manage me (i'm a mess)

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by technically_direct

Summary

The thing about Eddie, right, is that he's kinda an enormous fuckup. And it's starting to catch up to him a bit.

For real, the BEST thing to happen in those six months after he and Anne broke up was getting an alien parasite, and that was accounting for the whole 'it was eating his organs' thing.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

4/9/2019: Added sources/related links in the end notes! Some of it is further info, some of it is sources for factual information, but none of it is necessary for understanding the fic-- this is just for fun, and b/c i've ended up doing a fair amount of research for this, and want to show it off a little bit. :)

thanks,
technically_direct

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s not so much that Eddie’s an irredeemable fuckup as its…

Well.

Ok.

It kinda is that Eddie’s an irredeemable fuckup, actually.

Like, the few years where he and Annie were together were very much against the pattern of his overall fuckup nature. He remembered anniversaries, he was never late on rent, he was starting to eat healthy food, and he stopped smoking and drinking so damn much. Which, in retrospect, probably really helped him make marginally more thought-out decisions. But, before Annie? He’d been on a first name basis with at least five bartenders in New York, he’d been arrested a time or three or four, he’d had more than a few ill-conceived hookups, woken up at least twice with a new tattoo and no memory of how he’d gotten it, and on one memorable occasion he got into a fist fight with a man, who, it turned out, was actually a professional prizefighter. It didn’t go well.

And, once the thing with Annie died a quick, sudden death (rather than the slow, painful one he could see slowly lurching towards them a few years down the line), things took a turn for the worse, and Eddie went back on his bullshit like he was making up for lost time. He had some fun, no-strings-attached sex with strangers which resulted in one accidental stabbing, several small (non-accidental) burns from candle wax, participation in at least two overtly satanic rituals, stealing at least four very comfortable t-shirts from various people, one somewhat depressing orgy, and the knowledge that his time being with Annie and being fairly vanilla was definitely an outlier.
He kept money coming in, at least. Enough for liquor, rent, and at least two meals a day. Freelancing for some less reputable online publications wasn’t exactly what he was picturing when he was in journalism school—that was more toppling corrupt politicians and fighting for justice—but writing listicles about crypto-currencies and clickbait articles about superfoods under an alias was the only reason he had any money to make bad decisions with.

Anyway, he’s out getting drunk every night and buying all his groceries at a bodega and pointedly not thinking about how his life has fallen to pieces and seems to somehow be getting worse, when he stumbles ass over elbows into the Life Foundation shitshow. For the second time, technically. That was only because seeing Annie and Doctor Boyfriend Dan (part time life saver, full time fucking saint) made him feel a bunch of the weird, nasty feelings he thought he’d be past by that point. And then, you know, he meets Venom and eats a few people and falls into San Francisco Bay.

He crashes on Annie’s couch for a few days, fielding calls from the Life Foundation (asking him to please not sue) and former editors who, despite never once reaching out to him during his six months following his career suicide, made a point to tell him that they never once believed he was guilty, and they had some good times together, right? And would he mind terribly giving them an exclusive on his story of his time with the Life Foundation at a fucking steal. His former editor for The Brock Report calls him and chews him out for half an hour, yelling things like “Who taught you journalistic ethics? Stephen Glass?” and “Investigative reporting does not involve committing felonies, Brock!”.

It’s oddly refreshing.

When Anne starts making serious noises about having a Conversation now that he’s settled and how, really, it’s probably for the best that Venom didn’t come back, he texts Dan on the number he was given in case of emergency and fucking books it, saying some lie about having an urgent interview that he just forgot to mention. He’s out of that house in about three minutes, and out of the neighborhood in ten. He’s on his second ridiculously strong coffee when Dan gets back to him, texting with proper capitalization and punctuation. Long story short, he can, in fact, crash at Dan’s place for the next few days.

Dan is just such a fucking great dude.

He slugs down the last of his coffee way too quickly and legs it to Dan’s neighborhood, because his bike is god-knows-where, and for all its many faults, Bay Area Rapid Transit has the downtown area pretty fucking extensively covered. Sooner than he’d really like, he’s out of that house in about three minutes, and out of the neighborhood in ten. He’s on his second ridiculously strong coffee when Dan gets back to him, texting with proper capitalization and punctuation. Long story short, he can, in fact, crash at Dan’s place for the next few days.

It’s the gentlest sort of bachelor pad: dark wood floors, lots of glass tables, a large flat-screen television on a bare brick wall, and something that could be mistaken for a decent book collection if you didn’t stop to look at the titles—as it stands, so much as it is technically a “collection” of “books” (or, at least, exceedingly book-like objects), calling any of them “decent” is being a bit too fucking generous for Eddie’s tastes. The kitchen is blandly up-to-date, with fairly new appliances and no
personality whatsoever. There are no magnets on the fridge, and no stains on the countertop.

Dan, being, again, a great fucking dude, picked them up some Thai takeaway and presses an ice cold beer into his hand nice and quickly. They navigate through meaningless pleasantries fairly quickly, and Dan is kind enough not to mention how Eddie’s just shoveling curry into his mouth like he hasn’t eaten in a week. Eventually, they run out of meaningless stuff to talk about that isn’t “read any good books lately” or “how ‘bout them raiders”, so Dan decides to just jump headfirst into the several elephants in the room.

“Do you, like,” He begins, in between mouthfuls of Pad Thai, “still have an apartment? Since those guys trashed it?”

“Yeah. I’m working on getting the Life Foundation to feel guilty enough that they fix it up and then cut me a check.”

“On account of you almost dying, and all?” Dan uses his plastic fork to collect some more noodles, having chalked the chopsticks up to a loss before he even started in on the dish. Eddie is still trying to eat what is, for all intents and purposes, a soup dish, with a pair of tiny sticks.

“Dan. This is far from the first time I’ve almost died. Hell, I got stabbed a couple of months ago, and that was after my job stopped being exposing the corruption of powerful people.”

“You got stabbed?” Dan sets his fork down. “When? I didn’t see anything about that on your medical records.”

“Well, yeah, for it to be there I’d have had to see a doctor—“

“You didn’t see a DOCTOR?”

“… No? There were extenuating circumstances.” Meaning he was too lazy and didn’t have the money to get medical attention anyway. “At any rate, as stabbings go, it wasn’t that bad.”

Dan opens and closes his mouth a bit, trying and failing to find words to respond to that.
“Listen, even though Venom was actively killing me for some of the time, they were literally the best thing to happen to me in months.” Eddie’s mouth, like usual, seems to actively ignore the part of his brain focused on shutting the fuck up. This was why he was run out of New York—the state, not just the city. You keep (completely accurately) calling politicians and mobsters and police commissioners ridiculously corrupt to their faces, and sooner or later you’re given the choice between staying in town and not dying, and Eddie decided that he rather enjoyed being not dead.

Dan sets his fork down, takes a long pull from his beer, and visibly resists sighing. “Could you, maybe, explain that, Eddie?”

“Look, Venom was killing me for a while—and they got over that, for the record—but at least I was part of something, and we were going to be in it for the long haul. Like, we were only together for a few days, but it was like everything slotted in place, you know?” Eddie begins pulling the label off his bottle of beer, stops even attempting half-hearted eye contact. “I don’t really do well alone. I do dumb shit like get myself stabbed or accidentally do a ritual to bring about the antichrist or wake up in a stranger’s apartment with no idea of what happened in the last week and a new tattoo. “

“As your doctor, I’ve gotta say that in my professional opinion, that’s pretty fucked up.” Dan took another long drink from his beer.

“Even though I did some crazy shit when Venom and I were together, I just—it’s like—well—“ He shoves a piece of pork that had been floating in the curry sauce into his mouth to buy himself some time to figure out his wording. “Having a partner is pretty great. Someone to catch you when you fall, who you don’t even need to talk to because they know your head so well. And we were only together for a few days, but Venom dying still feels like someone’s scraped out all my insides.”

“You talking to anyone about this, buddy? Because even though you barely know me, you just unloaded a bunch of stuff right then, so maybe talk to a friend, or a shrink?”

“Look, Annie trusts you enough to give you a key to her place after six months. Plus, like, you’ve had plenty of opportunities to severely dick me over, and haven’t done that, even though you’ve really never caught me at my best.” Not at his worst, either, but that really didn’t bear thinking about.

“What am I going to do, go up to a stranger and tell them about the time I was possessed by an alien parasite, but don’t worry, it super died, and also that’s possibly the least fucked-up I’ve ever been, once we got everything straightened out?”

“I can see why that would be an issue, yeah.” Dan starts eating his Pad Thai again, albeit a bit more contemplatively. “You know you can always talk to me, right? Like, I was required to take a psych rotation as part of my residency, so I somewhat know what’s up.”
Actually, he hadn’t known that. But, then again, it tracks with Dan’s aggressively nice track record. “Thanks.”

For a moment, there’s a lull in the conversation, and Eddie seriously considers dispensing with eating utensils all together and just slamming his head into the curry and drowning himself in it.

“So,” Dan says, trying to rescue the conversation. “eating people. What’s that like?”

After dinner, which is overtaken by Dan’s weird, medical fascination with eating people’s heads – “THE PRIONS, EDDIE! YOU COULD DIE.” Dan says. “WE NEED TO GET YOU A TEST FOR CREUTZFELDT-JAKOBS.” Dan says. “THE WAY YOU ATE THEM MAKES NO BIOLOGICAL SENSE” Dan says—they turn on Dan’s obscenely big flat-screen television and watch about half a baseball came before Eddie passes out on Dan’s leather couch.

He wakes up to a note informing him that Dan has gone to work for a crazy-long shift at the hospital. A cursory look at the clock (one of those fancy ones, without any marks whatsoever) tells him that he’s slept for 13 straight hours. He spends about half an hour snooping around Dan’s apartment, finding nothing more interesting than a bottle of astonishingly bad whiskey and an enormous collection (read: more than three) of novelty boxers.

Eddie then spends about two hours on the phone with the Life Foundation, and manages to get them to throw in fixing up his apartment and redoing his flooring, in addition to the check they cut him as a thank you for not suing them into oblivion and even more public embarrassment. After that, he researches what the medical consequences of cannibalism are, and spends the rest of the afternoon drinking a frankly obscene amount tea, watching made-for-tv romance movies, and falling into a mild mortal despair.

He slugs down some of Dan’s frankly terrible whiskey, watches jeopardy, and passes out on the sofa.

Day 2 at the apartment goes better. Eddie still wants to chuck himself off the balcony a bit, but he turns that energy into aggressively judging the “collection” of “books”, popping a few BART stops away to a used book store, and buying some of the most aggressively terrible novels he can find (Eye of Argon, Queen Victoria: Demon Hunter, and Outlaw of Gor, among others). When he returns to the apartment, he stacks a few of the real stinkers on Dan’s nightstand, and shuffles the rest into the bookshelf. Judging by the entire shelf of Lee Child and Dean Koontz, they’ll fit right in.
And if he picked up some Michael Moorcock or some William Burroughs (or an inexplicable second copy of *Queen Victoria: Demon Hunter*) for himself, well, that was just a bonus. Most of his old books were at his parent’s house, anyway, and while he might still email his sister every so often, relations with everyone else were frosty enough that he was not going to even consider setting foot in the same city while certain people still drew breath.

He gets another call from an old editor, this time one from New York, demanding that he “GET HIM PICTURES OF THE GOO-MAN” in the middle of a long-winded rant that lasts more than forty-five minutes, never repeats, and is entirely shouted. The Pavlovian reaction to that specific voice yelling jars him out of any death-spiral his mind seems intent on going down, thankfully, and somehow the conversation devolves into a shouting match about, of all things, the *Weekly World News*. Neither of them had anything really invested in the argument, it was mostly just a way to return to normalcy, slightly. To ensure everything was on a somewhat even keel, as it were.

Anyway, feeling somewhat restored, Eddie made the cheapest frozen pizza he could find at the nearest bodega (it, being in a somewhat fancy neighborhood, was still pricey), flipped on the classic movie channel, and worked his way through a six-pack of PBR while watching *Rebecca*. He then drinks a rather generous coffee-mug full of Dan’s cheap whiskey, eats an entire pint of ice cream out of the container, and thinks, distantly, that he’d really like to be back in his own apartment. He takes a shower, during which he nearly slips and falls at least four times, saved only by the somewhat knobby shower floor, and the ridiculous luck of the very, very drunk.

Anyway. He wakes up only wearing boxer-briefs and lying on the cool wooden floor of Dan’s living room. Dan, for the record, is staring down at him, brandishing a scalding coffee, and looking very concerned.

“You doin’ alright, there, buddy?”

Eddie, because he has just woken up, and is too hungover to do the sensible thing and *lie*, says, “Not really.”

“Care to elaborate on that?”

Not particularly, but his brain-to-mouth connection, somewhat dicey at the best of times, has decided to abandon him. “My entire life has disintegrated, the best part of my day is getting calls from old bosses who chew me out for journalistic ethics, and the one thing in the world that made me feel even remotely like a person again is fucking *dead*, and it’s my fault. How would you fucking feel, Dan?”
Dan pauses, downs a fair bit of his still-steaming coffee at once, and collapses on the leather couch. “… So when you said you were having a hard time, it was more of a euphemism for ‘I’ve been trapped in a major depressive episode for months and now it feels like a vital part of me has been scooped out’. The way Anne tells it—“

Eddie still doesn’t feel up to actually levering himself up onto his elbows, so he just sort of glares up at the ceiling. It’s one of those exposed ductwork deals, painted a solid matte black to make the actual apartment look larger. “Look, okay, before last week I hadn’t spoken to Annie in six months? And I really don’t like making her worry, so even with the whole thing where I got run out of the entire state of New York, I just kinda shoved that into a little box and kept on keeping on, you know?”

“Wow. That is just… ridiculously unhealthy. And I get that you might not want to get into all that, but actually feeling your feelings is super important, and keeps them from festering and getting super weird up there.”

Eddie realizes, somewhat a bit late, that he is, in fact, still partially covered in bruises from essentially belly-flopping into the San Francisco Bay from a few hundred feet up after a short torture session. Then, there’s the scars, and the general fact that he has been eating absolute garbage for the past six months—it’s not a pretty picture. He sits up, trying to minimize the whole ‘disaster in repose’ look. “Yeah, because telling people things just works out so well.”

“There’s a story there, isn’t there?”

“Yeah, but you aren’t getting it right now.” Eddie grins, and hates himself just a little bit.

“Okay,” Dan begins, and takes another few fortifying gulps of coffee, draining the mug. “This is what we’re going to do. You’re going to text me every night so I know you’re alive, and once a week we’re going to meet up, in person, and talk about feelings and all that shit, alright? So you don’t, like, end up lying dead in your apartments for weeks, and end up eaten by your neighbor’s dog, or something.”

Eddie, not really have the energy to care either way, nods. At the very least, Annie would be upset if he burnt out like a 22 year old DJ, and it seems like Dan’s taken him in like a stray cat.

Thankfully, before he can attempt to formulate a reply to that, his phone rings. It’s the Life Foundation. After a the usual pleasantries, during which he promises not to sue them at least three
times and says that yes, he is fine with a rain shower head, and no, they didn’t have to get him a claw-foot tub, and thanks for upgrading the kitchen appliances; they tell him that they’ve transferred the money, and that work is done, and also that he’s just the best and if he ever needs anything he should just let them know, alright?

Eddie checks his bank account after he finally talks his way off the phone. There’s rather more commas than he’s all-together used to, and he honestly has no idea what to do with that knowledge? Buy a yacht? That’s a rich guy thing, right? Yachts? Stupid guns? Paintings that are, themselves, a pseudo-currency?

That train of thought gets him through a shower, and takes him and Dan to a diner in his neighborhood. The kind where the coffee is strong enough it’s technically a solid and just looking at a dish gives you chest pains. Eddie happily gorges himself on french toast, thick slices of chewy bacon, and enough coffee to kill a lesser man. Dan picks at his salad, which, despite being technically all vegetable (unless you counted the grape tomatoes as a fruit), is still somehow greasy.

The talk is small and light, and manages to be about nothing of substance. It’s full of sports teams (Dan, apparently, is part of a fantasy baseball league), movies (shocking no-one, they both have opinions about Bruce Willis, with Eddie’s being solidly ‘why won’t he stop’ and Dan’s a slightly shakier ‘but RED is actually good though?’), and cooking shows (both heavily in favor).

Anyway, they part ways in front of the diner, and Eddie makes a bodega run. Mrs. Chen gives him the normal amount of shit, which is less than he actually deserves, for buying whiskey, ramen noodles, a couple bags of jumbo marshmallows, and a large carton of mint chocolate chip ice cream.

He returns to his apartment, the asshole neighbor blasting his frankly awful attempts at the guitar solo from “Stairway to Heaven”, and unlocks the door.

He almost drops the whiskey. He definitely drops the marshmallows and ramen.

--

Eddie is slightly blown the fuck away by what the Life Foundation has done to his apartment. The appliances, he notices, while stowing his groceries, are fancy. Not, like, the kind he sees in ads where the fridge can tell you the weather and the washer has a secret mini-washer inside of it just for kicks, but pretty uniformly stainless steel with a lot of space somehow crammed into a small metal box.
Also, they actually shelled out for a gas range. The building didn’t even have a gas hookup a week and a half ago.

They also did a bit of redecorating, Eddie discovers while exploring his apartment. Frankly, a lot of it. His ratty old couch is still there, but shoved against the wall to make room for an enormous leather sectional and a low coffee table with a few strange metal orbs in the center that are apparently decorative. The bathroom is not only redone completely but also with new towels and washcloths that match the marble of his new countertop. The bedroom? Now an enormous California King, with a wrought iron headboard, a plush rug, and an actually organized closet. His new desk in the corner is nice, and looks over the city (over his alley, at any rate), and they’ve given him a plant.

Its very… tasteful. It's nice. He hates it, a little bit. The only thing distinguishing it from an apartment fixed up on HGTV is the lack of signs proclaiming that he should A) live, B) laugh, and C) love, in a large, funky font. Before, yeah, the apartment was unabashedly shitty, but at least it had some fucking character. It was at least recognizable as his. This? Isn’t.

He turns on the new television, and discovers that he now has a ridiculously nice cable package, with all the premium channels. He flicks it off, and decides that three in the afternoon isn’t too early to start drinking.

Eddie rifles through his (new) cabinets for a few minutes, and eventually stumbles on the carton of cigarettes he bought a month and a half ago, before taking out one of the new packs. He grabs his laptop from his (new) desk, and sets it up at the (new) kitchen table, taking a moment to connect his (new) Bluetooth speaker. A few clicks later, and he’s off, streaming something suitably low-brow. And then, he starts on his scotch.

After Slumber Party Massacre 2 is over, Eddie is suitably sloshed, and has chainsmoked half a pack of cigarettes, putting them out on the surface of his new table and marveling at the little round burns that he’s scorched into the pale wooden tabletop. He puts one a home decorating show—one of the ones that’s rich folks building their own houses badly-- and puts the next cigarette out on his arm, where it joins a cluster of other, older burns.

This, he reflects, is probably one of the worst possible reactions one can have to their apartment getting tastefully redone.

Anyway, after putting a few more cigarettes out on his new table and trying to hate himself a little less, he crawls into his new bed and texts Dan, casually reminding him that he’s still alive, as per the agreement. He promptly passes out.
Time passes. Eddie does dribs and drabs of writing, just so he can have something to do during the day. He still texts Dan every night, and Dan, depending on if it’s date night, or if he’s working a crazy shift, replies. Anne texts on occasion, mostly wondering in a semi-detached way how he’s doing and whether or not he’s going back to his old job at the Brock Report.

Spoilers: he’s not.

The first bro-hang/therapy sesh goes better than Eddie thought it would. After two hours of actually talking about things and only lying about 30% of the time, the room is just suddenly too large and too small all at once, and everything’s just loud and Dan won’t stop trying to self-actualize him, like he’s worth it or something. So, Eddie does the natural thing, and throws his empty beer bottle at the exposed brick wall.

Then, it turns into more of a lecture on handling emotions like an adult, so Eddie knocks all the Tom Clancy books off of the bookshelf in one motion and asks where he gets off lecturing him on maturity since he only reads books that eleven year old boys buy at grocery stores to feel more grown-up. So, Dan kicks him out, and he walks home less drunk than he’d actually like. It’s honestly a miracle he doesn’t get mugged. But he still texts Dan, because he made a fucking promise, and he’s trying to get better at actually keeping those.

He apologizes, because yeah, that was kinda a dick move. Thankfully, because Dan is a great fucking dude, he’s nice and understanding about the whole thing.

Anyway, the Therapy Bro-down is also at Dan’s, because Eddie is still too uncomfortable in his own house to invite people over. Over the course of the evening they both drink slightly too much and then Eddie freaks out and has to go sit on the fire escape for a while, smoking and having an existential crisis. And then, of course, when he comes back in, Dan feels the urge to tell him of all the dangers of smoking and about all the fun cancers he could get. He leaves the apartment of his own recognizance after that.

The third of Eddie and Dan’s therapy dates ends when Eddie accidentally sets himself on fire a little bit with Dan’s stove, and the forth doesn’t so much end as—well, they get super drunk and pass out on top of each other on the couch, and then Eddie has a screaming nightmare about being dragged out into those woods by Carlton Drake’s weird private militia, and wakes up to the sound of glass breaking as he seizes and just sort of launches himself through Dan’s glass coffee table.

They decide to start doing their weekly therapy hang at Eddie’s place after that.
Things get better with Anne, at least just by virtue of there actually being *something* to improve upon. Shit’s still a little dicey, but that’s mostly because Eddie can’t seem to stop leaking feelings out of every pore like an *asshole*.

--

The chill hangs at Eddie’s go much better. The new television is nice, and now that he’s actually been living in it a few weeks it’s got a little bit of character. His fridge is already covered in magnets that he doesn’t actually remember acquiring—pizza delivery places, the logo of his local library, a novelty one from some place called ‘Rick’s Magic N Stuf’—and there are now some stains on the new counters.

The little black burns on the white table are still stark, and he can see them from across the room, but their number hasn’t increased. This is mostly due to Eddie actually using an ashtray rather than cutting down on the cigarettes, but at this point he’s just going to take any victory he can.

Things are going well-ish, at least compared to the other thinly disguised therapy sessions—Eddie didn’t set himself on fire this time, but Dan dropped an entire bottle of red wine, and Eddie managed to trip over his own fucking feet and give himself a black eye—when there’s a knock at the door.

“…You expecting anyone?” Dan is wearing a pair of Eddie’s sweats, since his own khakis are in the wash. They stop around mid-calf, revealing a fair amount of hairy leg. He’s still wearing his button-down and tie from work. It’s not a great look.

“No?” The Greek food they had ordered earlier still had about twenty minutes until it was due to arrive.

Eddie gets up from the kitchen table and walks to the door, looking through the peephole.

Staring back at him is a complete stranger, who looks like he’d been murdered and floating in the bay for three months. Fuck it, Eddie thinks, this *might as well happen*. He opens the door.

The first thing he notices is the smell, which is fucking *pungent* and rotten and makes Eddie’s eyes water. The second, however, overshadows this quite a bit.
The stranger opens their mouth with an audible click. Eddie is fairly sure he can see actual jawbone from the inside-- which is super unsettling, honestly, because just in general, seeing bones is really just one of those things that Eddie never really imagined he’d have to deal with, and then—

“EDDIE.”

The stranger Venom is wearing as a skin suit leans forward and pukes directly on Eddie’s chest. By the time Eddie is together enough to fully piece through what exactly the fuck has happened, the stranger is gone and Vomit-Venom is slowly absorbing into his skin.

“Well, at least they’re not dead!” Dan says, brightly.

Chapter End Notes

Stephen Glass famously made up nearly every story he reported, and got away with it on a national level for YEARS.

These are some pretty stolid industry standards for journalistic ethics, and yeah, Eddie did fuck this up.

This is all about how we learned about prion diseases, and a study on a specific group of people who were affected; cannibalism has it's risks, and this is one of the least gross articles I found on them.

This is all about how the Europeans did a bunch of cannibalism, up to the VICTORIAN AGE.

The Eye of Argon is famously the 'worst fantasy novel ever written'.

The Weekly World News is a now defunct tabloid that regularly reported stories such as 'Bat Boy Found In Cave!' and 'Severed Leg Hops to Hospital'. Good stuff.

Rebecca is a very slowburn suspense film, even by Hitchcock terms. Worth a watch, especially if you're into old movies. (also yo it's on youtube for free!

Slumber Party Massacre 2 actually exists. It's on youtube for free, and is p short, if you're into slasher films.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Dan disposes of a corpse, and Eddie has an existential crisis or seventy

Chapter Notes

4/9/2019: sources/further info added in end notes :)

By no means exhaustive, but it's just some interesting things I came across while doing research for this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As Eddie later learns, it pops off like this:

The super-dead stranger vomits Venom onto Eddie, and then collapses into something that’s less of a corpse and more of a pile of vaguely connected body parts in the middle of the hallway of the apartment building.

This, Dan thinks, probably shouldn’t be a long-term set-up.

So he goes to the kitchen cabinets, finds the heavy duty trash-bags, and spends a good few minutes going through the knife-block before finding one that’s the perfect combo of sharp, not often used, and longish. Then he drags the corpse into the apartment, shuts the door, and gets the catatonic Eddie to go sit on the couch for a while.

“Wait,” Eddie breaks in, hearing this story for the first time, “Did you dismember a corpse in my apartment? Is this why my boning knife is missing?”

“How often do you use a boning knife? You can buy boneless meats.” Dan says, being far more reasonable than the conversation really deserves. “And, would you rather I left a corpse in your apartment?”

Anyway, he gets Eddie settled on the couch, wraps a blanket around his shoulders because he’s
looking a little shocky, and settles in to the business of separating the body into more manageable chunks. Fuck, he’s glad medical school taught him how to roll with the punches.

Also, the class where they practiced amputations on cadavers was really coming in handy right then.

Luckily, the fish have been after it a fair bit, so the connective tissue and muscles are pretty minimal. The torso has a big bite taken out of it, and most of the guts are missing, so it’s actually not that much of a job, all things being equal. A few quick slices, and he’s got the arm off, a few more, and he’s got the other, and a foot up to the knee. And then he starts on the torso—

“Okay, I don’t actually need to know exactly how you did that?” Eddie cuts in, looking somewhat unsettled. “I just want to know what went down while I was checked out, not this hardcore story about how you’re comfortable with disposing of a body.”

Venom erupts from his shoulder, slimy and eager. “TELL US DAN. TELL US WHAT HAPPENED NEXT. DID YOU EAT THE EYES, DAN?”

“Venom, you know I don’t go for that sort of thing,” Dan says, instead of ‘what the fuck of course not’, because Dan is very weirdly understanding about the whole alien thing.

So. He dismembers the body pretty fully, bags the segments up, and mops the floor, just to be on the safe side.

You know what, Dan thinks, better double bag it, nothing good can come from one of them splitting and spilling a hand or a bit of torso or (god help him) the head into the middle of the hallway.

Cargo sufficiently secure, Dan ducks out of the apartment, carrying the bags of body parts in both hands. He closes the door to the apartment, and heads towards the elevator.

When it stops at his floor, of course, there’s someone else in it. Her nose wrinkles. “Christ, but that stinks all to shit!”

“I’m...” Dan lights on an answer. “I’m helping my buddy redo his place, and you would not believe what we found behind the drywall.”
She looks at his trash bags, and it occurs to him that there is some weird bulging going on. “What, did you find a body, or something?”

He grimaces. “Or something.” It was kinda a stretch to call it a body at this point, even if he hadn’t separated it out into component parts. Even ‘corpse’ had been being a bit generous. “It was weirdly gooey.”

“Fuck, you didn’t breathe any of that shit in, did you, because I’m not sure that the building’s on the up-and-up with shit like asbestos, or black mold—“

“It’s okay,” Dan says, already knowing what her reply is going to be. “I’m a doctor.”

“You’re a doctor? Because I’ve got this growth—“

The elevator opens, thank god, and he fucking beats it to the alley, where he throws his bags into the dumpster, and rearranges the trash so they’re not sitting directly on the top. He also chucks the knife in there, because even though he knows that it’s possible to completely clean it, re-using that thing in any capacity, let alone for food prep, is a bit much.

He takes the stairs back up two at a time, and lets himself back into Eddie’s apartment. Eddie, for the record, is still on the couch, but is looking less checked out. Venom is oozing over his arms and through his fingers, sliding up around his neck and across his torso like a particularly sticky kitten.

Dan washes his hands. And then, he figures, fuck, he should probably do that a few more times. Actually, a thought occurs to him, and he grabs the bottle of bleach from the shelf over the washing machine, pouring some on his hands over the sink. The slick feel of his outermost skin cells literally melting off in reaction to such a strong base is cleansing, but he rinses them off before he actually seriously burns himself.


“Okay, that’s a bit of an oversimplification, but it reacts to the outer layers of your skin by essentially turning them into soap, which just kinda washes off?”

“WHY WOULD YOU KEEP THIS AROUND THE APARTMENT, EDDIE.” Venom says. “WE LIKE YOUR SKIN, EDDIE. WE’LL NEVER EAT YOUR SKIN.”
“How about you don’t eat *any* part of me, huh?”

“How about you don’t eat *any* part of me, huh?”

“Well,” Dan says, “Statistically speaking, you could probably eat his appendix, maybe a little liver if you’re careful, probably the gallbladder—“

“Dan. Stop helping.”

So, anyway, Dan washes his hands again, just to be on the safe side. Then, the delivery guy from the Greek restaurant shows up, so he pays for the food and gets it all set up on the table (souvlaki for Eddie, fasolada for Dan, and feta fries for them to share).

While that’s happening, Eddie starts actually coming out of it. He looks up at Dan, confused and clearly trying not to have too much of a reaction to his weird alien body-sharing pal rising from the grave.

Dan tries for comforting and misses by a country mile. “Well, at least they’re not dead?”

--

Eddie’s interpretation of the events following getting Venom back is a little different. Mostly, this is because it’s damn-near non-fucking-existent. All of a sudden some *stranger* just throws up on him—and Eddie is no fucking stranger to vomit, alright, and it’s usually not the color of tar—and then all of a sudden he’s not *alone* in his head for the first time in *months*, which is just too *fucking much* right now, so--

Eddie checks out for a bit. The lights are on, but nobody’s home, and now all of a sudden he’s on the couch? That’s weird. And something’s just wrapping itself around his fingers. He wants to look, but for some reason, his head isn’t moving, and now he’s got a blanket around his shoulders somehow, but oh well, that’s less important than the noise of blood rushing in his ears.

The sink turns, on, and it turns off, maybe. The door opens and closes, he thinks. The white noise in his mind changes, morphing from the void of static into words.

*EDDIE. EDDIE. EDDIE. EDDIE. EDDIE. EDDIE.* The voice in his head says. That’s weird. The
only other voice in his head was Venom, and since they’re dead, separated into pieces in the San Francisco bay, probably floating around the Pacific Ocean in droplets.

*WE AREN’T DEAD EDDIE.*

But that didn’t make sense, did it, because he was *there*, he saw Venom *die*.

*WE DIDN’T DIE EDDIE. WE LIVED IN A SHARK FOR A WHILE, THOUGH.*

What? He’s never been a shark, that makes zero sense, what the fuck—only he’s bombarded by memories of being surrounded by cool water and tearing fish to shreds with his teeth and being able to sense electrical fields. How the fuck is this—

*EDDIE GET WITH THE FUCKING PROGRAM WE ARE ALIVE AND WE ARE TOGETHER AGAIN.* Venom squeezes around his chest and arms like a fucking straight jacket, and Eddie realizes, wait, there’s no physical way he could contort himself like this without dislocating something.

Oh.

Oh fuck.

Okay.

Venom’s *back*.

This is… Good? All things being equal, probably not, at least objectively. Before getting hooked up with Venom, he’d gotten kidnapped a *lot* less. But, Eddie’s got some fucking self-knowledge, alright, and if anything he’s *more* likely to do something that is actively bad for him.

Then again, something in his mind feels complete for once, like a switch has flipped in his brain and he’s suddenly allowed to feel like a complete person again. Yeah, okay, he’s definitely going to have to take up cannibalism again, but as far as life choices go, he’s definitely made worse ones, like that time he got himself sent to prison to do an article series about the corruption inside private prisons. At
least Venom gave him superpowers, all that did was get him a shitty tattoo, a few scars, a couple of pen pals, and an increased distaste towards skinny, rich, white dudes with bad goatees who clapped their hands together while talking about synergy and profit margins.

Venom stops restraining him, and starts actually sinking into his skin, oozing down into his muscles, and settling into the space between his organs like water around ice cubes.

He looks up. The body is gone, the room smells strongly of bleach, and at some point while he wasn’t paying attention, food just magically appeared. He can’t bring himself to care much about any of those but the last one, because it’s been a hot minute since he’s had Greek food, and he’s never really nailed down the whole ‘three meals a day’ thing.

Plus, Venom only eating corpses and fish for the past month or so is probably contributing to how Eddie feels like he could start prying up the floorboards and start eating them.

“Well,” Dan says, grinning with far too many lower teeth visible to be anything but incredibly forced. “At least they’re not dead!”

Eddie gets up and walks to the fridge, attempting to pull out a beer. His arm moves on its own towards one of the sparkling orange juice he keeps for mixed drinks when he’s feeling fancy. He attempts to course-correct, but it’s like he’s pushing against a brick wall. Fuck it—he pulls a can of the juice out, gets a glass with some ice on it, and grabs the vodka from on top of the fridge. A little bit of consciously not thinking about alcohol, and presto, he’s mixed himself a screwdriver. Not a great one, mind, that would actually require paying attention. But it was something to drink, and what with a stranger literally dying in his apartment, he figures he’s earned a fucking drink.

At any rate, Venom doesn’t bitch about the alcohol, so it’s probably less that and more the fact that, despite being technically a multi-millionaire since the Life Foundation payout, he still drinks utter shit.

Dan gives him a look. “You doin’ alright there, buddy?”

“Yup.” Eddie grabs the mixed drink and slugs it down, only realizing once it hits the back of his throat how strong he made it. Fuck it, too late now. Guess he’s just drinking half a glass full of vodka. Goody. “Why wouldn’t I be fine?”

Dan cuts him a look, which manages to say a whole lot more than actual words ever could.
“It’s not bullshit, I’m fine!”

The looks gets, if possible, more disbelieving.

“Look, can we just eat and maybe talk about this some time that isn’t right now?” FOOD? CAN WE EAT DAN? HE LOOKS TASTY. “No, Vee, we aren’t eating Dan, we like Dan now.”

“There was a time when you didn’t like me?” Dan asks, like that’s the most important part of the last sentence.

Eddie pauses, and tries to work out a way to phrase his thoughts in the most diplomatic way possible without outright lying, because yeah, he did hate Dan and his perfect hair and his fancy job and the fact that his relationship with Annie was not only existent but a hell of a lot more stable and balanced than Eddie’s ever fucking was. “It was more the… idea of you that I didn’t like, and that’s all tied up with how Annie and I were engaged, and how breaking up with her really fucked me up. But like, now that I know you, we’re cool.”

Eddie doesn’t say ‘the only person I see more often is the lady who runs my bodega’, but it’s a close thing. It’s not that he’s become a shut-in, so much as it’s that he’s just complete garbage at actually talking to other humans (fuck, does he count as one of those anymore?).

NO? WHY WOULD WE BE HUMAN? Venom says. WE ARE BETTER. WE ARE US.

But that was a conversation for another time, because--

“You and Anne were engaged?” Dan asks, like that’s the fucking salient part of the conversation.

Eddie blinks. “You didn’t know?”

“It never came up! She always called you her ex, and I didn’t want to pry, so I just left it! All I knew was that you dated for, like, forever, and you were famous.” Dan cracked open his craft beer and began picking at the label.
“Okay, I was a local celebrity at best—“

Dan looks up at him. “Do you know how many vine compilations you are in?” He pulls out his phone, and searches ‘brock report vines’. “A lot.”

There are loads of results, and it seems to be entirely people holding their phones up to the local news and splicing together clips of him trying to goad politicians into a fistfight. Including the one time the city councilman took him up on it and brought out the brass knuckles. Also, there’s a few from human interest pieces that are just him being super soft and cuddling dogs. There’s—there’s fuckin millions of views. This is a lot.

Eddie slugs down more of his drink, and sits down at the table, just sort of staring into his food. Against his will, he just starts shoving feta fries into his mouth by the handful. They taste like tar, which is bullshit, because 1) feta fries are one of life’s genuine pleasures, and 2) Eddie has been smoking off and on since he was in high school, alright, he should be fucking used to the taste of tar at this point.

Dan looks across at him, morbidly fascinated by the mutinous way Eddie’s glaring at his own hands. “So, yeah, like millions of people have seen your face, even before the thing a while back.”

Eddie swallows, and bangs his head on the table hard enough to make the glasses rattle. He does it again. “Fuck. Can we just—not? At least for right now?”

“Sure. Sure. Sure. Let’s just chill out, okay?” Eddie knows that voice, that’s the voice adults use when they’re fucking terrified and don’t want to startle kids. “And you’re gonna stop trying to give yourself a concussion and eat your dinner, okay, buddy?”

Venom snakes up and emerges from his collar, wrapping loosely around his neck, just a long, gooey tendril of face. They snake out, chomping on fries and chunks of lamb. Eddie’s reminded of the time he did a human interest story for The Brock Report about a company that did dives with the sharks in San Francisco Bay, and all that was between him and the feeding frenzy that broke out was a dinky cage and a harpoon gun that looked and felt like it was purchased at a dollar store.

“Vee, baby, that’s disgusting.” Eddie says, with no small amount of reverence. Venom is just swallowing souvlaki, skewer and all, straight into their gullet. The juices from the meat are flying up in small arcs, covering the white table-top with little speckles of yellowish liquid.
It occurs to Eddie that his newish whiteish table is going to look like a Jackson Pollock painting—one of the super busy ones—in about three months if this shit keeps up.

Anyway, Dan keeps using the little plastic spoon for his soup, and giving the feta fries the sort of wide berth that only someone who’s dissected arteries can really express. After a while, he speaks again. “You gonna go back to eating folks, or are you gonna try whatever the alien equivalent of vegetarianism is?”

“WE NEED THE BRAIN JUICE. WITHOUT THE BRAIN JUICE WE DIE.” Venom spoke through Eddie’s mouth, which he had forgotten was a fucking trip and a half—having his mouth open of its own accord and suddenly have a deep, gravelly, voice.

Dan takes a long pull from his craft beer, and visibly restrains himself from reacting too much. “The, uh, brain juice. Is that just from brains, or can you get it another way?”

“BRAINS ARE THE BEST. UNFILTERED. PURE.” Eddie can’t not wince so hard his face hurts at that sentence. “BUT THERE IS ALSO BRAIN JUICE IN CHOCOLATE, IN CASE WE RUN OUT OF PEOPLE.”

“Could you maybe just eat convicted murderers, or something?”

Eddie, finally able to talk, bursts out laughing. And keeps doing so for a long minute. “You want me—me—to turn myself over to the government just so I can kill people they’ve decided are worthy of death?”

“What’s so funny?”

“Dan. Buddy. Pal.” Eddie reaches a hand up and gently squeezes Dan’s shoulder. “I have been an investigative reporter for over a decade. Do you know how many stories of wrongful convictions and corruption in the prison system I’ve seen?”

“No?”

“I’ve lost count.” Finishing off his mixed drink, Eddie sighs. “And then there’s the whole thing where they aren’t ever going to let me leave if I turn myself in, and if I’m lucky I’ll end up experimented to death in a year.”
“That’s really heavy, dude.” Dan runs a hand through his perfect hair, messing it up in a way that makes it look artfully tousled, like he’s in an ad for overpriced cologne. “You know, if you’re ever on the run, or whatever, my door is always open, right?”

Fuck, Eddie hadn’t known that, actually. God, why did Dan keep surprising him by being the *nicest person alive*, fuck, he was never going to get used to it. Then again, Eddie knew better than to allow himself to get used to nice things, it always got ruined. “Uh, that’s really—that’s really cool of you, Dan.”

Especially since, with Venom back inside him, it was looking more and more likely that he’ll have to go into hiding at a moment’s notice. Not because Venom was intentionally ruining his life—as far as Eddie knows, that’s just a fun side effect—but because folks can get a little touchy about an unending series of headless bodies turning up in the streets.

“You’ve been ‘getting back into it’—“ at this, Dan does massive air quotes,”—for over a month.”

“I mean, statistically, that’s more likely to happen with a small European principality than a flyover state—“

“Don’t matter. The Avengers will have a massive fight, or the X-Men will decide they hate humans again and crush a lot of convenient metal buildings, or Spider-man will fight a sea monster.

“Any time.” Dan, somehow sensing that Eddie was feeling about seventy different conflicting emotions, decides to let the matter drop. What a *great dude*. “How’s being unemployed treating you?”

“I’m not *unemployed*, I’m *freelance,*” Eddie says, on comfortable ground being vaguely confrontational. “And, you know, I’m getting back into it.”

“Come on!” Dan says, entirely an order of magnitude more happy than this conversation really deserves, “Give it a half a month, and Tony Stark will have accidentally blown up half a flyover state on accident, and all this Life Foundation stuff will be completely forgotten.”

“I mean, statistically, that’s more likely to happen with a small European principality than a flyover state—“
And folks will just let that slip away. The name might ring a bell, but they won’t connect A to B unless they’re super into the San Francisco news scene.” Dan risked it, and tried a feta fry, chewing thoughtfully. “Go bigger, dude.”

Venom finishes the food, slithering back up around his neck and settling there, like a python in a music video. “WE ARE BETTER THAN THIS TOWN EDDIE. EVERYONE IN THE WORLD WILL KNOW YOUR NAME.”

Was Venom just incapable of not sounding like a fucking serial killer at any and all opportunities?

“That seems a bit excessive.” Eddie says, absentmindedly running his hand over Venom’s smooth skin. “I should start a blog, or something.”

“YOU SHOULD PAINT OUR STORY OVER CITIES IN BLOOD.”

“Maybe do a few pitches to some entertainment sites, just to get yourself back in it, that way you can avoid talking about the whole alien—“

“SYMBIOTE!”

“—symbiote situation.” Dan finishes smoothly, having apparently completely acclimated to Venom very quickly.

They’re both silent for a while.

“You’re dealing with this really well for a guy who’s magiced a corpse away and just got reintroduced to an alien that tried to eat you last time you met.” Eddie says, just to break up the white noise that’s becoming almost unbearable.

“I mean, it’s not like I haven’t had patients try to kill me before—“

“What?” Eddie and Venom say in tandem.
“Residency was a weird period in my life.” Dan says, like that’s any sort of fucking explanation. “Anyway, I’ve found that being adaptable is pretty handy when your job is saving lives. Sometimes you have to get a little creative.”

Eddie… can’t really think of any reply to that that isn’t incredibly snide, so he waits a beat and then starts talking trash about Dan’s fantasy baseball team, because really, what a dorky fucking hobby, Jesus Christ.

Anyway, Dan finishes his food, washes his hands a few more times than is strictly necessary, and leaves, because he’s got rounds in the morning and, frankly, has had enough fucking excitement tonight without staying longer to see if Eddie accidentally sets himself on fire again.

Venom is pretty quiet for the rest of the night, but stays out, curled around Eddie’s neck like a comforting weight, occasionally snaking their way up through Eddie’s hair, or trailing down his arm and twisting about his fingers. Just a constant reminder that someone is there—that he is now a we—is so incredibly grounding.

For the first night in months he goes to bed and doesn’t hate himself, so that’s progress.

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The next morning, Eddie fixes himself a pot of coffee strong enough to dissolve a lesser being, and submits four different articles about Dan’s terrible taste in literature to four different publications. Two ignore it, one has the decency to email him back and calls him ‘a reactionary piece of shit who ruined a billionaire and cares too much’, and one actually accepts it, though the editor tells him to lean in to his rage.

It’s possibly the most times Eddie has used the word ‘fuck’ in anything he’s written for public consumption. Which is, for the record, kind of an accomplishment.

That night, Eddie goes out and gets himself mugged. And then Venom comes out and eats the guy whole, which honestly seems like a bit of an overreaction.

Then again, the mugger had held a loaded gun up to his head, and even though Eddie didn’t not have a death wish some days, that was still a bit fucking much, even for him.
**Bleach** does actually do some gnarly shit to your skin, and you should DEFINITELY wear gloves. This article is pretty science heavy, but hella thorough.

**Jackson Pollock** is kind of an acquired taste, but did a lot of really interesting work. (also, yeah, his paintings are huge and I really fuck with his work tbh, but it isn't for everyone.)

**The Innocence Project** is a nonprofit that does DNA testing on inmates, and has ended up exonerating a few hundred, either because the technology to compare DNA samples did not exist at the time of their arrest, or no one bothered to check. This includes people who were sentenced to death, some of whom had been wrongfully imprisoned for over 20 years. This is literally one of the least depressing articles on the corruption of the American prison system that I could find.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Eddie interrupts date night, and venom eats things that are decidedly NOT food.

Chapter Notes

4/9/2019: added sources/extra info into the end notes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Oh fuck, Eddie thinks, because he’s got someone else's blood in his mouth, and is standing in the middle of an alleyway, this isn’t good. All that remains of his would-be murderer is a hand with some truly badly trimmed fingernails, and some scraps of clothing. Fuck, did he eat the guy’s clothing? Shoes? Gross.

Wait. Didn’t the guy have a gun?

HE DID. Venom whispers into his mind, sibilant and gravely. WE TOOK CARE OF THAT. HE HAD SO MANY TASTY JUICES, WE GOT A LITTLE CARRIED AWAY.

Oh fuck.

Eddie’s just eaten a fucking gun.

He looks down at himself. He’s also, head to toe, covered in blood. Like, enough that his shoes squelch when he takes a step and his clothes feel about twice as heavy. It’s matting down his hair and drying on his skin and now more of a dark-rust color than cherry red, and starting to coagulate into clumps.

Well, first things first, Eddie needs to get out of the fucking alley and back into his apartment where he can take a nice long shower. And get rid of the hand. Fuck. Okay. How’s he gonna do this.
Eddie takes out a cigarette and lights up, thinking. Venom doesn’t call him on it, partly because he just killed a man and he needs to chill out for a minute, but mostly because Vee’s all quiet and full and happy and willing to let something like Eddie completely trashing his lungs to feel like a person again slide.

Okay. Do something about the hand first, he thinks, and just sort of grabs it and chucks it onto the roof of the club. Fuck, okay, as far as he knows it doesn’t have roof access, so it should rot up there, or at least get carried by a bird somewhere else.

He’s at least a twenty minute walk from his apartment, and since he’s literally soaking wet with someone else’s blood, taking BART is right out. Walking though, walking might work. It’s plenty dark out, at least, so folks will have to get pretty close and get a good sniff to tell that he’s covered in blood and not, like, your garden variety gross city muck.

Fuck. This is a bad idea, Eddie thinks. Whatever, that’s never stopped him before. There, in fact, are several things he’s done simply because they’re more than likely to end super badly. Before walking out onto a public street covered head to toe in blood, Eddie calls Dan.

He picks up after three rings. “What’s up buddy?” He says distantly.

“Hey, so I’m in an alley covered in blood? Gonna do something stupid.”

“Is it your own blood?” Dan asks, which is a reasonable question.

“No, but—“

“Good, because it’s date night with Anne, and I’m not breaking it for less than a mortal wound. Say hi Anne!” And Dan does the unthinkable, and passes the phone

“Hi, Eddie!” She sounds happy and it crushes him a little bit inside. So, fuck it, he walks out into the street. “How’ve you been?”

“Oh, you know,” Eddie says, starting the way home and very carefully not making any eye contact. He stays out of the streetlights, because while he’s never walked home covered in this much blood, he has done so covered in a fair fucking bit before, after a barfight where he got a scalp wound and lost enough blood to legitimately get lightheaded. “Same old, same old. Keeping myself busy, you
“Babe, Dan just had to ask you whether or not something was your own blood. Try again.”

“Hypothetically,” Eddie begins. “If I happened to find Venom again—“

“Eddie!” Anne interrupts. “That ‘hypothetically’ shit didn’t work when we were together, and it isn’t working now. Try. Again.”

“Okay.” Eddie begins talking very quickly. “Somebody threw up on me and Venom’s back and I got mugged and ate a dude and maybe also his gun and now I’m covered in blood?”

“Was that a question, Eddie, or was that a statement?” Anne asks, in a very controlled way that she always did when they were in a fight and he didn’t know it yet. It was also the voice she used for cross-examination in court.

“A… statement?” Fuck, a cop. Eddie ducks into an alley and loops around the ugly sides of the building, passing lots of bad graffiti, a fair amount of dumpsters, and at least two people getting blowies. One of them looks up and sees him, and he gives a thumbs up and a grin, just to be an asshole. The dude passes out.

Oh right, because he looks like a fucking nightmare. Fuck, he forgot.

Annie’s silent, thinking. Waiting him out, probably, waiting for him to break and start bleeding words out of every orifice. It’s going to happen, in a few minutes, if she doesn’t start talking again, there’s only so much of that shit he can stand without getting twitchy.

Thankfully, she breaks first, because she’s always had a lower tolerance for Eddie’s penchant for ‘reckless self-endangerment’ than most. “Are you saying that Venom isn’t dead, and that you’ve just killed a man?”

Oh shit, Eddie thinks, this feels like a trap. “Are you asking this as my lawyer, or are you asking this as my ex fiancé who ate a dude for me?”
“Let’s go with the second one,” she says, as Eddie breaks back onto the street, in a decidedly seedier part of town. Folks look at him, sure, but this isn’t exactly a neighborhood where folks routinely do things like call the police or report crimes or care about dudes soaking in blood, so that’s not actually that worrying.

“I think we ate him. Like, clothes and all. And the gun he was using to mug me, which is such a fucking head trip, oh my god, Annie, I ate a gun, what the fuck—“

“Like, in bites?” Annie asks.

“Listen, Anne, I was kinda focused on other things at the time, alright?” Eddie bites out, because what the fuck, Anne, why would he be paying attention to how he ate a gun when a guy had just tried to eat him, so Venom sprung out and started getting chompy on bits that were decidedly more screamly and gushy.

“Right. Getting murdered can be a little distracting,” She takes a restorative breath, and Eddie would bet a fair amount she takes a restorative gulp of wine, as well. “Now. Lawyer talk. Is there a body?”

“I mean… there was a hand? But I took care of it. Nothing else, though.” As far as he knew, at least. “Shitloads of blood, though, but none of it was mine.”

“Okay. Okay. So,” he can tell she’s tapping something on her phone. “according to the weather report, It’s supposed to rain—“

“In California? Bullshit.”

“Eddie, it does, in fact, rain here every so often.” Anne says, sarcastically. “Now. That should take care of most of the blood, but it won’t happen until tomorrow afternoon, so that might be a bit of a problem. Were there cameras?”

“Probably not?”

“WE ATE A CAMERA. IT HAD ALL KINDS OF FUN SPICES.” Venom says, their voice spilling out of his mouth. “WE ATE IT FIRST. IT WAS NICE AND CRUNCHY. LIKE SKULLS ARE.”
“Oh hey, Vee!” Annie says, studiously ignoring the second half of Venom’s comment. “That was a great idea, now there’s not footage of Eddie committing murder.” Her voice has that tightness of barely restrained freak-out that Eddie only learned to recognize after living with her for two years.

“**EDDIE IS OUR FAVORITE. WE LOVE EDDIE MORE THAN WE LOVE BRAIN JUICE. AND WE DIE WITHOUT BRAIN JUICE.**” Okay, they also died without Eddie, though, but the sentiment was still nice, and made him feel all gooey inside.

He can see his building now, thank Christ, but it’s still a good few blocks away.

“Okay, that’s good. Why don’t I give you back to Dan now?” Anne says, and without waiting for an answer, passes the phone back over. He can just tell, by the way he can hear breathing, that the phone has been squeezed between Dan’s shoulder and his cheek.

“You looking alright, legally?” Dan asks, jumping right to the chase without fucking around with small talk, which Eddie greatly appreciates.

“Looks like it? Should be alright, provided nobody finds that hand.”

“You should be okay, then, because legally speaking, a person can lose a hand without dying, and so long as there’s no actual body to connect it to, it’ll go to missing persons.” Dan says, and not for the first time, Eddie wonders what the *fuck* Dan did with his life before hooking up with Anne six months ago.

“How do you know this?” Eddie asks, because the question just will not stop nagging at his mind.

“Ehh, I’ve been around, you know how it is.” Eddie emphatically does *not* know how it is, but Dan keeps talking. “You want me to stop over tomorrow morning? Or, like, after dinner tonight, once you get cleaned up? Because it’s really no trouble, I’m off for the next few days.”

“That would… I wouldn’t want to—“ Actively fighting the way his mouth wants to say ‘yes please’, Eddie goes with, “I mean, if it’s not too much trouble, or whatever, it’s fine.”

“Oh my god, Eddie!” He isn’t sure how Anne can hear him, but he’s really fucking glad she can call him on his bullshit so well. “Dan, for real, you’re gonna want to go over there after dinner.”
“Alright, alright, fine, please come.” Eddie has to fight himself not to make it sound entirely hating, but it still comes out a bit mutinous. “I’m back at the apartment now, gonna let y’all go so you can eat dinner.”

“Did you walk home covered in blood?” Dan asks, but Eddie hangs up so he doesn’t have to answer, because he cannot fucking deal with all that shit, not right now.

He goes to the elevator and presses the button and—

Of course, someone is in it.

“You doin’ alright, there?” She asks, carefully repositioning so her hamper full of laundry is between her and Eddie, a makeshift barricade. He reaches over and presses the button for his floor, and some dried blood flakes off his skin, landing on the pressed metal floor of the elevator.


“Because you look like you’re kinda covered in blood, dude.” She looks him up and down. “Like, a lot of blood, bro, did you murder a dude, or something?”

“Or something,” Eddie says, because if you really wanted to get technical, Venom murdered the guy trying to mug them. But honestly, if you were getting that technical, seeing as how he and Venom share a body... there’s an argument to be made either way. He decides to lie, but doesn’t have the energy to do it particularly well. “My buddy’s sister’s roommate’s brother is a DJ, and was doing some sort of weird, high-concept rave, and I basically got forced to go, you know?”

She nods, buying it. Thankfully, San Francisco is a city with more than its fair share of weird, high-concept raves. “Oh yeah, was it one of those ones where they rig up the sprinkler system with random shit?”

