally assured that he’s really pissed.

“What the fuck was that shit all about?” Karkat demands because he can’t be quiet for long.

“They broke up, I got dragged into it.” you answer, fudging the truth a little.
“You let him point a gun at you.” Dayvhe states with a blank voice.

“I can deflect a bullet at this range but not catch it, with Feferi that close it could have shot her. And that’s if it was a bullet, some of his guns fire lasers.” you say defending yourself.

“You could have taken the gun from him!” Dayvhe snaps and throws the gun on the floor.

You could have… oh yeah, you could have done that. Just wrenched his hands off of it and removed it from him.

“I panicked.” you say dumbly.

Dayvhe’s shoulders slump and he makes his terrible broken little noise that has you grabbing at him to pull him closer because you can’t hear that and not try to fix it. Dayvhe knocks his head up underside your jaw and whines, his claws prickle and poke at your skin through your shirt.

“Shit, I’m sorry. I was stupid, I should have listened, should have thought he’d come down looking for her. Shouldn’t have-” you apologize in a quiet frenzied stream of words.

“Shut up.” Dayvhe tells you and your teeth click together with how fast your mouth shuts.

“I’m just going to… go. Now. And talk to Roxxie about flying and, uh… tell them about all this. Don’t mind me.” Karkat says awkwardly and you hear the flash of the transportalizer to tell you he’s gone.

“Just fly us back.” Dayvhe says.

Your arms are already around him so it’s no trouble at all to lift you both into the air and trace the familiar trail back to your place. He clings tightly to you, not because he fears you’ll drop him but more because you think he wants to be as close as physically possible to you. His face is pressed tight to the side of your neck, as if him not feeling your pulse would mean it stops being there. As you approach your building you psionically ease the window open to let you in. You use the window more than the door lately but as you land he doesn’t let go.

“You could have died.” Dayvhe says, he’s right of course.

You apologise again but Dayvhe just shakes his head against your chest.

“Not taking the gun was dumb but we all do dumb shit when we’re off guard and freaked. It was REAL dumb though, you’re so smart and you manage to be so stupid too it’s just- ugh it’s not that.” Dayvhe tells you and pushes away.

He stands in the main room of your hive with the gently warming light of the oncoming day lighting him up so much that you can see the pained twist of his mouth. He wraps his arms around himself and pings all of the pity centres in your head for it.

“I think I might be a bad person.” Dayvhe admits and pushes his shades off to give you a guilty look.

“What?” you say.

“Some asshole just tried to murder my moirail. I get- protecting is a normal thing, even killing him then and there just to be safe that he won’t try it again. That’s whatever.” Dayvhe says with a shake of his head.

“A lot of people wouldn’t have let him go, that doesn’t make you bad.” you point out. Honestly it
was merciful, you’re pretty sure that if the roles had been reversed there would be serious structural
damage to Jayekh’s hive and little more than a nasty cold blooded stain on the ground where Eridan
had stood.

“I didn’t want to let him go. Don’t want to.” Dayvhe says stiffly.

“He tried to kill you and you’re my moirail. I want to kill him, I could do. I could do it myself or fuck
I could ask Dirkka and Roxxie to do it for me. Even Jayekh would hunt him down if I asked him
right and Jayyne is all about bringing bad guys to justice. I know Rohhze hates him, she’d kill him if
I asked, wouldn’t even need to know why and she’d Chucklevooodoo him first.” Dayvhe hisses.

“He attacked you and I want fucking interest, I want him dead and I want him to suffer first. I want
him in parts for what he- for- I think I’m a bad person.” Dayvhe confesses like it’s some mortal sin
for him to be that invested in you.

Vengeance is an unusual thing to have to soothe out of Dayvhe because he’s right in a way, despite
his sometimes asshollish attitude and quick guarding wit he is underneath it all unusually soft. Maybe
it’s a mutant thing. Karkat is like that a little too, unnaturally soft for a troll and almost too caring.
Dayvhe is the same and people know it enough to inspire pity in them. He cares about people as easy
as breathing.

It’s not like he doesn’t have a mean streak or that he doesn’t get angry, the messages you saw him
send before strifing with Dirkka on Karkat’s roof once are examples of that but he regretted it almost
immediately. Maybe he’s never felt this before, maybe he’s never laid awake furiously wishing
someone dead. You’ve spent far too many days like that, visualising choking the life from Vriska for
what she did to you and Aradia and having it be one of the times that she can’t control you so she
can’t stop you. Or Equius for his soulbots and stolen flush, you’ve wished unspeakable pain on him
too but it passes. It’s too risky or comes with too little reward to carry those out so eventually it just
fades into platonic loathing and distain, a grudge that’ll never fully heal.

He’s right though, you’re sure. A word or two from him to the right people could end Eridan’s life
but it’s hard to justify now. He didn’t actually kill you and you’re in no danger from him now.
Killing him would surely damage your group’s standing with Feferi no matter her current
relationship status with him and that could jeopardize the mission, Roxxie’s takeover and the
improvement of life for trolls everywhere. Plenty of reasons not to kill him.

You shoosh him, tell him he’s done nothing wrong and don’t comment on how tightly he clings to
you that day in your sopor even as he sleeps. And, because you’re not a good person, you consider
that for the crime of trying to kill you AND making your moirail feel like shit about it that the next
time you see Eridan will be the last time.

It doesn’t take long until the 17th rolls around, your work with Dirkka to check out the data centre
proves useful but gives you all no reason not to go along. Roxxie has since heard from Feferi who is
still down with the plan with zero mention of Eridan being involved at all. You sneakily check in
with Nepeta who tells you that their dysfunctional quadrant is ‘ofurcially’ ended according to her
intel.

You watch out of the window as the ground whips by below you, the scenery moving faster than
you’re used to when you fly. Karkat is flying the ship with Roxxie standing nearby looking proud of
her student. You pointedly ignore Dayvhe asking ‘Captain Vantas’ how it’s going and Karkat’s
blatantly false threat that Dayvhe is never ever going to get into his pants again at this rate. That aside
the ship does go fast, Jayekh’s nuclear engine is enough to give the ship a lot of kick but it’ll never
be able to do the things Roxxie needs it to do in future at this rate. More unsettling is that this ship
still has a proto helmsblock, you were wrong about it not having one because of its size. You
suppose it was designed as a stealth scouting ship, even if it doesn’t look it from the outside. There’s no one helming obviously but just looking at the place sets your teeth on edge.

Before too long Karkat is lowering the ship out of view of the centre and apparently using what little stealth it does have before pulling up again. Not everyone has means of communicating with the ship directly but if you wanted to you could still troll Karkat on his palmhusk directly so you’re not bothered that you don’t have a control to summon the ship directly.

All of you have studied the map so there’s no conferring between any of you as you all sneak silently through the trees and out towards the facility. You don’t notice him do it but somehow Dayvhe ends up between you and Feferi, this isn’t the place or time to comment on that though. Dirkka stops walking suddenly and raises a fist, a signal that seems to only be understood by Dayvhe and Jayekh but you’re not just going to blunder past him.

Jayekh combat rolls across the dirt and presses his back against the dirt bank before crawling up a little to peer over it. You just, float up ever so slightly to look because you’re not a moron. Up ahead over the rise of the hill are a group of face painted clown jackasses, you knew there were some running security around this place but you’d still hoped to miss them.

“I have a plan.” Dayvhe whispers and pulls the rest of you closer to the bank as well so you’re all out of their line of sight.

“What’s the plan?” you ask.

“Stay here.” Dayvhe tells you all very quietly. That’s not much of a plan.

There’s a blur of psionic boosted ninja movement and suddenly no Dayvhe at all. Blind panic grips you and you scramble up the bank to see Dayvhe walking casually and confidently right up to the group of juggalos who have definitely seen him coming.

“Hey.” Dayvhe greets them.

“That’s the plan?!” you hiss to the background noise of Dirkka slamming his head into the ground.

“You shouldn’t be here little one.” one of the juggalos says lazily.

“Cause of that building, right?” Dayvhe asks, pointing at the data centre.

“What’s it to ya?” a second, larger juggalo demands with a snarl.

You need to kill these guys before they can hurt Dayvhe, pick them up and throw them maybe. It’ll blow your cover but Dayvhe won’t get clubbed to death.

“Hey man, chill a little. We’re all cool.” Dayvhe says, holding his hands up innocently.

“He said stay here, he’s got a plan. Let’s just wait.” Roxxie whispers.

“I’ve got a bead on two of them just in case.” Jayekh adds softly.

“You’re guarding that place, right? What’s that even like because, man, it’s pretty obvious they’re hiring by hue, right?” Dayvhe says, gesturing to the trolls around him all wearing the same colour.

“Only for us outside.” one says with a shake of their head.

“What, they don’t think you’re good enough for in there? That’s kind of rough them not respecting you like that.” Dayvhe says.
“They act like we’re stupid, like we don’t know how heretical they are and how little they think of our faith.” a second hisses furiously.

“You don’t have to take that.” Dayvhe points out.

“We’re not all useless drugged out of our minds, we want to work but it’s hard when they treat you like-” one of them says and there’s a loud snuffle.

“But you don’t have to work here, right? Or you don’t have to let them treat you so bad. They need you or else you wouldn’t be here. Who says you have to do what they say just because they’re higher up than you?” Dayvhe asks.

“That’s some downright blasphemous shit against the hemospectrum, little rustie.” one says seriously, inclining his large horns to Dayvhe threateningly.

“Are you going to rat me out?” Dayvhe asks. His life is in their hands, of course if they try to do that they are absolutely going to die but they don’t know that.

“I’m pretty sure we can all be cool, right? Besides it’s not like anyone else listens.” one of the others says.

“You know what? Fuck this shit, we should go have ourselves a good talk to those motherfuckers about treating us right. We don’t come back until they sort their shit out.” one of them snaps and there’s murmured agreement across the gathered highbloods.

You watch as the group wanders off, one even ruffling Dayvhe’s hair as he goes by. You all wait nervously before Dayvhe beckons you all over.

“That was a reckless, stupid plan!” Jayyne reprimands him.

“I think it was inspired!” Jayekh exclaims though his enthusiasm is dampened at Dirkka’s disapproving look. Bad Jayekh, no encouraging Dayvhe’s idiocy.

“We can all shout at Dayvhe later, come on.” Roxxie hisses and starts to run for the buildings. The rest of you rush after her and seriousness takes you all over again. That building is going to have plenty of armed trolls looking for a reason to use their weapons, you need to get the data and get out.

A chime makes you all skid to a halt and when Feferi curses at it you look around at her. Feferi’s face is lit up by her open shellphone as she taps angrily at the screen.

“Silence it!” Roxxie hisses angrily.

“Sorry, it’s just- it’s Eridan. He keeps trying to tell me what to do.” Feferi says, though you doubt that any of them care for her relationship drama. Not since they all learnt about Eridan trying to shoot you and not caring that his gun was also pointed at Dayvhe in the end.

“Unbelievable.” Jayyne mutters and all of you start moving again.

You’ve already agreed who is going where, there’s two possible points that data could be stored and if one of you turns out to be right then the other group will start a diversion. You are very, very, good at creating diversions.

Dirkka, Roxxie and Jayyne go one way and you, Dayvhe, Jayekh and Feferi go the other. They head for one large building and you four head to another, you have Eridan to blame for your irritatingly uneven groups. Jayekh and Dayvhe lead your group, as much as you hate to admit it
Dayvhe is more agile than you. His sword is also a more subtle weapon than Feferi’s very distinct trident and, well, neither of them have glowing eyes so there’s that.

Feferi’s hand is on your back, trailing along behind you as the four of you sneak through the spaces between the low buildings. From your mental map of the one here you’re pretty sure that this one to your left is small staff area. Dayvhe tugs on Jayekh to make him duck so his horns don’t cut into the view of the window, it’s slightly cracked and from within you can hear several angry highbloods arguing about getting the respect they deserve. That’ll tie several people up for a while, well done Dayvhe.

Jayekh peers around a corner and gasps.

“Hey! You there!” someone shouts at him and Jayekh leaps around the corner, both guns drawn and firing as he leaps sideways. You’ve never seen that move pulled off in anything other than video games and movies and it looks surprisingly stupid in real life. Especially the part where he then has to get up again. As soon as Dayvhe is done checking that no one else is around he gets back to the business of looking like he’s embarrassed to know Jayekh.

From the fact that the guy on the floor isn’t bleeding out you’re going to guess that Jayekh shot him with something non lethal but stealth video games haven’t taught you to leave bodies lying around. You step out in the way and throw the guy onto a nearby roof.

“This way.” you call and run off in the right direction. The building you’re looking for is short and squat, not like the other warehouse type buildings around the place. You think this is for storing things that the Empress wants or for distributing things that she decides you all need, it’s not a major import export place though so a lot of these buildings are likely empty and it’s all too easy to get turned around.

You spot the building in question and turn sharply towards it. It has large double steel doors and you can hear the soft hum of power going into the place. You press your ear to the door and the others fall into place behind you. You can’t hear anything but electrics coming from inside. Nodding sharply at the others you twist the handle, yank and… and the door is locked.

“It’s locked.” you say just so they don’t think you’ve forgotten how doors work.

“Maybe it opens the other way.” Jayekh helpfully suggests, evidently thinking that you HAVE forgotten how doors work.

“No, look it’s not that kind of handle. It’s a lever, it doesn’t GO the other way. It’s not a round handle thingie, it’s, look see?” you say stepping aside and demonstrating for him.

“Try just giving it a good yank upwards.” he tells you and Dayvhe snickers quietly like the traitor he is.

“Have you tried… turnways?” Dayvhe suggests, barely suppressing laughter.

“It’s locked!” you argue.

“Not for long.” Feferi says, brandishing her trident. You’re not sure how effective those are in turning locked doors into open doors but you’re also not willing to argue.

“Wait- Roxxie’s group found the data they’re transferring it now. We’re team distraction.” Dayvhe says, palming his communications device, having presumably also relayed that information to Karkat
“Are they all in the other data building, not wandering around?” you check. Dayvhe gets his palmhusk out again and fires off the question before getting an answer back.

“Yeah, they are. So time to blow shit up and cause a scene?” Dayvhe asks with a grin.

“Honestly I was hoping that would be our job.” Jayekh admits with a devious smile.

“Then let me start.” you say.

You float up into the air, pick a random building that is away from you but also not the building that Roxxie’s team are in. Being able to telekinetically throw shit around with great power is a wonderful skill but sometimes you just can’t argue with the sheer brute force of shooting fucking LASERS FROM YOUR GANDERBULBS. You obliterate the living shit out of one of the buildings. Down below Jayekh starts firing wildly at windows in buildings further down the way. Dayvhe leaps up onto a nearby rooftop and waits for someone to rush towards Jayekh and Feferi only to drop down and land on top of them.

You trust Dayvhe enough to handle himself in a fight, especially when you see that he might not be able to fly like you but he can pull off a double jump midair like a video game character. Your job instead becomes throwing people around and watching to make sure that the incoming goons aren’t going to close in on your group. To make matters harder it’s clear that they’re communicating and coordinating.

“This way!” you shout and lead your team through a building and out the other side, leaping desks and throwing boxes behind you. The path is narrow enough that the four of you can pass just fine but a big group like theirs has more trouble. A short hop over into another nearby pathway and you’re back to causing trouble again.

“It’s taking ages!” Dayvhe shouts, glancing at his palmhusk.

Jayekh has switched over to fatal ammo and Feferi has already forked several of the people who chased you through the building and found their way around to you. This isn’t right there shouldn’t be this many people here, none of the drone flights picked up this many people at all. You’re having to be more reckless and lethal yourself, you don’t have time for delicate here.

You bail again, rushing through a building and clearing a path. Making sure to ease the escape of your team and slow the pursuit of the others. Which is all well and good until it turns out that they’ve got someone with pyro-psionics on their side and the whole building goes up in flames. Busting a way out of that is far harder and you’re closely chased as your attackers don’t want to get burnt up either.

Feferi screams as one guy grabs her and Dayvhe lops off his arm allowing Feferi to pull free and jam a speared prong of her trident through the guy’s face. Dayvhe’s palmhusk is in his hands again and you can see Dirkka’s colour on screen, but he can’t run and read so you lift him up just for now.

“They’ve made it to warehouse three!” Dayvhe hisses in your ear, keen not to shout out vital info with people chasing you. Smart. You grab the other two and boost over in that direction, twisting in the air until some fucker with a crowd control weapon hits you with you don’t know what. It’s some kind of gun that makes you feel like you’ve just been punched all over and your hearing whites out in a painful screech.

The four of you plummet through the air but you manage to catch all of you before you hit anything,
but not fast enough to stop you all from falling through the roof of a burning warehouse in a bubble of psi that just barely protects you all.

You hit the ground hard and gag for breath but when you draw it in all you get is acrid smoke that has you hacking and coughing like mad. Crouching on the floor you pull your shirt up over your nose and mouth and try desperately to see anyone. Distantly you can see someone you think is Jayekh kick a hole in the wall and vanish so you stagger to your feet and decide to try to go that way.

“Sollux!” Dayvhe calls and a hand grabs hold of your arm. You turn to look at him and see that he’s got that same gas mask on that he had when opening his ancestor’s crate before, you guess it works for smoke too. He hauls you off a different way and drags you into the cleaner night air outside. You cough and try to breathe as you look around, no one’s found you yet but it’s also just the two of you. Dayvhe flicks his gas mask up, his eyes are bare under it because the mask itself has shades built into it because of course it does. He quickly checks you over but aside from the smoke inhalation you’re fine.

“Where are the others?” you gasp, your eyes watering like mad.

“I don’t know, I’ll tell them where to go.” Dayvhe says and types rapidly on his palmhusk.

Some random mook that you’re really starting to get tired of runs around the corner and you slam him into a wall hard enough to make him fall into a heap. Dayvhe grabs your hand and pulls you into a run again, you’re not built for this much running.

“There shouldn’t be this… this many people” you pant as you rush along. You point when Dayvhe is about to make a wrong turn and he corrects.

“Can’t help it now, we just gotta find the others and- Jayekh!” Dayvhe shouts when he sees the older troll across the room shooting at people cornering him. You toss a shelving unit at several of them and that thins them out enough for Jayekh to get the rest of them taken care of.

“Where’s Fef?” you ask looking around.

“She’s not with you? I got out and couldn’t see you, then Dayvhe put the message up and… and I thought she was with you.” Jayekh says worriedly.

“She knows where to go, she’ll meet us now let’s move!” Dayvhe insists. He’s right, if you’re this split up from her she absolutely doesn’t know where you are now but she does know where you’re going. If you go there then you can hold things down until she shows up. Or hell maybe she’s already there and relying on you three for back up. There’s no time to waste here.

The three of you run along and find warehouse 3, only it looks like the fire starter found it too because the roof is already burning and bits are starting to fall down. Everyone is there except Feferi. You wait, there’s no question about it. You all back up into a circle and defensively hunker down to fight and wait. Your body is dripping with sweat from the heat of the fire and you can’t say that Roxxie looks like she’s doing so hot. Dirkka’s mask covers his gills and he’s taking full advantage of that fact as he ducks in and out of the group with Dayvhe to attack as a team.

A beam falls down from the roof and Dirkka and Dayvhe jump back to the bunch of you with Dirkka pressing a hand to his bleeding leg wound, someone must have got a lucky hit in. Still it doesn’t seem serious so you try to not worry. Scrolling through the trollian chat shows zero communication after Dayvhe’s message of where to meet but you can see that Feferi is still online.

Dayvhe and Dirkka dart out again and a blueblood wrenches Dirkka’s helmet off and Roxxie has to
shoot him in the face before he lets go. Dayvhe drags him back through the thickening smoke and Dirkka can scarcely breathe for coughing so hard. This isn’t going to work. You back up closer to your group. Dayvhe has his gas mask pulled over his face but Dirkka is on the ground now gasping for breath, his hands over his gills. The mask he had was all that protected his vulnerable artificial gills, Dayvhe once said they were a weakness for him and got him sick easier and it seems this is no exception. This is no small amount of fire and smoke, even your eyes are watering through the smoke.

“We need to go! Just- just blow a hole in the ceiling and let’s go!” Roxxie shouts and shoots more encroaching people.

“We can’t just leave Fef behind!” you protest.

“It doesn’t seem right.” Jayekh agrees and fires at another group.

You scowl and haul one near adult up in the air and use him to beat the shit out of everyone else near him.

“We can’t just abandon her.” you reason.

“We’ve no idea where she is. We can track her down again, bust her out but we can’t stay.” Dayvhe reasons and flings one of your loaned shurikens at a guard who yelps and drops his weapon.

A terrified scream rings out from further in the complex and you know it’s Feferi instantly, you’ve heard her scream at Eridan before and one thing you know about her deep water breath sacs is that when she’s on the surface she has one hell of a powerful voice when she wants to use it.

“Fef!” you gasp, lifting up off of the floor.

“New plan. You get out that way.” you say and blast down a wall or two towards the outside. With the fire raging the building has zero structural integrity right now so it’s not hard.

“I’ll grab Feferi, shoot out through the roof and circle round to rejoin you with Karkat.” you say, pointing the way out.

“Are you shitting me? No!” Dayvhe shouts at you.

“We need Feferi for Roxxie’s plan to work, her plan is the only chance you have of being an adult that doesn’t just live in a cave. I can do this, just get out.” you tell him.

“No! You’re not invulnerable! You can’t!” Dayvhe yells but you’re already leaving.

And here’s the thing, he thinks that he’s seen what you’re capable of but he hasn’t. But now you’re starting to spread your wings a little. Flying solo you don’t have to stick to anyone else’s speed, you don’t have to move things out of other people’s way and be wary of hurting them by mistake. Alone is easier when it comes to psionics. You scorch through the air, room to room deflecting every projectile and crunching enemies up into shards of bone and meat. You can hear them screaming into their radios about you, about how powerful you are but their warnings do nothing.

Feferi screams again and you’re closer now, you burst through windows and some kind of smoke blows in your face. You land, blinking and confused to see Feferi slumped in the arms of someone you know. You breathe in but whatever smoke is in the air isn’t burning. It’s not… it’s not from a fire or meant to hurt you. Your skin tingles as you blink stupidly ahead.

You stagger, nearly falling over and your head is swimming. You were rushing to be here but now
suddenly you don’t feel so urgent. You force yourself to focus on the figure before you knelt on the
ground. A violet streak of hair, those waving horns.

“Eri...dan?” you mumble. Weren’t you mad at him? He tried to shoot you, you should be...

The man himself stands up, Feferi cradled in his arms. Around his gills and half of his face is a clear
mask. He scowls at you and you feel nothing.

“You shouldn’t have got her involved in this.” he reprimands you.

For a moment you feel contrite. You disappointed him and you shouldn’t have but... wait... this is
Eridan. The words ‘fuck that guy’ roll through your head without feeling. In fact you don’t feel
much of anything, you feel spacey and weird. The only real sensation you feel is the skin over your
cheeks tingling. In confusion you reach up to touch your face and nearly fall to your knees. It feels
like Dayvhe, like his hands on you and quiet whispered reassurances.

“What?” you mumble.

“Does it just work better on lowbloods because you’re weaker? She passed out before she reacted to
it.” Eridan hisses and glares at Feferi in his arms.

Reacted? He’s- oh, he’s done something to you. You don’t know what but when you breathe in the
air tastes weird and wrong, even past the smoke taste lingering in your mouth you can taste it. On the
floor between you and him is a canister on the floor that’s oozing out streams of sluggish hazy gas.

“What did you… do?” you slur and look down at the canister on the floor again. It’s stopped spitting
out gas now but your head still feels sopor thick with paleness and it’s hard to muster up alarm at
anything.

“What I had to, not something a scrub like you would understand.” Eridan sneers, his waviness
sneaking back into his voice.

“You knew about the… the ambush.” you conclude. That he knew about this in advance and put
Dayvhe in danger is enough to bubble up some anger through the surface crust of calm over your
mind.

“Feferi wasn’t supposed to be here! She was supposed to listen to me and then all of you would-
then things could go back to how they were!” Eridan snarls, spit flecking the inside of his mask.

“You didn’t know about the- about them all being here. You made them, told them.” you say
sluggishly as your mind wraps around the idea. You know you should kill him, that Dayvhe will, but
you can’t make yourself do anything. Even just standing and talking is almost too much for you.

“Shut up. Just- hah, kneel.” he chuckles on that last bit and drops Feferi’s legs, giving him one free
hand. He reaches out to you and catches you by the face. The heel of his hand hits your cheek and
you drop to the floor like a sack of bricks, your head blown out by pale static.

When something hard hits your temple you struggle to open your eyes, but when you do you see
older trolls leaning down looking at you. They’re angry, that much is clear. One of them lifts his foot
from the ground and you get a split second close up of the tread of his boots before everything goes
black.
When you awake it’s to a throbbing face, a metallic taste on your tongue and tightness around your chest and head. You groan, head lolling back weakly. Opening your eyes you see yourself in a room decorated purely in black and white, its harsh simplicity probably costs more than all the things you own. In front of you is a desk and there is sat… an adult. A new one though, her skin is still post moult shiny with paler parts here and there. The sign on her chest is not dissimilar from your own, if the top and bottom bars of your sign curved outwards and you rotated the whole thing 90 degrees on its side you’d have it. Oh, that and it being fuschia too.

You swallow thickly and your face aches again in protest. You’re tied to a chair and this woman is watching you with cold, impassive, pink eyes. Her hair is short and businesslike and her expression blank. You try to move but you’re bound too tight and an experimental push of your psi finds it bubbling away like rain in the desert. You’ve no idea where you are but you’re not on the base anymore.

“You can’t escape.” she says simply.

Smartly you decide to keep your mouth shut, all the better to give you time to panic internally.

“Sollux Captor, age nine, no criminal record, psionic but never tested. Really though I think we can put you down as exceptional in that regard, if nothing else.” she says flatly as she reads from a screen.

You roll her words around in your head, and only when you focus on her voice and not the content does it click.

“You’re East Alternian.” you say.

“It speaks.” she says in what might pass for amusement.

“I don’t know your name.” you say carefully, your eyes drawn to her symbol again.
"A deliberate choice on my part. If people know your name they can plot against you, research things about you. I prefer games when I hold all of the cards. You don’t know me but I know you, and I know who you work for.” she says calmly.

“I don’t work for anyone.” you tell her.

“Sure as shit no one pays me.” you add, because you’re a moron and will one day learn to control your mouth but today is not that day.

“Oh. Really.” the heiress says and taps a button.

Behind her a grainy photo of Roxxie pops up on the screen.

“Roxxie Lalond. The woman you work for. She’s a little younger than me, exact age unknown, and she’s been making a career for herself carving a bloody swathe through seadwellers and heiresses alike up and down the waters of West Alternia. I don’t care much about that but when I hear tell of her working with another heiress I care.” she says stiffly.

You lick your lip, tongue running over a split that you’ve found there as you consider your next words carefully.

“She’s still not paying me.” you point out.

“Then you’re dumber than you look.” the heiress sneers. Well, that was… harsh but probably fair.

“What…” you pause.

Here’s a thought. You don’t know where you are, you could even in theory be off planet right now. But regardless you’re pretty damn sure that Dayvhe is going to be looking for you which means Dirkka and Roxxie are going to be looking for you with the others. So potentially you might be rescued. This gives you several possible ways this can go.

Firstly you tell her that you don’t know anything, which is true. You know very little of Roxxie’s plans in the specifics. You know the plan to go through the other heiresses, that you were involved in, but the details of how she intends to take over and what that looks like with Feferi you don’t know. So, either this heiress believes you and probably kills you for then being useless or she doesn’t believe you and torture is in your future.

Second option is you tell her you do know things and make up anything you can to buy time hoping to either break out or get rescued. But that way could also lead to torture and if any of your lies are caught things are likely to go very badly for you.

Option three is that you’re a bargaining chip but this seems unlikely, you can’t see her thinking that a yellowblood like you is of any importance to another heiress. You could try to convince her you’re useful and very prized to Roxxie but then you’re tossing your odds up between having your parts sent back to Roxxie in a box or being used as bait.

None of these are good outcomes.

“What do you want from me?” you ask carefully, as you work out which way this is going to go.

“I want you to tell me everything you know.” the heiress says simply. Option two it is.

“Everything I know about Roxxie?” you stall.
“Yes.” comes the reply.

“She… she has a moirail.” you say slowly.

“He goes pretty much everywhere with him, ugly looking pretentious fuck. His name’s Eridan Ampora.” you tell her.

Yeah, fuck you Eridan.

“I have him down as being associated with Feferi Peixies.” the adult says slowly.

“Used to be, but she didn’t like him much. He… he jumped ship, for Roxxie.” you lie.

“You seem quite eager to tell me this.” the heiress says astutely.

“Yeah, well, I hate that guy. Platonically. If I could drown him I would.” you say, and it’s the most sincere thing you’ve ever said about that salty fucker.

She questions you more about Roxxie and you try to balance your lies with admissions of ignorance. Sorry you don’t know where her undersea base is, you’re not a seadweller and couldn’t get to it anyway. Enough admission and feigned reluctance to be believable.

You don’t know if you pass or fail because eventually she waves a hand and you’re dragged out of the room and thrown into a small room with a bored looking cerulean. Slumped against the wall you try to work out your position. You’ve still not seen outside so you’ve no clue where you are at all and as for what’s binding you that’s a bit of a mystery too. There’s a tight band around your chest and around your crossed forearms holding you captive and there’s a tight band of something around your head. Even now when you try to psionically push against it the resistance is bordering on painful.

The cerulean shouts at you but you don’t speak East Alternian and she obviously doesn’t speak your language either. Regardless you can about interpret ‘knock that off or I’ll break your bones’ in most languages. You settle down and try to think. Dayvhe will be looking for you, of that much you’re sure. So surely the best thing you can do is to keep an eye out for any opportunity to do something to get on the radar of the people looking for you.

You consider this and conclude that actually your best chances lie not with Dayvhe himself but Dirkka. He’s a paranoid, twitchy, son of a bitch and he and Roxxie are pretty much on your level. Pinging their attention is going to be your best bet. So what does Dirkka listen out for? What kind of ripples can you send out that he’ll pick up? Presumably… his own name, or Dayvhe’s. If suddenly he finds someone searching for his of Dayvhe’s name in East Alternia or even space then he’ll notice that, right?

So you sit and wait. You’re not sure how much time passes but eventually you’re hauled up off of the floor and dragged down blank corridors back to the room you woke up in. This time the heiress looks pissed, you’re not sure if she’s worked out how much of what you told her before was hoofbeastshit but you’re willing to bet a significant enough proportion of it.

She has a blueblood who makes Equius look like a scrawny wimp and from the way the guy cracks his knuckles you’re reasonably sure how this is going to go. The moron ends up hitting you in the face first which ends up just making you too disorientated to really process anywhere else that he roughs you up. But either way you’re pretty quickly in favour of saying anything that’ll make you stop being smacked about by mr trash can lid hands over there.

“What do you wanna know?” you demand, desperation ringing loud in your voice.
“Any weakness of hers, and no lying!” she snarls.

“I don’t care about her.” it’s sort of a lie. You do care about Roxxie, she’s nice and you like what she’s doing. But also if you had her life and Dayvhe’s life in your hands and you had to pick one it wouldn’t be her.

“Liar. You’ve been lying to cover for her.” the heiress accuses. You shake your head vehemently and then stop because the movement makes you feel sick.

She pauses and makes a thoughtful noise. This is much easier with someone smart.

“Not her. Someone else.” she concludes. Ah, shit.

“Who?” She demands, and you say nothing.

Maybe it’s the blow to the head thinking here but you can’t actually say Dayvhe’s name here, the risk to his life is too great. If she actually found him you’d die. More to the point if she found him he would die and you can’t allow that. And if you say Dirkka instead then Dayvhe is likely close by then too. You look up into her pink eyes and don’t doubt her ruthlessness. This was a bad plan.

If you tell her Dayvhe or Dirkka’s name she could trace an address, granted one they no longer live at but how hard can it be to trace that to one of your other friends or someone else who knows them and then they could be hurt too. No, you need attention but the kind that doesn’t focus on them. THINK.

Her lackey wrenches your arm in a direction that it’s not supposed to go, much less when tied to another arm. The pain brings out a moment of brilliance in you. You’re forgetting a Strydr.

“Strydr!” you gasp out and the limb rearranging pauses.

“Strydr?” the heiress says, rolling the word around in her mouth. You don’t have to fake the fear you feel that she’s going to go looking for the wrong one.

“Is that a first or a last name?” she asks you and you grit your teeth shut. She rolls her eyes and waves a hand and you and the whole chair you’re on are backhanded sideways to the floor. You curse her creatively, maybe if you channel Karkat hard enough then he’ll know where you are.

“Listen,” the heiress sighs as you’re hauled back upright, “I don’t want to have all your claws pulled out but I will if I have to. Tell me the name.”

Hey, this seems like a good point to do what you’re told.

“Dionte Strydr.” you hiss. If Dirkka isn’t tracking THAT name and you die out here you’re haunting his stupid ass forever.

You’re dragged back to your cell and left to yourself for a while. If you had a normal sleep/wake schedule you might know how long it’s been but as it is you have no way of knowing. Every so often you’re pulled out and asked questions. Some of which you feign ignorance to and others of which you really don’t have to. Other times you lie. Under duress you confess that Dionte is Roxxie’s matesprit and internally apologise to her actual matesprit for that.

“Tell me about the weapon.” she demands of you one time.

“What weapon?” you ask and the guard thumps you on the back.
“You useless fuck! Stop hitting me before we’ve established a line of fucking conversation, I’m not withholding information when I don’t know what she’s talking about yet!” you screech at the guard who glares at you and is blatantly considering hitting you again just because.

“The weapon that backfired on you where we found you.” the heiress clarifies.

Oh. Eridan’s fucking gas can that scrambled your head.

“That thing? It’s not mine, I don’t need weapons. It was Eridan’s, that fuck.” you say honestly.

“How was it developed? Tested?” she asks.

“I don’t know, I’d never seen or heard of it until then. If I’d known what it’d do I wouldn’t have been there would I?” you point out.

“It’s very interesting. But you were exposed to the original, so you can be useful.” she says, leaning back in her chair.

“...How?” you ask slowly, not wanting the answer.

The guard hauls you out of your seat without a word and drags you out of the room. You’re used to the path back to your cell so it’s alarming when you end up deviating from it. Struggle is pointless but you’re sure as shit not helping either. You get a taste of antiseptic in the air before you’re dropped down a hole. You yell and flail and utterly fail to land on your feet. But it’s fine, you didn’t plan to use that knee or anything again.

Sitting up you see that you’re in what looks like a tank of some kind. Not the vehicle but the water kind. The tank as a whole is about the same size as your cell was and the glass or plastic at the edge is double skinned. Above you the hatch you were thrown down slams shut. You look around to see a bunch of medicullers and scienterrorists on the other side of the glass and on your side there’s enough facilities here that tell you that you’re not leaving here any time soon.

“What the fuck?” you say, but you think the people on the other side of the glass can hear you about as well as you can hear them. Which is not at all.

You watch warily as they seem to debate something and then pull a long switch downwards. Hissing fills the air and you back the fuck up real quick when a hazy kind of smoke curls up through grates in the floor. You shove your face in your shoulder but it’s a bad gas mask and you have to breathe sooner or later.

Your skin buzzes all over and gravity slams you rudely down on the floor. You gasp and everything goes hazy.

In your ear you can hear Dayvhe. Quiet and assuring you that it’ll be ok and every time you try to move or even think everything goes treacle thick. Usually you like this with Dayvhe, but you know he’s not here. You can see that he isn’t if you focus, that you’re alone on the floor of the tank but your stupid mind seems to have worked on the ass backwards logic that if you feel like this it must be Dayvhe calming you down.

Your head swims and you wonder if you’ll end up so pacified that you’ll forget to breathe.

You wake up however many hours later to find your arms cut free and a mediculler crouched over you with a mask on. You... you are going to rip her face off.

“Don’t move.” she orders you and your already raising arm drops limply to the ground. She peers in
your eyes and takes your pulse, making notes as she goes and then leaves.

Things get weird after that. If you had a hard time keeping track of time before it’s nothing compared to now. Keeping track of what is real is just as hard.

“I told you not to go.” Dayvhe says and the wall behind him crawls with spiders that you’re about eighty percent sure aren’t there.

“I know.” you mumble.

“You were supposed to listen to me, that was the deal.” he says angrily.

“I know.” you whimper. This… whatever they did to this one, because it isn’t real, is it? Whatever they did it’s more chucklevoodoo than pale. At least you can tell this isn’t Dayvhe, he’s not angry in the same way that Dayvhe would be.

“Would be, not will be, you’re right about that at least.” Not-Dayvhe says.

“Gonna get out of here.” you mumble and the Dayvhe that isn’t there scoffs.

You prefer that to when the Dayvhe you envision assures you that he will find you, that it will be ok. When everything is so sugar pale that you could throw up because it’s not real.

One time Dayvhe is sat next to you on a chair as you sprawl there bonelessly. He looks down at you and drums his fingers on his knee.

“I need you to tell me about Roxxie Lalond.” he says.

“What? Why?” you groan, rubbing your eyes and then regretting it as your fingers pass too close to your cheeks and your mind gets blown out with warm fuzzies again.

“Tell me.” Dayvhe prompts you.

“You know more about her than me.” you point out and Dayvhe glances away, frowning.

“She has been… lying to me. I need to know what’s true and what isn’t, so you tell me what you know.” he says.

“So ask-” you hesitate and squint at Dayvhe, he seems solid enough and you feel more coherent than you have as of late. Mostly because you can still recall the word ‘coherent’. So how is Dayvhe here? And why is he asking you about Roxxie?

“So ask her moirail.” you say neutrally.

“Eridan isn’t talking to me.” Dayvhe says.

It’s not Dayvhe. It’s someone doing a very good job to make sure you see him. To make you see someone you trust completely instead of someone you do not. The grates hiss as more of their experimental gas floods the tank and you laugh. You make it a rule, tell Dayvhe nothing. Not ever. And not just Dayvhe, anyone at all. No names, no details. If you do he might die and Dayvhe would never make you talk, any Dayvhe that does is not yours.

They try again of course, changing the script, the dose, the formula. But you won’t talk to him about anything important. You won’t even say his name. Sometimes though they tweak the formula and you just pass out. One time you imagine you’re really little again and on the roof with your dad, and another is that one hot summer where you and Karkat sat together on his floor playing video games.
You even see Aradia once, alive and grinning at you. But mostly it’s Dayvhe.

One night, or day you don’t know which, you’re relatively undrugged. You’ve been here long enough to notice a pattern. The tests and the doses come in batches, this is still science so they’re refining things. One batch is tweaked to render you an immobile puddle on the floor, they cycle through strengths of it and then pull back to get some of it out of your system and then they try something else. A batch where you’re too stoned to speak, one where you comply to nearly everything they ask of you and with that one you just have the vision of Dayvhe to credit you not telling them everything. Either way you know they’re clearing your system of one dose before another. It gives you time and clarity of mind to think.

You have to get out of here and you need to remind yourself why. You need to see Dayvhe again, he must feel terrible about you being taken like this and you need to get back to him. You have to see Karkat and rescue him from the deep pit of self blame he’s no doubt in, he probably blames himself for not being on the ground with you at the time. You need to get out of here because… because you never got to try that curry place across the city from you. You need to get out so your video game mods stay updated, so you can get the new teleportation gun game when it finally comes out. There’s so many reasons you can’t stay here. You can’t die in a lab with your only sexual experience being that thing with Feferi, that’s just sad. The point is you haven’t lived through all you have to let this be the end of you. You have to escape. Screw waiting for a rescue if you can escape this building you can get more of a plea for help to Dayvhe and they’ll rescue you there. Your heiress is not in another castle, Memario, you’re doing your own fucking escaping.

You stand up and pace the tank a little. You know it by now, there’s a hatch up the top where they dropped you in and sometimes take you out. They lower a ladder to get down and it’s too sheer for you to climb without psionics. You’re also pretty sure that whatever they give you dampens your psionics, probably made with the same plant Dayvhe gifted you (you wonder if he’s watering it while you’re gone). However you still have enough, you’re sure of that. If you didn’t they wouldn’t have this suppressing headband on you, would they? Score one for logic!

Situating yourself near where the ladder comes down you turn your back to the people in the lab and breathe quickly. You feel how tight the band is around your head, tight enough that you’re never going to complain about a tension migraine again, but it’s not immovable. You breathe faster and harder and dig your claws under it. You’ve tried this before and what’s happened is someone comes in and attacks you until you stop trying and then more for good measure. So this goes one of two ways.

Option one: you get the band off before someone gets in here and you fly up, bust the hatch and try to find the way out with the optional bonus of taking people out as you go.

Option two: you don’t get it off in time and they send someone down to rearrange your face at which point you escape up the ladder and there options one and two dovetail nicely.

Of course they suspected this tactic and they absolutely have emergency gas prepared to drop you, which is why you’re hyperventilating right now. So, here goes nothing. Your claws hook under the headband and- ow, ow, those bastards glued this to your head! Well, that’s fine, you didn’t need that skin and also a few patches of hair. Psi crackles between your fingers, oh yes, you are back in business. There’s a sudden click and a hiss that tells you that you’ve been noticed so you clamp your mouth shut and hold your breath.

Launching yourself upwards you try to force the hatch but your psionics are so weak they can’t do it in one, in fact even the flight part is proving hard to maintain. With a shove it pops open finally. Only that may be more credit to the mean looking docterrorist on the other side.
You discover two (2) new facts. Firstly that working with psionics at a different strength level takes more control than usual and it is hard to maintain said control having been punched in the face. Secondly that it is impossible to hold your breath when an adult troll who probably weighs in around at least two hundred pounds leaps on your floating body and rides you down to the floor like an elevator with a snapped cable. You’re gasping in tainted air faster than you can say ‘get your knee out of my chest’.

Escaping isn’t as easy as it seems.

The heiress drags you into her room one night, or rather she has people do it. You’re slammed down into a seat and held there, a teal man with a cane stands nearby and the heiress is sat behind her desk.

“Sollux, I am a patient woman but I have limits.” she says and you say nothing.

“Some of this information you have given me is verifiably false. Now, there may be legitimate things that you have told me too and they will be checked out but I feel that you are not being honest with me.” she says and looks at you sternly.

“Oh no?” you venture and the man with the cane hits you.

“OW!” you yelp in surprise.

“No, no, thank you Kirrig. Sollux, I feel that perhaps I have not been honest with you. What you need to do is tell me everything I ask you for and if you do, I will let you live. It is very simple.” she explains.

“Don’t trust her, you can’t tell.” Dayvhe’s voice says in your ear and you know he’s right. You lick your lips for a moment and then carefully speak.

“With all due respect, ‘let me go’ would be a lot more tempting than just ‘let me live’.” you point out and she laughs.

“Ah, you’re clever. I like that. You are not in a position to bargain and I need you to understand that no one is coming for you. We are nowhere near where we found you, no one has come up on any of my informant networks as looking for you, no one who shouldn’t be here is anywhere near this place. You are not leaving, this is life now you can choose how that goes.” she tells you.

No way, no way is Dayvhe not looking for you. No way is Karkat not doing everything he can to find you. You’ve given Dirkka the best lead you can so they’ll look. Whether they find you or not is another thing but you know people are looking for you. She wants to make you think there’s no alternative but despite your love of binary very few choices are this or that. You will not give in to doing what she says or suffering, there’s another option here and that’s getting out.

“Now, see, you look skeptical and I think you don’t understand. Maybe this is a cultural problem or language based but here is the thing. This chemical you showed up with is very helpful and we’re curious. Finding out how it works and fixing it to work better is useful, it’s something you’re telling me no matter what you want. But we will find everything out about it soon, there is a limit to what your biology alone can tell us.” the heiress explains.

“I can tell you it sucks.” you mutter and the man with the cane hits you again but you grit your teeth and don’t make a noise.

“But, see, you tolerate this. The man hits you and you manage, the chemicals affect you and you survive and still tell me nothing helpful. But that isn’t all that will happen, when we know everything about this chemical I won’t need you for that anymore. And then I will break you.” she says.
“So, knowing this and knowing that I am going to ask you about Roxxie Lalond and her comrades what do you have to say?” the heiress asks.

You consider all of your friends, you think of your moirail and the people he loves. Even Roxxie herself but also more than her, the world she wants to make. She might have a snowball’s chance in hell of managing it but if there’s a chance you’re not going to sell her out. You won’t sell any of them out. You look up at the heiress with that in mind.

“Go fuck yourself, I guess.” you shrug and uncontrolled rage flickers over her face.

“You underestimate me! I will torture you and it will be creative as it is terrible!” the Heiress snarls and snatches up a remote from the table and clicks a button. You flinch but all that happens is some lights come on.

“How many lights are there?” she demands, waving a hand at them.

You blink and look up at the four lights above her desk and then back at her with mounting disbelief. Surely she’s not doing what you think she’s doing.

“Are you expecting me to say five?” you ask slowly and the Heiress nearly drops the remote in shock.

“What?” she gasps.

“There are four lights up there, you tell me you’ll inflict great pain on me if I say four instead of five and then you keep asking and try to psychologically break me. That’s what’s supposed to happen?” you ask the stunned heiress.

“H-how did you know that?” she demands, sounding genuinely unnerved.

“Because it’s a goddamn Star Travel episode that you’re ripping off! Picard is captured by, fuck, I think his name was Madred and tortures him to make him tell a lie instead of the truth. It’s famous, of course I’d know it! I- wait, YOU didn’t know that. HAH! Did you ask someone for torture ideas that were more creative than just ‘hit the yellowblood and hope it works’ and someone told you that?” you cackle.

The guy next to you with the cane is suddenly looking very uncomfortable indeed and the Heiress is thoroughly unbalanced.

“Don’t believe me? Goregle ‘four lights’ and see!” you wheeze, giggling to yourself.

The heiress pouts and stomps to her husktop and types. Her face pales but only grows more and more furious as you laugh harder. This is the funniest thing you’ve heard in sweeps, a highblood THIS uncreative at hurting people to get what they want.

“Oh man, your torture is going to be as creative as it is terrible, huh? I think I’ll be fine!” you laugh.

“YOU, TAKE HIM BACK TO THE TANK AND MAKE SURE THEY UP THE DOSE. As for you Kirrig, you stay right where you are.” she hisses. The big troll that was holding you in the chair awkwardly pulls you out of it and then back out of the room, still giggling. You get tossed in the tank but this time when you land on the floor you feel strong enough to flip that guard off even as they talk to the medicullers and pass on the instructions.

But still, the air becomes hazy and you fall to the ground but you’re still the one with the high ground here. Well, the high ground and a case of the giggles.
“You should eat.” Dayvhe says after what feels like perigees have passed and when your sense of hope is burning low. You can’t tell time here.

The rest of the tank around you is real and when you focus on Dayvhe you can’t make him vanish but you know he’s not real, your moirail wouldn’t just be here. He’d be trying to get you both out. Unless they caught him too and dropped him in here but you don’t think that’s what happened, you don’t think so.

“You need to eat to live, dumbass.” Dayvhe sighs, pushing himself up and shuffling around so he’s sat in your lap. You can feel the weight of him there, there’s nothing to tell you he’s not real.

“It’s probably drugged.” you point out and ignore the plate of food that’s on the other side of the room.

“But it definitely has calories in it and you need those, remember? Making sure you don’t starve to death is my job.” he points out.

“Go away, you’re not here.” you protest and shut your eyes.

Dayvhe sighs, the kind of put upon sound you’ve heard him make plenty of times. Like when Karkat is getting in a lather about something and Dayvhe is just bored of it. Has your brain just sampled that noise to replay like one of Dayvhe’s soundboards or is he real?

“I’m right here, of course I’m real. And right now I don’t want you to starve.” Dayvhe complains and you hear the plastic click of the plate and feel it brush your fingertips when you move your hand. You open your eyes and see the plate right by you on the floor and you’re pretty sure you never moved. The tank is pretty featureless but you’re sure this is where you were before, right?

“Eat.” Dayvhe reminds you, sat on the floor nearby.

“How did…” you trail off. If you didn’t move that then he did, right? It’s not like your psionics are working right now. Whatever Eridan’s original formula is the people here managed to modify it to reduce your psionics to very little even with the stupid inhibitor headband that you have off. The purpose of the headband as far as you can tell is to limit your psionics and if removed to summon a very angry blueblood guy to kick six different kinds of crap out of you. You don’t try to take it off anymore.

So either Dayvhe got up and got you this, you somehow used your psionics despite your previous inability and then forgot it, or there’s no one here and you got up and came back with the plate of food and forgot it as well. You’re not a fan any of these options.

“Are you here?” you ask him carefully and pick up some of the food.

“You need me, I wouldn’t be anywhere else.” he says with a shrug and eats something himself.

You’re… you’re not sure what’s real anymore.

It doesn’t help when Dayvhe’s presence comes and goes. On the one hand they could be questioning him like they do you or on the other hand you’re finally lost all of your marbles. You’re mostly sure he’s not real though, especially when he’s there when the heiress is questioning you. She’s never hurt you herself, she has people to do that. The choice then was obvious, tell the woman what she wants or deal with her hired muscle. But now it really is good cop, bad cop. Or more like bad cop, worse cop, questionably real cop with tempting offers.
“Just tell her something, she’s obviously losing patience with you!” Dayvhe reasons. Unfortunately you’ve been forgetting the things you’ve lied to her about and keeping your story straight is hard and saying nothing is best.

“Tell her about the heiress Roxxie killed at the party, she’s dead, there’s nothing she can do about it but it’s Roxxie based info. It’s harmless!” Dayvhe pleads with you.

But you doubt it’s harmless. For one that was right by Rohhze’s place and she knows all of your friends and even if she didn’t talk either she doesn’t deserve this. On top of that for Roxxie to run into that heiress probably gives a likely hunting ground that she has or reveals patterns of what she does. The chance is too great.

Ah, shit the heiress was talking and you weren’t listening. She waves her hand at her minion and Dayvhe visibly pales.

“Don’t look.” Dayvhe insists, catching your face in his hands. He helpfully shooshes you and drowns your brain in static, enough so you’re only academically aware that the huge troll next to you just dislocated and relocated your shoulder like some kind of party trick. If anything he seems pissed that you don’t care.

You’re thrown back in the tank with only the occasional company of questionably real Dayvhe after that. No one else tries to get information from you. At least information that’s not medical, the docterrorists and medicullers are still interested in what each new batch does to you.

You still have the distant presence of mind to worry when several tests in a row are incredibly reliable at making you compliant and jelly limbed. Dayvhe is entirely tangible and you swear he interacts with the world, enough to make you question if he really is real all over again. You’re still smart enough to be concerned about this pattern though, it means they’ve worked out the bugs of the formula.

They try questioning you on how it feels but you’re too useless to tell them anything, even though you’re compelled into wanting to. But you can scarcely focus enough to get from one end of a sentence to another.

You lay on the ground, unblinkingly staring out through the glass. You watch as the heiress talks to the head of the medical people and points at you. You blankly watch a man very aware of his position try to tell her no without actually saying so. It works about as well as you’d expect as she walks off satisfied and he looks grim.

For the first time in a long time you’re hauled out of the tank and scrubbed off then dropped on a table.

“-no idea if this works as anaesthetic.” someone says.

“Does it really matter if it hurts, though?” another counters.

“Oh, no, you’re right. Shock is so good for the system, not like it kills people or anything.” the first sneers.

“Can he even go into shock like this?” someone else asks and your jaw is poked, making your head flop to the side so easily you’d wonder if you had bones.

“Probably not but I’m not taking my chances with psi like that, skip the numbing if you must, but this I won’t.” another person says and you feel the pinch of a needle on your skin and something cold floods under your skin. Someone else shoves a mask over your face and things go hazy again.
“I gave you that plant.” Dayvhe says. He’s sat on your hips and is carefully sticking things to your chest, or maybe you’re just mixing sensations up.

“But you’re here anyway. You know what they’re doing, right?” Dayvhe asks and leans down. He rests one hand by your face and the other runs through your hair. He pulls his hand back and flicks his fingers and you can see your hair falling to the table. He didn’t do that and you can’t see him suddenly but you get it, they’re shaving your head, they have you on a table.

He’s not real, you know that. But he flickers back into view anyway.

“I know, but this is going to suck hardcore. Wouldn’t you rather part of me was here anyway?” Dayvhe asks. He’s right. You focus on his voice, on things you remember him saying, on everything about him because it’s either that or- or the sound and feel of that drill.

There’s screaming. Only…

“It’s not you.” Dayvhe assures you, his fingers ghosting over your throat.

“No! This is a delicate- AUGH!”

More screaming, meat sounds.

“Shoosh.” Dayvhe whispers in your ear.

“Sollux, Sollux, oh god. Oh fuck, is this shit vital?”

“Karkat?” the Dayvhe in your head says in surprise and you feel the things stuck to your chest being clawed off.

“Are you awake? You useless fuck wake up I’m not rescuing a corpse!” Karkat snarls. Are you dreaming him?

Your eye is pulled open and you’re snout to snout with Karkat’s sweaty, terrified face. Alarm and horror crosses his face in an array of facial gymnastics that you couldn’t possibly dream and he sits up more, only he’s holding onto you so your head tips backwards.

Things are still fuzzy but you watch as a black and red blur launches itself across the room at something that’s screaming. There’s a spray of teal up the nearby wall suddenly. The fuzzy figure keeps striking at whatever, whoever, is on the floor.

“Jegus, Dayvhe, you got him already! Just leave that one alive, we need at least one of them to fix him.” Karkat shouts, but not in time to stop another figure in a white coat getting slammed up against a wall seemingly by nothing.

“Dayvhe! Drop him!” someone else shouts and the floating figure slams into two walls before hitting the floor.

The figure turns and marches closer to you, he’s still blurry but you know Dayvhe anywhere. His shades are missing which gives you an excellent if terrifying view of his eyes which are red from edge of edge instead of yellow, it’s only his dark grey irises and black pupils that are normal but even those are blown wide with rage. You remember seeing Gamzee look like that once. It’s a strange thought to have, especially about Dayvhe.

He’s growling highblood deep but Karkat hisses back at him.
“You’re covered in blood, you want to get that shit in his pan and kill him from an infection? You’re not carrying him, I am.” Karkat says vehemently.

“What did they do? Wake him up.” Dayvhe demands.

“They were doing surgery, Dayvhe. He’s not awake.” another voice, oh you think it might be Jayekh, says.

More things are pulled from your skin and you can hear other people moving around. Finally you’re hauled up off of the table and draped over Karkat’s arms, one of which is a little higher up your back so that your head is resting neatly on his shoulder. The motion makes your eyes close again so you’re floating in the darkness with muffled voices around you.

You really really hope this is a rescue and not just an involved dream to stop you focusing on your head being drilled into.

Your awareness comes back to you as you lay on your back. To your side you can see Dayvhe sat there in a shirt of yours that’s so big on him the neck hangs to the side, exposing a bare shoulder. He’s sat with his arm resting on his bent knee as he reads a book, from his other hand dangles a bottle of the nice indie brand cola that the place two blocks down from you sells.

Your mind isn’t even trying anymore. Your shirts aren’t that big on him anyway, this is like the cover to a lame pale porno acted out by your actual moirail.

“This is why you can’t have nice things.” Dayvhe snorts, not even looking at you.

You try to blink him away but he’s not shifting so easily, but you can see reality enough to know that this isn’t the tank.

Dayvhe’s figure ripples as something moves through him and with a flicker he’s sat on your lap in much the same way, though he looks annoyed at having had to move. A grey arm reaches over you and hangs something up, a clear bag of something. They bow their head lower as they fuss with the other end of a tube at your arm. You can’t work your mouth enough to say anything but if you could it probably would have been ‘what the fuck?’.

Dirkka’s face swims into view above you, only it’s not his face. His glasses are a transparent red and underneath you can see that his eyes are black with glowing red pinpricks in the middle and his face is pure white. His fingers skirt over your head and he pauses.

He seems to consider something and cautiously touches your temples with his fingers. His eyes dim and you can feel something. Like a hand sliding up your back and into your thinksponge, like hot water over chilled skin, your scattered mind is covered.

For the first time in quite some time you feel panic kick up, something is IN you that shouldn’t be and it’s not a physical place that you can shake off but instead your mind. It’s like- it’s like- it’s like moving against your will, like standing before a hive, like seeing Aradia open her window and no matter what you wanted to do…

“Shoosh, don’t think that, don’t. It’s ok.” Dayvhe insists, pushing his semi tangible form past the not-Dirkka and petting at your face. The panic subsides as he talks you down from it. Not-Dirkka pulls back with a frown on his face and your imaginary moirail hisses at him.

“Well, shit.” he says without moving his lips. You’re not actually sure his face opens like that, but
he’s too far away to see now. Dayvhe paps your cheek and things fade out again.

“-kelated what I can, there’s still going to be some in his body. It’s not a compound that we’ve used before.” someone says.

“Why aren’t you still filtering it out of his blood now?” Roxxie demands.

“Because that would filter out the adrenaline we just gave him.” the person says patiently.

“Don’t act smart with us. You did experimental surgery on a mutant when giving him experimental drugs. Ethical questions aside that’s just bad science.” another counters.

“Hal.” Dirkka says, sounding despairing.

“Look, his pulse and blood pressure are rising.” the unknown person says.

You manage to haul your eyelids open, uncoordinated and weirdly but you manage it. You look up, there’s the not-Dirkka guy from before. You realise now that he’s a robot. Then Dirkka and Roxxie but then on the other side of the surgical bed that you’re on is one of the medicullers from the base. He’s hurt badly but alive.

There’s no Dayvhe around but this is probably still a hallucination.

“Go away.” you mumble and shut your eyes.

“Not the reaction I was expecting.” Dirkka says after a beat.

“I told you, his neural activity was strange, the drug was still messing with his head.” a slightly synthetic voice says.

“I think we should get you up, Sollux. Get you looked at, get you showered and dressed in some real clothes not that cheap medical shit.” Roxxie says and pulls you upright. Your arm hurts where she grips it but she’s not the one doing that, it’s not her. You evidently fail to suppress your pain reaction because Roxxie looks at your sympathetically.

“I want to make it clear that I absolutely think that my previous employer’s practices were poor.” the docterrorist says smoothly.

“Liar.” Dirkka says and the robot at his side laughs.

“BUT if you’ll let me finish the procedure to helm him then he can be far more useful to you, and we can work out these minor issues afterwards. I can be useful.” he adds, talking over Dirkka.

“Helm him. When he clearly can’t consent? And from someone like you who tortured him? No. And listen to me, the only reason you’re alive is to make sure he gets better. Dirkka, Hal, take him back to his cell.” Roxxie says harshly.

“Gladly.” Dirkka says with pleased malice and the two of them drag the docterrorist away.

“Oh, you poor thing.” Roxxie says, clucking her tongue and tilting your head by the chin. You’re not sure if this is real or not. If she’s here then… shit, you don’t know anymore.

“I got you another pair of glasses, Dayvhe found an old pair of yours at your hive so I got a few more made. That’s certainly the least I can do. I have so many things to ask you.” Roxxie says as she hands them to you.
Questions? She wants to know things, you must be under then, right?

“But I don’t think this is the time. I’ll take you back to your room, somefin tells me you’re not up to walking just yet.” Roxxie says, confusing the hell out of you. Without asking she scoops you up in her arms and starts walking. You let your eyes drift shut until you’re put down in a chair.

“I’ll get Dayvhe.” she says and walks off, ignoring your whine of protest.

Looking around the room is large but blank. White and pink surround you, on chairs and tables, the recuperacoon over there, the doors. You run your tongue around your mouth and find that it’s drier than a desert. You push up to your feet and take a chance on the door that you didn’t come in through, stumbling over to it is work but you get to it. Opening the door you pause, hearing footsteps behind you.

You don’t need to turn to see who it is, but you do anyway. Dayvhe is standing there, staring at you with his shades missing and his expression wounded.

“I was so worried.” he whispers.

“Don’t.” you groan and turn your back on him. You walk into the ablutionblock and uncoordinatedly abuse the tap handles by pulling them until water is a thing that happens.

“It was so hard to find you and we weren’t even in time.” Dayvhe says from behind you and you jerk away when his fingers touch your horns.

“Don’t.” you repeat and he holds his hands up in surrender.

You stare at yourself in the mirror, your hair has been shaved down to almost nothing. You’re one mohawk away from looking like Tavros. Or Tavros with extra tech. You twist your head to see silver in your thinkpan and flush to your skin. It looks rushed and the edges around whatever was done to you is an angry yellow.

You jump when the main door to the room is thrown open and Dayvhe stands there.

There’s two of them. You never thought that would displease you but you’ve not dealt with this before. Is one real and one fake or are they both fake? The one who is in the room with you hasn’t reacted to the other one coming in, is that because he’s the real one and the other isn’t? Or is it something else?

“Sollux!” the new one shouts and sprints towards you. Too late you realise he’s coming for you and you’re cornered in here.

“Don’t! Don’t touch-” you try but his hands are already on your face. You’re getting good at fighting that instinct to give in and you’re able to push at him.

“Shit! Sorry, sorry, did I hurt you? What did they do to you? I should have- hey, no it’s ok now.” Davyhe insists and runs his fingers over your jaw. For a dizzying second you see your frozen face in his shades. At least until your finally free psionics crackle and then he’s not there anymore.

You slam the door shut and press your hand to it so the edges heat up and melt to the frame. Terrified you scuttle into the trap and stay there. There’s hammering on the door and people calling your name but you try to shut it out.

“I wonder if he’s okay.” Dayvhe says calmly as he reads the ingredients on the toothpaste tube by the sink.
“If you know about him you’re not him.” you reason.

“Yeah no shit. And you’re pretty sure that that was him but not totally sure.” Dayvhe, or the Figment Of Dayvhe says.

“That means you’re me or the fuckers with the gas. Either way, fuck you.” you add.

“I wonder if you killed him. If he’s real that is, you threw him out of here at some speed.” Figment of Dayvhe muses.

“Would have heard it.” you say after a moment’s thought.

“Hmm, would you? If they killed their way through the place you were held at do you remember hearing any of them die before it happened?” FOD (Figment Of Dayvhe) points out.

You frown, you didn’t hear it but you were pretty out of it. It’s hard to say.

“So, maybe you never left. Or you did but your doomed voices deal isn’t working right now. So, I wonder if you killed him.” FOD says lightly and kneels down in front of you.

“Shut up.” you groan.

“If you did then you’ve killed a moirail AND a matesprite! Are you trying for all four?” FOD asks cheerfully.

“D- he wouldn’t say that to me. You’re not him. You’re just my fucked up pan and their drugs so get lost, I’m not listening.” you hiss.

“Still afraid to say my name in case they hear? I AM DAYVHE STRYDR! I WAS RAISED BY ROXXIE LALOND AND DIRKKA STRYDR!” FOD shouts and you dearly hope that him saying things doesn’t mean you are. You clap your hand over your mouth just in case.

You miss a corner being cut out of the door but you don’t miss your palmhusk being slid through the gap. You stare at it like the trap it probably is before you give up and pick it up.

carcinoGeneticist [CG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

CG: I KNEW YOU WERE GOING TO GO CRAZY ONE DAY BUT THIS IS NOT WHAT I THOUGHT.
CG: WHICH ALSO MEANS I’M REALLY WORRIED ABOUT YOU, YOU DERANGED EYE LASER WIELDING LUNATIC. TALK TO ME, WE CAN ALL HEAR YOU TALKING TO YOURSELF IN THERE SO YOU MAY AS WELL TALK TO ME.

You consider that this is probably also not real but it’s not like you want to talk to the Figment Of Dayvhe anymore so why not Karkat.

TA: ii’m pretty 2ure thi2 ii2 a trap and you’re not real. ju2t fyii.
CG: THAT’S ABOUT AS CRAZY AS I WAS EXPECTING AFTER HEARING YOU ARGUE WITH NO ONE. WHAT HAPPENED WITH DAYVHE BECAUSE HE WON’T TELL ME ANYTHING EXCEPT THAT HE FUCKED UP.
TA: what happened?

“That’s literally what he’s asking you, keep up.” the figment sighs and sprawls out on the floor.

TA: 2orry, ii mean. ii mean ii2 he ok?
CG: WELL THE WALL’S LOOKED BETTER AND HE’S A LITTLE BRUISED BUT I’VE
PUT HIM THROUGH WORSE SO DON’T WORRY HE’LL BE FINE. HE SAID YOU
THREW HIM BUT HE CAUGHT HIMSELF. HE WON’T TELL ME WHY YOU THREW
HIM SO DO YOU WANT TO ENLIGHTEN ME?

“You threw him into a wall. Wow. Think he needs to break up with you or is it a given?” FOD asks
curiously. He’s definitely just your brain, ignore and continue.

TA: ii panicked, ii't 2tupiid. ii ju2t diidn't tru2t that iiit wa2
TA: ii mean wiith all that 2hiit they made me breathe iin. iiit'2 not real.
CG: OKAY…
CG: THAT MADE NO SENSE BUT NO SENSE IN A WAY THAT GIVES ME AN IDEA
THAT SOMEONE NEEDS TO GO BEAT THE SHIT OUT OF THE DOCTERRORIST
UNTIL HE EXPLAINS. WE KNOW THEY GAVE YOU SOMETHING WEIRD AND
EXPERIMENTAL BUT WE DON’T KNOW WHAT.
CG: OH GOOD ROHHZE AND DIRKKA ARE GOING TO GO PERSUADE HIM. I’LL
WAIT I GUESS.
TA: 2he’2 here?
CG: YEAH, DAVYHE CALLED IN EVERYONE HE KNEW LOOKING FOR YOU. I’VE
NEVER SEEN HIM LIKE THAT.

You squeeze your eyes shut and try not to think of that. Of the risks and debts your moirail would
take to get you back safely. And you threw him out when he got near you.

“Do you think you’ll always think about this when he’s there? If he still wants to ever be around you
that is.” FOD asks.

“Great, like I wasn’t hard enough for him to deal with already.” you sigh.

“Hey. Hey I just had a thought. Do you think this seeing things is a forever kind of thing? Boy that’ll
suck if you hear your thoughts through your moirail’s face. Or your ex’s face as is probably most
likely. Oh, I wonder if this is forever you’ll get Aradia too! We should form a club.” The figment
says brightly.

“Shut up, shut up, shut up.” you hiss. In your lap the palmhusk buzzes.

CG: LITTLE WORRIED BY HEARING YOU TALK TO NO ONE AGAIN. SHOULD WE
TALK ABOUT SOMETHING DIFFERENT?
TA: liike what?
CG: LIKE ANYTHING. DAYVHE IS YOUR FAVOURITE SUBJECT SO WHY NOT HIM?
TA: ii won't an2wer your que2tiion2.
CG: HEY, I GET THAT INTERROGATION IS PROBABLY SOMETHING YOU NEVER
WANT TO DO AGAIN SO WE’LL NOT DO THAT BUT YOU GET MY POINT. DAYVHE
WAS ALL YOU TALKED TO ME ABOUT FOR A WHILE.
CG: ACTUALLY, YOU’RE LOCKED IN YOUR ABLUTIONBLOCK TROLLING ME
ABOUT DAYVHE, THIS IS BASICALLY A NORMAL CONVERSATION ALL OVER.
CG: HAH! I HEARD YOU LAUGH!
TA: liie2.

You don’t know how long it’s been since you laughed, the things you imagine certainly aren’t
funny. You eye the sulky looking figment, he’s never funny. But Karkat and his histrionics always
have been funny to you. It’s about the first evidence that you have that he’s not in your head.

TA: can you do 2omethiing for me?
CG: I’LL TRY. WHAT DO YOU WANT?
TA: 2top being polite for one. but 2econdly can you be normal? 2hiit talk 2omeone we know. liike a full tantrum.
CG: WOW FUCK YOU. YOU’RE MY BEST FRIEND AND CLEARLY VERY PAN ADDLED AND HURT AND I PIT YOU IN THE MOST PLANTONIC WAY POSSIBLE BUT WOW FUCK YOU ENTIRELY. JUST DISTILL MY ENTIRE BEING DOWN TO SHOUTING AND RANTING WHY DON’T YOU?
CG: I HAVE DEPTH YOU KNOW, LAYERS. I AM MORE THAN YELLING AND CURSES.
TA: weak
CG: FINE, FINE. PICK SOMEONE THEN SINCE I AM YOUR PERFORMING CIRCUS BEAST.

You consider what you told them already and the choice is easy.

TA: eriidan
CG: OH THAT’S TOO EASY BY FAR. THAT PRETENTIOUS CAPE WEARING FISHSTICK IS BASICALLY JUST AN OCEAN OF FLAWS CRAMMED INTO UNFORTUNATE SKIN. YOU’VE NO IDEA HOW MUCH I HAVE BEEN CURSING HIS NAME SINCE THAT FAILED RAID THAT YOU GOT KIDNAPPED ON. IF HE’D BEEN THERE INSTEAD OF ABANDONING HIS SUPPOSED MOIRAIL THEN MAYBE YOU’D HAVE STAYED WITH US.
TA: you’re real, aren’t you?
CG: YES!
TA: eriidan wa2 there, he took feferii. he wa2 the rea2on we lo2t her and when ii found her agaiin he u2ed that 2tuff two take me down.
CG: WAIT, WHAT?
CG: NO ONE HAS HEARD FROM EITHER OF THEM SINCE BUT WE’VE BEEN TOO BUSY LOOKING FOR YOU TO PUT MUCH EFFORT INTO THEM. BUT HE BETRAYED US?
TA: ii’ve had a long tiime two thiink about iit but ii’m pretty 2ure he’2 the rea2on 2o many people were there then. he wanted her back and u2 gone.
CG: OH WHY AM I EVEN FUCKING SURPRISED? THAT USELESS WASTE OF VALUABLE RESOURCES IS A PERPETUAL COWARD AND COMMITS TREASON SO REGULARLY YOU COULD USE HIS LIMP POSTURE POLE TO CALCULATE CELESTIAL EVENTS. WHEN I FIND HIM I’M GOING TO REMOVE HALF THE BONES IN HIS BODY TO BEAT THE OTHER HALF INTO A PULP WITH.
CG: THEN I SHALL GATHER ALL OF THAT WRETCHED PURPLE SALTY PULP INTO A PILE AND BURN IT. THEN I’LL CONDENSE IT DOWN INTO A BRICK THAT I WILL TAKE WITH ME. THEN I’LL TRACK DOWN HIS ANCESTOR AND BEAT HIM TO DEATH WITH IT FOR EVER DARING TO CONTRIBUTE MATERIAL RESULTING IN THAT ABOMINATION OF A TROLL.
CG: AND IF HIS ANCESTOR IS NOT ALIVE I WILL TAKE A DETOUR INTO NECROMANCY AS AN ADDITIONAL STEP AND *THEN* BEAT HIM TO DEATH WITH THE REMAINS OF HIS FAILED PROGENY!
TA: there’2 no way ii thought of that, you’re real. al2o you 2hould do that.

You can hear murmuring outside the door and your fake Dayvhe pricks up his ears in alarm, showing the worry that you suddenly feel.

TA: kk?
CG: SORRY.
CG: ALSO YES I’M STILL REAL. ROHHZE JUST GOT BACK WITH NEWS ABOUT
THAT GAS THAT THEY USED ON YOU.
TA: eridan had it fiir2.
CG: YEAH, WE WORKED THAT OUT TOO AFTER WHAT YOU SAID. WHICH MAKES ME WONDER WHAT HE HAD PLANNED FOR IT. HAD HE ALREADY USED IT ON FEFERI AND YOU JUST BLUNDERED IN?
CG: FUCK, THAT'S NOT IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW. NO WONDER DAYVHE FREAKED YOU OUT.
TA: ii2 everyone out there?
CG: I CAN MAKE THEM GO AWAY.
TA: plea2e.

You get unsteadily to your feet and eye the door, not that it’s going anywhere after you melted it in place. You can hear muffled people sounds and activity out there.

“This feels like a trap,” the figment says suspiciously. You shake your head, it’s no more a trap than talking to Karkat himself is. And you couldn’t have imagined what he said, so he must be real. So the people he talks to have to be real and they wouldn’t work against you so it’s not a trap. And you have your psionics back now, you can defend yourself.

“Oh, that worked so well that time at John’s and against Eridan.” POD snorts.

“If you’d listened to me about your limits and been smart you wouldn’t have got caught in the first place.” he adds and you can remember all too well Dayvhe pleading with you to stay behind and you should have listened to him. You don’t know how many times you had laid awake wishing you had, you don’t even know how long it’s been.

“Sollux, they’ve gone.” Karkat’s voice comes through the door.

Something else muffled goes on in the background and then it’s Karkat’s voice again but hushed.

“No, it’s fine. Well, no- I mean I don’t know but just stay there. Right back… further, yeah.” he mutters.

You grab onto the door with your psionics and pull until it clatters into the room that you’re in. At the doorway is a slightly startled looking Karkat but he relaxes quickly and leans on the frame looking in at you, he doesn’t come into your space.

“Good lord you look worse than I remember. You’re like an emaciated, grey, cyberpunk egg.” Karkat says bluntly.

“At least I have an excuse. Looking at you makes me want to go back to talking to myself.” you mumble, the habit of going back and forth with Karkat carrying through.

“I know your poor, perforated, pan couldn’t handle the raw power of the smart things I have to say.” he says with a soft smile.

“Want me to try coding something and really embarrass you? I can still beat you after being- after-” your breath hitches and Karkat’s smile falls.

“Hey, it’s ok. You’re safe.” Karkat insists and reaches out for you gently with his hand, not for your face but your shoulder. He still freezes before he gets near you though and looks at you questioningly. You shake your head and Karkat pulls back.

Movement draws your eye and you can see Dayvhe lingering near the door to the main room. The one with glasses, the one who tried to touch you and who is probably real. Karkat looks between
“Do you wanna talk to Dayvhe?” Karkat asks and Dayvhe takes a step forward. You don’t realise that you’ve taken a step back until your hip hits the sink.

“What if he stays out here with me?” Karkat suggests.

You can’t take your eyes off of Dayvhe. What if he stops existing or you pass out again? Or if it’s one of the bad ones that say terrible things or try to trick you into saying things you shouldn’t? But also… what if it’s the real one? Karkat bites his lip and walks over to Dayvhe and carefully pulls him over by the hand and then sits down on the ground a little way outside of the doorway. His expression is pained but he stays silent.

Maybe you should ask the questions.

“How long was it?” you manage to say.

“The night we picked you up was the forty first night since we lost you.” Karkat answers. That’s longer than you thought.

“What happened?” you ask. They’re still sitting and you’re standing which helps somehow.

“Well, I mean I wasn’t there for your raid thing so…” Karkat shoots a look at Dayvhe who bites his lip. You think he’s not going to speak but eventually he does.

“You left. We got away and went where you said but you didn’t show. I was going to go back in for you but this other tyrian ship showed up and Roxxie had to bail, we left you messages about where to go but your original palmhusk blew up. We went back of course but you weren’t there and it was chaos so we figured maybe you’d escaped but just lost your palmhusk but then you didn’t get in contact. We tore the place apart but there wasn’t even a trace of you.” Dayvhe explains, sounding more and more distressed with each sentence.

“The next night I came back with Kanaya, she said she could smell you but you just vanished so Dayvhe figured you were in that ship but…” Karkat shrugs.

Yeah, there are lots of ships. You could have gone anywhere.

“You told them about my ancestor.” Dayvhe says and in your head his words ring in accusation. You shouldn’t have said but you did.

“Not you or anyone else I know though. Just him and Eridan, they already knew Roxxie and Feferi’s names. I was trying to…” you flounder.

“Yeah, just trying to protect your own neck. So you gave out my ancestor’s name, mine and Dirkka’s both. You sold us out, some pale pity right there. What was it, night two? Good job holding out.” Dayvhe hisses at you and it takes seconds before you catch that it wasn’t the one sitting on the floor that said it.

“They tortured me.” you defend, against which of them you don’t know. Both, maybe.

Dayvhe is on his feet, reaching for you. Maybe to strangle you, maybe it’s one of those visions of him. But Karkat catches him in time. Good Karkat, best friend.

“That’s how we found you.” Karkat tells you.
“Should have left you, it’s what you deserve.” the Dayvhe without glasses says.

“Shut up.” you hiss and duck your head.

“He’s hearing things, I think. Maybe seeing them, I don’t know. Rohhze said the guy admitted they were trying to trick him into talking.” Karkat explains.

“What’re you hearing?” Dayvhe asks, stepping past Karkat and into the room with you. In the doorway he’s nearly shoulder to shoulder with his double. He takes off his shades and you find yourself worryingly glancing between the two of them, worried you’ll lose track of which is which.

“Let’s maybe not spook him a second time, yeah?” Karkat says quietly, trying to pull him back by his shirt.

“He’s my moirail! He’s hurt, I should be doing something!” Dayvhe snaps at him and you cringe. Karkat looks at you and a worried expression crosses his face. He pulls out his palmhusk quickly.

“What’re you doing?” Dayvhe asks.

“He said he never gave them your name or anyone’s name, not aside from your ancestor, Roxxie and Feferi. And he said that he wasn’t sure if I was real. And… yeah, he still hasn’t said anyone else’s name. If he’s this unsure he’s really awake or that this is really real then they must have done something really extreme to him. If figured it was maybe just him still freaking out about it like you would but if he’s really still not sure…” Karkat says and looks up at you again.

“Have you seen me when you were there? Since before you were being operated on?” Karkat asks.

“Once or twice.” you answer. They’d know that if this isn’t real so there’s no risk in saying that.

“But not that much. So… so if what they used on you made you see things but they were trying to use that to get you to talk then…” Karkat trails off and looks at Dayvhe and then back to the scorched dent on the wall where you threw Dayvhe before.

“It was me. They used me to get to you.” Dayvhe whispers as he realises the same thing.

“I didn’t tell them anything.” you swear.

“I don’t CARE about that! I care about what they did to you, I- look at you, you’re scared of me.” Dayvhe says and stumble back in horror.

“No, wait, I’m sorry D-” you nearly bite your tongue as you cut off his name.

“You can’t even say my name. I… I have to go.” Dayvhe says, shaking his head as he backs away from you and then dashes out of the door.

“I’ll talk to him, you should sleep.” Karkat says.

“I don’t want to sleep.” you say. You’ve spent more than enough time not present, you don’t want to be sleeping on top of that.

“Alright. Come on.” Karkat says and walks to the loungeplank and sits down. It takes a few long moments but you follow him. Sitting on something soft is sure better than the hard plastic of the trap or the grated floor of the tank. You’re on the far end from him and you can’t help but feel uneasy.

“So…” Karkat says slowly, looking over at you.
“Yeah?” you ask.

“Are we still friends?” Karkat asks. His stupid reference makes you laugh, it’s small and weak but there.

“Of course we are, stupid.” you tell him.

“Do you want to play a game? It’s stupid but I have one we can play.” he says, looking down.

“Remember the enslaved monsters games we had as kids? I only played them with you and you were missing for so long I thought… it’s stupid wiggler logic but I thought if I bought the new games then you’d have to show up again just to kick my ass.” he says, his cheeks dark with embarrassment.

He drops them between the two of you and you eye them. New handhelds and the new games, white and black this time. You pick one and start to peel back the shrink wrap, Karkat does the same. It sucks that the consoles need charging and it’s kind of ironic that for someone who just avoided being a battery you can’t charge these yourself. Conveniently you’re both close enough to an outlet that you can sit side by side and play as they charge.

“It’s good, the graphics were pretty clunky before.” Karkat says, and it’s the first thing he’s said in five minutes.

“It was retro, you moron.” you reply but he just rolls his eyes at you and goes back to playing.

It’s nice to be near someone without them trying to pry information out of you or jam surgical implements into you, you certainly appreciate not being attacked as well. You end up sliding closer together than you intended as you peer at each other’s screens from time to time but you still don’t touch.

When you’re starting to get tired someone else shows up, the robot from before. His pale face doesn’t seem to open when he talks and it’s distracting enough that he has to repeat himself.

“I said how are you feeling?” it asks.

You shrug helplessly.

“I don’t know if you know Hal. You know how Dirkka’s insufferable? Well surprise there’s two of them.” Karkat explains.

“We talked once.” you say.

“Yeah, you’re welcome by the way.” Hal tuts, again without moving his mouth.

“Why don’t you…” you ask, pointing to your mouth.

“Do you really want a discussion on how difficult it is to design a body that has a working tongue while also being intolerant to liquids? Do you want a discussion of lubrication problems or do you want to get up on the table and let me check your blood pressure?” Hal asks, one hand on his hip. It seems his face is mobile enough to scowl, just not open.

“Neither.” you reply.

“I need to check it for your health. As well as take some of your blood, listen to your breathing and check the ports that they gave you. No one wants you to die from infection after all we’ve all been through to get you back.” he says and then pats the table by him.
You stand up and do what he asks. Not because you want to but… uh… well perhaps the lingering worry that someone will try to break your arm if you don’t. Hal at least is so obviously not a troll that he doesn’t seem to alarm you much and he talks as he works, explaining what he’s doing and what he will do.

When he’s done he has food for you and Karkat and leaves you alone with him, still sat on the table. To your embarrassment Karkat has to coax you back to the loungeplank with food like some stupid stray meowbeast.

“Where are we?” you finally ask as you bite the edges of some bread.

“Roxxie’s secret underwater base and apparently where Dayvhe used to spend a lot of time before he spent a lot of it with you and me.” Karkat explains. That certainly explains the lack of windows around, if you’re really deep down then there’s likely not much to see.

“How did you find me? Was it just the thing with his ancestor?” you ask. There’s a big gap if that was it.

“That helped, it told us you were alive which was a big goddamn relief.” Karkat answers. Shit, they thought you were dead. Or they suspected you might be at least.

“We managed to track a search of his name down to East Alternia but the signal was so scattered that it was hard to figure out where it was coming from. Everything was nuts, we were hoping something else would pop up. Dayvhe and Dirkka set up alerts of whatever for all kinds of shit but nothing happened.” Karkat says.

“So how…?” you ask.

“It was a total fluke. We were in Roxxie’s ship, you know the one, we were cruising around as stealthily as we could when the fucking hunk of junk glitched. The navigation system freaked out and shot us over this whole continent until it got to this mountainous dead zone right by the ocean. Barely anyone living nearby, a total hole.” Karkat says.

You stay quiet and figure that Karkat will continue, and he does, gesturing wildly with his spoon as he talks.

“So everyone’s panicking and then Hal notices that this ass end of nowhere place has awfully good internet and it’s within the vague geographical area that we could limit the search of Dayvhe’s ancestor’s name down to. So Roxxie scans the place a little closer and finds this whole complex in the mountain which is suspicious as all fuck but that it edges onto the sea is prime seadweller signs. So we figure this is it.” he says.

“How did you even get in?” you ask.

“That thing you had Dirkka make when you killed his lusus came in handy. We managed to drop it on someone going in and we got a bit of a map of the place and chatter about you. Although when that happened Dayvhe was like ‘common sense and a healthy respect for gravity are for other people’ and jumped out of the ship. He’d killed two guards by the time we caught up with him because we couldn’t let him go it alone. Roxxie killed that heiress and we tracked the best path down to you that we could, we caught them part way through doing that if you don’t remember.” Karkat says, and points to your head but doesn’t touch.

“He was… he was actually kind of scary. I know he’s a psionic too and he’s good with his weapon unlike me but this was highblood kind of anger. His eyes went red, my blood’s the same as his and
my eyes have never done that! All he cared about was finding you and taking it out on anyone keeping you there.” Karkat says with a shudder.

“He’d do the same for you. You’re half of his quadrants.” you point out.

“I wasn’t feeling left out that he’s not murdered the shit out of anyone for me, thanks.” Karkat snorts.

You don’t know what to think aside from that you’ve probably ruined things now. At least that thought is still just in your head. With Karkat talking to you, eating and playing games the figment of Dayvhe has gone.

You settle back into your games and sparse conversation but eventually at some point you drift off. You don’t know how much later it is that you wake up only that Karkat is no longer there and your head is carefully cradled on a cushion and you’re covered in a throw. Loud snoring alerts you to the fact that you’re not alone and you slowly sit up to see Jayekh slumped over the table with his head on his arm.

You put your bare feet carefully on the floor and stand up. You’re actually kind of done with being guarded right now. Slipping out of the room isn’t hard at all, the door isn’t even locked. So you wander down the halls. The walls are dotted here and there with photographs of Roxxie’s friends and quadrantmates together as well as a number of pictures of Dayvhe at all ages. There’s one chubby cheeked Dayvhe in one with a heart patterned shirt on under grey overalls with his sign on that makes you particularly sad that you left your backup palmhusk in the ablutionblock. Overall Roxxie’s décor leads you to an understanding that she has a far bigger fascination with wizards than you knew her to.

You stand in a glass dome and look up at a twenty foot tall statue of one. A very big fascination indeed.

It seems that you were right about how dark it is down here, through the glass you can’t see more than maybe five metres. A few fish flit about here and there but you’re not interested in them. Your bare scalp tingles and you’d swear you feel your new ports fizz. In the glass your reflection is no longer alone, Dayvhe floats outside underwater. His skin is lit by the glow from the glass dome and he leans in close to the glass to look at you.

Dayvhe presses his hand to the glass, his hair floating in the water and taps his index finger on a red sheen on the glass. You squint, what is that? Walking closer you peer into the dark, Dayvhe’s figment helpfully swimming to the side so you can see. There’s something out there in the dark water. You lean in, press your face to the glass and cup your hands around your eyes to shut out the ambient light from the room.

It’s large, big and dark but unmoving. As your eyes adjust you see hints of red lighting out there, dark red. You close your red eye to be sure that it’s not you. If anything that seems to make the dark red light flare brighter and you feel… drawn to it.

“There you are!”

The words startle you back to reality and you whirl around to see a terrified looking Dayvhe standing there half dressed. He’s missing his shirt entirely and you watch as a glob of sopor drips from his ear.

“Jayekh woke up and you were gone, not that he should have been sleeping at all but- but-” Dayvhe stutters to a stop as he looks at you, still unkidnapped.

“Sorry, I know I’m probably the last person that you want to see. I’ll go, I’ll get someone else.” he
says, backing up.

“I don’t not want to see you.” you call out, suddenly finding your voice.

Dayvhe stops. With his shirt off you can see how tense he is all over, watch the shaking breath he draws in.

“It’s not like staying away from you now will do much good anyway, the damage is done, right?” Dayvhe says.

“What?” you ask.

“I ruined your life, didn’t I?” Dayvhe says and you are less and less sure that he is who he looks like. He’s making no sense. You check to see that the scar you gave him is there and it is but that’s not really proof.

“I met you and I was too stupid to realise how I liked you right away but I did. I pitied you and I shouldn’t have, I knew my life was stupid dangerous but I didn’t drop it. And then… you had an actual chance, you know?” he says and glares out of the window. He’s not wearing his shades.

“I told you all that and you kept saying you were ok and I gave in. And it got you captured and tortured because you were helping me and they used ME to do it apparently. To top it all off I’m pretty sure she had records of what she did to you, doubt we got them all. Even if we did, well… just look at you, there’s no way you didn’t escape partway through being helmed. Even if you tried to leave the planet people would know you did something wrong, you’d never make it. It’s my fault.” he hisses.

“It’s my fault.” you protest.

“You?! It’s not your fault that they caught you!” Dayvhe all but shouts and steps closer to you. You try to step back, or at least it happens without thinking about it and you hit your head on the glass which makes your whole pan throb angrily.

“And it’s not your fault that you’re obviously terrified of me.” Dayvhe finishes miserably.

“No!” you protest and defiantly step closer to him.

“What are you doing? It’s obviously a trap, made to make you get close to him so you go under again. Then you’ll open your mouth and get your real friends killed!” the figment outside the glass shouts at you. You ignore him.

“Don’t touch me, promise?” you ask, taking another cautious step.

“I promise.” Dayvhe answers without a thought.

That was your rule, the real Dayvhe would listen. You always did for him, you didn’t push him and right now you need that favour returned.

“It wasn’t your fault, it was mine.” you tell him, taking another step.

“That’s crap, it was obviously an ambush which you wouldn’t have been in if not for me.” he argues and you get closer, he’s close enough to touch now but he’s not moving.

“You told me not to look for- for her.” you edit as you talk, removing Feferi’s name just in case. Dayvhe winces, he probably caught that too.
“And the heiress who had you was only interested in you because-” he starts to argue.

“It was her fault. The heiress that had me locked up I mean.” you suggest.

“Glad she’s dead, wish I’d done it myself.” Dayvhe snarls.

“Wish I’d seen, we could have had some proof that she was gone and not out there plotting or waiting to finish the job.” FOD says, floating behind the glass to your side. He’s right but you’re shutting him out.

Cautiously you raise your hand but you avoid his face, that’s more than you can deal with right now. Instead you ghost a chipped claw over the whorl of his intact horn, following it around to the bed where it meets his scalp. His hair is soft and you’re reminded that you have none. You look alien and wrong but maybe it’ll grow back quickly. Dayvhe’s eyes flutter and you watch his chest move as he sighs.

“What did they do to you?” Dayvhe asks, his voice quiet and cautious.

“If you’re really out what does it matter?” the other one reasons and you glance to the side to see him floating over Dayvhe’s reflection, like he’s one person splitting into two. You drag your eyes back to the real one, or at least the one you’re touching.

“Just tell me what I can do to help.” he pleads. He moves his hands, not to touch you but just a gesture of ‘anything’ a sweep of his hands to the side but the movement is enough to startle you away from him. Anguish flickers over Dayvhe’s face but he crushes it under blankness just as you manage to read the expression.

“Not moving so much, got it.” he says softly.

“That’d be good.” you agree.

“Right, that’s cool I can work with that. I’m the most cooperative. What else, tell me?” Dayvhe asks.

“Don’t tell him anything, you really want to give the answers to someone to make you less on your guard?” the figment points out.

You must be too quiet because Dayvhe, the one who’s still dripping sopor, talks again.

“It’s cool if you don’t know, we can work on it. If you tell me you’re not cool with something I’ll drop it like it’s hot. I’ll do anything.” he promises.

“Big words for a man who left you there for forty nights.” the figment hisses.

Your eyes widen and you turn to glare at him through the glass.

“Shut up!” you bark angrily. Dayvhe did what he could, they all did, it’s a miracle they found you at all. It doesn’t mean they didn’t try.

“If you’re so sure I’m just you then that means that this is something you’re thinking too. But you still don’t know he’s real.” the figment retorts and then pops out of existence.

“Are you still seeing things? Is it me still?” Dayvhe asks. Great, he really needed to see that. To see you presumably yelling at nothing.

You try to come up with something to say, looking at the alarmed and worried expression on his face leaves you frozen. You don’t want to lie to him, especially as he and Karkat know full well that you
have been seeing and hearing things (possibly including him right now). But having to admit to it seems worse, he didn’t sign up for this shit. He probably didn’t imagine that if he got you back you’d be like this.

“Sol, there’s nothing there. It’s just me.” Dayvhe says gently.

“Yeah.” you agree quietly. Glancing away from the look he’s giving you is probably an act of self preservation. There’s a starfish crawling over the glass outside, you’ve just noticed it.

“Why did you even come here? To the wizardbowl I mean.” Dayvhe asks.

“The what?” you ask in confusion.

Dayvhe subtly inclines his head to the wizard statue at one end of the glass dome and you get it.

“Oh, like a fishbowl. But for wizards, and also the water is outside.” you conclude.

“Hey, it’s not a perfect term but when you come up with a portmanteau that baller it’s either name a room like this or start up an eccentric sport.” Dayvhe says teasingly.

“Not the sports.” you reply and feel a smile starting to tug at the corner of your mouth. You’ve always liked the wild shit that comes out of Dayvhe’s mouth the moment he’s allowed to get going on any given subject at all.

“The very same.” Dayvhe says seriously.

You can feel a laugh bubbling in you and maybe it’s messed up but that you feel good around Dayvhe is enough to make you suspicious. As he smiles it moves his ears ever so slightly and sopor drips down onto his shoulder from the tip of his ear.

“You’re covered in sopor.” you point out as the levity drains from you.

“Oh, yeah. Well I was asleep until fuckin Jayekh burst into my room like ‘oh shit I lost your boy’ or, well, more like ‘cripes I may have made a terrible blunder, what, what’. So I didn’t exactly dress up to go running around looking for you.” Dayvhe grumbles and looks down at himself, there’s even greenish puddles on the floor by his feet now that he’s standing still.

“You were in sopor though.” you say.

You’re the one who got him into sleeping in the stuff. He slept in yours and now sometimes at Karkat’s, but as far as you know nowhere else. And it’s not like you can even argue that he would of course had the stuff here because he’s safe here because he was totally unused to it when he was with you. This has to be unreal hoofbeastshit.

“Yeah, Roxxie’s pretty jazzed that I’m actually sleeping in it now. That’s another reason she likes you, you know. She’s always tried to get me to but I didn’t want to get used to it and I didn’t have one at Cal’s so it was weird to me. Plus Dirkka was all ‘you don’t need it, go make sure you can survive without it, sharpen your ninja skills’ and so on which meant they just argued about it and I did what I wanted. But now I run around in the middle of the day looking for you all sticky.” Dayvhe says and touches his arm that looks to be getting tacky.

That explanation makes sense. It’s a little too convenient but it makes sense.

“Speaking of, you should go back to sleep too. In sopor as well.” Dayvhe says firmly.
“I don’t know…” you say.

“The way back? No, good, I’ll show you.” Dayvhe says brightly and you watch him catch himself and last moment avert away from taking your hand. Instead he steps back and gestures behind him to the wide doorway you came in through, past the wizard.

“I don’t know if I want to sleep.” you finish.

“Sollux,” Dayvhe says slowly as he looks at you with affection, “I pity you more than the fucker who invented pity pitied someone. I am the palest anyone has ever been and I don’t care even a little if you don’t want to sleep. You clearly need it. I might not be able to touch you but I will dig up a squirt gun of ice water if I have to and herd you back to your room if I gotta.”

“Your explanation is putting me to sleep.” you lie. It’s a lie because firstly it’s Dayvhe saying how much he pities you and that never gets old and two it’s a Dayvhe tangent which are every bit as entertaining as Karkat rants.

“This way then.” Dayvhe says and starts walking. You follow him only slightly reluctantly and as you go you check the photographs on the wall to see if they’ve changed but they haven’t.

“This is my block.” Dayvhe explains, pointing to a room by a statue of a wizard holding a meowbeast aloft.

“Yours is down here.” he adds and takes a right then a left then up a bit to a familiarly blank bit of corridor. A guest room you suppose.

Dayvhe opens the door and you see the loungeplank with yours and Karkat’s games on it and a knocked back chair that you think Jayekh was sitting on.

“I can stay. I mean, someone should stay. After all you’ve been through you probably shouldn’t be alone and with, you know, surgery too. But I get it if you don’t want it to be me. You probably don’t want it to be me.” Dayvhe trails off.

You kind of don’t want it to be him, but saying that seems cruel.

“I’ll go get someone else.” Dayvhe says quietly and backs out of the door. Out of habit you turn to face him at the doorway. Him leaving and you saying goodbye is common now, sometimes it’s the other way but rarely. He’s on the other side of the threshold, looking up at you.

You open your mouth to say something but you stupidly didn’t have anything to say so you scramble for something.

“I’ll try and sleep.” you tell him.

“Good.” Dayvhe says with clear relief.

And you’re still both here. Of course it’s familiar. The first time he kissed you was when he was saying goodbye like this and since becoming moirails you’ve done it countless times. You doubt he’s waiting for it deliberately but you’re standing in your place out of the same kind of habit.

“I should… go.” Dayvhe says and doesn’t actually move.

You’re pretty sure he’s real. You’ve seen other people interact with him and- well, no you haven’t. You saw Karkat interact with A Dayvhe, you’ve no proof it’s this one. But he couldn’t see the other one that you know wasn’t real because he was fucking around with whether he was underwater or
not, but he could just be pretending. Or rather you could just be deluding yourself because the things you see aren’t real outside out your head, they’re not plotting things for fuck’s sake, it’s your mind.

You don’t know he’s real so you’re not going to go there. But fuck do you ever miss Dayvhe so maybe…

You reach out like you did before, just touching his horn but the broken one this time. He’s physical but that’s no proof. You watch as Dayvhe’s eyes go wide and see how his pupils change size, watch the way it shifts the grey flecks of his iris and wonder if you’ve got the kind of mind that can dream that up. Maybe you do.

“You should sleep too.” you remind him and pull your hand back.

“Yeah.” Dayvhe croaks.

“Yeah, ok, alright. I’ll just be- yeah, this way. Leaving… now. Right.” Dayvhe babbles and you can see the dawning horror of ‘why am I still talking’ cross his face as he backs away from you and then ducks around the corner.

Imaginary or not Dayvhe is still right that you should sleep like a proper person and honestly given how bad you feel the chance to be weightless instead of bony and sleeping on the floor is not something to turn your nose up at. You kick off clothes that you don’t remember being dressed in and awkwardly climb into this strange recuperacoon, the dimensions of which are different to yours and it takes a moment to settle yourself in right.

Right before you pass out into unconsciousness it occurs to you that strange mind altering chemicals are maybe not something you should combine with a full body skin permeable sedative.
You are starting to get suspicious. Not of how real things are because as the days and nights have
gone by you’re more and more convinced that things are real. You’ve certainly never hallucinated
anything this consistent for this long. Anyway if you’re that crazy now you may as well be less
miserable and crazy and just assume that what you see is real.

No, you’re suspicious of Hal and Dirkka.

“I didn’t ask you to be here.” Hal says snidely as he peers at the ports on your head.

“I’m not leaving you with unfettered access to a living thinksponge.” Dirkka says.

“You could do what about it, though? Also don’t make my patient more paranoid, thanks.” Hal
sneers.

“Can you take these out?” you ask, interrupting their obviously pitch flirting. Instead you point to the
ports all over your head.

“Post mortem, sure. With you alive? Not so much.” Hal answers and you slump miserably. You
suppose it makes sense though, helming was never meant to be a temporary thing and obviously not
anything that the poor psionic in question got a choice about.

“Are you still seeing things?” Dirkka asks.

“I’m not blind.” you say, even though you know that’s not what he means. Hal carefully touches
several of your ports and you can feel the strange oil on water sensation of another mind against your
own. You’re not a fan.

“He’s not hallucinating right now.” Hal answers and lets you go.

The nice thing is that everyone has got the message to not touch you, the exception being in Hal’s
medical checks and you’re only willing to put up with those because it means he gets to tell you
things about how little of the mind altering chemicals are still in your body. At least the amount is
going down but he seems concerned about more permanent psychological effects.

Rohhze rather helpfully offered to use her psychointerrogation skills on you but the idea of being
ruthlessly questioned made you want to get about fifty miles from her immediately. Dayvhe also took
issue with the idea because taking care of you and having you talk about your problems and feelings is understandably something he feels territorial over. The guy has to deal with enough what with having a moirail that can barely handle talking to him and won’t let him touch.

Are you even really together anymore?

“Do you know where—” you pause.

You’re still not quite willing to speak anyone’s name yet, even though you’re reasonably sure it’s not a trap. But given the weigh up of potentially endangering their lives versus making conversation clunky and weird you know what you’ll go with.

“Do you know where my moirail is?” you ask.

“He was helping Roxxie with the ship, I think. Not sure how much help he’s being but given that someone could help more and isn’t I think it’s going to be slow going.” Dirkka says pointedly.

“If you think I’m willing to catch a virus off of that biotech monstrosity you are so wrong. Also, I think we’re done for now, Sollux.” Hal says, his tone turning more pleasant as he speaks to you. He backs up out of your space and then glares at his creator.

“Like you don’t have cached versions of yourself all over the place, you’d be fine.” Dirkka argues.

“So I’m just disposable, huh?” Hal counters.

Yeah, you’re going to leave now.

You’re starting to get the hang of Roxxie’s underwater wizard base. You also can’t help but note that a lot of your friends are coming and going. You don’t know how or why Dayvhe let them in but Karkat did say he involved everyone who might be able to help when he was looking for you. It seems kind of strange but you suppose there is that six degrees of separation theory, the more people he went to for help the bigger chance someone would know something.

But then again that also meant a greater chance that someone would trace you back to him, a thought that makes your blood run cold. At least you’ve not seen Vriska around here and you’re pretty sure that your friends are about ready to skin Eridan when they see him next. The important thing to note is that you’ve not been allowed to leave and you’ve not tried in case they have to make you stay. You’re not sure you could deal with that. Going from being one kind of prisoner to another is definitely more than you can deal with.

You shake that thought off and come to a stop outside Dayvhe’s room. You knock in case he’s back already but there’s no answer. Hesitating in the hallway is not a good look. You try to reason with yourself, he’s your moirail and you should act like it. You’re already denying him the most basic levels of contact which calls into question yet again whether you’re even still together. If you don’t even feel like you can go into his space then the answer is pretty clear.

The door is shut but maybe you can just… sort of… reach out and open it.

The door opens, showing you a messy room devoid of Dayvhe. Going in and shutting the door behind you then gives you a chance to look around. There’s wires all over the floor and randomly collected shit all over the place. He’s like one of those hoarder birds. There’s a board on the wall covered in photos of his friends and there’s even a few pictures of you on there, not that you’d been aware he’d ever taken any. There’s one of you coding something with your tongue stuck out a little in concentration, so much concentration that you’d evidently missed him taking the picture on his palmhusk no doubt. That little sneak.
Across other surfaces are music equipment and a few scattered weapons. There’s a splaysac on the floor, kicked into a corner not too far from his coon. Looking around you don’t see anywhere else aside from his desk chair to sit so you settle yourself down and wait.

Hal says that your already shaky sleep/wake cycle is fucked so you’ve kept less of a sleep schedule than you have spontaneous naps and occasionally passing out in sopor until someone comes looking for you and wakes you up. You’re about on the edge of sleep when the door opening wakes you up. It was nice to discover that sopor doesn’t interact with the drugs still in your system, something no one thought of until the next night when you eventually work up again to a panicked Dayvhe and Hal. You were fine, if anything their concern alarmed you more than anything the sopor might have done. Even Dayvhe’s splaysac has sopor imbued in it to make it more relaxing to be in, so you’re glad it isn’t suddenly bad for you. As you’re sat there contemplating this Dayvhe walks in muttering to himself and not noticing you.

“Stupid, goddamn, it’s not like Hal can’t even go over there himself and- yes, run program obviously.” Dayvhe mutters as he wakes his husktop up and starts clicking things. You run your eyes over his slight frame and remember how you’d been so sure he was the one who needed protecting, and yet you’re the one constantly getting your ass handed to you.

“Hey.” you say uncertainly.

“AUGH!” Dayvhe yelps, spinning around with a crackle of red psi that he drops the moment he sees it’s you.

“Sorry.” you apologise.

“No, no, it’s fine. Just scared the fuck out of me. My observation skills are clearly not as off the hook as usual, oh man, whoo.” Dayvhe gasps, obviously startled and starting to calm down.

“What’s going on?” you ask, pointing to his husktop.

“Oh, bullshit with Roxxie’s ship. They’ve still not worked out what the bug is and Hal is being useless so she’s just beefing up everyone’s antivirus and blah, blah, tech stuff.” Dayvhe shrugs.

“I could help.” you offer.

“Nah, you’re good.” Dayvhe says. Well, there goes a chance for you to be useful.

“Anyway, you’ve not come in here before. So, uh, welcome to casa de Strydr!” Dayvhe says and waves his hand around with a flourish.

“It’s something alright.” you agree.

Dayvhe pushes away from his desk and walks over to you, sinking to his knees on the floor next to you and resting his hands on the bean filled surface of the chair you’re in. Not touching but as close as he seems to feel he can push it.

“How’re you feeling anyway?” Dayvhe asks. He asks you that a lot and you’ve never any clue what the right answer is, so you just shrug.

That probably wasn’t the right answer but no doubt Hal is telling him everything from your medical checks so giving him that information is hardly helpful. You’re supposed to say something though, so you do.

“Are we still moirails?” you ask. Wait, you should have thought before saying that. Given that
Dayvhe looks as startled and as hurt as if you just slapped him you really should have thought first.

“Unless you don’t want to be?” Dayvhe finally says.

“No,” you protest trying to sit up gracefully but no one has ever managed that in one of these chairs. You look at Dayvhe and your pumpbiscuit aches.

“No, I want…” you falter over your words. Looking down at him and at his hands that aren’t touching you but are close you know what you want. You want things to be how they used to be and not how they are now. You don’t want to doubt if he’s real or doubt if you’re going to be safe if he were to shoosh you. You’d never really appreciated how vulnerable and weak you were when you were like that with him but you can’t un-know it now.

“Then unless you change your mind I’m not going anywhere. And even if you do I’ll only stay as far away as you make me and like… desperately hope you change your mind.” Dayvhe says, trying to joke but coming off entirely as sincere as you know he is.

“That’s… ok.” you say awkwardly and immediately regret ever existing the moment the words pass your lips. Even more so when Dayvhe laughs and looks up at you from where he’s kneeling on the floor.

“Well, ok!” he snorts in amusement.

“Fuck off.” you tell him.

“I can, but is there anything you want? I can try and get you whatever.” Dayvhe offers.

You think about it. Your room is fine, obviously nicer to be in than the tank you were stuck in but it doesn’t have any of your stuff in it. The only thing of yours is your palmhusk and even that is your backup one. You suppose the people who took you have your main one but you’re pretty confident that anyone who tried to get into it is now suffering from an overwhelming amount of defensive viruses and also probably is missing a hand from it blowing up.

“Kinda hivesick and miss my stuff.” you tell him. This is the part where he tells you that you can’t leave, isn’t it?

“I picked up some of your stuff when we were looking for you. Jayekh has your husktop and your bees at his place, he said he’d look after the bees and he does live in a jungle so there’s flowers and stuff for them. I didn’t pick up anything else though. It’s not safe for you to stay there but I think we can go by and get your stuff if that’s what you want.” he offers.

“And come back here.” you say.

“Well, I would say if you want to stay somewhere else you can but Karkat moved out of his hive to live here. He was worried about being so out in the open and also the thought of losing him too was giving me the worst daymares and I think he was being merciful to me. If you’d rather stay with one of the others I guess that’d be ok but-” he stops talking suddenly and stares at you. You can almost see the lightbulb go off in his mind.

“You’re not a prisoner here, you can leave. I’m just worried with you not being yourself that you might get disoriented and lost or get attacked. But we can go get your stuff now if that’s what you want.” he offers. He stands up and holds out his hand, you stare at it for a moment before he seems to remember the whole no touching thing and snatches his hand back.

“Yeah, let’s go now.” you say suspiciously.
“You can’t leave.” Dayvhe says and- no, not Dayvhe, the figment. You try to ignore him and follow Dayvhe out of his room.

“You know I’m right! You couldn’t leave the tank at all and you just magically woke up here and you can’t go anywhere, they’re always watching you and you think you can just go? You’re just in a different squeakbeast maze at best!” the figment shouts after you as you walk down the hallway.

You try to ignore it and walk on quickly. Your bloodpusher is racing as you walk and you feel like you did any time you tried to escape and as the fear mounts the other Dayvhe matches your pace perfectly so you have a questionably real one and a definitely fake one with you.

“This is obviously fake. I mean, a big rescue is far fetched but suddenly everyone you know is coming together to save you? Not that people don’t want to but that heiress had hella security and you know they’re strong.” the figment points out.

“So this must be a new dose, something to keep you in something sustained, a longer dream.” he supposes.

Alright but why would it matter what you do or where you go then?

“Well, if you’re under a long time sleepwalking makes sense. They suggest to you that everyone is here and suddenly they are, they’re just waiting for you to make sense and drop vital info or names or something. And you’re still in a physical space in that base which seemed huge but they can’t let you leave, right?” the figment suggests.

You want to argue back but you also don’t want to be arguing with someone who isn’t there right next to Dayvhe. And to the figment’s credit you do have a bad feeling about this that you just can’t shake. At least Dayvhe seems to notice that you’re not feeling like yourself because he’s not trying to talk to you as you go. He doesn’t say a word until he stops at a door.

“So, uh, we’re underwater. There’s this bubble system to get up to the surface but uh… I’m not sure you’re going to like it.” Dayvhe says and presses a button on the door.

Metal doors swish back to reveal a round glass pod braced with metal supports and the first thing your mind leaps to is the tank they kept you in.

“Yeah, I thought you might feel like that. I can talk to Roxxie about getting something different down here but I don’t know how long that’d take. Maybe if your psi gets stable enough again when your ports heal you could just hold a bubble of air and fly out or something or… I don’t know.” Dayvhe says unhappily.

You stare at the pod, your breath coming fast and paranoia burning in you. This is too convenient, surely? Well, well fine then. You handled forty nights in that thing, you can cope with the small amount of time it’ll take to get to the surface.

“I can handle it.” you assure Dayvhe and he looks at you with surprise.

“Well, ok.” he nods.

Right, you’re going to go. You’re going to leave this place and there’s nothing anyone can do to stop you. Nothing at-

“Sollux!” Rohhze calls from down the way and you turn to see her jogging to catch up to you.

“Oh no, a predictable thing to divert you from leaving.” Figment Of Dayvhe says from his place at
“I was hoping to catch you.” she says as she stops by you. She looks from you to Dayvhe curiously.

“Are you leaving?” she asks. You nod.

“Oh, well my appearance is timely then. I have a gift for you.” Rohhze says and takes something from her sylladex. She holds it out to you and you see that it’s a knitted blue and red woolen hat with holes for your horns.

“I realise that your appearance right now may be upsetting to you, both from the helming implants but also from having your head shaven. Not that I want you to hide how you look but choosing to change your appearance yourself is a freedom often taken for granted until it is removed. So I thought you might appreciate the ability to change it a little, if you have any other designs or colours you would like me to try I’m more than happy to do so.” she says with a smile.

“So I can still leave?” you ask in confusion.

“I wasn’t trying to stop you, I just wanted to catch you before you left. Does it fit?” Rohhze asks curiously and uncertain of quite what’s happening you take your cue and try the hat on. It’s a little tight around your smaller horns but otherwise it’s just fine.

“Hm, I’ll have to adjust the measurements next time but I think that’s not bad for a first attempt.” Rohhze nods.

“You look good.” Dayvhe says from the doorway.

Right, the doorway, you can still go. You mumble your thanks to Rohhze and carefully squeeze past Dayvhe without touching him and get into the pod. It being small actually makes you less alarmed than if it had been the same size as the tank, the fear of being underwater isn’t great but you’ll tolerate it for getting out. You back up against the sloped glass wall and Dayvhe steps in with you and presses the button. The doors close and you start to move upwards.

“So uh, this connects to a dock thing underwater and then there’s a secret passage and a door and you gotta go out of. It’s a little tight but we’ll be fine.” Dayvhe explains to the floor because he’s not looking at you. You look around and see that the other one isn’t anywhere around, it’s just you and Dayvhe.

You tip your head back and look up, trying to see the surface of the water. Roxxie’s base must be really deep down because it’s a while until you can pick out the colours of the moons filtering through the water.

“Does he like it? Having gills?” you ask, avoiding Dirkka’s name.

“I don’t remember him ever not having them but he swims all of the time. He loves it. But, uh, not my thing.” Dayvhe answers. Yeah, it’s not yours either, you’ve never even learnt to swim. Why would you when you can fly?

The bubble jolts and you tense up immediately.

“It’s ok, it’s just the dock.” Dayvhe says and waits for a moment. A light comes on somewhere on the panel by the door and Dayvhe presses it. With that the door slides open smooth as anything and Dayvhe leads the way out into a small but boring steel tunnel, up a small set of stairs and then to what looks like a rock that blocks the passage. He taps at a screen and you hear a ping and watch a ripple go out on the screen.
“Just making sure no one’s there, Roxxie’s rules.” Dayvhe explains and then shoves on the rock which slides aside easily. You follow him out onto the crunchy sand of a beach.

It’s so… vast. After so long looking at the inside of a tank and then small rooms it’s disorienting to be out in the open again. The sea itself is so big from where you stand on the shore that you can’t see all of it at once, the whole scope of your vision from this position is taken up with sea and sky. The moons hang bright in the air and the stars beyond them glitter, far out as you are from light pollution.

“Oh.” you breathe shakily.

“You ok?” Dayvhe asks and you look around at him. Behind him the rock is over the passageway again and concern is writ large over his face.

“Yeah. Yeah, I’m just… outside again.” you tell him. You didn’t think you’d get out here, if you’re honest you can probably admit that you had pretty much lost hope of escaping or being rescued. You still had a flicker of it but nothing compared to when you first woke up there. But here you are, free again and you can do anything and go anywhere. The impulse takes you and you grab it. Your psionics are still shaky, Hal said it’s something to do with the surgery as well as your general health right now but you do have them still. And even a little of your psionics is more than enough to do this.

You burst up into the air in a spark of red and blue, twisting in the air and coming to a halt about fifty feet up. The wind whips at your clothes and you turn slowly. You can see Dayvhe down on the beach, a little speck pacing back and forth as he looks up. Across the way you can see the lights of a city, your city in fact if you’re not mistaken. Suburbs roll over the hills between and the dark shapes of distant forest are that way too, if you wanted you could go there. You could go and absolutely no one could stop you.

You’re almost a little dizzy with the possibilities.

Of course you could be dreaming this, hallucinating or being made to see it but right now you’re doubtful. Even when you used to dream of flying before it never matched the real thing. Even in dumb dreams like the kind where you have to get somewhere but you’re late and things keep going wrong and then when you fly no matter how fast you go you don’t get anywhere, that kind of thing. You still were aware at least a little that it wasn’t right. You feel the breeze on your face and figure that air convection and the feel of moonlight on your skin was just too complex for your imagination to make.

It feels real.

Which means you probably have a very panicked moirail down there on the beach waiting for you. You descend slowly and land with a crunch on the sand, he tries to go for you and then clearly catches himself and stops.

“Thanks, man. My blood pressure was feeling a little low but you fixed that right up for me.” Dayvhe wheezes.

“Did you forget I could fly?” you ask teasingly.

“I didn’t know if YOU had! I was trying to work out if I could catch you if you fell and not pancake you on the ground or something!” Dayvhe protests.

“I’m sure you would have caught me if that’d happened, ninja skills, remember?” you tell him and scramble up the sand bank.
“Yeah man, that works real well in comics when they just hold their arms out and their love interest is saved. But instead inertia is a bitch and you end up cutting your crush into three equal pieces and no one is happy. It’s hoofbeastshit is what it is.” Dayvhe grumbles and follows you up. It’s very Dayvhe like, you wonder if you could have imagined this but you’re certainly practiced at wondering what Dayvhe would say to things. Curse your long held crush on him.

“What now?” you ask when you both reach the top.

“If you want to go back to your place we gotta get transport but something tells me confined underground train is a bad idea.” Dayvhe says carefully.

You consider the feeling of being underground and away from the light of the moons, just like that fucking underground base. In a confined space where you can’t safely use your psionics and surrounded by people you don’t know or trust.

“Not doing that.” you agree with a shudder.

“That’s what I thought. So… communal scuttlebuggy?” Dayvhe offers.

Ugh, great. You hate having to get those, there’s always some weirdo who feels the need to talk to you like they can just sense that you’re there and it sucks. But they’re not underground so it’s basically all you’ve got. You could fly but that involves touching Dayvhe and- yeah, no.

“Ugh.” you shrug and thank goodness Dayvhe somehow knows the difference between your ‘ugh-shrug-no’ and your ‘ugh-shrug-fine’ because he leads you off to the nearest street and then around a little while until you come to a stop with a little shelter and a bench.

“I think… I think there should be one in about five minutes.” Dayvhe says and pushes his shades up his nose a little.

“I just realised I don’t have any money. I don’t have my stuff.” you tell him in dawning panic.

“Dude, I was always planning on covering you. Chill.” Dayvhe says, waving his hand dismissively.

Patiently you wait for your ride and look around at the few people walking around uninterested in you both, it’s nice not to be watched. For his part Dayvhe is looking around at other people more than he is at you, like he thinks he’s going to have to fight any rando who walks by. You take him in, his skinny frame and trained ready stance. He’s pushed his sleeves up to his elbows in deference to the slightly warm night and you watch the subtle shift of tendons under his skin as his thumb taps out an anxious beat against his belt. You remember thinking that he was small when you first met him but now you hold up your arm in front of you and see that there’s more meat on him than there is on you now.

“I think I need to eat something.” you mumble, turning your arm this way and that.

“When we get to the city I can buy you lunch if you want. That pizza joint near yours is good.” Dayvhe offers.

You agree to pizza pretty readily, surprising no one and you’re actually really looking forward to it. You don’t want to think about what happened to you and you don’t want to see imaginary Dayvhes, but maybe if you can just be outside and back in familiar places everything will go back to how it was before.

The scuttlebuggy pulls up and Dayvhe hops on before you, uses his Roxxie authorised pass for him and then pays for you. You both shuffle down the aisle of the buggy and you figure that you’d feel
better standing than being crammed in a corner against the window or sat in the aisle with everyone bumping into you. Pressing yourself against the glass you reach up and grab a hand hold and Dayvhe follows you, standing in front of you with his back to the middle of the vehicle. The wool of your gifted hat muffles the buzz of the glass as the buggy starts up and begins driving you all off again.

You look around. There’s a group of rusties, a bronze and two golds at the back all laughing together and you’d guess from the way they’re dressed they’re out to go party. An olive guy is sat half asleep a little closer to you but his head keeps jerking as he catches himself falling asleep. Up front there’s a nervous rustblood girl who is barely old enough to be riding the buggy even if she does have her snake lusus curled around her shoulders a few times. But all in all it’s your hue of people around here and none of them seem to care a bit that you’re here. You swallow thickly and force yourself to breathe.

“Have you thought about what you’re picking up?” Dayvhe asks calmly.

“Clothes probably, games, sentimental shit I guess.” you shrug.

“Like that amazingly tasteless gold foil hoodie?” Dayvhe says with a toothy grin.

“If- if you’ve not already stolen it.” you counter, trying to keep the normal conversation going.

“I might just.” Davyhe teases.

“Oh man, that corner there used to have a great ice cream stall, wonder what happened to it.” he says suddenly, pointing past you out the window. You look and relax a touch as Dayvhe starts rambling about anything that you pass and then any other incidental topic that seems to come into his head. It’s nice hearing him talk, you’d missed it.

Stops go by and a few of the people change on or off but there’s nothing of note for while. Not until you come to a stop near an arena and a whole team gets on. It’s a bunch of mid and highbloods with one rather out of his depth looking rustblood.

“I bet his hive is like, super busted.” a tall cerulean girl with buff arms laughs as an olive player throws some money carelessly at the driver drone. Dayvhe takes a half step closer to you and you can tell that his eyes are on the players as they walk down the buggy towards you all.

The rustblood walks past you both first, his head ducked. You’re not really up on sports but you know enough to know he’s the pusher, that rustblood position that has a real short life expectancy. Aradia used to hate that it was a thing. Some of the midbloods follow him to seats and sit down laughing and talking about the game. But it’s the higherbloods that have your attention.

You hold your breath as they swagger up the aisle. The cerulean girl clips Dayvhe and you see a crackle of red as he braces himself with his own psionics to stop himself from falling into you. Only that means that he didn’t get out of her way as she wanted.

“Excuse you rustie.” she hisses at him. Davyhe looks up and a muscle in his jaw twitches.

“Sorry, my bad.” he apologises without feeling.

Your eyes flicker over the exposed arms of the girl, she’s older than you and bigger too. She’s obviously strong and you can’t help but be reminded of one of the Heiress’s lackeys, the one who dislocated your arm. The one who caught you one time when you were trying to pry the door open and threw you across the tank. You’re not breathing and you can feel your psionics crackling over your skin as your fear ratchets up.
“What’s your fucking problem?” the girl demands, waving her hand at you, reaching for you.

“Back away from my moirail, asshole!” Dayvhe snarls, loud and deep. But it doesn’t matter, she manages to grab your arm anyway.

Pure panic seizes you and psi snaps across your skin. Your hearing seems to cut out, or at least narrow down. In front of you Dayvhe spins around and the hand on your arm falls away.

“Calm down, calm down, shoosh. You can’t do this here.” he insists and presses you to the glass as your legs nearly give out.

“Come on, shoosh.” Dayvhe repeats, his hand stroking along your cheek.

You hit the floor like a puppet with cut strings and seconds later a tight hand wraps around your wrist and pulls you up. You’re dragged out of the buggy that suddenly screeches to a halt, the doors blow open and then it’s a blur of streets. Before you know it there’s brick against your back and paving under your ass.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have but we had to get out of there.” Dayvhe apologises quickly, pulling his sword out and stepping away, glancing down the alley.

“Breathe, you’ve stopped breathing.” Dayvhe reminds you, no more than six inches from your face.

“Shut up.” you gasp, forcing yourself to try to breathe normally.

“You did good, you didn’t feel a thing.” Dayvhe says soothingly and runs his fingers through your hair.

“Stop it!” you snap.

“No, no, let me just-” he starts to say, rubbing his fingers in your hair and-

Wait.

You don’t HAVE hair.

Your eyes snap open and you’re almost nose to nose with a startled Dayvhe but if you look over there…

“Sollux? You ok?” Dayvhe calls back from further down the alleyway.

He didn’t do this. Remember the rule? Real Dayvhe listens when you tell him shit like ‘don’t touch me’ but this fucker doesn’t.

“You were going to blow the scuttlebuggy wide open and kill everyone on it, assuming that girl didn’t rip your arm off first!” Dayvhe- no, the Figment Of Dayvhe says defensively and backs up hurriedly. You try throwing him at the wall but it doesn’t work because he’s not REAL.

“Sollux what’s wrong? Is it- shit, I’m sorry I shouldn’t have touched you but I had to pull you out of there. You just collapsed and that girl was going to- fuck, I’m so stupid.” Dayvhe says in obvious fear.

“So he’s not real either then? He didn’t listen to you about not touching you either!” Figment Of Dayvhe accuses, pointing at the real one.

“If YOU hadn’t interfered he wouldn’t have needed to!” you snarl at the figment.
“Wait… what?” Dayvhe asks and steps a little closer into your field of view, closer to his double. He looks where you’re looking and back at you.

“Shit, you’re seeing things again aren’t you? Hal said you shouldn’t be anymore, not really, not big things. What- is it me again?” Dayvhe asks.

“Yes.” you groan, covering your eyes and digging your claws into your hat. How did you genuinely feel like you had hair again? What is wrong with your thinksponge?

“What’s he doing? He’s not real, I promise. If I could fucking fight him I would.” Dayvhe promises.

“What’s he doing? He’s not real, I promise. If I could fucking fight him I would.” Dayvhe promises.

“Pretty sure that wouldn’t work.” you say and crouch down, resting your arms on your knees. Davyhe settles down in front of you, his sword resting across his crossed legs. He’s still checking the way you came but you’re betting that if no one followed you by now you’re fine.

“You’re not fine. You’ve no idea where you are, those guys could be looking for you and who knows who’s out there!” Figment Of Dayvhe snaps and paces.

You ignore him and focus on Dayvhe instead. You watch the way he breathes and deliberately make yourself go at his speed.

“How are you even going to get anywhere from here?” the figment demands but he’s easier to ignore now.

“Let’s get out of here.” you tell Dayvhe who snaps to attention.

“What do you want to do?” Dayvhe asks.

“Not transport! The scuttlebuggy? The train? Are you kidding?” The figment insists in a panic. In fairness the thought of doing either of those things makes your throat close up.

“Walk?” you suggest instead.

“Alright.” Dayvhe agrees and gets up. You follow him, still shaky but you get there. He leads the way out of the other end of the alley and you rejoin the street, the figment is following along behind you jittery and staring at everyone that passes. Only he’s not staring because he’s not real.

The longer you walk for the calmer you feel, if something happened out here you could just fly off or run. And once again the people walking around don’t seem to give a shit that you’re there, they certainly can’t see the figment which… you look around and see that he’s gone. You’re not complaining about that, that’s for sure.

“You wanna eat something on the way? It’ll probably be a fair while until we get to your hive if we’re walking the whole way.” Dayvhe offers just as you’re coming up past an on the corner takeaway place. You remember your far too thin limbs compared to his.

“Yeah go for it.” you agree. Dayvhe goes inside but pauses when he realises that you’re not following.

“I’ll stay out here, thanks.” you tell him flatly. You think you’re going to lay off the confined spaces for now. You watch in building amusement as Dayvhe does a conflicted sort of shuffling dance. Towards the building for ‘must feed moirail’ but then looking back at you and starting to go back for ‘must stay with moirail’. The dumb little logic loop plays out for a few seconds until he grudgingly walks backwards into the shop.
“Shout if you need anything!” he calls out and ducks inside. You think to yourself that he’s such a
dumbass, you think it with a whole lot of affection though.

Idly you take your palmhusk out and message Karkat, no doubt he and everyone else has been
appraised of your status. Everyone is very obviously concerned that you’re going to implode under
psychological stress so you know they’re talking to each other and that’s not paranoia talking.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]

TA: walking and public transport 2uck2.
CG: OH HOW THE MIGHTY HAVE FALLEN, NOW YOU HAVE TO AMBULATE LIKE
THE REST OF US NORMAL PEOPLE.
TA: name one normal per2on you know kk i'll wait
CG: YOU’VE GOT ME THERE.
CG: BESIDES IT’S NOT LIKE YOU’LL HAVE TO DO THIS FOR LONG, AS SOON AS
HAL SAYS THAT YOU’RE ALL DRUG FREE AND YOUR PSIONICS STOP BEING
WEIRD WITH YOUR IMPLANTS YOU’LL PROBABLY BE CLEARED TO FLY
EVERYWHERE LIKE NORMAL, SAFE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT YOU WON’T DROP
OUT OF THE SKY LIKE A ROCK.
TA: yeah, i know but iit 2tiill blow2.
CG: DAYVHE TOLD ME YOU WERE GOING BACK TO YOUR PLACE, HOW’S THAT
GOING?
TA: he’2 incredibly freaked out and ii nearly accidentally killed a whole 2cuttlebuggy of people
po22ibly in2cluding him and me. al2o ii'm 2tiill seeiing thiing2. bad ii2 how iit'2 going.
CG: WELL SHIT, ARE YOU SURE YOU DON’T WANT TO COME BACK AND TRY IT
AGAIN SOME OTHER NIGHT?
CG: WAIT LET ME PUT IT IN TERMS YOU MIGHT UNDERSTAND.
CG: ARE YOU SURE THIS AREA ISN’T TOO HIGH LEVEL FOR YOU?
TA: iif ii2 then whoever de2igned thi2 reality diidn't even bother two colour 2wap the low level
mob2 two make them high level one2. lazy de2ign 1/10.
CG: YOU ARE THE BIGGEST NERD, I SWEAR. ARE YOU COMING BACK OR WHAT?
TA: or what. i'm not running back when i'm finally out2ide and not locked up for once,
e2pecially not ju2t becau2e my think2ponge hate2 me. what'2 even new with that? iit'2 alway2
hated me. i'm doing thi2.
CG: ALRIGHT. TRY NOT TO BE STUPID ABOUT IT I GUESS. I’LL SEE YOU LATER.
TA: later

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]

You kick your foot at the ground, the paving here is all shattered and broken up. You’ve no idea
what happened here but it’s not been fixed. Idly you float a few small chunks up into the air. You
spin them around, orbiting each other and making neat loops. Only the more complex you make it
the more your head starts to ache and the more the numb ports in your head feel like they’re buzzing,
two of the rocks clatter together and fall to the ground.

“You ought to work on that fine control.” Dayvhe says, walking towards you with food in hand.

“Hysterical.” you grumble and take your offering of food from him. It’s some grilled stuff in a wrap,
you don’t know exactly what.

“Everyone says that about how funny I am, and good looking too.” Dayvhe says seriously.

“And modest.” you snort and start walking as you peel back the paper around your wrap.
“The most modest.” Dayvhe says through a mouthful of food.

Eating real food again is really good. No, good is too much of an understatement it’s divine. Admittedly it’s cheap lowblood food so it’s probably not great for you but you’re not going to quibble over vitamins right now. Dayvhe walks and talks as he goes, about anything he seems to think of and about any memories he has of the places that he’s passing. He has quite a few of those, his previous circumstances made him quite the nomad and you’d wonder why he didn’t just live at Roxxie’s whenever he could as a pampered troll but you know how he feels about being tied down anywhere. You don’t talk so much and most of what you do say is asking Dayvhe another question about something he said and sending him off on a new tangent.

When you finally, exhaustedly, arrive at your building the sun is almost up and you’re relieved to get inside. You climb the stairs up to your floor which is right near the top, you didn’t realise how much this sucked when you weren’t flying. You would fly but small tight space bodes poorly for your current coordination and also you suspect that Dayvhe might have an actual aneurysm if you try again.

Reaching out to touch your door it swings open without you inputting the key, it wasn’t quite shut when you came near it.

“Move.” Dayvhe whispers at you and ducks in ahead of you, sword drawn.

He moves entirely silently as he stalks into your hive. The place is a mess, your loungeplank is just gone and your TV is missing too. Your books remain untouched but all of your hard copy movies and games are missing along with their consoles that were neatly folded up out of the way. Your coffee table is busted in half and from what you can see of your nutrition block a lot of your stuff appears to be scattered about and you’d bet more of it is gone.

You’ve been robbed.

Dayvhe slinks through the nutrition block, skirting fallen items without a noise and checks in your laundry room. You can’t help the wounded noise that comes out of you when you spot the plant Dayvhe gave you on the floor, its pot shattered and the plant itself clearly dead. That was supposed to save you, and it was the first gift he ever gave you, it was special! But… you suppose the fate it was meant to protect you from has already partially happened. All the same it was a gift and you promised to keep it alive. Not that Dayvhe will hold it against you but still.

With a scowl you leave and shove your way into your block. Your whole system is gone but Dayvhe had said that he already moved it to Jayekh’s so that’s no surprise. Your blackboards have been ripped off of the wall, most likely looking for any secret safes but you don’t have any of those.

“SOLLUX!” Dayvhe shouts out, making you jump.

He bursts into your block like the fucking cruel-aid mascot, except the door was already open which somewhat spoils the entrance. His head whips around, checking the room out.

“Don’t just vanish like that!” he scolds you, his voice high pitched and stressed.

“It’s the next room, the door was open, I’m two feet from it.” you point out.

“Fucker!” Dayvhe snaps and marches off into the ablution block to presumably menace any towels that might harbour malicious intent.

“I’ve just been robbed, I doubt anyone’s still here.” you call after him.
“You don’t know that!” Dayvhe argues from in there.

“Unless you’re having the universe’s most silent sword fight I do.” you retort and he sticks his head out and scowls at you.

“I’m going to go check the front door, see how they got in.” he informs you and marches off. You suppose your ablation block is indeed free of miscreants. You refrain from heckling him further, you were recently kidnapped so you suppose you can forgive his paranoia at you being around anyone who means you harm or being out of his sight in those circumstances.

“The door was kicked in, the lock’s busted.” Dayvhe shouts back to you from out there. You shake your head and ignore the world’s fastest troll CSI and instead focus on your desk. Opening drawers you find that the spare cash you had is gone (unsurprising), a few boxed husktop parts are missing (damnit), and even your energy bars are gone (fucking really??). The next drawer is entirely empty and at that is distressing to say the least. All of the notes Dayvhe ever left you were in there along with a bunch of other usual desk detritus of pens and shit but the NOTES were there. You’d taken them out of your sylladex because you’d been considering framing them or laminating them to protect them and you’d set out to measure them to work out how big of a thing you’d need for that. Only what had actually happened was you’d not found a ruler and then put the notes in your desk to look at later and got sidetracked by seeing if you could crash the World of Trollcraft economy single handedly (sidernote: you can). You did that for about thirty hours straight until Dayvhe had shown up and slam dunked you into your coon.

So they should be there, but they’re not. The notes aren’t there. Most everything else in your shitty hive can be replaced but not those. Maybe- maybe they’re still around somewhere? You drop to your knees and shoulder your chair out of the way and start searching under your desk, your hand feeling around for paper in the dark. Shit, there’s nothing here! Dayvhe comes into the room again right as you’re figuring you’ll go through your other desk drawers in case whoever robbed you moved shit around. You don’t know why they WOULD but- but-

Drawer out, cable ties, hand sanitiser, canned air, screwdrivers, husktop chitin plate. No notes! You throw the drawer behind you across the room and yank out the next one. Allergy meds, claw files, skin moisturiser, cold medicine (expired), tissues, solitary screwdriver, fuse for a plug. NO NOTES! You throw that drawer too.

“Uh, Sol, not that I’m not enjoying watching you trash your stuff but are you looking for something in this mess?” Dayvhe asks.

“Yes.” you hiss and wrench open the drawer they should be in again. Still not in there, remove the drawer, check the sides and bottom in case the notes are stuck there. They’re NOT. Throw the drawer.

“Holy fuck. What are you looking for?” Dayvhe asks as the wood smashes somewhere behind you.

“Papers.” you answer and cram your hand in the space where the drawer was just in case it’s in there.

“Alright, okay, chill. Big papers or little papers?” Dayvhe asks, holding his hands out from standard letter size to closer to post-it size.

“Small.” you tell him and pull another drawer out. God, this one’s full of shit. You tip it upside down and fling the drawer away, from the curse you think you nearly got Dayvhe which you’d feel bad about if it had happened. Desperately you search through what turns out to be mostly trash and broken things. Fuck, why didn’t you throw any of this away? NO NOTES THOUGH.
“What kind of papers are- oh! Oh, no it’s not that.” Dayvhe says and you hear the sound of paper behind you. You whip your head around so fast you nearly break your neck. Dayvhe is crouched by your wardrobe with a note in his hand, one of the notes.

You launch yourself across the room like some kind of demented beast, knocking him to the ground. You snatch the note from his hand and yes, it’s really it! You clamber across him and pick up the others scattered across the floor where he is. You’ve no idea how they got over here but they’re all here. You grab them all up into your greedy, desperate hands and clutch them to your chest. Holy shit, you thought you’d lost these forever.

“What- it was just a note from me about getting food.” Dayvhe says.

You look down, he’s underneath you with his glasses knocked halfway up his forehead. You’re sat astride his legs but he’s not touching you. Well, he is, obviously because that’s how contact works but you knocked his ass over and planted yours on him. He didn’t initiate any of that, he’s still doing what you asked.

“I thought I’d lost them.” you say quietly, still holding them to your shirt.

“Lost what? Some notes from people?” Dayvhe asks in confusion.

“No, just you. Every note you left me.” you admit. Dayvhe stares.

“You kept them all? I know you asked about having one back once when I was going to throw it but I thought you were joking or you just meant that one, I didn’t- all of them?” he asks in disbelief. You nod and lower your hands, letting the notes be more visible. Dayvhe shifts and leans up on his elbows so he can see as you flick through the individual little notes, scribbled on whatever paper he had to hand including Jayhne’s business card.

“Why did you keep them? This one was when I first met you.” he asks, pointing at one, his claw not quite touching it.

“I pitied you.” comes out of your chest in a rush of air. You hold the notes a little tighter.

“Pity you.” you amend and Dayvhe sucks a breath in.

“They weren’t where I left them, I thought someone had taken them for some reason I don’t know why they’re over here but unlike everything else around here I can’t just buy new ones. You wrote them for me.” you say, trailing off in volume as you talk. Your finger skirts the edge of the puncture mark from where Dayvhe had hung a note from one of your horns in your sleep.

You look away from the notes to Dayvhe as a tearing sound gets your attention. His claws are digging into your shitty too thin carpet, leaving ragged tracks in it but he stays not touching you or moving.

“That,” he says shakily, “might just be the palest thing anyone has ever said ever. Fuck, tell Karkat you said that and his romance thinksponge will explode. God I-”

One of his fingers twitch but he stays put, not touching you. You put the notes away safe in your sylladex and look at Dayvhe, buzzing with self restraint. He’s a far cry from the fake one on the bus who panicked and dragged you under into a pale haze and then told you that he knew best when you were in the alley. Carefully you reach out and take his shades by the arms of them and pull them back from his face.

Dayvhe looks up at you, his expression full of pity and a kind of self inflicted pain. You lean forward
a little to look at him closer, setting your hand with his shades in it near his but still he doesn’t move. You feel like you’re on a soap bubble ready to pop, held together only by suspension of disbelief. Your willingness to accept that you’re actually out, that this is really him, that he really will stick to the probably unreasonably restrictive rules you’ve set him.

You remember how you felt with each note that he left you, that building, crushing hope that maybe he could possibly feel for you what you feel for him. There’s something desperate slamming around in your chest and a kind of vertigo grips you, that it might explode out from your bloodpusher and kill you, leaving you dead on the floor with splayed ribs. You nearly did die for this, or rather you nearly suffered worse than death for this. No matter what they did to you they never pried his name from your lips, you’d never betray him no matter what they did.

But here he is. Knocked to the floor by you and blown over by your hoarding of the puzzle pieces that led to you being with him. Yet he listens to you. The terrified part of you that insists that this all isn’t real, the paranoia that something must be wrong because YOU don’t get good endings, all of that is wailing at this but Dayvhe ignores all of that and waits. For you.

“I pity you.” the words come, from you actually and both of you are startled by them after the silence.

“I can’t even tell you how much I pity you, man. I could spend the rest of my, no, like a seadweller lifespan looking for things paler than what I got for you. Wouldn’t ever find it. Fuck, I…” Dayvhe tears a few more tracks into your floor. He’s starting to ramble and you do like to hear it, you do. But…

You lean forward and when your nose brushes his he makes his kicked barkbeast kind of sound, a whine that reverberates through his throat.

You kiss him, kissing is what’s happening right now. It was kind of an impulse but here you are. He seems frozen for a moment like he’s trying to work out the metrics of does him kissing you back count as touching. But you guess he figures on it not being since he turns his head a little and fixes the angle between the two of you.

Kissing is one of those things that goes across all quadrants but you could really use a different word for it. This is nothing like the snarl, snap, bite kind of kiss you’d give a kismesis. Nor is it the conciliatory kind of peck you’d share as an auspistice as if to say ‘look, see, we can all get on now don’t kill each other for five minutes please’. It’s certainly a different creature from the overexcited, ‘oh god you’re so hot’, desperate kind of kiss you used to have with Aradia (though you’ll put inexperience down to part of that for sure).

No a pale kiss is like…it’s like…

Dayvhe sighs against your lips and he slumps back a little only to remember that holy shit kisses are still here and he comes right back to you like a magnet. He shivers and the comparison comes to you. A pale kiss is like cool sopor on sunburn and warm coffee on cold mornings. It seeks to equalise and soothe. You hurt right now, deep down and probably in a scarred forever kind of way. He’s been terrified and likely guilt ridden if you know him. But you’re here and he’s here and you’re both still pale for each other. You pity him and no matter how much you do you’re still pretty sure that him trying to pap you would freak you out and make you throw him through a wall but this is something you can do that benefits you both. It soothes the sting, calms the fear in you, bandages the wound.

You pull back from him but you’re still close enough that you’d go cross eyed if you tried to look him in the eye. You feel better, soothed and calmer without feeling hazy. If this was like being papped or like the gas you were drowned in when you were in the tank you’d feel different but this
is just perfect. Dayvhe leans his head back a bit and beams at you, all pointy toothed and bright.

“Hey, is that a chainsaw in your chest or are you just pleased to see me?” Dayvhe jokes and your eyes widen when you realise that yes that purring sound is coming from you. Whoops.

Oh well, good thing you know Dayvhe’s weakness.

“I’m pleased to see you.” you tell him sincerely and Dayvhe’s eyes go wide and you get to watch his face go darker than it already is and hear a similar sound get a little louder in HIS chest.

“I should keep checking this place for things I want to take.” you say and push yourself up.

“Yeah, cool dude, you do that. I’m just gonna… lay here for a bit, swoon.” Dayvhe says and fully flops back on the floor. The dork.

There are cables around that you want to keep, some stuff from your ablution block that you may as well take or else you or someone will have to buy replacements. Dayvhe will occasionally shout over to you about taking something or other and either giving it to you or jamming it in his own dumbly organised modus. Sure you have to solve hacking puzzles to get at your shit but your modus has a back way in to bypass that in a hurry, something Karkat never found out and you found too funny to tell him. You may be a terrible person but it is at least entertaining to you.

“Your fine control definitely is better.” you note as Dayvhe pulls some of your shuriken out from under a shelving unit. He grimaces, sits up and floats them between his hands spinning them slightly.

“I was… I was super stressed when you were gone. I know we were mounting a rescue and researching but a lot of those skills aren’t mine and I spent a lot of time not being able to do anything to get you back.” he says quietly.

“I’m sorry.” you apologise.

“What? No, that wasn’t my point. I couldn’t do shit but I could still do what you told me so I practiced. Pretty sure it paid off too because I wrecked shit when we finally found you, or maybe I was just that mad.” he says.

“Or both.” you say.

He hands the weapons over to you and so you move on to your wardrobe. This is pretty much untouched save for the top shelf having been combed over for potentially hidden stuff. No one wants your second hand clothes with your sign emblazoned on them. You’re able to start packing your clothes away and it takes a moment for you to realise that when Dayvhe got your servers and shit he must have also taken then clothes that you’re wearing now in both your old sizes and the new ones. You don’t need to check to know that you’re wearing your old, smaller, jeans and even they feel loose on you.

Fuck it, you take all of the clothes. You will eat better again, you will. You also thank your stars that Dayvhe got you up to a healthy weight before you got abducted, if you’d started out there like this you might have actually died from real malnutrition or starvation. With all of your clothes grabbed up at once the wooden chest at the back of your wardrobe becomes evident.

“Oh.” you say quietly. It’s obvious someone tried to force the lock which is all kinds of dumb because the box is only wood, you could absolutely just smash it open.

“Oh? Oh what?” Dayvhe calls out and peeks around the door.
“It’s Aradia’s box.” you explain, kneeling down and pulling it over to you.

“She gave it to you?” Dayvhe guesses.

“No. Well, the box itself she did, yeah. Some treasure she won in a FLARP game or something. After I killed her-” you explain but Dayvhe holds his hand up to stop you.

“After she died.” he corrects.

“After she died because of the lasers I shot from my eyes that destroyed her hive, yeah.” you say stiffly.

“That Vriska made you do.” he argues.

You sigh. Dayvhe has that look on his face, that look that says he will bite his teeth into this point all goddamn day and not let you off on it.

“Fine. After she died because of the lasers from my eyes,” you say and he doesn’t correct you so you go on, “at first I ran off but later I came back with this. She was my matesprit I wanted to take sentimental things and things that she loved before everyone picked her hive over.”

“That’s sweet.” Dayvhe says and sits down next to you.

“Well I hadn’t figured she’d come back and she haunted me for a good while trying to make me feel better about shit before Equius got his gross hands on her and crammed her into the first in a long line of bots. You know she never technically broke up with me? She’s still my matesprit.” you tell him.

You pop the lock on the chest open. Neither you or her bothered working out how to open it, your psionics were more than enough to just force it which was kind of the joke. Inside is a haphazard collection of things, her part burnt FLARP manual, some of her archeology tools, hair ties of hers that used to wind up everywhere. At the bottom there’s one of her shirts, a movie disk, a spare whip.

“I think dying and dating Equius pretty firmly puts an end to the whole dating thing.” Dayvhe suggests.

You shrug and sift through the box a little more, you’re pretty sure that no one broke into this and took anything. Besides it’s all worthless to anyone who isn’t you.

“Was she a good matesprit?” Dayvhe asks.

Your instinct is to say that of course she was, Aradia was the best, better than you ever deserved. With Dayvhe asking the question though you actually think on it.

“I’ve never had anyone else flush to compare to and we were young and I’d never had anyone else like me back so I was just amazed at dating anyone.” you admit.

“Okay, a valid point but you’re the only moirail that I’ve ever had and I know you’re great.” Dayvhe argues. This is not as strong of an argument as he might think it is.

“She was funny. Really happy too, sweet to people and ambitious. She didn’t care about being rust and staying in her place. She was a total opposite to me, I don’t know what she saw in me but I know what I saw in her. But if we were good together… I don’t know. It was a long time ago.” you confess and it feels terrible to say something like that but it’s the truth. Your relationship with her wasn’t perfect and her dying didn’t help because it made it impossible for you to let go, not to
mention the whole thing with Equius or the psychological scarring from Vriska.

“And you’ve always felt guilty about how she died.” Dayvhe adds knowingly. As much as you hate his glibness he’s right, it’s hard to be objective about a dead person you once adored when you’re the murder weapon that killed her.

Dayvhe sits there silently as you think and he watches you close the chest and lock it again. You could leave this here and leave that part of your past in your past. Newsflash, Aradia was never perfect. She could be callous at times, reckless and self-involved. But she was also funny, loving and smart. All of those things can be true. You could leave this chest here or you could take it, but it doesn’t matter. If you take it with you it could mean that you’re not running from your past or it could mean you’re still torturing yourself, leaving it here could be you trying to escape from guilt or it could be a sign that you’ve moved on.

Ugh, fuck symbolism. You can take it with you just because it’s yours and you’re probably going to be awfully shy on stuff that belongs to you and if you want to get rid of it later you can. You throw the chest into your sylladex and consider the matter closed for now.

Dayvhe flops back and pushes his shades all the way off, dropping them on a shelf and rubbing his eyes. It’s bright enough outside now that you’re going to have to stay here overday with him and if you want to leave tomorrow you’ll likely have to go as soon as the sun sets so you really need to finish up combing through your stuff soon. With that in mind you get on with it again but as you both work you can’t help but notice Dayvhe’s separated section of stuff you’re not taking is working itself into a sort of pile shape. You look at it out of the corner of your eye as Dayvhe tosses an old jacket with a rip in it on there.

Worry flutters inside your digestion sac but you push past it and do another sweep of your hive like you didn’t see it. Pile? What pile? Where? You’re too busy welding your front door shut to think about certain pale constructs happening in your block. You’re all about keeping the two of you safe when you sleep, not thinking of… of that.

You rest your head on the door and groan. Surprising no one but you the whole being tortured thing has fucked with your head. Well, you already knew this at least in part. You’ve been seeing things for one, been paranoid, all that shit. You’d been prepared for being touchy about, uh, touch. You’d caught onto that one real quick and figured that was something you’d solved.

Except not so much. You’d kissed Dayvhe earlier and it was amazing. Now he’s making a pile and your ass backwards mental thinkspoon is simultaneously reacting in terror at the idea of being vulnerable like that ever again but also basically begging for it. You hate being you, you WANT him to put you out of your own mind for a while and you know he’d never hurt you. But also bone deep visceral terror wells up at the image.

Fucking great.

You can’t avoid him forever (and part of you absolutely doesn’t want to at all) so you make your way back to your block. Dayvhe is angrily throwing cases onto the pile, game cases you think. You liked the grubs enough for the games but the discs always had better art so for your favourites you’d spring for both, though your game grubs are all gone and you curse the bastards who took them. Dayvhe snarls and tosses another empty case on the growing pile.

“Uh.” you say from the door.

“Who does this? Who just takes the discs and leaves the cases? They’re all gonna get scratched fucker!” Dayvhe declares and flicks another empty one over his shoulder.
“Maybe they had a folder.” you suggest.

“But why decant them all into that here? Why not just take the cases too? I’m going through them all in case something is left but good god, I mean look at all the stuff I’ve had to throw out!” Dayvhe says gesturing to the pile.

“Yeah, I see it.” you say with some reservation.

“It’s a mountain of stuff and if I ever find these people I’m going to throw it at them bit by bit and it’s a pretty substantial-” Dayvhe abruptly cuts off, his posture suddenly stiff.

“Pile?” you fill in and Dayvhe grimaces. The dumbass didn’t realise what he was doing. That’s… sweet in a way.

“Do you think,” Dayvhe says as he holds an empty case, “that I can just spontaneously combust under the weight of my own dumbassery?”

“Me and most of our friends are still alive so probably no.” you inform him, feeling better enough about this to come in the room now.

“Good to know.” Dayvhe groans and tosses the case that’s in his hand at the pile. Dayvhe then dares to look at it again, embarrassment and guilt flaring up on his face.

“I didn’t mean to make that, I can dismantle it or whatever.” he says quietly, scratching at the back of his neck and looking thoroughly awkward.

“Was it an accident?” you ask, stepping a little closer. Dayvhe shoots you a horrified look at your question.

“Of course it was, you said I can’t touch. It’s different if it’s you doing this stuff to me but that didn’t- I didn’t think the rules were different suddenly. I wouldn’t try to get you in there like this.” he says defensively.

“I didn’t mean that, but thanks. I meant it’s sort of… instinctive, isn’t it? Making it for you, not for me. My problems can’t be fixed just by talking about it for a while but what about you? I’ve been absent for way too long.” you don’t want to think about how much time elapsed, how long you were gone for. Instead you’d sooner focus on the guilty twist to Dayvhe’s face that tells you very well that he does need to talk to his moirail, that you are needed here.

“It’s cool, you get in there and-” you gently push him in the chest and he goes down into a pile with a crunch of empty disk cases and other damaged things that were yours before theives got here.

He’s in there and you’ll what?

Get in there with him? Listen to his problems? Shooshpap him? Kiss his stupid face? Ask him to do it back? Freak out, lose control of your psionics, blow out the wall and cook you both in the sun or else actually directly fry him with your psionics? Kill ANOTHER quadrantmate?

“I’ll stay here.” you say instead, pointing at the floor at the foot of the pile. You sit down with your legs crossed and look up at him expectantly. Dayvhe fidgets and looks anywhere but you.

“You don’t need to do this. It’s like you said, a lot of things can’t be fixed by just talking. I mean most of what I’m worried about is you, what happened to you, how can I help, what’s going to happen. You can’t tell me that.” he points out.
“Most of what you’re worried about?” you echo. Implication there being that what he said is not all of what worries him.

Dayvhe makes an uncertain sound and sinks a little lower in the pile. He’s pretty keenly unhappy to talk about whatever this is but you’ve both had to pry things from each other before in a pile, you’re each other’s first moirails and sometimes it’s hard trusting someone else with your feelings.

“It’s just something I’m caught up on, making sure you’re ok is more important than me.” he insists.

“That’s stupid.” you inform him.

Dayvhe could just not tell you, you can’t make him. Or maybe you could but you won’t and you’re diverting out of thinking about it. Either way Dayvhe is really bad at letting silence hang, especially when there’s something he wants to say so you just watch him calmly.

“Augh. Are we… alone?” Dayvhe asks worriedly.

“I sealed the door, no one’s getting in.” you inform him.

“That’s good but I meant you’re not seeing anyone else, are you?” Dayvhe asks.

Oh. Oh, he means the figment. You look around to see but he’s been gone for a while and doesn’t magically burst out of nowhere now just because you’ve thought of him. You’re not 100% sure on what makes him show up and what doesn’t but for now he’s not here.

“No.” you say.

Dayvhe nods but stays silent again, like he’s reconsidering asking anything at all.

“That’s what’s worrying you?” you ask in surprise.

Dayvhe looks at you like he’s wondering if you misplaced your thinksponge recently.

“Is it always me that you see? You didn’t believe Karkat was real before so…” Dayvhe asks.

“I hallucinated him but you’re the one that follows me, it’s pretty much just you.” you agree.

He looks kind of… heartbroken.

“What’s wrong?” you ask.

“What’s wrong? Aside from me being worried about your health and what they did to you what’s wrong is you getting tortured and attacked but it has to be by me?! Or not me, something that looks just like me.” he says perhaps a little louder than he meant to.

“He wasn’t the one torturing me and he hasn’t attacked me.” you point out.

“Really? Because I don’t touch because you’re not ok with it, which I have no complaints about I mean, I’m not entitled or anything. But if you think he’s me and he does it anyway then that’s attacking you. It’s assault, it’s a crime, Sol, a criminal crime!” Dayvhe insists.

“Except it’s not because it’s not real.” you reason.

Dayvhe leans forward and puts his head in his hands. This isn’t going so well.

“Why is he me?” he asks.
“It’s…” you trail off, trying to put things into words.

“You know about the stuff they tested on me?” you ask, you don’t want to explain that if you don’t have to. Dayvhe nods a little.

“Hal said it made you defenseless and trusting, and I know you won’t say names because they were trying to get information out of you.” Dayvhe says.

So he doesn’t really know how it felt, or not the actual in person experience of it at least. What’s the best way for you to explain it? It’s not as if you did this whole thing consciously, but…

“You know sometimes how you know something makes sense one way like how if K- if your matesprit is ranting then there’s nothing really wrong?” you say after a moment.

“God yeah, I used to think Karkat was actually mad at me when he went off on one but he actually goes all weird if he’s really upset. If he’s pitching a bitchfit it’s probably going to be alright after he tears a few people a new one.” Dayvhe agrees.

“Alright but you know how people are stupid and sometimes you think that the same thing goes the other way? I mean you know it doesn’t, the smart bit of you but the dumb part thinks it. So for me… alright.” you pause and try to think of it like you’re describing something that happened to someone else.

“You know how it feels physically to be shooshpapped? Makes you feel all boneless and weak and powerless but you’re also cool with that. It makes you feel good and ok with things. Mainly because you wouldn’t let just anyone do it.” you explain.

“I mean obviously I know how that feels we’ve both been like that with each other.” Dayvhe agrees.

“And not with anyone else.” you add.

“Never!” Dayvhe says firmly, not that you were accusing him of anything there but you can see how maybe he thought you were hinting at that.

“So imagine it’s you there and you’re tired and hurt and hungry, basically not feeling so clever. But the people there are testing this stuff, this gas on you. It makes you feel like that because they found it and they want to improve it, and why wouldn’t they? Can you imagine the crowd control you could get on people if you could suddenly make everyone that calm and trusting? Shit, I hope that research never got out. Not that it was good research done on just one subject who wasn’t even clean between each test, that’s just poor scientific method if nothing else.” you say hurriedly.

“Honey,” Dayvhe says, sliding lower in the pile so you’re looking at him more. He doesn’t use pet names on you a lot, he’s not really like that or he usually can’t do it seriously but now and then you get one. Usually bee themed because he does know you after all.

“Not that I don’t live for the critique of the scum that experimented on you and not that I’m not interested in finding out about every detail I think you were going for a point and I’m more into hearing that if that’s cool with you.” he finishes.

“Your moirail is the only person who makes you feel that way. So, you feel that way then if you run that thought the other way…” you look at the frowning Dayvhe.

“If you run the logic backwards then… then if you feel that way your moirail must be… making you feel that way.” Dayvhe finishes.
“Add all that to being tired and hurt and some other mindfuckery and you have him. Or that’s my
guess as to how he came around.” you explain.

Dayvhe slides down more until he’s no longer sitting on the pile of stuff at all but rather the floor and
just leaning back on it. An empty copy of Deity of Strife 2 is hooked around his cropped horn. His
fangs are worrying at his lip and his brow is scrunched up in thought. You told him, he knows, or he
knows your best theory anyway. You’d really like to stop talking about this now if you could.

“Well then what does he do? I’ve heard you shouting at no one, I guess him, and I still say he
assaults you but you’re the one who actually sees him so-” Dayvhe looks up from the ground and
when he meets your eyes his expression blanches.

“Shit, you don’t have to talk about it, I didn’t mean to push.” he says hurriedly.

It’s kind of funny in a way. ‘You don’t have to’ was your guiding principle with Dayvhe when you
first met him. He doesn’t have to stay around you, he doesn’t have to help, he doesn’t have to tell
you thing if he doesn’t want to, he doesn’t have to sleep in sopor. And yet telling him that you didn’t
want to coerce him into anything was often a good way to make him actually more keen on doing
that thing, like he needed the confirmation that he was choosing rather than being expected. Or
something. But here you are with the same thing working on you.

“All sorts of things. It’s a pretty good painkiller which I needed and if you could only touch me and
someone was trying to beat the shit out of me you wouldn’t you do that to make me not feel it?” you
ask him challengingly.

Dayvhe’s face suggests that he isn’t cool with his answer to that, especially given your no-touching
rule right now. He says nothing but you can hear the malcontented rumble in his chest.

“He reminded me not to say names to give information at all, would tell me that what I was seeing
wasn’t real.” you add. You don’t hate the projection, but now that you’re pretty sure things are real
you’d like for him to go away again. But maybe that’s it, maybe as long as you still have any doubt
he won’t leave.

“You’re talking about him like he’s real, like he’s someone who isn’t you.” Dayvhe says sourly.

“I know he’s not real.” you say.

“Do you?” Dayvhe challenges you, his eyes pinning you where you sit.

“They’re smart, I’ll give you that.” Dayvhe- not Dayvhe says. You look over to the side to see the
figment leaning against the red side of your coon.

“What’re you talking about?” you ask, looking at him. Dayvhe is looking around and then back to
you, he’s saying something and you can see his lips moving out of the corner of your eye but he’s
muffled and muted. That happened in the tank sometimes, can’t answer questions you can’t hear
after all.

“I’m not saying I’m real, we’ve worked that out just fine. But you’ve not proved that he is.” the
figment says, pointing at Dayvhe in the pile.

“He is.” you tell him defensively.

“Hm. You have two options.” the figment says, holding up two fingers. Now you know he’s just
pandering to you.
"We know I’m in your head, but that doesn’t mean I’m not real. I’m you. I’m you, I’m him, and I’m what you know he thinks of you. But your thinksponge is real, I’m real. You don’t know about him and you know they must have heard you talking to me. They would try to get rid of me and he’s trying to as well, you don’t know he’s not them.” the figment says. He glares at real Dayvhe as Dayvhe gets up and walks over to where the figment is and waves his hands in the general direction of where he thinks the figment is.

His argument makes sense, in a way.

The fuckers who put you in the tank want you to trust them and believe that you’re safe, they want you to tell them things, they want you to think it’s over and they want you to not trust the thing in your brain that kept you safe.

On the other hand your poor moirail wants you to trust him, he wants you to feel safe now that you’re back with him. He wants to know what happened to you and how he can help now that it’s over. Dayvhe also wants you to stop talking to people who aren’t there and recognise that continuing to see imaginary people is probably bad for your mental health.

Both scenarios make sense and from your point of view both of them look the same. God, you really hope the person you kissed is real Dayvhe and not in the best case of it being fake no one at all and at worst someone else. Fuck, you REALLY hope Dayvhe is real. The figment vanishes with a shrug, how incredibly fucking unhelpful.

You groan and lay down, throwing an arm over your eyes. Is this ever going to stop? There’s no way you can prove that anything is real but you. Well, ironically and the figment in a way. You feel Dayvhe come closer, sense him leaning over you.

“I’m fine.” you say.

“That’s a lie.” he says miserably.

You drop your arm up a little, pinning your own horns to the floor with its weight and look at him. He’s obviously concerned. Strike that, low key terrified.

“Is it gone? You weren’t answering me, you just went away somewhere.” Dayvhe asks.

He’s not gone, not really. You might not be able to see him right now but those are decidedly not the same things at all.

“Can we not talk about him?” you ask wearily and Dayvhe’s eye twitches.

“Can we- no! It’s clearly bad for you and I can’t help if you won’t tell me about how it works so we can fix it.” Dayvhe insists.

It’s like you’re neatly divided, bisected actually, and are two things at once. Half of you knows that you’re out, that this is real and Dayvhe is upset and frustrated as he tries to help you. The other half is more and more convinced that this is a con the harder that he insists on getting rid of the figment, that half is powered by paranoia and the vague undercurrent that getting out is too good of a thing to have happened to you and that you deserved this anyway.

“Not talking about it.” you say firmly.

“Sol!” Dayvhe shouts in despair. But it’s too much, too cornered, too much like being stuck in a tank and made to talk. You don’t mean it at all but instincts are hard to fight. You snarl at him and red and blue psi pops and crackles in the air around you. You’d never hurt him in a million sweeps but you
He does back off. He backs off more than you wanted. Several big steps away in fact. He crams his hands into his hair with a hiss, digging his fingers into his hornbeds.

“I need to- I need a minute.” Dayvhe mutters and then is gone. It’s that ‘flash step’ ninja move that he told you about before because your precious moirail is the kind of loser to name his moves. But he just used it to get away from you.

You sit up miserably, still alone. Good job breaking it, hero.

From the way the door is suddenly shut you think that Dayvhe is in your ablution block. You sit and wait, pick up a few things from the floor before looking hopefully at all of the scattered shit and deciding to just leave anything you haven’t already taken. He’s still gone.

You look at your chumroll and see that both Dayvhe and Karkat are online. It makes a change, you suppose, instead of it being you in there desperately talking about Dayvhe to Karkat it’s the other way around.

God, but you’re tired. All the walking, the emotional shit of finding your place trashed and picking through things, not to mention everything with Dayvhe. Your coon looks real tempting right now. Admittedly it means that you wouldn’t get to brush your teeth but you went forty odd nights without doing that so you’ll live. You peel off your clothes and climb in the blue side. It’s not the instant thinkspoon off switch it was on your first reintroduction to sopor but it’s still pretty damn potent.

The sound of the ablutionblock door opening stirs your mind awake a little but not enough to do anything about it. You hear Dayvhe sigh and then the sounds of him walking closer, you feel the warmth radiating from him as he leans in to look at you. You could open your eyes and look back, could talk to him even and work this out. You could do those things if you weren’t so hazy and sleepy.

“Fucking shit, just- good job, asshole.” Dayvhe mutters and pulls back. You hear him take a step or two back and then clothes rustling.

“Just hound him about shit, yell in his face, what’s wrong with- rrgh!” Dayvhe snarls quietly and you hear clothes hit the floor.

You force your eyes open and chirp at him in sleepy confusion. You know enough to know he’s not yelling at you, even though it feels like he must be on the backwards logic that you probably deserve it.

“Oh crap, I didn’t mean to- no, no, go back to sleep. It’s cool, we’re cool, super chill shoosh.” Dayvhe hushes you, reaching for you but not touching.

You’re tired and sopor numbed and most of your thinkspoon is running so slow that it’s basically still on dial up. But your instincts are in some deeper part of your pan that doesn’t turn off so easily. Or that’s your excuse when you find that you’ve pressed your blue sopor sticky face into his hand like an overly affectionate meowbeast. Your traumatic reactions might be deep but not as deep as the billions of years of evolution that say having someone who pities you getting their fronds all up in your face feels good.

“Oh. You should… sleep.” Dayvhe tries to tell you and his thumb slides slickly over your eyebrow as you move slightly in his grip. He doesn’t touch your cheeks, doesn’t go where he knows you’re not cool with. Paradoxically it makes you wish he would because he’s the kind of person who won’t
when you ask and- look, it doesn’t make sense but it is what it is.

“I should tell you this tomorrow but you’d look real sick with an eyebrow piercing right there. Could get one where the ends are red and blue.” Dayvhe says softly, pressing a thumb claw gently near the arch of your eyebrow.

Oh shit, that would look awesome. God, he gets you so well, he’s great. No wonder everyone pitied him, he’s perfect.

“Pity you.” you say into his hand, probably incomprehensibly.

“Pity you too, go to sleep.” Dayvhe says, gently lowering your head to the rim of the coon and letting go of you.

Sleep drags you back under and you’re out cold before Dayvhe has finished getting his jeans off and then remembering that shoes come off first.
“You heard my voice, I came out of the woods by choice  
    Shelter also gave their shade  
    But in the dark I have no name  
    So leave that click in my head  
    And I will remember the words that you said  
    Left a clouded mind and a heavy heart  
    But I am sure we could see a new start  
    So when your hopes on fire  
    But you know your desire  
    Don’t hold a glass over the flame  
    Don’t let your heart grow cold  
    I will call you by name  
    I will share your road”

Hopeless Wanderer - Mumford and Descendants  
‘Pale songs for tough times’

You wake up alone. Not unusual lately but the paper stuck to the edge of the coon is enough to make your pumpbiscuit seize. It’s a note with writing crammed in edge to edge to fit it all in.

gone to get hella breakfast brb

talked to rox she says shell send us
a little private scuttlebug for just you
and me or we can walk
if you wanna take her up on it troll her
<> dayvhe

You carefully store the note with the others and consider Dayvhe’s question. The scuttlebuggy and the train are so far out but a private smaller vehicle that’s just the two of you? Well, that could be different. It could also be just as bad but if it’s driving under your directions you can make it stop and get the hell out the moment you need to which is good. Besides, it’s not as if you haven’t spent time in close proximity. Your recuperacoon may have two separate halves but it’s still the one thing and doubtlessly smaller than a private vehicle.

Fuck it.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling tipsyGnostalgic [TG]

TA: ii think thii2 ii2 the right trolltag? the2e weren't on my lii2t before and iit'2 the right colour 2o…
TG: hey solluX!
TG: and yes its me, roXXie! i think dayvhe updated your backup palmhusk before we found you, poor little grub needed to do something useful to feel better and he had about Xed off everything useful off of his list!
TA: raight.
TA: he 2aiid two troll you about a ride? he’2 not here right now but he'll be back.
TG: oh yes, yes! im like, the queen of rides. handin those suckas out left right and centre!
TG: or i would but no one ever seems to want one much jayekh is all like oh but the adventure and
dirkka is all must hone my ninja skills hurrr brrr
TA: my god it’s like they’re right here in front of me.
TG: ha ha i like you man but yeah i can hook you up with a ride ill pre pay it and send it to you in
like an hour? it’ll wait for you anyway but still
TA: that sounds great thank2
TG: no problem!

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling tipsyGnostalgic [TG]

Well that’s that done, whether it’s a good idea or not you’ll have to wait and see. You float yourself
out of your coon, dripping blue sopor a little and then just because you can you float over into the
ablution block. You manage to not fuck that whole situation up and not crack your head open on the
tiles. Good job, a winner is you. You wash yourself clean and consider that your psionics really do
seem to be getting better as you heal. Or as… they heal.

You tip your head forward in the water and let yourself feel the weird dead zones of sensation. Your
now slightly soft felt textured scalp feels the water just fine, the very very short regrowth of your hair
changes the direction of the water as it flows. But everywhere the ports are there’s nothing besides
the healing ache of the skin around it as it decides to accept the modifications. If nothing else
goldbloods have been somewhat selectively bred to adapt well to shit like this being jammed into
their systems. Do this to an olive blood and you’re looking at immunosuppressant drugs at the very
least if not automatic death.

Cautiously you raise your fingers to trace the edges of the implants, your claw skirts cold metal and
you nearly rip the thing out by accident when you hear a slam from outside.

“I’M OK!” comes Dayvhe’s muffled shout.

Oh, oh good. You turn the water off and try to lower your blood pressure down to normal from ‘oh
shit what the fuck’ levels that you’re at right now.

“Hey Sollux are you in there?” Dayvhe asks, slightly muffled through the door.

“Yes, where else would I be? It’s not like I’ve been-” you cut yourself off before you can say
something terrible like ‘I’ve not been kidnapped again’ which would doubtless hurt Dayvhe and
make you feel shitty.

“Give me a minute.” you shout instead and grab a towel to dry off with.

“I got food.” Dayvhe informs you and walks off.

You get dressed, glad to have your entire wardrobe on you again and then leave. Dayvhe is sat on
your nutrition block counter, biting distractedly at a pastry and staring off into space with a slight
scowl. He focuses again when you come close enough to trip his senses and turns his attention to
you. Your focus however is on the wide spread of food that he’s brought back and you know that
he’s going to encourage you to eat as much as you can. A thought occurs and it’s out of your mouth
before you can think better.

“Do you think my psi is off because they didn’t feed me much?” you ask.

“Imagine your body is one of those management sim games and you’re suddenly way under budget
in resources. Do you fund functioning organs or bitching eye lasers?” he asks flatly.

“Are you implying that my body doesn’t appreciate the value of cool?” you challenge him.
“It’s fine, we can’t all be as cool as me. Here, I got two, your pick. White chocolate frap extra espresso and caramel syrup or goreo crush ice mocha also extra espresso.” he says, pointing to the two drinks.

“My teeth hurt looking at them. How’d you even get in? The door’s still welded shut.” you ask, taking your drink and looking at the front door that you sealed not long after arriving.

“Your window and some hellacious parkour.” He assures you.

You’re on the twelfth floor so you’re more than a little horrified at the idea of Dayvhe sitting perched on your window ledge thinking in all seriousness that this is a good idea and then jumping when you know he doesn’t have the psionics strong enough for flight. On the other hand the image of him bouncing up to your window on the way back, springing off of each ledge with his shitty ninja moves is just too much for you. You can almost hear the little 8-bit jump sound effects in your mind as you visualise it.

You desperately fill your mouth with straw and over sugared drink lest you laugh and indirectly encourage his dumbassery. When you’ve composed yourself you speak again.

“I trolled R- I… trolled your pseudo-lusus lady.” you correct just in time, you nearly named her there.

“Roxxie’s not my pseudo lusus!” Dayvhe protests, his voice hitching up an octave.

“You called her mom once.” you point out.

“AAAA! Shut up! I’m not listening!” Dayvhe wails out over dramatically and clamps his hands over his ears, only he needs those hands to keep eating so he can’t shut you out for long.

“She’s sending us a ride.” you tell him, magnanimously dropping the lusus thing.

“Are you going to be ok with that?” he asks.

“Who knows?” you say with a shrug. Worst comes to worst you’ll walk again.

The conversation kind of dies then. Maybe you could more optimistically say that you fall into a lull of comfortable silence as you both eat your food and drink your drinks. It doesn’t feel comfortable for you and maybe it’s just because it will likely be some time, if ever, before you’re comfortable again.

You chance a look up at Dayvhe, you’re side on to him right now so you can see his eyes. When he’s an adult those are going to be that bright shade of red that is one of your two favourite colours. The thought that you don’t know if you’ll be around to see that crosses your mind. Not because you don’t think you’ll both make it to that age but because… because you don’t know if he’ll still be yours then. Maybe by that age you’ll have driven him off with your hot and cold bullshit. In the last twenty four hours you’ve both kissed him senseless and driven him away so he had to hide from you in another room to be able to cope coming back. Anyway who says you’re going to get better? You might get worse, deteriorate and then push your overtaxed moirail away from you. If that happens you actually might not make it to adulthood.

“Hey, are you ok?” Dayvhe asks.

“It’s fine.” you lie. He obviously knows that you’re lying and so you cram some food into your mouth so you can’t incriminate yourself further.
Alright.” he replies and goes back to his drink. This obviously isn’t alright.

The pair of you awkwardly eat and drink until the scuttlebug shows up, he goes down there to make
sure it’s going to wait and you do one last sweep of the place that was your home for your whole life
and then leave. Dayvhe unwelded the door by himself it seems.

So the communal scuttlebuggies and the private hire scuttlebugs are two very different creatures.
This one is small, part organic and part not, the compartment for passengers is small and you could
maybe get four people in there. More than that if you wanted them to come out quadranted at the
end. But for just you and Dayvhe it’s fine. You sit on opposite seats and look out of the windows as
the automatically directed vehicle drives along happily by itself.

Both of you try making conversational attempts but you’re so anxious that they all just bomb. When
you get dropped off at the beach with the secret entrance you’re relieved and more so still when you
can retreat to your block. You distract yourself as much as you can by unloading all of your stuff into
your new block, that makes it feel more like home but you’re stuff all fucked up about everything.

You sneak back out of the base, another point for this not being a secret sleepwalking prison. Instead
of going anywhere you just sit on the beach and feel awful. You stare out across dark water and
ruminate over shit that can’t be solved by just thinking about it. Something slides through the water,
probably a sea creature or something from the way the waves are disturbed. Actually, that’s a big
drag in the current.

You stand up, wary of sea monsters like the one you, Dayvhe and Dirkka fought before. Your eyes
flick over the water but it’s too dark to see very deep. Maybe you didn’t eat enough today after all or
maybe your head isn’t right because the world suddenly feels off and hazy in a way it didn’t before.
You gulp for air and panic kicks up inside you when you don’t taste the salt spray, it’s wrong. As
you inhale you don’t smell sea or that slightly bitter smell of decaying seaweed. Instead it’s
something familiar that has no name. It’s warm and safe, something earthy and rich. You feel like
you should know it, like it’s baked into your bones.

You stare dizzily at the water and you feel compelled. It’s not like when Vriska controlled you,
you’re aware that something else is urging you on. What you want to do- no, what you’re being
made to want to do it to walk into the water, to find what’s out there. You take a stumbling step
towards the sea but then halt at the idea of, uh, all the bad things that live in the sea. Also something
is making you want this, you don’t want this.

"Yeah, back up we’re not doing this.” the figment insists, appearing out of nowhere.

"I…” you try to say but you can’t get anything else.

It feels like, like, come on silly it’ll be fine! An adventure!

Dayvhe, the figment, hisses and forcibly drags you up the beach. Which probably just means that
you’re dragging yourself up with your psionics. By the time you’re far enough up that there’s grass
underfoot the weird compulsion has faded.

“It can’t be Cal, he died. Maybe… someone from the lab is after you, trying to control you?” he says,
staring out at the water. You sit up and look yourself, your chest still heaving with panic.

“It didn’t…” you trail off and sniff at the air again, just salt and sand now. Fuck, what was that? It
was so familiar but you can’t place it.

“What did that smell like to you?” you ask. He’s not Dayvhe, he’s you. But maybe whatever other
part of your thinkspoon he lives in has some insight.

“Like… dirt? Warm leather I think?” he says uncertainly. So… boots? No, that’s not right. Augh, why can’t you place it? You feel like you should and you’re going to kick yourself when you do but it’s not coming to you. Now that you’re away from the water the fear in your chest is fading, the adrenaline tingling in your fingers is pulling back and you feel a little stupid and you’re glad no one saw you flail away from the sea for possibly no reason.

“No, no, you don’t know it’s safe. There could be something down there, another mind leech maybe? Do those have litters? Or some sea horror thing. Fuck, does Roxxie have the same lusus as Fef or is that only for people in her direct ancestry? She might have something else with awful luring powers.” the figment of Dayvhe babbles, pacing back and forth.

You watch him as he marches about like a caged jungle stripebeast, theorizing on all the terrible things that could be out there and you think you’re starting to get it. You’re starting to really see just what your desperately tired mind did to make him.

You were alone and scared, you needed to feel safer so you got Dayvhe. The Dayvhe you made wanted to look after you because that’s what Dayvhe does and because the drugs made you feel that way. But he’s not just that, he’s made of the fear that built him. He can’t know what to protect you from if he doesn’t know what you should fear. That’s why he’s not leaving, he’s that awful, negative, terrified voice in the back of your head that is always there at least a little and flares up really badly when you’re depressed at all. You just didn’t recognise him because he doesn’t act like you personally are the worst.

Whatever is out there scared you and he’s here obsessively worrying about what it might be. He’s fear in a fake Dayvhe suit. You can’t get rid of him and he’s not bad. But fear is reasonable when you’re being tortured, not reasonable when you’re just trying to interact with people or get public transport. But here’s the thing, you’ve been that kind of crazy your whole life. You have the commemorative photos from the endless ride that you’ve been stuck on in this theme park of mental bullshit. A coat of pitiable paint changes nothing now that you know it’s the same.

“Can you just fuck off?” you groan and the figment halts and looks at you.

“No! You don’t know what that is out there!” it insists.

“It’s not doing whatever that was now. It could just be me, not something else. And whatever it might have been isn’t here now so thanks for getting me away but you can go now.” you tell the figment firmly.

“You don’t know that! Whatever it is could be regrouping, it could be a diversion! No one does science without reporting their results who knows who else knows about you and maybe that was meant to distract you as-” the figment starts insisting and yeah, that’s fear alright.

“Fuck. Off.” you growl and fling a rock through the figment for good measure.

“They could be after your friends, you should go!” it persists.

You pointedly fall back on the grass in the world’s least defensible position for being ambushed by, what, jackbooted scienterrorists? Mysteriously landbound sea monsters? Who knows? But you’re perfectly fine with playing cluckbeast with the fear feeding this thing.

“I hope they do get you, you deserve it.” Dayvhe’s voice hisses out and you know for sure it’s not him. That’s the kind of awful thing you normally tell yourself. You flip off nothing and stare up at
the sky. As long as you can tell the difference between that figment and the real Dayvhe then you stand a better chance of ignoring him now, maybe of going back to normal. Perhaps.

Fuck.

A long while passes of glaring at the sky and trying to work out a way around the whole problem of not being monumentally f**ked up, only eventually you’re interrupted by the sound of shifting stone.

“Sollux?” Karkat’s voice floats up.

“Up here.” you call back.

You hear the sound of Karkat gracelessly scrabbling up the dune and onto the grass before dropping himself on his ass next to you with a huff of breath.

“The f**k are you doing up here?” Karkat asks.

“Thinking.” you answer vaguely.

“Why, does your stupid thinksponge only get signal up here?” Karkat mocks you. You get to watch in delight as his face clearly telegraphs panic at the thought that ‘oh no shit his thinksponge DOES have tech parts in it that was insulting and insensitive I’m the WORST’.

“Bite me.” you say flatly and Karkat relaxes.

He looks out over the ocean and the two of you stay in silence for a bit. You consider and then reject the idea of asking him if the ocean smells weird to him too.

“So I was thinking,” Karkat begins slowly, “quadrants, right?”

“Quadrants?” you repeat.

“Yeah, they’re kind of… hoofbeastshit.” Karkat says and you look around at him so fast your head spins.

“Who are you and what have you done with my best friend?” you say, only half joking.

Karkat rolls his eyes at you and absently flips you off.

“Not romance, that’s still the greatest thing. And quadrants are fine in determining maybe the way you might like someone and how people who feel like that usually act, it’s good for setting boundaries so your quadrantmates aren’t stepping on each others walkstruts or anything. But it’s not everything. I mean… me and Dayvhe… we’re not flipping between flush and pitch. We’re both, all of the time. Sometimes we’re feeling more one way than the other but it’s always a little of both. That doesn’t fit into a quadrant and we’re not wrong. I’m. I’m not wrong.” Karkat adds weightily.

Oh. Oh. You can see why he might feel rough about this, he’s always been the quadrant guy to no personal success and now he’s doing romance but ‘wrong’?

“Fuck what everyone else says you should be doing, if you two are happy then who cares?” you tell him.

“Thanks.” Karkat says with a wobbly smile. You hope he wasn’t looking for your permission, as long as Dayvhe is happy Karkat can conduct his romance however he likes.

“He doesn’t normally talk to me about you, you know.” Karkat says after a pause as he stares back
out at the ocean instead of at you. A little mental reverse engineering tells you that he means that
Dayvhe doesn’t usually speak to him about you.

“Actually, that’s not true. He talks about you a lot. Like extensive questioning on your cake
preferences, waxing romantic on how good you are at stuff or loudly plotting murder against people
who hurt you. I mean he doesn’t tell me private shit about you.” Karkat corrects.

“Doesn’t normally.” you repeat, starting to feel concerned.

Karkat shifts uncomfortably until you smack him in the arm to get his attention.

“You need to listen to me the whole way through and not just blow up, ok? You can blow up after if
you want but listen first.” Karkat insists and shuffles about so he’s facing you properly.

You stay silent and suspicious. Karkat looks deeply uncomfortable about whatever he’s about to say.

“Upfront admission here: I have never wanted to be your moirail. Not that you’re not full of flaws
and suffering with shit because obviously you are and I think you’d have starved to death if I hadn’t
shown up and smacked you in the head in the past. But I also know you’re wildly skilled at so much
else and a massive asshole besides that you probably only have all of your gross flaws to nerf you. I
don’t pity you and I don’t hate you, you’re my friend. You’re my closest friend, you’re important to
me. I may have known you better and for longer than anyone else but that’s still a thing.” he says
awkwardly.

“Thanks?” you say, squinting at him. That was weird but… nice in a Karkat sort of way.

“Same.” you offer in return.

“Let it also be said that I have all of the feelings for Dayvhe, all of them. You two are my two
favourite people, that you two are together is nice. You’re both way better together than apart.” he
adds.

“Maybe not lately.” you say miserably.

“Yeah, exactly.” Karkat says grimly and you glare at him.

“You weren’t meant to agree!” you snap.

“I don’t want to agree but let’s face it, you’re making each other miserable. Not that either of you are
really to blame but it’s not working. He’s terrified that he’s going to fuck up and hurt you worse or
lose you and you can’t make up your mind on what you want and you’re too scarred up in the head
to figure it out. It’s a fifty foot catherine wheel on fire rolling downhill to a dynamite factory near an
orphanage levels of bad right now.” Karkat exclaims.

He- how dare he?! As if you don’t feel shitty enough about this Karkat’s just come out to berate you
for fucking things up with Dayvhe. And… and Dayvhe’s been talking to him about it? Does that
mean that he wants to end things? Is this what he’s thinking too?!

“Hey! Hey you said you’d listen!” Karkat reprimands you.

“Then talk quicker!” you snarl at him.

“Okay, that was needlessly confrontational. Good job past me. Look, you’re… ok where to start?”
Karkat mumbles and taps his claws on his leg as he thinks.
“The whole bipolar thing… you know it makes you hard to deal with sometimes. Advanced moirail material, maybe. It’s not bad and obviously you manage to make it work but you must have known that when you finally did have a really bad turn with Dayvhe around I’d probably be telling him shit about how it works, right? You know he’s never done this before after all.” Karkat says.

“I guess.” you say bitterly. Any more of your flaws he wants to drag out?

“It’s not bad and it’s not your fault, man. Don’t act like it is. And what those bastards did to you is also not your fault and the fact that they fucked with how much you want to have contact with people is just extra cruel. Especially as Dayvhe got dragged into that. Just napalming your normal troll methods of dealing with horrifying shit. Again, not your fault.” Karkat adds.

“So what’re you saying?” you ask, because it sounds like you’re just too difficult for Dayvhe to know what to do with.

“I’m saying it’s really hard to work out how to help here and Dayvhe is terrified. He feels responsible for everything that happened to you, you know that?” he says.

“What?” you whisper in horror.

“That’s how he sees it, it’s what he said to me. He got together with you when he knew his position near Roxxie had dangers. He took you on that mission and let you go off on your own and then he failed to find you in time. As far as he’s concerned he may as well have done everything to you himself. Then he finds out that you’re haunted by some nightmare version of him… he’s losing his shit over it. And he wants to fix this but nothing seems to work and he’s too scared to make it worse.” Karkat explains.

You stare out over the water again. You didn’t know he felt that bad about it, or more accurately that responsible. Your gut churns even though it’s been long enough that your coffee and abundance of breakfast pastries are long gone. You’ve still got bile though, you can throw that up if you think too hard about where this is going.

“So you’re saying we should break up.” you mumble. You’re making his matesprit/kismesis miserable, of course he does.


“Are you shitting me? You two are perfect for each other and you worked flawlessly before. Like hell you’re giving something that good up when it’s still fixable. You’re just both just too fucked up and/or stupid right now to know what to do!” Karkat shouts, waving his hands angrily around as he talks.

“What?” you say. You watch as Karkat draws breath and seems to gather himself up again.

“I’m saying that you need help.” Karkat tells you.

“Help.” you repeat.

“Look, I stand by my new stance of quadrants are hoofbeastshit that shouldn’t be followed rigidly if they don’t work. But we have a whole quadrant designed for helping people that are important to you mediate their shit without everything burning to the ground.” he says carefully.

You stare at him wide eyed. Karkat looks deeply uncomfortable but he’s too stubborn to back down and is patiently waiting for you to say something, anything. Your move, fucker.
“Are you- are you actually offering to be my auspistice between me and my moirail?” you demand.

“Yes. And before you open your squawk blister to be all ‘but Karkat that’s only for a caliginous-’ blah, blah, blah. Yes, it’s ‘supposed’ to only be for those relationships where shit can go nuclear just like that but I get the impression that if you and Dayvhe break up one or both of you is going to go off of the deep end in a very messy way. I’m invested in keeping you together, I don’t think either of you are at fault but also I’m not terrified that my life will be ruined if something goes bad. I can actually be rational about this, something neither of you can do right now.” he insists.

“And this is what he wants, is it?” you ask skeptically and, ah HAH, Karkat suddenly looks a little guilty.

“Sort of yes. I haven’t actually talked to him directly about it but he gave me the idea. Look, let me just…” Karkat trails off and flicks through his palmhusk before passing it to you.

TG: you dont understand im fucking this up so bad i just got him back and im making this *worse*
CG: FREAKING OUT ABOUT IT ISN’T GOING TO HELP. HE KNOWS YOU CARE, JUST KEEP TRYING.
TG: how can you be so goddamn rational about this?!
CG: BECAUSE HE’S NOT MY MOIRAIL. BESIDES I’VE SEEN HIM BEFORE WHEN HE NEEDS HELP AND YOU JUST HAVE TO IGNORE HIM TELLING YOU HE’S FINE BECAUSE HE SOMEHOW DOESN’T NEED TO EAT ANYMORE OR SOMETHING.
CG: WHICH ISN’T WHAT’S HAPPENING HERE, HE’S JUST MESSED UP. HE’S NOT TRYING TO PUSH YOU AWAY.
TG: im no good at this
TG: you didnt see him just now im absolutely making this worse
TG: fuck karkat why cant you be here and like translate or something
TG: hah could you imagine if i was pitch for him and then you could be ash and fix this disaster fire
CG: THAT’S NOT HOW THAT WORKS, DAYVHE.
TG: i know and i could never hate him
TG: hes the most pitiable kar have i told you that before and im wrecking this by not being able to keep myself in check and i swear to anything you wanna put in front of me that if i missed any of those bastards who hurt him i am going to RUIN them
CG: YOU TURNED YOUR THINKSPONGE INTO A MEAT GRINDER BACK THERE, I THINK YOU GOT THEM ALL. DIAL BACK ON THE RAGE AND COME BACK TO REALITY, THANKS.
TG: sorry
TG: hah i just thought though, an auspistice but for moirails: an awwspistice
CG: I’M GOING TO STRANGLE YOU WHEN I NEXT SEE YOU.
TG: sexily?
CG: GO PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR MOIRAIL YOU PERPETUAL SHAME MACHINE.
TG: oh shit
CG: WHAT?
TG: hes asleep i should go too
CG: THE FIRST SENSIBLE THING YOU’VE SAID ALL DAY.
TG: karkat
CG: DAYVHE?
TG: what if he doesnt want to be with me anymore
CG: HE DOES. JUST… GO TO SLEEP.

carcinoGeneticist [CG] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

Karkat snatches his palmhusk from your hand when he sees you scrolling too far. You don’t fight
him for it, your insides feel heavy with guilt. As messed up as it is Karkat’s right, neither of you
know what to do and you’re both scared out of your minds about doing it wrong.

“This is stupid and weird not to mention straight up heretical. But I’d do pretty much anything for
him so if he agrees then… sure. Yeah, I’ll do whatever this is.” you agree, though unhappily you
might add.

“Oh. Oh, well, good! That took less convincing that I was prepared for. I guess I now have to talk
Dayvhe into this and think of a name for whatever this is that isn’t that terrible pun he made.” Karkat
says and shuffles forward to slide back down the dune.

He turns to go back inside and a thought occurs to you.

“Wait.” you call out and jump down after him. Karkat looks at you curiously but waits as you asked.
Eyeing the ocean suspiciously you beckon him to follow you and walk back to the edge where you
were before. The quiet waves lap at the sand, not quite reaching your different coloured shoes. You
breathe in and smell nothing unusual, all normal ocean smells.

“What?” Karkat asks.

“Nothing, I guess. I thought there was something… I must have just been hallucinating before. I’m
good now.” you shrug.

“That’s concerning but I guess I’ll just accept that. Are you coming in or what?” he asks. You shrug
and follow him into the stupid little bubble that takes you back to Roxxie’s underwater hive. You
peel off from Karkat and navigate your way back to the room via wizard statues and briefly
contemplate rearranging them just to see if anyone else relies on them for navigation like you do, but
that’s a lot of effort just to potentially fuck with people.

You have a brief conversation over trollian with Jayekh about bringing your husktop back even if he
can’t take your servers. Roxxie had a point before, bees are not aquatically compatible and you’re
betting that attempting to bring several thousand bees into JUST a confined underwater space will be
met with so much no from everyone else. No one will be happy with that solution, not you, the bees,
or anyone else.

You’re actually feeling briefly normal until your door is suddenly flung open with a bang and a
yelled ‘WHAT THE FUCK’. You flail in alarm and your palmhsk launches itself several feet
across the room. It’s Dayvhe standing in the doorway and you’re too freaked out to get a read on
what his expression is but shouting is happening.

“You’re breaking up with me?!” Dayvhe demands, advancing on you. You back the fuck up as does
your blood pressure probably, you can hear your pulse in your ears from how hard it’s going.

“I DIDN’T SAY THAT!” Karkat shouts, also coming in the room.

“Stop shouting!” you try to yell but there’s probably more whimper in it than you want to admit.

Dayvhe crumples and drops onto the loungeplank where you’d been before he terrified you, he’s got
his head in his hands. Oh… oh no, he’s upset, really upset. You upset him! A pathetic sound echoes
in your chest and you can hear it echoed in Dayvhe’s.

“All right, see, this is the kind of shitty feedback loop I was trying to stop. And, if you’d stayed to
listen to me instead of running off Dayvhe, then you’d know that he doesn’t want to break up with
you. Not at all. But if you could both stop scaring the shit out of each other that’d be stellar. Sollux,
sit your ass down.” Karkat orders and you just do that, sitting right on the floor. You realise that
Karkat has his hand on one of the chairs around the table and probably meant to pass it to you but that’s not happening now. He gives you and Dayvhe both a look of utter dismay and drags the chair over and sits down so you’re in a little triangle.

“Fine, the basics. You both still want to be moirails, right?” Karkat asks, leaning back in his chair with his arms folded.

“Yes!” you insist, trying to slow your breathing down. You count it as a victory that the figment didn’t appear and do it for you. You passing out on the ground would hardly calm Dayvhe down.

“Of course I do!” Dayvhe echoes, his voice sounding thick.

“Great, we’re all on the same page. Now as I was saying before you took off, I want to help.” Karkat tells him.

“How?!” Dayvhe demands, pushing his shades into his hair and glaring at Karkat. His eyes are brimming with red tinted tears, fuck, this is your fault.

“Remember that joke you made about being your auspistice? Yeah, I thought about it and that’s a thing now. I invented it. Everything the two of you are doing lately is ending in panic attacks and hurt feelings so here I am benevolently throwing you a life ring and offering to steer this ship back on course. The ship being the relationship if that allusion isn’t clear. Feel free to thank me any time Dayvhe, unless that’s with sexual favours in which case later I guess.” Karkat rambles.

“That’s not a thing.” Dayvhe hisses.

“Is.” Karkat insists.

“Isn’t!” Dayvhe counters.

“Hmm, yes, a valid point but consider that it is now.” Karkat says.

“Is this going to take long? Should I go get a drink and come back or something?” you groan. Evidently your moirail and your… uh… best friend (auspistice? Awwspistice?) arguing is normal enough to make you realise that no one is kicking down your door to hurt you. Kicking down your door to have dumb arguments in your block maybe but nothing more.

Dayvhe looks guiltily at you and falls silent, which Karkat seems to take as proof of his victory.

“You both know there’s a problem, you’ve both told me as much.” Karkat states and true or not it still hurts to hear. Dayvhe looks just as agonised about it as you do.

“So, my offer is this, Dayvhe. Everything between you and me stays as is but, temporarily, let me help you fix this. You’re both miserable and he’s already agreed.” Karkat offers.

Suddenly the hem of your jeans are very interesting, as is anything not in Dayvhe or Karkat’s direction because you don’t want to see whatever look either of them are giving you. Betrayal maybe? You shouldn’t be doing this, dragging your moirail problems out in front of a third party. Shit’s supposed to be private between moirails, you shouldn’t-

“Ok.” Dayvhe says hoarsely.

Oh, alright then.

“Good.” Karkat sighs and when you look at him he’s slumped back in his chair a little in obvious
relief.

“So, Mr. I-invented-a-relationship-from-a-joke, did you think about what happens now?” Dayvhe asks sharply.

“How about you tell each other how you think things are going because both of you are convinced you’re about to get broken up with but you also both made it clear that you’d never do that to each other so you’re both wrong about how precarious this is.” Karkat answers smartly.

Both of you go quiet, even under Karkat’s interrogative gaze. That thought alone is enough to send shivers down your posture pole, you’ve had quite enough interrogation in your life so far, thanks. If he starts asking questions it’s going to feel closer to it still, but not if you talk first. Then it’s just an awkward conversation.

“I was pre-fucked-up when you met me.” you tell… not Dayvhe or Karkat but that one patch of carpet you’re willing to look at instead.

“I knew that already. And don’t call it that.” Dayvhe says with mild disapproval. The old you might have baited him by challenging him to make you stop but you are aware that you can’t deal with that right now. Plus, you were on topic.

“That alone would have been more than most people could have dealt with, I mean no one was banging down my doors with pale offers before. But this shit on top is too much. I’m dragging you into this push me, pull you shit where I’ve no idea what I want, the rules are made up and far too strict and we both hate it. I wouldn’t blame you for leaving.” you say miserably.

“I’m not leaving! If you want me gone you gotta break up with me because I’m not going on my own.” he insists.

“Great, I always wanted to be an obligation.” you say bitterly.

“Bzzt. No, not what he said.” Karkat interrupts loudly enough to startle you into looking at him.

“He didn’t say that he agreed to this so he’s staying. He said he has no intention of leaving unless you actually break up with him. He wants to be here, not has to be.” Karkat elaborates.

“That’s what I said. I want to stay.” Dayvhe insists.

“That’s what I said. I want to stay.” Dayvhe insists.

“Not what he heard. Still think that sounds the same?” Karkat challenges you.

“I… get that you said those things aren’t the same.” that’s about as far as you’re willing to compromise because you’re definitely hearing the same response. You’ve trapped Dayvhe in this mess with you and now you’re dragging him down, that’s what it feels like.

“Well I’m doing a real shit job of helping to make any of this better, pretty sure I’m just making things worse.” Dayvhe says unhappily.

“That’s on me, not you.” you try to tell him but he’s clearly not buying it.

“And you ending up in that situation was my fault too.” Dayvhe says.

“Alright, no way. I’m intervening.” Karkat shouts over the objection you’d already started to muster to that stupid statement. Both you and Dayvhe turn your attention to Karkat and you can’t say you feel pleased at him interrupting but it seems that he’s taking this middle diamond leaf business seriously.
“You’re both going to keep feeling like your thing is true but it’s not and the other one doesn’t buy it at all but there’s no way you’re both just going to change your minds from me yelling at you, no matter what I want. So I’m just saying that you’re both objectively wrong and we’re going to move on.” Karkat announces.

This hasn’t solved anything, what kind of stupid shit is this?

“I’m also aware that I’m not going to be here to make you two drop your stupid ideas all the time so I’m building you a conversational and situational get out of jail free card. Feel free to both tell me how wonderful I am at any time.” Karkat says with a wide grin. Neither of you says any of that and he glares at you in response.

“Fine. The idea here is this; Sollux you’ve been through awful shit, been interrogated and tortured.” Karkat says and you don’t think you manage to fully suppress the flinch at his words.

“Pick a word or something you can remember that you wouldn’t normally say. Use it and the deal is that whatever’s going on stops without question and is totally dropped. Anything from ‘hey talking about this freaks me out’ to ‘back off you’re too close’ or you just not being able to deal with people anymore. Doesn’t matter if you were cool with it before or even if it was your idea, total stop to whatever.” Karkat explains.

“I’m pretty sure you just stole a sex thing.” Dayvhe mutters.

“Improved upon and modified, thank you. And the same goes for you. So you can opt out of conversations that make you feel like you’re going to throw up instead of running off and hiding in someone’s ablationblock.” Karkat says pointedly and you know he means yesterday.

This sounds dumb, it sounds like something you shouldn’t need. Moirails are supposed to know each other, trust each other with everything. Having something so rigid involved seems against the whole nature of the thing. But it’s pretty obvious that your relationship isn’t working right now so maybe you should think of this as training wheels for getting things back to normal.

Anyway, the problem isn’t that you don’t want to be that close to each other, it’s that you try and then realize that it’s too much too soon or something. Fuck, you want physical contact with your moirail, you love that shit. And before it all went wrong yesterday you liked being that close to him but you’re wildly aware that you don’t know how much permission you can grant him or if it’s going to stay the same so- oh.

“403.” you say and Dayvhe and Karkat look at you both obviously lost.

“The thing, my thing. The word or whatever, 403.” you tell them.

“Are you going to remember that?” Karkat asks.

“It’s an error code, of course I will.” you snort and Karkat smacks both hands to his face.

“Of course it is, what was I thinking? What are you picking, Dayvhe?” Karkat asks, not taking his face out from his hands.

“Well I was going to try to think of something myself but honestly there’s no way I’m going to forget a number that made you this dismayed and I’m not gonna randomly say it so, yeah, I can remember 403. This still seems hella stupid but I’ll bite.” Dayvhe shrugs.

“Fine, I’ll ask what does it even mean?” Karkat asks.
“The server got your request but it’s denied most likely because of an error with the permissions you have.” you explain, condensing the nuance a little for him.

“Hah! That’s perfect!” Dayvhe crows with laughter.

“You… you useless nerdlord. I can’t believe- actually, that’s a lie I absolutely can believe this. Ugh. Talking of permissions I’m moving onto a related topic.” Karkat groans and shakes his head.

“You deserve the highest of fives.” Dayvhe snickers, it’s nice to see him happy even if it’s just briefly.

“ON THAT NOTE,” Karkat continues loudly, “I want to talk about your thing with touch.”

All amusement is gone from Dayvhe’s face.

“Do we have to? I don’t blame him for not being able to deal with it after what he went through. I used to be twitchy about being close up to people when Dirkka first found me ‘cause my lusus fucked me up so bad. I get it, I hate it but I get it.” Dayvhe says.

“I’m not saying it’s not legitimate or that things even have to change, but I just think clarity is needed. People don’t touch Sollux, except for the times they do. Like when he does it first or with Hal’s medical examinations. A rule that’s just never do this thing except when you do is vague enough to make both of you anxious. I mean Sollux should we assume that if you touch us then things are back to normal for that time or is it like for like?” Karkat asks as he looks at you again.

“Like for like?” you repeat in confusion.

“As in if we’re playing games and you bump up against me does that mean I don’t have to worry about doing the same back for that time or is it cool for me to punch you in the arm when you cheatingly win or throw my arm around your shoulder or something? Is it a sign that anything goes or is it more like the other person can match whatever intenseness that your thing was at?” Karkat clarifies.

You try to think about it, the whole open season on touching you bad feels bad even if that’s just normal troll interaction. Maybe an escalation of intensity makes more sense, after all when you kissed Dayvhe you really wanted him to kiss you back. And on that line of thinking though if Dayvhe had woken your sleeping defenseless self up that way you might have accidentally thrown him through a wall.

“The intensity thing, for sure.” you say firmly and get to see Dayvhe actually relax a little, he’s as uncertain about this as you are. Maybe Karkat is right and having more rules will make this easier instead of harder and weirdly formal.

“Great, think you can both agree to those conditions?” Karkat asks, looking between you both. You’re struck again by how Karkat really is mediating this, negotiating and brokering an arrangement between you and Dayvhe. You hate it, you hate that he’s wedged between you both and more than that you hate that he’s right that you both need it. Here’s the catch though, what you want is to be able to do all of this yourself like you could before so that your relationship with Dayvhe is as natural as breathing. You need to be less fucked up to do that which means time and healing, healing facilitated in a large part by your moirail. You can’t let Dayvhe help you heal right now because you’re too fucked up for it. It’s circular.

If you want off of this ride you need Karkat’s help to steer you both back on the right path or else miraculously do it yourself and hope that you’re able to pull yourself out of the traumatised and
hallucinating hole you’re stuck in and maintain your diamond at the same time. You doubt that you’re capable of that. You’ve had regular bipolar episodes that you’ve not been able to pull yourself out of without someone else intervening and you know how those go. This is worse and unfamiliar.

Swallow your pride, accept the help and stop resenting Karkat for putting his own relationship at great risk to help you both. Follow his leadership and stop screwing everything up.

“I can agree. Well, to ask and copy and shit but he doesn’t have to ask me for anything I’m cool with anything without notice or permission or whatever. And the whole safeword thing, Karkat, that too. Don’t give me that look, you brought a sex thing into this.” Dayvhe says goadingly and you look at Karkat’s exasperated expression.

“So what?” Karkat prompts you. Oh, shit he was asking if you agree.

“You got it.” You agree weakly.

“Right, good. I’m going to go then. If either of you two geniuses needs me I’ll have my palmhusk on me always so if you need me I’ll be there.” Karkat says, getting up from his chair and shoving it back under the table again. He turns back and looks at you both with uncertainty on his face.

“I’m not just doing this as a chance to interfere or irritate the two of you. I’m actually, genuinely… you’re the two most important people to me and watching you both do this to each other sucks. Just so you know that’s why. I’ll… go. Ok.” Karkat mutters and then excuses himself.

So now you and Dayvhe are alone together, him on the loungeplank and you still on the floor.

“Sorry for just kicking your door in and screaming that wasn’t super cool of me.” Dayvhe says a few achingly long seconds later.

“I’m the one who made you think I was trying to end things.” you point out.

“Well I’m- actually, I’m thinking maybe going around in circles blaming ourselves is the kind of shit Karkat was saying we shouldn’t be doing.” Dayvhe says with a grimace.

“We got bad at this, huh?” you sigh.

“We’ll fix it.” he says. There’s no doubt allowed in his tone, though you’re pretty sure he does feel doubtful he’s faultlessly projecting confidence. You know it’s kind of stupid but it makes you feel a little better at least. You shift and get onto your knees and then climb up onto the loungeplank next to him.

“I miss you.” you tell him, a simple and honest truth.

“I couldn’t tell you just how much I missed you even if I had all goddamned night.” Dayvhe sighs.

He’s right there. Your moirail is right there after so long being so far from you and you’ll die before those bastards take this from you. Telling yourself that he’s real, that you’re out and safe again you inch closer to him. He’s watching you closely but staying entirely put, you even think the dweeb might be holding his breath.

“Tell me something.” you say.

“Something.” Dayvhe replies instantly.

“No, I mean tell me something that’s on your mind. This thing is supposed to go both ways, don’t
leave me hanging and not helping you. Honestly someone else’s problems would be a break right about now.” you say seriously.

You watch him considering. He’s not going to say no, you know that much. Dayvhe is clearly as desperate as you are to make things work and though he agreed to calling out if you push him too far you suspect that in practice he won’t do it at all.

“You want to jam?” Dayvhe asks carefully and shifts around so he’s sitting facing you.

“Something like that. Come on.” you prompt him and reach out to poke him in the arm. You’re reminded yet again that you need to get your mangled claws sorted out. Hal probably has stuff for claws in his array of medical supplies and if not you bet people as fancy and/or fastidiously groomed as Roxxie and Dirkka have claw maintenance stuff. You’re not usually high maintenance at all there but you haven’t usually tried to literally claw your way out of a room.

“Okay,” Dayvhe says hesitating, “I’m worried about Eridan.”

“Not what I would have guessed you were going to say.” you say. Dayvhe snorts and shakes his head.

“I’m not worried about his wellbeing, I’m worried that we’ve not found him yet. It means he’s hiding and you only hide when people know you did wrong and you were the only one who knew about him. So he must know you’re back, but I never told him that. Which means he knows some other way, so either he was working with the bastards who had you which is really bad because it means that I missed some of them and they got away–” Dayvhe says in a rush as anxiousness at the very idea just builds up and up in him, everything about his body language and expression becoming tighter and more intense.

“That’s a lot of leaps.” you interrupt him. Dayvhe looks at you dumbfounded so you sigh and continue.

“I’ve known Eridan longer. He’s always been convinced people secretly hate him because he doesn’t like himself that much either, it’s half the reason he was such a drain on Feferi. That and the genocide thing. He knows he did something awful, to me and Feferi both. You don’t know that he’s not hiding from her, or the paranoia that you and the others with you will magically know he did something.” you explain.

“But we’d have no way of knowing.” Dayvhe argues.

“Right, but Eridan’s not like that. He gets an idea of how things are and then common sense can fuck off, basically. If the only proof you have that some of the people from- from back there are still around is Eridan being missing then you don’t have anything to worry about.” you assure him.

“I’d still feel better if we found him, and not just because I’m going to kill him.” Dayvhe says darkly.

“You’re actually going to kill him?” you ask a touch surprised.

“I should have back at Jayekh’s house obviously and I’m going to hate myself forever for not doing it. Besides, I killed people to get you out. Aradia’s reading of my morally clean soul doesn’t apply anymore.” Dayvhe says. You hate the thought of that, not of him killing people because all of that was needed and reasonable. No, what you hate is the thought of Dayvhe considering himself less ‘pure’ or whatever for it, that kind of guilt is something you’re not so keen on.

“Killing someone who’s trying to helm me then and there’s different from premeditating it, are you alright with that? I’m not saying no, I mean fuck Eridan completely I don’t care about him, I care
about you.” you assure him.

Dayvhe shudders slightly, or you feel the vibration go through him at least. He flashes you a grin, a little weak and pained looking but it’s a smile all the same.

“Can I record you saying that you care about me just so I can set it as an alert tone on my palmhusk or something?” he asks semi jokingly.

“I’d rather just say it myself instead of you hoarding my voice for your own personalised pale softcore porn. Besides why should you pap yourself when I can?” you say jokingly.

Actually with the flustered look on Dayvhe’s face you’re actually not joking all that much.

“You don’t have to.” he tells you. However you are the universe’s most contrary fuck and now you want very much to get your hands up on his face, not that it ever takes that much convincing for you to want that to be a thing. Besides, he feels bad about his feelings, he’s worried and insecure and trying to hide it, how could you not feel pale for him?

So you just… do that. A little cautiously perhaps but he stays still and lets you get your hands to his face and he melts into your touch, his whole face pressing into your palm. His body starts to slump against you and you feel the moment he catches himself and hesitates and you hate that, hate that he’s not relaxed right now. So you shuffle that bit closer to him until you make contact with the rest of him first and he adjusts. He’s purring for you but his hands are reaching towards you a little hesitantly until he seems to figure that he’s probably allowed and slides them around your middle.

The angle is stupid and awkward so you pull back and climb all the way up onto the furniture so that your legs are under you and you can properly face him. When Dayvhe clicks that you’re not escaping but settling in longer he pulls you closer again.

Every stage of it is awkward and too aware of yourselves but an hour later you’re tangled up on the loungeplank laid down together. You’re more on top of him than under him because his weight on top of your very unpadded skeleton was too uncomfortable for you so you had to switch it up. Eventually Dayvhe’s purring trails off and you sleepily look up at his face to see a slight frown on his features.

“What?” you ask.

“Karkat’s gonna be insufferable, you know.” Dayvhe says, idly running his fingers up and down the back of your neck as he thinks.

“He’ll be like this forever. I’ll be all ‘Hey Karkat you call the pizza delivery drones this time’ and he’ll be like ‘I could but remember that time I saved your relationship?’ Then I’ll just have to drown him, I’ll have no choice.” Dayvhe sighs.

“Really backing you into a corner there.” you agree and lazily tip your head back a little so Dayvhe is petting what little hair regrowth you have by now.

“Did he actually invent a whole new thing or is this just ashen shit done weird? Because if so I gotta send out a memo and be like hey everyone else in the universe it’s not quadrants anymore it’s- what, quindrants? Quindrangles?” Dayvhe rambles.

“I like quadrants better, it divides into two.” you comment.

“See, I know where I stand with numbers and you. You’re a simple man with simple number based needs.” Dayvhe says.
“If you’re going to insult me by calling me simple you can get up and help me put shit away like I was doing before.” you tell him and get up.

“Aw, globes. This is all Karkat’s fault somehow. I’m not sure how yet but I’m gonna work it out.” Dayvhe vows as he sits up. But he gets up all the same and helps you anyway and at least when he does things feel more normal, not all the way like it by any means but closer. It’s less like the two of you are tiptoeing around each other convinced you’re both going to fuck up.
Waking up with someone touching you is jarring and frightening, it takes you a good second or two to remember why this is happening. You’re in the red half of your coon (oh red and blue sopor, you were missed) and Dayvhe is in the blue half, his arm hanging over your side from where he’s resting on the divide. His hand had been on your back but now that you’ve jerked away it’s just hanging there.

Your blood pressure lowers, you remember asking him to do this. It’s been a few nights since Karkat’s intervention and things are getting better. Of course Dayvhe had waited until Karkat was midway through drinking a huge glass of water before he turned to you with an expression on his face as innocent as can be and asked if you were as into the idea of you and him sleeping together as he was. Karkat predictably choked and misted the entire wall with his drink as it sprayed from his mouth and probably his nose too.

Winding Karkat up aside you’d learnt that Dayvhe genuinely missed sleeping next to you and since he’d apparently been having daymares about you vanishing again you wanted to try it too. It was scary at first and the staunch reiteration of the rules made you feel a little better but not completely. Once you were both in things had settled and you’d sleepily talked together about nothing much at all until you both drifted off.

You eye the hand that had been touching you. Dayvhe is obviously out cold and you remember him drowsily leaning on the divide before so he must have shifted in his sleep. It’s fine, you’re ok with this.

Mostly you want to just get back to sleep but your mouth tastes really weird right now for some reason. You work your tongue around in your mouth a little and then give up and hop your butt up onto the edge and start to sluice what sopor you can off of you.

“Mmmn?” Dayvhe sleepily mumbles and his hand blindly feels out for you but you’re too far away.

“Ablutionblock.” you say softly. Dayvhe grunts in vague understanding and his hand goes slack, fingertips grazing the surface of your sopor.
As clean as you’re gonna be you drop down and carefully walk out of the room. You drink some water and note that the taste is still there. It’s like… somehow your mouth tastes like the desperately cheap detergent that you used to use when you were five or six, or tastes like it smelt at least. Seeing as you’ve not been gargling soap you’ve no idea how your mouth tastes like this.

You try brushing your teeth to shift the taste. Resting one hand against the sink you try to remember why you stopped buying it, it worked just fine despite the price and didn’t shred your clothes. Importantly it was rustic cheap and… right. Aradia used to use it and buy it for you when you forgot how to function. It must have been one of the things you changed after she died so you’d stop remembering her all of the time.

You spit into the sink and rinse your mouth out again but the soap taste is just as strong. What the fuck?

“Dayvhe,” you call out as you go back to the main room, “my mouth tastes like soap.”

“Wha?” Dayvhe mumbles, opening one eye.

“Am I going crazy or does my mouth actually taste like detergent?” you ask him urgently.

Dayvhe opens both eyes now and looks at you in dazed confusion. He twists and taps a claw against his palmhusk that’s just in reach on a nearby coonside table and then looks back at you.

"Sollux it’s four, I was asleep. Did you just ask me to put my tongue in your mouth?” he asks.

“What? No. Or I didn’t mean to. I can taste soap, Aradia’s laundry soap. It woke me up but I can’t think why my mouth would taste that way and I brushed my teeth and I can still taste it!” you explain.

Dayvhe leans over the side of the coon towards you and then gives you an expectant look.

“Well come here then.” he says and you do.

“You’re not actually going to put your tongue in my mouth are you because I’m not sure-” you begin as he leans towards you.

“You just smell like mint.” Dayvhe informs you after giving you no more than a cursory sniff up close.

“I can’t even taste the mint, it’s just Aradia’s detergent!” you say in despair.

“But it’s not oh shit you’re hallucinating.” Dayvhe says slowly and pulls himself out of the coon. You look around but it’s just you and Dayvhe, no figment to be seen.

“No I’m not.” you tell him.

“You’re experiencing something that’s not real and you can’t tell that it’s not. You’re hallucinating even if it’s just taste instead of your other senses.” Dayvhe says and flicks his hand free of sopor and snatches up his palmhusk and starts typing away.

“What’re you doing?” you ask and you can hear a high pitched whine making your words almost whistle. Dayvhe’s musical, maybe he could tell you just what note your anxiety strikes in your throat. The taste of detergent is cloying in your mouth now, like someone scrubbed your tongue with it.

“I’m getting Hal here.” Dayvhe answers and drops his palmhusk to turn his attention to you. He
holds his hands out towards you, a silent invitation and question of permission. You shrink back a fraction and he takes the hint, no touching when you’re this amped up.

“Oh fuck is this like the beach?” you mutter in fear.


“I could smell something, leather and dirt. Fuck, that’s Aradia too. But Karkat couldn’t when I asked later and before he got there I just had this compulsion to walk into the sea and I had to get back before I could do it but when I got off the sand.” you babble and it feels like your chest is being wound tighter and tighter. You’d thought you were getting better, that the thing on the beach was just a glitch or some monster lurking in the depths but instead it’s data in a graph on you continuing to lose it.

“What?! You didn’t tell me that, why didn’t you say something?” Dayvhe exclaims. Intellectually you know he doesn’t mean it like that but it feels like a slap to the face to hear. Your old well practiced self loathing kicks up, milling the wheels of panic. You’ve done it now, you’ve upset him, of course you would you’re not good enough for him, he’s going to leave you. At least your worry doesn’t have physical form yet.

“Fuck, shit, I didn’t mean to shout. Hey, hey come on shoosh it’s ok.” Dayvhe says in measured calm. The anxious sound coming from you is so loud and strong you can’t force words around it or at least your tongue won’t cooperate to you. Instead you’re stuck standing there with your hands clenching either side of your head as you remain frozen.

“Goddamnit I can’t… ok, no there are other ways around this. I can… I can make you laugh instead of freaking out. I can call you pet names, you know I’m bad at them. I can do generic ‘honey’ and ‘sweetie’ and then my weirdo thinksponge churns out the dumbest shit. That’d help?” Dayvhe rambles. He’s not getting closer and not touching but you stare at his hands just in case as you hyperventilate.

“Alright, no answer but I’m gonna take that as a yes ‘cause I’ve got nothing else to go on. So, uh, how’re you doing, honeybee? You could try breathing a little slower, sugar.” Dayvhe says awkwardly.

That’s… wow you thought he just was wasn’t a pet name person but he’s cringeworthy at this.

“So Hal’s coming here and you’ve got your back to the door so maybe you wanna move so he doesn’t spook you all over again. You could go over there uh… fuck, butterscotch?” Dayvhe says in a strangled voice and you choke on your laugh.

“Hey, it’s sweet and I like it and it’s sort of yellowish maybe brown but gimme a break.” Dayvhe rambles. He says defensively.

“I can do better, man. Just you try to stop this yellow themed conciliatory free-form word association train, you can’t. Tall glass of lemonade, oh hey what about lemon drop?” Dayvhe rambles.

“Why is it all things you eat?” you rasp and your shoulders shake a little with a laugh that won’t come out but you can feel anyway.

“Hey man bees were in there, do you eat bees?” Dayvhe questions you.

“Did once, no one liked that.” you say in short breaths as you come back down.

“Two whole sentences now, you’re doing way better uh… pineapple?” he grimaces and you
wheeze, doubling over and finally laughing.

“Pineapple?!” you snort.

“I panicked!” Dayvhe insists.

Hal arrives in a flash of metallic speed that does make you jump but nowhere near as bad as it would have been if Dayvhe hadn’t talked you down. Hadn’t soothed you, looked after you. You watch him as his expression becomes businesslike and he explains to Hal what’s going on with you. It occurs, though not for the first time, that there’s nothing you wouldn’t do for him. If he needed the pusher from your very chest you’d probably pull it out for him. You’re likely not the first troll to feel this deeply for someone, intellectually you know that but you also feel like no one has ever pitied anyone as much as you pity him.

“Let me feel your pulse.” Hal says, snapping your attention to him and shaking the diamonds from your vision.

Obediently as you do in your medical exams, you hand your arm to him. Complex and delicately engineered fingers press to your wrist, fine sensors telling Hal so much.

“Not as high as I thought. Can you still taste it?” Hal asks and you nod, it’s so strong even now.

“So it’s taste now and before he says it was smell.” Dayvhe chips in.

“Olfactory and gustatory hallucinations are perfectly possible. I’m going to touch your ports now.” Hal explains and reaches his hand to your head. He has a way of interfacing with the tech in your pan. Near as you can tell he can’t do anything to it beyond check that it works, he can however use it to check on what’s happening in your thinksponge. The mechanisms in the ports are very precise and he’s been able to tell before the activity that your sponge undertakes to make you see things that aren’t there.

Hal’s hand is at your head and though his mouth never opens it does have expression and the rest of his face is expressive besides, the expression it suddenly flashes to is alarm.

“He’s not hallucinating, the sensation is coming from the outside in. It’s being sent to him.” Hal says, his eyes wide.

“I’m being controlled?” you yelp and Dayvhe shooshes you softly.

“No exactly, more like you’re getting something sent to you. It’s interfering with your senses. But the ports shouldn’t work like this, the tech doesn’t- this is like what I can do to Brobot, Sawtooth and Squarewave to ghost their senses from afar. Mods or not you’re a troll, not a robot.” Hal says.

Fuck if only Aradia was around she’d know what was happening, ghosts and robots are her two areas of expertise these days. Except no one’s seen her since the party.

y0u sh0uld g0 t0 the ship

Yeah you should, if anything around here has the tech to trace some kind of signal it’d be that.

“How do we get to the ship?” you ask, pulling away from Hal.

“There’s an airlock near the wizardbowl that you can go through but I think Hal’s-” Dayvhe tells you all you need to know and you duck under Hal’s arm and rush from the room. Hal and Dayvhe are shouting after you but you don’t listen. It’s stronger now, the taste in your mouth and it’s
changing. No longer detergent but now crisp, clean and cold night air so swept up with dust that when you close your jaw your teeth crunch on grit that lingers in the air. It’s that scent of handmade candles when Aradia decided she wanted to have her hive like those in the movies and have skulls with candles dripping down them.

The wizardbowl looms ahead of you and up next to the glass through dark water you can see the ship, the lights tinted rust. Her rust. The ship dives and you instinctively follow, nearly slipping down the staircase you’d not spotted.

A blur of black and rust makes you halt but it’s only Dayvhe and his false rust sign. He lands in front of you on the steps, his hands spread wide. He’s standing there in his hastily put on shirt and sopor slick boxers.

“Sol, you gotta listen to me man. Something is fucking with your head and you can’t go off following just anything you want. You need to come with us so we can look after you, I’m your moirail, remember?” Dayvhe says patiently. He’s so worried for you, you can’t do this.

You rub a hand over your mouth but it does nothing to get rid of the tastes and feelings that aren’t really there. You can’t worry Dayvhe like this.

“I… I don’t know what I was…” you’re not sure what’s happening really. Did you choose to come here or did something else make you want it? You’re all messed up and you go down a step and press your forehead to Dayvhe’s as if you can borrow his sanity somehow.

You feel the irritated sigh inside your head but the beep behind Dayvhe is very real. The doors of the airlock fling themselves open, blasting you both with a huge jet of cold seawater that has you both knocked to the steps under the pressure. Dayvhe hauls you up, kicking against the water. You break the surface together and gasp and choke at the air.

The room judders as something bangs into it and then all of a sudden the water you’re desperately trying to stay afloat in is sucked back out of the stairway and only a bubble of red psi stops you both from slamming into another wall. The water sluices away and you both cough and push yourselves up. You’re now in a very wet and very sealed hallway. The lighting above you is rusty red, tinting both of you strange hues.

“This is Roxxie’s ship.” Dayvhe breathes, pressing his hands to the sealed airlock. Through the glass of it you can see the wizard bowl and the rest of Roxxie’s underwater hive rapidly shrinking as you move away from it.

“So who’s flying it?” you ask and get up carefully. You can’t see Hal around here, he must have managed to get free. At least you hope it’s that and he’s not sinking to the ocean floor.

Dayvhe takes one step to your left and abruptly all of the lights that way switch off, leaving only the hallway the other way illuminated.

“This is starting to feel like a horror movie.” Dayvhe whispers.

“Well then let’s not do any dumb horror movie things. We stick together and, uh, call for help I guess?” you suggest.

“I left my palmhusk on the table in your block.” Dayvhe says with a grimace.

You thankfully did not do that. But no one else is online so you just open a memo with everyone who goes to Roxxie’s hive and let them know what’s happened and hope that someone can wake the others up to help. Not that you know how they’ll help, as far as you know Roxxie has the one ship
and you’re in it.

Abruptly the light above you flicks off, leaving you and Dayvhe in darkness. Oh you do not like that one bit. Without having to speak you and Dayvhe both scuttle to the right back into the light.

“I don’t like this.” Dayvhe says, waving his sword vaguely at the dark.

The light above you now goes dark again.

“Me neither.” you agree.

Every new patch of red light you get to gets shut off moments later leading you to the next one and the next. You’re obviously being led but you don’t trust the darkness and what could be hiding there. You freeze when you come to the helmsblock and the doors slide open. It’s as empty as it was when you first looked around Roxxie’s ship in the lead up to the mission that went to hell. Red biowires trail down from above the central pillar and you find yourself uncertain if they were that colour before or if the light is just playing tricks on your eyes.

“Were they-” you start to ask as you take a step in to the room to look and as you cross the threshold into the helmsblock the door snaps shut behind you leaving you on this side and Dayvhe out in the corridor.

“SOLLUX!” Dayvhe shouts.

“DAYVHE!” you yell back. You don’t have time to focus on a shut door because you’re increasingly aware that the bio part of the biowires is making itself known. They’re reaching for you like leaves to the moon, the high up ones reaching out to you and the lower ones slithering across the floor to you.

You curse and yank your feet off of the floor, pressing yourself to the door to stay away from them and floating off of the ground. You can feel the door banging with every attack to it that Dayvhe can muster, which is all well and good until a sword bursts through the metal and nearly skewers you.

It’s instinct that makes you leap away from it with a yell. The kind of dumb instinct that doesn’t think about why you were hiding there so fervently before. Something bumps past your ear and then everything goes black.

You’re floating in the dark, disoriented and untethered.

“You always did make things hard for yourself you know.” a voice says softly.

You twist and there she is, Aradia. Every bit alive and the age she would have been if she’d not died. God she’s so beautiful, her hair is longer and her eyes are yellow and grey but entirely sparkling with mischief.

“Aradia.” you say dumbly, twisting to face her properly.

“Sollux!” she laughs and then you have an armful of her, alive and wonderful.

“What happened?” you ask, still feeling slow like you’re not all the way loaded or something.

“Don’t worry about it, silly. I’ve just been trying to get in contact with you for ages. We’re in a ship, and it’s so big and so organic that it’s just like being alive again. I’m finally myself all over again, isn’t that great?!” she beams and ruffles your hair.
You look around, it doesn’t look like you’re in a ship at all. You’re just floating in nothing. You look down and see only darkness. Suddenly your eyes adjust, shifting into higher contrasts and sending back a buzz of information through your pan and letting you see the sharp drop and spikes of rock on the ocean floor. With a glow of red warmth you see the slight heat signs of all kinds of creatures swimming around. Looking up you can see hints of the moons now and you know that you are exactly 1264 metres below the surface.

Aradia is beaming at you and she reaches out to pet your face, she used to do that. Not like a pale thing but she’d stroke your face and then get her fingers under your chin to pull you in for a kiss. But it’s not– you don’t want that. The first hint of panic buzzes within your chest.

“This isn’t real! You’re not seeing with your eyes, how did you even get here?!” Dayvhe demands. You turn and see him standing there but Aradia huffs and waves a hand, making him vanish. That wasn’t Dayvhe, that was the figment. How can she see the figment? How are you floating in the sea? Where is Dayvhe? You suck in a terrified breath and try to ground yourself by putting your hands near your horns and WHAT THE FUCK YOU HAVE HAIR AGAIN. This isn’t real!

“Hey, Sollux, love, calm down. You’re making me anxious just watching you. It just takes a little bit to get back into yourself, it’s a complicated system.” Aradia assures you.

A system. You were on the ship with Dayvhe, you got trapped, lured here. You stupidly walked into the helmsblock, lost Dayvhe, then what? Dayvhe, oh no, where is Dayvhe? The desperate need to know surges within you and a screen pops into life before you, startling Aradia. It’s a camera shot from up high, live video feed of Dayvhe trying to get the door open. He’s got his sword wedged between the two doors and is pulling on it to try to lever them open.

“Oh wow you’re able to do that already too!” Aradia says brightly. Dayvhe’s sword snaps and he falls to the floor.

So if you can see here then what about… yeah, the view changes to inside the room. You’re on the floor, you can’t even see your face for how your head is wreathed in wires. A couple of the wires are poking at your back but the technicians never fully helmed you so they can’t do anything. You think. You hope at least, you really don’t want them getting through your skin.

You swallow thickly but it’s not your mouth, not your tongue, just a delusion of them.

“You helmed me.” you say. Not a question, you know the answer, you can see it.

“It’s temporary, I can let you go. I just wanted to see you now that I’m alive again and I’ve been trying for ages to get you here but getting used to possessing a ship is hard! I mean it’s a real learning curve even when I just observed from inside to see how things worked and it’s been perigees of learning. Having a mind in here to run it certainly helps but it’s all working so much better with your thinkspunge in here too, I mean it was designed that way you know?” Aradia explains.

“Perigees.” you repeat.

“Since the party, I told you I was done with robots, remember?” Aradia nods. She’s been in here for perigees, that’s why no one’s seen or heard from her. She was here the whole time.

“You were possessing the ship when we went to the compound, when Karkat was flying, when-” you start.

“I fixed their stealth up so they could get away!” she says cheerfully.
You’ve never really understood the expression of snapping before. People get angry but that’s just losing their cool, that you get. But this really feels like something pushed too far and then breaking. Aradia has been in this ship since the party, she flew the others away.

“You left me behind.” you say. At this Aradia looks genuinely saddened.

“I’m sorry. But it had to happen that way, or else this couldn’t have happened. Think of it that way.” she urges you.

This isn’t the apology for leaving you behind that you’ve got from everyone else one by one in private. Sorry for leaving you behind, we couldn’t find you, it was too dangerous, we kept looking, we had to hide. All valid reasons. But you know ‘it had to happen that way’, you’ve heard it before, Aradia’s spooky premonition bullshit. She knew and she did nothing. She must have seen how things were going to go down, how you’d be on your own and how Eridan would take you down. Must have known how you’d be taken away from there, what they’d do to you, what you’d suffer through. But no, you need to hear her say it.

“You let them take me and you knew where I was, didn’t you? They said the ship just took them right to the front door of the place the night they broke me out, you knew where to go. You could have shown up before then but you let me stay there until they’d done this to me.” you say as rage builds in your gut.

“It had to-” she starts to say but you lunge for her. She left you there, she left you every night in that tank in agony and she KNEW. The world around you bursts from deep water to the glittering night sky, cloud level.

“THEY TORTURED ME!” you scream at her.

You are red and blue lightning from within but it’s filtered off, you can feel it bursting the engines into wild surges of life and now that you know just what’s going on you can feel Aradia’s mind scrambling through the system redirecting you around moons and planets that you nearly hit as you try to scorch her from the very circuits.

“How COULD you?!” you demand and light stretches around you both.

“Sollux slow down!” Aradia begs.

“I fucking... I worshiped you, being made to kill you nearly ended me and watching the shit you got yourself into with Equius even though I was supposed to be your matesprit. You told me then that it was always going to happen because dead or alive nothing EVER matters to you!” you shout. You feel her slingshot you both around a black hole, through another star system and out again. Crippled or not ships are hugely efficient at changing your energy into power and maimed though you are fury will always boost your output. But she can’t handle you can she? She didn’t want you back, she wanted an engine no matter what she had to do to get it.

“I would have done ANYTHING for you and you get back to this, back to something that makes you alive again and you just leave me in their hands do you even know what you did to me?” you demand, pushing forward still.

“You’re going to be fine, I’ve seen it. This is all just temporary!” she scrambles to say and swerves the ship.

“Everything is temporary! You don’t even care do you?!” you shout.

“I…” you choke, feeling your face wet with tears of rage and anguish.
“I killed you and it nearly killed me and I’ve apologised a thousand times but you never did.” you say quietly as you feel something within yourself calcify finally. A wound finally healing over under the ministrations of time and Dayvhe’s unceasing care. You say something that you’ve never said or even thought before.

“But it wasn’t my fucking fault.” you say.

Aradia just stares at you, dumbstruck so long that the ship nearly clips an asteroid as you streak through space.

“I wasn’t the one who went FLARPing when it was obviously dangerous, I wasn’t the one who antagonised a deranged cerulean with mind control powers, I didn’t put her on a separate team and I didn’t haunt her when she did what highbloods do. I didn’t do anything and then she used me to kill you because I had the power to do it and because it’d hurt you the most to see me do it and I was closest to you and got punished. It didn’t take you half a second to die but do you even give a shit what being the thing that killed you did to me? And how the fuck was I ever meant to get over that or move on when you wouldn’t leave?! You broke my heart and then kept going back to Equius-” you say in a rush.

“I needed his robots! I needed a vessel to stay around long enough to get to here, I didn’t know it then but that’s what this was always leading to. It wasn’t like it was easy for me either!” she shouts at you.

“It’s your fault I’m so fucked up over you and you don’t care at all! Then after all that you leave me around to get tortured, to be helmed even though I was more scared of that than anything! I’d have rather died! But you don’t CARE! You could have done things differently but you never did! What’s WRONG with you?! You broke my heart and then kept going back to Equius-” you shout at her, your psionics flaring and rocketing you forward faster still.

“Stop!” Aradia demands, trying to throttle the output but failing to make it.

She was everything to you. She was everything to you and you were nothing to her. She threw you in harms way and abandoned you over and over, that’s not pity. She doesn’t pity you and now you don’t think she ever did. You’re going to make her pay for what she did to you.

“I’m going to kill you twice.” you hiss and cast your mind out, hitting a star map in the ship’s database. You find the biggest, hottest star and twist the ship towards it. You don’t care if you go down with her, hate is blinding you and honestly you’d welcome the end after what she warped you into.

Before you can jam all of your psi into the engines she flashes up footage of Dayvhe who is red eyed and furious as he tries to pry the doors apart with his bare hands. If you throw this ship into a star to kill Aradia you kill him too. Your blood ices up in your veins and the ship comes to a stop finally. You’re sort of nowhere, in relatively close distance to some asteroid belt with some nothing special water world nearby.

“Be reasonable.” Aradia urges.

You watch as Dayvhe sprints towards the door with a chair that he’s somehow unbolted from elsewhere on the ship. He slams it into the door, denting it but not opening it. You focus and flick all the lights back on and then open the very battered door as far as it will open, the dented side now won’t slide back properly. It’s more than enough room for Dayvhe to rush through and drop to his knees at your side.

“Sollux? Shit, Sol say you can hear me.” Dayvhe begs and you have the weird echoing of his voice
in your actual ears and in your pan through the recording. You can feel the strange phantom sensation of Dayvhe pushing the wires away from your face.

“If you try to disconnect him now you’ll scramble his thinkspoon!” Aradia calls out and you watch Dayvhe stare up at the ceiling. His eyes actually are red, it’s not the light anymore and his teeth are bared in a permanent snarl.

“Aradia? You LET HIM GO RIGHT NOW.” you wince and your head does something strange when filtered through the senses of the ship. Whatever audio equipment you have didn’t like that.

Aradia starts trying to reason with Dayvhe, giving him reasons why she won’t let you go. Because she wants to talk to you and she’s only going to talk to you when you’re calm and you’re not calm now.

Suddenly you go shuddery all over, physically feeling something from the ship that can be best exemplified by lots of exclamation marks. You look around until something compels you to look up. That’s the thing about movies set in space that you’ve all seen before. Trolls grow up on land and even in ships there’s gravity so you’re used to thinking on a flat plane and in movies ships coming to each other through space are level with each other. Like an old fashioned showdown. But it doesn’t work like that, in reality ships approach each other from every angle even if they end up upside down to one another. Right now above you is a collection of ships. Smaller ones but all bigger than this one, bigger than you. Six ships all together. You can feel them trying to scan your ship and you know somehow just what weapons they have on them compared to the nothing this ship has. You can outrun them, sure, but they’re going to tell someone about you. A ship like you- shit, no, like this…

“They’ll report back, trace the ship.” Aradia answers for you and you guess she has some access to your thoughts from here.

The ship’s schematics flow through your mind and when you reach for the controls to talk to Dayvhe Aradia doesn’t stop you.

“Dayvhe.” you say shakily.

“Sollux! Sollux tell me what’s going on are you ok? Can I pull you free?” Dayvhe asks desperately.

“No, no. I need to stay like this for a moment. This is the most heavily shielded area of the ship, it’s safest for you here. Grab me and wedge us somewhere tight until I tell you to not do that.” you tell him. Through the cameras you can see his mouth open in question but he decides to do what you tell him and you feel the phantom sensation of his hands on you.

You push away from your physical self and feel the ship humming through your mind, now that you’re actually consciously directing it suddenly it’s not so easy.

“You must be able to work the shields, right? I threw you around enough to need to.” you say as you plot the lineup of the ships, trying to find the right angle.

“Yeah, thanks for that.” Aradia says huffily.

“You helmed me, you don’t get to complain. What can your shields pull off?” you ask and- hah, there. A path plotted through all six ships clicks into space.

“Hah, that’s something. I can protect us from that if you give me the power and it’ll take a fair bit to get up to the speed you need for that plan.” Aradia answers.
“Isn’t that all you wanted me to be? A battery? I’ve got the power, just get those shields.” you tell her. Aradia opens her mouth with a frown but wisely doesn’t say anything.

You don’t need to check the screens to know that Dayvhe followed your request, you can feel his arm around you and the way your face is nestled in the crook of his arm. If you focus you can even feel his harsh and stressed breathing across your forehead. You turn your eyes to the ships, if they find out about this ship they’ll find out about Roxxie and the others. Dayvhe would be devastated, as would you. You’re not going to let that happen, you can’t, you won’t.

You say fuck the consequences, of how you’ll feel tomorrow, of how drained this will make you. You open yourself up and slam all of the power you have into the ship’s systems. Everything smears as you pass light speed and the ship’s systems frantically try to keep up with your mind as you blow through ship by ship and then out into new star systems. A living bullet and sacrificial shield all in one.

Aradia shoves you back and you reel, caught off guard. You feel her mental load shoulder you aside and plot out somewhere to go with all the juice you just gave her, far too much as it turns out. Alternia, you see it now at the end of the route planned.

“You can take him out.” Aradia’s voice rings out and you feel fingers on your face and in your hair right away.

Disconnecting is odd. Suddenly you’re too much in too small a container, but with each wire that comes out of you it clicks back into place.

“I’ve got you, I’ve got you. What the fuck was that?” Dayvhe whispers as he pulls the last wire free, a thick one at the base of your thinkpan. He slides your glasses back on your face and he comes into focus.

“It’s ok, it’s ok.” you assure him and reach up to kiss him. You smooth your hands over his cheeks, whisper for him to shoosh because you can feel how he’s shaking.

“What the fuck.” Dayvhe repeats, pulling back with eyes still tinged red.

“Aradia’s possessing the ship. She can’t fly it alone, needs my power.” you say briefly, it’s all you have energy for at the moment.

“She can possess anything mechanical.” Dayvhe says and sits up a little, you’re both under a console of some kind and he’s leaning on the metal pole supporting it.

“She can possess anything mechanical.” Dayvhe says and sits up a little, you’re both under a console of some kind and he’s leaning on the metal pole supporting it.

“Not just robots.” you agree a little breathlessly and your eyes flicker shut. Hell, you’re so tired.

Dayvhe hisses, a furious rattlenoodle sound of rage and your eyes snap open. Dayvhe leans forward and runs his fingers over your scalp and you only know he’s touching your ports because his touch becomes conspicuously absent.

“She possessed you.” he snarls lowly. She did, the taste, the compulsion you felt. A kind of poor man’s mind control. You’re getting quite experienced in that field, aren’t you? You nod weakly and the ship starts to rumble. Dayvhe gasps in alarm, bracing himself above you to protect you. He’s so good, you pity him so much. You might be a little loopy from lack of power.

“We’re entering Alternia’s atmosphere, she’s taking us back in. I gave her power and sponge space so-” you cut off with a bone cracking yawn.

Dayvhe pulls you up and shifts you so that he can carry you on his back. The doors all open for him
but it’s strange, you can feel Aradia’s presence around you everywhere in this ship. She used you, she left you there. It’s not even like she hates you or like she did it out of malice, she just didn’t care about how it would be for you. She didn’t care about you at all.

He carries you all the way to the doors you came through. There’s a bump as they connect but just like before you’re in the slightly wet hallway. The door snaps to behind you and you hear a click, you twist in Dayvhe’s hold and see the ship pull away again.

“It’s going!” Dirkka shouts from above you both.

“Holy ship, they’re here! Oh sweetie what happened to you both?” Roxxie gasps, rushing down the stairs to you both.

“It’s a long story. I need you to call your mom, Rox.” Dayvhe says, pushing past her until he gets to the top of the stairs where he carefully sets you back down on your feet.

“Meglomom? Why?” Roxxie asks but you’re not really paying attention. Instead your focused on the figure splayed on the floor in a puddle of water with Dirkka kneeling over it. Hal.

“He got sucked out into the water.” you guess, if it was just that he’d got caught in the stream that dragged you Dayvhe in then Dirkka wouldn’t be drenched as well.

“Luckily he backs up multiple times day and night. I can restore him even if I can’t salvage any memories from this body.” Dirkka explains. Even though his words are rational and calm Dirkka’s face still betrays a feeling of worry and concern that he probably doesn’t realise he’s showing, he cares more for Hal than he lets the robot know.

“So he’s not dead.” you ask worriedly. You actually kind of like Hal. You’d rather not need his medical attention but he’s good, even if he is an incredible weirdo like everyone else in Dayvhe’s group. Your group now too, you suppose.

“More like he lost a life, has to go back to the last checkpoint. He’s just going to be pissed that his body is fried.” Dirkka explains.

It’s not that you’ve tuned Dayvhe out for this conversation but more that you were just not fully focused on it. But Dayvhe rattle snarl of words gets your attention even if you don’t catch the beginning.

“-chomp the bitch to pieces.” Dayvhe snarls. He catches you looking and the redness pulls back a little, his body language dropping his defences just from your attention.

“Sol, you look dead on your feet. Go to my block, I’ll be there in a minute. I’ll grab food for you too, you must be trashed. Yeah?” he asks.

Actually, yeah. You need to talk about Aradia but you really don’t need an audience for that. You nod, bone deep weariness hanging around you. It’s just easier to leave, you know he’ll be with you soon. But as you walk you can’t help circling around it. Aradia. Even if you excuse the dubious-ok no it was downright unethical to control you like that even if she wasn’t as competent as Vriska at it. But you could buy Aradia doing that, she was kind of bad with boundaries. She used to go through your things and borrow them without asking sometimes, let herself in and out of your hive as she wanted back when your apartment had the lower tech locks she could force. But it wasn’t malicious, she had the same lack of care about her own things. She wouldn’t have done anything to you that she wouldn’t have let you do to her, she just didn’t consider that her standards were messed up.

You stop mid hallway. You’re doing it again, making excuses for her.
Fuck, you need someone else. Someone to sanity check this for you. You’re in the right corridor but it’s not Dayvhe’s door you’re banging on but Karkat’s. Finally the door slides back and a slightly sticky, very sleepy and agitated Karkat stands there.

“Why the fuck are you standing in the hallway soaking wet in just your fucking underwear at six?! AND WHY ARE YOU BOTHERING ME ABOUT IT?!” he screeches.

“Was Aradia always a bitch or is this new?” you ask.

“I- Now I have more questions. What?” he asks obviously dumbfounded.

You grab his wrist and pull him out of his block, across the hall and into Dayvhe’s. You don’t need to ask why they have their places so close together, you’re not stupid.

You explain about the hallucinations, about waking up smelling and tasting her things. Following that trail like a man possessed (hah), nearly getting drowned and Hal actually drowning. You explain about the ship, the hue of the lights, about getting helmed. You explain about seeing Aradia there.

Dayvhe joins you at that point and looks surprised to see Karkat but shakes it off and sits down in the beaten up old splaysac he has and scowls as you continue and Karkat reacts.

“But she helmed you? Aradia?” Karkat asks in disbelief.

“Yeah and locked Dayvhe out for it too.” you say and Dayvhe scowls harder.

Karkat slumps back on the loungeplank, dragging his hands through his hair as he puffs his cheeks out and exhales in one stressed breath.

“And she was in there the whole time, she left me when they captured me, she knew where I was the whole time I was being- when they- she left it until they did this to me because she needed me like this so I could be in the ship with her. She DID this to me!” you exclaim.

Any chill that Dayvhe had regained is long since gone and his claws are dug into the fabric of the seat and his leg is bouncing with agitation all while a low snarl rumbles in his chest.

“I won’t let it happen again.” Dayvhe hisses.

“You didn’t let it happen this time, it wasn’t your fault.” you argue.

“Besides unless you mean them finishing the job or Aradia plugging him in it’s not like it can happen again. They can’t helm him again, he already has most of the ports.” Karkat points out.

“Not what I mean. We’re going to catch her and she’s going to be destroyed.” Dayvhe vows.

“I mean she has limited power now, sure but still a bunch of mine left over. With her limited neural power she’s probably still stuck on the planet but you can’t just-” you try to reason with him.

“Since you got taken Roxxie and Dirkka have set up their own system for tracking ships on the planet, it’s not perfect yet but it’ll be able to track your signature just fine. And in case she’s planning on staying underwater to lay low I got Roxxie’s mom hunting her down.” Dayvhe says coldly.

“I don’t think you know how tough that ship is. I flew it through six ships at above light speed to keep us a secret, or else they would have tracked us. Not a scratch on me. It. On the ship. One lusus isn’t going to stop her.” you say.

“You know your building?” Dayvhe says, flipping through something on his palmhusk and then
tossing it at you.

You look at the screen you can see some kind of shark only it’s huge on the screen, just showing the start of its jaws and then its gills and one eye. It’s only because it’s so completely stark white that you can pick out Roxxie in the water in front of it, barely bigger than its eye.

“Megalomom is bigger than your building, she could eat that ship whole. But that’d be inadvisable, it might hurt her. So if she has to rip bits of that ship off bit by bit in what I really hope is painful for Aradia then good.” Dayvhe hisses.

“Leaving that slide into sociopathy aside, Dayvhe, I have to say that this whole situation is a trainwreck. That’s awful, I’m so sorry.” Karkat says sympathetically.

“Was she always like that, though? I know she could be blunt and vengeful, sometimes she didn’t think shit through or she didn’t care about how things were now because of how they’d be later and-but this? I don’t- I can’t stop thinking about it. She did this to me!” you whimper and start pacing, not that there’s much room in this place with all three of you in here.

“What does it matter if she’s always OW!” Dayvhe yelps but when you look over Karkat looks perfectly innocent.

“She could be like that and I think she usually believed she was right too. Whether she’d have been capable of something so evil and callous before I don’t know. I don’t know if being dead changed her, or being in the ship or Equius’ robots. I don’t know.” Karkat answers for you.

“But I just can’t think about her like that, I’ve always got these- these rose tinted glasses on with her. She was so beautiful and so smart and so perfect but then this happens!” you exclaim and pace a little more.

“Ok, no, she was never as perfect as you thought she was.” Karkat insists and gets up and reaches out for you. There’s a subtle pause before he actually grabs you, a chance to pull back. You don’t so he drags you down onto the loungeplank.

“You felt guilty for how she died, that was always going to fuck things up. But I don’t think… what does it matter if she’s the same girl? How you felt about her then won’t change, how you were wouldn’t either. Maybe she became someone different when she died, she acted really different. Maybe we should think of alive Aradia and dead Aradia as two different people.” Karkat argues.

“But it means everything is a lie, I can’t- I can’t- fuck I can’t breathe.” you tip forward, your chest heaving like you’re back in the tank and choking on the thickest dose they’d drown you in. This time it’s Dayvhe who skirts in close to you. He starts to ask for permission but you nod before he’s done and he’s reaching up with one hand to rub your back as the other comfortingly pets your knee.

You love her, you always have but you hate her for this, want her dead. You don’t want her dead, not again. But you deserved how she changed when she died, punishment for what you did to her, what you were used for. It’s your fault. Her fault. Your mind is moving too fast. You hate this ride and you want to get off of it now, please.

There is a way to do that.

You can’t do it. But you need it, but you can’t. But.

Something else then. You pull Dayvhe up onto the loungeplank with you, now you’re in the middle and then basically shove your entire upper body into the startled guy’s lap. He pets your hair, rubs your back gently but your mind is too stuck on Aradia. If she was always like this then it was your
own fault for not noticing sooner, you basically invited this in.

You move so you’re in his lap looking up at him and his sweet worried face. This isn’t working. You catch his hand.

“I know it’s probably a stupid, dumb idea but I need- I mean- please?” you garble out and he seems to catch your meaning from how close his hand is to your face and the words you’re uttering.

Dayvhe’s eyes go wide and he looks away from you to Karkat. Abruptly you feel the loungeplank move under you as Karkat does and he moves over you, his face all pinched with tension and dark with what is probably embarrassment.

“Are you actually asking him to pap you?” Karkat says with minimal scandalised voice breaking, far less than you’d manage at least.

“Yes, I know, I know. I just can’t and everything’s wrong and nothing is working.” you blurt out. That made no sense, you are distantly aware of it.

“You remember your number thing?” he challenges you.

The number thing? Oh, permission denied.

“403.” you answer numbly.

There’s an urgent whispered communication above you but you’re not so focused on that as you are the hand that’s creeping down from near your horns to closer to your face. Dayvhe’s looking down at you worriedly and you kind of want to call this off right away, you’re going to mess this up and make it worse than it was before. Just like you do with everything.

“Hey, hey, shoosh.” Dayvhe says quietly, privately almost.

It’s not enough but then you feel his hand gently brush your face, a weird counterpoint sensation to the way you can still feel Karkat’s body heat against your foot from where he’s sitting next to you on what must be the edge of the loungeplank with you monopolising this much space.

Dayvhe’s hand shifts more confidently now that the world hasn’t shattered, a proper pap. It’s enough to make your head warm and fuzzy. Nothing is different and everything is. Like Dayvhe has snarled at all the bad things vying for your mental attention and they’ve shrunk back. It’s ok, he’ll help you make it ok. Your bones feel like they’re melting and this is how it used to be.

“I’ll leave you two alone.” Karkat mumbles awkwardly and him getting up jolts you.

He’s going. You’re going to be alone with Dayvhe. Alone with Dayvhe shooshpapping you and it’s bad. Fear ratchets up in your chest. You’ve been on your own with someone who wasn’t Dayvhe and feeling like this too much. You can’t do that again!

“No!” you yelp in terror flailing for him. You miss him entirely but he comes back for you.

“Sollux what’s- AUGH!” Karkat yells when you drag him down with you again. The asshole’s not abandoning you now, not when you have both legs and one arm wrapped around him, the other digging into Dayvhe’s arm to stop him papping you again.

You’re talking and only distantly aware of it, rambling out some explanation that must include enough of a plea for Karkat to stay and for Dayvhe to start up again that they both concede.
Karkat is a bulky and heavy weight on your middle but he consolingly pets one hand on your side as Dayvhe assures you everything will be fine and switches your head off just like you’d needed.

You end up in a floating kind of nowhere on the edge of sleep when you get to hear Dayvhe and Karkat talking but you’re too tired and too chill to do anything about it.

“Is this weird I’m probably making everything weird,” Karkat says and despite his words his claws stroke soothing patterns into your skin. Soothing who, you or him? You don’t know. You hope both.

“Everything is weird all the time forever about all things man. But if you weren’t here I wouldn’t have this. I didn’t think we were ever going to get to- just, fuck man thanks. Don’t apologise for that. You’re the best.” Dayvhe says earnestly and you feel him shift forward and Karkat’s face leaves your middle, leaving just his hands.

You hear them kiss and it’s. There are no rules for this. Karkat kisses your moirail and you’re happy for him because they’re dating but also technically you’re dating him too now. Should Dayvhe be jealous that Karkat is all snuggled against you as he shooshes you? Should you be jealous that they’re kissing and no one’s kissing you? Fuck, maybe. You’re not though. They’re happy and it makes you feel happy to know that. They’re your two favourite people. They’re great, you think they’re both so good. Your whole deal with Karkat was always weirdly intense but in a good way but no quadrant ever felt right and your bond with him was too important to screw up just trying just in case. But he’s this. He’s your whatever this is. Dayvhe’s stupid pun, your awwspistice.

You can hear yourself purring and Karkat laughs, quiet and fond. Dayvhe paps you gently again and there goes any attempts you had at being awake. You’re not mad about it.

Dragged into sleep by two wonderful quadrantmates or not you’re still going to startle awake when the door opens and with a sleeper as light as Dayvhe and someone who’s been rightfully paranoid as long as Karkat.

“Dayvhe we have news about- OH!” Roxxie cuts herself off and stares with wide eyes. A slightly damp but very alarmed and interested Rohhze stares at you as well from around Roxxie’s side.

You consider your position. You’re just in your underwear and Dayvhe is just in his boxers and a hastily put on tshirt. Karkat was similarly underdressed in just his pyjamas. Karkat is sprawled over you, your legs around his middle to stop him from slipping off of the loungeplank. His face is pressed to your chest and one arm is looped under your back. You’ve no idea where his other hand is but you’d guess from the angle of his arm somewhere about Dayvhe’s person. Your head and shoulders are in Dayvhe’s lap and though he’s leant against the wall and the loungeplank one of his hands is still tangled up in your horns.

The three of you make for quite the scandalous picture.

“UM. NEVER MIND!” Roxxie blurs out and slams the door shut.

Well, that’s a thing that happened.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“How dare you

How old are you now, anyway?

How dare you

How old are you now, anyway?

You're given a flower

But I guess there's just no pleasing you

Your lips tastes sour

But you think that it's just me teasing you

You got a reaction

You got a reaction, didn’t you?

You took a white orchid

You took a white orchid turned it blue”

‘Best selling artist of the perigee, ‘We LITERALLY can’t stop playing this stuff!’”

“She’s going to ask questions.” you call out from your ablution block as you shimmy your jeans on and button them up.

“When does Rohhze ever not?” Karkat points out reasonably.

“Ok, cool but what are we going to say?” you ask and walk out again as you pull your t-shirt on over your head. The neck catches on one of your horns like the stupid uncoordinated oaf you are. Dayvhe chirps softly at you and untangles you.

“We don’t have to tell her anything.” he says.

“The number one way to make Rohhze desperately curious. Besides either she blabs or Roxxie does no matter what we do.” Karkat scoffs.

“Well, I mean so what? Who cares what Rohhze thinks or anyone else for that matter? Who cares if they think we having the most outrageous quadrant smearing makeouts and then some? For all Rohhze knows my ablutionblock is so covered in red and yellow material it looks like someone bombed a condiment station at Burger Empress. Hell, it might even be funny to see what we can get them to believe!” Dayvhe says, throwing his hands up in exasperation.

“Like what entirely outrageous porn plotlines can we get them to buy as truth?” you ask as the idea gains appeal. He has a point, you are already all doing things beyond what’s proper by troll standards so who cares? It could even be fun to fuck with them. You can already see the mischief sparkling in
Dayvhe’s eyes and he steps a little closer and carefully slides his arm around your back. He’s not—technically he should have asked or waited but you’re ok with this and that he can read that is comforting somehow.

“So scandalous, I can totally make a better fake idea than you, though.” he teases you.

“No way, this is stupid. I don’t want people thinking that I’m— that’s I’m involved in something like that!” Karkat squawks.

“Technically speaking you already are in a scandalous thing with me anyway. You know we don’t really flip we’re just kind of all of it.” Dayvhe points out.

“And you’re the one who brought up the awwspistice thing to us.” you agree.

“That’s not what we’re calling it!” Karkat snaps but you know this agitation, all bark and no bite. No real anger there.

Dayvhe grins dangerously and slinks closer to Karkat and because you’re never one to miss a chance to fuck with Karkat you go along too and you can see Dayvhe’s smile going brighter for you playing along. He wraps an arm around Karkat’s shoulder and leans in all close and secretive.

“Seeing as this was your idea I think you’re the one who’s secretly depraved and scandalously kinky.” Dayvhe needles him and the look of outrage on his face is too much for you.

“He just can’t keep up with this game is all, same as usual.” you agree, barely keeping a straight face.

When Dayvhe leans in and kisses Karkat’s cheek you actually can’t match him and instead fall forward snickering, having to mash your face in Karkat’s shoulder to stay upright and not double over laughing.

“Oh, you just think you’re so much better than me, like I can’t keep up in your idiot games for morons league, huh?” Karkat hisses at him.

“Uh-huh.” you laugh and pull back from him, getting yourself under control a little more. Karkat’s indigant face almost does you in again but you just hold yourself together.

“Well, I’m winning.” he brags and before you can ask why or how Karkat darts in and pecks you with a kiss that almost completely misses your mouth and does squish your poor sniffnode. But, shit, he kissed you. Dayvhe’s mouth is hanging open but he laughs in startled delight when Karkat breezes past him and shoulderchecks him as he goes.

“It’s on.” you vow and drag a still laughing Dayvhe with you.

Karkat’s all dark skinned with embarrassment and he keeps giving you looks like he’s really worried he overstepped his boundaries or upset you. Or at least he does until you deliberately trip him and shoulder him into a wall, then he seems to get that you’re just an asshole and chases you into the main room of Roxxie’s place where it turns out a lot of people are waiting.

A lot of people are there and the mood feels very different indeed.

Rohhze is sat on a plush loungeplank with John and Jayded on her other side. Roxxie is leant against the wall Dirkka and Jayekh are together by the door and slightly oil stained and Jayyne is lingering off to the side.

“What’s wrong?” Dayvhe asks worriedly, coming into the room.
“Oh. I… maybe take a seat if you can find one. Sollux especially, actually.” she says and you get ushered into a chair. Dayvhe is right by your side and Karkat is visibly tense as he sticks to the doorway.

“We’ve been looking for Eridan and Feferi ever since Sollux went missing, obviously we were more focused on Sollux but since you’ve been back and what with everything that you told us…” Roxxie trails off.

“So you found him?” Dayvhe concludes.

“I did, actually. Karkat told me that Eridan wasn’t much for deep water so I’ve been searching middle and shallow depths everywhere we could think to. There was a cave system, there was air in it. Suits his land-dwelling tendencies.” Rohhze says clinically.

“And?” Karkat prompts.

“They were dead. Both of them, for quite a while. I found several canisters of gas, a few open. The same he used on you, Sollux, I don’t doubt. You mentioned that he said it didn’t work on her and it looks like that was true, or at least it just knocked her out. My guess is from the set up he had there he was planning on keeping her there.” Rohhze explains.

Your blood runs cold. Feferi was in basically the same situation as you? Why would he do that? No, actually, you know why. He was obsessed with her, she broke it off, he wanted her back. God, you feel like throwing up at the thought.

“If it helps she choked the life out of him but he shot her and she obviously didn’t make it. I’m sorry, I know you two got on well.” Rohhze says sympathetically.

You got on well? That’s either an overstatement or one hell of a euphemism. Shit, Feferi didn’t deserve that. Eridan deserved worse.

“This really throws a spanner in the works for the plan, though. What’re we doing now?” Jayekh asks.

“Hey! My friends are dead have a little fucking sympathy!” Karkat snaps.

“He’s right. Feferi was good and she was just a kid, she was just Dayvhe’s age.” Roxxie says, her voice wobbling. Dirkka leans closer to her and tips his head so his horns just brush her shoulder, he’s covered with grease and oil.

“Are you fixing Hal?” you ask. It’s not what you should be asking, it’s not about Feferi or Eridan. Not asking if they suffered, not asking where the bodies are, not asking any of that. What’s the point in asking?

“Oh. Yeah, we were.” Dirkka answers as he looks down at his hands almost surprised.

“Can I help?” you blurt out.

Dirkka looks at you, inscrutable through his shades until he nods firmly.

“You’d rather be doing something, I get that. Sure, you can help.” Dirkka agrees. You stand, ready to follow him but Dayvhe catches your arm. You’re not expecting it and it makes you jump, he snatches his hand back right away and instantly you regret it. Hah, just because he got to shooshpap you doesn’t mean you’re magically better, if only.
“Are you ok?” Dayvhe asks.

Yes. No. Both.

“She’s dead, nothing I can do about it. Everyone dies. Unless you want to talk to Aradia into getting their ghosts up in here you’re not going to get to talk to them. Hah, yeah, I thought not.” you say without humour at the sour twist Dayvhe’s expression takes at Aradia’s name.

Behind him Karkat turns and rushes from the room. You’re not fine but there’s nothing to be done, Karkat needs actual attention from someone. You can see Dayvhe weighing the same consideration up.

“Go. I’ll be fine.” you say quietly.

He nods and rushes off after Karkat.

Rohhze catches your eye and holds your gaze for an uncomfortable second before slowly looking in the direction that Karkat and Dayvhe left through and then back to you. She arches one perfectly sculpted eyebrow.

“Don’t fucking start.” you tell her, the game not sounding so fun right now.

You walk to the confused looking Dirkka who seems to get the hint and leads you out of the room with Jayekh.

“I really hope I didn’t put my foot in it there, I know Karkat was friends with them but everyone’s wellbeing rests on Roxxie’s shoulders. That’s why I care but I didn’t mean to be a blundering idiot about it.” Jayekh says worriedly.

“I think with Karkat if he’s shouting it’s basically just an indicator of him being alive.” Dirkka concludes. Well, he’s not wrong there.

Your body follows the two older trolls but your mind is circling back to Feferi. You’re concerned at how not bad you feel. You’re not happy that she’s dead, it’s not like oh you had one ego bruising sexual encounter with her so now she’s good as dead to you anyway. She didn’t deserve what happened to her and it’s certainly not her fault. She cut Eridan out of her life after all, what more could she have done? But from what Rohhze was saying she was kidnapped and Eridan tried to screw with her head and she said fuck that I’m going to strangle you to death. Good for her, the difference between her experience and yours was that a) she knew the guy and b) she actually killed to protect herself. You tried and failed. But, honestly, if someone had come up to you in the tank and been like hey you can suffer through this for a perigee and change or you can get out of this whole thing now AND take someone responsible down with you then… well… you might have taken that deal. Dying sucks, obviously, but living through shit can be worse.

You feel sympathy for her, you do. Been there, done that, shame she had to as well. You don’t feel guilty though and you don’t feel like this is going to keep you awake. It just sucks is all and you’d sooner not think about it at all. Helpfully for you there’s a prime distraction. Hal’s body is laid out on a table, his chest popped open and the front of his face taken off and set on the side.

“Oh. Oh wow.” you say softly.

“Yeah, he sank a way before I got him and you don’t have to go far before the pressure’s as much of a problem as the water is. He sure as hell wasn’t watertight and not to that depth for sure.” Dirkka sighs and taps Hal’s chest plate with a claw.
“You said he was going to be okay, that he was backed up. Does he have another body or is he sharing with Sawtooth or what?” you ask as you get closer and peer down into the mangled workings of Hal’s body. Parts are pulled free and there’s holes drilled in the back where water is dripping out, poor guy.

“I keep forgetting you met them. No, they’re not sharing. And since he’s not around to hear me jerk his ego off their robotic brains couldn’t handle the size and complexity of his mind. He could be running in here just fine and basing most of himself on the internet but he gets a little…” Dirkka trails off.

You look up from Hal’s body to focus on Dirkka who looks guilty if anything but you don’t know why he would be.

“Being stuck and aware but not able to move makes him claustrophobic. Brings back bad memories for him. I woke him up that way to give him the choice and he freaked out, said he’d wait for us to build him a new body and he’d rather sleep it out. Not that he wanted to do that either. This time I’m going to do what I said and make two, no matter what he says about wanting improvements on his own form. I told him it was dumb to have no backup but why would he EVER listen to me? Why did I even listen to him?!” Dirkka snarls.

“Darling.” Jayekh prompts him and Dirkka seems to snap out of it.

“Sorry. So no, no Hal for the meantime. I’m grateful for another pair of hands though, the sooner he’s back the better.” Dirkka says with a nod.

Between the three of you it becomes evident that Jayekh is very good at following directions, better than you at least. That said you know more about mechanical parts whereas you think Jayekh probably only repairs his Brobot based on Dirkka’s instructions. You set out disassembling Hal, testing and salvaging what parts you can. You even have suggestions for Dirkka for future modifications. Robotics might not be your thing but compact mechanical parts, cooling systems and good wiring practice are.

Hal helped put you back together, the least you can do is return the gesture. Shockingly working on something proves to be excellent for your head. You don’t have to think about if you’re coping. You don’t have to think about what happened overday, about Aradia, about being sandwiched between Karkat and Dayvhe and being cool with that level of pale attention. Nor do you need to stress about whether this fifth quadrant thing is going to ruin everything for all of you and whether the fact that it feels good is an indication that you’re the worst or that this is the best thing for all of you. Instead, you test wires and sort good parts from bad. You help modify designs, set things out to dry, check conductivity.

When you’re dragged out for food you eat and return to work and at the end of the night Dayvhe calls time and pulls you back to his block. Karkat is still obviously upset so you grab your games and with Dayvhe sat between you both to stop cheating the pair of you battle each other, pitting your little monsters against each other. When he finally gets tired of losing you collectively smother his ranting by both sprawling across his lap and refusing to move until he chills out. You do at least all sleep in your own coons that day but things are still different in a nice way.

Things fall into a routine, you help fix Hal and Dayvhe and Karkat hang out with their friends. When you’re done working you retreat to being around Dayvhe and Karkat. It's not like you’re always all over each other either, sometimes Karkat’s reading and you and Dayvhe are jamming with barely any attention paid to you from Karkat. Other times Dayvhe is working on his music and you’re coding as Karkat watches a movie or one or the other of you joins in and needles him.
The spans of time where you feel better are getting longer, the stretches where you don’t see the figment or doubt reality are lasting longer. You still can’t… you still can’t let Dayvhe get his hands on your face again, that last time seemed like a one-off and aside from that crisis point you’re still working up to it.

It’s easier with Karkat too. Well, in a way at least. You still lose your shit at each other all the time and drive each other crazy, that hasn’t changed. But you’ve woken up several times with your face tucked into his neck and Dayvhe glued to your back and even if Karkat’s awake before you he trusts you that much in that red/pale/grey/something else kind of way.

It’s not escaped everyone else’s notice though. Your blanket rule of ‘don’t fucking touch me’ holds for everyone BUT Karkat and Dayvhe and that exception is blatant. Rohhze saw what she did and so did Roxxie. You know Roxxie told Dirkka because the night after you got discovered he picked Dayvhe up and set him on his feet on a chair so he was higher up so he could receive the ‘highest of fives’. Like a dumbass Dayvhe threw a fit about Dirkka talking about it behind his back which only confirmed that the whole thing was true. Probably just what Dirkka had intended to be honest. You wonder if that old chat about Dayvhe is still active because John keeps sceptically peering at all of you and Jayded seemingly finds herself giggling at ‘nothing’ a lot when you three are around.

Of course, it’s made screwing with them all the more fun. You’ve all three bought into ‘yes and’ with each others lies. One-upping each other in it is proving a dangerous game, especially as Karkat nearly made you drown in your own drink by deadpan responding with “Please, Dayvhe, the two of you… I just can’t. I’m just one man, be reasonable with your hedonism, I may never walk right again.” You don’t think anyone bought that one with you choke laughing in the background.

For the very smallest of mercies you are graced with the knowledge that Dirkka has made no comment to you about any of this, though you know he’s teased Dayvhe. It’s not as if he hasn’t had the opportunity, you spend all of your free time working on Hal’s body with him, building the new one up. It’s obvious that he takes the project seriously. He doesn’t flirt with Jayekh or get mushy over Roxxie when he’s working and although he’s not cold it’s plain that this means a great deal to him. He doesn’t ask or make jokes about your quadrants (quintdrants?) and to repay the favour you don’t ask him if he and Hal are pitch or if it’s more complicated.

Finally, early one night the final checks are run and you’ve gone as far as you can before uploading Hal into the body. Dirkka stands there above the table, looking down on his creation and tapping a screwdriver on his chin as he thinks.

“He can upload through the internet but it takes forever, obviously, with the size of him. It will tank our whole connection for nights. Or… or we could go to the bar. Hal always keeps a physical backup there in case something ever happened to here. He’s got other ones across the planet, hidden away, but the bar is the one I know best and it’s close. We could just go there, pick it up and transfer him over by cable which would be way quicker.” Dirkka says.

It would be way quicker and the internet wouldn’t be unusable for ages. Your own internet needs aside you would have to deal with a Karkat deprived of trollflix and that seems fundamentally unwise.

“We could probably use the fresh air.” you suggest selflessly.

“Stretch our legs.” Dirkka agrees with a nod. You have bought into each other’s lies together, you’re both going to cling to this facade of being entirely selfless here or die trying.

You grab a hat, bid goodbye to your quadrantmates and for the first time in a while you leave Roxxie’s hive. The train is familiar by now and you’ve come to find that you don’t mind Dirkka’s
company. You have a lot of the same interests.

“Oh god, I lost a solid two perigees on World of Trollcraft before Roxxie was like ‘you’ve not eaten or slept in four nights you’re banned’ I just cannot with MMO’s.” Dirkka groans, and stretches his arms above his head.

“World of Trollcraft was cool but it was more work for me. A couple of kids paid me to hack someone else’s account and delete their characters and another paid me to be someone else and mess around with their guild rankings.” you say with a shrug.

“You stone cold asshole. Speaking of cold, is it just me or is it hot in here?” Dirkka says, fanning himself.

The train around you doesn’t feel hot or stuffy, probably partially helped by people staying away from you both. You may be a pair of gutterbloods but Dirkka is older and he’s got the kind of body mods that say ‘fucking crazy, may well bite your face off’. You don’t need to add to your reputation by saying that it’s not hot in here it’s just Dirkka.

“It doesn’t feel hot.” you say instead.

“Really? I hope I’m not coming down with something, I’m all itchy too.” Dirkka hisses and scratches his arm.

Cautiously you touch him, he’s lower on the hemospectrum than you so he should be warmer but with you psionics you burn warmer anyway. You should be around the same but he feels significantly warmer even to you.

“Maybe you are sick, or having an allergic reaction.” you suggest.

“Maybe. Maybe it’s the chair, I’m getting up.” Dirkka says and gets out of his seat and heads to the door. You follow and watch as he leans against the cool glass, still scratching at his arm absently.

“We could go back.” you offer.

“Nah, I’ve had worse.” Dirkka shrugs so you drop it.

You try to steer the conversation back towards safer topics. Getting him talking about teaching Dayvhe how to make music is one that he’ll seemingly gush about forever and it makes you happy to hear about it too. You know Dirkka was only young himself when he found Dayvhe but that he didn’t just figure that Cal was his problem now and instead tried to help him and be in his life is nice. The look he gets on his face sometimes reminds you a little of how biclopsdad used to look at you, fond and loving. You’re happy for Dayvhe and if it feels bittersweet then it’s only a touch.

Dayvhe and Dirkka’s home station comes up and you two are the only ones who get off of the train, the place is deserted. Dirkka still seems to feel hot in the cool evening air and he’s still scratching. You’re about to tell him to knock it off because it’s annoying you when he freezes and gasps.

“What?” you ask and turn to look at him.

He’s staring down at his arm and you can see how the claw on his index finger has sunk right under his skin, the raised shape of his claw under the flesh is evident and you nearly gag to see it. Dirkka slowly pulls his finger away, not unhooking the claw and a flake of skin about the size of a one ceagar coin cracks off of his arm and flutters to the ground.

The skin underneath is new, shiny and a jet black of adult skin. The same happened to you once no
doubt when you went from being a grub to a bipedal child but you don’t remember it. All of your adolescent molts were slower and less dramatic, barely a molt at all. Just a growth spurt and full body dandruff grossness. This is way different.

“You’re molting.” you whisper in shock, not that anyone is around to hear.

“I’ve got… maybe a week? Oh shit, my gills. We need to grab Hal’s thinkspoon and get out of here. If they start shedding before I can get somewhere with proper medical attention I might drown on dry land.” Dirkka says desperately.

“Fuck. Ok, we’ll go, grab it and get back. Can Roxxie call us a ride so that’d be quicker?” you suggest.

“Good idea. Shit, shit I’m not going to be able to go anywhere after this. Adults can’t just wander around Alternia, I’ll be useless!” Dirkka snarls and paces in tight little circles as he alternates from messaging Roxxie to staring at his arm.

You wait nervously as they talk and carefully look around just to be sure no one is watching. There’s still no one. It’s been a while and a lot of trauma since you were here so your mind is a little fuzzy on the details but people did live here, you saw them before.

“How many people live in this area?” you ask as you look around the weirdly pristine station. Drones clear up public spaces like this but even so it’s never normally this neat and this is a reasonably lowblood area so it probably gets less frequent attention.


“You’re exposed out here. Right out in the open, something’s wrong.” Dayvhe’s voice, the figment’s voice calls out. You groan and turn to look at him, standing atop a sign that couldn’t possibly support his weight.

“Can we just go?” you prompt and Dirkka nods.

Dirkka leads you out of the station and out onto the silent street. This is how it gets with anxiety, it starts and then it just starts to snowball.

“This is bad, this is bad.” the figment whines. Everything seems wrong, too quiet. But Dirkka is staring at his arm and walking the route by memory.

The lights are all on in the hives that you pass, you can see the little cul-de-sac of hives just over there. All the lights are on.

“But no one’s home.” the figment says and points.

You stop. All of their doors are open. All their doors are open and no one is outside.

“Dirkka, Dirkka look.” you say, pointing.

“Huh.” Dirkka says quietly, his hand suddenly full of sword.

“You need to go, you need to get out of here now. Fly, run, just get out.” the figment urges you.

“Let get the hell out of here, come on, the bar.” you insist. Dirkka nods and the two of you jog silently on.

You jolt when you hear music playing and Dirkka snaps to attention too. Guitar playing quick and
bassy, the continuous sound makes it easy enough to track and you both rush towards the noise trying to keep low and stealthy. It’s a store, an electronics one or rather those little stores that sell a little of everything. The door is open and there’s a TV mounted on the corner wall quietly playing a music video.

A voice kicks in high, male and pitched up. The lyrics are weird, accusatory and something about a flower. You can’t make it out from the static in your head and the way the figment keeps screeching at it. What you can hear is the deep angry growl from Dirkka next to you. He’s staring at the screen and from side on you can see his gaze is unblinking. The tip of his blade scrapes the asphalt and the sound startles you enough to make you whip your shuriken out and fling them through the TV, breaking it into silence.

There’s a cold sweat all over your skin and you’re shaking. At your side Dirkka is panting hard.

It’s only then that you notice the body. You don’t know how you missed it, a yellowblood on the floor toppled to the side with his legs bent under him all weird like he was kneeling and someone just pushed him over. Well, after they shot him in the head that is. Fuck, he’s been there a while you can smell him from here.

Why has no one taken him away, not called the drones or anything?

“There’s no one here.” the figment whispers worriedly.

“We need to go, we really gotta go.” Dirkka says, rushing off leaving you to follow him. The bar is up ahead the front door open and that is not a welcoming sight.

You rush in and reel backwards into Dirkka right away and drag your shirt over your face. There was obviously a fight in here, weapon scuffs on everything, bullet holes in the walls, tables tipped over. You don’t know what happened but the four trolls against the wall who have all been shot, no, executed tell you they lost.

Dirkka makes a wounded sound and you look around to see him standing over what looks like two halves of Squarewave. Poor little guy, looks like someone took a chainsaw to him.

“Sawtooth!” Dirkka calls out as quietly as he can. He shoulders a table out of the way and claws at the floor, pulling back a trap door. Crisp cool machinery shines unharmed underneath and Dirkka drops inside and starts hurriedly unplugging things.

“Stay quiet. Why would someone do this to the whole town? It’s pretty obvious it’s the whole place.” the figment says.

You don’t know, the only thing special about this place was how close it was to Cal’s fuckery. Even if you missed Cal, though you know you didn’t, this isn’t what he’d do. The only other person who knows about this is Vriska and this isn’t her style either.

“She’s not the only one who knows what you did.” the figment says, looking at the trolls against the wall.

“Or maybe they didn’t know enough.” he adds worriedly.

“Got it!” Dirkka exclaims and pulls out of the hole in the floor.

Dirkka pulls you towards the back door, keeping off the street is smart.

“Someone could be watching this place shield yourself!” the figment shouts.
As you go out of the back door you throw up a wall of psi. You do that just as a bullet hits it and ricochets off wildly.

“Shit!” Dirkka gasps and tries to rush back into the building. You grab him by the back of the shirt.

“Can’t cover that far. Give me that.” you grit out, holding the wall up. You grab his sword and whoever is in the woods at the edge of town fires again, and you see the flash of the gun. The bullet bounces away harmlessly and you launch Dirkka’s sword right back the way that bullet came.

“Holy shit.” Dirkka gasps and sticks to your side.

You wait. No more gunfire. You drop your shield for a second and throw it right back up immediately after in case you were being baited to drop it. Still nothing.

“Let’s go get my sword back and see who tried to kill us.” Dirkka says and pulls you forwards. You’re not really one for walking towards the gunfire but you’re also not the dumbass who gets to a horror movie and then says you want to split up. Either way it’s not far into the woods, the guy still needed a clear shot at you after all.

Slumped on a hill surrounded by monitors is an adult troll. Dirkka’s sword is stuck through his chest and his olive blood is spilt out over the grass. You don’t know what an adult of all people is doing here but you’re more interested in the video feed he has going on a screen of the bar.

“Call me fucking crazy, but did you just stab famous actor Edward Norton through the chest with my sword?” Dirkka asks, dragging your attention back.

What the fuck?

You look over and, holy shit you do kind of recognise the guy.

“From that fight club movie?” you ask as you squint at him.

“Among other things, yes. I have so many questions.” Dirkka says shaking his head. He takes his palmhusk out and snaps a picture of the guy and of his husktop. You go to grab it but Dirkka stops you.

“Someone chainsawed Squarewave, but those trolls were shot and I found a bit of Sawtooth’s arm ripped off by force. That’s at least three different people, this guy has backup and he was surveilling our bar for a reason. The less evidence we leave the better, you know if we can hack into that someone can trace us with it, leave it.” Dirkka says reasonably.

“What is a famous actor doing here murdering kids and staking out Hal’s bar?” you ask.

“No fucking clue at all but I’m taking Hal’s thinksponge back, booting him up and asking him what he knows and seeing what information Sawtooth and Squarewave backed up before they got taken down. Now let’s get the hell out of here now.” Dirkka says and you can’t agree more.

Edward goddamn Norton. What the shit?

You both scurry through the woodland, looping around the perimeter of town until Dirkka manages to contact Roxxie’s scuttlebuggy. You make a mad dash for it and both throw yourself inside. Heavy silence sits between you both and Dirkka scratching more of his skin off his arm is suddenly the least of your shared problems.

Your head is pounding with a beat you can’t place and the certainty that you’re being judged. Not by
Dirkka but someone. There’s someone in your head and you can’t stop feeling it there, like a parasite under your skin. Dirkka’s talking but you can’t focus on his words so when he finally reaches out to tentatively touch your arm you nearly flip the vehicle clean over.

You don’t remember getting back, you’re so far into panic that you’re losing time. Instead you’re in the scuttlebuggy and then you’re pacing the corridors of Roxxie’s hive.

“What did you DO to him?!” Karkat demands snappishly as you pace around the wizard bowl now with your hands pressed to your temples. Maybe if you crush your thinkpan in you’ll kill the thing that’s sneaking into your head. You can feel it, something tugging at your thoughts, something other and not you.

“It wasn’t me! Shit went so badly wrong there I can’t even begin to explain and I don’t think you want me to in front of him if it made him this bad.” Dirkka argues.

“Sol, Sol, come here you’re ok.” Dayvhe insists rushing to get in front of you.

“It’s my head, they’re in my head.” you insist and turn around to go back the other way.

“Nothing is in your head, it’s just you. You’re just panicking which is cool, no one’s mad at you, you just need to calm down.” Dayvhe urges you as he runs around the other side and starts backing up as you walk so you can see him.

His words are nice and you’re pretty sure he’s real and even if he wasn’t the figment doesn’t mean you any actual harm, it probably saved your life even. You’re not being made too pale and pliable like before but something is messing with your head and you can’t do anything with it like that, you’re too aware, too panicked.

“Sollux, calm down there’s nothing wrong.” Dayvhe says and you jerk to a stop.

It’s in your head, you can feel it! Stop, shut up, slow down, sit down, shut up. It’s rattling around inside your head like gunfire. It’s too close to before. You stumble to your knees and gag, just barely stopping yourself from throwing up.

“Shit, fuck, Sollux ok listen to me.” Karkat says as he crouches down by you.

“Come with us, we’ll go to your block. You can lay down on the loungeplank or try to sleep or even hide in the ablutionblock if it helps you. Let’s just get you somewhere quiet and safe that’s yours ok? If your head feels like there’s something in it that’s going to happen anywhere so let’s go somewhere better where it’s just us, yeah?” Karkat reasons.

You nod weakly and when Karkat stands you take a second or two but follow his lead. He doesn’t touch, thank the stars and you mindlessly follow him to your block with Dayvhe sticking close to your right side. He doesn’t follow your into your block but it’s fine, you’re trailing Karkat right now.

“Here. TV?” Karkat offers.

“No sound.” you say quickly and Karkat nods. He flicks the TV on to some nature thing and kills the sound. That’s good, you can watch frogs hopping about silently. Karkat sits down and puts some food and drink on the table nearby but he’s not making you sit or ordering you to eat.

“Why is this happening?” you ask hoarsely, it feels like your body is buzzing. You miss your bees. Actually, you might be able to do something about that.

“Can you get- get hours of bee noises up or something?” you ask Karkat and pace a little.
“Sure. And I don’t know what happened when you were out with Dirkka, but Sollux... relapses like this happen after the shit you went through. I expected this. It’s like how whenever you have one kind of mood swing the odds of you getting the other go shithive maggots high. You go through what you did, especially with Aradia bringing it up again, then you’re going to get bad patches.” Karkat explains and then with a click you can hear the soothing sound of bees. Not your bees, you can tell that from the sound, but it’s bees all the same and it’s nice.

“It feels real.” you insist, scratching at your scalp.

“I bet.” Karkat says and you can hear sympathy.

“You probably hate me for this, you didn’t sign up for this. I’m ruining your quadrants. Ruining everything.” you whimper.

“You’re not ruining anything and I signed up for exactly this, actually.” Karkat argues patiently.

You jump when the door opens and Dayvhe comes through alone.

“Hey Karkat, think you oughta…” Dayvhe says quietly and jerks his thumb to the door. Karkat nods and gets up, heading out of the room.

Dayvhe walks over to you and stands a carefully generous distance from you, his hands in his pockets and body language unthreatening.

“Hey, Dirkka told me about what happened. That’s seriously fucked up but I’m really relieved you’re not injured and I’m sorry you had to see all of that.” Dayvhe tells you.

“It’s not-” you’re struggling for words so you try to focus. You squeeze your eyes shut and replay everything that happened.

“It was rough seeing all those dead trolls, the smell alone was- but no. Someone did that, executed them for a reason. Different people with different weapons, he told you that?” you ask.

“Yeah. I’ve no idea why a famous actor is coming down here to murder subadults or who he was working with but Dirkka’s going to try to get Hal running again and see what he can find from what Sawtooth and Squarewave saw. You don’t have to worry about that, he’s taking care of it and Roxxie’s taking care of him and it’s not like he’s molting tomorrow. You don’t need to worry about anything but you.” Dayvhe assures you.

“No, it’s not that. I said it’s not that. It’s not the dead people or even the actor guy it’s- it’s happening again. I can feel my head being fucked with again!” you insist.

“Well Aradia’s nowhere around here, Roxxie has scanners permanently on. I don’t see how she could have been near where you were either but I’ll get her to look into it. It’s probably not her, it’s just-” Dayvhe starts.

“No, it’s not that. I said it’s not that. It’s not the dead people or even the actor guy it’s- it’s happening again. I can feel my head being fucked with again!” you insist.

“Well Aradia’s nowhere around here, Roxxie has scanners permanently on. I don’t see how she could have been near where you were either but I’ll get her to look into it. It’s probably not her, it’s just-” Dayvhe starts.

“Just in my head?!” you snap at him.

“Not what I was going to say.” Dayvhe says quickly. You jump when the door opens and it’s Karkat again, you get a glimpse of Dirkka walking off.

“There’s something else in my head, I’m not crazy!” you insist to Karkat who stops and groans.

“I didn’t mean it like that, I didn’t even say that!” Dayvhe says.
“What did you do?” Karkat groans and Dayvhe looks desperately guilty. Karkat glares at you and you straighten up until his stare.

“You. You’re in no state to be solving any kind of problem so right now whatever caused this doesn’t matter at all.” Karkat snaps.

“But-” you begin but Karkat steamrolls you.

“No buts, fuckface. If Aradia or someone else is doing this to you then it doesn’t matter because other people are checking that out for you as we speak and you’re too fried to be of any help so the solution to that problem is you sit your ass down, listen to bees and calm down. If it isn’t that and you’re having a relapse which is totally expected even without you seeing and dealing with what happened tonight then the solution is what, Sollux?” Karkat demands.

“Sit… sit down, listen to bees… calm down?” you guess.

Karkat nods and stares at you unblinking until you back up to the loungeplank and hop over the back of it to sit down just so he’ll stop looking at you like that. It’s Dayvhe who gets the force of his stare next.

“And you stop worrying about always making his shit worse. Him snapping at you has fuckall to do with anything you did or said, he’s just panicking and you know that. And fine you’re still fucked up yourself about things not going right but they’ve been going great, this is just a blip so don’t fall apart now, idiot. So get!” he orders Dayvhe and snaps his fingers in the direction of the loungeplank.

Dayvhe scuttles over and sits down next to you, he takes his glasses off and drops them into his sylladex. You catch him mumbling about Karkat being bossy but he wisely shuts up before Karkat sits down as well.

You don’t know what you want. Everything just feels bad in a way that you can’t describe to anyone that’s not been mind controlled before. You’re not being made to do anything but it’s a heavy and present weight in your head, like a stranger across the street staring unblinking at you. Sure, they’re not doing anything but they could. All you feel is like it’s your fault. You did this. What’s your fault and what did you do? You’ve no idea but you can feel the shape of the idea like a shard of glass in your mouth.

Time passes as it tends to and there’s only so long your adrenal system can maintain unbridled panic. All the same you hear the sigh of relief from Dayvhe when you slump a little lower in your seat and thread your fingers with his. He doesn’t touch you more than that until you eventually pull him closer. When you topple over finally onto Karkat’s shoulder you guess you get him with your horns, or at least you assume so from the way he exclaims ‘OW you useless shit’ and you end up in his lap instead.

Dayvhe and Karkat are talking quietly now and between the familiar cadence of their voices, the drone of bees, and the way they’ve both eased into softly petting your side and horns respectively you end up drifting.

“It’s really not your fault, Dayvhe. You know you’re not bad at this, logically you know that, right?” Karkat says.

“No, I know that. I know he wouldn’t be doing this if he didn’t still want me as his diamond but things keep going to shit and the common denominator here is-” Dayvhe rushes out quietly.

“Is his terrible luck. Not you.” Karkat says firmly. He rubs one of your hornbeds a little harder than
before and you chirp softly without even meaning to.

“I guess you’re right, there was always going to be blips or whatever. At least there’s a why for this one.” Dayvhe sighs and pets your side.

At some point you drop off into sleep and you’re not the only one because you wake up as the filling in yet another mutant sandwich. You blink wearily at the ceiling, your head feels normal again or at least it feels like your own, but you feel burnt out and shitty. You duck under Karkat’s arm and sit up but in order to get up without displacing Dayvhe you have to very quickly swap yourself for a nearby pillow. You hold your breath and wait as Dayvhe makes a noise of discontent then squeezes the cushion tight and relaxes again. Score, now who has ninja skills?

Probably not you but you still get a shower for your efforts anyway. You stand under the spray of water and run everything that happened yesternight through your mind. It looked like that whole lawning was wiped out, the doors to the hives were open and you bet they’d been kicked down. You’ve seen the result of drones razing a lawning before and this wasn’t that. It was people, like that adult. That means there’s more of them out there just like Dirkka said.

Damnit, you don’t know anything about the place except that Cal kept irregularly irradiating the populace with his awful presence and mind control and that you, Vriska and Dirkka bombed the shit out of a round mile of where Cal was. What else is there that anyone might be interested in? You doubt they’re around because they’re impressed by Vriska’s weapon. It was strong alright but for sure the military could crank out plenty of stronger things and also there’s no call for an actor to need that shit.

It’s creepy and confusing, yeah, but that’s not what’s bothering you really. There was someone in your head, you’re sure of it. You get out of the trap and start drying yourself off and thankfully you already have the towel around your waist when the door opens a little.

“Sollux? Can I come in?” Dayvhe asks, already sticking his head around the door anyway. You do love him but good god locks don’t mean anything to him. Not that you’re sure if you locked it anyway.

“Apparently.” you reply.

“Oh good, sarcasm. That’s way better than you curled up talking to yourself.” Dayvhe says and steps in the room, but you catch the look of instant regret and ‘ah shit shouldn’t have said that out loud’ on his face.

“Did you want something?” you ask.

“Well apparently you turned into a cushion, so I thought I should check that out.” Dayvhe says, producing the decoy you palmed him off with.

“Maybe you should kiss it and see if it turns back.” you snort and flip the thing out of his hands and into his face.

“Who’s to say that isn’t exactly what I did and here you are, it worked!” he laughs. You roll your eyes and Dayvhe idly tosses the pillow out of the room, from the lack of startled cursing you guess he missed Karkat.

“How are you feeling really?” he asks seriously.

“Someone was in my head yesterday, that’s how I feel.” you tell him.
Dayvhe looks concerned but you’ve no idea if he believes you or if he thinks that you’re out of your mind and imagining things. He’d have good cause to, it’s not like you’re fully sane, you do see people who aren’t there.

“Dirkka came back with Hal’s backup, after he left us I’m pretty sure he went to go work on putting him back together. I’m sure Roxxie dragged him off at some point but I’m sure Hal will be up soon. We can get him to take a look at you, see if he can scan your head with his techno magic and see if there’s any signs anyone’s been jerking your mind about.” Dayvhe offers.

You nod, it sounds like a good idea. It doesn’t make you feel any better though. Dayvhe squints and you then cautiously get a little closer. He slowly and obviously raises his hands towards you.

“Notheface.” you quickly gasp but Dayvhe just nods and keeps moving. He wasn’t aiming for that anyway. His hands come down on either side of your neck, he pulls a little to make you lean closer and with one thumb under your chin tilts your head either way to look at you. God only knows what he’s looking for though. Having seen whatever it was he shifts his hold on you, one hand draped over your shoulder and the other curled around the back of your neck.

“Not that it’s not a lot because it is but is that it? You look like you’re more than just worried.” Dayvhe says.

You lean into his warm touch a little and try to survey the inside of your own- well, of your entire self really. You can manage to point out that you feel bad but you really can do better. Worried, sure. There’s also something that you might classify as disgust at having someone else getting in your thinksponge again, there’s not the sting of betrayal that came with Aradia because you have no proof this was her. But it’s to be expected, you get the same revulsion when you think of Vriska controlling you again.

You’re angry that this keeps happening. You were getting better and now this again. That’s faint though, you’re used to that whenever you used to end up in an episode again so you barely notice the feeling. No, beyond that you feel… guilt.

“I feel guilty, I think.” you say slowly and as you say it the words feel true. You did this, look at what you did.

“But you haven’t done anything that you need to feel guilty about.” Dayvhe insists.

“I know that.” you agree.

“That was easier than I thought it would be.” Dayvhe says, seemingly surprised.

“I don’t think it’s my thought. I haven’t done shit to anyone. It’s not like I feel guilty for worrying you two, or I do a little I guess but that’s not this.” you say.

Dayvhe stares at you with a frown. He opens his mouth and then pauses, closes it and frowns a little harder.

“I… have literally no goddamn clue how to solve that problem.” he admits.

“Great, at least we’re as dumb as each other.” you snort and pull away so you can finish getting dry and stop dripping water on the floor.

“But I can take you to the kitchen, make you coffee and we can steal Roxxie’s fancy super sugary cereal. Everything’s better with far too much sugar and caffeine.” he proposes instead.
Ah, this is why this boy will have a place forever in your bloodpusher. Can’t solve problem, eat junk food instead!

You toss your clothes into the empty sink and focus on making sure your ports are all dry. You don’t know if they can rust but you REALLY don’t want to find that out the hard way.

“Hey, if you’re feeling bad you should wear something nice and comfy. You can borrow my sweater.” Dayvhe offers as you pull your jeans on.

“Alright yeah whatever.” you agree absently as you try to coordinate balancing enough to put socks on without sitting down. You used to just float for this but you probably shouldn’t do that when you’re trying to recuperate.

“Here!” Dayvhe says brightly and hands you the sweater. You pull it on and only when you look down at it do you see.

“Your sweater.” you repeat.

“Yep!” Dayvhe says brightly.

“Strange that it doesn’t have that nice curly arch of your sign. Strange that it’s all grey and is exactly Karkat’s sign instead.” you add.

“Well, you know what they say: finders keepers. You can’t deny it’s soft and comfortable though.” Dayvhe argues.

You knead at the thick wool a little. It’s all soft and broken in and the thick rolled neck of it smells like both of your quadrantmates when you pull it up close to your face. Dayvhe’s grin is positively evil.

“You didn’t pull this off of his sleeping body did you?” you ask and open the door to look at Karkat who is sprawled over the loungeplank with his head tipped back and snoring loudly.

“My ninja skills aren’t that good yet.” Dayvhe whispers. The word ‘yet’ in that sentence is terrifying to you and you just hope Dayvhe starts stealing from sleeping Karkat instead of sleeping you. You’re not sure if your moirail is technically ‘Chaotic Good’ or ‘Chaotic Neutral’ but he’s definitely chaotic.

“I was promised breakfast.” you say quietly and Dayvhe beams at you. He links his fingers with yours and pulls you quickly and quietly out of the room.

Roxxie’s sugar laden cereal is just as outlandish as Dayvhe promised. It tastes amazing of course, and it has popping candy in it somewhere which leaves the odd after effect of your mouth feeling weirdly gritty and occasionally crackling. As great as that is, although nutritionally questionable, it still leaves you wondering about Hal.

You head over to Dirkka’s lab where you’ve been helping out with constructing Hal lately and Dayvhe follows along entirely willingly. You’re not surprised to find Dirkka already there, or Roxxie lurking at his side. You are surprised to see Hal up and awake.

“Nice sweater.” Hal says when he sees you. His mouth moves now, something you worked out for him but he’s still not got the hang of doing it as he speaks. Watching him talk is like watching a movie where the audio is slightly out of sync to the picture.

“Thanks.” you reply, giving him no ground. Roxxie looks at you, her eyes going wide and you watch as her earfins tinge a darker shade of pink. Dirkka glances your way and you can basically
read the big neon banner of ‘oh not getting involved in that’ before he focuses on Hal again.

“Stop getting distracted, I’m trying to check your core temperature here and interacting with people could well be playing havoc with my readings.” Dirkka chides him.

“It will not, it’s a fission reactor. Talking to the world’s most scandalous nerd is hardly going to ding that, you’re just looking for an excuse to bitch at me.” Hal argues.

“That scandalous nerd was in here every night with me helping put you back together, you’re the reason you’re back in half the time. And Jayekh helped too so maybe you could be less of a pain in our collective asses, hm?” Dirkka snaps back.

“Wait, you helped build this body?” Hal asks in surprise. Surprise that he can emote better thanks to you.

“You’ve done enough work with mine, might as well pay you back. Besides you only got sucked outside because Aradia hacked me.” you point out.

“Not your fault.” Dayvhe interrupts. You hadn’t said it was, but fine.

“Thanks, I really appreciate it.” Hal says with a smile.

“So, have you found out what happened with Sawtooth and Squarewave yet?” you ask.

Dirkka sighs and disconnects Hal from the sensors that had been on him. You watch Hal’s face frown and then his jaw drops.

“They’re dead.” Hal whispers in horror.

“No, I hadn’t got to that yet. I’ll rebuild them Hal, I promise. And you have the backups from the bar, we just need to see what they saw. The whole area was swept by adults, they killed everyone.” Dirkka says and sympathetically pats Hal on the leg. Great, you managed to upset him. Of course it would, stupid.

Hal raises a hand, palm facing the wall. A panel suddenly goes black and flickers then comes alight, it’s a shot of the bar and from the height you’d guess that this is Squarewave’s view. Tables are already knocked over here and there in the bar and the younger trolls are all still alive. In his view are three adults.

“What the fuck? I know who they are!” Hal exclaims, pausing the footage.

“Yeah, I didn’t get the chance to tell you but that’s the guy who tried to kill us. Edward Norton.” Dirkka says, pointing the guy out.

“So him, Margot Robbie and GODDAMN IRON TROLL are behind this?!” Hal squawks in outrage. He’s right though, that’s Robert Downey standing there in the bar with a chainsaw hanging from a casual grip in his hand.

“Look, it’s a very simple question, all we want is the answers.” Downey says on screen.

“I- I don’t-” one kid whimpers.

“What happened to the bombed hive over there?! You all live here, I know you must know!” he snarls.

The hive. Dayvhe’s hive. They want to know about Dayvhe’s hive. You reach out and grab
Dayvhe’s hand as you watch.

“It got bombed!” one of the kids answers.

“By what? Drones? I’ve never seen drones do that.” Margot says suspiciously as she walks back and forth behind Downey. As she moves you catch the grey of her sign. She’s one of the biggest hemoanonymous celebrities around, Karkat had shown you pictures of her a while back. Honestly you’re a little surprised that she’s still alive.

“I saw.” one of the kids pipes up and instantly all focus is on her.

“There was, uh, a guy. He was older, bronze, had gills.” she says and Roxxie curses softly.

“And a girl, highblood, something blue I don’t remember. She- uh she had a metal arm and long hair. Then there was a guy, eight or nine maybe. My age. Yellow. I don’t know what they used but they did it. Then there was a ghost girl and a fight and that’s all I know!” she says in a rush.

That’s a lot of information, that’s a worryingly large amount of information. You flew so there’ll be no record of you on a train or anything, you’ll bet that Dirkka got a private scuttlebuggy so that he could eyeball his husktop as he travelled and you just have to hope that Vriska didn’t slum it and use any means of transport that’d get her on camera.

“Where did they do it from? Where did you see them?” Iron Troll guy demands.

“The back of troll denny’s.” the girl says.

“Security footage, get their faces and signs.” Edward Norton says with a nod.

A black shape drops from the ceiling and as it lands and roundhouse kicks Margot Robbie in the face you realise it’s Sawtooth, he was hiding in the ceiling somewhere. He lunges for the door in the confusion and he’s gone in a shot. Margot reels back, slapping a hand over her face but you catch the bright lime there. No wonder she’s anonymous!

“WILL!” she yells and rushes out after Sawtooth.

The footage pauses and Hal shakes his head.

“They decide that the trolls in the bar can’t be trusted to keep quiet and kill them, the gunfire startles Squarewave and they find him too. I’m changing to Sawtooth.” Hal says.

Yeah, you don’t need to see a group of adults kill a group of kids for no reason. You know they die, you saw them, you just don’t need to see it again.

The camera view shifts to Sawtooth’s vision as he blurs the scenery from how fast he’s moving. The tags on the corner of the screen indicate two people chasing him but Sawtooth is faster. He bursts through the doors of the troll denny’s, skids across the floor and vaults the counter. He kicks a back door open and throws himself at a husktop station and the small server stack next to it.

The words ‘SELF DESTRUCT’ flash across the feed for a moment before the video cuts and the wall returns to normal.

“So they don’t know who you are yet.” Hal concludes.

“The better question is why are a bunch of famous actors on Alternia murdering kids and trying to find out what happened to our old hive/ How do they all know each other anyway and what makes
them want to work together to go there?” Dirkka asks.

“Your ancestor, maybe?” Roxxie suggests.

“Maybe I’m being unfair in maligning Dionte, perhaps he is a social butterfly who befriends famous people and then sends them here to investigate our old hive and kill kids. Maybe he has the social pull to do that. But given that he’s exchanged about ten unique written words with us which basically comprise ‘try harder’ ‘would you like to play a game’ and then written out maniacal laughter I don’t think so.” Dirkka says.

“Yeah, besides whose plan escalates from trapped boxes with bombs and weapons in that require map following and hacking to locate in time to, like, siccing hollywood actors on us?” Dayvhe agrees.

“Well there has to be some connection. I’ll go enslave some husktops around the planet to do my research for me because if I was those guys I’d have set up alerts to tell me if anyone searched all of our names together.” Hal says firmly.

“Hey, actually before you do that could you look at my head first? I know someone’s been controlling me again, or trying.” you say. Roxxie and Dirkka share a look that you don’t want to think about, you’re not going to engage in the whole angst over whether people believe you or not.

“You think it’s Aradia? Dirkka filled me in about everything with her.” Hal says and moves aside so there’s room for you on the table he was on before. You suppose you should sit in case you fall or something.

“I don’t know. I don’t think so but…” you shrug and hop up on the table.

Hal makes an uncertain noise and slowly reaches for your head. His fingers touch your ports and you feel that odd sensation of him interfacing with the tech in your head. Knowing that it’s him makes it less distressing but you’re still not going to be doing this recreationally.

“I could feel it when you were being made to hallucinate but there’s nothing like that now.” Hal explains.

“No, it’s not happening now. But it was, can’t you see whether it was or not?” you ask hopefully but Hal lets you go and shakes his head.

“Not as far as I know. Things like that don’t really leave a lasting mark on your actual neural physiology. But, that said, if I could catch that in the process of happening I might be able to work out if there is some change. All I can tell you is right now the only one in control of your head is you.” Hal explains sympathetically.

“Great.” you mutter.

“Hey, I’m not saying it didn’t happen. It could be someone trying to control you, some cerulean trying their luck. Or it could be a purpleblood chucklevoodooing you as you passed them on the street. Alternatively it could be a very specific kind of flashback which would be out of your control and feel real and that could be triggered by anything, a sound, a smell, anything. You’re not making it up, I just don’t have diagnostic tools capable of finding the answer. If it happens again, call me and I’ll be able to do more.” Hal says seriously.

You feel a little better at least. Not a lot, you’d be happier with an actual answer but you have an explanation for why you don’t and a plan for the future. Second best option, really. You thank Hal and get off of his table and leave the room with Dayvhe, as you go you can hear him talking to
Dirkka about trying to remove his gills before his moult gets too bad.

“I need to figure out who’s even here right now and tell everyone about our celebrity assassins. Want to come with?” Dayvhe offers, squeezing your hand.

“Pass, don’t need to hear the night recounted thanks.” you decline.

“You don’t want to hear my celebrity impressions? What if I only recall the whole thing through the medium of slam poetry?” Dayvhe asks teasingly though you’re not sure he’s joking. He probably would do just that if you wanted him to. Or if you didn’t want him to, the little shit.

“Pass, still. Though if you do that to KK film it, he has the best reactions.” you snicker.

“He really does.” Dayvhe says wistfully and you can all but see the fluttery little spades around him as he thinks of Karkat. What a pair of losers, you love them terribly.

“Go on then.” you say and shove him away with your hand.

Dayvhe goes with a sarcastic little salute and you wander off to the wizard bowl instead of going back to your block. You take the time to peer out into the dark water looking for Aradia’s ship that’s long since fucked off to parts unknown, chased by Roxxie’s mom. Seeing nothing out there of interest you slide down the glass and open up your husktop.

That’s where you are when Karkat walks in a few hours later. Really, the curved glass does wonders for amplifying his shriek of scandalised outrage at your clothing.

Chapter End Notes

Can I just say that I’ve really been digging reading everyone’s reactions and theories. The theories especially because dang a few of you are onto me!
Hot Mess - Cobra Starship

“Well, you’re a hot mess and I’m falling for you
And I’m like hot damn, let me make you my boo
Cause you can shake it shake it shake it
Yeah you know what to do
You’re a hot mess, I’m loving it, hell yes”

Frequent contender on both flush and pale playlists

Your trollian pings with a message from someone you’ve never heard from before, though it’s plain to see who it is. Actually you feel a little guilty for not wondering about him more.

Squarewave began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

Squarewave: YO DAWGG!
TA: ii... have 2o many que2tiion2 about thii2. how are you even trolliing me wiithout a troll handle?
Squarewave: IT’S ME SQUAREWAVE!
TA: ii worked that out my2elf, thank2.
TA: ii diiindn't think you’d 2tiill be awake wiith your body de2troyed. hal mentiioned 2omethiing about your backup2 when ii a2ked if he needed help wiith makiing hii2 2econd body.
Squarewave: JUST BECAUSE I DON’T GOT A BODY RIGHT NOW DOESN’T MEAN I’M NOT STILL KICKING IT.
TA: ii gue22 2o. ii ju2t a22umed becau2e hal turned hiim2elf off you two would two.
Squarewave: NAW HAL FREAKS OUT SOMETHING CHRONIC BUT WE’RE COOL.
TA: oh. well that2 good two hear, ii gue22.
Squarewave: SAWTOOTH SAYS THOSE FOOLS WERE AFTER THE HIVE YOU BOMBED SO REALLY YOU OUGHTA LET ME SCHOOL YOU IN A SLAM POETRY JAM TO MAKE UP FOR IT.
Squarewave: I’LL RUDELY HUMILIATE YOU WILL ILL RHYMES TO EVEN THE SCORE.
TA: not that ii don't feel bad about what ii diid in2direetiely leadiing two you lo2iing your bodiie2 becau2e ii do feel bad. but 2lam poetry ii2n't really my thiing at all.
Squarewave: THEN MAKE IT YOUR THING, IT’S THE BEST THING!
TA: 2orry, ii'll pa22.
Squarewave: YOU SHALL NOT PASS!
TA: are you quotiing moviie2 now?
Squarewave: IF THAT’S WHAT IT TAKES. BESIDES YOUR EXCUSES ARE AS WHACK AS I’M A DUDE MADE OUT OF METAL.
TA: what?
Squarewave: SIT YOUR ASS BACK DOWN WE’VE GOT SHIT TO SETTLE.
TA: oh god that rhymed, iit2 happening already ii2n't iit?
Squarewave: YOU KNOW THAT IT’S HAPPENING MY RHYMES WILL GET IN YOUR HEAD LIKE WE TREPPANING!
TA: my pronunciatiion might be perpetually mangled but iim 2ure that 'happeniiing' and 'treppaniing' only look like they rhyme. ii'm al2o not 2ure you 2pelt that right.
Squarewave: SO SELF RIGHTEOUS ABOUT WHAT’S RIGHT WELL YOU AND ME ARE GONNA HAVE A FIGHT.
TA: oh god 2top
Squarewave: WITH YOUR S’S ARE 2’S I’M GONNA HAVE TO SCHOOL YOU TWICE. YOU’RE GONNA FLAIL, GONNA HAVE TO HOP WHEN I PULL THE RUG OUT FROM UNDER YOU CAUSE IT DON’T STOP!
TA: ii'm 2tartiing two thiink beiing tortured wa2n't a2 bad a2 thii2.

Squarewave keeps on going and even with you ignoring him it seems he’s happy to keep sending message after message, playing off of his own rhymes and you suspect he could do it all night. You tab out of trollian and open up your browser and gogrele ‘words that nothing rhymes with’

TA: 2iiilver
av: OH YOU’RE FINALLY BACK AND READY FOR ROUND TWO?
TA: orange, purple, marathon.
av: HEY THAT’S NOT FAIR.
TA: Hey, I said I didn’t want to do it.
av: YEAH AND YOU’RE TRYING TO INTERRUPT THE FLOW OF THE MAD RYHMES I SPIT!

Oh god, more rhymes. Fine, don’t give him anything rhymeable.

TA: dii2combobulate
av: AW!
TA: dangerou2
av: FINE. I’LL GO. YOU WIN.

Squarewave ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

Ah, shit, you actually feel a little bit guilty now. Maybe you can research a way to teach him better rhyming abilities, you doubt Dayvhe would be stopped by you just listing words like that at him if he was really intent on slamming that poetry to the ground.

You wander out of your room and into Dayvhe’s. Dayvhe is kneeling on the floor amidst a bunch of his music tech and Karkat is in the corner on the pushed away desk chair, his feet are up on the chair and his book is resting against his knees which are basically at chin height as he reads. His face is so close into the book and you can hear emotional sniffling coming from behind the pages.

“Squarewave just challenged me to a slam poetry match and wouldn’t leave me alone.” you announce and Dayvhe looks up from the cable he’s coiling around his hand.

“He shouldn’t be able to- oh, wait, you’re on the local network so he can. Sorry man. Just be glad it was Squarewave and not Sawtooth, even I can’t beat that guy.” Dayvhe says, though the glint in his eye suggests that one day he will.

“I had to cheat to get him to leave me alone.” you explain and close the door behind you.

“How’d you cheat?” he asks, still winding cable.

“Used words that don’t have rhymes.” you answer and sit down in front of Dayvhe’s stuff.

“Ah, yeah he’s easy to beat with shit like that. You wouldn’t get me that way, that’s what slant rhymes are for.” Dayvhe says with a wicked grin.

You smile and nod like you know what he’s talking about. He probably does the same with your coding when it gets to complex, return the favour already.

“I feel kind of bad about it.” you admit.

“Don’t, he only makes you feel guilty to make you want to go another round with him again. Trust me on that.” Dayvhe insists. You suppose he’d know but you still feel feel bad.
There’s a melodramatic sniff from behind the book and a whispered ‘just TELL her already you shit’. You’re definitely not interrupting Karkat from that, it’s cause for him to throw the book at your face with enough force to break it if you try.

“What’re you doing?” you ask Dayvhe instead, gesturing to all the stuff.

“So a buddy of mine and his band are doing a gig tonight and because I’ve been, like, doing some sound mixing for them on the side they want me to come and perform with them and jam my electronic music into their brass and percussion deal. We’ve tried mashing up before online and it sounds rad so I’m just getting all my shit together for it.” he explains. He sets the coil of wire to the side next to a plastic panel of buttons, then he shifts his focus to untangling some headphone wires.

“I was actually hoping you might come with? Rohhze, Jayded and John are all going and Terezi even said she’d come. Maybe Kanaya too. I asked Karkat but he said that he’d stay wherever you are. It could be nice to go out and do a normal thing and there’d be people there you know who could bail you out if you got freaked when I was on stage and couldn’t help, but I get it if you want to stay here.” Dayvhe mumbles.

“Like I’d miss a chance to hear your music.” you say.

Dayvhe smiles and it makes up for the uncertain feeling in your gut. You were never one for clubs or concerts or anything. Too many people, too many chances to hear the voices of the imminently dead. Besides why see someone in person when you can listen to their stuff online? Only with Dayvhe you really want to see him doing something he’s great at and getting more appreciation than he does when he’s just playing on the street for money. Besides, even if you don’t feel normal yet you can still pretend you are. Fake it until you make it or whatever.

You step carefully over his things and fold yourself down onto a spot on the floor. Dayvhe has returned to quietly mumbling to himself as he sorts through his things. It’s a pretty decent angle to watch him from as he reaches about to all of his separate stacks of equipment. He’s still just as pretty to you as he was when you first met him, though goodness knows what he ever saw in you. But it’s weirdly nostalgic just admiring him from afar like this.