Okay. So. He’s maybe stealing his excuse from a 90s vampire movie. He’s talked his way out of situations with worse material, though. “Yeah, it was supposed to be a metaphor for consumerism, or something.”
“Right, I know that artsy type.” The elevator stops on his floor, thank god. “Hydrogen peroxide should help get those stains out, dude, they’re lookin’ pretty fuckin’ gnarly.”

“Thanks.” Eddie damn-near runs out of the elevator, around the corner, and to his door.

The man who lives across from him—Eddie never bothered learning his name on the basis of the dude being an enormous fucking asshole—ducks his head out of the door. “Hey, do you mind keeping it down?”

Eddie turns and glares, and, oh right, he’s covered head to toe in what is obviously blood. “Actually, yeah. I do fuckin’ mind, now that I think about it.”

“HOLY SH—ah, I-I mean… Sure, dude.” Asshole Neighbor says, weakly. “Y-You do you, and all…”

Eddie reaches up and claps him on the shoulder, leaving a hand-print. “Glad we agree on this!”

He smiles like a shark, wipes some more blood off on Asshole Neighbor’s shirt just to be a dick, and enters his apartment.

It still doesn’t feel like something of his own, though. What it does feel like is a stock photo for ‘blandly masculine yet non-confrontational’, they kind they put in women’s magazines in the ‘holiday gifts for him’ section, with little arrows pointing out all the ridiculously expensive knick-knacks.

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Eddie takes a long shower. He’s pretty sure the floor of his tub is permanently stained a brownish rust color from all the blood he’s washed off, and he manages to completely kill a loofa, as well as use up at least half a bottle of shower gel. His hair—that’s another fucking story. There’s blood in his perpetually present 5-o’clock shadow, which is alright, because shaving should clear that right up, but his hair?

Yikes.
Anyway, it’s matted enough that shampoo is doing precisely fuck-all, and dried in some fun snarls, so… Once he gets out of the shower, Eddie grabs his clippers and just starts shaving it off.

Thankfully, Eddie’s a little practiced at this. He’s given himself a more than a few depression haircuts in his time, so he knows how to set the clippers and bend his head and how far down on his neck his hair actually goes in the back.

He’s done in ten minutes. His bathroom floor is just covered in hair clumped together with blood and assorted viscera.

He looks up in the mirror. He still looks like shit—in fact, he looks possibly even more tired only with stubble—but at least he isn’t covered in blood anymore. He throws on some sweat pants, half-assedly sweeps up the bloody mess on the bathroom floor, and sacks out on the couch in front of the television. Partway through You’ve Got Mail—aftcer Meg Ryan and Greg Kinnear break up, but before she loses the bookstore—there’s a knock at the door.

He opens the door without checking the peephole, expecting it to be Dan. It’s not. Standing before him, looking a lot less like hot garbage than he expected after being dead for a month and a half, is Dr. Dora Skirth.

She stares at him. He stares back. And Venom seeps out of his skin, rising up and out until there’s enough space for them to form a head, and stares, too.

“WHAT THE FUCK?” They say, voicing Eddie’s thoughts perfectly.

“Wow.” She says, staring at them. “You’re not even trying to hide the whole symbiote thing, are you?”

“Didn’t you fuckin’ die, or something?” Eddie asks, because someone has to.

“Probably not a conversation for the hallway.” She shoulders her way past them, and into the apartment.

Eddie closes the door behind her, and sits at the kitchen table across from her, lighting a cigarette. He offers the pack to her, and she refuses, looking a little disgusted. “How is Venom okay with you doing that to your lungs?”
“So long as we aren’t hungry, they pretty much let me do what I want.” Eddie says, like he has any goddamn idea why.

“WE DIGESTED A GUN EARLIER, A LITTLE NICOTINE WON’T HURT US.” Venom says, swimming through the air next to Eddie’s head. He overs them the pack of cigarettes, because what the hell, today cannot get any fucking weirder. Somehow, despite having no pupils in their eyes, they manage to give Eddie a look of complete lack of amusement.

“What about the heavy metals?” Dora asks, ever the scientist.

Actually, Eddie hadn’t thought about that. Mostly, he’d thought that guns were big and shaped weird and probably had sharp edges. Fuck, could he get lead poisoning or lockjaw or god knows what from all the bioaccumulators—

“WE EAT THEM. THEY’RE TASTY.” They look at Dora. “ARE THOSE BAD FOR US?”

“Yeah.” She nods. “Very.”

“EDDIE WHY DO YOU HAVE ALL THESE METALS IN YOUR BLOOD?? IS ALL THIS IRON BECAUSE WE ATE THE GUN? WE’LL EAT IT FOR YOU SO YOU DON’T DIE.” As the sentence goes on, Eddie notices that their voice feels like it’s getting further and further away. Then, he realizes, hey, he’s super lightheaded all of a sudden, and his vision is closing in, and everything feels kinda like he’s underwater, and—

Eddie passes out. Falls face first down onto his kitchen table, directly onto his lit cigarette.

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Venom would very much like it to be known that this is in no way their fault. How were they supposed to know that there were good metals and bad metals and that blood needs to do more things than just leak around the meat-suit? How are they supposed to be an expert in human anatomy? They’re from an entirely different galaxy, and literally allergic to the air on this planet, when would they have had the time to learn?
“WE’VE KILLED EDDIE AND IT’S ALL YOUR FAULT!” They say, sinking back into Eddie and puppetting his mouth.

“He just got anemic, he needs the iron.” The Skirth Doctor, the one that they thought was dead, says. He likes Doctor Dan better, Doctor Dan was there for Eddie while they were busy being sharks for a while.

“What has iron?”

“Steaks, really any red meat, spinach—“ But they know that there is no was Eddie would have any sort of fresh food in the apartment, especially since before they re-merged into being *them*-them and not just Venom-them that Eddie wasn’t doing well enough to even attempt cooking for himself. The Skirth Doctor is still talking. “—nails, pipes maybe?”

Venom can feel that Eddie’s still alive, barely, but they have no idea where to get any iron, except—

Nails.

In the junk drawer, the know, is a box of nails that the contractors accidentally left when they renovated the apartment.

They get down into Eddie’s limbs, and stand up, making their way over to the junk drawer. Eddie’s neck is doing a weird, lolling thing right now, but that’s less important than him not dying, so they ignore it, rushing over and throwing open the junk drawer, finding the box of nails. They hold them up to Skirth. “Iron?”

“Yes, but that’s not a good idea—“

What does she know, anyway, she’s the one that told them metals were bad.

So, anyway, they open the box of nails, empty it into Eddie’s—their—mouth, pouring it down their shared throat and shoving the iron into their blood as it opens little bloody tears on the inside of them, only stopping when Eddie wakes up and begins clawing at their shared neck with ragged fingernails.
Whoops, they think, and absorb the rest of the sharp nails, patching up the bleeding maws that have been ripped into Eddie’s esophagus. They snake out a tentacle, grab a glass, and get Eddie some ice water. That’s a human thing, right, ice water making throats better?

He sips the ice water, and Venom can feel the relief course through their body, the coldness grounding them both in the moment.

“So.” Eddie says, and it sounds like he’s gargled glass. “You died, right?”

Skirth falls out of her chair.

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So. Eddie isn’t quite sure what’s just happened, only that his throat is ridiculously sore and now he’s standing in front of the junk drawer holding an empty box of nails and didn’t Venom say something about them eating all his blood—

Oh.

Okay.

That’s definitely something to think about some time that isn’t right now. Also, Eddie’s pretty sure that if he doesn’t shove that into a box in his mind right now, his brain is going to start leaking out of any and all orifices, and honestly Eddie has dealt with enough weird biological shit for one day.

“So. You died, right?” Eddie, who has said many dumbass sentences like ‘what are you gonna do, shoot me?’, is pretty sure that that particular opening line will rank forever in at least his top five worst attempts at talking to others.

Dora falls out of her chair. Just sort of lurches to the side like one of those fainting goats. “Jesus Christ.”

“What?”
“You just ate nails!”

“Yeah, just one of those days, I guess.” Eddie takes another sip of his ice water while Dora picks herself up. “These sorts of things just keep happening to me. Any reason why you’re not dead after the whole—“ He gestures vaguely with his water-glass, slopping a little liquid over the side. “—you know, thing?”

“You mean after Carlton Drake killed me by shoving a starving symbiote in me and watching as it ate me from the inside out before choking to death? That thing?” She rolls her eyes. “We managed to snag a few of the scientists before either of us died, crawled out of the wreckage, and I got to the bay, and they just jumped in the water and left. Mentioned something about mega-fauna and slithered away into the ocean.”

“That is an environment with a suitable lack of oxygen for our kind to live.” Venom says, curling themselves around Eddie’s exposed torso like an infinity scarf, their small head nestled near his collarbone. It’s very soothing. “But we like Eddie more. Eddie is our favorite, Eddie is filled with warmth and juices.”

Like a steak, Eddie’s mind supplies. Goody.

“Anyway, that was, like, a month or so ago, and I’ve mostly been job hunting and being with my kids, you know?”

“Any prospects?” Like, alright, Eddie doesn’t really know this woman, right, but he does, in fact, know how to keep a conversation going without it getting too awkward. That is, after all, part of his skillset as a reporter, and for some reason he really wants Dora to like him. He has a sneaking suspicion that said reason is ‘so she doesn’t have him arrested’, but it could also be ‘she trusted him that one time and it got her nearly killed’.

“Well, I’ve heard good things about Advanced Idea Mechanics—“

“No.” Eddie and Venom say in concert.

“You do know that AIM is, like, the go-to for mad scientist supervillains, right? If what the Life Foundation was doing bothered you, AIM is really not a place you want to be working.” Eddie remembers that story, how it got wordlessly passed around the newsroom, the pictures. He shudders,
and Venom squeezes just a little bit, just to remind him that they are there. “Listen, I’d really, uhh I’d really recommend that you not do that.”

Dora blinks. “Yeah, sure, okay. They weren’t even going to give me health insurance, and since I’m a research scientist specializing in weird stuff, that’s kind of important.” She adjusts her glasses. “What have you been up to lately?”

“WE WERE A SHARK!”

“Little writing here and there, got my apartment re-done.”

“It’s very… tasteful.” She says, taking another glance around and drawing a blank at how to positively describe it other than ‘inoffensive’. “Anyway, I just wanted to check in, make sure you’re doing alright. No problems with symbiosis? Unusual cravings?”

“Nope!” Eddie lies through his teeth, because ‘we just killed and ate a man and his gun’ isn’t something you just tell people. Other than Dan, apparently.

“Good to know, just checking.” She smiles, and hands him a slip of paper. “This is my contact information, in case anything comes up, or if you just want to talk.” She stands, and walks towards the door. “Oh, and Eddie? If you’re going to keep, you know, going out with Venom, you might want to make sure there aren’t people nearby taking video on their cell phones.”

Eddie... Hadn’t thought about that. Hadn’t thought about the possibility of being caught so very soon after getting Venom back. They give him a conciliatory squeeze.

"They didn't catch your face, or anything, but word about this is going to get out, if you aren't careful. Just wanted to let you know." She pauses, turning back towards him. "Thanks, by the way, for saving the world, and stuff."

That was why she showed up Eddie thinks, as she lets herself out. That whole 'checking up on him' was probably bullshit, then, her real reason for showing up was the warning. Not to stop eating people, but just to be a bit more discrete about it.

He sits down on the couch for a while, and time becomes liquid and hard to gauge. The television plays, but he absorbs none of it.
A while later, the movie having changed to *The Devil Wears Prada*, there’s another knock at the door. Eddie checks the peephole this time.

It’s Dan. He lets him in.

“Oh my god.” Dan says. “What have you done to your hair.” It’s technically a question, but he says it like a statement.

“Too much blood in it, so I just shaved it off.”

“Yeah, once it dries it can just be impossible to get out.” Dan gives him a hug, squeezing him tight and patting him a few times on the back. He gives Venom a pet, as well. “Any particular reason your voice is fucked up?”

“Oh, uh,” They break apart, and Eddie takes another drink of ice water. “That’d be because I swallowed an entire box of nails.”

“WHY THE FUCK WOULD YOU EVER DO THAT?”

Venom hums contentedly as they nuzzle into his neck, and Eddie sighs. “It seemed like a good idea at the time?”

Chapter End Notes

California already doesn’t get much rain, but it’s also been in a drought for the past five years. Thankfully, that's recently broken, but that doesn't stop most of CA from being a desert.

You can, in fact, live if you get a hand cut off. Sometimes. If you're VERY lucky. But please actually call an ambulance, there are arteries in there.

The Blood Rave is from the movie Blade, which RULES. For real, if you're down for a fun actiony vampire movie, you really can't go wrong with the first two Blades. (afaik, they're both on amazon prime?)

Iron Poisoning is an actual thing, though it's pretty rare in adults, because it takes a fuckton of actual iron to have enough to be toxic.
Marine Megafauna is a very real thing, and there's kinda a lot? Like, even full-grown manta rays can be seven meters! (23 feet!). And that's not even getting into various huge whales, sharks, jellies, and sea sponges (which, yes, apparently count).
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Eddie has feelings, and a bite to eat. Neither goes particularly well.

Chapter Notes

4/10/2019: sources/references/"further reading" added to the end of the chapter. As usual, not necessary, but i'm having fun going through this in retrospect and adding context/little extras :)

As usual, not annotated in the text, but with embedded links in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After about five minutes, which involve Eddie contorting his neck in a myriad of fun and exciting ways so that Dan can shine the light on his phone down Eddie’s throat to check the damage, Dan stops freaking out.

“Yeah, just stay away from sharp food for a while, and you should be good.” He turns the light off, and sticks his phone back in his pocket. “Any particular reason why you decided to shove metal down your throat?”

“WE ATE ALL THE METAL IN EDDIE’S BLOOD AND BAD THINGS HAPPENED.” Venom speaks up from where they are coiled around Eddie’s shoulders, a finger-like tendril snaking up to curl around in his newly buzzed hair.

“Okay, that makes sense.” Dan says, instead of ‘your entire existence is a horror movie’. “You doin’ alright, other than that?”

“Everything’s fine, why wouldn’t it be fine?” Eddie says, unconvincingly.

Dan rolls his eyes. “You know, Anne warned me about this—“ he gestures vaguely, slightly waving his hand towards Eddie. “—this weird, self-reliance bullshit, and how it’s apparently physically painful for you to ever ask for help. So. I’m gonna give this another stab. How are you doing?”
Eddie’s mouth, as per usual, seems to move without listening to his brain’s protests. “Pretty fuckin’ shitty, actually.”

“Want to, like, elaborate on that?” Dan opens the fridge and cracks open a beer, taking a long sip.

“Not particularly?” Eddie tries.

Dan looks at him flatly.

“Alright. Fine. ‘S just, I really didn’t think people had that much blood in them, you know, and like even though he was trying to kill me it still feels gross that I killed him, and now there’s apparently this cell-phone video floating around of Venom coming out—“

“Wait.” Dan says, “What?”

“Yeah, Doctor Skirth dropped by before you did, said she was checking up on me.”

Dan sets his beer down on the counter. “Didn’t she die?”

“Apparently not.” Eddie takes an ice cube out of his glass and starts chewing on it, just to see Dan cringe. It’s minor, but he definitely suppresses a wince. “Anyway. She drops in, right, no phone call or anything, tells me she might work for some mad scientist spooks, and as she’s leaving tells me that someone took video of me turning into Venom a few hours ago.”

“…Fuck, that’s not great.”

“Yeah, well, with my luck, that pretty much tracks, honestly.” Eddie pulls a coffee mug down form the cabinet, and pours himself a cup. He made the coffee this morning, and he’s fairly sure it doesn’t go bad, just gets progressively shittier. And hell, now that Venom’s back, there’s a decent change that food going bad doesn’t actually matter any longer.

Eddie Why Would You Ever Poison Us? We Like Us? You Like Us? Right? If it were at all physically possible for Venom to be shrill, they would be right now; as it is, they cling to his shoulders and collarbone like a vise, pressing down and in.
“Of course I like you, Vee, jeez.” Eddie gives them a little pat on the head, and just sort of keeps his hand there, making circles with his thumb on their smooth skin. Eddie looks up at Dan. “So. Any advice?”

Dan took another sip of his beer. On the television, still droning lightly in the background, Anne Hathaway is getting a makeover. He stares at it for a moment, thinking. “Well. This is going to sound weird, but you could just kinda lean into it?”

“What, like take up superheroing?”

“I mean, yeah. Just go out and rescue folks every so often. Get a cult following.”

“That—“ Eddie says, pointing at Dan. “—is a terrible idea. I’m in my 30s, and the whole vigilante thing is a dangerous gig. Plus, you saw how fast they turned on the avengers with that civil war shit, I’m not touching that with a ten foot pole.”

“WE WILL EAT ANYONE WHO DARES HURT YOU EDDIE. WE CAN FIX YOU, AND THEN THE STREETS WILL RUN RED WITH THE JUICES OF YOUR ATTACKERS.”

“That much blood probably isn’t going to help with the whole secret identity thing.” Dan says, like this has already been decided. Like Eddie’s just gonna become some sort of vigilante and fight crime on the streets of San Francisco.

“OR,” Eddie supplies, “I could just keep on keepin’ on, and just roll with what I’m doing right now.

Not only does Dan give him a disbelieving look at that, Venom snakes up and looks him directly in the eyes, unblinking. Eddie remains baffled by how they manage to get so much expression out of eyes that are essentially a white void. Eddie feels more judged than he has in his entire life, and seeing as how he’s actually spent some time as a defendant in a courtroom, that’s a little impressive.

“Guys.”

Their looks remain unchanged.
“GUYS.”

Dan rolls his eyes hard enough that Eddie is legitimately surprised they don’t get stuck that way, frozen in the back of his sockets. “One: this whole ‘keeping Venom a secret’ thing seems pretty out of your hands, at this point, if Dr. Skirth is right. Two: Eddie, buddy, you know I love you, but Jesus Christ.”

Eddie’s brain skips a step, and stops for a moment, turning around and around in circled. “You love me?”

“Yeah, dude? Obviously?” Dan looks confused, and a little hurt. It makes Eddie hate himself a little bit more than usual. “Like, I don’t generally hide bodies for casual acquaintances, Eddie.”

It’s just that, apart from Annie, no one’s said that to him in decades, or at least said it and meant it. Eddie doesn’t say anything, though, even though one traitorous part of his mind keeps screaming at him to cry.

Venom says it instead. “WHAT ARE ALL THESE GOOPY FEELINGS, EDDIE, WHY DO YOUR EYES WANT TO LEAK? IS THIS NOT A THING HUMANS SAY? IS THAT WHY IT ISN’T IN YOUR MEMORY?”

Without warning, Dan wraps them in another hug, squeezing tightly. Venom snakes out from between them just in time, wrapping themselves around the both of them a few times before nuzzling into Eddie’s neck, like some sort of bizarre cross between a boa constrictor and a cat.

“For real, though, you love me?” Eddie’s brain just keeps re-routing to that one question, running in circles around it because something just doesn’t make sense. How can Dan, a guy who has seen him pretty uniformly at his worst, and who could (let’s be real) do so much better, like him? Let alone start throwing around word like love willy-nilly, jeez. He doesn’t even know what to do with his hands, they just hang limply at his sides.

“Yeah.” Dan squeezes harder, and despite not subscribing to the Eddie Brock Workout Plan For Getting Absolutely Ripped—pumping iron until you’re sore enough you forget about all your feelings and eventually looking fucking sick as a result—he’s got a fair amount of muscle on him, and the embrace is starting to get a little uncomfortable. Not uncomfortable in a bad way, though, something traitorous in Eddie’s mind whispers, soft and sweet and entirely his own. “I love you, dude.”
“As a friend, though right?” If Eddie’s voice would stop cracking and breaking and coming out in all sorts of fun, warbly ways, that would be great. As it stands, the quaver in his voice—hell, the quaver in his fuckin’ body, at this point—is still resolutely staying.

Dan starts rubbing his back. “Yeah, but that doesn’t make it any less meaningful, you know?”

Eddie finally consents to returning the hug, at that. “Dan, you know how I am about feelings and emotions and, like, dealing with them. It’s just—it’s just been a while.”

“**EDDIE WE SHOULD EAT YOUR FAMILY.**” Venom says, like that’s an appropriate reaction for them to have.

Unfortunately, the only argument against that Eddie’s got is, “I have a sister, she’s alright.”

“That’s pretty fucked up, Eddie.” Dan says, instead of ‘eating people is bad, especially eating family members’. He lets go, and rubs the stubble on top of Eddie’s head as he disengages. “You ever need to talk, or anything—“

“I won’t, but thanks.” Actually, there is very little doubt that he will, but Eddie’s literally had fillings done without anesthesia that were less painful than even entertaining that idea is. “Anyway, you aren’t going to convince me to be a superhero, dude, it just won’t work.”

“**WHAT IF WE JUST ATE BAD PEOPLE EDDIE. DOESN’T IT FEEL GOOD WHEN WE EAT PEOPLE? ALMOST AS GOOD AS WHEN—“**

“As when you were a shark. Yeah. I know.” Intimately, because the memories Venom shared with him of being a shark were fucking sick, and while the ultimate fall out of eating a dude had been horrible, the in-the-moment feeling was a little fucking amazing, actually, and that was what made it even scarier. Eating folks, he could deal with. Enjoying it? That was just a little more difficult for him to rationalize.

“**WE ATE SO MANY FISH, EDDIE. THERE ARE SO MANY TASTY THINGS FLOATING IN THE WATER.**” They say, oozing around his limbs in a way that feels like sinking in water, a little bit. It’s surreal, and almost immediately relaxing in a very strange lizard-brainy way.
“Hey, make sure there isn’t any mercury in there, right?” Dan says, curious. “Because that’s a bio-accumulator, and it’s in fish a lot, and that can cause some serious health problems for the two of you. Major problems.”

Venom retracts back into his skin, and thins out to permeate every molecule in his body, searching. In a beat, they push a hand out of the side of his head, snaking around his shoulder to chest level.

“This stuff?”

They open their hand, and a quarter-sized dollop of silvery liquid sits in the gooey, black palm.

Dan nods. “That’s kinda… a lot. You know, for one person.” He empties the dregs of his beer bottle down the sink, and rinses it out, before offering it to Venom, who just makes a hole in the middle of their hand and lets the liquid trickle down into the glass bottle. He spends the next moment or two hunting up cling-wrap from Eddie’s drawers, before wrapping it over top and setting the whole thing off to the side on the counter. “Anyway. Eddie. Give the whole superhero thing a shot, right? What’s the worst that could happen?”

Well, he could die, for one. But with Venom, that was seeming more and more like a temporary consequence, which was something he was adamantly not thinking about. At a loss for words, he settles for just glaring at Dan.

“Give it a try, buddy, it’ll be great.” Dan turns over towards the television, where Anne Hathaway is searching for the manuscript to a Harry Potter book for Meryl Streep. “Is this *The Devil Wears Prada*? I love this movie!”

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So. Eddie decides to try superheroing, or, as he forces himself to think of it, vigilantism, because it sounds way less dorky. Also, vigilantism has more a ‘helping folks on the down low’ vibe, rather than a ’I wear my underpants on the outside and fight cosmic horrors’ vibe.

Like, not that Eddie would be against fighting cosmic horrors, but it’s not something he’d be super up for on a daily basis, you know?

Anyway. The next day, Eddie is worth precisely fuck-all, because he wakes up to an article that Anne forwarded him titled “THE GOO MAN LIVES”, written by his shoutiest former editor, and about seventy texts from various former colleagues wondering if he knew the ‘goo-man’, or whatever
weird name they gave him, and if, since he was local, he could get them an exclusive. Cell-phone
footage of him—they call him on the news an unknown person of interest, because it’s only of his
back—getting held up in an alley before morphing into this large, toothy eldritch horror and dragging
the would-be-attacker out of sight to chomp on, is all-over all sorts of social media.

At least Venom had the sense to drag the dude further in the alley, fucking hell. And thank god the
person who took video had the common sense to be scared absolutely shitless by Venom popping
up, because if there was anything else, Eddie would probably drown himself in his brand new
bathtub.

So. He doesn’t get around to actually leaving his apartment, let alone going out and looking for
someone to eat for a few days. He orders a lot of Indian food for delivery, has a few truly awkward
conversations with the delivery-man, and drinks. A lot.

Venom is very quiet. Like, yeah, they’re constantly cuddling and are generally tangled like
Christmas lights on any given moment, but other than their thing where they just say his name like
it’s a language of its own, they’ve solidly shut the fuck up, even inside his head. It’s disconcerting.

Anyway, a few days pass, and he runs out of booze in the apartment. Like, clean out—that last day,
he’s low enough on everything that he just starts mixing everything together into one legitimately
satanic cocktail, just so he runs out of everything at the same time. It’s supremely gross; but it gets
the job done, and when he wakes up the next day at about three in the afternoon, there’s just a line of
empty bottles of various spirits and liqueurs on his counter that he doesn’t remember drinking, and
he’s got a migraine strong enough that one of his eyes is completely bloodshot. So he bags up a fair
few bottles, grabs his jacket and wallet, and heads down to the recycle bin on the ground floor of his
apartment.

And then he goes to the bodega, because it has never been said that Eddie Brock had a refined
palette, and getting judged severely by Mrs. Chen is part of his weekly ritual at this point. Plus, part
of Eddie’s things he does to feel like a person is get out of the house every day, and it’s been long
enough that he feels so utterly disconnected from reality that walking down the street feels like
wading though quicksand.

The bell clinks as he enters the bodega, and Mrs. Chen looks up at him, and does a double take. It’s
because of the haircut, isn’t it, Eddie thinks.

“Eddie, you look like shit!” She says, from behind the counter, setting down her tabloid. “Did you
die, or something?”
Okay, maybe not the haircut. “Just a rough week, Mrs. Chen, you know how it is.”

“Eddie, have you looked in a mirror yet, today?” She seems honestly curious, which is a little worrying.

“Well, I didn’t exactly think it possible, huh?” He says, peering at the display of snack-cakes. He’s usually more partial to ding-dongs, but it seems like Venom would be more into twinkies. He avoids the bear claws on principle.

“Check yourself in the big mirror back there.” She gestures towards the other end of the shop, where a large, curved mirror is mounted on the ceiling in lieu of a security camera.

Eddie ducks into the back of the bodega, near where she keeps the large flats of water and the off-brand laundry detergent, and looks up into the mirror.

He looks like *hammered shit*. Now, Eddie’s no stranger to looking like a little bit (or a big bit, let’s be real) of rough, most days, but where his usual look of choice is ‘bad boy from the wrong side of the tracks who smokes and drinks and rides a motorcycle’, the current vibe he’s projecting is more of a ‘rescued from a cult after a week of torture’. His eyes are sunken in, his skin is pale and papery, his hair (despite there being very little remaining on top of his head) is somewhat of a fright, one of his eyes is completely bloodshot, and he’s rocking a five-o’clock shadow that looks more like a bruise than hair.

Anyway it’s at that point, as his hands are full of snack cakes and he’s staring up at his battered visage, when the dude comes in to hustle Mrs. Chen for protection money, or whatever fine distinction of that racket that the gang is running.

*BAD GUY?* Venom says, in his mind, speaking to him for the first time in days.

Eddie nods to himself. “Bad guy.”

And then Venom comes out and surrounds him, oozing up from his pores and down his arms and around and over his head, engulfing him in a black mass of goopy flesh, tracing down his fingers and sharpening them into claws. Covering his head and going down his throat and growing a new set of sharp teeth, way more than should feasibly in his new, wider mouth. The geometry of his body is all wrong, all of a sudden, but that’s okay, because he’s no longer having to drive it.
The man pulls a gun on Mrs. Chen, and without his say-so, Eddie’s new body *leaps*.

There’s a bit of attempted intimidation—the ‘turd in the wind’ bit, while inspired, works only in spite of itself, mostly due to Venom’s ridiculously terrifying face—and then, once the guy tries to shoot them, Venom get’s legitimately pissed.

They unhinge their jaw—Eddie’s jaw, which is a trip and a half for him—and it grows, opening and stretching his mouth until they—he—they swallow the guy whole, crunching on his bones and relishing at the gushes of warmth as they bite down, until eventually he somehow slips down their throat.

Venom sinks back into his skin, squidding around his organs and humming contentedly to themselves, wrapping Eddie in a warm, pleasant feeling,

He looks down. No blood this time, at least not on his clothing. There’s a little puddle on the floor of the bodega, and judging by the way his mouth tastes his teeth are *covered* in it, but it looks like his clothes are safe this time.

Mr. Chen looks at him, about thirty different and conflicting emotions on her face. “Eddie, what the hell?”

“I, uh, have a parasite.” He says.

Venom ejects from his shoulder, wrapping around to look him directly in the face. “*WE ARE NOT A PARASITE!*”

“It’s a term of endearment, Vee, jeez.” He pats Venom on the head, and starts gently shoving them back into his body. “Sorry about the mess, Mrs. Chen, we aren’t really used to this whole ‘eating people’ thing, yet.”

“So long as it’s outside of my store from now on, that’s fine.” She grabs a mop from the corner behind the counter, and wheels the bucket around. “You try those meditation CDs yet?”

“Oh,” Eddie says, because somehow this conversation is actually going well, and he’s not sure how to deal with it. “Not yet? You know how these last couple weeks have been.”
“Yeah, Eddie, I know. People who are doing well don’t drink that much Southern Comfort.” Which is a fair assessment, Eddie thinks, because Southern Comfort is the liquor for those who have truly given up. She starts mopping.

“Listen, Mrs. Chen, they’re in Mandarin, how do you expect me to use those meditation CDs that your cousin made?” They’re back on familiar ground, now, despite Eddie having just eaten a man whole and sprouted some new, autonomous appendages in front of her. He ducks back into the freezer section of the store, picks up a few bags of tater tots and a frozen pizza, and sets them on the counter.

“It’s not that hard a language, Eddie. Use an app, or something.”

He pops some snack-cakes up on the counter, opting for a bag of the little chocolate-covered donuts, and a couple each of ding-dongs and twinkies. “But Ms. Chen—“

“Stop whining. Just because you eat like a five year old doesn’t mean you are one, Eddie.” She puts the mop back, having gotten enough blood up that it blends in with the other mysterious stains on the floor of the bodega. “You mind if I post the footage from behind the register?”

“I’d honestly prefer if you didn’t.” She starts ringing up his purchases, and Eddie feels properly judged just from the way she’s looking at all the junk food. “But if you’re going to anyway, just make sure my face isn’t in it, alright?”

“You think I haven’t seen Superman? You think I don’t know how secret identities work, Eddie?” She rings up the last of the food. “Anything else?”

“Uh, yeah, pack of cigarettes, and a bottle of Four Roses, please.” She reaches up to the shelf behind the register and pulls one of each down.

“These are on the house,” She says. When Eddie opens his mouth to protest, she goes on. “Do you have any idea how much money I was losing a week to that guy? Trust me, I can handle paying for some booze right now.”

“Well, if you insist…”
She hands him his bags. “You have a nice day, now, alright?”

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It hits him, about halfway home from the bodega, that he’s just killed and eaten a man whole. For the second time in a week. And that he liked it. That part feels like it should be more worrying than it actually is; it’s less about developing a taste for human flesh or whatever the fuck, and more about the police of San Francisco probably not ignoring that many suspicious disappearances and deaths.

Then again, Eddie’s been an investigative journalist long enough to know exactly how much cops can ignore, so it’s not like it’s a particularly pressing issue, but on principle, it’s not exactly something he’d like to test.

He keeps walking back to the apartment, makes a frankly ridiculous amount of frozen tater tots in the oven, smokes four cigarettes, takes a long, hot shower, and has a bit of bourbon, before all the events of the day catch up to him at once. It’s not exactly pleasant, just being slammed in the brain with the realization that not only has he killed a man—killed and eaten, really—but he killed a man in front of Mrs. Chen, who was surprisingly cool about it.

But that’s nowhere near as disturbing as the memories of the actual act.

He remembers the sickening pleasure he got from the crunch of bones between their shared teeth, the gushes of blood and gooey marrow dancing on their thick, ropy tongue, sliding down into their gullet. The way their throat stretched and expanded around the man’s head and shoulders, closing in around biceps and forearms and legs like some sort of bizarre, reverse birth. The screams, as the man passed down into their stomach, digested alive by the acid, trying to claw his way out from inside as a last ditch effort to survive, smothered and compressed and snapping as Venom shrunk back inside of him, like a human version of a car at a junkyard.

Eddie throws up in the kitchen sink, and then sees an eye staring back at him, unblinking, and trailed by about an inch of optic nerve. The rest is rusty-red, all half-digested tater-tots and chunks of indiscernible viscera, little fragments of bone swirling their way down the drain. He throws up again.

The first knuckle of a finger lands in the sink, nail and all.

“EDDIE, STOP TAKING AWAY OUR FOOD.” Venom says, and when his body attempts to heave again, it’s stopped by an outside source, holding his stomach muscles relaxed. They push a head out
“Not really something I can control right now, Vee, ’s just a reflex.” Even speaking hurts, with Venom completely arresting the movements of his throat and diaphragm, but it hurts a lot less than throwing up someone else’s body parts.

“REFLEX? WHY WOULD SPEWING ACID BUT ONLY HURTING YOURSELF BE ANY SORT OF REFLEX?”

Pointedly not looking into the body of the sink, Eddie turns on the cold water, with high enough pressure that it drowns out the way his own blood is screaming at him. “That’s really more of a Dan question, Vee.”

Venom scoots their head and shrinks, until they’re comfortably settled at the base of his neck, tucked under his chin, nuzzling. “IS THIS ANOTHER BRAIN JUICE THING? WHAT’S THE NORMAL LEVEL OF NEUROTRANSMITTERS?”

Okay, Eddie thinks, just turn on the garbage disposal, and don’t look. Ignore the splatter, ignore the noise, and just run the disposal until the noise changes. “That’s another question for Dan, I think.”

Eddie flips the switch, and the sink starts grinding. Idly, he considers what would happen if he just turned it on and stuck his arm down there while it was running, just went elbow deep into a hole of spinning blades. Imagines how the blades would tear through his muscle and catch on his bones—

“EDDIE WHAT THE FUCK?” Venom nuzzles at his throat, extending tentacles around his shoulders and squeezing suddenly.

The noise changes, and he runs the disposal for a few seconds more, before turning it off and looking down into the body of the sink. It’s still kinda pink, but at least there aren’t bits and pieces of somebody else staring back up at him. He washes his hands and turns the sink off.

“EDDIE.” Venom says, more seriously. “WHAT THE FUCK.”

“I dunno, Vee.” The words claw themselves out of his throat. “Sometimes it’s just kinda like that.”
“THAT’S STUPID.” They say, as Eddie pads back to the bedroom. “HUMAN BODIES ARE STUPID.”

“…Yeah, Vee, yeah they are.” He starts pulling of his clothes, too tired to change into pajamas, and just kinda falls onto the bed, wearing only his black boxer-briefs.

Sleep comes fast and hard, like a punch to the face. He’s fairly certain Venom helps it along, juices up his hormones or constricts his airways until he passes out, or something, because he’s out like a fucking light in about a minute.

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The next morning, Dan texts him two things. The first is a string of question marks, about ten or so. The second is an article, written by his old editor, for the online version of *The Daily Bugle*.

Eddie blinks, turns the screen off on his phone, sighs, and opens it back up. The all-caps headline refuses to change, and stares back at him.

“SAN-FRAN GOO-MAN STRIKES AGAIN!”

Goddammit.

Chapter End Notes

Mercury poisoning is pretty gnarly, and you can get it by eating a lot of fish. But, it really has to be an obscenely large amount of wild-caught fish, so it’s not much of an issue for many people.

The Devil Wears Prada is a fantastic film, (at least, like, the first two-thirds), and they rerun it on cable CONSTANTLY.

Whoever wrote that headline clearly went to the Vinnie Musetto school of headline writing.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Eddie has lots of different feelings, sees a hipster, and eats a few different things, with varying success.

Chapter Notes

So, there's some decently intense gore in this chapter. If you would like to skip it, it is in the section starting with "He picks up a couple of tubs of the Ben and Jerry's with the brownie chunks" and ending with "Eddie turns and walks away, picking up the bag from the bodega and beginning the short walk home anew." The scene is separated by section-breaks, so if you are sensitive to that sort of thing, it can be easily skipped, and the events are touched upon later in the chapter, in much less detail.

4/11/2019: Added a sources/"further reading" section in the end notes! They are in no way necessary to understanding the chapter, I just wanted to go through and add some extra info, as sort of a pseudo-bibliography. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"ARE YOU GOING TO TAKE AWAY OUR FOOD AGAIN?" Venom asks, while Eddie’s brushing his teeth for about the forth time that morning, desperately trying to scrub the taste of blood out of his mouth.

He spits toothpaste into his new sink for the umpteenth time, and rinses his mouth out. “I mean, statistically speaking, probably? But, like, not intentionally, at least.”

It occurs to Eddie, right after he’s said it, that he’s essentially given Venom the okay for further consumption of humans, and he chokes on his mouthwash, spluttering and gagging for a few seconds before spitting it into the sink.

"ARE ALL HUMANS THIS BAD AT LIVING, OR IS IT JUST YOU?"

“Just me, I’m afraid.” This is starting to seem like most breakups Eddie’s ever been a part of, where the beginning of the end was signified with him being essentially asked ‘Eddie, why are you like this’, and failure to provide an easy, fixable answer resulted in him getting dumped.
Then again, providing the sort of easy, fixable answer that they wanted always made Eddie feel like some sort of broken object, something that existed only to be fixed by someone so that they could feel better about themselves, which was, in fact, the worse of the two options. Yeah, the relationship might end in literal fires, but at least he’d have his fucking dignity.

That’s not an exaggeration. Eddie has, in fact, had an ex that ended up hating him so much that they tried to set him on fire. Luckily, human beings aren’t actually super flammable, at least compared to, say, paper, and he just ended up getting a few burns on his arm.

“IS THIS A CALL DAN THING BECAUSE THIS FEELS LIKE A CALL DAN THING.” Venom says as Eddie wipes his mouth and then pads into the kitchen.

“It’s not—look, alright, I’m just going to have a lot of messy feelings, and if you don’t want to deal with that then you might need to get another host, because I ain’t great at—“

“NO OTHER HOST! ONLY EDDIE!” Venom forces themselves out of his face, so Eddie is staring at them through a tunnel of black, ropey tendrils that glisten with some unknown liquid. Their mouth seems, if possible, larger, and their opalescent eyes glow as the light from the kitchen diffuses through them. “EDDIE IS PERFECT FOR US! EDDIE IS OUR HOME!”

Eddie can fucking see the kitchen from where Venom’s mouth is opening and it is blowing his goddamn mind, a little bit. “I know, but, like, if I’m your home, you really must’ve had a terrible real estate agent. You know how much of a mess I am, Vee, c’mon. It’s just—“

“WOW,” Venom says, and Eddie can feel the way little tendrils sink through his mind when they’re feeling for the memories. “YOU DO THIS A LOT.”

“Yeah, well, I just can’t help fuckin’ up, I guess.” By feel, Eddie makes his way to the coffee pot, and pours himself a steaming cup of yesterday’s coffee. It’s scorched, yeah, but he’s definitely had worse.

“YOU AREN’T GETTING IT, EDDIE. YOU DO THE THING WHERE YOU FEEL INADEQUATE AND HATE YOURSELF AND OUT OF SOME GUILT FOR SOMEONE ELSE STOOPING DOWN TO YOUR LEVEL AND SULLYING THEMSELVES WITH YOU, YOU PUSH THEM AWAY.” Venom makes him set the cup of coffee down, and engulfs him, fully, wrapping him up in a cocoon of alien flesh. They squeeze, all over, and it’s strangely grounding, like that time he tried one of those water-powered massage beds in the mall, the kind that looks like the unfortunate spawn of a tanning booth and a water-bed. “WE WON’T LET YOU DO THAT, EDDIE.”
He can’t see anything now, and it feels like he’s trapped at the bottom of a swimming pool in a straightjacket and leg-irons, like a failed escape artist, about to die. “I’m not—I’m just being realistic, alright?”

Thick cords of flesh wrap around his already restrained limbs, snakes of sinew squeezing around his arms and legs, adding even more pressure. Eddie is honestly surprised that he hasn’t broken a bone yet. His ribs are definitely feeling it, and he feels them creaking and moving a little under his skin.

“EDDIE. YOU HAVE VALUE. WE WOULD HAVE DIED WITHOUT YOU. WE LIKE YOU, AND YOU DON’T GET TO TALK THAT WAY ABOUT THINGS WE LIKE.” Eddie tries to speak, and finds a tentacle wrapped around his head, holding his mouth open, gagging him. “YOU DON’T GET TO TALK ANY MORE. NONE OF THE OTHER HUMANS WE HAD WERE LIKE THIS, BUT NONE OF THEM WERE PERFECT FOR US. YOU ARE. FUCKING DEAL WITH IT.”

They release him, suddenly, and Eddie collapses into a puddle of limbs on the floor, sore and wanting to cry a little. Jeez, is he such a sad-sack that his alien best friend has to give him pep-talks about self-worth while physically restraining him?

“Oh, Eddie.” Venom says, wrapping around his chest and squeezing, and this time Eddie actually can’t contain his groan at the pressure. “WE ARE SO MUCH MORE THAN FRIENDS.”

Jesus Christ, Eddie thinks, this is a bit fucking much for seven thirty in the morning. He stands himself back up, bracing on the countertop, and has a sip of his coffee. That’s definitely more of an afternoon conversation.

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Of course, it ends up not being a conversation they actually have that afternoon. Eddie is outside of the apartment, riding BART around the city until he feels slightly more like a person and brainstorming article ideas on his phone—the freelance job he did bitching about Dan’s terrible literature got him another article talking about why the mono-myth is slightly bullshit and damaging to the way we view reality, but he’s having a hard time figuring out the structure to the article and just starting it in general—when it happens.

Someone sits next to him on the train. “Aren’t you that reporter guy?”
Goody. This could go one of three ways: 1) the guy’s just a fan, which is a nice if rare occurrence; 2) the guy’s a ‘fan’ with opinions about his reporting, and just wants to talk shop for hours about stories he forgot writing ten years ago, which is less common, but much more annoying; or 3) the guy’s got a fucking axe to grind and blames Eddie for getting divorced, or taking down a public figure, or for just making the world seem a little less comfortable. “Yeah, I’m that reporter guy. What’s up?”

“You ever think about looking into Advanced Idea Mechanics?”

Yes, but Eddie’s been in this job long enough to know not to tell the truth to random strangers asking him about faceless, malevolent corporations out of the blue in a public area. “I might be. Who’s asking?”

The guy stares at him through thick, hipster glasses, unblinking. They’re bright yellow, and something clicks into place in Eddie’s mind. He isn’t quite sure what that something is, per se, but something isn’t right, and he’s having a hard time figuring out what’s making his instincts scream at him to get the fuck out. “We’re watching you, Eddie Brock. Both of you.”

Oh. Okay. That’s not great. Venom’s churning in his chest, slipping around and through his organs, scaling his ribs like ladders, aching to get out. They climb up and down his spine, fill in the spaces between and under his teeth, and slide down his leg bones, tracing nerves and blood vessels like ink through water. Eddie elects to keep his mouth shut, otherwise he’s liable to start saying some things that would make the danger a little more immediately concrete than it currently is.

“Anyway,” The hipster claps him on the shoulder rather harder than necessary, standing up as the train rolls into a station. Eddie immediately knows something is super fucking fishy. “I’ve got Kombucha-making class, so I will see you around, Eddie Brock.”

Eddie stands up and rushes to the opening door, jabbing the hipster in the kidney with his elbow on the way out, and relishing the strangled cry, and the thunk as the asshole hits the exceedingly gross train floor.

He beats it out of the BART station like the cops are on his ass, and finds himself in the middle of the Castro district. Venom gets a bit less riled now that they’re out of the open air—they’re still clawing at his organs, but at least they aren’t running through his bone-marrow any more. Eddie picks a direction and just starts walking; sure, he knows the Castro by reputation, and he saw that movie about Harvey Milk, but most of his knowledge stems from trawling through public records for work, which doesn’t exactly lend itself well to being a nice fucking picture of the neighborhood, considering his job.
So, he wanders around a bit. Buys a fancy coffee that costs fifteen dollars (yikes, he had forgotten how fuckin’ pricey the neighborhood is, that’s part of the reason why he never goes there), pokes in at some independent bookstores—buying a few of the more content-heavy anti-authoritarian zines he sees, and stealing a copy of some Abbie Hoffman (it always felt a little sacrilegious to pay for it, after all)—and does the touristy thing for a little while. He walks around, eats some street food, sits in a park, that sort of thing.

It takes a while for Venom to stop churning around in his organs, let alone for them to feel up for human speech, even in his mind. There he is, sitting on a park bench and reading ridiculously outdated instructions for how to steal from supermarkets, when Venom finally grinds to a stop somewhere between his collarbone and his spine, before oozing down and out through his body, becoming less concentrated, thinner. More of a miasma than a tumor.

WE SHOULD EAT SOMETHING. Venom says, and Eddie rolls his eyes and gestures slightly at his one remaining fish taco. SOMETHING FRESH.

Oh, goody, he literally ate a man yesterday, and now he has to go out an eat one again. Like that won’t attract attention.

WE CAN BE SNEAKY! Because of course, Vee thinks that’s the issue. Eddie starts in on his fish taco, and idly thinks that he can get much better ones for much cheaper on his end of town. With a sauce that’s loads better than whatever ‘Sriracha but worse’ that they’ve drizzled over it, like it’s some sort of gourmet meal at a sit-down restaurant instead of a fucking sub-par fish taco from a food truck.

Eddie pulls out his phone and pretends to make a call, just so Venom will stay on track, because the whole stream-of-consciousness thing that they’ve got worked out is a little fucking prone to going off topic. At least if he holds a phone up, people tend to allow themselves to think that he’s well adjusted and not actively talking to his alien friend with whom he shares a body. “Look, alright, I just think the whole thing is too soon, is all.”

YOU WANT US TO STARVE, EDDIE? Venom manages to sound a little put-out, in his mind, though more sulky than offended. WE COULD ALWAYS START EATING PARTS OF YOU. A LITTLE HERE, A LITTLE THERE. YOUR FLIMSY HUMAN BODIES CAN WORK WITH VERY FEW REMAINING ORIGINAL PARTS.

“Jesus Christ.” Eddie says, with feeling, and it takes all his restraint to not loudly shout an expletive or ten in the public park. “No, I—“
“Is this, like, an urgent thing, or…?” Eddie trails off, taking another bite of the slightly terrible fish taco and actually beginning to regret the whole idea of the thing. What kind of idiot was he, getting fish from a food truck like he hasn’t been living in coastal cities the past fifteen years? Except under extenuating circumstances, it’s the gas-station sushi of the taco world.

“WE’LL GET SOME CHOCOLATE ICE CREAM ON THE WAY HOME, HOW ABOUT THAT? THE KIND WITH BROWNIE CHUNKS.” EDDIE IS, LIKE, SEVENTY PERCENT SURE THAT THIS WON’T WORK, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE IT DIDN’T WORK ON THE KIDS HE BABYSAT BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL, BACK BEFORE HIS REPUTATION HAD CEMENTED INTO SOMETHING A COMB AND A PLAIN T-SHIRT COULDN’T FIX.

HMMM… ACCEPTABLE. THEY SAY, Oozing around in the space between his skull and his scalp in a way that wasn’t strictly uncomfortable but was strictly incredibly fucking weird. He can feel tendril’s of Venom’s body snaking around his temples, and feels with sudden clarity the moment they send an exploratory tentacle along the side of his eyeball, getting a feel for the socket and skating around the orbital bone, briefly poking out from the corner of his eye closest to his nose, before ducking back in and retracting to slide down his optic nerve and see where it leads. WHY DO YOU HAVE SO MANY HOLES, EDDIE?

Eddie crunches down another bite of his fish taco, and idly wonders why he’s still eating something that he’s moved on to actively disliking. “I dunno, Vee, it’s just evolution, I guess. They’re sense, organs, mostly.”

BUT WHERE IS THE LATERAL LINE? THE AMPULLAE OF LORENZINI? YOU HAVE ALL THESE LINES THAT CONDUCT ELECTRICITY, BUT NO BODY SENSE FOR IT!

Oh god, Eddie thinks, this is more shark shit, isn’t it. He’s sat in bars that were playing Shark Week, and he’s definitely seen Jaws (and all three increasingly terrible and yet increasingly fun sequels), so it sounds a little familiar. That sounds like a shark thing, right? Fuck, they have two dicks and die when they stop moving, that might as well be another weird shark thing. Also, what the fuck would Venom know? They’ve been in sharks much longer than they were ever wrapped around Eddie’s brain.

“No, babe,” The endearment comes out on it’s own, and sounds sincere enough that Eddie actually startles himself into pausing for a beat. “’s just a fish thing, I think.”
WE CAN GROW YOU SOME, MAKE YOU STRONGER. They say, and Eddie can feel the beginnings of something start to form under his chin, harder than the surrounding tissue and setting off about a million fireworks in his brain before they disappear in a flash, and the little growths shrink into nothingness. BAD IDEA, TOO MUCH ELECTRO-MAGNETISM IN YOUR ATMOSPHERE.

Eddie feels something drip out of his nose, pokes it, and examines his finger. Blood. He feels like he’s in a b-grade sci-fi movie, and soon he’ll have telekinetic powers or be able to start fires with his mind, or something. He dabs at the nosebleed with his napkin, and just ends up spreading it around a bit. He’s starting to get looks from other people in the park now, and they’re mostly distantly pitying, saying ‘that man needs help, I hope he gets it from someone else’. The same sort of look rich folks gave homeless people from their expensive cars.

It is, he reasons, time to get gone, and he gathers his things and throws the sad remains of the fish taco in the trash as he begins the walk to the BART station.

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He picks up a couple of tubs of the Ben and Jerry’s with brownie chunks at a bodega near his place—not Mrs. Chen’s, because she only stocks the Haagen Daz and some generic brands—and he’s on the way home, a different route than usual, when it happens.

He’s passing by an alley, right, which isn’t too uncommon. His neighborhood has more alleys than a straight to video suspense movie, the kind you can buy at truck-stops and dollar stores, so passing by one with something vaguely untoward happening inside it isn’t really that much of an uncommon occurrence, much as Eddie would like it to be. Usually, it’s just some folks having ill-advised public sex, or shooting up, or something. Eddie, having been both of those people (once, very memorably, at the same time), tries his best not to judge, and just keep on walking.

Only, this time, it’s not strangers fucking, it’s a dude with a knife, and a dude without a knife. They’re arguing, and the dude without the knife says something that Eddie doesn’t catch, and, as consequence, gets stabbed in the gut. The knife rips through the man’s abdomen, pulled across and twisted by his attacker, chewing its way through viscera it’s too dull to actually slice through. The knife is ripped out, sideways, pulling a string of intestine along with it, glistening with blood so fresh it’s cherry red.

The victim lets out something that would have been a scream if he weren’t in so much pain, a choked-off, almost sobbing noise that catches in his throat and almost stays there. He brings his hands up to the wound, attempting to shove his intestines back into the gaping maw that was once his belly, trying to physically hold his own body together where his skin has failed, before his
It’s at this point that Eddie realizes he’s unconsciously walked into an alley where a murder is taking place. He’s seen enough Law and Order to know that this won’t end well. He sets his bag from the bodega down next to a dumpster, and rolls his shoulders, feeling Venom spread out under his skin in anticipation.

The man flips his knife over in his hands, wipes the blood off on his pants like that’s some sort of fucking courtesy, and runs towards him. Eddie decides to meet him in the middle, rather than just wait for this guy to try to stab him.

They meet in the middle, as Venom is beginning to ooze up from his torso, bubbling over his chest and up his back. But Venom doesn’t come out instantly, never just springs, fully formed, from wherever they’re stashed in his body. Which means that the outside of Eddie’s throat, this time, is encased in the symbiote slightly but significantly later than, say, his ribs.

The man with the knife sees that he’s got a short window, and slashes at Eddie’s throat, tearing a long gash from carotid artery to jugular vein, deep enough that Eddie feels the nick of the blade catching slightly against his spine before he feels the warm pain from the slice.

Oh shit, Eddie thinks, I’m going to die here. His second fucking day being a vigilante, and he’s going to die because some asshole got lucky. He’s starting to get woozy already, before Venom wraps around his neck, physically holding the wound together with their slick skin, reaching up and shielding his dangerously pale face from the world.

He can feel Venom begin to piece together his artery first, the way it burns as both ends of it cauterize themselves together. The vein goes an instant later, burning and healing itself back into perfect health. Eddie would scream, if he could remember how to. His vertebrae, displaced and chipped, punch themselves back into the proper locations, and the soft tissue sizzles up from beneath, like a tide of pain.

“You SHOULD NOT HAVE DONE THAT.” Venom says, letting their tongue fall loose from their mouth, pink and glistening and at least five feet long. It catches a little on their new, sharp teeth, their mouth stretching wider and larger than ever before. “WE DO NOT LIKE IT WHEN PEOPLE HURT HIM.”

A tentacle wraps around the arm holding the knife, squeezing it as the knife falls, and continuing to squeeze until well after the limb turns black, wrapping it in a vise-like grip until a little while after the telltale series of crunches of all the bones shattering. The man tries to scream, to do something, and
Venom reaches up and rakes a claw down through the middle of his throat, severing the voice box and shredding the esophagus.

“LET’S HAVE A TASTE, SHALL WE?” Eddie isn’t completely checked out, anymore, and his neck still hurts like a sonofabitch, but he knows where this is going, and hates it. Venom brings their shared tongue up, sliding it down into the newly created throat hole, poking around and through organs that taste mainly like warm blood, and licking up and down ribs before wrapping it around the man’s spine and pulling. Hard.

Eddie feels the moment the man’s pelvis disconnects from the spinal column, the way the series of bones are ripped through soft tissue and viscera, the cartilage connecting them to ribs tearing away. He feels and hears the way the collarbones and shoulders snap out of place, and sees the slide as the rest of the body falls away, leaving only their tongue wrapped around a man’s spine, his head lolling lifeless atop it. They open their shared mouth wide, slurping down the body parts, before gnashing their teeth and getting started on the torso and limbs, swallowing them in bites.

Venom tries to sink back into him, content, before Eddie says, “No, Vee, part of the whole gig is saving people, so if you could heal up this guy a little bit, that would probably help.”

One of Eddie’s arms moves of it’s own accord, a dark tentacle bursting from it to attach to the disemboweled man’s chest, and his intestines start to sink back into his body of their own accord, his tissues and skin sealing themselves back up, the only trace of the former injury being an angry red scar on his belly.