You glance at Karkat, he’s still sniffnode deep into his book and Dayvhe is rifling through stacks of things to get to what he wants. You shift a little so you’re behind Dayvhe.

“Hey.” you say.

“Mmm?” Dayvhe hums but doesn’t look around.

You sigh dramatically but neither Dayvhe nor Karkat drops what they’re doing to pay attention to you. You like that they don’t treat you like you’re made of glass and aside from respecting the basic rules of touching you that you’ve all settled into they treat you basically the same as ever. Unless you’re currently losing your shit, then it’s different. But you’re not currently losing your shit, which is good. But also you’re bored.

You kneel up and drape yourself over Dayvhe’s back.

“Dayvheeeeee.” you whine.

“Hi man, can I help you or are you just going to sprawl on me like that?” Dayvhe asks, still sorting through his stuff.

“Maybe I want to sprawl on you. Maybe I’m keeping you warm.” you suggest and wrap your arms around his middle.
"I’m warmer than you are, dude!" Dayvhe laughs and that’s a nice thing to feel reverberating through his back. Well, maybe you are a degree cooler than him but barely. But if he’s got an issue with you sneaking a hand under his shirt he doesn’t protest, though the startled noise is most likely from you doing that at all not you being cold.

He’s got all kinds of scars that you know decently well by sight now but you can always find the one that you gave him, trying to save his life. It’s raised still but it’s smooth. Plus he’s alive to have it so you didn’t do that bad of a job. You can feel and hear the purr starting in his chest. Like a motor that takes a few tries to get going.

"Hey." he says gently and reaches back and curls his hand around the back of your neck softly.

Turning your face into his palm and wrist is the thing that gets that purr going full speed. It’s funny, you’ve wondered before about quadrants. Trust is something that overlaps through all of them but it’s just shown in different ways. This couldn’t be pitch, not even by your weird ass quadrant dynamics. This isn’t you putting your mouth of very sharp fangs right by vital arteries and veins as a show that you could kill him and he’s only alive by your mercy because he entertains you, that threatening one up kind of trust of a kismesis. It’s more like you would never, you’d rather die than do that to him and he couldn’t even consider you hurting him like that so he trusts you with it unthinkingly. That’s an easy enough distinction.

What about red, though? Does Karkat do exactly this? You’re trying not to imagine that so you just go ahead and pull him back with you, away from the work he was doing. Dayvhe twists as you shift back to sitting so instead he’s side on in your lap.

"You got something against organised equipment or did you just desperately need attention, huh?" Dayvhe asks, shooting for teasing but the purr and slightly wide eyed look kind of undercuts any real sense of interrogation there.

"The second thing." you say and kiss his throat. Well, you’re not bored now.

It’s funny, Dayvhe is putty in your arms right now and you know for a fact that past you would have just died of delighted disbelief that this could ever happen to him.

"Of course it’s the second thing." Dayvhe snickers and loops his arms around your neck. He’s not wearing his shades, he barely does in Roxxie’s hive. Not that you don’t like his shades but it’s always nice to see all of his expression. You wouldn’t want him to give them up though, the complete deadpan he can get with them that drives people crazy is just FAR too fun to watch.

You’re not sure, you think you might kiss Dayvhe. He’s so close to you it’d be no effort at all to-

The sound of a book hitting the floor makes you pull back and look around. Karkat is scrambling to pick up his dropped tome of romantic smut and you somehow don’t think that the darkness of his face has anything to do with whatever titillating thing he may have been reading.

“Oh fuck, shitting- of COURSE.” Karkat curses himself under his breath. You know, normal talking volume for everyone else.

“I don’t think you two, ah, need me. I’ll just. Yeah.” Karkat blurts out, standing up with his book in hand.

Hm, you suppose you technically don’t. You’re entirely comfortable here, it’s a good night for you mentally and Dayvhe is clearly happy where he is. Karkat’s deal was supposed to be helping you two not make things worse for each other under the weight of your combined synchronised fail. That
was the arrangement.

You don’t think what you’ve been doing lately has been under that. He didn’t need to stay sleeping with you those times lately, he may lack ninja skills but you were way beyond chill then. If he’d just got up and gone, figuring this was moirail time and you had this under control, then he totally could have. But he didn’t.

Karkat scuttles back out of range of you both, head ducked and book clutched to his chest. It’s not like he did anything wrong, he was already here when you came in and were all like ‘HEY PITY ME ALREADY’. So yeah, he’s backing off.

Dayvhe glances at you. See, the cool thing about being a psionic is that your range is outrageous and Karkat is certainly not out of yours or even Dayvhe’s. Your nubby horned joint favourite mutant screeches as he’s propelled through the air to land in a graceless heap. Excellent. You drape the boneless form of Dayvhe over him and tilt your head to admire the confused rage that your handiwork has wrought.

“Going somewhere?” you ask.

“You don’t need—” Karkat starts, just as you thought he would.

“No more dumbassery out of you, only kisses now.” Dayvhe agrees and slaps his hand over Karkat’s mouth.

“For who?” you ask, though you suspect the answer is ‘everyone’. Dayvhe makes a pitying noise and leans over to actually kiss you, even though that basically leaves him sitting on Karkat’s chest.

Still, you’re not one to turn down a real kiss from your moirail. It’s good. He kisses you all gently, somehow jams all this feeling into it like he’s trying to undo every injury, bandage every inch of suffering you’ve had, wind back time on it somehow. You remember when you were really little your lusus would kiss things better for you, mainly because you were still getting the hang of power no kid that small should have and dropped things on yourself a lot. It’s obviously wildly different, but the whole concept of it hurts so you kiss it better is shared. Dayvhe kisses you like he’s trying to right a universal wrong.

“AUGH!” Dayvhe jerks back from you and snatches his hand away from Karkat’s face.

“I’m PERFORMING tonight you utter fuck! You can’t just BITE me!” Dayvhe snarls, cradling one hand to his chest and grabbing horn and hair in one handful and shoving back. It tips Karkat’s head backwards and his posture pole up to the point that Dayvhe’s sitting on him is an arch of trying not to get his hair pulled out.

Holy shit you’ve never seen them do more than needle at each other. You don’t- it’s not that you didn’t know about it but seeing it is another thing. And you know that if Karkat had a REAL problem with this the air would be blue for all the cursing and threats, they don’t need intervention but you also know this is something over nothing and the two of you had clearly been planning on playing nice with Karkat until this.

“Let me see.” you say gently and take the hand that Karkat bit. Running your fingers over his you can see that it’s not even broken the skin, probably hurt though.

“Your fucking fault!” Karkat snaps at Dayvhe.

“It isn’t!” Dayvhe shoots back.
“You stuck your prongs in my mouth they get bit, that’s just fair!” Karkat insists and tries to knee Dayvhe in the back.

“OVER your mouth. They were over your mouth you feral loser!” Dayvhe says. You peer at the bite marks all away around his fingers, little dents that’ll be gone in no time.

“I think they were in his mouth actually, look.” you say and hold up Dayvhe’s hand so he can see it himself.

“But-” Dayvhe begins.

“HAH! Even your own moirail is on my side, see?” Karkat crows.

“You shut up too, you didn’t need to bite him.” you say disapprovingly.

Hey, this is actual ash. Good job between the three of you all four quadrants have been hit and that bonus whatever one that you’re in with Karkat. Bingo, full house.

“Don’t see how it happened anyhow.” Dayvhe mumbles sullenly.

“Maybe you were distracted.” you say with a sly smile and the pleased little smile in response on Dayvhe’s face tells you all you need to know.

“Yeah sucking face with each other and I don’t need to be here.” you point out and Karkat’s face shifts fully into guilt. Ugh, moron.

You lean forward and with a careful glance at Dayvhe who seems to have miraculously forgotten his bitten fingers which likely didn’t hurt that bad in favour of instead watching the two of you as keenly as a murder fuelled featherbeast.

“Not that I don’t appreciate the help, things are way better now than when I first got back and…” you pause and shake yourself off because you really don’t want to think about how bad things were when they first rescued you.

“Shoosh.” Dayvhe says softly and pets your leg consolingly.

You continue on.

“But you’ve been my best friend since basically forever and you’ve been crazy for him since you first shot grey all caps into his screen. But I go and get myself all fucked up and you. And.” you squeeze your eyes shut for a second or two.

“Sollux you don’t need to talk about it.” Karkat says worriedly and you hear the shift of Dayvhe moving back so Karkat can reach you. Hah, you knew that if Karkat had actually needed to get up Dayvhe would have let him. But it’s fine, you can talk about this, you’re not going into the bad shit.

“No, shut up. You came to us and made this crazy goddamn offer and you must have known that it
could have gone bad and maybe we really wouldn’t have been friends any more or it could have
tanked your thing with Dayvhe who is basically the only person you can pail anyway unless you
find someone who’s really cool with mutants and you did that for us.” you say.

“Pretty pitiful, man.” Dayvhe agrees, leaning back so he’s resting his back on Karkat’s raised knees.

“You don’t have to go. If you want to that’s fine.” you say. It’s probably not you’ll probably actually
feel like you’re screwing things up if he does but you don’t say that.

“Do you even have any idea what you’re doing?” Karkat demands, sitting up. Or getting as close to
sitting up as someone can with Dayvhe casually slouched on their hips like a fancy chaise lounge.

“I usually don’t.” you point out.

Karkat looks like he wants to smack you upside the head and maybe Dayvhe too for good measure.
You’re damn sure that his book has nothing like this in it. The thing is that he’s been your best friend
forever and you wouldn’t have stayed that close if you didn’t like him, if his weirdness didn’t gel
with yours. On paper he could have been a match for any of your quadrants really but in practice it
was just… nah. Technically you still don’t want him in a quadrant, quadrants are four and your thing
isn’t that. The downside is there’s no obvious ‘you may only feel and do these things for your X’ laid
out for you. You want this whatever and he is that, you just need to work out the shape of that
relationship. You also don’t want it to go away.

Maybe he’s as good at reading you as you are with him, it’d make sense. You’ve known each other
a long time. You don’t flinch when his hand comes up and curls around the side of your neck. His
thumb ends up at the place where your jaw hinges and if he shifts just so he can probably feel every
thud of yellow through your artery.

“This was already a crazy idea, interfering like this. Just making something up and hoping everything
doesn’t go to hell. You two idiots are just acting like messing with it more is a good idea and I know
I’ve not been helping, I should have gone, you’re right.” Karkat says hurriedly.

“That was some spectacular point missing there.” Dayvhe snorts.

“Can’t we just do whatever we want?” you ask hopefully.

“Oh like THAT’S not a recipe for disaster!” Karkat shouts.

“Then don’t, if that’s what you really want.” Dayvhe says all casually. You look over and though his
pose is casual his expression is devious, he catches your eye and raises one eyebrow at you. Oh.

OH.

You take your attention off of Dayvhe and instead turn into Karkat’s hand instead. You’d been
wondering if Karkat and Dayvhe do this but you guess you just got the people wrong in that
question. Karkat absolutely can get up and go right now if he wants. You and Dayvhe have the
psionic powers to kick his ass but in sheer amount of stuff he can lift Karkat is by far the strongest of
you. You’ve seen Dayvhe fight, it’s all agility and precision. If Karkat WANTS to go he can pull his
hand away from you and turf Dayvhe off onto the floor and be gone.

With that in mind you kiss the inside of Karkat’s wrist because you’d never hurt him either. He
doesn’t yank his hand away but does make a noise that suggested he came very close to choking.
You’re not getting shoved off and you’re being very good and not laughing at the bug eyed look of
shock on Karkat’s face. Hm, speaking of Karkat’s face…
You shuffle in a little closer and Karkat has neither flipped out and Dayvhe isn’t flipping his shit and saying you totally misinterpreted that raised eyebrow. You think you probably got it just right. Maybe there’s a measurement, this high is ‘yeah totally kiss that cute troll’ and a little higher is more of a generic ‘oh really?’.

God, you are neither Dayvhe nor Karkat you should not be this tangent filled. But, well, you’re a little nervous. Karkat kissed you before sort of but not like what you had with Dayvhe just before. Or what you’ll hopefully have now.

“Doing what I want.” you mumble to yourself, to him, who knows.

You give him time, loads of time, to get away. But he doesn’t. And then you’re… well, not quite kissing him because that’s really more of a two person activity and you think Karkat’s thinksponge has fallen out. You’re about to abandon the whole thing when Karkat seems to come back online and decides that he’s into this. Either that or he’s trying to knock your teeth out because, ow. Minor starting setbacks aside you really had thought you’d be leading this kiss since you started it but nope, that’s not what’s happening.

Karkat is, you guess, trying to recreate some kiss from the cover of his books because he’s wrapped his arm around your back and pulled you closer. You think if you weren’t all sitting down he might even try to dip you, the outrageously over the top dork that he is. The other obvious thing is that just because you’ve never kissed each other really doesn’t mean he’s never kissed anyone. You guess he’s been getting a tonne of practice in with Dayvhe because, oh wow.

It’s not like kissing Dayvhe though, not sweet and pale where you just know Dayvhe wants to make things better for you. This is more like… well it is still sort of pale, ish. Maybe. Given that you can consider someone playing some kind of capture the flag game and jamming said flag into your torso and setting up to fight any other fucker that comes near kind of possessiveness to be pale. It’s that and it’s a kind of ‘you useless disaster get over here’ that’s all red and a sort of ‘yeah I see you and raise you’ that’s pitch and the fact that Dayvhe is there means you may as well chuck ash into that. Karkat kisses like a cross quadrant tornado that just blew through and killed thousands, destroyed your hive and left you standing there wondering what the fuck.

He lets you go. What the fuck. No wonder Dayvhe likes him so much.

“Swoon.” Dayvhe adds helpfully from the side and you’re not sure his expression could be any more smug.


“Oh, shut it.” Karkat grumbles but you see that smile on his face, you know what he’s about.

Needless to say it becomes pretty easy to pass the time until you all have to go out to Dayvhe’s thing, if he keeps getting distracted for sloppy interquadrant makeouts that’s hardly your fault now is it? Rohhze and Kanaya are already here to come along with you, having come down for the free ride courtesy of Roxxie. Roxxie who is standing there interrogating Rohhze in the friendliest of manners as to where you’re going.

“Is it a party? I love parties and Dayvhe never tells me where he’s going anymore.” Roxxie whines.

“It’s not like you’d come anyway, you have to look after Dirkka who’s a hot second away from gluing himself to a wall and melting his skin off or something.” Dayvhe says.

“Gross, Dayvhe.” Karkat sighs.
“No, I mean he’s right. But I used to take you all kinds of places when you were little, Dayvie.” Roxxie says wistfully and you watch Dayvhe wince at the pet name. You are very good and don’t laugh at him.

“Yeah but you tend to freak people out and also I’m playing an actual gig with people I’m not bringing my mom to watch!” he says loudly. Roxxie lights up enough that you could almost mistake her for Kanaya.

“You called her mom again.” you stage whisper.

“NO I DIDN’T WE’RE LEAVING BYE ROXXIE.” Dayvhe says loudly and marches off into the pod to leave the underwater hive.

The rest of you follow after him and there’s a pause for a moment or two before Rohhze simply has to speak in only the most smug of tones.

“I’m sure it’s perfectly fine that you treat her like your lusus, but it’s very psychologically interesting wouldn’t you say?” Rohhze says slyly.

“Imma rip out your posture pole and set it on fire.” Dayvhe hisses at her.

“Karkat, you’re such a bad influence on him.” Rohhze tuts.

“I’m so very proud.” Karkat says as he wipes away a fake tear.

The ride to the club is less interrogative and you’re happy to listen to Kanaya talk about her new project, she has enough pictures on her palmhusk for you to be able to ask questions even if you know basically nothing about how clothes are made. Rohhze chips in with comments on all the hats she’s made you and Kanaya admires her work. Before you know it you’re there. Getting in is no problem when you’re with Dayvhe and you’re hanging back as he fistbumps a vaguely familiar guy in the dark of the club, he’s waving goodbye to you when you nearly have an incident.

The whole no touching that you don’t expect rule is pretty basic, even for people not versed in your strange rule of escalation method. So when you’re jump tackled from behind you damn near launch your assailant into the fucking stratosphere. Or at least you do until you get your face licked. Either some stray barkbeast got in this club or…

“Fucking hell TZ don’t do that, you’ll blow my bloodpusher up.” you say, turning your head to look at her from where she’s dangling on your shoulders.

“But I haven’t seen you in so long.” Terezi complains and lets go.

“You haven’t seen me in a long time.” you point out.

“Ahaha, too true!” Terezi cackles.

Of course, wherever Terezi goes Vriska is seldom far behind. Dayvhe might not be there to give her the evil eye but Karkat certainly looks wary as she walks up to you all.

“Vriska, hey.” you greet her.

“That’s the nicest you’ve sounded to me in ages.” Vriska says, sounding surprised.

“Yeah, well. I’m not mad at you anymore, honestly I should probably fucking thank you.” you say, adding that last part bitterly with the memory of Aradia in your mind. Vriska is staring at you in wide
eyed shock, the expression so exaggerated as to tug on the burn scars over her cheek. These nights you can hardly tell her cyborg eye from her real one, Equius got good at details over the sweeps. You suppose with Aradia blowing up the bots all the time he had practice.

“Actually, I have a question about your mind control.” you say as the thought steals over you.

“I haven’t done anything.” she replies defensively.

“Didn’t say you had. You can control someone from a distance when you know them, like me. But what if they’re dead?” you ask.

“I can’t control Aradia’s ghost if that’s what you’re asking, or her bots. You need a real thinksponge for it to work.” Vriska says. Oh, she’s definitely tried.

“What about if she’s possessing a ship, a ship that has enough organic components in it that she feels alive again?” you ask.

“Sollux…” Karkat says warningly, like he doesn’t agree with where this is heading.

“Maaaaaaaybe? I’m not sure. Why do you want to know?” Vriska asks.

“Because that’s where she is right now, and if you felt like controlling her into flying into a cliff and blowing up or flinging her into the sun I’d thank you for it, honestly.” you hiss.

“Wait, what?” Terezi splutters.

“You know I got tortured, right?” you say. They both nod. Yeah, Dayvhe asked lots of people to help find you and even though you doubt he asked Vriska it’s a fact of life that people talk.

“You also remember that spooky knowing the future thing Aradia used to do? Like something would happen and she’d just be all ‘it was always going to be that way’ about it?” you ask.

“Ugh, yes! It was so goddamn frustrating! We’d, like, beat her and then she’d act like it was fate and nothing to do with us!” Vriska sneers and flicks her hair over her shoulder.

“Yeah, well she knew about me getting captured and let it happen when she could have stopped it. And you know what the worst bit is? You know what they did?” you say with your words getting faster the angrier you get.

“Sollux, public place remember?” Karkat hisses at you.

He has a point. You step closer to Vriska, duck your head a little and with your hand shielding it from view to anyone else you pull your hat up a little. Enough to expose a port at least. When Vriska’s jaw drops you pull your hat back in place and step away.

“There’s a line of people who want to kill her but if you want to join it I certainly wouldn’t stop you.” you tell her.

“She helmed you?” Vriska whispers in horror.

“That’s just- look I felt bad for using you to get to her but condemning you to that…” Vriska winces, looks like you’ve struck a rare patch of empathy with her.

“All so she could control me into walking into her ship so she could plug me in to use as her battery, yeah.” you add.
"God. Fuck that bitch, if I see her I’ll kill her for you. You know what? I’m buying you a drink, stay here.” Vriska announces and saunters off.

“That’s a rough break Sollux, I’m sorry.” Terezi says with a gentle pat to your arm.

“I have entirely lost track of this sweep, I couldn’t have predicted a single thing that happened. Dayvhe, you, everything with that, and now you and Vriska actually burying the hatchet.” Karkat says, sounding lost.

“In Aradia, if I get the chance.” you say cheerfully just as Vriska comes back with drinks.

“Well here’s to that.” she says, pushing one in your hand. It’s bright red and in a small glass. She clinks hers against yours and both of you drink at once. Sweet and spice explode on your tongue and you realise that drink was probably highblood expensive, expensive enough that you’d never buy one and you just wasted the experience by downing it in one.

Still, if it seals ending a feud then you’re ok with that. Karkat is still looking at you both with bewilderment on his face. But you’ll accept his point, things have been strange this sweep or rather this half sweep.

The music across the room changes but it’s not Dayvhe playing so you’re not really paying much attention, it’s some other band and they’re nice enough but pretty much all of your friends are in one place. People shift about so it’s Rohhze over there pitchflirting with Vriska on one side and over on the other Terezi and John are snarking at each other dramatically. You’re fine, though. You’re sat on the plush little chair thing, it’s not a loungeplank because it’s too small. It’s like it’s made for just two people or three if they really really like each other. Karkat has his arm around your middle as he talks animatedly with Jayded and his body is separating you from the rest of the club. You don’t have to worry about strangers freaking you out because Karkat is in the way.

You’re not oblivious, though. You know the kind of looks your friends are giving you, wondering if you’ve stolen Dayvhe’s flush or if the more scandalous rumours are true about quadrant swapping or hopping or who knows what. The confusion is endlessly amusing to you though so you do nothing to illuminate the situation.

Karkat’s thumb is slowly rubbing along your grubscar on your left when you catch the band leaving and other people coming onstage. Your breath hitches seeing Dayvhe up there and you shoot up onto your knees so you can see him better. A vaguely familiar guy comes up to the mic and people across the room cheer, there’s a couple of others on stage, all rusts and bronzes.

“Hello! We are Too Many Bluez! And this is our friend Dayvhe-” the guy says and there’s an embarrassingly loud cheer from your table. Seriously you think John damaged your hearing there.

“-he’s doing something that we don’t do much, actual electronic music! Mainly because he’s the only guy who’s any damn good at it!” the guy at the mic laughs and you can see Dayvhe laugh even if he’s too far away for you to hear it.

“We should get out there.” you say urgently to Karkat.

“But people and you isn’t a good idea.” Karkat counters.

“But I want to see him and he should see us supporting him.” you say but Karkat just looks uncertain and unconvinced.

“You just don’t like the idea that you might have to dance.” you say suspiciously.
“You’ve got me there.” Karkat laughs like he thinks you’re not going to drag him out there regardless. But Karkat is a dumbass and you’re doing exactly that. It’s not like you’re the only one getting up either so you in a vague cloud of friends that make you feel better as you venture out.

The band has already started up playing and you can see Dayvhe hard at work. The band themselves have a drummer who is going hell for leather on that drum, a trumpet player and another playing a thing that you think is also a trumpet but looks a little different, the guy who was on the mic is playing a saxophone. They are REALLY loud and you get why Terezi is hanging back near your table and seats, she’s not got enough senses to numb one safely.

As Dayvhe works you see that he’s got something around his neck, you remember him packing it and telling you that it interfaced with patterns on his music program. Something about vocal access to samples so he could play it with his voice. Your understanding of it is a little hazy because Dayvhe didn’t get too detailed and explanation in before Karkat basically draped himself over the guy and you both made it your mission to distract Dayvhe.

Dayvhe looks over at you and you catch the quick flash of a smile, his fangs glowing white under the stage lights. His hands come up away from his husktop and you see his mouth open. It’s not his voice, not really, but somehow it is. Some layer in his sound samples is him, you’re sure of it. You can feel the Dayvheness of it all resonating in your blood like flicking a glass to hear it ring.

A thrill of… well, joy just runs through you. You’re so super pale for him, just seeing how good he is at what he does just makes you happy to your core. Logically it’s just music, there’s nothing magical or special about it. It’s just Dayvhe’s and you love it.

For all his recalcitrance Karkat is suddenly very willing to dance with you. Neither of you are great dancers, you will admit that. But despite that it’s fun. It’s stupid, dumb, fun with the quadrantmate that you can’t even really put in a proper quadrant but also couldn’t care about that. It’s like all you want is to have a good time right now because goodness knows you need a good time. The feeling is electric, everyone is smiling and laughing around you as they dance and the floor is heaving with people. Karkat kisses your face, making both of you laugh like morons.

Eventually all things end and the band leaves the stage and because they’re not the last band of the night the crowd can’t drag them back for an encore despite chanting for one. Your group bumps back into each other and coalesces as you head back to your camped out area of the club. You end up sitting on the back of the not loungeplank thing as Rohhze and Kanaya ganked it from under you, but it’s fine Karkat is standing as he talks to you. He’s practically bouncing.

“Do you think we should have recorded it somehow?” Karkat asks excitedly.

“Maybe we just need to convince him to perform again and we’ll record that one.” you suggest.

“It’s YOU.” comes a voice from off to the side.

You look over to see an angry, snooty, hipster looking guy. It’s only when he comes closer and you clock the lime on his sign that you remember who is is. You literally only know two limes and they’re both here right now.

“Oh, it’s you that one guy from the store.” you say vaguely as the enthusiasm drains from you.

“I have a name!” he hisses.

“Did you tell me it because literally forgot you existed until now.” you tell him.

“Who’s this asshole?” Karkat asks, clearly picking up your dislike for him.
“He runs some music store or whatever. He was a sack of globes to me and Dayvhe dropped him like those beats he can supposedly barely keep aloft. This was when he got me sick.” you explain. Really the whole possibly getting void rot thing was more on your mind at the time, not hipster what’s his face.

“My name is Jaydee and I had a perfectly good relationship with Dayvhe until you ruined everything!” the guy snaps at you. You valiantly manage not to laugh as John hums the tune to ‘another one bites the dust’ under his breath.

“What, you like Dayvhe pale? Hah, he’s very taken.” Karkat scoffs. Is he ever, this guy doesn’t know the half of it.

“He and I had something special, until you ruined it!” Jaydee snarls.

“I think if Sollux merely existing is enough to ruin your ‘connection’ with Dayvhe then it was not that special in the first place.” Kanaya interjects which is a sick burn. Also partially a sick burn on you, ouch Kanaya.

“And it’s not like he ever mentioned you before. Or since.” you add.

“Yeah well I saw you two. You’re supposed to be his moirail and he deserves way better than you. I saw you two, that was pale, you’re cheating on him!” he accuses you both.

You can physically feel the weight of all of your friends looking over like ‘oh please do explain this thing we are also curious about but too polite to ask about’. Or maybe not all of them because Rohhze stands up and leans past where Vriska is sat to get in Jaydee’s face.

“You’re stalking my friends? Watching them dance? Tell me, did Dayvhe invite you here or did you choose to come here on your own in some foolhardy fantasy of reconciliation? Are you stalking Dayvhe?” she asks, her voice as cold as her blood.

You see him notice the gills, the ear fins, the caste of her sign. You don’t get much richer than her around and that’s enough to make anyone wary. Even without the chucklevoodooos you know she’s packing too.

“I- it’s not- it’s just a misunderstanding, I can prove it. And they shouldn’t-” the guy stammers out.

Rohhze snatches a fistful of lime sign and reels him in. Chucklevoodooos are often a broad affecting thing, aimed to fuck up everyone in an area but they can be targeted to one person. Rohhze has always been a fan of sharp pointed things after all. You can’t feel the voodoos but you can… hear the way they fuck with her speech. The way Gamzee’s voice used to seesaw in volume and bass, it’s like a danger noodle rattle, an angry wasp buzz too close to the ear.

“If you ever come near Dayvhe or any of us again I’m going to RIP the bones from your body and decorate my hive with them. You are NOT entitled to DAYVHE’S attention and frankly you’re undeserving. He chooses his own MOTHERFUCKING quadrants and they’re HIS business, not yours. If you even breathe in our DIRECTION again I’ll make it the last thing you do. ARE WE CLEAR?” Rohhze hisses furiously. You’re not even getting the chucklevoodooos but the similarity to how Gamzee used to talk is deeply unsettling, even her word choice took a wild step towards clown territory.

Jaydee is dangling from her hand, wide eyed and whimpering. This does not seem to please Rohhze who shakes him about with unfair strength.

“Yes! Yes! Please let me go, don’t kill me!” the limeblood wails.
Rohhze narrows her eyes and opens her hand, dropping him to the ground. He turns tail and runs at speeds you wouldn’t have believed.

“What a creep. It’s been ages since he’s had someone that obsessed and stalkery.” Jayded says with a frown.

“This has happened before?” Terezi asks.

“I think I’m going to pay someone to keep an eye on that guy, I don’t trust him.” Rohhze says casually like that’s just a thing people do.

Vriska is staring up at her with an awestruck look on her face that you guess promises good things for their future blackrom. It’s all coming up Vriska tonight, huh? Rohhze sits primly back onto her seat like she didn’t just mindflay a guy and announce criminal intentions and also murder.

“It’s happened more than a few times but not lately, I guess he got better at spotting the weirdos but it looks like some slip through.” John explains.

“This didn’t happen, by the way.” Rohhze tells you and Karkat both.

Thankfully you and Karkat are both well practiced at denying the existence of chatlogs, embarrassing conversations, weird confessions and the like. You both know the right answer immediately.

“What didn’t happen?” you say together and Rohhze laughs.

“Exactly!” she smiles bright and dangerous.

“Hey!” a voice calls, it’s Dayvhe. You look over and yeah, there he is. He’s winding his way through the crowd with someone else, the sax player from the band. Your group calls out to him, or at least most of you do.

“You were really great.” you tell Dayvhe the moment he comes up to you.

“You seemed to be enjoying it.” Dayvhe says.

“It’s nice to see you again, Sollux. Better than last time at least!” the other guy says and you freeze. How does he know you? The look of panic must show up on your face, you’re sure of it.

“You don’t remember me, do you?” he laughs.

“From you being on stage just now I do.” you say hastily.

“Fucking hell Sollux, what’s wrong with you? This guy hasn’t done anything to warrant you being this empty headed and rude in forgetting him. Do I need to gift you ‘social interactions for dummies’ for next twelfth perigees eve?” Karkat demands.

“I can just borrow your copy, in mint condition, never read obviously.” you snap back at him.

“In his defense he was very concussed when I met him the first time, it’s ok.” the guy says soothingly.

The guy’s face, his voice and the idea of your head injury all snap together into a memory again.

“You’re the guy from the train!” you gasp.
“If I wasn’t sure that your head is healed from that I’d be concerned at you not remembering that, Sol.” Dayvhe sighs.

“Heh, it’s fine. But it’s cool, we can do it again seeing as we didn’t get properly introduced then either. Adagio Custos.” he says and holds out his fist for you to bump, you can’t leave him hanging so you return the gesture.

“And you must be Karkat, right? Volume, projection like crazy and outlandish insults.” Adagio says, looking at Karkat.

“Just what are you telling people about me?” Karkat demands, glaring at Dayvhe who does not look even slightly sorry.

“Clearly nothing untrue.” you snicker and Karkat elbows you sharply.

“Ok, ok so. These are my friends, John, Jayded, Rohhze and her matesprit Kanaya, Terezi there and her… her Vriska. But don’t worry they’re cool. Probably not Vriska but still.” Dayvhe mumble that last part a little but you’re guessing that Adagio still heard him.

Instead of loitering on the back of a chair you’re clearly not getting back from Rohhze and Kanaya you go find a different seat with room on it. Only Dayvhe and Karkat follow you and you end up smushed between them with Dayvhe’s feet curled up on the chair and tangled around your right leg. This loungeplank that you found space on is only just big enough for the three of you, let alone John and Jayded who were already there. It necessitates Karkat basically wearing you like an ugly, bony cape as Dayvhe animatedly talks to Adagio on the other side and Karkat pays attention to Jayded next to him. It’s fine because you can elbow Karkat forward to talk to John about the husktop you built him.

Of course other bands play and people get up to listen, switching seats when they come back. You even end up at the bar with Vriska at one point, though Dayvhe mysteriously shows up to help you carry things back. Help you absolutely didn’t need and for the help you know he is offering his presence would do jack shit about Vriska’s powers.

Even though he’s friendly enough it’s pretty easy to tell that Dayvhe’s new friend is at least a little uncomfortable around the rather higher caste of most of Dayvhe’s friends. To Terezi and John’s credit neither of them act at all fancy. Kanaya does but she’s just a refined person, it’s more about her being classy than acting to her class. Jayded is, well, not normal but she doesn’t act any different from the lowbloods you know. The only two who really behave like highbloods are Rohhze and Vriska who can both seem a little stuck up, intimidating and murderous. You wouldn’t say that impression is wrong as such but it’s reductive. Rohhze and Vriska both think they’re smarter and better than the general population at large, not because people have lesser blood than them but just because they think so highly of themselves. The only two people you have been hatefriends with in any capacity who ever really gave more than half a crap about the values of the caste system are Eridan and Equius. Neither of whom you’re around now for different but obvious reasons.

It’s probably related that Adagio makes his excuses to slip off back to his bandmates and your group becomes insular again. The evening passes. You try dancing again but with it not being Dayvhe’s music it just feels awkward and weird so you bow out of that soon enough. You talk video games with John, plants with Jayded and listen to Karkat bicker with Dayvhe about anything and everything.

Soon enough the day is getting close enough that your group begins to thin out. Vriska leaves with a vow to try to track Aradia down. That leaves Dayvhe pretty obviously torn between supporting her doing that and his standard loathing for her.
The club spills out and you get knocked slightly to the side as Terezi launches herself past you to
wrap an arm around Dayvhe and cackle in his ear about something or other. You have to dodge
around someone else and figure you’ll skirt the building. A couple of bronzes are leant together
looking down at one of their palmhusks, music is blaring out of it and you freeze. You know that
voice somehow. The lyrics rush out and pound your head and maybe it’s just your ears ringing but
you can feel it inside your pan somehow.

And all I care about is sex and violence
A heavy bass line is my kind of silence
Everybody says that I gotta get a grip
But I let sanity give me the slip
It’s pounding in your head, demanding your attention. To go, to fight, to stir shit up.

“Hey, there you are.” Dayvhe says, wrapping a hand around your arm. You jump a little and he lets
you go.

“I- sorry, got separated.” you say hazily.

Dayvhe shakes his head with a little smile and pulls you off through the crowd back to the others.
When you glance back the bronzebloods are rushing down the street together shouting and laughing.

You walk when you’re pulled but inside you your bones beat with the bass you can still feel.
“Hey.” Karkat says, catching your sleeve as you’re about to turn off to your block. Dayvhe’s already gone ahead chattering excitedly to Roxxie about the show since she met you all at the door and wanted to hear all about it.

“Hey?” you reply.

“Are you alright? The whole way back you were a little spacey.” Karkat asks.

“Oh, Yeah, I’m fine. I’ve just not been out like that in ages, it’s a lot. Plus getting to hear Dayvhe’s whole sound and appreciate what he does like that was incredible.” you say and you can feel the smile creeping onto your face as you talk. He really was something up there.

“Tell me about it. I think I’m going to go appreciate the sounds he makes real soon too.” Karkat says with a devious grin and an obscene eyebrow waggle.

“Hah, have fun, man.” you snort and wave him off as you walk away.

“I will!” Karkat laughs and heads towards Dayvhe’s room. You’re going to bet you won’t hear from either of them until tomorrow.

Back in your own block you stretch and gratefully peel your clothes off, they’ve got club funk all over them and bits of your shirt are sticky from leaning against the bar and goodness knows what. Best to get them all off. You go to shower but hesitate before you do and instead take your palmhusk in with you and turn onto a new popular music stream, it’s from a music curator whose tastes mostly align with yours. As you step under the spray you wonder if one day this channel will play Dayvhe’s stuff.

You’re halfway through scrubbing at your hair and carefully navigating around your ports when the song changes to the one you heard the bronzebloods playing outside the club. You recognise the bass and feel the way it takes up in your head like a pulse of something else alive. You wonder who wrote the song, it’s not really your thing but you’re not complaining.

As often happens when you’re in the trap your mind starts to wander, usually to Dayvhe but everything with him is handled right now. Heh, he’s probably being trollhandled right now you bet. No, your mind ticks over to the problem of people trying to kill you. It’s an understandable use of your mental processes.

You turn the water off and the song lasts another two seconds or so before flicking onto something else, you guess you won’t get to see who the artist was after all. You stand there, water dripping off of you as you think. Edward Norton, Margot Robbie, Robert Downey. They’re all actors, obviously, but what else do they have in common? How do they know each other and why do they want to know about Cal and Dayvhe’s old hive? There’s a simple solution here but you’re not seeing it.

Bonkers - TGE

“And all I care about is sex and violence
A heavy bass line is my kind of silence
Everybody says that I gotta get a grip
But I let sanity give me the slip”

Bonkers - TGE
You dry off and pass your medication by your toothbrush, you’re not taking it now, if you do take it too long before you go to sleep it tends to make you feel sick. You throw on comfy clothes and sit down at your husktop. You know they’re not the only ones around, Margot called out to someone else when Sawtooth made a run for it so there’s at least one other troll, but you don’t remember the name.

You slip into the internet and manage to hack your way into some other idiot’s machine. It’s not hard. You pull up IMDB and search for Margot Robbie and every movie she’s been in and then chug down all the data about everyone else who worked on those films and when and where they were. You ditch all that into a spreadsheet and then repeat the process again from hacking someone new. Hal’s trying to do this sneakier than you but you don’t have time, if not for Sawtooth they’d already know about you all. Who knows what other evidence you’ve left?

When you’re done you organise your data, looking from one of them to another. None of them have even worked on the same movie together. Robbie and Norton have had some crossover in film crew but that movie was made by the same studio, MirMax but as far as you can tell they were never both shooting for that studio at the same time. Besides that’s not even helpful because Downey’s never done a film for MirMax studios, in fact most of his recent stuff is for the whole Iron Troll franchise which are all run by Entertainer studios and neither of the other two have worked for that studio at all.

You get up, grab energy drinks and food and return to work as you ignore the need for sleep. You get the idea for hacking into the list of award shows that they’ve been to, maybe they met somewhere when they were attending an event. Hm… in one of the colony world award ceremonies, the Beta Alternian Film and Television Awards, both Norton and Robbie were in attendance but you can’t see any dates where either of them overlap with Downey. Sighing you bemoan your lack of data, not on them but on who else they might be working with. If this is a group of people working together it’s likely to be through one or two central people. Like how you, Dirkka and Vriska aligned briefly to kill Cal because you have history with Vriska and you and Dirkka have a common interest. Without you in that picture it’d make no sense.

You’re not sure you’re making much sense anymore so maybe you’d better change tactic. Your door slides open and Dayvhe sticks his head in, glancing at your empty coon and then over at you.

“Hey look at you already awake and dressed. You want breakfast?” Dayvhe asks with an easy smile as he walks in. You glance at the clock, you didn’t go to sleep at all and it’s the next night now.

“Yeah, and if you make me coffee I will kill for you.” you vow.

“Hah, you’d already kill for me.” Dayvhe laughs.

“True. I’m going to brush my teeth.” you say and push your husktop off of your lap and close it.

“Alright, see you there.” Dayvhe says and leaves.

Shit, you pulled an all-dayer without meaning to. You also really discovered fuck all of use. Well, you ruled some stuff out at least that’s progress. As you brush your fangs your eyes land on your untouched medication. Shit, you forgot to take it and you can’t take it now or else it’ll screw up you taking it when you go to sleep today. Not to mention it’ll make you sick as hell. Damnit. Well, one missed dose isn’t the end of the world. You’ve got this.

When you get to the meal preparation block Dayvhe is already there frying cluckbeast embryos with moderate success. To your delight you see that he has already poured you coffee and you descend on it like a savage beast. You knock it back so fast your tongue scalds and you probably won’t really
even taste how much Dayvhe seems to be burning the food. He pours you another mug, the saint that he is and sets your plates out and gets the hot sauce out too.

“So,” Dayvhe says around a mouthful of food, “you’re good, right?”

“More of a Chaotic Good I think.” you say thoughtfully and take a bite.

“You’re the biggest fuckin’ nerd I know and you know how many people I know.” Dayvhe snorts.

“You say the sweetest things.” you say.

“What I meant was that you’re feeling ok at the moment, right? You seemed good yesternight and aside from that one blip you seemed pretty level. Are you good for me to go out and do something I need to do for a night or two and leave you here with Karkat and the others or do you need me to stay?” Dayvhe asks, his tone serious again.

You think of how certain you were that something was in your head, of how you didn’t sleep and of your untaken meds. But that’s just trauma and insomnia is nothing new and forgetfulness is hardly novel. You don’t need to monopolise his time like this, you’re great on your own. Golden, in fact.

“I’m good.” you tell him and Dayvhe beams at you.

“Yeah, you are. You’re the best.” Dayvhe says and bumps his shoulder against yours gently.

He finishes eating before you do, kisses you goodbye on the forehead and saunters off. You’ve only just finished your breakfast when one of the walking dead shambles in. Or, actually not, but from the way Dirkka’s skin is detaching from his body to reveal the black skin underneath he looks pretty dead.

“You look like shit.” you inform him. He flips you off and pulls the hunger trunk open. He glances at you and gestures vaguely at his throat, opening his mouth and saying nothing. His artificial gills are gone, you guess thanks to Hal.

“Can you not talk?” you ask. Dirkka points at you and nods.

“Do you think you’re actually going to start the full molt thing soon? You look real bad.” you ask. Dirkka nods and hauls a huge raw steak out of the hunger trunk and starts to devour it right there. You guess he’s going to need the protein.

“When are the others due?” you ask and Dirkka looks blankly at you and chews his steak. Right, closed questions.

“Really soon, a long way away.” you elaborate and hold your hands close together and then far apart. Dirkka nods and chomps down the last bite then pulls open the ice box and grabs a frozen dessert and just starts devouring that.

“Jayekh?” you ask. Dirkka holds his hands decently far apart.

“Jayyne?” you continue, his hands move a little closer.

“Roxxie?” you ask and now he’s just holding his thumb and forefinger apart, very close.

“Her wriggling day is near yours?” you ask. Dirkka nods.

“Shit.” you remark and Dirkka nods.
“I hope she doesn’t start when you’re in there. Good luck.” you offer and get up because there’s only so much you want to stand there and watch a guy who is literally shedding his skin. You’re not a squeamish guy but it’s a little nausea inducing.

Instead of going back to your block you detour and find Hal where you’d expected him, he’s in the room that’s become the medical room for trolls and machines alike. He’s currently spot welding something on Sawtooth’s skeleton.

“Hello Sollux.” Hal greets you without looking up.

“How’s it coming?” you ask, walking over.

“Rebuilding the boys or finding those actors?” Hal says. He picks up another part and starts hooking it in place to something else, a substitute for tendons maybe?

“Both.” you answer. It’s pretty much always both when people try to this or that you. Duality, motherfuckers.

“Sawtooth is coming along well and I’m still working out the designs for upgrading Squarewave as much as he wants. It’s a collaborative thing. As for finding the actors, no dice. I managed to parse out the ship from our scans but they left after Sawtooth blew up, went right out of atmo. Leaving Norton behind and I can only deduce that they were intending on returning as he’d set up a sniper’s nest to guard the place.” Hal says.

“What’s up in orbit that they want? Surely not a bigger ship.” you say. You really hope it’s not a bigger ship.

“No, I’d have seen that up there. I don’t know what they might be doing. It’s just satellites and old space junk up there. Maybe they needed to be on the other side of the planet to communicate with someone else, who knows?” Hal continues.

You don’t know but you damn well care more than he seems to. He’s more focused on robot building.

“Can I see your data?” you ask.

Hal tilts his head at you curiously but lets Sawtooth go and reaches into a drawer to pull out a thumb drive. He slots it into a port in his back and then tosses it at you.

“Go nuts.” Hal tells you and returns to working on Sawtooth.

Returning to your block you settle in to get a good look at the data. It takes a while to tease out just which ship it is but when you do get a look at it you’re unnerved. It’s a mid sized small class ship, about four times the size of Roxxie’s one. Definitely helm powered from the make of it and the specs you can glean knowledge that you’re starting to realise you didn’t learn. You squint at the data on screen and realise that it just pinged with information put directly into your pan by Aradia and her fucking ship.

Still, this thing is capable of supporting a smallish crew in interstellar travel. Not that Roxxie’s ship isn’t capable of interstellar travel as you proved, but that ship doesn’t have the kind of housing, feeding and other such necessities of life for a real crew. That ship is for short trips, a night or maybe two at most. This thing is capable of much more.

You muse over how to find them again, write a little algorithm to try to do it for you and then slap it across Hal’s way for him to plug into the live feed when he sees fit to actually help out. You’ve still
got ages before you need to go to sleep so you go grab food and kick Karkat’s door in to make him watch everything Margot Robbie has ever been in. Seeing the movies might help you understand something thematic that mere data can’t tell you.

“You don’t understand how important her being lime really is, I wouldn’t have believed it if Hal hadn’t played the feed back for me after you had all watched it without me.” Karkat says, you ignore the subtle accusation.

“Yeah, yeah, they’re super rare and they’ve got all of this edgy symbolism going for them in movies. I get it.” you wave him off and shovel grubcorn in your face.

“No, I mean they were outright illegal for ages, people culled them on sight just like they would me and Dayvhe.” Karkat espouses.

“Already knew that, only they’re not any more. And it’s not like I don’t know some limes. There’s Jayded and that fucker we met before who was obsessed with Dayvhe.” you list off. That is the extent of your list. You literally know the same number of limes as you do heiresses and technically you’ve seen more heiresses even if the extent of your experience with one of them was watching Roxxie ride her corpse down a dune.

“Yeah but limes are so untrusted, they’re assumed to be deviant and subversive and dangerous I mean no teal would take their case in court it’s an instant conviction.” Karkat adds.

“Oh, yes, the court system is so fair. If I did something wrong and by some miracle wasn’t instantly culled for it I would absolutely get a fair hearing in court. Not. I get it, it sucks, they either deal with it, go grey like you or lie like Dayvhe does.” you scoff. They’re still higher up the spectrum than you, they get more money. Probably not as much as their rung might suggest but it’s gotta be better than your lot or even Dayvhe and Karkat.

“Ugh, you don’t get it.” Karkat huffs but gives up on seemingly educating you more.

It’s not like you’re not sympathetic. Margot Robbie probably wouldn’t be in her position if she was openly lime, you get that. But so what, her life would be hard if people found out. Dayvhe and Karkat would be dead. If someone catches you with these ports you’ll probably get helmed or culled. Considering as she and her friends are trying to kill you and yours your well of sympathy for her runs pretty damn dry.

Several movies later and nothing of note gleaned, except for just how into troll Will Smith Karkat still is, he kicks you out so he can sleep and tells you to do the same. You head back to your block, only you’re not tired yet and you still have one more of her movies to watch before you’re seen them all, so you settle in to watch the latest. You’re trying to parse out just what her movies might have that would indicate this kind of action from her. Her later movies are subversive a touch, sure. There’s a connection, you know it. Even if you don’t have all of the pieces yet you can work out the edges of it, surely. Wait. Wait Robbie said ‘Will’ as she ran out of the door. Troll Will Smith was in ‘In which a group of dangerous psionics, highly skilled killers and cursed trolls are relieved from incarceration to fight a greater evil at the orders of the government. Meanwhile a deranged laughsassin hunts down and tries to recover his moiral despite their entirely nonfunctional relationship which proves terrible for both parties. Contains world ending peril, the death of many government agents, suitable for trolls six sweeps and up’. Maybe that’s who she was calling for.

You hack and recover his data as well just to be sure and with more points of data you have more to learn from.
Eventually tiredness catches up with you and you conk out on your loungeplank without even getting undressed, brushing your teeth or getting into your coon. You wake up a few hours later, your thinksponge fizzling with ideas. You start looking into who wrote and edited the scripts of the movies, if they’re being united by an ideology or something else then you’re better off looking at the words within them.

Looking at the script for the movie Robbie and Smith were in together you can see that it was initially written by someone called The Grand Entertainer, which is a highblood name if you ever heard one. The first script is actually REALLY good, not like what actually got made and it looks like it was taken out of their hands and chopped up by some other studio, it changed hands somehow.

You’re… ok you’re too stressed for this. You need Dayvhe, but he’s not here and you’re with Karkat so. So, Karkat. You leave your block and head to Karkat’s instead. You flick the light on when you come in and he hisses at you.

“Fuck, your eyes are so bright, the light’s so bright. Make it stop.” Karkat whines, tucking his face into his arm. You turn the light off and in the glow from your eyes you see him look up again.

“What time is it? Have you even slept yet?” Karkat asks, reaching around for his palmhusk to check the time.


“Oh. Crap, bad dreams? Want in here with me, or I could come back to yours.” Karkat offers, sliding aside to make room.

“Can you get up with me?” you ask instead.

It’s credit to whatever shade of pity he feels for you that Karkat does heave himself out of his coon for you. He cautiously slides his arms around you in a hug, his hand slipping under your shirt at the back to smear sopor across your skin.

“What to watch something?” Karkat offers. You nod and he pulls you down to his husktop and opens it.

“We could watch a movie.” he says.

“Kind of done with movies.” you reply. You want to not think of all of the questions you still have, you feel weird from working so much and not doing that would be great.

“Okay, grubtube it is then.” Karkat says and pulls it up.

“What the- has this been hacked?” Karkat asks and you’re wondering the same thing.

Damn near everything recommended on Karkat’s grubtube landing page is by TGE. You recognise the still of one of the videos, it was playing on the TV in the shop. The name of another song was repeated over and over again in the one that you heard the bronzebloods playing, the one that popped up on your stream.

Someone’s stalking you digitally and now this. It’s a sign, they know where you are.

You’re about to search for his name too but you’re starting to feel a little paranoid. What if these people have better hacking skills than you? You’re not as godlike as you had once thought you were, Dirkka proved that. Besides you can’t exactly ask him for help, right now he’s probably in a cocoon
with his whole body reforming. Hal’s already been through enough and you don’t want to risk him without another backup. Besides if whoever this is really is fucking with Karkat’s feed like that then… well.

You should… you should go somewhere else and physically jack into someone else’s internet connection if you want to keep researching this. If something happened to everyone here you’d never forgive yourself. Only problem is Karkat isn’t likely to let you go if he senses something wrong. You need a distraction.

You snap the husktop closed, much to Karkat’s protests. He shuts up when you kiss him though. Briefly at least.

“Sollux, what the fuck? Are you ok?” Karkat asks. He knows you too well, but you’re not above lying to him to save his life.

“I’m great. Golden. Hey, go shower. I’ll be waiting when you get back. You’re all gross and sticky.” you say.

“Well yeah, but-” he starts to argue.

You dig your claws into his hair and tuck your face into his neck and hope he gets the idea. Or any idea really that’ll get him gone and occupied.

“Alright, alright.” Karkat sighs and gets up.

You wait for the door to shut and the sound of water to start running before you pull the loungeplank across the door and run. You sprint back to your block, grab your husktop, some clothes and then you’re off to the exit. It’s late, no one else is up. Unfortunately as you rush down the passage you realise that’s because it’s still day, but you’ve known Dayvhe long enough to know how to deal.

Your gold hoodie never fit you right but the single upside of post starvation weight loss is that now it does. It reflects the sun like nobody’s business, between that and the scarves that Rohhze knits whenever she’s sitting still you have enough to keep your face protected. You rush out into the sunlight and wince as the heat overtakes you. You make a quick beeline for the nearest patch of trees and figure that if you stay off of the beaten path but under the shade this might be tolerable.

You cover a decent distance but you’re overheating way too quick and you didn’t bring anything to eat or drink. You blast a hole in the ground near a hive and heft dirt out of the way until you find their internet cable and manually jack your husktop into it.

You search the songs and find out that TGE stands for The Grand Entertainer. The same person who’s flooding your world and Karkat’s grubtube with songs also wrote a movie that two of the people who invaded were in. He has to be involved in this.

Terrified, you yank the cable out and start running in a different direction. You have to keep moving or else you might be caught. Who knows if those actors are hunting you down? Well, if they are you’re going to give them a hell of a chase.

When the sun starts setting you woozily pause again, get into someone else’s internet and open up your husktop. Only the moment you do trollian goes absolutely bugfuck nuts.

carcinoGeneticist [CG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

CG: WHAT THE FUCK IS THE BIG IDEA?! DO YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT TOOK ME TO GET OUT OF THERE?! I’M GOING TO KICK YOUR ASS RIGHT NOW!
CG: WAIT WHERE THE F**K ARE YOU? WHY IS YOUR BLOCK SO MESSY?
CG: SOLLUX! I CAN’T FIND YOU ANYWHERE! THIS ISN’T FUNNY WHERE ARE YOU?
CG: HAL JUST CHECKED THE LOGS. IT SAYS SOMEONE LEFT IN THE MIDDLE OF
THE DAY AND EVERYONE ELSE IS HERE! TROLL ME I’M REALLY WORRIED!
CG: SOLLUX! TELL ME YOU’VE BEEN TAKING YOUR MEDICATION.
CG: JEGUS, TROLL ME WHEN YOU GET THIS. I’M TELLING DAYVHE.

carcinoGeneticist [CG] ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]
turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

TG: dude where are you
TG: karkat just trolled me in a huge panic saying you’re missing and you locked him up and when he
got out you were gone and now you’ve gone outside???
TG: he also thinks you’ve not been taking your meds
TG: im already on my way to you im coming to find you its going to be ok
TG: sollux!
TG: dont go offline i can see youre online!
TA: ii can’t talk ii don’t think thi2 ii2 2ecure. but you have nothing two do wiith thi2, you diidn’t
do anything. ii’m goiing two 2top thi2.
TG: what
TG: sollux youre not making sense
TG: you have been taking your medication right?

Well there was that one day’s dose you missed. But you took the next, right? Right? You don’t
remember.

TG: it doesnt matter we can work it out later im not that far from you now

Wait. How does he know where you are?

Your husktop is barred as f**k from people being able to get any signal from it other than the IP
address if you’re being careless but you’re not careless. But… your palmhusk needs signal. You
whip it out and turn it off, peering at your husktop as you do.

TA: you can’t fiind me, ju2t go back iit’2 iimportant. ii’ve got thi2.
TG: its ok sol im like ten minutes out from you its all good

He still knows where you are. How does he still know where you are?

“It’s not paranoia if they’re actually out to get you.”

You jump, the fucking figment making you freak out like that.

“You don’t get to be mad, you did it to him once, remember?” the figment of Dayvhe says, leaning
against the building.

You did it to… oh. You bugged him once to see in Cal’s place. You look down at your palmhusk.
You got this from him and you know he was in it. He added contacts for you. You’d gone missing
on him before and Dayvhe pities you, cares about you, wants to protect you. You pop the back of
the case off.

Hello small blinking chip that shouldn’t be there.
He bugged you. It’s smart. If you were out on your own and got freaked out by the figment and ran and hid he’d need to find you before someone else or the drones did. It’d be sensible. Telling you would probably only make you feel more trapped. You probably should be mad but it’s clever and reasonable and all the things Dayvhe is.

But this isn’t the time for that.

You can handle this alone. This asshole is threatening you and everyone you care about and you’re going to end this and not drag Dayvhe into it again. You snap the chip and turn your attention to trollian again, it might not be the only one that he has so-

TG: sollux?!
TG: sollux oh fuck please be there

He thinks you’re hurt, or hurt enough that the palmhusk and the chip are broken. You’re not going to make him suffer though.

TA: i’m fine. go home.

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

You snap your husktop shut just in case. This will be the last place he has track of you, better to send him the wrong way. You heft up a small boulder with your mind and wing it into the trees, snapping branches as it goes. You store your stuff and break into a run in a different direction. It’s dark enough that you can pull your hoodie off and put that away too. You’re trying to hide and being covered in gold foil isn’t helpful to that end.

Soon enough you pause outside of a hive where a guy is watering his plants, you pause in your running to catch your breath. No one ever accused you of being athletic, alright? The guy watering his plants looks over at you and you catch sight of the yellow sign on his chest. People might be watching out for yours.

“Hey, you.” you call out as you look the guy over. He’s younger than you and his eyes are just a normal yellow and grey so he’s probably not especially psionically gifted if at all.

“What do you want?” the guy asks, lowering the hosepipe a little.

“I want your shirt.” you tell him, marching closer.

“What? No.” he says sharply.

“Fuck oAUUUGH!” he yells as you psionically grab him by the ankle and flip him up in the air. You yank his shirt off of him and pull it over your own shirt, good now you’re less obviously you.

“Got any cash on you?” you ask but the guy shakes his head hurriedly.

“Fair. Ok. If a rustie comes by here after me, cute skinny guy with half a horn missing you didn’t see me, ok?” you tell him.

The guy’s a quick learner because he’s just nodding in agreement.

“Don’t even remember what you look like.” he adds quickly.

You let him down to the ground and then leave off in a new direction, trying to shake Dayvhe off of your trail. When it starts rolling around to day again you find an abandoned building to hide out in.
You take your palmhusk out first and write a little program that changes what it thinks your location is. You don’t think anyone can get that info when you’re on the move anyway but better safe than sorry.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

TG: sollux please man message me im so worried about you
TG: karkat says youre probably manic if youre not sleeping
TG: i dont know if you were taking your medication before i wasnt tracking it but shit i probably should have been
TG: god im the worst moirail i dont know what im doing
TG: its not like i ever wanted anyone but you but times like this make me wish i had pale dated someone before you just so you wouldnt have to deal with my dumbass learning curve
TG: fuck just hold on maybe this will work
[carcinoGeneticist added to chat]
CG: DAYVHE I TOLD YOU IF HE’S NOT ANSWERING YOU IT’S EITHER BECAUSE HE’S DISTRACTED OR BECAUSE HE’S CHOOSING NOT TO. HE’S BEEN LIKE THIS BEFORE.
TG: hes run away before?
CG: WELL, NO. THAT’S NEW.
CG: FOR WHAT IT’S WORTH I’LL TALK TO HIM TOO, BUT I DOUBT HE’LL LISTEN.
CG: SOLLUX, I KNOW YOU THINK YOU’VE GOT WHATEVER YOU’RE DOING UNDER CONTROL BUT YOU DON’T. YOU’RE SICK. YOU KNOW YOU GET LIKE THIS, WE JUST WANT TO HELP SO JUST LET US KNOW WHERE YOU ARE AND WE CAN FIX THIS.
TG: sol?
CG: WE’LL JUST KEEP LOOKING.

carcinoGeneticist [CG] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG] and twinArmageddons [TA]

You tab the window shut and focus instead on looking for The Grand Entertainer. He’s got his hands in everything it seems, if you go far enough back it seems like he’s involved with damn near every movie studio going. He writes scripts, he directs, casts actors and does music too it seems. Maybe you’re overestimating this, though, about 80% of the movies that come out have his fingerprints on them if you count being made by companies that he’s on the board of. It could be a coincidence.

He’s just too suspicious though. There’s no record of what blood colour he is, what age, anything about him. You only found out he was a man through people mentioning him in interviews and all anyone says about him is how wonderful he is, how creative, such genius. Nothing personal or useful at all. It’s shady as fuck.

You doze, night falls and you leave your hideout and stumble into a mid sized town. You shoplift food and drink from a store when one of the drones is distracted with a bronze and a rust starting a fight with each other. You down your energy drink like the sweet nectar it is and eye the town as you go by. It looks like some kind of riot went down. Things are overturned, some things are on fire. As you chug the end of your second energy drink you’re practically buzzing.

A group of lowbloods down the road are raising hell, jumping about in an impromptu party, blaring music that by now is all too familiar. The Grand Entertainer’s music. It’s a good song though, the same one again. It’s in your head and you can’t help but laugh when they manage to flip a communal scuttlebuggy over.
You’re not laughing when a drone shows up. They’re attacking it but they’ll die doing it. But it’s not right, they were having fun. You throw out a hand, you’re strong, stronger than anyone. You crumple its torso under the sheer might of your mind. The crowd realises what you did and you’ve got punch drunk party lowbloods all up in your space and before you know what’s happening they’re pulling you off to the next thing, laughing and joking.

This is good though. No one would expect this, you can go with them for a while to shake up your pattern. Besides you don’t have enough fun and it’s nice enough to laugh and joke with them. You end up at one of their hives overday, some yellow girl whose name you don’t remember with so many piercings in her face it’s wild. She gives you food and drink. Time slips by and she goes to sleep but you can’t, you don’t know her. You don’t even really remember why you came here.

You steal a shirt of hers from the dryer, change yours for it. You bundle up in your protective gear, take some food and drink for the road and leave. You walk out of town, stumbling alongside the train tracks until you get near a hive. You hide out behind the back of it and do more research, you start looking into the music now. People are starting to note that things are getting out of control, across the area there are isolated little riots like where you just were. There’s highbloods with mind control powers saying that they don’t get why everyone’s acting like this and it’s messing with their abilities, though no one has connected it to the new music. No one but you.

You disconnect from the hive’s internet and walk a little way back the way you came, just a minute or two. There was a railway bridge back there and you can hide under there to get out of the sun. You’re not sure that broiling alive in the reflective hoodie is great for you, you’re dry mouthed and a little shaky.

You down another drink and curl up as tightly under the ledge as you can, wedging yourself between the bridge and the ground. You sleep restlessly, jerking awake eventually but you don’t know why. It seems weirdly darker around one side of the bridge but almost synthetically so if that makes sense. You tense when you hear footsteps and try to shrink in to your little space.

It’s a man, an adult troll. You know those sickles though and the wide sideways horns. It’s Troll Will Smith! His gaze whips around and you and you freeze on instinct. His sickles lower slightly and he takes a step or two closer to you, close enough that you can see the green in his eyes.

“Hey, you been here long?” he asks you quietly. You shake your head.

“Ah, hiveless then. That’s rough. So you don’t know the guy in the hive up there?” Troll Will Smith asks, gesturing up back towards the direction of the house with his sickle.

You shake your head again and the guy makes a frustrated tut.

“Wild feathered honkbeast chase this is. Listen, kid. Stay here, don’t make a sound and if you don’t want anyone to see you don’t open your eyes ok? And… here.” he says and reaches his large hand towards you. You’ve never seen a hundred ceagar bill before, he waves it at you again and you take it.

“HEY WILL YOU FOUND ANYTHING DOWN THERE YET?!” someone else yells, another adult by the deepness of the voice. You… you swear you recognise the voice.

Troll Will Smith holds a finger to his lips and winks at you before turning to head out the way he came.

“Huff my globes, Robert. You know I woulda said if I had.” Will shouts as he leaves.
They’re here, this is them. But from how many footsteps you can hear around you are so very outnumbered and you’ve not properly slept in far far too long. Your hands are shaking and for the first time real fear is breaking through your shell again. If Will keeps them from looking under here for you then it’ll be ok, he doesn’t know it’s you he’s looking for after all. If one of the others takes a look though you’re fucked. You’re fucked and you’ll probably die in that fight.

You fumble your palmhusk out.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG] and carcinoGeneticist [CG]

TA: ii diidn't mean two worry you two, for anything. ii'm 2orry.
TG: *SOLLUX*
TG: oh fuck youre ok tell me where you are so i can come get you
TA: ii can't iit2 two dangerou2. but ii piity you both and iif thii2 goe2 two 2hiit ii needed you two two know that.
CG: WHAT THE FUCK SOLLUX IF YOU’RE SOMEWHERE DANGEROUS TELL US SO WE CAN HELP. PLUS IF YOU REALLY PITY US YOU CAN MAKE US STOP WORRYING!
CG: COME ON, HOW MANY DOSES HAVE YOU MISSED? WHATEVER IS SCARING YOU PROBABLY ISN’T REAL SO JUST TELL US WHERE YOU ARE SO WE CAN FIX IT.
TA: ii can't, ii have two go. gotta hiide.
TA: <>

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG] and carcinoGeneticist [CG]

You shove your palmhusk deep into your jeans pocket and squeeze your eyes shut to try to be invisible. You can feel how you’re shaking but eventually you hear footsteps all together again and then the light around you clicks on, their ship must have had an artificial solar shield or something.

You leave it a minute and then scamper free, ducking your head out into the light to look at the hive. The door’s busted in and guiltily you suspect the resident is dead now. They’re after you, you have to move on every time you look for anything online. In fact you don’t want to stay here any longer at all.

The train tracks rumble and you turn to see the train approaching you. You can get on it from the outside if you time it right, if your psionics are strong enough to accelerate you that quickly so you won’t just die. You don’t doubt yourself, why would you ever? You step aside then jump and fly, you collide with the train and slip slide down it until you hit a join between carriages. You slide against the hot metal as the wind whips by you and ache all over as your body refuses to untense from the terror. You nearly got caught. No, you did get caught it’s just you were lucky enough that the person who caught you didn’t know it was you he was looking for. You won’t get that lucky again.

Your first instinct is to warn the others, to tell Hal what you know so he can track the ship. He needs to know what’s going on.

“And what if they show up at Roxxie’s hive, huh? Dirkka is probably out of commission and can’t defend himself and Roxxie can only do so much. You’re really going to risk them like that?” the figment demands.

“I can’t.” you agree.

“I can handle this by myself, I just need to be more careful.” you add.
“Careful doesn’t cut it, you need to forget all of this and go back, you need to hide!” the figment insists.

“I’m not doing that.” you answer, peering out at the world flashing by. You think you might know where you are, you’re getting closer to your city. You’re obviously not going home, they’d look for you there.

“They’re worried about you, you’re going to fuck everything up with them if you do that.” the figment insists.

“You’re just saying what I’m afraid of, not real things.” you tell him and go back to looking out, scanning the too bright skies for ships.

“I save your life and this is the thanks I get, you think you’d at least listen to me.” the figment sneers. You look at him again and glare, it pisses you off that he says shit like that with Dayvhe’s face but you don’t need to put up with that, he’s in your head.

“Maybe you should look like you actually are, huh? And anyway I saved my own life, not you.” you hiss and snap your fingers and he’s not Dayvhe anymore but you. It’s just your own voice in your own head. He seems shocked by this, frightened even.

“This isn’t right, you know you’re not right. You should be scared right now.” it insists.

“I don’t have time to be scared.” you retort.

“Well you should! You should be scared of you! When was the last time you stopped, ate, drank, took your meds? You’re ruining things, you’re-” he’s going on and on and you’re done with it. You don’t have time for this. Being scared is for people who aren’t as hot on the trail as you are, who aren’t as motivated.

You wave you hand and with a sound like glitching audio the figment disappears. You don’t need fear. You tug your hood tight and leap from the train before it gets to the station, you don’t want to be seen on cameras.

You walk into the city, drag someone into an alleyway and swap shirts. When they won’t shut up about you taking theirs you throw them onto a high up roof, by the time they get down you’ll be long gone. You write a program to skim data from the palmhusks of everyone walking by and sit on a rooftop as you search through them.

You can’t find a single damned photo of The Grand Entertainer. Not a description of his blood colour or anything. When you start tracing results back you nearly want to bash your husktop to pieces there’s records of his name going back almost as far as the fucking Empress has ruled! Well, ok, not quite that long but close enough, like almost eighty sweeps ago and whoever had that title hatched long before they got it. No way it’s the same person, that’s a push for a violet. Maybe it’s a title she bestows on people and it’s in regular use? No one but tyrians live that long normally.

You keep moving. You lose some nights doing the same few things. Swapping shirts, stealing food and drink, hiding in places to sleep. No sooner than you’ve established a pattern do you feel the need to break it. Staying still and in one place makes you twitchy. You’ve been in and around your city and the surrounding neighbourhoods a lot in your quest to keep moving. You think as you walk, trying to parse out the patterns and meaning of what’s happened but it’s slipping away from you now.

You find yourself outside of the club that Dayvhe performed at and you end up drawn inside. The
world around you has started getting skittery of late, things lurking where there aren’t things, making
you jumpy. Noise to drown it out would be good. Plus it’s where Dayvhe once was and you miss
him so much. He’s not there, why would he be? But the music is good, performed live and not the
stuff The Grand Entertainer is putting out. You grab a drink with what little money you have left and
down it. The beat of the music is drowning out every thought you have and it’s not hard to start
dancing, letting your head switch off and lancing the energy from you like infection from a wound.

You never used to be someone who was into dancing but you get the appeal now. Evidently you’re
not the only one who appreciates your dancing because you end up dancing with a teal girl. It’s fun
and you’re laughing even though there’s nothing funny going on it’s not stopping. Not until she
drags you off of the dancefloor and shoves you against a wall and kisses you so hard it hurts. You
weren’t planning on this but whatever, you’re doing the not thinking thing.

“Hey, get the fuck off!” someone snaps and she claws your hips as she’s pulled away.

“Come on.”

You stumble as you’re pulled away and it’s only when you’re shoved in a quieter room do you get a
good look at the guy. Rust sign but not Dayvhe, oh just thinking of him makes your bloodpusher
hurt.

“I know you.” you mumble and stumble backwards.

“Yeah, you do. Stay here I’m going to get you something to drink, you look like shit. Sit down.” he
tells you.

Didn’t you know him? Before. Oh, from the club and the train. Wait, this club, that makes sense.
Ugh, you’re bleeding a little where you were scratched. You have a stripe of teal on you too. Guess
she got overexcited cause you’re only one button down on your jeans. Whatever, maybe you can
find her again. You’re about to go to the door when it opens again and the guy comes back in with a
glass in hand.

“Drink this.” he says, pushing the glass at you.

You shrug and chug the drink back. It’s weirdly salty.

“What was that?” you ask, dropping the glass on the nearby coffee table.

“It’s to rehydrate you.” the guy says.

“Well, thanks but I’m gonna go.” you tell him. He knows Dayvhe, he might mention you to him,
you ought to move.

“You should stay here, that girl’s still looking for you and that’s really not on.” he says. You wish
you could remember his name but you tragically don’t care.

“Listen, whatever your name was, I can- I can handle my own quadrants not that it’s any of yours
and just because I’m gone on a secret mission avoiding troll Will Smith and that doesn’t mean that
I’m gone gone and you can’t have Dayvhe.” you tell him, waving a finger in his face.

“I don’t think I understood any of that. I’m not interested in Dayvhe like that though.” the guy says.

“Hoofbeastshit everyone wants him pale.” you hiss. You should attack him, Dayvhe is yours, yours
and Karkat’s!
“No! I don’t… I don’t like anyone that way. Ever. Not red or pale I only hate not pity. He’s just a good friend.” the guy defends.

You don’t buy that but suddenly you lose your balance and nearly fall so you have different problems to deal with.

“Whoa, hey how about you sit down? You look like you’ve got sunstroke, your skin’s a little yellow and angry you know.” he says as he ushers you to the loungeplank. You’re sunburnt?

You shoulder past him to a mirror on the wall and catch yourself by slamming a hand on the wall so you can look at yourself. You can hardly see your face for how bright your eyes are. You have to close one eye to get a good look at that cheek and then change to see the other. Actually, where are your glasses?

In your surprise your legs forget how to legs and you drop to the floor like a sack of tubers. You shake your head harshly but things are wobbly and wavering.

“What… what did you put in that drink?” you slur.

“We confiscate them from creeps, it’s the first time it’s been used for a good cause I think. I’m sorry.” the guy says regretfully.

Your arms give out and your head hits the floor.

You start coming around to the muted sounds of machinery beeping softly and a pressure around your head that you’re all too familiar with. That’s a psionic suppression band. You jerk upright and try to rip it from your head but wrists can’t lift high enough, you’re restrained! There’s cuffs tight around your wrists and they don’t come off any easier for you flailing around in a panic and repeatedly yanking on them.

“Sollux! Sollux it’s ok, it’s just us. It’s just to stop you hurting yourself, calm down. I’ve got you.” Dayvhe urges you. He can’t be here, you’re putting him in danger! Why couldn’t he just leave things to you? He does everything and you can do this. That is if it even is him.

“No, no, no! You’re in danger I have to go!” you shout and tug harder at your arms but the metal railings of the bed just stay put.

“In danger from what? Sollux nothing’s wrong, you’re ok.” Dayvhe insists and he hops up onto the bed.

“This is worse than I’ve ever seen him, you’re not going to be able to reason with him. I’m going to get Hal and Dirkka.” Karkat says and you try to grab for him but you’re still handcuffed.

“No, he’s talking we can reach him. Sollux, honey, my favourite banana lip balm guy, you gotta listen to me. Tell me what the problem is.” Dayvhe insists, holding your face in his hands.

He’s using the stupid nicknames. He knows you love and hate that and love the way you hate it. He’s so bad at them.

“Troll Will Smith and the others, but he gave me 100 ceagars so he’s not so bad but he’d have killed me if he knew who I was. And the music the Entertainer makes it keeps getting in my head and I think it’s starting riots. They blew up a hive!” you tell them both.
Dayvhe stares at you wide eyed.

“Yeah, like I said.” Karkat sighs and walks off.

“You can’t stay here, I can’t stay here, we have to go. Go in different directions I mean.” you tell him.

“We’re safe here.” Dayvhe begins.

“We’re not, we’re NOT!” you hiss and Dayvhe gently pets your neck.

“But I’ll have someone look into what you said, yeah?” Dayvhe continues.

“No, don’t! That’s how they find you! That’s how they found me, that’s why I was moving around so much! That’s—” you freeze.

There’s an adult, it must be another one from the group. Tall as hell with slick black skin and sharp pointed horns. You jerk your knees up, tipping a startled Dayvhe forward into your chest and you wrap your arms around him as much as your chained wrists will allow. You hiss at the adult as hard as you can and he seems startled but he doesn’t stop coming closer, when he’s in range you kick at him but it doesn’t help.

He presses a hand to your chest so large it nearly covers it and when he reaches in with another you squirm and manage to bite at him, latching your teeth around his wrist. Only his adult skin is so tough you can’t get through at all. You’re not strong enough to do that and hold Dayvhe to you and you want him to escape as you distract the adult anyway. Dayvhe skitters back shouting at something but all you can focus on is trying to bite and kick at this guy.

“I’ve got it! The IV’s still working he didn’t damage it.” someone says.

Everything fades but until it does completely you still fight.

You wake up again with a banging migraine and the heavy weight of two people on you. Karkat is lower down, his head on your stomach and Dayvhe is nestled under your chin. You feel tired, so goddamn tired. You don’t even know when you last slept properly or ate anything real or…

Oh God, what’ve you done?

They’re probably done with you, you must have terrified them so much. Dayvhe hasn’t ever seen you like that not manic, not really. Why did this even happen to you? Why does this EVER happen to you except for your stupid mutant thinkspoon. Fuck, you wish they’d scrambled your thinkspoon when they helmed you, it’s what you’re worth.

You hiccup as you start to cry, crushing shame suddenly weighing back down on you. The bill you forgot to pay this whole time, all the fear, doubt, anxiety, all of it returns with interest and then, yes, the shame of what you did. They begged you to come home and you wouldn’t listen. Dayvhe stirs and looks up at you sleepily.

“Wait, oh no don’t cry. You’re ok, Hal’s looking after you. You’re going to be ok, you’re back on the stuff you’re meant to be on and they’re fixing the dehydration and all that. You’re a little sunburnt but you’re going to be fine, we’ve got you.” Dayvhe assures you and tries to hug you.

He’s still trying to make you feel better, even after all you did. You’d thought you were helping but
it’s no defense, you’re the worst, the worst. He should just kill you, that’d be a mercy.

“Never!” Dayvhe gasps in horror. You might be mumbling to yourself instead of thinking here. Dayvhe is wide eyed, he looks terrified. Of you, for you, you don’t know. Karkat shoulders him out of the way and claps his hand over your mouth.

“Enough of that. I know what you’re like, you feel ambiguously terrible and you have all these awful things in your pan rattling around that you don’t challenge because your fucked up neurochemistry makes you think you deserve to feel that bad. So you’re going to be fucking specific about what you think is wrong here, got it?” Karkat hisses and takes his hand away.

“I’m sorry.” you apologise.

“You don’t need-” Dayvhe begins but Karkat talks over him.


“For running off, it’s so stupid. I didn’t mean to scare you like that I’m so fucking-” and there’s Karkat’s hand over your mouth, having correctly guessed that you’re done with facts and into how you feel about what you did.

“I know you. I know what you’re like when you’re manic even though that’s worse than I’ve ever seen you. Everything made sense at the time to you, right?” he asks and you nod.

“It’s not your fault you got that way and you were doing the best with how your head was at the time. I’m mad it happened, furious that I didn’t catch it before it got that bad, but I’m not mad at you. It’s not your fault.” Karkat says as he lets go of your mouth again and holds the side of your face.

“I knew what I was getting into.” he adds.

You eye Dayvhe who still looks completely freaked out. Your bloodpusher clenches as you whine, you made him look like that. You did that. Some moirail you are.

“What?” Karkat presses, reading your expression no doubt.

“Dayvhe didn’t.” you mumble miserably.

“It’s ok.” Dayvhe tries but you can hear the platitude in his words.

“Actually, I don’t think he did get how bad things can get for you. I don’t think he did agree to this.” Karkat nods.

“Karkat!” Dayvhe snaps at him but you know that Karkat’s words are true.

“But I’m here so it’s not like Dayvhe would need to be here if he couldn’t deal with it, you wouldn’t be alone or uncared for. I’m still with you. He doesn’t HAVE to be here, but he’s barely left your side so even if he didn’t know this was something that might happen you’ve not driven him off. He’s here by choice, not because he doesn’t get it or is obligated to be here. So it doesn’t matter that he didn’t know.” Karkat says his voice slow and careful, like he can drop the meaning of the words right into your head if he tries hard enough.

You don’t want this, he’s being too nice and you’re panicking Dayvhe too much. It’s not right. Being like this is the worst and you want it to stop but nothing ever stops. You can feel the ugly swell of tears rising up in you and you can’t do anything to stop them and it worsens when Dayvhe visibly panics at it.
“Don’t touch the band, alright?” Karkat says.

“Wait is it really ok to do that? Hal and Dirkka said-” Dayvhe protests.

There’s a click and Karkat’s warm fingers nudge at your wrist and suddenly you’re free. You curl over on your side and cover your face with your hands now that you can use them both. The crying won’t stop, it’s like someone’s just turned a tap on inside you and it’s rushing out and drowning you. Dayvhe is trying to reassure you but nothing about his words sinks in.

“It’s ok, you’ll live,” Karkat sighs and rubs your back.

“WHY SHOULD I?” you wail. Dayvhe makes a wounded noise.

“Hey, guess who’s getting constant supervision now? It’s you, asshole. We’re going to drag you out of this thing no matter what, alright?” Karkat says.

Fuck, this is the worst.
At some point you sleep, you conclude this because Karkat and Dayvhe don’t leave you alone but at some point Karkat has clearly filled him in on just how bad you can get. He’s told him all of the shitty things you’ve done before when you’re like this. He must have or why else would Dayvhe look at you like you’re made of spun glass?

Hal releases you from the medical stretcher but you’re under orders to return to him regularly. You don’t remember how often but no doubt Karkat will kick you into going.

“Hey you must be hungry, right?” Dayvhe asks brightly.

You don’t really feel hungry, you don’t not feel hungry either though. Just nothing. You shrug.

“Guess who’s getting food anyway.” Karkat says.

Well ok then.

You head to Roxxie’s nutritionblock and sit and watch as Karkat and Dayvhe cook. Or rather you watch Karkat tolerate Dayvhe helping for a while before relegating him to sit next to you.

“You think I’m a decent cook, right? I mean you taught me.” Dayvhe says with a pout.

You make a vaguely affirmative noise and stare off at nothing. You should have known this would happen, that you’d get deluded by mania again eventually seeing conspiracies that obviously aren’t there. Yet still even though you were probably wrong it’s weird how coherent your whole idea was. Karkat’s seen you somewhat deluded before. You were running on no sleep and were convinced that there were things in your walls so you bailed and crashed at Karkat’s place for a week until it passed only when you came back there wasn’t anything in your walls. It was all in your head. Well, all in your head and being distracted by the sound of your bees. But every step of your theory about The Grand Entertainer makes sense to you still.

That’s probably a sign that you’re still kind of fucked up.

“Eat.” Karkat says, dropping a bowl in front of you.
It’s his cluckbeast ova, moobeast steak in noodle soup dish. You’ve begged him to make this before you liked it so much.

“Oh wow, Karkles you’ve been holding out on me. I can’t cook this, Sol can you make this?” Dayvhe asks brightly.

“No.” you answer, lazily turning your fork around to get the noodles.

“Do you like it?” he asks as you take a bite.

It’s fine you guess. It doesn’t taste different really, not objectively. You just kind of feel like you could be eating wet cardboard and enjoying it just as much. You make a noncommittal sort of noise.

Karkat moves the conversation towards discussing Dayvhe’s musician friend, the one that you’re pretty sure roofied you to catch you so that Dayvhe and Karkat could get you back. They’re discussing some way of thanking him but you’re almost relieved that they don’t seem to need your input because the idea of having to talk is exhausting. Not that eating is much better. You get bored about halfway through. When you go to push your bowl away from you Karkat catches your eye and scowls at you.

“You’re finishing that.” he tells you.

“I don’t want any more.” you say.

“Well that sucks for you then, doesn’t it? Because finishing it is what you’re going to do.” Karkat says flatly.

“Ugh, why?” you ask, slumping down in your chair. Dayvhe is looking worriedly from you to Karkat like he’s watching a fancy ball and smash net game.

“Shockingly, you need food to live.” Karkat says.

You don’t know if it’s the expression on your face or just that Karkat knows you well enough to guess that you’re not jazzed about being alive in general.

“Oh, no way. I’m not letting you go hungry, much less starving to death. Which if you remember you got close to recently and it wasn’t fun, was it? Hal would absolutely intervene even if by some miracle I didn’t make you eat before then anyway. You’re not going to get better if you’re feeling shit from not eating, so eat.” Karkat hisses at you.

You grit your teeth and stare him down but Karkat isn’t backing away from this at all.

“I- can’t we just make him something different? We don’t have to fight about-” Dayvhe begins.

“Nope. He’s eating it, I have limitless fucking patience here and no way does he have enough willpower to keep fighting me on it. You need food to live, Sollux, not backing down on this.” Karkat says firmly.


“Because I pity you.”

It actually hurts to hear Karkat say that, of all things it’s those words that make you break eye contact with him. He won that staring match. You can’t stand to look at Dayvhe either, he looks so worried.

“You don’t need to feel hungry and you don’t need to want it. Just finish it.” Karkat says.
“I don’t care.” you say emphatically.

“I don’t need you to care either, you will eventually but you don’t have to now. I know that you know this will pass sooner or later but I also get that it doesn’t feel like that so just trust me, trust us. We’re just trying to keep you alive and looked after enough that you can get there.” Karkat says.

“It’d be better if you didn’t!” you snap at him.

“Sollux! Don’t say that, you wouldn’t- you can’t.” Dayvhe looks agonised.

Fuck. FUCK! Why did you open your mouth and say that? So you can, what, hurt Karkat and Dayvhe enough that they’ll leave you alone like you deserve? Karkat doesn’t deserve that from you, much less Dayvhe who is horrified about what you really are like. You’re the worst to them, they’re never going to have anything to do with you again and that’s for the best for them too.

You curl in on yourself like you’re actually physically injured.

“There’s no point telling him not to say it.” Karkat says softly.

“Yes there is! He’s wrong! It wouldn’t be better if we weren’t looking after him, he’d… I wouldn’t let that happen!” Dayvhe insists.

“Oh no, he’s absolutely actually wrong. But he’s being honest about how he sees it. This isn’t like making him sleep because he’s been dumb and not done it, or getting him to eat more because he doesn’t remember to do it. Saying that he’s wrong about how he thinks isn’t going to fix it, not shouting at him for it at least.” Karkat explains.

“Oh but your thing with the food is different? He ate half of it, he’s not going to die from that. What’s the point in doing this then?” Dayvhe argues. Damnit now you’re making them argue, you didn’t mean to.

“It’s different.” Karkat says. You look up to see him shrugging.

“How?” you ask.

“Because I can’t fix what’s actually wrong but I can look after the rest of you. And yeah, you’d probably be fine but it’s not about that. You need to know that it’s not possible for you to be so bad that I’ll back off, however terrible you think you are. I can’t do anything real but I can make you eat and sleep enough until you’re better and you can’t be so much of a shit that I drop that. You know I’m too stubborn for that. And before you get all freaked out about how you’re terrible for making me do it 1) I want to and 2) I’m not doing it alone.” Karkat says patiently.

It’s not about the food. This is a negotiation, if you give in and let him make a call on what you need on this you’re agreeing to let both of them do that until… whenever. The glassy surface of the remaining soup reflects the colour from your eyes, dull though they probably are. You’re sure that they’re better off without you, you know that. But…

Yeah, but you were also sure recently that music was controlling your mind and that troll Will Smith gave you money. Those things still feel real but they’re probably not, probably. And this is probably not real too, sort of at least. You’ve done this before. Not this bad since that awful patch after Aradia died but you’ve still done this before. You didn’t want help then because you didn’t deserve it and you should feel terrible. Yet there has been so much time since then that you really were happy in, where you enjoyed having people care about you, that’s real too isn’t it?

You’re the worst, they shouldn’t help you, they’re going to hate you, they should leave and it’ll
never get better. Yeah that all fucking feels true but you don’t know shit, not when you’re like this. You don’t want help but fuck you, you’re getting it. You grab the bowl and what’s left of the stupid meal that Karkat made and basically down it in one, you end up wearing almost as much as you consume but whatever. You’re gross and awful but fine you’re going to let them keep you from imploding until you gather the ability to punch yourself in the thinksponge and stop being the worst.

Karkat’s smile is savagely proud.

You wish it was that easy for everything but your surge of motivation fizzles almost the moment after. But a deal is a deal, unspoken or otherwise. Dayvhe is clearly out of his depth with this whole thing and you’d feel bad for him if it wasn’t for the fact that you’ve lost the capacity to feel anything at all, which is better than feeling shitty. Probably. Maybe worse, you don’t know and also don’t care. Still he tries taking after Karkat’s tough pity approach, like how when you refused to get up to shower that one time he just threw you in there. It would have worked better if you’d not been wearing clothes still but whatever. You just stood blankly under the water in your wet clothes and Dayvhe had instantly felt guilty, it was pretty unproductive for you both.

You could probably deal better if this whole thing wasn’t so goddamn boring. Nothing is interesting anymore and Dayvhe and Karkat have yanked all movies, tv shows and music away from you because the last thing they want to do is make you think of the shit you were doing that put you in this position. Most of your entertainment comes from listening to Dayvhe make music or both you and him forcing Karkat to read his books aloud.

Nothing holds your attention better than watching Karkat trying to straight faced narrate trolls fucking with the most purple of prose.

“We’re going out.” Karkat announces one night as he pokes you out of the new and bigger coon that the three of you just share these days. Dayvhe ordered it online from Roxxie’s account and had to claim that yes he was indeed a large seadweller now send the coon.

“Now?” you ask skeptically.

“No, later.” Karkat informs you.

“Mrr, five more minutes.” Dayvhe mumbles. Karkat gazes lovingly upon his quadrantmate and then remorselessly dunks him under the sopor, making a now very awake Dayvhe resurface with a loud ‘BLUH’ as he spits out sopor.

“But I don’t want to go out.” you protest as Karkat slides you towards the ablutionblock.

“Noted. You’re still going anyway, it’ll be good for you to get out. We’re going to play a game with our friends, and someone else but still. It’ll be good for you.” Karkat insists. He switches the water on in the trap and straightens up just in time for Dayvhe to fling his sopor soaked shirt at Karkat’s head with a wet slap.

You get under the spray without protest, if only to avoid the pitch flirting going on outside of it.

The journey in the scuttlebuggy to the woods is the first time you’ve been outside since you were caught and brought back to Roxxie’s place. Or you guess you could call it your place too since you live there permanently now. You didn’t expect to be brought to Terezi’s hive though.

“Ah, memories. Remember that time you tried to smother me to death with a scalemate here?” Dayvhe asks sweetly, looking over your shoulder from where he has his arm wrapped around you to Karkat who is walking on your other side.
“Want a repeat?” Karkat says flatly.

“I don’t want to deal with Terezi, I want to go home.” you tell them both. It’s not that you dislike Terezi, she can just be tiring and right now you’re so tired of everything right down to your bones that you can’t deal.

Karkat stops and then moves to stand in front of you, Dayvhe squeezes your hand gently and gives you a sympathetic look. You glance up and you can see the outline of Terezi at the window and if you’re not much mistaken the wide horns of Tavros are behind her and then you think that’s John at the side. Great, that’s way too many people to deal with.

“I know you don’t want to, but you need to get out and this is a social thing. But I get that it’s going to be draining, you don’t have to pretend to be okay and when we get back you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to. Please just try?” Karkat says quietly and reaches out to pet the soft layer of hair that you’ve regrown.

You’re about to warn him that people are watching you but he kisses you a little off centre before you can get the words out. Dayvhe slides himself a little tighter to your side with a soft chirr of comfort.

“I was about to say they can see us.” you say as Dayvhe nudges the underside of your jaw with his nose.

Karkat’s eyes go wide and he looks up at the window in alarm. John waves at him, the fuck.

“Well, fuck them.” Karkat says hot with embarrassment as he looks back at you.

“My quadrants are complicated enough already.” you sigh.

Karkat barks out a burst of startled laughter and then claps a hand over his mouth.

“Sorry, sorry, I wasn’t expecting you to joke. Caught me off guard. Come on, let’s just get inside.” Karkat says and pulls you towards the base of Terezi’s tree.

There are stairs nailed to the wide trunk of the tree and Karkat is already starting to climb them all slow and wobbly. Dayvhe looks up at him and then to you.

“I hate to see him go but I love to watch him leave. Nice view Karkat!” Dayvhe shouts that last bit up at him.

Ugh climbing is far too much effort. You float up off of the floor, grab Dayvhe and Karkat and quickly whip you up through the air and into Terezi’s hive. The room is warm and bright, a low and large circular table sat in the middle of the room with snacks and drinks scattered about. Terezi and Vriska are right by the door but immediately behind are Tavros and John.

“Hey what was all of that- ACK!” John is cut off from his questioning as Terezi whips around and karate chops him in the throat.

“No questioning the guests!” she snaps. John clutches his throat and chokes loudly, flailing an arm in alarm but he’s blue so he’ll be fine.

“So glad you all came, Dayvhe come on I’ve gotta show you how to make your character sheet!” Terezi says as she loops her arm with Dayvhe’s and drags him off to the table and sits down with him.
“Uh, Karkat I can show you how to do yours. I’ve been helping John already.” Tavros offers. That leaves you with Vriska. You look at her. She looks at you.

“Wow you look like shit.” she announces.

“Feel like shit.” you reply.

“I’m as observant as ever, come on, let’s make your character.” Vriska says and beckons you over. You get to sit next to Karkat with Vriska on your other side. On the table before you are a bunch of papers, a notebook, a pencil or two and then more snacks.

“I don’t even know what we’re doing.” you admit as Vriska settles into place next to you.

“Dungeons and Dragons, it’s all non-combat imaginative stuff, not FLARP. I’m the dungeon master and you’re one of the players. John is playing a barbarian, Tavros is going with a druid because he’s a weenie, Terezi is a rogue. You get to pick your class and I’m going to help you make it since I’m the best at this and you’ve never done it before.” Vriska explains.

You look across the table, this is clearly a new thing. Dayvhe and Karkat have never expressed interest in this kind of thing but it’s obviously a gaming thing but as social as someone could possibly make it. It’s so blatantly for your benefit that you almost want to cringe. These aren’t exactly your most favourite people in the world but they’re probably the closest people to you that Karkat and Dayvhe could convince to play Dungeons and Dragons with you to help you feel better and be social.

You couldn’t care much less than you do about this but they’re so obviously trying that you’d feel like a colossal jackass if you turned it down just because you’re not into it. You’ve already done enough things to feel shame over, you don’t really want to add to that list.

“I think paladin could be cool.” Dayvhe notes and Terezi claps her hands together excitedly.

“What would be the most useful?” you ask Vriska.

“Well John’s a barbarian and if Dayvhe does go Paladin that gives you two decent tanks.” she tells you.

“So… higher damage? Something squishy with a dps payoff?” you guess.

“Hm, something like that. Wizard maybe, it’s more than just hitting something hard. I mean Tasha’s Hideous Laughter is a nice early crowd control spell, feather fall has exploring uses, and charm person is really useful you can make people want to do almost anything you ask!” Vriska declares, grabbing a book and flipping through until she shows you the page she wants. It’s a list of spells with their explanations under them, some look interesting you guess.

“Wait, I can insult someone so bad they die?” Karkat gasps loudly next to you.

“It’s a cantrip so you are unlikely to do it in one hit but, yes, though I’m pretty sure Vriska will make you say whatever your character is saying for that.” Tavros explains.

“Yes, fuck yes, doing that. Make me a bard Tavros.” Karkat says gleefully.

“So, wizard?” Vriska asks and you nod. Why not?

Vriska starts writing some stats down for you, rolling dice to get some when others she just seems to
know off by heart.

“Do you want input on this or do you just want me to make your stats?” Vriska asks, looking up from her hunched over position over the paper.

“Just do it.”

“Alright, Sollux. I’ll set your wizard up with the best stats but you have to think about who they are. You’re gonna be a high elf because they cover the wizard’s weaknesses best and it works into my stat calculations well.” she explains.

Around you other people are asking questions about spells and shit and being engaged with the task at hand but you’re just lost.

“Just pick a name at least.” Vriska says under her breath so that only you hear.

Shit, something magic sounding maybe? That’s about as good as you can do. You hesitantly write down ‘Silvan Arcane’ in a feeble twitch of creativity. You’ve basically just named your elf Mr Magic but it’ll do, maybe it’s a shitty fake name. Who knows? The character creation part wraps up for all of you and Terezi stands up and then throws small bags at each of you except Tavros and Vriska.

“You should always have your own dice when you play and you four haven’t played before so I got you some.” Terezi explains. Dayvhe’s are bone white with red dots for his numbers, Karkat’s a shiny silver with black detail and yours… You pull a die out of your bag and find that the twenty sided die in your hand is a swirl of blue and red with bright metallic gold dots on.

“Thanks, Terezi.” you say quietly as you pull the other dice out to look. Karkat leans against your arm and shows off his.

Vriska moves away from you and pulls a screen out of her sylladex and sets it on the table, idly rolling her eight sided die over the back of her fingers as she talks.

“This first session will be a little easy, I’ll walk you all through how to interact with the game world and then run you through a quick fight. So, to begin in the world of Faerûn each of you had your own lives, specialties and skills and yet each of you despite these skills ends up kidnapped and thrown in a cart. The trip takes some of you longer than others but eventually you are all unmasked in a lavishly decorated block of an adult troll’s mansion. It is clear from his clothes that he is a troll of means but also that he is a pirate and he has a task he’d very much like you all to take on together.” Vriska begins with theatrical glee.

She starts to describe more of the set up to your game, freewheeling over the reasons why each of your characters even those of you just made are the only people for the job he has for you. The others launch into questions, roleplay in character with, heaven help you, character voices. You participate as little as you can get away with but just watching and listening is more entertainment than you’ve had in a while. You make your half elf do a few things, ask a question or two but not much else.

It’s several hours later and an exorbitant amount of snacks demolished when Vriska wraps up the session. She takes photos of all of your character sheets and then lets you leave with your new dice and your paper. In the scuttlebuggy on the way back you doze off against Dayvhe’s shoulder as Karkat wonders if and how you’re going to manage to leave the island of Kelthann that you’re all currently on. When you get home you dazedly walk back and all but fall into your shared coon.
You’re kind of burnt out the next night but you’re not annoyed to hear Dayvhe and Karkat discussing the details of their characters and working out why they might be the way they are as people. So, next week when you’re told you’re going to the Dungeons and Dragons meet up again you’re not exactly mad.

It’s stupid, it is, it’s not like playing some silly make believe game is going to fix everything. But it’s at least a little entertaining and with Vriska being the centre of attention as she basically acts as both the god of this world and all the NPCs in it she’s pretty happy. More importantly you’re not the focus of attention. It’s probably good for Dayvhe and Karkat to focus on things that have more reward than trying to fix your broken thinkpan.

You’re still in the stage where you’re not really feeling much of anything, emotion-wise. So it’s not as if playing this is fun but you’ll admit that it’s not un-fun.

“John, I have two HP, if you don’t let me take a long rest I will use my last spell slot to make your stupid dwarf laugh himself to death.” you groan on the third session.

“I’m not doing much better than you, so I will absolutely join you in mocking him fatally.” Karkat agrees.

“You’re, uh, really determined to kill something with that spell aren’t you?” Tavros asks.

“I’m going to make it happen. Shut up Dayvhe don’t even think about saying it.” Karkat says, cutting that diversion off before it can happen.

Dayvhe leans back a little and tosses a gummy grub into his mouth before flashing Karkat a devious grin.

“Are you warning me?” he asks and you can almost see the spades floating around Karkat’s head.

You’re back in your hive a few nights later, or should you say Roxxie’s hive? You’re gliding through existence in the way you’ve been accustomed to since your mind went all ‘blue screen of death’ on your ability to feel things. It was nice at first, not feeling especially guilty or sad. Not feeling anything, actually. Only all that leaves you with is zero energy and chronic boredom.

Dayvhe and Karkat are bickering over some game and mostly ignoring you. You’re playing a game on your husktop, not that you’re really invested in it because as previously mentioned your ability to give a crap about anything is low as hell. You’re playing this indie cube-based low res game which is nice enough but it’s a little dull at times.

Still, you can build primitive circuit boards in the game and you’re currently laying down the stuff to make a machine that’ll automate a cluckbeast farm for you. You’re doing this whole thing on the survival mode because if there’s no challenge you’ll completely stop caring about the game entirely.

You don’t have headphones on because Karkat and Dayvhe blatantly don’t trust you to not start listening to music because you’re banned from doing that in case it makes you worse or whatever and because Karkat was watching a movie earlier you have the sound off. Except there are certain enemies that spawn in low light because this game has a weird inverted day/night cycle, and one of the monsters that comes out in the dark is explosive. It’s explosive and the only warning of its approach you get is audio but yours is turned off.

You watch as your character explodes, ragdooling away and the screen fades a little to tell you that you died. It’s not enough to stop you seeing the muted burning of everything that you spent hours working on.
Like flicking a lightswitch on, emotion returns. Anger, blistering hot rage flooding through you. You whip your husktop up into the air and with a frustrated and furious screech you lob it psionically at the wall, shattering it into pieces. You’re breathing through clenched teeth as you watch the scraps of your husktop rain down to the floor.

And then it’s gone again. You had an emotion, a singular emotion. One experience of anger and you’re cut off again.

Dayvhe and Karkat are all over you, asking you questions about why you did it to see if you’re delusional or not. Dayvhe pulls you into a hug to make you feel better which is sweet but pointless because you don’t feel anything right now, you’re off again.

“Great, now I’m going to have to repair the stupid thing.” you mumble into Dayvhe’s neck.

“It’s ok, someone can do it for you if you don’t want to do it. It’s alright, Dirkka, Roxxie and Hal know their shit, don’t worry about it.” Dayvhe shooshes you. Like you’d want a husktop made by someone who isn’t you.

The two of them panic enough to drag you to Hal who gives the pair an unimpressed look when they explain the problem and you confirm that you just got angry.

“They’re called mood swings, you know. It means that sometimes his mood swings.” Hal explains flatly and kicks you all out.

It keeps happening, not with anger, or not just with anger anyway. You’re dead inside most of the time and then it’s like the emotional centre of your thinksponge just reaches out and grabs you and beats the shit out of you.

You’re minding your own business as Karkat tries to make you choose between things to eat for lunch and then something in your head flicks and you’re sobbing so hard you can barely breathe. Dayvhe actually had to pap your face to get you out of that phase and you wholeheartedly agreed to it because anything was better than feeling like that.

The next night you crawl into Dayvhe’s lap and cling to him, purring with affection that’s suddenly hit you again. Somehow you’d forgotten how much you pitied them both. You knew it intellectually of course and your bond with them never left but outright feeling the sweet ache in your chest, the fluttering of affection and that rush of warmth is so very different.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to make you worry.” you whisper to him and dig your fingers into his hair as you pull him down.

“It’s not your fault.” Dayvhe says breathily as you pull yourself closer to him and stroke his jawline.

“I don’t want to put you through this, though.” you apologise.

“I agreed to it, you’d do it for me. Besides I’d do anything for you, I pity you.” he says like a promise.

It’s sort of like that all over, the lights coming back on inside as your thinksponge remembers how to feel things. It’s nice to feel like a real person again but less nice because now you can viscerally hate yourself with all the sadness, anger and self loathing your mind has reacquired. It makes you a lot less pleasant to be around and out of necessity you find yourself wandering to stop you going stir crazy and biting your quadrantmates heads off. Despite your initial reluctance to go it’s the dungeons and dragons games that you end up looking forward to.
You’re sat on Terezi’s balcony, she and John had earlier run out for mid game snacks so the whole thing is on pause until the return. Leafing through Vriska’s rulebook (Terezi’s was too damp for you to consider) you find yourself staring at the spells. It’d be cool to have some of these, but you can guess that whoever wrote the rulebook and created the spell ‘compulsion’ based it off of someone with psionics like Vriska’s.

“Alright so I found a video that explains fireball, it’s stuuuuuuuupidly overpowered, you’re gonna love it.” Vriska says, appearing out of nowhere and sitting down next to you. She passes you her palmhusk. It’s been so long since you’ve seen video of any kind what with Dayvhe and Karkat banning you. Obviously the video explaining fireball has your undivided attention. Blowing shit up for twenty feet in every direction is pretty overpowered, but that said you can and have done just that by shooting lasers from your eyes so there’s that.

You scroll down on the screen to look at who published the video and make a mental note of it in case you want to look things up when you’re eventually allowed back on grubtube again. Although… you’re on it now.

The familiar itch of a bad idea at the back of your head tingles. You still don’t know if you were delusional before, or at least you don’t know how bad you were. You remember grubtube filled with the Entertainer’s videos, like he was watching you, taunting you. Was that all in your head? It could be. No one’s said a thing about it and Dayvhe promised that he’d have someone look into it so you needn’t worry about it and you’ve not heard a peep. Which means that it probably was all in your head.

You look over your shoulder, Dayvhe and Karkat are absorbed in some discussion with Tavros and not paying the slightest hint of attention to you. After many hours in your company and the closest attempt on your life or wellbeing is attempting to off your poor wizard character Dayvhe has somewhat chilled on the concept of Vriska. Somewhat.

“Let me just…” you mumble, looking down at the screen again. You could be wrong, you probably are. But you could be right.

You click the home button and grubtube loads up suggestions. They’re dungeons and dragons related, FLARP videos, makeup tutorials, urban legend documentaries. Normal stuff you’d expect to see on Vriska’s page. You were wrong. You’re weirdly disappointed.

“Have you just tuned out or are you trying to decide if you can cope with not knowing how to perfectly wing your eyeliner?” Vriska snorts, taking a peek at the screen.

“I’ll live. Sorry, here.” you say and hand it back.

“I almost wish I didn’t have that extension for it now, seeing someone’s grubtube recommendations is a very telling thing about a troll you know.” Vriska scoffs and puts the device away.

“I… extension?” you ask as she stands up.

“Hm? Oh, yeah for grubtube. It got, like, spammed with music from this one artist so people made a thing to filter it out. If you don’t have it then your recommendations are just f*cked. You must have something like that too, right?” she asks.

“I’ve… not been on in a while. Have you listened to any of the videos?” you ask her hurriedly. You stand up and cast a wary eye at your quadrantmates who still aren’t looking at you, but who knows how much time you have.
“Yeah, it’s not really my kind of thing. Sounds a little weird to me but everyone else can’t seem to get enough. I went to a party where they played it and the whole thing turned into a riot, it was crazy, I had to bail before the drones showed up.” she says.

You weren’t imagining things. You weren’t wrong.

Your bloodpusher is pounding in your chest and you almost don’t hear Vriska asking if you’re ok. You’ve got to keep calm, get through the game and then go home and talk about this. You bet it was Hal or Dirkka who was running research if any is really happening, you need to ask them what they’ve done.

“I’ve got it, it’s cool.” you assure her.

She gives you a strange look but doesn’t press you on your answer. Soon John and Terezi return with snacks and the game continues. Ghouls are killed, loot distributed and levels gained. You already knew what you were going to get when you gained a level but Karkat keeps waffling back and forth between spells. You end up waiting for him on Terezi’s balcony again with Dayvhe keeping you company.

“Want some?” Dayvhe asks, offering a bag of gummy grubs to you. They’re the sour kind, crusted in sugar.

“Ugh, no.” you cringe.

“Come on, calories. You need to eat enough.” Dayvhe reminds you like he has done basically every single night since he got you back. It is starting to wear a little thin.

“So I’ve heard but if I eat any more sugar I’m going to go into some kind of blood sugar shock and die. And you’d be very sad, probably. Besides I’m back in those new jeans you secretly bought me before so I’m not starving to death any time soon.” you snort. Honestly without TV, your husktop or music Dayvhe’s had an easier time getting you to eat because if nothing else it makes you less bored.

“I’ll make you something else when we get back.” Dayvhe nods.

Looking up you can see several of Terezi’s scalemates hanging from the tree branches. You reach up and idly nudge one with your finger so it swings back and forth. Being out here draws your thoughts back to Vriska’s palmhusk and grubtube.

“Dayvhe...” you say softly and he looks over at you with curiosity.

“All that research I was doing before when... you know. You said someone was going to look into it.” you say hesitantly.

“You’ve changed your mind on that or something?” Dayvhe asks, adjusting his shades.

“What? No, I still want it worked on. Someone is working on it, right?” you ask and worry starts to rise in your throat. If you are right and no one’s been doing anything you could be in real trouble.

“I mean the others know, I told Hal about it when you were sleeping at one point.” Dayvhe says with a half shrug.

“So... so as far as you know no one is working on it.” you clarify.

“On the theory that grubtube being weird means some adult is sending celebrities to personally murder you and Troll Will Smith handed you big cash? Sollux, you were off your head. That’s
“crazy.” Dayvhe sighs.

“I’m not crazy!” you hiss at him.

Dayvhe pushes away from the railing, holding his hands up to calm you like some dumb panicky animal.

“I didn’t say you were, but you were acting it then, you gotta admit.” he says.

“But you lied to me, you told me someone was going to take care of it and no one is. Besides, Edward Norton recently tried to murder me, this isn’t that much more unbelievable!” you snap.

“You were sick and freaking out, I needed you to let it go. It was an emergency, Sol! You really shouldn’t be focusing on this junk again, you’ve gotta just work on getting better.” Dayvhe says soothingly. You are not soothed, however.

“Better.” you repeat. You’re clenching your teeth so hard your head is starting to hurt.

“Yeah, back to normal. Cause this isn’t-” he starts.

You’ve had enough, if you have to keep hearing this you’re going to lose your shit.

“This isn’t normal. Newsflash asshole, neither am I! I never have been! I’ve always been ‘crazy’ or whatever and I tried to warn you. I’m not ever getting better. Hopefully I’ll get to make the parts where I’m not going at a hundred miles an hour or wanting to lay on the train tracks and end it all be less but I’m never going to be better or normal.” you snarl at him, clenching your fists tight.

“I get that this is hard on you and you clearly didn’t know the kind of shit I had going on. So, yeah, it sucks being exposed to me when I’m like this, I get it, but I have to be me all the time! That doesn’t mean you just get to lie to my face because it’s easier!” you add harshly.

“Okay, that’s- that’s fair I guess but I was just trying to get you calm. And you seemed to have let it go when you started feeling be- I mean-” he fumbles.

You open your mouth to talk, to argue back at him about how it not being okay for him to lie to you just because it’s easier cannot be rebutted by him essentially going ‘yeah but this time it was convenient for me to calm your hysterical ass down’.

“And what if I’m right?” you say instead as calmly as you can manage.

“About all that shit?” Dayvhe asks, his eyebrows raising above his shades.

“It’s not shit!” you bark back angrily.

“You were delusional and completely out of your mind! The fact that you’re even thinking about it now makes me think this is probably a bad night and we should have kept you home.” Dayvhe insists.

The door opens before you can say anything you’ll regret, it was ajar before but now Karkat is peeking through it.

“What’s going on out here?” he asks, looking between you.

“I’m going home.” you tell him stiffly.

“Alone. I’ll fly.” you add and leap from the balcony, firmly ignoring Dayvhe shouting after you.
You’re seething the whole way back. When you land on the empty beach you think about going inside but you’re just too angry to. If any of them talk about how of course you’re crazy and should never be listened to or tell you that yeah they looked into it without any of the precautions you were using you think you’ll lose it. At least all of your stuff on your husktop was backed up so even if no one was working on the intel you got then you can start up again on a new machine. That just leaves you pacing back and forth on the shore like an angry seadweller, occasionally lobbing rocks into the water.

You hear the scuttlebuggy before you see it. Dayvhe is frantic, or that’s the impression you get as you whizz by him on your path to somewhere fifty feet up in the air only to cross your legs and stay up there. You’ve been eating, you can sustain this for a while yet. You can hear Dayvhe shouting up at you but you ignore it, when you sense yourself starting to drift a little lower you look down to see only Karkat on the beach. He waves his hands at you and then grabs a rock off of the beach and tries to throw it straight up at you. It arcs up, gets nowhere near you and then nearly hits Karkat on the way down because he only thought about dodging at the last minute.

You float down to the ground, finally landing with a soft crunch of sand. Karkat is looking at you in clear shock.

“He wouldn’t tell me what happened, or his explanation made no sense but you two are really having a fight, aren’t you? I’ve not seen anything like this since you killed his lusus so what’d he do to piss you off this bad?” Karkat asks.

“Oh, are you sure I’m not just having a mood swing like a crazy and unreliable person who should just be cooperative?!” you snap.

“What? Look, if you’re going to drag me into an argument can you at least start at the beginning so I know what the hell is going on?” you snap.

“Start anywhere then, I can ask questions and you can backtrack if you have to.” he suggests.

“You’re only going to side with Dayvhe anyway.” you mumble bitterly.

Karkat straightens up suddenly and looks at you with his eyes wide and round.

“Why would you think that? Sollux, I’ve known you for practically forever. You’re my best friend. We’re dating, you’re my- we’re in a-“ Karkat hesitates and looks a little anguished.

“Say it.”

“Ugh. A ‘quintdrant’ that’s still not a word, we’re that together. I care about you both. I’m not working against you and if Dayvhe needs a kick in the head then I’ll do it.” he insists.

“Vriska showed me a dnd video on grubtube, and I know I’m not supposed to but I looked at the main screen and she told me that she has to have an extension plugged into grubtube or it just shows The Grand Entertainer’s shit and nothing else. I didn’t imagine that.” you explain.

“Well, firstly you know you’re supposed to be taking a break from that stuff so you don’t get upset and agitated but I know you know that so reminding you is pointless. But also I could have told you
“Right, but he has worked on, directed, casted, owned or otherwise been involved with productions that all of the adult celebrity trolls we know about. And when I was researching him they kept following my location, they killed a kid looking for me. These people are dangerous and I’m not imagining it and Dayvhe said that someone else was going to look into what I researched and found out and he didn’t, he lied to me. He lied to me about something that could be hugely important because it was easier for him that way.” you say. You can hear your words getting sharper as you go on but you persist.

“And I know I was manic. I’m fully prepared to admit that I jumped the tracks of sanity at some point but I don’t know which and it doesn’t mean I’m suddenly thinksponge-dead. I’ve coded so much genius shit when manic and it’s been glorious work. Sure I forgot other important staying alive things to do it and was hearing things in the walls but I can be rational and irrational at once. I can do both.” you tell him.

“No one’s checked that out then?” Karkat asks after a moment.

“Apparently not!” you say, throwing your hands in the air and falling back on the sand.

“There’s some stuff in your theory that makes sense. Obviously those adults all know each other and are working together for something that has something to do with Cal. But an explanation like oh they’re all part of a secret society that wanted something to do with that lusus or maybe they’re other grubs he raised or something. You make that way more complicated when you add in some random director who’s just bought out grubtube somehow and the theory that the music was doing something to your head, which I know you have.” Karkat says and you cringe.

“But there’s clearly something going on and we’re better off if your theory is investigated, for all we know you have all the right data and half of the right conclusions and then just went a little left field at the end. We’re better off knowing the answer even if the answer is absolutely none of it’s true and you’d feel better with a definitive answer either way. So Dayvhe was stupid to lie and not follow through on that but I think he was panicked and just trying to help for all that he obviously fucked up.” he adds.

You glare up at the stars. Karkat’s right about needing to know the truth no matter what it is. You wish he had a little more faith in you but he’s always been a skeptic, a trait you usually like in him.

“I don’t think that’s why you’re really angry.” Karkat says into the dark.

“He wants me to get better.” you say finally, because it hurt so much to hear so that must be what you need to tell Karkat.

“We all want you to get better, I’m sure you want you to get better.” Karkat points out, looking down at you.

“I want to feel better compared to how I feel now, I want to be stable again and have everything not suck so much.” you correct him.

“You mean… better?” Karkat says slowly with a confused expression on his face.

“He means better like get better from a cold. I’m sick now and then I’ll be ‘normal’ again, his words more or less.” you say.

Karkat sucks a breath in and then hisses it out through clenched teeth.
“Wow.” he finally says and pats you gently on the leg.

“Like he’s just going to tell me what’s real, what I’m allowed to work on, when and what I can eat and make me sleep. I get that I’ve been a mess lately and thanks for the help and all but I’m always going to be a little like this and if he doesn’t trust me to do anything when I’m ‘not normal’ then I don’t know!” you say frustratedly.

“Well, congratulations on not punching him for that. That’s really fucked up. He probably doesn’t actually think all of that but what he’s saying and how overprotective he’s being is hinting at him thinking something dumb at least. I’ll talk to him, set him straight. I’ll kick his ass if I have to.” Karkat vows.

You sit up and look at him in surprise. He’s taking your side, he’s agreeing that Dayvhe’s been a jerk however unintentionally that may be. You expected him to tell you that you were just having a mood swing or being overemotional. He didn’t though and you probably should have given him more credit.

“He’s been really worried about you and he’s very obviously handling it poorly, but it doesn’t mean he thinks the worst and it doesn’t mean this is all over. He’s been a tool and he will apologise but it’s his first rodeo on the wild up and down of the Sollux’s Bipolar Buckaroo, alright? He’s gonna fuck up.” Karkat tells you.

“I don’t remember you ever really fucking up.” you mumble unhappily.

“Ah, see, that’s the benefit of having been your best friend forever. Past Karkat’s stupid mistakes are long forgiven and forgotten, no one thinks of the idiot that once was.” Karkat laughs and throws an arm around your shoulders.

You lean into his side a little and you both stay like that. Eventually Karkat gets up and says that he’ll go talk to Dayvhe, set him straight about things. You end up following him inside and hanging out in the wizard bowl. Weirdly you miss Aradia. It’s dumb, you hate her and she betrayed you but she had a way of dealing with you when you were sick that you could really use right now. She’d just take you with her places or visit you, she acted like what was happening to you was normal and humdrum. Probably because she didn’t care or knew how it’d turn out already but at the time it made you feel normal.

You would consider trolling her but you don’t. Partly because that would be sad and desperate but mostly because you don’t have your palmhusk back yet because you’re still banned from tech without supervision.

Your ear twitches when you hear footsteps come into the room, they’re quiet enough that you know it’s not Karkat at all. Dayvhe sits down next to you and folds his legs under him and looks out through the glass.

“So, Karkat just ripped me a new one.” Dayvhe says quietly.

You don’t have anything to say to that, what does he want from you? Sympathy?

“Apparently I’ve been making you feel shitty about this whole thing. I mean obviously you bailed on us earlier. Maybe I’ve been too overprotective but I’m really freaked out by this whole thing.” Dayvhe says.

“So… ‘sorry if your feelings got hurt but what about me’ is that about right?” you snap. Dayvhe stares at you and seems to think his words over carefully before saying anything else.
“Can I try that again?” he asks.

“Do.”

He fidgets a little and you glare out into the dark and empty sea.

“I shouldn’t have lied to you, but it wasn’t like I was trying to. You were hurt and scared so I told you something to help make you feel better. When I showed up at your door bleeding out you told me things were going to be ok even though you had no way of knowing even if you did your best. You didn’t say ‘it’s going to be ok Dayvhe unless you get an infection and die’ because that would have made me panic.” he says.

“And all the time since then?” you ask.

“I… forgot, kind of. I mean, it was what you were focused on when you were delusional so it made sense to keep it away from you. Plus you were delusional, so…” Dayvhe says, holding his hands up and shrugging.

“I’m not automatically wrong about everything when I’m less than perfect!” you shout. This is going nowhere, if you keep reacting to him this will just be another fight and you’ll have to leave again. You don’t want it to go that way.

“I don’t want to be right, but I need to know. I have to either work on my investigation myself or get someone else to.” you insist.

“There’s no way Hal would let you, not until he’s convinced you’re yourself again. Besides he runs the whole network down here.” Dayvhe says hesitantly.

Great, so you’ve no hive to go back to by now most likely and you’re locked up down here with you access to anything restricted to hell.

“Look, I…” Dayvhe hesitates and looks anxiously at you, “I know what you were like when we got you back. Even if I don’t know how with it you were the rest of the time I doubt that you’re right about everything. But you’re right, I promised to have someone check it out so you’d know and I dropped the ball on that. I’ll ask, I swear.”

“I want to believe you.” you tell him quietly. You press the soles of your shoes against the dark glass of the wizardbowl and watch Dayvhe’s expression shift to fear.

“You don’t believe me?” he asks.

“You already lied to me, said it was ok because I’m sick. You obviously still think I’m that level of sick for how closely you watch me and you don’t seem to trust that I can think at all when I’m anything other than perfectly healthy so how do I know you’re not just trying to make me feel better by lying?” you point out.

“No! I don’t- I know it looks like I think that but it’s not that. I just… I can’t tell and I don’t want to make things worse. I’ve no idea what I’m doing and I don’t want to hurt you or break you, I’m not KARKAT!” Dayvhe says loudly.

You can hear Karkat’s name echo around the glass walls. Dayvhe looks like he’d very much like the ground to swallow him up and you guess that he didn’t mean to say that but something in that sentence he very much meant.

“What does Karkat have to do with it?” you say slowly.
Dayvhe’s whole expression is bitter, he’s tense all over and he won’t even look right at you.

“I keep nearly losing you. You’re my moirail and you nearly died, got tortured and helmed, I once got you sick with psipox that could have killed you and now when you get sick you run off and anything could have happened. Then I get you back and I can’t even help you right, the one thing I’m supposed to do. I pity you so much and I’d fly right off the handle without you but I’m clearly so SO shit at this. I try to look after you and I make you think that I think you’re an empty-panned idiot and I piss you off so bad you have to get away from me.” he hisses.

That’s a pretty skewed view of things. Your relationship has been a lot more positive and varied than just moments where your life and/or wellbeing was in serious danger. There’s way more good in there than he’s saying. That said, you know what having that viewpoint on things is like.

“But Karkat seems to know what to do make you feel better, he somehow knows when he should push you and when to let you do your own thing and recover on your own. I have no idea how he knows. But- but you’ve known him for forever so I guess it makes sense but sometimes it’s like you were single when I met you, when Karkat introduced us and I have no idea why.” he says in a rush.

You backtrack through his logic there for a bit.

“You think I should have been Karkat’s moirail instead of yours?” you guess.

“No. You’re my moirail and as I’ve already said, man, I’m selfish. I just don’t get why you and he weren’t if he’s so good at this.” Dayvhe says.

“This thing between you me and him, this fifth quadrant thing. That’s the only thing I can see working. Karkat can’t do proper quadrants because he’s not wired that way and I’m hardly stable. If he had to maintain just one normal quadrant with me without flipping to something else he’d go nuts and we’d break up. This bit of everything deal works great and it wouldn’t work without you. I’m not replacing you, that’s not what this is about.” you sigh.

Dayvhe doesn’t look convinced about the replacing thing so you try again.

“He’s not replacing you. It’s just he’s- he knows what he’s doing.” you explain.

“Yeah he said he’s seen you like this before but…”

“He has. It wasn’t anything. He’s my best friend and he’d know when I was in a bad way and he’d either hang out with me through trollian or come over to my hive or bring me to his and he’d suffer through me and then I’d be better and things would go back to normal. This part he knows, it’s just experience. I get that you’ve not done this but I’m telling you to quit treating me like you have been.” you tell Dayvhe firmly.

Dayvhe is squinting at you.

“Yeah, for sure I’ve been a tool. Slap me in the head if I keep patronising you like that, I apologise for real. But are we gonna cover that it sounds like you two have had a pale friends with benefits thing going for, uh, sweeps apparently?” Dayvhe asks skeptically.

“Don’t be dumb.” you groan and get to your feet, leaning against the glass.

“You were the first person to pap my face, I swear. We weren’t moirails.” you insist.

“Yyyyeah but I don’t exactly pap you at all these nights except in serious emergencies when you tell me I can and we’re still moirails.” Dayvhe points out and stands up as well.
“That’s different.” you shrug.

Dayvhe shakes his head and looks up at the ceiling.

“You’re both wildly stupid, but it’s fine. I’m not jealous, I’d rather someone good was looking out for you before. The idea of you all alone except for Aradia makes me mad enough to chew glass. I just wish I wasn’t so amazing at screwing this up.” he says, a frown marring his perfect face.

“For the record as well, Sollux. You warned me about this, you told me-” he starts.

“Dayvhe.” you warn.

“Augh, sorry.” Dayvhe hisses and tangles his hands in his hair. He paces back and forth for a moment before trying again. He licks his lips nervously, his teeth sinking into the bottom one a little as he looks up at you again. He takes a big breath and tries again.

“From what I understand this is just… how your thinkspoon is. Right?” he asks all careful as he approaches you.

“It’s not getting better.” you say.

“Right, but- ok here’s the thing. If I could just wave my hands or do anything and make you feel better, make your thinkspoon not hate you so bad and make you so hurt I’d do it immediately. If this was a person making you feel this shit I’d end them, you know? But I get that I can’t.” he explains.

Cautiously he reaches out and touches you as he gets a little closer, settling his hand at your waist. When you don’t cringe away he touches your sign and runs a claw over it carefully.

“You’re my moirail, though, and I pity you. I don’t want to change you, none of you. I want to help you so things suck less all over but I still want you. I want you even when you’re sick and gross and we’re both coughing and grody. And I’ll admit I know a hell of a lot less about how to help with this and good job me on screwing it so bad you don’t trust me about it or think I want to swap your thinkspoon for someone easier. I don’t want that. I want you.” he swears.

You’re still mad at the way he’s been acting, it’s been driving you crazy and the things he said before too. You get that it was probably a shitty way of expressing something that’s not that bad and maybe he just needed a slap upside the head about it. You’re still mad, you are.

But you’re not made of stone, goddamnit.

You’ve got your moirail here expressing the most sugar sweet of pale sentiments, genuinely apologising and telling you that he doesn’t really want to change you.

“I pity you too, but you said some messed up shit.” you warn and reach out to catch hold of one of his horns and tug his head to the side.

“I know. Engage thinkspoon before mouth next time, my biggest problem. I’m sorry, slap me next time I say something dumb.” he apologises.

“I don’t want to slap you.” you say, rolling your eyes.

“Ah but you don’t deny I’m going to say something dumb again probably.” Dayvhe teases.

“I’m a realist.” you snort.

Dayvhe snickers quietly so you shoulder him into the glass and kiss his stupid dumb face. Dumbass
moirail tried so hard he fucked it up totally differently. Variety, you guess. He’s purring real hard, probably the relief that you’re not fighting anymore. You can feel a threatening rumble of one building in your own chest too.

“Wait, man. No way I’m the one grovelling here I should kiss you instead.” Dayvhe says suddenly and then suddenly you’re against the cool glass.

“Just the palest for you.” Dayvhe says quietly and wraps his arms around the back of your neck. You can feel a cautious kiss against your neck, a test to see if you’ll let him. Naturally you want to.

“Oh, yeah?” you ask.

Look you’re willing to let him grovel and you’re still feeling mostly shit most of the time so sue you if you’re inclined to allow one of your favourite people to wax about how much he likes you.

“Yeah man. Should I just list shit? I can do that.” he says with a sharp grin and leans against you a little heavier and your longer horns click against the curved glass.

“You’re just the best disaster. You’re so wicked smart and you schoolfeed fools online who think they’re better at basically anything than you but then you try and get through one conversation with Karkat without accidentally insulting him and you can’t even. Not that I’m any better but most of the time I’m trying to insult him.” Dayvhe rambles.

“Same sometimes. If he didn’t want to be trolled he shouldn’t be so funny when he’s pissed.” you say. Dayvhe kisses your throat and he can probably feel you talking.

“That’s the fuckin’ truth. And hey did I mention you’re basically a god psionically but until me you didn’t even eat right and you gave yourself migraines and how did no one just like see you and instantly be like that wreck is mine. Except Karkat, ok no wait don’t look at me like that, I’ll totally buy that you two morons weren’t accidentally totally ‘no romo honestly’ dating for ages off and on. Fuck you’re both so dumb I’m gonna die.” Dayvhe laughs, backing off a little when you shoot him a look.

“You’re-” he kisses you quickly and keeps talking, “you’re a natural disaster and I’d fight the sun for you.”

You… you are a big fan of kissing your moirail. Just in general it’s great but you can’t stay mad or stop from laughing given that he seems to be trying to cover your entire face in them.

Needless to say you’re not expecting the sudden yelp in your ear or the way he hauls you back from the glass. You’re already crackling all over with psi when you spot what he’s seen.

“Holy… Roxxie?” Dayvhe gasps, stepping close to the glass again.

Outside, floating in the water is- well, she’s a giant.

“What is she, eight foot tall?” you whisper, looking Roxxie up and down.

“And then the horns.” Dayvhe says, pressing his hand to the glass.

She really is big and so very adult dark, aside from the fuschia in her fins and gills which almost seems luminescent in the dark water. Her eyes are just as hot pink and something about seeing that colour eyes in adult skin fills you with awful fear. You can’t help but think of the Empress herself or the heiress who captured you.
Roxxie smiles bright and wide, leans in to press her hands to the glass, one of them over Dayvhe’s even though it dwarfs his. The smile on her face though is all Roxxie, mischief and affection instead of cruelty. She inclines her head to you then looks at Dayvhe and waggles her eyebrows. To add to it she even flashes you both a diamond sign with her fingers.

“Oh my GOD Roxxie get LOST!” Dayvhe wails in mortification but Roxxie just holds her arms around her middle and laughs.

You turn your head at distant shouting.

“ROXXIE?! ROXXIE!” It’s Dirkka, you think. You know he molted too, you’ve seen him since then like once and freaked out but you were too out of it to remember much.

“She’s here!” Dayvhe shouts back and suddenly another adult skids into the room.

Pitch skinned and clutching a towel around his waist adult Dirkka isn’t wildly taller than his pre-molt self, maybe a foot taller at most. But this does not stop him marching up to the window furiously.

“What do you think you’re doing out there?! I took one shower break from watching your molt and you just waltz off out into the ocean?!’’ he snaps.

“Pretty sure she can’t hear you man.” Dayvhe points out.

“Yeah well I’m going out there to get her dumb almost naked ass and then we’ll see!” Dirkka shouts and stalks off.

“But you don’t have gills again yet!” Dayvhe calls after him.

“THEN I’LL DROWN AND THEN SHE’LL BE SORRY!” Dirkka yells back.

You look back and Roxxie isn’t there anymore, you guess she’s gone. Probably in whatever direction Dirkka is headed to.

“He’s not even going to notice that she was wearing his underwear and stretching out his shirt.” you say.

“Moirail clothes stealing privilege of course.” Dayvhe says lightly.

“What did you take?” you ask him suspiciously.

“Nothing that you can prove, also for unrelated reasons I need to go now.” Dayvhe says and flashsteps away. Of course you run after him, the little sneak thief.

True to Dayvhe’s word he does go and speak to Hal and Dirkka about what you found and they swear to you that they’re looking into it. Dirkka and the disconcertingly tall Roxxie even order you parts for you to rebuild your husktop. Dayvhe and Karkat don’t monitor what you do with it as such, but they still kick you off of it if you’ve just been moping about halfheartedly trying to break idle games all day. They’re keen on you doing this eating, showering and fresh air thing. Still, it’s better.

Or it would be, if someone else wasn’t blocking you.

“Your results are getting better, see? And your scores on the tests for depression are improving, plus Dayvhe tells me that you’re doing better in terms of functioning.” Hal explains, pointing to a screen on the wall now that he’s done analysing your latest results.

“Great.” you say without feeling.
“You still haven’t told me what you two have done with my research.” you say.

Considering as he’s an artificial intelligence piloting a robot body he doesn’t have body language in the same way everyone else does. All of his expressions are, by and large, very deliberate. He fixes you with a cool and calm look that carries the mildest smile.

“You don’t need to worry about that, we have the situation well in hand. You can go now by the way, I’m sure you’re eager to get away from all this medical stuff.” Hal says with gentle and measured reassurance.

“No, I’m eager for you to tell me what’s going on.” you say, standing up off of the medical stretcher that you’d been sat on.

“If you’re worried about security I assure you we’re taking everything very seriously. We’re working from the assumption that you’re right because that’s the worst case scenario and then looking for proof that we’re not and at the same time obscuring our location. You don’t need to worry about security. Roxxie and Dirkka are all molted now and they’re both very skilled and focused, and I live on the internet so I know what I’m doing. Really, just let us do this.” Hal says.

You wonder if he has self programmed expressions. What’s this one? Sympathy/concern with traces of being a patronising jumped up toaster?

“You know what? Fuck that, I’m just going to do it myself.” you hiss and push past him.

“You shouldn’t try to do that. It’d be bad for your health for one.” he tells you.

“I’ll manage.” you snap and hit the button for the door but it doesn’t open.

“You’ve done really well getting better and if you’re wrong then you’ll just make yourself sicker and worry Dayvhe, not to mention the rest of your friends. If you’re right on the other hand you’ve already proven yourself to be reckless. Brilliant, yes, but reckless. Either way you won’t be helping, so it’d be best if you didn’t try.” Hal says, his voice neutral in a way that real trolls voices never are.

“And if I do?” you ask slowly.

Hal doesn’t answer you and you take your hand from the door and look around the room. You don’t see anything out here that Hal could use on you to put you out of action.

“You can’t stop me.” you tell him.

“I don’t want to.” he replies simply.

“But you think you will.” you guess.

“Certainly.”

“Big words for a guy I can disassemble with a thought.” you growl.

“You have the power to inconvenience me and make me unhappy with a thought but even then it changes nothing for you. If anything everyone would be more concerned about your stability.” Hal reasons.

Just what is he threatening you with here? Or is that concern the threat itself? You definitely don’t want to worry Dayvhe and Karkat but you’d hope they would at least agree that this is absurd.

“I have no intention of controlling or monitoring what you do with that husktop that’s plugged into
the network that essentially functions as part of my thinkspoon. Just take my advice and neither of us needs to spare a thought for it.” Hal adds.

“Does Dayvhe know you spy on people like this?” you demand.

“Does he know that I see everything in my network? Of course. Your boring interactions with each other over trollian and the websites you go to take as much attention for me as the sensation of your clothes on your own body do for you. But something alarming, wrong, something that I’m looking out for has my full attention. So leave the alarming stuff to the adults, and be safe and boring with your quadrantmates, hm?” Hal says.

You could take your husktop out, off of his network but if you were him you’d put something in that’d stick even offline or off of the network. Something burrowed deep that’d brick the machine if you tried to take it out. You’re stuck, unless you manage to get your hands on a husktop that’s never been on this network your ability to research is null.

“Well, what are you standing here for? The door’s not locked.” Hal says and turns his back to you.

You hit the button and it opens. It had been locked, you know it was. You back away, the itch of surveillance too deep to scratch. Maybe Hal’s just put the paranoia in your head but you’re a little worried that if you told Karkat what just happened he might not believe you, or even if he did then he’d just be stressing about the same thing with his devices and you have no fix for that right now. If you tracked Dayvhe down, though you know he’s out at the moment, he might just shrug and say that’s how Hal’s always been. He hardly has the most normal upbringing to judge.

No, this is not a problem you can solve right now.

You return to your block, greet Karkat and sit down on the floor. You open up trollian on your newly repaired husktop and a message pings up right away. Not from Hal as you’d first worried it might be.

arachnidsGrip [AG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

AG: Here’s your digital character sheet in case you lose the original.
[arachnidsGrip attached image arcana.jpg]
TA: oh thanx2. 2orry if thi2 wa2 a while ago ii only ju2t got my hu2ktop back and workiing.

“Are you trolling someone?” Karkat asks without looking up from his book.

“Vriska, dnd stuff.” you answer.

“If she keeps trying to kill my bard I’m going to flip shit.” Karkat notes and keeps reading.

AG: 8ack and working?
TA: ii broke iit recently, 2o ii had two put iit back together. iit’2 better than iit wa2 before though 2o that’2 2omethiing.
AG: What do you mean got it 8ack though? Don’t tell me the oh so superior sollux captor had to send his shit away to 8e fixed? >:::D
TA: a2 ii would ever.
TA: not that iit’2 any of your bu2iine22 but dv and kk have been holding ontwo iit. or ii gue22 one of diirkka’2... friiend2? quadrant2? the guy who run2 the network around here.
AG: Ugh, I couldn’t stand someone confisc8ting my stuff like that. Is that why you were so touchy last time I saw you?
TA: wow fuck off ii wa2n't touchy.
AG: Suuuuuuuure you weren't. Still, why the husktop? It's not like you're being kept under hive arrest, right? Kind of a jerk move to pull your 8est loved thing away.

You want to explain but there's no way you can without colouring your answer with the kind of thing that'll get Hal talking to the others and revoking your access again. You know Hal's watching, he told you so himself, albeit not with much focus. But should you say something concerning his focus will zone in on you.

TA: i shouldn't talk about it. liike i ain't my network.
AG: Oh. I see. Wow Sollux that's so boring.
AG: Changing the subject entirely back to our game there's something I want you to look up, something that my character can do that it might benefit yours to take a level in. Search for Thieves' cant.

You want to snap at her for being a bitch but something she said gives you pause. Her character? She's the dungeon master, she doesn't have a character unless you count all of the npcs. Curiously you look the words up, it's a rogue thing. A secret language used to convey meaning between select parties but not alerting others.

Oh.

Vriska, you magnificent bitch.

TA: riiight, i iee. iit could be uful, you're riight.
TA: wa also talkiing too you about my character before.
AG: You were. So tell me more about what's going on with him. I forget, were you telling me about something that happened to him in the past or something that's going on now.
TA: Sort of both. He has this... curse, as you know. It's like a psychic damage thing.
AG: I already knew that from his backstory, what about it?

You search through the spell list quickly and get back to her.

TA: well, iit's liike phanta2mal force a a cur2e. 2ometime2 he 2ee2 thing2 and believe2 thing2 that aren't real and obviou2ly you do a wi2dom throw two 2ee if he break2 free. but he won't know if he ha2 or not, he ha2 no way of knowing if 2omethiing wa2 real if he doe2n't have proof.
AG: Proof is important, and obviously if he's still with the paladin and the 8ard he can't go get that proof. So do you want him to wait until 8r to get it or is this a quest that someone splitting off from the party could undertake? What would the quest 8e?
TA: whoa, no. my character only survived with th2ealth and deceptiion check2. no way 2hould your character do that, iit's way two high level a place.
AG: Danger is my character's middle name.
TA: yeah well your character ha2 intellience for dump tat 2o iit's 2tilt a bad idea.
AG: Your insult's not even accur8, that'd 8e wisdom, 8ctually.
TA: hah. 2elf burn.
AG: !!!!!!!!
AG: Not that you'd know but my character is far higher level than yours and has charm person and command at her disposal as well as excellent weapon proficiency.

You groan and end up searching spells again, you don't want to leave her hanging because Vriska is not a patient troll. You find one that's closeish and hope she'll get your meaning.

TA: iit's not ju2t an ambu2h inn that in2tance 2he'd have two worry about. there2 object2 in her po2e2iion that may well have a... detect thought2 spell on iit. iif 2he wa2 two use tho2e thing2 two
try to search for the wrong thing with them 2he could tip off the high level npc.
TA: before my character wa2 affected by hi2 cur2e he even thought there might be a bard
iinvolved. a guy who ii2 proliifiic with hii2 mu2iic. it could fill 2omeone’2 whole page. without an
exten2iion.

You really hope she gets your meaning, that she’ll know you mean grubtube.

AG: That sounds like you're angling for a 8ig campaign, not a one off mission.
TA: iit depend2 on ifi my character fail2ed hi2 wii2dom 2ave on hi2 cur2e or not, though doe2n’t
iit? iif he wa2 ju2t under the influence of that 2pell there’2 nothing there at all, but iif he 2ucceeded
on that then iit could be very dangerou2. 2o iit’2 a bad idea.

AG: What's the quest oobjective, though? When I design quests for you there's a thing you get at the
end that lets you know you did it. What's the oobjective with this quest?
TA: my character wa2 2tealthed and thought he 2aw the enemii2 kiill an npc. no npc corp2e, no
2prawliing que2tliine and iit’2 ju2t the cur2e.

AG: And where on the map is this place?
TA: vrii2ka
AG: Sollux.

TA: thi2 ii2 my character'2 que2t, even iif he can't do it now and even though iit could be urgent iit
doe2n't mean your2 2hould do iit. ii know our back2torie2 for our character2 made them enemii2
for 2weep2 but that doe2n’t mean he'd want her two die and e2peciially not on hii2 que2t.
AG: You don't get to play other people's character's sollux. Sometimes a character with a chaotic
alignment makes unusual decisions. So tell me, where on the map are we talking?

You stare at the screen and then finally tear away to look over at Karkat who is obliviously reading

AG: I'd need to make a map for this, o8viously. So tell me what to draw.

TA: iif your character 2o much a2 2ee2 an enemy, 2he 2hould dii2engage before 2he'2 2een. and iif
2he wa2 2een 2he 2hould ab2olutely u2e command, al2o ii don't think your rulebook ii2 up two
date becau2e that 2pell let2 you control people and make them do anything. even 2omething fatal
two them2elvie2. 2o iif 2he wa2 2potted 2he'2 be able two do anything, riight?
AG: I think your character's alignment is slipping. >:::D
AG: 8ut yes, that is a good attack plan. Now help me make this map.
TA: you'd want two put iit a liittle way out2iide of the ciity where my character grew up. you know
iit ha2 trade route2, metal track2 that lead the way. iit2 right on there, the buiildiing iit2elf ii2 ju2t by
a briidge.

AG: How many floors? What does the outside look like? Which side of the city?
TA: 2mall buiildiing, about two floor2. nothing much out2iide, no real decoration, no other nearby
buiilding2. iif you were two walk from the area where your character grew up iit'd be on the 2iide of
the ciity you hiit fiir2t. iif you got ontwo a trade caravan from there by jumpiing ontwo iit you could
be there iin maybe half an hour'2 travel.

AG: Got it.
AG: Also I think you made your character wrong.
AG: You go on a8out this curse he has, 8ut really it would have 8een easier for you to class him as a
warlock. They endure something that varies from warlock to warlock in exchange for incredi8le
power. That fits him 8etter if you ask me, instead of just saying it's a curse. Just a thought.

arachnidsGrip [AG] ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

What… was that? You can’t help but be uncertain about the choice you made. She’s acting as if this
is a big adventure but it’s serious and yet you’re not sure if she understands the danger but just likes
that. But one way or another you might know soon if you’re right or not.
You do tell Dayvhe and Karkat about Hal when Dayvhe gets back from visiting John. Dayvhe is less than pleased but notably not surprised.

“He gets like this sometimes. He means well but- ugh.” Dayvhe says, shaking head head.

“Can’t you tell him to stop? This is all kinds of fucked up!” Karkat protests.

“Oh, I can and will tell him. But whether he listens to me is a different thing. I don’t know if he’s got Dirkka on his side or not with this and that’s a whole different issue. Hal had to actually have code in him to stop him interfering with my life before. I’ll go try to get them to stop.” Dayvhe assures you both.

“He won’t even tell me anything about what’s going on with my research, he won’t even tell me that there’s nothing to tell.” you say.

“Alright, I’m going to go ask. You two sit tight.” Dayvhe says with a wave and quickly walks off.

“I think he’s actually pissed at them.” Karkat says slowly.

When night falls the following night you awake to find a message on your husktop.

arachnidsGrip [AG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

AG: I know it's l8, you're pro8a8ly asleep. Troll me when you get this, I have to talk a8out your dungeons and dragons thing. It's not a one shot, it's a whole campaign.

arachnidsGrip [AG] ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone, with tumblr imploding you can either follow me on pillowfort where I'm Unda, or on twitter @undanewneon
There are some messages that you expect to wake up to and there are some that hit you completely out of the blue. First was the message Vriska left you recently, but you’ve no idea what your next move is with that. Plus you think Hal’s been watching you closer lately so maybe your best bet for now is to play innocent. As a helpful distraction, you have another message greeting you one night when you wake up.

arsenicCatnip [AC] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

AC: :33 < hey sollux, can you message me back when you get this? i n33d to talk to you.
Wow, you haven’t heard from Nepeta since before you were kidnapped. You reply, shooting for casual. You shift in your coon so that your legs are dangling out above the floor and your head is resting on the divide between the red and blue side.

What? You don’t sleep with Dayvhe and Karkat every day, sometimes they’re uh… busy with each other. Besides, they’re reeling back on how worried they are about you and that’s nice to feel now and then.

TA: 2orry, ii wa2 2leepiing. what’2 up?
AC: :33 < oh don't worry about that! i know i'm an earlier riser than mostly efurryone.
AC: :33 < are you f33ling okay? i know you went missing, dayvhe came to me for help tracking you down but i don't think i was any help at all. i'm really sorry about that.
TA: you have nothing two feel bad about. and ii'm doing better than ii wa2 at lea2t.
AC: :33 < well that's good!
AC: :33 < um
AC: :33 < not that i'm not concerned with you, i am. i wanted to message you sooner but i figured that the people you're closer to would be all over you and that might be a lot. plus i already heard that you were back safe so there was nothing to worry about. but i actually had something else give me claws to message you.
TA: and what’2 that?
AC: :33 < remember all that stuff about looking for caves? i figured that might still be something that was n33ded and i liked the exploring challenge anyway. but i found something that i think you really n33d to s33. if aradia was around i'd ask her for help too.
TA: do me a favour and don't talk two me about aa but ii2 thii2 2ome kiind of griim diirt cave wiith bodiie2 iin or 2omethiing?
AC: :33 < uh, alright. but no it's not that, it's actually more video game like so i thought of you. well, there was more than one reason fur that but i think you should come here and s33. it shouldn't be too far for you to fly.
[arsenicCatnip sent link ‘meeting place’]

You click on it and, ouch, that’s a way out from here. You grimace and check out the train routes to find that there’s one that’ll take you closeish, close enough for you to walk after that at least.

TA: actually ii can't fly riight now.
AC: :33 < oh no! are you sick?
TA: no
TA: ye2
TA: ii mean, ii can fly. phy2iically ii can do iit. but ii'm grounded now, liike a 2hiip. permii22iion two fly denied.
AC: :33 < you mean so you don't push yourself or something? i didn't hear about how you were when effuryone brought you back but it makes sense not to stretch yourself too much if that is it?
TA: yeah iit doe2. but iit 2uck2 and ii hate iit but moiiraiil rule2 you know?
AC: :33 < do i ever know! but i get it, he's just trying to look out for you isn't he?
TA: yeah

You cringe a little at comparing Dayvhe’s reasonable request that you please don’t burn up precious calories that you need for repairing actual physical damage and undoing starvation just for psionic use. Like, yes, you can fly and that’s really cool but do you really need anything up that high that you need to fly for it? Or if it’s instead of walking couldn’t you just do that or take transport? It’s all very reasonable and you have agreed to it entirely even though it still makes you feel like garbage.

AC: :33 < would dayvhe even be alright with you coming out here?
TA: ii don't need two a2k hii2 permii22iion for everythiing, of cour2e ii'll come along. i can get dre22ed now and meet you.
AC: :33 < ok if you're sure i'll m33t you there and then there's a bit of a hike.
TA: 2ound2 great.

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling arsenicCatnip [AC]

Well, that was kind of dumb. You only agreed just because you hated the idea of your relationship with Dayvhe being anything like hers with Equius. Maybe you shouldn’t judge there, they’ve been together for so long that it’s clearly working for them but he’s so controlling. You couldn’t stand being controlled like that.

“What if you ask him and he says no?” Dayvhe asks from behind you and you turn, great the figment is back. You reach up with one hand and erase the chalk marks on the wall indicating how many nights since you’d seen him. Great, you were on a streak.

“I’ll talk to him like the mature person I am.” you say waspishly and haul yourself out of the sopor and onto the floor. The figment snorts, ok mature is not exactly you.

“If he does say no then you have to crawl back to Nepeta and say that your moirail won’t let you, just like she always did with Equius.” the figment says, following you into the ablution block. You peel your sopor soaked underwear off and throw it through him.

“If he says no I’ll tell him why I want to go. It’s going to be fine, I can leave here. I have before.” you point out.

“Yeah he said you can leave but when’s the last time you did it without it being a huge thing that you
got in trouble for? You’re not really free.” it hisses. You grit your teeth and turn on the water, stepping into it and trying to focus on that. The feel of how warm it is, how fast it flows over your skin, the weird ways you feel and don’t feel it over your regrowing hair. Anything but him, he’s just you and you need to shut him up and shut him out.

“You could just go.” he points out when you turn the water off.

“Without telling him, I mean. He can’t say no if you’ve already gone.” he points out.

“Yeah, just vanish on him again. Great idea.” you snort.

“Oh well leave him a note and go if you really don’t have to ask for his permission what’s wrong with that? If you don’t ask he can’t say no.” the figment point out.

Oh, the shitty logic of that does have an appeal. You don’t have to have a potentially stressful conversation asking for permission to do something you used to be able to do without even telling him at all let alone consulting. It’d be a way to feel normal again. And if you asked him and he insisted on going with you like a lusus with their grub you’d feel so stupidly helpless. It’s easier if you don’t tell Dayvhe beforehand.

But it’s also selfish and callous. You vanishing on him is cruel after what he’s been through, just as much as him keeping you captive somewhere would be. It’s also placing fuckall trust in your relationship which itself would undermine it. The figment has the tempting easy way out but as you throw your damp towel back on the rack and go to get dressed you conclude that shit that’s worth doing isn’t always easy. You’re doing this.

…

…Fine, you’re making it happen. Goddamn Dayvhe.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TA: locatiion piing
TG: uh shit wait
TG: location: nutritionblock
TG: status: doing frankly illegal shit with peanut butter and other things i found in the hunger trunk

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

Well if that isn’t enough to convince you to see Dayvhe anyway you don’t know what is.

The route to the nutritionblock is easy, right, right, straight ahead past the statue of a wizard riding a puma, first door on the right after that. Dayvhe is as he said behind the counter with many jars and other packets open.

“I think maybe the oinkbeast slices might have been a little too far but I don’t know, the saltiness is kind of doing it for me.” he announces as you walk in.

“Oinkbeast and peanut butter?” you say skeptically.

“And aioli, spicy cheese and crushed cool ranch doritos.” he explains.

“I’m not kissing you again, for nights maybe.” you inform him.

“That’s fair.” Dayvhe agrees, licking a knife calmly.
“So, I’m going out. I’m meeting Nepeta.” you tell him, you’re not asking.

“She lives kind of far out though doesn’t she?” Dayvhe says suspiciously.

“I’m not flying.” you assure him and he relaxes a little.

“Oh! Oh shit that reminds me.” Dayvhe exclaims and drops the knife to pat himself down. He pulls out something small and holds it out to you across the counter. It’s a little white plastic wallet thing with a cute cartoon bee on it, it has a little smiley face on. You flip it open to see that it’s a train pass, a royal one like the one Dayvhe has. The picture on it is an older one, you think it might be from a picture of you and Karkat, it looks like his wall behind you.

“Roxxie wanted to do something to help until you’re back on your feet. Or, off of your feet and in the air again. Not that she’ll take it away after but you know. Free transport now and no one can try to kick you off either.” Dayvhe explains.

“I’m already living in her hive she didn’t have to…” you mumble.

“Naw, that’s Roxxie for you.” Dayvhe says with a shrug.

You pocket the pass, that’s really nice of her. Dayvhe casually bites into his monstrosity of a sandwich with a crunch.

“Saw the figment when I woke up.” you confess and Dayvhe’s expression sours.

“Are you sure you’re up to going out then? I’m sure Nepeta would wait.” he asks.

“See? See!” The figment crows from across the room.

“I’m fine. I’m going to go now, thanks for the pass.” you say. If he wants to stop you he can, you’re almost daring him to, just to prove the figment wrong.

“Hey, wait.” Dayvhe says, coming around the counter to you.

“Message me?” he asks softly.

“Of course I will.” you assure him and Dayvhe smiles, coming to a stop just in front of you. He lifts a careful hand up to the side of your face and obviously shifts it so it’s further back. Out of habit you lean into it so his thumb is just by your ear and his long and dexterous fingers cradle your head.

His shades are off so you can see the way his eyes flicker down a little. With shooshpaps clean off the table for the foreseeable future the two of you have fallen back more heavily on pale kisses, which is awesome but not doing anything to quell the quadrant blurring rumours that swirl around you, him and Karkat these nights. Not helped by you and Dayvhe lying to people for your own amusement and seeing how long you can keep a straight face.

Either way the point is you can tell when he wants to kiss you, and you’re leaving and he’s not stopping you at all. You were right to trust him, fuck that awful fear in your head about it. You kiss him first and it’s wonderful until you breathe and then AUGH.

“BLUGH!” you recoil from your now cackling, treasonous moirail. Augh, it’s like you’re infected! It was just a peck and, oh GOD your whole mouth tastes like that awful sandwich. Oinkbeast and cool ranch and- fuck how much he’s laughing at you.

“You’re the worst.” you accuse him, grabbing him by the horn and hauling him in so he’s under
your arm and you can entirely ruin his hair. You snag the back of his shirt and pull it up and hook it on his horns too for good measure before you let him go.

“I had to!” Dayvhe laughs as he tries to untangle himself.

You flip him off and leave. But because you are the absolute worst and misery loves company you shoot Karkat a message as you’re waiting for the bubble to take you to the surface saying that Dayvhe is in the nutrition block and could use some quadrant-y attention. You’re just getting to the train station when Karkat messages you back cursing you out and demanding you bring back ‘A METRIC FUCKTONNE OF MOUTHWASH’ on your return. Poor Karkat, he probably had his actual tongue on Dayvhe’s mouth before it hit him. You will mourn him. Dayvhe trolls you and tells you that you’re the best. He also reminds you to eat real food.

The journey there is long and boring but being gold and with one of your now many hats hiding your ports no one pays you any mind at all. No one crowds you in and tries to touch you and all in all the whole thing is painless, another notch in your tally of things that are starting to assure you that you can function on your own now. You’re not broken forever.

You find Nepeta on the edge of some bumfuck nowhere town sitting on a big rock outside a shop reading comics and drinking a fountain soda. She perks up to see you as you come closer.

“Hey Sol! Good to see you!” she says cheerfully. You doubt that you’re good to actually see, you still look like someone who was tortured relatively recently.

“Hey Nepeta. I’m gonna get something to eat but then we can go wherever it is that you want to.” you tell her and duck into the shop. You grab enough high calorie snack shit to keep Dayvhe happy and then something hot from their counter, you send Dayvhe a picture of it just so he knows that you’re both okay and eating. You’re unwrapping your meal when you come back out to Nepeta.

“This way!” she says and leads you off.

“So why, exactly, do you need me?” you ask with a mouthful of food.

“Hm, I’m trying to find a good way to explain this. Uh, ok, yeah, you know in video games when you get to a level that’s packed with meaning and you solve puzzles based on stuff you’ve learnt so far? Well, it’s like that only I’ve just come into this here. It’s a ruin but I don’t know when from. I already disabled a bunch of traps but this is a bit beyond me, I wanted to know what you thought.” she explains.

“Unless it’s computerised I doubt I can be much help here, Nep.” you warn her.

“You’ll see.” Nepeta says cryptically.

If this is some FLARPING thing then you would have thought that the other half of team Charge would have been more useful, Tavros was always big into that backstory stuff. Or Vriska and Terezi, they’re always up for danger and excitement. Honestly you’re the last person you’d ask if you were her.

Nepeta leads you through the woods into a semi cleared area, or at least the trees here seem smaller, beyond it you can see a cave mouth right into the mountainside.

“This is it. So, this is sealed but I opened it by myself but it’s obvious other people have too and it’s been vandalised as well.” Nepeta explains as she takes you into the cave. As soon as you’re in the shade Nepeta pulls a torch and you see the wall that’s set in the cave a little way. It’s a mural made from small chips of coloured stone set into some kind of adhesive like cement, it’s obviously been
vandalised. What you can see of it shows a man in a cloak with his hands outspread to his sides but the whole torso and face has been smashed apart.

Nepeta reaches out and places her hand in the centre of what would be the figure’s torso, right over his pumpbiscuit and gently pushes. It pushes in with cracks that you hadn’t spotted and with a mechanical noise the wall slides into cave wall the whole way suggesting mechanisms and scale built into the place that hint at far more effort.

“What the shit?” you whisper.

“I know, right?” Nepeta says eagerly. She flicks on another flashlight and throws it at you and leads you in.

The cave goes a little further back, enough that you’re a little out of the light of night. The beam of your torch hits on another wall with yet another figure in a mural. The stones of this one reflect your light wildly, nearly blinding you. You shift the angle of the beam slightly and see that it’s the skin of the figure that reflects like that, this one too is vandalised but nowhere near as much as the first. It’s clear that this is a woman, but her face and sign have been smashed away leaving just broken stones on the floor and gaps on the wall. Your eyes run over the jade of her outfit and the shape of her face, horns and hair.

“It almost looks like Kanaya.” you say.

“Right! That’s what I thought but look here.” Nepeta says and points the beam of her torch down to the bottom of the mural. There’s a small sign that reads ‘trust’.

“Trust?” you echo it.

“This one took me a little bit, I did it by accident admittedly but I worked it out. She’s a rainbowdrinker obviously, what’d be the ultimate proof that you trust someone like that?” Nepeta asks eagerly. Hm… the last one was button activated right? So…

You walk closer and reach up to the figure’s face, maybe touching it in a way that exposes your wrist might do it? But no, nothing is happening. You return to Nepeta’s side with a frown.

“Right line of thought, but try…” Nepeta points the light at herself, upwards in fact and deliberately tilts her head back and exposes her throat to the figure. You look up as well and there is a rock that’s slightly differently toned than the others and sticking out of the cave roof. You reach up but it’s too high so cheating a little with your psionics you push it and the wall slides back.

“I don’t think many people if any got through because this one isn’t smashed.” Nepeta explains as she walks through. You follow her and less than a minute of walking away you see why she brought you here.

This wall like the others is covered in brightly coloured glittering rocks. Front and centre is a tall man, wearing yellow and black with your sign on his chest and a facsimile of your face rendered in small rocks. Small rocks aside from the glittering ruby and sapphire set into his face. In the scene he is holding hands on one side with the rainbow drinker who too bears Kanaya’s sign, on his other side is a man whose outfit is trimmed in mutant red and bears the same nubby horns as Karkat but is without sign. That man is holding hands with a woman with long hair and triangular horns, bearing Nepeta’s sign. Other figures are connected to them, all goldbloods like you and on each furthest side a sculpted hand reaches out from the wall.

“I see why you called me. But why not Karkat and Kanaya too?” you ask curiously.
“Because I… I was worried I was reading too much into it.” Nepeta mumbles.

“It’s not exactly subtext here Nepeta, apparently all of our ancestors knew each other and clearly decided that what they wanted to do with their lives was set up some weird ass tomb of horrors with a side of craft fair!” you exclaim, waving your hands around. Except that fucks with the light so you stop that.

“Well, it doesn’t matter because I can’t get past this door. I thought maybe you might be able to help since it’s your ancestor. The inscription says ‘unity’ and I can’t work it out.” Nepeta complains.

“Well what have you tried?” you ask thoughtfully, the others have all been button pressing so as she’s talking you start scouring the walls and the ceiling for buttons.

“I’ve tried touching the hands, not that I can hold them at the same time they’re too far apart. I’ve tried touching all of the hands there and basically touched the entire mural. I’ve tried kneeling in front of it to, I don’t know, show worship to the idea of unity or something.” Nepeta says frustratedly.

You walk closer and look at the stone hands sticking out, you wonder how it moves with 3d elements in it like this. You run your hands over them but they don’t magically react to your touch any better either. With little else to do you return to the figure of… of your ancestor you suppose. Geez, who even thought you had one? You shine the light right in his face and the light of his gaudy gemstone eyes throws red and blue light around the room in an arc. You grin and move the light about so they spark about familiarly.

“You think it’s the reflections?” Nepeta asks.

“No, it’s just funny. I mean, look.” you hold out your hand and let it spark, the light thrown off from it in red and blue is just like the light through the stones. Except this is real psionics on your… hand. HMM.

You lower your torch and go back to Nepeta’s side so you can look at the thing as a whole. There’s no way even both of you could close that circle, they’re too far apart. You pull a snack from your sylladex as well as an energy drink.

“I have an idea.” you say between bites.

“Let’s hear it.” Nepeta says encouragingly.

“They’re all adults, right? Look at their height, how dark their skin is.” you say with your mouth full.

“Yeah, the place must have been built back when adults were still allowed to live on Alternia.” Nepeta agrees. That makes the place really old, not that you remember ever learning just how long ago that was come to think of it. You just remember being schooled that it was ages ago and a bad idea so the Empress changed it.

“Ok but even then psionics were still helmed and that’s a lot of yellowbloods, look at their eyes.” you say, pointing out their bright colours even if they’re not gemstones like your ancestor’s.

“You think they were helmsmen? Or that they were hiding from being helmsmen?” Nepeta guesses you nod and drain the last of your drink.

“They’re a group or whatever. So if I wanted to be part of that group…” you say and put your trash back in your sylladex. You shake your hands out and step a little closer to the mural, not too close though. You try to imagine that circle stretching out into real space and put yourself opposite your ancestor. You hold your hands out like his and for the first time in a while you let your psionics
alternating red and blue arcs around you. You control it, channel it, and ‘reach’ for their hands. Red arcs for one and blue to the other and they hit something in the hands.

You can’t ‘feel’ with your psionics as such, not like with your actual hands. But you can feel where things are if you ‘touch’ them like this and even get a sense of material if it’s things that conduct or don’t conduct psionic energy. Metal and biological things conduct well, the rock that they look like they’re made of doesn’t. But this acts like metal so it must be in there somewhere. You’re a completed circuit and you can feel it charging something. The wall heaves upwards, stopping with the hands just shy of the ceiling and revealing a staircase going down.

“I knew I was right to troll you about this!” Nepeta laughs excitedly and rushes onwards.

It seems like you’re out of doors to pass because as you descend the steps there are no more obstacles in your way. Instead the murals line the walls and at the foot of each one is a book under glass and protected from the musty air.

The first mural you stop at depicts a mutant red grub with the Kanaya looking woman lifting him up. You and Nepeta look at each other and she carefully picks the glass up and opens the book. She begins to read.

“When the Signless was first hatched his mutation was plain to see. The Dolorosa in her mercy, wisdom, and love found him and knew that she could not cull him. Under cover of day she stole him from the caverns, fleeing her life to raise the Signless as her own.” Nepeta reads.

“Holy shit.” you say softly.

“She knew that no lusus would ever take a mutant such as he, wow this is really old fashioned language. Uh, no mutant such as he. This is why we have endeavoured to breed lusii for everyone, no one should be without hive, without love, without dignity. These things we hold true.” Nepeta continues.

You guess they must have succeeded, Karkat and Dayvhe both have lusii. That said you have complaints about Cal to lodge if someone bred that lusus specifically, but given how Cal took in Dirkka too you think he’s unusual rather than the rule. Nepeta carefully puts the book in her sylladex and moves on. The next mural depicts the Karkat looking troll as a kid. Nepeta opens this book too, flicking through it without reading aloud.

“This is mostly The Signless as a child noticing that there is injustice and him not liking it.” Nepeta explains.

“No way is that book thick enough to describe all the ways in which Alternia is shitty.” you snort.

“An abbreviated version I guess!” Nepeta laughs and takes the book anyway. Before you move you take a photo on your palmhusk of the mural and head on down after her.

Further down the passage there’s another mural with another book. This one uh…

“I guess,” you say diplomatically, “it’s a good thing you just brought me here instead of Karkat and Dayvhe and… everyone else.”

Nepeta makes a high pitched noise of distress and you don’t blame her. Caught in a passionate embrace that you did not know what possible to render in mosaic format is Karkat’s ancestor and Nepeta’s ancestor. Nepeta seems unwilling to look at this book so you do it for her, flicking through the pages and reading to her.
“Now a man, obviously fair, graceful and handsome- HAH maybe he’s not Karkat’s ancestor! He met on his travels with his mother Dolorosa an olivebood. He told her of his purpose to unite all trolls and she was so instantly swayed to his mission that she devoted her life to aiding him, titling herself ‘The Disciple’.” you read and Nepeta shoves the neck of her shirt in her mouth and bites on it as she shakes her head.

“Shut up! It was a long time ago!” Nepeta says, letting go of her shirt and trying to grab you. You keep reading.

“They loved without quadrant. Blurring the boundaries between quadrants to be truly happy, loving as was best for them. A love beyond quadrants, not vacillating, but comprising elements of all.” you say slowly and lower the book.

“What?” Nepeta asks.

“That’s like Karkat and Dayvhe. They have this red/black blur.” you say quietly. You don’t mention your quindrant but the parallel is obvious. You look up at the mural and think of how much Karkat seems to love like his ancestor does. You take another photo, less inclined to tease Nepeta with it after your thoughts about Karkat and Dayvhe together.

Nepeta has already moved on to the next mural, a portrait as it happens. You lay eyes on it and recoil instantly in horror. Your ancestor is helmed, wires burrowing into his head all pink, shining and nauseating. His head tilts to one side, his eyes half open and his lips parted slightly. From behind there is the Signless, you can tell from the nubby horns, reaching up a hand to him. Nepeta looks away from you and to the book.

“Upon the first meeting of the Signless and the Psiionic the man was without hope. He had grown up lonely and the cruel world around him insisted that his only place was at helm, that he was worth no more. We found him by chance, newly helmed in a small system to be sure that he would not fall prey to… there’s some medical terminology here I don’t get. Uh, oh, here. -for the cruel Empress herself had her eyes on him. Signless preached of his vision of the future, a world free of such injustices where such things would not be an eventuality.” Nepeta reads.

They helmed him, just like people tried to do to you, just like you’ve-

“Keep talking.” you grit out, you need to not focus on this or else you’re going to lose it.

“The Psiionic expressed his disbelief that such hopeful goals could even be achieved, that death would be the likely result of trying such a thing. The Signless spoke to him that all men must die and surely, then, it is more noble to engage oneself in an attempt to better their life and the world than to die accepting it. He offered to sabotage the mechanisms keeping the Psiionic in place if he chose to be free. The Psiionic accepted and once the Signless had removed that which bound him the Psiionic tore the place into so many pieces. But his imprisonment had made him sick and so the Signless and his followers took him in and cared for him as he healed and he became their strongest defender.” Nepeta says softly.

He was helmed and then freed, a fate so closely shared by you. Not quite the same but a half step off, it’s like you’re stuck in the same patterns again and again.

“Oh! Oh-hoh, Sollux look at this.” Nepeta giggles, rushing ahead. At some point she must have taken the book when you weren’t paying attention. You pull your eyes from the image of your ancestor and move on, eager for distraction.

That is certainly what you get when you stand before a mural of the Signless passionately kissing
your ancestor as he damn near swoons in his arms, at the same time Signless is holding the Disciple by the waist as she kisses his neck. If you’re not mistaken she also appears to have her hand on your ancestor’s ass too. The whole thing is a quadrant clusterfuck and now you too want to pull your shirt over your face and pretend you’re not here.

“Oh not so funny this way around huh?” Nepeta laughs but you catch her hand before she can touch the book.

“How about you don’t read that book aloud or even anywhere near me, thanks.” you tell her and swiftly move on. God, this is all the worse for the fact that you are sort of dating Karkat in a made up quadrant and have more than once noted that Nepeta is kind of hot.

A staircase leads you down and then another hallway stretches ahead. You must be a good way into the mountain by now. The amount of time that you spend on each mural is going down but the flow the the story is clear. The Signless preaches to more people, has small victories, gains a following and moves nomadically. You’re starting to collect ancestors over here, spying Tavros’ as well as Terezi’s. Redglare’s story isn’t exactly news to you though the idea that she was a follower of the Signless and died because Vriska’s shitty ancestor rigged shit to get her killed is a new spin on that tale.

But you screech to a halt in front of a large mural with a familiar face on it. One much like your own is there of course but you’re referring to the man on the left of the image, his face pale but his expression cool. One eye is mutant red iris in yellow and the other purple iris in yellow, his chest belies the same sign you’ve seen a thousand times in false rust on Dayvhe’s chest except now it’s purple. The book at the base of this one is different, you realise as Nepeta picks it up that it’s because it’s two stacked together. Curiously you both go for the thinner green book rather than the one that looks like the rest. As Nepeta opens it it becomes clear that it’s a diary, it’s obviously been rebound from whatever it used to be in because it begins right at the relevant part.

“Today we met the strangest man. His name is Dahvid Strydr, he’s so newly molted that he does not yet have his adult title. He has this aura around him that’s irresistible. He stumbled across our camp and at first we were anxious at someone so high blooded being near us. Signless spoke with him first and he says that they spoke of nothing unusual, simply the normal introductions, but Dahvid seemed fascinated by him.” Nepeta reads.

“How is Dayvhe’s ancestor purple?” Nepeta wonders aloud.

“Maybe he’s not, D- his- ugh, the other guy with the same lusus has the same last name but they’re not ancestor and descendant.” you argue.

“But their sign is the same and Dahvid and Dayvhe? It’s so similar.” Nepeta argues. You take the book from her and continue.

“He openly mocked our views, took our food and behaved callously. And yet now as I look back on these events I cannot fathom why I did not expel him from our gathering. Instead I recall being charmed by him, for reasons that now escape me. The conversation of the late night finally hinged on Dahvid forcing the Signless to boil his philosophy down to its basest level. His foundation was thus, that all people feel things and all those feelings are equally valid. Lowblood pain, wonder, joy, fear are all as valuable as their highblood counterparts. Nay, that other people feel things just as Dahvid himself does and their feelings are just as real and worth consideration. Such an assertion seemed to confuse Dahvid and he seemed to almost argue that other people don’t feel things. Signless, of course, would not concede on this matter. The highblood left us at this point and I wonder what to make of such a thing, I only know that we must move on lest he tell people where we are.” you read.
That sounds nothing like your Dayvhe at all. You sit down and flick onwards, it seems that Dahvid returns regularly. He is almost always led by a follower, though never the same one, who Disciple swears was trustworthy. It becomes clear that Dahvid means no harm and with each entry it seems that she warms more to him. When you come to one entry in particular you have to stop and read it a second time, you don’t read it aloud this time.

I cannot believe that it took me this long to work out what was happening, I feel so foolish but I am endlessly glad that I kept these records so that I can be sure I am not imagining things. Dahvid does not force anyone to lead him to us as we travel onwards but wherever we go people know of us, those sympathetic to our cause know where we are even if they do not feel safe enough to come. There are enough trails to lead to us wherever we go, but the key is in convincing people to give those to you which is hard with blood as cold as his.

Yet those who walk him into our camp time and again are never harmed, no one seems scared as if threatened. Neither have I seen Dahvid ever raise a hand or a weapon to someone in anger though myself and the Psiionic have certainly tussled with him in jest. No, everyone wants to help him. They always do.

We have seen psionics before with mind control. They enslave those who come across their paths, forcing their hand. Even when that direct control is not applied often their victims know how fruitless escape is and suffer confined to their fate. But this is not that, Dahvid cannot do that.

That’s Vriska’s shit and Dayvhe loathes it. Obviously his ancestor wouldn’t be like that, but what is the Disciple implying here?

No, what Dahvid does is in a way worse and more sinister. He makes you want to do what he wants. The moment he feels hunger he need only turn his attention to someone and the inclination to fill that need occurs to them. He has spoken of staying in the hives of strangers, just walking right in and being accommodated. He wants to find us and he looks until he finds someone suddenly desperate to bring him to us. At least with typical mind control you know what is happening.

Looking back at my records I can see my opinion of him wildly fluctuating based on his physical presence at the time of writing. He ensnares your affections and nary a night in his company goes by without someone in our extended party expressing pale affections for him which he brushes off without a thought. It is scarcely a wonder that he at first regarded others as being less real than him, of not having thoughts and desires of their own if he manipulates theirs so well. Truly the inner lives of others must matter little to him if he even sees them to exist at all because as soon as he interacts with someone all they think of is him and his needs.

Your blood runs cold. The thought of mind control of any stripe is enough to set your teeth on edge but something like this sounds awful. And yet you can’t help but think of how Dayvhe’s lifestyle before settling with you and Karkat in Roxxie’s place was to slide from hive to hive of friends and acquaintances as he pleased and everyone always welcomed him. Everyone likes Dayvhe as far as you know, even Vriska hasn’t expressed negative opinions to him and you know that even Eridan once hounded your moirail with solicitations despite Eridan being already taken in that quadrant. You can’t even think that Eridan or Feferi had anything bad to say about Dayvhe after he disarmed them that one time.

That example makes you pause. Eridan wanted to shoot you, Feferi was prepared to attack him back, but Dayvhe showed up and demanded that weapons be dropped and suddenly they were. Your mind flicks to the purplebloods outside the base that Dayvhe convinced to leave peacefully. It was a gutsy stupid move on both accounts but it always pays off for him. People do what Dayvhe wants.

You keep reading.
I have never heard of psionics like this before but it is the only conclusion that I can come to. I have heard him play music and lost so much time sitting listening and it is worse when looking directly into his eyes. He trusted us with those after a few weeks, one is purple as expected but the other is mutant red so bright it could be a twin of those of my own dear Signless. Mutation can do strange things to genetics and given his natural blood colour I wonder if the chucklevoodoos native to many of his caste have been mutated into something that promotes not fear but trust and relaxation.

We have since learnt that is own lusus is a mind leech which in all honesty explains a great deal, though how he remains mentally aware and with the living escapes me. I can only assume that his own psionics offer some measure of protection against such conversion.

“Does that book say anything about Rohhze?” Nepeta asks, her voice echoing down the hallway. You look up to see the light of her torch a way down from where you are. You put your stolen book away and follow her. She is shining a light on another manuscript and mosaic wall. Right there next to Dahvid is Rohhze with her needles drawn, facing off against Signless who appears to be preaching at them. Nepeta carefully flips the book open and reads, this one is like the other polished texts rather than the journal thing that you took.

“Dahvid brought his friend, the Academic although she permits him to call her by her hatch name, Rosali Lalond, but it must be noted that she allows this to no one else. He also brought with him his adopted descendant Dionte Strydr as Signless had previously expressed a wish to help reverse what amount of the zombification that he can.” Nepeta reads.

“I think we missed something.” you say and take your book out again. That’s Dirkka’s ancestor’s name so there’s no doubt that this really is the same line of people. Now that you know his name is in here it’s not hard to flick through until you find his name.

“Today I am filled with regret, I nearly killed a child, a sick child at that. Signless in his mercy and attempts to induce empathy for his fellow man into Dahvid urged him to return to his lusus to see if the mind leech had taken a new troll. It seems that it had and this one lacks the defences that I had speculated Dahvid to have. He is a bronzeblood named Dionte Strydr but as he entered our camp I took him for a zombie and attacked, only Dahvid’s quick defence spared the boy. He is young, no more than six or seven sweeps and barely speaks to us.” you read. Flicking ahead you can also see that he seems indifferent to Dahvid and entirely unaffected by his charms which is evidently fascinating to Dahvid, Signless takes this to be Dahvid developing a real and honest relationship with someone. But it’s blatant that Dionte is not a good person to be attached to, he seems perpetually under Cal’s control and you’d guess that’s just sheer exposure. Dirkka bailed on Cal at his first chance and Dayvhe stayed away as much as he could, but it seems like Dionte never left him.

“So he’s partially zombified? But wait, even if that’s possible does that mean Dayvhe’s lusus is a mind leech?” Nepeta asks and you realise that most people don’t know.

“He was, I killed him.” you say carefully.

“But Dayvhe isn’t a zombie.” Nepeta points out.

“No shit. What does it say about her?” you ask, pointing to Rohhze’s ancestor’s image instead.

Nepeta frowns at her book until she finds her place and while she does that you take yet another photo, you’ve not captured every mural in here but almost all of the ones you’ve seen.

“Uh… The Academic was no mere bloodthirsty highblood, though rage boils deep within her. She argues that revolution cannot be accomplished peacefully and seeks to turn our movement into a violent uprising. Though we sometimes fight to defend ourselves we never plan violence. When I
met The Signless I too struggled with this at first. A troll’s mind can be changed, even if the chance is low, but when he is dead he is dead. A troll dies and their friends and loved ones feel that pain, how can we preach love if we choose to cause pain, if we plan for it? It is a hard idea to truly embrace but a vital one for sure.” Nepeta reads.

You consider about how mercenary the Rohhze you know can be, that probably checks out.

“The Academic and Dionte were both adamant in this course of action and had even formulated a plan to attack an imperial base to secure more intelligence and gain further targets. Signless naturally pleaded with them to reconsider and it seems his argument swayed Dahvid at least somewhat. The Psiionic reacted badly to The Academic and Dahvid had to intervene to prevent her stabbing him. I had not seen the full extent of his abilities until—” Nepeta says but you yank the book from her hand and quickly read ahead by yourself.

I had not seen the full extent of his abilities until that moment. Placing himself between The Academic and The Psiionic he told her that she didn’t want to start this fight, that they were on the same side. He commanded her to drop her needles and she did without a second thought. All anger, all trace of violence was purged from her and she seemingly had no will to try to attack again. Indeed, she only had eyes for him, acting as if he was or shortly would be her moirail. Dionte was not swayed at all but seeing as his attack would not be successful he skulked off alone, probably to return home.

You think the very best of your moirail, you pity him unconditionally. But this… you’re not stupid, are you? You remember what happened with Eridan. You know how everyone feels about him. You snap the book shut and clutch it to your chest. What does this mean?

“You know what it means, he’s been controlling you. Mind control psionics.” the figment says, he’s not even pretending to be Dayvhe right now.

“I have to go. Don’t go through any more- I gotta—” you blurt out, putting the book in your sylladex and backing up away from her.

“But Sollux—” she calls after you but you’re already running out.

“If he’s doing it to everyone no way he isn’t doing it to you too.” the figment says as you rush past him.

You’re not faster than Nepeta, not on foot. You don’t even know if she’s chasing you but you need to get out of here and now. You can eat later, recharge and explain yourself but you need to get out of here. You can see the figment of Dayvhe up ahead as you jump to push off of the ground, his voice carries as you fly by him.

“Oh yeah, he’s so in your head that I’m here. That you of all people apologise for flying like you don’t fucking OWN the sky!” he shouts.

Your ability to fly doesn’t last long and you feel yourself weakening and getting light headed in advance enough that you can land in the forest without crashing or hitting things. You… you need to think this through. Think about what you know. The figment of Dayvhe is already there and though you normally hate the guy you get him well enough to know that listening to what’s freaking him out now will be at least somewhat helpful.

“You got away from people controlling you and warping what you see and it turns out he’s been doing it to you the whole time.” he says as you drop to the floor. You can feel your blood sugar crashing from the exertion of the flight and from the adrenaline surge, you need to drink something.
Thankfully you bought a lot of food and drink with you.

“He wouldn’t do that to me.” you say defensively.

“You don’t know that. He did it to Eridan and those other purplebloods.” the figment points out.

“But I know when things aren’t real, like I know you’re not real.” you say and open your drink and chug about half of it in one go.

“You didn’t know that right away and Eridan and those juggalos weren’t ever aware as far as you know.” the figment points out.

He has a point. It’s so hard to prove and the thing about paranoia is that sometimes you are right, sometimes people are out to get you. But you still can’t buy that Dayvhe would do that to you, what’d be the point? Your relationship is mutual, he has to help you as much as you help him and lately that balance has definitely shifted in favour of you being cared for and not the other way around. Enough that you needed to bring Karkat in. So, yeah, you’ve no proof he hasn’t been fucking with your head. But why would he, or more accurately why hasn’t he been? He could probably make you not afraid around him. He could unlink the fear connection in your head between when you got tortured and getting papped by your moirail now, he could do that and even claim to be doing it in your best interests but he hasn’t. He could make both of your lives easier but he’s not.

“So, what, the Eridan thing and the purple bloods is an exception?” the figment scoffs.

“No… but what if…” you trail off and pull the stolen books out.

The Disciple notes a lot of things about Dahvid that you can probably apply to Dayvhe. People like him right away, that’s pretty much carrying across. Or maybe it’s just that he’s a good person and people like him and not everyone is as misanthropic as you and the people you know. Karkat may have a heart of gold but he’s got an exterior full of yelling and highly personal insults.

People want to help Dahvid too, even when doing so is potentially dangerous or stupid for them. You could argue that you killing Cal was that for you but Dayvhe explicitly didn’t want you to do that and you went against his commands, besides Cal needed to die and that’s an objective fact. This is almost evidence against Dayvhe having the same powers.

Lastly, the active control. What Dahvid did to Rohhze’s ancestor, what Dayvhe did to Eridan and the juggalos.

“What if he doesn’t know?” you say quietly.

“How can you have psionics like that and not know about it? He has to know.” the figment scoffs. Your psionics are a bad comparison, though you can use them accidentally and parts of them like your eyes glowing are passive you still know about them. You’re inclined to compare the psionics that Dayvhe may have to Vriskas, the mind control parallel is obvious but hers is actual physical control of people. It’s more like, well, as Disciple wrote they’re like chucklevoodoos.

You happen to know just one person who has those, despite all biological hints that she should not.

\textit{twinArmageddons [TA]} began trolling \textit{tentacleTherapist [TT]}

\textit{TA: rohhze can ii a2k you 2omethiing and have iit 2tay ju2t between u2? ii2 iimportant.}
\textit{TT: <口: Elli Is something the matter Sollux? If you’re having any adverse psychological problems right now I can contact Hal and get him to find you.~}
\textit{TA: no, don’t do that. ii need two a2k you 2ome que2tiion2.}
TT: Consider me concerned, confused, but cooperative.
TA: Great, you have chucklevoodoo2 right?
TT: Yes...
TA: But that's not normal for fightroll2. How did you find out you had it?
TT: That's a rather complicated and personal issue.
TA: Can you just humour me here?
TT: So we're clear I do want to know what this is about in the end but for now I will oblige you and answer. No, it is not normal for my caste at all. It took me a good while to work it out. Chucklevoodoos have a nasty habit of leaking out if one isn't focusing or properly trained.
TT: Not to the full level of their power of course, but I found it very hard to make friends until I learnt to control it. Impossible even unless it was purely online. My very presence unsettled people, it would spook them and even make them more hostile to me.
TT: I was doing research for a character I was writing in a book and wanted to better get into his head, he had chucklevoodoos himself and I find myself wondering sometimes if I didn't pick that because deep down I suspected that I did as well. However I found myself on forums for purple bloods and discovered that some of them with less communicative or less present lusii had trouble identifying their talents, those away from the community of their own kind often were at a loss to find out how to shut the damn thing off and reading those symptoms clicked with me.
TA: So you were using them without knowing it? Even the high level stuff?
TT: Oh, yes. I had fully put the fear of the supposed Mirthful Messiahs into people and reduced them to a quivering wreck several times before this revelation. It was easy to mistake it, with my blood colour and general personality I understand I can be quite intimidating on my own. Learning to control it has helped me not to do it by accident of course, as well as learning to turn off the passive leakage of the chucklevoodoos.

Dayvhe could be doing it by accident. And if he really does have mutated chucklevoodoos thanks to this ancestor then it's likely that no one else has ever had this problem except for that guy who is probably dead by now. Or he ought to be but then didn't those very old mosaics and books mention Dionte who you know was still sending bombs down here mere perigrees ago. Maybe it's not the same one and Cal just is unimaginative in his charges names. Whatever, not the problem.

Rohhze got help because her chucklevoodoos were negatively affecting her life. But why would anyone ever google 'please, help everyone likes me a lot and trusts me and sometimes they do anything I ask'? Fuck. Of course he wouldn't know.

TT: So why did you want to know?
TA: Wait, just one last thing. How did you and DV become friends?
TT: You're really just going to be all questions and no answers here? Fine, but I expect something for this.
TT: I ran into him quite by chance, outside my hive. It was just before sunup and he had nowhere to go, he was going to get fried if he stayed out there. I had just gone out to check that my lusus wasn't stuck in a pipe, though that's incidental as she wasn't. We got talking and it became clear he was no threat at all, so I took him in.
TA: You're a fightroll and you took in some random cutie who probably lookedhivele22 when you didn't know him and for all you knew he could have wanted to kill you and eat your face off. Do you do that a lot?
TT: Of course not! But you know Dayvhe he's sweet and obviously harmless. Besides, how can you say no to that face?

Right. How can anyone say no to that face if he's going around leaking out good feelings and 'trust me' vibes? Goddamnit he's doing it accidentally! Shit, after all that's happened to you and everything he went through with Cal there's no way he'll handle this information well. You need more information.
He’ll assume what you did, that he’s been doing it to you and given how much things blew up and needed Karkat shaped intervention when Dayvhe couldn’t deal with the fact that he was used against you it’s pretty clear that his reaction will be terrible.

You can point to a million things that you’ve done for him that might have been you conforming to his will, times that you have anticipated his needs or made him feel better. If you want to prove to him that your relationship with him is real you need to point to times when you’ve not done that. Well, you going off and getting caught by Eridan for one, he told you to stay and you left. You caring more about protecting yourself when you were rescued than letting yourself be cared for by him is another, every time your depressed ass has denied his requests to eat, sleep or bathe and he’s had to harass you into it or call in Karkat. You can’t prove Dayvhe isn’t putting out some voodoos that make you like him but they sure as shit aren’t manipulating your every choice.

“You can’t prove he’s not doing it to everyone else, even if you’re immune-” the figment starts but stops when an idea occurs like a flash.

Immune. What if you’re immune? Just like when you got PsiPox you had it once and you can never get it again. No one has had their head fucked with more than you, between Vriska, Aradia, and everyone who exposed you to that gas it’s not unreasonable to wonder if you might have developed a tolerance. You’re pretty damn good at telling if someone is trying to mess with you.

If you could test and prove that then you might have a chance to talk to Dayvhe about this without him losing his shit. You get your bearings together and head to the train station, you have a plan.

“Rohhze I need a favour and I need you to not tell Dayvhe.” you say as you come into the block that she’s taken up as her temporary residence at Roxxie’s hive. Unlike Karkat and you she’s not left her place for good but she is here enough that she needs the space.

“Is this about your strange questions?” Rohhze asks, setting her knitting down.

“I need you to do something for me, I just need to test a theory.” you say.

“And what, pray tell, is this theory and why does is take such secrecy from my dear friend and your moirail?” Rohhze asks, folding one leg over the other as she gives you an assessing stare.

“If I’m right about something, and I hope I’m not, then I know something that could hurt him. But I could be totally wrong and just paranoid, I know I’m not the most rational troll around these days. If it’s just me being paranoid I don’t want to say anything to him and hurt him for no reason.” you say.

“And if you are right you’ll still hurt him?” she says.

“Yes but I’d be a shitty moirail if I kept something like that from him. Best case scenario here for him is that you help me out and there’s a way I can prove I’m wrong and then we can all forget I ever had this stupid idea.” you explain. You want to either prove that you’re immune to what he’s doing or that he’s not doing anything at all, but for that you need data. You also need help and you need Hal.

“And if you’re right?” Rohhze asks as she stands up.

“Then things are going to suck and I’ll probably need your help there too if I want to help him fix it.” you admit unhappily. If there’s any chance that the powers Davyhe has are like hers then she’s your best bet at helping him recognise what he’s doing and controlling it. If that’s what’s going on at all.

“Then I can hardly say no. What do you need from me?” Rohhze says.
“I need and you and Hal both, so come on.” you answer.

Hal is exactly where you expect to find him, finishing up work on Sawtooth’s body. He doesn’t look up from where he’s hunched over the robot but you know he’s aware that you’re here.

“Hal, I need a favour. I need you to look at my thinksponge, it’s about me being controlled again.” you say as you come in.

“Do you feel like that’s happening again? Are you not feeling like yourself suddenly?” Hal asks, dropping his focus from Sawtooth entirely. You see him give Rohhze a curious glance but his focus is on you almost exclusively now.

“No, nothing like that. I have a theory of a kind. Can you check my pan out and tell me how it all looks before I test this?” you ask.

Rohhze and Hal both look curious but Hal wheels a tall chair over to you and pats it, before it on the wall a screen flicks on. You sit down and Hal gently makes contact with your ports. The screen is flooded with information about you. Blood pressure, heart rate, but also the ratio of certain hormones and chemicals in your head. There’s blood flow to certain sections in your thinksponge. It’s comprehensive to say the least.

“Everything seems normal to me.” Hal says.

“Can you measure how well I’m thinking? Maybe how hard it is for me to think coherently or something?” If that kind of control changes how well you can decide things for yourself you’ll bet that it messes with your thoughts too.

“You’re already doing that by talking and thinking like that. I can measure how hard your thinksponge is having to work but by all means try some complicated math in your head if you really want to.” Hal says with a shrug.

Alright, fine. Math is a good enough test you start doubling numbers in your head, easy enough at first.

2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, 1,034, 2,068, 4..4136, 8,372, uh… 16… 16744, is that enough?

Yeah, you can see on the screen you’re thinking hard. Enough of that for now, trolls didn’t invent calculators just so you could do this shit manually.

“And this proves what?” Hal asks you.

“Nothing yet, this is the control. Rohhze, use your chucklevoodooos on me.” you say to her.

“What?” Rohhze says in surprise.

“Nothing yet, this is the control. Rohhze, use your chucklevoodooos on me.” you say to her.

“What?” Rohhze says in surprise.

“That’s a very bad idea. I don’t want to send you in a panic attack for no good reason and besides there’s plenty of scientific evidence already documenting the effect of chucklevoodooos on the thinksponge. You don’t need to do this.” Hal insists.

“There’s no information on how I deal with it though, and if this is nothing special then you just get to tell me you told me so. This is important, please?” you ask hopefully.

“You’re really sure about this?” Rohhze asks.

“Yes. Trust me. Don’t go easy on me either. I mean don’t try to melt my thinksponge but don’t wimp
"You asked for this." she says.

"So do it already." you say.

"I hope YOU know WHAT you're DOING. Because I DON'T WANT to explain to DAYVHE ABOUT THIS." Rohhze's voice is like an ice axe into your head. Your blood runs cold and icy fear latches around your bloodpusher, skittering terror runs over your skin but-

"It's not real." it's the figment again, back as Dayvhe instead of wearing your face. He's right, this fear isn't yours, it sits on the surface of your mind like oil on water and as soon as you catch it you can shove it back.

You're still shuddering a little, the adrenaline burning its way out of your system no doubt but you're fine.

"What the fuck was that?" Hal say slowly.

"Hold on, does it not work on you? I wasn't holding back, you shouldn't be this together still.” Rohhze says in surprise.

"I'm fine.” you say, shaking your hands out from where they'd gripped too tightly at the chair.

"No you're not, or you shouldn't be. Look, this is what people look like when exposed to chucklevoodoos.” Hal says and a new screen opens up over yours. You watch the recorded blood pressure, heart rate and a whole bunch of stress hormones spike way up and stay up as the whole thinksponge suddenly starts working overtime. He fast forwards and eventually you see the levels drop and return to something below normal, probably from exhaustion.

Hal swipes it to the side and you watch your own thinksponge. You can see the second Rohhze hits you with her chucklevoodoos. Everything spikes and then it's like there's interference and everything suddenly starts sloping back down to normal. What took the other person maybe half an hour of terror took you less than five seconds.

You're resistant. Not immune, mind, but resistant.

You're about to do something that's either very smart or very dumb.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling arachnidsGrip [AG]

TA: vrii2ka 2ince we're "cool" now ii need you two do me a favour but iit'2 going two 2ound crazy. 2o ju2t hear me out ok?
AG: EEEEEEEveryone always wants something from me, don't they?
TA: yeah, yeah, ii know. iit'2 hard being you no one under2tand2. wah, wah. at the very lea2t ii know you're going two be intere2ted in what ii have two 2ay.
AG: Very confident aren't we? 8ut fine I'll take your 8et. Spit it out and I'll tell you if you 8ore me.
TA: ii want you two mind control me.
AG: Alright, I'll admit that I'm not 8ored. 8ut what the hell? that's what started all this crap in the first place and isn't that half the reason you're so pissed at Aradia? Why would you want me to do it to you again?
TA: iit'2 complicat2ed. ii'm not a2kiing you two do anything bad ju2t, ii don't know, wave my hand2
around and make me empty out my sylladex or somethiing. just two prove that you're in control and not me.

AG: Oh no way, even if this isn't a trap you completely lost your mind recently. Like, ran off and had to have people track you down and put you in a padded room kind of lost your mind.

AG: This clearly isn't a sane thing for you to ask me and even if your stupid moirail doesn't catch me Karkat will never let me live this down and I'd bet any money he'd try to break up all the progress I've made with Terezi. No way.

TA: how i2 thi2 a trap? if i2 a2k you two do somethiing and you do that thing how i2 that a trap? a2o fuck you iit wa2n't a padded room i'm *fine* not that iit'2 any of your bu2iine22.

AG: To give Dayvhe justifica8le cause to attack me. For all I know you're him right now, not like your quirk is hard to fake and you o8viously trust him enough around your tech that he could pretend to 8e you. Actually I think you should prove to me that you're the real Sollux.

“That’s actually pretty smart of her.” Rohhze says, leaning over your shoulder to read.

“I’ve no idea why she’s afraid of Dayvhe. I know he doesn’t like her but he’s never done anything about it, or not that she’s seen anyway.” you say, shaking your head. You pop your husktop out of your sylladex and fold one leg over the other and start to break into Vriska’s system.

“You close the chat. Then you open up her word processor and start typing.

Actually, you recall the bloodbath he apparently left behind him when they rescued you. You remember how mad he’s been every time you got hurt. He knows what Vriska did, he nearly went for her at the party just for getting too close to you. He has her squarely labelled as a threat to you no matter how much you’ve moved past things. You don’t think he’d go out of his way to threaten her away from you but he has surprised you before. Too bad you can’t ask him about it now because that’ll give him a hint about what you’re up to. That and he’ll probably tell you not to outright invite Vriska to mind control you on account of common sense, past experience and having more than two thinksponge cells to rub together. So there’s no way you’re opening that door.

With a tap of a key you finish getting into Vriska’s system, you pause as you watch her typing a message to Dayvhe. She’s not sent it yet so you can intervene just in time but she got pretty far into a pretty unusual message.

AG: If you think I'm going to take your 8ait you're completely wrong. I know everyone else thinks that you're hot shit but you're o8viously just as ruthless as I am. 8ut seriously, you're the only one o8sessed with Sollux and Karkat, not me. I don't care what you're doing with them, you could 8e pailing and papping them 8oth eight ways to perigees eve for all I care. 8ut really, goading me into controlling him again so you have justification to

You pause. Dayvhe would never hurt anyone.

You close the chat. Then you open up her word processor and start typing.

for 2omeone a2 hiigh blooded a2 you ii 2tiill have two 2ay that you 2ecuriity ii2 embarra22iing. a2o leave dv out of thii2, jegu2.

You watch her cursor flash for a few moments before she starts typing.

W8, seriously it's you????????

Why would you ever want me to mind control you? Are you actually sane right now?

ii know ii wouldn't be delighted anymore iif you got taken out by a meteor 2triikking your hiive but ii diidn't think we were at a level where you cared thi2 much about my mental health. ii'm tryiing two te2t a theory already 2o ju2t do it, ii diidn't think ii'd have two 2pend 2o long talkiing you iintwo thi2.
“For the record,” Rohhze says, “while I think you are in your right mind at the moment I think whatever secret plan you are working on is clearly stupid.”

“I have to agree and I’m not sure I can let you do this, medically speaking.” Hal adds.

Whatever, you asked for it.

The cursor flashes in place and you hold your breath without meaning to. You feel it the moment Hal makes a sound of surprise. You’d repressed what this felt like for so long, you remember her controlling you before and then there are flashes of memory and then just smoke and rubble and blood. But Vriska’s control isn’t like that.

Your eyes are blinked but not by you. You’re jammed back, pulled from control and watching helplessly as your own hands type nonsense on the keyboard by smacking at it. Your hands lift the husktop up off of your lap and hold it out to the side and it’s the sudden fear of breaking something you care about that much that jump starts you. Vriska is around your mind, tangling you up like a bug in a web.

You’re stronger than this. You’re endless nights of seeing things that weren’t there and holding tight onto reality by the tips of your claws, minding your words forever after just in case, never off guard. She has you in a web but you’re too well practiced to fall victim to this. You shake her off, shoving her back away and batting the silken threads of her control away from you like a cobweb.

You do not drop your husktop.

You can feel her surprise, feel the way she tries to regain control over you. You bare your teeth and stand your ground, this is your mind and you fought for every scrap of it. No one is getting it from you. Vriska skitters away.

“Did you just—did you shake off my chucklevoodoos AND Vriska’s control? How can you do that?” Rohhze asks in stunned shock.

“I have no idea how he did it but that’s exactly what he did. It’s not that it doesn’t work, it did, you just… got through it.” Hal says in wonder, his eyes fixed on the screen.

You set your husktop in your lap again and read the message Vriska has sent you.

arachnidsGrip [AG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

AG: How the fuck did you do that?!
TA: well ii never thought ii'd have anythiing po2itiive two 2ay about torture but ii gue22 thii2 ii2 2omethiing. thank2 for helpiing me prove my point. iif you and rohhze can't fuck wiith my head ii doubt anyone can anymore. aradiia wa2 ju2t cheatiing by broadca2tiing two my goddamn iiimplant2 but that2 patched by now two.
TA: ii'll write you a 2ecuriity patch for your 2y2tem two 2ay thank2, you helped me out. Later.
AG: I have no idea what's happening anymore.

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling arachnidsGrip [AG]

Well, you did the hard thing now you just have to have a worse conversation. You rub your hands on your face and then look up at Hal who seems highly puzzled by you, not that you blame him.

“Who’s in Roxxie’s hive at the moment?” you ask.
“Us, Dirkka, Roxkie but she’s out with her mom, Karkat and Dayvhe. Why?” Hal asks.

“Can you get Dirkka here?” you ask and open a message to Dayvhe.

Working out how to word this is hard.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TA: dayvhe ii need two talk two you, ii'm ii in hal'2 lab. ii't2 ii mportant. [turntechGodhead is an idle troll]
TA: goddamnit [turntechGodhead is an idle troll]

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]

TA: 2top 2uckiing dv'2 bulge already, ii need hiim. you two a2 well.
TA: for rea2on2 unrelated two how that 2ound2.
CG: OH GOOD GOD I WAS NOT DOING THAT, WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOU?! TA: a2 much a2 ii'd rather annoy you about your 2exual prowe22 thii2 ii2 actually 2eriou2. thii2 ii2 2omethiing of a crii2ii2 here.
CG: WAIT WHAT KIND OF A CRISIS? ARE YOU OK? OH SHIT OF COURSE YOU'RE NOT OKAY IF YOU’RE ASKING FOR ME AND HIM IN A CRISIS.
TA: okay diial down the panic there kk, ii't2 dayvhe related 2o ju2t get two hal'2 room wiith hiim plea2e?
CG: I'M MORE CONFUSED BUT NOT REALLY LESS WORRIED. WE’LL BE RIGHT THERE, OK? DON’T DO ANYTHING DUMB ALRIGHT?
TA: ii fiind your lack of faiith dii2turbiing.
CG: OK YOU'RE QUOTING SHITTY NERD MOVIES AT ME YOU CAN’T BE THAT BAD.
TA: fiine, call 2ome of my favouriite moviie2 2hiitty, 2ee iif ii kii22 you again.
CG: YOU’RE PROBABLY NOT SERIOUS BUT I TAKE IT BACK JUST IN CASE. I UH. I LIKED THAT.
TA: ii need two de2iign a text 2ymbol for thii2 fifth quadrant and when ii do ii'm 2pammiing you wiith iit.

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]

You snap your husktop shut, the hatefriendly back and forth with Karkat was always good and distracting but you have an actual problem here. You also had somehow forgotten that Hal was still connected to your ports, they’re numb after all.

“Do you know how many theories people have about what the three of you are up to?” Hal asks and you look up to see him grinning with the new mouth that you helped put together. Rohhze is very pointedly listening into your conversation with Hal and you find yourself glad that she wasn’t reading over your shoulder for that part.

“And you?” you ask carefully.

“Given what I just saw and what I just felt your thinkspoon do when you interacted with Karkat I think it’s a little unfair of me to participate in this game. Consider me an invested observer. But you still haven’t told me what’s going on with Dayvhe or why I’m all in your ports in the first place.” Hal
“What’s the emergency?” Dirkka asks as he walks in and Hal sighs.

“I was just getting him to tell us when you interrupted us, good job bulgegrab.” Hal snaps.

“You know, the fact that you created Hal and you two feel so strongly negatively towards each other is fascinating psychologically speaking.” Rohhze says slyly.

“Don’t start.” Dirkka groans, you bet he hears that a lot. It’s sort of his own fault but still.

“So, the emergency?” Dirkka prompts you. Right in time for Karkat and Dayvhe to walk in and start the whole thing over again.

“Sollux, what’s wrong? Are you ok?” Dayvhe asks quickly reaching for you but not touching, just doing that almost touch thing where he waits for you to make contact first. You do, leaning your shoulder into his hand.

“It’s a little hard to believe.” you say carefully.

With everyone here you begin to explain. You explain the trip that Nepeta invited you on, about getting to the cave and the doors you had to pass through. The man who looked like you, the woman who looked like Kanaya, and then the opening to the hidden temple.

“You really believe in that ancestor shit? That’s highblood hoofbeastshit.” Karkat scoffs.

You sigh and pull your palmhusk out, opening it to the images you took of the murals. Specifically of his ancestor and Nepeta’s, then of yours, of Kanaya’s and so on. Karkat stares wide eyed with Dayvhe trying to muscle in to see. Eventually Hal gets tired of this and throws the images over to one of the other wall screens and lets you control it.

“We weren’t the only people either in the journals they mention a highblood, Rosali Lalond.” you say and flick to the mural with her, Dionte and Dahvid.

“That’s my symbol, and Dirkka’s and… and Dayvhe’s in purple.” Rohhze whispers in awe, her fingers ghosting the screen.

“Yeah, this journal namechecks that guy. Dionte Strydr, look.” you say, flicking to the right page and holding it up just long enough for Dirkka to read it before you pull it back. You don’t need him reading ahead. But from Hal’s faster processing speed and his position over your shoulder you know he has, you hear the quiet ‘oh’ that he makes.

“That can’t be right, not if you were right in how old that place seemed. He’s bronze like me, no way he’s lived that long.” Dirkka says shaking his head.

“Or Cal just keeps the same few names, I mean we’re both Strydrs even though we’re not the same colour.” Dayvhe points out.

“Same symbols too if that’s the case.” Dirkka agrees, looking at the screen again.

“The other guy, the one with Dayvhe’s sign. His name is Dahvid.” you say softly, hugging the book to your chest.


Rohhze is giving you a sidelong suspicious look. You’ve never been clear if people with
chucklevoodoos can sense fear as well as create it but even you can see all sorts of things spiking on
the readout from your ports.

“He, uh, he didn’t really get the Signless’s whole movement. He also apparently didn’t get treating
other trolls like people. I don’t think he was mean but thoughtless might be the word. He didn’t
think, not until the Signless it seems but- but he.” you swallow thickly. You don’t want to do this,
Dayvhe doesn’t know, he doesn’t mean any harm even if your theory is right. You know your
feelings for him are real and not manipulated, that you can’t be manipulated. You could keep it from
him. You could throw your hands up now and be like ‘how weird, right? Haha’ make Hal keep it a
secret and you wouldn’t have to do this. You wouldn’t have to hurt him.

No. You’re his moirail, your job is to do what’s best for him even if it hurts him in the short term.
You have to do this.

“He’s purple, but… look at his eye.” you tell Dayvhe. One is mutant red and he’ll know that but as
far as you know Rohhze doesn’t know about Dayvhe’s mutated status.

“Perhaps he had a situation like Terezi’s.” Rohhze muses, yeah she doesn’t know.

“Huh. Well, maybe… maybe he’s a really badly mutated purple.” Dayvhe says thoughtfully and you
know he means himself.

“Well his… he had chucklevoodos, sort of. Purple, right? But they were mutated, they didn’t work
like Rohhze’s do.” you explain.

“Okay?” Dayvhe says slowly.

“They didn’t make people afraid. They made people the opposite of that. People always liked him,
were calm with him, did whatever he wanted. He didn’t control their bodies like Vriska does, he
controlled what they felt, made it so they wanted to help him. People would let him in their hives
because he needed a place to stay, they would surrender before things became a fight, betray people
to please him. Everyone acted pale for him all the time.” you say hurriedly.

You get the horrible experience of watching everyone in the room hear what you say, look at
Dayvhe and then mentally scroll back through their memories and look at him with shock on their
faces.

“You think I’m doing that?!” Davyhe demands, jerking back from you.

“No! Or- I don’t know! I don’t think you’re doing it to me and I know you wouldn’t do it on
purpose if you did it to anyone but I had to say something, I couldn’t just keep this from you.” you
insist and hand the book over to him. Dayvhe snatches it from your hands but doesn’t open it.

“I’m not doing that to you. I would never! After everything that’s happened to you I wouldn’t, no I
couldn’t do that! This- ok, this has to be the paranoia talking, right? You don’t think I would do
that.” Dayvhe says firmly.

“It explains a lot Dayvhe. Everyone always bends over backwards for you and obviously with your
friends it makes sense, we love you, but strangers do it too. I’ve never seen anyone really dislike you
aside from Vriska and as a cerulean she might have a degree of natural immunity. I know it’s a touch
harder for me to affect her.” Rohhze says slowly.

“It might explain how things always seem to go your way when people would have tried to kick my
ass if I pulled the shit you did.” Dirkka muses. Dayvhe shakes his head sharply in disagreement.
“No! I wouldn’t do that, just- just drop it!” Dayvhe shouts at them, interrupting Karkat who had just started talking.

You feel guilty right away, you shouldn’t have done this. But- but no, you need to tell him this even if it hurts him.

“You’re right, I’m sorry. It’s just really weird is all.” Dirkka shrugs, looking for all the world like he will let it go.

“Dayvhe listen to me.” you plead.

“No, listen to me. You just did it.” Hal says and waves his hand. The images from the temple vanish and instead you see two different inputs of data from your thinkpan.

“That’s when Rohhze chucklevoodooed him and he shook it off and that was you, just now.” Hal says, pointing at the two screens.

With Rohhze everything spikes as fear takes over your system but when Dayvhe ordered you to drop it everything blunts and numbs out. You were thinking and feeling nothing and then he told you what to think and feel, right after other mental noise kicks in and you’d bet that’s your guilt and reluctance to keep doing this flaring up. Even your blood pressure and heart rate slowed. Then, just like with Rohhze, you shake it off and things go back to the way they were before.

But no one else is arguing with Dayvhe, everyone else has dropped it. Just like Dayvhe told them to.

He’s not stupid. He looks from the screen to you and then to the others who are putting up no protests at all.

“No.” Dayvhe whispers in a strangled tone.

You know Dayvhe, you know what he’s like and how he reacts. He doesn’t like confrontation and when things move in a direction that he’s not comfortable with he tries to get out of it. By deflecting, by going on a tangent or failing that by outright leaving. You’re sad but not surprised at all when he turns tail and runs, bolting from the room with the book still in his arms.

There’s nothing more that you want than to help Dayvhe, but right now you don’t think there’s anything you can personally do. That doesn’t mean that there’s nothing that can be done, though.

“Rohhze, you’re the only one who has any experience with what he’s going through. You have to help him. That’s what I needed you to do, please help.” you plead, looking at the startled Rohhze.

“I- yes. I might be able to, if nothing else I’ll bring him back here. I promise.” Rohhze nods and rushes off after Dayvhe, leaving you behind.
Lemon Boy - Cavetown

Chapter Notes

So I got bot hacked twice on tumblr and then they deleted my whole account which is shitty. God I hate that site. If you wanna follow me I suggest @undanewneon on twitter is the best place atm.

===> Author: Change POV

What? No, not this again. I’m pretty sure I’m the only one who found this funny in MC Escher.

===> Author: Indulge whims anyway.

You know what? Fine. Why not both?

Bifurcate THIS (THIS, (THIS))

import view C1;

But what if I run out of fertiliser
What if the clouds run out of rain
What if Lemon Boy won’t grow no longer
What if the beaches dry of sugarcane
Oh well
The whales start to beach themselves  
The tortoise shells tear away from their spines  
It happens all the time, it happens all the time  
Lemon Boy - Cavetown

Your name is DAYVHE STRYDR and you are never going back. You can’t, not after what you did, what you’ve done to all of them. You need to leave and get away from everyone everywhere and never speak again or go near anyone at all. You’re the absolute worst person to have ever lived.

Oh fuck, Sollux. After everything that you’ve put him through you do this to him. You HAVE been doing this to him, you know because there’s no way that was the only time it’d ever happened. Vriska controlled him into murdering his matesprit but you… you’re so much worse. You made him pity you. You made him pity you so hard he burnt his own life to ashes for you, got captured, got helmed. You’re a monster. The boy handed you his diamond and you’ve all but beat him to death with it.

You didn’t mean to, it was an accident! Well that’s SHIT. Your intentions don’t matter one goddamn bit in the wake of what you did.

“Dayvhe!” a voice shouts.

You turn and see Rohhze running towards you.

“GO AWAY! LEAVE ME ALONE!” you shout at her but you must not be doing the thing right now because Rohhze doesn’t stop and runs right up to you.

“You can’t just leave.” Rohhze insists, grabbing your arm.

“Leaving is just what I have to do. I need to get far away from all of you so go back home and let me go.” you insist, trying to pull your arm back but Rohhze isn’t letting you go. Stupid highblood strength. If you’re a mutant purple then where’s your hulked out physical prowess, huh?

“I can understand how you feel like that but it’s not what you should do.” Rohhze says. She’s still not letting you go, she doesn’t care if you’re in the middle of the damn road or not.

“Understand? How can you possibly understand this shitshow?!” you shout.

“I couldn’t always control my chucklevoodoos either, Dayvhe. I was never supposed to have them. I had to work out that was what I was doing and then get help to teach me to stop. I can help you too, I can take you to the people who taught me. If what you do is really in the same vein of psionics as mine then it could fix things.” she tells you.

“Or I could just stay away from everyone.” you counter.

Rohhze narrows her eyes at you and serves you up a judgemental look, one that you likely deserve.

“Training helped me stop leaking the voodos, now I only use it when I mean to. If you learnt the same you could only charm people when and if you wanted. You could know that you weren’t doing anything untoward to anyone you care about. You could go back to Sollux and Karkat, not to mention the rest of us.” Rohhze says.

Sollux… oh Sollux. You miss him already. Your beloved, brittle-bright, beautiful moirail. So admirably strong and powerful yet also so scarred and fragile, duality down to his core. He’s your
perfect disaster, the only person you have ever felt pale pity for in the whole world. You would and have murdered a bloody swathe through as many people as you have to if it meant keeping him safe. You want him back, need him. But you can’t, not after what you’ve done to him. If he was pushed he’d probably list his two most overwhelming fears as being helmed and being mind controlled. You got him helmed and you’ve been mind controlling him. You’re the worst moirail in the universe and you need to be far away from him for his own good. This at least you can do for him.

But…

But if you could learn to stop this, to fix yourself for him then maybe you could at least trust yourself to talk to him. To give him a chance to do whatever he sees fit to you to even the score. In your deepest and most selfish of hopes you hope that maybe he could forgive you, understand that you didn’t know what you were doing, that you’d never hurt him like that deliberately. Maybe he could forgive you. Maybe one night he could spill his deepest thoughts to you again, you could help him put himself back together again, you could smooth your hands over his face and listen to the jagged edged purr coming from his chest.

You want that, you want him, because you’re selfish and terrible.

Not to mention you want to be able to be around Karkat, to see Dirkka and Roxxie and know that your relationships with them are genuine. You want to see your friends and know that they like you for you and not you screwing with their heads somehow.

“Let me help you.” Rohhze says. You want her to, but you can’t.

“You only want to help because I’ve ruined your mind.” you say, finally pulling away from her.

“I suppose I can’t promise that it isn’t part of it, after all we only learnt of this just now. But I still want to help and right now I’m the only one who can. This is help you need either way so why not take it?” Rohhze reasons.

“Yeah, that’s a good point. Just- just keep controlling and manipulating people if it benefits me. Wonderful plan!” you say, throwing your hands in the air and storming off again.

Fuck. For the first time since he died you wish that Cal was alive again. Even though he barely spoke actual words to you this is a situation that he might actually have some information for you on. Controlling people and fucking with their feelings was his thing. Admittedly he only worked in the ‘piss your pants in fear’ end of the emotional spectrum but apparently you’re just that but inverted.

“Dayvhe, come back here!” Rohhze shouts, but you’re faster than her.

You run, flashstep, and climb away from her and soon enough you’re far enough away that she can’t follow you. But where do you go now? Your trollslum is bursting with people who would be willing to lend you a loungeplank in your hour of need but that’s the whole problem. You never really got how people found it hard to find somewhere to live when they didn’t have a hive to go to. All you ever had to do was make friends and then people were happy to let you stay with them. That isn’t normal though, you’re not normal. You’ve been taking advantage of people this whole time without knowing it.

So you take a train, paying with it with your own money instead of using Roxxie’s card, and you take a route you’ve travelled before a hundred times. You go to Karkat’s hive.

It’s empty of course but you have a key. Karkat moved out a while back and it seems that Crabdad has gone too, probably moved onto another mutant wriggler. At least Karkat managed to catch him
one time and say goodbye. He’s not here now though and admittedly he never seemed to have a
problem with you it’s better that you don’t have to face someone else’s lusus alone. His place has
had a lot stripped out of it. Karkat left to move into Roxxie’s place with you when you were hunting
for Sollux and when he did he pulled all of his prized possessions out. Then he scoured the place for
any hints that he was a mutant which, uh, explains the burnt furniture out the back as well as the
holes cut in the carpet. Look, if Karkat didn’t want his soft furnishings stained he shouldn’t be so hot.

...Fuck you hope he actually likes you and you didn’t
that he...

You lean over, your hand on your knees as you try not to gag at the thought that Karkat might have
not been himself around you. That you might have messed with his head to make him want to have
anything to do with you let alone anything else. Fuck. Shit. You’d never do that, not if you knew
what you were doing. If you’d been aware that snapping your fingers would make Karkat want you
then you never would have done it, that’s just wrong. But if you’ve been doing this without meaning
to- and you have because that thing you did that registered on Sollux’s scan and in the heads of
everyone else was something you never meant to do. You didn’t think to do it, you didn’t mean to do
it and you didn’t even know you did until you had it explained to you. So what’s to say you haven’t
been doing it the whole time?

You need to stay away from everyone forever.

You also need answers though and the only person who can give them to you is long dead but
thankfully you have a book.

You sit on Karkat’s staircase and pull the book out, you feel your palmhusk buzzing as it has been
for some time and you take it out. It’s Sollux. You shouldn’t talk to him but…

You open the message.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TA: i know you're probably not going two read thi2 for a whiiile, rohhze ii2 going after you and
hopefully 2he catche2 you and get2 you two go with her. i iiink 2he can help, iiif your thing ii2
the oppo2iite of her2 the 2ame 2tuff miight work.
TA: i'm 2orry about all of thi2. it2 not your fault but ii had two tell you, keepiiing it from you
would have been the wor2t. ii can't liie two you liike that. <>
TA: but ii know you, you know?
TA: oh 2hiit you're online. are you ok dv? ii mean ii know you're probably not but 2tiill.
TA: dayvhe?

You can’t talk to him and make this worse but you can’t bring yourself to exit the chat or to block
him either. You’re just stuck.

TA: maybe you're talkiing two 2omeone el2e.
TA: i know you're probably blamiing your2elf here. thiinkiing the wor2t of thi2 whole 2iituation,
but you 2houldn't. ii know you, you'd never do thi2 two 2omeone deliiberately.
TA: hone2dy, we don't even know the extent of what you can *do*, ju2t that it barely work2 on
me. ii'm re2ii2tant. that wa2 the poinit of that whole te2t, that'2 the rea2on ii got rohhze and vrii2ka
two try two control me and they can't now. ii'm not tryiing two talk two you becau2e you've me22ed
with my head or anything. thi2 ii2 all me.
TA: ...ii'm not inttwo the 2iilence but ii am appreciiatiing not gettiing chewed out for a2kiing vrii2ka
two miind control me two prove a poiint.
Wow you can feel the urge to maim Vriska rising as you sit here. You’re pissed enough that he’d ask something so dumb but that she’d go with it shows that she’s still the threat she ever was even if Sollux is sweetly forgiving enough to not see it. Maybe he wants to bury the hatchet with her but you’d rather bury it in her fucking thinkpan for touching him at all.

Goddamnit, he’s not yours anymore you self entitled asshole. You don’t get to keep your moirail after all of this.

TA: maybe you're not readiing the2e, maybe 2omeone el2e ii2 talkiing 2ome 2en2e iintwo you whicch ii2 good two be hone2t. but when you get thi2 troll me back, ok?
TA: and do u2 both a favour and read that book you took from me. your ance2tor ii2 obviou2ly a totally diifferent guy two you, iit make2 2en2e that hi2t mutant chucklevoodoo2 wouldn't work the 2ame way a2 your2. or maybe they're not a2 2trong. you're not hiim.
TA: iiit2 nearly daylight, ii hope you're 2omewhere 2afe.
TA: ii piity you.
TA: alright, ii have two go, karkat’2 tryiing two get my attentiion. ii'll look after hiim a2 well, don't worry about that. and before you think iit ii'll make 2ure ii 2tiick clo2e two hiim a2 well. everythiing'2 going two be ok.

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

You think this might be what it’s like to get your pumpbiscuit ripped clean out of your chest. It hurts and aches. You just want to find him, to go back to him and make things better. But of all things he’s worried for you! You have other messages too. Dirkka telling you to come back, Hal saying that he can give you more information about Sollux’s resistance if you come back, Rohhze telling you to contact her about getting help. There’s nothing from Karkat and you don’t know how to feel about that. You close them all.

You set your palmhusk down and wipe at your face. You can at least do what Sollux said and read the book you took.

This Disciple woman seems obsessively dedicated to Signless. Also, a side note here you still can’t wrap your head around the fact that Karkat’s ancestor was apparently in some messy hot three way with Sollux’s ancestor and Nepeta’s, even in this volume which is mostly dedicated to talking about your shitheel of an ancestor she mentions them.

It makes you wonder if you hadn’t come along with your mind fuckery would Sollux and Karkat have eventually fallen into a quadrant together? They work together now in this thing you have with them, but would they have been just as happy if you hadn’t crowbarred yourself into the middle like you apparently did? You can close your eyes and see them kiss, it makes your chest seize tight and then you’re just left with the bittersweet thought that if you stay away they may just settle into dating just each other. At least they’ll be happy, they’re both so good and they deserve that.

Goddamnit, focus, Dayvhe.

Your ancestor, the shitlord that he is, is Dahvid Strydr. You read and assess his personality as you go. He’s wholly self absorbed, which you like to think you’re not. He really doesn’t seem to grasp that other people even have feelings or thoughts of their own, you don’t think you’re like that.

People aren’t just a means to an end to you. They’re not. They’re… well. Alright so you’re not the best friends in the world with everyone. Some people you just want to make shut up, like Sollux’s old upstairs neighbour. Some people you just were nice to because they gave you cool information on shows or discounts on music equipment, or free food or…
They’re still people, it’s not like you don’t get that but there just isn’t the hours in the night to get the life story of everyone you talk to. But you don’t use them.

...you don’t think you do.

But you get that your friends are people, that your quadrantmates are. They have their own lives and feelings and don’t simply exist to please you or be a vehicle to you getting what you want. You’re not like him in that respect. But he’s different, he is!

I’ve been watching Dahvid try to form a hatefriendship with the Psiionic, though I’m not sure why he has picked him as his first target. My beloved Psii is a wonderful person and a faithful protector but he can be somewhat temperamental and prickly. Though he is endeared to Dahvid as we all are it is clear that Dahvid’s attempts are somewhat clumsy and confusing. Psii had previously been complaining about us travelling up the coast and having to eat so much fish. I don’t know if Dahvid was only partly listening or forgot but he attempted to gift a very perplexed Psiionic fish because he ‘liked it so much’.

What a fucking moron.

You’re not like this, you get people. You know what they like, you’re a good listener. Maybe Sollux is right and that what you do is minimal compared to him and you had to gain actual social skills instead of hacking your way into making people like you.

I worry deeply about Rosali’s, I mean the Academic’s, influence on Dahvid. She is cynical and used to getting her way through terror and violence. With Dahvid at her side they walked right into an imperial base, the purple guards simply walking off at Dahvid’s command. It is clear that she is very fond of him and I do not know if this is of her own volition or due to his inclinations. Sometimes he seems to regard her as a friend and at other times when I think back on their interactions she seems more akin to a favoured toy. He values her, is attached but whether she is his friend I do not know. She was injured in the base, a minor thing that she could easily shrug off but it enraged Dahvid.

It is easy to forget how highblooded he is, how prone to rages their kind can be. Dahvid seems harmless most of the time, placid even. But he has rage within him. The motive of someone he likes being hurt was more than enough to unleash that within him.

Our scouts tell us that no one survived.

You don’t know how long it took in the ablutionblock to wash the blood off from the night you rescued Sollux. They needed to pay for what they did to him and you personally ended everyone you ran into barring that one docterrorist that you all kept alive to fix Sollux. You don’t think Sollux ever asked where the guy went after it became clear that Hal could handle his medical issues alone. He had enough on his mind and you certainly didn’t want to make him think of that place.

You never told him that you killed the guy. He’d said once how good it was that you’d never killed anyone before, that you felt guilty for the deaths of the grubs that Cal took in when you weren’t there. How could you then admit that with your bare hands you killed the docterrorist who helmed your precious moirail and your only regret had been that you could only do it once?

You told Sollux once that you didn’t think you were a good person. He talked you out of it, said that you were reasonable, kind, that he pitied you. You wanted to be told that, but you’re not, are you? Cal was a monster and he made you, the latest in a long line of monsters and it seems like he’s made people like you before. You don’t know the machinations of his plan, if he needs you in sets or what. There’s obviously an echo there, Dahvid and Dionte, you and Dirkka. You don’t know if he lurks for people in the same line or what. You can’t ask him now and he probably wouldn’t tell you
anyway, just laugh and puppet you into his schemes. You’re not his puppet anymore but maybe that’s what he was teaching you, how to puppet other people.

Is that how it goes? You wanted to feel better and subconsciously you jerk on a string attached to a hook that you jammed into your poor moirail’s beating blood pusher until soothing words come out and you’re assured that you’re good.

You close the book and hold it to your chest. Eventually you fall asleep to fractured dreams of your friends and quadrantmates warm bodies around you and muffled happy conversations that you can never quite make out. In your hand you feel strings biting into your skin and when you wake your hand is cramped from clenching your fist so tight.

It won’t be long until Karkat’s hive is razed for the drones to build a new one, so you can’t stay for long. His neighbours might be slower on the uptake with looting than Sollux’s were but it’ll happen. But what do you do now? You stare at yourself in the mirror and think. You should stay away from everyone but that’s just not practical, you need people to survive. You’d rather not die, it won’t undo the harm you’ve caused and either Sollux comes to his senses and tries to kill you which he justly deserves to or he doesn’t because you broke him too bad in which case he’d be devastated at you dying which would mean you’ve only hurt him more.

Fixing your mess is the only solution.

You look at your palmhusk, Sollux messaged you again over the day. He must not have slept properly, no doubt your fault as well.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TA: rohhze came back, 2he 2aiid you ran off when 2he triied two help you.
TA: can you ju2t troll her back 2o 2he can help? 2he told me 2he diidn't know how two control her 2hiit at the begiinniing eiither, 2he can help.
TA: ii mean ii could help you but there'2 no poiint iin me even offeriing. hal know2 what ii look2 liike iin my head when you actually do your thiing, ii could be your te2t 2queakbea2t.

You recoil at the mere idea of experimenting on Sollux’s mind. You could never do that!

TA: not that ii'm takiing that offer off of the table but ii don't expect you'll take me up on that. ii can nail that fiirmly two the table, never gonna move iin two miilliion 2weep2 ii2 iit?
TA: ju2t troll me back when you're online.

You can’t reply to him, especially if you don’t have a better plan than fuck with his head because he will fuss at you to test your awful powers on him and you cannot do that to him. You have shitty luck though because his handle lights up then and there. Maybe he programmed something to alert him when you came online, you wouldn’t be surprised if he had.

TA: hey, you're on.
TA: dayvhe?
TA: are you ju2t not goiing two talk two me?
TA: fiine, ii can 2ee there beiing two thiing2 that could be happeniing here.
TA: ...really not going two comment on that? Fiine.
TA: one: you're mad at me for telliing you the way ii diid, ii could have done iit priivately but ii needed hal two prove that thi2 wa2 real and ii had hoped that rohhze would be more helpful at immediatley offering two compare her 2iituation with your2.
TA: two: you're tyiing your2elf im knot2 about u2iing thi2 thiing on me. which, you know, after the torture thiing. and vrii2ka. al2o aradiia. yeah, thi2 ii2 becoming a thiing ii'll grant you that. but
ii'm not pii22ed at you or afraiiid of you. you diidn't mean two and ii'm ba2iically iimmune, iit'2 a totally different 2iituatiion. ignoriing me ii2n't going two help that.

Yeah, the second thing. Except fuck your intentions. Also ignoring him may very well help. Vriska can control people over a huge range, Aradia needed to be reasonably close to Sollux to fuck with his ports and mess with his head but it was a reasonable distance. You know nothing about how far your reach is to someone you know so well. Anything you say to him could be some secret command, you just don’t know. You cannot risk talking to him until you do know.

So you’re left with the option to make things worse to try to make them better. You need to use someone for your own ends, even though you don’t deserve help and she deserves better than this. She’s already been trolling you but you scroll past her messages and start writing.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling tentacleTherapist [TT]

TG: tell me exactly how you can help me with this hoofbeastshit
TT: < コ:彡 Finally he replies to someone! We’ve all been so worried. Also I take it from your messages that you read nothing that I wrote previously.~
TT: < コ:彡 I can explain again if you want.~
TG: is this something youd tell other people
TT: < コ:彡 I suppose I gave Sollux some brief details when he was asking about the relevance of this to you, though I didn’t know just what he was getting at when he was asking. But no this is a fairly private matter to me and I haven’t discussed it with others before.~

Oh. Oh, good. She’s just wildly divulging personal information for your benefit when it is convenient and benefits you. Instead of smacking yourself in the head with your palmhusk though you should message her back. You’re the worst, you’ve accepted this.

TG: how can this possibly be fixed
TG: like do you know someone that can surgically remove the part of my thinksponge that does this or what
TT: < コ:彡 You are a terrible listener sometimes. Also as desperately romantic as that is your idea is incredibly dim.~

Dahvid is a terrible listener. Why does this keep happening? Why do you keep being alike?

TT: < コ:彡 Violets like myself are not supposed to have chucklevoodoos but I do. Mother was either unequipped to train me or saw no reason to tell me that training needed to happen. I sought out the answer to my inability to control the voodoos alone.~
TT: < コ:彡 Other trolls have similar problems. Like all psionic powers of any stripe they come in strength and often those with high strength have issues in not leaking power all of the time, fine control can be a problem.~
TT: < コ:彡 Naturally the church of the Mirthful Messiahs and their followers have systems in place for such eventualities.~
TG: that you capitalised those gives me the heebie jeebies rohhze please dont tell me you went to clown church
TT: < コ:彡 I went to clown church, Dayvhe.~
TT: < コ:彡 More accurately I am still technically a member of the “clown church”, for what it’s worth.~
TG: jegus take the wheel my life is out of control
TT: < コ:彡 Yes, yes, clowns are very amusing Dayvhe. But the question as to whether I subscribe to such beliefs myself notwithstanding the point is that they offer help that you desperately need and I can introduce you to my former mentor/teacher who enabled me to function in society without
terrifying everyone I met unintentionally.~
TT: <コ:彡 And if you want to be sure of when you are influencing someone or not I feel like it
would behoove you to seek the same help.~
TT: <コ:彡 For what it’s worth Sollux is very insistent that I help you in this.~

This is insane. One of your best friends might be a secret juggalo and now you have to go to clown
church so you don’t jam people’s thinkspongs into a pity blender the moment you talk to them.

TG: i guess i have no choice i have to fix this so yeah sure rohhze take me to clown church
TT: <コ:彡 Stellar, where are you? I shall come get you in a stretch scuttlebuggy.~
TG: why are you like this
TG: goddamnit im at karkats place cause its empty
TT: <コ:彡 Excellent I will be with you shortly.~

tentacleTherapist [TT] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

You lower your palmhusk and slowly leave Karkat’s hive, you walk down and sit on the street
outside and wait. Other people are trying to message you but you ignore it. You should probably
read more of the book but you’re not sure you can stand to right now. You just sit there like a total
sad sack and contemplate how it’s possible that basically everything about your life is a lie.

Eventually a winding stretch scuttlebuggy shows up, though it takes a while from the front passing
you to when the back stops. A door pops open and you sigh. You get up and go to get in, what’s the
worst that happens here? It’s someone else instead of Rohhze and you get murdered? Can you even
get murdered? Would your awful powers stop people? Has your life just been needlessly stressful
when you’ve been playing on some kind of safe mode this whole time?

You shut the door behind you and drop into a long bench seat.

Looking over at Rohhze you see that she’s just in some tiny cropped top thing with her secondary
violet gills on display at her sides, instead of her usual skirt she’s wearing some floating violet spotted
pants that finish at her knees and no shoes at all. To your mounting horror you note that all around
her eyes is white with greasepaint that has white tendrils radiating outwards from them, like her eyes
are glowing and filled with squirming… things.

“Why?” is all you can manage to say.

“Lighten up, Dayvhe.” Rohhze grins, her face devious.

Normally you’d talk back to her, engage in the kind of bickering you two always have. But can you
do that now when each word out of your mouth could be some hidden and loaded command?
You’re already taking advantage by being here, you shouldn’t make it worse.

“I’m going to stop talking now, I think. Just to be safe.” you mumble.

“Dayvhe, you can’t be serious.” Rohhze says.

You want to insist that you can be and are serious about this but doing so would invalidate your
point more than a little you think. You fiddle with your palmhusk, it’s pretty notable that Karkat
hasn’t trolled you when most other people have. It’s not a wild guess to say that he’s mad at you.
Casting an eye over how many messages Sollux has sent you it’s a pretty easy thing to conclude
that’s he’s worried and probably more so than he’s letting on. No one else has a relationship like
yours but you’re pretty sure it’s bad form to worry Sollux when you could just reply to him instead
and choosing to do that (even for the good reasons you actually have) is the kind of thing that
probably will make Karkat angry.

You sigh to yourself and open Sollux’s messages again.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TA: hey iif you come back two roxxiie’2 place and we're not there iit’2 becau2e ii'm draggiing everyone two the cave and temple that nepeta and me were iin.
TA: ii al2o need two go apologii2e two nepeta for literally runniing out on her two come back two talk two you about all of that. ii’m lucky ii didn't 2et off 2ome trap and lock her iin or 2omethiing.
TA: iif that had happened ii'm pretty 2ure equiiu2 would have broken all my bone2.

These messages are coming in live, he’s trolling you right now. You need to just back off and leave him alone. Rohhze’s palmhusk pings but you pay it no mind, at least until a camera flash goes off and you turn to see her smiling and lowering the device as she taps the screen.

TA: at lea2t you’re lettiing rohhze help you but you're 2eriio2uly not talkiing two anyone? that’2 a 2tupiid plan.

It’s not a stupid plan. You’ve thought this out very clearly.

TA: come on, talk two me. Plea2e?
TA: …
TA: for the record ii ju2t told kk about your vow of 2iilence and ii'm pretty 2ure he thiink2 iit'2 a dumb iidea two. or that'2 how i'm interpretiing the enraged 2hriekiing from hi2 ablution block.
TA: oh wow ii think he got a bunch of hower water iin hi2 mouth when he wa2 doing that becau2e now iit'2 ju2t coughiing and cur2iing.
TA: ii get iit, you’re not talkiing two me. ii 2tiill don't get why. ii al2o don't get why you won't at lea2t let me help you per2onally when you blatantly need iit but at lea2t you've 2een 2en2e and taken up rohhze’2 help.
TA: 2o ii get iit, you don't want two talk for whatever rea2on but iif you want two 2top me talkiing two you then you're goiing two have two block me.
TA: <>

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

You slump sideways in your seat miserably. Sollux and Karkat are just who you’d turn to when you feel this shitty, but you can’t. If you couldn’t talk to them you’d sit down with Dirkka and Roxxie and let them make you feel better. Just the thought of that makes you ache. When Dirkka had first found you he’d wanted to save you right away, it hadn’t worked of course because Cal didn’t let things go that easy but had you manipulated Dirkka just as much as Cal did? Had Cal been somehow training you?

You don’t even remember what Roxxie was like when Dirkka let her near you the first time but you do know that she adored you right away, she’s told you enough times how small and cute you were and how she couldn’t resist. Yeah, it’s the “couldn’t resist” part of that which gives you pause and fills your gut with squirming guilt.

You need to fix this.

You doze off at some point and the sun is almost rising by the time Rohhze smacks you on the leg to wake you up. She climbs out of the vehicle and stands there waiting for you outside. It’s still weird to see her in a clown themed outfit, it’s this whole side to her that you knew nothing about.
“There are a few rules that I need to tell you about.” Rohhze says, not looking at you but rather up the dark hill to the plethora of tents standing starkly out against the sky.

“My mentor is a very powerful man, very influential. I need to convince him to see you and help you, if he agrees everyone else should more or less fall in line. Until I’ve done that you need to stick very close to me, needless to say I’m not the most normal member here so my ability to protect you as an obvious outsider presenting rust no less is limited.” Rohhze explains.

You nod, that seems fair and sensible.

“Secondly, and perhaps most importantly is this. I need you to be respectful, I know you’re not talking now but I have zero faith that will continue.” Rohhze says.

She squints at you suspiciously, you’re still not answering.

“You don’t need to believe what they believe to learn what you have to here but I would encourage you to listen, you can learn things even if it’s not the message someone is trying to give you. Don’t just assume these people are crazy cultists and shut your spongeclots to everything. Above all else you cannot ridicule their faith here, you absolutely must not. Do you understand?” Rohhze asks.

You’d be more offended by her lack of faith in you if it wasn’t for your long recorded history of talking without thinking and openly mocking the shit out of things. Including clowns.

Fine, you nod agreeably.

“You really can’t keep this up, but fine. Come here.” Rohhze says and throws her arm around your shoulders, pulling you to her side.

She lifts her chin, straightens her back and shifts her shoulders back, she walks up the hill like she owns the fucking thing. All highblood social confidence and assurance of untouchability. She glides up the hill barefoot meanwhile you’re trying to match her pace but the ominous drumming is unsettling and a group of juggalos spot you before you get there.

They do not look pleased to see either of you. Rohhze gives them some kind of weird ass greeting that you don’t catch because you’re too focused on how very armed those three are. She must pass some kind of test because all their focus shifts to you, great.

It’s not like the hemospectrum means anything to you, obviously. But you’re aware of it, even if you tend to ignore it a lot. You’ve no problem with highbloods, half your friends are highblooded and Roxxie’s a damn heiress. The purples though… they always give you pause. If they’re chill you’ve no problem, you weren’t scared of them when you talked to that group the day that whole cursed mission went to shit. The angry ones are harder to predict and harder to make them see sense, it’s better just to not be around them.

They do not look like they like you, shit you really need them to like you. They have to if you’re going to get to this mentor of Rohhze’s and there’s no way you can fix this if you don’t get there. The three of them don’t attack you, they even seem to chill out, one waving at Rohhze with a muted honk. As Rohhze pulls you past on the muddy path you can’t help but wonder if you did that.

The cluster of tents is far bigger than you thought at first glance, plenty of small ones that you guess people are camping out in. You assume that’s temporary but who knows. Then larger ones with the flaps open, you catch sight of groups talking, some people performing, between the tents younger trolls chase each other. You pass a couple of trolls standing outside a tent on platforms. Their faces are painted pure white and they each have their eyes shut with an expression of concentration firmly
“Oh, it looks like people are still teaching. ARE you LEARNING THOUGH?” Rohhze growls at the two trolls and they both grimace in concentration. Rohhze laughs lightly and you stare in confusion.

“Part of gaining control is not allowing your own feelings to rule your chucklevoodoos, they’re being tested. You gotta throw things their way, I was up there once.” Rohhze explains and pulls you past the two trolls and into the tent.

This tent is one of the largest and it’s big and dark. Large cushions fill the space that you can see but your eyes can’t pick up anyone else inside. You’re not ashamed to admit that you’re sticking real close to Rohhze’s side. She does that strange ‘whoop whoop’ call which might be code or whatever.

“Stay.” Rohhze tells you and pulls away.

“Jasper? Jaaaspers?” Rohhze calls sweetly, walking deeper into the tent.

There’s a breath of movement, far too much like Cal zipping about and the flap of the tent falls half shut. You jump and back away from it, only to stop when you feel a gentle exhalation over the back of your neck. You leap and whirl around only to come right up close to an eye the size of your fist. Your own eyes rapidly adjust out of sheer fucking terror and you pick out two bright yellow eyes, blown wide with purple. They’re set in dark adult skin and not the fresh shed stuff of Dirkka and Roxxie. You stumble away as you take in the size of this adult, well bigger than Dirkka.

The movement seems to set it off and the adult pounces you, pinning you to the floor with two hands that easily cover your whole torso.

“There you are!” Rohhze says delightedly, the light on her palmhusk swinging over the adult.

In the light you can appreciate just how huge this adult is and how little fucking chance you stand of getting away. It’s a man, his hair cut short and his horns almost identical to Nepeta’s. His face is dark but for the white paint that makes almost a meowbeast face over his.

“Rohhze.” the adult… (Jaspers?) purrs in delight, though it sounds more like a chainsaw from your place.

“You found Dayvhe. He’s a good friend of mine, he’s got a problem that I think you can help me with.”

Rohhze is helpfully not mentioning the crushing your chest issue which is pretty pressing, no pun intended. The adult shifts his hand so that he can see your chest a little better.

“How can I help a rust?” he asks lightly. He moves a finger and one traces the arch of your sign, the slash at the top and the curls of it at the bottom and something dark shines in his expression.

“Well, see, it’s an interesting story.” Rohhze says as she sits on the ground by you. She pats your head in what looks like a casual motion but you think she’s trying to reassure you in a very deliberate way.

“His ancestor was purple, but a mutant I think. His eye was all rust on this side and he has chucklevoodoos but backwards almost, put his own truth in people’s pans, made ‘em feel good and warm about it. We just found out but he’s been doing it too and didn’t know.” Rohhze says and you can hear the way that she talks shifting into their kind of talk. You’re not a fan if you’re honest.
The adult makes a thoughtful chirrup and presses an oversized claw to your throat, you REALLY don’t want him to press hard or else he and Rohhze will find out just how mutated you really are.

“Do it.” he orders you.

You open your mouth and then remembered that you vowed not to speak so all that comes out is a meek and terrified ‘eep’ noise.

“Dayvhe, I’ve never said this before but start talking already.” Rohhze groans.

“I don’t know how I do it!” you blurt out and the adult’s attention snaps to you again.

“I just- I didn’t even know I was and I can’t keep doing it. I can’t have friends or my quadrantmates if I’m just doing this- this fuckin’ thing to them all the time. And I just want to turn it off and Rohhze said you helped her and she wants you to help me and you gotta ‘cause I can’t go back like this, please!” you yammer on in terror.

“Hmm. Furry interesting Rohhze.” the adult says finally getting off of you and leaning back on his pile of pillows.

Wait, shit was that a meowbeast pun he made? Great. Just… ugh.

“Obviously it’s way different to us but same theory, right? Will you help him?” Rohhze asks. You scramble to sit up, crouched in case you need to bolt.

“HMM.” he says again but louder and reaches back to hook a big ball of yarn with his claw. He tosses it back and forth between his hands as he seems to consider something. You look at Rohhze, she does not look as relaxed as you’d want her to be at this point.

“The chucklevoodoos are a gift, an expression of faith. Mutated they’re… pretty blasphemous.” he says slowly.

Ah, shit.

“There is duality in all things, especially the carnival. A different expression of our gift, mirth instead.” Rohhze counters. The adult leans up a little and grins at her, all wicked sharp teeth. He idly tosses the giant ball of yarn at Rohhze who is knocked over but unharmed by it, she seems fondly exasperated rather than concerned.

“Maybe! Heresy or prophecy, it’s a big question. You, mutie.” he says, poking you in the chest with a claw. Panic flares in your chest at being found out until you realise that he likely means your mutated voodoos and not your blood.

“My name’s Dayvhe.” you complain and his eyes narrow dangerously. Wait, shit, Rohhze said about not backchatting.

“Mutie.” he says firmly.

“Ok, yeah sure.” you agree in a voice more high pitched than you’d like to admit.

“I wanna see what you can do before I decide. You’ve got miracles in you, so I’m gonna see them.” he says brightly and picks his giant ball of yarn up.

“But I don’t know how to do it.” you say.

“I’ll bring it out. Unless there’s nothing there, then there’s nothing there. SIPHUS HERE!” he
suddenly bellows and a tall greasy looking clown rushes through the flap of the tent. He rushes over to the adult and shoots you a strange look before focusing entirely on Jasper. The adult opens his hand expectantly and with hurried urgency the troll presses a large touchscreen into Jasper’s paw.

“It gets people trusting?” Jasper (Jasper? Jaspers? Which is it?) asks, not looking up as he taps away on the screen.

“Very and a little slow in the head too.” Rohhze nods.

“Hm. What do you weigh, little kitten? No, it’s fine, let me…” he says and reaches forward and without any effort at all hefts you up off of the ground before dropping you again. You land on your feet and he smiles slightly in approval.

“Wait, are you putting him in- in the pod?” Rohhze asks nervously.

“Make that, I want the elixir in that exact mix.” Jasper says, slapping the tablet in the other troll’s chest. He stumbles back a bit and then looks the screen over with a confused expression. Nevertheless he nods sharply and rushes out.

“What’s the pod?” you ask. Rohhze’s eyes dart from you to her mentor and back again.

“It’s-” Rohhze starts but she is shushed into silence by the hulking adult.

“If you have any power I’ll see it, and if you don’t then I’ll know.” Jasper explains.

“And if I don’t or it doesn’t work?” you ask.

Jasper tilts his head and smiles. No, not smiles, more like leans in close and shows you all of his sharp teeth.

“Then I’ll eat you.” he says.

Oh. Oh, great. Rohhze brought you a camp of deranged cannibal clowns. Wonderful. You’re going to kill her if you survive this, what the fuck?! He seemingly senses your fear, maybe that’s part of his thing, so he stands up and grabs you up off of the floor. Turning he walks out of the tent and Rohhze is following closely behind you at his heels.

“It’s- it’ll be ok. We know you have it, it’s just… a test is all. It’s fine.” Rohhze assures you.

The giant deranged juggalo snaps his fingers and the trolls that had been concentrating leap to attention and follow along with several other face painted bastards. You’re taken into a different tent because of course you are, why have other structures that trolls have invented when there’s shitty canvas and poles? Fuck, you hate everyone here.

Jasper drops you on the floor in front of what looks almost like a hunger trunk and a recuperacoon got spliced and filled with clear goo. At least you think it’s clear, the whole thing is black on the inside.

“Some trolls have a hard time grasping the nature of fear and you can’t deliver it if you don’t get it, if you don’t get you. We’ll be out here and you’ll stay in there until you get it.” he explains.

You don’t want to do this. You don’t want anything fucking with your head and you’re not jazzed about small spaces that you’re forced into by deranged cannibal adults. Although side perk of being stuck in there is that he’s outside, some protection against being eaten. Every cloud a silver lining or something. You look sidelong at Rohhze, she seems worried but- well, you have to trust that if she
thought you'd really die she'd get you out of here. She's your friend and also probably a victim of your shit, if you can trust anything here you can trust that.

The weird troll from before rushes in, holding a big sciencey looking beaker with him that's full of mildly bubbling cloudy liquid. He looks up at his leader who just nods his head at the pod thing that you're close to. The guy steps forward and pours about half of the stuff in there, then squints at it and pours a little more. Oh yes, very scientific, much science, so precise. You have zero faith in this circus of assholes.

Suddenly the beaker is pressed into your hands. Oh no.

“I have an awful feeling you’re going to tell me to drink this.” you say unhappily.

“Smart mutie.” Jasper says. Fucking great.

You eyeball Rohhze and try to communicate with a look that if you die it’s totally her fault. Cal may not have been a great lusus but Dirkka and Roxxie brought you up with more sense than to drink strange liquids handed to you by weirdos in face paint. Or maybe they didn’t because drinking it is your only option.

It takes a few solid chugs to get through the liquid. It tastes like cheap soda and chalk, gross.

“Get in. Also, if you open the lock with those shiny psionics I saw you land with earlier then I’ll also eat mew.” Jasper says brightly. You kick off your shoes but that’s as naked as you’re willing to get here, so with no other choice you climb into the pod and are left standing in it.

“And how do I get out again? When do I get out?” you ask.

“Up to you.” he says.

There’s a sharp shove to your back and you land face down in weird clear sopor like goo and with a clang everything goes dark.

Alright, ok, great. Time for a fun life test of do you have claustrophobia or nah? Ok, stay calm. Assess.

You’re up to about your upper arms in the clear sopor like stuff when you’re on your hands and knees. You feel ahead of you and can just brush the upper wall, the sides are reasonably wide and the bottom goes down a way. Flipping onto your back you find that you float in this just as well as sopor and reaching your hands above you there’s a comfortable enough distance to the lid. You can feel the seam of the door with your claws but you probably can’t pry it open.

Alright, this is just a big, sealed, recuperacoon. You can deal with this.

Weirdly you can’t hear anything outside, no strains of music or voices at all. Just your own breathing and it’s pitch black so you can’t see anything either. Oh for eyes like Sollux’s right now. You don’t think you’re going to die in here but you also don’t see how you’re going to get any ‘miracles’ out of you which pretty much ups the odds of you dying when you get out.

You float worriedly but in no time at all you adjust and the worry fades. It’s probably the association but you start feeling a little sleepy. You’re ok, it’s ok. You blink lazily as you drift in the slime.

A hand brushes your back and you damn near leap out of your skin.

“AUGH! What the fuck get out!” you yelp, frantically flailing around onto your knees again and
lashing out at the goo but you hit nothing. You crouch, your head pressed to the sealed lid of the pod as you stare blindly into the darkness. It’s probably just your eyes playing tricks on you but you swear you can see colours now in here.

Red and blue.

Dim at first but then a more obvious double glow.

“Sollux?” you call out warily.

The lights blink, like he does in the dark and cautiously you reach closer, crawling up the pod towards the light. Your hand lands on his knee and then up his skinny thigh.

“Some people just say hi.” he laughs softly, it is him!

“How did you get here? I swear this was empty when I got in.” you say, blindly feeling up him until you get to his face.

“Wow, look at troll Sherlock over here.” Karkat’s voice scoffs from the other side. You fling your arm out and your hand connects with his soft stomach with tough muscle underneath. There’s an annoyed ‘oof’ in the dark where you hit him.

“Don’t worry, shoosh.” Sollux murmurs and paps you.

You were really good at thinking and now you’re not. Because why think about being trapped in here or how they got in here with you when you can just cling to your two favourite people?

“I’m sorry.” you mumble.

“Don’t worry.” Karkat assures you and kisses the tip of your ear clumsily in the dark.

“You’re good.” Sollux agrees soothingly.

“Hah, it’s funny.” you say, smushed against Karkat’s chest.

“Normally it’s you hallucinating me but now I’m- now it’s me.” you continue.

Suddenly Sollux and Karkat vanish and so does the slime you’re in, you tumble down and land on the ground, you’re not in the pod any more. There’s a snap and standing before you is… you.

“Are you- wait, no you can’t be the me that Sollux sees.” you say as you scramble to your feet.

“Don’t be stupid, he’s a figment in Sollux’s head. The only one in here is you. I’m you. That was the point of this shit, right? Get in touch with yourself?” other you snorts. To prove his point he reaches out and shoves you in the chest lightly.

“So this is some vision that helps me connect with myself and do whatever that guy wants from me?” you ask. The other you rolls his eyes and patiently faces you properly.

“Why are you here?” he asks.

“I need to stop doing whatever it is I do by mistake, I need to control it.” you say. That’s your whole purpose on this stupid quest, right?

“You do need to do that, but that’s not why you’re here. Try again.” the vision of yourself insists. He’s pacing around you in a circle and his glare is accusing.
You think a little harder. You do want to control this thing but your thoughts were of the people you
loved.

“I want to protect Sollux and Karkat, I want to not do this to them or Dirkka and Roxxie or anyone.”
you say instead.

“Wrong. Hey, you know how you can tell for sure that I’m not Sollux’s version of you? He has a
much higher opinion of you than he should. Tell me why you’re really here.” the figment says
meanly.

“I do want to protect them! I’m not lying!” you snap angrily at him.

“It’s not why you’re here.” he counters.

“I’m not lying! I want them to be safe, I want to protect them, I have to fix this!” you shout at him.

The double of you freezes and then turns to you slowly. His smile is menacing.

“There it is. You want to fix this. That’s why you’re here.” he says, his voice low.

“That’s basically what I said already.” you say. Why’s he being so picky about this? You know why
you’re here.

The other version of you scowls and reaches out to grab your arm. There’s a snap and a blinding
rush of pain, he just broke your arm! You cradle it close to your body and bite back the howl of pain
building behind your teeth.

“Your arm is broken. You want it fixed, that means you want it just like it was before I broke it. You
want to fix things with everyone you’ve screwed with, not to protect them, you want everything to
go back to the way it was before. You know, when you could control them and no one knew about
it. You don’t want to stop what you’re doing at all.” he snarls at you.

“No, I don’t want that. I don’t want to do this to them, augh, fuck my arm.” you hiss.

“That hurts? You’re exactly what Cal made, you’re just as bad and you know what you deserve
from that?” he says.

The world around you shifts, you’re at your hive and distantly you can see Sollux, Dirkka and
Vriska. There’s a streak of light in the sky. The bomb hits and it burns. You boil and break and
scream but it doesn’t help and you deserved this. You can’t take it, you did this, you need it to stop.
Make it stop! You need to get out! GET ME OUT!

Light floods your eyes and you’re pulled upwards. You’re crying and choking on the sopor stuff as
you’re hauled out of weightlessness and into many waiting cool arms.

“It’s ok, Dayvhe, it’s ok. It’s ok.” Rohhze croons as she strokes your hair. Other hands pat your back
and your arms, soft reassurances are whispered to you.

You cling to your arm and find that it’s not broken, you’re not burnt alive, you’re ok. Everything
feels shitty and weird but you’re ok. You tilt your head back to see Rohhze looking down at you
gently, her expression soft and hazy.

You shouldn’t be doing this. Sollux and Karkat would- wait why are there so many people around
you? There’s a feeling in your head, which is dumb because your thinkspunge doesn’t have nerves
like that to feel things as such. All the same it’s like the equivalent of popping a cap open on a new
box of those little mint pill things. A small pop and then things feel different. The clowns around you stop what they’re doing and Rohhze shakes her head slightly.

“You got nine people to haul you out.” a voice says. You jerk up to see Jasper sitting at the foot of the pod, sparkling with interest.

“I’ve never felt like that before.” Rohhze says hazily as she looks at you. Shame and guilt wash over you so hard they could drown you.

“Purrobably never needed your help that badly. I felt it too, magic sweet call. You do have miracles in you mutie. Get some sleep, Rohhze’ll show you, I’ll start on you in the evening.” Jasper says and then pushes himself up to standing. He saunters out of the tent with several confused looking clowns following him.

You can’t look at Rohhze. Not right now.

import view C2;

“There once was a bittersweet man and they called him, ”Lemon Boy”
He was growing in my garden and I pulled him out by his hair like a weed
And like weeds do he only came and grew back again
So, I figured this time I might as well let him be
Lemon Boy and me started to get along together
I’d help him plant his seeds and we mowed the lawn in bad weather
It’s actually pretty easy being nice to a bitter boy like him
So, I got myself a citrus friend”
Lemon Boy - Cavetown

Your name is SOLLUX CAPTOR, which it has always been so why are you thinking about that now? Maybe it’s just your head going funny as Hal disconnects from you. Watching Rohhze chase after Dayvhe instead of you doing it is bittersweet. You know that she’s the best placed to help him and you know Dayvhe enough that he’s outright allergic to the idea of harming you and he’s going to assume the worst. You being around him would just give him the means to panic about controlling you.

“I wanted to drop it.” Karkat says in disbelief.

“I know Dayvhe, he’s never shown any signs of being able to do anything like this. I know what I said before but doesn’t it make more sense that he’s just lucky and likable than being secretly like… that?” Dirkka says uncertainly.

“Well if he’d stuck around I could have told you more about how it works but I doubt he’s going to let me test anything any time soon.” Hal says disapprovingly.

“What more of a test do you need? He just made all of us do what he wanted, only Sollux fought it off!” Karkat snaps angrily.

“I wish I better understood how it works. Chucklevoodos can compel people into action but it’s a very blunt instrument, people do whatever to get away from something that scares them or comply with demands to make it stop but this…” Hal makes a thoughtful sound and replays information from his scan of you.

“It’s as if your critical thinking skills dip which certainly accounts for being more suggestible but you
didn’t comply with his command. It’s not a full pattern. But if it’s a true inverse of chucklevoodooos it wouldn’t be outlandish to propose that compliance feels good, making it rewarding to help him would make sense and accounts for his supposed luck and social circles.” Hal continues.

“But you think it’s your idea. And you just keep doing it because there’s a reward, right? Like addicts.” Karkat hisses.

“I don’t think that’s right Karkat.” you reason with him, standing up from where you were sat before.

“Oh, don’t you? Remember that lime who went nuts when Dayvhe cut him off? Or how miserable you felt every time you got separated from Dayvhe? Like you were in withdrawal!” Karkat shouts at you.

“It’s not withdrawal! It just sucks when someone you care about isn’t around or when you feel regret for fucking up. You know he wouldn’t do that to us, he’s not some evil mastermind, he’s Dayvhe!” you argue back.

“I DON’T KNOW ANYTHING!” Karkat shouts and storms out of the room.

It’s not much of a choice, to stay or to follow Karkat so you make your excuses and rush out after him. For a guy with such short legs he sure can motor. You only just catch the door of his block shutting as you reach him. You slip inside and shut it after you.

“What was that about?” you ask him.

“I’m so FUCKING ANGRY!” Karkat shouts, pacing back and forth furiously in the confined space of the room.

“I worked that out.” you say.

Karkat doesn’t elaborate on his anger but instead just continues to seethe.

“Are you angry at me?” you ask carefully.

“Yes!” Karkat snaps at you.

“You couldn’t have given me a heads up about that and- and letting VRISKA in your head again?! I ought to slap you right in your empty head! And- and you couldn’t have- about HIM and ARIGHAH!” Karkat cuts off into outraged teeth gnashing.

You squint at Karkat. He’s a little mad at you, but it’s not really what’s going on here. However you don’t think that pointing out that if you’d asked him for permission for what you did he would have said no is going to be a strong argument in your favour anyway.

“I’m sorry.” you say instead.

Karkat crumples like wet tissue paper and he stops his angry pacing to give you a forlorn look.

“Don’t be, I’ve basically come to expect this kind of dumbassery from you. You’re a hopeless disaster boy.” Karkat grumbles. Hey, that’s actually kind of sweet. Sort of. For Karkat.

Cautiously you get a little closer to Karkat and he reaches out for you, curling his hands around the back of your neck and pulling you down so he can press your foreheads together. The pads of his fingers gently knead at your neck muscles and wow you should get him to do this more. Your hands settle on his hips and you’re not especially inclined to let him go, you like this.
“Useless trainwreck of a troll, I’m supposed to be looking out for you here.” he mumbles.

You may not be the world’s greatest detective but you don’t think that he’s actually angry at you. Or not more than you deserve for making risky decisions and not more than Karkat usually is anyway. You take a stab at the real issue.

“He clearly didn’t know what he was doing, you know he’d never do any of that deliberately.” you say quietly.

Karkat lets you go and takes a step back. Not a good sign.

“Or maybe he just wanted us to think that. We don’t know that he’s not fucking with us.” Karkat hisses.

“This is Dayvhe we’re talking about and you saw how devastated he looked when I explained it to him, he just ran. What’s the point if he did that deliberately to then pretend he didn’t but then bail before he can get the benefit of talking us around? It makes more sense that everything isn’t a lie and he just ran because he’s Dayvhe and avoiding problems is his whole deal.” you argue.

“How am I supposed to know how he thinks? I used to hate him when I first met him and then I started to pity him and now I’m stuck with this- this thing I have for him. How do I know I’m not occasionally coming to my senses and hating him instead of being made to pity him? How do I know you’re not?!?” Karkat shouts.

“Because I’m resistant? That was the whole point of the Vriska and Rohhze thing. It doesn’t work on me.” you say slowly because Karkat’s clearly not been listening.

“You don’t know you’re resistant all of the time, that was a test case of one. And you don’t know you always were. Maybe before you got helmed and- and tortured you weren’t resistant. Maybe he did all the damage he needed to after I introduced him to you and got you hooked on whatever it is he does. Maybe it’s too late for you!” Karkat snaps.

“He’s not a drug.” you point out.

“He affects your thinksponge chemistry, he may as well be.” Karkat retorts.

“I thought I was meant to be the paranoid one here.” you scoff and Karkat glares at you.

“How is this not fucking you up? Having Aradia in your head hurt you, everything with Vriska messed with you for sweeps, recently you got paranoid enough to think that music was controlling you-” Karkat begins.

“I’m right about that and fuck you for bringing it up.” you interrupt but Karkat just steams ahead.

“-and now you find out someone else has been screwing with you and probably for the whole time you’ve known him and he’s been your moirail- how aren’t you angry? If I’d never introduced him to you then you’d still be fine!” Karkat insists.

You bite your tongue. This isn’t about you, not really.

“Do you think things would be better for me if you hadn’t introduced us?” you ask.

“Have you taken a look at the metal in your head lately? Yeah, I do. You wouldn’t have been in that fucking awful situation if I hadn’t walked him into your hive and like, ha ha, I joked about everyone falling for him like it’s pheromones but actually it’s mind control. And you’d be fine without him.”
Karkat says sharply, waving a hand at your head.

“That wasn’t his fault, you know it wasn’t!” you snarl, Dayvhe was wrecked by you getting taken like that. You know he blames himself but you never thought Karkat blamed him too. He probably doesn’t, or didn’t until now.

“It wasn’t your fault for introducing him to me either, god. I would rather be with Dayvhe than not and if none of this had happened you and I wouldn’t be… you know.” you say, gesturing awkwardly between the two of you.

Karkat isn’t looking at you he’s just glaring a hole in the floor. You know Karkat, he hates himself more than anyone else and if he has to drag Dayvhe down with him in order to feel bad then he will. You don’t blame him for reacting badly to the idea that someone was screwing with his feelings, intentionally or not. You know how shitty that feels, you’re just past it because you know Dayvhe never meant to and on a sadder note this is becoming a little routine for you now.

“There’s two options—” you start.

Karkat groans loudly and you shove him but continue nonetheless.

“Either he’s not who we think he is and he’s been deliberately evilly manipulating us this whole time, which makes no sense with his behaviour. It also doesn’t make sense that I’d be asking for that given that it doesn’t affect me.” you continue.

“Alright, assuming your one test was right and not a fluke we know it doesn’t work on you now. Doesn’t mean it’ll undo anything he might have done to you before. If I told you I didn’t have any viruses on my husktop because I put a firewall on it for the first time today you’d laugh me out of the building. It’s not going to remove what might already be there!” Karkat counters.

“Karkat, that’s… that’s a very good point but you used a tech metaphor for it. Correctly as well.” you say softly with a red little flutter building in your thoracic cage.

Karkat sighs and sits down again, his head in his hands. He looks so broken, so hurt by all of this. You grab a cushion or two from the loungeplank and offer one to him, if he wants to claw the shit out of something in his frustration he can claw that. The other you dither with for a moment before tossing it behind Karkat.

“I thought about it Karkat, I can’t think of any time that I’ve ever done what he wanted when it wasn’t what I would have wanted too.” you say softly and touch his shoulder.

“Because he made you want it, stupid.” Karkat says thickly.

“Alright, but explain all the times I’ve done things that he didn’t want. Like I killed Cal when he told me to stay away, or- or basically any time I’ve ever been a pain in his ass. He outright ordered me to talk to him and come back when I was manic and I still wouldn’t.” you point out.

“That was over text and after you being tortured and overdosed on pale feelings with that gas. As for you killing Cal it’s no secret that Dayvhe wanted him gone, you defied a verbal request because you wanted to do the thing he really wanted. You just prioritised differently was all. Plus that lime fucker at the club stalked Dayvhe because he thought Dayvhe wanted him around and he was doing what Dayvhe wanted, he was wrong but he was clearly still addicted to him. Just because Dayvhe isn’t always good at manipulation isn’t evidence that he’s not doing it all the time on purpose.” Karkat says sharply.

“Also he ordered you to stay away from him after that and you did even though it made you
miserable, I had to trick you into coming back to him. Great fucking decision on my part, obviously.”

Karkat sniffs.

“No… Karkat…” you say. You’re not sure how to fix this, he’s making everything a result of your minds being infected by Dayvhe and refusing to the far more likely outcome that Dayvhe just didn’t know what he was doing. If he’s so sinister and powerful why didn’t he just convince you all that you were wrong?

“He tried, remember? He tried to make you drop it, but it doesn’t work on you or on Hal. That’s too many witnesses. He’s probably run off to start again elsewhere.” the figment says from by the door.

Karkat sobs softly, his face buried in his hands and that yanks your attention back to him. You curl your arm around his back and lean your face on his shoulder.

“How do you know why I was always so into romcoms and romance books and- and all that?” Karkat asks thickly.

You discard the answer of ‘because you’re a sappy loser’ and instead just shake your head and let Karkat keep talking.

“I’m a mutant, it was never- that was never going to be me. I couldn’t trust anyone that much or- I mean you of course but I’m so fucked up I could never figure just one thing with you and you’re my best friend and the only person who knew and it was too much to risk and-” he hiccups so you just squeeze him a little tighter.

“I was never going to get that so I just watch it and then Dayvhe shows up and I wanted anything, everything, with him so bad. Then it turns out he’s just like me and it’s like all my wiggler prayers are answered. I get romance after all!” Karkat says with faux enthusiasm, waving his hands.

“And me.” you add.

“And you.” Karkat nods but then slumps forward so his elbows rest on his knees.

“But it’s all some lie. A bigass manipulation from some highblood pretending to be just like me who gets whatever he wants from anyone. I’m a fucking moron to have believed him, to think I’d ever get to have any of that.” Karkat says. His voice is hollow and achingly sad, like a barkbeast so used to being kicked that it just expects it.

“You still have me, though.” you remind him quietly.

“Yeah.” Karkat agrees and looks up at you. His eyes are red rimmed with tears and it just breaks you to see, you get why he’s leaping so hard on this idea that Dayvhe is evil. It fits in with his worldview that Karkat Vantas never gets anything good and wouldn’t deserve it anyway and if it SEEMS like he has a good thing then it’ll all come crashing down sooner or later like a terrible punchline. Dayvhe playing him this whole time for some cosmic joke slots into that so perfectly it’s no wonder he’s latched onto it as god given truth right away. Pity for him swells in your chest.

Cautiously you reach your hand out. You’ve got a language by now, the three of you, a way of communicating what you want. You reach out to pap him, and you can because you’re in a quindrant, right? Your thing is a smear of red, pale, ash, this counts doesn’t it? Still you don’t want to assume that it’s ok or that he wants you to, so you show him the same courtesy he shows you. You don’t pap him on his tear stained face, not just yet but it’s obvious you’re going for it, your fingertips so close to his face but waiting for him to choose to close the distance. The offer is there.

Karkat leans in and your fingers brush the dampness of his face.
“I’m not going anywhere, shoosh.” you whisper to him and pap him properly. He wavers and you steer him back against the seat back.

“It’s just a big joke.” Karkat whimpers.

“It’s not. There’s no plan to keep you single and miserable and doomed to die. You’re not doomed, I wouldn’t let you be.” you promise.

Karkat hiccups and clings to you.

He brings up more assertions that this was his fault (it’s not), that he broke you (he didn’t), that you shouldn’t have to do this (you want to), that everything is terrible forever (it’s not). You calm him down, talk him back from the world seeming so awful and shoosh him until you’re both laid back on the loungeplank and he’s dozing against your side.

Needless to say your mind is on your moirail as well as your awwspistice. No doubt he’s torturing himself as much as Karkat was and you’re not there to do this to him. You hope Rohhze at least caught up to him. You fish your palmhusk out and start to troll him.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TA: ii know you're probably not goiing two read thii2 for a while, rohhze ii2 going after you and hopefully 2he catche2 you and get2 you two go wiith her. ii think 2he can help, iif your thing ii2 the oppo2iite of her2 the 2ame 2tuff miight work.
TA: ii'm 2orry about all of thii2. iit'ii not your fault but ii had two tell you, keepiing iit from you would have been the wor2t. ii can't liie two you liike that. <>
TA: but ii know you, you know?
You’re about to keep messaging him when you see the change in colour of his icon, he’s online. He can see your messages! Maybe you really can talk him down too.

TA: oh 2hiit you're onliine. are you ok dv? ii mean ii know you're probably not but 2tiill.
TA: dayvhe?

He’s not answering you and you left a long time between those messages, he’s still not responding. But then again you’re not the only one who wants him.

TA: maybe you're talkiing two 2omeone el2e.
TA: ii know you're probably blamiing your2elf here. thiinkiing the wor2t of thii2 whole 2iituation, but you 2houldn't. ii know you, you'd never do thii2 two 2omeone deliiberately.
TA: hone2tly, we don't even know the extent of what you can *do*, ju2t that it barely work2 on me. ii'm re2ii2tant. that wa2 the point of that whole te2t, that’2 the rea2on ii got rohhze and vrii2ka two try two control me and they can't now. ii'm not tryiing two talk two you becau2e you've me22ed wiith my head or anythiing. thii2 ii2 all me.
TA: ...ii'm not iintwo the 2iilence but ii am appreciiatiing not gettiing chewed out for a2kiing vrii2ka two miind control me two prove a poiint.

You leave that bait dangling there, hoping for him to tell you how reckless you were being. To moirail at you just so you know he’s there but not a word comes through.

TA: maybe you're not readiing the2e, maybe 2omeone el2e ii2 talkiing 2ome 2en2e ii2ntwo you whiiich ii2 good two be hone2t. but when you get thii2 troll me back, ok?
TA: and do u2 both a favour and read that book you took from me. your ance2tor ii2 obviiou2ly a totally diffi1erent guy two you, iiit make2 2en2e that hi2t2 mutant chucklevooodoo2 wouldn't work the 2ame way a2 your2. or maybe they're not a2 2trong. you're not hiim.
TA: ii't2 nearly daylight, ii hope you're 2omewhere 2afe.
“What’re you doing?” Karkat asks, opening one sleepy eye to look up at you. You think about how he’ll react to you talking to Dayvhe and quickly decide to say goodbye.

TA: alright, ii have two go, karkat’2 tryiing two get my attention. ii'll look after hiim a2 well, don't worry about that. and before you think ii'll make 2ure ii 2tiick clo2e two hiim a2 well. everythiing'2 going two be ok.

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

You lower your palmhusk to the floor and pet Karkat’s unruly hair.

“I was talking to Dayvhe,” you say and Karkat’s face flicks to anger so you continue, “but he wasn’t answering me even though he was online.”

“How DARE he just ignore you?! You’re his moirail, you’re worried sick! Oh, when I see him next I’m going to kick him in the crotch so hard his globes will be vying for space with his tonsils!”

Karkat snarls furiously.

“Alright, ok, I think you should go sleep. Everything will seem better in the evening, I’m sure.” you tell him.

Naturally Karkat bitches and fusses all the way to his coon but he does get in there and he is drifting off by the time you excuse yourself. You have a quick wander of the base but you can’t find Dirkka or Roxxie anywhere, you’d guess they’re probably in a pile discussing everything that went down. Rohhze isn’t around that you can see either so you hope she’s off with Dayvhe. You’re not in the mood to have your pan prodded at anymore so you go to your own block instead.

Flicking your husktop open you write a new little program to alert you if Dayvhe comes online again and transfer it over to your palmhusk too.

You can feel the tell tale threatening of an emotional dip starting to form. You’re already pretty damn fragile from recovering yourself from the pit of despair your last episode left you in. Losing your moirail, finding out he may have been previously affecting your mind, albeit accidentally, is a lot to deal with. Added onto that Karkat’s upset and the potential threat to your triangular relationship everything is looking stressful. Stress isn’t great for people like you.

You don’t have the luxury of falling apart. Karkat needs you and Dayvhe is going to need you. You have answers to find and people to support. Closing your husktop you go to your ablution block and shower, acting every bit like a functioning troll. You brush your teeth and stare pointedly at yourself as you take your medication. You’re going to handle this, you have to.

Sleep isn’t easy but you’re in your coon early for your standards and you sleep out of stubborness.

Your dreams are fleeting but for the impression of music and mismatched purple and red eyes.

Waking early you go to get breakfast, resolving to get some for Karkat too, only to run into Rohhze sitting in the nutrition block uneasily. She straightens up when she sees you, her expression leaning towards anxious.

“He wouldn’t listen to me. I spent as long out there searching for him as I could after he ran away, I had to call a scuttlebuggy last minute to hide from the sun. He just ran off, saying that he wasn’t going to keep manipulating people.” Rohhze tells you.
“Goddamnit, Dayvhe.” you hiss.

“He was really upset.” Rohhze says miserably.

“I’ll keep trolling him, see if I can’t talk him around. If he messages you for help-” you start.

“Tell you?” Rohhze guesses.

“I was going to say do it, but yeah, tell me too.” you nod.

“I will.” she promises.

“Good, I have to go look after Karkat but let me know if anything happens.” you nod and grab some snack cakes and things to shove in your sylladex for him.

“I know asking outright is spoiling the game, but what exactly is going on with you three?” Rohhze asks curiously.

“It’s complicated.” you hedge. Rohhze looks entirely unimpressed with your plant based dodge and she is helping you a lot so you relent.

“At first it was like… well, things were complicated. Using pale shit as torture can certainly fuck your pale reactions up and mess with your quadrant, you know?” you shrug.

Rohhze’s eyes are wide and she looks a little like she regrets asking.

“But Dayvhe is the best thing that ever happened to me, neither of us just wanted to quit. As for Karkat, well, he was sort of like the club to our diamond. He stopped all the idiocy from going on, mediated us.” you explain.

“Was?” Rohhze asks.

You wince as you consider the far more red saturated kisses you’ve had with Karkat, the pale attention you’ve dealt each other that is more than just facilitating you and Dayvhe.

“It’s a little messier these nights.” you admit but on that point you’re not going to elaborate.

“So I saw.” Rohhze remarks with raised eyebrows. Right, she walked in on the three of you all tangled up together before along with Roxxie didn’t she? Well, she can read what she likes into that.

“I should go, later.” you nod and slip past her before she can pry further.

On your way to Karkat’s block you troll Dayvhe, telling him that you know he didn’t go with Rohhze and that he should, uh, do that. Your boy needs to accept some help because he’s way in over his head and if he can’t be helped by you then Rohhze is best placed to do it with her personal experience. Much as you’d rather be the one helping she’s the one who knows about the voodooos. As you’re trolling him you see him come online but he doesn’t answer you. You keep trying but when you reach Karkat’s door you give up and figure you’ll deal with the problem at hand.

Said problem is currently floating in his coon and sleeping fitfully. He wakes up before you get to him and blinks sleepily at you, his eyes crusted with sleep gunk and sopor.

“Was it all a horrible dream?” he asks and you shake your head.

“Figures I wouldn’t have that much luck.” Karkat hisses and hauls himself out of his coon with an unfair flex of that secret tried-to-be-a-threschecutioner muscle he has hiding under his body fat and
stomps off to his shower.

“I brought you food though.” you offer through the shut door.

“That’s very considerate of you!” Karkat snarls from inside the room. He’s being sincere but he’s clearly also still mad about everything so you sit down and wait. As you wait you drink one of the smoothies that you pulled from the hunger trunk which is packed with fruit but also plenty of sugar syrup and added protein. Roxxie told Jayyne at one point about Dayvhe’s plan to get you to eat properly and the teal girl was appalled that no one had considered, and you quote: ‘basic goshdarn nutrition, you fools!’ So she wrote a bunch of recipes for people to make and ditch in the hunger trunk to secure you precious calories and also ensure that you don’t get scurvy or whatever.

tentacleTherapist [TT] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

TT: <□̌□̌ Just to let you know, Dayvhe has trolled me. I’m going to go meet him now and take him to get training.~
TA: holy 2hiit that’s great! how diid he 2eem?
TT: <□̌□̌ Distressed mostly, I’m trying to keep things normal for him. I’ll let you know more when I see him.~
TA: thankz rohhze, ii really appreciiate ii.
TT: <□̌□̌ Don’t mention it, Dayvhe is one of my oldest friends. Anything I can do to help I am more than willing to undertake.~
TA: alright, well ii’m going two try two work on getting more an2wer2. anythiing ii can tell hiim will be helpful.
TT: <□̌□̌ An excellent plan. Well, I shall catch up with you when I have more information.~

tentacleTherapist [TT] ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

You chew your lip a little. Knowing Dayvhe, and you do, pushing him too much will just make him run away. It probably won’t do anything to counter Karkat’s theory that you’re addicted to Dayvhe either. No, the best option is to be productive and focussed elsewhere. You can trust Rohhze to help Dayvhe out, you need to work elsewhere.

You change contacts on trollian.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling arsenicCatnip [AC]

TA: hey nepeta, ii'm really 2orry for runniing out on you before. that wa2n't cool of me. everythiing ju2t got two inten2e and ii needed two talk two dayvhe about what ii'd 2een.
AC: :33 < hi sollux! leaving an adventuring partner behind is pretty poor form you know. buuuuut i'm pretty capable at handling myself, plus i know what it's like to n33d your moirail.
AC: :33 < so, i forgive mew.
TA: ii purromii2e not two do iit agaiin?
AC: :33 < aaaa! ok! you are pawsitively forgiven! besides, i wouldn't have gotten in there if not for you.
TA: on that note... would you be cool wiith going back? and would iit be po22iible for me two a2k a few other people two come with?
AC: :33 < oh? who else were you thinking of?
TA: ba2iically the decendant2 of everyone el2e on tho2e wall2 except for ro2alii, diionte and dahvid.
AC: :33 < oh wow, did they already agr33 to come?
TA: ii wanted two a2k you fiir2t, iif you're cool wiith iit ii'll go wrangle everyone.
AC: :33 < i'm so cool with it! tell the others i'll m33t them there, you still have the coordinates, right?
Getting Vriska and Terezi to agree to show up is easy as anything, you hardly have to do more than whisper the words ‘adventure’, ‘tomb’ and ‘ancestors’ for them to already be packing their shit up ready to go. With Kanaya you have to be straight with her, you tell her about her ancestor, send her some photos and explain its importance to all of you and she agrees. Making Tavros come along is hardest of all and you haven’t even told him that Vriska is coming. The appeal of adventure and ancestry only stretches so far and to your frustration you have to explain that it’ll greatly help Dayvhe if he comes along and that’s what makes him agree.

Fucking stupid other people having a crush on YOUR moirail. Goddamnit.

The door to the ablutionblock swishes open and a scowling Karkat emerges in a cloud of steam. You try to consider the best way to sweet talk him into this but quickly discard the idea.

“Hey, we’re going back to that cave where I found all of that stuff out about Dayvhe’s ancestor.” you tell him.

“The hell we are.” Karkat says flatly.

“Well, ok. You can stay here and I’ll go hang out in a dark enclosed cave with Vriska that you’ve never been to and can’t rescue me from.” you say with a shrug.

“Do you have a death wish?!” Karkat demands with his hands settled on his hips in a pose of angry defiance.

“That wouldn’t be unusual for me.” you point out. You kneel up and loop your arms jokingly around the back of his neck.

“Why don’t you come along and save me from myself?” you ask with a put on flutter of your eyes.

The look Karkat gives you could strip paint off of a wall three rooms away. Alright, he’s not in a teasing mood then, noted. You let the smile fall from your face and decide to go for honesty.

“Look, I just… I need to know all that I can. If I can find something out that could help Dayvhe or answer his questions I have to do it.” you say.

Karkat sighs and his expression softens to pity as he holds your face in his hands.

“It’s my fault you feel this for him, that he got you hooked like this.” Karkat says regretfully.

“It’s not like that.” you protest.

“I know, I heard you say it. I just don’t agree. But, hey, maybe there’ll be something there that’ll snap you out of this.” Karkat says.

You perk up, he’s agreed to go! Yes!

You grab supplies, leave a message about your destination with Roxxie and head on out with Karkat. On the ride up to the surface you let Dayvhe know where you’re going more or less. If he can see that you’re alright and that Karkat’s going to be alright then it should make him feel better. You even stick to the train like you promised Dayvhe you would. You’re totally nailing this.
Except for how Dayvhe isn’t talking to you at all, and Rohhze sends you a picture of him laid down on the seat in her stretch scuttlebuggy so you know he’s with her and getting your messages. It’s good to see him okay but she says he’s not talking to anyone, he’s probably afraid of doing more damage. You tell him in no uncertain terms that you’re not going to stop trolling him. That said you’re also willing to give him his space so you leave him be and when the train stops you walk Karkat over to the cave. Nepeta and Tavros are already there and after half an hour Vriska and Terezi show up arm in arm eager for adventure. Ten minutes later Kanaya arrives as Vriska struggles to open the first door because you and Nepeta won’t tell her how to open it until everyone is there. She’s certain that he has it under control, even though she doesn’t at all.

“Hey Kanaya.” Nepeta greets Kanaya as she approaches.

“Hello. Why is…” Kanaya trails off as Vriska runs at the sealed mural with a flying kick. This does not open the door in the slightest but Terezi is howling with laughter.

“Why.” Kanaya groans.

“A good question.” Karkat says flatly.

“Well, now that we’re all here I’ll open us up! Vriska, excuse me purrlease.” Nepeta says cheerfully as she hops off of the large boulder she was sitting on and lands by the door. She reaches out and again presses her hand to where Signless’ bloodpusher would be and the door slides open.

Your group proceeds through the caves and doorways, including the one you have to psionically open, and their wonder increases as you all view each mural and take the remaining books.

“This is astonishing, I’m not sure if I believed in the reality of ancestors before now but to hear that all of ours knew each other so closely is incredible.” Kanaya says in awe, touching her ancestor’s mural.

To Nepeta’s very obvious relief Karkat hasn’t shown any interest in the mural of her ancestor and his making out, instead he’s standing and glaring at the one of Dayvhe’s ancestor along with Dirkka’s and Rohhze’s. Behind you Tavros is excitedly pointing out his own ancestor on the wall and avidly reading about him in the closest book.

You hesitate for a moment and walk over to Karkat, setting your hand on his back before you come right up to him. You don’t want to startle him after all.

“Hey, are you okay?” you ask him quietly, trying to keep your voice down in the echoing chamber of the room. Karkat doesn’t answer right away, he just shrugs and keeps scowling.

“It’s pretty impressive that this survived all this time, don’t you think?” you ask.

“Do you even know how old all of this is?” Karkat asks.

“No but I’m pretty sure the Empress they refer to is this one so that gives us a ballpark guess, and adults lived here then so that too. But, I mean, you get to see your ancestor. It seems like he was a great man.” you offer.

“He was a mutant.” Karkat says, his voice and posture stiff.

Well, yeah, but Nepeta already knew about that. And so did Terezi and… oh.

“Oh fuck I- I was thinking too much about finding out about Dayvhe, I didn’t think about what your ancestor would tell other people about you. I thought you’d want to see him I didn’t-” you whisper in
panic but Karkat backhandedly bangs his knuckles into your forehead lightly without even looking around.

“I live in a rebel heiress’ base, I’m in a highly scandalous non quadrant relationship with you and I’ve been helping to kill other heiresses. If the others don’t know about me already I’m sure there’s enough else going on to have made them want to turn me in if they were going to.” Karkat says apathetically.

You didn’t think he’d take that so well. Or maybe he’s just so furious at Dayvhe he has no room to be mad at anything else. He sighs and his fingers slide under your hat and he pets your short hair.

“Shoosh.” he murmurs at you and even without him actually papping you your body starts to relax a little.

“Go and… do whatever you wanted to come here for.” Karkat sighs and waves you away.

You step back and leave Karkat where he was, glaring holes in the wall, and head off on your own. The room that you’re in is rectangular, lined on each side with alcoves with the muralled panels and the book pedestals. It is not the totality of the room however, a door at the end is sealed with another mural lock that Nepeta is standing at. As you draw close you can see that it’s actually two doors side by side, one door with Nepeta’s ancestor on and one with Tavros’. She’s standing there looking up at it, her tail swishing calmly. You’re not so stupid to assume that she didn’t hear you.

“Do you think I can just… lift it up?” you ask instead.

“Given that whoever designed these knew about and accounted for psionics I would suggest we don’t.” Nepeta advises.

You focus on the door instead, Nepeta’s ancestor the Disciple is standing with her right hand together with Tavros’ ancestor.

“There’s a divot right here between their hands, clearly something is meant to go here.” Nepeta says, poking at it.

“That’s the first door we’ve had to bring something other than ourselves to.” you say.

Nepeta makes a thoughtful noise and looks around. Something in the room, perhaps? But all that’s here is the mosaics and the books.

“Have you tried just… sticking something in there?” you ask.

The look Nepeta gives you suggests that she may stick you in there horns first if you ask her something that stupid again. Terezi walks over and leans on Nepeta’s shoulder as she surveys the door, unsurprisingly Vriska is not far behind.

“She has the same weapon as you Nepeta.” Terezi notes with a long sniff. She’s right, in Disciple’s other hand her metal claws are plain to see.

“Tavros’ weenie ancestor has nothing.” Vriska chuckles. You focus on him instead, he is missing a weapon but weirdly his free hand is empty and it looks like it shouldn’t be. Nepeta must be thinking on the same lines because she reaches out to touch his hand but that doesn’t open the door.

“There’s scratches on the floor here, like something was leant up here.” Terezi declares as she throws herself down on her knees to feel the area up.
“Hey, Tavros. Give me your lance!” Vriska demands.

“Uh, I don’t think I want to do that, actually.” Tavros answers.

“I don’t care, give it here!” Vriska snaps.

“Are you really not bored of pushing him around?” you ask Vriska. Turning around you can see her caught between you and Tavros who looks deeply uneasy at anyone challenging her.

“If he doesn’t want me to do it he should just give me his lance already.” Vriska replies.

“You could have just asked him to do it, it’s not like anyone here is unaware that you can boss him around. You wouldn’t be impressed at me doing something so basic as walking Karkat through turning a husktop on, would you?” you scoff.

“I’m not sure if you’re saying I’m that incompetent or if it’s not impressive because I’m not, actually, incompetent with tech but fuck you just in case.” Karkat comments loudly from across the room.

Vriska narrows her eyes at you, not breaking her challenging gaze building up a charge between you both. At least until Tavros’ lance comes between you.

“You can take it if you stop fighting.” Tavros says and Vriska takes it.

“Wasn’t fighting.” you shrug. You’d both know if you were.

Vriska walks towards the sealed door with the lance in her hand, she lifts it and presses the tip of it into the door. After a little pressure it clicks into place and the door rumbles and splits into two. The room beyond is dark and so Nepeta and her light head in first with you right behind, everyone else follows after you.

The room is square and large, rows and rows of seats are laid out facing forwards. The walls here are muralled too but not in the storytelling way the previous ones were, here it seems almost religious. The mural focus primarily on Disciple, Signless, Psiionic and Dolorosa. It looks like a church in here, especially as there’s something big at the other end of the room that looks like an altar.

“Something died in here, don’t you smell that?” Terezi asks, sniffing at the air.

“It doesn’t smell recent.” Kanaya adds.

“Oh great.” Karkat mutters.

“Be careful, this room could be trapped.” Nepeta warns you as you all start to wander through the room.

You eye the benches as you walk, doing a mental tally of the place. A rebellious faction with doors that require knowledge and understanding of its teachings to enter, held in a secure and secret location. This was both a meeting place and a stronghold for its people and its knowledge and they easily saw fit to seat more than a hundred trolls at a time here.

“Equius!” Nepeta gasps from the altar up top. You jerk around and quickly fly over to her.

“There’s our body.” Terezi says with a wince, looking the corpse over.

Slumped against the side of the altar is the skeleton of an adult troll, his horns are just like Equius own albeit unbroken and the metal part of his armor which is all of the clothing that remains has his symbol etched in it. His ancestor was around too, and involved with all this somehow. Held loosely
in his skeletal hands is a now tarnished metal lance.

“If he had this shouldn’t the door have been open?” Kanaya asks and casts a wary look at the door.

“I don’t know, if I was constructing a place like this I’d find a way to shut the doors to keep people out. Maybe he got locked in.” Vriska suggests.

“There’s no sign he tried to escape and I locked the doors after me last time I left, you can’t really do it accidentally and you have at least a minute to get out. Even then there’s just an easy way to open them again from this side, that one’s the same, see?” Nepeta says with a shake of her head and points to some old controls by the door that you’d not noticed before.

“So either he was dead beforehand and entombed here or he chose to stay here and die.” Karkat concludes.

“There’s a bottle by his side with a skull etched into it which, uh, not a great sign.” Tavros adds as he picks it up.

“So Equius’ ancestor just came here for no obvious reason, locked himself in and killed himself? Why?!?” Nepeta demands, waving her torch around angrily, making the shadows on the wall and altar. Something catches your eye as the shadows shift and you step closer to the altar and touch the stone. There’s words etched in it but it’s so grimy that you have to rub at them.

“Beloved Disciple, may the rebellion live on in your dreams, the eternal sleep.” you read slowly.

“Tell me there’s not a body in there.” Karkat groans.

Vriska shoulders what you’d all thought was the table top of the altar but is now clearly the lid of a stone casket. But highblood or not she’s not strong enough to shift it, the thing must be several tonnes at least.

“Stand back.” you tell everyone and carefully float the stone lid up and set it aside.

You all share a look and then with trepidation you all look in. The dead have never bothered you, with the exception of Aradia you guess. It’s the living and the dying you fear. As you peer into the casket you can see bones covered in expensive and finely draped cloth, where her skull should be there is a silver mask carved into a near perfect likeness of Nepeta’s own face just more adult looking. Cautiously you lift it up but underneath is just bones. It’s clear from the horns and the face that this really is Disciple herself and she was deeply loved. There are trinkets in here with here, carvings, personal items and even books. Many of them and the fabric must have been added long after her body had decomposed to be in such flawless condition. If anything it looks like her body was prepared to be kept in this state. Even after she was gone people still looked after her. You eye the skeleton of the unknown Zahhak and figure that you don’t need to guess who would have done that, who would have naturally outlived a olive blooded woman lucky enough to possibly die of old age rather than from violence.

Your eyes roam over the hoard of items until they land on something that definitely doesn’t belong. A tablet! And not a stone tablet either, a recognisable electronic tablet! You snatch it out and hold it up to the light to get a better look.

“This doesn’t belong here.” you whisper.

You tap the screen and unsurprisingly it doesn’t work. Underneath the main screen is a series of small buttons, a little keyboard instead of being purely touchscreen. You check the ports out on it and the brand on the back.
“This is old, really old. Or, well, not as old as I’d assumed most of this place was. Maybe fifty or… seventy five sweeps old?” you guess.

“That’s about how old I’d say these remains are.” Terezi adds.

“Can you make it work?” Vriska asks.

“Well… most tech is backward compatible to appease highbloods who can’t keep learning new shit as it progresses forward so the ports are the same kind I have back in my block. It seems to be in good condition but I wouldn’t be surprised at all if I need to take the thing apart to get it working and as for if it’s retained any data, well…” you trail off with a shrug.

“So it’s impossible then.” Vriska sighs, leaning in and flicking the corner of the tablet.

“No, just very hard. I’m going to throw everything I have at this, you’ll see.” you snap defensively. She thinks you’re not up to the job? You’ll show her!

“Good. Well I’m going to go be useful and take pictures of everything so I can crack any remaining mysteries before any of you.” Vriska declares and sweeps off to one of the walls. The flash from her palmhusk camera only draws your irritation more. Damn her.

You put the tablet away carefully and turn your attention to the skeleton once more. Tavros is crouched down looking at his ancestor’s lance and comparing it to his own.

“Any ideas?” you ask.

“One of the books up there mentioned my ancestor, The Summoner. He was a hero, part of the revolution, it’s incredible. But the book mentioned Signless’ death and Summoner’s too, they happened before all this was built.” Tavros says.

“Right?” you say.

“I get that you wouldn’t have some of the bodies, people lost in fights or executed. But if you were building a place and you had at least one body wouldn’t you also make caskets for the others too, even if some were empty? Or have memorials of some kind? Where is everyone else?” Tavros asks. It’s a good question, one you don’t have an answer to.

“Man, I wish Aradia was here. She could bring some ghosts in and ask them.” Tavros adds with a wistful sigh.

You feel sparks crackling off of your horns as you grit your teeth through the agitation at hearing her name. The thing that’s worse is that he’s right, this is entirely her thing but you wouldn’t ever ask. Honestly the situations that would have you asking Aradia for help ever again, or even just talking to her, are pretty fucking remote.

An idea occurs to you that makes you look sidelong at Tavros. You’ve been around him when you’ve been playing Dungeons and Dragons but you’re pretty sure he doesn’t know about what Aradia did. You told Vriska but she’s hardly gossip buddies with Tavros.

“You’ve not been talking to her, have you?” you ask.

“Uh. What? No. You know what? I think I’m going to get away from this corpse now, it’s creeping me out.” Tavros says quickly and backs off, conveniently away from you too. Gee, that wasn’t suspicious at all.
You try to shake the idea of Aradia off and let it go, what does it matter if Tavros is talking to her anyway? You’ve got way bigger fish to scorch in a flat pan right now than her. You need to find out what happened with your ancestors and importantly you need to find out all you can about Dayvhe’s ancestor. You basically need to prove to him that either Dahvid wasn’t terrible and therefore Dayvhe isn’t either or that the two of them are nothing alike at all so Dayvhe can’t hurt himself with the comparison. Not to mention that you weren’t as deluded in your episode as you were lead to believe you were, there are still celebrities trying to track down information about Cal and killing people to do it.

Needless to say dealing with your ex is pretty low on the priority list right now.

Eventually your group agrees to all go home before you get caught in the sunrise. Tavros will take all of the books home and scan and distribute copies for everyone as well as reading them for as much information as he can get on his own. You’re going to try to fix the tablet, Vriska is going to search Mindfang’s journal for any related information and try to figure out if there might be other strongholds like this around. Terezi is going to research her ancestor and find the exact dates of when the adults were expelled to try to see when all this shit must have gone down. Kanaya has a great idea about analysing the art and the attire the trolls are wearing as a way of dating the time period too. Karkat… offers no help.

You ride the train home with him, your knee bumping his with each jolt of the carriage and he remains eerily silent the whole way. He’s not ignoring you as such, he answers your questions or comments. When you tell him to get off the train he grumbles and says he’s coming but he just doesn’t keep talking.

Not until you’re floating in the big recuperacoon waiting for him to join you does he say anything real. He stands there, shirt in hand and mutant red grubscars on display as he glares a hole in the carpet.

“What’re you going to do if you uncover information that proves his ancestor was a manipulative bastard? If he puppeted people for his own amusement? Hell, my ancestor got executed by the looks of those murals and who knows what happened to yours so for all you know he sold them out.” Karkat says, throwing his hands in the air.

“I would be sad about that but it doesn’t mean Dayvhe is anything like that. If anything it’d be helpful to show him so he could see that it’s the person who makes powers like his awful and not the anti-chucklevoodoos themselves.” you say.

Karkat slaps his hands to his face and groans.

“He’s been controlling us! He’s been controlling you, even after everything that’s happened to you! Is he going to have to rip out your actual blood pusher before you get that Dayvhe isn’t who we thought he was?” Karkat demands.

“We don’t know the whole story, Karkat. But Dayvhe’s never given me any reason not to trust him-”

“THIS IS A GOOD REASON NOT TO TRUST HIM!” Karkat shouts. You sink lower in the sopor slime and glare at him before rising up and continuing as if he hadn’t said anything.

“I don’t think he knew and from what Rohhze said-” you continue.

“Yes, Rohhze, who is capable of being manipulated by him. Rohhze who sent you messages that made you feel sorry for him so you think he didn’t know so he can go away for a while and come
back like everything’s fine and swear he’s not doing it anymore but he’ll still keep doing it!” Karkat hisses.

You scoop up a handful of sopor and fling it at Karkat’s face. It hits and Karkat squawks in indignation and tries to swipe it off of his face and out of his ear.

“Everything else both of us know about him says that he’s a good person. That he’s sweet, that he makes dumb jokes, that he’s sometimes a little self involved but still cares about his friends, that he can get twitchy about his personal details but that he pities and trusts us. This one thing contradicts that and, you’re right, I can’t prove that him mind controlling us is real and everything else is fake but I’m not buying that.” you insist.

“And why not?” Karkat challenges you.

“Because! I can’t prove that all of this isn’t a drug induced hallucination. I can’t prove they didn’t finish helming me and this isn’t some weird involved soap opera I made up to keep myself sane through the pain of being a battery. I can’t prove anything is real!” you snarl at him, leaning over the rim of the coon.

“That’s… different.” Karkat says quietly.

“No it’s not. Sometimes you just can’t prove shit and you have to choose and take it on faith. I don’t want to live thinking that this is all fake and this is as close to proving it as I’m going to get. I can either live in paranoia or not so fuck that. This is the same, I’d rather live in the world where Dayvhe had powers he didn’t know about and fucked up than one where he’s secretly evil and ruined my mind. Until he straight up admits that’s what he did and I can tell he’s sincere then I’m not buying that, I’m not living that until I have to. I’d rather believe that he pities us, wouldn’t you?” you say angrily.

Karkat seems to curl in on himself a little and you’d feel bad about that but he needs setting straight.

“It just figures, doesn’t it? I finally thought I wasn’t going to die alone and it turns out my matesprit’s evil.” Karkat laments.

You glare at him and haul yourself half out of the coon so you can reel off and punch him in the arm hard, your fist connects with his upper arm. You cringe and shake your hand out, how does a guy get arms that hard? What the fuck? Goddamn you need that hand for typing, that’s not fair! Whatever, now you’re just angrier.

“Listen, taintlick, even if Dayvhe have never showed up and even if we’d never gotten in a quadrant. Quindrant. Whatever. Even if all of that was true you wouldn’t have died alone. You’re my best friend, you’ve been my best friend since forever. You think I would have just marched off happily into a helmsblock for the empire and left you alone to be culled? You’re a fucking moron, I would never have left you behind even if I had found a good way out. Even if we hadn’t lasted half a sweep and ended up roughing it in the woods until we died of scurvy and cholerabears you wouldn’t have been alone you morose fuck.” you curse at him. Karkat stares at you and then tries to tackle you. It takes longer than you’d like to admit for you to realise he’s ineptly hugging you rather than trying to haul you out of the coon to fight you or something. You growl and drag him in with you and snap the light off with your psi as Karkat clings to you as tightly and inexplicably as a horrorterror.

“Sollux,” Karkat asks in the darkness, “are we still friends?
“You’re the dumbest person I know.”

“...”

“Yes, we’re still friends, Karkat.”
“Here's to the ones
The renegades who never run
Despite all of my ranting and raging so
Here's to the ones
Who hide the bullet from the gun
Foot down on all my bullshit but won't cage me in”
Reasons Not To Die - Ryn Weaver
‘A pale call for help’

TA: ii know you're not onliine but ii've not heard anythiing from you or rohhze. ii2 everythiing okay?
TA: can you at lea2t 2hoot me a me22age or two ju2t 2o ii know everythiing ii2 okay? even iif you're bu2y with 2uper 2ecret clown mind trainiing.
TA: ii gue22 whiiniing at your trolltag ii2n't goiing two get me far. we made a lot of progre22 ye2termiight at lea2t. ii don't think ii told you where the cave ii2, ii'll 2hoot you the locatiion. but iit had dii2ciiple'2 actual body iin iit two!
[twinArmageddons shared a saved location]
TA: we're goiing two fiind out lot2 from that place, ii'm 2ure. probably about your ance2tor. ii hope you're readiing the book on hiim. ju2t try not two jump two terriible conclu2iion2 ok, ii know what you're liike 2ometiime2.
TA: ii piity you <>

You’re hung over the edge of the big recuperacoon, it’s just right for three but it feels way too big for just two. That’s… not a sad metaphor for your love life or anything right now. Ah, shit it is, now you’re just sad and disappointed in yourself. You float your palmhusk over to the sofa and drop it there. Idly kicking your legs behind you a little you bump into something, you run your foot curiously over it and… ankle bone. Hi Karkat’s ankle. You rest your toes right on the side of his foot and focus, it took your forever to perfect this particular move but it’s a good one.

Psionics like yours come in a bunch of varieties, the classic ‘throw shit around’, forming things from psi like barriers and shields, the adapted ‘throw me around/sick ninja moves’ that Dayvhe was so fond of, and then the more direct ‘laser/lightning shit’. Powerful as you are you have all of these kinds, but there are other things you can do with your psionics beyond those. Rudimentary feeling of things is one, a simple light show is another but the third is what you’re doing now. It’s a very delicate combination of the making something from psi kind along with feeling things out. You form a small ball of psi, about the side of a marble and then blow it bigger to pop it which dissipates the psi in tingling ribbons that react to flesh or indeed metal. Great for dicking with other people’s tech and… this.

You form several of the psionic marble sized spheres below your foot and, more importantly, below Karkat’s. They pop, dissipate and-

“AGH!” Karkat screeches, damn near leaping out of the coon and slopping sopor up the wall. He’s ticklish on his feet. You smile at him, the picture of innocence.

“I'M GOING TO KICK YOUR TEETH OUT AND WEAR THEM AS A TASTELESS NECKLACE YOU EMBARRASSMENT TO TROLLKIND!” Karkat shrieks at you.
“I’m always impressed how you can go so loud so soon.” you tell him happily.

“I hate you, get me breakfast.” Karkat groans, sinking down in the sopor again.

“Don’t see why I should do that, I could just get myself breakfast.” you point out, hopping your ass up onto the rim of the coon.

“See previous comment, re: tasteless necklace.” Karkat surfaces to say and sinks lower again so his mouth is covered and only his nose above the sopor line lets him breathe. He’s all angry eyebrows and seething mostly fake rage, daww.

You open your mouth to sass him back when you palmhusk pings with a new trollian message. You jump and half fall off the coon in alarm. Flinging your hand out your palmhusk whips across the room so fast that you think your hand may bruise after catching it.

adiosToreador [AT] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

AT: hEY SOLLUX, i HAVE THE FIRST BOOK SCANNED AND

You don’t even bother reading the whole thing, you just angrily throw it back on the loungeplank for daring to not be from Dayvhe. Looking around you notice that Karkat is watching you with wide eyes.

“It was just Tavros. I’ll get breakfast.” you mumble and slip away. You take the fastest shower, dress quickly and leave.

It’s pathetically plain that if you don’t do something with your time you’re going to lose your mind waiting for Dayvhe to message you back. Throwing breakfast together doesn’t seem to be enough to get your mind onto other things so as you wait for coffee to brew you decide to actually look at the message from Tavros.

adiosToreador [AT] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

AT: hEY SOLLUX, i HAVE THE FIRST BOOK SCANNED AND I’VE PUT IT TOGETHER INTO THIS DOCUMENT THAT I’M SENDING EVERYONE, iT SEEMED SENSIBLE FOR US TO ALL BE ABLE TO MAKE NOTES ON THE SAME THING,

AT: i’VE MADE SOME NOTES ALREADY, mOSTLY ABOUT HOW KARKAT’S ANCESTOR WAS A MUTANT, bUT THEN DAYVHE’S WAS TOO AND MY ANCESTOR ACTUALLY HAD WINGS AS WELL, i SUPPOSE THAT THING WAS JUST MORE COMMON BACK THEN,

AT: i’M STILL PRETTY EARLY ON IN THE HISTORY AT THE MOMENT BUT I’VE SCANNED AND READ UP TO THE POINT WHEN THEY FREED YOUR ANCESTOR, iT’S PRETTY GRISLY READING, i CAN’T IMAGINE GOING THROUGH THAT,

You suck in a sharp breath of air between clenched teeth. Yeah, you think you’ll skip the section on your ancestor’s helming. That won’t bring up any fun thoughts for you at all. He’s pulled you into a group chat and recounted more or less all he’s read, which is fine and all but you and Nepeta skimmed all of this already. You send him a weakass thankyou and go silent as the others who haven’t read all of this before talk amongst themselves.

When you hear footsteps coming towards you the person you half expect to see is Karkat, but it’s Dirkka. His brown eyes widen when he sees you and he comes closer in his still somewhat unsettling adult form.
“Sollux, how are you doing?” Dirkka asks, coming in and leaning against the counter.

“Still haven’t heard from Dayvhe, Rohhze told me she’s taken him to her people so that’s good but he’s not answering me.” you say.

“Yeah, he’s not answering me and Roxxie either.” Dirkka says, obviously miserable. He starts opening cupboards and pulling food out.

“How’s Karkat taking it all? He seemed pretty angry about it.” Dirkka comments. Angry is an understatement, clearly.

“It’s not just about Dayvhe I don’t think.” you shrug and grab the sugar, dumping some in the bottom of Karkat’s mug. It’s a huge mug for maximum coffee, you think you got it for him sweeps ago, you don’t quite remember. It’s got a crab painted on it that’s a little wonky but still sweet all the same.

“Oh?” Dirkka says around a mouthful of cold grubloaf he pulled from the hunger trunk. You guess he’s still getting used to his post molt metabolism, who know what Roxxie’s is like.

You pour the brewed coffee into two mugs and consider your words carefully.

“I don’t think Dayvhe even knew the guy, before his time I think. But at one point there used to be twelve of us in our little group. Aradia, Tavros, me, Karkat, Nepeta, Kanaya, Terezi, Vriska, Equius, Gamzee, Eridan and Feferi.” you list off one by one.

“I know… most of those names.” Dirkka says.

“Right, so we were all friends. I mean that. Well, ok me and Vriska were never tight back then even before Aradia died, but neither were me and Eridan but we were still ok. I’d answer their tech questions if they asked, if Karkat was playing a game with them and they needed another player I’d sooner play with them than strangers, you know?” you explain.

“More than just acquaintances but not close friends.” Dirkka concludes and you nod.

“So, Gamzee, he was this purple blood. Full clown, the whole deal. But he was the chillest guy, you know? Densest motherfucker I ever knew but friendly and nice enough, talking to him could be a pan-ache but he was decent.” you say.

“That’s pretty rare. A lot of their kind just seem calm and then it’s viscera everywhere.” Dirkka says and he’s not wrong.

“His lusus was missing. Or more like he just fucked off all the time, he basically raised himself and didn’t do a great job, not that you could blame him. The guy used to eat sopor to get high, baked it in pies cause no one ever told him not to and by the time we did he was too far gone.” you continue. A lot of your feelings about Gamzee over the years have changed and especially after seeing Cal and everything you know about Vriska’s mother, well… lusii can really fuck a kid up.

“He ate it? That shit would rot your pan so fast though.” Dirkka says in obvious surprise.

“Yeah, it did. He started getting weirder and weirder but Karkat was assuring everyone he was fine, I mean he was his friend. Long story short he flipped his shit, tried to kill people and Kanaya had to cut him in two. That chainsaw of hers ain’t for show. Karkat felt terrible about it, both for him being dead and what someone who was supposedly good could do.” you say.

“You think he felt responsible?” Dirkka asks.
“Wouldn’t you?” you answer. The expression on Dirkka’s face tells you all that you need to know about that.

“So, there was that. Now there’s Eridan, another guy he famously held up as being not that bad. Except Eridan had a body count. But it’s stupid, it’s not like Karkat was at all responsible for either of them. Their actions are on them, on Eridan especially because he had every warning and chance and it’s not as if Karkat pulling his support of the guy would have changed anything really. But Karkat’s Karkat so there.” you complain and stir Karkat’s coffee and toss the spoon in the sink.

“Karkat failed to see the clown was going to snap and people nearly got hurt. He failed to keep Eridan away from us and Feferi got killed, our safety was jeopardized and you got tortured and helmed. Now there’s Dayvhe.” Dirkka concludes, having seen where you’re going with this.

“He introduced us.” you say.

It’s stupid, it’s so wrong. No one anywhere blames Karkat for this, least of all you who has by Karkat’s count been a victim to his supposed poor judgement twice. What’s that saying? Fool someone once, shame on you; fool them twice, shame on them. Uh… fool them a third time lose your shit in a major way and overreact to everything?

Dirkka seems to get what you mean that Karkat’s blaming himself for nothing, or that his angst about past things is amping up his reaction. Of course it’s normal to be upset about what you’ve all learnt about Dayvhe or to be distressed at him vanishing like that but Karkat’s acting unreasonably.

“It’s a completely different thing. Gamzee was kind of no one’s fault but I get blaming yourself for not seeing the signs sooner, no one else blamed him but I get the feeling at least. Eridan chose to be the worst troll going and Karkat wasn’t even comfortable with him being around near the end, not after he tried to attack me that time. He did what he could, there’s no blame there. Again I can see why someone like Karkat would feel responsible, he’s like that, he cares.” you say with a sigh.

You’re both frustrated by how invested he is in people’s wellbeing but also it’s one of the things you admire most about him. You pity him for it but also sometimes you could strangle the moron.

“Dayvhe is even more different. Dayvhe obviously had no idea about what he could do, if he did know he would have told me. No one could expect Karkat to know about something that even Dayvhe himself didn’t know about, it’s stupid, even for him.” you huff. You turn around to look at Dirkka and you just catch the grimace on his face before he erases it.

“What?” you ask.

“No, it’s nothing. I agree, Karkat shouldn’t feel responsible for this.” Dirkka agrees with you, but that wasn’t it, was it?


“I don’t know, I don’t have those kind of psionics. The only person that I know who does is Rohhze and it’s not like I know her well, and even within that we don’t know how strong she is or how strong Dayvhe is. We’re dealing with something with so many unknown variables, it’s a real bitch of a situation and we shouldn’t assume things.” Dirkka says sensibly.

Yeah, the thing is the expression Dirkka was just pulling was clearly a reaction to a not so sensible thought.

“But?” you prompt him again.

“Cal used to control me all the time. I was aware of it, I hated it. I’m real familiar with that feeling.
With Dayvhe I didn’t feel a goddamn thing, until you and Hal started talking about how it made sense with how Dayvhe gets away with shit that no one else would. Now maybe his shit is real subtle and weak and maybe I really wanted it to not be true so it was an easy suggestion to lead me into. But I don’t think so, I think that was really strong psionics.” Dirkka says.

You’re not stupid, you know what he’s saying. Rohhze didn’t know she had chucklevoodoos for sweeps because even if she has them and they’re ok she’s not so advanced that she’s melting people’s sponges out of their heads. Maybe lesser psionics don’t always click in time. You, though, there’s no way you ever doubted that you had psionics. Dirkka is saying that Dayvhe knew full well what he had.

That cannot be true.

“That’s hoofbeastshit. We don’t know how it works, like you said maybe he wouldn’t have questioned it because he just thought people were naturally nice or agreeing with him. We don’t know how often he does it, if it’s just life or death or if he even knows. But I know he doesn’t know about it for a fact because if he had those kind of psionics he would have told me, I’m his moirail.” you hiss at him.

“I’m not discounting that,” Dirkka says placatingly as he sets his plate down, “but you’ve got a bad history with that shit and he’d have known that before meeting you. It seems pretty common knowledge, right? Besides if you have friends and you can make people be nice to you and agree with you whenever you want I get why someone wouldn’t talk about that because then people would always wonder. It’d fuck with all of your friendships and if you know you’re not going to use it on them then what does it matter?”

“It matters because I’m not his friend! I’m his MOIRAIL!” you snap and you can feel a crackle around your horns as several things on the counter jump up into the air ever so slightly and drop down again with a thump.

“And I more or less played lusus to him for half the time and he never told me! Besides you more than anyone would be likely to drop someone from your quadrants for having the ability to fuck with your head like that, if he did know about what he could do he’d have every reason to keep just that one secret. Plus, if he never used it on you then it wouldn’t matter.” Dirkka says quickly.

Except Dayvhe did use it on you, or he tried to. Here’s the thing, there’s a million moments when you’ve been stressed or anxious, upset in any way and Dayvhe’s just managed to snap you out of it. He’s your moirail, of course he can. But was it that or was it Dayvhe trying to ‘help’ with this… thing he can do?

No. No, he’d never do that to you. Not knowingly. He’s given you no good reason to doubt him, this is all speculation, you won’t believe that your whole relationship with him was a lie. You can’t believe that, you won’t.

You sling curses at Dirkka and storm off, abandoning the food you’d got out and the coffee you’d already made to go cold on the counter. You retreat to your room fumingly angry and telling yourself over and over that Dayvhe didn’t know. He couldn’t have known. If he had known then he would have said, maybe not right away in your very first pile but he would have said.

Maybe you’re just as irrational as Karkat. He sees this as another in a long line of failures where his supposedly poor character judgement has endangered people he cares about. If it’s not Karkat’s fault, if there’s not some sign that he should have seen then it means that he really can’t tell good people from bad and ANYONE could do this at any time. Karkat has to tell himself that he fucked up again
because that's what he does, he has to vow to do better or else life is endless danger. Berating himself gives him some form of control over the situation, imaginary or not. As for you, you have to buy that Dayvhe didn’t lie to you or else you just went from one kind of prison with people fucking with your head to another, one you would by definition have been in long before. You refuse to have that be your life, you can’t even consider it.

You turn your husktop on and angrily open up trollian. It’s not his fault, he’s just trying to tell you what he thinks but right now you could burn Dirkka’s face clean off his newly reformed thinkpan. Instead you’ll troll Dayvhe who hasn’t been lying to you since you met him.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TA: hey ii hope your trainiing or whatever ii2 they have you dooing ii2 going well there. can you plea2e ju2t troll me back?

He’s online, you can see it. You must have missed the notification when you were talking to Dirkka. You sit there, your knee bouncing up and down anxiously as you stare at the screen and at him not replying. Dayvhe wouldn't just abandon you, he's just trying to sort his shit out.

TA: dv come on, plea2e talk two me. anythiing, 2eriiou2ly.

More nothing. His handle is still lit up and then, abruptly, it flicks offline.

You very carefully do not throw your husktop at the wall, you only recently rebuilt this one and you're not doing it again. Ok, so, correction, Dayvhe is trying to do what's best probably but you're also gonna smack him in the horn for this later. Part of being someone's moirail is being able to recognise their flaws and the moments when they screw up and openly acknowledging them so as to help them improve. Right now you have lots to work with on that front.

Fucking Strydrrs.

You're not going to sit and stew all night so you're going to be aggressively productive. You keep up with reading everything that Tavros scans in for you all. It ends up with you learning a lot about Karkat's ancestor who it seems cared about people as overwhelmingly as Karkat himself does but more in a 'peace and love' way and less 'obscene angry diatribes into trollian' kind of way. Either way it's interesting but not really enough to occupy you.

Instead you spend your time picking over any information you can find about the old make of tablet that you found in the coffin. Sarcophagus? You're not sure what the difference is. In the big stone box with the skeleton. Alternian tech is deliberately designed to be compatible even across newer generations of things. Standard ports, standard charging, standard voltage. That way when you're some freshly hatched lowblood in tech support and some highblood comes to you with busted tech that's more than twice your own age you can still fix it and not get the snot subjuggulated out of you.

...and now you're thinking about Dayvhe again.

It's like that stupid six degrees of separation game, how many links does it take you to get from any subject to your missing moirail who's currently choosing not to speak to you? It sure as shit ain't as much as six right now. Fine, you're pathetic in a bad way. You ought to at least be useful.

You start to take photos of the tablet and carefully examine the ports on it, they don't seem corroded at all so you carefully plug it in to charge but unsurprisingly after that long dormant it doesn't come back to life. You didn't really have that much hope there so you gently pop the case open and, yeah,
the battery has corroded to shit. You set yourself to taking that out, cleaning down the inside and then cannibalising a battery from a gimmicky cereal box tablet that played basic games. You actually sent tokens away to get that thing a few sweeps ago though god knows why. You set that battery in place, reconnect everything, shut the case and try to charge it now. You think it's taking the charge but you're not going to try turning it on just yet, let the battery build up charge first.

Your door flicks open as you're gathering up your small screwdrivers and the suddenness of it makes you jump and drop a bunch of them. Great.

"This is the longest fetching of breakfast and coffee I've ever seen you useless excuse for a servant." Karkat snaps at you and stomps over.

"Sorry, I had to get out of there. Dirkka was... it doesn't matter. Sorry, I forgot after that." you mumble in apology and to your horror you find that your voice sounds all watery and sad. You do get to see Karkat flip from annoyed at you to annoyed at someone FOR you which is always interesting to watch. He crouches down by you, he's not fully dressed yet, still barefoot and his hair is still wet from the shower. You guess he got as dressed as he had to in order to be decent to wander around and then went to find you.

"Have you been crying?" Karkat asks bluntly, hooking a finger under your chin and making you look at him. The sudden movement makes you fumble the screwdrivers AGAIN goddamnit.

"No." you sneer, jerking your head back and yet again picking your things up. You've not cried at all, you've been focusing very hard on not doing anything like that.

"Only just it looks like your eyes are all yellow rimmed." Karkat says, how dare he know you so well?

"What did Dirkka say?" Karkat asks.

"Nothing. It's not important. Just- you know." you shrug.

"Dayvhe." Karkat concludes somehow from your mess of an answer. You nod weakly.

"So you've not eaten either, then?" Karkat guesses and you shake your head.

"Ok, I'm getting us food. I'll be back." he tells you and gently bumps one of his horns into the bigger one of yours on your left, it's a dumb little affectionate gesture but somehow it still makes you feel better.

"You don't have to." you call after him.

"I know." Karkat shrugs and leaves.

Fucking Karkat. Coming in here, messing up your focus, distracting you with food when shit needs to be done. What a jerk. Your thoughts would have more weight if there wasn't something in your chest fluttering and a stupid little smile pulling at the side of your mouth. You may not have Dayvhe right now but you still have your very best friend with you who you're lucky enough to count as your quindrantmate. It's still totally a word, for sure.

Karkat does come back with food and blessed caffeine and he makes you explain what you've been doing with the tablet and summarise Tavros' findings and by the time you've done both of those and eaten you feel a lot better. Dayvhe's being a tool but you still pity him so you could at least do him, yourself and Karkat the favour of not totally melting down just because things are hard right now. You feel like you've worked this conclusion out before but hopefully it'll stick this time.
Eventually you're sat on your floor with Karkat taking up your entire loungeplank as you try to turn the tablet on but it's still not working. You sigh in frustration, open up the case again and, yeah, this thing was all button operated, or at least a lot of it is. Not like the touchscreen only tablets that you've all had for generations. Honestly the only tech around that's actually button based is keyboards and that seems to be more of whatever the touch version of an aesthetic choice is. Everyone's screens are still touch operated and there are lots of people with more artistic jobs that just use those. The downside of buttons is that they get gunk in them and that then corrodes the contact points and given enough time they just become nonfunctional. You think Disciple was pretty well gone before this was placed in her casket but any moisture plus time is a recipe for disaster and rust.

You spend a while scraping what you can off of the vital power buttons but you're pretty sure you're just going to have to connect this thing to your own machine and bypass them entirely. You finally make it when the screen flickers to life, or most of it does at least. But it's showing some blue screen of death error. Still, it means there's life in the thing and you'll take that.

You put your husktop into rescue mode, the same thing you have it in whenever you need to help Karkat unfuck his own machine or one of your other idiot friends for money. Wait, that's an idea.

"When was the last time I charged you money for tech work, and I don't just mean like favours or food." you ask as you plug the tablet into your machine.

"I don't know, sweeps probably." Karkat answers, not looking up from his own screen as he reads.

"You're the only person I do that for. Well, you and Dayvhe but he doesn't usually need my help." you tell him.

"In order: aw and then fuck you." Karkat scoffs without looking up.

You have to do a lot of boring maintenance tech work to get the tablet functional again, the OS doesn't like the huge date jump it's been subjected to and it's flagging up all sorts of internal errors about hardware problems which it's right to do. You have to work around all of that in order to get into the damn thing and it's taken you almost all night to do. You're lucky you didn't have to order new parts in.

"There we go!" you say delightedly as the screen pops up on a window within your own husktop. It's running on a little emulator you coded but it's running. The desktop is standard hex tiles with blue outlines which makes you suspect all the more that the tablet did indeed belong to Equius' ancestor after all. There are several folders on the desktop and you skirt through all of them with curiosity.

One is a huge database that repeats each half sweep, they go back for... for ages. You click on the first one, it's 80 sweeps old. On it is a huge, sprawling list of names, locations, blood castes, ages, some trollhandles, boxes for status, other intel. You skim through but the first entry is for The Disciple, it lists her age, 20.7 sweeps, her olive blood, it places her as the de facto leader of the resistance. Her location is unknown. As you go through the others it's clear that these are all members of Signless' rebellion, why would he have this? You try to think laterally and skim through his files for anything around the same time.

A direct Imperial communication flags up, a video message. You open it.

The flash of fuschia in the background tips you off to who it is before your ganderbulbs have even processed the face on the screen, it's the Empress. She's reclined in her seat, her claws drumming on her knee. Behind you Karkat drops his palmhusk and stares.

"Darkleer, as the man who had the honour of dealing the krilling blow to Signless I am tasking you..."
with finishing what you started. You will hunt down and kill every rebel, everyone who adheres to Signless' treasonous movement until they are all dead. Do you understand me? Whale I can't say that I'd be displeased with any of their deaths, far from it, I want you to tell me when Disciple is dead. She is the only one in his original circle whose location I don't know. I have sent you the details of a few other rebels as well, two Strydrs and a Lalond but I have them following my lure just fine. Do not fail me Darkleer." The message cuts out.

"What does she mean she had them lured? There's got to be more, search for Strydr in the files!"

Karkat demands, shaking your shoulder.

You do just that and a host of video files pop up, this one comes in a folder with an 'e%traction note' attached. You open the note first but it's short and to the point.

D --> Message intercepted from Gallus Grieve, rebel was attempting to deliver this message to the Disciple Alas, he bled out before I could enquire as to her location

You play the video.

On screen is a man. A man with horns you know so very well, only both are complete. He's wearing Dayvhe's face, older, but still so clearly him. His eyes are screwed shut but even with that it's obvious to see the vibrant purple scratches on his skin, the split on his sniffnode and the cut in his lip. When he opens his eyes one is hot mutant red and the other the same purple of the sign on his chest, the same sign on Dayvhe's.

"Hi Dis, I hope this gets to you fine and I know you're gonna bitch about my delivery methods but Gallus was a tool anyway and this is more important. Don't shoot me for the messenger, ok? I'd troll you direct but it's easier to scramble and hide this way, even if it means I gotta charm a messenger back down on planet." he says with a half shrug.

You're trying to make out the background behind him, the sky is a hazy thin grey, like storm clouds but the ground around where he's sat is barren.

"So, don't say I told you so or nothin' but yeah, Rosali's big old murder plan went to shit. She's. She's dead, Rosali I mean. The Empress is very much alive. Psii is too for all that he blatantly wishes he wasn't, I'm not sure if that's good news or bad. Before you hear it from anyone else I need to tell you myself. I cut a deal, I had to. I didn't tell her nothing, I swear, I never would. But if I surrendered she wouldn't kill Dionte, he's just a kid Dis. The terms were we get stranded on this shit rock, we can't never leave and we got like, a week of food. Or we did, I got more down. Don't ask how you wouldn't like the answer. I'm out of the war, I have to be, it's the only way Dionte stays alive." he says with blatant regret.

"It's getting too big a file." a voice off camera. Dayvhe's ancestor curses and reaches for the camera and the feed cuts.

You and Karkat share a look. There's no claiming that this guy isn't Dayvhe’s ancestor now and that it's just a coincidence with the sign and the name as well as the likeness on the mural and... the information in the books. Look, the argument that you weren’t dealing with Dayvhe’s ancestor was paper thin as is but it has to be well and truly sunk by now. You open up trollian on your palmhusk, your husktop is still in its protected mode in case there’s anything untrustworthy on this tablet, and troll Dayvhe.

TA: dayvhe when you get thii2 troll me back, we ju2t watched a viideo of your ance2tor. he look2 ju2t liike you.
TA: maybe we could come two where you are and we could 2how you. or you could come back
two u2 for a niight maybe?
TA: we mii22 you

He comes online with a ping from your alerts, stays that way for maybe twenty seconds and then goes offline again. Your shoulders slump dejectedly and you hear Karkat hiss.

“Forget him, show me what the last video is, Sol.” Karkat insists, pushing your palmhusk down and pointing to the screen on your husktop. He’s trying to distract you, obviously but you go with it and drop your palmhusk to your lap.

This video oddly starts with some old software for making calls, as if something in it had to record it by design. From the side of the person making the call you can see the anxiously waiting face of a teal adult in a crisp suit with an axe resting on one shoulder. He seems twitchy.

“Does he look familiar to you?” Karkat asks but you shake your head. By the date on the screen this was sixty sweeps ago.

The call connects and this guy you DO recognise, it’s not Dayvhe’s ancestor though, or not his direct one by blood at least. That’s Dirkka’s face staring back at you on the screen, right down to the stupid shades, it’s got to be Dionte!

“Dionte! Get him, please, I did what he asked. I did it, I’m here, I need to talk to him.” the man in the suit babbles.

Dionte stares back impassively, holy shit you thought Dirkka was hard to read. The man making the call is twitching in the silence until he seems to finally crack.

“Subverse, PLEASE fetch him, please let me speak to my beloved, I have done what he asked and he told me to call!” the man pleads.

Dionte just sighs and pulls something soft, a soft toy maybe, into view and rests his head on it a little as he taps at a screen. He pauses and straightens up a little and you see that the plush that he has looks just like the lure that Cal had. Who the fuck has a mindleech lure plush? Well, someone raised by Cal you suppose.

“You’re calling from Imperial tech.” he says without inflection or tone at all.

“I took it off the man that’s here with Disciple, mine broke in the landing.” the guy in the suit explains.

“Huh. I could do a lot with that. Fine, I’ll message him.” Dionte or as you suppose his adult title must be The Subverse says. He’s impassive as he types and ignores the increasingly desperate man on the call. You can hear a noise in the background and with a blur of silent movement that you’ve seen Dirkka and Dayvhe pull off so many times he’s suddenly gone only to be replaced by Dayvhe’s ancestor sliding into the chair at speed.

“Buster! Did you find her?!?” he demands. You notice now that he’s wearing white paint on his face, covering everything as far as you can see he’s even wearing sunglasses like Dayvhe’s except in a slightly older style.

“Dahvid! I’m so happy to see you!” the teal guy purrs and Dahvid’s lip curls back in a snarl.

“Answer me.”

As he speaks you can feel that uncomfortable otherness in your head and you grit your teeth against
it, yet the man on screen and Karkat both blurt out ‘Yes!’ at the same time. Karkat’s eyes go wide and he slaps his hand over his mouth but it’s already happened.

“Well, where is she? I want to talk to Disciple.” Dahvid says with a frown.

“Right, yes, uh. I have sad news there. I don’t know when you last spoke to her and I’d hate to pry into your personal affairs more than you’re ready for. Of course you can tell me anything but…” the teal man hesitates and glances to the side.

“She’s- she’s dead. It looks like she has for… sorry how long did you say?” the teal man- Buster, says to someone ofscreen.

“Two sweeps.” someone else says.

Dahvid’s face is not as impassive as his descendant’s is. The anguish is plain to see, even if he bites it back after a moment or two.

“How? And who were you talking to?” he asks.

“Here, this is Darkleer.” Buster says and passes the tablet over to the man who you suspect is its actual owner. Hello guy who looks distressingly like Equius.

“You’re Dahvid, Disciple spoke of you.” he says solemnly.

“What-” Dahvid begins but behind him you see Dionte lean over and point at something on a different screen. Dahvid’s mouth opens in alarm and then twists into a silent snarl.

“Buster, can you still hear me?” Dahvid asks quickly.

“I absolutely can sir!” he replies cheerfully, jostling into frame.

“Wonderful, where are you?” Dahvid asks his words and tone pleasant but his face a lot less so.

“In a temple, a bunch of locked rooms, it was really hard to get in here. I did really well to find him and her.” he says.

“You did. Come home and on your way out of there, lock every door after you ok? Go.” Dahvid orders him.

There’s a burst of movement and you catch the edge of Darkleer’s alarmed face.

“Darkleer don't take a step.” Dahvid snarls and it’s in that same unsettling voice but because it’s not directed at you you don’t have to resist it, this is targeted. On screen Darkleer freezes and then gives the tablet a wide eyed look of panic.

“She told me you could do this.” he says tightly.

“Yeah, see, here’s the fuckin’ thing my man. The Disciple is literally the only friend I have left and I know that she’d never tell some loyalist imperial scum anything aside from to go to hell. So her telling you about me willingly? Nah. Besides, my Bro here’s found all sorts of things in your tablet. People we know who aren’t around anymore, and you know what? I recognise you. I was there when he was killed, you’re the one who shot Signless.” Dahvid hisses.

“I’ve changed since then, I made a mistake. She changed me-” Darkleer says in a panic.

“You’re an assassin, Aren't you?” Dahvid snaps out in accusation. Behind you Karkat denies it as
onscreen Darkleer confirms it.

“But not anymore, I defected!” he pleads.

“Oh, great. So you’re a traitor and the man who shot and killed the Signless, was responsible for splitting up everyone I cared about and did who knows what to Disciple to make her talk. You’re a bastard and you can’t be trusted, good to know. And don’t you DARE turn this off.” he snaps cutting off movement that you’d already seen Darkleer start to make. If he can’t hear the instructions he doesn’t have to obey them. He’d have been better off just throwing the thing at the wall, if he has any of Equius’ strength that would have done the job.

“You see, Condy isn’t allowed to know I’m still looking for the others, still doing what I do. And you’re unreliable and I hate you anyway. So if you’re an assassin you probably have poison on you, I know I’ve caught people trying to kill me who down the stuff before I can stop them and find out who was trying to off me. Do you have that too?” he asks.

Darkleer nods wide eyed and you quickly pause. Aside from you not being sure if you want to see this you also want to be sure that Karkat doesn’t hear anything fucked up with those powers. You’ll be fine… probably, but Karkat has no resistance. But if he’s compelled to drink something then that’s fine but if Dahvid gets more specific into an actual command for Darkleer to end his life without specifying Darkleer then you can’t let Karkat hear that. You hit mute and scrub through the video and… yeah Darkleer did have poison.

“Holy shit.” Karkat whispers.

Darkleer is clinging to the wall of the sarcophagus, sweating profusely. There’s a lot of video left so cautiously you raise the sound again.

“-in there?” Dahvid asks. Darkleer nods weakly.

“Good, put me in there.” Dahvid tells him. Darkleer drops the tablet inside and you can hear the shift of stone and darkness fills the screen.

“That’ll teach me to not say ‘put me in there where I can see her’ but whatever.” Dahvid says. His voice suddenly changes from harsh to soft.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t be there Dis. And I know you’d probably kick my ass for that but given what you probably went through maybe not. I can’t believe you fucking died on me, now it’s just me and Psii.” Dahvid sighs, sliding down in his chair. He slides his shades off and looks utterly miserable.

“I didn’t tell you last time, I know I was playing up the whole ‘maybe you can rescue him’ thing because Condy’s got him on that immortality train like me and Dionte. Or- well, not immortality, not dying from old age I guess. But yeah, every time I see him when I have to go see her as per our deal he’s… I used to be able to talk to him. But he’s not really there now, or all he can bring the sense to say is just begging me to rip him out even if it’d kill him. Probably knowing that it would.” Dahvid says with regret.

“If it wouldn’t get me and Dionte killed and also not free him because I’d definitely get caught then I would but…” he shrugs.

“It was never gonna work Rosali’s way but I don’t think it was ever going to work Signless’ way neither. If it’s just me, if I’m all the rebellion is now then we’re doing this my fucking way. I’ve got eternity apparently so long game or whatever. That bitch is gonna pay. If I fail then… fuck, if there is an afterlife you can hunt me down and call me a dumbass again.” his smile is bittersweet but
seemingly having come to an end he leans in and cuts the feed. That was the last thing recorded on the device, for obvious reasons. Now you have it.

“Can Dayvhe do that?” Karkat asks into the sudden quiet of the room.

“I don’t… think so.” Or if he can he doesn’t know it. He and Vriska might be cooler with each other since you two called a truce and you all started playing Dungeons and Dragons together but there was a big stretch of time where he loathed her and thought she was seriously dangerous to you. If he could have got rid of her without it being held as his fault then, well. Either he can’t do that, or he doesn’t know he can or he can but he’s just a better person than you’re giving him credit for. You know Dayvhe would never hurt an innocent person and he’d pretty restrained with guilty people too, he just made Feferi and Eridan drop their weapons and back off before, he never killed them or made them do it.

“He looks like he’s properly purple, not a full mutant. Or at least his blood isn’t mutated, he was bleeding before and it was definitely purple. So maybe he’s stronger than Dayvhe is.” you say. It’d make sense if he’s more completely in a blood caste meant to have chucklevoodoos that his weird version would be more powerful.

You really wish Dayvhe was here now. You wish you could show him what you found and test out your theories with him. There’s so many questions building up and no way to answer them without him. At the very least you hope that he’s doing ok and that he talks to you soon.

===> Author: Run path C1

“Flew here to help clear the mess that was me
Made up of fear and self-hate
A stalemate with he-who-shall-not-be-named
You tried and you cried, confessing your grip was slipping
Couldn’t help me, you held me, the shadows began to fade”
Reasons Not To Die - Ryn Weaver
‘A pale call for help’

After you’re pulled from the pod Jaspers excuses you and Rohhze, says that your training is to start in proper the next night. He gives Rohhze some instructions that pass by you and so it falls to her to lead you to a small but unoccupied tent. There’s a whole bunch of pillows stacked about and an unconscious younger purpleblood who scarpers when Rohhze hisses at him, flaring her fins out in obvious threat.

“No sopor.” you note, not a complaint, just an observation.

“My mentor, our mentor I suppose, is big on us connecting to the fear our voodoos are supposed to inspire. Don’t dish it out if you can’t take it, that sort of thing.” Rohhze says with a shrug. She knows enough to know that’ll be no problem for you, sleeping in sopor with your quadrantmates is a relatively new thing for you and going without isn’t hard.

You drop down onto some of the cushions and stare up unseeingly at the fabric of the tent above you where the first hints of the incoming daylight are filtering through in the smallest pinpricks of light. You can’t help but reel back to what just happened, to being pulled from that pod. No, to making people pull you out. You controlled them, puppeted them and that includes Rohhze. She’s not mad but maybe you did that to her. Maybe you soothed her well earned anger down before it started.
If you learn how to control this are you going to have to leave her? To leave everyone? Cut ties with everyone you’ve hurt and move somewhere else on Alternia with people whose heads you’ve not fucked with? Your bloodpusher aches at the thought of doing that, you want to stay with all of them. You don’t want to lose your quadrants or your friends, especially those so close to you that they raised you. Dirkka and Roxxie were everything to you growing up, they were your connection to a world that wasn’t Cal’s control. Seeing their paleness for each other and later their flushed feelings for their separate matesprits were your models for trolls caring about each other. Seeing how good friends they all were was invaluable for you. When you first started becoming serious about your friendships with John, Rohhze and Jayded it was Dirkka and Roxxie that you went to for advice when it came to hurt feelings or any problems.

Did you do all of that because you’re incapable of understanding real emotions because you’re a monster? Or… or is it a sign that you really do love your friends and this is just unfortunate?

Rohhze seemingly senses your unhappiness because she sits down next to you.

“That really was something back there.” Rohhze says.

“Something awful.” you say with bitterness.

“You need to stop thinking about this as something terrible. We can’t help what’s given to us and, yes, you made me want to rescue you but… well, I’ve been in that pod before. I hated it. It was filled with nightmares and terrors, I didn’t want you in there anyway. I was hardly unwilling to rescue you, you made me reach out to you yes but I’m not upset. You’re a good person, I wouldn’t want someone terrible running around with your psionics of course-” she says but you cut over her.

“I am someone terrible.” you say instead.

“Dayvhe, you’re not.” she says.

You sink your claws into your jeans, needling at the fabric, it’s a habit that you picked up from Sollux you think.

“I know you can say that I didn’t know what I was doing so things aren’t my fault… and I want that to be true. But even if it’s not I don’t think I’m a good person. Voodoos or no voodoos.” you say.

“I hurt people, Rohhze, and I liked it. I wanted them to suffer. If I’d found Eridan before Feferi got him…” you shake your head. You don’t like thinking about what you would have done but he deserved to go through worse than what Sollux suffered and he suffered so much.

“That’s defending people you love, that’s vengeance. That’s normal troll behaviour, Dayvhe. No one expects you to be a saint. Hell, if I’d found Eridan I would have ripped strips from him for what he did to Sollux and I have plenty of people I’m closer to than him even though I do like him.” she assures you.

God, this conversation feels so familiar to the one you’ve had with Sollux on the same subject, you saying that you’re bad and him saying you’re not.

“When I was in that pod I saw myself. He- the other me that I saw, he asked me why I wanted to learn to control this thing. I gave all the answers I could think of, that I wanted to not manipulate people, all of that. And I don’t want to manipulate people, I don’t want to control people or think that people are only being nice to me because I’m irradiating their thinkspoons with pale thoughts. But he said that wasn’t it and he pinned down what I really want, I want things to go back to how they were.” you admit miserably.
Rohhze stares at you in confusion, seemingly waiting for you to continue as if that wasn’t your final point in that whole thing.

“Well, yes? Of course you want things to go back to normal.” she says slowly.

“That means things going back to how they were before! To- to people not knowing that I can do this. To Karkat not looking at me how he looked at me, to Sollux not knowing what I can do and- oh, God, if he’s resistant and can tell when I’m fucking with him then all that time lately when he’s been swearing he can feel someone in his head it was probably me!” you wail and throw yourself back into the pillows. Maybe you can smother yourself with one, that’d be good.

There’s a beleaguered sigh from Rohhze and she turns around and smacks you in the face with a pillow, a button on one of them clacking against your front teeth. Ow.

“Dayvhe, you are my best hate friend and I won’t deny that in the past I have had pale feelings for you too. But despite all of that you can sometimes be astoundingly dim and shockingly self involved. Everyone wishes for better times that were in the past when something terrible is happening in the present. Unless you would wipe all of our memories and take that knowledge from us all then you are not a bad person for desiring that past when things were better.” she says, her voice as sharp as her strife specibus.

You can’t even form the words for your hurried denial because of course you’d never do something as morally bankrupt as that to people you care about that much. The strangled noises of horror seem to do the the job because Rohhze powers on before you can manage a real reply from the snuggly stranglehold of softness that you’ve buried yourself in.

“I thought not. You seem determined to self flagellate yourself for something that it is highly likely you had no control over at all or if you had any then it was almost certainly subconscious, for which you cannot blame yourself. It’s pointless and you’re just wallowing in guilt instead of doing anything about it and grabbing hold of any evidence you can find to fit your predetermined conclusion that you’re terrible.” she accuses you.

“But,” you protest and wrap your arms around a cushion and tuck your face into it a little, “I’m here because I want to do something about it.”

“You’re hardly throwing yourself willingly into this training, I all but dragged you here and Jaspers basically did drag you around.” Rohhze counters.

She rolls over on her front so she’s looking down at you from her higher vantage point on the pillows, she reaches down and flicks the bridge of your shades.

“You’re a good troll, Dayvhe. But if you want to act like a good troll then accept that you need to do something you don’t want to do for the good of others. Accept your teaching, hold nothing back, protect the people you care about with what you learn.” she says.

“I wish I knew if I was making you do this for me.” you whisper as you look up at her pretty face, the way her violet earfins poke out from her hair making her so out of place here yet belonging all the same.

“That sounds like the kind of thing you could learn with proper application of training and practicing your abilities on people, doesn’t it?” she points out smarmily because despite everything else she’s still Rohhze.

“I don’t want to control anyone, though.” you say.
“Well, suck it up.” Rohhze snorts and rolls onto her back.

You guess that conversation is over then. You sink a little lower and cling to the cushion in your arms. You miss your massive recuperacoon, you miss drifting to sleep with Sollux’s narrow frame and Karkat’s compact one up against you as you slept. It’s too dark without the dimmed red and blue light that you can see even through Sollux’s closed eyes, even though it’s dullest when he’s catching those z’s and obviously muted significantly through his eyelids but in the true darkness of a sunproofed room you can always see the faint hint of light. You miss the way Karkat mumbles in his sleep and the way he’ll thrash around sometimes when he dreams, you’ve woken up before pasted to Sollux and the wall of the coon as Karkat and his flailing occupies the rest of the space until abruptly the dream passes and he falls still. Despite all that when you all wake up the next night he vehemently denies doing any such thing. You wonder if right now he’s dreaming so wildly in dim red and blue light.

You want to say that you’d do anything to be back there again, and you think you would. You suppose you’re about to see just what you’re prepared to do to get there.

You sleep, you wake, you eat. Even in a clown tent normality happens to some degree. You get up and Rohhze leads you off towards the big tent. Anxiety bubbles within you and you pull your palmhusk out, you don’t want to be distracted by anything when you’re-

Sollux has been messaging you. You freeze midstep and stare down at his honey text.

TA: ii know you're not online but ii've not heard anything from you or rohhze. ii2 everything okay?
TA: can you at lea2t 2hoot me a me22age or two ju2t 2o ii know everything ii2 okay? even ii if you're bu2y wiith 2uper 2ecret clown miind trainiing.
TA: ii gue22 whiining at your trolltag ii2n't going two get me far. we made a lot of progre22 ye2termiight at lea2t. ii don't think ii told you where the cave ii2, ii'll 2hoot you the location. but ii it had dii2ciiple'2 actual body iin ii2 one!

[twinArmageddons shared a saved location]

TA: we're going two fiind out lot2 from that place, ii'm 2ure. probably about your ance2tor. ii hope you're readiing the book on hiim. ju2t try not two jump two terriible conclu2iion2 ok, ii know what you're liike 2ometiime2.
TA: ii pitty you <>

You must have missed his message when you and Rohhze were eating breakfast, you guess clowns start their night at a more reasonable hour like you do. Maybe you can blame your clown heritage on your late rising for your whole life. Heritage? Honkitage?

He pops online again as you’re contemplating that honkitage is a fantastic word.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TA: hey ii hope your trainiing or whatever iit ii2 they have you doing ii2 going well there. can you plea2e ju2t troll me back?

You hesitate. You still don’t have the data to know if you can mess with his head over text and you refuse to subject him to that but he sounds desperate, did something happen? You should talk to him. No, you shouldn’t. You… oh...

TA: dv come on, plea2e talk two me. anythiing, 2eriou2ly.

You’re just about to type to him when a wave of malice rolls over you like thick oil. You start and
jerk your head up to see Jaspers looming in the tent doorway with Rohhze at his side. Her face suggests that you cut this shit out if you don’t want to get your ass bounced across the circus. Fuck, he’s supposed to be your teacher, you should show him respect if you expect him to teach you what he knows.

Damnit, sorry Sollux. It’s safer for him if you don’t answer right now, and he has Karkat. Karkat will make sure he’s ok, you trust him. It’ll be ok. You log off and hurriedly shut your palmhusk off as you run towards the tent. Jaspers hulks there and watches as you skid to a stop.

“Sorry about that.” you apologise, you catch a look at Rohhze and double down.

“Sir.” you add, uncertainly.

Jaspers rolls his large eyes and ambles into the tent with a lightness that someone of his size shouldn’t have. Rohhze doesn’t ask you what you were doing, probably she can guess but likely you’re meant to be quiet so in a rare moment of perception for you, you catch a clue and shut up. This tent is large and split up into a bunch of different functions, more permanently you can see rows and rows of seats at the front but a whole bunch of foldable ones are off to the side so either the congregation fluctuates a lot or they use it for other things.

Other things that it’s currently being used for is strifing practice. It looks like strifing practice at least, someone’s getting schooled at least but the laughing pointers others are giving them seem helpful you guess. Other trolls in groups are busting some sick dance moves and part of you itches to join them just to hold up the side for lowbloods, or you guess mutants in your case.

Your attention snaps to Jaspers as he bounds up to an improbably high stage and reaches down to grab something from inside a box. He beckons you over with a curl of one large razor claw tipped finger. Sicknasty ninja stunts have always been in your wheelhouse so you leap right up after him just the way he did without expending any effort at all.

“You’re going to be my student, you showed you have the voodoos. Whatever truth shines within that fragile little thoracic cage of yours is rare indeed and I’m going to show you how to make that yours.” Jaspers declares, unscrewing the lid of what you can see now is a jar and dipping several fingers in. His fingers come out as white as the paint on his face, on Rohhze’s, on everyone’s here. He holds his hand up before your face.

You notice the absence of sound. With your shades still on you glance sidelong. The dancing has stopped, the strifing has stopped and every eye is on you. You, the outsider with rust on his chest and clearly this place sees more rust on its floor than it ever does like this.

You take your shades off and put them aside, hanging them just above the fake rust sign on your chest. You’re not a fan of this. Jaspers gives you the fucking creeps and it’s pretty clear most people in this room would rather end you than associate with you and even if you could convince them not to treat you like that it doesn’t change that they’d be assholes to lowbloods.

This isn’t something you want to do, but you want what’s on the other side of this. You want control, restraint, you want your life back and the people in it. If this is a shit bridge you have to cross then so be it, if one must walk a thousand miles in floppy clown shoes to find the way back home then let the honking begin, you guess!

“Let’s get our teach on then, sir. Just pop my damn nugbone open and pour that wisdom in or however this works.” you say, holding your arms open invitingly.

Your mentor’s smile stretches wide and sharp and his large hand comes down over your face,
smearing white all over your face. You keep your eyes shut so he doesn’t blind you as he rubs over your finer features and then up into your hairline. When he pulls back you feel… greasy.

“You’re a blank slate until I’m done with you, no design you hear?” he says, turning your head to the side with a claw under your chin. You can see the faces of the crowd watching you, most like Rohhze have designs in their face paint but you can see a few blank white faces here and there and you realise that you must look like them. You’re an initiate, a trainee, a clown-let.

You look back up at Jaspers and nod and he stands up properly and bellows your name to the crowd and you’re nearly deafened by their screaming reply, differences or not their leader has accepted you as one of them. Jaspers leads you out and instructs Rohhze to leave your side, instead she is replaced by a young kid with an all white face and this time you’re taken into a different but smaller tent.

No sooner are you inside than your mentor jumps up into the ceiling of the tent to where a great hammock is hanging down. He bounds with the heavy grace of the giant purrbeast that he clearly wishes he was.

“First lesson,” he says as he rolls onto his back with a yawn, “you two can take as long as you like with this. Dayvhe, this is Deimos.”

Now that you’re looking at this kid he’s smaller than you even thought he was, a lot of his height was hair. Hair that looks like he’s never seen a hairbrush either. He’s got that scabbed up unkempt wide eyed twitchiness to him that you used to have until you really started interacting with other trolls. Alright, until Dirkka came along. He looks fucking feral just like you were. If the kid has a lusus then it’s a shitty one.

“How old are you?” you ask skeptically.

“Four and a half.” he answers you.

“F-” wait, maybe don’t swear around the kid who’s basically a wiggler, “heck.” yes, much better.

“So what’s the lesson then?” you call up to Jaspers.

He rolls over in his hammock and looks down at you both with a smile.

“You gotta learn the truth of your gifts, you’ve got them because you’re stronger and better than everyone else. You have a will and you bend people with it, as you should.” Jaspers instructs you both.

Deimos nods in understanding but you’re not taking that.

“I’m not better than anyone without chucklevoodooos, I’m not stronger either it’s just different. My moirail’s got hella psionics but he’s not better than people for it.” you insist.

Jaspers props his head up on his palm and smiles down at you.

“Gold or rust? They burn strongest usually.” Jaspers asks and you’re aware that you’re treading into dangerous waters.

“Gold, he’s really good.” you say uneasily.

“Then isn’t he more powerful than some lowblood without his abilities, isn’t he stronger?” Jaspers challenges you.
“That’s- ok, fine but he wouldn’t say that he’s better than people because of it.” you say.

That’s kind of a lie actually, Sollux does tend to swing between feeling like he’s the worst thing to happen to trollkind and feeling like he’s god’s gift to the world. You’ve seen less of the second kind but you do know that for all the trouble it gives him Sollux is pretty secure in how bitchin’ his powers are so you can’t really claim that Sollux wouldn’t say that he’s better than someone for his psionics. In fact you can perfectly picture Sollux straight faced declaring that very thing so that he can steal the last piece of sushi from Karkat. You can say that he doesn’t believe it, he doesn’t think he’s better than Terezi because he’s got psionics and she hasn’t.

“Is it better to be strong or not to be strong?” Jaspers asks.

“Strong!” Deimos declares enthusiastically.

“It’s more complicated than-” you try but Jaspers sighs and waves a hand.

“The four sweep old gets it.” he says, seemingly bored.

“Strong is better.” Deimos tells you like it’s a secret.

You want to argue more but it’s hard. If you were stronger you might have asked why things worked out so well for you, you might have learnt to consciously control what you can do and none of this would have happened. If your will was sturdier you wouldn’t have needed Rohhze to kick you up the ass to make you give this your all. You wouldn’t be fucking HESITATING AGAIN.

Fine, you have voodoos of some kind. That’s a strength, it’s a strength others don’t have and it does usually make shit easier for you. It’s probably better to have a strength than not, not that this is any kind of judgement on your worth to other people you’re going to be firm on THAT part at least. Then it’s not too hard to think that you using these voodoos is, in a way, forcing your will onto someone else.

“Okay, fine. I accept your point, what now?” you ask.

“You both have trouble choosing to use your strengths, you have no control. Here.” he says and drops down two balls. They’re soft and squishy foam about the size of your fist. You swear if these are clown noses you’re going to shove it down your throat and choke to death and- oh they’re not noses. That’s good. Now you just have nondescript foam balls for some reason.

“Try to exert your will on each other to make the other one give you their ball. If you lose your ball, you spend the rest of the night in the pod.” Jaspers says.

Oh fuck no you do not want to go back in there! Deimos looks equally horrified at the prospect which means this poor kid has been in there already. He clutches tight to his foam ball and shoots you a look of utter dread.

“Hey, wait, we don’t need to start right away. It’s ok.” you try to assure the kid.

Deimos throws up a hand and his face becomes a pinch of concentration. Within your head you feel a prickle of unease but you’re not even sure if it’s him doing that or if it’s you worrying about what’s about to happen. He seems to realise that it’s not working and cringes back from you wide eyed and worried. You chance a look up at Jaspers who is watching through the net of his hammock with sleepy half interest.

You crouch down to Deimos’ height with your spongy ball held close to your chest.
"You can't do it on command yet either?" you ask him gently.

Deimos worries at his bottom lip with chipped teeth, smearing the white greasepaint off a little. He shakes his head gently.

"It's ok, me neither. I've only done it by accident before, I didn't even know I was doing it." you confide in him.

"You're rust though, why would you?" he says as he points out your sign.

"Yeah, right. My friend is violet and she's got voodoos too, she's a fishtroll so she was pretty damn surprised too but she learnt ages ago I think. She brought me here, how about you?" you ask.

"Mmm, my lusus died ages ago. He probably said something but I was bad at listening so I just stole stuff and hid a lot. I thought people thought I was scary and ran away 'cause of that then some of them brought me here." Deimos explains.

"But you've probably been doing it without knowing, like I have." you say more to yourself than to him.

He nods and you both stay where you are. This really isn't how you thought your training was going to go. It's funny though, you're every bit as lost as this kid.

"How does it work? You said it was about enforcing your will but I don't know what that means. I know I've done it sometimes but is it just like... I have to want my thing more than they want to not do that?" you ask as you look up at the hulking mass in the hammock.

"It's more. You have to find truth within them. Chucklevoodoos latch onto fear, they don't make it, they find it deep in the shining core of people." Jaspers purrs.

He shifts and an arm dangles down lazily and he pins you in place with a look. His eyes shine in the darkness of the high top of the tent. You can almost feel the moment your adrenaline spikes, all the hair on your head feels like it stands on end and your posture pole freezes up. You can feel the way your breath catches, but it's not indistinct fear at all, it has form. The walls of the tent around you seem to warp and in the dark edges you jump at the sight of Cal's form skittering by, his lure just catching the light. He's dead, he's dead it's not real. He's dead, it's not real, it's not! Sollux killed him! It's not that you stop seeing what's in front of you, you can see the tent but you can see your own memories so clearly too. Your fist, Sollux's face. He killed your lusus, he lied to you and you made him pay. Yellow blood oozes between your fingers and his head snaps to the side at the force of your punch. He drops to the floor and stays there. He doesn't sit up like you know he did, he doesn't look at you with the pain in his eyes that he had. No, he stays on the ground and your pusher races and races. You see yourself rolling him over and you watch open mouthed as the light pulls back from his eyes, fading until you're left with unfocused grey on yellow. His neck is at a bad angle, you- you did this. You hit him so hard you killed him.

No! No, you didn't! You never would! You pity Sollux, you'd never, you'd never!

But you did, didn't you? You're capable of that. You're capable of so much. Cold hued blood flows over your hands, drenching your clothes and you're back in the mountain again. Sollux is on the table now, half helmed and dead eyed. There's a man, you killed him and his dying spasms did something- killed Sollux. Everyone in the room is dead but you, you lost it, killed everyone. YOU DID THIS.

Everything stops and you're curled up on the floor of the tent sobbing and gasping for air.
"Your fear, it's real and true in you. What truth you grab in people I don't know, I don't know how it's done from the inside with that kind." a voice from above you says but it's hard to focus when you're choking on snot and tears.

You didn't do anything. Sollux is alive, he trolled you right when you woke up. You didn't kill him, you got him out of the mountain. You didn't lose control that much. But... Jaspers is right, he didn't give you fear. He woke up the fear within you, amped it up so it could kick the shit out of you. You fear hurting the people you care about, you fear losing control, you fear that you're a monster. That's the truth inside you, isn't it?

Pushing yourself up on shaking limbs you haul yourself to your feet and rub the tears off of your face even though your face gets smudged with greasepaint as you do it. Deimos is watching you carefully and he holds his hand out.

"Give it to me." he tells you, shooting for intimidating but that's hard in a four and a half sweep old's high pitched voice.

The inside of your being, already weakened from Jasper's fuckery twitches spasmodically as a spark of dread sinks tiny claws in. If you don't hand your ball over this kid's gonna end up in that pod and you know what that's like. That sucks. You clench your hand around the ball and keep it held tight against your side. This is really your choice then, try your shit on him and get him tortured in that pod for hours until they let him out to sleep or else you give yours to him and you end up in there all over again. That's hoofbeastshit!

You know what? You're not Sollux, you don't live and die by duality, there's a third option. You don't have to condemn this kid to that fate when there's someone else who could use a spell in there for a little empathy. You look up at Jaspers and grit your teeth, no way you're going from a standing start to controlling that guy, no you need a warm up so you know what the fuck you're doing.

Sorry, kid.

Jaspers didn’t have to talk to you to fuck with your head, but this kid had to in order to try. When you got caught using your voodoos it was when you spoke so for now you’re going to have to say something. You know you don’t work on fear, you’re fear turned inside out but you get why you’re being taught with fear. How else can you offer someone an alternative if you don’t know what they’re afraid of?

You did it to your friends because them telling you what you’d been doing hurt you and you didn’t like that and you know they like you too much to want to hurt you so you must have grabbed that. Don’t hurt me, stop talking about this. If you ever did it just to Sollux… well, he’s your moirail. He has the same fear that you have, that you won’t be good enough for the other, that you’re not helping, that you’re making things worse. Sollux helps you without you doing anything to make him just like you do for him. You’d never do it on purpose but-

Yeah.

What about Eridan, that’s another one people mentioned. He was trying to shoot Sollux, you made him stop and back the fuck off. That’s real control, that’s what you need. If you can’t do something hard like that what chance do you stand with someone competent like your mentor up there? What did you do to Eridan to make him stop?

Did part of him not want to hurt Sollux either? Maybe he wasn’t as into violence as he made out or he didn’t want to see himself as someone who’d need to have to shoot a rival. What fear did putting that gun down soothe? Fuck, you wish you knew.
You focus on Deimos. He’s a little kid, feral and alone like you once were and like you could still have been if not for you finding people. He was brought here, he didn’t choose to come and everything here probably freaks him out. He’s small and weak compared to almost everyone around him. His shit will get way worse if he hands that ball over to you though. What would make him choose to do something so obviously against his interests?

It hits you, square in the chest with an ache that comes from your core. You remember having met Dirkka and he knew what you were going through, you were alone and then you had him. You trusted him and Cal hated him being around, he wanted him dead and that would have been easier. It would have been tolerable if he died and you went back to how things were before, but you didn’t want to be alone, you wanted to trust him and you wanted to stay with him. Things could be different and taking that risk hurt you badly, even now your head is still unbalanced from your missing half horn, but it was the promise of change that made it worth it. It was worth it!

You took a leap of faith, knowing you could fall and believing you wouldn’t.

This kid has already been in that pod once if he knows to fear it, but he’s still here. This place is shit-awful but it’s not where he was. Fear, turned inside out. You dig tight onto that thought and hold out your hand.

“It’s gonna be ok, give me the ball, yeah?” you say to him, willing for him to believe you for it to be real for him.

Deimos’ expression goes a little glassy for a moment and then he smiles slightly, small and cautious as he reaches out and drops his ball into your hand.

You feel the rush of air as Jaspers lands behind you.

“Well that was some progress, Deimos you need to study up on your fear better.” Jaspers says.

You whirl around in place, dropping the two sponge balls and put yourself between the kid and your mentor.

“Come on, man, he’s practically a wiggler. He’ll get it.” you plead.

“I did say about questioning me.” Jaspers points out, slinking closer.

Fuck. Fuuuuuck. Ok, new plan. Why’s a big fuckin’ dude like this running a self-help camp for kid clowns? Why’d he take you in, why Rohhze? He’s got to want to help, right? That means he cares, somewhere in there, doesn’t it? Why else would he do this? Try that, hold the idea tight and hope it’s true in him.

“You don’t want to do this!” you insist, backing up.

The adult freezes, his eyes wide and locked right on you.

“Did you just try to control me? On PURPOSE?” he hisses.

Well, fuck, you failed.

“Run.” you hiss to the kid and shove him backwards behind you. You back up, your hands held up innocently.

“Listen, I was just hoping I could. Trying to learn and that and, uh, was that ‘on purpose’ thing a pun because, you know, purr?” you squeak as you try to retreat.
Jaspers eyes flash red and in his hands appears a giant ball of wool. This is going to be a real fucking stupid way to get your ass kicked, isn’t it? The thing smacks into you like a wrecking ball, flinging you outside the tent so you land and skid in the mud outside. You know better than to stay prone when you’re being attacked, so with a heave of effort you pull yourself back onto your feet.

“You don’t question me, boy.” Jaspers hisses, coming out into the moonlight. Around you juggalos are watching attentively in the wide circle of people who want to see this fight go down but absolutely don’t want to be caught up in it.

“I mean, I did. I think you mean to say that I shouldn’t question you, which you’re probably right on. Ow. But I do a lot of shit I shouldn’t.” you say with a weak laugh.

The adult snarls and flings his definitely not entirely wool ball at you again, holding onto it with a loose thread. Outside and unconfined by the tent you’re free to jump right over it and you even manage to bend all the way back to avoid the sudden whip back that it does that’d catch most people. No way man, gotta get up earlier in the night to get the drop on you of all people.

“Look, I’m sorry for questioning your fucking methods but if you wanted to get the kid familiar with fear I’m pretty sure he’s already afraid enough of that thing. He was afraid when he lost, he’s probably afraid now. You don’t need to go all the way, lesson learned.” you reason.

“You’re too soft for someone who isn’t strong enough yet, you can be far better and you need to submit to my teaching to get there. If this is how you have to learn then so be it.” he hisses and throws his ball of wool and probably goddamn metal at you again. This time you dodge the ball itself but the string catches you and he jerks it to the side, wrenching you to the floor with a hacking cough.

“Dayvhe!” Rohhze shouts and you catch her running towards you, weapons drawn. You hold your hand out to stop her, the last thing you need is her burning her connections to something that’s obviously important to her. She does stop but clearly she’s uncertain about it.

“I get that you want to make me into the strongest version of me or whatever, but I still wanna be me when I get there.” you insist.

That prickle wave of fear rushes over you again.

“That’s not who you are and that’s not the person they care about. They don’t want just anyone back they want you back, you’ve got to make sure that’s what they get.

You know your own fears, better than Jasper it seems. Just like you tried to grab onto the wrong thread of anti-fear… of hope maybe, within him he just tried to snag the wrong fear.

“You don’t know who I am and you don’t know what I can be.” you snarl back at him.
You feel really accomplished about that excellent comeback until you see a second ball coming right for you at mach fuck-you-up. It hits you square in the chest and sends you skidding back through the mud. You wheeze as you try to breathe again and Jaspers looms over you.

“Rohhze, take him back to your tent. We’re done for tonight.” Jaspers growls and stalks off.

“Yes sir.” Rohhze says quickly and rushes to your side to help to pull you up.

The purplebloods around you are staring but it’s not hostile like you would have expected. They seem surprised, of course, but a little impressed. That’s something you’d not expected.

“Come on, let’s go.” Rohhze whispers, ducking under your arm and supporting most of your weight.

You cough and start to walk with her, yeah that’s it. Walk it off, champ. It’s the kind of think Jayekh used to say to you when you were little and Dirkka had left him supervising you for a few hours only for you to get hurt. Jayekh was always so worried about returning you to Dirkka damaged at all.

Your whole body is drenched in mud but you’re pleased to see that Rohhze pulls a steel tub out from some stacks of things in a disused section of the tent, it’s sort of on the other side from where the loadgaper is sectioned off and boy were you pleased to find that yesterday. This isn’t that temporary a settlement and it seems that even if the clowns aren’t keen on walls that aren’t fabric it also seems that they’re not keen on getting, like, cholera or whatever. Needless to say an actual soak would do you the world of good.

Rohhze drags a hose over and flicks it over the edge of the metal tub and goes to turn it on. You have a horrible feeling that you know the answer but you’re still disappointed when you reach under the spray and find it icy cold.

“Sorry, Dayvhe. Most highbloods aren’t as keen on hot water as you rusties are. I mean I like it but I’m a seadweller and coping with varying water temperatures is kind of our thing. You’re just going to have to deal with it. I think you should try to wash most of the mud off before you get in, though.” she adds, handing you a large bowl and a washcloth as well.

“Oh good, great, I get to have an icy spongebath before by icy bath-bath.” you grumble and Rohhze smirks. She leaves you to it with a wave.

Reluctantly you throw the bowl into the tub under the hose spray and find that Rohhze has thrown some fancy coloured fizzing thing in the water too that seems to be bubbling up a storm. You take your shades off, the arm is slightly bent but you can fix that. You pull your palmhusk out and check that it’s still working and also didn’t fly out of your sylladex midfight from you yelling something. Not… that that’s ever happened to you before. Ever.

Thankfully it is still working and present and… Sollux is trolling you. You set your palmhusk down on the side and read as you pull your shirt off.

TA: dayvhe when you get thiit troll me back, we ju2t watched a viideo of your ance2tor. he look2 ju2t liike you.

Great, just the guy you don’t want to hear about. Before you can read further your shirt catches on something painful in your back and you curse loudly. Pulling the rest of your shirt off you reach around to find that being thrown on the floor and skidding about in the mud has lodged something almost completely under your skin. You gasp in pain as you pull it loose.

“Dayvhe? Are you- oh.” Rohhze says and you spin around to face her, knocking your palmhusk to the floor with a clatter.
"You're a mutant." Rohhze says softly as she comes closer.

"I can explain." you say quickly.

"Can you?" Rohhze asks.

"Uh. I'm a mutant? Yeah, I guess you had it in one there." you babble nervously as Rohhze comes to a stop by you.

"You never said, come on, let me see. That looked painful." Rohhze says gently and puts her hand on your shoulder to turn you around. You go with it, half just from her strength and half because you've known her so long that you trust her instinctively. It’s only when she’s looking at the mutant blood oozing through the mud on your back that you realise how stupid you’re being.

"Oh, ouch. Does Karkat- hm, well I suppose he would know about this. Sollux too I guess. Damnit, that explains why he was so weird when he was explaining about your ancestor’s mutation, he was trying not to give you away." Rohhze curses. She hooks her claws around the thing in your back and pulls it free, tossing it away carelessly. She reaches into the tub and grabs the washcloth and starts wiping your back clean.

"You never said anything." she says after a moment.

"It’s a pretty big secret. Safer not to tell anyone unless I gotta. Are you… cool with this?" you ask hesitantly.

"I’m a seadweller with chucklevoodoos. My blood may not be mutated but I’m certainly a mutant to some degree. I’m friends with your moirail who has all those bifurcation mutations, though just how far that goes I don’t know but from the obscene jokes I’ve heard him make with Karkat I have a theory. Plus, Jayded is lime and that’s illegal. You surely didn’t think I’d have a problem with this, did you?" Rohhze asks.

You look down at your palmhusk on the floor. Damnit, you dropped it and the battery has popped out. You’re not even sure you know what you should say to him, it’s almost better to say nothing still. God, and Dirkka was always so firm about you never ever telling anyone about your mutation. The meowbeast’s out of the sack now though isn’t it?

"I hoped you wouldn’t if you ever found out." you say.

You turn back around to Rohhze, she’s stopped washing your wound clean and instead now she’s looking at a bead of your bright mutant red blood on her thumb. Just seeing it makes anxiety ball up in your chest.

"Get in the tub, Dayvhe. If you need help putting a bandage on that after let me know. I’m always here for you, ok?" Rohhze says with a nod and walks off.

You stand there alone but only in the literal sense. People still care about you, they have your back even with how fucked up you are. You think you owe it to them all to be decent. You’re going to do your best to get this under control so you can be deserving of that loyalty from the people you care about and you’re going to make sure you get there on a path that means you’re still worthy of it at the end.

Now you just have to get clean in the world’s coldest bath and think about what you’re going to say to Sollux next time he trolls you, you should say something. But what can you say?
Toxic - Britney Spears

“To high, can't come down
It's in the air and it's all around
Can you feel me now?”

Toxic - Britney Spears
Produced by Entertainer Records

==> Author: Run path C1

Despite the accusations of certain fishtrolls and, let’s be real other land dwellers too, you’re not actually an idiot. You want to try to message your quadrantmates but you’re also too afraid to fuck it up so you’re going to try a compromise.

You will PRACTICE.

Not out loud of course, not where Rohhze can hear, again you’re not that demented. No, you’re going to write out your practice messages.

hey sol im sorry for not trolling you sooner things have been crazy here

Oh, good job. Make it all about you. You backspace a little and try again.

hey sol im sorry for not trolling you sooner i hope youre doing ok and youre eating and sleeping properly but karkats probably on your ass about that huh

You squint at that. Is it too presumptuous to act like you’re still his moirail? He hasn’t broken up with you so maybe you should just go on as if you’re still together. But, damnit this isn’t apologising for what you did. Where do you even begin with that though? Unwittingly or not you mind controlled him at least once in the time you were together if not more. After his history with Vriska, with being tortured, with Aradia, there’s no end to how much you need to apologise to him.

Maybe Sollux was the wrong person to start with. You slide a little lower on your cushioned slope and try a new tactic.

so karkat im guessing that youre impressively angry at me from everything im gathering from everyone else and how youre not trolling me
not that i blame you id be real fuckin pissed at me too but maybe we could talk
i can grovel you can threaten me creatively its a date

Wait, fuck, no backspace that. No blackflirting mid apology. This shit is why you’re not trolling him live.

The flap of the tent pulls back and a small troll sticks half his body through the gap, looking around cautiously.

“Deimos!” you say in surprise, lowering your palmhusk to look at him.

“Hey. Uh, Jasper says he wants us out there. Training.” Deimos says, bobbing his head as he talks a little which makes his tangled hair bounce around.

“Right.” you nod and shelve your messaging plans for now. You look around for Rohhze, she went to have a soak in the ice cold tub a while back and you’ve not heard from her since.
“Just let me find my friend and tell her.” you say to him and walk across the tent.

Rohhze’s clothes are stripped off on the floor and the water in the metal tub is right up to the rim but there’s no Rohhze. You start to panic, you weren’t paying attention or listening for her, what if she’s-

Wait. She’s a fishtroll she can’t drown, dumbass. Cautiously you step closer and look down through the water and see Rohhze slumped lazily on the bottom of the tub, her hair floating in an inky halo around her head. Violet gills flare and flatten as she breathes. At the very least she’s mostly clothed, bra and underwear thank goodness. Seemingly sensing the weight of your gaze Rohhze opens her eyes and stares up at you through the water. Slowly she surfaces, her hair slicking to her head as she breaches the surface. Her skin on her face is free from paint for the first time in a while and her earfins flick sharply to dislodge stray droplets of water.

“Yes?” she says flatly.

You’re about to answer when a tangled little snarl of anxiety and almost disgust flares behind you. It’s subtle, like someone striking a match but now that you’ve started to pay attention to this stuff it’s hard not to notice it.

“You’re leaking.” Rohhze says coldly, leaning over the side of the tub to look at Deimos behind you at the tent door. He squeaks in alarm and ducks out of the tent.

“Be nice. We’ve gotta go see wise old soldier purrbeast himself for training, thought I’d let you know.” you tell her.

“What did I tell you about being respectful, Dayvhe?” Rohhze sighs deeply.

“I can’t just not be inappropriate and stupid, but I can just be inappropriate and stupid around you. It’s my best offer.” you tell her, backing away with a grin. Also with fingerguns that you entirely didn’t mean to do and you wholly blame Jayekh’s influence for.

“Ah, yes, those subtle clauses in this disease known as friendship.” Rohhze snorts and then slips back under the water.

You slip outside the tent, mildly concerned that just anyone could slip in on Rohhze when she’s bathing. Then again, you linger just outside your tent for a moment and consider that creeping on or threatening a seadweller in water is basically suicide. Like, fuck man, Jaspers is strong and all but that motherfucker can’t breathe underwater and Rohhze can. Rohhze ain’t above drowning someone in a tub.

Deimos is loitering just out of the way and he perks up when he sees you.

“Hey, we’re good.” you tell him, as you walk over.

“Right. Uh.” Deimos glances around a little before deciding that he’s safe to focus on you again.

“Thanks, for before. Trying to keep me out of the pod.” he says quietly.

“I did, didn’t I? He didn’t catch you after and throw you in anyway did he?” you ask in concern.

“Nah. But that was cool of you, you didn’t have to. It’s not like I’m not used to dealing with- with everything on my own, you know?” Deimos says and puffs up a little as he talks. He’s a bright little firebrand of a kid, isn’t he?

“Yeah, you said but you shouldn’t have to. Being on your own sucks.” you say.
The two of you are walking vaguely in the direction of the larger tents but neither of you seem to be in any real hurry.

“I’ve never had anyone, I don’t need anyone.” Deimos insists.

For a kid who insists that he doesn’t need anyone around he sure is sticking close to you after thanking you for saving his ass and he’s here learning how to not scare people off. That doesn’t sound like a kid who doesn’t want or need people to you. You side eye this small clown child and wonder if Dirkka felt something like this for your dysfunctional ass when he found you.

Remembering the first time you met Dirkka is a little strange. It’s a memory you’ve gone over so much that it’s almost hazy, probably warped by sweeps of remembering it and changing it a little with each memory as speculation blurs into recollection.

You remember horror and guilt on his face, now that you’re older and you know him better you’re sure that Dirkka blamed himself for your situation then even though it was all on Cal. You didn’t mesh up right at the start either. He’d spent so much time since leaving Cal with Roxxie, Jayyne and Jayekh who are all physically affectionate to the point of parody almost. Dirkka isn’t as touchy as they are but you were so used to Cal that you fled from touch. Being able to run and feeling someone brushing against you made you sprint away, Cal liked that sometimes, liked to chase you places. It’s how you learnt to flashstep and exploit your other psionics so there’s that. Even the strangers who you guess you’d charmed into helping you got ditched the second they got too close to you physically.

Dirkka was the first person to get close to you but not get grabby, he sat close to you and asked questions and told you about his time with Cal. You saw him several times before the incident with Cal and Dirkka happened, the one that lost you half a horn. Several visits, talking, and finally you leaning up against his side and sniffing into his shirtsleeve.

You can recall it, being smaller than Deimos and curled against Dirkka’s chest as his arms wrapped around you. You were terrified but desperate for it.

So you look at this kid, who’s fronting that he doesn’t need anyone but still sticking to you like glue and feel a weird ripple of familiarity.

“Well, who knows what our teacher’s got planned. But I’ll try and have your back, yeah?” you offer.

“I’ll have yours too. We’re both initiates so we gotta.” Deimos agrees with a nod.

“Glad I can count on you.” you say and he almost bounces with pride.

It’s hard to stay optimistic, even with the added powers of the warm fuzzies threatening to overtake you. Something about a giant adult meowbeast clown hulking up ahead like a pissed off mountain dampens your mood for some reason. He narrows his eyes at you as you approach.

“Since you got schooled did you learn anything?” Jaspers rumbles.

“Oh, for sure.” you agree. You learnt that Rohhze is cool with your mutation, you learnt that you’re totally adopting this tiny clown, plenty of things. Nothing that your mentor wanted to teach you no doubt but that wasn’t what he asked, was it?

He jerks his head and walks towards the tent you found him in at your first night here, only he doesn’t go inside, he stops at the pillars nearby. These had initiates like you standing on them trying to keep their focus as others tried to spook them off.
“Focus is vital, if anyone can throw you off you’re useless.” your mentor states.

You look up at the platform of the pillar, it’s a log basically jammed upright into the ground with just enough room for your feet and at a height that’s awkward to climb up to. Around you people are milling past and several are stopping to watch what’s happening.

It’ll take focus to stand that still for any length of time anyway, doing it while holding your composure is going to be hard. Sollux said he was immune to you, or something like it. You don’t want to think about that but the point is that you know you’re not immune at all. Your mentor has already had you in a sobbing ball on the ground with his powers.

You’re going to need this kind of focus, you need to leash what you can do so tightly that it won’t flare up when you’re upset, hurt or scared. You cannot get into an argument with Karkat and accidentally lash out and force him to forgive you or pity you. You can’t be upset that Sollux is having an episode and being difficult to help and end up trying to put him down into some calmed state because it’s better for you that way.

You have severe misgivings about the usual teaching methods here but this you are all down for. With a psionically boosted bound you leap up and land on the end of the post and turn around to face the crowd. Deimos jumps and scrabbles up to his place on his pole, he’s a nimble kid but you guess he’d have to be.

Perched on top of the wooden pole you look down and out across those gathered around you. Several of the clowns whose faces are patterned, showing them to be more advanced than you, look questioningly at your leader. The adult smiles and nods.

You need to learn to keep your cool, you hold tight onto that conviction even as the wave of prickling fear runs over you.

You start to sweat, cold and clammy. It’s a fight to control your breathing and you have to fist your hands tight to stop them from shaking. All of the physical tells of fear, but you’ve got this. You’ve been afraid before, you’ve faced down Cal countless times, you can tough this out. Deimos makes a choked little noise but you don’t hear him lose his balance and fall.

To your horror you watch as the skin starts to melt off of the faces of the people watching you. You squeeze your eyes shut, it’s not real. Think of it like a video game or a movie. You open your eyes again, it’s still happening, colours around you are warping too and the edges of your vision is going skittery.

Inside your pan you’re getting the… whatever the mental equivalent of taste is. You can discern that a good number of people are trying to screw with you. It’s working, of course, you’re not immune but you’re still up here. You curl your toes inside your shoes and press down on the edges of the pole, you’re still here. If you can hack this then you’ll be strong enough to better protect the people you care about.

There’s a frightened yell to your side and still hopped up on nervous energy you’re whipping around to look out of sheer reflex. It’s you, you as a little kid falling with terror and pain on his face. You stumble and the ground rushes up to meet you. You land hard in the dirt and immediately you catch that it wasn’t you at all, it was Deimos who fell.

“F-” You start to swear in frustration but you remember that you’re not doing that around a kid this young, you have to be at least some kind of good role model, right?

“Frick.” you adjust last minute and haul yourself up to your feet.
Deimos groans and stumbles upright, clinging to the pole. You don’t need Jaspers to tell you to get back up there, you jump up all by yourself and Deimos hops right up next to you the moment after. An older girl in the crowd looks pleased with herself and you guess she was the one responsible for knocking you off.

New tactic: think of why you’re doing this, ignore what they’re trying to put you through and focus on your motivation for going through this. You know that you’re never going to lose hold of the love you have for your friends and quadrants, you can always pull on that so that’s what you should train yourself with.

Mentally hunkering down you try to pull a point of focus as you stare out at the painted faces of the kids around you. Rohhze stuck her neck out bringing you here, she’s a good friend, one who knows about your mutation and came through for you by being so cool. You don’t want to let her down, she deserves better than that. Jasper smiles and tilts his head at you and everything gets way worse right away.

It’s not visual like his voodoo’s have been before, it’s like everything inside your head warps. It’s like facing yourself in that pod all over again.

Rohhze brought you here because you ruined her mind and you’re training yourself to be stronger so you can obliterate her ability to think completely. You don’t want friends, do you? You want slaves who adore and worship you.

No, no you don’t! That’s not what you want!

But… but you are training, aren’t you?

You mentally flit to Dirkka, you’re trying to live up to what he did for you, he looked after you and you need to be worthy of that. You need to be good to him because he’s good to you and you care about him.

But you’re nothing but a drain on him and your screwing with his head distracts him from his real goal, one dedicated to helping the girl he has a real emotional connection to. Not like the one has has with you, the leech that you are.

Every person you try to focus on gets you smacked back into greater panic and self-hatred. You deserve this. You believe that and because of that you find it impossible to break free. You get a second of comfort and then it’s dragged away and warped into its antithesis and-

Karkat stops you.

Not actually Karkat of course, he’s not here, but something he said once. A conversation you’d had over Sollux’s passed out, tear stained, post-manic crashed body. How Sollux’s problem was that his thinkspoon was terrible at balance. His feelings and emotional states got dragged into extremes. He’d get depressed, and you’ve seen him so terribly depressed, and all you’d wish for is for him to have all of the happiness in the world instead. Then, as if his thinkspoon could hear you, it’d be like ‘sure’ and then slam every happiness associated hormone into his pan until he was happy, bright, energetic, smart, driven and ELATED TO DEATH.

You trying to counter fear with hope or happiness is just as useless as looking at Sollux’s moods and trying to claim that this is a good system that works for him. Bouncing from one extreme to the other is doing nothing for you just like it does nothing good for him. You need balance, stability, calm.

You were thinking about Sollux so the fear in your pan snarls around him and throws the idea at you
that everything you have with him is over. Your mind helpfully supplies all of the reasons for this being completely plausible, you deserve that to be true, look at what you did to him, look at his history.

The idea of losing him is terrifying, Jasper must know that. Or at least he knows enough to prod at the loss of a loved one in your head so that your own thinksponge fills in the details of the prompt. You’re not going to give into that fear and you won’t cling desperately to every scrap of hope you have that it won’t be true like a drowning man.

You do something else, you picture it.

Imagine him. You’re outside, near Roxxie’s hive, he’s so pretty in the almost set moonlight. Still too brittle-bright for his own good. He’s avoiding looking at you. He’d say something like…

“You controlled my mind.” Simple and to the point. You’d apologise, of course you would, he deserves that. But you’re afraid it won’t be enough and you don’t blame him if it’s not, you get that. You’re afraid and you can feel Jasper’s pressure on that fear like claws denting skin.

“I can’t be your moirail anymore, not after that. I can’t trust you, I can’t forgive you.” he’d say.

It hurts like a kick in the teeth, no, worse than that. You’ve lost him, this is what you’re terrified of. You want to say it won’t happen or that maybe he’ll change his mind when you can tell him that you’ve learnt to control yourself. The thought crosses your mind and the situation gets worse, Sollux becomes angry.

“You think that makes it better?! You’re the worst thing that ever happened to me, I’d rather be back in that tank than with you, at least they didn’t pretend to care about me!” Sollux snarls, but it’s not him. It’s your fear talking. It’d rip you open if he said this. Hope and bargaining isn’t the way out of fear, it’s the opposite swing of that scale. Giving people what they want and making them feel good is your deal, it’s voodoos backwards but that’s just as unstable. You want stable.

“I’m sorry. If you don’t want to be with me, I understand.” you tell Sollux in your imagination. The rage boils away from him and he looks surprised.

This is your fear, look it straight on. You’re afraid he’s going to leave you and that you deserve it, that you’ll lose the only person you’ve ever felt pale for.

So what? You’ll be devastated, yes. You’ll probably never get over it, you could die and his name would probably be carved into your bones for how deep your pity is for him. But you’d never willingly do something he didn’t want, nothing serious anyway. Making him take a damn shower or eating something isn’t the same. You would never bully him into being with you, never control him into it. If he decided that because of what you did he can’t trust you, which is reasonable given his past, then you’d have to accept it. Broken diamond or not.

You’re afraid of this. It scares you because you pity him so much and losing him would be so bad, but it’s his call. You can try to be better but you won’t change his mind for him, it’s out of your hands. Besides, he has Karkat, he has friends, he would survive your breakup. You would survive. It’d be shitty and you’d hate yourself but that’s all that would happen. It scares you because you care and you’re okay with that. You’re not happy, not hopeful, not even fine.

You’re ok.

You draw in a shaking breath and open your eyes again to stare at your mentor. You’re still on top of the pillar you were placed on, you’ve looked your fear in the eye and you’re still here. Next one,
fucker.

It must be six hours later when, jelly limbed, you’re told to get down from your post and call it a night.

“You only came off, like, twice. I kept falling off.” Deimos whines unhappily as you both walk back towards your tent. You wonder where he’s staying, but you’re too exhausted to ask.

“Confronting the fear helped, I think.” you mumble.

“Being here IS confronting my fears and so far being here sucks. You’re the only one that talks to me.” Deimos mutters.

“Wait, really?” you say, surprise overtaking your tiredness for a moment. You’re outside your tent anyway so you stop to look at him. Deimos pouts unhappily and kicks at the ground.

“I’m in a tent with a couple other kids and no one talks to me for more than a minute.” he admits.

“Well, sometimes kids suck.” you tell him sagely. Deimos does not look impressed with your stellar advice. Shit, think of what Dirkka would have said to you at this age if you’d come to him with this problem.

“You could take a shower.” you blurt out.

Well, that is pretty solid Dirkka advice. Dude loves his ablutions, weird cyber-gilled fucker. Damn you miss him.

“Are you saying no one talks to me because I stink?” Deimos demands, obviously offended. Ah, shit.

“No, but I’m pretty sure I do. All that fear sweat, gross. Besides a wash and brushing your hair never hurt anyone, I’m sure we’re both sweaty and muddy. But you’re doing it so you can stop leaking fear on people, you’re kind of doing friendship hardmode right now. But maybe if you do something nice for them like find some candy to share you could get people talking to you.” you suggest instead.

“And it’d help if I didn’t look like I spent all night falling in the dirt.” Deimos concludes.

“For sure. I’m pretty sure if I go sit down in there like this without having a soak first Rohhze will smack me in the snout and we’re already friends.” you agree.

“Well, ‘kay. See you tomorrow night for whatever we’re doing.” Deimos nods and rushes off with a wave.

You stick your head through the tent door and see no Rohhze, the tub is also upside down so she’s not in there either. It gives you time to have the most tolerable scrub down with a wash cloth and freezing water because highbloods suck kind of wash going. Rohhze still isn’t back after that which is great for your modesty but pretty sucky for everything else.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling tentacleTherapist [TT]

TG: rohhze where are you and please let it be near food
TG: im so cold and hungry
TG: do they have tacos here
TG: clown tacos
TG: clacos if you will
TT: < コ: erno I will not.
TT: < コ: erno There are burritos which i will fetch you if only you do not invent a new word for them.
TG: you strike a hard bargain lalond
TG: but deal
TT: < コ: erno Excellent.

tentacleTherapist [TT] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

Clean and dressed again you fall into your go to stack of cushions and find your exhausted mind wandering to your fellow initiate. Deimos seems like a sweet kid, you hope the other kids do make friends with him. But then maybe when he can control himself better he can make friends outside of his own kind. Hell, look at your group, it’s pretty goddamn rainbow hued across the spectrum and there’s two of you in it with voodoos now.

You wonder what Dirkka would make of the kid. You hope him taking you in was a sign of how genuinely good and helpful he is inside and not because you softboiled his thinksponge. Your shared lusus was certainly a point of solidarity.

Your hand itches to be filled with palmhusk and it's easy enough to oblige it. You’ve done a lot of fear confrontation tonight, you’re not up to actually talking to anyone but… but maybe you can read a little.

timaeusTestified [TT] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TT: ( ◡̈_・_・) We're all really worried about you, you know.
TT: ( ◡̈_・_・) I know Rohhze says that she's keeping an eye on you in this clown school or whatever but I don't know her well enough to trust her with you.
TT: ( ◡̈_・_・) I know, I know, they're your friends and I should listen to that. Will you please just come home?

timaeusTestified [TT] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

timaeusTestified [TT] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TT: ( ◡̈_・_・) Hal says he knows where this place you're at is, he gave me the address but he and Roxxie pointed out that us going in to get you could put you in danger.
TT: ( ◡̈_・_・) That doesn't mean to say I don't want to and this radio silence from you isn't making me feel any more like I've made the right call here.
[timaeusTestified is an idle troll]
TT: ( ◡̈_・_・) This reminds me of the time before you used to stay with your friends more.
TT: ( ◡̈_・_・) When you were either with us or you were with Cal. I hated you being there but at least I knew where you were and it was a familiar kind of hopelessness, you know?
TT: ( ◡̈_・_・) But then you started hanging with these kids I didn't know who could do such damage to you and I couldn't do shit about it.
TT: ( ◡̈_・_・) You were such a goddamn brat about it too, you wouldn't let me meet anyone because I'd scare them off.
TT: ( ◡̈_・_・) Roxxie just read over my shoulder and laughed right in my ear so that's pity for you there. I suppose you were right, but it sucked. This sucks.
TT: ( ◡̈_・_・) Listen, I don't know about all of this mind control shit and Hal's not got good enough data to do more than speculate but this changes nothing. This is still your home, not just the hive you live in. So when you're done with this just come home, ok?
You have other messages of course, one from Terezi asking you to ‘4PP34R 1N COURT FOR YOUR CR1M3S TH1S 3V3N1NG!’ You’re not doing that, whatever that is. You don’t even have the energy to wonder what terrible thing that could be, you’re burnt out enough on confronting your fears that you’re a terrible person who may lose everyone that means something to him and trying to be ok with that.

When Rohhze comes in, burrito in hand, you’ve got just about enough energy to eat it as you lean against her and then fall asleep.

When the sun sets and the next night rolls around bright and early you have to be up again. You feel less tired but still exhausted in a totally different way. You’re the one who seeks out Deimos this time, wanting to look out for the kid like Dirkka looked after you. If you act like one of the best people you know then you’ll probably be on the path to being a better person, right?

You find the kid pleasingly surrounded by a gaggle of other kids, hey, he is making friends! You pause in your approach coming up behind him as you realise the story he’s rapturously telling the other little kids is of you getting your ass kicked by Jasper the other night.

He’s not telling it that way, he’s telling it like you’re some hero going up against some unbeatable demon to save him from the pod, which he says with terrifying emphasis. The kids are all wide eyed with excitement until one of them catches sight of you. You’re not hard to see, you’re the only guy around here sporting rust on his shirt. The kids gasp in that caught out kind of way and finally Deimos catches on enough to turn around and look at you.

“Shit, Deimos it’s him!” one whispers, like he hadn’t realised.

“Don’t say that! He doesn’t cuss, don’t upset him!” Deimos hisses back.

Wait no, you swear, you’re cool. You’re just not doing it infront of small impressionable youth. Did… did Deimos think that he was sparing you by not doing it to not offend your delicate sensibilities? How has this happened?

“Hey Dayvhe, should we go?” Deimos asks brightly and you nod, still in silent shock.

Deimos trots away from his new friends and you dazedly lead the way to the big top for the night, convinced that somewhere Dirkka is probably laughing at you.

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“You should be asleep.” Hal says, not looking around. You’re stood at the doorway to his ever versatile lab.
“I’m not the only one.” You point out. Dirkka is slumped over one table, his face smushed against the keyboard and his shades abandoned on the table.

“I’m not going to carry him to his coon, I’m not Roxxie. If he wants to give himself neck cramp he can.” Hal says huffily. You walk into the room a little more and look over at what Hal’s doing.

“What’re you working on?” you ask.

“I’m looking at recordings of Dayvhe, his music, anything I can where he might have done his thing before. If I can analyse it I can find out more and be more helpful.” Hal explains.

“Don’t you need me for that? I can tell if it’s doing anything.” you say as you snag a spare chair and sit down in it, kicking yourself over to him on the squeaky little wheels it has.

“I’m not experimenting on you. No offense Sollux but you’re hardly a stable person to begin with, I can handle this alone, thanks.” Hal says.

“That’s worked out so well before.” you mutter. Why does no one listen to you? Ok, yes, you’re unstable and questionably sane but so what?

“Look, I’m offering to help. If I help we can get more information on Dayvhe’s powers and more information on my resistance to them…” you say.

Hal shakes his head and goes back to ignoring you.

“Oh, come on. We both know you care more about Dayvhe than you do about me.” you point out.

“Something we have in common.” Hal sighs.

So, is that a yes then? From the somewhat withering look Hal is giving you it seems a safe bet to say it’s not. You wheel your squeaky chair backwards to a free bit of counter space not currently occupied by a sleeping adult or sarcastic robot. You open up your husktop and consider your options.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling tentacleTherapist [TT]

TA: hey rohhze ii know iit'2 late but can you u2e your chucklevoodoo2 on me agaiin?
TA: rohhze?
TA: damniit, you're a2leep aren't you? ii 2houldn't wake you probably iin ca2e iit wake2 dv two.
TA: actually ii don't even know iif you have range enough two do that from wherever you are.
TA: nevermiind.

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling tentacleTherapist [TT]

Okay, not Rohhze then. You’re also not wildly inclined to just hit up random highblood message boards trying to scope out someone willing to put some pan rotting fear into you. Trusting Rohhze was one thing but some rando, no way. You knee bounces up and down as you think. Not Rohhze, but you do know someone who can still reach you. Vriska’s control isn’t in the same family of Rohhze and Dayvhe but maybe you can get some data out of it, you can train yourself perhaps.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling arachnidsGrip [AG]

TA: hey vrii2ka ii need you two miind control me agaiin, ii need more data on how iit work2 on me. or doe2n't work.
TA: come online already.
TA: vrii2ka!

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling arachnidsGrip [AG]

You give up trolling her and instead hack your way into her system. Although, it’s not really hacking as such. Out of gratitude for her helping you last time you did write her a patch to make her system more secure from hacking. To people who aren’t you. Like you’d give Vriska a system you couldn’t hack. You staying out of her machines is like her staying out of your head, it’s a choice and a courtesy.

Her husktop is in sleep mode and her palhmusk hasn’t been active in hours, she must be asleep. Unfortunately for her that’s not really working for you right now. It takes a minute or two of thought and then some careful synching of every device in her hive that has a speaker but you hit a key secure in the knowledge that Vriska’s hive is now being flooded with Skrillex at maximum volume.

arachnidsGrip [AG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

AG: turn it off!!!!!!!!
TA: oh great, you're awake.
AG: turn that noise off! i was sleeping you 8astard!
TA: done. 2iince you're already pii22ed at me how do you feel about miind controlliing me?
AG: what
TA: you. controlliing. my miind. don't know how much more 2iimple ii can make it. ii need more data iif ii'm going two help dv and rohzte ii2 a2leep and already dealing with looking after hiim
2o ii need you two try again. ii want two 2ee iiif iiit work2 iiin all ca2e2.
TA: hal won't te2t thing2 on me 2o you're all ii've got.
AG: as thrilling as 8eing someone's second choice might 8e for you, it's not doing it for me. >:(((
AG: 8esides, it's the middle of the day. What are you doing awake? normal trolls like me were happily asleep until you came along.
AG: have you gone off of the deep end again? are you in need of a padded room?
TA: not funny
AG: shockingly 8eing woken up in the middle of the day doesn't do gr8 things for my sense of humour
TA: ii need you two control me already. wiill you do iit or not?
AG: uhhhhhhhh. NOT.
TA: oh come *on*. 2iince when have you been thii2 2queamiish?
AG: maybe I'm not evil incarnate and I don't get off on watching you hurt yourself. It's not like I haven't seen all the books a8out dayvhe's ancestor, you're acting all wrong.
TA: he'2 nothing liike hii2 ance2tor

Suddenly you can feel it, like a cobweb drifting down gently over your thinksponge. The awareness of it prickles at you and you wait tense and expecting. But nothing happens. It’s like that dumb wiggler thing you and Karkat used to do when you were four and trying to piss each other off by almost touching the other and loudly insisting ‘I'M NOT TOUCHING YOU’ just so the other one would throw a fit about it. She’s not doing anything, she could but she’s not. But then you could stop her and you’re not.

The cobweb drifts away and though you’re no more in control than you were before you’re alone.

AG: Just what are you hoping to prove with this anyway?
TA: ii want two 2ee how much re2i2tance ii have. what wa2 that ju2t then? you dii2n't do anything, were you tryi2ng two?
TA: thii2 ii2 what ii mean, ii don't know iif my re2i2tance ha2 got 2tronger and ii 2topped you
wiithout tryiing or iif you ju2t diidn't try two make me do anythiing. whiich ii2 iit?
AG: C0me to Terezi's l8r tonight, play Dungeons and Dragons with us and I'll mess with your head afterwards.
TA: or you could do it now.
AG: I'm not making you a second offer.
TA: what about an eiighth?
AG: Alright, I'm going 8ack to my coon and don't think I won't 8reak every speaker in my hive if you make me. I made my offer, that's it. Goodday Sollux.
TA: no, no wait! fiiine, i'll come over but ii don't know how we're going to play wiithout dv.
AG: We don't need him. I'll arrange the others, just show up.

arachnidsGrip [AG] ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

That was weird, but if there’s nothing else you can do then that’s the situation you’re stuck with. But why is Vriska planning on playing stupid games now of all times? A ping comes into the longstanding group chat that you have for your game sessions, not that anyone else is awake at this time, you ignore it and try to think of what else you can do.

“Need me to listen to things yet?” you ask Hal.

“Go to sleep.” Hal says, not looking up.

Ok, no new information to be gained there. Maybe you can get better data though? You have plenty of Dayvhe’s music saved on your husktop and you know he has backups and files in his block, there’s plenty of audio of your moirail kicking around that you could expose yourself to but without Hal you’ve no way of objectively getting inside your own thinkspoon.

You rub the hair on the back of your head in frustration, it’s getting longer now but it’s still short and it’s growing out more than it is laying down flat like normal. If it keeps getting longer without changing you’re going to end up with hair like Gamzee’s and that’d be a real fucking tragedy. Your claw grazes a metal port and you pause.

You do have a way of getting in your own pun.

Slowly you stand up and have a look around Hal’s lab, you carefully open drawers and peer at things. You know where the tools are that Hal and Dirkka have for repairing Sawtooth and Squarewave but there must be other stuff here too. This room was used for your medical treatment so they probably…

You slide a drawer open. In a clear plastic case is a slippery pink biowire, organic on one end with a harsh metal jack on the other. You can feel them peeling off of you when Aradia released you, the sick invasion of them inside your own head, docterrorists holding you down as they jammed needles and drills into you. You slam the door shut and your body quakes as you back away from it. You don’t- you can’t do that.

The weight of eyes on your skin makes you jump, Hal is watching you.

“I.” you stammer out.

“I think I’m going to go to sleep.” you manage to say.

“What a good idea.” Hal says flatly and returns to his work.

You rush from the room, from his too observant black and red stare. It’s not a panic attack, or if it is then it’s too quick to really be one. It’s more physical than anything else. You feel sick, slightly
shaky, you’re breathing too fast and you’re pretty sure you’re crackling psionics behind you.

You go back to the coon you left Karkat sleeping in, your hands are shaking too much to do more than get your jeans and shoes off. Screw the shirt you don’t care. You fumble gracelessly into the sopor with him and Karkat growls halfheartedly at you.

Your greedy, shaking hands clamour for him and you pull yourself closer to him. You nudge your head up under his chin and cling to his chest. You can still feel the ghostly invasion of the biowires so you have to let go of Karkat to clamp your hands around your head, covering as many of your ports as possible.

“Hey. Hey, ‘s just a dream.” Karkat rumbles sleepily. He pulls you closer and eases your hands away from your head.

He’s saying soft and reassuring things that you already know. That you’re here, than he’s here, that you’re safe. It’s ridiculous but it does start to work. Your pusher starts to slow down in your chest, matching up with the slow thud of Karkat’s.

“You should…” Karkat cuts off with a jaw cracking yawn and, yeah, you get your best friend’s point. You should sleep. Karkat’s arm is wrapped around your waist, his hand loose and open on your side. His legs tangle with yours, thick thighs with hard muscle under them keeping you in place against him. It’s weirdly protective in its own way, something not totally lessened by the way Karkat’s head is tipped back and he’s starting to snore loudly.

You wake to the sound of claws on keys and blearily look around until you locate your glasses cleaned and on the rim of the coon. Karkat must have cleaned them up for you. Sliding them onto your face you see Karkat sat on the loungeplank, scowling at his husktop screen and typing. From the pattern of frantic jabbing at keys and then silence you guess he’s talking to someone. You rest your jaw on the edge and watch him for a moment, he’s even got the lamp dimmed to keep the room dark enough for you to sleep.

Karkat notices when you float up and sit on the edge.

“You should shower, I got breakfast for you.” Karkat says, pointing to a stack of toaster pastries, some fruit and other assorted snacks.

“Coffee?” you ask hopefully as you drop to the floor.

Karkat lifts up a large thermos and swishes it from side to side, it doesn’t sound like there’s an awful lot in there.

“Shower fast.” Karkat suggests.

You don’t need to be told twice, really. You rush off, shower, dress and return. Karkat in a showing of magnanimity has not drunk the last of the coffee and you’re able to use it to wash down the entirety of the toaster pastries that you inhale cold.

“You’re an animal.” Karkat sighs with a hint of fondness. You chew your food and stick it out on your tongue at him just to gross him out because you’re mature like that.

“So, who’re you talking to?” you ask, leaning back on the sofa next to him.

You catch a flash of several open trollian windows as Karkat snaps his husktop shut.

“No one.” Karkat says, obviously lying.
“Karkat?”

Karkat drums his claws on his husktop for a moment before putting it away and turning to face you on the loungeplank. His expression is weirdly intense and after a battle of wills acted out on his face he puts his hand awkwardly on your knee.

“You know if Dayvhe doesn’t come back it doesn’t change things for us, right?” Karkat says.

If Dayvhe doesn’t come back? What? Why would he say that?

“He’s coming back, he’s just with Rohhze.” you say.

Karkat’s expression is pained.

“Karkat, he’s with Rohhze. Unless you know something I don’t. You don’t, do you?” you ask.

Karkat says nothing so you pull out your palmhusk but you’ve no new messages since you were asleep.

“I haven’t heard anything from Dayvhe, I would have said. But I mean it, I’m not going anywhere as far as you’re concerned, alright?” Karkat tells you and squeezes your knee.

“This is super weird. You know this is super weird, right? Who were you talking to and what’s really going on? Am I dying? You’d only be this sweet if I was dying.” you tell him and the hand on your knee suddenly is a lot more sharp claws.

“I can smother you with some of these cushions if you think it’d help.” Karkat retorts sharply.

“Ah, normality restored. Seriously though, what gives?” you say.

“I’m just worried about you.” Karkat says with a weak little smile.

“I’m worried about you, you’ve clearly gone off the deep end.” you say.

Karkat shoves you and settles back into his earlier place on the loungeplank.

“We’re going to Terezi’s later, a change of scenery and different people will be good.” Karkat says.

“Yeah, Vriska mentioned about playing the game but I don’t see how we can without Dayvhe there.” you say.

“We don’t need Dayvhe, Vriska or Terezi have it covered.” Karkat says sharply.

Alright, you’re going to file that under Karkat being angry about a different thing than he appears to be angry about. You try to distract him by asking him to read to you from one of his smutty bodice rippers, at least until it’s time to leave anyway. Clearly Karkat could use a break. You message Dayvhe a few times but predictably get nothing, you make sure to do it when Karkat’s not there though, you know he hates seeing you look disappointed at not hearing from Dayvhe.

The time eventually comes for you both to leave and Karkat seems distracted and uneasy, more than he usually is on public transport at least. You try to fill the space with upbeat talk but you can’t do that for long so you mainly needle at him and try to bait him into elaborate insults just to keep him entertained. Needless to say it’s a relief to get to Terezi’s hive and not just because you can take your hat off. Now that your hair is growing back it’s way too hot for it, here at least you’re in good enough company that you’re fine without it. That’s something you can’t say on the train.

You guess you’re used to a certain setup when you arrive at Terezi’s hive for a game so it’s pretty
notable that it’s not how it usually is set up. Instead of the table that you all sit around there’s just one chair sat alone in the middle of the room.

“I guess no one ever accused you of being subtle, Terezi.” Karkat sighs as he shuts the door behind him.

“What’s—” you start to say.

“Do you ever think about how that whole thing with Gamzee could have been avoided if someone had sat him down and confronted him about his addiction problem?” Vriska says suddenly without so much as a hello.

“Sure.” you agree uncertainly as Vriska stares at you.

“Good. So sit down.” she hisses at you.

“I don’t have a problem.” you point out, it seems like key information.

“It’s ok Sollux, you don’t have to think of this as an intervention.” Terezi says reassuringly, patting your shoulder and steering you towards the chair.

“That’s good, because I don’t need to have an intervention.” you agree.

“Think of it as… AN INTERROGATION.” Terezi says gleefully.

“It doesn’t have to be a legal thing, ‘rez.” Vriska sighs.

“It’s going to be a legal thing, obviously.” John groans.

“IT’S GOING TO BE A LEGAL THING!” Terezi cackles and shoves you at the chair.

“Alright, well you’re crazy. I’m leaving.” you say sensibly and turn towards the door. Karkat is stood there with Tavros and when he sees your intent to leave he steps closer to the door to block you off.

“You knew about this.” you conclude. Karkat’s looking at the ground.

“It was kind of my idea.” Karkat says softly.

“Half your idea, bringing him here was mine, you just did the details.” Vriska interjects.

“And just what idea is this?” you snap and Vriska raises an eyebrow at you.

“Sit down and find out.” she says challengingly.

“Yes Sollux, the innocent have nothing to fear.” Terezi beams.

“That’s not true for the legal system and certainly not you.” you retort.

Karkat’s still blocking the door, he looks genuinely upset. Is this what’s been bothering him all night? You could run but you don’t want to leave him behind and even with Terezi’s hoofbeastshit vow that the innocent have nothing to fear you actually don’t have a problem. So… fine, you sit down in the chair and look at all of them pointedly.

“Excellent!” Terezi says and bangs her dragon headed cane on the ground.
“The court is in session. I, Her Honourable Teal-rany…” Terezi says, pausing for groans you absolutely all make, “am presiding over this case. I will also be representing the plaintiff in this matter, Karkat Vantas. Karkat please raise your hand.”

Karkat rolls his eyes but does so.

“Karkat is bringing the accused, one Dayvhe Strydr up on the charges of controlling the mind and emotions of the victim, one Sollux Captor. Specifically to the extent that normal mental functioning is impossible. As you can see Dayvhe did not respond to his court summons which indicates guilt but is not completely conclusive.” Terezi announces.

“Karkat what the fuck?” you demand.

“The victim will only speak when he is asked direct questions by the prosecutor.” Terezi says and smacks you in the ankle with her cane.

You’d really like to not answer questions from people speaking about themselves in the third person but it seems like it’s going to be that kind of night.

“Karkat.” Terezi says, turning to him.

“I… fine, the plaintiff asserts that Sollux has been mind controlled and is unaware of how badly and is really hoping that this can prove something to him.” Karkat says grudgingly.

“Her Honourable Teal-rany accepts this statement into evidence and calls to the stand one Tavros Nitram.” Terezi declares.

“I’m already standing because, uh, you only put out one chair. So am I already at the stand?” Tavros asks awkwardly from his place by the door.

“Oh, what, are your metal legs getting tired?” Vriska scoffs but the others ignore her.

“As evidence I guess I submit all of The Disciple’s writing that we have, I’ve scanned and read it all. It details just how his powers work.” Tavros says.

“I object.” you call out and rock back in your chair a little, floating the front legs off of the ground a bit. Terezi whirls around and narrows her red eyes at you.

“Unorthodox but Her Honourable Teal-rany will allow it. What is the victim’s objection?” Terezi asks.

“One, stop calling me the victim. Two, that evidence shows only Disciple’s speculation of how Dayvhe’s ancestor’s power works. So it’s not even definitive proof of how his works and Dayvhe is not his ancestor.” you say.

“The evidence alone is not enough for a conviction because of these points, yes. However Dayvhe could have arrived here and defended himself against these accusations in person but chose not to, thus leaving us with no other means of introspection into his powers than we already have here tonight. Secondly his ancestor’s powers seem to be an accurate model for Dayvhe’s own and as such will be taken as the guideline. Objection overruled.” Terezi declares.

“So, overruled because I said so?” you mutter.

“It’s like you’ve never seen a legal drama.” Vriska snorts.
“Tavros, describe these powers in your own words.” Terezi says.

“They make the target want to do whatever the person using them wants, they alter the interests and desires of the target seemingly without their knowledge. It caused people to become obsessed with him sometimes to obvious harm to them.” Tavros says.

“So what you’re saying is that Sollux could well be affected by this without knowing it?” Terezi asks.

“Absolutely.” Tavros nods.

This isn’t good.

“I would like to object on the grounds that you all know Dayvhe and if his powers make people ‘incompetent’ and ‘unstable’ or whatever then you’re all as bad as me and because of that you’re not fit to try anyone for anything.” you accuse.

Terezi makes a thoughtful noise and rubs her chin for a moment.

“Of course, we need evidence for such things. An obsession with Dayvhe, an inability to let go, irrational behaviours, being a danger to oneself, holding him in worshipful status, that kind of thing.” Terezi nods.

“Right, and given your stupid club that you all had for him I think the only person off the hook here is Vriska. I mean, Tavros once came onto Dayvhe so hard that Dayvhe freaked out and ditched him and it made the start of my relationship with him weird.” you accuse.

“The victim- Sollux Captor has stated for the record that he accepts that Dayvhe is exerting his power on others and has theorised that the behaviour of others here, notably of Tavros are as of a result of mind control. This establishes a past history on Dayvhe’s part of mind control.” Terezi declares.

“Wait- no that wasn’t what I meant.” you try but Terezi is ignoring you.

“Yeah, I can’t say that I’m happy to wonder if everything that happened was because of this.” Tavros says unhappily.

“No, I didn’t mean that. I don’t think you have the right to accuse me of something so dumb when it could be so easy to accuse you too when you’re no more controlled than me. Dayvhe would never do that.” you insist.

“The victim asserts certainty of the moral character of the accused to be flawless, an earlier agreed upon mark of controlled behaviour.” Terezi says.

Your jaw clicks shut, you need to stop talking and now. You’re just giving Terezi more rope to hang you with. Terezi watches you with a smile before turning her focus on Karkat. She marches away for a moment to retrieve another chair and then sets it down relatively near you and shoves Karkat in it.

“Wait, I didn’t get a chair.” Tavros protests but no one cares.

“Karkat Vantas, state for the record your relationship with the victim, Sollux Captor.” Terezi asks, leaning towards his face.

“It’s none of your business.” Karkat replies.
“Her Honourable Teal-rany will not be disrespected in her own court! It’ll be a thorough drubbing for you my boy if you don’t come clean!” Terezi says, threatening him with her cane.

Karkat appears to be reconsidering every choice that he’s made in his life leading him to this point, which he absolutely should given that this shitshow is his fault. You have no sympathy. Karkat smacks his hands to his face and drags them down with a groan of frustration.

“I’m his, and I’m as horrified by the word I’m about to say as you are I promise you but I blame Dayvhe for the word, his awwspistice.” Karkat tells her.

“His auspistice?” Terezi asks in surprise. Which is surprising because you’ve never had a kismesis in your life and she’s no Nepeta with your group’s quadrants but surely she knows that. So you’d never need an actual auspistice.

“No, his awwspistice. It’s like clubbing for their diamond. It’s kind of pale, kind of ash, kind of… red.” Karkat mutters that last bit, glancing at you and then wrenching his eyes away. Unbidden the memory of making out with him with Dayvhe right there flashes into your mind and you’re pretty sure your face is going some kind of dark embarrassed shade.

“We did see you kiss that one time!” John volunteers loudly and helpfully.

“Would it be safe to say then that you are as invested in Sollux’s wellbeing as you are in Dayvhe’s?” Terezi questions him, moving on.

“More so, Sollux did nothing wrong. Dayvhe is at best questionable right now.” Karkat states.

“Oh come on, he didn’t know.” you protest.

“Enough backchat from the victim’s stand, you’re not being questioned!” Terezi snaps and returns her attention to Karkat.

“How has Sollux seemed to you since Dayvhe’s absence?” Terezi asks.

Karkat looks at you and sighs.

“Unstable. He’s worried but he keeps insisting that it’ll all be fine but he’s lying, he’s secretive, he’s doing stupid shit and he’s obsessed. It’s like an addict who’s been cut off.” Karkat says. His words are so sombre, almost talking about you like you’ve died from something and you’re not mere feet away from him.

“What evidence can you provide that he’s lying?” Terezi asks, leaning on her cane.

“He’s pretending that things are fine when I know he doesn’t believe it or feel that way. He keeps trying to do dangerous research and then not telling me about it, he acts like he’s ok but I can see that he’s so much more upset than he lets on.” Karkat says.

“Fucking forgive me for trying to hold my shit together so you didn’t have to deal with all of this and worry about me getting depressed again. Fuck off.” you snarl and Karkat’s expression flashes guilt but you’re not interested in seeing it.

“Defensive.” Terezi notes.

“Tell me how obsessive he is and how is this evidence for addictive behaviour.” she says, moving on.
“He messages Dayvhe constantly even though he never gets any answer back. Even someone missing their moirail would get the hint that this isn’t a good time eventually. It’s not even like he doesn’t know where Dayvhe is or what’s happened, we’re in contact with Rohhze who is answering us. He’s just sending thousands of messages.” Karkat says.

“Sollux, your palmhusk.” Terezi says, now turning to face you.

“I don’t have to show anything to you.” you hiss.

“No, you don’t. I have the figures already from Karkat. He was given the data on your messages to Dayvhe by the robot guy that lives at your new hive. How many messages do you think you’ve sent him since you saw him last? Individual messages, not conversations.” Terezi asks.

“I’ve trolled him every night to let him know I’m not mad and he can talk me me whenever so… a few hundred?” you shrug. You know it’s a little excessive but you’re just trying to keep the lines of communication open.

“Three thousand messages. I could say how many words that is but I can see that even you are surprised. Feel free to scroll through your palmhusk if you don’t believe the evidence.” Terezi says, looking up from her notes.

It can’t be that many. It can’t. You open up your palmhusk and Dayvhe’s trollian is the first thing to open of course. It’s all yellow in there, you know he wouldn’t have messaged you back. You swipe along your screen, a lot of the messages are sensible things, reassurances that he can troll you back and it’ll be fine, wishes that his training is going well, hoping that he’ll message you. But there’s just embarrassing shit in here as well, pleas for him to talk to you again, apologies for anything that could have possibly upset him enough to make him want to do this to you, assuring him that you still pity him. You’re scrolling and scrolling and it’s just you talking to yourself like a crazy person. You weren’t this bad before, you had more self respect before.

Fuck self respect though, you want your moirail back.

...that probably wasn’t a rational or stable thing to think, was it? You’re glad you didn’t say it aloud but even without Terezi hearing it, it’s damning all the same. You have no defense.

“You were also trolling him whenever I was out of the room, Hal told me so. And you were hiding it too, you know, like an addict.” Karkat adds.

You think you’re going to disassemble Hal when you see him next.

“Obsessive behaviour. Noted. Vriska, I call you to the stand about Sollux’s self destructive actions.” Terezi says. Karkat gets up, shooting you a pitying look and then Vriska takes his chair. She flicks one leg over the other and makes aggressive eye contact with you, as if to dare you to say anything about this whole shitshow that she evidently had a hand in organising.

“Vriska, tell me what you know about Sollux’s dangerous behaviour.” Terezi asks in her official voice.

“Well that’d be a long topic.” Vriska sneers and flips her hair over her shoulder.

“Sollux Captor would like to pre-emptively point out that though he is considerably smarter than all of you fuckers being stupid and reckless is not out of character for him and doesn’t count against Dayvhe, so this evidence is pointless.” you say, stooping to the level of their dumbass court roleplay.

“Your background in being a moron is noted, thank you.” Terezi grins wildly. Ow, self burn.
“Sollux trolled me when this all kicked off, asking Rohhze and then me to try to control him to prove that we couldn’t do it for long at all. I’m talking seconds here. It was a show of his resistance that he thought he had, and does now to an extent it seems. But it’s completely stupid given that me controlling him was the whole reason that Aradia thing blew up.” Vriska scoffs.

“I think ‘that whole Aradia thing’ went off was because you used him as a murder weapon to kill his girlfriend and she only antagonised you in defense of me. Defending me from you, actually, so really all of that is your fault.” Tavros interrupts.

“Oh build a bridge and use your new legs to get over it Tavros, no one cares anymore. Even Sollux doesn’t care about that whole thing, in fact he wants to kill Aradia too now.” Vriska shoots back.

“I, um, am aware. But just because he agrees with you now doesn’t mean you’re not a huge bitch actually?” he points out.

“ORDER IN THE COURT. Vriska, continue your argument about Sollux’s condition.” Terezi interrupts, slamming her cane on the floor.

“Fine. Between me controlling him when we were kids, the whole thing when he got helmed, Aradia jamming him into her helm the last thing he should want is more control. But he begged us both for it and I gave in and in the middle of the day just gone he woke me up trolling me over and over demanding I do it again so he could test more things I even had to promise that I would try to control him tonight if he came here.” Vriska says.

“And he hit Rohhze up for the same, she was asleep but she let me know when she woke up.” Karkat chips in.

“Given how dangerous you know Vriska to be based on personal experience this absolutely classifies itself as risky behaviour.” Terezi declares.

“Oh objection, don’t give me that shit.” you hiss and kick her cane. Not that she needs it to see or stay upright, she just likes the look of it.

“Vriska controlled me the first time because she was using me to get even with someone. I’m of no use to her like that now and she has no one she needs to get even with anyway. She’s a bitch but she’s not a psycho. Destroying me, if she was even able to, would fuck her shit up. Karkat would wreck her life and you’d probably give her hell if not leave her. The worst she’d do is some bulge move kind of prank on me and I think these nights her ‘jokes’ have got better than ‘hey run off a cliff for my amusement’. I’m in no goddamn danger at all and Rohhze is my friend and has never hurt me, it’s not risky at all.” you argue.

“Thanks?” Vriska says uncertainly.

“Blow me, Serket. You still squeakbeasted on me to these fucks, you owe me.” you snap at her.

“You were also trying to listen to audio of Dayvhe to trigger some kind of response in your thinksponge and Hal said you even seemed to be contemplating jamming a biowire into your ports before you freaked out and ran back to me. That risky and insane enough?” Karkat cuts over you.

“It doesn’t work on me!” you argue, leaping up from your chair.

“You don’t KNOW that! You know one vague command to everyone didn’t work on you, you don’t know about all the other layers that could be going on. He could still be changing how you feel and what you’re willing to do and you have no way of knowing that!” Karkat shouts.
“I WOULD KNOW THAT IF YOU’D LET ME RUN SOME ACTUAL TESTS LIKE I WAS TRYING TO!” you shout back.

“YOU’RE NOT SOME LAB ANIMAL! CAN’T YOU HEAR YOURSELF?!” Karkat screams at you and he absolutely has you beat on the volume front and always will.

You want to get the last word in, to say something as cutting that’ll hurt him as much as him subjecting you to this indignity in front of everyone is hurting you. But he’s your friend, your best friend and he’s stupid and scared. After everything you don’t want to lose him. Even at your most grim and selfish you can admit that your chances of managing to hit adulthood without Karkat around to look out for you are… slim.

Besides, you pity him.

It just leaves you standing there in obviously hurt silence with a Karkat who looks like he’s about to cry and everyone else just staring at you both.

“You seem angry.” Terezi says softly.

“Really? REALLY? Thank you, detective!” you snap out at her.

Terezi looks at you for a moment and then thunks her cane on the floor.

“I need everyone to be absolutely quiet for this, except for Sollux. No interruptions, no interjections, if you have anything to say it can and will wait to the end. If you interrupt me you will be ejected from my hive through the window, am I clear?” Terezi says, stone cold and serious.

“This investigation and trial has started because your friends and your… Karkat are worried about you. We care.” Terezi states simply.

“Learning about Dayvhe’s ancestor and hearing about Dayvhe himself has been jarring to all of us, especially as we can all look at our own past with him and wonder if this applies to us too. Dahvid’s victims are clearly irrational, slavishly devoted, suicidally obedient and act like he’s this perfect god. Resistant now or not we don’t know what damage has already been done to you. Us trying to work out if you’ve become a victim of this severe level of control is hard to do, you’re right, we don’t know how it works. But we’re also assuming that you were sane and rational beforehand, that you possessed self control before, that even before you knew him you weren’t careless with your safety when it came to people you cared about.” Terezi says.

“So impossible then?” you sigh. Also, ouch, but that’s probably fair.

“Perhaps, but I still have questions for you.” Terezi says. Of course she does.

“Why did you not tell Karkat about your plans? About trying to enlist Vriska’s and Rohhze’s help a second time, about considering using a biowire on yourself?” Terezi asks.

“You get that I pity him, right? Even that aside he’s my best friend and he has to grubsit me far too often. I wasn’t going to worry him more than he already was, this Dayvhe shit is a lot. You think I wanted to add to it without having anything to show for it?” you reply.

A surprised pale chirp squeaks within Karkat’s throat and he claps a hand over his mouth before Terezi can throw him through the window for it, though you doubt she would.

“And the messages?” Terezi asks.
“As in why so many or why was I hiding them from KK?” you ask.

“Both, but Karkat first.” Terezi specifies.

“He’s pissed at him, obviously. I didn’t want to keep setting him off when he was actually enjoying himself not thinking about him. And I didn’t realise I’d sent so many but Dayvhe tends to pretend things are fine even when they’re not, if I kept talking to him he might buy that things are cool and finally talk back so we can get some damn answers.” you explain.

“And… do you think Dayvhe is perfect?” Terezi asks, drumming her fingers on her cane thoughtfully.

“Dayvhe has more flaws than I have teeth.” you say deadpan and Terezi looks around sharply at Vriska’s smothered laughing across the other side of the room.

“Interesting. Go on, with examples. I want to hear specifically how he’s flawed and times when he’s shown that.” Terezi says, poking you in the chest.

You want to tell her to go take a hike, Dayvhe is great and it’s absolutely against good ‘rail code to just lay your other half’s problems out for other people. That said they’re accusing him of violating your mind and whole sense of self, proving them wrong is likely in his best interest. You know, that thing that’s your responsibility to look after.

“He can be… willfully oblivious to other people’s feelings in the hope that it’ll work out the way he wants things to. He knew all of his friends had pale crushes on him, he told me so. He just pretended everything was fine and that you were all just really great friends and no one had any messy feelings in the hope that it’d all quietly go away without him having to confront that. It’s not like it went well when he actually had to do that.” you say, looking pointedly at Tavros who winces.

“He can be even messier than me and he steals clothes all the time because he forgets to wash his own and it drives Karkat crazy. He’s said insensitive shit about me and hurt me before. He’s a sweet guy sometimes, he really is, he learnt that I needed to eat more to support my psionics and kept pestering me to eat. But sometimes he can be mean, he deliberately hurt Roxxie to get back at Dirkka once, I’m talking reminding her that her moirail will die of old age long before she even hits middle age.” you say and your friends cringe at that last one. It was a really low blow.

“He’s not perfect, but I pity him. He has good qualities, he genuinely cares about people, he’s skilled at what he does, he’s loyal, he’s funny, he’s loving. He has flaws, I have flaws. He’s not perfect, I’m not deluded about him I just pity him. He’s perfect for me, alright?” you tell her.

Terezi looks at you. Or, she doesn’t actually. But her blank eyes are turned to you and her face is the picture of focus.

“I don’t think you’ve been controlled. You are a loyal troll, Sollux. You’re dedicated to the people you care about and you’ve always been wildly careless with your own wellbeing, I’ve known you long enough for that. You know what mind honey does to you but you keep beenary servers because they’re ‘better’ or whatever. You piss people off when you shouldn’t. Everything you’ve done is stupid, sure, but your thinking is sound. You’re acting in line with your nature, your values and your loyalties.” Terezi declares.

“Unless I get compelling evidence to make me reopen this case I declare this case closed. Sollux Captor you are a… awwspistice worrying dumbass but that is not a criminal offence. For now. You are free to go!” Terezi declares.
“Well that was… something. I take it that we’re not playing Dungeons and Dragons though?” John asks. Terezi turns on her heel and drops her focus from you and starts to bicker with John. God, public blackrom is so gross.

Karkat moves from his place where he was rooted for that whole interrogation with Terezi and goes from zero to sixty by throwing his arms around your shoulders and crushing you to him. You wheeze as he squeezes you tight.

“I’m sorry I was just-” Karkat whines.

“I know. Worried. Just- KK- I need air!” you gasp and Karkat loosens his grip on you so you can drag in a breath.

Karkat’s face is mashed into your chest and you can feel hot mutant tears soaking your shirt, the fabric and his crying is muffling the words but you get the idea. That it was his fault for introducing you, that Dayvhe had then corrupted you in the worst way possible, what if you were still awake somewhere in your head begging for help and Karkat did nothing? Oh god he betrayed your trust you’ll never talk to him again he’s the worst, etc, etc.

“Shoosh.” you murmur and awkwardly pat the top of his head. You’d go for his face but it’s currently engaged in ruining your shirt.

You rest your chin between his horns and sigh. You’re pissed at him for this but his pumpbiscuit was in the right place, you understand why he did this. If you were controlled and all your friends agreed to it and pulled out the evidence to make you face it then maybe you could be helped. But as you’re not it was just painful and shitty, not to mention embarrassing. So, yeah, you’re pissed at him kind of but you’re also pissed at Dayvhe for bailing on you but you’re still talking to him. Talking to him more than you thought you were in fact but still.

“I think I’m going to get some air. Alone.” Karkat sniffs, pulling away from you.

“Yeah, there’s a short supply of air out there. Can’t have two people using it up.” you nod sagely only to be flipped off as Karkat walks away.

“Pity you.” you call mockingly after him as he exits onto Terezi’s balcony. You’re assessing the damage to your shirt when a wild Vriska appears at your elbow.

“What do you want?” you say, not looking up as you stretch your shirt to peer at it critically.

“I wasn’t going to control you when you might not be in your right mind, so if you’re waiting for an apology…” Vriska says trailing off.

“I may as well expect to be suddenly crowned leader of our entire species and gifted a wealth of gorgeous and charming quadrantmates for all the likelihood either would happen?” you guess.

“More or less.” Vriska says, rolling her eyes dramatically.

“Well, thanks for whatever passes for caring with you. I’m still pissed you lied to drag me into this idiot theatre hour but whatever, I’m not going to lose sleep over it or hold it over you.” you say, waving your hand carelessly. You know, to show how you don’t care at all.

“Whatever. Since you’re not some weak little spongewashed idiot I can control you again if you still want to test some nerd theory.” she says airily.

“I want to see if- if I can still be affected if I let myself. I want to see if I can still break out of it even
if I don’t notice or don’t try right away.” you say slowly as you try to sort out just what you want.

“I can do that.” Vriska nods.

You face her properly and nod, waiting for her to do her thing. She watches you carefully for a moment and then lifts a finger to her temple, a gesture you’re entirely sure she just does for show and doesn’t need to do at all. Spidersilk weaves through your thinksponge and settles over you. You’re pulled back from yourself and you feel like you’re watching things happen.

You focus on just watching and keeping calm as your hand raises up, you’re made to look down at it as your fingers flex, and your hand is turned this way and that. Your head tilts up and you look at Vriska. You allow your balance to be shifted from one leg to the other.

This is longer than your test before, she’s got full control of you. Enough of this.

You feel her in your head and push back. She doesn’t belong in here, no one but you belongs in your head and you won’t let her control you any longer. The webbing around you splits and breaks away and suddenly you’re you again.

You lick your lips, your throat feels dry from slightly repressed panic.

“Alright.” you nod.

“Let me try again, I’ll throw everything I have into controlling you, you throw everything you have into resisting. See who wins.” Vriska suggests.

You doubt that she was just going easy on you before but, fine.

“Alright, go.” you agree.

Her control snaps around you, it feels sharper, more brutal and you’re intensely aware that this is far closer to how it was when Aradia died. She must have been less refined then. Even now you can see the intense concentration and teeth gritting effort she’s putting into this.

You dig in, this is your body, your mind, you won’t let her have it. You push back, ripping every tendril of her control away and it takes less than a second of focused effort to wrench her away from you. There’s a tremble in your hands when you have yourself back and Vriska is wide eyed and out of breath.

“Interesting.” Vriska says finally, pushing her glasses up the bridge of her nose a little from where they’d slipped.

“Sollux.” Karkat says and you look around to see him standing at the open front door.

“Let’s go.” he says and you nod.

“Thanks.” you say to Vriska as you walk off. You float you and Karkat down to the ground and start walking.

“This was a weird ass night.” you say after several long seconds of silence.

“When were you going to tell me about Vriska?” Karkat asks, apropos of nothing.

“You were right there, she can’t control me for very long at all anymore. I have to choose to stop her so it’s not an automatic reaction. If I can get Rohhze to—” you start.
“I don’t mean that.” Karkat groans.

“What? Asking her to help before you mean? Like I said to Terezi I was going to tell you when I’d found something worth telling, I didn’t want to worry you for no reason.” you say.

Karkat squints at you in obvious disbelief.

“Sollux, with all the platonic and romantic love I have for you I have to say you’re the single dumbest person I know.” Karkat groans and keeps walking.

“I- what’s that supposed to mean? Why? Karkat come back here!” you call after him but Karkat’s still walking off and shaking his head.

What’s his problem?
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

==> Author: Run path C1

‘Break you down, now put it back together again

I’ll break you down, now put it back together again

Break you down, now put it back together again

I’ll break you down, now put it back together again’

‘Another way out’ - TGE

You’ve been kicking it in this clown camp for maybe eight nights total now, and yes, you’ve learnt a lot but once you got the basic grasp of how to deliberately use your voodoos you didn’t really learn much. You’ve still got no idea if you’re doing it without knowing and really the only other thing you’ve learnt is don’t mouth off to Jasper or you get your ass kicked.

You’re across the room brushing your teeth when your palmhusk pings, making you cringe at the sound. You don’t have the guts to turn the thing off entirely. You don’t even have the guts to stop reading over Sollux’s messages, sick with missing him. Sometimes you read over the few that Karkat has sent and at how furiously angry he is at you for ignoring them both. It depends on your mood, do you want to feel alone or guilty?

“Are you going to get that?” Rohhze asks. She’s slowly and gracefully kicking her feet off of the floor to put her in a handstand, it takes real balance to do that slowly.

“Are you?” you sneer around your toothbrush.

Wait, fuck, you immediately regret that because Rohhze will for sure answer your messages if you say something like that to her that she can paint as permission. You snatch the device up before she does and poke your tongue at her.

“Remember your face paint.” Rohhze reminds you, poking you in the cheek and then going back to her spot to do handstands or whatever.

“Remember your face paint.” you parrot back at her in a high pitched voice.

You love Rohhze very dearly, she’s doing you an immense favour helping you like this and sharing this part of herself with you. Immense trust has been exchanged, her with her more sincere than you might have known belief in some clown church tenants and you about your mutation. That said you’ve spent every waking minute with her more or less for eight nights straight and you don’t have your moirail to talk to so you’re about ready to smother her in her sleep at this point.

“You really should answer them, you know.” Rohhze says, upside down. You brush your teeth a little more as you look over Karkat’s message.

carcinoGeneticist [CG] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

CG: HE’S SLEEPING LIKE SHIT, I HOPE YOU KNOW. ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS TO
TELL HIM THAT YOU’RE OK, AND I KNOW YOU ARE BECAUSE ROHHZE IS TELLING US THAT YOU’RE NOT DEAD.
CG: NO THANKS TO YOU!
CG: THERE IS NO REASON FOR YOU TO BE DOING THIS. AND THE THING THAT REALLY MAKES ME WANT TO SCREAM IS THAT SOLLUX IS STILL CONVINCED YOU’RE PERFECT, THAT THERE’S GOT TO BE SOME REASON YOU’RE NOT TALKING TO HIM. SOMETHING HE’S DONE OR SOMETHING HE DOESN’T KNOW ABOUT.
CG: BUT YOU JUST SUCK, DON’T YOU?!
CG: AUGH! FUCK THIS! I HAVE TO GO COMFORT *YOUR* MOIRAIL. IF YOU FEEL LIKE STEPPING IN AT ANY POINT PLEASE FUCKING DO!

carcinoGeneticist [CG] ceased trolling turmttechGodhead [TG]

Oh boy.

You spit into the sink and close the application on your palmhusk.

“I still don’t know if it’s safe. Jaspers has taught me jack shit about the whole subconscious ‘make everyone like me’ shit I apparently do.” you say miserably and sit down on the ground by Rohhze. You have to tilt your head to see her right way up.

“And like I told you no one else’s works over text and even if it did surely that would take enough concentration that you would know about it.” Rohhze points out.

“But it’s subtle and you didn’t know about it, hell, you didn’t even know about the more hardcore stuff that I was doing until Sollux and Hal caught me! I could still be doing it!” you protest.

Rohhze groans loudly and flips herself back upright and sits down by you.

“What is it that you’re arguing? That your powers are so subtle and gentle that no one can tell that you’re doing them or that they’re so overpowered that you simply have to stay away from people for their safety? It can’t be both.” she tells you.

You don’t have a good answer to that.

“Honestly I think you could use a little bit of that passive ‘like me’ vibe the next time you see Karkat, I think he’s about ready to kick your teeth in if the messages I’ve been getting from him are any clue.” she mutters.

“I don’t want to deliberately or accidentally fuck with the heads of my quadrantmates or friends!” you snap.

“I was joking.” Rohhze groans.

“Not funny.” you growl.

“Look, if you’re wanting to find out more about how your own backwards chucklevoodoos of warm fuzzy feelings works then go read that book about him that Sollux so helpfully gave you.” Rohhze says, waving her hand towards the stack of cushions as she knows full well you’ve jammed the book in there and not touched it in nights and nights.

It’s hard to muster up a strong argument for not doing that besides just that you really don’t want to and you hate reading about the guy. So you do what any sane troll does, you procrastinate and annoy someone a million times higher up the hemospectrum than you.
“They’re not really chucklevoooods and just ‘voodoos’ doesn’t really work.” you muse, not looking at the book.

“You said warm and fuzzy so… cuddlevoooods.” you decide.

You get a cold snap up your spine and you snicker in amusement as you scuttle away from Rohhze and towards the book. Time to stop being such a wiggler about this. You pull the book out and see Rohhze eyeing you suspiciously as you settle down to do some actual work on your self improvement. It’s hard knowing where to start, at the beginning it’s all just shit that makes you cringe to read. Dahvid so obviously using his voodoos on others for his own, often petty, gains. But then there are other moments and here and there drawings too, charcoal etched and slightly smudged over time from the book being opened and shut but there’s one. A drawing which for the life of you looks like you and Karkat in strange clothes talking excitedly with Dirkka who is unsettlingly, what, maybe six sweeps? You read the closest text to the picture.

Dahvid remains staunchly protective over his ‘bro’ as he insists we call him, though I can see the point they’re clearly not ancestor and descendant in the traditionally understood sense. I must confess that Dionte still unsettles me, for all the world I still see him and think undead. His face is perpetually devoid of expression and he can remain motionless in the way that people simply don’t. We have seen the undead many times and I could call him one if not for how every so often his attention will snap to, like some light has been awoken in him and he’ll talk, albeit almost exclusively to Dahvid. Unlike the rest of us Dionte does not seem enchanted or swayed by Dahvid at all, which ironically seems to make him all the more enchanting to Dahvid.

That’s… unsettling to hear. You know that sometimes around Cal you mentally checked out, sometimes you distanced yourself deliberately and sometimes it was more like Cal muscled you out. Your hand slips to the scar at your hip where Sollux put you back together even though when he saw you he thought you might be a zombie. Stupid boy, taking a risk like that for you. Your treasonous pusher flutters at the idea, it’s so pale it belongs in Karkat’s movies. Fuck, but you miss them both. Still, you run your finger over the words and consider that if Sollux really is resistant like he claims then when you get a handle on this properly you might be able to continue your lives together. You might be able to trust that you’re not making him be with you.

That’s great, it is. But you have other relationships to think of and you’re not even accounting for what you may have done unwittingly in the past. You’ve made some progress since Jasper craft faired your ass to the ground, you’re starting to gain a feel for what your commands ‘feel’ like when you’re giving them in comparison to just telling people to do things. Rohhze even volunteered for an hour, determined to deny you things she was hoarding as you practiced just trying to convince her normally and then cuddlevoodooing her into it. It was a relief to see that Rohhze was perfectly happy to tell you to get lost under normal conditions.

Your eyes track over to Karkat’s ancestor drawn on the page and again you miss him. Fuuuuuck do you miss him. Emotionally too of course but, you know, you’re a healthy nine sweep troll with hella hot quadrant mate. Oh, Karkat, he has an ass that won’t quit and a face that says ‘fuck you’ in red ways, black ways, candy striped in both and the straight up grouchiness for the world that you adore.

Damnit, you’re meant to be reading. You flip through the book some more.

-Dionte is not the only one who can deny Dahvid’s requests!

Oh, what? What’s that about? You backtrack to the beginning of the section.

The people that Dahvid enchants with his ways purposefully seem to sometimes bother him, usually he can just brush them off but some overstay their welcome with him and he sees fit to make them
leave. Needless to say Signless disapproves of this highly. This time was different, we had not seen Dahvid for some weeks which is not unusual for him but it had been long enough that when he appeared we were not surprised to see him. As always he was accompanied by a follower leading him to us, a woman that I had met in town two nights prior. He seemed to be visibly uncomfortable as he approached us.

Dahvid palmed the woman off onto me by suggesting that I might like help with tanning some leather, which I did not need or especially want. I was not surprised that the woman could not be dissuaded from helping, some take Dahvid’s words very firmly. What did catch my notice is that Dahvid caught hold of Psiionic and broke to the furthest edge of camp and seemed to try to put Psi between him and her. As the woman spoke every subject she discussed revolved around Dahvid. She spoke of how wonderful he was with almost every breath, expressed jealousy to us for getting to spend time with him so often. Every direction I gave her met with wondering if that was what Dahvid wanted and soon enough she left me to track him down. She kept following him around and it was only when Psii intervened that I realised just how unwanted this situation was, the unthinkable had happened, Dionte is not the only one who can deny Dahvid’s requests!

I wish the news had been exciting instead of distressing. The woman simply would not leave him alone despite Dahvid’s orders for her to do so, his commands to leave him be seemed to have no real effect. When Psii resorted to threatening her to make her leave she interpreted his actions as him trying to steal Dahvid from her and tried to attack Psii for this imagined slight.

You have to look away for a moment. You’ve had people get like that with you. Making friends is always something that’s come easily to you, no fuckin’ prizes for guessing why now that you know what you do about yourself. Every so often you get someone who’s just too into you, who isn’t cool with you going off to see your other friends or even to just bounce and do your thing elsewhere. People who blow up your trollian endlessly. You’ve even had people follow you before but you’ve obviously got better at that lately because you can start to tell if someone’s heading that way and you can cut them off before they go all hopbeast-boiler on you. Shit, you think you got the hang of that by the time you started hanging out with Rohhze and the others. How did this guy not know what to do?

Actually, you can’t think of the last time someone went bad on you before you caught it. Jaydee was maybe starting to head that way now that you think of it, when Sollux took you back to his hive you caught that look in the guy’s eyes that spelled bad things but you’ve never seen or heard from him since. You totally have this under control all by yourself.

Still, for the first time you feel a little sympathy for your ancestor, having someone stalk you like that isn’t fun, especially when they back you into a corner like that. You skim a little, they had to fight her it seems. You don’t want to read what she said or did or how that went down so you skip ahead.

Dahvid stayed with us that day, he seemed different and rattled in a way that none of us have ever seen him. We wanted to help but Dolorosa urged us not to, her view was that it was plain that he wanted to be left alone. Psiionic pointed out that if he’d really wanted to do that he could have gone to someone’s hive and kicked them out of it and stayed there alone, we know he has done that before. Dolorosa then pointed out that just because he wanted to be left alone that did not mean he wanted to actually be alone. It seemed that she was right for when we all awoke the next night he was just as intrusive and overly talkative as usual, getting underfoot and asking questions about all sorts of hypothetical ethical situations. It seems to be his favourite game with Signless, to pester him with such questions as if to trap him into an unfavourable answer. Signless seems to enjoy the challenge most times and, as he pointed out before, Dahvid could only be trying to trap him if he already knew the right answer which he does not. Still, I find myself thinking of the woman. I wonder why this happened and moreover how often such a thing occurs to him. It must be
frightening for him given that he’s normally without us, he must usually deal with this alone. I can’t say I like the thought.

You’re really not sure that you buy her sympathy. Well, you buy that she feels it. You’re not sure your ancestor deserves it. He clearly had an advantage on you, he knew what he was doing and did it purposefully. You’ve just been blindly flailing around through everything, entirely oblivious until Sollux did research for you. On you. He’s deliberately manipulating people who haven’t agreed to it, if that had bad consequences for him then that’s his own fault. You at least didn’t know, that makes you better, right? Right?

If you’re in a building and you lean against the window and it falls out and the glass kills someone, that’s bad but you’re not bad, right? You didn’t mean to. But if you’d seen the person and shoved the glass to kill them on purpose that’s bad. Then again, if you’re the same dead person in either scenario does it matter to you if it was a mistake or malice? Are you shitty for what you’ve done even though you didn’t mean to or know what you were doing? Can you even make that judgement when you don’t know just how much you have been doing?

Closing the book you turn your attention again to Rohhze.

“You said your chucklevoodoos used to leak out, do they still do that?” you ask. More importantly to you, you need to know if you’re doing that still.

“They can sometimes, if I’m especially angry or if I feel cornered but I like to think that my control is better now.” Rohhze answers you, opening one eye from where you think she’d started to meditate.

You want that, you want to know when you’re doing your thing even without meaning to. You’ve got the feel of the deliberate stuff even if you’re still shaky on its application, but the subliminal evades you. If you know what it feels like then you can cut it off, shove it all in a box in your head and never touch it again. Well, maybe not never. If there was an emergency and you needed to break someone away from one of your friends then perhaps, if there was no other way.

“I’m going to go talk to the boss man.” you announce.

“Touch up first.” Rohhze reminds you, tapping her cheek. Ugh, you must have smeared some of your paint off, or maybe not applied it right in the first place. You know that when Jaspers deems you learned enough you’ll get to choose your own design instead of the blank white you are now but you know you’ll never wear it again so it scarcely matters. You fix your face and head on out.

Locating Jaspers isn’t hard, he’s preaching right now so you’re polite and take a seat. The whole religious part of this deal mostly washes over you, everything about the messiahs just sounds like highblood shit to you. Rohhze would scold you but you end up zoning out, only focusing when the preaching is over and people break away in their own groups. Meandering to the stage you greet your master in the way you’ve learned is appropriate with them. He crouches down on the stage edge and eyes you.

“And what can I mew for you, my most troublesome student?” he asks with an infrequent cat pun. They’re usually a good indicator of his mood so you’re happy to hear it.

“Rohhze mentioned that her voodoos leak out sometimes, or they did more before you taught her. I think mine do too, before I left my friends were saying how even strangers are usually nicer to me than they are to other people. How do I tell if I’m doing it?” you ask, straight to the point.

“So people like you more, so what?” Jaspers says and sprawls back on the stage with a sigh.
“So I don’t want to be soft boiling the pans of everyone I meet with pity, I don’t want to externally influence how they feel about me. That’s what. Shit, man.” you hiss.

Jaspers sits up and rolls his eyes so hard his whole head follows the motion. He leans in and jabs you in the forehead with his finger.

“You are an outside influence. You think your friends wouldn’t have given you the time of night if you hadn’t made them feel nice to you? Maybe! Maybe they wouldn’t have given you the time if you weren’t small and sweet to look at, maybe if your face was scarred and clawed up they’d have looked away. Your gift is part of you, I teach you to use it and you treat it like garbage.” Jaspers hisses at you, low and threatening as he grabs your face in his hand.

“I came for help because I hate this and I want it to stop, you know that.” you point out.

“Fine, but you can’t do anything until you’re more aware. You need to meditate, connect to the bright miraculous core of yourself and focus just on it. Then you’ll see what you do.” he tells you as he lets you go.

“Up there?” you ask, pointing up on the stage with him but Jaspers shakes his head. He points outside the tent where the loud hustle and bustle of purples going about their business and making a huge racket is.


You open your mouth to point out that it’ll be loud out there. You’ll get distracted and moreover if you’re on those pillars people will assume they’re invited to try to break your concentration with their chucklevodooos. They probably are being invited to do that. You don’t say these things though because your master is not a fan of being told things he already knows. Instead you just grumble and head out there.

You hop up onto a smaller pillar and sit on it crosslegged like you’ve seen Rohhze do. Meditating is never something that you’ve done but you get the principle, it’s thinking of nothing. Actually, you guess you’ve been instructed to focus on yourself. The “core” of who you are, whatever that means. Presumably to the exclusion of every other little thing going on around you.

Shutting your eyes makes you a little too twitchy so you just space off with your vision unfocused. You ignore everyone going by, the noise of the crowd, the smell of the mud and perpetual sugary aroma. Left unattended your mind flickers to Karkat, to his messages. You push it aside for now. Sollux then, but with guilt you ignore that and then get past your guilt for doing that. It’s like playing whack-a-ground-mammal with your thinksponge, each thought you bat aside another pops up in its place. Let’s face it, you’re the champion of unending rambling thought.

Visualising helps. You imagine a red ball in your chest and say it’s you, you try to keep it undisturbed and smooth. An older troll walks by and jabs fear at you and it takes several minutes to untangle yourself from it. You get caught in another trap of watching yourself watch yourself, commenting along until you remember that you’re not really supposed to be doing that either.

Needless to say when a group of three slightly older trolls comes to a stop by you agitation rolls around inside you, hard to shut down and only rising as they talk.

“It’s that rustie initiate.”

“He’s being tested, right? We should…”

Oh, no. You don’t want them to do that. You’re starting to get it, you just want them to be nice and
leave you be. Focus on that red ball in your chest that’s you. It’s not so smooth feeling now, instead it’s more fuzzy and prickled.

“It’s not like he’ll make it anyway, come on I’m hungry.”

They walk off and your attention pulls to them so much that you watch them walk away. Did you do that? Did you influence them to be nicer to you? Or… is that just coincidence? Uneasily you settle down again but your agitation isn’t so easy to push back this time. You feel ruffled, uneasy.

You can feel something within you, unnoticed before but with hyper focus you can just catch it. Like listening so hard you can hear your blood pulse against your eardrums. It’s like the subtle buzz of a lightbulb that’s not in right a sound so background that you’d never notice it, or you wouldn’t until you do and now you can hear it. You can feel it. It’s small and weak, little flickers here and there that amp up slightly as you become more distressed. No one’s stopping to throw themselves at your feet but you look around and see that when people do notice you their expressions don’t seem so judgemental now.

Trying to clamp down on it is hard, like holding your breath for too long, but eventually you manage it. People start ignoring you or looking at you meanly. Someone smacks you with their voodoos and you lose your focus. Trying to control yourself is impossible, you can stop it for a moment or two but soon enough your subliminal ‘like me’ vibe starts to seep out again.

You run, rushing back to your tent and throwing yourself into the heap of cushions with all the angst and drama you can muster. You curl up tight and try to shut it off. You manage, for maybe thirty seconds. In either an example of your shitty voodoos controlling her or just the worst timing Rohhze walks over to you at that moment with a look of concern on her face.

“Are you alright, or should I leave you to your melodrama?” Rohhze asks, lifting a cushion away from your head.

“I am always doing it and I don’t think I can turn it off for more than, oh, half a minute.” you whine.

“Then you’re probably fine.” Rohhze comments, despite the overwhelming evidence against your fineness in any way shape or form. You guess the expression you are pulling accurately conveys how much this is not fine.

“If you’re doing this all of the time then it can’t be that strong. You’re my friend, obviously. I do like you, I feel nice things towards you most of the time and perhaps that is as a result of the background radiation of your-” she says.

“Cuddlevoodoos.” you interrupt.

“Of that. But it can’t be that strong because even when you are doing it you can irritate me enough that I want to beat you around the head with nearby soft furnishings. In moments such as this one.” Rohhze says stiffly, narrowing her eyes at you.

“But I don’t want to be influencing anyone at all!” you complain, sitting up and then sliding down in the avalanche of cushions you set off with your movement.

“Well, tough shit.” Rohhze says with a shrug and throws the cushion at you.

You get her actual point, that there’s nothing you can do about it aside from keep practicing. Maybe you get more control, maybe you don’t. Either way there’s shit all that whining about it is going to achieve. That said you can’t really discuss the topic at all without getting ‘whiny’ about it so the only thing to do is change the topic.
“Can we not talk about me right now? Can we talk about you instead?” you mumble, slouching into the heap of cushions and fiddling with the tassels on the one Rohhze smacked you with.

“Me?” Rohhze asks, arching an eyebrow at you.

“Yes, you. This whole thing here has been about me and my shitty, defective, mutant thinksponge and it’s awful abilities. We’ve not talked about you unless it related to me because I’m the worst, always.” you grumble.

“The self depreciation isn’t really doing it for me, Dayvhe.” Rohhze sighs but nonetheless she takes a seat near you. This feels weirdly like a pile but you think it’s just the topography of what you’re sitting on rather than the topic you’ve got going on.

“How are you and Kanaya?” you ask.

“We’re fine. I miss her of course but I’ve been messaging her a lot and she understands why we have to be here, she’s worried about you too, naturally.” Rohhze answers you.

“Sorry about that.” you say and Rohhze shrugs.

“And how are your quadrants?” she asks sweetly.

“I’m still not answering anyone’s messages, I don’t want to risk controlling them.” you say.

“That and you’re being a pissy wiggler about it. If you’re so very worried about it then I give you full permission to try… to try ‘cuddlevooodooing’ me over trollian. Just think really hard about something and write it out. Go on.” Rohhze insists.

You hesitate but you do want to know and Rohhze said it was okay so…

Taking a deep breath you pick up your palmhusk, ignore all of your new messages and open one to Rohhze.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling tentacleTherapist [TT]

TG: hey rohhze id really love it if you got up and went over to the other side of the tent

turntechGodhead [TG] ceased trolling tentacleTherapist [TT]

You focus on it as you type trying to slot the request into a kind of ‘I know you like me and want to make me happy’ groove. Rohhze looks at you placidly and then pointedly opens her trollian message, reads it and puts it away.

“Pass. Also, if it had worked I’d have just repeated the test from the other side of the camp to try to be out of your range. But it seem that if you’re not verbally directing something at me you can’t channel it at all. Perhaps when you gain more control you could do non-verbal commands but still the point remains proven. You can message people just fine.” Rohhze says.

You look down at your palmhusk and at Karkat’s lit up handle. You could talk to him without influencing him!

You could… talk. Talk to Karkat. Now, even.

A cold sweat prickles the back of your neck and you don’t think it has anything to do with Rohhze.
“Mmmaybe later.” you say hurriedly.

“Coward.” Rohhze snorts.

“Alright, yes, okay? I care about Karkat a lot and I’m terrified about what he’s going to say when I do talk to him. I mean if I do see him he’s going to gut me! He’s gonna- he’s gonna rip my bloodpusher out and kick it around, he’ll wear my entrails as a disgusting yet fashionable scarf! I’m freaked out, okay?! Congratulations Holmes, you solved another mystery!” you rant, throwing your hands in the air.

“Wow, ‘a disgusting yet fashionable scarf’? You’ve been spending too much time with Karkat.” she teases.

“I’ve not been spending enough, I’m in withdrawal and overcompensating.” you groan, muffling your voice in the cushion.

“We’re talking about me again,” you say as you pull the cushion away, “back to you. What about the rest of your quadrants, weren’t you pursuing Vriska in a wild blind spot of otherwise good judgement on people?”

“I was. But… I don’t think anything is going to come of it.” Rohhze answers softly and you sit up, sensing that you’ve hit actual interesting information. Rohhze looks over at you and tuts softly at your overt interest.

“I know you don’t like her. I didn’t either, my feelings were black after all. The appeal is there, she’s smart, cunning, competitive. That’s all good blackrom appeal. I’d antagonise her and she’d antagonise me back, it was promising.” she continues.

“What happened?” you ask.

“I don’t know. The last perigee she seemed to lose interest. She put time into that game of yours and she just doesn’t seem interested in me anymore. It’s a little hurtful to have someone tire of you but I find myself wondering if I really had feelings for her or just enjoyed antagonising someone, after all I enjoy teasing you but I don’t have black feelings for you at all. It’s strange is all.” Rohhze says with a little shrug.

“If it’s any consolation I think she’s untrustworthy and you can do better.” you offer.

“Very sweet of you Dayvhe.” Rohhze says with a smile. She looks at you thoughtfully for a moment and then leans in as if she has some big secret.

“I know you have this passive thing that you can’t control, but have you considered that it’s possible that people like you when they talk to you because you’re a nice person? When you’re not trying to be a tool you’re very likable and even when you are a tool it’s obvious that’s a deviation from your usual personality. Just a thought. Also, you should really troll someone, I’m going to get something to eat to give you some privacy.” Rohhze says, tapping your nose and then sweeping out of the tent as if she was wearing a majestic ballgown and not clown clothes.

You look down at your palmhusk again, at the many lit up names on it. Your finger hovers over Sollux’s name for a moment but you just don’t think you can face him right now. Besides, he’ll probably call you out but he’s clearly so worried that he’ll probably just be nice to you and you don’t really deserve that, do you? Screw all your practicing, you’re going into this live.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]
TG: uh so sorry for not answering any of your messages ive been trying to deal with this whole voodoos thing and i didnt want to drag any of you into it until i had some kind of a handle on it but im starting to get there now so i should really troll you sorry this message is so long i just know that youre gonna fire messages back at me so fast and i actually have time to think about this one

CG: DAYVHE STRYDR I AM GOING TO FUCKING MURDER YOU!

Ah, fuck.

==> Author: Run path C2

‘Voices won’t go away

They stay for days and days

They say some awful things

Ways to make you fade away

I don’t think no one’s home

And we’re just here alone

I better find you first

Before you find the phone’

‘Another way out’ - TGE

TA: 2o that’2 the edited down ver2iion of that, or 2ubbed at lea2t. hal cleaned iit up.
TA: the plu2 2iide ii2 that ii wa2 iimmune two hii2 p2iioniic 2hiit a2 well, 2o that’2 2omethiing. iit’2 not ju2t dv expo2ure protectiing me from him.
AG: Yeah, 8ut like, you were also immune to me. Where did you figure that into your theory?
TA: Shut up is where.
AG: HAH! I got you. 8ut why did you even tell Hal a8out it in the first place?
AR: This turns out that if you plug outrageously old tech into my network I notice.
AC: :33 < wait, what? how did he even get in here?
AR: This conversation is being held over my network, I’m everywhere.
CG: AND HE HAS NO GODDAMN SENSE OF PERSONAL SPACE. STOP BEING VAGUELY MENACING AND GO TALK TO OTHER PEOPLE, HAL.
GC: R3M1ND M3 WHY W3 DONT W4NT SOM3 SUP3R POW3RFUL 41 H3LP1NG US 1NV3ST1G4T3 TH1S C4S3?
AG: 8ecause we’re at 8reaking point for 8chingly irritating losers. We already have Equius and Tavros in this group.
AC: :33 < that’s not nice vwhiskers!
CT: D --> It is fine, Nepeta. Vriska will apologise before she gets another upgrade to her arm or her eye.
GC: DOUBTFUL!
CG: YEAH, NO YOU’VE MET VRISKA BEFORE EQUIUS, YOU KNOW SHE WON’T.
AG: And we all know he’ll get off on it too!
GG: oh i really didn’t need that mental image.
EB: hard same!
AG: Hahahahahahahaha! You're all stuck with it anyway! And Tavros, no comment on me calling you a loser?
AT: i KIND OF THINK THAT IF SOMEONE COULD TALK YOU INTO BEING NICE BY
JUST, uH, aSKING YOU TO NOT BE MEAN IT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED ALREADY, i'M A LITTLE BIT DONE BEATING THAT DEAD HOOFBEAST, AT: wAIT, sORRY EQUiUS, AC: :33 < getting back to the point, though. tavros you were saying about the darkl33r guy and how he wasn't a bad purrson?
AT: i'M NOT SURE HOW COMFORTABLE I AM IN PASSING ETHICAL JUDGEMENT THERE, hE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE IN THE REBELLION DYING, AT: bUT BY THE POINT IN THE VIDEO SOLLUX FOUND HE HAD TURNED EVERYTHING AROUND, hE WAS HELPING THE REBELS, hE HID THEIR LOCATIONS AND EVEN KILLED LOYALISTS AND PASSED THEM OFF AS DEAD RESISTANCE MEMBERS TO TRY TO EXTEND HIS POSITION, CG: AND DAYVHE'S ANCESTOR MURDERED HIM ANYWAY. GREAT.
GC: 1N D4HV1DS D3F3NC3 TH3 3V1D3NC3 D1D LOOK PR3TTY34SY CONCLUS1ON TO JUMP TO TT: ▶ ▶ ▶ Me and Roxxie are going to go check out my old hive and the area around it. Pretty low chance there’s anything there from my ancestors but it’s worth a look. Also other reasons.
GA: And How Did You Get Into This Chat TT: ▶ ▶ ▶ Yeah when Hal says its his network what he means is it’s mine. AR: ▶ ▶ What he means is I let him in.

You groan and drop your head back on the arm of the loungeplank you don’t need to see the latest installment of ‘are we pitch or not’ from Hal and Dirkka. Karkat is glaring at his husktop screen. You shift on the loungeplank and stretch your legs out to him until your mismatched socks are pressed against his hip. Karkat furiously types with one hand and absently pets your shin with the other.

Great, now your palmhusk is pinging again but it’s not the group memo.
timaeusTestified [TT] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

TT: ▶ ▶ ▶ This is just a local conversation, and it’ll be erased afterwards.
TA: why doe2 every conver2atiion wiith you or hal over trolliiian begiin iin the mo2t un2ettliing way2 po22iible?
TT: ▶ ▶ ▶ It’s a gift.
TT: ▶ ▶ ▶ Also, more importantly, we’re going to investigate the signs of anyone else aside from Edward Norton having been there and seeing if they’ve come back at all.
TA: that 2ound2 really dangerou2.
TT: ▶ ▶ ▶ Danger is my middle name.
TA: what??
TT: ▶ ▶ ▶ It’s not, I don’t know why I said that. Who would even have a middle name? What an absurd idea. I’ve been spending too much time talking to Jayekh, clearly.
TT: ▶ ▶ ▶ Speaking of him, he’s getting Jayed to help boost the capabilities of the scanner that can track ships.
TA: two track the actor2?
TT: ▶ ▶ ▶ Yeah.
TA: niice that you're fiinally lii2teniing two me about that. why the change? before you guy2 were definiitely bru2hiing me off.
TT: ▶ ▶ ▶ That’s fair, I looked into the information you had a little but you’d organised it so randomly and your notes were unintelligible crazy person scrwlings. I chalked it up to you not being in your right mind but Dayvhe said I should look into it again and now with him gone I’m going stir crazy so I may have finally got to it.
TA: 2ee! ii'm not a crazy con2piiracy theoriit2t!
TT: Well.
TT: You have a theory.
TT: About a conspiracy.
TA: If you call me crazy I will come down two your block and bounce you around the room like a kickball.
TT: Just saying!
TA: Well don't!
TT: Still, you’re right about The Grand Entertainer being involved with all of these people but I still have no idea why he would do this.
TT: Besides if he had some problem with us or with the town I come from why wouldn’t he just come here himself? Why send someone else?
TA: Well try not two die when you're checking that out. I think I'm going to go back two that temple two check out the whole murder scene again, maybe see if I miied some tech in that ca2ket.
TT: Oh. I think I just worked something out.

timaeusTestified [TT] ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

Wait, what?

“Oh great, now Dirkka is just adding people to this conversation! Roxxie, Jayne and Jayekh are in the memo now, this is getting too big to even handle at this point!” Karkat bitches.

You look in the group memo and sure enough Dirkka has done just that. You skim past the back and forth of ‘who the hell are you people’ and get to the point where Dirkka is resharing your edited video to the newcomers.

TG: i mean aside from that being like hellaciously mean im not really shore what we are supposed to be getting from that
GG: Oh my goodness that’s Buster Keaton! :O
TT: He’s an actor, right? I knew his face was familiar!
GG: I mean, yes, he is but a very old one. Very early Planet Hollywood era productions.
GT: Goodness me yes he was part of the beginning of the modern golden age of cinema that still continues to this night.
TA: wait, we're talking about dahviid 2tryder here.
CG: HE WAS RAISED BY CAL.
AG: oh, this is disgustingly obvious. Some random adult highblood has no motive to send adults down here killing kids and running around. And if The Grand Entertainer has Dahvid's already st8d abilities of persuasion it's not beyond the realm of possibility to think he could exert some control through music, that's recorded audio too after all.
AT: i THINK I'M A LITTLE LOST IN THIS CONVERSATION,
CG: IT'S POSSIBLE, I GUESS. DAHVID WAS HIGHBLOODED AND THERE’S NO WAY YOU BECOME AS POWERFUL AS THE GRAND ENTERTAINER IS WITHOUT THAT.
AND I CAN IMAGINE THAT POWERS OF PERSUASION WOULD BE AN ASSET IN THAT INDUSTRY. IT'D CERTAINLY EXPLAIN HOW HE SEEMS TO BE INVOLVED WITH SO MANY SUBVERSIVE MOVIES. MORE SO ACTUALLY IF HE WAS INTO THE REBELLION.
TG: wait so does this mean that like dirkkas ancestor is alive too? dionate or w/e he was called? that theyre for sure the same dude and not a rename?
EB: no way does a bronze live that long.
GC: IF YOU W3R3 P4Y1NG 3V3N TH3 SL1G3ST B1T OF 4TT3NT1ON JOHN YOUD KNOW FROM TH3 V1D3O TH4T D4HV1D M3NT1ONS 1MMORT4L1TY OF 4 K1ND FOR H1M 4ND D1ONT3
CT: D --> But there's no explanation at all of how such a thing would be done Not unless it was through some kind of biotech upgrades but even then it would be ludicrously hard to manage Lowb100ds just aren't strong enough for that kind of thing

TT: Excuse you?
AC: :33 < he didn't really mean that, promise!
GG: okay! moving on from that trainwreck!
GG: if we accept that dahvid and tge are the same person which seems pretty likely it still doesn't totally answer why the hell all of this is happening.
GG: sure it explains why he would send movie stars to do his bidding if he is under hive arrest or whatever from the empress but why send anyone?
GC: GOOD PO1NT J4YD3D 1F H3 W4S UP TH3R3 FOR 4G3S WHY CH4NG3 TH1NGS

TG: we killed hii2 lu2u2, that's what changed.
AG: Oh.
TA: we killed hii2 lu2u2, that's what changed.

“Don’t you dare start blaming yourself for this, even if that’s what caused him to do this his psychopathic behaviour is not your fault.” Karkat interrupts, not even looking up from his device to slap some hard opinions in your face.

GG: Alright, but how did he know about that?
TT: Some kind of surveillance maybe?
GT: People in your genetic line being slightly paranoid? Never!
TT: Jayekh, you wound me.
TG: buzy u know hes right
GG: Well regardless it would be best for our investigation to know more and to confirm if we can that these are the same people we’re talking about. I’m sure the nearest city’s records department would still have those records and with the dates that Sollux got from the tablet and how old we know he was at a set time so I can look him up more easily.
GC: DO YOU 3V3N H4V3 TH3 CL34R4NC3 TO G3T 1NTO TH4 SECTION B3C4US3 I KNOW I DONT 4ND 1TS 4LL OFF N3TWORK R3CORDS SO SOLLUX C4NT 3V3N H4CK 1T
GG: I’ve passed enough exams and earned enough kudos to have access to the building.
GC: ...4ND TH3 R3CORDS ROOM?
GG: I could perhaps use a little help there, I could pretend to be working for a higher blooded client perhaps.
TG: sweetie as much as i would like to help you in your totes secret spy shit i cant adult now remember
EB: and rohze is gone so that leaves me and equius i guess?
CT: D --> I am accompanying Nepeta to the temple later, it is clearly far too dangerous to go alone
GG: I think you just volunteered yourself john!
EB: nuts
GG: I also wouldn’t say no to some muscle in case things go south. Sollux?
TA: wait what?
AG: Hah! Metaphorical muscle o8viously!
TA: of cour2e i'll help you, jayyne. i can ab2olutely defend you from anythiing with my p2iioniic2 and would be *happy* two help.

Karkat snorts in amusement next to you and you glare at the traitor.

“Oh come on, you’re so easily riled. How you’re insecure with all of your power I’ll never know. What’s Vriska got on you except for mind control and a single minded joy in stabbing things while dressed as a pirate?” Karkat scoffs.
He has a point there.

The alert on your phone that Dayvhe is online pings and you look at your screen hopefully, maybe he’ll message you this time! The group chat beeps a little as people talk more, seeing as you're tabbed out of it to look hopefully at your contact list. Karkat however should be looking at the conversation so he shouldn't be getting alerts and yet there one is.

Karkat sucks in a sharp breath and lets it out in a furious hiss. Wide eyed with hope you lean over his shoulder and see Dayvhe's rust words spread so beautifully across the screen, oh you've missed him so much and now he's talking again!

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]

TG: uh so sorry for not answering any of your messages ive been trying to deal with this whole voodoo thing and i didnt want to drag any of you into it until i had some kind of a handle on it but im starting to get there now so i should really troll you sorry this message is so long i just know that youre gonna fire messages back at me so fast and i actually have time to think about this one
CG: DAYVHE STRYDR I AM GOING TO FUCKING MURDER YOU!

"Karkaaaat." you whine. You don't want Dayvhe scared away at all. But no, he's replying!

TG: i probably deserve that
TG: definitely actually
CG: YOU FUCKING THINK?! YOU OWE ALL OF US THE WORLD'S GREATEST EXPLANATION FOR THIS SHIT, HOW DARE YOU DO THIS TO US!
CG: NOT TO MENTION ALL THE EXPLAINING ABOUT YOUR HOOFBEASTSHIT POWERS THAT YOU KEPT FROM US!
TG: i know i know
TG: this isnt what i wanted at all i never would have come anywhere near any of you if i had known i was doing this to any of you
TG: i am beyond sorry

"He didn't know, I told you he didn't know." you whisper as if you might scare Dayvhe away by speaking too loud.

"He SAYS that, we have no proof." Karkat counters.

"Can't you at least hear him out?" you plead.

You watch a muscle in Karkat's cheek twitch with tension from how hard he's clenching his jaw. Then all that tension seems to release as he sighs.

"I'll ask him." he says.

CG: WE NEED TO TALK.
TG: i know man thats why i got up the guts to finally troll you
CG: NO, IN PERSON. WE NEED TO SEE YOU SO YOU CAN EXPLAIN ALL THIS SHIT AND THEN DECISIONS CAN BE MADE.
TG: *we*
TG: shit no man i cant see sollux
TG: i cant handle him right now

You flinch back away from Karkat and his screen. Dayvhe can't handle you? He doesn't want to see you specifically even though he's willing to see Karkat and reached out to him personally? What did
you do? Even you can hear the pained whine from inside your thorax and Karkat's expression is livid as he furiously types away to Dayvhe. He stops, curses, then looks at you.

"Do you want me to see him? To find out what he has to say and come back to you with it or are you done with this?" Karkat asks sharply.

You open and shut your mouth mutely for a moment. You can't believe he's shutting you personally out like that. Dayvhe hadn't even said something like he couldn't handle being around more than one person right now and he wanted to see you separately which you could have maybe understood. No, he just personally can't deal with seeing you.

"I... I always said I wasn't going to leave Dayvhe unless he made me. If he doesn't want to see me then he doesn't want to see me, I can stay away but I want to know what's going on. Plus, you deserve answers, I know you still pity him too and I know you miss him as much as I do." you point out. You know Karkat's angry and rightly so but he's a complex guy, under his fury there's still real feelings and he deserves to know where he stands with those and not lose them because of you.

Karkat groans, his head in his hands and starts to type again.

"You're sure?" he checks with a glance at you. You nod and he hits send.

"Then I'll see him tonight, he's sending me the directions." Karkat tells you and sets his palmhusk down next to him. You open the group message up again and look over what you missed.

"I guess I'm going off to help Jayyne and John with their investigation." you say with a touch of bitterness that you are unable to keep from your voice.

TA: jayyne and john iif we're going two look at the record2 in the city we could meet at the miidway 2tation between the thre2h thru2t central line and your 2tepford branch. you diid mean my city for the record2 riight?
GG: I did, yes. How about we meet there in, say, two hours?
EB: i can do that

Karkat pushes your tech away and winds his arms around your neck, plastering his whole upper body to yours.

"I'm gonna kick his ass and find out what the hell has been going on. He can't do this to us. I'll tell you everything the moment I'm out of there, ok?" Karkat says against the skin of your neck. You nod softly and Karkat gives you a not so gentle squeeze then gets up to get his stuff together. He eventually leaves before you do, you're actually the only person in the hive right now. You don't know if Hal is even here, you haven't seen him yet tonight. It's odd, everything about this night is odd and so you're left to wander the halls to the exit, following the wizard statues to guide you.

You go to check the directions but realise when you do that you had set the whole chat up with security that deletes the chat and any record of it from all devices the moment it's closed. Good thing you know the station you're going to, even if you didn’t say where to meet you can individually troll them when you get there if you don’t manage to spot one another.

You take the train as planned, it's helpful that John and Jayyne live in more or less the same area, even though they didn't know until recently that they lived so close to someone else who was friends with Dayvhe. Finding the two of them isn't that hard, even if they blend into the relatively upper mid end of the hemospectrum that knocks around these parts.

“Are you ready for some counter intelligence?” John demands to know loudly as he walks up to you
with a huge grin on his face.

“You’re counter intelligence.” you retort.

Jayyne ignores your insult to John and herds you both onto the right train and sits down. You’ve not really spent a whole lot of time around her in person, just here and there and never without Roxxie around. It’s odd and not helped by how unhappy you feel to be so excluded by Dayvhe. You don’t want to be pathetic and mopey but it’s hard to just suppress your moirail rejecting you like that. Focusing on Jayyne’s plan is far more helpful.

“It may require a little bit of subterfuge to get into this place, like I said earlier I can secure us entry to the building but further in than that might be tricky. If we go with the cover story that I am looking up information for John then that may get us the leverage we need.” Jayyne explains after she checks that no one around you is listening in.

“Ok, but who is Sollux in this situation, why is he there?” John asks.

“Assistant?” you suggest.

“Hm, sorry Sollux. I’ve never seen any teal with a lowblooded assistant, much less a hue as warm as yellow. Claiming that would likely make me look less credible. Which is absurd, of course, but it’s the way it is right now.” Jayyne says, clearly carefully phrasing that to try to not cause you offence. As if you’ve gone through your life unaware of the amount of shit lowbloods get.

“You could be my matesprit!” John suggests.

“Tell anyone that I am and I’ll rearrange your face.” you hiss. John rolls his eyes at you, you know he wasn’t offering for real but still! You’re not interested in even playing pretend here.

“Well whatever we come up with and whatever lies we have to tell when we’re they’re it’s important that we all stick to the same story. If one of us says something then as far as the rest of us are concerned it’s the whole truth that you’d swear on your lusus for, ok? You cannot expose contradictions to teals, alright?” Jayyne says seriously and you and John both nod.

With that decided you set yourself on your new activity, looking out of the window and feeling sorry for yourself. John and Jayyne aren’t talking but you get the feeling they’re watching you.

“Hey, man, are you ok?” John asks awkwardly.

“’m fine.” you mumble, not looking around.

“You don’t seem fine.” Jayyne points out delicately.

Great, they’re not going to let this go.

“Dayvhe got in touch with Karkat earlier.” you tell them, not looking around.

“Hey! That’s great news! I’m glad that dumbass has finally realised he needs to talk to people again. I know this whole thing was a lot but geez. What did he say?” John asks brightly.

“He talked to Karkat, they’re meeting up.” you answer, trying not to grit your teeth as you do.

“Did- Sollux, did he not talk to you?” Jayyne asks.

You cringe and that’s clearly answer enough for them both.
“Oh. Oh, I didn’t…” John gasps and slaps a hand over his own mouth before he can stick his foot in there any further.

“You know I bet he hasn’t talked to Dirkka or Roxxie yet either. He was always like this when he was little, if he broke something and was too ashamed to admit it he’d just hide it and hope you never noticed. I thought he’d grown out of avoiding his problems but I guess not!” Jayyne says in disgust. You turn around to look and she seems really pissed at him.

“It’s not…” you start trying to defend him. It’s not Dayvhe avoiding his problems like a moron, it’s just he clearly doesn’t like you enough any more to deal with you. Or you’re too much work, or he’s mad at you for revealing a secret he’d have rather remained ignorant of. But that’s shit and you don’t know the real answer and the reason you don’t know is because he’s choosing not to talk to you. But that’s not your fault, right?

“I didn’t think about asking Dirkka if he’d said anything,” you admit. But Jayyne shakes her head and waves you off.

“I’m not surprised, I’d be upset in your position too and not really up for thinking about who else he might be ticking off. I’ll let Dirkka, Roxxie and Jayekh know now. I’ll tell you he’ll be getting a talking to when he comes back, you mark my words.” Jayyne huffs indignantly. You can kind of see it now, how even Jayyne and Jayekh were if not direct lusus figures to Dayvhe they were something adjacent to that. Dayvhe is plenty old enough now and yet Jayyne is obviously going to scold him just like a lusus would the moment she gets the chance, it’s almost funny.

She’s right though, running from his problems is pretty standard Dayvhe isn’t it? Well, sometimes he faces his problems head on, like that time he broke into a secret base and killed a bunch of people to rescue you.

You’re having the most conflicted diamond feelings on the planet right now, a winner is you.

Pleasingly Jayyne and John leave you alone and talk to each other for the ride there about innocuous things that you can ignore for the most part.

carcinoGeneticist [CG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

CG: I'M HERE ON THE EDGE OF TENT PSYCHO CITY NOW JUST SO YOU KNOW, ROHHZE IS COMING OUT TO MEET ME TO SMUGGLE ME INSIDE.
TA: you don't need two keep me updated.
CG: DO YOU WANT ME TO JUST LET YOU KNOW WHEN YOU'RE ON MY WAY BACK?
CG: I MEAN WHEN I'M ON MY WAY BACK, GOD.
TA: yeah 2ure. ii'm not even 2ure iif ii want you tell me iif dv tell2 you why he diidn't want two 2ee me. ii think ii want two hear that from him my2elf.
TA: unle22 he never want2 two 2ee me again or 2omethiing. whiich iiif that’2 the ca2e tell me that.
CG: IF HE BREAKS UP WITH YOU FOR THIS WE'LL BOTH BE FUCKING SINGLE AND MISERABLE. YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG.
TA: maybe ii 2hould have ju2t kept my mouth 2hut. ii thought ii’d done the right thing for himm even iiif iit 2ucked and he diidn't liike iit then and himm not talkiing two anyone wa2 2hiitty but at lea2t he wa2 refu2iing two talk two anyone that wa2n't phy2iually there. but now he’2 called you over two talk iit2 liike, fuck.
TA: diid ii do the right thing?
CG: STOP THAT THIS SECOND, YOU DID THE RIGHT THING. DON'T YOU DARE BEAT YOURSELF UP!
TA: ii ju2t wii2h he’d tell me why he’2 not talkiing two me!
CG: SOLLUX, ARE YOU CRYING?
TA: ii’m not cryiing on publi2c tran2port kk. 2hut up.
CG: I’M NOT SURE I BELIEVE YOU.
TA: fiine, a2k john then.
CG: ALRIGHT, I BELIEVE MORE THAT YOU WOULDN’T CRY IN FRONT OF JOHN RATHER THAN NOT CRYING ON A TRAIN. GOODNESS KNOWS YOU GIVE NEGATIVE FUCKS ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE’S OPINIONS, ESPECIALLY STRANGERS.
TA: look, the la2t few periigee2 or 2o have ju2t been e2peciially emotiional. mo2t people have never 2een me cry and you ju2t happen two be one of the few people ii do that around. ii’m not comiing down with the goddamn vapour2 at every po22iible opportuniy and wriiing out my anguii2h duct2 on the 2houlder2 of ju2t anyone nearby you know!
CG: FUCK.
CG: WE NEED A THING.
TA: a thiing?
CG: A THING.
CG: <3<>c3<
TA: well iiit’2 not that becauu2e that’2 godawful two look at. but yeah, 2ame or whatever.
TA: look, ju2t 2ee hiim and tell me when you’re comiing back and anythiing viital ii gue22. ii get the feeling thii2 ii2 gonna be a rough night.
CG: WE’LL TALK LATER, OK?
CG: ROHHZE HAS BEEN WAITING FOR ME FOR A MINUTE OR SO NOW SO I’D BETTER GO. TROLL ME IF YOU NEED ME, OK? DON’T DO ANYTHING DUMB.
TA: when do ii ever do anything dumb?

carcinoGeneticist [CG] ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

It’s nice to feel the gentle warmth of Karkat’s affection through the hollow sadness that’s stuck to you so far tonight, he’s the best friend anyone could have.

In the time it took you to have your little relationship drama moment you’ve crossed most of the distance to the city and you’re close enough that people are standing up and gathering their things as they move closer to the door to be the first people to get off, like that’ll get them where they’re going any amount sooner than actually matters.

The three of you disembark and head to the judicial records building. You didn’t really know where it was because your city is a big place and you’ve never had any reason to go to the courthouse as evidenced by you still being alive.

“I say we recon the building quickly in case we have to make a fast escape!” John whispers excitedly to you both as you look at the building in question. You shrug and John rushes off to do just that.

“Do you think we should have gone with him?” you ask after a minute or two as you look down at Jayyne.

“Oh, maybe. But look he’s coming back so I guess it all turned out well!” she says brightly and true enough John is coming back to you both.

“Ok, there’s only one way in and one way out. Though, really I guess you can go in or out of either of them because that’s how doors work, duh. But the front is obviously the big entrance. If we want to make a fast escape I say the back.” John explains.

“Or any of the windows.” you point out.
“Not all of us can fly, Sollux.” John sighs and rolls his eyes.

“I can more than carry both of you.” you assure him.

“Not the point. Look, we need to act like this is routine for us, almost boring even. Blend in. Ok?” Jayyne asks you both. You and John nod.

“Good, let’s go. After me.” Jayyne says and picks up a brisk but businesslike stroll towards the building. She’s already fishing her card out and flashing it at the door as she gets close.

“They’re with me.” Jayyne says, not looking up from her palmhusk as she walks through the door. You watch the teal guard on the door as you go by, unless you turn your head most people can’t be sure just where you’re looking. Some people get it after a while of looking at you and some people like Terezi just seem to have a sixth sense for it but to most you’re just blank. It takes a little effort to school your face into the kind of seen but not heard lowblood in his place vibe that you basically never have. You’re not weak, you’ve never met another psionic of your type even in your league. Besides most people are so chronically stupid or useless that it’s hard to look up to other people.

It’s not like you think less of higher caste people by default. Roxxie is great and clearly very skilled, Equius for all his many personal and ethical failings is a good engineer. Terezi is whip smart, Kanaya is witty and wonderful, Vriska might be as morally suspect as a three ceagar note (which of course there are none) but she’s not incompetent.

You suppose seeing as Karkat introduced you to basically everyone in your circle of friends it speaks more to his good taste in people rather than coldbloods being good.

Still, the point is that you’re doing your best to look subservient and nonthreatening as you tail Jayyne and John into the building. Jayyne works out where you have to go and the three of you end up having to go up about six floors until you’re in the right area. A big sign above a large desk declares this ‘ARCHIVES’ so you suppose that you’re in the right place. It’s a nice room actually, Jayyne leads you closer to the desk where there are machines that you guess function as indexes of the place if the way Jayyne is searching is any clue. Around the whole back wall closest to you teal tinted glass showcases the city’s skyline around you. For all it’s problems you do like your city, even if you don’t live in it anymore.

Oh, shit. The teal woman behind the desk is glaring at the three of you and pushing herself up onto her feet. She angrily marches over on shockingly silent shoes.

“You need to show me your clearance badge, miss.” the woman says in a sharp whisper.

“I would thank you kindly not to interrupt me whilst I am obviously with a client, miss. Unless you wish I should bill my time to you instead of to him?” Jayyne shoots back quietly.

“Do you have the proper clearance forms to bring a client to these archives? Even if you have I very much doubt they will cover him as well.” the woman hisses, glaring at you.

Ugh, calm face. Maybe go for slightly intimidated? Yeah do that.

“You can’t kick him out!” John declares loudly.

Several people around the room shush you all and John winces.

“He’s my-” John hesitates and looks at you.

This fucker had better not claim to be in any of your quadrants, so help him!
“He’s my seeing eye troll! I’m blind, you can’t take him away.” John insists.

You’re his WHAT?! Oh, he is so dead.

“Exactly.” Jayyne agrees perfectly straight faced.

“If you’re blind why did you look at him when you spoke and why did you seem to need no help until just now?” the archivist interrogates him.

“Just because my client is blind does not mean that he does not know where his seeing eye lowblood is, additionally he was not hatched blind and as such retains habits from when he could see such as turning his head to look at people when addressing them.” Jayyne answers immediately as if this was a courtroom.

“And being blind all of my other senses are heightened and I’m probably smug about that a lot like all blind people are.” John adds a little louder than he should and gets shushed again by everyone around him. John claps a hand on your shoulder and looks vacantly off to a spot somewhere above and to the left of the archivist despite having looked her in the eye this whole time until now.

You’re not sure what’s more humiliating, being passed off as some highblood’s service aid or being dragged into the worst lie around.

“Then why do you have glasses?” the archivist asks sensibly.

John flounders for a moment and then dramatically takes his glasses off.

“Some glasses are for seeing and some… are for… being seen in. They’re fashionable.” John insists. You’re dying inside, you think, and honestly you welcome it with open arms.

The archivist glares at all of you and pulls her palmhusk out and starts to dial.

Well, that’s definitely security! You eye the buildings behind her and spot one with a particularly narrow pointed roof and make your decision. You snatch the palmhusk from her before she can call for back up, pick her up with your psionics and fling her soundly through the window and across to the rooftop of the other skyscraper. You watch for a moment as she grabs on tight and panics, trying to find a way down that won’t end in a sudden stop of both movement and life.

“I can’t believe you did that!” John exclaims.

“Don’t you start, John. I’m half tempted to toss you out there with her, seeing eye troll my ass!” you hiss at him and John has the audacity to giggle.

In the room around you several wide eyed teals are peeking out around the stacks, looking at the hole in the window and the missing archivist and then all of you. Specifically at you who is obviously the one responsible.

“If she’s not here then… unlimited archive access?” one of them says slowly.

“Well yes, if we aren’t checked for credentials how are we to know if we’re not allowed to look?” another says.

“There’s no one to submit request forms to…” a third adds.

Unanimously it seems that the occupants of the room are going to value their chance for illicit records reading above apprehending people responsible for criminally assaulting an evidently very unlikable
“We don’t have time for this, just shh and let me work.” Jayyne reprimands you both and starts hastily searching through the digital catalogue. You feel the buzz of a palmhusk and for a terrified moment you think it might be the one you stole, but no, it’s your own.

arachnidsGrip [AG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

AG: silliux
AG: soloux help
TA: vrii2ka? what'2 wrong?
AG: oh god i cant feel my fii8gers on my good arm
TA: what? why what happened? are you hurt?

“What's wrong?” John whispers seriously, you guess he caught the worried look on your face. You brush him off and wait for Vriska to answer you.

AG: You have to help they took her! i trued
AG: i tried to help but the woman was so much stronger than me i los control of my body
TA: who took who? what did someone do to you?
AG: It took everything i had to fight her control! AND THEN
AG: It was too l8 she had her its all my fault you need to save her!
TA: vrii2ka an2wer my que2tiion2 already! 2ave who? from what? who came? what happened to you?

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling arachnidsGrip [AG]

Oh this is useless! You're going to try someone in the group she was with, you swipe out of the conversation and peer at trollian. If Vriska is hurt she needs someone closer to her to come and offer her help.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling gallowsCalibrator [GC]

TA: terezii ii thiink vrii2ka'2 hurt, what'2 happened? are you near her?
[gallowsCalibrator is an idle troll]
TA: terezii!
[gallowsCalibrator is an idle troll]

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling gallowsCalibrator [GC]

What the fuck? You try Tavros and get the same response, Kanaya too.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling arsenicCatnip [AC]

TA: nepeta for the love of god plea2e be there!
AC: :33 < whoa there, what's all the furrs about?
TA: where ii2 vrii2ka?
AC: :33 < isn't she back at the temple? that's where we left them all. me and equius went out to get lunch for everyone, we're on the way back now. why, what's wrong?
TA: 2hiit, 2hiit, 2hiit. ii think 2omething'2 really wrong. vrii2ka ju2t trolled me beggiiing for help. 2he 2aiid they took 'her' which ii'm going two gue22 ii2 terezii becau2e ii can't get a hold of her or anyone el2e really. you're the fiir2t per2on ii your group ii've been able two reach.
AC: :33 < right, i'm going to run ahead to try to find her. if you can get any information about where
she is that'd be helpful otherwise i'm going to have to go to the cave and track her from there. i'll be there in a flash sollux, equius too.
TA: thank2 nep, ii'll try two get what ii can from her.

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling arsenicCatnip [AC]

Alright, back to Vriska. She’s left you messages since you trolled her last but they don’t make all that much sense.

AG: all my fault
AG: i just let them take them all in that fucking thing!
AG: and my stupid ARM! I'm goingto kick eqs stupid teth in for makin git so weak!
TA: vrii2ka 2hut up for a 2econd. nepeta and equiu2 are on their way two you, where are you? can you tell me what you're near?
AG: 8ig tree near the cave like a COWARD. shit!
That’s not super helpful information but you relay it to Nepeta all the same, back to Vriska because you have a horrible idea that you know what happened here.

TA: diid you 2ee adult2?
AG: the lime singer grande or wh8ver her name was and iron troll and heiress layiah.
AG: she was so much stronger than me
TA: they took the other2? tavro2, kanaya, terezii?
AG: had a ship y ou have to get them
AG: im 8leeding a lot you have to get them!
TA: 2tay put vrii2ka, ii'm workiing on iiit.

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling arachnidsGrip [AG]

“I have to go, the adults took Terezi, Tavros and Kanaya. I need to catch that ship before it gets too far away.” you tell John and Jayyne. They burst into a flurry of protests that you can’t possibly catch a ship and surely that’d be too dangerous if you even tried, naturally the other people in the archive hiss at them to be quiet.

“I have to, just find out what you can about Dahvid. Besides, they’re not expecting me.” you tell them as you walk towards the hole in the glass and then leap through it. You inhale some candy as you open up a group memo.

[twinArmageddons opened memo ‘2hiip’]
TA: ii have an emergency, the adult2 ju2t landed their 2hiip at the cave temple, abducted terezii, tavro2 and kanaya and flew off. ii need two know where iiit ii2 now.
AR: ◣◢ What?!
GT: Oh crap ok we can get this working to track the ship, do you have the exact location of the temple?
[twinArmageddons attached ‘cave.map’]
GG: alright it looks like they've been lurking around for a while but I can see that they went to the cave
GG: right we have their current location!
[gardenGnostic attached ‘shiplocation.map’]
TA: where in the a22 end of nowhere ii2 that? ii mean ii can alter cour2e right now two get there, ii’2 not that far but what the hell ii2 there?
AR: ◣◢ That’s where Dayvhe is.
AR: ◣◢ He sent Karkat the location when Karkat was in MY network, that’s where Dayvhe is.
“You better run, better run, better run, yeah I’m coming after you
When you’re sleeping at night, yeah there’s nothing you can do
There’s no place you can hide ’cause I’m coming after you
I wish there was another way ou-ou-ou-out for you
I wish there was another way ou-ou-ou-out for you”
Another Way Out - TGE

So… Karkat’s coming to see you. He’s coming to see you and he’s probably going to kick your ass, which to be fair is probably what you deserve. You’re trying to make up for what you’ve done but if you can get some karma delivered to your door via quadrantmate then that’s probably good too, right? You’re pacing about worryingly for a while when Rohhze comes back with something good for you both to drink, she doesn’t touch faygo anymore and you’d rather not all so it’s quite the mission finding anything worthwhile around.

“So Karkat’s coming to see me.” you tell her as she hands you your soda.

“Oh, really? That’s good, I’m pleased that you’re talking to the others again. Is Sollux not seeing you as well?” Rohhze asks and clinks her can of drink against yours.

“Let’s just deal with one train wreck at a time, yeah?” you mumble and open your drink.

“So where are you meeting him? Initiates like you aren’t really allowed to leave without permission, I mean people do of course because rules are meant to be broken but still. Outside the edge of the camp maybe? There’s not much out there, you’d have to stay out of the way.” Rohhze says smartly.

You stare vacantly into your can as the notion that you are the biggest fool out of all of these clowns here.

“You didn’t think about it, did you?” Rohhze sighs.

“Can’t we sneak him in here though? That way no clown patrol is gonna catch him and turn him into an angry stain on the grass. Plus if he’s here for any length of time he’ll need to stay here to avoid dawn, I don’t want him deep fried.” you plead and after a split second of thought you pay attention to yourself, making sure you’re just begging on your lack of dignity, not cuddlevoodooing her thinksponge.

“That or you have certain hopes about how well your reunion is going to go.” Rohhze snorts.

That’s… well, you hadn’t thought about that but you certainly are now. Besides you have missed Karkat so it’s not like you’d say no to anything like that but somehow you doubt things are going to go so well for you.

“That or you have certain hopes about how well your reunion is going to go.” Rohhze snorts.

Alright, loverboy, let’s go see what’s going on around our tent, if people are out I might be able to spook people away enough to get a path to sneak him in the back.” Rohhze says, wiggling her eyebrows at you. You know that she’s going to hold this over you for forever but honestly you don’t care right now.
Still drinking your drinks and looking the picture of casual disinterest you and Rohhze head outside and look around. There are tents near your own of course, some other initiates camped out here and there, some tents for storage and further to the right there’s a huge area for food. Sniffing the air now you can smell freshly cooked oblong meat products. You don’t think you need to worry about anyone from the food area noticing Karkat, they’re too far away and busy as well. So you and Rohhze start investigating the tents between you and there and then the others on the other side.

For the most part everything is empty and the ones that aren’t there are just a few older kids passed out cold in their tents, it looks like the place is clear.

“Alright, if you go back to the tent and pull the back loose from the pegs I’ll go get him, he says he’s close by.” Rohhze says and when you turn you see that she’s looking at her palmhusk and tapping away idly. You get a glimpse of that sweet grey text but she shuts it down before you can get a peek.

“Right, gonna go do that now.” you agree instead.

You’re left standing inside the tent that you’ve come to think of as yours despite you having never owned or wanted to live in a tent before now and honestly after this is all over you’re never going to go in one again. That doesn’t change the fact that your current location is very tent-bound. Wait, no this situation is stressful and given your location it is…

In tents.

Alright laughing to yourself alone in a tent is a crazy person thing to do and you’re a little glad that no one else was made to suffer that awful joke. Still, yeah, Karkat incoming. You go to the back of the tent and psionically lift the pegs out until you can pull the canvas back enough for someone to squeeze in. There’s still no Karkat yet so you wander around the tent a little, you even uneasily arrange cushions around the place.

“In there.” Rohhze says distantly and your posture pole snaps straight. You’re pretty sure half of whatever water stores you have in your body immediately turn to sweat because holy shit Karkat is about to be RIGHT HERE and you’re terrified. Nervous? Excited? One of those, maybe all.

The tent canvas moves and you rush closer to it. Karkat squirms under the fabric and then staggers to his feet. He’s really here.

“Karkat.” you whisper in awe. He’s staring at you, wide eyed.

“I’m- I’m so sorry for all of this shit.” you begin, stepping closer to him rather than being so far away like a dipshit.

Karkat’s eye twitches and suddenly he’s flying at you with one fist balled up tight, you have a millisecond to think ‘what the fuck’ before it cracks into your face with a burst of pain. You hit the dirty ground in an ungraceful heap but you’re back up and on your feet before Karkat gets to you.

You’re pitch for the guy, sure and you’ve had your fights before in the throes of blackrom but that’s usually more pushing and shoving each other or slamming one or other of you into nearby unfortunate furniture. You’ve punched each other now and then but he’s never OPENED with a sucker punch to the face.

Not that didn’t deserve this one but still. You shake your head and back off a little, keeping your guard up.

“You bastard. Did you plan this?” Karkat hisses, coming closer.
“Oh shit, look- Karkat-” you begin but he grabs you by the shirt and slams your back into the pole in the middle of the tent. He doesn’t let you get more words out on account of the hands he has around your throat choking you out.

The one kind of psionics that you have that you don’t hate are your telekinetic kind and they give you the advantage you need to shove him off of you and retreat a little more.

“Wait, is this-” your words are cut off by Karkat kneeling you in the gut and then bulldozing you to the floor. Again his hands wrap around your throat, constricting your air.

“Is this,” you manage with a wheeze, “the sexy kind of strangling or the actually trying to kill me kind?”

“I’m still deliberating. Answer my fucking questions and we’ll see!” Karkat snarls at you, his claws prickling at your neck. You scrabble for his wrists and try to pull him off, you get a little more air but you think he’s just letting you.

“I’m just saying that if you do kill me then it’s going to be a bad look, dead in a tent with facepaint on and a party in my pants that no one showed up to.” you babble nervously, half thrilled and half terrified. What is wrong with you?

“Leaning more towards murder now.” Karkat hisses, his grip tightening on your throat.

“I forgot the question!” you admit loudly and Karkat rolls his eyes.

“I’m starting to think you’re too incompetent to be actually evil.” Karkat groans.

“Ouch, but probably fair. I can’t breathe really, just fyi.” you wheeze.

“Did you plan this? Were you fucking with our heads deliberately? Sollux especially, after what he went through for you if you were I’ll snap your neck right here and now.” Karkat says forcefully.

“God, no! I mean, I know I did it when he and Hal did the… the thing. But I didn’t KNOW!” you choke out. Karkat glares and lets you go. Oh, sweet blessed air! It may smell of, like, tent funk and general sugary clown odor but it’s also not suffocating so that’s something.

“So you say, convince me. Why should I believe anything you have to say, huh?” he demands, glaring down at you from where he’s sat on your chest.

“There probably isn’t any reason for you to. I wouldn’t trust me, not after Cal. I know it doesn’t work through text, I tested it before I trolled you so I can only guess you’re here because you really want answers not because I made you.” you’re getting off on a tangent. You look away from Karkat, his stare is too intense and you can’t take it, it’s like being fried by the sun.

“I couldn’t risk it before then, but that I’m letting Rohhze be my test subject at all is just- fuck. If I could scoop out the parts of my thinkspoonge that do this I would, but being here to learn how to do it so I know how not to is all I’ve got. I’d never do that to any of you.” you tell him.

Karkat seethes as he looks down at you, his wild hair a dark halo against the dim moonlight that filters through the tent fabric. He’s warm on your chest where he’s sat and even if he’s pissed as all hell you’re still happy to see him. Your face still hurts like hell though, ow.

“You could have messaged us.” he tells you.

“I didn’t know if the same thing would happen!” you insist. You also cowardly didn’t test it out until
this recently because you’ve been running from what you did.

“You could have had Rorrhze pass on your messages, answer questions for you.” he points out.

That… is a thing you could have done.

Karkat rolls his eyes and leans back a little.

“You’re USELESS, you know that? I spent this whole time going back and forth on whether this was all some sociopathic con you’d set up. Whether I’d introduced my best friend to this monster who’d end up going through his life and trashing the place like a natural disaster. But no, it turns out that you’re really just a moron with superpowers.” Karkat hisses.

He’s calming down at least now, even if he’s right. Paranoia itches at the back of your pan, are you doing this? You don’t think you gave him any kind of command and you certainly haven’t deliberately fucked with his head, but what about the stuff you can’t control? You take a moment to find your centre, whatever the hell that means, and yeah as always you’re radiating pity vibes out. Actually it’s a little stronger than usual, probably because you want him back whether you deserve it or not.

“I need to tell you something.” you say seriously, reaching up and catching a claw loosely in his sweater to get his attention. You have it, his eyes narrowed at you with laser focus.

“There’s two types of this thing, oh Sol would love that.” you murmur as the thought occurs. Karkat’s expression shifts sharply towards homicidal again you so you get back on track in case you’re rambling is what’s making him mad.

“There’s uh, this direct kind. Like what I did without realising it back home, where I told you all to drop this whole thing. I tell you something, you want to do it. Well, it’s more complicated than that but that’s the idea. The other kind is just always on, I’ve tried switching it off but I can’t get it off for any length of time beyond like half a minute before it comes back. So I’m not… I’m not controlling you now but it’s happening still kind of.” you say and let him go just in case he’s going to get off you and leave.

“Right now?” Karkat asks in shock.

“Yeah.” you agree.

Karkat pauses and his thick eyebrows draw together in concentrated focus, like he’s listening or something. Then he shakes his head and looks at you again.

“Well it can’t be that strong.” he says confidently.

“What? You don’t know that. I don’t know that! All I know is I can’t turn it off which means I’ve always done it so I don’t know what anything is like without this… this radiation of pity. Which is just great, it undermines all of my friendships and everything because maybe people just like me for that!” you argue.

“I know it can’t be that strong because I can still visualise the expression on Sollux’s face when he saw you messaging only me. Asking just me to come here and saying that you couldn’t deal with him. Yeah, I can still picture the way he looked like you’d just ripped his pumphiscuit clean out of his chest and thinking about it makes me want to punch you again, so it can’t be that strong.” Karkat hisses furiously at you.

Your mouth goes dry. You can just picture it, Sollux’s pretty red and blue eyes wide with the sting of
rejection and then cringing back as it sets in. Fuck, he probably thinks he did something wrong or that he should have done something else. He’s so pitiable and better than anyone else deserves, better than you do for sure.

“I didn’t mean it like that! I want to see him if he still wants me. I just knew this was going to suck and seeing both of you at once would probably destroy me.” you admit miserably.

“And it’s all about what you want.” Karkat sneers, making you wince.

“You left us, me and him both. You didn’t stay so we could get answers, you ran away and ignored everyone. I don’t even know what your plan was going to be if Sollux hadn’t had the idea to send Rohhze after you to at least schoolfeed you on this shit. We needed you and you bailed, you have some SERIOUS grovelling to do before I can even think about forgiving you.” Karkat says, jabbing you in the chest.

“I know.” you nod.
Karkat scowls at you and gets off of your chest and starts walking about in angry little circles.

“You need to apologise to him.” Karkat says sharply.

“Of course I will, I really really need to.” you add that last part guiltily under your breath. You didn’t think that he’d be this upset about you asking to see Karkat first, but then you didn’t think to SAY that you wanted to see Karkat first implying you’d see other people after. You said just Karkat, no one else. Of course he’d be hurt.

“And everyone else, Dirkka and Roxxie have been worried sick.” Karkat continues and kicks a cushion spitefully.

“Yeah I bet I’m grounded.” you agree.

“Kanaya too, because of you she’s not seen Rohhze at all.” Karkat tacks on.

“I’ll apologise to everyone.” you vow, inching a little closer to where Karkat is standing. He seems to be running out of steam. You watch nervously as Karkat snatches a cushion up, glares at it like it personally offended him and then crushes it to his chest.

“I wish I didn’t have this.” you tell him quietly, sneaking a little closer.

“I wish you didn’t either.” Karkat says.
You’re just both standing in front of the heap of cushions in silence.

“I don’t blame you for having this… this thing. It’s clear you didn’t know, psionically enhanced likability or not I don’t think you could lie about that. I’ve seen you try to lie and for a guy who claims to have a pokerface you’re really shit at hiding the truth.” Karkat accuses you.

“Wow, Karkat, just dragging me like it’s a national sport tonight huh?” you retort.

“I’m harsh but fair.” Karkat insists with a haughty little sniff and, yeah, you’re getting the feeling that you’re going to be ok.

But… are you still going to be you? Or, rather are you two still going to be a thing?

“Given what I can do… even though I didn’t know about it before and I wasn’t hiding it from you on purpose but now that you know I feel like I should ask.” you say and- nope you can’t do this
when you’re looking at him. Instead you’re looking at the tent roof.

“You might not have agreed to date me if you knew I could do this, and I might still fuck up and do it by accident sometimes. Which is a thought that I hate because controlling anyone makes me wanna throw up, much less someone I care about as much as you. So, I mean, if you’ve changed your mind about us you could say it and I wouldn’t hold it against you. I’d say no hard feelings but I will for sure feel really shitty but that’s my problem, not yours. You didn’t agree to this, you know? So I can’t just assume.” you say to the roof. Well, to Karkat but you’re still not looking at him.

“It’s not like we had some big written out contract in the first place, or like we haven’t already changed things from back then anyway.” Karkat says. You chance a look at him. He’s picking at a loose thread on the cushion, unravelling the fabric as he goes.

“This is obviously big and different, Karkat.” you say.

Karkat bites on his bottom lip which has always forever given you the urge to kiss him, even before you two were dating. Especially then, it made being around him and watching him do it so frustrating. Man if Sollux hadn’t got you two together… and now you’re feeling guilty about Sollux again.

“I will agree on three conditions.” Karkat declares.

“Name them.”

“First, you fix things with Sollux. Even if you didn’t stay together which I can’t see him wanting and really the amount of shit that idiot will take from people before he cuts them off is astounding. I mean he’s friends with Vriska of all people now. Anyway, you fix things with Sollux in a way that you both agree on.” Karkat says. You’re concerned about the Vriska point in comparison to you but fine.

“I can agree to that.”

“Second,” Karkat says and holds up two fingers before your face in case you didn’t get the concept or something, “I get that you don’t know your ass from your elbow here, though what else is new with you? So yeah, you maybe screw up. But you don’t ever do that shit to me deliberately unless I ask you to.”

“Why would you ever ask me to do that to you?” you balk in horror.

“I don’t know, I don’t know the details of exactly what you can do because you RAN AWAY AND DIDN’T TALK TO US. But, if it’s anything like your ancestor it looks like you can choose to turn off some ways of thinking. Having some kind of administrator override to my thinksponge when I’m panicking but need to get some shit done could theoretically be useful. I don’t know. Point is not without permission, got it?” Karkat says, casually brushing your concerns aside.

“I can agree to that but I don’t think I want to use it on you at all, even if you did ask me. From what I read it seems like my ancestor had a lot of problems with stalkers and people obsessed with him, probably from overcooking people’s thinksponges like that. I used to have that problem but not for sweeps so I’m sure as shit not going to start on you.” you tell him.

“Oh, no, you still have stalkers. Rohhze just got rid of your last one. This lime guy that Sollux knew followed you to the club the night you performed. Rohhze basically threatened to kill him if he came anywhere near you, for all I know she had him killed.” Karkat says like it’s nothing.

You haven’t heard from that guy since when you and Sollux were sick and aside from blocking him on trollian the moment he was a shit to Sollux and then you switching shops you’d not even thought
of him. You had no idea he was that far gone.

“I didn’t know he was that bad.” you whisper.

“Well, yeah. Actually I should check the group chat and see how often that does happen, I didn’t think to ask.” Karkat mumbles thoughtfully.

“What group chat?” you ask.

“I- I didn’t say anything about a group chat. You said that. You’re distracting me from my third condition in this agreement!” Karkat blurs out nervously.

“What?” you’re completely lost here. He was definitely the one that brought that chat up.

“My third condition, it’s very important. Highly important.” Karkat insists and reaches his hand up to grab your face, squeezing your cheeks.

“Is that I swear if you keep wearing this stuff afterwards I’m never pailing you again. I’m- look, look at my hand. Greasepaint everywhere.” Karkat says, taking his hand away and holding it up as proof.

“Yeah, I can’t wait to get this shit off of me. I wouldn’t pail me looking like this either.” you say with a shudder.

“Well, good, I’m glad we agree. So, then… if you’ve agreed to my conditions then I don’t see any reason for things to change. But if you pull this vanishing act on us again and ghost us for weeks then your ass is out the door, got it? I don’t care if that leaves me with nothing but my own hand for company for the rest of my natural life. Are we clear?” Karkat demands.

“Crystal clear.” you say with a nod.

“Okay then. That’s settled I guess.” Karkat replies. He’s still picking at the cushion with his claws.

You’re not breaking up with Karkat, things are settled. He might still be pissed at you but you can deal with that, you more than deserve his anger. And yet still things feel tense between you, everything just stretched tight uncomfortably. He’s biting at his lip again as he works on destroying a perfectly innocent bit of soft furnishing.

“Karkat-” you say.

The moment the first syllable of his name comes from your mouth something seems to snap within him and his hand grabs you by the shirt with speed that you don’t think you’ve seen since the last strife between Dirkka and Hal. You don’t even get beyond the end of his name before he yanks you towards him and you suppose he kisses you but really he just kind of headbutted you in the face. Good god you’re both so full of fail. Both of you recoil a little because, ouch. Still, you can pick up what he’s putting down here. You missed him so much and you’re sure as shit not going to turn down the chance for this.

Karkat decides that the problem is best solved by shoving you back into the heap of cushions and launching his assault there, nevermind that you’ve both sunk down into mound of them and you can see over Karkat’s shoulder that at least one has dropped down on him. You’re ok with this though.

“I missed you so bad.” you admit between kisses.

“Well that’s your goddamn fault, isn’t it?” Karkat snaps at you and bites your neck. He doesn’t bite hard, bleeding isn’t something either of you are cool with for obvious reasons.
Karkat kisses you again but he’s not so frantic about it, he’s lazy almost. You’re not going to complain at all, Karkat has always been the king of makeouts. His hand strokes your face, fingers touching right where he punched you before. You lean into it even though it still hurts, you had that one coming for sure.

“Stop that.” Karkat reprimands you and moves his hand to your chest instead.

“I’m a dumbass.” you tell him.

“I know.” Karkat says and then ruins the effect by snickering in amusement at his words against your mouth.

Karkat slides his hands up your shirt and holy shit this is your lucky night. Nervously you focus on yourself for a moment and though you think you are still doing that normal background thing it’s not higher than usual, maybe lower even. You don’t think you’re influencing this. Karkat digging his fingers into the skin around your grubscars snaps you out of your focus and you’re more than cool with that.

“JASPERS! You don’t need to go in there, I’ll tell Dayvhe. He was napping earlier, I’ll wake him.” Rohhze says loudly from outside, startling you out of the cushions.

“Oh fuck. Dude, you need to hide in there, they cannot find you!” you hiss at Karkat whose expression has gone from interested to terrified in a snap. You psionically shove him further into the pile and bury him a bit.

You rush to the tent door and push the fabric aside, Jaspers is standing there with Rohhze.

“Can’t sleep with you yelling Rohhze.” you joke weakly and Jaspers trains his large dark eyes on you. He reaches out with his large hands and cradles your entire head in his grasp as his smile goes wide and unsettling.

“Your first massacre, kitten.” Jaspers says gleefully as he looms over you.

“My first what?” you ask, you’re pretty sure he said massacre but you really don’t want to be involved in killing a whole bunch of likely innocent people.

“It’s like a sermon, but bigger, the whole congregation. It’s an important event, I didn’t know there was one coming up.” Rohhze says sounding just as confused. You wonder if she actually attends these normally and you realise that she just might, you never knew about this part of her life before so you’ve no way of knowing.

“Guests confurring last minute, now come.” Jaspers purrs and slides one hand behind your back and the other behind Rohhze’s. He’s steering you away from your tent and Karkat and instead towards the big top in the centre of the tent city.

Purples are moving in a wave around you to the tent but a good deal of them look confused too, confused and nervous. You guess even clowns are intimidated by a full fledged adult suddenly acting strange. Strange is unpredictable, strange is dangerous.

You want to ask Rohhze about what’s happening but with Jasper so close you can’t. You try to work it out yourself, maybe as he’s an adult he has communication with other adults. No way this guy is the head of the hierarchy of the clown church, maybe one of his superiors off world wants to preach to you. Then again you know there’s a whole purple music scene that’s hella hard to break into and even though you’re not a fan of a lot of their stuff because a lot of their rhymes are so shallow you could walk through them and not get your feet wet but some are ok. Maybe it’s a
famous guest like that and this is going to be part preaching part concert from some primadonna juggalo. Either way being in here with Karkat in your tent alone makes you all kinds of uneasy. Jaspers moves you and Rohhze to the front row, eliminating any chance of you slipping away unseen. As you walk up you’re drawing stares from people who haven’t been around since you’ve been here, their confusion of seeing someone wearing rust and full initiate white face paint is plain.

“This is an exciting night motherfuckers! It’s not often we get to be in the presence of divine truth and we should appreciate it when it happens!” Jaspers shouts to the crowd wildly to cheers of approval.

“Just blend in.” Rohhze says under her breath and cheers as well.

You try to listen but he’s prattling on about clown shit and the uneasy feeling hasn’t left you. You’re not sure if it’s your own feelings or if that sense is being amped up from being around a whole swarm of kids with chucklevoodos. Not all of them know how to stop or care to stop those from leaking out so it makes for an uneasy time. You swear you see the tent fabric ripple above you and, yeah, you must be picking up some subtle voodoos if it’s messing with your peripheral senses.

Your attention snaps to when you realise that Jaspers is trying to call someone on the screen. It rings for a few moments and then disconnects. Jaspers seems genuinely taken aback and tries again but yet again it disconnects after several rings. That’s quite the slight to his authority there and around you there’s confused and alarmed muttering from the trolls gathered.

Jaspers glances back at all of you and down the aisle and then tries a third and final time and now the call finally connects. It hangs for a moment and then a picture comes up onscreen.

That’s… your face.

Or it’s not, but it is. Those are your features on an adult face, an adult face wearing glasses not unlike your own. His hair is yours, his horns are yours and on his chest you can catch part of your own sign but not in your colour. A white painted lip curls up in irritation.

“Carrie, why the hell am I taking this guy’s call?” he demands, looking down the aisle.

“Sir, your holiness, the most righteous third messiah-” Jaspers gasps and you slowly slide your sword free of your strife deck as Rohhze palms her needles.

“Don’t fuckin’ call me that.” your ancestor snaps from the screen.

“But-” Jaspers tries.

“Sit down and shut up, preacher.” your ancestor says but hearing him say it feels like having all the hair on your head rubbed the wrong way. On stage Jaspers drops to his knees and slaps a hand over his mouth looking anguished at having ever spoken.

“Carrie. What the fuck?” your ancestor demands again and you ease yourself out of your seat and try to pull Rohhze with you. The list of places you need to be is rapidly not including this shitty tent.

“Maybe this will make it clearer.” an amused voice from the back says.

With one unanimous movement every member of the congregation stands up and then falls right to their knees like a puppet lifted and then dropped. That leaves you and Rohhze to be the last two people standing, even half crouched as you are. With everyone else out of the way you can see adults at the entrance of the tent, in the lead with a sly smile and far too familiar cinnamon bun
shaped horns on her head it’s- fuck you can’t remember her actual name. He called her Carrie, but- it’s Heiress Leiyah. Near her and now walking around the edges of the tent are other famous faces. That one girl from Game of Thrones, the guy from Walking Dead, and yeah Troll Will Smith with Margot Robbie at his side.

“Well, shit, she’s the spit of Rosali ain’t she? And you…” your ancestor says, reminding you of his presence.

“I told you that you’d be interested.” Heiress whatever her real name is smiles.

You need out of here, there’s way too many people to fight and adults at that. You could call on your new barely trained psionics to help you out but with a guy who’s been doing it for who the fuck knows how many sweeps up there you’re not gonna win.

That part at least is a problem you can solve. You launch your sword right at the husktop that’s streaming to the screen up there and with a bang of destroyed tech your ancestor is gone. Walking Dead guy is walking right to you now, time to do your terrible thing.

You reach inside of him. You want to try for you being just a kid but you doubt that’ll work, you’re not as young as Diemos who you hope is somehow not here right now, so you go for something else. He should look at your face, how can he scare you or lay a finger on you when you look so much like your ancestor that he’s so pale for?

“Leave us alone!” you tell him and oh YEAH you felt that one catch. His purple eyes flicker over your face and his will drains out of him.

Taking Rohhze’s hand in one of yours and pulling out a backup sword into the other (what they break a lot, it’s not your fault) you run past him. See, the door to the tent is over the other way but the thing about having a sword and being in a tent is that any part of it is a door if you don’t care about the tent having bigass holes in it.

“Really?” Carrie groans.

Sollux told you before what Vriska did to him, but his memory was obviously fragmented from repressing it. Here’s how it goes. You’re perfectly aware of what’s happening and then suddenly it’s as if you’ve been thrown from the control of your body, like if you were a pilot someone else has shoved you out of the seat. You and Rohhze crumple to the floor and even skid a foot or two. You try with all your might to move ANYTHING but you can’t. After a minute Carrie leans over you and her last name finally comes out from the terrified rolodex in your mind, Fisher. Carrie Fisher.

“You really are making this a lot of work, come on. Up. We’re not the bad guys here you know.” she sighs and your body hauls itself up complacently without your say so. You want to tell her that she sure SEEMS like one of the bad guys but she’s smartly not left you with the ability to talk.

She handcuffs your wrists and Rohhze’s too then she takes out something else from her sylladex, two bands. They’re rubbery but you know just what they are. You’ve seen one on Sollux when he needed protecting from his own psionics, he told you they used them on him when he was captive too. They block psionic powers. She snaps the rubber of it around your head and you feel the frustrated internal fizzle from your psionics, both kinds you suppose.

“No one saw us, right? You’re gonna make sure no one talks about this, The Grand Entertainer would be hugely displeased if any of this got out.” Game of Thrones girl says, her teal eyes narrowing at Jaspers who nods with his hand still over his mouth.
You march right out of the tent, no matter how much you try to resist it does you no good. The place around the big top is abandoned, everyone is inside. It makes the giant fuckoff spaceship parked just down past the food area all that more prominent and terrifying as you head towards it against your will.

You catch movement in your peripheral and your bloodpusher sinks, it’s Karkat. He’s tucked against the wall of a tent in shadow staring at you in fear. You need him to stay put, you’ve no idea what’s going to happen but it won’t be helped if he- goddamnit he’s coming closer. Karkat keeps low and moves out of your line of sight. You REALLY hope he’s not going to do what you think he’s going to do.

There’s a scream and a clash of metal behind you and then abruptly nothing.

“Holy shit he nearly got me!” Game of Thrones girl gasps.

“That sign…” Troll Will Smith says.

Carrie pushes past you and stares down at the ground. Is he dead? Is that- did he really just die?

“Oh he’s going to love this.” Carrie whispers and you hear movement again, a clink of metal and when you start walking again with everyone staring just behind you over and over you can now hear an additional set of footsteps. She got Karkat, he’s not dead but he’s fucked just like you are.

You board the ship, far bigger than Roxxies for sure and you’re piloted down a hallway. You turn right into a room, it’s standard grey and two adult trolls are already standing in the centre of it. A tall albeit round yellowblood with a shaved head that has ports in it almost like Sollux’s, he has his back to you but you can still see them.

“I mean it’s not going to overload?” a second says and you know that voice, it’s Iron Troll.

“No, man, we can take it. We have the power.” the yellowblood says.

“I need you to open that up and make another as well, we have more guests.” Carrie says as you’re walked into the room.

The yellowblood turns around and if you had control of your body still your jaw would drop. The yellowblood looks at you with electric blue and yellow glowing eyes, it’s fucking Biggie Smalls, you thought the guy was dead! What the fuck?!

“Hold up, is that- is he one of us? He looks just like… well, like Signless.” Iron Troll interrupts, leaning around Biggie to look at Karkat.

“Exactly what I was thinking, open up and we can get some answers.” Carrie says with a gleeful grin.

Biggie shifts down the room and him and Robert Downey both moving away from where they were before shows you what they were standing by. There’s a glimmering barrier blocking off a sliced third of the room and slumped on the floor there is far too many people you know. Roxxie, Dirkka, Terezi, Tavros and Kanaya. All of them are out cold, you hope that’s it and that they’re not… dead. People don’t usually lock up corpses though so you’re hopeful.

Karkat and Rohhze walk through the shimmering wall when part of it drops only for it to raise again after they go through and are left staring blankly at the wall.

“A separate one for him, it doesn’t need to be as big as that one.” Carrie explains.
After a minute of button pressing you’re led to a spot in the corner close to a window and left to stand there.

“Can he do the thing?” Iron troll asks, pointing in your direction.

“He used it on Norman, yes.” Carrie confirms.

“So, we’re just leaving him to take that blocker off the moment you let go?” Iron troll asks.

“I’ll fuse it to the wall.” Biggie offers and gently pushes you so that your back is against the wall, makes you sit down and then with a flash of some kind of power your handcuffs are stuck to the wall behind you. He jostles you carefully and seeing that you’re not moving he steps back.

Everything outside of the bit you’re in goes a little opaque and shimmery and then abruptly your body is your own again.

“I’M GOING TO KILL EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOU!” Karkat screeches in fury, so you guess she let him go too.

You look up and Karkat is in a full on shitfit and the rest of your friends are starting to wake up. Despite that the focus of all the adults is laser guided onto Karkat.

“Tell me your name.” Carrie asks him.

“Go fuck yourself! I hope you’re psychically aware of every time every nerd loser manhandles their bulge thinking of you in your overrated movies, now let us go!” Karkat snarls at her.

You try to pull your wrists free from the wall but something is holding the cuffs in place. You’re not entirely sure what Karkat is threatening the actress with, ‘let us go or I’ll insult you some more’? To the side Troll Will Smith is wearing the blank expression of a man trying desperately not to laugh.

“Dayvhe, you hurt?” Dirkka asks, ignoring Karkat’s shouting. You’re glad he’s awake now at least, you suppose either Carrie Fisher or some other cerulean must have put him to sleep.

“Just my pride.” you answer and try to yank your arms free again.

“I demand you let us all go! And don’t you dare lay a finger on any of them either, I know what you people do.” Roxxie hisses and pulls Karkat back away from the wall to put her own body between them.

“Oh no, the heiress is ordering us around.” Robert Downey drawls in bored amusement.

“Shit, and here I threw my back out the other week. I’m not up to bowing.” Biggie snorts and both of the lowbloods laugh.

“Sorry, your highness, that royal shit don’t fly round here.” Troll Will Smith tells Roxxie who seems both startled and angry. She doesn’t play the heiress card a lot but when she does it’s never failed her.

“So, I’ll ask again now that we have a greater audience. Who killed Cal, the mindleech lusus? We picked you two up right where it happened and-” Carrie begins.

“I told you it was me, I killed him. He was my lusus, he was shit, I have every right to kill him. You don’t need to drag everyone else I know into this.” Dirkka hisses at her.

You can see panic spread over the faces of several of the others, most notably Terezi and Karkat
though and the adults watch with interest. You know they know there were three people involved. Or at least they were told that, but they don’t know that you know that, probably.

This still doesn’t help anyone and your wrists are still restrained.

“Where can I find the cerulean girl who was with you?” Carrie asks.

“In the place where I keep the fucks I give about you, you’ll never find it!” Karkat snaps, shoving past Dirkka to jeer at them more.

Yeah, your wrists aren’t coming free. You don’t know how, the cuffs don’t seem to be melted to the wall but they’re held there as securely as if they were. But maybe there’s another way out. The band that squeezes tight around your head hurts you inside, compresses you in more ways than just physically. As everyone’s attention is on Karkat at his shouting you twist your neck and try to nudge at the band with your shoulder. It’s hard and not really moving but if you keep it up you might get the thing off entirely.

Rohhze looks at you and you see understanding flicker on her face. She’s so smart!

“Exactly what is your plan here, or better still what are your motives?” Rohhze asks.

The answer that they give is something fleeting about how they don’t have to and won’t tell you anything. You nudge more at the headband. More of your friends have caught on and are distracting the adults with accusations, demands, or bitterly scathing insults. The headband slips slightly but not enough.

“This is clearly pointless.” Carrie suddenly declares, holding her hands up. The other adults look at her curiously, waiting for her word. Clearly she is in charge despite there being a purple guy around here somewhere.

“We go back to Planet Hollywood. We turn in one obvious culprit as well as the other bonus finds that I’m sure he’ll be pleased with and then I’m sure they’ll be willing to tell us anything. If we have to come back, we have to come back.” Carrie says.

“I’ll get Robert to the flight deck then.” Robert Downey says, squeezing past troll Will Smith. He pauses in the doorway and looks around.

“Other Robert I mean, not me. Well, also me. I’m not starting to talk about myself in the third person I mean.” he babbles on distractedly in a way that’s unsettlingly just like he is in the Iron Troll movies.

“You know what, actually, I think you’re probably smart enough to have worked that out on your own.” he continues.

“Dude.” Troll Will Smith interrupts.

“Yeah, gotcha.” he nods and backs out of the room entirely.

“Get some rest, shift change in twelve hours, Biggie.” Carrie says without looking behind her as she sweeps out of the room.

“Well, wait what am I supposed to do? Hey, yo don’t just leave me!” troll Will Smith calls, leaning out of the doorway.

“Guard duty!” she shouts back and he wilts in obvious displeasure.
“Sorry man, grubsitting is rough.” Biggie laughs and walks off.

“Ugh.” Will groans, turning around to look at all of you. You make yourself look as much as you can like you weren’t just pulling your headband off. You need to get out of here before they take off, you need to rescue everyone but you can’t do that with this thing on!

Karkat steps up to the plate again, like the goddamn champ he is.

“I cannot believe that my favourite actor is evil, how could you?” Karkat accuses him.

“I’m your favourite actor?” Troll Will Smith asks in obvious surprise.

“Not anymore!” Karkat shouts.

Come on, come on. Your bloodpusher is hammering hard at your ribs as you try to stay quiet and wriggle free. Troll Will Smith is going on about how Karkat doesn’t know his life and there are moral complexities here, okay? You don’t care, you don’t care about his thoughts and his feelings, you’re going to end him!

“Takeoff in five, four, three, two, one.” a female voice from somewhere in the ceiling announces and sure enough when you twist to see the windows you can see things moving outside as you take to the skies. FUCK. You squirm harder but the band is caught in your hair on one side and hooked under your complete horn on the other.

“Clear to exit airspace Nicole.” a familiar male voice says over the speakers, but it’s no one you’ve seen yet.

Troll Will Smith looks over at you so you have to stop what you’re doing. Idly he walks to the window and looks out. The whole ship rumbles and rocks a little, it’s enough to be concerning.

“Nic, we’re getting shimmy. Report?” Iron Troll asks over the speakers.

“It’s not turbulence, something’s interfering with my flight.” the woman replies.

“Running system check.” Iron Troll says.

“What the hell’s going on?” Troll Will Smith wonders aloud, looking up at the speakers. He’s not looking at you though so you squirm a little more. Ow, ow, hair. Fuck it you can grow more, pull harder!

“Flight, it’s not me! Engines operating at normal capacity, we’re starting to lose altitude!” the woman says hurriedly.

“Be advised: opening you up to max safe limits.” the first guy tells her.

The ship jerks, lurches in the air and you have the horrible g-force sensation of dropping cold for a moment before being pressed to the ground again. The room flares cobalt blue suddenly, only to flicker out with neon red.

“We have incoming, it’s not a ship. A… a missile? It’s not tracking like one I can’t identify it.” Robert says uncertainly.

“No fucking way.” Troll Will Smith gasps, staring out of the window.

“Losing altitude, incoming!”
There’s a bang and you just catch the edge of grey fingertips and yellow claws on the window. It’s Sollux, it’s fucking SOLLUX. The light is still flicking wildly from red to blue like a 3d epilepsy nightmare but it means he’s here, your moirail is here!

“It’s a troll, it’s a fucking psionic kid stuck to us!” Robert shouts over the speakers.

Carrie’s voice comes over the speakers this time, interrupting all of you staring at the window.

“Downey, DeNero, remove all helm restrictions and get us out of atmosphere. Nicole, give it everything you have we’re going to need it. That troll can’t breathe in space. Ariana, Margot, prep for medical and helm transfer. Smalls, shift change the moment we’re clear of atmosphere. Go!” she orders them sharply.

The ship shudders and Sollux’s claws screech on the glass, but he doesn’t move.

“Shit, kid it’s upper atmo. How cold is that out there? Let go.” Troll Will Smith whispers, peering out the glass. He won’t though, you know he won’t.

“Out of atmosphere, they’re still there.” the other guy reports.

“Helm out, battery at fifteen percent. Ten. Five.”

The light on the walls flickers, red… blue… then nothing, a faint hint of red and then nothing. Sollux’s hand slips free of the window and you realise you’re not breathing anymore. He’s got to have just passed out, right? He’ll be fine won’t he? You know he flies high in the atmosphere, he can cope can’t he?

“Flight, he’s gone.” Troll Will Smith says, pushing a button on the wall.

“Thanks Will, helm change.” Robert says and the speaker clicks.

The lights dim to almost nothing and the artificial gravity flicks off, making you float up slightly. The forcefield keeping you and the others in drops but everyone is staring out of the window too stunned to do anything. The lights click back on, gravity hits with a bump and you’re all fenced in once more.

“Oh shit, I’m dead.” Troll Will Smith whispers.

“Make way!” a voice shouts and a stretcher bursts through the door with a woman on it. Sitting on her chest is a younger female troll dressed entirely in neon lime green. The plastic-y faux leather of her skirt and jacket squeak as she holds down the woman on the stretcher.

The other woman, Margot Robbie, shushes Troll Will Smith out of the way and dives into a cabinet on the wall before rushing back with a complicated looking syringe. It’s a yellowblooded woman on the table, it’s obvious from the gold leaking from her eyes and nose. You can see ports clearly through her hair which appears to have been temporarily braided out of the way and despite her sharp features she seems to be healthy. Well, aside from the bleeding and the sort of seizure she’s having now. Margot rolls the yellowblood’s head to the side so she’s looking at you and you realise who it is, Nicole Kidman. Fuck, are they all actors? But, wait, you saw her in something recently and you know she’s billed for upcoming stuff. You’ve seen what a recent helm job looks like and this isn’t it. What’s going on?

Margot injects something and Nicole’s body relaxes with a mild shudder. Ariana Grande plugs something into one of the ports and stares at the screen its attached to, her lips are painted a bright lime. You always thought that whole look was so tacky, so obviously pretending to be lime just for
the edginess points but what the fuck do you know? You know, if you think real hard about the lipstick choices of pop stars you don’t have to think about anything else which given that you’re already hyperventilating here is probably a good thing.

“How is she?” Carrie asks, sticking her head through the door.

“Doubt she’ll fly anytime soon but… she’ll live. She’s stabilising.” Ariana answers, her eyes on the screen in her hand that attaches to the passed out yellowblood.

“I want eyes on whoever the fuck that was. ROBERT!” Carrie shouts back into the corridor.

“We were over the ocean so…” Troll Will Smith says in a tight voice. Margot looks up at him with a frown.

“If that kid doesn’t burn up in the atmosphere then hitting water at that speed will be like concrete, I still want to see.” Carrie says.

A display on the wall pings on and you can see a desktop running, a map displays on the screen and you watch it narrowing down coordinates. As it works Carrie comes inside properly and touches Nicole’s slack and bloody face, she looks… regretful.

“The feed went janky from the power loss, nonvital systems you know? But here’s the kid entering atmosphere.” a male voice says over the speakers. You can see the narrow shadow of Sollux’s frame against the blue water of Alternia.

“Then… five seconds after.” he continues. You can’t make him out, just a bicoloured streak.

“What kind of psionic nearly unassisted pulls a ship out of flight and then have enough left to shield for atmospheric reentry?” Carrie asks and no one has anything to say to that. If… if he was awake to protect himself there then surely he caught himself? Surely he landed ok?

“I don’t have the impact with the water but I do have something after that you’ll want to see.”

Carrie opens her mouth to ask something but the next picture flicks on. The jaws of Megalomom snapping shut as she breaches the water.

“Well that solved that problem, I guess.” Ariana snorts.

“Help me take her back to her block.” Carrie says, pulling on the stretcher. Ariana hops off and unplugs her screen from the fallen helmswoman but your mind is elsewhere.

That was absolutely Megalomom but she doesn’t know Sollux. You never got him to meet her, so why would she be there? What she HAD been doing was chasing down a certain ship. Aradia’s ship. Aradia who sees the future and is convinced that all her schemes will work out in the end, if anyone was going to be there at the right time to catch Sollux it’d be her. Megalomom showing up is no proof that he’s dead, if anything it’s proof of the opposite. It means Sollux is alive and Sollux has a spaceship. You know your moirail, the moment he’s able to he’ll come after you even if it means getting in a helm again so he can chase you through space.

He’s going to be hurt and you need time.

The stretcher starts wheeling backwards but Troll Will Smith catches Margot Robbie’s wrist and holds her back so the two women wheel the stretcher out without her.

“Alright, what’s wrong?” Margot asks, her eyes narrowing as she looks at the older troll.
Troll Will Smith looks anxiously at the window and back to her.

“Mar, I fucked up.” he whispers wide eyed.

“It can’t be that bad.” she assures him.

“Everything that just happened is my fault, it’s that bad. I know that kid.” Troll Will Smith hisses desperately.

“You gave him a hundred ceagar bill, he wasn’t imagining it.” Karkat says slowly.

Troll Will Smith looks from Karkat to Margot Robbie desperately.

“I didn’t know who he was! I thought he was just some poor hiveless kid and he was right near that hacker signal we found at that hive and DeNero was in a shitty mood and you know how much more seriously he takes that whole ‘leave no proof’ order and I didn’t want him to die and-” he’s babbling anxiously and Margot reaches out and paps his face gently.

“Shoosh. Slower. How is that random kid that sharkbait troll down there? Start there.” she tells him. They’re moirails then, just like you and your moirail that they’re responsible for separating you from. Both of them are so distracted that you can wiggle your headband up higher, it’s getting looser.

“They obviously know him, he clearly was the hacker. And that psi, it was red and blue, a power level no one else should have and- and look at them! Who they are! If that kid’s last name is Captor I’m a dead man, I’ll be The Subverse’s goddamn chew toy before the perigee is out!” Troll Will Smith insists.

Margot Robbie seems to consider this, her hand idly patting Will’s cheek as she thinks.

“I’ll look over the footage and over the whole trail that led us there. It could be nothing, could be coincidence. Red and blue’s not so rare, there’s almost always one primary colour in there. And you’d have noticed a kid wearing that sign, remembered it for sure. Stay here, keep watch, be cool. I’ll find out. Ok?” she says to him.

Looser, looser… there! The band pops over your broken horn just as Margot walks out of the room. Having it off is like finally being able to breathe after the worst head cold going.

“You fucked up.” you say and Will freezes, not looking around at you.

“You’re right though, that was Sollux Captor.” you tell him.

“Dayvhe!” Karkat gasps but Rohhze elbows him hard.

Troll Will Smith turns to look at you and his eyes go wide as he notices that you’ve squirmed free. He’s afraid already, you didn’t do anything but if your time with clowns has taught you anything it’s that fear and comfort are two sides of the same coin. He is afraid, he should be, but you’re going to offer him an out.

“You don’t want to get the others, I mean you already don’t want them finding out, right?” you point out and he hesitates.

He’s scared and you can use that. You reach out into him and find that place of fear, the want for what he fears happening to not be true.

“I don’t want to go where you’re taking me, and if you go there you’ll be killed.” you point out and
Will nervously nods.

“There’s nothing I can do about it though, and if someone sees you with that off I’ll be in—” he begins but, dude, you weren’t done.

“If you make it so the ship can’t fly, it’ll be ok. Stop the ship from flying,” you order him. It’s a stupid idea, you know it wouldn’t work. It’s the same kind of problem avoidance that you do more than you want to admit. But you feel him sway somewhat. You focus, you want him to trust you, to listen to you.

Troll Will Smith hesitates and then pushes a button to drop the field around you. He reaches in and pulls the band back down over your head, making you cringe. He steps back, traps you again.

“Gotta stop the ship. Fuck, Biggie will have seen… gotta…” Will mumbles to himself as he walks right out of the room leaving you all alone.

“Let’s hope he doesn’t break anything vital. What exactly is your plan?” Rohhze asks you.

“Yeah, what the hell Dave? You did that thing your ancestor does, didn’t you?” Terezi says.

“That was Roxxie’s mom, she’s been chasing Roxxie’s ship. The one Aradia is in.” you say and then don’t say any more because unlike Karkat’s apparently thinkspongeless favourite actor you CAN remember that you’re probably being watched.

“If we’re banking on that ship we still don’t know if he survived that fall or what state he’s in.” Dirkka says slowly.

“He’s fine!” you snap.

“Uh, that was a pretty long fall. And uh, a lot of time without oxygen?” Tavros ventures.

“No, he’s fine!” you insist.

Your mind displays the image of Sollux’s psi failing him, his skin burning off in atmosphere.

NO. He’s fine.

He falls, awake and unburned but going too fast to slow down enough. Too burnt out from trying to save you, you know he put everything he had into it. Aradia’s ship arcs up from the ocean and Sollux impacts into it at over a hundred miles an hour, a streak of yellow, broken bones and-

No, NO, NO!

He’s fine, Sollux is fine. No one is stronger than him, not even him. You did not run away from your moirail, get caught in something that’s entirely your own fault and get almost everyone you give a shit about captured only for your moirail to DIE rescuing you. That’s NOT how this goes. Sollux is fine. He’s going to be ok and he’s going to rescue you.

The floor rumbles and there’s a loud bang from distant areas in the ship, the lights flicker and you hear shouting. Sollux is fine, and you’ve just bought him time.

==> Author: Run path C2

“Better run, better run, better run, yeah, I'm coming after you

When you're sleeping at night, yeah, there's nothing you can do
You open your eyes slowly, dazedly. You’re not entirely sure where you are.

You remember Jayekh and Jayded telling you were the ship was headed, flying like you’ve never flown before. Catching it, dragging it, losing it and falling.

“It was very dramatic!” Aradia says. You sit up, Aradia’s sat in a chair in… this is Roxxie’s ship. She swivels it back and forth a little as she looks at you.

“Why are you here?” you ask. You still feel weird and spacey, didn’t you hate her? You can’t quite remember why yet. It’s like your thinksponge hasn’t fully downloaded yet or something.

“I was in the right place at the right time, like I always am. You needed me here, so here I am.” Aradia says with a smile that manages to be genuinely affectionate.

“I was chasing the ship. The others were in it, Dayvhe and Karkat too. What…” you say.

You were falling, so fast, faster than you should. The water, the ship breaking the surface, the door opens.

“You caught me.” you say.

“I did.” she nods.

“I need to get back to them, but… shit they were in space. I can’t go in space.” you curse looking upwards even though it’s just the roof of the ship.

“I can.” Aradia says brightly.

You abruptly remember why you hate her. The tank, screaming, the gas, the ports in your head. You stare at her, she’s physical. You run a hand through your hair and find no ports at all.

“You helmed me, again.” you hiss at her.

“I did it for two reasons.” Aradia begins defensively.

“Don’t think there being two changes things.” you snap.

“One, in order to have us not consumed by a giant shark I needed extra power to keep speed with it so we stay in its throat and not get digested. I was nearly out of power, you still had power. I thought you’d like not being digested. Two, you probably can’t feel pain so much in here.” Aradia lists off.

You’re about to ask why that would be relevant when you suddenly become aware of video footage happening right before your eyes. That’s your body streaking down through the sky, trailing smoke and unstable psionic flares, the ship adjusts to give you a better landing. Still your shoulder smacks into the doorframe coming in, then you bodily hit a wall then a bolted control panel, a chair and finally a last wall. You’re crumpled up on the ground in an unnatural heap, you’re very sure your arm shouldn’t be at that angle. The timeframe speeds up, a cable plugs into your neck and here you are.

“You want to get up there to do your rescue, you need me. And as a fascinating note you need to be helmed to do it.” Aradia adds that last bit in a slightly cold tone.
“If you’d said to me before all that that this would happen and I’d need you and helm tech to save them I would have agreed. I would have gone along with it and not had to worry I was going to be stuck there forever, I would have known I was getting out, I wouldn’t have felt like you betrayed me. But you just did it anyway.” you tell her harshly.

“I didn’t think it mattered. You were always going to be here, things would be awful if you weren’t so if I knew you’d say yes then why risk making you not say yes by asking? It’s a stupid risk for no change at all.” Aradia argues.

You cover your face with your hands. You don’t know how to make her get this.

“I just wanted to help you. I’m helping, this is the best situation available. I care, I don’t know why you think I don’t!” she insists, sounding like she might cry.

How do you explain to her that you value not being treated like someone’s chess piece? That even if you’re her very favourite and she wants to look after you that treating you like a toy is unbearable? She’s not malicious to you, that requires her caring about what goes on in your head. Or if not caring about it, understanding it.

You don’t know how to do it. So you move on.

“I need to contact the others, we have to meet up. We have to make a plan, track the ship and get up there.” you say.

“Do you want me to get us out of the shark when you’re doing that?” Aradia asks.

You squint and the world around you, including Aradia, vanishes to be replaced with the view around you of the inside of some giant maw. The water shifts around you and slits of lighter water open up to the side, its gills.

“How do you do it without hurting her?” you ask.

“Easily.” Aradia answers from inside your head.

You shift your focus from the angling thrusters of the ship as it skirts close to the gills and instead you open up a chat.

[twinArmageddons opened chat ‘iit’2 not murder iif they have iit coming’]
[Added arachnidsGrip]
[Added arsenicCatnip]
[Added centaursTesticle]
[Added ectoBiologist]
[Added gardenGnostic]
[Added gutsyGumshoe]
[Added golgothasTerror]
[Added timaeusTestified]
[Added tipsyGnostalgic]
TA: ii don't actually have hal on my lii2t but ii'm gue22iing you're here becau2e you mu2t have hacked 2omeone on that lii2t.
AR: ☻ You’re right.
GT: They got away didnt they? I mean i can see it on my screen the ship is just stalled up there in orbit.
EB: jayded filled us in after you left, you didn’t really chase the ship all the way up there did you?
GG: They must have got away from him when they got too high up, you must have been freezing
Sollux. Are you okay now? I’m sure we can figure out something to do, I’ve no idea WHAT but we have to!
AG: How far did you chase them?
TA: ii blacked out a little after ii left alterniia'2 atmo2phere. aa caught me 2o now theoretiically ii can leave the atmo2phere again.
TA: they have dv, kk and literally everyone el2e ii liike be2iide2 you guy2.
AG: That was stupid and I’m impressed. 8ut your plan clearly failed, we need another.
GG: well i wouldnt say failed the ship is really stalled i think something is broken on it
TA: they're not damaged are they? ii wa2 tryiing really hard two not break anything because ii diidn't want two explo2iively decompre22 all of them iintwo a ra2in of dead friiend2 and quadrantmate2 ontwo alterniia.
GG: ouch yeah that would have been bad but no theyre just stopped??
GT: If this was a big problem with the ship then it would be falling back down into orbit but its remaining stable up there so at the very least the helmsman is alive and getting orders. Thats some hope at least.
GT: Maybe they escaped and are taking over the ship!
AG: How a8out we don’t assume that and work on our own rescue plan? Let's all meet at Equius' hive.
TA: why there?
[arachnidsGrip is an idle troll]
EB: uh?
GG: I suppose we can head there, it’s a bit of a pain to get to but no further than it would be for Jayed and Jayekh looking on my map.
GG: Sollux, are you hurt? Also what about the other two, Equius and Nepeta?
AG: :33 < this is nepet, i've taken her palmhusk away from her because she wasn't sitting still during surgery from reading it and i've b33n trying to help even if she is ungrrateful about it.
TA: 2urgery? why doe2 2he need 2urgery?
AG: :33 < her arm was destroyed and she was purretty badly hurt when we found her. vriska can catch me up on everything else she's said but i've got to go and hold her down now so equius can work, i'll leave the door open let yourselves in.

That’s really all there is to say about that. You contemplate your next move quietly. You’re calmer than you thought you would be. That is if you’d imagined how you’d feel in this situation. You have to get them back, there’s just no negotiating it. The question is then, what will you do to get them back? Anything. You’d do anything.

It’s a freeing thought in a way. This isn’t like feeling crazy or being in an episode, this isn’t something that can be solved by ephemeral things like sleeping at the right time, paying attention to your feelings and thinking positively. No, this is a situation that requires using your psionic powers to go somewhere very fast and then when you get there you’re going to evaporate people with eye lasers. As many people as it takes until you get the people you want back. Beauty in simplicity.

Or maybe you just have a concussion, probably both.

Still, you’re the first to arrive at Equius’ hive and when you’ve engaged your landing gear-
...the ship’s landing gear. You’re not a spaceship, you’re a troll.

“I need to get out.” you tell Aradia.

“It’s going to hurt.” she warns you but you feel things disconnecting without you having to ask again.
It’s a slimy and grossly intrusive sensation as the biowire slides out of your ports. Your thinksponge suddenly registers that you have a body again and waits a half second before smacking you in the face with SO MUCH PAIN. You gurgle in agony from the floor, your shoulder is a white hot ball of screeching pain and it’s just your luck that it’s the shoulder nameless mook #2 from your time in torture interrogation favoured popping out of its socket. Your right cheekbone is throbbing furiously, you’ve no idea where your glasses are but that’s probably for the best as your sniffnode is screaming at you.

Avoiding your shoulder you roll over.

“Oh, fuck. Auuugh.” you whine as you roll over onto your good shoulder and push yourself up. Oh, ow, ow, knee. You wobble but you’re standing now. You limp and curse your way through the ship, manage not to fall down the stairs despite Dayvhe’s memes of inevitability.

You stumble towards Equius’ door, wrestle with the handle for a moment and then let yourself inside. The sound of clanging and banging is cue enough as to which way you should haul your carcass through the obscenely large hive. When you finally stumble into the workshop Nepeta looks around you and waves before rushing to a drawer and pulling it open to scan inside of it with urgency. Vriska is on the table, shirtless but for her bra and covered in her own blood. That cerulean blood is flooding the table, dripping off onto the floor around one of Equius’s feet. The other leg is off of the ground, bracing him on the gurney that Vriska is laid on. He scowls in concentration and pins Vriska down with one hand as the other pulls a metal bar from the scraps left of her arm. Vriska’s back arches and she screams. Arched back like that she catches sight of you with her one real eye, the other is clearly damaged but you don’t know how bad.

“Is she going to be ok?” you ask Nepeta who rushes past you with a tool of some kind in her hands.

“You’re not- not worrying about me are you? Not when you look like shit.” Vriska cackles harshly.

Whatever Equius is doing to her now seems far less painful so you cautiously come closer even though you’re lingering on the other side of her to Equius, you don’t want to be in his way when he’s working on her.

“What the hell happened to you?” you ask.

“This woman, she was an actress. In those space nerd movies.” Vriska says weakly.

“That’s so many movies.” you point out as Equius pulls something out from Vriska’s flesh, examines it and throws it away with a metallic ting.

“You know. The force be with you?” Vriska wheezes.

“Carrie Fisher?” you say in surprise.

“That’s the bitch. So, cerulean right? Adult. Stronger than even me, she got the others and me too but I fought her. If you’re strong enough you can overpower someone’s control, turn the tables because their mind is already open. I was trying. Then the lime girl distracted her and I nearly made it.” Vriska explains.

“What happened?” you ask.

“Bigger sutures, Nepeta. It’s the smaller silver one.” Equius says and Nepeta nods and darts away. You should probably keep Vriska distracted. Thankfully you’re already on Vriska’s favourite topic of conversation: Vriska.
“The thing with my kind of control is that you have to have focus or else your thoughts and instructions get all screwy, fleeting ideas become real. I was obviously a thorn in her side, a big one at that. Between me and the girl fucking up and breaking her focus she made me do something she didn’t mean to, especially as she was trying to negotiate us all climbing up the mountainside to the ship’s landing place as her friends carried this big important casket.” she explains.

“So what happened?” you ask again.

“Has no one ever annoyed you enough that you just wished they’d fall off of a cliff?” Vriska sighs.

“That’s definitely a you thing.” you tell her.

“This will hurt.” Equius informs her.

“I can take it.” Vriska insists and looks away from the stump of her shoulder to you again.

“Breaking mind control scrambles your- ah- your focus. As does. You know… falling down a mountainside. I didn’t break any real bones, just fucked the shit out of my metal arm, and I hit a tree with my head. But I walked out of there after passing on vital intel, so, you know.” Vriska brags.

“Mind your language.” Equius reprimands her and fires another stitch into the skin of her shoulder.

Only Vriska could brag about falling down a cliff and hitting everything on the way down and then sending concussed panicked messages which you know she didn’t feel calm about when she sent them.

“I flew into space dragging them down and only woke up when I caught fire on re-entry,” you say, pointing to your singed shirt.

“Then I managed to slow myself down to non fatal speeds and landed right in the open doors of the ship, hit everything on the way in and then flew here.” you add.

“Sounds like Aradia did a lot of the work.” Vriska retorts and Equius takes his hands away from her.

“And the ship got eaten by a shark.” you tell her and Vriska’s eyebrows raise.

“I’m done for now, I need to assemble you a new arm. I would not recommend moving.” Equius warns her and of course Vriska immediately sits up and swings her legs over your side of the table. She’s dripping blood on the floor. Her shoulder is now just a mangled and partially metal stump with no arm at all, you can even see the metal socket where it’ll plug into.

“They have our moirails, they stole them. Mine and yours, and whatever you and Karkat are called.” Vriska says seriously. Nepeta is very keenly and unsubtly listening, you try to ignore it.

“And our friends.” you add.

“And Tavros.” Vriska agrees and trying to stifle the laugh makes your nose hurt like hell.

Vriska reaches forward and with her hand touches your nose, you’re so startled you don’t think to pull back like you usually would if someone reached for your face. That means you’re still in her grasp when Vriska twists her fingers and your nose SNAPS loudly.

“AUGH, YOU BITCH!” you curse, doubling over as blood suddenly flows from your nose. It hurts like hell but the moment it subsides it hurts less than it did before she rearranged your face, as you feel it the line of your nose feels straight like normal. It was broken, you thought it might be but it
“We need a plan, you can fly the ship for sure but what’re we going to do when we get there? A boarding party of just me isn’t helpful right now, as much as I want to say I can take on that many adults with one hand tied behind my back I’d rather not do that.” Vriska continues casually like she didn’t just snap your nose back into place. You’re about to thank her despite that when she casually wipes your blood off her hand onto the back of your shirt and keeps talking.

“We need everyone in on this and we need supplies. Food, medicine, water. We need to see what that ship has and what it can take. theirs is bigger than ours, right? So we need to be prepared, this can’t be a siege.” Vriska continues, unflinching when you stand up to glare at her again.

“I’m just supposed to wait around for all of that? What if they go when we’re running around doing all that crap?” you demand.

“Duh, you need to sleep and eat. You’re clearly burnt out in more than just the literal, you need a long rest.” Vriska grins, so self satisfied with her dungeons and dragons joke.

“You need two eyes.” you tell her.

“Equius can do that kind of work in the air, or failing that I’ll go without if we don’t have time. Pirates are cool and fearsome and have eyepatches. Binocular vision is for sissies.” she scoffs.

Vriska looks over towards Equius who is putting several of his tools into a sterilisation machine and Nepeta who is staring at you both. Vriska has to turn her head a little too far to compensate for her broken eye and you take the chance of being out of her line of sight to gingerly touch your poor nose again, that’s going to leave a mark.

“Can you two take a hike already?” Vriska demands.

Nepeta clearly does not want to go but Equius just grumbles something and picks her up, hulking off out of the room. Now alone Vriska turns her attention on you. She rolls what’s left of her shoulder and idly picks at her bra strap, it’s sitting weird with all of the blood and sudden lack of arm. You’d think that much bloodloss would kill a person but she’s colder than you and they can take a lot of physical trauma. You’re not worried about her.

“You want to get Karkat and Dayvhe back more than anything, right?” Vriska asks.

“Of course I do.” you answer immediately.

“Same for me and Terezi. Next question, if you were in a situation where the only way you could get them back was to abandon everyone else would you do it?” Vriska asks sharply, her eye focused right on you.

“I wouldn’t let it get to that, there’s always another way.” you argue.

“Usually yes, but I’m not asking about that. In that one situation would you take them and leave the others if it was all you could do?” Vriska presses unrelentingly.

“I-” you hesitate. Why is she asking this? What does this prove?

“Oh please, are you scared I’M going to think YOU’RE a bad person? Would you do anything for them or not?” she sneers.

“Yes. No I don’t care what you think but… yes. I’d do anything.” you admit, though the thought
sickens you.

Vriska smiles sharply, satisfied with your words.

“Good, I feel the same for Terezi. I would sell you and everyone else out for her and you’d do the same to me and everyone else for yours. We’ve agreed to that, so in every other instance we’re aligned aren’t we?” Vriska says.

You open your mouth to uncertainly say that yeah that seems to be the case but why is she asking? Vriska looks away from you but starts talking, cutting you off before you can begin.

“For all of our history I don’t think less of you and we’re not trying to kill each other, there’s no revenge. You might spend most of your time unmotivated and overly interested in doing things for fun instead of what you could be doing with your skills but that’s not my business. You’re not… stupid. You’re certainly not weak, not with what you’ve survived.” Vriska flicks a glance to you, her eye focusing on the ports in your head rather than making eye contact. She looks away again.

“We have the same goal here. Near enough at least. You’re the only one who can get me up there and I’m the most conniving and vindictive bitch you know, you need me to organise these chumps and form an attack plan. You’ll be too busy flying and whatever to do it.” she says.

“What’re you saying?” you ask slowly, because you know what it sounds like.

Vriska looks at you again, lifts her chin in haughty confidence and stares you down. Abruptly she thrusts her one remaining hand out at you.

“Cahoots?” she asks.

Your eyebrows about climb into your hair.

Cahoots is… well, it’s what it sounds in part. Two trolls aligned to a common goal, an agreement of allegiance, trust and respect. But the thing is that you don’t usually need to codify that kind of thing with trolls who like each other. Dayvhe and Karkat worked together to get you back before but they weren’t in cahoots because, duh, they already trusted and respected each other anyway.

Cahoots isn’t a quadrant, it’s not like that. But it kind of is like that too. If you watch a movie and two trolls fall into cahoots with each other to do some difficult thing then you’d be stunned if they’re not pitch by the end of the film, barring one of them being killed off from the drama of what could have been. Because if you are prickly enough with someone that you have to declare cahoots you’re already in the vague arena of hate, and if you both have to trust each other enough to make that agreement then that’s required in healthy blackrom.

You stare at her. Blood soaked, armless, shirtless and clearly savagely deranged. She’s crazy, she’s bad news and she could easily kill you. She’d probably say the same about you though. Here’s the thing, she’s right. Not just about that but she’s the most merciless, driven, maniacal person you know and you can sic her on these adults and never doubt that every move she’ll make will be towards destroying them. You don’t need to grubsit her, talk her around, check out what she’s doing. If you want this to work, if you want your quadrants and friends back you need her.

You want to shake her hand, but you can’t.

“My shoulder’s out, unless you want this stupid shit.” you say, holding up the arm on the same side as hers and vaguely flailing your hand against hers.

“Uuuugh, hold on.” Vriska groans and grabs your other hand. She kicks your foot so that you twist
against the work bench and then basically bodyslams your shoulder back in place. It hurts but your arm works again. Vriska’s hand is cold in yours and she moves to pull away but you’re not letting go.

“Cahoots.” you say and Vriska’s expression goes from surprise to dark glee.

“Yes! You go find somewhere to sleep, Equius has a bunch of rooms. He’ll probably get off on some yellowblood making himself at home in fact.” Vriska says.

“That makes me want to do it less.” you reason but you’re ignored.

“I can’t use you if you’re drained. Sleep, eat, I’ll find you and wake you when the plan has a good shape and we’ll go over it then. Got it?” she tells you.

“Alright.” you say. You shrug, forgetting your shoulder but you try not to wince despite the pain. Negotiating the maze of Equius’ hive is next so you turn to leave with that task in mind.

“Sollux, we’re going to make them pay.” Vriska says suddenly as you set foot on the stairs.

You turn to look at her and consider just who they took, you think of the people responsible and how soon you’re going to have them in your grasp. Something dark and vengeful bubbles inside of you and the smile on your face is malicious and alien to you.

“Hell. Fucking. Yes.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey all! A buddy of mine did really cool art for this chapter which I just have to show you! http://tophatbigpencil.tumblr.com/tagged/image-homestuck-aradia-unda-fanart-broken-diamond
Bring It - Cobra Starship

Chapter Notes

tw: if you're particularly squicked by medical or body horror stuff i'd advise you to read Sollux's half of the chapter with a little caution

“Ladies and gentlemen, 
These snakes is slitherin' 
With dollar signs in their eyes 
With tongues so reptilians 
This industry's venomous 
With cold-blooded sentiments 
No need for nervousness 
It's just a little turbulence”
Bring it - Cobra Starship

Promotional song for the critically controversial movie ‘In Which Shaune Johnes Is Escorted To Trial By Fbi Agent Nevill Flynne However Their Interstellar Flight Is Interrupted By The Release Of Numerous Highly Venomous Snakes In An Assassination Attempt. Includes Needless Pailing Scenes Senseless Death Explosive Decompression And Blatant Meme Fodder Regarding ‘Lusus Fucking Snakes On This Lusus Fucking Ship’ Unsuitable For Trolls Of 7 Sweeps And Younger’ Written and directed by acclaimed genius The Grand Entertainer

==> Author: Run path C1

Note to future Dayvhe: next time you control someone make sure to specify that they’re not to psionically neuter you again. God, you’re going to rip all of your hair out at this rate.

“So he’s been learning to do this? That seems to have been an awfully quick learning curve, suspicious.” Terezi remarks from her space in the group cell across the way.

“It’s not suspicious for him to pick up how to use psionics that he was given from hatching, besides he’s put a lot of hard work into it.” Rohhze counters.

“I think the real point here is that we need to be ready for what happens when they come back, it’s not going to take a thinksponge surgeon to work out that Dayvhe screwed with Troll Will Smith’s head and all of us yelling isn’t going to help delay that!” Karkat cuts over them both and thankfully the rest of them fall silent.

“Nothing vital seems to have broken at least.” Dirkka notes as he wriggles his leg around to move his cuffed wrists from behind to his back to his front instead.

Down the corridor you can hear a lot of shouting and crashing which all goes silent with a sick wave of chucklevoodoos that make everyone in the room but Rohhze and you jerk in alarm. They must have got Will.

“I can’t get it off.” you hiss and really the band just won’t budge this time, it’s stretched weirdly or something.
“We need to try to get one of them in here so we can get leverage to get out.” Dirkka insists.

You’re on your own, struggling to get free as your friends bicker amongst themselves as quietly as they can, which isn’t that quietly. Black space looms outside the windows and you can’t stop thinking that Sollux was just there. He was so close and he tried so hard to get you all back.

It’s like- it’s righteous fear in your core, as Jaspers would say. You’re afraid that he didn’t make it back safely, that he’s dead, risked it all for you and died for it. But there’s nothing you can do, if he is dead you can’t fix that and if he’s not you can’t help him from here. All you can try to do is escape but it’s not working. You’re trapped, powerless and helpless and you don’t understand what more you can do.

The decision is taken from you when Carrie Fisher sweeps in the room with Margot Robbie at her heels.

“It’s not Will’s fault! He did it to him, you know that.” Margot insists, pointing a finger at you.

“He should have said. If that really was the Psiionic’s descendant and we just killed him we will not be pleased at all. His only descendant ever found just gone like that? This could have been prevented we could have brought him in or…” Carrie sighs, rubs her temple and turns her focus on you.

“At least Will still had enough sense to contain you.” she mutters, glaring at you as she walks to a cupboard and opens it.

“So, Will isn’t… in trouble?” Margot asks hopefully.

You’re frozen against the wall as the lime actress looks nervously at the older cerulean. Carrie pulls out a vial of something and jabs a needle in it, drawing clear liquid out.

“I’m sure that he will be willing to set Will’s allegiance back where it belongs, just… let me sell that one to him. Insisting that Will’s actions were following the path of charity, mercy and kindness as taught by the Signless, that might do it. Let me speak to him.” Carrie says softly and when she smiles gently there’s a flash of eerie resemblance to the merciful heiress she played on screen so much. That all vanishes when she turns and fixes you with a stiff and judgemental look.

“You, on the other hand, seem incapable of not causing trouble. We can’t even keep that on you, can we?” Carrie asks, gesturing at your headband.

“Why don’t you come in here and find out?” you hiss furiously at the same time that Karkat yells at her to not touch you at all.

“You’re taking me to my ancestor, right? Dahvid?” you demand as she lowers the field penning you in.

“That’s right.” she nods.

“Then I’ll kill him when I find him, I’ll- I’ll rip his throat out with my teeth if I have to.” you vow. Behind Carrie Margot’s face warps into an expression of horror but the colder actress is not so easily intimidated. She smiles and your body freezes up.

“Better trolls than you have tried.” she says with wry amusement.

You feel the needle break your skin and the slow, cold spread of something through your system. Your friends are shouting at her but you can’t make it out, even as her control drops you do no more than slump to your side. On the floor the headband digs into your face and you cough weakly a little
as you nearly mess up breathing and swallowing.

You pass out.

A vague moment of really needing to piss and being half dragged into a bathroom by some famous guy happens, only your focus is so shot you can’t remember why you’re there right away. By the time the thought that you could do something to escape works its way through your head you’re cuffed again in your little square of space.

You think it’s a while before you’re together enough to talk at all.

“Dayvhe? Come on sugargrub, talk to me. Look at me.” Roxxie croons sweetly.

Your face is smushed on the floor and you think you’re laid out in a puddle of your own drool. You open one eye and then the other to look at Roxxie who beams brilliantly at you.

You want to ask her what happened, if she’s ok, has the ship moved, has anyone heard anything else about Sollux. All those things.

“Auuughlyh.” you say instead, half into the floor.

“Mutant chucklevoodoo or not that’s not a highblood drug tolerance.” Karkat sighs.

“Hhhh.” you agree.

Ok, focus, you can do this.

“Kay?” you ask weakly, looking at all of them.

“We’re fine, Dayvhe. You’ve been in and out for… over a day now, maybe? I think they’re letting it wear off so they can feed you soon. Or maybe not, I don’t know how long it’s going to take us to get there.” Karkat answers.

“What I want to know is how they have two interchangeable helmsmen. Nicole Kidman has covered for brief stretches so Biggie can sleep, I heard them. How’s that possible?” Dirkka asks.

“We… move?” you mumble and roll a little onto your back. Ugh, half your face is kind of numb.

“Yeah, we started moving about six hours ago maybe. Whatever you made Troll Will Smith do to the helm didn’t stick for long.” Terezi tells you.

You blink blearily at the ceiling. If you’re moving and you’re not just frozen in orbit around Alternia then Sollux… he might not know where to find you. If he’s even still alive. Your stupid ancestor was apparently behind this whole celebrity deathmatch thing the whole time which is… you don’t even know what that’s about. Except Sollux tried to warn you, tried to look into this and you shut him down. Now he might be dead. Sollux might be dead and the trolls who raised you are stuck in your mess along with your friends and your quadrantmate. You’re a disaster, ruining everything you touch.

A sob bubbles up out of your throat and you can feel hot tears streaking through the smeared greasepaint on your face. You don’t have the mental focus to clamp down on the crying and anguish wrings out of you in humiliating waves.

“Dayvhe, it’s going to be ok.” Roxxie soothes you.

“It- it’s not.” you choke out and sniffle pathetically.
“Listen, they have to let us out of here at some point. This ship flew here, it can fly back. This isn’t over, we’re just waiting is all. Just trust me, we’ll come up with something.” Dirkka agrees.

“But… I’m sorry. It’s my fault you’re all here.” you apologise, looking over at them.

It’s funny, they’re all clearly sympathetic to you and the band pressing into your forehead is a pretty stark reminder that you’re not making them do that. Rohhze did say that maybe people just like you.

“I think that blame rests solely on them, not you.” Rohhze points out.

“Yeah, you didn’t lead them to us. I don’t know how they found the cave.” Tavros agrees with a nod.

“A leak in communication somewhere, some unsecured network perhaps. I can’t say I understand a lot of that sort of thing but that isn’t your fault.” Kanaya adds.

You start protesting again but Karkat cuts over you, all angry scowling with his hands bound behind his back and his thick eyebrows drawn down low.

“How can you stop being pitiful with greasepaint on? It’s making me respect myself less.” Karkat says harshly. That’s Karkat for he pities you and is angry, just not specifically at you. You’re pretty fluent in Karkat. It’s a second language that involves a lot of tongue.

Well, now you’re just sniffling and giggling to yourself and Karkat is looking at you like you’ve lost your mind and he’s not in the least surprised at this.

Time passes and your coherence grows. You really can’t do anything to get out of here and that’s really all there is to say on the matter. Before too long there’s chatter over the intercom about landing and the sky outside the window gets light. There’s a bump as the ship touches down the others stand up in their cell but any hopes they had of breaking free are dashed when Carrie takes over their bodies.

An exhausted Biggie lumbers into the room and glares at you as he drops the containment around you, your body is snatched from your control and the yellowblood snaps his fingers and your handcuffs abruptly detach from the wall. Some kind of magnetic psionics maybe?

You’re walked down the ramp that you entered the ship on and there’s already a medical team attending to Nicole Kidman and then to Biggie Smalls as he falls into a chair with a weary sigh. The eyes of the medical team aren’t on you but Karkat as each one of them stares at the sign on his chest. You can only wonder what he would say to them if he wasn’t controlled but as he is all of you just walk on by.

Finally clear of the ship you can get a better look of the space around you. The atmosphere is thin here but bright, it’s daytime and yet the sun doesn’t burn you. It’s a distant light in the sky, and the sky itself is pale enough that you can see dim stars through it in some places. Around you the grass is bright green and trimmed all to precisely the same length, the hedges around it are ornamental and all pristine to the millimetre. A bot zips past you with no care for your wellbeing, slices the barest edge off of a leaf and then vanishes into the distance. You’re walked past a tasteful fountain that happens to have a vintage neon purple convertible scuttlebuggy lodged in it at a bizarre angle.

Bursting through the grounds that stretch as far as the eye can see is a… building? You’re only questioning this because it looks to you like the process they went through to design this building was to shred a photo album of building design styles, dip an architect in tar, induce a seizure in them and then force them to afterwards design a building out of all the bits of building pictures that stuck
to them as they flailed around on the ground in them. Or something. Honestly it’s not just hideous it’s nonsensical, you think some of that geometry isn’t possible. It’s entirely out of the question that this wasn’t deliberately intended to be as offensive to the eyes as possible.

Every person that your group is marched past stares and a lot of people are actually finding somewhere better to be as they see you and evaluate their choices. Nevertheless Carrie sweeps through the inside of the building like she owns the place, finally shoving open the double doors to a large room that is bustling with noise and activity. Trolls are rushing around holding stacks of paper, hurriedly having conversations into their devices or rapidly typing away. Music is piped through unseen speakers and there, on the other end of the room a man paces back and forth. He’s tall, adult, wearing a suit entirely mutant red and walking about like your face belongs to him.

“No, no, I don’t care.” he says into his palmhusk as he paces.

“Nah, see, you’re just continuing to list things I don’t care about. No… I don’t care about the imperial censors or- Smirhl, every time you make a cut to my script I’m going to come down there and cut something off of you am I clear?” he hisses at the palmhusk.

“Sir, the budget is over for-” an assistant says urgently, rushing up to him with a tablet. Your ancestor holds a finger to his lips and glances down before scribbling a signature and turning away.

“Absolutely not. You will not change the script.” he says, using your- using his cuddlevoodoos and then hanging up.

“Entertainer.” Carrie says with a smile.

It’s then that your ancestor turns to face you all properly and surprise flashes over his face, but he’s not looking at you. He’s looking behind you.

“Everyone else out.” he says, his voice almost a whisper. Wide eyed the assistants flee from the room and the music cuts out suddenly.

Dahvid walks slowly towards you then past you entirely. Carrie at least turns you to watch him as he comes to a stop in front of Karkat.

“Oh… oh he’s just like Signless. Stars… look, Carrie, look.” Dahvid whispers in awe, curling a finger under Karkat’s chin and turning his psionically compliant head this way and that.

“I thought you’d be pleased.” Carrie says with a smile.

“And the descendants of you, Dolorosa, Summoner, Redglare, Academic and even your bro, though god knows how that happened.” Iron troll says, muttering that last part.

“Don’t talk shit about my bro.” Dahvid says sharply, looking up. Robert Downey blanches in terror, his ears flattening back meekly.

“Sorry boss, just a joke.” he says quickly.

Dahvid scowls, his white paint warping on his face but he seems to shake the agitation off and instead turns his focus back to Carrie who really does seem to be in charge here. Well, second to him of course.

“Carrie, let them go. I want to find out all about them.” Dahvid tells her and, obligingly, she breaks her control, but she’s smart enough to keep her hand wrapped tightly around your upper arm so you can’t rush your ancestor like you want to.
She didn’t think to stop Karkat, Dahvid’s hand is still gently cradling Karkat’s face and your beautiful, blessed, perfect kismesis sees that chance and snaps his teeth hard into the meat of Dahvid’s hand. Purple blood splurts messily out of the wound and up Karkat’s cheek. Dahvid howls in pain and yanks his hand back as several of the other adults pull Karkat away and restrain him tighter.

“I’m going to KILL you, you self-important MONSTER!” Karkat spits furiously, purple blood dripping down his face.

Fuckin’ swoon.

Dahvid is staring in complete shock as he cradles his injured hand. Without him even having to ask one of the actresses comes forward and starts gently cleaning and bandaging the wound. It’s just like the book said, Dahvid feels a need for something and people are compelled to fill it.

“Can’t say I ever made Signless that mad at me but I’m sure I deserved that at some point, fuckin’ ow.” Dahvid hisses in pain shaking his hand.

“You deserve a slow, painful death is what you deserve! Send us back to Alternia you raging sociopath!” Karkat snarls.

“No, no, don’t be silly. I can’t do that. Far too dangerous for you, for any of you. Though, that said why the hell have you brought me an heiress Carrie? You know I hate them, why would you do this to me?” Dahvid whines at her and Dirkka puts himself between Roxxie and your ancestor and hisses threateningly at him which seems to surprise your ancestor a lot.

“We found them together near your old hive, he claims he was behind your lusus’ murder but naturally he could be under orders to cover for an heiress so we brought them both. It seemed possible that she could be on commission from the Empress to take your lusus out herself on the promise of something that certainly wouldn’t be delivered but she’s clearly young. Not a bad way to bump off a potential challenger.” Carrie shrugs.

“As if, the only fin I wanna do to that beach is krill her!” Roxxie snarls.

“As the note of ancestors and descendants… I have good news and bad news, I’ll give you the bad news first.” Carrie says seriously.

“Aww.” Dahvid whines and you glare at him, he’s such a petulant wiggler. This is a grown as man of who the fuck knows how many sweeps and his cuddlevoo does have made him a spoilt brat. You’re embarrassed to share DNA with this loser!

“Will fell victim to your descendants voo doos, he tried to take out the helm. We stopped him obviously but the attack drained Biggie a lot and because of Nicole being previously injured we-” she starts.

“Wait, what happened to her?” your ancestor asks with a frown.

“Well, that’s… related to the bad news. The point is that Will can perhaps tell you best but I genuinely feel that he did nothing wrong but at the moment he’s still fixated on not being here, Margot has him under control as best as she can but I think you’re the only cure here.” Carrie says delicately.

“Oh, well sure, bring him in.” Dahvid nods.

Carrie lets you go and fixes you with a stiff look and nudges the Walking Dead guy to pay attention
to you as she walks off to the door. She opens it and disappears into the hallway for a moment. You’re trying to get Dirkka’s attention to find out what you should do but he’s too focused on Roxxie, then Carrie comes back and the opportunity passes.

Carrie Fisher leads Margot Robbie into the room, she’s quietly shooshpapping Troll Will Smith who is weakly resisting coming in here. You remember the fear in him about failing your ancestor and it’s plain to see on his face that the weird logic you put in his head has got twisted. You told him his fears were true, that the worst would happen if he was here so he should make you not come here. Yet, here you all are and he’s terrified out of his mind. He’s trying to pull away but your ancestor tuts and reaches for him, ignoring the way Will flinches and tries to escape.

“Shoosh. Stay still, Will.” your ancestor croons at him, his voice dipping into some resonant tone that makes it feel like every tooth in your head is buzzing, some kind of shitty feedback loop gone wild.

Will goes lax in Dahvid’s hands, almost unnervingly puppetlike.

“I’m sorry.” he whines.

“He didn’t mean to, it wasn’t his fault!” Margot blurts out and your ancestor’s mismatched eyes narrow at her, she shrinks back.

“Will, tell me what you did. What’s the bad news? What happened?” your ancestor asks.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know who he was, I was trying-” Will pleads and your ancestor’s face goes cold.

“Don’t make me ask again.” he says icily.

The room is so quiet you can hear Will’s terrified swallow before he starts to talk, his voice almost whisper quiet.

“You said no one could know we were there, so we were careful. But there were- shit went wrong. Edward got stabbed, we don’t know how. We started looking and your software- Psii’s stuff that he- the algorithm or whatever to see if someone knows about us, it started kicking up a fuss. And we thought maybe it was a mistake.” Will says nervously.

“Psii doesn’t MAKE mistakes.” Dahvid hisses and his eyes start tinting red with anger.

“I know! I know! So we started looking for a hacker, someone smart enough to find us and then we found that someone was- it was one person. Hopping from place to place, not spoofing IP’s but actually like running so we tracked it. No witnesses, you know? And we found this hive, the last place the hacker was, they were getting sloppy and. The guy there didn’t seem the type but Robert- not Downey, DeNero I mean. He didn’t want a risk, cause you said no witnesses.” Will says hurriedly.

“He’s dead, yes?” your ancestor asks.


“But?” your ancestor growls deeply.

“I scouted! I set up a perimeter and looked just in case this hacker was, was getting into the internet outside somehow. There was a bridge the hive was near and I went under and there was this kid. He was nothing, some scrawny kid their age. Yellow and clearly hiveless and terrified, he looked like he was on something you know? Obviously not the guy and he hadn’t seen no one but me so I thought who was gonna believe him and I’ve been like that before and he was just a kid. I- mercy, you
know? Kindness. I didn’t want him to die.” Will insists.

Despite everything, you kind of hate this guy a little less now. Will, that is, he saw Sollux and took pity on him and who wouldn’t? He helped him because like he said, who’d believe him? Not you, not Karkat, not anyone. You all thought he was just crazy, but he wasn’t. Fucking hell.

Your ancestor is still holding Will tight in a grip that could easily become neck snapping and his expression is the one of a man trying to work out which bit of this is the bad news.

“I said no one was there, we left. The hack stopped. Bits started up again later but we thought noise, or he’d programmed remote stuff that was still going. Then we found them two, the- well we found all of them. Point is we were going, coming back home. We were leaving atmo and we got shimmy only it wasn’t, we were being dragged down.” Will continues.

“By what? A weapon or another ship or something?” your ancestor asks, clearly concerned.

“By a psionic. A kid. That kid. He flew right out past the atmosphere chasing us, dragging us down and no one’s that powerful outside a ship. No one except—” Will says.

“Psii.” Dahvid says quietly, the red draining from his eyes.

“So… so you- Psii has a descendant too?” Dahvid asks, letting Will go and pacing back and forth, his hands in his hair.

“He was wearing the wrong shirt the first time but the second time, yeah, it was the same sign. And I thought he was going to let go of the ship before he ran out of air!” Will insists desperately.

“YOU DIDN’T THINK ANYTHING! PSII DOESN’T GIVE UP, NOT EVER! NO DESCENDANT OF HIS WOULD EVER SURRENDER, NOT WHEN YOU HAVE HIM ON YOUR SHIP! ARE YOU FUCKING- IS THAT WHERE YOU WERE? CHIPPING HIS FROZEN CORPSE OFF OF THE OUTSIDE OF MY SHIP?!” Dahvid screams, grabbing Will Smith by the shirt. Margot’s hands are over her face, she can’t look but it’s Carrie who steps in and pushes Dahvid back.

“He’s not outside the ship. He passed out, let go. He fell to atmosphere, pictures looked like he protected himself at least a little but… he hit the water and then a giant shark lusus… well. He was eaten. If we’d have known then we never would have let this happen but there’s no way he could have known.” she insists.

Your ancestor is standing there, his chest heaving with each furious inhale and everyone else in the room has decided that someone else can break the silence first. In the end it’s Dahvid himself who speaks next.

“He burnt up in the atmosphere and then got eaten by a shark?” he asks weakly. Carrie nods.

“Fuckin’ Psii’s going to get a kick out of that, his descendant dies twice AND avoids the helm. Fuck. I could have saved him Carrie, you fucked up. I’m… I don’t suppose you can get the body either.” Dahvid says creepily.

“Unfortunately keeping us from crashing nearly burnt Nicole out entirely, then when Biggie took over your descendant convinced Will to damage the helm so badly that there was no way we could possibly get down there and track that shark. Even after that time there wouldn’t have been anything in the way of remains.” Carrie tells him.

Your ancestor sighs deeply and sits down on his desk, obviously pusher-broken.
“I can’t believe you killed him and I don’t have a body. You know I hate not having a body.” he
sniffles.

You glance at Rohhze who is also seemingly of the opinion that this guy is completely deranged.
Why would he want Sollux’s body? Fuck, if he is dead you’d be happier with Roxxie’s mom having
eaten him than his corpse in the unsettling hands of your ancestor.

“On that note I have good news, remember I said there was good news? This is that part.” Carrie
smiles brightly.

“Psii’s only descendant is dead, this had better be the best news in existence. I’m talking ‘death of the
Empress’ or ‘free Psii’ level of good news here.” your ancestor says sullenly.

“We have Disciple’s body.” Carrie says.

Your ancestor’s face goes slack with surprise and then is suddenly an ear to ear grin as he leaps off
of the desk and grabs her by the shoulders.

“Oh are you SERIOUS? That’s just as good! Where is she? Why didn’t you tell me sooner? And- oh
and the descendants here too and this- this is the best day ever WHERE IS SHE?!” he babbles
excitedly. Carrie smiles and gestures towards the door and your ancestor bolts past you all with a
high pitched excited chirp.

The moment he’s out of sight the adults sag in relief.

“Fuck, I thought I was going to die. Carrie I OWE you.” Will gasps in relief.

“You do but, it’s fine. I said it’d be fine, always do the bad news first. You’re ok, he’ll let it go
eventually. It’s fine.” Carrie nods and pats his shoulder.

“Thank you.” Margot whispers and squeezes her moirail close to her.

“Have you seen the BOX she’s in?! This is AMAZING!” your ancestor yells from down the hall.

Carrie makes the rest of you move out of the way as Dahvid zooms back into the room pushing a
huge levitating trolley that has a big carved casket shaped thing on it made of stone. Like a wiggler
on twelfth perigee’s he carefully pulls off the lid like it weighs almost nothing and then gasps as he
hops up onto the rim.

“She’s in amazing condition! How did you find her?” Dahvid asks eagerly as he leans in and then
stands up with… a skull in his hand. The horns on it are just like Nepeta’s and it makes your blood
run cold to see the reverant way he looks at it.

“When we caught these two me and Biggie did some… we did fancy tech stuff to find very
fragmented map data that’s left behind even when you try to delete things. We knew Disciple’s body
was down there and the location looked worth checking out so… we got lucky. It’s where we got a
bunch of them too.” Robert Downey explains but it’s blatantly obvious that your ancestor isn’t
listening.

He has Disciple’s skull in his lap and his hand reaches into his mutant red suit jacket until he finds a
remote and then carefully presses a button.

You jump in alarm when the floor drops and starts to slide down, the ceiling rising higher and higher
above you. The painted walls of his office giving way to smooth metal as you’re lowered down.
Finally the floor clicks into place as a tile at the centre of a far wider room. Past where you are is a
glowing circle of light and your ancestor pushes the casket past you all towards it.

You don’t have to be controlled to follow him, your own itching curiosity is enough. The other adults stay back in the office space but your group uneasily follows. It turns out not to be a glowing circle of light but rather a number of pillars that all seem to stop about hip height for you and above them is a glowing beam of light. When you move closer the first one resolves into the figure of a teal woman with the same horns as Terezi, the same cane and bright red glasses. Her expression is noble and dignified, it’s a hologram. When you come closer still you can see through it until the angle you’re at changes so that you can’t see her at all. Instead you see what’s floating in the light. A perfectly preserved set of bones, the same cane bobbing gently in the air, suspended in whatever field holds it. You step back in alarm and the angle resolves so that you see the image of the woman as she was.

Your eyes flit around the room. There, Tavros but not, Kanaya but different, Rohhze from another lifetime. As you move you go from seeing them to all that is left of them. Many of them have broken bones, Rohhze’s ancestor’s skeleton is in so many bits you almost can’t imagine it. Where your ancestor stands is clearly the central focus of the room. Karkat’s ancestor, Signless, stands in perfect serenity. The image projected shows his face in an expression you’ve seen on Karkat a million times, love. He looks like he adores you, like at any moment he might laugh at you for something you’ve said. To his side one blank pillar remains and on his other is Disciple, her eyes sparkling with mischief.

Dahvid reaches to pick the skull up again and pushes it through the hologram and into the light. It floats up into place and he carefully puts every part of her in there. It was, you realise, the only empty one here except for the blank one that doesn’t have a picture on it. It’s not a hard guess to conclude that one is for Sollux’s ancestor. From the way you’ve heard him spoken about it seems he’s still alive somehow. But the rest of them… they’re all dead. This is some kind of… memorial or something.

Dahvid steps back finally, the last bit of Disciple in place and sniffs slightly. You look at your ancestor properly, maybe for the first time. He’s an adult, standing here surrounded by friends and allies who have all fallen and died. The adults back there are all obviously under his spell, you’re not sure about Carrie, but at least here he seems terribly alone. You could almost feel sorry for him, except you remember that he doesn’t deserve to have even this much.

You could feel sad for the man whose powers have so isolated him and his own age has parted him from the people he actually cared about, except you don’t. He knew what he was doing, he knew that he was manipulating people and because of it he’s in this situation. This shouldn’t invoke your sympathy, this should be a cautionary tale. You’re stood with your friends, your living friends and quadrantmate, if you want to not be some sad mutant surrounded by bones you need to fix things and FAST.

Dahvid reaches out, his fingers grazing the light projected over Signless’ pillar, the image splitting. The skeleton there is broken, bones snapped, one rib has an arrow lodged clean through it. Still around the skeletal wrists is rough, bent iron, wrapped and shackled. Somehow the metal seems fused to the bone itself but that’s not the most jarring thing. The worst part is that the picture those shackles make is one you see every night, the sign on Karkat’s chest.

No. You won’t be a Strydr stood by the corpse of a Vantas, you won’t allow it.

“Go back upstairs, don’t leave the building unless I tell you.” he says, making your head ring with the words. You wince but the others all turn and calmly walk back to the office area. You linger for a second, you don’t have to go but you don’t want to stay either. Leave the dead-inside man to his
dead friends, you have a plan to make and a planet to escape.

Oh, and an ancestor to murder.

“So kiss me goodbye
Honey, I'm gonna make it out alive
So kiss me goodbye
I can see the venom in their eyes
Goodbye
It's time to fly
Tonight the sky's alive
With lizards serpentine
Lounging in their suits and ties
Watch the whore's parade
For the price of fame, hey”

Bring it - Cobra Starship

Promotional song for the critically controversial movie ‘In Which Shaune Johnes Is Escorted To Trial By Fbi Agent Nevill Flynne However Their Interstellar Flight Is Interrupted By The Release Of Numerous Highly Venomous Snakes In An Assassination Attempt. Includes Needless Pailing Scenes Senseless Death Explosive Decompression And Blatant Meme Fodder Regarding ‘Lusus Fucking Snakes On This Lusus Fucking Ship’ Unsuitable For Trolls Of 7 Sweeps And Younger’ Written and directed by acclaimed genius The Grand Entertainer

==> Author: Run path C2;

You sleep like the dead, your body trying desperately to heal and your mind too burnt out on the worst case scenario happening right now to hold out. You don’t dream, you don’t think, you’re just out. At least you are until the slime you’re in is jostled over and over and you are jiggled into wakefulness.

You lift your face fully out of the sopor and a pair of glasses is handed to you. You put them on and realise that you’re alone with Vriska who has her hands on the edge of your coon and you’re abruptly and acutely aware that you’re just in your underwear in here. You don’t usually care much about what you’re wearing around people, more that you care that you are at least wearing something.

“I’m not asking a second time to satisfy your duality thing, but you said you’d do aaaaaaaanything to get them back. You meant that?” Vriska asks.

“Yes?” you say uneasily.

“Then you’re about to have a really shitty night.” Vriska says stepping back from the coon like she expects you to get out. You don’t want to get out, what with the aforementioned you just being in your underwear thing.

“How shitty?” you ask and at least lean on the rim of the coon.

Vriska is wearing a tank top and you watch as her fingers uneasily skirt the part of her amputated shoulder where metal meets flesh.

“Equius and Hal got a look at Aradia. The ship, I mean. Hal had a theory but he said he never brought it up because it wasn’t supposed to be an issue which is such shit if you ask me.” Vriska
“Is the bad part of the night where you’re just talking to me because I can just go back to sleep.” you tell her and she glares at you but doesn’t insult you back. That’s… unusual.

“You flew her before? Or she used you as a battery and you had a big blowup at each other in space, yeah? Took… less than an hour?” Vriska asks.

You try to remember the timespan of that, working out the bit inside Roxxie’s mom is harder, you weren’t actively flying for a lot of that but for the parts you were that was very quick indeed.

“Yeah?” you say.

“Yeah, they thought so. You know how you don’t have all the ports, even the ones that go down your posture pole? I mean obviously you’re missing the ones that get inside your vital organs. Aradia said she got everyone to you in time to stop them flipping you over and burrowing right into your chest cavity which would make the whole living outside of a helmsblock thing impossible.” Vriska rambles.

You can just imagine it, those horrible squirming wires getting into your thorax, wrapping around your organs, parasitising them. Tendrils pushing between the chambers of your bloodpusher… you want to throw up just thinking about it.

“The ones down your back at least are apparently pretty vital.” Vriska says.

“For what?”

Vriska purses her lips and sighs through her nose.

“There’s that cord that goes down your backbone from your thinksponge, it’s part of the same thing. To move a ship and not have your thinksponge dribble out of your ears you need to distribute the neural stress properly. Having Aradia’s mind in there probably helped and that you only did short stretches helped too but there’s no way we can get up there with you helming the ship with the ports you have now, you can’t sustain it.” Vriska tells you.

You want to say that she’s wrong, that you didn’t feel that bad before. You’ll do it for them, you’ll take the risk.

“Hal and Equius are willing to put just the ports in your backbone in, none of that other shit. You can walk out of it afterwards. That’s the only way we’re getting up there.” she says before you can speak.

You understand the question. She asked if you’d do anything. So, will you let someone pick up helming you where they left off? Everything in you recoils at the thought, like those cartoons where someone tries to stuff a meowbeast into a box and it just won’t go.

But.

Dayvhe and Karkat. The rest of your friends.

You pull yourself out of the coon and stand on the floor, not caring now about not being properly dressed. What’s the point in doing that anyway? They’ll need to take clothes off of you to...
Yeah.

“Now?” you ask.

“I told them to get ready.” Vriska nods.

You nod as well. Vriska opens the door and you walk through it with her.

“I need your help.” Vriska says as she walks you down the stairs and towards Equius’ lab.

“With what?” you ask.

“Planning.” Vriska says.

She opens the doors to Equius’ lab. Hal and Equius are standing there. Hal perks up when he sees you but his expression is concerned.

“You’re sure you want to do this?” he asks. You nod.

“I have options for you. Obviously, there’s painkillers. You’ll still feel sensation but it won’t be pain and things will be somewhat numb. We... need you awake and still feeling something so we know that we haven’t made a mistake. I do have some sedatives but they might make you feel very...” Hal hesitates.

“Surely the sedatives are his best option. He will be calm and compliant, without his moirail here to keep him pascified through the surgery...” Equius starts.

“No.” you cut him off, panic rising through the numb shock in your chest. This is going to be bad enough without feeling like you’re being experimented on as well. Equius looks at you strangely but Hal nods in understanding.

“Do you want to know the risks for this?” Hal asks.

“I’m going through with it anyway so I’d rather not give myself ideas about what to panic over.” you shrug.

Equius is shining with how much he dislikes this breach of medical procedure. Hal conversely just gestures to the table. There’s a bit cut out for you to lay flat on your front, so your neck and everything else will be perfectly in line through this. You hate this, you do it anyway.

The table is cold and as you get onto it Hal starts to talk.

“Only the needed ports are going in. I’m going to plug something into your lowest one but it’s not a wire, it’s just a way of distributing the numbing agent, okay?” Hal says. You nod and lay down.

You can see a weird little oval of the floor, a little of Hal’s foot and nothing else. Not until red sneakers come into view and then Vriska shuffles on the floor until she’s almost under you completely. Her balance is skewed from the lack of arm.

“What’re you doing?” you ask and Hal’s fingers brush the back of your neck. You tense as they go through your hair and your claws curl around the edge of the table.

“I said I needed your help with planning and right now you’re the best thing for it, a captive audience. You have to stay right here the whole time I’m talking so you have to listen to my plan.” Vriska grins like she’s won.
Translation: She’s staying right here the whole time.

Your back goes weird and cold all at once and your breath catches. You can’t hear what Hal and Equius are saying through the rush of terrified pounding blood in your ears but you can just about feel the tap of a finger on your back and the slick wipe of something that smells sterilising over your skin.

“Wh...at’s your plan?” you mumble.

“So here’s my thinking. You’re resistant to Dayvhe and I’m the only other person we know who dislikes him. Not that you dislike him but you know what I mean. It’s possible that I’m immune too, mind control doesn’t always mesh with mind control.” Vriska says, tapping her lip thoughtfully.

There’s a pressure on the nape of your neck and then there isn’t but your skin feels. Wet.

“Can you… do chuckle voodooos work on you though?” you ask. You’re not thinking about what they’re doing, you’re not.

“A little, Rohhze used to throw them at me. They spook me but it’s not control. Maybe I’ll like his ancestor if he makes me but I don’t think he can control me.” Vriska continues.

You can feel a sudden brush of something across the skin on the front of your neck and then down your chin. Suddenly there’s a splash of gold on the floor. Vriska looks down at it, reaches out with her one hand and smears it.

“I don’t know how much I can count on that. Maybe we need to agree that when it comes to anything he says if we run into the ancestor himself that if you tell me he’s controlling me I have to take your word for it.” she continues.

There’s pressure, weird pressure on your neck. Don’t THINK about it.

“Ok. Hal can too, he’s not affected. So three of us. But if he’s stuck on planet he wouldn’t be on the ship, right? So it’s not going to come up.” you say, focussing hard.

“But if we have to chase them we might find him.” she says.

“Ok. Then… the woman with the mind control. Maybe Hal should take her, she already beat you so you’d be better controlling their helm maybe.” you rush on. There are metal sounds.

“Right, that was my thought. We also need to consider Nepeta, she runs a good ambush.” Vriska says.

Hal’s hand moves lower, have they finished that first one? You’re one down if so. Keep talking.

“Are you just being nice about Nepeta because Equius has his fingers in my nervous system and you need me?” you joke weakly.

“Pft, no. Have you not seen the girl hunt?” Vriska laughs.

“No, and neither did anything she caught.” you say back. You’re not breathing so hard now. It’s good, you’d rather not have Vriska considering you a complete loser for panicking. After all she was being pulled apart on this table just… how long did you sleep? That long ago. And yeah she was screaming at one point but she was fine.

“What do you know of Jayekh’s combat abilities? He seems like kind of a drip to me.” Vriska asks.
“Pistolkind, I disarmed him once when he tried to shoot me.” you recall as a distressingly organic sound comes from your back.

“Not reassuring.” she says.

“If he’s not facing another psionic it should be ok. He lives in that mental jungle so he can’t be that bad and he has that deranged robot Dirkka built.” you tell her.

“Hey, Brobot’s cool. Be nice. Equius pass the clamp, thank you.” Hal interrupts. Eugh, pressure in your back.

Vriska makes you assess Jayekh’s combat abilities more, then Jayyne’s, then one by one everyone in your group. You’re walked through planning teams for people. She asks questions about if you can hack their ship when you’re already helmed and makes you explain the terminology you use in your answers. Every so often you can see your blood drip onto the floor or you feel the panic inducing sensation of either some tool or Hal’s mechanical fingers touching the inside of your vertebrae. It gives you a lurching nausea that’s so distracting Vriska has to accuse you of not pulling your weight in this planning in order to make you focus again.

You don’t know how long the whole thing takes. It’s forever and also a blur. You hardly remember anything you’ve said, you sure as shit hope it wasn’t important. When they’re done Hal crouches down so you can see him and he explains they’re going to put you under now, it’s important that you’re totally still for the next twelve hours or so when their boosted healing stuff they put in it works. That is, Hal explains, if you like having movement in your body ever again.

When you do wake up again you’re in no real rush to move, what with not wanting to be paraplegic or whatever. Your blood has been wiped from the floor and Vriska is no longer present. You’re clearly not alone in the room, you can hear the sounds of industrious metalwork going on. Fingers and toes are reporting that you still have sensation and cautiously you curl your toes and are not struck down by paralysis. Your mouth is dry as hell so you work your tongue around it to try to get everything functioning enough for you to be able to speak. You wait for a break in the banging to talk.

“Can I move?” you croak out.

“One moment.” Equius says distantly and you hear his footsteps come closer.

Cold fingers press into your bare back and you feel his hair brush your skin as he leans in and looks closely at you.

“Can you feel this?” he asks, his fingers skirting a circle midway up your back.

“Yeah.” you tell him.

“No numbness here?” he asks, and no, you can feel him.

“Oh-uh.”

“Mentally how do you feel? Alert or still groggy? Do you think you might fall if you sit up?” he questions you further.

“Just… cold and stiff. Tired.” you answer.

“Oh if you think you might sleep then do that some more-”
“A different kind of tired.” you interrupt. You are tired. Tired of things going wrong, tired of suffering through shit. Really you’re just done. Not done fighting to fix things or protect people, but you’re done with having the energy to hope that things are going to not suck. At least that’s how you feel now.

Equius tells you that you’ll probably be safe to sit up and with care you do. He seems ready to catch you which is nice, you guess. You slump forward into your usual slouch and feel… different. Your back is sporting the same patches of dead sensation that your head has, you feel sore though not as much as you’d expect for having two people punch holes in your body over and over.

Curiously you reach behind you, eyeing Equius to be sure that you’re allowed to touch and getting no signal otherwise you do it. You touch them. First the middle of your back. Your backbone has always been kind of knobbly, though less so with Dayvhe’s ‘eat more, dumbass’ regime. Now you can feel the bumps of your vertebrae and then body warmed metal in a circular port just like the ones in your head. They’re spaced out evenly from the nape of your neck all the way down to just below your hipbones, there’s about two bones between each one you think. That’s nice in a vague satisfied your doubles kick kind of way. You’re helmed, fully this time.

Ok, not fully helmed, if someone were to chuck you into a permanent helmsblock like this you’d die of dehydration or something pretty quick because these are just the… the neural ports or whatever. This is still more helmed than you’d ever wanted but at least these ones you agreed to.

Dayvhe and Karkat would probably have things to say about how numb you feel about this. You’re mentally silent except for a very distant sense of internal screaming far, far away. They might say something like you’re in shock or that you’re distancing yourself from your problems. You can’t know, because they’re currently stranded in an enemy ship in orbit. You need to find the others.

Equius was saying something but you weren’t listening, you get up and walk out of the room.

You follow the distant sound of voices, people arguing. You pass a lot of sweaty hoofbeast art and push your way into a room.

“-have finite space in that ship Jayded, there’s only so many sub-machine guns anyone needs. Just because Dirkka and Roxxie aren’t here doesn’t mean you can fill that space with guns.” John groans.

The door bangs shut behind you and conversation immediately stops as everyone turns to look at you.

“I’m helmed, tell me the final plan so we can go.” you say.

“You’re not really ready to fly just yet, I don’t think Sollux. Besides there’s a lot still to be done.” Hal says gently.

“You can’t stop me, also what’s still to be done? Weren’t you all doing things when I was getting these and then recovering?” you demand, jerking a thumb at your back.

“He’s saying he thinks you’re not mentally with it enough to fly.” Jayekh clarifies.

“Why?!” you shout. Is everyone else doing nothing when you’re going through this to get them up there?!

“Because you’re just in your underwear and covered in dry sopor and blood and you don’t seem to have noticed!” Jayyne says, throwing her hands up in the air in dismay.

You look down at yourself. Oh, well, so you are.
“Dayvhe and Karkat have seen me in less, let’s go.” you shrug.

“Sit down, the plan has changed.” Vriska says. She’s still down an arm and an eye but she’s sitting side on in an armchair and tapping on her tablet so she seems to be getting on with something at least. There’s a spare chair nearby so you sit down as everyone else just looks at you uneasily.

“What changed?” you ask.

Everyone looks at each other, seemingly wanting someone else to talk. That is aside from Vriska who’s curiously peering at your back. It’s Jayed who speaks first, standing next to a pile of guns that she was clearly in the middle of arguing about when you came in.

“They’re not in orbit anymore, they flew off.” she says gravely.

“We need to chase them then, I need to get in the ship-” you gasp.

“Stay down.” Vriska groans.

“The fact of the matter is that if we were to follow right after them they would sure as heck notice us. Space is so darn big, you know? If they’re out there on their own making tracks and suddenly there’s this other ship trailing right behind them they’re going to know and it’s not like there’s a lot to hide behind out there. We need to take a more circuitous route to where they’re going.” Jayekh says.

“We know where they’re going. I’ve long known the rough position of where the crates from Dirkka’s ancestor were coming from, it’s how we knew to look for them. The hard point was pinpointing it because there were no planets directly around there, just planetoids. They’re heading off in the same direction, we know the two ancestors were stranded on a planetoid and we now know that Dahvid and The Grand Entertainer are the same person and the obvious destination matches up with my data. I know where they’re going.” Hal explains.

“Where-”

“Planet Hollywood, it’s ridiculously obvious, isn’t it?” Vriska groans but she’s looking at her tablet again instead of you.

“It doesn’t matter if they see me, I’ll catch them and we’ll fight them!” you protest.

“No. If we’d caught them in orbit then the conclusion would have been that the engine or the helm failed and they landed and were destroyed and they’d assume everyone on board was killed. Our friends included. But they’ll see us approach and give notice of a fight. Even if we won that fight and somehow destroyed the ship other people would come looking for us. An orbit crash we’d just have to maybe give them new identities but with chasing them through space Dayvhe and Dirkka’s ancestors will just keep hunting us even if we are successful.” Vriska says flatly.

“Alright, orbit was better I’ll accept that. But how is following them to a planetoid filled with people who are no doubt under Dahvid’s sway any better than catching them in flight and running?” you argue. It sounds way worse to you!

Vriska lowers her tablet and grins widely at you.

“Sollux, I’m not saying the solution to every problem you and I work on together is a bomb but I am suggesting that a big enough bomb DOES solve a lot of problems!” Vriska says cheerfully.

“We go there, break them free get to a safe distance and bomb them from orbit.” Hal explains.
“It’s the only way to be sure.” Jayekh nods and is completely ignored.

“A stealth mission would be best but I think we can only really make a concrete plan when we’re there and we can see the lay of the land.” Nepeta nods.

“Vriska needs to make a bigger bomb, we need to pack things for the attack, Jayded and Jayekh need to get Vriska a lot of radioactive stuff and you need to either eat or sleep but whatever you do you need to do it WEARING CLOTHES!” John shouts that last part.

So they don’t need you yet. The plan is to kill Dayvhe’s ancestor and probably everyone else who’s even halfway famous in the entertainment industry too, you’re ok with that. The thought that what if Dayvhe and Karkat are already dead, they could be-

There’s an unsettlingly loud electrical noise and you think you feel psi arc up your entire backbone set of ports at the mere idea of that being… yeah, no. You’re not thinking it. Ah, staring is happening again.

“I’m gonna go shower and… then…” you trail off. Whatever, they don’t need to know.

You leave. You shower alone in a cold and weird ablution trap that isn’t like the one you’ve shared with your quadrantmates. You dress and then decide that you can’t do a shirt right now so you leave that off and then you go eat food that isn’t like the food you get normally. Not like anything you’ve eaten with Dayvhe and Karkat.

They’d want you to eat, though, so you’re there mindlessly and joylessly eating nut butter out of the jar because it’s high calorie and even you can’t just down cooking oil even if it would be more efficient calorie wise. Your leg is bouncing with agitation against the chair you’re sitting on as you think about the plan. There’s logic to it, you get that it’s a better idea.

There’s a possibility you’re having some kind of psychological meltdown. Or maybe you’re numb like you get when you’re depressed.

You test this theory.

You can’t think of anything funny or joyful right now. Even thinking about nice things with Dayvhe and Karkat makes you feel… wrong. Off kilter somehow. You know they’re good memories but it feels like static in your head and that same distant muffled screaming.

Your emotions should not be best described with static and muffled screaming.

Ok, so you’re having a thing. A thing is happening to your head but it doesn’t matter. You just need to hold your shit together until you rescue Dayvhe and Karkat and then your problems can be their problems. Is that a lot to put on people? Probably, but you will at that point have rescued them from probably certain death so they can fucking OWE YOU.

Oh hey, anger. You still have anger. That’s something.

Speaking of anger, thinking of the rescue is making you very angry. Not that you have to rescue them, that’s not making you angry. No, it’s more the details of Vriska’s plan. The whole thing where you swoop in, steal them away and then leave that place a smoking crater in the ground without any of you ever getting subjected to Dahvid’s mind control. It is a sensible plan, strategic, you’re on board.

Except that part where you’re not. Here’s the thing, Dahvid, The Grand Entertainer, whatever you call him has hurt people you care about. He’s abducted people you care about. He’s taken and done
who knows what to your quadrantmates. Dying in a quick explosion is too good for him. He needs
to suffer worse than he’s made you suffer, worse than he’s made them suffer. You need to make him
pay for what he’s done.

Too bad he doesn’t have anyone like Karkat and Dayvhe.

Your spoon clatters to the counter and you shove yourself upright.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling arachnidsGrip [AG]

TA: where in thii2 stupidly big hive are you?
AG: The workshop, getting my eye finished. Can't really read screen right now

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling arachnidsGrip [AG]

You grab a bag of something snacky and quickly leave the nutrition block. Equius’ hive is stupidly
big but you know your way to the room where he and Hal finished helming you, that place is going
to be in your memories forever. You shoulder your way into the door, Vriska is still down an arm but
Equius is doing something delicate up close to her face.

Thank goodness his fine control is so much better than it used to be.

“Can’t really move right now.” Vriska says stiffly.

“You don’t need to. I was thinking, about that scumbag who took them. Bastard Dahvid, don’t you
think that dying in an explosion is too good for him?” you ask as you rip the packaging open to your
food. Oh it’s gummy grubs. Dayvhe used to buy these for you.

You go still as you look into the bag. He has to be alive, he has to.

“I said yes, Sollux are you even paying attention?” Vriska says loudly. Shit, lost it there.

“I don’t want to do that.” you continue.

“Well, me neither but he can’t charm his way around a bomb but he can the rest of us.” she points
out.

“I was thinking about that, it’s a good plan. We take them, bomb the place, go home. Simple.” you
agree and shove a handful of the grubs in your mouth.

“Are you eating when Equius is jamming needles into my eye?” Vriska asks incredulously.

“He’s not jamming them into my eyes.” you point out. Vriska hisses and flings her palmhusk at you,
or rather several feet to the right of you.

“Should have waited until you had depth perception.” you tell her.

“ANYWAY, this plan gets totally fucked if we get caught. If we die it’s not our problem because
we’re dead but if we get caught alive they’re all going to sell me and Hal up the river, probably you
will too if he’s stronger than Dayvhe and he obviously is. You’ll tell him the plan and we’ll all be
captured.” you continue along and keep eating as you pace.

“Then we don’t get caught or get near him, what do you want? You can’t take him on one on one,
he’ll have a planet of people onside. Planetoid at least, still.” Vriska argues.
“Look up and stay still.” Equius interrupts and Vriska sighs but does what she’s told.

“Yeah and then torture or murder, not looking forward to that. Obviously I’d surrender because he has the people I love and pity.” you say.

“Did you just come in here to list reasons why I’m right? Ow, you nicked me Equius!” Vriska hisses.

“I apologise. My hands… they’re so sweaty. I need a towel, one moment.” he says and steps away.

You peek at Vriska. Her eye is convincing unless you’re very close or in this case when the circuitry is lit up in blue. She’s still looking straight up at the ceiling but she looks annoyed all the same.

“We need to get even.” you say.

“Bombing him-” she starts.

“He stayed on that planetoid to protect Dionte, remember? That’s what he said to Disciple, he took the Empress’ deal to protect him. You don’t do that and spend all those sweeps with someone you don’t care about. He took our people, we take his. And if he doesn’t agree to trade them back I WILL make him regret it.” you hiss.

Vriska looks at you, her mouth open in surprise. Slowly her expression shifts into a dark and malicious smile that shows off every fang.

“We make him pay, that’s… I like that. If we get caught he’s our leverage.” she whispers gleefully. There’s a nick in her eyelid that is oozing cerulean but she’s not reacting at all.

“Vriska, you were meant to keep your gaze upwards. You know how the saline of your eyes affects the circuitry when it’s being set up like this.” Equius chides her and tilts Vriska’s head up. Reluctantly she goes with.

“We can’t keep him on the ship, though. If we trollnap Dionte and the rest of us know where he is we’ll tell him if he makes us, even Hal can be hacked. But if only you know then it’s safe, you have to put him somewhere secure that only you know about. He can’t control you into telling and I think you’ve proved you’re impervious to torture.” Vriska says like it’s nothing.

You wouldn’t say that you were impervious. Being tortured absolutely affected you but she has a point that you never told them anything worthwhile. Dahvid may well be more creative but with the obvious peril of Dayvhe and Karkat’s lives as well as the rest of your friends… yeah, you’ll die before you break, you know that.

“So we go there, find Dionte, secretly trollnap him. Then I fly off with him, hide him somewhere by myself where he can’t escape and no one can find him. Then I come back, we break in to wherever our friends are being held.” you say slowly.

“Done.” Equius says and steps away. Vriska blinks a few times and then turns her focus on you.

“If we’re caught we leverage a trade with Dionte and then leave, then we blow them up from orbit anyway.” Vriska nods. She doesn’t intend to have anyone following you again after and on that part you’re agreed. You’ll agree to give Dionte back, you won’t say how long for.

“If we don’t have to exchange Dionte because we don’t get caught then we contact Dahvid afterwards, tell him where Dionte is. Then we blow that place up, make Dahvid watch and then destroy the whole planetoid and everyone on it and go home.” you say viciously.
“Why, Sollux, I didn’t know you have this kind of malicious violence in you. The whole thing with Cal was surgical and clean but this is something else.” Vriska purrs, crossing her legs on the table and resting her one elbow on a knee.

“I think I might be having a psychological break.” you tell the bag of gummy grubs. You really don’t feel right, but you just have to hold on until you get them back. Just until then.

“Hah, tell yourself that if you like. Being angry and in shock might make you less merciful than usual but you’re no more capable of violent spiteful ideas now than you are normally, that’s not how it works. That’s imaginative, I’m impressed.” Vriska laughs and leaps off of the table.

Hey, you are capable of other emotions. You really hate that she’s implying you’re cruel as her, more than that you hate that she might be right.

“I mean, he’s already going to die that much is obvious. But making him watch Dionte die? They might be moirails by now, that’s just cruel.” she purrs, walking around you.

“He took our quadrantmates, took our friends, he’s the reason I’m full of ports. He fucked his friends over with his idiocy, maybe the rebellion could have won and lowbloods like me could have not had shit lives but we won’t know now. He controls people, fucks with what they want, poisons music to mess Alternia up and sends people to murder kids. He deserves it.” you insist.

“You don’t need to justify yourself to me, but I don’t think it’s me you were trying to convince there.” Vriska sneers.

You wonder if punching her in the face will mess up her eye and make Equius mad at you.

“Don’t worry, Sollux. I’ll make you the bombs you need, I’ll make the one for Dionte slow and agonising.” she says gleefully.

“Do it.” you nod.

Vriska beams and walks off all cool and casual like, she glances over her shoulder as she gets to the door.

“Get some sleep already, you’re my ride there and I need you at your best.” she says and then sweeps out of the room.

“Did you need to have that conversation here? I also see that you have eaten all of my sweets.” Equius notes.

“Yeah, well I also ate all of your nut butter and a bunch of other stuff. I’m going to sleep.” you tell him and throw the empty packet in the trash.

“Will you be wearing a shirt when you wake up at least?” Equius calls after you but you don’t bother to answer.

You hadn’t ever really thought about if you had to plan an excessive amount of murder who would be the best person to do it with, but if you had you probably would have put Vriska on that list. What would have been a weird hypothetical is now your life, but that’s fine. Together you’re going to make Dahvid pay and you will collect that debt.

You don’t doubt Vriska’s commitment to this at all, you trust her completely in this matter. She wants that insult to trollkind in as much agony as you do, she wants him to wish he’d never been hatched as vehemently as you. You’ll handle your part and she’ll handle hers and with your powers
combined you will burn this man’s life to the ground around him and then destroy him.

That’s what cahoots are for, after all.
You’re still cuffed behind your back as you stand on the office floor as it rises up, obscuring the dark slice of the room where you can see your ancestor standing motionless before the memorial pillars to Signless and Disciple. The adults that walked you in here and then Troll Will Smith are all standing there waiting. What unsettled you most is how your ancestor said go and everyone just… went. You pay attention to yourself as you’ve been training yourself to do lately. Dahvid said not to leave the building unless he said so but you have every intention of getting the fuck out of here right now.

It doesn’t work on you. There’s no reason for you to have assumed that before. Your cuddlevoodooos work on Jasper, even if they weren’t that strong to him he still felt them. Chucklevoodooos normally give you no immunity to someone else’s beyond maybe being more experienced at dealing with them and building a mental tolerance to them but that’s not the same as them just straight up not working. With your ancestor his shit just doesn’t work on you. Interesting.

You can use this but he doesn’t need to know, not yet anyway. You didn’t want to stay down there with the bones of the dead and him, especially with the limited escape routes that gave you what with your psionics still being off. So for now you’ll watch and comply until a better opportunity shows up.

“Well, that could have gone worse.” Carrie sighs, dusting herself off.

“So are we going to ask him about going back for the others tomorrow or what because I’m not going back down there. I mean he’s obviously a wreck about Disciple but we can’t help there.” Iron Troll says though his face tells you that he really does want to help despite his reasoning. Passive ‘like me’ vibes indeed.

“We’ll raise it later, they’re not going anywhere. Follow me, we have a place for you to stay.” Carrie says to the rest of you, gesturing to the door and leading the way out.

“Well I’m going back to my hive, Biggie and Nicole are in the hospital now so you don’t need me.” Ariana says offhandedly. There’s a murmur of agreement from the other adults and Carrie nods. So what happens is that they end up going one way out of the door and you all go the other, you guess that she doesn’t need back up. She can control you all easily.

“So, is this some kind of dungeon we’re going to or do you have somewhere else outfitted for prisoners? Does he trollnap people a lot?” Terezi asks brashly. Even if she’s being manipulated to going along with it at least she doesn’t think that this is a good thing, you might be able to make them all see what’s happening if they’re all like this.

“Cute. Come on, I’ll have some things sent to you to make you comfortable until The Grand Entertainer decides what he wants to do from here.” Carrie says breezily, walking off already on her tablet. She’s busy tapping away quickly and your group has no choice but to follow her.
The hallways here don’t make much sense but you guess it’s possible to learn the way around them because your group and Carrie comes along a cluster of assistants from before who all snap to attention when they see Carrie. They go from lounging against the wall chatting together to all nervously holding tablets and jockeying for attention.

“Is he okay?”

“Does The Grand Entertainer need us again?”

“We have questions and-“

Carrie holds up a hand and waits for them to fall quiet.

“The Grand Entertainer will be indisposed until further notice, no one is to go into his room.” Carrie says firmly and looks over the assistants. The assistants cautiously look at all of you as if they might not be allowed, they clearly have questions but no one wants to be the first to ask.

“Someone order flowers on behalf of Entertainer for Nicole and Biggie to be sent to the hospital. You’re all looking like you have fires that need putting out so I will accept three, come on.” she sighs.

“Laashi is dead, miss.” one says with a grimace.

“Subverse?” Carrie asks and the assistants all nod.

“I’ll hire someone else. Next?” she says.

“The grubtube domination and release schedule is a problem, I’m playing off the Empress’ people but it’s getting harder.” one guy says unhappily.

“Hold the releases and tone down the grubtube freeze a touch, not totally. I’ll raise it with him tomorrow.” she nods.

You look sidelong at Karkat who is wearing the same expression of guilt as you. Maybe if you’d all taken Sollux’s theories at face value when he was manic you could have escaped this situation. Shit, if you all live through this you’ll have the respect to not write everything off like this, he was trying to save you all.

“The Chittr stats for-“ another starts.

“That is not an emergency. I’m going, none of them are to leave the building. Inform the staff, program the bots. Move.” she says and starts moving again, expecting the rest of you to follow her. Once again you kind of have to.

None of you seem willing to talk with the actress right there so the walk to the wing of the building that she takes you to is done in silence. She pushes open a door to a wildly plush highblood level expensive room and steps in holding the door open for you to all follow her inside. From her sylladex she draws a key and holds it in her hand with care.

“Food will be delivered later.” she says like that’s normal and then tosses the key towards Karkat who fumbles for it and catches it. In the moment of distraction, Carrie sweeps from the room and the door clicks shut behind her. You rush to it but as you suspected it doesn’t open when you turn the handle.

“Locked?” Dirkka asks, he’s holding his wrists out for Karkat to uncuff him seeing as Karkat is just
realising that the angles are wrong for him to be able to uncuff himself.

“Yeah.” you nod.

“So this is… bad. I’m going to make the very firm statement that this is bad and we’re probably all going to die.” Tavros nods.

“Positive thinking Tavros, good job.” Rohhze groans.

“I really thought he was going to kill Troll Will Smith there, he thought it too, I could smell the fear coming off of him.” Terezi says as Karkat unlocks her and she, in turn, starts to unlock Rohhze.

“I think we all could. So, Dayvhe, your ancestor is kind of… charismatic, a little terrifying and quite deranged.” Rohhze notes.

“What gave you that impression, was it the creepy skeleton shrine of all his dead friends?!?” you demand and she shakes her head in despair as she comes to unlock you now.

“I kind of understand the skeleton thing…” Roxxie says softly.

As one your group eyeballs Roxxie for that bonkers thing she just said. She understands your deranged ancestor’s weird bone shrines to dead people who he no doubt is partly responsible for being dead people. She gets the weirdly adoring way he was holding Disciple’s super dead bones? Really?

“Uh.” Dirkka says, stepping on that landmine so the rest of you don’t have to.

“I’m fuschia, assuming the Empress doesn’t stick a fork in me I’m going to outlive all of you. Dirkka’s bronze he-” Roxxie’s voice dies.

“Rox…” Dirkka says softly.

“I can understand wanting to hold on to something, you know? And people like them, people who lived a life that meant other people might want to do some godawful thing to those remains, I get wanting to protect them.” she says a little fiercely.

Dirkka chirps softly at her and slides his arms around her.

Your ancestor is purple, he’s a little mutated, sure but he’s still purple. You haven’t touched him, and you’ve no desire to, but you don’t know how warm he runs. You’re rust warm, Karkat is too, so you’d both figured that was the slice of time you got. You don’t like thinking about problems like when you’re going to die unless it’s a very immediate issue like someone actively trying to kill you.

If… if you have a purple lifespan though…

In this room, Rohhze and Roxxie. Those are the only people who’ll be around when you bite it if you’re lasting that long. Who knows about Karkat, he’s a mystery too. But… Sollux.

You can’t think about it.

From the macabre looks on everyone’s faces you’re all having similar thoughts about the people most important to you.

“So, what’s the plan here?” Karkat asks, breaking the silence.

“We should probably split up and survey the place that we have here, it seems fairly clearly self-
contained but we should know where we’ve been left.” Kanaya suggests sensibly. There’s nodding and agreement all around, it’s a good idea.

Kanaya reaches out for Rohhze’s hand and with a nod at the rest of you they pick a direction and go off. Terezi pulls Tavros off and they go exploring. Roxxie is still standing there with Dirkka holding onto her but they’re both looking at you. Finally Roxxie pulls out of Dirkka’s arms and takes two quick steps forward to lean down and then scoop you up into her adult-sized embrace. “Sweetie we were so worried, you just left! Don’t ever do that to us again!” Roxxie reprimands you and squeezes you tight, kissing your busted horn. She seems to consider it and then pulls the headband free, you practically swoon in her arms with relief at it being gone. She gives you one last cuddle and puts you down again.

“You should wash your face. Also, you’re grounded. Don’t ever pull that shit, we still love you though, you goddamn moron.” Dirkka sighs and messes up your hair.

“I’m really sorry. I panicked, I was stupid and I can’t apologise enough.” you say sincerely. Better to overblow than undershoot this apology. You did masssively fuck up after all.

“I don’t know, I think you can try and we’ll tell you if you’re good.” Dirkka says flatly but you see that little quirk of a smile that he’s trying to hide.

You suppose it’s hard to hold a grudge with all of this going on.

"Gonna go scope this place out, we need to know what we're dealing with. You go do the same, and keep sharp, okay? Don't get distracted.” Dirkka warns you and from the slight inclination of his head in Karkat's direction you can guess what kind of distraction that he's thinking of.

You nod in agreement and Dirkka turns to pull Roxxie off with him. So you're just left alone with Karkat again.

Instead of looking at him you turn your attention to the room that the two of you are in. It's big and more spacious than even Rohhze's hive ever was. There are gold framed pictures and papers on the walls in overly elaborate frames. The floor itself is covered in a carpet so plush and expensive that your feet sink into it where you stand and yet there's no footprints left from anyone who was here previously and has since walked off, it's just sprung back. Everything in the room is decorated in gold, white and copper colours. The lighting is warm and clearly designer, a screwed in chandelier throwing light around the room that's echoed by similar smaller wall mounted versions placed evenly throughout the room. The far wall of the room is solid glass and keeping your wits about you, you walk over to it.

The building is set in wide grounds that are just as expansive from this side of it as they are from the angle you approached it at. The gardens seem to be a mix between the kind of faux polished rich aesthetic and then here and there touches that make the whole thing have a very 'ahahaha, it was all a joke, got you' vibe to it. Like over there is a garden of refined sculpted shrubbery with a robot carefully manicuring it. There are shrubs that are obviously animals, others show famous actors, several are large topiary awards. But mixed right in there are several obvious and lovingly shaped obscene bulges sculpted out of foliage. You're not sure which you hate more, that your ancestor has through sinister means gathered the resources to do this or that you can't be sure that given the same funds you would not also commission obscene plant sculptures in with the rest of the sculpted plants just for laughs.

"Everyone's just walking around in the daylight." you say instead as Karkat comes to a stop at your side.
"Annoyed they're infringing on your brand by doing it?" Karkat asks lightly. Ok, he's still slightly annoyed at you, you can grant him that.

"I don't know why you're surprised, Dayvhe. This planetoid orbits a different star, this one doesn't seem to try to cook people." Karkat adds with a shrug.

Hm, he has a point. You press your fingers to the glass, it looks suspiciously thick to you. Likely it's bulletproof but there's a tint to it that you'd expect to be solar shielding except there's no need for that. One way glass maybe? Is this just mirrored from the outside?

"What's that over there?" Karkat asks suddenly and taps on the glass. You look where he's pointing and squint into the distance. Past the grounds of your ancestor's place there's what looks to be city buildings. You watch as two vehicles screech down the street at high speed, there's things in the air orbiting them and something smaller and black whipping along the street alongside them. It all suddenly comes to a stop and you can see trolls rushing back from the side to the vehicles and back again, after that the vehicles calmly reverse back down the street and around the corner. A second passes and suddenly it all repeats again.

"They're filming!" you exclaim.

"I guess your ancestor IS The Grand Entertainer, makes sense that some movies are actually shot right here. Surely they can't do many, though?" Karkat says a little uncertainly.

You don't know about that, you didn't get to see the size of this place when you came close on account of being locked up.

Cautiously you bang your fist on the glass a little but you don't think you're getting out this way, maybe if you threw something big at it but you're not betting on it.

"It's not like we can leave." Karkat sighs.

"We're getting out of here." you tell him firmly.

"We're not leaving." Karkat reiterates. Of course he is, your ancestor cuddlevoodoo'd the idea into his head.

"You're just saying that because Dahvid told you that, he fucked with your head." you point out and Karkat's nose wrinkles in distaste.

"I think he was just giving instructions that we should be locked in here until he wanted to see us next which, we are." Karkat says, rationalising the order. You feel sick just hearing him do that.

"We're getting out." you insist.

"Alright, fine. Say we *somehow* bust out of this building. Your plan is then to... what? Hijack a ship? I don't get how their helm system works but it's obviously different to anything we know about and you don't even know if you can do your thing on someone in a helm. Sollux's immunity might extend to anyone helmed, it might be a hardware thing." Karkat says and taps his finger on his head right where Sollux's ports are.

He has a point. You saw two goldbloods, both with helm ports or at least partial ones. Nicole Kidman got damn near deep fried trying to escape Sollux and she was boosted from being in a ship. You fear being wildly proud of Sollux for being that strong is somehow reinforcing stupid ideas like that but he doesn't need to know that you're impressed. Biggie Smalls seemed obviously worn out but both of them were out of the helm and outside the ship when you were being walked out of it.
Sollux was able to pilot the ship with Aradia in but you were under the impression from Hal that he was able to do that at all because she was in there doing half of the thinking for him, Hal did also tell you that he shouldn't be doing it at all because with the ports he does have it's not enough to safely fly. Despite that the two goldbloods are partly helmed enough that the ship flew just fine and they both got out. It's... weird.

"I don't know how that works but no person in their right mind offers themselves for helming and you know it. He made them, he had to have. There's nothing to say that anything he made them think before hand wouldn't stay there even if they were immune after and we've no proof that's the case. They both seemed pretty on board with this whole trollnap us all plan that was all for my ancestor. They're obviously still in his... his thrall or whatever." you argue.

"Pissing your ancestor off without a plan of what we're doing next is stupid, Dayvhe. He's an adult and we're all unarmed. We need to play nice until we come up with a better plan." Karkat tells you.

You don't know if he's being reasonable or mind controlled or both.

Karkat slides his hand around your arm and pulls you away from the window and down a hallway. He opens the first door you come to and it swings open to reveal a lush respiteblock. This one is done up in rich reds, even the sopor in the coon is red like half of Sollux's coon. There's a warm glowing rock in what would normally be a fireplace and when you reach out to it the thing is really really hot. It throws out heat without being actual fire. There's an expansive and expensive looking desk and chair, a red leather loungeplank with a coffee table next to it all in front of a high end tv on the wall. There's even an attached ablutionblock past a grand wardrobe.

Going inside there you find pre-packaged toiletries but more importantly there's a mirror on the wall. You're a mess. You've still got white greasepaint on your face but it's been so smudged by you trying to escape and then by people getting all up in your grill, honestly there's almost as much exposed skin as there is white painted skin. You tear the soap out of the packet and lean down to wash your face with vigorous scrubbing. You don't have to wear this shit anymore and you're not going to.

When you're done and you're drying off your face you find Karkat watching you. He smiles when you fully lower the towel.

"That's a much better look." he tells you with a smile and reaches in to wipe at your eyebrow with his thumb, smearing the last little trace of paint away.

"I hated that stuff." you shudder.

"No arguments on that front." Karkat nods.

"So, what is this place then? Roxxie has guest blocks but this is something else entirely." you ask, looking around a little more. You've not seen any cameras but that's no proof there aren't any. You know better than to make assumptions like that.

"My guess is that your ancestor has a lot of visitors, or at least is prepared for them. Maybe that door out isn't always locked from the outside. It could be that he doesn't always trust the people that visit him." Karkat suggests, pushing away from the door and looking around the main room again.

It's as good a theory as any.

The next block over is a cerulean coloured one, then there's a bronzey-coppery themed one. You'd bet they're all themed by blood colour and yet they're very pointedly not in order, high and low mixed up all over the place. There's a private bookhive, a dining block near where you came in, even a sauna and steam room. The wing that you're all confined to is clearly more than big enough to
accomodate you all, hell you could probably have two rooms each and still have extra left over.

It's no coincidence that you're standing in the gold themed respiteblock when you and Karkat can't avoid the topic of Sollux anymore.

"Do you think he made it?" Karkat asks weakly, not looking at you but rather holding a book from a shelf that's a primer to ~ATH code.

You screw your eyes shut, trying to not think of all the numerous ways he could and probably should have died.

"He has to have." you say.

"No," Karkat says sharply as he thunks the book down on a pale wooden table, "he doesn't. Just because Sollux survives so much shit that should have killed him doesn't make him immune, he's- I don't even know if that's lucky or unlucky but it doesn't mean it'll hold up. He passed out from lack of air. IN SPACE. Then- then he fell and maybe you're right and the ship caught him or maybe some giant shark just ate him. Ate his corpse because hitting the water at that speed if he was out cold would turn him into a- a- SMOOTHIE!"

"Stop it! I can't think like that! If he's dead and it's because of me then I can't deal with that!" you shout. Your hands are tight and shaking fists at your side.

Karkat's not punishing you, though. He's obviously on the edge of tears himself.

"I should have never left him to see you. I thought it'd be ok, he was with John and Jayyne, I wasn't going to be gone long. I should have been with him and now I'm never going to see him again." Karkat chokes.

"No, no it's not your fault. It's my fault." you whisper, coming closer.

Karkat scrunches his eyes up tight and shakes his head. He gasps in a breath and presses the heels of his hands into his eyes.

"I should have invited you both, or- no neither of you. I shouldn't have been there in the first place. I should have stayed with you all and we could have worked this out together." you tell him urgently. You reach out and gently touch your hands to Karkat's sides, aware that he could well brush you off. You can’t keep doing this.” Karkat laughs, his voice watery and upset. He takes his hands away and opens his eyes, he looks at you sadly and his warm hands rest on your arms.

"I can’t keep doing this at least. When you were gone I hated you so much for what you must have done to him but I hated myself just as much.” Karkat sniffs.

“What, why?” you say. That doesn’t make any goddamn sense!

“Because even if you were evil and scheming to ruin my best friend’s mind and soul I was the one who introduced you, so anything you did was eventually my fault. You wouldn’t have met him if not for me.” Karkat says.

This is what Karkat’s like, he loves everyone so much even if it fills him with so much yelling and insults that no one would know. Except they do know because Karkat is as transparent as glass most of the time, everyone knows his rage is all a blustery, put-up front. He cares about people and feels responsible for them, that’s why he has so many friends and why everyone loves him. Even you can’t hate him all the time, he’s too sweet and pitiable for that.
“That’s the dumbest thing you’ve said in your whole life and you’ve said a lot of stupid shit, Karkat. And I’m including the quadrant scheduling fight in that.” you grin at him.

“God, at least with Sollux when we agree things never happened he sticks to it.” Karkat huffs.