“Who—Who are you?” He says, half disgusted and half painfully relieved to be alive.

“WE.” Venom’s voice rattles itself out of his new vocal cords, “ARE VENOM.” And with that, Eddie turns and walks away, picking up the bag from the bodega and beginning the short walk home anew.

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The ice cream isn’t melted when they get back to the apartment, but it goes directly in the freezer. They aren’t hungry any more. Eddie strips to his boxers and smokes half a pack of cigarettes in quick succession, adding more and more little black burns to his kitchen table. After that he moves over to the living room portion of his apartment, and turns on the classic movie channel.
Then he just sort of lays on his cool wooden floor and feels things for a while. Eventually—about half a movie later, according to the guide on his TV, he gets up, has a glass of ice water, and wraps himself in a fuzzy blanket before sitting in front of the television.

Venom pokes out from his shoulder, wrapping around his neck in a way that should honestly be more worrying than it actually is. “PEOPLE DO NOT GET TO HURT YOU, EDDIE.”

“That’s… sweet, Vee.” Eddie tries. His throat is still tender, and it hurts a little to talk. “You want to tell me what the fuck that was back there?”

“You Died, Eddie. We Fixed It, But You Died.” They loop around him, getting all tangled up in his torso and armpits, and going around his neck another time, like whatever the symbiote equivalent of a hug is without any limbs. “PEOPLE WHO DO THAT DO NOT GET THE LUXURY OF DYING PAINLESSLY.”

What the fuck. That’s a little too fucking much for Eddie to really piece through at the moment, because he’d really rather not think through the whole ‘you died’ thing right now. Or, ever, really. He boxes all that shit up, and shoves it in the back of his mind, so it becomes future-Eddie’s problem. Future-Eddie deals with so much of his shit, what a good guy.

“That’s… uh…” Eddie trails off, trying to come up with some sort of sentence that’s marginally coherent without being a thank-you. Because, like, he’s at least marginally glad to not be dead, and all, but he’s seen a man’s spine and knows what it tastes like now. There’s no going back from that, really. At least when he swallowed that guy whole he didn’t have to see any viscera, but tonight Eddie has seen far more entrails than someone who isn’t a doctor really needs to see in their life. Failing to find a suitable answer, Eddie bangs his head against the floor, once, twice. He tries for a third, but Venom surges up his neck, arresting the muscles and cushioning his skull, forming a little pillow of black flesh under the back of his head.

“EDDIE.” It’s more of an admonishment than an actual address, this time. Venom’s tendrils snake over his collarbones and down his torso, winding their way over his pectoral muscles and stopping around his hips, covering his front and back with wiggling feelers of alien flesh. They snake over his stomach, slide over his chest, and skate over his pelvis, toying with the little hairs on his upper chest. Suddenly, everything is too much in an entirely different way than it was before. “WE DON’T LIKE IT WHEN YOU HURT YOURSELF, EDDIE.”

Well, to be honest, neither does Eddie, but that ends up not being very important in the end, usually. He levers himself up to his feet, rolls his shoulders, and tries to empty his head. He’s still got an article to write, and no amount of thinking about what spines taste like, or how Venom just seems to know some very specific and very personal things about him, or how an organization of freelance mad-scientists is gunning for him is going to write that fucking article about Joseph Campbell and
how he’s damaged the way we tell stories.

It’s not like he needs it for rent, or anything—the payout from the Life Foundation took care of that—but Eddie’s at a place where if he doesn’t actively do something, his mind is going to go down a death-spiral of guts and blood and shark facts. And, let’s face it, it seems like every time he leaves the house something horrible happens and he maybe eats dudes, so that really narrows down his options.

Eddie cracks open a beer, opens up his laptop, and begins typing. Venom is wrapped around his torso snugly, but not uncomfortably (‘like a harness!’ a small part of Eddie’s brain supplies), and as the sun sets over San Francisco, with the in-house advertisements on the classic movie channel droning slightly in the background, he gets to work.

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For the second day in a row, Eddie Brock wakes up to a series of text messages. They’re from Anne this time, though.

“EDDIE. DID YOU RIP A MAN’S SPINE OUT.”

“THE WITNESS SAYS YOU GOT YOUR THROAT SLIT. ARE YOU DEAD, EDDIE?”

Eddie types out a reply in the affirmative immediately, because it has never been said that he’s not a smartass.

He looks at the final text she sent. A link, to a news site. Lovely. That ended so well last time. He opens it.

“STICKY, ICKY, AND IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD: OILY MADMAN ATTACKS!”

Fucking GOO-MAN was better than this shit, at least.

Chapter End Notes

Setting someone on fire is actually kind of a production, and heavily reliant on extenuating circumstances and prolonged periods of time. That being said, burns are
serious business.

The Monomyth, first postulated by Joseph Campbell, is basically a road map for how stories/myths are told, and the way they sprang up, independently, in various cultures. But also, like, don't use it as a guide for reality.

Abbie Hoffman was a member of the 60s and 70s counterculture movement, and famously wrote Steal This Book (mirrored here in full on the internet archive).

Sharks have at more sense organs than humans, though they're mainly focused on sensing electrical impulses. Very useful for sharks, but not something you want to jam into a human skull.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Eddie does a bit of hacking, talks to his neighbor, and has a bunch of feelings. Venom decides to break the laws of physics.

Chapter Notes

4/12/2019: added some sources/"further reading" to the end notes. As usual, they're in no way necessary to understanding the chapter, it's just a little fun stuff I stumbled upon while doing research for this :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

So. First things first, Eddie gets his article posted, with some light editing. It may not be journalism—journalism, but it’s still fucking writing, and it does moderately well. The one thing about being a professional journalist (or really, being a shock-jocky television personality investigative reporter) that bothered him was having to dull down his own personal voice. Every single fucking editor he’s had (with one major exception back in New York) told him to ‘let the facts speak for themselves’ and that his job was ‘to inform, not to convince’. And, yeah, every other week or so he’d get a work email asking him to ‘maybe tone down on the editorializing’.

Anyway, they’re interested in more articles, dipping their toes into making it an ongoing series, depending on how the metrics work for engagement. It’s not the ‘bust this whole thing wide open’ sorta shit he got into writing for—no uncovering corruption or rescuing kids from cults or solving murders—but he gets to use his own voice, and it’s nice to have money coming in that isn’t essentially a bribe from the Life Foundation asking him not to sue them to hell and back.

He starts brainstorming other things to write expletive-filled articles about. It’s not particularly difficult, because there are a fair few things that rile him up, especially now that Venom is sliding through his brain, constantly. Then again, every time Eddie’s left his apartment in the past week or so, he’s eaten someone and traumatized himself, so being a little short-tempered is honestly come by.

Eddie stands up from the computer and idly pats Venom where they’ve curled up on his shoulder, the same way he would a cat. He stretches his neck, feeling rather than hearing the clicks of his vertebrae rubbing against each other and settling in to a distinctly more spine-like shape. Eddie’s… a lot more aware of his own spine than he was yesterday.
He pads over to the kitchen and drinks directly from the coffeepot, scorching his throat, but absorbing that life-giving caffeine. His head feels like it’s going to explode, or at the very least detach and roll off into the great unknown—apparently severing important arteries isn’t a walk it off sort of injury, no matter how quick your alien buddy is at patching you up—but a migraine is so ridiculously far down the list of things he cares about, what with AIM apparently monitoring him.

Fuck. Alright. Time to do some fucking research.

Eddie throws on some dark jeans, and a button-down flannel shirt. He shaves, fully, bidding goodbye to his perpetual stubble. He slides on some fake reading glasses, the kind with thick, black frames, clips on the chain-wallet he keeps for these exact sort of situations, and looks in the mirror, nodding to himself. A stranger nods back at him.

Good, okay. Not recognizable, at least as anyone specific. He looks like, well, practically every other guy in the Bay area, except a little burlier and a little meaner. The glasses really change the entire shape of his face.

He grabs the shitty little netbook from the drawer in his desk, seldom used but occasionally fucking vital, and walks out the door, riding the train all the way over to the rich part of town, where all tech CEOs and other assorted new-money folks live.

He finds himself a bougie coffee house, one of the sit-down places that make their pastries on site and where the menu is half in French and they accept four different types of crypto-currency, and sets himself up. The netbook is ancient, and he got it used about a year or two after they all went out of fashion because they’re well-nigh unusable if you want to do any sort of typing; he keeps it around for when he needs to poke at anything particularly nasty, for times when maybe having his usual IP address linked to spectacularly shady shit, or at least shit that could get him in serious fucking trouble, would be less than advised. It only turns on when he’s researching, otherwise it has about the same form and function as a brick in the back of his desk drawer.

Also, like, he bought it off craigslist for 75 dollars in cash, using a fake name, so it would take a fair bit of fucking excavation to trace it back to him.

Anyway. He boots up the laptop, runs a scan for malware, deletes a few malicious programs, cracks his knuckles, and starts looking into AIM on the café’s public wifi. His coffee, when it comes, is large, strong, black, and twenty fucking dollars—his croissant is enormous and flakey. He makes sure to do a fucking virus scan every ten minutes, because there is precisely jack-shit info on the computer, so it goes fast, and he’d really like to know whether or not fuckin ‘Mad Science Я Us’ at any given moment.
What Eddie finds, over the course of about fifty minutes, during which he consumes a croissant, two enormous mugs of coffee, three cake pops, and a chocolate pastry, is this:

- AIM had really shitty network security. This was because:
  - Their tech support guy was obviously someone with a doctorate in geophysics or whatever the fuck, not working with computers, so:
  - They hadn’t fucking updated admin access from the original settings, made the password something other than ‘password1234’ or made the username something other than ‘aimadmin’.
  - Easy website navigation was apparently not something they had sprung for in the design process, but:
  - Connecting to the fucking shared drop-box, once he found it, was simple as shit, and:
  - They didn’t even have fucking coded file names, or anything. Some back-ronyms, yeah, but other than that, just your standard database stuff. Last name, first name.
  - The Brock, Eddie file is pretty fucking sparse, actually. There’s an unsettling amount of pictures of his at a distance, a few reports on the whole Life Foundation thing, a copy of one of Dr. Banner’s papers about exposure to gamma radiation, and a few very extensive plans for Hulk containment from General Ross.

Eddie logs out of every single thing methodically, runs another malware scan, and takes a sip of his coffee. Those dumbfucks think it’s more of a Jekyll and Hyde situation, then, clearly; all that Hulk shit means they don’t actually know about Venom. Like, they’ve clearly managed to connect the… goo-man with him, partly because he was terrible at hiding it, but it looks like they haven’t gotten a handle on what exactly the fuck him and Vee can do together.

And, to be completely fair to the super-villain organization that’s monitoring him for unknown but definitely suspicious reasons, ‘the Hulk but different’ isn’t exactly an unheard of thing, actually.

This is, Eddie thinks, taking a large, crunching bite of his croissant as he powers down the piece of shit netbook, something to keep an eye on.

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Eddie is about to open the door to his apartment when his asshole neighbor steps out, looking shifty-eyed. “Hey.”

Venom pushes their head out of Eddie’s shoulder, snaking around to look the man right in the eye. “WE SHOULD EAT HIM.”
“Jesus fuck!”

“No, Vee.” Eddie says, gently shoving them down, and coiling them around his neck. “No eating my neighbors, alright, most of them seem to be pretty decent.”

“HE LOOKS LIKE HE HAS ALL SORTS OF FUN JUICES!”

Eddie gives the neighbor a once-over, and, just to be an asshole, makes it a little hungry, in all senses of the word. “Ah, not tonight, babe.” He gives Venom a little pat on the head, and they look back at him, grinning, and hold his eyes for a few beats longer than is really appropriate for just body-roommates, or whatever the fuck they are, now. “Anyway,” Eddie says, snapping his eyes up to the asshole neighbor, “did you want something?”

“Yeah, uh,” His voice wavers, and he closes his eyes and takes a restorative breath. “Folks were around here, earlier, looking for you? With guns, and shit. And so’s I tell them ‘what the fuck would I know, we don’t talk’ and I think they mighta tried to break into your place, but ever since you got that door, that’s pretty much impossible—“

“Wait,” Eddie says. “You broke into my apartment, before?”

“Yeah, but, like, not to steal shit, I just really like pickin’ locks, you know? Anyway, those guys acted like they knew you, which seemed bullshit, because you’ve got no fuckin’ friends—“

“I’ve got a friend!”

“Sure you do, bud, like I haven’t lived across from you for seven fucking months, and these walls are just sooo thick, bro, seriously.” The asshole neighbor rolls his eyes. “Anyway, like, they all looked like complete fuckin nerds, and none of them wanted to buy my band’s demo, which is bullshit, right, because Saint’s Anchor is actually pretty good. We’re a nautical themed Metallica cover-band, but we’ve got some of our own shit, too, and we’re starting to get a little traction on the house party circuit.”

Eddie is just blindsided by just how quickly this fucking conversation has gotten away from him. “Okay?”

“Yeah, anyway, after that they left.” The neighbor looks down at Venom where they’re nuzzled
around his neck, and asked reverently, “Holy shit, are you GOO-MAN?”

Oh god, this conversation is getting worse, somehow. Eddie sighs. “Please don’t tell anyone, man. I’m trying to do the whole secret identity thing.”

“For sure, for sure, no doubt.” He gives a leery look at Venom, and reaches out as if to pet them. Venom, to combat this, sprouts about twenty more nasty looking teeth in their mouth, and lets it hang open, allowing them to all shoot out about an inch longer than they already are. “Well, I’ve got a thing, you know how it is, just gotta be somewhere the fuck else for a while. See you around, dude.”

The neighbor slides back into his apartment, and slams the door hard enough to rattle the frame.

Eddie lets himself into his own apartment, sets his bag on the counter, and shakes himself a little bit. Fucking hell, random spooks who may or may not be affiliated with AIM trying to break into his place is definitely an escalation, that’s for sure.

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Life just kinda… goes on, for a few days after that. He writes a little bit—this weekly article thing is turning into more of a concrete thing than a nebulous idea, they just want a few more as proof that the engagement will sustain—and for the first day and a half he jumps out of his skin every time the building makes noise.

But, you know, he drinks a little, and he drinks a little more, and eventually that feeling goes away, right around the same time the apartment just gets super warm for no reason, so he cracks his window open, pops of his shirt, and goes to lie down on the kitchen floor in front of his fridge.

It may technically be fucking winter, but Cali-fucking-fornia is a state without any discernable seasons. Also, fuck, Eddie’s spent most of his life in New York, alright, and there’s something very comforting about the cold, even if it is just some slightly less balmy air.

He’s just about to pass out, when his phone rings. It’s his sister, and since A) she’s the only member of his blood family he’s even remotely on speaking terms with, and B) she calls maybe twice a year, though they do email a fair bit, he picks up.

“One!" She begins. “When were you going to tell me you’re a superhero?”
There isn’t a good answer for this, is there. “Well, never? I was trying for the whole secret identity thing, and that kinda hinges on folks not knowing who I am.”

“Oh, yeah, because lying to all your friends and family is sooo conducive to forming healthy relationships.” She laughs, loudly. “And, also, Eddie. You know I love you, but you are incapable of shutting up. This whole hardcore secret identity sh*t was never going to work.”

“I can shut up!” It is a fucking verifiable fact that this is indeed not the fucking case. People with the ability to shut the fuck up don’t often get themselves chucked out of multiple reporting institutions for revealing corruption; part of that is Eddie’s sense of justice, sure, but a fair chunk of that is him not being able to keep it to himself when he figures something out. “Why are you calling, anyway?”

“Oh, you mean other than you killing and eating a man, spine-first?”

“Technically—”

“Technically that was goo-man, or whatever the fuck, sure—“

Venom surges up into his jaw, wrapping their little tentacles around it and pulling, as they speak with his vocal chords. “OUR NAME,” They say, “IS VENOM.”

“Ohmigod, did you get a roommate? Do they know about you eating that dude’s spine?”

“Uh, Mary, they don’t really like it when you call us that. Y’know, they have a name, and even though we keep telling people, they keep not using it, which is really goddamn frustrating.” He runs his hand through his short hair, and sits up, rescuing a pack of cigarettes, his lighter, and a coffee mug from on top of the kitchen island. He sticks one between his lips and lights it, enjoying the way it immediately slows his brain down to something a little more manageable. “We’re sorta sharing a body. Let’s not get into it too much.”

“How can you sort of share—“

“Look, it’s weird, but we’re both super okay with it, so can we just drop it?” He feels Venom ooze up out of his shoulders and drape across his chest, like a shawl. “How’s shit with you, anyway?”
“Same old, same old. Finally moved out of Manhattan, ‘m living over in Queens, now. Got real tired of the Avengers constantly having life or death battles on my doorstep, you know?”

“Yeah?”

“And, like, now, y’know, Spider-man fights giant animal-men sometimes, but other than that, it’s pretty chill.” Eddie’s not touching that one with a ten-foot pole, partly because, yeah, a good two-thirds of Spider-man’s villains are, like, lizard-men or rhino-men, or whatever. Also, like, he probably qualifies as ‘not-human’ enough to fit into that broad category. “Nothing too different, I guess. Just less fights, and usually it’s, like, single dudes and not armies, you know?”

“Yeah, I did live in New York for a while, Mary. Just because I moved to San Francisco doesn’t mean I somehow put a moratorium on random alien bullshit affecting my life.” He gives Venom a little pet on where he reckons that their head is, digging his fingers in slightly and scratching, gently, the way Annie’s cat always likes. “Trust me, things might be quieter, out here, but they aren’t any less—“

“Yeah, yeah, I saw the news, Eddie, Jesus.” She coughs, a little, and Eddie can hear her take a sip of something. “Anyway, I saw that weird cell-phone video, and, like, I can recognize the back of your head, so I figured I’d wait a while for things to calm down, but then you just kept being in the news, you know?”

Eddie lets his head thunk against the cabinets. “Trust me, I’m aware.”

“You gonna come visit New York, soon?” Ah. Funny how her coming out to the Bay area was never in question. And it’s not like she doesn’t know what the answer is going to be, either.

“I don’t really think it’s going to work out, this time,” Eddie says, like always. Even if the fucking Avengers were suitably distracting for those certain people who told him that if he ever showed his face in town again, he’d ‘be in small puddles across the eastern seaboard, washed away with the tide’, there were other reasons why he wasn’t particularly eager to revisit that particular part of his past. “Sorta having a hard time getting a handle on controlling our whole ‘eating people’ thing.”

“C’mon, Eddie, everyone wants to see you!”

God, could she not get it through her head that he would rather rip his own veins out of his skin with
his bare hands than have a conversation with certain people?

“Look, I—chhhhhhkkk—it’s just not—grlkgrlk—you’re breakin—“ Eddie puts the phone down on the floor and slides it over the wooden boards, for a second, to complete the illusion. Then he hangs up.

She calls back, but he ignores the call outright, and throws his phone across the room, where it lands on the rug with a thunk. Why did family shit have to be so fucking difficult, jeez.

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Even though it ended on a sour note, talking to his sister did actually help, a little bit. Vee’s staying out more and more, too, settling around his shoulders and toying with his hair, pressing down onto his shoulders and collarbones, nesting into the hollow of his throat and nuzzling into his face. They’ve gone quiet, again, but there’s enough cuddling that he’s less worried than the last time.

Like, he’s still worried, a little, right, and after the second day of radio-silence, he stops getting the cool press of tendrils into his thoughts he gets a little more worried, so during his and Dan’s weekly therapy sessions disguised as hangouts, he methodically shovels two pints of Ben and Jerry’s down his gullet. After the brain freeze subsides, he can feel Vee scaling up his spine, wrapping around his discs and latching onto his vertebrae, hauling themselves up to the base of his skull, and twining themselves into the bundle of nerves there, sliding little fingers up into the gray matter of his brain, and feeling around the insides of his skull.

EDDIE, he hears, for the first time in days, projected directly into temporal lobe. THANK YOU. WE GOT… PECKISH.

Fuck if Eddie doesn’t break into goddamn tears, like an asshole, and keep shoving chocolate ice cream down his throat like he’s in the third act of a rom-com.

“You gonna… need a moment, there, Eddie?” Dan asks, reaching over the table to give his shoulder a squeeze.

“I’m—It’s fine’.” Eddie’s voice is watery, still, wavering and breaking at the end of the sentence. “Why wouldn’t I be fine? Everything’s fine.”
“Okay, dude, it’s just that you’re crying into your second ice cream of the night, and before that you looked like absolute sh**t, and it’s really okay to tell me these sorts of things, dude.”

“Didn’t want to, like, bother you, I guess. You’ve got your own fuckin’ life.” Fuck, Dan had a girlfriend (his girlfriend, his mind stopped yelling at him, a while ago), and his day-job was literally holding other people’s lives in his hands. He doesn’t need Eddie’s feelings shit, he doesn’t need the number of fun, strange ways Eddie can say he’s fucked up. Eddie lights up a cigarette, taking a deep drag, and feels something in his chest clench up. At least he’s not actively crying any more. “And there’s the whole thing where I apparently kill and eat people, now, and you’ve literally sworn an oath to do no harm, and I didn’t want to put you in a tight spot.”

“I mean, most of those times, it seemed like you were in mortal danger, though, so I think that’s pretty excusable, really. Also—that’s literally not how the Hippocratic oath works?” Dan takes a sip of his beer. It’s some small-batch, craft porter, named after a ship that sank a hundred years ago. “And buddy? I love you. You can always come to me, for anything.”

Eddie’s brain whites out a little bit, the same way it did the last time Dan said that sort of soft shit. “I just, I dunno—“

“It’s hard. I get that, Eddie, I really do. And, like, from what I’ve heard from Anne, that’s pretty honestly come by, for you.”

Jesus, he didn’t have to come out and say it like that; Eddie was well aware of all the weird, sad bits of his past, and Annie had accrued a fair bit of knowledge just by living with him for years. He just didn’t really like to think about them dissecting his life like he was some fucking case-study in a psychology textbook at the end of the chapter on depression.

So, naturally, Eddie forgets himself for a moment and puts the cigarette out on his arm, forming a rough little circle of a burn next to a cluster of other, older ones.

“EDDIE WHAT THE FUCK.” Dan and Venom say in tandem, Venom pushing themselves out of the front of his chest and sliding their face through the air so they can look at him directly.

“Sorry, habit.” He can’t think of anything else to say, really, and that just gets him Looks. He’s tempted to bang his head on the table a few times, just to feel something other than a numb sort of shame. He lets the now cool cigarette butt fall out of his fingers and on to the tabletop.
“That doesn’t make it better, Eddie! Christ!” Dan runs a hand through his hair, for once messing it up legitimately, and not just like a guy in a cologne commercial. “You done with your ice cream?”

Eddie looks into the tub of Ben and Jerry’s. It’s now pretty much more of a soup with little brownie chunks floating in it, in the bottom third of the carton, and it’s solidly lukewarm. He stares at it for a moment, wants to throw up, and sets the spoon down. “Yeah, I’m done, I think.”

“Alright.” Dan says, using his ‘don’t spook the children’ voice. It manages not to be patronizing. “Are you cool with me touching you right now? Because I’d really like to give you a hug, but if that’s going to be a bad thing, please tell me.”

Eddie literally ate a man, spine-first. Like, a few days ago. Why the fuck anyone wants to spend time with him, let alone touch him, is a little goddamn beyond him right now. “I mean, if you want?”

Dan stands up quickly, and walks over to where Eddie’s sitting, hauling him up and engulfing him in his arms, squeezing. He rubs a hand up and down Eddie’s back, smoothing over his shoulder blades and tracing the curvature of his spine, slightly. Venom joins in, after a beat, squelching out of the way up to Eddie’s neck, and looping around the both of their shoulders like an enormous scarf.

“Now,” Dan says, still holding on, “I’m not going to lecture you, because you’ve had a really rough couple of days, and you’ve probably already said those things to yourself a few times already.”

Eddie nods, and hugs back, albeit a little half-heartedly. He’s not really feeling up to actually speaking right now.

“I’m here for you, dude. You’re kinda my best friend, alright?”

“Don’t you—“ Eddie coughs, and his throat feels like it’s stuffed with shattered glass. “Don’t you have other friends?”

Dan laughs, lowly. “I’m a little intense, it can scare people off.”

Eddie wisely swallows his first reaction of ‘who are these people and when can I physically fight them’, setting on one that’s at least a few rungs down the list. “That’s pretty fuckin’ bullshit, you’re great.”
“Many people would disagree with you.” Eddie can tell that there’s a story there, possibly several, but he doesn’t press.

“Fuck ‘em.”

Dan laughs, a bit more genuinely, and finally disengages, giving Eddie one last pat on the back.

“How have you ever considered getting a massage, or maybe acupuncture?” Dan says, out of nowhere. “It’s just—dude, the knots in your back are like rocks.”

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Things are somewhat back to normal after that, for a bit. He writes a bit, tracks down some of Saint’s Anchor’s songs online (Enter Sea-man is certainly… interesting), reads a little, drinks an entire six-pack by himself in two hours, eats an ungodly amount of chocolate, and gets Mrs. Chen’s recommendation for an acupuncturist. Three days after his talk with Dan, he goes out and gets little needles poked into him, and two hours later he feels like he’s got a new body.

The acupuncturist had informed him that his back was ‘interesting’ and ‘a real challenge’, which was less than inspiring, but his back doesn’t feel like it’s made entirely out of salvaged bricks anymore, so that’s pretty great, actually.

Anyway, he’s walking back from his appointment, when he hears a hiss and something sharp stabs him in the neck. He pulls the offending thing off—out, really, and looks at it, already getting a little woozy.

A dart.

A dart, with a little clear reservoir, which only has a little electric green residue remaining in it.

He can feel Venom bubbling under his skin, boiling their way up to his chest, but all of a sudden, that’s less important than the way his blood is screaming in his ears, the way hands clamp themselves on both of his arms, hauling his body off somewhere. His feet aren’t really working right now, and even though he can hear things like WE ARE WORKING ON IT and EDDIE and ONCE I FINISH
EATING THIS POISON IT’S OVER FOR YOU FUCKS and YOUR BLOOD WILL BOIL UNDER THE STREETS FOR CENTURIES TO COME, that’s not as important as the way everything is starting to get really dark, and the way his eye’s have decided to stop working, all of a sudden. He remembers falling, but doesn’t register hitting the ground.

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Listen, alright, Venom’s fucking new to this planet, alright? And they like most of it, really they do. They’re big fucking fans of the whole shark idea, chocolate is almost as good as brain juice in a pinch, and they’re really starting to get into watching PBS after Eddie falls asleep. But their favorite —their absolute, no holds barred favorite—thing about this weird watery rock floating on the ass-end of some fucking backwater galaxy, is somehow Eddie goddamn Brock.

No, they aren’t sure how it happened. Stop asking.

They really want to make it clear that Eddie is theirs, and yeah, they might also be Eddie’s, but they’ve got a whole lot of skin in the feelings game, and are a little more invested in Eddie living than he might, for them. The thing is, right, this rock—this planet—just happens to have an Oxygen-rich atmosphere, and those six valence electrons do fuck all for their survival, at least in gaseous form. Under water? They’re fine. But this gas shit, it just won’t do. They die, without Eddie. Eddie does not necessarily die without them.

And, you know, there are workarounds. They’re new to this whole ‘having a host’ thing, let alone the ‘perfect symbiosis’ thing, but it’s looking like the whole dying thing is more of a temporary setback, if they do it right. Not that they’re super eager to test it, but Eddie seems to just keep getting into situations where that’s a legitimate concern.

Anyway. Trying to kill Eddie is bad enough. Trying to kidnap Eddie—to take away what is their’s, strip-mine them from his shell and cast them off to die and ruin him? That’s fucking unforgivable. Heads would roll, if there was going to be enough of them left to do so.

Once Eddie crashes onto the floor of the truck, tossed into an enclosure entirely made of glass and sealed inside, Venom starts looking around, spreading out into his limbs and inching their shared head up, getting a feel for the cage. The kidnappers are mostly in the body of the truck, staring at them, and Venom can’t keep a grin with far too many teeth to be human from sliding across their shared face.

Helpfully, the cage is raised, slightly, and there’s a drain at the bottom, leading into low tray that they can see from in between the grating.
Venom is about to do something very stupid. They know this. But, you see, that’s never really stopped them before.

You see, Venom shares a body with Eddie. Technically, Eddie also shares a body with Venom. And Venom’s body has the advantage of being liquid. So theoretically, right, they could probably alter Eddie’s cells enough to turn them liquid—swallow him whole and put him in a pocket somewhere and just ooze out of the cage.

They are very, very thankful that Eddie is knocked the fuck out, because there’s no way what’s going to happen next could remotely be pleasant.

They start to seep out of his skin slowly, under his clothing, covering him completely, like a wetsuit. Then, they send a thin layer down over his arms, and start reaching little tendrils up, swallowing his face whole.

The men watching the cell have noticed, and they’re yelling, but they don’t seem to know what the actual fuck is going on.

Venom grabs pushes slightly outward, engulfing Eddie’s clothing and getting a little tension inside their body in one fell swoop, before snapping down into a puddle of goo, Eddie’s mass crushed somewhere between the atoms of their body. Venom can hear him stirring in their mind, in that nebulous space between fully asleep and barely awake, as they roll themselves over to the drain and push themselves through the tight wire mesh, landing safely in the tray below.

That burnt up all their frankly limited energy from the chocolate, but now, things are different. Now, they are hungry.

Venom slides over the edge of the tray, and out from under the cage, reconstituting themselves into something vaguely humanoid, and re-forming Eddie’s body inside of their own in seconds. They maybe put the head on backwards, but that’s not an immediate issue. Inside them, Eddie is safe.

And outside them? The world is going to be torn apart until things are all right again.

Chapter End Notes
This is the obvious music for Eddie's hacking montage.

Saint's Anchor is completely made up. That being said, there are some wildass cover bands out there.

Legitimately, a good 75% of Spider-Man villains are, if not animals, like, vampire men or big game hunters.

The Hippocratic Oath is not only very vague on the whole 'do no harm' thing, it's also mostly just about being humble while doctoring?

This is the specific beer that Dan and Eddie drink in this chapter. I like it, but it's not for everyone-- very dark.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Venom has a few snacks, Eddie has a few feelings, Dan gets a few voicemails.

Chapter Notes

So, this chapter starts out with some more gore. If you'd like to skip it, it starts at 'this, Venom decides, is going to be goddamn cataclysmic' and ends with 'Venom waits for him to run out of bullets a second time'. If you're sensitive to body horror/carnage, the events in this particular section are alluded to without too much detail in the rest of the chapter.

4/17/2019: Added a sources/further reading' section in the end notes. As per usual, not necessary to understanding the fic, just a bit of fun at the end :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Venom… isn’t exactly known for their skill in fucking combat, alright? All their fights with other symbiotes have been won only due to some spectacularly unforeseen fucking circumstances, or some outside intervention; they’re used to getting the absolute fuck beaten out of them, up till recently. They aren’t really used to this whole ‘winning fights’ thing.

That was before they started regularly fighting regular humans. They’re just so leaky, like balloons filled with juice. Even Eddie, their absolute favorite of humans, is about as fucking durable as a paper bag full of entrails, without them. Punch a hole in the right place, and all sorts of fun liquids start leaking out, and refuse to come back in.

That’s the problem with humans, Venom thinks, as the men across from them start unleashing a hail of bullets, each the size of one of their teeth when they’re feeling particularly mean. The meatier life-forms rely on projectiles too much, rarely branching out into fire or noise or gas. Luckily, well, you can’t shoot a fucking liquid, can you?

Well. Okay. Technically, you can shoot a liquid. But not very goddamn effectively.

The four men shooting at them haven’t seemed to realize this. Despite the fact that they’ve just turned into a fucking puddle and reconstituted themselves into something vaguely bipedal, the mad scientists for hire seemingly haven’t realized that bullets are doing precisely jack and shit.
Venom waits for them to run out of ammo. It’s easier than trying to fight with all the noise, especially with it echoing off the sides of the truck, rounds ricocheting and punching through to the outside world. The noise is not strictly painful, like those machines at the hospital, but it’s distracting enough that the fight would be a little too workmanlike for their tastes. This, they’ve decided, is going to be goddamn cataclysmic.

Eventually, the bullets stop, and they push the many squished, metal slugs out of their flesh slowly, allowing them to plink onto the metal floor of the truck. The men falter in their reloading, and Venom can see them cross the line between nervous to terrified, the way their hands an arms start to shake in earnest, their breath quickening and heartbeats racing as adrenaline shoots through their veins. Venom can taste it on the air, the way their bodies start pumping hormones and neurotransmitters through their veins, can feel the way the air becomes slightly yet discernibly more humid by the sheer amount of sweat leaking out of their pores.

In the process of reloading, one of the men drops his gun, the automatic rifle slipping from sweat-slick hands and landing on the floor with a clatter of steel-on-steel. He bends down to pick it up as a reflex, realizing his mistake too late, already committed to the motion.

Well, now is as good a time as any, Venom thinks, and stretches their arm suddenly, shoving it down the warm vice of his throat, clawing through his esophagus and worming their fingers through his thoracic cavity, drilling claws through organs. Puncturing the stomach, and coming out the other side, wrapping around ribs as acid leaks downward, beginning to melt the intestines. Venom can hear him attempt to scream, and ignores it, the sound stopped by the oily flesh plugging up his throat. The man can’t breathe, but that’s not really going to be a pressing issue in a few seconds.

They drive little fingers through lungs, shred through pectoral muscles with razor-sharp claws, cementing themselves to the inside of his rib cage, dissolving the little shreds of cartilage attaching it to the spine. They avoid the heart, it’s a bit too quick and too kind for them, right now. They’ve latched themselves onto the ribs and sternum, and begin to push.

His shirt goes red, first, in little splotches. They turn into huge, weeping gouges, as the bones begin to push outward, breaking skin and rending muscle, until the first rib fully breaches, tearing through the shirt and falling to the floor with a clatter, stained red with blood and trailing little strings of viscera. Others soon follow, the larger plane of the sternum falling to the ground with a decisive thump.

Venom retracts their tentacle, clawing through the back of his throat on the way out. One down, three to go. Two of them are shouting—screaming. One is throwing up all over himself, unwilling to look away from the bloodbath in front of him.
Venom grabs one of the shouting ones, and claws a hole through their abdomen, slicing through the abdominal wall and connective tissues and pulling out a thick rope of intestine. They wrap it around his neck, pulling it tight until his face goes red, then purple, and finally completely slack. Venom snaps his head sharply to the side, the telltale crack of a broken neck splintering through the air like a thunderclap. It is best, they think, to make sure that no one is in a position to get any ideas while they’re busy rending the still physically healthy ones limb from limb.

Venom grabs both legs from the one covered in his own sick, and begins pulling apart, forcing him into a deep split and continuing to separate, his screams bouncing off the walls of the semi, slowly turning watery as he is bisected, a puddle of blood and connective tissue forming as he is torn in half, lengthwise. Soon enough, the screams turn watery and weaken into nothingness, the mushy puddle of blood and viscera below both halves of him growing steadily.

Venom turns to the last one, taking a series of slugs to the chest as he finally—finally—manages to successfully reload. The man reeks of fear and anger.

Venom just waits for him to run out of bullets a second time.

When he eventually does, Venom wraps a hand around his chest, beginning to tear away the fabric of his shirt when—

“AIM doesn’t fucking pay me enough for this shit, man,”

“WE,” Venom says, speaking for the first time since this confrontation began, “ARE NOT A MAN.”

“Right, right, not human, no reason to ascribe to a gender binary, I’m catchin’ up.” He looks up at them with clear eyes. “You gonna kill me, or what?”

“MAYBE.” Venom’s seriously considering just reaching into his chest and pulling out his aorta through his nose, but the burning anger has subsided from the previous bout of violence, the break in their momentum allowing them to cool off a little bit. Now that things have calmed down, they can feel Eddie clawing at their insides, begging to get out. They acquiesce, sinking back into his body.

“OH MY GOD HIS HEAD IS BACKWARDS!” The man says, looking like he’s about to pass out.
So. Eddie's had better days. Someone is shouting, something about heads, but Eddie's mainly focused on how much fucking blood and gore is surrounding him, an ocean of red that's slowly coagulating into a dark gel. He turns his head to the right, towards the noise, but—

His vision moves left.

“What the fuck!?” He says, trying again and getting the same result. He bends forward, to look at his feet, and suddenly finds himself staring at the ceiling of the semi.

Okay, he thinks, this isn’t great. He bends backwards, and finds himself confronted by his own ass.

“Venom,” He says, slowly, “Why is my head on backwards?”

“OUR BAD.” They puppet his own arm up, grab his face, and wrench it around 180 degrees. Eddie can feel his neck shattering and re-forming in an instant, and suddenly, his point of view makes a lot more sense. “LONG STORY, WE’LL EXPLAIN LATER.”

“What?” The man across from them says. He’s covered head to toe in blood, and from what Eddie’s seen of the rest of the room, it’s honestly fucking come-by. “THE FUCK?”

One of Eddie’s arms shoots out to the side, a tentacle erupting from it beginning to devour the corpses. “Uh, hey? I’m Eddie?”

“Are you even human? Because you just completely turned your head around and tore some folks apart and are talking to yourself in two different voices? And I’m still not sure if you’re going to kill me?”

“Maybe? I haven’t, like, done one of those mail-order DNA tests, and either way, y’know, I’m still me.” Eddie reaches up with his non-tentacle arm and scratches the back of his neck. The other man flinches, hard, and Eddie realizes that maybe trying to pacify the dude with the high-caliber rifle would be a good idea. “Chill out, I’m not gonna fuckin’ kill you—“

“Listen, dude, if you don’t, AIM will, so like, if you could make it kinda quick, that would be great.” He bares his neck.
“Jesus Christ.” Eddie can feel the enormous bites of food traveling up his arm, but he’s starting to get used to the sensation, now that it’s happened enough times. “I’m not going to fucking eat you, dude! Fuck!”

“I’m going to die anyway! Just kill me dude, at least if you do it, it’ll count as a work related accident and my family will get the life insurance!” He drops his gun, and runs a hand through his hair. “If I go back to AIM after this, I’m going to be used to test biological weapons, alright? I’d really rather not do that, so if you could just kill me—“

“Nah.” Eddie takes a look around the cavity of the semi. “There’s enough—there’s enough blood here for, like, ten dudes. Leave your gun, Venom’s eating the bodies, we’ll just make it seem like you died, and you can fuck out of the city with your family, or at least get new IDs and move a few streets over.”

“So, what, me and my family are just supposed to leave our lives behind?”

“Fuck, dude, you just kidnapped me for a weird mad scientist cult, alright, that seems like more of a you problem.” Eddie is pretty fucking done being magnanimous, alright, he’s surrounded by other folks’ blood, he’s had to re-grow his throat for the third time in a week and a half, and he’s fairly sure he spent some time as a fucking liquid, so to but it bluntly, it’s been a rough goddamn day. “If you need papers, or anything, I know a guy, but calm the fuck down with this antagonistic shit, alright, because I’ve had a rough fucking day.” To illustrate that point, Venom eats an entire half of the man’s bisected body in a single swallow.

Eddie does, actually, know a guy. Eddie knows several guys. And it’s not one of those investigative reporter things, like knowing a ton of cheap lawyers or knowing like seventy different ways to say ‘a guy who won’t tell me his name told me this one time like three months ago’. This is one of those Eddie Brock things, because he just keeps tripping and falling into situations where he has to rely on a guy’s buddy’s cousin to help him.

“You know?” The guy says, staring morbidly as the body slips down Venom’s gullet, and the telltale bump slides its way up the tentacle, fading gently as it reached Eddie’s arm. “You’ve got a point there, dude.”

Venom eats the last fragment of corpse and oozes back into Eddie, sliding into his limbs and running full-steam into the side of the truck, near some of the bullet holes. They punch through the side, landing in the middle of an empty warehouse, and leaving behind a person-shaped hole in the side of the semi. The driver is nowhere to be found, probably run off by all the fucking gunshots. And now, they’re covered in slices from the sharp edge of the hole.
“So,” The guy begins. “Are you just the most extra person on the planet, or…?”

“C’mom, dude, we’re two different people. ‘S more of a roommate situation with my body. Sometimes I run it, sometimes they run it, and sometimes we morph into a big gooey thing that eats people. It ain’t fuckin’ calculus.” The cuts on his arms are already healing themselves, sealing up into scabs and white lines, before fading, almost imperceptibly, into his skin.

Gingerly, the dude steps out of the truck, somehow managing not to cut himself on the exposed raw edge of the metal. “So, you gonna give me a ride, or…?”

“Jesus Christ, dude, BART is dirt fuckin’ cheap. Get the fuck outta town.” Eddie cracks his knuckles, all at once, just to be intimidating. “Just one more thing. If this comes back to bite me in the ass—if you call AIM and snitch, or pop up a few years down the line threatening to expose me—what happened back there will look like a goddamn episode of *Happy Days*. Are we good?”

He claps the guy on the shoulder, just to be an asshole. Because, like, he might be feeling a little merciful, but for real, *fuck that guy*, also.

Eddie walks out of the fucking warehouse, and doesn’t look back.

--

The first thing Eddie does when he gets to his apartment is strip, change into some fresh boxer-briefs, and throw on a robe. The second thing he does is splash ice cold water on his face in some vain effort to try and feel like a functional human again. The third thing he does is get a PBR from the fridge, stab it near the bottom with a kitchen knife, and shotgun it over the kitchen sink. The forth is just repeating the third.

The fifth thing he does after getting home is call Dan. It goes to voicemail.

“Hey, Dan, it’s Eddie, just wanted to let you know that I’m probably gonna have a hardcore panic attack in the next four hours, or so, so if you could, like, stop by, that’d be great. Tell Annie I said hi.” He hangs up, and automatically hates the voicemail he just left. Should he leave another one? He thinks he should leave another one.
He grabs the bourbon from the liquor cabinet, and makes his way over to the couch, flicking on the television, and putting it on a low volume. *Antiques Roadshow* is on, and one of the hosts is talking about the history of a bland-looking painting of a meadow that looks like it could be hanging up in any of several hundred Hampton Inns across the country. He doesn’t bother bringing over a glass.

He drinks a little bourbon, watches a little TV. Drinks a little more bourbon, starts arguing with the presenters on *Antiques Roadshow* about how they appraise things. Drinks a little more, and calls Dan again.

“Hey, Dan, it’s Eddie. So, like, I’m pretty sure I broke my neck today? Like, we’re all good now, and that’s actually not the weirdest thing my body did today, by a long shot, like *much* better than when I was kidnapped for like fifteen minutes or however long it was. Time’s a little weird, you know? Anyway, love you, bye.” Christ, Eddie thinks, that’s still kinda a garbage voicemail, isn’t it? Fuck, he should try it again, right? Right? Right.

Eddie goes through the channel guide, trying to find something else to watch. *The Fly* is on, but that’s a little goddamn on the nose, and he’s not drunk enough to give QVC a try. E! is running a marathon of *Botched*, however, and once he tunes to that he’s well and truly enthralled.

He drinks some more bourbon. It’s getting a little easier to take it in mouthfuls rather than sips.

You know what he should do? Call Dan.

It goes to voicemail.

“Heyyyy, Dan, it’s Eddie. Had the weirdest day: got drugged, turned into liquid, my head was backwards for a while like in *The Exorcist*, which, oh my god, what a great movie, right? Pretty sure I got shot, like, a hundred times, but that’s okay because Vee caught them all. I just love them so much, you know? Get at me, bye.” Eddie hangs up. Wait, did that voicemail actually deliver? Probably not, right?

He drinks a little more. About a quarter of the bottle is gone. Vee’s being quiet, the way they always are after they’ve eaten. While Eddie’s head was on backwards during the encounter, he could still see out of their eyes, because of the symbiosis. That was some ridiculously gory shit, back there, and the less Eddie has to think about it, the better. If only he could pour bleach in his eyes and erase the whole thing from his mind.
He looks over at the shelf above the washing machine. Too much work; he’d have to stand back up, and walk all the way over there, and then deal with the child-proof cap, which would take *way* too long, and then he’d have to do it over the sink, so he didn’t ruin the couch—but then he’d get it on his *robe*, which was nice, and a dark green terry-cloth. He really wasn’t feeling like expending that sort of effort.

Fuck, he was going to call Dan. Right.

It goes to voicemail. Again.

“Hey, Dan, it’s Eddie. Have you ever thought about, like, ribs? Because, honestly, I think I might never eat barbeque again, which is a damn shame, because it’s so fuckin’ tasty, man! Not that you can get authen—aufen—real wet-rub in San Fran, you know, but oof, not any more. Seen too many ribs, now, I guess. Love ya, buddy.” He hangs up. Ahhh, fuck, that voicemail doesn’t have any context, does it? Better call again.

He watches more television for a bit, and drinks some more. Everything is starting to feel all floaty in the best way, and if he can just keep this train rolling he’s pretty sure he’ll turn into water and evaporate.

He calls Dan again. And yet again, it goes to voicemail.

“Hey, Dan, it’s Eddie. Oh my god, you’re totally doing surgery, aren’t you? Oh wow, everything makes so much sense! Alright alright alright. Cool. Oh my god, you’re probably elbow deep in somebody’s guts, right now. I did that today, you probably had the more positive experience there, but I can just *watch* and *feel* and can’t do *anything*, and now I know what *spines* taste like, okay? Talk to you soon, Gucci!” What the fuck is he, fourteen, why is he ending conversations like that?

On the television, they’re correcting a badly done tummy-tuck in detail that Eddie’s frankly surprised to see broadcast on cable. Huh, Eddie thinks, he’s seen those muscles before, a few times. So that’s what they look like intact, he reasons, staring blankly at the screen. He wonders if he can rip his own stomach open and look at it, stare at the striations of the muscle fibers stretching across his abdomen. 

He drinks some more bourbon.

He’s worked almost halfway through the bottle, now. Should he start worrying about alcohol poisoning? That seems like a thing he should start to be worried about, with this much liquor rolling around in his guts. He did a story on that, once, talked about the way fraternities foster alcoholism and greatly warp the idea of what is and isn’t a safe amount to consume at once. He’s pretty sure he’s past that, because the room is starting to spin, but he’s sitting still. Dan would know this!
He dials Dan. It goes to voicemail.

“Yo Danny, how much alcohol is it safe to drink at once? Because I’m pretty sure I’ve crossed that line, and I’m not getting sick, and it’s really super weird, and I really don’t want to die like Elvis, you know? Can I even die anymore? Because like, I’ve grown a new throat three times in the past two weeks, and I’d really like a solid answer? Fuck. Bye.”

Eddie tries to reach for the bourbon again, but his arm won’t move. Somehow he stands up, and walks over to the kitchen sink, even though he is pretty consciously *not moving* his legs. He turns the sink on, despite his best efforts to hold his arm down, and bends at the waist, greedily guzzling at the tap water, his throat swallowing without his say-so.

Water is getting all over his face and his hair, and honestly? He’s a lot more fucking sober from it than he wants to be.

*THIS IS NOT*, Venom projects directly into his mind, *HOW YOU SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS, EDDIE.*

Well, what the fuck else is he supposed to do right now? He’s open to goddamn suggestions.

*YOU SHOULD CALL DAN.*

Sure, like that’s worked in the past however many hours it’s been. The dude has his own goddamn life, and Eddie really needs to get used to the whole ‘becoming surrounded by scenes of unspeakable gore’ thing, since his and Venom’s relationship is looking like a permanent thing, right now. Not that he’s against Vee chilling out in his body till the Sun collapses in on itself, because Eddie is *all for* that, but he’s just… historically, right, he’s not good at commitment. And this has all been *very* hard and fast.

*WE KNOW, EDDIE. WE’VE SCANNED YOUR ENTIRE ROMANTIC HISTORY FOR PATTERNS. THAT ONE COMES UP A LOT.* Eddie is still swallowing, and honestly this position is starting to get increasingly less comfortable as the whole mental conversation is going on, but he’s decided to just roll with the punches at this point. *YOU DON’T WANT PEOPLE TO BE BURDENED BY YOU, STRAPPED TO YOU FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIFE.*

A deep, dark part of Eddie concedes that’s accurate, but they didn’t have to come out and say that, to
come out and confirm everything he thinks about himself is true.

THAT WAS AN ANALYSIS OF HOW YOU THINK, NOT A STATEMENT OF FACT, EDDIE.

Well, it’s perfectly possible for it to be both, isn’t it? Eddie thinks, now uncomfortably sober as Venom sucks up all the alcohol from his body, metabolizing it quickly enough that he’s punched in the face by a hangover. He feels a blood vessel burst in his eye, and wishes he could fucking stand up, and stop drinking from the sink, please.

YOU DO NOT DRINK ENOUGH WATER, EDDIE. DEHYDRATION IS SERIOUS. Venom, for lack of a better word, chides, but lets him up. And then, they drop a fucking bombshell. BY GALACTIC LAW, WE ARE MARRIED.

“Look, Vee, do you even know what’s in the San Francisco city water?” Eddie begins, turning off the tap himself. “Because you hear things about amoebas and lead and shit, and—“ Eddie stops, and rewinds the conversation in his head. “What do you mean, we’re married? I don’t fuckin’ recall getting in front of a space-priest and sayin’ vows!”

Venom actually manifests on his shoulder and loops around his neck to look at him. “PERFECT SYMBIOSIS IS NOT COMMON, AND THOSE WHO ACHIEVE IT TEND TO WRECK GALAXIES. BOTH INDIVIDUALS ARE LEGALLY TREATED AS A UNIT BY THE MAJORITY OF SOVEREIGN PLANETS AND SYSTEMS.”

So it was more of a common law marriage than a religious one. Honestly, Eddie was a little more comfortable with that, anyway. Something always struck him wrong about the whole wedding thing, getting up in front of everyone you know and some folks you don’t and swearing to a deity that you’ll combine bank accounts. This definitely seemed more of ‘marriage as criminal partnership’, and less likely to affect his day to day, or how he does his taxes. “I didn’t—uh, I never really saw myself getting married, you know?”

Which is stupid, right, because he and Anne were fucking engaged, but that always seemed like it would go on forever, and they hadn’t even started entertaining the idea of weddings or receptions, and she’d worn that rock for years. Probably another sign that they just weren’t good at being a romantic couple, the way their relationship just started to stagnate in that weird, transitional phase of being halfway to something that looks like complete commitment.

“WE KNOW.” He can feel a stray tendril of their flesh work it’s way down his arm and toy with his fingers, wrapping around them and weaving through them. It’s almost like holding hands with a particularly smooth octopus. “WE DIDN’T REALLY THINK ABOUT IT AT FIRST, IT WAS
“SURVIVAL.”

That tracked. Of course the only time someone would willingly tether themselves to Eddie was when the other option was *certain death*. He grabs the pack of cigarettes from where it sits on the counter, fishes one out, and lights it. “*Thanks, Vee*, that just means *so much.*”

> “*YOU ARE WILLFULLY MISUNDERSTANDING US. STOP.*” They loop around his neck again, settling on the other side, further away from the ember at the tip of the cigarette.

> “I’m just saying that I know that I’m nobody’s first choice for anything, let alone a *husband*, or a body-roommate, or whatever the fuck even we are—“

> “*LITERALLY NO ONE ELSE WOULD FIT US, EDDIE. YOU ARE A PERFECT MATCH. LITERALLY NO ONE ELSE ON THIS BACKWATER ROCK WOULD FIT US EVEN REMOTELY AS WELL AS YOU DO.*” Venom wraps around his shoulders and middle, in something that’s way more akin to a hug than anything else.

Eddie’s about to say something, something to cut through this weird, bulbous moment that’s formed between them, to gut their conversation of the sudden weight of feelings that it has been burdened with, when there’s a sudden knocking at the door.

He looks through the peephole first. It’s Dan. He’s looking very harried, very tired, and very much like he just walked out of a movie about a pandemic somewhere in the third act, right before they complete the miracle cure. He opens the door.

Dan rushes past him into the apartment, and pulls a beer out of the fridge without so much as a ‘hello’. The show about plastic surgery is still playing quietly on Eddie’s new, enormous television that he kind of hates.

> “Hello to you, too, Dan. How was your day, mine was alright, saw a bunch of organs, you probably did too, so it’s kinda like we’re the same person, only now I’m apparently space married.” Yeah, Eddie’s being kind of an asshole, but he’s had a rough goddamn day, and Dan has apparently left his manners at the hospital on accident.

> “I dunno, Eddie,” Dan says, cracking open his beer on the side of the counter, mainly to show off that he can. “I walked out of a five-hour bypass surgery at the end of my shift to six increasingly disturbing voicemails from my best friend who somehow looks and smells like he’s been on a bender
for two straight weeks. How would you be doing, then?”

“I mean, if we’re having the whole ‘my day was harder than yours’ competition, I was kidnapped by some mad scientists for a while and turned into liquid before Vee fuckin’ massacred most of them, so I’d say that I win as far as shitty days go.” Eddie takes a drag off his cigarette, knocking the ashes off into the sink.

Dan sips at his beer, and hums in acquiescence, staring off into space for a moment. A thought occurs to him. “Did you just say you’re married?”

“I mean, it’s really more of a galactic common law thing—“

“And you didn’t invite me?”

Chapter End Notes

At-home DNA testing services have legitimate privacy risks, are not bound by HIPPA, AND sell your data to insurance companies, pharmaceutical research, and the government. Maybe think twice before doing one.

Antiques Roadshow occasionally has very boring things that are RIDICULOUSLY valuable. And, yes, it is often hotel-art looking paintings that are secretly worth like $50k-- the Hudson River School made A LOT of American landscapes, and some of them are intensely boring.

The Fly is pretty great if you're into Jeff Goldblum and/or body horror.

Fraternities have a far higher rate of "excessive drinking" than the rest of a student population at a college. For the record, alcohol poisoning is very serious, and Eddie almost certainly would have had at least a minor case for drinking that much liquor that quickly.

Amoebas are rarely-if-ever found in tap water, and are actually safe to drink. Neti-pots, which pump water REALLY CLOSE to your brain, and freshwater swimming are usually the cause of getting infected. Lead, on the other hand, is really ridiculously common in municipal water, and incredibly unsafe; that being said, it can be filtered out easily.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Eddie gets some lunch, punches a dude, and has a very important conversation.

Chapter Notes

4/19/2019: Added sources/further reading in the end notes. As per usual, totally not necessary for enjoying/understanding the chapter, just a bit of fun :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Eddie writes some more, because it’s what he’s good at, and Venom and Dan jointly decided that pouring the better part of a whole bottle of bourbon down his throat was a coping mechanism that didn’t necessarily need to continue. Eddie is of the opinion that other people running his fucking life, be they body roommates or not, is something that doesn’t necessarily need to continue, either, but he was similarly overruled.