The mention of Sollux’s name is enough to bring you both down again.

“If he survived what do you think he’s doing right now?” Karkat asks softly.

“Well he’s obviously worked out he can’t survive in space and we’re too far away now for him to be able to fly with Aradia. Not unless he keeps hopping in and out of the helm before he hurts himself but that’d be a really stupid plan.” you say.

Karkat looks at you and you stare back. It’s a very stupid plan but Sollux is the kind of wildly smart that occasionally warps back to fantastically stupid. Besides if it involves rescuing you then he’d probably be inclined to do it.

“That’d take so long, though. Could you even fit enough food in the ship for that kind of a trip if he was doing it an hour at a time then resting and back again? What about getting us back? It’d never work.” you say uncertainly.

“He’s a pretty dedicated problem solver and if the problem is food and water then, well, you know how much he’s neglected that before. But I don’t even know how he’d find us or how he’d- no, it’s impossible.” Karkat shakes his head.

A silence hangs between the two of you.

“We need to get out of here before Sollux does something really dangerous trying to get us back.” you say gravely. Maybe Sollux will try something else, maybe he’ll try hacking your ancestor back, or writing some virus to destroy his things until he agrees to return you. He’s creative and a genius, there’s no telling what could happen.

That’s if he’s alive. Which he is, he has to be. You can’t deal with the alternative.

“We can’t, not until we have a plan too. It will do Sollux fuck all good if our dumb asses die trying to get back to him.” Karkat says firmly.

Stupid Karkat, wanting stupid plans so you don’t all die.

You pull yourself in close to him, sliding your arms tight around his middle and burying your face in the knitted collar of his turtleneck. It smells like Karkat and home which is so much better than this place.

“Dayvhe?” Karkat asks worriedly, cautious clawtips skirting your neck before settling into a reassuring hand holding you close. You draw in a breath and pull back a little, you hold him close still. Not so you’re sniffnode to sniffnode or whatever but close all the same. You try to crush down your own radiation as much as you can before you talk.

“I need you to think very carefully and answer me. Will you leave here with me?” you ask.

“I’m not leaving people behind, why would you-” he begins.

“No, all of us. Not leaving anyone behind in our group. Will you leave with me?” you press on.

“We just talked about not going off without a plan, I know we did. Has it fallen out of your
“thinkspunge already?” Karkat groans.

“Okay, yes, we need a plan. Let’s say we have one, when we have it will you leave?” you ask.

Karkat frowns and opens his mouth, clearly hesitant.

“I don’t know what the situation will be like then, what’s the point of this hypothetical situation when we don’t even have a plan yet?” Karkat says as he tries to misdirect you again.

“Right, but imagine that we have a plan and everything is in place for it to go perfectly. Can we go?” you try again.

Say yes, Karkat, please.

“- I-…” Karkat grimaces.

You push away from him, fisting your hands in your hair and sucking in a furious breath through clenched teeth. He definitely did it, that wasn’t some passive thing you picked up, that was an active command. The moment you get your hands on something sharp you’re going to eviscerate your ancestor with it.

“Of course you can’t, you can’t even imagine a situation where we could leave, can you? You know why? He told you not to leave, he cuddlevoodoo’d you and now you’re coming up with reasons that his order makes sense because you already know you want to do what he told you to want and you’re just… just making up excuses for that to be a rational thing to do. And then when you can’t do that you just get stuck. You want what he made you want and you don’t know why!” you rant.

Livid you throw a psionically boosted kick at a chair, blowing it into chunks when it hits the wall with a bang. You don’t feel better. When you look at him you see that Karkat is open mouthed, staring at nothing as his worried frown digs deeper and deeper into his brow.

“I can’t- I can’t imagine leaving. Or when I try it feels wrong, like I’ve forgotten something or it won’t work or-” Karkat shudders and then looks at you, clearly terrified.

“You need to fix this!” he tells you sharply, grabbing you by the arm.

“How? I don’t know how to undo this shit or if it even can be undone!” you say hysterically.

“Wait, no, if it’s working on me it’s working on everyone. We have to get the others, come on!” Karkat blurts out and hauls you from the room.

That’s how you end up stood in the main room as Karkat walks everyone through the thought process you did to have everyone realise just what’s happened to them.

“I thought maybe I’d be better at feeling it by now.” Rohhze says softly, her hands clenched tight in her clown pants still. Unlike you she hasn’t washed her face paint off.

“We need him to undo it.” Karkat concludes again.

“We saw him shake Troll Will Smith out of whatever Dayvhe broke him with, so it obviously can be reversed.” Dirkka nods.

“You’d probably have to word it right but you could counter one idea with another in theory.” Terezi muses.

“Look, I don’t know if y’all thought I was just spending over a week kicking it in clown school
doing jack shit and just fondling my globes or whatever but this shit is hard and I barely know what I’m doing.” you tell them loudly.

“But, you could also say that you’ve been doing it instinctively your whole life.” Tavros counters.

“People breathe instinctively, don’t mean just anyone can win a slam poetry contest on the logic that it’s advanced breathing, can they?” you snap back.

“Regardless, you know the wording of his command. If you craft an idea that properly negates it you could counter it.” Rohhze says.

“Or it could be like writing two conflicting lines of code and then trying to make it compile, only it bugs out and crashes the system. Except the system is your pan. You told Will that he needed to stop us getting here and he didn’t seem to be doing well when we arrived anyway.” Dirkka says unhappily.

“So it means you have to be careful but you know how to do it, right? If we help you figure out what to tell us then maybe we can fix it.” Karkat says, clearly blinded by hope.

“I’m not risking it, besides this is hard and he has like a billion sweeps of experience on me. Who knows how old he is.” you say.

Karkat heaves a sigh and falls into an armchair. You unhappily join him, sitting on the arm.

“Jayyne was looking into that, she was going to the records room the night we got caught but her ballpark guess from the tablet Sollux recovered put him around ninety to ninety one sweeps old.” Roxxie murmurs.

“I’m nine. Even assuming that my slippery, buck naked, six legged ass slid out of the egg mind controlling jadebloods left and right which… actually given that I’m a mutant who made it out I may have done, he still has, oh, at least eighty one sweeps of experience on me!” you yell and slide off of the arm of the chair and flop pathetically across Karkat’s lap. You nuzzle miserably into his middle.

You wish your moirail was here to pap you and tell you things are going to be okay. Karkat might later if he feels especially blurry tonight but he’s not going to do that infront of everyone.

“Huh, that’s a thought…” Roxxie says slowly. You lift your head away from Karkat to look at her.

“What?” Dirkka asks.

“Remember when we were younger and Hal started acting up about shit and you tried the very dumb super bad idea of coding restrictions into him instead of talking to him like a person. And he’d like… passive aggressively be an asshole about the things you asked him to do or not do. What did you call it?” Roxxie asks.

“Uncivil obedience. Following the letter of an instruction instead of the spirit to the point that it breaks. That or creatively interpreting what he… oh. You think we should see if thinking like Hal works here.” Dirkka smiles slowly.

“Creatively interpreting the law is my whole thing. You’re suggesting that we test to see what ‘not leaving here without his permission’ effectively means. Could we trick him into saying that we can leave by hiding the question and getting a yes that he doesn’t mean, or making him redefine the definition of ‘here’ or ‘leave’ without him realising it.” Terezi says with her best legislacerator face on.

“That is something Dayvhe and I can help test, we already have done basic tests of will for simple
instructions. My mentor had him make me give him things or stand places on command to be sure he could do it on command regardless.” Rohhze agrees.

You cringe at the memory of having to do that. Sure Rohhze consented and even a lot of it was her idea but she’s been around your ‘like me’ radiation for so long that her free will is questionable. That said as Jasper pointed out it’s a small factor that influences people but so do lots of other things about you. Then again he was apparently some sycophantic fan of your ancestor so who knows what you can trust of his words.

You hate your voodoo, you wish you didn’t have them. But, well, tough shit.

Escape attempt or not you don’t want to use them on Rohhze, you feel gross enough right now as is. That said you should really just suck it up and do it anyway but you’re spared from that by the distant sound of doors opening. All of you leap to your feet which is more complicated for you and Karkat as you’re on his lap right now but the two of you manage to scramble apart and get up. None of you have weapons but you can always improvise. There’s sounds of moving around from one of the other rooms.

Dirkka waves his hand to get everyone’s attention and then beckons people to follow him. He and Roxxie go first and you hang close to Karkat, letting Terezi, Kanaya and Rohhze protect Tavros in the middle and take up the back of your group. As stealthily as you can you all creep forwards until you end up in the dining room, just in time to catch a couple of adults slipping out of the door leaving the table full of stuff.

There are plates and cutlery laid out with fancy glasses, bottles of drink and several large covered dishes that smell fantastic even from the distance that you’re at. Dirkka cautiously creeps closer and snatches a knife from the table. It doesn’t look that sharp, it’s just a table knife and not even really serrated at all at that. But a blade is better than no blade and you’re sure of that. With the knife Dirkka flicks one of the lids off of the covered silver dishes. There’s no horror movie severed head inside, rather a really tasty looking pasta dish. Dirkka pokes suspiciously at it.

“It’s dinner Dirkka, calm down.” Roxxie sighs and opens the other few covered dishes. One’s a more East Alternian spread of smaller spicy dishes, another cover conceals a whole bunch of Burger Empress meals and a last is all kinds of sauces, side dishes, bread and a large dark bottle.

Your group has drifted closer to the table, drawn by the siren song of food. It’s a curious Rohhze who picks up the dark bottle and reads the tag that hangs around its neck.

“It says ‘Maryam’, nothing else.” Rohhze says.

Kanaya frowns and takes it from her, uncorking it with a pop. She sniffs it and her eyes go wide as she hastily recorks the bottle.

“He knew my ancestor and she was a rainbow drinker so I guess he- it’s blood.” Kanaya squeaks.

That’s certainly catering for a wide range of diets.

All the same you are hungry, not hungry enough to try drinking blood of course, but hungry enough to sit down with everyone else and start picking things to eat. It could be poisoned, but if it isn’t being weak from hunger won’t help you so you may as well.

“I didn’t say earlier,” Dirkka says as he chews his burger, “but we have another problem, Dayvhe.”

“Of course we do, shit was just too easy until now, wasn’t it?” you groan.
Dirkka swallows his food and grabs something from his sylladex and sets it on the table between the two of you. It’s a puppet faced man on a little three wheeled device. His eyes are glassy with camera lenses and your knife is in your hand so damn fast.

“The battery’s dead on it, I checked. It was hidden in one of the rooms but that means he has access to this place, he’s here.” Dirkka says darkly.

“Sorry, what’s going on?” Karkat asks, obviously lost.

“My ancestor, Dionte Strydr, always used to send us these boxes full of traps and we had to get past them or there would be consequences. It was mind games and explosions and- it sucked. Shit like this is the kind of thing he’s included in them before, usually you’d see it right before you’d have to duck for cover because shit was about to explode into shurikens. This may well be where all that stuff came from, this could be a prototype or one he never got around to sending us seeing as his game seemed to end when Cal died.” Dirkka explains.

“That’s so goddamn creepy.” Karkat shudders.

“That’s really messed up.” Tavros agrees.

“Was the point to train you from afar or something? Why was he doing it?” Terezi asks.

“That was my guess but who knows with him.” Dirkka shrugs.

“So what does this mean for us?” Kanaya asks.

“If he’s here this place just became even more dangerous, don’t go anywhere alone. Always at least in twos and keep an ear out for each other, better to check up on someone when things are fine than miss a muffled cry for help.” Dirkka advises.

None of you have any objections to that plan but it sets a very grim tone for your shared meal. No one’s really up for just hanging out afterwards so in your groups of two you all go back to a respiteblock and settle in to get some sleep.

You and Karkat end up back in the gold room and neither of you mentions it. When you get in the coon together you find that because it’s adult sized there’s more than enough room for the two of you. The two of you and one more. Sollux’s absence is so obvious it aches. Without him you and Karkat just drift in the sopor holding on to each other, filled with uneasiness and regret.

You don’t dream of Sollux, which is surprising given the situation. It’s just formless anxiety dreams of running and endless dark carnival music. Your mind is clearly unhappy and wants you to suffer as well but it’s too tired to be creative about it.

You don’t think Karkat slept any better and you’re not meant to leave him, at least that’s your excuse for showering with him. He doesn’t kick you out at least which is a good sight better than how things were a few nights ago when you hadn’t spoken to him in just over a week.

“I hope he’s remembering to take his medication.” Karkat says abruptly, obviously meaning Sollux.

“I do too but…” you trail off.

The pair of you exchange a knowing look. Sollux can get distracted and forget it when nothing all that stressful is going on, he’s obviously going to be very stressed right now no matter what his exact situation is.
“Hopefully he’s talking to Hal, he’ll remind him.” you say hopefully.

Karkat winces and, yeah, Sollux sometimes doesn’t get on with the guy for good reason and he may well not take that intervention in his stride. That said he has trusted Hal with a lot of medical stuff before so maybe it will be fine. The point is Sollux hardly needs more problems right now.

“I’m sorry.” you sigh miserably, tipping your head down to rest your forehead on his. The shower water slicks your hair into his indistinguishably. It might be sappy but Karkat is such a huge part of you, the idea of wrecking things this badly just hurts.

“Shut up.” Karkat grumbles and kisses you.

It’s sweet, and nice. A moment of peace. Not that it lasts long because of course it doesn’t.

“Guys you need to get out here fast.” Dirkka insists from the other side of the door, banging on it with his fist. You break away from Karkat with frustration and murder running through your mind, Karkat sensibly turns off the water instead.

You do have some common sense, you’re not in Roxxie’s hive. Whatever Dirkka is disturbing you for likely is important.

“Give us a minute we’ll be right out.” you say, scrambling out of the trap and grabbing for a towel. You fling another at Karkat’s unprepared face and delight in his muffled yell as you roughly scrub all the water and probably the first few layers of skin off of your arms.

You rush through dressing, taking clothes from your sylladex when all your weapons were stripped clean. These certainly aren’t your blue and red socks but you’re wearing them now. It really is just a couple of minutes until you and Karkat are stumbling out into the gold respiteblock that you picked only Dirkka isn’t there. Uneasily you go into the corridor only to find other people coming out as well, you just catch Tavros disappearing around the end into the dining room.

Exchanging an unsettled look with Karkat you both follow after him, bumping into Rohhze and Kanaya on the way. When you get into the dining room you see the long table that you all ate at set up with plates and food spread across it. Dirkka, Roxxie, Tavros and Terezi are all already sat in a row down one side, all of them stiff with tension for sat at one narrow end of the table is your ancestor. The Grand Entertainer is sat with his feet kicked up on the table.

His feet themselves are snug inside a large pair of fuzzy hopbeast slippers, fluorescent orange parachute pants and a tshirt that has his sign neatly stitched onto the breast of it as if that changes the fact that it’s a tacky t-shirt with a tuxedo printed onto it.

“Please, join me at the table.” he says, setting off that gross feeling in your head.

As if magnetically drawn, Karkat, Rohhze and Kanaya walk to the table, pull out chairs and sit down. You grudgingly go with, you don’t need to tip him off that you’re not in his sway but you don’t know how long you can keep that charade up for in all honesty. You sit on the opposite end of the table to him and hope that your shades cover the filthy look you’re giving him.

“So glad we’re all here. We’ve got, like, pastries that I don’t know the name of, got ya fancy little multi-layer desserty things, we’ve got waffles. Seriously they’re so good, if you eat them and don’t like them you’re probably some Empress loving dumbfuck. Go on, eat.” he urges you all as he’s slathering the inside of a ripped open pastry with some kind of jam.

You look at your empty plate, you’re not hungry. Not right now. Instead you stare down the table at your ancestor. You watch as he bites into his pastry and jam oozes out of the side of it. The knife on
the table finds its home in your hand and you grip it tight.

“So,” he says still chewing. “yesterday was kind of crazy. Didn’t really get to talk, we should do that. Don’t know who to start with first, mini-Strydrs or wiggler Signless. It’s like twelfth perigee’s eve up in this bitch.”

Karkat shoots you a look. The kind of look that even you know suggests that your way of talking is like his. Maybe you should give up how you talk, take lessons on sounding proper from Rohhze and Kanaya instead.

“How ‘bout you mini-me? Carrie tells me you pulled some shit on that ship. She said it’s Dayvhe, right?” Dahvid asks and bites into his pastry again. Everyone else around the table has hesitantly started investigating the food but you half wonder if they really want it themselves or if something else is going on here.

You need to keep your head, be strategic.

“It’s Dayvhe. We don’t want to be here, let us go.” you tell him.

“Ah, no can do.” he shrugs and tosses the last of it into his mouth and wipes his hand on the tablecloth.

“Why not?” Rohhze asks.

“What do you know about your ancestors?” Dahvid asks her instead of answering.

“That we had them. I know Signless, Psionic, Disciple and Dolorosa set up a resistance-” Rohhze begins. You ancestor groans and slides down in his chair with a pout.

“Yeah, they did. They were great but like, I was there too! I’m one of the very last OG resistance members left. Anyway, you’re shortchanging yourself here as well, Rosali Lalond who was your ancestor was a badass bitch who took out The Grand Highblood through wildly violent means. I mean, it… she got caught but still.” his tone shifts a little somber and he shakes his head and turns his focus to pouring himself some coffee.

“I had a point. What was- right, so, ancestors. Though the whole revolution is officially over and fish bitch is very keen on saying that she won there’s still people all over scouring the adult ranks for any descendants coming up and so far there haven’t been any as far as I know but then all of you come up at once? No way, when you started going off world people would’ve spotted the names. You’d have all been dead within the sweep, you’re toast out there.” he sighs.

“So you’re… trying to protect us?” Kanaya asks uneasily.

“That’s the plan.” he nods and drinks.

“Protection wasn’t really the impression we got on your ship.” Terezi says coolly as she butters a scone like this isn’t some big tense situation. Terezi always did have the best poker face.

“Oh, well, they were on a different mission. That changed with the fact that they found all of you so they were going off of old orders. Which, by the way, you. Yeah, you the Dionte looking fucker.” Dahvid says, clicking his fingers at Dirkka.

“It’s Dirkka. Please, Dionte-looking-fucker was my ancestor.” Dirkka says deadpan and your ancestor chokes laughing into his coffee.
“Oh, you’re funny, I like that. But this I like less. Dirkka, you had Cal as your lusus too didn’t you? I mean you’re a Strydr and you’re very obviously Dionte’s descendant so you had to have, right?” he asks and sets his mug down with a muffled thunk.

“He was a pretty shitty lusus.” Dirkka says slowly and cautiously, you can all see where this is going.

“Eh, it’s whatever. Character building, makes you a man or something, I don’t know or care. It was forever ago for me and it musta been a while for you because Cal only takes one grub at a time so for him to be kicking around means you moved out, yeah?” he says, gesturing at you.

You could throw this knife, psionically boost the speed it goes and drive it right into his bloodpusher. You could. You only get that shot the once though so you have to take it properly.

“Point is he’s fuckin’ dead. I know about it because my bro’s always had a thing with him, said he could always feel him or whatever and he ain’t been the same since he died at all and I don’t fuckin’ LIKE THAT NONE.” he hisses. He sounds all pissed off juggalo but you can’t feel voodoos coming off of him, he’s just really angry. Maybe it’s just that part of your brain that evolved to know that angry adults are bad for your survival odds.

“I hear from my crew that you confessed to killing him and they also told me that they interviewed some witnesses, said you had help. And I sent a guy to stalk out the place only he came down with a tragic case of stabbed to death which on a side note I’m having to recast shit because of you. Yes I know it was you, I have your strife specibus! So, in conclusion: WHAT THE FUCK?!” he shouts.

Dirkka is staring down at his empty plate and you see his hand twitch towards his knife. He’s not you though, he can’t do what you can do.

“Y-” you feel your ancestor start so you flick your knife up and throw it at your ancestor with as much psionic force as you can muster.

There’s a noise. Well, two. Firstly there’s a sound not unlike an electric fence discharging. You know what that sounds like because one time when you used to be better friends with Tavros you walked close to one and you bet him that you could touch it since he wouldn’t for fear of frying his legs.

Second is the metallic twang of your knife as it embeds firmly in the ceiling and vibrates in place. You stare up at it and then at your ancestor who is also staring at the knife. His odd eyes then focus on you, the person who obviously threw the knife.

“Damnit, I’d managed to go three sweeps without anyone trying to kill me. You shit, what is that, telekinetic psionics? You’re even more mutated than I am. Sit your ass down.” he says sounding more put out than actually annoyed.

Well, there goes one of your aces and it completely failed. You do flop back into your seat as your ancestor pouts for a moment.

“What’s your problem with me anyway? Sorry for the rough ride here and all but you did try to off one of my actors so I think that’s fair play if you ask me. I’ve already explained that keeping you here is for your own good so don’t get pissy at me for that.” he frowns.

“Go fuck yourself, Dahvid.” you hiss.

“It’s The Grand Entertainer, actually. Entertainer if we’re friendly which, clearly, we’re not.” he says, pointing to your knife in the ceiling above him.
“Adults get titles, you’re just a tall, dark, wiggler. You’re a temper tantrum throwing son of a fuck and you might be able to charm everyone else but- actually you obviously can’t since you only had a three sweep no one trying to kill you streak. I hope the next one’s shorter and they manage it.” you snarl.

“High fuckin’ hoofbeast you’re on considering what you did to Will.” he counters.

“I’m not like you.” you hiss.

You’re a little bit like him and you hate it but he’s objectively worse in every way.

“Why’s he really mad?” Dahvid asks Karkat who just stays in horrified silence that this is happening at all. Your ancestor looks around with his mismatched eyes, his expression getting more and more annoyed as no one answers him.

“Tell me why he really hates me.” he orders.

You hear seven voices of your friends give slightly different answers but they all boil down to the same thing.

‘You killed his moirail’

“What? No I didn’t.” he argues.

“Well, not you precisely. Your crew, the ship.” Kanaya adds.

“The Captor kid? He was your moirail?” Dahvid asks in surprise, he sits up in his chair, legs dropping from the table.

“Keep his name out of your mouth.” you hiss furiously. Karkat reaches over, puts his hand on yours. At least Karkat’s answer was ‘what you did to Sollux’, he isn’t assuming Sollux is dead.

Your ancestor’s face is grave and he leans forward on his elbows.

“Carrie said he chased the ship up out of atmosphere, trying to drag it down. Damn near did, nearly fried a strong adult psionic doing it too despite being a kid. That right?” he asks seriously.

You nod, your throat is thick. You don’t want to comply with anything but also you can’t deny the incredible things Sollux has done, he deserves credit even if just to this asshole.

“It’s cold up that high and he’s warm, burning a lot of heat and energy. That takes a lot of oxygen and even if he’d took a bubble of the stuff up that high it wouldn’t last. He’d have let go because he passed out, Carrie said she saw psi trails on the photos when he fell down but that shit’s a reflex. He would have been completely unconscious when he made reentry. As ways to die go, that’s more painless than you’d think.” Dahvid says softly, he’s not looking at you.

“No, he’s not- he isn’t-” you protest, your throat catching.

“There are worse ways to die, Dayvhe. Worse ways to live too.” your ancestor says and stands up from the table. He turns his focus quickly from you to Dirkka.

“We’ll talk again later about Cal and… her. But not now.” he says, shooting Roxxie a cold look.

“I’m sorry, Dayvhe. I am. If you need anything there’s a… a thing by the door. Someone’ll get you what you want if they can. I’ll leave you alone.” Dahvid says quietly and walks past you. The door clicks shut behind him but you’re just staring unseeingly at your empty plate.
Fuck his condolences, he doesn’t know Sollux, he’s alive. He has to be.

He has to be.

==> Author: Run path C2;

“We’re stars now can’t you see
The center of the world is lonely me
Float along through the catacombs
The endless cycle, flesh to bones”
Nothing Personal - TGE

Roxxie’s ship is not really that big, not in comparison to other ships. But standing at the back of it and looking up as it obscures the moonlight it certainly feels big. John walks past you, a crate of supplies hefted easily on his shoulder with highblood strength, Jayded and Jayekh follow after him laden down with more supplies. You’ve been basically hibernating as you heal, trying to conserve energy and be in as good a shape as you can for when you have to fly. Hal’s told you that he doesn’t want you helping to load the ship, after all you’ll be lifting everything in there within the hour.

Equius has been building Vriska’s arm but it’s not installed yet, she’s insisting he do it on the way and you’d bet that’s a joint con between her and Nepeta to ensure that he actually goes with. You’ve been informed that he’s not pleased about doing something so rebellious and honestly now that you’ve all seen how being a rebel worked out for his ancestor you can get that. Vriska has been planning more with the others and you trust her to hold that down but you’re still uneasy about how much of the plan is vague and really down to seeing how the situation is when you get there. There’s so much you don’t know and you could easily get frozen with indecision, so you’re just not thinking about it.

You’ll get them back or die trying and you’re okay with that entire proposition.

Your attention drifts upwards, past the looming figure of Roxxie’s ship and to the open sky above. You’d been so terrified when you were chasing them into the sky, so determined to catch them. You flew faster than you’d ever done unaided, yet you had to be so careful when pulling the ship down to hold it in such a way that you wouldn’t break it and kill everyone inside. Should you have been bolder, grabbed them harder? You can’t say.

You are ice cold, a stiff and blank surface covering something very dark. The distant screaming unease in you is getting worse but if you can bleed it to shoot you to the place the others are being held at then you’ll happily allow it to stay in your head.

“Sollux?” Hal asks.

He’s standing in the doorway to the ship, watching you. He inclines his head and you follow him inside. You walk past the others setting up their places to sit for the launch and you hardly notice them as you go. You walk the corridor that you did with Dayvhe before, when Aradia had manipulated you here. The door to the helm clicks open as you come close, one door not sliding all the way in because of the damage Dayvhe did to it.

There’s a chair this time, one of those backless ones that you lean over that supposedly help posture or whatever. Importantly you can be in it and every one of your ports is up for grabs.

“So I’ve been talking to Aradia about the plan even though she’s known things before I’ve told them
to her which is unsettling to say the least.” Hal says as he picks up the wires.

“You’re not fully helmed so you’ll need breaks because you are, after all, a feeble biological creature with needs. Needs that I’m going to be keeping an eye on so you don’t die from dehydration or anything.” he adds.

Yeah, ok, whatever.

“Just do it.” you mutter and get in the chair.

Hal sighs. He doesn’t need to, he doesn’t breathe, he’s just being melodramatic.

You’re trying to pay attention to anything that isn’t biowires and your ports. Anything, anything else. It’s gotta happen, you don’t have a choice. You can’t freak out about it because all the people that talk you down from that are gone.

Getting into that weird imaginary space of the helm doesn’t have the lag of not knowing where you are like it did before. You were in the helm and then you’re standing on the cliff that Equius’ hive is on by Aradia’s side.

“You feel strange.” Aradia says, her hair blowing in the wind.

“Can we just go?” you ask. You look up and information about weather, wind resistance, power consumption estimations flick up into your head. Needing only to think about it and the file appears, the suggested flight route from here out to Planet Hollywood. It’s not a planet, it’s a planetoid. Not that it matters.

Aradia is looking at you with concern she touches her hand to your shoulder, a little odd as you’d started to think about not having a troll body but rather acquainting yourself with the shape of the ship that’s your body for now.

“I knew you’d want this, want to go there so badly but I didn’t… I didn’t realise it would feel like this. You feel more dead than I am.” Aradia whispers.

You look at her, objectively you can see that she’s worried but as that doesn’t fall under the goal of getting everyone back you’re not physically able to care. Just as she’s touching your shoulder now you can feel the ghost of her touch through your mind, like Vriska or even Dayvhe. She recoils and stares at you with horror on her face.

“I didn’t- I thought-” she gasps.

You don’t have time for this. You need her to help shoulder the load of the ship’s demands on you but you don’t need her permission to take off or her help either. It’s as instinctive as breathing, you hug the plotted line through the sky, deviating only for the wind and atmospheric resistance that you can calculate better. Of course you can, you can feel it.

Your friends clamour in alarm at the unexpected takeoff but it was smooth, you didn’t shift a thing inside the ship. Free of the atmosphere you can see your own path laid out for you and the path that Jayded and Jayekh have tracked the actor’s ship on, it’s partly guesswork after a certain point and combined with Hal’s historical data. You want to follow that but it’s not the plan and so you head off in a different plotted path but your focus doesn’t drop from that route.

You can feel Aradia sort of hovering at the edge of your focus the whole time you’re flying. Only space is really big and mostly very empty, even going as fast as you are this isn’t a stroll around the corner, you’re not following directions on your palmhusk to a hive you’ve not been to before. Or if
you were it’d be more like ‘after the next eight thousand light years, turn slightly left then continue onwards for another five thousand lightyears’. You’re less of a pilot now and more the actual thing you are, the battery.

There is of course the nice supplemental hum of the radioactive core that Jayekh outfitted this ship with ages ago, Aradia’s been leeching off it since she possessed this thing. It’s a nice little boost but the idea that it could ever compete with you or replace an actual helmsman is laughable.

Not that you’re laughing, but still.

She’s still there, very obviously focussed on you so you’ve little choice but to turn your attention to her. The world around you shifts from nothing to you and her just standing in space. Aradia opens her mouth and then hesitates, looking away from you. An image of one of the earliest Aradiabots pops up, Equius mark one to two perhaps. You don’t know if it’s your memory she’s pulling it from or her own, possibly even Equius’ own husktop.

“The bots helped keep me around, spirits without a purpose tend to fade.” she says.

“I thought revenge was a purpose.” you comment.

“It is but revenge didn’t work out great for me when I was alive, did it? I wasn’t interested.” she shrugs halfheartedly.

You might be fine with Vriska now, in cahoots with her even, but the idea that dead Aradia looked at the mess her death had left you in and decided that she was good is still infuriating.

“They weren’t great for emotion. Or not the subtle kind anyway. Unless it was punching the crap out of something it was kind of hard to simulate.” she says into the silence.

“I know you weren’t the same, I know you didn’t get things. I had to talk to you for ages after.” you say.

“You didn’t have to.”

“You were my matesprit. At least until Equius put that chip in you and all you cared about was him, even when I tried to tell you what had happened.” you tell her. You still can hear Dayvhe pointing out that even if she never officially broke up with you that everything that happened between you for sure ended that.

“I’m sorry for that.” Aradia says regretfully.

She did break your heart but of all the things that you do blame her for, that isn’t one.

“That wasn’t your fault. Equius though…” you shake your head, too bad you need him at the moment. Plus he has ties to Nepeta who you for sure need right now and happen to like and… well, this is how revenge cycles start. Best to just not.

“Yeah, see revenge isn’t great. Plus technically you did recently lose a knife fight to him, he stabbed you a lot.” Aradia jokes and gestures at your back.

That’s… not funny.

Aradia seems to realise that her joke missed the mark and she looks away from you.

“The better the bots got the more complex I could be again, but when I got in here it was like being
alive again! It was advanced enough to support me but it’d been so long since I was alive and feeling things that I think I forgot how. Or I could do it at least but I didn’t really understand my feelings, or… anyone else’s.” she says sadly.

Cool, you don’t understand your feelings either but thankfully you’re not having many at all right now which you’re going to hurriedly label good and not think about further.

“I could see how happy you are in the time we’re supposed to get to where we rescue them and I knew all the steps along the way so that was fine, right? I knew if I’d asked you would have agreed and you couldn’t know what I did so it was just me making the decisions and objectively at the end point that I was seeing I was right but I think…” Aradia trails off.

“I think I missed a lot of the detail. Maybe I still did the right thing, it’s the best outcome but I’m thinking I missed something and you feel… wrong, Sollux. You don’t feel like you.” she says urgently and reaches for you. You pull away. Not just away from her touch but out of that whole space all together.

You avidly focus on Equius and Hal leant over a table working on Vriska’s arm as much as they can before they eventually attach it to her. John and Jayded are sat by an open chest with guns scattered beside it talking about a backup plan for if you’re all caught. You run diagnostics on the ship, you watch how far you have to go and the levels of the battery containment that remain. Anything but talk to Aradia and think about what she wants you to think about.

You have to hold it together until the rescue, you can’t break, you can’t afford it. Aradia’s trying to get your attention but she can’t make you. With your whole central nervous system wired in you have more dominance over the system than her.

Hal makes you have a break to eat more and all that stupid ‘biological stuff’ and then you’re back in again, ignoring Aradia. You watch as the others all drift off to sleep and stay watching as they wake up, Hal interrupting you partway through that to make you eat and drink and so on. He tries to get you to sleep but you’re not tired, it doesn’t feel like you’re really doing much. You figure a psionic of your class would normally be helming a far more powerful ship than this one, you’re comfortably doing the high end of speed that this thing is capable of and you’re not even trying. You’re having to make work for yourself, finding ways to make little changes in the ship’s systems to make them more efficient, dull little number problems that… that really don’t take focus. It’s almost… soothing.

A shock to your system jerks you to attention and suddenly you’re confronted with the slimy intrusive feeling of biowires pulling out of you and then Hal is there hauling you upright.

“Okay, you need to get out of this and sleep somewhere else.” he tells you.

“I- what? I wasn’t sleeping, put me back!” you argue as you try to get your wits about you.

“Did you wake him- oh! Hi Sollux!” Jayekh says brightly as you’re pulled into the corridor.

“You really were, chum. Apparently you’d been snoozing for a bit but you dropped into dreaming and everything around here went all screwy. The lights went all strange and we were getting audio from inside your head! I was quite happy to stay that way but Hal and Jayyne sensibly pointed out that leaving a sleeping mind to pilot us may not be the wisest plan.” Jayekh laughs.

You look at him and Hal uneasily, they wouldn’t lie to you, much less be dumb enough to pull you from the helm for no reason. Also, you maybe feel a little groggy, like you’ve just been woken up.
“Come on, there’s not much space to sleep but there’s fewer people in here.” Hal says and drags you off.

“What was I dreaming about?” you ask curiously.

“I don’t know. It was… odd. I’ve always wondered what dreaming is like to experience, I can remember some of Dirkka’s dreams but it’s so long ago and so abstract that I can’t relate to it anymore. It was just light and music, voices. Nothing coherent, just the noise of your thinksponge organising I guess.” Hal shrugs and leads you into the room where the small meal prep block is with a bolted down table and one sad little loungeplank.

Vriska is currently laid out on the table with her shirt off, you have to stop running into her like this. Equius seems to be in the process of attaching her arm. Hal shoves you towards the loungeplank and returns to Vriska’s side to aid Equius.

“Ah, found the culprit of the weird trance-y mashup noise then? I didn’t know you listened to that stuff.” Vriska asks, her voice slightly strained.

“I don’t listen to moisturewave.” you deny hotly. Okay, maybe you do sometimes when you’re coding and- look, you don’t have to justify yourself here!

“Is that what it’s called? I wouldn’t know.” Vriska grins triumphant.

Damnit, you might be too tired to go up against Vriska. You drop onto the loungeplank instead and try to get a look at what’s being done to her arm.

“Does that hurt?” you ask.

“You need nerves to know where everything is, body placement and whatever. Nerves hurt.” Vriska tells you. She’s clearly got it handled though.

You tuck your legs under you on the loungeplank and lean to the side so your head rests on the arm of it.

“Wanna catch me up on the plan?” you ask sleepily.

“We’ve been thinking of- of contingencies. The whole plan hinges on getting Dirkka’s ancestor, that’s our ace, our big bargaining chip. Failure there is really not an option.” Vriska says with a hiss of pain that she squashes right away.

“After that then what’s new?” you ask.

“So I figure it could go two ways.” she says. You wipe the smile off of your face that you hadn’t even realised got on there. She can’t judge she’s as bad with the number eight.

“Don’t look like that, god. The first way is where it goes well and we do get to start the exchange for one side’s captives for the other. The second is where we show up and The Grand Entertainer decides that he’s as angry as him drowning Alternia in music and sending actors to murder people suggests and we get tortured. Which he wouldn’t need to do but vindictive highbloods or whatever.” Vriska says, waving her hand like that’s nothing.

In the calmest understatement of the century you don’t really think you want to be tortured again, you didn’t care for it last time and even if this would make a second time you’re not inclined to try.

“So seeing as we’re, well you’re, hiding the guy somewhere for ransom it’d be sensible for him to
have a guard. Someone that can’t get controlled when we call to give proof that he’s alive and in the event that we don’t contact him in time he’ll assume that torture is what’s happening with us and he’ll issue the demand himself and start sending parts if he has to.” Vriska proposes, clearly meaning Hal.

He’s a failsafe, that’s a smart idea.

“I like it.” you mumble.

“There’s another part, if we’re stuck there for a while for whatever reason. Say you can’t fly because you get injured or damaged, or the ship needs repair or… any kind of delay, we need a better way to hide and maybe even ransom our way out again. Can you make a virus that’ll take everything over? You never did it before so I didn’t know.” Vriska asks.

“It depends on what you’re wanting when you say ‘take over’ but I always worked on targeted viruses because- actually no I want you to tell me how you think me slaving the husktop of near enough everyone on Alternia including really official shit would have worked out for me and my life expectancy.” you say pointedly. Geez, just because you haven’t done something doesn’t mean you can’t. You’ve never thrown Vriska out into space before, doesn’t mean you can’t.

“Point taken. What about on a planetoid of adults where having control of all of their secrets and fun little systems goes better for you, can you do that?” She asks.

“Probably. Maybe in my sleep, let you know.” you yawn and slide down a little to get comfier. Vriska makes a noise of irritation that suggests that when she finally has both arms back she’s going to come over and slap you with one of them.

In the privacy of your own head you dream of Vriska, Terezi, Tavros, John, Dayvhe and Karkat. You’re in your Dungeons and Dragons games as your characters and Vriska’s some rogue that you met along the way who against all reason is pirate themed despite no one else being like that at all. You’re trying to fight something but none of your spells are coming off right.

It’s a dumb anxiety dream and when you wake up Hal bullies you into food and drink before you’re allowed to go back on flying the ship. Unsurprisingly nothing happened with you gone except the battery drained to almost nothing but otherwise nada. Not even space debris. Aradia catches you before you can absorb yourself into more work.

“Hey,” she says as she grabs you, “I’m sorry.”

“Ok.” you tell her and try to squirm out of her focus but it’s hard.

“I never wanted to hurt you.” she insists, so very earnest.

You look her in the eye and feel a moment of flashback to when you were held captive, of being attacked, mutilated, hurt, psychically fucked with and most of all abandoned and half sure you were going to die there. Aradia pulls away from you like you burnt her.

“I-” she tries.

“I.” you say numbly.

“Sollux, I really think we can get them back, you know? I wouldn’t have done this at all if I didn’t believe that, and I realise that I did more than I thought about but still. It’s going to be okay.” Aradia presses on.
“I need to write a virus.” you announce.

You might be crazy but you’re not stupid, you’re not going to write a virus on the ship carrying you through space, the destruction of which would kill you all. You need your husktop. Wait, can you use your body and helm at the same time?

Flicking to a camera view of the helmsblock you try to engage any physical movement at all but, yeah, it’s not happening. Crap. Does this thing have trollian?

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling centaursTesticle [CT]

TA: eq, you have 2pare biowiire around, right?
CT: D --> Is something wrong with the wires in the helm I checked them before we left and they seemed perfect What is the problem
TA: that doe2n't an2wer my que2tiion
CT: D --> You cannot order me around
CT: D --> Yes, we have spares
TA: could that plug me iintwo my hu2ktop?
CT: D --> In theory but you're helmed currently so your ports are occupied
TA: can't you ju2t unplug one port and plug me in that way?
CT: D --> It would be a lot to split your focus like that
CT: D --> Actually, that was an e%ceptionally f001ish comment on my part, I am sure you would delight in being in two systems at once I will fetch what you need

centaursTesticle [CT] ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

You watch Equius on the cameras as he fetches a biowire and shows up to the helm with it in hand. He manages to get your husktop out of your fetch modus but can’t solve the coding problem to unlock it. Honestly, hardware guys. You do it for him and then with some reluctance he connects your husktop to the biowire, then unplugs one of your ports from the helm and attaches it.

To your delight nothing blows up, you don’t fry your machine and you can see it open up as a separate entity to you. Unfortunately viewing your machine as distinct from you means that you end up holding a more concrete idea of yourself and that puts your projected body right in that imagined space with Aradia’s again.

“Ooh!” Aradia chirps in delight, peering over your shoulder at your open husktop. Honestly the way the desktop has kind of exploded out into program windows makes you think of what little you’ve seen of Jayded’s very sweet setup.

“Can you just get out of my head?” you sigh, trying to will her away.

“I literally can’t. I’m using your thinksponge as much as I am the rest of the hardware in here. If it’s any help I can’t actually read your thoughts. Or, well, sometimes I get things. Stuff that you mean to send to the helm and then that… that big awful flash of feeling a while back.” Aradia says that last part uneasily, as if it might happen again.

It takes you a moment or two to realise what she must mean.

“Good to know my flashbacks are as intrusive and shitty for you as they are for me.” you grumble.

She pulls back from you and turns to look out at the barely changing landscape of distant planets and stars. There’s a tingle of guilt in your simulated digestion sac but you don’t have time to indulge it, you have people to fuck over.
You know the vague shape of the program that you want to make, you want a virus that’s more of a worm than anything else. Something subtle and unobtrusive that’ll mask itself as an already existing program, you want it to rummage through the saved data and get back to you. Because, here’s the thing, it’s totally possible to build a completely impenetrable security system. It’s not even really all that hard, as long as you don’t ever want anyone to use it. Because, people are lazy and people are stupid. You can demand that people have the most secure password there is but they’re just going to save it on their devices so that they can have it autofill so they’re not inconvenienced. The hard thing in security is that sweet spot between secure and usable, make it too secure and your users will rapidly break the thing to make it easy and then you may as well have none. If that’s what’s happening there then controlling this network will be a walk in the communal recreation area for you.

You’re not going to assume the best case scenario though, you’re going to assume this is a very secure system populated almost exclusively by intelligent and not lazy people. There’s only so many of them around so your program needs to hop from device to device until it finds the one dumbass with the keys to the castle saved somewhere on their palmhusk or husktop. Once you have that it’s a whole different ball game. You can get your fronds into that network and start taking control of everything The Grand Entertainer needs. Flight plans, food supplies because there’s no way that planetoid is self sufficient, power supply, hell even social media. Actually, there’s an idea…

You open up your own chitr app and take a look at the code in the app there. If you can write something that pretends to be chitr it can hop from device to device whenever they interact or share files and if you do a good enough job no virus scanner will catch it. Apps are updated so often that really all anything needs to do is to insist it’s part of something like that and the scanners will let it go. Even if it does get caught all a user will get is a popup that’ll be all

WARNING: CHITTR APPLICATION’S FILES LOOK SUSPICIOUS DO YOU WANT-

And then they’ll click yes because you can’t keep people from their meowbeast memes, can you?

Can you write a virus, Vriska asks. Bitch, please.

You’re rudely kicked out of the helm a good while later, but you’re still connected to your husktop whose fans whine in distress at your undivided focus overclocking the thing.

“Get up, eat, walk around. I’ll never hear the end of it if I return you to Dayvhe all broken. Also I realise I’ve been chasing you on this every time before you sleep but you did take your medication before you passed out last night didn’t you? I was too busy with Vriska’s arm to check.” Hal says, poking you with a bottle of water.

“Yes, okay. You and Equius made the point about if I go manic the increased power output could fry the ship and kill us all.” you grumble and swat him away as you keep coding.

Hal picks your husktop up and curiously looks at your program as you write it.

“That’s good, really subtle.” Hal remarks and suddenly unplugs you, which feels about as pleasant as getting an elastic band snapped on your frontal lobe.

“Your code has too much of your own fingerprints on though, go eat and rest a bit and I’ll blend you in a little better. Go on, go.” Hal says and shoos you away.

You grudgingly leave, grab food and go join the others in the main room. They’re all sat in chairs near control panels that no one is using because you and Aradia are doing all the work. John and Jayded are on their knees by a large chest. There appears to be a whole bunch of magic items on the
floor around them, not the fakey magic is real kind of roleplay shit but more the ‘pick a card, any
card’ kind of dumbassery.

“What.” you say around your microwave burrito.

“I have a plan!” John says cheerfully.

“It’s wonderfully creative!” Jayekh agrees brightly.

“It’s very silly.” Jayyne adds.

You look at Vriska for an explanation, she looks a little like she’s nursing a headache just from being
near this conversation.

“It’s a contingency plan, one that might work just because it’s so stupid no one would ever believe
that anyone would try it.” Vriska explains.

“I don’t want to know.” you tell them all.

“It’s great. And they were all like ‘that’s too many guns Jayded’ but now who’s laughing, huh?”
Jayded says smugly, captchloging a rifle and then handing the card to John.

“You can never have too many guns.” Jayekh nods in agreement.

Oh, no, you just remembered you had a prior engagement somewhere where this conversation isn’t
happening. You turn on your heel and walk down a different corridor, this is the one that goes down
into the more mechanical parts of the ship. It’s more of a service entrance to the mechanics parts so
you didn’t expect to find anyone in there. Much less Equius sprawled across Nepeta’s lap, very
obviously midway through a feelings jam.

You hastily back out of there before you’re seen. Wow, you really didn’t need to see that. Nope, you
could have happily lived your life without seeing Equius that obscenely relaxed as Nepeta ran her
fingers around his snapped off horn.

“What-?” Jayyne asks but you hold up a hand to stop her.

“Didn’t see anything, wasn’t here, leaving now.” you say quickly and walk back out the other way.

You finish your food and then return to the helmsblock. You spend a while sat in a different position
so that you can talk to Hal and both look at your code, the end result is a damn good sneaky virus.
Hal says that he’ll find a few ways to distribute it so even if the worst happens and he’s the only one
of you who can act he can still enact this plan and get more power. After that you kick him out and
get back to being a battery.

You’re only turfed out of there when you start dreaming again and somehow at that point your sleep
cycle has gone back around to be in time with everyone else’s. The end result of that is that you’re
out cold on the loungeplank again with John snoring away on the floor below you. That’s where you
are when Vriska shakes you awake not nearly enough hours later.

“We have a problem.” she tells you. You stumble hastily to your feet, apologising to John for
standing on him as you go, and follow her into the main room. Everyone else is there, bleary eyed
and concerned.

“This is us.” Hal says, waving at the screen and showing your relative position.
"We’re nearly there, Aradia made good time unless… was I asleep for longer than I thought?" you wonder. On the map onscreen you can see the partly cleared band of rocks with the large planetoid of Planet Hollywood floating calmly. From the indication on the screen you’re stopped the next solar system over, currently in the haze of a gas giant.

"Shut up, our problem is to do with this. Aradia, show the thing." Vriska orders.

"You could say please." Aradia points out from the speakers and the displayed image doesn’t change.

"AA," you groan and cover your face, "can you just show me the problem so I can fix it?"

The screen changes and you can see a glowing red field surrounding the whole solar system and dipping into yours, coming up almost as far as the gas giant you’re behind.

"Within that range we’ve seen ships entering, heading right for Planet Hollywood, only there’s been chatter between them whenever they get inside there. My best guess is that’s the range that the traffic control of the planetoid scans ships and determines if they should be there. Some have sailed right through and some have lingered but it’s high traffic, I tell you. All sorts of ships too." Hal remarks.

"So the moment we go in there without the proper clearances we’ll be seen and caught. We can probably speed through it into the planet but every fucker with a ship will be looking for us and we lose our element of surprise and our real chance to secure Dionte.” Vriska adds.

So you’re stuck.

"Could we find a ship like ours, take it out of commission and pretend to be it?" Jayyne asks.

"This ship’s pretty distinctive and even if we did find something like it or assumed they wouldn’t care about the look it’d still be a job to board another ship and get that data without them sending out a distress signal. We can get the codes from them or I can destroy the ship before they send a signal, not both.” you answer.

This is such shit! You need a way in there! You have to rescue everyone.

"Can you not just…” Jayekh begins and you’re already glaring at him because whenever anyone asks you something technical and opens with something like ‘can’t you just’ you know it’s going to be absolute ignorant hoofbeastshit.

"You know, hack it?” he finishes. There it is.

"That’s not how that works.” you sigh and Hal smacks his hand to his forehead with a metallic thunk.

"No, no, all I’m saying is that all that’s happening out there is those ships have signatures on them or whatever, as no doubt I’m sure we do. And they’re just checking those details with some fellow on the ground who has some itinerary and he’s going ‘yep you’re on the list come on in’ that’s all. Can’t you hack that?” Jayekh asks.

"No.” you say because it’s quicker than just screaming or crying.

"But I saw something like that in a movie once!” he protests.

"Here we go.” Hal mutters.
"No, don’t you be like that mister! It was… oh what was the title? I don’t recall. This blueblood fellow got out of prison and sees his dead criminal buddy’s matesprit to find out he was killed for these plans for this job, right? And it was about robbing gold from some planet’s vaults and- it was something to do with a traffic system like this. You know the one, it had the ships in white, red and blue with the stripes and that song, it was all ‘this is the self preservation society’ or something!” Jayekh sings.

“OH! Oh, you mean ‘In Which Unreformed Criminal Charli Croker Undertakes His Former Colleague’s Criminal Plan To Steal Gold From The Trading Planet Turin Through Technological Subterfuge Regarding Its Flight Traffic System. Includes Glorification Of A Criminal Lifestyle, False Impersonation Of Arena Stickball Fans, Dangerous In Atmosphere Flying, An Inordinately Catchy Song And A Cliffhanger That Started Riots’, that movie? Also, not made by The Grand Entertainer at all and coincidentally the movie that coined the term cliffhanger from the ending.” Hal explains.

“I think I watched that with Terezi once, they broke the code in the traffic system to make it impossible to chase them.” Vriska adds.

“That’d be something I could do if we were down there but all the way out here I’ve no hope of infecting the system like…” you trail off.

“What?” Vriska asks.

“The problem is that I can’t mess with that system unless I’m down there, if I could get down there then the virus I coded could absolutely put us on the manifest and we could sail in. But that plan means we have to be there before we get there, doesn’t work. But…” could that work? Could you do that?

“But WHAT?!” Vriska demands, grabbing you and shaking you.

“If I got close enough to one of the ships going in I could try to infect it with a virus carrying the one I made already, if I modified it. Then it’d continue onto the planet, spread the virus and give me control of the system. I could make it add us to the manifest and let us know when it has and then we could sail in without a problem, in theory at least.” you say.

“That’s a lot of layers of complexity, that’d be hard to write but it’s not impossible.” Hal muses.

“We have nothing but time. Or at least until we run out of food and resort to cannibalism, we can get it before then.” you nod.

Jayekh grins and throws his arm around Hal’s shoulders.

"Hang on a minute lads, I've got a great idea.” Jayekh says with a waggle of his eyebrows. You’ve not seen this movie but you’d bet every goddamn ceagar you have that he’s quoting it.

“Can you resort to cannibalism now, starting with him? You know, just to spread the real food supplies out for later. Please?” Hal asks hopefully.
Zombie - The Cranberries

"It's the same old theme
Since nineteen-sixteen
In your head, in your head, they're still fightin'
With their tanks, and their bombs
And their bombs, and their guns
In your head, in your head, they are dyin'"
Zombie - The Cranberries

‘Anti-war anthem that got the band culled’

“Some kind of force field, I guess.” Dirkka says thoughtfully as he looks up at the knife still embedded in the ceiling.

“I’m gonna guess that shooting him would fail for shore, not that I have my gun on me.” Roxxie sighs. It makes sense, projectiles at high speed get stopped, if it’d stop your knife it’d stop a bullet. You’ve never seen anything like that before, certainly in movies or even imperial military propaganda people die left right and centre from bullet wounds. You guess when you’re as rich as him you can afford that kind of tech.

“Shooting him seems a little unneeded.” Tavros argues. You stare at him wide eyed, is your ancestor already getting people on his side?

“I think- Roxxie give me a boost here.” Dirkka asks and Roxxie obligingly hefts him up into the air.

“I think trying to kill him is the wrong way to go about this. He’s clearly eccentric and pissed about Cal too but if we can explain without dropping anyone else in it then I think we can reason with him. He doesn’t seem irrational.” Dirkka remarks and grabs the knife from the ceiling, he hauls on it until it comes down and he drops down to the floor.

“Are you fucking kidding me? He’s a lunatic! He’s trollnapped us all, locked us all up ‘for our own good’ supposedly and he’s evidently always a hair’s breadth from murder!” you shout.

“If people really are looking for the descendants of our ancestors then he is right about us being in danger though.” Kanaya points out.

“I think we could have come to that conclusion ourselves eventually but it seems pretty sensible to me.” Terezi nods.

They’re all agreeing with him and he’s not even here! You wrap your hands around your own horns and pace back and forth, not sure if you’re more likely to scream or cry. They’re being voodoo’d and they don’t even know it.

“Dayvhe, calm down.” Karkat sighs.

“No! Don’t you see what’s happening?!” you demand, waving your hands at the others.

“You think he’s manipulating us. Maybe he is, I don’t know. But walking around with our name and our signs is obviously a death sentence with what we know now, I can’t argue with that logic. I don’t think the solution needs to be ‘we stay here forever’ or anything. If he cares so much about us he could let us choose what we want ourselves and give us fake identities and signs.” Karkat points out.
“That’s a good idea.” Rohhze nods.

Your sign is already a lie, it claims rust and you’re not. You’re a mutant, same as Karkat. No fake ID is going to get you past any blood test, it’s the whole problem Sollux was trying to help you with in the first place.

“But with us…” you say quietly.

“Yeah, I know. But what else is new?” Karkat shrugs.

Dirkka leans back against the table, his shoulder against Roxxie’s arm. He tosses your damaged butter knife up and down in the air with a frown.

“It’s not like I was ever joining the military, I’m going to aid Roxxie’s challenge to the throne. Getting a fake sign and name wouldn’t up my chances of survival doing that so I’m good. I don’t know what the rest of you want.” Dirkka says nonchalantly.

“ Asking someone what they want to do with their whole life is a pretty big question. But, supporting the takedown of a corrupt Empress is a pretty good goal. People who do bad things should be punished to the full force of the law, unfortunately there’s no law dealing with our leader except the rule for an heiress to make a challenge. So, aiding that seems sensible. But if you do win Roxxie I will keep my eye on you.” Terezi warns.

“The more people holding me accountable the better, turning out like her is never something I want to happen.” Roxxie says gravely.

“I can’t say that I would do any different than my ancestor if I was in her position, and the situation that jadebloods are in is dire, the rest of our society is no better either. Changing the system seems the best thing to do but I cannot say that I like the odds.” Kanaya adds.

“The alternative is to become complicit in it, assuming we even have that choice. Even if we did forge new identities, and the chances of doing that is dubious for me because so much of highblood culture is who you know. You can’t fake those connections or erase your reputation. I doubt I have much alternative, but I don’t think I’m the only one in that situation.” Rohhze says smoothly and looks sidelong at Karkat.

Karkat stares back at her and bristles angrily.

“Does EVERYONE fucking know about me? Is this the world’s worst kept secret? Congratulations! I’m a mutant! I’m totally fucked!” Karkat screeches, throwing his hands up in the air.

“With your ancestor… we assumed.” Tavros mumbles.

“I made an educated guess after learning about Dayvhe and your ancestor.” Rohhze shrugs.

“What about Dayvhe?” Tavros asks with a frown.

“We’re mutants, bright candy red. Off the spectrum. Can we talk about why you’re all considering not escaping to go home?” you demand.

“Well, it hardly seems worth it to go back if when we age out and attempt to leave we risk being caught. Besides if we all intend on rebelling anyway it could well be safer up here.” Kanaya argues.

You stare at them all in disbelief.
Turning, you walk away and go to the door. You grab the handle and try to open it but you’re still locked in.

“No, I’m not going crazy. We are all still LOCKED UP HERE AGAINST OUR WILL!” you shout at them.

“Dayvhe-” Rohhze sighs.

“No! What about our friends? Or- our our fucking quadrantmates? Are Jayekh and Jayyne just dead to you two? And isn’t Vriska your moirail? What the HELL?” you shout, looking at them in turn.

“We just need to convince him to let us talk to them, explain what’s happening.” Dirkka suggests.

“I can’t- I can’t do this. You’re all being mind controlled and you’re not even listening to me.” you hiss.

You can’t stay in the room with them. You stomp off and hide yourself away in the communal bookhive. There’s even a table game of arena stickball set up. Within your sylladex, because not everything was confiscated, is an old blanket from your room. You shove the table to the wall, drape the blanket over it so that three sides are covered and then weigh those down with books when you’re underneath.

Taking off your shades you lay down on the floor and cover your eyes. You’re so frustrated you could cry.

Killing your ancestor, if it’s even possible with that thing he has, could be dangerous for the people he’s got controlled. You don’t know how to undo his awful voodoos so you’re stuck there and no one will listen to you that they’re obviously being affected. They’ve seen him twice and they’re acting like this is some wacky misunderstanding and things will all be fine afterwards. They’re being soothed into thinking it’s all fine, you’re sure of it. You’re the only one here who can think clearly and god only knows how that’s going to go. You need a plan.

Now is the time when you come up with a brilliant plan.

The wood grain on the underside of the arena stickball table seems unimpressed with the amount of plan that you currently have.

You could tell Rohhze what you think is happening and go with her previous suggestion to try testing the limits of your control against your ancestors. That’s not a great plan though, you have to say. You’re not keen on any venture where there’s a chance for you to scramble your friends thinksponges. But what choice do you have?

This is a bad plan.

You roll over onto your side miserably and wish, for about the two millionth time, that you were with Sollux. You scroll through your sylladex until you find a shirt of his you stole a while back. It’s in with a few of Karkats sweaters too. Look, they do laundry regularly- well, Karkat does laundry and takes pity on Sollux and does a lot of his too to make up for when Sollux forgets. You’re less keen on the laundry thing so stealing their clothes is easier. Plus it annoys Karkat and Sollux pretends it annoys him but you know that little smile on his face, he thinks it’s funny. You’d tried to have self restraint when you were at clown camp and not take them out, not knowing if they still wanted to be with you really took the edge off of comforting yourself with their things but now you don’t have the strength.

You pull your shirt off and put Sollux’s on.
You’re sure if he was here that this wouldn’t be a problem, he could just break you all out with a thought and save the night. Your finger traces the straight lines of his sign. He’d tell you that it’s ok and help you work out what to do. He’s smart, driven and dedicated and he’d point out any holes in your plan just like that. But he’s not here.

You hope he’s safe on Alternia, if that’s not a complete contradiction in terms to say. If you can talk your obviously crazy ancestor into letting you talk to anyone back home then hopefully you can talk to him. Because he is alive. He IS. No matter what anyone else thinks. You can’t let your ancestor’s words about him passing out from suffocation in space and burning up in the atmosphere trick you into thinking he’s anything but alive.

You hold your hand to his sign on your chest. He is alive and you WILL talk to him again.

The sound of floorboards creaking makes you freeze, but when the corner of the blanket is lifted up it’s only Karkat.

“How can I come in?” he asks quietly.

“No, this is Sanity Town, only sane people allowed in here.” you sulk.

“No one left to evict you, then? Move your ass.” Karkat snorts and muscles his way in anyway. He’s on his hands and knees under the table when he catches your change in shirt. He opens his mouth but his words seem to die. Cautiously he reaches over and touches his hand to your chest, to Sollux’s sign.

“I’m worried too. This whole situation is crazy.” Karkat says gently.

“You’re acting like we’ve not been trollnapped by a psycho. They killed people, on his orders!” you point out.

“Panicking or hiding under the table isn’t helping either.” Karkat argues.

“I’m not doing either of those.” you insist. Karkat obviously doesn’t buy it.

You stare at the wood grain instead of him.

“You don’t think he’s dead, do you? I know some of the others do.” you say.

“I can’t think that.” Karkat sighs and crosses his legs under him and leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees.

“Because it’s too terrible?” you ask.

“Pretty much. If I seriously considered that Sollux was dead, if I saw his body right there I think I’d just cry until I passed out and then just be broken for… for so long. We don’t have that luxury right now and we never saw the body so I have to tell myself he made it. Besides, I’ve known him long enough. I’d say he’s like a meowbeast with nine lives but he’s probably over nine brushes with death by now. Why break that pattern now?” Karkat laughs weakly.

“If he even let us message anyone what would you send him? I can’t tell him we’re fine, we’re not. I couldn’t even say that we’re coming back because I’ve no idea how we’d manage to swing that one. Maybe just that we’re alive and we pity him, we miss him.” you breathe. Just thinking about him reading a message like that hurts you.

“If you’re thinking that I’d try to tell him not to do anything stupid or risky then you’re wrong. I
don’t want him to but not even either of us could talk him out of something like that. I’d just remind him to look after himself, it’s not like we want him to be all hurt or unwell because of us. Then again, nagging him about that often doesn’t even work in person so fuck knows if we can smack sense into him from this far away.” Karkat grumbles.

He’s probably right on that. Karkat shuffles over so he’s on the ground next to you with both of you looking up at the underside of the table.

“What do you think he’d say to us?” you ask.

Karkat hums thoughtfully and then holds his hands up, as he starts to talk he moves one along like he’s reading invisible text through touch.

“DV and KK,” Karkat begins, “after I found out that I need air to breathe I fell back to the planet like every other sucker that is affected by gravity. But I managed to break my fall and land in the water just fine.”

“I can’t swim but swimming is just like flying but wet, right?” you chip in and Karkat giggles.

“Then I rode a giant mega shark lusus home. I fell asleep out of the sun because I’m not totally insane and when I woke up I went back to the clown camp to get more answers but now it’s just a smoking crater in the ground.” Karkat continues.

The smile falls off of your face.

“Shit, I hope Deimos got out ok.” you murmur.

“Who?”

“Deimos, he was this little clown kid going through the same training as me. Sweet kid, he was like… four? Didn’t deserve that shit. I was trying to help him out.” you say sadly.

Karkat goes quiet and rolls over on his side to look at you, his head propped up on his hand.

“You know, you pretend like you’re all cool.” he begins.

“I am cool!” you protest.

“Shut up no you’re not. You pretend like you’re all cool and not bothered by things but actually you’re all soft inside. You actually really care about people and not just people you like but people you just met. It’s one of the things that made me pity you as well as hate you in the beginning, you know?” Karkat says gently.

Your face feels so hot you think it could be on fire but you’re distracted from that when Karkat leans in and kisses you real quick.

“Sollux likes that about you too, he’d be proud at you looking after some little kid.” he adds sweetly.

“It wasn’t- I didn’t do anything great. I just couldn’t let them put him in that nightmare pod and all I had to do was get my ass kicked by some adult to stop it, it wasn’t- you would have done it too- it’s not-” you fumble to answer.

“See? Soft. It’s ok though, I still think you’re as cool as I ever did.” Karkat says and falls back on his back again.

“...Wait, how cool did you think I was before?” you ask and Karkat only laughs instead of
answering, though you guess it’s answer enough.

Karkat leans in and kisses you short and sweet, kind of like him as a person actually. After that you just stay there for a while in camp sanity, which is to say under the table and blankets. At least you stay there until you hear the sound of the main door clicking open and people talking. Then you’re both scrambling free and slip sliding down the hall back to the main room.

Roxxie is standing in the hallway behind a door with anger on her face, she turns to look at you and stands there with her arms folded.

“She kicked me out! And every time I try to go back in she just makes me walk back out here!” Roxxie protests.

You have a good guess who ‘she’ is in this situation, goddamn Carrie Fisher!

“Karkat, stay here and look after Roxxie, I’m going in there!” you insist.

“I- just what do you think I can do? Look at her, look at me- get back here!” Karkat screeches at you as you leap through the door to the main room and slam it behind you. The wood doesn’t to much to muffle Karkat’s frustrated shriek.

You’re confronted with the sight of a very angry Dirkka facing down Carrie Fisher as the rest of your friends look on uneasily.

“She’s my moirail!” Dirkka snarls at her.

“And did she demand you get those put in? We can remove them for you, you know.” Carrie offers, pointing to his artificial gills.

“I’M THE ONE WHO DESIGNED THEM! I wanted to be able to be with her wherever she went, Roxxie was the one who was all like ‘hey Dirkka don’t risk your ability to breathe for me’ but I did it anyway because I pity her! I need her so don’t even try to hurt her!” Dirkka roars at her. His voice makes you flinch, angry adult voices up close do that. But, wow, even for bronze he’s projecting menace that you’d expect from someone far colder than him. You guess the topic of Roxxie gets him particularly fired up.

“I was just asking.” Carrie says innocently, holding her hands up in a halfhearted surrender.

“Don’t.” he retorts sharply.

“What’s going on?” you ask.

“It seems our esteemed host, your ancestor, isn’t pleased about harbouring an heiress and I think the conclusion we were getting to here is that he had sent his subordinate here to do away with her.” Rohhze says.

“If that was my goal I think there’d be a far easier way of me achieving that, don’t you think? I’m trying to work out why you people were around her at all.” Carrie says, shaking her head.

“Because she’s my moirail!” Dirkka snaps.

“But heiresses, the Empress included, they’re shit people. All they want is power. Your group is obviously very mixed across the hemospectrum, you’re harbouring two mutants, three if you count the Lalond girl’s voodoos. Given who your ancestors are I just can’t see why you’d associate with someone like an heiress.” Carrie argues.
“Roxxie’s different.” Dirkka insists.

“She is, she helped raise me. Cal was no damn help there, obviously.” you defend her.

“We also had another heiress friend before and she was sweet too, her moirail snapped and killed her but that’s not related.” Terezi adds.

“Roxxie Lalond is a good person and you’ll have to kill me to take her away.” Dirkka declares.

Carrie looks startled and loses whatever reply she was going to give before.

“Roxxie… Lalond? Lalond like you?” Carrie asks, looking at Rohhze.

“We share a last name, yes. It’s very rare but seadwellers do have fewer names going around it seems. Longer lifespans, fewer hatches, fewer names.” Rohhze shrugs.

Carrie makes a thoughtful noise and takes her tablet out, she taps on the screen and then holds it up to Rohhze’s face. If you lean over enough you can see an old picture of a woman who looks just like Rohhze as an adult. She lowers it and walks to the door you burst in through. She opens it, revealing a surprised Roxxie and a pissed off Karkat. It’s your experience that lots of recently slammed doors contain a pissed off Karkat on one side or the other.

Ignoring Karkat, poor Karkat, she holds her tablet up to Roxxie’s face and compares the two. Looking at the adult features of them both you can see there’s some resemblance, maybe. Carrie puts her tablet away and reaches over and before Roxxie can stop her she pulls a hair from her head.

“We have The Academic’s remains to compare to, but if you are significantly related to her I’m sure I could dissuade Entertainer from culling her and handing her dead body over to the Empress herself to negotiate for the rights to the Spider-troll franchise. I would say she can’t just keep rebooting the damn things every five sweeps but she seems intent to do that just to keep him from- anyway.” she shrugs and tucks the hair away in her sylladex.

“I brought clothes for you all as well and tomorrow I’ll take you all around the building and explain to you what we do here. I would do it today but I’ve not cleared everyone who’s here for this level of security. I’m sure you understand that your existence and your presence here is top secret. We can’t have just anyone bumping into you.” Carrie explains and sets a large number of bags on the table from her sylladex.

“Nothing to do with us being locked up here against our will.” you say sarcastically.

“Exactly, so glad you understand.” Carrie says sharply and looks at you. Her eyes flicker down to your chest and her expression becomes less pleased with herself.

“I am sorry, about him I mean.” she says softly. You look down at Sollux’s sign on your chest and realise that she’s giving her condolences to you on his death but he’s not dead. He’s NOT.

“Fuck you!” you snap and storm out of the room.

You end up back in the gold room that you were sleeping in with Karkat and you’re not surprised that Karkat was able to easily deduce your destination and follow you in there only a few minutes after. He has bags in his hands and sets them on the table.

“I don’t know about you,” Karkat says as he unbuttons his grey pants, “but if I’m going to be kidnapped and held prisoner I at least want to do it in clean clothes.”
You’re quite happy in Sollux’s shirt, thanks, but when Karkat hands you a bag you at least look through it. There’s a number of shirts in the style of your own with your symbol in rust, grey and even mutant red. You can’t help but notice that Karkat’s has a few sweaters with his sign in hot red that you’re going to bet will never be worn.

“After you stropped out-“ Karkat begins, zipping up his new nearly identical pants.

“I didn’t leave in a strop, that’s not a thing.” you protest.

“**AFTER** you stropped out, she said that tomorrow she’ll give us a tour and answer any questions we have. We’ll keep getting food and all the entertainment systems have been unlocked. She seems pretty keen to show us that they’re not the bad guys which even if it does make more sense for us to stay here is still ehhh.” Karkat continues unabated.

“They are the bad guys, they trollnapped us.” you argue from the sulking slouch you’re holding on the loungeplank.

“Yes, Dayvhe, I was there.” Karkat sighs.

You miserably agree to Karkat’s eventual attempts to entertain you with the movies he’s now unlocked, though you argue that you don’t want to watch anything your ancestor had anything to do with. Which, lacking the ability to do a lot of research leads to you just taking Carrie’s hint and binging all of the Spider-Troll movies as Karkat loudly wonders how much of her spider aesthetic Vriska may or may not have ripped off from them.

You know Dirkka is holed up in the copper coloured room he and Roxxie have claimed for themselves, with her under such threat he’s not leaving her side for anything. You’d be there to guard her too if not for the fact that she hardly needs you and being around her and Dirkka when they’re this stressed means you’ll probably be pileblocking them and that’s just mean.

Food is delivered and again you fall asleep in the coon with Karkat but without Sollux. You dream about him.

You dream of how awkward the two of you used to be around each other. How hard it was that it wasn’t hard to open up around him, how that used to scare you. God, you always used to watch him so intently, just living for the delight that you got when you made him happy. You were so abominably stupid to not realise your feelings for him the moment you started talking to him. Like, hell, you went out into the middle of nowhere to hunt down the seeds for that plant for him. All the time convincing yourself that it was just a friend thing for real. You just felt bad for the guy knowing that he’d suffer a fate about as bad as yours and you just wanted to get him out of it, it didn’t mean anything. It was just sympathy, that was why you couldn’t stop thinking of him. Then when you handed him the plant he cried and the inkling started getting into your head that you needed to be more than just his friend. Yeah, you worked that out as you wiped his tears away and told him it’d be alright. You’re a real genius.

Needless to say, waking up without him is disappointing and you’re no more pleased that you have to wear the clothes your ancestor gifted you and meet Carrie Fisher for breakfast either. You’re all sat around the table, none of you wanting to break the tense silence until she finally shrugs and does.

“How did you discover that temple?” she asks and sips her coffee.

“One of Dayvhe’s friends found it, asked for Sollux’s help with the door as far as I understand.” Dirkka answers before anyone else can and smartly keeps Nepeta’s name out of it.
“We’ve been looking for it for a long time, longer than I’ve been around. We knew the rough location but we’re not supposed to go down there, that’s why we had been ordered to not let anyone see us. The Empress takes a dim view on that sort of thing and there are… consequences for that.” Carrie nods and sips at her mug.

“Did you know about Darkleer?” Karkat asks suddenly as he, for some reason, eats his cereal without milk.

“The man who killed Signless and Disciple? I know of him, it was before my time. I’m not that old you know,” she scoffs.

“He didn’t kill her. We read his tablet, I even checked up later records on it. He killed my ancestor but regretted it, he turned and worked for the rebellion. Seems to me like your leader jumped the gun and killed someone who could have been enough of an ally to change things. If that’s something he even cares about. For all I know he just wanted even for someone who offed his friends.” Karkat says with a shrug.

Carrie is visibly taken aback by Karkat’s words but to her credit she does seem to consider them, lowering her mug.

“If that’s true it’d be a pretty big fuck up, but given the circumstances I can see why it’d happen.” she excuses him.

“Given the shit he can pull it’s not like it would have been hard for him to ask, you know, any relevant questions and find out what really happened.” Karkat presses.

“We’re not all as rational as we would like when people we care about have died. Are we, Dayvhe?” Carrie asks.

She means Sollux.

She- oh you’re gonna- Karkat’s hand presses into your chest and pushes you back into your chair.

“I have another question, since you’re not the bad guys but you did lead a group of people who killed several kids and then kidnapped all of us. Just one question. Do you have that same forcefield that Dahvid does? That whatever it is thing that deflects projectiles?” Karkat asks, still pressing his hand to you. He gently pats his fingers on your chest as he keeps you there, a sort of mild soothing gesture.

“He has the only one, it was a gift from The Psiionic as far as I understand.” Carrie answers slowly.

“Then you might want to reconsider saying shit like that unless you want a knife in your chest. I’m not sure I can or even want to stop Dayvhe next time.” Karkat hisses at her. He lets you go but the point has been made. If she throws Sollux, who isn’t dead, in your face again you’re going to make her pay for it.

Carrie seems to be searching for a good response to that but eventually just sighs and sets her coffee mug down.

“I won’t pretend that The Grand Entertainer is a perfect person and in any mission or any movement mistakes will be made, they’re regrettable and we’re not proud of them but we’re still trying to do good. I meant what I said before, we’re not the bad guys here.” she sighs.

“He’s controlling you, and us. You know that, right?” Roxxie points out.
“I have a certain measure of resistance and he doesn’t usually give orders unless he has to, keeping you safe here is a notable exception.” Carrie shrugs and stands up.

None of you are sure why she’s standing so you all just look at her until she waves her hands at you.

“Up, then! You all have this very incorrect impression of us and Entertainer both and I intend on setting you all straight. Follow me.” she tells you and walks briskly to the door.

You don’t want to go with her but knowledge is important and knowing the layout of the place is important, really any extra information you can get is going to be useful in your eventual escape. You shoot a look at Dirkka who is getting to his feet as well, he seems to have the same idea.

“I don’t know about how much you know of the Signless’ actual teachings but no matter how good his ideas were the point is that speaking to him was likely the first chance people had at hearing ideas like that. You have to be a very convincing speaker to undo a lifetime of imperial messaging in one speech, not that he didn’t do that but you’re never going to win that way.” Carrie begins to explain as she unlocks the door and opens it.

“The Academic, your ancestor,” she continues and glances at the Lalonds, “had a different argument. Aligned on the same message she decided that true peace could never be achieved while the Empress still ruled. Even if people secretly agreed with the movement she decided that fear of the Empress would make people shy away.”

“They both failed, they were both wrong.” Carrie says and leads you all out.

“My ancestor launched a direct attack didn’t she?” Rohhze asks.

“She did, she failed.” Carrie nods.

“And I suppose you’re going to tell us what you’re doing instead?” Roxxie asks.

“I’m sure you’ve all seen the Empress’ brand of propaganda.” Carrie continues and leads you down a set of stairs.

You certainly have. Her Imperious Condescension is many things but subtle sure as shit isn’t one of them. She routinely plasters pictures of herself on the screens of any connected computing device, complete with shittily animated glitter. Her schoolfeeding propaganda about serving the empire is about as subtle as a brick to the head, but then so are the not at all veiled threats about what happens to people who don’t comply with the wishes of your ‘glorious leader’, yeah you know about it.

“Suffice to say that hers isn’t very good. Effective at instilling fear, sure, but not much else. When the message you’re going for is love and tolerance you need more of a foundation and, well, when it comes to instilling a message into people…” Carrie pushes a door open and reveals a huge room with adults going about the place in busy work and movie posters floating in projections in the air as they’re designed and critiqued in real time.

“We’re a lot better at it.” she grins.

She gestures for you all to go into the room and with some uncertainty you do. It’s filled with the noise of people talking and there’s so much going on that it’s hard to take in. One whole wall by you is colour coded and covered in digital notes. It’s documenting the progress stage of numerous high profile movies that aren’t even out yet, some are down as being shot, some are being edited. Interviews are jotted into place on their timelines, planned dates for marketing hype and so on.

“We make core movies and other movies. Our other movies are sometimes padding, revenue grabs
or a way for us to assess the merits of certain talent on non vital projects. Plenty of people work for Entertainer and not all are followers of Signless, but anyone working in here or on a core project is a devoted follower. The core movies, music, books, media of any kind is all focused on advancing the cause.” Carrie explains and leads you into the room.

“That’s pretty self aggrandising, don’t you think?” Kanaya asks.

“They are just movies.” Terezi agrees.

“You’re all so young. When I was your age it would have been unthinkable to have a rustblood as the genius hero who saves the day. It just didn’t happen. There were movies where rustbloods were smart, sure. There were movies where they were the hero, rarely. But every movie stands on the progress the one before it made, and now we have this.” Carrie smiles and twists the digital poster design for the next Iron Troll movie. Robert Downey playing the genius billionaire rustblood who made good on his successful ideas and now is a hero saving the universe.

“You tell people rustbloods are as good as they rest of them and they laugh, but they’ll see the movies and buy the merch. Ideas sink in, then if someone was to write a rustblood off near them they might wonder if that’s really right.” she says slyly.

“You want to challenge toxic consumer culture and how it relates to toxic gender identity? Make a movie about a man who has a nervous breakdown about it and imagines a hyper masculine man that he nearly has to die to overcome, but I suppose we won’t be making a second one of that.” she adds, shooting Dirkka a look.

You look around the room, at all the projects and how hard all of these people are working. Has your ancestor really looked at the bravery of Rohhze’s ancestor and the ethical commitment of Karkat’s and decided that the real problem was bad marketing?

“Can you even prove this makes any difference? Or are you all just congratulating yourselves for changing things when you sit out here playing make believe?” you ask accusingly.

“I think we do more than that. We have actors- like Will, actually. When Entertainer first took him on and pitched Thresh Prince of Bel Air to him he didn’t think anyone would buy a midblood like him in that role, but it was successful. We’ve got actors here now who got started in acting because of his career. Stories we tell are important, the roles we see on screen even if they’re fantastical stories about somewhere… well, a long long time ago and in a galaxy far away, they’re still stories about people like us. People we see ourselves in. If the Empress tells you that you deserve nothing but you see movies and tv shows saying that people like you can be the hero, that you can find quadrants, that you can have friends across every hue then maybe you don’t listen to someone who says you’re nothing.” Carrie says softly.

“I can see that helping but if no one’s stepping up to say what you’ve supposedly got everyone thinking then things aren’t really ever going to change because that’s fiction and this is reality.” Karkat argues.

“You sound like you’re stepping up for the job.” Carrie smiles all sneakily.

“Fuck right off, I’d like to outlive my ancestor, thanks.” Karkat sneers.

“But no, this is what I wanted to do. I wanted to overthrow the Empress and change the systems that make things so shitty for everyone. I believe people are better than this, they’re just too scared to be. I want to change things.” Roxxie insists.
“And that is why she’s my moirail.” Dirkka says haughtily, though you know it’s more because Roxxie is one of the very few people able to get between Dirkka and his self-destructive tendencies but that doesn’t make for a pithy comeback, does it?

You split away from the group and Carrie notices but seemingly lets you go. You gather everyone here must know about you because though people look at you and pay attention to you when you come close to them no one is freaking out about how you’re a mini version of their almighty leader.

You slide closer to a group of adults discussing a movie trailer.

“-look if it’s just a mashup…” one sighs.

“It’s not, I do more than that you know. I- oh hey, look. Target audience, if you can’t get a kid interested in this movie you can’t do it. I’m not saying this trailer’s perfect it’s just a step, I think.” the adult says, adjusting his glasses and smiling at you. He has a vaguely familiar face but you can’t place him.

The other adults there are looking at you so you shrug and the guy sat at the husktop station hits play.

A nice guitar riff starts up and the film starts bragging about the director being the same as a bunch of heist movies. The adult on screen is limping up a corridor in what looks like a mine and he’s obviously lowblooded, when he gets outside you realise bronze. There’s a cut to his boss letting him go from his job.

‘2 moirails’ the screen proclaims and shows the bronze guy standing next to a rustie guy.

“You were just fired.” the rustie says from a loungeplank and you clock that he’s very obviously just got the one arm and now that you know what’s going on you can see it.

“I was let go,” the guy concedes, his knee brace obviously in shot, “for liability reasons involving insurance.”

‘3 arms’ the screen adds and then shows a shot of two guys mocking him for it and then his moirail beating the snot out of them for it. It’s perfectly shot.

Hey kids on Alternia, are you lowblooded? Physically injured enough that you don’t think you can make the cut when you become an adult (if you make it that far?) well don’t worry cause here’s some adults just like you and they’re the leads in this story.

It becomes obvious as the trailer goes on that this is a heist movie, run entirely by lowbloods. It’s not even like lowblood who’s smart and superior like typical highblood characters are. The backgrounds are shitty cheap hives, the accents and outfits are gutter trash poor but these people aren’t stupid and they’re not the joke characters they’re the sympathetic leads. You want them to win.

Shots of the Alternian Imperial anthem and flag held by stiff military highbloods are contrasted with shots of these lowblooded criminals actually getting away with their shit. By implication taking the money of those very highbloods and the empire.

You look around and as much as you want to hate your ancestor you know what good art does to people. This is clever and even if it doesn’t seem meaningful you know better. Is it enough? Is it okay that this may take a goddamn ice age to really make huge improvements? That’s a different question but this, this can work and you get how to make it work. You hate your ancestor but this at least you get, it has potential and the operation as a whole is a work of genius.

“Well?” the familiar looking adult asks and you realise they’re all watching you. Are they waiting for your view just because of who your ancestor is? It’s possible.
“I’d watch it,” you say honestly. You would. It’s probably not Karkat’s thing but you could see Jayekh, Jayded, John and maybe even Sollux liking it too. Well, now you’ve just made yourself sad. Good job, self.

“Yes! See, I know what’s cool.” the adult says triumphantly.

“If I didn’t know better, Cicirega, I’d think all the repeated claims about how you’re so much more down with the kids than me were attempts at blackflirting.” the guy at the desk says mockingly.

“What? No. I’m not- I’m just deeply cool.” the guy nods. God, you swear you know his voice. You squint at him, he doesn’t seem all that old… maybe if you imagine him younger you might-

“You’re Neilci Cirega!” you gasp. He does weird comedy songs and did that one puppet thing about the wizards that, being a perfect intersection of their interests, Roxxie and Dirkka were obsessed with when you were little. He beams at your recognition.

“See, cool with kids. And it’s The Cicirega now I’m an adult.” he grins.

“Did you just remix your adolescent name into a title?” you ask with a frown.

“Yeah, exactly that. I remix things to make them better. Other artist’s work, my own, imperial propaganda to make it meme worthy and a joke instead of in any way effective.” Cicirega explains.

“Mix up your pitch crush’s song from that movie he pretends didn’t happen with, of all things, the Shrek soundtrack to piss him off. And, by the way, Will does tell everyone you only have your title as it is because you made a typo on your own papers.” the other guy grins.

“That’s- no! I didn’t! And I showed you that without having shown him or released it but, rhgh… if he’s telling people that I’m gonna- I have to go.” Cicirega hisses and marches off.

The guy doing the actual trailer editing shakes his head and goes back to work, more or less ignoring you so you figure you leave that. If that guy is involved with Troll Will Smith, or at least that’s who you assume they were talking about, you probably don’t want to be around them. You know, after what you did to him.

Looking around you can see that pretty much everyone has done what you’ve done, spreading out to look at everyone’s work and get an idea of what goes on here. Carrie is standing in the centre keeping an eye on what’s going on so you figure you’ll go talk to her instead.

“So he just controls everything, then?” you ask her as you come up to her.

“Only in a very vague sense. Like I said everyone here’s a follower of The Signless and his movement and a lot of the artists here have their own personal causes they want to advance because of who they are. More or less everything crosses his desk at some point but he tries to keep his hands off of a lot of things for obvious reasons.” Carrie answers.

“What obvious reasons?” you ask with a frown. Well intentioned or not this whole operation is really just another extension of his control, isn’t it?

“He makes edits to scripts for the purpose of making movies better, sure. Things like tightening the pacing, pointing out plot holes, helping to balance how overt we can make things and not get caught by censorship. And he writes his own sometimes, he has his own issues and perspectives. Being an outsider, being alone, losing people he cares about, all of that. But he can hardly write a movie about what it feels like to be a psionic doomed to a helmsblock even if he’s seen it happen. That’s better left to writers who’ve felt that, actors who’ve lived that, don’t you think?” she asks.
Logically you know that she has a point and that’s actually a good thing that your ancestor knows his limits and isn’t just dictating how people should feel. But fuck that guy, you move to a different point.

“What does that matter when he’s controlling everyone anyway? Even if someone else writes it they’re still doing it because he fucked their thinksponge and they’re all- they’re all stupid for him! You included!” you accuse.

“The very same psionics that you have? That I’ve seen you use on people?” she replies, arching an eyebrow.

Ouch. You curl your arms around yourself as if that’ll make you feel any better.

“Yeah, and I hate them. They’re evil and awful and so is he!” you argue.

Carrie’s expression is sympathetic and you jump when Karkat sets a hand on your arm.

“What’re you shouting about?” Karkat asks.

Wait. You’re doing it, you’re doing the thing. That background ‘make me feel better’ vibe is several notches higher than usual because you hate this and yourself so much and you want to not feel this shitty. Yet this is the very thing you’re feeling shitty about!

“Forget it, I’m going back.” you mutter and push past him, leaving the room in a hurry.

You retreat back to the blanketed space under the arena stickball table and pretend that the rest of the world and even you aren’t there at all.

‘Cause, here’s the thing. The big problem on which everything rests.

Mind control is bad.

That’s not exactly the spicy, controversial ethical statement of the year, is it? You might not be into mind bending philosophy like Rohhze but even you can stretch to that. Mind control is bad, doing it is bad. Choosing to do bad things makes you a bad person.

Proof of concept: Vriska is a shitty person for mind controlling people and she herself IS a bad person.

All looks good to you. You tolerate her because Sollux is mostly cool with her, she had helpful skills you needed and she’s important to Terezi. That doesn’t change her being bad, it’s just the reason you still speak to her at all. Your ancestor is also a bad person, he mind controlled people, threatened to kill people, made a bunch of actors kill a heap of kids and trollnap all of you.

You have mind control powers.

You do, you hate them. You’ve done bad things with them without meaning to, you’re in the process of apologising and you don’t intend to do it again. Except, uh, you did do that. Twice. You controlled two of the actors. You did it to save your life and the lives of your friends, or at least you were trying to.

So, you did a bad thing for a good(?) reason. Does that make you a bad person or a good person?

You know the answer you want. Obviously you want to be a good person. You suspect that you’re not but you want to be. The problem is that if you change the rules for that things get… weird.
Mind control is bad unless you’re using it to save lives.

Seems legit, gets you off the hook and seems like a valid enough exemption. Like how you think it’s bad to kill people but when those people started it by hurting or trying to kill you and yours it’s fair game. Makes sense.

Only it doesn’t get just you off of the hook.

You ancestor is controlling and influencing a whole bunch of people directly, though how much you don’t know, to make media that changes the opinions of trolls around the universe. Would these people still have these ideas and want to make this stuff without him? Maybe. You don’t know. Would they be able to without him making this place for them? You don’t know. Do movies and music and shit actually change people’s mind and is breaking up imperial propaganda with good stories and representations good? Well, yes. Is this place probably producing actual tangible good in the universe? Well… yeah.

If you’re not a bad person because you only used your shitty powers for good then your ancestor is not a bad person either. In fact you could argue that he’s doing more good with this set up than you ever have, so he’s better than you.

That can’t be true for the super duper logical reason that you hate him and would kill him given half a goddamn chance. Because he’s a monster and he needs destroying and because of him Sollux might-

There’s a chance that he could be…

No. See, you can’t even think it. Your ancestor is a monster and you hate him, he’s a terrible person and that has to be true. But, unfortunately, if he’s terrible then so are you. Which, right now, feels pretty true anyway.

Karkat comes by later and so do Dirkka and Roxxie. You’re not interested in coming out and even though they leave food you’re not interested in it. You sleep there without sopor and have fractured nightmares about falling through the atmosphere and catching fire as you fall.

“Alright.” Dirkka declares the next morning as he flips the blanket up onto the table. This place seems to be weirdly diurnal and though you didn’t have any jet lag coming here it’s still weird to sleep at night and be awake during the day so much. You wince in the light and weakly hiss at him.

Dirkka shoots a disapproving look at your untouched plate, jabs you in the stomach and then shoves a croissant in your mouth as you gasp in pain and then drags you out by the ankle.

“If you’re going to act like a wiggler I’m gonna treat you like one. You need to get up, you’re making people worry. Especially Karkat and even when he’s silently worrying he does it loudly and it’s pissing me off.” Dirkka insists.

“Karkat’s loud, water is wet, any other shocking insights to share?” you ask as you pull the pastry out of your mouth.

“Funny. Look, we’ve been given these.” Dirkka says and holds his wrist out. He’s got some kind of bracelet on with a little screen on it.

“They unlock doors, including those to here. We’ve been given access to lots of places, I think some people’s offices are out of bounds so we don’t screw up their work or anything but still. Me and Roxxie were going to go check some things out, see how they feel about possibly helping her challenge to the throne. It seems like Carrie Fisher convinced your ancestor not to throw Roxxie out
at least. Want to come with us?” he asks.

“No.” you grumble and roll back under the table.

“Fine. If you stop being a wiggler then here’s yours and…” Dirkka pauses as he drops your bracelet on the floor by you. He’s obviously hesitating about something.

“What?” you ask.

“Roxxie said not to say.” Dirkka mutters.

“To say what?” you ask again, immediately way more interested.

“You probably won’t need to know because the doors don’t open anyway if we’re not allowed through but the whole top floor is out of bounds. Apparently my ancestor lives in the roof spaces and he’s got some lab up there but he gets into the floor below through the ceiling a lot and he’s supposedly been a little… homicidal since Cal died. No one’s giving details. But either way it’s all locked up and no one’s going up there except the occasional unlucky intern to deliver him food so just don’t try to get up there okay?” Dirkka tells you.

Oh, so your ancestor has a whole secret floor that you’re not allowed access to but he’s giving you all the space to wander around the approved bits so you think he’s decent? How convenient an excuse that Dionte is a roving murder machine and so you can’t go up to a whole floor for that reason. A likely story!

“I hear you.” you say, not technically a lie and you pick the bracelet up.

“You really won’t come with us?” Dirkka asks.

“Nope.” you reply and pull the blanket down again.

You munch on your pastry and wait as Dirkka leaves. Your ancestor is definitely hiding something and you’re going to find out what. Doing the bracelet up by yourself is a little tricky but by holding one end in your mouth you manage to make it close right.

You roll out of your base stealthily and sneak off. You can hear Rohhze and Kanaya’s distant voices in a room down the hall but no one else, that likely means Karkat is off somewhere else. Peeking into the main room you find it empty and pleasingly when you reach for the door handle it makes a soft little beep and swings open when you pull it.

Finding a staircase that goes up isn’t hard, the hard part is avoiding people walking around. Thankfully you’re small so you’re able to linger out of sight and use your ninja skills to get out of the way before people spot you. Sneaking past office doors you catch glimpses of meetings going on, people discussing the Empress’ Chittr feed, there are people going over scripts. It’s a whole operation. Still, your ancestor is hiding something and you’re going to find out what.

You ascend another staircase, there are fewer people on this level and the little studios and those that are here are absorbed in their work. You have to youth roll past a few windows of recording booths, a move that you think you’re pretty much too old to do given that you’re nine but still you manage it.

Finding another staircase is a bit of a trip given how stupidly laid out the building is but you do it and this one has a door at the top. You try to open it but it buzzes a denial beep at you. You eye the thing up, it doesn’t look super sturdy. It just looks like an internal door that has a lock on it. It’s got a regular handle and everything. From your perspective the door opens away from you, into the hallway on the next level. Peering at the handle and the edge of the door it looks like it’s just got the
old fashioned kind of mechanical latch thingie in it, the sloped thing that goes in and out of the door when you turn the handle. If that’s there then either there’s a proper lock on it or this thing just turns the handle off if you’re not authorised.

Hmm.

You take your wallet out and pop out the loyalty card for the coffee place across the street from Sollux’s old building, you seem to recall you were about due a free drink but you can risk that reward. You jam the swipe card into the edge of the door and jiggle and force it against there until the door pops and you’re able to shove it open. As you reach for it the handle still makes the nope noise and refuses to move but the lock itself is forced open.

God, this security is shit. What was it Karkat said about you? That you’re too incompetent to be evil? What must he think of your ancestor then?

Beyond the door is a straight hallway, much like those on the floors below. Only the floors below didn’t have giant teal bloodstains on the floor. There’s a huge pool of dried blood about halfway down the hallway and big drag marks disappearing around the corner. You’re acutely aware that all you have in your strife specibus right now is a dinged up butter knife but you also know you’re not going back without more answers.

Holding the knife in your hand you walk with stealthy silence down the hallway. There are rooms off the side but they’re very obviously abandoned, the tech in them is noticeably older and a lot of it looks like it’s been taken apart. Around the corner you find a discarded upper half of a robot but you figure it’s been there a while because the teal smear of blood goes over part of its lower body a little further away. It looks like the one that you saw on your way into the building the first time that was trimming the hedges. More importantly it’s carrying a sword which you hastily nab up.

You’re just switching the blades over when you hear a pained yell and feel a sickening wave of mental static. Your ancestor is here. Your mouth goes dry as you look around for him but you can’t see him anywhere. The teal blood tracks on the floor lead to a dead end partway down the corridor. Cautiously you advance, sword still in hand. You stand where it stops and kick the floor, there’s no hidden hatch there so… you look up. Above you is a hatch in the ceiling with a cord dangling from it.

A familiar note is hanging from the cord, it asks if you want to play a game. You’ve got crates before with shit like this written on them, it’s obviously Dione’s handiwork. You jump up, grab the cord and haul down on it and leap back to a safe distance. Dirkka’s ancestor is all about traps so you need to be on your guard here.

With mechanical clicks a ladder clunks down, each step of it is stained teal. That’s definitely not good.

You lick your lips nervously, your mouth suddenly very dry and tighten your grip on your sword. You could just go back now. It seems pretty clear that your ancestor isn’t hiding some secret evil base up here but then again some dark shit is clearly going down and if you and your people have to be in the same building as this then it’d be irresponsible of you not to check it out. Right?

You edge closer to the ladder and peer up into the darkness above, you can’t see anything so you tentatively climb a step or two and then wait. Nothing happens but you’re also not going to slowly stick your head over the edge and get stabbed in the neck or something. You duck down and then with a psionically boosted jump spring into the attic space of the building with a defensive roll and crouch. You hold your sword up to defend yourself from incoming attack but none comes.
Because of the bugfuck nuts way the building is put together this attic layer of the building has a ceiling that ranges from normal height, huge steepled points to tiny crawl spaces. Mounted in one enclave of the room is a massive fuckoff canon that looks powerful enough to shoot shit straight into space. Actually, knowing what you know it looks like it’s powerful enough to shoot shit all the way to Alternia and stacked next to it are a bunch of the metallic pods that the crates used to be packaged in. A few duds never opened from them so you’ve seen them before.

There are dismantled husktops all over the place, parts scattered in piles that elude you as to their sorting. Banks of screens and machines are all over the place with camera feeds scattered wildly about, mostly likely from the robots roving around the place. There’s a huge workbench by a big wide opened window that’s covered in parts, even if a lot are knocked to the floor. Honestly the breeze from the open window is about the only decent thing here. The place is filthy and on top of all that it’s just lousy with puppets. Thousands of glassy eyes look back at you and a disquieting number of them look just like Cal.

The teal patch of blood terminates in a messy looking puddle and though whatever body was there has since been removed there are… bits that were missed. Chunky little bits of what you’re going to say is just bloodstained clothing that’s been ripped up because you don’t want to think hard about it being anything else. Anything more… organic. There’s handprints on the floor in teal and you have the uncomfortable feeling that they don’t belong to the poor teal troll who owned that blood.

You’re not left with a lot of people those handprints could belong to and you’re pretty sure you’re not alone in here. You progress silently as you can, your stolen sword held tight. You keep your eyes open for traps, even taking off your shades so you don’t miss any details. The only signs that a real living person lives here are tucked in one corner, a coon, a wardrobifier and a blocked off space that you’re going to guess is an ablationblock. The rest of the space is so dedicated to just puppets, tech and murder that you wouldn’t buy that someone lives here. It’s… unsettling. The constant nails on chalkboard vibe of your ancestor’s powers aren’t helping set your mind at ease as you stalk through the space. The higher bits of the roof have beams and rafters to support them around the empty space below and you’re constantly glancing up at them, wary of attack from above. It’s here that you see him.

Not Dionte, as it happens. But your ancestor.

He’s dangling upside down a good distance from the floor. There’s what looks like a harpoon spike driven through the lower half of one leg an out through the upper. He’s trying to claw at the rope but it’s out of reach, quite cleverly. On the floor below him is his palmhusk and a good deal of his other shit too. Warily you glance around but you can’t see anyone else watching this.

“Dayvhe! Finally someone came!” your ancestor gasps in relief.

“What happened to you?” you ask flatly.

“I’m having a tea party. What the FUCK do you think is happening to me? I set off one of Dionte’s stupid traps because I was trying to find him.” Dahvid hisses, clutching at his leg.

“You don’t know where he is?” you ask.

“He’s an elusive motherfucker. He’s probably in the crawlspace again and AS FAR AS I CARE HE CAN STAY THERE!” Dahvid shouts that last part and likely not for your benefit. You lower your sword a little and look at him properly. Mutated or not he’s a highblood and they’re not exactly easy to kill. No doubt this doesn’t feel good but it’s hardly going to kill him.

“Do you really think you’re doing the right thing here?” you ask.
“What?” Dahvid gasps as he tries to reach the rope again and fails.

“All of this.” you clarify and Dahvid stares at you wide eyed. His red eye is the colour yours will be when you’re an adult. If you’re ever an adult.

“Are you interrogating me right now?” he asks in disbelief.

“Well, you’ve not got anyone around to take me away and you’re not going anywhere. Also, I hate you. So, yeah.” you shrug.

“What did I even-” he starts but then you guess he remembers the whole Sollux thing because he stops.

“I’m doing what I can, that’s better than nothing. Sign always- I’m just trying to fix shit.” he grits out.

“With mind control, and you nearly killed one of your own people if Carrie hadn’t stopped you. Don’t really match up there, man.” you point out.

“Nobody’s perfect.” Dahvid says sullenly as he sways from the rafter.

Nobody’s perfect? That’s the stupidest excuse you’ve ever heard! That’s the worst excuse you’ve ever heard and you’ve heard Karkat defend staying up for ages to see if ripped swank McDude would finally get the guy of his dreams (spoilers he does, they always do). You’ve also heard Sollux defend himself forgetting to eat and/or sleep because he forgets that time is a thing that progresses and you need to keep doing those things.

But oh yeah, sure ‘I fuck with people’s heads and murder people but golly gee, no one’s perfect!’

You reach up with your sword and, with the flat of your blade, smack him in the leg right by the metal sticking out with it. Your ancestor howls and scrabbles angrily to claw you.

“Try harder. Roxxie wants to kill the Empress and fix things, if you want to help then help her do that.” you tell him.

“If I did that and she failed Condy could trace that back to me and then she’d kill Dionte and who knows what she’d do to Psii!” Dahvid snarls.

“So you’re just gonna do nothing and jerk your ego off saying you did something good by making some cool art. Yeah, I’m sure that’s what the revolution was all about!” you argue.

“You should know what it’s like to lose someone! I’m not letting anyone else I give a crap about die!” Dahvid shouts back.

You don’t know what it’s like to lose someone. Because Sollux isn’t dead. He can’t be. Nope.

You jump up and slice clean through the rope, dropping him to the floor in a cursing heap. You land next to him and watch him yank the long metal barb free with a spurt of purple. Your first aid kit wasn’t taken so you sit down with it and open it up. You started stocking up on it more after Sollux had to burn your skin back together, just bandages isn’t enough.

“You need stitches.” you tell him. Dirkka taught you how to do them of course, you just never really did them to yourself, you’d always go to him for them and sometimes you helped him with his own.

“You don’t need to-” he says.
“Shut up.” you mumble and pull the antiseptic out. You’d be lying if you said you didn’t enjoy the way he winces in pain when you use it on him.

“I shouldn’t have thrown your moirail in your face like that.” he says regretfully.

“Just… shut up. Where is Dionte anyway?” you ask, changing the topic as you thread the needle.

“Fuck knows. Ever since Cal he’s been fucked up, they had this mental link. He always said that. He went weird a while back and that’s when I started looking into Cal only to find that my old hive was a goddamn crater and worked out why.” Dahvid says with a shrug.

“And then you lost your shit.” you conclude.

“If it was your bro wouldn’t you?” he challenges.

“If someone hurt Dirkka would I send a bunch of people to murder a village of kids and then trollnap a bunch of different people and drop an innocent guy back to the planet from orbit? No.” you say and jab the needle into his skin. Dahvid yelps and averts his eyes.

You’re not actually trying to torture him so you make quick work of stitching him up. It’s not exactly fun for you either so speed is pretty key.

“I am sorry about him. But, like I said, there are worse fates.” Dahvid says quietly.

Yeah, great, just pull that back to how his Captor has it worse. He’s just gotta win that competition.

“He’s not dead.” you tell him flatly.

“He-” Dahvid pauses and you see him look at the needle in your hand, his injured leg and come to a smart conclusion.

“They are pretty tough.” he says instead. Good answer.

“What’s the deal with the helmsmen here? You had actors helming, people I’ve seen in shit and people who are lined up for other movies. They changed places.” you ask and keep working.

“Give me that bandage. When I first got here, or once I’d built the place up a bit I wanted to pour research into helm tech. I hoped that if I fixed it, made it more efficient and not so fuck-awful I could trade the tech with fish bitch. Way easier to recruit goldbloods if they know they’re not going into a life of endless agony, right? Figured that if I got it right I could trade the tech for Psii.” he says and winds a bandage around the upper part of his leg that you’ve finished stitching.

Psii isn’t here, so you can guess how well that went.

“She said it was their place, that they deserved it. She thinks it’s funny. She even showed it to Psii just to fuck with him.” Dahvid hisses.

“So… psionics working for you can just do whatever? They don’t have to work in the empire because they work for you?” you ask.

“We’re still in the empire, I’m not actually the Emperor of anything, not even on my own little rock. But, yeah, more or less. They line up for the tech because it makes them unusable to her and they’re able to interface with everything else and if they wanna fly things about they can. Needless to say there’s a lot of people who owe me favours because it’s my tech in their quadrantmate instead of hers. I’m not allowed to advertise it because last time I tried she proved how her promise not to kill
me meant it’s really hard for me to die, not that she wouldn’t try. Still, word of mouth, you know?” he says as you tie off the thread and cut it.

“Could you remove ports from someone if they’re not in a helm and it’s her style of ports?” you ask.

“Upgrade, yes. Remove, no. Thanks for the assist though.” Dahvid says, sitting up and rubbing his leg.

Maybe when you get Sollux back you can do something with those ports in his head. If you can’t take them out maybe you could make them something slightly more positive for him.

Dahvid watches you uneasily and reaches for his palmhusk.

“I could check his trolltag out if you wanted to see, if you wanted to be sure if he’s still alive or… not.” Dahvid offers quietly.

You could. But… this is a real Schrodinger's Meowbeast situation. If you don’t check then you don’t know, he’s alive and not alive at the same time. Half dead and half alive even, a level of duality you’re sure he’d find darkly amusing. Really though checking wouldn’t even tell you that, not unless he’s online. Seeing that he’s offline could make you think he’s dead when really he’s just sleeping or healing up from whatever injuries he got trying to catch you. It’s just, you know you can’t cope with seeing him offline.

You should check, but you just can’t.

“I should talk to Karkat about it.” you mumble. By which you mean, you should procrastinate this uncomfortable situation until you talk to Karkat and he hits you in the head and calls you an idiot for not taking the chance right away. Because what if he’s online and you miss him? But also what if he’s online but it’s not him and it’s really, like, goddamn Aradia or something and she’s all ‘he’s super totally dead and it’s 100% your fault Dayvhe!’ or however Aradia talks.

You can’t do it. You’re wildly aware this is the wrong choice and you can almost feel the future regret burning back to this moment but in the spirit of Karkat you’re fully accepting that past you (or currently present you) is an idiot but it’s inescapable.

“If you’re sure…” he says slowly and puts his things away. He uneasily gets to his feet and with a limp starts walking back the way you came from.

“How come you didn’t get caught in any of these?” Dahvid asks as you walk around a subtle button on the floor that would no doubt hurl pointy shit at you.

“Your ‘bro’ used to send trapped crates to us all the time. We’ve got shitloads of scars from them, spotting things that can blow up or fling you at things real hard is a skill we developed.” you tell him. "Oh, yeah. I guess he did that. He always took an interest in Cal’s new grubs, I stopped asking him what he was doing ages ago. Never got a straight answer anyway, so whatever.” he shrugs.

Great, good to know how little attention he was paying. It seems though that Dahvid interprets your silence as anger or at least he shares your near compulsive need to fill up any silence with talk.

“I’m not really on board with heiresses.” he tells you even though you hadn’t been talking about that just then. “Replacing one Empress with another seems like a bad idea but if she can set out a reasonable plan and Dionte’s descendant can promise to rein her in then I might consider it. Maybe.”

“If you actually want a revolution you have to do something actually real, you can’t just keep
building groundwork or whatever you think this is and act like you’re helping.” you point out and hop down the hatch to the floor below.

“I used to think shit like that when I was younger too. Then all of my friends were horribly murdered in a failed revolution so, you know, there’s that.” Dahvid says flatly and swings down, landing on his good leg.

You’re pretty sure that you’re not going to see eye to eye here. Not least of all because this isn’t a situation that you’re free to choose to be in or not.

“So don’t fail this time.” you shrug and walk off.

“I’m keeping this, by the way.” you add, holding up the sword.

“Try not to stab anyone with it!” he calls after you. But, well, it’s a sword. That’s the point.

===> Author: Run path C2;

“In your head, in your head
Zombie, zombie, zombie-ie-ie
What’s in your head, in your head?
Zombie, zombie, zombie-ie-ie-ie, oh”
Zombie - The Cranberries
‘Anti-war anthem that got the band culled’

“It’s a little underwhelming, that’s all I’m saying.” Jayekh says with a shrug as you watch him through the cameras.

“Well what were you expecting?” Jayded asks, folding her arms.

“I don’t know.” Jayekh sighs.

“It’s not like it is in the movies, to be fair.” John adds.

You track the distant progress of the ship sliding towards Planet Hollywood, carrying the modified virus you and Hal put together. If they’ve detected the infection you can’t see that they’ve done anything about it so it’s just a waiting game.

“Oh, yes, sure. Sollux and Hal should be like-” Jayded pauses to reach out to a keyboard and mash intently and nonsensically on the keys.

lakfngoiauwurto’iqwhrgv,ndfb,k,jzd’:l - the input for the console informs you.

“I’m in.” she says in her best movie hacker voice and the others all laugh.

“I think I have seen Dirkka do that once, but only for a joke. I doubt it really works that way unfortunately, it would be fun though!” Jayne giggles from her seat.

“Yeah, in a movie it’d be like that and Hal would be going along as well but he’s skulking about in the weapons pile and Sollux is passed out in the helm like a ragdoll. It’s not exactly dramatic, is it?” Jayekh sighs.
You tune out of their conversation, pushing the feed from that camera to the back of your awareness. Instead you focus all of your attention on the ship sailing to the planetoid.

"Is this just what we’re going to do? Track the signal for the ship there? You can’t even see it with this planet in the way.” Aradia says sitting next to you in empty space as you both float above the gas giant below you. You can see the projected path of the ship glowing through the planet as your- as the ship’s sensors feed you the information.

“The virus needs to-

“I know why you’re interested in it but you also know roughly when it’s getting there. You’re not going to do anything else, talk to anyone? Not even play games?” Aradia challenges you.

You don’t take your eyes off of the ship’s planned path.

“I don’t want to.” you finally say.

“I did pity you, you know. I still do but that’s… I don’t know.” she says, touching your arm.

“I don’t want to talk about that.” you tell her. You really don’t, it’s an old wound and you’re not keen on opening it up for no good reason.

“Well, if you really wanted to avoid talking to me about this you could unplug yourself and go talk to your friends and I’d let you know when the ship’s nearly there.” Aradia offers, swinging her legs idly from where she’s sat on nothing.

Yeah, you don’t want to do that either. Pretending you’re ok is taking a lot of effort and you can’t be bothered and you’re too tired of this shit to have the energy to smack Vriska in the face for her endless library of personal failings. If you go into that half assed she’ll own you and you’re certainly not interested in losing to her of all people.

“I didn’t think so!” she laughs. You always liked her laugh, you don’t really feel anything about it now.

“My point is, I used to pity you and I still care about you now that caring properly is a thing I think I can do now. I don’t blame you for not liking me much anymore after everything but I need you to know that I do care about you.” Aradia says gently.

Shit, is there a way to mute her? Surely she’s in the ship’s subroutines or something somewhere. You go looking.

“The thing is you don’t seem right, not like yourself. I know you used to get like this sometimes but I’ve never seen you quite like this, it’s like something’s gone wrong up here.” she says and taps you in the head. You recoil away from her.

“Don’t.” you tell her.

“Don’t what?” she asks.

“Don’t anything. I just need to get there, get Dionte, hide him, rescue the others and destroy everything. That’s all.” you insist.

“And get away afterwards.” Aradia adds.

Ok, yeah, well that too. You just need to do those things and only those things and then everything
will be okay.

You’ve just got to hold it together. The finish line might be a way off but you have the steps to it plotted out, you’re not doing it alone. Just keep going a little longer. Tolerate biowires in you just a little longer, be a battery just a little longer.

You can’t mute Aradia but you can focus intently on your virus to be sure it’s perfect, even if there’s nothing you can do about it because it’s already gone. Still, it’s mental busywork to burn down the time until the ship docks. It’s your own internal sense of time rather than the ship’s alerts that make you check back on it again. You watch the projection of the ship you infected getting into orbit, there’s a margin for error there based on how they flew. Like Aradia said the planet blocks you from Planet Hollywood’s sight but them from yours too. The ship exchanging the last of its credentials as it gets close should hop the coating of your virus over to the main system which should put you on the manifest and then start to distribute your Chitr virus as well.

You couldn’t afford a big signal back to you when it’s done but you needed something, even if there was a risk of it tracing you back. You can see Hal watching on a screen with the others looking at him intently. You wait.

A tiny bit of data flies back to you, a simple change in variable that tells you that your virus worked. You’re on the list. The others cheer and start rushing to get their things together, checking that they have everything, Vriska begins to lecture on the plan again. As for you, you steer the ship away from the gas giant and plot a calm and considered course to the planetoid. You keep your speed middling to slow, like this is routine for you. It’s not, though, and nervous energy buzzes within you and you can physically feel the helm siphoning it off of you as extra power.

The ship passes through the generously drawn field that Hal and Aradia had demarcated and it’s a little way into it when you feel the automated message hit you.

> Entering Planet Hollywood Zone. Request identification.

Aradia answers back before you can even get to, robotically reading back your—well, the serial number of the ship.

> Hold.
> Confirmed. Proceed to destination.

And like that you’re allowed in. You didn’t even have to talk to a person at all.

The planetoid called Planet Hollywood is a decent size, if not for the fact that it is surrounded by other space debris it would be classified as an actual planet. But as it is it exists in a ring of other space rocks and you can only imagine it gets the shit pelted out of it on the regular. Your sensors focus in on the place as you draw nearer. The gravity is a little lower than Alternia but you’d bet that most of the buildings here have stuff to even that out just like this ship does. The atmosphere is thin but perfectly breathable, the composition of it similar to Alternia’s own. It also doesn’t need to be too thick as it’s far enough from its star to not fry the inhabitants during the day. There’s liquid water and even large swathes of green grassland and forest around, although their layout pings you as distinctly artificial. In fact you could even view the planet as a patchwork of biomes, probably encouraged to grow in certain ways to aid different filming environments.

Scattered about are cities but it’s obvious where the main centre of the planetoid is, all roads lead to it and seem to orbit around that central hub. Again, all very artificial. You start to dip into atmosphere and you feel the ping of internet access hit you.
Aradia mentally muscles past you and keeps her eyes out before pointing out a distant landmark.

“I think that’s the place. The majority of things seem to orbit it, so let’s take a sneaky look around it, yeah?” Aradia suggests, waving her hand and you see the plotted flightpath. It’d be bad and suspicious to dither about like you don’t know where you’re going so you smoothly ease into her suggested route.

Jayekh and Jayded’s tracking software pings at you and, yeah, you can see the signal for the ship that took Dayvhe, Karkat and the others. It’s in a hangar not far from that central building. Which, God, that building looks like a non-Euclidian nightmare. Looks like you’re in the right place after all.

“Sollux, I think that’s the place. Make circle around the area to get a good look.” Vriska shouts up at the ceiling, like you don’t have microphones right there.

“Thank you, Vriska. Wherever would I be without your genius ideas?” you say flatly over the speakers. What did she think you were going to do? Launch the ship right through the wall?

You eye the place as you drift past, not all that close of course but your sensors were made to see things light years away. A few miles is nothing, especially not through this thin atmosphere.

Where there is glass on the building it’s deliberately impervious to your cameras and very obviously thick. At least on all but one layer it is. The roof of the building has this big gun barrel coming out of it that the ship clocks as an interplanetary weapon, it could probably shoot you out of the sky but the way the building it set up around it doesn’t suggest that it’s used for that. In that top layer the glass seems different, still toughened but older perhaps and you can see through it. Well, it’s hazy but you can get something through it. You circle around and then peel off to a more isolated spot to land.

Aradia disengages you from the helm without even asking you and you have the jarring half moment of having a body without expecting it. You grab a shirt from your sylladex when you get over the full body ‘blugh’ sensation of being a terrible meat vessel and not a spaceship you put it on, put the shirt on your terrible meat body that is. This is probably a sign that you’ve been flying too much.

You probably ought to be concerned by that, you can’t really spare the headspace for that right now though so you just put it on the backburner of things you’re not thinking about deliberately. It will absolutely stay there and nothing bad will happen because you’re putting that off at all, nope. Hey, you’re not going to think about that either.

“Hey, you have a shirt on! Proud of you, buddy!” John teases you as you walk into the deck area of the ship.

Hal is leant over a console, his fingers contacting several of the raw ports that tell you he’s bypassing the whole keyboard and screen affair and instead interacting with Aradia’s system directly.

“I have good news.” Hal tells you.

“I think we could use some of that.” Nepeta says from Equius’ side. He’s sweating nervously, or maybe just sweating, who knows?

“Dirkka and Dayvhe constantly got packages from Dionte. That big fuckoff gun up there is the only thing that I’ve seen that’s capable of doing that. Added to that the way the whole building is the universe’s ugliest mansion and people and technological traffic are going in and out of there all of the time it’s safe to say that’s Strydr central.” Hal explains.

The screens show a cleaned up shot of what you’d seen earlier, only now you can see the outlines of a big room beyond the glass there. It’s obviously not just used to shoot things from, someone works
up there. It’s not a huge leap to guess Dionte himself. Even if it’s not him that’s as good of a way into the building as any.

“So what’s the plan now?” Jayded asks.

“Well, like Vriska said before we get in and we keep hunting until we find the man and then take him back. Unless you meant how we’re actually getting into the building itself?” Nepeta says.

“I meant that bit, if we’re going in through the roof or what. It looks pretty tough to me.” Jayded notes.

“I could punch a hole through pretty much anything with my psionics. I can fly us up there and see if I can spot a quieter way when we’re closer.” you shrug.

“And given that if we’re caught doing this we have to be prepared to rush the plan and go the whole way we need everything.” Vriska nods. That’d be a bad way to go but it’s a reasonable amount of foreplanning so if it all goes sideways you don’t all panic and not know what to do.

“Which seems as good a moment as any to remind you that I’m not coming with you.” Hal says, turning around.


“You have a big ship parked in the middle of nowhere where no ship should be. None of you can be seen because you’re all obviously underage so no matter how well you try to lie you can’t talk to anyone without being clocked. I, on the other hand, can easily pass for an adult in costume. If someone comes by and wants to know why there’s a ship here I can lie.” Hal says smoothly.

“And just what lie are you going to tell?” Vriska asks irritably.

“Whatever I think they’ll buy. Trolls are stupid and they usually buy whatever means less work for them. All I need to do is say it’s a prop that’s been left far enough out of shot and I’m some extra that’s not needed yet and people will go on by. Besides, I can still fly this thing with the charge we have left from Sollux and if you need rescuing or a last minute evacuation I think you want me doing that, don’t you?” he points out.

You don’t care. You wildly don’t care about this. You’re within a few miles of Dayvhe and Karkat, you’re not going to stand around all day debating shit when you could be moving the plan onwards. You turn away from the debate that’s going on and head to the airlock. People can go or people can stay, it’s whatever.

“Sollux, don’t underestimate Dionte. You never got to see the mechanisms he put in those crates, did you? The man isn’t stupid and he’s very deadly. He might not have your psionics but they won’t protect you from an explosion of acid or a trap that rips a limb off.” Hal shouts after you in warning.

“Don’t care.” you say and the airlock wooshes open with a pop of displaced pressure.

Jumping out into not blistering daylight you look around with your way inferior troll eyes. You can still see the vague shape of the building over the peak of the hill you’re parked behind. That’s where they are and you’re coming for them.

You hear someone land behind you and a cold metal hand closes around your arm.

“We need him alive, remember. Slow and painful, alright? So don’t blow this early no matter how pissed you are.” Vriska says seriously.
She has a point. You loathe Dionte for contributing to Dayvhe’s shitty life, although ironically you probably only had the chance to get close to him because of one of those crates so who knows. Still, his usefulness is because he’s at least comparable to Dahvid as Dayvhe and Karkat are to you. This is about getting even and making Dahvid pay, so yeah, cold and calm.

You don’t hear Nepeta land but when you turn at the sound of Equius landing she’s right behind you. Everyone except for Hal and, obviously, Aradia gets out of the ship and then it’s up to you to fly them the rest of the way. It’s not exactly hard, you’ve brought them this far so what’s another mile or two?

You float everyone up into the air and figure that height is best, going up and over the building takes you out of the line of sight of a lot of people and your flying experience has taught you that very few people look up as they’re walking around. This, of course, is the point that you find out Equius isn’t a fan of heights. Thankfully you have Nepeta to calm him down and everyone else seems fine with it.

You’re a good height above the building and nothing’s shot you down and though it’s just a little shape below you there doesn’t appear to be swarms of people rushing out to greet you. Near as you can tell you’re unseen.

“I was thinking,” Jayekh says quietly, “that the big cannon thing looks like a later addition. Maybe we should land there, the building might be weaker around it.”

Makes sense.

“This is gonna be fast, no screaming.” you warn them and drop all of you.

Not at terminal velocity of course, just fast. The quicker you go the less time people have to see you within their sight line. You know how to slow you all down before you land so that you don’t do any damage to anyone. Jayyne all but crams her hands in her mouth to avoid screaming as you fall and with your warning Nepeta has Equius under control. Well, she has him near boneless he’s so soothed.

The roof comes up to meet you with a bump and you crouch, skin tingling with adrenaline as you wait for any sign you were detected.

“I don’t see any cameras.” Vriska whispers in your ear.

Weird. Why would a building like this not have shitloads of surveillance?

“Stay here.” you whisper back and float up off of the roof. You kick yourself forwards and cautiously dip over the edge, leaving the rest of them huddled in the shadow of the weapon protruding through the roof.

The roof of the building is uneven as all hell, jutting up and down in weird jagged shapes to match the 3D rendering nightmare of a building it tops. The bit you’re at hangs over the windows below. With caution you sink low enough to peer through the glass.

Even upside down you can make out several long tables covered in husktop parts and other scattered bits and pieces that look more like robotics work to your trained eye. There are also… toys around the place. Or plush toys you guess. That’s really weird but whatever. As you look around you can’t see anyone inside at all but it is pretty dark inside.

You reach out and touch the glass itself, it’s thick. Heavyset panels of the stuff set in a solid metal grid, clearly not meant to open or shut. No obvious way to get in or out. Your finger lingers on the
metal frame, still warm from the weak light of the setting sun that this planetoid gets. Oh… there’s an idea. Drifting back from the window a little to get a better view you catch sight of Vriska leaning her head over the edge to watch you.

‘What’re you doing?’ she mouths at you.

“Giving us a way in, there’s no one nearby.” you whisper.

“That doesn’t look like it opens.” Vriska whispers back.

“Just gotta try hard enough.” you mutter.

Holding out your hands you do something you don’t do a lot. This is a chance for a fun physics lesson. Heat isn’t really a thing; it’s just stuff vibrating really fast. More vibration, hotter; less vibration, colder. The nice thing about metal is it conducts heat really well. Look, you’re a very powerful psionic and you’re usually doing one of two things (of course you are) interacting with things you really don’t want to damage or destroying the shit outta things. If you want to break things just throwing them or blowing them up usually works so ‘shake this thing so hard it melts’ is not a skillset you use a lot. You only need this to melt a little bit though, like centre of a toaster pastry gooey.

You vibrate it harder then harder and the metal begins to glow, the hard part is not shattering the glass but you’re doing ok on that so far. Carefully you tap at the glass with your finger and it gently pivots around the middle until the window is, effectively, opened. You have to hold everything really still as the metal cools but soon enough you have an open window with no noise or broken glass raining down and telling everyone you’re here.

“That was stupidly over complicated and amazingly cool.” Vriska says in awe.

This is a trying day, you’re going to take that as a compliment and ignore the general Vriskaness of that statement. You flip right ways up again and land back on the roof. Equius seems to be on his feet and has his wits about him, even if he looks a little more chill than you’re comfortable seeing the guy. Jayekh and Jayded are already brandishing their guns and everyone else’s close range weapons are already drawn. Well, except Equius who you guess is just going to punch whatever he sees but then again you’ve seen his old robots so that’s probably fine.

“It’s furry important we stay quiet as we stalk our prey.” Nepeta says seriously as she adjusts the metal claws on her hands. She’s going in the room at the front of the pack, you decide then and there. You grab everyone up and float them down to your opened window. You float through silently first, then you drop everyone else through after you one by one until you’re all stood there. Nepeta looks around and sniffs.

“Blood, a lot of it.” she whispers and points off to the side. Now that you’re indoors you can see a dark patch on the floor in the distance. You look up at the ceiling because you’re not one of the idiots that doesn’t look up. Thanks to the big weapon being so close there’s nowhere up high for anyone to really hide so you feel a little more secure going closer to it. The room is laid out strangely and it comprises the entire giant footprint of the building so there’s no way to see all of it at the same time which isn’t reassuring you at all. As you approach the blood you see that it’s teal and though you wouldn’t say it’s wet it still looks tacky and there’s handprints in blood on the floor around it.

Nepeta points to a folded ladder and you can just see the edges of a hatch into here, it looks like someone bleeding was dragged up here and judging by the amount of blood they died here. There’s no body though so you guess it was taken away relatively recently. Dionte really is dangerous.
“Should we split up?” Jayekh whispers.

“No way, stick together.” Vriska insists and then holds a finger up to her lips. You all need to be quiet.

You don’t really have a range for combat so you’re happy to stick in the middle of the group to allow the people with guns the range they need and not get in the way of the more melee based people in your party. You mean group. This isn’t a game.

Near the giant weapon there’s highly complex and powerful machines, they’re in sleep mode but you walking near them is enough to wake them up. They’re tracking target paths to Alternia from here, counting down to the next optimal window to send another crate. Nearby is an abandoned crate with shuriken just like the ones you pulled from Jayekh’s leg all that time ago. Dionte isn’t stupid and you can’t help but wonder why you haven’t seen him yet, this is starting to feel suspiciously like an ambush.

There’s a lurch of movement off to the side and Jayekh and Jayded jump and shoot at it right away. You snatch hastily at the figure but it’s some half broken robot that bears more resemblance to the basic form of Brobot than it does Hal. It’s not resisting your hold at all and when you let it go it crumples over like a broken toy.

“There goes the element of surprise.” Vriska mumbles.

At Vriska’s side Nepeta suddenly stops walking and holds her hand up she’s glancing around wildly which you really don’t like. If a hunter like Nepeta has her instincts tingling it’s got to be bad, but there’s no one around.

But then… no one ever looks up, do they?

You tilt your head back and there’s a high beam across the ceiling more or less directly above you and there’s someone up there. You don’t wait, you don’t ask, you launch all of you backwards a few inches above the floor and just in time to miss the figure dropping from the beam above. He lands in a crouch and straightens up in a smooth ripple of muscle that sets every prey drive in your head whimpering.

You can argue that as an adult his face is very close to Dirkka’s but you could never mistake them. His bare bronze eyes are unfocused and his expression completely blank. Not Dirkka’s pokerface but straight up the lights are on but nobody’s home kind of blank. His lip curls back in a snarl, far enough to show teal staining his teeth and glancing back up at the crossbeam he jumped from you think you can see an arm up there.

He just… stares at you all for a second and then starts walking towards you. Vriska’s hand flies to her temple and Jayded and Jayekh ready their weapons, remembering this time at least that you’re trying not to kill him. He’s not stopping and you don’t have time to wait for her. You’re just about to psionically grab for him when his movement blurs and suddenly with a frantic snarl he’s on Nepeta.

She hisses at him and rolls backwards, nearly throwing him off but not quite. Equius shoulders you aside and grabs Dionte by the shoulder and flings him from Nepeta and across the room.

“Fuck this, we need him alive, not whole.” Jayded hisses and hefts her gun. She fires as Dionte is getting up and hits him just above his knee, toppling him to the floor.

“Vriska, what are you—” you cut off as you grab Vriska by the shoulder and try to find out why the hell she’s not controlling him. Only her expression is frozen in blank terror and she’s not even
looking at anything. Whatever is in Dionte’s head is fucking with hers right back. You’ve gotta do something.

You clench your fist and with nothing else you can do you punch her square in the face and you think you hurt your hand as bad as you hurt her face. Vriska falls to the ground with a curse and gags, ok, good you broke whatever that connection was.

“I think we have a problem with bringing this guy back alive.” John says hurriedly and you turn to see Dionte trying to rush you again. John pulls back his giant hammer and smacks him away with a hit that should break ribs. He’s been shot in the leg and he’s standing up again like he can’t even feel it.

He’s not alive.

Dionte’s a zombie or- or close enough at least. No wonder trying to puppet him fucked Vriska up, if he’s not properly alive it’s not gonna work like it should. Shit, shit, shit this is so bad. You look around and your eyes fall on the robot that’s broken. You haul it over and rip its insides out, there’s enough wiring in here to make a good enough rope. You fling it at Dionte and snare him up in it. In fact you grab all the metal from the bot that you can and lash that around him too.

“Do you think someone heard that?” Jayyne pants, clinging tight to her fork.

“I get the feeling that if he managed to kill and eat someone up here that people are quite used to ignoring sounds from up here.” Jayekh says, gesturing to the arm you spotted earlier up in the rafters.

Equius is checking on Nepeta and John is making sure that Vriska is fine after trying to take over Dionte and injuring your hand with her face. So, cautious and alone you walk to the fallen and trapped figure of Dionte Strydr. He hisses at you as you come closer, squirming as he tries to get free. Uneasily you grab a nearby spool of wire and pisonically bind him in that, you’re not exactly willing to physically touch him right now.

He’s biting the air as he tries to get at you and as far as you can tell he’s showing no sign that he even feels the pain he should be in. Is this a temporary thing like what happened with Dayvhe before, or is this permanent? He talked to Buster Keaton before so you know he’s not always been like this. Did Cal somehow-

Cal.

This all started when you killed Cal. You’d worked that out already but the question had been how did Dahvid know that Cal was dead? What if this is how? Cal is the hand up the back of the Stryders when he controls them, the puppetmaster in this whole thing.

Dayvhe came to you before and pinged you like a zombie because he wasn’t in there, not really. He was just following basic programming, get somewhere you feel safe by doing something you’ve done a million times. Associations plus habit and autopilot. Dionte was way more involved with Cal than any of the rest of them were and you know he was, Dayvhe told you that Cal still had something to do with him then that’s what you have here. You’ve got a puppet without its strings and a highblood who’s suddenly very mad that the real boy he thought he knew turned back into an empty doll without Cal around. No wonder he wants revenge.

Well too bad for him, this is why it’s called a revenge cycle, it goes around. At least if Dionte isn’t really in there you don’t have to try to not feel bad about sending bits of him back to Dahvid if he doesn’t do what you tell him. You float Dionte off of the ground and turn around to the others.
“Let’s go.” you tell them.

Retracing your steps back to the window that you ‘opened’ you float your whole group out onto the roof first before taking yourself and Dionte out. It was a good decision because he flails about just as you’re going through and kicks damn near everything on the table into the floor. You zip outside into the open air and make sure to keep him away from everyone else.

The others are debating on if Dionte really is a zombie or not and if that’d make him infectious and if so will Nepeta be ok? It’s not like he bit her but he did claw her and draw blood. You stop paying attention after Equius makes it very clear that if anyone suggests preemptively culling Nepeta they will be shortly making that recommendation through the other side of their thinkpans because he will punch their faces inside out.

You come in to land near the ship and find Hal sat outside on a lawn chair that you have no idea where he got but he is very much putting out the ‘bored extra in a movie’ vibe. He stands up when he sees you.

“That was quick. Also I’ve talked to five people since you left, apparently there’s an outback steakhouse somewhere around here that has terrible address problems. Is Dionte a zombie?” Hal asks as you drop him to the ground.

That’s a complicated question.

“Yes.” you say instead.

Equius picks a protesting Nepeta up and brings her inside to presumably render medical assistance.

“Well there goes any hope of getting information out of him.” Hal says at nudges him with his toe. Dionte doesn’t try to bite him, he doesn’t even react. And why would he, Hal’s not alive like that.

“I need you to grubsit him.” you say to Hal, he’s the safest choice.

“What are we supposed to do when you’re gone?” Jayyne asks.

“Find a way to make the ship look like it’s meant to be there I guess, or sleep. I don’t care.” you shrug.

You don’t wait for Hal’s permission to scoop him and Dionte up into the air as you take off again with significantly fewer people. He tries to talk to you as you fly, tries to ask questions but you don’t have the thinksponge for it. You’re just focussed. You have Dionte, you’re one step closer to your goal. No one caught you.

You just have to fly unpredictably, in a pattern they couldn’t guess even if they found the ship. You’re small enough that you can’t be tracked through the air and as long as you stay away from populated areas no one will see you. Hal is still trying to say things but right now it’s as much useless noise as Dionte’s feral sounds are. Find a hiding place. This planetoid used to be basically just a useless rock with some air before Dahvid warped it to fit his needs, there’s got to be places that it’s been pelted with space rocks that’d make good hiding places, there has to be.

Near dawn you find somewhere, an impact crater lined with trees. You draw in and land and then smash through enough rock to make a bigger side chamber.

“Sollux, Sollux you need to listen to me. There’s something really wrong with you.” Hal insists, holding Dionte back. You grab them both and shove them in the chamber you’ve cleared out.
“I thought you were just tired when you were on the ship or freaking out about the wires and hiding it but you’re not yourself, we need to change the plan. Sollux!” Hal insists.

“If you don’t hear from us in seventy two hours, contact Dahvid.” you tell him. You’re not changing the plan. The plan is all you have, you need to get the others out. You back up, looking at the overhanging rock in the lip of the meteor crater. You do to it what Vriska once made you do to Aradia’s hive. Rocks and trees tumble down from above, cutting off the entrance to the cave you made and sealing them in.

“Sollux! You crazy fucking- don’t you leave!” Hal’s muffled shout comes from within. Good, he’s fine. The angle didn’t look like it was going to go near him but you can’t handle the plan changing now because you hurt Hal.

Get a ship - done
Get ports so you can fly the ship - done
Get a crew - done
Fly to the planetoid - done
Secure access to the planetoid - done
Plant a virus to get control in case you need it - done
Trollnap Dionte for ransom - done
Hide Dionte and use Hal as failsafe - done

You’ve got this far by just looking at the step in front of you but now you just have two left.

Find the others, get revenge.

Hal’s still shouting but you leap off the ground and into the air. Your return back to the ship is more straightforward now that you know where you’re going. You land by the ship, half covered in tarp. There’s a hastily written sign next to it saying that the ship is outside to gather ‘realistic weather damage’ and to contact this trollhandle with any questions, it’s Hal’s. Clever.

You go inside to eat, you’re going to need power to melt Dahvid’s body into its base elements. You can’t actually do that on just rage alone. Hey, Nepeta isn’t a zombie, that’s good news probably.

“Sollux.” Vriska says and you pause, you hand frozen in the bag of… dry pasta.

“What.” you reply.

“Once we find Dayvhe and we’re not fighting anyone I’m leading the plan.” she tells you.

“What am I supposed to do?” you ask. You need to get back after that, there’s other things to do.

“You probably won’t be doing much. Look, just-” Vriska takes her glasses off and rubs her face.

“I regret. The thing that I did. To you.” Vriska grits out.

“Well, yeah.” you say with a shrug.

“No, shut up. Obviously it was bad but you were just this- a means to an end. I used you for what I wanted, what benefitted me.” Vriska continues, leaning against the counter.

“I don’t care.” you say easily and eat more dry pasta. Pasta has energy, right? You just grabbed the first thing you found. Vriska smacks it out of your hand and onto the floor and scowls at you, her cybernetic eye focussed intently on you.
“Yeah, you don’t care about all that much right now, huh? We’re in cahoots you’re my- we’re working together you’re not a tool for me to hit things with. You’re supposed to trust me, do you trust me?” she demands.

“I was eating-” Vriska looks like she might beat you to death with the bag of pasta, “sure, I trust you.”

“Then trust me on this, I will handle it after then. We just need to get you to your heretical colour smeared boyfriends and then you’ll be back online. Honestly, it’s not like anyone but us could handle this shit and you’ve been plugged into your ex for nights and nights which is just garbage and it’s not like I expected you to be a gibbering mess because you’re better than that but this is still not…” Vriska sighs.

You’re a little bewildered here. Is the plan changing or what?

“This is not even a conversation I should be having right now.” Vriska mutters and puts her glasses back on and straightens her hair out from where it’d flown all over the place with her wild confusing speech.

“You are going to fly us back over to that building, right?” she says, poking you in the chest with her metal finger.

“Yes.” you agree.

“And you also agree that I have more experience than you storming buildings so I should be calling the shots, yes?” she continues.

“As long as we get to Dayvhe and K-”

“YES?” Vriska presses.

She wants to be in charge? Fine, you don’t care. Your goals align, she can do whatever.

“Ok.”

Vriska sighs in relief and reaches up to hold your face in her hands so you’re looking right at her. You were already doing that but now you have to, you guess. A part of you notes that you wouldn’t normally be cool with someone having their hands this close to that part of your face but that thought gets thrown in the pile of other thoughts you’re refusing to have.

“Good. All you need to do is exactly what I tell you until I hand you over to them and then you can recover because you’re not a tool, Sollux. Well, you are a tool but not like that. Ugh, you’re a mess. Come on, let’s go murder.” Vriska groans and shoves you away and marches towards the door.

Hey, murder. You’re up for that.

You follow behind her and let the sound of her talking to the others wash over you. It’s daytime properly now and your eyes are glued on the distant building that contains Dayvhe and Karkat. Vriska smacks you in the arm.

“Fly us back in to where we were before, in the roof.” Vriska orders you.

You do that.

There was probably detail but it’s just autopilot and it’s not Dayvhe and Karkat and that’s what
you’re here for. When you land inside you keep your eyes on Vriska and Nepeta at the front, you move when they do and go where they go. The hatch with the ladder is open now and it’s easy enough to get everyone down, you don’t even have to float them down because the ladder is there.

You all stop, there’s a door in the way. Vriska puts a hand to your chest and moves you away so that Equius can get to the front. He holds onto the door handle and leans his shoulder against the door and gives it a quick but forceful pop so it comes out of the frame in one big and bent piece.

There are stairs on the other side of the door and in your group you slip down them as silently as possible. There are rooms branching off here, adults at work doing whatever. They’re people keeping the others captive, they’re involved, guilty. You want to end them so they can’t do more harm, so they can’t sneak up on you but everyone you’re with is pushing you on in the middle of the group so you have to crouch under the windows and go with everyone else. You don’t know how you’re going to find them. You don’t know how Vriska is determining that you’re going down another floor instead of searching this one properly. The stairs here are longer and wider, there are adults here.

“I can’t believe you’d remix my song, that song of all songs. You’re just- RRGH!” a man with his back to you says to a smug looking green hued troll in glasses.

You’re all just frozen when the greenblood in glasses clocks you.

“Hey, you shouldn’t be up there.” he says and it’s so far from the obvious spotting of you as intruders that you just don’t know what to do and seemingly neither does anyone else.

“Sorry, we didn’t know.” Jayyne says innocently.

“That’s… wait. You’re not them.” the green troll frowns.

The other one turns and you recognise each other at the exact same moment. It’s Troll Will Smith. His mouth opens and maybe he says something but you’re not hearing it. He was on the ship, he took your friends, he took Karkat and Dayve. He took them, he did it.

You’re an endless loop, a hanging error of one line over and over again.


The other troll is running away as fast as he can, screaming and shouting but you can catch him later. You grab Troll Will Smith and punch him through enough walls to fucking count and around you people are shouting, your psi is sparking and some things are now on fire.

“This isn’t the fucking plan!” Vriska shouts in your face.

“He’s getting help.” you say, pushing past her. You know what help means here, he’s running back to the man responsible for all of this.

You leap and fly. You can break the sound barrier no problem so catching this fucker is zero problem and you don’t actually care about damaging this building. Thing is you don’t want to catch him, you want to follow him. The rest of your group is sprinting after you and so you follow him down another level.

You’re after him and you catch another familiar face, Heiress Leiyah jumps out of your way and you
catch the tingle of her trying to grab your mind but you’re immune. People are shooting at you or at least you think they are but they stop when you hurl anything not nailed down at them. Someone in your group catches her before she can try her stuff on anyone else and puts her out of commission.

Then the greenblood skids to the floor at the feet of… of him.

He stands there like he doesn’t deserve death, looking startled to see you. Maybe he thought you were dead or that no one would stop him but tonight he’s wrong on both.

“Wait, no-” he starts but you can’t stand him alive one moment more, not even if he is begging for his life. The greenblood hurls himself into the room Dayve’s ancestor came from just in time for him to avoid being vaporised.

You grab every ounce of power you have and force it through yourself, you’re a live wire, a conduit between the primal goddamn energy of the universe and your well deserved vengeance. Everything is heat and light and unstoppable force. The walls are melting, anything that can be on fire is burnt away already, half of the floor is missing but not all of it. There’s a cone of undamaged building before you, spreading out from where the monster himself has fallen over.

How is that possible?

He yelps and curses, shuffling backwards away from you as he plunges a hand into his shirt and rips out a red and blue… thing on a chain. Some kind of machine, maybe a few inches thick and not much bigger than your palm. It’s glowing with angry red and blue and shuddering. He flings it desperately away behind him, just in time for it to explode, filling the corridor with shrapnel and scorching a laser burst through the outer wall of the building that leaves even you blinking afterimages away.

It was protecting him. You don’t know how but it took your psionics and stored them like a battery instead of letting them do what you wanted them to. Psi crackles up your arms and you snarl at him. It was protecting him, he won’t get so lucky the second time.

“Wait, you don’t want to kill me! We’re on the same side!” he shouts, scrambling backwards and up onto his feet again.

“Sollux! Sollux, no!”

You falter. That…

A body collides with yours and you can’t bring yourself to look away from Dahvid, so sure that the man you’ve chased this far to murder will evaporate the moment you look away.

“Sollux, it’s me. Stop it.” Dayvhe- shit, it’s Dayvhe.

You look down, you’re still floating and Dayvhe has his arms around your waist and is staring up at you. He’s alive, he’s alive and he looks ok.

“Dayvhe?” you croak.

“Yeah, yeah it’s ok. Just come down here ok, no killing anyone, yeah?” Dayvhe says, soft and soothing.

Wait, no. Why would he want you to do that? Dahvid trollnapped him and everyone why would he want you to do anything that isn’t murder right this very second?
“I need to kill him.” you explain, because obviously you do.

“Calm down now, Sollux.” Dahvid orders you.

You feel it. You should stop, this is bad, just take a breath just-

No. No, he just tried to control you.

You wrench a section of the wall free and hurl it at him, he manages to cut it in half before it hits him but how’s that for calm, you bastard?

“Alright, that’s… new. Kid, get your moirail under control before I gotta get creative.” he snarls and you can feel the dislike for him radiating off of Dayvhe.

Creative? Oh, oh, you can be creative. You’re going to rip him apart and rearrange him, it’ll be modern goddamn art is what it’ll be. You lift your hand and start to pick which limb you’re going to pull off of him first when it happens.

Familiar spidersilk around your mind. Vriska. You shake her off but she’s got your attention and made you pause.

“We’re surrounded, Sollux. Think you better give up, besides this is a little quick, isn’t it?” Vriska says behind you.

You turn and stare at her, her eyes are locked right on yours.

The plan, you still have the plan. You have Dionte and soon enough you’ll also have control of this whole planet’s network. You have the power to hurt him now, yeah, but it’s like he said. Be creative.

You drop to the floor, drained and exhausted. Dayvhe wraps his arms tight around you and squeezes you close.

“Come on, we oughta get out of here. Let’s go.” he mutters and pulls you away, back the way you came.

Adults are staring at all of you and you’re shaking with unspent adrenaline and anger. Dayvhe pulls you along with the others trailing behind you.

“You could have been killed, what were you thinking?” Dayvhe whispers sharply at you.

“I’m fine, he’s the one who should have been killed.” you insist.

“You’ve been shot!” Dayvhe snaps at you.

Have you? Oh, yeah you have. Grazed, really. More like a cut on your arm, it’s fine. After all this it doesn’t even register.

“What are you even doing here?” Dayvhe demands, turning around at the top of the staircase to look at you.

“We’re here to rescue you.” Isn’t it obvious?

“This was your stupid idea, wasn’t it?” Dayvhe snaps, glaring at Vriska.

“I think you mean ‘thank you for the rescue’, try that again.” Vriska sneers at him.
“I didn’t need rescuing and everything’s going to be way more complicated now. I’m glad you’re all okay but this would have been easier if you’d just not!” Dayvhe shouts at her.

He… what?

He didn’t want you to come here? You were just supposed to, what, stay on Alternia after he’d been trollnapped like that? But this is a rescue, you’re- it’s a rescue plan. Everyone is just staring at Dayvhe and then Vriska looks at you in shock.

“Ouch,” she grimaces and she’s not mocking you. More like she’s voicing what you can’t, because after everything you’ve done it’s just thanks but no thanks?

“No, look, Sollux just come on. I didn’t mean it like that, I missed you.” Dayvhe says in the mildest thank you that isn’t even a thank you.

What just happened?
Hold Me Tight, Or Don’t - Fall Out Boy

An-n-n-n-n-n-n-other day goes by
So hold me tight
Hold me tight, or don’t
I’m pretty sure that this isn’t how our story ends
So hold me tight
Hold me tight
Hold me tight, or don’t
Hold Me Tight, Or Don’t - Fall Out Boy

Rinsing your ancestor’s blood off of your hands is a surreal kind of experience. You’ve never liked admitting this because it makes you a pretty poor excuse for a troll but you’ve never liked blood. Sure, you’ve killed people but it’s something about blood that you’ve not a fan of. You’re naturally a little phobic about your own but so is Karkat, it comes with the whole mutant blood territory.

You towel off your hands, you guess Karkat is somewhere else because you’ve not seen him. Actually, that’s a stupid thing to think. He is, by definition, not here if he isn’t here. You probably shouldn’t be leaning on him this much anyway, shit’s hard for him too right now and Rohhze has already dealt with your nonsense enough lately. Besides, hearing your ancestor go on about his ‘bro’ has made you miss yours.

Dirkka’s not even somewhere obscure in the building that you have to hunt him down in, he’s in the very unfurnished nutrition block. The place is very obviously missing anything sharp or dangerous. Instead, Dirkka is staring vacantly into the hunger trunk with the expression of a man who came in here looking for something specific and has since forgotten just what that was.

Dirkka hears you come in and even lifts his arm up a little when you go to duck under it so you can hug him around the middle.

“Hi?” Dirkka says, gently baffled as he pats your hair softly.

“I’m… really glad I got you and not Dionte.” you tell his shirt as you smush your face against it.

“Thanks, I think. Wait, did you meet him?” Dirkka asks, starting to sound mildly alarmed.

“No, didn’t even see the guy, just his lair. It was worse than Cal’s place was if you can imagine it.” you answer.

Your head moves from the great heave of a sigh that Dirkka does.

“His lair on the floor that was the one place you were specifically told not to go to and shouldn’t have unlocked anyway if you tried? That place?” Dirkka asks.

“I don’t think it really counts as locked if I can break the lock with a loyalty card.” you mumble.

“Great, I owe Roxxie ten caegars now. She was all like ‘if you tell him not to do it then that’ll be the first thing he does’ and there was me defending your maturity.” Dirkka growls and pokes you in the
top of the head. You pull back, you can’t convincingly go for contrite so you just look at him flatly.

“It’s like you don’t even know me.” you say.

“I don’t know why everyone says I’m a pessimist, I have moments of optimism. They just blow up in my face like this.” Dirkka grumbles.

“That’d be why.” you answer. Dirkka shuts the hunger trunk but you’re still latched onto him like a limpet, like you used to do when you were really little and first knew him and were so starved for affection that wasn’t unwanted from strangers or Cal’s personal brand of lusus “nurturing”.

“So you went up there and it freaked you out, huh?” Dirkka asks, resting his chin on the top of your head.

“Dahvid got caught in a trap, right through his leg. We talked, I fixed him.” you explain.

“That’s good. What’s wrong?” Dirkka asks you, pushing you back so he can look at you.

What’s wrong? What isn’t wrong? You’re stuck here when you don’t want to be and you’re starting to really fear that your moirail might be dead. You’re starting to see that you may never go back at all. It’s obvious your ancestor has the means to protect you all and he’s obviously right about the Empress being petty enough to hunt down any descendants of any rebels. If she’s spiteful enough to rub superior helming tech in the faces of Psiionic and Dahvid both then she’s spiteful enough to kill you and your friends given half the chance. Everything is wrong.

You still know why you feel this way.

“He offered me the chance to troll Sollux.” you tell him quietly.

Dirkka’s expression becomes very obviously staged concern, trying not to give away what he thinks you’re going to say.

“Oh, what happened?” he asks carefully.

“I didn’t do it.” you mumble.

“What? Why? Were you worried about tipping him off to Sollux’s location or something?” Dirkka asks with obvious surprise.

That… that’s a sensible reason to be concerned. That was not your reason.

“That’s a point, but no. I… what if he is dead?” you ask.

Dirkka has Roxxie, he knows how pale pity feels when it’s real. Of course, he’s been with Roxxie longer than you’ve even known him. As intense as your feelings for Sollux are this is still new by comparison, you don’t think Dirkka thinks less of your commitment to your moirail for that.

“Someone else would have to answer his trollian and tell you he was dead, though. If he was just offline then that’s all you know but if he is online then you’d know he was alive. You should ask him to let you do it, say you changed your mind.” Dirkka reasons.

“But what if he is dead?” you press him.

“Then…” Dirkka shakes his head, “then everything will probably suck at least a little forever. And right now I can say it’ll probably be the worst thing that’s ever happened to you. If Roxxie died or Jayekh or Jayyne… I’d be destroyed. I don’t even know what we are doing when it comes to Jayekh
and Jayyne, me and Roxxie have been talking about it.”

Yeah, they’re left on Alternia without you all as well. Your diamond is, hopefully, stranded alive and well on Alternia but so are Dirkka and Roxxie’s hearts. Not to mention the rest of your friends and, oh yeah, Terezi’s moirail Vriska ‘shittiest person in your social circle’ Serket is there too.

“I mean maybe you can contact them? You could ask instead.” you suggest.

“Right, but tell them what? There’s so many of us that have ancestors that were important to the revolution. Nepeta and Sollux could be in danger if they just age out of Alternia but were there any Nglish or Croker trolls running around in the revolution that we just don’t know about? Given the amount of coincidence it seems stupid to rule it out.” Dirkka points out.

You don’t like the idea of Sollux being alive and alone until he hits his adult molt. Actually, on that note given how much height Roxxie and Dirkka (well mostly Roxxie) gained in their molt how are Sollux’s ports going to hold up with that? He has Hal around to help but so much could go wrong.

If he is alive you could long distance your moirallegiance but given how unaware both you and Sollux are of your own problems until everything is metaphorically on fire around you that seems… bad. You’d both be saying that things were fine until they were very much not fine and then you might be beyond simple text based help. But even if you do that, if he’s alive, then what happens if he hits his adult molt and survives it then he still shows up or gets caught then has his psionics tested and you wouldn’t be shocked if he got slam dunked into one of the Empress’ personal vessels. The plant you got him is dead, and Kanaya’s here anyway and can’t help grow a new one. Jayded might be able to, maybe, but he’s just as fucked as he was when you first met him.

You can’t even think that bringing him here is a good idea, Roxxie and Dirkka obviously intend to go ahead with their takeover plan and you’re clearly going to be dragged into that, so it makes this a delicate and dangerous situation. Who knows if your ancestor would agree to pick people up for you? Who even knows if that was a good idea? Hell, the first time you met your ancestor he was lamenting about not having Sollux’s dead body to keep around in his creepy personal museum. You’re pretty sure that you’ve only scratched the surface of your ancestor’s issues with The Psiionic but you’ve seen the way he looks at Karkat, like he’s seeing Karkat’s ancestor instead. Is putting Sollux around him a good idea? You don’t even know if Sollux is immune to your ancestor, he’s supposedly resistant to you but you’re pretty outclassed by Dahvid. Exposing Sollux to more mind control is just not something you can do.

“I don’t know what we’re supposed to say to any of them. I don’t know if he’s alive and I don’t know if I can hold it together if he’s not. I need to figure out what I’m going to do if he’s… I just don’t know anything.” you manage to say.

“Yeah, it’s a little hard to just be like ‘hey I have no clue what we’re going to do, stand by I guess’. But if he is alive I’m sure he’d want to know that you and Karkat are okay. And not to be an asshole here but, Dayvhe, if he’s dead he’s dead whether you know about it or not. You’re just torturing yourself and Karkat with not knowing.” Dirkka points out.

He’s probably right, you should do something. You should ask. Just… not now. Not yet.

“If you were wondering Karkat’s with me and Roxxie, they’ve been talking more about her move for the throne. You know, since you left him behind when we were supposed to be sticking together to avoid Dionte catching us alone. Actually, since you left him behind to deliberately go seek out my ancestor, that’s more accurate.” Dirkka says judgementally. He’s looking at you like you’re critically stupid, he’s probably not wrong but ouch all the same.
“Ah. Sorry.” you apologise.

“No you’re not.” Dirkka says.

“I am a little.” you say.

“Cool, progress. Maybe I haven’t failed as a troll-lusus after all. If I could talk to the dead I’d probably call up Kanaya’s ancestor and we could bitch about how these damn kids we look after don’t listen and cause us stress.” Dirkka says with faux drama and a hand pressed to his forehead like he might faint in the style of some old-fashioned damsel.

“You’ve been an adult for less than a perigee.” you point out.

“Yeah, I didn’t expect to molt so soon. You artificially aged us with stress, Dayvhe. Think how much taller I could have been normally, think of that.” Dirkka says with a grave look at you.

“Get bent.” you retort.

“Hah, still, do you want to come hang out with us? I’ve long since forgotten what Rox sent me in here for so I need to go back anyway.” Dirkka offers.

It’s tempting but his mention of Dolorosa has the gears in your head turning.

“I’m uh… I’m good, actually. I wanna check some things out, I’ll be back later.” you say and head back out of the room with Dirkka waving you goodbye with mild concern still on his face.

You walk down the hallways of this place, attracting some attention as you go from adults passing by here and there. You walk past an office and catch strains of familiar music. Peeking inside you see that Cicirega guy anxiously looking over a music video with Troll Will Smith in it, he seems to be psyching himself up for something so you figure you’ll stay well clear of that.

It takes a while to find your way back to the entrance of the building you were first brought in through and though you’re able to look through the clear glass doors to the gardens outside you doubt your bracelet will unlock them to let you leave. Besides there’s a robot out there giving you the kind of calculating dismembering look that you’ve seen Brobot give people and you’re not going to fuck with that even if you are newly rearmed. You only came here for the navigational waypoint anyway.

The place might be a maze but even you can retrace your steps from the entrance to your ancestor’s office. In a stroke of pure luck the place is empty, you guess other people are off fussing over your ancestor’s wounds but that’s fine with you. It buys you time.

This room descends down into the bone room. Uh, wait, you’re not going to call it that. The skeleton room? Yeah.

Your ancestor took a remote out to make it do that and obviously he’d have that with him and he’s not here, but no one has a secret room that only opens via remote. You only need to lose the thing or break it once and you’re screwed so there’s got to be another way in. A few quick steps and you’re at the desk. It’s covered in other people’s tablets with scripts, legal agreements, calendars and all sorts of work stuff. As much as you’re tempted to peruse the scripts of next sweeps blockbusters you’re not here for that, plus you get the feeling that you’d only need ask for him to be willing to show you things that he’s interested in like that. You crouch down and look under the desk, there’s no buttons under there so that’s no good.

Secret button, secret button, where’d you put a secret button? Easy to reach but not obvious, easy to
get to but not easy to hit by accident. The drawers? Picking the top left drawer you pull it open. There’s random pens, styluses, a bunch of empty doritos bags shoved in here instead of in the trash, snared up tangled headphones and a broken sword hilt that’s just got a little bit of blade left on it. It’s wildly annoying that this could easily be the drawer of your desk at Roxxie’s hive. If you were shown photos of each you’d struggle to tell the difference.

Whatever, you turn your hand palm up and feel the top of the drawer from the inside and- there, button. You press it and the room slowly starts to sink down. When it finally comes to a stop on the ground you look up at the door. You’re not really up for anyone knowing that you’re down here and as clues to your location go someone opening the door and falling far down to explode their leg bones is a pretty solid one. You click the button in the drawer and the room starts to lift again. You hop off of the floor platform in time and watch as it slides back up to the floor above and clicks shut again, leaving you in near total darkness lit only by the memorial pillars.

The idea that the room you just sent away might be the only way out of here washes over you, your ancestor got out of here alone but he had the remote so maybe he can. That said your logic about there being a spare button to get down here probably applies for in this room too. What if the battery in the remote dies and Dahvid gets stuck down here? No, he’d have another way. You’re fine.

You walk towards the pillars of holographic light and stand there, taking them all in. Like it or not you and your ancestor have a lot in common. Your gaze drifts to the missing space for a Captor. You have more in common than you like.

Psiionic is a prisoner of the Empress going through hell forever and yours…

You’re alone, in the dark with only the soft light of holograms of the dead and their bones for company. No one is watching you, you don’t have to front for anyone here. Stuck staring at the empty pillar you come to understand that you need to accept at least the possibility that Sollux is dead. The only hint you have that he’s alive is that you know Megalomom was chasing Aradia’s ship and if she was there then there’s a chance that Aradia caught Sollux and he didn’t die from all the things that should have killed him. Only you never saw a shot of the ship and, not to be a dick to Megalomom, but it wasn’t the best photo of her and she’s likely not the only giant shark lusus out there.

The evidence you have for Sollux being alive is your need for that to be true, some very weak circumstantial hints and a lot of denial about how unkillable he is. On the side that he is dead is the fact that he passed out in space, who knows how long he’d have to fall for until there was enough air to breathe. How well could he have shielded himself for reentry if he was unconscious at the time? Your ancestor said it’s a reflex but that doesn’t mean it was enough to save his life. Then you’re banking on him waking up before he goes too fast so that he could slow himself down to not die when he landed and having the psionic energy left to do just that.

You’re alone, on a foreign planetoid and unobserved you have to admit to yourself that it’s possible or even very likely that Sollux is dead.

Just thinking it is like having your bloodpusher ripped out. You touch Psiionic’s empty plinth and figure that you’re never going to have a body to grieve over, you’ll have an empty space in your chest forever at the loss of him.

Even if he is alive, and you hope he is, there’s the other point that he’s likely better off this way. You’re dangerous, not just for your questionably controlled cuddlevoodoos but also because being around Roxxie and it seems Karkat as well you’re a magnet for trouble. You’d wondered this before you started dating him, if you were too dangerous to be around, but you’d been selfish because you wanted him so badly.
If he is alive you need to talk to him and Karkat both at some point, you need to work out a plan for how to ensure Sollux doesn’t become a battery but you’re not sure that bringing him here is a good idea at all. Dahvid is pretty goddamn mercenary and he’s already bartered for Psiionic’s freedom and failed. Would the Empress be tempted to exchange one Captor for another and would your ancestor be cold enough to try it? Maybe you’re being unfair and Dahvid would move the stars to keep another Captor out of the Empress’ bedazzled talons, he might do anything to stop the same horror from happening again. Or maybe he’d stab you in the back to cut a deal. You can’t rule it out.

What now? Well, the best way to secure Sollux’s future, if he’s alive enough to have one, is to destroy the empire that wants him as a battery. Dahvid is understandably hesitant but if you can prove that it’s in the best interest of the people he cares about and even point out that all these dead people he cared about gave their lives for that cause then maybe you can truly get him on Roxxie’s side. It’ll take some real smooth talking so you really need things to go flawlessly, no surprises.

Signless’ eyes are looking at you with compassion and warmth. You look around at the ancestors of your friends. They had lives, they made dumb jokes and had quadrants and relationships all of their own. More than that though they saw things weren’t right and did something about it. Even Dahvid has arguably made cultural progress in his time. You don’t want to fight the Empress, you want to spend your life making music and comics, snuggling up with your quadrantmates under a blanket and watching dumb movies, you want to hang with your friends and tag around with Dirkka forever. You just want a life.

Destiny is hoofbeastshit, even with all of the coincidences going around you still don’t think this is all fated to be, but it’s a moot point anyway. The sign on your chest and the name you carry bear a weight you didn’t ask for, same with all of your friends. Revolution is something you’d have supported anyway as a mutant but the burden of it is resting on your shoulders whether you wanted to carry it or not.

You could lose, you dip your hand into Signless’ hologram and it parts to show the gory way they restrained him to kill him and how that became Karkat’s sign. You have a lot to lose and you’ve already likely lost someone very important to you. But if Sollux is alive then you owe it to him to fix the system for him so he can be safe, not just for him but for you and Karkat and everyone who is fucked over by the Empress. If he’s dead then you should change things so that the next psionic who has power close to his doesn’t find themselves so terrified of being an adult that the opportunity to get out of it makes them sob in relief like Sollux did.

You take your hand back and look over all of the holograms. Stepping back a little so you can see them you finally sit down on the floor and just take it all in. What would they all tell you if they were alive to speak? What advice would they give you? Hell, what stories could they tell you?

For a good long while you sit in silence, until there’s a sudden explosion and screaming from above you. Leaping to your feet you look around and see part of the ceiling start to melt and fall in, thankfully far away from you. What you see through it is flashing light.

Red and blue light.

You rush back to where you came down through the ceiling and scrabble about in the near total dark, lit only by the flares of blue and red from above and the distant glow of the memorial. You find your theorised button and slam your hand on it. There’s a slow clunking and the floor starts to lower down. Backing up you watch the gap and then leap up to it the moment there’s enough room for you to land in there, then you jump straight from there to the closed door and cling to it as you haul that open. You weren’t going to wait for it to get to the bottom and then take you up.

You lunge through the door and run smack into someone else. You pull back from the muscled chest
you shoved your face into and stare up in shock at an alarmed Jayekh.

“Dayvhe!” he gasps and then whips his arm around to shoot behind him at people trying to chase after them.

Jayekh is here, along with Jayyne, John, Jayded, Nepeta, Equius and… ugh, Vriska.

An explosion and a flash of white light rocks the building and your head snaps in that direction. Your ancestor is scrabbling backwards on the floor away from the hole that’s been lasered in it and the walls but, more importantly, he’s retreating from Sollux.

He’s floating there, crackling red and blue. He’s alive, he’s really alive against all odds! But… what’s he doing here? What’s going on?

“Wait, you don’t want to kill me! We’re on the same side!” Dahvid yells, stumbling to his feet and holding his hands up.

Sollux’s whole head is almost shrouded in a red blue haze of psi and it suddenly starts getting brighter. Sollux is going to kill your ancestor. Shit, whatever just exploded must have protected him from his first attack and your thrown knife before but he’s without it now and very very mortal.

Fuck! You need Dahvid alive! Without him, his money and his influence you can’t fix things so that everyone can live. You can’t protect Sollux from the system without Dahvid!

“Sollux! Sollux, no!” you shout desperately, shoving past your friends and rushing to him. You leap into the air and wrap yourself around him, your arms tight around his waist.

You can see his face now. His glasses are gone somewhere and haloed in light or not his eyes are bruised underneath, mottled darkness spread over his nose. He looks wild, feral, shaking and savage in a way you didn’t even see when he was at his most manic. But he pauses, tense muscles at his sides stiff under your hands, he won’t look at you but he’s aware of you.

You can’t let him make this mistake. You don’t even have time to question how or why he’s here, you need to fix this situation first.

“Sollux, it’s me. Stop it.” you beg.

He finally looks down at you, his movements stiff and unnatural but you see him recognise you. His cracked lips part and you get to hear his voice, strained but speaking your name. Fuck, just now you’d been seriously thinking him dead or lost forever but now he’s here saying your name.

“Yeah, yeah it’s ok. Just come down here ok, no killing anyone, yeah?” you urge him as gently as you can. Actually him coming down would be great because you’re starting to lose your grip on him. His hands wrap around your shoulders and he snarls over you at your ancestor.

“I need to kill him.” he growls.

Well, that’s not good. You need to stop him, but how? You can’t- you don’t want to just pap him. It’d work but he’s clearly not in a good place and doing it without permission is still not allowed. There was some scope for it being an emergency which this obviously is but you’d sooner exhaust the option of talking him down first.

Only your ancestor decides he’s going to talk instead.

“Calm down now, Sollux.” Dahvid orders him, because he knows his name.
Sollux blinks, shakes himself off ever so slightly and then rage warps his features. He isn’t affected, he really is resistant! Sollux responds in the calm and measured manner of ripping a goddamn wall off and flinging it at your ancestor. Thankfully, injured or not, Dahvid is still handy enough with a sword to cut the thing in two. Not only are you worrying for the future of the rebellion and the lifespan of Dahvid but you’re starting to have more than a few concerns about the structural integrity of the building you’re in right now.

“Alright, that’s… new. Kid, get your moirail under control before I gotta get creative.” Dahvid hisses. You really don’t want him to get get creative, that’d be so bad for all of you.

You’re going to have to shooshpap Sollux whether he wants it or not, if you don’t something far worse could happen to him, including the possibility of a building collapsing on him. You’re raising your hand when Sollux freezes rigid, you figure he’s clocked you going to pap him and isn’t keen but then someone else butts in.

“We’re surrounded, Sollux. Think you better give up, besides this is a little quick, isn’t it?” Vriska says. You peer around him to see her lowering her hand from her temple. She- she just mind controlled him! That’s why he locked up! It wasn’t you, it was her!

Sollux isn’t looking at you but instead at her. His claws prick through your shirt a little and then he drops down to the floor, holding you close. On stable footing you squeeze him close, grateful he’s still alive but the backwards glance you spare for your ancestor doesn’t suggest great things for him if he sticks around here.

“Come on, we oughta get out of here. Let’s go.” you tell him quietly and pull him off the way you came. The others move out of your way and join in behind you. Unsurprisingly enough with Sollux up front with you absolutely no one seems willing to try to stop you from going anywhere.

Now that he’s here, now that his warm arm is in your hand as you pull him along you start to think of everything you were contemplating before. Sollux is suddenly here, alive which is great, but all he’s done is throw himself in Dahvid’s clutches and called it a rescue. This is the opposite of a rescue, more people are now stuck here than before!

“You could have been killed, what were you thinking?” you hiss at him. This was a stupid plan, at least when you rescued him before you had an exit strategy. Although his plan may have been the same as yours was then. That being ‘murder everyone who isn’t being rescued’ but still!

“I’m fine, he’s the one who should have been killed.” Sollux hisses, twisting around as you march him away from your ancestor. You’re a little concerned that he’s just going to start firing off lasers again so you squeeze his arm a little tighter to make sure you have a good hold on him and stop him from focusing back there. As you squeeze you feel warm wetness roll over your hand and you stare at your fingers to see a thin rivulet of gold blood dripping over them. There’s a cut in his arm, no, a bullet graze. You’ve seen them before thanks to Jayekh.

“You’ve been shot!” you yell in alarm and Sollux just looks dumbly at his arm, “What are you even doing here?”

Sollux looks up at you from the step below you on the stairs and just blinks at you vacantly. He’s clearly not all there and just seeing that makes you furious. Who allowed him to come here like this?

“We’re here to rescue you.” he says. Some rescue. Someone agreed to this and you think you know who’s to blame.

“This was your stupid idea, wasn’t it?” you accuse her and Vriska glares back at you hotly, she’s not
denying it and with her that’s all the proof you need. You’ve previously established that she’s the worst person around and if anyone would come up with a scheme that’d not care about Sollux’s wellbeing like this it’d be her.

“I think you mean ‘thank you for the rescue’, try that again.” she sneers at you and you all but see red.

“I didn’t need rescuing and everything’s going to be way more complicated now. I’m glad you’re all okay but this would have been easier if you’d just not!” you yell at her. This is so goddamn irresponsible and it’s completely fucked all of your plans up.

“Ouch.” Vriska says, looking at Sollux.

Oh… oh, no, Sollux. You didn’t mean it like that, you’re sure he knows that but all the same he’s clearly hurt.

“No, look, Sollux just come on. I didn’t mean it like that, I missed you.” you assure him.

You rub your forehead and think. You need to get them out of sight, get them to the others. You can’t just loiter here in the stairwell, it’s just begging for trouble. You motion at them to follow you again and lead the way. The door to your wing of the building is shut and when you reach for it and the lock clicks you get why. It was locked shut.

You push the door open to see all of the rest of your group already inside, worriedly questioning a highly anxious looking Robert Downey. When the actor turns to see you relief floods his face.

“Is that all of them?” he asks, pointing at the group behind you.

“Yeah, I-” you start.

“GreatIhavetogo! Entertainer could be hurt! Don’t blow anything up!” Downey blurts out and sprints from the room, slamming the door behind you. Yeah, there’s probably going to be a lot of highly strung people given that the man they worship very nearly just died.

“Sollux.” Karkat whispers in disbelief and then with a frantic sprint he launches himself at Sollux with great speed and enthusiasm, wrapping his arms around his neck and his legs around Sollux’s middle and clinging like a South Alternian Eucalyptus Bear. Only Sollux is, uh, not the strongest guy you know physically and both of them crash to the floor with an alarmed shout. That doesn’t deter Karkat though.

“Holy fuck, how did you get here? What happened? How- I thought I was never going to SEE you again! I missed you so much!” Karkat yells in Sollux’s poor face and then kisses him hard enough to bruise his face more.

“Was that explosion you?” he demands to know the very second he pulls back at all, he’s sat on Sollux’s legs holding him by the face.

“Dayvhe- I tried to kill Dahvid but…” Sollux mumbles in explanation, looking over at Vriska who is giving him a pointed look.

The others around you are all greeting the people they missed. Jayded and John are hanging off of Rohhze, Terezi and Vriska are together again and Roxxie, Dirkka, Jayyne and Jayekh are all reuniting. They’re all prisoners now too, your ancestor hasn’t told them they have to stay yet.

“You need to leave.” you tell Sollux hurriedly.
“What?” Karkat says, looking up at you.

“Dahvid hasn’t got to them yet, they can still get out of here but we can’t. They should go when they still have the chance.” you insist.

“So he’s done something to keep you here.” Jayyne concludes, her voice cold.

“We’re not allowed to leave, but really staying is a better idea than going. People are looking for us and we can do more with Roxxie’s takeover from… sorry, I keep making it make sense.” Dirkka says shaking his head.

Jayekh chirps pitifully at him and squeezes Dirkka close.

“We’re not leaving.” Vriska insists. Ugh, you could kill her.

“Forget leaving, how did you get here in the first place. Did you have some bomb-ass breakthrough on your engine Jayekh? I mean I get having motivation for it and all but still.” Roxxie says, sounding impressed.

“How did you even survive?” Karkat says softly and slides his arms around Sollux’s back to hug him close.

“Oh, well, I wish I could take credit but it wasn’t me.” Jayekh laughs nervously.

“Well then how?” Roxxie asks.

Karkat stands up in a sudden rush of motion, his eyes wide and one hand over his mouth.

“Karkat…” Sollux says, hurriedly getting to his feet.

“I don’t- how could-” Karkat bites his words off with a furious hiss. He whirls around and his eyes land on Equius.

“YOU. Did you do this to him?!” Karkat screeches, pointing furiously at Equius.

“I- I can explain. He agreed and it wasn’t my idea anyway.” Equius blurts out and you watch Nepeta carefully position herself between Equius and Karkat.

“Do what to him?” you ask but Karkat is ignoring you.

“What the FUCK is wrong with you? You’re not a docterrorist, it’s his spine, it’s really fucking important!” Karkat screeches in a rage.

Wait.

“KK, it’s my backbone, I can do what I want with it.” Sollux protests and is also ignored.

Wait. No, please no.

You clear the distance to Sollux in two long strides. You grab the back of his shirt and pull it up enough to see metal. Round ports jammed into your sweet moirail’s bones. He’s been helmed, again, and more completely than before. That’s how they flew the ship here, they used him as a battery.

“Hey, let’s all cool down here, alright? Equius didn’t make him do anything. Sollux was all for it and Hal was there too. He wanted to get here, we didn’t make him.” John interjects.
You stare at Sollux, bruised and helmed, powered by desperation. They didn’t make him? Maybe not but they should have stopped him, they’re his friends. They know Sollux needs stopping sometimes, they ALL know that about him but they let him mutilate himself to get back to you and Karkat because it benefited them? You’re horrified that your friends could be so callous but you don’t think so little of any of them to have come up with the idea.

“This was your idea, wasn’t it Vriska?” you demand as rage boils white hot underneath your skin.

“You heard him. It’s his backbone, he can do what he wants with it.” Vriska says airily. There’s that word again, backbone. Or should you say 8ack8one? Sollux was vulnerable and she’s just- just wormed her way right in there, hasn’t she? But she won’t tell you and she thinks she’s so smart for it.

“Who had the idea to helm Sollux?” you demand and get a chorus of ‘Vriska’ right back at you, except for Vriska herself who in horror at what her own mouth is doing says ‘me’.

“Alright, enough of this.” you hiss and your stolen sword drops into your hand. Vriska throws her dice in the air and hauls out something you’ve never seen from her, a shield.

“Dayvhe, drop it!” Terezi snaps at you but of the two of you only one of you has a sword. You’d sooner not stab Terezi and that’s one thing you and Vriska can agree on so it’s her that pushes Terezi back, not you.

“Nice to see what you’re really like inside.” Vriska hisses at you.

“Same, only it’ll be more literal for you in a second.” you snarl back.

Your sword flies right out of your hand, embeds itself in the ceiling with a twang only to snap. Half a blade starts to fall back to you but that then takes a rapid detour back up into the ceiling as well in a flash of red and blue. You wrench your eyes to Sollux and just stare at him.

“I wanted to come here. She asked if I was willing, Eq did too. There was no choice.” Sollux insists.

“There were other choices! You could have not come here! It’s not as if it’s safe and- and I was going to contact you eventually!” you insist.

“If we could have told you what was going on we would have but we lost our palmhusks when we got here, Dahvid has them all.” Terezi agrees even if she is still glaring at you.

“Dirkka, Roxxie, what- why are you pulling those faces?” Jayyne asks, eagle eyed. Dirkka’s pokerface is impenetrable but Roxxie lies like a cheap watch. Dirkka must have told her. Everyone else seems curious about what’s going on but you know from experience that this will go better if you say this yourself.

“My ancestor offered me the chance to troll you. I turned it down, it was just a few hours ago. I wanted to talk to the others first, work out what our plan was and… and I was starting to seriously think you were dead, I couldn’t deal with confirming that. I didn’t even get to tell anyone but Dirkka yet.” you confess.

Everyone is stone silent and Sollux is staring at you, unblinking.

“You… thought I was dead?” he says weakly.

“I- the chances of you surviving were so tiny and I was in denial this whole time but I was becoming realistic about it. I don’t even know how you did survive, I have a guess but that’s not the same.” you point out.
“And you can’t leave? Or… you won’t, weren’t going to. You weren’t coming back.” he continues.

“The others can’t and it’s dangerous, not that I was given the choice. I’m locked in the building too.” you say, holding your wrist up.

“But you weren’t going to?” he asks again.

“I-” you hesitate.

“Oh. Oh no.” Sollux mumbles, shaking his head and backing up away from you a step or two.

“It’s Dahvid’s control, it has to be. It has to. He’s made you do this.” Sollux says quickly.

“What? No, it doesn’t work on me.” you insist. Why would he think that?

“No, it has to. It- you wouldn’t do this.” he argues back.


John drops a giant magic chest on the ground, you’ve seen it in his hive before. He reaches in and pulls the bottom up and then slides out a sylladex card and launches it at Sollux who catches the machine out of reflex.

“Sollux, the plan? Don’t worry about him, like you said he’s obviously controlled. Do what you can before they notice you.” Vriska orders Sollux.

He looks between you and her, nods sharply and then darts off down one of the passages. With Sollux gone you look back to see Vriska eyeing Karkat.

“It doesn’t work on Dayvhe, does it?” she asks and Karkat shakes his head.

“Wow, you’re an asshole. Do us both a favour and let Sollux keep thinking that you are under your ancestor’s control.” Vriska sneers at you.

“Why would I worry him with that when I’m fine?” you snap at her.

“Because otherwise you just admitted to leaving him for dead and having no intentions to check if he was even alive at all. Mind control looks better, trust me.” Vriska says, her voice as cold as your insides have suddenly gotten.

“Hey, Rez, why don’t you show me around here, yeah?” Vriska asks and Terezi obligingly leads her off.

You look around, Dirkka and his group at least look somewhat sympathetic but a lot of the rest of your friends are looking at you coldly. Karkat looks like he wants to rearrange your face.

“Unbelievable.” he hisses and walks off the way Sollux went.

“K-”

“Don’t you DARE follow me!” Karkat shouts at you and disappears, leaving you by yourself.

Well, by yourself and with a lot of people judging you.

===> Author: Run path C2;
It’s like a video game, when your character gets low on health and the screen goes all blurry, all you can hear is the thud of your stumbling footsteps and the pounding of blood in your ears. Except, it’s not a video game, you’re alive.

Not that Dayvhe thought so.

No, no, that’s not fair. He’s- it’s Dahvid messing things up. You can fix this, you can make Dahvid fix this. You still have your virus and you still have Dionte, the plan is intact. You stumble into a room that’s a deep blue all over, like being in the ocean. It’s weird but you don’t care, you drop to the floor and open your machine up.

The internet is locked, of fucking course it is. You try your palmhusk instead- or at least you go to only to remember that John still has that. You could try to hack the password to the wireless here but if you’d designed this system you’d be on the lookout for that from unknown machines. Think of another way.

A shadow in the doorway makes you jump and nearly throw furniture. You don’t because it’s Karkat. He comes in and kicks the door shut behind him. Quickly crossing the distance to you he kneels down and reaches out for the lid of your husktop to flick it closed. You scramble to stop him and Karkat fixes you with a look.

“Is this vital? Will someone die if you don’t do this right now?” he asks.

Well… no. You’d not even been able to check anything and even then you were just checking. You shake your head and Karkat nods as he shuts your husktop.

“I’m not sure if it’s good or bad a lot of the time but you have more luck than anyone around.” Karkat whispers against your forehead.

“I got here, I got to all of you.” you offer hopefully and grab hold of his soft sweater.

Karkat makes an uncertain noise and then grabs your wrists to pull your hands off of him. He stands up and you can’t help but feel a little shunned, at least until he stomps over to the bookcase and starts wildly flinging things off of the shelves and onto the floor. He’s making a pile.

“What about Dayvhe?” you ask.

“I’m not talking to that fucker right now, if I do I don’t know what I’ll say. This is just us. As… long as you’re okay with that?” Karkat asks, turning nervously to look at you with a book in hand. You nod fervently, you’re ok with this. With your willingness confirmed Karkat spikes the book in his hand into the pile and jumps onto it, leaning forward only to haul you in after him.

“I have so many questions. But first, what happened to your face?” Karkat asks.

A mildly deranged laugh bubbles out of you before you realise it. That’s where he’s starting?
“Ah, shit. Alright, yes, I know. I’m the smoothest pale partner for sure, I finally get to see you again and the first thing I do is go ‘AUGH WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOUR FACE?!’ I’m so good at this.” Karkat groans.

“You know what? Actually, just start with you chased the ship. I guess Vriska tipped you off because she escaped being caught and then, what, the green nerds with their big space ship dish?” Karkat asks and slides his arm around you to encourage you to roll onto your side and rest your head on his shoulder.

“Chased the ship, failed.” you begin.

“You didn’t fail, you just can’t breathe in space. Also that was stupidly dangerous but I’m sure you already know that.” he chastises you.

“Woke up when I caught fire. Slowed down some, Aradia caught me but I was still going too fast. Hurt my leg, broke my nose, dislocated my arm. Vriska fixed the last two for me.” you explain.

“Huh.” Karkat says thoughtfully and you can practically see the cogs turning in his head but you don’t know what about. Unless… unless he knows?

“We’re in cahoots, to rescue you all.” you tell him.

“Oh. And how do you feel about that?” Karkat asks with obvious interest.

“Well, we’re here?” you answer uncertainly.

Karkat squints at you, like he thinks you’re being dishonest but you’re mostly just confused.

“We’ll come back to that later. Keep going.” Karkat tells you.

“She lost her arm and her eye and we wanted to use Aradia to get to you but I needed people to fight on the ship. We got the others to show up and Vriska told me about me needing more ports so.” you stop.

This close you can see the weave of Karkat’s sweater. Everything else is kind of fuzzy, you’ve no idea where your glasses went.

“Last time was worse. I got on the table myself. Hal asked me if I wanted to do it or hear what could happen and he and Equius made it not hurt. I could still feel it but it wasn’t pain. Vriska stayed too. It could have been worse.” you tell the small fibers of Karkat’s sweater.

Your throat is tight and raw, you can feel the warmth from Karkat’s hand as he hovers close to the back of your neck, not touching your ports but almost doing it. Does he hate them? Hate you?

“I know they’re horrible, you must hate- but I had to!” you choke out.

“No, that’s not it. I- ok can I touch them or not? I don’t want to upset you more.” Karkat says in a rush.

You’ve not had anyone touch them who wasn’t plugging or unplugging you from something or doing something medical, not the ones down your back at least. You hate the feeling of biowires and, actually, you’re not crazy about having other things in your head like a whole ship. You’ve not had the time or luxury to hate it, to be revolted at what was happening, you just had to do what needed to be done.
Here, though, you don’t need to fly the ship again. Not for a while at least. You’re not sick or injured so Equius doesn’t need to touch you. You- you hate this and you think you actually desperately need Karkat to touch your ports and not react like you’ve mutilated yourself, ruined your body and become the battery you never wanted to be.

You nod desperately and even you can catch the way you’re whining in your throat.

“Hey, no it’s ok. It’s ok.” Karkat whispers soothingly and quietly verbally shooshes you. His left hand curls around your neck properly and you have that uncanny sensation of his fingers existing on you and then not in the patches where you have no nerves.

You can hear yourself apologising in a rush, practically gagging out self recrimination, self loathing and making it very clear that you think Karkat should think the same of you. You don’t regret what you did to get here but it wasn’t without cost, he should look at what you did to yourself and be horrified.

He just isn’t. He’s smacking down everything with denial of your words, telling you not to decide what he thinks and he’s…

One of his hands is up the back of your shirt, you can feel it off and on as his fingers smooth over your skin and then exist only as pressure rather than pure sensation only to reappear on fresh skin above that port. It’s uncanny to feel.

“I couldn’t have done it, especially not awake like that. I would have panicked and bolted or not even gone through with it at the start, it’s nightmare fuel.” Karkat shudders.

“I had to, I couldn’t leave you.” you insist and Karkat chirps sweetly at you and shoves his face in your hair.

“You’re such a disaster.” he says gently and his hand changes direction and now his fingers are sort of loop-de-looping around each port as he goes past them.

“I thought you were going to do something stupid and risky so we wanted to try to get hold of you before you did anything although- ugh, no I’m not talking about Dayvhe. We thought you might try to hack The Grand Entertainer back or something from Alternia.” Karkat muses.

“That’s… not how that works. Why does no one understand how hacking works?” you whine.

“Can’t you just-” Karkat starts.

Nope! No you’re not listening to anyone else tell you how hacking works! Karkat yelps when you bite him.

“You asshole!” he snaps at you.

“Stupid bastard.” you growl back.

“Me? Stupid?” Karkat scoffs.

“At least you’re not deaf too.” you retort.

“It’s rich you calling me stupid when you make a living out of being the most empty headed, reckless, self-endangering asshole in the universe. Other species look at you in awe as the monument to the heights of idiocy trolls can achieve, tourists come and take photos. If I strangled you the average IQ would go up!” Karkat shouts at you hysterically.
“Well-” you’re working up to your own insult but Karkat clearly isn’t done, he shoves you over onto your back. One of his hands is still over some of your back ports and with the other he’s controlling your head by wrenching one of your longer horns about.

“No, shut up! This was stupid and dangerous and I’m the worst because I couldn’t be happier to see you, I missed your dumb ass so much. I didn’t know if you were okay or if I’d ever see you again and I couldn’t-” Karkat chokes, his eyes all red and watery. He presses his forehead to yours, you startle and jump a little when a hot tear falls onto your cheek.

It’s like someone’s turned a switch on in you. It’s mechanical at first, some reflex you don’t understand. He’s crying and now you are. You don’t know what you’re crying about, the two of you clinging together like you’re huddling for safety from some natural disaster.

Technically things are good. You have Karkat back, Dayvhe is somewhere else but you’ve seen him, he’s safe. They’re infected with mind control but you knew that was a risk. Everyone is otherwise alive and unhurt. You’ve disabled the device that was apparently protecting Dahvid and unless he has more of them he’s a lot more vulnerable now. Hal still has Dionte and your virus should be progressing well. The plan is going perfectly.

This is good. The plan is fine.

But it isn’t fine. That wailing, dark, writhing thing that’s been in your head this whole time is breaking out. Dayvhe left you to train with Rohhze, he never contacted you, Karkat had to go, they were attacked when you weren’t there, you weren’t good enough to save them. Then Aradia helmed you without you being awake enough to escape and that’s apparently fine and you’re not supposed to feel like you want to throw up when you think of it. You had to let them put more ports into you, you understood it and everyone tried to make it the best they could but it was awful and you’re not okay with it at all. Then endless bio wires and Aradia just poking and poking at you and then Dayvhe-

You’re not okay.

You’re still crying even when Karkat manages to compose himself and he switches seamlessly to gently petting you, not flinching from your ports when he does happen to touch them. He’s telling you softly how you did good, how it’s all going to be ok, how he’s got you.

Eventually you just can’t sustain that output and you feverishly drift off in Karkat’s arms.

You’re not really asleep, just hazily not really awake either. Your head is on Karkat’s chest and his voice dipping into a low rumble right under your ear drags your attention back to him.

“had an agreement, you remember? There were terms, you agreed. You need to fix this.” Karkat threatens.

“I know, I know. You know that isn’t how it was, she’s just twisting things.” Dayvhe protests.

Wait, Dayvhe!

You flail fully awake to see Dayvhe kneeling at the base of the pile Karkat built, seemingly surprised to see you up and moving.

“Dayvhe.” you whisper, like that was needed at all.

“Sup.” Dayvhe says a little weakly and even though he’s still got his shades on you catch the hint of movement of his face that tells you he just glanced from you to Karkat and back.
“I, uh, need to apologise to you.” Dayvhe mumbles.

Oh.

You guess he does but you don’t need that.

“It’s ok, it’s not your fault.” you assure him and Dayvhe actually grimaces at that.

“You don’t even know what I’m apologising for yet.” he points out.

“And you have so very much to choose from.” Karkat says dryly.

“Yeah, well, maybe I should just start chronologically and go down the list that way. Then we can talk about it in order.” Dayvhe suggests.

This doesn’t really seem needed but Dayvhe is continuing on anyway and Karkat isn’t stopping him.

“I’m sorry that I ever used my cuddlevoodoos on you.” Dayvhe comes out with right away.

“Oh. I- hah, because they’re not chucklevoodoos, they’re all nicey-nicey so… cuddlevoodoos.” Dayvhe explains. You can hear Karkat’s double facepalm behind you.

“Well, you didn’t know you were doing it.” you point out, ignoring the name. Don’t engage the terrible puns, ignore them.

“Right but knowing or not I still definitely did it to you. Even if by some miracle I never did the direct cuddlevoodoos I still always have a passive thing on that makes people like me by default.” he reasons.

You’d figured as much, the way people always are with him and how he just generates obsession in people does lend itself to a passive effect. Everyone likes Dayvhe, well, except Vriska.

“Vriska is immune to that. Too bad she’s not immune to the main thing, we were really hoping she’d be at least a little immune to your ancestor but I guess it’s just going to be me.” you say thoughtfully.

“Good to know that when I’m not doing this to someone they hate me.” Dayvhe says bitterly.

“That’s not true. It doesn’t work on me and I don’t hate you.” you tell him.

“And you are doing it to me and I want to punch you in the face. It’s not a high achievement to get Vriska to not like you. Actually having Vriska hate you would be something I’m sure a person would be aware of, at least on some level. Right?” Karkat says pointedly but Dayvhe looks as confused with his statement as you are.

Dayvhe shoots you a look and inclines his head towards Karkat. You shrug and Dayvhe seems to decide to keep going anyway.

“Anyway, I’m still sorry about it Sollux.” Dayvhe apologises.

“It’s ok.” you tell him. Dayvhe lets out a tense breath and you’d like to imagine that you can see a weight coming off his shoulders at you telling him that, you don’t want him to feel bad.

“I also want to apologise for just bailing on you when you told me about all of this. That wasn’t cool. I’m really lucky you sent Rohhze after me and that was really selfless of you but me not talking to
you was shitty, especially when I was reading every message. I just didn’t know if it worked over text and I was terrified to try and too stupid to work out that I could test that with Rohhze until the night I trolled Karkat.” Dayvhe explains.

“I didn’t want you thinking the moment that you left that your spell or whatever had been broken and I wasn’t talking to you anymore. I know I trolled you too much and it was probably annoying—” you apologise.

“Dude no, it got me through a lot of shit. I was just too caught up in my own trials and what Rohhze has since dubbed by ‘moral wankery’ to act like a decent moirail. I was a douchebag and I’m sorry.” Dayvhe apologises again.

“That’s what I more or less figured was the case.” you shrug. It’s nice to hear that you were right, though.

“Yeah, Sollux here had endless faith in you. A few crushing moments where he was worried he wasn’t good enough for you and had failed you somehow. All this faith is way better than you deserved for how you acted so you could stand to grovel more you know.” Karkat interjects. He really is middle leafing this diamond to hell, isn’t he?

“I’m sorry. Also, I didn’t mean that I didn’t want to see you when I trolled Karkat. I just thought you were probably going to be nice and understanding like this and I felt guilty and shit. I figured Karkat would be angry instead and I wanted someone else to yell at me, I think.” Dayvhe explains.

“Because guilt is a good hint you did something wrong. Also you deserve what you got.” Karkat sneers at him.

“He punched me in the face and strangled me a bit. In a non sexy way. Well, maybe a little sexy but I think that’s just a side effect of it being Karkat, I think.” Dayvhe explains.

“I’m not strangling you for sexy reasons. Or, well, maybe- WE’RE OFF TOPIC. GO BACK TO APOLOGISING!” Karkat demands loudly. Oh good, because this isn’t really a conversation you want to be there for. Dayvhe is also just barely holding onto his poker face so a topic change is probably good.

“Right, yeah. I’m… sorry I didn’t troll you. You would have thought I learnt my lesson about that from literally the apology I was just giving you about that but I think I was specifically bred to be the dumbest troll in the universe.” Dayvhe groans.

“Were you really not going to troll me at all?” you ask softly, it hurts to think that he really was going to just leave you not knowing how he was. Sure, you’re talking to him now but he didn’t know you were coming. For all he knew you were on Alternia worrying yourself sick about him.

Or dead.

“No, no I was! I just- ok I wanted to talk to Karkat before I did and the whole situation here is crazy and I wanted to have something to tell you.” Dayvhe insists.

“I’m alive and no one is being dismembered by a psychotic highblood.” you suggest flatly.

Dayvhe looks all ready to protest your point but seems to wilt under the look you and probably Karkat too are giving him.

“...Sorry.” he says softly.
“Going to apologise for wrenching a chance to talk to my lost quadrantmate out of my hands as well?” Karkat demands and folds his arms angrily.

“Yes, I’m sorry. It was a shitty move.” Dayvhe admits.

“Did you really think I was dead?” you ask.

Dayvhe doesn’t have an answer right away, he’s just silent.

“I couldn’t deal with the idea of you being dead and whatever shit you pulled off to not die was clearly some kind of miracle. Ah, fuck, I spent too much time with clowns and they ruined that word for me. I mean- it was pretty unbelievable that you would be but I was holding onto hope because if you were dead it was my fault. But…” Dayvhe shakes his head.

“You being alive wasn’t much better, Sol. You could be hurt and you’d be trying to get to us, though I never thought you’d do something like this to get here.” he adds, gesturing at you.

He means your ports. That horrible squirming loathing at your physical body gives another thrash inside of you and you feel cold, like you just downed a big glass of ice water like a shot.

“It’s not exactly safe here and I don’t trust my ancestor entirely, not enough to have been willing to bring you here. I was trying to deal with the idea that alive or dead I wasn’t gonna see you again either way, so, yeah I was starting to entertain the idea that you might be dead like basically anyone would have been from what you went through. It’s not like I was happy about it, I was just trying to prepare for the worst.” he insists.

“So you were just planning on… what?” you ask.

“I didn’t have a plan! I was working on coming up with a plan when you showed up here without one.” Dayvhe snaps.

You grit your teeth. Without a plan? Without- seriously?!

“You get to punch me in the face and strangle me now too, because I want to.” you hiss at him.

“Oh, shit.” Karkat whispers from behind you.

“What, for pointing out that your plan to get here apparently ended at ‘burst in with no idea what was going on and get caught’?” Dayvhe argues.

You’re sitting there with your mouth open and when you close it your teeth clack for how hard you do it.

“Good to know you think I’m that stupid.” you mutter.

“I don’t think you’re stupid, this is stupid.” Dayvhe corrects.

Wow. He thinks your ‘lack’ of a plan is stupid but insists he thinks that you’re not stupid. The smart thing to do there is to conclude that you have a plan that includes this and you have backups and failsafes. But no, him not questioning that is pretty telling.

“This is dumb, I’m not trying to argue with you. I know you must have gone through a lot to get here and I’m happy to see you, I am. This is just really dangerous and it’s not exactly going well, is it?” he says, pushing his shades up so he can pinch the bridge of his nose and sigh with stress.

“Sorry, I don’t have the damsel in distress dress. Should I have got one so I could have sat back on
Alternia wishing you were going to come back? I mean, we could have talked about it and worked out a plan together only you didn’t troll me.” you point out sharply.

“That’s not what I meant and it was literally like, what, twelve hours ago Dahvid offered me the chance. Where were you twelve hours ago? Would it even have worked?” Dayvhe asks.

“You didn’t know he was here, you don’t get to get out of it that way.” Karkat interjects.

Twelve hours ago you were flying back from hiding Hal and Dionte. You wouldn’t have been contactable but Karkat’s right, that’s not the point.

“You two and the rest of my friends were trollnapped, I don’t know why you think I’d be okay with just waiting around for some word from you. You didn’t do that when I was trollnapped, did you?” you point out.

“No, we were looking the whole time but this is a totally different situation. You were being tortured, we—”

“I DIDN’T KNOW THAT, DID I? And even if I’d found that out somehow you’re still all here against your will, right?” you demand, looking at Dayvhe and Karkat both this time.

“Slightly complicated, but short answer is that we’re still prisoners technically.” Karkat explains.

“I’m not okay with that. Of course we came up with a plan to rescue you.” you snap at him.

Alright, I get you, but if I get the power to time travel and to troll you I still could only do it this morning. It was me stitching up Dahvid’s leg after he got caught in one of Dionte’s traps that I guess bought me the good will for that offer.” he says.

Dionte? Wait…

“You’ve- tell me about that.” you ask carefully.


“You know about him, Dirkka’s ancestor. Stopped sending us hell boxes after Cal died, apparently his death made him go weird in the head.” Dayvhe explains.

Boy that’s an understatement.

“He just lives up in the roof of the building, I don’t think people go up there much except to bring him food. I don’t think people see him a lot, Dahvid wasn’t really worried that he hadn’t found him. He was more concerned with the spear through the leg he had.” Dayvhe explains.

Yeah, you bet people aren’t willing to go up there a lot unless Dahvid asks them to deliberately. This is… this is good.

“I need to go.” you say hurriedly, getting to your feet.

“Wait, no, don’t go. Where are you going?” Dayvhe asks, reaching for your hand.

“I need to see Vriska, do you know where she is?” you ask and Dayvhe’s face twitches in agitation.

“Why would you possibly want to see Vriska? We were talking, I was apologising.” Dayvhe says with more whine to his tone than he likely intended.
“You,” you say, sticking your finger in his face, “haven’t apologised for the shit that’s actually pissed me off. I have to talk to her and you don’t get to tell me not to, actually.”

“But she’s the worst.” Dayvhe protests.

“She’s not. I have to go.” you say and walk off out of the room.

Dayvhe kicks up more of a fuss behind you but you hear a suspiciously Karkat sounding scuffle including an angry hiss from him of ‘it’s not about you’. You walk off down the hallway. Goddamn, you pity Dayvhe, you do. That hasn’t changed even if you are also pissed at him. You come to rescue him and it’s too inconvenient or whatever?

He’s worried, you get it, Karkat was worried but he wasn’t a prick about it. You’d much rather buy that Dahvid was controlling him somehow but this does rather smack of Dayvhe’s personal brand of not thinking things through. It’s probably not totally his fault there either, if people really are inclined to be nice to him no matter what then he probably doesn’t have to do more than just say ‘I’m sorry’ at all before people let everything go. Except Karkat apparently, but Karkat can hold grudges like it’s an olympic sport if he wants to. He’s soft like a marshmallow inside still but he’ll also sharply remind you that one time you overwrote his castlevania save so really you owe him now do this small favour for him that you would have done anyway.

You know Dayvhe, he’s not a bad person. He can just be an asshole sometimes. So can Karkat, so can you. He’ll probably feel bad more or less right away, just like he did when he threw Dirkka’s lifespan in Roxxie’s face. Despite the beliefs of your friends who held a damn inquisition about your feelings for Dayvhe you’re not totally without backbone when it comes to him. If he’s being a sack of bulges to you personally in a way that really matters you’re not going to just let him off the hook for it. You still pity him, you don’t think any of the lengths you went to for this rescue have been a mistake, certainly you don’t feel like he’s not worth it just because he’s acting like this.

Needless to say though you’d feel a little better about this rescue with him not being such a tool.

Ugh, this is a mess. Crying all over Karkat and having a nap made you feel appreciably better but you still feel really shit in a way that probably won’t be better for a while yet. You walk into a room to find just who you wanted to talk to. Vriska and Terezi are in what looks to be a nutrition block and both of them notice you walk in.

“Oh good, I found you. I need to talk to you.” you say in relief.

“I, uh, also need to talk to you.” Vriska says and you think from the way she jumped that Terezi might have just kicked her. You don’t know why she would do that. Maybe Vriska said something shitty before you walked in. She was talking so the odds of that are pretty high.

“I’ll leave you two alone.” Terezi grins at you and slinks off out of the room.

“That was weird.” you note. Well, it was Terezi, so…

“What was your thing, let’s talk about that first.” Vriska says tightly.

“Oh, right.” you nod and lean against the counter, “Dayvhe mentioned that he was up in the roof this morning, probably not all that long after we were there. Apparently Dahvid was looking for Dionte but it seems like people don’t know where he is an awful lot. He wasn’t worried by the sounds of things.”

“We can factor more time in before we have to make our play.” Vriska says, her eyebrows raising in surprise.
“Right? I think we might need it, we have to find out what Dahvid’s done to them.” you agree.

“Terezi was saying that the solution doesn’t seem to be so simple as just killing him. Dayvhe fucked Troll Will Smith’s head on the way here, it’s why the ship stalled out for a while before they repaired it. He said that Troll Will Smith shouldn’t come here but when it happened anyway he was a wreck, going against orders seems bad. She’s been trying to convince him to practice removing commands but he’s being too much of a weenie to do it.” Vriska tells you.

“We’re definitely going to need to the time if Dayvhe’s going to remove whatever he did. Or we just use Dionte as leverage to make him take it off and let us escape but… I don’t know.” you say unhappily. It really is complicated.

“This whole thing is so weird and shitty. If one more thing blindsides me I’m going to lose my shit, I swear.” you mutter.

“Right.” Vriska says in a strangled voice.

“Yeah, sorry, what was your thing?” you ask her.

“I…” Vriska hesitates. She doesn’t do that a lot. Not that she always knows what she wants or anything but she hates looking weak so when she doesn’t know she just blindly picks an option and loudly insists how it was definitely the best and how she was so smart to do it.

“It’s nothing, I just wanted to… know if you got to checking the virus or Hal?” Vriska asks.

“There’s basically a bubble around this place blocking me. I could be more complicated about explaining it but I can’t from in here, or at least not just yet.” you explain.

“Well, shit. Also Terezi said that Dirkka’s confirmed that there’s no surveillance in here that they can tell, not that you checked before talking.” Vriska says haughtily.

Oh, hey, that actually was dumb of you.

“Oh, fuck off.” you say instead.

“Anyway, if there’s a bubble in here can’t you just go outside of it?” Vriska challenges you.

“We’re locked in, if you hadn’t noticed.” you argue and gesture to the many walls around you.

“Oh,” Vriska fake gasps and holds her hand over her mouth, “do walls, doors and gravity stop you all of a sudden? Why so cluckbeastshit so suddenly?”

You bristle angrily, you’re no coward! You just didn’t feel up to trying to break out through a wall and then Karkat showed up and- and you just didn’t think about it, ok?! You can’t stand having her condescend to you or think you’re weak.

You slam your hands on the counter and walk off towards the nearest window. You turn to walk backwards and face her, flip her off two handedly and throw up enough psionically generated heat to melt the thick glass as you go backwards through it, shattering chunks off as you go. You push off into the air and, still giving her the finger, fly upwards.

Up a sensible height in the atmosphere you fold your legs and open up your husktop. You should give this back to John soon so he can stash it away again but for now it’s yours. Your machine connects to the internet and hums away happily.
First of all you check on your virus, it's spreading nicely with a good number of downloads and the data you're getting back is nice but none of it is control the whole planetoid kind of nice. Still, the more people infected the easier a time you'll have. It's just a waiting game with these kinds of things.

Speaking of waiting.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling autonomicResponse [AR]

TA: hey 2o you can probably pu2h that tiimer back for the demand a liittle longer, look2 liike diionate won't be mi22ed 2o 2oon.
AR: □□ Oh hey person who locked me in a cave with a zombie despite my loud and repeated protests, how are things?
TA: it'2 not liike he'2 intere2ted in eating you. al2o ii'm drawiing a blank on you prote2tiing, you agreed two watch hiim.
AR: □□ Because you were basically in a trauma induced fuge state!
AR: □□ You weren't listening to anything I said at all! So, just, do us both a favour and tell me what's happening right now.
TA: we ended up 2urrenderiing, whiich ii2 apparently a good thing becau2e ii2em2 that he'2 already controlled the other2 enough for iit two be worrying. ii'm not 2ure iif dayvhe ii2 affected or not yet. either way kiilling dahvid could have dangerou2 re2ult2 for the other2.
AR: □□ Makes more sense to find out what you can before we play this card then, right?
TA: that wa2 my thiinkiing. what iif ii try two keep you updated and you re2et the clock each tiime, maybe?
AR: □□ Seems sensible. Do you think Dahvid is likely to snap and start torturing you all?
TA: a22ume the wor2t, ii gue22.
AR: □□ I suppose you can only be pleasantly surprised if you do that. Unless there’s anything else you should probably go before you're caught talking to me, no doubt the guy has cameras everywhere even if you've found a way to not run on his network.
TA: ii'm really hiigh up iin the 2ky, ii don't need two worry about that. but ii 2hould go anyway. talk two you 2oon.

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling autonomicResponse [AR]

Well that's that then, it looks like your job from here on out is gathering intelligence. You need to figure out how much mind control is happening so when you make Dahvid remove it you know everything he has to take off. Mutated or not he's still a highblood and they can be spiteful as fuck. After all, look at Eridan or even Rohhze. You happen to like Rohhze but you still wouldn't cross her unless there was nothing else you could do.

You put your husktop away in your sylladex and start drifting back down towards the window where you came out, only Vriska's loud and often grating voice catches your attention.

"He left that way, obviously. I don't know where he's gone except for 'out', so I don't know why you're asking me, Dahvid." she says snippily. It sounds like she's yelling right by the window.

Oh, shit. Dahvid is right there and she's giving you a heads up. You can't be caught with your own husktop on you, that was part of the plan that John and Jayded came up with, the one that's so stupid it just might work. Well, this at least is a little better, you have your husktop and you're outside where he expects you to be. Zipping up on top of the roof you look around for somewhere to stash the thing. You've not got your glasses on so anything really distant is out of the question, even if you did have something to wrap your husktop in to protect it from the elements you're not shooting it off into the hills where you can't see it to get to it again. No, it needs to be here. You can't just leave it out on the roof though, Dahvid knows you're out here and you're obviously not the only psionic around so
someone else could get up here. You have to be thoughtful.

Scouting around a little reveals the perfect hiding space. There's an old robot on the roof, it's started rusting up and when you poke it carefully it doesn't respond at all. You guess Dionte breaks his toys and abandons them, or he lost his mind before he could repair this one. You pop the compartment on the robot's chest open. The battery in here is dead as a doornail, he's not been using radioactive power like Brobot runs on thanks to Jayekh. You assume Hal and the others have that too. Actually, you probably should have asked that before you trapped him in a cave but he didn't mention it just now so you're going to assume he's fine there. Hal's self interested enough that he'd tell you if he was going to die from low power.

You crush down the robot's components, pleased to see that although the outside is rusting the inside is dry. You stuff your husktop inside and shut the chest panel again. If this thing has been left up here long enough to rust you doubt anyone's going to take it away now.

You drop off of the roof and sail easily through the air to the melted glass you left through. When you slip back in the room you find everyone there and Dahvid with his back to you. You have no idea what you just missed but everyone's faces are frozen in an expression of horror.

"You can't just do that! Take it back!" Dayvhe shouts at his ancestor.

"If you're not planning on doing it then it's not a problem is it?" Dahvid says冷ly.

He notices you then and narrows his mutant eyes at you.

"Are you just going to keep destroying my building?" he asks you, clearly annoyed.

"If you don't want me to then let everyone go." you suggest.

"I'm not doing that, it's for their own good. Which I could explain if-" he says angrily.

"Not interested." you say over him.

"Rude." Dahvid says with haughty offense in his tone.

"You're evil, I don't need to be nice to you." you shrug apathetically. Oh no the guy who murders kids and trollnaps people doesn't like your attitude? Well, shit, that's really going to damage your self esteem isn't- oh, no, wait you don't give a crap.

"Well you can think again about trying to hurt or kill me or else everyone else here is dead, you got me?" he hisses at you, leaning towards your face.

You glance at Dayvhe, he seems furious. What was it he said? Take it back?

"You controlled them." you conclude.

"Think of it as protection because apparently you think I'm some monster that needs to be killed. You've already injured a number of people working here, even my second in command is hurt. It's sheer luck no one died with everything you people did." he scolds you.

For someone who claims to not be a monster he's only insuring his own life and not theirs, that says something about his priorities, doesn't it?

"You can undo the things you make them think, right?" you ask thoughtfully. You know what the others said but you'd rather hear it from the hoofbeasts mouth so to speak.
"We're a little beyond you just saying sorry to get me to do that." Dahvid says waspishly.

Ok, so he can undo it and he will. Just... later. It's fine, you weren't planning on killing him during this phase of the plan anyway. It was nicer to have that option on the table but it's not the end of the world to lose it.

"Great. Did you want something or whatever?" you ask him in a bored voice. He probably doesn't have people annoyed with him or irritated at his presence a lot so you intend to give him every drop of the most platonic loathing you have for him.

"Shockingly, I don't trust you. Give me your sylladex." he orders you.

"Just do it Sollux, it's just easier." Karkat says softly.

It's fine, you were prepared for this.

You open up your modus for him. You've not got any weapons at all, the only thing he seems interested in is the husktop in your inventory. Or rather...

"Your machine is a squiddles lunchtop?" Dahvid snorts in amusement. Around you your friends expressions either become carefully neutral or mildly confused.

"So what?" you ask.

He tries to take it, only he doesn't bypass the coding problem and your modus snaps the lunchtop up in a locked case of code and won't open until its solved. It thunks heavily on the floor.

"Have fun with that." you tell him smugly.

"You know I have people who can break this code, right?" Dahvid says as he picks the locked up card up.

"Why are you still here?" you ask.

"I still had- you, yeah you. What's your name? You were the last one left." Dahvid says, pointing at John.

"John, but fine. Here." John says sulkily and hands over a giant hammer, the husktop you built him a while ago and his palhmusk. Dahvid isn't satisfied with that and flicks through John's sylladex until he finds the magic chest.

"What..." he says and the chest drops to the floor.

"It's magic." John says, explaining sweet fuck all.

Dahvid squints at him and puts his foot on the lid.

"I'm going to open it, you get what'll happen if this hurts or kills me, right?" he asks.

"I think we're all very clear on that." Rohhze interjects icily.

Dahvid kicks the lid of the chest open and inside there's a whole bunch of fakey magic wands, tied up scarves, decks of cards, cans of shaving cream, empty pie tins. Dahvid grimaces and slams the lid shut.

"Ugh, I thought I was done with shit like this when I left the damn clowns behind." he says in
"Everyone needs a hobby." John protests.

"Big talk for a guy wearing face paint." Jayded points out.

"Hey! It's ironic!" he insists and you think you see Dayvhe die a little inside just hearing him say it.

"Whatever, I have a hell of a lot of work to do now, thanks to you lot. So just stay here and stop putting holes in my building!" Dahvid orders you and stomps off out of the room petulantly. You all wait to hear the door slam.

"I think someone owes me an apology about that being a stupid idea." John grins at Vriska.

"No, it's still a stupid idea. I guess it just takes a stupid idea to fool a stupid man, you're useful to the team after all." Vriska grins.

"Exactly what was your idea?" Rohhze asks.

John beams and flips his magic chest open again and pulls the bottom up as much as he can with all the magic paraphernalia on top of it. No doubt revealing to Rohhze and the others the stores of tech and weapons hidden almost in plain sight.

"That's why you had Jayded's lunchtop." Terezi nods thoughtfully.

"As if I would have any less than five computing devices on me at any one time." Jayded nods.

"Or firearms, however I feel that we've fallen into quite the pickle with that... whatever it is we're calling that Strydr mind control. If he is injured or dies because of us we have to kill ourselves? And just thinking on it I can even feel that I'd want to. It's very unsettling and I'll feel far better when it's gone." Jayekh shudders and Dayvhe looks furious all over again.

"It didn't work on you either, did it Dirkka?" Roxxie asks softly, looking at her moirail.

"What? Why?" you ask.

"He said 'you kids' when he gave the command. Sure he's a tonne older than them, like, what eight times or so their age? But they're still adults, not kids." Dayvhe explains unhappily.

So there's room to wiggle out of the order. Could you then theoretically take Dahvid somewhere isolated and kill him? If the others don't know about it surely they can't respond. Or if it's specifically all of you banned from killing him then could Dirkka or Roxxie do it and that'd be fine or would you have to frame someone totally unrelated so they'd believe it wasn't any of you? Lots of questions but it's a high risk to gamble with. You'd rather just have him remove the order.

"I wonder if we've burnt up any good will we had with the adults here though. Do you think it'll affect the move on Condy if we have?" Roxxie asks.

"We have time, I guess we just have to see. It was always just the four of us planning before, if it goes back to that then it's not the end of the world, is it?" Dirkka reassures her.

You guess Vriska is bored with other people's drama because she turns her focus on you.

"Well, how did it go?" she asks quietly.

"Don't have any useful information from the virus yet but it's fine, I expected that. I talked to Hal,
we're resetting the clock, I just have to go talk to him regularly to keep him updated and keep resetting it. That way if Dahvid suddenly snaps we're still insured." you explain.

"And your husktop? Don't tell me where it is just in case but..." Vriska asks.

"Safe and hidden." you nod.

"Not bad, not bad." Vriska muses.

"So glad I get to meet your minimum standards." you mutter.

"Well I have a different standard for you with things like this." Vriska says and then looks a little panicked at having said something that you could, very charitably, interpret as nice.

"A double standard, you mean?" you grin.

"I'm going to push you out of the window now." Vriska growls and shoves you at it without any real intent. What'd be the point anyway? You can FLY after all.

You guess that your friends have moved past the distress of the previous moment, you think they're all still riding high on the joy of being together again. Karkat and Nepeta are talking eagerly and Dayvhe has a slightly pained expression on for whatever conversation he's being forced to listen to. He catches your eye and takes a step towards you but Karkat has his hand clenched in the collar of his tshirt and he comes up short in his attempt to leave Karkat's side. KK's probably put some kind of a ban on him talking to you again so soon until he can figure out just what he's supposed to be saying sorry for. That'd be your guess.

"Is it just me or does Dahvid seem like, well, like some kid our age or younger? He's as self centred as a six sweep old." Vriska says, drawing your attention back to her.

"Yeah, he does. But I got that impression a little from Disciple's books, she seemed to think he matured from being around them so who knows what he was like before. I guess if you always get what you want right away then why bother growing up, right?" you shrug.

Your words make your mind drift to Dayvhe. He knows that you're mad at him, there’s consequences for what he does and his power isn’t so absolute that people don’t ever think poorly of him. That’s why he’s a good person and Dahvid is not, but in the same vein you’re likely doing him a favour by waiting until he gets why you’re mad and you can work out a resolution together instead of you just forgiving him because you pity him so much.

The rest of the day (it's so weird having everyone awake in the day) wears on and you’re not refusing to speak to Dayvhe at all, it’s just obvious you’re mad and he knows it. All the same you’re still pretty exhausted from everything you’ve done since you last slept properly, not that you got a full days sleep then either. A bunch of adults who are very clearly annoyed at you all deliver food and in your experience this is the nicest of the two times you’ve been trollnapped. Like holy shit you get really good ramen here and no one tries to rearrange your skeleton. Alright, you're not really imprisoned here seeing as how you already poked a hole in the wall and left by yourself earlier, but still.

Terezi and Tavros are bugging Vriska to play dungeons and dragons again soon since you’re all together again but she’s protesting that you’re in too deep in an actual adventure to play make believe ones right now. You certainly aren’t up for playing now unless you’re just rolling for your wizard to fall asleep as you pass out and drool on your character sheet.

Karkat seemingly takes pity on you and pulls you and Dayvhe off to the gold room that you guess
he’s been staying in, the mess has a very Dayvhe like quality to it, interspersed with Karkat’s irritable tidying. The kind of organised chaos the block you all ended up staying in back at Roxxies had to it.

“Meds?” Karkat asks around his toothbrush as you unwrap one that Dayvhe found for you.

“Uh.” you say slowly, your hands freezing on the packaging.

“Tell me you’ve been taking them.” Karkat says slowly.

“I have but I don’t have them.” you answer slowly.

“Wait, what? Who does?” Dayvhe asks, sticking his head through the open doorway. You guess he heard you both.

“No one here.” you say quickly.

“Hal then? But what about the flight here? That counts as you not taking them, that was nights and nights wasn’t it?” Karkat asks urgently.

“No, I was taking them then. I just… I don’t have any. I wasn’t thinking about it.” you hiss in agitation. You know right where they are too, in Hal’s sylladex and you can’t risk going back there and blowing his location and risking losing Dionte as your bargaining chip. You’re stuck.

“Rrrgh, ok, there’s hundreds of thousands of people on this plantoid. Especially lots of creative geniuses, right? You probably can’t throw a rock without hitting someone with bipolar around here, there’s got to be a way to get you what you need.” Karkat insists.

“That’s not how that works, it’s not like creativity and-” Dayvhe begins.

“I know shut up, I was being facetious. Still, statistically speaking there’s no way you’re the only one here. I’m sure they’ll be happy to help.” Karkat groans.

“Yeah I have so much good feeling from people around here.” you mutter unhappily and start brushing your teeth.

“Whether they like you or not I think they’re going to want to keep the guy who keeps wrecking their building sane.” Dayvhe points out practically.

Well, there’s that you suppose.

“I’ll ask tomorrow when they bring food, okay?” Karkat asks, setting a hand on your shoulder reassuringly. You nod and Karkat leaves you alone.

Annoyed at him or not you’re still not passing up the chance to sleep in the same coon as Dayvhe and Karkat together again. When you get in you hit the sopor and you’re almost immediately out. Or not asleep as such more just like… hazily recollecting memories. What was it Hal called it when you drifted off to sleep at the helm? The background noise of your thinkspoon organiseing itself. You know it works somewhat like that. Sometimes you’ve been coding something, got stuck, finally given up and gone to sleep only to wake up with the answer. Even when you’re sleeping your mind is still ticking over little problems, putting information together and coming up with answers.

It’s this very process that has you flailing bolt upright in the coon hours after getting in it. You stare wide eyed in shock at the wall.

“Mmn, shh, jus… a dream.” Dayvhe yawns, patting your arm weakly.
“Sol?” Karkat mumbles.

You’re so stupid, how didn’t you see this before now? How only now did all the puzzle pieces slot into place for you? You’ve been so blind. But you can’t unthink what you’ve realised now.

“I think I hate Vriska.” you say in shock.

“Everyone hates Vriska.” Dayvhe grumbles and the sopor shifts and when you turn you can see the hazy gleam of coloured light off of Karkat’s eyes and the brightness of his sharp grin.

“No, I think… I think I hate hate her.” you say in wonder.

“...WHAT.” Dayvhe says loudly, suddenly very awake.

“YES! Called it!” Karkat crows all smug about it.

What the fuck happened to your life?
Your name is DAYVHE STRYDR and you are not even slightly okay about any of this shit right now, in fact-

Yeah. I think he’s had his time in the sun. Well, not on Alternia, that’s not healthy but still. I’m merging these streams back together again, crossing them if you will. I’m not listening to no Ghostbusters advice.

Hell yeah. Besides, don’t you think this guy has more than enough to deal with in whole chapters by himself again? I mean just look at him.

Well, now I feel kind of bad for everything I wrote already for him.
What?

“What?” Karkat asks as he struggles into his sweater and pulls it down properly. You’ve been spacing out for a while just thinking about everything.

“What?” you say back.

“What? Wait I wanna see how long we can keep this going.” Dayvhe says, leaning over the back of the loungeplank.

“Denied.” Karkat interrupts, which is fine by you, you didn’t want to keep that going anymore either. You don’t even know how it started.

“Also you should get off of the floor and pretend you’re a functional person.” Karkat tells you.

“You got me out of the coon and dressed, isn’t that enough?” you protest.

“No, I’m a horrible taskmaster, how do I live with myself? Go see if there’s breakfast.” Karkat
demands of you and kicks the sole of your shoe. You groan reluctantly and get up, sometimes with Karkat the path of least resistance is just doing the thing he wants so you don’t have to suffer the bitching about it. Which is obviously exactly what he wants and you shouldn’t encourage him but whatever.

“I’ll show you the-hhk!” Dayvhe chokes out. You look over to see him being mildly strangled by his shirt collar as Karkat holds him to the loungeplank by pinning the back of his shirt there.

Karkat doesn’t so much smile as show a lot of teeth with a vague aura of malice. Yeah, you’re not staying here, thanks. You leave the two of them to whatever they’re doing and shut the door behind you.

You’re in the hallway now because that’s how building layout works. Wow, you’re in a strange mood. This isn’t fair, you got your ass in a pile, you cried it out, you even ate and slept, who do you complain to about still having feelings? This isn’t fair, you want a refund.

Speaking of feelings that you don’t want to have you need to consider what you’re going to do about the Vriska thing. You think you might like her, or at least you worked that out in the middle of the day when you were asleep. Actually, not like her but hate her. Like her in a hate way.

Your head is too scrambled for this.

You go back to where you ate before, it really is just the fanciest room. The whole place is clearly put together with more money than you’d ever have in a lifetime, so you don’t feel even a little bad for punching holes in the place. Not everyone is out here yet. Jayekh has his feet up on the empty table and is animatedly talking to Jayyne who is more or less wearing Roxxie over her back. Roxxie’s head is resting atop Jayyne’s with loving and closed-eyed contentment. Nearby Terezi is interrogating Kanaya and Rohhze about something and Vriska is standing there with her.

You stand there and squint at Vriska.

Is she attractive? Are you attracted to her? Well, maybe. She has long hair which at least fits into the pattern of your female concipient crushes in the past, but that’s a poor sample size and also a lot of girls have long hair so you’re not sure that’s statistically significant. She’s not unattractive, you suppose. But also she’s not more or less attractive than the other girls she’s standing near or, indeed, anyone else in the room. If you want to be really objectifying about it you can say that Jayekh has a nice ass or Jayyne has nice curves. Kanaya has elegant features, Rohhze has nicely defined horns, and so on. All that is true but you don’t really feel compelled to pay attention to any of that.

Possible theories:

All of your friends are hot
You’re easy to please aesthetically
This isn’t really the way you find people attractive.

Well, ok what about your past? You pitied Aradia but she made the first move there. You’d thought she was pretty and dangerous and you had fun being with her. You hadn’t thought much would come of it even if you got butterflies around her a lot and then you ended up flush with her anyway.

You had an old crush on Feferi before because you related to her being tied to a future she didn’t really want and she was fun, she was dangerous and pretty. You hadn’t expected her to kiss you but you sure as shit weren’t complaining.

You may as well include Karkat because he’s a whole swirl of colours and the pattern kind of holds. There was already a deep connection but that was way more important than any quadrant so things
stayed as they were until he made his ‘there are five quadrants now but don’t name it after a pun, you fuck’ offer.

Dayvhe is sort of the pattern breaker there because you definitely had a crush right away that just got worse the more you got to know him. Maybe your diamond just works differently or maybe that’s Dayvhe specific.

Either way, if you ignore Dayvhe it looks a little like you’re kind of physically ambivalent to people’s objectively attractive features unless you really like them. See Jayekh, see that ass, see you not really caring at all. So, yeah, if you look at Vriska’s body like that you really view it more as a vehicle for her to go around irritating people in. Do you have any feelings when you look at her just like that? Eh, her arm is kind of cool with all the scars around it, her teeth are pretty intimidating, but you’re ambivalent.

Hell, you’ve even seen Vriska shirtless before when Equius was working on her and that doesn’t-

You remember her standing there, blood soaked and shirtless from surgery without any painkillers. She reached out and snapped your nose back into place and then slammed your shoulder back into its socket and made you the offer of cahoots. She was injured and blood covered but you knew that didn’t take down how dangerous she could be to people and she thought you were still worth that offer even burnt up and having failed to save people.

Your digestion sac makes a very good attempt at tying itself in knots. It’s not at her rumblespheres which aren’t bad (you don’t really think any are bad, just different, right?) but you’ve seen advertising and you don’t think you’ve gone a night in your life without an image of some troll or another showing theirs off to sell you products tangentially related to something they think you’re interested in. But ones that happen to be on a girl as cutthroat as Vriska who is crazy ambitious and who you needed to work with to be good enough to get here? That’s something that makes you interested.

Really that’s the thing, isn’t it? She helped make this possible and the thought of fucking up in front of her and making yourself look incompetent and weak makes you sick, you want her expectations of you to be high and you want to smash them and throw it in her face. You want to be better. You trust that she’s not going to betray you or kill you but beyond that you’ve only your own wits to protect you and your own strength to make screwing you over a case of mutually assured destruction.

Shit, you have a pitch crush on Vriska. It really wasn’t just some sleep induced loopiness.

If you look at her as a whole you get that tingle of nerves and a slightly nausea inducing hope that she has the same kind of feelings.

God, what would you even do if she did feel the same? Dayvhe wouldn’t be happy, he made that pretty clear when you were all trying to sleep and it first hit you. Karkat told him to shut it and eventually he did but you know his opinion. You see his point, your history with Vriska is uh… complicated. Admittedly she can’t control you anymore so that’s off the table but things have been different lately. When you needed her help to check out the hive the actors destroyed she believed you and stepped up, she also refused to mind control you when she thought you weren’t yourself but the moment she was convinced you were she let you go by your own judgement. She’s a huge bitch, yes, but you’re in cahoots. There’s enough mutual respect there. Besides the trope of cahoots turning to blackrom is there for a reason.

“What’re you staring at?” Vriska demands, snapping you out of your thoughts.
Oh God, she is hot and now she’s annoyed and that’s somehow making it worse. What are you supposed to do about this? What if she knows? What if she knows that you think she has a nice face and it is nice, very punchable, shit no don’t think about that. Or how making out with her kind of sounds like it’d be fun. Stop thinking already!

“Sollux!” she snaps.

Lie! Lie! Come up with something!

“I need coffee.” you say instead. Weak, but not incriminating.

“Man, you’re as bad as Dirkka when he wakes up.” Roxxie snickers.

“The coffee typically arrives with food, which should be any minute.” Rohhze says.

“Right, okay, good. Yes. I’ll go… Karkat and Dayvhe… bye.” you babble out, backing out of the room.

Excellent, you managed to survive torture and interrogation without cracking but realise you have a crush and you’re a complete liability.

You’re so good at being a disaster that you open the door right on an argument between Dayvhe and Karkat.

“-IT’S NOT ABOUT YOU!” Karkat yells.

They both startle at your sudden appearance and neither are coming forth with explanations about what their disagreement is so you guess you’re not going to know.

“Oh. Rohhze says food will be here soon, and coffee.” you tell them.

“Right, thanks.” Karkat sighs.

“Yeah, thanks.” Dayvhe nods.

The tension between them is absurdly thick and it’s not broken any when Dayvhe walks towards you to leave the room.

“Is everything ok?” you ask. It’s obviously not but you still have to say something.

“Yeah, ’s fine. Just Karkat telling me what to do when I didn’t ask.” Dayvhe grumbles as he moves past you.

“It’s literally what I’m here for!” Karkat snaps at him.

Dayvhe shakes his head and slips his hand into yours, walking you back the way you came.

“How’re you feeling? You said you only missed one dose right, but…” Dayvhe asks warily.

“One won’t kill me.” you point out.

“Shockingly there are stages before dead that I don’t want you in either.” he teases you slightly, a tiny hint of a smile telling you that he’s just fucking with you. It feels nice, normal.

“I’m fine, we have bigger problems. I’ll let you know if- when things get bad.” you tell him, correcting yourself. Because if you don’t find a way to get your medication back this is going to go
to hell real quick. You’re the only one who can power the ship, you may just have to sneak out again when you know Dahvid is occupied.

He stops walking and then pulls you back to him, taking the chance to tuck his face into your neck just under your jaw. He’s close enough that you can feel his partially severed horn brush up against your skin.

“I was being an ungrateful tool.” Dayvhe says, even though you weren’t talking about anything like that.

“Dayvhe-

“I also think it’s pretty obvious because it’s me and it’s you but gonna throw out the daring statement that I’m glad you’re not dead. A revelation, right?” he goes on anyway.

“I’m glad neither of us are dead.” you agree. And in a moment of not very shocking magnanimity you’re going to extend that sentiment to everyone in your group.

“God, Sollux, this is basically a public place. Keep it in your pile.” Dayvhe deadpans, pulling back.

“Hey, Dayvhe?” you call out to him and when he looks at you curiously you take the chance to kick him in the ankle.

“Here I am, baring my feelings to you. You monster.” Dayvhe grins, unable to sustain his blank expression for quite that much.

There are different kinds of apology, you think.

Some things are too big for an apology to ever truly cut it. Even if you can move past something saying sorry will never be enough to right that wrong. Even if the wound heals enough to hurt so little that you can one night not howl at every thought of it, even then it cannot be undone. Vriska using you to kill Aradia and Aradia in turn abandoning you to torture. Vriska has apologised, proved she’s changed and shown she can be trusted. You don’t forgive her for what she did to you, you can’t. Even though you seem to have grown gross pitch feelings for her she’s still the girl who used you as a murder weapon when you were kids, that doesn’t undo that. But that’s ok.

Thinking on it now you’re pretty sure Aradia was trying to apologise to you, maybe she didn’t get what she was doing at the time but it still happened to you. It’s good that she’s apologising, you need that, but even if you do become friends again… yeah. Can’t be fixed.

Sometimes it’s a hurt that is fixable. Where you need an admission of guilt, an agreement the other person did wrong and a sincere apology. The fight you and Dayvhe had about you being ‘crazy’ was one of those times. You had to know he got why he was wrong to be okay with letting it go.

Then other times an actual ‘I’m sorry’ isn’t needed. Sometimes it’s a nasty argument with Karkat about tv shows that later becomes him looking guilty and offering to let you pick what to watch. Or it’s John walking you back to the station to be a shield between you and his neighbours or Kanaya sending you some handmade shirts to make up for having you fix her husktop when you were in the middle of an expensive project. There’s no ‘sorry’ but there’s apology in there.

This is one of those times. He’s not actively saying that he’s sorry for treating your arrival like an inconvenience or telling you off for not being sensible enough about your own wellbeing, but he still is sorry. Maybe you’re too nice to the people you like but you’ll take it.

With that sentimental moment passed you both go out into the dining area again. Dirkka is out now
but you’d hesitate to call him awake as his current position is slumped over the table with Jayekh gently resting a hand on his back as he talks to Jayded and John. It’s nice, restful even.

The door clicks open and you jump, psionics crackling in readiness as you wonder why you’d even dared to think that the situation was nice or let your guard down for even a second. The door swings open and several adults come in holding covered trays, stacks of dishes, things like that. You realise the moment that you lay eyes on them that they’re all goldbloods.

A tall woman with a crown of three smaller curved horns going back from her hairline and pink and blue eyes looks at you right away.

Dirkka is most definitely awake now but though he’s wary neither he nor any of the others who have been here longer than your group look exactly afraid.

“It really is you.” the woman says softly, setting her tray on the table with her psionics.

“His sign.” one of the golds behind her whispers.

“Those eyes.” another concludes with a nod.

You are not enjoying this many adults staring at you.

Nervously you take a step back, pulling Dayvhe behind you a little.

“Oh, my, I don’t mean you any harm. As a matter of fact I’m certain in that kind of contest you would win against me for sure, you nearly killed me last time after all. Sit down, please. I’m Nicole.” the woman in the lead says and floats a chair towards you and one to her. She sits but you’ve no desire to.

“You’re working for Dahvid, right? So I’m not sorry if I hurt you breaking in here but you don’t look like I nearly killed you.” you argue. She looks fine, you’re pretty sure she’s a movie star, her face is vaguely familiar to you but you couldn’t name her. The point is she looks maybe a little tired but otherwise camera ready, not on death’s door.

“I don’t mean yesterday, I was only released from the hospital this morning. I sadly missed seeing you in action again. No, I was the helmswoman for the ship that brought half of your friends here, you tried to drag me back down to Alternia and I only won because you ran out of air.” she smiles.

“It was more of a tie really, you were unconscious as well.” one of the other golds points out but she just shoots him a sour look.


“Yes I… don’t exactly have your hardware. Let me see you.” she says, standing up again to move towards you.

You scramble back and spark threateningly at her.

“I’m not going to hurt you!” she exclaims in obvious frustration.

“That makes one of us!” you snarl.

“Wait, hold up. What are you wanting to do here exactly?” Dayvhe interrupts, getting between you two.
“I just want to get a look at his ports.” she says.

“He’s not going to let you touch him, I’m not going to let you touch him either.” Dayvhe says. Too right you’re not going to let her touch you!

Dayvhe glances back at you, checking your reaction out. His mouth flattens in displeasure as he looks at you and then focuses back on her.

“Yeah, no way.” he answers for you.

“What if I show you mine first? Here, I’ll sit down.” Nicole says and pulls her seat over again and sits.

She folds one leg over the other elegantly, her pointed heeled shoes clicking against the chair as she moves.

“Obviously I’m in movies and you can’t show ports but a lot of us dislike the look anyway. That and you shouldn’t wear clothes over ports unless you want to risk an infection so we have these.” she explains and raises a manicured claw to her temple, right where you have a port.

She swipes her claw over it delicately and a thin piece of what you can only guess is silicone or some other skin substitute peels right off. Exposed below it is a port like yours, or more accurately very much not like yours. Hers is flat to the skin, gleaming metallic gold with narrow gold filaments connecting her thinkspoon parts inside to the port itself. The whole thing is smaller, neater and less bulky than yours.

“The connectors are solid gold, pricey obviously with the amount of ports we need and the amount of people with them but it’s such a unreactive metal that infections are vanishingly rare and of course they conduct energy far better than the cheap aluminum that the empire uses.” she explains as she pulls her hair back and reveals another, this port cover has synthetic hair on that you still aren’t totally sure isn’t her actual hair somehow.

“Of course some people prefer the look, plenty walk around with their ports exposed around here. We just can’t do it offworld, we’re not allowed to officially advertise the tech but we try to let people know they have options as much as we can without getting The Grand Entertainer into trouble.” she sighs and twists in her chair so you can see her bare back as she reveals as many ports as the back of her dress allows.

“Well, they go all the way down, you get the picture. Would you like to see closer?” she offers.

Again Dayvhe looks back at you but curiosity overrides your hesitance and you come a little closer to her to look at them. Down her back the ports themselves they look almost like a work of art, you can appreciate the elegance in their design like you could appreciate high end husktop parts. Compared to yours these are unreal.

“Did they hurt?” you ask.

“Mmm, no. Obviously you can’t be under anesthetic when they’re put in, your nervous system needs to be awake and firing so the docterrorists know they’re doing it right but we get sedatives and there’s music The Grand Entertainer made that takes you out of yourself so you don’t feel anything at all. Honestly I don’t remember anything about the procedure apart from the music.” she answers.

She’s turned to face you now to answer your questions and you can see the way she’s looking at the ports on your temples and a slight frown is building on her face.
“That’s an imperial helm job sweetie, who- who did this to you?” she asks softly.

“An heiress.” you answer stiffly.

“Not her.” Dirkka chips in before Nicole can even look at Roxxie.

“But then what stopped-” she begins.

“I got there in time and killed everyone doing it.” Dayvhe answers roughly.

“You could probably get that upgraded, that shit will infect you so fast. They don’t care about it rejecting, when you’re in the helm they medicate you for any attempts at rejection there and encourage the biowires to fuse with even more of you. It’s not like they want you to go anywhere.” one of the other golds points out.

“We’ve been making sure they don’t get infected, he’s had medical attention.” Dirkka says helpfully, although not mentioning Hal by name.

“Not all of them we’ve not.” Dayvhe points out and Dirkka goes quiet.

“You were being checked on, right Sol?” Roxxie asks uneasily.

The uncertain noise you’re making is not reassuring Dayvhe at all.

“Maybe?” you hedge and Dirkka groans in despair.

“Wait, why would you be getting only some of your ports checked?” Nicole asks, clearly confused.

“They were put in at different times. The first lot were, what a perigee ago or so but his neck and back were only a few days ago. Well, just under a week I suppose.” Jayyne fills her in and Nicole’s eyes go wide.

“And you’re just walking around? You should be resting!” one of the other goldbloods gawps at you.

“I didn’t have time for that I had to get here!” you argue.

“YOU FLEW HERE?!” the three of them all shout at once, making you jump.

“You- you need to see a docterrorist right away. We have specialists, I’ll get you an appointment.” Nicole declares, standing up in a rush.

“No way, I’m not stupid! I’m not letting anyone near my ports or letting you drag me off away from the others to attack me or them.” you hiss at her, backing away.

“I wouldn’t- we want to protect you, not hurt you!” she insists.

“Like hell!” you snap back.

The three of them look at each other and then at you. Nicole reaches into her dress and pulls on the chain of her necklace until she pulls it out. There, on the end of a delicate gold chain, is your sign in gold. The other two trolls hold out a pendant and a bracelet charm with your sign on it.

“We’re not Entertainer’s followers. We work with him, yes, for him when he’s leading our actual projects sure. We’re completely aligned almost all of the time but our loyalty is to The Psiionic. His work with the Signless, his commitment to the freedom of our people, that’s what we follow.
Entertainer gave us freedom from the helm, as much as he could at least. He’s working to change the empire in small steps and that’s good and we follow his word as far as it aligns with Psiionic’s.” one of the goldbloods says softly.

“You're his descendant, his only descendant. We would never hurt you.” Nicole says gently.

“One second.” Dayvhe says and grabs your hand. He pulls you off around the corner so you’re away from the goldbloods and wraps his arm around your back so he can lean in close and whisper to you.

“What do you think?” he whispers.

“It feels like a trap, I don’t trust any adult here but…” you’re hesitant now, you could just be paranoid. Well, you did recently cause a lot of damage here, it’s not unreasonable to think they might want to harm you. Your proof is just how convincing that actress is, which really acting is her actual job so that’s not great, and then the charms but they’re not hard to make.

“But if the alternative is ‘shit the fluid around my thinksponge is infected oh no I’m very dead’ then maybe it’s worth checking out? I mean admittedly of the two people I know who have had body mods done at our sort of friend Equius’ basement surgery lab it gets good reviews but, you know, still not ideal.” Dayvhe points out.

“I’m sure Hal was keeping an eye on me and the whole helm, I just wasn’t paying attention to what he was doing. I didn’t care.” you admit.

“I would like to say he cares about your wellbeing enough to not be so negligent that he fails to check you but I’d also have liked to think he wouldn’t helm you to allow you to come here so…” Dayvhe sighs.

“I still don’t trust them.” you whisper.

“What if the doc comes here and we’re all here and ready to fuck shit up if they try any funny business?” Dayvhe suggests.

“We still have weapons so… yeah ok.” you nod.

“Why are you two whispering in the hallway like a pair of four sweep old little girls?” Karkat demands loudly and suddenly from down the hall.

“I’ll go.” you say, leaving Dayvhe to catch Karkat up. It’s also good if they’re having a conversation that isn’t arguing about whatever they were just arguing about.

You look at Nicole as you walk back. She looks genuinely concerned for you but, you have to remind yourself, she could well just be acting.

“I’ll see someone, but only here and with the rest of them here with me.” you tell her.

The actress seems uncertain.

“I thought you just wanted to help him.” Rohhze says silkily.

“Surely those with innocent intentions have nothing to fear.” Terezi grins with a smile like knives. Yeah, you definitely want your friends around for this.

“It’s not exactly sterile but if that’s the choice we have then, fine. I’ll call and make an appointment,
then let you know when I know more.” she says, clearly ill at ease with the answer she’s having to give.

So that’s that then, you’ll be prepared, hopefully not die of horrible infections and if your ancestor’s… followers are okay maybe you might have some options here. You should also probably at some point find out if they’re a cult and want shady shit. Moreover you don’t know what words of your ancestor they follow. Disciple spoke about Psiionic a lot but he didn’t seem like the preaching type to you, that was more Signless’ domain as you read it. Likely there’s other records out there than just Disciple’s. You kind of want to see their sources.

“So are you done then, or do you people just stand around making the place look untidy after you’ve brought prisoners food? Are you allowed to just be here wasting everyone’s time?” Vriska asks icily just as you were about to ask some of those very questions.

“We don’t agree with keeping people prisoners, as a rule. Entertainer sometimes keeps people here because he doesn’t trust them in the world and they might be a danger to others but he doesn’t keep people locked up long term and we’re ok with that. Freedom is the guiding principle that we follow. Signless sought an end to conflict and peace in an equal society, which we’re fine with. However the we and The Psiionics recognise that some people cannot be tolerated if you seek to create tolerance.” she sighs, walking close to Vriska and then leaning past her to flip a lid from a tray revealing a display of fruit.

“Our order has a long memory, Serket, so really what you need to ask yourself is not whether we who value freedom above all else are allowed to do this. That’s not the right question.” she says calmly and a cantaloupe floats out of the dish and hovers near Vriska’s head.

“The real question is do you think anyone stops us? Because the point I advise you learn if you want to survive on this planetoid,” she continues and the melon glows bright pink and blue before splitting and crushing in on itself. It starts compressing and compressing, juice and pulp escaping under the pressure. “the real point, is that we don’t take orders. Not from The Grand Entertainer, and certainly not from you. Gold here settles for nothing less than freedom, peace is great, but we are not beneath you.” she hisses.

The fruit once very pointedly the size of Vriska’s head is now compressed down to a hardened mass not even half the size of your fist.

“If you need anything, Sollux please let me know.” Nicole says, like she didn’t just obliquely threaten to crush your crush.

“I’d like to not be a prisoner, or any of us actually.” you say, uneasy at being near her.

“We’re already working on that. Trying to talk Entertainer around is no easy task especially as you put Carrie in the hospital for a few hours. She’s fine now of course, the woman’s hard as nails but while he holds a grudge, she is the more reasonable of the two of them. But still there is a pad by the door, you can contact anyone who has access to the room which is not many people and right now that might be best for your own safety.” Nicole says regretfully.

You shrug, what else can you really say?

“Well then, it’s been a pleasure to meet you Mr Captor.” Nicole says, inclining her head in a slight nod of respect. Wow, coming from an adult that’s something. Karkat is looking from you to her with incredulity building on his face.

“You’re as useless as a sack of assholes, aren’t you Sollux?” Karkat shouts loudly and smacks you in
the forehead with the back of his hand.

“What my idiotic quadrantmate forgot is that he very desperately needs medication to not get very sick, I have the specifics on my palmhusk which… I don’t have. Do you have a pen, I could write it down.” Karkat says.

“Oh, no need, here.” Nicole says lightly and hands over a tablet. Karkat takes it from her and taps at it harshly as he spells out the names of all of those pharmaceutical concoctions you need for a functioning sponge. Better he write it than you, his quirk is less likely to fuck up and give you the wrong drug because you added too many i’s or 2’s. Like oh shit no you took a slightly similarly spelled drug and now the thing you’ve taken will make your arms fall off.

You don’t know if there’s a drug that makes your arms fall off, but it’s not germane to your point.

“I can certainly talk to the docterrorist to get them to come see you and make sure they bring this and do… whatever they need to do for that if anything. I wouldn’t really know, but yes I will get on this right away.” Nicole nods, putting her tablet back away.

“Thanks.” Karkat says.

The goldbloods nod at him and then at the rest of you in a respectful sort of way and as one drift gracefully out of the room. When the door clicks shut behind them Roxxie whistles long and low in an impressed sort of way.

“So, nice cult you got there. Pretty big on that goldblood pride huh?” Dirkka says as he butters some toast that you didn’t even see him take.

“I don’t have a cult. I don’t even know if they are a cult and if they are they’re my ancestor’s.” you argue.

“Fucking mustards, you’re all CRAZY!” Vriska snarls in fury, flicking shattered seeds and pulp off of her.

“I’m not sure hating you makes someone crazy.” you point out. For example in your case being crazy came first and is unrelated to… hating Vriska.

“You were kind of a jerk to her.” Jayded points out.

“She threatened to pop my thinkpan!” Vriska shouts angrily.

“Technically she didn’t. Maybe she was just very badly making you a smoothie.” John snickers.

“Screw all of you, I’m taking a shower. And I’m taking this too!” Vriska declares, swiping up several obviously still hot waffles and refusing to drop them despite her obvious discomfort. With that she leaves the room in a squelching huff.

“Fruity.” Terezi cackles and grabs a few more things before going after her.

You do still need to eat so despite potential cult, a semi-veiled threat to Vriska’s life and everything else that’s going on you sit down to have breakfast.

“It seems pretty obvious to me that we’re not being let out of here today, or maybe not anytime soon.” Roxxie begins, breaking the awkwardness in the atmosphere that the death threat created.

“I think our entrance with a lot of fire, lasers and injury may have ruffled a few feathers if the attitude
those three were giving is any clue.” Jayekh agrees.

“Where are Nepeta and Equius?” Karkat asks, looking around.

“I, uh, heard them having a disagreement earlier about being here. I think they’re probably… talking it out.” Tavros says with an awkward cough. You’re pretty sure that’s a euphemism but you’re out of eye bleach after the last time you walked in on them so you’ve no desire to go looking for them again.

“I suppose we can catch them up. Since we’re more or less all here, what’s the plan?” Dirkka asks, looking around at all of you.

“The escape plan, you mean?” Jayyne asks over her oatmeal.

“Yes, Jayyne, the escape plan. The plan for escaping, the plan you came here with specifically for escaping here, the escape plan.” Dirkka says, stone cold serious. His front only cracks a little when Jayekh snort laughs across the table and giggles about how he loves that movie. Dirkka Strydr, acts like a cold emotionless bastard but is really the sort of guy who will do dumb things to make his matesprit laugh.

“We’re not telling.” you interrupt because Jayekh clearly isn’t going to stop giggling in time to answer.


“Everyone but me can be made to talk, the less of you know the lower the odds are that the person he asks will have that info. Even they don’t know a hundred percent of it, they’re missing details. Vriska doesn’t even know everything.” you tell him and start pulling your toast apart instead of eating it until Karkat smacks you in the wrist softly to make you realise what you’re doing.

“I suppose that makes sense but I can’t say that I like it. Then again the thought of actually leaving makes me disquieted too so it more or less balances out.” Rohhze sighs.

“But is the plan that you have going how it was meant to?” Kanaya asks.

“Well… we didn’t anticipate this place being like this. We had feared that we would have to fight our way to a far more gruesome holding cell. Our initial plan of attack was to stop anyone alerting Entertainer and make someone tell us where you were being held and then to break you out of there, but in chasing the people running I think Sollux lost his focus somewhat.” Jayyne says diplomatically. It’s a very nice way of saying that you’re a goddamn liability.

“Much nicer than the last place I was held prisoner in, I’ll review it better on yelp.” you say sarcastically.

“Alright, but presumably that plan was to find us, break us out and get up back to the ship where Sollux would fly us away. Obviously that’s not happening, did you plan for that?” Kanaya presses.

“Of course we did.” you snort.

“Wait, there’s really still a plan? But it didn’t- I thought you just got caught and that was it.” Dayvhe says in surprise.

You give him a flat and unimpressed look and Dayvhe’s expression shifts from surprise to an agonised kind of cringe.
“That would be stupid and... and you’re not stupid. You had a plan for if you got caught and you’re just following that one, it just looks like you got beat so my ancestor would underestimate you if you got caught.” he realises.

“I’m sorry, I’m as stupid as he is.” Dayvhe groans, his hands over his face as he slides down in his chair a little.

“Can I get that in writing?” you ask meanly and Karkat snort laughs into his coffee.

“Well, at the risk of finding out things that I shouldn’t and also not digging Dayvhe in a hole any deeper I’m going to stop asking. So if the plan is going fine what should we do with our time?” Dirkka interrupts.

“Actually, I had a plan of my own there.” Rohhze chips in brightly.

“Oh no.” Dayvhe whines.

“You always say that when I have a plan.” Rohhze protests.

“I think that’s because he knows you!” Jayded laughs.

“Harsh, but fair. Moving on, seeing as the amount of interference in our heads has escalated from an order to stay all the way up to death pact I think it’s in our vested interest to work out just how we can get around or undo that order without asking the man himself to free us from those.” Rohhze says calmly.

You shouldn’t really need her to do that. When you threaten to end Dionte’s life, if you can call it that, if he doesn’t remove it then you’re pretty certain he’ll resolve that for you. But, on the other hand if you can work out a way to get the metaphorical and metaphysical cuffs off of everyone without revealing your best play then all the better.

“But I don’t want to experiment on you, Rohhze. I hate it.” Dayvhe protests.

“We don’t have much choice, honey.” Roxxie sighs sadly.

“No way, I hate these powers and I’d rather never use them ever again! Every time I do I feel worse and worse about what it makes me.” Dayvhe argues.

Ordinarily that would be a valid point, but everyone else here could die if he doesn’t so it’s a pretty exceptional circumstance. Point is it’ll certainly be better for all of you if Dayvhe works out how to understand his psionics better instead of just hiding from them and hating them. Untamed and unknown power is dangerous.

“You should do it.” you tell him.

“It’s not that I don’t want to help, I’d do almost anything to protect any of you. But I could damage Rohhze’s mind forever if I screw this practice up and that she agrees to it don’t make it any better! I don’t want to hurt anyone!” Dayvhe protests.

“If they’re all dead that’s worse.” you point out and Dayvhe whimpers.

“WOW, just- don’t pull that punch or anything.” he says in horror.

“He’s your moirail, it’s his whole obligation to do what’s best for you in the long run not just bow to your every whim right now. If you wanted someone who just wants to make you happy you should
“Have got a matesprit.” Karkat says primly and waves a spoon at him as if to lecture him further.

“Except you are my matesprit.” Dayvhe counters.

“Ah, but I’m also your kismesis and that means I want you to be better. So control Rohhze already.” Karkat tells him.

“I think if you wanted easy quadrants, Dayvhe, you should perhaps have selected different partners.” Kanaya smiles.

“That ain’t happening. Fine, Rohhze, what am I supposed to be doing then?” Dayvhe says reluctantly and stands up, pushing himself away from the table. Rohhze’s face is self satisfied and smug but then isn’t it always?

Terezi shows up again with Vriska and she watches intently and offers advice on what Rohhze could possibly do to squirm around the wording of Dayvhe’s commands. He’s only asking her to do simple things like go here or there. At first the others try just straight up stopping her but it makes her visibly uncomfortable and distressed to be stopped so that clearly isn’t working.

Your theory is that Dayvhe wants this to work but you know he doesn’t want to hurt Rohhze so this likely is him pulling his punches, at least subconsciously. His ancestor will do no such thing. Besides age and experience will no doubt make him more powerful anyway.

You watch as Terezi gets Rohhze out of fulfilling an obligation by convincing her that since Dayvhe indicated a spot of carpet and the whole carpet is the same then more or less anywhere in the vague area he gestured to will do. That’s a good bend of a rule. Your focus starts drifting from them to your own back. Could you really have an infection? That certainly sounds like the kind of thing that could kill you and you don’t know how you’d be able to tell. You’ve not looked at the ports at all, their positioning on your body pretty much precludes you from doing that by mistake and their presence is distressing enough that you don’t want to go out of your way to look.

But… if you had an infection you’d know, right? Infections are gross and they get all hot with your body’s immune response, they itch. You run a finger around one of your lower back ports, it’s totally numb. You wouldn’t know if it was itching because you can’t feel anything at all. Does it feel hotter than the rest of your skin? You can’t tell. The metal is warm but it’s in your body so no shit it is.

“Look.” Vriska hisses, smacking your arm and pointing to Rohhze. She’s got a blindfold on and Terezi is leading her around. She is walked to the spot that Dayvhe indicates and Dayvhe refuses to confirm or deny if she did it so Rohhze asks Terezi who tells her that she is where Dayvhe told her to be and so she seems satisfied. They take off the blindfold, walk her back to Dayvhe. He points out another spot and compels her to go there, Terezi blindfolds her and walks her somewhere different. Again, she tells her that she’s where she’s meant to be and Rohhze seems satisfied.

“We can use that.” Vriska says under her breath.

“Depends what happens when she takes it off.” you tell her.

Rohhze removes the blindfold and the moment she sees she’s not complied with Dayvhe’s order at all she becomes distressed and has to complete the task given to her. They run the test again telling her they’ll take her to the right place this time but again they lie to her and bring her back to Dayvhe without letting her see that she went to the wrong place.

Rohhze being okay with this seems to hinge on her buying the lie that what Terezi has said and the reactions of the rest of you backing that up. The moment she doesn’t buy it the same order kicks in
“It’s a time bomb, it’s gotta be taken away.” you mutter to her and Vriska nods in unhappy agreement. You really wish this could just be the solution, but there’s no way you can kill someone as famous as Dahvid without them suspecting that you did and the outcome of that is unacceptable.

Watching this whole thing is making you feel ill at ease, your claws dig into the arm of your chair that Vriska isn’t sitting on. Just seeing how disoriented and distressed Rohhze can become is reminding you all too much of being in the tank, of being put under in a pale haze you didn’t want and having people try to force you into saying things against your will.

It feels like marchbugs under your skin, a taste in your mouth so sour you almost gag. You can’t-you can’t watch this. You don’t hate Dayvhe for what he can do, he doesn’t disgust you. Importantly he didn’t choose this and has taken big steps to avoid doing this by mistake and had to be cajoled into doing it at all even for the good of everyone else.

You still can’t watch.

You abruptly get up from your chair and exit the room.

Your chest feels tight and enough rides on this particular merry go round of experience have taught you the tell tale signs of something panicky. You pass through rooms until you find one that’s like a communal bookhive and hop up onto the edge of an arena stickball table and try to breathe.

It’s fine, it’s fine. He can’t do it to you and he never would anyway. You’re fine. It’s ok.

You breathe in, focusing on how it fills your chest. You’ve seen movies of alien parasites bursting out of people’s chests, their thoracic cage all splayed open when it leaves. You don’t want to imagine your chest opening up that wide, but oh look you just did, slightly less than that would be better. Breathe in, hold, try not to think of chest bursters. You cough a little on the panicked exhale. You’re fine.

“You don’t look fine.” Dayvhe says, making you jump. You look up, you thought you shut the door behind you but you must have been so focused on your breathing that you didn’t hear him open and shut it again behind him.

“I don’t feel it.” you admit shakily.

“It makes you think, right? Seeing Rohhze like that and all the times you told me someone was in your head…” he trails off meaningfully.

Right? That was why it was so upsetting and…

You squint at him. You’re very good now at telling reality from unreality. Dayvhe’s form flickers, it’s the figment.

“I thought I was done with you.” you sigh.

“You locked me down pretty deep but you already worked out I’m just a face on a part of you that you’ve always had. But you still haven’t said anything about my point, Dayvhe was the person you could feel in your head that whole time. It was him, you weren’t imagining things!” the figment insists.

“Well, no shit. And obviously it got worse when I wasn’t okay, he wanted me to feel better so he was doing it subconsciously, then that panicked me and it just cycled.” you admit.
It sucks admitting that he definitely was doing his mind control thing on you but he didn’t know it and you don’t blame him. As reasons for someone to mess with your head go ‘you’re in terrible agony and I pity you too much to do nothing’ is a pretty good one, especially given that he didn’t know he was doing it. To Dayvhe’s credit you’ve been not great since you got here and he never even offered to so much as take the edge off, or at least to attempt it. After all you can allow Vriska to control you, you could probably allow Dayvhe.

“Who knows what he’s left in your head?” the figment points out.

“Don’t.” you warn him.

“Karkat had a perfectly legitimate point about that! Just because you’re immune to new things now doesn’t mean-” he says.

“SHUT UP!” you snap just as the door opens.

A slightly startled looking Vriska is in the doorway and the Figment of Dayvhe evaporates like he was never there.

“I didn’t even say anything yet!” she snaps at you. She thinks you were talking to her, of course she would.

“Yeah, well, I’ll bank that shut up for future I guess.” you mutter miserably.

“Wow, you look like shit. Kinda interesting that seeing Dayvhe do this creepy thing to Rohhze sets you off but you’re cool around me.” Vriska notes, kicking the door shut behind her.

“I doubt I’d be cool watching you puppet someone I like around either. Doesn’t mean I hate Dayvhe or- or can’t stand to be around you.” you swerve your way out of having to say that you don’t hate Vriska because, uh, actually you do.

“Makes sense. The docterrorist is here, Dayvhe is talking to them with Equius about your history and what you’ve had done or whatever. He sent Karkat to go get you and Karkat, tyrannical lord of delegation that he is, sent me.” Vriska explains.

Damnit Karkat stop trying to matchmake.

“Thanks for telling me.” you nod.

Vriska’s metal fingers drum on her hip for a moment or two of silence between you.

“I think they’re thinking of setting up in the nutrition block since no actual cooking goes on there and it’s easy to sterilise or whatever.” she adds.

You nod, that makes sense. Besides they’re not operating on you, so it’s not like you’re looking for surfaces easy to mop your vital fluids off of are you?

“Do you want me there?” Vriska offers and you look up in surprise. She’s not looking at you, but rather glaring at a bookcase.

“It’s not like you need my help fighting off some medical nerd but your ports are pretty vulnerable and if I was running this whole evil entertainment empire I’d put taking you out at the top of my list. You can evaporate a troll, sure, but I can see what they’re doing before they jam something fatal in your ports or whatever and control them to stop them.” Vriska says, scowling.
“The most literal way of having my back.” you laugh weakly.

“We’re in cahoots, I take my promises seriously.” Vriska tells you with haughty pride in her tone.

“I know.” you nod.

It’s been said before that you should quit while you’re ahead but that’s usually one of those things that you realise after you’ve crossed the point where you should stop. Like how you just opened your mouth and said-

“Why are we in cahoots?”

-without thinking about how that sounds. Vriska’s face goes slack with shock, you may as well have just slapped her.

“I mean,” you amend quickly, “we were cool. I trusted you more after the Cal thing and when I properly got over Aradia we weren’t best friends but we were cool. I trust that you’re not going to stab me in the back, we’ve since found out that you can’t control me and I’m not one for big revenge plots unless someone does shit like this to our friends and quadrantmates. You could have just asked to work together and not fuck each other over.”

Vriska looks sharply away from you.

“Cahoots is… there’s this expectation that without it things would fall apart but I don’t think that was true for us. But it’s important, it’s big. It’s an agreement, a relationship, our status is being in cahoots. I said yes but why did you ask?” you continue.

Vriska grits her teeth and then looks you dead in the eye, the light gleaming off of her artificial eye and just adding to the intimidating vibe that she’s no doubt suited for.

“Because I wanted to. Have you got a problem with that?” she challenges.

“No problem. I said yes because I wanted to.” you say easily and Vriska relaxes just a touch. You wonder if she thought you were trying to end things.

“I’ve got no complaints either, neither of us would have got here without working together.” you add.

“Dahvid did not expect us.” she smiles with feral pride.

“There’s a lot he’s not expecting.” you agree with evil glee.

Seeing that you’re not trying to break up your cahoots Vriska’s relaxed a bit and she’s not so far away. You hop off of the edge of the table and get another look at her. You could just take a step towards her and try to kiss her, see where that gets you. Imagining it makes your pumpbiscuit stutter in excitement. But maybe she’d say no. Just because every crush you’ve had eventually has worked out for you romantically doesn’t mean this will. You’re going to say that Aradia worked out romantically because you did date, you were happy, it just ended badly to say the least. Besides now isn’t the time when you want to be dealing with a broken pumpbiscuit.

Maybe you could be subtle?

Yes, you. It does happen sometimes.

“What are we going to do after? When we win, I mean.” you ask.
“Because we absolutely are going to win, I don’t do losing.” Vriska hisses with a bright smile.

“I know you didn’t do video games but I can assure you, I don’t do losing either.” you grin.

You’re about to ask her if you’ll just be friends after you’ve won, with the obvious hope that she’ll say no because she doesn’t want to be just friends with you. You hope that she wants to be your kismesis. But before you can ask that embarrassingly forward question the door opens again with the real Dayve on the other side.

“There you are I- Karkat said you were finding him.” Dayve frowns.

“She did. She told me they want to use the nutrition block.” you say before Vriska can talk.

“Yeah, are you okay with that? You don’t have to let them do anything you don’t want to.” Dayve assures you. You nod, you know Dayve wouldn’t make you, at least not when it comes to something like this. He leads the way out and you look back at Vriska as you go but she’s already following.

“What’re you looking at?” she says sharply.

“Don’t know, but by the smell of it some kind of melon I’d say.” you grin.

“I do NOT! It took so long to get that out of my hair you know.” Vriska snaps at you and shoves you in the shoulder.

Dayve gives Vriska the most disdainful look but he doesn’t tell her to stop following you both, nor does he seem massively surprised that she doesn’t leave when you get there.

The Docterrorist waiting in the nutrition block is yellowblooded as well, they have thick dark glasses on, not unlike Equius’ own. Equius and Karkat are both there and Equius is explaining something to the docterrorist that they don’t seem to approve of.

“Well, I suppose you did what you- oh. Hello.” they say, perking up as you walk in.

“Found him.” Dayve says, redundantly.

You see Karkat look at you and Vriska and catch the barely restrained little smirk he gives you, damnit he was matchmaking.

“Hello, Sollux. Nicole sent me, I’m Docterrorist Feelgood.” they say, holding out their hand.

“What the fuck?” you say sensibly in reaction to a statement like that.

“Some of us when we get the chance to choose our adult titles really seize the opportunity, and some of us are cowards. I’m no coward Mr. Captor.” they grin sharply.

Oh good, your medical professional is bonkers. Good. Excellent.

“Please hop up here, Mr. Zahhak has been explaining the work he did on you. If you could take your shirt off if you please.” they say, patting the counter.

You boost yourself up there and, trying not to look at Vriska, take your shirt off. You turn your head so that you can see the docterrorist in question but it means that you’re effectively turned so you’re looking right at Vriska. She’s not watching you at all though, her eyes are locked on the docterrorist.

“Hmm.” the docterrorist murmurs thoughtfully and clicks at their glasses.
“The first helm job ended here, yes?” they ask, touching a port near the bottom of your hairline.

“Yes, everywhere from the vertebrae-” Equius keeps talking, medical jargon that’s just like what he and Hal discussed when they were finishing the job. You try to tune it out.

“Hey, you’re doing good.” Dayvhe whispers to you, leaning forward so he’s leant against your legs. His hands stroke a soothing but aimless pattern over the middle of your thighs and you focus on that instead.

“I can’t see any sign of infection but it would be best to take a small sample of your neurofluid to be sure, is that alright with you?” the docterrorist asks.

From the higher angle you’re at you can see Dayvhe’s soft grey eyes full of concern as he looks at you, watching for your response. You nod minutely.

“He said you can, it won’t hurt, will it?” Dayvhe asks.

“No, with the old style ports like this there’s a lot of numbness around the ports and of course no nerves in this outside part themselves.” they say and you feel the pressure of one of your back ports being touched. You can hear a click and your claws screech on the tile by your legs.

“If you paralyse him you’re not getting out of here alive, doc.” Vriska warns.

“It’s just a fluid tap, I’ve done thousands and thousands of these.” the docterrorist protests and takes their hands away.

“Done. It doesn’t look infected but I’ll run more tests at my lab.” they say cheerfully.

“You shouldn’t keep wearing this.” they add, reaching around you to tug at the balled up shirt your other hand is holding onto.

“What?” you say.

“It doesn’t look like you have an infection but with uncovered ports like this, especially the old style that you have, you’re just begging for one if you wear a shirt over it. With your current ports your choices are to either get a shirt that will expose the ports or not wear one at all.” they tell you firmly.

“I’m sure Kanaya can make you something, I don’t know what equipment she has on her but we can ask.” Dayvhe suggests. You nod, she’d probably enjoy the challenge actually. Though you’re not really keen on the idea of exposing the ports that you don’t like all that much to everyone. It’s bad enough that people can see the ones on your head wherever you go.

The docterrorist makes their way around the counter to look at you properly and nudges their dark glasses up on their face a little more.

“Of course, I could upgrade your ports for you to the kind we have here. Then you could cover them like this.” they say and peel off what you thought was skin to show a golden port.

“Then you could wear whatever you like or not even let anyone know you have them if that’s what you wanted.” they add.

That end result does sound appealing but the thought of undergoing all of that again and being awake for it makes you feel like you’d rather die.

“I don’t want more surgery.” you manage to say and Dayvhe chirps softly at you.
"That’s… understandable." the docterrorist sighs, running a hand through their short hair.

"Helming someone against their wishes or having to undergo something like that under duress is barbaric. That any troll still has to go through that when we have perfectly fine alternatives makes me sick. That it happened to you of all people- it’s terrible.” they say angrily. You look at them and catch a glint of your sign hanging on a chain around their neck. There are a few other chains on there, Karkat’s sign and then two unknown ones hanging from tiny diamond and spade shaped charms. Another follower of your ancestor who apparently advertises their whole life around their neck.

“Well enough of my grandstanding. You seem healthy to me, you should probably eat more but I understand you’ve been through a lot and that’ll take time. I will test this sample and get back to you no matter the result. I left your medicine with Signless’ descendant here, if you need anything don’t hesitate to call.” Docterrorist Feelgood says and gives you a short bow.

They go to leave and then rush back, clearly having forgotten something.

“You should also probably have a nap, sometimes people feel a little out of sorts after this kind of test.” they tell you quickly and then leave for real.

You feel pretty drained and not just in the literal sense that you just were but all of this is making you feel pretty raw. Needless to say a medically mandated nap sounds like a great idea.

Karkat and Dayvhe take you back to the room that’s seemingly yours now and Karkat goes off to talk to Kanaya about your clothing situation. Falling asleep with your head in Dayvhe’s lap isn’t a chore at all.

When the evening comes and you know you’ll be a little harder to see you sneak outside again, take your husktop back and fly out of the geofence around the building that’s blocking you from messaging people. Safely up in the air you contact Hal.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling autonomicResponse [AR]

TA: everything okay?
AR: ☢️ Thank fuck, someone to talk to that talks back.
TA: ii’m gue22iing that diionte ii2n’t much for conver2atiion 2iill, huh?
AR: ☢️ Where would we be without your brilliant mind?
AR: ☢️ No the zombie isn’t talkative. Because I’m not organic it’s like he doesn’t even see me. If I move my hand around really quickly near him the movement catches his attention but he immediately works out he can’t eat me and no longer cares.
TA: 2o he’2 ju2t 2at there, no attempt2 two e2cape at all?
AR: ☢️ Not even a little. He’s still breathing though so I guess he’s ‘alive’ for lack of a better word.
AR: ☢️ I don’t really know what to do here, unsurprisingly most literature on the undead is about how to kill them, not keep them alive.
AR: ☢️ My guess would be a lot of his functions have shut down and he’s conserving energy by not doing a lot of anything. The thinksponge alone takes up a lot of calorie use in sapient creatures like trolls and there is nothing going on upstairs in this guy’s head.
AR: ☢️ Still, I found some things in my sylladex he would eat so I don’t think he’s going to starve. He doesn’t seem to be dehydrated either but I’m only guessing at how I could tell.
TA: ii iin the form of blood from that per2on he ate before.
AR: ☢️ That’s… good?
AR: ☢️ An actual corpse isn’t a good hostage so I’m going to tentatively call that thing you said good.
TA: yeah, i don't know either.
AR: So what's happening in the Strydr mansion?
TA: we're still locked up and i don't think dayve'2 going two be able two undo the command2 hi2 ance2tor ha2 put on everyone. we're going two need diionte two negotiiate that, iit think.
AR: Should i drop the cooling period on that timer then?
TA: not yet. iit want two see him again fii2t, iit 2ound2 liike iit might have another way of doing thii2 but iit'm not sure yet.
AR: Do tell.
TA: turn2 out my ance2tor ha2 2ome kiind of followiing of all the goldblood2 here. iit'm not sure iif iit'2 a cult or a politiical thiing.
AR: So often there's not much of a difference.
TA: thank2 for the 2cathing politiical commentary, we're all 2o impre22ed.
TA: they were worried about me getting an iiinfection from my port2, got a doc two see me. turn2 out their port2 are way more advanced here. iit could all be a ploy but the goldblood2 2aid they wanted two help me rather than being loyal ju2t two dahviid. iit'm not going two count on iit, iit could be a trap but iit'2 2omethiing.
AR: Given that I doubt this rock gets much in the way of environmentally generated energy I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of their power was generated by your caste. If they're able to act outside of Entertainer's control, which would be surprising, then it could be another way to play hardball with him negotiation wise.
TA: then we could e2cape
AR: Would you really be able to bomb the whole planet to dust after that, though?
TA: ...i hadn't thought about that.
AR: I was wondering when you were going to realise that the logic of ‘this guy is bad because he controls and trollnaps people so I'll *murder an entire planetoid of people*, many of whom are probably victims too’ wasn’t great ethical logic.
TA: you went along with the plan! you all did!
AR: Yeah, we all figured you and Vriska would come to your senses a little more when you got back to your quadrantmates.
AR: Plus the plan was still viable if everyone was incredibly evil even without Dahvid’s control. Then there was the option of scaling back the explosion size to just the mansion and maybe an area around it as acceptable casualties. There were a lot of potential creative solutions to this problem.

Creative solutions, huh? OH! That reminds you, Hal doesn’t know about the latest commands and you haven’t told him about the tests that Dayvhe and Rohhze were doing.

TA: we have another complicatiion. dahviid made the order that iif he ii2 iiinjured or died becau2e of u2 then u2 kiid2 have two kiill our2elve2.
AR: That’s dark.
TA: obviou2ly i't'm not affected but roxxiiie and diirkka weren't eiither, they're not kiid2.
AR: Yeah, that wording is sloppy as hell. What that exactly what he said, word for word?
TA: i don't know, i wa2n't there but that2 what diirkka told me ii think.
AR: Get them to write it down for you, but if that’s the actual wording I can think of a lot of ways around that.
AR: For a start it seems to leave it open that if Dirkka declared that he was going to kill Dahvid because he trollnapped him and then did so it wouldn’t be one of the kids that did that and it wouldn’t be because of them. Problem solved.
TA: i'm not sure how flexiible thii2 ii2 though. dayve wa2 te2tiing hii2 power2 on rohhze and when 2he 2u2pect2d 2he wa2n't following the 2piiriit of the reque2t 2he became really uncomfortable. who know2 how much 2tronger that effect would be with one of dahviid'2 command2.
AR: So the people affected have to sincerely believe they’re complying? Then there’s plenty of solutions. Capture him and put him in stasis, he’s not injured or dead but he’s neutralised. Or kill him where they can’t find out and replace him with a robotic duplicate.

AR: If you gave me enough time I could make a convincing dupe of him. You could have him free everyone in exchange for Dionte then we kill him away from everyone and replace him so if they happen to see him or if they want to call him again for whatever reason, to check they’re complying or whatever, then you have the fake they can interact with.

TA: I’m not sure I can lie to everyone like that.

AR: Lying to protect the lives of your loved ones is bad, but nuking a whole planetoid is good? I’ll never understand people.

AR: Try to find out what that wording was and I’ll work on solutions.

AR: Oh and before you go, I have your medication here you know. You should probably take that.

TA: the docterrorii here gave me some, I don’t want to go out there and be being followed. I02iing the 2upri2e advantage of diionte would 2uck.

AR: That’s fair.

AR: Thanks for the puzzle though, it’ll give me something to think about. Maybe I’ll ask Dionte his opinion.

TA: I don’t think you need to mock the zombie.

AR: He has no thoughts on the matter.

TA: well, I’ll leave you two that, I’m going inside two sleep.

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling autonomicResponse [AR]

You stash the husktop safely away and glide back into the wing of Dahvid’s hive that you’re all being kept in. You think everyone else has gone to sleep, or at least is in the blocks that they’ve taken as their own. Literally your hand is just reaching for the door to your shared one when you hear it, a soft muttering voice down the hall.

It doesn’t sound like it’s coming from any of the colour themed rooms down here, rather the main room. But you can see that all the lights in there are off, if they were on the glow of the light would be coming down the hall to you. With uneasy footsteps you follow the sound into the main room. What if it’s Dahvid or his underlings come to try to kill your friends in a sneak attack?

Instead of a fight you find Rohhze. Just Rohhze in a sodden undershirt and underwear, her skin sopor sticky with drying sopor starting to flake off of her. She’s repetitively walking back and forth across a small patch of carpet and muttering to herself as she anxiously strokes her ear fins.

“Rohhze?” you ask and she freezes, turning to look at you.

“I did stand here, didn’t I? He told me and- and I did it, you saw it, right? I couldn’t see but I think I did, but what if I didn’t?” Rohhze babbles anxiously.

“Y-yeah, you did. You did it.” you stammer out in horror.

“But maybe you’re just saying that, maybe…” Rohhze whines and trails off into indistinct muttering and pacing again.

You watch her for a moment, this definitely isn’t the solution to getting out of here. If they suspect something is wrong they could be stuck like this or worse forever. Backing out of the room you make your way quickly to the block you were originally headed to.

Karkat is half dozing, draped over the rim of the coon and Dayvhe was obviously sitting up waiting for you, even if what he’s actually doing is building a tower with all of the books from the shelf.
“Hey! You’re back, what do you think of this?” Dayvhe asks, gesturing to the pyramid he’s made.

“You need to come with me, it’s Rohhze.” you tell him urgently.

“Wait, what’s wrong with Rohhze?” Karkat asks, perking up and hauling himself upright.

“She’s- she’s stuck I think is the best way to say it.” you hesitate.

“Stuck how?” Dayvhe asks.

You don’t have time to explain so you just grab him by the wrist and pull him out of the room. Karkat swears loudly and hops out too. You and Dayvhe stop when you enter the main room with Rohhze in, a few seconds after a slippery Karkat just avoids running into your back.

Holding your hand up to silence them you all listen as Rohhze, oblivious to your presence, mumbles about how she did go here, didn’t she? She did. But what if she didn’t? On and on she goes. She’s stuck in a bad loop, an error that won’t resolve or go away.

“No. No, no, no, fuck this is what I was afraid of.” Dayvhe hisses.

At the sound of his voice Rohhze’s head snaps up.

“Dayvhe.” she says in relief.

“Hey Rohhze, what’s… what’s up?” Dayvhe asks gently, going to her and holding her by the shoulders.

“I did- when you told me to come here I did do it, didn’t I? Terezi wasn’t lying, right? Or was she testing me?” Rohhze asks, her hands grabbing tight at Dayvhe’s shirt.

“No, you did it. You did good. I asked and you did it, just like that.” Dayvhe says with fake confidence.

“Really?” Rohhze whines.

“Of course, and you’re here now too so that’s, like, extra credit!” Dayvhe jokes and pulls her close. He wraps his arms around her and strokes the back of her sopor stiff hair.

“You should probably take her back to her block.” you suggest quietly and Dayvhe shoots you a grateful look. But it’s not like you were going to ban him from fixing your friend. He’d be devastated if he permanently messed with her head, what kind of moirail would you be if you allowed that just because you wanted him with you at night instead of her? What kind of friend even?

“Yeah, let her sleep it off.” Karkat agrees.

Alright Rohhze, all the cool trolls here and Karkat agree that you need to go back to your block. So come on, you did good. Let’s go.” Dayvhe tells her gently and steers her off to the block she picked as hers. You and Karkat retreat back the way you came in horrified silence.

“I think we should probably listen when he says he doesn’t want to do this.” Karkat says and jumps up the coon again.

“I was on the side of people saying he should suck it up and do it, Rohhze herself was but- shit.” you hiss guiltily and undo the buttons of your jeans, kicking them off to a heap across the room.

“Did he do it wrong or was it too much exposure at once or what? I sure as hell don’t want to keep
testing to find out.” Karkat groans and falls back into the sopor in one big gloopy splash. You climb up the side and swing your legs over.

“Medication, by the sink.” Karkat says, smacking you in the leg.

Oh, shit you forgot. You float over there and remember that you should also brush your teeth too. Wow you’re a disaster.

“At least you know he wasn’t doing that to us before, we never got like that.” you call out to Karkat as you spit toothpaste in the sink and then start freeing your pills from their tiny foil wrappers. They look just like the kind you’re used to, you’re probably not being poisoned.

“That’s a positive take from all of this.” Karkat concedes.

You down the pills with some water and float back to the coon.

“I’m not a complete pessimist.” you tell him and flick the light off with a snap of your psionics.

“True.” Karkat agrees and you slide in the not quite warm enough sopor next to him. He scoots you closer to him so you’re floating on your side and sweeps his hand up your back over your bare ports.

“Kanaya was nearly done with your new shirt earlier, she didn’t have all of her stuff but you know Kanaya, she’ll make something amazing.” Karkat tells you. You nod, that’s nice of her. You’ll have to remember to be grateful and keep an eye out for anything nice you can do back for her in future.

“So, how about Vriska, huh?” Karkat asks with a grin that you can sense in your mind as much as you can just about see in the low light of your eyes.

“You sent her after me earlier, you meddling fuck.” you accuse him.

“Guilty, how’d that go?” Karkat says without an ounce of remorse.

“I don’t know. I hate her but everything’s going to shit right now, this isn’t really the time to be writing notes like ‘hey do you hate me back tick yes or no’. ” you point out.

Karkat makes a soothing little sound and squeezes you a little tighter to him.

“I think this would suck if I didn’t have you and Dayvhe here. I hate that you’re in danger too but you two make me happy, frustrate the hell out of me too but that’s not my point. If you think being in spades with Vriska would make you happy, would make you better, then why not make this situation better by adding that?” Karkat reasons.

You sigh and wonder if this is some speech from one of his romance books but you suppose he has a point.

“I don’t even know if she hates me back.” you tell him after a few moments of silence.

“You’re far too close to technically locking a full quadrant set to be this stupid about romance. How is being inept at things worked so well for you?” Karkat asks in obvious frustration.

“Well, it’s not my looks.” you snort.

“Thanks, asshole, now we’re both sad.” Karkat snaps and with a shove dunks you under the sopor. You come up coughing, trying to be sure you didn’t swallow any only to find yourself at the receiving end of a glare that could bubble paint off a wall.
“Fine! I’ll think about asking.” you concede.

“Good, now come here. I’m cold.” Karkat demands. You roll your eyes but let him drag you over to him. He’s warmer than you anyway but with just two people in the coon it is a little chillier than normal. At least you have each other.
What is this feeling?

“Every little trait, however small
Makes my very flesh begin to crawl
With simple utter loathing
There's a strange exhilaration
In such total detestation
It's so pure! So strong!
Though I do admit it came on fast
Still I do believe that it can last
And I will be loathing
Loathing you
My whole life long!”

‘What is this feeling?’ from the hit musical ‘In Which A Heretical Limeblood Of Extraordinary Power In A Magical World Falls At First Into A Pitch Relationship With An Heiress Which Later Shifts To More Pale Affections. Involves Rebellious Sentiments, Unreliable Authority Figures, Singing, Magical Transformations And Allegories Of Oppression’. The musical was of course banned, despite featuring the vocal talents of its director The Grand Entertainer, yet it was illicitly distributed. Historical critics have praised how on the cultural zeitgeist the director was as it came a mere five sweeps before the cull on limebloods was lifted.

Gentle fingers brushing your fringe wake you up. Dayvhe is leaning over the edge of your coon, he looks tired and stressed. You sit up, careful not to wake Karkat and pull yourself up to the edge. Your toes press against the side walls of the coon as you lean against them.

“You ok?” you ask in a whisper.

Dayvhe looks like he’s going to say he’s fine but with a slump of his shoulders he seems to accept it and shakes his head.

“Is Rohhze ok?” you ask.

“I don’t know. Me and Kanaya got her to sleep for about four hours and she’s awake now, she seems like herself again but…” Dayvhe trails off.

Yeah, she had seemed fine yesterday until she wasn’t. You climb up onto the edge to try to hold Dayvhe but he pulls back away from you.

“It gave Kanaya time to make you clothes at least, I think she sews when she’s stressed. Come on, come shower and you can try them.” Dayvhe offers and grabs your hand.

You float over to the ablution block with him and get into the shower. Dayvhe leans against the sink and fixes his unhappy stare at the wall, clearly deep in thought.

“You know she doesn’t blame you, she asked you to do this. She knew the risks and thought it was worth it.” you say a little louder now that Karkat’s not sleeping in the same room that you’re in.

“It’s still my fault.” Dayvhe counters.

You tip your head back under the spray and let the sopor run out of your hair.
“I guess, but what you did wasn’t bad. We all made the call it was the best thing to do, if you’re guilty we all are.” you say.

“I don’t really like that any better.” Dayvhe says after a moment. You reach back and contort to try to run your fingers over all of your ports to be sure they’ve not still got sopor gunk in them. It’s not like you can feel them to tell.

“You can get in here with me if you like.” you offer. Being under the nice warm water with you would be nice, you could hold him close and argue down all the shit that is in his head, you want to look after him.

“I- nah. If you’re done come out, I wanna give you this.” Dayvhe says instead so you shrug and turn off the water.

“Making yourself feel bad as punishment doesn’t actually change anything you did or didn’t do.” you tell him and step out to grab a towel.

“I’ll remind you of that the next time you’re depressed and not eating because you think you don’t deserve it anyway.” Dayvhe warns you.

“Good, do that. Future depressed me is a moron and you should tell him that.” you agree and that at least makes Dayvhe laugh softly.

“I will. I don’t know, I’m not suffering for the sake of being virtuous or something. I’m not up here whipping myself in penance but I did a shitty thing, I should feel shitty. Good people feel bad when they do bad things.” Dayvhe explains.

“You don’t need to prove you’re a good person.” you tell him, drying off your legs. He needs to prove that to you least of all, you know who he is.

“Don’t I?” Dayvhe mutters.

“No, you don’t. No one thinks you’re a bad person.” you assure him. Well, maybe Vriska kind of does but you’re not going to bring that up. You pull your boxers and jeans on and start drying the rest of you off. Look, you don’t normally dry off like this but there’s only so long you can be totally naked having a conversation with a fully clothed person without it starting to get a little odd.

You start drying off your back by pulling the towel from side to side sharply only for Dayvhe to yelp in alarm and grab your wrists.

“Dude! Ports! Be gentle!” Dayvhe warns you.

It doesn’t hurt, it’s fine. But- oh, yeah, you can’t feel them so… Hm, you might be a dumbass.

“Let me.” Dayvhe tuts and turns you around.

You face away from him and feel the towel move across your back, even if it seems to vanish in places. He’s certainly gentler than you were.

“You shouldn’t have to do it again anyway, it’s pretty obvious this isn’t the answer to our problem. I won’t let people make you do it again.” you promise him.

Dayvhe’s towel wrapped hand slides across your middle as he hugs you from behind. His warm face presses against your neck, his shades just bumping against the underside of your jaw.
“Pity you.” he murmurs against your neck.

“Pity you too.” you agree, running your fingers over his horn.

Dayvhe chirps at you all pale-sweet before letting you go leaving you with the towel in your hand instead. You dry off the last of your chest and quickly scrub at your hair. You’ve given up brushing it yourself because ports and combs do not mix.

“Here.” Dayvhe says, takes a shirt from his sylladex and offers it to you.

“I think you need to let go unless you want in this shirt with me.” you tell him because he’s still got an arm wrapped around your waist. He sighs deeply like the whole universe is unfair on an atomic level and lets you go.

“Kanaya would kill me if I stretched it out doing that.” he concedes.

The shirt itself is black, short sleeved and up the back you can see a vertical lattice of square holes for your ports to be uncovered. You pull it on, careful of your horns because this shirt is tight and stretchy in a way that almost reminds you of Feferi’s swimsuit. When you pull it down you get why though, with it being this skintight it means the fabric around your ports isn’t shifting about and risking touching them. Although Dayvhe has to adjust it slightly once you have it on.

Turning around you look at yourself in the mirror. You’d normally never pick anything this tight to wear because it seems a lot like showing off and given that your physique is, uh, non existent it’s a little silly to do that. That said you’ve been shirtless loads lately and not cared at all, but that’s probably more symptomatic of how you’ve had so many overwhelmingly important things to stress about that smaller things just got forgotten. The collar on the shirt’s a little high and it has your sign hand stitched in something close to your colour up near your collarbone. You guess she maybe didn’t have enough thread to hand embroider the whole middle of your chest and if she did that’d probably itch like hell anyway.

“Hm, try the other one.” Dayvhe suggests so you peel the shirt off.

This one he hands you is long sleeved and the sleeves themselves are a bright yellow and there’s two thin yellow stripes up the sides of the black body on each side. You pull this one on quickly and happily note that the neck on this one is wider, more like a tshirt collar than the higher neck of the last one. You slide your arms down the fluorescent yellow sleeves and discover, to your delight, that they’re really long, coming almost halfway down your palm but they have holes for your thumbs. It’s so cool!

Dayvhe adjusts the back for you slightly and turns you around. You twist to get a look at the stripes up your sides and then again at the cool hands on these sleeves. This is a super nice shirt!

“Alright, that one’s great. You like it so much you’re even doing the happy little tongue thing.” Davyhe beams.

The smile falls off of your face and your let your arms drop.

“I wasn’t. I don’t know what you mean.” you insist.

“Oh come on, I’ve seen you do it a bunch of times before. This happy little…” Dayvhe trails off and grins, showing just the tip of his tongue between his teeth.

“Just that much, so you can see the little points. It’s cute. You do it when your code’s going super well or when you really like things.” Dayvhe smiles at you.
Damnit, you’d thought you’d broken that stupid habit. It makes you look like such a dork, you hate it.

“Aw, don’t make that face, it’s great.” Dayvhe assures you and pets your wet hair. He shifts his hand a little so the pads of his fingers knead at your hornbeds and that’s nice enough to make you drop the issue. But not so much that you’re not focusing on making sure you don’t pull that stupid face again.

“Make sure you tell Kanaya you like that one, ok?” he reminds you, taking his hand off of your head. Nooo, horn rubs, come back!

“My lusus dragged me up with some manners you know.” you tell him with a scowl.

“Did he?” Dayvhe asks, his face perfectly neutral but you know ‘trying not to laugh’ when you see it.

“Alright, Biclopsdad didn’t really do much there but that means I’m a self made man.” you insist.

“Not bad for a first project.” Dayvhe teases you so you zap him just a little, making him back off with a laugh.

You’re glad he’s happy right now, this Rohhze thing is obviously weighing on his mind. He looks pretty tired. Carefully you float his shades off his face and, yeah, he does look dark and exhausted around his eyes.

“Maybe you should get some sleep, keep Karkat warm since I’m up now.” you tell him.

“Hey, no, you should come with.” he offers, trying to pull you back towards the main room.

“Nah, I’m up now and I’ve got stuff to do.” you tell him.

“Like what?” Dayvhe asks.

“Plan stuff.” you say vaguely.

“Oh this plan you won’t talk about. I swear my ancestor’s stuff doesn’t work on me, you can tell me.” Dayvhe whines.

“The less people know the better, besides not much is happening now. It’s just waiting for the right moment.” you say.

Dayvhe doesn’t exactly look pleased with your explanation but you manage to stop him protesting with the ancient technique of quickly escaping the room before he can come up with a better counter argument. Dayvhe chases you into the main room where Karkat is softly snoring. You kiss Dayvhe quickly on the cheek, push him towards Karkat and quickly exit the block entirely. You just win at conversations, yes you do.

That said your reason for leaving was legitimate, now that you know that Dayvhe altering or removing the control Dahvid has put on the others isn’t an option you need to adjust the plan accordingly. Only you previously agreed that you were no longer in charge of making the plan, Vriska is. You don’t entirely remember why you agreed to that, it was right before you brought everyone here and a lot of stuff is a little… hazy around then.

You can remember the important stuff, like Hal’s location, but things like the route you took there, what you passed or anything he said to you are just a blur. You remember agreeing to follow Vriska’s lead although actually you didn’t do that at all after you saw Troll Will Smith again. It
slowly occurs to you that you were probably not doing very well then and actually you think she knew that. What did she say, that you weren’t just a tool to her?

Well, now you’re just standing alone in the hallway feeling a little sick with nerves and stupid that you didn’t realise this shit earlier. No wonder Karkat seemed to think this was obvious. Does that mean she knows too? Which if she does would imply that she doesn’t hate you back or she’d have done something, right? Or… maybe not?

Alright, no, you’re being stupid. You have a crush, big deal. You also have big life or death problems that you need to consult Vriska with, your stupid feelings can wait.

You don’t know exactly what room Vriska chose for her block, but you can hazard a good guess. You worked out that there’s hints outside the door of each room to the colour contained within. Some people went for their own hue, some didn’t. You figure Vriska is the kind to go for her own colour. Because of this you knock on the door with confidence.

Only it opens to Terezi.

“Hello, Sollux. How good to smell you here.” Terezi grins up at you.

“Oh. I thought this was Vriska’s-”

“It is! I was just leaving, here, we’ll swap!” Terezi suggests. She grabs your shoulders and whirls the two of you around so you’re in the room and she’s outside. She grins at you and smacks the button to shut the door, leaving you apparently alone in Vriska’s block.

You stand there uneasily, the place is a mess. She’s not only moved around the stuff that was in here and pulled loads of things off of the shelves but she’s also unloaded more or less anything that seemed to be in her sylladex already and seemingly thrown it at random across the floor and tables.

You’re about to leave when the door to the ablution block slides open and, in a cloud of steam, Vriska walks out thankfully dressed but still trying to wrestle a brush through her wet hair. She freezes when she sees you.

“I knocked on the door and Terezi…” you try to explain.

“Yeah, fine.” Vriska sighs, rolling her eyes. You guess if you’re quadranted with Terezi eventually you get used to her weirdness.

“We need to talk.” you blurt out.

Vriska narrows her eyes at you and yanks the hairbrush out of her hair.

“Does anything good ever come from that sentence?” she says.

“Yeah, sorry, it’s bad news.” you nod in agreement.

“I went out to talk to Hal last night, caught him up on Dahvid’s order to you all. Which, oh, he wants the exact wording of that and I wasn’t there so…” you trail off.

“I can write it down.” Vriska nods and walks to the desk and starts searching for a pen. You spot one on the loungeplank and float it over to her.

“Don’t touch my stuff, nerd.” Vriska says and snatches it out of the air.

“I literally didn’t.” you say smugly, holding your hands up.
“So, the rest of the news?” she prompts as she writes.

“Right, so I come back in and I hear this muttering. I go check it out and find Rohhze trying to complete Dayvhe’s command for her to stand in a certain spot in the main room because she’s not sure if she did it before or if Terezi lied. I couldn’t talk her down so Dayvhe had to spend all night trying to get her to let it go.” you tell her.

“Given the stakes we’re dealing with for The Grand Entertainer’s orders…” Vriska doesn’t need to finish that sentence, it’s too high risk to try. He has to remove them, Dayvhe can’t do it. Maybe someday but not now.

“I think I should maybe try talking to the other goldbloods, find out what their deal is with my ancestor. They seem to care that I’m his descendant so maybe that could be something, plus I bet they’re pretty vital for this planetoid running even if it’s just power.” you reason.

“Yeah, Terezi was telling me as well about this collection of skeletons he has in a basement level. He seems obsessed with them so that could be worth ransoming later too.” Vriska agrees.

“What about Dionte?” you ask.

“Since I’ve been here I’ve changed my mind on that, we’ve more to lose than he does. Sure he doesn’t want to kill Signless’ descendant but as far as we know John, Jayded, Jayekh and Jayyne don’t have any ancestors that he knows. He’s certainly no fan of Equius’ and even I know my ancestor had a… controversial past. If we threaten Dionte’s life he’ll probably happily threaten ours right back to make you turn him over and follow through on it if he has to. He doesn’t seem like the most reasonable guy when he’s upset so it won’t go well.” Vriska says grimly.

“So our plan…”

“Is mostly fucked, yeah.” she nods.

Vriska hands you the paper with Dahvid’s words on them and you fold it up and put it away to send to Hal later. She’s scowling as she drops onto the loungeplank and shoves a bunch of stuff off of it and onto the floor and then sits there slid down with her arms crossed sulkily against her chest.

“There’s still my virus and this potential thing with the goldbloods.” you tell her, there’s still hope.

“Yeah, great. All your stuff, it’s nothing to do with me.” she mutters, glaring off to the side.

“We’re still getting out of here, what does it matter if we’re changing the plan as long as we all get out fine.” you point out. Vriska hisses and leaps to her feet, almost chest to chest with you.

“But it was OUR plan! Now it’s Sollux saves the day and I don’t want to need rescuing by you! Even my bombs aren’t going to work because sooner or later they’re going to find the ship and we can’t kill Dahvid without the rest of us dying too so I do NOTHING!” Vriska snaps at you.

“I’m not rescuing you! We’re rescuing them! We’re in- oh.” you were just about to shove her back but it clicks.

“You’re mad because if I’m the one quote unquote doing all the work then it’s not cahoots because we’re not working together. You’re mad because you think this means we’re not in cahoots anymore.” you say as it occurs to you.

You’re certain you’re right and Vriska looks like she wants to punch you in the face for it, which if anything is just more confirmation that you’re correct.
You’re not sure if you’re about to be very stupid or kind of brave but either way you’re doing it.
(You’re making it happen.)

“I don’t want to be in cahoots anyway.” you say.

Vriska jerks back from you obviously hurt, bad place to pause that sentence but you couldn’t help it, your throat went all dry. How do people do this? This is terrifying.

“I want-” Oh god, she’s just staring at you now.

“I hate you.” you add lamely.

And now you’re both just standing there in silence. Vriska’s eyes are almost perfectly round behind her glasses and you’re starting to wonder if you can set yourself on fire with your own psionics just to give you an excuse to not be here.

“Are you… feeling alright? Like yourself I mean?” Vriska asks cautiously.

You could use that as a get out. Like haha no she’s right you’re clearly having an episode you should go now and then later pretend you don’t remember this. But no, you should have some conviction.

“There’s nothing wrong with me.” you tell her sharply.

“Hah, there’s plenty wrong with you, I can tell you that. But you’re yourself again?” she laughs a little, at least she’s not angry at you for what you’re saying.

“Look, I know I got a little weird before we got here but it’s like you said I got back to Dayvhe and Karkat again and I’m fine.” you assure her.

Vriska is nodding absently, staring at you. You’re feeling more than a little foolish for just blurting out your feelings like that, you should have known Karkat was just seeing what he wanted. He knew your feelings and he’s a romantic, of course he thinks things will work out. Shit, at least Dayvhe will be pleased that you’re not-

You were too busy in pessimistic thought to react in time to Vriska launching herself at you. It’s like a full body slam that sends you both staggering back several steps and in your joint stumbling her attempt to kiss you sinks at least one of her fangs fully through your lip.

“OW! FUCK!” you yell, covering your lip. You look at your hand and it comes back yellow, you’re bleeding!

“Whoops. But YES, finally! You were so screwy I couldn’t trust it enough to do anything because I didn’t want you to not mean it!” Vriska declares gleefully as she paces back and forth seemingly reveling in her own supposed brilliance and not paying to attention to the fact that she’s maimed you. You run a tip of your tongue over the still bleeding cut, goddamn that hurts.

“You bit me!” you point out because it needs to be stated.

Vriska narrows her eyes at you and comes closer, catching your face in her hand and tilting your head so she can see it.

“Don’t be such a wiggler.” she sneers at you.

Oh, oh really? You zap her with your psionics in the side, not enough to do real damage but enough to hurt. She yelps and jumps backwards, letting you go as she does.
“Don’t be such a wiggler.” you say mockingly back to her.

Vriska launches herself at you but you’ve already dodged out of the way, your pulse is racing in excitement as you try to stay out of her way. Only your foot catches on something from her sylladex she’d just dumped on the floor, you just catch your balance when Vriska tackles you against the loungeplank. You try to fly up to escape it but you can’t and all you manage to do is pitch your weight too high up so instead of you both landing on the furniture as she intended the whole loungeplank tips back. The angle she’s stupidly rearranged it to means one end of it hits the wall with a bang as you all go down. You just catch yourself with your elbow so you don’t land back ports first but that just makes your arm explode into awful pins and needles. Which, speaking of exploding, the fall knocks a lamp off of a nearby endtable and that shatters with a loud smash.

You get the feeling from the feral look in her eyes that she’s about to try and kiss you again, given that you’re still bleeding from her last attempt you’re not going to let her. Fitting that the second time would be one you’d instigate. You lean up to meet her and kiss her first. It’s a great kiss, no one starts horribly bleeding because of it.

As much as pitch romance movies emphasise the chaotic struggle and destruction of things in pitch encounters, which ok yes you have broken a lamp, had you lip split and tipped the loungeplank, it doesn’t show just getting to make out with your kismesis as much. It’s not as dramatic, but it sure as hell is great! If you were just showily fighting her you wouldn’t get to be here. You wouldn’t be under her on the floor and getting to run your fingers over the scar around her robotic eye. You’ve not touched it before and despite her getting it through an explosion big enough to lose her an eye it’s not too noticeable, but it’s cool.

She breaks- ugh you can hear her quirk in your head- she breaks the kiss to ask you something in that way where she’s trying to play off that she’s totally certain about something but you know she’s not.

“Kismeses?” she asks, like she obviously knows you are. Except she’s asking so clearly she doesn’t.

Still, jerking her around for fun will actually lose you this quadrant which is the opposite of what you want, so you go along with it.

“Definitely.” you agree enthusiastically. Vriska beams and licks the cut on your lip, gross.

“This is the weirdest sweep of my life.” you add.

You completely flipped on your thoughts about Aradia, you got a moirail, bombed a town to kill a lusus, made a whole new quadrant with Karkat, got laid and more or less immediately ditched Feferi, got helmed twice, trollnapped and tortured, invaded a planetoid and now you’re Vriska’s kismesis. What the fuck?

“The most interesting sweep of your life.” she counters and pulls at your shirt.

“Don’t you dare rip that, it’s literally the only shirt I have that I can wear.” you warn her. Okay, you have another but technically Dayvhe has it and you think he’s going to return it to Kanaya so your point stands.

“What?” Vriska snorts, leaning in again.

You crackle threateningly at her only suddenly Vriska jerks back with an actual cry of pain and surprise. Wait, shit, that shouldn’t have hurt her. It’s just a lightshow, if it lands it’s like being flicked at most. Vriska’s hand is pressed to her artificial shoulder and she seems both genuinely in pain and
surprised by it.

“Did that hurt?” you ask, sitting up with her since she’s sat on your legs and not your middle.

“Not on my skin but my shoulder. It- ow, it feels all wrong.” she winces, rubbing at her metal arm and the joint to her shoulder.

“Psionics fuck with circuits sometimes, if it activated one that deals with your nerves then maybe that’s it.” you theorise.

“Maybe. Ugh, it’s fine now.” she insists, shaking her arm out. You won’t do that again. Sure you want to hurt her a little but causing her real agony just isn’t something you want to do. It doesn’t make her stronger, it just makes you an asshole. She’s obviously annoyed and upset that she has this weakness she didn’t know about, probably even more so that it makes her weaker specifically to you and no one else.

“I guess that’s fair.” you say thoughtfully, leaning back on your elbows to look up at her.

“Fair? How?” Vriska sneers and pulls her hair over her good shoulder so she can peel her sleeve back and look at the mechanical joint on the other.

“I could accidentally spark and fuck up your arm, you could accidentally get a claw in my ports and really badly hurt me.” you shrug like it’s nothing.

It’s not nothing though, is it? She exposed a weakness, having obvious weaknesses isn’t something you really want to do around a pitch partner. Not for lack of trust but more that exposing all the places you’re messed up or vulnerable is more the red/pale side of the quadrants. It’s a thing that endears pity, not hate. So you offer a match, she has a weakness, you have one. It makes you even, you’re on level footing again. Obviously you aren’t actually. If you so wanted you could rip her arm right off without any psionic strain at all, biological arm or fake one, you could turn her to ash. She can’t control you for more than a second anymore. In terms of sheer immediate destructive power you have her beat easily, it’s not an even contest. But that’s not the point.

Vriska is cunning, devious and yes she’s impulsive and petulant too which irritates you because you know how much of a force she is to be reckoned with when she’s playing the long game instead of just reacting. And there, there it is, you want her to be better. You can tear shit down no problem but Vriska can plan things to make people beg for that destruction because it’ll get them away from the vindictive shit she can do. You ought to know, she damn near ruined your whole life at one point.

So it’s a show, a symbolic thing you guess. You agree not to hurt her arm, she agrees not to do anything to your ports and you’re both equal again.

“Right.” Vriska agrees and drops her sleeve. She returns her focus to you and rests her hand on your new shirt.

“We need to get everyone out of these rooms, I’m no help in here.” Vriska says seriously.

“If we have to we can exchange Dionte for that freedom, maybe.” you suggest.

“I hate that idea but we might have to. Hold off on that for a bit longer if we can. But then again just knowing we have him might make him lose it.” she frowns.

You shift your weight to one arm so you can reach up and run your fingers through Vriska’s partly dried but mostly wet hair. It must take forever to get dry, you barely have the patience for yours and yours is short. It grew out one time after Aradia died and you didn’t bother to cut it until Karkat
showed up, mocked you for looking like a dandelion and dragged you out to get it cut.

“Karkat’s going to be really smug when he finds out about this.” you say slowly. Sure, he’ll be pleased but also very ‘I told you so’ about it.

“Terezi too.” Vriska agrees.

“Ugh, I don’t want to have this conversation with Dayvhe.” you groan, falling onto your back.

“I have no intention of being nice to him if he’s an asshole about this, me dating you doesn’t mean I have to be.” she warns you.

“As long as neither of you actually fight each other I’m staying out of it. It’s not like he can veto my quadrants. I think he just thinks you’re planning on, I don’t know, cutting my chest open and selling my organs on the black market or something sinister like that.” you sigh.

“If you’re dead I can’t make out with you.” Vriska says silkily, leaning over you so a lot of the room gets blocked off by the sweep of her hair. She probably is trying to be real smooth here, too bad for her that she’s dating an asshole like you.

“I can’t believe you wouldn’t kiss me if I was dead. Kiss my corpse you coward.” you demand.

In some kind of rare benevolent moment of the universe not ruining things for you she decides you kiss you again despite that thing you just said. You have to swat her away from putting claw holes in your nice new shirt a few times to which she compromises by pushing the damn thing almost as far up as it’ll go without you taking it off.

“Cold hand!” you gasp in alarm as her metal hand runs up your side and your ever so sympathetic kismesis just laughs in your face. Thankfully the laws of thermodynamics are on your side and it warms up soon enough but, wow, surely that’s got to be cold even for her.

You spend a while taking the edge off of the frustration of your previously unfulfilled crush. Long enough to end up on the other side of the room having knocked over a different table and banged a bookcase against the wall loudly when you introduced Vriska to it so you could turn the tables on her so to speak. You can’t let her think she’s winning after all.

It was all going really well until some idiot starts knocking on the door, you want to ignore it but you’re annoyed at being interrupted.

“What?!” you demand loudly right as you remember that this isn’t your block and you shouldn’t technically be in here.

“Uh… Sollux? I thought this was Vriska’s-” John’s muffled voice comes from the other side of the door. Ah, shit.

“It is!” Vriska says loudly and cheerfully and in your moment of blinded outrage she swaps your places. You can’t help but note that you don’t hit the shelf edges with your ports, it’s more your side first and then there’s not enough impact to matter at all. She’s still paying attention.

“Normally we’d come back but Dayvhe’s ancestor is here.” Jayded’s voice comes through the door also.

“Shit.” you whisper.

“We’ll be right there, stall him!” Vriska orders them loudly.
“We need a new plan, if we don’t use the Dionte thing soon he’s going to find out and that’ll be worse. We’ve got to… to flip the narrative on it somehow. Act like we’re doing him a favour.” Vriska says in a low and hurried voice. Her eyes dart around like the answer might be somewhere just in sight that she’s so far overlooked.

“That’s the most Vriska thing I’ve ever heard.” you snicker, making her glare at you.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she growls.

“Oh no, my plan’s gone wrong! Quick, pretend that this was my plan the whole time, no one will know!” you say putting on a voice far higher than hers actually is.

You’re going to blame having your head tipped back slightly from laughing as the reason why you weren’t able to stop her from getting a sizable bite in at the side of your neck. It hurts but- uh- if she was hoping to dissuade you from mocking her with this she’s definitely failed and you’re pretty sure the delighted little trill from your chest just told her as much. You can feel her vindictive smile against your skin and when she lets you go you’re both out of breath.

“We should get out there.” she says sensibly, you nod in agreement.

You take a moment to get your shirt straightened out again and try to make your hair look like you didn’t have someone pulling at it recently but since there’s no mirrors in this area you’ve no idea how successful you are. Both exiting her block you make your way to the main room only to find that everyone else in your group is already there. Heiress Leiyah and Nicole Kidman are standing together by the door. Nicole at least seems pleased to see you but you can’t say the same for the other woman whose arm is in a sling.

“She seems to hold a grudge about me stabbing her.” Vriska says under her breath.

“I don’t remember that.” you whisper back and Vriska sighs. Yeah you may not have been all with it.

On the large and elegant loungeplank Rohhze is sat on the arm, staring ahead blankly as The Grand Entertainer clad entirely in what is either mutant red or imperial red but it covers every aspect from the laces of his shoes to the stitching on his clothes. He’s free of greasepaint today and instead is wearing shades that are unpleasantly similar to Dayvhe’s own if not for the lenses and frames of them being the same red as everything else he’s wearing.

“You made a right goddamn mess up in here.” he says softly and runs his fingers through her hair.

“I didn’t MEAN to! I was trying to fix it and- look, can you just undo it? I thought I had but-” Dayvhe whines in distress. You guess when Rohhze woke up she wasn’t better at all. Kanaya is teary eyed with worry and is clinging to Karkat.

The monster you came here to kill sighs like he cares about Rohhze’s wellbeing and tucks her hair behind her earfins so he can lean in close. You don’t catch what he says as he whispers it so softly, you don’t even stand a chance of reading his lips because relative to your position Rohhze’s face is in the way. You watch her expression suddenly snap from blank to alive and aware. Rohhze jerks back away from him in alarm, falling off of the arm of the chair. She would have landed on the floor if Dahvid had not caught her in time. When she has her feet under her again he lets her go, though she backs off nervously.

“It takes practice but you can avoid doing that to people and learn to undo it too. But it’s fine, I couldn’t fix that at your age either.” Dahvid says calmly to Dayvhe. Dayvhe has his back to you but
you can see the way he hunches over a little as if to protect himself from that idea, his arms wrapped around himself.

“I don’t want to do it ever, to anyone.” he protests weakly.

“It doesn’t work like that, you have to.” Dahvid replies.

“Is that what you tell yourself so you can sleep?” you interrupt and the adult’s attention shifts from Dayvhe to you, his eyes locked on you behind his red lenses.

“You don’t get to lecture me about ethics with the number of people your little party and you in particular injured getting in here.” Dahvid says sharply.

You’re about to argue a very cutting point about how you don’t have to justify your rescue activities in relation to him controlling the minds of innocent people and trollnapping a whole bunch of people and then imprisoning you all. It was going to be a good point one that would be incisive, only Dayvhe gets there first and he’s not even making that point. Instead he’s staring at you with horror.

“What happened to your FACE?!” Dayvhe yells, making sure that everyone is looking right at you.

Your- oh, shit, your lip. Thanks a lot, Vriska.

“Oh, uh-” you try. Vriska is saying nothing, the unhelpful asshole that she is.

“And your neck.” Kanaya adds.

Wait, your neck? You move your hand there and feel the dull throb of pain under your fingers right where Vriska bit you earlier. You shrugged it off because you know she didn’t break the skin but you didn’t stop to consider the possibility that she left a mark on you.

You can just feel Vriska trying not to laugh and it’s all you can do to not stamp on her foot in retaliation.

Terezi launches herself from her chair to a stop just before the two of you.

“Who confessed? I have to know, tell me now.” she demands.

“What? Why?” you ask and you see Vriska looking equally surprised.

“Please say it was you.” Terezi says hopefully, looking at Vriska.

“What? No, he cracked first.” Vriska brags, which is an interesting way of saying that you were the one that got up the guts to say something first instead of her.

“No, no, no!” Dayvhe wails.

“Nooooo!” Terezi whines miserably.

“Shut up both of you. This isn’t about you Dayvhe, we talked about this. And Terezi, pay up.” Karkat grins darkly.

Terezi whines and stomps over to Karkat to slap several bills and some handwritten note in his open palm.

“Were you betting on us?!” Vriska demands.
“Yeah, and you made me lose!” Terezi groans and falls back into her seat ‘accidentally’ elbowing John on her way down.

“Wow, Signless was never this mercenary about things.” Dahvid says, raising an eyebrow.

“Get off your moral high hoofbeast it’s not like I can spend it anywhere right now, is it?” Karkat says pointedly.

“On that note, Nicole you said about the other goldbloods.” you say, looking at her.

“Yes, everyone’s really very excited about you and the docterrorist says you’re fine, thank goodness. I have the actual results here if you’re interested.” Nicole says, holding out her tablet.

“Oh no you don’t. I wouldn’t trust a Captor with anything more advanced than an electric toothbrush or else he’ll be in our whole damn network!” Dahvid orders her and Nicole retracts her hand. You don’t think he’s actually making her but he is her boss you guess.

Yes, Dahvid, it sure would be a shame if you had access to anything computational and could, say, have a virus infect the entire planetoid. Hey, you wonder how it’s going that virus you did code and is doing that exact thing right now. The sad part is that wouldn’t have worked quite the same if John’s so-dumb-it-worked plan hadn’t gone off perfectly.

“Can I at least show him that he’s not going to die of an infection? If he’s not touching it then it’s no problem, right?” Nicole reasons and her boss pouts a little but nods.

The text on the tablet is pretty small and unlike your husktop everything she has is yellow on white, you run everything in dark mode because eye strain and migraines are a thing for you, plus you don’t have your glasses. You squint at the tablet and make out that you don’t have an infection, which is great. There’s also a note on your serum lithium level which is uh… bad. Bad is the number that is but you had missed doses before this so that’s fine, you’ll be good now. There’s notes on… on…

“Are you ok?” Nicole asks worriedly.

“Fine, I just don’t have my glasses.” you tell her as you skim over levels of vitamins and nutrients and what have you. You’re not sure what those numbers should be but them being written in red with notes by them is probably a bad sign.

“Are you out of spares? I did wonder.” Roxxie pipes up.

“I think there’s a few back at your place but the only ones I had on me I was wearing when I fell through the atmosphere so they probably melted. I wasn’t wearing them when I woke up and it wasn’t exactly a priority after then.” you shrug.

“But you’re basically blind without them. No, wait, that explains Vriska.” Dayvhe says with mock thoughtfulness. It catches you by surprise and makes you laugh louder than you’d meant to and, terrible vision or not, you can still see Vriska scowling at him.

“Dayvhe, that wasn’t nice.” Kanaya reprimands him with that particular lilt to her voice that lets you know that she’s still amused anyway.

“It was funny though.” Dayvhe counters.

“Do you know your prescription?” Nicole asks.

“Uh.” you say.
“I know it, or at least I had it written down in my palmhusk.” Karkat offers.

“I had it on mine too, you sent me the file with all the details on him.” Dayvhe agrees.

“That’s nice of your… moirail?” she says uncertainly, narrowing her pink and blue eyes as she looks at Dayvhe and Karkat together clearly trying to work out what’s going on there.

“I thought mini-me was your moirail.” Dahvid says, chipping in for the first time in a while. You guess he was just watching until now.

“Fuck your thoughts and fuck you too.” you tell him sharply.