Honestly, he thinks, it’s pretty fair, because he was hitting the liquor pretty hard, and despite being maybe functionally immortal, that’s still not a habit he really wants to regularly engage in, especially since the whole ‘riding along for a bloodbath’ thing seems to be becoming a permanent fixture in his life. Not that he’s against it, right, because—

Okay, he is kind of against the whole eating folks thing. But, Eddie figures that as long as those people are actively trying to kill them, he can make a goddamn allowance for self-defense. And since he keeps falling ass-over-elbows into situations where the options are either eat folks or die, well, he’s getting a little more comfortable with the whole thing.

Not, like, comfortable-comfortable, because that starts you down the slippery slope to accidentally being a super-villain, but, you know… he’s locked those feelings into the back of his head, along with all the other things he has no business feeling, and has settled on something of more of a distanced distaste. More of a ‘Jesus Christ, not this shit again’, than anything else.

Anyway. He writes another article, this time about the way housing prices in the Bay Area are artificially inflated as some sort of strange hyper-gentrification, but it sort of spins out into a screed on how actually owning land is a little bit of a goddamn ridiculous concept and why owning things
collectively is more healthy for communities. It gets published, with light edits for grammar and ‘personality’. Eddie’s honestly just happy to be getting stuff out there again, stuff that matters, even if it’s just freelance work.

They decide to roll it over to a weekly feature. The pay isn’t great, and as far as websites go, it could be better, but he gets to decide his own articles on more than ‘optimal clicks’, and he can write them under his actual name. It’s a work in progress.

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Things cool down for a while after that. Venom is less… for lack of a better word, hungry, so Eddie manages to get away with just shoving a couple of candy bars down his throat each day, instead of, fuck, he doesn’t know, prowling the city at night, searching for someone to gnaw on.

“So,” Eddie says, one morning, about a week later, halfway through his second coffee and just finishing his forth cigarette. “We’re space-married.”

“**BY STANDARD GALACTIC LAW, WE ARE TREATED AS A SINGLE UNIT, YES.**” Venom is toying big, ropy tentacles down the arm he’s not using to drink coffee, squeezing and slithering down his arm like a boa constrictor. “**WHICH MEANS THAT ANYONE NOT FROM KLYNTAR AND NOT FROM THIS WATERY ROCK WILL LIKELY KILL US BOTH ON SIGHT.**”

“What the fuck?” Eddie drops his coffee mug, thankfully only on the counter. It doesn’t crack, but a goodly amount of the liquid sloshes out, all over the countertop and a little on the floor. He grabs some paper towels and just kind of sets them on the liquid, hoping that they’ll absorb it on their own. “I’m not getting killed by an alien, I’m going to die like any other self-respecting journalist: at age sixty from liver failure.”

“**WHO SAID YOU HAD ANY SELF RESPECT?**” They say, and he can feel little tendrils worming their way between his organs, checking in on where he’s pretty sure his liver is, as if to reassure themselves that it’s still in existence, still healthy-ish.

“Vee, baby, you’ve met me and seen literally all my memories; when did it ever occur to you that I had any self respect?” Eddie gives them a little pat, and moves the soiled paper towels into the trashcan. There’s still a little bit of spilled coffee on the counter, but he’s frankly past the point of giving a shit. “Can we get back to the killing me on sight thing? Because that seems important, and like something I should probably fucking know more about.”
Venom’s quiet for a moment, organizing their thoughts. He can still feel them, winding around his liver and twisting inside his guts, but it’s more comforting than it used to be, than it has any right to be.

“**KLYNTAR HAS CRUSHED EMPIRES, EDDIE. ANY PLANET THAT’S EVEN REMOTELY CONNECTED TO THE GALAXY HAS HEARD OF US.**” They wrap a tentacle around his middle, almost to ground themselves. “**EVERY OTHER EMPIRE WE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO INVADE HAS BEEN DEVoured, EDDIE. IT IS A REASONABLE REACTION.**”

“Yeah, but you said you didn’t want to do that anymore because I taught you the power of love, or something!”

“**EDDIE.**” Venom says, actually manifesting eyes at the end of a tentacle so that they can look at him. “**THERE ARE LESS THAN A MILLION ON KLYNTAR. FOUR OF US CAN STRIP A PLANET OF SENTIENT LIFE IN ONE OF YOUR EARTH WEEKS, IF WE WERE REALLY TRYING.**”

“That’s pretty fucked up,” Eddie says, after a beat. “Alright, though, it makes sense why a whole bunch of aliens have a standing kill order on us. But how would they even know?”

“**OTHER THAN THE NUMEROUS NEWS REPORTS ABOUT OUR ESCAPADES?**”

Ah. That. “But, like, is there some kind of litmus test, or whatever, for symbiotes?”

“**JUST BECAUSE WE DON’T CONFORM TO YOUR PHYSICS DOESN’T MEAN WE DON’T SHOW UP WHEN SOMEONE SCANS FOR LIFE FORMS, EDDIE.**” They thin out, spreading throughout his insides like ink in water, a kind of non-verbal sigh.

Eddie figures it’s time to let the goddamn subject drop, and he starts brainstorming for another article; he wants to have a few banked ones just in case, anyway.

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Oh god, Eddie thinks, not this shit again.
It goes down like this:

- Eddie’s out of the apartment to get lunch with Anne.
- It’s a fucking hike from his apartment, right, because they live in completely different neighborhoods, and the place she decided was cheap enough and good enough was close to her work but a good twenty minute walk from the nearest BART stop.
- The BLT he gets is disappointing and overpriced. It’s got some sort of strange mustard aioli, and avocado, and they only used cherry tomatoes, and honestly it’s just an affront to the entire idea of sandwiches, a little bit.
- They talk about fuck-all of substance and, despite a ten minute digression consisting of ‘Dan’s such a good dude’ and ‘I know, right???’ manage to completely avoid the topics of Venom, aliens, space, cannibalism, any sort of goo, that one time they were engaged for a few years, or anything remotely dealing with human bodies.
- Anyway, he’s hoofing it back to the fucking BART station, because he still has no goddamn idea where his motorcycle is even though its been two months since it disappeared, when—
- Someone fucking grabs him off the street and shoves him into a windowless van.

As windowless vans go, it’s not too bad. Like, Eddie’s definitely seen worse, and he’s sure as shit been bodily thrown into far shadier windowless vans over the course of his life. Unfortunately, the outside is a plain white, and not some sort of sick ass mural of a wizard fighting a dragon that would look in place on many a prog-rock album cover. The interior is fairly basic—long, bench seat in back, a few chairs awkwardly bolted to the middle to face it—and the floor is covered in garishly patterned industrial carpet, the sort they put on the seats of city buses.

The AIM guy—the one with the beard and the flannel shirt and the ridiculous, neon yellow glasses—it sits on the bench seat at the back of the van. Venom’s churning in his insides, wordlessly screaming at him to start ripping his goddamn limbs off. Eddie has a feeling, though, that that’s a very bad idea at this point and time.

Mostly due to the fact that his fucking hipster nemesis is pointing a goddamn video camera at him. Footage of Eddie getting engulfed by Venom and turning into a gigantic homunculus was bad enough; footage of that happening with his face clearly visible and his status as a semi-public figure spelled fucking disaster.

“Oh, Eddie,” The man says, like they’re old friends, “How nice of you to join us. Did you bring your little friend with you?”

“Nah, I left them at home.” Eddie says, trying desperately to school his face into something that’s even remotely honest looking. He maintains the cordial affect, just to be an asshole. “You know how it can be with the old ball and chain, don’t you?”
The man looks like he has an extensive collection of samurai swords, Eddie’s pretty solid on him having a long history of first dates that go absolutely nowhere and zero committed relationships.

“Oh, definitely,” The man says, and it rings about as true as a cracked bell.

“…So,” Eddie says, after a beat, “You gonna tell me why you grabbed me off a street corner?”

“I just love our little chats, don’t you?” The hipster scratches at his beard with the hand that isn’t holding the camcorder. “Why wouldn’t I want to check in with my favorite monster in the San Francisco area?”

“Oh, but there’s just so many to choose from, and you’re favorite’s little old me?” Eddie knows he’s being an asshole, but the windowless van has started moving, and he has the sneaking suspicion that he’s being kidnapped again.

Venom is boiling under his skin, worming their way through layers of subcutaneous tissue, the changing wrinkles in his clothes the only outward indicator of the way they’re bulging out of his body, writhing against the thin cover of skin like eels.

“Cut the shit, Brock!” The hipster is actually getting a little angry right now, not willing to carry on with the charade, and not stubborn enough to tough it out until Eddie breaks. “Where’s the Goo-man?”

Eddie bursts out laughing. Fuckin’ Goo-man, Jesus Christ, that thing will not goddamn die, and it sounds even more ridiculous than it looks, written. He has a sudden stab of sympathy to the poor editors in charge of fucking Goo-man copy in daily papers. “I dunno, dude, we’re different folks. They have their own life, buddy.”

“Look at you, mister Eddie Cock,” He says, like that’s the first goddamn time Eddie’s heard that, like the hipster is some kind of goddamn pioneer in the world of humor. “Tryin’ to lie to a man with an IQ of 173. Where is he?”

“Dude, you’ve gotta stop with the gender essentialism, ‘s really not a good look for such a progressive evil scientist organization.” Eddie’s on pretty solid ground, now, because he’s won. Yeah, he’s still getting kidnapped and his skin is doing weird alien shit and yeah, he’s starting to get peckish in a very particular sort of way, but the other guy broke first, which means he’s winning the conversation. “Look, you’ve already tried to kidnap me twice, what incentive do I have to lie, bro?”
“Yes, I remember your little stunt with the semi. Very clever. Real difficult covering that up.” One
handed, the hipster pulled a vape out of the pocket of his flannel shirt, and took a big drag, sending a
cloud of carcinogens dispersing throughout the van, smelling like cherry cough syrup. “Things could
get real difficult for you, if you kept him to yourself. Just turn him over to us, we’ll take it from
here.”

Something within Eddie just fucking breaks. Not in an alien way; this is the same reason why Eddie
goddamn Brock has literally lost count of the number of fistfights he’s started. His mind whites out
sometimes, and he can’t figure out words because he’s so goddamn pissed, and he can’t fucking deal
with it except to try his best to beat someone’s face through the back of their skull. When he was
doing The Brock Report, he got a lot better at getting folks to take a swing first, or at least getting big
and scary and actively asking if they wanted to ‘take this shit outside’ while cracking all his knuckles
at once.

He's not doing The Brock Report anymore. He doesn't have to worry about fucking lawsuits,
anymore.

The hipster isn’t expecting the punch, clearly. Maybe he was prepared for some wacky alien shit, and
maybe he’s extensively studied the Goo-man footage the way some folks devote their lives to
hunting for Bigfoot, but that motherfucker has clearly not studied the tape on Eddie goddamn Brock.
Didn’t fucking do the three minutes of research it would take to learn that there are literal ten minute
compilations of him beating folks up, threatening to beat folks up, or getting his ass kicked.

Anyway. The dude’s clearly ready for him to sprout tentacles or get all gooey and try to take a bite
out of him. Eddie settles with punching him hard enough in the jaw he feels the bone break under the
skin, feels his one of knuckles dislocate and another of his fingers snap the wrong way from the force
of it.

He grabs the hipster by the back of the neck and head-butts him savagely, before the other man can
get a swing in. Eddie feels his own nose break, but he doesn’t give a shit, and he has a feeling that
getting his face absolutely drenched in blood will only make sure the situation is as intimidating as
possible for the hipster.

“Feeling fuckin’ difficult enough for you yet, you son of a bitch?” Eddie yells, grinning. He can taste
the blood on his teeth, feels the way it drips down his lips and chin. He licks some off, just to freak
the other man out even more, and his tongue feels longer than usual, and a little pointier. He can taste
the fear on the air, before it’s overwhelmed by the metallic taste of his own blood.

Then, of course, the AIM hipster pulls a gun out of a shoulder holster, hidden underneath his
Eddie tries to wrestle the gun away from him, but he got a little fucking cocky with that punch, and now it hurts too much to use some of his fingers, which makes it a little fucking difficult to wrench the pistol out of the other man’s hands.

He hears the gunshot before he feels it, the loud *bang* reverberating off the metal walls of the van, spearing itself into his eardrums, somehow simultaneously incredibly high-pitched and too low for comfort.

Then he feels it punch a hole in his throat. Feels the blood start fucking *gush* out, shooting out of the front of his throat like a fucking super-soaker. Venom, while they are being gracious enough to let Eddie fight his own goddamn battles for once, isn’t about to extend that courtesy to letting him fucking die like a punk, and he feels them sear the wound shut, sealing it off and burning it clean like an autoclave.

Goddammit, Eddie thinks, another goddamn throat injury. Couldn’t folks aiming to kill him try and hurt him *somewhere else*?

Eddies reaction is to *laugh*, as he pulls the gun from the man’s limp hand, relishing in the look of surprise as he realizes that fucking bullets will not goddamn kill Eddie Brock. He laughs deep enough that a little blood drips out of the not-quite-sealed hole in his throat, dripping onto the other man’s face. “Nice fuckin’ try, buddy!”

He also wrenches the video camera out of his other hand, for good measure, throwing it on the ground and stomping on it a few times, just to be on the safe side.

“You gonna let me out of your fucking van, or are you gonna try and kill me again?” Eddie asks, grinning savagely as he tucks the gun into the back of his pants. “Because I’m fucking down for either, bro, but you need to get your shit together a little bit before we try this dance again.”

He pats the hipster on the cheek, gently, with one blood-covered hand, feeling the red liquid start to matte the wiry stubble that pretended to be an actual beard.

Eddie walked over to the door, ready to rip it open at speed. “One more thing, buddy?”
The hipster gulped, Eddie’s red handprint standing out starkly against his paper-white skin.

“This was me being nice.”

Eddie tore the door open, and launched himself onto the San Francisco street.

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The walk back to the apartment, he sticks to alleys. Some junkies give him looks, one dude passes out because Eddie is positively caked in his own blood, but other than that, the trek back to the apartment is fairly uneventful.

As he’s unlocking his door, his neighbor pokes his head out.

“Hey, dude, is this a bad ti— whoa, yeah, you’re fucking covered in blood, alright.”

Eddie turns around to get a better look at him. “What?”

His voice sounds rough, but since his default state these days is ‘regrowing his own throat’, he figures that’s just something he’s going to have to get used to for the rest of his goddamn life.

“Y’know what?” He asks, voice quivering slightly, “It can wait. It’s just—I was down at the bodega, right, trying to get Mrs. Chen to sell some of my band’s CDs, and she’s all ‘Saint’s Anchor is a terrible concept for a band’ and I’m like ‘you sell these I’ll give you 40%’, and then she goes ‘40% of zero is still fuck all’, and anyway, right, some of those fucks who were trying to break into your apartment last week were there, looking at the goddamn dish soap, tryin’ to be inconspicuous, and talkin’ like they’re gonna kidnap you or some shit, so I just wanted to let you know.”

“Oh, yeah. That. Took care of it earlier.” Eddie gestured to how he was covered in his own blood. “They’ll probably try again, though, fuckin’ AIM really wants to study my ass.”

The roommate takes a look at Eddie’s ass. “I mean, it’s a decent ass, I guess?”
Eddie cuts him a look.

“…How are things going with your, uh, roommate?” The neighbor asks, after a beat, trying desperately to make small talk that isn’t terrible.

“Uh, apparently we’re space-married, I dunno, it’s weird.” Eddie scratches at the back of his neck, and some dried blood flakes off his hands as he runs his fingers over the fresh, raw skin, where the bullet passed through.

“Does that—I mean, do y’all—“ It’s taking the asshole neighbor a while to actually get his words out. “Are you—you know, who’s on—is that even—“ He takes a deep breath. “I’m very happy for you.” He says, eventually.

“You want to run through all those things you started to say?” Eddie asks, wryly.

“Uh…” The neighbor takes in the way Eddie is covered in blood, the gun tucked into the back of his jeans, the way his right hand is turbo-fucked from the punch, earlier, and the way his grin is just the wrong side of manic. Eddie’s nose sets itself with a crack, and he can feel blood dripping down his face anew. “I think I’m fucking good, bro. You get some sleep, alright?”

The neighbor shuts himself into the apartment right quick.

Eddie immediately throws his clothing in a cold sink to soak, and pads, naked, to his bathroom, before taking a forty-five minute shower. Venom pops his knuckles back into place, straightens his broken finger, and stretches across his back, working out the approximately seventy-thousand knots out under the boiling hot spray.

He gets out, throws on a robe, and throws his clothing in the washing machine. He wants to smoke an entire pack of cigarettes, but something tells him that doing so less than two hours after growing an entirely new throat might be a bad idea. He settles for drinking a coffee mug full of tequila.

You know, to sanitize the wound.

“THAT,” Venom says, wrapping around his chest and down his arm, carefully avoiding his neck, “IS A TERRIBLE JUSTIFICATION.”
“Well, fuck, it’s the only justification I’ve got right now, and I really want a goddamn drink, alright?”

“YOU COULD HAVE DIED, EDDIE.”

“Yeah, well, I can die walking down the street, too, so…”

“WALKING DOWN THE STREET DOES NOT USUALLY GET YOU SHOT IN THE THROAT, EDDIE. WE DON’T LIKE IT WHEN YOU GET SHOT. WHY DID YOU NOT LET US RIP THAT MAN INTO PIECES?”

“It’s… It’s hard to explain, alright?” Eddie sighs, and wishes for a cigarette, just for something to do with his hands. “Like, he was sayin’ shit, and I really needed to kick his ass, and I needed to do it on my own, you know?

“WE DON’T KNOW.”

“I just… I really felt like—Like, he was majorly disrespecting you, and as your space-husband, I wanted to make sure my face fucking haunts his nightmares until the day he goddamn dies.”

Venom takes a moment, and plays with his fingers, thinking, knotting their way around his knuckles and squeezing gently in something that’s almost like holding hands.

“THANK YOU, EDDIE.” He can feel the thick rope of their tentacle wrap around his shoulders, and down his other arm. “YOU DO NOT HAVE TO CALL YOURSELF OUR SPACE HUSBAND IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO, EDDIE.”

“Well, yeah, I know, but—“

“WE KNOW WHAT CONNOTATIONS THE WORD HUSBAND HAS ON THIS STUPID ROCK, EDDIE. YOU DON’T HAVE TO CALL US THAT, EDDIE.”

“Jesus fuck!” Eddie says, “We’re goddamn space-married, alright? I wouldn’t call us that if I didn’t
damn well mean it! Fucking Christ, I want to be your husband, alright?” He downs about a third of his mug of tequila in one long gulp, and deeply regrets it. “I would be fine just calling us body roommates or whatever the fuck, but I don’t know, jeez, married just seems to fit better, and I’m going balls deep on this whole thing, alright?”

“MARRIAGE HAS A CERTAIN IMPLICATION IN YOUR CULTURE, THOUGH, AND—“

“Vee, baby, I was engaged for years, I know the fucking societal implications of marriage, alright? I know you’re trying to be nice and all by giving me sixty million goddamn outs, or whatever, but if you’re letting me define our relationship, us being married is not something that’s gonna fucking change, alright?” He gives them a little pat, which turns into more of a caress.

“BUT YOU ARE—“

“Venom?” Eddie says, evenly, “Even though we eat folks, and you’re an alien, and I’m a goddamn mess a good 90% of the time, this is the healthiest and happiest relationship I’ve ever been in, alright? You not having a solid body or being from space or eating people whole doesn’t change that, alright?”

“BUT YOU WILL EVENTUALLY DIE!”

“I mean. If this afternoon is any indication, uh, that’s gonna be pretty goddamn difficult.” Something occurs to him. “Oh! You’re talking about, like, if we run into any other aliens, right?”

“YES.”

“You think I won’t fucking fight Thor for you, babe? Like, he seems like a cool dude, and all, and I’m a big fan of the shorter haircut, but you gotta understand, Vee, it’s you and me and I’ll fight the entire goddamn galaxy to keep it that way.”

“WHY?”

“Because I think I love you, you absolute fuck!”

Chapter End Notes
The San Francisco housing market is INSANE. Like, it's systematically pushing out locals and folks of lower incomes (here meaning, for real, less than 200k a year) while restricting housing development.

This is just an interesting piece on conversion vans, re: their cultural impact, common traits, and yes, the occasional dope mural.

IQ Tests are not only notoriously flawed and fairly controversial, but have also been used as a way to justify basically all flavors of discrimination. Also, for the record, 173 is such a ridiculous number to throw out--like, depending on how you count it, there have been only six or seven folks with a higher score. Pro-tip, if you're lying about your IQ, put it somewhere in the 140s.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Eddie has feelings, more feelings, steals some silverware, and is a local celebrity.

Chapter Notes

4/20/2019: Added a lil something for sources/"further reading" in the end notes; this is just for fun, and not necessary for reading/enjoying! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Fuck. Eddie hadn’t actually meant to say that. Ever, really. He’s no stranger to bottling up all his feelings and chucking them into a dark corner of his mind, letting them fester and mutate into weird shit that he refuses to even consider thinking about. And he was fully goddamn prepared to do that, and was well on his way to halfway being there.

Let it be fucking well known that Eddie Brock was perfectly willing to keep that romance shit to himself, thank you kindly, but Venom had to go and try and play it like he wasn’t fucking ride-or-die, ass-over-elbows in love with them; they have a direct line into his mind, but somehow—somehow—they missed that Eddie would physically fight every single goddamn alien in the fucking universe just to keep them with him.

How the fuck that happened, Eddie isn’t entirely fucking sure. The ‘Venom not knowing’ thing—Eddie’s known for a long-ass time that he falls fast and hard, eyes closed and headfirst, the way he does everything else in his life. He’s always gone from zero to ‘burn down the world’ really quick, and even though Venom lives in his skin and reads his thoughts and slides through his memories like a librarian through a card catalogue, nothing cements the fact that they are a fundamentally separate individual like the fact that they don’t fucking understand his emotions in the slightest.

It’s a little comforting, actually. They can’t twist his feelings into something they aren’t if they don’t actually understand how and why that shit works and what they actually are. Not that he thinks they’d ever do that, but it’s comforting to know that it isn’t even an option on the table. That he’ll never have to worry about being forced to fucking love eating folks whole.

Anyway, were was he? Oh yeah.
Eddie really wasn’t going to say anything. He’s really good at shutting the fuck up about this sort of thing, usually. But, well, Venom just kept trying to make Eddie pull the ripcord on the whole marriage thing, and that just kinda pissed him off a little bit. And let’s be real, he isn’t great at controlling his fucking words at the best of times, and he’s even worse at it when he’s frustrated. So it just kind of… slips out.

“Because I think I love you, you absolute fuck!”

But instead of something helpful, Venom says, “YOU DON’T LOVE US, YOU LOVE ANNE.”

“That’s—alright, there’s more than one kind of love, Vee, alright?” Eddie’s still stroking where they’re wrapped around him, squeezing and scratching gently at where they’ve wrapped themselves around his bicep. “And what I had with Anne—what I feel towards Anne—hasn’t been at all romantic since Dan fished me out of that lobster tank, alright?”

“EDDIE.” They shy away from his touch, a little bit, rearranging themselves so that he isn’t touching them anymore. “WE ARE NOT FROM YOUR PLANET. WE ARE LITERALLY A PARASITIC SPECIES FROM THE FAR REACHES OF THE GALAXY. YOU CAN’T LOVE US IN THAT WAY.”

“Vee, baby, don’t call yourself a parasite, stop talkin’ down to yourself like that, it ain’t healthy.” Eddie’s fucking aware of how much of a hypocrite he’s being right now, thank you very much, but there’s only room in this relationship for one person who constantly falls down into spirals of depression, and it ain’t gonna be Venom most of the time. “And, sorry to say, I can love you in all the ways I fuckin’ choose to, Vee. And I’m choosing all the goddamn ways I fucking can. Sorry.”

It’s not like Venom can actually return his feelings, or anything. He’s okay with dealing with that, he’s thought it through before, they’ve had a pretty rough life, from what he can tell from the little iotas of information they’ve dropped about Klyntar—Klyntar itself, even without all the shit about being the smallest and being a loser and being forever the un-favorite, sounds like a fucking hellhole of unspeakable proportions. And he can deal, alright, he can work through it, so long as they’re together, because as long as it’s them against the universe, that’s enough for him to be happy with—

“EDDIE. STOP THINKING.”

It’s not that he expects them to reciprocate; he’ll go along regardless, because he just loves—
“**EDDIE.**” They say, squeezing sharply around his shoulders, snapping him out of his head. “**IT WOULD NOT BE ONE-SIDED. WE ARE HERE FOR WHATEVER YOU NEED. FOR WHATEVER YOU WANT. WE HAD JUST THOUGHT THAT OUR BACKGROUND MIGHT BE A DEAL-BREAKER.**”

“They say, squeezing sharply around his shoulders, snapping him out of his head. “**IT WOULD NOT BE ONE-SIDED. WE ARE HERE FOR WHATEVER YOU NEED. FOR WHATEVER YOU WANT. WE HAD JUST THOUGHT THAT OUR BACKGROUND MIGHT BE A DEAL-BREAKER.**”

“Vee, baby, you know I ain’t choosy.” Eddie says, since it’s the only thing he can figure out that will come out of his mouth. “I’ve had loads of worse partners than you, and you’ve just been really good to me, at literally every opportunity.” Eddie sighs, “And, like, I really wasn’t kidding when I said that this is the healthiest relationship I’ve ever fucking been in, alright?”

He feels them probe little tendrils into his memory, flipping through things like through pages in a magazine. Feels the way they flicker through all the breakups, all the fights, and that time his ex tried to set him on fire; feels the way they relax the squeeze into something more like a hug than anything else.

“He feels them probe little tendrils into his memory, flipping through things like through pages in a magazine. Feels the way they flicker through all the breakups, all the fights, and that time his ex tried to set him on fire; feels the way they relax the squeeze into something more like a hug than anything else.

“**ANNE WAS GOOD FOR YOU,**” They say, after a beat, because that’s the only remotely positive facet of Eddie’s dating/hookup history. “**WE WOULD LIKE TO EAT SOME OF YOUR FORMER PARTNERS, HOWEVER. ALL OF THEM. ESPECIALLY THE ONE WITH THE FIRE.**”

“Arguably, right, the ex who tried to set me on fire isn’t the worst one.”

“**EDDIE. TRYING TO KILL YOU AUTOMATICALLY MAKES THEM THE WORST ONE.**”

He hums, content, and runs his hand gently over one of their thick tentacles. Finally, for the first time in fucking years, something is going right for Eddie goddamn Brock.

He drinks a little more tequila from the coffee mug full of it, forgotten during their conversation about feelings and love and all that fun shit. Time to start the clock on when something will go horrifically wrong, then.

Things don’t actually far apart in the way Eddie expects. Like, he and Venom are rock-fucking-solid in the way they’ve always been (and when did three weeks, give or take, become always?), and he and Dan remain the weirdly solid odd couple that they’ve been for months. He’s out with Anne, some sort of bistro near her townhouse for lunch, when things finally come to a head.
“So,” Anne says, after requisite small talk about work and weather and Dan, “How are things with your roommate?”

“I mean, things are good, I guess, we’re apparently space-married, and I told them I love them, and we’re just kinda figuring things out, you know?”

Anne rolls her eyes, as if she’s expecting him to deliver the punch line to this joke. She’s never really seen Venom the same way he does—the same way Dan does—as a friend who just happens to eat people and live inside his skin sometimes and would (has, Eddie’s brain reminds him) rip the world to shreds at the drop of a hat for him.

“What?” Eddie asks.

“C’mon, Eddie, if you’re going to lie, at least try a little harder.” She huffs a small laugh. “You? Married? To an alien? Jesus Christ.”

“Anne,” Eddie says, feeling the say his grip tightens around his fork, “I’m not kidding.”

“Stop joking, Eddie.” She says, flatly.

“I’m not laughing, Anne.” He’s actually starting to get a little pissed. Anne’s his only ex who he’s still on speaking terms with, which is nice, but that doesn’t exactly make them friends, anymore. Things are better than they used to be, for sure, but he’s not exactly calling her in the middle of the night or having her over to his apartment or trusting her to dispose of a body. Even this whole platonic lunch-date thing is new and awkward. “Like, it’s more of a common law thing, anyway, but yeah, guess we are.”

Eddie really wishes that they still let people smoke inside restaurants, just so he would have something to do with his hands and his mouth other than talk and grab the silverware hard enough that it digs into his hands.

“Is there a reason you got married?” She’s getting little frustrated now, which is somewhat understandable, but bothers him. She lost her shares of controlling interest in his relationship drama when they fucking broke up.

“Look, Annie, it’s really more of a legal distinction, right, and it’s not like either of us were really
given a choice, okay? But, like, we’ve actually talked bout it, and married just seems to really fit, you know?"

“If Venom forced you into anything—“

“Well, they didn’t. Like, it’s more of us getting treated as a single unit under space-law, because of the symbiosis, and that got us to talkin’ about the whole ‘how we define ourselves’ thing, because I just kept callin’ it bein’ space-married, so we talked about it, that’s all.”

“So it’s just a platonic thing?” Anne asks, like that would make it at all less fucking meaningful to either of them, like that would suddenly make it more acceptable.

“I mean, we haven’t, like, done anything, yet, but it really isn’t just one of those just friends marriages, Anne!” Eddie’s having a hard time keeping his feelings out of his own voice. Venom’s being quiet, because they’re all tied up, backwards and braided, about his feelings towards Anne; also they’re quiet because they haven’t eaten anyone recently, not since those guys in the semi, and Eddies starting to recognize that gnawing craving in the back of his throat for a very specific kind of bloodlust. “Why’s it matter to you, anyhow?”

“Eddie, it’s just—I care about you, dammit, and I don’t thing that hitching yourself to the first cannibal alien that comes around is a really good idea!”

He can feel a twisting in his gut, can feel the way Venom’s burbling up through the space between his organs to settle around his ribs, to trace little fingers up his neck and around his skull. It’s less comforting than the gesture is probably meant to be.

“Oh, fuck off,” Eddie says, letting his silverware fall onto the plate with a clatter. “I get that you’re coming from a place of love, or whatever, and that makes a difference, for real, but I can’t fucking deal with this conversation any more.”

“Fuck, Eddie, I meant that—“

Eddie stands up, and surreptitiously pockets his silverware. “Look, I’m gonna fucking go, alright? Like, we’re good, and all, but I’m never gonna agree with you on this thing, okay? Take me for coffee next week, or something, but this conversation is done.”
He leaves the restaurant, and starts walking back to the BART station.

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The ride home takes a while. Normally, Eddie’s pretty fucking understanding about the whole public transit system and its inherent problems dealing with urban sprawl, but he can only rationalize himself out of frustration for so goddamn long before the 45 minute delay becomes less of an annoyance and more of a major goddamn inconvenience.

So suffice it to say he’s not in the best mood when he gets back home. Not even the stolen silverware can bring a smile to his face, and that’s not a stunt he’s pulled in years; back in the day, he did that shit all the time—he wonders, idly, if Anne knows precisely how many of her forks and knives are lifted from restaurants.

(All of them, most of the spoons, and some of the glasses)

He’s pissed, and he’s frustrated, and he feels like if he stops moving, he’ll shake out of his goddamn skin. He paces, but that’s not enough. He lights a cigarette, and then another one. The gnawing feeling of hunger is starting to roar in his mind, a white noise wall of silence screaming out all other thoughts in his head.

He needs to fucking run, needs to stretch and grow and rip himself apart.

He needs to EAT.

Eddie finishes his cigarette first. And then he does the sensible thing, and gets out on his fire escape, and fucking jumps.

For one terrifying second, he falls, and a variety of thoughts shoot through his head in very quick succession:

- God, his apartment is actually kinda high up, isn't it?
- Fuck, is he gonna die if Venom doesn’t catch him? Because it been a while since he was depressed enough to actually look up how far of a fall the human body can feasibly survive.
- Oh god, Vee’s been quiet lately, are they alright?
- Are they still being weird about the love thing? Is that what this is?
• He probably should’ve been nicer to Anne, earlier.
• Then again, she doesn’t get the deciding vote on Eddie Brock’s love life, anymore, and this is the first time she’s actually had to deal with that.
• Oh God, what’s Dan gonna think if they die? And all that he’s left with is the knowledge that Eddie ate half a lunch and chucked himself off his own building?
• What if Venom’s dead?
• What if he doesn’t eat and then all his injuries from the past few weeks start re-doing themselves?
• What if AIM picks up his broken but functionally immortal body from the bottom of the alley and vivisects him?

His arm jerks as it latches onto something, against his will, and he can feel his shoulder wrench out of socket with a frankly obscene noise. It feels like that time he crashed his motorcycle and went flying, shoulder first, into a brick wall, and his rotator cuff ripped itself apart.

**EDDIE,** Venom hisses, directly into his mind, **WHAT THE FUCK?**

“It seemed like a good idea at the time, Vee, I dunno, fuck.” Eddie says, actively focusing on anything else but the pain.

**WHY WOULD YOU EVER DO THIS, EDDIE?**

“We’re hungry.” Eddie says, and he doesn’t quite recognize the voice that comes out of his mouth. It’s his own, but something weird and carnal courses through it, like an undercurrent of bloodlust. And, if he’s being honest, lust-lust.

**LET’S FIND SOMEONE TO EAT, THEN.** They sound, if he’s honest, a little fucking weirded out. Which is reasonable, because Eddie’s pretty certain he should be freaking the hell out right now, but he’s really not. The way his blood is screaming in his ears is now way more important than anything else he can remotely think of, right now.

His other hand raises itself of its own accord, and his fingers drive themselves deep into the brick wall, before hauling himself upward in a way that defies all laws of physics, anatomy, and common sense.

They work their way into the roof of the next building over, and Eddie only notices once they stand up that all his fingers are broken, twisted into horrific snarls, the joints angled against each other in a ghastly array exposed bone and sprung knuckles.
Huh, Eddie thinks, that’s pretty fucked up. He should care more about this, right? This feels like an important fucking thing to care about, the same way his shoulder is still out of socket, but for some reason that spark of feeling isn’t actually igniting anything in his mind. God, but he’s hungry.

He flexes them, and pain immediately shoots up his arms. Probably he should deal with that, at some point. “Let’s get something to eat, Vee, alright? I’m getting really fucking hungry, babe.”

“ONLY BAD PEOPLE, EDDIE.” They manifest on his shoulder, not the turbo-fucked one, and look down at his hands for a moment. His hands fingers straighten themselves out with a sickening snap, all at once. Eddie would feel like throwing up, if he was able to feel anything other than this horrific, gnawing hunger that’s crawling up his throat.

“I mean, obviously, yeah,” Eddie says, and it trips the little ‘you’re a fucking liar’ bell in his head. He wants to rip and tear flesh apart, scrape the muscles off a skull and slurp the brains out through the eyes, crunch teeth down on bones and get elbow deep in—

WE NEED TO GO, EDDIE. IS IT OKAY IF WE DRIVE THE BODY FOR A BIT? Venom asks, and the question feels like a trap. But Eddie’s really starting to feel lost in his own head, and his mind is going in very strange directions that he doesn’t really want to follow it down, so it’s a trap he doesn’t actually mind springing.

“Yeah, go ahead, sure. Probably a good call, dude,” He also has a sneaking suspicion that if he keeps controlling his own body, he’s going to start biting people in the street, like patient zero in a zombie apocalypse movie.

His feet start moving without his say-so, and he can feel Venom boiling up from under his skin, seeping out of pores and encasing his limbs in a suit of gooey flesh, dripping down his face and covering his eyes until he’s fully separated from the outside world by an impenetrable veneer of flesh. Nothing can get in, and he can’t get out, which is more comforting than it strictly aught to be. Eddie checks the fuck out for a while.

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It’s not exactly a—Eddie’s brain just fucking does this, sometimes, alright? Something happens, and he just goes on autopilot, for a little while. And, usually, going on autopilot involves making bad sexual decisions and drinking a bunch and getting himself arrested, or some combination of the three. It’s not usually ‘fuck, guess I’d better start eating folks’, but Venom’s never really had a direct line to
his brain when this shit happens, and, fuck, Eddie’s kinda gotten used to eating people, a little bit. As much as he’s helped Venom acclimatize to earth, well, some of the alien shit has rubbed off on him, as well.

He remembers wondering if he’s still technically human, and the answer wasn’t ‘yes’. It wasn’t ‘no’, either, but the fact that it can’t be quantified as an absolute anymore is a little goddamn telling. It’s also very goddamn apparent why that doesn’t have a solid answer, any more.

He’s just sucked under this quicksand of hunger, drowning in a sea of bloodlust and something that feels too detached to be anger. It takes him a while to come back to himself. When he does, he knows exactly why.

He’s in an alley. Again. Fuck, is he just destined to kill dudes in alleys for the rest of his life? Looks like it.

More importantly, though, he’s just bitten a man’s head off, and is crunching the skull between his jaws, feeling the way the eyes pop out and the cranium shatters, the way the blood leaks from the neck like water through a colander. He can feel their long, sharp teeth puncture the skin of the face, crack into the skull and slide into the soft flesh of brain.

The rest of the body falls in front of them, twitching slightly as the nerves fire blanks up the spine to a non-existent brainstem. They’re holding a gun, and Eddie can feel bullets caught in their chest, stopped before they actually penetrate his body.

He feels the head slip down his throat, rolling its way down to their stomach. Then, they get started on the body, taking a leg here, an arm there, until they begin ripping the torso apart, feasting on guts and viscera like a hyena, crunching on vertebrae and cracking open ribs to expose the no-longer functional vital organs.

For the first time in what feels like years, he can think without this curtain of hunger masking him from the outside world. It’s not pleasant, but at least he can think for himself about things that aren’t ripping and tearing, can think in sentences and words rather than images and sensations.

He feels the last chunk of torso slide down his throat and looks up from the puddle where the body once lay. He finds himself staring into the face of a punk, youngish and high and with more piercings than Eddie’s seen outside of documentaries on body modification.
“Oh holy shit, dude, that was so fucking metal, oh my god.”

Eddie feels Venom sink back into his skin, and feels much restored for only having just eaten a single person. “Thanks, I guess. You gonna be alright?”

“Hell yeah, I’ll be alright! Just met fuckin’ Goo-man, and they saved me from, like, five dudes tryin’ to kill me!” The dude looks fucking jazzed, even though he just saw somebody get eaten a-fucking-live in front of him. “You just made my fuckin’ year, dude!”

“Pretty sure it was just one person?”

“Nah, dude, wayyy fucking more, holy shit!”

Venom manifests a tentacle and wraps themselves around his neck like an infinity scarf, nuzzling themselves into the hollow of his throat. “IT WAS SIX. YOU WERE OUT OF IT FOR A WHILE, THERE.”

“Oh, so you’re like two different people?” The punk says, no less stoked, “That makes so much sense! Does this make you Goo-men instead?”

“I mean, they don’t fall on the gender binary, so it’s not really a ‘men’ thing, you know?” Eddie isn’t touching the ‘you just killed and ate six people and forgot most of it’ thing. That’s definitely something to hash out when not in front of other people.

“Fuckin’ A! We need more superheroes who aren’t cis-hets, gotta love some fuckin’ diversity in the whole world-saving gig.” What an earnest motherfucker! Eddie can’t help liking the dude, actually.

“So, like, you’re a pretty cool dude, and chances are that folks will ask you about this whole—“ Eddie gestures around the alley, which has a ton of blood splattered around it.”—shit. So if you could do me a solid, and not mention anything about me as a person, that’d be pretty tight.”

“Oh yeah, for sure, no doubt, no doubt. I ain’t no fuckin’ snitch, Eddie Brock!”

What the fuck. “What the fuck?” Eddie says, confused. “How do you know my name?”
“I watch the goddamn local news, my dude! Shame about that Carlton Drake shit, you really got dicked over, but you did get a nice alien buddy outta that shit!” He laughs, and leans against the wall of the alley, flattening part of his frankly prodigious mohawk on the bricks with a dull crunch. “Anyway, dudes, I ain’t gonna spread this shit around? Like, yeah, I’m definitely gonna report a sighting of y’all, or whatever, but shit about you, personally? No fuckin’ way, buddy!”

“That’s real cool of you.” Eddie rolls his shoulders, embarrassed. He knew, intellectually, that being a fucking local celebrity was going to get him recognized, but he hadn’t actually pictured what the moment would be like. “You gonna stay out of trouble?”

“I mean, this was mostly just because a dude super hates me and got a few buddies together to try to kill me, and since you killed him and all his friends, I think we should be good?” He shrugs, the metal studs on his denim vest clinking on the brick behind him.

“Okay, cool, I guess. Find me on twitter, or whatever, if you need anything.” Eddie turns, and leaves the alley.

He pulls out his phone, looking at where he is. Fuckin’ Oakland, he really got out of his neighborhood this time. At least, like, being decentralized was probably good for folks not narrowing down who the fuck he is. He starts the long walk to the nearest BART station.

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He wakes up to a series of texts from Dan.

“Eddie, what happened between you and Anne?”

“I tried to go to your apartment, and your neighbor told me you jumped out a window?”

“And then he tried to get me to buy some of his albums???”

“Wait are you out Venoming?”

“Why are you in OAKLAND, Eddie?”

“SIX PEOPLE?”

“SIX”

“PEOPLE”
“?”

The final text is, of course, a link to an article, because that’s almost tradition at this point.

“SLIMY SAVAGE SLAYS SIX; SAVES PUNK: GOOEY MONSTER HAS NO GENDER BUT LOTS OF TEETH”

Well, at least they're cottoning on to the gender neutral pronouns.

Baby steps.

Chapter End Notes

Dissociation comes in many flavors, though the one I tried to describe here is specifically de-personalization.
Eddie’s getting started on his second cup of coffee, five-hundred words into an article about why liking things ironically is bullshit, when there’s a sudden knocking at the door. He pads over to the door, robe open over his boxer briefs, and checks the peephole.

It’s Anne. She’s looking a little freaked out, in that restrained way of hers. Shifting foot to foot, dressed in one of the many sharp pantsuits that she wears when she’s meeting clients all day in the office. Eddie checks the time on his phone—ten in the morning. Too early for her to be on her lunch hour, and even if she took an early one, a round trip from the law office to his apartment is long enough it doesn’t exactly leave much of a window for conversation.

He opens the door, and she rushes in without so much as a hello, closing the door behind her with a decisive click, something that would have been a slam if she weren’t so controlled with her movements.

“Sure, fine, just let yourself in, pour yourself some coffee.” Eddie says, rolling his eyes. “Anything you want, Anne?”

“You know, I was fine with this Venom shit, but once it starts leaking over into my work—“ She pauses for a moment, giving a double take. “Why aren’t you wearing any pants?”

“It’s my own goddamn house? Why would I wear pants in my own apartment, what am I, a savage?” Eddie scratches at his ribs, just to have something to do with his hands. He’s tempted to light up, but Anne has this thing where she hates the whole smoking thing, especially the ‘smoking
indoors around her’ thing, which is fair.

She looks around the apartment, and it occurs to him that, yeah, she’s never really been by before. He’s got a coffee mug full of cigarette butts sitting in the middle of the table, and there’s more bloodstains around than he’s really comfortable with; plus, like, he’s never been great at, you know, cleaning. It’s not like the apartment is a dump, or anything, but it definitely looks like a guy with a serious impulse control problem has been living in it for seven months.

“Are you smoking again?” She asks, like she doesn’t already know the answer. Fucking lawyers, always bringing the job wherever they go.

“Yeah?”

“Didn’t you quit when we moved in together?”

“Yeah, but we aren’t living together any more, so…”

“I don’t like it.” She says, after a beat. He’s not sure if she’s still talking about the smoking, or something else.

“Yeah, well, it’s not yours to like, is it?” That comes out a little more cutting than Eddie means it to, but he’s a little goddamn confused as to why she’s here, and yesterday’s argument is hanging over the conversation like a thick fog.

Anne blinks, chastened. “Fuck. You’re right, my bad, it’s just that you’ve been really cool with everything with Dan, and I just thought—“

“Fuck, Annie!” Eddie laughs, “The day after I met Dan, I had a mental breakdown in a lobster tank! I am the poster child for not dealing with emotions well.”

She nods. “Right, right, sorry, had somehow blocked that from my memory. Too fucking weird, you know?”

“I can say, with absolute certainty, that I’ve done weirder shit.” He takes a sip of his coffee. It’s
starting to get the wrong kind of cool, and it’s stupidly strong, and a little burnt.

“You know what, I don’t doubt that.” She opens up his fridge, and pulls out one of the sparkling waters he keeps in there, in case he wants to feel fancy when he’s drinking.

“…’S there a reason you ditched work to come over here?” Eddie asks, after a beat.

“Yeah, actually, there is.” She rolls her shoulders, and takes a long pull from the water. “This guy just showed up at the office, told me to tell you he says ‘hi’.”

“Ah, fuck.” He takes another sip of his lukewarm coffee. “What’d he look like?”

“Terrible beard, neon yellow glasses, flannel shirt. Smelled like that cologne that boys in eighth grade buy instead of showering.” She pauses, thinking. “And he was covered in bruises, too. His face was black and blue, mostly, and his jaw was really swollen.”

Eddie sets the coffee mug down so he doesn’t break it on accident. “Fuck!”

“You know him, or something?”

“I mean, I did break his jaw a few days ago, if that’s what you’re asking. But, like, he shot me in the throat right after that, so I think we’re pretty even.”

“Eddie? What the fuck?” She dropped the water bottle, and it fell to the floor, fizzing as it spread out over the wood.

Eddie handed her some paper towels. “He was trying to kidnap me! And he was being really disrespectful towards Venom, which is a major dick move, you know?”

“I’m talking about the part where you got shot, Eddie. You’re being very relaxed about the whole thing.” She sets the paper towels down on the ground, and picks up the bottle, placing it on the counter.
“Look, alright, it’s really not a big deal—“

“You getting shot is a pretty big deal, Eddie!”

Eddie blinks, “I mean, is it really?”

“Yes! It is!” She shakes her head, and starts shoving the paper towels around with a sensible brown heel. “I’m getting off topic. Make sure this stops bleeding into my work, alright? You know I get paid by the hour.”

“You know you could’ve just texted me, right?”

“I mean, we just left things at such a weird place yesterday, and I wanted to make sure we’re still good.”

“We’re good. Relax.” That’s not strictly accurate, because Anne has yet to fucking apologize for yesterday’s conversation, but they’re certainly fucking better. “Well, okay, we’re not good-good, but we’re definitely doing better, alright?”

“I still don’t like it.” She says, again, and Eddie knows exactly what she’s talking about, this time. “I mean—it’s just—this is a little fucking weird, to me, alright, and I still care about you, and I still worry.”

“Okay, but out of the two of us, Venom’s by far the more emotionally stable one.” He can feel them curl up a little bit inside him in affection, wrapping around his ribcage. They’re still a little fucked up about the whole Anne thing, like they’re expecting him to suddenly drop everything and fall to his knees in worship, like they’re expecting him to run off and fall headfirst back in love with Anne at the drop of a fucking hat. “Plus, they’re really good at fixing it whenever my throat gets destroyed, which is pretty fucking often, nowadays.”

“Look, it really just sounds like you got shot once, I mean—“

“Nope, there was that time I ate an entire box of iron nails, that time somebody slit my throat deep enough I felt it on my spine… uh, what else, fuck,” Eddie thinks for a moment. “Oh, I turned into liquid for a while, had to re-grow after that. And getting shot, right.”
Anne’s looking more and more nauseous with every passing item on the list. “How long has this been going on?”

“Fuck, I dunno, three weeks?” Eddie shrugs. “It’s really not a big deal, I’m kinda immortal now? Like, we’re still figuring out the limits of that shit.”

“Jesus Christ, Eddie.” She seems to almost fold in on herself, a little. “That’s pretty fucked—you really need a shrink.”

“The fuck do you think I talk with Dan about? His fantasy baseball team?”

Alright, alright.” She shrugs, and then seems to shake herself back into perfect posture in an instant. “This conversation isn’t over, but I really need to head back into the office. If you need anything, you call me, alright? I’m serious.”

“Of course.” Eddie says, not meaning it in the slightest. His fucking asshole neighbor is more understanding about the whole Venom thing than Anne. Hell, his neighbor has been pretty goddamn chill with him wandering the halls covered in blood, too—like, yeah, the man’s a little leery, but he hasn’t called the superintendent, or anything, and gotten him evicted or arrested. “You taking a lunch hour, or something?”

“Yes. Got it extended to an hour and a half, because chewing you out technically counts as Firm Business right now, but I really need to be headed back.” She stoops to pick up the sodden paper towels, and throws them in the trash, before turning on the sink and beginning to rinse off her hands. “You aren’t… involved in anything, are you?”

“Uh, well.” Eddie huffs out a sigh. “You’re probably going to want some plausible deniability on that one, Annie.” He says, meaning ‘yes, obviously’. “At any rate, if I do end up hypothetically needing legal counsel for alleged Venoming, you’ll be the first person I call.”

“Good.” She pats him on the shoulder, awkwardly, because they both kind of need the physical contact and they aren’t really at a hugging place yet. “Stay safe out there, Eddie.”

“Will do.” He says, not meaning it in the slightest.
“And one more thing!” She says, moving over to the door and opening it. “Clean your fucking apartment, please?”

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Eddie’s staring blankly at the laundry detergent at Mrs. Chen’s bodega, thinking. He’s tempted to try the laundry pod things, but they’re all shiny and shit, and gooey looking, and he doesn’t quite trust himself not to get curious and start eating them. The liquid detergent is all scented after flowers and shit, with flavors (scents, his mind corrects) named things like ‘midnight majesty’ and ‘ocean summer’. All Eddie’s memories of oceans in the summer involve the whole family heading down to Jersey City, being overpowered with the scent of cheap sunscreen and cheaper rum, the sand hot and course and full of broken glass under his bare feet.

There’s a rustling noise behind him, the sign he was waiting for while filling time comparing the merits of detergent he doesn’t actually need.

“You really need to get better at sneaking, Doctor Skirth. It’s not that hard, jeez.” He said, not bothering to turn. It’s kind of a dick move, yeah, but it’s also a stupid party trick that impresses folks a whole bunch.

“How did you know it was me?” She says, curious.

Eddie grabs a container of fabric softener, one claiming to be scented after ‘spring meadows’, and turns around. “You mean other than the fact that no one else bothers sneaking up on me?”

She nods, moving from where she’s tucked herself behind the edge of the aisle, next to the motor oil. “Yeah.”

“I saw you when I came in, you were lurking next to the two-liters of off brand soda.” He shrugs. “Anything you want to talk about? You’ve got my cell number, you could have just called.”

“It’s a—look, this is really more of an in person conversation, and I’m pretty sure they’ve got my phone tapped, so that’s kind of a non-starter right now.” She leans against the shelf of various automotive fluids, shoulders nudging over large cans of Fix-A-Flat and engine cleaner. “You’ve gotten yourself tied up in AIM.”
Eddie doesn’t bother denying it. “Yeah. Pretty sure they want to study me and Venom, try to duplicate them, or something.”

“I know.” She said, staring directly into his eyes. “I’m working for them.”

“What the fuck?” Fuck, was she just only taking jobs from mad scientist organizations? He told her that they were doing some super fucked up shit, but then she turns around and starts working for them? “Why would you ever fucking do that?”

“Not many people will take you for an interview after you’ve been presumed dead and publically associated with the research arm of the Life Foundation. I’ve got kids to feed! Plus, I figured that I could keep an eye on their projects, see what they’re trying to do, you know? Change it from the inside.”

That… made sense, he supposes. The Bay Area job market being what it is, plus how stupidly expensive most of the city is, it tracks that she’s taking whatever job she can.

That whole ‘changing it from the inside’ thing, though…He’s seen movies, and he’s interviewed guys in the joint for organized crime. He wonders if she knows the statistical likelihood of that actually occurring.

“I mean, their network security is for shit, though, it’s honestly a little embarrassing. You get any good benefits, or is it more of a freelance thing?” He asks, for lack of anything else to say.

“Eh, they match what I put into my 401(k), and there’s health insurance. No dental, though.”

“I mean,” Eddie says, “Dental insurance is a racket, anyway. Like, compared to other insurance, even.”

She shrugs. “Anyway, I wanted to tell you that AIM is really gunning for you, and I figured that since we’re kind of friends, it would be a good idea to warn you.”

“Oh, they’ve only tried to kidnap me twice, I don’t know how I missed that!” He snarks, crossing his arms.
“Eddie!” She swats him gently on the bicep. “I am serious! You really do not want to be caught by these guys!”

“You mean, you guys.” Eddie moves over to look at the dish soap, rolling his eyes. “I’m very aware of what y’all do, alright? You think I haven’t seen those leaked documents?”

“It’s worse than that. They’re doing some pretty bad stuff, there, and there’s only so much torture I can deal with watching, alright?” She shakes herself, joining him next to the dish soap. “I’m not waiting that long, again. I’m not letting more innocent people die in the name of progress.”

Fuck, Eddie thinks, not again. He’s not letting this shit happen again, he’s not getting fucking dragged into some weird mad scientist lab again.

“YOU SHOULD DO IT, EDDIE.” Venom manifests quickly, coiling around his neck and shoulders like a shawl. “WE CAN EAT THE FLANNEL MAN, EDDIE.”

“What the—What if someone else sees!” Dora says, aghast.

Eddie shrugs. “I mean, for one, Mrs. Chen already knows, right, like—we ate someone, whole, in front of her, she’s very aware of what we are.”

“And she still lets you shop here?”

“Yeah?” Eddie blinks, surprised. “Why wouldn’t she?”

Dora shakes her head, huffing slightly. “You know what, I’m not going to touch that one. Anyway, that’s actually not why I wanted to talk to you.”

“Oh, god, is this going to be more vague warnings about my personal safety? Because that’s what it was last time, and if it is,” He gestures towards the container of Barkeeper’s Friend, sitting on a shelf at eye level, “I’m just going to swallow an entire can of that and we’ll both see what happens.”

“EDDIE, PLEASE STOP TRYING TO POISON YOURSELF. THAT IS AN ACID, EDDIE.” They wrap a little further down his arms, restraining them a little bit. “PLEASE DO NOT DISOLVE
“Fuck, Vee, I’m just being dramatic, chill out.” Eddie lies, fully prepared to start playing chicken with industrial strength cleaning products. He looks at Dr. Skirth. “You were saying?”

“We had a break-in in our internal servers, somebody looking at your file.

“Yeah, that was me. Like, a while ago.”

“No, this was yesterday.” She gives him a hard look. “And what you did wasn’t hacking, it was exploiting bad network security. There’s a major difference. One is being good at coding, the other is being good at guessing passwords.”

Okay, that’s fair. “Any idea who did it, then?”

“It came from Manhattan, that’s all we were able to zero in on before the connection terminated. And clearly, they’ve got state of the art software, just to crack all the encryption the hard way.” She shrugs. “That give you any ideas?”

Eddie thinks for a moment, and something in the back of his head pings onto an idea. He’s not quite sure what it is, yet, but he knows that if he just sits down and fucking thinks for a while, fights tooth and nail with his own mind, he’ll be able to tease the information out. “There’s a lot of people in Manhattan who hate me, that doesn’t really narrow the list down all that much.”

“Your life, dear god.” She shakes her head. “It’s a little fucked up, is all I’m saying.”

Eddie rolls his eyes. “Not really.”

“Yes, really. Just, stay safe, alright?” She says, turning to go. “This all kind of feels like my fault, and I’d hate for you to get hurt.”

“I mean, getting mortal wounds is really more of a temporary problem these days.” Eddie’s grin softens a little. “Hey, Dora? Thanks.”
“You really don’t have to thank me, Eddie, I’m just trying to do what’s right.” She walks out of the bodega, taking off down the street.

Eddie moves towards the candy aisle, and picks up five chocolate bars, a large bag of little powdered donuts, and three different tubes of ‘tropical’ mentos, before making his way to the register.

“Eddie,” Mrs. Chen says, beginning to ring up his purchases. “You’ve been in the news a lot lately.”

“Yeah, well, you know how it is.” Eddie says, gently shoving Venom back into his skin. “I dunno, now that Venom and I are space-married, things have been a little weird, you know?”

“Good, you need someone to ground you, Eddie. You’re always going in seven different directions at once, it’s good to have someone to help you get your shit together.” She says, not blinking an eye at the whole ‘I married an alien on accident but we love each other so it’s okay’ thing. “I was going to set you up with one of my nephews, after that whole thing with the rocket, but you were kind of a mess for a while there, and then he married somebody on the LA Galaxy.”

“…Thanks?” Eddie’s not really sure how to respond to that, because such bold-faced, no questions asked acceptance of his complete dumpster-fire of a personal life is a little strange.

“It’s true. You were a mess after that lawyer-girl dumped you.” She didn’t have to fucking say it like that, no matter how true it is. “Anything else?”

“Uh, yeah, carton of cigarettes, some Ketel One, and a bottle of Kahlua, please.”

“A whole carton? Really?”

“I haven’t had the best couple of weeks, Mrs. Chen, c’mon. I’m feeling really judged, here.”

“Get out of my store, go kill somebody, or something.” She hands him his receipt. “And listen to those meditation CDs!”
When he gets back to the apartment, Eddie changes into some sweatpants, fixes himself an enormous drink, throws on a season of *Real Housewives of New York*, and smokes an entire pack of cigarettes. He puts a few out on the surface of his table, again, just because it’s been a while, and nothing quite scratches that destructive itch like *burning*. He makes another drink.

Who the fuck could be looking him up in Manhattan? Specifically looking into what AIM has on him, not just pulling an internet search and paying the three dollars to track his ass down—organized crime bosses tend not to be the most hardcore of computer hackers, in Eddie’s unfortunately fairly extensive experience.

And then there’s the thing where they took the hard way in, instead of just exploiting the bad network security. Some motherfucker was showing off how good of a hacker they are, was arrogant enough to assume that the situation was much more difficult, and that they were the only person able to crack it.

Two and two are starting to add up. It’s not four yet, but it isn’t negative thirty-seven, either, so that’s progress. Eddie makes himself another drink, a Black Russian. One part Kahlua, two parts vodka, on ice. They’ve always hit him like heavy artillery, because there’s nothing tempering the liquor.

Fuck, what arrogant son of a bitch in New York City has a hard-on for knowledge of active vigilantes and a skill for hacking—

Oh god.

Okay.

Fuck.

Tony Stark is looking for him.

And with him comes the full force of the Avengers, unless they all hate each other again. Which, to be fair, is a fairly common occurrence; those fucks are more of a soap opera than the X-Men sometimes.
“EDDIE.” Venom says, curling themselves down his arms and around his neck, reaching little fingers of tentacles up into his hair. “WE SHOULD DEAL WITH AIM FIRST, THAT IS THE MORE PRESSING ISSUE.”

They are right, at least. AIM is actively threatening to kill him, the Avengers are just theoretically going to kill him. Or, hey, don’t they have that dude who can grow really, really tall? Didn’t he do stuff in San Francisco, like, five years ago? He can take a tall dude; Eddie Brock has spent enough time as a short, angry man to be very, very good at tripping gigantic bastards.

Granted, this is a whole new class of ‘gigantic bastard’, but still. Kick him in the back of the knee and he’ll probably still go down like a ton of bricks.

He calls Dan.

“Hey, Eddie! What’s happening, man?” Dan says, cheery as ever.

“Just sitting in my apartment watching reality TV. What about you?” Eddie asks, rubbing gently on one of the ropy tentacles that Venom has wrapped around his middle.

“Oh, you know, same old, same old. Nothing too interesting, had to do an emergency appendectomy earlier, and somebody accidentally swallowed a thumbtack, not anything very exciting. “ Eddie hears him yawn wide enough that the crack his jaw makes is crystal clear through the phone. “Why’re you calling?”

“I—I dunno, it’s stupid, it’s just…”

“Eddie. I haven’t slept in thirty six hours. Stop it with the ‘nothing that happens to me matters’ shit, alright? Because it does, and I love you like a brother, but I’m really not equipped for a hardcore conversation about feelings, tonight.”

“AIM keeps trying to kidnap me so I’m going to probably track them down and kill their head neckbeard and also the Avengers probably know my address and they might show up to murder me because of some galactic law that they don’t understand because they don’t like my marriage.” Eddie says, the words pouring out of his mouth in a rush.
“That’s rough, buddy.” Dan says, after a beat. “You got a plan for the AIM thing? Because that seems like something you should deal with sooner rather than later.”

“Find their hideout, show up, eat whoever tries to shoot at me, destroy their computers, and pull the fire alarm, or something, get some emergency personnel there.” Eddie says, improvising the plan as he talks. Arguably, this is how his better plans form—the others tend to be improvised while he’s actually doing them, so this is definitely a step the fuck up from those.

“Might want to workshop that a little bit, buddy.” Dan says, not unkindly. “But hey, you might meet the Avengers, that’s cool!”

“They probably want to kill me, Dan!”

“Yeah, but still! You could meet Spider-Man, Eddie!”

They talk for a little while longer, mostly about how Spider-Man is actually probably a literal child, and how Dan really needs to start reading books that have more value as literature than they do as kindling, before ringing off for the night.

Then, Eddie mixes himself another drink, cracks his knuckles, lights yet another cigarette, and gets to searching the internet.

AIM, as opposed to other mad scientist organizations, has one major disadvantage. Whereas groups like HYDRA are shady and constantly thrumming under the surface of seemingly every single social interaction in the country, AIM is an actual company that’s publicly traded. Which, yeah, is pretty fucked up, but that also means that every single outpost has legal paperwork.

So, he just looks up where their San Francisco branch is, and the history of the building. Then he gets on the website for the City of San Francisco, and finds the deed in the public records. He prints out the floor plan, and draws a vague route through it.

He pours himself another drink, watches some more Real Housewives, and pads back to the bedroom.

And that night, he sleeps like a goddamn rock. The next morning, he has a cup of black coffee, throws on the most generic outfit he owns, and heads out towards AIM.
Plausible Deniability does actually have legal precedent, but it has fallen out of favor recently.

Dental insurance is a little ridiculous, and is set up very badly. And yes, that's compared to other insurance.

Don't eat Barkeeper's Friend. It's a 12% solution of Oxalic acid, which is really strong, and, uh, not something you want to be eating.

Hacking is a very specific thing, and at best, Eddie's just good a guessing passwords. Hackers however, is a GREAT movie, and y'all should watch it. It's on amazon prime.

Black Russians are DELICIOUS, but they will fuck you up.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Eddie plays with a katana, commits some arson, and ruins his shirt.

Chapter Notes

So, there's some pretty graphic gore in this one. If you'd like to skip Eddie's adventures with the samurai sword, it takes place between 'Oh! I am so sorry' and 'there's a lot of his fucking DNA in this room'

just a small marvel continuity note: this is a weird movie/comic fusion, so we've got the same folks as the movies, only infinity war didn't happen and civil war got resolved eventually though kinda begrudgingly.
edit 5/5/2019: Just added some "further reading"/sources in the notes section! As per usual, this is in no way necessary to reading or understanding the chapter, it's just a bit of fun.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

So, first thing’s first. Eddie fucking knows that his plan is shit, right? And it isn’t because of some sort of galaxy-brain reasoning where the plan is intentionally so terrible because the mad scientists will be expecting some intricate scheme that involves Mission Impossible-style masks and machines that can crack passwords in thirty seconds and seven-ish different people with loads of infiltration experience playing clearly defined roles. His plan is garbage because, to put it frankly, Eddie Brock isn’t the best at thinking things through, and he knows it. The less moving parts of the plan there are, the less chances there are that it can fuck up, and the more adaptable it is.

Also, like, who the fuck is he going to ask to pretend to be a health inspector or a janitor or whatever, especially when he’s expecting the whole situation to be a fucking bloodbath? Who has the free time, let alone the stomach or inclination, to get into what’s no doubt an incredibly illegal venture that’s for sure going to involve loads of murder? And why the fuck would he be friends with someone willing to drop everything to get some hardcore killing done, before returning to their regular life? Other than Dan—Eddie’s pretty sure he might have a ridiculously checkered past, but he’s very happy leaving that door firmly fucking shut. Plus, like, he just got off a long shift, and that would be a really dick move.

Anyway, he’s in this alone. Which is probably for the best, from a collateral damage standpoint; Venom can get a little excited once the blood starts flying, and he wouldn’t want to, like, accidentally eat the wrong person.
As he nears the BART station closest to the AIM headquarters, he texts Dora.

“jsyk ur gonna want to not b at work”
“say ur kids sick or smthg”
“ne thng I shld no?”

Once he steps off the train, he gets a reply

“Thanks, for the heads-up, Eddie.”
“The regional director is here, but all the tests are offsite”
“It’s all documented on our internal network”
“Emergency procedures lock down the building and start an alarm, so you’ll want to at least get the noise dealt with first”

And then, after a pause:

“Stay safe, Eddie.”

He replies with the fire emoji.

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The AIM headquarters isn’t exactly in the best neighborhood. One of those ones that’s just on the beginning of getting gentrified, so all the small businesses are getting run out by rising rents, but nothing else is opening. The sort of neighborhood with a lot of empty storefronts, a few expensive versions of shit they already had, and more than one place where you can sell your own plasma. The headquarters itself is located in an otherwise abandoned office park a little ways off the main drag, a decent walk away from the BART station.

Eddie checks his phone, walking through the half-full parking lot up towards the door. As far as he can tell, the building has two stories, with the upper level being primarily offices, and the lower being some form of cube-farm/”fun” workspace/file storage area.
“Vee?” He asks, quietly, pulling his shoulders back and trying to look as bland as possible, “You ready to bust some fuckin’ heads?”

ALWAYS. He can feel them spread out, under his shirt, like a tight undershirt, made out of flesh. They stretch tight over his biceps and shoulders, clinging to him like a second skin. It’s just the right kind of uncomfortable.

“Right,” Eddie says, before opening the front door. “Let’s do something stupid.”

The lobby is clean, aggressively so, and all straight lines. Eddie immediately goes up to the receptionist, and tries to look as non-threatening as possible. It’s a little bit of a fools errand, because no matter how genial he comes off he’s still a shortish, muscley dude with a buzzed head and visible neck tattoos, but some folks really go for the whole ‘reformed bit of rough’ act.

“Can I help you?” She asks, a little nervous, but not worryingly so. This didn’t seem like a place that got many visitors.

“Yeah, I’ve got an appointment with your regional director?” Eddie smiles, blandly, and tries project some ‘tech bro’ energy. He starts bullshiting. “There was just an issue with some investors, and I though it would be better to deal with it personally, you know? No need to get corporate involved.”

“He’s out for lunch, right now, but I can get one of the guards to take you up to his office?” She offers.

“That’d be great. Thanks,” He checks her nametag. “Cheryl.”

“Oh, call me Cherry, please.” She giggles, and taps a few keys on her computer, before waving to the guard who’s standing by the door to the rest of the building. “Could you take this man up to the director’s office? He has an appointment to discuss some recent investors, and you know how much he hates it when I leave the desk.”

The guard grunts in assent, and leads Eddie into the office proper, bypassing a room crammed to the gills with cubicles, and another with some very sad looking bean bags, a Ping-Pong table, a few boxes of donuts, and the world’s most depressing kitchenette, on the way to the elevator.
As they’re rising between floors, he notices that the guard has a gun. And not one of those fancy deals that carry non-lethal rounds, this gun is straight out of a seventies detective movie—big and long and one of the most obvious metaphors for a dick that exist in the modern cultural lexicon outside of trucks with two sets of back tires and Cuban cigars. Eddie also marks that he has a pair of handcuffs, a tazer that looks like it’s gotten goosed up with some sort of miniature car battery, and a big can of bear mace. Then there’s the K-Bar he’s got strapped to his belt. He’s not built like a regular rent-a-cop, either, he can tell through the shitty uniform that the man’s built like a professional wrestler, except without all the knee injuries. Private security, then. Fuck.

The upper level is mostly glass-walled conference rooms, and smaller offices for individual employees. He passes Dora’s, and notices that she’s wisely fucked off, and taken everything except the potted ficus (including, he notes, the company-issued laptop he sees in all other offices). They pass two more guards, all carrying the same fucking overkill of an arsenal. The regional director’s office sits at the end of a hallway, closed off and larger than the other offices.

The guard lets him in, and lets the door close softly behind him.

The first thing Eddie does is sit behind the desk and wake up the computer, signing in with his fake AIM credentials. He downloads his own file to a flash-drive, before deleting it off the internal server. Then, he goes ahead and enters the ‘utilities’ section of the internal server and disables all the building’s alarms, before logging off, and wiping his fingerprints off the mouse and keyboard.

He stands up and starts snooping around the rest of the room. Directly across from the computer, hung next to the door, is a large rack holding no less than seven replica samurai swords, lovingly polished. On the other side of the door, a large Banksy print hangs, the one of the rioter throwing a bouquet of flowers. Behind the desk is a large wall of windows, flooding the room with natural light; the other walls are covered in black wood paneling, giving the entire room the feel of a bachelor pad from the year 1992. Hanging on one wall is one of those fancy clocks without any numbers or face, the kind where you just stick the little marks on the wall attach the hands separately.

Eddie sets himself down on one of the uncomfortably boxy looking armchairs that face the desk, and waits. He writes a few notes on his phone, checks twitter, and basically just focuses all his energy on not getting up, grabbing one of the many katanas on display, and hacking the room to pieces. That, he thinks, would really ruin the ambush. And a good 70% of why he’s doing this assault the hard way, instead of just calling in an anonymous tip and getting a swat team to raid the place, is so he can see the look on that regional director’s face as he realizes exactly what the fuck is up.

Eddie cracks his knuckles, and settles in for a long wait.

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It legitimately takes half an hour for the regional director to return from lunch. It’s a little boring, because Eddie’s phone starts getting low on battery, and he has to resort to brainstorming hypothetical articles while alternatively cracking his knuckles, drumming his fingers, and humming softly to himself. He would let Venom out for a cuddle, or something, but he’s not sure if there are cameras in this office or not, and he’d really rather bring out his space spouse when it’s time to start murdering folks, just to streamline the whole process.

He hears the door open behind him, and adamantly doesn’t turn to look.

“Oh! I am so sorry!” He hears the hipster say, as the door clicks shut behind him. He can see a vaguely human-shaped blob reflected in the window. “Cheryl said you wanted to talk to me about … the… investors…” He trails off as he settles down at his desk, and gets a good look at Eddie. “Oh fuck.”

Eddie grins, and his mouth suddenly has way more teeth than it did a moment earlier. The sharp, pointed teeth sprout out of his gums, and run out of room, some ripping themselves outwards from the empty flesh at the bases of his teeth. They stab through his lips, sending a waterfall of blood cascading down his chin and neck.

“What was that?” He asks, every movement of his lips tearing them more, and increasing the amount of blood flow. He isn’t really sure why Venom is letting this happen, why they’re letting him tear his own face to ribbons, but he’s honestly a little bit into it. “I didn’t quite hear you, there.”

“Where are the investors?” He asks, quietly. He also stands up, and starts slowly edging his way towards the rack of samurai swords. Eddie actually really hopes they’re edged, and that the man is going to try to fight him with a goddamn katana.

“There never were any investors.” Eddie says, letting his mouth hang open slightly, to accommodate his new, dagger-like teeth. He can taste the fear that lays heavy on the air, can feel his lips cracking open at the sides to accommodate his much larger jaw, tearing his ruined mouth open into a gaping maw of weeping flesh. He can feel the air hitting his now exposed and shredded cheek muscles, the sudden cold on his flesh a small thrill. “Cherry didn’t even check to see if I had an appointment.”

Not that Eddie has anything against Cherry. She seems nice. But this is all mind-games right now, and proving that he’s more familiar with the man’s receptionist than he is, is a very easy way to get under his skin. Though, to be fair, Eddie’s slow destruction of his own face is doing that pretty well on it’s own. He feels like this should hurt more. Is Venom stopping the pain, or is this just another thing where he’s so angry he’s just shutting everything out?
THE LATTER, EDDIE. WE ARE A LITTLE IMPRESSED. Venom’s sibilant voice whispers, directly into his temporal lobe. YOUR BRAIN DOES VERY STRANGE THINGS WHEN YOU ARE FEELING INTENSE EMOTION.

Cool, okay, that’s probably something he should be way more worried about than he actually is.

“I’ll have to fire her.” The hipster says, distantly, creeping ever-closer to the rack of swords. “I can’t have that kind of incompetence at AIM.”

“Motherfucker, you aren’t going to have anything, anywhere here in a goddamn minute.” Eddie turns, standing up, sending a wave of blood slushing down onto the room’s plush cream carpet. “Hope you made your peace with god, you son of a bitch.”

The other man grabs a katana, and unsheathes it in a fluid motion, before rushing Eddie with an inhuman screech, bringing the blade down onto the dome of Eddie’s skull, embedding it into his forehead, cleaving into his cranium directly over his left eye. He feels the cold steel of the blade slice through his muscles and chip against his skull, before a sudden nothingness as it manages to force its way even deeper, down to the brain and its lack of nerve cells.

The hipster tries to lever the blade out, but it remains wedged into the gorge freshly cleaved into his skull. He lets go, and suddenly looks very, very afraid.

“Not good enough, you goddamn no-good neckbeard shit-stain sonovabich!” Eddie yells, pulling the sword out of his own skull with a sickening noise, parts of his own brain landing on the ground with a splat.

WE ARE GOING TO FIX THIS BEFORE YOU DIE, EDDIE. YOU ARE VERY LUCKY WE KNOW EXACTLY WHAT GOES WHERE IN YOUR WEIRD WRINKLY ELECTRICAL TISSUES. Venom says to him, distantly, as he feels his skull knitting back together, the bone boiling up from the underlying tissue like a splinter working its way out of a blister.

Eddie snaps the sword to the side, like he’s seen in samurai movies, and it sends the viscera that clung to the blade flying against the large Rothko print hanging on the otherwise blank wall, staining it with clumps of red. “Ready to fuckin’ die?”

Eddie brings the sword sharply in, wrenching it through the other man’s body in a vicious, horizontal
slash. He feels the blade catch on his spine, and it falls out of his hands with a clatter.

Eddie feels his tongue move of its own accord, wrapping around the hipster’s throat and dragging him sharply towards his now much larger mouth, hanging open like some grotesque imitation of a marionette.

Alright, Vee, Eddie thinks, it’s your show, now.

They finally ooze up, dripping themselves over him like some sort of otherworldly baptism. Their mouth opens wider than ever before, and they chomp down on the hipster’s torso, severing it from the rest of his body, and letting it slide down their throat in one whole chunk. They make short work of the rest of the body, wolfing it down quickly.

Fuck, Eddie thinks, there’s a lot of his fucking DNA in this room, now isn’t there? How the fuck is he going to get rid of it, it’s pretty easy to harvest unless—

“Hey Vee? Can I get back out for a second? You’re gonna want to be safe in my body for this next bit.”

They oblige, melting back into his skin, and Eddie rips some paper from the printer, laying it out on the floor in a track, winding it across the room haphazardly. Then, he pulls out his lighter, and sets one on fire, feeling something nice and satisfied click in his mind as the flames quickly spread across the room, before catching on the carpet and spreading voraciously through the polyester, until Eddie finds himself confronted with a wall of raging flame.

It feels great.

But he should probably make himself scarce.

Eddie walks out of the room, closes the door behind him, and finds himself face to face with three of the heavily armed security guards when he turns around, each with their ridiculously large handguns trained at him. He wonders if they notice the building inferno in the other room, the smell is starting to permeate the rest of the building.

Shouldn’t a fire alarm be going off—
Oh, right, he shut those off so Venom wouldn’t constantly be falling out of his skin like water through a colander.

“On your knees or we will shoot!” One of them says, and against his better judgment, Eddie collapses, because if one iota of self-preservation has ingrained itself in his mind over his adult life, it’s ‘do not give police a reason to shoot you’.

One of them lumbers behind him, and roughly hauls him up, locking the police-issue handcuffs around his wrists in angry, controlled movements. “You have the right to remain silent, anything you say—“

Eddie can feel the heat of the fire leeching through the door behind him, but that doesn’t stop Venom from reaching a tentacle out of his chest and dragging the security guard into a mouth that’s opened up in the middle of his torso, swallowing him whole. He can feel the muscles in his stomach moving, but he can taste the blood in his mouth, can feel the limbs slipping down his gullet.

One of the other guards shoots him in the shoulder, and he feels it explode with a sudden crack of pain, feels the bullet bore all the way through the front of his arm to the back, punching out and erupting from the ropy muscles in his shoulder. He can feel the bones shatter in an instant. Venom just snaps the guard’s neck, extending their long tongue from their new stomach-mouth and dragging his lifeless body to their glistening maw, hauling him inside in a way that defies all known laws of physics.

The final guard gets a few shots off, but Eddie rushes him, chest first, and tackles him into their large, gaping mouth.

He’s still handcuffed, and he can hear the crackling of the fire, now. Time to go.

He sees the wall of windows on the other end of the hallway, past the elevator. It leads straight outside. He heads towards the window at a dead sprint, feeling his wrists try and wrench themselves apart against the police-grade handcuffs. But they’re strong, and he doesn’t keep a handcuff key on him at all times, so unless he’s up to chopping his own hand off, it seems like he’s pretty thoroughly stuck.

He’s getting closer to the windows, now, feet pounding on the floor in tandem with the heart in his chest, launching himself through the glass shoulder-first, meeting the slight resistance of the crystalline pane and breaking through. He lands a second later, in a sudden tangle of limbs and
broken bones on the asphalt of the parking lot.

Venom straightens his bones out, first, before burning shut the lacerations and scrapes covering his skin.

Eddie looks down at himself. He’s utterly *covered* in blood, most of it his own, and he’s still handcuffed. “Hey, Vee? Do you think you be my shirt for a while? It’s kinda covered in blood, and I’m not really in good shape to turn it inside out.”

“*OF COURSE, EDDIE.*” They wrap around his arms, sliding down his chest until they look something like a black t-shirt that just happens to be made out of liquid. “*WOULD YOU LIKE US TO EAT THE HANDCUFFS AS WELL?*”

It’s tempting, but not as much as the possibility of having a pair of legitimate, industrial-strength handcuffs for, uh, *personal use.* “Could you just, like, unlock them? Kinda want to keep them, you know?”

*OH, EDDIE,* He hears in his head, as he feels a small finger of flesh worm its way down from his arm, wind, feather-light around his wrists, and snake into the little keyhole of the cuffs, unlocking them. *WE KNOW.*

Of course, that only gets them off of one wrist, but that’s a lot better than being actively restrained on the way home. He starts the long walk to the BART station, the open manacle of the handcuff dangling from his left wrist.

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Eddie’s about to open up his door when his neighbor ducks out.

“How the *fuck*—You know what? Not my fuckin’ business, so long as it doesn’t actually get my
own apartment shot up.” He shakes himself slightly, getting back on topic. “Anyway, some asshole tried to break into your apartment today, figured I should let you know. “

“Jesus, again?”

“Yeah, I dunno, some skinny white dude. Looked sorta like that guy from Clueless? Anyway, he didn’t manage to get through the door, and while he was doing that, I managed to slip him the contact card for Saint’s Anchor? We’re trying to expand our horizons, right, because there’s only so many house-parties, you know?”

“And?”

“He said somethin’ about his daughter having a birthday comin’ up, and asked if we also do Bat Mitzvahs, which, hey, we do now, and I feel like we’re getting’ kinda pigeon-holed into this novelty act, stickin’ on the circuit, you know? So we got to talkin’, and it turns out that he was in the joint with our drummer, right?”

“So did he break in or not?” Eddie asks, words spilling out of his mouth as quickly as possible.

“Probably? Like, the dude left, but a while later I was hearing some weird noises on the fire escape, so he mighta snuck in that way—you’ve got this thing where you don’t lock your windows, because we’re a lot of floors up? You gotta get better at that, dude, it makes it way too easy to break in to your place. Speaking of, my dude, you’ve really gotta get your DVR organized, it’s all reality tv and Antiques Roadshow.”

Eddie’s a little goddamn lost, now. “Wait, you’re breaking into my apartment again?” He blinks, and looks directly into his neighbor’s eyes. “Plan your next words very carefully.”

“I don’t like, steal anything, and it’s only when you’re out cracking skulls for the greater good, or whatever the fuck, but yeah, man, you’ve got all the premium cable channels and add-free streaming, of course I’m gonna take advantage of that. Plus, like, that’s just kinda a thing I do, and your apartment is always a fun challenge, you know?” He shrugs. “And, like, I know I’m not gonna find weird shit in there. That lady, who lived a few floors below us and moved out like three months ago? She had like three taxidermied cats in her living room.”

“You know what?” Eddie says. This conversation, like every single conversation he’s ever had with his neighbor, has spun wildly out of his control. “Fuck it, just don’t stain any of the furniture.”
“Right on, dude. I’ll put some beers in your fridge, next time, or something.” He pauses, curious. “What’s it like to wear your alien lover as a shirt, anyway?”

Venom opens up a large smile on the front of his shirt, teeth stretching all the way across his stomach. A big glob of alien spit falls onto the floor of the hallway.

“You know what?” The neighbor says, “Forget I asked. Please don’t kill the dude who broke into your apartment, he might buy some of my albums.” And with that, he shuts himself back into his own apartment, locking the door firmly behind him.

Eddie girds his loins, and unlocks his own place.

A lanky, brunette man is sitting at his dining table, hands up, and doing his best to look very innocent. Eddie recognizes that look, because he’s also broken into places and gotten caught—it’s the sort of look that, if vocalizes, would sound something like, ‘Gee, officer, I didn’t expect to see you here!’.

“Oh! I’m Scott.” The lanky man says, with a little wave. “The Avengers sent me to check you out, and since they know my PO, I figured that I’d better, you know? Like, I’m pretty sure Tony Stark meant something along the lines of ‘track you down and take you in for questioning’, since those were the words he used, but I’ve not been feeling too charitable with the guy after he got me thrown in his extra-judicial underwater super-max prison.”

Oh god, Eddie thinks, there’s two of them.

Chapter End Notes

Sword Guys are more common than you'd think, and come in many varieties. Our hipster here definitely refers to his as 'the blade'.

Mark Rothko is famous for his large, abstract paintings that are primarily large colored rectangles. (some theories are that they're all just very abstracted landscapes? which makes sense, but, you know, trying to rationalize the abstract art of a man who died over 30 years ago is kind of a fools errand).

Yes, Eddie, your DNA is allll kinds of over that room.

So, like, this focuses on house fires, but it's a really good timeline for how fast things
catch fire and how fucked you are five minutes after initial ignition (short answer? if you've got carpet, very.).
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Eddie makes a friend, has some feelings, and drinks an obscene amount of coffee.

Chapter Notes

edit 5/5/2019: added sources/"further reading" in the end notes. As per usual, they aren’t needed to understand the chapter, they’re just extra stuff that i either found while doing research or thought would be fun. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So are you gonna, like, try to arrest us, or…?” Eddie says, staring at the other man, curious.

“I mean, I can if you want?” Scott says, shrugging. His hands are still up. “But, like, I know that’s a fight I can’t win, I’ve read the news. And honestly? I’m a local dude, it’s not like I didn’t know exactly who the hell I was supposed to go try and fight.”

“SHOULD WE EAT HIM, EDDIE? HE LOOKS BONY.” Venom says, speaking through the mouth that’s carved itself out of where they’re pretending to be his shirt.

“What the fuck?” Scott says, shrilly. His voice goes up about two and a half octaves.

“Oh, yeah,” Eddie says, “This is Venom, they live in my body, we’re space-married.” He gestures to where they are pretending to be his shirt. “Vee, baby, you don’t have to be a shirt anymore, c’mon. And no eating Scott, okay? I can’t be the only vigilante in the Bay Area, there’s a real urban sprawl issue.”

They sink back into his skin, revealing his t-shirt that is absolutely covered in blood. Ah, shit, Eddie thinks, not the best way to meet a new person and convince them you aren’t a fucking serial killer.

“Are those handcuffs? Were you just arrested? Why are you covered in blood?” Scott asks, still
“Technically,” Eddie says, because he was engaged to a lawyer for years and therefore knows what the fuck is up with this particular aspect of the law, “It doesn’t count if they don’t mirandize you, and on account of me gettin’ brained by a samurai sword five minutes earlier, and them shooting me, they didn’t exactly get the chance to finish.”

“Oh my god,” Scott says, almost reverently, “Your life is a nightmare.”

Eddie shrugs. “I mean, kinda? Ain’t too bad, though.” He rolls his shoulders, and they make a telling crack. “I’m gonna go change into something that isn’t covered in blood, and then we can talk, or whatever. And Christ, put your hands down, jeez, Vee’s not gonna eat you unless you try to kill me, or something.”

Eddie pads back towards the bedroom, changing quickly into a pair of sweats and one of his old t-shirts, worn soft with age, the text on the front cracked and faded, proclaiming ‘PROUD UNION MEMBER: UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE BEG’. He walks back out into the main room of the apartment. “You want a beer?”

“No, it’s two in the afternoon!” Scott says, somewhat affronted. “But, yeah, actually, this feels like it’s gonna be a beer conversation, you know?”

“Oh, for sure,” Eddie pulls two bottles out Molson out of the fridge, grabbing the magnetic bottle-opener from where it’s stuck on the front of the door and cracking them open. “So, is there anything specific you want to talk about?”

Scott shrugs. “The instructions I was given were to tell you that killing people is bad and there will be consequences. So, uh,” He puts on an affected, somewhat deeper voice, “Killing people is bad, and there will be consequences.”

Eddie passes him a beer. “You’re really underselling this whole scared straight thing, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, well, I don’t actually have that much of a problem with it, but Stark was reminding me about how conditional me not being in his super illegal underwater prison was, and I figured I might as well at least make a how of it.” Scott takes a long sip of his beer. “The man’s kinda a dick.”
Eddie snorts. “Trust me, I’m aware. I was an investigative reporter in New York City a while back, there’s a lotta shit I learned about him.” Something occurs to him. “Tell me about this privately owned secret prison he has in international waters for his political enemies?”

“I’m pretty sure it’s run by the government, actually.”

“That,” Eddie ways emphatically, pointing with his beer bottle for emphasis, “Does not make it better.”

They sit in silence for a moment, nursing their beers.

Venom slides their way out of Eddie’s skin and up his spine, wrapping themselves gently around his neck like a scarf and nuzzling into the hollow of his throat. “SHOULD WE EAT TONY STARK, EDDIE?”

“Nah, Vee, too high-profile. Plus, he’s got this business empire and no heirs, so that’ll go up for sale if he dies, and which means that whoever buys it is probably gonna get back into selling weapons, since that’s a lot more profitable than clean energy.” He pats them, absentmindedly, before looking up at Scott. “What’s your stance on the whole killing dudes, thing, you know, since we share a city, and all?”

Scott thinks for a moment. “I mean, if they’re actively trying to kill you or somebody else, I don’t really see the issue? It’s not my thing, but I’m also tryin’ to set a good example for my daughter, and ‘Daddy kills people sometimes’ isn’t exactly a conversation I’m eager to have, you know?”

“That makes sense, I guess.” Eddie takes another sip of his beer. “I just kinda keep wandering into situations where people try to kill me.”

“That’s pretty fucked up. You ever consider, like, not eating folks?” Scott asks, honestly curious.

“It’s more of a—Right, so Venom needs a host to live, and unless I want them to start eating my organs, they need some sort of sustenance, you follow me?”

Scott nods.
“Yeah, well, part’a what they need to live comes only from chocolate and other folks’ brains. It’s some sorta neurotransmitter, I dunno, but those are the only places it shows up, and if we don’t eat, we get a little hungry.”

“So just eat chocolate?”

“Tried that. Lasted about a week, and then I jumped off my fire escape, stopped feeling pain, and blacked out until we ate like six people.” Eddie shrugs. “I’m gonna try not to do that any more.”

“So, like,” Scott says, trying not to sound too morbidly curious and failing miserably, “What’s your body count looking like?”

“Let’s see, four people today, six yesterday, three guys who tried to kidnap me, that guy who slit my throat, the dude at the bodega a while back, and—shit, I’m forgetting one, aren’t I?”

“THE ONE WHO TRIED TO SHOOT YOU, EDDIE. WE DIDN’T LIKE HIM.” Venom replies, nuzzling against the side of his head like a cat.

“Right, yeah, forgot about him. So that brings us to, what, sixteen?” Eddie shrugs, and re-counts, mentally. “Yeah, sixteen. ’S kinda a lot.”

He pulls a cigarette out of the pack sitting on the table and lights up, taking a long drag.

Scott just stares at him, somewhat aghast.

“Fuck, I scared you off, didn’t I? Goddammit. I need more friends, fuck, and now the Avengers are gonna try and kill me because Thor doesn’t like my marriage.” Eddie sighs. “Fuck.”

“Wait.” Scott says, “What?”

“I dunno, dude, my entire social life is my ex-fiance, her new boyfriend, the lady who runs my bodega, and my neighbor who keeps seeing me covered in blood.” Eddie takes another drag of his
“No, about the part where you think Thor is going to kill you! That makes zero sense!” Scott runs both his hands through his admittedly fantastic hair. Was that a side-effect of super-heroing? Just constantly having rugged good looks and the perfect amount of stubble to look like an every-man and not a felon?

“Yeah, so technically because Vee and I have symbiosis or whatever the fuck we’re classified as married under galactic law, and there’s just kinda a kill-on-sight policy, I dunno.” He takes another pull of his beer, and begins peeling the label off of the bottle. “And Thor’s an alien, so like, he’ll probably follow that.”

Scott blinks. “Wait, Thor’s an alien? ALIENS EXIST?”

“Did you just miss that whole thing in New York a few years back, where that enormous portal opened up in the middle of the sky and like a million insect dudes and some space-whales came out?”

“I was in prison, then! And when I finally heard about it a few months later, all of those guys were talking about it like some sort of dimensional hole thing, and it sounded like bullshit, and anyways I was more focused on not choking to death on the shitty food!” Scott talks with his hands, gesturing wildly. “Aliens, man! Wild.”

“…Not really? Vee’s an alien, and they’re pretty normal.” Eddie runs his fingers along where they’ve migrated slightly, stretching across one of his shoulders and trailing slightly down to one of his biceps. “Like, yeah, they’re liquid and completely contradict the laws of physics and eat brains or whatever, but they’re pretty fucking great, actually”

“Well, alright then. Fuck, I came here to tell you something, what was it.” Scott raps his knuckles on the side of his head a few times, as if to physically shake the thoughts loose in his own head. “Right! The Avengers are lookin’ into your shit, man. And they probably want me to bring you in for questioning, or whatever, so don’t be surprised if you come home one of these days and Tony Stark is sitting in here judging your DVR. Speaking of, dude, you’re recording Antiques Roadshow but not Dog Cops?”

Of course he went through Eddie’s DVR. Obviously. “Look, thanks for the warning, and all, but I’m starting to get real tired of folks trying to kidnap me and/or breaking into my apartment. This happens to me a lot.”
“I’m literally just the messenger, dude. And your apartment is surprisingly hard to get into, by the way. I used to be a cat burglar, right, and if you hadn’t left your window unlocked there’s no way I was getting in without some serious property damage.” Scott finishes off his beer. “You want me to put in a good word with the Avengers if they ask? Or is this gonna be a ‘I wasn’t able to track them down’ situation?”

Eddie blinks. He honestly wasn’t expecting that sort of courtesy, let alone the chance to choose which outcome would work better for him personally. “Yeah, put in a good word, they already know my name and where I live, if they’re working of the AIM file that they copied. But if you could keep the whole ‘Venom and I are different people and also married’ shit to yourself, that would be great.”

“For sure.” Scott gives him a once over. “Oh, hey, can I have your number?”

“You do know that Vee and I are married, right?” Eddie’s just busting his balls at this point, but he’s been a smart ass his entire life, and that’s not gonna change because he may or may not be in mortal danger.

“Wha—No I was jus—“ Scott takes a moment to collect himself. “You’re an asshole. For, like, superhero reasons, dear god.”

“There are entire vine compilations of me trying to fight public figures, of course I’m kind of an asshole.” Eddie rattles off his phone number, regardless. “You need any help bustin’ heads or whatever, text me.”

“I mean, okay, sure. Y’all tend to be a little more bloodthirsty than I’m super comfortable with, though.” He sighs.

“I mean, I am perfectly comfortable beatin’ the ever-living shit outta folks without killing them, if that makes you feel better?”

“It doesn’t actually.” Scott allows, shaking himself slightly and standing up. “You are one scary dude, you know that?”

He does, actually, but he’s not too upset about the whole thing. “Oh my god, get out of my apartment.”
“Yeah, yeah,” Scott moves towards the door, and starts to let himself out. “Try not to kill any of the Avengers, I like most of them.”

Eddie waits until the door shuts with a decisive click before lighting up another cigarette. “Fuck.”


The first thing Eddie does is take a long, hot shower. Venom stays out for it, which is a little weird, but they move so he can wash his neck, and he kinda needs the physical contact right now. Also, like, he and Venom haven’t had the whole ‘what are we’ conversation yet, but it’s seeming like ‘just friends’ really isn’t the answer to that question, so Eddie figures that them tagging along on the outside while he showers isn’t exactly out of line.

Plus, like, fuck, they’re married and Venom has access to literally all his memories, it’s probably okay if they see his dick.

He gets out of the shower, towels off, and throws on his robe. Then he pours himself a drink, pulls out his laptop, and cracks all his knuckles at once. Time to do some fucking research on the Avengers.

He ends up learning a lot. Mostly because they’re based in New York, and he still has most of his trusted sources from their locked down, but partly because Tony Stark can’t spend his entire day correcting Wikipedia articles to say exactly what he wants them to and nothing more.

After a while, once the sun has set and he’s listened through the album Rumors twice, back to back, he comes to the conclusion that if it gets to be an all-out fight, he is fucked.

So far, Eddie’s go-to strategy if it actually comes to an out and out fight is to stand over a vent and turn into a liquid to escape.

“YOU REALLY DON’T WANT TO DO THAT, EDDIE.” Venom says, curling around his shoulders and squeezing gently.

“WE WOULD BE DISSOLVING YOUR WHOLE BODY, EDDIE. WE LIKE YOUR BODY.” A tendril reaches up, and rubs gently at where his hair is growing in. Absentmindedly, Eddie thinks he should probably trim it again, because it’s starting to get a little shaggy. “WE DON’T WANT TO MESS UP AGAIN WHEN WE PUT IT BACK TOGETHER.”

“Wait, you like my body?”

“WE LIKE ALL OF YOU, EDDIE. YOUR BODY IS A PART OF YOU, AND IT IS OUR HOME. WE WOULD RATHER NOT MELT IT.”

“That’s really sweet, Vee, jeez.” He means it, too. No one’s ever really just told him ‘[WE] like all of you’; there’s always been some sort of caveat about how he should smoke less or think more or how his job is too dangerous or how he’s just too much some of the time. It’s really nice. He can feel the blush work its way up from his neck, loves and hates the way his face starts feeling really hot all over. “I like you, too, just so you know. All of you.”

It comes out easy, but Eddie feels weird saying it—it feels like this should be harder to say, like the words shouldn’t just tumble out of his mouth as easily as they do when he’s talking to Venom. He’s always had to claw words out of his throat when he’s talking to other people about his feelings, always had to fight his own body when telling someone that he likes them, like he’s a fifteen year old asking someone out to prom.

(Anne’s the one who asked him to marry her. And he got on board real quickly, but he was never going to be able to bring it up himself. It was only after they’d talked about it and he’d said yes that he went down to the pawn shop and bought her an enormous ring.)

(He’s still pretty sure she doesn’t know it was from a pawn. It wasn’t like he could afford a new one back then, he’s always been what one would call ‘financially insecure’. Also, like, conflict free diamonds do not exist and never have, and he’d really rather not perpetuate that cycle.)

“WE DO NOT THINK YOU WOULD ENJOY BEING INSIDE US AGAIN, EDDIE.” They pause. “NOT IN THAT WAY, AT LEAST.”

Eddie can’t tell, because they’re more mouth than eyes at the moment, but he’s pretty sure that if they were giving him a look, the only adjective to describe it would be lascivious.
He restrains himself from saying ‘but I want to be inside you in all ways’, and settles on saying, “We might not have a choice, Vee. If it’s all the Avengers at once, that’s not a fight I can really win.”

They trail little fingers of tentacle up to his chin, a few splaying across his face, gently. One traces where his throat connects to his jaw, heavy enough so it’s a substantial presence without cutting off any blood or his airway. “THEN WE WILL JUST HAVE TO CONVINCE THEM. DISSOLVING YOU AND ESCAPING IS A LAST RESORT.”

“I dunno, Vee, I’m not very convincing. There’s a reason I kept getting fired as a reporter, and it’s not because I lied.” It’s actually because he kept antagonizing corrupt city officials who would pull strings until ‘you’ll never work in this town again’ became distressingly literal—but if he had just written better, then maybe it wouldn’t have happened that way.

“EDDIE, YOU CONVINCED ME TO BETRAY MY ENTIRE SPECIES AND SACRIFICE MY LIFE FOR YOU WITHIN THE SPACE OF 24 HOURS, MOST OF WHICH YOU SPENT ASLEEP, INSANE, OR KIDNAPPED. YOU ARE PLENTY CONVINCING.” They run a thick tendril down his arm, to his right hand, and wrap around it, squeezing slightly. It feels an awful lot like they’re holding his hand, without all the hassle of manifesting fingers and figuring out how thumbs work. “WE BELIEVE IN YOU, EDDIE.”

Fuck, he kind of wants to cry at that. It’s gross, but he doesn’t like that such a simple sentence can send him spiraling of an emotional cliff. “Thanks, Vee, that really… That really means a lot.”

“WE KNOW THAT YOU CAN DO THIS.” They puppet his hand to put his latest cigarette out on the table, and then to close the laptop. “WE ALSO KNOW THAT IF YOU STAY UP MUCH LONGER LISTENING TO DEPRESSING NOISES AND CONSUMING NOTHING BUT NICOTINE AND BLUE-SPECTRUM LIGHT, YOU WILL PASS OUT.”

Eddie leans back, and is a little distressed at how he can feel every single one of his vertebrae click into place, one after the other. “You know? I think you might be right, there.”

He stands up, and pads back to the bedroom, falling face-first onto his unmade blankets. He’s asleep before he can even muster up the energy to take off his robe, let alone crawl under his sheets.

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Eddie wakes up to a series of texts from Scott.
“So I told the avngrs that id done surveillance on you”

“And that you seem like a good dude”

“And they told me to bring you to an abandoned warehouse in Oakland later”

“So like”

“Idk”

“Not sure if this is a get to know you thing or a kidnap you thing”

“Just wanted to keep you in the loop”

“Ill stop by your place this afternoon”

Eddie staggers out of bed, takes a warm shower, and has a cigarette, standing in front of the sink in his bathroom. It’s hard to smoke while trimming his beard, but he manages. God, he thinks, he is *fucked*.

He spits the end of the cigarette into the bowl of the sink, running water so it slides down the drain with a sizzle. He goes to get dressed.

Wake up, time to die, he thinks, pulling on his ass-kicking jeans, the ones with the diamond-shaped gusset so they wouldn’t split down the middle or restrain movement if you needed to kick someone in the head or run for your life. He’s pretty sure Chuck Norris used to be the spokesman for the company, and he’s a good 70% he bought them because of an infomercial. He also throws on yesterday’s shirt—not the super bloody one, because, you know, *blood*, but the pro-union one, just because he as a sneaking suspicion that it will piss Tony Stark off.

Look, it’s not like he’s actively setting out to *antagonize* the Avengers, but—

Alright, he totally is, a little bit. But if someone else starts shit, well, that’s solidly *their* problem, if they can’t behave like fucking grown ups.

Eddie finishes getting dressed, goes out to the kitchen, and makes breakfast. Eggs, over-easy, sausage patties, and home fries—if he’s gonna have his last meal be vaguely breakfast foods, *and* have to cook it himself, he really can’t go much better than that. Plus, there’s always something very grounding about runny eggs, he can’t quite explain it.
Anyway, he finishes his breakfast, pours himself a third cup of coffee, and settles in to wait for Scott. After about forty-five minutes of trying to write something about how there is no bad art, just art that you don’t like, he throws in the towel and starts watching a Jean Claude Van Damme movie. And then, when that one finishes, he starts another one.

By the time Scott shows up, he’s gotten through Bloodsport, Hard Target, Double Impact, and is halfway through Timecop. Sometimes, Eddie just needs to watch movies where muscley dudes do the splits and beat the shit out of people, and today is one of those times.

Scott doesn’t even bother trying the door this time, just walks up the fire escape and knocks on the window, before jimmying it open.

“You ready to go, dude?” He asks, clambering over the windowsill a little jerkily.

“Yeah,” Eddie says, standing up. He folds up his laptop and chugs the last half-cup of his now-cold coffee.

“Good, because I’m parked super illegally in the alley.” Scott drinks some of Eddie’s coffee straight from the pot, and winces. “You cool with us getting coffee on the way? Because this is straight trash, and if I’m gonna be defending my new alien buddy and his space husband, I don’t want to do it on an empty stomach.”

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They roll up to the warehouse ten minutes late, but Scott’s drinking something that’s nominally coffee but actually a milkshake, and Eddie is halfway through an enormous chai latte, so he figures it’s a decent excuse.

He makes Scott go in first.

“Hey,” Scott calls out, Eddie trailing behind him through the door. “I brought the guy!”

And suddenly, Eddie’s face to face with the Avengers. Not all of them, thank god, because some of them are actual spies, or off doing X-Men shit, or just have their own goddamn lives to lead. But some, all grouped together in the middle of the warehouse, like they’re in some gangster movie. Tony Stark, for one, dressed in a t-shirt and jeans that probably individually cost what Eddie makes
in a year. Bruce Banner—the Hulk, something in his mind recalls, mousy and unassuming in a way that made Venom churn around his insides. Captain America, in his civvies but still looking like he belonged on a Wheaties box. The arrow dude—what was his name, Hawkguy?—was standing a little further back, along with the dude with the metal wings.

Oh shit, Eddie thinks, they really brought the heavy artillery for this one. Or, at least, the heavy artillery that wasn’t busy doing other shit like going to high school or fighting eastern European dictators or ruling an alien planet.

“‘You’re late,’” Tony Stark says, unamused.

“Sorry, didn’t realize I was your employee, all of a sudden. This is a favor.” Ooh, Scott’s got some bite to him, Eddie thinks. “And this guy wasn’t gonna settle for Starbucks, so we went somewhere local, an that took a little while longer.”

Eddie salutes with his coffee mug, and gets an idea. “It’s bad coffee, and it’s overpriced, Scott, we talked about this. Plus it puts local places out of business just to sell more easy-listening alt-rock CDs and terrible branded mugs.”

Scott gestured towards him. “Do you see what I’ve had to put up with for the past forty-five minutes?”

“Well,” Eddie says, enjoying this immensely, “If we’d just taken the BART like I asked—“

“I was parked illegally!” Scott cuts in, playing along. Eddie’s happy he’s going along with the whole ‘bicker so they don’t think that you’re a threat’ thing. “I can’t just leave my buddy’s van in your alley, your neighborhood is terrible!”

“And that van is so bad no one would even bother stealing it, so I don’t see why it’s an issue!” Eddie concedes that his neighborhood isn’t great, but he likes it loads better than when he was living with Anne, mostly because people are willing to talk to him, and it feels familiar, scratches an itch in a way that living in the ‘nice part of town’ never does.

“Speaking of,” Eddie continues, “Why the fuck am I here?”

Captain America speaks up. “We’ve gathered some information about you, and it looks like you’re being mind-controlled by an alien influence. Now, you might now know this, but there have been a number of suspicious deaths in your area, and they might be taking over your body while you sleep
Eddie bursts out laughing.

“Look, Mister Brock, we know this might be hard to believe—“

Eddie laughs, harder. It takes him a while to collect himself. “Oh my god, holy shit!”

“We just want to let you know that you’re safe, and we can take care of this.” It’s Doctor Banner, this time, and that actually manages to piss Eddie off.

“Sorry, guys, I already know, I’ve known for weeks, and if you want to rip apart my space marriage for my own good, I’ll tear your bones out of your fucking bodies with my bare hands, and they won’t even have to help.” Eddie smiles, a little meanly at that, and feels the way it stretches across his face, literally from ear to ear. His mouth sprouts new teeth, razor-sharp daggers stretching a little longer than they have any right to.

“Okay,” Stark says, dropping the tough-guy façade slightly, “What the fuck?”

Chapter End Notes

Scott actually wouldn't be in violation of California's parole conditions; that being said, unless his parole officer is ridiculously lenient, probably a bad call.

Tony Stark's Secret Underwater Prison in international waters is actually a thing in the MCU! Briefly. But, you know, that's not the sort of thing you just let go.

You've heard it before, and you'll hear it again, Rumors is a fantastic goddamn album.

Conflict diamonds are a lot more pervasive than you'd think, and the system to prevent their circulation is easily gamed. Go with a zirconium, they're cheaper and made in labs.

Here are a selection of adds for the "kickin' jeans", later rebranded as the "Chuck Norris Action Jeans". There are other brands of diamond gusset pants, usually for bikers/farmers, but these are the ones exclusively for kicking ass.

All the movies Eddie mentions are real, but the only one that's really worth watching is Bloodsport.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Eddie yells at a billionaire, turns into an eldritch horror to flex on some folks, and eats some sushi. Also, he's kinda a jackass, but that's a pretty common thread throughout the entire fic.

Chapter Notes

Hey, so this has some tony stark bashing in it? it goes kinda hardcore, bc Eddie's back is against the wall and he's kinda a jackass with a ingrown hatred of the rich and powerful.

I posted this without tagging, originally, that has since been corrected.

“What, you’ve never seen a guy with a lot of teeth before?” Eddie asks, grin getting markedly more manic. “After all, you’re the Avengers, don’t you know everything? Haven’t you always been right when you’ve rushed straight in to situations you don’t understand?”

He’s laying it on a little thick, but it’s never been said that Eddie Brock is not an asshole.

“Oh my god, Eddie, put your teeth away, and bring your space-husband out so we can have a chat.” Scott says, rolling his eyes.

“Well, one,” Eddie allows his mouth to shrink back to something approximating normal size, though his teeth remain on the pointy side, and there’s far too many of them, “Venom’s an alien, why the fuck would they conform to earth’s gender binary, and two, how can I trust that y’all won’t try to rip them out?”

“Wait, wait, wait,” Tony Stark pauses, “You want to keep the mind-controlling alien inside of you?” He asks, with a sort of morbid fascination.

“I mean, yeah, like, we talked about it, and we really like each other, and we go halvesies on the DVR. It’s not rocket science.” Eddie tries his best to load those last two words with as much disdain as is possible while still being vaguely polite. “We done here?”
“They’re making you kill people!” Stark replies, loud and insistent, and that’s just something Eddie cannot let fucking stand, actually.

“You would know all about murder-by-proxy, wouldn’t you, Stark? How many hundreds of thousands of people did your weapons kill again, I forget.” Eddie’s being a little fucking vicious, more so than usual, but he figures that willingly profiting off of the deaths of other people is a bit goddamn worth it, no matter if the man had a change of heart. “At least they all tried to kill me, first!”

Okay. Some of the folks at AIM’s headquarters he had goaded into trying to kill him, but they’re still the ones to take the first shot, of their own recognizance, and that matters, to Eddie.

“Hey!” Stark says, “I’m not the one on trial, here.”

“Oh yeah?” Eddie brings his arms up, and gestures widely, “I don’t see a fuckin’ judge, do you?”

Oh god, Eddie thinks, now he’s done it. He just started fucking talking, and now he’s ready to fight Tony Stark to the death in the middle of an abandoned warehouse in Oakland. Fuck, why does he do this to himself?

“Jesus Christ, Eddie!” Scott says, suddenly, “Tone it down! You’re sloshing your latte everywhere, and I paid good money for that!”

Eddie rolls his eyes. “It was three bucks, Scott, and you used my card, for chrissakes. That ain’t a fuckin’ argument.” He rolls his shoulders, and they make a telltale crack in the otherwise silent warehouse. “Anyway, the fuckin’ Avengers got me out to an abandoned warehouse, and it’s looking like they’re gonna kidnap me for medical experiments! Why the fuck would I be anything approaching calm!”

“You know what?” Scott says, “You’ve got a point, there.” He moves slightly closer to Eddie, just to be on the safe side. It’s not that he’s a bad fighter, per se, but he’s read the witness statements about what exactly Eddie’s alien lover can do, and he’d much rather be on their side if a fight breaks out.

Plus, like, without the suit, he can’t exactly go really tiny and rip weapons apart, or go really tall and step on folks, which is mostly what he’s good for in an Avengers-style fight, anyway.
“We’d just like to get rid of your little alien problem, and then you can go back to your normal life,” Doctor Banner says, trying for a sort of gentle camaraderie that Eddie refuses to let phase him. “I know sharing a body with someone else is not fun, and we’d really like to help you get past this.”