“I have to concur with Sollux here, his quadrants are really none of your business, buster. Besides it’s not like we’re your guests here and this is polite conversation, you’re holding us prisoner and Sollux was having a conversation with the one person here who’s been of any help.” Jayyne interjects.

“Yeah, you don’t get to jump in on that goodwill.” Jayded agrees.

“Wow, why the hostility? I was just asking about something Dayvhe himself told me before.” Dayvhe’s ancestor says defensively.

It’s funny, Dayvhe’s described the passive stuff he and presumably his ancestor do as endearing goodwill and positive feelings but you suppose that if someone starts out with a very negative view of him then it’ll take a while for that to get somewhere useful for him. The people who have been here the longest are closest to hearing out the things he has to say but most of your camp, even if they’re rationalising the orders they’ve been given, are still pretty squarely in ‘fuck that guy, he’s a jerk’ territory.

“Also, since we have you here, Ms. Fisher I just have to say my bit.” Jayekh says suddenly, looking at the injured Carrie.

“You are- were- one of my favourite actresses and I adored your work in the whole Star Wars franchise.” he says in a rush.

“I wrote those.” Dahvid adds.

“No one asked.” Vriska snaps at him.

“But you working with this maniac, doing the things you’ve done here, well I just can’t support you anymore! You always seemed so funny and genuine in your videos and interviews and your Chitr feed was rip roaring but I just can’t anymore.” Jayekh tells her firmly.

“Well maybe you should learn more about our situation before you decide that, have the others not told you about what we actually do here?” Carrie asks, making a sweeping gesture to your group with her good arm.

“I think our sources have been significantly tampered with, don’t you?” Jayyne points out.

“Exactly where did you stab her?” you ask under your breath.

“Near her shoulder, I was going for her bloodpusher but she dodged so I stabbed her there instead and then hit her in the head. Control me once, shame on you; control me twice, shame on me.” Vriska intones seriously.
“If it’s just a matter of seeing what we do here then, I’m sure that could be arranged. And, Sollux, if you would like to meet the other goldbloods I could set that up, not to mention get you some glasses made.” Nicole suggests, taking her tablet back and holding it in her folded arms as she looks at The Grand Entertainer with polite hopefulness.

“It might help change their minds but may I suggest supervision. One of us for one or two of them at most?” Carrie suggests.

“Seeing as locked doors aren’t even a deterrent to some it’s probably a smart idea.” Dahvid says pointedly and looks down at Dayvhe who is remorseless.

“If I hadn’t gone up there you might still be dangling by your leg from the roof.” Dayvhe points out. And then you could have swept in here and taken him away before that problem causing kill command had been put in. Goddamnit Dayvhe why’d you do that?

“And he is not to be given any computational technology, no smart anything, got it?” he adds, pointing right at you.

“I won’t give him anything like that.” she nods.

“Good, if it stops people yelling at me in my own hive-” he says huffily.

“You could go outside and we could yell at you there, we could do a whole tour.” Jayded says cheerfully and John quietly fistbumps her.

“I don’t have to put up with this, I’m leaving!” Dahvid says dramatically and sweeps out of the room.

“I’ll have breakfast sent up. And Dayvhe, you really should be careful around her for a day or so.” Carrie says, looking at Rohhze. With that said she leaves with one less fan than she entered, making Nicole the only adult in the room.

“I’ll need to make a few calls but I’ll be back later.” she says with a smile and then with a small nod of respect she too excuses herself.

“Definitely a way out through that angle.” Vriska agrees quietly.

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“I did say.” you reply.

“Hey, Sollux, just eff why eye you have like a HUGE hickey like right there.” Roxxie says loudly, pointing to her neck.

“Yes, thank you Roxxie I worked that out.” you grumble and this time Vriska does laugh in your face.

“Aw, Rox, you’ll embarrass them.” Dirkka teases.

“That assumes Vriska has shame which she does not.” Kanaya adds.

“It is pretty cute.” Jayne giggles.

“Okay, I’m leaving now.” you groan and walk off.

You’re not surprised at all that you find yourself being followed and less so that it’s by Dayvhe and Karkat. Dayvhe quickly drags you into your shared block and worriedly looks you over as an
unconcerned Karkat beams and recounts his winnings.

“I can’t believe you bet on this.” you accuse him.

“Hey, Terezi proposed the bet, I’m happy to take her money and the sweet taste of victory any day. Vriska cares too much about not looking dumb in front of people she gives a crap about, you care more about real shit. I was obviously going to win, now she owes me a favour too. I have it in writing.” Karkat grins at you.

“Karkat, she hurt him this is serious.” Dayvhe says sharply and gently touches the cut on your lip that’s just starting to stick together properly.

“I’m fine, we’re fine.” you tell him.

“But you can’t trust her, she’s dangerous! After everything she’s done-” Dayvhe says.

“Like helping me get here? Like not calling me crazy and checking out the place that I met Troll Will Smith? Like sitting with me when I got my back ports put in or fixing my shoulder and my nose?” you interrupt.

Dayvhe opens his mouth but Karkat talks over him at high volume.

“DO NOT SAY THE THING YOU’RE THINKING OF SAYING. AT THE VERY LEAST THINK OF HOW IT’D SOUND FIRST!” Karkat yells.

You think Dayvhe is grinding his teeth a little and if they’re going to get distracted with their own black dealings you’re just gonna go.

“I’m worried for you.” he says slowly and diplomatically.

“It’s not like she can mind control me, believe me I’ve checked.” you point out.

“But even without that she’s highblooded, that’s dangerous.” Dayvhe argues.

“The only people here who aren’t higher than me are Dirkka and Tavros, assuming we’ve no idea where you two are supposed to be because your ancestor is purple so who knows there.” you say loudly.

“Yeah, plus two of your closest friends are blue and violet, you can’t really play that card. Besides which an heiress helped raise you so, yeah, no.” Karkat interrupts, mediating as usual.

“Fine, but she personally is dangerous, you have to admit that!” Dayvhe insists.

You were just talking to her about how she stabbed an adult in the chest in that invasion you helped her plan and carry out. The first time you got back in touch with her was because you needed a bomb and someone with weak enough ethics to be willing to let you use it. Yeah, Vriska’s dangerous but you’re pitch for her so it’s part of the appeal.

“Dayvhe… I’m dangerous. Remember what you did when you rescued me before? You’re dangerous.” you tell him quietly.

“Yeah but…” Dayvhe stops and just stares at the floor. You can hear the scared little whine pitching high in his chest, he’s genuinely afraid here.

“You’ve never had to properly share him before.” Karkat says softly and walks over to you both.
“Says the other person dating him.” Dayvhe says incredulously, looking up from the floor to eye Karkat.

“Made up quadrant or not and complicated multi-colour smearing aside I’m still a middle leaf analogue here. Even if my relationship with him is about more than just you a large part of it is all about your relationship together. Vriska’s relationship with him is nothing to do with you, this whole thing is nothing to do with you and you don’t like it.” Karkat’s tone is gentle even if his words themselves are confrontational.

“No that’s not- I’m not selfish! She’s a bad person, she’s dangerous! I can’t just let him be hurt again, I’m already a shitty enough moirail without allowing him to just walk into the half robotic arms of genuine danger!” Dayvhe says, throwing his hands up in the air and walking off only to turn and walk back again as he paces the room anxiously.

“You’re not a shit moirail.” you protest but Dayvhe seems unconvinced.

“But that’s the thing Dayvhe, I told you this already. It’s not about you. You’ve not even asked him how he feels about her.” Karkat says.

Dayvhe stops to look at you and you’re all standing there silently until Karkat gives you a ‘well get on with it’ kind of look.

“I… hate her.” you say, looking down at the floor.

“I know she’s a self obsessed, self righteous, morally questionable bitch. But she does care about people, she was as determined to rescue Terezi as I was you two and she at least is aware that she’s a self obsessed, self righteous, morally questionable bitch which is more than some people. She’s driven and single minded about things, when she actually focuses on something instead of bragging about how good she is at things she’s actually impressive. I did see the FLARP tables when Aradia still played. If she was better about actually doing things right instead of bragging she’d be almost unstoppable and I know I could make-” you can feel how your face is going dark so you focus really hard on the laces of Karkat’s shoes instead of what you’re saying.

“When she checked out that hive for me we were talking in code to get around Hal watching me, so we were talking in DnD terms. Stupid I know but it worked. I was trying to say about how I wasn’t sure if what I saw was real or not because my thinkspoon is broken trash-” you begin again.

“Sollux, don’t say that.” Dayvhe says softly but you shake your head.

“But I had to say it like it was a game. So I said my character had a curse and he thought he saw something but didn’t know if it was real or not. She said her character would go check it out but that I was wrong about mine. That it wasn’t a curse, but a- a price for overpowered magic, a way of making my character balance out so it wasn’t overpowered.” you tell them.

“She doesn’t pity me for my stupid defect thinkspoon. She acted like it was the only way I could be taken down a notch. I like that. I like that she thinks I’m someone worth competing with outside of the two things I’m good at. I want to be smarter and stronger for…” you stop because you’re starting to embarrass even yourself here.

You chance a look up to see Karkat beaming at you with obvious self satisfaction and Dayvhe just staring at you.

“And Terezi bet against you.” Karkat laughs quietly.

“Do you really feel all of that for her? That big time romance movie stuff?” Dayvhe asks.
“I wouldn’t call it that.” you protest.

“I would!” Karkat says brightly.

“Could you not be so obnoxiously pleased about this already, Kar?” Dayvhe despairs as he glares at Karkat.

“I live for romance, you know this. So fuck off and let me enjoy this, and by fuck off I mean stay right here and resolve your emotional problems you dumbass.” Karkat retorts.

You are in a stupid three way relationship populated entirely by idiots, yourself included.

“I can’t pretend to like her, you know I don’t. Which maybe makes sense? My whole deal is looking after you and even if you forgive things I can’t, because what if it happens again? So obviously someone you hate is going to be someone I hate. I just hate and mistrust her platonically which you obviously don’t, I mean, whoa.” Dayvhe says with a weak laugh.

“I don’t need you to like her, I don’t like her! I hate her and obviously I don’t want you to hate her like I hate her.” you point out.

“Yeah, let’s not do that. We don’t need to invent a sixth quadrant. Five is already breaking the definition of a QUADrant, six is just straight up anarchy in this bitch.” he laughs.

“People are just going to think we can’t count.” you agree.

Dayvhe seems to stop to think, rubbing the back of his neck and mulling things over for a moment.

“If things went bad with her, you’d get an auspistice or tell us, right?” Dayvhe asks.

“Of course I’d tell you two, that’s how this works. As for an auspistice… she’d have to agree on that, it’s not ash unless you all agree.” you say. After all, you all had to agree with Karkat for your thing, if you hadn’t then your best friend had just awkwardly asked you both out and got rejected.

“Right. But you’re happy about this thing with her? For real?” Dayvhe asks.

You smile so wide that it makes your lip hurt, so you think that and you nodding firmly is answer enough.

“Then… I don’t like it and I’m worried but… ok. I want you to be happy and if something Vriska does makes you happy then maybe she’s not the worst troll in existence because I ran for my station on a pro-Sollux-being-happy platform and those are my goals. So if it means—” Dayvhe rambles.

“Fun tangent, would ignore again. I think what he means to say is we’re happy for you.” Karkat talks over him and squeezes you into a quick hug.

“I am, I’m sorry I’ve been a shitty moirail lately.” Dayvhe says and comes close enough that he can touch you, his thumb just ghosts over the cut on your lip and you know he’s trying to be supportive but he’s worried. You’re never worried about him with Karkat but you’ve known Karkat for forever. He doesn’t know Vriska all that well and a lot of what he knows isn’t great.

“You’re not a bad moirail, I don’t think that.” you tell him.

He sighs a little sadly and leans in to kiss you. It’s soothing and pale, so sweet you ought to check for cavities after. You get that feeling, like he’s trying to put enough into it that your cut will somehow heal through sheer force of pale pity. He wants to protect you from something he sees as a threat, you
get that, you were prepared to bomb a whole planet to be sure no one could come after Dayvhe and Karkat. It’s irrational and overprotective but pity is overwhelming like that sometimes. He means well, he wants you to be happy and he’s not getting in your way.

“I promise I’d tell you if something was wrong.” you vow.

You have things to do. You have a virus to check up on, you have wording to feed back to Hal and information about what happened to Rohhze to give him. Hal might also have some salient advice on what to do in regards to Dionte, in fact you could gather the whole rest of the ‘rescue team’ and try to pool opinions on that matter. It would also be wise to see what things everyone wants to investigate here if you can only go places with supervision now.

All of those would be more productive than ending up in a happy purr filled pile with Dayvhe and Karkat but nevertheless that’s what you end up doing. Your head is resting on Karkat’s soft middle and Dayvhe is tucked against Karkat’s side with his head on his shoulder.

“I told you it’d be ok.” Karkat says as he strokes his hand down Dayvhe’s side.

“You’re gonna be smug forever aren’t you? No, longer than forever, five-ever. Like if you cry every- AH!” Dayvhe yelps as Karkat pokes him in the ribs and it doesn’t matter how betrayed Dayvhe pretends to be, you’re still laughing.

“Were you two fighting about this?” you ask.

“No.” Karkat says.

“Yes.” Dayvhe says at the same time.

“It wasn’t a fight, you were just wrong and I was telling you so. I was also making sure you didn’t screw things up for all of us by opening your mouth before you thought things through.” Karkat corrects him.

“Oh, like you never do that.” Dayvhe retorts.

“I know I do, that’s why I don’t want to see you doing it too. I’m the one who screws everything up for myself, not you.” Karkat argues.

A silence falls between the three of you as you and Dayvhe stare up at a flustered Karkat who clearly didn’t mean to say the thing that he just did.

“KK, noooo.” you say, squeezing him tight.

“Aww, poor Karkat.” Dayvhe agrees and you watch him press a kiss to Karkat’s darkening face.

“I WASN’T SAYING IT TO GET SYMPATHY!” Karkat wails.

You look Dayvhe in the eye and decide silently and unanimously that Karkat needs to be drowned in a frankly mortifying amount of affection immediately. Karkat looks out for both of you so much, hell, for everyone. He’s a universal mediator even if he’s more explicitly romantically yours and Dayvhe’s. He keeps the peace but is godawful at properly looking out for himself.

You and Dayvhe collaborate on coming up with a list of all the things that are great about him and smothering him in enough physical affection that he can’t really protest. But unfortunately the whole paleish haze thing goes both ways, obviously no one’s papped your face but the whole vibe of the three of you has lowered your defenses a lot so when someone calls your name you just respond
with ‘yeah?’ . Which would be fine if it wasn’t an adult on the other side of the door right as you’ve got your hand right on Karkat’s face to pap him out of protesting that he’s not as great as Dayvhe is saying he is.

“Oh- OH! I’m- sorry I’ll just go!” Nicole says in a rush and the door slides shut again.

“The gold thing… ah, shit.” you mumble as you remember that oh yeah she was coming back. She said so.

“Are you going?” Dayvhe asks.

“I should. Gotta work on finding stuff out and… and making a plan. A new plan.” you say. You mess up Karkat’s hair affectionately (not that anyone would know) and get up.

“Do you need me? I could come with.” Dayvhe offers.

“No, you’re good.” you assure him, bending down to kiss him on the bridge of his nose.

“You’re good.” Karkat murmurs and pats you on the leg. Aw.

Mustering up a little urgency you leave the block to find Nicole hesitating a little further down the hallway.

“Sorry.” you apologise, shutting the door behind you.

“No, I’m sorry for intruding.” she says quickly.

“I didn’t mean to make it sound like you should have come in, that’s my bad.” you admit. Damnit you need to get a door that locks if you’re gonna deal with your quadrants. Quindrants. Whatever.

“If you want to go you can come with me.” she offers and you will gladly take the avenue out of that layer of awkwardness so you go with her.

In the main room Rohhze has her head in Kanaya’s lap as they talk softly. John, Jayded and Jayekh are all watching a movie together but everyone else is absent. You’re still observed as Nicole walks you out of the door and fully out of the wing of the building that you’ve all been occupying but it’s not like everyone is there staring.

“I thought-” Nicole hesitates and starts walking, leading you with her.

“I thought the Strydr boy was your moirail.” she says delicately.

“He is.” you say, like she didn’t just catch you papping someone else with him right there.

“So it’s a non-quadrant thing then with the three of you? I wonder if that’s just a Vantas influence. Your ancestor’s romantic relationships were certainly nontraditional, the same can be said of a lot of people here actually.” Nicole says.

“Really?” you ask curiously.

“Oh, certainly. When you see it around you it becomes easier to see it as an option for yourself. It’s not like everyone is like that but more people than you might imagine. Maybe one day we’ll have worn the censors down enough that we can start sneaking that stuff past them more but I doubt it’ll be in my lifetime.” she says Sadly.

“How do you even know there’s been progress at all? I know Dahvid claims he’s not the bad guy
and Karkat’s told me about all this stuff he supposedly does but if it’s that slow how do you know he’s not just saying he’s doing anything worthwhile?” you ask.

Nicole stops at the top of a staircase and smiles widely at you, she reaches out and taps you quickly on the end of the nose.

“That,” she says, “is a very smart question. I’m going to show you just how we know. Come on, we need to get out of the building.”

She leads you out through a side route that you haven’t seen before and people that you pass follow your progress with curious eyes.

“What exactly do you do here? Dayvhe said Carrie’s like his right hand troll, what about you?” you ask as Nicole holds up a card and taps a reader with it, unlocking an outside door.

“Carrie’s position is to be a sort of mediator between Entertainer and everything else. Sometimes that means making sure that if he’s in a poor mood that he doesn’t take it out on other people but she also ensures that he’s consistent with his message and that he attends things he doesn’t want to. She works a lot with the talent of his projects and she tends to make things happen, she’s a veteran of the industry really and everyone owes her favours. She doesn’t hold her tongue but she’s genuinely lovely. This whole mission with all of you and with Cal has been quite the disaster and it’s thrown her a bit, I think.” Nicole muses as she shoulders the door open and holds it for you.

“But me, well, obviously I act still. But my main job is a representative for the goldbloods. Anyone who’s gold and works for us even if they’re not on planet are part of our union, together we look out for our own interests, we largely follow The Psiionic’s words and we decide what we want. My job is to communicate the thoughts of the group. Everything from Entertainer asking our opinion about how a character has been written to fairness of contracts. I was elected to represent all of us.” she tells you.

“Does every colour here have that?” you ask in surprise.

“Oh, they have little meetings sometimes some of them, but it’s nothing like us.” Nicole smiles conspiritally and leads you through the gardens.

“And what do all of you think about us being prisoners here?” you ask, finally reaching the edge of the gardens and coming towards the main road. Nicole stands at the side of the road and taps her palmhusk screen.

“The debate on that is still going, actually. We were hoping we could get your input.” Nicole tells you as a scuttlebuggy pulls up. She opens the door and gestures for you to get in first.

You climb inside and the vehicle lurches off to parts unknown the moment Nicole closes the door after her.

“Given your destructive potential some of us think that it’s sensible to let all of you cool down and have everyone say their part before you choose what you want to do. A few people, myself included, have pointed out that given the damage you caused and that a lot of people are upset about it that having you under lock and key for a bit might be safer for you. Then again a large portion of people are arguing that your freedom is paramount, being imprisoned is a violation of your freedom and if we do that to you then we’ve become the very thing we hate.” she continues.

“I agree with that last one.” you tell her and the adult simply shrugs as if she can’t comment. You suppose her position has to be what the majority decides.
You look out of the window and realise that you’ve got a fair way from where you started.

“Does he know you’re taking me this far?” you ask.

“He didn’t explicitly forbid it.” she says, meaning no.

“You mean he didn’t control you.” you say instead.

“I meant what I said. We’re here, come on.” Nicole ushers you so you open the door and step out.

The building you stand before is solidly built and utilitarian in design with nothing in the way of decoration besides some gold painted edging and only a pass reader on the outside by the door. Nicole holds her pass up and the door beeps to let her in. Inside there are a number of large monitors and a few machines, a few largeish slots in the walls and what appears to be a vending machine of sorts.

‘Please Exchange Your Wires!’ a cheery sign reads and curiously you peer into one of the slots into the walls to catch sight of biowires in a container below.

“We all use biowires but they can degrade over time or become a means of infection, even with our latest ports. In ideal use they’re wonderful but they end up dropped on the floor or people spill things, nothing’s ideal in practice. We have an exchange program distributing fresh wires at zero cost. An effort undertaken by my predecessor’s predecessor actually.” Nicole explains without looking away from the screen she’s typing away at.

You turn your attention to the screens on the walls but they simply seem to display information about server load and number of users online. The load is phenomenally high actually and that’s not a small number of people online either. At least this screen isn’t painfully eye-strain inducing.

“What’s this?” you ask, pointing to it.

“Just a second, you’ll need this to get in and out of any of our buildings. They all look like this.” she says and hands you a card like hers. It just says Sollux Captor and has a little picture of you on it taken moments ago without you realising. You were midway through squinting at the screen, great.

“But as for what this is… well, you asked about our union of goldbloods and I said that ours was better than everyone else’s. This is why, come on.” Nicole smiles. She opens the vending machine and takes two wrapped up wires and leads you into the next room.

This place seems quiet, too quiet somehow. It’s very dimly lit and you can just make out a tall adult man seemingly asleep on his side on a splaysac near the corner of the room, but you can see the shadow of a biowire connecting him to the wall by a port in the back of his head.

“Come here, we’ll go in together and I can show you around. Our whole meeting space doesn’t exist in physical space. You only need the one port, whichever one you like will do but I prefer here.” Nicole says and reveals the port on her temple.

She passes you one wire and unwraps her own, plugging one end into the wall. She ‘helpfully’ psionically unwraps yours for you and plugs that into the port right next to hers in the wall.

“I don’t…” you try to find the words.

Nicole’s face falls a little and she taps her fingers on the wire.

“I think my experience with this is different to yours. I grew up probably like you, thinking I was
going to be enslaved and I acted before I was an adult because I wanted to be remembered for something. But then I got scouted for here and I was saved. I wasn’t helmed against my will, I was given freedom to things I could never have imagined, I got to keep acting and to help something wonderful. When I fly it doesn’t hurt, I’m not made to, I take people who work with me and for the same cause to places they need to be because I want to. Because I get paid or because I owed a friend a favour. But I can understand that your history with this…” Nicole trails off.

“It’s not exactly good.” you agree.

“I wouldn’t ask you to do this, knowing that, if I didn’t think you’d benefit. But… I’ll go under first. If you want to join me so I can show you what you should see then you can. And I do think you should if you want to understand us, if you want to see why this is worth it and understand both your ancestor and The Grand Entertainer.” she tells you gently.

You don’t really have much to say to that so you watch as she settles herself back on a big enough splay sac for the both of you and plugs the wire into her temple with a relaxed sigh and closes her eyes. She looks asleep, just like the other guy.

So you’re left standing there with two people out cold and a wire in your hands.

You should leave. You could. Your group would probably agree that this was sketchy but you know that it’s a chance to learn something that could be helpful and you’d be passing it up. Karkat would say that you don’t need to keep sacrificing yourself for everyone else but you’re not really convinced of that. If you could have done something and you didn’t then whatever happens afterwards is your fault.

You dither, the wire in your hand still, you hate being scared of things and you hate being curious about something and not knowing the answer. You sit down on the floor cross legged and lean against the splay sac. You’ve got at least enough familiarity with the port at the base of your thinkpan to easily plug right into there and-

You’re not on the floor.

Or you are but you’re on a wooden deck outside of a hive. Nicole has her back to you, sat on a step looking out at green grassland. She looks around at you with a smile and pats the boards by her. Warily you walk and sit. It takes a moment of noting that the white dress she’s wearing now isn’t what she had on a moment ago to finally catch that your own clothes are different. You’re wearing your old simple tshirt, you run your hands through your hair and realise that you don’t have ports. It’s like when you were under with Aradia and you didn’t realise it yet.

“It’s like a helm.” you say.

“A little, but it’s a lot more than that. This is the Dream, or my part at least. One day when I’m not acting anymore or representing us I’d like to live somewhere like this, so this is somewhere I dreamt up.” she says happily.

“Okay.” you say slowly.

“When this place was still new and The Grand Entertainer was still attracting people to this planetoid he needed basic things. Housing, sustainable utilities, a network, all kinds of things. We made a network, but we made it collaboratively, like this. Putting together code with ideas and everything at once, but it was new and we realised that we could leave things behind. It started easily at first, little messages, jokes, but then it became thoughts that would stay forever. As long as the session was active, as long as someone was using it they stayed and we liked that idea. It was a way for us to live
forever in a way.” she explains and a breeze blows through her hair and fills your chest with fresh air that’s entirely imagined.

“A particularly bright spark who wasn’t an actor but worked behind it all building things had an idea, he’s since been titled The Borrower. The Empress comes here every so often to antagonise The Grand Entertainer, sometimes it’s official business and sometimes it’s simply to be cruel.” she continues.

Overhead the sky goes dark and when you look up you can see the looming outline of the Empress’ famed personal ship.

“Your ancestor has been the helmsman for that ship for eighty sweeps but sixty five sweeps ago The Borrower snuck aboard and connected him to the Dream for only a few minutes, nine in total as it happens. We borrowed his memories, his thoughts, his words to us and he just escaped with his life without being caught. Ever since that night this session has never gone down, never been without a dreamer and his memories and ours live forever. We say we follow his thoughts because we have them right here.” Nicole says as she stands up. You follow her and the world around you falls away. Instead it’s as if you’ve fallen into some galaxy, swirled with colour and bright lights. Only you’ve seen galaxies and this isn’t like it, this is what people think they look like when in practice they’re much less compact.

As you focus you realise that the lights are eyes just like yours, people and their- their consciousness living in here. It’s a hum of activity that reminds you of your bees, thinking is happening here not just on an individual level but this network is hundreds of thousands of minds operating together and functioning like a mind of its own. It’s all of you. This is what Nicole represents, not the concerns of each of you but your cumulative thought of everyone as a unified force.

“We’ve seen the rebellion through his eyes.” Nicole says, raising a hand and the memory plays before you. A little hazy maybe but there.

It’s Karkat- no, Signless grinning brightly as Disciple shows him a stack of fliers.

“What do you think?” Signless asks, holding one up. The text, a little hazy in its recollection, espouses the view that rust is every bit as noble as blue and invites people with questions or opinions to come along. A hand that isn’t yours hands it to someone else, Dolorosa you guess.

“I think I’m going to be doing a lot of crowd control.” a voice says with a laugh that’s weirdly like yours.

“Why pick blue?” Dolorosa asks.

“It’s as high as I can get before I start having to deal with chucklevoodoos and I have to start somewhere.” Signless points out.

The memory cuts, they seemed young. Or- no, it felt young. You were seeing things from your ancestor’s eyes, he felt young. Maybe closer to Dirkka and Roxxie’s age than you’d assumed.

“But we have discussion, debate, social connection, design, planning.” she continues, pulling things up.

You touch one and suddenly you’re not with her anymore.

“Am I the asshole here?” A man asks loudly and you can feel people watching him, “I’m always the middle leaf and I don’t want to be. I was this guy’s moirail but every time he goes pitch for someone he drags me ash and I hate it, he always says he doesn’t trust anyone else but I lose my moirail for
perigees for something I don’t even want!”

You can feel the swell of opinion, of sympathy, empathy for him and for the people he discusses. The opinions around you start gaining weight, forming into categories almost. You can see the volume of people who think that he should raise his concerns to his moirail and if he doesn’t take them seriously then drop him from all quadrants. Others defend this kind of flipping as insensitive perhaps but understandable. More and more opinions weigh in but none quite like yours.

Like, does this guy only hate being ash because it pulls him out of pale? If that’s all it is then why not be both at once and only stay ash when it’s needed? As long as he can be unbiased in his mediation then why not blur it if that could work better?

As you think it your opinion forms and it slips from you without you meaning to. But attention falls on it and several other people lend weight to it. The opinions of everyone watching seem to settle, weighing themselves accordingly and the arena of the question passes, leaving you back with Nicole.

“Well, wait, what’s he going to do?” you ask her.

“He can choose to listen to or not listen to whatever he wants, he asked our opinion and he got it. Not that I saw the question but that’s how it works. We do the same thing with technical design for software and hardware if that’s your thing, open sourcing ideas and projects when people get stuck.”

“Of course, we have memorials and that’s one of the things that I want to show you, come on.” Nicole says, pulling you away.

Memorials? Like the skeletons Karkat told you that Dahvid had in the basement? That’s pretty creepy and Aradia used to be into dead things before she was one so you have a pretty high tolerance for that.

It’s a little disorienting conceiving this place as having space in a physical sense. As you look around you get it, that things are connected to each other as ideas are. Places here are tied by use and function and that’s all well and good when you’re seeing it visually but you can’t take it that literally even when you’re there because 3d space could never contain this kind of complexity.

Over there you can see how parts of a design forum are entangled with the debate section and as you look they try to resolve themselves into adjoining spaces but over there each of those things are intertwined with other ideas and things warp to fit around that. Organising this place as a website or in a physical building with people interacting that way would never work. Nicole wasn’t talking shit when she said none of the other castes could come close to doing this.

You stop and stand for a moment and try not to look at what’s around you, to stop letting the visual part of your mind process the input its getting into a reasonable world and instead to just take it in. Hundreds of thousands of swirling minds are buzzing around together, making, creating, living. You’re not just aware of them as numbers but you can feel them as people. Not like you can read their minds as such but they feel distinct and real, each an actual life not unlike yours.

Your city had expensive areas than ran higher and cooler than you, of course, but by and large your city was pretty lowblooded. A lot of it was focused on industry, there were plenty of places devoted to training up eager young lowbloods into slightly better work in the empire and so things skewed warmer. Or maybe the local mothergrub was just inclined your way.

The point is there were cafes and nightclubs, shops and hole in the wall places to eat where it was all red, brown, yellow and you wouldn’t see anyone higher for nights if you stuck to the out of the way
places. There were times when there was a sense of ‘us’ about the place, a community and solidarity. This is what that feels like. Being in a room full of so many people just like you and fitting in.

It’s a sense of belonging.

“Sollux?” the words come through like a private message right to your thinkspoon and you snap back to where she is only to find yourself in a more deliberately imagined area.

Above you is the night sky of Alternia, the green and pink moons shining brightly like the balmy nights of the warm seasons. You’re in a verdant field of grasslands cut through the middle with a wide stone path, there’s a hazy stillness to the air. The place feels like it’s holding its breath somehow and you’re compelled to stay silent as you come up to Nicole herself.

“As people live here and dream with our network we get and store an impression of them. People leave their own memories behind in their files, things they want remembered.” she says quietly.

“So they’re not entirely gone?” you say also keeping your voice hushed and your instinct makes sense now, in a way you’re surrounded by the sleeping ghosts of those before you.

Nicole nods and inclines her head to the side and starts walking along the path. As you walk together golden arches glimmer into view, like two dimensional shapes that are too narrow to see from anything but the right angle. Peering through one as you pass you see within it rows and rows of golden pillars but you’re continuing on too far to stop.

“These are people who died ten sweeps ago, so just a little while before you were hatched, right? Come on in.” Nicole says softly and leads you through an ornate arch. Space warps around you and your skin tingles as you look around. Narrow pillars of gold about chest high to you jut out of the ground, some ornately decorated and some with things left at their sides but each with a name plate on them at the base.

“Pick someone, anyone.” Nicole says, waving her hand.

You turn and look over the field of golden bars and stand in awe at so many. Without purposeful direction you start walking through them. People aren’t buried on Alternia, or as far as you know anywhere else. But these aren’t bodies and empty bones stacked up, these are people. They’re asleep forever now but they’re here. Stopping on impulse you look over the one closest to you and look at the nameplate there.

Dreyur Neunro - The Mirthful

Reaching out you lose yourself. Whatever remains of Dreyur awakens with a touch and seeps into you. You know her immediately and viscerally. She was fun, as full of humour and entertainment as her title suggests. One chipped horn and missing an arm from an encounter with a neighbours lusus when she was just a small thing, but she was bright and too full of life to be kept down. She lived way out in the sticks, trash poor and happy despite it. She had friends online and she repaired little land skiffs, bits of vehicles slapped together from parts discarded and then it was just her and the open road. Only the one arm but she built these machines, she made them to work for her. She couldn’t fly, couldn’t use her psionics for telekinesis but what she did have was a sense of space around her all the time. Her psionics touched all things and she knew her surroundings like no one else. When she flew her reflexes were razor sharp.

She fell in pity a sweep or two older than you, a palerom so sweet it made her cry with delight. But he was older than her and when he ascended he left her behind. She would never make it off world, not with her disability and she cried herself wretched to lose him, to be left. Nothing could be done
about it, even with all her skills she couldn’t help herself. She had made limbs before, though she rejected them because she didn’t feel she needed them but even with a fake she’d never pass muster at ascension, they’d cull her for sure. Her anguish is like a kick in the chest to you. But never one to dwell on sadness Dreynr rushes ahead to tell you that her moirail came back for her, took her from Alternia before she aged out and brought her to Planet Hollywood. They helmed her and here she found a home just as full of happiness as her first. She was a stunt driver, working on all sorts of movies and racing for fun. She was happy and died old by yellow standards even before you were hatched.

You step back, blinking the feeling of her smile on your face away. You feel your arm where hers was missing.

“What is it?” Nicole asks at your side.

“She was missing an arm, thought she’d be culled for it.” you say.

Nicole holds her hand up and scans some information, the sweep she hatched and the one she died in.

“In her time she would have been for sure.” she says with a nod.

“But- no. Okay, Tavros, the guy with the metal legs. Bronze, you know him, right?” you ask and Nicole nods.

“Kanaya helped take his legs off because he got paralysed and Equius made him new ones so he could walk. The point was to give him metal ones so he could pass the test and he’d do it again after Tavros molted so he’d be fine. That was the whole point of doing it. I get maybe Vriska wouldn’t have a problem because she’s cerulean but Tavros is lower than us, not that lower means anything, so if she’d made her own arm and proved she could use it and even that she designed it then-” you say.

“No, not in her time. Maybe now. Things change, Sollux.” Nicole tells you.

“That’s SHIT.” you say angrily.

“Yes, it is.” she laughs and leads you back out of the memorial, through the gate and onto the wide stone path.

“Further back, let’s say people who died fifty five sweeps ago.” she says and progresses further back through the memorial path. Gates and gates pass as you walk and the air feels heavier around you, like people don’t come here so much. Surely no one alive knows anyone back here as anything more than a memory. The archway Nicole indicates is bleached pale wood with gold inlay and the markers are styled similarly, each pole supporting a large golden bell.

The air here has a chill in it and your skin tingles with a reactive prickle to it. There are fewer markers for this sweep, you suppose that this far back the planetoid wouldn’t have been as developed and there were likely fewer people around altogether, including goldbloods. Still, you don’t want to walk too far into the place and your feelings on that are solidified when a phantom wind blows and the bells ring in deep and somber notes.

You pick a memorial, the one closest to you and turn your head to read the tag on this one.

Gilyut Orcose - The Aridwish

You touch it.
Gilyut’s whole life feels like the third day of a migraine, bone tired and furious. Their allowance is pitiful but it’s what you get when you’re piss yellow and even that is more than the bronzes or rusts get. They want to make you eat each other but you’re- they’re not that stupid. Gilyut works every night of their life, in shops staffed entirely by lowbloods with side jobs in cafes and everything else. They supplement their own shit allowance but give the rest to their neighbours who are lower than them. As they get older their group forms a tangled clade of relationships, splayed red and pale knotting their group of eight together. They pool resources, money, food, supplies. None have the energy for pitch or ash with anyone they’re too tired.

They live under the heel of highbloods who don’t need to work to live, who can kick them down with no repercussions. One of Gilyut’s clade catches psipox and it spreads through all of them before they know what’s happened, half of them die from voidrot agonisingly over the next sweep and the loss of it is like a gaping wound even now. Gilyut is furious, filled with a toxic rage. When they molt something triggers the rest of them to do so all within the same perigee, the four survivors report together and they try to helm Gilyut and something in them snaps. They fry the imperial agent who tried, and of the batch of yellows who were in the helming facility a tonne of them all knew Gilyut or their clade, had worked jobs with them or had quadrants who benefitted from them. They revolted, blood and guts and death. Only Gilyut survived to be trialled, to be made an example of. Their legal representation was some unqualified joke, someone who wasn’t qualified but had just played a legisllacerator on tv. Of course, that troll worked for The Grand Entertainer and Gilyut was slipped from the noose with a totally staged execution.

You see through Gilyut’s eyes as they explain the situation to The Grand Entertainer who asks for Gilyut’s help to set that kind of thing up again. The system for job applications is centralised and with Gilyut’s advice they fuck with it so that networks of lowbloods organically form. Lowblood groups start banding together more often and before Gilyut dies the Empress abolishes mandatory work on Alternia, replacing vital jobs with robot workers to reduce lowblood solidarity and networking opportunities. It’s a blow to rebellion but Gilyut dies from old age knowing that young yellows won’t have to slave like they did.

Your allowance was pretty poor, sure, you had to work to afford nice things but you got to choose what to do and you could have survived without it. That’s just how things were. You think all lowbloods got about the same and it couldn’t have been that bad, Tavros bought fidspawn stuff a lot and Aradia could buy things for FLARP. You could never afford the things highbloods could but you weren’t dying from lack of money.

It’s just how things were. But it wasn’t always and you wouldn’t have known because history is determined by the Empress, she says what happened. But this is the mind of the troll who changed things for you personally. Your life was different and better thanks to Gilyut.

...Thanks in part to Dahvid.

“Things really are better, aren’t they?” you ask quietly.

“It’s still terrible, no one’s saying it isn’t. Progress is frustratingly slow and in lives as short as ours it feels too slow. Having these memories here reminds us that we can change things and that we are doing it.” she tells you.

“That’s great, this place is great, all of us together is. But even if he made the place that gave these people the opportunity to make this network, this dream, then I’m glad it happened. But Dahvid is a monster, you know that right?” you insist.

Nicole beckons you out of the memorial area and once you’re on the stone path she pulls you back to the hive with the deck that you were on when you started.
“He’s not perfect—” Nicole begins.

“He’s terrible! He trollnapped my friends and quadrantmates, he’s keeping us prisoner and he mind controls people! You know he does that, don’t you?” you insist.

“Of course I do. When you’re connected to people by your mind it’s not hard to notice when someone’s thoughts and actions glitch into things they weren’t doing before. We have whole forums dedicated to people questioning if their ideas and desires are their own or not.” Nicole says sharply.

“So how can you possibly stand him?” you ask.

“Because he doesn’t do it as often as you’d think, he doesn’t do this at all until now. Holding children against their will… it’s all very out of how he usually acts. The loss of his lusus really upset him, not least because of what it did to Dionte. Not that I’ve seen the man but you hear stories. But, no, he’s not perfect but with him around things are getting better for our kind. When we’ve got rid of everything worse than him then maybe we can look at changing his place but until then he’s as useful to us as we are to him.” Nicole says.

Is that a compromise you’re willing to make? After everything Dahvid has done to you and the people you care for and what you’ve suffered because of him can you really just decide it’s ok because it’s for a greater purpose? Can you let your personal misery just be more yellow on the slow grinding gears of very expensive progress?

“I can’t- I don’t want to be here.” you say. You reach up and just like the helm in Roxxie’s ship this isn’t forcing you to be here and you’re able to disengage yourself from The Dream entirely and snap back to yourself, sat on the floor in the dark room you started in. You’re on your feet as Nicole opens her eyes, she tries to call out for you to wait but the doors weren’t locking you in.

You get outside and you fly.

You’ve nowhere to go so you just sit on the roof of Dahvid’s hideous mansion on the highest point and wrap your arms around yourself. You think of your ancestor, the life he must have lived and how he must be now. You think of Dreyur and her hard won freedom, the limits she surpassed that were seemingly lifted for your friends. You think about Gilyut and their life and you can’t help but wonder what the three of them would think of you. Two of them dead and unable to answer and one enslaved and probably out of his mind with suffering. What would they think of you? Would they admire your tenacity in sticking to what you value or would they punch you in the face for being so complacent that you can try to take moral qualms with someone they considered to do good?

You’ve heard before that progress is a cumulative thing, that you stand on the shoulders of giants. The code that you write relies on the innovation of those who came before you and theirs on those who were before them. That’s true in a sense. The life you’ve had is no different, it is the way it is because of the people before you. Yes, you were bettered for their greatness but that’s not really how you see it. Sure you stand on the shoulders of giants but you also stand on a mountain of bones of the dead. Of those who came before you and gave more than they could stand to lose to change things.

How do you justify yourself to the dead?
You stay on the roof a while thinking about the ramifications of what the whole network of goldbloods has shown you. You’re there long enough that you start getting hungry. The feeling is something you shove aside in favour of the decision to go indoors. The long table inside looks like there was food there, there’s crumbs all over and the chairs have been moved around like people were sat on them, but it’s all empty now. You guess you missed mealtime.

You open the hunger trunk with some hope but it’s just drinks in there keeping cool, no food at all. Shutting the door with a sad sigh makes all the bottles jangle together and you’re just considering the pros and cons of slipping out again to find food. After all this place has got to have some fast food places, you are tragically short on cash though. That said you could just try to scout out some goldblood run place, point at your chest and be like ‘do you know who I am’? That’s about the most cringeworthy thing you’ve thought in a long time and you think even imagining doing that is making you contemplate never going outside again.

“Sollux, is that you?” Dayvhe’s voice comes from down the corridor and then he flashsteps into the room.

“Hey, it is you.” he says, clearly pleased.

“It’s me.” you agree slightly wearily.

“You missed dinner so I saved you some. Woulda put it in the hunger trunk but certain people we know, who will remain nameless, lick everything around so I thought you’d want to pass on that.” Dayvhe says conspiratorially, as if you don’t know it’s obviously Terezi that he’s vagueing.

Dayvhe takes food out of his sylladex and jams it in the microwave, shutting the door before you get to see what it was. With that done and the machine humming away happily he hops up onto the countertop, sitting there looking at you.

“Thanks for saving me some.” you offer him with weak enthusiasm but at least you still have some manners.

“You owe me a life debt now. But I’ll forgive you if you c’mere and tell me where you were today. Gotta say that like five minutes after you left, me and Karkat about pissed ourselves with fear
because we realised we’d let you go off alone with some adult. You are ok, right?” Dayvhe asks, reaching out for you.

You walk over to him until he gets close enough to catch you by your left side horns and pull you closer.

“She didn’t hurt me, she was fine.” you tell him.

Dayvhe tugs you a little closer so you’re leaning on the counter that he’s sat on, your hands on either side of his legs as his fingers slide over the inner subtle curve to your longer horn.

“Not the same as being ok though, is it?” he points out.

You open your mouth to answer his question but a wave of familiarity washes over you. Him sat on a nutritionblock counter as he asks you questions about yourself and you divulging your feelings to him. You even look down at his ever so skinny jeans and feel just the same.

“This is like the day we met.” you say unthinkingly.

“What?” Dayvhe says, puzzled.

“This.” you explain, looking up at him and gesturing vaguely to your positions relative to each other and this whole situation in a way. You watch the recognition dawn on his face and take in the way he bites his bottom lip a little to stop from smiling too wide.

“How come I’m involved with so many hopeless romantics, huh? You and Karkat both are the same like that.” Dayvhe teases.

“The only common denominator in your ability to attract romantics is you. Besides you’re the guy who nearly baked me a white diamond cake to ask me out with, remember? You told me that.” you point out and lean in close enough to his throat that you can feel his laugh against your mouth.

“I can’t believe you’d hold the things I say against me like that, you monster.” Dayvhe teases, hooking his foot around the back of your leg and using the leverage to hold you closer.

The microwave dings but you’re clinging to Dayvhe and you have no intention of letting go. He’s making you feel better and right now you need that.

“Dude, your food is done.” he tells you.

“I’m done with things that aren’t this.” you counter and rub your face against his neck and do your best to chirp enticingly at him. Like maybe he’ll just drop the whole you having to do anything else issue and you can float the two of you back to your block and this can just become a nice cuddle puddle where you don’t have to think about anything ever.

“Too bad, you need to eat.” Dayvhe says callously and tries to push you back so he can slide off of the counter. Only the joke’s on him because he just slips down between you and it so you can pin him there and demand all the affection you like.

Dayvhe sighs in a long suffering way and then, the monster he is, shoves his hands under your shirt and tickles your undefended sides until you screech and leap back from him.

“Traitor.” you accuse.

“Yeah how do I sleep during the day? I mean, uh, at night here I guess? That’s still weird.” Dayvhe
rambles as he pulls your food from the microwave and psionically yanks a fork from an open drawer across the way to jam in it as he hands it to you.

“Oh hell yes, chilli. I hate being a prisoner but I can appreciate the food delivery.” you admit and Dayvhe shakes his head.

“Come on, everyone was watching slash arguing over a movie in the other room. You should come out there and tell us where you went today.” Dayvhe suggests.

“How’d you hear me coming in over how loud that must have been?” you ask. Augh, the bowl is too hot to touch so you float it.

“Jayekh doesn’t make his points as loudly as Karkat does, it was good timing I guess.” Dayvhe tells you.

You grab another bite of wonderfully spicy rice as Dayvhe takes his shades off and hooks them around the neck of his shirt.

“I pity you, you know that?” he says without warning or any apparent reason.

“We’ve been dating a while, I did know. I pity you too obviously.” you say around your mouthful of food.

“Yeah, no, I know that. It’s just- I was thinking about this whole Vriska thing.” Dayvhe says, shaking his head.

Ah, shit, that doesn’t sound good.

“I just want to keep you safe and protect you but I know I can’t do that for everything. Vriska as a person just gives me the creeps. Obviously I hate her for what she did to you before but it’s not like I liked her before, partly because she dislikes me so much. But how dumb is that? It looks like she has resistance to my passive cuddlevoodoos and that’s so weird that it makes the two of us dislike each other. But you’re cool with your past with her so like, what the hell, are my objections to her just narcissistic?” Dayvhe frowns.

“I respect Vriska, I hate her romantically but Dayvhe, Dayvhe, you know I think she’s irritating as all hell too don’t you? My thing with her is more than just finding her annoying but goddamn is she annoying. You’re completely rational to not like her. Besides, she doesn’t like you at all and she’s worse to you because of it.” you point out.

“No, dude, you gotta stop doing that!” Dayvhe argues, waving his arms wildly.

“Doing what?” you ask.

“Just letting me off the hook for shit. We’ve talked about this Vriska thing and we talked about my concerns and you put them to rest-” Dayvhe starts.

“They seem very rested, yeah.” you interrupt.

“Karkat’s right, I just need a smack in the face and yelling at that it’s none of my business! I don’t want to become like my ancestor, thinking everything is about me and what I want!” Dayvhe says loudly.

You don’t smack him in the face but you do pap him on the cheek pretty firmly, enough to make him chill out a little.
“I do what I want.” you tell him simply and Vriska laughs slightly hysterically for a second.

“You’re my moirail, of course you care. I want you to care. You’re not interfering or telling me what to do about something that’s out of your area, you’re worried and coming to me with it. That’s entirely moirail business. Besides, you’re not like your ancestor, you’re a good person.” you assure him.

“I don’t think I am.” Vriska confesses quietly.

You wave your hand and your bowl sets itself down on the side. With your concentration undivided you step up close to Vriska and hold his face between your hands.

“You’re not him. But obviously you could become like him, you have the same psionics more or less. Maybe if your lives had been the same you’d be just like him but you’re not.” you tell him firmly.

“But I could go that way. I’m already part way there.” Vriska says, his voice raw and hurt.

“I won’t let you. I’ll drag you kicking and screaming away from that if I have to, I won’t let you be him. I hold you accountable, Karkat does too, we help you be better and we won’t let you become that. I won’t let you be that, never.” you vow, staring him down. Vriska looks away first, even though his eyes are getting a little misty and red tinted.

“I wasn’t even fishing for that, I was- like I was trying to apologize for making shit about me and I went and did just that.” Vriska mumbles.

“Yeah, I don’t give a crap. I can’t let you think I’d allow you to be that much of a worse version of yourself.” you tell him fiercely.

You get it, how hard it must be to see someone so similar to yourself around and being acutely aware of how all their flaws reflect on you. Given that you know Vriska is nowhere near as self-assured as he acts and given how his ancestor is literally a trollnapping murderer it’s got to be doing a number on his already damaged sense of self.

The sense that this Vriska thing with him isn’t really about her at all is starting to filter through to you. If Vriska is the worst thing that could happen to you then him saving you from her is in a weird logical reach around a way of ensuring that he’s not the worst. Because how can he be if she’s worse than him? All that falls apart if you and her have genuine romantic hate for each other and you’re both happy with that situation.

“I didn’t even know I needed to hear that.” Vriska laughs weakly and you note that his voice sounds watery.

“Well, I’m basically just the best moirail anyone has ever had so, you know.” you brag.

“You are! God, you really only have two modes, huh? You’re either the best or the worst. Gotta say I prefer you confirming what I think, that you are the best.” Vriska beams at you even when you squish his cheeks a little because the sweetness of that smile is going to break something in your chest, you swear it is.

“Moderation is for suckers.” you tell him.

“Alright, alright, enough emotional honesty from me. God, you still think I’m cool even after all that, right?” Vriska asks, squirming back from you so you take your chance to levitate your food up again and grab more.
“Oh, not even a little cool.” you say and have another bite.

“You wound me.” he informs you.

“Watch as I throw even more mild insults at you.” you warn him sarcastically.

“Pass, if I want to be creatively insulted we all know Karkat has everyone beat.” Dayvhe reasons.

“Karkat once told me that his expectations for me were so low it was like stars had collided and collapsed into a black hole so his expectations and standards for me could fall forever and then at the bottom would be him screeching about how I’d still even let him down despite that.” you say slowly.

“Wow, dude, what did you do to deserve that?” Dayvhe asks as he slides his shades back on.

“I wouldn’t fix his terrible virus for him, I think. Either that or I wouldn’t go get the grubcorn for him. Something dumb.” you shrug.

“He is harsh but fair. Also we should probably return to him to see if he’s, I don’t know, ripped out Jayekh’s throat with his teeth for his no good terrible opinions on the romantic lead.” Dayvhe suggests. You take his hand and let him lead you and your bowl of chilli down the hall and towards the other room with the tv and all the chairs.

“It is not contrived you weak-panned fool of a- Sollux!” Karkat cuts off his insult to stare at you.

“I’m not sure you meant to end that there.” Jayded laughs. Karkat whips a cushion at her without even looking and you can see him looking you over.

“I can actually be out of your sight without something terrible happening to me, KK. Calm down.” you say in amusement as you pick your way past people to sit next to Jayded on the floor with Dayvhe taking the space directly behind you on the loungeplank so he can more or less wrap his legs around your chest and pull you closer to him. He tries to act cool but he can be clingy as fuck sometimes.

“Oh no you little shit, experience tells me in fact that you cannot. It’s a wonder that I sometimes let you shower alone because otherwise it’d be very reasonable for me to fear you might drown in there!” Karkat accuses you.

“I have absolutely no idea how this relationship between the three of you works.” John announces.

“Don’t worry about it.” Dayvhe tells him, leaning over you to do so and absently petting your hair.

“At the risk of being vaguely on topic to something relevant that isn’t this stupid movie, Karkat’s stupid opinions or John’s stupid questions… what happened when you were out?” Vriska asks from an armchair across the way. Several of the named people vocalise mild protests but you take your time to swallow the mouthful of food you were part way through already before responding to her. The movie was seemingly paused to allow the previous argument to go on without interrupting it so it’s quiet enough for you to talk.

“So when Nicole said before that all the goldbloods here were organised together and followers of my ancestor instead of Dahvidd she really wasn’t kidding.” you tell her.

“Do they not like him, then?” Jayyne asks, perking up in surprise.

“Well, no they do like him. Obviously they do, everyone here does.” you say with a grimace.
“So what then?” Vriska prompts.

You hesitate, how best can you explain this to them?

“When I was in the ship me and Aradia could talk but there was this space. It was a projection or an imaginary space that we could interact in, my mind and hers like a network of two.” you say slowly.

“Like a husktop network?” Dirkka asks.

“Right except it was a real actual space, not metaphorical.” you insist.

“That’s interesting.” Dirkka says thoughtfully.

“So it seems like all the goldbloods here have ports and they’ve set up this giant server-” you doubt people will understand. Try again.

“There’s a real big computer thing ok? Then people with ports plug into it and it’s like a whole world where only we can go and they all talk to each other.” you explain slowly.

“I don’t think you needed to dumb it down that much, sweetie.” Roxxie laughs.

“I guess the real question is who in the room is the lowest common denominator he’s aiming that explanation to.” Rorrhze says and you know she must be feeling better if she’s stirring up trouble again.

“The point is they’re aware of what Dahvid does. They use it to check each other’s behavior and use it as everything from yellow only social media to crowdsourcing ideas on their work. But they have this archive of memories of the lives of everyone who’s been plugged into it all the way back to ones they took from my ancestor. The place is half internet right into your pan and half… half some kind of afterlife.” you say, starting to trail off a little at the end.

“I saw people there who died before we were even hatched. The shit they lived through and everything. This place was a sanctuary for them.” you add.

“Just what are you saying? That you want to stay and work under Dahvid all of a sudden after everything he’s done?!” Vriska demands.

“Fuck that! If I could kill him and get away with it I would. He’s a monster but despite that he made this place and it’s good for people. As far as I can tell this is the only place in the whole universe where lowbloods are organised together as a unit, they make decisions and Nicole returns their judgement. They’re an organised group and they’re obviously powerful. Not to mention having history like that and the shared ideas and- look if they all agreed to do something you couldn’t argue with them!” you snap back.

“Oh so you’ve found some cosy little bubble full of people like you that you want to run off to when we’re out here trying to solve real problems?” Vriska snarls leaping to her feet and you’ll be damned if you’re going to be outdone so you get up as well.

“No, a whole bunch of people who worship my ancestor’s whole message about freedom might be valuable allies to us against Dahvid! They’re already debating if they’re cool with us being prisoner at all without me having to do anything. You’re the one who said that Dionte wasn’t a viable-” you stop talking abruptly, you hadn’t said about this to the other half of your group.

You’re just staring at Vriska and she’s looking right back at you, both of you stone silent and seemingly hoping that no one else heard that. Only you not saying anything is very much
highlighting what you did say.

“...What about my ancestor?” Dirkka finally asks.

“Nothing!” Vriska answers immediately, she may as well have said everything.

“Is the plan changing?” Nepeta asks after a pause.

“Sollux is the only one who’s immune, he’s the only one who can be trusted with all of the details. But- look, it’s under advisement alright? We’ll keep you informed.” Vriska says snippily.

“I’m immune too.” Dayvhe points out.

“Seeing as half of this group is already aware of the plan, even at a nonspecific level do you not think it would behoove us to discuss any changes at that level alone of detail? If the rest of us were an acceptable risk then what could have changed now?” Equius asks.

“And not to deride your level of planning you two but it’s short sighted at best to not utilise the skills of all of us.” Rohhze agrees.

“Gotta say I agree with them.” Roxxie nods.

Dayvhe’s fingers slip between your own, squeezing them softly.

“Come on, man. Let us help.” Dayvhe urges you gently.

You glance at Vriska who just throws her hands up in the air, rolls her eyes and sits down with an overdramatic mutter of ‘Sure what do I know?’. But that said if you were someone as stubborn as Vriska you wouldn’t admit that maybe you wanted help either, you’d wait for someone else to offer it and then act like you begrudgingly have to accept it so you don’t have to lose face no matter how it turns out.

You sit down as well and stir your food about.

“Are we doing this, then?” Jayyne asks and you nod.

“Alright then.” she says and folds one leg over the other and smooths her skirt down. “We knew there might be a chance that our rescue attempt might be interrupted somehow. Maybe Dahvid had some weapon that could stop Sollux or someone got a lucky shot in, perhaps he wouldn’t be resistant or we’d all be forced to turn against him if he was.”

“All the things you were very lucky didn’t happen, you mean?” Rohhze interrupts.

“The reason we weren’t concerned is that we had a backup plan. We still do as far as I know. Sollux?” Jayyne continues and you nod in response.

“We needed something equal to trade to get you out if it got to this kind of situation, he wasn’t gonna give you up fur nothing.” Nepeta adds.

“You’re our friends. All of his friends are floating skeletons in the basement or helmed in a spaceship, you’re not exactly comparing like with like. Unless you were going for volume and threatening the welfare of his whole industry and everyone who works for him?” Rohhze asks.

“Or my ancestor that lives in the roof, were you planning on catching him and threatening him because he’s dangerous and I don’t recommend that.” Dirkka points out.
“Oh, we know how dangerous he is.” Nepeta snorts.

“Coming in here to get you and then getting Dionte as leverage is the stupid way around of doing that.” you say and eat another bite of your food.

“No one’s seen him. I didn’t see him when I was up there the day you showed up and my ancestor doesn’t look too hard because Dionte’s apparently evasive as fuck and really hostile lately. Sollux what did you do?” Dayvhe asks urgently.

“Hostile is a very light term for what he was. Zombie would be more accurate, I don’t think your lusus dying did him any favours.” Vriska mutters.

“Sollux, what did you do?” Dayvhe asks again, touching your shoulder.

“He took all of you. Dionte’s the only person he cares about, he got stranded here for him. It’s a fair exchange.” you say quietly to your rice.

“Sollux, he’s not the most reasonable person. He’s like a little kid when it comes to his temper and how he reacts to things, you don’t know that he’d calmly exchange us for him.” Rohhze points out.

“Yeah, that’s why we’re reconsidering it.” Vriska says before you can open your mouth.

“This is really dangerous, this could go so wrong.” Karkat insists, looking more and more worried with each passing second.

“At the risk of asking an obvious question, if Dionte is not here then where is he? You must be keeping him somewhere. On Roxxie’s ship?” Kanaya asks.

“Not on the ship but no one but Sollux knows where.” John explains.

“So Dahvid can’t charm it out of anyone, clever.” Kanaya nods.

“Dionte’s with Hal, isn’t he?” Dirkka groans, his head in his hands.

“How did you know that?” Jayekh says, obviously surprised.

“Because Hal would come with you for this, I was surprised when I didn’t see him here with you. But you’d want someone inorganic guarding a zombie if that’s really what Dionte is now. Plus Hal would work as a failsafe, if Dahvid went off the rails and attacked us all he could make a demand on his own without any input from any of us. I assume that’s the plan and that’s why you needed your husktop so bad and why you go outside so often?” Dirkka says and you just stare at him.

“And I thought I was the detective here.” Jayyne says, very impressed.

“Is he okay?” Dayvhe asks you, making it clear that he thinks this is very important indeed. He’s not fucking around or asking stupid things, he’s trying to make sure everything is going to be okay. He’s trying to make sure you’re going to be okay.

“Well, I did shoot him in the leg but that’s because he attacked Nepeta.” Jayded says.

“I’m fine, though. Not a zombie. No claws for concern, so stop staring me like that John!” Nepeta says and nudges a suspicious looking John in the shoulder with her foot.

Were people twitchy about Nepeta being attacked and maybe turning? That sounds like a thing that should have happened or you should have been concerned about but for the life of you nothing is coming to mind. That’s troubling, you should probably mention that to Dayvhe later. On the topic of
Dayvhe he’s still fixing you with a look, shades or no shades you can tell a look when you’re getting one.

“He’s a zombie, okay isn’t really an applicable term here.” you tell Dayvhe flatly.

“You thought I was a zombie one time.” Dayvhe points out.

“Wait, what? When did that happen?” Roxxie asks.

“I got to his sometime after Cal’s when I was hurt. No memory of how I got there really, Cal had done that thing he does sometimes. Showed up at Sol’s and he thought I was undead, I told you about it. It’s how I got that scar here when he fixed me up. I even bit him I was that far out of it. Like I said he thought I was a zombie too.” Dayvhe explains.

“He tried to help you even though he thought you were undead? He tried to save you?” Nepeta squeaks. Her eyes are shining with delight at the mere idea and you’d despair more but Karkat is looking a little misty eyed too.

“I wondered how you got that scar on your shoulder.” Vriska interjects.

“How would you know about-” Dayvhe starts but you’re not entertaining this line of conversation from either of them. You hold your hand between them, though a certainly safe distance from Vriska and her arm, and snap your fingers to a big spark of light. It works well enough to cut them both off.

“He’s not turned back, not like you did. Also unlike you, who managed to get on a train to my place, he was far gone enough that when we found him he was partway through eating some poor teal person. So no, he’s not fine but nothing we did could technically make him worse than he already is.” you say loudly.

“So the question is what do we do? We wanted his help for Roxxie’s revolution but even if you did get him to remove his controls on us by threatening my ancestor I think it’d pretty clearly tank our chances at that ever happening afterwards even if we did then get away.” Dirkka says grimly.

“I wouldn’t put it past him to tip the Empress off out of spite. He hates her but he’d hate us then too, making us fight each other would be a win-win for him.” Roxxie agrees.

“Well I for one care more about getting away from here than any side project you lot have.” Vriska says.

“I also have my misgivings about any revolution.” Equius adds, to the surprise of no one.

You watch as Nepeta’s eyes narrow and she turns in her seat to look at Equius, as if perhaps she had misheard him. Or, well, no she didn’t but she’s giving him the chance to correct what he said so they can both pretend that she just misheard him. But Equius, though nervously sweating, is standing his ground.

“We talked about this.” Nepeta says.

“And I still disagree, it is highly dangerous and I can protect you better than-” Equius begins.

“Except you can’t! My ancestor was a revolutionary, my name is purreejudged to be dangerous and set me in line to be culled even if we went back and acted like things were normal. Also so was YOUR ancestor! Dahvid might have been too quick to judge and assumed he was still on the Empire’s side but there’s no way he wasn’t discovered before then by the Empress’ spies. If I let you go back you’re in danger and I’m the one who’s not allowing that!” Nepeta tells him firmly.
“I forbid you-” Equius tries.

“I forbid YOU!” Nepeta counters.

“No.” Equius says.

“Yes!” Nepeta argues.

“No.”

“Yes!”

Everyone else in the room is starting to look supremely awkward and you try to convey just through expression alone to Dayvhe that at the very least the two of you aren’t as bad as them. Dayvhe raises his eyebrows slightly and nods at you.

“I’m helping, I’m going to finish my ancestor’s work and change things and you can’t stop me.” Nepeta says finally.

See, there’s the thing, Equius is strong. He’s freakishly strong even for a blueblood but Nepeta is strong, not just that but she’s fast, cunning and stealthy too. Nepeta allows Equius to tell her what to do sometimes but you’re starting to get that if you’re being really REALLY real he can’t make her do jack shit. If she wanted to back on Alternia she could have at any time ghosted him and vanished into the wilderness, set up a new hive in a different cave and he would never have found her.

From the slightly horrified expression on Equius face you think this whole time neither of them have ever acknowledged that Nepeta has all the cards here and maybe there was a silent agreement to not say it. Nepeta’s eyes are hard and fierce and for her smaller stature to Equius her posture is fierce. She’s not threatening him, it’s not that, this is more a display of her unshakable will here. It’s defiance, daring him to try to change her mind again.

You wonder if Disciple was like this too, you can only imagine she was with the life she lived. But looking at Nepeta now you can certainly get why your ancestor would have been involved with hers, as you’ve noted before your type with girls is pretty girls who totally could and might murder you. Maybe Psiionic was the same way, who knows?

Equius looks away, his hair sliding over part of his face but not so much that you can’t see his chipped fangs digging at his lip.

“Wherever you are, I’ll…” he mumbles and with a nod Nepeta sits back down.

“We’re with you, Roxxie.” Nepeta says lightly and smiles at her like they didn’t just have a very public pale altercation in front of you all.

“Oh! Uh- thank you! That’s- um, wicked nice of you to say. Oh God this is so awkward, am I making this more awkward by saying how awkward it is? Dirkka is that more awkward?” Roxxie asks, her voice pitching higher.

Dirkka’s hand reaching out to pap her on the face is so quick that you nearly don’t see it, only he has to slow down enough when he gets to her that you absolutely can. Roxxie blinks the diamonds from her eyes for a second and then goes on as normal, calmer than before.

“Yes, right, thanks Nepeta we appreciate it!” Roxxie says cheerfully.

“Why. Why is this happening in public?” Kanaya whines quietly and Rohhze gently pats her elbow
comfortingly.

Terezi looks over at Vriska, the so far unchallenged objector to Roxxie’s revolution.

“We’ll die if we go back. Besides I wouldn’t want to take down the Empress herself without you and I know you wouldn’t back down from a challenge like that, you’d be famous. Legendary even.” Terezi points out with a sharp smile.

“Whatever.” Vriska sighs, slouching in her chair.

“It keeps happening.” Rohhze whispers quietly to Kanaya and Dayvhe’s shoulders shake in silent laughter.

“What do we do about Dionte?” you ask, looking at Vriska.

“You know my plan, give him back to Dahvid and tell him he ought to be grateful for it. Make him a peace offering.” Vriska suggests.

“Hey, I’ve done this terrible thing but have walked it back at the last moment so thank me, is that basically the thing you’re saying?” Dayvhe asks sharply.

“It is a wonder people don’t try to stab you more often.” Rohhze chips in.

“I think you should put him back, just- maybe no one’s noticed yet. I actually bet no one’s noticed yet because my ancestor isn’t in here screaming murder about it. So just go get him and put him back and hope no one notices.” Dayvhe suggests.

“As much as I usually don’t approve of avoiding admitting doing something wrong I think in this case Dayvhe’s suggestion is the best here.” Jayyne sighs.

“Maybe we should all vote on it.” Roxxie suggests.

“Everyone in favour of putting Dionte back where you found him and acting like nothing happened?” Dayvhe asks and a lot of people raise their hands, not everyone but a lot.

“All in favour of giving him back but showing Dahvid what we’re capable of and how he owes us for this peace offering?” Vriska says fiercely.

A few people put their hands up for that idea, not just Terezi but Jayded and Nepeta too.

“I mean don’t say it like that but yeah, I agree in theory.” Jayded corrects.

Karkat voted on Dayvhe’s side, so did all of the older trolls in fact. The majority shook out in favour of sneaking Dionte back where you found him and that’s good, you know now what they think you should do. You can still just… not do that. You’re the only one who knows where he is and the only one who can get out to get him anyway, it’s up to you no matter how democratic this seems.

You are, by and large, in favour of things that don’t get deranged highbloods in the mood to maim your friends or cram more mind control into their heads. But you’re also very heavily in favour of exacting revenge on deranged highbloods who kidnapped your people in the first place. Threatening Dionte is a very good way of getting back at Dahvid. It’s good revenge.

You look at Vriska’s arm and her eye. Revenge is probably deeply satisfying but it’s a cycle and it doesn’t do just the one turn, it goes and goes. He kidnaps your friends and quadrantmates, you hurt Dionte out of revenge, he retaliates, you retaliate, then maybe his followers get back at you. Maybe
even the other goldbloods to whom Dahvid is so important. Is there anywhere on that path of vengeance that ends well?

How does this even look from someone else’s point of view? What would your forebears Gilyut or Dreynur say at this? Dahvid saved their lives, he was their hero. Did they think that he was perfect and would they even believe you if you told them what he had done?

Dahvid isn’t a good person and you could never willingly serve him any more than you would the Empress herself. Unlike the Empress he does do good things, he saved the lives of those long dead trolls, he improved Alternia for so many including you. How do you balance that?

Is trying to make him suffer just making everything worse on a grand scale? Should you let this desire for revenge go to fix things?

“Are you planning on working for him?” you ask, looking up at Roxxie.

“I’m planning on becoming Empress, you don’t work for anyone when you’re Empress.” Roxxie smiles.

“Maybe not on paper but if he puts you on that throne do you work for him? Could you?” you press her.

“I don’t know. He’s not bad as such. I mean he is, he does- like this right now is for sure totally bad. But he does want to make things better and he is making things better even if it’s super slowly.” Roxxie says.

“There was this East Alternian show that I watched once, Fatal Written Reminder, where a troll gains the power to magically cull whoever he writes down and decides to take out everyone he considers bad. Another character points out that if he’s successful he’ll still be left with one morally bad person in the universe, him. Dahvid seems like a product of his life and his time and even if he does reform the universe by himself eventually it’s pretty obvious he wouldn’t fit in.” Dirkka says thoughtfully.

You’re really not going to take advice from a guy just regurgitating quotes from goddamn anime, especially not Fatal Written Reminder, but you can’t exactly call him on it without admitting that you’ve watched it too. Well played, Dirkka, well played.

“This isn’t the point!” Karkat says loudly and abruptly, dragging everyone’s attention onto him.

“I know when you started this everything looked like it was going to be a life or death situation and I totally understand how with Dahvid being able to mind control people you needed a backup, I get it. Especially as you were all scared and at least in Sollux’s case probably in actual medical shock too.” Karkat says, looking you up and down. The back of your neck prickles hot with embarrassment at him so publicly stating how you were not okay at all.

“But we’re pissed at him for the whole trollnapping thing when you guys have done the exact same thing, is that really something that you want to brag about because you can’t really claim you’re better if you do.” Karkat points out.

“Dionte isn’t a troll anymore, he’s a full on zombie.” John argues.

You catch Dayvhe looking around quickly at Dirkka and that sure is some mutual concern there. You wonder if the partial zombification thing is something that happened to Dirkka once too, it’d make sense since they both spent time with Cal. The fact that they’re concerned rekindles the slightest worry within you that maybe Dionte is going to just wake up.
Wait, no. Rekindling implies that you were ever concerned about that and you weren’t concerned about him at all at the time. You’d fully intended on maiming and trollnapping a living sentient troll and locking them away with Hal for as long as it took, you didn’t care about that at all.

Karkat may have a point with you not quite being yourself then.

“It doesn’t matter if Dionte’s alive in here or not, Dahvid still is. You all took him because you know he cares about him, you were wagering something of comparable value weren’t you? So maybe you should all take a good long fucking look at yourselves and work out if you can be pissed or not at him when you’re acting just as bad. You’ve got a chance to fix it, you should take it.” Karkat says.

“Legally speaking the crimes are the same category but they’re in different volume and as we were motivated by an attempt to save your lives and our hands were effectively forced we haven’t acted unjustly and the law is on our side. The Grand Entertainer is still the perpetrator here and us seeking a measure of our own justice via leverage is perfectly allowed.” Terezi pipes up.

You want to point to that and be all like ‘see? I’m still good’ but you of all people know that Alternian justice is pretty much an oxymoron. Sure there’s skill in applying the law and it’s certainly an art that can be used for good, it just usually isn’t reliably done like that. Terezi is a lot fairer than most teals in how she’d actually apply the law but even her own personal brand of justice isn’t totally fair. Siding with the law to give your argument credibility isn’t smart.

“I’m not as bad as him.” you insist.

“So, wait, are you going to return him or not?” Roxxie asks.

Do you or don’t you? What’s your next move here and how are you going to play things out? Moreover what’s the right thing to do and what obligations do you have here? Sure you’re obligated and motivated to prioritise the wellbeing of your quadrantmates and friends, to protect and aid them, but what else? Do you have a duty to uphold the work of the goldbloods who came before you and continue the legacy of your ancestor and the ancestors of your friends? The whole system is fucked up so colossally that surely you have some kind of demand on- on the weight of your soul itself to at least try to fix things. If you do nothing and look out for only yourself you might as well kick the feet out from under anyone hatched after you. You benefited from the lives of Gilyut and Dreynur, can you really just act like you appreciate the help but you’re good now, you got out, so you’re not going to do anything to help anyone outside of your friends and quadrants?

But you can’t work for Dahvid, you just can’t. You can’t see him as anything more than a monster.

Is there a way of threading this needle? Of not endorsing that bastard but also not selfishly refusing to help. Supporting Roxxie’s revolution seems like the obvious answer but she clearly intends to use Dahvid’s help and resources to do it.

“I don’t know yet. I need to think about it.” you tell them. You poke your spoon about in your bowl but you’re not really hungry anymore so you just get up and leave, it’s better than being stared at. You go to your block and Dayvhe follows you soon after with your food in hand.

“Eat.” Dayvhe reminds you, holding the bowl out.

“I’m not really-” you start but Dayvhe makes an error buzzer noise and wiggles the bowl at you.

“Dayvhe, I’m-”

“Fooooooood.” Dayvhe interrupts and pushes the bowl into your hands.
“I’m not interested in-” you try.

“I can be so annoying on purpose and will be if you don’t eat. Just the most annoying. Or I’ll just be really sad, you don’t want that, right?” Dayvhe asks, the stupid fucker. Trying to manipulate you into eating and taking care of yourself. God, what a pain.

You’re spared from having to negotiate further with Dayvhe by the door opening again, seriously you need a lock, only it’s not Karkat it’s Dirkka.

“Hey, there you are.” Dirkka says with a nod at Dayvhe.

“Here I am.” Dayvhe agrees.

“Is Rohhze always that quiet? It’s probably nothing but-” Dirkka starts to say.

“Shit, is she broken again? But I thought Dahvid fixed her. Oh shit. Sollux, eat that, I’ll be back.” Dayvhe says in a hurry and rushes out of the room.

Dirkka doesn’t follow him, instead he steps fully inside and looks down at you. The suspicion that there’s nothing wrong with Rohhze at all starts to rise in you and worry is starting to mount.

“When we first got here Dahvid wanted to kill Roxxie. She’s an heiress and he hates them so why not kill her? We objected obviously and Carrie put some theory that both Rohhze and Roxxie are related to Rosali Lalonde, that she’s Rohhze’s direct ancestor but she’s at least dominant in Roxxie’s genes. I don’t know, it could all be shit for all I know and the only coincidence is the last name. I guess she made a convincing argument because no one’s tried to hurt Rox, either that or he knows it’d destroy me and Dayvhe to lose her and he wants us to like him.” Dirkka says with a shake of his head.

“See, this is why I hate the guy. He can’t just dangle Roxxie’s life over you like that, it’s shit.” you hiss and grudgingly eat some of your food so Dayvhe will be at least a little appeased when he returns.

“Yeah, only the thing is like we said, the guy doesn’t have the most balanced temper. Highbloods, you know? I know I shouldn’t say that because Roxxie’s as high as you can get and sure she’s super chill for her caste but even she goes off the deep end sometimes and I have to-” Dirkka pauses and coughs awkwardly, “you get my point.”

“Yeah, I get your point.” you nod.

“I don’t think you do. Are we friends, Sollux?” Dirkka asks suddenly.

You think of the time you spent together building Hal’s body, how much nicer he’s been since he stopped regarding you as a threat to Dayvhe. Sure he’s older than you and there’s a bit of a disconnect from the age difference but, yeah, you like him.

“Yeah, we are, aren’t we?” you say.

“Ok, see, the thing is that even if you hate him Dahvid cares about you being alive or dead. He was really upset when he thought you were dead, you’re a bit of his- of whatever your ancestor was to him. He wished he had your skeleton so he could put you in his little memorial. He’s pissed that you broke in here and very obviously hate him but he wants you alive, he doesn’t want Roxxie alive. If he finds out that you’ve taken Dionte you’re not going to be the one he takes it out on.” Dirkka says. His voice is harsh but he’s trying to be calm.
It won’t be you, he won’t attack you. It’ll be Roxxie and maybe Vriska, John, Jayded, Jayyne and Jayekh, people he doesn’t really care about because as far as you know he either didn’t know or doesn’t like their ancestors. You won’t suffer the consequences of your rash mistake, your friends will.

“I can’t lose Roxxie. Dayvhe- do you know what that’d do to him? Even if we’re not friends he’s your moirail and it’d destroy him to lose her, you need to stop that from happening. Dahvid can’t find out about what you did.” Dirkka urges you.

You like Roxxie, she gave you a place to live when your own hive was compromised. She provided the resources to look after you when you were helmed. She helped raise Dayvhe and has been nothing but kind to you. She’s a genuinely good person and the thought that you could get her killed sickens you even without considering how it’d affect anyone else. Of course Dirkka is right, it really would devastate so many people. And if Dahvid doesn’t go after Roxxie then it’ll be your kismesis or any of your other friends. You’re supposed to protect them, not put them in more danger.

So, fuck your pride, fuck vengeance and fuck your principles. The others are more important than those things.

“I’ll put him back, just let me…” you shove food in your mouth and gesture at the bowl with your spoon. You ought to fuel up if you’re going to go rushing off playing the hero.

“Right. I’ll tell the others, yeah?” Dirkka asks and you nod.

He ducks out of the room and you’ve only just finished cramming the last of the food down your neck before Vriska and Karkat are shoving each other aside to try to be the first one through the door.

“What the hell why are you so suddenly going?” Vriska demands, her hand pushing Karkat’s face away. He tries to bite her hand but it’s the metal one so no luck there.

“He pointed out that Roxxie’s life is in danger and I worked out that applies to all of you who don’t have ancestors he knows or in your case, ones he likes.” you explain as you set the bowl aside and get up.

“Actually, Mindfang was part of the revolution before she died. She worked with Summoner before he had to kill her.” Vriska corrects you haughtily.

“I didn’t know that.” you say, there was nothing about that written anywhere you’d seen.

“Yeah but Darkleer was on the same side too and that didn’t work out so great for him. So does Dahvid know that?” Karkat points out and Vriska’s face scrunches up a little in uncertainty.

“Well it was sort of a complicated situation and… well her journals tell all about it.” Vriska says uncertainly.

“You could show him the journals.” Karkat suggests and Vriska grimaces.

“By complicated do you mean ‘really fucking ethically dubious and probably questionably true’ by any chance?” you ask her flatly.

“Yeah, he might have some bias against the whole Serket line for reasons that I refuse to confirm or deny may or may not be legitimate. But I’ve never done anything wrong.” Vriska insists.

“You stabbed his second in command in the chest, organised a break in and trollnapped his only
friend!” Karkat shouts.

“Mmm-hmm, here Vriska I’ll help,” you say and reach out so your hand is under her jaw and by squeezing your fingers a little you can make her mouth move like she’s talking, “thank you Sollux for trying to save my life.’ Just like that!”

Vriska pulls her head away and glares at you.

“Have you got ports here?” Vriska asks, gesturing to the side of her head near her ear and trying to look there on yours.

“Not past my temple no wh- OW!” you yelp as she smacks you in the ear. Not hard but, still, ow!

“Don’t get caught.” Vriska huffs and stalks off out of the room with her head held high.

You’re left standing there with Karkat, rubbing your ear as he grins at you.

“Can you stop looking smug about her being my kismesis?” you sigh.

“Sorry, I’ve seen a docterrorist and they said it’s a terminal case of smug about Vriska being your kismesis. I’ll die smug.” Karkat grins.

“This isn’t a live action romcom, KK.” you protest.

“You say that but it’s both more romantic and way funnier than a lot of stuff I’ve seen. Besides I don’t have my trollflix account here, I have to get my entertainment where I can. Oh, and I guess I care about your happiness or something too.” Karkat teases you.

“Wow, KK, don’t go so heavy on the feelings there, a guy could die from shock.” you say flatly.

“YOU’RE GOING?!” Dayvhe yells, bursting through the door and making Karkat jump. Seriously, a lock is all you want, is that so much to ask?

“I have to. I ate my food, don’t worry I’m not going to drop out of the air. Like I would anyway, I can take way more punishment than that and it’s not even all that far away.” you assure him and though Dayvhe looks a little reassured about your abilities you don’t think your statement about how much you can take made him all that happy.

“What did Dirkka even say to you because Rohhze is fine and I think he was just trying to get me out of here. If he’s trying to play you then you shouldn’t let him make you do something you don’t want to.” Dayvhe points out.

“I actually do agree with him here. I want you to put Dionte back where you found him but for the right reasons. He didn’t threaten you, did he?” Karkat asks.

“Oh if he did I’m gonna be, like, wicked fuckin’ angry.” Dayvhe hisses.

“Shoosh, no, he didn’t.” you say, papping Dayvhe gently.

“I gotta go, I’ll be back probably uh… tomorrow.” you say slowly as you guesstimate the time. You probably shouldn’t bring Hal back here so that means going there, taking Hal back to the ship then getting back to here in one long trip.

“Then take your medication now, you were going to forget it, weren’t you?” Karkat challenges.

Damnit, you don’t even have an excuse for that. The moment your routine gets screwy your ability
to remember to do basic shit just goes. Oh gee Sollux why do you have so many mood swings? Who knows, it forever remains a mystery. It’s certainly not ever your own fault. You back off, hands up in the air, and go into the ablution block. You down the drugs which have proven to still not be poisoned and return to two expectant stares.

“Be careful around him, ok? If he’s a zombie he’s dangerous and if he’s not a zombie he’s dangerous so, just, careful ok?” Dayvhe says.

“I know.” you nod.

“You’re doing the right thing, you know.” Karkat tells you.

You wonder if Dahvid would see Signless in Karkat’s thoughts right now. Karkat’s always seen the best in people, he’s always been kind in his own ways. Even if those ways are filled with wildly creative insults and cursing. He sees the best in people more often than not. Was Signless that way too? Not his teachings but how the guy was just in his night to night living.

“I’ll see you when I get back.” you say to them both and walk between the two of them to leave through the doorway. You exit the building itself through your scorched hole in the window and take to the air. You know the direction you’re flying in but like the first time you try to avoid populated areas where you might be caught on camera. The last thing you want is to be intercepted on your way back.

Either way you’re left to your own thoughts as you fly through the night to Hal and Dionte, never a good thing. You’re stuck on the same ideas, wrestling with and chewing over the same questions. The trolls whose pasts you saw didn’t do what they did with their lives because of some on high moral obligation, though you know they liked helping things get better. Dreynur believed in Dahvid’s plan to make the plight of trolls better through subtle changes in culture and felt her work helped that, plus she was free and happy. Gilyut’s own actions were in part a moral stance but a lot of it was personal motivation, fucking over the system that had hurt them so badly. You can’t be asked to do EVERYTHING you possibly can to try to fix things but you also can’t justify doing nothing. So… so you support Roxxie’s takeover, you help her work out what fair means for your caste in the future when she’s successful. That said you do kind of hope you can get the support of the other goldbloods behind her. Being in the dream felt like being part of something, it felt like a home, a people you belonged to. You run your hands over the ports on your neck and wish at least a little that you could go back in.

Still you have a mistake to fix before you can do any of that so, in the middle of the night, you land in the old crater of rock that you left Hal and Dionte in before.

“Hal?” you call out as you come close to the rock slide you caused to trap them in.

“Sollux?” Hal’s surprised but muffled voice comes back.

You wave a hand and heft several tonnes of rock out of the way without effort. There’s a horrible monster snarl and a thump. You move the rocks out of your line of sight only to see Dionte on the floor trying to crawl over to you to eat you, only he’s tied up and can’t do more than be flopped over, meanwhile Hal is looking down at him with a face of vague disappointment like he thought Dionte was smarter than that.

“Probably should have trolled you first.” you admit.

“You think?” Hal says huffily folding his arms. You’re reminded that Hal doesn’t breathe so he doesn’t need to huff or sigh or anything like that, he’s just being passive aggressive about shit.
“Dirkka pointed out that Dahvid is going to take out any threats on Dionte or finding out we took him against Roxxie or basically any of the others who don’t have ancestors that he knows and liked. He’s pretty petty and temperamental like that.” you explain.

“That seems stupid, but I guess you’re the people who have spent time around him to tell. Plus, you did say that he put that death order into them on a whim so I guess I can see that.” Hal says and presses his foot into the middle of Dionte’s back to stop his slow wormlike shuffle towards you.

“Karkat has moral objections.” you add.

“Oh fuck that.” Hal snorts.

“Still, the threat to the others is enough and I still have the virus so I’m going to try to sneak him back in.” you explain.

“What about me?” Hal asks as he bends down and pulls Dionte upright again and holds him tight enough to his side that the man can’t lunge for you. You could stop him in the air if he tried but the more things keeping him from ripping your throat out the better.

“Put you back with the ship in case we need you to fly in a hurry I guess.” you shrug.

“If that ship hasn’t been discovered already it will be soon, you know that, right?” Hal points out.

“Well what else would you suggest? Try to play you off like the tall shiny friend I have who I’ll swear was totally here this whole time, what do you mean you didn’t notice, Mr. Strydr? Really?” you snort. Actually as you say it you try to think of just how wonderfully terribly you could try to disguise him, dip him in grey paint and jam a shitty black wig on him. Hey, you could try to make him look even more like Dirkka and they’d both be insulted and you’d either die from laughing too hard or they’d find a way to stab you.

“Oh good, you’re back to your normal smartassed self. I guess your quadrants fixed you up after all.” Hal says. You lift off into the air and pick up Hal and Dionte with you as you start flying, so you have a few moments to think before you talk. Smartly you don’t say about your imagined disguise scenario but dumbly you do say…

“Yeah, all three of them.”

“Typical cahoots progression, huh? This isn’t surprising at all you know, trolls are stupidly predictable.” Hal says sounding bored.

“At least you weren’t making bets on who asked the other first, Karkat and Terezi were.” you grumble.

“Oh, oh! Don’t tell me. Hmmm you actually asked but I bet she was very unsubtly flirting with you for ages beforehand because you’re stupid.” Hal says brightly.

“You can walk back, you know.” you hiss at him.

“Hah! I’m right!” Hal crows.

Thankfully the android lets you fly in silence for a while after that and Dionte has nothing to add aside from snarling, groaning and general zombie noises that are as easy enough to tune out as background video game monster noises are. But eventually Hal sees fit to talk again.

“So, if I’m understanding your read on Dayvhe’s ancestor’s temperament correctly, anything we do
to Dionte he’ll do to Roxxie and probably several of your other friends and maybe even worse? Is that right?” Hal asks slowly.

“That’s why I’m so worried and picking you both up, yeah.” you agree.

“Is this a bad point to tell you that Jayded did, in fact, shoot him in the leg before and that hasn’t healed?” Hal asks.

“Maybe he just… won’t notice? Or at least he’ll blame someone else because he won’t know we had him and he thinks he took all of our weapons before.” you say hopefully.

“I guess I just won’t point that out in future around Karkat ‘moral objection’ Vantas then. We’re cool with letting him maim some random bystander who didn’t actually do anything.” Hal shrugs.

“Do you have a solution to that or are you just making me feel shitty?” you demand and Hal shrugs in a very ‘that sounds like a you problem’ kind of way.

Needless to say you’re pretty pleased when you’re able to drop him off near the ship a little after dawn. You’re also pretty surprised that no one’s discovered the ship, or at least that the signs that it’s a prop are just being believed.

“AA?” you call, stepping inside the ship with Hal. Of course you’re also dragging the zombified Dionte after you.

“Sollux!” Aradia’s voice rings through the ship, echoing around you. You consider your point about forgiveness and that she might have been trying to apologise before, it probably wouldn’t be a bad thing to see her. Even with all the shit she’s pulled she did help get you here as much as Vriska did if not actually more given that she’s the literal vessel you flew here.

“Here, hold him. I just need to talk to her for a minute.” you tell Hal, pushing Dionte into his arms.

“Oh no, it’s cool. You’re the only person I’ve got to talk to for ages, by all means just abandon me with the zombie so you can go privately chat it up with your ex.” Hal tells you flatly, clearly unimpressed.

“Thanks for the approval that I’m going to take as sincere.” you reply and quickly walk into the helm before he can stop you. The door shuts or at least mostly shuts behind you, Dayvhe did still damage it before.

“You’re back.” Aradia says.

“Yeah.” you nod.

“Nice shirt.” she says after a second or two.

“Oh. Kanaya made it. Dahvid is keeping everyone locked up in his building, he’s not torturing them but he’s fucked with their heads so they can’t leave.” you explain.

“That’s awful, I hope he feels really bad about this someday. I don’t think he does right now, though.” Aradia sighs.

“I think you’re right there.” you agree and rub the back of your neck awkwardly only to jolt one of your ports. You admit you’re at least a little envious of the flat to the skin kind of ports the other goldbloods have.
“Sollux, I know you probably don’t want to hear it and I’ve probably got no right to say it…” Aradia says hesitantly, her voice coming from all around you. She is apologising, she was trying to before as well, you were right about it.

“You didn’t entirely understand, did you? Being in bots for so long and then a ship with no thinkspoon plugged into it.” you interrupt her.

“No, or- or I think I did know in a way. Like how you can know how much water is in an ablution trap and how long someone can survive without air but it’s not the same as knowing what being drowned feels like. It’s just information and something that happened in your past and without it this wouldn’t be happening so it just seemed less than ideal but okay.” she says and it does make sense, even if thinking about how she just left you there makes you feel awful. You don’t want to feel awful so you just avoid thinking about it any more than you have to.

“I didn’t know what it felt like until I was in you.” Aradia says softly.

You’re startled into laughing so suddenly and so hard that it’s a choked cackle of laughter that forces its way out of you. You would like to blame Dayvhe and his frequent accidental slips into innuendo or Karkat’s general crude language for why you find that so funny but you think this one’s all on you.

“Do you maybe want to rephrase that?” you giggle, trying to stifle your laughing with your hand.

“That- not like that! Sollux!” Aradia scolds you but you know her amused tone, it’s just like it was when she was alive.

“I am sorry, Sollux.” she adds a few moments later when you’ve controlled yourself.

“I know. Thanks for saying it. It’s still pretty rough but I get it a little at least. You weren’t yourself and I don’t think I’ve been myself lately either.” you admit. Aradia makes a thoughtful noise and you notice that the lighting of the room around you shifts a little as she talks.

“You felt really wrong before, but you seem better now. Are you?” she asks.

“Ha… yeah, quadrants, you know?” you hedge, not mentioning that one of those quadrants is Vriska. You’re not sure how the girl Vriska murdered will take you dating the murderer in question. That’s maybe a problem for you to deal with later.

“Hal’s going to stay here but we might still need you if we have to bail in a hurry. Hopefully I can use my virus to coerce Dahvid into undoing his mind control and if that happens we might still need to leave if he takes it really badly. Or- I don’t know. We’re still trying to help Roxxie. I’ve no idea how this is going. But at least you and Hal have each other to talk to now.” you say as a quick subject change.

“Oh, that’s not what you should be worrying about. Anyway I’m not lonely, but I’m sure I’ll enjoy talking with Hal, so far I’ve just been talking to other ghosts hanging around the place.” Aradia informs you cheerfully.

Ah, Aradia’s being spooky and weird again. It kind of makes you nostalgic in a way.

“I was too sort of. The goldbloods here have this shared network of memories and I was looking through this huge library of memories from dead trolls.” you say and the lights get brighter around you with what you assume is interest.

“Really? Oh I’d love to see that! I wonder if I can, if it’s mechanical maybe I can take a peek.”
Aradia wonders.

“Probably but don’t do that, you’ll blow your cover. Stick to real ghosts. I gotta go anyway, I have a zombie to return.” you tell her.

“Not something you hear every night!” Aradia laughs cheerily. It really does make you think that she’s alive again, at least for a second. You hope that won’t fade now that she doesn’t have access to your thinkspoon anymore because you don’t really want to keep lending it to her. It’s your thinkspoon, you have plans to use it at some point no matter what Karkat might say.

You leave the room, she’s not stopping you. Hal is waiting around the corner with Dionte held securely by the metal wires wrapped around him. The moment Dionte senses you his focus snaps on you and his jaw hinges open with a gutteral snarl, he really wants to eat you.

“Have you got him?” Hal asks. You nod and Hal lets Dionte go but your psionics restrain him more than enough for things to be safe. You bid Hal goodbye and start the short flight back to the building from there. When it’s just you and Dionte you really can’t help but consider how much he looks like Dirkka, or you suppose how much Dirkka looks like him.

He’s far more gone than Dayvhe ever was but it makes you wonder if Cal’s appearance of a mind leech has an awful lot to do with this. Actual mind leeches are what makes zombies but simply being around Cal can’t turn people to this right away because Dayvhe, Dirkka and also Dahvid spent time with him and they’re not zombies. It can’t even totally be that it’s because Cal died because everyone else was fine.

Did Cal nibble away at the inside of Dionte’s mind over the sweeps leaving nothing at all behind when he died? He certainly sunk his teeth into your moirail’s mind but he’s still all there. Dirkka seems fine and you’re more inclined to blame Dahvid’s entire person on his own moral bankruptcy, highblooded status and his psionics stunting his social growth. Cal probably isn’t responsible for much there.

“Are you still in there at all?” you ask him as the wind whips by you both. His brown eyes are locked keenly on you, they absolutely follow you, he knows that you’re there but beyond that the lights are on and nobody is home.

“Hhhhhssss.” Dionte snarls at you and bites at the air.

“Yeah, I really hope you’re not still in there somewhere. But if you are I’m sorry I locked you up with Hal in a cave and trollnapped you. Jayded probably isn’t sorry for shooting you in the leg seeing as you attacked Nepeta but I guess I’m sorry all the same.” you tell him as you slow down, reaching the slid open window.

You float on through just fine but when you take Dionte through he kicks and sends all the stuff on the table just under the window scattering with a whole load of loud crashes. Goddamnit he did that last time too, when you took him out he flailed all that shit onto the floor.

With a frown you set Dionte onto his feet and hold him back from you as he tries to stare a hole into you.

“Yeah, yeah, you want to eat me. I get it. Just gotta let you loose…” you say because it feels kind of mean to not to talk to him at least a little. You start snapping the wire off of him and your eyes drift to the husktop parts he kicked off of the table and it makes you pause.

He did kick all that off before but you guess maybe people were in here since? Dayvhe said he’d
been up here but you’ve seen Dayvhe’s block. No way he snuck up here and thought he’d do a spot of tidying as he passed by. Like leaning against someone only for them to move you feel your psionics catch as you stop having to apply force. The partially unrestrained Dionte stops fighting you.

Looking at him you could swear he was Dirkka. No longer is he snarling, trying to attack you with bared teeth and murderous intent. Instead he’s stood there under his own power, his fangs not bared but his mouth just slightly open like he’s just about to ask a question. He’s not straining against what few bonds you still have on him, he’s calm.

Dionte is no longer staring at you, instead he’s looking over your shoulder.

You turn in a rush, no point in doing it slow like this is some horror movie, you already know the monster is there behind you. And he is, his height looming over you as he stares at Dionte in shock. Red and purple eyes flick over the wires still restraining him, the bullet wound to his leg and then to you.

“What- what did you do?” Dahvid hisses as his voice goes all claws on a chalkboard, the furious see-saw of highblood rage and sure enough his eyes are pitching red.

All the excuses for this run through your head but they won’t work, he’s too angry to listen and they’re weak as shit anyway. He’s going to attack your friends, your quadrants. The plan failed. YOU failed. You’re stuck so… so you need to improvise.

You fling the wire that you tied Dionte up in over him and hurl him across the massive space so you can dunk him in Dionte’s coon, maybe the sopor will slow down his escape and chill him out a little. Dionte, seemingly pacified at Dahvid’s presence now turns to look at you so you go right ahead and throw Dionte over there too. You cast around for something heavy and wrench a large machine away from a wall and drag it over the hatch into the room, that ought to slow him down a little more. He’s already cursing and shouting at you so at the very least you know Dahvid isn’t drowning in the sopor.

You have maybe minutes here to act on the plan that you’re making up as you go. Launching your way out of the window you curve around seeking out the wing everyone else is kept in. You can’t take anyone off of the planet and you’ll be caught if you stay. You need help, you need to hide.

“We have a problem!” you shout as you rush through the glass.

Dayvhe bursts into the room with a bang of flashstep displaced air and looks at you in terror, obviously sizing you up for injuries.

“I got caught we gotta bail! Get the others!” you yell and Dayvhe rushes off. Nepeta and Jayded who were already in the room and looking at you surprised at your entrance also run off to grab people.

You pace, you need to fix this. But you can’t, Dahvid is too angry and you arguably are in the wrong here at least a little. But you had your reasons, you’re defensible like Terezi said. But he’s going to kill people and you can’t let him but at the same time you can’t hurt or kill him, you’re at a stalemate. Or not a stalemate as he’s still able to hurt and maim people on your side.

You have to escape then. The ship is an option but it’s hardly subtle and you’ll definitely be caught, you can’t outfly people on a planet and even with how fast you can go eventually you will run out of energy. You need safety, sanctuary, you need…
You need backup.

“One job! You had ONE JOB. ONE THING I TOLD YOU NOT TO DO!” Vriska screeches at you as she marches into the room.

“Shut up, I hate you, I have a plan.” you say in a rush.

“Is-” Vriska hesitates and looks genuinely flustered. You replay what you just said back in your head and, whoops, you just dropped the h-word on her without a second thought.

“Is it a good plan?” she forces herself to say as the others arrive in the room in groups, all looking alarmed.

“It’s the best plan I have.” you assure her.

“How many plans do you have?” Vriska asks suspiciously.

“Unusually for me, just the one.” you say. You look over the group of your friends who are asking what happened and you count heads, everyone is here.

“I got caught, Dahvid is coming and he’s going to kill people I’m pretty sure so you’re all coming with me. I have a plan so just hold still, try not to scream or attack anything.” you say loudly.

“Wait-” Equius starts to protest but you don’t and instead burst the whole window behind you out and drag everyone into the sky with you. You get to hear Equius’ terrified yelp but it’s not your focus, nor are you paying attention to people shouting questions or objections at you. You need to get where you’re going and fast.

Thankfully you happen to be a really powerful psionic and fast is absolutely something you can do. You’re almost instantly out in the city and it’s not hard at all to spot the square gold trimmed building that Nicole took you to before. You shove the door but it’s locked. Remembering the card you were given by Nicole you fumble it out and slap it to the reader so the door unlocks. You rush through the door and drag everyone with you, the lobby is empty as it was before so you’re left to haul a biowire out of the vending machine again.

“This is the place you told me about, the goldblood place.” Karkat says as he looks around all of you.

“Sol, what are you about to do? You have a biowire in your hand and that face on that says you might be about to do something dumb.” Dayvhe asks you, pushing past people to get to you.

“That’s fair.” you admit as you pull the plastic away from the wire.

There’s a high pitched whine and you turn around to see Dirkka starting to lose his shit, his hands are clamped tight on either side of his head.

“We- we can’t be here, we gotta go. We gotta go back.” Dirkka whines.

“This is bad, super bad.” Roxxie agrees.

“We were ordered not to go.” Rohhze says slowly, looking around. Half of your group is rapidly starting to panic. You just forced them to break a direct order from The Grand Entertainer.

“I need to talk to the other goldbloods to get help but we need to stay here to do it!” you insist and hold the door steady as Dirkka tries to pull it open.
“I can’t give a conflicting order, what am I supposed to do?” Dayvhe shouts back to you as he holds Karkat close. He’s right, he can’t fix this and the people without that order in your group trying to talk the others down isn’t working.

Your eyes fall on Vriska, currently shooshing Terezi out of having the coherence to worry about anything including Dahvid’s orders.

“Vriska! I need you to stop everyone trying to leave. I have to go in there to try to fix this but I can’t do it if I come back and you’re all gone.” you tell her desperately.

“That’s a lot of people and it gets harder the higher up the hemospectrum you go, I don’t know if I can do Roxxie and Terezi’s hugely resistant!” Vriska protests.

“You don’t need to do everyone. Figure something out, delegate or whatever, I don’t know! I need you-” you insist but she yanks you forward and kisses you before shoving you back.

“Go! I’ll do it, just don’t take long.” Vriska tells you and lifts her hands to her temples.

Turning on the spot you rush for the back room.

“You’re not going alone!” Karkat shouts. You stare at him, he’s trembling all over and looks like he wants to scratch his skin off but he’s also staring you down with determination radiating out from his very being.

“You’ve got a wire and you’re going into some room to do something I KNOW you hate and- and I won’t let you go alone! I’m coming with you! I know we have to go and we shouldn’t be here but I can’t let you be alone for this all over again, I won’t!” Karkat insists.

Dahvid’s command has run into something in Karkat’s head that’s stronger, an internal command of Karkat’s own. Karkat doesn’t abandon the people he cares about, he’ll want to leave the moment you’re done but letting you do this to yourself alone is a thought that hurts worse than not obeying Dahvid. He’s literally too stubborn and loyal for his own will to be overridden on this.

“Come on then. What’s the plan exactly?” Dayvhe asks and grabs Karkat’s hand. You know he’ll keep an eye on Karkat when you’re out so you nod and rush out of the room leaving Vriska and the others to deal with your friends who are currently under orders to not be here.

“I’m going to get us backup or… or plead for help because right now that’s all we have. Psiionic’s cult is the only thing that might protect us so I have to try, I’ll be fine. I just need to go in there.” you explain.

Again there’s a troll in here passed out on a splaysac but she doesn’t seem aware of your presence at all, Karkat and Dayvhe are absolutely staring at her. You kick a free splaysac to the wall and drop down into it, the wall jack easily accepts one end of the biowire and with a last look at Karkat and Dayvhe you plug yourself in.

The world around you goes black and you’re stuck in complete darkness, only the sound of your own breath lets you know that you’re real. You don’t want to be here, you want-

Like unfolding a paper sculpture the world around you comes into being, each piece around you opening up into more. Bit by bit your old hive, your apartment, unfolds around you. Your loungeplank is constructed, the plant Dayvhe gave you settles into place on the counter, the window reveals your city humming with life. You wouldn’t come to the area Nicole started you in, this is yours. God, every detail around you is perfect. Things Karkat gave or lent you are right there, traces of Dayvhe’s presence and even your own work scattered about.
All of this is great and all but it’s not what you need, you want a way to the main area. The door seems the most logical place so you reach out, open it and step out into the awake and glimmering universe of other yellow minds going about their work.

Navigating the place before was just a matter of thinking the right way. Which sounds easy enough to anyone who has never had trouble controlling their own thoughts. You try to summon the familiarity of that ‘am I the asshole’ thread that you visited and sure enough you’re there, it’s archived but you’re in the right subgrub for it. Or, well, you’re not. You don’t want to put your plea for help into ‘am I the asshole’ because that’s asking people if you’re the asshole for trollnapping Dionte or if Dahvid is the asshole for starting it and though that information is relative you need help not judgement. You certainly are going to get judgment but it’s not what you’re here for.

You try to hop over to what feels like roughly the right area, this whole place seems to rely on a certain amount of intuition and your own visualisation to arrange this place. It makes sense, better to have your mind make a map of this space than try to design some nightmare GUI for it. Still it leaves you with not enough in the way of context clues to be totally sure you’re doing this right so you go with the feel of what you want. You try to channel the confidence with which Karkat can walk into a crowded room, hop up onto something and loudly demand the attention of everyone about a bone he has to pick, his voice loud enough that everyone hears. That’s what you want, you need everyone’s attention for this.

So… so you go with that feeling.

The black ground solidifies under your feet as you draw breath and clench your fists.

“I need your help!” you plead to the void as loud as you can.

The air around you looks like space, distant galaxies and stars indicating activity but at your words pairs of light click on around you. People are watching.

You explain, more in thought and feeling than mere words how you got here. You introduce Dayvhe and Karkat and cram in as much as emphasis as you can in how much you care for them, of how hurt Dayvhe was and what you had to do to Cal to protect him.

Around you more and more eyes in a spectrum of colours focus on you, getting exponentially greater with each passing moment so you push onwards, knowing that your account is recorded and this isn’t just live.

You show what happened to Dionte, not that you knew or could have known about that then. You show how it felt when Dahvid started razing Alternia with his music to punish whoever killed Cal and what that did to you and others, then the fear when the actors arrived. Dirkka nearly getting killed and you retaliating, of the people killed on Dahvid’s orders. How you had no clue why this was happening, how you were scared and alone.

The sheer weight of attention on you now makes your nerves twang anxiously and it’s so very bright from the light of all of them. Out of nowhere Nicole appears next to you as fully embodied as you are. She nods in encouragement so you keep going.

You grab your recollection of your desperation, your fear, the bone deep terror at losing everyone when they took your quadrants and half of your friends with them. You show them what you remember of chasing the ship, of passing out, of how much that hurt. You drag the ugly memory of letting yourself be helmed again and shove it in their faces as proof of just how desperate you were, it’s so visceral you may as well just throw up your feelings in front of them.
You came here to get them back, to save them but you have to show them everywhere it went wrong. How Davide stopped you and the terrible controls Dahvid put on your friends to keep you all there. You tried to fix your mistake by bringing Dionte back so Dahvid wouldn’t find out and hurt your friends, but you failed. The memory of Dahvid’s murderous face is recent enough that you can recall the memory and shove it to them in full HD quality. So you ran, you came here because this is the only move you have left. You need help and you’re only nine, Dahvid is ten times your age and he has a whole planet and all you have is your thinkspoon controlled friends and a hope that there’s enough reason in people who wear your sign as a symbol of something better might help.

“Please,” you beg again, “I can’t let them get hurt. But I don’t- help us.”

Nicole lays a hand on your shoulder and waves her hand, a poll appears. To help you or not. The lights from the eyes of those watching you is a blinding multicolour blur around you, so many people are present that you can’t even pick out individuals anymore aside from Nicole at your side.

The poll floods with votes, thousands and thousands. Hundreds of thousands even. All into helping you, not a one into denying you. You’ve been on the internet as long as you could type and you’ve never seen an online poll for anything not have at least a few dissenting votes, even as a joke. You guess you made them take you seriously and compassionately. Or perhaps when you get older you do actually grow up.

Wait, no, you still know Dirkka and Roxxie, that’s not a thing that happens.

“Well, that’s enough people for a call. We’re helping. Now what do we want to do?” Nicole asks the hazy glow of light.

If you focus you can hear the unintelligible drowning roar of voices but just like what happened with you before whatever intelligent system this whole thing is running on is able to sort things out into categories. A first suggestion ‘Reason with Entertainer’ comes up and is slotted up into a grid for future voting. A second category ‘hide them until he calms down’. You don’t think either of those will go well.

“I propose a full strike. This is not what Psiionic would want and not what we stand for. We strike until he takes the control off of them and allows them to stay or leave as they want without threatening them. No work for any department or job.” Nicole suggests and ‘Strike’ is fitted into the tally with the other options.

Some dissent weighs in and Nicole modifies her suggestion.

“Alright, yes, aside from long range scanning. That’s for our protection too, no need to endanger ourselves for this.” she concedes.

‘Lock the planetoid’s network’ is also suggested.

“What do you mean by a strike?” you ask Nicole, but you’re not sure if people outside of her can hear you or not. You suppose it doesn’t matter.

“We work for The Grand Entertainer because his goals align with ours, he’s trying to advance the cause and it’s close enough to Psiionic’s own generally speaking that we’re happy to go with him. But we don’t serve him, we serve Psiionic and his teachings. This is way outside that. We weren’t happy that he was caging you in but to control you and threaten you this much isn’t something we can tolerate. Why he’s doing it is a subject of debate but the bottom line is we can’t stand it. If he goes against us he goes without us. We won’t do our jobs, act in his films, work on his projects, make his sets, heal his people, cook his food or power his planet. He needs us and this is something
We will not allow him to do, he’ll have to give in. We’ve always known this kind of action was a possibility but no gold leader has ever had to call this before as motion we’d actually take, this is… it’s a big deal.” Nicole says shakily.

No other suggestions seem to be coming in, or if they are they’re similar enough to the ones already here that they’re not being added. With a gesture Nicole opens up the voting and, again, thousands on thousands of votes are streaming in. Most seem to be tipping towards striking.

“Sollux, where are you right now?” Nicole asks, turning your face to look at her.

“The place you took me to, we all are. I didn’t know where else to-”

“That’s fine, I’ll send some people to you now. People immune to Dahvid’s influence, or mostly at least. It only works if you can hear it and we have enough deaf trolls on hand who he can’t directly control even if he can pull on their general pity strings for him. But they’re loyal to Psiionic and me more than they are to him. You need to all be somewhere safer, better defended.” she insists.

You look towards the poll, it’s tipping heavily towards striking right now.

“But what about the results?” you ask.

“Looking at the numbers it seems pretty clear what’ll happen, but I’ll worry about that. It’s my job, you need to get up.” Nicole tells you firmly.

You try to remember how to get out but you can’t quite call it to mind so in the end you just go to pull out a biowire that isn’t there for your projected body and that disconnects you enough that you really do wake up. Dayvhe and Karkat are leaning over you, each of them with a hand on your face.

“Sollux?” Karkat asks worriedly.

“You were crying.” Dayvhe tells you. Oh, great. You pull the wire free and sit up, rubbing at your face which as they said is a little damp. Your impassioned speech about your plight must have got a reaction out of your physical body.

“They’re gonna help us, but we need to go. We’re-” you pause, if you tell Karkat that you’re absolutely going somewhere that’s not Dahvid’s place then whatever pain this is putting him through will surely get worse. You don’t want to lie to him though, or manipulate him but maybe you can walk that line somehow.

“We need to go back.” Karkat insists and Dayvhe hisses somewhere behind you.

“He might kill our friends if we do. He might kill me.” you say. He might, it’s very unlikely that he’d kill you given that he still tries talking to Psii from what you’ve heard. But it’s not impossible, you’re not lying. Plus highblood tantrums can be fatal to people nearby and you’re not able to defend yourself properly right now.

“No! I wouldn’t let him!” Karkat snaps.

“You couldn’t stop him.” Dayvhe chips in, presumably catching onto your idea at least somewhat.

“Then we need to get you somewhere safe.” Karkat concludes.

“Right, Nicole is sending some goldbloods to pick us up to take us somewhere safe.” you say.

“Us?” Karkat asks, pulling back from you slightly. Dahvid is trying to wrench him from you and you
can’t let him.

“You’re going to leave?” you ask.

“You can’t leave Sollux alone, look what terrible things happen literally every time we do that!” Dayvhe insists and you know he’s playing it up so that Karkat will stay but, ow.

“You wouldn’t be alone, you could go somewhere safe and-” Karkat starts.

“Right, yeah, leave me unsupervised with Sollux. Like that time we were unsupervised and I got him sick and he would have got void rot if you hadn’t shown up.” Dayvhe nods. That’s not quite how it happened but ok.

“Oh, or that time you left me with him and then he got trollnapped.” Dayvhe adds.

“Or the time you left me with him and he panicked and blew out the side of a communal scuttlebuggy, or that-” Dayvhe continues.

“God, stop already! You’ve made your point, I should keep you two on a leash or something.” Karkat groans.

“I feel slandered.” you say sharply.

“Wow, Karkat, I didn’t know you were into that.” Dayvhe laughs.

“In the interests of no one getting murdered I’ll go with you and Dayvhe needs to stop talking.” Karkat shouts, interrupting Dayvhe’s usually scheduled hoofbeastshit.

“Wait, I need to shut up so I don’t get murdered?” Dayvhe asks and the look that Karkat shoots him is confirmation enough.

Dayvhe slides his hand into yours and squeezes tight. Karkat goes through the door and the two of you hang back a moment.

“They’re really going to help? What’re we going to do about the others?” Dayvhe whispers.

“They’re going to help and I don’t know, I just hope Vriska can hold them or- or I don’t- this is all my fault. I fucked up, I got caught! The whole thing with Dionte was my fault and-” Dayvhe shooshes you and kisses the side of your face.

“We’ll improvise, come on, you got this.” Dayvhe assures you and gently pulls you through the door. No matter what you’re not alone in this, for better or for worse.

Out in the lobby Roxxie, Dirkka and Kanaya are all standing stock still with their faces completely blank, at their side Vriska is stood with her face contorted in concentration. Terezi is on the ground, crying and struggling as John and Rohhze hold her down.

“GET OFF OF ME WE HAVE TO GO BACK! WE HAVE TO GO!” Terezi screams and Karkat cringes to hear her, as if her words are reminding him of the obligation that he has.

“Why is Rohhze okay?” you ask as she looks up at you.

“It seems that when Dahvid removed Dayvhe’s control he voided his own. No doubt he intended to put his orders back in but for now it seems that I am free on all accounts, which is good. Fewer highbloods for Vriska to control.” Rohhze explains.
“Look out, we’ve got goldbloods incoming.” Jayekh says from the door, cocking his pistol.

“Wait, no, they’re our ride!” you call out.

The door darkens, blotted out by the form of a yellowblood who looks like he may have eaten two other people for breakfast. Seriously this guy is subjugulator build which you’ve never seen in someone else of your colour and you’re pretty tall for gold but you’re sure as hell not broad with it. You’re more string bean noodle guy than that kind of build. To his side a far shorter woman with bright orange and red eyes taps a card to the door and looks over at all of you. She hops up onto the shoulder of her companion and quickly counts all of you before gesturing for you to follow them.

“Hello? Where exactly are we going?” Jayded calls after them but they don’t respond at all.

“I think they’re deaf, Nicole said something about it. It stops Dahvid from fucking with them so much,” you explain.

“That’s pretty clever.” Rohhze says thoughtfully and you lead your group outside. Vriska forces Roxxie, Dirkka and Kanaya outside, leaving John and Rohhze to haul the struggling Terezi with them. Everyone else escorts the group as an armed guard.

The vehicle outside is a big all terrain scuttlebuggy that looks seriously reinforced. On the roof of it another goldblood is crouched, clearly guarding the vehicle for how she’s scanning the area. She’s wearing a helmet that covers her ears with a clear and colourless visor that covers her eyes. When the two goldbloods who came into the building climb into the front of the vehicle she stands up and looks at all of you.

“Come on, in here.” she says in a rush, leaping off and opening the door for you all.

With no other choice you all pile inside as you try to find a seat for everyone but also get in the vehicle quickly and efficiently. Dahvid has to be free by now, he’s got to be looking for you. He has to have people looking for you, surely. You snag a seat by the window and the woman shuts the door behind you all as she grabs a backwards facing one so she can look at you. The scuttlebuggy starts moving and the woman with the helmet on holds up a hand as she fiddles with a setting on her helmet.

“And… right, there, I can hear you again.” she says brightly.

“I thought you were deaf.” Dayvhe says in surprise.

“I am, I have a mic that feeds right into my ports so I can hear but it’s digital and as I’m sure you all know Entertainer’s gifts still transmit that way. I have to cut my hearing off totally to be resistant at all, not that we’ve ever needed to do this before.” she explains.

Oh, good. You’re causing more problems, wonderful. You can see text scrolling across her visor and she’s reading with a small frown.

“Last I looked the vote was heavily swinging for a strike which means these roads will likely be impassable soon so we really don’t have much time to kill. I’ll tell him to go faster.” she says softly and you catch the ghostly outline of a trollian window on her visor before it vanishes shortly after. The landscape outside shifts past your window a little faster.

“What’s wrong with her?” the helmeted woman asks, pointing to Terezi.

“The Grand Entertainer ordered most of them to stay in his building. Vriska’s keeping the others controlled and Karkat’s powering through it but…” you shrug.
“I’ll send the word ahead, maybe we can do something for them.” she says and seems to focus and you catch the ghostly images of windows opening on her visor.

“Exactly what’s going to happen with this strike?” Jayyne asks from her place a few seats down.

“It’s going to be chaos. We’re about a sixth of the population of Planet Hollywood. We provide about ninety percent of the planetoid’s power, we’re the primary set constructors and destructors, heavily employed in visual effects not to mention all of the technology infrastructure.” your helmet wearing guide says, looking out of the windows. The scuttlebuggy comes to a stop and she twists to peer out the front.

“Damn lights.” she hisses.

There’s a flash and a scrolling message across the windscreen of the scuttlebuggy, your helmet wearing friend’s screen pings with a red box flashing up on it.

“We have a strike, it’s official.” she says softly.

An almighty crash shakes the vehicle and you lean over Karkat to look through the window on the other side. A building has toppled over, on a film set if the nearby cameras are any clue. You can see a cluster of yellowbloods standing together staring at a screen as a man in cerulean comes marching towards them angrily, he’s shouting and gesturing at the building but the three yellows just shrug and hold their palmhusks up for him to see and walk off.

The scuttlebuggy starts to move again and as you drive on you see goldbloods walking out of businesses, out of coffee shops as they dump their aprons on the ground, others just dropping files they were carrying for work and you guess going back to their hives. Everyone else is staring in shock, both inside and outside of the vehicle you’re in.

“We’re issuing invitations to the rest of the population, the other groups if you can call them that, to join us.” she tells you.

Your scuttlebuggy stops again and it becomes apparent that the road has been very quickly choked to a standstill with work vehicles just abandoned in place, so much so that the big guy up front has to float you over several large jams to get you going again. None of you have much to say, you’re all just watching total anarchy unfold because of a plea for help that you made.

“We’re taking you to the medical centre. It’s where we research the development of ports and other gold tech, we do some surgery there but mostly it’s research and teaching other docterrorists how to do the job. It’s secure and it’ll stay powered and connected to our network. I think there should be some places there for you to stay but I don’t know, I’m just here to bring you places.” the woman informs you when you finally come to the last stretch of congested road.

The medical centre itself is a triangle sided building of mostly glass, surrounded by guard walls of a large campus style facility that look like they normally would be peaceful but right now are anything but. Tall walls surround the centre and your three guards walk you through the manned gates and into the grounds themselves. It’s clearly an academic institution but around you are just yellowbloods staring at your group. Their faces are sympathetic though, not gawking at kids being here but rather people who know your situation. These are people you plead your case to.

Ugh, you may have oversharped your feelings for all of your group to literally hundreds of thousands of people, most especially your feelings about Dayvhe and Karkat. Shoving down the sense of shame you just keep following your guides towards the main pointed building.
“Sollux, thank goodness.” Nicole sighs in relief from the doorway. She thanks the people who brought you here and urges your group inside.

“The others-” you say, gesturing to them but Nicole nods before you can finish.

“This is a medical building and though there’s nothing that we can do to that’ll undo any order The Grand Entertainer has given, we can make it easier for them. People are on the way up.” she explains and you relax at least a touch.

“We’re having some rooms put together on the lower levels but you’re free to go anywhere in the building. The science director is putting sensitive experiments on pause for the moment but, well, please don’t touch things in labs. I have a lot to organise, a lot of people to talk to, including The Grand Entertainer who is not pleased at all right now.” Nicole says worriedly and brushes her hand through her hair, exposing ports that she’s not got covered up right now.

“Thanks, this is huge. I kind of can’t believe it.” you admit, looking around.

“Me too if I’m honest. Oh, which reminds me, you’ll need palmhusks. I have a box of them here.” she says and pops a medium sized box out of her inventory and lowers it to show you that there’s a whole pile of high end palmhusks that look freshly unpackaged. You fish one out and tap to turn it on.

“They should all be set up and trollian is on there so you should be able to log on, Sollux I need your handle at the very least so I can troll you with any updates you all need to be aware of.” she says and you hastily log on. Your trollslum starts lighting up as everyone around you not currently occupied manages to grab a device and do the same.

“I’m twinArmageddons.” you tell her and watch as she one handedly types that into her own device, the request pings up on yours and you accept it. You now have dimensonalMeganesian on your list.

“Excellent, oh, over here.” Nicole waves and a few labcoat wearing docterrorists come over.

Dayvhe steps in and helpfully indicates just who is affected and who isn’t, including going into how Vriska is controlling three of your friends to stop them from going crazy from Dahvid’s orders.

“We can sedate them, but you’ll need to come with us.” the docterrorist in the lead nods and the others are buzzing around your friends investigating them and making notes here and there.

“I’ll go with them, I’ll troll you and keep you updated. I’m sure you’ve got stuff to do with all of… this.” Dayvhe says, gesturing vaguely to Nicole who is off to the side typing rapidly on her husktop that’s just floating in the air.

The docterrorists lead most of your friends off, some of your unaffected friends are restraining Terezi, Dayvhe is looking after Karkat and Jayekh and Jayyne are going along with their matesprits, obviously Vriska is still controlling several people so she goes too. A hand touches the small of your back, making you jump, but it’s just Nepeta.

“We’re going to go check around, see what’s going on in here. Ways in and out too.” Nepeta whispers in your ear. You nod in agreement and she leads Equius off so it’s just you.

The room you’re in is a weird shape, a right angled triangle with the mostly glass wall/roof sloping down behind you and when you start getting to the back wall behind Nicole it’s about two floors tall and there’s slivers of rooms curving around the space. You walk a little closer and look at Nicole typing hurriedly, then pausing, then typing.
“What’re you doing?” you ask.

“I’m trying to negotiate but it’s not going very well, I don’t think he’s listening to reason right now.” Nicole sighs.

You lean closer so you can see and sure enough she’s on trollian typing away. It’s a conversation between her and tautologicallyGauche who, from what she said and the alternating colours of TG’s typing, you’re sure is Dahvid. They’ve been talking for a while so you’re only seeing part of the conversation but it’s still telling.

TG: DIONTE HAS BEEN SHOT NICOLE!

TG: SHOT!!!!

DM: III appreciate that must be diiiistressiiiiing siiiiv But we don’t know iiiif Sollux hiiimself or the others were responsiiible forthathV

TG: oh really because he wasn’t shot before and NOW HE’S BEEN SHOT AND YOU WON’T ANSWER MY CALLS TO BRING THEM BACK!

DM: III have to uphold the judgement of my uniion siiriv

DM: But, we diidn’t agree to holdiiing them captiive iiin the fiist placeV IIIt viiiolates our priiinciiiples of freedom, III diiid explaiiiin that worry to you beforeV

TG: what about DIONTE’S freedom?!

TG: they had him chained up who knows where

TG: i oughta fucking cull them for this!

DM: III absolutely cannot return them to you when you say thiiings like thatV

DM: Liiiike III saiiid before untiil you remove the controls on all of them and ensure theiiir safety eiither on or offf this planetoiid dependiiing on what they want the goldbloods wiill not work for youV

TG: you can’t do that

DM: By Psiiiioniic’s own teachiiings we aren’t free at all untiil we can make choiiices liiiike thiiisV

TG: DON’T TALK TO ME ABOUT PSI2 YOU NEVER KNEW HIM AND I DO

TG: and for your *information* psi helped me rescue dionte once from a bunch of psychos that meant him harm and fucked shit up with me so dont you dare presume to lecture me about what my psi2 would want in this situation!

TG: you give them back to me right now

DM: Even iiif III wanted to, III can’tV Not wiiiihout a majoriiity vote to change our actiiioonV

TG: then i will come down there and get them myself

You hiss and pull back. What was that handle again? tautologicallyGauche? You type it into your new palmhusk and fire off your first message on the thing.

[twinArmageddons began trolling tautologicallyGauche]

TA: hey a22hole, try two take my friiend2 and we’ll 2ee how well you 2tand up to me now that ii blew up your 2hiity necklace.

TG: ill troll carrie and tell her to remind me to be scared

TG: unless you want dead friends you cant hurt or kill me

TA: ii gue22 2o

TA: but ii can throw you iin the hole ii kept diionte in

TG: youre dead youre so very dead you know that right

TA: ii diidn’t actually hurt hiim you know, but good job keepiing track of hiim that you diidn’t notiice he wa2 mi22iiing.

TG: HE’S BEEN SHOT!

TA: yeah ok that wa2 us but he attacked u2 becau2e he’2 a ZOMBIIE, we were defendiiing our2elve2!

TG: hes not a zombie dont say that
“Does he really not know?” you ask, looking at Nicole who’d been not so subtly reading over your shoulder but you did it to her so that’s fair.

“We don’t talk about it in his hive.” she says quietly.

“Why?” you ask.

“Because he doesn’t like it when people say things like that. We all know he’s different and we all know how.” Nicole says.

“Miss Kidman, it’s just it’s George Carlin and…” the man trails off pointedly.

“Oh, lord. He better be on our side or else I’m going to hear about this on stage for sweeps, I have to go.” Nicole groans and walks off with the younger man who must be assisting her. You guess she is the leader around here, even if she was elected.

You figure you should probably catch Hal up on what’s going on but then again other people have palmhusks now and can do that. Besides you don’t know enough about what’s going on with the others or the proper status of your current location to properly inform Hal. He’s a guy who likes questions and dislikes not having answers so trying to inform him too early isn’t something you’re really dying to do.

Nicole did say that you could explore though so you walk through the door that Nicole left through and find yourself in a large two floor high room that’s perfectly square with other doors leading out of it, staircases going down to lower floors and one other minor detail.

Nothing really all that fascinating.
Just a two story tall statue of a guy who looks eerily like you rendered entirely in gold. He takes up a whole wall of the place, sat on the ground cross legged. The points of his tallest horns touch the ceiling above you and his blank gold eyes could either be seen to look out across the room as a whole or right down directly at you. It certainly feels like he’s looking directly at you. Your ancestor is depicted wearing what you guess is some kind of flight suit and even though everything is monochromatic gold some parts of it are burnished and dulled in a way that suggest darker colours. Not unlike the colour scheme and fit of the shirt you’re wearing right now. Whatever artist made this didn’t shy away from the old style ports visible on his temples, just the same as your own. His hair is longer than yours and a little wild in a way that could have easily covered them but they’re still shown, it feels important somehow.

Maybe it’s that he’s a giant gold statue but you can’t help but feel that you’re seeing and hearing about your ancestor everywhere these days yet you really don’t know anything about him. You hope he was someone worth all this fuss. You hope he is someone worth all of this. No one’s perfect of course and even if these goldbloods here have an accurate picture of his views and personal ethics on things they’re not going to get everything. They won’t know if he was an asshole when he didn’t have coffee or if he took up all the space in the coon or drank juice right from the carton and put it back.

You stand on the polished floor looking up at your ancestor and wonder if he would be on your side or Dahvid’s side.

The building is a hive of activity of people answering messages, making calls, checking things with a very stressed Nicole. You manage to peer into a meeting room containing trolls of other hues demanding Nicole call the strike off and her explaining that unless your entire colour swathe of trolls on the planetoid changed their vote to a majority calling it off she lacks the authority to do so. Everyone made the decision, she’s just the figurehead.

This is not a popular answer, nor is her suggestion that if they want the strike to end they take things up with the man who has the power to meet their demands.

When you find the medical rooms lower down in the building you find that several of your friends have been sedated into sleep with the full intent to keep them that way until Dahvid relents. That way they won’t suffer for not obeying his orders. Karkat seems to be coping well enough that they didn’t see fit to go so far as full sedation.

He’s sat on a stretcher next to Dayvhe and is leant against his side, though he perks up when you spot him having just walked into the room.

“Sollux!” Karkat says loudly, his eyes sparkling as he sees you.

“Oh boy.” Dayvhe mutters.

“How’re you feeling?” you ask as you come closer.

“Yeah, he’s a little-” Dayvhe tries but Karkat shoves him over to launch himself nearly off the stretcher to wrap you in a posture pole creaking embrace.

“I’m so glad you’re ok.” Karkat croons at you as he nuzzles his face into your chest.

“I was only upstairs. But what about you, how’re you? The others are out cold but you’re not.” you
say and pet his hair absently. At least until Karkat purrs almost chainsaw loud and leans his head right into your hand.

“Sollux, you’re my BEST FRIEND. I pity you so much, you’re the best, I love your stupid face.” Karkat purrs, all but petting himself with your hand that’s just frozen in shock.

“Yeah they gave him something to quote unquote calm him down and he’s basically high as globes right now it’s gone from worrying to piss your pants funny.” Dayvhe grins at you and you try to gently herd Karkat back onto the stretcher next to Dayvhe.

“Are they going to change it so he’s not like this the whole time?” you ask as you dig your fingers into Karkat’s thick and unruly hair and knead the pads of your fingers to his scalp in a way that seems to turn him all jellylike.

“That’s the plan, they want him to be able to think and reason his way into justifying what he’s doing but not be like this. We’re not sure if it works funny on Karkat specifically or if my ancestor was pulling his punches because of the whole Signless thing. I don’t think it’s that because Dirkka is Dione’s descendant and you saw how much he likes that guy but he’s totally wrecked Dirkka’s shit. Maybe it’s mutant weirdness or Karkat’s the most stubborn troll alive and wants to only do his thing and no one else’s.” Dayvhe shrugs.

“The last one, I think.” you say with a soft laugh.

“You’re my best friend.” Karkat whines into your shirt.

“Yeah, KK, I am.” you agree.

“I love you so much, you’re just- I always have. And Dayvhe… I pity him so much and hate him so much and he pities you so much.” Karkat bumbles uselessly.

“I know, Karkat. I pity you both too.” you assure him.

“But he does, he pities you so much, he’s so pale for you.” Karkat whispers it’s a secret.

“God, Karkat, he knows. You don’t gotta go on.” Dayvhe mutters, his cheeks dark.

“No, no, he is! And I am- I’m. Wait, we don’t we don’t have a colour. He an’ me are red and black and this other thing and you and him are pale and this other thing and you and me are this other thing but that doesn’t have a colour we need a colour.” Karkat says vehemently.

“Karkat, you’re really high. Maybe you should sleep.” you suggest.

“No! I’m not! You both pity each other so much and I want you both to be happy because I pity you both so much and you let me help and whenever I think of how nice it was of you two to let me be that for you it makes me want to cry and I just-” whatever Karkat’s saying after that is lost to incoherency because he’s just kind of grossly sobbing into his hands in between looking up at either of you to declare the strength of his very many feelings.

You honestly have no idea how a body as small as Karkats can physically hold that many emotions.

He’s sweet in a disgusting kind of way and more or less calms down after a little while of wailing about how great you both are and instead just sprawls spacily across your laps entirely happy with the absent petting you and Dayvhe are giving him as you talk.

“So you actually have his trolltag?” Dayvhe asks as he rubs his palm against one of Karkat’s nubby
“Yeah, and he’s a TG too, look.” you say and hand it over.

“I oughta sue, too bad my legal rep’s in a coma.” Dayvhe grumbles as he reads. You know he hits the death threat when you hear the growl building up in him. You pap his face with the back of your hand and swipe your palmhusk back.

“Too bad he’s probably had that handle longer than you’ve been alive.” you point out.

“Details.” Dayvhe shrugs.

You missed lunch but Dayvhe has snacks on hand for you but when dinner rolls around Karkat is more himself again, a little dozy perhaps but himself. He’s aware and sensible enough that you can take him away from medical supervision and pick one of the high up meeting rooms to eat in so he doesn’t get overly emotional about other people being sedated like that and not him.

“I guess it’s going to stop all of their imports and shuttling people off the planetoid to events and stuff, right? Unless they call in Imperial transports, but Dahvid won’t want to admit he has a problem. So there’s that.” Dayvhe theorises.

“It’s not like we’re the only psionics.” you reason as you peel the foil off of your burrito.

“Yeah but how often do you get rustbloods as strong as your average yellow? I’m not saying those with the power can’t help clear the roads or do some of the movie work but it’s not going to fix their problem.” Dayvhe counters.

“Aradia was really strong psionically.” Karkat chips in as he struggles to unwrap his burrito, so you take pity on him and psionically do it for him.

“Aradia was crazy strong, for rust. She didn’t have shit on me, but then I couldn’t raise ghosts to do my bidding so it’s whatever.” you shrug.

“I think given that you’re not an adult and you have overpowered every adult you’ve come up against, only tying with Nicole because you ran out of air we can safely say that you’re not normal, dude.” Dayvhe points out.

“You just noticed?” Karkat snorts and bites into his food.

“Rude.” you retort.

“Point is that you can’t measure people against you, it’s not fair. So I’m just saying that this whole thing is going to need some major solidarity from other people if you want to really force my ancestor’s hand. There’s got to be more we can do.” Dayvhe explains.

You hear the sound of something land on the table you’re all sat at and you look to see that Karkat is sitting there open mouthed and some of his food has literally dropped from his jaw. Gross.

“Karkat, shut your mouth.” you tell him.

“No, LOOK!” Karkat says, his mouth still full of food as he points past you both and to the windowed wall to your side.

It’s night now and the city lights stretch out across the dark landscape, some film sets are lit up in bright oases of light and the thread of streetlights map out each road. Then, without warning, a huge
chunk of it just vanishes. Your chair screeches as you stand up and walk to the window. Outside another block goes dark, then another, then another.

“They’re out of power.” Dayvhe whispers.

The three of you stand there and watch as street lights flicker off and the city drops into darkness bit by bit until the only thing left alight is the building you’re in and the distant glow of the mansion on the hill.

“The woman in the scuttlebuggy with us told us yellowbloods power the city, it must be psionically charged or something. No yellowbloods working the power grid means no power.” you say in a hushed voice.

“A whole planet without power, we’re lit up because this place represents the people who supply it and then there’s him. How many nights can go by without people screaming at him to fix this?” Dayvhe says.

“What about food?” Karkat asks and bites his burrito.

“No power, means no working hunger trunks. Not unless you’re someone who can power it yourself with psionics. No helmsmen means no deliveries. This isn’t a strike, this is a siege.” Dayvhe says in awe.
Gold - Marina and the Diamonds

“Don't think I want what I used to want
Don't think I need what I used to need
Don't think I want what I used to want
Don't think I see what I used to see
In El Dorado, your gold
To Colorado can't be bought or sold
Now, there's no moral to this story
But I can hear my freedom calling me, calling me”
Gold - Marina and the Diamonds

You’re an anonymous flare of light in the glow of the crowd around Nicole, your shared awareness washing up against the shores of each other to be part of a single being. She’s sharing information about the strike, what’s been successfully shut down, people have been without power for two days now. Everything is grinding to a halt and with the system being so vastly broken a vast number of people outside of your caste have stepped forward to join in solidarity.

Unsurprisingly of those joining in the strike there’s a bias towards the warmer end of the hemospectrum, aside from a huge spike with almost every lime stepping in to share their support. To your muted guilt of those striking with you a number of them are among the people who trollnapped your friends in the first place. Troll Will Smith, Margot Robbie and Robert Downey have all publicly refused to have anything else to do with Dahvid’s operation until your demands are met. Well, you say publicly refused, as all networks but this one are down publicly stating anything has become a matter of finding a yellowblood and telling them so they can tell the rest of you. There’s a whole thread of names that people are adding to.

“I received a call this morning offering some notable support.” Nicole says to you all and you actually get to hear her audio memory of the call.

“Nico, it’s Carrie Fisher! “he’s completely losing his shit over this you know.”

“You know my position, Carrie. I can’t-” Nicole’s voice says in your memory.

“No, no, that’s not what I mean. I would come and help but this wiggler is not going to come around unless someone holds his hand and walks him all the way to the right answer, I think me leaving too would be a bad idea.” she laughs wryly.

“So you’re offering your support but explaining why you can’t officially join?” Nicole asks. Asked.

“Nothing would get fucking done if I left! Not that anything can right now, no power no work. Even trollian is down.” Carrie laughs.

There’s a pause.

“The sensors are still working, aren’t they? I called the first night and they said so but I just wanted to be sure that you weren’t going to escalate to that.” Carrie asks, her voice grave.

“No, of course not! We wouldn’t take that down. All ships are being halted but we can still see what’s coming.” Nicole says.

“That’s good, that’s good.” Carrie says and then sighs, “People are beating down the door to complain to him but he’s mostly just keeping himself locked up in the roof with Dionte and you
know how few people are willing to go up there.”

The memory cuts there, whether it’s because what was said after wasn’t relevant or because Nicole doesn’t want to share you don’t know. The point is that the strike is going fine. Well, it’d be better if Dahvid cracked already but you can’t make that happen faster just by wanting it really bad. At the very least the docterrorists have settled on the right dose of medication to keep Karkat’s discomfort at tolerable levels, even if supervising him isn’t mandatory you and Dayvhe wouldn’t let him be so undistracted. A distracted Karkat is okay, a Karkat left to focus on how he should be obeying Dahvid and be back at the mansion is bad. Even now you’re face down on Karkat’s middle with one of your mid back ports connecting you to the Dream. You try to focus on the audio your actual ears are getting and it comes to you like a pop-up.

“-their vacillation is a clear metaphor for the story as a whole! Don’t look at me like that! I’m gonna- give me those shades you smug fucker or I’ll-”

You roll your eyes and mute it, Karkat and Dayvhe are fine.

This whole discussion about the strike is getting circular and you don’t know enough about the fine tuned way that people’s jobs work or how the infrastructure on the planet works to bother listening more. You drop out of the meeting space and float aimlessly in the Dream itself.

There’s a lot of activity going on in all of the threads about relationships, unsurprisingly revolting against Dahvid has caused a lot of people relationship issues. That’d be fascinating to Karkat but not to you. What you would like more information on is Dionte. Aside from his current zombie status you don’t know much about the guy and he’s obviously the most comparable thing to your friends and quadrantmates that Dahvid has, that’s why you had intended to use him as leverage.

You could ask people what they know about him but you think in this situation you’d rather use a more… direct source.

A step to the side brings you back to the memorial path that Nicole brought you to before. Making your way down it you pass each sweep gate that appears and disappears when you move on, you slow down twice at the right places, sparing a thought for Dreyur and Gilyut in turn as you pass their gates. They aren’t your destination, no, what you’re interested in is somewhere specific.

At the very end of the path is a large golden gate carved in your exact sign, you take a deep breath and step inside. Unlike the markers and such before that held a lot more artistic sentiment this finally looks like a file structure you’re familiar with. The files of memory are displayed as little bubbles of varying size and as you watch them they reorganise themselves into groups, constantly shifting and moving about. You reach for one and watch as a whole mess of notes appears around it.

Memory of Signless’s speech being interrupted
Age: circa 24 sweeps
Tags: #Signless #Disciple #Dolorosa #Signless speech #antagonism #speech #negative memory #Signless philosophy
Curator note: still in need of crowd identification work, cross reference with memories of similarly aged trolls

Ok so the memories have been sorted, so how do you search then? You have to be able to or else why tag them?

“Dionte Strydr?” you say aloud hopefully.

A whole mess of bubbles rush to you, all bumping against each other and bouncing away slightly.
Ok, so that works, try something more helpful.

“Dionte Strydr, sort chronologically.” you say and they shuffle around into an ordered line.

You eye the first bubble, may as well start at the beginning, right? Not bothering to read the tags you just touch it.

“The thing is,” Signless sighs as he is ever patient, “that negative circumstances can explain actions but they should not excuse them. We’re all responsible for ourselves.”

“No one is blaming you for your upbringing, it sounds awful. But Signless had a troubled start to life and he strives to do good.” Dolorosa points out. Signless’ face flashes with worry and his focus drops from Dahvid at your side to look up at the rainbow drinker who was and is his lusus.

“Mom, no, you made things great.” Signless says sweetly to her and her face crinkles slightly around the eyes as she smiles.

“So, wait, Cal was the worst like you said.” you say slowly as you stretch your arms over your head.

“Yeah.” Dahvid says, looking sidelong at you so the eye you see is his mutant one.

“No, I believe you. I’m just wondering where he is now.” you say.

“I don’t know, probably still back at my old hive. Could have picked up another grub for all I know.” Dahvid shrugs.

You stare at him, you can feel Disciple staring at him too as well as Signless and Dolorosa. Who’s gonna be the one to try to explain really basic shit to Dahvid tonight? You guess it’s you.

“You said that was the worst thing that happened to you though.” you start, it’s often best to start with the basic parts of these things with Dahvid.

“Yeah.” he agrees.

“And you think he could have some other grub with him now that you’ve left.” you continue.

“Well that’s what lustii do, isn’t it? Just raise a grub to an adult hopefully and then do it again, right?” he looks at Dolorosa this time who nods.

“Then yeah that’s probably what he’s doing.” Dahvid nods.

You stare him down. He’s not stupid, he’s just new to understanding that other people have feelings and properly thinking things through. It’s not so instinctive for him so you’ll wait. Dahvid seems to sense that you’re all waiting for something from him. And- there! Dahvid’s face shifts to concern and he straightens up a little.

“That… probably sucks for them.” Dahvid says softly.

“Yeah, it probably does.” you agree.

“I should go.” he blurts out, scrambling to his feet and rushing off without a backwards look.

“God, that was almost painful.” Disciple groans.

“He’s trying. It’s not his fault he’s dumber than a bag of rocks sometimes.” you defend him.
“We shouldn’t mock him for his problems, even if they are… trying.” Signless says and you know he’s only saying it so that he doesn’t say something bad too.

You’re back to being yourself. So that was Psiionic and the others sending him off to go check on if Cal had picked up another grub, it’s pretty obvious that he had. Logic would suggest that the next memory in order would be Dionte’s first appearance but you’re going to check the information on it this time.

First introduction to Dionte Strydr
Age: 24.6 sweeps approximately
Tags: #Dionte Strydr, #The Subverse, #Dahvid Strydr, #The Grand Entertainer, #Disciple, #Meulin Leijon, #Signless, #Kankri Vantas, #Dolorosa, #Porrim Maryam, #introductions
Archivist notes: I swear to god whoever keeps editing these tags to be like #Dionte Strydr/The Subverse instead of as TWO SEPARATE TAGS I will find you. I will find you and rip out your eyes. Edit: Like you could, besides your tagging system is bad and you should feel bad. Edit 2: YOU BASTARD!
Moderator notes: Notes locked, good god.

Cool, you can make hyper-reality shared networks and people will still use them to be obsessive about making other people do things their way, threatening each other and flirting with strangers. This probably says more about trolls as a species than about networks.

That interesting observation aside you now know this is the memory you were looking for. You reach out and your fingers sink into it.

Your reflexes are usually pretty good against most people, despite it being a decent enough length of time since you were taken against your will to be helmed you’re rarely entirely off of your guard. And, in fairness, when you are off your guard it’s usually because you’re very much at the mercy of Disciple or Signless. In other words a selfless man who’s grown up with people trying to kill him and is wildly aware of his surroundings and a huntress who can hear a twig snap a mile away and would eviscerate any danger before it got close to you.

Your reflexes are good, but Disciple’s are better. So when she leaps through the air past you with her metal claws on and murder on her face you scramble to your feet knowing the threat is real.

There’s a zombie, or that’s your first reflex. Some kid. But then without warning Dahvid is in the way holding his hands up and shouting Disciple back. You pull everyone apart and you rush over, having heard the noise Dolorosa and Signless aren’t too far behind.

“Why would you attack him?!” Dahvid demands, shielding the kid with his body.

The kid is small and skinny, maybe six sweeps and wearing pointed sunglasses. He peeps around Dahvid’s side and you can see now that he’s armed, the sign on his chest is bronze and he raises his guard as you step a little closer.

“Dahvid, who’s this?” you ask carefully, motioning with your hand for Disciple to back off a little.

“But he looked- he was a zombie I swear.” Disciple hisses at you.

“He’s not a zombie!” Dahvid spits angrily.

“V, who is he?” you ask again, edging a little closer into pet name territory than you really should. Yeah, yeah, your crush is showing. No one is surprised.
“This is Dionte Strydr, Cal did take in another kid, look!” Dahvid says brightly and steps slightly aside to grant you a better look at the skinny kid who very obviously bristles under the scrutiny and is trying to show the group of adults around him that he’s entirely willing to stab you all even though you’re all way bigger and stronger than him.

“Hey there, you don’t need to be afraid of us.” Signless says, walking past you and reaching his hand out to the kid.

Dionte hisses at him and backs up, pointing his sword right at Signless. Dahvid frowns when he sees that and tries to grab for it.

“Knock that off. No stabbing.” he orders.

Dionte’s focus shifts to Dahvid who is currently trying to confiscate the weapon and responds by stabbing him in the arm and then jumping back out of range.

“AUGH you little fuck! He stabbed me, did you see that? He stabbed me!” Dahvid says, pointing at his arm. Purple blood is leaking out of the stab wound.

“I… will go get the first aid kit.” Dolorosa says in a tight voice behind you.

Signless is asking Dahvid if he’s okay so you take the chance to yank the sword from the kid’s grasp even though it makes him cry out in alarm and glare at you.

“Give me that back!” he hisses at you.

“Are you going to stab people with it?” you ask, knowing the answer.

“I’m going to GUT YOU with it.” Dionte threatens.

“You’re not getting it back.” you tell him flatly.

“I’m so sorry, I really thought he wasn’t a troll anymore. He looked so much like a zombie, I’ve never made a mistake like that before.” Disciple apologises, touching Dahvid’s arm as she looks at the kid in horror.

“Just don’t attack him, ok? He’s mine.” Dahvid tells her.

“No I’m not.” Dionte protests from a safe distance.

“Here, give me that. Let’s sit down, you were eating, right?” Dahvid asks, holding his hand out for the sword which you automatically give him.

“Yeah, but you’re bleeding. A lot.” you point out and true enough there’s purple running all down his arm. It’s not going to kill him but it’s got to hurt, little kid or not it’s clear that he’s good with a blade to get that kind of hit in on an adult. But then again Dahvid doesn’t usually have to defend himself from anything does he?

“It’s fine, it’s fine. Isn’t he great?” Dahvid beams as he steers you back to where you were all sat down eating before he showed up.

“He stabbed you.” you know you’re going on about it but this seems important. You twist to get a look at the kid not following but sinisterly skulking around the area instead.

“I know, he hates me! He doesn’t listen to anything I tell him at all!” Dahvid says in glee as he sits down. He’s acting like this is a good thing instead of something awful. Congratulations Dahvid, you
found a feral kid that wants to maim you. You can find those everywhere.

Except he can’t, can he?

“It doesn’t work on him.” you say as you figure it out.

“I KNOW IT’S AMAZING!” Dahvid exclaims. Dolorosa crouches down at his side to try to bandage his arm but he’s too excitable to hold still enough for her to really finish the job up well.

“What makes him different and where did you find him? You said Strydr so was he really with your lusus?” Disciple asks, keeping an eye on the kid who’s circling the camp you’ve made.

“Yeah he was with Cal so I talked to him and figured it out and then Cal was all ‘bluh bluh he does what I make him do go away’ and long story short now I have him!” Dahvid says cheerfully.

Dolorosa looks up in alarm and you can see from the expression on her face that she’s trying to express that she very much does like Dahvid but wouldn’t trust him to keep a houseplant alive, much less a kid.

“That’s a lot of work.” Dolorosa explains.

“I know, right? I’ll have to get a hive or something!” Dahvid says in glee.

“One that someone isn’t currently living in.” Signless interrupts.

“Yeah, yeah.” Dahvid says and you know he wasn’t really listening.

“Is this where you are all the time? What you do with your life since you left the hive?” Dionte demands, suddenly coming closer.

“Not all the time, some of it. You should meet everyone! This is Psiionic.”

“You took my sword.” Dionte accuses you.

“Cry harder about it.” you snort.

“This is Disciple, Dolorosa and Signless.” Dahvid continues as if neither of you had spoken.

“You could do anything and you just sit around with them?” Dionte sneers.

“What are you, four? You’re a little young to be judging him.” you laugh at him.

“I’M SIX!” Dionte shouts with the fury only a little six sweep old can muster. Oh God, that was way too easy but still overwhelmingly funny. Disciple grabs your horns and pulls you back into her chest.

“Are you ever going to not be a shitlord?” she asks sweetly right into your ear.

“We both know the answer to that.” you grin at her. She likes you far too much to be actually annoyed, you know that.

“Whatever, I’m going back to my hive.” Dionte says like he’s too cool to be around you and that grabs all of Dahvid’s attention.

“What? No! You can’t go back, Cal’s there and he sucks. Stay with me, my friends are cool.” Dahvid insists.
You’re not going to lie, the flat lack of any admiration or even the tiniest amount of grudging respect from a kid you disarmed with your psionics is a slight ding to your self esteem. Dionte shakes his head and turns to walk off.

“They’re cool, they’re revolting,” Dahvid insists.

“You said it.” Dionte snorts and flips you off as he walks away.

“Oh come on, that’s not what I meant you little shit. They’re rebelling against the empire and the empress as well as the whole hemospectrum thing.” Dahvid pleads.

At this Dionte freezes in place. Stuck still and, yeah for a moment or two there almost zombielike. You can see how Dis made the mistake. Then he turns and looks at all of you.

“We hate the Empress, she has to die.” Dionte says, stone cold serious.

“Yes!” you cheer.

“Psionic! I understand your feelings towards the Empress and given your past you’re—”

The memory peters off with an understanding that Psionic tuned so hard out of Signless lecturing him about pacifism that it actually broke the connection with the memory.

The whole experience just leaves you a little lost. You came here to understand Dionte, to work out who the zombie used to be but that didn’t tell you anything. If anything you only gained a better understanding of how it feels to be your ancestor. He’s not unlike you. He cares about Dahvid even if he’s aware that his feelings to him are because he’s been manipulated, whether he’s aware that him being okay about that is likely part of it or not you don’t know. That aside he feels pale for him like you used to feel in your early nights of having a crush on Dayvhe and he has the kind of deep connection with Disciple and Signless that you can compare to your relationship with Karkat and Dayvhe.

And he’s kind of an asshole. You know, like you are.

If some kid tried to stab your crush you’d totally disarm them and repeatedly mock them for it when they got salty about being disarmed, you’d absolutely do that. Maybe these aren’t the best memories to view to get an insight into your ancestor’s philosophical or political views if he had any but the impression you’re getting from him isn’t this saintlike figure that the giant statue of him in the building implies. He’s just a guy with people he cares about who just… lived. He had feelings and crushes, he was an ass sometimes and that’s it.

You’ll admit that your ancestor is special, it seems like he’s the most powerful psionic in history so that’s something. He lived in remarkable times, was tangled up with pivotal people, he probably did important things. So he’s “special” in that sense, but he’s also not. He’s just a guy, just like you. These are normal memories and maybe you shouldn’t be looking at them.

That guy ‘The Borrower’ or whatever his stupid title was took them and you don’t know if Psionic was like ‘yes please take these so I can live forever in a way with all of you’ or if he had no way to agree. When Dirkka hacked you or when Hal was surveilling your network you hated it, are you just doing the same to your ancestor? If he’s a guy just like you then he’d probably hate you snooping through this stuff and you can’t even excuse yourself by saying you’re looking for vital information. You’re trying to find out who Dionte used to be so you can… what? Be better informed for how to feel bad about him being a zombie now?

You give the bubbles of memories around you an exasperated look. Your life was way easier when
you had a policy of staying out of other people’s shit and minding your own goddamn business. Stupid connections with other people making things more difficult. Somehow you’re sure this is Karkat’s fault. Though if you want to make it more likely that you get laid you can probably work that logic back to it being Vriska’s fault and then go take that objection up with her and see where that gets you.

...With Terezi in a coma it’ll probably not get you far, actually. That’s fair, you’re not gonna blame Vriska for that.

You disconnect from the network and stir slightly, your face still pressed to Karkat’s middle. Dayvhe and Karkat are watching the tv screen and you blink hazily at it as a short haired Nicole comes into focus, she’s in some perfect highblood style hive following a pristine looking olive lady around.

“-listen to me, what have they done to you, huh? What have they done to you? Is it drugs? Thinkspoon washing? Come on, hey, talk to me!” Nicole’s character asks as she follows the olive woman around a coffee table.

“Of course, only for a minute. Then I have to get to work on this oinkbeast sty.” The olive lady says with a serene sigh as she gestures at the perfect hive around her. Nicole’s character looks utterly terrified.

“When did you start watching this?” you mumble and Karkat and Dayvhe look at you in surprise, clearly not having realised you were back with them.

“A while back, she’s just about to bust this whole thing wide open.” Dayvhe whispers and you glance back at the screen. Nicole is desperately trying to tell the other woman something.

“-all of the lowbloods here used to be big deals! I mean big deals, CEOs, executives, business owners, Sayrah Sunder she used to run a fleet!” Nicole insists and the other woman gasps loudly.

“With that perfect skin?” the other woman says in shock and Nicole’s character recoils.

“This is ‘In Which A High Achieving Goldblood Is Taken To Stepford, A Luxurious Private Planet Lawnring By Her Slightly Lower Achieving Matesprite Following Her Emotional Breakdown Due To High Pressure. Features A Thrilling Mystery About The Perfect And Subservient Lowbloods In The Lawnring In Quadrants With Highblood Partners. Flush To Pitch To Pale Vacillation And One Sided Relationships Across Cast Members, Featuring Several Quadrant Critical Themes And Entirely Fictional Science Fiction Devices.’ And yes, it was made by Dahvid.” Karkat explains.

“I’ll just put it back to the beginning, we missed half a scene from you reading the title out. It’s actually an okay and kind of heretical film. I’m trying to look at it like ‘how would I make this’ when I’m watching it.” Dayvhe explains as he clicks on the remote.

Looking at Dayvhe you get a weird smearing of memory, you can see how similar he looks to his ancestor and like ink stuck to your skin you still have traces of how Psiionic felt for Dahvid. He felt like Dahvid was kind of hopeless and exasperating but he clearly cared about him and thought he was a good person. It’s very disconcerting to be able to relate that to your own feelings for the man’s descendant yet have such polar opposite feelings for Dahvid himself.

Maybe if you actually unplug you can distance yourself from those feelings a little more, get whatever traces of Psi’s mind out of your nervous system. You twist your arm behind you to try to grab the port in your mid back, thank Kanaya’s genius for the shirt design again, and just brush the biowire with your fingers.
You shouldn’t have done it with your bad shoulder, the one that’s still not healed properly from everything you’ve put it through. It’s not as flexible as he other and sometimes it clunks unpleasantly in the socket, like right now. Your shoulder jerks enough to wrench your arm a little of course just as you’re pulling the wire out. The flash of pain in your back makes you scramble upwards and press your other hand to the now vacant port.

“Aagh, fuck.” you hiss and curse a little more as you try to feel the port itself. It’s still numb around it but that you felt pain gives you a worrying suggestion that you did something to a deeper nerve.

“What happened?” Dayvhe asks, lowering the remote.

“Shit that hurt, I don’t know, my shoulder did that stupid thing it does and I pulled the wire out bad I think.” you explain and look at the end of the wire to be sure it’s all still there and you’ve not got part of it in you somewhere, a thought so gross and distressing you can hardly tolerate the mere presence of the idea of being invaded like that. Just thinking about it nearly trips your gag reflex. To your immense relief the wire is fine.

“Are you ok?” Karkat asks as you one handedly tug the wire from the wall and stash it in your sylladex.

“Yeah I think I-” you trail off when you pull your other hand from your back and see yellow staining the fabric of the sleeve that pulls over your hand.

“Is that BLOOD?!” Karkat yelps, scrambling up.

“I think. Pretty sure spinal fluid is uh… clear?” you say uneasily.

Dayvhe pushes Karkat off of him and rushes around behind you and with one hand on the back of your neck and one on your hip he keeps you still so he can look at you.

“The port’s bleeding, you need to go to the docterrorist now.” Dayvhe states.

Ugh, you don’t like being poked and prodded. The troll with the stupid title who checked you for infection before was fine but the others all look at you the way you’d look at some hugely expensive huskstop that you desperately want to dismantle and play with before you put it back together. You’re not keen on being looked at that way.

“It’s not like I can’t feel my legs or anything, you don’t need to call Kan to cut me in half or anything. They’re just healing and I jerked it a little is all.” you assure him.

“Then it won’t be any problem getting someone qualified to say that, will it?” Karkat challenges you.

“But I don’t want to.” you say, it’s honest at least.

“Show me where I asked, you’re going and I’m carrying you. You probably shouldn’t be walking.” Dayvhe says and stands up, with a flick of his hand he lifts you up off of the floor psionically and you try to catch yourself out of reflex.

“Quit moving.” Dayvhe reprimands you.

You’re not totally comfortable with this. Aside from the fact that Dayvhe is taking you somewhere you don’t really want to go to his fine psionic control is… not the best. Certainly it’s way better than it used to be, he practices loads now and he’s hardly doing anything fancy. But, well, accidents happen.
Shit, now you feel bad for not trusting him. You guess if his psionics do falter you can catch yourself before any harm comes to you. In fact you’re so focused on being ready to catch yourself in the event that Dayvhe drops you that you don’t notice the medical area until you’re almost in it.

“Can I bribe you to not make me go in here?” you ask hopefully.

“Hm, maybe. Would you do anything I wanted?” Dayvhe asks in a thoughtful tone as he comes to a stop at the door.

“You can’t be serious.” Karkat snaps.

“Anything!” you agree.

“Then the thing I want is for you to see the docterrorist.” Dayvhe says, the traitor, and pulls you through the door. Karkat rushes ahead but you get to see his evil little expression of delight at you being tricked so badly.

You could break out of Dayvhe’s hold if you wanted to but that’s a shitty thing to do to your moirail and really that’s the thing holding you here. You see Karkat catch someone and start to explain what happened as Dayvhe gently sets you down on one of the examination tables.

“I hate this, I hate the smells of this place. The antiseptic just-” you sniff the air and grimace. It’s the room you were first helmed in, it’s Roxie’s impromptu medical area when you needed looking after, the smell of Equius and Hal working on you.

“I know, I know, shoosh.” Dayvhe whispers and turns so he’s facing you and his hands are resting on your legs. Again, not keeping you here, he couldn’t if he tried but when Dayvhe wants you to do something this badly you’re pretty helpless to resist him. At least when the only reason you have for not doing it is just that you don’t want to.

Karkat returns with a tall and thin docterrorist with different shaded blue eyes that only glow ever so faintly, he must be a pretty weak psionic by adult gold standards.

“Right in the middle of his back.” Karkat explains and the docterrorist sighs as he looks you up and down.

“I have your notes from Docterrorist Feelgood, let me see.” he says, moving around the table so he’s behind you. You twist to look at him so he’s not out of eyesight but the Docterrorist scowls.

“Face forward please, if there’s any damage you need to keep still.” he tells you so you have to turn around to face Dayvhe.

“Hey, like you said it’s probably nothing.” Dayvhe says softly and his fingers curl around the side of your leg.

“I need to wash my shirt now.” you say as the thought stupidly occurs to you.

“That’s ok.” Dayvhe says. Knowing Kanaya she may well have more shirts in her sylladex, too bad she’s not awake to ask. You don’t even know what her modus- oh god you weren’t prepared for the docterrorist just suddenly touching you.

“Terrible ports, they should just all be ripped out.” he complains.

“Is he going to be ok or not?” Dayvhe demands, clearly not liking the docterrorist’s tone with you.
“Feelgood said you turned down the offer of an upgrade, in my opinion the change is very needed. Let me see the work on your pan.” the docterrorist says and just pushes your head forward enough so he can get a look.

“Hey, don’t just trollhandle him like that.” Karkat snaps.

“This is not a good enough job, these aren’t going to reject at least but you’ll require modification when you’re helmed properly.” he says, ignoring Karkat too.

When. Not if. You’re not getting a choice, you’re not…

You try to focus on small details, the direction Dayvhe is looking in, the sweep of his hair, you try to count the stitching on your jeans at the side seams without moving. Karkat scoots in close, taking Dayvhe’s place. It sounds like you’re underwater but you can watch the way his mouth moves and see the way Dayvhe steps away, he’s talking as well in a quiet tones.

The docterrorist growls, making you jump and Karkat is quick to reach out to grab your hands. He laces his fingers with yours and squeezes them tight. He tries to climb up onto the table with you but it’s hard with his hands in yours. Confused you help him, carefully setting him next to you without letting him go.

A flash of light snatches your attention away from Karkat and you look over to see Dayvhe and Vriska both armed, swords out. They’re not fighting each other, instead they’re threatening the docterrorist who was seeing you.

“Don’t look at them, dumbass, look at me. I’m the one talking to you.” Karkat says, freeing a hand to touch the edge of your jaw to tilt your head to look at him.

“I don’t want to do it again.” you say tightly.

“I will rip out and eat the bloodpusher of anyone who tries to unless you emphatically tell me that you actually want to go through with it.” Karkat vows and presses his soft nose to yours and his forehead to your own. He chirps sweetly at you and though you don’t have the thinksponge to get yourself together enough to do it back the feeling is mutual.

“You should have just found them in the first place.” Vriska hisses.

“It was an emergency! We didn’t know he was going to be like that, I oughta-” Dayvhe snarls and you pull back from Karkat to look up. Dayvhe and Vriska are still armed and on either side of the docterrorist that saw you back at Dahvid’s place. Feelgood, that was their title.

They psionically pull a little wheeled examination chair over to the edge of the table you’re sat on with Karkat and they sit down. They put their hands clearly in sight on their legs and look up at you patiently.

“Hello Sollux, do you remember me?” they ask after a moment. You nod, hesitant and nervous.

“That’s great. I’m really sorry about my colleague, he’s kind of an asshole and he doesn’t usually deal with patients who are awake. Surgeons, no social skills.” Docterrorist Feelgood laughs jovially.

“Yeah, you don’t say.” Karkat growls and squeezes you tight. You’re breathing too fast, you should try to slow that down.

“Dayvhe said you hurt your port, can you tell me what happened?” Docterrorist Feelgood asks calmly.
“I unplugged. My shoulder went- I pulled it bad. It hurt and bled.” you say in stunted sentences and hold your hand out. They look and make a thoughtful noise.

“If you look at my ports they protrude beyond the skin a little, a few millimetres maybe at most, see?” they say, scooting a little closer and pulling back a cover to show what they mean. You look, they’re pretty flush to the skin for sure.

“The old style ones that you have are much further out and the edges are raised more, it’s easier to catch them on things by mistake and as they’re bulkier internally too they can cause more damage when that happens. It’s just a risk. But since you can still walk about and feel things I don’t think you’ve done any serious harm, can I look?” Docterrorist Feelgood explains slowly.

The thought of letting that happen again isn’t pleasant but it does mean you might be allowed to leave soon so you just nod. Instead of getting up and looking down at you the docterrorist just wheels the squeaky little chair around the other side of the table and stays there. Karkat is turned to look at them even as you’re frozen in place.

“That looks like it hurt.” they say after a moment.

“Is he really badly hurt?” Dayvhe asks worriedly.

“I don’t think so, no. But it’s like how stubbing your toe doesn’t really do you any great harm but fuck does it ever hurt. It’s stopped bleeding on its own so clearly nothing big was damaged. Sollux, can I touch it?” Docterrorist Feelgood asks, shifting their attention from Dayvhe to you.

Dayvhe is close to you now and Vriska has edged around the table with her eyes glued to the docterrorist, this has the potential to go very badly for them. But despite being threatened by a bunch of armed and dangerous kids the doc seems nothing but chill. You’re able to nod.

“Alright then, I’m just going to touch the port to see if it’s actually come loose. I’m pretty sure it hasn’t I just need to be sure. You might feel pressure.” they explain.

You do, like pressing your tongue against a tooth. You can feel it but you can’t.

“Yeah that’s perfectly fine. I’m just going to clean the skin to make sure you don’t get an infection, probably going to feel cold.” they go on and you get an on and off again sensation of cold just as promised.

“There you go.” the docterrorist says and sits down again with a squeak of the chair before wheeling around to the side you can see them from again.

“So he’s fine?” Vriska asks, narrowing her eyes at them.

“As much as he was this morning.” Docterrorist Feelgood says, dodging the question.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Karkat demands and leans away from you to turn the full force of his glare on the adult. It’s fine, you don’t need him clinging to you. You got hurt, you got looked at. They’re obviously done with you because they’re all the way over there and not touching you anymore, you’re good. Besides you have all your quadrantmates here and they wouldn’t let you get hurt, you’re good.

“It might be sore but he’s not got any lasting damage from that. But, insensitive as he was, my colleague was right. You would be better off having those ports upgraded. We’d take out almost all of what’s in there now, keeping only what’s been fused to your neural system and then changing all the hardware around it that’s extractable. You’d be more resistant to infection, you wouldn’t have
this problem of yanking your ports about like that, you could cover them if you wanted. Not to mention a better connection with the dream or any ship you want to helm with.” Docterrorist Feelgood explains.

“He doesn’t want surgery.” Dayvhe says, repeating your wishes.

“I’m sure, and he said that before. There’s just… other risks to those kinds of ports, bugs that were worked out when the new style was developed.” they say.

“Like what?” Vriska prompts them.

“The old style of helming was made on the assumption that a disposable goldblood would be helmed the once and kept alive through external systems. They allowed and encouraged the helm technology to parasitically bond with the psionic. Obviously as Sollux only has the neural ports he couldn’t stay in a helm long enough for it to invade his system and grow through his body but those ports offer no protection to that where these ones do.” Docterrorist Feelgood says, tapping their temple port. You shudder at the idea and think again of your ancestor.

“They also weren’t designed for lots of wear and tear of plugging and unplugging because the implication was that you’d do it once. Those likely won’t last, they’ll get damaged and probably be a vector for infection. Most concerningly of all is the way they make you vulnerable to digital attack.” they explain.

“You mean hacking his thinkspoon?” Vriska asks, casually resting her sword hand on her hip.

“A little more complicated, but yes. You’d need to be a mind working through mechanical means, just hacking through a husktop wouldn’t do it.” the docterrorist answers her.

“Aradia.” Dayvhe and Karkat say at the same time.

“Who’s Aradia?” the doc asks.

“My dead ex-matesprit. She’s a ghost who lives in machines now. After I got helmed she possessed a ship and screwed with my head until I walked right into her helm. It’s… complicated.” you mumble.

“It… sounds like it.” Docterrorist Feelgood says in shock.

“I told you.” Dayvhe grins minutely at you, yeah, you remember your first conversation with him about Aradia too.

“Dirkka and Ha- Dirkka wrote a patch though. He said he put it in Sollux’s ports so Aradia couldn’t do that again.” Dayvhe says to the docterrorist instead. Docterrorist Feelgood frowns and squints at Dayvhe like they’re not sure Dayvhe understands what he’s on about.

“There’s not enough storage to really do that.” they say diplomatically.

“Well he did.” Dayvhe insists.

You glance at Karkat. Again, you don’t dislike or especially distrust either Hal or Dirkka. Despite your less than perfect past with them you’re good with the both of them, so you don’t think either of them would say you’re protected when you’re not.

“Can you take a look and see if that will protect him enough? That way we won’t worry about it.” Karkat asks.
“Are you ok with that?” Dayvhe checks and you nod, you also want to know the answer to this.

The docterrorist shrugs and pulls their tablet out and connects it to a biowire before handing you the other end so you can plug yourself in, that’s good. You don’t think you could could deal with someone else plugging you in.

You’ve connected to your own husktop like this before but it wasn’t designed for it and got very unhappy if you did it without splitting your energy to the helm and Aradia at the same time. This tablet however was probably designed for just this so the docterrorist just calmly sits there and looks at whatever it says.

“...Huh.” they say after a moment.

“Not a reassuring noise Doc.” Dayvhe points out.

“No, nothing’s wrong it’s just… the ports are a way of running communication and other systems through the nervous system and siphoning psionics and so on. They’re an interface, not strictly a computing system at all. But they do need to communicate with each other and store current data on vitals to report to a helm or any other system so there’s a small amount of memory and the very basest operating system. But it’s- the Empress’ printable animated images have more capacity for that than these.” Docterrorist Feelgood says.

Vriska leans over their shoulder and narrows her eyes at the tablet.

“That looks like code to me.” she says.

“Well it is but I’ll be damned if I know what it says and I can’t think that it could do much, it’s the length of a chittr post.” they say.

“Let me see.” you say and pull the tablet out of their hand and float it over to you. Even if the thing can interface with your head without freaking out is absolutely doesn’t have the capacitor strength to take all of your power away from you.

It’s written in very condensed ~ATH, not a language that condenses easily. And you have no idea what it’s doing exactly or why.

“What’s r3?” Karkat asks, looking at the screen.

“A function of the ports but I don’t know what it is.” you tell him.

“The r3 function is Report 3, it monitors power readings.” Docterrorist Feelgood supplies.

You nod and read over the code a little more as you try to phrase it in Altemian properly for everyone else.

“~ATH needs to be tied to the life of something, this code is tied to my life. It functions until I’m dead, which is fine, I don’t care what happens to my thinksponge when I’m dead.” you say and continue despite Dayvhe looking like he’s going to say that he cares, “So essentially, until I’m dead this blocks ‘non-contact access’ to my ports and information.”

“No, you can’t turn that off.” Docterrorist Feelgood interrupts.

“It’s not turned off, it’s conditionally switched. I guess the shitty settings on these allows that logic. So, ‘Until Sollux dies block ‘non-contact access’ to ports if request for access is less than r3’. It’s a conditional denial and if r3 is a power reading…” you explain.
“Only a psionic stronger than you can get in, which is no one, right?” Vriska says smugly. This is technically a compliment but from the way she looks you know she’s preening about how she’s so great that she managed to get the most powerful psionic for her kismesis and that says great things about her. Even when Vriska’s saying nice things you want to shove her down some stairs!

“Basically.” you shrug, unplug yourself and hand it back.

“Not basically. That may have been a fair assumption on Alternia but you’re among adults here. The Empress herself is the second most powerful psionic in the universe and your ancestor is the first.” Docterrorist Feelgood says sternly.

“Does the Empress even have the kind of psionics that can actually interface with my ports? Because Aradia possesses tech, it’s what she does and that’s why I needed this to keep her out. Besides, I was stronger than Nicole when she was in a ship and I was outside.” you say stubbornly.

“We don’t choose our leaders based on strength, there are plenty of people around with stronger psionics than her. Me included. I don’t know if there are adults around who could beat you but it wouldn’t surprise me, you’re still a child and you’re at only a fraction of your adult potential. This is not a secure block, it’s better than nothing but a port upgrade is the most sensible fix.” Docterrorist Feelgood tells you.

“Wait, wait, wait. I can control people but that’s a different thing than this, right? Or is it this programming that’s blocking me, Dayvhe and Dahvid?” Vriska asks, holding up her hand to interrupt the proceedings.

“No, that can’t be it. I’m still affected by all of that I just can sense that it’s not me thinking it and kick it out of my head, it’s me doing it not some programming. The way this is written if it applied to all mind control you’d either be able to control me totally or you wouldn’t at all because of how strong I am compared to the rest of you. It’s a binary thing.” you tell her.

“Right, that’s why nothing works on you because you have your own defenses.” Dayvhe nods.

“When you use them.” Karkat adds.

“Yeah, anyway I’m pretty sure this is specifically for Aradia’s type of thing. Mechanical to mechanical.” you continue.

“That’s right.” Docterrorist Feelgood agrees.

“Wait, sorry that’s fascinating and I really want to come back to that but what did you just say Karkat?” Dayvhe interrupts.

“God, keep up. He’s saying Sollux chooses to not let us in his head instead of it being some automatic defense thing.” Vriska huffs and rolls her eyes.

“Can you two not fight?” you groan.

“Nah, nah, nah, I’m not fighting. This doesn’t sound like speculation and you said she couldn’t make you do anything, but the way she’s talking makes it sound like she can. Have you been pulling some shit that I need to know about?” Dayvhe asks her sharply and you’re keenly aware that he’s got a sword in his hand still and so does she. You lift your leg up enough to use it to bar Dayvhe’s path slightly to her and nudge him back.

“Vriska’s mind control isn’t exactly subtle, I know what it feels like when she does it. She can’t force me to do anything.” you assure him.
“Nothing that he doesn’t want to do.” Vriska adds.

“What’s that supposed to mean?! You can’t just say cryptic shit and not explain it.” Dayvhe groans.

“But she enjoys that so much.” you mutter and earn yourself an irritated glare from Vriska.

“You people are terrible at communicating, honestly. I don’t know what I expected, Vriska and Dayvhe are in my top three friends who adore the sound of their own voices and never shut up but you could have helped here, Sollux!” Karkat interrupts.

“I am helping.” you point out, bouncing your leg a little to draw attention to how you’re keeping Dayvhe from Vriska at least a little.

“You’re all dumb.” Karkat bitches, “To sum up, Vriska and Dayvhe both use control that Sollux can sense and reject, it’s not affected by the patch in his ports. Sollux knows he can resist it because he’s tested it and he also knows that he can choose to let Vriska control him so he’s immune by choice but given that he always knows if someone’s trying to control him it’s still safe to say that neither of you can do anything to him that he doesn’t want you to.”

“Why would you ever want to let her control you?” Dayvhe asks.

“I was just testing how it worked, I can’t think of any reason why I’d want her to.” you shrug.

Karkat’s right, when you let Vriska control you it wasn’t subtle. Being pushed out of the controls to your own body was weird, you could still feel everything but it wasn’t you doing it. It made an interesting enough test but it’s not like you want her to do that. After all one of your worst experiences in your life was when she was controlling you. Though, in fairness, this isn’t really the same thing because whenever you wanted to you could just snap out of it. It’s like those magic handcuffs John has in his stupid magic chest, they look real but there’s just a little switch to open them. That said you’re pretty sure they’re not magic handcuffs, you’re pretty sure they’re like the kind people who are into that sort of thing use for sex.

Hah, you should ask John that. Watching him try to deny it would be hilarious.

So, yeah, Vriska can’t really control you. It just looks like she can. It’s the same thing, like, John’s handcuffs look like handcuffs but they’re totally for…

Well there’s a thing about Vriska’s psionics and its uses that you can’t unthink.

You’re going to try very hard to not look at any of the three of them because your poker face isn’t great. You’ve gotta change the subject before anyone catches on to the crazy thing you just thought. You’re not going to be like Dayvhe and Karkat who just accidentally blurt out innuendos and implications like that, someone in your trio has to be in control of the shit they say and by process of elimination that heavy burden must fall on you because it sure as shit ain’t them.

“So it’s going to be someone like Aradia or a psionic who’s more powerful than me but plugged into some kind of tech who could get into my head?” you ask, desperate to get this back on track.

“Yes, but before you ask the Dream can’t really do that kind of thing. You’re looking at a ship with a helmsman really, someone more powerful than you.” Docterrorist Feelgood answers, presumably they are also eager to get away from the weird adolescent bickering going on around you.

“I’m all for protecting Sollux from threats but this is sounding more and more like it’s not really something that going to crop up. Unless I’m massively lowballing how strong the adult psionic goldbloods are here, that is.” Karkat points out.
“Well can’t you compare Sollux’s numbers to someone else’s since that’s what the program does?” Dayvhe asks reasonably.

That’s a list you’d like to see, you want to get a measure of how powerful you really are psionically compared to everyone else. You’ve always got the impression that you were freakishly overpowered psionically, like you told Dayvhe once you were too strong for all of the kiddie tests and you squared up to adults just fine so far. You want to know where you stand, especially if your ancestor is the most powerful psionic alive. When you hit your adult molt your psionic strength will jump like hell so… yeah you wanna know!

“We don’t keep that information. People get… really competitive.” Docterrorist Feelgood mutters.

“Oh.” you say, disappointed.

“Hah! You were already getting competitive!” Vriska laughs at you.

“You do need to get a upgrade in my medical opinion, but I also would probably say now isn’t the time. We’d want to plan for it and you’d need time to recover, things right now are pretty unsettled. I’ll send you all the information I have on it for you to look at.” Docterrorist Feelgood says.

“I don’t really want it.” you say.

“It would be best for him.” Docterrorist Feelgood tells Dayvhe directly and stands up out of their chair. That’s a dirty trick, going for your moirail’s concerns to get to you.

“But for now you’re fine and free to go.” they add and push the chair back under a table and, with a nod to you, walks off.

Vriska looks at you with her artificial eye, her head having turned to track the docterrorist’s walk away from you all.

“I don’t suppose you’ve heard any more about if Dahvid is going to cave yet?” she asks quietly.

“Apparently Carrie’s trying to talk him around, she wants him to give in too it seems but… no. No news.” you tell her and hop down off of the table. You try not to think of her mind control.

“How’s Terezi doing?” you ask instead.

“She’s in a coma like the others still, but it’s better than the alternative. When I get the chance to get my hands on that man I’m gonna… ugh!” Vriska snarls.

“Yeah, I get that.” you agree, glancing at Karkat for a second. He might be fine now but because of Dahvid you’re having to keep him unnaturally sedated and distracted for things to be tolerable for him.

“I better get back to her, I still might stab that first guy. See how I feel. Later.” Vriska says and nonchalantly wanders off.

Looking at Dayvhe you know he damn well wants to stab that guy too for panicking you so bad but he’s also basically allergic to agreeing with Vriska.

“I didn’t even ask her to come along, I just went past her and explained to the other doc what was happening and she just decided to join in too.” Dayvhe says.

“She’s his kismesis, that was actual harm. Of course she was going to step in, same as you did.”
Karkat says as he gets off the table.


“Can we get out of here?” you ask and unsurprisingly both of them agree to let you get out.

“You should rest.” Dayvhe insists as he steers you out of the room and up towards the block you three have commandeered as your own.

“You should watch that movie with us, then we can all see how it ends.” Karkat adds.

Obviously they’re both still concerned for you. That was a rough moment back there but you’re fine now. Having backup and then that weird idea about Vriska’s mind control more or less completely put the whole experience out of your mind. Still, if Karkat is focused on trying to make sure you’re ok he’s doing something that he considers more urgent than obeying Dahvid’s command. So you get someone making sure you’re ok and you get to make sure he’s ok, everyone wins.

“Sure, we’ll do that.” you agree.

You watch the movie and a few more, you eat and sleep. The whole while you can’t help but feel like the really important stuff happening on this planetoid is going down elsewhere and that means there’s nothing you can do to change things.

Even keeping tabs on things through the Dream doesn’t help too much. Sure, you can see what’s been happening but it doesn’t give you any way of changing things.

Planet Hollywood imports basically all of its food and it seems like some people have had the bright idea of draining power still remaining in some of the ships to make sure that big industrial coolers stay running and preserve food. But you’re all going to run out of food soon and there are all kinds of ships stalled out in space unable to make deliveries.

One thing everyone is concerned with is the Empress noticing what’s happening. If Dahvid is seen as unable to control all of you this whole situation could become very dangerous and the Empress may very well just choose to destroy you all to be safe. Essentially you’re playing a game of cluckbeast with Dahvid, not that you think it’d turn out well for him if he got caught either.

Needless to say people are getting twitchy.

You eyeball a thread of speculation about Dahvid changing his mind or not, there are no yellowbloods left inside his hive so no one’s in there to get a direct report. The rumours are getting wild, you’re talking ‘what if Subverse ate The Grand Entertainer????’ level of wild.

Other people are trying to organise for everyone to just camp out around Dahvid’s hive to show him that you’re all just waiting, there’s a lot of response to that but you know you can’t go. There’s some people in there pointing out that exposing large numbers of you to Dahvid’s presence and possible mental meddling could be a way of fixing the vote so it might not be wise, which is a point. You can’t do anything about it though. You’re useless, useless.

You hit upon a thread that does interest you, it’s not in the general help but in the extra-planetary surveillance section. Meaning the people who check to see that the Empress isn’t coming down to check on all of you. When you dip into the thread it’s so full of people arguing that it hurts your head to try to process it all, so you change your perspective and make it text instead. You don’t need to visualise and hear everything if you don’t want to and you’re getting the hang of this place enough to not need to. Besides, you can read faster than you can hear so this way you can catch up.
Longgame: I’ve noticed an anomaly with this one ship, it keeps trying to hop the queue of ships waiting at the border. It’s just acting weird, here’s the record of its behaviour.

Longgame attached file Jumanji.log

You open the file and watch the sped up video of the ship approaching and getting held in the queue, it waits for about eight hours and then it starts bothering ground control repeatedly for landing permission. Getting no luck there it starts creeping through the queue and poking at ground control as if to see whether or not that changes the answer. Weird.

Longgame: Records have it that Jumanji is an unmanned shuttle ship, it’s not supposed to have anyone on it at all. It’s just transporting food.

Eliteend: Is it a regular?

Longgame: Yeah, has been for longer than I’ve had the job. Simple as you like just drops its stuff and leaves. As far as I know it’s just battery and solar powered, no high speed helm at all.

Eliteend: Then it makes sense that it’d have a good AI programmed into it and if it’s battery powered I get why it would have commands to make it return quickly and maybe this is just it trying to find a solution to that rule.

Rabidbit: This seems more like a person to me.

Eliteend: Don’t know how to break this to you, Rabidbit, but these things are *programmed* by people.

Longgame: I’ve got to say I thought it seemed like a person too and I can’t get a good enough scan on this ship to see if there is life in there. There’s not much space in there with all the stuff I know they have on board but you could theoretically get a person inside.

Eliteend: But why would you and what about life support? That’s really bulky.

Corroder: You’d only put a person in there for a reason, just delivering food isn’t a good reason when ai could do that.

Sollux: Could it be a stowaway trying to come here?


Sollux: Uh.

Sollux: I mean yeah but a stowaway is an idea. They might be running out of water or something up there.

Corroder: Or it’s a spy. Also, wow, talking to a Captor in person. That’s pretty wild.

Eliteend: Can we not be weird about this?

Rabidbit: I can see why a troll would want to sneak down here, but I can see why a spy would as well. But isn’t the evidence of this kind of chaos more than enough to run back to the Empress with? Surely this is big enough news that a spy would have left.

Corroder: Unless they’re wanting to take advantage of the chaos and make an attempt on The Grand Entertainer’s life.

Sollux: Cool, can we let them in?

Longgame: But they might try to kill The Grand Entertainer if we did that.

Sollux: …

Sollux: Oh no.

Corroder: That’s not funny.

Sollux: You’re right, I should be serious. Let’s let them in.

Eliteend: Assassins have tried to kill him before, I don’t think I need to tell you how well that’s worked out so far given that he’s still alive and he keeps sending them back in boxes.

Longgame: SHUT UP ITS MOVING! LOOK!

The video feed is live and looking at it knocks you out of seeing things as text and instead it’s just you and the other trolls you were talking to watching a live feed. The little freighter shuttle is sweeping in towards the planet and you can see the scrolling list of messages from ground control to the shuttle.
Ground control to Jumanji, you do not have clearance to land. Pull back up immediately!
Ground control to Jumanji, landing request denied. Leave Planet Hollywood airspace now.
Ground control to Jumanji, we will open fire if you do not leave in the next five seconds.
Ground control to Jumanji, opening fire.

The ship immediately takes evasive actions, sharp, fast and unpredictable.

“Still think it’s AI?” one of the trolls by you mutters.

“It could just be a good one, the reflexes are fast. It’s not like it’s a helmsman in there.” another replies.

Finally a shot lands and instead of the ship exploding into debris heavy shields deflect the blast.

“What’s an unmanned freighter shuttle doing with those kinds of shields?” you gasp.

“I- I can’t see any record that any of its deliveries before have been suspect. I don’t understand this!” a man, you assume it’s Longgame, says as he looks through a bunch of files.

You watch some frankly superb piloting as the ship bucks and weaves through the air, finally getting inside the range of the planetoid’s defenses. There’s nothing you can do, the ship is on the other side of the planetoid to you. You’re fast outside of a ship but you’re not that fast, you can’t get there in the next thirty seconds.

One of the other adults waves their hands and patches in video feed from every building near the ground there that has any kind of camera and you watch as the ship swoops in low and hovers just above the ground at a shipping building. You hold your breath and the back of the ship slides open and in one go a whole rush of cargo slides out and when the last giant metal crate falls out onto the ground you can see a person behind it. They’re hanging from a space just above the door like they’d swung to kick the things out and then grabbed it to stay in the ship. They’re wearing a sort of basic space suit, the kind of thing for a quick trip out of a ship to repair the outsides. That’s how they were surviving with no real life support inside.

The troll lands for a moment and then they turn away and walk into the ship with the door shutting behind them. Then the ship takes off again.

“I’ve got an image at least, what the hell was that about?” one troll mutters and a freeze frame pops up.

It’s of a moment when the troll was turning and the helmet of the space suit turned clear without the glare of the light. Your jaw drops.

The troll is old, pretty damn old. His hair going grey like only the oldest of trolls start to go, behind his glasses his eyes are a bright olive. Lined or not you know that face and you know those gun barrel horns and if that weren’t enough the stitched sign on his shirt collar just visible through the helmet is clue enough. That’s Jayekh. Or- it isn’t, but it’s his ancestor clear as day.

“Holy shit, that’s Jayekh’s ancestor!” you gasp and try to pull a mental image of Jayekh to the forefront of your mind so you can show the others. With a little effort you do just that and the adults around you clearly agree the likeness is striking.

“We didn’t even know he had an ancestor. He doesn’t know.” you say in wonder.

“What kind of a coincidence is it that all of the descendants of the rebellion show up at the same time and now one of the kids with them who wasn’t involved at all has his ancestor just arrive here of all
“I don’t think coincidence is the right word here, we need to know where that ship came from and what his ancestor is doing. We don’t know he’s a good guy, someone may have leaked information about your presence here. It’s not like we know what’s in those boxes yet.” a woman says darkly. She’s right, that’s a thought you hadn’t considered, who knows what kind of trap that could be.

“I need to get Nicole. Entertainer needs to know about this and you should ask your friend if he really, really, doesn’t know about his ancestor.” Longgame says and with that you’re all kicked from the thread.

Oh shit, you need to ask Jayekh about this. With somewhat more practice now you disconnect from the Dream and come back to the awareness of your body. You’re slumped in a slightly cushy chair in the medical area, Dayvhe had wanted to be around Roxxie and Dirkka despite them being out cold. As you focus on the world around you (as much as you can without your glasses at least) you find that your feet are on the edge of your chair and your knees have slipped over to rest on the edge of Roxxie’s stretcher with your back to the wall so you could connect more easily to the port in the wall. Dayvhe and Karkat however are nowhere around but to your surprise Rohhze is at your side.

“They’re checking up on Karkat if you were wondering.” she says, glancing away from the sleeping Kanaya to look at you.

That makes sense, Karkat’s still affected unlike Rohhze so he needs monitoring. Still, though you’re glad to know where they are, Dayvhe and Karkat weren’t who you were looking for.

On the other side of Roxxie is Dirkka’s stretcher with him similarly sedated and between the two is a dozing Jayekh and Jayyne who is playing idly on her palmhusk. Grabbing your wire from the wall you scramble to your feet and face Jayekh over Roxxie’s body.

“Jayekh, wake up! Jayyne, smack him already.” you say to them both and, ever one for mischief, she does just that.


“Didn’t you say you didn’t have an ancestor?” you ask him urgently.

“I’m not really sure we ever had this exact conversation. I mean, I suppose I must theoretically have one even though I’d never really thought of ancestors as being a relevant thing. Dirkka was pretty much the sole exception who had an ancestor who was tormenting him. But, no, I don’t know anything of whomever my ancestor may have been.” Jayekh answers with a wide yawn.

“You’re solidly sure on that? You’re not hiding anything?” you ask suspiciously.

“Why do you think he’s hiding something, Sollux? Jayekh doesn’t really deserve this level of skepticism in my opinion.” Jayyne says.

“THANK YOU Jayyne!” Jayekh says indignantly.

“I only say it because his ancestor just flew up to the planetoid in what was listed as an unmanned ship and broke landing protocol to deliver what is supposed to be food and we’ve no idea why. I’m gonna try to get a picture.” you say and pull out your palmhusk.

You… actually don’t know how to contact Longgame. You give it a moment’s thought and try the network to see if there’s a page for contacting the people who work at the flight control department. There’s a department email which really isn’t what you want but you try it anyway, sending off the
barest of emails requesting that Longgame get back to you about a picture of the guy.

A whole minute elapses with nothing and, despairingly, you try another method. Stupid borrowed palmhusk making your life hard.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling autonomicResponse [AR]

TA: hal ii need you two do me a favour. ii know you mu2t have kept copyies of the viiru2 ii made, ii’r on a borrowed palmhu2k 2o ii need you two giive me ace22 two it through thii2.
AR: ▶️▶️ I kn0w y0u’r e n0t g0ing t0 listen right n0w but we need t0 talk t0 y0u as soon as possible.
TA: ii know everything you have t0 2ay ii2 the mo2t iimportant but thii2 ii2 urgent!
AR: ◢◣ of c0urse this wasn’t the m0ment. But n0 w0rries, I can get that file t0 y0u n0w.
[autonomicResponse sent file: chiittrviiru2ma2teracce22.exe]
TA: thank2 talk two you later
twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling autonomicResponse [AR]
AR: ◢◣ See y0u soon.

You shut that chat down without thinking and install your controlling copy of the virus on the palmhusk that Nicole gave you. Dahvid really should have ordered her to not give you tech, not just asked her, because you’re already abusing your privileges.

Ok time to sift through the massive swathe of people in your list. Sadly the shutdown has rapidly shut cut the spread of your virus, shockingly no power means no internet or palmhusk charging for most people so less spread. But let’s see what you do have here. Seeing as what you have are a whole bunch of chittr accounts you try the laziest thing you can imagine and run a search through them for anything to do with flight control and, bingo, idiots who list their jobs.

Two people in that department but neither of them seem to be Longgame, nevermind. You break open the account of the first on your list and hello saved passwords for the flight control system for the planetoid. You tilt your palmhusk to the side to show the current position of every ship around the planetoid and consider just the kind of havoc you could really wreck with that kind of system if you were so inclined. Hell, there are a bunch of unmanned ships up there, you could reroute them to crash right into Dahvid’s hive if you wanted.

Sadly a move that baller would likely be traced right back to the only person with the skills to pay it off which is basically just you. So, tempting or not you’d end up with dead friends and you don’t want that. Still, the point is you could. Well, whatever. You’re in their little running network now and it’s easy enough to find Longgame now, he’s desperately looking into information about Jayekh’s ancestor and trying to coordinate people into finding out what the fuck is in the boxes he dumped.

You could just rummage through his files and get the picture you need but where’s the fun in that? You freeze his screen and open up a text box for him.

iif you want my help tryiing two fiind jayekh’2 ance2tor maybe leave me your trollhandle before you boot the thread huh? otherwii2e ii gotta do all thii2 work my2elf - 2ollux

You take the images you need, hand him control back but only after stealthily making yourself a little admin account with full privileges on your way out.

“This guy.” you say, holding the palmhusk out to Jayekh.

His eyes widen and he leans in and touches your screen to zoom in on his symbol on the man’s collar underneath his helmet.
“My goodness, that’s a real turn up for the books. I wonder if that’s what I’ll look like when I’m older. But no I really didn’t know anything about him at all. What was he delivering?” Jayekh says in surprise.

“No idea yet, they’re looking into it. I’m sure I’ll find out. I’m sure someone’s motivated to contact me about stuff over there.” you say, failing to suppress a smile. No one else knows why you’re pleased with yourself, but that’s fine.

“I wonder if this means that all of us have ancestors then who are involved in all of this. The coincidences certainly do seem to be piling up and I, for one, think that Carrie was very much lying when she said that me and Roxxie shared an ancestor. That’s just not how it works.” Rohhze notes.

“Well in that case we’re missing… who? We’ve seen Jayekh’s but that would mean Jayyne and Roxxie’s could be out there if you and Roxxie aren’t sharing. But then… Jayded and John as well maybe?” you wonder.

“I was fully prepared to put this down to coincidence, that for some reason members of the revolution were granted descendants at the same time. Perhaps some shenanigans were involved, but that doesn’t explain Vriska whose ancestor wasn’t exactly a favoured person. To assume that everyone we’re friends with must be involved is absurd but with Jayekh’s thus far unmentioned and unknown ancestor showing up… it seems more plausible.” Rohhze shrugs.

“But we all met by chance. I mean, fine, Dirkka and Dayvhe had a connection but the rest of us made friends with each other of our own free will and sure we all lived within travelling distance of each other but we weren’t exactly the next hive over from each other. It was chance.” Jayyne points out.

“Fate seems more apt.” Rohhze shrugs.

“There’s no such thing.” Jayyne says firmly.

“Ehhh…” you’re not so sure. Your ex sees the future, you hear the voices of the soon to be dead if you’re close enough although you’ve got better and better at blocking them out for the good of your own psyche. Those two things already suggest a certain amount of the future being set or at least there being a given number of paths to follow. Aradia’s said as much and even if you’re inclined to dismiss a bunch of what she says the evidence over time shows her to be right more often than just guessing would be.

Not to mention the universe conspiring to make your life complicated and distressing is entirely in line with your worldview.

Dayvhe walks into your area then with Karkat dozing on his back, clearly sleeping off whatever the docs just gave him and therefore having to ride Dayvhe around like he’s the emperor of hoofbeastshit mountain.

“What’s going on? I could hear all this excited talking from around the corner and Sollux has that look on his face.” Dayvhe says and shifts Karkat a little higher up on his back.

“What look?” you ask.

“The kind where you’re up to no good.” Dayvhe says.

“Hey.” you protest.

“Which is more upsetting, that he’s probably right or that you’re so transparent with it?” Jayyne asks
with a devious little smile.

“You can’t question me, my legal representation is in a coma.” you say defensively. Would Terezi legally defend you? Certainly. Would that work out well for you? Ehnh who knows?

“We were discussing the existence of fate, a predetermined destiny in our lives pulling us along a set path. Is every detail planned out in advance or merely the main idea? How much can we steer the path of our own lives and alter our fate? Is it an active thing or were the pieces merely set up, put in motion and then observed from then on like a child watching a toy car careen away from themselves?” Rohhze opines.

“I think you just made my thinkspoon hemorrhage.” Dayvhe tells her.

“Philistine.” Rohhze sighs.

“My ancestor showed up, I didn’t even know I had one. Sollux show him the picture.” Jayekh urges you as he totally ignores Rohhze’s monologue. Deciding to go with Jayekh you call up the image again and flip it around to show Dayvhe.

“Huh, I’ve never seen an olive troll get old enough to start going grey before. Blues maybe but not olive, huh.” Dayvhe says curiously.

“Carrie seems to be starting to head that way a little.” Rohhze notes.

“Is she?” you ask.

“You’re so unobservant.” Rohhze sighs.

“I wonder how long he’s been kicking around though, and what’s he doing here?” Dayvhe continues and turns his back to Roxxie’s stretcher to set a barely awake Karkat on the end who promptly just slumps against Dayvhe’s side.

“Well the ship he was in, Jumanji-”

“Oh, I love that movie!” Jayekh exclaims in delight, sitting up a little straighter in his chair. “It was a favourite of mine when I was little. I mean that’s not the title but everyone calls it that because of the game in it, it’s actual title was-”

“God, no, we don’t have that long. But it’s a movie thing, then? Maybe your ancestor is as big into movies as you are.” Dayvhe suggests.

“If so I’m glad to know I come from a line of good taste.” Jayekh nods.

Well, you don’t know about that. It’s a race to see which of you between you and Dayvhe can burn Jayekh fastest on that particular statement but you’ll never find out who of you would win that. The lighting for the whole room shifts suddenly into red and loud alarms start blaring.

Around you the docterrorists are frozen in shock for a moment before all leaping into action, rushing about as they check their palmhusks. Several of them run to your group, Docterrorist Feelgood among them.

“We need to get you all to safety in the lower levels right now. Wrangler, make sure we have two nights supply worth of medication at least to keep these ones sedated, go!” Feelgood orders.

“What’s going on?” Jayyne asks as she scrambles to her feet.
“The Empress is coming, she’s mere hours out and we need to get this planetoid looking like nothing is wrong and Entertainer still has full control. Needless to say you all need to hide, I don’t think I need to tell you what would happen if she found any of you.” Feelgood says and looks at Karkat and Roxxie specifically.

The stretchers can be moved and you’re more than happy to float them where you’re told. The group of you that were present are led down into a basement level of the building with thick stone walls, not everyone in your group is here though as Nepeta and Equius were off scouting as they’ve been doing almost the whole time. You think they might be trying to get some moirail time in to make up for the very public fight they had recently and normally you wouldn’t begrudge them it but this isn’t a normal situation.

You send off a message to them to get here before Nicole even thinks to prompt you to round up anyone you’re missing. You even fire off a message to Hal to warn him and Aradia but you get nothing back on that.

The basement level is getting crowded, plenty of people are being stored down here. The injured, dramatically disabled, the clearly mutated and a lot of limebloods. Some people don’t seem to fit into any of those categories and you’d bet they’re hiding because of who they are not what they are. It’s pretty clear though that everyone crammed into the basement level here is hiding because the Empress would kill them as soon as look at them and no doubt her closest lackeys would do the same to impress her.

“I’ll fight her if she comes in here.” Karkat mumbles into your shoulder.

“I know, KK. I know.” you tell him.

You’re both sat on Kanaya’s stretcher along with Rohhze, it’s pushed up against Terezi’s to save on space so Vriska is camped out at the head of the two stretchers between the two girls. Time is ticking on and it’s clear that this place is basically full, you suppose there must be other hidden places around the planetoid that people go to if they’re at risk and there has to be some way of saying that this one is full because new people just aren’t coming in anymore.

The adults around you all are talking quietly, trying to pass the time and keep things normal. Some are playing card games but there’s a tension in the air so thick you can hardly breathe. The point is you’re all so on edge that someone bursting into the room is noticed by everyone. The room prickles with fearful psionics at the ready but not you, you know this face.

“Hal?” Dayvhe calls out.

The android leaps through the air and lands just near you all.

“Sorry, it was a long journey and we should have anticipated the time better but all is as it should be.” Hal says and flicks his hand near his face for apparently no reason, but the gesture is familiar to you.

“Are you ok?” Dayvhe asks.

“Were you worried about the Empress finding the ship with you in it or something?” Jayyne asks as well.

“She will know it’s there but she won’t care, she doesn’t know its significance. We need to talk to Sollux.” Hal says and looks at you. He flicks his head slightly and instantly you know where you’ve seen that. Aradia’s hair was forever getting in the way and she never could keep track of hair ties to
keep it out of her face so she was forever flicking it out of her eyes. When you trolled Hal earlier his quirk was weird, why didn’t you notice then?!

“Aradia?” you ask.

“Hah, more like Ar-radia!” the bot laughs and then pauses.

“That joke worked better in text in our head. ARadia. Like, ‘AR’?” she explains.

“Why are you in Hal? Is he even ok with that?” you ask her. You really hope he is, you don’t wish that experience on anyone.

“He agreed to Aradia’s terms when she explained it. We’re kind of a unit at the moment. Like you and her were but imagine only in one body. She needed to see you for this, this moment coming.” he… she… they explain.

“Not that I don’t trust you, Aradia, but I don’t trust you.” Dayvhe says flatly.

“You do have a history.” Vriska agrees, like she doesn’t herself.

“Ugh, you’re so obsessed with the past Vriska. Aradia really doesn’t care.” they sigh despairingly.

“And she’s too obsessed with the future, so why are you here?” Vriska snaps back.

They, the Hal/Aradia hybrid, gives Vriska a look of disdain that is delivered so perfectly with Hal’s practiced sneer that you actually feel a prickle of agitation because, hey, Vriska is yours to insult that hard.

“What’s the problem you’re here about? The Empress? Because we know about her coming that’s why we’re here.” you interrupt them.

“We- Aradia was thinking about everything that happened with you, about choice and knowing things even when the right answer is completely obvious and Hal doesn’t get it but- fine. Something is going to happen and there’s a- a right answer… no, there’s a good outcome and other ones. Obviously you should go for that one and without us here you would without knowing and…” they trail off, putting their hands to their temples and shaking their head.

“Sorry, this was clearer when I was just Aradia.” they hiss.

“Can you not just get out of him?” Jayekh suggests.

“No, I’m already losing my ability to understand why this is needed, if I get out I don’t know how much I won’t get it.” they protest.

“This is like the situation with me being captured and tortured before.” you conclude.

“Yes.” they nod.

“What? No!” Dayvhe yells.

“Nooo!” Karkat agrees and wraps both his arms and one leg around you.

“What’s-” you swallow thickly and dig your fingers into Karkat’s arm to ground you, “what’s going to happen?”

“Your ports are weak, they’ll let in anyone stronger than you psionically who’s in a machine. Your
ancestor is stronger than you and in the most advanced ship in existence. He’s in agony and you have a thinksponge that’s all meaty and in just the right setup that his used to be in along with ports that are a wide open door, he’ll jump the moment he gets close enough to you to do it. He’ll be in your head, controlling everything.” they explain, catching your face in their metal hands and looking at the ports on your temples.

“Can I stop it?” you ask weakly.

“We have to.” Dayvhe agrees.

“Well, wait, what happens if we do and if we don’t?” Rohhze interrupts.

“You can stop it, sedate yourself like that but the future goes darker that way. Billions of people will die because of that. But if you let him in for twenty minutes things will be so much better, this is the obvious choice, everything improves.” they say, their expression twisting like even asking you is a stupid question.

Once again your head is getting invaded against your will. Except it isn’t, you’re being given a choice. A terrible choice but it’s still more than you’ve had before.

“Will I be awake or aware?” you ask as queasiness rises up inside you.

“Yes.” the robot says.

“Sol, you don’t have to do this. We don’t know that Aradia is telling the truth, she’s got control of Hal and she could be lying. No one would blame you if you didn’t do this.” Dayvhe assures you.

“Don’t be stupid, he’s going to do it.” Vriska sighs.

Davyhe looks livid and snarls furiously at her.

“Don’t give me that, he’d do anything to make our chances better. You know he would. Besides he’s been through worse. Hell, what I did to him lasted longer than that. If Sollux doesn’t do it because he doesn’t want to that’s one thing but it sure as hell won’t be because he can’t handle it.” she scoffs.

Billions of lives against twenty minutes of something that makes you feel ill to think of.

You squirm out of Karkat’s grip so you can pace back and forth. Is this the moment? Is this like what Gilyut faced? Stuck between two shit decisions and trying to do something that would improve things even if they had no idea exactly what would get better, just like you right now. Vriska’s right, you’ve been through worse but also Dayvhe is right, no one has a right to demand you give up your freedom and wellbeing like this.

You can’t help but think that you have an obligation to help if this really will make things better. You should ask.

“If you really, really know that things will be better then I’ll do it. Wait, will everyone here be better off?” you ask, pointing to your friends.

“Yes. Vriska pass me that pillow now please.” they say, holding out a hand.

“Why?” Vriska asks flatly.

“Just- here.” Rohhze groans and hands it over.
“Oh fuck, I’m going to have to do this. I don’t know if I want to be aware of this or not. I mean which is worse knowing that someone was in your body without knowing what they did or being stuck by having to watch it happen?” you whine, pacing back and forth.

Hal/Aradia drops the pillow on the floor in a weird place and you’re aware that basically everyone in the room is watching all this go on.

“Sol, just tell me what you want me to do. I’ll do it.” Dayvhe offers, standing by where you’re pacing.

“Well, that’s that.” Hal/Aradia says as they look up at the ceiling.

“This is fucked this is so fuck, this is-”

You freeze. That feeling steals over you again, like listening to Dahvid’s psionically fucked music or feeling Vriska slipping into your pan. An inquisitive and curious slip through your ports and then a rush, like being smacked with a tidal wave. You stumble, fall, and land with your head softly cushioned on the floor.
Your title is THE PSIIONIC and your hatchname is MITUNA CAPTOR and right now you have a headache that would have the most hardened substance abusers you know crying for their lusii. Fucking hell you’ve not felt this shit in forever, what hit you?

You clutch your head in agony and whimper. You feel a jolt as someone lands next to you and cringe as the vibrations run to your poor pan.

“Careful.” someone scolds someone else.

“The next person,” you say with your lisp wildly out of control like it hasn’t been in sweeps, “who makes a noise is dead.”

“Is he hurt? What’s wrong do I need to get a docterrorist?” the same person whispers and you crack open an eye to deliver swift and well deserved vengeance.

“V?” you mumble instead, squinting at the guy crouched down on the floor next to you. God, this must be a visual migraine too because your vision is the worst right now but you swear that’s him.

“What?” he asks, looking at you. He’s wearing his shades.

“Dahvid?” you repeat yourself and the guy grimaces.

“Not even.” the guy says.

His name is Dayvhe.

“AUGH!” you yell and jerk yourself upright. That sounded like it came from inside your own head! That didn’t sound like the voice of someone about to die, that just sounded like someone. Someone in your head.

You’re the one in MY head, asshole.

“Why am I hearing voices, oh shit.” you whimper. This is a whole new flavour of crazy to you and you’re not enthused, not at all.

“Is it Sol?” a too familiar voice asks and- oh. He’s too young but it’s Signless.
“Signless?” you whisper.

Karkat.

“Karkat?” you repeat and the guy looks puzzled as hell. He’s subadult too and, shit, look at your hands you are as well.

“Why am I not me and why am I hearing voices?” you ask again.

“We did say that he would be awake in there.” a voice says from a… robot?

“I don’t think we anticipated open communication between them though.” a girl says. You squint, an Academic looking girl no less.

“What the fuck is going on?” you ask.

Not-Dahvid groans and shuffles a little closer, he runs his hands through his hair and tries again.

“It’s Psiionic, right?” he asks, you nod and regret it because you still have the lusus of all headaches going.

“Right, ok, you’re sort of possessing my moirail’s body right now. He’s Sollux Captor, your descendant. Look, here.” he explains and pulls out his palmhusk, turns the front facing camera on and shows you the face that you apparently have.

Well, it’s nearly your face. Or your face when you were a kid anyway.

I’m not a kid, I’m nine.

“So you’re a kid.” you mutter.

Ouch those ports look reasonably new so you can probably excuse the fail of a haircut he’s got going right now. You can feel the prickle of his irritation in your head and it clicks that his pan is probably hurting you so much because it’s got two people in it right now.

So you’re possessing your descendant. That still isn’t getting your questions answered and this pan-ache isn’t doing wonders for your patience.

“Tell me what the fuck is going on or imma shove that palmhusk right up your pre-molt nook you useless not-Dahvid fuck!” you snap and smack his palmhusk out of his hand.


“Sorry.” you apologise out of reflex even though you really don’t mean it.

This is about the time that you realise this room wherever you are, not that you can tell all that well with this awful vision, is packed with adults all of which are staring at you.

“So who the fuck are they?” you demand, waving a hand at them.

“Well I think a lot of them are your followers.” Dayvhe says and yes you’re calling him Dayvhe just so the angry voice in your head doesn’t get snippy about it.

“Followers.” you repeat.

“Yeah.” he nods.
“Signless has followers, I’d know, I’m like the MVP of them. He’s the one who gives all the speeches I just talk about helm shit sometimes and the shocking lessons of ‘shit’s bad don’t do it’ and remedial ethics q and a for Dahvid.” you say slowly.

“Yeah I have criticism on how well you did that.” the guy mutters.

“If you’re really Psiionic in there we’re- we’re followers of your philosophy.” a voice says from the crowd.

“Unless you’re devout followers of my two core principles of good programming and good pailing I really don’t know what philosophy you’re following.” you snort.

“Fantastic, how about you tell us the last thing you remember?” Mini-Strydr asks you.

The last thing, huh?

“I was… with Dahvid. I was meeting up with the others later. But I didn’t…” you trail off.

They got the jump on you, a stupid mistake. Broken bones, a power dampener and mind control. The ambush. Signless, Dolorosa. The post, the whips, the beatings, the screaming, so much bright red blood. His furious words, Disciple screaming, the final blow.

Your throat clenches up and there are tears running hot down your face.

They’re gone, they’re all gone.

“How am I not in the ship? Or…” you sniff and look up at the ceiling above you. You flew here, or you were made to at least. So you must be on Dahvid’s planet, right? These people would be culled if they were anywhere else, especially these kids with your friends signs and faces.

You focus and, yeah, like a heavy weight on a sheet of cloth you can feel the pull in the air to the ship. Following it for a moment you trace where it came from only to jerk back at the sting of perpetual agony that comes from the helm. Yeah, the ship is there. You’re up there. There’s a hum of anxiety from the kid, Sollux, in the back of your head.

“This is Dahvid’s planet, I flew here.” you say stiffly and stand up, wiping your face off.

“And my moirail’s got the wrong kinds of ports and the same kind of thinksponge so you jumped in.” Dayvhe nods and gets up as well, helping the other Vantas up too. The kid weaves a little and slumps against Dayvhe’s side.

“What’s wrong with him? I’d rather think about that than all my shit.” you mutter, pointing at Karkat with one hand and grinding the heel of your other hand into your eye to stop the stupid fucking tears.

Signless and Disciple and- and everyone else have been gone for who knows how many sweeps and crying over it won’t do shit.

Dahvid has their bodies in a creepy room.

You don’t really know what to make of that but it’s clear he doesn’t approve of this.

“Oh, he’s sedated. Lots of my friends are too, because of my good for nothing ancestor.” Dayvhe hisses like a furious purrbeast and gestures to a series of medical beds with a bunch of people on them- wait, is that actually Dionte? No, there are gills on his neck, what the fuck?

Your eyes land on a girl. Long dark hair, a face you know and a sign you never thought you’d see
again. There weren’t many perks to being in the Empress’s daymare helm but knowing everything she did in virtue of being her network was one of them. You know what Serket did to Dolorosa and you can’t possibly even the score but you’re going to try.

“SERKET.” you snarl and her face flicks into fear. You’re going to melt her. You lift a hand only to be slammed to the floor. Your own psionics turned against you and now you can’t breathe. The guy in your head is fighting you for control and you know he can’t do it but he’s making it nasty as hell.

You don’t get a choice about what he’s doing and you don’t get to opt out of what he’s thinking either. You get a flash of kissing her, of the intensity of his hate for her of the kind of desperately clingy and burning need to get into someone else’s pants that only hormonal subadults can really muster. He’s too terrified to do anything but damn if he doesn’t want to. Gross, you remember being that age and how awkwardly and desperately you were into people and thank god you got somewhat smoother as you got older. But ok, fine he likes her and he’s going to pitch a shitfit if you murder Mindfang’s descendant.

DON’T YOU DARE, DON’T YOU *DARE*!

“Alright, fuck I’m sorry just let me breathe.” you croak out and the pressure of not breathing in and out right fades.

Mindfang’s kid leans over the edge of the stretcher to look at you and raises an eyebrow.

“That’s some resistance, Sollux.” she says slickly and why do you have to be in the middle and subjected to just how much he likes her approval? They need to get a room with you not in it, thanks.

“You cool?” Dayvhe asks, looking down at you.

“So cool.” you wheeze and he hauls you to your feet.

There are far too many people watching for you to be okay with what just happened but you’re going to go ahead and pretend that it didn’t just happen.

“So, wait. Dahvid did what?” you ask instead.

“Dahvid’s lackeys trollnapped half of us.” he starts.


“Dahvid’s lackeys trollnapped half of us.” he starts.


“Cal died, he was pissed. It zombified Dionte apparently. He wanted to find out who did it, his people found half of us and they took us back to him.” he explains.

“We didn’t want to go, they made us.” Karkat insists and rubs his face on Dayvhe’s shirt, wow he’s really out of it. You’re kind of sad you never got Signless on anything more adventurous than booze, you bet he would have been amazing to watch. That said he wasn’t really super comfortable with alcohol and you’d hate the idea of making him feel obligated to do anything, he always respected the things you didn’t want so you’d never ignore that with him.

Not that it matters. He’s dead.

Think about Dahvid instead, this is a problem you can get answers to.

“So he wanted to know who killed his lusus but I get why he’d want to see you and he’s shit at asking permission sometimes.” you nod.
“Yeah well they’re all like this because they’re banned from leaving his hive and it’s agony to them, Karkat’s just powering through it like this. The other half of our group came here to rescue us and—” he goes on angrily.

“Wait. Rescue? What do you mean rescue? Why can’t you go? I get people would be looking for you but…” you’re not entirely sure you’re following.

“Sollux and the others rescued us because we’re not allowed to leave at all, he keeps us locked up in a wing of the building and made them think that leaving the planet is a bad idea at all and they’re not even allowed out of the building. And, AND, when Sollux and the others came to rescue us they made a mess of the building and some of the staff—” Dayvhe says angrily.

“Yeah, precision or massive destruction it’s hard to do both.” you laugh.

“Oh, laugh it up. My fucking ancestor got so pissed and so scared of Sollux that he ordered everyone else in our group to kill themselves if any of us hurt or killed him.” Dayvhe snaps.

The smile falls off of your face.

“I’m… going to need you to explain that.” you say slowly. Surely he couldn’t have done that.

“It’s exactly as he said, not only are half our group incapacitated because Sollux had to evacuate us but should we make an aggressive move against him everyone but Sollux, Dayvhe and myself would die.” Academic- Rohhzeh says. There’s a bubbling well of loathing for Dahvid in the back of your pan and you’re getting why.

“But you’re children and they’re like- what? Fresh out of molting?” you say, gesturing at the two adults.

“Yeah.” Dayvhe agrees and offers no corrections.

“He… trollnapped you, kept you here against your will and bound you to suicide if you fought back? Dahvid? Dahvid Strydr did that?” you ask.

“You see why we hate him.” Dayvhe tells you flatly.

He…

You want to say that he wouldn’t, that you know him better. He does have a sweetness in him, a gentle and caring kindness but sometimes… Ugh. Sometimes he doesn’t get that other people are people and you thought you’d dragged him out of that but evidently not.

“AUUGH! FUCK!” you yell at the top of your borrowed lungs. Oh you’re going to kick his ass for this. Children, really?! CHILDREN.

“Who has the best husktop in this room?” you demand of the people gathered in here with you.

A few people clamour and hold theirs up in the air and you snag one at random. It’s yours now.

“What’re you doing?” a lime girl asks curiously.

“Shut up.” you say, sitting down and opening it up. You bypass the login and get to work.

Network… network… There’s an adult looking over your shoulder and you hate that.

“You can’t get into the mansion’s network, it’s completely locked. The only person who has access
is The Grand Entertainer and even he is locked out of most of its functions.” this random asshat decides to tell you.

“Bitch I made that network, sit down and fuck off. Not in that order.” you hiss and start typing.

Right? What kind of idiot would make a network they can’t hack into? Seriously. How did you lock yourself out of it when you were helmed though or was it before?

“I made it afterwards. Fishfuckface was paranoid that V’s security was shit and it would compromise the ship’s by extension so she made me make something to protect us both. Only she forgot that I’m literally the best ever. Made a lock, threw away the key.” you explain to him.

It’s funny, you can feel him watching what you’re doing and the keen interest he has. You guess your descendant is as technologically inclined as you and he’s obviously impressed with your skill. So yeah, you made a lock no one else can crack but you know how it fits together and getting in isn’t easy but it’s very possible for you. A few minutes of work and you’re back into the system you made all those sweeps ago. A vicarious little thrill runs through you from Sollux and you can’t help but smile but it falls off your face when you remember why you’re here.

You can’t believe Dahvid. You’re going to wreck his shit for this. You flick through security feeds until you see the grand bitch herself cornering Dahvid in his office. They’re arguing but you don’t care, she’s there and you need to be there. You need a diversion.

“I wonder if this thing goes two ways.” you wonder aloud as you look up at the ceiling and rub your temple. Well, Sollux’s temple.

“Everything with Captors goes two ways.” Karkat declares confidently and you nearly choke on your own spit at having to laugh without expecting it. Damn you like this Vantas kid! You hope he’s this entertaining sober.

There’s a flare of amusement heavily tinged in quadrant smeared pity and you get the feeling that he very much is. Also it seems that Vantases continue to have mad non-quadrant game and you respect that.

Still, you have work to do. You can see you- the ship. You can see the ship on one of the external garden cameras if you twist it right. Also what is wrong with Dahvid that his security is this terrible? There’s not even any cameras on the roof. You know Dionte was always more into this stuff than him but he’s obviously been slacking. The problem for you right now is that fish bitch is harassing Dahvid and you need to get her gone. You need a distraction.

You could try to hack into the ship but why do that when you’re already in there?

“I need a minute.” you say, putting the machine on the floor.

“For what?” the littlest Strydr asks worriedly.

“I need her to fuck all the way off which means I need to cause some pretty temporary chaos to make her go.” you explain.

Why not just damage the ship?

“Because she’ll go looking for who did it and that’ll hurt. Besides, she’s not above just wiping out whole groups of people because of one person, or near enough anyway. It’s a wonder there’s any limes left after Signless.” you tell your descendant.
“Wait, I never understood that. People give all sorts of bad reasons for why we were illegal for a while but was it really to do with Signless?” the lime girl asks.

“Sign was a mutant lime, same as Dahvid is slightly mutated purple and I figure you are too, right?” you say, looking at Dayvhe again.

“I’m totally red, so I’m even more. But our body temperature is—” he starts.

“Unrelated. Now drop it and don’t interrupt me if I start screaming the place down, the helm sucks.” you tell them all.

They’re going to outlive me then…

You pause. You always figured that you’d be saying that about your friends and partners, you were lower than any of your close group. But that isn’t how it worked out, they’re all gone and you’re still alive. You try to convey to Sollux that really being the first to go is monumentally better than being the last one left around.

Wow, no one is happy with this line of thought. Not you and not your descendant either. You’re almost eager to plunge yourself back into the helm to escape it, really. Closing your eyes you follow that trail back into the sky towards the ship and instead of cringing back at the pain you push into it and like that you’re back at the helm.

You can’t really say that you can feel your body because the time when you became more biotech than troll was so long ago you can’t even see it in the distance anymore. You are accustomed to the blistering pain of the helm and that’s enough to let you know you’re fully back in yourself.

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAUGHHHH!!!!!

Oh shit, why is the kid still with you? Why wouldn’t he stay in his body? You try to calm him down but it’s not working, so the next best thing you can do is to accomplish what you wanted and get out of here as soon as possible.

You start searching for your files when abruptly Sollux quietens down to just a whimper, you guess he still has enough connection with his body that someone was able to help. Well, good, no one deserves this. There’s still this hazy awareness on you as you look through things.

As the helm you’re privy to everything that goes through you and you’re allowed to categorise things as you want in so far as your doing so doesn’t affect the experience of people using you. Condy took those privileges away after you reorganised her hierarchy rankings with employment bands such as ‘caste traitor’ ‘spineless losers’ ‘deranged idiots’ ‘wants fish bulge so bad’ and so on. How you sort historical files is mostly up to you because she can just make you find things for her. It does mean that you have this.

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You rifle through it, some of the people in here are dead now but you don't have time to filter them out so you’ll just send them all on. All of these files you caught even though people tried to delete them. Some are messages between parties who are cheating on other people, some are evidence of blackmail, conspiracy. Over the sweeps you’ve carefully hoarded these things, appending to them the contact information of the people who it would be worst of all to discover them. At the time you had no real concrete plan for what to do with them, you’d thought of saving them for some very important event of the regal tacky bitch herself just so you could trash it but a distraction works better.
You send the contents off to its most disastrous ends and make it all auto-open when it gets there. As much as you’d like to stay and watch that chaos you can still feel Sollux’s pain and you don’t want that. You grab his hand, an idea that doesn’t make sense when you think of it but you guess it’s like your thinksponge visualising it, and you pull him and you both out of the helm. There’s a connection between you and him, some kind of wireless perfect storm of matching so you both synched up in the first place and you want to go back to his body to do what you have to do but that can wait.

Forcing yourself to be aware of yourself is something you’ve been actively trying not to do but Signless used to be all about that grounding shit when you got panicky or filled with daymares. Of course you don’t have a body anymore, not really, but you do have a concept of one. Just picturing it seems to pop you into existence in some proto helm-connection-like space. You having an imagined body gives Sollux one too.

At your proper size you can get a sense of how small he is, just a little kid. He’s nine so he’s not a wiggler by any means but he’s so young. He’s little, already got helm tech in him and you can feel how he vibrates with fear for the people he cares about.

“This is like the Dream.” Sollux says, looking around at the void.

You’re about to ask what that is when you get slapped in the face with the idea as you asking makes it pop up in his head. Oh, ok. Cool, networking and they have… some of your memories. That’s what that guy was doing that time. Boy you wonder what kinds of memories they have of yours. Holy shit maybe you’ve been a porn star this whole time without knowing it!

Sollux cackles with laughter and he doesn’t know the answer but you bet he’s going to look the next time he gets there. Though you guess theoretically he could end up finding whatever encounter you had that spawned him. That said no matter how many times Dolorosa explained to you how the mother grub really worked it never actually made sense to you.

“Gross.” Sollux concludes.

“Listen, did Dahvid really do all that stuff?” you ask.

You’re bombarded with Dahvid’s carelessness, his cold expression and his terrible orders. How he tried to attack Sollux and the genuine fear and fury Sollux holds for him. They’re not blowing this out of proportion.

You try to show Dahvid like you know him. The guy who genuinely wanted to be better, who could have coasted his whole life on other people but actually stopped to fix things. He picked up his damaged friend from Cal’s hive and tried to be good to him. He’s an asshole sometimes, sure, but so are you. He wanted to help. He’s your friend, he tried to save you personally from the helm and you pity him something awful.

From the fact that you suddenly wake up again in Sollux’s body you guess he doesn’t want to know about your feelings and that’s fair. But hello overly familiar faces but kiddified. You sit up, pushing Dayvhe and Karkat aside.

“Are you ok? That sounded shit.” Karkat says, squeezing your shoulder.

“Yeah well my life is shit so. I need to go.” you shrug and stand.

“Where exactly are you planning on going?” Academic look-alike asks.

“Dahvid’s. Hey, there’s the exit.” you say as you spot the door and fly over to it.
“I- hey! Come back here!” Dayvhe shouts after you and jumps way higher and further than anyone should be able to. Huh, looks like mutating more gave the kid some actual mini psionic powers of the fun telekinetic kind. Good for him.

“I’m not letting the Empress catch my moirail, it’s way too dangerous out there. Plus I think we’re locked in.” he says, pointing at the shut door.

“Locks are an ‘other people’ problem.” you snort and flick the door out of the way.

“Sol- I mean- PSIIONIC!” Dayvhe shouts after you and runs to catch up.

“Look, I have a small window to do this. As far as I know when the ship leaves I do too, there’s gotta be a range on this thinkspoon and I got shit to do. But you’re right it’s dangerous and you’re a kid so go back.” you tell him.

“If it’s too dangerous for me then it’s too dangerous for you to take Sollux’s body there, so either we both go or we both stay.” Dayvhe insists and grabs your arm. Stupid stubborn- ugh, he’s as bad as his ancestor. You don’t have time to argue so fine, he can come.

“We’re going to have to to fly.” you warn him as you start up the next set of stairs.

“I love flying.” Dayvhe replies stubbornly.

Great, well, he’s not going anywhere is he? You come out of the stairs and figure you’ll just pick a direction to walk, eventually you’ll run out of building. This is taking forever, you miss being a tall adult. When you go into a room filled with a giant statue you have to stop and stare because that’s you up there.

“What.” you say flatly.

“You got a lot of fans.” Dayvhe shrugs.

“But Signless is-”

“Yeah he has too I think but I don’t think his people built a statue for him. They just wear Karkat’s sign, which is a little creepy seeing as I think that came from the guy’s cuffs. Morbid at least. I don’t know how Karkat ended up with it, he always had his sign. Coulda been some secret cultists on Alternia I guess.” Dayvhe rambles as you stare up at your own face in gold.

This is so messed up. You can’t be here. Thankfully the direction of the light tells you which way is out so you leave the statue behind easily enough and you’re just going to try to put it out of your mind. No one stops you exiting the building and Dayvhe is right behind you.

You’re a little lost, you’ve only ever seen this planet and this city from the sky. If you’re totally honest when you were able to wrench some fucking clarity of mind to yourself through the pain when you were here you were just desperate to see a glimpse of your friend. Your not moirail. Your friend with fluctuating pale benefits. The literal last person alive that you really really care about. Needless to say you’re always looking for a hint of him and not exactly sightseeing his planetoid much. Because it is a planetoid, not a planet, no matter what he called it but you’ll let him have that one. You can’t really call him out for definitively naming something that it really isn’t when you went ahead and called yourself The Psiionic, you know, like you’re the only one out there. Well, you did it because you’re the best and you were high on ego and your own shitty neurochemistry at the time so it stuck but whatever.

The point is, you’re lost.
“The mansion’s that way. Bigass building with a huge hole in the windows now, can’t miss it.” Dayvhe says because you guess he knows lost Captor when he sees it.

“You’re not going without me.” he adds, coming to stand in front of you and resting his hands on your shoulder.

There’s a glow of pale pity inside the chest that’s not really yours and you don’t have it in you to tell him no. Not when he looks so much like the man you have such similar feelings for. You lift up off of the floor and take him with you and he doesn’t so much as flinch. You float up to the level of the top of that walls that border this weird building that houses a giant statue of yourself. For the second time again today you’re left staring up at yourself, but not the polished gold of that statue, no the red ship that is you. It’s not like you’re getting out of it, your whole body is melded into it and you’ve been integrated into it for more sweeps than you were your actual flesh and blood body. It’s… unsettling.

Underneath the shadow of you, the ship, is Dahvid’s mansion. You create a proper cushion of psionic energy and try to fling the two of you there as fast as is reasonably safe only to be wildly disappointed with your lack of actual goddamn power.

Hey!

Wait, no, this kid is nine, right? Fine, that’s probably fair. You don’t remember what your psionics were like at nine except probably better than everyone else’s.

Mine are.

Well fine, but you’re nearly there so you take a dive and land in the garden. You duck inside the foliage until you notice exactly what this plant is trimmed into the shape of.

“Holy shit it’s a bulge, he said he’d do it to give me something to look at when he last saw me. I didn’t see it before. This is amazing.” you giggle, touching the leaves.

“When did Dahvid talk to you? I thought you were stuck in the helm.” Dayvhe asks you.

“I am, but sometimes she brings him up to see me so that he can be horrified at me and I can see what I can’t have. He tries to make me feel better and we both feel worse. It’s clever, why should she torture us when she can make us torture for each other?” you grumble.

Still, he actually followed through with obscene shrubbery that you could see from the ship if you were up there. You’re touched.

All hell should be breaking loose up there now so you’re pretty sure you’re safe sneaking up to the mansion and sticking close to the walls. Dayvhe follows after you, stealthy quiet like Dione always was. You know more or less where the office is. There’s a door leading into the building that you sneak past on your way there. Close to the long window there’s a hedge about waist height along the wall and the glass. You creep closer and just catch sight of Dahvid standing there with an irritated look on his face. A sweep of a long fingered hand tipped with pink gem encrusted claws waves close to the glass and you seethe at her very presence near him.

You don’t dare sneak closer to the glass and it’s reinforced enough that you can’t hear what they’re talking about through it, but you can still be seen.

Dahvid rolls his eyes and before he can complete the movement his eyes catch on you and Dayvhe. For a split second his expression freezes and then it’s back to normal, his biclored eyes directed back at her. You lean back from the window edge a little.
“Now what?” Dayvhe whisper hisses in your ear.

“She should go back up soon, people have to be bugging her about all the shit that’s got to be going on.” you whisper back. It takes a few minutes but you hear a hand on the door that you passed before and Dayvhe rapidly shoves you both into the bushes. You carefully move and peek out through the leaves to see the worst troll in the universe stalking off as she talks angrily on her shellphone, fuck she’s tall when you’re this height.

You wait for a tense few minutes before getting up and rushing into the building.

“Wait, dude, you know he hates Sollux’s guts right? Be careful!” Dayvhe yells as he chases after you.

You don’t even get to see Dahvid’s office, he meets you halfway there. You’ve never had to look up at him before and he looks angry as fuck.

“What the HELL are you two doing?! Do you know what she would have done if she caught you?!” Dahvid snarls, looming over you both. That deep adult snarl in your kid ears has all the evolutionary survival parts of your thinkspounge backing off, at least until you get ahold of them.

“It’s not what you think.” Dayvhe begins to say.

Sollux is wary of him and angry, Dayvhe is trying to minimise his reaction and you… you are pissed. Snarling right back at him you float up into the air and, with him too surprised to react, smack Dahvid right in the horn.

“OW!” Dahvid yips, ducking away and covering his horn.

“REALLY, V? I get out of myself for the first time and I have to come DOWN HERE to find you CONTROLLING CHILDREN INTO SUICIDE. REALLY?!” you yell at him at maximum volume.

“What did you call me?” Dahvid asks in a small voice as he stares at you with big eyes.

“A fucking idiot is what I ought to call you. You know it’s a good fucking thing Signless is dead because he really thought you were better than torturing kids. Little kids! I can’t believe you’d do this!” you snarl.

“I- it’s not- how do-” Dahvid fumbles over his words.

“It’s Psionic. Sollux’s ports are picking him up like a radio station or something, it’s a whole full body possession type deal.” Dayvhe explains.

Dahvid’s mismatched eyes flick between you and Dayvhe and his face is a picture of shock. At least with you floating you’re close to your proper height. Straightening up and floating a little higher puts you at the level you should be which is just the right one to look down at him.

“Psii?” he whispers, wide eyed and with his hand still holding onto his horn where you smacked him for being so dumb.

“No, it’s the mothergrub’s glistening back end. YES IT’S ME YOU USELESS CRETIN!” you snap.

“But… the helm… can’t you feel it? Doesn’t it still hurt or are you ok in there? Wait, did you swap places with the kid? Is he up there?” Dahvid asks, and looks up at the ceiling like that’ll show him
the helm somehow. But still, he’s… worried about you?

“Like you’d care if Sollux was hurting, but no, they’re both in there.” Dayvhe mutters bitterly.

“Explains the pan-ache.” you complain quietly.

“You haven’t seen what those things are really like, no one deserves that.” Dahvid tells his descendant sharply and you drop back to the ground.

“Cut that out. Stop being sweet when I’m pissed at you.” you tell him sharply and ignore the soft and silent snicker of Sollux’s amusement in the back of your head. That asshole, laughing at your misfortune. Signless would probably say that it’s only your own traits reflected back at you through the generations and if you find them annoying that’s on you to improve yourself. You suppose that’s possible, or maybe you’re just genetically predisposed to being a smug fucker and there’s little you can do about it.

“Why are you pissed at me?” Dahvid asks and gives his horn a last rub before dropping his arm. He leads you both away from the door which is probably smart, you don’t want to be surprised if the damn Empress herself swims back in here do you?

“Think real hard about why.” you tell him and go into his office with him. Dayvhe is still following behind you.

“I hate this game.” Dahvid whines and sits on his desk. He stretches his leg out and hooks his foot under his large wheeled desk chair and pulls it closer. As it moves the chair spins and you see that Dionte is sat in it, his arms bound to the chair by gold that you recognise all too well as being bent thick bracelets owned by the bitch that owns you. She must have tied him down with them. Dahvid slips his hand under Dionte’s jaw and rests his foot on the edge of the chair, he guides Dionte to rest his head on Dahvid’s knee. Dionte was always as high alert as could be, even when he seemed to be empty there was always the sense that he was very dangerous. You helped him with his early hacking attempts before he got really good and he was never chill like this, like a purrbeast laid out on a warm rock. Dionte’s eyes are unfocused and he lazily blinks, not even seeming to see you or Dayvhe at all.

Dayvhe’s hand slides around your wrist and you look over to see him shake his head ever so slightly. He’s a zombie. He just changes for him.

Sollux supplies you with that information and then a memory of Dionte’s snarling, biting, violent demeanor going like this.

“What’s wrong with him?” you ask, coming a little closer and finally Dionte’s eyes focus on you. His lip curls back in a snarl so Dahvid slowly pets his hair.

“Nothing, he’s fine. It’s just- it’s shock. Weren’t we talking about what I did wrong?” Dahvid mutters, shaking his head.

“You’d rather talk about that than Dionte?” you ask, no stranger to these kind of diversions. You’re just surprised that he evidently really REALLY doesn’t want to talk about Dionte.

“I mean it’s the kids, right? The descendants of everyone. It’s crazy, isn’t it?” Dahvid says softly, not looking at you.

“Yeah.” you agree. Touching Sollux’s face gives you another reminder of how young he is
compared to you. Not to mention seeing itty bitty Signless. You never knew him at that age but, fuck, if he was as adorable as his descendant was you’re pretty sure your younger self would have died just to see him. Actually, the age difference between you and him would have probably been weird at that young of an age so maybe that was best, you’d have hated to feel like he was so much older and cooler than you. God knows no one is cooler than you. Well, Dolorosa is but she’s a stone cold badass rainbowdrinker so that’s fair.

She was anyway.

Congratulations, you made yourself sad again! Be angry instead.

“Yeah, yeah, V they’re kids. Tell me the problem there.” you say sharply.

“I… look, they killed Cal. Your one, Dionte’s brat and that Serket kid killed Cal and him dying sent Dionte into- into shock or whatever.” Dahvid says defensively.

“Alright, but… I offered to kill your lusus once because of how chronically he sucked.” you point out.

“Oh my god.” Dayvhe whispers behind you.

“Ok, fair, but you couldn’t. It was too dangerous, Cal would have controlled you if you got close. We talked about it.” Dahvid says.

“Why is this happening?” Dayvhe whines and paces about at the back of the room, though you’ve no idea why.

This is why you need a kismesis who makes doomsday weapons recreationally and can make you a bomb that’ll turn a square mile to glass <3<

Gross. You didn’t need that unwanted look into his love life.

“What’s your problem?” you ask, looking back at Dayvhe.

“I had the same conversation with Sol, made him promise not to go near him only he got creative with that agreement.” Dayvhe whines.

“So you’re not mad that your lusus is dead specifically, just that it fucked Dionte over?” you ask Dahvid instead, leaving his descendant to his personal crisis.

“He’s really badly hurt.” Dahvid protests and runs his finger up one of Dionte’s horns, not that he gets a reaction from it.

“They couldn’t have known that, even you didn’t.” you reason.

“Yeah.” Dayvhe adds smugly.

“Shut up.” you snap without looking. No heckling from the peanut gallery when you’re trying to untangle your idiot’s thinking.

“So?” Dahvid pouts.

Ok, so he knows that’s shit so you’re just going to wait for him to crack as you watch him and sure enough you can see his shoulders starting to curl over a little.

“I may have… gone a bit… too far. They hurt Dionte but I guess…” he mumbles, not looking at
“And then what did you do?” you ask.

“He-” Dayvhe starts but you wave your hand at him. No answers from people who aren’t Dahvid right now please.

“I… overreacted. That’s why she’s so mad at me. Apparently fucking the airwaves of Alternia was entertaining for a little bit and then she started taking it as me trying to start shit and now she’s claiming I’m trying to start the revolution again which was against the deal. I really should be insulted that it wasn’t a hard sell for me to say I wasn’t doing that I was just being petty and vindictive to anyone near the people responsible.” Dahvid complains.

“If you’re just going to burn yourself I don’t really need to be here.” you grin and he flips you off.

“But the point is that my people found a whole bunch of descendants and then the others showed up real soon after and she’s never going to get them, isn’t that great?” Dahvid says brightly.

Dayvhe is growling softly behind you and Sollux is vibrating with malice inside your head but you hold up your hand.

“Let him work it out himself, ok?” you say to Dayvhe but to Sollux too.

“So they’re all here.” you say, looking at Dahvid again who nods.

“For how long?” you ask.

“Well I can protect them here, I can’t anywhere else. She might find them and you know how awful that’d be. I was hoping to get them involved in things here but-”

“So they have to stay here forever. Do they want to?” you press on.

“I-”

“Without you making them want to.” you add and Dahvid shifts guiltily.

“They’ve not seen the danger of her like we have, they’d understand if they had. I wouldn’t hurt them and when they get used to it they would want to stay, I’m sure.” he says.

“Because they don’t want to stay now.” you clarify.

“Well…” Dahvid hesitates, his mouth half open and he twists a little to avoid making eye contact with you.

“V.” you prompt him.

“I just wanted to protect them. And everyone else is gone, it’s just me and you and this is the most I’ve got to talk to you in so long and you’ve not even been yourself for even longer and I don’t know if Dionte is going to get better at all! I just- if they could just get it then it might be… it could be like another chance. Not for me but I could… I could watch them be happy. I could see a kid that Signless made grow up watching movies and being happy and not being murdered, that’s all I wanted!” Dahvid argues.

“And would you have let them leave?” you demand.

“It’s too dangerous!” he insists, getting off of the desk.
“Yes or no?” you press on.

“No!” Dahvid snaps.

“So, you’re keeping a bunch of kids here against their will forever. What’s that called, V?” you ask.

Dahvid folds his arms across his chest, wrinkling the tshirt with his sign on it. It’s in his colour though you know he doesn’t always wear it that way. You may or may not have a whole folder of footage and photos of Dahvid on the ship, snatched from your external cameras and what you get whenever he’s onboard. His expression is deeply uncomfortable and defensive. Around now you’d normally be feeling the need to reassure him a little, to soothe him through the disquieting feeling of being made uncomfortable like this but you don’t.

I’m immune. I guess if you’re in my head you are too.

That’s interesting but you don’t have time to figure out why, you need to get the answer to your question out of Dahvid.

“There’s a word for it, what is it?” you ask him again.

“I was trying to-” he starts.

“Nope. I get your reasoning, I understand why you did it. I want to know what the word for what you did is. I want you to tell me already.” you insist.

Dahvid’s claws dent his skin a little with how tight he’s holding onto his own arms.

“Imprisonment? Trollnapping?” he says softly.

“I know you didn’t mean any harm but this is shit, Dahvid. They’re kids. You deliberately fucked with their heads too.” you add.

“He tried to kill me!” Dahvid says, pointing to you but obviously meaning Sollux. The feeling is certainly mutual by the way Sollux bristles at Dahvid’s accusation.

“If someone had imprisoned you, Disciple, Signless, if someone had done that to everyone I gave a shit about you don’t think I would have tried to kill them too?” you snap at him.

“That’s different. I’m trying to protect them!” he insists.

You slap your hands over your face and groan. More direct, then.

“Dahvid, it doesn’t matter what your intentions were, your actions are what count. Signless went over this. It doesn’t matter that you locked them up out of love and good feelings or a want to protect them from her of all people. You trollnapped a bunch of kids against their will, made this one go through hell to try to save them, then locked the other half of their group up with them and messed with their minds to make it agony if they left. The ones you did that to are out cold enough that you could do surgery on them ’cause it’s the only way to protect them and you knew that would be that bad. And then to add onto that I’m told that you put some kind of self destruct order on them if they fought back!” you shout at him.

“What you think doesn’t matter, why you did it doesn’t matter. YOU’RE THE BAD GUY HERE.” you add loudly and emphatically.

“I don’t want to be the bad guy, I just wanted everything to be okay.” Dahvid says with a whimper
in his tone.

You reach forward and cover his mouth with your hand in a rush, not to calm him but because you thought you just heard…

The click of gold tipped heels on polished floor, the jingle of expensive bling. She’s back and you’re stuck in a room with no way out! Dahvid jerks back from your hand wide eyed and gestures at the desk he was sitting on before. Dayvhe rushes forward, grabs your hand and vaults the desk. It’s only thanks to being able to fly that you don’t straight up hit the thing, instead landing on the other side of it.

Dionte senses your far closer presence and begins to snarl and bite for you like Sollux remembers him doing before. Dayvhe pushes between the two of you and Dionte instantly quiets, his expression going blank just like he was with Dahvid. You don’t have time to question it though and the two of you dive under the desk. The thing has a solid wood front so you can’t see or be seen from the rest of the room but you certainly can hear her.

You cover your mouth with your hands and Dayvhe does the same, both of you wide eyed and afraid. You can’t be hurt in this body you don’t think. If you’re just wirelessly connected to Sollux you’d probably just go back to yourself if you died but he’d actually be gone. Actually, that’s the best scenario. The worst one is he ends up in a helm just like you or he gets used for parts. Who knows what kind of terrible things she’d do to Sollux or even Dayvhe if she found the two of you? You don’t want to find out, that’s for sure.

“You just keep turning up like a bad caegar, don’t you? You already called me an idiot and refused to fix Dionte, what else do you want?” Dahvid sneers at her.

“Beach I own you, I can go where I like because I own this too. Just because I had to go shout at other people for being un-sea-mingly unprofessional and stupid don’t mean I was done with your dumb ass.” the bane of your life says snidely and it’s all you can do to not growl at her and immediately blow your hiding spot.

“So what do you want then?” Dahvid sighs.

Dayvhe looks confused as all hell about this conversation but you’ve no way to explain their arrangement to him with both of you being silent like this.

“Did you really spongefuck half the krilldren on Alternia just out of petty revenge? I mean, you’re stupid but I didn’t think you were that stupid. How do I know you’re not back to your old tricks, huh?” she asks slyly and the click of her heels tells you she’s walked closer.

“That’ll teach you to underestimate me.” Dahvid says dryly.

“Reely? Why should I believe you, huh?” she asks.

“How does this benefit me in any way other than punishing the bastards who killed my lusus? What do you think my plan is? Drive everyone down there crazy? Great, we both lose a generation of people loyal to us. Or maybe I could drive our whole species extinct! If I was going to take you down I’d be better at it.” Dahvid snorts and walks off, like he can’t stand to be that close to her.

“And you want me to think that I’ve got you so under my thumb that there’s almost nothing left for you to lose?” she purrs.

“You have Psii, you have Dionte’s life in your hands. You figuratively have me by the globes, what else could you possibly throw at me that means more?” Dahvid snorts.
“I could literally have your globes.” she laughs.

“No in this fucking lifetime you won’t.” he snaps.

The creepy bitch laughs and sits on the desk, her long hair spilling over the side so it falls inches from your arm.

“Still, I don’t like the idea that you think you’ve fallen as low as you can. I can aaaaaaalways bring you lower, ‘specially as you’re not being a good buoy right now.” she says slowly.

There’s a sharp gasp of breath and then a loud but muffled thunk followed by a sound like twanged metal.

“That- what happened to your stupid shield thing?” she asks in obvious surprise and the desk creaks as she stands up suddenly.

“AUGH! FUCK! It broke! You just- aaaaugh, you bitch!” Dahvid snarls in a pained tone. Dayvhe clings on tight to your arms to make sure you stay put but he looks as alarmed as you feel.

“Ohhh. Hey, didn’t Psii make you that huh, sweetie? Oh I’m sure he’ll be so sad that you don’t take better care of your things, things he made you. I’ll tell him as soon as I get back.” she purrs. There’s the sound of her shoes on the floor, the clack of heels and a hiss of pain from Dahvid.

“You know, we don’t need to do this. I know you hate me too.” she says, her voice dropping lower. You grind your teeth together and it takes all you can to stay put.

“Platonically.” Dahvid rasps out in tightly wound fury.

“You’ll come around eventually, I got an eternity you know. But since you’re being such a prick you can do somethin for me, I want new Star Wars movies. Something to keep them current. You can write them and make them but my people gotta approve, I know how you love that.” she purrs at him.

“What?! No!” he protests.

“Ah-ah-ah, sea? There’s always more to lose, isn’t there? Think I can’t keep makin it worse? Your original trio all has to die in them. Agree or we’ll have to find something else you can’t stand to lose.” the monster sneers.

“FINE. Fine, you- fuck you’re the worst. I hope you choke.” Dahvid snarls back.

“That wasn’t nice. It’s a long way to where I’m going next but maybe I feel impatient, maybe I’ll really open up the engines for a change, see how fast he can go.” she simpers faux sweet and your blood freezes in you. When she pushes you that hard and the helm drags all you have from you it’s unrivalled agony that takes your body and mind weeks to recover from. It makes normal helm life look like a blissfully awaited picnic by comparison.

“No, no, please. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” Dahvid apologises immediately and your bloodpusher seizes in your chest from the overwhelming wave of pity you have for him.

“Knew you could be nice. Bye, bitch.” she cackles. You hear a slap and then the click of her shoes and the distant sound of the door.

You’re stuck under the table, frozen in anger and pinned by fear of being caught. What if she’s just leaving to try to trick you out? You can’t see Dahvid to get a signal about if it’s safe to come out or
not. You also know he’s hurt and until you get out from under here there’s nothing you can do about that. Dayvhe’s head is tilted, presumably straining to hear any sound of her coming back but you can’t hear a thing.

Edging out from under the table alone puts you close enough to Dionte that he starts snarling at you again and Dayvhe has to get between the two of you to make him shut up. Again he does so and you’ve no idea why but it’s hardly your top concern right now. You squirm the rest of the way out and carefully get to your feet, looking around the room to catch any hint of her.

Dahvid is right there, pinned to the wall through his shoulder and chest with one of that witch’s giant, tacky, golden tridents. Purple blood is spilling out of his chest into a slippery streak down the wall ending in a puddle on the floor that he can only just touch with his toes. You gasp and rush to him, reaching out to try to put pressure on the wound.


You nod and bending Sollux’s psionics to your will you yank the weapon free of the wall but try to keep it in his body so that you won’t make the bleeding worse. Disciple always taught you that, being stabbed is bad but sometimes whatever you got stabbed with is your new best friend because it’s stopping you from gushing blood out at a cartoonish rate and immediately dying.

You set Dahvid down carefully, making sure he won’t slip in the puddle of his own blood.

"I made that necklace for you so if you ever did meet anyone you couldn't charm this kind of thing wouldn't happen. What happened to it?" you say as you anxiously peel his shirt aside to try to see just how much blood is coming out. The answer is more than you'd like.

Unbidden a memory of Sollux’s comes up, of him overcharging the damn thing so much that it blew up.

You didn't make anything you couldn't get through yourself if you needed to though, huh?

He has a point, but not for the reasons he thinks. You never wanted him to be beyond your help and if he needed pacifying in a seriously dangerous situation, one where he was far gone enough in some highblood rage that you’d have to attack him to get to him then, yeah, you didn't want to be unable to do that. Not that Dahvid ever had an anger problem. He has a thinking shit through problem, which you guess a lot of highbloods have as well but it's not because he's a violent person especially.

Dahvid doesn't answer you and, in your moment of distracted interaction with your descendant Dahvid leans away from you and then yanks the trident clean out of his chest and shoulder.

"Oh God that's a lot of blood." Dayvhe grimaces behind you.

"Sure, dumbass, just rip that thing out. Who needs two arms anyway? It's only the best number of arms, or anything else, to have." you groan. Like you said, he has a thinking shit through problem.

"What am I supposed to do now?" he asks you.

"See a docterrorist probably, maybe get a blood transfusion. Shit, sit down already will you?" you say and ease him to the floor, cheating a little by psionically pulling on his knees so he unsteadily goes to the floor anyway.

"I'll be fine, I've had worse." he mumbles and rests his head against the wall.
"Super reassuring," you sigh, kneeling next to him.

"Just let me catch my breath." he says. You nod, that's a reasonable enough request for sure.

Off to the side Dayvhe is curiously creeping closer to Dionte and you've got a wary eye on him. The kid is nice and obviously important to Sollux so it'd be a shame for anything bad to happen to him. So you'll watch him like a lusus carefully keeping an eye on their grub as they explore on their own, he can do what he wants but you'll snatch him back before he gets hurt. Dayvhe gets close to Dionte-sorry, to Subverse. It's hard to adult title a guy when you saw him as a bratty little six sweep kid who was socially stunted enough that he made Dahvid look worldly, you watched him go through his awkward post molt wobbliness. He was always Dahvid's kid to you, always will be no matter how old he is.

...Or how alive.

"He just turned like that when Cal died?" you ask softly, inclining your head to Dionte.

"He's not like it with me. With me he's like... an animal I guess, but tame. He has to still be in there, right?" Dahvid asks and you watch Dayvhe cautiously reach out a hand only to have Dionte blandly watch him as Dayvhe touches him.

"Cal was a mind leech. Dionte always pinged Dis as kind of undead even before, it's got to be a Cal thing. You'd need to check with Dionte's descendant but maybe he just doesn't hurt people he knows are Cal's? Or else he's just not attacking you and someone who looks just like you." you suggest.

"That'd track a bit I guess. I never had any problem with the undead when I moved around during the day, they always just left me alone. Me and Kanaya went into an abandoned city once to get this plant cutting for Sollux and it was swarming with the undead, they just ignored me and her." Dayvhe says, waving his hand in front of Dionte's face.

"Your Maryam is going to be a rainbow drinker too, even if she's not turned yet. Undead don't like the taste of them. Why'd you need a plant so bad?" you ask and Sollux feels all fluttery.

"I- I needed a way for Sol to bomb the psionic tests. That way he could have got a job that wasn't a battery. The plant nukes psionic power for a night, it's illegal but it would have meant that he would have lived." Dayvhe mumbles and shrugs.

"I doubt he would have left for an empire job and left you and Karkat behind, there's no faking the blood test." Dahvid points out.

"We uh, we weren't moirails then actually." Dayvhe admits. Well, shit no wonder they got together with a gesture like that.

It was really, really early on. I'd only met him twice before that, didn't even know his last name then.

"You went into a destroyed city swarming with the undead, for an illegal plant for a guy you'd MET TWICE?" you exclaim in shock.

"Fuck, Disciple would have loved that. Gotta remember that for a movie." Dahvid grins.

"Don't- you can stop trying to sell my life experiences for script inspiration, and you can tell Sollux to stop gossiping." Dayvhe says hotly, his face going dark.

"I think he's bragging more than anything." you counter and Dayvhe squirms. Aw, young pity, so sweet.
"I have her, you know. The others too. Their bodies I mean, Condy isn't going around drinking wine out of Signless' thinkpan. No one can fuck them up, they're safe here with me." Dahvid says, his tone going serious again. You did already sort of know this.

"That's the sweetest creepy thing you've ever said, thanks for that though. I did wonder." you say. The thing is you know she would absolutely desecrate their bodies for her own glorification or her own sick revenge. She'd make you watch too. Knowing she can't eases a worry that you'd never really considered all that much before. It can't happen now and for that you're glad.

That cheery note has pretty much put a damper on whatever conversation you had going before. You're just sat next to a guy who's bleeding, though likely not going to bleed out, as well as a kid and a weirdly chill zombie. It's not like you get out a lot but you're pretty sure that this would be a weird day for anyone.

"What am I supposed to do now?" Dahvid asks and you know he's not asking about the holes in his chest.

"I don't think you need me to tell you, I know you're a good person when you think things through." you tell him.

Dahvid's eyes get a little teary and you watch the way it tints his mutant eye redder and his non-mutated one shifts almost violet.

"I'm... I'm sorry. I let you all down so badly. If I'd not been so stupid I could have done better, saved people, fixed things. I could have saved you, rescued you before she threw you in there. I made all the wrong moves and I fucked up so much." he chokes out.

"I think that shit all the time too. If I'd not got caught, if my reflexes had been quicker, if- I don't know... maybe I talked to the wrong person and they tipped her off. You can't do anything about it now." you say softly.

"Yeah but you're in an agony generator and I'm HERE." he hisses.

"Yeah, you got to build your prison, mine came pre-made." you say with a shrug.

"I can't leave and there's all these rules but my prison has fucking champagne in it! It's not right that you're stuck how you are and I'm-"

"Torturing yourself? Yeah, you seem real happy here. I see all the messages about how much she fucks with the things you love to make and I do get to see your movies you know, I know what you're doing. What you've done here." you tell him.

"You do?" he asks in a tiny voice.

You nod. You know what he's doing.

"What's your favourite?" Dayvhe asks because he's a saint.

"The fast and furious series, duh. But if we're talking actual movies that aren't just dumb fun then... Monteh Python's Life Of Briyan - In Which A Man Who Is Definitely Not The Saviour Of Trollkind Is Mistaken As Such Repeatedly For Humorous Effect." you say.

"I... don't know that one. " Dayvhe says with a slight frown.
"It was never released is why. It was one of my first big things here early on, not about Signless but almost and she broke my arm for it and culled the whole cast. How'd you see it?" Dahvid gasps.

"She has to have a record of it to ban it, anything she has records on I can see. I can probably recite the whole thing from memory! If there's an afterlife anywhere you KNOW Signless is just building the lecture you're going to get for that one." you cackle.

"I'm pretty sure I'm not going to the same afterlife that Signless must be in." Dahvid mumbles so you reach out and smack him in the horn.

"OW! Hey, cut that out!" he protests, rubbing it.

"Fun fact, this kid's resistant to your shit and I still feel the same way about you that I always did. In that I pity you a lot and also think you need your idiocy pointed out to you on a regular basis. Even if you could control me you didn't and my shit was rational. I was right, you always were a disaster." you point out.

You mean it to be kind of a 'so there' moment but really both of you at the same time are overcome with the same sense of wasted time. You pitied him pale so much but his psionics always kept him isolated from real connections with people, or at least none that he could trust to the degree that you need to with a moirail. But here you are realising and pointing out that nothing is different, you could have had what you wanted. You could have had what he wanted if the distraught look on his face means what you think it does.

You get a feeling, like that sensation you'd sometimes get where you were drifting off to sleep and you'd jerk awake because you felt you were falling even though nothing was wrong at all. It's like you're being pulled out of yourself. Only it's not you that you're being pulled out of, is it? It's Sollux. You tip your head backwards and look up, unfocusing and feeling that the drain on the helm is building. The drain on you. The engines are firing up to leave the thin atmosphere of the planetoid.

"I'm leaving, she's about to turn the ship around." you say softly.

"What? No! Please, don't- I need you. I don't want you to have to go back to that!" he insists.

"Then do what you're supposed to do, V. Stop me living in that helm." you say simply.

"And get this kid better ports." you add, looking back at him again.

"But then I can't see you like this if you come back." Dahvid says in a small voice.

"With his ports like this she can throw him in there with me, or in some other ship and you know she will. The moment she sees him that'll be the rest of his life, you know that." you tell him firmly. The windows rumble as the ship starts to move. You guess enough of your mind is left or has distributed basic calculations to programs written ages ago that you don't need to think to leave the planetoid.

You don't have much time left. You get up on your knees and grab him by the shoulders, if this is the last thing you'll be to say to him when you're not stupid with agony or being watched then you have to make sure you say it right.

"I don't blame you, but you need to do the right thing. I know you can do this, you're a good person and... and I pity you." you insist.

"Psii..." Dahvid whispers.

The drag of the helm is harsher and harsher, warping your vision and smearing colour at the edges.
You wobble and he catches you. See? He is a good person.

Your face is smushed to soft fabric and you're dizzy and disoriented. You know these two things for sure though. One, you are in control of your own body again and two, your name is SOLLUX CAPTOR. You move, a little wobby and gentle hands help you upright a little even as your heavy head lolls down so that you're hazily looking at a rust sign. Dayvhe.

"Sollux? You in there?" he asks worriedly.

"I'm- yeah. My head hurts like hell." you groan and reach up to dig your fingers into your scalp like you can ease your pain. You could have sworn it was Dahvid who caught Psiionic when he lost connection, did he pass you off to Dayvhe? Turning your head you can see that Dahvid is slightly doubled over, his arms crossed tight to his chest and as you watch him you can see his large shoulders shaking slightly.

He's crying.

Maybe it's just Mituna's- Psiionic's feelings still rolling around in your head but you feel bad for the guy.

"Do you think you can get up?" Dayvhe asks you and you look at him instead.

"Help?" you ask him and obligingly Dayvhe holds your hands and gently guides you up onto your feet. A little unsteady but you're otherwise ok. You feel like you need to sleep this off for a long time but it's certainly the least awful experience of having other influences in your head that you've had so far. Looking down at Dahvid you can see that he's unfolded himself slightly and has one hand pressed to the holes in his chest and shoulder and his face is smeared with a mix of purple tinted tears and his own blood that's found its way onto there from his hands.

"We should get you back, I'm sure someone can give you a ride. You don't look like you should be walking much, let alone flying. Can you walk or do you need me to carry you?" Dayvhe rambles in worry.

"I can walk, just let me hold on." you say and Dayvhe loops your arm over his shoulders. That's better.

Dahvid unfolds himself from the floor in a tangle of long limbs and looks down at you both.

"You were staying at the goldblood medical academy, right? It still had power and if you needed docterrorists for the others it makes sense." Dahvid says, his voice flat and without any affect at all. He seems numbed out which may not spell good things for you. You're not sure at least.

"Why do you want to know?" Dayvhe asks suspiciously.

"I'm doing the right thing." Dahvid says with a shrug that he obviously regrets right away if that flinch is any clue.

"What, you're going to remove your control on the others?" Dayvhe challenges him and obviously isn't expecting it when his ancestor just nods in agreement.

"I shouldn't have... I had reasons but they were selfish and I shouldn't have trapped you all here. Not like that, not with those orders. I am sorry, let me fix it. It's not everyone else's fault and they're paying for it right now. Well, not now, Nicole's people called this whole thing off for her coming back didn't they? That was smart." Dahvid says in a lost sounding voice.
He wants to fix his mistake. He wants to do the right thing, which is obviously not controlling and threatening to murder a bunch of people that he's ten times older than. You guess the weakness to pale feelings goes both ways there, that wasn't even a feelings jam and Psiionic still managed to talk him out of destructive and shitty behaviour and make him better. You're glad it didn't go full feelings jam in your body but you're a little wowed by the pale skill of your ancestor to get results that good without really doing all that much. But maybe Psiionic is right and it's not a hard sell if Dahvid isn't that bad of a troll in the first place?

Ugh, you don't know what you think. You're still all messed up from sharing a thinksponge with someone else and you could use a proper feelings jam yourself to sort everything in your head out. You're glad when Dayvhe just makes the call to agree to take his ancestor with you. Even if it means that the three of you head out into the warm daylight outside, to a sky free of imperial ships, and a garden with obscene shrubbery. Plants that were put there not so that The Grand Entertainer could fuck with people meeting him for business, to see if they would say anything or not, and not on a childish whim but to entertain his literal last friend alive who can only see things from the air.

You think that if the situation was reversed and you were stuck in a helm and Dayvhe was stuck on the ground away from you then he'd do stupid things like that to bring you some kind of entertainment, some small atomic measure of happiness.

The three of you walk slowly to the road and a scuttlebuggy that looks all kinds of fancy just pulls up for him, you guess they must sense when he's walking this way. Who knows? He opens the door and Dayvhe slides you inside and gets in after you. Lastly Dahvid himself climbs in and sits delicately on the seat, trying not to let his injured side touch the back of the seat itself.

There’s this residual weirdness in your head, in your whole body even. A creeping sensation that your skin isn’t quite right, that you’re not the right height and your face is ever so subtly off. You have the strangest feeling that your eyesight is different and that you’re missing more than one piercing.

You’ve intensely hated Dahvid for everything he’s done to you and to your friends and quadrantmates. That hasn’t changed, sure you can maybe understand that perhaps he was acting out of grief and desperation and then doubling down on bad decisions. You’ve been like that to people before. You’ve had arguments with your quadrantmates where you’ve been too stubborn or upset to admit you were wrong. You’ve never fucked up so bad that you imprisoned and mind controlled anyone though, so, you know.

The point is those feelings aren’t gone, you haven’t had your mind changed in the sense that your opinion has shifted. But you have had your mind changed in the sense that someone else has recently been using your mind and all the old settings are still there.

You look at Dahvid and there’s a pang of sympathy for the pain he’s in. Maybe that’s partly you, a trident through the chest is pretty nasty no matter what and you’re not made of stone. You can hate someone and still think that’s got to suck, right?

“Why did you believe that it was him?” you ask and it takes him a moment to realise that you’re not talking to your moirail here.

“You’ve not lied to me yet and…” Dahvid looks out of the window, “he called me V. It’s a stupid joke, but it’s his.”

You don’t get how it’s a joke. You call Dayvhe DV sometimes, because those are letters in his name and since you were able to get KK out of Karkat it just became a thing. And you guess that the ‘v’ in Dahvid is more stressed than the one in Dayvhe but it’s not exactly high comedy, is it?
“Signless misheard my name, called me something else when we first met. I can’t even remember what the wrong thing was exactly, I overcorrected him and Psii thought it was the funniest thing. Signless being mortified and me saying my own name being like, no, with a V. So he just… no one else calls me V.” he says, his voice a little distant and as he says it the story feels right. You can almost feel the letter forming in your mouth. You won’t say it though, you’re not your ancestor.

The glass triangular building of the goldbloods that houses the rest of your people for the moment looms through the window, ending all further conversation. Dayvhe gets out first then you and lastly the clearly in pain Dahvid. There are guards posted at the gate and they immediately adopt the frozen and slightly terrified position of people who should probably stop Dahvid from entering but really kind of hoped that would never go beyond theory and obviously have no will to do it for real. Unsurprisingly Dahvid just sails through the gates unhindered. Dayvhe is the one leading him and you don’t know if it’s Dayvhe’s cuddlevoodoos (how you hate that term) or his ancestor’s but the two of them just seem to go wherever they like with no one stopping them.

“You’d better fix them.” Dayvhe warns as he heads to the stairs. You’re steadier on your feet now so you don’t need Dayvhe propping you up but they’re getting ahead of you for sure.

You follow them down the stairs about thirty seconds after they went down only to be nearly ran down by a docterrorist sprinting up to the floor you came from like his ass was on fire. That’s some Strydr hoofbeastshit if you’ve ever seen it. True enough when you get down there you find fewer people now that the Empress has fucked off and a lot of them are just watching their leader in awe. Dahvid opens his mouth and then glances over at the group of adults avidly watching, so instead he just gestures to a barely awake Karkat and Dayvhe pulls him upright. He leans down and whispers in Karkat’s ear, though you can see Dayvhe paying very close attention.

A docterrorist runs past you again and starts injecting each of the sedated people in your group with something as Dahvid works his way through the awake members that you have, barring Rohhze who he already cleared before. It’s interesting to watch that when he does that some of them seem horrified by him and jerk away.

Karkat turns his hazy eyed attention on you and hefts himself off of the stretcher with all of the stoned grace you might imagine him to have and you end up having to psionically catch him so he doesn’t splat his face into the floor. Still, you can see the determination etched into his stupid little face, from the tilt of his nubby little horns to the set of his jaw, Karkat is determined to come talk to you no matter how many times he has to faceplant on the ground.

To aid your goal of having an un-concussed quadrantmate you figure you’ll just go to him instead.

“Hey.” you say, catching him by the shoulders. This is good, you can lean on each other now. Surely two things are more stable than one. You hope so or else so much of your life is built on a lie.

Karkat just smushes his face against the side of yours with a happy little noise so you guess he’s pleased to see you. You still have a slightly wary eye on Dahvid and, oh hey, he’s dealing with Nepeta now. You guess wherever she hid herself and Equius worked because the two of them weren’t down here with you. Again, you weren’t worried, Nepeta can handle herself.

“Are you you again?” Karkat asks the side of your face from about a milimetre away.

“Yeah, my ancestor stopped ghosting my head when the ship left. Well, not ghosting, he’s not dead. You know what I mean.” you say and pull back to look at Karkat. He’s nodding but you’re not entirely sure he’s following you so you may have to tell him again later but that’s ok. It’s not urgent.
“He said we can go if we want.” Karkat says and you guess he means Dahvid said that.

You can’t help but think of the ports in your head. The same kind your ancestor has and you’ve seen how that worked out for him. Maybe if you got the new ports and still got caught the Empress could in theory work around them but you want to take any immunity to your ancestor’s fate that you can get. Having even a secondary fraction of what he lives with is enough to make your blood freeze.

“I think I need to stay here a while, get an upgrade.” you explain.

“You’re gonna be gold?” Karkat asks, leaning back to get a better look at you.

“I’m always gold.” you grin and Karkat’s eyes narrow. He reaches up and flicks you right in the middle of the forehead.

“You… ass… bag. I worry about you and you’re just… oooh.” Karkat hisses but smushes your face between his hands a little.

The stretcher next to you jostles slightly and you look up, with your face still squished by Karkat, to see Nepeta crouched there.

“Sollux, I heard what happened to you. Are you ok?” Nepeta asks seriously.

“Oh. I’m… I’ll be fine. It’s just weird. He didn’t hurt me or anything really.” you tell her and she seems to relax a little.

“Sorry we weren’t here, but I’m glad you’re your own purrson again.” she beams and Karkat laughs a second too late.

“Dahvid, hello?” Dayvhe says loudly and you look up to see that Dahvid is just… looking at the three of you. You, Karkat and Nepeta.

You realise just how this must look to him. Vantas, Captor and Lejion together and relaxed, not being tortured, dead, or imprisoned. Didn’t he say he just wanted to see people who are almost like the people he lost being happy? The idea of losing Karkat and Dayvhe and then having to watch people who aren’t them but look a lot like them being together with you on the outside is just painful. He doesn’t seem to be in pain as he looks at you though, or not beyond what the holes in his chest warrant, it seems more bittersweet.

Dahvid has stopped focusing on the three of you, turning away to whisper to a barely awake Dirkka. That has to sting as well, especially as Dahvid’s ability to deny just how gone Dionte is has seemingly broken down. He finishes the last of you and finally steps back.

“I’m… sorry. You don’t have to stay. It’s safer for you here and you could do whatever you want here. But… if you want to go, and you can come back if you do, I’ll give you whatever you need.” Dahvid says. He sounds numb in a way and he’s not really looking at any of you.

“Sollux has your trollhandle so we can talk to you. Not that the mansion is hard to find or anything.” Dayvhe says. It’s a subtle dismissal but it is still one and his ancestor knows it enough that he just nods at all of you and stiffly walks off with the arm on his injured side held close to his body.

It occurs to you that you should tell Nicole what just happened so the strike doesn’t come back on despite Dahvid meeting your terms. Fishing out your palmhusk you send her a brief of a message as you can and then put it away.

“Aradia needs to go back, this isn’t good for either of us so she’s going to return to the ship.”
Hal/Aradia tells you all. You catch a glimpse of her ghostly form as she leaves Hal but she doesn’t stay to talk and flies off through the ceiling.

Hal’s expression twists into a grimace and he absently runs his hands over his body before looking at you.

“I… I get why you don’t like that.” he says and shudders.

“She was right though, there was a pretty solid reason to do this. I agreed.” you say.

“Aradia said this would end Dahvid’s hold on all of you and get you off of the planet, that’s why I let her into my body. That is what happened, right? We can go, he wasn’t just fucking with us was he?” Hal asks, looking around.

“I guess we won’t really know one way or the other until we test that, will we?” John chips in, you have to admit that he has a point.

Half of you wants to go right now just to see if you can and half of you wants to stay. You need that upgrade to try to dodge Psii’s fate and to protect you from anyone else getting into your pan. But then again, freedom.

“I don’t think I have the space in my pan to think about what to do today. Plus half our group is either high or barely awake.” you reason.

“Sleep on it then, see how everything looks when we wake up.” John suggests.

“That would be most sensible, I think. We could agree to meet in the main area of the building where we came in at, say, eight? Test our freedom by leaving the facility entirely to go find breakfast and discuss our options in the wild.” Rohhze suggests as she pets Kanaya’s hand. She’s on her side at the moment trying to pull herself awake again but she keeps drifting back under into sleep. Terezi’s not looking much better as she’s currently drooling on Vriska’s shoulder.

“It’ll be like old times, Dayvhe can stay somewhere he doesn’t live and then leave unannounced really early.” you say and Jayded snorts with laughter.

“Are you talking about me?” Dayvhe calls down from the other end of your group, he’s fussing with Dirkka and Roxxie.

“Always, Dayvhe. Always.” you say innocently.

“Do you need a hand getting back to your temporary block?” Nepeta asks, leaning over you again. She’s giving Karkat a dubious look but you as well, you guess you still must look somewhat shaken too. You were just possessed recently you suppose.

“No, it’s cool. Thanks. I’m sure we’ll be fine. I can walk and Karkat’s just a little… happy.” you decide on that word choice as the guy in question is nuzzling closer to you with a purr like Kanaya’s chainsaw.

“He looks it!” she giggles.

“Nepeta, could I trouble you for help getting Kanaya upstairs? Dayvhe has many times before warned me about the stairs.” Rohhze says with a perfectly straight face.

“He has? Why? But yes, of course I’ll help.” Nepeta agrees.
“Don’t ask about the stairs, just don’t. But Vriska I can help with Terezi if you like.” Jayded says. Vriska goes through the motions of assuring Jayded that she’s doesn’t need her help with Terezi but if Jayded wants to feel useful then she suppooooooooses she can let her. And so your group starts clustering up to transfer the previously comatose to rooms where they can properly rest. A room that isn’t a secret basement for hiding in.

When you start internally debating trying to get you and Karkat up the stairs together Dayvhe comes to your side to help. It’s a good thing too because you’re still a little weak on your feet, your guess your body wasn’t meant to support two people in it at once and even aside from the splitting pan- ache you’re somewhat dizzy. Karkat is mostly fine but every now and then he wobbles. Needless to say you wouldn’t be a great pair right now. Not that you’d want to insinuate that there would be any reality anywhere where Karkat would accidentally drop you down a bunch of stairs. The point is with Dayvhe supporting you both it’s fine.

“Do you think we should just let him sleep it off?” Dayvhe asks you as he shoulders the door open to your small and borrowed block.

“I’m fine. I’m fiiiiine.” Karkat insists.

“It’s early, but yeah.” you agree.

“No, no, I’m good.” he protests.

“If you’re really not tired then get out of the sopor after five minutes.” Dayvhe suggests.

“Fine, I will. And then when I get out I’ll fight you.” Karkat threatens.

“Feisty, I like it. See if you’re awake to do it, huh?” Davyhe teases him.

This isn’t helping so you start helping Karkat out of his clothes, working the neck of his sweater free from around his little horns. Karkat unbuttons his own jeans but has to slide down the outside of the coon to wriggle out of them, only then he realises he still has shoes on so then has to take them off too.

Working together you and Dayvhe shove him in the coon and Karkat “I’m not tired” Vantas is out instantly.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought.” Dayvhe says, shaking his head.

“I want to see how mad he’s going to be about all this when he wakes up. Not about us I mean, but all of… this.” you say, gesturing to basically everything. This whole fucked up situation.

Dayvhe makes an affirmative noise but from the tilt of his head you know he’s sneaking a look at you.

“Now to deal with you.” Dayvhe says.

“Deal with? I don’t need dealing with. I don’t need to sleep for sure, that’s hours away.” you say in surprise. It’s still daylight here, you should probably even eat dinner still. You may have to wake Karkat up for that or at least be prepared that he might gnaw your arm off with hunger when he wakes up in the morning.

“Someone was fucking around in your head again. That needs dealing with, it’s got to.” he says firmly and faces you head on.
“I know but it wasn’t… Psiionic was as surprised about it as me. More even because he didn’t have Aradia warning him.” you say.

“I know I get it, it’s complicated and a long story. But we could...” Dayvhe hesitates a little. “Karkat’s down for the count so it’s just us and I know it’s been a while since that’s been true but we could properly- you know. Feelings jam.” he offers all nervous like it’s the first time for either of you.

You dread to think that maybe he’s worried that you’re still holding a grudge about his behaviour when you first got here, enough that you’d say no. Or that with Karkat entirely out of action rather than just a little way off or a few rooms away that you don’t trust yourself to be that vulnerable with him when you don’t have Karkat as a safety line.

“Yes. Hell fucking yes.” you blurt out right away and Dayvhe lights up.

“Let me just…” he mumbles, fiddling with his sylladex and then with a crash he ejects just about everything into a huge mess on the floor. Dayvhe starts grabbing things and tossing them to the centre of the mess so it starts forming a proper pile.

“This is my shirt.” you say as you pick it up from the floor. It is indeed one of your old shirts.

“I’m, uh, holding onto it for your own good since you can’t wear it right now.” Dayvhe lies and you toss it on the pile.

“And Roxxie’s sweater, Dirkka’s shirt, Karkat’s- Karkat’s underwear. You’re like one of those flapbeasts. The little bicoloured thief flapbeasts but instead of stealing shiny things you steal clothes.” you accuse him.

“I’m not going to stand here and take your accusations!” Dayvhe insists dramatically and then falls backwards into the pile.

“You’re gonna lay there and take them?” you guess.

“Yeah, much more comfortable.” he says flatly.

“You’re such a loser.” you say with all the affection you can muster and drop onto the pile next to him.

Dayvhe shifts, nudging some audio cable bundles aside so he can look at you properly.

“You said he didn’t hurt you but there was a moment when I know you were in pain. After he took that person’s husktop he checked out and you were… I know what pain looks like on you. He hurt you.” you explain. That’s clearly not enough because he’s still watching you, waiting for more.

“It was the helm. He was sharing my body down here and when he went back he took me with him, I was sharing his in the helm. It was…” you grimace and sit up a little, enough to let you link your hands behind your neck as if you can protect your ports that way.

“I want the upgrades, I don’t care how much it’ll suck. That was so, so much worse.” you whisper in
horror.

“I’ll get you them.” Dayvhe vows. “Whatever you need me to do. I’ll get you whatever you need.” he adds seriously.

You chirp at him and twist so you can press your forehead to his, just a touch of closeness. Dayvhe leans back for just a moment, captchalogues his shades and then goes back to leaning against you like before. You’re grounded like lightning with him here so close to you. You ache for it and you can’t keep one thought out of your head in particular.

“He’s as pale for your ancestor as I am for you.” you whisper. The longing Psionic had just looking at Dahvid, or when he wasn’t pissed at him anyway, it was so intense but so weirdly not your own.

“You have better taste at least.” Dayvhe smiles, the smug fucker.

“Yeah, but I feel bad for him. He never got this with your ancestor, or not really. I think they kept dancing around the whole thing, stepping over the line but not this blatant. I don’t think so anyway.” you explain. It’s weird, you have these notions from him but it’s not like concepts in your head where you know something vaguely and when you think on it you can call up the information in your head. This is like you’ve got memories littered with dead links that go nowhere.

“Is your head still tangled up with his?” Dayvhe asks and strokes your side.

“Not in a possession kind of way. Who knows how far away he is now.” you say.

“No I mean, your thoughts and feelings mixed with what he had in your head.” Dayvhe explains.

Oh.

“It kind of is, yeah. It’s not like I don’t know who I am or can’t pick his thoughts from mine, it’s pretty obvious and all. It’s just I want to…” you pause.

Dayvhe is watching you with curiosity and all of his attention. He’s your moirail and you’re so lucky to have one at all let alone one so wonderful as yours. You’re a mess though. Caught between your own thoughts and feelings on the one hand and on the other the afterimage of Psionic’s, you’re a mess. You could probably just sleep it off like Karkat’s doing and be more or less okay.

That’s not what you want, though. That’s not what you really want. You’re a jigsaw puzzle with bits from different sets layered over you and right now you’re kind of a mess. Looking at Dayvhe’s expression of concern you know what you want. You want him to break you apart and put you back together again all better.

Your throat goes dry as that conditioned nervousness seeps in but you still want it. You want it bad.

“Sol, are you cool? You look a little, uh, on edge?” Dayvhe asks carefully.

“I-” your hands shake a little. This isn’t a crisis, not like the other times since then and you’re effectively alone as Karkat’s dead to the world.

“Got more words after that?” Dayvhe nudges you.

“You don’t have to. But. Can we.” Fuck, how do you do words again?

“Can we stop? Is that what you want? Because yeah we can do that, if you’re getting panicky we can totally-”
“No, not that, just like fuck me up.” you say in a rush.

Dayvhe is staring at you which, you know, that’s fair.

“What?” he croaks.

“You know, your hands, my face. I’d- everything’s a lot right now and I don’t want to be Psionic but being me is hard too and everything is happening. It keeps happening, you know? So I’d really like for you to just…”

“Pap you?” Dayvhe says in a whisper. You nod sharply.

“But Karkat…” he says, looking over.

“I know, I don’t need him here. I just want you and I’m not talking the dumb one quick shoosh because I’m freaking out and gonna be a danger to myself and it’s ok because we’re supervised. This is me now and I’d just really like if you could just break the shit out of my useless overtaxed thinksponge to an atomic goddamn level and throw away all the shit that’s not working and put me back together because this sucks. It sucks and I don’t trust anyone else enough and I know I normally can’t handle this because I don’t get nice things much but right now I want-” you push on through saying because you really need him to get that you do mean this and exactly what you want.

“No, no, I got you.” Dayvhe says hurriedly, nearly tackling you in sudden urgency.

“If you can’t do it or change your mind just say the word.” he adds, draping himself over you.

“The safeword.” you agree eagerly.

“I’m not sure if you’re being helpful or smartasssed there.” Dayvhe notes as he slides his fingers into your hair and basically velcros himself to you as much as possible.

“Why not both?” you reply automatically.

“Alright, shut up. Let’s make this happen, I’ve got you.” he says with sweet sincerity despite the shit meme snuck in the middle of there.

Dayvhe paps your cheeks, not hesitant like he has been in the few times when it’s been something desperately needed. You’re not being watched and for once you’re not being weird about this. Maybe it’s Psionic’s longing for something like this that’s reminded your thinksponge of how good this is, either way Dayvhe’s strong shooshpap sends a relaxing wave of static through you that doesn’t spark panic. You’re not tensing up against the weakness that’s coming to the surface, you’re just here in the moment.

Dayvhe softly praises you for dealing so well with it as you melt under his touch. You’re not really in control enough to talk back beyond the most basic answers so you’re left to listen to all the nice things he’s saying to you. How much he pities you, how much he missed this, that he’s so happy you trust him enough for this.

Dayvhe backs off from papping your face for a bit so that he can get his hands into your neck and shoulders, digging his fingers into your muscles and making them unknot for you. He’s careful with your messed up shoulder but he does something to it that makes it seem to sit a little better.

The whole time he keeps talking, just a low kind of gentle tone. More of a stream of consciousness than anything, he’s trusting you with everything in his head as much as you’re trusting him with your body and mind. When you’re nothing but a troll shaped puddle Dayvhe returns to laying on you. He
has his hand splayed over the column of your throat and you giggle dazedly at how funny the overlap is between pitch and pale.

If this was Vriska with her hand on your throat, it’d be a brag, a threat of what she could do and how she could end you but she’s not going to because you’re more good to her alive. But with Dayvhe it’s a gesture of protection, a recognition of your weak spots and the soothing reminder that he can be so close to them and you have no fear of him. Why would you fear him when you pity each other so hard? Two halves of the same thing.

The two of you lay there together, him mumbling on about anything he’s thinking and alternating that with the sweetest and palest statements. How much he cares for you, how he’d do anything for you, how proud he is of you.

Eventually the time lapses enough from his last shooshpap to your face that you start to come back to yourself. You don’t feel like yourself, your mind is calm and placid. Not a landscape of agitated frustration and worry, but actual goddamn peace. Fuck, you can’t believe it’s been so long since he’s really really broken you apart this much and soothed you back together. It’s the best thing. Maybe you’ll magically be over your issues about this, probably not, but at least you hope you can catch yourself in a mood where you’re capable of accepting this more often because holy shit this is good.

“Pity you.” you mumble into Dayvhe’s shirt and he strokes his hand down your back.

“I’d risk death by the Empress for you.” Dayvhe nods. You pull your head off of his chest and look at him.

“You did.” you say. He followed Psii in your body and tried to look after you as much as he could with someone else more or less completely calling the shots for you physically, even including keeping you both hidden from the cruel ruler of your species herself.

“I’m basically the best.” he brags insincerely. You know he’s being insincere because, like Karkat, Dayvhe can talk a big game but he doesn’t actually think he’s very good at all. Your self esteem is sporadic but when you don’t loathe yourself you probably think better of yourself and your abilities than either of them do of themselves. No wonder you pity them both so hard.

Your head is more together now so you can move up so your face is against his, forehead to forehead and hold him there with your hands on his cheeks. Your elbow twinges slightly from leaning on a sharp angle of a broken shitty wizard statue that you guess Dayvhe got from Roxxie’s.

“You are the best. The best troll. The mothergrubs can pack up their shit and go, they can’t do better than you.” you tell him. Even if you can’t hear it you can feel Dayvhe laughing.

“So I’ve singlehandedly driven our species to extinction huh?” Dayvhe asks softly and kisses your cheek.

“There are worse ways for a species to die out.” you sigh.

“I think you’re feeling okay if you’re talking about shit this weird with me. Good to know I didn’t fuck you up with all that pale attention.” Dayvhe says carefully, like mentioning it might send you into a breakdown.

“Oh no, you did fuck me up it was great.” you grin like a loon as you pull back from Dayvhe enough to look at him. Dayvhe rolls his eyes in fond exasperation and you pity him even more.

“Yeah?” Dayvhe says softly and traces your cheek with the back of his hand.
“Yeah.” you agree and wrap your arms around him.

Dayvhe’s claws slide under your shirt and he carefully peels it off of you. Of course you move to help him. You don’t know why he wants your shirt off but you trust his intentions, whatever they are. His fingers slide up your back, around your ports and you think he’s being careful around the one that you jerked about before. God, that feels like a lifetime ago. Well, it sort of was, just Psiionic’s life in your head making the time feel weird.

“I need the new ports.” you tell him. “I can’t have him in my head again, or anyone. I know he doesn’t want that but- it’s not just some theoretical thing is it? And- and to not end up in that helm like him, I’d let Kanaya cut me in half if it stopped it.” you whine, ducking your face into his neck.

“No one is cutting you in half, man. And I don’t want anyone in your head neither, if you want the upgrade and you’re willing to do the surgery I’ll make it happen. I’ll get it for you.” he promises, his fingers up to the back of your neck now.

“If they’re still willing to. We’ve been nothing but trouble since we got here. I know Feelgood is trustworthy but I don’t know if anyone else will want-“

“They’ll want to.” Dayvhe says simply.

You believe him. You don’t know what his plan is. Is he just going to scout out people who are willing to help or is he implying that if he needs to he’ll take a leaf out of his ancestor’s book and persuade people? You guess it’s inconsequential, your moirail has promised you something and he will deliver. That’s really all there is to say on the matter.

You certainly care a lot less when the hands on your neck pull you just so, letting Dayvhe kiss you all sugar pale. You get a kind of full body reaction to it. Your skin feels like- like when you’ve got water on your skin and air moves over it, soothingly cool and setting your nerves tingling. You’re done, entirely wrecked so you just melt for him. You’ve no resistance when he decides that you should probably both sleep either, you go with him and follow his lead without question or hesitation.

When the two of you slide into the coon together Karkat is still out of it enough that he doesn’t react, so it’s just you and Dayvhe curled up together. You doubt that’ll last, when you wake up Karkat will have probably laminated himself to one or both of you but now... now it’s just you and Dayvhe.
We Are London - Madness

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“In all the nightclubs, strip joints and the bars
From it's poorest paid to its highest stars
The poets, plumbers, painters, spreads and sparks
From it's inner city to its furthest parts
You can make it your own hell or heaven
Live as you please
Can we make it if we all live together
As one big family?”

“We Are London” by Madness

A famous top 10 song describing a city on the star studded planetoid Planet Hollywood.

“So when Dahvid does his whole psychic undo function thing-” Dayvhe begins.

“The old psionic Control Z.” you nod in agreement.

“-right. I heard him do it and it basically just nullifies any effect that he’s had on you so far, which is why Rohhze could leave when he did it to her. I still need to learn to do that.” Dayvhe continues.

“He’s had a lot longer to get it, you’ll get there.” you assure him, turning so that you’re just hanging onto the rim of the coon with one arm. There’s a distant angry crash from the ablutionblock but Dayvhe just carries on with what he was saying.

“So my theory is that it just undoes all of the passive like me shit, but I think it must work on his stuff and my stuff because, again, Rohhze.” Dayvhe explains.

“I’M GOING TO KILL HIM! HOW DARE HE DO THIS TO US?! I’M GOING TO RIP HIS ARMS OFF AND BEAT HIM TO DEATH WITH THEM!” Karkat declares for what has to be at least the fourth time and marches back into the room from the ablution block. Either he’s gone actually rabid or the temporary pause that allowed Dayvhe to voice his theory to you was Karkat shutting up to brush his teeth. So, toothpaste foam around Karkat’s mouth or angry rabies, who knows?

“On the upside Karkat doesn’t want to kill you so like I said you weren’t that naturally charming. You didn’t make him want you.” you point out.

“Hey… I hadn’t really thought of that. I was thinking more that any orders I gave by mistake before would be gone now, I didn’t consider the passive shit for me.” Dayvhe says, brightening up.

Some of the rage seems to fade from Karkat as he drops his ranting to look at you both. That’s pretty impressive on it’s own, he’s been on an anger kick more or less since he woke up.

“I hate you as much as I always have, and pity you as much as I always have. I told you, if your subtle like me vibes are even there it’s not enough to make me not want to strangle you often.” Karkat assures him.

“I’m starting to think this is a thing with you, something you want to tell me about your wants and
desires Karkat? It’s ok, this is a non-judgemental space.” Dayvhe teases him.

Okay, you’re not sticking around for that, you know how that’s going to go. You need to wash the sopor off you sharpish if you want to be ready to meet the others downstairs soon to go eat and test your freedoms.

You brush your teeth, shower and try to avoid looking in the mirror to see a face that looks weirdly young all of a sudden. When you’re done Dayvhe is out of the coon and Karkat’s still bristling with agitation.

“Go drown in the trap!” Karkat snaps at him and shoves Dayvhe towards you, though he obviously instantly regrets it because his hands are now covered in sopor. Grinning with self satisfaction Dayvhe swaps places with you.

“Here.” you say, throwing your towel at Karkat and starting to get dressed. Your clothes are still abandoned on the floor with Dayvhe’s from last night. You can wear clean boxers and your jeans still have another day in them but this new shirt is getting a lot of wear, huh?

“Sorry that I wasn’t any use yesterday.” Karkat apologises.

“You were fine.” you assure him as you pull your clothes on.

“I wasn’t. I was off my head with stupid drugs.” Karkat argues and throws the towel down in a crumpled ball on the floor.

“For your own protection. Besides, you still helped. It’s fine.” you say and Karkat hunches his shoulders up and tucks his chin into his chest.

“KK.” you call out to him gently and he makes this dissatisfied rumble.

You get close but, oh no, it’s a trap. Karkat’s arms snap around you the moment you’re in range and you’re squeezed tight into a hug. Wiggling your arms free you return the hug and let Karkat get all his dissatisfaction out in one go.

“I should have done something.” he hisses against your throat.

“You’re the only one who was able to resist enough that you didn’t have to be knocked out entirely. You did great. I mean, it is fuel to my argument that you’re the most stubborn troll alive.” you say into his hair and when he laughs one of his horns knocks into your chin.

Karkat pulls back a little and when he looks up at you there’s a moment where you’re terrified that you won’t see his face but rather Psiionic’s perceptions will stick in you and it’ll be Signless’ face that you see. But it’s not, it’s Karkat. It’s Karkat’s soft round cheeks, his thick and wild eyebrows and the way his thick dark lips part in a smile to show pointy but dull teeth.

“I am the most stubborn troll alive, just try to change my mind.” he teases you and his eyes go all squinty with amusement.

You know Signless looked similar and thinking on it and comparing what you know of their facial structure and basic features you can see that they’re very similar. Void of expression they’d be remarkably so. But Signless was intense but measured, calm and even when he was joking around there was a serenity to him. He had a quiet restraint to him, you think. Karkat isn’t quiet, calm or restrained in any way at all. You swear he’s got two troll’s worth of feelings crammed into him at all times. Maybe more, you recently were two trolls worth of experience in one body and you still think Karkat is more. When Karkat laughs it’s loud and wild, his anger is righteous fury and his affections
are enough to kill a lesser man through sheer emotional power. So the way he looks, how he uses his face and his expressions, they’re completely different. You’d never mistake the two.

You’re very much in some kind of nonquadranted pity with your best friend. You wonder if that’s some Captor weakness or a Vantas siren song of appeal. Maybe both. Wait, it’s you, of course you’re going to conclude both.

Because you can you lean in and happily kiss him, an entirely quadrant absent smooch of affection just because you can and you like him that much. You pull back and Karkat protests, letting your sides go and grabbing your face instead.

“Stop making me worry about you, asshole.” he reprimands you and smushes his nose up against yours in what you guess is an affectionate nuzzle but because it’s Karkat he’s a little overblown so it’s a little rough. But, actually, you like that about him. It’s very Karkat.

“We both know that’s not going to happen. Either because I’m not going to stop being in situations that make you worry or you’re not going to stop caring enough that you would stop worrying.” you point out.

“Or both.” Karkat says just as you add the words too.

You giggle and he snorts in amusement, his shoulders shaking with a laugh he’s trying to keep contained but is just too big to fully manage.

This time he kisses you and it’s good, grounding. Like last night with Dayvhe it’s a way of reminding you who you are. That you’re not someone else who got in your head, you’re not a desperation driven rescuer who would do terrible things, you’re not the guy on the run, you’re just Sollux. You’re Sollux and your moirail is Dayvhe and Karkat is your best friend and awwspistice. Those are things you know are true, but there are more. You have friends, you have a kismesis too even, romantically and platonically you’re loved. You’ve protected those people and they’ve protected you. It’s who you are and this affection from Karkat nails you down into that idea so you can’t wander away from it. Even when things are bad you always have this. You’ll always have him.

You hear the camera shutter and though it takes you a second to properly react to it both you and Karkat look around to see a shirtless and still slightly damp Dayvhe standing in the doorway looking at his camera with a smile.

“Oh shit that’s a really good one. Don’t mind me.” Dayvhe grins and Karkat glares at him.

“Did you even really shower, you were barely any time.” Karkat says with accusation heavy in his tone.

“I was quick but not that quick, time flies when you’re making out with Sollux.” Dayvhe grins cheekily and you flick a harmless blue spark of psi at him.

“You- just… shut up.” Karkat grumbles and Dayvhe gasps as he presses a hand to his chest.

“Scathing, I may never recover. People will talk about my tragic downfall at your hands for the rest of time.” Dayvhe says in the world’s most unaffected voice ever.

Karkat groans and grabs Dayvhe by the shirt, pulling him out of the room with grumbled complaints about how you’re all going to be late and it’s all Dayvhe’s fault. But it’s fine, you’re in too good of a mood to let anything rain on your parade today, much less a squabble that you know Dayvhe and Karkat are just doing for fun.
It turns out that you are late but Jayekh, Jayded and a barely awake Dirkka are later than you. Dirkka is being pulled along by Jayekh and you wouldn’t be surprised if his eyes were shut behind his shades. He’s really not an early riser.

Your group merges together in the glass hall at the front of the slope sided building and with each new person that shows up you find yourself eying the adults going about their business. You’re all attracting attention for sure, but you’re the only kids on this planet and it’s safe to say that you’re pretty famous ones at that. Notably though no one is trying to steer you inside and when Karkat pushes you all into walking out the only interaction you have with an adult is a guy who tries to come in when you leave and holds the door open for you without realising just how many people he’s committed to doing that for.

“We said coffee, right? Please be coffee.” Dirkka mumbles, bumping against your side as you both walk.

“I second that.” you agree.

“Of course you do.” Dirkka replies slyly.

“Could you not drag me in a less accurate manner please?” you complain.

“Food is the part I care about.” Dayvhe adds helpfully.

“Oh somewhere with a bakery would be perfect.” Jayyne agrees with a nod.

The wall of the medical campus is coming into view and you can catch the tilt of Vriska’s horns that tip you off to the fact that she too is scanning the area around you all, looking for someone trying to stop you. Nepeta is also unusually quiet and though she looks relaxed you can see that she’s very ready.

Despite your shared concern the whole group of you ends up on the street with no problems, the guards that were here during the strike aren’t even present.

“Let’s go… that way!” Jayded decides, probably at random, and points across the road towards some other streets. You have no better clue, and even though you could Goregle some directions you also want to get a better look at this city and planetoid than you’ve gotten simply by flying over it or driving through in a panic.

You pass music stores with all kinds of specialties, instruments in the windows and very obvious hives above the shops. There are bookshops, art stores, clothing shops, beauty places both for buying makeup and others that are more like high class salons. You nearly lose Kanaya when you all pass by a fabric and tailoring megastore that spans three or four normal shopfronts.

“I’m going in there on the way back, I need fabric and- and machines. I hope I have the money but… still, I need them. All of mine are at my hive,” Kanaya says ruefully.

“I’ve totally got the scratch to cover you, Kanaya. Don’t you worry about it.” Roxxie assures her.

“You don’t need to put yourself out Kanaya, this one is perfect. I can just wash it. The blood even came out pretty well.” you offer your hand to show her and then pull it back at Kanaya’s irked expression.

“It’s a prototype and I can do better. Besides you need it and no friend of mine will own only one usable shirt. Also give that to me later you did an abysmal job at cleaning it.” she scolds you.
Well, that’s you told. You’re just going to stay out of that for now.

Dirkka inhales sharply and his head jerks off in one direction.

“Coffee. And… cinnamon. That way.” he bites out in little sentences.

“Oh, we’ll get you coffee. Come on.” Jayekh sighs like he’s terribly put upon but that doesn’t match the grin on his face as he leads Dirkka off in the direction his sniffnode is beckoning him. You would ask why Terezi didn’t pick this up sooner but she probably didn’t feel the need to announce it to your group at large, knowing you likely would have walked by it anyway.

Your group had got quite a few double takes from people walking by but it was clear that everyone had places to be and wasn’t going to come up and question you. Inside the coffee place however people are sat and looking at you all with undisguised interest and curiosity.

The woman behind the counter looks at your group with wide eyes and just gestures further back.

“Sit down back there, we’ll come to you.” she says and that makes sense, otherwise you’d all just cause a huge jam at the counter.

You weave through tables to get to a big square one surrounded by a plush booth, you end up getting all jumbled about so you’re sat with Vriska on your right and Tavros on your left and Dayvhe and Karkat are further down that way. Not the most fun seating arrangement that you’ve ever been party to but you’re not going to make a fuss and rearrange people. Trying to do that always runs the risk of getting hit in the head by Tavros’ giant horns and it’ll only provoke fighting. But nothing’s going to rain on your parade today, remember? You’re getting to sit near your kismesis who is no longer worried about her moirail, this is good. You’re being optimistic.

“This place is super hipster.” Vriska declares.

You look around at the crowd in here, the deliberately distressed furniture, the way everything is mismatched in a precisely calculated way and even how at the counter the names and prices of the products are written on tiny chalkboards.

“It is.” you agree and then look over at her again, letting your eyes linger on the cerulean plaid overshirt she’s wearing over her normal tshirt. At her scuffed but still expensive trainers and her pointedly not fashionable jeans.

“You fit right in.” you add.

Vriska’s expression is both outraged at your accusation but most obviously offended at your highly accurate burn. You don’t get to hear what she says next unfortunately because someone comes up to try to take your group’s monster of an order.

The guy in question is a young rust adult, probably Dirkka and Roxxie’s age thereabouts, maybe a touch older. He’s got blunt horns that have that sawn off kind of look to them but the colour fade on them tells you that they’ve not been damaged like Dayvhe’s or Equius’ but they just look that way. His hair is short and curled in the way Aradia’s used to be close to her neck where the hair was shorter from always getting snagged in hairties.

Tavros’ mouth falls open and he’s obviously not saying something, his face a hesitant mess of uncertainty.

“Hi… welcome to… uh… I know you.” the guy says, looking at Tavros.
“Johnny, yeah! Uh, hi! It’s Tavros.” Tavros blurts out.

“Wait, you know two people with the same name?” John asks, accidentally outing his real full first name to be Johnny despite hotly denying it all the time.

“No? Wait, unless... is that what John is-” Tavros starts.

“No.” John says quickly.

“It’s good to see you, it’s been a while. Glad to see you on your feet again.” Johnny smiles. He, uh, has a nice smile actually.

“Oh, yeah, well Equius was responsible for helping me there. And Kanaya too. I stopped taking part obviously but I saw you did well in the leagues until a while before when I guess you left the planet.” Tavros says cheerfully.

“Oh, you know each other through FLARP.” you say as you figure it out.

“Yeah! Team Charge were kinda below my league because of age but damn the two of ‘em punched over their weight like hell, real good players.” he says brightly.

“Unlike some.” he adds and directs a sharp look at Vriska and Terezi.

“But how the hell did you all end up on this planet with... I mean I heard there were kids who were, like, descendants of important people. Which I get because, Entertainer, Subverse, Signless, Psiionic, Disciple, but I didn’t know it was you guys.” he says, pointing at each of you in turn as he lists the few of you out.

“It’s a long story.” Terezi says and you notice that she’s got her hand on Vriska’s, soothing her from the entirely accurate accusation about their FLARP nights.

“One we can do over coffee? Please? I'm dying.” Dirkka whines and Roxxie pats his shoulder consolingly.

“Right! Hah, sorry man.” Johnny says and pulls a small tablet from his apron, probably a little intimidated by an actual heiress sitting right there, not to mention Rohhze as well.

As predicted the order is huge and unwieldy, especially adding food into the mix. Nevertheless Johnny gets it all done and strides off quickly to get started on all of that. How funny that the first adult you all really talk to after leaving Dahvid’s control and Nicole’s supervision is someone that Tavros already knew. Some kid from, by the sounds of his accent and the league he must have played in, was from a city or two North of yours that skewed just as lowblooded by your guess. Still, he can’t have known Aradia and Tavros that well if he didn’t work out who you were, but that’s fine by you. You’ll pass on the platonic pitying looks of ‘oh no your matesprit died’. Those mostly ran out a long while ago as people found out and you’re not keen to restart it. Especially as Aradia is having a new lease of unlife in the ship and sometimes Hal.

“So, um, how come you’re here? If that’s not too invasive a question?” Tavros asks when Johnny returns and starts handing the drinks over.

“Well, I was studying acting and I was in that movie. Don’t know if you saw it. But apparently it was too controversial, which I get, not exactly subtle and no one cares if rusties bite it instead of ascending or whatever. But I got scouted from it and it was here or dying so, you know.” he shrugs modestly.
“Are you acting here too?” you ask as you turn your coffee around and Roxxie pays him with a sizeable tip.

“Trying to but everyone here wants to be someone, so for now it’s this.” he shrugs. He tries to hand Roxxie back some change but she refuses and says it’s just for him.

“Thanks… we uh, we do live music here at nights. Upcoming talent and all. You’re more than welcome to come.” he says to you all.

“That sounds really awesome!” Jayded says brightly. Johnny smiles, nods, and goes off to get back to work.

“He seems nice.” Jayekh says happily.

“He is.” Tavros nods, nearly taking you out with his horns.


“So, it seems pretty clear that we’re not being followed or prevented from going where we want.” Rohhze notes carefully. You’re still getting looks every now and then from the other patrons but they’re more curious and less surveilling.

“Dahvid did say we could go.” Dayvhe points out.

“I trust him as far as I could throw him.” Karkat hisses and bites into his cinnamon swirl with feral rage.

“Aw but you’re so strong.” Dayvhe says in a faux sweet but joking because he actually means it tone.

“Fuck you.” Karkat retorts, showering Dayvhe with crumbs.

“So we can just… go?” Jayekh asks, perking up.

“No, Sollux says he needs new ports and the docterrorists agree. We need to do that before we even think of going anywhere.” Dayvhe says, suddenly serious.

“The ports I gave him are perfectly… functional.” Equius trails off under a glare from Dayvhe that manages to be blistering despite his shades.

“I- yeah, I still need to get more information about that. Actually I’ve not checked my messages, Feelgood said they were going to send me information.” you say quietly.

“Maybe not when you’re eating?” Karkat suggests. Probably a good idea. You should also actually eat.

“I guess we’re back to the revolution question again. But if we’re not staying at the big old Strydr mansion, which I’m totally all for but that means we need a place to live of our own and it’s suddenly occurring to me that our bank accounts are probably going to have stopped getting money put into them when we left the planet. Or if not now then soon. It’s not like we’re broke but I don’t know how we’re going to find somewhere to live.” Roxxie says worriedly.

“Don’t worry about it.” you shrug and everyone looks at you.

“Psiionic wanted Dahvid to protect us. Letting us starve or die from exposure on his planetoid is something that’d make him beyond pissed at Dahvid. Pretty sure that if we want hives we just have
to ask. Even without Psii around to make him reasonable you forget that a bunch of us are still wearing faces he cares about.” you shrug. Even with you being kids you felt the instant recognition when Psiionic looked at your group and the associated feelings with it. Of course it’d work the same for Dahvid.

“I mean, between me, Karkat and Disciple alone we’ve pretty much got him.” you add as you point your fork to each of the three of you in turn.

The group stares at you in silence for a moment.

“You called me Disciple.” Nepeta says finally.

“I-” wait, you did, “shit. Sorry, Psiionic’s whole deal is still banging around in my pan. I know who you are, sorry for calling you that Nep, I didn’t mean it.”

“I do want us to leave still, just to check that we can.” Dirkka says slowly, you guess he’s finally awake. He runs his finger around the edge of his coffee cup and seems to consider.

“But given that Sollux is probably getting surgery and won’t be able to fly for a while it’d make sense to set up here first. See what we can find here from the history of the place and see what information everyone has on the Empress. The more we know the better we can attack.” Dirkka continues.

“And you’re resting this time, not going right off into using those ports.” Dayvhe insists.

“I did make him rest.” Vriska points out.

“She did.” you agree.

“For the minimum amount of time. It was fine because we do excellent work but it should have been longer.” Equius corrects you both.

“I’m fine.” you argue just as Vriska says “He’s fine!”

There are more than a few giggles at your expense there but you understand, you’re a little too obvious with your shiny new spade, huh? Under the table Vriska’s knee slides over and bumps into your leg a little, it could just be an accident but you doubt that.

The point is that after your breakfast of another round of coffee and food, accompanied with you and Dayvhe filling in every last tiny detail about Psiionic’s takeover and answering questions you’ve nowhere else to go. Well, correction, after hitting up that fabric shop and Roxxie buying enough things for Kanaya that there may be a contest for her favourite Lalond you’ve nowhere else to go.

As Dirkka and Roxxie pointed out, you’ve no hives of your own. So, with no other choice besides the mansion, you return to the gold medical centre. What they said about a plan from here keeps going around in your head. Even as your group stays together and Tavros suggests watching that movie his friend was in it’s still circling around.

You can’t go back to Alternia, that’d be suicide even if it is delayed. But you bet all of you vanishing and coming back in a ship would be noticed and drones would come knocking. Besides the adults in your group can’t go back. It’s one thing being late to reporting to ascension off the planet but it’s an entirely different illegal business to return to the planet once you’ve left as an adult.

So, really, you’re stuck here aren’t you?
All the same you don’t want to go back to living in Dahvid’s mansion, acting like some kept toy that he owns or like his prisoner. You’re not down for that. You don’t want to be something he possesses and you don’t want to work for him. So finding your own place is really all you can do. You could potentially lever some goodwill with the goldbloods to see if you can find somewhere for free until you’re all able to manage to get more money in but given the strike you just had them pull you think it’d be pretty obnoxious and ungrateful of you to go back for more.

You watch onscreen as a pre-molt Johnny and a group of other lowbloods mug some midblood lady who must have been just on the edge of molting herself when they shot this. You roll your eyes, wasn’t this movie supposed to be cool? It’s just looking to you like that old trope of lowbloods are violent, stupid, thugs. Of the lowbloods you know you can’t say that any of you are all three of those. And okay you’re all a little violent but you’re trolls aren’t you?

You could use your virus to blackmail money or resources out of people but that could go bad very fast and given that the people on this planetoid are pretty anti-empire and decently pro-equality you’d feel more bad than usual if you did that.

On screen the midblood woman is talking to legislacertors about the lowbloods who attacked her, since she was attacked they’ve gone on and beat the shit out of some alien animal and dragged it around a hivestem that’s eerily similar to your own.

You fiddle thoughtfully with your palmhusk and check your messages. That sure is an informational leaflet about your surgery sitting right there in your inbox. You probably ought to read that. Your skin itches uncomfortably and you make the executive decision to do something else.

[twinArmageddons began trolling tautologicallyGauche ]
TA: 2o a2 my ance2tor wa2 2ayiing, you kiind of owe me.
TG: he didnt say that at all
TG: and given that youre mentioning psii im going to go ahead and assume that i am talking to sollux and this isnt psii back in your head and messing with me
TA: ii2 that 2omethiing he would do?
TG: in different circumstances he probably would but not so much with how things are now
TG: what do you want
TA: 2iince you 2tranded u2 on thii2 planetoid we need a place to liive
TG: your old rooms are still here and youre not locked out or anything
TG: unless there was a problem and you tried to come back in and couldnt
TA: nah
TA: ii don’t make a habiit of breaking back iintwo prii2on2 that ii’v e2caped
TG: well youve been staying somewhere this whole time havent you?
TA: thii2 place wa2n’t really buillt for liiving in and the goldblood2 have put them2elve2 iintwo a lot of trouble for u2. ii’2 not fairi two keep a2kiing.
TG: well gee if only there was somewhere free that you could live that was designed for people to live there
TA: thii2 kiind of 2arca2m ii2 endearing from dayvhe but you’re nearly a century old, quiit iit.
TG: wow man just fuckin age me nearly ten sweeps why dont you
TA: do you hear that?
TG: youre not about to crack the whole ‘worlds tiniest violin playing the world saddest song just for me’ line are you because that was tired when i was your age
TA: no there ii2 no 2ound becau2e even the uniiver2e’2 tiiniie2t viioliini2t caired 2o liitle about your problem2 they diidn’t 2how up.
TA: ii’m 2ure there are place2 around here big enough for our group two 2tay in.
TG: no doubt
TA: that aren’t your2
“Yeah and it ain’t like we called anyone when Sollux’s place got broken into ’cause he was gone for Tavros says. “I wouldn’t have called for help either but at least I was out of the way for anyone causing trouble.”

“This was one of the reasons I was always glad to, uh, live somewhere quite isolated. Sure I others just don’t get. But they’ve already had the legislacerators out there already, they could absolutely help.” Terezi

“Holy shit.” Karkat breathes. Yeah, no wonder this film got Dahvid’s people interested in him. No shit that end of the hemospectrum is.

“With that done you pocket your borrowed palmhusk, reminding yourself that you should soon fly back to the mansion to collect your husktop from the roof. You tune back into the film to see Johnny’s character and another talking about the idea someone threw out for calling the legislacerators or the drones on the aliens that are attacking them. They are understandably rejecting that plan.

“They attack us for nothing anyway.” one of the guys says and Johnny’s character narrows his eyes as he looks outside.

“No, I reckon yeah, I reckon, the highbloods sent them anyway. Government probably bred those things to kill lowbloods. First they sent in drugs, then they sent guns and now they’re sending monsters in to kill us. They don’t care man. We ain’t killing each other fast enough. So they decided to speed up the process.” he says with the harsh voice of someone who’s entirely accepted just how shit that end of the hemospectrum is.

“Holy shit.” Karkat breathes. Yeah, no wonder this film got Dahvid’s people interested in him. No way he would have made it off planet after making something like this.

“But they’ve already had the legislacerators out there already, they could absolutely help.” Terezi argues.

You catch Tavros’ eye and share the unspoken sentiment that no matter how much you may like all of your friends regardless of their place on the hemospectrum there will always be points that the others just don’t get.

“This was one of the reasons I was always glad to, uh, live somewhere quite isolated. Sure I wouldn’t have called for help either but at least I was out of the way for anyone causing trouble.” Tavros says.

“Yeah and it ain’t like we called anyone when Sollux’s place got broken into ’cause he was gone for
Dayvhe nods. He’s a mutant, not the rust he pretends to be, but that’s how people have always seen him and it’s not as if finding out the truth would have improved people’s treatment of him.

“The drones would have been a bad idea for sure but there are trainee legislacerators who would have enjoyed the puzzle of tracking down those people, right?” John asks, making you groan.

“Yeah, instead of calling to get a pizza delivered you could call law enforcement and get suicide delivered!” Dirkka says brightly.

“I have a lot to fix.” Roxxie groans and slides down in her chair a little more.

You move up a little so you’re against Karkat’s side and keep watching the movie. You’re pretty much into it when you hear a character address Johnny’s character. They must have said his name before but you were preoccupied then, now though it has your full attention.

“Kankri, wait!” someone on screen calls out and your breathing hitches.

“Wait, that was Signless’ name.” you blurt out, some part of your thinkspoonce slightly reprogrammed by your ancestor’s thoughts and feelings occupying it and supplying you with that knowledge.

“We already had this conversation, but you were too busy fiddling with that.” Karkat says and flicks your pocket with his claw, earning a plastic click as it connects to the palmhusk, albeit slightly muffled.

You should get your hustop, you should find a place to live. You should…

“I gotta…” you mumble and pull back from him. You zip quickly up to the ceiling and then land over by the door so you don’t get between anyone and the screen. Letting yourself out and shutting the door behind you leaves you in the hallway, which is fine by you.

You hand itches and you obligingly fill it with palmhusk. Resisting looking is like trying not to pick at a scab when it itches, you know it’s going to end badly and you would feel better if you left it alone but you can’t resist. You open your messages again as your feet carry you to a glass wall off down the way and your eyes slip over the words. You try to scrabble away from their meaning in a fit of self preservation but you need to do this and you are, as you mentioned, uncomfortably curious.

Feelgood’s message is thorough. Everything is planned to the minute. There are diagrams, explanations of procedure, timings. A list of medications you can’t pronounce, plans for rest afterwards, tests that will be run. There are also timings. Did you mention the time?