Eddie laughs again, loudly. “You don’t get it. I like having them here, and my life is a damn sight better than it was before they showed up, so if you could kindly get the fuck out of my business—“

“They’re controlling your thought patterns, once we get you cured, then you’ll see this for what it truly is!” Stark, this time. Eddie’s honestly wondering why the fuck Falcon and Hawkguy are here, but he has a feeling its for backup just in case he gets a bit bitey. Stark shakes his head. “Clearly, the man has Stockholm Syndrome.”

Banner cuts him a look. “That’s not what Stockholm Syndrome is.”

“Oh, so you’re on his side all of a sudden?”

“I just think,” Banner begins, cautiously, “That the man might know his own head and his own life better than we do. And, since their relationship seems like it’s very different than mine with the Hulk, we should maybe not treat them the exact same way.”

“Oh,” Eddie says, “If Venom came out every time I got pissed, there wouldn’t be a fucking city left. It’s more like we’re body-roommates, not some fuckin’ Jekyll-and-Hyde situation. Uh, no offense.” He actually means that, too; Banner’s been dealt a pretty shit hand in life, as far as he’s concerned, and if the man’s gonna extend that sort of olive branch, Eddie’s gonna be niceish.

“That sounds like you might just have anger issues, dude.” Scott says, not unkindly.

“Fuck off, Scottie. See if I let you break into my apartment any more.” Eddie takes a sip of his chai latte, which is starting go a little lukewarm. “Anyways, Stark, you’ve broken up enough marriages, I think you don’t have to add mine to your list.”

“What do you mean, married?” Stark asks, a little affronted.

“Well, like they’re an alien, and we’re in symbiosis, so it’s more of a galactic common law thing— Why am I telling you this? Fuck off, you try to take them out of me, and we’ll rip your fucking spine out, okay?”
It occurs to Eddie, suddenly, that this might be a good time to get the *fuck out*. He looks at the floor—no vents or drains. Fuck. If he’s gonna run, he’s gonna have to leg it, and there’s just no out-running a super-soldier or a dude with rocket-shoes.

“You know what? I’m out.” Hawkguy says suddenly, letting all the tension uncoil from his body by degrees. “I did *not* sign up for this, and it’s startin’ to look like we’re the bad guys here.” He points at Eddie. “You seem like an okay dude, have Scott give you my number.”

And Hawkguy—fuck, it’s Hawkeye, isn’t it—turns, and starts walking out of the warehouse.

“So you’re just going to *leave*?” Stark asks, now edging more towards legitimate anger.

“Oh really? What exactly am I doing then?”

Then, he hears one of the special avengers’ planes start up, outside. A dull *whirr* loud enough to shake his bones inside his body, but not a high enough pitch that Venom starts leaking out of every orifice. Eddie thinks he might just love the arrow guy. Fuck, if he’s gonna have a favorite avenger, it might as well be the dude who’s idea of a uniform to fight evil is a purple t-shirt and a weapon that the rest of the world abandoned four hundred years ago.

“So, can we go now, or…?” Eddie asks, breaking the slowly escalating tension in the room. Of course, he probably shouldn’t have done that, since the tension was between the avengers, and now they’re all focused on him, but it was just lingering so heavily in the air that it was starting to make him want to scratch all his skin off.

“No!” Stark says, “You’ve got an alien inside of you, and we need to *get it out*!”

Okay, Eddie thinks, your literal job is convincing people things, how are we gonna play this? He decides to go for the easiest solution. “*Why* do you need to get them out of me?”
He can feel Venom churning in his insides, can feel their thick tentacles sliding in between his subcutaneous tissues and his skin, raising little, moving ridges and tendrils down his arms, larger ones down his chest, thankfully hidden by his shirt. It’s more comforting than is should be by half, but ever since Eddie resigned himself to the rest of his life being filled with gonzo body-horror, it’s taken up a certain resonance of right in his mind. It’s just the way his life is, now; it may not be pleasant all the time, and he may end up with ridiculous injuries, but he fits in this weird, body-horror niche, and that’s enough.

“They’re eating you form the inside out, and once they’re finished, they’ll jump to another host. We’ve seen the files from the Life Foundation.” Captain Americ—Steve Rogers says, all serious business with exactly the right amount of pity to make Eddie want to get a little murdery.

“Ah, yes, because the sainted Carlton Drake has no history of falsifying documents, and was all about ethical research, wasn’t he?” Eddie asks, a little meanly. “We’ve been together for like, a month now, and I’ve actually had scans done; they aren’t eating me.”

Okay, well, Dan had gotten him in for an MRI back after the Life Foundation shit went down, and his organs were a damn-sight healthier than they were before Venom, let alone before Venom figured out how to heal him and regrow things. He hasn’t gotten that shit checked out again, recently, because noise, but seeing as how he’s smoking like a chimney but can still run a mile in the gym with his usual time, he figures, well, they’re taking care of him. Plus, he can still drink like a goddamn fish, and if they were taking little nibbles of his liver on off days, his alcohol tolerance would probably have gone all to shit.

“You’re literally killing and eating people! How do you not have a problem with that?” Stark asks, baffled and angry. Eddie’s probably laid on the cutting remarks a little heavy, but to be fair, he lives in San Francisco and has a strong, ingrown distaste for tech billionaires, especially tech billionaires who are actively trying to hurt him and the people he loves.

“I do, but generally they’ve tried to kill me first, and Vee’s a bit on the vindictive side, you know? Doesn’t like it when people try to kill me, gets a little.” He pauses for effect, mostly to be an asshole. “Antsy.” He can feel a little tendril curl up his neck and branch out, on the outside, this time, just tracing the veins in his throat and crawling up to splay on the side of his face, open and thready.

Scott cuts him a look, saying nothing, but looks incredibly unfazed. It’s almost like he’s known Eddie for years, rather than a day or so.

“Is that them?” Banner asks, a little curious, a little fascinated. “Are you doing that, or are they?”
“I dunno,” Eddie says, taking another sip of his now-cold latte and hating himself a little bit for continuing to drink it, just to have something to do with his hands, “Both? Neither? They’re really good at reading my mind, and shit, but sometimes they just kinda wrap themselves around me and we cuddle. Pretty sure this is happening because they think it’ll be intimidating and they’re tired of runnin’ around under my skin.”

Venom bubbles out of his shoulder, over his shirt, and the various assembled avengers let out mild to moderate gasps. Except Scott, obviously, because he’s seen this shit before, and takes precisely zero of Eddie’s bullshit. “WE WANTED YOU TO CONVINCE THE AVENGERS NOT TO KILL US, EDDIE, NOT ANTAGONIZE THEM.”

“Vee, baby, you know how I am with billionaires, c’mon.” Eddie gives them a little pat, on what’s nominally their head, at least for the moment. “And I’m tryin’, but they just keep doing the same arguments, and none of them have been about galactic law, they’ve all been about my mental state and our, uh, diet.”

“THE BRAIN JUICE BOTHERS THEM. WE CAN TELL.”

“Oh my god, Vee, it’s just a neurotransmitter, ‘brain juice’ makes us sound like fuckin’ supervillains.”

“NO, EDDIE, HOW WE GET IT MAKES US SOUND LIKE SUPERVILLAINS.”

Eddie nods. “Fair point, Vee, fair point.” He gives them a few extra pats, and lets his hand linger on the tentacle that’s serving as their head, before looking up. All of the Avengers, such as they are, are staring at them in disbelief. Except for Scott. “What?”

“… So you’re, like, seriously close, then?” Stark asks, gobsmacked.

“Look, man,” Eddie says, resigned. “I told y’all we were married. That generally implies a fair fuckin’ bit of closeness. The fuck, you think I was lying, or something?”

“So this isn’t actually a situation where an alien is mind-controlling you to take over the planet so you can farm humans as a crop for your species?”
“Yeah, no, we took care of that, like two and a half months ago. What, you thought that Life Foundation rocket exploding was just—what was the cover story they used, again?” Eddie pauses, trying to dredge of the memory of that half-assed attempt to make a martyr of the millionaire. “Oh, yeah, a ‘catastrophic leak in one of the oxygen tanks, that ignited the craft, taking out the brave pioneer, Carlton Drake’. ‘S that what you think actually fucking happened, Stark?”

“So, this is sounding a lot more like a personal vendetta thing, Stark,” Falcon says, for the first time, finally speaking from where he’d been silently observing in the rear of the group. “I agreed to help when it was, like, a world-ending threat, but it’s turning into more you just having a problem with this reporter and his alien buddy? And, when I agreed to become an Avenger again after the whole thing with the Accords, I remember specifically not signing up to be part of your private superhero army.”

“Yeah, Tony, this is getting to be a little much.” Banner says, shrewdly. “Do you just have a problem with this guy?”

“He was an investigative reporter in New York a few years back.” Stark says, rolling his eyes. “And maybe some of the stuff he printed wasn’t factually accurate when it came to me and mine.”

Eddie laughs. “Oh, Tony. Tony, Tony, Tony.” He takes a deep breath. “Every single thing I wrote about your company, I triple checked for authenticity. You might not have made the calls, but you let them happen. Trust me, if I wanted to spread bad blood about you, I could. I could do it right now, with a phone call.”

“Bull. Shit.” Tony says, stretching the words out into two distinct sentences, each with their own inflections.

“I still know the head editor for The Daily Bugle. You know how widely that circulates?” Eddie asks, rhetorically. “One and a half million paper copies a day in the city. More traffic online, but that’s a little harder to measure engagement for. You fuck with me, and I could fucking ruin you. Doesn’t matter if it’s an outright lie, so long as it’s convincing enough to sell papers and get clicks.” A grin stretches itself across his face, and he can feel it stretch wider than his normal mouth would allow, ripping open about an inch on either side of his cheeks, and sending little rivers of blood streaming down his chin.

“There’s no need to get nasty—“ Rogers starts.

“There’s no need?” Eddie interrupts. “I’m bein’ kind of a jackass about this, yeah, but y’all don’t seem to get that we don’t want or need your goddamn help! There’s no goddamn alien invasion, so
please, get the *fuck* out of my city." Eddie can feel his own eyes start to change shape, to stretch and elongate, shoving bones out of the way and adjusting the entire structure of his skull to be more like Venom’s. Small tendrils of black flesh start to drip down from his forehead, oozing down the now-surreal planes of his face like a melting scoop of ice-cream over a hot brownie. “Or I will *make you.*”

His hands clench into fists hard enough that he can hear some of the bones *snap.*

“…Tony?” Banner says, quietly, a little leery, “I think we should go now.”

Eddie feels his tongue grow longer and thicker, as his razor sharp mouth lolls open, and it spills out, suddenly long and pointed and prehensile. He can taste fear on the air, uncertainty wafts over to him with every exhale the Avengers take. He moves his neck around, trying to work out the tension, but it suddenly moves much further and longer than before, the vertebrae stretching apart, slightly, in a way that Eddie can feel the echoes of down his entire spine.

“Yeah, okay. Hear you loud and clear, Lovecraft, we’re gettin’ gone. Stop eating folks.” Stark says, masking his confusion and fear under a very thin skin of attempted humor, before turning, and walking (as fast as he can without looking overtly hurried) out of the warehouse.

Eddie can feel his face begin to set back into something more vaguely human the moment Stark is out of his line of sight, bones crunching back into their normal shape, joints compressing, organs *shrinking* back towards something approaching normal.

“Did I or did I not tell all’a y’all to get out of my city?” He asks, breath hissing slightly through shrinking teeth.

“You did.” Falcon says, “Let’s head out. I’ve got a feeling that we *really* don’t want to piss this guy off.”

Eddie’s very happy that at least some of the second-string Avengers have *sense,* since it seems to be sorely lacking from the regular cast of world-saving folks, the kind who get their pictures put on lunchboxes that are sold in drug stores.

Almost as a unit, the rest of the Avengers turn and leave. Eddie turns to Scott.
“We good, dude?”

Scott shakes himself slightly. “Fuck, you’re terrifying sometimes, Eddie. Jesus Christ, do you have to go from zero to murder all the time?”

“Sorry, dude, but yeah? That’s just kinda how my brain works, I think, I dunno.” Eddie flexes his hand, and the bones reset themselves all at once with a loud crack. “It’s kinda a theme with my life, honestly.”

“I’m starting to see why everything I found when I googled you was either some hardcore investigative reporting or stories on you trying to fight billionaires in the street.” Scott remarks. “Not that I’m, like, against fighting billionaires, because I’d totally punch Elon Musk if I saw him on the street, but that’s not really a healthy way to approach folks who literally hold your life in their hands, dude.”

Eddie shrugs. “That’s never stopped me before.” He says, ruefully.

Scott takes a sip of his fancy, frothy coffee. “You want to go get sushi or something?” He says, after a beat.

“Why, you got a place in mind?”

“Kinda? According to my buddy Luis, I need to get out more for things other than seeing my ex-wife and hanging out with my weird old mentor and his daughter that I kissed that one time.”

“Well, fuck, lead the way then.”

--

Eddie and Scott go halvsies on one of those big wooden boat platters that carries like sixty pieces of sushi, and each have a beer or two. Scott’s halfway through his red bean ice cream and Eddie’s gleefully working through a pile of mochi, when a man walks into the restaurant, and pulls a gun out of the back of his pants. A silencer is screwed onto the end, like something out of a James Bond movie.
He starts waving it around haphazardly, shouting vague and incoherent ramblings about how ‘VOTING IS THEFT’ and ‘LITHIUM IN THE WATER MADE MY DOG HATE ME’ and ‘WHY CAN’T WE GO BACK TO THE GOOD OLD DAYS OF THE CONFEDERACY’.

Eddie’s very thankful that it’s off hours for the restaurant, at the very least. He and Scott are the only customers there, so that’s why Eddie does the stupid thing, stands up, and says, “Why don’t you shut the fuck up and leave, pal?”

So, naturally, the man points his gun at Eddie. “You got a problem with me exercising my first amendment rights?”

“I do when you’re pointin’ a gun at folks, yeah.” Why am I like this, he thinks to himself. Oh well, might as well ride this train straight to the end of the line. “What are you gonna do, shoot me?”

“Yup.” And the guy pulls the trigger, planting a slug of lead directly into Eddie’s jugular vein, sending a fountain of blood spraying across the room of the relatively small restaurant.

“Anyone else want to be a hero?” He asks, as Eddie sinks to the floor, hand clamped on the side of his neck.

Eddie feels Venom burn shut the hole, first, a spot of heat as the surrounding tissue surges up and closes the wound, and the rush of relief as they force more blood into his circulatory system, replacing the quart or so that’s now decorating the inside of the small restaurant.

He feels Venom slide out of his skin in an instant, wrapping him securely under a blanket of gooey flesh, sliding out of his spine and over his head and down his limbs in seconds, forming a cocoon of violence.

“WE DO.” They say, opening their mouth wide and letting their tongue slide out through the air. “WOULD YOU LIKE TO TRY THAT AGAIN?”

The man shoots them. He shoots them a second time. They refuse to flinch. He empties the rest of his clip into them, the silencer on the end of his pistol dulling the noise of the shots. “Why won’t you die, Goo-Man? It’s things like you that’re ruining this country for us normal folk.”

Instead of thinking up something pithy, they wrap their tongue around his neck and drag his body
into their open mouth, swallowing him down in a single bite. Eddie can feel the gunman pushing against his esophagus as he slides down towards the stomach, can feel the half-bitten-off screams reverberate through his bones as the man slides into stomach acid, melting in an instant that feels like an eternity.

He shakes himself, and Venom slides back under his skin, slowly, crawling fingers of tentacles unwrapping themselves from around his head and across his chest.

“So,” Eddie says to the hostess, “Do you need help, uh, cleaning up? Because there’s kinda a lot of blood in here, now, and I don’t want to leave a mess, you know?”

“Oh my god. Goo-man is fuckin’ real, Jesus Christ.” She takes a deep breath, and a moment to collect herself. “I mean, we’ve got a mop in the back, I guess, but this really feels like it’s a health hazard?”

Eddie looks at the blood spatter that’s painting the walls. “Yeah, okay, that’s fair.”

“Look, we’re gonna have to close down for the rest of the day to clean up. I’m guessing that you don’t want all of your blood to go to the police as evidence?”

He nods.

“Cool, I’ve got a cousin I can call to take care of this, then.” She nods to herself. “Also, this is going to be one of those ‘I never saw his face’ deals, right?”

“Oh yeah, I’d really rather not get arrested.”

“Cool, never seen you before or since, Eddie Brock.”

“Oh, goddammit.”

“What, you think I never watch local news? Or even vine compilations? Are you just pretending that you aren’t a local celebrity?” She laughs. “You want to sign something so we can put it up on the wall of ‘famous people who went here one time’?”
“Ah, fuck, why not. You want as Eddie or as, uh, Goo-man?”

“Why not both, we need to fill up space on the wall.” She hands him a sharpie and two half-sheets of printer paper. “Tell you what, you and your buddy’s meal is on the house today, alright?”

He signs his fancy signature, the one he put conscious work into so it’d look dope as all hell, on to one of the papers. On the other, he writes, in stylized block capitals, ‘VENOM: AKA ‘GOO-MAN’”.

“So,” Scott says, as he comes back to the table, “is it always like this when you leave your apartment?”

“I mean, kinda? I just keep wandering into attempted murders, it’s really weird.” Eddie shrugs, and pugs a lump of mochi into his mouth. “You want to head out? They’re comping us the food, don’t worry, but I think they’re closing down for the day.”

“Cool.” Scott shoves the large hunk of remaining ice cream into his mouth, and immediately regrets it. “Let’s go—Let’s get you back to your apartment, alright? I think I’ve had enough excitement for the day.”

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Scott does everything short of just slowing down and shoving him out of the moving car door, and Eddie thinks that hey, that’s pretty fucking reasonable, considering the day they’ve had, so Eddie just goes up to the apartment.

The first thing he does is smoke a cigarette. And then, he smokes another one. Then, he pours himself a generous glass of bourbon, and settles down at his computer to write.

He gets about 1500 words into an article about why millionaires are anti-union, because it’s on his mind after the whole episode with Tony Stark this afternoon, before he gets a little too drunk for sentences to make sense consistently. He calls it a night early, and passes out on his couch in front of an episode of Antiques Roadshow in a position that’s more of a ungainly sprawl than a comfortable position.
The next morning, he wakes up to a few texts from Scott.

“Wow is this what happens every time you eat folks”

“wtf”

“youre in the news SO MUCH”

And, of course, there’s a link to an article. “VENOMOUS, GOOEY SAVIOR TAKES A BITE OUT OF CRIME!”

Well, Eddie thinks, they’re getting there, at least.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Eddie essentially recaps the past 5 or so chapters, learns some philosophy the hard way, talks about/has feelings, and goes on a DATE!

Time passes. Eddie wanders out of the apartment every day or so, and eats a few dudes—nothing too out of the ordinary, these days. He talks with Venom a bit, though on nothing of substance—which of the Real Housewives they’d most like to eat ( Venom is strangely fond of Lisa Vanderpump, though they would eat Teresa Giudice if given a chance), which brand of chocolate has more BRAIN JUICE (apparently, Hershey’s has too much sugar, and any chocolate with fillings does practically nothing for them, so Eddie settles on buying the fancyish super dark chocolate with sea-salt, so it’s got a hardcore amount of cocoa without tasting like an old piece of asphalt), if they are a liquid, why don’t they just pool in his feet because of gravity? (they do, sometimes, there’s just more room in the torso and they’re pretty active in moving around)—it’s not quite small talk, but it’s not exactly large, either. He writes a few articles, banks a few more, just in case. He pitches a few to other websites; only one gets published, but now that he’s got examples of recent work, all get responses, and invites to pitch again. He knows that it’s just a courtesy thing, and that they probably have no intention of following through, but it’s still nice to get asked.

Anyway, where was he? Oh yeah. Eddie essentially spins his wheels for a bit.

Dan comes over on Thursday night, about a week after the thing with the Avengers, worn thin from a long shift at the hospital. Eddie actually has on pants this time when he answers the door, which is a change from the usual, but they’re flannel pajama pants with little dogs skiing on them.

“So,” Dan says, once they’re both halfway into their beers and dispensed with the small talk (Dan, Eddie learns, did a double knee replacement earlier, and had to surgically set a really badly broken ulna and put in, like, ten screws), “Did you end up meeting the Avengers? Was Spider-Man there?”

“Dude, Spider-Man’s, like ten, or something.” Eddie takes a sip of his beer. “Yeah, I met some of them. They were mostly dicks, fuck, I dunno, it was really more of an anticlimax.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Look, man, he’s short, all his jokes are terrible, and I’m pretty sure he has an official TikTok account. What part of that screams adult?”
“I dunno, Eddie, you’re short and make bad jokes, too.” Dan rolls his eyes. “And you know that’s not what I asked.”

“Fuck you, all my jokes are great.” Eddie’s not gonna contest the ‘short’ thing. It’s… not inaccurate. “I dunno, Scott showed up, he’s great by the way, I think you’d like him, and we got some nice coffees and went to an abandoned warehouse down in Oakland, and I’m pretty sure I threatened to rip Tony Stark’s spine out before breaking all the bones in my face?”

“Let’s take this one thing at a time. Who’s Scott?”

“Tall, brunette guy, has a weird suit that makes him shrink or grow really tall, literally the only other superhero in the Bay Area? Like, he’s been on house arrest recently because of a string of convoluted circumstances involving an underwater prison and his felony record, but he’s a pretty decent guy. Think you’d like him.” Venom winds one of their larger tendrils through the fingers of his left hand, curling through and wrapping around, gently.

“Oh yeah,” Dan says, “That guy. Seen him on the news, he seems fun, for a guy with a terrible superhero name.” He eats a little of his Indian takeout—a colorful but ultimately basic tikka masala—and takes a sip of his beer. “So, elaborate on the whole threatening to kill Tony Stark situation?”

“Well,” Eddie begins, and realizes that there’s not really a good way to put this that keeps him in a good light, “Stark kept talkin’ about Vee like they were a parasite, and like it would be better if they were yanked outta me and exterminated. Mostly him, but some of the other Avengers, were treating it more like pest control, and talking to me like I didn’t know any better, so I got pretty pissed off.”

“Oh okay?”

Eddie looks down at where Venom is toying with his fingers, and gives them a little squeeze, to ground himself. “And, like, I said some pretty heinous shit about Stark’s past, and he doubled down, so I threatened to commit libel on essentially a national scale.”

Dan sets his spoon down and brings his hand up to his face, inadvertently smearing a little orange sauce on his forehead. “Jesus, Eddie.”

“I do really stupid shit when I’m angry.” Eddie says, more than a little self-aware, and hating himself more than a little for it.
“Oh, trust me, I know.”

“No, you really don’t.” Eddie says, a little sharper than he intends. “You’ve never seen me be angry. Frustrated, definitely. Pissed off, a few times. Dan, the last time I got legitimately angry I shattered a man’s jaw. Without Venom’s help.”

“It only takes 8 pounds per square inch to break a jaw, though, Eddie.” Dan says, instead of ‘why’ or ‘how’ or ‘please let me out of your apartment and never speak to me again’. “They’re not that hard to break, buddy.”

“Then I head-butted him hard enough to split open my forehead in a few spots.”

“Well, if you landed on something with any sort of edge, or zipper—“

“No, Dan, this was forehead-to-forehead.”

“… Fuck, that takes a bit of doing, then.” Dan looks directly at him, and Eddie feels like he’s under a microscope. “When was this, exactly?”

Fuck, when did that AIM guy try to kidnap him in a windowless van and then shoot him in the throat? Before the whole thing with the samurai sword, but after he got completely blitzed out of his mind and filled up Dan’s voicemail box. So, what, two weeks ago? Less? Probably less. “Uh, I think two weeks ago? Shit’s a little foggy, and things have been happening pretty quick lately.”

“… Have they?” Dan asks, and Eddie knows a goddamn loaded question when he hears one. Dan gets the same tone in the back of his throat that Anne gets when she cross-examines in court, the same sort of bitten off question with zero inflection. “Care to elaborate on that, Edward?”

Fuck. “Fuck.” Eddie says, “Please never call me that. And, like, I don’t mean this in a cutesy, teasing way, but I’ve never goddamn been an ‘Edward’ to anyone I have any remote interest in including in my life any more. So let’s just not, okay?”

Dan blinks. “Sure, yeah, sorry. I was trying a thing, and it clearly didn’t work out. Want to tell me about how busy you’ve been lately?”
“You want a chronological rundown or just a list of felonies I may or may not have committed?” Eddie asks, half-serious. “Because one’s shorter, but the other makes me look a little less unhinged, you know?”

“Dealer’s choice.” Dan picks up his spoon and has another bite of curry.

“Uh, I told you about how AIM tried to kidnap me and we turned liquid and then pushed this dude’s ribs out and strangled another with his own intestines, right?”

“Not *that* vividly, no. And anyway, the tensile strength of intestines is actually not very—“

“Dan, think very carefully if you want to finish that sentence.” Eddie pauses for a moment, but Dan stays silent. “Good. So after that we were sort of kidnapped by AIM again, but I broke the dude’s face pretty badly and was a scary motherfucker at him for a bit, and then we ran into Dora at the bodega and she mentioned that the Avengers are looking for me, but before that Anne and I fought and we didn’t, you know, *eat* for a while, so I stopped feeling pain and blacked out for a while. And then I rescued this punk guy over in Oakland and ate like six folks at once, that was wild.”

“What,” Dan asks, “Like in one chunk? Or just in the same encounter?”

“*THREE TOGETHER AT ONCE, THEN INDIVIDUALLY.*” Venom pipes up, not even bothering to materialize a mouth. “*EDDIE’S BRAIN WAS DOING VERY STRANGE HUNGER THINGS, SO WE GOT TO DRIVE THE BODY THAT NIGHT.*”

“Yeah, Vee, brain’s are weird like that.” Dan shrugs. “Anyway, continue.”

“So anyway, Dora corners me in the bodega a few blocks over, and is totally inept at the whole spy shit, and was *working for AIM*—“

“Didn’t you specifically tell her ‘don’t work for AIM, they’re evil’?”

“Yeah, but,” Eddie sighs. “I don’t want to get too into it, but she has her reasons and they made sense, all told.” He gives Venom another gentle squeeze where they’re wrapped around his hand, just to ground himself. “So, she tells me that they’re gonna keep gunnin’ for me, and also that the
Avengers have looked in at my shit, so naturally, I think I’ve got to go over to the local headquarters for AIM and delete myself off of their server. Also, like, I wanted to completely destroy their regional director.”

“And?”

“I did, but only after he took out a katana and tried to slice my skull in half. Shit’s wild. Very glad that the brain has no nerve endings.”

Dan drops his beer bottle, breaking it, and sending shards of it scattering all over the floor in a small puddle amber. “Your brain, Eddie?” He asks, shrill.

“WE HEALED HIM, DAN.” Venom says. “WE CAN HEAL ANYTHING FOR EDDIE. EVERYTHING CAN BE MADE NEW AGAIN.”

There’s a brief pause, and then—

“You ever heard of the ship of Theseus?” Dan asks, the non-sequitor sticking out baldly.

“No?”

“Right, so there’s this guy, Theseus. Ancient Greek dude. He’s got a ship, sails it around the Mediterranean.”

“I fuckin’ figured.”

“Anyway, he’s a clumsy guy, and keeps breaking parts of his ship, so he gets them replaced.”

Eddie can sort of make out where this conversation is going, and though he can’t follow through the specifics yet, he can tell it won’t be anywhere good. “Okay?”

“By the end of twenty years, he’s replaced every single part of his ship. All the planks, all the sails, all the deck-hands, everything.” Dan stands up. “The question is, is it still the same ship that he
started with? And, if it isn’t, when was that line crossed, anyway?” He pauses. “Also, do you have any paper towels?”

Eddie fucking knew that this wouldn’t go anywhere good. “They’re next to the coffee maker.” He says, subdued.

As Dan goes about cleaning up the shards of his beer bottle and sopping up the spilled liquid, Eddie has a moderate existential crisis. Fuck, is he the same guy he was a month ago? A week? Did regrowing his own brain into something shiny and new, even if it was the exact same, make him somehow less Eddie than he was before? Fuck, would he even know? Or would he just wake up one day and be completely unrecognizable to himself, like those frat guys who end up becoming accountants and hating themselves? Or is this all in his head, and is he just convincing himself that he’s not an actual person—and wouldn’t that be even more fucked up, that his brain can just do that, and that there’s no way to avoid it? Fucking Christ, he needs a drink. Or two. Several, really, preferably one after the other until his liver pickles and he fucking dies.

“DAN, YOU BROKE EDDIE.” They wrap around his arm and shoulder more tightly, more like some sort of boa constrictor than any sort of caress. “FIX HIM. THERE ARE SO MANY NEUROTRANSMITTERS, THEY’RE DOING STRANGE THINGS TO HIS CARDIO-VASCULAR SYSTEM. WE DEPEND ON THAT TO NOT DIE, DAN.”

Is there really any him left? Eddie knows that cells die at pretty quick rates, so like, what if he was never himself to begin with? What if Venom’s stopping cell death, and that means that he’s a deviation from his normal state, and therefore also not himself?????

“EDDIE, WE HAVE BETTER THINGS TO DO WITH OUR TIME THAN BABYSIT ALL OF YOUR NUCLEI! WE CAN KEEP YOU RUNNING UNTIL THE HEAT DEATH OF THE UNIVERSE SO LONG AS THERE ARE THINGS TO EAT, BUT THAT IS JUST TOO MUCH WORK, EDDIE.”

Wait, what? Also, why are they making his body sound a lot like the way one of his uncles talked about his Camaro?

“You mean,” Eddie says, finally breaking out of his funk, “Hypothetically, right, I could look the same a hundred years from now?”

“NO, EDDIE, THE FASHIONS WOULD HAVE CHANGED.”
Eddie’s pretty solid he’ll be able to deal with any sort of future, so long as it was more on a *Mad Max* or cyberpunk vibe; he can deal with the style for those, but if the future ends up looking like Steve Jobs designed it, he is *fucked*.

Well, he’s probably *fucked* regardless, but still.

“Are you—“ Dan begins, and then falters. “Are you okay?”

Eddie takes a deep breath, and attempts a smile that ends up as much more of a grimace than anything else. “Wish you wouldn’t have done all that philosophy bullshit, I sorta make a habit out of re-growing body parts.”

“Yeah…” Dan admits, “Could have handled that better.”

You think? Eddie doesn’t say, because Dan is his best friend, and Dan is also allowed to fuck up on occasion. “Just maybe don’t bring that up again, alright?”

Dan nods, and comes back over to the table, sitting down in front of his cooling food. “Sure thing. Anyway, where were we? I think you’d just gotten brained by a katana?”

Eddie nods. “Yeah, so we ate him, deleted our file off of the company-wide server, shut off all of the alarms, and set the building on fire. And then we ate some security guards, and then when we got back Scott had broken into the apartment.”

“Was he at least nice about it?” Dan asks, like this sort of thing happens all the time. And, to be fair, it kind of does, to Eddie.

“As nice as he could be, yeah. Gave me shit about what we’ve got on the DVR, but we had a beer and talked about shit. Anyways, the day after that, he broke into my apartment again, we got lattes, and met the Avengers in an abandoned warehouse in Oakland.”

Dan takes a bite of his tikka masala. “And?”

“I dunno, Stark was there, I threatened to pull out his spine, Captain America was there, kept talking
about doing things for my own good. The Hulk seems like a cool guy. Falcon was there, he seems alright. And, holy shit, I think I might love Hawkguy.”

“That’s the one with the arrows, right?”

Oh god, Eddie thinks, the dude must get that so much. “Yeah. He fuckin’ peaced out halfway through the thing and stole their airplane on the way back to New York.”

“What an icon.”

“Honestly, though.” Eddie looks down at his lamb vindaloo, and starts mixing some long-grain rice in to soak up some of the sauce. “Anyway, after that Scott and I got some sushi at this really nice place downtown, and some guy there started waving a gun around and shot me in the neck. Walls got covered in blood. So then, you know, we popped back up and ate him.”

“Wow,” Dan says, “Is that all of it?”

“Pretty much. Like we went out and ate folks a time or two since then, but nothing, you know, dramatic.”

Dan stares at him. “Your life’s pretty fucked up—you do know that, right?”

Eddie tears off a piece of naan and dips it in the excess sauce from his vindaloo. “Trust me, Dan, I’m very aware.”

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After another beer for the both of them and some much less heavy conversation (during which Dan attempts to convince Eddie to read James Patterson’s newest bestselling novel about an action hero president who is also a computer hacker, and Eddie tries to convince Dan to start watching Law and Order: Criminal Intent; neither are particularly successful), Dan leaves the apartment. Eddie bangs out a few hundred words of an article, which ends up going in ever-decreasing circles, before giving up and watching an episode of My Cat From Hell that he finds while channel surfing.
He adds that to the DVR when the episode ends, along with *Dog Cops*, mostly because Scott seemed awfully insistent on the quality of that show. After that, he has a cigarette and takes a long shower, hot enough that his skin is still warm five minutes after he towels himself off.

He tries to get to sleep for about twenty minutes, tossing and turning for a position that doesn’t make him feel like he’s somehow off balance. Then, he gives up, pulls out his phone, and watches a video that’s half an hour long about the institution of British monarchy, before putting a pillow under his neck until his legs start to get dangerously tingly.

And still, he doesn’t fall asleep.

He can’t stop thinking about that fucking metaphor about the Greek dude and his boat. His usual method—boxing that thought up tight and shoving it into the storage unit of repression in the back of his mind—isn’t fucking working, for some reason. He’ll feel Venom shifting around his organs, sliding through parts of his body, and it’s like being punched directly in his sense of self.

He gets up, pads to the kitchen, and makes himself a cup of tea in the microwave, adding a healthy amount of honey and a healthier amount of scotch along with the little bag full of ginger tea.

“Fuck,” He says to himself, softly. “Goddammit.” He wants to tear his own hair out, but that’s a little self-defeating to the whole idea that re-growing things fundamentally changes him as a person. And yeah, he knows that the whole thing is just a *thought exercise*, and that there’s *no right answer*, and that he’s tying himself up in knots that there’s no way he’ll be able to unpick on his own for no good reason; that knowledge is doing precisely jack and shit for his mental issues at the moment.

“**EDDIE.**” Venom says, stretching out of his chest and curling little fingers around his ribs, “**SOMETHING IS BOTHERING YOU. MAKE IT STOP.**”

“I can’t just—That’s not how brains work, Vee.” Eddie says, softly.

“**CAN WE HELP?**” Venom asks, “**DO YOU WANT US TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR NEUROTRANSMITTERS?**”

“I’d really prefer if you didn’t do that, actually."

“**THEY ARE CAUSING YOU DISTRESS, EDDIE. WE WANT TO GET RID OF ANYTHING**
Eddie sighs, because he knows that they’re being sincere, in their own backwards way. “I know, Vee. It’s just—some parts of me are really fucked up, but if you un-fucked them, I wouldn’t be me anymore.”

“EXPLAIN.”

“It’s just—” Eddie’s not sure how to explain this, let alone how to explain this without mortally offending Venom and getting the silent treatment for days on end. “I don’t know how to define myself now that you’re constantly replacing parts of me. Like, what part’s me, and where does that stop? Will any part of me still be here from original Eddie Brock next month, or will I just be cobbled together from spare fleshy bits you had lying around?”

“…WHAT?” They actually look confused, which is a little impressive for a being whose face is essentially tar and who only has white voids for eyes. “YOU ARE YOU, EVERYTHING INSIDE YOU, INCLUDING YOUR SKIN, IS YOU. EVERYTHING ELSE IS SIMPLY DETAILS.”

That sounded nice, sure, but it didn’t actually tell Eddie anything, one way or another. “Yeah, Vee, but like, is this version of me somehow fundamentally changed, or…”

“EDDIE, IF WE STOPPED FIXING YOU, WE’D BOTH BE DEAD IN A MATTER OF DAYS. YOU GET MORTALLY WOUNDED VERY OFTEN.”

“I know, babe, and I appreciate it, it’s just all kinda tangled together in my head.” And, truth be told, Eddie’s thoughts have been veering dangerously towards this mental cliff ever since Venom turned him liquid and then snapped him back to being not only human sized, but also of human density. But, he’d shoved those thoughts into the back of his head and resolutely didn’t think about them; turns out, his mental storage-unit can only hold so many of the same type of thing before getting a little fucking overtaxed.

Repression only works if you don’t keep being reminded of what you’re trying to repress, after all.

“What do you even do when you fix me, anyway?”

“WE REMEMBER WHAT YOUR BODY WAS LIKE WHEN WE FIRST ENTERED IT. WE
“Such as?”

“YOUR NICOTINE INTAKE WAS DOING SOME FRANKLY DISGUSTING THINGS TO YOUR CARDIO-VASCULAR SYSTEM. WE LIKE TO CLEAR THAT UP EVERY SO OFTEN, JUST TO BE ON THE SAFE SIDE.” Eddie can feel little finger-tentacles wrapping, almost unconsciously, around his ribcage on top of his skin, settling over his lungs.

Oh, god, it’s been so long since Eddie’s thought back to those grade school classes about BLACK LUNG and THE DANGERS OF SMOKING and THE DAMAGE THAT A LIT CIGARETTE CAN DO; the sort of class where they brought someone in to present for an hour or so, and they had a briefcase full of nightmares, like dried, rubbery lungs and tracheal tubes pulled out of people who died of throat cancer. They’d always drag out the TV cart and the VHS player, and play a video about how quickly houses can catch fire towards the end, the same video that had C-Grade celebrities like second-string professional wrestlers or interchangeable country artists with two first names asking you to make a promise never even to look at cigarettes.

Obviously, that didn’t exactly stick with Eddie. But it suddenly occurs to him that, oh yeah, he’s been smoking for the better part of thirty goddamn years, that’s not exactly a move likely to get him perfect health.

“Thanks, Vee,” Eddie says, after a beat. “That really—I appreciate that, I really do.”

They give him a squeeze. “WHY WOULDN’T WE DO THAT, EDDIE? WE LIKE YOU. YOU’RE OUR FAVORITE OF THIS PLANET’S MANY BAGS OF WATERY MEAT.”

Eddie leans into the touch a little bit, which does nothing, because they’re growing out of his chest like some sort of sentient, friendly tumor. Still, after a moment, they seem to get with the program and squeeze a little harder. It’s like hugging an octopus that can breathe air and isn’t constrained by only having eight legs or obeying the laws of physics.

“So,” Eddie says, bringing a hand up to stroke the amorphous mass of Venom as they jut out from his torso, “What are we, anyway?”

“What? WE ARE IN SYMBIOSIS. YOU ARE OUR HOST, AND TOGETHER, WE ARE VENOM.”
Wow, Eddie thinks, they’re really overdue for this conversation, aren’t they. “I told you that I think I love you, and you didn’t say it back. Like, you didn’t not say it back, either, but you didn’t outright say it. And you’ve been more tactile lately, and that’s fucking great, don’t get me wrong, but we haven’t really talked about feelings yet.”

“WE WERE UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT TALKING ABOUT FEELINGS IS A TABOO IN YOUR CULTURE, LIKE PUBLIC NUDITY OR RETURNING TO YOUR ANCESTRAL SPAWN PIT.”

“It’s not, it’s just that humans, especially in American culture, are pretty bad at it. They put all of Grey’s Anatomy on Netflix, that might be a good place to start, if you want help dealing with weird, complicated feelings.” Eddie sighs. “I really, really like you, alright, and if you don’t want us to do anything about that, it’s fine, but I kinda want to pull the trigger on the more romantic part of the whole ‘us being married’ thing.”

“ARE YOU SPEAKING OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE?” Venom asks, curious, “BECAUSE ON KLYNTAR, WE REPRODUCE ASEXUALLY. WE HAVE NONE OF THE FUN SYNAPSES AND REACTIONS THAT YOUR BRAIN DOES TO SEXUAL PLEASURE.”

“Maybe? Probably, actually.” Eddie makes little circles with is thumb on what’s nominally their neck. “It’s just, historically, right, I don’t really have the best track record with this sort of thing, and want to take it slow, alright?”

“SO WE WOULD DO SOMETHING MORE AKIN TO A CONVOLUTED SPORTS METAPHOR THAN ANYTHING THAT CAN BE FOUND IN YOUR INTERNET SEARCH HISTORY.”

“Look, alright, I use private browsing, it wouldn’t be in the history—”

“WE CAN LITERALLY SEE ALL YOUR MEMORIES IF WE SO CHOOSE, EVEN THE MUNDANE ONES. WE KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU LOOK AT ONLINE. WE KNOW EVERYTHING THAT YOU’VE LOOKED AT ONLINE.”

Jesus Christ, he doesn’t need to be reminded of that. Then again, it also means that Venom will fall for significantly less of his bullshit than other people, and be able to reliably pull receipts on anything—which means that it’s gonna be a pretty difficult for him to lie to them. Considering the track record of his previous relationships, that’s probably a good thing.
“I was actually thinking we could maybe go on a date, and maybe work our way up to that sort of thing.”

“WHY? WE ARE LITERALLY NEVER SEPARATED, EDDIE. THERE IS NO NEED FOR US TO GO SOMEWHERE TO ‘BE TOGETHER’, BECAUSE WE ALWAYS ARE.” They give him another firm squeeze, and that makes his brain white-out momentarily in the best possible way.

Eddie nods, because they’re not actually wrong. “It just seems like whenever we leave the apartment, we end up killing people. I don’t think that mixing killing folks with romance is really the best idea—those aren’t wires I want crossing in my brain, you know?”

“We can keep them from mingling, Eddie.”

“Yeah, but if you start fuckin’ with my brain this whole thing is off, alright?” Eddie says, a little sharply. “We might be sharing a body, but we’re separate people with separate thoughts and feelings and shit. Fixing that second part because it’s not convenient would be a really shitty thing to do.”

“We understand, Eddie. We would only do such a thing if you specifically asked us to.” A tentacle grows out of his shoulder and wraps itself down his arm, branching out and threading between his fingers, gently. It’s not quite holding hands, because Venom is beyond such trivial things as having a fixed shape or even attempting to be anthropomorphic, let alone having joints like some fucking savage.

“Okay, uh, good. Because I sometimes get panic attacks, and, you know, being able to stop that shit might be handy, at some point. But, that’s really the only situation I can think of where that’d be helpful.” Eddie looks to the side, staring out his window to the empty street. He’s so fucking tired, but sleep is apparently not going to happen tonight. “I mean, like, we could go out and do something together that we both enjoy, without killing folks?”

“Such as?”

“I dunno, you got any strong feelings about zoos?”

“We are interested in your practices of imprisoning lesser beings to gawk at them.” They pause for a moment, thinking. “We would also like to see some snakes.”
They go to the zoo, and spend a long time looking at reptiles. Venom finds the snakes a little underwhelming after all the hype from Animal Planet documentaries, but they really enjoy the Komodo Dragon exhibit. They sit on the little bench in front of the enclosure, watching the gigantic reptile pace back and forth. Or, at least, Venom slides out of the collar of his shirt, and watches it. After about three minutes, Eddie gets a little fucking bored of it, and pulls out his phone to dick around on twitter.

After the whole Carlton Drake situation, his follower count tanked, and since he’s been regularly getting articles posted again, it’s slowly clawing its way back up. Plus, Anne’s no longer there to talk to him about his brand or why posting something a little ‘controversial’ might hurt his chances at a future job, so now he can pick internet fights with whomever he so chooses.

So, naturally, he’s busy offering to fight a city council member in the replies of a proposed local ordinance concerning lowering the city’s minimum wage for restaurant workers, and doesn’t notice immediately when someone sits down on the bench next to him.

Tall, skinny, with slicked-back black hair, the man looks like bassist for a goth band from 1999. “We have been watching you, mister Brock.”

Eddie jumps out of his skin, practically. Venom sinks back under his shirt, fast enough that it feels like someone pouring a glass of ice water down the front of his button-down. It’s a dark green, with small dinosaurs printed on it. After all, this is technically a first date, Eddie’s gonna fucking dress up a little. “Jesus!”

“I assure you, mister Brock, Jesus has nothing to do with this.” The man smirks, and Eddie wants, suddenly, to punch him in the face. “My employer, however, would like some words with you.”

Oh god, Eddie thinks, this shit again? Didn’t he fucking burn down AIM’s building? San Francisco real estate being what it is, there’s no way they could have found another headquarters and gotten all situated in the space of a week. “Look, man, I don’t want shit to do with your employer.”

“We’ve come to offer you a unique opportunity,” The man says, and Eddie is reminded of every time he’s been offered work for ‘exposure’. “Our organization does exceedingly important work in the world of science and innovation.”
Something’s clicking in his brain, but Eddie’s not quite sure what it is yet.

“I think I’d like to know exactly what I’m getting into, before agreeing to anything.” He hedges. Something’s off about this entire conversation.

The man nods, and holds out his hand for Eddie to shake. He does, fingers grazing the cuff of the impeccably white dress shirt, starched all to hell. The rest of the suit is jet black, like something out of a spy movie. They shake hands, and Eddie maybe squeezes a bit harder than is strictly necessary.

That’s weird, Eddie notices. The other man’s cuff links are little octopi.

The suit stands up. “We’ll get into contact in a week or so. Don’t worry, we’ll find you.”

He walks away, and Eddie can hear the sirens go off in his mind.

**WE WOULD LIKE TO GO SEE THE HIPPOPOTAMUS. THEY HAVE A BITE HARD ENOUGH TO SHATTER A HUMAN FEMUR, EDDIE!** They say, enthusiastic, directly into his mind.

Well, fuck, okay, Eddie thinks, as dates go, he’s had worse ones.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Eddie and V finish their date, talk about feelings, participate in ritual fluid exchange off screen, have more feelings, and learn about an underwater octopus colony.

Chapter Notes

Hey, so, there's off-screen fuckin. If you're wanting them to get busy in the actual text of this, you're going to be disappointed, because 1) I'm not super comfortable writing porn, and 2) my mom reads this and that's a little too weird for me.

Also, hey! felt the need to bump the rating up to M. Mostly bc there's some decently frank sexual talk in this chapter, but also bc, jeez, i really probably should have done that back when i started putting in fairly graphic violence.

They do go end up seeing the hippos. Venom’s into it, because some very kind zookeeper had chucked a few watermelons into the pool in the enclosure, and the animals spend some time cracking them open between their enormous jaws. It reminds Eddie of the way skulls sound when they shatter, because that’s something he has personal experience in, now.

Anyway, Eddie buys an overpriced hot dog and an electric-blue ICEE, and eats lunch sitting on a concrete bench and staring in to the tiger exhibit.

So far, the date’s gone alright. Like, sure, he’s gotten some weird looks from tourists because he’ll occasionally mutter to himself, and Venom’s pretty constantly poking out the top of his shirt, even though there are other people around—like, if anyone gets close or tries to start up conversation, they duck down, but otherwise they’re pretty consistently exposed—and then some dude with octopus cuff-links invited Eddie to join his secret society. But, you know, he’s not been set on fire and he hasn’t killed anyone, so it’s definitely shaping up to be a legitimate good date, by Eddie’s standards.

Venom doesn’t have standards, but they seem to be enjoying outing regardless. Eddie buys them a little stuffed dinosaur in the gift shop on the way out, because the stuffed Komodo Dragons looked a little underwhelming, and only came at 1/5 scale, which is the kind of commitment to lizards that Eddie’s just not willing to take.
They take the BART back to his end of town, and Eddie picks up some Korean take-out for dinner—Bibimbap for Eddie, Galbi for when Eddie gets hungry in the middle of the night and doesn’t feel up to making one of those little French bread pizzas, Kimchi on the side—and head back to the apartment. Thankfully, they don’t stumble onto any attempted murders on the way back.

“So,” Eddie says, sitting at the kitchen table and tucking in to his dinner. “What’s the verdict on dates?”

It takes a while for Venom to respond. Eddie has a feeling that they’re turning over the experience in their mind, running through it again. After a moment, they tighten where they are draped across his shoulders. “**WE WOULD LIKE TO ATTEMPT MORE OUTINGS WITH YOU THAT ARE UNRELATED TO SUSTENANCE.**”

“You have a favorite part?” Eddie asks, curious. Personally, Eddie was mostly really glad to be out of the house without murdering anyone, but hearing and feeling Venom be so fucking enthused about hippos and lizards was a close second.

“**WE LIKE ANYTHING, SO LONG AS IT IS WITH YOU, EDDIE.**” They say, with the same sort of absolute conviction they use when they talk about neurotransmitters and hunger.

It’s the sort of thing that just makes the bottom fall out of Eddie’s mind. He’s not used to such naked affection without any sort of caveat—usually there’s some sort of catch where Eddie’s *too much* or *likes stupid things*, and he’ll get forced to dress up and stick out like a sore thumb at wine bars because ‘it’s past time you grew up, Eddie’. And it always turned out, after about a month or two of knife-twisting by checking the social media of his exes, that it wasn’t so much that they disliked doing ‘dumb’ and ‘childish’ and ‘silly’ things, it was just that they didn’t like doing those things *with him.*

Why the *fuck* is Venom always so nice to him? Jesus, Eddie knows what he’s like! He *knows* that he’s difficult, alright? Before Anne, his healthiest relationship was with someone who called him a ‘fixer-upper’ affectionately. And then, when it turned out that getting laid on the regular and going to dinner at fancy restaurants didn’t magically fix him, they fucking washed their hands of him and *left.*

Venom had probably intended on being affectionate, but what Eddie feels is a sort of bone-deep despair. “You don’t really have to say shit you don’t mean, Vee.”

They push themselves out of his shoulder, getting about two feet of distance so they can look him directly in the eyes as they slowly manifest a head and something vaguely torso-shaped. “**EDDIE. WE HAVE NO NEED FOR THE CONCEPT OF LIES.**”
“You lied to me about what you were doing on Earth,” Eddie points out.

“WE DID NOT MENTION IT, AND WE CAME CLEAN VERY QUICKLY. YOU ARE PURPOSEFULLY MISSING THE POINT, EDDIE.” They don’t break eye contact, and it feels very unnerving. “WE HAVE NEVER MADE A FALSE STATEMENT TO YOU BEFORE. WHY ARE YOU HAVING SUCH A DIFFICULT TIME UNDERSTANDING THAT WE ARE FOND OF YOU UNCONDITIONALLY? IS IT SOMETHING IN YOUR PAST?”

Eddie feels them dip little, spindly fingers into his memories, probing the hippocampus in a way that’s probably much grosser than he’s particularly willing to give too much thought to. “Look, could you at least ask first before looking into my memories?”

“EDDIE, WE’VE ALREADY SEEN EVERYTHING, WE JUST LIKE TO REVISIT IT WITH ADDED CONTEXT.” They scrunch up a little, in the air, and Eddie’s pretty sure that’s their equivalent of a shrug, just without the shoulders or musculature. “STOP DEFLECTING, EDDIE.”

“I’m not deflecting, it’s just—“ Eddie sighs. “I’m not fucking used to this, alright?”

“EXPLAIN.”

“I dunno how to, Vee.” He reaches a hand up and pats awkwardly at where their shoulder nominally is, and his hand sort of sinks into their flesh. He leaves it there, half submerged in the liquid meat of what would, on a human, be the trapezius muscle. “It’s just really hard for me to deal with there not being any rules about this, for us, you know? No one’s ever really come out and said that they like me, full stop, with out any qualifiers or caveats. ‘S a little weird for me, is all.”

“EDDIE.” They say, completely serious. “WE ARE MORE THAN WILLING TO EAT EVERY PERSON WHO HAS EVER HURT YOU. IF YOU COULD GIVE US A LIST, WE WOULD BE MORE THAN EAGER TO WORK OUR WAY DOWN IT.”

“I appreciate that, Vee, really I do, but this is really more of a me issue than an ‘other people’ issue, you know? And, that sort of goes along with the whole discussion we had about you not killing any of my family members if you can avoid it, even if they did—“ Eddie almost says ‘severely fuck me up’, but makes a last second revision. “—shape some of the bad parts of my personality.”

“WE HAD FIGURED, EDDIE, THOUGH WE OFFERED ON THE OFF-CHANCE THAT YOU
WOULD ACCEPT.” Eddie figures he should probably be a little less fucking touched that his live-in, uh, goo-friend, offered to murder several people for him, but he can’t exactly help himself from feeling all soft inside. “IS IT NOT CUSTOMARY AFTER ONE OF YOUR HUMAN DATES TO HAVE A CEREMONIAL EXCHANGE OF FLUIDS?”

Unfortunately, Eddie’s first thought is ‘oh, like a blood transfusion?’ before his brain catches up to his ears and he drops his spoon on the table with a clatter. “That’s—uh, I guess that’s, you know, traditional?”

He can feel himself turn bright red, and kinda relishes the way his face heats up suddenly.

“PERHAPS AFTER YOU FINISH EATING, EDDIE.”

Eddie looks down at his take out container of bibimbap, and the small, styrofoam cup of kimchi; both look a lot more depressing and overall less-fulfilling than they had a few minutes go. “I mean, I’ll just stick this in the fridge, and we can get going?”

Venom doesn’t have pupils, but Eddie gets the distinct impression that they roll their eyes. “THAT IS A RICE DISH, EDDIE, STICKING IT IN THE FRIDGE DOES LESS THAN NOTHING. RICE IS A NATURAL DESICCANT, EDDIE.”

“How do you even know that?”

“THE FOOD NETWORK IS VERY INFORMATIVE, AND WE DO NOT BOW TO THE HUMAN OBLIGATION OF SLEEP. WE ARE ESPECIALLY FOND OF JAMIE OLIVER.” Eddie feels them splay a loose net of stringy tentacles on the back of his neck and down his shoulders. “FINISH YOUR DINNER, EDDIE.”

Fuck, it’s looking increasingly less appetizing, and Eddie has a long tradition of fucking loving Korean food. Hell, at least the kimchi will keep pretty well. “Look, I’ll get down a tupperware, or something, keep the air from getting at it too bad.”

“HMMM...” They give him a squeeze, tightening over the back of his neck in a way that’s not exactly sharp, but Eddie has a feeling that if they keep it up, he’s going to have a very strangely-shaped bruise. “ACCEPTABLE.”
Eddie gets up *immediately* and begins hunting in his cupboards for the fancy-ish glass tupperware he liberated from Anne’s place when they broke up. It takes longer than he’d like, because usually he doesn’t bother taking things out of their styrofoam take-out boxes when he consigns them to the fridge. Venom slides back into his body, but keeps up the pressure on his neck and the backs of his shoulders. It’s very grounding in a way that it really shouldn’t be, shuts part of his brain off like flipping off a light-switch on a snowy winter morning—yeah, he can still do everything just fine, but something is demonstrably different and *calmer*.

Anyway. He gets the take-out in the fridge pretty fucking quickly.

“Is this something I should have a safeword for?” He asks, only half-joking. He’s decently sure they’ve jumped the line from heated eye-contact and innuendo to restraints and some fairly hardcore (if not very well articulated) feelings, but he’s down for whatever is happening, honestly.

The pressure on his neck lets up a bit, but *wraps around*. Into something that’s less of a rope of tentacle and more of a *collar*, and Eddie gives himself a mental pat on the back for being *completely correct*. “**YES. THOUGH WE LOOKED ON THE INTERNET, AND LEARNED THAT A SAFE GESTURE OF SOME SORT IS ALSO APPROPRIATE IF YOU ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO SPEAK CLEARLY.**”

“I’ll just give you the finger if I need to tap out, alright?” He thinks, for a moment, and draws a complete blank. He needs something that won’t come up in regular conversation, but that he’ll also be easily be able to remember at a moment’s notice. Something that will stand out to the both of them, but not necessarily kill the mood. “Fuck, I dunno?”

“**EDDIE. NOW IS THE TIME TO DECIDE. WE DO NOT GO ANY FURTHER UNTIL WE BOTH HAVE ONE OF THESE.**”

“Can’t I just say ‘stop’? What’s wrong with that?”

“**FROM WHAT WE SAW, FOR SOME VARIETIES OF SCENES, THAT WOULD BE AGAINST THE POINT OF THE EXERCISE.**” He feels them trail little fingers up into his hair and scratch at the back of his head, gently.

“I’m not really—“ Eddie pauses, and takes a deep breath. “Doing that isn’t something that I’d be super into, Vee.” He sighs. “We might have to make a list, at some point, alright?”
“THAT MAY BE A GOOD IDEA.” They give the collar a little squeeze, and Eddie can hear his blood rushing in his ears, feels his face flush even more, which is odd, because it seems like all the blood in his body has already traveled to one specific location in his anatomy. “WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAD TO THE BEDROOM? WE UNDERSTAND THAT IS THE PREFERRED LOCATION FOR MOST OF YOUR SPECIES.”

Fuck it, Eddie thinks, he’s always been more of a risk-aware guy than a safe and sane guy anyway. “Let’s do it.”

He doesn’t think much for a long while, after that.

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Fuck, Eddie thinks about three hours later, when his brains have stopped running out of his ears and he’s stopped feeling super cold, he should have brought a bottle of water back to the bedroom. And he should maybe invest in some softer blankets, if this is going to become a regular thing, just for aftercare purposes. Venom’s pretty great at that aspect, actually—clearly, they’ve done a little bit or research about, ahem, HUMAN SEXUAL PROCLIVITIES—but there’s really nothing like one of those soft micro-fiber blankets.

Eddie rolls out of bed and stands up, and almost immediately falls flat on his face. It’s been a long time since he got railed hard enough that he was this out of it. Goddamn.

Fuck, he feels great. He’s also pretty sure he just gave himself a nose-bleed, but ‘covered in his own blood’ has always been kind of a winning look for him, anyhow, and he’s on too much of an endorphin high to be feeling much in the way of pain.

He takes a long, warm shower, washing off the blood and letting the scalding water ease the ache of his overtaxed muscles. Fuck, he was going to look something up, wasn’t he, but he got distracted by feelings. What was it? It’ll probably come back to him in a little bit. What was it, something about squids?

He gets out of the shower, throws on his softest (and also, it should be noted, rattiest) pair of boxer-briefs, the ones with a hole on the asscheek that have faded from black to more of a warm gray. He makes his way to the kitchen, digs out the box of Kind Bars from the back of the cabinet, and liberates one, tearing off the plastic packaging and eating it in three bites, standing over the sink and crunching on the hard nuts. Then, he lights up a cigarette, sitting at his kitchen table, and stares at the blank screen of his laptop.
After a few minutes, he lights another, and doesn’t bother waking the screen up. His face hurts, but not in a bad way.

“Hey, Vee? Should we, like, talk about what just happened?”

They push themselves out of his shoulder, wrapping gently around him like a scarf. Only a little pressure, mostly just warm contact. “WE HAVE SEEN DYING STARS THAT ARE LESS IMPRESSIVE THAN YOUR HYPOTHALAMUS GLAND.”

“Don’t they just kinda wink out, though?”

“They explode, Eddie. In colors your human mind cannot even begin to conceptualize.” Eddie knocks the ash of his cigarette into the old coffee-mug filled with butts that sits in the middle of the table, and sighs, content. “Would you like to talk about what happened?”

“I mean, we should, right? Like, what we did is probably illegal in at least seventeen states, and we didn’t even make out first or talk about hard limits, or even talk about what sex means to you since your species produces asexually.” He runs a hand through his short hair; its starting to get a little shaggy, he should probably buzz it again, or at least take the sides down a fair bit and trim it up top. “I dunno, it just seems like we’re doing this backwards.”

“Technically, it was illegal on a galactic level, Eddie. Those of us who are not traditionally bipedal and humanoid are… discouraged from fraternizing with those who are.” They bring a small, branched tentacle up to scratch at the back of his head, and Eddie leans into the touch, groaning slightly as they gently run the small, hard tips of their little fingers against his scalp. “On Klyntar, sexual relations are regarded as the crude actions of lesser species. We are supposed to dominate and control, not wallow in the carnal pools of neurotransmitters that do not even give us sustenance. But we are beginning to see the appeal of your carnal pools, Eddie.”

Eddie bites back his first remark, which was a half-completed joke about how Venom certainly didn’t lose the knack for dominating despite being in a pretty even relationship. He also decides to keep ‘oh I’ll show you my carnal pools’ to himself, mostly because it isn’t even that good of an innuendo. “What, you mean there’s anti-miscegenation laws in space? That’s pretty fucked up.”
“SPACE, IN GENERAL, IS REALLY FUCKED UP, EDDIE. THERE ARE REASONS WHY WE HAVEN’T STOLEN A ROCKET AND BEGUN DEVOURING PLANETS.”

“Yeah, because you just love me so much.” Eddie says, without thinking, not flippant enough to spin it off as a joke.

“YES.”

Eddie blinks. “Really?”

“We have known that we loved you since the night we removed all the iron from your body on accident, we just did not have the words or emotional knowledge to express it accurately then.”

“Shit, Vee, that’s real sweet.” Eddie feels a smile stretch its way across his face, open and free and loose in the way his expressions rarely are. “You’re fuckin’ sweet as hell, Vee, and I love you so fuckin’ much.”

They manifest a head, just to nuzzle at his now slightly-bruised neck. “YOU ARE LEAKING SO MANY NEUROTRANSMITTERS, EDDIE. WE ARE VERY FOND OF THE WAY YOUR BRAIN FEELS, WE SHOULD MAKE IT FEEL THIS WAY MORE OFTEN.”

“Within reason, Vee, I don’t want to show up to my bro-date with Dan all trussed-up and hard enough to pound nails, alright?” Okay, right, he wouldn’t particularly be against it, but it seems like something that would require a decently long conversation with Dan and Anne about opening up their relationship, which isn’t exactly something he’s eager to do because 1) comparatively, Dan and Anne actually haven’t been together that long, and they should probably settle out a little more, and 2) Eddie and Anne are on the outs, again, and that’s not really when you want to begin polyamory negotiations. Also, like, is Dan even into dudes? Especially dudes who are package deals with sentient oil-slicks who are especially talented in murder? Eddie tries not to assume with this sort of thing.

“EDDIE, WE’VE SPENT ENOUGH TIME ON THIS PLANET TO LEARN A LITTLE EARTH ETIQUETTE. WE ARE AWARE OF THE CONCEPT OF INFORMED CONSENT.” Goddamn, is Eddie very, very glad he doesn’t have to explain that. Thank Christ Venom discovered the internet and knows how to weed out the complete and utter horseshit that comprised 93% of it.
Eddie has a sudden flash of ‘what if venom but 4chan’ and immediately regrets that his mind wandered down that deep, dark hole of absurdity. His post-sex great mood isn’t completely dissipated, but Jesus, the thought of Venom calling anyone folks they fight ‘soyboys’ and ‘cucks’ really puts a dent in it.

Wait, he was going to look up something about a secret society, right? Fuck, right, the symbol was of something with a bunch of arms, right? Like a spider, or a squid, or—

An octopus.

So, naturally, he types into google, ‘octopus society’.

And is confronted by a page full of articles about Octlantis, an underwater octopus city. Fuck, he probably should have formulated a better search query. Anyway, he still watches a few videos about the octopus city, because he’s already there, and he has a feeling that whatever he finds when he searches for the secret society is going to be nasty.

He searches for ‘secret society octopus symbol’ which, yeah, isn’t the most effective entry into google, but does actually give him useful results.

For the record, he was right. It does end up leaving him feeling particularly nasty.

—

Fucking Nazis. Goddammit, of course it would be fucking Nazis.

Whelp, at least he can eat them now, instead of just punching them really hard. Although, there’s no reason why he can’t do both.

He’d been too busy being run out of New York on a rail to read through that enormous leak of documents after SHIELD collapsed, so he hunts down a longass summary (with in text citations! That opened into a new tab! Directly into the documents retrieved from FOIA and archived directly so that you can personally verify sources! This, Eddie reflects, is how you do fuckin journalism online) and reads through it. About a quarter of the way through, he breaks out the bourbon. By the time he’s in the final stretch, he’s finished the entire bottle.
WE FIGURED THAT YOU MIGHT APPRECIATE NOT DYING OF ALCOHOL POISONING.
Venom says, directly in his mind, as Eddie stares at the empty bottle and wonders how he’s even remotely conscious, let alone coherent enough to stand up and walk the few steps over to the recycling bin. YOUR LIVER IS A WONDROUS ORGAN, WE ASSUME THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONTINUE HAVING A FUNCTIONING ONE?

Eddie nods, not trusting himself to say anything.

WE SHALL CONTINUE FILTERING THIS OUT OF YOUR BLOOD, THEN.

Eddie nods again, and pulls out the next bottle in his liquor cabinet. Some schnapps that he picked up because they had a pretty bottle and he was feeling a little maudlin. They’re peppermint flavored.

So. He cracks the bottle open, sniffs it. It smells like if someone liquefied starlight mints, cut it with Everclear, and then left it to ferment in an attic for fifty years. It tastes like pepperminty chemicals.

Eddie takes a fortifying sip, wonders why the fuck he’d buy something so terrible (it was on sale for 75% off. Of course he bought it), and sits back down in front of the laptop.

He puts ‘hydra history’ into google, and gets information about Hydra Island, in Greece. Named after the myth. He gets a few Wikipedia pages about the secret society also, but considering that they’re publicly edited and Nazis have come back like a particularly bad case of syphilis, they tell him practically less than nothing. Fuck, he needs to capitalize things.

Anyway, he searches ‘HYDRA history’ next. And he wades through a lot of Nazi shit, and deeply regrets that being an investigative journalist has taught him about thorough research and ingrained in him as instinctual. He pores through at least three pages of google search results and some very web 2.0 looking sites. He sees a lot of sand-colored backgrounds, white text, and questionable font choices. More importantly, said shitty web design is talking about some spectacularly heinous shit. Eddie manages to get to the kitchen sink before he throws up all the liquor he’s drunk in the past several hours.

He rinses out his mouth, rinses out the sink as much as he can while only using the sprayer, and gets himself a cup of ice water and nurses it, slowly. Then, he pulls out his cellphone and dials Scott.

“Eddie. It’s three in the morning. Can it wait?”
“Fuck, really?” Eddie pulls his phone off his ear to check the time. “Well, goddamn, I’ve been a little preoccupied, sorry.”

“What, you have a hot date or something?”

“Actually, yeah. Went to the zoo, got some Korean food for dinner, got plowed, and got invited to join HYDRA. You know, basic date shit.”

“Look, dude, I don’t need to know about your sex life, alright?” Scott sighs, and Eddie’s pretty sure that he hasn’t even bothered sitting up in his bed yet. “Just keep that shit to the bedroom, alright?”

“That feels awfully limiting.” Eddie feels a positively shit-eating grin stretch itself across his face, for a moment. “Anyway. You just gonna ignore that the Nazis are trying to recruit me to do Nazi shit?”

Eddie hears the phone drop, and clatter onto a hard surface. “Shit!” Scott says, far away from the microphone. A few scratching noises, and then, “Sorry, dropped the phone, not prepared for that shit at three in the morning.”

“Sorry,” Eddie says, not meaning it in the slightest, “But seeing as how you’re an Avenger, and their big thing is hunting down HYDRA now, I figured you should be the first call.”

“I’m a second-stringer at best, Eddie; just because I’m Avengers adjacent doesn’t mean that I actually have Captain America on speed dial.” Scott sighs. “You want me to send this up the Avengers phone tree?”

“Maybe? I’m kinda tempted to accept the offer just so I can learn where their base is.”

“That,” Scott says, and Eddie can immediately tell that he’s gesturing emphatically with his other hand, just by the way the word punches out of his mouth, “Is a terrible idea.”

“How else am I gonna learn where the secret Nazi base is, Scott?”
“Buy a tracker off amazon? Stick it on the guy who tried to recruit you next time he shows up? It’s not that out there, and it’s a hell of a lot safer than trying to infiltrate a secret Nazi base run by mad Nazi scientists.”

“Okay, you might have a point there,” Eddie concedes, “How’s shit with you, anyway?”

“Fuckin’ tired, Eddie, it’s three in the morning.” He practically hears Scott roll his eyes. “Go to fuckin’ sleep.”

Scott hangs up, and Eddie pulls up amazon to try and find some spy shit; it’s woefully disappointing, so instead he looks on mommy blogs for the most favored hardware for tracking your teenager when they’re using your car. That provides way more favorable results, and he picks up one of the shockingly inexpensive bug/tracker combos after a short amount of research.

Alright, he thinks, time to lo-jack a Nazi.
Eddie day-drinks, gets in over his head, and has a close shave. Venom eats an appendix. Greek myths are woefully misunderstood.

He and Anne are out at lunch, again, a few days after he and Venom, uh, began ‘exploring carnal pools’. It’s at some place near her office that actually isn’t too bad a hike from the nearest BART station; it’s decidedly not an Anne sort of joint, a diner masquerading as a ‘sports bar’ so they can serve obscene amounts of alcohol and have outdoor seating for smokers. Eddie, naturally, loves it.

Also, he makes a point to get there early and insist on outdoor seating, because if they’re mending fences or whatever the fuck, he’s going to want a steady stream of cigarettes just so he doesn’t end up making a scene and stealing his entire table-setting while storming out.

Anyway, he’s halfway through his first margarita when Anne shows up, wearing an impeccably pointy power-suit and looking twitchy.

“Eddie, it’s noon.” She says, in lieu of a greeting.

He grins, shameless. “It’s got lime juice in it, I’m just making sure I don’t get scurvy.”

“You never can be too careful,” She replies, dry as dust, sitting down across from him and opening up the menu.

“Maybe I’ll switch to gin and tonics after this, the quinine will keep me from getting malaria.”

“God,” Anne says, not unkindly, “You’re an asshole.”

“Yep.”

The waiter comes by, and soon enough Anne is nursing a Long Island Iced Tea that’s frankly a little
large for someone who’s going back to work after lunch. But, hey, this is looking like it’s going to be a rough conversation, and he trusts her judgment not to roll up to work three sheets to the wind and try to practice law.

“So,” Anne begins, after a short period of staring at her drink and half-heartedly gazing into the middle-distance, “How’s work?”

“I mean, it’s writing, it’s—“ Eddie stops, because this isn’t even where their tension is, and he’s just picking a fight on instinct. He gives it another shot. “It’s alright, keeping busy. They rolled me over into a weekly column a while ago, I’m really liking that.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah.” He takes a sip of his margarita, just so he doesn’t have to say anything else and has an excuse to change the subject. “How’s shit with you?”

“Things are okay, they’re trying to digitize some of the closed files, and that’s taking a while.” She says, blandly. “Lots of scanning.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah.”

They sit in silence for a moment.

“So…” Eddie begins. “hypothetically, right—“

“Eddie, c’mon. You never start a sentence like that unless it’s emphatically not a hypothetical question. Want to try that again?”

“Right, so,” Eddie takes a deep breath. “What’s your stance on felony arson?”

“As your legal counsel,” Anne begins, “As long as there’s no physical evidence linking you to the
scene, my stance is that it’s a horrible thing to do, and I hope they catch whoever committed it.”

“And as my friend?”

“I mean, Eddie, DNA evidence has only really been studied from wood-based fires. But, if something had, for instance, your fingerprints on it, and it just happened to burn down, then that wouldn’t withstand any sort of blaze.” She sighs. “And even then, fingerprint evidence is notoriously unreliable.”

“Cool.”

She pauses, and then says flatly, “What’d you burn down.” It’s not a question.

“An office-building. But it was owned by mad scientists and they’d attacked me with a katana first, so…”

“You know what?” Anne says, and takes a long sip from her drink, “Your life is like a weird jumble of books you can only buy at truck stops.”

“Oh, Anne, you know I buy all my literature at the finest of drug stores.” He grins. “You know, like Dan.”

“Eddie…” She warns.

“Look, he’s got shit taste. C’mon, he keeps me around for some reason, clearly the man is just a magnet for utter trash.” Eddie takes a sip of his margarita and hates himself a little bit. “No offense.”

Anne takes a contemplative sip of her Long Island Iced Tea. “God, I’m so glad we aren’t together anymore.” She rolls her eyes at Eddie’s expression, and continues. “You and me, not Dan and me. Jesus, Eddie, you would know if we’d broken up.”

“I mean,” Eddie says, “We had some good times.”
“Yeah, but you also got me fired, and we might be—“ She gestures between the two of them, “—okay-ish, now, but I’m not going to just forget that. Forgive, yeah, but forget? Not likely.”

“That’s fair.” Eddie says, because it is. He’s honestly kind of amazed that their relationship has mended to the extent that they can go out for semi-awkward drinks on occasion and have it usually end on a somewhat decent note. “Hey, at least you didn’t try to set me on fire.”

“What?”

“Oh, did I never tell you that one of my exes tries to set me on fire?”

“I always thought you were joking about that!”

“Nope, that actually happened.” Eddie licks some of the salt off the rim of his margarita. “No big deal, I lived, obviously. Happened years ago.”

The waiter comes back around, delivering an enormous burger with thick cut fries to Eddie and a fried-chicken sandwich with a slimy pile of lettuce that pretended to be a side salad to Anne.

She looks at him, curiously. “Is that…”

“What?”

“It’s just, your neck.” She peers at him, searchingly. “Is that a hickey?”

“What? No.” It’s an entirely different sort of sex-bruise, actually. He and Venom haven’t actually done much kissing, mostly because Venom’s got a bunch of razor-sharp teeth, and Eddie’s a little leery about that. “Not a hickey, no way.”

“Are you getting laid?” She asks, excited.

“… Yes?”
“Are you…” She leans forward, “Are you fucking *Venom*?”

“Maybe?” Eddie’s voice gets a little high-pitched, and he knows that she’s caught him, then.

“Is this one of those ‘maybe’s that means yes?’

Eddie nods, and stares into the dregs of his margarita, as the ice slowly melts into vaguely tequila-flavored water. “Do you—“ He sighs, and tries again. “Do you have a problem with that?”

Anne picks at her salad, and vinaigrette drips of the portion of iceberg lettuce that she’s managed to spear with her fork. She sets it down, after a moment. “I mean, I’m not *super jazzed*, or anything, but you seem, a lot more together than you have, you know, *recently,*” She says, carefully dancing around ‘since we broke up and your life fell apart’; Eddie can still hear all the baggage that they’re carefully avoiding, like they’re traversing a minefield. “And, I’ve got to say, if you’re both consenting adults and this is a good thing for the both of you, I can live with it.”

“That’s uh,” Eddie stares down at the greasy, half-eaten burger on his plate. “That’s real cool of you.”

“Oh, yeah, me wanting you to have a shred of happiness is just going *above and beyond* the call of duty for basic human decency.” She says, sarcastically.

Eddie takes a bite of his burger and resolutely does not say anything.

“Jesus.”

He motions the waiter for another margarita, and downs the cool dregs of his current one in a single gulp. He’s still not looking at Anne.

“*Christ,* Eddie, do you really think so little of me?”

“No, it’s just—“ He sighs, and pulls out a cigarette, lighting it. “It’s just easier to expect nothing and
be right than it is to constantly be disappointed when folks dick me over.”

“Oh, honey.”

“Don’t you ‘oh honey’ me, alright? It’s fine, everything’s fine.” The waiter gives him a second margarita, and Eddie licks some of the salt off of the rim of the glass before taking a long sip. Something occurs to him, and he uses it as a life raft out of this sinking ship of a conversation. “What do you know about HYDRA?”

She blinks at him. “They’re Nazis. Captain America fights them. Secret society, infiltrating high levels of government, that sort of thing. Seem kind of like a villain in a James Bond movie, complete with suicide pills in fake teeth. Why.”

“What.”

“Just tryin’ to cover all my bases, y’know?” He says, and can tell immediately that she doesn’t buy a single word of it.

“Sure.”

“I mean it!”

“Uh-huh.” She takes a sip from her drink.

“Annie.” He whines.

She cuts him a look, and takes a large bite out of the remaining half of her fried-chicken sandwich.

“Fine!” Eddie says, all of a sudden, “They’re trying to recruit me and they crashed my date and now I’m gonna hunt them down.”

“Sure, okay.” Anne says, flatly. “Just gonna go hunt Nazis.”

“I mean,” Eddie says, “What are they gonna do, kill me? Lately, that really seems to be more of a temporary setback.”
“You do you, then, I guess. Just don’t get Dan arrested, alright? I don’t think he’d do well in prison.”

“Have you met him? The man’s, like, super adaptable. He’d be fine in the joint.” Eddie doesn’t think it’s a good idea to mention that he’s becoming pretty tight with a convicted felon.

The conversation moves on to greener pastures and smaller talk, mostly about what a stand-up guy Dan is, and how Anne doesn’t actually have a good bodega near the house (‘I know!’ Eddie says, ‘your house is in the middle of a fucking food desert!’). Anne replies, ‘I live near a Whole Foods, Eddie, it’s just not in walking distance and everything’s a third as pricey as it needs to be’), and how she’s thinking of getting another cat, to keep the current one company.

It’s like when they were dating, except without all the messy feelings entangled with everything. Fuck, after the breakup, he’d forgotten that he was actually also friends with Anne, instead of just her fiancé. It’s nice to have some of that back. And honestly, it’s a new experience for him, not leaving a road full of burnt bridges and salted earth behind every relationship.

This, Eddie thinks, is too long a run for him not to have something bad happen to him. He waits for the other shoe to drop.

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A few days later, he’s at the bodega. His tracker, the one he ordered from the mommy blog, arrived the day previous, and now Eddie’s just wandering around hoping to run into some errant Nazis so he can slip it into one of their pockets.

The tracker itself is roughly the shape of a hockey-puck, though a bit smaller and much lighter. Unfortunately, smallish trackers have a pretty low range, and no listening functionality, at least the ones that are available for purchase by civilians in the great state of California, so the whole setup is a little clunky. But he figures he can slip it into a suit-pocket or maybe a messenger bag without too much hassle.

Personally, he feels that he got cheated out of some grade-A James Bond style bullshit by reality.

Anyway. He’s standing, staring blankly at the cans of soup and wondering about the difference between tomato bisque and hearty tomato, when someone says, “Have you given our proposal much thought, Mister Brock?”
“Fuck!” He nearly jumps out of his own fucking skin. The nerve of those bastards, sneaking up on him in his own bodega. He turns to face the HYDRA agent. “Well, you guys didn’t actually tell me what I’d be signing up for.”

“Progress, Mister Brock.” It’s the same man as before, with slicked-back black hair and smartly cut suit. He still has the little octopus cufflinks. “We are working towards a better planet, towards creating a new order for the world.”

Eddie’s spent some time researching conspiracy theorists, and those two sentences are ringing a ridiculous number of ‘bad shit do not get involved’ alarms in his head. For as put together as this guy is, Eddie figures that there’s 60/40 odds of him believing in lizard people, just going by their two interactions.

“That’s pretty vague,” He says, feckless and intentionally stupid.

“We have our fingers in many pies, Mister Brock.”

Eddie turns to more fully face the other man, and palms the tracker. “What’s with the octopii, anyway? ‘S that, like, your logo?’ He pulls the pocket-square out of the man’s suit-jacket—nominally, so he can look at it more closely; actually, so he can fold the tracker into it. It is, in fact, patterned with little tiny octopi. “There any symbology behind the octopodes?”

(Yes, Eddie is aware that not only is it symbolism, but that there is some contention about how to pluralize ‘octopus’. He’s also very aware that playing dumb is the only way that this is even remotely going to work, and tying someone up with grammar so they don’t focus on his hands takes a little fucking effort.)

“Cut off one head,” The man says, as Eddie carefully folds the tracker into the pocket square, “And two more shall take its place.”

“Kinda hard to do that when octopi only have one head.” Eddie makes the little square of fabric go as flat as it can, and gingerly stuffs it back into the lapel pocket of the jacket, arranging the little corners poking outwards into something a little professional looking. “Starfish, I think, can do that-regrow limbs ‘n shit, and the detached arms’ll grow their own bodies.”

“In ancient Greek myth, Mister Brock, one of Heracles’ twelve labors was to slay the Lernaean
Hydra, a beast that resided in a swamp connected to Lake Lerna. And though he fought and fought with his sword, he found that removing one of its heads only caused two more to sprout in its place. Only after a long, hard battle did he admit that he was outmatched, and call upon the gods for their aid.” Eddie’s fairly certain that “not how the story goes, but this seems like it might some sort of weird, doublespeak warning. “The gods struck at the innocent creature, rending it limb from limb and burning the scraps. And once they had left, and returned to their frivolous pursuits atop Mount Olympus, the Hydra stirred, rising from the ashes, and sunk back into the swamp from whence it came, ever hiding from the gods who viewed it as destroyed, and conducting its business from the shadows as the world progressed.”

God, Eddie thinks, the HYDRA party line on Greek myth is all kinds of ass-backwards. “I always thought that the hydra ate Heracles, and he cut his way out of its stomach, leading to it bleeding to death.”

“Feh!” The man scoffs, and says the next word with as much scorn as physically possible without actively spitting on the floor of the bodega. “Disney.”

Eddie makes a noise of assent, and picks up a can of Spaghetti-Os, before setting it back on the shelf and moving slightly down the aisle to look at the boxed dinners. He picks up a box of the creamy broccoli Tuna Helper, and tucks it under his arm.

“Mister Brock,” The man says, “Would you like to join our humble organization? We would be… honored to have you.”

“I’m really more of a Kali guy.” Eddie says, blandly. “I appreciate your offer, though.”

The man nods, and smiles. It’s not a nice smile, and Eddie can feel his insides curdle. “We’ll see each other again, Mister Brock.”

“I’m sure we will.” Eddie says to his retreating back.

Only when the other man is out the door, and it has firmly shut behind him, does Eddie allow himself to exhale, all in one go, allow himself to push all the air and tightness out of his lungs.

“Eddie!” Mrs. Chen calls out, from the front of the bodega, “What the fuck was that?”
“Just some Nazis trying to hunt me down and threatening me, no biggie.” Eddie says. It would probably help sell the ruse if his voice didn’t break halfway through ‘threatening’, but Eddie’s off his fucking game right now, what with all the Greek myth shit.

“You’re a terrible liar, Eddie.” He picks up a couple packages of tropical-flavored Mentos and works his way to the checkout counter, placing his purchases on top of the clear glass. “You’re going to need tuna with that, Eddie.”

“Got some at home.”

“Not if you haven’t been cheating on me with other stores, you don’t.”

Eddie sighs, and trudges back to the canned goods aisle, picking up a few short, stubby tins of tuna. “Why d’you gotta kill me like this, Mrs. Chen?”

“Eddie.”

“Fine, fine.” He sets the tuna on the counter. “And a pack of reds, please?

“Why didn’t you just eat that guy, Eddie?” She asks, reaching behind herself and pulling out a pack of Marlboros from the shelf without looking.

“Put a tracker on him. Nazis hunt in packs, like hyenas. Just want to learn where their base is, and then I’ll rain down like the angel of fuckin’ death. Gonna go for some real grade-A biblical-calamity style carnage.” He hands over his debit card.

“You need to let go of some of this negativity, Eddie. You listen to those meditation CDs I gave you, yet?”

He smiles, and shakes his head. “Mrs. Chen, you know that shit’s in Mandarin.”
He gets back to the apartment, and checks the tracker. It’s moving slowly along the BART line towards Fisherman’s Wharf.

He takes half an hour, makes some Tuna Helper, and then refreshes the page. The little blinking dot of the tracker’s location remains still at Fisherman’s Wharf.

Eddie finishes dinner, boxes up the leftovers, and has a nice, long cuddle with Venom while watching *Botched* before passing out on the sofa.

The next day, the tracker is still in Fisherman’s Wharf, so he’s pretty sure that’s where the HYDRA base is.

Eddie throws on some clothes, eats a protein bar, smokes a cigarette, opens the door to leave the apartment—

And promptly finds himself face to face with the HYDRA goon, and about a dozen or so other well-dressed men pointing guns at him.

HYDRA guy is wearing a different suit, this one with a subtle pinstripe, and holds up a syringe, and jamming it into his neck. The last thing Eddie hears, before things go completely dark, is, “Mister Brock, you really thought you were clever with that tracker stunt, didn’t you? You really ought to reconsider your stance on helping us achieve our goals.”

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Venom didn’t actually mean to get in the habit of leaving bits of themselves stashed around the apartment. But, if they’re hitching a ride on the outside while Eddie’s showering, or washing his hands, sometimes a drop or two washes off. And it’s no big deal, really, they can reconstitute themselves pretty quickly if it’s just a few molecules. But that doesn’t make the them that’s in the drains any less them, it just makes that part of them non-contiguous. And they can shut off awareness to the little dense droplets chilling out in the U-bends of Eddie’s plumbing, caught in the little reservoir of water and never washed away because of their weight, so it’s really not a bit deal.

Most of the time.

Now it kind of is a big deal.
Because Eddie’s fucking passed out in the back of a windowless van, given some sort of paralytic agent that induces unconsciousness. And as versatile of a body roommate as Venom is, they can’t make muscles move if they’re frozen in place. This fucking movement scheme based on electrical impulses is all well and good until somebody decides to overload the circuits.

There’s a creak, and a thump. They think it sounds like the window on the fire escape being opened from the outside, though they can’t quite tell. If it’s fucking HYDRA, they’re going to eat them from the inside out and ride in the meatsack until they find Eddie or the world burns. They aren’t particularly picky either way, and are leaning towards both.

“Fuck!” They hear, dimly. It’s the voice of Eddie’s neighbor. “Fuck, alright, Ziggy, you’ve got this. Fuckin’ Matrix looking motherfuckers kidnap your neighbor, what do you do, fuck. Alright, he’s gotta—he’s gotta have some fuckin’ emergency contact info somewhere around here. Goddammit. Okay.” He claps, suddenly. “Let’s do this, fuck, why don’t people have rolodexes any more?”

The neighbor putters around the apartment, rifling through papers and opening cabinets, like there’s going to be any sort of list of important contact information just lying around.

“Fuck.” Closer to the kitchen sink, this time. “Goddammit, Eddie—god, is your name even Eddie? Fuck, is that something I should know? ‘M rescuing the dude from g-men and I don’t even know his name. How is this my life, holy fuck.”

The sink turns on, and cold water begins gushing down the drain.

Venom slithers what little amount of them there is up and out of the garbage disposal, over the stainless steal wall of the sink, and into the neighbor’s hand.

**EDDIE HAS BEEN KIDNAPPED.** They project, directly into his mind, too small to manifest any sort of mouth. **WE NEED TO GO RESCUE HIM, AND THE REST OF OUR BODY.**

“*What the fuck?*”

**NAZIS HAVE KIDNAPPED EDDIE. WE DO NOT HAVE A MOUTH RIGHT NOW, SO WE ARE SPEAKING DIRECTLY INTO YOUR TEMPORAL LOBE.** The neighbor still has an appendix, they get to work correcting that, just to they have a little energy to work from. Also, for some reason, Eddie is fond of this imbecile, so they figure that diffusing the time bomb sitting in his lower
abdomen is a nice thing to do. Now, they have *that much* more energy, and they’re feeling a little more pragmatic than they are *charitable*, at the moment. **WE ARE VENOM. WE NEED TO FIND EDDIE. OPEN UP THE LAPTOP.**

“Fuck, yeah, sure, *Jesus.*” The neighbor shakes himself slightly. “Might be going insane, gonna have to beg off of practice tonight, *goddammit.*” He walks over to where the laptop sits closed on the table and opens it. “You know what the fuckin’ *password* is, or do I just gotta sit here with my thumb up my ass?”

They reach his hand up and puppet his fingers to the correct keys, in sequence. It’s a little weird, driving someone else’s hand, especially when they are emphatically *not* in symbiosis. Not that Venom’s actively opposed to this body, or anything—it isn’t too bad, all things considered—but the joints are all wrong, and it’s just *not Eddie.*

“That’s fuckin’ weird, dude.” The neighbor says, staring at his own hand in bemused dismay. They haven’t actually bothered learning his name, though, to be fair, Eddie hasn’t, either. “Fuck, sorry, not a dude, my bad.”

**FIND EDDIE,** They say, and puppet the neighbor’s hand up to point towards the screen emphatically. *USE THIS.*

“Okay, but, like, *why?* I can’t do jack shit from here, and no offense, but it seems like y’all have had better days.”

**WE ARE EATING ALL THE POISON IN HIS BODY. HE MIGHT LIKE TO KNOW WHERE HE IS WHEN HE WAKES UP.** They ooze out of the pores in the skin of the man’s hand, and give it a conciliatory squeeze. *NOW PLEASE.*

“Fuck, yeah, of course, sorry.” He moves the mouse around a little bit. “Jesus, dude, would it kill you to organize your desktop? Folders exist, Christ.”

Inexplicably, his eyes light upon a little radar symbol in the doc at the bottom of the screen. “It can’t be this easy.”

The neighbor opens up ‘find my iPhone’, and runs it.
It pings in a building on one of the streets just off Union Square. “Boom. There he is.”

**THANK YOU. DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER EXTRANEOUS ORGANS? WE ARE GETTING HUNGRY.**

“How rea—what do you mean, other?”

**YOU WERE NOT USING YOUR APPENDIX.**

“Alright, can’t be too angry about that, I guess.” The neighbor sighs. “Not really any extraneous ones, but I heard your fella mention once that you like chocolate? Got one of those huge jars of M&M’s customized for my girlfriend last Valentines, but then we broke up, and it felt really weird eatin’ them, you know? So they might be a little stale, or whatever, but you can go to fuckin’ town.”

**ACCEPTABLE.**

“Cool, because I just found out that they put some of Columbo up on youtube, and I’ve been meaning to watch it, because I’ve got this big soft spot for 70s character actors and murder mysteries, you know, but I don’t really want to do it alone, because it just feels weird being in the apartment watching shit on my laptop alone for six hours, you know? And it might help keep you from freaking out too much about your fella, alright, the rest of you has got this whole ‘saving his life’ thing covered. Now lets go back to my place and get ourselves fuckin’ settled in for a wait, alright?”

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Eddie’s first thought when he opens his eyes is that fuck, he gets kidnapped way too much, especially compared to, like, normal dudes who don’t actively antagonize secret societies.

Eddie’s second thought is that he is absolutely fucked. He looks down, or at least, as well as he can, and finds that he’s strapped to an old-timey metal dentist’s chair, the sort they sometimes have at tattoo parlors. His neck’s not feeling great about moving, but he can sort of angle his chin a little bit, and manages to get a look at one of his hands. He tries to wiggle a finger.

Nothing happens.
He can hear the blood screaming in his ears, all of a sudden. He tries to wiggle it again, and—

Nothing happens, but at least it isn’t numb. He can feel the cold air of the room seeping through his thin, cotton t-shirt.

**EDDIE**, He hears, practically screamed into his brain, *THEY HAVE TEMPORARILY PARALYZED YOUR MUSCLES. WE ARE TAKING CARE OF THE POISON, BUT IT WILL TAKE A WHILE. AS FAR AS WE CAN TELL, WE ARE TRAPPED SOMEWHERE OFF OF UNION SQUARE.*

Eddie’s never felt more happy to be hearing voices in his entire goddamn life. It’s a little grounding, in a very surreal way—he may be *kidnapped by Nazis*, but at least he isn’t *alone*. Though how they know *where* he is—

*PARTS OF US WERE LIVING IN YOUR PIPES. YOUR NEIGHBOR CAME IN LOOKING FOR AN EMERGENCY CONTACT, SO WE IMPROVISED. AND THEN WE ATE HIS APPENDIX, BECAUSE WE WERE HUNGRY AND HE WASN’T USING IT.*

Before Eddie can begin to formulate a response to that, the door opens at the far end of the grungy room, and the slimy HYDRA goon walks in, a large, rubber apron over his impeccably tailored suit. Eddie has a bad feeling about it as he snaps on a pair of blue nitrile gloves.

“You will tell us what we want to know, Mister Brock.” He menacingly steps closer, pulling something thin out of the large pocket on the front of the apron. “Either you will, or your blood will.”

And then, he unfolds the straight razor.

Eddie might just be in over his fucking head.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Eddie gets tortured, makes a few lists, and bites a dude's throat off. Venom makes a friend, makes a phone call, and does a bit of healing.

Chapter Notes

just going to put a content warning for GORE right here, because there's a FAIR BIT, folks. It's pretty much right out of the gate, but if you'd like to skip it, the grossest stuff is over before 'Alright, Eddie thinks, time to get ourselves together'.

The thing about getting cut with an extremely sharp knife, Eddie realizes, as the tip of the straight razor is carving into his bicep, is that it doesn’t actually hurt at first. If it’s sharp enough, and goes in a straight line, it just feels cold, and you get slammed with endorphins. And then, later, the pain punches you in the face all of a sudden. At least, if you do it right, and don’t decide to start twisting.

The thing about the straight razor is that it’s not in pristine condition, and it’s not surgically sharp. It’s the designated torture straight razor; parts of the blade are a little chipped, it clearly hasn’t seen a whetstone in a while, and there’s a rusty stain near the hinge, the sort that only forms when blood is left to dry and doesn’t quite flake off all the way. Goddammit, it’s not like he was expecting the Nazi torturers to stoop to using an autoclave, or whatever, but the last thing he needs is blood poisoning.

The thing about the dude hacking into his arm is that he isn’t doing it with surgical precision. He’s doing it to inflict pain.

It’s working.

Like, okay, it’s not the worst pain that Eddie’s experienced in his life—he’s popped his own shoulder back in the socket, and he’s broken bones so badly he can see them, among other things in the Eddie Brock medical history—but it’s certainly the most that’s been intentional.

“I’m going to ask again, Mister Brock,” The man says, wiping Eddie’s blood off the razor on his large, rubber apron, “Tell me what you are.”
His arm is cold and on fire at the same time, and he can feel blood dripping down fingers he still can’t even wiggle. “I’m a fucking journalist, dickface.”

The man raises a gloved hand to the set of three gouges that stripe down the length of Eddie’s bicep, and pushes. The bright red of Eddie’s blood contrasts sharply with the dull blue of the gloves, and it sends a stab of pain screeching up and in; it feels like the bone underneath is on fire. “Mister Brock, if you do not do this the easy way, trust that we have ways of making you talk that are far less pleasant.”

“Oh, but I just like it hard so much,” Eddie says, because apparently all his sense is leaking out of his body, along with the blood.

The man takes the straight razor and cuts twice, deeply, directly perpendicular to the previous slices. The blade catches slightly, on his humerus, and a choked cry bubbles up from the bottom of Eddie’s throat. He feels the muscle fibers split apart, like a sausage breaking out of its casing, and the noise turns into a scream.

Okay, yeah, this might count as the worst pain Eddie’s ever been in, outside of injuries related to Venoming.

The man pulls a pair of medical forceps out of the front pocket of the apron, and holds them open with one finger, carefully inserting both sides into the parallel lines of the wound and squeezing. Eddie feels blood seep out as pressure is applied, and the thrumming undercurrent of pain is starting to rise out of the background, screaming and licking its way up into his brain as the man wrenches a somewhat raggedy and lopsided cube of muscle out of Eddie’s arm.

It’s less of a scream now, and more of a high-pitched, breaking, exhale; screaming takes too much energy—more energy than he has right now.

“Mister Brock, I do wish you would be less difficult. It is truly a shame to experiment on a specimen such as yourself without any scientific benefit.” He wiggles the section of shredded muscle in the forceps, slightly, and Eddie wants to throw up. “We cannot get any information from this different than the information we get from the blood sample that you so graciously provided before you woke up. A little cosmetic damage never hurt a tool, however.”

Eddie coughs wetly, bringing up a fair amount of phlegm, and uses the last vestiges of his energy to spit it directly into the other man’s face. Some gets in his eye, and Eddie feels a grin claw itself, kicking and screaming, across his face.
“You should not have done that, Mister Brock.” The man says, wiping the razor once again on his rubber apron. “You’ll learn, eventually, that actions have consequences.”

Eddie’s wondering where the *fuck* Venom is, and why the *fuck* they’ve gone silent, though if they’re still dealing with whatever’s coursing through his veins and preventing them from bringing down the wrath of god onto this motherfucker, that’s understandable.

> WE ARE BUSY MENDING THE DAMAGE TO YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM, EDDIE. FLUSHING A PARALYTIC AGENT FROM YOUR BRAIN STEM AND SPINE IS NOT SOMETHING THAT WE WERE PREPARED TO DO AT THE DROP OF A HAT. He feels them curl up around his ribs, squeezing slightly, and Eddie’s never been happier to feel like he’s got a sucking chest wound. WOULD YOU LIKE US TO SUPPRESS SOME OF THE PAIN?

Eddie shakes his head, minutely. It moves a hell of a lot easier than it did five minutes ago, and now he’s steering from his neck, instead of his chin. Pain is cleansing, clears all the detritus from his mind until he’s focused on one thing. And right now, that one thing is how *incredibly angry* his is. Eddie doesn’t want to lose his edge in this fight, if it eventually turns into a fight and not just him dying of torture, and the only thing keeping him on his fucking toes and crossing his Ps and dotting his Qs is the way it feels like someone’s taken a melon baller, dipped it in Sulphuric acid, and methodically used it to carve the flesh out of his arm.

> WHAT THE FUCK, EDDIE. WE NEED TO WORK ON YOUR FEAR RESPONSES. They stop squeezing so hard, and Eddie can feel a tentacle worm up the back of his neck, under the skin, and gently move back and forth, like some sort of subcutaneous caress. The execution leaves something to be desired, but the thought counts for a lot. ALSO, EDDIE, THAT’S NOT HOW YOUR WRITTEN LANGUAGE WORKS,

He’s a little fucking *preoccupied*, alright? Again, nothing like searing pain to really clear the wheat from the chaff in the mind.

The other man stands up, and reaches something off a shelf, behind the dentist’s chair that Eddie is strapped onto.

It’s a cordless drill, and along with it, a small case.

The man spins the chuck of the drill, loosening the Phillips-head drill-bit and removing it. “Mister Brock, I really hate to do this,” He sounds more than happy as he reaches into the case, and brings
out an inch-wide spade-bit, and begins getting it secured into the drill. “You’ve really given us no choice in the matter, but information that you can give to science far outweighs your usefulness to us as an asset.” He squeezes the trigger of the drill slightly, making sure that the bit is secured properly. “It is a shame that you don’t share our scientific vision, Mister Brock.”

The man pulls out the rusty straight razor, and slices a large X with two quick strokes into the meat of Eddie’s right thigh, cutting through the thick denim of his jeans and his flesh quickly enough that it’s more shocking and cold than it is painful.

Huh, Eddie thinks, why the fuck would he do—

The Nazi puts the head of the drill-bit into where the two strokes of the X meet, and Eddie realizes exactly where the fuck this is going the instant before he pulls the trigger.

And Eddie clenches his jaw so hard he feels one of his molars shatter, and then he can’t help the way a scream rips itself out of his throat at the way his thigh muscle is torn apart and twisted around the metal rod, the way it’s stripped away from his femur by the torque of the drill.

Eddie feels his hands clench into fists as his torturer decides to lean a little weight on the drill, and his scream gets even more shrill and strained. Eddie’s pretty sure he can feel his throat split open on the inside, just from how much air is being forced through it. His mouth tastes coppery, and he feels his femur begin to shake and jar as the drill-bit begins to bore into the bone.

The pain is so intense now that it’s almost inconsequential. It’s everything, it tinges every single aspect of his being, and he can’t do shit about it; his body is still ringing all sorts of alarm bells, he’s still screaming, but he isn’t in control of this any more, and he isn’t even really here. It’s very grounding, in a way that Eddie is pretty sure should be way more troubling than it is at the moment. As it stands, he’s in goddamn agony, but it’s mostly background noise.

Eddie Brock has solidsy checked the fuck out of his own body. This—this—is what he was telling Venom about. Pain makes you think super clearly, if only you can manage to dissociate hard enough.

The man stops, and Eddie can see his own bone, can see the way it’s been carved into. Blood wells up, quickly, and stains the outside of his jeans. It occurs to him, suddenly, that he’s probably lost at least a quart of blood, just judging by the size of the puddle he can see on the floor.
“Mister Brock, have you reconsidered your stance on speaking to us? We can make it worth your while.” Eddie tongues the remainder of his molar to the front of his mouth, and grins, letting it fall from between his lips and down the front of his white t-shirt, along with strings of bloody saliva. “Medical care, for example, can be provided.”

All this blood loss is probably what’s making it easier for him to separate himself from all this—

Oh, okay, he’s going into shock, that makes sense. Not, you know, great, but knowledge is power, and all that shit.

EDDIE, THIS IS A BAD THING. VERY BAD THINGS ARE HAPPENING. He can feel them slide down his arm and begin knitting his bicep back together. WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE, EDDIE.

He’s fucking working on it, alright? There’s only so much he can do without the use of his limbs…

Only, wait, that’s not quite right, is it? Because he can clench his fists, and those are finer motor control that’s further away from his spine than the rest of his arm, so it stands to reason that he should have movement in them, now. Eddie rolls his shoulder, the one not connected to his turbo-fucked bicep, and feels the click deep inside the joint. Good, he’s got two working extremities.

The other man pulls a phone out of his suit pocket, and taps on it a few times, leaving bloody fingerprints on the glowing screen. Eddie notes, with some small degree of humor, that the phone case does, in fact, have an octopus on it. “My colleagues have elected, upon hearing your wondrous screams, to allow you a few minutes alone to consider our offer.”

He sets the drill down on the floor, and strips out of the nitrile gloves, turning them inside out in a practiced motion that ensures none of Eddie’s blood stains his porcelain-white fingers. He leaves the room, and locks the door firmly behind himself, with what sounds like two dead-bolts and a chain.

Alright, Eddie thinks, time to get ourselves together.

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Meanwhile, back at Eddie’s stoner neighbor’s apartment, the Venom that is non-contiguous, is wrapped around the neighbor’s hand, on the outside, and is absorbing stale chocolate by osmosis,
feeling more and more stable as they work their way through the enormous jar of M&M’s. On the television, Donald Pleasance plays the murderous owner of a failing winery in Napa Valley, who killed his own brother by drowning him on accident after bashing his head in with a decanter.

Once Eddie gets a drill to the leg, though, they squeeze tightly on the neighbor’s hand. They’re about the size of a softball, now, and they feel some of his fingers break with a crack before they reset them and back off slightly.

WE NEED TO CALL DAN.

“Did you just break my fingers? I’m a professional musician, that shit’s my livelihood! Fuck!” He pauses, and flexes his hand, once, twice. “Ah, fuck, alright, that seems pretty decent, actually, sorry. Who the fuck’s Dan?”

DOCTOR FRIEND. EDDIE IS BEING TORTURED BY NAZIS AND WE NEED TO CALL OUR DOCTOR FRIEND SO WE CAN LEARN HOW TO MAKE HIM NOT DIE IN THE NEXT TWENTY MINUTES OR SO. They puppet his hand over to his cellphone, and unlock it using the fingerprint ID. HE WORKS AT THE HOSPITAL, WE NEED TO CALL HIM.

“Do you know which hospital? Do you know his last name? Because either of those would make tracking this guy down a lot easier.”

DAN LEWIS. HE WORKS AT ZUCKERBERG GENERAL.

“Alright, gotcha.” The neighbor—his name is Ziggy, Venom reminds themselves, and you’d better remember it, since he’s doing you a large favor—pulls up google, and searches ‘dan lewis zuckerberg general hospital san francisco’.

They both find themselves staring at a fairly rudimentary hospital website, looking at a list of staff for ‘Orthopedics’. A small, smiling picture of Dan, against a generic heather grey background, stares back at them, about hallway down the page.

“Oh, he’s, like, really good looking. You could’a warned me.” Ziggy pulls out his phone and dials the office number listed by his staff portrait.

Miraculously, Dan picks up.
“This is Doctor Lewis?”

“So, this is going to sound really weird, but apparently you’re my neighbor’s doctor-friend, and he’s been kidnapped by Nazis? And now his alien lover is telling me that they’re doing some pretty hardcore torture, and they want some medical advice.” Ziggy says, all in a rush.

“Oh goddammit, Eddie, what the fuck.” Dan sighs, and it sounds a little tinny over the phone. “Could you maybe describe what they’ve done to him?”

**WE NEED TO USE YOUR MOUTH FOR THIS,** Venom says, and sinks into his skin, sliding up his arm and fastening themselves, securely, into Ziggy’s brain.

**“THEY HAVE EXCISED SOME OF HIS BICEP, AND ARE CURRENTLY TAKING A POWER DRILL TO HIS RIGHT FEMUR.”** They say, using Ziggy’s mouth, and he’s very confused as to how a voice so deep and growly can just emanate from his voice box like that. He’s a fucking natural tenor, alright, with a falsetto good enough to do decent covers of Dio—the voice coming out of his mouth sounds like if gravel was sentient. **“HIS BRAIN IS DOING STRANGE THINGS, DAN. ALSO HE IS SLIGHTLY PARALYZED”**

Christ, Ziggy thinks, what the fuck is his life.

“What sort of strange things?” Dan asks, like that’s the worrying part of the last sentence.

**“HE’S IGNORING HIS PHYSICAL RESPONSES AND HAS LOST A DEPRESSING AMOUNT OF BLOOD. THERE ARE FAR TOO MANY NEUROTRANSMITTERS.”**

“Sounds kinda like he’s dissociating buddy. That’s not really something you can fix, you’ve really just gotta make sure he has enough blood and try and talk him out of it.”

**“THAT MAKES ZERO SENSE.”**

“Brains are weird, what can I say.” Dan sighs. “You keeping an eye on Venom, uh—“
“Ziggy.” Ziggy says, his own voice restored to him. “We’re staying inside, watching Columbo, ‘n eatin’ chocolate. I think we’ll be fine.”

“You gonna give me a call when Eddie shows back up?” When, Dan says, not if. Gotta keep positive.

“I mean, obvi. The dude sounds like he’s gonna need some hardcore doctorin’ once he gets back from the secret Nazi bunker in Union Square.”

“Cool. I’ve got clinic hours that I should be getting to, but keep me posted if anything happens, alright?”

“Sure.”

“Thanks.” Dan hangs up.

“Fuck.” Ziggy says, with no small degree of feeling, bringing his hands up and running them down his face. “Anything else you want me to do?”

Venom oozes out of the skin of his left hand, and redirects it to the open jar of M&M’s. *PERHAPS YOU SHOULD ATTEMPT TO RESCUE EDDIE.*

“No offense to your fella, but I’m a lover, not a fighter, and I don’t think that Nazis will be super injured by acoustic covers of Iron Maiden, alright?” It’s true, Venom sees in the man’s memories, that he is, in fact, next to worthless in a fight; they really want to be back in Eddie, instead of this chucklefuck—at least then they could *do something.*

Ziggy turns the video back on, and they sit in silence, only half watching the murder mystery unfold.

—-

So, he’s missing a chunk of his arm, one of his teeth has fallen out, he’s got a hole in his leg all the way into the bone, and he’s partially paralyzed; he needs to get *out* before something actually irreversible (like *death*) happens.
So, a fox, a chicken, and a bag of corn need to cross the river.

Eddie tallies up how his situation is looking in two mental lists, to try and better organize his thoughts.

Positives first:

- Hey, he can move his hands again, and it feels like he’s wiggling his toes together. That’s progress!
- He’s managed to dissociate himself into not being focused on pain
- Venom’s here.
- Venom’s also chilling out with/in his neighbor, who’s just gotten off the horn with Dan
- His torturer has left the room
- He feels perfectly justified razing the entire compound to the ground for what’s just been done to him. No doubt in the slightest. Everyone who’s even remotely been involved with this needs to die, and he’s honestly looking forward to being the one to do them in.

And then, the negatives:

- FUCK
- OW
- JESUS CHRIST
- The pain is pretty goddamn intense.
- He’s lost a not-insignificant amount of blood. Like, enough that he’s picturing milk-jugs for volume instead of measuring cups.
- Goddammit, he liked this shirt.
- It’s probably not the best idea to just section off his mind this much, even if it is a little necessary.
- He’s not, like, not-paralyzed, either. Eddie’s pretty certain that any attempt to move his legs would result in abject failure.
- Christ, but it
- There’s a very legitimate chance he might have all sorts of fun diseases due to the rusty blade
- He’s got four minutes to make and begin executing a plan to get the fuck out.
- He’s still fucking tied to the chair.
- Hah, he’s actually managed to injure his throat again, this time by just screaming so much that it bleeds
- The Nazis have his blood. Who knows what the fuck’s in there, after all this time with Venom?
- His arm is legitimately turbo-fucked, muscle-wise. There’s a reason they do C-sections side to side, and that’s because the body isn’t actually super great at fixing muscles if they’ve been severed instead of just divided.
- His leg. Yikes. See above. But worse.
• He really needs his phone, actually. Though, since they’re under the impression he’s paralyzed, they might not have taken it off his body.
• He’s still locked in, even if he does manage to extricate himself from the chair somehow.
• Fuck, he lost a tooth somewhere in there, didn’t he? Is he gonna have to find a fucking oral surgeon to deal with this shit?
• Where the fuck is he going to find a dentist that works nights and is cool with him showing up covered in blood?