“Hey there nightlight.” Dayvhe’s voice makes you look up and you see him walking slowly towards you.

“Nightlight?” you repeat, his confusing words having boggled you out of your building worry entirely.

“Yeah, I mean that’s what you do. Even with your eyes shut I can always see some light.” Dayvhe nods and kneels down by you.

“How’d you find me?” you ask instead of commenting on his pet name shift.

“You didn’t go far. Plus I thought I’d check this way first. You like big windows you can see things out of, I don’t think Roxxie’s wizard bowl did much for you but places like this and your old hive…
yeah.” he shrugs and leans over so he’s leant against your shins with his arms crossed over your knees and his chin rested there.

“I didn’t know that was a thing.” you admit.

“It’s a thing.” he says and pushes his glasses up into his hair. He’s giving you a quietly curious look so in lieu of explaining you just dump your borrowed palmhusk into his hands. Dayvhe looks at it and his eyebrows rise a little in surprise.

“You got the surgery notes, do you want me to get Hal to look at it?” Dayvhe asks and you shrug, suddenly mute.

“You do still want to do this, right? Because you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do.” he points out.

Your toes curl inside your shoes as you think about everything you just read and Dayvhe, perceptive when it comes to you, sharpens.

“Do you or don’t you?” he asks again.

“I do.” you say.

“Well,” Dayvhe starts.

“And I don’t.” you add.

Dayvhe rolls his eyes.

“I don’t know why I even give you either or choices, I don’t learn. I’m the dumbest.” he groans.

“I have to be awake again.” you explain, tapping the top of the palmhusk.

“You were sort of awake the first time, or Karkat said you seemed to be at least a little with it.” Dayvhe says quietly.

“The second time Hal and Equius numbed me and Vriska talked to me to keep me distracted. It took an hour, I think. Around that.” you explain. Dayvhe’s hand tightens on your knee in a reassuring squeeze.

“Read the… the timetable.” you tell him.

Dayvhe looks down at the palmhusk and scrolls a little.

“Consultation, pre-surgical checks and scans, anesthetist arrives, wow that’s a lot before they really do anything huh? Then… uh…” Dayvhe trails off with a frown as you see him scrolling. His eyes get wider and wider until he looks up at you in horror.

“SIX HOURS?! You have to be awake and conscious for all of that for six hours?!?” he exclaims loudly.

“I guess taking out what they can is a more delicate process than just punching the ports into me. They have to get them out and then put new ones in and make sure they’re connected. They’ve got two teams to get it done in six hours. I need it done but I- I don’t know if I can deal with that.” you confess quietly.

Dayvhe seems like he wants to say something but your mouth is going and there’s no off switch
now. Karkat and Dayvhe must be a bad influence you in that way.

“It’s not as if it’ll hurt, it’s all numb but I know what they’re doing and you can still sort of feel it and just knowing is- I can’t take anything that’ll keep me awake but so far under that I won’t know up from down because that’s how it was the first time and I know enough to know that I’ll lose it if that happens.” you insist raggedly.

“Yeah, no don’t do that.” Dayvhe agrees.

“And I remember hearing that the golds here just have that and your ancestor’s music. I’m sure as hell not opening my pan up to his shit, if I do that I could take in anything he put in there. I know I need this done, I can’t be exposed like this. What if the Empress gets hold of me somehow? What if she throws me in a helm or- or if she works out that Psii got in my head and does it too? What if she turns me against all of you? I have to change them, but it’s-” your throat closes shut. This is probably a bad place for this conversation but you didn’t plan this, it just happened.

You catch a flash of Dayvhe’s tongue as he licks his lips minutely and takes a steadying breath. He gently puts the palmhusk on the floor and looks you in the eye.

“What if it was me?” he asks.

“If it was you what?” you ask back in confusion.

“Not my ancestor making music to calm you, but me doing it. Me talking to you and making music and keeping you chill. I could put it in music, I think I’ve done it before without knowing it.” he says.

“You hate doing that though.” you point out. He’s had good reasons for not using his psionics and every time he has since he left the clown camp has been pretty much life or death situations. Even using them on Rohhze before was a way of seeing if he could free you all to rescue you, which is basically a life or death emergency. He doesn’t like his psionics, he doesn’t want them.

Dayvhe frowns and drums his fingers on your knees.

“You tried to drag us out of space, you followed us past the atmosphere to save us. You helmed yourself again to fly a ship and save us, you invaded a hostile planet, you faced down adults, you let your ancestor into your head even though you hated it because you wanted to save lives. I’m pretty sure you hated having to do all of that stuff. I’d do anything for you too, you know. And if you need something to keep you calm for six hours when you go through this I’ll do whatever I have to so that I can help.” he tells you.

You’re going to ask if he would do that, but you don’t because he just said he would. It really did keep you together having Vriska to talk to the last time, having Dayvhe would likely work even better. Vriska kept you together with the assertion that you could handle this and you didn’t want to prove her wrong, also how did it take you that long to work out your feelings? God, you’re oblivious. But still, Dayvhe with your diamond is going to make a situation where you know he won’t let you get hurt, he’ll keep you calm and distracted psionically or otherwise.

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“I’ll ask- no, I’ll say you’ll be there and they need to factor that in.” you nod. You’re hanging a lot on you being a special case but it’s not like you’re planning on leveraging this a lot. You’re not going to demand to be treated a certain way for your last name and your ancestry.

“I was talking to Dahvid, trying to get him to agree to get us somewhere to live that he doesn’t have control over. I mean I could just take money from him but I kind of want to avoid actually
antagonising him for no reason since we’re not going to have Psiionic around to smack sense into him again. Then there’s Roxxie’s contest for the throne and—” you’re cut off when Dayvhe covers your mouth with his hand.

“You talked to him on here?” Dayvhe asks you, one hand on your mouth as he holds your palmhusk up with the other. You make a muffled affirmative noise and Dayvhe taps away at the screen.

“You don’t mind if I look, right?” he checks, glancing up. You don’t wildly care, if you were hiding it from him wouldn’t have said anything would you?

His hand slides over your face a little as he reads, just from him not paying much attention. You bite him on the thumb, not hard, just enough to annoy him. Without even looking at you Dayvhe flicks the end of your nose in retaliation.

“Alright, so he’s kind of agreed to help. I can get somewhere with that. You, however, don’t have to think about this anymore.” Dayvhe says, holding up your palmhusk to show the chat. “You don’t need to find a way to finance a hive for all of us, or find that hive either. You don’t have to worry about anything. We’re dealing with this right now.”

You feel it when Dayvhe taps your left temple port in demonstration of his point.

“We need somewhere to live, we can’t just stay—” you begin.

“No, I totally agree. Somewhere that can be home, not to mention a base for all of us to actually do the shit we gotta do without inconveniencing other people or being spied on. That’s a hugely urgent need, for sure.” he nods.

“So…” you say slowly.

“So someone else can do it. There’s enough of us here and you have enough to worry about and, honestly, so do I. Jayyne is good at this sort of thing, she can do it. Or Rohhze, you know she’s intimidating. You don’t have to do everything.” he points out.

“I wasn’t trying to take over or anything.” you protest weakly.

“I know, man.” Dayvhe nods and you get that he didn’t mean it that way.

Dayvhe leans back against your legs and looks out of the window for a moment, seemingly lost in thought.

“It’s funny. I always heard and I always used to think you weren’t someone to meddle in people’s lives, you don’t pry for gossip and you’re not someone to fuss over stuff. I don’t think either of us are. Karkat though…” Dayvhe trails off.

“You ‘used to’ think that?” you ask.

“Ah but this is my theory, right? Karkat, Kanaya, Rohhze, Dirkka they’re like micro problem meddlers. Relationship drama, gossip and all that trivial stuff. They gotta know and they gotta fuss with it. You couldn’t care less about all that.” Dayvhe explains.

“Big stuff though… things like Cal, like my ancestor, getting here, finding somewhere to live. That’s big time stuff, macro scale problems. You couldn’t not get involved and help with that stuff, huh? That’s the kind of thing that you can’t stop yourself from dealing in.” he grins at you.

“A bold accusation from the guy who brought me a plant so I wouldn’t end up in a helm.” you
counter and Dayvhe shrugs.

“I guess I’m the same way, at least a little. But my point is right now the big problem you and I have to deal with is you, leave the other big problems to the other big problem people.” Dayvhe replies.

You consider his point and lean against the window as you fingercomb his hair. There’s probably problems in his theory there but you get his drift. You need to focus on the thing that’s actually your responsibility. After all you flew everyone here and if anyone wants to go anywhere after this you’ll be the one flying them there then. You’re already doing a lot by doing that so maybe you should get some chill.

“In fairness I have to point out that Dirkka absolutely worries about big stuff as well as small stuff.” you say.

“God yeah. Dirkka worries about everything. Big stuff, small stuff, old stuff, new stuff, red stuff, blue stuff-” Dayvhe laughs as he starts rhyming.

“Alright, alright Doctorterrorist Zseuss.” you snort and mess up Dayvhe’s hair. You don’t want to point out that you also worry about red stuff and blue stuff, mainly about you not having as much of it as you possibly can. Even your-

Wait.

“What? You’ve got that expression like you’ve just remembered you left the burner on in your hive or something.” Dayvhe says.

“I love red and blue stuff.” you tell him.

“I did notice.” he nods.

“You and Karkat are red.” you say.

“With each other or like bloodwise?” Dayvhe asks.

“And Vriska is… blue.” you finish.

“Did you just notice?” he asks.

“I just noticed the pattern. I didn’t only just notice that she was cerulean obviously.” you snort.

He seems very amused with this idea and he’s entertained, leaning on your legs and teasing you from that position. So, naturally, you pull your knees apart suddenly so he topples over onto your front. You’re not sure that this has taught him anything because he just makes a happy noise and cuddles up to you. You’re lucky Dayvhe doesn’t really have any bad or damaging habits you have to break him of because you’re very bad at negative consequences for things. Oh, he’s insulting you? Well these hugs will surely show him. Hmm.

“Before when we’ve disagreed on things we’ve just talked it out or argued about it before coming back again.” you say because what is a thinksponge to mouth filter anyway?

“Riiiiight?” Dayvhe says dubiously and rests his chin on your chest so he can look at you.

“And we do the positive reinforcement thing. When you remind me to eat more and I do it you’re pleased and it’s all good. We don’t do the negative reinforcement thing, do we? Is that weird?” you wonder.
“I mean you see it in movies. That whole highblood ‘I know what’s best for you’ super controlling kind of thing. I thought Nepeta and Equius were kind of like that until I saw her not bend with that ultimatum back at the mansion, I guess I had them wrong.” Dayvhe says thoughtfully.

“We don’t do that though.” you point out and let yourself stroke his hair.

“I think you would in the right circumstances.” Dayvhe shrugs.

“I can’t think of any.” you say with a shrug.

“Oh, really?” Dayvhe grins impishly and sits up. “Did I tell you I’ve uninstalled every virus scanner and adblocker on my husktop and I’ve decided to go with Alternia OnLine as my browser. I’m also going to click on every link in every email that I get!”

You think every cell in your body recoils in horror at his words.

“Psh, yeah. Like you wouldn’t take all my electrical shit away from me then for my own good and only give it back when you’ve taught me how to behave like a proper troll.” he says triumphantly.

“But I wouldn’t HAVE to because you’re my moirail not a MONSTER.” you hiss in horror. Who the hell would even use AOL as a browser anymore? God, even Gamzee had more sense.

“Mmm, I’m installing it on this palmhusk right now.” Dayvhe says calmly and you reach for it urgently only for Dayvhe to push you back.

“Calm your glutes, Sol. I’m only jerking you around. I’m sending the messages about the surgery for you, I’m gonna be checking you’ve got only the very best people. You don’t have to worry about a thing.” Dayvhe says gently.

“You wanna go back?” Dayvhe asks, lowering his arms to the sides so he’s all splayed out like some kind of sacrifice. That was… a weird thought to have. You shake it from your head and answer his question instead.

“To the room? Yeah.” you agree and stand up.

Dayvhe takes a moment to react but gets up and walks back to your temporary block with you. It’s only later when you’re curled up against him as he reads every last word of the surgery notes that you figure out he might have meant back to the room where everyone else was watching movies.

Time passes, as it tends to do, and eventually Karkat tracks you down to inform you all that your group is going out again since you’re able to. There’s talk of food and entertainment and you’d all figured why not go back to the coffee place that you went to this morning after you’ve eaten so that you can see what kind of stuff they have at night.

Dayvhe agrees to go so you should as well and all together you head out. You end up walking near Jayded and Equius having a talk about some advanced tech and power supplies to robots, a conversation overseen with a suspicious eye from Hal. He’d decided to join you this time, having overcome the unpleasant experience of sharing his mind with someone else.

There seems to be more people around in the evenings and your group is definitely getting some stares, Karkat especially is getting adults stopping to gawk at him as he walks by. No one is intimidated by Karkat’s snarl and the show of his dull fangs and he ends up dropping back in your group so he’s next to you and behind Dayvhe with Nepeta behind him, he couldn’t be safer.

Trying to avoid the stares your group picks some hole in the wall place to get tacos and sends Dirkka
up to order them, sending Roxxie would just get stares as well. There are a few nearby stone walled
trees and flower beds in the middle of the shopping area so you spread out around there and eat.

Since people are staring at you then you figure you may as well return the favour and people watch. A
yellow guy with long horns walks past all of you with a frown on his face, only to pause and look
at your group. His eyes land on you first and then with a sly little grin you see him eye the rest of
your group. Oh you’re really going to regret how sappy and filled with feelings your plea for the
help of the goldbloods was, aren’t you? He flashes you a peace sign and walks on, looking around
for someone else. A minute or two later he paces back by your group, clearly agitated and looking
around.

A slender and fashionable bronzeblood walks up behind him, his boots clicking on the paving.

“You look like you’re going to burst something. My shoot ran late, deal with it.” he says, shoving the
gold guy in the shoulder.

“Well maybe if you spent less time looking so prissy you’d be on time.” he says and flips the
bronzeblood’s tie up in his face.

“Bold of you to assume I did this for you.” the bronzeblood hisses, smoothing his tie down and you
can see the spades flying between them.

“I never said that, must have been on your mind for you to say it though. But if you can manage to
get over yourself we might just make our reservation.” the goldblood guy says with triumphant smirk
and walks off without a backwards look.

The bronze guy splutters in denial and rushes to catch up to his kismesis.

You take another bite of your levitating taco, because why get greasy fingers when you have
amazing telekinesis? As you do you let yourself look down the concrete planter edge a little to see
Vriska being very careful to not get salsa anywhere near the metal joints in her hand.

You have the immature inclination to subtly psionically crack the underside of her taco shell so that
she ends up with a handful of its filling but a thought stops you. Not any thoughts about how you
shouldn’t do that, goodness no, you absolutely want to do that. No, what stops you is the realisation
that you and Vriska despite dating have not been on an actual date yet. In fairness you’ve both been
trollnapped, in hiding, possessed or caring for a quadrantmate. But now you’re free enough and out
of danger enough that you could take her out if you wanted. Hell, you’re out eating food with your
friends right now so it’s totally possible that you could take her out on a date.

Shit, you don’t know what you’d even do on a pitch date. If you were to take anyone else you’re
dating or have dated out on an actual date it’d be for something you’d mutually enjoy, something
nice and something fun. With Aradia you’d go with her to check out sites of historical interest or to
the movies to see something adventure themed. More often than not though your dates were the two
of you spending time together and just enjoying each other’s company with something nice to eat.
For Dayvhe it’d be either some way that you could let him into something personal to you and trying
to share that with him, like showing him how to do something you’re good at so he can be closer to
that part of you. Or you would cater it to his interests, a concert for an artist he admires, a chance to
play with some hard to find music tech maybe or even just going somewhere you’d both find
relaxing.

But with Vriska?

Gifting her a chance to show you up at something she’s good at is just conceding a point and you
don’t want that, but also demanding she watch you own at something you’re brilliant at is too insecure show-off for your liking. Are you supposed to pick something new and competitive that you could both try? That might be an idea but it could be weird, especially given the obvious misalignment of your interests and hobbies.

Well, shit, you may have to confer with Karkat Vantas, undisputed tyrant of romance knowledge, and beg for him to advise you. Addressing him as such may help your case there, actually. A gift could be a better place to start. Dead flowers are a pretty standard offering but you can do better. Oh, shit, you could get her loaded dice that’d roll ones almost all of the time. Enough to frustrate her but not quite enough for her to be sure that you’d messed with them like that. Shit, you’re going to have to do math to work out how to pull that off but you bet you can manage it. Eheheheh, you wonder how long it’d take her to be sure enough about it to confront you. Maybe you ought to hold off on that one until after your surgery so you won’t end up with an eight sided die lobbed at your pan unexpectedly.

Alright, you’ll ask Karkat later for help.

“It’s weird, this place feels kind of normal. It’s not that different from home, just everyone’s taller.” Dayvhe says eventually.

“I kind of expected everyone to be going around like little robots.” Jayded agrees.

“Hey.” Hal protests mildly from up near Dirkka.

“No offense. I mean like mindlessly following the orders they’d been given without a second thought.” Jayded corrects herself.

“Yeah, see? Nothing like you.” Dirkka says smugly and you can hear a vaguely metallic sounding slap from up that way and a pissed off hiss.

“Whatever, I want to go back to that place from earlier.” Vriska declares as she gets to her feet and faces your group.

“I, uh, would also like to see Johnny again. I want to talk to him about his movie now that we’ve seen it.” Tavros agrees and gets up as well.

“Being inside beats being out here getting stared at by every empty panned gibbering fool that goes by, I’m in.” Karkat nods and heaves Dayvhe up with him as he stands.

You group together all gets ready to leave and all of you retrace the path back to the coffee place. As Johnny promised it’s more of an entertainment venue in the evening. In the back part of the coffee place is a stage that’s just a little way off the floor, still quite low and you think this morning it was just a slightly raised seating area.

Tavros splits away to talk to Johnny again and as there are no tables left for your group it works out well that you all seem happy to go your own ways. You end up on a table with Karkat, Jayded and John with Rohhz and Dayvhe gone to get drinks and snacks for you all, not that you really need those as you all just ate but whatever.

The guy on stage is setting up and the room is full of quiet conversation and people enjoying themselves.

“I guess it must be kind of hard if everyone on the planetoid is famous or trying to be. How do you get noticed like that? Or, well maybe not everyone is if there are people doing the other jobs around.” John wonders.
“Maybe a lot of people do things part time?” Jayded suggests.

“I swear I know that guy.” Karkat says irritably as he squints at the guy on stage. It’s hard to get a good look at him as he’s fussing with his instruments. When he straightens up to talk to someone who looks like they work here Karkat snaps his fingers.

“I recognise him now.” Karkat grins.

“Who?” Dayvhe asks, pushing up against you so he can set the tray of drinks on the table and then sit down in his seat.

“The guy on stage. He was on that reality TV show a while back, you know, Love Planet? They put a whole bunch of hot people together and see what quadrants they end up in. I remember he ended up flush with this woman.” Karkat explains.

“You watch such trash Karkat!” Jayded teases him.

“Shut up! It’s a guilty pleasure you woodland dwelling hobo!” Karkat hisses back.

“You don’t seem all that guilty though, Karkat.” Rohhze adds.

The argument is interrupted by the guy on stage strumming his first few notes on a smaller instrument. It’s a light but slightly wistful tune, he leans into the mic and starts to sing.

“I met my baby on Love Planet.” he begins melodically.

“Told you.” Karkat hisses.

“All alone… just her and me and the sound of the sea and six billion folks back home.” he adds in a line that surprises a smile onto your face. The song that follows is a wistful but bitter romance song that seems pretty harshly critical of a show that he himself was on. Though maybe it wasn’t the experience it was sold to him as, maybe he was just looking for something to up his profile so he could chase his musical dreams. It can’t have worked if he’s playing a small coffee shop at night. But, then again he is obviously very good and everyone here seems to be enjoying his work. When his first song finishes people applaud him and he moves on. He’s kind of darkly comedic and his set works through his personal hate to TV presenters, painting a situation of a troll that was so health conscious they died, and so on.

You watch with interest as he takes a deep swig of the water from a bottle at his feet. He looks out across the room and for a moment he seems uncertain but then gives a ‘fuck it’ kind of shrug.

“So, ah, this is my last song. I’ve been doing this a while. Well, not this-this here but music itself I mean. So how many of you are new here? To the planet, to the biz? Been here a sweep or less?” he asks and a good number of people in the audience cheer with enthusiasm.

“Well then, this last one’s for you.” he says with a tired kind of smile that doesn’t quite reach his olive eyes.

He shifts his guitar a little bit and then starts playing. Quick fingers plucking at the strings as his other hand dances about the fretboard so fast you can hardly believe it. When he starts to sing again it’s a soulful kind of tone, one that sounds old and wise in a way.

“Gather ‘round you children and listen to me, I was a child myself the day I took the job down the old dream factory, this machine kills optimists like me.” he sings and your eyes widen in surprise.
“It comes on slowly, it comes in waves, it comes in foul moods and arguments with loved ones and it leaves a bitter taste. This machine lays optimists to waste.” he continues. The people who cheered aren’t cheering now. You don’t know exactly how most people get here, you don’t know enough adults to be sure but you bet that the ones who are here for their art most likely arrive with a burning passion to do something great. But, statistically speaking, even on this planetoid everyone can’t be famous. That’s probably a very hard truth for some.

The singer straightens up in an almost patriotic salute as he continues with his own voice slightly echoing back to him.

“Oh shining, captivating, cruel machine… for many sweeps I’ve tried to give myself to thee. All my advances fall like raindrops on the ocean, all my steps lead back it seems. This machines kills optimists, you see. These days my feelings tend to run away from me, and I say things I can’t possibly mean. Sometimes my bitterness alarms me. This machine kills optimists, you see.”

For the guy’s act any instrument he’s not actively playing but you can hear has been shown with a projected video on the wall behind him and you get to watch him playing some kind of weird… thing, Dayvhe would probably know what it’s called but it sounds spacey and pretty to your spongeclots. He gathers in a breath and smiles ever so slightly as he keeps singing.

“All that remains is to remain positive. I chose the lifestyle so the lifestyle I must live. All that remains is to remain positive. This machine will kill you if you give, this machine will kill you if you give, this machine will kill you if you give it half a chance.”

When his song finishes he gives a short little bow and aside from your group it’s mostly the older looking trolls that are applauding him. He smiles and grabs his things, wishing you all a good night.

“That’s kind of sad don’t you think? Coming all the way here and having it not work out like that.” Jayded says softly.

“There are peaks to these things, it’s narrow at the top. It happens.” Rohhze shrugs.

Karkat’s sharp eyes are tracking the guy as he walks to the bar. His face has that kind of tight and slightly pinched expression of being close to the edge of no longer putting up with something. He must snap because he abruptly gets to his feet and stamps away from the table.

“KK!” you call after him but he’s not stopping. Ugh, fine, you’re going after him.

“He’s fine.” Dayvhe tries to reassure you but he’s going to get into trouble when he goes off looking like that, you know it. You quickly tag along after Karkat and you’re just close enough to hear when he comes to a stop next to the musician guy, Stockl or something you think he said, and then starts to talk.

“I liked your music.” Karkat declares loudly.

“Oh, thanks I-” the guy turns around, sees no one there and then looks down at Karkat with his mouth open.

“I recognised you from TV but I didn’t know you were this good of a musician.” Karkat adds.

“What the fuck?” the guy says, bewildered and you join Karkat at his side. The guy looks between you and Karkat at a loss.

“I knew the golds were striking because of some kids the Entertainer took but I thought my neighbour was fucking with me about this part. Are you really…” he stares.
“Karkat Vantas, Sollux Captor and there more of us around here somewhere.” Karkat explains as he waves a hand towards the rest of the room.

The musician nods and you suppose he’s catching up with the knowledge that you exist and you’re watching carefully to see what he makes of it, especially with the not entirely friendly look he’s giving Karkat.

“My ex was a big fan of your ancestor’s. Or- well I mean I guess she still is, I just don’t know one way or the other because she’s my ex. Obviously.” the guy says.

“You’re not a fan of Signless then?” you guess.

“I don’t really care. I’m a fan of not being dragged into a war I don’t want and being a footsoldier on some godforsaken rock a billion lightyears away so the Empress can look good. I’m a fan of not that.” he snorts.

“Hah, same.” you grin.

“Yeah, honestly I don’t know what to make of that stuff with my ancestor.” Karkat admits.

“If you’re like him and all his teachings you probably came over here to tell me to be positive or some shit like that. Not to be so angry about things, change things for good and not just hide out here doing unimportant shit or whatever. Is that what you wanted to say?” the guy bristles.

He seems startled when Karkat laughs right at him.

“Oh, fuck that! Do what you want, it’s none of my fucking business. Also I happen to like your music and it made me happy so who says this isn’t a good use of your time? If you want to do it then do it. Why the hell should anyone else be entitled to your life and your choices? I mean obviously shit around the universe sucks and if you’re able to fix something and you have the chance then it’s kind of a bulge move not to but who says you’re not already doing exactly what you’re supposed to anyway?” Karkat snorts.

The guy is just staring but Karkat’s on a roll and obviously not stopping.

“Besides, being on this planetoid at all is a pretty rare and privileged chance, right? Just existing like this is revolutionary in a way. If my ancestor would have demanded that on the miniscule off chance you got free of a shitty system then you should dedicate one hundred percent of your life to breaking that other system down then that’s just turning freedom into a different kind of slavery where you’re a morally bad person if you don’t perform exactly how some unknown overseer of morality thinks you should. And, frankly, anyone who thinks that can blow it out their ass, which will be a great distraction for when I then punch them in the face for being so pan-rottingly stupid.” Karkat snaps.

“Who the hell can even predict if something’s gonna be helpful anyway? One of the dead trolls I saw helped change work on Alternia by starting a riot at their ascension, it was a goddamn brawl but it ended up changing everything. That’s not very peace and love but it worked.” you agree.

“Yeah! Exactly. Who can tell if he’s going to be ‘useful’ or not but who decided people have to be useful anyway? As for being positive, that’s great and all but sometimes you’ve gotta be mad!” Karkat declares.

“You certainly have to be.” you grin at him.

“Suck my bulge.” Karkat snaps at you.
“Does that line work on Dayvhe?” you scoff and then pause, “Actually it probably does, I’ve changed my mind. Don’t tell me.”

The expression Karkat is giving you tells you more than you wanted to know. Oh, ugh, the eyebrow wiggling is really not helping.

“You… are nothing like what I’ve heard your ancestor was like.” the musician remarks with an intrigued and slightly delighted smile.

“I take that as a compliment.” Karkat says with tart smugness.

“Hey! Don’t say-” is out of your mouth with defensive agitation before you can even think about it. You halt, frown and try to trace the feeling back.

You have nothing against Signless. He seemed nice, patient, not entirely as prissy as people want to paint him as being. He’s not Karkat, he lectures and… and the defensiveness you felt isn’t yours. It’s Psiionic’s sentimental leftovers that crumble away as you mentally touch them, your thoughts changing back to your own instead of remaining on the last used settings of your ancestor’s.

“Sollux?” Karkat asks worriedly.

“No, sorry. It’s just Psiionic, or what’s left. It’s just jumbled still a little. I’m fine, I don’t care about Signless or whether you want to be like him or not.” you tell him. Karkat gives you a worried frown.

“I mean, I care. Obviously. If it was bothering you I care but I’m not invested in it because of him, I don’t care about that. I do about you, which, duh.” you add but you’re not sure it’s cleared anything up.

“Do you need to go back? If you’re not feeling right we can go back. Just the three of us if you want.” Karkat offers with a sympathetic little churrup noise from his throat.

“Augh, shut up, I’m fine!” you insist and shove Karkat away by the face and of course the fucker bites you.

“OW! I need that hand.” you yelp, snatching it back and holding it protectively against your chest.

“Yeah I bet you do.” Karkat laughs loudly and makes an obscene gesture with his hand. To your side the musician is sneaking off and really you don’t blame him.

“You asshole.” you snap and snap a spark of psi at him.

“You’re twice the asshole I am.” Karkat sneers back.

“Are we playing musical quadrants now? Am I the middle leaf now?” Dayvhe asks, suddenly beside you both. He’s got his shades on and is looking down his nose at you both, even if he has to tip his head a little to do it and- hey he’s floating ever so slightly too. God, he’s even got his arms crossed like he’s being all stern and menacing.

“In my defense, Karkat started it.” you offer.

“In my defense… Sollux is annoying in general.” Karkat says but you can tell he’s reaching there.

“I accept both excuses.” Dayvhe nods seriously and then cracks a grin as he drops to the floor.

“You chased the music guy away.” he notes.
“And started who knows what rumours.” you add.

“I’ll troll you both if I ever manage to care about that.” Karkat snorts and you know he means it too.

“He was thinking his ancestor’s thoughts.” Karkat snitches on you.

“I’m FINE.” you insist angrily. It’s not like Dayvhe doesn’t know, he doesn’t need to try to drop you in it like that.

“Are you? Do you need to go back?” Dayvhe asks, suddenly not joking and suddenly very on point.

“No.” you say hotly and you’re aware that people nearby are watching and pretending they’re not. You can feel your face starting to burn.

Karkat glances at Dayvhe and all friendly joking and rivalry is gone. You guess that Karkat is trying to impart some significant information through facial expression alone but you don’t know what it might be. You don’t have much chance to work it out as he suddenly turns on his heel and marches back to your table and starts loudly arguing with Jayded and John about something, drawing stares. People are staring at him now, not you.

“I’m not going back because something’s wrong.” you say bitterly.

“I just want to be sure-” Dayvhe tries.

“But I’m going.” you interrupt him.

Dayvhe’s mouth opens slightly but then he just nods and offers his hand. You take it, sloting your fingers together and pull him out onto the street with you. You could find somewhere else to go but you don’t really want to, you think being out is kind of spoilt for you this evening. Who else is sick and tired of your mercurial feelings? Is it just you? Probably not!

You look around at Dayvhe who is not exactly expressionless but rather he is passive. His hand is in yours and he’s just waiting to see where you’re going to go. He’s not showing concern for you because you hate the idea that you might need that kind of looking after or that you might have been part of enough of a scene back there and concern would imply that. He’s not directing you back to where you’re staying because you’re about to have some kind of meltdown because you don’t want to be this burden and you know that’s why you’ve been so keen to be helpful, as a way of proving that you’re not a drain.

You know you need looking after, you’re a troll so of course you do. You know he does, Karkat does, everyone does. But you also feel like if he acted like you needed attending for every little thing you’d bite him out of sheer frustration. And- and he’s NOT DOING IT. He’s not acting that way, he’s letting you lead. Because he knows you that well.

All the frustration and defensiveness drains out of you, leaving you feeling more than a little stupid for all of that. He’s just trying to help, and he obviously is doing that isn’t he?

“You didn’t even say anything.” you protest.

“...Sorry?” Dayvhe says, sounding confused.

“You just stood there and I had this whole jangled stupid shitfit about this whole thing in my head and now there’s nothing wrong and I just feel kind of dumb but fine. You didn’t even do anything, you just stood there and it just fixed itself. It’s like when people complain to me their husktops aren’t working and I go stand by them so they can show me the problem and they magically start working
“That sounds like you giving me a lot of credit for you working shit out on your own.” Dayvhe says slyly.

“Gross, now you’re being nice about that too. Grow some personality flaws already.” you complain as you shove him away.

“Well I am an unrepentant clothing thief.” he says thoughtfully.

“That’s more endearing to mildly annoying.” you counter.

“You say I snore sometimes.” he adds.

“Yeah, well, so does Karkat. These days it’s weird sleeping without the noise.” you shrug.

“I also make great sandwiches that no one appreciates.” Dayvhe continues.

Oh no. You remember that sandwich. The one that left you needing mouthwash just from kissing him goodbye. It’s not like it’s the only sandwich like that he’s made either though that was certainly the most heinous. It would be inaccurate to say that Dayvhe doesn’t understand about foods that shouldn’t go together, no one ignorant could make choices that terrible that consistently.

“I changed my mind, you’re a monster.” you amend quickly.

“No way, no take backs. I’m perfect, I want it in writing yo. Gonna frame that.” Dayvhe teases you, backing you a little further into the street.

“I didn’t say perfect.” you point out and reach out to flick him in the nearest horn with your free hand.

“I’m sure I can get you to say it.” Dayvhe grins.

Hey people are staring again. OH BOY YOU WONDER WHY.

“You’re impossible. Both of you are, I swear.” you mutter and pull him off of the ground and grab hold of him as you fly off. You’re kind of lazy in your flight back, you’re not really in a rush.

“Hey, I have a question.” Dayvhe says as you drift through the sky. You make a curious noise, trusting that Dayvhe will ramble on with his question without more input from you.

“When we flew the first time, when you took me to the coast so I could fight Cal…” Dayvhe starts. He pauses and looks at you then carefully pushes away so that you’re just floating him near you as you fly both of you on.

“Yeah?” you prompt him.

“Well, this. You can fly people just fine without touching them but you held me close to you to fly but you didn’t need to, did you?” he asks.

“I-” you hesitate, “when you fly very fast wind resistance picks up and we were going pretty fast. I wanted to get you there as soon as you needed, remember? So you have to shield for it, smaller shields are easier and safer to make than bigger ones so closer was better.”

“Sollux Captor, you were the most powerful psionic on Alternia and you may damn well be the most powerful one on this planetoid too. You nearly wrenched a ship from outer space. Don’t try to tell
me you couldn’t make a shield for two people this far apart.” Dayvhe says very firmly.

“I could have, but- I mean it’s not like I was thinking about it like that. It was easier to do less and it lined up with having you closer which I obviously wanted, you know I already liked you. So I wasn’t creepily trying to get you closer by scheming for it but I wasn’t exactly sad at the chance, you know?” you say in your very weak defense.

“Well, if it helps,” Dayvhe says and reaches for you so you pull him close again, “I thought about it a lot afterwards.”

“How blatantly pale they were for each other.” Dayvhe says simply.

There’s no denying the feelings that Psiionic has, no way in hell. He is as pale as the fresh fallen snow for the guy.

“If you start going on about some Captor and Strydr pale fate Karkat might just explode from the sheer weight of romance tropes you just dropped on this building. Hundreds will be crushed to death or vapourised. Can you face that, Dayvhe?” you ask.
“Oh no, fuck that. That’s not what I’m saying.” Dayvhe insists.

He falls silent and runs his fingers down the seam of your shirt on the side which feels nice damnit but you don’t like when Dayvhe is quiet like this, it doesn’t mean good things.

“He knew about his psionics when I didn’t, but his seem stronger than mine even then. I get how much it sucks, feeling like you don’t know if someone really likes you or if you’re just making them.” he says all soft and vulnerable. You try to get a look at him but he’s not separating from your chest to look at you.

“It seems to me that any refusal to be pale was coming from my ancestor, not yours. I mean Psiionic said that now he was in your head it was proof that his feelings were real, not something Dahvid made him feel. I had the same conversation with Karkat about if he wanted to still be with me after he learned about what I can do, or the conversation we had about you being immune. And it sounded like Psiionic offered to try to kill Cal just like you did. It’s a lot of the same.” Dayvhe continues.

“It’s not the same, you’re not the same as him.” you insist and Dayvhe sits up and drags his hands through his hair, looking stressed.

“No, not the same exactly. But enough that I can squint, look sideways, and kind of get things. You took Dionte because he was the closest you could get to someone he cares about, compared to who he took from you and everyone who came to rescue, but I don’t think that’s right. I know they weren’t in a quadrant, which is good because that’d be as gross as me and Dirkka, but Dionte’s the only guy who isn’t cuddlevoodoo-able. Or that was what he was before Cal died. He didn’t have to worry that things with him weren’t real, but with everyone else it’s likely that things aren’t real.” Dayvhe points out.

“I think he’s doing fine.” you snort and gesture your hands to indicate the entire planetoid around you.

“Really?” Dayvhe asks.

“Because when Psiionic checked out and he caught your body I got to watch him realise that he’d just had what might be the last conversation he’d ever have with someone who genuinely cared about him. I got to take my passed out moirail back and watch as my ancestor sobbed like a child, a- a sad and lonely little child.” Dayvhe adds a little sharply.

“Are you sympathising with him?!” you demand, sitting up a little straighter.

“No. Well, sort of.” Dayvhe hesitates.

You want to argue with him. Dahvid took Dayvhe from you along with Karkat and half of your friends! He sent adults to your planet to attack you, he personally harmed you and Dayvhe is sympathising with this monster? You know Psiionic sees things differently to you when it comes to Dahvid but you differ there. And though it’s not like you think Dahvid storms through his mansion with a billowing cape and cackling laughter as he plans to ruin the lives of kids like you and maybe murder some barkbeast pups but he’s still bad.

“You’ve got that look on, I know what you’re going to say. But can you just let me say my thing first and then you can say how I’m wrong if you still think I am? Just don’t say anything?” he asks and gets up. He’s doing a tense little circuit of the floor back and forth.

He’s absolutely wrong, there’s no sympathy or pity to be found anywhere in the vicinity of his
ancestor and you know it, no matter what Psiionic thinks or what Dayvhe thinks. But given how sure he is about how right he is and how wrong any other opinion is, you’re willing to let Dayvhe go on this. What is it Terezi would say about this? Giving someone enough rope to hang themselves with? Yeah.

You give him an expectant and notably silent look and get to see the moment Dayvhe catches onto the fact that you’re not talking. He beams and throws himself into your lap.

“I know it’ll be rambling but I have a point, I promise.” he vows.

You stay pointedly silent and wait.

“Alright, upfront,” Dayvhe says and holds his hands up, “everything he did after Cal died was shit. The actors getting sent there, what they did, the music, taking us, the orders he put on. All shit. Not going to say it’s not.”

Oh, good, the position that you hold. You’re glad he agrees. But you’re staying quiet so you figure you could show your approval differently. You reach up and sink your fingers into his hair, combing through it gently. Dayvhe smiles, soft and small and continues talking.

“I just… after I saw that after Psiionic left I feel like I understood something about him. When I ran off and was trying to figure out how this shitty cuddlevoods thing worked I felt so shitty. I’d hurt people, I wanted to be alone so I couldn’t do that again but I also didn’t, you know?” he says.

“My ancestor had Dionte and maybe they had the most bitching mutual friendship ever, because it obviously wasn’t quadranted.” Dayvhe starts and you shake your head.

“You don’t actually have to be silent the whole time.” Dayvhe points out rather tartly but he asked you to be quiet so you figure you could show your approval differently. You reach up and sink your fingers into his hair, combing through it gently. Dayvhe smiles, soft and small and continues talking.

“It wasn’t a good relationship?” Dayvhe asks and you nod.

“But he was really upset about it.” he points out and you shrug.

“You don’t actually have to be silent the whole time.” Dayvhe points out rather tartly but he asked you to be quiet so you figure you could show your approval differently. You reach up and sink your fingers into his hair, combing through it gently. Dayvhe smiles, soft and small and continues talking.

“Alright, quiet Sollux, fine. There’s just so many parallels, you know? Him and Psii, me and you. Not to mention the thing with Dionte compared to Dirkka. And, like, what if the night I met Dirkka I just hadn’t gone out? I was only little when he met me, little and basically feral. I didn’t get people then at all, Dirkka taught me everything about normal troll social interaction.” Dayvhe explains. You don’t laugh, but it’s almost like the void where your derision about Dirkka’s abilities to be a socially normal troll is loud enough to attract Dayvhe’s suspicion. You remain the picture of innocence and so he continues.

“I think Dahvid’s psionics are stronger than mine, maybe some of my strength got shunted into the way better telekinesis kind. Then again maybe if I’d spent more time with Cal he would have eventually trained me and explained shit like I can only assume he did with Dahvid. Just imagine that me, though. Going out able to make people like me but having no idea of how people really work and probably still wanting people to like me because we’re a goddamn social species, of course you would.” he rants.

“And if I’d met you I know I would have wanted you, even if I was too stupid to realise how I felt right away.” he continues and this time you do laugh. Or at least it’s a wheeze of amusement that you muffle against his chest.

“Yeah, laugh it up. Just like I didn’t realise, I know. Har har. My point is we got our shit together
and became moirails, they never did. That’s got to suck. Unrealised pale longing for that many sweeps? It’s got to kill. And then seeing the friends he’d made die the way they did, getting stuck here and having Psiionic stuck up there in hell? If I was stuck down here and you were stuck up there I think I’d lose my sanity too, especially if I had a basement filled with our dead friends!” he says, his voice starting to edge onto hysteria.

“I can’t say that if I had his circumstances then I wouldn’t have done all that too!” he adds and, no, you’ve finally had enough.

You flip him so he’s on his back on the loungeplank and one handedly pin his arms out of the way so he can’t distract you. You take his shades off and stare down at him.

“You’re Dayvhe, not Dahvid.” you tell him firmly.

“But if-”

“You can’t say ‘but what if everything was different’ because then you may as well just say ‘if Dahvid lived Dahvid’s life he’d do what Dahvid did!’” you parrot at him.

“That’s not what I said.” Dayvhe protests.

“It basically is! If everything about you was different you wouldn’t be you, it’s a pointless idea. You’re not changing just a thing or two, it’s everything. I can say ‘oh but if I was caught between flush and pale for my moirail and someone else interfered with that and also I was a massive genocidal bigot and a dereanged fishtroll then I’d resort to murder too so that’s totally justified!’ Because that’s not me anymore, that’s Eridan! Saying ‘if I was exactly this person I would do exactly what they did’ explains jack shit about anything!” you snap.

“Obviously I’m just- I can see why he thinks what he does is all.” Dayvhe insists.

“So what if you can understand it? He tried to kill our friends, he-” you say.

“I already said I hate him for that!” Dayvhe snaps at you and his claws scrape your fingers where you’re holding him still.

“You’re letting him off too easy as well.” you add and Dayvhe gives you a suspicious look.

“You were slow in noticing pale stuff, Dirkka’s bad with new people, Hal’s just… Hal and I blame Dirkka for that. Dionte was weird from the start and your ancestor has to often think about how other people feel before he gets it. None of you have the easiest time with this shit and it’s Cal’s fault, I can understand you empathising with that. I can as well even, it’s not like I don’t already hate Cal and that at least wasn’t Dahvid’s fault.” you admit.

“See!” Dayvhe insists and wriggles in your grip but nope. Besides he’s not really trying to escape, you know which of the two of you is physically stronger and it sure as shit isn’t you.

“But he writes, Dayvhe. He writes movies and scripts that talk about morality, that understand how people feel, that show people getting their feelings hurt and doing the right thing. He’s not incapable of understanding, even if it’s harder for him. Even IF he really didn’t understand that it was wrong he chose not to think about it and work it out and I gotta tell you that Psiionic was really damn surprised and mad that he had to go remedial ethics school of ‘don’t force kids to kill themselves, it’s bad’ on his ass. What he wanted to do was more important than us. I don’t care how much sympathy you feel for him, it’s shit and you know it. You said it yourself.” you tell him.

“But if I’m so much like him how do I know I won’t end up doing that kind of shit with my
“Well which is it? He’s terrible and you don’t want to be him or you think you might be him so let’s make it seem like he’s not that bad? You can’t have both.” you point out. Dayvhe glares up at you but you know you’re right and he does too.

“I would never let you get like that, not that I think for a moment you would. When you worried about influencing us you got away from everyone. You did it like a dumbass but you cared more about us than what you wanted. I would stop you if I had to but you don’t need it because you’re better than that.” you promise him, probably a little repetitively but you’re getting the feeling he needs that reassurance right now.

“I- ugh. I know I just- it’s so weird ok? Why aren’t you this weird about your ancestor?” Dayvhe whines.

“Because my ancestor’s never personally fucked me over. He didn’t want to be in my head either and he made it clear it shouldn’t happen again even though it’d benefit him. And I’ve had him in my pan, I’ve seen his memories and I keep getting feelings he left behind. He’s just a guy.” you shrug.

“He’s the most powerful psionic in the universe and one of the most historically important people ever, he’s not ‘just a guy’ Sollux.” Dayvhe points out.

“He’s definitely just a guy. He seemed fine but even if it wasn’t, what’s it to me? He’s him, I’m me. But it seems like he was pretty cool, good taste in people for the most part, sucks he’s in that helm. I feel bad for him, that’s all.” you say easily.

“Stop being the well adjusted one, I hate it.” Dayvhe whines petulantly, though you know it’s insincere.

“Well it had to be me sooner or later! It can’t always be Karkat out of the three of us!” you snort.

“I- hey! It’s sometimes me!” Dayvhe protests and you hide your face in his neck so he can’t hear you laughing at him so easily. You don’t think you’re successful.

“Fine, I’ll be the balanced one. I’m going to sort everything out for you with these.” Dayvhe says and nudges the port on your temple with the tip of his nose because you still have his hands.

You shift how your hands are on his and curl up close to him. Yeah, you know he will. Sometimes he needs you to metaphorically sort his head out, sometimes you need him to very literally sort your whole cerebro-spinal system out. Vastly different scales of literal but the same in principle. You’ve got each other.

Chapter End Notes

The musician whose songs I reference is actually totally real and you should absolutely check his work out! I’ve seen him live and it’s lovely stuff, honestly!
https://soundcloud.com/matt-stockl
As promised a lot of stuff gets taken out of your hands. Jayyne and Rohhze jointly get tasked with finding somewhere for you all to live and Dayvhe is the one who gets his ancestor to pay for it all. Dayvhe and Karkat are also the ones finding you docterrorists and the delay is apparently them working with Dirkka, Equius and Hal to secure you only the best. Though when they do settle on a group it’s mainly because they’ve found a bunch of medical professionals who take their jobs seriously enough to chew Hal and Equius out for performing that kind of surgery without the proper qualifications for it. Not that getting an adult was an option open to you at the time but still.

The girls do eventually find you all a top floor of an apartment block with huge windows, it gets remodelled so that there’s a whole bunch of common areas for you all but still you all have spacious private blocks about the size of your old hive in your hivestem. You guess getting construction done on a planet that’s constantly building up realistic sets for movies and taking them apart just as quick is easy.

Distracting you from the whole moving process is the fact that you’re having to go in for all kinds of tests to a big expensive looking hospital, flanked at all times by Karkat and Dayvhe and primarily seen or at least overseen by Docterrorist Feelgood. They’re the doc that you actually have built up some trust with and Dayvhe and Karkat have deemed them a non-negotiable part of this process and basically made them the boss of the whole medical team. You don’t know if this is causing problems with the team but you don’t care.

“We just need you to stay very still, Sollux.” Feelgood says over a speaker as a giant scanner runs over your whole body. It takes its time but when the machine goes back to its start position it’s Karkat and Dayvhe who come to get you with your actual clothes in hand. You’re not the fashionista Kanaya is but even you’re not a fan of cheap medical scrubs. They tell you they’ll write a final medical report, a final surgery plan and then it’s just doing the thing. You even have a date for it already.

Four days time.

You’re understandably preoccupied by this even as you’re looking around your new home.

“Just how much did you spend on this Rohhze?” Vriska asks as she looks through a cabinet at all the glassware and crockery that Rohhze has accumulated for you all. You’re trying to get the washer programmed and half considering tracking down whoever wrote the manual for it so you can slap them with it.
“Not too much, a reasonable amount.” Rohhze answers her airily.

The numbers on the little screen of the washer blink cheerfully and your shoulders drop in relief.

“Finally, that should work now.” you tell the room at large.

“Yeah but are we talking a reasonable amount for normal people or a reasonable amount for a fishtroll?” Vriska scoffs at her.

“Why are you asking? You’re not a normal person, Vriska.” you point out and shut the washer with your hip.

“You say the sweetest things.” Vriska smiles at you with faux sweetness that makes your teeth clench.

“It wasn’t a compliment!” you snap but you’ve already lost this round.

“You’re welcome either way.” Rohhze says in a voice that despite not being a laugh definitely implies laughing at you both. She glides away with smug elegance, damn her.

“Sollux, your medical report arrived.” Dayvhe calls out as he walks around the corner with his husktop in hand.

“Let me see.” Karkat says from the dining table and Dayvhe joins him.

“Unless I’m dying I don’t care what it says.” you tell them both so they start reading without you.

Your eyes drift to Vriska again and you look around quickly to see that within this very large room pretty much everyone else is occupied with other things and no one is paying any attention to the two of you at all. You turn your back on the room and face her properly.

“Hey, uh, I have four days until they do this thing.” you say quietly, kicking her lightly in the knee to get her attention.

“Yeah.” she nods.

“And apparently afterwards the whole resting for a stupidly long length of time is mandatory and my chances of getting out of that with Dayvhe and Karkat around plus everyone else who’d happily snitch on me too… well, yeah I’m stuck there.” you grumble. No one needs weeks of rest. You probably could have used more than you had last time but you were fine.

“Karkat’s got Terezi on retainer for hunting you down if you get up so you’re screwed there.” Vriska grins.

“Well, exactly. So it’s now or a long wait.” you continue.

Vriska gives you a suspicious look and sets down the fancy drinking glass she had been looking at.

“A long wait until what?” she asks, curiosity sparking in her eyes.

You hesitate for a moment but she’s already dating you and if she doesn’t want to go out on an actual date with you then that’s her loss. You don’t need to be insecure so you should stop feeling nervous about this.

“I was thinking about us going on a date. Dinner’s just boring.” you start.
“Snore.” Vriska agrees.

“But I also didn’t want to lean too heavy on something that’s one of our solo strengths. I want to do something fun for both of us. I thought I’d ask first because I don’t want to do something you’re not into, we both know dragging you to something you’re not interested in is negative fun for both of us. Besides, very occasionally you have good and not terrible ideas.” you tease her.

“Such flattery.” Vriska scoffs but that’s not a no.

“We could try to pick something for before I get taken in for this shit.” you say, jerking a thumb towards where Dayvhe and Karkat are reading your medical report.

“Something fun to do before you lose a knife fight with several people at once.” Vriska nods as she fills the fancy glass in her hand up with water.

“That’s the weirdest description of surgery I’ve ever heard but you’re not really wrong.” you concede as you try not to laugh and kind of fail. She raises her glass to you in a sarcastic little toast, making you roll your eyes.

You jump when Karkat suddenly bursts into hysterical laughter behind you. Turning you see that him and Dayvhe are still reading your medical report and Dayvhe’s shoulders are shaking with silent laughter.

“That sure is some phrasing they used.” Dayvhe says in a strangled voice.

“What?” you ask.

“Oh, no, you didn’t want to read this. It’s fine.” Karkat cackles.

“Laughter is concerning. What’d they do?” you ask.

You should have known not to ask, but you did and now Karkat’s face is wearing that most evil of expressions that all sane people who know your best friend know to fear.

“Other anatomical notes of interest:” Karkat begins loudly, “we conducted a full body scan to note the placement of ports but also to look for other unusual biological features that could impact surgery.”

“Hilarious.” you say flatly.

“The patient has MULTIPLE instances of either bifurcation or straight duplication of appendages and even entire organs, though the most interesting of these are located far enough away from the surgical site to present no problem. It may be of interest to find out how this kind of duplication affects the patients personal life, however.” Karkat reads aloud with a salacious expression on his face. You can hear Vriska choke on her water a little behind you.

“KARKAT WHAT THE HELL?!?” you demand loudly and when you catch the sound of Vriska half choking on her drink and half spitting it across the counter you realise that what you just did was take some dubious wording and accidentally confirm the implication.

Which Karkat knew about already.

There is no way your skin is a dark enough grey to hide how yellow you must be going from embarrassment. Vriska is still coughing when Dayvhe takes pity on you and talks.
“They’re mostly talking about your tongue, your horns and so on. Also your breathing system is slightly bifurcated, I mean more than normal because people have two breathsacs, duh. But it explains why when you purr it’s that sweet little harmony double tone with yourself that I like.”

Dayvhe interrupts.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” you mumble, your face still hot.

“Oh, maybe my musical ear’s more in tune to hear it. Whatever. They also mentioned you have two sugar processing organs instead of one, which maybe is why you lose weight so damn fast or maybe that’s more of a psionic thing, I don’t know. They wanna watch that when you’re recovering is all. So, slightly suggestive wording aside, that’s all they included on that as relevant. Karkat, stop giggling like a tool.” Dayvhe says and elbows your treasonous best friend.

You’re going to fry Karkat’s husktop, you don’t care.

“Yeah, I’ll-” Vriska pauses to cough a little, dragging your attention back to her and away from Karkat and Dayvhe.

“Tell you what, I’ll plan this. I’ll just tell you when to show up.” Vriska offers.

“Alright…” you say a little uncertainly. You’d thought you’d be coming up with ideas together but you guess not?

“Oh, you don’t think I can?” Vriska challenges you, getting into your face.

“I didn’t say that, go on and do whatever it is you’re going to do if you’re so sure of yourself.” you tell her.

“I will! I’ll tell you what to do and when, you’ll see!” she declares, walking off with a dramatic swish of her hair.

“You’ve got a lot of practice at that, but fine you can plan it!” you call after her but she’s gone now.

“What was that all about?” Dayvhe asks, but you can tell he’s still reading the medical document as he talks.

“Date.” you answer.

“Before all of this?” Dayvhe asks in surprise. A reasonable question.

“See, you’re welcome. You get a date because I get you to accidentally tell her about your-” Karkat starts to say with a shit eating grin but you pelt him in the head with a wet and machine grease covered dish rag that you’d been using earlier when you were fiddling with the washer and trying to get it working.

Because the basic things about you and Karkat haven’t changed since you were tiny kids Karkat still feels guilty before too long and seeks you out.

“Hey, Sollux.” Karkat says softly later that evening. You’re sat in the corner bit of one of the big square loungeplanks in the common entertainment room with Jayyne and Roxxie. You’re trying to work out why her husktop is glitching and you suspect that it’s not a virus like she assumed but rather she’s accidentally messed about with the drivers by badly following something Dirkka or Roxxie has said offhandedly.

“Karkat.” you reply as you frown at the husktop and click into another directory.
“Glad you both know who each other are!” John heckles from the other corner of the sofa. He, Dayvhe, Nepeta and Jayded are all playing some card game together.

“Shut up John, no one asked you for your inane thoughts!” Karkat snaps out reflexively.

“Ooooh, someone’s in a bad mood. Or maybe not, it’s so hard to tell with you Karkat.” Jayded teases him.

“I’m just the best kismesis, I don’t get sniffy when other people insult my most hated spade. And it’d be so sad if I did because everyone loves to dunk on Karkat. Also I have a straight of flush, read em and weep.” Dayvhe says triumphantly setting his cards down.

“Ah-ah, full quadrant Empresses, eat THAT.” John catches him and sets his own cards down.

“I’m sure he’s cheating.” Nepeta mutters, Jayded nods sagely.

“Sollux, can we talk?” Karkat says awkwardly.

“We are talking.” you point out and cut a file to paste it into a different place.

“I don’t mind if-” Jayyne tries but you keep going.

“Also I’m busy.” you add.

“I’m really sorry. I thought I was being funny but that wasn’t cool and I know you’d said before about- but, no, I’m sorry past me is an idiot. I mean, present me is an idiot as well. I’m a long reaching continuity through time of unbelieveable toolishness and I don’t know why any troll would ever associate with me. I hate that I thought opening my mouth for a joke that dumb was a good idea, especially given who you were talking to. Yeah, great job Karkat, just try to jokingly blab important shit about your best friend when his kismesis is right there, that’s a good move. I’m such a waste of oxygen, I swear.” Karkat rushes to say in a self depreciating tidal wave.

You click and the husktop begins to restart as you hand it back to Jayyne, you’re confident that should fix her problem. With that done you look up at Karkat. His stupid face is twisted with worry and regret and his claws are sunk into the fabric of his sweater.

“Ok.” you tell him flatly.

“Are we still friends?” Karkat asks. The old magic words you two have always used and you can’t keep all of the smile from your face even though you get most of it. Karkat needs to feel at least a little bad for all that.

“Of course we’re still friends.” you tell him. Karkat flings himself over the back of the loungeplank so he lands right on you and crushes you into a hug.

“I’m such a dumbass, I’m sorry. You’re my best friend.” Karkat insists more or less right into your ear. He squeezes you tight and you squeeze him back. There’s no room for holding grudges with you two, you’re both too inclined to be shitty to be able to do that and still be friends.

“Ohh, you two are adorable!” Roxxie croons and you tip your head back to see her photographing you both on her palmhusk. She takes another picture and you can’t help but note she’s stuck glitter stickers on the back of it already, though you don’t know where she got them from.

“I still don’t get how this thing works but they are cute.” John agrees with a laugh.
“Do you also understand that if I find extra cards up your sleeves that me and Nepeta are going to dangle you off the roof, John?” Jayded asks sweetly. Nepeta makes unflinching eye contact with John and cracks her knuckles.

Huh, and here you thought that only Equius could sweat that much, but maybe it’s a blueblood thing. Or maybe John’s just suddenly very nervous about being caught cheating at cards, who knows?

Karkat is forgiven, of course, and things go back to normal as the days to your surgery tick down. The day before it you figure that Vriska has forgotten about your date or couldn’t come up with an idea in time and didn’t want to admit it. This is what you think, with some disappointment, until she breaks into your block before you’re even out of your coon yet. She marches in like she owns the place, her hair swishing behind her and it’s unusually shiny you think, and to top all of that off she’s wearing a full formal black suit.

“What.” you say, peering at her over the edge of the coon.

“We’re going on a date!” she declares.

“My surgery is-” you groan but she interrupts.

“Tomorrow, and until then you’re all mine. I have everything planned and I even brought you clothes so you won’t show me up.” Vriska says, throwing a bag with a hanger in it at your desk chair.

“You can’t just-”

“I can and I am, you have fifteen minutes!” Vriska says loudly and exits your room.

You slide a little lower in your coon and open up a message on your palmhusk.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TA: vrii2ka ju2t 2howed up iin my block.
TA: and by 2howed up ii mean broke iiintwo.
TG: i guess pitch dates are like that huh
TA: waiit how diid you know 2he wa2 takiing me on a date now
TA: oh waiit you knew 2he wa2 2uppo2ed to ii gu22 iiit’2 a 2en2iible gue22
TG: that and she told me last night she was taking you out all day today
TA: what
TG: wait did she only just tell you i thought you knew
TA: NOPE
TG: surprise?
TA: ii gue22 ii had better go get ready huh?
TG: guess so
TG: just remember we gotta go pretty early tomorrow morning cause they gotta see you before they actually start the surgery at midday
TA: ye2 thank2 you’ve only remiinded me about two hundred tiime2.
TG: shut up
TG: <>
TA: later <>

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

You shower and get ready quickly, simmering with annoyance that this wasn’t planned last minute.
but she just chose to spring it on you without any notice. It’s a frustrating move that’s not especially damaging even if it is irksome, an interesting pitch opening gambit as it were. The last thing you do is check out the clothes that she brought you. They’ve obviously been made by Kanaya and they’re almost entirely black. The bottom half isn’t too different from Vriska’s own suit, just cut differently to fit you but the top is in the line of skintight port skirting kind that she’s been making you lately. The shirt’s almost completely black, the sleeves long and the neck high. Your sign is conspicuously inconspicuous, just a small stitched detail where neck meets shoulder. Thinking of it you can’t say that Vriska’s sign was really all that visible either. That’s interesting for sure.

You dress and try to straighten out your hair a little before going to leave your block. Examining the door you can only guess that Vriska picked the lock, which really begs the point about why the hell you have one if even still now people will just ignore it.

Opening the door you find Vriska leaning against the wall opposite your door coolly, or at least trying very hard to look cool.

“Were you just waiting there the whole time?” you ask, shutting the door behind you.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Vriska says haughtily.

“That’s how questions work, yes.” you point out.

“I don’t have time for your silly questions, come on.” Vriska says, turning and walking off. You do actually want to go on this date so you’re stuck following her.

You don’t eat before you leave and Vriska doesn’t tell you where you’re going, evidently this whole thing is supposed to be a surprise but you’re game for it. You’ve even figured something out as you walk along.

“People can’t see our signs so easily so they’re not staring so much.” you say when the idea occurs.

“As much as I love your glowing fanclub I’d rather not deal with them.” Vriska grumbles.

“They’re not my fanclub, they’re Psiionic’s. Also I don’t think they’d like you calling them that.” you argue.

“Whatever, we’re here.” Vriska says and pulls you towards a tall building. A man on the door perks up when he sees her.

“Ah, Ms. Serket, welcome back. If you just come with-” the man says, recognising her right away. He picks up menus but Vriska marches past him and plucks them from his hand.

“Don’t worry, I know the way. I know where we’re sitting.” she tells him with a backwards shout. She wraps her cool hand around your wrist and pulls you into an elevator.

“Is this an actual restaurant? Why is it upstairs?” you ask and try to take a menu from Vriska but she’s playing keep away with it.

“Of course it’s an actual restaurant.” she tuts at you.

“It’s breakfast.” you say slowly.

“It’s a date.” she retorts like you’re stupid.

The elevator stops and the doors slide open. Dodging another attempt to take the menu from her she
steps confidently outside but when you go to follow her you freeze. This place is absurdly fancy, there’s a chandelier on the ceiling, there’s tablecloths more expensive than your wardrobe. This isn’t just highblood expensive, this is fishtroll expensive!

But then a guy laughs and your attention snaps over with kneejerk fear that he’s laughing at seeing someone as warm as you in here only to see that the man is rust. He has a vaguely familiar face and the people he’s with, though higher on the hemospectrum than him, are clearly trying to impress and sway him. In fact around you the place is a pretty even blend of the whole hemospectrum. It’s expensive and fancy to be here it seems but you’re not going to get culled for setting foot in the place.

Still a touch uneasy you follow Vriska who is walking calmly through the place to a table by a curved window. Her kicking your chair out and sitting in the other with a smug grin is enough to make you properly focus on her and not the other people.

“You’ve been here before?” you say, sitting down and glancing out of the window at a pretty nice high up view of the city.

“Had to check it out first.” Vriska shrugs like it’s nothing.

“This is a lot… you didn’t have to…” you try to get your point across without outright asking her how the hell the two of you are going to pay for this but her assurance that everything is fine is bulletproof enough that just asking her is hard.

“It’s important preparation for later. Oh, here.” she says and passes the menu to you. You’re kind of lost so you just settle on something, noting that at some point after she took the menus off of the guy at the door she’s run a thick blue marker over all of the prices so you can’t read them. You’d be more annoyed but honestly it’s better that you don’t know, it’d probably just either make you annoyed or freak you out.

A finely dressed waitress comes by and takes your orders and pours you what is quite simply the best coffee you’ve had in your entire damn life. You remind Vriska that you’re just going in for surgery, you’re not dying tomorrow and she just kicks you in the shin for saying it.

You’re going to excuse yourself with the strangeness of the building and Vriska’s distracting company that it took you so long to notice something so obvious.

“The building’s moving.” you say in surprise.

“Yeah, it spins. We can see the whole city from here over breakfast. Like, see, there? That’s where the city’s water system is, they use it for movies for flood scenes and the like but when it’s not in use they run it through fake rivers in a kind of club pattern, see?” Vriska says and taps on the glass with her metal finger and you follow where she’s pointing to see that she’s right.

As it happens you can only do that now because Dayvhe finally managed to corner one of the docterrorists into getting your eyes tested at the hospital and some new glasses made for you. But thanks to that you can see the glimpses of water Vriska’s pointing out. The waitress sets your food down, which oh wow it smells great.

“What are we doing next then? You said later so I assume there is a later.” you ask and stab a fancy looking vegetable with some meat onto your fork and then take an enthusiastic bite out of it. Oh fuck this is good, can you eat nothing but this now forever?

“Well, I suppooooooooose I can tell you.” Vriska concedes, waving her knife dismissively.
You eat and wait for her to fill you in, you’re not going to beg her for information or exposition. That’s what she wants.

“I’d thought about something that we could do that’d let us compete with each other where neither had an advantage, like you said. But then I realised that idea was stupid and bad and I came up with my thing. Pick something that has things about it we’re both good at and then we team up and curbstomp everyone else.” Vriska grins.

“Interesting.” you nod. You’re going to call a lot of bickering about who takes the credit for this but you’re curious nonetheless.

“Thank you, I’m glad you think so.” she preens. You give her a flat look and the next time she goes to reach for food on her plate you psionically jerk it away.

“So what are we doing?” you press her as she steals her plate back.

“We are solving a murder.” she says gleefully.

“What.”

Vrisa rolls her eyes and pulls a leaflet from her jacket and hands it to you, which really she could have done in the beginning but this is Vriska. As you read you understand that it’s a game. Not quite like FLARP, there’s no combat but it’s all puzzle solving to work out who committed this fictional murder. You’ve got to rush around the city, solve clues and pick the right guy at the end. It’s a nice mesh of her interest in roleplay games and your more focused interest in puzzles and twists in your videogames. Neither of you have done this before and you’re both equally unfamiliar with the city so which of you is stronger in your team when it comes to unravelling the mystery is going to be a pretty even competition. Plus you both as a team get to show up a bunch of adults who are also playing the same game and neither of you are ever cool with not beating everyone else competing.

“They seem to have a thing for puns is the only downside.” Vriska warns you.

“It can’t be that bad. This looks like fun.” you tell her happily and continue eating you breakfast as the two of you look over the city and try to guess where you might get sent.

It is EXACTLY that bad.

You stand at Vriska’s side in a rough group of adults who are clearly on their days off watching a man dressed up as an old fashioned movie detectorturer with everything from the trilby hat, the cigarette (fake), and the teal button up coat. He is bright eyed and enthusiastic as his assistant hands out booklets to you all.

“Welcome, welcome. We’re all so glad to have you here, I am the chief detectorturer and honestly I am so glad to have a new influx of detectiviolators working under me to solve this case. Just don’t ask about the previous ones. But I am saddened to report that we’ve been informed of the death of the fantastic singer Ms. Beltin Ballad who was due to perform here this very evening!” the ‘detectorturer’ informs you all.

The puns are going to stretch into names now? Oh god. You look at Vriska but she just shrugs because she did warn you. A bunch of the adults nearby are playing along and gasping in faux horror at her death.

“I know, I know, isn’t it terrible? But I can tell you the three suspects that we have narrowed it down to and it is only one of these three and I can tell you how she died!” the detectorturer continues eagerly.
“Ms. Ballad was performing her warm up act on stage, very strange, she was doing this at 8am this morning. She was discovered by staff here when they heard her suddenly stop singing only ten minutes in, they came in to find her dangling from the ceiling in electrical wiring completely dead! But who would do such a thing?” the man continues and as silly as it is you’re finding this you can’t help but mentally note down those times just so that you’ll have more information for other puzzle pieces to slot into later.

“Firstly this gentleman that you see here in your case notes is her sound manager The Boommykh.” the detectorturer says and there are several groans around you.

“Thank you.” the detectorturer grins.

“He claims he wasn’t on site yet but I have to wonder why Ms. Ballad would practice without everything set up as it would be on the night. Very strange. Yet he does have an alibi, his moirail says he was fixing her sound system at home before heading to work so maybe we have the wrong man.” the detectorturer continues.

The man goes on to the two other suspects, a professional model who owns the building weirdly enough. Her name is Shuttr Stockh. Then her backup singer who seems to have a grudge against her, Accahh Pellah. The model was in the building and you can’t see a motive for her killing the singer but you’re going to guess that the backup wanted the stage instead.

However, to Vriska’s surprise, they want a team name from you and a picture but seeing as you didn’t know they go around to the other groups first so you have about three minutes to come up with a name.

“We could… do something thematic.” Vriska suggests.

“There’s enough puns, don’t you think?” you point out.

“Well it’s not like we can just put a spade on there like yeah that’s why we’re here.” she snorts.

“At least that wouldn’t be punnable though, or get warped by a typing quirk.” you say thoughtfully. It’s a shitty move especially as the guy’s probably gonna read them out but it’ll also be FUNNY for you so there’s that.

“Oh yeah? Give me that.” Vriska grins and snatches the palmhusk from your hand where you were supposed to be digitally filling the form in for them. She types and turns it around to face you showing you…

<8>

“You’re the worst person I’ve ever known.” you tell her flatly and snatch it back deleting it all.

“You’re just jealous you can’t do that!” she sneers.

“I absolutely can if I ignore all the rules of what looks good or makes sense like you just did.” you scoff and show her yours.

<2>

It makes even less sense than hers and you hate it.

“Well we should choose then. Mine or yours.” Vriska states with a nod.
Oh no.

That’s an either or question. The best answer to an either or question is ALWAYS both, it just is.

You erase it all and type again, showing it to her.

>8<><2<

“That… that’s the most absurd, ugly, stupid thing I’ve ever seen and I hate it. We absolutely have to have that.” she insists and with a grin you hit send. The assistant guy comes around to check your name, giggles at it and motions for you and Vriska to stand together for your picture. The whole thing is just so silly that you think you actually messed up and laughed when they were trying to take your picture, or if not actually then it was right after.

Finally when you’re guided to the section of your book with the map there’s a whole eight clue trails, Vriska is delighted, and the start points for them are on the map already but where they go from there is up to you to figure out. You’d think this would be a disadvantage for the two of you what with not knowing the city but your google-fu powers are unrivalled and you’re totally capable of finding out where to go next.

You spend literal hours rushing around the city, talking to actors who give you information, following posted website links to faked bank reports for certain people. For example it turns out that The Boommykh was in financial trouble and hiding it from his moirail, he’d even been taking money from loan sharks.

“Tch, ‘The Boommykh’ they may have well just called him The Soundguy.” Vriska tuts at one point.

“Don’t give them ideas. Does this clue sound like it’s to do with a waterway to you?” you say and hold it up to her. It’s a riddle about water that comes and goes, which makes you think of the ocean which you suppose could be a business around here but after what Vriska told you about what they do with the water in the city you think that might be it.

“Oh! Yes! Come on!” she grins victoriously and rushes off, pulling you by the arm.

You grab street food on the way and argue about whether the locks the riddle talks about mean something akin to the metaphorical unlocking of the clue or lock in the sense of a thing for boats to use on the water, you doubt they’d have that but as Vriska points out it might be part of a movie set that’s being taken down or due to be. These campaigns only run for a week or two so a temporary thing isn’t out of the question.

“It can’t be Shuttr Stockh, she wanted to sell the venue and this is bad business.” you argue as you walk to the railings by the waterway, trying to keep your eyes open for clues.

“Maybe The Boommykh was being paid for it to settle his debt?” Vrisa suggests and walks up and down looking at everything.

You swallow the last of your food and put your trash in your sylladex because you’re not an animal and look around as well. Normally with a clue there’s a little sticker or card on something with the logo of the mystery and then something to scan or read or download from it. But you can’t see a thing.

“Lock…” Vriska says slowly. She gasps suddenly and lunges for you, shoving you to the side. You just catch yourself and see that she’s crouched down staring at a padlock on the railing. It’s not a big deal, it’s a thing people in quadrants do sometimes. Carve their name on a lock with their quadrant
symbol and lock it to a railing. Only when Vriska turns this over it’s in the purple colour all the mystery clues have been on and there’s three numbers on it.

“Five, six, nine?” Vriska reads.

Does that mean anything? An address for anything you’ve been to already? A number of money or anything? What about something mathematical?

“There’s another!” Vriska exclaims, pointing down the railing a way.

You fly over to it quick as anything and turn it over to reveal more numbers.

“There’s another!” Vriska shouts.

Soon enough you have five padlocks with numbers on and little symbols. It takes a bit of going over your earlier clues but you spot there was a cartoon on a fake newspaper with those symbols and when you order it the thing looks very like a business audio line number.

“Call it!” Vriska urges you.

You dial the number on your palmhusk and put it onto speaker. Both of you are kneeling on the ground facing each other and so close that Vriska’s almost sitting on your leg. The pair of you are stone silent as you listen, it’s a recording that plays when you call the number. A woman with a raspy voice talking to a man, he’s asking her if she feels better today and she’s saying her voice is still terrible but it’s better with him around. She says his name but it’s his hatchname and you only get the first. Mykruf.

“Who was she? She can’t have been Accahh Pellah, not with that voice. Not unless something happened and she killed so that she didn’t have to perform.” Vriska theorises.

“No, that name… Mykruf…” you mumble as you try to think.

“Have we heard it already?” she asks.

“No, just… these people like puns. I’m thinking from a game making point of view. Mykruf… Microruf… Microphone?” you say as you stretch the name out.

“Booomykh! He has a moirail and he was at her place and she’s his alibi but if she knows something then maybe she’d lie!” Vriska cheers with glee and in her excitement she kisses you. You’re beaming as you rush to the next clue together.

When the mystery finally runs out of time you’ve discovered that Booomykh’s moirail used to be a singer until the murder victim deliberately gave her something to drink that trashed her throat. You also find out that Accahh Pellah was only going to get her own solo act if this show made enough money, which now it won’t so you can rule her out. It ends up being a slight guess but you and Vriska are confident in accusing Booomykh of the murder and it turns out you were right!

The overly enthusiastic detectorturer congratulates his ‘youngest detectiviators’ for cracking the case and maybe if you keep this good work out you too can make the illustrious rank of detectorturer like him! You also get your photo back with a silly news framing about the case you cracked. Your dumb team name is printed in a banner on the top and to your dismay you can see that you and Vriska have your arms around each other, her laughing and you doing the stupid happy tongue thing.

As much as you appreciated the very fancy breakfast you’re kind of happy that dinner ends up being just burgers grabbed from a street market, eaten at an outdoor improv show in a park. Usually
something you’d stay the hell away from but these are comedians you know from TV who were evidently just hanging out together between projects and put on a show. It’s set up so they’ve got broad categories of what they’re going to do but everything is designed so the suggestions come from the audience. The part at the end where one of the comedians has to go away as you all come up with a really complex job title done in a really weird place and time so you have this elaborate thing that they then have to mime to him when he gets back is AMAZING. It’s sobbing with laughter kind of funny. Vriska didn’t even plan this, you just stumbled on it by some measure of incredible luck.

It’s late when you both get back, really late. You’re kind of relieved that no one’s waiting up for you and you wonder which sensible person suggested not doing that.

“So, basically…” Vriska says quietly as the two of you walk down the hallway, “I win at this.”

You want to argue out of reflex but, well…

“Actually, yeah. I’m going to have to work really hard to outdo you on this. I will, naturally, but you’re not making that an easy one up are you?” you concede and Vriska beams at your words.

“Go big or go hive.” she says sagely.

The two of you stop outside the door to her block and you wonder if you’re supposed to do the stereotypical romantic post date goodbye or something, you could. This is her block and yours is over the other way but it’s very important to note that you do basically live together so that’s kind of an odd thing to do. Vriska more or less takes the decision away from you though.

“You know if we stay out here talking everyone’s gonna be listening at their doors.” Vriska says flatly. You think John is next door and you’re pretty sure eavesdropping on this kind of conversation is the kind of thing that would set his pranksters gambit going.

“Probably.” you agree.

“So we should go inside.” Vriska says instead.

Oh.

You are about 99% sure that her suggestion has nothing at all to do with people overhearing you talk. But, well, you’re more than happy about this.

“We should.” you agree with a nod like you buy her excuse. You’re both committed to the lie, it’s fine.

Vriska grins at you, twists the lock on her door and drags you back in with her and kicks the door shut after her. Yeah, she’s not worried about people hearing you two talking.

Your palmhusk angrily decaptchalogue itself with the force of its buzzing and clanks onto the floor.

“Whuh?” you groan, jerking awake.

You rub your eyes with both hands and psionically feel out for your palmhusk and grab it. You look blearily at it, close one eye and try again. That helps slightly.

“Where’re my glasses?” you whine.
“I don’t know, go back to sleep.” Vriska groans, rolling onto her front and nearly kneeing you off of her loungeplank. You psionically jerk the table closer and- ah!

“Wait these are yours, here.” you say and hand Vriska hers. You manage to locate your glasses instead and put them on. You might have been having to cope without them a lot lately but reading small text when you’ve just woken up without them is too much even for you.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

TG: hey where are you youre not in your block
TG: or karkats
TG: you didnt go to the hospital without us did you
TG: wait youre probably flying or something to chill out thats cool
TG: uh its 9am my dude where are you
TG: hal says your key registered you as coming back and youve not left so youre still here
TG: you know i bet theres a way to make this thing get your attention because im not going in vriskas block
TG: ok but this is the lesser of two evils man

turntechGodhead [TG] ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

timaeusTestified [TT] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

TT: (◣◥) For the record I wrote a program that does this and it’ll stop the moment you lift your palmhusk. I’m not putting that much effort into this.
TT: (◣◥) I’ve also worked out where you must be.
TT: (◣◥) This link definitely doesn’t lead to the memetic lonely island ‘I just pailed’ song, no sir.
TT: (◣◥) So now the thing to get your attention.
TT: (◣◥)

Fuck there’s hundreds of the damn blank messages.

TA: IIM AWAKE
TT: (◣◥) Good to know, we have coffee out here.

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling timaeusTestified [TT]

“I’m going to hide all of the coffee, fuck Dirkka.” you complain.

“Mmm-hm.” Vriska hums sleepily.

“Thanks, your contribution is really helpful.” you sigh.

“Get what you deserve.” she counters.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]
TA: okay ii’m awake!!
TG: youre with vriska right
TA: ye2 and ii know ii over2lept, ii wa2n’t exactly 2ettiing an alarm when ii fell a2leep
TG: very happy for you please dont tell me more
TG: i was gonna ask if you had a good date but i guess thats pretty well answered
TA: iit wa2 great but ii need to go, riight?
TG: yeah sorry man
TA: no ii2 my bad.
TG: <>
TA: <>

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

“I’m gonna use your shower.” you tell Vriska, smacking her lightly on the leg to get her attention.

“You’re telling me they’re not going to disinfect you or whatever before surgery?” Vriska grumbles rolling over to look up at you. Incidentally you get to have a good look at her which you’re not complaining about.

“I’m sure they will, but I’m not getting dressed like this.” you say, gesturing to yourself.

Vriska tilts her head and very obviously looks you up and down.

“I don’t know, blue’s a good colour on you. Cerulean abstract art maybe. I could sign my name.” she cackles.

“You’re the worst. This had better not stain!” you snap at her and walk off. It’d be better if you couldn’t still hear her giggling to herself from the next room.

You shower and emerge thankfully pristine and hurriedly get back into last night’s clothes. Vriska for her part has climbed into her coon and is leaning on the edge calmly watching you with the smug satisfaction of someone who doesn’t have to be somewhere urgently.

“Agh, where’s my other shoe? The others are gonna be freaking out even though we’ve got loads of time and you’re being so calm it’s freaking me out!” you accuse her. You spot your shoe and grab it, you don’t remember kicking it off over there but whatever.

“Why bother panicking? You’ve got Dayvhe and Karkat with you, the best surgeons, you’re fine. I saw you at Equius’, you could handle that, this is nothing.” Vriska shrugs.

It’s not nothing though, is it? You’ve been trying very hard not to think of it and having other people organise things was good for that. You certainly weren’t awake all night worrying. You were very much otherwise occupied there. But the idea of spending that many hours having to go through what you did before, even in a better environment with more qualified people and two people who pale pity you… that’s better but still awful. You’re going to do it because Psiionic’s argument about what might happen to you otherwise is very real, but you’re not looking forward to this at all.

“I’m not going to wish you luck for something you can do. I don’t wish you luck for eating food or climbing the stairs, do I? I’ll see you tomorrow and if you’re not loopy from pain meds maybe we can play a game or something. Now get lost I’m going back to sleep.” Vriska says rudely.

...It’s about as reassuring as a kismesis can be.

“Hate you.” you tell her. Not angrily but… well, in the same way you’d say ‘pity you’ to someone
else. Vriska mumbles something back that sounds like the same and that’s good enough for you at this moment.

You make the mistake of walking out of Vriska’s block and around to the central elevators by way of the kitchen where you have to endure a loud whistle from Roxxie and a silent thumbs up from Dirkka. They’re the worst. When you find Karkat and Dayvhe by the elevators you’re almost anticipating more of the same from Karkat judging by his amused expression but he holds back.

“I think we’re still gonna be on time, as long as they aren’t changing the rooms on us or anything. You remembered not to eat anything this morning and not to take your medication last night?” Dayvhe prompts you as he steps into the elevator.

“Yes, I know it messes with the pain medication they want to use. You took it all out of my sylladex remember?” you point out.

“Oh, right.” Dayvhe nods.

“Will you calm down, you’re making everyone nervous.” Karkat says, shaking his head.

You get a scuttlebuggy ride to the hospital and unsurprisingly the check in and the whole process goes absurdly smoothly. You think that’s either because of a combination of Karkat’s lack of tolerance for anything going wrong, Dayvhe’s distressed passive make-me-feel-better cuddlevoodoos or both. The point is that it’s no time at all before you’re sat on a surgical stretcher waiting to go in with a mediculler taking a read of your blood pressure and then sticking little sensors to you.

“We’re going to have to cut your hair you know.” she warns you, looking up through her lashes at you as she sticks a sensor to your inner wrist.

“Great, I get to be bald again, I was really hoping for that.” you say flatly. You wonder if Rohhze will make you hats again. Probably.

“Oh, I don’t think we need to do that. As long as it’s short enough that it can’t get in your ports I’m sure we could do something nice with the rest of it, so it doesn’t have to completely go even close to them. We could do something almost faux-hawk perhaps?” she suggests, her pretty bronze eyes sparkling with inspiration.

You consider that means you might look a little like Tavros but he just shaves most of his head at least once a week to keep it that short and you don’t think the mediculler is suggesting that.

“You know what? Yeah, why not?” you shrug and she smiles brightly. She hops you off of the stretcher and onto a chair.

“I’ve done all sorts of fun designs for people getting theirs put in the first time, this is a little more complex but I’ve got it.” she says cheerily.

Karkat and Dayvhe are watching with interest, leant against the wall of the bright hospital room. This is wildly different from your first time or even Equius’ basement. You’re kind of jealous of trolls who get to have this as their only experience of being helmed.

When she’s done a lot of your hair is a lot shorter but a good deal of it is exactly the same and it doesn’t look too bad either. Karkat and Dayvhe seem to approve if the amount of petting your hair is getting is any indication.

“You two are supposed to be keeping him calm instead of sedatives, yes?” the mediculler asks suddenly and you find yourself leaning into Dayvhe’s hand a little more at her words.
“Yeah, he’s had bad experiences with them so we’re not doing that. We talked to the docterrorists about it, they know.” Dayvhe tells her.

“And you do all know that if his pulse and blood pressure get too high in the surgery they’ll either have to sedate him or call it off, right?” she says. You didn’t know that but Dayvhe and Karkat don’t look surprised.

“That won’t happen.” Dayvhe tells her firmly.

The mediculler doesn’t look even a little convinced but she still invites you to get back on the stretcher and you get wheeled into the operating room with Karkat and Dayvhe following you. You do get to watch the very entertaining sight of Karkat and Dayvhe having to change into surgical scrubs as well, complete with silly hairnets and you are not above laughing right at them. Karkat flips you off with his hand covered in soap bubbles.

Soon enough the docterrorists have got Karkat and Dayvhe sat down out of the way, which means somewhere that they can get to you but within a small enough area that they’re not getting literally underfoot of the docterrorists. Which means that once again you have to lie down on the stretcher thing looking down at them in the first thing that is reminiscent of Equius’ hive and your insides start tying themselves in anxious knots. You can hear the decently fast beat of your own blood pusher as the machine has synched up to the sensors on you.

“So they’re going to give you the stuff to make you numb.” Karkat tells you, reaching up and brushing stray hair from your face.

You know this part doesn’t hurt, it’s just something plugged into your ports and you’ve done that yourself without any problem. But it’s- you don’t know, you hate it. Obviously this whole thing would be hell if everything they’re going to do actually hurt but you just-

You…

They ask if you’re numb and test it a bit and then just start with the surgery and you really wish you couldn’t hear your own very fast heart rate or the sound of what they’re doing.

“Hey, hey you’re ok. Don’t think about what they’re doing, right? That’s why we’re here.” Dayvhe urges you and you do try to focus on him and what Karkat’s trying to say. You’ve done this before, twice even. What was it Vriska was saying? That of course you can handle it because you have before?

You don’t think that’s right. It’s like… it’s… Karkat spilled half a can of Crueler Cola in his husktop once when you were younger and you helped him set it out to dry and hoped it’d still work. Miraculously it did, he was lucky as hell, but that doesn’t mean that he should just keep doing that because it worked the first time. There’s a point at which you can do something that’s worked before and then it just won’t anymore.

Like how… like… you can feel what the docterrorists are doing and you’re stuck in place and surrounded and you can’t-

“Pressure’s way too high, pulse too.” someone warns.

“You need to get him under control.” another says and Dayvhe is looking up in the direction the voice is coming from.

“Hey, hey Sol you gotta chill, ok? Shoosh.” Dayvhe tries but it’s not working.
“I can’t.” you choke out.

Dayvhe’s face is panicked and he tries to reach to pap you but you jerk your head away as much as you’re able and even though it seems to upset the surgeons, it does stop Dayvhe. Dayvhe’s face is conflicted but finally he says something.

“Do you want the upgrade? I’m not saying about this shit right now but the end result, do you want it?” Dayvhe asks.

“Of course he wants it that’s why we’re here.” Karkat hisses at him.

“Yeah.” you whisper hoarsely.

“You just can’t deal with this part?” Dayvhe continues.

You squeeze your eyes shut and whisper that no, you can’t.

“And the sedatives?” he asks.

“No.” you say instantly. It’ll only be worse. You’ll be even more trapped but just in your own head and you can’t take that.

Dayvhe bites his lip for a moment and looks you over, gently reaching up to touch the edge of your face.

“You said before you can let me and Vriska in if you want but you have to choose to. So… so let me in.” Dayvhe says.

“Trust me, ok?” he adds.

Just what is he going to do?

Dayvhe says your name and you can feel the wrongness of it, how it’s trying to slip into your head. But he said to let him in and you trust him so…

“-doing so good. You’re listening to me right?” he says.

“Yeah.” you tell him without meaning to.

“Dayvhe what are you doing? What about Rohhze?” Karkat hisses but Dayvhe pushes him away.

Your limbs feel like they must weigh several thousand pounds each. Whatever you’re laid out on feels like what people think clouds would feel like to the touch, which isn’t what they actually feel like which is really just wet and cold. No you’re comfy and settled on marshmallowy softness with no desire to move or leave at all. You’re just warm and happy.

You never can be content for long though because eventually you open your eyes. Well, eye because the other is smushed against the… thing… stretcher that you’re on. You look hazily ahead to a small
light grey hand on the edge of the stretcher, nubby round ended fingers with neat claws on the end currently picking at a thread in the sheets. There’s a scar on the little finger near the knuckle, he cut himself with his sickles and bragged about his hardcore training injury.

“KK?” You mumble, your tongue thick in your mouth. The hand jolts in surprise only for Karkat’s face to suddenly duck down to your eye level.

“You’re awake.” He sighs in relief.

“I’m… yeah.” you mumble and push yourself up enough that you’re on your elbows. It takes a second or two of leaning before the information that bending your back like that feels, uh… bad.

“Ow.” you hiss.

“If it hurts, don’t do it, stupid.” Karkat huffs and pulls at you so you’re down flat again.

“If you want to sit up I can sit you up straight, just let me know if you’re dizzy or need anything, ok?” Karkat offers and his fingers gently run through the longer parts of your hair and you offer him a weak little purr in response.

“What happened?” you mumble out. They started and you panicked and then… 404 memory not found.

“Dayvhe voodoo’d you. You were awake the whole time, sort of at least. He was talking to you and playing music a bit. Then when it was all done you just passed out and we were both really worried that something went wrong. Do you want help getting up?” Karkat asks and you nod, even though the movement makes your neck feel sore.

Karkat gently scoops his arms under you and pulls you until you’re sitting upright. You blink hazily at him as he gingerly bites the arm of your glasses so he can unfold them with just the one hand and keep the other supporting you. Carefully he slides them on your face and everything comes into sharp focus again. You’re in the same nice bright room you’d been in before your surgery.

“Thirsty.” you croak and Karkat nods. He lets go of you for just long enough to grab a bottle of water from the side and then stands well within range to catch you as he opens it.

“Here, drink it slowly.” Karkat warns you as he hands you the open bottle. You drink slowly and honestly water has never tasted so good to you. You try to put the cap back on but you don’t have it so you just hand it back to Karkat.

“How’d it go? I can’t believe that I… I missed it?” you say, feeling woozy.

“The newer ports actually caused them more trouble, something to do with how much they’d healed compared to the older ones. I watched them do this one in like… three minutes. Also I can confirm you have a thinksponge, I’ve seen it. Despite all evidence to the contrary.” Karkat grins and runs his finger around the edge of the bandage at your right temple.

“But it went good?” you ask.

“Yeah, it did. I’m just glad you woke up.” Karkat smiles.

You nod, regret it because of moving your neck and instead you just pull Karkat close enough that you can rest your chin on his shoulder. He’s just… so nice and warm and it was so nice of him to be here with you.
“KK?” you say softly.

“Yeah?” he replies.

“You’re my best friend.” you tell him.

“I. Oh. Yes.” Karkat says, his voice tight. You unsteadily lean back to look at him only to find that he seems to be half a second away from bursting into tears.

Other voices interrupt you before you can ask anything or reassure him more that you really do mean it.

“-BROKE HIM! HE WASN’T WAKING UP AND HE DIDN’T- Karkat? SOLLUX!” Dayvhe is suddenly all up in your face, grabbing for you and staring at you intently as he looks you all over.

“Hey.” you say sleepily.

“Be gentle, you’re gonna snap him in half if you do that.” Karkat sneers.

“Oh fuck I’m so glad you’re awake, how’re you feeling? Talk to me? Do you remember what happened? Are you thinking right? Wait, you wouldn’t know would you? Shit. Fuck, I screwed this up. You were just panicking and, no I shouldn’t just make excuses that’s not any good.” Dayvhe babbles right in your face in a panicked wave.

“He can’t tell you anything if you don’t shut up.” a deeper voice says and you twist to see Dahvid standing in the doorway. You also IMMEDIATELY REGRET DOING THAT, oh fuck your back.

You whine in pain and Karkat elbows Dayvhe out of the way and makes you sit straight again.

“I should call the mediculler in a minute, let them know you’re awake and see if you need more pain medication. Especially if you’re going to be a dumbass about moving around.” Karkat huffs but you can tell he likes taking charge of this whole thing.

Dahvid stalks around to your side of the room. His face is bare, his hair a mess and from the bruised dark circles under his eyes and the gigantic cup of coffee in his hand you guess he’s not been sleeping much. He’s also basically dressed like a hiveless troll so that doesn’t really add to the look in his favour.

“He probably didn’t get everything you told him.” Dahvid says, squinting at you.

“I know, tell people to sleep at the end of something you give them to do. But I didn’t TELL him to go to sleep, I told him to not do that and just be almost there. He needed to stop panicking.” Dayvhe argues.

“You did the thing.” you say pointing at Dayvhe.

“I- you were going to hurt if I didn’t. And I said I’d do it and if you wanted to, you could let me and it worked so you let me, right?” Dayvhe asks guiltily.

“Thanks.” you yawn and try to rest your head on Karkat’s shoulder only for him to jerk away before you can, catching you with his hand.

“You have SEVERAL holes in your head, if you want to do that then here. You drugged up nerdlord, come on.” Karkat sighs and leans in against the bed so you can rest your chin on his shoulder happily.
Dahvid isn’t quite looking at you, or any of you as it happens.

“Why’s he here?” you ask, pointing at the adult.

“It was weird having you out the way you were and then you just passed out and you wouldn’t wake up so- so I figured I’d fucked up again and I needed his help.” Dayvhe explains unhappily.

“You put a time limit on him being almost asleep but not actually asleep, right?” Dayvhe’s ancestor says.

“For the time of the surgery.” Karkat confirms and you can feel the rumble of him talking through your chest, it’s nice.

“Well there you go then. He just went to sleep after is all, lots of pain medication, lots of stress. He sleeps. Mystery of the century. I could do with more pain medication and sleep, but no I have to be here.” Dahvid bitches and drinks his coffee.

“Could you just look like you did with Rohhze? Check I didn’t fuck up?” Dayvhe pleads.

“Fine. I’ll teach you how to do this on someone easier at some point just so you stop asking me. But whatever, I’ll look. Pretty sure Psii wanted him to be fixed not upgraded and mentally fucked with by you so… whatever.” Dahvid grumbles and leans down to look at you.

“You’re… fuck you.” you say, glaring at Dahvid for being so mean to your moirail. When you see the stiff way he’s leaning you remember the trident he got through the chest and decide impulsively to pop a bubble of psi right near there and sure enough he jumps back with a startled shout of pain.

“Don’t talk to him like… like… my neck hurts.” you trail off in a mumble and try to scratch at it but Karkat stops you.

“Yeah I don’t think you need more of whatever they gave you, funny as this is. Are you ok?” Karkat asks but he’s looking away from you.

“Agh, I’m fine. Can you keep him under control so I can try to check him out?” Dahvid asks and comes closer again.

“I don’t think we’ve ever totally successfully done that but we’ll try.” Dayvhe promises and holds your hand. Karkat gently pets your hair which is a nice distraction until you feel something trying to get into your head, something that isn’t you.

You mentally slam the door on it and Dahvid hisses.

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“Yeah, no I can’t check. He won’t let me in.” Dahvid says.

“I can teach you how later but unless he’s still being weird after all the stuff they’ve got him on wears off I think he’s fine. But if you’ll excuse me I’ve got a planetoid to run.” Dahvid says from somewhere out of your field of view. Dayvhe and him talk for a little bit and then he goes, you’re too sleepy to really care especially with Karkat being so nice to you.

There’s some mediculler later asking questions and whatever but the important thing is you get to sleep again, you get some kind of food, then you sleep some more. You’re woken up at one point to Dayvhe having a nervous conversation with a mediculler about if this is normal or not but you’re currently the big spoon to Karkat’s little spoon and he’s warm and you’re fine how you are.

This is the second morning in a row where you’ve woken up not in your coon but instead pressed up
against someone else sleeping and having no idea where you are for a good few seconds after you wake. You pull back and the sudden ache from your back and neck reminds you just fine. The surgery, you’re in hospital. You were curled up against Karkat who is still sound asleep. Sitting up you see that Dayvhe is sleeping in a plushly padded chair with his feet up on the stretcher that you and Karkat are on. His eyes click open just at that little amount of movement from you, you guess a lot of time being paranoid about being found out as a mutant and sleeping in other people’s hives will do that for a guy.

“Ok?” he asks, his voice soft so as not to wake Karkat.

“I’m fine. Sore. Where’s the-” you start.

“Ablution block? That way do you need… ok no you can fly. Go nuts.” Dayvhe stops offering to help when you levitate off of the bed. Who wants to walk after surgery? Flying is WAY better. Fuck gravity you’re never going back. When you’re done you get a chance to look at yourself in the mirror. You just look like yourself with a new haircut and bandages on your head. You’re not totally sure if the ports bruised you or anything before, you had a lot of problems after you got partly helmed the first time and your memory of it is hazy but you seem fine now.

Curiously you peel one of the small, square, gauze bandages off at your temple and take a look.

A small, flat and shiny gold port gleams against your skin which is a little unhappily yellow but no more than if you’d just scratched your skin on something. You wouldn’t guess it was this recently put in. Cautiously you press your fingers near it to find no more than the slightest dull ache.

You reach around your back to feel your neck, now that hurts a good deal more and even all the muscles nearby are tight with discomfort. Stressed and having a nervous breakdown or not you’re sure you remember it hurting this bad when Equius and Hal worked on you. You guess modifying their work didn’t go so smoothly. Or maybe it’s just easier to heal bits of your body that don’t move, like the bones of your pan.

You turn to look in the mirror but looking at your own back is hard, even harder when trying to turn your head too far is an exercise in agony. If you had two mirrors you would be fine, but you don’t. You could snap this one in half but that’s a lot of needless vandalism, isn’t it?

“Dayvhe.” you hiss quietly as you lean out of the door.

“Yeah?” he whispers, creeping around carefully.

“I wanna see them but I’ve only got the one mirror.” you point out and when you try to look at the mirror you remember again that you’re still sore in your neck.

“Will you stop doing that? If you want to look I can just take a photo, damn.” Dayvhe sighs at you.

“I keep forgetting that it hurts, it’s hard.” you protest as Dayvhe comes in and stands behind you.

“And no one understands.” he teases and carefully pulls back a bandage on your upper back and you hear the shutter noise from his palmhusk. It actually is his one now, his ancestor gave everyone their stuff back when you moved into your new place. Just sent an intern around with a box full of it.

Dayvhe carefully reapplies the bandage and comes around to show you the picture of your own back.

Your jaw drops as you look at it. Dayvhe’s taken one of the bandages off but even with the couple of other ports in shot that still have theirs on you can see the bruising is huge. Your back is a bruised
yellow and dark grey mess that certainly looks as bad as it feels, if not worse.

“What did they do? Pull my old hardware out and put the new stuff in like an oversized nail with a comically large hammer?!” you gasp.

“They may as well have, it was bad. I’m glad you weren’t really awake, I’m also glad Karkat held onto his lunch but he only just managed that. And- I mean, you did want to be out for that, right?” Dayvhe asks hesitantly.

You pause, you remember him asking when it was all too much and you couldn’t take it anymore. Looking at the picture you’re damn certain you couldn’t have withstood whatever they had to do that fucked you up that badly. The feeling of him trying to get into your head floods back to you. It’s not like Vriska’s spidersilk around your thinksponge kind of feeling, no, it was warmer. Like the feeling when he slides his hands along your jaw or into your hair, a welcome kind of touch.

He wants to know if you wanted that?

“Have you been worrying about that?” you ask. Dayvhe shifts uneasily, his eyebrows drawing together in a frown that concerns you.

“I let you.” you point out.

“People do all sorts of things they wouldn’t normally agree to when bad shit is happening to them.” Dayvhe points out.

You narrow your eyes, oh it’s this kind of conversation is it? The kind where Dayvhe’s had the whole thing out in his head already so he’s sure he knows what you really mean regardless of what you actually say. You back him up against the wall and look down at him.

“I have been tortured before.” you tell him and Dayvhe’s face flashes anguish at having to even think of it.

“I never cracked then. I couldn’t take the surgery much more and I’d have called it off or attacked them if I had to, it’s not like they blocked my psionics which is pretty stupid if you ask me. I let you control me because it was a good idea and I trusted you. I don’t want you to do it now, want to see if you can make me?” you say pointedly.

“No! I don’t want to make you do anything!” Dayvhe almost wails.

“Really? Cool, I’ll remember that the next time you get on my case about drinking energy drinks.” you say triumphantly and you absolutely will bring this up.

“That’s not the same! I just didn’t want to harm you with this shit is all and the best way to do that is just not using it but it seemed like the best solution but I don’t know.” you interrupt him.

“It’s only harm if I don’t want it.” you interrupt him.

Dayvhe pauses and when the smile that you know all too well starts to appear on his face.

“If you turn that into a pailing joke I’m going to throw you out of the window.” you threaten him.

“No you wouldn’t.” Dayvhe grins.

“No, you’re right. I wouldn’t.” you concede. But…

“Tell you what I would absolutely resort to though. HEY KARKAT!” you shout and Dayvhe curses
in alarm but you fly out into the main room before Dayvhe can silence you.

“What?” Karkat mumbles, sitting up sleepily.

“Dude, why, no!” Dayvhe says in hushed and desperate tones.

“KK, Dayvhe’s picking on me.” you plead.

Normally this would get you absolutely nowhere. If Karkat mediated every time either of you made an inappropriate joke he’d literally do nothing else. Karkat may not have the finely tuned pranksters gambit of John or Jayne but he has some sense of it. His eyes flick between you and Karkat and suddenly his face transforms into a look of horror.

“Dayvhe, how could you? Poor Sollux!” Karkat gasps holding his arms open for you and you slide right on over there so Karkat can comfort you from the horror of Dayvhe’s terrible innuendos.

“I hate you both, I’m disowning you.” Dayvhe says flatly.

“Don’t listen to the terrible man in the terrible shades.” Karkat says soothingly and that’s your limit, there’s only so long you can hold back laughing for.

“You’ll regret this.” Dayvhe informs you both as Karkat puts your dumb and bruised body back on the stretcher and hops up to sit beside you.

“I’ll leave you both, hitch a scuttlebuggy to the most abandoned part of this planet and build myself a hive in the woods out of trees I cut down myself. The two of you will be so lonely and you’ll wonder where did Dayvhe go, I wish he was back but I will be gone because of you both.” Dayvhe announces.

“The docterrorists told me that if you hear any whining, annoying noises they should be disregarded so don’t worry about that.” Karkat snickers as he tells you.

“I wondered!” you laugh into your hand.

“There I’ll be, sat in the woods, whittling away at something and also my life because it’s a metaphor.” Dayvhe adds, sitting back into his chair from before.

“All the best metaphors have to be pointed out.” Karkat agrees so Dayvhe throws a cushion at him.

It’s not all that much longer after that until Docterrorist Feelgood comes by to check on you. They’re pleased that you seem like yourself again and you get bumped down to painkillers that you can take with your normal medication which is a relief. You’re freed from having bandages on the ports on your head but the ones on your back and neck need to be protected more.

You’re given instructions on how to take care of them, when your follow up appointments are, what are good and bad signs, how you’re supposed to sit or lay down, what things you’re not allowed to eat on these painkillers and so on and so on. You’re glad that Karkat and Dayvhe are there because you’ve tuned right out at the end, only perking up when you get to the part where you’re allowed to go back to your hivestem.

Karkat and Dayvhe order a scuttlebuggy but it becomes apparent that you can’t rest your back on the chair normally and there’s a five minute debate about how to get you in there and it goes on for long enough that you just fly back to your place when they’re not looking. You’re in the elevator looking at angry messages from Dayvhe and Karkat when you decide that you can deal with that problem when they come back and chew you out in person.
You run into Tavros and Jayded first, it seems like Tavros is teaching her fiduspawn which is a mess you’re glad you’re not going to have to clean up. It actually occurs to you that you can probably get out of a lot of chores in your communal area on account of how much terrible pain you’re in before you’re made to do it and the sympathy runs out. Well or until someone remembers your near limitless psionics that can absolutely do any chores your hands can.

“Sollux! You’re back!” Jayded gasps in delight as Tavros’ horsaponi gambles about happily on the floor.

“I am.” you confirm.

“Uh, alone? What about Karkat and Dayvhe?” Tavros asks as he looks around and sees neither of your quadrantmates previously mentioned.

“They were arguing about where to sit in the scuttlebuggy and I got bored and flew back.” you say nonchalantly.

“Alone.” Jayded concludes.

“I figure I’ve got maybe fifteen minutes before there’s a lot of yelling, yeah.” you nod and Jayded just laughs.

Tavros stands up and leans towards you curiously, he doesn’t quite touch you but for a moment you think he might. His smile is bright and curious.

“I like… your hair. Did they do that for the surgery?” Tavros asks eagerly. Oh, right, the sort of not quite mohawk that you’ve got by necessity right now.

“Oh. Yeah. It seemed better than getting it all off and the mediculler suggested it, so.” you shrug and regret it with a wince.

“The ports look really nice actually, I thought they’d look kind of rough right away.” Jayded says thoughtfully.

“You should see my back, it’s awful. My head’s fine but the rest… nope.” you tell her.

“Oh, you had some deliveries by the way!” Jayded announces, clapping her hands together as the thought occurs to her.

“What?” you weren’t expecting anything. If your friends are giving you a gift that’s a weird way to phrase it.

“We put them in your block. Most of them anyway, we started running out of room!” Jayded grins.

It seems neither of them will tell you any more information than you’ve already been given. Wary you go to your block, the door is unlocked and you don’t think you left it that way. When you went out with Vriska you think she probably left it behind you. It’s not surprising that she’d pick it again if she had to but then again given the people you live with it’s not a short list of suspects.

First thing on your wishlist is a lock other people can’t pick goddamnit.

You slide the door open and you find yourself frozen there as you stare.

On almost every flat surface there are flowers in vases, boxes with tags on and most notably of all sat on the desk that previously only held the husktop that you used to carry around with you instead of
your nicest machine that you know is sat at Jayekh’s old place with all of your bees. No, previously this held your husktop but now there’s the nicest most expensive machine you’ve ever seen! The case is clear on the side affording you a look at parts you couldn’t have afforded in sweeps of saving.

You’re mumbling ‘what’ over and over again under your breath as you pick up the envelope on your desk. You open it and pull out a card, it’s got a picture of stars on the front but there’s looping writing in gold pen inside. You recognise the typing quirk before you even read the name at the end, it’s Nicole.

Sollux,

III hope you’re recoveriiing well, we’re all wiiishiiing you a speedy recoveryV III know you hadn’t told me about your planned surgery but the downsiiide of the Dream iiis everyone gossiiips liiike crazy, especiiially about someone as notable as youV

A liiittle fundraiiiser was set up on the Dream to get you a sort of get well present and probably partly as a proper welcome to the planetV A few people wanted to chiiip iiin theiiir own iiiindiiiviiidual giiifts and III had these forwarded to me and sent on to you, so don’t worry, everyone doesn’t have your addressV

Feel better soon,
Nicole Kidman

There are boxes and bags about that you manage to tear yourself away from your new sick machine to focus on. There’s multiple boxes of all kinds of candy, movies and tv box sets of things, high end audiogrubs, video games, snack food, comfy snuggleplanes and cushions. There’s so much stuff. The notes that come with everything are something else, some are from people you know or at least kind of know. There’s a bundle of collected movies and two music CD’s and you can guess before you check the label that it’s from the whole group of trolls that trollnapped your friends. They’re apologising for any bad feeling and hoping you feel better. Johnny Boyega from the coffee place sent you a thoughtful note with a few chocolate bars and an invitation to come back to the coffee place when you’re better for a free drink. One note is from Longame which calls you a little shit for what you did but nevertheless it’s attached to a box of cookies. The rest are from people you don’t know, people who acknowledge that you don’t know them but who are grateful for you correcting Dahvid’s path, people who are in awe that you were a vessel for your ancestor, people who want you to come into the Dream more so they can get to know you.

Karkat and Dayvhe find you knelt on the floor in your block surrounded by gifts and notes, all of the yelling goes right out of Karkat and it might be because you’re sitting there all misty eyed and overwhelmed. These are nice thoughts people are having about you, not even people who know you that well or at all. On Alternia no one outside of your friends cared if you died, or at least not beyond your neighbours caring because there it’d mean they had first dibs on stealing your stuff. But here you’ve made contact with a whole group of people who actually would care if you died and who did really have your back before. Then the situation arises where you’ll be feeling shitty in a way that they all have before and all these people have come out to say that they hope you feel better soon.

“Whoa, where did you get that?” Dayvhe asks in surprise and, as you did, picks up the card.

“What is all this?” Karkat asks and you offer up the handful of notes with a speechless kind of whine. Karkat reads through several of them, his angry frown smoothing out into something sentimental.

“See? People care about you. Like us. DON’T FLY THROUGH THE CITY WHEN YOU’RE ON PAIN MEDS YOU MORON!” Karkat snaps that last part out loudly.
“Feelgood was clear on that, no flying above a height you can’t safely land.” Dayvhe agrees.

“I stopped listening by that part.” you admit and Dayvhe and Karkat both facepalm at once.

“Despite having been forced to view your thinksponge I’m convinced you have all of the neural matter of a particularly dim mollusk, the kind that gets bullied by its peers for the idiotic things it does. You have just had THINKSPONGE SURGERY you blithering idiot! Why would you even think it was a good idea to- I- ugh.” Karkat shakes his head.

“You know what this means, man, you’re going to have to live your life under Karkat’s tyrannical rule until you’re all better.” Dayvhe says.

“So… like normal then?” you say after a moment and you get Karkat’s shriek of indignation at the same time as Dayvhe’s surprised laughter. But still, it’s kind of nice knowing people care. You think you could get used to that.
You make it a week of being fussed over and prevented from doing anything before you have to break out, it’s that or rip off your own skin or something. You know everyone wants you to have a good outcome from your surgery, that no one wants you to have another one so it’s vital that you heal right this time. You know it’s only because your friends and partners care about you and you have needed some of their help for sure. But you’re too observed, too catered for, too condescendingly sympathised about. You escape onto the rooftop. Not your most daring escape for sure and you’re pretty sure in terms of places that they’ll look for you this will be if not the first then easily in the top five places.

Other people already being on the roof wasn’t something you had anticipated. Roxxie is squared off against Dirkka, her trident flashing gold in the afternoon light as Dirkka lunges for her with his sword out. Parry, thrust, riposte.

“You’ve got more than that.” Dirkka tells her and any inclination you had to pull them apart fades, they’re just sparring.

Roxxie steps back, breathing a little heavy and making her gills flutter.

“Sol, I didn’t see you come up here. Shoul’d you be up here?” she asks.

“I’m not doing anything. What’re you two doing?” you respond.

“Training. She has an Empress to take out after all.” Dirkka says and pulls his shirt off. He rubs his face on it and drops it off to the side. You eye his adult lack of grubscars. Having the remnants of them is a purely adolescent trait, though you think some adults still have shadowy discoloration. It’s weird to see on him.

“She has to beat you then?” you guess. Dirkka nods.

“Not to talk shit here but I’ve seen the Empress and you’re not on her level.” you say flatly.

“And until Roxxie can beat me and beat me without breaking a sweat she’s nowhere near ready.” Dirkka says tartly. Ooh, you touched a nerve.

“Again.” he tells Roxxie.

You watch as she steels herself and attacks Dirkka. He has to work hard to parry her attacks, Roxxie
has the reach and mass on him because of her bigger size but he still has a blade to her throat in under two minutes. You rest your chin on your hand and watch them go again. Mentally you try to replace Dirkka with the Empress and you really can’t see this working.

“Wouldn’t a bot be better?” you say finally.

“As a physical proxy? Sure, you could even calibrate strength. I’ve thought about it but it won’t do anything to hone her reflexes even if Hal pilots it, it’s just not… it’s not as spontaneous.” Dirkka dismisses your suggestion.

“What about Brobot and Sawtooth? They could fight.” you point out.

“They ran off of thousands and thousands of hours of footage of me strifing to build the patterns they ran off of.” Dirkka explains.

“If we had that for the Empress then we might be somewhere but we don’t, obvs.” Roxxie sighs.

Hm.

You don’t have that information, but you can think of two people who might. You pull out your palmhusk, shoot Dayvhe a message to tell him you’re on the roof and not to freak out and then troll the person you really had in mind.

[twinArmageddons began trolling tautologicallyGauche]
TA: hey 2o you have 2ome 2ecuriity iiin your man2iion right?
TG: one of these days youre going to talk to me with a proper greeting or something
TA: ii 2aid hey
TG: sigh
TG: what lusus did you have
TA: what?
TG: humour me
TA: biiclop2e dad was my lu2u2, why?
TG: huh psii had the same though no way it was the same one but still
TG: i guess theyre bad at teaching their grubs manners because psii always used to just launch in mid conversation too
TA: you’re right, ii’2 way better to wa2te all thii2 tiime. Geni2u2.
TG: actually this might be nearing the territory of not throwing stones in glass hives here on the subject of lusii
TA: you think?
TG: back on topic security was always more diontes bag than mine and he had all these roving bots but they seem to have mostly stopped doing their thing
TG: at least the ones who arent doing aggressive hivehold chores or whatever
TG: i guess theyre still following his last programming of them which means i always gotta strife to get into my own damn hungertrunk but whatre gonna do
TA: do you ever fight the empre22? Ii know you got 2kewered recently but have you fought her much el2e before that?
TG: me being able to run this place at all is pretty much based on me not doing that so no
TA: damn
TG: why
TA: ii’ll get back two you.
TG: wait sollux no this sounds like you having a bad idea
TG: stay away from her
TG: please
TA: i'm basically under hive arrest right now, what do you think i can do from here?
TG: hello obvious bait to underestimate you did you know i wasnt pupated yesterday
TA: 2hut up, i'll get back two you later.
[twinArmageddons ceased trolling tautologicallyGauche]

Hm, so Dahvid himself isn’t going to be helpful for this. Or at least not in the sense of just having the data that you need. He may still be useful later. You get up and head inside, a plan starting to converge together in your mind. Inside the floor that you group is living on you track down Dayvhe and Karkat in the main room playing a vintage racing game WIP3OUT on the big screen. They’re doing passably.

“On a scale of slightly gritted teeth and narrowed eyes to full on freakout how are you two going to react to me flying over to see Aradia?” you ask them.

“It’s interesting that you’re not asking if you can go or if it’s safe, but how mad we’ll be about the fact that you apparently definitely are going no matter what we say.” Karkat says in a tone that suggests more annoyance than interest.

"Why do you need to see Aradia anyways?” Dayvhe asks, not looking away from the screen.

"I need to ask her a question.” you tell him.

"About?” Dayvhe prompts.

"Spaceships."

"You could ask Aradia that from here with trollian, you don't need to fly out there to ask her it. Especially as you shouldn't be using your ports yet." Karkat points out and you roll your eyes. You flew with ports newer than this and you were FINE. This is overly cautious nonsense.

"If I was asking her a question about something else I would do that but I don't want to ask her this question over trollian, I need to be there in person." you explain patiently.

"Why can't you ask a question about spaceships over trollian? If it was a question about your past or sorting shit out I'd get you wanting to do that in person but spaceships seems like a pretty neutral topic." Karkat points out.

"Because it's not safe to ask over trollian." you tell him.

On screen both of their little spaceships idle and you get the feeling that you now have their full attention.

"Not safe?" Dayvhe asks carefully.

"I'm not paranoid before you start. It's about the idea of Roxxie taking down the Empress and that kind of shit shouldn't be done over trollian in case the network gets compromised somewhere. It's not like I can control every point of it to make it secure so in person is smarter." you explain.

"That makes sense." Dayvhe nods and his ship starts up again.

"Right, but why don't you just take a scuttlebuggy out that way instead of flying?" Karkat says, not having noticed that Dayvhe has started racing again.

"Because flying is great and scuttlebuggies suck and I hate people. So I'm going to go to that now." you groan.
"Take snacks, troll us." Dayvhe calls after you.

"I've already got some." you shout back.

"Finally some- HEY YOU STARTED AGAIN WITHOUT ME YOU FUCK!" Karkat screeches and you nip back up to the roof as quickly as you can. Roxxie and Dirkka are still strifing up there and they seem mildly concerned when you throw yourself off the roof and take flight but it's not as if either of them can do anything to stop you, is it?

You always have loved flying. It was one of the great perks to your kind of power, something people dreamed of but very few got to attain with the stability and power that you have. Sure it's a little tender if you don't keep your back just right but even then it's only a little uncomfortable, you're fine. You take your time flying to the ship, just enjoying the actual feeling of being in the air properly again. But soon enough you're landing by the ship.

The door opens for you right away and you easily climb inside, the lighting turning on for you.

"You're looking nice and shiny." Aradia says cheerfully from all around you.

"Thanks." you beam. Your ports are all uncovered now and you've taken to Kanaya's newly designed shirts just to show them off. After all you've been through to have ports you'll be damned if you're not going to display the things to the world at large.

"What's up then?" Aradia asks as you wander to the bridge of the ship and drop into a chair.

"I had some questions about spaceships and I figured who better to talk to than you?" you tell her as you swivel the chair around.

"Oh, exciting. Hit me with them then!" Aradia chirps and the lighting around you flares a little rustier, it feels like a smile.

"If I was in this ship, helmed I mean, could I put a file in another file without you noticing? And I mean let's imagine that you're not you but probably some kind of programmed safeguard." you ask.

"Hmmm, well that's hard to answer if I don't know what the program is looking for. I mean surely you'd be a better person to argue about programming than me." Aradia points out.

"Yeah, true. But when we weren't actively interacting you said you couldn't really read my mind but you still knew what I was doing with the ship, so you could obviously read some." you reason.

"Well, I suppose so. It's more that it comes through to me what you're doing. Like... oh, like it would say that you're sitting right now but I wouldn't know how or why or what that was like. So I'd know that you were looking at a file or attaching files to something but I wouldn't really know all that much more, but a program might comb things more specifically." Aradia answers.

You nod and turn the chair around a few more times. That's more or less what you'd thought. Your memories of the helm with Psiionic were hazy at best but you know he has a certain amount of freedom in there. He was able to compile a burn file and send it without whatever programs that contain his free will catching him, so if he's thoughtful he has some autonomy. You can also see how it'd be hard to digitally categorise something as complex and qualitative as sentient thought into really fine grained categories, there's not going to be some big 'betrayal' alarm that goes off when he thinks bad things.

"What kind of plan are you cooking up?" Aradia asks, reminding you that her knowledge of the future is far from perfect or broad reaching.
"I want to send a message to my ancestor and get him to send me a file back. Without the Empress knowing." you say slowly as you decide that, yes, that is the best way to do this.

"That's quite the undertaking." Aradia says, not saying that you can't or that you shouldn't but simply commenting on the difficulty of the task. Aradia was never really one to tell you not to do things. She always saw the benefit even when things went wrong. She's a kind of optimistic nihilist. Nothing matters, you're all going to die, do what you want, you may as well have fun. That kind of thing. You liked that about her. You still kind of do, at least when it's not very obvious that you personally don't matter, and she's better about that these days.

"Yeah, but I think I have an in." you smile.

"Oh?"

"I know a guy, very important. Or self important at least." you say with a grimace.

"Ah, Dayvhe's ancestor!" Aradia laughs and you snicker along as well.

"Alright, I'm gonna go work on my evil plan. I'll see you later, I'll troll you even when it's not something so heretical." you promise her.

"I look forward to it!" Aradia says brightly and you step outside.

You could go straight to Dahvid's hive, it's only just over there. You could tell him what you want him to do and with enough 'but what about my ancestor' you're sure you could get him going on the way to this plan. But it would be more reasonable to go back to your hive and propose the idea to the group at large. Why must being reasonable always be more work? Why?

You fly back, your mind churning over the problem and you actually have to double back on yourself when you realise that you've flown past your hive and you have to turn around.

"I have," you announce to the room at large as you walk in, "a brilliant idea."

"I don't want to discount your brilliant ideas..." John says, midway through setting the table.

"But?" you ask.

"No, that's all I have. Probably gonna have to though, right?" he grins toothily and you psionically shove him just a little.

"Tell us the plan then we'll mock you." Vriska suggests. You would resent that but you know she will no matter what you say. Or at least unless you give her something more enticing to mock. You'll do that instead.

"There's no way in hell Roxxie is ever going to beat the Empress just by fighting Dirkka." you declare.

"HA!" Vriska laughs loudly.

"Gee, Sollux. Thanks." Dirkka says icily.

"Yeah, what the hell?" Roxxie says sounding a little hurt.

"All you're training to do is get a little better at fighting in general but mostly training to get better at kicking Dirkka's ass." you say.
"A valid pastime, enjoyed by many." Hal chips in from the other side of the room.

You share a look with Karkat. They're absolutely pitch, why aren't they doing anything about it ever? Oh well, moving on.

"You need to fight the Empress without fighting the Empress, you need to fight a bot." you continue.

"I already explained why that wouldn't work." Dirkka says as he walks past you and sets plates down on the table in a stack with a thump.

"Right, you don't have thousands and thousands of hours of footage of her fighting that'd give you estimates of her strength, abilities, fighting patterns, all that." you nod.

"So-

"I have good news, bad news and then more good news. It will be in that order." you announce.

"What if we want the bad news first?" Terezi asks curiously.

"Then you would be confused but more accurately you'll be disappointed because that's not happening." you tell her.

"The good news is that there is all of that information stored and Captor is in possession of it." you say.

"Hm... bad news it's the other one?" Rohhze guesses and you nod.

"But second amount of good news, I think I know how to get it." you tell the others.

"How? You're not contacting the Empress' ship. You'll be killed or worse, we all will be." Dayvhe points out.

"Oh, no, I know. I have no intention of going anywhere near that thing and I'm sure as shit not just going to try hitting him up on trollian to ask for a favour, we'd be so fucked so fast. No, not doing that." you tell him calmly. You're not a goddamn idiot.

"So what is your plan?" Dirkka asks carefully and you know he's at least listening now.

"Dahvid's movie scripts, at least the important ones, get run through censors. He was ordered to write more movies in the Star Wars franchise by Condy herself so I know she's going to read it because it pained him to do it. She's only going to get off on the way it tortures him if she reads it herself. We'll have a file that will go right to the ship for sure." you explain.

"And anything that goes through the ship goes through your ancestor." Equius nods, speaking for the first time.

"Right. But I'm not going to put a virus in it or anything, I want to put a message in there. To tell Psiionic what we want from him so he can work out a way to send it to us. But the script itself, the images, the short video cuts presents loads of opportunities to get bits of data smuggled out of the ship to us so we can build a bot. I just have to get the first message to him and I know how to do it." you explain.

"He had this big file of pictures of Dahvid, he was so desperate for any image of him he missed him so bad. If I encode a message in a picture in any kind of code, binary, hex, morse even it'd work. I just need to make something about the image off enough that he'd spot it and given how obsessed he
is I'm sure I can make it subtle. Then we attach that picture to the first script that Dahvid has to hand over and then it's in Psionic's hands." you tell them all.

"Your plan hinges on my ancestor playing along." Dayvhe points out.

"Would it be terribly manipulative of me to point out that within our group large numbers of us are more or less wearing the faces of his most beloved people and it wouldn't be hard to ingratiate ourselves enough with him that we could probably talk him around to this idea? Besides the point is to train Roxxie up so she can contest for the position of Empress. The Grand Entertainer could easily specify that he wanted Roxxie to act like she just came out of Alternia to make that challenge so there's no threat to him or us, it's pretty plain that he cares more for some of us than others." Rohhze points out.

"That's a little cold, Rohhze." Jayyne points out.

"I'm not saying I agree at all, more that I think that's an accurate reflection of our former captor's mental state. By which I mean the man who held us captive, not the Captor before Sollux." Rohhze clarifies.

"You're gambling a lot on what you know about the helm setup on the Imperial ship, the security there will likely be tighter than anywhere." Equius points out.

"It'd have to be." Nepeta agrees.

"But my ancestor was still able to find a way around it to cause chaos and lure the Empress out when he needed to, he's not completely restrained up there." you tell them.

"And if he's anything like you with technological weak points if you give him an inch he'll take a mile. I can see him being pretty motivated to help, anything to get him out of there and change the situation at all would be good. If there's no weak point now I can bet he'll engineer one or at least find a way to send us a message back the same way." Karkat sighs, clearly resigned to the idea that this will happen.

"So our plan is what then? We pitch this to Dahvid?" Kanaya asks.

"Are we voting again?" Terezi asks.

"I think we ought to. Or at least vote on asking Dahvid for his cooperation and then seeing where the ground lays from there." Rohhze answers.

"None of us go anywhere near that ship, right?" Dayvhe repeats.

"I don't want to get anywhere near that helm, I swear." you nod fervently.

Roxxie looks around the nutrition block.

"All in favour of asking Dahvid if he will cooperate with this plan?" Roxxie asks.

It takes a few seconds but everyone in your group votes in favour. Equius is still clearly grudging but interestingly Vriska has her hand up right away. Karkat and Dayvhe still seem dubious but you can't really blame them, big ambitious projects and you swearing not to get in trouble aren't always great signs. But the thing is you mean it, you never want to be in a traditional helm. You certainly don't want to run the risk of spending eternity jammed into the same one as your ancestor, sharing your collective hell together. You really, REALLY, don't want that.
Your group decides for maximum chance at changing Dahvid’s mind the group going to convince him into working with you ought to be you, Nepeta, Karkat and Dayvhe. You fly everyone over and, as Dahvid said before, the bracelets that half of your group has still let you in the door just fine.

“We’ve got to try to sell this right.” Dayvhe says softly.

You look down at the newly repaired floor that you’d psionically burned through, you could certainly up your negotiating strategy with Dahvid for sure. Dayvhe leads you all to his ancestor’s office but there’s no one inside. Notably the blood is gone from the wall as is any evidence that there was a weapon embedded in there ever.

You’re not sure if it’s luck or if she’s been tipped off but you don’t get much further before you all run into Carrie who adjusts her glasses as she looks at you all.

“Back again?” she asks.

“Help us Obi-Wan Kenobi you’re our only hope.” Dayvhe says and the rest of you just look at him in disbelief and dismay, what happened to selling this right?

“We have a crazy stupid plan and we need the crazy stupid guy to do something for us.” Dayvhe adds.

Carrie’s mouth twitches in an amused smile.

“Anything to get him out of his block. I’ll take all the help I can get, come on.” she says and leads you up several staircases and passages and through a few doors to which it seems that she has access and you do not. When you get through the door the decor changes, no longer the pristine slickly decorated walls of the main areas, this is wallpaper that seems aged and the photographs on the walls are of Dahvid with people on set. Not posed photos but actual live action shots.

Carrie pauses in the hallway and waves her hand towards a door down the way, from how she’s leaning against the wall you don’t think that she’s going to come in there with you. Karkat’s hand clings to your arm and you can see him gritting his teeth but it’s Dayvhe and Nepeta who push the door open first.

The room you enter is beyond messy. Messy is small change compared to whatever this is. To your left the room opens up into what you guess is supposed to be a walk in wardrobe but what it actually appears to be is an avalanche of clothes and shoes just dropped or thrown into a pile and over the rest of the floor. There’s a coon shoved against the wall and though it looks fancier than anything you’ve ever owned it’s clearly not well maintained and the sopor level is well below what it should be, like no one’s bothered to refill it to replace the stuff that always sticks to you when you get out. Books, movie disks and the odd stray instrument litter the floor. At the far end of the room there’s an old wooden desk with Dahvid slumped over it. Behind him are smeared whiteboards, scattered post it notes and an overflowing trash can that’s full of scrunched up paper and coffee cups.

“This is just a little sad.” Nepeta whispers and you kind of agree. He still weirdly reminds you of a kid younger than you who hasn’t worked out how to grow up yet. It’s more of a grim take on the pupa pan myth that Tavros used to be so keen on.

“Hey, wake up.” Dayvhe says as he steps up to the desk and raps his knuckles on it.

Dahvid jerks awake, red and purple eyes sharpening in alarm until he spots Dayvhe and the tiredness hits back in again. A post it note detaches from his face and flutters to the desk.
“How’d you get in here?” he yawns.

“We used the force.” Dayvhe says seriously.

“So you mean Carrie let you in.” his ancestor concludes.

“That too.” Dayvhe nods.

You watch as Dahvid looks your group over and raises an eyebrow. You lead Karkat up to the desk as well and Nepeta lingers slightly behind, her keen eyes running over the place some more.

“If you wanted another hive you could have just trolled me. I was busy.” Dahvid sighs.

“We don’t want another hive.” Dayvhe says, the one you’ve all got is just fine. Great even.

“Glad you’re healing well, all your checkups seem good.” Dahvid says as he looks you over.

“I’m so happy to hear that my confidential medical information is getting shared with you. Maybe I was going to thank you for the gift and card or whatever until you said that.” you say flatly.

“Doubt it. Also nothing that I want to know stays secret around here for long. Besides all I wanted to know was if it went well and that you’re not going to die or anything, I don’t want that.” Dahvid says waving a hand dismissively at you.

“Is your place always like this? I can see this is your purrivate area of the mansion but does it always look like this or are you just…” Nepeta seems unsure how to phrase what you would term ‘having a mental breakdown because your eternal pale crush can’t ever see you properly again and your worst enemy who wants you pitch skewered you and ruined your pet project’. It’s not exactly succinct to say. Or tactful but whatever.

“It’s- listen, I don’t have to- don’t judge my process!” Dahvid says defensively.

Nepeta gives him an unimpressed look.

Dahvid huffs and straightens up his keyboard and makes a show of looking like he’s at least trying to work now, like he’s too busy to see you. You’re not convinced.

“We did want something.” Dayvhe finally spits out.

“A new ship.” the adult nods.

“No? Why would… why would you say that?” you say suspiciously.

“What do you know about any ship anyway?” Nepeta asks quickly.

Dahvid stops typing and looks up at all of you like you’re fucking with him. Seeing as you’re all just waiting for an answer he rolls his eyes and grabs something from his sylladex, a pair of souped up binoculars.

“What do I know about your ship? I know I can see it from my goddamn window.” he says and tosses the binoculars to Nepeta.

“You knew about it the whole time?” Karkat asks incredulously.

“I didn’t think half of you walked here. I don’t know how you didn’t get caught coming in but even if I hadn’t seen a weirdly imperial looking ship under a tarp from my window someone would have
told me eventually. It wasn’t like you could outrun my best helmsmen in THAT thing even with him powering it and honestly I’m amazed you were able to fly the thing here in the first place. So why should I do anything about it?” he says like it’s obvious.

You’d be more annoyed at the ‘hide the ship under a tarp and pretend it’s a prop’ plan failing if you were ever convinced it’d work in the first place. It also wasn’t your idea so whatever. Although…

“Someone would have told you about it? So no one has. No one but you noticed it?” you ask with a grin.

Dahvid’s pause tells you EVERYTHING you need to know. Holy shit, this place is absurd.

“What do you mean you’re surprised he could fly it?” Dayvhe asks slowly.

“I’m not a helmsman so I can’t tell you. But from what I’ve heard- I mean ships are ranked on how much power they need and what grade of helmsman can provide it. That rinky dink little thing out there is low grade, it’s a little scouting run around ship not something real. You plug a high rate helmsman into a mini ship like that then there’s… supposedly it’s exhausting, all that power has nowhere to go and you can’t blow the thing so it’s supposed to be this nasty feedback loop that’s like arm wrestling yourself. But, like I said, I’ve not got the right thinksponge for that so that’s just what I’ve heard.” Dahvid shrugs.

The others all turn to look at you, seemingly annoyed that you didn’t say anything.

“What? I’ve only flown one ship and I wasn’t exactly myself at the time, it sucked, I assumed by design!” you say defensively.

Dahvid sinks a little lower in his chair and with agitation backspaces repeatedly and sharply on whatever he’s working on as his fangs dig into his bottom lip and his scowl grows deeper.

“If you leave in that thing I can catch you. But…” he stops backspacing and you watch a muscle in his jaw jump with tension.

“You’re allowed to go. If you want. I mean I can just say that and have your ship get mysteriously damaged and then you are allowed to go but unable but Psii would be so mad at me if I did that, and I can just hear Signless going on about taking people’s choices away and blah blah blah.” Dahvid says petulantly.

“And even if I don’t do that sending you out in that thing is just asking for trouble and I want you not in trouble. So… when you get the all clear you can go down to the whatever it’s called. Place with all the ships. Get tested, take a ship that’s a good fit for you. I don’t want you to go, I want you to stay here where it’s safe but if you HAVE to go and I don’t know why you have to and I don’t want you to, but if you must… then take a ship. Whatever ship, whatever you need for it.” Dahvid says tightly.

“And that one won’t hurt him?” Dayvhe asks.

“A properly matched ship doesn’t need to, shouldn’t at all. That’s the whole point of those ports, it’s supposed to be a good way to use that skill that people want to do. It should be what everyone uses, that’s why I had them developed but noooooo.” Dahvid hisses, very obviously bitter about it.

“That’s good to know but still not what we came about.” Dayvhe says.

“Well what then?” Dahvid sighs and types rapidly on his keyboard without looking up at Dayvhe, like he’s just oh so busy but you know keysmash when you see it.
“We need you to write that movie script or at least part of it and send it to the Empress’s ship just like you normally would but with an image attached that we give you.” Dayvhe says.

“An image of you, doing whatever you want. The point is that it’s an image of you.” Karkat adds because that wasn’t clear.

Dayvhe’s ancestor lowers his hands and looks around at you all with slow and careful consideration.

“Why? Why do you want that?” he asks.

“Because your not-moirail apparently hoards every image of you he can get so he’ll absolutely get that one and he’ll find the little message Sollux is going to hide in it.” Nepeta says gleefully.

“It’ll be very subtle.” you add.

Dahvid stands up suddenly, looming tall above you all and even as he leans down to rest his clenched fists on his desk he’s still imposing.

“You’re not sending any message up there, you’ll be caught and then if you’re lucky you’ll die. No.” Dahvid insists.

“We’ll be careful and I’ll work with any intelligence people or whatever you want to make sure it won’t get caught, I’m fine with that. I just need to send Psii a message.” you tell him.

“You can’t just send him a message! Besides even if you technically could do that because I’d not looked into the idea of using a picture of me because that’s self-centred even for me and why would he- not the point! It’s risky and I’m not letting you.” Dahvid says with an air of finality.

“You don’t even know why we want to! It’s important!” Karkat snaps.

“We need data about the Empress, how she fights, how strong she is and if anyone has that data it’s going to be the guy who’s been plugged into the security feeds for longer than I’ve been alive.” you point out.

“Why do you need that?” Dahvid asks despairingly.

“We need it so Dirkka, Hal and Equius can build a robot and make it fight like her so Roxxie can fight it.” Nepeta answers immediately.

Dahvid stares at all of you in silence for a moment.

“That is not the most bonkers thing that’s ever been said to me but it is up there on the list near the top. How were you even going to- no…” he shakes his head, “Actually this is a pitch meeting, you’re trying to pitch an idea to me. So do it. What’s the exact thing you were going to say to Psii in this questionably hidden message, huh?”

“We hadn’t exactly-” Dayvhe tries but his ancestor cuts him off.

“Do you know how many people would kill for this much of my time for a pitch? You don’t come in here halfassed without a formulated plan to the letter for something, especially something this dangerous. So spit it out now.” Dahvid says sharply and you get a flash of the menacing directerroriser that he really is.

Dayvhe flounders for a second but then haltingly speaks again.

“Psii… we need footage of… uh… of Condy fighting. Wait he might not know for sure who we are
but we don’t wanna, uh, just initials then so… SC?” Dayvhe says.

See, Dayvhe isn’t a hacker because if he was he’d know that sending messages you’re not supposed to should not be appended with your damn initials but because he’s your moirail you’re not going to show your despair for his dumb idea in public. Karkat on the other hand is staring at Dayvhe like if he looks hard enough he can see where the guy’s thinkspoon fell out.

“Get out of my office.” Dahvid says flatly.

“But-” Dayvhe tries.

Dahvid snaps his fingers and points at the door.

“Don’t come to me with stupid ideas that’ll get people killed. Out.” he orders him and you guess all of you.

“You’re not my lusus!” Dayvhe snaps out at him and you can watch the cringe of ‘did I just say that’ on his face so you know even he knows how weird that just sounded. Even leaving aside that they had the same lusus who is now dead the fact that Dayvhe was interpreting Dahvid’s actions as lusus fussing is… augh. You didn’t even say it and you’re wincing.

“We’re gonna go now.” you announce and grab Dayvhe by the back of his shirt to pull him out. Carrie is long gone from the hallway and Karkat and Nepeta have the good sense to be out ahead of you two.

Outside near the pornographic shrubbery the four of you loiter and talk.

“That was a disaster.” Karkat states.

“If we come up with a finer tuned version of it we might be able to suggest it again. He did say he hadn’t thought of the idea.” Nepeta suggests and that you agree with. Between your group you can surely nail down something short, safe and instructive without giving everything away. It’s a solvable puzzle.

“I need to…” Dayvhe hisses, his hands in his hair. He’s blatantly not feeling good about what just went down and you can almost feel the alarmed shoutpole hovering above your head with your desire to help.

“Gonna walk. Think or whatever.” Dayvhe mutters and you relax, you can deal with him wanting to be alone to sort his shit out. You’re the same a lot of the time and you know he’ll come back if he needs you, so you relax. Dayvhe walks off out onto the street leaving the three of you alone again.

“Are you really going to take him up on that offer of a ship?” Karkat asks you, changing the subject.

“I can see how being too cramped in something would make you less effective, like trying to meownuver in a really small space in a fight.” Nepeta adds in.

“It’s worth looking into. Besides a bigger ship would probably make Aradia more like herself again and if Dahvid really isn’t going to help at all then we’re going to need to get off this rock at some point so I may as well get better at flying something like that, right?” you say.

“Makes sense. I hate it, but it makes sense.” Karkat concedes grudgingly.

Karkat declares that you’re going home and neither of you stop Nepeta when she says that she wants to go back to your ship to see if you really can see it from his window or if Dahvid was lying and
knew some other way. She also wants to catch Aradia up on things.

Of the people that you know that you’re inclined to worry about Nepeta is not high up on the list. You wonder if Psiionic was the same with Disciple, if she just did her thing and they let her, confident that she would be fine. She alone survived after Signless was caught, she kept up the resistance didn’t she? You’ve a weird tinge of pride that you don’t think is yours but there’s an admiration in it that is, actually, you. You’ve got to admire that kind of faith she had in her cause and the grit to just keep going despite losing everything else. When you nearly lost everything you didn’t handle it well but Disciple seemed to get up again and go on because fuck you is why. You don’t think Nepeta is the kind of person who would go down without a fight either. You should try to be a better friend because she’s actually a really good one to you when you’ve needed it.

For his part when Dayvhe comes back he’s kind of sullen and weird. He’s not weird with either you or Karkat specifically but he keeps dipping into these moments of scowling thoughtfulness. He’s not sad or anything, Dayvhe is cheerful enough when interacting with people and you watch him seek people out to have dumb fun with. He teases his friends and affectionately drapes himself over Karkat and you but even so he keeps returning to this stubbornly persistent mood.

“Is it like when you burn the roof of your mouth?” you ask suddenly as Karkat is sternly watching Dayvhe shove a load of laundry into the machine to make him pay for being such a little thief of clothes.


“This moody thing you’re doing. Something’s bugging you and you’re not saying but you keep going back to it. Like when you burn the roof of your mouth and it goes all weird and burnt and you can’t stop poking it with your tongue every now and then.” you explain.

“That was a weird analogy.” Karkat says, like he has any room to talk.

“Yeah but you’re kind of right.” Dayvhe concedes and slams the machine’s door. He jabs at the button and it starts churning away, you float up because otherwise the thing is just going to eventually vibrate your bony butt right off of it and onto the floor. This machine already has a habit of wandering across the floor when in use, you’ve had to put it back several times before.

“Well what’s the problem anyway?” Karkat asks him.

Dayvhe opens his mouth and just stands there wordlessly before gesturing wide and helpless and eventually saying “Dahvid.”

“Can I help?” you ask.

“Eventually, probably. But I feel like I need an actual question to hand you to get you to help and if I ask you to help now then all I got is your thoughts on this and I need mine and I’m just-”

“Chronically empty of thought?” Karkat interrupts with a fanged grin.

Dayvhe looks back at him with a blank face and then suddenly psionically jerks one of Karkat’s legs out from beneath him and nearly topples him to the ground. You roll your eyes, this may well devolve into a slap fight at this rate and then you’ll just leave.

“You need a proper query before I can help you find a useful result.” you say and Dayvhe nods.

That’s good enough for you. Dayvhe is the only one out of you who has to deal with his ancestor for more than a little bit. Your interaction with yours was more up close and personal than most people
ever get with each other but it was still fleeting. Dayvhe’s ancestor is just hanging around all the time so you can forgive Dayvhe for having more than his fair share of issues about that, you already know that he doesn’t quite know what to feel about the man but there must be more to it than that because it’s still bothering him.

Still, there’s nothing you can do about it for now.

On the note of other things that aren’t things, you don’t actually need supervision everywhere. You’re a perfectly capable troll and you don’t need your quindrantmates holding your hand any time you go anywhere. Anyway, now that you’re healed enough that the likelihood of you accidentally paralysing yourself (sorry Tavros) is basically zero, people are less up in your grill about everything. You’re just killing time by shooting the shit with Aradia of all people as you float above stupidly uncomfortable chairs in the waiting room. Look, it means you know you’re out of the way but you don’t have to subject yourself to badly formed plastic that suits no one.

AA: im just s0 excited!
TA: what for?
AA: y0u getting t0 fly again
TA: are you gettiing 2poiiler2 again?
AA: well n0t ab0ut this n0 but i als0 kn0w it has t0 g0 well because 0f the thing that set all 0f this 0ff in the first place
TA: you 2et mo2t of thii2 off iin the fiir2t place aa
AA: n0 n0 i kn0w that but im talking ab0ut what i saw that made me think it was w0rth it
AA: s0 0bvi0usly its g0ing t0 be good news!
AA: isnt that exciting!!!!
TA: promii2e2 of good thiing2 make me a liitle nervou2
TA: feel2 liike a trap
TA: not that ii’m 2ayiing you’re tryiing two trap me or anythiing. Ju2t that’2 how iit 2eem2 two work out a lot for me.
AA: really?
AA: because y0u seem pretty happy this sweep t0 me!
TA: are we forgettiing all the torture and maiimiing?
AA: alright yes fine but y0u have all this happiness t00
AA: all y0ur heart/spade/diam0nd/clubs smushed t0gether in one happy mess and y0ure 0ff 0f alternia
AA: AND THE THING IS G0ING T0 HAPPEN!
TA: whoa all cap2
AA: s0rry im just very excited f0r this
TA: you really are

Your fingers pause on the screen of your palmhusk as your attention is grabbed by the ache of an old hurt. Nothing fresh or hugely devastating, more the dull throb of a bruise that’s protesting at being touched. Aradia really is excited, far more than she usually would be. It reminds you. But it doesn’t remind you of Aradia.

CC: I'm -EXCIT---------------------ED!

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling apocalypseArisen [AA]

TA: have
TA: have you ever 2een ff?
AA: since she died y0u mean?
TA: yeah
AA: n0 but i think thats a g00d thing
TA: you’d thimk dyiing the way 2he diid would be unfinii2hed bu2iine22 thou2h riight?
AA: n0t always
AA: its n0t like she didnt kn0w what eridan c0uld be like and she did take him 0ut t00
AA: plus her b0dy was disc0vered s0 pe0ple knew
TA: ii gue22 fef alway2 knew her chance2 of 2urviival were low 2o maybe iit wa2n’t a 2urpriise
AA: isnt that why y0u pitied her
TA: thi22… feel2 lii2e a weiird conver2atiion two have wiith you
AA: d0nt feel weird
AA: i get it
AA: she was way higher up the spectrum than us
TA: liitera2ly cant GET hiigher than her
AA: right but fighting 0ther heiresses and maybe the empress herself and had n0 ch0ice in it
AA: 0r n0 real ch0ice
AA: and her lusus…
TA: yeah her liife expectancy wa2 about the 2ame a2 our2
AA: but the p0int is i get the pity there its n0t weird t0 talk ab0ut
TA: no ii2 2tiil feel2 pretty weird
AA: als0 we sh0uld really check that s0me0ne else is feeding her lusus s0 we d0nt all die
TA: pretty 2ure RX took care of that
AA: what if i sell the idea t0 y0u as
AA: d0ouble checking
AA: 😊
TA: you 2tole that from me!
TA: ii’m both offended and amu2ed
AA: 0f c0urse y0ure both
TA: …hey.
AA: accurate
TA: well either way from what tge 2aiid iit doe2n’t 2eem liike your 2hiip ii2 2omethiing ii 2hould fly
TA: 2o ii don’t know how we’d even get two alterniia two do that
TA: ii mean iif iit were ju2t me ii’d ju2t 2uck iit up and do that
TA: but ii2’2 liike ii can ju2t hear the whiining and complaiiniing radiatiatiing back ii in time from that
po22ible future from dv and kk
AA: there arent many ships around that can c0mf0rtably acc0modate y0ur p0wer
TA: ii am ba2icaii y0u2ed the be2t ye2
AA: and y0u w0uld want a ship that i c0uld g0 in t00 s0 i can help
AA: and t0 make me feel better riight?
TA: uh
AA: s0 thats a pretty specific list 0f needs f0r y0u t0 even try a ship
TA: …exactly what do you know?
AA: I KN0W IM EXCITED!
TA: oh 2hiit that2 my doc ii gotta go
TA: thi22 ii2n’t over
AA: see y0u later
TA: ominon2 aa
TA: ominon2
AA: ^_- 
TA: oh god

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling apocalypseArisen [AA]
“Sorry about that.” you apologise, stashing your palmhusk away.

“It’s fine.” Feelgood shrugs easily.

“I was talking to my ex. Friend. Not my ex-friend, we’re still friends, I think. It’s… complicated?” you blabber on but Feelgood just grins and motions you to follow them. They open an examination room door and you go inside, familiar enough with the processes now to know to go to sit on the examination table and wait.

“So, your last scans are back and short answer is it’s all good.” Feelgood says, psionically shutting the door behind them and walking over. They flick about on their notes to refresh their memory.

“The ports on your back are still more scarred inside than I would like and fully healing that may take sweeps but I wouldn’t expect more than the occasional twinge from them or a slight lack of flexibility, nothing serious at all.” they continue.

“Yes, finally something to blame my bad posture on.” you snort and Feelgood laughs.

“So, basically I’m all clear? I didn’t really need to come in?” you ask in surprise because if that’s it then surely they could have just sent you an email discharging you or whatever.

“Well, no. I have these for you. They ought to match your skintone but when you decide what you’re doing with your hair you should visit the woman on the card in there to set you up with some for the ports on your pan.” Feelgood says and hands you a case about the size of a glasses case. You pop it open to a neat double row of grey dots in little recessed slots. It takes you a second to work out what you’re looking at.

“To cover my ports?” you gasp and when you move your hand to them you can see the exact match to your skintone.

“On the card there’s directions for a space in the Dream to look up videos and memories for how to put them in and look after them but the details are all in there too. And whether you want to use them or not is totally up to you but we’re mandated to provide them either way because people shouldn’t have to pay for them even though having ports is nothing you should have to hide and-” Feelgood pauses mid rant and glances away.

“Sorry, it’s a hotly argued subject.” they add quickly.

“Got it, I’ll try not to piss people off unintentionally.” you nod. There’s no promises about not pissing people off intentionally, you know what you’re about.

You put the covers away figuring that it can be an interesting thing to try out later and you find yourself wondering about something.

“Am I… cleared to fly then?” you ask carefully.

“You were floating earlier and you’ve been off of the serious pain medication for a while, have you not flown at all?” Feelgood asks, clearly surprised.

“Oh, no, that’s not what I meant. I flew home the day you released me.” you say, waving your hand.

Feelgood covers their face with both hands and groans.

“I didn’t hear that.” they moan, shaking their head.
“I meant can I fly a ship.” you explain.

“Well,” Feelgood says as they lower their hands, “you’re able to I suppose, and you can plug
yourself into things now so that would cover that. But I can only clear you to fly medically, in order
to have permission to fly in Hollywood airspace you need flight control to grant that to you.”

“The Grand Entertainer said I could have whatever ship I want.” you say.

“That would certainly help, but you’d still need to register with flight. I know a girl, she dated my
moirail once but she runs the testing and approvals down there. Starskip. Just head down there and
ask for her and I’m sure you’ll end up in the right place.” Feelgood explains, writing on the back of
their business card and handing it to you so you can see the name and rough address of the place.

You send a message to everyone that you’re allowed to fly now but you have to go get approved and
then get a ship, so if they want a say on a new one and maybe a joyride in it they’d better come on
down. You fly there and unsurprisingly everyone else shows up too, but what does surprise you is
that you’re not the first person there.

Aradia’s spectral form is floating outside of the building and when she sees you she gives you a
slightly numb smile and a wave.

“AA, hey. Was this what you were so excited about?” you ask, landing next to her.

“Not quite but nearly.” Aradia says with a smile that seems more like one she’s remembering how to
do than anything real. Her clothes are burnt and tattered around her still. No matter how much time
passes or how different she seems when she talks to you from the ship when she’s a ghost out in the
real world she looks just the way she did the night that you k-

She looks just the way she did the night she died.

You look through her and wonder if she knows what this is like from your side. The world shifts
through her, faintly tinted by the colours of her clothes. See, this is why you kept talking to her for so
long after she died. Partly because you weren’t sure where you were with her, partly out of guilt but a
lot out of the feeling you have right now. You feel sad for her. She's stuck here instead of wherever
people are meant to end up and it's clearly not good for her, she's not right like this. You've been
depressed enough that you feel dead inside and you know how much that sucks, that empty, sucking
void of numbness but she actually is dead. Being in something as advanced as the ship and
connected to your living mind was great for her being herself again but the rest of the time...

It's just sad.

"Did you ever know any of the ghosts you talked to?" you ask as a drifting lock of her hair floats
near you. You move your fingers through it and feel the slightest chill.

"A few. Other FLARP players Vriska and Terezi killed. No one I knew well." Aradia shrugs.

"Sorry." you say.

"Everyone dies." Aradia shrugs again.

You think of your ancestor, of how almost everyone he knew is dead but though that's sad you feel
worse for him. Stuck where he is instead of with them or with Dahvid. Dahvid might be a shitty
person and your ancestor apparently has terrible taste in that one instance but you can't deny that the
other man makes him happy.
"That can be a mercy sometimes." you say softly.

One day your ancestor will die, he'll be out of the hell he's in and somewhere better. Anywhere is better, really. But one day the Empress will die too, hopefully soon. Hopefully things will get better when that happens.

Aradia smiles at you and this time it doesn't feel forced or a mimic of what she thinks she should be doing.

"You always got that, I always liked that about you." she says happily.

"I think my moirail takes issue with my vaguely hopeful nihilism, AA. Even if you had it as much as I did." you point out.

"Memento mori, Sollux. Everyone dies, may as well do what you want when you can. Everything ends so you might as well have fun." Aradia counters.

You can't say that the philosophy is entirely gone from you, you still operate on 'fuck it, why not' a lot with things but you think these nights you're a lot less removed from things. Actually having half of the people you care about taken from you is a pretty stark reminder that you really do want to keep them close to you at almost any cost. You felt it from your ancestor too, he was happy for you that you had people still but it reminded him of what he'd lost himself. Knowing what you have to lose makes it harder to be reckless and 'whatever' about risk.

"Where do ghosts go when they move on?" you ask slowly. It's not the first time you've asked this but Aradia's never given you a real answer and you've not cared enough to press it before.

"I've never been there obviously, and I'm not going any time soon." Aradia says, narrowing her blank eyes at you.

"Not what I was asking." you say, shaking your head.

You look upwards at the sky. Why do people do that? Think that the beyond or whatever is 'up there' in the very literal sense. That presents a horrible possibility of space being filled with ghosts. Imagine that shit, being some prehistoric troll ghost wandering the cosmos only to get splatted by some spaceship going over light speed, RIP random ghost you're double dead now.

"What I mean is... are Disciple and Signless and all those ancestors just waiting on Psiionic? Is he going to get to see them again?" you ask.

"They can wait, they have an eternity." Aradia answers cryptically. Though you suppose it does answer your question. There is a somewhere that the others are and they are waiting for him. That's reassuring in a way.

"Hey!" Karkat's foghorn of a voice bellows loudly, albeit far away. You look around Aradia's floating form to see your distant group walking closer. Good god Karkat can project that voice like a sledgehammer through a wall. Unfortunately what that means is that there's a good minute or so before they actually all get close enough to talk to which is a little awkward but still.

"You got the all clear then? You're all good?" Dayvhe asks.

"Golden." you grin and several people groan, including Vriska so that's a win.

"And I'm cleared to fly so I just have to see this person about getting a ship. Well, they have to test me first I think so that'll be interesting." you say cheerfully.
"I'll see you there." Aradia says vaguely and flies off through a wall. Ok... you guess you'll catch up with her later, wherever and whenever that is.

"Test you for what?" Dirkka asks.

"To see what ship is the right fit for him psionically, right? That's what Dahvid said befur and it makes sense that you'd want one at your level." Nepeta nods, she's sat up on Equius' shoulders for some reason so you have to look way up to talk to her.

"Which is interesting because before Feelgood told us that they didn't keep those records because people get competitive, so I guess what they meant is they don't keep those records publicly." you say.

"You're just excited to see how you measure up, huh?" Vriska scoffs.

"Do you find it hard to relate to the idea of being the best at something? I can try to explain what it's like for you, it must be a foreign concept I'm suRE!" you yelp as you jump backwards because Vriska just tried to grab you by the neck of your shirt. Only Kanaya sternly smacks her hand away.

"We're in PUBLIC can you both not? And do you know how much time and effort those shirts take to make? Don't you dare rip them." she scolds you both. You and Vriska just stare at her in surprise.

"Oh my lord, can we just go? We weren't this embarrassing at this age, were we?" Jayyne asks and Roxxie makes a 'sort of' hand motion as Dirkka shakes his head.

Ok, no. You turn right around and walk inside, anything is better than that conversation.

The building you're at is called, creatively, Central Flight - West. There's a Central Flight - East on the other side of the planetoid. Luckily for you important shit tends to cluster around where Dahvid is based which makes it so that you don't have to go all that far for anything important you might need. Though to say that the Central Flight - West building is a singular building is a misnomer, it's more of a highly automated complex. Around you flight crews are coming in and out and small but highly powerful robots are shuttling freight around at high speed to where it needs to go. Ships are being attended to, inspected, maintained and cared for. Even the part that you're in stretches out so far that you can't see the end of it.

Honestly you're lost. Everyone seems so busy and even the people who do seem to notice your group have time to do little else than give you a curious look before their work drags them off.

"I'm a little concerned that we can just walk into a facility as secure as this and have no one stop us." Roxxie says quietly.

"Surely everyone's got to know who we are by now though." John points out.

"I'm supposed to talk to Starskip but I've no idea how to even-" you say helplessly but Jayyne steps forward and plucks the note from your hand.

"Just give me a moment." Jayyne says with a nod and strides off with her head held high. You watch as she flags someone down and talks over them with the self assurance that someone will listen.

"Oooh, the 'I'd like to speak to your manager voice' classic." Terezi cackles.

Up ahead Jayyne nods and returns to your group.

"I've got directions to Starskip's office. She works in the admin area near maintenance, there's a
shuttle system that way which will take us there." Jayyne explains.

Following Jayyne your group goes off the way they said. The building's own transport system is more like a modified version of its freight transport system, you simply plug in where you want to go and it takes you there. Or that's the theory at least. It's asking for access credentials and none of you have what you need to get in. You could of course hack it and you're considering how best to start that when Dirkka sighs unhappily behind you.

"I have an idea but I don't like it." Dirkka grumbles and takes his shades off. As well as a scanner for passes there's a biometric scanner that'll take eye scans. Dirkka leans in and there's a beep as it scans his eye, leaving him standing there blinking rapidly to adjust back to normal again. The machine thinks for a moment and then flashes up a little message 'Welcome Subverse!' and happily accepts Jayne's directions.

"I guess being more or less genetically identical to the guy has its advantages. I was wondering if we might not be a match but..." Dirkka shrugs.

"Yeah I mean it's not like I'm the same as my ancestor. Not unless my adult molt hits me real goddamn weird." Dayvhe says thoughtfully.

"Thankfully that won't happen ever because you're gonna stay little forever." Roxxie asserts confidently and grabs Dayvhe up in a squeezing hug that Dayvhe tries with mortification to escape and utterly fails. All of his friends are terrible because none of them offer to help. You're probably worse, you snap a picture and get yourself a betrayed yell of your name back from him for doing it. Soon enough you find the right area and with a little more asking around you find yourself outside of Starskip's office. Karkat nudges you forward and so you're the one left to knock on the door.

A tired looking blueblood adult opens the door and looks down at you, she seems confused for a moment before tired understanding sets in.

"What are- oh. You're the guy." she concludes.

"Totally how he introduces himself." Karkat nods and John snort laughs.

"Sollux Captor. Docterrorist Feelgood said I should talk to you about getting approved and whatever? The Grand Entertainer said I could have whatever ship I wanted that was a match and Feelgood said I'd need to talk to you first so here I am." you explain.

Starskip narrows her eyes and stares at you.

"One moment." she says sharply.
"Uh. Ok?" you reply.

"I can't believe I'm expected to just provide a ship for a bunch of children and two barely passed adults just because your ancestors were- ugh." Starskip shakes her head and then sighs.

"Come with me, we need to test you. All we have is the adult test because children aren't supposed to be flying but I guess it's just opposite day today! Honestly, Feelgood would send you to me all because their stupid moirail was such a- ugh I could scream. Waste of my time." Starskip mutters and stomps past all of you leaving you to follow her.

"So you're not honoured to help The Grand Entertainer with a task he's specifically mandated?" Rohhze asks curiously and Starskip hesitates slightly.

"The Grand Entertainer is a genius and I would never question his thoughts on his subject of expertise but ship allocation is a very specialised subject and looking after helmsmen, though something he has great interest in, is a very niche and complicated business. Providing a child with a helm is just... look, your ancestor might be the most powerful helmsman who ever lived but you're a sub-adult. Your body and your thinksponge just aren't mature enough to be powerful enough to control a ship." Starskip says stiffly.

"I didn't WALK to this planet, dumbass. I flew half of us here, but by all means test me. Besides, Feelgood said that-" you try.

"Feelgood is a meddling pain in my ass that ruined my relationship with their stupid moirail and they need to stay in their own goddamn specialty!" Starskip hisses angrily.

"Maybe if you consider your ex-spade to be stupid and so easily manipulated that might be the reason you're not dating anymore, not Feelgood." Karkat says bluntly and Starskip jerks back like Karkat just slapped her.

She marches on without another word, finally stopping at what looks to you like a helm. It's just outside of a ship. Starskip eyes your ports up and then waves towards the helm. There are biowires waiting that twitch when you get near them, something that's always creeped you out a little. They're fine when it's just connecting you to the Dream or to a husktop but biowires connected to a helm respond like they're part of a living thing. In fairness that's exactly what they are but it's just too organic and alive to be anything but unsettling to you.

"You want me to just... get in?" you ask as Starskip drops into a chair with a squeak and starts rapidly typing and opening up programs.

"Yeah, yeah." she mutters.

You rub your arm uncomfortably and remind yourself that you wanted this as you come closer. You turn your back on the wires and when they connect there's... nothing.

Well, not nothing. You're still standing exactly where you were before, there's no ship, no interface, no feeling of being bigger and more than you are. It's just that you're connected to some wires. You can feel a small tug of power demand but that's it. You look over at Starskip to find her sitting up straight in her chair looking at her screen. Dirkka and Equius look over her shoulder at the screen.

"Mid level class psionic, suited for ship classes..." Equius trails off and Dirkka looks over at you with a frown.

Mid level? Ouch. You know you're not an adult yet but you'd really thought you were better than that.
"Isn't he supposed to be doing something though? He's just standing there looking confused." Dirkka points out.

"What do you mean he's just standing there?" Starskip demands and pushes Dirkka out of the way to stare at you.

"Is that it? It doesn't feel like it's doing anything, is that all the test is?" you ask.

"I... had it on the lowest demand because I didn't want to kill you. How are you still aware and fine?" Starskip breathes.

"I'm fine, I can barely feel anything." you assure her.

Starskip stares at you for a solid few seconds before pushing her chair back in place and typing quickly and clicking.

"I'm going to try increasing the demand to what an upper mid ship would ask of you, I've got your vitals here so if anything starts going wrong it'll stop immediately." Starskip says seriously.

You wait but nothing much seems to be happening.

"Are you going to do that then?" you ask after several long seconds.

"She is. Keep going up." Dirkka says with a bright grin.

Starskip keeps clicking through levels of demand and you can see yourself jumping up and up the table of rankings, it's starting to get enough of a demand that you can feel it. You feel like you've had to run for the communal scuttlebuggy to not miss it, you know you've done something but you're hardly tired.

"Can I not just push power out rather than you taking it?" you ask finally.

"I think it would be likely that you would blow the complex's power if you did that, be patient Sollux." Equius reprimands you.

"He's a terrible patient and terrible at being patient." Karkat snorts.

"Sollux, this one's going to be a bit of a jump, less of a gradient so this one might actually hit you. You ready?" Dirkka warns.

"Finally." you scoff.

Seeing as you were warned this shouldn't be such a sucker punch but it still is, you're breathless for a second but you settle, finding an equilibrium and shaking the stars from your ganderbulbs.

"Sol, you ok?" Dayvhe asks worriedly.

"I'm... good. It just kicked was all, Dirkka was right. I'm good." you assure him.

"What the fuck." Starskip whispers hoarsely.

"Do you not have anything between these two?" Equius asks and you crane your neck to try to see the screen but the others are in the way too much. You wonder why Hal's not looking but his unfocused expression tells you that he's probably in the system somehow looking at it directly.

"We gather the more accurate figures from in flight power consumption data. These are the the
results of those two helmsmen, I don't have a setting in between but we can... we can try this one. We have safeties if it's too much but that's another fifty percent demand on what we're already doing.” Starskip says hesitantly.

"Do it." you tell her.

"Sollux..." Dayvhe warns you.

"I won't know otherwise, that's why we're here." you point out.

Starskip’s fingers tap hurriedly on the keyboard and your brace yourself, not quite sure what to expect.

There was a movie you watched once, you can’t remember the title and you wonder if it was made here or elsewhere. But in the end this alien got sucked out through a spaceship window, a tiny hole in it through several gross and agonising seconds as the vacuum of space ripped it apart. The sudden drain of your psionic power through your ports is the closest you have ever felt to what you imagine that must have felt like.

Your vision goes white and you don’t even have the coherency to gasp, you hit the floor in a tangled heap but by the time Dayvhe’s got to you everything is starting to come back.

“I can-” you choke out as you try to talk and gasp more air in at the same time and fail. You can supply the power it’s demanding but only just and it hurts. It hurts like Psiionic’s helm hurt, or at least it’s heading in that direction. So yeah, you can meet this level of power but not without cost.

As suddenly as it started the demand cuts off and the biowires detach themselves in a hurry.

“I’m ok.” you say shakily, your eyes watering.

Colder hands touch your jaw and Starskip is knelt down looking at you seriously.

“Grit your teeth, breathe through your nose. Sit up straighter, you’ll get more air that way, come on.” she says in a clear voice and moves you how she instructs. Dayvhe helps her and rubs gently at your face to wipe away the watering of your eyes.

Slowly you start to feel better and Starskip sits down in front of you, giving you a careful look.

“So what level is he then? I know he’s not an adult yet but he could clearly do that even if it looked like hell.” Vriska asks.

“No child should have been able to do any of that. He’s not- we don’t have firm data on The Psiionic’s power abilities or those of The Empress herself, we’ve just inferred through physics and guesswork based on the psionics that we have data on. We calculate the maximum power level as one that can be achieved without pain, a consideration the empire does not take and one he did not meet with that standard. It’s… look.” Starskip sighs and gets up.

She taps at her screen and brings up an image.

“Telekinetic psionic ability, or those in the family that helms can harvest can be ranked in power. Most common of which is to have just a touch, the ability to just about move yourself a little and move other things around somewhat.” Starskip says, pointing to the lowest level of the triangle like shape on screen.

“Like me then? I can float a bit, boost my jumps and stuff and move some things around but not very
“Right, you’d be around here. Most common, no point in helming you, we’d not get anything worth anything.” StarSkip nods and waves at the screen.

Her claw tracks up to the band above that and below the middle.

“Obviously any goldblood who comes here gets ports for their own reasons but we won’t helm anyone in a ship until they’re above here. The Empire will helm them anyway but those helmsmen are sure to die within six perigees. Beyond that you have this band, your low level helmsmen capable of small shuttle flight without discomfort. As you can see it’s a reasonably broad band, very common.” StarSkip explains. You think of Nicole and how fighting against you put her in the hospital and Feelgood’s dismissive attitude that despite being their leader she wasn’t that powerful. She must be around that level.

Yeah, you’re starting to get why this information is kept confidential.

“As the capabilities to move bigger and more power hungry ships grows the rarer the psionic ability becomes. This was where you tested when we first connected you.” StarSkip says. When it had read mid level you’d assumed mid level of psionic ability not ‘the middle of the upper levels capable of flight’. Practically that puts your starting result at the upper third of psionics as a whole.

“This level has only a hundred psionics in it, this one forty, the next twenty. This is less a pyramid than a cluster of data now, see the large gaps in ability forming here? Here, these are our top two most powerful psionics. At the top, Firenova.” StarSkip says and taps the screen. A picture of a woman with blazing red and orange eyes and a wild grin flicks onto the screen.

“Below her the previous top ranked psionic Grimdust, his psionic ability has been waning as he’s aged but he’s incredibly reliable and his endurance is second to none.” StarSkip explains, bringing up an image of an older goldblood who has one eye so pale blue it’s almost white and the other a deep blue.

“That was the one whose level hurt Sollux?” Dayvhe asks.

“I’m fine.” you mutter.

“Yes. Grimdust could have withstood that comfortably, he has more psionic power than Sollux, as well he should as he’s a child.” StarSkip mutters that last part out in displeasure.

“I think you’re selling Sollux short here miss, he’s not four sweeps old you know. He might not be an adult yet, nor am I, but neither of us are children thank you very much!” Jayekh says in your defense. Yeah, thanks Jayekh!

“Child. Ren. You are children. But, despite that it makes Sollux the third most powerful psionic on the planetoid.” StarSkip says stiffly.

Your shoulders drop a little in disappointment and Dayvhe turns to look at you, his lips a flat and unimpressed line.

“Sollux Captor are you disappointed with that? Specifically are you disappointed not just because you’re not the best but because you’re not at least the second best so you could fulfil some number two obsessive thing and being third denies you both? Is that what’s happening here?” Dayvhe asks you.

“...No.” you lie. Hopefully convincingly. Dayvhe flicks you in one of your smaller horns, ok, that
wasn’t convincing then.

“Your adult molt seems to around double your psionic power at least though some find it does more than that so when he is an actual adult he will be beyond both Grimdust and Firenova.” Starskip says.

“Okay but what’s double my amount then?” you ask eagerly.

“I don’t know because like I said we don’t have actual data for anyone higher or from within the imperial fleet so what we have is just guesswork not actual-”

“Oh come on!” you interrupt her.

Starskip rolls her eyes and turns her back on you, she enters some information and the screen flicks to a new image, just your sign. There’s no photo of your ancestor like the others, you wonder if that’s deliberate or if it’s out of respect. You doubt your ancestor would want an official photo of him from Signless’ execution or whatever as his image for all eternity.

“Ballpark somewhere around our estimate of your ancestor’s level, happy now?” Starskip sighs.

Yes. Yes you are happy. You just need to molt and THEN you’re going to be the most powerful psionic in the universe and you know you can outstrip your ancestor because you’re not growing up on the shittier version of Alternia that he did. Shit, if looking after yourself properly will stack the odds in your favour for outdoing Psiionic then you’re actually going to take that seriously! Dayvhe will no doubt be delighted.

“Alright, enough stroking of his ego now. What can he fly with what he is now and also won’t hurt him like Grimdust’s level did?” Karkat asks.

Starskip chews on her lip for a moment and turns her chair around, fidgeting as she thinks by swivelling it around a little.

“Firenova’s ship is The Supercollider and even if she wasn’t offworld right now I wouldn’t put you in there, it’d be too high scale for you. Plus she’s always in demand along with Grimdust to move large scale props and buildings between shooting locations as well as containing massive sets within the ships for specialised filming. You could in theory helm Grimdust’s ship, we’ve dialled back the demand because of his age so you could but he’s very precious about her. I know The Grand Entertainer said you could have anything but I don’t think you should do that, besides all of you together just isn’t enough people to keep a ship of that size functioning on a maintenance level alone.” Starskip says slowly.

“Anything else?” Dirkka asks.

“There’s a backup ship that they share but she’s currently undergoing maintenance and is in about six hundred pieces right now. But… maybe if I look at multi helm ships instead of solos…” Starskip trails off and turns back to the keyboard again and starts typing.

She’s mumbling to herself as she talks about neural loads and power requirements but after about fifteen seconds of typing she freezes. When she turns back around to you her face is in an unsettling smile.

“He said ANY ship? So even a private one?” Starskip asks eagerly.

“Yes.” you say. You’re not totally sure but you’re very happy for that to be a problem that Dahvid can deal with later. Starskip beams and leaps to her feet.
“Come with me, I have just the thing. She’s been down in storage for a long time, private collection you see but she ought to be fully functional because he does get her maintained all the time. She’s a dual helm ship because though she’s relatively small she had to be very fast indeed for filming. It’s not unheard of for the empire to deliberately mess with film ships in space so they have to be functional and able to defend themselves and escape and she certainly deserves better than just sitting in that guy’s collection.” Starskip explains as she leads you to the transport system again and starts tapping on the console in there to take you to where you need to go.

“If it’s designed for multiple people how does that work if it’s just Sollux flying it?” Equius asks sensibly as the facility whips by you at high speed. You slow down and then suddenly drop down many many floors one after the other, this place is even bigger than you thought!

“Well that’s what we have to try out, when you connect a helmsman to a ship you know right away if it’s a good fit. Obviously I’ve never experienced it myself but everyone says that you just know. The load mentally may be a problem because usually you have two minds to sift that through, but we’ll see.” she shrugs.

Aradia, you’re sharing with Aradia. Wherever you’re going has got to be where she went off to, right?

Finally you stop going down and start going along again, lights clicking on as you get close to them.

“I’ll be so happy to see her finally flying again, it’s such a crime to keep her locked down here. I know The Grand Entertainer gave her to him as a gift but it’s just not right to keep her grounded like that, and he demands maintenance all the time even though he can’t fly her and- RRRGH!” Starskip snarls.

“Is this your kismesis’ ship?” Nepeta asks with intense curiosity. Starskip doesn’t answer but her face twists into an uncomfortable kind of expression that tells you that there’s something going on there for sure. You all slow down and the door slides open allowing you out. You can hear the dim buzz of fluorescent lighting not quite catching, leaving you all in the dark. You float out of the door and then suddenly the lighting catches and floods the hangar space with light.

Your breath catches in your chest and you grip onto the nearest railing as you stare down at her in shock. You’ve never- you didn’t know it was a real ship. Not a working one at least but there it is right in front of you and YOU’RE going to get to fly it?!

“Isn’t that from Star Trek or whatever?” John asks casually leaning against the railing to look down at it too.

“The Star WARS series, they’re different! One was mostly TV and a few movies and-” you protest but the shit eating grin on John’s face tells you that he knows that just as well as you do and he’s just winding you up for fun. Stupid prankster’s gambit.

“She’s not actually the main Millenium Falcon from the movies, we had two in case we needed to repair the first which we did a few times and in case we needed to shoot it in two places at the same time because of scheduling. This is technically The Millenium Falcon Two.” Starskip explains.

“I’m pretty sure that makes it better for him.” Vriska laughs.

“But she’s so much bigger than she looks in the movies and oh she’s so pretty.” Jayekh gasps, his eyes sparkling with glee. He’s right of course, the ship is fucking magnificent. You’re more of a software guy than a hardware guy and you’ve never been one to get over excited by spaceships. Some goldbloods who bought into the imperial propaganda were all about that shit but not you, even
a bunch who knew it was going to be shitty at least hoped for a good ship to get stuck in. By and large though you couldn’t care.

But you’re also not BLIND. The Millenium Falcon is cool as shit, even without the movies that it’s in you’d think it’s a cool ship and the fact that you do, actually secretly, kind of really like those movies makes the whole thing all the cooler for you. You can’t be bothered with all the stairs to get down there so you just launch yourself into the air and take your time getting down to land so you can look her over. There’s damage to her and you have to get close to see that a lot of it is very diligently and authentically painted on even as some is normal wear and tear for going in and out of atmospheres. You peer in the windows and see inside and get views of rooms that you remember from the films.

“Aradia?” you call out softly and the lighting inside the ship flares a rusty red for you, she’s already in there. Your face hurts from smiling and you quickly zip down to the entrance of the ship which slides open for you. Your shoes on the walkway make a metallic clang that echoes seemingly forever.

Inside the ship is no longer rusty red but dark. You’re never truly in darkness but it’s still a little dark for you.

“AA?” you call out.

apocalypseArisen [AA] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

AA: its been s0 l0ng since the ship had any0ne in the helm that theres nearly n0 p0wer left 0_0
TA: But 2tar2kiip 2aiid they were doiing maiintenance work before, how were they doiing that iif there wa2 no power?
AA: fr0m the logs in the system here it l00ks like external batteries were used t0 run checks
TA: ii gue22 ii'd better go giive thii2 2ome power, huh?
TA: ii it ii2 going two work riight? ii ii2 a match to me?
AA: 0_^
TA: were you going for un2ettliing there because that'2 what you got
AA: 0h
AA: n0 hmm
AA: 0_n
TA: ii'll let you work on that, ii'm gonna fiind the helm

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling apocalypseArisen [AA]

You turn on the flashlight on your palmhusk and keep walking into the ship, the others will catch up sooner or later. The doors aren’t opening as you get close to them, you guess Aradia’s trying to conserve power so you don’t get to see as much of the ship as you’d like. Some however seem to have been left open and you catch glimpses of rooms that you hadn’t seen in the movies but would have needed to be there. A decent nutritionblock for one, empty store rooms, you even catch sight of a respiteblock with extensive clothes racks.

“SOLLUX!” your name echoes distantly down the hallways, Karkat’s voice for sure.

“DOWN HERE!” you yell back and keep walking on, taking your time as you look around areas.

Along the hall a light flickers red and then off, so you walk towards it knowing Aradia’s signs when you see them. The corridor curves around but there’s no obvious door. You stop and think carefully. In the movies there were never any helmsmen at all, it was never clear how the ships themselves flew and any technical talk became tecchie sounding nonsense. But it made sense, the people in the Star
Wars movies were different species to you, even those who looked like trolls. Besides, given that psionic power in one way or another was portrayed by the Jedi and the force it wouldn’t have made sense for there to be helmsmen. Plus, it’s a movie, as far as you’re concerned it just ain’t that deep. The point is though that for a series determined not to show helmsmen in ships but absolutely needing them from a filming standpoint it’d have to be hidden. So if Aradia directed you here then you must be in the right place, right?

You could stand here and investigate, use your detectorturer skills that you honed so keenly in that mystery game. Orrrrrr you could cheat. Psionically you gently press against everything around you, just the most fleeting touch and then when you can feel it all you just carefully vibrate everything a little. On the floor a metal plate buzzes more freely than everything else. You let go and then gently psionically open it, the thing isn’t even locked. With the hidden hatch open you climb down, the light from your palmhusk swinging across the room.

The secret helm of the Millenium Falcon, sorry, the Millenium Falcon Two (that really is so much better) is pristine. It reminds you of the hospital with its neat and shining surfaces and neutral calming colours. The helm itself is double sided but there’s no biowires around that you can see, even though the biological parts of the helm they connect to are neatly contained within clear toughened glass.

A sudden, sharp, puff of air on the back of your neck and the feeling of something far too close makes you yelp in alarm and shoot up in the air so fast you actually bump against the ceiling. Through the beam of light coming from your palmhusk you look down to see a smirking Dayvhe looking up at you as he lands on the floor from the ever so slight hover that must have let him sneak up on you.

“You little shit.” you accuse him and land.

“I’d say that’d teach you for running off but I’m not that much of an optimist.” Dayvhe says casually.

“Plus, Starskip has the biowires so there was only so much trouble you were going to get into down here. You couldn’t plug yourself in, which is exactly the sort of stupid stunt you’d pull.” Dayvhe adds.

“That’s a baseless accusation and I’m hurt.” you gasp.

You know what, if the wires had still looked fine you totally would have already done that. Even with his shades on in the dark you can tell that the look Dayvhe has on harbours exactly zero faith in your self restraint or good judgement, which is probably fair and accurate.

“Aradia’s here already.” you tell him, gesturing vaguely to the ship at large.

“Oh. Yay. This is my reassured face, really, can’t you tell?” Dayvhe says flatly.

You kind of want to protest a little that you and Aradia are fine now and he should trust her too but that’s not really his job. He’s your moirail, he doesn’t trust people who hurt you. He only just about trusts Vriska and that’s because so much of your happiness hinges on being able to be with her and also you dying or getting hurt would be monumentally terrible for her. You doubt he’s going to just trust Aradia easily any time soon. Maybe you forgive too easily but Dayvhe doesn’t.

You don’t get to argue the point because Starskip comes in the room with an actual light in her hand. Now that you’ve proven useful and not just some little child playing at being powerful she seems to have more time for you, not to mention you may or may not be unlawfully taking the ship of either her ex-kismesis or someone she currently has a spade about which is probably helping her out too.
Starskip stops at the closest helm half to the hatch into the room and takes a bunch of wrapped up biowires out of her sylladex and starts plugging them in. Several of the other more mechanically inclined trolls among your group are clustered together on the stairs watching, leaving Karkat to climb over all of them to get to where you and Dayvhe are waiting.

“I would say that you don’t need to do this, but you look like a wiggler just before twelfth perigee’s eve so I think that’s wasted.” Karkat snorts loudly. He’s right, you’re excited, probably obnoxiously so. You want to know what this is going to be like, if this or something soon by this is what Aradia saw and determined that everything you went through was worth it then fuck yeah you’re excited.

Starskip stands back finally, the helm wired up properly. The dumb biowires are sleepily trying to get in her hair and up her arm, thinking that she might be a psionic they can use. Starskip bats the wires away and you eagerly get closer, you’re not thrilled about the wires but the rest you are. You have enough time to turn around before the wires makes their first connection to you, from that alone the lights all immediately flick on and newly energised the other wires rush right into place in under a second.

It’s…

You’ve been connected to the Dream before, you’ve been connected to husktops before, you’ve been connected to medical equipment and to Roxxie’s ship. This is nothing like any of those.

You do not control the ship, you’re not interfacing with the Millenium Falcon Two. You ARE this ship. This is like being a tuning fork suddenly struck and exactly matching the note of this ship. This is like sinking into sopor after forever away from it, like hands in your hair and up your back making your skin tingle and your body shiver, it’s what those weird whispering channels on grubtube claim their stuff does.

Your energy isn’t being taken, it’s more like you have expanded to be the ship as a whole. Your psionics are blood and finally you’re circulating through all of you, it’s so right in such an obvious way that you feel absurd for never getting it before.

You see with every sensor on the ship, inside and out. You know just where you are in space and just where everyone you’re carrying is. It’s incredible but you don’t just want to be here, not trapped in a hole down here, you want to be out there.

“You’ll get there, it’ll be great. Trust me.” Aradia says, her arms over your shoulders as she floats behind you. You’re both looking up, not really seeing the hangar roof above you but instead the known starmap.

“That’s the thing you saw?” you ask.

“Mmm.” Aradia says almost a purr. You guess she’s happier being in a bigger ship too and one with a better connection to you as well. You twist to look at her and in comparison to the young, dead, ghost girl you saw outside this Aradia is as alive and as real as you and looking exactly your age as well. Her grin is bright and destructive, like she can’t wait to go cause trouble.

You open your mouth to say something but like a barkbeast on a chain your attention is jerked away. You’re looking through your own eyes again. Dayvhe and Karkat’s concerned faces as Starskip talks to them.

“It’s obviously a good match, you don’t need to worry.” she says calmly.

“I’m fine.” you agree and your partners both look at you in surprise, having not realised that you
were present for this conversation. It’s then that you realise you’re floating in the helm, it’s using your own psionic power to keep you perfectly supported in the air, much better than being slumped over a chair like in Roxxie’s ship.

“Are you? You seemed pretty out of it there.” Karkat asks you suspiciously.

“No, I am. It’s just new and getting used to it is all. It feels… good actually.” you admit.

“See, I told you it-”

Your attention is jerked away by the feeling of another mind pressing up against your own all of a sudden with a YOU UTTER BASTARD!

You realise right away that being connected to anything with ports on this planetoid technically puts you within reach of the Dream, but you hadn’t chosen to connect to it. That decision was pretty much taken out of your hands and you’re in that space with Aradia and now some other guy.

“AAGH!” you yell in alarm.

“Hello!” Aradia offers cheerfully and the adult goldblood in your face looks at her in bafflement and you realise who you’re talking to right away.

“Wait, Longgame. What’re you doing here? Don’t mind Aradia, she’s a ghost.” you tell him.


“That’s rude.” Aradia pouts at you.

“You’ll live.” you groan.

“No I won’t!” Aradia laughs and now Longgame is the one groaning in despair.

“You keep getting in my system and I can’t get you out. You need to tell me what you did right now!” Longgame demands, pointing a finger in your face.

“I really don’t need to, if you can’t work it out that’s on you.” you tell him, pushing his hand away.

“There will be consequences if you don’t!” Longgame threatens you, clearly desperate. You laugh and pull your legs up so you’re floating crosslegged. This space isn’t really real so you don’t really have psionics to do that but then again physics isn’t really real here either so you can float if you want to.

“I’m sure there will be, man. Just not for me.” you say with a grin.

“I’ll ground you. I’m flight, no one leaves without our department’s approval and I’ll ban you if you don’t fix this.” Longgame says firmly and you find yourself laughing in his face.

“You can’t ground me, you’re not my lusus. As for grounding me in the flying way you can’t do that either because The Grand Entertainer himself promised me any ship Starskip approved as safe for me to fly and I’ve got this one. I can come and go as I like, so unless you want to take that up with him…” you trail off and take the time to really enjoy Longgame’s blanched expression of fear.

“I can’t believe this, after everything that’s happened with that damn shuttle and now you and your stupid hack too and I can’t even…” Longgame mutters, pacing back and forth in your imagined space as he runs his hands through his hair.

“What’s happening with that shuttle anyway? What did it have on it?” you ask curiously. Longgame
pauses and looks around at you with a sly smile.

“Tell me how you got into our system and I’ll tell you about the shuttle.” he offers and damn the offer is tempting.

But then again you didn’t hack as many of the machines on this planet as you could just so you could bargain for things, did you? You could just zip over to flight controls machines, to which you still have access, and get the information yourself. But then again everyone was so nice to you weren’t they? The goldbloods of this planetoid looked out for you. You don’t need to shove someone else down to prove that you can be better.

“A virus on Chittr, it scrapes saved passwords. As soon as someone gives me an inch I take a mile and get in.” you explain.

“Chittr? But everyone has... oh no.” Longgame pales a little and you stop floating to take a step closer. You doubt that even knowing what you’ve done will entirely stop you from being in his systems. You just need one more person who has access to the flight section to save a password somewhere and you’re back again. As the famous slam poet Eminem once recounted ‘guess who’s back, back again’ except it will be you who is back in their system.

“And your side of the deal? Tell me about the shuttle.” you say.

“Well... a lot of it was unremarkable to us. Just food and normal supplies but I traced the manifests back through time and they’ve been delivering to us for longer than I’ve been alive but I can’t seem to find anyone who actually places an order with them. Just different companies since then have claimed things from their deliveries and it’s just an accepted oddity.” Longgame says uneasily.

“Some company you don’t know about has been shipping mundane things to this place for who knows how many sweeps and you were all just like ‘that seems fine’ about it? And there was nothing weird about this shipment?” you ask.

“There was something really weird but- actually... wait you said this ship is yours now? And you can go wherever and whenever you want?” Longgame asks, seeming to realise something.

“Yeah.” you nod.

“I might have a job to propose to you. Come see me and you can see the shipment yourself and hear my idea. It’s the least you can do for all the shit you’ve pulled. I’ve gotta go.” Longgame says and you feel a message pop into your system, well it feels like it’s right in your mind as if he stuck a sticky note to your chest. Then with that he just vanishes out of your space.

“He seems pretty confident that I’m going to go.” you tut. No sooner than you think it does information from Goregle maps pop up, showing the reasonably short route from the front of this sprawling facility to Longgame’s office. You do want to know what weird thing was delivered and find out what Longgame’s idea is but do you want to know that badly? You’re also not sure you like that he conceded to tell you what he did perhaps as a cost to get you to come do what he wants anyway, it’d be a pretty duplicitous thing to assume of him but the guy’s damn title is Longgame. It’s not beyond the realm of reason to think that he might be playing the long game here as it were.

“You do go. Or else you don’t know how to get to where you have to go.” Aradia informs you.


“Well, you do have a choice.” Aradia says.
Not really you don’t. But fine you don’t mind this so much, you’re just being contrary.

“I’ll see you later.” you tell her.

“You will!” she replies brightly and then seems to catch the unimpressed expression on your face and tries again. “I mean a maintenance crew is on it’s way thanks to Starskip I’ll help them get everything working since you gave me enough power to do that.”

“Right.” you nod and easily flick back to your more limited troll form, focusing on just that body instead of all of you. Uh, the ship. It really does feel like your body now, focusing on just your actual body feels as absurd as just paying all your attention to just one hand and nothing else.

“-sure it’s not hurting him at all? Or messing with his mind? I’m not comfortable with putting him through anything that’ll harm him in any way.” Roxxie says seriously. Dayvhe butts his horns against her arm and she casually drapes her arm around him, it’s obvious he approves of her words.

“Certainly not. Aside from being terrible, mistreating helmsmen is just bad for everyone, the empire is stupid to do what it does when this is an option. I don’t allow any helmsman to be overtaxed, overworked or anything by any of our ships. The match between Mr. Captor and The Millenium Falcon is perfectly in balance and as long as he sticks to the directives the ship gives him and rests when appropriate he’ll have no ill effects at all. We have safeties in place to ensure that no one in a helm is hurt.” Starskip says, not noticing as you disconnect yourself from the helm. It feels strange losing the awareness of the ship, so much of its connections and processing power is suddenly lost to you and the sensation isn’t too different from walking into a different room and completely forgetting what you went in there for.

“When we were taken from Alternia Nicole Kidman was the helmsman for the ship and she had to be hospitalised.” Roxxie points out.

“And that was the first case for I can’t tell you how many sweeps and there would have been so much disciplinary action but The Grand Entertainer decided to deal with it himself.” Starskip says with a tone that suggests that though she would never ever voice any disagreement to that you wouldn’t be wrong to read that into it.

“I’m fine by the way.” you announce to the room at large.

Dayvhe gasps and nearly accidentally clotheslines himself by trying to rush to you when Roxxie’s still got her arm around him.

“You seemed pretty lost in there.” Karkat points out as Dayvhe squirms free of Roxxie.

“I was talking to Longgame about that ship Jayekh’s ancestor came in, apparently something was weird about it but he was cagey about what it was and says we should go. Also Aradia seems to be pretty sure that we do go so… want to go solve a mystery?” you suggest.

“I am pretty keen to sea what Jayekhey the elder was up to.” Roxxie answers for Karkat.

“I’m not sure what we’d even do if we managed to find out what the guy was here for, besides I’m not sure Dirkka can be trusted around two of them.” Dayvhe says in amusement. Yeah, you’ve seen the way Dirkka is around Jayekh. You’re pretty sure half of both of their thinksponges turn off around each other, or at least half of them focus on other things you guess.

“I can put in an order to get the ship ready for flight if you want to go visit someone else in the meantime.” Starskip offers with helpfulness that you know is almost entirely because she wants to piss someone else off but you’ll take it.
“Yeah?” you ask Karkat and he shrugs.

Not everyone in your group goes with you, it ends up being you, Dayvhe, Karkat, Terezi, Jayyne and Jayekh. So two teals who can’t resist a mystery, a guy wanting to know about his ancestor and two people trying to keep you from causing some kind of incident because they’re basically romantically obligated at this point. Starskip helpfully gives you a visitor pass so you don’t need Dirkka’s ganderbulbs to get about so you end up tracking your previously planned route to Longgame’s department.

The department itself is a bit of a mix of everything. They handle people coming in and out of the planetoid so there’s regular shipping stuff but also they’re tracking all kinds of regular astronomical events that could affect the planetoid and ships at all as well as keeping an eye out for the Empress herself. The door is locked when you get to it but no one else around here respects a lock so you just psionically pop it open. Actually, with this many adult psionics around on the planet you wonder if locks are really just more of a polite suggestion. You peer into the office and it is honestly pretty rare that you can look around at a group of people and think that they’re a bunch of nerds in a genuinely pejorative sense. You’re on a planet of celebrities, rebels and rule breakers and you’re pretty sure you could start a half hour impassioned debate in this room about different spreadsheet formatting styles.

“It smells like dweeby nerds in here.” Terezi declares loudly, attracting a lot of attention on your group. There is muttering and it’s a few long seconds before Longgame pokes his head out of a doorway and sees you all.

“Hi!” you say with cheer.

Despite inviting you here Longgame doesn’t seem overwhelmingly happy to see you, you guess he’s still sore about you being in his system but he can just get over it. He casts his eyes over Jayekh and his eyes narrow a little.

“He really is his descendant then. Come with me.” Longgame says and leads you all around the corner and down a set of stairs. It leads to a kind of basement where a bunch of servers are against one wall and the middle of the floor is taken up by large crates.

“These were just normal food supplies, like I said no one ordered them but it at least fits with the rest of the shipments.” Longgame says, indicating a number of the boxes on one side.

Terezi and Jayyne wander over and start picking things out. It’s preserved food supplies, perfect for space travel. It all seems pretty ordinary to you but no one ordered it so why did it come here?

“And this one?” Jayekh asks, pointing to the crate that Longgame didn’t include.

“That one is… we’re at a loss with that. It was the last one that came off the shuttle according to the marks on it and how that matches up to our footage, we can only assume he didn’t mean to drop it.” Longgame explains.

You watch as Jayekh pops the lid and pulls out an envelope from it. It’s bright red and when he opens the flap he pulls out a decent amount of cash.

“What the hell?” you say and get closer. The crate is filled with boxes like the open one that Jayekh took the envelope out of. Within that one box is several hundred envelopes that look the same as the one Jayekh is holding. The box has ‘East’ written on it as well as the perigee after next underneath. All of the boxes have a continent and a perigee on them, either this one or next.

“Jayekh was your ancestor stealing allowances?” Dayvhe asks in alarm.
“How much money is in there? What caste was he even stealing from?” Karkat asks as well.

Allowances? You look at Jayekh and he seems just as lost as you.

“What?” Jayekh finally says.

“How much money is in the allowance envelope, stupid?” Karkat repeats.

“What’re you talking about? Allowance envelope?” Jayekh says.

Karkat rolls his eyes and stomps over. He plucks the envelope from Jayekh’s hands and smacks him in the forehead with it.

“The envelope, this envelope, that you get your allowance in each perigee from the empire. Maybe yours was olive or something.” Karkat says, waving the paper right in Jayekh’s face.

“Quick show of hands, who got their allowance in envelopes like those?” Jayyne asks slowly.

Karkat and Dayvhe raise their hands and then immediately realise they’re the only people who have done so.

“And who got it through their bank accounts?” Jayyne continues and everyone else, including Longgame, raises their hands.

“Wait, what?” Karkat frowns.

“I always figured someone in the caverns just looked the other way and registered you falsely so you were set up for all that stuff but if you weren’t being officially paid and this was how it happened…” you frown as you run your claws over the envelopes. Is this how many mutants there are on your home continent on Alternia?

“That means there’s someone else looking out for them. That means there’s a movement that we don’t know about.” Longgame whispers.

“My ancestor’s a rebel too?” Jayekh says in surprise.

“Alternia’s really not far from here, if they were pretending to deliver to here they could sneak in and drop a crate off to people on the ground without really being noticed. Then they weren’t delivering things to us, we were a front.” Longgame breathes in awe.

“But that means there’s got to be adults on Alternia, right? Or jadebloods in on it? Unless they’re recruiting kids somehow but they’d have to know where mutant grubs go and where’s the ship coming from anyway?” Terezi concludes.

“And why would they not work with The Grand Entertainer? Don’t they trust him or something?” Jayyne adds.

“I don’t know but we have been working out roughly where the ship came from based on its path each time. But we can’t just go chasing after that, we don’t have the resources for that and the further we get from Planet Hollywood the less The Grand Entertainer can protect us so missions like that don’t get greenlit.” Longgame says.

Aradia said you had to come here so you’d know where you had to go.

“So that’s where we’re going.” you say with a nod.
“Wait, wait, we didn’t say that.” Karkat argues.

“Don’t you want to know who knew about you both and was helping you for your whole lives in secret?” you ask him, you know he does want to know.

“I want to know how neither of us worked out this isn’t how it was for everyone. But I guess it’s just a mundane thing, right? I don’t know what- what brand of nutritionblock cleaner Karkat buys because that’d be the most dull conversation to ever have. Same with this, right?” Dayvhe says and drops an envelope back in the box.

“We also need to find out where these go normally or else a whole generation of kids like me are gonna starve to death. This is, what, several perigees worth of money for however many kids are in each box? A lot. Too many.” Dayvhe adds as well.

“Then we have to go. Send me the information you’ve got and I’ll download it into the ship and me and AA can plot a route together and go investigate.” you say, looking at the adult now.

“I’ll send you everything we have. We’ll try to see if we can work out where on Alternia they went to, maybe some of our long range cameras caught more. That way we can beg The Grand Entertainer to let us sneak the box down there because if you’re flying in the ship I saw you in when I contacted you, well, it’s not exactly subtle.” Longgame says.

One of the most famous ships from one of the most famous movies of all time? Not subtle? Who knew?

“So we try to find out where older Nglish came from, they find out where these usually are dropped off. Got it.” Karkat nods, dropping his envelope in the crate again.

“We have a plan.” Terezi agrees.

“I’ll let you get to it then.” Longgame says, ushering you out.

“Also,” Karkat says from behind you on the stairs as you leave, “scum slayer, since you didn’t ask.”

“What?” Dayvhe says.

“Nutritionblock cleaner, that’s what I got.” Karkat explains as if Dayvhe is stupid for not getting it.

“You’re right, this is a boring conversation!” Terezi laughs loudly.

“That’s what I said!” Dayvhe agrees and now the bickering is inevitable.

It takes a little time to prepare the ship, get the coons in it filled with sopor, get food in the cupboards. It’s certainly less than it took for your friends to get Roxxie’s ship ready but yet again you don’t get to see all of the details because the moment the coon in the room by the helm is filled and working your quindrantmates throw you right in there. You want to protest but they’re pretty adamant on you resting before flying.

Dayvhe is awake when you wake up again, unsurprising because it was only the afternoon when they dunked you in sopor to sleep it’s got to be, what, mid evening now? He’s sat down on a chair with his feet up on the edge of the coon and a tablet balanced on his knees.

“Am I free to go now, officer?” you ask him teasingly. Dayvhe just nods in silence and puts his tablet away, taking his feet down as well.
“Alright, what’s going on?” you ask, floating out of the coon and taking his shades from him. Dayvhe wipes off the little drip of sopor that came off of your fingers and landed on his cheek.

“You know my general position in life is the remorseless evisceration of people who hurt and use you? I totally run on the platform of absolutely stomping those people.” Dayvhe says, explaining nothing.

“You have made that pretty clear before. I invaded a planetoid to get you back as well so I think we’re on pretty even footing there. Look, I need to shower, are you coming?” you ask and Dayvhe nods. He actually has to show you where the helmsman’s ablution block is because it’s hidden behind some panel. You have the weird feeling that you should have known where it was because not so long before this was all part of you.

Helming is weird.

“So my point is…” Dayvhe says.

You pause, partway through getting the water on right and look at him.

“Dayvhe.” you prompt him. He doesn’t look like he’s got distracted, his expression is tense.

“Feel a little like I deserve to be eviscerated.” he says finally.


“Because I’M using you! Because- because as curious as I am about Jayekh’s ancestor and that money, as much as I want those other mutant kids to get their money, we don’t actually HAVE to. I mean this thing with Jayekh’s ancestor isn’t actually vital, nice though it would be to get out of here, and sure those kids will probably die but weighing you up against anything else in the universe I care about you more.” Dayvhe says in a rush.

“But I mean, here I am, trying to get myself prepared to actually hook you up to this thing. Not to have a look around or have you geek out but to actually USE YOU as a power source as a battery-” he continues.

“Don’t call me a battery.” you interrupt sharply.

“Sorry, I didn’t- it’s just that’s what it feels like I’m treating you as and you’re not that.” Dayvhe says, backpedalling.

“Fine but just don’t call me that.” you mutter.

“I won’t. You’re not, I’m sorry.” Dayvhe apologises softly and gets a little closer to you.

“The first time you flew getting back was an emergency, you needed to as much as me. When you flew here you were trying to rescue us, it was your choice even if I still think it was wrong to do to you. But this isn’t life or death and I don’t want to treat you like you’re something I can use for a purpose, you’re my moirail.” Dayvhe says miserably.

“Alright, but I want to fly. I want to do this.” you explain and flick the water back on.

“I’m supposed to say that’s ok then.” Dayvhe says and you hesitate in getting in the trap even as the water is splashing warmly and invitingly around the one foot you have in.

“Supposed to?” you repeat.
“Get in, you’re going to get cold.” Dayvhe reminds you so you do.

“Yeah so it’s supposed to be like: I get worried about if something is ok, you say it’s ok because you want to do it and I go ‘alright that’s legit carry on’ and everything is fine.” Dayvhe says.

“But?” you say, inviting him to continue.

“I- ok so my feelings for Karkat get pretty frustrating because of how mixed up they are and I don’t know if I’m getting red frustrated legitly or if I’m just feeling all blackways so I’m used to that being weird. Plus I’ve seen Dirkka and Jayekh around each other, Roxxie and Jayyne too. I figured all of the boning quadrants made people a little cavetroll stupid you know?” he rambles.

“And so logically I know that you want to do this and I trust you not to lie to me and you’re not great at doing that anyway so I think I’d know if you were. So I should be fine, this should all be cool. But the crazy quadrant frustrated stupid part of my pan, the part that I guess evolved a bajillion sweeps ago and is all dumb bug boy instincts is like MMM NO.” Dayvhe says, throwing his hands in the air. When he starts talking again he alternates between his normal voice and this weirdly clicky put on primitive cartoon cavetroll impression so all you can do is stand there under the spray of water looking at him.

“I mean- it’s just- I look at you and you’re all pretty and fragile and scarred and I want to look after you because I’m your moirail and that’s fine but then you just go and say you want to do this and I get this dumb part of me. All like no danger, only protect moirail. Which like, yeah, I agree with but you want to do the thing so I gotta let you but that dumbass part is like no can’t allow. Got to keep him safe, can’t let him keep getting hurt. And sure but you gotta do your thing but like nope. Eat him, only way to be sure. And apparently CANNIBALISM is like a thing that my thinksponge is suggesting as a way of keeping you nearby so you won’t be hurt despite the obvious built in flaw there and I’ve definitely gone crazy now.” Dayvhe says dramatically.

You step out of the water, using your hand to shake a bunch of the water free from your new haircut and come to a stop out of the water but still in the trap and facing Dayvhe down.

“That’s the sweetest, grossest thing you’ve ever said to me.” you tell him with an affectionate chirp. Dayvhe echoes it before he can stop himself and then covers his face with his hands.

“Nooo, don’t encourage me. This is shitty and possessive and also cannibalistic and that’s bad.” he whines.

You shut off the water psionically and lean in close to him, he doesn’t try to protect himself because you’re his moirail, why should he need to? It’s because of that you’re able to get your teeth at his throat, you can feel his startled pulse against your fangs. You could totally kill him just like this. But you don’t, you’d never. You let him go and mush your wet face against his skin instead.

“Sometimes with Vriska I hate her so much that part of me wants to just do that, rip her throat out with my teeth and just kill her. But I wouldn’t, obviously. When you want things like that it’s just like your mind going ‘AUGH I FEEL THIS THING SO MUCH THAT I’M GOING TO COME UP WITH SOMETHING DUMB’, that’s all.” you assure him.

“You’re not scared that I’m going to try to eat you in your sleep or something then?” Dayvhe asks softly.

“Never. Besides you aren’t actually doing anything bad, you’re not forcing me to drop this because you’re worried. You trust me. You just have feelings, welcome to the club.” you snort and push past him to find a towel.
“Aw, no. Feelings aren’t cool. I want to unsubscribe from having feelings.” Dayvhe protests.

“Done that before, I don’t recommend it.” you laugh and pull your shirt on.

“Ah, shit, the depressive numb thing. Now I feel like an asshole, I’m sorry.” Dayvhe apologises and you just laugh at him because you don’t have to be sweet to him all the time. With the rest of your clothes on you leave the room, Dayvhe following behind you.

“You’re really ok with this?” Dayvhe checks again.

“I’m actually excited.” you tell him as you step from the block made for helmsmen to rest in to get to the helm itself. You guess Aradia’s enthusiasm has rubbed off on you, not to mention the elation that connecting to this ship gave you before.

“Ok.” Dayvhe nods.

You step into the helm and as you’re connected you feel the bright, tingling, melting feeling of becoming part of the ship. You slip into the space that Aradia resides in and she’s rotating star systems above her hands.

“What’re you doing?” you ask as you come closer.

“Plotting our route. Jayekh’s ancestor has been here so many times but he approaches from different angles often because, you know, planets rotate, orbit, galaxies turn. That kind of stuff. So I’m just unwinding the time to produce a direction.” Aradia explains and in her hands the star system freezes and a bright green path tracks out in a straight line out into space.

“It’s got to be close enough that he could survive the trip so that limits distance and it didn’t look like there was a helmsman so…” you try to call up some star maps. There’s not really anything going on that way, in fact there’s a huge blank patch on the map when you look far enough.

“What’s-”

“A black hole.” Aradia answers before you can even finish the question.

“What kind of insane people go near a black hole if they don’t have to?” you grin.

“Pretty good place to hide!” Aradia agrees, and it’s right on the path Jayekh’s ancestor came from.

You let Aradia tell the others that you’re about to leave and instead you pay attention to your surroundings, at some point in your sleep you moved. Or the ship moved, to be more accurate. Instead of being so many levels underground you’re now in a layer of the facility just below the surface and the ceiling above you is clearly one that opens up. Just thinking of it summons up a log of Aradia talking to Longgame as you and getting him to grant Starskip the permissions to set the ship in place to launch and give you all the clearance you need to go.

“It seemed easier than explaining that I was a dead girl possessing the ship temporarily.” Aradia explains.

Yeah, you can imagine the weirdness of that conversation and you don’t blame her for trying to dodge it at all. You track down where everyone is and make sure that, yes, everyone is here. Alright Aradia probably had that, you’ll leave her to it.

Slipping deeper you feel every plate, screw and pipe as keenly as you’d normally be aware of your own skin and your own breathing. With a little shudder you flex your moving parts and find that
everything bends to your slightest whim. Above you the ceiling starts to open and the floor rises up with you on it.

“Alright everyone! Sit down somewhere safe we’re leaving in a moment!” Aradia calls out cheerfully.

“I’m not going anywhere.” Dayvhe says and you hear him through both your microphones in this room and with your actual ears. You do at least see him reach forward and set his hands tightly on the edges of the helm that you’re floating in, tethered by biowires.

You feel as if you are crouched, coiled and waiting as you're brought to the surface with the fading light glinting off of your panels. Aradia is chattering standard commands and updates back to the flight people as you search the sky for your path. You need to curve around the planetoid after you leave orbit and then it's more or less a straight shot with the route Aradia planned.

You feel Aradia give you the green light and for a moment you pause.

Is this what everything was all for by Aradia's estimation? What would make everything you went through worth it? You're trying to imagine what that might be like and it makes you hesitate for a moment. But you can't wait forever, you have a job to do. Only you can take the others where they need to go and you have a mystery to solve. More than that you need to prove that you really are allowed to leave the planetoid, that Dahvid hasn't just told you he's taken the restraints off of you all but secretly left them there. You have to know.

If you were in your troll body this would feel like your muscles tensing, winding up for a burst of activity. You're not, though, you're a ship. Your psionics course through you and your engines power up, you need to start reasonably. No need to liquify everyone in the ship by slamming on full acceleration and probably ripping great chunks of yourself off in atmosphere, you're eager to get going but not that eager.

You float up, taking yourself off of the ground and gently move away from the building. You pick up speed the higher you go now that you're less likely to hurt anyone by doing it and you're fine like that, really. It feels like you're just bigger than you're used to, holding onto and carrying the others like something precious and yet you're still able to twist in the air and feel the edge of the atmosphere as you skirt the planetoid. Excited particles in the upper atmosphere react to your passing, flickering and glowing in a kind of aurora. On the dark side of the planetoid you get to look down at a billion twinkling lights of people living their lives and you feel the same as you always did before when you flew back on Alternia. Being goldblooded and as psionically gifted as you were felt like a curse, condemning you to a future you feared, but there were moments when you flew high and saw everything down below like a god looking down that it almost felt worth it to be what you were.

Now you get to turn from the planetoid and stretch out properly in space, it makes you realise just how cramped you really were in Roxxie's ship. You were contained, penned in, but now you're free. You drift for a moment, taking in the star that Planet Hollywood orbits, the view of the other planets and moons around it, asteroids, everything. All moving and rotating like some grand clockwork and even beyond this system you can see more, a great dance of celestial bodies, nebulas, stars making and unmaking themselves at a timescale so great that even the existence of your species must have been a blink of an eye to them. But here you are, safe and free, protecting the people you care about and getting to be out here.

Looking at the planned path for Jayekh's ancestor you know that it's not really the path he took, it's just the most probable path based on the data they already had, the odds are he came that way. You kick off easily, space offers no resistance after all and you soar along the path he probably came down more or less. And probability, right? What's the chances you'd even be here? How many
goldbloods get to have this kind of helm instead of the hell most of you get? Or even more abstract, what're the odds of having that kind of power in the first place? Further out even, what are the odds of even being hatched, let alone surviving? Or the chances that your species’ proto ancestors stopped fighting in their colonies long enough to form something that would become all of you.

You hold onto your friends, keeping them safe as you think about all of this. The odds are so against any of you being here but you are and now that you've been so lucky you won't let it go. In fact isn't is absurd that you even have to fight to protect that? Why isn't everyone as in awe of this as you feel right now? The Empress spends basically all her life in space, how can she look outside and not see what you see? Your species got so lucky to be here and she ruins it by making it hell? Well, fuck her. You're going to help the others stop her somehow and until then you're just going to be fucking radioactively happy to be alive at all.

"Do you see what I mean?" Aradia asks softly and it's like she's there with you, both of you on your backs looking up at a nebula in the distance that feels so close you could almost touch it.

"I think so. I feel small but in a good way, I think?" you murmur. Feeling like a small part of something massive never felt good before but when the big thing feels so miraculous as trollkind being alive at all maybe it's not so bad. All the goldbloods that came before you that made a difference were just one part but they were important parts weren't they?

"It's a kind of perspective." Aradia nods.

You're aware of Dayvhe finally deciding to go spend time with Karkat instead of just waiting by your body for something terrible to happen and you settle in to the business of actually flying the ship. You stretch out and it feels so goddamn good, like finally working a kink out of a muscle or a joint finally popping. You're properly using your psionics to their potential and it's really blissful and it's an easy feeling to sink into. Instead of thinking so hard or worrying about things you just- don't. You glide through space, turning and adjusting when you need to, not stressing about any of it but just experiencing things. You've felt similarly before, a kind of productive flow that you'd get on the best projects where you lose track of time and everything just works perfectly. It's amazing.

Yet you're broken from it sooner than you'd like by the feel of a hand over your ribs.

"He's purring, listen." Karkat says and you try to ignore the feel of it.

"Mmm-hm, it's two tone. You hear it, right?" Dayvhe says.

Karkat makes an uncertain noise and when you feel an ear press to your chest you finally do let yourself shrink back into your body's awareness. You blink and look down at him.

"KK... what the fuck?" you mumble and oh wow your throat feels dry. Karkat jumps back a little, embarrassed at being caught.

"You need to get out, it's been twelve hours." Dayvhe says firmly.

"I'm-" your protest is cut off with a yawn that you didn't see coming. Before you can try to argue again Aradia disconnects you and you drop to the floor, only just catching your balance by grabbing Karkat.

"Do you feel ok?" Dayvhe asks.

You look at him and try to work out how you can explain that you're fine but you're dealing with the jarring feeling of being about five percent as tall as you were a moment ago and not being able to feel your engines.
"Yeah I'm... I'm good. I could REALLY use a drink though." you say as you swallow thickly. Dayvhe immediately holds out a can of your favourite soda and you have to wonder if someone engineered someone so perfect as him in a lab because no way could his wonderful brilliance have occurred naturally.

"Fuck, you're the best." you sigh happily and psionically grab the can. Dayvhe lets go and it floats an inch or two closer to you before you get the abrupt sensation that you can only compare to biting down on tin foil and suddenly the can drops to the ground with a thud.

"What was that?" Karkat asks, his eyebrows climbing up his face in surprise.

"Nothing, I think I'm just tired." you say with a shake of your head.

"Pick it up then. Psionically." Dayvhe tells you.

Uh.

You try. The can twitches, lifts a few inches and drops back down again. It's like when Dayvhe was trying to learn to be finely tuned with his psionics but this has NEVER happened to you, or at least not when you weren't fighting through something actively fucking with your psionics.

"I... I guess I'm tapped out. I probably did need a break." you concede uneasily.

You keep trying to move the can but you can’t and the more you try the harder it gets. A panicky thread of nerves rises within you and you know you’re starting to whine anxiously.

“Hey, hey, no panicking. Use words. I’ll accept either rhyming or non-rhyming if you really must.” Dayvhe jokes, trying to keep you calm.

“I’m defenseless.” you squeak. You’re being dumb, it’s not like you’ve never been without your psionics before but it’s never enjoyable.

“Hey, it’s ok. I’ll protect you for a change.” Karkat boasts and flexes the arm that he doesn’t have around you, you know he’s only joking about showing off but Dayvhe dramatically swoons anyway. He psionically catches himself before he hits the floor and then shoots right back up, pointing an accusing finger at Karkat.

“Excuse me sir, do you have a permit for that gun show? Innocent people could suffer bloodpusher failure seeing that unprepared.” Dayvhe says with faux seriousness.

Karkat rolls his eyes and shakes his head, giving you a look like 'can you believe this guy'. You can absolutely believe this guy. This is because you know Dayvhe very well and though he's pretending that he's overdramatically swooning at Karkat's muscular prowess under the soft padding of his body you also know that Dayvhe sincerely does get pretty swooned about it. That's the key to understanding Dayvhe, knowing that there's layers of sincerity and insincerity there. Like an irony lasagne. Your stomach grumbles at the idea.

"Wow I'm hungry." you say in amazement, the mere thought of metaphorical food is enough to set your digestive sac going eagerly.

"What a coincidence, Jayyne and Jayekh are cooking right now. Come on." Karkat says firmly and scoops you up into his arms like you weigh nothing. From everywhere around you Aradia giggles and you scowl.

"Hey, whose side are you on AA?" you demand.
"Mine mostly." Aradia laughs and yeah that checks out.

Karkat pats you sympathetically on the thigh and starts carrying you out of the room, the movement making you grab hold of him all the tighter.

"I can still walk!" you yelp, keenly aware that you can't catch yourself if he drops you.

"Too bad." Karkat insists and starts carrying you up the stairs and through the hatch, leaving you clinging to him so he doesn't bang your head on the edge of the hatch or drop you down the stairs. Yeah, yeah, warning, stairs etc. You know the meme.

Karkat in fact carries you all the way to the smallish nutritionblock and then dumps you in a chair.

"What happened to you? Your legs stop working or something?" Vriska asks with a snort and down the table that she's at Tavros gives her a sharp look that goes entirely unnoticed.

"No, Karkat's just on a power trip." you explain.

"His psionics aren't working, he's used them up for the moment so no throwing things at him." Karkat explains.

Vriska's eyes widen in interest and your neck prickles hot under her attention.

"So much no. Don't even think it." Dayvhe says firmly.

"I would have to agree that Sollux should remain uninterfered with as he's our only means of not dying horribly in space." Kanaya interrupts.

"You guys have the strangest conversations, I swear." Roxxie laughs before you can sulkily point out that maybe you might want to be 'interfered with' Kanaya, what about that, huh? Also why is she suddenly getting involved in this?

"Well how about this as a follow up? I'm giving Sollux this, does that make this rocket fuel?" Jayekh asks as he sets down a bright orange fizzing drink next to you with a whole bunch of deep fried something in front of you.

"Technically I guess so." you agree.

"That's just stellar then, I've never made rocket fuel before! Well, aside from that battery we used in the other ship to help you out, not that you seemingly needed it. But still eat up, that's just for you. The main course will be ready in two shakes, right Jayyne?" Jayekh says cheerfully.

"Five or ten minutes." Jayyne nods, stirring something in a large pan.

Still absurdly thirsty you take a sip of the drink, you don't know what it is but you can taste a sharp kick of lemon and ginger along with a really sweet dose of orange. You wonder how much sugar must be in this but then again you figure you probably need it. The fried stuff turns out to just be deep fried gooey cheese and you have come to the conclusion that you deeply love both Jayyne and Jayekh so you're going to continue to do your best to keep them alive because they're now your main supply of this kind of godly food. Also you like them or whatever.

"So why did this ship need two helmsmen before then if Sollux can just get in and out like this and everything's fine?" Roxxie asks.

"Well you don't if you're just using it for going in a straight line like we are, space has a lot of
nothing in it and once you're flying you're more or less fine. If one person can power it enough to do that then you're good, but like we saw there aren't many psionics in Sollux's range." Hal answers and you grin around your straw.

"We've got Aradia still doing a lot of work right now and you'd either normally need another helmsman for that or an actual pilot. But this ship wasn't designed for this, it was mostly up close film work and quick movements and the like for movies. That sucks a lot of power. Sollux has left the ship with enough energy for him to have time to refuel and sleep while keeping you meat bags alive and non-irradiated by space, powering the life support so you don't freeze or get cooked assuming that the lack of air doesn't do you in. Doing all that AND sucking up a lot of power for quick fighter flying isn't really doable. So you either need two in there alternating if they're at his power level or three or four on rotation if you want one or two in there all the time." Hal explains.

"So short version, he's very good and we're not doing something super demanding so we can do this on our own." Dirkka surmises and Hal glares spades at him.

As it happens Jayyne and Jayekh are very keen on fuelling you up and they cook damn good food doing it too. You don't even need to be told to go to sleep afterwards, you're happy and exhausted enough that you'll go under your own power. And so that's how you spend the next few days, alternating in twelve hour slots between flying then refuelling and resting until you get the full use of your psionics back only to immediately go spend them in the helm.

The thing is you get how there are plenty of helmsmen who are happy to do this for their living when they're able to get out and have lives outside the helm, when they're working in a helm that doesn't hurt to be in, when they get paid and get to have longer breaks to have a life and relationships in. Besides it's not like when you're plugged in you can't do other things with the rest of your concentration. You're able to talk to people, code little things if you want, all that stuff. Sure you've got to always keep a certain amount of your focus on the ship itself and your route but it's fine. It's nice.

You can't even think about how Dayvhe's ancestor proposed this as a perfectly legitimate alternative to her method, one that'd leave goldbloods happy to do their work and would actually make her time recruiting people of your caste so much easier and she turned it down to spite him. To spite him and to show that she doesn't need to care about how goldbloods feel because the point is that you don't matter to her at all, none of you do. You can't think about it because doing so just makes you so angry you could breathe fire. It makes you so angry that the ship's weapons system, your weapons system, powers up just in case the thing that's making you angry and defensive is physically nearby. It's funny though, that it turns on like that as a subconscious response just as thoughtlessly as gritting your teeth when you're angry is a thing that happens. The ship really is your body for half of the time now and really you're fine with that, happy even.

Several days into your journey you're far enough away from Planet Hollywood that the projected path that Jayekh's ancestor took is less and less certain. You and Aradia are still betting on this black hole but the problem is that very long range sensors have a hard time seeing it. Not least because it's, well, a black hole. But because whatever it's eating is throwing out weird radiation that distorts the readings you get from it so until now you've not had any real chance to see what you're looking at. But now you're close enough you and Aradia are starting to be able to corral the data into some kind of sensible picture, even if it's very fractured. The whole process is like some terrible mathematical jigsaw but you get something.

You've no idea how it happened but this black hole is currently eating two stars, whether this was a binary star system once or if it's just dragged two close but distinct star systems to it you don't know. One of them is a red giant and it looks like large flares of its body is being peeled off by the black
hole, spiralling into its maw and joined by similar strips of burning solar matter from a star that's
pitching almost green in colour. You've never seen anything like it and you're still too far away to get
much detail. The point is that you'd have to be right up close to this thing to see much of anything,
it's a true blind spot and an amazing place to hide. It's just got to be your destination, it has to be.

You don’t know what you’re going to find there so you break early and catch the rest of your group
to explain things.

“So we’re, uh, going to fly into a black hole?” Tavros asks with some concern, a fork frozen halfway
to his mouth.

“Not into, that’d be stupid. Just towards, we’re sure there’s something near there that Nglish senior
was hiding in. We get closer, we find it, we check it out.” you explain and shovel pasta into your
face.

“Will we not fall into the black hole though?” Jayyne asks worriedly.

“In a few hundred thousand sweeps probably. We’re not going to get all that close, right?” Roxxie
prompts you.

“Right. Getting out of its reach will be harder, I probably won’t make twelve hours when we turn out
again but it’ll be fine.” you nod.

You sleep and when you get up again you’re much closer to the black hole and the two stars,
unsurprisingly your speed picked up when you were out. With the engines staying on as normal and
the added pull of the black hole, however slight, you’re going faster now. What that means is that
you’re closer than you thought you’d be.

“So here’s our two star systems.” Aradia explains, floating next to you as she spins out a large and
now very detailed map of what you’re coming up on.

Of the two stars they have about six planets between them but it’s clear they used to have more. The
actions of the black hole have been pulling material from the stars for some time, unfortunately
whenever a planet has intersected with that they’ve either been straight up obliterated or skirted so
close to it that any life on the planet has been totally erased. The remaining planets are either dead or
in an orbit that puts them nowhere near the solar ejections but also doesn’t bring them too close to the
sway of the black hole itself.

“This planet, that looks like it’s got atmosphere, right?” you say, squinting at a greenish planet near
the red sun, but then it’s possible it’s just the light from the green sun nearby fucking with your
colour perception.

“The readings are fuzzy but it’s got a halo of atmosphere I think and it looks green so maybe plant
life too. The crates had food in, was it maybe grown here?” Aradia suggests.

“It’s possible. We can go in and have a look but then we’re stuck there for a while I think.” you say.

You both agree so you’re left with the careful business of adjusting your course to avoid the debris of
dead planets, meteor belts and keeping the shields high enough to defend against dual solar radiation.
But you get closer and closer to the small green planet and it becomes clearer that it does have an
atmosphere. On top of that it has weather, water on it, atmosphere breathable by trolls and plant life
for days. There’s also more than a few satellites around the small planet which give you the
unsettling feeling that your visit will not be an unexpected one. However as you come closer no one
tries to hail you and though you’re jamming energy into the shields with reckless abandon you don’t
come under fire at all.

Dipping into the atmosphere you spot buildings in the distance, not many but enough to stand out in the rolling wilderness and so with care you set down a little way outside. As you’re carefully coming down you’ve got half an ear on the debate happening in the cockpit of the ship.

“It makes more sense for us all to go out there together.” John says firmly.

“I don’t think taking Sollux out without his psionics working well or maybe even at all is a good idea.” Dayvhe counters.

“Leaving him here with just a few people to protect him isn’t smart either, he’s our only way off this planet. Keeping him and the ship separate while we’re looking around is way smarter.” Vriska argues.

“Splitting the party’s not a good idea.” Tavros nods.

“Then we go.” Rohhze agrees.

You land gently and keep every sense you have open and alert as Dayvhe and Karkat come down for you. You can track small animals scurrying about in the grasslands near you but nothing else. In the settlement ahead you think you can track three people maybe. You’re not sure and there’s some buildings that seem to stretch a lot deeper than they should.

“Are you gonna be ok Aradia?” you ask her as you quindrantmates come close.

“Don’t worry about me!” she says cheerfully and disconnects you.

You stumble and Dayvhe and Karkat have you instantly, supporting you with a hand each on your shoulders. You shake your head to rid yourself of the disorientation.

“How do you feel? We’re going to have to go outside and have a look with you coming along.” Karkat explains.

“I know, I heard.” you sigh as the tiredness catches up to you again. Dayvhe presses one of those healthy energy drinks into your hand, the kind with the electrolytes and stuff. Karkat pulls you towards the stairs and the three of you head out to leave.

Everyone looks set for an expedition, Jayyne even has on a sensible sunhat and Jayekh is practically bouncing in excitement. With a whoosh the ramp out of the ship starts to descend and your group together heads out. You start flagging behind pretty quickly, the uneven grassy terrain slowing you down until Karkat finally loses his patience and just carries you on his back. From your perch there you drink your drink and look out at the planet around you.

The air tastes fresh and with the distant mountains, rolling tree covered hillsides and grassy terrain the place seems peaceful and idyllic. In the far distance you think you can see a herd of something on a hillside, they’re white and moving about calmly but that’s all you can make out from the distance you’re at. If this planet has larger fauna it’s possible that you need to keep your wits about you for more than just people.

The rest of your group certainly aren’t letting their guard down. Everyone with a weapon has it drawn even as you just walk along. You hardly want to walk towards the little settlement, if you can call it that, all gung ho with all guns blazing but you sure as shit don’t want to be caught out either. The low buildings here seem to be made from wood, probably harvested from the local trees, and built by hand. They’re simplistic but not crude or poorly made.
“Doesn’t this feel like those old wild west movies? The showdown in the dusty town?” Jayekh whispers and as much as you hate him for saying it you find yourself holding onto Karkat a little tighter because Jayekh is right.

As a group you all pause at the edge of the settlement, everything is just laid out in two rows of buildings facing each other. A handmade rocking chair sits on the porch of one building with a few other chairs around a wooden table outside another. Weathered paint above the doorways reads out purposes for the buildings.

Food store, mechanic, hotel&bar. The words of that last one are pressed together with the air of someone who ran out of sign space very quickly.

“Did you hear that?” Nepeta asks suddenly.

“People talking in that building you mean?” Terezi asks, pointing her sword towards the food store building.

“No. I mean yes but I thought I heard… I don’t know, something big?” Nepeta says uneasily, looking around.

“Well keep an ear out but I think we ought to be checking that building out. We came here for answers and we’re going to get them.” Dirkka says firmly.

“You can put me down, in case you need your hands free.” you say under your breath to Karkat.

The floor here is dusty and even so you should be fine. Besides, everyone’s going slowly. Karkat gently sets you down and draws his sickles and you all proceed towards the store. You look at every window you pass, wary of snipers at any direction but nothing happens.

In the end it’s Jayekh who pushes the door to the building open and steps inside.

“Oh! Um, hello there.” you hear him say from inside and cautiously your group filters in.

Jayekh is stood before a very elderly teal woman who was in the middle of sweeping the floor and is now looking at him through thick glasses, in the corner of the room a man is slumped in a chair snoring with his hat tipped down over his face but a blue sign visible on his tie. This isn’t what any of you expected.

“Sorry to… be a bother miss but-” Jayekh starts.

“What? Speak up boy my hearing isn’t so good as it used to be.” the old woman says, squinting at him through her thick glasses. She shifts her broom and you catch sight of her sign, the very same as the one on Jayyne’s chest. Her posture is hunched and frail.

“Oh, sorry. I was saying sorry to be a bother but we wanted to ask you something.” Jayekh says a little louder stepping closer.

“Mask? We don’t sell masks here.” the woman says in her frail little voice.

“No, we wanted to ASK you something.” Jayekh says louder and steps closer still.

“What? Oh! It must be about my cakes, I do make the very best cakes. Now where are my manners I should get you some, you’ve come all this way. Just a moment.” the woman gasps and totters off with her broom in hand.

“No, I-” Jayekh tries but she’s off.
“That guy has my sign.” John whispers urgently, pointing to the man in the hat who chooses that moment to snore loudly.

“And she has mine!” Jayne adds.

The woman totters back with a large slice of cake on a plate, covered in whipped cream. She jams a spoon in it and as Jayekh is opening his mouth to no doubt say that really he’s fine he doesn’t want any she jams it right in his open mouth. Jayekh jerks back and coughs a little but swallows it.

“God, that was- thank you ma’am but I… I don’t…” Jayekh sways on his feet.

“Oh thank you dear, I find the paralysing neurotoxin really gives it that extra kick.” she says brightly and then without a pause flings the cake right into your group, hitting Vriska square in the face.

“Vris!” you shout, leaping for her. She’s trying to wipe it off of her face but you can see it hit clean across her mouth, cheek and eye. Behind you Dayvhe yelps, as you had your back turned he got hit too, but not by the old woman who is now standing tall and agile in contrast to her earlier demeanour.

The sleeping man in the chair clearly wasn’t sleeping at all and he’s now standing at his full height. His tie is blue, his sign is blue and his eyes are a bright adult blue. You need to pay attention to all of that because the paint on his face is full subjuggulator and the large spiked hammer he’s now resting on his shoulder is no reassurance at all.

You hiss in rage and try to pull at your psionics but you just get a sad and unproductive fizzle of red and blue.

“Now that’s the funniest thing I’ve seen all day.” he grins at you. Behind you Vriska hits the ground and you’re just able to catch Dayvhe before he does the same. Roxxie’s trident embeds loudly in the wall with a twang.

At your back the door is kicked open and you hear the sound of a shotgun being pumped. A woman who could be Jayded stands there ready.

“I think you’d all better surrender or else this is going to go really badly for you.” she says smartly.

“Nepeta, remember you said you heard something big?” Hal whispers and points. You look and through the window you see an expanse of scaled white shift and then one giant red eye peer through the glass at you all.

“Mom?” Terezi whispers.

You’re surrounded, three adults to two, your psionics are tapped out, Dayvhe and Vriska are out of action which leaves Rohhze as your most powerful psionic. Roxxie’s already disarmed, Jayekh is out cold and if that wasn’t enough there’s a dragon outside.

Grudgingly and as one your group surrenders.
Weird Science - Oingo Boingo

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

‘My creation, is it real?
It's my creation—I do not know
No hesitation—no heart of gold
Just flesh and blood—I do not know
From my heart and from my hand,
Why don't people understand
My intentions, ooh, weird
Weird science!’

Weird Science - Oingo Boingo

A song originally commissioned to promote careers in the science field with little success, now mostly sung loudly and under the influence of illicit substances at karaoke parties. A paper has been released on the likelihood of the song being sung and how that number increases with the density of scientists to non scientists present.

“I think you need to come with us.” the little old lime lady with a gun pointed at all of you says from the doorway.

You stand up slowly, helping Terezi lift Vriska up. Dirkka already has Dayvhe and Roxxie has Jayekh slung over her back. Desperately you pull for your psionics but get nothing more than a useless crackle, in fact you get worse than nothing because adult not-John is now focused on you. Karkat forces himself between you and the adult, hissing and snarling like someone twice his size.

The only warning you have of being grabbed is a soft gasp behind you.

“Don’t you touch him! He’s harmless!” Jayyne declares as she grabs you. She pulls you close, whirls you around and drags you down into a crouch with her. She’s shielding you from everyone else and you’re about to say something, anything, when she all but shoves her hand in your mouth. What she’s actually doing is cramming a fistfull of gummy candy in your face.

“Eat it quick!” she whispers.

Oh shit, sugary sweets are full of energy, the kind you need back if you want your psionics anytime soon. Stupid awesome ship depriving you right when you need it. Unprotesting you choke down the mouthful of actually pretty gross candy. How can gummy candy have so many geometrical edges and also be so weirdly gooey as well? You’re not a fan. Jayyne manages to get another handful to you before Karkat is no longer able to hold the adult back, it buys you the time you need to look as helpless as you actually are right now.

His blue eyes narrow at you but you’re as innocent as can be.

“Up.” he orders, pointing his spiked hammer at you.

Jayyne stands and takes you with her, handing you back to Karkat. The adult who looks like Jayyne ushers you outside by smacking anyone who isn’t walking out with her broom. Not-Jayded backs up as you go out and it gives you a damn good look at the giant dragon stood behind her. Terezi is staring right at it, or what passes for staring with a blind girl at least. You can see that the dragon has scars on her body, gouges and damaged scales that indicate age and as far as you know Terezi’s
lusus never even hatched. It’s not her lusus but it’s what she should have been.

“Ugh. They even went so far as to do Darkleer, disgusting. They’ve no respect.” Not-Jayded tuts disdainfully.

“I don’t know what you mean by that but we didn’t come here for some kind of common brawl.” Equius asserts, stepping forward. You follow with him and the rest of your group so you’re surprised to bump into Tavros’ back. You catch hold of his shoulder and see that his eyes have gone distant.

Behind the adult who looks just like Jayded the dragon rears up on its back legs and the adult just has time to look around in surprise before a giant white and scaled talon slams her down into the ground. The woman is alive but she’s not getting out of there any time soon. The dragon's mouth opens and an unsettlingly bright glow emanates from within as it swings its giant head towards your group and to the adults behind you.

"I think you should let us go." Tavros says, his voice distant.

"Wisehunt!" not-Jayyne gasps.

Jayded's ancestor, apparently titled Wisehunt stops squirming and instead is looking over as much as she can towards your group but it looks like she can't turn her head all the way because she's not quite looking at you all.

"Do it, bring them out." she wheezes.

The two adults remaining look at each other before gesturing to the outside. It feels counterintuitive to see a giant dragon and walk towards it but you guess that's what you have to do. Not-Jayyne and not-John linger in the doorway as you step outside. Karkat's hand finds yours and clings tightly to you, giving you a reassuring squeeze. You just need to get out of here and get back to the ship. On the way you can pound enough energy drinks and candy so that you'll nearly vibrate out of your skin with it and you can jam yourself back in the helm and get everyone the hell back to Planet Hollywood.

You can't say you've ever wanted Dahvid's brand of psychotic affection before but you're pretty sure if you rush back to him and all of you tell him what happened he'll get things settled pretty firmly. There's the worry of course that they'll chase you the moment Tavros is out of range of that dragon and you've only got a finite amount of energy. Well, a finite amount that you can get through before it becomes AGONY but you'd do that for your friends and quadrants.

You're already so in the works of planning your escape and what might go wrong when you get to the ship that you didn't consider all the ways that what's happening now could go wrong. How foolish of you.

It can always get worse.

You have one arm linked with Tavros, guiding him out when he's seeing through the dragon's eyes instead of his own and your other hand is in Karkat's. The point is that the moment you're two steps out onto the dusty excuse for a road between the two rows of buildings a shot rings out and Tavros yells and drops to the floor so suddenly he nearly pulls you with him. Ahead of you the dragon roars and flaps her wings mightily as she lifts up off of Wisehunt. Tavros is alive but bleeding and- and sparking. Whoever shot him hit his modified backbone where it connects to his robotic legs.

You're too focused on Tavros to react when a figure drops down from above and Karkat's hand is pulled from yours.
You spin around and see Karkat held to the chest of Jayekh's ancestor with a pistol pressed to his temple. He must have been on the roof, that's what Wisehunt was looking at!

"I don't think we'll be doing any more of that now, hm?" he says and you can hear several people hissing in quiet displeasure. You can't think about them, only Karkat. He's wide eyed and terrified. You clench your fists but nothing comes to you but sparks. Jayekh's ancestor is looking at you and he wiggles his finger on the trigger a little.

"Ah-ah, no. Let's not make a mess." he warns you.

You're buzzing with fury, you need to rend this man to wet chunks of meat. He's trying to KILL Karkat! His friends knocked Dayvhe out with who knows what! But at the same time you're powerless to do anything about it with your psionics so uselessly drained. You're useless, less than useless even! You have to rescue Karkat but you can't, but you have to, but yoU CAN'T! YOU CAN'T!

"Sollux, Sol, look at me." Karkat says urgently and you do.

"Let's not make the asshole with the gun jumpy, yeah? Shoosh." Karkat says smoothly.

"A good idea." Jayekh's ancestor agrees.

"Listen, fuckface don't take this for me agreeing with you. I just don't want anyone else shot on our side. But Sollux here is upset, sure, but useless. All lightshow and crackles so don't lose your shit and get my thinksponge splattered." Karkat lies through his teeth and you hope he can sell it. Though what's probably selling that point is how dearly you want to do anything and you're stuck doing nothing.

"He didn't do anything earlier." not-John confirms.

"I think everyone's got a lot of questions and you're going with us to get some answers." not-Jayded says as she gets up and dusts herself off.

Your group is split so each of them can watch some of you. Equius is carrying poor Tavros but you're stuck as close to Karkat as you can get, he's in immediate danger as Jayekh's ancestor marches him along with the gun still at his head. Dayvhe is comparatively safer held to Dirkka's chest with his head lolling on the man's shoulder with just a trace of whipped cream on his face as a clue about how he got to that state.

The four hostile adults walk all of you to what you thought was a mid sized building but you find when you get into it that it's just the top of a huge elevator sticking out of the ground. You're all forced to enter and with a press of a button you're all lowered down below the surface with slick efficiency that you hadn't seen before on this planet. After several floors go by the doors ding open and you're all walked off.

"RESIGNED!" Wisehunt yells loudly, keeping her rifle trained on her group as she does so.

There's no one else around and though you can hardly take your eyes off of Karkat you get a look at the space you're in. The place is massive, stretching off in all directions far enough that outside of the large area that you're in the lights are just off. Large stacks of computing equipment and servers are laid out as well as machines that you have no idea as to the purpose of. In a few cylindrical tanks there are lusii floating in some kind of liquid that you guess must preserve them. In several of the large glass containers though there are still living lusii penned up and looking at you curiously. There are containers all over the place, they're built into the floor and ceiling and seem to be sized to house
lusii of all sizes and most near you are empty.

"Damnit, where is she?" Wisehunt mutters and jabs at her palmhusk, keeping her eyes fixed on her group as she does so. She's not letting her guard down for a moment. She holds it up to her ear but eventually you guess whoever she's calling isn't picking up.

"She's probably out of it again, we're going to have to track her down. But one of us can't take all of them at once." not-John says.

What was that thing about it getting worse? Oh yeah. It can always do that.

"Well- we'll just have to store them in the tanks, if lusii can't get out they can't." one of them says.

No. No, no, no, no, no.

Oh, you were saying that aloud.

"Don't do that! Please not that!" Karkat pleads desperately.

The others are being grouped off into ones or twos and marched into the clear tubes that lower from the ceiling to the floor and then rise again to seal them in when your friends are stuck in there. You stare, shaking and verbally denying that this can be happening as you watch Dirkka and Dayvhe shoved into one. Someone tries to pull you away but another smaller hand on you stops them, pulls you back.

Karkat stumbles into your arms and you're both shoved. You're trying to resist but you have nothing, there's glass, your claws scrabbling at it and then it's just. Bits.

The sound that your ears don't hear but you feel because your horns clicking against glass echoes through your pan.

Your hands are slippery, whether with your own terror sweat or blood you don't know.

Warm weight pinning you down, hands on your head.

There's only so long you can freak out for. Karkat knows that. You try to come back, focus on the little things. Your chest pressed to his and the hypnotic way the two of you are breathing in time. The tactile feeling of his sweater against your fingertips. He moves his head a little, his soft nose brushing your newly cut hair closer to your temple. He's talking, soft things, promises that he's there.

"KK." you mumble and Karkat sucks in a startled breath.

"Hey, hey there are you back? I lost you for a bit there." Karkat says softly and gently rubs a horn.

“We came to the planet, got caught, marched here, locked up.” you say into his sweater.

“Right, it’s real, this isn’t the same place as before. You can trace everything you did back, remember how that helps?” Karkat confirms. You’re not hallucinating, this isn’t THE tank this is…

You pull back and look.

You're sat on the floor of a narrow tube. On the floor with you leant slightly slouched against one wall your legs are bent a little as your feet press to the other side. It's not very big, you couldn’t sleep in any way but curled up on the floor here. The tube, and yes you’re going to call it a tube not a tank for reasons that ought to be obvious, stretches way up the ceiling so you’re not in danger of hitting the roof that way. Karkat is sat straddling your lap, previously leant over you like a heavy blanket.
What he was giving you was real physical sensation that you’re used to associating with being safe, that’s probably why you came out of this panic as soon as… however long this was.

Through the glass you can see Jayded’s ancestor sat with her rifle resting ready on her knees and though she’s keeping an eye on everyone she keeps looking back at you more often than is even. You guess you must have been putting on a show back there.

“How long?” you ask weakly.

“About forty minutes. Vriska’s been moving a little but she’s still out but Dayve and Jayekh are completely down for the count. Tavros isn’t bleeding anymore, he got in with Equius thank fuck but he’s obviously hurt.” Karkat fills you in.

You look up at his soft face and notice that he’s got a black eye forming, it’s almost starting to swell shut on one side and the dark bruise is starting to blossom there. His nose looks a little swollen too, not broken but like he took a hit.

“What- when did that happen?” you gasp.

“Oh. Don’t… don’t worry about it. I’m fine, you’re the one I’m worried about. How are you feeling now?” Karkat asks softly and strokes your jaw.

You don’t remember anyone hitting Karkat, Jayekh’s ancestor had a gun to his head and that doesn’t look like he got pistol whipped. You look at your hands, you’ve chipped a few claws pretty badly but you did that in the ta- the other place before. It happens when you try to claw through glass. But what you can’t help but notice is the multiple smears of mutant red on your hands.

“I’m fine.” Karkat insists, putting his hands over yours like he can just hide it from view.

“Did I hurt you?” you whisper in horror, that’s the most sobering thing you’ve encountered since you came back to yourself.

“Hey, don’t give yourself any credit here. You were flailing around and my face got in the way of your elbow before I could get you down on the floor to start calming you down. It was a fluke, I still got you pinned so don’t act like you’ve got something on me.” Karkat tells you sternly. He’s making it like a joke, like you were going to brag about how you’re stronger than him because you were able to hurt him and did. Because if it’s framed like normal bickering between the two of you then you don’t have to look at what you really did.

“I’m sorry.” you whisper, papping the uninjured side of his face by way of an apology.

"Shut up, there's nothing wrong. Don't make me bite you." Karkat huffs and bats your hand away. He then catches one of your wrists in his hand and you feel the way his fingers press into the vulnerable inside of your wrist, feeling for a pulse. More accurately he's trying to see where your pulse is at, to see how you're doing.

"How're you feeling?" he asks, his voice quiet.

"Well, I've had worse days but this sucks. I mean I could have stayed on the ship and hung out with AA, that would have been better. Or got in a pile, that would be better. Or, hey, if Vriska wasn't unconscious in a tube thing and was on the ship with me I could have got laid. All those things are better than this. But it also... it also would have been a lot worse without you in here with me I think." you admit and nudge his chest with your forehead gently, careful not to catch him with your horns.
"I'm not offended. I would also rather be pailing my quadrantmate than being trollnapped." Karkat snorts in amusement and you bet that wasn't comfortable with his nose the way it is.

"What, no crack about Vriska?" you ask.

"Hey, I'm the one who thought you two would be good together before your dumb ass caught onto the idea. Or is it that with Dayvhe out I'm obligated to make the Vriska jokes?" he laughs and you feel yourself smile weakly, you know that's what he's looking for. Normal responses to things. Which isn't to say that you're faking the smile to make Karkat feel better, he's genuinely entertaining. Even in times like this he can make you feel at least a little better.

"You don't have to, Vriska is a joke." you say a little weakly.

"Imagine me checking off the 'rag on Vriska' checkbox on an imaginary list. Tick. Anyway, how are you feeling?" Karkat asks.

"I said-" you start but Karkat leans in close to you, so his mouth is nearly at your ear. He slides his hand into your hair in an obscenely pale move.

"No, I mean..." he whispers and rubs his face against yours only suddenly one of his teeth clinks against your temple port, "how are you *feeling*?"

Oh. OH.

Karkat is being distractingly pale and also hiding a lot of you from view. You mentally tug on your psionics and find something there. Using Karkat's body as a shield you flex a hand behind the cover of his torso and find that you get more than a lightshow. You run your psionics all over Karkat's body and though you don't move him or put enough force in it to make him glow up tell tale red-blue you can tell you could toss him around easily.

"Not defenseless but still weak." you whisper right into his sweater.

Karkat makes a curious noise, harder to read his lips that way you guess. So he wants more detail then.

"I could probably get us all out but I'm not sure I could fight an adult without a weapon and I don't have any." you say. You try to look at your sylladex but find that it's gone, they must have taken it and probably everyone else's too. That said you learnt from your fight with Eridan, you need to just take the gun away from your opponent. Actually, the glass or whatever glasslike substance this is could make for a decent weapon. They're not throwing stars but to be honest flinging sharp shit at people to hurt them isn't a precise science. Throw enough stuff and they'll get stabbed with SOMETHING.

You could probably do that now, you probably should do that now. Maybe you ought to let the others know before you start but then you risk tipping Jayded's ancestor off and you don't want that. You shouldn't wait longer than you have to, you don't want backup showing up even if it'd mean that your psionics would be stronger and there's a chance that Vriska would be awake. She probably won't be useful for hours even if she wakes up now. Her psionics require her to be careful, she can't use them if she's high as a kite. At least you don't think she can, but she does surprise you.

"Now?" you ask softly and Karkat pulls away from you. He stands up and pulls you to your feet. Standing up has got several of the others to look at you, including your guard. Karkat pets your face and you're going to assume that means to wait until she's paying less attention to you. You try your best to look like you just wanted to move, pacing the two small steps it takes to get from one end of
this tube floor to the other. You're trying to psych yourself up, to remember where you came from to get out, to remind yourself to be as strong as you can be with the tubes so that you won't rain down more shards of glass on the others than you have to. If you were at your full strength you could catch every shard with ease but you likely won't be able to spread yourself that thin. They're just going to have to deal.

Karkat's posture sharpens and you look over to the dark beyond to see figures drawing closer in the distance. Shit! Backup is here! Should you just go now and say to hell with it and hope you can get through everyone before the others get here? Karkat takes the decision from you by making a 'uh-uh' sound in his throat. Karkat says you wait, so you wait. As they come closer you see that the approaching people are the ancestors of John, Jayekh, Jayyne and...

You squint. It's not that you don't have your glasses, you do, but you're not totally sure what you're looking at. It's a woman, her hair is shortish and pure white. White like snow. Her clothes are white too, some kind of dress. The only hint of colour on her is a hot pink scarf wrapped tightly around her neck. When she comes closer however she just looks even more odd. Despite being clearly an adult from her size, and boy is she big about Roxxie's size, her skin itself is pale, about your colour. What you had assumed was dark adult skin before is actually sleeves and tights of her outfit, her face is pale grey.

Pale grey and SCARRED. She is- well you think she had eyes once. There's a deep set of gouges horizontally across her face that have long since healed over but left her without any defining facial features up there. Except eyebrows, drawn on eyebrows. Not especially symmetrical drawn on eyebrows. She's by far the strangest looking adult you've ever seen and you know Dahvid. It takes a good few seconds of looking at her and then her turning her head towards John's ancestor and you catching a flash of bright royal pink earfin for you to put the small details together. The curl in her hair, the shape of her mouth and the rest of her face.

She's Roxxie's ancestor.

You guess Carrie really did make up the resemblance between Rohhze and Roxxie, or rather she fudged how related they are.

Roxxie's ancestor is drinking from a large steaming mug and frowning with her fake eyebrows. She's talking to the other adults but the glass muffles everything enough that it's hard to hear exactly. There's no reason to assume they can't hear you through some kind of microphone in the ceiling here but you can't hear them. She frowns a little more as the others talk, then chugs the last of the liquid in her mug and wipes her mouth on her sleeve.

"-believe you didn't think to test it." you finally make out as she comes closer.

"Your equipment never listens to me." Wisehunt protests.

Lalond the elder totters closer to your tube and claps her hands together loudly.

"Controls! Which tank is- is this?" she says loudly and tries to put her hand on your tube, misses and then finds it.

"Tank 14a." a mechanical voice comes from the ceiling.

"Thx." the woman giggles and holds her hand out. Obligingly a control panel raises up from the floor and she traces her fingers over unlabelled buttons.

"Knock knock." she says, tapping on the glass with her other hand.
"Who's there?" John's ancestor says with a cheery grin and Jayekh's ancestor elbows him in the ribs.

"Ooo no not falling for that again. Anyway, come on, knock knock." she laughs and taps again.

"Let us the fuck out so I can strangle you to death." Karkat snaps loudly at her.

"It's the Signless clone and the Psiionic clone." Jayyne's ancestor says.

"Fuck you in the ganderbulb, bitch. We're not clones!" Karkat snarls.

"He's got fight, that can't be Psii's clone though he don't sound right. WTF?" Roxxie's ancestor remarks and taps at the controls a little more. You jump as something in the ceiling above you moves and before you can do anything about it you're zapped with something that feels sharp and stinging, right in the shoulder. You twist and try to look at it. Just on the edge of your shoulder there’s a little hole in your shirt now and a bead of yellow blood is welling up to the surface. Karkat is hissing and rubbing at his arm, you guess the same thing happened to him.

Roxxie’s ancestor cocks her hip and pulls out a flat tablet, she taps her high heeled foot on the floor as she runs her light grey fingers over the unlit matte screen. She makes a thoughtful noise and taps on the tablet a little more.

“Well these two at least are p interesting. They’re not clones tho.” she says cheerfully.

“No, Resigned, not of each other. Of Psiionic and Signless.” Jayekh’s ancestor explains patiently.

“No duh, I mean they ain’t clones of Signless and Psiionic.” Roxxie’s ancestor Resigned says. What kind of title is Resigned anyway?

“You know I miss the carefree days when I knew precisely jack shit about my ancestor, it was so much more peaceful back then.” Karkat grumbles.

“We got trollnapped a lot less.” you agree.

“Wait, what?” John’s ancestor says in surprise.

“Yeah, looks like you locked up their actual factual descendants which is both hilarious and also terrible.” she laughs.

“Let us the fuck out already!” Karkat snarls and bangs on the glass.

“Didn’t you just threaten to strangle me to death?” Resigned asks smiling Roxxie’s sharp and serrated smile.

“...No.” Karkat lies and badly too.

“Yeah, I don’t think I wanna let you out.” she laughs.

You’re not getting out, they don’t want to let you out. You can feel the panic within you starting to pick up again, your breath hitching as you plaster yourself against the wall of the tank. Tube, of the tube.

“Please, please let us out. Ok? I won’t attack you, any of you. You took all my stuff anyway and even if you’re blind you’re an adult and the other blind girl I know could kick my ass anyway. Just let us out, you’re hurting my- you’re hurting Sollux by keeping him in here.” Karkat pleads.

You screw your eyes shut, you were handling this fine a moment ago. You’re fine, you’re fine.
“What were you going to say there? Your what? What is he?” Resigned asks.

“It’s none of your business!” Karkat argues.

“We have ways of making you talk.” Roxxie’s ancestor giggles and ice goes through your veins. You’ve heard that before, you’ve heard it before from someone of her colour right around the time when everything became agony for you. You’re trapped and she’s-

This is bad but the world keeps going despite your frozen terror.

“A bad clone is what he is, all of them. You should run the test again, that fake Psiionic doesn’t even have any psionics.” one of the men says.

Karkat’s fist slams against the glass and you jump.

“Oh, shit. Sollux, no it’s ok. It’s ok.” Karkat says, suddenly hushed and you can feel him move closer.

“It’s NOT ok, you’re locked up again!” Dayvhe says. You open your eyes, the figment is here. You’d thought he was gone for good, it’d been so long and you were doing so well. But he’s part of your own mind isn’t he? You’re still you and you’re in this situation so of course he’d be back. You know he’s not real, not really but you can’t help but talk to him.

“Don’t say that it’s not the same as last time.” you whine.

“You don’t know what their plan is. You can’t stay here, you can’t let everyone else stay here.” the figment insists, talking over Karkat so you don’t hear him.

“You mean he’s not restrained? You didn’t put a thing on him?” Roxxie’s ancestor is asking on the other side of the glass.

“Yeah, they didn’t and you’re not defenseless this time. You’re getting out.” Dayvhe insists, his voice leaving room for no argument. Karkat tries to catch hold of you but Davvhe pulls you away from him. But- wait, he’s not physical. This is like before when you weren’t sure if he was moving stuff or if it was you. Did Dayvhe, no the Figment of Dayvhe, did he just move you or did you move and mentally add him in afterwards? You can’t untangle it.

“It doesn’t matter! Just get us out of here now!” Dayvhe demands.

How can you say no to Dayvhe?

The glass bends. Flexing before exploding outwards in a million shards. Roxxie’s ancestor is lifted into the air and thrown across the room, you don’t see where but you hear the crunch. There are weapons, the other adults have them but now you do somehow. Karkat is shouting but it’s just sound.

“The others!” Dayvhe orders.

Right. The other tanks don’t come down as easily. Big chunks of them pull away or partly shatter, a few are yanked straight from the ceiling. John has a weapon now, Jayded too. The tanks aren’t coming down so easily now but John is attacking them too. Everything is kind of spinning now and there’s shouting. Roxxie’s tank fractures and even with her pounding on the glass it’s not going.

“You can’t stop, you have to get them out. You have to get out of here and fly the ship away. You have to.” Dayvhe insists.
Your stomach aches or something in your chest does, maybe something deeper. You have to keep going you have to.

The floor rushes up to you and a heavy weight settles on your chest. More shouting but you’re too focused on Roxxie’s tank to do anything else, something trickling down the back of your throat makes you cough and you taste metal.

“FUCKING STOP!”

It’s somewhere between a pap to the face and a straight up slap. Your ears are ringing but that might not be related. You blink, everything swimming and Karkat’s angry face is right up near yours.

“Don’t listen to him, you’ve got to-” Dayvhe says but now Karkat CAN talk over him. Shout over him.

“Look at me, dumbass! Stop. Don’t do anything else.” Karkat orders.

“You’re going to leave Roxxie to DIE?” Dayvhe demands.

“No, no I’ll do it.” you whine and try to reach out again. Equius is slamming his fist into the tank so you can just… just boost that or whatever. Oh, that’s a lot of glass everywhere. Jayekh now, you’ve gotta-

“Everything you think is stupid so I’m taking over, this is an emergency ok? So just- we agreed, remember?” Karkat says and you-

You think maybe he kills you. Or at least you don’t exist anymore. Wait, no, you’re aware so you’re not dead. Yeah, not dead, it’s like he said, he’s taking over. It’s a neat little logic thing.

IF Karkat then YES, else: NO.

Mmm, that’s bad code. Makes no sense. You try to open your eyes. Wait, that’s just one, you can do both. Hey, you have Karkat and depth perception. You can feel one of his hands resting gently over your throat and the other kind of on the side of your face near your cheek but his finger is close enough to one of your ports that it keeps dropping out of sensation for you.

“My mouth tastes bad.” you say quietly, the words surprising you and Karkat both. You hadn’t known you were about to say anything.

“You gave yourself a nosebleed, it probably got in your mouth. Can I trust you or are you going to lose it again?” Karkat asks you suspiciously.

“I… did everyone get out? Where are we?” you ask as your overtired adrenaline system starts to kick into action again.

“Wrong answer.” Karkat groans and gently rubs his hand over your cheek, enough to take the edge off but not enough to make you insensible again.

“You were seeing things again, weren’t you?” Karkat asks.

“Dayvhe.” you murmur and turn your head to try to see around you. You catch sight of him, not yelling at you but rather on the floor slumped against the back of Dirkka’s legs. He’s not moving but you can see him breathing.

“It wasn’t him. I knew that but I… forgot?” you say uncertainly.
“You probably panicked enough that you lost the ability to tell, that’s why you need to keep calm. If you kept going like you were you were going to burn yourself out and probably fry your thinkspoon. So we’re going to be really cool, alright?” Karkat says evenly and turns your face so that you’re looking up at him.

“But is-”

“Are you gonna be cool?” He asks again.

“Karkat-”

“Are you going to be cool, Sollux?” Karkat repeats again, his voice firm.

“I- yes, sure.” you tell him, actually starting to feel annoyed instead of numb or whatever you were before.

“How about you say it then?” he challenges you, leaning in a little closer and squinting his uninjured eye at you. The other is already pretty narrowed thanks to you.

“I’m cool, get off me.” you say and smack at his wrist.

“Absolutely not, you lost your shit colossally back there. Not that I don’t appreciate the breakout but I prefer you alive, thanks. But since you’ve said you’ll be cool maybe we can move on with this.” he says. He looks up from you and around at the rest of the room.

“We’re in sort of a… a South Alternian style standoff here.” Karkat says slowly.

You twist your head again to try to see and this time Karkat isn’t stopping you at all but he does quietly remind you to ‘be cool’ about the whole thing.

All of your friends are free, for a flexible interpretation of free anyway. Vriska is on her feet, leaning heavily against Terezi and she gives you an uncoordinated wave that nearly makes her fall over when she sees you looking at her. Dayvhe and Jayekh are still out cold and Tavros is laid out on the floor just outside of the tank that you broke him out of. Which, on that note you can’t help but spot that there’s broken glass everywhere. Several of your friends are armed but unfortunately so are the people who took you, though gallingly you’re pretty sure that they’re armed with the weapons from your friends. In between your group and theirs stands Roxxie’s blind ancestor and between your two groups it’s pretty obvious that their attention is switching warily between each other and you.

“I could…” you begin softly, trying to keep your voice quiet so only Karkat hears you. It’s to no avail though because his face twists angrily.

“You absolutely will not! I made it crystal fucking clear that you were to be cool, you even agreed. You’re NOT going to do anything at all. You will be the laziest motherfucker going. Absolutely everything falls under the broad category of ‘not Sollux’s fucking problem’, do you understand me? They want to talk to me but I’m not going anywhere with you like this because you could bring this whole place out and if you don’t get yourself killed you’ll turn yourself into a vegetable and I’m not having that.” Karkat snaps out sharply.

“You absolutely will not! I made it crystal fucking clear that you were to be cool, you even agreed. You’re NOT going to do anything at all. You will be the laziest motherfucker going. Absolutely everything falls under the broad category of ‘not Sollux’s fucking problem’, do you understand me? They want to talk to me but I’m not going anywhere with you like this because you could bring this whole place out and if you don’t get yourself killed you’ll turn yourself into a vegetable and I’m not having that.” Karkat snaps out sharply.

“Now you might be thinking that I wouldn’t do something like that, maybe I would have some modesty but you would be wrong. I lost my dignity sweeps ago when I befriended your stupid ass and it’s been a steady decline since then. We’ve been acting out the most dramatic torrid pale drama since you tried to indiscriminately destroy this place and at least half of the people in it and I had to leap in to save your life, I don’t think that even if I slapped Dayvhe awake and somehow rode him back home through the power of literal fuckery could this get more obscene. Modesty is not even
visible in my rear view mirror anymore, Captor, don’t you test me.” Karkat rants.

“Does he ever stop talking?” Jayded says not so quietly. Yeah, she has a point.

You work a hand free and pap Karkat over the less injured side of his face because maybe finally you will discover the magic shut Karkat up combo that has eluded you forever.

“Shout at someone else.” you tell him and pointedly do nothing else after that. See? You’re doing nothing just like you were told.

“I’m watching you.” Karkat warns but actually shifts his gaze from you and ahead to the people who took you all captive. It’s not like you can go anywhere with his ass on your chest and you’re exhausted, too worn out to try throwing him off for something as petty as spite that’s for damn sure.

“Barring any unexpected problems that’s done, so how about you start talking now, blind lady.” Karkat says. You know the situation is serious because Terezi doesn’t even try to crack a joke about whether or not Karkat is talking to her or not.

“I think we all just got off to a bad start is all.” she says, holding a hand out at her people to stop them and one to your group.

Several people on your side start shouting at her about how much of an understatement that is. You cringe at the noise and Karkat’s warm hand curls comfortingly around the side of your neck, you don’t need to defend anyone, you’re fine. You focus on breathing and try not to think of how mad Dayvhe is going to be at you and at himself about this whole thing. Well, he probably won’t be mad at you, but he’ll be upset that you got hurt.

“Alright, alright!” Resigned shouts, trying to drown out the noise of the others yelling.

“How about we start at the beginning since you obviously know our ancestors if you think we’re clones.” Karkat says reasonably. You’re being cool, remember? You try to… to focus on the gravelly rumble of his voice and not on being alert for what might go wrong.

“Yeah, we know who they are. Didn’t know most of ‘em in person. We ain’t that old.” Resigned answers.

“How about we start with names then, or titles I guess. You’re The Resigned, right? The one who looks like Jayded is Wisehunt if I heard that right before, yes?” Karkat asks.

Resigned confirms her title and Wisehunt’s as well. She goes on further to name Jayekh’s ancestor as The Wanderer, seeing that you found him so far from this place is fitting. John’s ancestor is The Comedian which given the subjuggulator facepaint is awfully appropriate and also you wonder how many juggalos would kill for that title. Jayyne’s ancestor’s title is the last one, The Enricher.

Your friends introduce themselves but you already know who they are, obviously.

“How did you even find us? Darkleer said this place should be impossible to find, that’s why he set us up here.” Wisehunt asks.

“Should we be talking about Darkleer? If they’re not on our side then…” Enricher says lowly. Wisehunt just raises her descendant’s rifle a little which pretty much suggests her solution to the problem of political disagreement.

“Be cool.” Karkat whispers, clearly having seen the same. You want to disarm her, you want to psionically yank Jayded’s gun away from her but you’re not sure you can. You’re not sure you can
without badly hurting yourself at least and Karkat will catch you anyway.

“We followed, uh, Wanderer. Nglish dude there. He left Planet Hollywood in a hurry and left weird boxes that shoulda gone to mutants on Alternia we think.” Roxxie starts to say. As she talks all of the other adults except for Resigned look sharply at Wanderer who looks immediately and deeply uncomfortable.

“I mean! That’s not what really happened!” he insists, his voice pitching high with nerves.

“What you mean the video we watched of you straight up kicking a whole bunch of crates out of your ship didn’t happen? That we didn’t find a crate full of bright red envelopes stuffed with cash? We didn’t follow a trail of your old deliveries right this way to the very obvious black hole and giant stars?” Dirkka says flatly as Wanderer shrinks down. His… friends? Colleagues? All of them are glaring at him, well Resigned isn’t but she doesn’t look pleased.

“You said you made the delivery!” Enricher scolds him.

“I did!” Wanderer protests.

“NOT IF YOU LEFT THE ALLOWANCE ON HOLLYWOOD YOU DIDN’T!” Wisehunt yells.

“Okay, fair point. But there was a rush, the Empress was coming and I couldn’t bally well go down and pick the thing up again and I’m sure it’s all fine.” Wanderer says, backing away from her only to run into The Comedian who is not looking amused at all.

“And how are the children supposed to survive without their money?” he asks.

“It’s- it’s only a perigee or two. It’ll teach them… life skills?” Wanderer answers weakly.

There’s a moment of silence before the two women start banging Wanderer on the top of the head with their fists and calling him all kinds of variations on ‘thoughtless idiot’ and so on. Resigned has her head tipped back like she’s looking at the ceiling but with a shake of her head she seems to ‘look’ at you again.

“I guess that answers that. I think that makes it your turn on this, like, back and forth q and a game or whatever we’re doing,” she says.

“Okay. Why were you giving mutants money, did you give me money then? Wait, that’s two questions. Is that allowed? No, why am I asking you anyway I’ve executively decided I’m allowed to do that. So answer my questions.” Karkat demands.

“We give ‘em money because people die if you don’t and the cult on Alternia can’t do much more than getting people out of the caverns and sometimes helping with short term jams if they manage to keep tabs on people, which they don’t always. We don’t talk to that branch really, cells shouldn’t communicate so we can’t squeakbeast on them and they can’t on us. But yeah if you got one of our red envelopes that was us.” she answers with a shrug.

“Okay but why do you care?” Karkat asks her sharply.

“I think it’s my turn, but I mean I don’t know how to tell you that people dying for no good reason is, like, wicked bad?” Resigned shrugs.

“I think it’s definitely our turn now. What I want to know is how did nearly every important historical figure in relatively recent memory suddenly have a descendant at roughly the same number
of sweeps? Or within a relatively narrow spread at least. You can see why this seems improbable to us.” The Comedian says, looking at you all.

“I think we were starting to suspect that your people on Alternia might have something to do with it.” Jayyne says pointedly.

“I mean… you’re not totes wrong. I’ve been scalping relics and things Darkleer gave from us for DNA for the good guys for a while and I’ve had some help from, like jades and shit. I mean some of it’s p. easy because the mothergrub basically is a DNA database and some of ya ancestors got it on often enough that when I know roughly what to look for I can find it. Helped that Signless’ lot was all peace and love, emphasis on the loving part. I mean…” Resigned grins and waves a vague hand at you and Karkat.

“But nah like I get way high a wicked lot but not ‘make a shit tonne of lil grub clones and ship them to Alternia and forget’ kinda high. Besides I already checked ya, you’re not clones. You’re actual straight up descendants, there’s enough variation in your DNA to have ya be real close but not the same. I don’t know what kind of sicknasty power you’d have to have to make a mothergrub just like hard reset on this whole line of people.” she shrugs.

“So, beloved, are you saying that this has happened because ‘reasons’ and that’s all you can say?” Comedian asks skeptically.

“Always happy when you pick up what I put down, hun.” Resigned giggles.

“I feel investigatively frustrated.” Terezi says unhappily.

“SHIT mystery for TOOLS.” Vriska declares unevenly as she sways in place.

“Allright, trying to corral this back into a vague approximation of on topic why were you delivering pointless shit to Planet Hollywood in the first place?” Karkat asks.

“To keep tabs on The Grand Entertainer and his treachery.” Wisehunt says angrily.

“…Treachery?” Dirkka asks.

“He’s in league with that monster of an Empress, he’s a lap barkbeast. He betrayed the revolution to save his own skin. I won’t trust anyone who works with her.” Resigned snarls.

That’s certainly one way to look at that. You’re not sure they’re totally wrong. Dahvid certainly does do a lot of what the Empress says but it’s also obvious he does it just to keep Dionte alive, though that’s a bit of a moot point now. He’s still doing some good but you can see how from the point of view of people still actively revolting the situation would look, well, revolting.

“Have you… have you ever talked to him?” Karkat asks slowly.

“Of course not, that would compromise our status as an isolated cell and put our mission at risk.” Comedian says in a tone that suggests such secrecy is serious business.

Karkat’s stare is blank and unfocused and spells nothing good at all. He shifts his weight a little on you so he’s not so high up, enough to give him room to lean down and muffle his frustrated scream into your shoulder. It’s your turn to pat him consolingly on the back and hold him close. After a moment he pushes himself up and away from you a little but he’s still not sat up properly.

“My life is just a neverending whirlwind of other people’s idiocy, an endless cavalcade of impudent, idiotic fools who don’t have the sense a goddamn blowfly evolved with. I should just make it my
life’s mission to go around with a staple gun and a sheet of paper that reads ‘fucking talk to each other’ as I affix it to the face of everyone I meet and yet my work would still never be done. If I could find some way to harness the energy—"

“KK shut up.” you interrupt him.

“No, fuck you.” Karkat snaps.

“No, fuck you.” you counter brilliantly.

Karkat is clearly about to come back with more of the same when he jumps in alarm, the hand that is resting on you tightens. Looking at the adults you can’t see that they’ve done anything to unsettle Karkat at all so you don’t know why he’s like that.

“That’s enough of that, thanks.” Rohhze says primly as you recall that, oh yeah, she has chucklevoodoos. You spend so much time focused on Dayvhe’s voodoos that you forget that Rohhze has her own more traditional kind.

“In the interest of openness,“ she goes on as she directs her attention now to the adults, “we are also not fans of the Empress, we’re actively working on a plan to take her down in fact. So if we’re willing to overlook you taking us prisoner without so much as a hello and you’re willing to overlook Sollux defending himself and breaking us out rather violently then I don’t see any reason we can’t continue on less hostile terms.”

“I don’t think we can just forgive that, they’ve knocked out several of our friends, clearly unbalanced Sollux and they shot Tavros.” Nepeta points out.

“I can repair this but I’m sure it is painful.” Equius says and Tavros whines as if to confirm the statement.

You push Karkat off of you and sit up, being on your back was starting to not feel all that great. Your ports are healed and all but being flat on a metal floor with them and also Karkat’s ass parked on your torso is not best described as comfortable. Karkat doesn’t get up, rather he stays sat next to you like you need his company at whatever level you’re at to keep you calm. He might be right, you don’t know. At least the figment is gone, though you know you’re going to have to go over that to hell and back later. Super looking forward to that.

You miss most of your team pointing out that Equius and Hal are passable when it comes to surgery but maybe now you have a bunch of docterrorists willing to do what you want back on Planet Hollywood that should really be the option you go for. You miss all but the end because you’re looking around to check that the other Dayvhe is really and truly gone.

You do catch the end of that argument though because it sparks an angry reaction in the adults who took you prisoner.

“I don’t see how we’re supposed to trust you if you’re working for him.” Enricher says, her voice tart and lacking the old lady sweetness she was clearly faking earlier.

“We aren’t working for him, if anything he’s working for us.” Kanaya points out and that gets the attention of the adults.

“He’s obsessed with our ancestors, Psiionic especially,” she elaborates and folds her arms seriously, “Through a series of events that I can only describe as shenanigans Psiionic was able to interact with The Grand Entertainer through Sollux and he was more or less told to be as nice as possible to us and give us whatever we needed.”
“He’s only said no when he thought that our requests would get us killed but even then he gave us the ship we have because we wanted it, even though he thought it was dangerous.” Nepeta adds in agreement.

“We’re not saying he’s great, he trollnapped us which really is becoming way more common in my shit life than I’d like thank you very much. He killed Darkleer too.” Karkat says.

“You know about that? And about Darkleer himself?” The Comedian asks, obviously surprised.

“A little, we found that… church? Temple? Where Disciple was buried and Darkleer died. Sollux got some information off of his tablet.” Karkat explains.

“So you know that The Grand Entertainer killed Darkleer despite him being a member of the rebellion, a leader. Our leader. They were supposed to be on the same side.” Enricher says.

“Psiionic doesn’t think that.” you manage to say. Yeah, no you can’t talk to them and look at them so instead you look at Karkat’s knees.

“As far as Psiionic is concerned The Grand Entertainer is self involved, kind of stupid and bad at thinking about if something’s right or wrong. You can hate him, it’s not like I like the guy. Even so he loves his friends and their cause, he’s not a traitor. An insufferable asshole, sure, but not a traitor.” you say softly.

“That’s nice but he convinced the Empress to keep him alive and she doesn’t do that when she’s not getting anything from it.” Resigned says flatly.

“He has those ‘like me’ psionics that I’m guessing you knew about since you targeted Dayvhe specifically as well. So it’s not hard to think he could worm his way out of getting executed with that alone, but on top of that she’s under the illusion that he’s, like, her fated spade and one day he’ll come around. Only he’s not going to because that’s the most platonic loathing I’ve ever seen. Well, heard of.” Karkat explains.

Ugh. Yeah, you don’t like Dahvid but you wouldn’t wish the Empress on him. If she hit on you like that you think you’d need to take a shower and scrub several layers of your skin off before you felt clean.

“Well what is your plan then? As much as I want to subscribe to the idea that the enemy of my enemy is my hatefriend I can’t say that just opposing the Empress is enough.” The Comedian asks.

“We’re still working out the details.” Rohhze says lightly.

“But the hemospectrum is a load of shit obviously and needs to be dropped, the Empress has to die. Social restructuring or whatever but that’s all their planning.” Karkat says, gesturing to Jayyne, Roxxie and Dirkka. You imagine Jayekh has been helpful but he’s currently too asleep to be of any help.

“We have a lot of plans but a lot of it really can’t be nailed down firmly until after the death of the Empress and we see how the land lays from there.” Jayyne explains.

“One of them is my descendant, right? We’re following that pattern and she said Lalond before didn’t she?” Resigned asks, glancing sightlessly to The Comedian.

“She is. Tyrian as well if you wondered, no mutation in colour there.” he answers.

“How do you see this working out after she’s dead ‘zactly? Say your plan to kill her works what are
“You personally doing then?” Resigned asks, her words are informal but her tone is sharp.

Roxxie hesitates, sensing the change as you did.

“When the Empress is dead and I take over—” Roxxie begins and very abruptly every weapon on their side is trained right on Roxxie instead of evenly focused on all of you.

“You can’t be the Empress.” Resigned hisses.

“Oh, do YOU want that title, huh? Is that what this is about?” Roxxie snaps at her.

“No! I Resigned, that’s the thing behind the title. I opted out of that shit from the beginning. I don’t want to be Empress, I don’t want you to be Empress. No one should be! It’s too much power for one person and it’s not right, just changing the person at the top of the system isn’t good enough!” she argues back.

“No shit! But you know what? It’s easier to give away power to other groups and let people control things they should instead of me doing it when I at that point HAVE all the power! I’m also guessing that people tend to listen to you more when you can have them executed for not doing that.” Roxxie counters.

“Roxxie’s nothing like the Empress, nothing like anyone else of her colour that I’ve met. She has us to keep her in line, not that she needs it.” Dirkka agrees with her.

“Aw, Dirkka, no. I need you.” Roxxie tells him sweetly.

“No to stop you being a tyrant you don’t, you’re the best person I know. For other things though, yeah you need me.” Dirkka answers back smartly.

“I want to say they’re being gross but I’m not sure I can throw that accusation around after everything with you.” Karkat says under his breath to you. Yeah, that was pretty explicit pale shit that just went down there, that’s for sure.

"The point is, I don't want the kind of power the Empress has. Not long term at least. I want it long enough to fix things and to set everyfin up so that if someone eventually krills me and takes my place that the better way of doing things survives me and is a pain in the ass to change. I want to make it so things are good and can't go backwards. It's just got to be me because everyone else sucks and it's not like I think it's my right but I ain't stupid enough to think that all of Condy's highblood lackeys are going to consider anyone who isn't an heiress to have a valid challenge. If Dirkka offed her it'd be treason, I do it and it's succession. It's busted but it's what we have to work with." Roxxie explains.

Yeah and everyone knows that Roxxie listens to Dirkka more than anyone and she already listens to everyone else a lot.

"I think it's pretty obvious that we're all at least nominally on the same side and I think if you want to prove that you need to let us go back to our ship where we're safe and can take care of the people you injured or drugged. If we can reach some kind of understanding after that then great, but you need to let us go." Rohhzee says sharply.

The old people look at each other in debate. Well, Resigned doesn't look especially old but her kind likely never will. Or at least only will on a timescale you can barely comprehend.

"Sweetheart, can you open the doors? Let them go." Resigned says softly and drops her stolen weapon. She turns and walks off into the dark, away from the door.
The Comedian looks like he wants to go after her but instead he walks closer to your group. He carefully distributes your sylladexes as single stacked item cards, rather than letting all of your collective things get strewn across the floor. A couple of the other adults do likewise and hand your weapons back. With that done The Comedian wordlessly walks to the elevator you came in through and taps some buttons on it, letting the doors slide open.

It feels like a trap, like bait to get into a small container again but you have no choice. Karkat pushes your collapsed sylladex into your hands and then immediately picks you up so he's carrying you on his back again. He walks to the doors with the others and you get a look at poor Tavros and feel bad for him, platonic pity obviously but it still sucks getting that many posture pole injuries over such a short span of time. Equius is carrying him carefully and Nepeta is guarding them both, her metal claws firmly on her hands.

The doors slide shut, hiding the elder trolls from your view and your bloodpusher is in your throat until the elevator moves upwards. When the large doors ding and open you're back looking at the dusty street again. You can't see the dragon anywhere but that's not exactly reassuring. Tense and presumably fearful of being caught again or somehow recorded all of you move in silence back to the Millenium Falcon Two. The doors open for you and any worry you had that this was another setup by Aradia leaves you.

"What happened?!" Aradia gasps, her voice coming from everywhere around you.

"Ambush and a case of semi mistaken identity mostly, I think." Kanaya answers.

Karkat doesn't stick around, taking you into the nutrition block with him and given that you're riding on his back you've no real way of stopping him from doing that.

"You're going to eat until you can't anymore and then you're going to sleep." Karkat tells you firmly. There's no 'I think you should' or 'It would be best if you...' nah, that's just you getting told what you're doing.

Karkat starts setting food out for you, things like toaster pastries, instant noodles with secret healthy stuff snuck in there, energy drinks and specifically the kind without caffeine in them. Karkat is just smashing his impatient little fists on the nutritional buttons for calories, carbs, concentrated vitamins and the electrolytes and salts that make you not feel like someone wrung your sponge out recently.

"Dirkka's got Dayvhe in the block by the helm that you were staying in, he's just staying there in case he starts to come around more. But I gotta go, Jayekh's coming to." Roxxie says, sticking her head around the door as you're halfway through your noodles and starting to reach your limit.

"Karkat, I can't. Literally no one can eat this much." you protest, finally defeated.

"That's fine, come on." Karkat nods and slips his hand into yours. He pulls you gently from your seat and walks you towards the helm, through it and into the block on the other side.

"Jayekh was like this when we got back and Roxxie says he’s starting to wake up now so maybe he’s got another hour?" Dirkka theorises. He stands up as you come in, leaving Dayvhe laid out on the loungeplank over there.

"Got it, thanks. I'll keep an eye on him." Karkat nods.

You're already peeling your shirt off as Dirkka leaves, eager to get back to his matesprit. You want to sleep and you don't need Karkat to tell you. Surprisingly he stops you just as you're about to climb in.
"Hey, can we talk?" Karkat asks softly, his hand around your upper arm. A little flare of worry goes through you at those words which usually don't mean anything good.

"I know today got kind of wild and I had to cross some lines because it was an emergency, but I hope I haven't... that I haven't destroyed everything, you know?" Karkat mumbles, not looking at you and instead frowning in the general direction of your collarbones or something.

"No, I needed you. It was bad, I was seeing the figment of Dayvhe again." you admit and compulsively look around just to check that he's not here and that the Dayvhe you can see is the only one and real as well.

"I gathered that. But you did really well, actually." Karkat says softly.

"What? No I didn't. I lost it, freaked out, had to have you calm me down instead of handling my shit myself. Then I fell apart a second time because of course I did, started seeing things and felt compelled to psionically break everyone out, fight everyone, rescue them and fly everyone back to Planet Hollywood even if it blew my pan open." you hiss.

"THAT WAS YOUR PLAN?!" Karkat yells and on the loungeplank Dayvhe twitches slightly.

"That was my plan, you see what I mean? I didn't handle that well. I handled it terribly, I'm a fucking failure at this!" you wail. You'd thought that you were doing so much better but you're not, are you?

"Whoa, hey. No. Stop that idiocy right now." Karkat orders you.

"It's not stupid you-"

Karkat has his hand over your mouth. This happens a lot you think.

"You panicked in a situation that had everyone panicked, it upset you more because you were tortured in a situation just like that. It's MORE than understandable. Secondly you did calm down when I got hold of you and I didn't have to do much, you were way less terrified than you first were when we got you back. You have made progress, so don't you dare deny it. Then when you did see that other Dayvhe you knew he wasn't real, at least for part of the time and that's really good progress too. Your plan might have been stupid but at least part of it probably needed to be done and being reckless and self sacrificial is kind of your deal, I doubt anyone will ever change that about you. Lastly you managed to come down from what was building into a major meltdown and function afterwards, that's a huge improvement so don't you dare say it's not." He insists.

"But-" you whine.

"I will fuck you up, Captor. Don't think I won't. I'm going to be proud of you and tell you so and there's jack shit you can do about it so suck it." Karkat hisses.

You don't think you'd ever understood the expression 'aggressively nice' until you met Karkat.

You can't argue with him, or it won't work out well for you at least.

"I'm sorry I elbowed you in the face." you say softly.

"Oh, pff, don't worry about that. It's not like you've made this mess any worse to look at is it?" Karkat scoffs.

"I like your face." you insist.
It was a weak compliment but you're still both just staring at each other. It feels like a moment is happening but you're not totally sure that you've got the approved script for this so you're just winging it. Your relationship with him and Dayvhe is one big colour smeared mess and it's not like your paleish ash has never had any red in it before but who knows how this absurdity works? Not you, that's for sure.

Still you're grateful he kept you sane, you wouldn't trust many other people like that and it's special with him. He really does believe that you did well, he sees good things in you instead of what you see. You're so viscerally relieved that you're all back on the ship, a ship that has shields and Aradia watching it, a ship that if you need to you can wake up and fly at least a little way away from danger. This could have so easily not gone well at all but it worked out. It worked out and Dayvhe is going to wake up soon and Hal and Equius are already doing what they can to repair and stabilise Tavros as well as dosing him with pain medication, the poor guy. Your friends are safer now, you can do things to help and it's all because Karkat kept you from blowing yourself apart.

You lean in and kiss him as if gratitude and sheer force of affection is something you can pass along that way. He seems surprised but then melts against you, a hand coming up to pet the side of your face in something pale-adjacent. You're a mess, both of you are a mess. Karkat's so bad at quadrants he makes other people bad at them. You're not mad about it though not when you're making out with your [best friend/auspistice/ moirail/awwpistice/maybe matesprit] (delete as appropriate or maybe just leave them all).

"You should... you should sleep." Karkat finally says, his voice pitching deeper with the happy rumble he has going on in his chest.

You are exhausted, that much is true.

"Go on. I pity you, you know?" Karkat says and easily picks you up and sets you on the edge of the coon (swoon).

You consider his words and the movies the ship you're in comes from.

"I know." you tell him and mean 'I pity you too' with it.

Karkat squints at you, absolutely catches the Star Wars reference and one handedly shoves you back into the sopor with an annoyed snarl. Ah, he pities you too.

Chapter End Notes

Just so you know if you have a twitter so do I! Come follow me @UndaNewNeon
You’re pretty sure that if Dayvhe could find some way to crawl inside your ribcage at this point he would. He’s asleep, the rounded whorl of his intact horn nudging up against the underside of your jaw, his slack mouth slightly open against the column of your throat. His arms are wrapped tight around your middle, his fingers dug into your grubscars. He’s against your side rather than on top of you in the weightless sopor but he is at least partially above you and his legs are locked around one of yours as tightly and repeatedly as if you were a rope he was trying to climb up, you’ve only got one leg free and even then he’s got the toes of his closest foot hooked around it.

“Good luck with that.” Karkat says sarcastically and you lift your head a little to see Karkat sitting on one rim of the coon with only one leg lazily dangling in the sopor. He’s reading something on his palmhusk and occasionally typing, you can hear the tell tale sound of his claws clicking on the glass of the screen.

Sleeping Dayvhe doesn’t seem to like you lifting your head and makes an unhappy little whine as he squirms closer. Unfortunately that gets you his thigh pressed right up against your junk and startles you so much you nearly choke on your own spit. Karkat looks over and unhelpfully laughs at your predicament.

“He woke up for about half an hour when you were already asleep, long enough for me to give him the short version of what went down and for him to start freaking out, until I got tired of that and threw him in there with you and he’s been out like a light ever since.” Karkat explains.

“Are you sure you should mix sopor and whatever was in that pie they hit him with?” you ask and reach down with your one free hand to push Dayvhe’s leg away. Dayvhe mumbles and does move but only to latch onto both of your legs, welp you’re stuck forever.

“Everyone else has been fine. Tavros is doing better too but he’s going to need surgery back on Planet Hollywood, I don’t know how we’re going to try to play that to Dahvid but we’ll think of something on the way back.” Karkat says as he keeps typing away.

“So I should get up and start flying us back then.” you conclude and look down at Dayvhe still clamped onto your body and start working out just how you’re going to do that.
“Hold your hoofbeasts, I’m not cool with you leaping right back into that after everything. Besides Tavros is stable and we still don’t have answers about this place that we really need.” Karkat tells you as he puts his palmhusk away and looks at you properly now.

“But we can’t just leave him injured and paralysed again, what if he starts healing that way and it can’t be fixed?” you protest.

“Well, Equius and Hal both said there’s no danger of him getting worse as things stand right now and I’m not going to say he’s comfortable but he’s not in pain either. Whereas what we do need to know is what these old rebellious adults were doing for Darkleer because I doubt it was just the money thing. We have a lot of questions and if they really are on our side they could be useful allies for Roxxie. Up until now the only adult rebel we had around was Dahvid and he’s hardly a good example of anything that can be accomplished in a reasonable timeframe. And- and look at this. Look what Aradia saw in the distance.” Karkat says, pulling out his palmhusk and holding it out to you.

On the screen you can see the white forms of two lusii on a hill near some trees. A very crabdad looking one facing down a barkbeast like lusus. Why would there be lusii on this planet? You saw no evidence of other inhabitation here beyond the little town you found. Certainly no colonies of troll kids, but maybe the black hole fucked with your sensors some?

“Lusii?” you whisper.

“Yeah, and from what we can work out that dragon was Redglare’s lusus. How they got hold of her I don’t know but the point is we have a lot of questions here that we need answers to. We need to talk to them again at some point.” Karkat says.

“Good luck with that.” you scoff and let your head fall back into the sofa with a gelatinous slap.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Karkat challenges you.

“Eventually he’s going to wake up and will be there when you try to talk to them. Given what went down, even leaving out what they did to him personally you think he’s going to be at the level of holding a conversation with them?” you point out, jiggling your shoulder a little to move Dayvhe so Karkat knows who you’re talking about.

Dayvhe is a mutant, not the only partially mutated highblood that his ancestor is, except the fact remains that he’s still a mutant highblood. You’ve seen him lose it before. He’s told you the carnage he wrought when he rescued you from the original tank and the people who put you there. Dayvhe might be a sweet boy who loves his friends more than anything, who is so terribly nice to you and adoring to Karkat. Even if he’s a little shit sometimes he really is the nicest guy. But there’s also that part of him very deep down that has more violence, vengeance and a streak of sadism that runs so shockingly counter to the rest of him. Sure, he’s a troll, he’ll get violent when he needs to like all of your kind will but it’s more than that.

Look, the hemospectrum is a load of shit but it’s also not wrong. Or- ok it is wrong but not in the way some might think. Like, no there’s no part of highbloods that’s meant to rule and there’s no subservent nature in lowbloods. No one’s smarter or better than each other as a caste, that’s not a thing. Sure there are factors of socialising people to behave certain ways but it’s not innate. Eridan was a genocidal fuck but Rohhze is caring and community orientated and wants to protect her friends. She’ll absolutely fuck people up and probably enjoy it a bit but you could say the same about Kanaya, or Terezi, or Vriska.

Wait all the girls you know are deranged. That was a bad example, moving on.
Right, the hemospectrum.

So by and large some rules do apply. Not ALL fuschia trolls are narcissistic maniacs who want to murder each other, but most of them are. Not all highblooded trolls have these snaps of rage where they just lose shit on the regular, but pretty much all of them do to some extent. Take Gamzee, his whole religion was shit and you didn’t massively like the guy because talking to him could be like smacking your head against a wall but he was nice and likable enough. He cared about your friends and he was a lonely kid, you felt for him and helped him out techwise when you could. 99.99% of Gamzee’s life he was a gentle guy who took life with a smile.

Until he snapped and tried to murder everyone and Kanaya had to chainsaw him in half.

His caste can just be like that. It’s not bad as such, you’re not throwing shade here. Dayvhe flipping that way to try to rescue you may well have saved your life. He’s not dangerous to you and yours. Still, mutant or not there’s a little place in his psyche that has eerie carnival music and blood in it. If you show him a bunch of people who locked you up, made you lose it that bad, hurt Karkat, shot his friend, tranquilised several people, and made you nearly fry your pan trying to help everyone it’s… well, it won’t be good.

“We can… work around that.” Karkat says but you can hear the concern in his voice.

Yeah, that’ll be interesting.

You manage to get Karkat to help you wake Dayvhe up and then that whole thing is a round of Dayvhe apologized for getting taken out and leaving you undefended. Then there’s an amount of Dayvhe backpedalling because of course he meant leaving both you and Karkat undefended, he wouldn’t want to imply that you wouldn’t be looked after with Karkat. Then followed a worried amendment that he also doesn’t want to imply that you’re some defenseless and helpless person because you’re not but those specific circumstances were-

Yeah, he just keeps digging himself in a hole and whenever you think he’s about got out he just leaps right into digging a new one. His last line is no exception to that, and you’re just putting your shoes on which really shows how long he’s been on this hoofbeastshit train.

“Sometimes I swear that none of us should go anywhere or do anything because it’s like whenever we do everything just goes nuts.” Dayvhe pouts.

“Not true, sometimes trouble comes and trollnaps us.” Karkat points out sagely.

“Also you really don’t want to keep us in one place.” you say confidently.

“Oh yeah? If we’d stayed behind this wouldn’t have happened. Karkat wouldn’t look like shit-”

“Fuck you.” Karkat interrupts.

“-and you wouldn’t have gone through everything you did, Tavros wouldn’t have got shot and instead we’d just be playing racing games or hanging out.” Dayvhe points out.

“Mmm, you’ve not seen the downside in this plan.” you say confidently as you stand up.

“What downside?” Dayvhe challenges you.

“You’re not the first person who came up with the plan of ‘everyone currently on this ship should stay on Planet Hollywood where it’s safe and no one wants to kill them, entertain them with other things and never ever leave’ because it’s been proposed before. Just not by you and you don’t wanna
be that guy.” you say flatly.

Dayvhe’s jaw doesn’t comically drop but his mouth does fall open a little as he stares at you. Karkat is staring too.

“That’s the most brutal burn I’ve ever seen holy shit.” Karkat whispers.

“It’s not a burn. Dayvhe doesn’t want to make his ancestor’s mistakes. Wanting to keep people safe is sweet, wanting things to be better is normal, locking people up against their will to try to make all that happen is deranged. So like I said, I know he wouldn’t do it. He’s better than that.” you say with a shrug. You go to head out of the room but Dayvhe is between you and the door so you just have to detour to kiss his face because he really was worried. Besides you know he really does feel bad about not being awake to help even though it was no fault of his own.

“I- I still don’t know if I’ve been burnt or complimented here.” Dayvhe says.

“It’s Sollux.” Karkat points out.

“Ah. Both.” Dayvhe says in agreement so you flip them off without looking back and walk out into the helm.

“Hey Aradia, where’s everyone else?” you ask as you head to the steps.

“Between the rec room and the nutrition block mostly.” she answers you.

“Thanks.” you tell her and climb up with Dayvhe and Karkat following a little bit later.

What your group has started calling the rec room is the one with the little holographic table, the one that in the Star Wars movies people played games on. Not that you can remember the game, your knowledge isn’t that comprehensive but it’s where the whole ‘let the wookie win’ bit came from you think. The point is it’s a largeish room and the others have taken tables and chairs from elsewhere to make a big place for everyone to gather.

Tavros’ stretcher is also hooked up to one wall and you know there’s plenty of attachment points for cameras and the like there, hidden among the normal looking ship scenery. You suppose that Hal and Equius improvised a place to keep him where he could still interact with people but wasn’t in danger of rolling off somewhere. A lot of your group is already here as Aradia said but before you can figure out where to sit Vriska is on her feet and walking to you with a scowl on her face.

“How are you?” she demands.

It should be a nice question, asking about your wellbeing is supposed to be a thoughtful sign of concern and affection. Vriska has a way of saying it that suggests that you’ve personally wronged her by making her care at all and if you don’t tell her the answer she’ll stab you.


“I have my psionics back.” she says and before you can consider this a dig at you she presses on, “I’m close enough, I could make at least some of them kill each other or try to kill the Lalond one if you want. Unless you want to do it yourself, so.”

Some people would give you sympathy or romantic pity for the kind of admittedly re-traumatising and painful experience you just went through. Your kismesis offers you a contract multiple homicide out of the darkness of her spade. You’re actually kind of touched.
“I’ll… consider it. Karkat was saying he wants some information out of them, that’s harder to do when they’re dead.” you tell her.

“Not impossible though. Can Aradia even commune with the dead anymore?” Vriska asks.

“It’s not really communing when you’re dead yourself.” Aradia’s voice comes from above, making Vriska jump. You’re well aware that Aradia’s presence makes Vriska uncomfortable even though you know for a fact that Aradia doesn’t hold a grudge at all about her death. You guess Vriska wouldn’t forgive anyone if they did to her what she did to Aradia so you suppose she finds it hard to imagine that it just doesn’t matter to Aradia anymore.

No money in the universe could be enough to make you want to mediate that problem so you’re staying well out of it. You take a seat at a table near Tavros, he’s talking to Jayded at the moment and the room has the feel of multiple conversations winding down and everyone getting seated like some big speech is coming. You’re not entirely wrong.

“We need to decide what we’re going to do.” Roxxie announces loudly. She’s sitting on the back of one of the benches her legs on either side of Jayyne’s body. A murmur of agreement goes around, everyone can agree on something needing to be decided.

“Wait, before we do that, Sollux could you fly the ship right now?” Dirkka asks.

“Whoa, wait, no that’s a terrible idea.” Dayvhe protests.

“Knowing our options in an emergency situation is important.” Rohhze adds.

Most everyone looks at you for your answer.

“I could. I don’t know how far I could get beyond orbit. I’m pretty sure I couldn’t pull a twelve hour shift like I was before, not today at least. Or, well…” you trail off.

“Well?” Karkat asks.

“I believe that Sollux is saying that were Aradia committed to the situation and were we all on board we could probably get considerably more psionic power out of Sollux for the helm. The helm assignments are designed to not be painful and not to push psionics past the point of pain, but these are safeguards that could be bypassed. His ancestor and I imagine the majority of helmsmen within the imperial fleet are in such a situation. How much power we could get out of Sollux in an emergency situation is, to put it crudely, up to what we’re prepared to take from him.” Equius fills them in.

The expressions of horror on the faces around you are reassuring.

“Exactly. I don’t think I need to say that I don’t want that but I also don’t think I need to point out how dumb I’m prepared to be if it means keeping everyone else alive.” you sigh.

“I’m not letting you do that in a million fucking sweeps, don’t you even dare try!” Dayvhe yells.

“I don’t think Sollux or Equius are advocating for that plan. If we had to go this very second the best solution would be to get Sollux to get us to the end of his reasonable range and then step out and recover, hopefully that would be far enough and leave us coasting at a speed that’d keep us safe.” Hal interrupts.
“And this ship has weapons, we have options before Sollux has to kick us into hyperspeed to his own detriment.” Jayekh adds.

“Hyperspeed doesn’t mean anything, that’s not-” Equius mutters and Nepeta shooshes him quietly.

“So, that’s our emergency plan with layers and shit and hopefully we never have to get to the bottom one of those.” Roxxie says with a firm nod.

The little holographic table flicks on and a small projection of Aradia appears sat on it.

“I don’t think you’ve considered that I control the safeguards, you said you can remove them but they’re in me. There’s nothing you can turn off that I can’t turn back on. Besides, I can unplug Sollux at will, I’ve done it before.” Aradia points out.

“Well, yeah but…” Hal’s words tail off and you get the distinct impression that Aradia is not interested in this plan and attempting to force her hand would not go well. Besides this is the girl who considers death to be inevitable and not an especially sad thing to happen to a person. Though for the first time Dayvhe seems pleased with a choice Aradia is making, so that’s a thing.

“I want to know more about the adults here, their whole operation cannot simply be to ship money to mutants and deliver innocuous things to Planet Hollywood to keep tabs on Dahvid and use that as an excuse to be in the area. We also don’t know their exact connection to Darkleer and when he interacted with them.” Rohhze says.

“And why do they have lusii here?” Karkat adds.

“I’m sure those are fascinating things but I don’t want to stay here and find out, they’re dangerous! Sure they let us go but that doesn’t mean they won’t still try something again.” Dayvhe says with his face looking the picture of stubborness.

“But if we can talk them into being on our side they could be more help for Roxxie’s takeover.” Jayyne reasons.

“How could you ever imply that The Grand Entertainer is anything but a responsible and helpful adult?” John asks, his serious deadpan broken by a major case of the giggles that sets off well over half of your group.

Aradia’s hologram suddenly disappears and you have maybe two seconds to wonder why that feels like a bad thing before she yells your name.

“Sollux! We have incoming, get to the helm!” Aradia shouts.

You’re out of your chair and down the hallway before anyone else is out of their seats. You freefall down the hatch and just catch yourself in time to fling yourself to the helm. Never have you connected so fast.

You jam power into the shields of the ship before you even get to look at what’s coming. Bloodpusher hammering worriedly in your throat you appear at Aradia’s side as you look out around you. Coming down the hillside you see Wisehunt on a… oh you can never remember the name for them. The lusii that have antlerbeast antlers and mostly large meowbeast bodies, cuspi-somethings. She’s riding this one sedately without any kind of saddle and it doesn’t appear to have a problem with this, walking slowly along with them is a very shaggy looking barkbeast lusus. Wisehunt isn’t the only incoming adult though, a little behind her on a white hoofbeast lusus is Wanderer.

“They’re not exactly charging us.” you point out.
“They’re armed, or carrying a lot of metal if they’re not.” Aradia counters, pinging your more in depth sensors out.

“Sollux, what’s happening?” Dayvhe asks, he’s in the helm with you. You can see him through the cameras in the ceiling. You decide to answer to everyone.

“Wisehunt and Wanderer are riding over to us on lusii, not very fast but we think they’re armed. It’s just them.” you tell everyone, you know there’s no other life nearby. Not troll sized life anyway.

What do you do? The others are already debating about staying or going. The ship’s safety and by extension yours are priority, without you and the ship everyone is doomed. A good number of the group do want to talk to the adults but no one wants to let them close enough to the ship to do any damage and risk stranding you here forever.

Forever is probably an overstatement. Planet Hollywood’s flight department knows the direction that you left in and what you were looking for, if too long passed without you returning you’re damn sure Dahvid would get worried and when he’s upset people want to make him feel better. You’re pretty sure a rescue would come, but would it come in time?

“I have an idea!” Aradia says, popping up in your view with something held in her hands. It’s a smallish round silver and black thing, about the size of one of Equius’ fists.

Your connection to the ship informs you before you can even ask that what Aradia’s holding is an image of one of the floating ship cameras used in filming, especially in places where they couldn’t reasonably get a proper camera crew in. They possess a little anti gravity propulsion system letting them float smoothly and can be controlled first person style by the helmsman themselves.

“We can talk to them without letting them near the ship. That’s a great idea.” you say and Aradia bounces in glee.

“I’ll tell the others and patch the feed through the screens to them so they can see and hear what’s going on.” Aradia tells you.

You can feel and hear her talking to them but you push it out of your awareness and try to mentally track down where within your metallic form these things are. Where is- ah! With a tiny jolt of power delivered your new little nervous system opens up back to life. A new way of moving about and navigating the world is suddenly open to you.

...you are inside a cupboard.

Trying to shift back into the main systems to unlock and open that cupboard and also at the same time keeping your awareness in the camera bot is akin to trying to pat the top of your head and rub your stomach at the same time but you are nothing if not a master of doing two things at once.

Freed from your dark and dusty prison you zip out into the hallway and rush further along. You have to take an abrupt turn to avoid beaming Jayded in the head as she suddenly comes out of a door but you’re cool! There’s a way out of this ship for you that doesn’t involve opening the main exit and potentially letting dangerous adults inside. It’s a complex series of little airlocks to let the cameras get the shots of the exterior of the ship that they needed in space that were very close up, the kind they could use to either capture or edit in near miss shots from enemy ships.

This must be a little what it’s like being Aradia because you’re very much possessing this little bot. It’s got a rudimentary AI of its own that handles operating the camera, the tiny propulsion system and parsing instructions given to it. So it’s intelligent for a very basic kind of intelligence, maybe a small
animal kind of intelligent. The bot is aware that it’s been asleep for a long time and as you and it squirm out of the little vent together you can’t help but pick up the feeling that it’s really pleased to be out and excited to be going out with you. You think if this bot had a tail to wag it would be doing just that.

Outside in the fresh air you spot Wisehunt and Wanderer closing in, they’re still not moving aggressively but they’re closing in to the distance your shield typically holds at. You zip towards them and your shield lets you through without a second thought, you’re not going to attack yourself are you?

“Hold up.” Wisehunt says, her voice just catching your microphones as you rush over and screech to a stop midair before them. Wanderer already has a pistol in his hand. Aradia was right, he is armed.

“What do you want?” you demand, and you can hear how weirdly tinny your voice sounds through the speakers. A bubble of ‘did bad?’ floats up through the bot’s basic AI and you emotionally crumble. No, little bot, you’re great. It feels all delighted and buzzy about that and you’re pretty sure your are now lusus to a tiny camera bot.

“Is that from the ship?” Wanderer asks, glancing behind you.

“It’s Sollux Captor, you may not remember me. Maybe it’d jog your memory if you stuffed me in a specimen tank again, only if you try that I’ll make you into a hole in the ground.” you snarl at him.

“Listen, like Resigned said, we got off to a bad start yesterday, we came to apologise and see how you were doing. Can we come in?” Wisehunt says peaceably.

You can feel several people in the ship loudly say that no, no they cannot come in and you agree!

“No way.” you inform them.

“Also, you’ve not actually said sorry. You’ve just said you were going to.” you point out.

“The cheek! You darn well rocked up to our planet cool as you like and marched in like you owned the place.” Wanderer starts.

Hey, cool, the bot has sound effects. You slam down on a loud and obnoxious error button noise that has Wanderer spluttering indignantly and Wisehunt laughing.

“Sorry, he’s kind of a pain in the butt. We are sorry, Resigned especially feels bad about the whole thing. Our whole mission is about protecting the next generation, hurting and abducting it is pretty counter to that. It’s just given who you are we assumed you were a trap from either The Grand Entertainer or someone in the empire hierarchy. But, we were wrong and we’re sorry.” Wisehunt says with sincerity.

“It was a perfectly reasonable assumption and they tried to- oof!” Wanderer grunts as Wisehunt reaches over and shoves him in the side.

“Sorry.” Wanderer says with a huff.

“Ask them what they’re doing here!” Roxxie says excitedly.

“Ask them about the lusii.” Tavros adds from his stretcher.

“What about Darkleer?” Nepeta suggests.
Partly out of sympathy for Tavros’ situation, you don’t like being confined to a medical bed for your own good and it must be worse with his horns, and partly because it’s an easier question you opt for his.

“What’s with the lusii?” you ask through the bots little speakers.

“We make them here. Partly we breed them and some of them Resigned engineers. My lusus here is one of the last original lime lusii from Alternia, the rest were all culled when she declared us illegal.” Wisehunt says bitterly. You look at the shaggy and yes pretty elderly looking barkbeast lusus at her side. It’s a pretty effective way to ensure any limes who escaped the caverns met with a bad fate, with no lusus to look after you a troll’s odds of survival went down.

“But now Alternia has a pretty much full stock of limeblood lusii, that part of our work is basically complete. We just have extras here in case anything happens to them. We breed and engineer mutant lusii too, like this fella! He’s a splice of several critters so despite his kind usually being bronze he’s bright red!” she says and cheerfully slaps the shoulder of the antler-meowbeast lusii she’s riding on. The beast turns its head a little and makes a wuffling little huff of breath through its strange nose.

“Crabdad…” Karkat says softly, you know the microphone in the room he’s in isn’t picking up every tone but you know the worried, sad and wistful way he’s saying it just because you know him.

“So every mutant and lime lusus came from here?” you ask.

“I drop one off at least most times that I make a delivery, but at least the limeblood lusii are keeping their own population number stable. But it’s pretty likely the mutant ones have a hard enough time finding each other because of how few there are right now. Until now we’d sometimes find limeblood lusii adopting mutant grubs, they spent enough time with the mutant lusii up here to be more inclined that way but… well, yes, a mutant lusus on Alternia almost certainly came from here.” Wanderer confirms with a nod.

You’re left with the inescapable knowledge that these people funded the lives of Dayvhe and Karkat at least in Karkat’s case provided him with a lusus. Crabdad was the sweetest, if not exactly the brightest, lusus around. Without Crabdad and that money Karkat would be dead, without these people there would be no Crabdad and no money. Without these people there would certainly be no Karkat and without Karkat you don’t think you’d be around either. Long before you were anything more than just friends Karkat pulled you out of some really bad places mentally and without him you’d probably be dead by now. Either you’d have just stopped looking after yourself and died that way or you’d have tipped too far the other way and have done something so reckless that it would have cost you your life.

Dayvhe at least you can say probably would have survived without these guys, with his psionics being what they are if he was in real need someone would have helped him. But Cal…

“What about Cal? He was Dayvhe’s, Dirkka’s, Subverse’s and The Grand Entertainer’s lusus. The mind leech?” you ask. He has to predate these guys, right? Actually you don’t even know if he was a mutant lusus, he raised bronze kids too after all. It’s not like you could have checked, you didn’t leave enough behind to look at.

“Oh no, we didn’t make him!” Wisehunt says, her eyes wide in a muted kind of terror that tells you she knows well and good what Cal was like.

“In fact Disciple and Darkleer were very clear that we weren’t ever to make a lusus like him. Criminy no, that clearly doesn’t make for stable trolls.” Wanderer says with a shudder of disgust.
“...Hey.” Dirkka protests in mild offense. You’re glad the others outside can’t hear him, just you.

“It’s true but they shouldn’t say it, huh?” Roxxie says sympathetically.

“We’re not unstable. Me and Dayvhe aren’t anyway.” Dirkka mutters bitterly.

“So Disciple herself and Darkleer set all of you up on this mission to... what? Ensure there’d still be mutants and limes?” you ask instead.

“That’s our part to play, yes. Or rather we ensure they’re looked after. Ensuring they survive the caverns is the job of several other cells but we don’t know who they are. It was all Darkleer’s plan you see. If we know all about each other only one person has to turn traitor for the whole operation to be compromised, if the spread of information is limited only so much can ever go wrong.” Wanderer says and Darkleer has a point, if you were going to run a large scale illicit operation that’d be a smart way to do it. You set it up and it runs by itself, you can kill the leaders and the machinery keeps going, it’s clever.

“So... why you?” you ask. You’re not trying to sound quite that hostile given that you’ve worked out how much they’ve influenced your life for the better but you’re hardly over the whole imprisoning you all thing yet either.

“I’m an astrophysicist, keeping an eye on what’s going on elsewhere and working out how to deal with our environment here is my thing. Plus I’m a pretty outdoor oriented lady so wrangling beasts is well within my comfort zone.” Wisehunt explains.

“I’m an intrepid intergalactic explorer, I find things we need in remote locations and I’m the one who makes the journeys off planet.” Wanderer boasts, thumping on his chest with one fist.

“Yes, he usually makes the deliveries. When he isn’t dumping them on the wrong rock.” Wisehunt says sharply and Wanderer wilts.

“One time.” he mumbles unhappily.

“Enricher is our medical specialist, she looks after the health of the lusii as well as us if any of us get sick and she’s a damn fine cook too. The Comedian used to be a double agent, infiltrating highblood circles with his comedy and performance skills until his cover was finally blown. He fought The Grand Highblood and lived but it ended his counterintelligence career. This is where he can be without being found and he’s useful backup for Wanderer if he’s going somewhere dangerous.” Wisehunt explains.

“He never talks about that fight and he refuses to get into a scrap with me, I’m sure I could give him a run for his money.” Wanderer says with stars in his eyes.

Wisehunt shoots your little bot a tired look that suggests that she’s heard this boast for countless sweeps and expects to hear it until she dies many, many sweeps from now. You’re starting to get the impression that Wanderer is kind of like his descendant, only Jayekh isn’t as lost in fantasy and you’re pretty sure Jayekh wouldn’t lie about completing such a vital job just so no one would be mad at him. Jayekh isn’t perfect by any means but it’s a fair analogy to make that he’s like The Wanderer just with some of the bugs worked out, he’s an improved version.

“And Resigned?” you ask.

“She’s...” Wisehunt hesitates.

“She’s a genetic engineer, she creates the lusii lines as well as a bunch of other projects that go over
my head in all honesty. She’s the one in charge here, not that it really works like that with our group. She met Disciple shortly after Signless had died, it was the witch herself coming down that made Resigned surface to find out what she was up to,” she says finally.

“Wait, how old was she? Where in the timeline does that fit?” Nepeta asks. A good question.

“Was she still a kid then?” you ask.

The Wanderer and The Wisehunt exchange a look, seeming to have a silent conversation before coming to some decision.

“I don’t know exactly what sweep Resigned was hatched on but I know the Empress was a young adult then, she was already Empress but she was in the process of moving her regime off of Alternia and into space properly. This was all long before any of the rebellion were ever hatched.” Wisehunt explains.

Holy shit how old is she?!

“Do you know a lot about the ocean? About deep sea fish?” Wanderer asks.

“I’m gold, I can’t even really swim. So, no, I can’t say I know much aside from everything in the ocean is fucking terrifying and should be left well alone.” you answer him.

“Well, here’s the thing. Our skin is so dark because it protects us from the light of the Alternian sun, not enough obviously but a little. Even you must know that your skin is darker now than it was when you were just a little grub, and of course with each molt it gets darker. Well, that’s in response to light. But Resigned always lived in the deep ocean. She never had a lusus of her own but she did start to get friendly with the Empress’ lusus, she talked to it, fed it. Looked after her when the Empress didn’t.” Wanderer says.

“She always stayed down there you see, no friends, just her and the giant pale monsters that live down there. The Empress came back one time and instead of seeing Resigned’s relationship with her lusus as a lonely adolescent looking after a lusus that needed help she saw it as a bid for the throne. She attacked her, mauled her and ripped her eyes out. She was left for dead but Gl'bgolyb, as a repayment for her kindness saved her life and set off her molt early so she could repair herself. Because it was so early and she’d never seen the surface or any light she came out all pale like that. So it’s pretty obvious why she hates The Empress so when she first came to the surface as an adult and ran into Disciple she was understanding, I mean she knew first hand how awful The Empress could be.” Wisehunt explains.

“So she resigned from her position of heiress to try to bring her down and help the resistance?” you check.

“Right, just don’t call her an heiress.” Wanderer says hastily.

“Why?” you ask.

“It really upsets her and besides if you do she’ll end up useless for days.” Wisehunt says.

“She has a problem, not that she says it is, but with sopor.” Wanderer explains.

Your attention snaps to your internal cameras. Roxxie winces just a touch and at the same time Dirkka leans against her side a little more heavily. You replay it, slowing it down. As Roxxie hears about her ancestor’s problem, which you can only guess is like Gamzee’s problem with sopor was, her eyes widen in alarm and her expression shifts through a grimace and a kind of self loathing. At
the same time Dirkka perks up in worry and immediately goes to reassure her physically. But Dayvhe can barely spare any curiosity for what he’s hearing, he’s more focused on standing in front of you and paying attention to your body.

Something about The Resigned’s sopor problem set off a pretty extreme reaction in Dirkka and Roxxie, one they’re trying to play it cool about but Dayvhe doesn’t seem to know about it. Didn’t Resigned mention she was high a lot? But you’d figured that she was referring to the multitude of mind altering substances on Alternia alone that don’t fuck your pan up in the super addictive and damaging ways that sopor does.

You can buy Resigned having a sopor problem but why would Roxxie react like that? You know she doesn’t have a sopor problem, you live with her and she’s spent a whole bunch of time in the ship that’s currently you. You would know. Surely Dayvhe would know if she used to and his only thing with sopor is that he didn’t use to sleep in it.

Wait. He didn’t sleep in it, never used to at all and he said it’s because Dirkka discouraged it, didn’t even have the stuff in the hive. And if you had a moirail with a sopor problem you’d remove all sopor from the hive too and if you were looking after a little kid you might make up some kind of shitty excuse about why you did that. Holy shit Roxxie used to have a sopor problem, didn’t she?

You wonder if there’s a genetic predisposition for that sort of thing, there probably is. Shit, poor Roxxie, that’s not her fault.

With that mystery that no one thought was a mystery and didn’t even really need solving anyway well and truly solved you turn your focus back to the two adults outside. It’s not like any of that took any real time from their point of view.

“Is she going to have a problem with Roxxie? Because if she does then we’re not going to be able to get on.” you say. You’re pretty confident on that, even Equius who is still a touch uncertain about the whole thing is pretty firm in his conviction that Roxxie is someone worth following. How much of that is his weird adoration of those ‘above’ him you don’t know. He doesn’t seem as creepy about Rohhze but maybe that’s because Rohhze is more intimidating.

“From what we know of her so far we don’t have a problem with her. When we talked to her Resigned didn’t seem entirely against the idea that there could be an heiress out there who wasn’t total shit but she’s understandably skeptical.” Wisehunt answers you diplomatically.

“Well the only other adults of her colour aside from Roxxie that we know have either locked us up and threatened to torture us, actually locked up and tortured some of us, or tyrannically ruled our entire species. So we’re pretty fucking skeptical too.” you say with bitterness curling inside your chest.

“That’s… fair. Look this was really a peace offering, we really thought you were a trap and not a group of innocent if weirdly improbable kids. We don’t mean you any harm and as long as you don’t stop us doing our work we’ll stay that way. We understand if you want to leave and you’re free to do so but if you want to stay you’re also welcome to come and talk to us. That’s all, really.” Wisehunt says. Wanderer nods, and the two of them seem to consider their message delivered and so with an encouraging noise to their lusus mounts the two of them turn and ride off back the way they’d come with the old barkbeast lusus tagging alongside.

You slip back through the vent you came out through, the camera bot excited that it got to do something. You probably ought to put it back where you found it but it still has charge from you and putting it back in the dark when it’s awake and aware is just meaner than you’re capable of being. You just withdraw your consciousness from it’s pleased little form and let it just do whatever it wants.
until its charge runs down.

Opening your eyes you skip straight to disconnecting from the helm, drifting to the floor where Dayvhe steadies you with his hands. You don’t need it but it’s a nice thought.

“How do you feel?” Dayvhe asks.

“Like I still haven’t eaten yet and want to.” you complain. Dayvhe grits his teeth and nods, starting to pull you closer to the steps.

“Hey, did Dirkka and Roxxie not have sopor either when you were a kid?” you ask carefully.

“Huh? Yeah of course not, Dirkka was all about not letting your guard down. I guess Roxxie eventually talked him out of it or they’d trained themselves to be alert enough or something because they were sleeping in it sometimes before you got me into the stuff. Not the first thing Roxxie’s talked him out of.” Dayvhe shrugs.

Oh boy, you’re pretty sure you’re right and Dayvhe just doesn’t know at all. That’s a conversation you should probably have with him at some point but not now.

Dayvhe guides you to where the others are waiting, now that you have a few more answers you can try to decide what to do. Or more accurately they can decide what to do because your immediate decisions are taking what’s left on the table and deciding between either toast or some kind of fancy smoothie Jayyne must have whipped up.

Trick question, correct answer is both.

“They don’t seem bad as such, I mean- despite the obvious.” Roxxie says, gesturing to Tavros.

“No one gave me that kind of a pass when I paralysed Tavros.” Vriska mutters sulkily.

“Tha’s because- because you’re an insufferable bitch.” you tell her, you have to pause midway through to swallow your toast. You have a hard enough time not slipping back into your stupid speech problems with words like ‘insufferable’ let alone when you have half a mouthful of food too.

“And yet,” Vriska sneers as she glares at you, “I can and will make you suffer.”

“That’s not what insufferable means, idiot.” you laugh at her and she punches you in the arm, though at least she does it with her flesh and blood fist instead of her metal one. Dayvhe growls slightly at her, he’s cooler about Vriska stuff these days but with you already not running at your best he’s probably not cool with her just hitting you.

“We have a lot of the answers we came for, right Vriska?” Terezi says, pulling her attention away as slick as anything.

“More or less. I want to know about the other cells and how many of them still operating but I get the feeling that knowledge died with Darkleer.” Vriska says.

“Didn’t you have his tablet?” Hal asks you.

“I did, but it’s back at Roxxie’s place. I didn’t have it on me all the time, I wasn’t thinking about that kind of stuff when I was getting you to perforate my nervous system with ports. It’s not like we can go back there.” you tell them.

Dipping into the atmosphere with this ship would be way too dangerous, you’d be seen and the ship
isn’t huge but it’d absolutely ping something. Besides the Empress knew about Dahvid’s shit and she’s likely got the place watched pretty closely. But…

“We… could go back. Maybe.” you say slowly.

“I think we were told pretty specifically not to do that, remember?” Karkat says.

“Well the problem is that if we got caught it’d be a big deal. But if we don’t get caught then it’s no problem, right?” you say.

“I hear the familiar tell-tale sound of a terrible idea.” Rohhze says.

“We don’t know how closely Alternia’s being watched, they’re able to get crates and lusii down on the planet, surely we can do something similar. We could try to find out how they do it.” Hal agrees.

“Getting stuff down isn’t a problem. If we’re proposing to get down how are we gonna get back up again?” John asks.

“I don’t know but we can always go look, I might well be able to turn off any equipment that’s watching and just fly land the ship somewhere out of the way.” you point out. Until you get there you won’t know.

“I feel a little like this is needlessly risky.” Jayyne says.

“Yeah but on the other hand if we go ask Dahvid first he’ll probably say it’s too dangerous and not let us go. Better to ask for forgiveness than permission.” Terezi quotes, but you don’t know if that’s just some saying or a legal precedent. With her it could be either.

“I don’t think staying here is wise, Tavros needs more help than I am capable of giving him here. We should return to Planet Hollywood. Otherwise my only option is to cannibalise parts of this ship to repair what I can with his prosthetics.” Equius says, making you choke on your drink.

“I’ll cannibalise you!” you snarl at him in utter horror that he could even contemplate that.

“I realise it’s just a ship to you Equius but when Sollux is connected it’s part of his body. You stripping it for parts is not going to play well.” Hal adds.

“How about nobody takes parts out of anything or anyone, huh?” Nepeta says loudly and Equius pouts a little but doesn’t argue further.

“What I think we need is a way to contact them again after we leave, after all we don’t want to have to come all the way back here just for one question do we? And knowing any more about where they send the money to would be helpful.” Rohhze proposes.

There’s agreement all around and you figure you can just have that conversation when they inevitably come back when you don’t go right away. Cross that bridge when you get to it, yeah? You figure at that point you’ll take your leave. You didn’t exactly do much but you’re still tired and if you want to get going again you’re going to need to recharge. Besides fighting with Equius is never a good idea, not when Nepeta’s about, and if you stay around Mr. Cannibalise the Ship you will fight with him properly.

You take a wander around rather than going straight to your claimed block, swipe some extra food from the stores that are outside the nutrition block and keep walking with a view to circling around back to your block again. Only you’re distracted on the way there.
“Eeeeeee.”

Just one letter, or at least a sound like it is mechanically projected at you. Looking up you see the little camera bot bumping along the ceiling, flying right for you. It dips last moment, a little clumsy without your direction and bumps into you.

“Eeep.” it announces with a little beep.

“Oh, hey.” you greet it, running your hand over its smooth and round metal body and feeling weirdly jarred at being outside of it. The bot buzzes against your palm and glows a little brighter.

“You not tired yet? Still got charge?” you ask even though the little beeps it gives you in response mean nothing to you. You’re also a little grateful that you’re on your own and no one else can hear you talking to the bot.

“When you’re low on power try to go back to where you came from, ok?” you remind it and gently let it go.

“I’m going back to my block now too.” you add and start walking off, leaving the camera bot floating there.

You’ve never heard a sadder mechanical tone before in your life. Stopping instantly you look over your shoulder and see the little bot floating lower, its camera downcast. In a vain attempt to cling to sanity you desperately try to remind yourself that it’s a super basic AI, not really alive by any means, you’re probably just projecting. Oh fuck it’s just floating there so SAD, you can’t leave it, you’re not a monster!

“Come on.” you tell it, holding out a hand. With a delighted little noise it flies right for you and plasters itself to your free hand again and glows happily. It’s probably not happy, it’s probably just stealing your psionic energy to power itself through touch.

“For the record I’m not going to anthropomorphise you.” you warn it as you carry it back to your block. Heedless to your words the bot just beeps and glows at you. But an hour later when Karkat comes down into your block to find you using a laser pointer to get the little thing to fly wildly around the room you’re not sure you can hold claim to that any more.

“What… what’re you doing?” Karkat asks as you click the pointer off too late. The little bot beeps in alarm and whizzes around looking for the red dot.

“N…nothing.” you lie.

“Are you playing with a robot?” Karkat asks. He steps inside and peers up as it flies over his head and around in circles. You can’t help but feel mean so you turn the pointer back on again. With several sharp excited beeps it gives chase.

“It’s intelligent, it’s got an AI. It’s not like Hal but more like, I don’t know, a little animal. It still had power.” you explain yourself.

“It’s a camera.” Karkat points out.

“And it has feelings.” you tell him. You turn off the laser pointer and hold out your hand, the bot flies over to you and makes itself at home against your hand and then your chest.

“It- how do you know it has feelings? Why would they build a camera with feelings?” Karkat sighs and sits down with you.
“I don’t know why but it does, it’s a side effect of AI I guess. You leave that stuff running long enough it develops personality. Besides I was directing it earlier, I could feel what it felt.” you protest. It absolutely has feelings, it wanted to do a good job, that’s a feeling.

“Just tell me you’ve not named it.” Karkat says.

You don’t say anything but that’s answer enough. Karkat pinches the bridge of his nose which must still be a little sore, or you’d think so at least.

“What have you called it?” Karkat asks.

“Spot.” you mumble quietly, “’Cause it’s a camera, it spots… things.”

Karkat is looking at you as if he is reevaluating his conclusion on if you pushing yourself too far psionically lately fried your thinksponge or not.

“You’re a disaster person.” Karkat informs you and gently bats at your legs with his hand to get you to move so he can sit with you.

“Yeah, well, unlike you I have excellent choice in best friends.” you sneer.

Karkat squints at you, looks like he’s going to say something and then frowns a little.

“You insult my taste by insulting yourself and also complimenting me. I’m not sure who won there.” Karkat says uncertainly. Honestly confusing him is just as appealing as insulting him sometimes.

“Let’s assume me. Let’s always assume me when it’s that question.” you tell him.

Karkat rolls his eyes and the Spot bot wriggles out of your hold to peer over your knees at him. Karkat gives the bot a suspicious look but doesn’t do anything to stop it.

“Jayekh and Dirkka have gone to ask about a way to contact the adults after we leave and then whatever else we can get them to tell us about Alternia. Aradia says she’s put some kind of tracker on them, not like this thing but I don’t know what it was.” Karkat explains, tapping on Spot’s camera. The little bot whirrs and pulls away from Karkat’s tapping claws.

“Wait, did they ask people if we were cool with this idea? No one asked me.” you protest and quickly double check your palmhusk to see, but, no you weren’t contacted.

“Well no one wants to disturb you anyway~” Karkat says.

“Except you, always.” you interrupt.

“Shut your face. No, they didn’t consult people but they didn’t not do that either. They had a big discussion about it with their quadrantmates right in the main room where everyone else was which meant that a bunch of other nosey people weighed in on it.” Karkat explains.

“So all of the girls we know?” you guess.

“Pretty much. Would you have said they couldn’t go though?” Karkat asks.

“No, I might have said they should be accompanied so we could see what was going down and if we needed to send backup.” you say, lifting Spot up on one finger where it rotates a little and makes a little ‘ee!’ chirp.

“Think we should chase them down?” Karkat asks, worry creasing his brow.
“Nah. They don’t seem bad. I’m not about to write them twelfth perigees eve cards or anything, I’m not getting over the locking me up thing but it’s pretty obvious that without their help over our lives we’d be dead. So, I don’t know, I guess that evens out a little?” you shrug.

“What’s this ‘we’ business? I’m the mutant here and we both know Dayvhe would have been fine. Mr. ‘How can anyone be hiveless? You just make friends and live with them’ would have landed on his feet just fine.” Karkat scoffs.

“Yeah, Dayvhe would have been fine but not you and me.” you tell him.

“Again, why you? I wouldn’t have had a lusus or money but you would have, it’s not like they’re breeding gold lusii here is it?” Karkat presses on. Is he really that dumb? You sit up a little more and look right at him, letting the bot drift off on its own.

“I would have had money and dad, yeah. But living on a planet where Karkat dies as a grub means I’m too dead to enjoy either of those things, are you really too stupid to get that? No Karkat means me not meeting at least half of my friends, because loads of them don’t meet each other without you. It means I don’t have a best friend looking out for me and it means I don’t meet Dayvhe. It means I’m on my own, how well do you think that works out for me. Or did you forget that it was you harping on about how I have something ‘diagnosably wrong in your stupid pan’ that made me get tested to prove you wrong and, spoilers, you weren’t? I don’t go broke and I don’t die without a lusus but you think I make it to this age without having known you? You’re not that dumb.” you say pointedly.

Karkat is staring wide eyed at you, he opens his mouth and you’re guessing he’s going to argue with you. That’s at least until his lip wobbles and his eyes get all watery. You’re afforded half a second of panic before Karkat launches himself at you with a thump, landing on you and tangling you up with his arms. He’s half bawling and half ranting into your chest, not that you can make out a goddamn word of it.

“Hey, Karkat it’s-” you try just Karkat just wails at you.

Well, shit, you broke Karkat.

He’s got both of your arms more or less pinned but you have enough of your psionics still to get your palmhusk out and hold it close to your hand so you can type out an emergency message.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TA: help ii broke kk
TG: what
TA: karkat help!
TG: wait shit are you serious you need me to come find you or something
TA: YE2!
TG: oh damn our block
TA: y

turntechGodhead [TG] ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

You let your palmhusk go and try to twist your arm around so that you can at least approximate a comforting pat of your hand on Karkat’s side. You’re ever so grateful when Dayvhe appears at the door to your block by the helm and takes in the sight of you and Karkat.

“Oh you weren’t kidding.” Dayvhe whistles. You don’t want to upset Karkat more so you try to
convey through sheer expression alone that you need him to get the hell over here and actually help, not make smart comments from the doorway. You guess he gets the message because he comes in the room and carefully circles around to where you both are.

“Heeey Karkitty, what’s up?” Dayvhe asks sweetly.

Karkat garbles something out through your shirt that’s entirely unintelligible to both you and Dayvhe.

“Heeeey Karkitty, what’s up?” Dayvhe asks sweetly.

“Uh. Right, cool story bruh. Sol, wanna catch me up?” Dayvhe asks, looking at you.

“We were- agh- we were talking about Dirkka and Jayekh going off and about how it’s not that big a deal. I don’t think the adults are actually trying to kill us or anything.” you wheeze as Karkat squeezes you a little too tight around the middle.

“Debatable but fine.” Dayvhe nods in understanding.

“I just said that if Karkat died as a grub which he would have without money or a lusus that I wouldn’t be here either and he just…” you gesture helplessly at Karkat.

“I would say what about me but I probably wouldn’t have been much different. I woulda still had Dirkka and one way or another woulda had Cal.” Dayvhe says thoughtfully.

“Exactly.” you agree, at least Dayvhe gets that part.

“But when you say that you wouldn’t be here do you mean specifically here in the Millenium Falcon Two or… more of an existing as a living person type deal?” Dayvhe asks. You give him a flat look and Dayvhe gasps.

“Wait, the second also means the first. Both is the answer! Hah! Aw, but wait that means you think you’d be dead.” Dayvhe’s excitement wears off as he gets to the end of that thought.

“Without Karkat in my life at all? Yeah.” you say and Karkat whines against you.

“That sucks but I can see that. We wouldn’t know each other either, didn’t he introduce basically everyone to everyone too?” Dayvhe asks and you nod. You knew Aradia on your own but Karkat even helped you realise your feelings for her. And no insult meant to Aradia here but you’re not sure her being your only friend, or rather only relationship would have been great for you either. You’re pretty sure you would have been a shittier person to date without Karkat around too.

“I’m with you Karkat that’s a pretty sad thought but I’m not sure it’s really all THIS sad.” Dayvhe says gently, sitting down and patting Karkat’s back.

“No, shut up, I hate you both!” Karkat bawls against your chest.

“Nah you don’t.” you say confidently.

“I do, you both suck and you don’t need me! You would have been fine without me!” Karkat insists.

“Ohhh, so this is a Karkat hates thinking that he’s important to people and that we’re terrible for pointing out that he’s wrong thing, huh?” Dayvhe concludes succinctly.

“I wouldn’t have known half our friends without you. I wouldn’t have had a good enough team to play the game even if I’d managed to survive to that age without knowing you which I doubt. So Dayvhe’s group and ours wouldn’t have merged.” you point out.
“Which means Cal doesn’t die, so my ancestor never finds out about us and takes us off Alternia.” Dayvhe chips in.

“So I don’t meet Dayvhe and even get that plant he got me, which means that if I MADE IT to ascension age as you wrongly think I would then I’d either get helmed- actually I’d certainly be helmed in Condy’s own ship, or I’d die trying to fight that.” you point out.

“And Dirkka and Roxxie were never going to take me to her challenge to the Empress, and let’s be honest the four of them don’t stand a great chance alone. So likely I’d be stuck on Alternia with Cal trying to survive alone because I’d have had to ditch my friends when they aged out.” Dayvhe adds.

“Not to mention you were the one who noticed that Gamzee was going bad, without you around who knows how many people he would have killed?” you say as the thought occurs. With each point about Karkat connecting you and your group to good things and to each other Karkat cringes a little. It’s so stupid, he desperately wants to be important to people but when people point out how he already is he gets so neurotically weird about it.

You look up at Dayvhe and make eye contact with him, silently and unanimously you both decide that the thing you’re going to both do is entirely destroy Karkat by systematically and entirely truthfully pointing out every single way he’s made someone’s life better by being in it. There will be no mercy, you’re going bludgeon him with every nice thing he’s ever done until he accepts that a world where Karkat never made it creates a universe that sucks completely. That’ll teach him to be good.

A few hours pass with Karkat eventually calmed down and the three of you bingeing all of the back seasons of Cake Authoritarian that you may have illicitly ripped from Jayyne’s harddrive to calm down. You’re just getting to the good part, one of the subordinate employees has accidentally dropped an entire cake down the stairs and any moment now he’s going to be caught. Only you’re interrupted before the good part.

“Sollux, the others are back. I don’t think there’s going to be a meeting though, Jayekh and Dirkka are fighting at the moment. But I understand they got the information that they left for.” Aradia says.

“Wait, why’re they fighting?” Dayvhe asks, sitting up from where he was leaning on your shoulder.

“Something about The Wanderer and his hoofbeast lusus that he was riding? Him being shirtless? Jayekh seems very angry about the whole thing.” Aradia says but she seems pretty confused about it. Dayvhe winces at her words and nods.

“Yeah, some buff shirtless Jayekh lookalike riding a quote unquote majestic hoofbeast near Dirkka is basically his kryptonite. I can see how Jayekh himself wouldn’t like that though. Especially with Dirkka being an adult at the moment and Jayekh not.” Dayvhe sighs.

“What does Jayekh not being an adult have to do about the whole thing?” you ask, feeling suddenly lost in this conversation.

“Because adults don’t pail sub-adults. Sub-adults pail each other and adults pail each other, the two don’t mix. I’m not talking practically, obviously, it’s just a hormone thing or something. Pheromones maybe. How do you not know this? It’s the plot of so many romantic dramas, a couple was together and then one molted a good amount of time before the other and their relationship drifts apart because they can’t go all the way and then one is unfaithful. It’s a whole trope!” Karkat insists.

“We watch very different movies, and books, and games.” you tell him flatly.
“What kind of games do you think I’m playing?” Karkat asks after a moment.

“Whatever you’re into playing. No judgement.” you tell him innocently.

“A little judgement?” Dayvhe snickers quietly on your other side.

“Maybe. So Jayekh’s mad that he’s not getting any and Dirkka’s into his ancestor of all things?” you ask, just to be sure that you’re all caught up.

“To be fair to Dirkka, a lot of it was probably just general interest in hoofbeasts and also shirtless dudes.” Dayvhe says.

“He and Equius really have a lot in common, huh?” Aradia asks from above.

“The less I have to think about that the better.” you grumble. You’ve already got your quota of one friend creepily into that stuff, you don’t want to think about the fact that Dirkka and also Hal add to that number. You’d like to think you’re not surrounding yourself with this kind of trait in your friends.

Dayvhe is typing away on his palmhusk and you crane your neck to see Roxxie’s pink on his screen. Dayvhe notices you looking and decides to explain.

“She says we’ve got the contact details and we know where the crates go but she wants to try to help fix this thing with Dirkka and Jayekh, so between that and wanting to let you rest more we’ll go in the morning. Now hit play I wanna see Cake Authoritarian lose his shit on camera.” Dayvhe says, tucking himself up against your side again. You can’t really deny him that, can you?

You don’t see Roxxie, Dirkka, Jayyne and Jayekh for the rest of the day and in all honesty your group is mostly just kicking around the ship in their own smaller groups doing their own thing. The morning’s meal is fully packed again however even if it is notably frosty from Jayekh’s side. Even Jayyne looks really irritable and as far as you know this whole drama shouldn’t really affect her that much. Whatever, you’re staying out of it.

“So we’re going back the way we came then, yes?” Kanaya asks you across the table, she’s currently trying to reach for the syrup but it’s out of the way. Dayvhe helpfully floats it across to her.

“Do you want the simple answer or the complicated answer?” you ask and shove the remaining half of your top pancake in your mouth.

“The… correct answer.” Kanaya says suspiciously as she drizzles syrup on her pancakes.

“I’m gonna take us back to where we came from at the most efficient route, that’s the plan. We also came here on a very efficient route because Wanderer is a lazy pilot and picked about the straightest line he could. But because this planet and Planet Hollywood have both moved and the bits of space they’re in are spinning and moving as well it’s technically not the same so… eh?” you say with a shrug.

“The simple answer was just ‘yes’ wasn’t it?” Rohhze asks and you nod.

You look back down and idly cut into your pancake to take a bite.

“Are we going close enough to Alternia to take a look at whatever they use to watch us or is that really out of the way? I don’t know how fast this ship really goes compared to the other one.” Terezi asks. You stab your… your top pancake. You swear you had one left because you picked up two and you definitely already ate one. Dayvhe is very studiously not looking at you so you’re pretty sure
you know how it got there. Whatever, Jayyne makes great pancakes, you’re not gonna turn another
down.

“It’s out of the way, sure, but not that out of the way. We can have a sneaky look at what they’re
doing, I really want to know, actually.” you admit.

No one seems to object to that plan so when you’re done eating and have cleared stray syrup off of
your hands, not that you know how it gets there because you were using cutlery, you head down to
the helm and get started. Aradia connects you up and you’re happy to find that she’s already planned
your route off of the planet, it’s nice having a copilot living in here with you. Her presence curls
around you as you both run through the checks to be sure that you’re safe to fly.

“This planet has a little bit of a thicker atmosphere so you all need to be sitting down.” you
announce, you’re glad that breakfast has been cleared away already because you’d hate to wreck all
of that. Literally being the ship you are now you’re able to see everywhere and when you see that
everyone is sat down on something you really get this started. You fire enough power through to get
off of the planet and up enough that you can angle yourself as per Aradia’s rapidly updating
calculations. You soar through the atmosphere with only a scarce little rumble and phase the artificial
gravity in at the same rate that the natural gravity of the planet fades out. Fighting against the black
hole isn’t exactly hard as such, not like it would be on TV where everything is done for effect. The
proportional distance between it and you is bonkers because the distances between everything in
space is like that. So, no, it’s not absurdly taxing but it’s the difference between walking through
ankle high water compared to just walking down the street. Not exactly hard but try doing both of
those for twelve hours and you’ll feel the difference.

Still, once you’re up in space things are as peaceful and as uneventful as they were on the way here.
You try to entertain yourself, talk to Aradia and mostly avoid as much people watching as you can.
People watching is a fine enough way to pass the time, it’s a little sketicher when you inhabit the
entire confined space that they live in. You’re trying very hard not to notice the worried messages
that Jayekh is getting from Dirkka or how he’s getting in a very obvious lather about it.

Some things do snap your attention though, whenever anyone says your name it grabs your focus
whether you want it to or not. Mostly it’s inane stuff, people wondering how you’re doing or what
time your shift ends. Other times people are actually trying to talk to you, like Dayvhe and Karkat.
Or, in this case, Jayyne.

“Sollux?” Jayyne says, leaning against the glass and occasionally looking outside.

“Hi Jayyne.” you say pleasantly.

“Can you turn the heating down a touch? It’s really toasty in here.” Jayyne asks and fans herself with
her hand.

“Give me a second.” you tell her.

You pull away from your view of Jayyne and drag up the data about the environmental controls.
Your shift is nearly at an end and you hope you’re not losing enough focus that you’re screwing up
the homeostasis of the ship. But no, you’re not. The ship has been kept at the same temperature the
whole time, Aradia’s even been tweaking the heating when people cook or shower, really whenever
they do anything to make the place warmer she dials back the energy you’re putting into the heating.
The ship is literally the same temperature it’s been the whole time.

“We have thermal cameras, right?” you ask Aradia but even as you ask you already know that you
do. It’s the weird thing about being the ship there are things you don’t know sometimes until you
think to ask and you’re immediately provided with the answer.

“You’ve not used them before though so you won’t have back information if she’s sick.” Aradia points out, she’s already ahead of you.

You flick your view back to Jayyne with the thermal camera. See, to you that seems cold, if you were that temperature you’d be really REALLY sick. But who knows what’s normal for her? Well, you kind of do because you have another teal on board. Terezi, Terezi, where is she? Ah, there in the cockpit with Vriska.

“-don’t know what to do about it. We’ve got enough going on and he’s not exactly pushing it either.” Terezi sighs. You get a quick look of her cool temperature and can’t help but notice the lower temperature that Vriska’s running at.

“Ok but maybe he’s thinking that you’re not pushing it so why should he? You can both say that and then nothing happens.” Vriska reasons.

Yeah you don’t want to be listening to this impromptu feelings jam. Not your business. Looking back at Jayyne you can see she’s a good degree and a half warmer than Terezi.

“Sorry about that, I think you might be running a fever a little. You’re warmer than Terezi. But if you want I could turn the heating down a little in your block, that’s a smaller space and easier to temperature control.” you offer.

“Oh, I hope I’m not coming down with anything. I don’t feel bad, just warm.” Jayyne says as she stands up. With a worried frown she presses a hand to her forehead to feel her own temperature.

“But yes, I think I will go back to my block. Maybe have a rest on the loungeplank with a book or something, drink some water.” Jayyne nods.

You notch down the temperature in her block and pause in thought. If Jayyne is sick then everyone onboard could get sick, sharing a small space and recycled air is a bad idea even with the filtration system you have. You take a quick flick through of everyone, noting their temperatures now.

“You want me to keep tracking that?” Aradia asks.

“Yeah, maybe keep a note of who’s spending time with who too?” you suggest. You don’t want to quarantine people but if you have to then you will.

“Ok, you seem pretty beat, go eat and sleep. I’ll wake you if-” Aradia pauses, her eyes narrowed. You follow her attention through the ship and see that she’s focused on Jayekh who is angrily pacing back and forth in his room. Aradia drags across readings from Jayded and Nepeta. Jayded is lime so she should be warmer than Nepeta and Jayekh. She is indeed warmer than Nepeta but Jayekh is the same as her.

“But look how angry he is, and he’s physically active right now so…” Aradia says uncertainly.

“Yeah but if your body got thrown that much out by a little angry pacing we’d all overheat and die the moment we ran anywhere.” you argue. You look at Jayekh again.

“Jayekh…” you say over the speakers in his block and he jumps at your voice before glaring up at a random patch in the ceiling.

“Blast it, Sollux! I don’t need you interrupting me from above like some nosey deity! What do you want?” he demands sharply.
“Sorry, I just wanted to know if you were feeling alright. Not sick or running a temperature at all? You look a little warm to me.” you ask in your most neutral voice, you don’t want to rile him up more if he’s sick.

“I’m perfectly fine, thank you very much. On that note I didn’t give you permission to- to stick your oar in like that and be up in my biological data so kindly butt out why don’t you?” he says sharply and goes back to pacing.

You back away and look at Aradia.

“There’s something up with him, keep an eye on him. I don’t care what he said.” you tell her.

“You don’t think he’s just mad about the Dirkka thing?” Aradia wonders.

“A little maybe but I don’t think Dirkka actually did anything, this seems really disproportionate.” you say. Potentially two people on your ship sick, or maybe Jayyne is just tired and Jayekh is just really mad. It’s too soon to call it. It’s not like you have any real medically trained people here, or rather the only medically trained people you have focus more on the surgery and artificial limbs side of things. You guess Hal has more training but you don’t have much data to give him. Maybe when your next shift starts you can see how things are and then consult him.

Yeah, that’s a plan. You disconnect and stretch your back out, popping several joints as you do. You leave the helm, you eat, you talk to people, you sleep. It’s easy, you’ve got this whole thing sorted. Who was that guy before who never had a routine and frequently forgot to do all of those things? You certainly don’t know him and you definitely aren’t him. Admittedly if you stop powering the helm you’ll all die in space which is quite the motivator to keep doing your job.

You have breakfast before you get in the helm again and to your displeasure you see that Jayyne is cooking which you really don’t want her doing if whatever she may or may not have turns out to be contagious but there’s no point in belatedly securing the animal hive after the hoofbeast has escaped is there? She’s not making pancakes today but rather Jayyne seems to be frying basically everything in the food stores that can be fried, even some things that you think maybe shouldn’t be.

She looks a little teal in the face as she sets plates down, there’s so many that your group is stuck in a situation where you have to pass plates to each other to empty them because there’s not enough room for every plate present to sit on the table. You let Kanaya push the last two fried eggs off onto your plate to empty the serving platter and also because two is the best number, naturally. John foists fried bread onto you (why did she fry bread?!) but you get him back when Terezi hands you grilled tomatoes and you shove the plate of those right into his hands.

“Sweetie, I don’t think we need more food you can come sit down n- are you… did you find a way to deep fry an ice cream sandwich?” Roxxie asks and you lean back in your chair to see that, yeah, that is what it looks like Jayyne is eating one handed as she keeps cooking.

“It tastes really good. Do you want one?” Jayyne asks. Roxxie shoots Dirkka a bewildered look.

“Not for breakfast? Come sit down.” Roxxie urges her.

“Just a sec, the hollandaise is nearly done.” Jayyne waves her off as she pours this yellow sauce into a serving jug that you’re going to have to find room for somewhere, not that you know where THAT is going to be. Jayyne finally does sit down and starts loading her plate high and finally it clicks. As subtly as you can you get your palmhusk out and message Aradia directly through the ship’s network.
twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling apocalypseArisen [AA]

TA: hey aa ii’im gonna take a wild gue22 and 2ay their temperature2 are 2tiill hiigh.
AA: they are!
TA: ok thank2

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling apocalypseArisen [AA]

Alright, you need Hal now but you’re not going to take him out of the room with you now to talk. That’d be too suspicious, so…

“Did you just dip your ice cream sandwich into that sauce?” Karkat asks suspiciously. You glance up, Jayyne suddenly has full cheeks and an empty hand.

“No?” she says around her mouthful of very weird food.

Ok, yeah. Time to call in the ”””””Professional”””” among your group, you can do that as Dayvhe reprimands Karkat for being gastronomically unadventurous and Karkat in turn calls him a tasteless savage. That conversation proceeds as you’d expect it to really.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling autonomicResponder [AR]

TA: 2o ii don’t know if you’ve noticed thi2 but jayyne and jayekh are actiing really weird
tA: even jayekh over there ii2 eatiing a whole bunch even ii if iit’2 anriiily
TA: and jayyne… yeah.
TA: they’re al2o both runniing way warmer than they 2hould.
AR: ◣◢ Oh. They’re molting.
TA: thank you troll 2herlock holme2 how could we have ever cracked thi2 ca2e wiithout you?
AR: ◣◢ You wouldn’t have, I’m entirely indispensable.
TA: how diid you not notiice before me?
AR: ◣◢ I was more focused on how irrationally angry Jayekh seemed to be and if Dirkka and he were hiding something else that happened. You weren’t around when the two of them first got together and how I may have made that more difficult but I don’t actually want them to break up.
AR: ◣◢ As for Jayyne it’s not unusual for her to stress bake, so stress cooking isn’t a stretch. I just wasn’t looking at their temperature I suppose.
TA: well great, tell them all what’2 happeniing.
TA: al2o how long do you thiink we have untiil they actually 2tart gettiing melty and junk?
AR: ◣◢ In my professional medical opinion we’re around 30 hours before shit starts getting ‘melty and junk’
TA: ...ii can’t get back iin that tiime.
AR: ◣◢ And you shouldn’t move people when they’re molting. So I guess we’ve got time to kill. I’ll explain all about the miracle of life to our hormonal friends, don’t worry.
TA: Are mood 2wing2 a 2ymptom of molting?
AR: ◣◢ They can be. All those extra hormones going around can unbalance people, not everyone though. Dirkka was only as impossible to deal with as he usually is and Roxxie was perfectly fine.
AR: ◣◢ Found a new thing to worry about with yours?
TA: ii’ll try to 2chedule iin tiime two worry about that iin between worryiing about how my port2 wiill work.
AR: ◣◢ You’ve got ages. Don’t stress about it, I’ve got this one.

autonomicResponder [AR] ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

You watch in horror as Hal turns his attention from you and looks instead and Jayekh and Jayyne.
He’s going to do this right now?! Oh you don’t want to hear that, it’s going to be toe curlingly bad.

“I just remembered!” you announce, standing up and grabbing your plate and cutlery. You’re out of hands to get your drink but you have psionics so you’re good.

“I have to do a thing. Bye.” you finish and scarper. The key to a good lie is planning, consistency and really selling it; failing that you can just yell a bad lie and run away before anyone questions you. That’s at least the reason why you’re hiding in your room eating the last of your food and hoping that they’ll all be done having that awkward conversation by the time you have to helm yourself and become effectively omnipresent and omniscient within this space.

You have no such luck.

“Oh no.” you whine, trying not to be aware of Jayyne pacing back and forth in her block with Roxxie trying to comfort her.

“It’ll be fine, you’ve got time yet to eat a bunch and then it’s just like being asleep. It reely is.” Roxxie assures her even though you don’t want to hear it.

“Do you want a distraction?” Aradia asks, popping up in your attention.

“Please.” you nod.

“How about… how about we try to recreate your hive from memory or something?” she suggests, and so you do. Using something a little like the Dream you model the 3D space of your hive together. It’s hard to consciously do, your subconscious did it fine in the Dream but when you’re actively trying to focus on it it’s actually a very hard task. Even with Aradia helping in between flying the ship herself you know you’re getting the colours of things off and the fine details are definitely screwy. But it’s fine, with the time it’ll take them to molt you can take your foot off the gas a little so to speak, not that you think this takes up much of the ship’s power at all, but still.

A weird moment overtakes you as you’re standing at the window to your hive looking out and sizing the view of the planet’s pink moon up and down as you try to work out how large it used to look when you lived there. You’re stood, your index and middle finger spreading slowly apart before your face as the moon grows and you spot just how strange this is. This is godlike power, something you couldn’t have even imagined that you might have before. You let go of the moon and for a long moment you long to go back and connect to the Dream back on Planet Hollywood, if anyone will understand this feeling and these experiences it’ll be your fellow goldbloods up there who live the same kind of life as you’re trying out now.

But it’ll be a little while until then.

Jayekh starts his molt first but Jayyne follows very soon after, Karkat tells you all about their pheromones influencing each other to molt, just like what happened with Roxxie and Dirkka. He notes though that they’re not in a direct quadrant with each other, they’re just friends whose matesprits happen to be moirails. You’ve not seen evidence of Karkat and Nepeta getting together to discuss shipping possibilities but, well, you would not be surprised. With all of you waiting on Jayyne and Jayekh’s molt you gently divert your course to Alternia instead and let yourself coast there, taking off as much time as you can before you really do need to get back to it.

You draw closer to Alternia, grey and glittering with light as you approach from it from the side where it’s currently night. It takes a bit of effort and focus to come to a dead stop in the middle of space, you’ve not really done that before but you and Aradia pull it off, of course.
“We’re mostly looking to see what Condy’s got setup to spot people, or anything that’d notice us.” Roxxie explains from her seat by Jayyne’s sealed over recuperacoon.

“I really want to look at what Jayyne looks like now, too bad cracking it open now would kill her horribly.” Aradia sighs. Probably best to just… ignore that. Instead you focus on Alternia.

Some of the planet’s satellites are easy to see, they’re older things or they’re not trying to hide themselves. Others though are hidden, either inside of or disguised as space debris and natural space rocks that are caught in Alternia’s orbit. It’s a good chunk of time where you and Aradia are essentially playing I-spy and also trying to work out just what kind of range the satellites might have and what you can expect them to see. The pair of you even have to get Hal in on the job to be sure that you’re not missing anything.

When you have your answer it’s not a good one.

“Nothing can get in or out?” Karkat asks in disbelief.

“But the ship that took us came in and out of the atmosphere just fine.” Kanaya says.

“Yeah and no way did Condy not spot that.” Hal says grimly.

“That’s why she was so sure that Dahvid was planning something, that’s why she was so pissed. Or into it, I don’t know it’s hard to tell with her.” Dayvhe says with a shudder.

“Can they see us now?” Dirkka asks seriously.

“Not with the distance we’re at. They’re focused on what’s going in and out, not what’s nearby, there are a few satellites that could see us but I’ve been hiding us too close to the moons for them to spot us. This ship isn’t big, but it is big enough to get caught if we tried to go down there.” you answer.

“And we can’t go down like this of course because she’d see and interpret it as Dahvid going behind her back and then either take it out on him or send someone down here to try to take us out. Damnit, I was hoping we could maybe go down there. I have things I want to get and check.” Terezi hisses.

“I think we all do.” Tavros agrees.

“Then how the hell are the old folks getting the crates down there?” Vriska demands.

“Crates.” Dirkka gasps but explains no further.

“Dionte used to shoot crates at us, unless you think she knew about that.” Dayvhe says.

“No, we worked out that the absolute biggest thing you can get down there is maybe something about the volume and size of… of that table.” Hal says, gesturing to the dining table as an example. Actually, you have it down to a far more precise measurement but this one is easier to picture.

“I was just thinking that Dionte’s gun is how we can get that crate of money down to the planet so no one dies from not having it. We’ll just shoot it down there. I’ll have to make sure that it can survive the journey.” Dirkka says, trailing off into a mutter at the end. You can just see all the planning start up for that project.

“But launching crates at Alternia doesn’t get us our things back, we don’t get to check on our lusii or retrieve sentimental items because we can’t bring anything back. I doubt you can pick things up that are down there from up here, right Sollux?” Rohhze asks, looking at you.
“You want me to psionically pick up an object I’ve never seen before, in a room of your hive that I’ve likely never been in. On the surface of a planet that’s rotating at over a thousand miles an hour from a little over two hundred thousand miles away and as a bonus not set it on fire on the way out of the atmosphere?” you ask her flatly.

Rohhze stares back at you, clearly uncertain.

“In her defense, if you could do that this is exactly how you’d lead into being like ‘that’s wiggler stuff watch, I’ll do it now!’. Like, really.” Vriska snorts.

“Oooh, she’s got you there.” Karkat grins.

“Your criticisms are accurate and hurtful and I’m ignoring you both. No, I can’t pick things up. I’d need to be there to…” you stop.

You feel an idea coming on. Sometimes you get this with coding, you can be working at a problem and it looks like a dead end and then aaaah, there’s an idea. It might be a bad idea, it might be a good idea, you’re not sure yet.

“Hold that thought, I need to check something.” you tell them and leave the room.

“Should I be concerned?” Dayvhe shouts after you.

“I’ll be right back!” you yell back at him.

You know where you’re going but it’s a little harder to remember where everything is when you’re not in the helm, when you’re stuck in your tiny meat body it’s easier to get disoriented and forgetful of the totality of what you know in the helm. You open a cupboard in the hall. No, no the one you want, this has cleaning supplies. Wildly not your job, the perk of helming is you get out of literally all other chores. Ok, try a little closer to the airlock and- hah!

You pull out the crinkly textured silver suit and inspect it. Too tall, you try the next and that one looks about right for you. The battery has been charging when it was connected to the wall so it’s all ready to go if you’re being technical. You give it a careful look over and all seems to be well. You throw everything you need into your sylladex and rush back to the room where you left the others.

Well, the others who aren’t currently ghosts or in the process of melting into their own primordial goo. Everyone aside from them.

“I have a plan!” you announce as you burst back into the room.

“I’m setting my opening reaction at skeptical.” Karkat informs you.

“I’m gonna settle on naively optimistic by choice.” Dayvhe adds and that’s as close to support as you think.

“So the problem is we can get stuff down there but not back up. I can’t pick anything up from up here so any object we send down there stays there, especially as we can’t take the ship all the way down.” you explain.

“Right.” Jayded nods.

“So what did you find? Some little robot that can pick things up from this distance?” John asks.

“There’s nothing like that on the ship, the most advanced thing we have is those little camera robots. Besides the way you came from- oh. That could work, hold on I need to do the math.” Hal says and
stares off into the distance a little.

“What? What’s an idea?” Dirkka asks but Hal’s not answering.

“I have an idea but if you could all restrain yourselves from shouting until I’m done that’d be great.” you say.

“Oh and we’re up to a concern level of very concerned if even you know that it’s a bad idea.” Karkat says loudly.


“Thanks.” you tell him.

Everyone’s staring at you so you decide to just go with it.

“The real problem is getting anything back up here, nothing we have can get enough lift to leave orbit. There’s only two things here that can do that and one of them is the ship and that’s not an option.” you say.

“Oh my god the second thing is you, what the fuck Sollux?!” Dayvhe shouts.

“Hey, you said you’d be quiet!” you point out.

“We can move the ship closer than this without setting off the sensors, that’s one thing.” you begin again. Hal seems to focus again and looks at you.

“Talking to Aradia, we’ve worked out that we can get you to one hundred and twenty five thousand miles away. She also says that the suit has ten hours of air in it and will protect you from any solar radiation. We’d need to test it but in theory it works. Coming back isn’t so hard, once you get out of orbit there’s no atmosphere to slow you down. I’m pretty confident you could make the distance back before you ran out of air or energy.” Hal nods.

“You’d have to adjust the ship’s speed and position to meet me though.” you point out.

“I’ve got enough power for that.” Aradia chips in from above.

“Wait why’d we need to move the ship?” John asks.

“We need to be going the same direction and speed relative to him. If you walk in front of a train you’re not going fast but it is, except in this case we’re the train and instead of a sixty mile an hour difference you’re talking thousands. But that’s not hard math to do, we can do that.” Hal answers.

“Oh, yeah, it’s not hard. It’s just LITERAL rocket science!” Jayded says, throwing her hands in the air.

“I can do this and Aradia and Hal know the actual power output I’ve got and they know all of the math, if they say I can then I can.” you say confidently.

“Dude, not to throw shade on Aradia or anything but she’s not exactly shown the greatest concern for your life and wellbeing in the past you know?” Dayvhe hisses.

“I can still hear that, you know.” she points out and Dayvhe flinches slightly.

“But if it reassures you any, Dayvhe. If Sollux dies at any point in this what happens is that this ship runs out of power, life support fails, you all die and the computing system that houses me shuts
down. Everything keeping me like I am now instead of hollow and wrong like before goes away and I have to go back to that, only now I’m either alone for eternity up here or I’m trapped in here with a bunch of other ghosts who hate me. Neither works well for me, even if I didn’t care about Sollux staying alive I’d have my reasons for wanting to keep him that way.” Aradia adds.

“Th...anks?” you say uncertainly. That was a nice thing, right? Right? You’re not totally certain but with Aradia it’d be foolish to assume malice when her just being weird accounts for everything better.

“You can’t be serious about doing this, Sollux. We don’t need our stuff that badly, no amount of sentimental shit is worth shooting you out into the vacuum of space for.” Dayvhe says.

“It’s not just sentimental shit. You really don’t think that Darkleer’s tablet or Disciple’s records won’t be useful to have in person? And there’s other things that’re important too.” you defend yourself.

“The Darkleer thing sucks but Disciple’s records are all digital thanks to Tavros so we don’t actually need them. There’s nothing else! We can live without that.” he argues back.

“Actually, Dayvhe, just because your lusus is dead doesn’t mean everyone else’s is. I’d like to see if my mom has hatched and if not get a message passed to her. I doubt I’m the only one either.” Terezi says like it’s a courtroom and she’s just smacked her opponent’s argument down. You hadn’t wanted to make that point, obviously you knew that if you went down there you’d be talking to people’s lusii for them but you didn’t want to throw that out there at Dayvhe.

“I would like to see if my dad is ok as well.” Tavros says softly.

“As would I.” Equius agrees. More and more people agree that they want to know how their lusii are and if they have a chance to pass on a goodbye and an explanation through you. Not everyone left the planet of their own free will and you don’t know if those who were left behind to be in your group slipped out to say goodbye before coming back. You were otherwise occupied at the time.

Dayvhe is obviously torn, he can’t say that other people wanting to contact their lusii is unimportant or selfish at least not in front of everyone else. He obviously still wants to keep you from going.

“What if they see you going in?” Dayvhe says, trying for a better reason to keep you here.

“Like you already heard he’s too small to be seen. We wouldn’t let him go out right by a camera so he’d be spotted obviously, if he was right up close to one he would be spotted but we’re not that stupid. Sollux, pass the the suit and I’ll have a look at it with my far superior senses and be sure that it’s safe for you.” Hal says, holding his hand out for it. You comply and pass the whole thing over to him. Not to be as grim as Aradia but even if you didn’t pretty much trust Hal already he’ll also suffer a lot if you die on the way down so he’s got an incentive to keep you alive too.

“Well as much as I love to watch other people agonise about shit as much as I usually do about everything I need to get back to Jayekh.” Dirkka says. Dayvhe is clearly disappointed, you guess he was hoping from some backup from Dirkka but he’s always been pretty practical, not to mention currently distracted.

“You know they’re not going to have gone anywhere yet.” Roxxie reminds him but Dirkka’s going anyway.

“I’m going to talk to AA about power and positioning the ship while Hal’s looking that over.” you explain and leave the room right after him. Aradia’s biowires don’t even reach out for you because she can see that Dayvhe is right behind you.
“Do you really gotta do this? REALLY?” Dayvhe whines from the doorway. He probably would say that he’s not whining, he’d probably say that he’s voicing reasonable objections but whining is definitely what is going on here.

“I gotta. You heard.” you say.

“I know, I know. People having functional and loving relationships with their lusii, what even is that? I get why someone’s got to go down there and I get that you’re the only one with the juice to make it down and back out, so I know why it’s got to be you. But also I don’t get why it’s always you! It’s always danger with you!” Dayvhe says, throwing his hands in the air in despair. You catch sight of Karkat sitting at the top of the steps as well.

“I used to be so chill about things before you, now look at me. You fucked up a perfectly good moirail is what you did, look at it, it’s got anxiety.” Dayvhe memes at you. He can’t be that freaked out if he’s doing that then can he?

“You meme loving fuck. Also, for the record my life was mostly pretty boring before you. Besides, it’s not my fault that I’m basically the best and therefore very useful.” you point out.

“That’s got to be the most generous use of the word mostly I’ve ever seen.” Karkat snorts derisively.

“I’m not counting any shit that Vriska had anything to do with.” you remind him.

“I’m sure there’s somewhere I could go with you saying that your life would be peaceful and boring if Vriska wasn’t around but I’m just going to leave that there. Instead, you should take your dumb little robot with you. We can talk to you through it, right?” Karkat asks.

“I… think so? I could see through it so if Aradia directs it a little and it mostly pilots itself she should be able to send audio and video through it. There might be a little lag because of distance but yeah.” you say.

Dayvhe nods, his expression is serious even as he takes off his shades and hangs them from the neck of his shirt. He comes close and slips one hand around the back of your neck, his fingers threading around either side of a port there.

“Don’t die, don’t get seriously injured and don’t get caught. I really wouldn’t get over it if you did.” he says, dead serious. This isn’t his deadpan that you know how to see through by now, this is him being very real with you.

“I’ll do my absolute best, I promise. I really wouldn’t do this at all unless I thought I could pull it off and Hal and Aradia said my thinking was right here, honest.” you tell him. You don’t have a deathwish here, just a desire to help and even if those look the same a lot they really aren’t.

Dayvhe nods very slightly, as if he understands you and buys what you’re telling him. You can feel the tight pressure of his fingers on the back of your neck, how his clawtips are just pressing against your skin too. His other hand skirts your hip and you’re about to ask about that when, without any warning, he hauls you into what you’re pretty sure is the most dramatic pale kiss of your life. Maybe of anyone’s life.

He has you tipped back enough that you’re at least symbolically vulnerable if not actually so because you’d psionically catch yourself even if he did let you go, not that he ever would. It really is like something in one of Karkat’s movies, he kisses you like you’re all his and if there was any fairness in the universe there would be sentimental music swelling and the screen fading to black with ‘the end’ on it or something. It doesn’t happen though, he just pulls you back upright properly and both of you
stick close to each other, your breathing a little shaky.

“Don’t you dare die.” Dayvhe says.

You try to say that you won’t but you guess the needy and overwhelmed pale chirp you just did will have to suffice. Dayvhe nods and steps back.

“I know you have stuff to do with Aradia first so I’ll let you… I’m going to go check Hal’s doing his job properly.” he nods and seems to force himself to walk out of the room past a wide eyed Karkat.

“God damn.” Karkat says a moment later as he looks back at you. You nod a little helplessly, god damn indeed.

It takes a little bit to clear your head after that before you’re willing to plug yourself into the helm and share space with Aradia. To your relief she doesn’t say anything about it, less relieving is the mile wide smile she has on her face and the scandalous waggling of her eyebrows when you first see her. Nevertheless the two of you move The Millenium Falcon Two into position to put you as close to Alternia as you can reasonably expect to be while still staying undetectable by the satellites. You top up the battery of the ship as much as you can and dial down on the systems you won’t be needing to keep online and work out that with the ship staying stationary it could be there for about two weeks and still have enough power to move a decent distance to intercept you in space.

When you’re done with that you grab some more food, Hal tells you that the suit is flawless and sends you off to have a four hour nap so that when you wake up and finally get going Alternia will at least have rotated enough that you’ll land within a few thousand miles of where all of your friends used to live. It’d be a pain in the ass to end up on another continent.

“We’ll be able to talk to you the whole way, Aradia can contact you directly and she’ll be using the sensors in the suit to adjust your positioning.” Dirkka explains.

“Yeah, I know.” you tell him as Hal puts your helmet on you and seals it in place.

“The suit pressure and life support is holding just fine.” Hal tells you something that’s actually helpful information. You try to resist the urge to lean against the airlock wall, putting friction on the suit that you don’t need to just seems like tempting fate.

“I’m going to find out how they make those suits and make better ones.” Kanaya vows.

“You’ve got the robot, and food too? Cash on you as well?” Karkat checks worriedly.

“No, Karkat, I totally just threw all that out the moment you looked away from the last time you checked and I said yes.” you groan.

“Remember that Aradia’s going to pass on all of our messages to you as well, try to keep a low profile as well. I know that’s hard for you but it is important.” Karkat continues on like he didn’t hear you.

Hal tips his head backwards and groans in despair.

“Pity you, be careful.” Dayvhe says.

“THIS IS TAKING TOO LONG!” Hal insists loudly and slams his hand on a button. Suddenly the airlock door comes down in front of you and you have a second to take in the alarmed faces of your quadrantmates before the door behind you suddenly opens and you go from being in the ship to rapidly not being in the ship faster than you can process it.
You’re spinning, turning wildly in space, your vision just a repeating streak of ship/Alternia/moons/ship/Alternia/moons/tiny ship/Alternia- oh god you need to stop this or you’re going to throw up or pass out. Or both. You put enough force out to counteract the spin and now you’re just steady. Looking down at your feet you can see the ship, a tiny thing smaller than your pinky claw now.

“Auuugh, AA. Can you hear me?” you groan.

“Loud and clear! That looked like fun!” she says enthusiastically into your ear.

“Oh, yeah, being centrifuged like that’s just bags of fun. Can you ask someone to punch Hal for me?” you ask her and she just laughs. No doubt someone will.

You look up, as much as up has any meaning in space, and take in the grey ball that is Alternia. It’s not that big right now, you’re still far away to it even though you’re getting closer with every second. You can see just how close you are in miles if you look to the corner of your vision, it’s one of the stats Aradia set your helmet up with.

“Alright then, your heading is pretty good for now. Feel like kicking up the speed a bit?” Aradia says into your ear.

“Hell yes,” you tell her, “hell fucking yes.”

Chapter End Notes

Just your routine reminder that you can follow me on twitter @undanewneon and the playlist for this fic is here if you want it https://open.spotify.com/user/meunda/playlist/1u0p3JWLiYaRu5hVMeToSw?si=kH6ngA8QT629_2fTLHCN3Q
I know what people want, maps and graphs! Have a local map!
‘Stop, the train is riding
Down to the station
Where you lived
When we were school kids
Hey, the rails are caught now
And I am falling down fools in a spiral
Round this town of steam
My body tells me no, but I won't quit
Cause I want more’
‘My Body - Young The Giant’

‘The lead singer of this band was accused of inciting lowblood solidarity in a threatening manner,
the lead singer alleged that the young legislacerator levelling these claims had it out for him.
Thankfully such claims were dropped when he was executed, proving the perfect functioning of the
Alternian justice system once again’

You’re going to catch fire and blow up. Not metaphorically, though maybe that too at some point.
No, after what turned out to be a lot of boring waiting for you to get closer to Alternia and several
rounds of ‘am I nearly there yet?’ you’re finally starting to get into atmosphere. This leads you back
to your first statement. You’re going to catch fire.

Your suit’s heat sensors are picking up unhappy readings so now seems like as a good a time as any
to shield yourself with your own psionics. You make a bubble around yourself and hold it cool and
steady. Now that you’re dealing with friction and actual aerodynamics if you start screwing with the
shape of this thing you may whirl off to a totally different end destination. It won’t be the end of the
world but it will be kind of a pain in the ass.

“Sollux, you need to start to ease the speed off a little more now.” Hal warns you.

Your continent is rushing up to meet you now and though you’re trying to hold everything steady
and push back against Alternia’s gravity and your own momentum everything is starting to shake.
Maybe it’s upper atmosphere wind streams throwing you off but it’s hard. Not hard in a sheer power
sense but just balancing, keeping yourself totally level and holding everything so very fixed.

Come on, come on…

“Sollux you need to be slower!” Hal warns you sharply. You try to slow down more, you can see
your speed is decreasing steadily the whole time but Hal wants it to be a sharper slope. You blink
sweat out of your eyes and try to focus, you track to the familiar without realising it.

“You’re drifting, you need to correct. You don’t have time for this!” Hal announces.

“Oh, he’s really getting annoying isn’t he? You’ve got this, you’re properly in atmosphere now.
We’ve flown this high together, remember that night?” Aradia sighs and you get the feeling Hal has
been cut off.

“You’re right, I can see… we were there.” you say through gritted teeth and flick a finger in the
roughish direction where you’re going.

Actually, she’s right. You’ve been up this high before.

You twist in the air, onto your back and place your hands on the helmet, twist and pull it off. You
can hear tinny alarms blaring in it but you want them gone, they’re psyching you out. You’ve been this high before. Cold thin air rushes through your lungs, not recycled but pure. Dampness rushes over your cheeks, you just fell through a cloud.

You hold your helmet in your hands tightly and twist again. You can’t explain what you do. It’s like all of you gets a grip on all of you and you just screech to a blurring halt. You giggle dumbly at the slight headrush of it, look down and see a neighbourhood that’s really familiar. You’ve flown over here a bunch of times. It’s… well, you’re past Outglut you think at this point, you’re somewhere between Karkat’s and Aradia’s place.

You look around and spy somewhere a little more out of the way and land, change and let Spot out of your sylladex.

“ESTABLISHING CONNECTION.” Spot tells you in janky processed speech.

“Good bot.” you tell it back and rummage through your sylladex for those port covers. You sit down in front of the hovering bot and use the mirror in the port case to guide you in covering your visible ports. Will you look like you have weird patches on the side of your head where the hair doesn’t grow? Yes. You can pass them off as old scars though and your temples at least look like nothing ever happened to you. The old shirt you’re wearing covers the ones on your back so you really just have your neck and head to deal with.

“CONNECTION ESTABLISHED.” Spot informs you and does a cheery little bob in the air.

“YOU’RE ALIVE!” Hal yells at you.

“Well, yeah?” you shrug and fiddle with the port at the base of your pan. It slides in and you run your fingers over it to be sure it feels right.

“You should be a troll smoothie for stopping that quickly! Even if you didn’t hit the ground you ought to have liquefied yourself from stopping that fast!” Hal insists.

“Really? I’ve always stopped like that when I’m on my own.” you tell him.

“THIS IS WHY I HATE FLYING WITH YOU, ASSHOLE!” Karkat bellows through Spots little speakers.

“I go slower with you.” you grumble. Karkat always bitches about you flying with him, like you’ve ever been bad about it. You can hear a scuffle going on and then Dayvhe takes over, his voice coming through like he’s very close to the microphone.

“Sol, you went from a thousand miles an hour to zero, we all thought you were going to die. Aradia kept saying you’d be fine but INERTIA IS A THING. I’m going to go have a pusher attack now.” Dayvhe hisses at you.

“Oh. I don’t know how that works then, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to freak you out.” you apologise and look at the bot apologetically. There’s a slightly delayed whining noise and you cringe with guilt. Whoops. You’d better bring him back something really nice to make up for this.

You nudge the last port cover into place and run your hands over your head and neck, they all feel fine. You should be good to go. It’s early in the night here, you’ve got all night to kill going to people’s hives.

“KK, AA, I’m pretty near both of your places. Anything either of you want?” you ask as you stand up again and stretch your sore back out.
“No, I emptied my place before I left for Roxxie’s. Everything I want is at hers, I even said goodbye to Crabdad already so I’d be amazed if he or my place were even still there now.” Karkat says, his voice a little rough.

“I don’t need anything.” Aradia tells you easily.

Alight then so who else lives this way? Spot bobs closer to you and bumps against your shoulder so you pet it absently as you consider your next path. Abruptly there’s a muted sound of scuffling and people being shoved aside, you can certainly hear Karkat’s distant complaining.

“Hello, Sollux.” Vriska purrs through Spot and your backbone snaps straight at the sound of her voice catching you so off guard.

“I see you landed, well done or whatever. I didn’t bother watching, how long have you been flying anyway? What do you want a gold star? Psh. But now that you’re here I can see just how hopelessly lost you are and how you’re desperately in need of someone who knows what they’re doing.” she adds.

“I’m not lost, I know exactly where I am.” you tell her, folding your arms and glaring at Spot’s little camera.

“Where you are is in need of my expert guidance. You need someone to tell you where to go.” Vriska insists.

“I’ll tell you where to go in a minute.” you threaten her, but it’s a very toothless threat from all the way down here.

“I have a route all planned out for you that accounts for places for you to rest overday. Ignoring Karkat and Aradia’s hives you should head South-West to the forest. Do a quick sweep of the temple and then on to Nepeta’s hive.” Vriska instructs you.

You don’t want to do what Vriska is telling you to do, not because her idea is bad but just because she’s telling you to do it. But you may as well have her pointing out the hives that you don’t visit a lot so you know what you’re doing, but if you do that you absolutely can’t act like you care at all or else she’s winning.

“Whatever, you’re just going to be annoying no matter what. By all means direct me, oh mighty Vriska, the knowledgeable one etc, etc.” you say in as bored of a tone as you can manage.

“I kneeeeeeew you’d see it my way.” Vriska says.

It takes a little bit for the two of you to work out how she can indicate a heading without being able to interface with your palmhusk. You can’t contact the ship with your palmhusk from here, Spot can interact with the ship but it’s not capable to talking to your palmhusk because why would it need to be? What you’re using this bot for is well out of the designed functions it had so you shouldn’t be surprised. Unfortunately as a perfectly round bot it’s bad at indicating directions or pointing so you have to point until Vriska works out that you’re doing it the right way and then says ‘yes, go there’.

Of course you already knew how to get to the temple cave from here but if Vriska’s going to be in charge you’re not going to do her job for her are you? She’s going to have to work to be in charge of you. A while later you land by the cave though you deliberately get ‘lost’ just so you can find the hill that she fell down and broke her mechanical parts on, just to rub it in her face.

You’re happy to take Spot through the temple, letting its little camera record everything with a built in light. Some of the information might be important but you think you all already took the pictures
you needed. What you bet you can do with this is build a 3d model of the place that someone could walk around in a VR environment. Specifically Dahvid and, if you’re very optimistic Psiionic might be able to get his hands on it if you find a way to send data to him. Your feelings about Dahvid aside you know that if your quadrantmates were dead or worse you’d want to hold onto every last part of themselves they put into things that they left behind. You can do Dahvid that kindness without changing how much you like him.

You leave and Vriska brings Nepeta over with her and directs you to her hive in the woods which, even with direction, is very hard to find. She hid it so well, it’s crazy.

It’s your understanding that lusii are all pretty different but by and large they stay with their kids until the kid in question can defend itself just fine. Of course some lusii are equal parts caretakers and requiring care of their own. You had to look after biclopsdad as much as he looked after you, but you were both happy with the arrangement, not something you could say for Vriska and her mom or indeed Feferi and hers. Gamzee was as bad off as Vriska just in a different way, his dad straight up abandoned him.

Actually, wait you’re pretty sure you could make a double axis graph or whatever it’s called for this.
You didn’t need to spend that much time sketching that out on your palmhusk with your finger in the shitty art program you have, but you did! So essentially neither side of that scale is especially bad. Karkat always complained about needing to feed crabdad roe cubes but the guy also went out and caught his own food and brought stuff back for Karkat too so he was actually a pretty self sufficient lusus. Whereas your dad not so much and you’re guessing John’s lusus was the same and you think his care of John was more emotional rather than protection or providing but you could be wrong. You’ve hesitantly lumped Rohhze in with you because her mom lived in tubes in her hive so you question how much looking after there was there, but you don’t know that situation enough to be sure.

But it’s not as if not being looked after is bad by default, Nepeta was a pretty free roaming kid, as was Tavros before Vriska roamed him right off a cliff. Terezi you would have put at the bottom if it wasn’t for the fact that her mom taught her to see again after she was blind, so that’s fine and you know she loves her.

But, oh boy, that extreme bottom row of not being looked after. The line of sad feelings. On the extreme self sufficient lusus side there is ‘what even is looking after children?’ with a bonus of ‘you never know where I am’ in two horrible flavours. On the extreme relying on their kids side you have ‘you exist only to keep me alive’. Both kinds suck.

Also you’ve been romantically involved with three out of those five which gives you questions about yourself but you’re going to move right on past that.

The point is that you’ll be damned surprised if you find any of the lusii on the far right side of your chart. Lusii look after kids and if their kid is gone long enough that it can assume said child has moved on or been killed they’ll go compulsively take in another kid. It’s the circle of life or whatever.

You duck into Nepeta’s cave and, to your total lack of surprise, there’s no Pounce de Leon about, no matter how much Nepeta calls for her through Spot. You can only listen to that for so long before you have to say something.

“She’s probably found another grub, Nep.” you tell her gently.

“I… I know. I just miss her, I wanted to say goodbye. Can you grab a few things for me, please?” Nepeta asks in a small voice shockingly devoid of puns.

“Anything.” you tell her.

Nepeta has you take pictures of her shipping walls, grab a few of her books, some clothes and a few things that look like just random shit to you but you suppose are deeply sentimental to her. You even pick up a few of Equius’ things that she’d borrowed which she should return.

“Thanks Paw-lux, I’m going to take off now. I’ll see you when you get back, be safe.” Nepeta says, although her voice is a little tight sounding.

“Where next then? Dayvhe’s place isn’t far from here but he doesn’t even have a place anymore thanks to us, but Tavros isn’t far from there.” you say thoughtfully.

“You’re finishing there, this is going to be a spiral. You’re going North, slightly North-West to the coast. Rohhze’s place first. I’ll get her in here.” Vriska says.

“Wait.” you say and silence falls between you and her, or between you and the speaker in Spot at least.
“What?” Vriska prompts.

“Did you know Rohhze had a crush on you? Pitch-ways I mean?” you blurt out, you don’t even know why you brought it up but you have now and you’re committed to it.

“I knew. Didn’t really think she was serious about it, she’s alright. Pretentious enough to be hateable, I flirted with the idea and her for a bit but it wasn’t a great distraction. Are you going or what?” Vriska sighs. You grab Spot and fly.

“How did you bring it up?” Vriska asks from where Spot is nestled against your chest.

“It doesn’t matter, I hated you more than I felt bad about ganking her crush from under her but I did do it to her twice in two quadrants if you want to be accurate about it.” you explain.

“Pitch and... oh, yeah, right everyone else wants Dayvhe’s diamond. No prizes for guessing why. Hey, uh, hang a right here a little will you?” Vriska asks. You don’t know why but you do what she asks and in very little time you spot the landmark.

A black burnt circle of landscape, charred and melted. The remains of the outskirts of Dayvhe’s town that was destroyed by a combination of you lot, Cal’s voodoos and Dahvid’s people.

“Stay still, let me get a picture.” Vriska tells you.

“Why do you want a picture of this?” you ask in horror.

“We did this.” Vriska answers.

“I know.” you say, this isn’t a good thing to have done. Ok, it was good for Dayvhe. Bad for Dionte and also set off a whole train of shit you never saw coming but you ruined this whole town. Sure you made sure your bomb killed noone else but the shitty town really went downhill after that for reasons you’re also semi-responsible for.

Why would Vriska be sentimental over this? It’s not like-

“It’s the first thing we destroyed together.” you say as the idea starts to dawn on you.

“No duh.” Vriska scoffs.

But you weren’t dating then, you weren’t anything then. You just called on her because she had what you needed.

“Did you hate me then?” you ask carefully because she could mock you for thinking something like that but it’s the only conclusion you can really draw here.

“Ugh, it’s not a thing. You just- do you know how much you pissed me off after Aradia died? I’d seen what you could do and you were partially immune to me already. I spent ages anticipating an attack from you either cyber-wise or laser based but nothing, you just cut me off and shut me out. You could have taken revenge and you not doing it was so irritating. You were strong enough, we both knew it but nothing!” Vriska rants.

You want to point out that you were a little too devastated to do anything at the time and you’d also seen first hand how revenge goes bad so why do it?

“And then sweeps later you slide into my trollian like ‘ohh hey Vriska, I need you, come show off how dangerous you can be and how good you are at it to me.’” Vriska says and in what you suppose
is meant to be you but her voice is all breathy and needy like some swooning movie damsel.

“I did not say it like that, that wasn’t what I said at all,” you say. God, Vriska really is one interpret your most unsexual requests for absurd explosive firepower to mean ‘I desperately want on your bulge’. She’s absurd, you hate her so much.

“Psh, I know that. I knew that then but you may as well have got a broom out because my feet were swept. And, yeah, Rohhze wasn’t a great distraction from that. Come on, go to her place already.” Vriska tells you.

She hated you even then? Or at least that was the start of it for her? But that means she hated you when you got trollnapped and when you came back, basically scalped, full of ports and scared of your own shadow. You looked skeletal and terrified but you remember how she talked to you in the club, how she didn’t seem put off or treated you like you were fragile. She hated you when you went manic as fuck and crashed into being depressed as shit too?

“But- was… the dungeons and dragons thing?” you whisper.

“It wasn’t my idea but I was never going to say no, I knew you were going to get better. Even you can’t stand in your own way forever, dumbass.” Vriska says.

She hated you then, she hated you then. She was trying to make you get better by giving you a new challenge.

“Vris, how long is this route of yours going to take me?” you ask, your throat tight.

“A night or two. Depends on how fast you go. Why?” she says.

“I hate you.” you say emphatically.

If Vriska was to read anything into that… well, she wouldn’t be reading too much that wasn’t there.

“Oh.” is all she has to say to that. She excuses herself a few moments after to go get Rohhze and you take the flight and the silence before they come back to get yourself back under control.

“He isn’t that far out at all, though I can’t say I’ve ever see my town from above like this.” Rohhze’s distant voice comes through Spot.

“Do you know exactly where you’re going, Sollux?” Vriska asks, her voice is a little louder and clearer so she must be closer to the microphone.

“I’ve been there a few times, so yeah.” you answer her.

You land when you get to the cut through to the beach where you had that party once, the one Dirka and Roxnie crashed when she surfed down a sand dune on the corpse of another heiress. You walk along the street a little to get to her hive and you draw a look from her neighbour across the way, not that you’re taken aback by them being surprised. It’s not as if Rohhze has been home lately or had any guests.

“I’m realising now that I should have given you a key.” Rohhze says but you psionically pop the lock and push the door open.

“Or maybe it won’t be a problem. Alright, I need you to see if you can find my mother. Head to the nutrition block please, Sollux.” Rohhze says, her voice calm and authoritative. You do as she says, pushing the front door shut behind you.
The nutrition block is enviably huge but there’s a large water filled glass pipe running up, around and through the place and there’s even a few little branches on the pipe that have air in them and little latched doors. Rohhze tells you that she used to feed her mother through here sometimes so you go about the process of opening her icebox and throwing a few frozen treats in the water and splashing about in the pipe a bit to get her to hear you.

A few minutes pass but Octomom doesn’t show up.

“Does this connect to the sea or is this a closed system?” you ask. You’re trying not to ask if her lusus has just left or worse.

“It connects to the sea, but nothing else comes in here. There’s valves and things that make it hard for anyone but her to get in, she’d go out on her own sometimes to eat or do… whatever. Perhaps she’s asleep though. I can direct you around the hive to the things I would like you get back for me and if you can just check the pipes in every room you go through we can look for her at the same time.” Rohhze suggests.

You’ve no objection to that so you go where Rohhze leads you, evidently Vriska has handed her the controls to Spot. Just like the first time you were here you’re left feeling mad that she’s got both money and taste, she buys things that you would really like to own unlike all the other highbloods you know who have weird and/or bad taste. Not to knock Roxxie and her wizard statues but… actually no that’s just what you’re doing.

You grab movies, photographs, items of clothing, a cushion, and so on. Each room you check the pipes and in each room you find no Octomom. Rohhze has you grab a few books wedged between her coon and the wall, her musical instrument, her husktop and you’re just flicking through her clothes when you hear it. You could hardly miss it. The banging is so loud you feel the walls shake. Currently you’re at the back of Rohhze’s hive, looking out onto the sea so you quickly rush to one of the front side rooms on this floor and carefully peer out through the window.

A large red drone is banging its fist on the door.

“COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS UP.” it blares. Who would be stupid enough to do that?!

Behind the menacing red figure you spot several highbloods congregating on the other street, watching what’s going on with concern and interest.

“Your fucking neighbours called the drones on me!” you hiss at her.

“Oh, that’s unfortunate. But I guess it makes sense, they don’t exactly see many yellowbloods around here or certainly not without accompaniment.” Rohhze sighs, you bristle at her words and glare at Spot’s camera. Not that Spot did anything to deserve that look, Spot is a good little bot and never implied that your kind doesn’t belong here at all. You hear some shoving and scuffling and now you’re talking to a different girl.

“Sollux, you can’t let that drone see you. It’s bad enough getting in their database but given that we know people are looking out for the descendants of our ancestors you pinging up could expose us all. You’ve just got to kill it.” Vriska tells you seriously.

Kill a drone? That’s… you’ve fought them before, helpfully in someone else’s clothes, but you’ve never killed one. But then again you’re the most powerful psionic on this planet aren’t you? You’ve flown several spaceships, you came down to this planet under your own power. It’s just one drone.

“You say that like it’s going to be hard.” you grin at her with bravado you don’t quite feel. You
know it’s silly being scared of them but everyone’s afraid of the drones, everyone in your end of the spectrum at least. Every lusus teaches their kid to run and hide when you see them, they will kill you, be very afraid. Shaking that is hard.

You tuck yourself back from the window so it doesn’t see you and psionically feel around where you last saw it. Your gentle psionic push gives you a sort of outline of the drone, huge and spiked. It’s a little like closing your eyes and feeling things out by hand, but you’re not trying to feel out its facial features here, you just want to break it. You wrap your invisible touch around it, breathe and then...

The building shudders with the explosion but you keep crushing and crushing. You stand up and see that the towering drone is now just a lawn fire and a roundish red ball of scrap metal. The highbloods across the way practically have their eyes popping out with terror. Spot wriggles through the gap between your waist and your arm to get a look out of the window.

“I think that’d be my cue to go.” you say.

“You think? Go to Roxxie’s place, it’s just up the way and you’ve got several people to go through there.” Vriska agrees. You head back to the other side of the hive, leap from the window and start flying again.

The power is still on in Roxxie’s place and it occurs to you that you don’t know just how the place is powered. You clear out your own block pretty easily and Dayvhe and Karkat collectively get rid of Vriska, she needs to eat dinner and the two of them need you to direct them about and pick up their things.

“Sorry I freaked out on you earlier.” Dayvhe apologises as you stack his music gear atop each other in a pile before putting it into a card in your sylladex, you’ve already had to do some reorganising to avoid running out of cards before you’re done here.

“I think you both had pretty good license to. Hal was trying to treat me like I was a ship but I’ve never flown like that when it was just me, it was throwing me off. But Aradia knew I was going to be fine, she’s done that with me before.” you tell them both.

“It was still really goddamn stressful. You keep breaking physics and one day physics is going to come in and be really mad about it at you.” Karkat warns you.

“Yeah, it’ll be like ‘what happened to all my laws? Who broke them?’ and then you’ll get sued by an anthropomorphised concept of reality. And then where will you be?” Dayvhe chimes in, clearly in agreement.

“Ass deep in metaphor apparently. Do you need all these cables too or are you good?” you ask, gesturing to them all.

“I wouldn’t say no to them but I could just get new ones, there’s probably a bunch here. Hm, leave em. Just grab my machine and there’s a book of smutty romance on my shelf that Karkat gave me that I wanna keep.” Dayvhe tells you.

You look around and find the book as Spot plays Dayvhe and Karkat going through the emotional overtures of ‘of course I kept the first thing you gave me’ and Karkat being far too affected by that and getting sniffly. You sweep Karkat’s underused block and Dayvhe makes you sit down for a bit before you do Roxxie and Dirkka, also he has to go get one of them.

It takes a while but soon enough you’ve got everything you needed here and manage to scrape up
enough food for yourself from the nonperishable things left behind so then you move on to Vriska’s hive. You don’t need directions to get here and she’s notably flustered when she comes back and sees where you are.

“Are you stealing my treasure?” Vriska accuses you as she comes to sit down and sees you doing just that.

“Only the easily resellable shit. You said I’m going in a spiral, right? That means I’m flying near my city, I’m going to dump a bunch of this on there. You don’t need it, and unless there’s anything especially sentimental here for you in this pile of gold and jewels…” you say, gesturing to it.

“No, I was mostly hoarding it as a reminder of my triumph over other people. It’s useless to me now, but aren’t you the do gooder?” Vriska teases. It’s good natured but even a handful of this could make life so much easier for any rust, bronze or gold in your city who gets stuck with a tight bill or an unexpected illness. You also don’t want to tell people about this when you get back, not people who are into your ancestor anyway because they’re just going to see this as you continuing his legacy with doing good. It’s not that at all. You just have an opportunity to help, you know what it’s like to need it, why would you not help when you could? You’re not doing anything good here, it’s just the right thing to do. Ugh, even that sounds self important.

“Hey, how come you were never into FLARPing?” Vriska asks a moment later.

“I’m either going to fight people or I’m going to play games, doing a halfassed mashup of the two wasn’t my deal. Besides I don’t kill people just because I can.” you tell her.

“Yeah, yeah, I know. You just could have been great at it.” Vriska sighs wistfully.

“I don’t have the time to put myself to everything I could be great at.” you tell her and your brag is probably a little less impressive given that she can likely see the way you’re grinning to yourself because you really don’t buy into that bravado but you know it’ll annoy her.

Vriska’s hiss of agitation is cut short and you wonder if maybe Spot lost connection, until you hear voices.

“What’re you doing here? It’s my hive, you already got him for yours.” Vriska says petulantly.

“Yeah well I’ll give him back, the sun is rising there so he’ll still be there overday and you can get him to pick your crap up when he wakes up. I need my moirail.” Dayvhe tells her bluntly. You look at Spot’s camera, not that you can see through it but you get to hear the squeak of a chair.

“Be my guest.” Vriska says. It’s polite and pleasant for her, accommodating even. You wonder if Terezi has had a word about not pissing off the moirail of your kismesis for no reason.

“Hey, Sol.” Dayvhe says softly after a few long moments that make you think the two of you are alone.

“Hey, DV.” you say back and sit down on the slope of the mound of treasure that you were sorting through and stealing.

“Are you ok?” he asks you.

“Yeah I mean I left Roxxie’s and came here, nothing exciting going on and given that Vriska’s only neighbour for ages is on the ship with you so I don’t think anyone’s going to call the drones on me again. I’m fine. Are you ok?” you ask because you’re starting to be sure that the answer is no.
“Me? Why are you asking me when you’re all the way down there dealing with actual problems and danger? I’m just stuck on this ship with our friends where nothing is happening, there’s no reason for me not to be fine.” Dayvhe says hurriedly.

“Nice dodge, are you fine?” you ask again.

“I- is Aradia listening to this?” Dayvhe asks.

“I wasn’t until you said my name, I’ve been trying to keep out of the conversations especially as I don’t need to steer the bot since I turned those controls over to all of you. Just don’t mention me and I won’t notice. Besides I was working on something with Hal so I’m really not paying attention.” Aradia says cheerfully.

About what you thought, then. She’s trying not to hear your conversations, which you appreciate.

“So, are you ok?” you ask for the third time.

“I- ugh. Not really?” he hedges.

“Talk to me.” you urge him, looking right at the camera as you say it.

“This is so weird with you so far away and there’s nothing I can do if anything goes wrong. I know you’re not helpless, I know you’re not. You only didn’t kill Dahvid when you tried to rescue us because I stopped you, I’m the one who got taken out by the old folks back there. I know you can look after yourself.” Dayvhe insists.

“You’d rather be down here, huh?” you guess and absently pick up a coin. You start turning it around in your hands as you talk, just for something to fiddle with.

“I’d always rather be by your side when something dangerous is going on. I knew you’d be down there without me and I thought I could be cool with it because I get why it’s needed and why you wanted to go but I’m so uselessly worried about it that I can’t do anything else.” he says miserably.

“Can Karkat-” you start to suggest.

“I need you.” Dayvhe insists.

“Then this is as good as you’re going to get. Even if I left right now the planet’s facing the wrong way, I’d never make it back to the ship.” you tell him.

“Please don’t say things about you never making it, I’m sick enough with useless, stupid, unhelpful worry. This isn’t like me.” Dayvhe tells you.

You slide down the gold pile that unfortunately isn’t a pile you’re on with your unsettled moirail, you wish it was. You lean towards the camera a little and offer him a weak smile, you wonder what he’s doing on the ship as he watches this onscreen.

“Sorry. But you can stay up and talk to me if it helps. I’ve got shitloads of Vriska’s stuff to steal before I sleep.” you offer.

“Yeah. Yeah, ok.” Dayvhe agrees a little weakly.

“Have you seen all this gold and jewels and shit? I’m definitely stealing it.” you tell him, gesturing to the pile you’re sat on.

“Roxxie and Rohhze aren’t like this, what the hell?” Dayvhe says.
“Yeah, well, like I said I’m gonna steal it and drop it on my city. My old city at least. If I leave it here it’s just going to stay until her hive is either demolished or some other highblooded wiggler moves in and then they’re filthy rich for no reason.” you tell him and start sifting through it again. The art and historical doodads really only have value to the right people whereas gold and the more traditional kinds of treasure can be sold anywhere, so that’s really the stuff you want to take.

“You’re not going to literally drop it on people are you because that’s going to be bad, Sol.” Dayvhe warns. In your imagination you had more or less envisioned just letting go of all of the treasure as you flew around the city and then bailed but Dayvhe’s right, that’s a lot of shrapnel and potentially injured people you hadn’t considered.

“I need to figure out a way to do it.” you agree.

“You could reverse pickpocket people!” Dayvhe suggests excited and there you’re glad to get him feeling something other than anxiety.

“How would that work?” you ask as you turn a ruby the size of your eye around in your hand. Dayvhe starts excitedly rambling about how you can reverse pickpocket someone and comes up with a plan for you to slip your treasure hoarde into the pockets and maybe even sylladexes of the people around your old city. You know, as opposed to potentially raining expensive terror down on them from above. You work through the entirety of the stash and then wander around the hive until you find an ablution block, it’s predictably huge and you could really do with a wash seeing as how everything in her hive is covered in cobwebs and you’re dusty as hell right now.

“You’re on your own, right?” you ask Dayvhe and he makes an affirmative noise.

Vriska doesn’t have a shower, or maybe it’s in a different ablution block, but she does have a big clawfoot trap so that’ll do. You shove the stopper in the bottom of the trap and turn the hot water on. Carefully you pick the port covers out of your skin, you’re not meant to have them in sopor so you may as well take them out now in case you forget later.

“How are those working out anyway?” Dayvhe asks and Spot floats right up close to your face.

“They work. I’m not sure I’ll keep wearing them though unless I have to hide that I’ve been helmed but on Planet Hollywood or around all of you it seems pretty pointless to pretend that something we all know has happened didn’t.” you say and you can see how this is a controversial topic among goldbloods back home.

Wait, you meant back on Planet Hollywood. Not- that’s not the same thing. Moving on.

“I think the idea is if you’re uncomfortable with your ports you don’t have to see them.” Dayvhe says reasonably.

“Mmm, looking in the mirror and not liking what’s there would definitely be a new feeling for me, sure.” you snort.

“I think you look great, actually, so you can cut that out right now.” Dayvhe huffs, almost insulted on your behalf.

You know he would have told you if he wasn’t still alone so you have no hesitation in stripping off and getting into the hot water. It’s just the right amount of hot, enough to make your skin go yellowish with heat but nowhere near enough to hurt. You’ll get lightheaded if you stay in for too long though so you’re quick with washing the dust out of your hair and from under your claws. You know that no one else is here but you’re still sneaking around like there might be as you try to find
Vriska’s block and thank fuck her windows are light filtering. You get a glance down into the now empty canyon where Vriska’s spidermom once lived and you feel a pang for Vriska.

It’s not like you pity her, she’s far too hateable for that and she’s done far too much reprehensible shit out of her own choices that she didn’t need to do for you to put it down to a bad situation. It doesn’t mean you can’t still feel bad for the little kid Vriska who got lumped with that bad deal.

You find Vriska’s block and know immediately that’s where you are because of two things. One, you spy all of the FLARP posters on the wall and two, you instantly step on an abandoned d8 with your bare foot and spend the next minute or so floating up near the ceiling spitting curses and rubbing your poor foot. You resolve to float around her block from now on. You drop into her coon with a relieved sigh and rub your foot one handed under the sopor, you’ll feel better when you wake up.

“You know that stuff’s probably going to be more concentrated after this much time.” Spot warns you as you blink hazily at it, wow you’re tired. You mumble some sleepy affectionate message and fall right asleep.

When you eventually wake up moonlight is shining into the room and Spot is resting on the rim of the recuperacoon with perfect stillness. You’re a little fuzzy headed but fine. You know you should get up but the warm sopor is just so comfortable, you mumble something to yourself and jump when Spot talks back.

“Oh, awake now are we? EHEHEHEH.” Terezi cackles through your sweet little bot.

You’re suddenly wildly aware of all the clothes you’re not wearing, which is to say all of them because you’re as bare ass naked as the day you went from walking on six legs to two. More accurately you probably fell right out of your molting coon disoriented and mildly horrified at having to walk on two legs before the fact that it was two caught up to you. You don’t actually remember. The point is you’re nude and you’re not talking to someone who’s experienced that before and you’d like to keep it that way.

“Hi Terezi.” you squeak out, sinking lower in the sopor.

“Vriska has a shower that way. Wait, no arms on this thing. Out the door three doors right. I’ll be here.” Terezi informs you brightly.

You eyeball Spot for a moment until you cautiously reach one hand out and turn it the other way. It’s hard trying to coordinate yourself and it as you climb out of the coon, it’s consuming enough attention that you forget to pay attention to where you’re putting your feet.

“AUGH! Fucking dice!” you yelp. You kick it across the room, angrily tie a towel around your waist and resolve then and there that you’re going to bring every dice Vriska has in this hive with you and the moment you get back to Planet Hollywood you’re going to steal all of her shoes and cover her entire floor with the pointy fucking dice.

You float angrily to the other ablution block, shower, put on some thick boots for protection and return fully decent to be observed by Terezi.

“Is she sleeping or something?” you ask grumpily as you come back in the block.

“Yeah, mostly everyone is. I had to wake Dayvhe up to take my shift, but I can show you what Vriska wants from here.” Terezi tells you and Spot floats over to you. You don’t know how much power it holds so you reach out and run your finger along the bot with a crackle of psi.
You do, as you vowed to yourself, take all of her stupid d8 dice from the floor. You also take her
posters and spreadsheets stuck to the wall, you catch a glimpse on her desk of information to do with
your dungeons and dragons campaign and quickly look away. You don’t want spoilers! You wind
up taking a lot of her things and actually Terezi is able to point out little sentimental things that you
think Vriska might not have asked you for out of some kind of embarrassment.

Eventually you come to the end of that and you fly across to Equius’ place. You let yourself in there
and brace yourself for the absurd amount of gross highblood art that he’s going to ask you to pick up.
Even so Terezi abandons you to Equius’s company as he directs you about. You even give him a
moment of privacy when you find his lusus Aurthour and as you wait outside the room you found
him in you’re grateful that you managed to track down at least one lusus. At least someone gets to
say goodbye properly and tell their lusus to go find a new grub. Honestly, helping Equius out has
been pretty good, at least until he asks something you really aren’t sure you can do.

“I would also prefer my tools from my workshop rather than purchasing new ones on Planet
Hollywood, I order you to go down into my workshop to retrieve them.” was his gross order.

You should do it, it’s a reasonable request. Yet here you stand at the top of the stairs going down that
way, frozen from going down any more. Your eyes are stuck to the double doors down into there.
You have your arms wrapped around yourself but it’s no help. You’re being stupid, absurd and
dumb! There’s no one in there! Nothing’s going to happen so just stop fucking around and get in
there! You don’t move.

“Sollux,” Equius says quietly from Spot’s place a little to your side, “I know I’m no docterrorist but I
care about my patients. With Tavros and Vriska I could do most of the work with them asleep and
only a little needed them to be even partly aware, but for you it was different. It was never my
intention to hurt you even though you begged for the work to be done, I…”

Sometimes with Equius you have to listen to the things he doesn’t say. He’s making excuses but you
can feel his meaning around those words. The thing is he’s the hardware guy and you the software
guy and sometimes your work overlapped. He used to be more of a hemocastist prick and he stole
your matesprit, even before all that went down you didn’t exactly get along a lot. He was too uptight
and you ran your mouth too much.

Fundamentally though Equius isn’t a bad guy. His friends across the spectrum come to him for help
and he helps regardless of payment, his relationships were weird on both red halves but the Aradia
thing aside he is and has been your friend for a long time. You believe him when he says he didn’t
mean you harm, you can tell he regrets that he did harm you and that his work was judged inferior
and needed replacing. From one technological creator to another that’d make you ashamed and you
bet it has with him. You don’t always like him but he is your friend.

“I know.” you manage to say.

Equius clears his throat awkwardly and you think you hear a towel near the microphone.

“Do you want me to get your moirail here as well?” he asks. You nod.

“I will be back, stay there.” he tells you and the chair squeaks to let you know he’s gone.

You’re sat on the top step when you hear them come back. Spot coasts a little to the side to get a
better look at you.

“Hey, Sollux.” Dayvhe says, his voice gentle.
“Hi.” you reply.

“Equius wants you to go down in that lab, huh? He told me what he needs and I get his point. Do you think you can go down there or do you want to call it off?” Dayvhe asks, his voice soft and close to the microphone so it almost sounds like he’s near you.

“I don’t have a choice.” you say stiffly.

“Oh, what? Whoa dude, no. You totally have a choice. Equius wants his stuff but it’s just stuff, he can get new things or make new ones if he can’t find what he needs. You absolutely have a choice and he’s only getting this because of your good will. No one will make you go in there, no one can, and nothing bad will happen to you if you don’t go in. You have a choice Sollux, tell me that.” Dayvhe tells you, his voice calm but firm.

“I- I have a choice, I don’t have to go in there.” you say, doing as you’re told.

He really does know just how you tick. It’s that enforced helplessness that makes the terror worse. Sure, you technically had a choice to get Equius to helm you the first time or not but given that it meant losing half of your friends and both of your partners it wasn’t a choice at all. Just because you wove it yourself and stepped into it didn’t mean the situation wasn’t a noose around your neck. This isn’t that, though. You don’t have to go.

“I’ll go.” you say, breathing a little easier. You hesitate and grab Spot, holding it close to your chest as you push through the double doors.

The place is pristine and for some reason that surprises you. It shouldn’t do, you did see it after your surgery and it was clean then. You think you’d built it up in your head to be like some torture porn set with serrated saws and dried blood splattered everywhere.

It’s not like that at all. Equius and Dayvhe direct you around the place to pick things up and with them held so close to your chest it’s fine, there was no need for that freakout. Honestly you feel embarrassed about the whole thing but Dayvhe would probably tell you that you shouldn’t be ashamed for your feelings either.

You leave Equius’ place after that, hit up Jayekh and Jayded’s places. Jayded guides you through her hive and says goodbye to her lusus. Jayekh hasn’t finished molting yet so Dirkka and Roxxie lead you through that process. You actually find a bunch of things there that you want to take, for one your server with all of your bees. Is it wise to jam your sylladex full of bees? No, because it has a decent risk of sudden bees everywhere. Are bees a wise thing to put on a spaceship? Also no because of the bees everywhere. But you also know that you can cool them down and make them sleepy in a room by themselves when you get up there and it’s your goddamn ship as far as you’re concerned so everyone can get lost. You want your goddamn bees back.

The second cool thing you find isn’t really a thing.

“YO DAWG!” Squaretooth mechanically yells at you and Dayvhe yelps in delight and yells for Dirkka to come back quick. You’d just left out of the back of Jayekh’s hive only to find Brobot, Squarewave and Sawtooth having what you can only understand to be a sword fight interpretation of a rap battle with Squarewave deciding who won each bout and then that robot getting the advantage of attacking. Do you know how Brobot is managing to rap with no mouth or obvious ability to speak? No. But the other two clearly understand him.

“Hey Squarewave, have you three just been here this whole time?” you ask.
“IF YOU WANT TO KNOW, YOU GOTTA THROW DOWN, YA HO.” Squarewave declares.

“Oh. I suddenly don’t care.” you tell him and immediately feel bad when he seems put out at your rejection.

“Guys.” Dirkka says suddenly through Spot. All of his creations perk up at the sound of his voice.

“We’re not coming back, but we’re not fighting the Empress right away either. We’re chilling on Planet Hollywood, filled with movie stars and music people, lots of slam poets too. We’ve even met Biggie Smalls.” Dirkka says, obviously trying to tempt them.

“He was supposed to be dead.” Sawtooth says.

“He’s not though.” Dirkka tells them.

The three robots turn to each other in quiet discussion, or quiet apart from Squarewave at least. Finally they turn back to you and Spot as a unified team.

“We will come with you IF you can beat me in a slam poetry battle.” Sawtooth intones seriously.

“Oh, it is on.” Dirkka says with feral glee.

What follows is about ten straight minutes of back and forth slam poetry battle which you’re sure is very biting and there’s a few parts in there witty enough to make you smile but… look, you support Dayvhe’s interests but the whole slam poetry battle thing isn’t you. It’s all very clever but so what, you know? People likely feel the same about your coding and that’s fine. Dayvhe’s musical interests are broad into other areas that you can appreciate better and you’re proud of him, that’s enough. You’re still pretty glad when those ten minutes are up though. Dirkka has triumphed through some metric that eludes you and now you’re being followed by four robots which is… interesting. Squarewave can’t keep up on his own so Sawtooth carries him as you carry Spot and Brobot is fast as fuck. All of this has you leaving the Gloom Peninsula where Jayded and Jayekh live and following the forest along to Terezi’s place. She doesn’t need to lead you there, you know the way.

The personal effects that Terezi wants you to pick up are pretty basic, her wardrobe, some scalemates, some roleplay stuff and her husktop. The part you’re not looking forward to is outside.

“THAT’S A BIG EGG.” Squarewave observes.

“It’s Terezi’s mom.” you tell him.

“LOOKS LIKE THAT LADY GONNA ACTIVATE A BOMB.” he replies quickly.

You eye the scale that the egg rests on. Terezi always said it would set off the end of the world if her mom was to ever hatch, you’re tempted to take her off of it but in the odds between possibly ending the world and just not doing that you’re inclined to the latter.

“Kind of tempted to just swap the egg for something the same weight.” you muse.

“IT AIN’T WISE TO BE TEMPTING FATE.” Squarewave advises you. Brobot shakes his head for some reason.

“Hold up are you rhyming me? I said weight and you said fate.” you frown.

“OH SNAP IT’S CHECKMATE!” Squarewave yells. You cover your face with your hands and groan.
“DO MY SICK RHYMES MAKE YOU DEFLATE?” he adds.

“I’m not-” you think about it for a second, “rising to that bait.”

Oh god Squarewave looks so delighted, you’re a monster for not doing this sooner just to make him happy.

“Sollux?” Terezi says through Spot and you don’t know how long she’s been waiting.

“Right, sorry TZ. Hey Squarewave just…” uh you need a rhyme, oh duh, “wait.”

Squarewave nods eagerly and you look back at the egg again.

“If you touch her very carefully you should be able to talk to her, I think it helps.” Terezi tells you. Man, it’s sad that she doesn’t know for sure. You need to stop messing around and help out.

The egg is huge, it’s large, you could get inside it and stand up no problem. Hell, Dirkka could. You float up instead of climbing the doomsday device because that seems like a bad idea all around and tentatively reach out with your hand. You press it against the shell of the egg, it feels weird and pitted, ever so slightly warmer than the air around it.

“Uh.” you say.

You suddenly get the feeling of something trying to get into your head and instinctively you shut the door on it. That is until you awkwardly remember that you’re trying to communicate with this thing and obviously she’s psychic, how else did she speak to Terezi? You lower your guard again and feel something scaled and cold curl around your mind.

It’s not the way Dayvhe talks to you, full of feeling and wanting to please. It’s not Vriska’s forcible takeover with spiderwebs pulling your body as she wants. This is something totally different. Concepts hit you like water balloons to the face, they burst and soak you. You get flickerings of images pressed into your mind’s eye.

A sense of inevitability and a view of Terezi aging from a little kid to now and then gone. Her left behind on the clock for an achingly long amount of time, longer than your yellow thinksponge can fathom she thinks.

Love seeps into you, a pride at Terezi’s life and what she’s done. The girl she is. Your own memories are rifled through, Terezi checking that Dayvhe wasn’t controlling you, her having your back, being your friend. Greedy dragon claws curl around the deepest part of your feelings for your friend and look it over like a valuable prize, you love Terezi. She’s an utter lunatic and one of your very best friends, you trust her deeply and care about her a lot.

A wide fanged smile grows in your mind and falters a little. Terezi had to go, she has to stay behind, it was always going to be that way. She’ll be fine.

Abruptly you’re released and it’s just you with your hand against the egg. Hesitantly you take it back and look around at the robots.

“She’s… I don’t know how to say it. It wasn’t words but I know what she meant, I think so anyway.” you say and come closer

“It’s like that sometimes, what did she tell you?” Terezi asks urgently.

“She-” you hesitate, trying to conjure the feelings up yourself but finding nothing quite good enough,
“we need to leave her behind, she was clear on that. The clock is all… I don’t know. But I know she’s proud of you, really proud. Of everything you’ve done and I think things you’ve not done yet too, she loves you.”

You wish you could see Terezi’s face to know if you’re saying something that’s reassuring her or if you’re just rubbing salt in a wound here. You bite your lip and try again, the empathy and care you feel for Terezi’s wellbeing isn’t just leftover from her lusus because she’s your friend too.

“If, no, when Roxxie wins we can ignore the satellites. I’ll fly you here myself and you can talk to her in person again. We win, I’ll take you back here, I swear.” you tell her.

You hear a little sniff come from Spot and then a soft laugh, so unlike Terezi’s usual sharp machine gun bursts of laughter.

“Thanks Sollux, I’ll take you up on that.” Terezi says softly.

She clears her throat a little and out of the corner of your eye you catch Brobot somehow conversing with Sawtooth and you’re pretty sure from the way they’re looking that they’re discussing you or Terezi, or both.

“Vriska has you down as going to Kanaya’s next, I’ll go get them. Do you know the way there on your own in case it takes me a little bit to get both their asses here?” Terezi asks you.

“I’ve never gone there from this way though I do know how to get to the desert she lives in but this is the first time some actual map help would be useful and not just Vriska bossing me around.” you complain.

“That’ll make her happy to hear! Get started and I’ll get ‘em to you.” she laughs and leaves.

You grab the now silent Spot, tell the other robots to follow you and start flying. Kanaya lives the most isolated from any of you, probably further from your city than anyone else. North of your city and its suburbs is this bigass desert Kanaya lives in. Once there were other cities here and you see their ruins every so often but the only living person as far as you know who kicks it out here is Kanaya and now even she doesn’t live here. It’s just sand, rocks, rubble and the undead.

You have a suspicious feeling this is where Dayvhe got your plant from. Going out here was incredibly stupid and dangerous for him to do, even now you’re only over the edge of the desert and you can see the undead eating the remains of someone unlucky enough to get caught. You want to tell him not to do stupid stuff like that but you did just fling yourself out of a spaceship and fight a drone in the last twenty four hours so maybe you’re not in a place to call him on that. Yeah, you’ve lost the high ground there.

“Something is following you, Sollux.” Kanaya informs you suddenly. You stall in the air and flip upside down to look.

“Oh, that’s Dirkka’s robots. They’re coming back with me.” you say as you watch the impressive progress of the two bots who are running. Squarewave is hidden underneath Sawtooth’s cape right now but still.

“Whyyyyyyyy are you doing that?” Vriska groans, great, she’s back as well.

“Because Dirkka invited them back, they could be useful, it’s mean to abandon them if that’s not what they want and you literally can’t stop me.” you tell her, point by point.

“My hive is a little more to the left, you should be able to see the sails soon.” Kanaya interrupts
before Vriska can get her comeback in. Sorry, her comeback.

You look around carefully, it takes some close inspection but you just catch sight of fluttering movement behind a dune. As you close in it becomes clearer that you’re looking at fabric on a building. You soar over a large sand dune and suddenly, without warning the sand gives way to the oasis that Kanaya’s hive is nestled in. Now that you look at it, surrounded as it is by lush greenery, you note that it bears a certain resemblance to Jayekh and Jayded’s hives. It must have at least partly been a preset in the construction drones that all of them chose.

“Mom!” Kanaya gasps. She’s right, wandering amongst the oasis is the white shape of a lusus.

You drop from the sky, careful at approaching a lusus that may well not remember you. She seems defensive but mollified somewhat by Kanaya’s voice. Kanaya is able to deliver her message in person, so to speak, and you linger out of earshot to wait for the bots and when they’re close enough to see where you’ve gone you let yourself in Kanaya’s hive.

Heading straight to her room you pick up the obvious, her wardrobe, some photos and you decide to take her book collection because you’ve heard her lamenting its loss with Rohhze back at your shared hive on Planet Hollywood. Your sylladex isn’t massively fussy unlike some people’s but even you can’t ask it to just pick up everything fabric in the room so you go about building a big stack of fabric bolts and large sheets of the stuff. Brobot even sticks his head in to see what you’re doing and when you explain your objective clearly in a way you suspect is going to be hard for his AI to mangle he starts helping. He’s even the one who finds Kanaya’s large sewing room. You relocate your stack there and begin piling everything in there up. It takes a couple of pretty heavy cards but eventually you get all of her sewing things packed away.

Of course when Kanaya eventually returns to you (alone, apparently she drove Vriska off when you were gone) she points out that you forgot things. So you start again, with things you didn’t realise were sewing things and you pick up a few smaller sentimental things. Kanaya doesn’t say what she and her mom talked about and you’ve got the good sense not to ask. With all her stuff gone and you intending on heading to your city to redistribute Vriska’s treasure you expect Kanaya to leave and either for you to be alone or for Karkat or Dayvhe to take over in wanting to talk to you.

But that doesn’t happen.

“Sollux, can I ask you a question?” Kanaya asks as you hold Spot close and climb onto Kanaya’s window ledge.

“Sure.” you say and open the window. You take to the air and linger for a moment until you’re sure that the robots are paying attention to you before you set off at a lazy pace to your city with them following below.

“How- how do you stand Vriska?” Kanaya asks with a little pause and you get the feeling she just looked around to see if anyone else was there.

“I don’t.” you say, because that ought to be obvious.

“No, I know you hate her but… I don’t know. I can see why, Vriska has many terrible personality traits and her behaviour is often very self centred and I have always found that frustrating.” Kanaya says.

Oh, this is getting into weird territory.

“But also I know she has very many good qualities. I know a lot of her negative behaviour is rooted
in insecurity and I feel sorry for her about that. But she is smart, aware of people and she’s very pragmatic. I like that in people. Rohhze has those good traits and you’re a very intelligent and sensible person when it comes to problems most of the time and I feel we get on and understand each other.” Kanaya continues.

“I’m not sure about Rohhze but I think you and I always get on, I know where I stand with you.” you concede.

“Right! But Vriska she- ugh. I know she’s not my problem anymore, I don’t want her flush even and Terezi is clearly a better fit for her diamond than I ever was which is good too.” she says.

You watch the dunes rise and fall below you and wait for her to go on, but she doesn’t.

“I’m sorry this isn’t really your problem, I just don’t understand.” Kanaya says softly.

“What don’t you understand?” you press because this sounds important to know about.

“You and her.” Kanaya says and you’re about to open your mouth to say something very choice about that but Kanaya keeps going on.

“I don’t mean why you’re together or what you see in each other, you’re obviously a nice fit for each other and I can see the appeal. Academically, I mean, I’m not trying for either of your spades.” Kanaya amends quickly.

“She seems good for you, her particular brand of one upmanship doesn’t seem to grind you down like it does for pretty much everyone. If anything I think it helps, though goodness knows why because her method of helping is- anyway not the point. But the fact that you can keep her challenged at her games gives her a decidedly not terrible outlet for that drive in her which is honestly better for everyone else.” Kanaya continues.

“It sounds like you understand pretty well to me. What’s got you confused?” you ask. She’s just talking in weird circles.

“Well… that’s how it works now, if things were to change it could go terribly wrong. If you two being together was just a matter of everything being as it is now then it’d be wonderful but she can be thoughtless and mean and you’re… you have your…” Kanaya hesitates and you stop in the air, holding Spot up before you.

“If you’re trying to find a nicer way to say ‘unstable and crazy’ don’t bother, I’ve got your meaning.” you say coldly.

“I wasn’t trying to insult you, Sollux.” Kanaya backpedals.

“You’re doing a good job without even trying then! So your confusion is why am I dating her when I’m apparently not capable of that because of my ‘problem’ and she’s just too evil to be trusted?” you snap.

You’re not being fair, that’s not what she said but it’s certainly what you’re hearing. You’re offended for yourself, pretty deeply actually but you’re also offended on Vriska’s behalf, she’s been good with you. Well, no, she’s been loathsome but in the pitch way you want.

“Aradia, can you- just- Karkat.” you manage to say through gritted teeth and then without waiting for her answer, because you know she caught her own name, shove Spot away in your Sylladex. If you talk to Kanaya now you’re just going to say something you’ll regret. She’s not Karkat, you can’t spit out something hurtful and take it back later. You need to do something else.
You drop down to the sand and wait for the robot squad to catch up, idly flinging a shambling undead a mile the other way when it starts walking towards you. Soon enough Brobot and Sawtooth crest the nearest dune and slide down the other side.

“I’m going into the city, I don’t know if you wanna come there or if you want me to troll you in the evening after I’ve found somewhere to eat and sleep and we can go on to the last few hives.” you explain.

“Palmhusk, man.” Sawtooth says, bobbing slightly to a beat only he can hear. Obligingly you take out your palmhusk and with a tap of his finger [sawTooth] is added to your contacts. He nods and then takes off in a new direction with Brobot and poor Squarewave who doesn’t have a neck flexible enough to look in the direction that Sawtooth is carrying him.

You’re still seething over the Kanaya thing. You start flying again and try to be reasonable about it. Rrrrgh, ok, no it’s too soon to be reasonable. You’re still in the stage where you want to flip something big over to make yourself feel better. Ok, new tactic, your city is just visible at the tiniest part of the horizon so you’re going to go there and turn things around. By the time you land on the edges of the city you’ve made sure all your ports are covered or hidden under clothes. Making sure you’re in the lowblood part of the city, well it’s all pretty lowblood but the ‘bad’ neighbourhoods, you find a place to eat. You’re trying to make sure it’s a place you eat first and pay after so that takes a little finding but you do. You eat and drink because it’s been a while and you have been in a desert and when your bill comes you take a solid handful of Vriska’s treasure and push it into the rustie waiter’s hands along with the money for your actual bill.

He stares down at the gold coins in his hands, a thick silver and diamond necklace dangling between two fingers. His eyes are wide with confusion but you just nod and leave without a word. You wonder just how much Vriska’s treasure is worth and how long it’ll take to get rid of it all.

A while, it turns out. Whenever you run across hiveless kids you palm off some of the treasure onto them and the most you do is reassure people that it really is yours to give away and this isn’t some setup. You walk into hivestems and shove riches through the mailslots, you hand it to people as you pass by them. Really you’re just giving it to anyone who looks lowblooded enough or in real need, doubly so if they’re both.

You enrichen the mailboxes of your old hivestem and when you curiously fly up to your old window you find a lusus following a little yellow grub around. Life moves on you guess, someone else has taken your hive. You hope they like it as much as you did.

It’s getting late and when you stumble upon the club that Dayvhe performed at once you figure it’s some kind of fate and head in there. You remember Dayvhe’s friend, the performer with the band. The one you met on the train when you had that concussion, the one who performed with Dayvhe and the one who drugged you when you were on your manic bender so your quadrantmates could get you back. His name was Adagio and you spot him working behind the bar. It’s thankfully not too busy so you’re able to walk right up and lean on the bartop.

“Adagio, hey.” you call out and he looks around at the sound of his name, recognition crosses his face right away. He finishes with the person he was serving and comes over to you.

“Sollux, I haven’t seen you for a while. Not since… uh, I hope there’s no hard feelings there?” Adagio says hesitantly.

“No, I actually owe you for that. That’s kind of why I’m here. I was hoping I could ask you a favour or two and do one or two for you as well.” you say to him.
“That’s an interesting thing to say. But… sure, I’ve got a break coming up in ten minutes anyway. Want a drink first?” he offers.

“Sure, whatever you want to make. Just nothing drugged.” you grin at him and the guy laughs brightly.

“You can watch me make it, I swear.” Adagio vows and starts putting something together. What you end up with is this fizzing yellow sherberty thing that’s actually really nice if a little weird. You watch the guy work for the rest of the time before the end of his break and envy his easy and approachable nature with the customers he serves. It’s not fake service cheer, he’s just genuine and personable. You can be a little too abrasive for people sometimes and put them off, a little like Karkat ‘angry foghorn voice’ Vantas can.

Soon enough Adagio’s break is up and he leads you into the same back room that he drugged you in before, again, no hard feelings but you’re still not leaving your drink alone.

“So where’s Dayvhe? I’ve not heard from him in forever and he’s not answered any of my messages.” Adagio asks when you’re out of the noise of the club.

“I can’t actually tell you, but he’s not ignoring your messages, he’s just not getting them.” you tell him.

You pause and consider your words, then try again.

“I realise that sounds like he’s dead or held hostage or something but that’s not it. I swear. But it’s kind of related to the thing I wanted to say.” you say carefully.

Adagio squints at you but stays quiet, leaving you the space to talk.

“I remember your whole act, the whole Too Many Blues thing and the whole leaning of that. It’s not just an act, right? You’re not secretly into the Empress or the hemospectrum are you?” you ask warily.

“I don’t even care if this is a trap. Fuck her and fuck that.” Adagio sneers and you beam.

“Great! Hey, for reasons I can’t totally elaborate on do you have a demo tape or video of you performing and the details of the people in your band? It’s not a trap but it’s related to where me and Dayvhe have been that I can’t say about and how you saved my ass when you didn’t have to and I’d like to repay the favour. For real.” you insist.

“Where have you been?” Adagio asks again.

“Again, can’t really say. But you know how the whole serving the empire thing is shown as the only option? Well, it’s not. Especially not in your industry.” you tell him.

“No empire label would ever-”

“I know a guy.” you assure him.

Adagio watches you for a moment and you wonder if he’s trying to tell if you’re out of your mind again but you must be convincing enough or he cares about his safety little enough to pull out his husktop and drag a few files onto a datagrub for you. He throws it your way and you catch it.

“That’s one favour down. The second comes with a request from me. I got this from my kismesis so it’s not stolen before you worry about that. I can do what I want with it but I’m not going to be
around much longer and she’s not here either because she’s elsewhere. I’ve been handing this stuff
out since midnight and I’m still up to my eyes in it. You live here, you know who could do with help
and you helped me when you didn’t need to so I’m guessing you deserve more than little of this and
you’d know who else could use some. So, here.” you say, offering the card to him and switching off
its demand that you solve the coding problem on it.

Adagio takes the sylladex card from you and looks at it. His eyes go comically wide and he
decapitchalogs the treasure pile to find it still head height.

“Holy shit. HOLY SHIT. I heard on Chittr someone was just handing out cash but I thought it was a
joke or some kind of stunt but it’s you, you’re just… why?” he gasps.

“Bluebloods sure as shit don’t need that more than people like us. Spreading it about seemed a good
idea.” you shrug.

“Amen to that but… wow. You’re trusting me with this?” he asks and you nod.

Adagio puts the pile away in his own sylladex, still looking blown away. Finally he looks back at
you again.

“So… what was the favour you wanted me to do for you?” he asks in the tone of someone expecting
a catch.

“It’s not all that long until sunup and my old place has been taken by someone else. Do you have
somewhere I can crash? I’m not really keen on registering to rent a block for the day because I don’t
really want to ping up on anyone’s server so it’d really help.” you say hopefully. If he says no you’d
understand. You could try to hack through to rent somewhere for the day but then there’s camera
evidence and it’s a whole thing. Of course you are at a club and you could theoretically convince
someone else to take you back to their hive with them but it’d have to be flush and you’re not sure
you’re anywhere near suave enough to manage to pull that off. Besides sometimes your stuff with
Karkat leans a little reddish so are you spoken for flush-wise? You should really be sure about that
before assuming anything.

“You want to stay at my hive?” Adagio asks in surprise.

“I… know it’s a lot to ask. You don’t really know me and-”

“Dude. You just gave me several fortunes in treasure and you’ve been handing it out to people all
evening, if I didn’t already know the kind of guy you were from the times we’ve met and how
Dayvhe talks about you I think I’ve got a pretty good handle on the kind of person you are. You
gave me all that and some weirdly important sounding request for a mixtape-” he begins.

“I know a guy.” you say cryptically. Adagio blinks at you and after a second keeps going.

“I trust you enough to let you crash on my loungeplank, man. I’m just stunned that’s the only favour
you wanted.” he says.

“Well, if you’re pushing for a second favour you could let me hang here until you head back.” you
say hopefully.

“Oh wow, you’re really busting my globes on these outrageous favours. Yeah, you can chill back
here it’s no problem. I’d better get back actually.” he tells you and lets himself back out with a
disbelieving shake of his head.

You slouch a little lower in your chair and then self consciously shuffle your shirt around to make
You find a staff ablation block and with the help of a mirror and psionics where you can’t twist your back enough you get all of them in.

After that’s done you’re more or less bumming around, every so often someone else working will come in but when you explain that you’re just waiting for Adagio they seem satisfied enough and leave reasonably soon after. You’re a little bored because there’s no one to talk to on your palmhusk because everyone’s on the ship, unless you feel like talking to Sawtooth and being destroyed in slam poetry, which you do not. You could in theory route the signal through Spot but you’d need to take it out to do that and given that Spot is transmitting video and audio the whole time it’s a little pointless.

You take Spot out and let it rest on your knees which, as you’ve got your feet up on the armchair you’re in, means it’s pretty much at eye level with you. The glow of your eyes reflects in Spot’s camera glass and as soon as it’s out you can hear the speaker going.

“-it’s not like we’ve ever needed- SOLLUX!” Karkat gasps.

“Wow, harsh.” Dayvhe chuckles and you hear pushing and shoving go on for a moment.

“Did you have that bot shoved in your sylladex or something? We were just getting blackness from your end.” Karkat asks, ignoring Dayvhe.

“Yeah I didn’t want to hang around talking to Kanaya and I had shit to do.” you mumble.

“Good job siccing Karkat on someone by the way, that was interesting to watch. Also Aradia showed us the whole conversation so you don’t need to explain stuff to us or anything.” Dayvhe tells you. That’s a relief, you hadn’t wanted to explain all of that.

“I think I’ve fixed that for you. I talked to her about it.” Karkat says.

“Interrogated.” Dayvhe adds.

“We had a civil discussion!” Karkat protests.

“Yes officer Vantas, sir. No spotlights, handcuffs or raking over the coals were done here. Sorry for bringing it up, please don’t bring me in too officer, no, don’t throw me in the cells too.” Dayvhe drawls and so you have to wait several seconds as the two of them have a bickering filled shoving match.

“Anyway! Ignoring Dayvhe-”

“Hey!”

“IGNORING DAYVHE! I, uh, I talked to Kanaya. She had some pretty complicated feelings that she didn’t really know about herself until I asked the right questions and believe me I made her feel pretty guilty for what she said.” Karkat continues.

“You mean she’s all ash like usual.” you say, you’ve worked that much out. Besides with ashen crushes Kanaya’s basically the village troll powered two wheel device, she’s a meddler.

“Yeah, but it’s not like it usually is. She really isn’t biased to either of you and her interest is in seeing the two of you stay together, but to her mind she sees this whole thing as really unstable and so it needs her to interfere. I don’t think you and Vriska are actually unstable that way, I know it’s pretty new but still. It seems like she just wanted to keep things as good as they are but the only way
she could justify getting involved was by making it seem to herself like there’d be this big disaster if she didn’t. Which sucks.” Karkat says.

“Mmm, that good moment when my friend implies that my moirail is too unstable for quadrants and that says such great things about my relationship with said moirail by association. And the whole deal with Karkat too.” Dayvhe complains.

“Yeah, she wasn’t actually trying to say that our triangular thing is unstable but her whole dumbass reasoning makes that the following conclusion. Not to mention that if Vriska is too spiteful and capricious for relationships what about Terezi?” Karkat adds.

“Haven’t they been dating since forever?” Dayvhe asks.

“Longer than any of us, longer than Kanaya and Rohhze even.” you confirm.

“Well there you go, if TZ ever found out about this she’d be piiiiissed. And hey I’m not a member of the Vriska fanclub but I’d rather she get dragged for flaws she actually has, which is so many. So many.” Dayvhe adds that last part in a mutter.

“So she made us out to be incompetent so that we’d need her, is that about right?” you say with a sigh and rub a groove in Spot’s casing with the tip of your finger.

“Aaaand when I pointed that out to her she was mortified. She wants to apologise but she wants to do it in person which is why she’s not here now. She’s got a Vriska problem and she’s just hopped it onto a different quadrant which would make her a terrible mediator as it happens. But she really didn’t mean what she said and she doesn’t think that about either of you.” Karkat assures you.

Ugh. It’s pretty unusual for Kanaya to be such a tool, she’s usually the easiest person to get on with. Or at least you disagree with her the least. She’s smart and funny, besides her dry sense of humour is right in line with yours, you don’t think you’ve ever argued with her really. But, well, like Karkat said she’s got a Vriska history. A Vriskory if you will. She has a type, you get that. She likes girls who are wildly dangerous and yet manage to be both nice and also capable of being very mean as well as ruthless. You can’t get on her case for that, you have a type too at least with your relationships that work. Your type seems to be ‘I wildly overcompensate for my insecurities in absurd ways but I’m actually a way better person than people think’. That covers Dayvhe ‘so very cool’ Strydr, Karkat ‘angry yelling’ Vantas and Vriska ‘gotta be the hero’ Serket.

Maybe you need to just accept that this is a moment of uncharacteristic madness from Kanaya owing to her Vriska weakness and move on. Yeah, or you could let Kanaya actually apologise to you AND Vriska and then forgive her. You’re not hiding this shit from Vriska, she’s been insulted just as much only she doesn’t know it yet.

“Fine, she can apologise when I get back but I’m still mad.” you grumble.

“You’re absolutely allowed to still be mad.” Dayvhe insists, he’s the best.

“She can apologise to Vriska too.” you add and you actually hear Karkat grimace.

“Oh that’s going to be shitty but I get it. I might forewarn Terezi though, run damage control.” Karkat says that last part with quiet thoughtfulness and Dayvhe giggles.

“You’re the ashen master, it’s you.” Dayvhe laughs.

Right then Adagio comes into the room, his coat on and he looks around at the sound of Dayvhe laughing.
“Oh, shit, sorry I gotta go.” you say and then pause.

“Wait, where are you anyway?” Dayvhe asks.

“Dayvhe?” Adagio says in surprise so you pick up and spin the little bot around so Dayvhe can see his friend.

“Adagio! Hey man I didn’t know Sollux was hanging with you.” he says cheerfully.

“I- yeah, he’s staying at my place overday. Where are you?” Adagio asks.

“Oh man that’s really cool of you, thanks. And… we can’t really say? I don’t think? But I can’t come back it looks like, which sucks. I always liked jamming with you and your band but I’m glad I get to say bye instead of just ghosting you like everyone else which I feel really shitty about actually.” Dayvhe says glumly. You guess he’s the only one out of your group who has real friends outside of that group, the rest of you are insular weirdos.

“Alright, I gotta go. Talk to you two later.” you say and put Spot away again.

“You’re really just gonna not explain that, huh?” Adagio says.

“Really.” you confirm and get up. He shakes his head but leads the two of you out of the club through the back way.

The two of you are getting the second to last trolley of the night across to the other side of the city, for obvious reasons they shut down during daylight. Actually, that’s something you hadn’t realised you appreciated about Planet Hollywood, being able to be out at whatever time you like without the risk of being cooked by light is really nice. The pair of you chat on the way back to his, mostly about Dayvhe actually. He has high praise for Dayvhe’s musical ability and you explain the whole backstory to the concussion incident where you all met and that at least has Adagio laughing at you as he opens his door.

He lives in an apartment not entirely different from your old one and his hopbeast lusus lopes over to you, his nose twitching curiously. You’re introduced, shown around the place and then the two of you hang for a bit (you end up fixing a bug on his husktop as well) and then it’s time to sleep. You brush your teeth, take your meds and sleep in your clothes on his loungeplank. As you’re starting to drift off you formulate the plan to go through to John’s place and then Jayyne’s if Vriska gives you the directions and then you’ve just got Tavros left. You need to work out the exact time you’ll be done so that the planet will be in the right alignment with the ship.

With all of these things in mind you drift off into a light sleep that’s too consumed with sleeping in a strangers place out of sopor to be fully restful. Then again you guess Dayvhe may well have slept right where you are before. You at least have the manners to not leave before sunset with just a note behind you. Instead your musically inclined friend gives you toast and waves you goodbye when you leave.

You still have John’s address on your palmhusk from the first time you visited him so it’s not hard to message it to Sawtooth when you get up. You get a reply which you think might be in some kind of beat if you read it out loud but you’re not musically inclined enough to know.

John’s place is simple enough and you’re alert enough to not get a brick thrown at you this time but you do still attract those good dirty looks and this time John can see them.

“Are they- do people my hue always look at you like that if you’re in an area like this?” John asks in horror, looking through Spot’s camera as you walk past a blue and a cerulean standing together and
glaring at you.

“I mean they’re not all shitheads on your end of the spectrum, you’re cool. Our friends are. But yeah most people suck, John. It’s a whole thing.” you explain wearily. You walk up to John’s front door, pop the lock and let yourself in.

John’s lusus waddles its salamander body into the room you’re in and fixes you with a disapproving lususly look.

“John invited me, talk to him. I’ll grab your husktop, come meet me up there when you’re done talking.” you tell them both and push Spot towards John’s lusus. You slip by them and head upstairs.

You take the husktop that you built and pack that away along with all the right cables and such. When you’re not concussed you are able to get a better look around his room. You can’t help but note that he’s even got a beginners guide to ~ATH on his shelf which you’ve got to talk to him about later. On impulse you take his whole mini bookshelf and even start taking his posters down. You all have new blocks of your own in the building you all live in now but sometimes it’s nice for your new place to have a hint of your old one too. Not an option you really had but you’re inclined to offer it to other people if you can.

When a teary John does come back he has you pick up a few extra things, a stuffed toy Dayvhe got him sweeps ago and other things like that, and then you’re handed over to Roxxie to fly to the literal other side of the nearby train line to Jayyne’s hive. You could actually see her hive if you stood on the roof of John’s place, it’s so dumb.

Roxxie is the one guiding you through Jayyne’s hive and by now the bot boys have caught up to you, which is fine because at least now you have company going through her hive. Jayyne’s stuff is pretty detective based which isn’t surprising but she’s also got a very similar assortment of pranks and disguises to John’s. You discover this when you turn around to find Brobot wearing fake glasses and a moustache over his regular triangular glasses. Squarewave has a smoking pipe held upside down against his mouth and Sawtooth is wearing a deerstalker hat, again over his regular hat.

“Ok, so, robot cosplay is the direction my night is going. Cool, good to know.” you say helplessly. Why is your life so weird?

Roxxie is no help at all on the other side of the camera because she’s just howling with laughter, it doesn’t stop even when Brobot looks you dead in the eye and sticks a moustache on Spot below the camera.

“Elementary.” Sawtooth says with a nod.

“CLUES!” Squarewave yells.

Roxxie directs you to just basically clear out all of Jayyne’s baking supplies that aren’t fresh food. You’re pretty sure the bots could help you with this but they don’t. You also think that Sawtooth is ripping off some classic poetry, rather than the slam poetry kind you’re more familiar with. You also think he might be mocking you, his language is certainly leaning more highblood fancy to aid the air of refinement in his work.

“Once upon a midnight dreary, while I wandered, weak and weary,
Through another crammed full and abandoned kitchen drawer,
While I searched, my vision overlapping, there came a rapping,
As of a bot so strapping, rapping at her kitchen door.” Sawtooth raps, his words smooth. He stops suddenly, seeming to wait on you.
“You could help.” you say and with your input Sawtooth continues again.

“-I grumbled, rapping at her kitchen door,
Only this, and nothing more.”

You shake your head and keep packing the stuff you need, well, the stuff Jayyne would probably want.

“Ah, surely I was bored I was in the bleakest Stepford,
And each fancy tool I stored delayed my stupid quest some more,
Eagerly I wished the morrow; - vainly I had sought to borrow-” Sawtooth has to cut off when you throw a cake pan at him. You’re starting to get how Dayvhe has trouble keeping up with the guy still.

Sawtooth shakes his head and Brobot gives you a thumbs down but you’re fine with that. You don’t need your actions described sarcastically in poetry. In fact, this is as good as Jayyne’s going to get when it comes to her stuff. If she really wanted to tell you that she absolutely needs six whisks then she should have had the forethought to burst from her coon to tell you so in person. Or over the mic at least.

The bots, still in costume, follow behind you to Tavros’ place and he’s immediately eager and helpful. He directs you there despite you already knowing the way. Only you’re not the only one who knows the way it seems. You land to find Tavros’ door hanging off of the hinges.

Your skin crackles with wary energy and it’s a good thing too. You step inside Tavros’ hive and the guy inside jerks around to stare at you. He’s a yellowblood too, his eyes green and purple. That’s all you get of him before he tries to blast you clean out of Tavros’ hive.

Stopping a bullet is hard but redirecting someone else’s psi isn’t, not unless there’s a huge power jump in their favour which there absolutely is not here. You easily flick it harmlessly into the air behind you, step a little further into the hive so that you can psionically pick him up and fling him wildly into the field beyond. You suppose that the confrontation has attracted attention because several of your friends are trying to talk to you all at once, meaning that you can understand none of them at all.

Oh man, Tavros’ husktop is broken. You and Equius might be able to repair it but what the hell, who does that? You take it anyway and start looking around for other things. Tavros’ hive is pretty small and you can’t help but notice that his lusus is nowhere to be seen, encouragingly there’s no brown smear of blood that suggests that the guy who was here before killed him.

Speaking of…

Slightly out of breath the yellowblooded guy appears at the door, he clearly ran back here and there’s a twig in his hair.

“I got here first!” he insists angrily and points at you.

“I don’t care.” you say with a shrug.

“This hive is clearly abandoned and as it was obviously some bronzeblood’s I have every right to take whatever I like here!” he says angrily.

“Why… why does Tav being bronze have anything to do with it?” you ask as your suspicions rise.

“Because,” the guy says as he draws himself up proudly and you note now that his clothes are a
pseudo military style, “we’re above the bronze and rust.”

“Cool story, I bet you think that being helmed is going to be great and you’ll get to choose your own ship and everything in the empire is wonderful.” you snort.

“It doesn’t work that way for every psionic but I’m without a doubt the most powerful psionic on the planet, you just got a lucky shot in was all.” he sneers.

“Ah, man. See it’s not a boast when I say it but you’re not only hilariously wrong but you’re outmatched too, how about you piss off and rethink your whole life, yeah?” you say and shake your head as you turn to get started on picking up Tavros’ playing cards and assorted game junk. You anticipated that he’d throw something at you but even as you stop it with ease you’re disappointed.

“Get lost.” you tell him again.

“Make me.” he hisses.

You hear Vriska’s offended noise from the other side of the microphone.

“If I do then you stop bugging me and get lost.” you warn him as you walk closer.

“It’s not going to happen, but sure, whatever makes you feel better. When I win you leave this hive to me.” the guy brags.

You usher him outside and he squares off against you, his jaw is lifted defiantly and he’s so obviously confident.

“Give me everything you’ve got.” he tells you.

“You really don’t want that, how about you try.” you say flatly.

“Fine, but I warned you.” it’s funny because he’s thinking more or less the same as you. Only you’re right and he’s not.

Psionic on psionic fights when they’re your kind tend to be flashy affairs, lots of stuff flying around, a lightshow often. The basic way to win if you don’t have the murder eyelasers that you have is to just push the other person against the ground and do that hard enough that you crush them until either they give or you kill them. To the guy’s credit as he looms up above you and tries just that you can actually feel the pressure, too bad it’s like the kind of pressure you get in your ears when you go up too fast. Around you the ground cracks and dents but you just stand there.

“Alright, enough of that.” you say.

Psionically you grab the intruder, slam him into the ground opposite you and you’re not gentle about it either. You press down, for you it’s delicate, enough to restrict how much he can breathe but not enough to actually kill him. Carefully isolating where he is you slam down around him in a perfect cutout, making a crater several metres wide on each side in a perfect circle with just a sort of gingerbread troll cutout.

“Like I said, get lost and stop trying to rob my friend’s hive. And rethink your shit, god.” you growl and then let him go, he gasps in a desperate breath of air as you float back into the hive. As you cross the threshold you can hear the guy muttering ‘holy shit’ to himself over and over.

“You still weren’t even trying were you?” Vriska asks.
“If I was trying he’d be dead and Tavros wouldn’t have a hive. Tavros, where are Disciple’s books?” you ask as you scrape all of Tavros’ game stuff into one card.

“Under the floorboards over by the back window, have you seen my dad yet?” Tavros asks.

“Not yet but I’ll look outside later.” you say. You float the boards up and there’s a big airtight box with the books in, score.

“Just how strong are you?!” the guy demands from the doorway, still out of breath.

“Go away. What else do you need Tavros?” you ask after ordering the guy to go.

“Uh, my wardrobe and maybe my chair just in case.” Tavros says uneasily. You grab both things as he asked and worry that some change has happened with his legs that you don’t know about, or maybe he’s just trying to make sure he’ll be ok, whatever.

The guy marches over to you and grabs your arm. Or he tries at least, he hits the psionic barrier you’ve got around you.

“Be my kismesis. No one’s ever been as strong as me but you… you’re…” he doesn’t even seem to know what to say.

You sigh but you guess you’re going to have to do this.

“Hey, Tavros is Vriska there?” you ask.

“No.” Tavros answers assertively and immediately.

“I’m spoken for, whatever your name is. And don’t tell me what it is, I don’t care. I don’t have time for someone my colour who thinks the spectrum is great and the Empress is wonderful. Even if I wasn’t already seeing someone I wouldn’t consider you.” you tell him bluntly.

“I bet whoever they are they aren’t half as strong as me.” the guy brags, clearly still trying to get you on his side.

“My guy, if she was here you’d be dead. I was nice and didn’t kill you, she’s not nice. She’s a bitch, she’s the only one who can challenge me and she’d eat you for breakfast. I’m astronomically not interested.” you explain. You also get the feeling he’s not going to just leave so you pick him up, float him outside and this time when you throw him you put enough effort into it to send him a good way away without throwing him so fast he catches on fire in the atmosphere.

“Geez. You want your books and posters too, man?” you ask, looking at Spot.

“Uh, um, sure. Yes, that would be great I think.” he says weakly.

“Vriska’s done talking through your mouth, huh?” you snort. He sounded way too assertive and confident earlier and not in the way Tavros sounds when he’s faking that.

“I- wh- I don’t know what you mean!” Vriska blurts out, only proving that she never left.

You untack Tavros’ posters and gather the last few things and Aradia helpfully tells you that you have about ten minutes until you optimal window for leaving the planet starts, you timed this just right. You leave Spot in the main area of Tavros’ hive and sidestep into his ablution block to change back into your spacesuit, you leave the helmet off because there’s no point wasting the air down here. By the time you’re done the rest of the bots are standing outside, looking into the hole in the
ground you made.

“Is it possible to put you three in my sylladex?” you ask hopefully. You can’t put living things in there, not beyond very small animals. Any single animal much larger than a small hopbeast will just reject or explode out of your sylladex along with everything else. You do consider your robot friends here to be alive but you can put Spot away just fine so it may be that the problem is more like ‘alive + organic + greater than X size’. You consider Spot to be more or less the first but not upsetting the second two rules. The other bots are all pretty sizeable and definitely alive to you, but they’re metal.

Sawtooth shakes his head at you. Damnit, you’re going to have to carry them up.

“Great. Well do me a favour, I’m going to go look for Tavros’ lusus, if the three of you could tie yourselves together then if I lose hold of one of you a little in zero g then things won’t go to hell right away.” you tell them.

“Sollux are you sure you can do that?” Tavros asks.

“It’s going to be awkward getting out of the atmosphere but otherwise it should be fine, I think.” you answer.

Leaving the three of them to their work you hop onto the roof of the hive and look around. Tavros’ hive is situated in a wide and formerly unblemished field filled with wildflowers and long grasses. Plenty of places for a little tinkerbull lusus to hide and your eyesight isn’t the greatest in the world, you also suspect you’re not fantastic at differentiating fine colours thanks to your already tinted eyes. So because of all that separating white lusus from beige grasses isn’t easy. Tavros is turning Spot around to search and calling for his lusus but no one’s coming.

Even if Tavros leaves a message it won’t be of any help, even if you made it an audio one. No lusus would look at Tavros’ hive the way it is now and go in, especially with how long Tavros has been gone. You still wait until your window opens up, you gather the bots together and you put Spot away with a quiet apology to Tavros. You have another reason for leaving, though. In the distance you can see the glowing light of another psionic getting closer and you bet you know who it is.

“Alright try and stay still, ok?” you tell the bots. Sawtooth nods, he’s got Squarewave firmly held under his arm and he and Brobot are tied together by their wrists. You pick them up and carefully launch into the sky. If you were wearing your helmet right now you know it’d be feeding you data about the right angles and trajectories, but you know how to get into the upper atmosphere and until the air starts getting thin you’re not going to waste the air your suit generates.

You’re not trying to sprint out of the atmosphere, you’re taking it easy.

“DUDE INCOMING!” Squarewave yells.

Wait, does he mean ‘dude (addressing you), something is incoming’ or does he mean ‘incoming dude’?

You look down. Oh, he meant both.

You’re taking your flight at a steady subsonic pace, more of an even jog for you but below you is that yellow guy desperately trying to keep up with you and he looks on the verge of passing out to do it.

“Be my kismesis!” he yells up at you.

“My kismesis backs off when I really want her to, and when she loses a bet and agrees to. You’re
not listening, you’re becoming less attractive by the second and you weren’t great to start out with.” you shout down to him. Brobot shakes his head and gives a thumbs down with his free hand, you agree with him.

“You should at least know who- who I am!” he gasps.

“No.” you tell him.

“I’m-” he begins.

“I said no, man!” you snap.

“But you’re the only person I’ve met who’s challenged me!” he insists.

You roll your eyes and get your helmet out. You shove it on your head and twist it until it clicks into place, the helmet display shows that it’s pressurising the suit accordingly and testing to be sure you have no leaks. Happily you’re good to go. You look down, this asshole is still chasing you even if he’s lagging behind. He’s looking desperate and you don’t like that look, desperate means he might try to grab you and this is the only spacesuit you have. Hal could maybe throw another one down to you but that’s ridiculously risky.

Time to put a little effort into it.

You hold tight to your robot friends and, carefully buffering the wind from all of you, casually break the sound barrier and shoot up well out of reach of your admirer. You track the angles you’re supposed to go now and it’s a good thing because you need to start adjusting your angle as you leave the atmosphere completely and move towards the ship.

“Hello Sollux, you’re on target and fully out of atmosphere. If you’re still shielding the three of them you can drop that now.” Hal tells you calmly.

“Already stopped that, let me know how my speed is going later. I’d rather slow down over a longer time to meet you guys than do it suddenly.” you say.

“Yeah if that somehow didn’t kill you it’d kill someone, probably all of us.” Hal agrees.

Sawtooth, Squarewave and Brobot can’t talk to you now although you guess Brobot never could. The point is your helmet is pretty well protected signal wise so that not just anyone can blabber in your ear when you’re doing important things. You think that Squarewave is still talking or rapping from how he’s moving but whatever he’s saying is lost to you, probably for the best too.

In the reverse situation to the way down here you get to see Alternia begin to get smaller and the green moon get larger, you wonder if you can remember to focus and keep an eye on the moon to see if you can spot the moment it and Alternia appear to be the same size.

“Sollux, we have a problem.” Hal says abruptly.

“What?” you ask, your bloodpusher leaping into your throat.

“Remember we calculated before the size of what you could get past the satellites without being picked up? Aradia’s just worked out that something about your group is tipping the mark with them, either the amount of metal or the signals they’re throwing out. The size was already close but you’re going to be spotted at this rate and the light from your psionics where you’re speeding up isn’t helping.” Hal says grimly.
Surely Hal can’t be suggesting that you leave the bots behind to float in space or maybe at this height eventually crash down to Alternia sweeps later.

“What if… what if I push them far enough away from me to look like a separate mass? And I’d only have to do that until we pass the satellites, right?” you ask.

“That could work but you’re going to need to throw them up here in the right direction exactly and then cut your psionics and drift, that’s going to take a lot more time, you know that don’t you? And you have to throw them hard enough that they’ll meet you on the other side before you run out of air.” Aradia warns.

“No, that’s not so much of a problem, they don’t need air. We can catch Sollux and then have him helm with you to catch them if they’re not going as fast, as long as they don’t bring us within range of the satellites ourselves we’ll be fine.” Hal says back.

“Can you talk to them through the line you’ve got with me so they know what’s going on? I don’t want them to think I’m just throwing them into space and abandoning them.” you ask, that’s a horrifying thought. Especially given that they can live for however long their crazy power source allows them to, that’s a special kind of hell that you don’t want them to fear you’re condemning them to.

You guess that Hal’s doing just that because all three bots suddenly react and Sawtooth eventually nods at you.

“You said I have to stop psionically speeding up and drift instead. How long does that make my trip take now?” you ask and at the same time you’re trying to work out if you need to push the bots away and throw them up or just throw them from where you are right now then cut sideways and up yourself. You know you can control yourself better so that’s probably best.

“Almost three times as long, but you have that much air left, don’t worry!” Aradia says cheerfully.

Alright then. You lower yourself behind the three bots and line them up with the projection on your helmet. Throwing something psionically in space is hard, on a planet you’re used to pushing back against the world around you to do it. Every force has an equal and opposite reaction and all that, but in space… actually you’ve no idea how the physics of this works, you just know it does and is more challenging.

You dig deep and grab hold of a tonne of psionic power and then with a shove the bots are so far from you that you can hardly see them. Quickly you cut sideways and then after enough distance has passed you put on a kick of speed back towards the ship. Enough to ensure you’ll get there and also to cancel out your sideways motion, you don’t want to drift diagonally like that. Then you simply… stop.

You hang without any force of your own making you go faster or slower, it feels like you’re in midair without any action on your part and if you’re being brutally honest, you’re not a fan of the feeling.

“That should put them on track, does it looks right to you?” you ask instead of thinking about it.

“We’ll need to catch you first then get them, but yes. It will take a few hours to get you far enough at this speed, you need to not put any more speed on.” Aradia tells you.

“Well at least I can talk to you two.” you laugh weakly.

“Actually you can’t. We’re slowing down the communication from your suit to us, an effort to lower
the chances of you being spotted since the satellites might be on higher alert now. We’ll be getting suit readouts every five minutes unless it notes a problem or you shout for us.” Hal says.

“What?” you ask, your voice going tight.

“I’m sorry Sollux, we’re just trying to keep you safe.” Aradia says sadly.

“Alright, all quiet now.” Hal says.

Then there’s nothing.

You can hear the sound of your own breathing in the contained helmet but that’s it. You twist, looking down at Alternia below your feet. It’s just hanging there and with it being so big the speed that you’re moving away from it seems imperceptible when you just look at it. Without you exerting your psionics at all you feel, for the first time in your life, a sense of vertigo. A lifetime of understanding that if you stop using your psionics you fall pairs up with the idea of just how far below you Alternia is now and comes back with the screaming conclusion that you’re going to fall.

You squeeze your eyes shut tight, you’re not going to look and you’re not going to fall. You swallow thickly and in the oppressive silence of space you can hear the sound of your own spit in your mouth. You can hear your pulse thumping away. A thousand tiny biological noises that are the simple result of you being alive and have so far been unobserved by you are, without warning, very noticeable now.

No. No way are you going to lose it in a few minutes of sound deprivation, stay calm or else your pulse will get high enough to alarm your friends back on the ship and then things will be more dangerous. You count backwards from two hundred, instead of focusing on the whooshing of blood inside your own head you try to recall every account name and password you’ve had ever. Despite these supposedly soothing distractions you’re perfectly capable of doing multiple things at once.

You’ve long since shut your eyes against the void of space, you feel sick to look at it when you’re drifting like this. You worry that you’re not alone out here, or rather that you are alone but that it won’t look that way.

You worry that if you open your eyes again the figment will be there as he so often is when things are dire so you get stuck in a loop where you’re too scared to open your eyes to see. Eventually enough time passes that you give in and open your eyes anyway.

The Figment of Dayvhe’s hair is so dark it nearly blends into space around him and when he smiles it, to you, feels like a poor facsimile of Dayvhe’s real expressions.

“That’s not nice, dude. You needed me and I came.” he points out.

You’re about to point out that you didn’t need him, that you’d hoped he wasn’t here and here he is but he talks first.

“You might wanna not talk unless you want other people hearing. And by other people I mean Hal and Aradia but also, like, the Empress’ goons and what have you.” the figment points out and reaches his hand to cover your mouth, entirely ignoring the helmet in the way. You shake your head to dislodge him and hate how much you actually can feel him.

He’s not real, you know this. You’re good at this.

“I’m real, I’m you. We’ve been over this, you’re just thinking to yourself through a pitiable face.” the figment argues.
Yeah this is you. This is your own dumb ideas, neuroses and stupid thoughts run through a Dayvhe filter with a good deal of catastrophizing thrown in for good measure. It’s not Dayvhe.

“Yeah, well, if Dayvhe was here he wouldn’t be able to talk to you. Also if he didn’t have a suit on like me he’d be dead, so there.” the figment says petulantly. You’re going to ignore him. Yourself, you’re going to ignore yourself.

“Good luck with that.” the figment snorts.

You’re still not talking to him, if you don’t give it any material your thinkspoon will get bored and do something else.

The figment narrows its eyes at you. You’ve always suspected that your thinkspoon hates you as much as you hate it but this seems like proof.

“You know I’m not going anywhere right? Not in the long term sense. Even if you don’t need me and I don’t show up I’m still in your head forever. Like, you act as if they didn’t break you when they tortured you just because you didn’t talk. Which you’re welcome for by the way. But we all know you just broke this way instead of their way. I’m staying forever, you’re not healing this.” the figment tells you.

You’d suspected as much, but that’s why the figment is saying it. It isn’t a living person that has knowledge you don’t, it’s just saying what you worry is true. That’s not proof. It doesn’t seem to like you thinking that.

“Do you think if he breaks up with you I’ll still look like him? I probably will, that’ll suck, huh?” the figment says.

You’re not going to break up with Dayvhe. He pities you, you pity him, it works.

“You’re nine, it’s not like-”

NOPE. You’re fated or something like that.

“You don’t believe that.”

Fine, you don’t. You hate the idea of fate. Sometimes Dayvhe is a lot of work but so are you and you have Karkat. Also, as much as you’re not a fan of yourself you’re apparently very desirable for some reason because you’re dating Karkat, Dayvhe and Vriska and in the last few nights alone you think you also got offers from some random yellow asshole and Kanaya so apparently you’re a catch.

“Yeah that’s pretty weird.”

And on top of that Dayvhe has gone to great lengths to affirm that he thinks you’re great and Vriska thinks you’re a worthy opponent and you have good friends too. Also, even if you did break up you’re still friends with Aradia so even in that worst case scenario you don’t see why you wouldn’t still be friends with Dayvhe.

You’re being so spitefully positive that you don’t notice right away that the figment has shut up. He’s looking up so you look where he’s looking. The green moon is getting pretty big right now, you look down at Alternia and see that it’s getting smaller. Hey! They’re the same size!

Wait, was the figment making you argue with it so you wouldn’t think about being alone out here?
The Figment of Dayvhe smiles impishly and you hate both it and yourself ever so slightly.

Without your input the figment keeps monologuing about things, recalling memories you have and theorising what Dayvhe would have thought about those situations. You don’t really like that, Dayvhe surprises you a lot and you enjoy that about him. You are able to think about Karkat to get the figment to talk about him and that’s a nice enough distraction. Dayvhe getting mushy over Karkat has always made you happy. You think even if you and Dayvhe had stayed in will they/won’t they limbo forever you would have still enjoyed seeing those two idiots be happy together.

What had felt like an unbearably long time in objectively total silence passes reasonably quickly and when Hal finally contacts you again the figment vanishes, harmless as can be.

“Sollux, you’re out of satellite range so we need you to start slowing down and adjusting your course, we’re moving to meet you now but the projection should be on your helmet. Can you see it?” Hal says, quick and businesslike.

On the screen of your helmet you can see in red the projected path you’re to take and the estimation of what’s going to happen if you take it at this speed. You can only assume from the colour and… well, what you’re looking at, that Aradia and Hal are responsible for this. The projected outcome of getting to your destination at this speed is surmised only as a thinkpan and crossbones.

“Yeah, I see it.” you tell them.

You start to put the breaks on things. As the moon is looming so large you try to imagine yourself bracing against it to slow yourself down. You likely aren’t doing that but it helps you to visualise stopping in space with the confusing physics that entails. What seems so obvious and natural in the ship is foreign to you outside of it.

The numerical dial totalling your miles per hour is sliding lower and lower but presently you’re still at very dead levels of speed. It’s just that you’re tired, you know? You’ve flown in and out of this planet in a week, not to mention all around the place down there and then hefted a bunch of bots up here with you that you never intended to. Plus on top of all of that you didn’t sleep in sopor overday so you’ve been groggy all night. Slowing down your speed in space is hard, a constant flex of effort that’s absurdly hard for how delicate it is.

In an example of a good news/bad news moment you see Aradia’s prediction of your speed change from ‘thinkpan and crossbones emoji’ to ‘snapped bone emoji’. That’s better but still not great. Oh, oh shit you can see the ship! Hanging there in space, lit in ambient green from the moon, she really is beautiful. She’s also getting closer very quickly and boy do you hope she’s moving too or this is going to be bad.

“Matching your speed… trying to anyway.” Aradia says to you.

“I think I can slow down more!” you gasp, trembling with the effort to both slow down and keep yourself on course. The problem isn’t the psionic strength here, it’s the accuracy. This is like doing a pushup, getting an inch from the ground and then holding that without moving so much as hair either way. If your trajectory wobbles even slightly and Aradia doesn’t correct in time you’re just going to paste yourself against the ship wall and be very dead. Or you over correct and blow a hole in the side of the ship and make everyone in it very dead. Basically it’s success or terrible failure are the two end states here.

“Slowing down to meet you then.” Aradia says stiffly. You can make out the doors of the back of the ship, they’re coming at you very fast.
“That’s not slow enough!” Hal exclaims but it’s too late.

The airlock zooms past you and you can see the wall of the inside of the ship rushing to you, this is bad, very bad. Then suddenly you collide with a body and the crunching impact you expected doesn’t happen. You open your eyes to find your face maybe an inch from the airlock wall with red crackling between you and it. Glass clanks against your helmet as you drift to the ground, the artificial gravity extending to the open airlock.

“Got you.” Dayvhe’s voice filters through to your helmet. He’s suited up as well, he’s the one who caught you and helped decelerate you with his own psionics. It’s not the figment, it’s really your moirail, protecting you from broken bones and lots of pain. You slump against his shoulder in exhaustion and behind you the airlock shuts, the room pressurises and the door you nearly slammed into opens.

Several of your friends are waiting, notably Equius with a medical kit at his feet just in case but Karkat is obscuring the rest of your vision by getting his grubby little hands on your helmet as he hauls you and Dayvhe in together.

“I’m so tired.” you whine.

“I bet.” Dayvhe says sympathetically and unscrews your helmet, then his own and handing them to Karkat.

“Wait, I might need that. AA, what about the bots? Do you need me to help catch them and slow them down?” you ask, looking up at the ceiling to the camera you know is there.

“No, I’ve planned an intercept course with them where we can match each other’s speed perfectly and they can seamlessly land on the ship. It takes a decent number of hours to line up and if we’d done that with you then you would have suffocated to death before we caught you.” she tells you cheerfully.

“That plan was vetoed, you’re going to get some rest. We can get our shit back from you later.” Karkat says firmly.

“I need to examine him first.” Equius interrupts.

“Wait, hold that thought. AA where’s the nearest room that we can quarantine so nothing gets in or out?” you ask, it’s been too long since you were connected to the ship to remember and you are very tired.

“Uh, the staircase in the wall three doors down leads to a small-”

“Right, storage room. Got it, thanks. Can you tell Tavros I might need his help in a second?” you say and duck out of Dayvhe and Karkat’s hold to get to the aforementioned room, Karkat of course is following you loudly protesting that you shouldn’t be doing whatever you’re doing. Dayvhe seems to have accepted that you’re doing whatever you’re doing and Equius is following along trying to ask you medical questions and dripping nervously as he does so. All three of them are ignored.

You open the door to the storage room and note the lack of small holes for things to get in and out, perfect. You flick through your very full sylladex until you find the right card. The difficulty of the problems on the cards scales with how many cards you have filled so between that and you being pretty tired it takes you almost a minute to come up with the answer.

In terms of smart things to do ejecting a sylladex card of a server stack dripping a substance that you should not under any circumstances consume and is also filled with angry bees is not exactly an
action high up that list. You snap a few of them down and then just slam the door on them.

“Do I have mind honey on me?” you ask, turning to the three people that followed you. Dayvhe goes to grab you so he can check you over only for Karkat to smack him away.

“Getting any on you is a terrible idea too! Let me look!” Karkat hisses.

“Why do you have to be such a bitch when you’re right?” Dayvhe grumbles.

“By your accusations I’m right all the time then aren’t I?” Karkat sneers.

“If you’re just gonna drag yourself like that to be right…” Dayvhe mumbles.

“Let’s get you out of that suit first.” Karkat suggests. He helps you out of the space suit and it looks like you didn’t get any on that and because that’s designed to keep you separate from space itself Karkat just has to check your head and neck to be sure no honey splashed back at you when you threw the server in there. You’re pretty sure you’re fine though.

Equius has a few health questions for you. Some normal things like do you feel tired or dizzy, do you have any unexplained bleeding. Dayvhe asks if explained bleeding is somehow ok but you’re fine on both fronts. Karkat deems Equius’s help to be unhelpful when Equius asks you if you feel like you’ve been irradiated at all, so he’s banished and Dayvhe and Karkat drag you to your block and throw you into the coon to sleep.

At one point in the… night? Day? Whichever, at some point you wake up to eat something only to find a slippery and naked adult Jayekh hunched over on the floor of the nutrition block with Dirkka and Roxxie lingering near him with concern on their faces. Yeah, you’re not getting between Jayekh and food right now, you’ll just go back to sleep.

“Jayekh molted.” you tell the other two as you slip in the coon between them.

“Good, now Dirkka can just worry about Jayyne.” Dayvhe yawns and reaches for you with slippery hands. You slip into the sopor up to your chest and Karkat trollhandles you about until he can get his face in the curve of your neck just like he likes it. Either your neck or or Dayvhe’s it doesn’t matter, it’s his favourite way to sleep.

“Do you think that treasure’s going to make a difference? I handed out as much of it as I could and Adagio said he’d keep doing it but it’s not like it’s going to fix anything is it?” you say unhappily.

Did you really even achieve anything? A temporary bandage isn’t going to fix the shitty situation lowbloods are in.

“It made a difference to them and who knows what they’re going to do. I mean didn’t you say some of the goldbloods you saw did things that weren’t that huge but made huge differences or whatever?” Dayvhe yawns.

You guess he’s got a point, you giving someone some extra cash might give them the freedom to do something great, or save someone else who otherwise wouldn’t have made it. You had to have made a difference, right?

“Besides, you’re gonna be some mysterious cult figure. The new secret sufferer. Peeps will start a tradition of randomly handing out gifts dressed as you. As in they dress as you not gifts that look like you though that would be wickedly cute too.” Dayvhe babbles.

“Go to sleep.” you say, rolling your eyes.
“Shit, let’s be secret sufferer.” Dayvhe mumbles sleepily.

You hope you made a difference but even if you didn’t you think that you’re determined now more than ever to really give the whole changing the universe thing your all. You’re not trying to follow your ancestor’s footsteps, after all you’ve seen where they led him, but he is right about how shit needs to change. So yeah, you’re in this for the long haul. Given the ship you’re flying in it’s kind of an on the nose statement but fuck it, the rebellion can add your name to its ranks.

Hell fucking yes, you’re a rebel.
Star Wars The Saga Begins - Weird Al Yankovic

"Oh, the Council was impressed, of course
Could he bring balance, to the force?
They interviewed the kid, all training, they forbid

Because Yoda sensed in him much fear
And Qui-Gon said, "Now listen here
Just stick it in your pointy ear, I still will teach this boy"

He was singin'," My my, this here Anakin guy
May be Vader someday later, now he's just a small fry"
And he left his home and kissed his lusus goodbye
Sayin', "Soon I'm gonna be a Jedi, soon I'm gonna be a Jedi"

"Weird Al" Yankovic - Star Wars: The Saga Begins

For the record you and Aradia catch the bots in a feat as impressive as it is not entirely understood by everyone else on the ship. You’re not a train, you didn’t pull up at a stop and they walked on. You matched your speed to theirs at the precise time and location of their-


The short version is that you now have more robots on board, which makes Hal very happy. Jayyne has also molted now which makes her friends very happy. Essentially 100% increase in adults and 300% increase in new robots, and yes you’re absolutely keeping Spot. You put your back into getting everyone back to Planet Hollywood as fast as is reasonably possible and when you get close you let Aradia deal with talking to flight to sort you a place to land and ensuring that there’ll be an ambulance there to take Tavros in. Dirkka and Dayvhe rush off to go talk to the flight people about getting that crate back, you suppose they’re going to use Dionte’s gun to shoot it at Alternia but you’re staying out of that.

You also suspect they’re not going to bother asking Dahvid if they can do that first and you’re staying out of that one too.

What you want, what you really want, is to get back to your block and chill out undisturbed. You’re spread out face down on your loungeplank just really enjoying the lack of- oh goddamnit is that your door? You twist your head and see Vriska casually letting herself in through your definitely previously locked door.

"The lock isn’t a challenge.” you inform her.

“I know, it’s so easy.” Vriska says with a snort of derision.

“You know that wasn’t what I meant, I know that wasn’t what I meant but here we are. Here you are, in my block despite the locked door. Why?” you groan melodramatically into the loungeplank cushions. Are you being infected by Dayvhe and Karkat’s penchant for melodrama? Maybe. Actually, Vriska’s dramatic too. ...actually most people you know are. Scrap that thought.

“I would ask what you were doing in here that was so important that I’d have to wait for you to be done but let’s be real, I don’t care and it wasn’t more important.” Vriska declares. The loungeplank cushions muffle your frustrated scream.
“Why are Kanaya, Karkat and Terezi being weird and why won’t they talk to me about it?” Vriska asks.

Ah.

You sit up a little and look her in the eye, not backing down is key with her.

“Maybe not everything is about you.” you suggest.

“Funny, but now you’re being weird so it definitely is.” she concludes.

“I want to point out that you being factually right on this involving you and people actually being weird doesn’t mean your self obsessed logic is right.” you state definitively, you don’t want to encourage this kind of shit. Vriska sighs dramatically and flops onto the loungeplank where you had been sprawled out so you guess you’re stuck sitting now. She runs a hand up the back of her neck to flick all of her hair over the back of your loungeplank, just to make it look super casual when she slides down a little and looks at you expectantly.

Ugh, fine.

“You’re not allowed to leave until I’m done, alright?” you warn her.

This isn’t something you do a lot. Vriska could mind control you but it just doesn’t really work anymore and the fact of the matter is that if you wanted her to stay somewhere and were prepared to make her there’s jack all she could do about it. She knows it, you know it, it doesn’t usually come up because it’s not an interesting way of challenging each other. Sticking her to the ceiling doesn’t make you smarter or better than her, it makes you a decently powerful psionic and that’s it. So not impressive. But here you are bringing it up because you really aren’t going to let her run off halfway through your explanation so she can go shout at someone.

“Go on.” she prompts. She’s not denying that you can do it, that’d be beneath both of you really.

Well, shit, now you hadn’t thought about how you were going to start this. You just go for it instead.

“You know how that guy kept hitting on me pitch and wouldn’t take no for an answer?” you begin.

“Ugh, that chump. Though you were so very nice about me, I would alllllllmost think you care.” Vriska teases.

“You’re not dumb enough to think I don’t. Anyway, my point was he was the second person that trip to awkwardly proposition me, even if the first didn’t do it as directly I guess.” you say.

“The guy from the club?” Vriska guesses, sitting up a little.

“No, he’s cool. This was an ashen proposition anyway.” you explain and now Vriska is bolt upright, looking at you with a frown starting to form.

“Who the hell would- wait, no. No one hits on someone else ash without knowing the other half of that spade so… not Karkat because he’s your whatever he is. Terezi isn’t flipping ash for me and she’d be terrible at it, she’s too biased so—” Vriska cuts herself off, her eyes wide. Her lip draws back in a silent snarl as her fists clench and shake.

“KANAYA.” she growls and leaps to her feet.

“I said you’re not leaving.” you tell her and psionically drag her back and plaster all of her flesh and
blood limbs to the loungeplank. You don’t know if you psionically grabbing her robotic arm hurts her too but there’s no reason to risk it.

“She didn’t actually proposition but Karkat talked to her after and that was basically her thing. It seems to pretty much be all about you, her pale thing for you then her flush and now this. She’s just hopping I guess. You’re too untrustworthy with quadrants and I’m apparently too unstable.” you grumble that last part out, the words still bitter on your tongue.

“Unstable.” Vriska repeats.

“Crazy is the reading I got from that. Because oh, we’re alright now and everything is great for us at the moment and we’re good for each other NOW. Insert insinuation that my “moods” and your whole personality I guess, will suddenly ruin things and then everything will be terrible for everyone forever.” you hiss.

“I’m going to kill her, I’m going to-” Vriska gets that look that you know means she’s starting to control someone so you don’t hesitate at all to slap her in the side of the head, right against one of her horns. She yelps in alarm, her focus broken.

“Don’t. Karkat had an apparently mortifying conversation with her about it and apparently she didn’t realise her motivations for it all or what she was implying.” you grumble.

“You used apparently twice in that answer, you don’t actually buy this shit you’re telling me.” she accuses you and you let her go because you don’t think that she’s actually going to run for it right now.

“I do. I absolutely believe Karkat’s conversation was mortifying, he’s good at those. I can also buy that Kanaya was probably not being honest with herself about why she was meddling. She just likes meddling a lot and usually she’s right so why think about what it means when you do it or what that says about people? Ugh. KK says she doesn’t think that… doesn’t think I’m too broken or whatever to cope with.” you say but even as you say it the miserable doubt that either everyone does think that or that it might be true creeps over you.

“I don’t think you’re-” she starts.

“I don’t need your pity and reassurances, thanks.” you tell her sharply and then soften up a little, “Besides if I’ve got my timeline right you hated me even when I was basically at my weakest, so.”

You shrug and Vriska stares at you for a moment.

“That wasn’t weakness. You mean after you got back from being helmed the first time? When you withstood shit that’d break most people and make them say anything to get it to stop? Nah, not weakness.” Vriska asserts.

Your bloodpusher thuds heavy in your chest. Kanaya’s fears about you two aren’t right because you’re sure that this thing that you’d never have thought of being possible a sweep ago is actually rock fucking solid.

“Oh.” you say, feeling almost lightheaded with-

Ok, look, we all know how this goes. We just don’t need to watch it go down. Any troll familiar with pitch romance can see the writing on the hive supporting strut here. And of course you are a troll familiar with interpersonal and romantic tropes, you can read the room, can’t you? So maybe you should be that troll right now instead of Sollux, since he’s currently… occupied.
You’re Dayvhe. Which from your perspective you always are so it’s a pretty weird if neutral self affirmation to currently think. It’s not like you’re standing outside your ancestor’s door trying to psych yourself up for this conversation which holds weight for reasons you don’t totally get and telling yourself who you are is helping.

You guess it isn’t not helping, which is a sentence that totally makes sense.

Ah, fuck it.

You turn the doorhandle and walk into the room like you own it. You don’t own it of course but genetically speaking you very nearly do and that’s totally how property rights work, yeah? Your ancestor who does own this room lifts his head from his desk to glare at you and the people in the room trying to talk to him all glance your way.

Huh, you wonder what they’re doing. There’s one troll at a whiteboard writing things down that look like script ideas.

“Hey, are you busy?” you ask him.

“What do you think?” he replies and several of the adults glare at you.

“It looks like they’re busy and you’re waiting for death to take you so you don’t have to do whatever this is.” you conclude.

“Accurate.” he nods.

“I need to talk to you about something. A few things actually, important things.” you insist.

“We’re busy, I’m sure you can get an appointment like we did.” says one of the adults who you spitefully resolve to not only not remember but also not to note any distinguishing characteristics of at all.

Out of nowhere a large boom sounds and the whole building rocks. People jump but don’t seem wildly alarmed, except for Dahvid who is staring up at the ceiling wide eyed.

“One of those things was ‘I hope you don’t mind but Dirkka has to use his ancestor’s giant fuckoff gun’.” you add.

“Why?! For what?!” Dahvid demands.

“I will tell you if you let me tell you all the stuff I came here for.” you answer.

Your ancestor’s eyes narrow but he sighs and relents.

“Fine, everyone else go.” Dahvid sighs, waving a hand at them. They’re clearly not pleased but instead of directing that at him they’re all not pleased at you. You guess in the tug of war between passive getting people to like you that your ancestor has you beat. You’re ok with that really.

With the chairs around his desk abandoned you sit in one opposite him and pull your feet up onto the chair.

“Explain the gun thing.” he prompts you.

You figure that you should start at the beginning, you explain about the crates, about the money and how you and Karkat were getting money from whoever sent the crates and so naturally that was a
mystery that you all wanted to use your first trip off planet to solve.

“I knew roughly where you were going but no one told me why.” Dahvid admits.

“Of course you knew.” you sigh.

You explain about the adults, about the network of hidden resistance and how that cell don’t like him because of how he killed Darkleer. You tell him how you stupidly got taken out quickly and what Sollux nearly did to himself to try to get you out. You’re sure that your rage and your continued shame at leaving him in that position seeps out. Your ancestor gives you a gentle look and leans his chin on his hands as he looks at you.

“You should have been more on your guard but the Sollux thing… well. I don’t know, he’s like Psii. They’re just like that, it’s always other people first.” he says sympathetically.

“Did Psiionic ever pull anything like that on Alternia when you knew him?” you ask and Dahvid laughs sharply.

“Oh yeah. Biting off more than he could chew, letting his mouth run him into trouble and one time he was a little unstable and started yelling about people being worms and threatening to laser people and Disciple had to basically wrestle him into submission.” Dahvid laughs. You consider Sollux and figure that this has to be some genetic trait your absurd diamond is stuck with, somehow you pity him for it all the more.

“They told us where the crate was supposed to go and since Dionte used to shoot trapped death crates at us all the time we knew we could use his gun to deliver the money so no one has to go without.” you continue on.

“That’s really nice.” he says softly. His approval makes you feel weird in a way you can’t quite parse and that makes you feel even weirder so you just steamroll on without thinking about any of it.

“I wanted to ask you a favour. Or, well, Sollux did. This was more his thing but he seemed like he wanted to just chill for a bit and Karkat was clearly winding up to make stuff primo levels of awkward back at our hive so I wanted to not be there so I guess I’m asking you this favour?” you ramble.

Your ancestor lets you go on without interruption.

“So, like, Sollux stole a whole bunch of treasure from Vriska. Actually I think she was cool with it so idk on where that stands theft wise but he decided he was going to spread it around his home city which is basically lowblood central and he seemed to just think this was a normal thing to do and not a supremely heroic good person thing to do.” you say with a sigh. When you’d asked him later why he didn’t think of keeping it he looked at you with the kind of confusion he’d have if you’d asked why he didn’t think of eating it.

“Anyway, he didn’t get to give it all away but he gave it to this revolutionary musician buddy of mine who’s def. gonna get culled and in return he asked the guy for all of his deets and a mixtape. He was kind of hoping you might get them here, I mean I am too because he’s a cool guy and his band are fun. But yeah, he gave it to me so here.” you continue and fumble the little hard drive out of your sylladex and hand it to your ancestor.

Dahvid afford the device a curious look and casually plugs it into his own machine. It occurs to you that you don’t actually know how the whole process of scouting people to come here works and maybe your buddy is already on the list. If so then no harm done but he’s done you a solid in the past
and it seems fair to repay him for it.

His screen shows a video of the band playing their typical brasshouse work, without you joining in this time the sound of their music plays over some quite frankly sweet speakers perfectly placed around the room. Your ancestor’s face is a perfect mask of neutrality as the music and video plays. You like Too Many Bluez, not just on a personal level because you think they’re good people but because they do fun, creative and bold things with music. But looking at your ancestor you can’t tell at all what he thinks of them.

Are you nervous about what he thinks because it’ll determine if they are allowed to come here or not? That’d be the responsible thing to worry about but you don’t think that’s it. You want him to like them because you like them, to… approve of your taste?

No, no, that’s dumb. You don’t even like this guy. He’s like you but way worse and even if he’s been through a lot of shit and maybe knows things he could teach you to stop your life being bad he, uh, where were you going with that?

“They’re definitely on a cull list already.” your ancestor notes, tapping on the desk with his claws.

“Does that mean they can’t come?” you ask.

“Hm? Oh, no. You were just right that they weren’t gonna make it off world, they’re dead as. But I’ll send this over to the scout guys, check there’s nothin’ shady in their backgrounds or activity that suggests they’re fakes working for Condy to get in here. Standard shit, you know? But if they pass that they’ll be on track to come here. Usually let people age out first unless they’re in immediate danger.” Dahvid explains.

You want to ask if he likes them but why should you care? You shouldn’t ask.

“Do you like them?” Goddamnit.

“Eh, I wouldn’t listen to them by choice but it’s cleverly done.” Dahvid answers. You have no idea if that means he likes them or not, or for that matter why you care.

“Right.” you say.

“Oh, that reminds me. Remember your very stupid idea about sending an absurd message to Psiionic hidden in an image that I absolutely vetoed on account of how bad a plan it was? Well I did it my way, sent a pathetic coded message in the image that Condy would if she found it be unable to resist taunting me with.” he says and turns his screen around with you.

“Oh, that reminds me. Remember your very stupid idea about sending an absurd message to Psiionic hidden in an image that I absolutely vetoed on account of how bad a plan it was? Well I did it my way, sent a pathetic coded message in the image that Condy would if she found it be unable to resist taunting me with.” your ancestor beams with your own smile which seems weirdly disarming to you. On the screen is… uh… a very young purrbeast standing on a troll’s outstretched hands meowing, the text beneath reads ‘IT’S DANGEROUS TO GO ALONE! TAKE THIS!’.

“Is… uh. What?” you say, dumbfounded.

“He sent this back!” your ancestor says, obviously delighted. You look at the entirely random seeming image and then at your ancestor once more.

“So did she intercept it or what? I don’t… what’s this meant to mean?” you ask.

“What? No. It’s a meme.” Dahvid says, slightly offended.
“From when? The stone age?” you ask with only the most measured coolkid smile to the edge of your mouth.

“I’m not old you little shitlord, this is nostalgic. Psiionic was all about vintage internet- look, I don’t have to explain myself to you. The point is he can get messages back and in pretty good detail too. I’m going to ask him for what you need to train Roxxie, so you’re welcome for that.” Dahvid hisses.

“Thanks, I’m sure it’ll really help Roxxie.” you tell him, your sudden sincerity disarming him.

“Tavros was hurt so we had to come back fast, aside from the break of Jayekh and Jayyne molting and Sollux dropping down to Alternia to fetch stuff. We didn’t get a lot of time to spend with the adults, I kinda wish we had.” you say and even you don’t know where you’re going with this.

“They attacked you. You seemed pretty mad about it.” your ancestor points out.

“I am, I’m still.” you shudder, thinking of Karkat’s bruised face and the way Sollux was overly clingy in his sleep afterwards. He whined in his dreams and you kept waking up to worry, he probably doesn’t even remember. You want to crush the people who did that to him but what else is new?

“But the point is they were living ancestors. Jayyne’s, Jayekh’s, Roxxie’s, John’s, Jayded’s, they could have properly talked to them. I’ve been the only person who could do that so far because Dionate’s not exactly talking and what Psiionic did wasn’t exactly a sit down talk so it’s not the same.” you explain.

“It’s pretty rare to meet your ancestors, none of us did. Seeing someone who looks like me as a kid is weird and looking at Dirkka when I can remember Dionate being that age it’s, well, it’s something.” Dahvid nods.

You don’t know where you’re going with this, why did you want to see how other people react to their ancestors when they get to know them? Are you looking for some kind of comparison? Why? What do you want here?

“What?” Dahvid asks slowly, dragging the word out all suspicious-like.

“Nothing, I don’t know. They’re still in the rebellion, maybe we could have… I don’t know. Maybe Roxxie could have got something out of talking to another heiress or whatever, learnt some life lessons.” you shrug helplessly.

“What could you possibly learn from some old failure living on a rock in the ass end of nowhere in space?” your ancestor scoffs.

“What?” Dahvid asks slowly, dragging the word out all suspicious-like.

“Nothing, I don’t know. They’re still in the rebellion, maybe we could have… I don’t know. Maybe Roxxie could have got something out of talking to another heiress or whatever, learnt some life lessons.” you shrug helplessly.

“What could you possibly learn from some old failure living on a rock in the ass end of nowhere in space?” your ancestor scoffs.

“Are you talking about yourself or them?” you ask and Dahvid splutters indignantly.

“You said ‘you’, not ‘them’. Even if you were angling for you plural it didn’t sound like that.” you add.

Your ancestor grits his teeth and a tendon in his jaw jumps under the strain. He’s not wearing shades today at all, he doesn’t always, but he is wearing clown paint in his stupid fake pattern for reasons that you’re going to guess aren’t really all that deep. If you want to be inscrutable to other people sometimes you’ve also got to not know why you do things, you know that.

“Whatever, it’s not like Roxxie has any positive role models. Sollux doesn’t worship the ground his ancestor walked on or anything but it’s pretty obvious he thinks the guy is a solid dude, you know? The only adults we’ve met or known about in Roxxie’s colour before are basically the worst and this
lady wasn’t great. She put us- put Sollux in a glass tank of all things, but she designed and bred
Karkat’s lusus. That’s a good thing, without Karkat around things would be way shittier. Jayded
wouldn’t have had a lusus either.” you shrug, there was a point in there somewhere.

Your ancestor kicks his feet up onto the desk, he’s not wearing shoes so you’re confronted with his
bright blue socks with little burgers on them.

“I’m not saying they’re bad, I don’t know ‘em and I totally get why they don’t trust me. I wouldn’t
trust me if I were them. And I mean this as nicely as possible but I don’t really give a crap about
Roxxie. Like you said, everyone else her colour is a monster and I’ve had far too much experience
with one in particular to feel anything good about her colour. Her whole plan of taking over and
changing shit from the inside sounds sensible but that’s a lot of trust to put in someone. Benign
dictatorship isn’t a replacement for a proper revolution, and I’m pretty sure Signless would hate it.”
he points out.

“You don’t know her like I do, there’s not a bad bone in her body.” you insist.

“Power changes people and that’s ALL the power going.” Dahvid counters.

“Well I don’t know about you but I bet the kids growing up on Alternia would rather have Roxxie
fixing things from a position that probably shouldn’t exist rather than have the Empress now in
charge.” you argue.

“Fair. Besides I ain’t seen any proof that she’s evil and given that Dirkka’s her moirail that oughta
help her policies from getting too cold biased. And if she turns out to be a tyrant I’ll deal with that
problem when I come to it.” your ancestor says with a shrug. That wasn’t really a threat to kill
Roxxie if she turns bad, more like an admission of an actual contingency plan.

“You think this is a bad idea.” you conclude and your ancestor’s clown paint creases a little as he
grimaces.

“Rebellions get people killed.” he says simply.

“So if you could do it all again would you sit it out or try to talk the others out of it?” you ask, well
aware of the room of bones below you. For all the hoofbeastshit your ancestor talks he does know
about the price of rebellion. He stares at you, his eyes all mismatched and you wonder again if yours
will be that way.

“No, I’d do it better. Make sure no one died. But you can’t go back in time so given that I know I
can’t talk you and yours out of it I’m trying to help and up your odds. I sent that message to Psiionic
didn’t I?” he points out. He did, he’s helping, it’s what you wanted. So why do you still feel like you
want something else?

“I’m gonna go.” you say suddenly, getting to your feet. Your ancestor looks at you strangely and
then shrugs.

“At least give me a little notice if you’re gonna fire that thing. I know Dionte never did but it pisses
off everyone who’s recording shit in this building or anywhere near it.” he reminds you. You nod
vaguely and leave. You really should wait for Dirkka but he may have peaced out without you and
besides he’s big enough and ugly enough to look after himself.

That’s a joke, you don’t think Dirkka’s ugly. Man, when he’s not here for you to tease in person it
just sounds like you’re thinking mean things about him. If he was here and you said that to him he’d
shove you or pick you up and hang you upside down like he used to when you were little and
pretend to shake you until you threatened to throw up on his shoes. Without that part it just feels mean.

You let yourself out of the building, noting that it’s got to be pretty rare that anyone is just casually granted this level of access to your ancestor and you feel that itch of something again in you. You wander in the direction of your hive, even though it’s a long walk and try to reason with yourself. Imagine that you’re trying to work Sollux through something like this.

What’s bothering you? It’s your ancestor, obviously.

Some things you know are true about him. He has wonky morals which both is and isn’t his fault, he has the same psionics as you in the cuddlevoodoos department. You don’t want to be the kind of person who could do the things he’s done, things like trollnapping kids or puppeting people the way he can. However you worry that if your psionics get stronger as you age like most people’s do then you may get as isolated as he is and if all the people you cared about were dead or worse you’re not sure that given enough time you’d be doing any better.

You empathise with him but you also think he can’t take back the worst of what he’s done. You can see yourself in his shoes easily enough but you hope you’ll never be there. He’s obviously fucked up and lost a lot and… and he said he wanted to help you not make the same mistakes. Is that what you want?

You just don’t know. You should think about it some more and-

Holy shit look at that midi fighter in the window of that shop! It’s in the sickest rainbow colours, oh damn that looks nice. You detour into the shop real quick and end up spending way too much time looking at all of the cool tech that you’re lusting after and having a play with all of the- wait you were meant to be thinking about your problems.

See, this is why you need Sollux. You suck at introspection, you have to force yourself into it in agonising sessions to realise anything about your own feelings whereas he can just pluck your thoughts right from your head with ease.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

TG: hey are you busy
TG: youre set to idle so
TA: hey ii wa2 totally afk a biit ago but iiif you’re haviing 2ome kiind of crii2ii2 ii’m here
TG: crisis is kind of overselling it
TG: why are you busy
TA: uhhhhhhhhhh
TG: SIGH
TG: vriska?
TA: yeah
TA: but iiif there’2 2omethiing really wrong ii can help
TG: ill hold dude
TG: am i allowed to just put like [insert sincere expression of ‘hey good for you’ here] on account of how whatever i put will probably come off all insincere or whatever
TA: iiit miight be the ‘or whatever’ that doe2n’t help there dv
TG: a valid observation
TA: actually giiven that vrii2ka’2 apparently iintendiing on confrontiing kn iiin a miinute you miight be 2mart to get dili2tracted on your way back here.
TA: ii wii2h ii could not be iiinvolved iiin that conver2atiion that’2 going two be a traianiwreck but ii
gotta, the lea2t ii can do ii2 2pare you.
TG: sollux captor you are a goddamn saint
TA: ii know.
TG: B)
TA: p222h, you think you’re 2o cool. Get on my level.
TA: :
TG: youre ridiculous
TG: <>
TA: <>

turntechGodhead [TG] ceased trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

You breathe in, feeling like a pressure has lifted off of your chest. Even though Sollux hasn’t actually
done anything to solve your problem you’ve got a raincheck for him doing that and if anything he’d
probably say that you already know the answer, he’s just going to help you sort your head out so you
become aware of whatever the answer is.

Your fingers trail over the sweet, sweet music tech that you’re lusting after and you figure that maybe
you could do something nice since you’re avoiding your hive because of impending arguments.
Maybe you should go get your quadrantmates something nice.

Who needs to think about personal dilemmas when distractions are a thing?

Karkat’s easy enough to get a gift for, you just find a bookstore and go in. It turns out that Planet
Hollywood plays host to a good deal of writers and not just of the tv and movie writing kind but
books too, some people are putting out things so subversive that they can only be sold here. So it’s
easy enough to describe Karkat’s taste and extensive collection of books so that one of the people
there can suggest something restricted to this planetoid alone that Karkat has no way read at all.

Sollux is a little harder, you don’t just want to get him food even though you know his tastes there
pretty damn well. You don’t know enough about tech to buy him something and you’d feel pretty
confident that he’d be the same with your musical gear. Actually you remember catching him trying
to buy you a music oriented present right before you got sick and took him down with you. See, for
all his unphased calmness that he tries to put out your ‘rail has got a pretty soft caramel centre, huh?

You manage to find him some cool coloured hair gel so he can have some fun with his current
haircut which you’ve got the feeling he’s not totally enthused about even if he prefers it to having
had his head totally shaved. You’ve got two colours for him to play with and they’re supposed to
show up, obviously you got red and blue because duh.

As well as that you do get some snacks but not for Sollux or Karkat, for Tavros. He’s still in the
hospital, though Equius told you his surgery went well but he needs to rest before they let him go
again. That’s got to suck and you have time to kill. Besides you used to be pretty good friends once
so why not murder two featherbeasts with one stone and go cheer him up?

Tavros’ surgery has gone as well as you heard and when you let yourself into his little recovery room
he’s walking tentative steps from one side of the room to another, though he nearly falls on his robo-
butt when he sees you.

“Dayvhe!” he exclaims.

“Hey man, thought I’d drop by and see how you were doing.” you say. Tavros wobbles his way into
sitting down on a nearby chair and you drag another nearby to join him.
“That’s really nice of you, I, uh, didn’t expect that.” Tavros says.

Uh. Ouch.

“Hey man don’t say that. We live together and we’re friends aren’t we?” you ask.

You used to be friends, then he got way too friendly and you really didn't want to be his friend. Since then you’ve pretty much got past it so you’re friends, right?

“Um. I mean, we’re not not-friends but are we friend-friends?” Tavros asks.

Ah, right, that strange disease known as friendship is one of those two way things. Just because you’re fine with what went down doesn’t mean he is. Deep inside your core you feel the whining petulant need to be liked flaring up and you have to consciously grit down on the reflex to smooth things over psionically, you’ve got to be responsible. You know Karkat says your passive shit doesn’t count because he can still hate you but you know it still greases the wheels and you don’t wanna do that.

So here’s the deal, you and he had a kind of nasty falling out but you’re all stuck together now and you’re on the same side. You could just be polite sort of friends, in the same social circle and nice to each other. Like… like you guess Sollux and Jayyne are. They get on you think but it’s not like they hang out socially all that much and even if they help each other out they’re not gonna be exchanging friendship bracelets anytime soon. You could be that.

“I guess I wanted to see how you were doing anyway. I brought you this too.” you tell him, offering out the sweets you bought like a peace earning bribe.

“Oh, thanks Dayvhe.” Tavros smiles happily and accepts them, a little of the weight on your shoulders falls away.

“I think about that thing you do sometimes.” he admits softly, his claw picking idly at the cellophane on the sweets.

“Thing?”

“The voodooos?” he adds.

“The voodoo that I do.” you say back instantly because you have no thinksponge to mouth filter.

“I mean, yes? What do, uh, you think about it?” you amend hastily.

“I think, uh, that is to say it’s not that I think you’re unlikable without them. I mean you wouldn’t know, right? But, um, I’m aware I took things too far which is why we’re not friends anymore. I was trying to be more confident because I thought that maybe was what you wanted and I just needed to be more assertive.” he says all awkwardly hunching his shoulders up as he talks like it’ll protect him somehow.

“Yeah, no way.” you say flatly.

“No, I-I know that. Obviously that’s my fault but I think, um, it might be kind of your fault too? Voodoo-wise?” Tavros says.

You stare at him and guilt brings up uncomfortable prickles on your skin. You try to remember how to swallow and remind yourself that you’re doing better now. Now you know what you do, back then you didn’t. You almost hear that in Sollux’s voice in your head, or maybe Rohhze’s.
“Yeah. That was probably part of it.” you admit. Tavros nods and relaxes a little.

“I really did want to be your moirail then but I think now that would have been, um, not to be mean but a terrible idea? As in I don’t think I could have handled you, you’re a lot of work.” Tavros says.

“Oh.” is all you manage.

“I get that Karkat and Sollux probably are too, so it probably balances out. Karkat’s such a good person and he wants to help people, he’s a real leader. Well, and Sollux is- he was always just good at things without seeming to try, which I always wanted. I can see how he’s a lot of work too, he kind of attracts trouble too it seems.” Tavros says thoughtfully.

His claws pop through the cellophane and he casually drags a claw through it, tearing it apart.

“I guess what I’m saying is I’m glad you turned me down. Maybe we can be properly friends again.” Tavros smiles.

“You know what? Yeah. I know what I’m doing more now, I can keep things on the level. Let’s do this man.” you say confidently. You don’t entirely feel that confidence but Tavros of all people wouldn’t judge you for that part.

“We’re making it happen.” Tavros quotes back at you and you laugh.

You spend a good few hours with Tavros before heading back, he’ll be released tomorrow so you’ll see him again soon enough. You head to your hivestem and hit the button for the top floor. When the doors slide open you’re greeted to loud arguing. Tensing up you follow the noise and due to the shape of the building you’re afforded a look at the main room. It’s just a slice of it at first, you see Sollux sat on the three sided giant square shape that is the loungeplank. Despite the yelling he’s slouched low on the cushions, his leg bouncing in that annoyed and bored beat that you can spot a mile off. You guess he’s grouchy about the argument going on, it’s certainly not anything else because from what you spoke about earlier and the way his hair is suspiciously messed up at the back you think he ought to be in a pretty chill and happy mood.

“-ALWAYS like this! Why can’t you just let shit go?!” Vriska screeches furiously.

“I am TRYING to apologise here but you are not making this easy!” Kanaya argues back.

“I object! This isn’t getting any of us anywhere!” Terezi interrupts.

Sollux rolls his eyes and you can pinpoint the moment he catches sight of you. His body language changes into alertness as he glances from the ongoing argument to you. ‘Run’ he mouths at you.

‘Are you even paying the slightest bit of attention, Sollux?!’” Vriska screeches furiously.

“You’re acting like this doesn’t involve you!” Vriska says waspishly.

Sollux slaps his hands over his face and growls in pure frustration, from your hidden point you can see how his back arches with it and he even floats off of the loungeplank a little to do so.

“You’ve all been at this for twenty minutes!” he accuses, getting to his feet. Oh wow, they’re really
been arguing for that long?

“We’re not all in agreement yet.” Terezi reasons.

“I don’t care! I don’t want to be here having this stupid argument anymore or be subjected to it anymore! I’m done!” Sollux declares.

“But-” Vriska snarls.

Gleefully you watch as Sollux raises a hand and a giant seating cushion rises up off of the loungeplank, he flicks his hand and it whizzes off out of your view but from the loud thump and the cursing you know it hit Vriska.

“Kanaya, you’re sorry, right?” Sollux asks quickly.

“Of course I-” Kanaya begins.

“No further input, I forgive you I’m going bye.” Sollux says hurriedly and rushes towards you.

“SOLLUX CAPTOR YOU GET YOUR BONY ASS BACK HERE RIGHT NOW OR I SWEAR I’M GOING TO SET EVERYTHING YOU OWN ON FIRE WITH THE SHEER POWER OF MY ANGER!” Karkat yells.

“Run, run!” Sollux hisses, grabbing your elbow. He pulls you both back into the elevator you just left and jabs at the button. When it begins to move he slumps against you, his head hitting your shoulder and one of his horns scraping the metal wall in a way that makes you wince.

“Was that about the Kanaya ashen thing?” you ask, tilting his head with a careful hand on his jaw so his horn isn’t against the metal.

“Yeah, it’s gotta be a federal fucking issue apparently.” Sollux confirms and pulls back. He stretches a little and shakes himself off as if to rid himself of that whole deal up there.

“Has it been like that the whole time?” you ask. Sollux is combing his hands through his hair and you’re struck that at least to you he’s very pretty in the most pitiable way.

“Well, no. Vriska came around earlier which was much more fun and then after she decided that she wanted to ruin the nice afterglow bit by getting in a huge fight with her ex and dragging in her moirail and my- and Karkat too. Massive fucking clusterfuck of issues that don’t concern me.” Sollux complains.

“Yeah, you seem more caught in this crossfire of lady drama if you ask me.” you agree.

“Right?” Sollux agrees with an irritated little noise. He leaves his hair alone and you’re suddenly reminded of your gift.

“Oh, I got you a thing!” you say quickly as you flick through your sylladex and, there! You hand your offering to him, you hadn’t bothered to wrap it because that seems silly.

“What’s… the occasion? It’s not…” you can see Sollux frowning as he runs over any holiday or important date that he could have forgotten, in fact he’s so concerned with it he’s not even really looked at what you handed him.

“I got you something because I wanted to. What do you think?” you ask, and tap on the little tubs of coloured hair products. Red and blue, of course.
He actually does look down at them and you can’t help but delight in the pull of his slight smile on his face.

“I see, you’re trying to make me look cooler, huh? I’m not good enough, is that it?” Sollux says monotonously even as his little grin widens enough that you can see the full length of one of his longer fangs.

“It’s embarrassing being around you, honestly.” you lie with a straight face.

“Understandable, carry on.” Sollux nods and sequesters the gift away in his sylladex.

“You want to go get a drink or something? I think if you go in there again any time soon Karkat may shout so much that you go deaf.” you suggest.

“Good call, lead the way.” Sollux nods.

The two of you leave your building, bumping into each other’s sides every so often as you walk. You have to say that you’re relieved to see him out and about with you. You know helming doesn’t hurt him, not in the way he does it now and you think he even enjoys piloting a ship at least a little, but seeing him like that is so unsettling to you. You far prefer seeing him in the soft daylight of this planetoid walking about with a relaxed set to his shoulders.

“I… saw my ancestor.” you say.

“I did know where you were going.” Sollux says and presses the button for the crossing you’re both stopped at.

“I handed over Adagio’s information. I think he wanted other people to background check him, apparently there’s a whole process but I think it’s a yes.” you say. Sollux lights up at your words, the whole thing had been his idea after all and you’d approved thoroughly.

“That’s awesome! He’s gonna lose his shit when they get here and find out what’s been going on.” Sollux laughs. Yeah, that’ll be some explaining, but that said you bet that it’ll be nice to have more people to hang out with for you and Sollux. He seems to like the guy at the very least.

“And he followed through with your message plan. A different message but still, he got a response back from your ancestor.” you say under your breath, pressed close to his side. You’re aware that this isn’t public knowledge but you need to tell Sollux and self restraint is not your forte.

“What? Really? What did he send back?” Sollux asks as he starts to cross the road, you keep close to him as you walk.

“Some vintage meme, I didn’t get it.” you shrug.

Sollux’s shoulders shake with laughter and he ends up having to float himself across the crossing because he’s laughing too much.

“Oh man, you know what? If our places were swapped, you and Dahvid and me and him and I could finally send you a message back to let you know I was ok and getting your messages I’d probably send you shitty memes too. If you sent me some heartfelt message and you got back loss.jpg you’d know that was me, no one could fake that!” Sollux cackles.

“I hate that and I hate that you’re right.” you groan. He absolutely would pull a stunt like that and you’d completely cherish the dumb thing anyway.
“Did you get to use that stupidly big gun?” Sollux asks when he recovers and starts walking again instead of floating.

“Dirkka did, we figured if we asked his permission first he might say no.” you answer and ahead you spot the coffee place you came to on your first exploration of the city.

“I bet that went down well.” Sollux says, shaking his head.

“I explained, it’s fine. He’s fine with it. He just wants me to let him know if we’re going to use it again ‘cause it fucks up recordings and that.” you answer and pull him into the coffee place.

There’s a break in your conversation, the part you were just having at least, and you shift to coffee shop conversation. Sollux pointing at the food through the glass cover and talking about what he wants, you doing the same and the two of you casually trash talking each others selections. You run into Johnny at the cash desk and you wonder just how many hours he pulls here.

“Oh, hey guys.” he says a little glumly. You give him your order and he speedily runs it through the system and hands your orders off to his coworkers.

“Hey, are you alright?” you ask.

“Oh, yeah man. It’s just same old, you know? Everyone wants to be a star but there’s only so much room I guess.” Johnny shrugs and hands you your change.

The two of you head to the end to wait for your food and drinks and Sollux is warily surveying the tables around. There’s not many left and there appears to be a loud script reading going on at one end and a brewing passive aggressive fight for power outlets.

“To go?” you suggest and Sollux nods. You ask Johnny if you can get all that to go and he says it’s no problem. You watch as he pours your drink and pops the little lid on it, it’s such a contrast from how you saw him on screen. It must be devastating to get here and be stuck doing this when what you really want to do is something so different.

“Dahvid is writing this movie, he needs actors in it.” you say softly to your moirail.

“I hear that’s how they work.” Sollux agrees and you know he’s watching you, even if his face isn’t turned to look at you.

“Johnny’s a good actor, I could ask if he’d see about casting him in it.” you suggest, still quiet enough that Johnny can’t hear you.

Sollux’s grin spreads slowly across his face, showing off his haphazard fangs. He makes that breathy little snickering laugh he does and leans in a little closer to you.

“What?” you ask defensively.

“I don’t know how you ever thought you were some evil manipulator when you care about people you barely know so much. You’re all soft and sweet Strydr, you can’t fool me.” Sollux teases you, keeping his voice down so you’re the only one who hears it but STILL! There are PEOPLE here!

“I- wh- first of all that’s not even accurate. Slander and lies.” you blurt out in your defense. Sollux is unconvinced, only grinning harder now. No, you have an answer for this.

“Big words coming from you. You asked for Adajio’s demo track and you’re the one who was playing financial secret sufferer with hundreds of total strangers. What does that make you, huh?”
you say, grabbing his face in one hand and squishing his cheeks a little to wipe that knowing smile off of his face.

“Uh, order.” Johnny says awkwardly and Sollux squirms out of your grasp and pokes his double pointed tongue out at you childishly.

“Thanks man.” you tell him, refusing to act embarrassed but nonetheless you’re getting out of here ASAP.

You pull your absurd moirail out of the place and try to find somewhere to sit and eat that’s out of the way. He’s trying to insist that what he did doesn’t count as something good, he was just doing… stuff. Yeah, it’s not a convincing argument.

The place the two of you settle on is a support arch under a bridge, although almost all of the water seems to be gone from the river below you for some reason. It means you and Sollux sitting side by side on the metal bar with your food and drinks between you. You frown down at the water as you eat, there’s still this pressure of this idea in your head about your ancestor that’s just not going away.

You’ve tried talking about it before but it’s just not worked out, you don’t understand it enough yourself yet to ask the right question. Maybe you can get at it sideways through weird analogies or something, sneak up on your own stupid thoughts.

“Hey, if you could talk to your ancestor, what’d that be like?” you ask.

“Well you said we can, right? To get Roxxie’s spy work done on the Empress.” Sollux says around the sandwich in his mouth.

“Right, but I mean if he was just… here. Or- or say we do pull this off and like rescue him. Would you hang out with him?” you ask.

Sollux doesn’t seem to give it much thought at all and shrugs.

“It doesn’t work like- you mean in a what if sense, right? Then I don’t know. Maybe. He’s just a guy, Dayvhe.” Sollux says apathetically.

“You don’t think he could teach you anything? There’s nothing you want to ask him about?” you press.

Sollux at least seems to consider that, drinking his coffee slowly before he chooses what to say.

“Hmm, he had some nice code. The locks I saw him undo to get into Dahvid’s network were tight, I’d be interested in the rest of his work. There’s some goldblood history I’d be interested in catching him up on and showing him the whole Dream thing. Not that I think he can be rescued, you can’t really unhelm someone who’s been in a helm that long but theoretically Roxxie could have the ship rebuilt so it wouldn’t suck for him. I’m sure there are people on this planet who’d die to get the chance to helm with him.” Sollux says thoughtfully.

That answer feels wrong and not just because the idea of not being able to rescue The Psiionic is sad. Besides you’re sure it can be done with the people Dahvid has at his disposal. But still, it’s sad. You know, objectively speaking, that The Psiionic is just another guy in the same way that any person is just another person. But it feels WRONG.

“He’s not just a guy, he’s your ancestor.” you tell him.

“Yeah. Many, many sweeps ago he got laid with someone and through the gross miracle of
reproduction here I am with basically his entire genetic code. What do you want me to do? Send him a handwritten thank you note? A woven fruit container with a card saying ‘good job, thanks for the jizz I guess?’ on it?!” Sollux snorts.

“No but he’s your ancestor! So few people even get to know about theirs don’t you think it should- I don’t know!” you say, throwing your hands up in the air and entirely accidentally your half eaten muffin too. You watch sadly as it tumbles towards the water until it flashes red and blue and floats back up.

“Are you done pretending this is in any way about me and Psii? You’re the only one of us who actually chills with their ancestor and I’m not counting Dirkka being anywhere near his zombified progenitor.” Sollux asks flatly.

You take your muffin back, not that you’re intending on eating it with how your insides are squirming right now. You fiddle with the wrapper but Sollux is watching you patiently with blank glowing eyes.

“I have… feelings.” you tell him.

“Oh god, not feelings. What if you get cooties next too?” Sollux snorts.

“Nah, I got a shot for that.” you confirm and cross your finger over your arm to prove it.

“Really.”

“Uh-huh, how do you think I can so safely interact with Karkat?” you point out.

“I’ve seen the results of you ‘interacting’ with Karkat, remember?” Sollux says and he’s trying to keep a straight face but he’s not doing a great job.

“Did you not get your shots as a kid?” you tease him.

“Well, you know how it goes with me and shots.” he shrugs. Oh yeah, that time you got him sick and nearly KILLED HIM.

“But it’s ok, I’ve got a natural immunity.” he brags.

He doesn’t keep the conversation going and you realise that he’s expecting you to drop this diversion and go back to that issue of having FEELINGS.

“I don’t know, I just feel like it should be something. He’s not just a guy.” you mumble as you wade knee deep into this serious shit again.

“It’s not like everyone else where their ancestors are dead or far away. Or only interactable through stolen memories or a one time possession deal in my especially weird case.” Sollux agrees.

“Right, but- ok I know we’ve talked about this before but scrap all that because I’m going again.” you say.

“I’ve forgotten everything.” Sollux nods.

“I think he does bad shit, I don’t totally trust him and maybe he’d sell us all for a chance to get his diamond crush back. I know he finds right and wrong hard apparently but he knows it enough, like you said, to talk about it. No way he didn’t know what he did to us was the worst. I’m also not totally convinced that all this is the most he could be doing and I don’t think I like that either.” you
“Makes sense to me.” Sollux says and pops the top off of his coffee to lick the last of the cinnamon foam from the inside.

“But I also think he’s also… me?” you say and that has Sollux looking at you sharply.

“I know, I know. Just let me finish.” you say hurriedly. “Maybe his psionics at my age were the same or maybe they were stronger. I don’t know. I don’t understand mine well enough to get it. But I feel kinda like he’s me if Dirkka never found me and made me want people in my life and made me care about people, he’s me who did things the easy way and avoided questioning anything. I don’t do that and I’d like to think I wouldn’t have in that situation but I don’t know. But I also don’t think that’s ok, see my whole first thing.”

You set your muffin down and take your shades off so you can rub your hands over your face tiredly.

“I think he fucked up a lot. I think he tried to make it better and fucked up in different ways. I don’t think he’s bad deep down, I don’t think he gets anything out of hurting people. I sure as shit don’t want to make his mistakes and- like- ok it’s like Dirkka. Dirkka sometimes does some questionable shit, remember when he didn’t like you?” you ask.

“You mean the hacking and the death threats? Yeah, I remember.” Sollux says flatly.

“But he’s not a bad person, he just sometimes does stupid shit. I don’t approve of everything he does and he tries to make sure I don’t make his mistakes. When he’d give me advice a lot of it was ‘don’t do this thing I did Dayvhe it’s a bad idea’ and I appreciate that. And I- I don’t know where I was going with that. That I can like people and maybe not like everything they do?” you sigh.

Sollux swings one leg over the metal beam you’re sat on and snatches up the remains of your food and drink into his sylladex so nothing gets knocked off. He rests his weight on his hands as he leans towards you.

“I know just what you mean but it’s not that. Try again.” Sollux tells you.

“What do you mean you know? If you know just tell me.” you whine.

“Nope, you gotta work this out yourself. Why’d you bring Dirkka up?” Sollux insists.

“I don’t know.” you shrug.

“Try harder.” Sollux tells you and reaches out to poke you in the head with a finger.

“Because sometimes he does bad stuff too and I still care about him?” you guess.

“That’s relevant but not exactly it I don’t think. What’s Dirkka to you?” he tries again, giving you the question at a different angle.

“We’re just friends.” you answer.

Sollux just raises an eyebrow at you.

“We are! I- fine, we share the same lusus. Or we did. That’s a connection to Dahvid.” you try.

Sollux is just waiting so you guess that’s not the answer he’s looking for.
“I know it’s a weird relationship but he basically rescued me and he and Roxxie looked after me. I can’t believe you thought we were moirails when you first met him, hah, but you thought Rohhze was too when I mentioned her. Do you remember that?” you laugh.

“Yeah, my pale thirst for you is hilarious. What does everyone say your relationship with Dirkka and Roxxie is really like?” Sollux says all unamused and flat.

“You say they act like they’re my lusus.” you answer and at this Sollux smiles.

“Exactly.” he nods.

“But it’s not totally that anymore. When I was little it was way more like that but the older I am the more it just seems like we’re the same age. We’re still something to each other, we have that history and we shared the same lusus but it’s not… he’s not my pseudo-lusus.” you say, waving your hands as you try to explain the concept.

“Right, you’re closer in age proportionally. He still looks out for you but there’s only so much he can teach you now because he’s not exactly the same as you and a lot of the problems you’re having now are new to him as well.” Sollux agrees.

“Yeah.” you nod.

Sollux scoots a little close to you and watches you silently.

“What?” you ask.

“I’m just waiting for it to click.” he says.

Why did you bring up Dirkka when you were talking about Dahvid and how is your weird relationship with Dirkka relevant to- OH GOD.

“I HAVE THE SAME THING FOR DAVID!” you yell.

“There we go. Knew you’d get there.” Sollux says happily and brushes a kiss to your cheek.

“Oh fuck, I do, don’t I? I don’t like everything he does at all but he’s been through so many of the problems I’m having now that no one else can really get and I super don’t want what happened to his friends to happen to mine so of course I want to learn from his mistakes! I want to know how not to do what he did!” you gasp and clap your hands over your face.

Is this… no, this is so weird. He’s your ancestor, you’re not supposed to really even meet a person like that much less expect them to teach you and give you advice and look out for you like a lusus is meant to. You say meant to here because Cal sure as shit never did that but then Dahvid would actually know what that’s like just like Dirkka does.

“Should I say something to him?” you ask, cringing at the mere idea of having to do that.

“If you can think of a way of doing that without sounding really weird I’d love to hear it. Besides I don’t think you want to let him know that he has more influence over you than he already does.” Sollux mutters that last part.

“Aw, you care. You’re worried about me.” you tease him and scoot even closer to him on the metal beam so you’re knee to knee and leaning into his space. Sollux rolls his eyes and with an effortless flick of his wrist he drags you closer so you’re basically in his lap.
“No shit, this thing goes both ways you moron. Besides I’ve worried you enough lately, it’s your turn.” Sollux says, curling his arms around your back.

Weirdly being close to him like this makes you remember how before you were together you’d feel some kind of way whenever you got close to him like this, you figure you should tell him as much.

“Before we were ‘rails whenever I got all close to you like this I’d just have this confused alarm going off in my head. I wanted so badly but fuck me I had no idea what it was I wanted. I was just obliviously pale for you for ages before it clicked. Now I realise I’ve been having this pseudo-lusus thing about Dahvid without knowing it or even knowing if that’s a good idea. Man, I am just the dumbest troll around.” you groan.

“No you’re not, shut up.” Sollux orders you and then softens that by touching his forehead to yours all sweet and tender like.

“You did just call me a moron.” you tell him.

“I also told you to shut up but here we are.” Sollux points out.

“I don’t know though, not sure I should trust him that much.” you say, just knowing what it was you were looking for doesn’t do anything to tell you if that’s a good idea or not. You’ve still not really got an idea there.

“Well you don’t have to tell him, you probably shouldn’t tell him actually, so you don’t have to decide. Or if you decide one way you can change your mind and he’ll literally never know.” Sollux points out.

You lean back with a dramatic sigh so you’re sprawled on the metal beam with your legs around Sollux so that you don’t slip and fall off. He’d catch you of course but your dignity might not survive the fall. You flick your shades back over your eyes and figure you may as well change the topic because he’s not gonna know what you should feel is he?

“What about your shit with Kanaya, huh? Let’s talk about that.” you say. Other people’s problems are so much better for you to deal with than yours.

“There’s nothing to talk about.” Sollux says, obviously irritated at the mere mention of the topic. You tilt your head up to look at him.

“Sounded like there was enough to be shouting about.” you point out.

“Right, let me correct myself. There’s nothing for ME to talk about. Karkat’s trying to make everyone happy, Terezi’s trying to get either side to just back down and they won’t and Kanaya and Vriska are doing the same thing they’ve been doing for sweeps. I’m just collateral damage. KN apologised to me, I get that it’s not about me, I want nothing more to do with it.” Sollux says and he’s getting more irritated as he talks.

“That sucks, I’m sorry.” you say. All of the tension bleeds out of Sollux in one go and he gives a half hearted little shrug.

“It’ll blow over and it’s not like Kanaya’s trying to steal my spade, it’s just girl drama. Girl and Karkat drama.” he says all casual like.

“Do you want me to check if it’s safe to go back?” you ask and all he gives you in response is a non-committal ‘I don’t care’ kind of noise so you’re going to do it anyway.
turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]

TG: so uh is it safe to come back yet
CG: WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
TG: that huge fight going on in the main room
TG: the one sol bailed from
CG: HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT? DID YOU MEET UP WITH THE TREACHEROUS LITTLE COWARD WHO ABANDONED SHIP AND LEFT ME TO FEND FOR MYSELF AGAINST THESE DERANGED LUNATICS?
TG: i know cause i got back and saw it and he ran off with me
CG: OH SO YOU’RE BOTH TREACHEROUS LITTLE COWARDS WHO ABANDONED SHIP AND LEFT ME TO FEND FOR MYSELF AGAINST THESE DERANGED LUNATICS. GOOD TO KNOW.
CG: ALSO, RELATEDLY, GET FUCKED STRYDR.

“So Karkat says hi.” you tell Sollux.

“What did he actually say?” Sollux asks, clearly knowing Karkat better than that.

“Blah, blah, abandoned him, blah, blah, treason. Also he told me to get fucked.” you mumble as you type again.

“Sounds like Karkat.”

TG: aw
TG: <3
CG: DON’T YOU GIVE ME THAT, I COULD RIP YOUR FACE OFF WITH MY TEETH RIGHT NOW.
TG: ohhh
TG: i see how it is
TG: why dont i just…
TG: <3<
CG: YOU THINK YOU’RE SO CHARMING DON’T YOU?
TG: youre right i should do a poll its unfair to just base this shit on my opinion of me so hold that thought in your sweaty lil hand ok

“Am I charming?” you ask, lifting your palmhusk out of the way to look at Sollux.

“I think we both know the answer to that.” Sollux tells you.

“I’m conducting a poll, for science and Karkat annoyance.”

“Then yes.” he says with a grin.

TG: 100% of people polled find me charming karkat you cant argue that
CG: SOLLUX DOESN’T COUNT.
TG: sollux is people
CG: SOLLUX IS A GREMLIN AND HE WON’T EVEN DENY IT IF YOU ASKED HIM, SO THERE.
TG: its cute when you act like you think hes awful when everyone knows youd disembowel anyone who talked shit about him
CG: WE CAN SHIT TALK HIM, WE’RE DATING HIM. EVERYONE ELSE IS BANNED.
CG: AND JUST BECAUSE I PITY HIM DOESN’T MEAN I DON’T ALSO THINK HE’S AN EMPTY PANNED SUPER GENIUS WITH HIS HEAD SO FAR UP HIS OWN ASS THAT
HE’S AN INFINITE MOBIUS STRIP OF INSUFFERABILITY. HE IS BOTH INFINITELY PITIABLE AND INTOLERABLE BECAUSE SOLLUX.
TG: aw shit im gonna have to screencap this and get it framed
“Karkat’s saying things about you.” you tell Sollux.

“Tell him I can’t hear him from all the way down there.” Sollux says immediately.

TG: i told sollux you were talking about him
TG: he said he couldnt hear you from all the way down there
CG: TELL HIM WHEN I SEE HIM NEXT I’M GOING TO HEADBUT HIM IN THE THROAT SO HARD HIS WINDPIPE WILL COLLAPSE.
CG: ALSO YOU TWO CAN STOP HIDING WHEREVER YOU ARE, THE WHOLE KANAYA AND VRISKA SHOWDOWN FINISHED AGES AGO
TG: really cause that looked set to rage forever
CG: YEAH WELL AS MUCH AS I’M LOATHE TO ADMIT IT, JOHN SAVED THE DAY.
TG: wait really
CG: AND BY SAVED THE DAY I MEAN DISTRACTED EVERYONE SO MUCH THAT THE FLOW OF THE ARGUMENT GOT BROKEN ENOUGH THAT PEOPLE JUST WENT THEIR OWN WAY.
TG: and by distracted you mean…
CG: JOHN SET HIMSELF ON FIRE
TG: what
CG: HE WAS IN THE NUTRITION BLOCK MAKING HIMSELF FOOD AND HE COULD HEAR THE WHOLE THING BECAUSE LALOND THOUGHT OPEN PLAN WAS A GOOD IDEA FOR DESIGN. THEN TEREZI STARTED GETTING HIM INVOLVED AND HE GOT DISTRACTED IN MAKING HIS FOOD.
CG: HE LEFT HIS FORK IN HIS FOOD IN THE MICROWAVE.
TG: oh shit
CG: SO THAT CAUGHT FIRE AND JOHN PANICKED I GUESS AND TRIED TO PUT IT OUT WITH HIS APPARENTLY VERY FLAMMABLE SHIRT THAT HE WAS WEARING AT THE TIME AND SO VRISKA HAD TO CONTROL HIM TO MAKE HIM DROP TO THE FLOOR AND ROLL TO PUT IT OUT.
TG: holy shit what was he doing just standing there on fire????
CG: NO HE WAS TRYING TO OPEN THE DISHWASHING MACHINE WHICH WAS STILL RUNNING TO, I DON’T KNOW, GET WATER OR SOMETHING. HE WENT PAST THE SINK TO DO THAT I KNOW.
TG: john no why
CG: I KNOW, RIGHT? BUT HE’S FINE. YOU KNOW HIGHBLOODS AND INJURIES.
CG: KANAYA IS MAKING HIM NEW AND FIRE RESISTANT CLOTHING.
TG: ok but did someone make some kind of sick burn joke about the whole thing
CG: *SIGH* TEREZI DID.
TG: aw yeah tz my girl i gotta high five her later
TG: thanks for the update im gonna tell sollux
TG: cya later
TG: <3 / <3< / ???
CG: ARE WE GOING TO HAVE TO DESIGN SOME CUSTOM SIGN FOR THAT?
TG: at some point
TG: we should make sollux do it since he and vriska have their thing
CG: OH WHAT THAT THING FROM THEIR DATE? THE >8< <2< THING?
TG: except better
CG: THAT’S MEAN, I THINK THEY’RE DISGUSTINGLY ADORABLE.
TG: is that a compliment
"So," you say as you drop your palmhusk on your chest and fold your hands behind your head, "John set himself on fire and stopped the girls arguing."

"HAH. I’d have paid to see that.” Sollux laughs loudly.

“What? No concern for one of my best friends? He was on fire, Sollux.” you gasp.

“Yeah and if he was actually hurt you wouldn’t be telling me like that you’d be shaking me demanding I fly you there or to the hospital. You not doing that tells me John just fucked up in a hilarious way that I’m sad I missed. Maybe Hal saw it and recorded it, I can hope at least.” Sollux says.

“Damn, you got me.” you admit.

When you return home only John’s pride is injured and the argument does seem to have broken up, you could hang out with the others but Sollux has given you a lot to think about. Sometimes as much help as a moirail is you just need to think things through on your own, you can’t outsource all your decision making to someone else. Because of that you shut yourself in your block and open up your husktop out of habit, balancing it on your knees.

You could lay down some sick beats or draw some shitty/brilliant comics.

Your eyes track to trollian and with one quick message to Sollux you have your ancestor’s handle added to your trollslum, it’s just sitting there all online and shit.

OH FUCK HE’S TROLLING YOU FIRST!

tautologicallyGauche [TG] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

TG: any reason you added me
TG: what a guy cant add his ancestor to trollian without it being a thing
TG: i feel persecuted
TG: you know im a busy dude
TG: most important dude on this planet
TG: you trolled me man
TG: but uh
TG: see! i knew you wanted something
TG: wow fuck off with your ego
TG: might take some time though they can see your ego from space
TG: no shit they can i founded a planet on it
TG: planetoid
TG: oh get lost
TG: i did want something though
TG: called it
TG: look if you keep this up were gonna be stuck on the dumbass merry go round for morons forever
TG: never will we get to the point but we will circle around it over and over until one of us dies the end
TG: are you gonna get to the point
TG: mrrgh
TG: you know what no im cool i can do this
TG: you sent a script to fish face to contact psii right well i wanna see it
TG: why
TG: because i want to
TG: cool but why
TG: because i want to
TG: cool but why
TG: (fyi one of us has a job and one of us has nothing but free time here) because i want to
TG: COOL BUT WHY
TG: (oh snap the caps) because i want to
This could go on a while, thankfully you’re not above cheating. You keep one handed pasting your response back to your ancestor as you pull your palmhusk out and troll Sollux with the other.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

TG: can i get another favour
TA: 2ure?
TG: can i have carries trollian
TA: ii don’t actually have that one
TG: ah shit
TG: so you cant help
TA: whoa whoa
TG: consider me whoad
TG: thats a verb now
TA: look at iit being a verb and everything
TG: i know right
TA: but yeah whoa ju2t becau2e ii don’t have iiit doe2n’t mean ii can’t get iiit
TA: ii saw psii get intwo the network that he made
TA: between that knowledge, the chittr hack ii already have and how fuckiing fanta2tiic ii am ii general ii got thii2
TG: youre the best
TA: ii know brb

twinArmageddons [TA] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

It takes all of five minutes of you and your ancestor shooting the same message back and forth, and you know he must have copy pasted it too but now you’re too stubborn to give up, and then Sollux has that name for you. He really is the best.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling drownedMoonlight [DM]
TG: yo carrie
DM: what.who is this???
TG: its dayvhe
DM: oh i see what do you want?Unless you’re actually trying2 book an appointment for once
DM: Instead of wandering in like u own the place
TG: i feel like i should have followed your chittr before because i would not have guessed your
typing quirk
DM: what
TG: uh nevermind
TG: i actually came to tell on dahvid hes spent the last ten or fifteen minutes arguing with me instead
of working
DM: >:(
drownedMoonlight [DM] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

That might work. You shift your focus back to your chat with Dahvid.

TG: cool but why
TG: because i want to
TG: cool but why
TG: because i want to
TG: cool but why
TG: because i want to
TG: cool but why
TG: because i want to
TG: c
TG: you asshole
TG: haha
TG: what happened to you not manipulating people
TG: only the old fashioned way
TG: gimme that script you sent and ill let your get back to work
TG: ugh fine but only because carrie is giving me looks
TG: again haha
[tautologicallyGauche attached file epVIIvers1.doc]
TG: thanks
turntechGodhead [TG] ceased trolling tautologicallyGauche [TG]
TG: BUT WHY

You ignore that and open up the file. You can see the picture of him flipping the camera off and your
eye can’t detect whatever they put in it to conceal the message, which is awesome. You settle in to
read what little of the script there is so far.

STAR WARS
EPISODE VII
In Which Lookhe Skywal Has Vanished, In His Absence [etc etc bad guys]. General Laiyah leads a
brave RESISTANCE
ifdk note to self insert after or w/e working title ep vii

intro with pretty visuals or some shit something like
PAN across the star field to a bright moon. A RUMBLING is FELT (shit sound dudes drop that
bass yo). A VAST STAR DESTROYER -- unlike any we have seen -- HURTLES PAST US, of
seemingly endless length, eclipsing the moon. After a long beat, FOUR TRANSPORT SHIPS fly
from a hangar. We HOLD ON THEM NOW, as they fly off toward a distant planet. Jakku. MUSIC
BUILDS AND WE...
A GROWING ROAR of MEAN ENGINES -- gnarled RADIO CALLS, the SHUDDERING of a ship's hull. Then FLASHES OF LIGHT: for an instant we see a STORMTROOPER -- then BLACKNESS. Then ANOTHER STORMTROOPER, then it's gone.
The FLICKERING CONTINUES until the LIGHTS ARE CONSTANT. We ARE IN:
INT. TROOP TRANSPORT VEHICLE - NIGHT
TWENTY STORMTROOPERS. Holding on at attention, moving to the ship's rhythm, in the tense moments before a raid. A FILTERED COMMAND and they LOCK AND LOAD their heavy blaster rifles. The BRUTAL NOISE is replaced by SUDDEN, SHOCKING QUIET:
is that #aesthetic enough for you bitch
You sit there for a second, staring at what you just read. Ignoring the title, which really seems to you like Dahvid’s soul isn’t in it, you read the rest again. You’re pretty sure he just slapped this together so he had something to hide a message in but it’s also clear that he’s actually really good at this. In your minds eye you can see the moon being overshadowed by the ship, that menace of scale is just visually stunning even when just imagined. Shitty notation or not he’s already putting thought into music, into using music itself and its absence to communicate things. You look over the part about the storm troopers, he mentioned about seeing one. Is that the same one the whole way through? You’re not an expert on the movies but you don’t think you’ve ever really got any details about these guys as individuals, in fact you think them not being individuals was part of the point. The way they were nothing to the empire is an obvious nod to how the low levels of the Alternian military are basically red, brown and yellow cannon fodder.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling tautologicallyGauche [TG]
TG: tell me about the storm trooper
TG: what
TG: the stormtrooper
TG: you mention one and then pull out to show the others
TG: what were you going to do with that one
TG: ...
TG: ...what did you think i was going to do
TG: i mean i dont know
TG: well you thought it was something or you wouldnt have trolled me would you
TG: well
TG: it made me think of karkat
TG: why karkat?
TG: ugh the whole storm trooper thing is like a big metaphor for the empire troops and lowbloods etc right
TG: i could be pretentiously offended at you boiling large points in my magnum opus series to that but thats too much effort so yea
TG: well dumbass kitkat used to want to be a theshecutioner for survival reasons like if he proved how great he was theyd make an exception about mutants
TG: not in a billion sweeps sorry
TG: yeah dude i know that but
TG: ok so it just made me think like if he had somehow made it through idk sollux hacking or our friends pulling shit and hed actually got there he would be so bad at the job
TG: hes not a wimp and hes gonna fight for good reasons but merciless pointless violence is not his bag
TG: and if the storm troopers are what you set them up to be and were looking at one its like well hes gotta be different right so it made me think of karkat like that
TG: a storm trooper who doesn't want to be a storm trooper
TG: yeah
TG: so what were you going to do
TG: hm?
TG: *with the storm trooper*
TG: oh TG: i dont know i hadn't planned anything beyond there being storm troopers there i was just filling for space
TG: i wasn't singling one out at all it was just a thing to show scale
TG: oh
TG: whyd you let me go on then?!
TG: because thats a REALLY GOOD IDEA
TG: wait
TG: are you fucking with me
TG: not even
TG: come over i gotta do things
tautologicallyGauche [TG] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

You stare at the finished chat and then close and store your husktop away. You gave him an idea? A good idea? You feel- you feel-

“Sollux! Help!” you shout shoving his door open.

Sollux pauses, a sillicombe server surrounded by annoyed bees hovering in the air. There’s also a big hole about the same size as the server in his wall that you swear wasn’t there before.

“Do you actually need my help?” he asks as he tries to carefully move the server into place.

“I- yeah kind of but I don’t think you should really stop that halfway.” you say worriedly.

“Yeah, me neither. If I keep stopping and starting with moving this thing they’re going to be pissed. What’s the problem?” Sollux asks.

“I think I just helped Dahvid with an idea for his movie, he said it was really good and I should go up there and talk about it with him or something.” you say in a rush. Sollux nods at your words and gets what looks to you to be a spray bottle out and floats above the server. He starts spraying around it and the can creates a foam that seems to be hardening as it expands, he’s making it fit his wall.

You also guess you’re meant to keep talking.

“I don’t know what to do and I don’t know what I want.” you conclude.

“You did want him to teach you things, right? So why not go along? If it feels shitty you can just bounce.” Sollux reasons.

“That’s sensible, you suck.” you whine. It’s such an obvious answer and yet you’re panicking and you didn’t think of it.

“I hate you.” you add bitterly.

“Uh-huh. I’m done now. Gonna go wash my hands so I don’t get honey on anything.” Sollux says flatly and you can see the stuff dripping from his fingers.

“Oh yeah? Sure you don’t want to poke it in my eye?” you tease him. Sollux’s eyes narrow and he lifts a hand.
“You’re right, I only did it once, you know two would be better. Now stop being a whiny little grub and make a decision before I do poke you right in the ganderbulb.” Sollux threatens and with that you scarper from his block. Yeah, tough moirail love there, it sucks that he’s right.

Ok, you’ll go but you won’t promise to stay. This is on your terms! You want so hard to just get this over with, you really need it to be ok. You’re all nervous and weird about it and you need things to not be like this, you want to be ok. Aimlessly you wander to the road, you need to get to Dahvid’s but it’s so far away on foot. You should have asked Sollux to fly you, or called a cab or something. You hate this, you’re so nervous and unsettled and-

“Hey, aren’t you The Grand Entertainer’s descendant? You look just like him.” someone says, leaning out of a scuttlebuggy window to look at you.

“Oh, yeah.” you answer out of reflex, they surprised you. It looks like there’s two people in the front and the back is free.

“Aw he really does look like him, look!” they say, moving so the driver can see you. The vehicle has just stopped driving now to be right by you.

“Were you going somewhere kid?” the driver asks.

“I was going to his place actually, I was just walking that way.” you explain. It’s going to take ages to get there and you’re going to worry the whole way, you know it.

“Hey, we can give you a ride!” the adult leaning out the window says brightly.

“Sure! Hop in!” the driver agrees cheerfully.

Shit, that’d be really helpful. The sooner you get there the sooner that you can stop worrying about this. It’s nothing, not a big deal, but the quicker it’s over with the better. Like ripping off a bandage. It’d make sense they’re going the same way, everything in this place revolves around your ancestor.

“Are you sure?” you ask and they both nod happily.

The door pops and so you climb into the back, you already feel a little better that other people being nice to you is distracting you from your concern. The two people in the car chat happily to you about themselves, answering the questions you shoot their way. One’s a bass player for a band and the other is a graphic artist, both things you have a strong enough interest in to chat about.

In no time at all they drop you right outside of your ancestor’s mansion. When you get out you expect them to keep going, but instead they pull a u-turn and go back the way they came. Did they drive out of their way for you? Why would…

Oh no.

You wanted a ride and a ride magically appeared. Not magically, you cuddlehoodoo’d two people without even meaning to. Shit. SHIT.

Ugh, ok it was maybe a ten minute ride and it can’t have been out of their way the whole time. You shouldn’t have done it but as accidental voodoos go that wasn’t a terrible thing to do to someone. Or maybe you didn’t voodoo them at all and they were just psyched to get to talk to the descendant of the most famous man on this whole planetoid. If you had paid attention you’d know but there’s nothing you can do about it now.

See? You’re solving your own problems.
Moral crisis averted you march confidently, alright fake-confidently, into your ancestor’s hive. Mansion. Into his sick-ass tacky mansion that you kind of low-key think is awesome.

The Grand Entertainer’s office is often bustling with people vying for his attention and approval but you’ve never seen it quite like this before. Dahvid is standing in the centre of the room as his subordinates rush to his every command. They have screens, more like huge interactive boards that they’re desperately beaming images to. On another a troll is curating written notes into a digital format on the board and adding to them as Dahvid or other people says things.

“Are you coming in or not?” Carrie asks wryly from her place by the door.

“What…” you mumble as you come in the room.

“No, no, no, ooh maybe, no, ohhhhh I like the sky there but not the ground can we refine the search that way? Do we have any word on Williams? I need his sound.” Dahvid says, rejecting photo after photo of landscape before turning and asking someone else a question.

“It’s the creative process. He’s building the world with images and ideas to inspire him, trying to nail his feelings down.” Carrie explains.

“Wait, gimme cast pics. I want Mark, Carrie and Harris up here.” Dahvid says to one terrified and excited looking staffer who rushes to do just that. You walk closer, your conversation with Dahvid is floating on one board along with a shot of a storm trooper.

“Hey, you’re here. What do you think?” your ancestor asks, gesturing to the room with a sweep of his hand.

You look at him, at your face but adult. He has a frame and form that could be yours, he could be you, or rather you could be him. He wants to know what you think and part of this feels like a test. Like when Cal would push you or try to break you just to see what you’d do and see if you’d do what he wanted. Or how when you first started hanging around Dirkka and you wanted him to like you, you wanted his approval. Long ago you stopped wanting Cal to be happy with you beyond trying to balance it so he’d fuck you up less. You’re also less desperate for Dirkka to approve of everything you do, you do things that you know he won’t like. Not that it doesn’t feel good when he tells you that you handled something well or that you did good, the point is that you don’t seek it out.

You’re so caught up on that contrast, of how you wanted Dirkka’s approval and how that felt contrasted against how you needed to know for your own wellbeing what Cal thought of you. Like Cal your ancestor is bigger and more powerful than you, he’s smarter, older, and unquestionably dangerous to a degree that you’d be stupid to forget.

Is he having the effect on you that Sollux thinks he is, where there are things about him that you admire or want for yourself and so his approval is meaningful. Is it like things were with Dirkka? Or is this closer to Cal’s situation?

Are you seeking the approval of someone with qualities you admire so you can be better or are you seeking the approval of someone who could rip you and your life apart and doing this so he doesn’t? You hope it’s the first, you fear that it could be the second.

Then again as Sollux always points out, maybe kind of both.

So, what do you think?

You swallow the lump in your throat and get closer to one of the boards. You look over a still image of a storm trooper. There’s other pictures, a shot of the ship he had mentioned and more of a desert.
“Is this him?” you ask, pointing at the storm trooper picture.

“Yeah, or a stand in shot until we cast. I gotta get that helmet off of him at some point, do some nice before and after symbolism or something. Individual compared to the ideal unit or- hey write that down would you?” your ancestor says offhandedly to one of his assistants. He pulls over his desk chair on wheels and hops into it next to you, his feet pulled up onto it.

“So I was thinking,” he says and looks up at you from his place on the chair, “a lot of the stuff in the previous movies has had, like, notes of the rebellion in them. I mean obviously it has but it’s not a straight one to one and- some of it’s just fantasy and like…”

He’s waving a hand like he can’t quite grasp the concept he’s going for.

“It ain’t that deep?” you guess and your ancestor laughs, clapping his hands together.

“Yeah, exactly! But you saying this guy made you think of Karkat got me thinking. I don’t want this as a straight comparison either but it makes sense to set this series in the future. I gotta have the main three in it after all and, you know.” Dahvid shrugs.

You glance at the doorway and see Carrie shooting your oblivious ancestor a look. The kind that you know from Rohhze’s face, where you’re digging yourself into a hole and she’s just going to let you keep doing that and THEN bury you.

“The other two were warmer than Carrie, right? In real life I mean.” you ask.

“Yes.” Carrie answers.

“Oh so Dahvid could play you off as being in the same time period but they’ve probably aged, right?” you ask innocently.

“He’s smarter than you, Dahvid.” Carrie crows with laughter and your ancestor pouts at you.

“Kiss ass. MY POINT WAS-” he says loudly.

“Yes, we’ve all got to pay attention to you all the time.” Carrie laughs a little more. It’s fond, obviously, but you’re pleased that she’s at least mostly resistant to doing anything to make your ancestor happy just because. Having people annoy you and make fun of you sure keeps you in your place.

“I’m ignoring you. I don’t want Karkat, but that bit of him you mentioned I do. A storm trooper who had to be there and is suddenly realising that he doesn’t want to be, that’s what we’ve gotta open with.” Dahvid continues.

“Taking the whole expectation and flipping it.” you concur.

“Right, but there needs to be a reason for this to happen now, to happen here. Why Jakku? What’s… what?” your ancestor slumps in his chair and glares at the boards.

Around the room the people helping look uncomfortable. Your ancestor scowls and his leg bounces with tension, his heel jumping up and down as he thinks.

“May-maybe Laiyah’s secret base is there.” a woman suggests.

“That’s stupid.” Dahvid says dismissively and she looks instantly crushed.
“He could kill his commander there.” another pipes up.

“No.” Dahvid sighs.

You squint at him and then you close your eyes and try to keep looking anyway. You can feel it, way more than you ever have before. If you imagine the room to be like the surface of a trampoline your ancestor is sat there putting a huge dip into it, everyone else in the room is sliding towards him. You’re making a small dent but he’s pulling on everyone, he’s influencing them passively. Seeing him do it makes catching yourself all the clearer by comparison. He’s unhappy with this situation and his unhappiness is reaching needily out to everyone else and they’re scrambling to fill that need as best as they can.

“Why are you even making this movie?” you ask him, opening your eyes.

“You know why.” he tells you sharply.

“Alright, I know that practical part yeah. But-” you hesitate, “your last ones were about the revolution, kinda-sorta at least, right?”

“I said that.” Dahvid grumbles. He’s unhappy, it’s your fault and now a lot of the people helping him are shooting you dirty looks.

“So aside from the obvious reasons of you not wanting to make this movie are you pissed about it because it means that if you have to set it in the future and it’s SORT OF about the revolution means that you have to write a movie where you lost and the bad guys won?” you ask.

Your ancestor’s purple and red eyes narrow at you, the idea that maybe this is a Cal thing and not a Dirkka thing flutters through your mind again but you ignore it. You try to at least.

“Fuck you too.” he hisses.

“Well you did. You failed, THEY failed.” you add that last bit with a point to the ground. Below here is the room of bones, where all his old dead friends rest.

Your ancestor’s expression shifts to a snarl.

“You failed and time went on and my generation grew up without you, Alternia’s still shit and even if things are different or better we don’t know about it because the bad guys won and they control what we know. We have Secret Sufferer at Twelfth Perigee’s but no one knows who he is, he’s a myth that people only get vague bits of.” you rush on because running your mouth has always been your thing.

Dahvid isn’t snarling now, he waves a hand at someone until they start hurriedly writing things down.

“I don’t know, I get that this is probably hard because you were with the good guys and then they lost. I get the world where my matesprit could have been made to be that guy.” you finish uncomfortably.

“It isn’t about my generation, it’s about yours.” Dahvid says softly. He stands from his chair and leans over you, his larger adult form towering over you as a sharp clawed hand rests on your shoulder. Dahvid pulls back with paper held in his hand.

“Signless… he used to try to explain morality to me like good and bad. There was strength in doing good, even if doing things the wrong way was easier or seemed more powerful sometimes. The light
side and dark side of the force metaphor was all that kind of thing. We lost, yeah. But Signless’ whole point was that you don’t need a magic destiny to do good, so even if every good character in the last movies died before this one it doesn’t mean that good itself lost. It’s still a universe where someone like that can decide not to do something awful.” Dahvid says softly and puts the printout of the storm trooper into your hand.

“We’re trying it again too.” you agree quietly.

“See? New generation trying to finish the job. That’s a good thing to make a movie about.” he nods.

You look at the anonymous storm trooper, it’s pretty obvious he’d be lowblooded. Some nobody just trying to make something of- wait.

“I know someone, I know a guy. Someone for this role, he’s an actor!” you gasp in excitement.

“It’s a little early for casting yet, and we keep saying he but we don’t even know for sure what gender this-” Dahvid starts.

“No, shut up, just see the guy. He’s made a movie before, I can’t remember the name but it was really revolutionary themed. He’s a rustie, he’s just right for it.” you insist.

“What’s his name?” Carrie asks, holding her tablet in hand. You rush to her side and reach up to type his name into Troll Internet Movie Data Base and tap on the screen to bring his entry up.

“I haven’t seen this, have you?” Carrie asks, turning the screen around to your ancestor who shakes his head.

“He works really close to here, call him in, he’ll be great.” you tell him.

“I’m not going to just hire someone because you want me to. This is a major role in one of my most famous films.” your ancestor says, folding his arms.

“I know that, I’m not saying you have to hire him just that you should at least see him. Please?” you ask hopefully.

The Grand Entertainer, most powerful directerrorist and owner of this entire planetoid looks at you assessingly. He puts up resistance to your hopeful plea but with a sigh he gives.

“Go find where this guy works and bring him in will you? I may as well work on the script a little when this nonsense is happening.” Dahvid says to one of his assistants. The guy rushes to you and you fill him in with the details of where Johnny works and he pulls up his photo on his own palmhusk and then sprints out of the building.

For the half an hour it takes for the assistant to return your ancestor does write some more, he and Carrie also talk about possible shooting locations for the planet Jakku. Carrie plays Dahvid a clip of the movie with Johnny in which your ancestor watches with a completely blank expression. You linger close to the door when you think they ought to be getting back, you want to give Johnny at least a bit of a heads up about what’s going on. Sure enough a very stressed looking Johnny soon shows up, following the assistant down the hallway towards you.

“Just give me a minute, yeah?” you say to him, interrupting the two of them before they get to the room.

The assistant gives you a challenging look and you force yourself to pay attention because you want the guy to get lost so you can talk to Johnny alone first. But, uh, you don’t want to make him want to
do it. Pulling on that same mental image of the surface of the trampoline you can feel yourself making a dent but you’re not dragging the guy into wanting to help you. You could, it’d be easy. You want to talk to Johnny and this guy has basically done what your ancestor asked him to, it wouldn’t be a hard sell to say that to him, the assistant could easily balance the regular request from your ancestor to your actual voodoo’d command to leave you be.

You don’t want to.

“I just need a second.” you say, again voodoo-free.

“I’ll tell him that he’s here.” the assistant says and vanishes into the room.

You turn your focus to Johnny who is wide eyed and honestly a little sweaty with anxiety.

“Hey man, so, you wanted an acting job right?” you ask him cheerily.

“Dayvhe what did you do?” Johnny hisses, grabbing your arms.

“Well, I’m trying to get you an acting job. My ancestor-”

“I KNOW who your ancestor is! He’s- he’s the most important directerrorist ever! You can’t just— I’m not ready for this! I never thought I’d even be IN this building let alone speaking to him!” Johnny panics.

“Hey man don’t worry, he’s a total loser. Good at what he does and shit but a living disaster, it’s fine. It’s just we were talking about this movie he’s doing and this character and I thought of you. Of your movie and how revolutionary it was.” you tell him.

“Oh god…” Johnny groans, rubbing his hands over his face.

You think about what Dahvid said about doing good, about how even though his side lost there’s still good out there.

“You didn’t know about this place when you made that movie, about fighting aliens and how being poor and lowblooded was shit and no one cares. You didn’t think it’d get you up here, didn’t you do it because it needed to be done and…” you should probably stop telling someone else why they did things.

Johnny sighs and shakes his head, the panic subsiding a little.

“I was part of that film because, yeah, it needed to be said. Maybe it’d make someone else get it or admit that things are that messed up. I’d rather have died for that than because some highblood can’t tell what way is up on some war map and gets my rust ass killed in a shit military job, or someone just decides they don’t like me. Sometimes things are worth it.” Johnny says quietly, his worry giving way to subdued conviction.

“Way more people are going to see this movie, isn’t that important?” you ask.

“You- you don’t even know I’m getting the part. I didn’t even audition for this and I don’t even know what I’m auditioning for.” Johnny points out.

“The latest in the Star Wars series, not got a title yet.” Dahvid says from behind you and Johnny goes so pale he could almost pass for adolescent.

You turn and see Dahvid leaning against the door frame, looking Johnny over with an assessing eye.
He pushes away from it and walks toward the frozen barista like some predatory animal, his steps almost slinking. He walks around Johnny, looking every inch of him over. When he gets back to his front he gently catches him by the chin and peers closer at his face.

“Hm. Not exactly intimidating.” he notes and a flicker of offense ghosts over Johnny’s face.

“Hah, there’s a spark of it there though, I like that. But… hm… more pitiable overall. That could work if I spin it different. Decent… yeah look that way, I could work with that profile on a poster. Hm.” your ancestor finishes trollhandling Johnny about and lets him go.

“Come on.” Dahvid says and turns to walk back in the room without a second glance to even check that Johnny is following. Naturally Johnny nearly trips over his feet in his haste to follow your ancestor.

“We don’t have a script for you to read from yet, the character doesn’t even have a name. But the part is a storm trooper who doesn’t want to be one anymore.” Dahvid says airily.


“You’re fine man.” you whisper to him.

“Yeah. I can do this, I can do this, I can do this.” Johnny chants to himself under his breath.

“Comin’ around to that nervous kind of vibe, write that down.” Dahvid says offhandedly to an assistant who dutifully does so.

Dahvid turns around to face Johnny again and looks at him assessingly.

“Since we’re just making shit up as we go along let’s freeform the shit out of this. That’s you, that storm trooper there, you don’t want to be one.” Dahvid says, pointing at the picture that you guess they either stuck back up there or printed out again. The notes that have already been made on the storm trooper are digitally floating around it.

“I guess I wouldn’t have a choice, right?” Johnny says slowly.

“Right.” Dahvid confirms.

He gestures to the desert images collected so far, there have been a few sketches of buildings added since you last looked at it.

“This is Jakku, it’s a sandy shithole and this is where the movie starts, this is where you and the others in your group are.” he explains.

“Is he about to have a moment where it’s do the bad thing or don’t?” you ask and your ancestor gives you a look. You suppose that it’s not decided yet but this question isn’t directed at you, is it? It’s seeing how Johnny gets it.

“That’d be terrifying, if anyone found out he- I wasn’t feeling or doing what I should I’d die.” Johnny says, his eyes locked on the picture now and not your ancestor. Your ancestor is watching him intently, watching his every expression.

“That’d be terrifying, if anyone found out he- I wasn’t feeling or doing what I should I’d die.” Dahvid says. Johhny’s posture straightens a little, like he’s trying to compensate for it. He’s acting, you realise, and it’s subtle but really good.

“I want to hear you lie, unconvincingly. Say… you have to tell someone something to try to get out
of danger. Lie about… being part of the rebellion.” Dahvid says walking around to face Johnny properly.

Johnny looks stressed out but nods, swallows hard enough to be audible to you and looks your ancestor right in the eye.

“Yes. I am. I’m with the Rebellion.” he says, wildly unconvincing.

Johnny coughs awkwardly into his hand and seems to try again, this time shooting for a cooler voice which still sounds massively stressed out.

“I’m with the Rebellion.” he adds, that’s such a bad lie.

“Wouldn’t it be funnier if he actually did both?” you say trying to repress your laughter.

“Yes, good point.” Dahvid says to you and then looks back to Johnny, “You don’t look like you’re part of the Rebellion.”

“I- actually, I do. We look like me. Not all of us, that’d be- uh.” Johnny fumbles and you legit can’t tell if he’s in character or freaking out a bit. The wonders of acting!

“I’m not sold on calling it the rebellion, food for thought. Alright I have script to write everyone get out, I could murder a coffee.” Dahvid groans as he grabs his desk chair with one hand and wheels it back towards his desk.

“The… the place I work at does good coffee.” Johnny says weakly.

“No it doesn’t, the coffee here is terrible no matter what I tell them to do with the nutrition block. I always order out now.” Dahvid says and falls into his chair.

Confusion rests heavily on Johnny’s face and around both of you people are grabbing their things and hurrying out of the room.

“You work for me now. Give people your details or whatever, I have to… where’d I put my goddamn pen? Ugh.” Dahvid is looking over his desk in distraction as he talks.

“It can’t be Rebellion, too on the sniffnode. What if…” he’s still mumbling to himself and you jump when a hand lands on your shoulder. Carrie quietly pulls you both from the room and shuts the door behind you.

“Johnny, come with me to legal, I’ve got contracts for you to sign.” Carrie smiles at the shellshocked looking ex-barista and then turns to you, “-and you can go home and stop making the place look untidy.”

“I’ve seen his block, it ain’t me making anything untidy here.” you point out.

“Well fuck knows I don’t need two of you around doing that.” she scoffs but it feels… good natured.

You wave goodbye to Johnny and start walking out of the building. You think you helped there and you think that your ancestor actually appreciated what you had to say. Not only that but you’re pretty sure you learnt shit in return. That was… it was good.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling twinArmageddons [TA]

TG: will you still pity me when im famous
TA: it’d be a pretty bulge move for me not two 2eeiing a2 how you 2tiill piity me.
TA: ii’m kiind of a biig deal.
TG: i know you have a setting between off and on with self esteem somewhere in there
TA: am ii wrong though?
TG: you did get a whole room full of swag after your surgery to be fair
TA: eheheheheh
TG: id be more offended at the idea of you actually being famous if i didnt know that people actually
treating you like a celebrity on the regular would make you launch yourself into the stratosphere to
get away from it
TA: ii’ll ju2t be a reclu2iive weiirdo
TG: same as normal then
TA: ii ju2t read that out two kk and he laughed iiin my face 2o ju2t 2o you know ii hate you both
TG: nice
TG: <>
TA: <>
Bad Moon Rising - Creedence Clearwater Revival

“\textit{I see the bad moon a-rising}\\I see trouble on the way\\I see earthquakes and lightning\\I see bad times today

\textit{Don't go around tonight}\\\textit{Well, it's bound to take your life}\\\textit{There's a bad moon on the rise}”

‘Bad Moon Rising’ - Creedence Clearwater Revival

‘#2 song for trolls who know three chords and are also kind of pessimistic about things in general’

What do you get when you combine top secret information about the Empress and the greatest technological minds that you know? Answer: a lot of deep thought, frowning and inexplicably a room where everyone is wearing some kind of glasses.

Seriously it’s uncanny. Your ancestor doesn’t always don shades like yours but he busts them out every now and then and they’re always different. These are a cherry red pair that are closest to Terezi’s colour but shaped just like yours. Then Sollux with his bicoloured shades, Equius and Dirk with their respective sunglasses and Hal with his functionally useless ones, then you have Jayekh and Jayded with their normal clear glasses.

“Move, let me see those dimensions.” Hal says, pushing Dirkka aside. Equius leans back so that Hal can get a proper look, as he does a 3d projector that he’d previously set out on the table starts to construct a wireframe 3-D model.

“Tactically we’ve got to include the hair, anything that Roxxie could use to her advantage or could get in her way has to be in there.” Jayekh points out.

“What’s this information?” Jayded asks, pointing at the screen.

“Records it looks like, I guess he’s giving us the means to be sure our bot is as tough as she is. How far she’s fallen without injury, estimated strength of a punch she’s taken without serious damage, amount of blood she has to lose before she starts losing strength.” Dirkka answers.

“We can’t begin serious planning until we get the second half of the data, her actual speed and strength.” Equius nods thoughtfully.

“We can rule some things out.” Hal counters.

“I can start working with Jayekh on power sources, it’s easier if we theoretically don’t need her powered for more than a day or so.” Jayded nods. That’s a point, it wouldn’t be feasible to have such a tiny power supply for Hal or any of the other bots but this Empress double isn’t going to be alive like they are, it’s just a tool and it’s not going anywhere.

“You can’t fake her psionics though and even if I participate and attack on her behalf I’m not as strong as she is.” Sollux mutters.

“Starskip said there’s, what, two people between you and her? That’s pretty damn close and I trust you to not destroy Roxxie, I don’t trust the other two strangers with that.” Dirkka tells him. Ouch, that’s an unpleasant thought.
“At the risk of bringing up unpleasant ideas or alluding to…” Equius hesitates and you can hear his typing quirk in the way he says ‘all00ding’, “you won’t be the robot we make, there will be a delay in how it processes and how she does. It could create weaknesses where there aren’t any.”

“Are you suggesting connecting me to it somehow?” Sollux asks, looking sharply at him.

“Oh no, that’s not happening!” you interrupt, you’re not letting anything in Sollux’s head that doesn’t have to be there.

“Actually, that’s not a terribly bad idea. Not connecting you to the bot but giving you more… haptic feedback. Mimicking heat or cold anywhere that Roxxie has pinned so you can judge what would distract her more accurately. It’s not like we need to simulate pain, I’m taking care of that when I control it, I have programs for that. We also don’t need you right there to do the optic blast thing, one shot from that and Roxxie’s dead. Light sensitive clothing would tell me all I needed to know there.” Hal explains.

“Oh, like VR but instead of visual just physical? That’s fine. Actually that’s definitely been invented, I’m sure of it.” Sollux says, relaxing.

“You think someone’s already invented that very specific thing?” Jayekh asks, his eyebrows climbing over the rims of his glasses.

“They invented virtual internet with their ports.” Dirkka points out.

“Look, having ports isn’t exactly great but, yeah, the goldbloods exploited that to get fully immersive internet. No way in the many MANY sweeps since we’ve had this kind has no one at all gone ‘wow I bet I can make something to virtually pail someone else from a really long way away.’ Not a chance in hell does this not already exist.” Sollux snorts.

“I’m both a little grossed out and kind of jealous.” Jayded laughs loudly.

At your side your ancestor shakes his head in despair.

“If Psii was here he would have absolutely invented that within a week of having working ports, there’s not a single doubt in my mind.” Dahvid groans.

Wow, so The Psiionic is both nasty and creative about it, you’re vaguely impressed.

“What would Disciple and Signless have said about that?” you ask curiously.

“I don’t know what ideas you have about them but disapproval or shame is way down on the bottom of the list of things that would have ever happened. It’s a good thing I liked Dolorosa because there were a bunch of times I showed up and she was the only one available to talk to because the other three were busy with each other.” Dahvid says with a shake of his head.

“Big on the loving part of ‘peace and love’ huh?” you laugh.

“Uh-huh. I’d better go fuck around with the script enough that I can hand another revision in and give Psii a chance to get the rest of the details to us quickly.” he tells you and walks off.

You watch him go and then turn your focus to your friends. They’re having debates about what materials they can and can’t use, whether they should get other people in on the project or if that’s too dangerous. Sollux and Hal are talking code and in all honesty it’s going right over your head. You linger for a bit and then slip out unnoticed. Your ancestor has leant them a room in the mansion for this purpose and Sollux had confirmed that it was more secure than your shared hive. What that
means is that it’s not hard at all to backtrack to find your ancestor in his public office space, not the one in his personal living area.

He glances up at you through red tinted shades, looking up from a tablet on his desk. Getting closer you see that it’s got the amendments that the editors working for The Empress have made and he’s comparing it to his current edition. Skirting around his desk you lean over on your elbows so you can read.

Edit: More bloodsHed here, a good cHance to empHasise wHat the proper results of rebellion are.

That’s a note to the scene where Johnny’s yet unnamed storm trooper is on Jakku for the first time and they’re tracking down a rebel in a village trying to find information and a small skirmish breaks out. It seems it’s no longer going to be a small skirmish.

“Do they actually want you to change it or were they just trying to get that dig in at you?” you ask curiously.

“Doesn’t really matter, I have to make some change to it to appease them either way.” he shrugs.

“If we win and when he gets fixed up do you think he’s going to approve of the network the goldbloods have?” you ask suddenly as your train of thought hops a few tracks over.

“What?” your ancestor asks with a frown as he keeps typing, you guess he didn’t follow you.

“Psii.” you explain.

Dahvid stops typing.

His long fingers rest on the keys for a moment in total stillness and then, slowly, he moves. He reaches up and takes his shades off, turning in his chair to face you. He looks you over but you don’t know what he’s looking for, it seemed like a reasonable question to you.

“He’s been in the helm for a very long time, Dayvhe.” Dahvid says patiently.

“I know that.” you say.

“He- you know I had the system Sollux is using developed as an alternative to that. To make them get out of the helm so it was only temporary, right?” he goes on.

“Yeah.” you agree.

“The other system is permanent.” Dahvid says emphatically.

“No, I know that. He can’t just get out because it’s tangled in, you can’t just unplug like Sollux can. It’s harder, surgical I guess. But you’ve got thousands of surgeons who’d chew their own arms of to get a chance to get him out so it’s not like-” you say but your ancestor holds up a hand.

“PERMANENT. The helm has infiltrated so much of his body that it cannot possibly be separated from him. He isn’t ever getting out, Dayvhe. He’s not stuck in there because it’s hard to remove him, he’s stuck in there because it can’t be done.” he says, his voice hard.

What? You knew he couldn’t just go, that it’d be complicated but you’d assumed it could be done with the right people. That Dahvid hadn’t broken him out before now because it was impossible to do in the timeframe he’d have to do it in. You didn’t think it was impossible ENTIRELY.
Dahvid’s hands tense on the desk and the expression on his face is agony.

“If we’re lucky enough to pull this off, if we actually win and the bitch dies… If that happens then I have to go do something he’s begged me for repeatedly in the past. I’m going to have to go in there and stick my sword through his chest and free him from the hell he’s stuck in now. He can see the others again, he can stop hurting.” he whispers.

“You’re going to kill him?” you ask in wide eyed horror.

“You wouldn’t do the same for your Captor?” your ancestor asks, his expression dead inside. He puts his shades back on and looks back at the screen.

“I have work to do.” he says, clearly meaning for you to leave.

You didn’t know. Fuck, you didn’t know. Does Sollux know? You don’t want to ask him now and risk upsetting him so you’ll wait. You manage to last until after dinner when he’s floating plates into the washer with you.

“When we win this thing and Roxxie is Empress…” you begin hesitantly, you’re alone now so you may as well ask.

“Yeah? Also get the thing from the packet will you?” Sollux says offhandedly and snags a glass from across the room.

You rummage about for the little cleaning pod and shove it in the drawer.

“When she’s Empress do you think we’ll be able to free the helmsmen?” you ask.

“Some of them. The newly helmed ones, but I don’t know how long that timeline goes before it’s too late. I could ask Feelgood to get their colleagues to make a plan for that, it’s a good point. I talked to Roxxie before about changing everything to Dahvid’s system but you’re right we can save some people in the old one too probably.” Sollux nods.

So he knew. He knows that Psiionic isn’t escaping.

You stare at Sollux as he fiddles with the buttons on the washer and your ancestor’s question runs through your mind, could you do it?

Sollux leaves you in the kitchen with a playful little flick to your horn and goes back to his block to write code for the bot. Left alone your insides churn with unhappiness. It’s not right, Psiionic has suffered so much and it seems that even if he wins he loses. It’s not fair, where’s his happy ending to this awful tragedy his life has become?

It doesn’t stand thinking about, or at least you can’t stand thinking about it. So you go and distract yourself, with Karkat specifically. You don’t want Karkat asking you why you’re not yourself so red isn’t really an option. Besides half an hour later with his claws digging into your shoulders and your head ringing from him dropping you onto the floor with a sweeping kick you’re not in a place to think about Psiionic. When things eventually swing back redder because Karkat is Karkat you’re distracted enough that the thought doesn’t come up.

You hadn’t considered the perils of sleeping on that idea.

It’s disorganised in the way dreams often are, your dreams anyway. It’s more occasionally clear images and moments, sensations and the how between those moments sometimes hazy. You couldn’t say where you are beyond a big ship but Sollux is there. He’s strung up in the helm and it’s not the
loose floating way he is in the Millenium Falcon Two, where he’s bathed in light and only a few narrow wires connect him to the helm. No, this is blood and wires like slithernoodles coiled tight around him and plunging into his bare flesh. Something’s modified his body, ripped his chest apart and shoved some clear cover over like he’s a designer husktop. You can see his bloodpusher beating.

He looks at you desperate, crazed with pain and pleading. You stand there, your sword in your sweating palm as you stare frozen and unable to move.

You jolt awake with a scream, scrambling for purchase in the coon. Your hand finds a body which surfaces in a hurry. It’s not Sollux, it’s Karkat, coughing up sopor and cursing you out. He’s not here, he’s not here! His block, he’s got to be in his block, right? You launch yourself from the recuperacoon and nearly slip on the floor when you land but you catch yourself just in time and take off running. His block is right by yours anyway, you burst through the door and immediately spot him slumped over his desk.

With a trollish noise of desperation you fling yourself at him. He opens his eyes with a flare of red and blue, opening wide when you collide with him. Neither of you hit the floor, but that’s fine, it means that you can affix yourself to him as you check that he’s really ok. You run your hand up his back, he’s unconnected to anything. His body is fine. He gently drifts to the floor with you still on him so you can look down at him. Ignoring his look of alarm and confusion you can see that there’s no biowires burrowing under his skin, no clear panel in his chest that you have to get your sword and-

“DV, why the shit did you just wake me up at who knows what time completely naked and covered in sopor slime?” Sollux asks with forced calm.

You try to answer but it’s just cut off chunks of sentences. ‘You’re-’ ‘-I thought’ ‘it wasn’t-’

Behind you the door slides open again and Sollux tips his head sideways to see.

“Explain?” Sollux asks, gesturing to you.

“The fuck if I know, I just got rudely awakened by this assbag trying to drown me.” Karkat growls, his voice rough and raw from coughing.

“I appreciate that you at least put some pants on before coming in here.” Sollux teases.

You push his shirt up, making Sollux give a surprised little chirp. You just need to see the skin there, just to be sure it was a dream. The shirt catches on his grubscars for a second before rolling up past them and leaving your hand on his bare pectoral. Well, not much pectoral, Sollux isn’t the buffest dude around. But it’s skin, warm and soft and unmarked by machinery.

“We both know that’s a lie, clearly you’ve spent your whole life trying to get my bulge.” Karkat grins sharply at Sollux as he crouches down to sit by you both.

“Oh yeah, you got me,” Sollux drawls as he runs a gentle hand over your bare leg, trying to calm you down. You know what they’re both doing, they’re aggressively doing normality to make you relax and to contrast the dream you just had. “my red seduction attempt hinged on setting you up with someone else red then dating that guy and you in totally different quadrants. All part of my scheme.”

“I knew it.” Karkat nods.

You look at him. At Karkat you mean. Your treasonous thinksponge immediately abstracts out from the original nightmare. If Sollux is trapped in a helm, only able to be freed by death then Karkat…
You’ve seen Signless’ skeleton. How the metal of his red hot cuffs fused to his delicate wrist bones, you feel like you can hear the scream even now. It was Signless but it could be your Karkat. This revolution could be crushed the same way and it could be your beloved Karkat howling in agony, crying and begging for the pain to stop.

“Okay, right, let’s not- hey there.” Karkat says gently and pulls your hands off of Sollux. Your moirail sucks in a sharp breath and Karkat pulls you to your feet. You don’t notice that you broke Sollux’s skin, not until the morning.

“I think you should go back to sleep.” Karkat says gently and starts to pull you towards Sollux’s coon.

“Yeah. Yeah it was just a stupid daymare. Nightmare, whatever.” you agree a little numbly.

Karkat pushes you in and slides in after you and before you can wonder where Sollux is your question is answered with the sound of his jeans being kicked across the floor and his screen turning off. He slides in the coon behind you and they don’t make you talk about your horrible dream and you’ve no desire to.

You figure that it’s done with anyway, at least you think that until the next night when you dream of standing in front of a helmed Sollux trying to work up the nerve to end his life. The bad dreams become a solid feature.

You spend the day watching Roxxie work out and train as best as she can without a bot as a partner and that night you dream of her corpse on the floor at the Empress’ feet. You spend time with Hal and Dirkka then that gets you a zombified Dirkka staring at you with dead eyes and Hal’s scattered parts at his feet. Rohhze broken under Jasper’s heel, her blood mixing with face paint to make a pool of pale lavender. You dream of Karkat, strung up with molten metal at his wrists screaming in fury and agony.

Two weeks of fractured sleep and an increasingly worried moirail leaves you sat at your ancestor’s desk drinking strong coffee to stay awake. You’re supposed to be reading the script but the words are just sliding off of your mind. Dahvid is distracted with trolling Harris Onford, apparently he’s not happy about Sollux borrowing the Millenium Falcon Two which seemingly belonged to him and wasn’t really Dahvid’s to give away.

“If you’d known how things were going to go would you have done it different?” you ask finally, setting the script down and just holding your coffee mug instead.

“That is how regret works but I don’t know exactly what it is you’re referring to.” Dahvid answers, still typing.

“The revolution.” you explain.

The typing stops for a moment and then begins again.

“Duh. I’d have been more helpful, done it better, pulled my ego in and protected people better. We could have won.” he says quietly.

“Right, yeah, or you could have made them not do something so dangerous.” you say.

Dahvid stops. He stops typing and for a moment or two he doesn’t even breathe. When he swivels around in his chair to look at you it brings home once again how he is an adult and genuinely dangerous. He opens his mouth, seems to hesitate and then talks.
“I know you think Alternia is bad now but then it was even-” he starts.

“Yeah, I get it. It needed to change. It didn’t need to be them, though. You’re the one who’s better at this, couldn’t you have made other people do it so…” you gesture helplessly to the floor of the room, towards the underground memorial. What you want to say is ‘so a bunch of strangers died and not the people you cared about’.

“I don’t think you know much about how this works. More importantly why are you bringing it up?” Dahvid asks you.

You haven’t really confided much about the details of your dreams to anyone. Sollux and Karkat know that you’re dreaming about people dying, that you’ve dreamt about them and how upsetting it is. The feeling behind it you’ve kept secret, you’re too ashamed to voice it or until now you have been.

“You said about Psii, about how you’re going to have to kill him and wouldn’t I in your place. I keep dreaming of Sollux like that, of me having to do it. I dream about Karkat dying like Signless, of Hal being in bits and Dirkka turning like Dionte, Rohhze-” you shake your head. Your hands are shaking too so you put your mug down on the table. You want to express how horrified you are without outright saying that his past and his life now are your literal nightmares.

“I’m not seeing the future or anything, I don’t think this is magic but it could happen. They could all die.” you whisper.

“They could.” Dahvid agrees, not patronising you with platitudes.

“I can’t sleep and I just… it’d be safer if they just weren’t doing this. I wouldn’t do that though, even if I could live with that and didn’t fuck up the actual doing of it I couldn’t do that to Sollux. I don’t mean that he’s immune, even though he is, I just couldn’t screw with his head after everything. And, you know, if anything would make him leave me that’d be it, Karkat would too.” you add quietly.

“They know the risks, my people did too. Psii knew where he’d end up if we failed and he did it anyway.” your ancestor says, his voice soft.

“I don’t- I don’t think I could live with that. How do you live with that?” you ask.

Your ancestor’s expression is pretty hollow, outlined with old but not very dulled pain.

“You find things. Projects, people who still need you. Spite’s a big motivator. Spending the rest of my long lifespan making things better under her nose and frustrating her is about all I can do, I wasn’t going to leave Psii as the last survivor so dumb attempts on her life were out and Dionte needs me. If everything goes to shit and you end up in my shoes you’ll be the same, people are adaptive.” he shrugs.

“Wow, that’s real fuckin’ bleak.” you say.

“Ain’t it?” Dahvid laughs bitterly and leans back in his chair.

He looks you over thoughtfully for a long moment, like he’s turning some idea over in his head a little.

“You know I couldn’t have just made anyone- I couldn’t have made people do Signless’ job or any of the others just by making someone else want it, right?” he asks, his purple eye looks dark in the dimmer light of this room, you’re here late after all.
“No, I’m sure his way of inspiring people or whatever was pretty unique, I’ve read Disciple’s writing on him. Just making someone else try to take his place wouldn’t have done it, I know.” you nod.

“No, not that. Well, that’s a good point too but listen how did you learn how to do our thing? Did you just work it out or…” Dahvid asks.

You shrug, your hands curled around your mug and you take another long sip. The longer you can go tonight without sleeping and therefore not dreaming the better.

“The passive stuff is always on and I think I did the more active commands sometimes without knowing. Telling people to back off and them being agreeable, shit I just put down to being more intimidating or whatever. But I got formal training from the asshole clowns, that’s where I was when Carrie and the others trollnapped us, remember?” you tell him.

“Right. Ugh, goddamn juggalos don’t have a clue about how this shit really works. I mean it’s helpful as a 101 to getting into someone else’s pan and seeing what strings you can pull but they just don’t get my- get our psionics.” Dahvid grimaces.

“You’re saying juggalos like you don’t sometimes wear the face paint too.” you point out.

“Ironically.” Dahvid dismisses you and wow is it that annoying for other people when you do that? You hope not. Also you don’t want to follow this train of thought because you’d been all painted up when you got here too and people in circus tents shouldn’t throw… uh… clown horns? You don’t know, this metaphor has got away from you on a novelty tricycle and you’re glad no one else can hear your thoughts.

“A word of advice though, well let’s be real this won’t be one word, some words of advice then. This whole plan is dangerous and if no one dies I will be stunned.” Dahvid says.

“That’s not reassuring!” you say in dismay and he just shrugs.

“The point is that if you want those nightmares to be just nightmares you’ve got to do everything you can to shift the odds in their favour. I can’t make people become rebels just like that but there’s a lot I can do, there’s a lot YOU can do too if you’re prepared to do it.” your ancestor says seriously.

“I.”

You want to say no. You want to say that you don’t want to use this horrible psionic burden that his genetics landed you. You’ve seen what it does when it goes wrong and how unsettling it is when it goes right, you want nothing to do with it. But you’ve seen every night for weeks what happens if you lose, your dying friends and Sollux begging you to end the torture of the helm for him.

Let’s be real, there’s a lot you’d do to basically anyone to ensure that horror stays in your head alone and doesn’t become reality. You don’t want to turn someone’s mind to silly putty but if it’s that or your moirol in the helm and your matesprit in molten chains… well.

“Alright but I don’t know how I would, shit I’ve been trying not to do anything like that.” you say miserably. If you tell Sollux and Karkat what you’re doing, if you tell your friends, what will they all think of you?

“I can teach you. I’m the only one who can, actually. I don’t want you kids dead, I don’t want everything I’ve built to fail, I don’t want to let Signless down a second time and I don’t want Psii to watch me die because I know she’d make him watch if this failed and she caught me. I can teach you. I’ll find a way to clear enough time to do it, I’ll troll you about it.” your ancestor says and reaches out to pull the mug from your hands.
“Now go back to your hive and go to sleep already. You look like shit and your tarnishing the Strydr brand of hotness.” he insists and dismissively waves you off. He even turns to go back to typing away to Harris Onford about the ship again.

You do go home, he didn’t make you but your hive sounds like as good of a place to be as any. You slip into the building like a thief and slink around to get a chance to watch. Nepeta is at the stove in the kitchen, Sollux at her side.

“You couldn’t pay me to have an opinion on this.” Sollux tells her.

“Coward.” Karkat says, you can’t quite see him from where you’re standing but the direction that Sollux’s middle finger goes gives you a good idea of his position.

“I agree.” Kanaya says and walks into view. She opens a tall cabinet and pulls several mugs down, you realise then that the mug your ancestor took from you was one of yours and not one of his and make a mental note to steal one from his nutrition block in revenge.

“You saw the movie, you have to have an opinion!” Nepeta insists, still stirring something in a pan.

“Do I?” Sollux sighs.

“The obvious romantic overtones were-” Karkat starts to say. Sollux turns to look at him and suddenly spots you.

“Dayvhe!” Sollux exclaims.

“The obvious romantic overtones were Dayvhe?” Kanaya repeats.

“Sounds right.” Nepeta giggles.

Sollux floats up into the air and flies over Kanaya to land by you. There’s no point hiding anymore so you step a little closer, and now you can see Karkat watching intently.

“You good?” Sollux asks gently, he knows you’ve not been.

You don’t answer at first. Your gaze falls to the others, to this little moment of peace between people you really do care about. This is what you want for all of them, even if it means that you have to be prepared to do things that you’re not proud of to keep it that way.

“Yeah, just tired. What’re you making?” you ask and you allow Sollux to pull you closer to the group.

“Hot chocolate, Nepeta was bragging that hers is better than Kanaya’s so there’s been testing. You missed round one but I’m sure Nep can give you some.” Sollux tells you cheerfully.

“Sure can!” Nepeta beams.

The last of the evening is spent pretty quietly. Half of your friends are playing Chance Based Capitalism The Board Game. Naturally Jayded has the little silver dog and Rohhze has the top hat, you don’t know who else was playing but John is currently hemorrhaging fake money at a dangerous rate to Rohhze and Jayded’s conniving hands. You’d guess from Jayyne’s sulky expression that she perhaps was playing earlier. You end up between Sollux and Karkat who are playing that little fighting monsters game together again, you get a few rounds of Sollux absolutely stomping Karkat at it and then they shift to Sollux leaning over your lap to direct Karkat on catching shiny monsters and filling up his collection index.
It’s nice. It’s nice and with Karkat leaning on one shoulder, Sollux leant over your lap and around you the rest of your friends happy and enjoying themselves you really do have to face it. You’re willing to reach into the minds of other people and potentially fuck them up forever if it means you get to keep this. Maybe it makes you a monster but if you have to become that to keep this intact, you’ll live with that.

When you sleep that night you don’t dream at all.

tautologicallyGauche [TG] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]
TG: room 101
TG: midday
tautologicallyGauche [TG] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

You spend most of the morning cuddled up to Sollux’s side in the coon, you don’t know what your ancestor has in mind but you’re not excited for it.

“What’re you doing today?” you ask him as you feel around the ports between his shoulder blades.

“I need to talk to a guy about that thing he invented that was definitely for fucking and how I can repurpose it for robot fights. Which is… a thing I don’t think anyone has ever said before.” Sollux snickers.

“And Karkat’s… uh?” you don’t actually know what he’s doing.

“Spending the morning with Roxxie, remember? He did say. He’s helping her hammer out her policies for when she wins.” Sollux explains patiently.

Right, that. You remember something about that. Roxxie can’t spend all her time working out for the fight, she’s got to do preparation for her leadership which absolutely will start right after. You’ve just been fucking around doing nothing and tangentially helping to make a movie. Stupidly enough you have a chance to learn to help people and instead you’re in here hiding from it.

“I have to go.” you say suddenly climbing out of the coon.

“Go shower and properly, your hair has gone seriously crazy.” Sollux warns you.

You do shower and he’s right too, the damn sopor was giving you pointy horns of hair in every direction and you can’t have that. If you go out looking like a wreck people will stop thinking you’re cool.

...People do think you’re cool right?

“I’ve gotta see my ancestor, you think I’m cool don’t you?” you ask as you come out of the ablationblock. Sollux is floating on his back in the coon, his palmhusk floating above him.

“Coolest mutant I know.” Sollux answers, faintly distracted.

You pause, considering that accounts for Karkat and your ancestor. A weak compliment but you’ll take it. You hesitate and finally figure that you ought to be honest here.

“I uh,” you hesitate and start leaning over the edge of the coon to look at your moirail, “I might need you when I get back.”

“Why? What’s wrong? If something’s broken I can look at it for you, I know I bitch about being everyone’s tech support but I don’t mind when it’s you.” Sollux says and casually floats his
palmhusk away so he can pay attention to you.

“No, thanks but… I’m going to Dahvid’s.” you say.

“Did he do something?” Sollux asks sharply and sits up quickly, so ready to defend you.

“No, no. He’s going to teach me how to control my psionics. I wanted him to.” you explain.

Sollux’s eyes are wide with shock.

“I thought you didn’t want anything to do with that.” he says.

Oh no, is this wrong? Does the idea of you getting better with your psionics beyond simply knowing how to not use them unsettle him? You wouldn’t blame him if it did after what he’s been through.

“Dayvhe you don’t need to do anything you don’t want to do, if Dahvid is making you think that you have to then he’s wrong and I need to go bounce him off the ceiling a few times until he drops it.” Sollux insists.

“It’s not that.” you say hurriedly.

“How about you tell me what it is then because this is super different from everything you’ve said about your cuddlevoodooos and I don’t like that sudden change. I don’t trust him like that.” he says and moves so he’s leaning on the edge to watch you closely.

You look at him, at the narrow slope of his neck and the delicate collarbones that shift as he leans toward you. There’s a bruise starting to come into mottled yellow fullness on the rounded part of his right shoulder, something that showed up after one of those times when no one could find him or Vriska or especially wanted to look either. You don’t like it but it’s a sign that he’s living a fulfilled life, he’s got quadrants, he’s happy and he’s free. Your eyes track to the glint of gold at his temple and you know just how tenuous that freedom can be.

“We’re doing this thing, this revolution and I can’t stand the idea of being in Dahvid’s shoes. Even if we win he’s going to have to kill his diamond, put Psii out of his misery. If we lose and you’re alive then you end up there, I don’t want that for you and I don’t want to have to make that choice.” you say shakily.

“This is what’s been giving you nightmares.” Sollux concludes, he always was smart.

“I can’t let you go into that risky of a situation unless I’m willing to do everything I can to keep you out of that bad outcome. I can’t hold back because I don’t like this thing about me, I don’t want to use this but if it’s a matter of me scrambling the thinksponge of some other troll or you ending up in Psii’s place then fuck that other person I’m saving you.” you hiss.

“But… you hate it. You hate yourself when you do it.” Sollux says quietly.

You nod. You do, he’s right. If you have to use this thing you’re going to loathe yourself and if it saves anyone you care about you’re going to hate that you’d do it again if you had the choice. You’re writing a blank check to fuck yourself up and you’re entirely aware of it.

Sollux stares at you in… what? Disbelief? Shock?

“You helmed yourself for me, you think I wouldn’t do this?” you point out.

Sollux reaches out and even though he told you to get the sopor out of your hair he still pulls you
He leans back enough for you to look at him and he doesn’t try to talk you out of this. He doesn’t tell you not to risk this for him, one equivalent to what he’s risked for you, he doesn’t belittle your feelings that way.

“I’ll have my palmhusk with me constantly, say the word if you need me. If you want to jam about it when you get back I’m here.” he promises.

“I probably will.” you admit.

“I’m all yours.” Sollux nods.

You pity him so much, no wonder you’re willing to do this for him.

With the forethought this time to call a cab you go to your ancestor’s mansion. Stuck into the now shattered and taped up glass door is a shuriken with a note on saying some shit about being ready.

You’re not in the mood. You wrench the shuriken free and go inside, ignoring the door falling to bits behind you. There is a trail of throwing stars throughout the mansion and you carefully take each one until you find the room that you’re supposed to be in.

“Do you even know how to use these?” you ask Dahvid who is currently sat crosslegged on the floor like a zen master and you’re already done with this shit.

“Well, no, that was more Dionte’s thing. You’re ruining my aesthetic here kid.” Dahvid complains.

“Yeah, I know it’s his thing because they were still littered around my hive when I was a kid. Also he used to send explosive crates filled with the things to us, I hate these things.” you snap.

“Well, can you use them?” Dahvid asks challengingly as if he thinks that it’s his lack of proficiency that’s pissed you off.

“Kinda!” you say with faux cheer and promptly cause a collision in your sylladex, launching every one of them out toward him at speed. He yelps and dives for the floor but when he comes up he’s still got one lodged in his arm.

“OW!” he cries out, yanking the thing free.

“No more fucking throwing stars or theatrical shit, do you have stuff to teach me or not?” you demand, he’s sulkily stemming the bleeding.

“Honestly, you try to put on a little goddamn ambiance for your ungrateful descendant and-”

“T’m leaving.” you tell him and turn to walk out.

“No, no, no! Ok, fine. God, sorry or whatever.” he calls out and you give him an unimpressed look.

“Sorry.” he tries again, saying it with an awkward little cough.

You do not need reminders of Cal or Dionte when you’re trying to do something that you’re already not comfortable with, you don’t need that one bit.
“Sit?” he asks hopefully.

Begrudgingly you walk over to him and sit opposite him on the floor, he’s still keeping pressure on his shoulder and you’re sure he’ll be fine. He walked away from a trident through the shoulder and chest after all, a little throwing star is fine.

“I guess I need to know what you already know, or what you think you know. That’d be the right place to start.” Dahvid says.

“There’s the passive thing that I can’t turn off, I know you have it too because I can feel it affecting people.” you say at first and Dahvid nods.

“It’s good that you’re aware of it and that you can tell that I do it too, yours is weak enough that I have to really REALLY pay attention to find it.” he says.

“Well I wasn’t always aware of it, I only found out about it when Sollux found out about you from Disciple and put two and two together.” you shrug.

“Captors, it would be two and two huh? Still, that’s good. Go on.” your ancestor laughs.

“Then there’s the other kind, the verbal command thing. What I did to Rohhze, what you did to my friends so they couldn’t leave.” you say.

“Yeah. How do you think that works? You said those clowns had trained you but they’re, well, clowns so I don’t trust a damn thing they do.” he snorts, like he isn’t the same kind of highblood as them. Mildly mutated or not he’s the same caste in your mind.

“They’re sort of inside out chucklevoodoos. The real thing is all about preying on fear and making people see or feel what you want them to by yanking on the right bits in their head. So this is like the inverse.” you explain.

“That’s… kind of right.” your ancestor grimaces.

You wait for more explanation and you’re not wrong, he has a lot to say.

“Fear and pleasure are two sides of the same coin. Look at theme park rides, blood sports, fuckin’ all of blackrom basically. It mashes a lot of the same buttons in a person’s head but people respond way better to good things than bad. I make people want to do what I want them to do because doing that makes them feel good. It confirms things they want to be true and reassures them about how they see the world. I can still do the opposite by making it feel terrible if they don’t do what I want but the basic bitch juggalo fear-fest is out of my range and probably yours too.” Dahvid explains.

“The mind has… uh, look let me draw you a thing.” Dahvid pulls out a pen and then gets up onto his knees and draws a big square on the floor before you both.

“So on the top here we’ve got the shit that’s going through your head all the time. Like ‘boy I’m hungry for lunch’, or ‘I think this marker’s bleeding onto my fingers’, things you’re saying. That shit.” he explains and draws a line separating off the top layer of the square and labels it surface thoughts.

“Are there psionics who can fuck with that?” you ask.

“Some, I think. It’s not common though or especially useful. If you had enough time and patience you could probably drive someone crazy, or it could be useful to confuse someone in a fight. Underneath that is your simple drives, basically your moods. So basic happy or sad shit but also
where more biological things come in like being tired or hungry. This is less of a layer that people can fuck with but more something that people can pull on, so if you’re frightening someone it goes through there.” he continues and writes moods there.

“Next you have beliefs and this is where the cool and useful shit is for us. So when I say beliefs I’m talking less about physical shit like gravity more like how we see the world. Uh… give me a statement about how someone sees the world, it doesn’t have to be you.” Dahvid asks.

You’re not sure you’re willing to put something of yourself out there, you are notoriously bad at introspection after all. Try Sollux maybe, or Karkat? Yeah, Karkat is easier.

“Uhhh, what about ‘everyone deserves’- no, ‘everyone should have romance or someone who cares about them’.” you say, it’s hard to boil that sentiment down.

“Oh that’s a good one, ok let me write that down somewhere else. Man whoever cleans this floor is going to be hella confused. Alright, here’s a fun fact, lots of these ideas are like this. They’re very ‘everyone’ and ‘should’ in how they’re phrased. It makes them easy to exploit.” Dahvid says and underlines those words.

“Exploit how?” you ask.

“So here’s how our shit works, when we give a command they hook onto something like this. Some statements are more just things we want to be true or things we desire but some are deeply held feelings about the universe and us. This is the second kind. The stronger a statement is the more power it gives to a command that hooks onto it. I can find something appropriate to attach my demands to most times but you can’t seem to see this stuff yet so you just blunder about and make a mess.” he says.

“So with this person there are a bunch of things you could attach to this belief. If you wanted a positive thing you could wrap an order to do something in the idea that you’re sad and no one cares about you and if they did what you want it’d show you that they care. That would confirm this thing they believe and make them feel good and it makes resisting it uncomfortable because it runs counter to their view on the world. If you wanted to pitch shit at a fear and sadness angle which just doesn’t work as well you can go ‘do this thing or no one will love you’ but that’s suckier because all it requires to fuck with it is for someone to disprove it or for that just to not match up to their actual life.” he says.

“And how did you get so far as to put ‘if I die you kill yourself’?” you ask him bitterly.

“That’s way beyond your skillset and we don’t have that kind of time. Honestly it was dipping into that actual chucklevoodoo skillset, it’s out of my realm but I know enough to have it give my advanced shit some nasty psychological teeth. But that’s not what you’re going to use in a fight, you need to learn to do this to make people obey you and stop causing trouble for your friends.” he says firmly.

“Anyway below the really deep category of beliefs we have deep mind stuff. This is where chucklevoodoos come from, they prey on the fears and reflexes baked into our DNA. Fears of drowning, of heights, disease, injury, pain. Again that’s not certain either, most trolls who can fly aren’t scared of heights one bit and seadwellers don’t tend to fear the ocean. But it’s not exactly hard to find a base fear there.” he explains and scores the last section off. Then he draws a huge semi circle around the whole box.

“This is the body itself. The mind influences the body directly and the body influences the mind. Outside stimuli affects the mood and can upset deep mind things for good or bad. So someone can be
scared because of what their body is experiencing or they can be soothed, dangling someone off a cliff or papping them for example. There are, of course, psionics who can control the body alone or dabble a little in the mind through it. Carrie is like that and I think your Vriska is too, right?” he asks and you nod.

“You can influence the body, telling people to calm down. You put Sollux in a trance for his surgery, remember? But physically marching people about against their will isn’t something I can do and I doubt you can either.” he explains.

You look at the drawn out diagrams and think for a moment. You’re sure that this is a way over simplified view of how the mind works but it’s probably one of those visualisation and idea things where if it helps you know the feel of what you’re doing then you can do it. It’s like Sollux probably doesn’t know exactly how he does the cool psionic shit he does but he likely has a way of thinking about it that makes it happen even if that thing isn’t strictly true.

“So what am I supposed to do with this?” you ask.

“What you’re supposed to do is understand this stuff in here, the beliefs. The deeper a belief you tack a command onto the stronger it is and that can go good or bad depending on what you say and what you intent is. As an additional fun layer of difficulty it’s different with different people. Have you ever had people get obsessed with you?” he asks.

“...Yeah.” you admit quietly.

“Me too. Something like that is, I think, because you put in a ‘you can trust me’ command or too much ‘you like me’ into someone with fucked up psychology. You slap a demand for trust onto someone who believes 100% that people cannot be trusted then it gets twisted into no one but you being trustworthy. Then you have other ideas hanging off of a belief that big and it cascades. It leads to ‘he wouldn’t treat me this way’ and ‘other people are worthless’ except you’ve built yourself in as the only exception to this and this is how you get people stalking you and… well, it goes bad. If you’re lucky you can untangle them before it goes wrong or you can ditch them long enough that they sort of detox you out of their head.” he says with a grimace.

You think of the people who have got weird and creepy on you over the sweeps. Some like Tavros are fine now, you managed to bounce out of his life before he got too bad and your ancestor is right that he’s fine now. Other people got seriously weird on you, but seeing as that’s your fault in a way you hope they’re doing ok now.

“But if it’s someone working for the Empress trying to kill one of my friends I need to not care how much I’m going to screw with their minds.” you say quietly.

“You need to care and do it anyway.” he corrects you.

You nod, he’s right.

“I was doing most of this on instinct for a long time, I worked out what buttons to push. It was like a video game where you’re never told the rules and you just work it out by spamming whatever. I understood more of it when Signless started explaining what people were really like to me. I spent more time watching people, working out why they thought things. I watched a lot of movies, it’s why I like them so much. So that’s your assignment. Pick a movie, any movie and then pick a character. Work out why they’re doing what they do, what’s their damage and keep digging until you get a… a statement like that. Find a belief and bring it back to me, you need to get real good at spotting them.” he tells you.
“But how’s that going to help me in a fight? I’m not going to be able to run some rando through a buzzfeed ‘what does your sandwich choice say about you’ quiz before getting in their heads.” you point out.

“No, smartass, you won’t. But when you know what flavours of fucked up you’re looking for you start to get a taste for it. You can sense it on people without asking a thing, like a super psychological sommelier.” he says, super pretentiously actually.

“Right, well I’m going to go do that. But I have to say this is the worst superpower.” you tell him as you get up again.

“I apologise for my genetics, I guess? It’s useful but it sucks.” he shrugs.

“Like you, later.” you snort and walk off. There’s a quiet ‘hey’ of protest as you leave but you don’t look back, it’d ruin the effect.

You go back to your hive and find Roxxie slumped over the nutrition block island with a protein bar half in her mouth and her head mysteriously wet looking. She’s obviously exhausted and she can only lift her hand a little to wave hello to you. Karkat is unloading the washer and despite him not looking actually pissed off he’s managing to drop clean cutlery into the drawer with an astonishing amount of noise. If you weren’t watching him you’d think he was standing on the counter touchdown throwing it into the drawer.

“You alright Rox?” you ask her.

“Dirkka’s makin’ me do pushups til my arms are noodles with him ‘n Jayyne sitting on my back. I got too tired to eat so I’m just…” Roxxie says and flaps a hand a little helplessly at her whole position.

“She was drying out too so I dumped water on her.” Karkat adds, explaining the little puddle her head is in.

“Karkat I’m the best matesprit ever, I’m sure you’re about to agree.” you brag.

Karkat gives you a look so skeptical that it almost burns you.

“Really? Are you magically not a clothing thief now? Have you stopped abandoning socks under furniture like that magically makes them get clean because no one is looking at them? I could go on. I may go on. If you don’t make a point I will go on.” Karkat threatens.

“Anyone would think you don’t like me.” you pout.

“Alright, I’m going on! Have you stopped being wrong about your choice of proper snack food?” he continues.

“Grubcorn is overrated.” you insist.

“HAVE YOU STOPPED MAKING NIGHTMARE SANDWICHES?” Karkat shouts over you, flailing his arms and sending a few teaspoons flying.

“Those things are nasty. You’re nasty Dayvhe.” Roxxie agrees from the island.

“So you don’t want to watch a romcom with emotionally damaged characters with me and then discuss it at length? Ok, cool, I’ll just go.” you say with a shrug and turn to walk off.
Karkat lunges over the counter and grabs you by the back of the shirt, throttling you a little bit in the process.

“Holy shit are you serious?” Karkat gasps.

“Yes, can’t breathe, Karkat let go,” you wheeze. Karkat does let you go but only to spin you around and grab you by the shoulders. He’s kneeling on the countertop now, looking down at you with wide eyes.

“Oh God this is amazing, I pity you so much this is fantastic. You ARE the best matesprit ever.” Karkat gushes and immediately kisses you.

“Really? In front of my protein bar?” Roxxie groans.

Karkat ignores her and promptly drags you off to his block and grabs his husktop in excited glee.

“Wait, you find a good one I need to let Sollux know that there’s not a crisis happening.” you say and Karkat barely seems to hear you as he scrolls through his digitised collection. He has physical disks too so you suppose the selection process may take some time. You back out of what you’re sure is going to be a choice you regret and instead head the short distance to Sollux’s block.

The door isn’t locked at all and Sollux is sat at his husktop typing away, typing which immediately stops the moment you come in the room.

“Dayvhe! Are you ok? How did it go?” Sollux asks urgently.

“Well, there was some hoofbeastshit with shurikens at the beginning that made me want to leave but after I stabbed him with one he seemed to drop the thing and get to actual teaching.” you admit.

“I could spend all day unpacking that sentence alone but why don’t you just keep talking?” Sollux suggests.

You explain the vague concepts that your ancestor outlined to you and how you’re seemingly going to be trained in spotting other people’s psychological damage, getting practice in first by watching movies and pulling the characters apart instead of real people.

“At least I didn’t have to do the remedial ‘people have thoughts and feelings because you’re not the only real person, Dahvid’ lesson.” you point out, that’s something.

“I only have Psiionic’s memories of Signless but I’m pretty sure this isn’t how he saw that lesson being used. Your ancestor’s a trainwreck.” Sollux says with a shake of his head.

“Yeah, well, I’m not much better am I?” you sigh.

“I’ll be the judge of that. So, you’re just going to watch movies with Karkat?” Sollux asks.

“Romcoms. I figured they’ve got pretty messed up people in them and it’ll make Karkat happy so, you know.” you say with a shrug and Sollux smiles slow and warm. He reaches out and catches you by a horn, affectionately scratching your scalp by it with the tips of his fingers.

“See? You’re sweet, you’re a much better person than your ancestor. This version is definitely an upgrade on the earlier model.” Sollux grins.

You’re dragged into watching a romantic comedy called, ugh, it’s such a long title. Fine. Called: In Which A Well-To-Do Purple Blooded Socialite Loses The Affections Of Her Teal Matesprit For

You set yourself the task of working out what Ehlleh Woohds’ psychological damage is. She’s comically unsuited for the legal system even if she’s smart enough and got the work ethic. You don’t think she’s pushing herself too far though so it’s not as if she regards her performance at her studies to be a direct reflection of her worth. No, it’s something else.

“Why’s she so obsessed with this guy from the beginning? He’s so shit and also dull.” you whisper to Karkat, though you don’t know why you’re whispering. There’s no one else here to hear you.

“She has this big life planned out for them, him leaving ruins everything.” Karkat explains.

He’s right, she’s attached to this vision of their life together. Of them publicly committing their flush quadrant to each other, it leads to this vague sense that if that goes alright then everything else will. She’s willing to uproot her whole career path and life to try to hold onto it, that’s got to be her thing, right? Dahvid said to work out what the idea is, if you were trying to manipulate her then what would be the idea or belief that you could attach that to. Work it out.

i need warner as my matesprit to be happy

Hmm, no, you can do better.

i can only be happy if im matesprits with warner

Yeah that sounds like the kind of thing someone would massively change their whole life for, if they really thought they’d never be happy again without that relationship you can see a person doing something that wild. But can that really be a deep belief she has with how the movie turns out? She ends up with someone totally different and completely rejects him when he tries to win her back.

“Do you think that she really believes that she needs him? She changes her mind after all.” you point out as the credits roll.

“It’s called character growth, Dayvhe.” Karkat says, rolling his eyes dramatically.

Yeah you’re not sure that you’re doing this right. You suppose you’re just going to have to go back to your ancestor and show your working, but at least you know if you keep picking rom coms to study you’ll be very firmly in Karkat’s good books.

You take your results back to Dahvid and you keep getting the same task, when Dahvid starts setting you specific movies to watch and people to pick apart he seems to set you a lot of romance movies too. You guess he assumes that it’s your thing now. It actually does become a thing for a while, Rohhze enjoys dipping into your psychoanalysis and Karkat enjoys watching. It’s slow progress and you’re not getting any practice on real people but you can only hope it’ll come with time.

Dirkka is sick, it happens sometimes but man you don’t know gross until you’ve seen someone sneeze out of artificial gills. The thing is you think someone else started it and it’s basically spread through the whole robo-nerd team. Or, rather everyone but Jayded and Jayekh but you’re not ruling out one of them being patient zero. Poor Sollux is so congested that he can’t sleep in soper so he’s hacking and sniffling in his block alone and sleeping when he can in a sad upright ball of dulled psionics.
Roxxie can’t afford the time to be sick so Jayyne is keeping her at bay and lots of alcohol hand gel has appeared around the hive.

You know Sollux has lost his voice when John loudly points out that Sollux has eyes and he does nothing more than flip him off. He’s right too, Sollux’s eyes are dim enough that you can just about make out his iris under there, or maybe his pupils, you can’t quite tell.

You try to cut down time with your ancestor a little so you can try to be there for him. You’re practicing the things he’s taught you, trying to identify how people think but it’s all theory. Like, you have Sollux’s head in your lap as he catches a fitful few minutes of sleep and you think your hand soothingly petting his hair is about all that’s keeping him under. Yet barely any distance underneath your fingertips is Sollux’s thinksponge and contained within that a whole mess of thoughts and drives that you don’t fully understand. How do you go from analysing people’s thoughts and psychological hangups when you watch them in a movie that’s scripted to work on those to dealing with someone in person that you might not know?

You’ve been petting Sollux’s hair for so long your fingers are starting to feel weird and tingly from the sensation but you’re not going to stop. You just keep petting and zone out a little, your mind still churning on the idea of how this belief thing practically works. You guess with Sollux here it’s easy to think about him.

He doesn’t think he’s worth much, not worth liking, pitying or hating but also he thinks he’s the greatest. He thinks that he’s smarter and more capable than anyone else. He thinks both of those things, they’re equally true but you think they kind of wax and wane with each other. Neither one ever goes away entirely but also one never totally dominates. Your bifurcated boy has twinned beliefs about himself.

Your fingers keep running over his hair as he sleeps, defenseless and protected by you watching him. He’s so…

You don’t know what. It’s a sense of pushing back the inevitable, fighting the darkness however futile. A desperate ‘can’t stop, I have to’ about it. It’s…

Everything end2, everything ii2 doomed. II have two 2top iit.

You jerk back, snatching your hand from his head and Sollux sits up suddenly. You swear he hit you on the way up because your head feels like someone just smacked you in the face with a plank of wood. Sollux coughs and looks at you blearily.

“What?” he mumbles.

“It’s… it’s nothing. Go back to sleep.” you tell him.

Sollux groans and sniffles, leaning against the back of the loungeplank for a moment.

“Everything hurts, my throat feels like sandpaper. I’m gonna… gonna get one of those drinks.” Sollux rasps. Karkat brought back a few boxes of cold medicine drinks and pills, especially the kind Sollux can take without medication conflicts, and all the plague ridden people in the hive have been going through them to ease their suffering.

Without waiting for input from you Sollux shuffles off to do just that and you’re left alone on the loungeplank. You stare at your hand, still tingling from Sollux’s hair. Did you get in his head just then or were you just thinking about his issues? It’s just… that didn’t feel like your thought at all.
You try to push the idea aside and focus on just looking after Sollux, you and Karkat are able to alternate keeping him company and finally getting him at least a short nap in sopor. Karkat has the morning with Sollux so you’re supposed to go to see your ancestor and get your training on but in part you don’t want to go. You don’t want to know if you actually just did what you think you might have done but you also know that if you don’t find out you’ll just assume the worst of yourself.

You’re anxious when you walk through the doors of his office, even seeing that he’s cast one of the remaining two leads isn’t enough to interest you just yet.

“Hey there padawan.” Dahvid greets you distractedly as he reads over some messages on his screen.

Did you do it? Did you get in Sollux’s head? You didn’t mean to. Maybe you didn’t, but then if that’s the case then what was that feeling afterwards like being smacked? He didn’t hit you when he sat up. Maybe it was some errant psionics? His, not yours.

“Dayvhe?” your ancestor asks, his focus on you now and his expression concerned.

You shove the door shut behind you and you look at Dahvid. If this is like Cal- if your relationship with him is motivated by fear of what he can do then you shouldn’t show weakness like this. Cal would grind that shit out of you, make you keep everything on lockdown. Dirkka wasn’t like that, Dirkka wanted to know when things were wrong when you were little. Is this lusus-like thing you’re forming with your ancestor like your experience with your actual lusus or is it like people’s lusii are supposed to be? Like a lusus who cares about your wellbeing and happiness even if they’re strange and sometimes their ways of showing it are weird.

“Dayvhe, what’s wrong?” Dahvid asks, getting up from his chair.

“I think I fucked up.” you blurt out.

“Alright, talk.” he says.

“You said before that you could, I don’t know, feel people’s beliefs. The deep ones about themselves, other people and the world that you can do things with. The kind I’ve been looking for in stupid movies. I think-” you clench your fists.

“I think I did it to Sollux.” you whisper in horror. You’re not meant to go in his head, you promised.

“What makes you think that? What happened?” he asks, clearly trying to project calm.

“I- he was- and-” you blurt out.

“Whole sentences, kid.” your ancestor reminds you. You suck in a deep breath and try again.

You explain. Where you were, where Sollux was, what you were doing. The start of it feeling just like it was you thinking and then it felt like it was him and then he woke up.

“It sounds to me like you’re right. I suppose it would be easier for you getting in his head because as his moirail you’d already know what he’s got going on in there. But yeah, it sounds like you hit a core belief of his, not that different from his ancestor’s ones actually. Psi always helped if there was an opportunity to, even if things were going to stay shitty anyway.” Dahvid says, his words tinged with sadness at the end but he quickly covers it up with a shrug.

“I didn’t want to do it!” you insist.

“Good, don’t.” Dahvid says and returns to his chair.
“What?” you ask, following him.

“Don’t get me wrong, you’re getting the theory down all well and good but not knowing this shit really screwed with how I use my psionics and it took ages to unlearn and refine things for me. I’d rather you get the big stuff right first time. Now that you know what it’s like to get in someone’s head like that make sure you don’t, not until you’re ready to move on to some willing volunteers that don’t have the complex psychiatry your boy does.” Dahvid tells you. You must show some surprise on your face because your ancestor just snorts and shakes his head.

“Please, he doesn’t take prescription psych meds for fun.” he says.

“Is there no such thing as medical confidentiality on this planet with you?” you demand.

“Nope. Not much of any other kind of confidentiality either if it’s something people know I’d be interested in. I get all the gossip, so remember that before you get any unwise tattoos. I will absolutely know and laugh at you.” he grins.

“You’re the worst.” you groan.

“Yeah, I know.” he says with a shrug and a not at all sorry expression.

You really got inside Sollux’s head then. Not some command to make him painless in an operation or urgings to be calm in emergencies, but you got an actual look in his head. He uh… probably won’t like that and you should apologise even though you didn’t mean it. But still…

“There’s no way I hurt him though, right?” you ask warily.

“From just having a look? Nah. But for real though stay out of his head, trolls with psych problems can make things complex. The bipolar shit especially, when they get a mood swing things can get really unbalanced. I always suspected it made Psii more resistant to me, Carrie’s the same way and she’s got a high tolerance for my shit too. But it works. We’ve got an understanding and I can feel when her episodes are coming on, just like I could with Psii.” he rambles.

Wait, could you do that? Could you be an early warning system for Sollux? Think of all of the damage that you could have prevented if you knew what to psionically sense! You’re probably a good way off from that but when you’re at that level you should tell him about it, oh man you’d worry so much less about him if you could tell for sure if something was coming on.

Dahvid seems to realise that he’s wandered off topic and looks at you again.

“Anyway, point being when you are ready for real people I get you trolls with normal brains to start with.” he tells you. Psh, ‘brains’ he’s so highblooded sometimes.

Dahvid smiles at you and you hand over your homework and the conversation between the two of you segues into your lesson on psionics. It feels pretty productive and when you get back to your hive you realise that Sollux and the other plague riddled nerds are up and about from the jarring joint smells of menthol and espresso.

“Nano tubing, it’s got to be.” Hal says.

“Alright bud- are we rudding a reflex AI?” Dirkka asks, his speech totally mangled with how congested he is.

It’s amazing how you’ve been standing here listening and you still don’t really have any idea what they’re all talking about.

“Did you get more information from Psii?” you ask.

“Oh! We did, once us hardware folks agree on materials for a prototype we can get started building.” Jayekh tells you cheerily. Right, that explains it. You guess you’ll leave them to it then because hell if you follow what they’re doing.

Their dorky little meeting keeps going on, to the extent that when it comes time for you to cook dinner with Rohhze (because the dreaded chore rotating device selected you two) they’re all still there talking.

“So, how goes studying under the tutelage of your progenitor?” Rohhze asks as she stirs the pot.

“It ain’t scrabble, you don’t have to get the longest words in you know.” you tell her but she’s still waiting for an answer.

“It’s… instructive. I still don’t intend on using this on anyone except people trying to kill us.” you add that last part in hastily and with feeling.

“Well you hardly see me throwing out voodoos left, right and centre either.” she shrugs.

“Yes, ok, but-” you try to grasp for where you’re going after. You don’t want to be like your ancestor who uses his psionics on people who aren’t trying to kill him! Except, well, your ancestor isn’t bad as such and it’s not like he’s doing things without thinking about them so maybe trollnapping aside he’s not so bad. Also he’s alright and you do admire stuff about him so- but-

Try again. It’s not that you want to be like your ancestor. Well, you’d like to be as good at your creative pursuits as he is at his so in that respect you’d like to be like him. Not to mention you’d be very happy if you grew up with his height, that’d be nice. Or, uh.

“Are you going to finish that sentence or just leave me hanging?” Rohhze asks, arching a delicate eyebrow at you.

“No.” you tell her.

“Did your thinksponge fall out? Should I organise a search party? Perhaps we ought to find magnifying glasses.” Rohhze teases you.

“Oh no, I have ideas. Maybe I’ll tell you. I see you shiver with antici-” you stop mid-word but perfectly quoted.

“I should never have shown you In Which Two Matesprits Happen Upon A Castle Of-” Rohhze begins.

“Oh no, if you say the whole title we’ll be here for hours and you’re supposed to be cooking with me!” you remind her.

The pair of you finish up preparing a passable meal, not as good as some people in your hive but better than others. The smell of cooking food draws the less nerdiest members of your group to the room and the table is laid at almost light speed when Rohhze asks who would be faster at it, Terezi or John.

Across the room the nerds are still hard at work and though the hardware kids are more easily
summoned over it’s the software group that stay put. You and Rohhze set the food out and everyone begins helping themselves.

“Dirkka, c’mon.” Roxxie calls.

“I’ll just help myself to his then!” Jayekh teases.

“Jus- a minute.” Dirkka mumbles, whatever he’s saying to Hal and Sollux is too quiet for you to hear from here.

“Buoy do NOT make me pick you up.” Roxxie shouts and Dirkka groans. He petulantly gets up and trudges over but Sollux is still there.

“Dude, food.” you call, your own plate still empty.

“He’s not listening.” Karkat says matter of factly as he slaps Vriska’s metal hand away from the potatoes with a clang of his fork so he can take them.

“Sollux, you ass. My blood, sweat and tears went into this meal, get up here already.” you call out again.

“Ew.” John grimaces. Terezi just locks eyes with him and makes an obnoxious slurping sound as she licks everything on her plate despite or perhaps because of what you said.

Sollux half heartedly waves a hand in your direction, furiously typing with the other. Karkat gives you an ‘I told you so’ look. Ugh, you don’t like being ignored like this. Fine, he wanted you to practice your fine control before? Then he’s going to see it. Psionically you reach out and grab his husktop, nearly jerking it off of his lap. Sollux flails and catches it and even his physical grip is stronger than your capable of psionically out-muscling. But now you have his attention.

“Breakthrough.” Sollux protests.

“You’ll be as smart after dinner.” you counter.

Sollux huffs a little but gets up. Who ever said stroking someone’s ego never did any good? Is that even a thing people say because no way is that true.

“Ha ha, you need to eat.” Hal mocks him and goes back to working on his own tablet. You know he doesn’t even use it right because he just digitally interfaces with it but it’s a good way of showing other people what he’s doing. Sollux drops into the seat next to you and at least starts grabbing food without prompting. Dirkka looks smug that he’s not the only one who got dragged over here by his diamond. Seriously though you know he’s into this project but everyone else came up just fine, jeez. It’s not like you even get time to talk to him because he all but inhales his food and ditches again to launch himself into nerd shit with Hal once more with Dirkka following right after. Even Roxxie is looking over what they’re doing, she’s as good with code as Dirkka really.

Well, at least he’s distracted from being sick so you guess you’ll leave him to it.

When the next morning comes, you grab food, say goodbye to your friends and kiss your beloved matesprit goodbye. Well, no, ok you don’t do that last one. What you do to Karkat is catch him playing a game on his palmhusk and lean over to sink your fangs into his ear to make him yelp. You just need to track down your moirail to give an actual non-bitey goodbye to him.

His block is a good bet and to your surprise he’s up already, working away at his husktop. He barely
even notices you come in, just makes a vague hum of recognition and keeps going.

“Hey, I’m just-” you pause.

Sollux, in an example of awful posture, is sitting cross legged on his desk chair which affords you a good look at his feet. Which isn’t exciting or interesting typically, except he’s wearing the purple and black bee stripe socks. You know he doesn’t have another pair and you remember him wearing them yesterday because he was annoyed (affectionately) when he found out that you’d stolen and were already wearing the other half of the pair. The thing about Sollux is that, unlike you and Karkat who will get undressed and then the next time you get dressed perhaps wear some of the same things again, he only wears clothes once. If Sollux takes something off it goes in a heap to be washed, which is one of the reasons he’s so easy to steal clothes from. The point is you know Sollux hasn’t got undressed, slept in his coon, and put that sock back on again.

Sollux hasn’t slept.

“Did you sleep?” you ask, knowing the answer is no.

“Mmm.” Sollux says mindlessly.

“Sol.” you say, setting your hand on his shoulder. Sollux actually looks up at this, blinking tiredly at you.

“Pity you.” Sollux says.

“You weren’t listening.” you accuse him faintly, though that was a decent stab at a response for someone who didn’t listen to the previous dialogue.

“Ehhh, no. Sorry I just- I’m trying to get this out before I lose the idea.” Sollux admits, waving his hand at the screen.

“You know it’s the morning, right?” you ask him and watch as his eyes widen a little and he glances at the corner of his screen in surprise.

“Uh. Yes. That’s definitely a thing that I, a functional person, knew about.” Sollux blatantly lies.

“I’ll just finish this part before I forget it and then I’ll catch some sleep.” he adds.

Bluh, stupid moirail. You catch him and smooch his forehead, satisfied with that promise. By the time you’re through the door he’s already typing again.

You figure that Dahvid must be pleased with your work because after a lot of arguing about the psychological hangups of Karkat’s latest romcom offering he declares that you will be practicing reading real living people very soon! The key part is that these real living people have agreed to let you do this to them and as far as you know Dahvid hasn’t made them agree. All in all you’re in a good mood until you get home.

Sollux is still wearing the same clothes. The only proof you have that he’s moved an inch at all is that there’s a plate with a half eaten sandwich on it and two empty cans of energy drink abandoned on the floor. Sollux is scowling at the screen, scrolling up with angry jabs at his up key.

“You said you were going to sleep.” you say.

“Busy.” Sollux says, his chin in his hand.
“You clearly haven’t slept!” you point out, coming closer.

“Did. Loungeplank when this was- earlier version. That one fucking compiled at least.” Sollux hisses.

You duck as an errant bee nearly gets you in the head as it whizzes past.

“You need to go to sleep.” you tell him, trying to herd him out of his seat with your hand on his shoulder.

“DV, I’m trying to concentrate.” Sollux snaps.

“That’ll be easier when you wake up.” you reason, trying to nudge him out of place.

“Go away.” he tells you, leaning out of your touch.

Fine. You reach for the power button on his screen, but your hand never gets that far. All of a sudden you’re a foot up in the air. Sollux flicks a hand at you and you’re set carefully but firmly outside of his block, just in time for the door to shut after you. He just treated you like a spider someone might catch under a glass to release outside.

“Sollux! What the hell!” you shout and pull at the door to open it. The damn thing won’t budge and from the faint coloured glow on it you bet you know why.

Alright, you’re not above telling on him.

You march down the hall and dramatically burst into Karkat’s block. Unfortunately he isn’t there which very much ruins the drama of the moment and sours your mood even further. After some very not dramatic looking you find him on the roof watching Roxxie spar with Jayekh and Dirkka as a team.

“Sollux threw me out of his block and he’s not been to sleep like he said he would, he had a nap at most!” you tell Karkat.

“That doesn’t surprise me.” Karkat shrugs.

You crouch down next to Karkat and give him a worried look, yet Karkat himself seems mostly unphased.

“He needs to sleep, this isn’t good for him.” you say.

“No, but again I’m not surprised. He’s got a new big project, this is how he gets with really big things. He sinks his stupid doubled teeth into things like that and forgets everything else. I threw food at him and I saw him get something to drink so he’s not going to keel over. It’s fine.” Karkat shrugs.

“But…” you look around to see if anyone else is listening but they don’t seem to be, “not sleeping, obsessing over things. That’s heading in a bad direction, right?”

Karkat’s nose wrinkles a little.

“This just seems like Sollux behaviour to me. The problem is he’s always reasonably bad at looking after himself when he gets into something. I’ve seen this so many times and if I’d gone running to his hive every time he got stuck into something like this I’d have moved in sweeps ago. As long as he does start sleeping and still makes sense when you talk to him then he’s fine.” Karkat insists.

“I was trying to get him to sleep and he picked me up like a bug and threw me outside!” you tell him
and you’re still kind of offended at that.

“Ah,” Karkat nods sagely, “that’s just because he’s an asshole.”

It’s not news to you that Sollux can sometimes be an asshole. You’re sometimes an asshole, as is Karkat, it’s a reasonably well distributed state of being in your little triangle. This seems out of line for him though and as much as you want to trust Karkat’s words you can’t help but worry.

Sollux does appear for dinner, though he seems to eat without noticing it and spends the whole time talking to Hal and Dirkka about what he’s finally got working, then the hardware people start updating the software trio about what they’ve been planning and that seems to change something in Sollux’s work somehow because he gets up with a scowl while grumbling about having to change things.

He didn’t finish his food either.

Worry is starting to rise in you but Karkat urges you to wait and sure enough just as you’re considering going to sleep yourself a very tired looking Sollux comes into Karkat’s block and sleepily showers before damn near dropping face down into Karkat’s coon and passing out almost instantly.

“See? He sleeps.” Karkat says, gesturing to him and then marking his place in his book.

Right, he has to be ok because he’s sleeping. Right?

You brush your teeth with Karkat at your side and eye the medication strip that Sollux has abandoned on Karkat’s little shelf under his mirror. He’s got four days left in this one. You’re not worried about him running out, there’s an automated system for that, but you want to make sure he’s taking what he should. This strip at least wasn’t here earlier so you’re pretty sure he took them today, it’d be weird for him to have just abandoned them there without taking them.

Since Karkat isn’t multi-tasking worrying and cleaning his unthreatening teeth he goes off to get into the coon before you’re done. You can hear him quietly telling Sollux off for sleeping like a starfish and taking up all of the space. When you climb in with them Sollux sleepily and affectionately chirps at you both and goes back to being asleep right after.

It takes a little while for you to drop off to sleep but you’re tired and pretty irritated when you’re woken up in the small hours of the morning by someone moving around. See, that’s the downside of sharing a coon with other people, if one of you has to get up to pee or if Karkat starts thrashing around in his sleep you all know about it.

“I can netht them, augh!” Sollux hisses in the dark, he’s so not awake that his lisp is crazy thick right now. You half expect him, having had this revelation, to fall back asleep but no. Sollux climbs out and you lean up to look at him.

“Dude, what?” You whine.

“Oh no, sorry. Shooosh. Shhhh.” Sollux shooshes you softly and paps your face with smoothness and ease, it’s enough that you slide right back into sleep without meaning to and you don’t wake up until your alarm hours later.

“I’m gonna rip off your arms why do you have an ALARM?” Karkat whines, slapping weakly at your bare back until you start moving to shut the thing off. You turn it off and Karkat goes back to mere unintelligible grumbling. You rest your elbows on the edge of the recuperacoon and frown, you remember Sollux getting up in the middle of the night so where is he now? He clearly didn’t come
back.

You shower, dress and head to Sollux’s block warm and comfy in a stolen Karkat sweater. The door slides open easily and, yeah, there he is sat in his desk chair again typing away with speed. He’s got his ankles crossed under his chair and one of his bare feet is basically vibrating with how fast he’s fidgeting.

“Have you not been back to sleep?” you ask.

“Uh.” Sollux turns to look at you, seemingly he didn’t hear you come in.

“I had a breakthrough, you were asleep again when I left. I didn’t wake you did I? What time is- oh. Well I’m already up I guess.” Sollux mumbles as he looks at the very obvious daylight outside the window.

“Do you want to come eat breakfast at least?” you sigh.

“Yeah just… just one sec.” Sollux says and twists back to his keyboard. To his credit he does only type for a minute more before getting up with an overarm stretch that pops his back a few times and causes a fizzle of blue sparks to crackle around one horn.

“I really think it’s gonna work now.” he says happily as he comes closer to you.

“What are you even doing? I know it’s to do with the Empress robot-”

“We’re going with Project Condybot right now.” Sollux interrupts.

“…right. So what are you doing?” you ask and walk out with him.

“Ok, so she’s going to be partly controlled by Hal but that’s no good because if we wanted Hal to fight Roxxie with a more hardcore body that’s be a snap and no one would need me involved at all. I’m designing the programming that’ll interface between the scraped data categorised by-” Sollux pauses and looks at you. He very visibly hesitates and squints at you and you realise that he’s mentally dumbing down what he’s about to say for your benefit which, ouch.

“You know fighting games, like Mortal Kombat?” he tries.

“That vanilla fight game, yeah.” you scoff, that’s a kiddy game. So low in violence.

“Right, but you can’t do just ANYTHING in that game, right? No matter how good a player you are you’re limited by the predetermined moveset of the character you play. Me, Hal and Dirkka are categorising the Empress’ fight style into fixed patterns, very detailed and pretty flexible ones mind, and translating that into habitual determined movements with the body the others are building. That way when Hal controls Condybot he won’t fight like Hal, he’ll fight like her. He’ll just be acting as the game player.” Sollux explains and leans against the kitchen counters.

“That sounds really difficult.” you say with a frown.

“That’s really hard! But I like it, it’s a good challenge. Besides Dirkka and Hal are actually pretty good to work with and I’ve never worked with other software people before, I thought it’d suck because let’s be real I’m the best, but they both come up with things I wouldn’t have thought of. Collaboration, who knew!” Sollux beams.

“So you’re not going to be plugging into this thing anymore?” you ask, you’d never liked that part of the plan.
“No, she’d just fight like me if we did that. This moveset thing and Hal playing was the better solution.” Sollux explains. Thank goodness.

“That’s good but the sleeping and eating thing is important too.” you remind him and can’t help but feel like you’re nagging but these are vital life sustaining things.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m sorry.” Sollux says dismissively. He hops the counter and starts coffee going, you leave the toaster unsupervised and sneak over to wrap your arms around him.

“How’s the stuff with your ancestor?” Sollux asks, psionically setting mugs out for you both.

“Yeah. He’s cast a guy Carrie found for the second lead, the pilot guy. We’re just waiting for one last one.” you tell him and rub your cheek on his back, feeling the body heated warmth of one of his ports across your cheekbone.

“Going for three like the originals, huh?” Sollux nods and the coffee machine pings.

“Yeah. And the other stuff is still theory, talking movies or whatever.” you shrug. Sollux shifts out of your grip so he can turn around and hand you the sweet coffee you both crave.

About the lessons, you really ought to tell him about sneaking a peek into his head that one time. You still haven’t got to it yet.

“Dirkka! I made a bunch of progress this morning, well, I woke up in the middle of the night but still.” Sollux says brightly, spying Dirkka walking in.

“Oh hell yes. I was having a thought this morning in the shower about gills like mine, they’re a weakness and we should absolutely fit them so Roxxie can look at exploiting that. Fishtrolls don’t like going for the gills, like how people shy away from punting someone else right in the bone bulge you know? But Rox shouldn’t hold back.” Dirkka says firmly.

“For sure. Wait- actually do you think we can calculate her stamina? How much oxygen she’s bringing in and see if maybe there might be an endurance factor we can program in? Roxxie’s younger after all so that might run in her favour, unless more experience makes it harder?” Sollux frowns.

“Huh, that’s a good idea. Simulated fatigue, I don’t think Psii sent us that information but he ought to be able to get it, right? He makes the air on the ship so theoretically…?” Dirkka muses.

“I don’t know the details of the ship and what data Psiionic has access to, we could check and then ask in the next message.” he says.

“Yeah, come on.” Dirkka nods and before you can say anything they’ve both left the room.

The toaster pops. Breakfast for you but it seems like Sollux isn’t interested in his. Your quiet growl echoes around the now empty room and it isn’t at all muffled by the toast you shove in your mouth or the agitated walk to your ancestor’s place. You’re only really brought back to yourself when a girl calls out to you just as you’re about to go into the building.

“Hey! Do you work here?” she calls.

You pause and look over at the girl. She’s basically Roxxie’s age but how skinny she is makes her look younger, she’s hurrying over to you with her rusty red shirt flapping in the air as she moves.

“Uh?” you say dumbly.
“Do you work here? I mean you’re just a kid, I didn’t even know kids could be here but I’ve been here a week so what do I know, it’s just you were walking to the doors like you knew you could get in and I can’t.” the girl says in a hurry.

“Oh, right. I’ve got a thing, it lets me in.” you say, showing her the bracelet that Dayvhe gave you.

“Ah, maybe the agents have those. I don’t have one yet but… do you need agents to get roles? On Alternia I just showed up to places myself but I don’t know how it works here, I know this is the main guy’s place but I don’t even know what he looks like. I’m… oh man, I might be in over my head.” she says in a nervous rush.

“No, hey, it’s ok. I’ll let you in with me if you want. I’m Dayvhe.” you introduce yourself, holding out your hand.

“Daisey.” she says with a smile and shakes yours.

She opens her mouth to say something else but someone else calls your name.

“Dayvhe! Hey!”

You turn and see Johnny hurrying up to you.

“Hey Johnny. Oh, you’d know this. Do you need agents, as in are they mandatory?” you ask him.

“Mine ditched me before I got this, I’m sure he’s kicking himself for that. So I don’t think you do but I know it’s advised and all, why?” Johnny answers.

“There you go. Daisey wasn’t sure if you needed them.” you explain.

“That’s good to hear, could we…?” she asks, gesturing to the door.

“That’s good to hear, could we…?” she asks, gesturing to the door.

“Right, right. Come on.” you say, waving a hand to the building and walking to the door.

“Do you work here too then?” Daisey asks Johnny curiously.

“I do! I’ve got one of these too.” Johnny says with pride behind you, the pair of them talking as you open the door.

“So, what are you doing here?” Johnny asks her as you go through.

“I’m going to audition! I want the part in The Grand Entertainer’s new movie. I don’t have an agent and I just got here but I think you have to go for things, you know?” she says brightly.

“Oh wow that’s brave, I was terrified when I first met him. I’m… still kind of terrified of him.” Johnny admits.

You’re getting closer to Dahvid’s office now and you can’t help but note that you’re inadvertently leading Daisey past people waiting with their agents. The casting call for the role was super vague, suggesting pretty much only age and attitude with nothing else listed. The door is open and Carrie glances out to see you and steps into the hall.

“Ohh, oh it’s Carrie Fisher.” Daisey gasps softly.

“Good you’re here, and you brought Dayvhe with you.” Carrie smiles teasingly.

“I brought him.” you protest.
Without warning someone else looks out of your ancestor’s office, not your ancestor himself but another familiar face from the franchise. Harris Onford, you’re not a big fan of the way he glares at you and steps out.

“You’re the one whose moirail stole my ship, aren’t you?” he accuses you.

“No. Dahvid told us we could take, not steal, whatever one was a good fit. Also if you didn’t want that happening maybe you should use the thing once in a while.” you point out.

“What is he doing?” Daisey whispers desperately, like she thinks you’re in trouble.

“He’s just LIKE this!” Johnny exclaims under his breath, you ignore them both.

“It’s my ship I can choose not to fly it if I want, that’s using it.” Harris growls but you’re not intimidated.

“Take it up with Dahvid.” you shrug.

“See what I mean?” Carrie laughs softly.

“Except he’s not as likeable.” Harris grumbles.

You COULD be more likeable. You could turn the dial on your passive like-me setting until he thought you were charming no matter what. You won’t, but you could.

“And who is this?” Carrie asks, looking behind you to the skinny rustie behind you. Uh, actually they’re both rust, you mean Daisey.

“This is Daisey, she’s here to audition but the door was locked so I let her into here where the auditions are. You’re welcome I guess? IDK, I’m not the butler here, serving people etcetera.” you shrug.

“Do you know her?” Carrie asks.

“No.” you say and Carrie looks to Johnny expectantly.

“We just met outside, just now. Minutes ago.” Johnny blurts out.

“Woulda thought longer.” Harris notes gruffly and Carrie makes a thoughtful sound.

“Come with me you three.” she says after a moment and leads you in.

Dahvid is sat at his desk, well, on his desk with a bored expression on his face. He perks up when he sees you, the previous people who were auditioning are leaving and despite how they’re thanking Dahvid for his time you doubt they’re getting the part.

“What.” Daisey says flatly.

“He’s his descendant.” Johnny whispers.

“So it’s auditions first then? Have you actually got things for them?” you ask, coming over and hopping up on the desk next to him.

“Bits. Who’s that?” Dahvid asks, inclining his head towards the two rusties huddled together near the door.
“Daisey, I found her outside. She wanted to audition, she only just got to the planetoid I think but she wanted to go for it. I ran into Johnny out there too, so.” you shrug.

“They don’t know each other.” Carrie adds helpfully, though you don’t get why.

“You wouldn’t know it, they click. Hm. No agent either, that’s gutsy. I can work with… hm…” your ancestor leans back and shuffles through some papers before straightening up again.

“Johnny, I want you to run through this with… Daisey, right?” Dahvid asks, looking up at her.

“I- uh, yes. Yes.” Daisey seems to get her confidence back and starts to walk over, only Johnny still seems a little intimidated and she actually takes a step back and then pulls him over with her.

“As some background this character has been living on this desert planet all her life, very desperately poor and this is her starting to be caught up in an adventure. Johnny here is playing an escaped storm trooper although you don’t know that yet, we’ll go over that bit first just-”

“Hey you changed that bit like I said!” you interrupt as you happily note the edited script.

“Shh, yes. Here, look.” Dahvid shushes you and hands the paper over to the two actors who gather there reading it for a little bit.

Daisey and Johnny seem to settle on their characters. Johnny is nervous and trying to hide it in this scene and the yet unnamed character that Daisey is playing is more confident, self-reliant. She stands straighter, bolder, a scrappy rustie with defiance which is a look you like seeing on rusts because fuck the idea of them having to be meek and grateful to be allowed anything.

“So you’re with the Rebellion?” she asks Johnny, her expression attentive and smart. Johnny’s character lies and badly.

“Obviously. Yes. I am. I’m with the Rebellion, yeah.” he nods and then furtively steps a little closer and drops his voice.

“I’m with the Rebellion.” he says lowly and it’s not clear if this is him trying to whisper or to hit on her but from the considering look that Daisey gives him you know it didn’t work and the subtle comedy of the moment has you grinning despite the start to your day.

“I’ve never met a Rebellion fighter before.” she says, the statement presented neutrally. It feels like it could be a trap or a hint that she knows he’s lying, or maybe she’s sincere. It’s off balancing for sure, it plays well.

“Well, this is what we look like. Some of us. Others look different.” Johnny lies and you can almost see him sweating with fear that she’s going to find him out, this works way better with the two of them.

They’ve run out of script so they both look at your ancestor is standing there, thoughtfully tapping a pen against his chin.

“Carrie, do you know if the kid we cast for the pilot is around? I did say we might need him today but…” Dahvid shrugs.

“Osscar Isaack, you mean? Let me just look on the system you definitely already have access to.” Carrie says, rolling her eyes and you watch Harris grin at her sass.

“It says he’s in the building, I’ll go send someone to find him.” Carrie nods and walks out of the
“What’s your acting experience? Hold on I can look you up.” your ancestor says, getting up to go to the other side of his desk but Daisey whips out a tablet from her sylladex.

“I thought someone might want to see that so I brought it with me.” Daisey says with a businesslike little nod, she’s professional though that’s cool. You suppose it is her profession though so that’s fair enough. Your ancestor scrolls through it in silence for a moment or two.

“You’re basically a total unknown.” he says bluntly and Daisey winces at his words.

“I’m… I’m AFTA nominated.” she protests weakly.

“Oh, who isn’t?” Dahvid snorts which seems harsh, sure it’s probably small fare compared to the awards available the adults but the Alternian Film and Television Awards are kind of a big deal, it’s not like you know anyone who has one. Not to your knowledge at least. Like, Kanaya is a somewhat secretive lady but you’re pretty sure she was never nominated for an AFTA award.

“You were nominated? Oh wow, did you win?” Johnny asks eagerly and the sharp ‘stop trying to help’ look that Daisey shoots him tells you that no, she did not win it.

“Look who I found when I was looking for someone to hunt him down.” Carrie announces as she sweeps back into the room with the actor who’s playing the pilot at her side. He’s not as young as the other two but he’s not old either by any means, he’s just an adult rustblood. Hm, three rust leads, that’s a statement isn’t it?

“Osscar, you’ve already met Johnny, this is Daisey. She’s auditioning for the last lead.” Dahvid explains, waving at her.

“Oh that’s great. Hi, it’s nice to meet you.” Osscar smiles and reaches out to shake her hand Daisey smiles and shakes his hand.

“Excuse us one second, I need to talk to my descendant about some training. By all means get to know each other, we shouldn’t be too long.” Dahvid says easily and the three of them helpfully agree as Dahvid pulls you off to the other side of the room to face the boards that are still set up with information about the movie on them. He drapes her arms around your back and leans down so he’s whispering quietly.

“I have a thing I want to teach you.” he says in hushed tones.

“Ok?”

“Remember I told you about mood and surface mind stuff? I know you can already get more than that from people, you told me you did it before. Well the thing is with this movie I need everyone to be falling over themselves with how much they adore the main three, it all builds on that and it has to be genuine between the cast. Carrie, Harris and Mark are all still super close, Carrie and Mark are moirails for crying out loud. I need these three to click.” Dahvid says softly.

You turn a little to look at them, they’re paying a little attention to you but they seem to be getting on fine. Better than you’d expect people who’d just met to get on.

“I want you to really focus on the three of them, not deeply, just on the top layer. Tell me what you see.” your ancestor tells you.

You guess he thinks that you’re ready for this and you’re only having a look, not even at anything
deep. So this is fine, right?

You frown a little and try, your senses flick to the weighted way yours and your ancestor’s passive cuddlevoodoos radiate out but that’s not what you’re looking for. Ugh, you don’t have the thinking muscle-memory for this yet. Focus on them. You latch to Johnny first because you know him best, though not by much.

“I don’t…” you mumble, trying still.

“It’s like touching without touching.” Dahvid says.

You were touching Sollux before but you’re over here now, too far out of reach. Maybe if you just visualise reaching over to Johnny and just-

Nervous energy, excited a bit, needy ‘like me! Like me!’.

“I- whoa, I think I got Johnny?” you whisper.

“Try for all of them.” Dahvid advises.

You try to widen your mental hand and what you get back is an indistinguishable mish-mash. It’s more noise than feeling and you certainly can’t pick out any kind of thoughts or desires there.

“It’s like a noise, I don’t know.” you mutter.

“Right. You’re into music. I’m looking for a harmony, not dischord. We have to see if we can make them all resonate together right and if we can then maybe this is the setup we’re looking at.” Dahvid explains and that at least does make a kind of sense to you.

“What do you have in-” you don’t get to the end of your question before your ancestor spins you around to face the three actors.

“My two new employees and potential future employee, these roles will likely require a lot of athletic ability given the background of these characters. So, consider this a test with rewards and punishments depending on performance. So, I’m presenting this challenge to the three of you. I want you to catch my descendant.” Dahvid grins and pushes you forward.

“What.” you say.

Daisey’s eyes are sharp, Johnny looks confused and Osscar seems to be a little more aware of Dahvid’s shit and looks ready for anything. Oh, a challenge to see what they do, you get it.

“I don’t really know about-” you switch from looking lethargically uninterested to bolting out of the room, skidding around Carrie at the door. The hall is still filled with people and you’re smaller than everyone else here, getting through is going to be easier for you than them.

“Come on!” Osscar yells behind you.

“What are you- why are you GRABBING MY HAND?!” Daisey shouts but you’re not looking back to see why.

You break through the mass of people waiting and rush to head outside, hanging a hard right to the right corridor. Oh fuck, there’s a huge olive guy in the way. You drop to your knees and skid between his legs, leaping into the air to shoulder the door open and rush outside. You can’t stick to a straight line, the three of them are taller than you and with their longer stride they’ll catch you in open
terrain. You’ve gotta put a little spin on this.

Sprinting desperately for the thickest topiary sections of the grounds you rush into an obscene hedge maze.

“Go that way, Johnny, you go there, we can fence him in!” Osscar calls out.

You try to focus on running and the three of them but you can’t. Instead you psionically leap up to the top of a tree, one of the tall bulge tip ones and hang there. They missed you getting up there so it gives you a chance to look. The three of them are working together even though they weren’t told this was a cooperative test, this could easily be a one winner game but they don’t seem to have thought of that. It’s pretty easy to describe what’s happening now as a kind of harmony.

“Hey!” Johnny shouts, pointing up at you. Ooops, busted.

The three actors circle the bottom of the plant until Osscar gets the idea to climb up to get you. You watch until he’s about halfway up before leaping to another one, then another and then to the ground right outside the maze.

“Oh come on!” is all you hear from behind you as you take off running again. You lead them on a wild chase out onto the street, over the fence which they manage to climb, back onto the property and around the building. You’re looking out for something in particular. There! The window that Sollux blew out before is being repaired but there’s still a pane just covered with wood at the moment. You’re not strong enough to psionically pull it out but you are strong enough to psionically parkour up there, slice the thing in two and double jump into the building. You do just that and then look down at the three actors below you.

“I can’t do that.” Johnny gasps for breath.

“Me neither, I don’t have psionics.” Daisey says, her tone frustrated but not with him.

“I do, I could… I could throw you up there.” Osscar says.

“Yeah!” Johnny agrees loudly and you back away from the window. Suddenly Daisey flies up and just grabs the edge, hauling herself inside. She gets up on her feet and looks right at you. Johnny’s hands grab the ledge just as hers did and with a little struggle he hauls himself in too.

They could chase you, either of them could and Daisey is closest. You’re easily within reach of a good lunge for her.

“AH!”

There’s a thump from outside.

“He can’t get as high on his own.” Johnny realises and Daisey takes her eyes off of you to look.

“Let’s grab him.” she says and for a moment you think she means you until she steps to the window and leans down with her hand out and Johnny follows her. You watch as both of them jerk forward a little as they catch Osscar and together haul him inside.

You grin and start running again. The second he’s inside the three of them are hot on your tail but you know where you’re going. You were a prisoner in here for a while after all. You’re about you jump the loungeplank when Osscar yanks it closer and it trips you. You roll to your feet but it loses you precious time. The door out is shut and it opens inwards, your hand lands on the handle and it beeps as it unlocks but before you can pull it open the three of them crash into you. They’re laughing
with delight at having caught you and all of you fall to the floor.

You’re not unhappy they caught you, it’s pretty easy to feel that harmonious vibe the three of them have and even if you didn’t have the weird psionics you do you’d know about it. But that said you’re getting your face smushed in someone’s chest right now and your poor sniffnode is starting to ache from it.

“Oh wow, are you ok?” Johnny asks, his voice is kind but he’s still grinning widely from the entertainment of the whole thing.

“I’m fine dude, come on.” you assure him and lead the three of them back to your ancestor who of course already knows that the three of them fit perfectly. Daisey goes off and gets signed and the other two are excused as your ancestor does script work that stops being fun to watch when he actually gets into it properly and stops talking to you.

The thing is that you can’t forget that the hardware part of the team building the stupid robot are in this very building. Soon enough you end up drifting over there. Sollux isn’t with them of course but Hal is, you figure he knows enough about both sides to be a good go between. You watch as they set out a skeleton frame for the prototype and find yourself suppressing a grimace. You absolutely get why this project is needed, in fact you support it. You just don’t like what it’s doing to Sollux.

Standing there and watching the others you shoot him a message but get nothing back. You hope that he’s asleep but when you ask Karkat to check (and he asks you what your last servant died of) he tells you that Sollux is too busy working to even notice him peeking in at him. You abandon the hardware team and mooch back to your ancestor’s room. You keep an eye on what he’s writing and he allows you to flick through some suggested locations for shooting, you end up going through the records of old props for the movies and actually get caught up in how specific the instructions for making them are. As time passes by people come in and out for appointments, at your ancestor’s request and to ask questions about work they’ve been assigned on the movie.

It’s nice, it feels like everyone else is doing important shit. You know that training your psionics is important but so is this movie because this is what allows you to communicate with the Psionic and it keeps your ancestor from getting forked again. Naturally that means that he can’t dedicate his every waking second to training you and, in a way, you feel like helping with this movie is teaching you things about your ancestor and you’re learning about something you don’t know much about. Besides working together seems to make the part of your thinksponge that has weird lusus associations with Dahvid happy so that’s good.

Truth be told your mind is still elsewhere.

At least until blue and red streak past the window of Dahvid’s office, grabbing the attention of you and Dahvid immediately. You leap to your feet and rush to the door, running into the hallway. The room where the robot project is going on is a little further down and you just catch a glimpse of Dirkka and Sollux running that way. You sprint after them but when you get to the doorway the two of them have already launched into excitedly explaining their breakthrough. Dirkka is visibly enthused but Sollux…

You know he barely slept last night and the night before that he got hardly anything and yet to look at him you’d never know, if anything you’d say he looks like he’s been slamming espressos all day. He’s talking a mile a minute about shit that you’re way too stupid to understand with Dirkka breaking in to elaborate here and there. Sollux is beaming, glowing almost as he gestures excitedly with his hands as he goes on. He’s so excited, he’s the smartest guy in the room and he couldn’t be happier about it.
If this was anyone else you’d be happy for them, but it’s not just anyone it’s Sollux. It’s Sollux who isn’t sleeping, who’s forgetting to eat, who’s been intensely focused and now is acting like this. Your insides feel like you’ve just swallowed a lead weight because you look at him and all you can think is…

Oh no, not again.
‘Everyday I Love You Less And Less’ - Kaiser Chiefs

“Everyday I love you less and less
It's clear to see that you've become obsessed
I got to get this message to the press
That everyday I love you less and less
And everyday I love you less and less
I've got to get this feeling off my chest
The doctor says all I need is pills and rest
Since everyday I love you less and less”

‘Everyday I Love You Less And Less’ - Kaiser Chiefs
A song likely sung by someone starting to hate you.

You are Sollux’s goddamn shadow. You watch as he talks brightly, animated and fast with your friends. You observe him as he gleefully agrees to go out to celebrate their big breakthrough (that you don’t understand) with everyone. He’s playful with Karkat when the rest of the group meets you at the fancy burger joint that your group picked out, you watch him needle your ornery beau and cackle with amusement when Karkat bites back with just as much attitude.

Sollux orders and when he eats he swears it’s the best burger he’s ever had and your mind is nothing more than a symptom checklist. Was improved enjoyment of things a symptom? You think it was. You want to confront him, to offer your help but you know that when he’s properly manic his mood can turn on a pinhead. He can go from happy and enthused to rage and doing this in public is a bad idea for that reason.

You’re itching with the weight of the truth you have in you.

“Hey, can I borrow you?” you ask him innocently when you get back.

“Sure.” Sollux smiles at you. You nod and link your fingers with his, following Karkat back to his block just so he’ll be there too.

“I need a shower, I think I’m sweating out burger grease.” Karkat announces to the delight of no one when you get into his block and before you can be like ‘can you stay greasy out here for a moment’ he’s already in his ablution block with the door shut.

Damnit.

It’s fine, you have self control, you can wait.

“What did you want to borrow me for?” Sollux asks you.

Damnit. You can buy time, you can manage to-

“You’re manic.” you blab.

Goddamnit.

Sollux frowns a little and shakes his head.
“I hate that. I get that it’s metaphorical or whatever. No, wait there’s a word for it… hyperbolic I think. I get that people mean something like frantic which, yeah I have been working FRANTICALLY but it’s not the same.” Sollux huffs in irritation.

“An interesting linguistic point.” you agree.

“I wasn’t mad at you.” Sollux assures you, patting your shoulder as he sits down on the arm of Karkat’s armchair.

“That’s good, but I wasn’t being hyperbolic.” you tell him calmly, you should keep him calm.

“You’re going to tell me that you’re doing it ironically and I’m going to tell you that I reserve the right to kick you in the knee.” Sollux says with a grin, showing his double fangs.

“No, I’m not. I’m serious, you’re manic.” you insist.

Sollux stares at you, seemingly lost and then after a long second he laughs.

“Because of the not sleeping thing, right? I didn’t mean to worry you DV, I know you’ve been fussing but I’m fine. Really, I am. I needed to finish what I was working on and it wouldn’t get out of my head until I did, plus we’re on kind of a time crunch here. Though it’s the hardware team who are under pressure now, I can actually chill for a bit until they implement the test build and—”

“It’s not just the sleeping thing, though obviously that’s a big part of it.” you interrupt him.

“Dayvhe-”

“You’re not sleeping, you’re ignoring me, you forget to eat, you’re working crazy hard and tonight you were going a million miles an hour.” you list off and the smile goes from Sollux’s face.

“I was happy.” Sollux says stiffly in a tone that suggests he’s not now.

“No, look, I know you think it’s just that—” you try.

“It IS just that, I don’t think it. I know.” Sollux says sharply.

“Alright, but you’re not always rational when you’re like this are you? And you don’t always see it in time and I’m telling you now that I see it.” you point out.

Sollux stands up from the arm of the loungeplank, his hands in fists at his sides. He draws in a deep breath and relaxes. He presses his hands together in front of his face, his index fingers brushing his lip as he heaves another sigh and then lowers them, seemingly calmer now.

“I get that this is from a place of pity, but I know myself better than you know me and I’ve done this way more times than you. Trust me, I’m fine. And look, tonight was fun, let’s not fight about this ok?” Sollux says in a gentle voice.

“You’re not fine and the fact that you won’t listen to me is proof of how bad it is.” you groan. Shit, you need to make sure he doesn’t do anything to make this worse. Hal can help, right? Or an actual docterrorist on this planetoid since you have them here at your disposal.

“Wait, are you seriously saying that I’m manic and my options are either to agree to being manic or to deny it which is proof that I’m manic? Seriously?” Sollux demands, his voice rising. See? His temper is flaring up now, more proof.

“Ok, just calm down.” you shush him softly.
“What?! I AM CALM!” Sollux shouts, oblivious to the irony.

“You’re yelling.” you point out.

“You’re being infuriating, that’s why!” he snaps.

Your shoulders sag with relief as the ablationblock door slides open, revealing Karkat’s short, angry form in a halo of steam. He’s holding a towel around his waist with one hand and glaring at both of you.

“I went to take ONE shower in peace, why did you two follow me in here just to make absurd amounts of noise the moment you’re left unattended?!” your nubby horned saviour demands.

That thing happens where both you and Sollux try to talk at once and no one can make out anything. Karkat lifts a hand to silence you both, the other’s still holding the towel. You leap into the momentary silence to blab your news.

“He’s manic!” You say quickly.

“I am not!” Sollux snaps, glaring at you.

Karkat raises an eyebrow and looks Sollux up and down. You list off all your previously given arguments as Karkat goes to grab some boxers and put them on so he’s not stuck holding a towel this whole time. When you’re done Karkat gives Sollux a disapproving look.

“You’ve been pushing it. You know that, right?” Karkat says.

“I was just focused-“ Sollux begins.

“Yes or no, you binary fuck.” Karkat cuts him off.

“Yes, happy now?” Sollux hisses.

“Almost never. Maybe you ought to sleep more, cut out the caffeine too if this is becoming a pattern.” Karkat suggests.

“Whoa, whoa, cut out? No way.” Sollux protests.

“Cut down then, I’ll match you and suffer with you if you like.” Karkat suggests.

“Well if I’m making YOU suffer…” Sollux snickers.

“There you go, no shouting needed.” Karkat sighs, looking at you.

“But that can’t be it, there’s got to be more! He’s manic, we can’t just-“

“I’m not!” Sollux snaps angrily.

“Yeah, no, he’s not. Don’t get me wrong, the way he’s behaving could easily send him that way, because he’s a dumbass but it doesn’t always. And he knows he shouldn’t play North Alternian roulette like this-” Karkat says.

“I’ll just stop living my life and bubble wrap myself then.” Sollux sneers.

“Asking you to sleep regularly and not overdo things is not the most demanding request, don’t be melodramatic.” Karkat tells him sharply.
“I get why you’re worried though, you’ve only seen him that way once and you’re right in that pretty much every time he goes that way this kind of shit starts to build up first.” Karkat says sympathetically to you.

“That’s what I’m saying, we need to stop this now before it gets worse.” you tell him urgently.

“I’m FINE.” Sollux shouts.

“Shoosh. Dayvhe, it’s more like… uh… it’s this kind of thing. Every Dayvhe I know has Strydr for a last name, but not everyone with Strydr for a last name is Dayvhe. I told you before, being obsessive and kind of a tool with a low skill level at looking after himself is just Sollux being Sollux. It’s smart to keep an eye on him but right now he’s fine.” Karkat explains.

“Oh yeah KK, I’m so glad you both know how hot for pale action being patronised and bossed about gets me.” Sollux says, his tone acerbic.

“I’m not patronising you. We both know you’d rather not have an episode at all but if you’re going to have one you’d prefer a milder one. Well, guess what, looking after yourself and having people remind you to do that is what makes that happen and you know it.” Karkat tells Sollux in a no-nonsense tone.

“Whatever, this conversation is ass and I’m leaving.” Sollux grumbles and stomps off towards the door.

You try to stop him but Karkat grabs your hand, so before you know it the door has shut again and it’s just you and him.

“What the hell Karkat?” you say, turning on him.

“You’re worried, I know. I really do think he’s fine though and you’re not going to get any progress going at him like that. Sollux knows his whole deal and he isn’t a fan of being reminded of it if things aren’t currently going to shit.” Karkat tells you.

“Things are going to shit.” you argue.

“I don’t think they are and I’ve done this more than you have. I’m not trying to tell you what to do here or anything but meditating you and him is literally my whole pale-ashen job here and I’m telling you that if you keep pushing that he’ll just get angry. Besides I really don’t think he’s sick right now. I do think we should keep an eye on him together and if things change we’ll change our tactic but until then it’s fine.” Karkat says placatingly.

The thing is that it does sound like he’s telling you what to do. He is, actually, telling you what to do. Moreover he’s doing it in a way that reminds you all too well that he has more history with Sollux than you do. No matter how great a moirail you are it won’t change the fact that Karkat was looking after Sollux long before you knew either of them.

You don’t like it but there’s nothing at all you can do. Sollux has already gone off who knows where and Karkat has clearly decided that he knows best regardless of what you know to be true. You have to accept it, or at least act as if you do. You check your hive and as you thought he’s gone. The window in his room is shut which likely means that he didn’t leave that way, so you settle yourself on the roof of your hive and idly mix music for a few hours. You even ask your ancestor a few questions that you guess are insightful from how he suddenly vanishes from the chat.

It’s late when a halo of red and blue streaks through the dark starry night towards you. You close your husktop but stay sat down as Sollux lands on the roof. He touches down onto the roof a bit
away from you and despite going off to blow off steam he still looks frustrated.

“Checking that I came back?” he asks waspish and annoyed.

“No.” you answer honestly, you hadn’t thought he wouldn’t.

“I just don’t like the idea of you going to sleep mad at me.” you say. You say it without thinking, you’re not trying to manipulate him and it is true. You’re still convinced that you’re right but you really don’t want him to be angry about it or angry at you. You’re his moirail, you’re supposed to support and look out for him not piss him off.

Sollux’s shoulders drop a little, his guard falling.

“I’m not a fan of that either.” he says.

“I probably could have handled that better.” you say as a peace offering and get to your feet. You’re still right but maybe a little more tact could have aided you there.

“Yeah but- I know I’m scary, that my whole deal with my head is alarming and I know last time really freaked you out. You’re overreacting but I’m sure I’m terrifying and the worst and-”

You cover his mouth with your hand. In the dark it’s all the more prominent when his glowing eyes narrow and for a moment you’re lost as you take in the way they throw soft coloured light on his cheekbones and the plane of your hand.

“That’s enough self pity there man, you’ve got me for pity. I pity you, you don’t need to do it.” you remind him.

Sollux pulls back, shaking his head but there’s a ghost of a smile there.

“I’m not scared of you. I’m scared for you.” you say.

“Well you don’t need to be, I’m fine.” Sollux insists.

“But you’d say that if you weren’t too, you know?” you reason.

“I’m not having this argument again, besides Karkat agrees with me not you so it’s not like it’s just my word here.” Sollux tells you sharply and that bolt of stupid jealousy runs through you again.

“I’m fine, end of. Right?” Sollux asks.

He’s not fine, you’re sure of it. You can feel that something is wrong in your bones and it has to be him. Everything feels off kilter and Sollux isn’t acting normal, you’re not going to ignore your gut here. But you’re not stupid either, if you keep pushing this you’ll get locked out and then you won’t be around to help when things get worse. You’re going to need to lie to him and gather more evidence to get Karkat on your side before Sollux gets too bad.

You have to protect him at any cost. If that means lying then so be it.

“Right. I’m sorry.” you nod. You are sorry for upsetting him at least.

“Alright, I’m going to sleep. Pity you.” Sollux says gently, leaning in and bumping his forehead against yours at an angle that makes one of his horns click quietly against your complete one.

“Pity you.” you tell him back.
Sollux walks off, leaving you alone on the roof. You don’t follow him but five minutes later when you head to your own block you are reassured by the sound of Sollux moving about in his block. When you get up in the middle of the night, just happening to be awake, well then so what if you check outside his block to see that the lights are indeed off inside. At least he’s sleeping tonight, you may have made some progress there.

“You tired or something kid because I got work for you today.” your ancestor says as he clicks something on his husktop and closes it, turning his attention to you as you first walk through the door the next day.

“And something. Doesn’t matter, what’re we doing?” you ask.

“Well I promised you live test subjects the other day but then we got distracted with the new cast.” Dahvid explains and stands up.

“Oh, right.” you nod.

“You do still want to do this, right?” he asks, setting his hand on your shoulder and leading you out of the room and down the corridor.

You think about the chance for you to have your nightmares be reality and immediately you know that you can’t allow that. You will do whatever you have to.

“I still want this.” you confirm.

“Alright, couple of friendly- or I guess familiar faces at least. I want you to get a feel of the emotional layer but then if you can try to reach down into the drives each person has, right? Don’t do anything with them yet, just get in there.” your ancestor explains and opens a door.

Inside you find a small meeting room with loungeplanks and armchairs instead of normal chairs and tables, it’s more informal. Sat down waiting are two familiar faces, just as your ancestor said. Robert Downey and Troll Will Smith, Will’s arm is still in a sling which you remember is kind of Sollux’s fault. Loitering by the windows with a frown on her pretty face is Margot Robbie, right, she’s rails with Will isn’t she?

“Margot, didn’t expect to see you here.” Dahvid says and you read the ‘why are you here’ loud and clear.

“I trust you, sir. I just-” Margot hesitates as she looks at you.

Yeah, you don’t trust you with this either.

“You think I’d let him do this if I didn’t trust him to be ready?” Dahvid asks, a simple question, but all three of them tense up. They start backpedalling and you don’t know why. You didn’t feel that strange against the grain feel you get when your ancestor is actively commanding something but they’re still acting odd.

Your eyes land on Robert Downey.

He doesn’t want to upset your ancestor, he’s worried. There’s an urge to help and a guilt that slides over your senses as you look at him. What’s he guilty about? You try to visualise that feeling as a thread and follow it down, you can do this. You have to do this.

You follow his feeling of guilt to its source.
I don’t deserve this second chance.

Second chance? You don’t know what that’s about but you try to feel it out. Related thoughts and beliefs spread out like petals from the centre of a flower and you run yourself over them.

It was my fault I needed a second chance.

I can do better than before.

Then you feel it, like a fishhook through the core idea, a concept so related to the core belief that you almost didn’t notice it.

Earn your second chance.

That’s where the guilt is coming from. It’s a simple statement, encouraging even if viewed positively. It’s a resolution to be better and view himself as worthy but tangled up with the other ideas it becomes a nasty double edged sword.

Disappointing Dahvid means he’s not earning that chance, which reinforces the negative belief that he doesn’t deserve it, which means that he can’t be better and it’s all his fault. That’s a lot of emotional weight to pin on someone that’ll trip up when he disobeys or disappoints Dahvid.

You shake your head and nearly fall over doing it. Your ancestor catches you by the shoulder and steadies you.

“You did it, right?” Dahvid asks eagerly.

Your ears are ringing like you got hit in the head, it seems you can subconsciously mess with people’s heads but rooting through them intentionally leaves a mark on you. You nod and try to snap yourself back in shape. You’re going to need to do this reliably and well in the future so you’d better shape up fast, you don’t have time to adjust to this.

“Yeah, I did.” you say with a nod.

“Excellent!” Dahvid grins, showing his sharp fangs.

“I also felt,” you hesitate looking at Robert for a moment and lowering your voice, “I felt you in there.”

Dahvid spares a glance at Robert, his eyes narrowing just a fraction. From the angle you’re at to him you can just see the glint of bright purple in the eye closest to you.

“Oh yeah, put that in an age ago. Useful motivation.” he explains quietly.

“Whichever direction you slice that sword, yeah.” you agree.

“Well spotted.” Dahvid says now at normal volume, the two of you no longer whispering.

“I want to see what else you can do.” he says challengingly.

So you do. You work on the deep mental drivers of Will, of Margot too since she’s here. You’re able to pick out the thoughts Dahvid has already messed with and spot just what you drew on when you controlled Will before and what Dahvid did to change it. He moves you on to other people in the building, they all agree of course but a more cynical part of you thinks that obviously they would, wouldn’t they?
Each person you push your psionic touch into makes you feel weaker, you’re getting tired and because you have to go through their feelings to get to their beliefs you wind up with a kind of emotional backwash in your head. One woman is agitated when you work on her and you’re antsy after that, Cicirega still has a grudge against you for nearly killing the guy he’s pitch for (although Will is fine, thanks) so that weirdly screws with your perception of yourself. You’re not saying the process is perfect but it is giving you progress here and besides, the ends justify the means, right?

Drained at the end of the day you go back to your hive, hoping against hope that catching the problem with Sollux early will have caught things. You possess enough self awareness and awareness of him to know that you continuing to pester him about his mood swings will just push him away, so you really hope Karkat’s been keeping track of him.

It’s not actually hard to figure out how he’s doing when you get back because he’s having a loud argument with Jayded in the main room. Most of the Condybot team is there actually and you get the feeling that everyone has some kind of opinion on this, even so it’s obvious that Sollux is the most annoyed.

“Do you know how long that took to get right?!” Sollux demands angrily.

“That’s not MY fault!” Jayded snaps back at him.

“It is! We agreed on a plan and you went and did something totally different, it completely changes all of my work!” Sollux argues.

“Surely your work can be modified, though.” Equius reasons.

“It shouldn’t have to be, because we had a plan and you all changed it without telling us.” Dirkka points out.

“Hey, what’s this ‘you all’ business? I had nothing to do with that, nor did Equius.” Hal says defensively.

“Alright, I get that it’s a bit frustrating and our improvements put you in a bit of a pickle but it’s just code. Surely you can just tweak what needs tweaking and it’ll all be right again at the push of a button.” Jayekh says cheerily.

There’s a split second pause and then Sollux lunges for Jayekh. Dirkka pushes Jayekh away and Equius grabs the furious Sollux into a strong grasp.

“A PUSH OF A BUTTON?! I’M GONNA PUSH YOU OUT OF A WINDOW INSTEAD YOU FUCKER! PUT ME DOWN!” Sollux screeches, squirming in Equius’ grasp.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. No one’s pushing anyone out of anything.” you insist, stepping into the argument.

“Jayekh, man, you know our side of things is more complex than that, don’t be like that.” Dirkka says sternly.

“PUT ME DOWN!” Sollux snarls.

“Are you going to behave?” Equius asks and the noise Sollux makes back in response is feral. He’s obviously too mad to remember that he can absolutely make Equius let him go, either that or he’s still with it enough to not want to actually hurt a friend.

“Give him here.” you tell Equius, reaching for Sollux.
With a look of trepidation Equius does indeed pass your squirming, livid, moirail to you. Unfortunately because you’re not a foot taller and built like a brick hive you can’t contain him quite so easily, but you have an advantage Equius doesn’t.

“Hey, hey, shoosh. Come on.” you tell him gently.

“No! You fucking take that back Jayekh, it’s not like this change was your idea anyway! Jayded is the thinksponge of your power source operation!” Sollux hisses at him.

Jayded and Jayekh both burst into angry protests so you start pulling Sollux back, Dirkka is trying to push Jayekh out of the situation too.

“Alright, walk away.” you urge him.

With a furious hiss Sollux storms off in the direction you were pulling him anyway so you rush to keep pace with him. He’s angry, obviously, but wildly powerful levels of anger and aggressive behaviour is right on the money for mania.

“What was that all about?” you ask as he throws the doors to his block open.

“There was a plan! A good plan! But nooo! They’re not going to go back on it, I know they’re not. Fucking-” Sollux hisses, pacing about the room and digging his fingers into his hair hard enough to make it stay stuck up in wild directions even when he lets go.

“I’m going to have to redo everything.” Sollux groans.

“Everything? But you’ve been working nonstop for so long, that much work-”

“Alright, not everything but the time I save on the stuff I don’t need to repeat is going to be chomped up in working out how to get around this dumb new idea they’re on that completely changes the power source and the whole way the bot is going to- ugh, never mind I can’t explain it anyway. I don’t even have time.” Sollux groans and falls into his chair.

If he keeps working at this rate he’s going to make things worse, you have to stop him somehow.

“Well, look, maybe Dirkka can talk them around. Just give him time. Call it a day and come back to it tomorrow at least, something might come to you between now and then.” you suggest.

“We both know that Dirkka entirely lacks anything close to a posture pole with his damn matesprit. Hal and Equius clearly don’t have a side which means staying how things are and that’s on Jayded and Jayekh’s plan, that means I have to change.” Sollux says, shaking his head.

“You should still sleep on it.” you say firmly.

Sollux shakes his head and then stops, some idea plays across his face and he straightens up in his chair.

“Sleep. The Dream! I could code there, probably way faster too and the processing power of that is way going to outstrip my bees!” Sollux gasps.

“Hey man, the bees are right there, don’t hurt their feelings.” you joke, trying to lighten the mood.

“Bee-lings.” Sollux grins at you and it actually take a second or two for the pun to sink in.

“You’re awful.” you say.
“I know. You’re a genius though, thank you for the idea. I won’t have to work so long after all if this pans out the way I think it will.” Sollux smiles.

So he’s still going to work despite your recommendations that he not do that. He’s standing there pulling a biowire out of his sylladex. He plugs it into the wall and then, with a smile at you, he plugs himself in and slides down on his loungeplank with his eyes shut.

You stand there helplessly, you couldn’t even fix this problem. You’re angry and disappointed in yourself in a way that you can’t totally put down to your own feelings, some of that could be the recycled emotions of other people. You look at the planes of Sollux’s face and you’re consumed with a wave of anger at yourself and at him too. You know he’s sick and you hate that he’s denying it, you hate that Karkat is denying it and the longer it goes on the worse everything will be.

You need to stop this but you don’t know how. You don’t know what you can reasonably do to fix this problem if no one but you sees that there is a problem there to fix. In the end you’re just left by his side, effectively alone and watching his body as if that’s any protection for his mind.

When it comes time for you to sleep he refuses, saying how much work he still has left to do. He even unplugs so you can have this argument in person.

“I was just going to get a drink, I thought you’d be pleased, not fussing about something different.” Sollux grumbles, not that he leaves his block, he just cracks open a drink from his sylladex and begins to chug it. At least it’s not caffeinated.

“Take your meds.” you tell him.

“Good point, if I’m staying up I might forget.” Sollux nods and snags them from his sylladex. You eye the packaging as he pops them out. He’s not behind at all so that’s something at least.

“You should still sleep.” you say.

“I have stuff to do. Besides I’m basically lying down, actually I can do that. The whole loungeplank right here, I’ll be all over that and it’s basically like sleeping for my body. When I get too tired and make mistakes I promise I’ll go to sleep.” he vows and drapes himself over the furniture in question.

“Well I’m exhausted.” you inform him.

“So you sleep then, since you’re so hot on the idea.” Sollux snorts.

“Nope. Not gonna until you do. I’m just going to get ready to sleep and stay there in the sopor forcing myself awake until you get in with me.” you say, peeling your shirt off.

“Oh no. What a shame it’d be if I just… closed my eyes.” Sollux says entirely insincerely and plugs himself in again.

Fine. You finish getting ready to sleep as you said you would and get into the coon, you can totally stay awake like you promised you would just to make him feel bad enough to join you.

Except you totally can’t. Your dumb ass falls asleep in about fifteen minutes and that’s a charitable guess. Sollux is still awake in the morning, exhaustedly looking at his code on his husktop now. At least he has toast in his hand, though he seems to have got distracted from eating it.

“Did you sleep at all?” you ask as you climb onto the edge of the coon.

“Can we not have this argument?” Sollux groans.
“So you didn’t.” you conclude.

“You’re going to your ancestor’s place today, right? I assume that’s going well since you haven’t told me it’s terrible or anything.” Sollux says, changing the subject.

“I don’t know, maybe I should stay here if you’re not-” you start.

“If you bring up your theory about me being manic again I’m just going to throw you out in the hall, I don’t care if you’re just in your underwear and covered in slime.” Sollux warns you and you bet he would too, it’s not like you’d have far to go to get back to your block.

“At least promise me that you’ll eat today.” you try.

Sollux groans and with that you’re lifted up in the air and put outside again, you’re nearly dropped right on top of Karkat who was just walking this way with a plate of toasted waffles and two mugs of coffee. You feel his eyes rake over you as he looks your slippery near naked form up and down.

“Oh no, please go on and explain this because I’m sure your stupid ass reasoning is going to be way funnier than anything I could come up with by myself.” Karkat says with a wolfish grin.

“I just asked him to make sure he ate is all.” you say sulkily.

Karkat’s expression shifts a little and he inclines his head to the side a bit.

“Yeah, about that. Come with me?” Karkat asks.

You’re not wildly inclined to stand out in the hallway all day in your underwear, letting the sopor crust up on your skin like some gross little gremlin man, so you’ll go with him. Besides he has food and TWO mugs of coffee so you suspect that breakfast might be on offer for you here. You follow Karkat back to his block and sure enough a wonderful mug of coffee is pressed into your hands and Karkat sets his plate of waffles down on his coffee table. Of the three of you Karkat is definitely the neatest, despite you and Sollux being in here a lot it remains tidy.

“About Sollux.” Karkat begins and you sit down on the loungeplank with him, filled with relief.

“Something’s up with him.” Karkat says.

“Yes! Finally you agree.” you sigh.

“Well, no. I don’t think he’s going manic, not yet anyway. He’s just being kind of moody, maybe he’s just tired. The thing about that fight that no one will stop talking about is that we both know that if Sollux really wanted to hurt Jayekh then the guy would be in the hospital or dead. I mean if he gets angry he usually just spits out an insult and leaves, to need Equius to hold him back is weird. Also damp from what Sollux told me.” Karkat adds that last part with a grimace.

“Well, yeah.” you nod.

“Maybe he’s just working too hard or this project is getting to him but he’s obviously upset and this fight isn’t helping.” Karkat tells you.

“Him and Jayekh?” you ask.

“You and him. Don’t get me wrong he absolutely needs someone keeping an eye on him but it being a thing we bug him about is just going to upset him more.” Karkat points out.

“You’re saying be more subtle about it?” you ask slowly.
“Basically. If we do that and it turns out that he needs help then we’re there and we’ve not pissed him off so bad that he doesn’t want to ask for help and if it’s nothing then we’ve not annoyed him for no reason when he’s already stressed from working.” Karkat explains. You don’t want to drive him away, that’s for sure. Pressing the issue this morning is what got you thrown out, so that isn’t working.

“But we can’t just let him have an episode.” you whine.

“Either it’ll happen or it won’t, there’s not all that much anyone can do about it I don’t think. Making sure he’s eating and at least sleeps somewhat is good but keeping his stress down is better. I’ve not got much to do so it’s not hard for me to stay in his block with him for the company and to keep an eye on him.” Karkat says.

“But if he wasn’t working in the first place then-” you stop. See, ideally you’d like to take Sollux away from this work that’s stressing him out and make him do nothing but relax and look after himself, or let you look after him. Then you could stop this episode before it goes really bad, you could do your job as his moirail and protect Sollux. But you know him and even if you didn’t you’ve seen inside his head, you know he feels that he has to hold back the tide of terrible things and forcing him to drop a project designed to boost the chances of you all surviving is only going to upset him more.

“Did you just work out that there’s no way you can sell that idea to him?” Karkat scoffs at you.

“Something like that.” you mumble.

It doesn’t feel right, you should be doing more for your moirail. Just hoping it’s going to magically get better with Karkat hanging around doesn’t feel like enough! There’s nothing you wouldn’t do for him and yet here you are doing what feels like nothing. You feel an itch, through your whole being at the wrongness of all of this. You need to do something.

“I’ll watch him, it’ll be fine Dayvhe.” Karkat says gently.

“I guess.” you say unhappily.

“Great, now eat some of these waffles that I slaved over already.” Karkat demands, thrusting the plate at you.

“Slaved over? You poured batter into a waffle iron.” you say and get kicked in the ankle for your trouble. Even if Karkat didn’t slave over them the waffles are good and you go off to your ancestor’s place in a slightly better mood.

The last revisions of the script have gone off already so Dahvid seemingly considers himself free to mentor you all day. It’s much the same as before, you work through Dahvid’s staff to root through their deep beliefs and drives. Just like before the work drains you, it makes your head hurt but you know as well that you are getting better. When the day finally ends and you’re so stupidly tired that you can’t really do more than sprawl in a chair as Dahvid tells you his plan for the next day.

“You’re going to move on to influencing beliefs in other people, trying to make someone do what you want.” Dahvid says, pouring himself a drink.

“Alright.” you agree weakly. It seems like the logical next step.

“Bring that girl so you can do it to her.” Dahvid says, swirling his drink around with his finger as he seemingly can’t find anything else to do the job.
“Girl? What girl?” you ask, sitting up straighter. You don’t like the sound of this.

“That cerulean one, the Serket. Mindfang’s spawn.” he elaborates.

“You want me to control Vriska?” you say in disbelief.

“Yeah, that one. She’s got more resistance to you so her mind will be less fragile, it’s a lower chance of you blundering about and doing to her what you did to Rohhze. Plus, I get the feeling you don’t like her much and if things were to go, like, categorically awful and you do fry her pan irreparably then better her than any of your other friends, right?”

“That’s not-” you try to say.

“Oh? You’d rather someone else? If you had to pick who’d you go for then?” Dahvid asks, sitting down in his chair and fishing the cherry out of his drink by the stem.

You hesitate. You’re not one to rank your friends by how much you like them but you’re not a fan of Equius, but he’s useful to have around for Sollux. You’re getting back in touch with Tavros, Aradia’s already dead and Kanaya’s already made up with Sollux. You actively dislike Vriska in a way that you can’t compare to anyone else. You don’t hate her, you’re not planning to kill her but if you had to pick someone…

“Yeah I thought so.” Dahvid grins, a cherry stem now hanging between his teeth.

“You’ll fix anything I break though, right? Not that I want to break anything but just in case?” you ask him warily.

“Of course.” he says with a nod and drops his cherry stem on the desk.

“And how exactly am I meant to convince Vriska to come and do that?” you ask him. Vriska is not exactly wildly cooperative, is she?

Dahvid pauses mid drink and sets his glass back on his desk. He taps his claws on the wood for a moment before speaking.

“It’s not often we get second chances but that’s what I see this as. A chance to kill the royal bitch and have all of our descendants survive and make something better. That’s how it should have been with us but we failed. I’m not going to let you fail and I’ve seen in your head, Dayvhe, I know that when it comes to it there’s nothing you wouldn’t do for the people you care about, is there? You need to get stronger at this no matter what and I’m giving you everything you need to get there because there’s basically nothing I wouldn’t do at this point to see this thing through.” Dahvid says darkly.

“So really,” he adds as he picks up his glass, “the better question is what wouldn’t you do to get her here seeing as you need to practice on her to progress. I’m sure you can come up with something.”

You feel like your throat has seized shut as your ancestor shrugs casually and downs his drink. You’re pretty sure that you’re dismissed so you stand up from your seat on slightly shaking legs and leave. You fall into a taxi that you don’t remember calling and ride home. You get out before you get there, walk into a takeout place and walk out with food that you inhale mindlessly as you get to your building.

You go from the elevator to your block without interacting with anyone, just stripping and falling right into your coon.

You dream.
You dream of your friends in chains, guards with red hot irons creeping towards Karkat and Sollux resisting getting dragged towards what you know will be a helm. They’re all so scared, shouting and begging you. The Empress towers over you, her hair a dark curtain. She grins at you, her mouth full of dangerous serrated teeth. She hands you a sword and points.

Following the direction of her finger you see Vriska held in the arms of two guards, struggling to get away but failing. Her face is stained with blue tears and the sound of her begging you not to hurt her rings in your ears. But you can hear Karkat’s pleading louder, you can hear Sollux’s fear, the terror of your friends.

You don’t want to hurt Vriska, even as you stand there with the sword hilt heavy in your hand you know that. But Dahvid is right, you’d do anything to protect Sollux and Karkat that’s the truth deep down in you, isn’t it? You raise the sword and lunge at her.

You jerk awake before the blade ever connects, your face red with tears but it doesn’t make you feel any better. It wasn’t just a dream, was it?

Dahvid told you to get Vriska and you need her to get better, so you have to do just that. After dressing unthinkingly in anything you can find you hunt her down in her block, knocking roughly on her door. Vriska opens the door, looking you up and down through the gap she’s opened.

“I need your help.” you tell her upfront.

“With what, getting dressed? You know that sweater’s on backwards, right?” Vriska points out.

You look down, you are indeed wearing your sweater backwards. It’s not actually yours, it’s one of Sollux’s old ones but he can’t wear it anymore because it’d touch his back ports when he’s not wearing the covers on them. Since he never wears the covers, or almost never, this is basically yours. It’s the comfy burnt yellow one where he’s picked at the sleeves enough that you can slide your thumbs through the sides. As Vriska said though his sign is bracketing your spine because you put it on backwards.

“No that, I need your help training my psionics with my ancestor.” you tell her.

“Not interested.” Vriska says and goes to shut the door but you shove your foot in the way, wincing as it bangs into the arch of your foot. She has to help you, you just need to show her why.

“If I don’t do everything I can to help when this fight goes down our friends might die. Your moirail might get killed, Sollux could be killed or helmed, let alone anyone else. You’re resistant to me, at least a little. I practice on you with him telling me what to do I can learn how to stop people killing our friends. He says you’ll be harder to fuck up by accident and he’ll fix anything I do.” you tell her.

“I thought you were getting teaching to not do it, I didn’t realise you were training to get better. I thought you were full of promises to never be a bad boy and control people, that only awful girls like me do that.” Vriska sneers.

“I don’t like it but I’ll be ethical when my friends and quadrants aren’t in danger of being tortured or murdered.” you tell her.

You’re eye to seven pupilled eye with her, you’re not backing down so you just watch as she seems to decide. She drags her real hand through her hair and sighs.

“Let me get my shoes.” she says and shuts the door in your face.

You take the time in the hallway to pull your arms back into your sleeves and twist your “borrowed”
sweater back around the right way so Sollux’s sign shows up on your chest. You’re tracing your claws over the vertical tines of Sollux’s sign when Vriska opens the door. She glances at what you’re doing and steps out into hallway silently, letting the door shut behind her.

She’s the one who hails the cab to take you there, neither of you speak on the way there and that’s fine with you. In your mind you can still feel the weight of the sword in your hand, of her begging you not to kill her and your determination to do it anyway. The nightmare won’t leave you and you wonder if your upset about it sits so obviously on the surface of your mind that your ancestor will be able to feel it when he sees you.

That’s the thing, isn’t it? With the things that he’s taught you it leaves you aware of just how much you can do that you never knew about and you’re only just starting to learn. He’s been alive for ten times as long as you have and he was a natural at this. He learnt gradually as he grew up into an adult, he never had to do this crash course like you’re doing. So given all of his experience just what is he really capable of? What is he really doing?

The Grand Entertainer has deigned to entertain you both in the same room that he set himself up in the time he pulled that shuriken stunt before. His mismatched eyes flick from you to Vriska and he smiles in satisfaction, he said you’d get her here and you did.

“Well then, we should get started. Come and sit down.” Dahvid says, setting his hand on Vriska’s shoulder and steering her to the centre on the room. You don’t need psionics to feel the hostility coming off of her in waves. She might consider this as necessary as you do but she certainly holds no affection for your ancestor. You go along willingly and sit on the floor opposite Vriska as he indicates for you to do.

“We’re going to ease into this, I want you to go through her beliefs first. Just look, no touching just yet. Know what’s in there before you mess with things, yeah?” he tells you, almost ignoring Vriska as he talks.

“Yeah, I get that. Vriska?” you ask, looking at her.

Vriska glowers at Dahvid but finally takes her gaze from your ancestor and shifts it to you.

“I didn’t come here just to stare at you.” she says acerbically.

Dahvid gives you a look that suggests that he too is not here to watch you do nothing, so you’d better get on with it hadn’t you?

Even though you keep your body still you reach out to Vriska in the way you’ve learnt to with your psionics through the intense training you’ve been through. From Jasper’s initial teaching to Dahvid’s you’re familiar now with touching the minds of others.

She feels cool to the ‘touch’ and smooth, like marble almost. And just like marble you can’t just phase your touch through it. You can tell that it’s Vriska, more or less anyway, but that’s it. With caution you try to push the intensity up on your grip to push through but nothing’s working.

You frown, gritting your teeth against the strain. You stare at her, getting nothing more than you normally would. Her eyes drop from yours, lingering on your chest with your borrowed sign on it. You feel the shell of cold stone around her mind crack, enough for you to get in at least. You slip past her emotions, just catching irritation and concern building there.

You properly get to feel through her beliefs like scattered, well, if you’re visualising this why not make it catered to her? You imagine her beliefs as dice scattered on the floor before you. You
imagine hovering your hand over before finally touching one. Your fingers close around an eight
sided die and the content of the belief spills out.

I need to prove my worth

Before you can scarcely think on that other connected thoughts spill out.

I have to be the hero.

If people don’t appreci8 me, fuck them!

Sometimes the hero has to be the bad guy!

be respected or be feared!

You are very glad that you’re not Vriska’s moirail, that’s a whole lot of complicated and dangerous
shit that you don’t envy Terezi for dealing with. You debate on what one to touch next but finally
you pick one.

I protect my own.

What spools out from that statement is not so much beliefs but more feelings, or a mish-mash of
feelings and… physiological reactions. Yeah, it’s like the kind of thing Dahvid showed you. It’s the
same systems that let you put Sollux out for his surgery. There’s a weaker feeling, a light almost that
you dip your fingers into.

Images of your friends slide over your mind, no, not images but more the concept of them. A fond
hate-friendly exasperation tinged with affection. You might all be a bunch of losers but you’re her
friends. That’s nicer than you expected. You drift to another.

Terezi settles around you, the concept of her. A partner, an ardent supporter, someone who can be
trusted to hold her moirail to task no matter how hard she has to be. A scourge sister, a hero, a
dragon whose scales only partly protect the weakness in her. The self doubt and-

Oh boy, that’s not something you should be seeing. You hesitate and reach for the other light mix of
feelings and responses that came from the belief.

Sollux, oh Sollux. Bright and terrible, wrath and warmth tangled up into a body that’s she’s
controlled every muscle of before. So challenging, so lethal but he doesn’t even do anything with it
and no one sees it but she can make him better and no one has ever pushed her as much. Your
bloodpusher races and you get a flash of her hand on his horns, pulling his head to back arch and
make his ports glint, proof that he’s so unbreakable that he can withstand them. He-

Augh, no. You don’t need to see that and certainly don’t want her pitch feelings for Sollux tangled
up with your decidedly pale feelings for him. You get that he’s theoretically dangerous but he’s so
pitiable that you just don’t get how anyone could feel hate for him.

There’s another link here, old and faded but there. You touch it and feel an old ache, eight legs and a
burden far too heavy. But she protects her own, she feeds her lusus.

A new dice.

I need to be important to live up to my ancestor’s importance.
You can feel an older version of that lingering there, a desire to be just like her ancestor. Only that
eroded, Mindfang’s life lost its shine to be replaced with shame but the desire to be as notable
remains. She wants the same thing her ancestor had, to be remembered long after she’s dead. Only
you suppose Vriska wants to be remembered for something better.

Well, she is helping the effort to kill the Empress and change the universe for the better isn’t she?

There are other smaller beliefs and drives. Impressions about what the average person is like weak
or how intelligent most people are compared to her dum8. Most of those aren’t that interesting and you
flick past them easily enough.

You groan and let go of Vriska’s mind, falling back onto the floor. Your head feels like a mess. You
were tired coming in here and it’s only getting worse.

“I could kind of feel that.” Vriska says with a note of disgust in her voice.

“He was in there long enough, I’d be surprised if you didn’t feel anything. Come on, get up, you
have to control her now.” Dahvid insists, poking you in the arm.

“I want to take a break.” Vriska says suddenly.

“No you don’t, you’re fine.” Dahvid snorts.

“Alright, fine, I don’t. But I’m not cool with him screwing around in my head when he looks like
he’s going to throw up any moment now. So I want HIM to take a break, ok?” Vriska retorts.

You sit up woozily and are greeted with the sight of your ancestor and Vriska staring each other
down.

“Fine, whatever. I need to piss like a race hoofbeast anyway so you may as well take five.” your
ancestor shrugs and wanders off. Vriska watches him go and stares at the shut door for a few long
seconds before she talks to you.

“Is something wrong with Sollux?” she asks seriously. Your head jerks up, your tired neck obeying
its commands from a question like THAT.

“You see it too? Karkat keeps saying he’s fine, what makes you say he’s not?” you ask, desperation
rising in you. It wasn’t all in your head and now Vriska’s going to confirm your suspicions!

Vriska wrinkles her nose at you, presumably repulsed at the idea of having to share intel with you of
all people but she starts to talk anyway.

“I know we’ve not been dating all that long and there’s like a honeymoon period or whatever where
it’s wall to wall hate makeouts and endless pailing-” she starts.

“Gross.” you add.

“Shut up. The point is lately he’s not been interested in me at all and it’s not that he’s too busy or
anything, though there is that, but it’s like he can’t muster up any malice for anyone but himself. All
he does it work, I’ve not even see him play games and when he happens to have been nearby with
other people watching movies it’s so passive. He doesn’t seem to care about anything much, he’s
obviously getting depressed again.” Vriska says unhappily.

“Depressed? Are you crazy? He’s clearly going manic. Constant working, obsessing over things, the
way he snapped at Equius and tried to attack Jayekh, he’s moody and his sleep cycle is all fucked
“Well we can’t both… be…” Vriska stops what she’s saying. You’re talking about Sollux, of course ‘both’ is an option here. She whips out her palmhusk and starts rapidly Goregling, you lean over to see but she pulls it away from you.

“Oh.” Vriska says in a rushed sigh.

“A mixed state, featuring symptoms from both ‘poles’ of bipolar disorder. Such as low mood, loss of interest in other activities, sleep disturbances as well as increased goal-directed activity, obsessive fixation on new projects, volatile mood, psychomotor agitation whatever that means.” Vriska says with a frown.

“The fidgeting, leg bouncing, agitated thing.” you explain.

“Right.” Vriska stares at the screen for a moment or two longer, “Apparently it’s the most dangerous state for him. In terms of… life threatening.”

You open your mouth to ask how but the answer is obvious. When he’s depressed he doesn’t care about being alive, even when it shows up in smaller ways of just not looking after the basic things he needs to live like eating and taking care of himself. When he’s manic he has to do everything and he acts like he’s bulletproof. Combining a lack of care for his own wellbeing with the energy to be reckless and very destructive is mind bogglingly dangerous.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]

TG: karkat youre with sollux right now arent you
CG: WHAT? WHY?
TG: just answer the question!
CG: GEEZ, WHAT CRAWLED UP YOUR ASS AND DIED? I ASK BECAUSE I ASSUME YOU HAVE A FANTASTIC VIEW OF IT FROM HOW FAR YOUR HEAD IS UP YOUR WASTECHUTE AT ALL TIMES.
TG: karkat im serious
CG: YES, I'M WITH HIM. I'M READING A BOOK AND HE'S WORKING.
TG: good you need to stay with him ok
CG: AND WHY SHOULD I DO WHAT YOU TELL ME? I'M TELLING YOU HE'S FINE, STRESSED BUT FINE.
TG: hes not
TG: just describe him right now would you
TG: please
CG: ONLY BECAUSE YOUR WORRY IS PITIFUL RIGHT NOW.
CG: FINE, OUR PITIED NERD IS SAT AT HIS HUSKTOP SCOWLING AT THE SCREEN IN AN EXAMPLE OF TERRIBLE POSTURE AS HE GOES THROUGH CODE HE'S ALREADY WRITTEN THAT I CAN'T UNDERSTAND HEAD OR ASS OF.
CG: EVERY SO OFTEN HE SEES SOMETHING AND THEN IT'S FURIOUS TYPING FOR A WHILE AND THEN MORE QUIET AND NOT SO QUIET BITCHING ABOUT THE HARDWARE TEAM.
CG: HAL AND DIRKKA KEEP TALKING TO HIM EVERY SO OFTEN, TRADING FILES AND BITS OF CODE I THINK. OR MAYBE IT'S JUST ONE OF THEM, I CAN'T TELL. BUT SOLLUX DID GET INTO A MILDLY ENTERTAINING RANT ABOUT SMUG POINTY SHADE WEARING ASSHOLES.
CG: AND BEFORE YOU ASKED I ALREADY ANNOYED HIM INTO EATING.
TG: ok good thats good
TG: when i get back we can trade shifts in watching him
CG: CONSTANT SURVEILLANCE ISN'T AS SOOTHING AS YOU THINK IT IS, DAYVHE.
TG: its for his own good
CG: YOU'RE BEING REALLY WEIRD DAYVHE, ARE YOU OK?

turntechGodhead [TG] ceased trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]

“Karkat’s watching him.” you tell her.

“That’s good. I’ll see what I can do to put some fight back into him safely, maybe we should start up the DnD game again.” Vriska muses.

Sure, you’d be happy to see Sollux doing something that isn’t work. You’re not sure how optimistic you are about him agreeing to do that but if it’s not you asking that might help, you’re pretty sure that you pestering him is getting you nowhere at the moment.

“What about you?” Vriska asks, poking you in the knee with her metal finger.

“Yeah, I’ll play. Pretty sure everyone else will too.” you nod.

“Well duh, of course they will. I run an epic game. But I meant how are you? Is your training with him always like this?” Vriska asks.

“Sort of. There’s been some movie stuff but there was a lot of psychology study and since I got good enough at that it’s basically been this all day every day.” you shrug and put your palmhusk away.

“ALL DAY?” Vriska gasps.

“Well, reading people then he tests me on what’s there. Then I move onto the next person. I don’t know how many people I’m up to now, it’s all just blurring together.” you groan and push your shades up to rub at your face, you’re so tired.

“But you’ve barely used your psionics before this- what, half a sweep? Now you’re going from uncoordinated crawling to trying to run a marathon. Dayvhe, even I don’t get in people’s heads all that much. You can’t overstrain yourself like that.” Vriska insists.

“I have to, if I don’t improve I won’t be as strong as I can be when this fight happens and our friends and quadrants could die. I can’t let that happen.” you tell her firmly.

Vriska just stares at you for a moment before seeming to shift her tactic.

“Dayvhe, when I controlled Tavros to make him control Terezi’s lusus to control HER that was the most I’d ever used my psionics ever. It was a tough trick to pull off and for nights and nights afterwards everything was a blur, I had nosebleeds, I was out of my mind. Sollux blows his powers out and he cooks his pan or just dies from the shock, what makes you think the same doesn’t apply to us? This isn’t some limitless well of awesome power, there’s a cost and there’s a penalty for overdrawing on it.” Vriska says seriously.

“Much as I appreciate the advice we don’t have the same psionics.” you point out.

“No, you have chucklevoodoos. I’ve seen what happens when you blow those too. I saw Gamzee, hell, I’ve seen plenty of clowns around who are out of their heads all the time and it’s not from the faygo or their dumbass religion. The way they hardly seem to think straight, the paranoia, the mood swings, their whole deal. It’s because they go nuts on weaponised fear and it fucks them up. Rohhze
is smart enough to use hers sparingly and she’s the sanest one I’ve met.” Vriska tells you firmly.

“But I DON’T HAVE chucklevodoos. I’m a mutant, I have mutated psionics. The only person who has the same deal as me is the guy who’s teaching me and if he tells me to do something I’m going to do it, this whole place proves that he knows what he’s doing with his if nothing else.” you insist. Your ancestor is a fuck up at a lot of things but controlling people is his specialty, you need to get better at it.

“You can’t tell me you’re trusting him completely, are you? He trollnapped half of us and controlled all of us, we’d still be his prisoners if The Psiionic hadn’t slapped sense into him and he’s not here to do that now!” Vriska hisses at you.

“I don’t-” you shake your head, unable to force your thoughts into lining up just right. Dahvid is like your lusus, isn’t he? He’s trying to help you because he knows you’d do anything so he’s giving you more that you can do. He’s training you, making you useful.

The door opens again and your ancestor is back.

“Allright, come on, time is dead kids.” Dahvid says glibly but the very idea makes you cringe, you’ve had too many nightmares to find that funny in any capacity. That said regardless of how much Dahvid is playing his comment like a joke you know he’s serious.

“Dayvhe, you’re kidding me. You can’t trust him!” Vriska insists, getting to her feet. You stand up to mirror her but you’re not on her side with this, you have too much to lose and you’d do anything.

“Here’s a useful one. If you’re somewhere you shouldn’t be in that fight, like say the Royal Bitch’s ship and you run into someone who works there you need to make sure they don’t go and tell everyone where you are. Obviously you could kill them but people start to notice when people go missing and fatalities are the kind of thing that helmsmen report. Psii can fuck with the rules enough to delegate dealing with intruders to the guards but he can’t handwave a dead crewman. Solution: make it so they can’t talk about you.” Dahvid explains and you nod along.

“You’re deranged! You can’t make him do this, he’s not ready. What’re you playing at?” Vriska snarls at Dahvid.

“Shut her up about me.” Dahvid tells you, his cool gaze resting on you.

You look at Vriska who stares at you in disbelief. It’s not that you’re on Dahvid’s side, you’re not. You’re on YOUR side, you’re on the side that doesn’t land you with dead friends and dead quadrants because you weren’t strong enough. But you’ve already had this nightmare, haven’t you? Choosing between them and her, you choose them.

You reach through her mind, you know what you’re going for. That protective drive, a hint of her need to be the hero. You wind the concept around it, give your idea teeth. If she doesn’t do what you tell her this is what she loses, she won’t be the person who steps up to the hero’s mantle and saves her friends, she won’t have a kismesis or a moirail if she talks.

”I have to make you shut up about Dahvid or I’ll never be able to win this fight and everyone will die. So shut up about him.”

Vriska’s eyes go wide behind her round glasses, she looks from you to your ancestor open mouthed and silent.

“Dayvhe, no, why would-” she whispers.

“Hm, how about a test? Who am I, Serket?” Dahvid pushes past you.
You stumble back, off balance and dizzy. Dahvid is leaning down to Vriska who is unable to get even a single word out. Your lip feels wet and you touch it, pulling your hand back to find your fingers covered in mutant red.

“Dayvhe!” Vriska calls out and you land on your ass on the floor.

“You’re not going to get away with only doing this to one person on the day, you know. You can’t make my mistakes, you can’t lose like I did so get up.” Dahvid tells you and you think you can feel fear from him, not for you but an old kind. Maybe. God, you weren’t even trying to look in his head, what’s going on?

Vriska’s hands are on your arms and you didn’t mean to but you can feel in her head, the bright red tangled web of demand that you put in her mind.

“You said we’d undo it.” you manage to say.

“Right. Come on, just focus and I’ll show you.” Dahvid says as he kneels down with you.

You look at Vriska but the feeling of her mind won’t come. You’re running on empty here aren’t you? But you can’t stop now so you can give more, can’t you? You have to so-

-grubsauce dribbles over your fingers and lands on the paving slab in the setting sun. You stare at the burger in your hand. When did- what?

Where are you?

You look around, vague landmarks stick out. You’re near your hive, you have a burger for some reason but you are hungry. It was morning earlier why is it almost evening now? You bite into the burger and frown. You lost time, that used to happen with Cal. You really ought to-

-stare at your own reflection and watch the lights come back on behind your eyes. You’re there toothbrush in hand in what looks like your ablutionblock. Alright, this isn’t great. You should really sleep this off, you’ll feel more like yourself in the morning, you’re sure. You drop the toothbrush in the sink, not even putting it back and fall into your coon with your clothes still on. This has happened before. One time you were on a train and then the next you were pinned in Sollux’s ablutionblock with his blood in your mouth as he tried to put you back together.

Damnit, Sollux, you need to look after him. You’ll just close your eyes for a moment and go check on him.

You wake up hours later with the kind of headache that’s so bad you can hear the blood moving through your thinkspoon and it’s DEAFENING. It’s like your bone marrow has been replaced with angry bees and all of your teeth are hot lead. It’s that kind of headache. Migraine, whatever. It takes a while for you to peel yourself out of your recuperacoon and then out of the clothes you didn’t think to take off, but dragging yourself into the shower afterwards as well as taking two painkillers dry helps your head out some.

You feel weird, strung tight like the surface of a drum with every outside stimulus banging hard against you and echoing inside you. It’s like there’s something you ought to do but you don’t know what. At a loss for anything else to do you stumble to the nutritionblock, you need to eat, everyone needs to eat.

Staring at the bread and toaster unfortunately doesn’t make it assemble itself into food and you’re too tired and fried to work out what to do here. A hand brushes your shoulder, making you jump. Sollux moves past you, reaching for the coffee machine.
“Didn’t mean to make you jump.” he mumbles.

Sollux! Sollux is sick! He’s- yeah you talked to Vriska about this. He’s having a mixed episode and you need to stop it. That’s what was bothering you!

“Did you sleep?” you ask and Sollux groans, hanging his head.

“We’re not doing this, I’m too tired to have this argument.” Sollux tells you firmly.

“Because you didn’t sleep.” you conclude.

“I didn’t ASK your opinion on it but I slept some, actually.” Sollux says sharply as he turns to face you.

“Ok, that’s something. You need to stop working, no coffee either, you’re sick.” you say, reaching past to flick the machine off. Sollux glares at you and flicks it back on.

“Look at me. Look. At. Me. I’m not SICK.” Sollux says through gritted teeth.

He doesn’t know he is, but you know. Vriska said it’s the most dangerous time for him and she’s right. A depressed Sollux would just stay here and hate himself but a manic or mixed Sollux could get in some ship and get it in his head to take on the Empress one on one and die doing it. You can’t fail him like that when he needs you!

“You are, I promise! Please just-” you beg.

“Why should I?! You won’t listen to me! What’s with you lately?” your moirail shouts.

You can’t tell, you can’t prove it to him. Not- wait. You can!

You’ve had more practice than you can count and getting into his head is easier than Vriska’s. Or it is and it isn’t. Everything feels weirdly on the wrong frequency but you can still feel his feelings. He’s annoyed at you, tired and angry. You can’t feel the despair you expected or the too fast twenty shots of espresso and a thousand ideas that you’d expected either.

Horror and disbelief rush over you, like you’re trapped in a tank that’s rapidly feeling with all of his negative emotion. You- you shouldn’t be here! You can hear his thoughts too, his surface ones at least.

NO NO NO NO NO! He wouldn’t- he- why?! NO!

There’s a flicker and suddenly you’re looking at yourself, your own furious face directed back at you.

“GET OUT!” he yells and your sword appears in his hand and is promptly buried in your chest.

“You were in my HEAD!” Sollux accuses you, back in the nutritionblock.

There was nothing wrong with him, or there wasn’t before you did that. Something was wrong this whole time but it wasn’t him, it’s you. It’s YOU!

“Sollux, I didn’t- I’m so sorry I don’t-” you try, reaching for him but your moirail flinches back away from you. He’s breathing too fast, panic overwhelming him. You take a step towards him but instead of going forwards everything lurches backwards. Your back slams into the wall behind you, your head bouncing off of it and making your already aching head throb in agony. You hear glass shatter
but by the time you blink the stars from your eyes a whole window is blown out and Sollux is long

gone.

Desperation overriding your lack of coordination you stumble to the giant hole where the window
once was to see the slightest fading red/blue glow in the distant sky. Shit. SHIT. You have to fix this
and you have to fix it now. How are you meant to do that?

You fumble your palmhusk out and try to troll him but he’s offline, no help there then. Oh your
vision is spinning something awful, it’s bad enough that you have to bend over and rest your hands
on your knees for a second to steady yourself. What now? You have to fix this.

KARKAT!

Karkat can help you! Karkat cares about Sollux just as much as you do.

You stumble to his block and almost fall through the door.

“You’re not making any SENSE!” Karkat yells but is startled out of whatever tirade he was about to
go into by you blundering in.

“Dayvhe? Holy shit are you ok?” Karkat says in alarm and rushes to your side to help you stand
properly.

“I… I fucked up.” you gasp.

“Your nose is bleeding.” Vriska says. When did Vriska get here? Oh, wait, Karkat was talking to
someone.

“I’ll grab you a tissue, can you stand?” Karkat asks. You make an affirmative grunt, not trusting
yourself to nod and stay upright, so Karkat lets you go and rushes off.

“You’ve been doing it again, haven’t you? You said you weren’t going to anymore!” Vriska says
sharply.

“I said what?” you groan.

“You told me that it was getting worse, that you weren’t going to keep it up.” she says.

You try to remember that conversation and come up with nothing.

“I don’t remember.” you say and Karkat comes back with a bunch of tissues in hand and gently
touches them to your face.

“Can you be less of a bitch to him? He’s clearly hurt.” Karkat says snidely.

“No! If you’re having memory problems then this is worse than I thought! Are you missing time or
acting weird?” she asks.

“You’re the one acting weird. You show up here talking in circles about stuff that doesn’t make
sense and a point you never get to.” Karkat accuses her. You take the tissues from Karkat and press
them to your nose for a moment before figuring that, fuck it, you’ll live.

“No, I need your help.” you say to Karkat. Whatever’s going on with you can wait, Karkat is the one
who can help with Sollux and that’s what you need.

“Anything.” Karkat nods.
“I fucked up, I fucked up big time. I thought Sollux was sick and I was so scared and I- I don’t know why I thought it was ok, I’m so stupid-” you hiss.

“You’re not stupid.” Karkat tells you sympathetically.

“No, I am. I’m the worst! I got inside his head without his permission just to… to prove that he wasn’t right! He lost it because obviously he did and bailed and I don’t know where he’s gone and I don’t know what to do!” you sob, your eyes watering.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?! Of all of the things you could have done to Sollux!” Vriska yells at you with justifiable fury.

“Hey! Cut that out! Shouting at him isn’t going to help!” Karkat argues with her.

“What?!” Vriska snaps.

“I’m not saying that was a good idea but Dayvhe didn’t mean any harm and shouting at him isn’t going to fix any of this.” Karkat tells her.

Now you and Vriska are both staring at Karkat. This is the Karkat who last time you fucked up like this kicked the shit out of you in a clown tent and tried to strangle you and now he’s just… okay with this?

“I’ll see if he’s just blocked you, maybe he’ll talk to me instead. Him running off like this won’t solve anything and he should know better, obviously you were trying to help.” Karkat says, shaking his head and taking his palmhusk out.

Oh no. If Sollux hears a message like that just what is he going to think you did to make Karkat send it? As a matter of fact what are you doing?

“Dayvhe… are you…” Vriska says slowly and carefully, she’s just realised what you have.

You focus on yourself, imagining that weight on a trampoline feeling like you did before, a way of measuring your influence. It’s usually a small dent that you can never totally shut off but right now… right now it’s like a black hole you can feel it dragging Karkat in. You try to shut it down but it’s not working, if anything it only gets worse.

“I can’t stop it!” you shout. Oh fuck, Karkat’s trolling Sollux. You snatch his palmhusk from his hands and delete the message before he can send it. Instead of reacting with anger at you stealing his shit Karkat just looks at you adoringly.

“You need to get the hell out of here!” Vriska shouts at you, grabbing your arm hard with her metal one. The strength of her grip makes you wince and Karkat’s expression flicks from adoration to rage instantly.

“Let go of him!” Karkat shouts, drawing his weapons against her. Vriska lets you go and holds up her hands in surrender.

“Get to the roof, I’ll get Aradia and Hal, they’re not influenced by this shit.” Vriska says quietly as Karkat puts himself between you and her.

“What about you?” you ask worriedly.

“I’m resistant to this passive shit but I don’t know how much, besides I can’t work around the active stuff you already did to me and-” Vriska stops talking, her face a conflicted mess.
“I can’t be trusted, I can handle Karkat. I won’t kill him, get out of here.” Vriska tells you.

You rush out of the room hearing Karkat protest behind you at you leaving. The roof, you need to get to the roof.

“Whoa there Dayvhie, where’s the fire?” Roxxie exclaims as you turn into the hallway, you nearly ran into her chest.

“Are you alright?” Dirkka asks from Roxxie’s side. They’re both looking at you with concern on their faces.

“I just need to get to the roof.” you tell them, trying to slip by but Roxxie who is so much bigger than you, blocks your path.

“Oh no little koi, somefin’s up with you and I’m not letting you go anywhere until you fess up what it is.” Roxxie insists, her hand landing on your shoulder.

“No, I just need to go.” you tell her. Behind your eyes your thinkspoon is throbbing, you can’t turn it off but you’re pushing yourself far too hard. How is this going to go?

“Come on, Rox. Let him go.” Dirkka defends you, pushing Roxxie’s hand from you.

“What?” Roxxie gasps.

“Thank you.” you say quickly, ducking away from her.

“See? He’s my kid, I know what he wants.” Dirkka tells Roxxie and your digestion sac clenches with worry.

“YOUR kid? If I recall right I was the one looking after BOTH of you most of the time!” Roxxie argues.

No, no, no! You leap behind Dirkka and burst into a run, trying for the stairs. Both Dirkka and Roxxie are calling after you and you can hear them both chasing you. You slam the door behind you and rush up the stairs but they’re hot on your tail. When you get to the top you fling the door shut behind you again and rush out onto the roof.

You’re not the only one on the roof, about half of your friends are there and as they turn to look at you it’s evident that all of the sense is draining right out of them. They get to their feet and advance on you with calm and soothing words, telling you that it’s ok, that they’ll protect and look after you. It feels like a zombie movie as you back away from them to the edge of the rooftop realising that now you’re cornered.

You peer down over the edge of the roof and see people clustering on the street below, on the floors below you people are leaning out of their windows to look up at you as they beg you to be careful. Your head throbs and you stumble, nearly losing your balance but for an artificial hand closing around your arm.

“If any one of you takes another step closer I’ll cut his head off, don’t think I won’t.” Hal stays firmly and presses a sword to your throat. Your vision focuses and your friends are hissing in outrage at Hal’s threat to your life, threatening to disassemble him, to kill him in any way possible for doing this. Some are bargaining, if he lets you go then they’ll protect him, provided he hands you over to them.

“Just gotta stall for a minute kid, Aradia’s on her way. Thankfully Sollux left a lot of juice in that
thing, we can get away so this will wear off. Just stay with me and do what I say, ok?” Hal whispers into your ear. You nod weakly, you think your nose is bleeding again. Where’s this blood coming from anyway? Hopefully not your thinksponge.

Things get a little hazy until you’re suddenly in freefall. You gasp in alarm as the roof surges up away from you only for you to suddenly be in the hallway of the ship as the door snaps tight behind you.

“Somewhere unpopulated!” Hal shouts and everything goes black.
You sit up unsteadily, helped by his hand on your back. Looking around you can tell where you are but you have no idea why you’re here.

“It’s the ship, right? Millenium Falcon Two.” you say.

“Right, do you remember anything else? Because if you’re missing a lot of time I’m going to need to put you in the MRI again.” Hal tells you.

“MRI?” you ask.

“Guess who just bought himself a trip to the MRI!” Hal announces and gets to his feet. He grabs the stretcher you’re on and unlatches it from the wall and starts to push you from the room you’re in.

“Tell me what you remember.” Hal orders you.

You try to-

“SOLLUX!” you exclaim in horror. Oh FUCK you broke damn near every trust he ever put in you by going in his head without his permission, he’s never going to speak to you again is he? No, no, no, you totally fucked up there.

“Yeah, that was a mess. What else?” Hal asks as you curve around the corridor.

“Karkat, I did it to Karkat too. Passively but it was so strong and the others as well and you saved me at the end.” you tell him unhappily.
“I did. It got a bit horror movie there at the end huh? Which reminds me, now that you’re awake you need to take these.” Hal says, pausing his moving of the stretcher. He steps around it in the corridor clearly not designed for this and drops a handful of nondescript pills into your open palm.

“What’re these for?” you ask as Hal starts pushing you again.

“Most of them are post surgery things to keep the pain down and make sure you don’t get an infection.” Hal says easily.

“Surgery? I had surgery?” you ask in surprise.

“Mmhmm, you overblew your psionics so much that your thinksponge started bleeding, hence all the nosebleeds. If I hadn’t done anything you’d have died so what I did do was drill a hole in your pan. The proportion of people in our group I’ve put holes into is becoming bigger.” Hal tells you cheerfully.

You reach a hand up to your head and feel until you get to your temple where there’s a simple little bit of gauze taped down.

“You drilled a hole in my head?” you repeat, touching it carefully though the site throbs angrily as you touch it.

“Yes, stop trying to stick your finger in your pan. Take the drugs.” he reminds you and starts to execute what feels like a twenty point turn into another room with the stretcher.

“You said most of them were for that, what’re the rest for?” you ask him.

“You ought to be familiar with that one at least, you’ve seen it before. Sollux has had it before, antipsychotics and mood stabilisers. You’ve been awake off and on for about a week but the result of you overdoing it psionically is it’s thrown your mental regulation out of order. It’ll likely be temporary though.” Hal tells you.

You don’t think you need something like that but then you thought that forcing your way into Sollux’s mind was a good and reasonable idea so you clearly can’t be trusted right now. You down the medication in one with a plastic cup of water that Hal hands you. With that done you get a look at this room. You’re pretty sure that before it was just storage but now it’s got a bunch of plating on the walls and a decently sized machine with a flat bed in it.

“Lie on that, stay very still, I just need to look into your head. I’d stay in here with you but my body makes this thing go crazy.” Hal explains. He watches as you get up from the stretcher and weakly stumble to the machine and get on there. You shuffle into place and look up to check that Hal approves before relaxing. He leaves and soon the machine starts to make strange sounds, Sollux was in something like this before his surgery but it wasn’t quite the same. You wonder if the metal in his head would have been a problem from what Hal said about his body.

“Just checking,” Hal’s voice comes from the ceiling, “but can you see if you can dial down the passive psionics yet. I don’t know if you remember but you’ve not been able to yet which is why we’re up here and not down there with trolls.”

“Living trolls.” Aradia corrects him over the speakers.

“Yes, that. Living ones.” Hal agrees.

You focus in on yourself. The internal pull of your psionics is weaker than before but still strong. With some concentrated effort you’re able to drag the level of it down some but the effort of doing it
is exhausting and leaves you thankful that you’re already flat on your back.

“Oh, that looks a lot better.” Hal remarks from everywhere around you.

He comes in a minute or so after that and picks your limp and useless self back up and onto the stretcher.

“It’s been a week?” you ask wearily. Hal nods as he pushes you along.

“How is- what happened?” you ask him.

“I was right that the effect of your voodoos wore off with distance, the passive kind anyway. We’re pretty sure you did something active to Vriska but she can’t talk about it, The Grand Entertainer isn’t in a state to tell us anything either.” Hal explains.

Not in a state to tell them anything?

“Why’s that?” you ask.

Hal sighs, entirely performatively you might add.

“Vriska managed to explain that you were having some kind of burnout and the symptoms that could cause, which I was able to verify. By the time we were in the upper atmosphere everyone had come to their senses enough to accept that kind of an idea. Everyone else managed to work out that it was likely everything you’d been doing with your ancestor that started it and we’d written off your paranoia about Sollux as you making a fuss over your moirail who was dealing with pretty standard stress.” Hal continues.

“I really thought he was sick but that’s no excuse for what I did.” you groan, shame welling up inside of you.

“Did he make you do all of that? Your ancestor I mean? Did he use his voodoos on you to make you push yourself so hard you burnt out and lost your mind?” Hal asks, looking down at you properly.

“I don’t know. I don’t think so. He told me the consequences for not being strong enough and he reminded me often enough but… does it even matter? I still did what I did.” you answer him. Hal looks sad, partly for you and partly you think he wanted to hear that you weren’t responsible for this at all.

“What about Sollux?” you ask.

“Sollux… remind me never to get on his bad side.” Hal says with a wince and pushes you back into the room you started in. Hal helps you sit up and then keeps talking.

“Karkat tracked him down, it took about a day but he managed it. He explained that we’d worked out that your ancestor was at least partly responsible for what you did. Whether he knowingly pushed you too far, or if he psionically manipulated you or even just regular manipulated you we didn’t know but we were all pretty confident that he was at least part way responsible.” Hal tells you.

“So what happened?” you ask again.

“Those Star Wars movies, did you ever see the prequels? The ones with Darth Vader when he was just Anakin? Where they have that fight at the lava planet with their lightsabers and he ends up losing all his limbs? From how I hear it went a little like that, only instead of lightsabers and lava it was just Sollux’s eye lasers. Either that or Sollux just grabbed him and… well. Anyway, he didn’t take it
well. I think having you in his head pushed him into some state and finding out that your ancestor
hurt you made him lose it. Vriska stopped him but she was very clear it was for his benefit, not your
ancestor’s.” Hal explains.

“Is Dahvid going to live?” you ask, horrified at the idea and even more so about how Sollux must feel about it now.

“Oh he’ll be fine, he’s a highblood. Tavros lived to get artificial legs, Vriska has an artificial arm and eye. The guy has every docterrorist on the planet working for him, he’ll be better than ever by the
time he’s done healing which won’t be long. I wouldn’t feel sorry for him if I were you.” Hal says dismissively.

“But Sollux himself? How’s he?” you ask. You want to know the answer but you’re not sure if you’re ready for it. Hal’s mechanical face is purposefully blank as he seems to consider what to tell you.

“He’s detained right now. Mostly for his own protection. Dismembering the leader of a whole
planetoid isn’t a popular move and he needs the supervision. Karkat told me that the docterrorists are
treating him for something, some kind of traumatic reaction and a depressive episode is their guess.”
Hal says carefully.

“They’re guessing? Why’re they guessing?” you ask in shock.

“Because he’s not answering their questions about what’s wrong with him. He’s not talking at all in fact, not to anyone. Not even Karkat. But from what I understand he’s got a constant Karkat shadow
so he’s safe at least.” Hal explains.

Shit, poor Sollux. This is totally your fault, what he’s going through rests on no one’s shoulders but your own. He has Karkat though and you know he’ll never give up on him, he’ll stay by his side.
How’s Karkat taking this anyway? Not well you bet, though that’s totally understandable.

“What about Karkat?” you ask. Hal hands you your palmhusk, or at least he holds it up so you can see the screen.

carcinoGeneticist [CG] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

CG: HAL KNOWS WHERE WE ARE, THE SAME DOCTERRORISTS ARE ADVISING
HIM ABOUT YOU AFTER ALL.
CG: WHEN YOU'RE SAFE TO BE AROUND HAVE HAL TROLL ME TO SET UP A
MEETING, WHATEVER YOU HAVE TO SAY YOU OWE US MORE THAN DOING IT
VIA TEXT.
CG: I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT ELSE TO SAY TO YOU.
CG: I'M BLOCKING YOU AFTER THIS, THE NEXT TIME I HEAR FROM YOU IT'S
GOING TO BE IN PERSON.

carcinoGeneticist [CG] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]
carcinoGeneticist [CG] blocked turntechGodhead [TG]

That…

That seems fair. If Karkat’s too furious to tell you how angry he is then he’s pretty goddamn angry.

“I think he might try to kill me when I see him.” you say softly as Hal puts your palmhusk away,
you’re not trusted with it yet you guess. Again, that seems fair.
"I doubt that would make him feel any better so I don’t think he would.” Hal says.

“I’d deserve it so at this point I think I’d just let him.” you say with a shrug.

“Consider that the second reason you’re on mood stabilisers right now. I’m not letting you down there until you’ve got your voodoo under control but I’m also not letting you down there until your mental state is more stable. The result of the burnout is you’re still not right in the head, and let’s be real Sollux isn’t either so waiting seems like a good idea to me.” Hal tells you.

“So now what?” you ask.

“We wait. I managed to build that machine myself and the medication you needed was small enough that drones could deliver it. We’ve got enough power to hover here for some time and if I’m honest we could really land somewhere isolated with your levels as they are now and be fine. There’s enough food in here for quite some time and you’re the only one needing life support, we have plenty of time. So rest and try to recover from having a hole drilled in your pan and, I don’t know, read any long books you’ve been meaning to get to and think about what you’re going to say to people. For what it’s worth you have people who do want to talk to you now but tomorrow would be better I think.” Hal says and sets a gentle hand on your shoulder.

That really is it. You’re left to your own devices with only the warning that you’re not to get in sopor at all because shockingly putting soporifics right up against your actual thinkspoon is such a wildly bad idea it doesn’t even need to be explained.

All the same you find yourself in the room off of the helmsblock that you shared with Sollux and Karkat before which is probably just you torturing yourself because they’re very obviously not here now.

“It’s kind of funny how you didn’t trust me around him and now you’re here.” Aradia says to you from above.

“I don’t trust you around him.” you tell her.

“And yet you-” she starts.

“I don’t think anyone should have trusted me either. We’re both dangerous for him.” you say unhappily and climb onto the bench seat that Sollux was sat on before with his little camera bot. You wonder where that thing is. You wonder just where Sollux is, you hope he starts feeling better soon. He deserves to feel better.

You speak to a lot of your friends over the following days. Days that are otherwise taken up with tests and trying very hard to turn your psionics off, that at least you get better at until it’s basically normal. It’s not that your friends have split neatly into your friends and Karkat and Sollux’s friends but there are a few people that don’t call you and you didn’t expect them to either.

Most of your friends are relieved that you’re feeling better and a lot of them seem to view all of this as an unfortunate accident on your part that was set off by your irresponsible/obviously evil ancestor, depending on the person talking. And of course it’s not your fault that Sollux is so particular about that one thing that it’d set him off so badly, not his fault either. It’s just some perfect storm of awfulness that leaves everyone neatly unblamed except for probably your ancestor.

They don’t really get it but it’s nice that they care, you suppose.

Mostly your time varies between feeling awful and feeling super bored. Also has anyone ever had panache for weeks and weeks on end? Because seriously you do not rate the experience well. No
more trepanning for you. You know Hal thinks you’re better when he has Aradia land the ship and then scales you back to the very small amount of medication that just stops your thinkpan from becoming a petri dish, although that said you’re just going around with a bandaid on your face right now so you’re probably not long for those ones either.

You’ve got lots of time to yourself and you’re bad at the self reflection thing usually because you don’t really like what you see for all that you pretend that you’re the coolest and most together dude of all time. You can’t psionically root around in your own pan so you’re just left to work out why you did what you did the same way everyone else does, by thinking about it. Thinking about it and resolving never to fuck up this bad again.

You try to figure how you think like you did with Vriska, work out what ideas connect to what. You’ve got layers of shit about how sincere you are or aren’t about things and how you want people to see you but you’re not looking for personality flaws here, you want the deep stuff. Given enough time you find the answer, it’s one that sounds nice at first but it’s pretty wrapping on something terrible.

Not unlike you.

Hal agrees to set up the meeting between you and Karkat, he even has Aradia fly you to the hospital itself on the day of. He reminds you that if you need to bail either because things get too real or because you set off the Dayvhepocalypse 2.0 in there then the two of them will be ready and waiting to evacuate you for your, or possibly everyone else’s, safety.

You have the room number written on the palm of your hand, your sweaty, sweaty palm. You’re there first which is maybe the better option, so you take a seat in the uncomfortable chair near the dying potted plant and wait. Your bloodpusher leaps into your throat when the door opens.

Karkat comes in first and when he sees you his face does this complex series of expressions that you can’t decode beyond that he’s having a lot of feelings and trying to keep them under wraps. Sollux follows him. He looks… not good but better than you’d prepared yourself for. He’s skinnier than he was but not as much as you have seen before. His eyes are more dull than you remember and notably his ports are covered and he’s wearing his old shirts, he looks at you but his expression doesn’t shift.

“Come on.” Karkat tells him, making a move to get closer to you. Sollux reluctantly follows and Karkat pulls chairs about with a screech on the floor until you’re set up not so much in a triangle but the two of them facing you. Silence hangs there for several stiff seconds until you fill it.

“It’s not like I can… what I mean is that an apology is never going to cut this shit but I also can’t just not apologise so I’m doing that first. I’m so… so sorry.” you begin.

“Yeah, it doesn’t cut it.” Karkat agrees.

“I know.” you nod.

Sollux says nothing.

“Do you have questions or do you want me to just talk or what?” you ask them both. Sollux isn’t looking at you but Karkat is scowling at your direction.

“How about you start at the beginning, go to the middle and then to the end. I’ll heckle when I want and if Sollux wants to say anything he should.” Karkat says, shooting a meaningful look at your moirail.

“I was spending time with Dahvid, I guess that’s the start. You know about his whole room of dead
people. I kept thinking that could have been me if things were different, me and Sollux talked about it. And he, Dahvid I mean, pointed out that if we lose I could end up just like him. Room full of dead people kind of way.” you say unhappily.

You take a steadying breath and go on.

“I started having nightmares about it all the time, it was driving me crazy. And everyone else seemed to be so useful and I was just not and all I could think about was the price for fucking this up.” you explain.

“You weren’t sleeping.” Karkat says.

“Yeah, that was then. So I talked to my ancestor about it and he straight up told me that, yeah, I was right if we fail that’s what’s gonna happen. So the only option we have is to not fail and obviously I should be prepared to do what I have to so I can keep you alive.” you tell them.

“He manipulated you?” Karkat asks.

You want to deny it but you have a better point to make.

“One thing he taught me was about core beliefs. They’re things we think about ourselves and the world, right? They change how we interpret things and the active psionics we have use them as a… a hook I guess? Do this because you think that. Everyone has them, I do too. And here’s the thing, I’d do anything to protect you two. What I did counts as something and I did it because I thought if I don’t then you two would be hurt or die, I thought Sollux was sick and I’d do anything to protect him from that so…” you trail off.

“Are you telling me why you did it or are you making excuses for yourself?” Karkat asks you sharply.

“No excuses, I’m not doing that. Everyone else seems to want to. They figure- look there’s three rough ways this goes down, right?” you sigh and hold up three fingers.

“One, I did nothing wrong. My ancestor took hold of that noble protective streak in me or whatever and fucked with it so he wouldn’t see mini-him fuck up and lose people like he did with his people. I’m totally blameless and a victim here. I think a bunch of people want that to be true.” you say and lower a finger.

“Two, he either messed with that a little or just routine took advantage of me worrying and because of that I pushed myself too hard and burnt myself out which made me somewhat irrational. I wasn’t totally myself but I still chose to break into Sollux’s pan because I thought I was helping. That makes me somewhat to blame, kind of the bad guy but also not totally.” you say and get to your last remaining held up finger.

“Three, I got weird about having nightmares and pushed myself too hard and made a long string of stupid choices that I could have turned around at any point if I’d had the sense so basically the end result is it’s totally my fault. I could have called time on it earlier, I could have talked more about why I was worried, I could have done anything but what I did and it’s all my fault.” you tell them.

“Well which is it?” Karkat asks finally as the silence dragged on too long there after your list.

“I don’t know and honestly it doesn’t fucking matter.” you sigh.

“It doesn’t- OF COURSE IT MATTERS! IT MATTERS TO US!” Karkat yells, finally raising his voice.
“Sorry, sorry, of course it matters to you. But it doesn’t to me. Or- hold on let me just think. I’ve got things I need to say and I’m not doing it right.” you say and squeeze your eyes shut. You’re trying to stay calm and a quick check on yourself shows that you’re still on the lowest level of passive you can manage.

“I would do anything for you two and that’s really not a good thing. There are lots of things that I don’t want to be the kind of person who’d do them. I don’t want to be that guy but if I can go around telling myself that anything is alright as long as it’s to keep you two safe then you’ve seen where that goes. Whether Dahvid made me or I just did it doesn’t matter, until I fix this I’m not safe. You two don’t deserve that shit.” you explain.

“Wait, what’re you saying?” Karkat asks, staring right at you. You seem to have Sollux’s attention too.

“I can’t. I can’t date either of you any colour until I stop being such a liability and honestly even after that I would entirely get if you didn’t want that then either.” you whisper.

Sollux gets to his feet in a rush of sparking red and blue.

“Fuck you.” he snarls and storms off.

“Sollux!” Karkat shouts but he’s already gone.

“That’s… the first thing he’s said in a perigee near enough.” Karkat says numbly.

“Yeah, well, I deserved it.” you mutter.

Karkat just stares at you, a dumb expression on his face as he seems to work out what to do now.

“You’re really breaking up with us?” he asks, you nod.

“For real? Because if this is some sympathy thing…” he says suspiciously.

“God no. But you even having to ask that shows it’s what I should do.” you answer.

“Don’t think this means you can just walk back into things when you’ve finally meditated on the concept of being an insufferable prick long enough. Sollux might not want you back, I might… you can’t expect shit is all.” Karkat warns you.

“That’s totally fair.” you nod.

“This doesn’t really fit with you doing anything to keep us around, you know.” Karkat points out.

“No, it completely does. I’d do anything to keep you both safe but I’m the dangerous thing here, I’m keeping you safe from me. What it does to me doesn’t matter. I’d do anything, it’s an absolute.” you shrug.

“Anything? That… that’s worrying.” Karkat says.

“Yeah, Hal and Aradia have been all over my ass about that too. But like I said I need to fix this exact thing, so, yeah.” you shrug again. You’ve been doing a lot of that lately.

“I know you said it doesn’t matter which one of those it was but it matters to us. Not least because if Sollux hurt a guy who didn’t do all that much wrong it’s going to mess him up more.” Karkat says reasonably.
“I can try to talk to Dahvid if you want.” you offer and Karkat nods. You guess you’ll do that then.

The room is quiet now with just the two of you. For a lack of anything else to do you get up and pick up Sollux’s tipped over chair.

“Are you going to come back home? You can’t live in that ship forever.” Karkat reasons.

“Do you even want me living with you?” you ask, genuinely unsure of the answer. Since you’re already standing Karkat gets up and glares at you from his lower height.

“You say that like I broke up with you. You just broke up with me, remember?” Karkat tells you with a hiss.

“I know. It’s not like I want- I mean.” you shouldn’t say that, try again, “Think about what you want and ask Sollux if he’s ok with it. I’ll do whatever you want.”

“You’re not doing what I want so that’s not true, but fine I’ll ask him. Maybe he’ll actually talk now.” Karkat says, glancing at the door that Sollux left through.

“You don’t need to stay here, if you want to go after him…”

“No, I know. I should really. Make sure he’s not doing anything dumb.” Karkat nods. He looks from the door to you and frowns. “Are you ok? You don’t seem right, are you sure that your head isn’t still broken too?” Karkat asks.

He shouldn’t care, you’re not his problem anymore. You’re his ex now. He should be glad to see the back of you or at least he should be angry with you for breaking things off with him and Sollux, but he’s not. He’s acting like you might need looking after, even if he’s pissed at you too.

“I think I’m doing pretty good considering that I deserve whatever reaction you two had for me and this wasn’t really anything. I was half expecting a strife from you, you were pretty clear last time about how a second time would go. I’d deserve it.” you say with a helpless little gesture.

Karkat reaches up and wraps a hand around your horn, you let him because like you said, you’re not defending yourself here.

“I’ve heard shit like this from Sollux before, you don’t sound ok to me at all.” Karkat insists.

He’s looking up at you with pity on his face. Platonic, maybe? Or romantic? But you’re not together so it’s not a thing. He looks like he might kiss you and honestly you’ve been so alone when you were recovering that you’d about gnaw your own arm off for the chance at that but here’s the thing and everyone can say it together now.

YOU ARE NOT DATING KARKAT VANTAS.

This means that you have to stop acting like you’re in any way entitled to anything from him, you’ve got to stop your problems being his. You can’t do things just because you’d do anything for him, or at least you need to try to fix that part. The point is you can’t kiss Karkat because you miss him terribly, because it’s been so long since you’ve seen him or because he looks like he wants you to.

“I should go.” you make yourself say.

“Right.” Karkat says, letting your horn go. You bite back the sad little whine at the loss of contact.

You watch Karkat go and hope that he and Sollux will be ok, not that it’s any of your business
anymore. You leave the hospital to find Hal waiting for you outside.

“How did it go?” Hal asks you.

“No one tried to kill me but I’m single now.” you say as you walk up to him.

“They broke up with you?” Hal asks with obvious surprise.

“I broke up with them, I’m too dangerous. I need to see my ancestor though, can you take me there?” you ask, changing topic quickly.

“I’m guessing you have some words for him, some questions.” Hal nods.

“Right, let’s go.” you agree and start to walk back to the ship.

“Sollux and Karkat though…” Hal tries again.

“I really don’t want to talk about it.” is all you have to say about that.

Dahvid is apparently too recuperating from his grievous injuries and adapting to his new prosthetics (Hal called that one) that he simply cannot see you. Or so a very disapproving receptionist tells you. You can feel the sway of Dahvid’s pity-me pull through the whole building so you’re sure he’s getting plenty of sympathy and care, though notably he’s not turned the whole thing into the zombie horror show that you did.

When she tells you that you can, however, come back the next day to see him you figure that your ancestor wasn’t expecting to see you and wants a whole day to prepare some suitably dramatic and cutting remarks like this is ‘In Which Linsay Lowhan Plays A Transfer Student Into An Academic Institution, Gaining The Favour Of Three Alpha Violetbloods Only To Be Thrown Into Disarray When Romantic Entanglements Become A Problem. Includes Such Memetic Lines As ‘On Wednesdays We Wear Violet’ And Many Animated Gifs.’ You know, that movie that you’ve never actually seen just sent gifs of ironically to your friends.

That leaves you back on the ship with nothing to do but wait and sleep. It’s not like you’ve been dreaming much lately, more like you’ve been remembering. It’s basically your thinksponge doing a highlight reel of all the ways you screwed this up, but you prefer that to it being creative. The nightmares before were awful.

This is kind of worse. No, definitely worse.

You’re in Sollux’s hive. He’s sat on his loungeplank talking to Karkat who’s starting to ignore the tv in favour of talking to Sollux. Behind them the green moon is setting which leaves their skin in soft focus pink with flickering highlights of blue from the TV.

Sollux laughs at something Karkat says, that breathy, shoulder shaking little ‘ehehheheh’ sound of amusement he makes. Karkat grins wolfishly at him as he goes on, talking with his hands as much as his mouth because he’s so absorbed in his story. You’re standing at the edge of the room just watching this.

Your digestion sac makes a valiant attempt at escape when Karkat looks at you but he just rolls his eyes in fond exasperation and without your permission your feet take you over there. The dream you’re in drops you between them, Sollux settles himself against you like it’s nothing and keeps talking to Karkat.

“You didn’t actually say that to someone- wait, no what am I saying? It’s you, of course you did.”
Sollux laughs.

“Just slamming idiots left and right over here.” Karkat brags and leans against your shoulder in a way that has your arm curling around his back. He’s a warm and heavy weight against you and when he looks at you the quiet little chirp of affection is just audible from his thorax.

You wake up, alone and with your arms empty. It’s pretty telling when the worst your subconscious can do is to just underline reality and stand there Troll Will Smith posing at it like ‘look you already destroyed this’. You’re left with weird thoughts as you get dressed, namely that you’re probably going to have to return a good deal of stolen clothing to Sollux and Karkat. It’s one thing to hold onto your ex’s clothing because you like them still, it’s pretty weird to do it if you’ll still be living with them. Either way you’re wearing your actual own clothes when you come to visit your ancestor in the hospital.

He’s standing there with his back to you, facing towards a large window as he surveys the outside world. A drink rests in his new hand in a fancy glass and the silk dressing gown he has on is lavishly and fancily patterned.

“If you’re going to be Gatsby I’m leaving.” you warn him.

Your ancestor whirls around in a manner intended to be dramatic but you catch the wide eyed flash of pain on his face so you suppose his new legs aren’t really up for that level of melodrama. He slumps against the glass like he meant to.

“Your moirail tried to murder me and that’s all you have to say?!” Dahvid demands as his sleeve soaks up some of his drink that slopped out of his glass when he turned.

“Well, he’s not my moirail anymore for one.” you tell him.

“Oh, what? He broke up with you because you fucked around in his pan like I warned you not to? I got that much out of him before he REMOVED MY LIMB HAVING PRIVILEGES.” Dahvid’s voice raises into a nasty adult snarl at the end but you’re more immune to that now.

“No. I can’t be trusted. These psionics just aren’t something you can have and be with someone, at least until I figure out how to make them less dangerous. I broke up with them.” you shrug.

“Well that’s never happening.” Dahvid mutters and downs his drink. He cracks a pane of the window open, throws the glass outside where it’s someone else’s problem and shuts it again.

“What exactly did you tell him I did to make him do this?” Dahvid demands and carefully sits on a plush chair that certainly isn’t hospital standard issue.

“Nothing. I was too busy bleeding in my thinksponge from blowing out my psionics at the time.” you tell him. You ought to thank Hal more for saving your life or at least saving you from irreparable thinksponge damage. That said maybe if he’d let it go on it would have killed off the part of your thinksponge that does the whole psionic thing and that’d be nice.

You could also say that Vriska managed to finally communicate around the shit you put in her head and everyone put two and two together and came to ‘it’s all Dahvid’s fault’. You could do that but you don’t trust Dahvid not to take his anger out on her or any of the rest of them. So you’re going to let him think your friends are all just wildly smart and perceptive which is mostly true.

“You actually blew out from that? I knew it was hard or whatever finally doing something with our psionics but, you know, get good.” Dahvid says.
“Yeah, well, I hope it hurt when Sollux got you.” you say sharply.

Dahvid flips you off with his new hand. From what you can see of his hands and forearms, because his probably designer sleepwear doesn’t afford you a look at his new legs, they’re a black satin finished steel. The detailing that runs from his hands up his synthetic forearms is a matte chrome that all looks very slick, very expensive. It still had to hurt and you bet that Sollux isn’t even a little sorry.

“I was going back and forth wondering, you know.” you tell him, changing back to the earlier topic.

“Some of my friends seem to think you made me go along with the whole training plan. If you did I can’t tell.” you continue.

“Why would I? I don’t even know if I can. You know why you have to get better, why would I make you do something you already knew was the right thing to do?” Dahvid says, genuinely seeming confused. He still thinks he’s right.

“Yeah, I figured that was it. I wanted you to like me, I wanted to understand my psionics better and you teaching me dovetailed that nicely. You pointed out that if I didn’t do this everyone I care about dies, which is a pretty big motivator. If you had wanted to force me to do it that’d be what you’d attach that order to, right? I just dumbassed all the hard work into it myself, right?” you say with a bitter laugh. The ironic thing is Sollux had encouraged you to try to make a connection with Dahvid because it seemed like you wanted it.

“It’s not like this benefitted either of us, is it? I assume you’re better now since you’re walking about and whatever so I guess we’ll go slower or what have you even though we don’t really have the time. Pushing you harder is obviously a false economy but maybe you being less purple than me just gives you a lower threshold, I don’t know.” he shrugs.

“Are you CRAZY? I’m not doing this anymore! Working with you ruined so much of my life, what the fuck?!” you yell and Dahvid honestly seems surprised.

“But you need to, if you don’t then you’ll end up like me all your friends will-” he starts.

“Yeah! Yeah, if I keep listening to you I’ll end up just like you. A semi-sociopathic, self absorbed idiot. You weren’t trying to destroy me, it wasn’t malice. You just didn’t care to check and you destroyed people because of it. Honestly ‘Not malicious but dangerously self absorbed leading to disaster’ ought to be the title of your fucking biography!” you tell him angrily, your voice creeping louder.

“I’d do anything for them but I shouldn’t! I don’t want to turn myself into you to keep them alive because they hate you and they should!” you shout, fully yelling now.

“And if you don’t you won’t have them anymore. You don’t know what it’s like, being the last one left. If I had to go through losing my limbs every day, the pain of that, to get everyone I cared about back like some kind of shitty mythological figure I would! It’s abstract for you but it’s my LIFE! You’re telling me that you honestly believe that if you stood there and it was your friends, your quadrants dead on the floor with the imperial trident through them you wouldn’t regret not doing everything you could?” he demands, rising from his chair to loom over you.

You’d absolutely regret it.

You’d sell your soul to have them safe and with you again. Fuck that, you’d sell anyone’s. You’d do ANYTHING. But here’s the thing, let’s say you did that somehow and got them back then would that be ok? How would they look at you? How would they treat the monster you’d be for doing
something so terrible? They wouldn’t want to you, you wouldn’t be worthy of them.

You know this, it’s logical. In the rational part of your mind it checks out but when you feed that back to the emotional part you just get anguished wailing. You can’t accept the theoretical worst outcome and the pants shitting terror of it is what’s driving you into being awful to avoid it.

Of course you’d regret it in that situation.

“No, I wouldn’t.” you lie.

“Liar.” Dahvid says, accurately.

You shrug, playing it off as he can think what he wants. You know you’re lying, he knows. He may even know that you know and know that you know that he knows that- wait you’ve lost that one.

“They’re going to die.” Dahvid warns you, threatens really.

“Would Signless be cool with this? Can I tell Psiionic? Is he going to think this is totally above board if I shoot him a message about all this?” you ask and maybe you should do that. Let his not quite moirail kick his teeth in a little because it worked before.

“Don’t you dare!” Dahvid says sharply.

“So they wouldn’t be and you know it.” you conclude. Dahvid doesn’t have words for you, just a threatening growl.

You want to look in his head, to see for sure what he thinks and why. You’re also pretty sure that if you try that you might pop something in your head and die and if you don’t Hal might just strangle you for being stupid. Besides you’re pretty sure that you can guess. Dahvid’s devotion to Dionte and Psii are as ironclad as yours to Karkat, Sollux and your friends. He fucked up in protecting his own people, lost a war and everyone else but Psii and Dionte, and being real Psii isn’t doing so hot either.

He wants to protect you as well, keeping you locked up against your will was that all over and you’re pretty sure his concern is patchy, less inclined to cover those he doesn’t know so well or those with faces of people he wasn’t cool with. He doesn’t want you to go through what he did which is a nice enough sentiment if he wasn’t trying to put you through the psionic equivalent of a woodchipper to ensure you’re tough enough. You already had one lusus whose batshit attempt at raising you so you could protect yourself, Cal fucked you up enough you don’t need round two. Hah, even though you stupidly invited it in, didn’t you? Dahvid is maladjusted, misguided and oblivious. All traits you inherited and the pair of you made a fine mess of things here.

“Right, well, I’m leaving.” you tell him. No further business to conclude here, you got the answer Karkat asked you to get. Or rather the one you offered to get because he was so desperate you couldn’t deny him. Damnit, get better at that already.

“What? Why?” Dahvid asks, surprise on his face.

“I need to get back to the ship, self imposed exile until I can trust myself around people I care about. I just wanted to find out about what happened was all.” you explain.

“But the movie.” Dahvid says. It’s not a complete sentence but the confused and maybe slightly rejected look on his face tells you that he’d fully anticipated that you’d at least both be going back to that. Dude isn’t used to consequences, is he?

“Your movie.” you say and yeah that’s hurt and confusion on his face.
It’s no one’s job to explain to you why what you did was wrong and it’s not your job to walk your ancestor through that shit either, especially when you’re evidently no expert. You wave goodbye to him and leave, he protests and tries to go after you but it seems that his control or whatever of his new legs isn’t quite good enough yet to catch you so you get outside just fine.

Then it’s the same as before, back to the ship and to Hal checking up on you and otherwise being alone.

Karkat’s unblocked you though so that’s something.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]

TG: karkat?
CG: OH, YOU’RE BACK ONLINE.
TG: right i was seeing dahvid since you wanted that answer and i said id get it for you so
TG: thats what i was doing
CG: RIGHT, RIGHT.
CG: IS HE IN A LOT OF PAIN?
TG: do you want him to be
CG: I WANT HIM TO SUFFER AT LEAST SOMEWHAT FOR WHAT HE DID. THOUGH I GUESS SOLLUX ENSURED THAT ALL BY HIMSELF.
TG: dude i havent even told you what he did or didnt do
CG: SO DO THAT THEN.
TG: ok so i got there
CG: WAIT.
TG: uh
CG: SORRY I HAVE SOMETHING I NEED TO SAY FIRST, IT'S IMPORTANT.
TG: oh ok
CG: IT'S ABOUT SOLLUX.
TG: is he ok
TG: is something wrong
TG: did something happen?!
TG: something else besides everything i did
CG: ALRIGHT SLOW DOWN.
CG: WE TALKED, HE AND I, I MEAN. I HAD TO AGREE TO A FEW THINGS ABOUT HIM AND ABOUT YOU.
TG: oh
CG: I'M NOT ALLOWED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT HIM. NOT ANYTHING MEANINGFUL I MEAN. I DON'T HAVE TO PRETEND TO YOU THAT HE DOESN'T EXIST BUT I CAN'T GO SPECULATING TO YOU ABOUT HOW HE IS OR THINGS THAT HE SAID.
CG: NO EXPLAINING THINGS TO YOU ABOUT HIM OR WHAT HE'S SAYING OR THINKING AND I ALSO DON'T DO THE SAME TO HIM ABOUT YOU.
CG: THAT'S THE DEAL, AND I'M ALSO NOT ALLOWED TO SAY ABOUT WHY THAT'S THE DEAL BUT IT IS. SO THERE.
TG: uh
CG: DO YOU AGREE TO THAT AT LEAST? IF NOT I THINK THIS IS GOING TO CAUSE MORE PROBLEMS.
TG: no no i agree i mean thats fair enough
TG: i dont blame him for not wanting anything to do with me or to have you telling me things if youre talking to me which im kind of surprised you are at all
CG: I HAVE MY REASONS.
TG: okay?
CG: TELL ME ABOUT YOUR ANCESTOR.
TG: alright
TG: he didn't use his psionics on me to make me do anything first off or at least thats what he said and i think i believe him but im pretty sure he knows how i tick enough to pull that same shit old school style
TG: i mean rohhze can talk people into things no cuddlevoodoos required
TG: not that shes like him
TG: but im not saying that its his fault im the one dumb enough to fall for it
TG: i did what i did and i chose to
TG: i coulda not done that and i coulda like noticed how much my psionics were fucking me up
TG: ive been thinking on it and i think i might be missing more chunks of time than i realised because of this and thats happened to me before and i should have said something but i didnt because i was too obsessed with what i thought was the problem
TG: what im saying is
TG: my ancestors an asshole but i knew that already so really
TG: its all my fault
CG: YOU’RE AN INFURIATING PERSON TO TALK TO SOMETIMES DAYVHE.
TG: sorry
TG: but think of it this way
TG: i might be a problem but im not your problem anymore
TG: at least i can stop leeching off of you
CG: I DON’T EVEN KNOW WHY I’M TRYING TO TALK YOU OUT OF YOUR SELF PITY, I WASN’T EVEN THAT GOOD AT IT BEFORE YOU BROKE UP WITH ME.
TG: karkat wait i didnt mean
CG: NOPE
CG: NOPE, ALL THIS CAN JUST NOT. IF YOU COULD TRY TO BE LESS BLISTERINGLY STUPID NEXT TIME WE TALK THAT’D BE GREAT.
CG: THANKS FOR AT LEAST FINDING OUT WHAT I WANTED TO KNOW.
CG: I HAVE TO GO [REDACTED] WITH [REDACTED] NOW.
TG: wait are you doing that or did sollux modify your trollian
CG: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

carcinoGeneticist [CG] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

You, uh, you aren’t sure which answer is true.

You dream again that night. You and Karkat stumbling through his hive together, too busy making out and trying to pick a flat surface to be coordinated. You skate your hand up underneath his soft sweater and it obviously tickled a little because he laughs against your lips. Shirts get lost somewhere along the way. You’ve always loved seeing Karkat shirtless because for one the boy is hotter than midday in the desert and two it means he trusts you enough to expose himself to you. As a fellow mutant you understand the gesture and its meaning better than most.

“Give me a sec.” Karkat whispers as he kisses you and then gets up from where you two had landed on the floor of his block.

“Why?” you ask after him but he’s walking out of the room. He waves you off so you sit there and wait, Karkat’s sweater in hand.

Time drags past the tingle of excited anticipation and into actual concern for him not having returned yet.
“Karkat?” you call out, getting to your feet.

No answer.

You leave his block and call out again but there’s no answer still. You traipse down the hall and the stairs only to find his living room empty, no furniture, no nothing. You turn around and all the pictures on the wall are gone even though you just passed them.

“Karkat?!” you shout and rush back up the stairs.

You run into his block and it’s blank and empty, you’re reminded of the night you came here after Karkat had left it, before Rohhze took you to Jasper. It’s not abandoned though, it’s as if Karkat was never here. Looking down the sweater in your hand is suddenly gone.

You awake with Karkat’s name spilling from your lips and you have to anxiously look at your palmhusk, at pictures of him and at your last conversation to see that he exists. This sucks.

A few of your friends have started trolling you, you suppose that word has got around that you’re awake and coherent now. Obviously you have heard from Dirkka, Roxxie, Jayyne and Jayekh. Naturally your oldest three friends were hot on their heels but of the rest there are some people who when you see them message you it either fills you with relief or dread.

With this message you think that particular coin is still in the air, a verdict to be decided.

gallowsCalibrator [GC] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

GC: H3LLO D4YVH3
TG: oh no
TG: i mean
TG: hi terezi
GC: 1 W4NT3D TO T4LK TO YOU D4YVH3
GC: 1 H4V3 LOTS OF CONFLICTING EV1D3NC3 4BOUT YOU YOU KNOW
TG: i bet
TG: but i'll save you the trouble and say what i already said to karkat and sollux
TG: i am completely responsible for everything
TG: and if you're turning this into one of your weird courtroom roleplays then the accused pleads guilty
GC: TH3 COURT 1S NOT 4CC3PT1NG PL34S 4T TH1S TIME
GC: H3R HONOUR4BL3 TYR4NNY W1LL 4CC3PT TH1S 4S TH3 4CCUS3DS OP3N1NG ST4T3M3NT THOUGH
TG: rezi i know people wanna think that im innocent or whatever and this is some tragic misunderstanding
GC: YOU H4V3 NOT PROV3D TH4T TH1S 1S NOT 4T L34ST P4RTLY TRUE Y3T
TG: but i talked to my ancestor
TG: he didn't make me do anything
TG: and even if he had then its my fault for being weak enough to allow him
GC: W3LL 1F TH3 COURT 4CC3PT3S TH4T LOG1C TH3N YOU 4R3 AN 1NNOC3NT MAN
TG: what
GC: YOUR CR1M3 1S CONTROLL1NG TH3 M1NDS OF OUR FR13NDS 4ND 1NV4D1NG SOLLUXS M1ND 4G41NST H1S WILL
GC: BUT BY YOUR LOG1C TH4T 1S OUR F4ULT FOR B31NG TOO W34K TO R3S1ST YOU
TG: wait no thats not what i meant
GC: 1S TH4T NOT WH4T YOU JUST S41D THOUGH?
TG: i didnt mean it like that
TG: obviously its no ones fault but mine that i controlled them
TG: it sure as shit wsnt solluxs god no
GC: TH3N TH3 4CCUS3D 4CC3PTS TH4T IF HE W4S N3F4R1OUSLY 1NT3RF3R3D
W1TH BY H1S 4NC3ST0R TH3N TH4T WOULD NOT B3 H1S F4ULT
TG: fine fine i accept that if it means not blaming everyone else
TG: but he didnt control me
GC: WH3R3 1S THE PROOF OF TH4T
TG: he told me so
GC: TH3 COURT F1NDS THE 3V1D3NC3 OF 4 KN0W3N CR1M1N4L TO B3 UNR3L4BL3
4ND 1T 1S STRUCK FROM TH3 3R3CORD
TG: what thats such shit
TG: ok fine i interviewed him in a legal fashion and was convinced that he did not spongefuck me
with his psionics happy now
GC: TH3 COURT 4LS0 F1NDS T3ST1MONY PROV1D3D BY SOM3ON3 NOTOR1OUS
FOR BL4M1NG AWAY FROM H1S PROBL3MS TO BE TO B3
UNR3L14BL3 4ND 1T 1S STRUCK FROM TH3 3R3CORD
TG: hey
GC: 4LS0 TH3 COURT QU3ST1ONS TH3 CL4R1TY OF M1ND TH4T SOM3ON3 WHO
JUST 3R3NTLY H4D A MAJOR TH1NKSPONG3 H3MMOR4AG3 COULD H4V3 1N
ORD3R TO CONDUCT SUCH 4N 1NT3RV13W
TG: then why am i *on trial* right now if im not reliable
GC: 4 V4L1D QUEST1ON
GC: 1N L1GHT OF TH3 4CCUS3DS COND1T1ON
GC: TH3 UNTUSTWORTHY N4TUR3 OF TH3 GR4ND 3NT3RF3R3D
GC: TH3 KNOWN CH4R4CT3R OF TH3 4CCUS3D
GC: H3R HONOUR4BL3 TYRANNY D3CLA1R3S D4VH3 TO B3 INNOC3NT UNT1L
R3L4BL3 3V1D3NC3 1S PROV1D3D
gallowsCalibrator [GC] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]
TG: wait what
TG: what just happened

After a week of no psionic fluctuations on your end and perfectly clean MRI scans Hal suggests that you move back home. By suggests you mean he has Aradia land and stow the ship away and then throws you outside and walks you back to the building you used to live in.

Do live in.

You’re not sure if you’re hoping or dreading that Sollux and Karkat will be there when you get back in the building, they’re not as it happens but almost everyone else is there.

“Dayvhe!” Jayded yells and bodily throws herself at you, hanging from around your neck and knocking all the air from your chest.

“Maybe don’t choke him out Jayded?” John suggests.

“Missed you too.” you wheeze, patting Jayded’s side as she relents and loosens her chokehold on you.

“And here I was expecting an awkward erotic asphyxiation joke from you Dayvhe, I’m very disappointed.” Rohhze smiles at you from John’s side. Oh, you have so many hate-friendly feelings for these three tools.
Jayded properly lets you go so that the others can get a look at you, namely Dirkka and Roxxie with their respective matesprits who also helped raise you lingering behind worriedly.

“Oh sweetie, we were so worried.” Roxxie croons and picks you up in a squeezing hug that you can’t help but return.

“I’m so sorry.” you sniffle, not that you’re tearing up at all.

“Dayvhie, no, you were hurt and you didn’t have control. No damage done to us and no hard feelings at all here. We’re just glad you’re ok.” Roxxie tells you, setting you down.

Dirkka leans in to get a look at you, tipping your head to see the healing cut from Hal’s surgery.

“Is that where Hal punched a hole in your pan?” Roxxie asks with a gasp.

“Excuse you, my skills are far more precise than that.” Hal says with offense.

“More of a tactical karate chop to the pan?” Jayekh grins.

“PROPER surgical techniques, I hope.” Dirkka says.

“Mine is the drill that will pierce the heavens.” Hal quotes shamelessly.

“I HATE you.” Dirkka snarls. Well, tries to snarl. Sometimes certain tones in a growl or snarl with him get tangled up with his artificial gills and it produces a noise with an undercurrent of a garbage disposal being fed ten forks at once with vigor.

“Dayvhe.” Terezi calls out, you turn around in time to see her elbow John in the ear in her quest to get close to you and drag Vriska through the small crowd too.

“Ow!” John complains but is summarily ignored.

“You need to undo what you did to Vriska, she can’t tell me what she knows without you doing that.” Terezi explains.

“You don’t even know if he CAN anymore Terezi, for all you know his psionics might have burnt out.” Vriska argues with her but Terezi is very obviously not listening.

“I should be so lucky. No, the passive shit is still going. I’ve not tried the active thing though and I don’t know how to undo it for sure but.” you start.

“We’re not taking her to your ancestor.” Terezi interrupts.

“I wasn’t going to suggest it.” you agree. You don’t really trust him with a girl he doesn’t much like in the first place.

“I think if you’re going to attempt that it should be back on the ship in case it sends everything haywire again.” Hal suggests.

“Wait, is that such a good idea. What if he hurts himself again?” Jayyne asks, which is good because you’re concerned about that too.

“You just got here.” John adds which, yeah, that too.

You look at Vriska and Terezi, the way their hands are tightly clasped together and how Terezi is seeking to protect her, to fix what’s wrong. Because they’re pale for each other. There’s a hollow
ache inside you. You saw how much Vriska pities Terezi, you pity Sollux just as bad if not dangerously worse, so you know how Terezi must feel. Making your moirail happy is off the table now that you don’t have one but you can at least make someone’s happier.

“Yeah, come on.” you agree. Despite having just come from there you and Hal retrace your steps back to the ship with Vriska in tow. Hal had explained that even though Terezi badly wanted to come with it’d be best if there weren’t more susceptible people around if your voodooos went bad.

As usual Aradia isn’t surprised to see you again, just cheerful. It’s a cheer that still seems to unnerve Vriska at least a little, like she expects it to be fake and is waiting for the other shoe to drop. Honestly it wouldn’t surprise you if Vriska being on edge about Aradia just being upbeat is one of the very things powering that good mood. Vriska suffers at least a little and Aradia technically does nothing wrong. Win-win for her, right?

“You don’t have to do this.” Vriska says finally.

“It was a waste of a takeoff if you decided to tell me that just now. Unless you don’t trust me in your head again which is completely fair.” you remark as you drop into the pilot’s seat that Hannsolo always sits in the movies. As Vriska joins you in the next seat over you guess that makes her the wookie but you decide not to voice that particular thought.

“I’m more worried about you having a stroke or whatever but go off I guess.” Vriska sneers at you managing to both be nice and a bitch. Maybe that duality is why Sollux-

Well. That’s none of your business anymore is it?

“Terezi told me you went to the hospital. I don’t mean Karkat and Sollux.” Vriska says, moving the conversation on, she’s talking around the block in her head as much as she can. You make an affirmative little noise.

“What was that like?” she asks, pulling her feet up onto the no doubt priceless chair.

“He was pretty convinced that training was gonna resume when I felt better, same with the movie making.” you say.

“Wow.” Vriska says, her eyebrows raising in surprise. You guess she really only has one and a half eyebrows. The scar around her fake eye seems to have made it so half of it doesn’t grow back but she’s got some pretty darn convincing pencil work on there. You only really know because you’ve seen her without it.

“I can’t really talk about him with you, can I? Not with your head like that. I should try to fix you first. Where is-” you look around and see Hal lingering in the doorway. Well, you guess that’s as ready as you’re going to be.

“Are you sure you wanna do this?” you ask and she nods with vigour.

“I feel like in movies whenever people do psychic stuff they, like, touch the other person’s head and you get all cool visuals about it. It’s odd to just sit across the way from you and just think real hard at you.” you laugh awkwardly.

“Let’s both imagine you reaching out and touching my face and then Terezi shanking you for it and let’s not, huh?” Vriska snickers, her sharp fangs flashing in the light.

“Yeah, I pity the fuckers who piss her off.” you nod in agreement.
You take what is probably a totally unneeded steadying breath and metaphorically reach out to Vriska. There’s the cool slippery marble of her mind but since she’s inviting you in you can just walk over it with no resistance, less of a wall blocking your way than a path you have to cross without hindrance.

Her mind appears to you as the scattered dice you saw it as before and though your head is throbbing already at just looking it’s a mild ache, you can do this. You owe it to Vriska to do this. Snarled up in red messy strings is your order to not talk about Dahvid, the tendrils of your idea have latched around a few little ideas some of which you didn’t intend. Touching your command makes Vriska suck in a sharp breath, filling you with her desperate resistance. The ‘no I can’t say anything’ fear that’s snarled around the things she values most and the things about herself and the world she wants to protect or fears validating.

You don’t know how to do this, if Dahvid taught you then you blacking out right after erased the memory. He learnt by instinct though so you can too. The obvious answer is to unhook your order from the beliefs before you try to interact with it, like, uh, getting gum out of hair or something. Actually no that’s a bad metaphor because you remember one time Jayekh got gum in Dirkka’s hair and it was a whole THING and it had to be cut out. That was a nightmare, so much drama. Maybe it’s more like untangling Rohhze’s wool or something, yeah, that works.

“I’m gonna be honest, I don’t know what I’m doing but maybe talking to you might help.” you say and you can hear that your voice is a little spacey.

“Ok?” Vriska says.

You reach around for the least tangled part and settle on it, your fingers ghosting on the idea.

I need to prove my worth

“You’re keeping quiet about this because I made you, right? You don’t care about my approval or Dahvid’s, do you?” you ask.

“No.” Vriska says.

“So keeping quiet doesn’t prove that, right?” you ask and wriggle your fingers under the red thread of command.

“No.” she agrees and it comes free.

“Oh.” Vriska says softly.

“Is it working?” Hal asks.

“Yeah, I felt something.” she replies.

You look around for the next part.

Sometimes the hero has to be the bad guy!

“Dahvid’s the bad guy here to you, right?” you ask. Vriska says nothing but you feel the command in your hand tense, she can’t talk about it.

“Alright, ok, try again. This thing, this command, was just a meaningless test. It doesn’t help anyone so you doing it or not doing it is, I don’t know, it’s not heroic or evil. You don’t need to care.” you say, if you come at the idea sideways maybe it’ll click that it’s irrelevant to how important she needs
to be then you can maybe get it off.

“It matters.” Vriska says but not with conviction.

“It mattered that I could do it, it doesn’t say anything about you.” you counter and give a good yank on the threads of the order and suddenly it comes free.

Alright, the order is now just stuck around one idea! You’re nearly there, how hard can-

I protect my own.

Ah, fuck.

You want to take a break here and try to think about this but you’re scared that if you let go of the idea it’ll burrow deeper into her mind like some kind of horrible thinksponge cancer that YOU GAVE HER. You need to push on for her sake.

Hah, that’s kind of ironic. You’re trying to defuse her protectiveness over her friends wellbeing and you’re making yourself power through with what you guess is a pretty similar drive in you.

That’s a thought, your idea was pretty focused on you wasn’t it? So maybe you can get it that way.

“Dahvid wanted me to do this, as proof that I was learning. He wanted me to be stronger, me making you shut up about him was proof that I could do that.” you say and in your hand the idea thrashes like it’s trying to get out and wrap itself further in her head.

“But he wanted to teach me this, too. So me getting this out of you proves that I’m still getting stronger. He’s not going to hurt our friends because of it, he’ll be pleased. He’ll probably think it’s proof that he did the right thing, so if anything you talking about him is the best way to keep everyone safe because it’ll make him happy.” you say.

You don’t even have to pull on the command, Vriska’s own mental processes stop gnawing on her for disobeying and turn around to immediately sever the command from her. Looking over her mind all seems well, or at least all seems ‘Vriska’ for whatever that counts for. In your hand is the order you put in her, you made this and now you’re going to destroy it. You clench your fist and the idea dies.

“Dayvhe?” Hal asks suddenly as you slump down in the pilot’s chair.

“I’m fine, just… ugh.” you groan and rub at your face.

“Dahvid.” Vriska whispers cautiously and makes a startled little noise when she hears his name pass her lips. With a yell she leaps to her feet, her fists clenched in the air in either determination or triumph, you can’t tell which.

“DAVID TOLD DAYVHE IF HE DIDN’T CONTROL ME EVERYONE WOULD DIE! DAVID SAW DAYVHE’S NOSE BLEEDING FROM OVERWORKING HIMSELF AND MADE HIM KEEP GOING! HE TOLD DAYVHE HE HAD TO KEEP DOING THIS MORE AND MORE TO GET BETTER AND WHEN HE THREW ME OUT HE SAID HE WAS GOING TO HAVE DAYVHE KEEP CONTROLLING OTHER PEOPLE! IT’S ALL HIS FUCKING FAULT!” Vriska yells at the top of her lungs.

“Wait, I don’t remember that.” you say.

“Because you were having a burnout and giving yourself thinksponge damage.” Hal tells you flatly.
“Did you want me to pass that message on or were you just going to yell it at us?” Hal then asks, turning to look at Vriska.

“Fuck you no I’m starting a memo!” Vriska says angrily, whipping her palmhusk out and pacing back and forth as she types with ferocity. It has a funny CLICK CLICK CLICK CLICK sound of her metal and flesh thumbs alternating as she types on the glass screen. If you were feeling more yourself you might sample that for a beat to a track but you’re too tired for that.

Well, you’re tired until it occurs to you that you ought to check that memo out. You scroll through the ‘added so and so’ notifications at the beginning but your blood runs cold when you see that she’s added Sollux. Well that is until-

TA: BOY AM I GLAD I’M HOLDING ONTO SOLLUX’S PALMHUSK FOR NOW, HE DOESN’T NEED TO SEE WHATEVER THIS IS.

Well that is until-

twinArmageddons left the memo
CG: BUT I WILL STAY AND IF THERE’S IMPORTANT SHIT GOING ON HERE I’LL PASS IT ON.
AG: of course wh8 I have to say is import8nt!
AG: Dayvhe just made it so I can talk about his ASSHOLE ANCESTOR AGAIN! And H8LY SHIT D8 I HAVE A L8T T8 SAY!
TT: (◣ ◢) I’m going to assume the wild increase in 8 density means that you’re angry?
GC: 1 4M V3RY GL4D TO S33 TH4T TH3 W1TN3SS C4NT3STY TO TH3 COURT NOW
EB: nooooo not the shitty roleplay
gallowsCalibrator banned ectoBiologist from responding to the memo.
AG: Dahvid

You tune out at that point, you already know what she said your ancestor did and now that you know Sollux isn’t looking and you can’t hurt him more with that knowledge you find that you’re out of willpower to do anything more.

“I’m gonna have a nap.” you say quietly, moving past Hal.

“No sopor, remember?” Hal reminds you, as if you could forget that you still have a hole in your head that’s not healed completely yet.

Walking through the empty helmsblock gives you a disgusting pang of loneliness, but that’s your own damn fault isn’t it? You keep going into the block you had shared with Sollux and Karkat before and fall down face first on the loungeplank there. It’s not really something you could describe as a loungeplank really, more of a built in bench with padding. It’s also not something you could accurately describe as comfortable but whatever.

You don’t fall asleep but you do space for a bit, even so you’re still troll enough that the sound of someone else coming into the same room as you alerts you. You lean up to see Vriska walking into the room, she looks around for somewhere to sit but you’re laid out on the only thing around. She seems to decide the same thing but then just lifts her leg to kick you in the knee and lower legs in general until you move at which point she sits down like you invited her.

“I’m gonna be upfront and say that I don’t like you much.” Vriska announces.

“Cool. Great. Good talk.” you groan, thunking your head against the wall tiredly now that you have scrunched yourself up that high to avoid her assault.

“But that shouldn’t make you think that it means that we’re not friends.” Vriska continues.
“I mean, I think not liking someone generally makes them not your friend.” you say reasonably.

“Nonsense, I have plenty of friends I don’t like.” Vriska snorts like you’re some kind of moron for not knowing that.

“You’re a very fucked up person, Vriska.” you groan.

“Shut up. My point is that we’re friends.” she says and rests her sharp metal elbow on your knee, again, ow.

Something horrible in you thrashes and snarls at her words and your response to her flies from your mouth without permission from the reasonable parts of your thinkspoon.

“I’d kill you in a second to save Sollux and Karkat.” you tell her emotionlessly.

“Oh, Dayvhe, same here. I’d gut you to save them, to save Terezi or the rest of our friends. You’re not special.” she sneers at you.

Well. Ok? You don’t really know what to say to that, because that’s a horrible thing to tell someone but you started it so you can hardly complain. Vriska’s not looking at you now, instead she’s looking across the block with her eyes kind of unfocused.

“Terezi… she pitied you, kind of. A long time ago I mean. The more she finds out about you the more she thinks it’s because we’re alike, and yes the idea disgusts me too before you say anything.” Vriska adds that last part quickly just as you’re going to protest.

“Because if I were you I’d hate myself for what I’d done, for all the people I’d hurt. Especially for what you did to Sollux which, as his kismesis, if anyone else hurt him that way I’d feel justified in murdering them for it. My spade doesn’t have a lot of weak points but that one is off limits. If I’d done what you’ve done the idea of anyone being my friend at all would make me want to strangle myself and if people didn’t hate me I’d make them, I’d do something like tell a friend I’d murder them just to get them to go away.” Vriska says, her metal fingers digging into your leg a little.

“Oh so Terezi tells me.” she adds with a shrug.

“And I mean, so what, your ancestor forced you into it but he didn’t psionically force you. You still had a choice, so really isn’t it your fault?” Vriska hisses.

You remember the inside of her head. That desperate desire to be the hero but if you can’t be the hero then be the bad guy. Adoration or revulsion, no middle ground. If she can’t earn someone’s respect then destroy them and make them fear her. But the counter to that is that if she doesn’t deserve someone’s respect or forgiveness then they ought to hate and despise her, obviously if that’s the case then she may as well choose what they hate her for. She may as well make sure they hate her, right?

Vriska Serket is a deeply fucked up troll.

...You are a deeply fucked up troll.

You don’t deserve your friends forgiveness or the affection of your quadrants, so you break up with them and hide up here. It’s the same goddamn thing, isn’t it?

“I know you’re trying to be shitty about it, but yeah, that is why it’s my fault.” you tell her.

“Look, I’m not going to say it’s not your fault-“
“Thanks.” you interrupt her.

“-because we both know that getting into someone’s head like that isn’t one mistake, it’s a whole line of bad ideas in a row. You could absolutely have chosen not to get in Sollux’s head, even if the passive shit was out of your control which I think it was, what you did to Sollux wasn’t.” Vriska continues, ignoring your interruption entirely.

“Like it was the last time you did it to him?” you hiss at her.

“Nah, the last time I controlled him he had asked me very nicely to and we had a great time.” Vriska says with a leer.

Wait, she- no, no, because that sounds like-

“AUGH, I don’t want to know! That’s an awful idea! Why would you- why would he- you’re just lying to me for fun, right? Right? Wait, no, don’t tell me.” you blurt out in horror. You’d heard allusions to that before but you’d thought it was a joke and Vriska doesn’t look like she’s joking at all.

“Aaaahaaaanyway, my point is that yes you failed but it wasn’t all your fault.” Vriska says, her tone becoming serious again. She’s back to not looking at you as well.

“Sometimes you can admire someone because they have the same kind of interests to you or maybe they seem really cool. They’re older and powerful and obviously you want that because being young and at a disadvantage is no fun.” Vriska says slowly.

“Are you talking about your ancestor or mine?” you snipe at her. It’s worse because you’re at least partly aware that you’re trying to make her mad so she’ll leave and stop saying things, but Vriska isn’t giving in.

“You want to be like them and it becomes easier to try to push back the things you don’t like. Sometimes you’re also in a situation with someone who has loads of power over you, even if they’re meant to be helping you it can end up being that you’re stuck in a situation that’s shitty because the alternative seems so much worse. You can pretend like it’s how things have to be or that you like it but when there’s such a high cost to not doing something it’s not a totally free choice. When you’re at that kind of disadvantage you’re not… what you might do is not totally your fault.” she says stiffly.

“Like…” you hesitate but go for it, “like your lusus?”

Vriska is visibly tense but she nods, once in an almost mechanical fashion.

“Cal sucked too but at least he never made me hurt anyone else, I just knew if I brought anyone back he’d kill them but that’s easier to avoid.” you tell her.

“But Dahvid has us all here. We can leave on the ship if Sollux flies it but they could stop us, they have helmsmen fast enough to catch us and potentially they could shoot us down. All that’s assuming they don’t just take the ship away on his orders. Dahvid could have us all killed whenever he wants but he pretends like he’s nice and that’s way more pleasant to believe. But even if he’s acting cool and you’re hanging out with him doesn’t mean he can’t still do all of that.” Vriska says, finally looking at you again. It’s an uncomfortable thought and one you’ve been trying to avoid because remembering how powerful he is over you makes you feel helpless in a way you deeply dislike.

“A guy like that tells you that you have to use your psionics until it hurts and then some it’s not
exactly easy to say no, not exactly safe either. And if he’s someone, like my ancestor used to be, that you look up to in a way as well then it’s harder.” Vriska adds.

“Fine, it’s harder to argue with him about it but like you said I still made the choice to hurt Sollux.” you say and that’s the sticking point, isn’t it?

“Yeah, you did. But you were in a bad situation, dealing with someone who could kill all of us, with someone you wanted to be important to, with someone who it was hard to say no to. You had all that against you and then your own psionics started frying your ability to think straight which makes you a little less responsible too.” she says.

You can sort of see her point. Like, logically you can pick up the beginning thread of her argument and follow at along, at each point everything seems to check out but then you get to the conclusion at the end which is that you’re not completely (and possibly only slightly) responsible. At that point your mind basically yells LOL NOPE at the top of it’s mind lungs and walks off. You’re like that cartoon meme with the starfish.

“It doesn’t matter.” it what you say finally, you’re not explaining any of that to her that’s for sure.

Vriska looks at you, a little sad but mostly frustrated. She shakes her head and sighs heavily through her nose.

“You’re coming back with me.” she informs you, not asks you.

“I don’t think-”

“If you want to avoid hurting people you’ll come back. You being away is making everyone worry more than they already are and people are already plenty worried about Karkat and Sollux. You being far away is upsetting people, if you don’t want to hurt them then stop it.” Vriska interrupts.

The idea of making your friends hurt even more, worry about you even more, is like chains around your pumpbiscuit slowly tightening and making you burst with agony. If that’s the case then you just have to go back you can’t hurt them any more, you’ve already done enough damage!

“Ok.” you agree.

Vriska seems a little surprised that she could talk you around so easily but she knows better than turn down a win just because it’s easy. So, with that the three of you leave the ship, leaving Aradia’s ghost behind to do who knows what. Your friends are just as pleased to see you as last time but home or not you’re still pretty exhausted. Dirkka brings you food later and just happens to stay there long enough to watch you eat it and then you’re allowed to get to sleep. Alone, of course.

Your dreams remain weird. They start off nice, you’re being offered moments of Sollux and Karkat, instances of happiness but it always warps so that you either wake up lonely or it all vanishes for you in the dream the moment you take your eyes off of them.

At some point however now that you’re back in your hive you have to go into the nutrition block. A troll’s gotta eat and Dirkka ain’t gonna bring you food all of the time, is he? The window has been replaced since Sollux burst through it. There’s no trace of you on the wall he threw you against. Even so you’re standing in the room where you fucked up the hardest you’ve ever fucked up and it’s miserable. It’s almost worse that you can’t actually recall exactly how he looked when he caught you in his head but your thinksponge is happy to flick through Sollux’s simulated horror, betrayal, terror, disgust for you. Really any negative emotion can be simulated and directed at you via your imagination because you deserve to feel bad about this.
You suppose that just standing in the room without doing anything is a pretty good clue as to your state of mind so you shouldn’t be surprised when Rohhze finds you and decides to talk about it.

“I can feel your despair and self loathing around you, you know, it’s like a thick miasma in the air.” Rohhze informs you as she slips past you to boil water for some tea.

“Sorry.” you apologise.

“That won’t help anyone and you didn’t do anything to me. Besides I know you better than to think you meant it.” Rohhze sighs.

That thing inside you thrashes about again, other people affirming good things about you runs so counter to something right now that it makes you feel worse. Rohhze is frowning at you and you jerk back when she all but comes nose to nose with you as she gets close suddenly.

“You feel very strange you know.” she says, squinting at you.

“I don’t know.” you tell her.

“Do you mind?” Rohhze asks and reaches out and touches your face with her fingertips anyway. Chucklevoodoos go up the vertebrae in your back, you’d like to imagine that happening with a comical xylophone noise but alas not.

“Really weird.” Rohhze says and pulls back at last.

“My head’s kind of messed up enough as is right now, maybe don’t keep doing that. I don’t want anything to go haywire and hurt you. Or me I guess, although that’d be my own fault, so.” you shrug.

“Well you’re right about part of that at least. Something really is wrong with your head, I don’t know if it’s something Dahvid did or something your own psionics did but you’re a big snarled up mess of bad feelings in there. You need to sort that out.” Rohhze says and one of her ear fins flicks in agitation.

“I’ll just schedule that into my calendar, Rohhze.” you say with a roll of your eyes.

“Just pencil that easy little task in right next to end the Empress and maybe fuck the laws of physics around. You know easy little things like that. I hadn’t thought until now about fixing myself up before getting around other people, I’m so glad you pointed it out to me.” you carry on.

“I wasn’t suggesting going back. Within that ramble there were several good reasons for not doing
so, but I doubt Jaspers developed that technology on his own so there must be other such pods out there and there have to be more purple bloods out there who aren’t under the Empress’ direct control.” Rohhze says, tossing the tea bag in the trash.

“Well exactly what are you planning?” you ask but Rohhze just smiles at you and saunters off.

Goddamnit you hate when she does that.

Rohhze remains inscrutable and your trolling her does nothing to stop it so you’re just left in John and Jayded’s company because they at least have the decency to not be impossible to deal with. They both, however, do feel compelled to try to make you feel better which again is so much nope. You can’t deal with being herded into feeling better about yourself so you bail on them early and try to sleep some more but again you just get weird dreams.

Rohhze, it turns out, has a plan. It took a few days to put together but she has a plan.

There are apparently some more unaffiliated clown sects that hold religious sway with trolls who follow the messiahs. One particular sect is apparently unaffiliated enough that its congregation boasts the small number of clowns who run around on Planet Hollywood and also the Empress’ own purples. Having enquired with religiously inclined purples Rohhze has found someone to put her in contact with the leader of that church, an old woman known as The Designed. You’re presuming that reads as designed as in possessing a design rather than de-signed but who knows. Rohhze’s plan is to get you an audience with this woman to see if she can help you out with the tech that Rohhze has decided will fix your problem.

This is, for the record, a stupid plan. You tell Rohhze as such.

“This is, for the record, a stupid plan.” you inform Rohhze as she herds you onto the ship with the other purplebloods. Every so often they meet up for a sermon and you’re tagging along with Rohhze. She’s wearing her facepaint and insisted that you go back to yours.

It must be noted that you think this plan is dumb but if there’s any chance it’ll help protect the others you’ll do it. Besides these are Rohhze’s people so she’ll be fine and if you get killed then that’s not a problem, you won’t be a danger to anyone then will you?

Whoa, that just got dark. What gives?

Well, the lapse in willpower is more than enough for her to get you on the ship. It’s bigger then the Falcon but it’s not a big ship by any means, it does seem to be party central like lots of clown shit seems to be. Everyone’s excited to go so you guess this is take you to clown church two: electric boogaloo.

Rohhze is talking theology with the older purples so you peace out and check the ship out. It’s probably because you miss Sollux but you find the helmsblock easily and end up peering inside. It’s not what you expected at all, it’s not dim and moodily lit like the rest of the place but bright and kind of messy. The walls are slapped with posters for movies and games, there’s a TV set up with splaysacs and all that around. Two young adult goldbloods are sat in them laughing and talking as they ignore what’s playing on the screen by them. Within the helm a slightly older woman is plugged in and not paying attention to you at all, not something you can say for the two remaining goldbloods who are now looking at you.

“Uh. Hi.” you say awkwardly.

The pair look at each other and then glance at the woman in the helm who opens her eyes to look at
“Why are you here?” one, a guy, asks you.

“I’m- my friend Rohhze, she’s the one who’s all clowny but she got me involved and so now we’re here and I guess I just.” you hesitate and look at the helm and the woman who seems to be in there of her own free will and the room that looks comfy, fun and pleasant, “I guess I just wanted to see that things were cool here.”

The two guys in the splaysacs look at each other again.

“You were worried about us?” one asks.

“Well, clowns can be shitty.” you shrug.

“Watch it.” the woman in the helmsblock growls but the two guys just laugh.

You apologise and start to hastily introduce yourself, if they’re gonna hate you then they ought to know who they’re hating at least so they can tell everyone else about you.

“Oh, we know who you are. All of us do.” one of the guys laughs.

“You’re nothing but trouble, you know? You showing up caused all kinds of problems not to mention the actual second coming of Psiionic ripping our boss limb from actual limb.” the other says shaking his head.

“You mean Sollux? You say that like he’s a religious figure.” you say with a frown.

“You don’t have to be well stocked in faith to see all the same players lining up again to be some kind of sign.” the guy says in his defense.

“I don’t want to be the second Grand Entertainer.” you say miserably.

The two guys look at each other and laugh, not that you have any idea about what thing exactly you just said was entertaining.

“Well, I’m glad you’re doing this because you’re… getting paid I guess? Right?” you ask and the two guys nod.

“Good, I mean I didn’t think about it before I came in here but it’s probably pretty likely that I’m the last troll you wanna see around.” you say with a grimace. It’s pretty obvious that the goldbloods as a whole have Sollux’s back, you saw how they all turned on your ancestor for him. You don’t know if Sollux is well enough to go into the Dream and tell people what you did, but you suppose even if he was inclined to do that he wouldn’t have to. It just takes some other goldblood to know what happened and then the knowledge spreads. Golds are gossipy bitches you guess even though you don’t think you’ve ever met a goldblood you hated.

The look on the faces of all three of them tell you that they know something about what went down but it’s only the woman in the helmsblock who looks really annoyed. They’re not a hive mind after all, they do have their own opinions, you’re just pretty sure that lady’s opinion of you is deservedly bad.

You say your awkward goodbyes and ollie out of there real fast.

But here’s a fun riddle, what’s worse than spending all day and night on a clown ship with only
Rohhze and a bunch of clowns for company? Spending TWO days and nights doing that! You can’t even feel good about the fact that the number would please your ex.

Ugh, sometimes just thinking of Sollux as your ‘EX’ feels like a knife through your chest, but you’ve got no one to blame but yourself for that.

Whatever. The ship docks with The Designed’s space faring church and you’re all hurried off board and set off to blocks of your own, you’re sharing one with Rohhze and in a mixup worthy of Karkat’s dumbest of novels it’s only got the one coon.

“It’s fine, I’m supposed to keep that stuff out of my head anyway. Besides I’m pretty much healed but why risk it?” you shrug, gesturing to your temple.

“Because you’ve been having nightmares, haven’t you?” Rohhze asks, looking at you sidelong.

Yeah, well, you bet Sollux is having far worse than you.

Rohhze narrows her eyes at you more, seemingly displeased about something. She doesn’t elaborate, such is the life of a mysterious and cryptic broad you guess.

“We have enough time to set our things out. The Designed’s next sermon is in half an hour and after that we have a meeting set with her, my contact was more than helpful.” Rohhze informs you. Being children and potentially in the company of Empress loyal trolls neither of you are keen to jet down there and mingle with the others before The Designed gets her preach on.

You time it so you’re just in before the doors close and the preaching starts.

The Designed, as it happens is a very interesting troll to behold. She’s old, old as globes. You’d wager that she’s older than your ancestor by a good stretch. Her hair is long and wild but now almost completely lusus white with a few bits just clinging to faded grey. Her horns are long and wavy, sprouting sideways from her pan and flowing down either side of her body. She’s tall, naturally as you’d expect for a troll of her age and caste. And though she’s old she moves with a quiet and practiced grace. Her words are clear and stirring as she speaks of how the mirthful messiahs work in strange ways and how sometimes we experience things that defy explanation but that trolls must strike a balance between understanding the divine jokes that have been hidden in the world and simply marvelling at the unknown. Her sermon is stirring, even within you her balanced faith fills you with something that no other massacre has before. It doesn’t feel like madness, like violence or cultish obsession. This is actually straight wisdom and you can see how she’s attracted such a diverse audience.

When the sermon is over The Designed retires to a private block off to the side and a troll that Rohhze seems to recognise ushers you in after her, shutting large doors behind you both. Designed gives you the customary greeting that you nearly forget to return, you were so entranced with her long orange fangs. Are they dyed like that or some kind of replacement? Either way it lends a coolness to her face paint that you’ve not appreciated in anyone’s before.

She falls into a large chair with an age weary and muted groan. She shuts her eyes and rolls her neck with a sigh, giving you a few long moments to take in the space you find yourself stood in. The Designed’s private space has high vaulted ceilings, similar to the church but unlike in there every inch of the walls and ceilings are painted. Not splattered with blood or other dubious fluids but actual art.

The painting is in full technicolour showing trolls in important moments, stories, but there’s more abstract things in there too. Visions of the dark carnival itself and a repeated figure in places whose
strange features are bone white in a way that you guess has to be a metaphor for something because no troll looks that way even with face paint on. What makes you uncomfortable are the splashes of bright mutant red accented in the paint here and there. You know how people get paint and you’re wildly uncomfortable with the idea of anyone having your colour up there.

“You like art.” Designed notes and you jump at being caught.

“It’s… it must have taken forever.” you say, your eyes skittering over every high part of the ceiling. Every inch is covered.

“No, but about half a lifetime. My moirail was an artist.” Designed says softly, looking up as well. You eye her warily, that past tense is pretty telling and she’s at the colder end of the spectrum where people outliving their quadrantmates because they’re warmer is pretty damn common.

“The Designed, I’m- we’re honoured that you were willing to see us.” Rohhze says with a formal little nod.

“Names like yours coming up again I had to, didn’t I?” she shrugs.

“About that, obviously things will be terribly difficult if the Empress knows about us and I’ve been assured that you don’t hold any allegiances either way. Would you be willing to keep us secret from her?” Rohhze asks, and that’s the important question here. If she won’t then you’re going to have to go through hell to try to keep your friend safe, you don’t want to think about it really.

“HAH! Why WOULD I tell her? I’m not one to spoil the joke before you get to the punchline, I can see this set up coming. I just want to hear it play out. The messiahs are feeling pretty comedic right now it seems, in times like these you gotta laugh along.” Designed grins.

Ah, yeah, batshit clown logic. Sure, whatever.

“But you have worked with both The Grand Entertainer and the Empress haven’t you?” Rohhze prompts.

“If I was allied to whoever I worked with I’d be all over the place. My loyalty is to the Mirthful Messiahs and my flock, whatever other colours and allegiances they wear is their business but in my church we hold onto the good word and nothing else. I’ve no interest in selling either of you out to anyone.” the elderly troll says.

“Come closer, I’m old now and ‘misia was always tellin’ me to get glasses but I don’t wanna.” she grumbles, holding a large hand out to you so you come even closer. She beckons Rohhze too so you’re standing shoulder to shoulder before the old troll.

Her dark eyes widen as she takes you both in.

“You really both are just… little wigglers ain’t ya? You especially, ain’t even got a face to speak of. Are you really not even molted?” Designed whispers in awe. Her large hands come up to your head and one holds your plain painted face in her palm and the other rubs at your skin to reveal the adolescent grey beneath rather than the darker tones of her own adult skin. A yelp of pain springs from your lips before you can stop it when her thumb claw catches on the sticking plaster covering your temple and yanks it free. It pulls a hair or two out but worse than that you think her claw catches on your healing wound.

You’re frozen in fear as Designed pulls her hand back in shock and you see mutant red smeared on her thumb.
“Been a long time since I saw that colour but never in a troll though. Heard of it of course but… hah. Alright little alien buddy, wherever you are, message received. I’ll help you both with whatever you need, I can’t deny a favour from the beyond no matter how strangely wrapped it is.” Designed grins and stands up with an eager clap of her large hands.

She… she doesn’t care that you’re a mutant? Or it’s a good thing? Wait, if she’s seen your colour before but not in a troll then where’s she seen it? Is that where her moirail got her mutant red paint from? What happened to whatever she got that from because you don’t want to end up as paint, you really don’t!

“But…” Designed says slowly with her hand on her chin, “it feels wrong to have you call me your title when you’re too young to have your own. Besides they didn’t have one and I didn’t when I knew them. So… don’t use mine. Call me my hatchname when you talk to me, call me Chahut.”

“Are you sure?” Rohhze says in obvious surprise but Des- but Chahut nods with a sleepy smile.

“So what wicked favour are you needing, little miracle kids?” Chahut asks you both.

Rohhze gives a quick rundown of your cuddlevoodoos and paints an account of what happened that shows you pretty damn favourably. What she does explain in detail is the pod you used before and how she thinks it could help you focus on yourself and see how things really are. Chahut stays silent for this explanation except for one part where she interjects that she does actually know Rohhze’s former mentor and he’s a ‘sack of bulges’ so that’s a highlight at least.

“Basically then you just want to get under enough that you can take a look around your pan but not be too blazed to do anything or too amped up to be of any use. You want like… bottled focus and isolation basically?” Chahut asks, raising a painted eyebrow at you both.

“That sounds about right.” you nod in agreement.

“Sounds like a trial to me.” Chahut says soberly and you think she means that it’ll be hard until you clock Rohhze’s reaction of surprise.

“He ain’t got no mentor and if he can make it through his own pan and come out the other side on what is clearly a divinely guided mission he’s a welcome member of my church.” Chahut says.

You look between her and Rohhze with confusion until Rohhze has the mercy to let you in on what’s happening.

“She’s saying that you won’t be an initiate anymore, you’ll be a fully fledged member of the church like me. You’ll be one of us and you can design your own face.” Rohhze explains and your eyes roam over the eldritch lines in her paint as she talks.

“I’m not sure I want to be though, if I could just not have these psionics in the first place I would but-I’m not meaning any insult here like please don’t club me to death or anything but it’s not really my deal.” you tell Chahut awkwardly.

“You’ve had some pretty crappy mentors from what I hear of it. The Grand Entertainer is a disgraceful blasphemous fucker and I’m not surprised he couldn’t mentor one child into proper maturation and Jasper was all but face first in the guy’s bulge the whole time anyway so that doesn’t surprise me none. The number of people out here failing at the basic tenets of the faith are just—” Chahut hisses angrily for a moment and shakes her head.

“Still, I can give you what you need. It’ll take maybe a day to concoct what you’ve asked for. We’ve made it before but we were dealing with adults so we’ll need to adjust the science of it all but that’s
not my field.” Chahut says and gives you a serious nod.

“Thank you so much, we’re very grateful.” Rohze says and elbows you so that you bow with her.

Chahut just grins at you and the pair of you are dismissed. Given that the cut to the inside of your pan has opened a little from Chahut’s claws you don’t feel like getting into the sopor is a good idea. You’re going to be climbing into a pod tomorrow and that shit will probably seep through into your thinkspponge but that’s half the POINT isn’t it? You don’t want to get high on sopor the night before that.

Besides the idea of sharing a coon like you used to with Karkat and Sollux is. It’s.

You’re split right down the middle between remembering and almost fantasising about that kind of closeness with the two of them and horribly berating yourself for wanting that when you don’t deserve it. When you never did. Yeah, you’re not getting in that coon.

Before you go to sleep on the loungeplank alone you take time to wash the stupid paint off of your face. Almost half of it is gone so you start with scrubbing that half. You look up in time to see your face bisected neatly in half between painted and not. It reminds you of that wiggler heiress movie about the girl who joins the military when she shouldn’t or something and then there’s facepaint involved. You don’t know, you’ve only ever seen gifs of it. But she wipes half of her paint off in one swipe in a way that just doesn’t happen.

Still you look at your half and half face and find a weird fitting resonance in it. People see this person that isn’t you all of the time, they think you’re better than you are but they don’t know who you really are. Some of that is you purposefully obscuring yourself and some is just your psionics making them think better of you. Maybe even you don’t know who you really are but if all goes well tomorrow you’re going to get all up in your own business and who knows what you’ll find.
Chahut is so absurdly nice and reasonable that it almost makes you angry, not at her exactly but just in general. Maybe at Jaspers and Dahvid. You’re angry about it, alright?

“The fluid in there is already dosed, so you just have to drink this. I had them undershoot the amount, we don’t want to make you sick.” Chahut explains as she hands you the vial of liquid that’s similar to what you had the last time.

“If it doesn’t work we can try again with it stronger. You can get out whenever you want but it’ll be quiet in here, if you need help just bang on the lid and we’ll pull you out.” she explains, tapping her large hand on the lid of the big pod for good measure.

“You’re not locking me in?” you ask in surprise, holding onto the glass in your hand. Chahut looks confused for a moment and then decently annoyed.

“Did he- no. I’m not locking you in.” she sighs.

Oh. That’s nice.

Rohhze is giving you a soft kind of look, a pity that’s probably only mostly platonic. She’s one of your oldest friends and you love her dearly but she needs to stop acting like you’re worth anything because it’s going to actually kill you.

“Dayvhe-” she begins.

“Well! To untested science!” you say loudly over her and chug the entire flask in one go and yeet yourself into the drugged up goo to avoid that entire conversation. The lid bangs shut after you. Ah, if only you could escape all unwanted social interactions this way.

What this means is that yet again you’re in total darkness, total silence, and barring the sensation of chilled gelatinous liquid around you, without touch too. This thing is bigger, designed for adults and so the only part of it you can reach is the lid with the very tips of your claws with your arm outstretched. It’s so nothing-y that it’s unsettling, you wonder if this is what space was like for Sollux when he came back from Alternia. He never really talked about how that was only that he didn’t really like it.

Thinking of Sollux reminds you of why you’re in here in the first place and so you try to focus on yourself. You want to know if you’re ok, if you’ve done something to your own mind or if
someone’s done something to you. On the other hand if you’re exactly how you’ve always been you need to know that too, not that you think anyone would believe you, they’re all so keen to think good things of you.

You’re feeling pretty chill but you’re aware that you’re not exactly tired or dazed. Nor are you getting distracted, your mind is clear and focused on the task you’ve set yourself. You’re just not sure how to do it is all.

With a lack of anything else to do you end up focusing on your passive psionics, watching the subtle ebb and flow of them. You wish they weren’t there at all but it’s what you’re stuck with. It’s just… you. As you focus everything begins to feel like treacle around you, like you’re slipping down into the liquid you’re suspended in but you can’t take your focus from your own psionics so you’re slipping and slipping and-

You think your eyes were already open so it’s strange to think that you open them AGAIN but that’s what you do.

You’re in a room. A big one, made of red stone and iron girders but inside it’s packed with statues, weirdly enough the statue in front of you is one of Rohhze. Her face is carved in smooth white and grey marble, her lips in a slight little knowing smirk. In front of the statue is a little round plaque, like the kind at the fancy histatoriums that tell you when a piece of art was made and all sorts of relevant details about it.

The plaque doesn’t have any details written on it but Rohhze’s name but it does have glittery glowing gemstones embedded into it that are each about the size of your whole ganderbulb. You just touch one and instantly you’re at Rohhze’s side in the pillow pile at the clown camp feeling in awe that she would do all of this for you and just how much you love her, she’s your best friend and she’s done all of this for you. Jerking your hand back you’re in front of the statue again. That was a memory then, weird.

“AUUUGH!” A loud scream and a clang make you jump and pull your sword out.

“OPEN! YOU! FUCKER! LET! ME! IN!” a voice, your voice, screams as it’s interspersed with loud banging. It’s a sound of metal on metal and as you come around a few of the other statues you see just what’s causing it.

Across the room stand two larger statues only both of them are encased in bright red bars like a huge flapbeast cage, the two statues inside are of Sollux and Karkat. Desperately wailing on the bars with a sword is, well, you. Not quite you. This you appears to be a little shorter than you perhaps and his hair is a violently pale mint colour and his shades are candy pink hearts. His fun and cute appearance isn’t doing much for how furiously he’s attacking the bars.

“Come ONNNNN!” he wails, dropping his sword and shoving himself through the bars as much as he can manage, getting stuck at the shoulder. He’s desperate, his hand grabbing at nothing but air even though he’s trying so hard. You’re debating whether or not to say anything when he suddenly catches sight of you, his eyes going wide behind his stupid shades.

“YOU! You’re me!” he yelps and pulls his arm out.

“And who are-” you start but he launches himself across the room at you, colliding with your chest and knocking you to the ground. Before you can even demand to know who the hell he is or what he thinks he’s doing he grabs you by the shirt and hauls you into a far too over enthusiastic kiss that he promptly drops seconds later.
Well, damn, that sucked. I always thought making out with yourself would be better than that. Damn, I hope we’re better than that when we’re kissing them, they’re way better than we are if not.” he pouts.

“What the fuck is your problem and who or what are you?!” you demand to know, shoving him off of you but he just grins at you and then leaps to his feet when he realises something.

“HEY! You can probably help me here! Come on, grab your sword, I need you.” he says in a rush and pulls you up again. He drags you over to the caged statues and pushes you at it.

“You need to break through this so we can get at them again!” he urges you.

“But what is it?” you ask, touching the bright red bars.

“It’s self restraint, it might look unfamiliar to both of you.” a deeper voice says.

You jump and whirl around to find the source of the voice. At first you think that it’s Dahvid here in your head but a second of looking at the guy corrects you. He’s tall, clearly an adult and dressed in a rust red suit with your sign sensibly stitched onto the lapel. He’s wearing the same shades at you and the cut horn marks him as actually you, just older. In fact he’s you if you were an adult pretending to be rust and also very sensible and fancy.

“Oh great, YOU’RE here.” the minty version of you complains, his hands still on your back.

Adult-you saunters over and gives the minty you behind you a disdainful look.

“I highly doubt you’ll get through that cage and I doubt even more that you’d want to if you knew what you were dealing with.” the adult says.

“How about you tell me who you both are and what that is first, huh?” you demand.

“He’s a big jerk is what he is.” the you behind you hisses.

“I know you’re familiar with the concept because we’re familiar with the concept. Rohhze told you about it ages ago, that psychological idea of the Id. The base part of all trolls that deals in basic emotions and desires, the unending wanting and raging at things, the needy, selfish, stupid part of you. That’s him.”

“That’s not true! I’m everything GOOD about him! No one who likes him goes ‘oh boy I really like when he gets all uptight and stuffy about things!’ do they?!! Nah! No, they like me because I LOVE PEOPLE and I’m fun!” your… id you guess snarls furiously at the adult you, shoving his way past you to point his finger right in his face which with their height difference is entertaining to see.

“You wanna know who he is? He’s that bit in your head that says that it’s good that you miss Sollux and Karkat because you were BAD and you don’t DESERVE to be happy anyway! He hangs out in your head telling you that you’re not good enough, that you did it wrong. Stop that, put that down, don’t say that, don’t do that, you’re better than this, think about what you did, feel bad. HE’S THE WORST! You’re a kid playing grown up, you insufferable prick!” your id rages, his focus leaping wildly from you to the adult you.

“Grown Up. Id. Got it.” you say and ignore how both of them protest immediately at being called things they don’t want to be called. Too bad, it’s your mind and you can do what you want.

“What are the bars about? What are the statues about?” you ask, gesturing to the room at large.
“These are… I suppose you could say they’re a representation of the people carved in them. They contain memories about them as well as thoughts and feelings, this place updates itself as your situation changes and as your relationships with them change. The bars are to keep him away from their statues.” Grown Up says, pointing down at Id.

“Yeah, right after you stupidly broke up with both of them the two of them slammed these down to keep me out!” Id says angrily.

“Ok, two things. One, why do we need to keep him out of them? What’s he going to do?” you ask, looking between Grown Up and Id.

“Oh, by all means. If you want to let this moron slam his hands on the buttons that remind you of how great things were nonstop until your willpower erodes and you go crawling back to them go right ahead. Or even if you don’t go crawling back it’ll be unending torture thinking about what you can’t be trusted to be around anymore, we thought we’d spare you the pain.” Grown Up scoffs.

Actually, that sounds like a good call to you. It’s bad enough every time you remember that you’re not dating them anymore, thinking on it more than you already do would be a special kind of hell.

“Ok, good call-” you start.

“NOOOOOOO!” Id wails dramatically and bangs his head against the bars as Grown Up shakes his head in despair.

“Second thing, I can count. He said the ‘two of you’ put this up and he obviously didn’t mean you and him so who else are we dealing with here?” you ask because you totally can count to three, you genius.

Both Id and Grown Up share what you would class as being an uncomfortable look.

“Can you at least get him to stop him, do that much, come on?” Id pleads with Grown Up. The adult seems uncertain.

“There are three of us, really. Id, me and… and The Knight. Usually we all work together pretty well but with everything that’s been going on lately he’s sort of taken over. Normally any two of us working together can completely overrule the other. Id and Knight have worked together before to push my ethics aside because Id is vengeful and Knight is trying to protect someone and there’s nothing I can do about it. But now even me and Id can’t do anything to control him but it’s…” Grown Up trails off a little and his shoulders hunch up slightly under his suit and you catch a glimpse of someone younger trying to act far older.

“It’s not that I disagree with what he’s doing. We’ve done terrible things and we deserve to suffer for them but…” Grown Up can’t seem to decide what he wants.

Maybe this kind of imbalance in your psyche is what Rohhze and Vriska were talking about before but it’s pretty obviously not something that’s been done to you. If you’re losing your marbles that’s pretty squarely on your shoulders, no one else’s.

“I can look at that, I guess. But I wanted to see if my ancestor has done anything to my head, not that I think he has.” you sigh.

“No!” Id says suddenly.

“Yeah, he has. I’d actually really appreciate if you took it down because it’s creepy as hell if you ask me.” Grown Up says, making Id sulk immediately.
Grown Up helpfully leads the way through the maze of statues, away from the caged Sollux and Karkat that part of you still longs to get to. You guess that part of you is walking right along with you, isn’t he? You come to a statue of Dahvid standing in a self aggrandising pose. Weirdly though the whole thing seems covered in string, like Rohhze had a knitting party all up in here and just went nuts. As you get close Id pushes past you and jams his hands right on the plaque and all of gems that are sticking out of it.

Instantly your head fills with memories. The two of you working together on the movie, how he seemed proud of you or impressed with the things that you said. Or the times when you stood up to him and he respected you for it, how he never actually attacked you even though he could have. Even in the hospital he didn’t turn on you. You flash to the conversation with Sollux, about how he felt like a lusus to you, how you wanted that and needed it.

“Stop that, you’ll go blind.” Grown Up scolds Id and shoves him away from the plaque but it’s not stopping how loud Id is purring about the whole thing. He likes it, it makes him feel good. It makes YOU feel good.

Wait a fucking minute. You eyeball the string, getting closer and, yeah it’s bicoloured. Mutant red and bright purple. That asshole is fucking with how you see him. You grab the stuff but it doesn’t feel like there’s an order attached, not like anything in Vriska’s mind did, it’s a ‘like-me’ that’s stuck instead of just working when you’re there.

With a furious little snarl you yank the stuff off of the statue, it comes off reasonably easily but you could do without the unsettling way that the pose of the definitely stone statue shifts to something more neutral. What you don’t like, ok no you hate all of this but more so is this. You’ve pulled all of the string from his statue and you’re stood there with it all in your hands, only there’s a strand that’s branching off elsewhere in the room. You start winding it around your hand as you follow it only to see that it’s tangled around Dirkka’s statue. You jerk it free of his leg and the expression on stone Dirkka’s face shifts to something a little warmer.

That fucker was leeching off of how much you like Dirkka!

You rip the thread to shreds and it disintegrates in your hands. When you march back to the statue it’s your turn to push your hands on the gems there. You remember how terrifying he was when you first met, how he threatened the lives of your friends. You do remember that but you also remember how broken he looked when he was talking to Psiionic, how alone and pathetic he was. You still feel bad for him and you still like it when he likes you but now at least you can hold it in your mind just how dangerous he is too.

“Maybe he didn’t mean to do it.” Id says softly, you think he just wants things to be ok.

“Does it matter? We’re staying away from Sollux and Karkat because we’re not safe, if he had any decency he’d do the same but he doesn’t.” Grown Up says disapprovingly.

“Alright, is that it? Is that all he did?” you ask and both of them nod.

Cool, so everything you did to Sollux you did under your own power. Cool, cool, great. That’s perfect. Maybe you can just stay here forever or something. Id is on the floor in melodramatic despair. Or maybe it’s not melodrama, if he’s where your deepest feelings come from then he probably feels this more keenly than you. Grown Up seems unhappy but at least he’s upright.

“Stop it, stop him.” Id moans from the floor.

“You should probably see, it is why you came here after all. Maybe if you understand things will be
You exit what appears to be a giant stone temple of some kind and head out into a landscape that’s eerily familiar.

"Is this- is my mind LOHAC? Oh my god, Jayyne really was right, I played too many video games and it ruined my thinkspoon. This is my shitty LOHAC land from that busted ass SGRUB game."

you say in horror as you look over the, well, the Land of Heat and Clockwork. Giant steel gears rotate slowly on huge girdered structures and the little brainless nakkodile NPCs scuttle about on the levels below you.

"They’re not like us, but they’re bits of your mind. The stuff you don’t think about like breathing or how to make a sentence make sense.” Id explains, leaning over the railing and waving at some of them.

“At least I know who to blame now then.” you snort, remembering all the times your mouth has run away from you. Who knew it was little dumb nakkoldiles shovelling words into a blade pitcher to make it come out of your mouth at speed, suddenly so much is explained.

"That is what you’re here for.” Grown Up says gravely, stopping at the end of a walkway and looking out to the lava that stretches out from the rest of you.

You move to stand at his side and stare at what lies below. Floating on the surface of the lava are huge records with gear edges to them, some mesh along with other smaller gears and some simply spin on their own. It’s notable however that many of the gears are either not turning or they’re doing so with difficulty, probably something to do with the bright red chains wrapped tight around them.

“What…” you whisper.

“Your core beliefs, the parts of you that power and shape every thought you have. Each of us interact with the beliefs you have differently and they’ve been created by us in a sense. Everything is supposed to work in harmony with us. At the moment though-” Grown Up says.

“IT’S BUSTED AS HELL!” Id shouts over him.

“That sounds like something I should get a better look at.” you agree and the three of you keep going down until you get to the lava level. The nearest gear is a smaller one and it’s turning just fine. You run and jump to it, landing on the edge.

I AM CREATIVE

That’s the thought that floods through you. Id beams and jumps after you and you’re flooded with that sheer joy of making something awesome, the flow of concentration when you really get into something and the pride you have in your skills. Grown Up joins you and you feel that uneasy sense that really you ought to practice more and you probably also should use your skills for something good. Adagio uses his musical talent to stand for what he believes in and to an extent so does your ancestor, you should do that.

“You suck the fun out of everything, you know that?” Id complains.

You don’t want to entertain that argument so you jump to the next one, it looks old.

BE COOL.
Layers of sincerity and irony weigh on you, the desire to distance yourself from people and things as a way of protecting yourself. You want people to think that you’re cool and it’s uncool just how much you want that. Id joins you but he gives you only a weak flutter of liking being more like Dirkka and when Grown Up follows there’s only a weak sense that it’s dishonest to pretend to be something you’re not.

“I made the last one, that belief is mine. Neither of us made this one so we don’t vibe with it so hard.” Id tells you.

“So who made this one, The Knight?” you ask. It must be, they said there was three of them.

Interestingly this gear interlocks with another that looks just as old and watching the way they interlock you’d guess the two beliefs feed into each other. You stand on the edge and wait until it rotates enough that you can simply step from one gear toothed record to the other.

LIKE ME!

Oh, there it is. You want people to think that you’re cool but you also super really need people to like you but no one can ever know. This time Grown Up joins you first and you feel the wash of shame that you’re still holding onto such a wigglerlike desire, besides isn’t your desire to be liked exactly what’s set off your dumb psionics in the first place? Id follows and you feel the happy bloom in your chest of when Karkat rolls his eyes at you in fond exasperation where even though he’s pretending to be mad you know he likes you. Or the first time you made Sollux smile for you, a perfect happy little “achievement unlocked: feeling that another troll thinks you’re good”.

Doesn’t everyone want to be liked? Is that so bad?

“Do you deserve that?” Grown Up asks and you wilt a little under his stare.

“He’s great at parties.” Id sneers, glaring at Grown Up who just shrugs.

You’re far away from the bigger disks and this requires some jumping on precarious rock formations over lava to get to the biggest ones. As you come closer you can see a big gear toothed record spinning, entangled in red chains that ensnare other smaller records too. A chain whips past you and it’s more than close enough to see that while a lot of the links are bright mutant red there’s a share of them that bear the rust colour that Grown Up sports.

Most notable of all though is in the middle of the largest record there’s a huge troll hammering something out on an anvil. He’s wearing bright mutant red all over and a long geartooth edged cape flutters behind him as the record turns. A giant sword is embedded into the ground by his feet and from the metal shoulder guards and the sections of plate mail that he’s wearing you can guess who he is.

“The Knight?” you whisper and both Id and Grown Up nod.

Well, you came all of this way, you’d better do something hadn’t you? You jump, catch onto the edge of a gear and haul yourself up.

I WILL DO ANYTHING TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE I CARE ABOUT.

It kicks you in the gut instantly. The terror you’ve felt at people looking like they might attack Karkat, desperately trying to protect Sollux, standing up for your friends online and in person. When people need you, you’ll be there. No matter the cost, you’ll do it.

Grown Up climbs up with you and you’re reminded of how you’ve been doing a shitty job of that
lately, haven’t you? Good job breaking it hero. It takes Id a moment to make the jump and unexpectedly you don’t get the happy and joyful stuff you’re used to from him. No, this is different. Of course the Id is all the basic natures of a person, right? Sometimes that’s good stuff but sometimes…

Sometimes it’s when you fail to protect someone. It’s when people stole Sollux from you and helmed him and you were there to rescue him and MAKE THEM PAY for what they did. Protecting is great, but you can’t always and then vengeance will do in a pinch. Id gives you a territorial primal snarl, evolved for millennia, base and furious.

Feeling the input of the other sides of you has taken your focus from The Knight, which isn’t great as he’s focused pretty squarely on you. He lowers the hammer he had in his hand and you can see that on the anvil he was standing before are yet more giant mutant red links in the chain, he’s the one making them. He hauls his sword from the floor and hefts it to his shoulder with a clang before walking over to you.

He’s… he’s big. Bigger than Jaspers, than Chahut, than Dahvid. Shit, you think he’s bigger than the Empress herself horns included. You don’t even reach his waist. Giant though he is, he looks like you.

“I knew you’d come.” he says, your voice but deeper and booming from the size of him.

“Well you’re part of me, right? So.” you say nervously. The Knight nods and crouches down to better look at you.

“It makes sense to get a look around, to know what you’re doing so you can stop beating yourself up about stuff you’ve already fixed. Stuff I’ve fixed.” he says and his eyes flick to Grown Up, feeling bad is his specialty isn’t it?

“Right. A lot of this is… pretty abstract though. I know I pulled a bunch of Dahvid’s control off back in the statue room-” you say.

“He was controlling us there?” The Knight asks in surprise.

“Like me shit.” Id mutters from behind you.

“Well, thank you for getting rid of that. We’ll all be safer without him influencing us, letting him have any control was a mistake. One I won’t let us make again, we need to be in control.” The Knight nods and stands up once more.

“Right.” you nod, “Uh, so what are you doing?”

“These are your core beliefs, Dahvid was useful for explaining that much at least. Now I know what to fix and how to do it. The problem is that any belief can become dangerous if left alone or if they fall into the wrong hands, look what you did to Vriska after all.” The Knight reasons.

“She was supposed to be your friend and you sold her out.” Grown Up says disapprovingly.

“Ugh.” Id grumbles.

“Our psionics are too dangerous to run unchecked so I’m fixing the problem by making it impossible for you to hurt anyone ever again. We both know you’d do anything to protect the others, we’re standing right here after all. You’d scoop out the part of your thinksponge that gave you the psionics if you thought it’d work.” The Knight says confidently.
“Would… would that work? Not a spoon but surgically maybe? I could ask a docterrorist, Hal would probably say no but someone else might agree.” you whisper as the idea steals over you.

“No! That’s a terrible idea!” Id argues.

“It’s not exactly like you’ve used those psionics responsibly, is it? You deserve to lose them and I suppose the others would be better protected with you neutralised.” Grown Up says thoughtfully.

“Well for now they’re useful to me but it’s something to keep in mind.” The Knight says calmly.

“What’re you using them for? What’re the chains? Is this… is this my psionics?” you ask, reaching out to touch one but your hand never makes it to the nearest one. The Knight’s iron grip wraps around you painfully tight.

“You’re not touching any of them. Look if you want, but you’re not allowed to touch.” he tells you harshly and dumps you on the ground again.

“They are though, aren’t they? This is my psionics, I’m controlling me.” you say, crawling away from him and scrambling to your feet.

“You’re dangerous and what you did can NEVER happen again. I’m using our powers that caused this to fix it, ironic in a way, isn’t it?” The Knight laughs though there’s no amusement in it.

Id pulls you to the edge and points.

“There, look. That’s new, he made it. ‘NEVER HURT THEM AGAIN’ it’s chained to this. That, there ‘EVERYTHING I DO HURTS THEM’ that’s him too. He’s even dredging old shit up, look, that one sunk sweeps ago!” Id hisses, pointing at the interlocking and chained gears that are tethered to this one. There’s even a white gear that’s being slowly winched out of the lava with the chain The Knight was making.

“But…” you hesitate.

You don’t ever want to hurt any of your friends again, what you did was terrible. And it does seem like no matter your intentions you keep causing harm. You can’t trust yourself, that’s why you broke up with Karkat and Sollux because you don’t deserve them and they’re safer without you. All these beliefs that are tied up in your own chains of your psionics sound true. They FEEL true.

“You’re stuck under their control, you have to stop it!” Id insists, shaking you by the shoulders.

“But you don’t want to hurt our friends either, right?” you say uneasily.

“No! Making them happy makes me happy, it makes you happy, you know that! Do you think this is helping anyone or making anyone happy?! You’re not!” Id says desperately. You’re here because you’re worried and you’re unhappy with things, that much is true. But…

“What exactly are the chains doing? I know they’re psionics but what’s the command? What am I making myself think?” you ask warily.

“All that matters is you never hurt anyone again.” The Knight says firmly.

“Fuck that, break them. Destroy the fucking things!” Id snarls and hauls you over to a chain.

“You’re NOTHING but trouble!” The Knight snarls, pointing his sword at Id but it’s clear your smallest personality driver isn’t scared.
“Oh yeah? I was here before you, remember? I’m the one who loves our friends, you’re an obligation, I’m the real deal. You kill me and you’ll end up just like Dahvid and you know it.” Id snarls like he stands any chance in a fight against The Knight.

“Whoa, no. Don’t get me wrong I want to strangle him all the time but you can’t kill him, we need him.” Grown Up says, putting himself between the two warring traits.

“I don’t have to kill him, I can BURY him though.” The Knight snarls and that at least seems to scare the shit out of Id.

The three of them are arguing now, Grown Up trying to defuse the situation. Your eyes fall on one of the chains and you know that you agree with The Knight. You need to be stopped, you need to be controlled so no one is hurt, but this seems like a bad idea no matter what. It’s causing chaos so maybe you should just break the chains, the beliefs will still be there afterwards right? So… no big deal.

You step back from the fight and then closer and closer to a chain, your hand outstretched.

The Knight slams into you, all the breath forced from your body. Partly that’s from the force and partly because his giant hand is crushing your chest. He’s suspending you over the lava with one hand, his sword held in the other.

“I won’t let ANYONE hurt the people I care about, especially not you. Get out.” he snarls and then he lets you go.

You scream as you plummet to the lava and agony bursts through you as you hit the surface. Your fists slam into something and you’re dragged away. You scramble, terrified and agonised only to realise that it’s not The Knight that has you but someone else.

“Dayvhe! Dayvhe are you ok?” Rohhze asks desperately.

You’re drenched in the pod’s liquid, in fear sweat and probably tears too. Instead of burning alive in lava you’re in the lap and arms of Chahut as Rohhze leans closer to comfort you.

“No… not really. I found out who was fucking with my head.” you say, your voice trembling. Rohhze looks at you wide eyed as she holds onto your arms to try to quell your shaking.

“It was me and I think I’m stuck this way.” you whimper.

You scramble, slippery and afraid, from Chahut’s arms. Your mind is swirling. You’re afraid, afraid for what you’ve done to yourself and how dangerous it is to be using psionics you barely understand against your own mind. Only you can undo it, you think so anyway, but there’s a chance that you’ll tie yourself up so tight that you can’t undo what you’ve done.

Yet no sooner do you think that do you start to consider it that these psionics are a weapon you never asked for, one that cannot be safely holstered or put away. The only thing within your control is you, the things you choose to do and the things you think. If you cannot get rid of your psionics then the only rational recourse is to control yourself. You are just too dangerous and this is the only way to protect people. And so what if it damages you a little to do it, you could consider it punishment for the harm you caused.

“Dayvhe?” Rohhze says softly, getting to her feet like you’re a startled hopbeast that she might scare off with the slightest wrong move.

“I think I need to be alone.” you force the words out between your teeth and bail from the block
before the others can stop you.

You need to fix this! You need to- or do you? Do you? No. Yes? Augh, your head is a MESS!

You bounce off of the doorframe to your temporary block and stumble to the ablution block. You strip and throw yourself in the shower, scrubbing every drop of whatever that stuff Chahut whipped up was. You even scrub so hard at your head you make the stitched incision on your temple start to bleed a little again.

“Dayvhe? Dayvhe, please come out.” Rohhze calls to you through the door.

You’re shaking but you don’t want to worry her more so you do what she asks of you, though you dry yourself and dress first because no one wants to see you naked. Stepping out you watch as Rohhze backs off to give you a little bit of space.

“What did you see in there?” she asks.

“It was… pretty whack.” you admit.

You fill her in briefly about Id, Grown Up and The Knight and what you know of their roles, including that The Knight saw fit to throw you into the lava to protect the psionic chains around your beliefs. You don’t want to bore her with the details or overshare about your psyche, that seems like more of a pale thing. Not that you’d be cheating on Sollux or anything because you aren’t with him anymore.

The little wave of shame at hurting Sollux, and the mean little twist to the feeling that you should feel bad tells you exactly who that feeling is coming from. Thanks Grown Up part of your mind for making you feel crappy about things.

“That really is a lot to take in. I mean all the research from current theoretical Psychomancers suggest that all of The Psychoan’s- all of Freuyd’s work if we’re going by his more notorious hatchname there, was wrong. Certainly his ideas about dream interpretation are fallacious, but…” Rohhze seems to think for a moment or two.

“...It wouldn’t be inaccurate to say that we have baser emotions, other systems seeming to run on more conceptual ideas rather than primary reactions to things and I suppose the Id to an extent is a representation of that. Moreover any representation of the mind will only be a model and if a model aids in understanding then it’s useful, if you find that identifying that part of yourself with the concept of the Id to be helpful I see no problem in it.” she continues, managing to say a lot without actually saying a lot.

“Good?” you venture.

“It’s interesting that you view the more restrained part of yourself to be an adult but distinctly not Dahvid or even Dirkka and The Knight certainly sounds like a drive that I’ve seen in you before. But, that said, the fact that you’ve been using your psionics on yourself is deeply troubling.” Rohhze muses.

“Well…” you lean back on the loungeplank that she’d sat you down on and gesture like ‘ehhh’, “is it though?”

“Yes, Dayvhe, it is.” Rohhze says.

“But ok hear me out, if it means I won’t hurt anyone again isn’t that a good thing? Look at my ancestor and his bonkers psionics, if I can make it so that I’m safer, then isn’t that a good thing?” you
reason.

“No, because you’re interfering with yourself and you don’t know what you’re doing. Besides how do you know that it’ll work the way that you want? What if it makes it harder for you tell when you’re doing something you shouldn’t?” Rohhze points out.

Well that at least is a good point. If there’s any universal constant it’s that you’ve basically no clue what you’re doing at any time.

“Ok, but I tried to touch the chains- the psionic stuff that’s binding up those beliefs in commands but The Knight wouldn’t let me. I got killed and kicked out of my own head for trying. It’s out of my hands.” you say.

“Yes, perhaps just grabbing things isn’t the best method of doing anything. I certainly hope it wasn’t how you courted either of your former quadrants.” Rohhze remarks dryly and you wince. Partly because of the reminder of how and why they’re no longer yours and the desperate wish that they were again.

“Maybe you ought to go back in there when you’ve recovered and try to reason with all of your… personality drives? Is that what we’re calling them? Id’s desires seem obvious but maybe looking more into the other two could enlighten you and change your mind on this topic. They are your mind after all, they are a reflection of you and nothing more.” she says.

Again, that makes sense but…

“Two out of three of them think this is a good idea. I think this is a good idea, or it’s safer at least. Let’s be real here, if you told me that gnawing off my own arm would somehow magically fix all of this and protect everyone I’d do it. There isn’t anything that I wouldn’t do.” you tell her.

Rohhze just stares at you.

“Dayvhe, that kind of absolute is what drove you to do something so dangerous and stupid. You hurt Sollux because breaking his trust was better than letting him get hurt in your mind. Don’t you remember that? This is why we came here, to try to fix your thinking and to see what was causing it.” Rohhze says.

No, you- uh. You came here to find why your mind was weird, right? Because maybe Dahvid did do something.

“What you’re doing is changing how you think, Dayvhe. I remember my friend who refused to help a little kid because there were things he was never prepared to do, no matter the cost. Do you remember that?” Rohhze asks, her voice is calm but her expression speaks of urgency under the face paint.

You do remember. The little kid at Jasper’s clown camp for assholes. You had to learn how to control yourself in order to be around Sollux and Karkat and the rest of your friends again, not a dissimilar situation from this one. But even knowing that you refused to do as your then mentor ordered you because you wanted to be the right person when you got back to them.

Yes!

No.

“I remember it but…” you’re not sure what to say.

“Dayvhe if you take these commands off of yourself then you can make a choice, a free choice,
about what to do afterwards. Something you did in a moment of trauma is not going to be a rational decision, you need to stop controlling yourself.” she says gently and rests a hand on your knee.

It sounds logical but… no. You don’t want to.

But looking at Rohhze, how obviously worried she is, it makes you feel bad. You’re causing her more upset by not doing what she wants and you want to make her happy so badly. You care about her and you want to do the right thing, whatever that is. You don’t know if you want to undo what you’ve done but at the very least you can maybe try to not go any further, let the dust settle a little perhaps and see how things are then. Maybe Rohhze and the others will say it’s a good thing and you can go ahead without upsetting anyone or causing further harm to people or maybe they’ll say they want something else and you’ll do that.

“What if I keep talking to them, try to find out what’s going on and see how things go. Maybe I can make it safe for everyone.” you suggest.

“Introspection is a good start at least, I wonder if Chahut will let us take the pod.” Rohhze wonders.

You don’t want to stay in clown church until you’ve sorted your shit out but maybe you’re safer up here. Actually that’s a good point, you should stay here. Sure you could accidentally control a bunch of clowns but no one you actually care about.

“I think we should get something to eat, maybe watch a movie and try again tomorrow.” Rohhze suggests, patting your knee. That all sounds like a pretty good idea to you and you owe Rohhze enough to do what she wants, especially when it requires so little from you. She gives you a pleased smile and sets out getting everything ready.

You’re not looking forward to it but the next day you’re up and eating breakfast in your shared block when someone comes with a message. You have to say that room service is a definite plus in Chahut’s church compared to the muddy tents of the last church you kicked it at. You crane your neck to see the doorway as Rohhze talks quietly to whoever called, with a nod she shuts the door and comes back to you.

“There’s another massacre going on this morning and Chahut wants to see you beforehand, so you need to put your face on now and get going.” Rohhze tells you and drinks her tea.

“Ugh, fine.” you sigh and shove food into your face a little more and chew as you unscrew the tub of white paint that Rohhze gave you a while back. At least you have no design so it’s easy enough to smear your whole damn face in white and you need to only glance at a mirror to be sure you’ve not missed anywhere. Meanwhile Rohhze just drinks her tea and daintily nibles toast, all while not smudging her paint at all.

“Come on.” you tell her, standing up.

“You misunderstand me Dayvhe. Chahut requested YOUR presence, not mine. I’ll see you at massacre.” Rohhze says simply.

You have to go alone?

“I’m sure you remember the way.” Rohhze says, looking at you through her eyelashes. Are they white too? What did she do, use white mascara?

“Oh course I do.” you huff and leave on your own.

Alright, so you mostly remember the way but it’s fine, the ship has some pretty winding and odd
paths through it. Like right now you’re crossing a narrow walkway above a main hall where a whole bunch of people are jamming together with all kinds of instruments. The melody is a little cacophonous and chaotic but damn if these clowns can’t drop a good beat at least. You know you ought to be going along to see Chahut but part of you at least wants to play too. Your steps slow as you walk so you’re right in time with the beat and even though you’re still going on your way your head bobs a little to the music.

You’d probably have to be dead or something before you stopped enjoying music, even if it is clown music.

Chahut invites you in when you knock on her door, you at least have the good sense not to burst in unannounced. She’s sat in her huge chair again, reading notes on paper that’s comically small in her large hands and holding them too close to her face like she can’t read it any further away.

“Dayvhe, come sit down.” she says, gesturing to the floor by her chair. You shut the door behind you and then sit where she’d gestured, looking up at her.

“You ever have that thing where you talk to someone and after you’re all ‘ah, shit, I meant to ask that other thing’ and you forgot until it’s too late?” she asks, setting her papers down.

“I think everyone does. Or I do at least, maybe we’re the only two.” you say and she laughs, a quiet rumble of a sound.

“Well I had that with you. Your friend caught me up on all the whys and hows of why you’re here but I never asked you. How about you tell me?” Chahut asks.

She wants you to explain something that’s already been explained? Why?

Chahut is still looking at you patiently so you figure you’d better answer her.

“Well… my psionics are dangerous. I control people without meaning to and sometimes I do mean to. I hurt my moirail and I can’t forgive myself for that.” you confess.

“Are you here for salvation and forgiveness then?” Chahut asks, leaning forward in her chair.

“No. Rohhze thought she saw something wrong in my pan which, duh, of course there is. But I guess what she saw was part of my mind is using my psionics on me, controlling what I think. But it’s supposed to be so I don’t fuck up again like I did before. I don’t want to mess things up again, I don’t want to hurt anyone again.” you tell her.

Chahut sighs and leans back in her chair, running one of her large hands through her hair, you wonder if the length of her horns makes things awkward for her sometimes, you bet it does.

“What you see in the pod is… it’s a metaphor, a story. The inside of your pan ain’t really like that, you’ve just got squishy meat inside you. But just because something’s a metaphor or a story that doesn’t mean it’s not real, stories and art are realer than real things sometimes.” Chahut says, her voice soft as she gazes up at the art on the ceilings. You wonder how well she can see it now.

“There’s no one controlling you but you. When you put a face and a name on a thing though it becomes realer. If you say a part of you is doing this to the rest of you then it will have a real effect, be careful with that.” she warns you.

“I understand.” you say.

“Yeah but do you though? If you remove your ability to choose-” Chahut shakes her head and tries
“Doing good and doing bad are choices. Good people choose good often enough that it can seem like it ain’t but it still is, same with bad people. If someone blasphemes all day every day it’s a habit but each time is still a choice. If you make it so you can’t do something then you’re not choosing it. If bad is impossible you don’t get credit for doing good when it’s all that’s left to you.” she says.

“I appreciate the concern, Chahut but I’m not here about my soul. I just care about making other people safe.” you tell her.

“So choose that.” Chahut says, leaning forward with her elbows on her knees as she looks down at you.

“I tried that and I messed up! It’s not like I chose to do this to myself but it’s not like it’s a bad idea, if it makes me safer then-” you say but Chahut is having none of it.

“So you failed. Try again, choose it again. If you fail again, try again.” she says, pointing her finger in your face.

“That’s a nice idea, put it on a motivational poster. I failed and my MOIRAIL ENDED UP IN THE HOSPITAL. I turned my friends into zombies because they were so devoted to me. I can’t fail at this again, the cost is too high!” you tell her as you push her hand away from your face. Again, it’s a good idea that makes sense but just can’t be applied to you.

Chahut’s almighty chest heaves and her lips flatten into a tight line. She stands up and looks down at you.

“I invited you into my church, I’ve given you my aid and my council and asked you for nothing in return.” Chahut says.

You sink a little lower and feel your ears flatten slightly to your head, it’s not like yours are super moveable like Tav’s are but any amount of gestures that show that you’re not trying to be a threat would be great right now.

“Is this the part where you do that?” you ask in a small voice and try to edge back away from the huge adult. The huge adult who has you here on her ship, surrounded by people loyal to her. Oh no this is bad.

“No, it’s not. I’m not trying to convert you, I’m not telling you what to do or taking your choices from you. But I’d say it’s some good fucking manners to at least listen to me when I talk to you.” Chahut says irritably.

“I… I’m sorry.” you apologise, more out of confusion than anything.

Chahut crouches down and gently puts her hand on the top of your head, rubbing a thumb through your hair and messing it up slightly.

“Really listen, don’t just hear what you think people are saying or throw it out because you think it ain’t right.” she tells you with a gentle tone that doesn’t fit her terrifying stature.

“Come on, massacre time.” Chahut says and stands up, scooping you up onto your feet with a hand under each of your arms like you’re a little baby meowbeast and not an adolescent troll of perfectly respectable size.

“That’s not a reassuring word for anything that we should be doing, you know.” you tell her because
“Your mouth is always going to run, it seems. Chahut just laughs like distant thunder and steers you to the door with a careful push.

The church proper is bustling again and you find your seat with Rohhze who shoots you a curious look but the crowd is too loud for you to really be heard and you think that chatting it up in church might be bad manners. It’s also pretty antithetical to the whole concept of listening that Chahut just tried to get through your thick pan. Really it should be easy getting ideas through there now, you have a convenient hole drilled in it after all.

Chahut walks onto centre stage, combing her fingers through her long hair as she seems to take a moment to compose herself and look out at the crowd. Her eyes land on you and Rohhze for a moment and continue on as she looks at the others.

“I want to talk about truth today.” she announces to a chorus of cheers.

“There’s all kinds of miraculous truth out there, isn’t there? Truth in the good word, in the world, in the messiahs. But this isn’t about that today, we all know about them and this is about us. We’re supposed to do the right thing, say the right thing, act the right way. Right?” Chahut asks and there’s a wave of agreeing and engaged honks from across the congregation. Chahut nods like it was some salient point they made.

“But how can anyone do that if they don’t know what’s really true? We know it’s true that people can do right no matter what they hatched as but if we’ve got feelings that we don’t see in us, things we don’t know are true then we can’t do right, can we? There are motherfuckers out there who think warmbloods can’t do no good, that they’ve got sin built in, even if they don’t think they think that it’s true in their pushers. You have to listen to what’s in you before you can decide if it’s true or if it ain’t.” Chahut explains.

You certainly don’t think hemocastesist shit like that, even as a mutant you don’t hold any internalised casteism. Seeing as the first people you really interacted with at length were basically polar opposites on the hemospectrum you saw first hand how it means nothing at all. But you suppose all that might feel true for other trolls in here.

“We owe truth to ourselves, but we owe it to other people too. It’s what’s right, and is right always easy?” Chahut asks and a deafening yell of ‘NO’ echoes back at her.

“Nah, sometimes you’re going to fail. Should you give up if you fail?” she asks and again everyone shouts no.

“And if someone should fall what?” she starts.

“PICK THEM UP!” the crowd hollers.

“If they’re HURT?” Chahut asks louder.

“HELP THEM!” the yelled response returns.

“If someone falls and they get up again are they weak?” Chahut asks, no is the answer apparently.

Chahut leans on the lectern at the front that’s absent of notes she apparently abandoned in her block.

“We’re bound to do right, to be true. It’s hard but you’re not alone and no one in this church lets anyone else deal with that alone.” Chahut intones seriously.

The crowd is going nuts and you’re sure there’s formalities here but Chahut inclines her head slightly
to the side and leaves the stage after what is honestly a pretty short massacre, so you and Rohhze duck out to follow her. She leads you to the pod again.

“Do you want to do this?” Chahut asks, holding the glass of stuff you have to drink slightly out of your reach. Then again that might just be the height she is, it’s hard to tell.

“I do. Aren’t I supposed to be learning truth or whatever?” you say.

“He can be taught.” Chahut grins at you.

“Sometimes.” Rohhze sighs with a fondness in her tone.

“My offer still stands by the way, little, miraculous, mutant. You survived the trip through your own mind just fine, you passed a trial. You’re more than welcome to be a member of my church.” Chahut offers.

“Is that an offer or an order?” you ask warily and Rohhze elbows you for asking.

“An offer, taking your choice would be bad, remember?” Chahut says and rolls her eyes at you.

“I don’t believe in the messiahs.” you tell her because you guess you have a death wish.

“That’s fine, they clearly believe enough in you to make up for it.” Chahut responds right away.

That’s- ok, you don’t know what to say to that but you’re done poking this particular cholerbear just to see if it’ll bite you. Instead you reach up and Chahut hands you the glass you want. You down it and hop into the pod, shutting the lid behind you and waiting for things to get weird.

It’s a little hard quieting your mind today. You know you should be getting focussed but your head is busy with everything Chahut said, not to mention lingering feelings about what you failed at before and all the people you failed. Every time you start to get a little zen it feels like something comes up again.

Eventually though it happens. You don’t need to open your eyes to know you’re somewhere else, you can… uh… hear it?

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa-”

What the?

You look around to see yourself hip deep in nakkodiles at desks, all with their heads tilted back making that weird noise.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa-”

”They can’t just do nothing apparently so I had to give them something to do so…” you look around to see Grown Up shrugging as he looks across the sea of, you’re going to say warbling, nakkodiles with something like despair.

“I have about a million questions.” you tell him.

”Your train of thought.” he says and with a wave of his hand you look up to see a scrolling billboard. Just before it is pushed off of the screen by the endless ‘aaaaaa’ that the nakkodiles are doing you catch the last things that went through your head to distract you.

Around are more screens and boards, they look more like the project flow boards that Dahvid’s
movie central command was running. In the front of the room is a list that’s half checked off.

See Chahut
Go to massacre
Get in pod
Fix?? Problem????

Around you see other charts that are just as helpfully filled in. A list of the progress of things on the Empress problem which include exciting points like ‘sick robot fights i guess’ and ‘win???’ . You try not to look at how both the charts for Karkat and Sollux have notes to break up with them and stay away written in hot red. Either way pretty much all of your thought processes include a lot of question marks in them.

“I’m a fucking idiot aren’t I?” you say after a minute of looking.

”No, but you really should think things through more and plan better. But you already know that.” Grown Up says disapprovingly and, yeah, you should but it’s effort and you’re bad at it.

“So, uh, I’m supposed to be getting to know all of you.” you say awkwardly as you look up at Grown Up. You have to say the continued background ‘Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa’ from the nakkodiles that apparently run your every surface thought is not especially aiding your concentration right now.

“Yes, I know it’s on the board over there and if you were planning on ditching me it’d be me responsible for making you feel about about breaking a promise you made to Rohhze.” Grown Up says with an air of suspicion like he suspects you might still bounce and try to get out of this.

“Right, right, you’re the sucky one that makes me feel shitty about things aren’t you?” you say.

“I’m your conscience, your sense of right and wrong, your understanding of social obligation and your effects on others as well as yourself. I make you a better troll for you and everyone else. You’re WELCOME.” Grown Up says stiffly.

“The thing that I said, yeah.” you say, only half teasing.

"I actually…” Grown Up hesitates, adjusting his tie.

"Let’s get out of here, listening to them is putting me off. Come on.” Grown Up says instead and gestures for you to follow him. You do, as the sound of about a hundred nakkodiles loudly intoning the letter a fades off into the distance.

Grown Up is leading you out of the metal structure and onto one of the few rare bits of actual earth on LOHAC and you guess also your mind. He walks you out a way and finally selects a rock big enough for you both to sit on and sits down.

"I remind you to be honest with people and tell them if you did something wrong but I’ve never had anyone to do that to myself. I’m up front with the other aspects of you and to a certain degree they know what I know. But even though we’re you… you don’t know everything I do. Which means I have a confession to make.” Grown Up says and chews at his lip, a habit you have when you feel guilty. Only you’re usually better at hiding it.

“A confession?” you ask.

"Yes, but I’m trying to think of where to start.” Grown Up says uneasily and then springs to his feet, pausing only to dust off his suit.
"Everyone has things like us in their heads, right? But we change as you do. Does that make sense?" he asks. You nod and so he goes on.

"Troll grubs aren’t very bright. As a species our larval stage runs on the very basics of intelligence, animal instincts and very basic emotions. I wasn’t around back then, there was just one of us. As you got older that being refined into two of us, naturally your ideas and emotions developed so we’d reflect that.” He explains.

“Like a cell splitting in half?” you guess.

"Right! Exactly! One half of that first driver became Id. He was around before you even molted, he was all the things you loved and hated. The other one- he was something else.” Grown Up says.

"Sort of a… a bundle of survival instincts, deep fears and desires. I think maybe in someone not raised by Cal he might have been more developed but even as Id matured and I appeared to tell him not to do things like savage the furniture because it was fun because that meant he’d have nothing later the other one didn’t. He was useful I guess… to a point.” Grown Up says.

Grown Up seems to want to get this off of his chest and you want to hear what he has to say.

"He was scared of so much. Of Cal, of metal, of the way he laughed, he was scared of being alone, he was scared of new people even though he hated them leaving. Id wanted to see people, I wanted to see people but Feral just made us weird!” Grown Up says loudly, almost angrily.

“Feral?” you ask, your eyebrows raising in surprise.

"That’s what we call him. Called him, we don’t talk about him anymore.” Grown Up says, his voice going quiet again.

"We met Dirkka, we wanted him to like us so badly and I knew enough that if Feral was in control then we’d push him away. It’s hard enough controlling Id but Feral would get physical when he was scared, I couldn’t deal with both of them at once and Id hated him because he was getting in the way of us being with people so-“ Grown Up puts his hands over his face and even though he still is an adult and looks older than you for just a moment you catch a glimpse of yourself trying to be older and more mature than you are.

“We can’t die, we found that out. But we can be harmed, we can be repressed and locked away. Feral was stopping us being around people so we… me and Id took him out. We attacked him, threw him him away to a hole, locked him away and threw the hole away too.” Grown Up confesses.

“There’s another part of me around here that’s just locked up unable to do anything?” you ask, the idea feels horrifying. Grown Up just nods, not able to meet your eyes.

"Those beliefs we were on before, wanting people to like you and wanting people to think you were cool. Id lied about them, he made them with Feral. They were half his desire and half Feral’s fear that no one would like you. And strictly speaking he’s not gone, he’s just never up here. When you’re hurt to a level that- well, it’s not really pain. When you black out because of Cal or because of Dahvid that’s Feral. If you didn’t have the survival instincts that he has we’d be dead by now, we just all have to be out for him to have any sway.” Grown Up tells you.

“So you didn’t like him and you killed him? Or near as you could come to it?” you ask.

Grown Up sniff and nods, clearly consumed with his own guilt.

You think about Chahut’s sermon, about truth, about knowing yourself. You think that maybe she
has a point. You didn’t do this but parts of you did, so maybe you owe it to yourself to find out if this is something you can fix.

“I think you should show me where he is.” you say slowly.

Maybe Grown Up expected you to ask that of him because he leads you away across the dirt to somewhere not that far away. It’s a patch of red soil no different from any other but Grown Up knows what he’s doing, it seems. You kneel down on the soft red dirt and with your bare hands you start to dig with Grown Up joining you at your side. You don’t have to get down too far before you hit something hard, but it’s still taken a fair bit of time and the heat of the world around you isn’t helping how much you’re sweating. You claws clang against metal and you brush the dirt away to find a large metal plate on the ground covering a space about as wide as you are tall. Grown Up helps you drag it away revealing bars underneath, set into the ground.

Nervously you get to your knees at the dirt and peer down into the darkness, the impossibly dark space below. You stare and just when you’re starting to think there’s nothing down there you catch a shine in a pair of eyes.

“Hello?” you call out nervously.

”don’t leave me.”

You can’t hear anything back but you can’t in good conscience leave a part of yourself down there. You guess Grown Up is thinking the same because both of you jam your swords into the ground, in the place where the bars connect to the frame so that you can lever them out. For once in your goddamn life your sword doesn’t snap in half and the bars creak up enough for Grown Up to catch a grip so you can both pull the bars away.

”help”

You lean over the edge of what is now just a pit but you still can’t see, you guess this is going to be a leap of faith. You reach out to Grown Up with one hand and hold tight onto him. Your grip secured you lean into the pit with your other hand outstretched, reaching into the dark until…

Until a tiny hand grabs yours. You close your grip and pull back and as you do you see, for the first time, what you’ve pulled out.

Feral is a kid. No, barely a kid, just past molting he’s so little. His hair is bone white and his eyes are completely blank white too, his clothes are white, it’s like he’s been bleached. The only colour he has is the pale grey of his skin and his two intact little horns.

”Don’t leave me!” The kid is clinging to your chest the moment you sit back, sobbing silently. Out of sheer instinct you hold him close and wonder if this is what it was like for Dirkka.

"I'm… I'm so sorry.” Grown Up apologises, clearly wracked with guilt as he sets a hand on Feral’s tiny back.

You guess Chahut was right, you did have truth in you that you didn’t know about. You only hope that this is… a good… thing. Your grip on Feral wavers and you do whatever the opposite of falling asleep is. Falling awake maybe? Either way you’re abruptly in pitch darkness floating in pod goo again feeling overall kind of weird. You reach out to the lid and have a weird moment of fear that it won’t open and you’ll be trapped inside, only when you touch it the thing swings open. Obviously it would.
Chahut and Rohhze both look at you, clearly having been part way through talking with each other only to be interrupted by you coming out of the pod.

“Dayvhe, you were in there ages!” Rohhze exclaims as you slump exhaustedly over the side of the pod and slither to the ground.

“No big, just literally digging up parts of my psyche.” you groan into the carpet.

“What happened?” Chahut asks as she gently flips you over onto your back.

“There was this part of myself that I- that bits of me ganged up on and buried when I was little and I let it out. He was so scared, I think that’s what he was. Fears and wants and stuff. But like… truth, right?” you mumble, waving your hand in a hopefully explanatory way.

“Right.” Chahut smiles warmly down at you.

“I think you should shower and maybe sleep, perhaps get some sugar into you too.” Rohhze suggests and that sounds like a stellar idea. Rohhze is the best, you love her so much.

“That’s a good idea.” Chahut agrees and stands up, again she picks you up like you’re a little meowbeast and hands you to Rohhze.

You stumble back with Rohhze, your arm around her shoulder. You’re bone weary with exhaustion but also feeling really out of it and you’d rather not fall on your ass. But she’s nice, she’s so much cooler than you and she’s here for you when you need it.

“Dayvhe you’re-” Rohhze is looking dead ahead but her cheeks are going a little darker, “you’re purring.”

Oh shit, you are. Oh no what if you made her uncomfortable? What if-

“Don’t look like that, it’s fine, come on.” Rohhze tells you without you having to say a thing. She pulls you through the door and pushes you into the ablution block. You don’t shut the door but you’re also not in there for long and when you come back out Rohhze has ordered food, again this place is great for that.

You drop onto the loungeplank with her and cling to the food she gives you. Any distance between you and her feels intolerable and awful so you all but laminate yourself to her side as you both eat and have nothing much of interest play on her husktop.

“Rohhze?” you say softly.

“Yes?” Rohhze responds.

“Please don’t go.” you whisper.

You don’t want to be alone, you- don’t want to be alone.

You don’t sleep in the recuperacoon, you feel like it’d be a bad idea but Rohhze does stay with you on the loungeplank and listens to you tell her everything. When it gets late she still stays and the pair of you fall asleep together on the loungeplank and you’re not alone.

It’s the idea of not being alone that consumes your thoughts when you wake up. The idea of your previously abandoned psyche fragment and Chahut’s sermon about being true to yourself as a way of serving other people is pinging you in all kinds of ways. This is helpful, you’re pretty sure of it.
Even if you’re not doing what Rohhze wants exactly it’s pretty plain that becoming more aware of what’s going on in your own mind is only going to be a good thing. After all this is very much your sole responsibility now, you have no moirail to jam with. Sollux won’t sit there and roll his eyes at the obvious idea that you’re obliviously circling around and help you out, you have to do it alone now.

You pause and glare at the ceiling, you’re alone on the loungeplank as Rohhze brushes her teeth in the next room. The thing about having been in your own head and naming the bits you met is that you’re acutely aware that the thought you just had about Sollux that made you feel shitty and guilty in a ‘look what you did’ kind of way is ENTIRELY from Grown Up. He’s shaming you and sure you deserve it but the guy could take a break from kicking you all the time couldn’t he?

Still, he’s right. You have no Sollux now which is all your fault so you’re on your own. Please no.

But maybe you don’t have to be. You’ve had Rohhze’s help, you’ve had Chahut’s help. All this crazy shit has already happened so why not…

“Rohhze can I borrow a brush?” you ask, getting to your feet as she comes back into the room.

“All my things are in there still, by all means.” she says and gestures to the ablution block she just left. You go in and shut the door behind you. Rohhze’s hair brush and makeup bag are on the side, you have your own hair brush of course, you’re not a savage. You have no intention of borrowing that. You take your own brush and pull your hair back from your face and hold it there with your shades. You may as well have this as a shades off look, they’ll just smudge the paint and Chahut already knows you’re a mutant so if your eyes get a little bloodshot then whatever, right?

Staring at your reflection you consider your next move. After a little thought you nab your paint from your sylladex and start above your left eyebrow. Your fingers are enough to smear it over the left half of your face, being careful to leave your eyebrow black and not touch your mouth. It’s after that is where you need Rohhze’s brushes. You grab a mid sized one and dip it into your white paint, aware that there are still traces of it on the metal whatever it’s called that holds the bristles in from when she painted her face. You should be good and wash it too afterwards. With that brush you carefully and cleanly slice down the middle of your face and cut the paint so it doesn’t go over the darker grey of your lips on that side, then you just have to neaten out the edges at your jaw. If you’re doing this thing you’re going to put some goddamn effort into it. You switch to your unpainted side and carefully paint over the eyebrow and your lips on that side.

See, on the one hand it looks cool and you can play it off as that it’s just for the #aesthetic. But on the other hand there’s a certain acknowledgement that the paint isn’t you but it’s also representative of how you throw hoofbeastshit over sincerity and sincerity into pretension because being totally real and getting rejected is terrifying. Yet also you want nothing more than to be wholly and unconditionally accepted for who you are totally of someone else’s free will so you keep grabbing for it and messing it up. So, some you in your paint and some paint in you.

A deep and personal metaphor and flashy distraction at the same time. Oh the duality.

Goddamn you miss Sollux.

You wash the brush off because you’re not an asshole and when you’re done you go back into the main room. You go back only to see Rohhze staring at you in shock.

“I thought you meant a hairbrush!” Rohhze exclaims and covers her mouth with her hands.

“I have my own hairbrush Rohhze, you think I look this good without one?” you joke.
“Are you really joining the church? It won’t be just me?” she asks in a small voice, just daring to hope.

You stare at Rohhze’s painted face and realise something. She was the one who brought you to her mentor’s church and to this one. She may not be as into the faith as a lot of people here and in fact she may feel excluded from it because she’s not the ‘right’ colour, though neither are you. Despite that it’s clear that she gets something from her connection to this religion, faith, whatever you want to call it. But she hides it, she doesn’t wear her paint outside church. She doesn’t mention it, she’s probably aware of how basically everyone thinks this is a crazy thing for demented clowns. She’s been alone in this but she shared it with you when you needed it and even though how much help it’s been could be debated when it comes to her last mentor the gesture was sincere on her part. You doing this means something to Rohhze, it means she’s not alone anymore.

You can’t abandon your friend, not with everything she’s done for you. Besides after all the crazy shit that’s gone on in your life semi-reluctantly becoming an atheist clown is probably not even in the top five weirdest things that have happened.

“Yeah, I guess I am.” you tell her.

Rohhze makes a sound that’s half delight and half trying not to cry and flings herself at you, clinging to your shoulders and squeezing tight. Well there’s no way you could ever back out now is there? When Rohhze has composed herself, you don’t mention the loss of that composure, she seems to centre herself again and asks you a very important question.

“Well what do you want to do now?”

You want to go home but you know you need to fix yourself to protect everyone.

“I have to stay here until I’ve figured everything out in my head, I want to go back already but I just… it’s not safe.” you tell her unhappily.

“I understand. I think you should talk with Chahut though, tell her your intentions and see what advice she can offer you. She’s a leader of sorts to you now after all what with you joining.” Rohhze says, her eyes roaming over your face.

It’s not a bad idea. Rohhze does decline to come with you, to her it seems that this conversation you’re going to have with Chahut should be private. Either way on your journey there you note that the looks you get are different now. There’s surprise from some that a kid is here but the fact that you’re wearing the paint of a member seems to override any questions on just who you are or how old you are. You belong with them and that’s all they seem to care about. It’s a nice feeling.

You slink through the door to Chahut’s room to find her already occupied with a tall man with sleek horns who is talking to her in a loud and upset voice. Chahut’s glance flicks to you and she motions for you to stay and then returns her attention to her first guest seamlessly.

“-don’t know what to do! We’ve talked about this so many times, I know he gets our ideas, I know he agrees. Then every time I try to get him to come here- and I know it’d be good for him, it’d put him at peace and help him, every time he backs out! We fight about it and make up, he learns the same damned lessons again and then the whole thing repeats!” the man hisses in frustration.

Wow, that must be exhausting.

“You can’t make someone learn a lesson if they’re determined not to get schooled and you don’t know why he finds that hard.” Chahut comments.
“I just want to help him! If I didn’t think being here would help him or that he didn’t really want it then I wouldn’t do it, it’s not like I’m trying to force what I want here. We just keep going around over the same mistakes again and again.” the man says, his shoulders slumping.

“I understand but you just have to let it be, if he wants your help understanding what the problem is then by all means help but sometimes people can only help themselves.” Chahut advises him, setting her hand on his shoulder.

“But I pity him so much…” the man says, quiet and broken.

“It can be hardest of all to step back when pity is involved.” she consoles him.

The man nods slowly.

“Thank you for your wisdom, Designed.” he tells her and bows.

“Keep faith, brother.” Chahut nods back in a much smaller gesture of respect.

The adult turns and is surprised when he sees you but simply offers you a muted whoop of greeting that you hastily return and he slips out of the door behind you. It clicks shut and you look around at Chahut again who is watching you, her eyes intent. Right, the face paint.

“I, uh, hope that offer still stood. Yeah?” you ask uneasily and point at your face.

Chahut stands like a mountain moving but walks closer with grace someone her age shouldn’t have and crouches down to look you right in the eye. A long and dangerous claw presses the underside of your jaw to tip your head up and then left and right.

“I am very proud of you little one, like your fishsis you weren’t hatched into this life and you chose it anyway, that takes a lot. Don’t think I don’t know it. I’m very happy to have you among my number.” Chahut smiles, showing off her sharp teeth and yet the gesture feels warm.

“Thanks.” and though you’re not sure why you feel so grateful, the extent that you do is almost overwhelming. She wants us to belong with her, with Rohhze.

“What can I do for you, Dayvhe?” Chahut asks and stands up again, her knees clicking as she stands. Yeah, she is getting damn old huh?

“I was thinking about how I wanna go home but I don’t think I can until I’ve made it so I’m safe to be around, or as safe as I can get without being dead or whatever.” you say half jokingly.

“You want to use the pod again?” Chahut asks.

“I guess that’s what I have to do.” you nod.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea, not so much so soon. Take a day or two off, spend it with your invertesister, troll your friends, watch movies or enjoy the company of your siblings in mirth.” Chahut advises you.

“I can take it.” you insist.

“Aren’t you here because you pushed yourself too hard and hurt people?” Chahut asks.

“Damn you didn’t have to, fuck, didn’t have to come for me like that.” you mutter, slouching down and shrinking under her gaze.
“But I did.” she laughs, the sound booming around the room.

“But… that said being around people you pity, platonic or not, is good for the soul. I’ll see if I can find something that’d do the work of the pod for you, or close enough, so that you can go back sooner.” Chahut says.

“Really?” you ask, that’d be great. The best of both worlds, surely?

“Really. Now scram, I’ll let you know when you can get started again.” Chahut chuckles and shoos you out of her chambers. You step outside and for the first time in a while you feel light, almost hopeful.

Well, then, you’d better… go back to Rohhze then? She’s going to think that you’re on a piece of elastic at this rate, going and and coming back over and over. Something on the way back trips you up though. Not literally, you have more dexterity than that. There’s a little cleaning droid that zips by low and silent and something about the movement out of the corner of your eye with the lack of noise makes you nearly jump halfway up the wall in fright. You feel pretty silly when you’re up there, you’re not usually that jumpy.

You resolve to not think about it or tell anyone and instead just go back and surprise Rohhze with your early return. She does, indeed, seem surprised to see you when you walk in. She’s sitting in an armchair with a notebook in hand, busy scribbling away.

“She was very happy but told me I should rest, look after myself, socialise and all that crap instead of ‘overdoing it’.‘ you say, making air quotes around something that she didn’t exactly say. Then again you’ve not made a habit of accurately quoting people up until now in your life, why start now?

“At last, someone sensible. Sit down, I have questions for you.” Rohhze says, pointing at the loungeplank with her pen. Sensing what’s happening you lay back on the thing and fold your hands over your stomach. You know, for ironic purposes.

“I’d been thinking about your… what shall we call them? Id and The Knight and the others. They’re not personalities as such but they direct your thoughts and actions, yes?” Rohhze ponders.

“Drives?” you suggest and Rohhze nods, making a note.

“You said that Grown Up informed you that Feral and Id split from the same initial grub drive which was likely just pure animal instinct. It would be more helpful if you’d been able to find out more about Feral first hand because I think we can regard all of your drives as unreliable narrators.” she continues.

“That seems fair.” you agree. They all have very set views on how they see themselves, each other and the world. It’s not that they’re lying, just limited you think.

“I was trying to put together a chronology of them to better understand their function within you and in relation to each other. We can regard Feral and Id as the same age although Feral being repressed for so long has likely put him behind in strength, influence and development. Grown Up came after them, yes?” she continues.
That’s what he said, right? You nod.

“That makes sense for normal development, a sense of self restraint forms in most trolls at a young age. We’re still sadly waiting on that with Vriska.” Rohhze sighs and you snort in amusement.

“This suggests however by process of elimination that The Knight is your newest emotional driver. I would say that I’ve noticed a protective inclination in you for as long as I have known you but can you think of when this might have developed or why? If we can find out more about how he thinks and what roots him then perhaps we can get to why he’s using your psionics against you.” Rohhze suggests.

“Well…” you hesitate as you try to think.

“Id and Grown Up buried feral after I met Dirkka, I think. He didn’t say that The Knight had anything to do with it so either he sat that one out or he wasn’t around yet,” you say as you puzzle it out.

“I think it would be safe to say that a drive focused on protecting others would likely not stand by and let two different drives effectively murder another.” Rohhze says and that seems to make sense to you.

“So, after you met Dirkka then. Can you think of what might have spawned that?” she presses you again.

Uhhh. You have… an idea.

“Do we have contact with Planet Hollywood from up here? Chahut said about talking to the others back there but I don’t know if it’s live or what.” you say as you sit up.

“There’s a slight delay but we do have contact, yes. I was trolling Jayded earlier because she was wondering how long we would be. Why, who do you want to contact, Dayvhe?” Rohhze asks.

You ignore her question and flip over onto your front as you pull your palmhusk out. You have some questions.
TG: wow that's a lot of things that I'm sort of also interested in.
TG: but I meant like emotionally and behaviour wise, how did I act?
TT: (▇▇) Hmm.
TT: (▇▇) Obviously you were pretty jumpy, Cal does that to people. You also seemed torn
between wanting to trust me and distrusting me. If I gave you food or water you always seemed to
suspect something was wrong with it even if you ended up taking it anyway.
TT: (▇▇) Just skittish in general really. I remember one time we were hanging out and some kidless
lusus wandered by and tried to attack us and you up and bailed on me. You left me there defending
no one because I didn't even see you go!
TG: shit I'm sorry
TT: (◣ ◤) No, no, you were a little kid you were trying to protect yourself.
TT: (◥◣) Besides, I think it helped. After you saw me try to protect you I think it helped you
realise that you could trust me. You knew I would look after you, I think.

Yeah, that's what you'd thought he'd say. Well, not that exactly because you don't remember the
incident he's talking about but you'd suspected this.

“Dirkka protected me when I was little, he looked out for me.” you tell Rohhze who takes this in and
seems to ponder for a moment before speaking.

“Imitation is the most sincere form of flattery, is it not? If you wanted Dirkka to like you, which
seemed to be part of the motive for taking Feral out, then imitating a drive of his that you admired is a
logical outcome of that.” Rohhze concludes.

“Yeah, only Dirkka gets overprotective and irritating too. He nearly destroyed me and Sollux before
we were even a thing because he was convinced that Sollux couldn’t be trusted.” you say miserably.

“It sounds like you made an accurate imitation then, doesn’t it?” Rohhze says.

TT: (▇▇) Can I ask why you're asking? Or if that was helpful?
TG: yeah I think I may have picked that protective thing up from you
TT: (▇▇) Oh.
TT: (▇▇) Oh no, Dayvhe I'm sorry.
TG: no dude I
TG: all of this is my fault I'm not blaming you at all
TT: (▇▇) That's fine, I can blame me enough for both of us. Shit, Dayvhe I never wanted to infect
you with my awful personality. It's bad enough that I made Hal and duplicated my shit for everyone
else.
TG: I happen to like you and Hal dude
TG: lay off
TT: (▇▇) All the same I'm really sorry if I had any part in what's gone down lately.
TG: that's definitely all on me
TG: don't blame yourself
TT: (▇▇) I can't promise anything there.
TT: (▇▇) Look, we all miss you. But screw everyone else, I miss you ok? I know everything with
our quadrants have been crazy lately and your ancestor it's just. Yeah.
TT: (▇▇) I should have been there for you more.
TG: I coulda asked for help
TT: (▇▇) Maybe we're all a little guilty? Still, come back home soon ok? And try to be safe.
TG: I will
TG: sorry to make you worry so much man
TT: (▇▇) It's ok Dayvhe.
TG: I should go but I'll let you know when we can come back
As soon as I know, I’ll tell you man. Give Rox a hug for me.

I will.

Pleasingly, Rohhze seems to run out of actual questions to ask you about your mind once you’re done describing the appearance and behaviour of all the living things you saw and, as she played SGRUB with you, she knows what the landscape looks like already. After that she just veers into baseless speculation that you eventually derail with movies.

It takes a day or two before Chahut breaks the news to you. She has a solution to your pod problem. She can’t let you take a pod down because it’s apparently complex machinery in there and maybe she doesn’t trust you with it. Harsh, but fair. But she does have what appears to be some incense that’ll waft out a vapourised hit of what you get from the pod so you can zone out and go into your mind with that. You can also do that in your own hive back on Planet Hollywood. Also, also, when you run out you have to go see her for more so she can check up on you and see that you’re ok and being responsible. It also means that you have to go socialise with people that you care about beyond just Rohhze.

Not that you’re knocking Rohhze, she’s an amazing best friend, but you’re no doubt a heavy burden to carry alone. Besides, you do miss your other friends even though you deeply fear that you’re going to hurt them again.

And of course you miss other people.

You miss Karkat. Sweet, soft, deadly Karkat. You miss his anger and his laughter and how he just worked so well with you. You miss Sollux, you pity him so much but you hurt him so badly. You hurt both of them. If you could go back in time and undo all that did then you’d do it in a heartbeat but it doesn’t work like that. You have to live with your mistakes and you have to live without them in your quadrants. This is how a few days later you’re touching down on Planet Hollywood with a sylladex full of questionably legal psychoactive incense sticks, a bloodpusher full of anxiety and a face hopefully totally scrubbed of paint.

Rohhze does not let your detour on your way back to your hive, she does not allow distractions or delays, you are made to walk through the front door perfectly on time. The sound of the door behind you both closing prompts several of your friends to rush to greet you.

“Dayvhe!” Jayded shouts and John makes a good attempt to tackle you to the ground in his enthusiasm to see you again.

“Hey man.” you say nervously, you haven’t been gone all that long. John squeezes you in an attempt at affection and rib dislocation and then lets you go.

“Hey.” Dirkka says softly and puts his hand on the top of your head and gently ruffles your hair.

“Come on, there’s no point us all standing in the hallway.” Rohhze points out.

“Yeah, you’re right. Did your trip help at all Dayvhe?” Jayded asks and pulls you along.

“Oh, wait there’s something that-” John starts but you’d already started talking.

“Kind of but HEY, I found out who’d been mind controlling me! It was ME ALL ALONG!” you say loudly as you walk into the main room.
“Wait, what?” Jayded asks in surprise.

“-uh, the others are back.” John says in a tight voice.

What? You look at John, trying to work out what he said, you missed part of it. And then you see.

John wears glasses, and in them right now as well as his slightly baabeastly expression you can see a faint sheen of red and blue on the glass. Which. Which means.

You spin on the spot and, yeah, right there are Sollux and Karkat. Karkat keeps pulling his stare from you to shoot concerned looks at Sollux. For his part Sollux is looking at you, there’s no expression on his face at all, his body language is absent. There’s nothing there to tell you what he’s thinking.

“I-” you say. Yeah, great just make everything about yourself, Dayvhe!

“You-” you try again. No, not working.

Sollux still hasn’t moved and everyone else is watching this showdown so tense they’re hardly breathing.

“Fuck, I’m- I didn’t know you were here. I’m sure you don’t want me anywhere near you, I’ll just go.” you blurt out.

Oh, hey, Sollux is making a whole expression now. He looks livid and like he might throw you out of the window, but at least you know what he’s thinking now.

He doesn’t say anything though, he just clenches his fists and storms off in a silence so total that you can even hear the quiet pop of angry psionics pinging off of the tips of one horn or another as he marches past you. Karkat opens his mouth as if to say something but then seems to think better of it, just making a frustrated sigh and rushing off after Sollux.

“That could have gone worse.” Dirkka says, trying to reassure you.

“It could have gone a lot better too.” Rohhze counters.

This is going to be hard, maybe coming back was a mistake. But isn’t this whole thing about living with your mistakes? If so then good because you’re obviously going to get lots of time to be real cosy with them if you keep this up.
ECTOBiologist opened memo: Dayvhe’s Broken Diamond/Heart/Spade/Club Club

Pinned note -- What happens in the chat, stays in the chat.
Pinned note 2 -- no inviting karkat or sollux!

Added tentacleTherapist
Added gardenGnostic
Added gallowsCalibrator
Added adiosToreador
EB: that’s everyone

EB: wait no nepeta is good with quadrants right?

Added arsenicCatnip

TT: <口> Did you just copy and paste my note at the top?
EB: focus rohhze!

GC: 1T 1SN’T L1K3 TH3 L4ST GROUP W4S US3D MUCH B3FOR3, 1D1OT. B3S1D3S
WH4T 1S 3V3N TH3 PO1NT OF TH1S ON3?
EB: gee i don’t know terezi maybe if you had shut up for a moment i would have explained things!

GC: TH4T WOULD B3 NOV3L FOR YOU! >:]

AC: :33 < is this a shipping club? :OO
AC: :33 < but what dayvhe got to do with it?

AT: uhM, IT’S TO DO WITH DAYVHE’S QUADRANTS, i THINK,

AC: :33 < oh thats not so interesting he doesnt have any

GG: well yeah i dont think anyone has failed to notice that!
EB: thats exactly what this memo is about! we need to get the three of them back together!

TT: <口> Before we all pile on John for that statement can I ask that we hear out exactly what his plan is for that because I desperately want to know.

GC: 1 4LSO W4NT TO H34R TH1S W1LDLY STUP1D 1D34!

EB: gee guys thanks for the support

TT: <口> Anytime.

EB: ok i will admit that i dont have an exact plan as such but its just so dumb

EB: the three of them have all been back here for a whole ten days!!!
EB: A WHOLE TEN

EB: and as funny as it was at the beginning watching dayvhe repeatedly forget how to talk whenever he went near sollux or karkat its just getting painful to watch now

GG: yeah but sollux still isnt talking to him what can dayvhe even do much less us?

GC: TH4T’S NOT 4CTUALLY TH3 S1TU4T10N.
EB: then enlighten me oh all mighty terezi

GC: HM… 1T M1GHT B3 CONF1D3NT14L INFORM4T10N, 1 N33D TO CH3CK

EB: check with who?

AC: :33 < listen i get that mew want to make your friend happy

GG: our friend?

GG: what like dayvhe isn’t your friend too?

AC: :33 < not really no.
EB: what?!

AC: :33 < he mind controlled my moirail and he broke the heart and diamond of two of my oldest friends not to mention hugely violated the sacred trust of moirallegiance!

AC: :33 < i get that he didnt mean to do a lot of that and i dont HATE him or anything

AC: :33 < if sollux and karkitty decide they want to be together with him again then i support them but i dont really think that dayvhe should date people if it turns out like this

AC: :33 < im sorry but i have to stay out of this one
TT: <コ:彡> That’s perfectly understandable Nepeta. If I’m honest I’m more on the side myself that Dayvhe is doing a good thing by working on himself before getting involved again. I think he’s going about it like an idiot but, well, Dayvhe.
AC: :33 < ok i am glad that you understand
AC: :33 < if you ever want to do this with any other ships i would be delighted to join!
AC: :33 < but not these ones sorry
arsenicCatnip left the memo
EB: wow
AT: tHAT DOESN’T REALLY SURPRISE ME,
AT: nEPETE WAS ALWAYS, uH, pRETTY SWEET ON KARKAT AND APPARENTLY SOLLUX TOO?
GG: i guess it makes sense she would side with them but i didnt think this thing had sides
GG: we care about all of them damnit!
EB: I know jayded
GC: OK 1 4M B4CK
GC: 1NV1T3 VR1SK4 TO TH3 M3MO
EB: what no
Added arachnidsGrip
ectoBiologist transferred admin rights to arachnidsGrip
GC: HOW N1C3 OF YOU TO DO TH4T JOHN!
AG: Yes! How nice!
EB: augh you made me!
GC: B4S3L3SS 4SS3RT1ONS
AG: aaaaaaaanyway I’m here to answer your questions re: my kismesis.
TT: <コ:彡> Technically no questions had been raised about him yet.
AG: No8ody asked you.
AG: Sollux and Karkat have come to an agreement about Dayvhe which though I’m not involved as such I do know a8out. Specifically rel8ing to communic8ing with him.
GG: the fact that they arent you mean
AG: 8uuuuuuuuuuuuu but who knows how much patience she has with the Strydr stupidity marathon, she could crack and 8lab.
TT: <コ:彡> If it’s any consolation I firstly have a lot of experience in Dayvhe being dumb, well meaning but dumb. No matter how much I care for him I know he makes absurd choices sometimes, this mess included.
TT: <コ:彡> Secondly, I think I may have already worked out what this agreement between Sollux and Karkat is. Dayvhe already told me that Karkat is banned from telling Dayvhe anything about Sollux and I would imagine that ban extends to you?
AG: It does.
TT: <コ:彡> One moment, I’m going to troll you privately.
EB: wait what if we promise not to tell?
AT: i DOUBT THAT WILL GET VRISKA TO TELL US,
GG: oh come on vriska! dayvhe is so obviously miserable without them and i know he broke up with them but like you said he is a big dumb boy and everyone would be happier together!
EB: is it even possible for sollux to be more depressed? i thought he was bad before but its like someone sucked his soul out
AT: tHIS IS A PRETTY BAD ONE I THINK, iT´S KIND OF PAINFUL WATCHING HIM TENSE UP AND REFUSE TO SHOW IT WHEN DAYVHE IS AROUND THOUGH,
GG: i feel so bad for him
GG: and its clearly hard on karkat too
GC: SOLLUX AND K4RK4T H4V3 34CH OTH3R SO TH3YLL SURV1V3
GC: 1T JUST T4K3S T1ME
EB: yeah and who does dayvhe have
TT: <:·:* Just dropping back in from my conversation with Vriska to remind you that I’ve been helping Dayvhe and he’s taking time to improve himself, not just moping. There is some moping though, but that’s to be expected.
EB: yeah but you wont even tell us what hes been doing!
EB: its all spooky clown shit!
EB: like gee on a scale from ok to JOINED A GODDAMN CLOWN CULT how well is dayvhe handling is breakup?
GC: JOHN YOU 1NS3NS1T1V3 SH1TLORD, ROHHZ3 1S 4 M3MB3R OF TH3 S4M3 F41TH 1F YOU FORGOT,
EB: bluh bluh
GG: i mean she isnt though is she? rohhze just joined up so they would teach her about voodoos
EB: she just likes being spooky is all
TT: <:·:* I feel so heartened to know that everyone knows so much about me and Dayvhe. Having spoken to Vriska it turns out that my suspicions were correct and I have made the same agreement as her, with Karkat if not Sollux himself because he wasn’t available just now.
TT: <:·:* As such I have nothing further to contribute to this memo.
EB: wait!
EB: whats the agreement???
TT: <:·:* …
TT: <:·:* Honk.
tentacleTherapist left the memo
AT: oH NO I THINK WE MIGHT HAVE REALLY, aH, HURT HER FEELINGS,
EB: what no rohhze knows we’re her friends!
GG: it isn’t like she actually believes that stuff!
AG: Terezi, why do you have a thing for complete 8listering idiots?
GC: WHO KNØWS, LUCKY YOU THOUGH HUH?
AG: >::<O
AT: oH, bURN
AG: Memo closed morons!
arachnidsGrip banned Everyone from responding to the memo
arachnidsGrip deleted the memo
Nothing Personal

“I'll be the king, you'll be the filth I wash away
Nothing personal, personal, personal
I am the light, I am the truth, I am the way
Nothing personal, personal, personal
I keep your star light, I control you
Far up above you do what I do
I keep your star light, I control you
Pull your strings, you do what I do
I keep your star light, I control you
Pull your strings, you do what I do”

Nothing Personal

“Dude, I swear you’re getting bigger.” you say to your personal shadow, Feral, as you walk around your mind. No a longer barely molted size his head now comes up to about your middle.

"Getting stronger.” his mouth seems to move but damned if you can ever hear what he says.

“Uh huh. Hey, I didn’t come here to see you exactly but if you could stop making me freak out every time I catch sight of someone I didn’t notice before that’d be great. I swear Equius nearly had to peel me off of the ceiling this morning, being hyper freaked out about stuff isn’t helping anything.” you tell him.

"Everyone hates it and it makes us look weird!” Id shouts down at you, leaning down from the level above you to contribute that. He doesn’t like Feral much but what dismays you more is that Id is seemingly up in the bit of your LOHAC mindscape that controls your current thought processes and you really don’t like him up there.

"You’d thank me if we were attacked.”

“Did you say something?” you ask and Feral sighs.

“Listen you stay here, I’m going to go check out those core beliefs and the psionics around them since The Knight seems to be somewhere else right now. I can’t see him…” you say thoughtfully as you crane your neck to peer around the girders of the lower levels of the LOHAC thought exchange to see out across the lava.

"I’m going with you, The Knight will throw you in the lava if he catches you.”

You hop over the edge and jump down to make your way to the nearest belief, despite what you said Feral is following you, his white hair and clothes stark against the dark metal gears.

“Go back, kid. I- oh great, now Id’s coming too.” you groan and watch as your mintier self with zero impulse control jumps off the higher level of the exchange and hauls ass to follow you.

“If we’re all going I had a great idea!” Id announces eagerly.

“We’re not all going and your ideas are often very bad.” you tell him.

"You shut your mouth, I invent the best sandwiches. Oh man, now I’m hungry.” Id groans in delight.
“Alright I concede your point on the food thing but-”

“You should go find Sollux and tell him you want to be together again and then Karkat too! Both, at the same time even! Then awesome makeouts for everyone!” Id says brightly.

“That’s not happening.” you groan.

“WHYYYYY?” Id wails in utter misery.

You can’t understand anything Feral says but you can understand the loud SHHH he makes and how he elbows Id in the stomach.

“Seriously, man, every time we talk you’re on about this even though I’ve explained to you why we can’t be with them. Also before you try your second tactic, you’re not gonna talk me around by giving me a detailed and pornographic list of the things you want the moment Karkat lets you back in his pants.” you tell him firmly and hop onto another belief.

“Well maybe if Grown Up wasn’t guilting you so much that you didn’t even wanna get yourself off for fear you might think about Karkat’s ACTUALLY FANTASTIC BULGE and all the things he USED to do to you with it then maybe I wouldn’t be so FRUSTRATED but here we are!” Id shouts and Feral shushes him again.

“I’m not listening to you.” you groan.

“You couldn’t even do me the solid of working that tension out for the quadrants you can do that for. We both know there’s no way you can ever pap yourself and have it work like when Sollux used to. Besides do you know how tense we’ve been since you let this fucker out?” Id says, waving his hand at Feral.

“I keep us alive when you’re busy thinking about getting pailed. We wouldn’t even be here if I wasn’t around, remember?”

“Oh shut it. Come on, Dayvhe! Think how good it’ll be to apologise for things and ask him what he wants you to do to fix it and then- THEN you can throw a whole bunch of shit in a pile and he can get his hands all up in-” Id goes on but you can’t take it anymore. You turn around and grab him by the front of his shirt and haul him in.

“Stop it, just stop, ok? I’m not doing any of that. Karkat has some secrecy ban on me and Sollux hasn’t spoken a single goddamn word to me in the almost two weeks that we’ve been living together. We’re never ever getting back together!” you shout in his face.

Id hisses and shoves you back.

“The Knight and Grown Up might as well be here because they’re all I ever hear from you these days! I’m part of you too! You won’t give me the two people that make me happiest and even when you’re hanging out with Rohhze you’re determined to enjoy it as little as possible. I didn’t do anything wrong!” Id shouts at you, his eyes are welling up with tears behind his heart lenses.

"Why can’t you just let me be happy?! You won’t let me have anything! Grown Up’s got you so convinced that you suffering somehow makes what we did better but it doesn’t! It just makes you miserable and I bet Sollux and Karkat don’t like seeing you miserable either! If anything they might think you’re just being sad on purpose to make them feel bad for you!” Id says loudly.

“Wait, you think they’d think that? Fuck, they might.” you whisper in horror.
"If you won’t let me be with them then- then make music, watch movies with your friends, eat good things, just stop STARVING ME!” Id demands.

"If you’re miserable all your friends might hate you.”

"Yeah!” Id agrees, but you don’t know what with.

“What did he say?” you ask, looking between the two drives.

"Learn to listen already!” Id shouts and shoves you.

The motion, though entirely imagined, jolts you back to yourself.

You’re sat on the floor of your block, one of the incense sticks from Chahut has burnt down leaving a heavy smell of something between burnt sugar and sandalwood hanging in the air. You consider what just happened and you can feel the other drives and beliefs in you arranging around the thought.

Id wants you to be happy again or at least to stop punishing yourself. Because he wants to be happy, obviously. But he also suggested that you making yourself unhappy as a way of punishing yourself could make everything harder. It could make it harder for you to fix your problem and that won’t do. It could be you manipulating the feelings of other people and that’s not on either, you’re doing everything you’re doing so that you can AVOID controlling people. You certainly don’t want to be so sad that people change their actions to fix you!

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling tentacleTherapist [TT]

TG: hey rohhze whatre you doing
TT: < コ: ♪ Nothing in particular, why what's wrong?
TG: nothing
TG: well nothing new
TT: < コ: ♪ I'm not sure I entirely buy that given that you've been moved to reach out to troll me. I can come over if you're not feeling well, it's not as if you're far away.
TG: no no its not that
TG: or maybe it is
TT: < コ: ♪ Clear.
TG: shut up
TG: no i mean we should do something
TT: < コ: ♪ Something...?
TG: everything is about my problems at the moment
TG: can we just like
TG: chill
TT: < コ: ♪ If you'd wanted me to back off or something then you contacting me was an odd way to go about that.
TG: no i didnt mean it like that
TG: i mean maybe upping the amount of depression in this hive isnt the best way to fix things
TG: and im sure sollux wants a break from me lurking around just always turning up like a bad penny
TT: < コ: ♪ Hm.
TG: what i mean is do you wanna go out and just hang
TG: do something not to do with my problems
TT: < コ: ♪ We could go see a movie
TG: great you pick
TT: Alright then, meet me in the hall in five minutes?
TG: uh make it ten i gotta wash the smell of this smoke off of me
TG: crack a window and all that
TT: Ten then.

tentacleTherapist [TT] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

Hell yeah, your Id better be happy about this. Actually, you’re feeling kind of happy about this so you suppose he must be. You hook up with Rohhze at your agreed time and your hair is probably gonna go bonkers from air drying but given how painfully single you are who are you trying to impress? No one, that’s who. You both wander out to the nearest movie place which considering what this planetoid is all about you don’t have to go far. The two of you talk, notably not about your problems. You queue, buy tickets and look at snacks. It’s not hard to listen to yourself about what you want in this area of your life so you go wild and get absurd amounts of snacks that you are sure Grown Up would disapprove of, but the thing is you’re already listening to him about the rest of your life. You can see Id’s point here, you gotta give the guy something.

You don’t know why you’re acting like Id is some separate person from you, he’s not. You’re giving him a break because you’re trying to do the right thing by listening to the rest of yourself in more important areas like Sollux and Karkat. So, really, you’re just cutting yourself a break.

The movie is fun enough, a survival drama about one stranded helmsman which you guess will play as pure sci-fi to everyone not involved with this planetoid. Troll Matt Damon really sells the whole thing and it gives you a few hours of way too much ice cream and not having to think about how you’re the worst troll to ever erupt from an egg in a wave of amniotic slime and personality flaws. It’s good, it’s good FOR YOU probably.

“Thanks for this.” you tell Rohhze quietly in the elevator.

“No, thank you for inviting me, it was nice. It’s good seeing you not tearing chunks out of yourself for a change.” Rohhze says as the door dings for your floor.

“Well, it’s- VRISKA!” you yelp in alarm as the doors slide open and the bitch herself is standing there.

“Is it now?” Rohhze says slyly.

“Beat it Lalond, I need to talk to Dayvhe.” Vriska sneers. Rohhze rolls her eyes and you can see how everyone thought it would be them who would be pitch together.

“See you later, Dayvhe.” Rohhze bids you goodbye and walks off.

Vriska narrows her eyes at you, her metal eye gleaming menacingly. She grabs you by the shirt to haul you out of the elevator and then uses that grip to pin you to the wall by the doors to it.

“I need to talk to you about Dungeons and Dragons.” she says and you nearly laugh in her face at how unexpected that was.

“Oh shit no, the nerd shakedown is here. I always feared it.” you say.

“Shut up. I want to get our old game running again because it helped last time, it gave Sollux something else to focus on. I asked him if he wanted to and he basically said yes.” Vriska says.

“He basically said that?” you ask suspiciously.
“Well… he said something more like ‘I don’t care, do whatever’ with lots of apathetic noises.” Vriska sighs and you can see that she’s genuinely concerned. You’ve felt how much she cares about your—about Sollux.

“That is pretty much badly depressed Sollux for ‘sure that’s probably fine’.” you agree, remembering what he was like the last time.

“Exactly. Everyone else playing has agreed to, so you just need to say that you’ll come along and play too.” Vriska says.

With Sollux? You? Playing a game with Sollux, talking to him and being there and… No, you’re too dangerous to be around. Haven’t you inflicted yourself on them enough? If you hurt him everyone will hate you…

“What? No, I can’t. He wouldn’t even want me there.” you tell her, pulling her hand from you.

“Did he tell you that?” Vriska challenges you.

“No, he doesn’t need to. You should run the game for him, I’ll stay out of it.” you tell her. But-

You slip past Vriska and start walking back to your block.

“Fine! I will run the game without you even once asking him if he wanted you there or not! I’ll kill your character off too!” Vriska shouts after you. You don’t bother to answer and instead slip into your block and lock the door behind you, your good mood completely vaporised.

Terezi informs you a few days later that your poor paladin was indeed killed off. Apparently his patron god declared him too dumb to live and smited him. Smote? You don’t know.

This is fine, you should do something helpful instead.

You do pick something helpful to do. The Condybot project is still going ahead, even if it’s not stationed at Dahvid’s mansion anymore. Roxxie rented a whole warehouse to work in and they’re testing the bot, taking it apart, improving it and repeating. You don’t know anything about code or robotics, or at least not more than anyone hanging around your friends would naturally pick up. You certainly can’t help with that side of things. What you can do is the more practical shit.

You help Roxxie in her workouts, you bring everyone else food and drinks, you haul shit around. You’re helpful, you’re trying to help. It’s not your fault that you don’t have the required skillset for this but anything you can do to grease the wheels of progress here is another step to Roxxie defeating the Empress and saving Karkat, keeping Sollux from the helm and actually improving life for all of trollkind. If that means you playing busboy so that Dirkka’s desk is clear enough that he can work or bringing Equius a drink so he’s not dehydrated from all that sweating then all the better.

It’s good too, it’s good for you. With you helping the parts of your mind that scream at you for being useless are quiet. You get to spend time with people who like you, who always liked you, and Equius. You get to help, you get to be sociable and you don’t feel so bad about sometimes doing nice things for you like getting something to eat that you really like or not treating yourself like shit in general. You can justify it because you’re helping. It’s not perfect but it’s good.

That’s the theory at least.
It’s the theory until Sollux walks in the place, dead eyed and not even wearing shoes. His hair is sopor sticky even though it’s the middle of the afternoon. It stays in place when he drags a hand through it as he walks to Dirkka.

“Oh. Shit, I didn’t mean to wake you up.” Dirkka says with regret.

You’re just standing there staring at him. You WANT. You want to run your hands over his face and make him better, you want to drag him back to his coon since he’s obviously so tired. You want to get in with him and let him know that he’s safe, that he can sleep because you’re there, you pity him so hard it’s actually painful.

“I wasn’t asleep.” Sollux grumbles as he walks over to Dirkka.

“But…” Roxxie says, looking him over. He obviously just got out of the coon.

“Can’t sleep. What part of my code is so shit you can’t read it?” Sollux asks.

“That isn’t what I said, but it’s here. It’s looping but I can’t see what your ~ATH is tethered to.” Dirkka explains, pointing at the screen.

Sollux makes an unhappy noise, leaning on the desk with his eyes running over the code. You want to fix this but you don’t know what to do, you want to ask him what you can do or even if there is anything. Even if all he wants is for you to sit over there and leave him alone or just actually leave then you’ll do it. You’ll be happier with him happier.

But you already know what’s best for him, staying away from you, so really you just have to go.

“I’ll just- sorry.” you trip over your apology and make a hasty exit, Sollux looks up at you when you talk but says nothing as you back out of the room. You figure you’ll go home, it’s probably better that way and fuck you’ll even take the stairs to work some of your nerves out because that’s better than the elevator. It a great idea until you get almost to your floor and you hear crying in the staircase, little sobs echoing off of the walls. You don’t know who it is but it’s probably your fault if you’re being honest. With caution you creep around the stairs and your shoulders fall with dismay when you see that it’s Karkat crying into his sleeves. Definitely your fault.

He must hear you because his head jerks up and he stares at you, mutant red rimming his eyes and you freeze.

“Fuck.” Karkat curses.

“I didn’t know you were here I wasn’t trying to intrude, I’m sorry.” you say quickly.

“No, it’s- this might as well happen. Have you seen Sollux? He did get to the lab, right?” Karkat asks you, wiping his eyes with his sleeve.

“Yeah he did, that’s why I came back.” you tell him, still not sure if you should stay or go.

“Did he tell you to go?” Karkat asks with a sniffle.

“No, but I thought he’d probably not want me there.” you answer.

Karkat shakes his head and scrubs at his eyes again.

“God, you’re so fucking stupid. I don’t know how you breathe. This is good, at least I’m pissed off now instead of stress crying like some wiggler over Sollux.” Karkat hisses.
You want to ask what made him cry, especially if it’s to do with Sollux, but they have that deal so you can’t ask.

“It’s not like I want to make you angry either. I can go if you want.” you tell him and Karkat seems to pause.

“Are you asking me if I want you to stay or not?” Karkat asks you slowly, his eyes trained on you.

“I… guess I am? Or at least it was an offer to do what you want which I guess… yeah. What do you want?” you say uneasily, feeling like this is a trap.

“Stay, please?” Karkat asks and you can hardly say no after that, can you? So you sit down a step or two below him.

“For the record I’m not making a habit of wringing my anguish bladder out in the stairwell, ok? I just can’t spill Sollux’s business to everyone and I don’t have you to help anymore and I’ve no intention of not helping and it’s not his fault but-” Karkat gestures helplessly.

“No, I remember last time. He wanted help then, at least a little, but it was still hard. This time I can’t even help.” you say.

God, you remember how helpless you felt then. Karkat knew what he was doing and he handled Sollux with skill and practiced care but it was still difficult and he’d come to you and lean on your for support, yet now you’ve left him with no one. Karkat isn’t going to spill Sollux’s business to anyone else and you don’t know what kind of help Vriska is or even can offer. You would have accepted help from your kismesis but your kismesis was also your matesprit and awwspictice, Sollux may well not want aid from someone who’s supposed to see him as a challenge.

“Hah, ‘can’t’ he says.” Karkat snorts.

“He’s not talking to me.” you point out, because he isn’t really.

“Is that so.” Karkat says, his voice flat.

“Besides I’m trying to not fuck up further and if he’s not talking to me it’s clear that he doesn’t want me anywhere near him which I don’t blame him for because it’s all my-” you clap a hand over your mouth, you heard that. You HEARD that psionic tone in your words.

“Dayvhe?” Karkat asks, reaching for you. You skitter back propelled by a feral kind of fear and clutch your free hand to your chest. Your passive psionics are starting to rev up into action and you slam down on them so hard that you can’t breathe. You’re doing it again! It’s going to get out of control and you’re going to fry your thinksponge and zombify everyone and-

“Dayvhe? Dayvhe shit you’re not allowed to have a bloodpusher attack on me, I won’t let you. You can’t die, I pity you too much, stop it!” Karkat orders you in a wild panic and the word pity startles you so much that you start breathing again only everything comes out in a panicked whine of terror.

“Oh… ok, not a bloodpusher attack, panic attack. I can deal with that one, come here, breathe ok?” Karkat shushes you softly and slips closer to you. You want to tell him to stop, to leave you alone, to shove you down the stairs away from him but you cannot say a word because if you do it might be an order and that’s not happening.

Karkat reaches for you to pap you and the horrified little noise you make seems to be enough to dissuade him from that so his hand diverts and cautiously sets on your shoulders.
“You’re breathing too fast, you’ve got to slow down. Come on, in, hold it.” Karkat commands you and with nothing else you can do you end up doing what he says. You try to hold your breath in but you’re dizzy and scared. You topple forward, your head hitting his shoulder and the next breath you drag in is all Karkat.

Karkat is telling you soothing things as he rubs your back, that it’ll be ok, that you’re doing good. You know he’d do this for any of your friends, Karkat’s a helper and basically the most selfless person you know, for all he likes to pretend that he’s an asshole he isn’t. You know you shouldn’t be letting him do this but you’re so scared, you’ve been so scared of so much ever since you let Feral out but being alone scares him too. Scares you. You don’t want to let go just yet and the part of you that’s missed Karkat like your bloodpusher was stolen from your actual chest is desperate to have every second of this.

You should let go, you should get away from him, you know he probably doesn’t want to be looking after you but right now you can’t move. You’re shaking and he’s helping. The desperate eye you’re keeping on your psionics tells you that you’re not making him do this, the warm hand rubbing small circles on your back is doing it because Karkat is making it, not because you’re making him.

Sitting up finally you look at Karkat, how close he is, how obviously concerned he is. A dumb part of you wants you to kiss him but the rest of you is smarter. You want to explain but, again, you can’t talk. So you fumble for your palmhusk and try to say what you have to there.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]

TG: i have to go
TG: psionicproblem
TG: fuck i mean

The one hand that you’ve devoted to trolling Karkat and not holding over your mouth in case awful psionically barbed words spill out is shaking super bad. Karkat frowns at his own palmhusk and then at you.

“I don’t think you should be going anywhere just yet. Maybe you’d find it easier to breathe if you weren’t smothering yourself.” he says and reaches for your face. You jerk away from him, forgetting that you’re on a staircase and slip down two stairs before you stop, having caught yourself with one foot and Karkat’s claws snagged in the shoulder of your shirt.

You type, your head bent at an awkward angle between the stairs and the wall. This is fine.

TG: dont touch!
TG: i cant talk
TG: i was doing the thing the voodoo thing
TG: fuck i cant believe i fell down the stairs i was warned
TG: i think i might be dying i cant breathe

“What if I cover my ears and you take your hand off of your mouth, ok? Then you can troll me and breathe. I don’t need to hear you to talk.” Karkat suggests.

That makes sense. You nod and struggle to sit up. Karkat sets his palmhusk on the stair in front of him and covers his ears with his hands. With trepidation you take your hand from your mouth and bite the inside of your cheek slightly to keep quiet, thankfully nothing terrible spills out. Still wary you open your mouth a little bit and, yeah, that makes breathing easier. You look like a dumbass sucking in air like you just sprinted a mile in three minutes but it’s easier.
“Better?” Karkat asks, a little too loud. You nod.

“Were you… you said about voodoos. Were you doing me? Wait, that sounded- never mind you know what I mean.” Karkat says, not even bothering to reword that.

You shake your head but Karkat doesn’t seem satisfied so you troll him again.

TG: i wasnt doing it to you
TG: thought for all i know it could have hit you too
TG: i wasnt trying to do it at all but im pretty sure its just more of me doing it to me
TG: but you being here makes it even more a risk i dont want to do that to you or anyoen
TG: anyone
TG: stupid shaking hands

“Wait, you said before about your ancestor not using his voodoos on you and that really it was just you but I thought you meant that no one was voodooing you. Are you telling me that you’re actually mind controlling yourself?” Karkat asks, wide eyed.

You nod mutely.

“Shit, really? No wonder you’ve been- fuck. Can you undo it?” Karkat asks.

You hesitate, trying to word the problem.

TG: i mean i think i can but its like
TG: have you ever pretended to be asleep or unconscious to someone as a joke or whatever

Karkat shakes his head.

TG: oh well me and rox used to have this game where we would
TG: its not important
TG: point is that even if youre pretending super hard to be idk out cold or dead or asleep and even if you make yourself all limp all over
TG: theres still stuff that doesnt work
TG: someone can pick your hand up and hold it over your face and let go
TG: if youre really not awake you slap yourself in the face
TG: but theres this instinct that our thinksponges have thats like hey thats a bad idea and either slows it down or changes the way your arm goes so you dont just smack yourself in the kisser
TG: because that sensible part of you doesnt want you to hurt yourself even if part of you wants to for the vine or whatever

“So you can’t because it’s some survival instinct?” Karkat guesses.

TG: more like i see that mind controlling myself is probably a bad idea
TG: but the control itself is all about keeping me on the straight and narrow so i protect and help everyone and like
TG: its doing the right thing a sketchy way probably
TG: also whenever i try to even get my hands on it to change it or take it down i get slam dunked out of my meditative trance access to my own pan denied
TG: because i guess i dont want to take it down

“How do you know you really don’t want to change it and you didn’t just in a moment of literal thinksponge damaged panic put up some nonsense command that meant you couldn’t want to go against it? Dayvhe this is dangerous.” Karkat insists.
You don’t think you can type this and Karkat has his hands away from his ears now so you just grip onto your voodoos real tight and try to talk like a normal person.

“You’re not supposed to care.” you say in a rough voice.

“Fuck you, you can’t tell me what to do.” Karkat snaps and his hands slide to your shoulders.

You can’t tell him what to do? The whole problem is that you ABSOLUTELY CAN. The absurdity of that whole idea has you wheezing with laughter that feels like it’s a knife edge away from crying.

“Shut up, you know what I meant.” Karkat growls.

His hands move from your shoulders to either side of your head, he’s not going to pap you and he’s not stroking your face all tenderly but he nearly is. You don’t know why and you’re too scared to risk saying more and he’s certainly not looking at his palmhusk right now, instead he’s looking at you intently.

“Rohhze said you were doing a lot of work on yourself up there, getting your head straight. I didn’t know she meant this, I didn’t know that you meant this. Fuck, I don’t think you should be dealing with this on your own.” Karkat says.

He was crying from stress overload when you got here but now that you’re the one having the crisis he’s soldiering through it because Karkat is all about helping people and you pity him so much for it. You… you hear the needy little ‘I want you’ red chirp from inside your throat, you can feel how it hangs in the empty space between you and feel how Karkat’s hands tighten on you ever so slightly.

“Dayvhe…” he whispers.

He’s a stupid romantic and you know it, you know what he’s going to do the moment that pitystruck look crosses his face. He pities you for being caught up in your own voodoos, he pities you because you’re scared and hurting. So he kisses you because if this was a romance movie the focus would be going soft, the music would be rising and that’s what Karkat is like.

Karkat kisses you like it’s him that needs you and not the other way around. His soft lips move against yours and because you’re the worst and you’re weak you’re kissing him back. You don’t trust your voice and that’d mean stopping anyway but this you can do. It feels like eternity since he kissed you last, like you died from the lack of it and only now you’re alive again. You don’t want it to ever stop but of course it does.

“Oh shit, I shouldn’t be doing this.” Karkat gasps, pulling back from you and wrenching a wounded sound from you as he goes.

Of course, of course he regrets it, you shouldn’t have-

“Goddamnit this wasn’t a problem when we were all dating but now this might be cheating and I’m not doing that.” Karkat hisses and shoots you a guilty look.

You… wait. Cheating? You being red with Karkat was never an issue even with the quad-smearing mess you had between the three of you, red is still red and separate from that. So if there’s a conflict then…

You scramble for your palmhusk, you’re too wound up to be verbal right now so this will have to do.

TG: whoa are you and sollux red now
“That’s… well… well for one I’m not sure I’m allowed to talk to you about that because of the deal.” Karkat says with hesitation. His face is dark and he looks anywhere but you, though you have to note that he’s not leaving either. His claws drum on the wall beside your head.

“Even I can’t be ashen-ish when I’m missing a leaf and we’re still friends obviously and you know I’m bad at not blurring so without any ash it’s all…” Karkat makes some complicated and incomprehensible gesture as he tries to get the idea across.

“No red but. It’s. Redder and paler? I’m not talking to you about it because I can’t but I’m also not just making up a reason to not do this.” Karkat says in a rush.

They’re properly red and properly pale? You guess they replaced you with each other then. You thought they might the last time something like this happened. The thought stings but there’s something to it as well. You look down at your screen and type again.

TG: you’re the best people I know
TG: only people good enough to deserve you two are you two
TG: not that it’s my business but

“Shut up, whatever you’re thinking it’s like, it’s likely not. Not that I’m having this conversation with you.” Karkat tells you, he’s still not gone away at all.

TG: but as an expert at fucking things up I gotta say don’t do that
TG: don’t let me wreck anything else
TG: I’ve already caused enough damage
TG: and Sollux is perfect
TG: and

The problem with doing this with Karkat right here is that he can see the shit you backspace on, the self recrimination and all that shit. Karkat frowns and takes one hand away from the wall by your head so he can push your palmhusk away.

“I kissed you because I still pity you, certainly something Sollux would understand.” Karkat says firmly.

Wait, does that mean that Sollux still pities you? Why the hell would Karkat even still pity you? You whine, reduced to just that because you can’t do the word thing, it’s not safe. Karkat’s face twists into this pained expression of wanting to do something and not being able to and from the way he keeps looking at your mouth you’re pretty sure he wants to kiss you again.

You want that, of course you want that. But you shouldn’t. Keeping your distance, remember? You slide up the wall to get to an unsteady standing position on the stairs (you were warned about them) and Karkat stands up too. He still looks like he’s considering the pros and cons of makeouts. You try to convey through hand gesture alone that you need to go, not that you’re running away from him because he’s great and you liked this but also you really shouldn’t and so you need to not be here. It’s a complicated and probably unclear series of gestures.

“Dayvhe!” Karkat calls after you but nope, you’re going, you have places to be. Metaphorical places that is.

You speedwalk to your block and when you’re in there you lock the door after you. You kick laundry across the doorway and shut the window, you’re basically hotboxing yourself in here with mysterious clown meditation incense but you’re just going to roll with it.
“This is such shit, I can’t even believe it.” you hiss angrily as you flick the lighter and sit down in the grumpiest zen imaginable.

You voodoo’d. Near KARKAT of all people. What if you’d caught him in it? What were you even trying to do anyway that made it worth that risk? What the fuck?! You slump against the loungeplank a little and glare at the ribbon of grey smoke trailing through the air. ...You got to kiss Karkat. Fuck, but you missed him. You missed him and you really wish you could have kissed him again, just grabbed him and held him close and-

You remember kissing him for the first time, back before either of you knew about each other’s mutation. It was risky even to kiss him, if he got too fresh with his claws or if his teeth had been sharper you could have been in trouble. Yet despite the risk or maybe because of it the whole thing was the biggest thrill you’d ever had.

You’d been watching some movie and one thing had lead to another and then there you were, pinned underneath the hottest shortassed ball of rage troll who was kissing you like you were worth it. You’d made every noise under the moon for him because you’d wanted him so badly and he’d given you as much back. You got your hands under his shirt and even as he tried to shrink away from your touch you were pitystruck in the best way. He couldn’t believe you liked what you found and you couldn’t believe he was letting you. It was perfect, until you bailed on him because you were about to expose your mutation, but then that led to you outing yourself to Sollux. To extending such a vital trust to him and him pushing you and Karkat back together like puzzle pieces meant for each other.

It was perfect and your blood pusher throbs with the memory.

You open your eyes to find yourself in the hall of statues that you were in before. The statues of Karkat and Sollux are still behind bars and as before Id is reaching desperately through them to get to the plaques with the gemstones on, the ones that contain memories. If what had been coursing through your head wasn’t enough of a clue that Id had managed to reach then the way his clawtip just graces one would do it.

“Are you taller?” you ask as he pulls his arm out and straightens up to his full height. He is, he’s a little taller than you now and evidently he has a longer reach.

"I am! Hah, you’d be surprised what a kiss can do in a place like this!” Id laughs and you roll your eyes. But you get the feeling at least, kissing Karkat could make anyone feel on top of the world.

"Fuck me I wish you’d kissed him again, but he kissed US! He still pities us!” Id shouts in delight.

"It looks that way. Not sure if that’s a good thing or not but…” you shrug and look up at the statues.

"Oh quit feeling bad, you’re ruining this for me.” he huffs.

Your eyes trail over the stone likeness of Sollux, and then Karkat’s.

“I think they’re together now, like… red/pale ways.” you whisper.

"Fuck that’s hot.” Id says with obvious glee.

“Ugh, of course you’re all for it.” you groan.

"Shut up, remember that time they kissed each other before when we were there?” he says with a wistful smile.
You absolutely do remember that. The whole thing pings you across quadrants, you like Sollux being appreciated by someone else. You know how much Karkat cares about him in his own colour smeared way and damn if Sollux doesn’t deserve every bit of that. Sollux is perfect and wonderful and basically the only person good enough for Karkat. You’re not jealous, you wish you weren’t on the outside looking in but you’re happy for them as well.

”We didn’t completely fuck up if they’re happy with each other.” Id finishes the thought for you.

”But I want them both back!” he adds selfishly. You roll your eyes and walk off without him, of course Id thinks that way. But maybe this is a sign that when you fix yourself the door might not be shut to you forever. There might be room there for you again, maybe you could really be happy again.

”Or you could stop all this and be happy now.” Id suggests, following you outside.

You look across the gears and you can see the other three parts of you gathered on one of them seemingly having an argument. There’s the conflict you’ve been feeling, time to go settle it. Hopping and jumping across the gears you traverse the distance to get to them.

What if you’d dragged Karkat into it?!” Grown Up shouts at The Knight who looks down at him with tight fury.

”Ooh boy.” Id grimaces.

Feral’s mouth moves and his arms make gestures but you still can’t tell a damn thing he’s saying.

“Why is one of my drives a mime anyway?” you ask Id quietly. The green haired version of yourself shoots you an odd look.

”Dude, just...” he makes a gesture with his fingers like a box. Like if you were trying to pretend to capture a picture.

At a loss for anything else to do you look at Feral and do just that, pressing your thumbs and index fingers together to form a square and-

- anyone ever found out what you did they’d abandon us! We’d be alone forever!

”Whoa.” you whisper.

”And we’d deserve it too. You still haven’t even told us just what you were making up there and you won’t let us see!” Grown Up accuses The Knight and you watch as his hands tighten on the links of a chain he’s holding.

”Show me what it was you were making, what you risked hitting Karkat with. I had to stop talking because I didn’t trust you not to keep going.” you say and walk closer to him, your face warps in the shine of his armour and despite the size advantage he has on you he steps back a little as you get closer.

”You can’t be trusted!” The Knight insists, jerking the chain back out of your reach.

You’re mad, you’re really starting to lose it with this guy. You get that he’s helping, you get that he IS you, but this isn’t helpful and you refuse to be bossed about by one quarter of your psyche. Besides it’s his meddling that could have put Karkat in real danger again and you’re not having that shit. Behind you Id is snarling in rage and you’re reminded that he’s not just the hedonistic happy part of you, he’s the part that throws down and kick ass too.
“Give it to me!” you demand but The Knight clearly isn’t going to. His armoured hands cling tight onto the chain that he was part way through making.

That’s it. You throw open your hand and your sword materialises. You leap for The Knight before he can react, you go high. He’s so much bigger than you that you need to compensate for the height and he hesitates, not knowing whether to defend himself or the chain he’s protecting. He chooses himself and your blade clashes with his. Predictably yours shatters because even when you imagine it all your goddamn swords snap in half eventually. It doesn’t matter though, you yank the chain from his hand.

It’s your fault, you can’t be trusted. Do what I say, your judgement is always wrong.

This isn’t a command, The Knight is trying to formulate beliefs here. Things that will force you to listen to him no matter what the rest of you thinks. Well fuck THAT! With the same concentration you used on removing the commands you put on Vriska you crush this chain under your hands, putting pressure on it until it shatters into pieces.

The Knight’s sword stabs through your chest before you can start on anything else.

Flailing, gasping and choking on the air you fall over onto your side. The floor of your block and the nearly burnt through incense is the sight that greets you. Karkat and Rohhze are right, you need to fix this. You’d thought that too before The Knight got you so caught up in your own web.

You shamble to your feet with poor coordination and shove the window open again. Cool evening air hits your face and your lip goes cold right away, your tongue flicks out and you taste iron. You smear your hand under your nose and come back with red. Great, now you need another head scan don’t you? You send Hal a message and of course he drags you back to the ship immediately. He finds nothing especially untoward, you’ve probably overdone it and for once you agree. You can’t break down everything you’ve done to yourself in one go and finally, FINALLY, you’re starting to realise that you can’t do this alone.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling faithfulReveler [FR]

TG: hey chahut its dayvhe
FR: well hello There liTTle one.
FR: how are you?
TG: been better
TG: been worse
TG: i think the stuff you gave me has helped me realise something about my psionics and my mind
FR: oh?
FR: a revelaTion, do Tell.
TG: i think im kind of fucking myself over here
TG: all the people in my head are me and i get why there all there but the balance is wrong
TG: the protection thing is going into overdrive
FR: proTecTion is a sensible Thing To wanT buT iT can be dangerous.
FR: you can do a loT of harm wiTh ThaT, speaking from experience here.
TG: yeah im definitely picking up what youre laying down here
FR: so whaT do you plan To do about iT?
TG: i need to undo the psionic commands i put on myself
TG: but the knight wont let me and hes so much more powerful than everyone else
TG: but i can do something about that i can get help
FR: oh?
TG: the id part of me the part thats all happy about shit but also really down to bash some pans in
sometimes
FR: That sounds very much like The messiahs, a spark of divinity in you maybe...
TG: well i dont know if anything about me is divine but
TG: i know what makes him stronger
TG: me being happy and doing things that i like makes him stronger
TG: and if hes stronger the two of us can overpower the knight and undo what i did and if i make the
right argument grown up might help too
TG: i guess you could say that im fighting my problem with mirth?
TG: chahut
TG: you there
FR: yes! yes i am.
FR: i wasn’t
FR: ok i was crying a little, i’m very proud of you little one. i see a lot of potential in you. i’m very happy to have you in my church, you have a bright future here i’m sure.
TG: well thats
TG: i mean thank you i know thats high praise but you know i dont believe even if what you say makes sense when i hear it
TG: but im not a believer like you
FR: yes dayvhe that’s their joke.
TG: uh
FR: keep me updated. i have every faith in you.
FR: honk.
TG: auuugh dont make me
FR: honk.
TG: if anyone ever sees this chat im eating my own head but
TG: just between us because you’re helpful and i like you and you dont care that i dont buy into the
hokey clown shit and i aint drinking the cruel-aid or anything but
TG: honk
TG: i guess
FR: :o)

faithfulReveler [FR] ceased trolling turmtechGodhead [TG]

It takes a night of observation before Hal lets you go back but that’s fine, you’re all about looking after yourself now. You’re gonna get, uh, bubble tea on the way home because you passed a place and the part inside of you that you know now to be Id got all excited feeling about it so now you have bubble tea. You’re just going to give Id every harmless thing that makes him happy so you’ll feel better and he’ll be stronger and then you can team up and kick The Knight’s ass and undo your own psionics. Then you can really set things straight and undo the damage you’ve done to everyone else. The fact that you’re coming up with moral reasons to do things tells you that you might even be getting Grown Up on your side too.

You play games with your friends, running John’s little racecar off of the track and letting Jayded and Rohhzee tease you both for it. You help Dirkka with his work, which mostly means running errands for him and the others. Sollux still isn’t up to working with them yet but you know he’s sent them some work which you’re hoping means good things. You make yourself happy by making other people happy, you hold the doors for strangers, pay for the next order in line when you pick up whatever Dirkka and the others have asked for.

You don’t see Karkat and Sollux all that much, you’re still trying to give them space but it’s not weird when you bump into Karkat again, he’s even got other things on his mind.

“They’re just driving me crazy is all.” Karkat bitches and glares at the socks in his hand with venom
before he hurls them into the washer.

“Yeah but John and Terezi are always like that.” you point out. Them being obnoxious about it isn’t exactly new so who knows why it’s bothering Karkat now.

“Yeah, well it’d all be better if they just got together.” Karkat grumbles.

“Got their shit together you mean?” you ask curiously.

“That too, but I mean actually got together in an actual kismesitude.” Karkat sighs.

You become the spiritual embodiment of a question mark, John and Terezi are…

“You mean they’re not dating already? I thought they were just weird about it.” you say in surprise.

Karkat freezes and then turns to stare at you.

“How do you manage to draw breath while being that stupid? No, they’re not together but the fact that even a pan rotted idiot like you can see it’s a good idea means that they very clearly should be. You need to help me get them together.” Karkat insists.

“I- hey.” you pout.

“I’m serious, it needs to happen.” Karkat insists.

“I don’t know…” you hesitate, you want to stay away from manipulating people at all.

“That’s quitting talk, Dayvhe. Also, if you want a more selfish motive for getting them together I can tell you that it’s frustrating Terezi. And Terezi being frustrated means she has to talk to Vriska about it a lot, and if Vriska—” Karkat starts.

Yeah you get it, Vriska’s wellbeing is intrinsically tied to Sollux’s. You want her gently challenging him back into being a functioning troll again, not taking her frustrations about Terezi’s unhappiness out on him.

“I’m not exactly a romance expert though, Karkat.” you point out.

The withering look Karkat gives you probably strips the paint off of the wall behind you. Ok, yeah, Karkat knows you’re not good with romance, fucking hell ouch.

“How about… how about you tell me what you want me to do and I’ll do it.” you tell him.

Karkat shuts the machine with his hip and looks up at you where you’re perched on the one next to it.

“Now that’s an offer I could do a lot with.” Karkat smiles and there’s a glint of mischief in his eyes. You all but swallow your own tongue in your alarm and excitement to a statement that goddamn leading.

Does he mean what he’s implying or are you reading into it? He did kiss you before. But what about Sollux? He wasn’t sure if he was going behind Sollux’s back with that but what if they’ve talked since and it’s ok? What if- what if you and Karkat could…

Hell yeah you’ll stand behind your offer of doing whatever he wants if THAT’S the case.

“I’ll let you know if I think of something.” Karkat says, not selling the innocence that he’s trying to
get that line across with. He smiles in a way that sends lightning up your posture pole and saunters out of the room. Oh god, you’re going to die aren’t you?

Karkat holds good on this promise/threat for you to do whatever he wants and bangs on your door a few days later. You open it and see him leaning against the doorframe with one hand.

“Time for you to do whatever I want.” Karkat opens with, probably doubling your pulse.

“Okay?” you manage to say in a high and strangled tone.

“We need to get John and Terezi together and you’re going to help me. Plus Sollux is at the hospital today so I’m just going to worry otherwise and- AND NO HE’S NOT. I SAID NOTHING ABOUT WHERE HE IS, YOU KNOW NOTHING.” Karkat is shouting by the end of that.

“Yeah, no, for sure. I know nothing about where Sollux is or isn’t, I’m like fountain of ignorance over here.” you agree helpfully and Karkat relaxes.

“Same as always. I’m not having this conversation in the hallway though, Terezi’s hearing is distressingly good.” Karkat tells you and steps inside uninvited, not that you mind.

“What?” Karkat sniffs the air, “why does your block smell like a drug den?”

“Uh.” you say and kick some abandoned laundry behind you to cover the incense burner that you forgot to empty a day or so ago.

“I don’t know what you mean, also how do you know what a drug den smells like? Is that even a thing?” you say.

“I’ve seen it described in books. God, crack a window in here or something. Terezi’s going to smell you coming a mile off at this rate, hasn’t she said anything about this?” Karkat asks.

“I’ve not exactly been socialising with her. I mean I’m not NOT doing that but, I don’t know, I’m working on the people thing I guess. She’s not said anything so you’re obviously exaggerating.” you argue but do crack the window open anyway.

“Well, whatever. My point is that the two of them are just bubbling over with sexual tension all the time anyway, I’m sure they just need a little push.” Karkat says.

You would very much like to go into your mind and divorce the phrase ‘bubbling over with sexual tension’ and your concept of John from each other for forever, thanks. You’re gonna put that on your list of things to do next time you go under into your mind.

“I said I’d do whatever you said but I really hope your plan is less literal than just shove them at each other.” you say.

“Hey, I’m the romance expert here. What do you take me for?” Karkat demands.

“I’m just saying you lack the god powers for some narrative meet cute in the rain or whatever the fuck.” you say.

Karkat pouts a little, his diminutive fangs pressing into his plush bottom lip and- stop thinking about Karkat’s mouth!

“You’re right about that, much as it pains me to admit it. I’m sure if they just went on a date they’d see how perfect they are for each other but they’re obviously not going to take that step on their own.
So… so we have to make them!” Karkat says with confidence.

“And how do you plan on getting them to agree to that and what kind of date are you going to send them on even if they did?” you ask.

“A candlelit hate-date is pretty classic and I know Vriska could get us an in to that fancy place she took Sollux to for theirs ages ago and if it’s for Terezi I’m sure she’d help.” Karkat says.

You did promise that you’d help with this and you know that alone won’t cut it, besides it’s a chance to make two of your best friends happier and Karkat would be there to ensure that you don’t do anything bad. You should be staying away from him but he’s the one who’s sought this contact out so… so you should be ok, right?

You should help.

“That’s something but they did other things too, remember? Just dinner’s gonna be awkward. What about something competitive like the arcade? John likes games and Terezi’s all about bright flashing lights and shitty snacks. But we still don’t have a way to get them to agree.” you point out. After all if their romantic tension that was so obvious you thought they were actually dating has gone on this long it’s going to need something pretty spectacular to push them into it.

“This calls for drastic measures.” Karkat nods.

“Oh no.” you say on principle.

“We must kidnap Pyralsprite and, uh, does John have anything sentimental that he highly values?” Karkat asks.

“He has a stuffed hopbeast that I gave him as a present, it was a prop from one of his stupid movies that I’m not even going to name. It’s the one we don’t speak about that he and Vriska got way into.” you grimace at the mere memory and the expression Karkat pulls is similar.

“So we kidnap them both, go to this arcade and send them a ransom picture saying they have to come there and… and get a high score on something to prove they were there but before they get there we move on to the other place.” Karkat suggests.

“This is a terrible plan with about a million ways it could go wrong.” you inform Karkat.

“You said you were going to help me, you’d do whatever I said.” Karkat reminds you, jabbing a finger in your face.

“I didn’t say I wouldn’t help you with your very dumb plan, just saying that it is. So is step one somehow not get caught stealing beloved items then?” you ask.

“Yes!” Karkat insists.

“Alright then, step one is recon.” you say and pull your palmhusk out.

turntechGodhead [TG] began trolling ectoBiologist [EB]

TG: yo john where you at
EB: oh hi dave! I’m at the super market at the moment did you need something?
TG: nah dude we gucci
EB: what?
“Well John’s not here, gonna ask Terezi now.” you say and flip chats.

“began trolling
gallowsCalibrator [GC]

TG: the humble court bouncer or whatever the dude who tells people in court to pipe down and also
does attendance asks where her honourable tyranny is right now
GC: TH4T’S D3F1N1T3LY HOW COURT WORKS D4Y VH3 YOU BROK3 1T DOWN TO
1TS B4R3 3SSS3NT14LS!
TG: i m the master of this shit
GC: >:]
TG: but for real though where are you
GC: 1M 4T OUR H1V3
GC: VR1SK4 S3YS H1
TG: i doubt thats what she actually said but thats cool if you two are kicking it in her block ill catch
you later
GC: M4YB3
GC: OR M4YB3 I W1LL C4TCH YOU!
TG: uh oh

“Well Terezi remains terrifying, I say we hit her block first if we’re doing this. Who knows how long
it’ll be before the smell of our guilt gets to her nose.” you say and put your palmhusk away.

“Agreed, you can use your cheating psionics for assholes to open the door.” Karkat tells you and
pushes you towards your door.

The pair of you pink junglemeowbeast to Terezi’s door and after a moment of listening at it in case
Terezi was lying you press your hand to the lock and give it a psionic jiggle or ten until it pops open.
Sollux has this down to a fine art, though he pretty much always has the manners to knock. It’s
harder for you but you can do it.

The door to Terezi’s block slides open and you’re greeted with a mishmash of bright colours and
familiar items that, though not exactly the same as her old hive, is still very her. You’d expected this
more or less. Karkat pushes past you, all elbows, as he starts his hunt for Pyralsprite. Of course
you’re all fucked if Terezi has her beloved plush in her possession because she’ll absolutely smell
you in here anyway.

“Yessss.” Karkat hisses, scuttling back towards you with the plush in his hands.

You nod, open the door and the two of you sneak to John’s. Again, you pop the lock and start
looking. You have been in John’s block since you moved in here so you’re able to locate the bunny
right away. You take it and put it in the box, by which you mean your sylladex, obviously.

Fleeing the building like the criminals you are the pair of you hop a communal scuttlebuggy into a
more densely populated area of the city where your palmhusk tells you there is an arcade. Plus it’s
basically the first Goregle search result so it makes it easier for the two of them to find you. Finding
idle banter with Karkat isn’t hard, it never has been, between the two of you conversation was never
in short supply and the only problem comes when Karkat would naturally mention Sollux and he
realises that he can’t do that anymore and has to divert topic.

You know you said you didn’t hear him but you did, so you know Sollux is at the hospital right
now. You don’t know what for but since Karkat isn’t there with him it can’t be an emergency so you can only hope it’s something routine, a checkup or whatever. You wish you could ask, you wish you could be there.

You’re indulging Id, so for a minute as you stare out of the window you imagine that you’re going to the hospital to pick Sollux up from some totally normal checkup about… about his ports or something. You’d arrive and he’d be grumpy at having to go through something so mundane in the first place when he could be doing anything else. But it’d be fine because you’d slide your fingers between his thin ones, feeling the way they’d close around your hand and he’d get quiet for a moment, touched that you wanted to touch him. So often it seemed like a surprise to him that you wanted him back, sure it was obvious from your relationship but occasionally you’d show some small measure of affection and he’d seem almost surprised by it. You wanted to keep surprising him like that forever, or better yet make him feel so totally pitied that he’d never doubt your affection for a moment.

But that isn’t what’s happening here. You’re still lucky that you’re spending time with Karkat, that he’s tolerating you enough to invite you on this silly mission and you don’t want to spit in the eye of that gift but you’re here with him as his friend, as his ex, not as his quadrantmate and it’s not enough. You want.

When you get to the right place Karkat drags you out onto the street. The two of you wander out and track down the arcade and you’re trying to do the mental gymnastics that you have to in order to not think that this feels less like a date setup for John and Terezi and more like one for you and Karkat. You’re not thinking that, nope.

“Taking a picture of the outside is too easy.” Karkat says firmly and you agree so inside you go.

“If it’s them against us, the plushnappers-”

“In the name of all that is holy don’t call us that.” Karkat groans.

“Felt felons?” you suggest with a grin.

“Stop.” Karkat groans.

“Heh, well what I’m saying is we should pick something co-op for them.” you suggest.

“For once you say something not terrible. Come on.” Karkat agrees.

The pair of you scope out a shooting game, so you’re not favouring either of their strife specibi there, and you hold the hopbeast in one hand and Karkat holds Pyralsprite in the other as you take the shot.

“I’ll make a burner account to send them the picture from.” Karkat nods, tapping away at his palmhusk.

“Dunno if we should demand they get a high score though, those are some pretty bonkers numbers up there. But just saying that they play is a little weak, maybe we could say tickets from different machines? Do they do tickets?” you wonder as you look around.

“We could…” Karkat hesitates, he’s not looking at you, “we could play and demand they beat our score.”

This is a trap. Wait, no, it can’t be a trap because the only person you swore you wouldn’t do this to is yourself. Karkat isn’t turning you against yourself, is he? You’re doing that all by your own damn
self. Besides, you promised that you’d do what he said so really you have to play the game with the cute boy!

“A’ight.” you nod, grabbing a gun.

Karkat flashes a smile that’s all fang and challenge and reminds you for an instant of how he looked the night the two of you went to the carnival together, the night he took you to see Sollux for the first time. You’d squared off in games like this so many times that night that you blew all of your cash to get home because all you wanted was one more game, more time with him. It worked out pretty well, all things considered. At least until you broke everything.

You and Karkat mow down hordes of monsters until eventually you’re both killed, Karkat defending your fallen avatar for a full thirty seconds before he dies too. He’s violently and absurdly pleased, just looking at him puts your bloodpusher in your throat. He takes a photo of the score and you watch as he sends a message to Terezi and John both in a memo, painfully typing in lower and upper case in a pattern closer to Rohhze instead of the all or nothing approach you both take on caps.

The challenge is thrown down but you two had better get out of here sharpish or else you risk being caught by the short arm and long hammer of the law.

“We should take the long way around towards the fancy place that Vriska booked before and maybe we should troll her when we get there.” Karkat says a little breathlessly as he runs alongside you. That’s not a thing that needs to happen though.

arachnidsGrip [AG] began trolling turntechGodhead [TG]

AG: What exactly are you two 8ozos doing?
TG: i have no idea what you mean
AG: Oh can it.
AG: I know your hand when I see it!
TG: thats
TG: well i dont know if its *the* creepiest thing youve ever said to me but its surely making a top ten list
AG: Why are you and Karkat trying to get 8lue 8oy and Terezi together? More import8ntly why are you doing it together?
AG: What happened to your ’oh i cant 8e with people im too dangerous’ deal?
TG: look you cant mimic my quirk and then jam your 8 in there pick one or the other
AG: You’re running right now, I can make your legs not do that.
AG: I’ll make you look like those crappy game glitches you love so much.
TG: holy shit why do you escalate so fast
AG: Answer the question!
TG: kk wanted to get them together
TG: because hes a romantic and itd make solluxs life easier if rezi wasnt pining over john or whatever
TG: i agreed to do whatever karkat said
TG: because im a moron
AG: At least you admit it.
TG: could you get them into that place you and sol went to before?
AG: I can do anything.
AG: 8ut I’ll do it for Terezi. Plus I wanna see how this dum8 idea of yours plays out.
AG: >:::D

arachnidsGrip [AG] ceased trolling turntechGodhead [TG]
“Well on the plus side Vriska is helping, on the downside she’s still our creepiest friend. But she’s…
our friend I guess?” you pant and as Karkat tugs on your arm you slow down your running a little.
You can’t help but remember how Vriska’s mind felt and Grown Up’s reminder that she is your
friend despite all that you’ve done to her.

Then again Vriska said herself that the fact that the two of you don’t like each other much doesn’t
mean that you aren’t friends. That’s probably healthy.

Karkat’s still catching his breath when his palmhusk pings on his fake trollian account.

W3 4R3 COM1NG TO F1ND YOU 4ND WH3N W3 DO JUST1C3 W1LL B3 S3RV3D!!!!

This is accompanied by a photo very obviously taken by Terezi because it’s a front camera shot of,
well, mostly the inside of her nose but you also see a slice of John at an unflattering angle that makes
him look like he has no chin at all. Just straight up head into neck, it’s like someone melted him.
She’s the shittiest photographer you know and you’re kind of jealous of that natural talent for awful.

“They… they are going to play the game, right?” Karkat says uncertainly.

You consider everything you know about John and Terezi both.

“I think we should start running again. Maybe if we cross running water she won’t be able to smell
us.” you suggest and grab his hand to take off in a sprint.

“You’re thinking of FICTIONAL rainbowdrinkers, Dayvhe!” Karkat yells at you but it’s the only
plan you have so you’re going with it.

You rush on, trying to loop around the city to throw them off. If they decide to play the game and
send you their high score you have a fine lead, but if they decide that catching you two is the game
then it’s a lead that’s getting worryingly thin. The thing is that you two have to stop to navigate and
all Terezi and John have to do is chase you.

GC: 1 C4N SM3LL YOUR F34R!

EB: we’re gonna catch you!

“Now I’m not sure if Vriska is our creepiest friend.” you gasp.

“They’re all awful, look! Communal scuttlebuggy!” Karkat wheezes and points at it. You both leap
aboard the vehicle and if this was a movie it’d take off driving right away, but it doesn’t. It takes a
full TWO minutes-

Sollux…

-for the vehicle to pull away.

“No way they can find us now.” you say a little breathlessly.

“I wouldn’t be so sure.” Karkat says and points, you look around just in time to see a woman take a
photo of you on her palmhusk and start typing. Oh fuck.

You open Chittr and search for posts in your location and find, yeah, a photo of you. Oh no, that
kind of evidence is dangerous you should get off at the next stop, fork left or right to get away
perhaps. But for now you’re trapped on a vehicle and there’s nothing you can do about it. Well, at
least they can’t get in here either.
“Dayvhe!” Karkat slaps your arm. You look out the window to see a taxi pulling level with the communal scuttlebuggy. Terezi presses her face to the window, her tongue smushing against the glass. John shoves her away to jab his finger at you through the glass.

Well, if that’s how the game is going to be…

You take the bunny out of the box—er, sylladex and hold it up before the window and make a slashing motion across your throat. That’ll tell him to back off, surely it—WHY IS HE WINDING THE WINDOW DOWN?! You watch as he and Terezi try to climb out of the window at the same time. Terezi clammers onto the window having shoved John away, leaving him to climb up out of the sunroof. Terezi pulls her cane in half, showing the two blades within and John equips a hammer that has a clawed back and both of them leap for the scuttlebuggy. Their taxi, probably having had some sense has tried to floor it to get away from the communal scuttlebuggy to prevent this lunacy but it only means that when they land it’s on the front of the vehicle’s bonnet and roof.

“CRIMINAL!” Terezi yells against the wind, banging on the glass.

John swings around and kicks his way through the sliding doors to the communal scuttlebuggy.

“Time to go!” you squeak and grab Karkat’s arm. There’s an emergency exit at the back of the communal scuttlebuggy and since none of the adults on board, including whatever pilots this thing, have decided to do anything more than take pictures you’re on your own. You rush to the exit, dragging Karkat with you.

Karkat twists the handle, probably expecting it to force the vehicle to stop but nope that’s not what it does and John is only getting closer now.

“Can you catch us if we jump?” Karkat asks, clinging to your arm as he looks at the road whizzing by below.

Can you neutralise forty five miles an hour of speed before you hit the ground? Sollux could, but you?

“Not a chance in hell but we gotta go, onto the roof!” you insist and swing out of the door. You cheatingly hop up with your psionics and reach down to grab Karkat with you.

Against the force of the wind and conscious of any oncoming traffic signs you forge forward and cling tight to the plush hopbeast in your hand. At the front Terezi bounds up from the bonnet of the communal scuttlebuggy and onto the roof at the same time John climbs up the back.

Well, you have no other choice.

“Stay back, or the plush hopbeast gets it!” you shout over the wind.

This is dangerous and stupid.
What if you got someone killed?

All of the life goes out of you. What are you doing? You’re supposed to protect people and you’re up here being a risky moron!

You’re too absorbed in your thoughts to notice John leaping for you until it’s too late. You go down like a sack of shit under his blue blooded bulk and John rips his plush from your unresisting hands.

“Wait—no, no, no! You can just HAVE IT AUGH!” Karkat yelps and is slammed onto the roof next to you, Terezi’s swords piercing the communal scuttlebuggy roof on either side of his head.
harmlessly. Well, you assume harmlessly and since there’s no screaming from inside you guess she didn’t just shank some passenger by mistake.

Terezi leans forward with a rattling growl and licks Karkat’s face from chin to hairline in one slobby swipe.

“Tastes like… justice.” she hisses gleefully and snatches Pyralsprite back.

“Oh my God you’re so weird.” John groans.

“Yes, wonderful, thanks for this horrible experience. Will you two go out already now?” Karkat groans dismally, trying to wipe his face clean.

“Oh. That was your game, was it?” Terezi asks, looking down at him.

“Wait. What?” John says from his perch on your chest.

“Dude, don’t blow this.” you advise him.

“Yes! I wanted you two to finally get together and stop blackflirting and frustrating each other and everyone else, you obviously work so why not?” Karkat tells her.

“What?” John says again.

Terezi fidgets and then her back straightens and she lifts her chin defiantly as she stares John down. Smells him down?

“Well. Since the topic has already been raised, do you want to be my kismesis, John?” she asks, her voice proper enough to tell you that she’s probably nervous.

John just stares at her.

Don’t blow this dude, don’t.

“I…” he says slowly.

“I thought we already were dating?” John says.

You can’t help it, you laugh and Karkat executes a double facepalm of maximum despair.

“I just thought we were taking it slow! Like… like really slow? I didn’t want to be pushy.” John adds hastily.

Terezi blinks slowly at him, to the soundtrack of Karkat’s anguish below her.

“John… John you are the dumbest person I know and I know Dayvhe.” Terezi says.

“Hey!” you protest.

“Well I don’t know!” John says defensively, not defending you though you can’t help but notice that.

“God you’re just- you’re so goddamn stupid. Come here.” Terezi hisses and half clambers over Karkat to get to John and either kisses him or tries to bite his face off.

“Get your knee out of my throat! How is every part of you pointy?!?” Karkat chokes.
“If we were dating you’d have known about it!” Terezi insists, letting John go.

“I thought I did!” he protests.

The communal scuttlebuggy comes to a stop, finally.

“Well?!” Terezi demands loudly.

“Well what?!?” John says back, just as loud.

“WILL YOU BE MY KISMESIS OR NOT?!?” Terezi hollers.

There’s a slightly muted ‘say yes, dude’ from the pavement below and John’s face is wildly dark.

“Duh. And I’m getting off the bus now.” John says, going all highblood fancy with his words. He grabs you and slides off of the roof onto the pavement thankfully and not oncoming traffic.

“If it helps, I thought you two were dating too.” you say quietly.

“Right?!” John exclaims.

Karkat bounces off of the bonnet of the communal scuttlebuggy with a loud ‘FUCK’ and hits the floor. Terezi lands on her feet of course.

“You have a reservation after this or whatever, talk to Vriska. I’m sure she’ll take all the credit.” Karkat wheezes as he shambles around to where you are.

Terezi checks her palmhusk for a moment and then grabs John by the shirt collar and drags him off with a wild grin.

Success???

Yes? Maybe? You’re going to go with yes.

“I think I bruised my everything.” you complain quietly.

“Yeah you and me both. How does she have that many angles on her anyway?” Karkat says with a grimace.

You watch as he checks his palmhusk and then looks around at where you both are, the communal scuttlebuggy has long since driven off.

“I have to go… uh…” Karkat hesitates.

“Pick up the person you’re not allowed to talk about at the place I don’t know he’s at?” you ask.

“That’s right.” Karkat nods.

You hope Sollux is ok but you don’t say it, Karkat’s not allowed to talk about him and you’re going to respect that. It’s still a bittersweet feeling, standing here having helped other people get into a quadrant, one you used to share with Karkat, only to be left alone.

“Thanks for helping me. I’m sure it’ll make a lot of people feel better now, me included.” Karkat says earnestly and you want to kiss him, but you don’t do it.

“It was fun. Stupid, highly dangerous and risky, but… fun. I’m glad I was able to help someone
though.” you smile and glance behind you. John and Terezi are long gone but you’re still happy thinking that they’re happy, that you had a positive influence on them.

“I should go.” Karkat tells you quietly.

You want to ask him to stay but you’re not going to, so instead you watch him walk off and then exhaustedly search to see what communal scuttlebuggy you need to take to get home. You think you’ll ride on the inside this time.

Still, it’s good to see Karkat and as long as you’re not involving Sollux in any way things are better, more like how they used to be. Sollux himself… well… Sollux is more elusive. You don’t know if he’s avoiding you or if he’s just not leaving his block much because depression is a bitch like that. But it’s cool though, when you do see him next you’re definitely being a cool dude who is totally functional and not a disaster.

Haha, no, you lied. The next time you see Sollux is seconds after you had managed to fuck up the basic command of ‘pour boiling water through strainer’ into ‘pour boiling water onto self, flail around in alarm, pour boiling water onto floor, slip dramatically’.

Oh yeah, you’re a catch.

Well, you might be because you’re levitating right now and you’re not the one doing that. But you know that red and blue haze, no matter how long it’s been since you’ve seen it.

“How are your reflexes that good?” you ask without even thinking about it, instead you’re getting your feet under you and clutching at your burning arm.

“How are yours that bad?” Sollux replies.

You stare at him. He kind of looks like crap right now but as far as you’re concerned the clouds are parting and choirs of angels are singing because SOLLUX CAPTOR IS TALKING TO YOU.

“You’re talking to me?” you gasp.

“That is what’s happening. Doesn’t that hurt?” Sollux says, pointing to your arm which is still covered in scalding water and soaked shirt sleeve which is only making it worse.

“Oh.” you look down at your arm and it throbs angrily, “Wildly, yeah. But you’re talking to me so I guess priorities?”

He sighs at you like you’re insufferable, you probably are, and nudges the cold tap on. You take the hint and shove your arm under it.

“Auuuuughhhhh.” you hiss as the rest of your nervous system reminds you that yes it really does hurt. The rest of your nervous system can shove it though because Sollux is RIGHT HERE.

“I, um-” you say.

Sollux is looking right at you, you probably should have thought of something to say before you started talking but here you are. Fuck it, go for honesty.

“I wanted to say something but I didn’t really think before I started talking.” you tell him.

“Well, you’ve fucked up worse with that before.” Sollux says with a shrug. He comes around the kitchen island, glares at the water on the floor and with a wave of his hand it flows upwards into the
sink. It’s not fair that he can control liquids, that takes such skill. With that done he opens the hunger trunk and stares inside.

“That’s fair. I. Listen, I’m sorry.” you say and shut off the cold water probably way too soon but this is more important, dammit.

Sollux’s hand tightens on the handle of the hunger trunk and he shuts it, he doesn’t look at you but instead stares ahead straight at the door.

“What are you apologising for?” he asks.

This… this feels like an important question. A test almost.

“A lot of things.” you say weakly.

“I’m- in no particular order I guess, I’m sorry I went into your head. It was fucked up for so many reasons and I should never have done it.” you apologise.

Sollux nods, stays silent and still doesn’t look at you. Importantly though he doesn’t leave or eject you from the building via the window.

“I’m sorry that I got so on your case about you being sick and started this whole thing because you weren’t but would it be fair to say that through all the shit that ensued from that I played a majority part in making you the kind of sick you are now?” you ask.

“Holy shit are you asking me a question instead of telling me what you think?” Sollux asks and now he actually does look at you.

“I…” you trail off.

It’s like a lightbulb going off in your pan. The Knight thinks he knows best for everyone, that’s how he knows what to do to protect people. Sure he’s right in the parts where it’s like ‘stop friends from being stabbed’ but when it gets more abstract that’s really goddamn assumptive, isn’t it? You stayed the hell away from Sollux and Karkat because you, no The Knight, thought that was what was best. There was a good argument with it but you never actually asked them what they wanted.

“I have not done that for a while, have I? I’ve just been… assuming shit.” you whisper.

Tension bleeds out of Sollux, he’s no longer strung tight ready to go off instead he’s looking at you like you’re really there and relief flickers across his face for a moment.

“Yeah, you have been.” he tells you.

“You’ve not been talking to me because I’ve not been talking with you at all for ages I’ve just been talking AT you, right? You banned Karkat from telling me anything about you so that if I wanted to know bad enough I had to ask and I still didn’t get it! I- fuck I’m so stupid!” you curse yourself. You rub your burnt arm by accident and hiss at the pain.

“Cold water, idiot.” Sollux says and psionically flips the tap back on for you.

“What is wrong with me?!?” you demand of the inside of the sink. Well, you know what’s wrong with you, don’t you? And you need to fix it.

“I don’t know, you’ve been stressed, I guess? Or something. I just… I can’t deal with that Dayvhe. Not now and if that’s how it always is going to go-” Sollux starts talking but you don’t like where
“No, it’s not that. It’s- it’s complicated but it won’t happen again.” you tell him firmly and shut the tap off, you don’t care if it burns you can’t let Sollux get hurt again. So you have to go, you have to end this thing now.

“What?” Sollux asks, obviously confused.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got this.” you tell him.

“Wait, what?” Sollux says but you’re already gone. You’re itching to fight this, to set things right, to settle the score. You go into your block and shut the door, locking it behind you. The process of removing the ventilation and getting the incense set up is routine enough that it requires no thought at all from you, you just want this over with.

You open your eyes.

Id is bigger now, Roxxie’s size at least. Still smaller than The Knight was last time you saw him but it’s two against one right now. Id smiles, sharp fangs flashing in the reddish light of LOHAC.

"Let’s fuck shit up.” he hisses with violent glee.

He draws his sword, a quadrant themed blade with a diamond pommel, a hollow club symbol for a hand guard and a heart and spade etched on each side of the blade. Yours is just your sword, it’s not fancy but it’s sharp. Hopefully all you’ll be destroying with it today is those shitty commands but you’re prepared for anything. Id grabs you and the two of you bounce from gear to gear to get to where The Knight is standing at his anvil, he’s not hammering out links in a chain anymore. That’s a sword he’s got.

"It’s over!” Id yells, dropping you when you land on the gear.

“I guess so.” The Knight says quietly.

“You need to let me break these commands, they’re nothing but trouble.” you tell him, holding your sword ready.

“You’re not doing that, they’re for your own safety. For everyone else’s, you can’t hurt anyone again.” The Knight says firmly.

“That’s SHIT!” Id snarls furiously.

“This isn’t how I want to do this.” you say.

“What you want? We’ve SEEN what happens when you get what YOU want. I’m here because you obviously don’t learn, after everything you start going around with HIM again. Look how out of control he’s gotten.” The Knight says, gesturing to Id. He lifts his sword, still glowing cherry red, from the anvil and hefts it in one hand.

“How about we all stop arguing and talk about this reasonably?” Grown Up interrupts. He’s standing on the other edge of the disk with Feral by his side looking between all of you with mounting fear that you can feel growing in you.

“Fuck you, you’re on his side!” Id accuses.

“I’m not on anyone’s side, I just want to do what’s right.” Grown Up says patiently.
“So you are on my side then.” The Knight smiles meanly at Id.

“I say we take the commands down and then with a level playing field all sit down and come to an agreement about how we want to go on and what’s the right thing to do for us and everyone else.” Grown Up says, looking at both larger parts of you with an air of stern command.

“Not a chance.” The Knight says.

“Fine by me!” Id snarls and lunges for The Knight. Their swords meet in a clash that sends sparks flying. You gasp and step back as the two of them fight with clearly deadly intent. Grown Up is trying to intervene and Feral is crouched behind him in fear. Shit, what are you supposed to do?

Your eyes track across to the nearest giant chain of psionic fuckery. The Knight is more than distracted right now! With a burst of speed you rush across and try to grab for one of the chains, only to nearly lose an arm when The Knight’s sword slams down on the ground before you as you reach out. He’s knocked away when Id barrels for him and lodges his knee in The Knight’s bone bulge in a move that makes your eyes water just to see.

“Stop it both of you! I have the moral high ground!” Grown Up shouts. He’s on top of the anvil now so he has the very literal high ground too and he’s armed with a thin and deadly blade.

“Either HELP or fuck off!” Id shouts and pulls back his sword to strike.

“Have neither of you thought about what this is probably doing to our thinksponge? What’s going to happen when Sollux or Karkat come looking for us and find us with our thinksponge bled out of our pan, huh? How’s that going to make them feel?!” Grown Up demands.

It’s an emotive argument and you can feel the pang of sympathetic pain for it, that comes from Id. From Id who empathises with people, who pities Karkat and Sollux so badly, who knows how you’d feel in their shoes. He feels that pain. So he hesitates.

The Knight does not.

His blade slams through Id’s unprotected chest, erupting between his ribs on the other side.

“NO!” Grown Up yells and your chest throbs, you fall to your knees but you still see as The Knight grabs Id by the shirt, whirls him around and throws him off of the edge of the gear and into the lava below.

You feel- you…


Small hands grab you, trying to pull you away but you’re too heavy, you’re too… something. You don’t have the words for it.

Grown Up is smaller than The Knight, much smaller. He puts up a fight, trying to reason that this is wrong all while Feral tries to pull you to safety but he’s too small to jump from one gear to the next while holding you. The Knight’s fist slams into Grown Up, knocking him to the floor. He picks up Grown Up’s narrow blade and jams it through his shoulder, pinning him to the ground.

With everyone else defeated The Knight turns to you. Feral runs when The Knight gets too close but he doesn’t seem interested in anyone but you.

“Finally, now it’s all going to be ok. I won’t let anyone get hurt again.” The Knight promises as his
hands close around you.

“It’s time to wake up.”

You open your eyes. You’re on the floor of your block, slumped over to the side. You’re bleeding, it seems, but that’s ok. Overusing your psionics is fine, it was all for the greater good. You stand up and look at yourself. If you want to protect people you really ought to be stronger but that’s a problem for later. Finally your head is clear enough to solve problems with no other distractions at all.

You’re not sad or anguished anymore, not distracted by silly desires. No, you’re going to protect people and do it properly. It’s good, actually. You’re not happy about it but you’re not unhappy. That’s fine.

Your name is Dayvhe Strydr and you have a lot of work to do.

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