One of those lists is a bit longer than the other. And it’s not the happy one.

Alright, fuck, Eddie thinks, how are we going to get ourselves out of this one. “Hey, Vee? Hypothetically, right, could you get me out of these straps, and just pretend to be the straps holding me down? Like how you were my shirt after that AIM thing went down, because I was covered in blood?”

**WE CAN DO THAT, EDDIE, BUT THE STRAPS ARE BROWN, AND WE CANNOT CHANGE COLOR.**

“That’s fine, they’re, like, covered in blood right now, so a little color variation makes sense, I guess.” Eddie sighs. “Can you get me out of these restraints, please?”

Venom obliges, pushing a few different heads out of Eddie’s chest and gnawing through the leather cuffs attached to his wrists and ankles.

“What the fuck,” Eddie says, “Since when do you have more than one head?”

**WE DO NOT EVEN HAVE ONE HEAD, EDDIE, WE ONLY MANIFEST ONE TO BETTER FIT IN WITH YOUR VERTEBRATE BRETHREN. WE ARE A LITERAL PUDDLE, EDDIE WE HAVE NO BODY PARTS THAT WE DO NOT WISH TO.**

Huh. That makes sense, Eddie supposes.

Venom finishes biting through the restraints, and wraps back around Eddie’s extremities in a copy of them, albeit a fair bit less snug. Eddie’s pretty fucking appreciative that they didn’t go too hard to try and sell the idea. He’s had a bit too much of actually being restrained for non-sex reasons, lately.
“Okay, Vee, I’ve got a plan.” He does. It’s not a particularly good plan, but it is, in fact, in existence, and reasonably workable-ish, which puts it above every other option in the running.

The plan is ‘wait till his torturer comes back, kill and eat him, and then massacre his way to the door’. It’s not exactly going to win the fucking Nobel, but Eddie’s always been fond of cutting the Gordian knot rather than attempting to untangle it.

*THAT*, Venom says, weaving his muscles back together and welding shut the hole in his femur, *IS A TERRIBLE PLAN.*

Well, it’s the only fucking plan he’s got, which puts it a step above any other plans he could theoretically have. “We good?”

*OF COURSE WE’RE GOOD, EDDIE. WE’D JUST APPRECIATE IF YOU STOPPED LEAKING BLOOD EVERYWHERE AND GETTING KIDNAPPED BY EVIL ORGANIZATIONS.* They pause, and wrap a tentacle up into his hair to give him scritches, like he’s their favorite cat. It’s far more comforting than it has any right being. *WE WILL BACK ANY PLAY YOU MAKE, SO LONG AS IT DOESN’T RESULT IN YOU DYING. WE ARE NOT IN FAVOR OF PLANS THAT RESULT IN OUR FAVORITE LIFE FORM DYING.*

“I’m your favorite life form?”

*OBVIOUSLY. WE WOULD NOT PUT UP WITH THIS IDIOCY FROM JUST ANYONE.* They say, and Eddie feels far too touched than he should at something that’s supposed to be an insult.

Eddie hears the chain on the door unhook first, and then the two deadbolts unlock, one after the other. The Nazi, with the slicked back hair and large rubber apron reenters, flicking the straight razor open with only one hand with all the practice of an understudy for the Broadway production of *Sweeney Todd.*

“Have you reconsidered our offer, Mister Brock?”

Eddie, like usual, speaks without thinking too hard about it. And, like usual, what spills out of his mouth is a suitably smartassed comment. “Oh, but I don’t think I want to go to the prom with you, Mr. Mengele, what ever would my parents think?”
The other man slashes the straight razor into the meat of Eddie’s trapezius muscle, and leaves it there. It’s cold, at first, but it quickly turns into a sharp heat, far too close to his carotid artery for comfort. “We do not appreciate your cheek, Mister Brock.”

Eddie defaults to his default setting, which is something along the lines of ‘never let them see you fucking sweat’, and ignores the knife buried in his neck. It helps that he’s already in enough pain that it doesn’t even register very much. “Oh, gee, I didn’t mean to give the impression that I have mixed feelings about your offer.” He grins, sharply. “I meant to say that you can take your offer, roll it tightly, grease it lightly, and shove it up your ass.”

Eddie makes the appropriate hand gesture to punctuate that sentiment.

The other man attempts to lever the blade out of Eddie’s shoulder. It’s stuck.

“Oh,” Eddie says, raising his hands up from where he’s been white-knuckling the arms of the dental chair, “You don’t get to have that back.”

“W-What are you?” The other man asks, suddenly thrown off base.

And, because Eddie can’t fucking resist, he wraps his fingers around the other man’s throat and squeezes, saying “Your worst fuckin’ nightmare, shit-for-brains.”

Eddie can feel bones in the other man’s neck shift under his grip, and he goes limp with a prodigious cracking noise that echoes against the walls of the small room.

“Vee,” Eddie asks, “If we eat this guy, can I get up and walk around faster?”

They push a head out of the middle of his chest. “OBVIOUSLY.”

“Dope.” Eddie drags the limp body towards him, from where his hand is firmly latched around his throat, and takes a bite out of the neck using his remaining, and very human teeth. He swallows rather more than he had imagined could feasibly fit inside his mouth. Hot blood scorches stripes as it slips down his throat.
Fuck, when Eddie got up this morning, he hadn’t imagined that he’d end up ripping another man’s throat out with his own teeth, but he’s not exactly surprised. This is just his life now, apparently.

Venom stretches their head from where it’s sticking out of his chest, and widens it, into a gaping maw of monstrous proportions. They bite off the legs first, both at the same time, before chomping down onto the torso and upper extremities. The segments of the body slip down their throat in large chunks, pliant and twisting around into shapes that would have been biologically impossible before the other man died.

Alright, Eddie thinks when all that remains of the other man is the smears from where the boy slid through the frankly disconcertingly large puddle of blood on the floor, time to kill some fucking Nazis.

Well—He tries to move his leg, and it feels like all his bones are made out of lead. Also, dumbfuck that he is, he tried to move the leg with the big fuckoff hole in the thigh, which was, to put it mildly, a bit of a mistake.

The pain goes away faster this time, at least. And the dull throbbing that it settles into is less all consuming than before. WE ARE FIXING YOUR LEG, EDDIE, WE’D APPRECIATE IF YOU DIDN’T MESS IT UP WORSE WHILE WE ARE DOING SO.

“Yeah, okay,” Eddie says, like he wasn’t about to do that anyway. “You’ll let me know when it’s safe for me to stand up, right?”

OF COURSE, EDDIE. He can feel a new tooth boiling up from his jaw, can feel muscle fibers threading their way through gaping chasms of flesh. WOULD YOU LIKE TO KEEP ANY SCARS?

Ah, fuck it, Eddie’s already got a bunch of scars, what’s a few more. “Go ahead ‘n leave ‘em. Reminders of what I’ve been through, I guess.” He sighs. “I’m more worried about the bone damage, actually.”

WE KNOW YOU DOWN TO YOUR MARROW, EDDIE. LITERALLY. WE KNOW VERY SPECIFICALLY HOW YOUR SKELETON WORKS.

Well, fuck, that’s handy. He really needs to stop being surprised when Venom knows how his body works; it is, after all, their home. And yeah, that’s a little more literal than it is romantic, but it still means a whole hell of a lot to Eddie.
“Hey,” He says, a thought occurring to him, “You know where my phone is?”

A black patch spreads out over one of his forearms, and slowly but surely, his phone is pushed out of his own flesh. THE MAN TORTURING YOU HAD PLACED IT IN HIS POCKET. WE MANAGED NOT TO DIGEST IT. Eddie pulls the device out of his skin, and it feels like his arm is a tube of toothpaste that’s being squeezed out from the inside. PLEASE TRY TO KEEP BETTER TRACK OF IT.

“It’s not like I had much choice.” Eddie sighs. “We got a timeline until I’m up and killin’ Nazis?”

GIVE US FIVE MINUTES, WE WILL BE READY.

–

“Yeah, so, I don’t think I can make it to practice tonight?” Ziggy says, holding the phone up to his ear with a shoulder. “My neighbor’s going through a really tough time right now, and they literally don’t have anyone else? So I kinda need to be here to make sure they don’t, like, die, or whatever.”

Venom hums appreciatively, and drags the hand that they’re attached to around the bottom of the nearly empty jar of M&M’s.

“Look, alright, I know that I haven’t been the best at showing up, and I get that we were going to workshop ‘For Whom The Bell Tolls’ and try and figure out a pun for it, but I really can’t leave the house right now! I get that I’m the fuckin’ guitarist, but y’all are just gonna have to figure something out without me for tonight, fuck!”

There’s some mumbling on the other end of the line. Venom is fairly sure that they catch words about ‘becoming a piano band’ and ‘postmodern jukebox’ and ‘we don’t need a guitar to create art’.

“Well, fuck you too, then, Chet! You want to do this without me, that’s fine! I’ll be by tomorrow to pick up my fuckin’ amps, unless you want to buy them offa me.” Ziggy hangs up, and tosses the phone onto the coffee table with a clatter, for emphasis. “Fuck that guy, amiright?”

“YOU CAN DO BETTER.” Venom says, having finally accrued enough volume to manifest a small
Ziggy huffs out a laugh that’s utterly devoid of humor. “Sure.” He spreads his hand out, so Venom falls between his fingers like webbing. “Any news about your fella?”

“He is working on his escape. We are currently healing him, it is taking a little longer than we would like, but it seems like we are over halfway done.”

“Cool.” Ziggy sighs. “Want me to put on another Columbo? They’ve got one where someone’s murdered by a Rube Goldberg machine in a MENSA clubhouse.”

“Acceptable.”

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Eddie rolls his shoulders, and gingerly puts his weight onto his right leg. There’s a twinge, and it pulls a bit, like a fresh scab, but other than that, it feels alright. He shakes his hands out, getting the tension out of them.

Slowly, he makes his way to the door, opening it quietly and peeking out. The hallway he finds himself looking down has a few more doors, festooned with a frankly excessive number of locks. One of them, in particular, is metal, and looks like the door to an industrial freezer—all metal and bolts, with a cartoonishly large deadbolt operated by a wheel, of all things.

Eddie walks over to the door quietly, testing the temperature with the back of his hand. Cool, but not overtly so. He opens it.

Another dental chair sits in the middle of the room, well away from all walls. A man is strapped down, rather more thoroughly than Eddie was. He looks up as the door opens, looking murderous, then slightly surprised.

The man’s built like a brick shithouse, he’s got some legitimately stringy hair, and he’s only got one arm. A bunch of thoughts slot into place in Eddie’s brain, but what comes out of his mouth is decidedly the stupidest. “Didn’t you, like, die, or something?”
“Went into deep freeze to fix my brain. Are you going to torture me, or are you just going to stand there?”

“Neither, actually.” Eddie moves closer to the man, and ignores the suppressed wince as he gets close enough to touch. “Is it alright if I loosen some of these?”

“That depends, you with HYDRA?”

“Fuck no.”

“Go ahead.”

Eddie begins unfastening some of the straps, suppressing his first reaction (why is he helping the Winter Soldier?), and asking, “So, what brings you to my neck of the woods?”

“Hunting down rogue HYRDA cells.”

“Your buddies know what you’re up to?”

The Winter Soldier—fuck, Eddie read his name somewhere while he was doing his research on HYDRA, what the fuck was it—blinks. “They may or may not be under the impression that I’m cryogenically frozen in Wakanda.”

“That may or may not sound like some fuckin’ bullshit,” Eddie says, loosening another strap. “But they ain’t friends of mine, and I’m not gonna be telling tales. Except maybe to Scott, but he’s semi-retired and pretty fuckin’ disconnected from those folks.”

“You do know what I am, right?”

“Yeah, yeah, still not leavin’ you in a fuckin Nazi base.” Eddie fully loosens the arm, and gets to work on one of the legs. “You got a place to stay in town?”
“Are you seriously—“

“Guess the fuck so, buddy. We’ve got a couch, if you want it, it’s decently comfy, if you don’t get too freaked out.” He sighs, one of the restraints isn’t loosening properly. “Vee, could you fucking help, or are you just gonna hang out?”

They push a mouth out of Eddie’s hand and shred the leather restraint between their razor sharp teeth.

Oh, that reminds Eddie, he’s still got a straight razor jammed into his neck. He reaches up with his free hand and pulls it out, sending a trail of blood soaring through the air as it exits his muscle. He wipes the blade, and folds it up, sticking it into the front pocket of his pants.

“… That’s different.”

“Yeah, well, ‘s not that weird.” Eddie pulls the shreds of leather away from the other man’s legs, before standing up and stepping back. “How would you feel about killin’ some fuckin Nazis as we make our way outta here?”

“Pal, it would be my genuine pleasure.”
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Eddie steals office supplies, makes a friend, and thinks briefly about modern art; Venom learns to sing a Dolly Parton song.

Chapter Notes

So: Gore notes! Not as intense as last chapter, but if you're squeamish, the main body of the gore is between 'You gonna try that again?' and 'Eddie turns, and is about to do something to the remaining thug'.

Nowhere NEAR as intense as last time, though. There is some gore that is alluded to later, but it's maybe one paragraph and not particularly graphic: we see the aftermath, and that's about it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So,” Eddie says, peering out the door of the vault that he and the Winter Soldier are both standing in, “You got an arm lyin’ around here somewhere, or have you been doing your Ash Williams impersonation for a while?”

“You did not just ask me that.”

“No, what I didn’t do is compare you to Titus Andronicus, who was the only other one-armed literary figure I could think of.” Eddie rolls his shoulders until he feels them click, and feels a little stupid for calling the protagonist of the Evil Dead series a ‘literary figure’. “Looks like the hallway’s clear. Are we gonna have to go rescue your big chrome arm, or not?”

“…Stark ripped it off.”

“God, that dude’s a dick.”

“I…declined to have it replaced in Wakanda.” Eddie’s fairly certain that means that the Winter Soldier was pretty fucking tired of having an enormous chrome reminder of his 70 some-odd years of brainwashing bolted to his spine, which seems reasonable. And, he figures that breaking in a new limb is decidedly less fun than, say, breaking in a pair of Doc Martens, which is already fucking
“Gotcha.” Eddie walks out the door, and starts down the hallway. He makes no concerted effort to be stealthy; Eddie’s actually very eager to be descended upon by every Nazi in the San Francisco area, just so he can eat them all.

“Are you trying to get caught?” The Winter Soldier asks, snarky and a little affronted.

“No?” Eddie says, meaning yes.

“For fuck’s sake.” He mutters.

“Look, man,” Eddie kicks open one of the other doors in the hallway, and finds the torture chamber empty. He doesn’t even attempt at whispering. “I’m really more of a blunt instrument? And it’s not like they can kill me.”

Venom pokes a head out of his shoulder. “EDDIE, WE ARE NOT IMMORTAL. WE CAN STILL DIE.”

“Yeah, Vee, but it takes some doing, so…”

“WHAT DID WE TELL YOU ABOUT GETTING YOURSELF UNDULY INJURED?”

“That I shouldn’t do it, yeah, but—” Eddie walks up to another locked door, and kicks it open. It leads to a supply room, lined with various office supplies. “Hey, ‘s there anything in here that you could use?”

The Winter Soldier peers in at the walls lined with reams of paper, boxes of staples, and industrial-sized jars of white-out. He grabs a hefty stapler, tossing it in his hand to test the weight and balance. “Any letter openers back there?”

“Just the ones you can put pictures in, not the dagger kind.” Eddie scans the shelves for a moment. “Oh shit! Industrial-strength sharpies!” He pockets the box, along with a memo-pad with little octopi inked onto the corner of every page. “So, uh, you got a name?”
The Winter Soldier cuts him a look. “Is this really the time?”

“You’re right, this can definitely wait until we aren’t in mortal danger any more.” Eddie exits the storage room, and continues down the hallway, passing the still-open door of the room where he was tortured. He’s frankly a little fucking shocked by how much blood is puddled on the floor; it’s like there was a horrific accident at a Kool-Aid factory. “Fuck.”

“Is all that yours?”

“… Yeah.”

“Jesus.”

“Yeah.” Eddie shakes himself, and forces his eyes away from the gory scene, where, not 30 minutes earlier, some nameless HYDRA goon took a power drill to his thigh. “Let’s get the fuck out, alright?”

They approach the elevator at the end of the hall, and Eddie presses the call button, leaving the large, bloody smear of a thumbprint on the clear plastic. The basement they’ve been confined in is relatively small, and the other doors were already splayed open; one had dried blood caking the floor, and the smell of mildew and black mold hung in the air like a thick fog.

The elevator dings as it arrives on the floor, and the doors open, revealing five men in tactical gear, each wielding guns that are straight from a 90s sci-fi movie—all excessive barrels and loads of scopes and enough extra steel to make a mid-size sedan.

One after another, they cock their guns in concert. The lead one, face hidden by a tactical mask, speaks. “SURRENDER YOURSELF! OR WE WILL USE FORCE!”

“Force me, then, motherfucker,” Eddie says, stepping forward as Venom coils up around his spine and begins to leak down from his shoulders like a second skin. He suddenly has a lot more teeth than he did earlier, and his mouth is hanging open just that much further so that even when he isn’t speaking, he can feel the cold air of the hallway on the daggers constantly on display in his mouth.
“That is,” Eddie says, stepping closer, and letting his suddenly larger tongue slide out of his mouth and taste the fear than hangs in the air like cheap, drugstore cologne, “Unless you’re too scared of little old me.”

So, naturally, they shoot him. Which, for the record, he had anticipated—that’s why he kept edging slightly away from the Winter Soldier. It’s probably bad form to get your new friend shot as you’re escaping Nazi custody.

Anyway, like usual when people attempt to shoot him while Venom’s sitting on top of his skin, it doesn’t work very well.

Eddie just waits for them to stop shooting. By unspoken agreement, Venom lets all the impacted rounds that they caught fall to the ground at once, in a cascade of lead and copper and steel that falls onto the concrete with a tink-tink-tink that’s almost thunderous in the silence of the hallway.

“You gonna try that again?” Eddie says, and without his say-so, his right arm lurches up, glistening and black, and a mouth slices its way across the palm of his hand, dropping a thick glob of saliva on the floor. His fingers are longer, now, and it looks like they’ve got more sets of knuckles than they did a few minutes ago.

His hand makes contact with the barrel of the gun of the closest soldier, swallowing it down in a grotesque parody of fellatio. Eddie can taste the metal of the gun in the back of his throat as it slips down the gaping maw that’s grown in his palm.

His arm grows longer, swallowing more of the gun. The soldier attempts to wrench it out from between their teeth, but it’s firmly caught. The mouth encroaches further, engulfing the index finger first, around the trigger, before following the bones down and biting off the rest of the hand. The butt of the rifle falls onto the concrete with a clatter that’s overridden by the soldier’s primal scream as Venom stretches a tentacle out, stabbing into the other man’s gut and out his back, looping back around.

His scream is cut off once Venom runs through one of his lungs, then the other, like a tire blowing out. Eddie feels the way they slide up his spine to the brain-stem, viscerally feels in his fingers the way they scramble the other man’s gray-matter before popping out of his eye-socket, before retracting back to Eddie’s arm in an instant.

The corpse falls, immediately.
One of the other soldiers pisses himself, which Eddie thinks is a fairly fucking reasonable reaction, all things considered.

Against his will, Eddie’s body lunges, face first and mouth open, at the next-nearest soldier, his jaw unhinging and splitting until his mouth wraps around the other man’s head, tactical mask and all, and bites down. The gooey mass of brain, which tastes far better than it has any right to as it slides down Eddie’s gullet, freed from the hard candy shell of the skull. Then—

A thunk to their left, as a heavy, all metal stapler flies directly into the plastic mask of the soldier next to them, impacting itself through the face-shield and into the cranium, sending a stream of blood seeping out from between the cracks in the plastic. Only two goons left, now that the Winter Soldier has so kindly brained one of the remaining ones.

A tentacle grows out of Eddie’s chest, touching one of the remaining combatants and melting under their skin, digesting their internal organs all at once. Eddie can see on the other man’s face the moment the first hole forms in the stomach and acid begins to spill out into the intestines, but it fades quickly as Venom starts in on the aorta, flooding the chest cavity with blood. The HYDRA goon dies quickly, after that.

Eddie turns, and is about to do something to the remaining thug (Venom entertains notions of disemboweling and squeezing), but finds that the Winter Soldier has gotten to him first, and is in the process of breaking the other man’s neck with his muscular thighs. The crack echoes off the concrete floor of the hallway, bouncing back and forth between the cinderblock walls and warping.

“So,” Eddie says, throwing out an arm so Venom can begin devouring the bodies, “They teach you that in Soviet spy school?”

“Yeah, along with underwater basket-weaving and Gymkata.” The Winter Soldier unwraps his legs, and does a bizarre backwards roll over his remaining shoulder to pop back up to his feet. “So, you’re actually eating them?”

“I mean, technically,” Eddie begins, “Venom’s eating them, we’re just body roommates.”

The Winter Soldier blinks at him, and manages to look incredibly dubious with only a slight movement of his eyebrows.

“Okay, yeah, they need to eat people so that they don’t die, because if they die, I die, which neither
of us is particularly eager for, and since I love them very much, we mostly try to eat assholes.” Eddie shrugs. “Also we’re space-married and literally every other civilization in the galaxy wants to kill us.”

Venom finishes engulfing the last body before settling against Eddie’s shoulders and squeezing slightly. Eddie notices, almost absentmindedly, that he no longer feels like he’s been run over by a succession of increasingly heavy agricultural equipment; mostly, he feels like he could punch through bricks.

“We good?” Eddie asks, because he can see how the events that have occurred over the last few minutes could be construed as a ‘deal-breaker’ for couch surfing purposes.

“Fuck,” The Winter Soldier says, “If I get a flashback, it’s not like I can kill you.”

Eddie nods to himself, and presses the call button for the elevator again. The doors pop open with a chime, and they both step in.

‘Girl From Ipanema’ plays through tinny speakers, and Eddie very suddenly wants to laugh about exactly what the fuck his life has devolved into.

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“What the fuck,” Ziggy asks, like this is some sort of important, life altering question, “What do you mean you don’t know ‘Islands in the Stream’?”

He taps on his phone for a moment and pulls up a video, holding his it up so that Venom can see the video.

“WE WERE NOT AWARE OF YOUR EARTH CUSTOMS OF COURTSHIP.” Venom starts, “WE WERE UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT—“

“God,” Ziggy says, “You need to work on bein’ romantic and shit, oh my god.” He sighs. “You’ve got the deeper voice, so you get to be Kenny Rogers, alright? ‘S a song about love and trust and it’s—it’s just real cute, alright? And, like, I’ve been stuck playing fuckin acoustic boat-themed Metallica covers for the past year and a half, I just need something super different right now.”
“YOU HAVE MORE FEELINGS THAN EDDIE.” Venom says, playing with the webbing between his thumb and his fingers, “THAT’S FAIRLY IMPRESSIVE, ACTUALLY.”

Ziggy rolls his eyes, and presses play on the video. “Fuck off.”

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“So, I’m Eddie, I’m an Aries, and I make terrible life choices.” Eddie says as the elevator travels up from the underground bunker, soaring up to god-knows-where. It’s one of those private elevators, the kind that only go between two specific floors, so there isn’t much chance of them magically being able to get out at the lobby. Eddie’s betting on some sort of penthouse exit, personally.

The Winter Soldier looks up from where he’s leaning on the railing on the opposite side of the elevator car—the one with the emergency phone, not the one with the buttons for closing the door and calling the fire department. “James.”

“You a ‘Jimmy’ guy or a ‘Jamie’ guy?”

“Neither.” James tenses up for a moment, then forces himself to relax. It’s very practiced, and Eddie can only tell the underlying tension by the way the other man’s jaw muscles are still tense. “My friends used to call me Bucky.”

“Fuckin’ why?”

“My middle name’s Buchanan, alright? What’s it to you?”

James Buchanan, James Buchanan, where does Eddie know that from—he was a president, wasn’t he? What was it he learned in US History…? “Fuck, isn’t he the guy who was president before Lincoln? Did nothing to stop states from seceding, and arguably made the Civil War much worse through inaction? Who the fuck names their kid after that guy?”

“What, you just know that off the top of your head?” James quirks an eyebrow—Eddie’s not entirely comfortable calling a grown man ‘BUCKY’, especially since he’s fairly fucking positive that he’ll be unable to refrain from calling him ‘Fucky’; Eddie Brock is a jackass, and can’t help himself when
such an obvious opportunity presents itself.

“Fuckin’ yeah, man, history’s just stories, and I’m great at stories.” Plus, back in college when he was taking his history requirement, he had to write a fucking eight-page paper on the lead-up to the American Civil War, and put it off for long enough that he had to do so over a weekend; that information is now fucking seared into his brain.

“Sure.” James is getting a lot of mileage out of that one eyebrow—it gets even more dubious.

“Fuck you too, buddy.”

The elevator begins to slow down.

James cracks all the knuckles of his one hand at once, pushing them up against his jaw and popping them along the plane sharp of bone. “You good to go?”

“Nope.” Eddie says, rolling his shoulders. “But I’m damn well fucking ready to.”

The elevator chimes as the doors open.

Things get a little hazy for Eddie after that, but to be fair, he’s had a pretty shit day, all things considered, and even compared to his new, sloppier life now that he and Venom are space-married, this is a fucking cut above. The next fight comes in flashes, mostly; Eddie’s pretty sure that there’s something tripping in his brain from all the torture earlier, something that he should solidly deal with when he’s not breaking out of a secret Nazi prison with his new assassin buddy.

As it stands, Eddie rips, he tears. Guts string through his fingers and blood drenches his skin and he lunges headfirst, jaw splaying open like some bizarre flower with far too many teeth; it makes biting off limbs and tearing into ribcages that much easier.

When Eddie finally comes back to himself, he’s standing in the middle of a conference room, surrounded by corpses. The floor is littered with mangled flesh, and blood paints large swathes of the walls like some sort of macabre Jackson Pollock.
Half his skin feels dangerously new and slimy, tender and raw like it’s been flayed off and barely started re-growing. Venom’s spread out in a pool below his feet, chomping down on the carnage that surrounds them in an ever-increasing radius.

James is sitting on top of a desk on the other side of the room, picking at his nails with a fountain pen. “You back?”

“Yeah. Sorry, dude, checked out for a little bit there.” Eddie cracks his own neck with his hands, and automatically feels more grounded. There’s something about making his own joints make noise that really settles him back into his own skin, reaffirms his body as his own. And, like, yeah, he’s sharing it, or whatever, but dear god, does it feel good to have something that’s his. “You ready to do some secret spy shit and blow this place up?”

“Can’t blow this up. ‘S a public building, and the thing about massacring a horde of Nazis is that you should probably leave evidence that they were the bad guys.” James stabs the letter opener into the top of the desk.

“They’ve got my blood, dude. I don’t want the government having my blood, who knows what sortsa shit is floatin’ around in there?” Eddie looks down at his hands. He’s missing a few nails, and some of his knuckles are sprung and swollen, and they’re completely drenched in blood. “Plus, like, I should probably redact some of the security footage. ‘M fine bein’ a vigilante or whatever, but I really don’t want my face public, y’know?”

That’s bullshit. His face is already incredibly public, and a good portion of people he’s rescued know his full name on sight. But, you know, there’s a difference between being an open secret and being out and proud as a gooey vigilante, and Eddie’s way more comfortable as the former.

James gestures to a computer terminal in the corner of the room. It’s a little blood-splattered, but the display is still on, which is promising. “Go nuts.”

Eddie walks over, and pokes around for a moment, finding the internal server. He lifts up the keyboard, looking for a place where the password might be stored, and finds a worn, warm sticky-note, proclaiming in neat lettering, ‘hydra’ and ‘cut0ff1h34D’.

Goddammit, didn’t fucking 1337 die like, ten years ago? What the fuck, HYDRA, get with the fucking times.
Anyway, Eddie gets to the internal server, searches the documents by ‘most recent’ and deletes the minimal blood-test information they’ve gleaned (he’s type O! his plasma’s really weird! lotsa bad heavy metals that magically aren’t hurting him!). And, of course, there isn’t any security camera footage stored, because that would be easy, but it’s not how fucking servers work.

After a few minutes of hunting through the computer and finding precisely nothing, he chalks it up as a wash. Can’t fuckin’ win them all, and at least every fucking editor in San Francisco owes him majorly for the Life Foundation thing and knows it. Plus, like, revealing the name and face of someone who was tortured without their consent is a major violation of journalistic ethics, and just, overall, a really shitty thing to do; Eddie figures he’s somewhere close to being in the clear for those specific reasons.

Also, fuck, he just wants to go home and have a hot shower. Also maybe get completely shitfaced, but that’s definitely more of a secondary goal than a primary one.

“Fuck it,” Eddie says, standing up from the computer, “Let’s go home. You got a card for BART?”

“Why the fuck—“

“Yeah, yeah, fuck, I’ll cover you, Jesus.” Eddie shakes his head. “You sure we can’t set this building on fire?”

James looks up, gazing at the sprinkler system for a moment. “Yeah, okay, whatever.”

Eddie goes to the largest pile of limbs—it’s mostly arms still in sleeves and legs still in trousers, with a few torsos matted with blood—pulls out his lighter, and sets one of the exposed sleeves of a polyester blazer on fire. It spreads up to the elbow dangerously quickly, with a flare of heat and a sharp increase in the size of the flame. Eddie stares at it for a moment, as the fires spreads to some of the other limbs in the pile and the carpet, sodden with blood, starts to catch. Then, he notices the smell.

It’s not a good smell.

He turns away, and walks towards the door, opening it.

James follows him out. “You’re sure that I can crash at your place?”
Eddie heads towards the fire stairs as the alarm starts ringing. They’re only on the third level, so the situation isn’t too much of a hassle. “For real, sleep on my couch or whatever, it’s cool, we can get Indian food delivered, or something. You got an opinion on the Real Housewives?”

It turned out that James had several opinions about the Real Housewives, none of them complimentary.

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So, they get back to Eddie’s end of town. Not that San Francisco really has ends, mind—it’s a textbook example of urban sprawl like every other city on the California coast. As it stands, it’s about half an hour by BART, providing there’s no delays.

Anyway.

They get back to Eddie’s end of town. At the sight of Eddie’s apartment building, James manages to only make one legitimately cutting remark (‘It reminds me of where I grew up—in a tenement during the Depression’) and Eddie maybe takes advantage of the other man having only one arm to gently slug him in the ribs.

Eddie’s neighbor pokes his head out, right as him and James are walking up to the door to his apartment. “You want the rest of your space waifu back, or what?”

“Dude,” Eddy says, “They don’t fall into the gender binary, we talked about this.”

“Fuck, my bad, sorry dude.” The neighbor sighs, and holds out a hand, in which floats a roughly grapefruit-sized undulating sphere of black tar. “Please. I’ve run out of ways to entertain them, and they’re already eaten my appendix. Plus, like, I bet you’re pretty eager to have all of them inside you—not in a sex way, but, you know, also in a sex way, these walls are paper-fucking-thin, bro, and I’m really sorry if I, like, kept you up with guitar playin’ or fuckin’ my girlfriend or whatever, that’s a really shitty thing for me to’ve done. “

The neighbor, fuck, Eddie should know his name by now, reaches out and begins smearing the ball of Venom onto Eddie’s slightly bloodstained shirt, where they slowly begin absorbing back into Eddie’s body. “Is that—“

Eddie nods. “Yeah, it’s a long story.”

“But didn’t he, you know—“

“Look, as far as anyone needs to know, he’s either dead or freeze-dried somewhere in Wakanda. Please don’t call in the Avengers, those guys are dicks.” Okay, again, Eddie may just fucking love Hawk-guy, but that didn’t mean that he was about to fall head-over-heels into accepting Tony Stark as his personal savior.

“Speaking of,” The neighbor says, “Call your doctor friend, he’s super worried. Pretty sure he wants to come down here and tear you a new asshole about being kidnapped by Nazis or something.”

“Fine, yeah, I’ll call Dan, Jesus.” Eddie rolls his eyes. “We done?”

The neighbor removes his hand from where it’s awkwardly laying on Eddie’s shoulder, wiping it off a few times. “Yeah, okay. “

He slinks back into his own apartment as Eddie unlocks his door. Fuck, he thinks, he really should have cleaned up. The coffee mug of cigarette butts is front and center on his table, there are still some liquor bottles out on the counter, there are some serious rings on his coffee table from times he was too lazy to find something to use as a coaster. Plus, he’s pretty sure that there’s at least one t-shirt just abandoned in front of the couch, and probably about a thousand socks stashed somewhere in the front room. It’s not—Look, Eddie Brock has never been what you’d call the ‘most organized’ of people. But, like, for sure, if he’d known he was going to be having non-Dan guests, he would’ve tidied up a bit.

Eddie pulls out his phone and thumbs open GrubHub, “You good with Indian food?”

James shrugs. “I literally have no idea what I like. Go nuts.” He looks around the apartment, briefly. “This place is a dump.”

“Thanks.” Eddie says, meaning ‘fuck you’. He selects a Tikka Masala for James, decently spicy, and
a Vindaloo for himself, hot enough to blow out the back of his neck; he also orders some Aloo Gobi for them to share, along with some extra Naan and a largeish thing of jasmine rice on the side—the kind with turmeric in it, so it turns bright yellow.

And then, a beat later. “Wait, you know Gymkata, but you don’t know whether or not you might be into curries? What the fuck, man?”

James shrugs. “My head’s all fucked, don’t know what to tell you.”

Eddie calls Dan. It goes to voicemail, which it only does if he’s actively holding someone’s life in his hands, so Eddie figures that’s perfectly reasonable. “Hey, Dan, it’s Eddie. I’m still alive, or whatever, and just got back to the apartment. Got tortured by Nazis, but it’s cool, because I’m all better now. Made friends with a one-armed assassin. Maybe bring by some leaflets on PTSD, that might be a good idea. Catch you later!”

Eddie hangs up, and immediately hates the voicemail he sent. Should he send another—no. No, he should not.

“So,” Eddie begins. “You got any idea of what to watch? Because they’ve got some pretty good shit on streaming, now, and if you don’t put forth a suggestion we’re probably going to end up watching Divorce Court, or something.”

“Do you not get how incredibly shattershot my pop culture knowledge is? Or are you just trying to be nice?”

“Fuck you,” Eddie says, “We’re watching Clueless, and there’s not a single goddamn thing you can do about it.”

Chapter End Notes

So, Gymkata is a movie from 1985. It's... something else. Trailer here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Mkl9rtt tog
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Eddie watches Clueless, takes a bath, and has a BUNCH of feelings. Also a panic attack.

Right around the time in *Clueless* that Cher is abandoned at the party by what’s-her-face and that guy who was on *Scrubs* (“This is an ALAÎA!”), Dan lets himself in. Eddie had gotten a key cut at one of the more disreputable locksmiths in the neighborhood at the other man’s insistence—“you could DIE, Eddie!”, “you keep getting weirdly wrapped up in evil organizations, Eddie!” “I’m not gonna climb your fucking *fire escape* if there’s an emergency, Eddie!”—and the other man had happily used it to let himself in for a couple of their therapy dates so Eddie wouldn’t have to get up, as well as dropping by to put some of his preferred brand of craft beer in the fridge while Eddie was out looking for a place to write.

(he found one, there’s an independent coffee shop one neighborhood over with good prices and comfy chairs and coffee strong enough to strip the paint off a car. he loves it.)

Anyway.

The first thing Dan does when he opens the door is make a beeline directly towards the fridge and rescue one of his precious craft beers from its frigid clutches. The second thing he does is do the total frat-bro flex of popping the bottle cap off with the edge of the counter, rather than with the magnetic bottle opener that Eddie’s got stuck to the door of the fridge in plain view. The third thing Dan does is toe off his shoes so that they’re settled under the kitchen table and walk over to the living area, settling in on the armchair.

“So.” Dan says, looking at the two of them. Eddie’s sprawled on the couch, half wedged against the armrest and half trailing out like some strange parody of *The Venus of Urbino*, shirt *covered* in blood but in a boneless sort of relax. He’s abandoned his pants at some point, and one of his legs hosts a new, nasty scar; there’s a fair amount of blood dried into the leg hairs. James has his feet up on the coffee table, and is in more of a controlled, practiced sort of posture—relaxed, but alert, and ready to make the transition to something less safe, but settled in for the moment. His arm is stretched out over the back of the couch, relaxed, but also easy leverage in case he needs to move quickly. “You got yourself kidnapped again.”

“To be fair—“ Eddie begins.
“To be fair,” Dan interrupts, “This is the third time in two months, Eddie.”

Quietly, Eddie says, “Fourth.”

“Fourth?”

“You’re forgetting the Life Foundation, or you aren’t counting that time that hipster from AIM shoved me in a van and shot me in the throat.” Eddie shifts, slightly, making a mild attempt to lever himself up from the cushions. “This does kind of happen a lot, doesn’t it?”

James rolls his eyes. “I have literally been a prisoner of war since the forties and you might have a worse track-record for being held against your will. The fuck?”

“Oh, we’ll get to you later,” Dan says, “After Eddie’s done being needlessly clumsy with his life.”

“Jokes on you, that’ll never happen.” Eddie’s only half joking, and the not-joking half is belied by a somewhat bleak undercurrent in his tone. It’s not that he’s, like, actively suicidal, or anything, it’s just that he’s stopped particularly caring either way a long time ago. And, like, when he was with Anne, he got better about it, but that’s not the sort of mindset that just being in a relatively happy relationship can mend.

Dan and James both cut him very similar looks. Fuck, why do all his friends have super high emotional intelligence? He’s not prepared to talk about depression and shit tonight, he was literally tortured by Nazis earlier. There’s just—fuck, Eddie’s a little too used to this sort of thing, and sometimes he lets certain walls down when he really shouldn’t. He manfully resists the urge to bring both of his hands up to his face.

“…Okay, that’s definitely something to talk about later, when you’re less, I dunno, fucky with the whole emotions thing.”

Don’t laugh, Eddie tells himself, he’s gotta save the ‘Fucky Barnes’ joke for some point where it’s really going to make an impact. He does grin slightly, though, can’t suppress the way it stretches, unbidden, across his face. “Yeah, probably.”

Dan takes a pull from his beer, and they all watch the movie for a moment or two. Brittany Murphy is yelling at Alicia Silverstone, and Eddie honestly doesn’t know why he loves this movie so much,
because the romantic entanglements are baffling (“You’re just a VIRGIN who can’t DRIVE!” Brittany Murphy says, on the screen). Fuck, the guy who plays the stepbrother looks a lot like Scott, this is getting into a whole new a different level of weird.

Goddammit, why does he love this movie.

“Hey, Eddie,” Dan says, after a bit, “Why’d you bring the Winter Soldier home like he’s a stray kitten?”

“I just saw him in the shop window and couldn’t resist.” Eddie rolls his eyes. “Fuck, what was I supposed to do, leave him with the Nazis? In a building I was setting on fire? When he knows no one in town? I’m an asshole, but I’m not that much of an asshole.”

Dan shrugs. “You could have just called the Avengers.”

“Those guys are dicks!” Except Hawk-Guy, obviously. He seems like kind of a jackass, to be sure, but definitely Eddie’s kind of jackass. “And, like, as far as they know, he’s frozen in Wakanda, or something, and he’s sort of vaguely on the lam and killin’ Nazis.”

“That,” Dan says, “Sounds like a very easy way to explain that he’s trying to be independent but has somehow imprinted on you like a baby duckling.”

“Hey,” James says, not unkindly. “Shut the fuck up.”

“Look, you could do so much better.” Dan takes another sip of his beer. “Scott probably needs a roommate.”

“Fuck off, he’s got, like, seven,” Eddie cuts in. “And I thought we agreed that we’re keeping the Avengers out of this? On account of James faking his own death to break up with Captain America, or whatever.”

“We didn’t break up, I just needed space!”

Eddie and Dan exchange a telling look, and Eddie suddenly understands exactly the feeling that
everyone who gives him the ‘dubious eyebrows’ is attempting to convey. Eddie says, with as much sarcasm as can fittingly be injected into a word as is physically possible, “Sure.”

“I’m tryin’ to figure out who I am on my own terms, is all, Jesus fuck!” James sits up a little straighter on the couch, coiled tight like a spring. “It’s been me’n’him against the world since the twenties, and I think I deserve to figure out who I am before I figure out who we are, y’know?” His voice gets a little softer at the end, and Eddie takes that bite of vulnerability and savors it.

Much like the Iron Curtain that he languished behind for years, the walls around Fucky Barnes are high and well guarded—

Goddammit. He needs to write more, if he’s getting that sort of theatricality in his internal monologue. He’s got a few articles in the can for a rainy day, but there’s something to be said for getting feelings out on paper so they stop gumming up the works in his head.

Also, again. Save Fucky Barnes for when it will really hit home, like some sort of life or death situation, or whenever he and Captain America run into each others’ arms like at the end of Love Actually. Like, for sure, he’ll definitely get punched if that happens, but he’s pretty sure it’ll be worth it, regardless.

“Yeah, dude, finding yourself is important, and shit.” Eddie rolls his shoulders and sinks further into the gaping morass of his couch. “And, you know, if you kill a few Nazis on the way there, that’s pretty good, too.”

They watch the movie for a few more minutes; Alicia Silverstone goes depression-shopping and has an epiphany in front of a fountain.

“So, you aren’t going to, like, “ Dan gestures vaguely with his beer bottle, “Kill Eddie, are you? Because that’d piss Anne off something fierce.”

“I don’t intend to,” James says, “But he is kind of a jackass, so I’m not going to make any promises.”

That night, after Dan has left and he’s shoved a bunch of Indian blankets and, like, seven throw pillows at James, he takes the laptop back into the bedroom and lies down on his back, setting it on
his stomach. It’s uncomfortably warm, but in a good way.

He’s got his knees bent, and he can see the ugly snarl of a scar from the earlier torture, flesh furled and discolored over a good portion of his right thigh. It’s not ugly—once enough time has passed to divorce the sight from his feelings and memories a little, it’ll probably look awesome—but staring at it feels like standing on the edge of a cliff, one step away from complete annihilation. Do not pass go, do not collect two hundred dollars. A step and a few seconds from becoming a liquid splattered against rocks.

He wants to cry, he wants to scream, he wants to rip all his fingers off.

He wants to stop feeling, but that seems like the most unlikely of all of those things to actually come to pass.

“Vee, baby,” He says, softly, “Can you come out for a little bit? I’m havin’ kind of a rough time, and I kinda need to see and feel you, or whatever.”

They bubble up from his shoulders, wrapping loose tendrils of themselves down his arms and around his neck, sliding out of his feet and curling tentacles up and around his legs.

“WE ARE HERE FOR YOU, EDDIE, WHATEVER YOU NEED.” They manifest a mouth, somewhere around where his collarbones meet with the top of his ribcage. He can’t see it, because of the way his neck is contorted, but he can feel the air hitting the open flesh of the inside of his chest.

They squeeze, gently, and Eddie’s breath catches in the back of his throat in something that’s somewhere between a gasp and a sob, and too quiet to be either. He’s got a fucking houseguest, he can’t—he can’t fall apart like this, Jesus.

Not that he’s falling apart—he’s just been on a knife’s edge all day, and it’s starting to cut pretty deep now that they’re alone.

Okay, he may or may not be barely holding it together by the skin of his fucking teeth, but given the nature of opposites, that still means he isn’t split apart yet, broken in some irreparable way.

“WHAT DO YOU NEED, EDDIE?” Venom asks, softly and resonant; their voice shakes him down to his bones.
That’s the thing, right? Eddie’s not sure what he needs, he just needs something, and he can’t quite articulate what it is, and his brain starts stuttering into this weird no-man’s land of fuck-all, like a self replicating computer error. He needs a fucking reset, or something. Turn him off and back on again, and maybe things will make sense.

“I need— I need to wake up, Vee. Everything’s all—jumbled. Fucked up. Something. And I need to wake the fuck up now, alright?” He’s hot all over, and the room feels too small and too big at the same time. His hands are doing something—clenching, shaking, clawing at nothing,

“YOU ARE AWAKE, EDDIE.”

“I know, Vee, it’s just— fuck, alright, shit’s fuckin’ clickin’ in some weird ways in my head, and I really want it to stop.” At some point, the laptop has slid off of his belly and onto the bed, and his back has started doing some weird things without his say-so. It’s contracting and bending and tensing in all sorts of weird ways, but that’s not really something that Eddie’s prepared to reckon with at the moment. “Just— fuck, Vee, please, make it fucking stop, alright, please.” His voice is doing some weird hitching, and getting all sorts of breathy in the wrong places. He can hear his heartbeat pounding in his ears, can feel it thundering in his chest, punching against his ribcage.

“EDDIE.” Venom says, slowly, “I THINK WE SHOULD DRIVE THE BODY FOR A LITTLE BIT.”


They don’t even bother sinking under his skin to puppet his limbs, just articulating them from where they’re wrapped around the outside, dragging him up off the bed and shuffling him, a little awkwardly, to the bathroom. The door closes behind him, and Eddie’s honestly not sure where he ends and Venom begins at this point.

He’s all Venom, or Venom’s all him, and he’s just along for the ride, hitchhiking in his own body.

God, he wants to throw up.

With clumsy fingers, his hand reaches up and turns on the cold tap in the shower, but doesn’t press
the diverter. His other hand jams the plug into the drain of the bathtub, and it begins filling up rapidly with frigid water. Just looking at it makes Eddie clam up inside.

Stiff fingers pull his clothing off as cold air beings to fill the bathroom, heavy and wet.

Fuck, Eddie thinks, he’s gonna be sitting in that, isn’t he.

God, he wants a cigarette.

“AFTER YOUR BATH, EDDIE. ONE THING AT A TIME.”

The water in the tub looks preternaturally clear, like it’s a solid hunk of glass, or like it isn’t there at all, and the air just turns solid.

The tub fills up, and one of Eddie’s hands reaches out and shuts off the water, right before it reaches the overflow drain. It can’t—it can’t be that cold, can it? Like, clearly, he’s just psyching himself up.

Unbidden, one of his feet steps into the tub, sinking fully into the water.

It is, in fact, that cold.

His other foot is lifted up and into the tub, and Jesus Christ, it’s even colder, fuck. He’s lowered into the water, ass-first, and leans back, completely submerging himself, leaving only his face poking out.

Every breath hurts. He’s never felt more alive in his goddamn life. His lungs feel like they’re taking in more air, which is a little ridiculous, because there’s a good chance that he’s just giving himself shock. Good god, this is awful.

Eddie’s pretty sure he loves it. He’s also pretty sure that that’s kinda fucked up.

Fuck, he’s shivering.
Awareness of other things seeps into him slowly. He’s shaking, but not in an uncontrolled way, like earlier, just minute trembles to keep his core temperature up at something approaching normal, involuntary shivers instead of full-body spasms. His blood is screaming in his ears, but he can tune it out now, and it slinks into the background of nothingness as the water surrounding his head slows all sound waves into a flat void. The water burbles as it trickles down the overflow drain, and it suddenly occurs to Eddie that he hasn’t taken a bath since he was, like, eight.

“WE ATTEMPTED TO TRIGGER SOMETHING IN THE ANCESTRAL MEMORY STORED INSIDE YOUR BRAIN.” Venom says, and Eddie idly wonders if they’ve been talking to him this entire time and he just hasn’t noticed. “SOMETHING ODD ABOUT YOU HUMANS IS THAT A REFLEX DEEP WITHIN YOUR BRAIN TRIGGERS WHEN SUBMERGED IN WATER, RELAXING YOUR BODY. WE HAVE SUSPICIONS THAT IT IS A HOLDOVER FROM GESTATION.”

Eddie sits up and takes a deep breath, bringing a large gulp of air into his lungs as his cold skin hits the air of the bathroom, warm and welcoming compared to the water. He doesn’t trust himself to talk, yet, but makes a noise that’s somewhere between an affirmative and a question. It’s easier to just not open his mouth when he’s fighting the urge to hyperventilate.

“YOUR MAMMALIAN REFLEXES ARE STRANGE, BUT OCCASIONALLY VERY WORKABLE.” Eddie can feel where they’ve splayed little finger-tendrils down his chest like some sort of Lovecraftian root system. “AND SOMETHING ABOUT COLD WATER TURNS UP YOUR AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM AND PRIORITIZES IT ABOVE ALL ELSE.”

Yeah, Eddie thinks, that would be the fucking hypothermia. He grew up in fucking New York, alright, he knows from cold, and over the course of a few winters in the city being poor as dirt and having to walk a few blocks to the bodega through snowstorms, he has some unfortunately practical experience identifying the symptoms of it. This is…not dissimilar.

Except, you know, it’s a vaguely controlled environment and he’s not likely to keel over and die when he’s in his own apartment and Venom’s constantly babysitting the functions of his internal organs.

He looks down at his legs, and the blood that was matted into his body hair is diluting into the water, turning it the color of rust. Reaching up, he grabs his loofah off of the shelf and dips it in the water, before squirting a little shower-gel on it and getting to scrubbing at his legs. His feet are starting to go numb.

Honestly, he’s a little slapdash about the whole thing. But the coldness is starting to be less cleansing and clarifying, and more gnawingly unpleasant, and he’s not exactly eager to spend much longer in the tub.
He’s not clean—it would take a long shower hot enough to scald off all of his skin and then some life-affirming sex to feel anything approaching somewhat clean—but a good scrub goes a long way towards making him less actively covered in blood. He levers himself out of the tub and pulls the plug out, watching rust-colored water snake down the drain as he dries himself off, leaving faded bloodstains on the towel.

“Vee, babe?” He asks, softly, running a finger over where they’re splayed over his chest like a misshapen net.

“YES, EDDIE?”

“Thanks.” His teeth are chattering, a little bit, and the air is wet and heavy and warm. “I know that I’m not exactly the easiest person to live in—“

“EDDIE. WHETHER OR NOT YOU ARE EASY IS IRRELEVANT. YOU ARE OURS. WE TAKE CARE OF YOU, NO MATTER HOW MANY NEUROTRANSMITTERS YOUR BRAIN STARTS LEAKING.”

Well, he is easy in one particular way, but this doesn’t really seem like the time to bring that up. “I’m just—I’m sorry for freaking out, earlier, alright?”

They wrap a tentacle around his shoulders and neck to affectionately scratch at Eddie’s scalp. “EDDIE. YOU HAVE NOTHING TO APOLOGIZE FOR.”

He gathers up his clothes, and pads over to the door. “Yeah, I kind of do, Vee. Me freaking out over nothing and losing myself for a while isn’t really cool to force you to deal with—“

“OVER NOTHING.” Venom says, squeezing him in a way that’s a little too hard to be completely intentional. “YOU THINK THAT YOU WERE HAVING A PANIC ATTACK OVER NOTHING.”

Eddie quietly pads back to the bedroom before answering. There’s no way that James is actually asleep—too long as an assassin and prisoner of war pretty much guarantees that the other man’s not going to fall asleep in an unfamiliar location after being tortured by Nazis—but Eddie’s trying to make sure he can at least have a quiet night. He’s got no idea how long James was strapped to that chair by HYDRA, especially considering the weirdness of super-soldier metabolism, but he’s pretty certain that it was the sort of time that’s measured in weeks rather than days.
He closes the door to his bedroom quietly, throws his clothes and towel into the hamper, and collapses naked on top of his sheets before working up the courage to speak again. “Yeah, it’s just—it’s nothing. You shouldn’t have to deal with my fucked up neurotransmitters at the drop of a hat.”

Venom streams out of his chest, settling across his naked body like a particularly heavy blanket. “YOU ARE REFERRING TO BEING KIDNAPPED AND TORTURED BY NAZIS AS NOTHING, EDDIE? WE WERE UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT YOU WERE OF THE SMARTER OF YOUR EARTH PEOPLES.”

“C’mon, Vee, you know that I’m a dumbass,” Eddie says, which he knows is telling in both what he refuses to refute and what he doesn’t even address, but he’s pretty fucking emotionally exhausted.

“EDDIE. YOU ARE ALLOWED TO BE NOT OKAY. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DEMOLISH ALL YOUR FEELINGS JUST BECAUSE YOU THINK THAT THEY MIGHT BE INCONVENIENT FOR US.” They press down onto his body a little harder, trying to hammer their point home. “WE ARE NOT ENTIRELY UNFAMILIAR WITH THE CONCEPT OF FEELINGS AND MENTAL HEALTH, EDDIE. YOUR PLANET DOES NOT HAVE A MONOPOLY ON EMOTION.”

Okay, yeah, but he has this thing where his emotions don’t work like normal people’s. Or they do, and just at the wrong time, and he knows that it can be kind of hard to deal with when your partner is, uh, ‘emotionally volatile’, as a cop who arrested him back in New York put it after he had a panic attack in the back of a squad car and broke his wrist against the divider. It got a lot easier after that to just stop feeling certain things.

And then, you know, he met Anne and his life got more together, and it was suddenly a lot easier to shove that sort of shit on the back burner and not act on it. And he just kind of got in the habit of, well, not feeling shit.

“Vee, I know; it just that the way I deal with emotions is pretty fucked up, and it’s been that way for years.” He really wishes that it sounded a little less pathetic, a little less resigned.

“WE KNOW, EDDIE. WE’VE SEEN ALL YOUR MEMORIES.” They grow a tendril and splay it on the side of his face, applying a little pressure. A gentle caress, skating up his neck and across his cheekbone, sending little fingers crawling out and settling around the planes of his face. “YOU ARE IT FOR US, EDDIE.”
He leans into the touch, and sighs. “I’m just saying that I could be better, is all.”

“EDDIE. WE WON’T SUDDENLY DECIDE THAT WE WANT TO TRADE YOU IN FOR A NEWER, MORE EFFICIENT MODEL. DO YOU KNOW HOW RARE PERFECT SYMBIOSIS IS?”

He shakes his head, because he’s not feeling super solid at talking, at the moment.

“IF, FOR EVERY BILLION BEINGS IN THE UNIVERSE, ONE WAS CAPABLE OF PERFECT SYMBIOSIS WITH AN ENTITY FROM KLYNTAR, THE GALAXY WOULD HAVE FALLEN EONS AGO.” They shudder and soften where they lie draped over him, turning from something like a weighted blanket to more of a duvet. “THERE ARE SOME SPECIES THAT WE CANNOT EVEN BOND WITH, BECAUSE OF THEIR CORE TEMPERATURES AND GANGLIA. AND EVEN THEN, THE ODDS OF FINDING ONE INDIVIDUAL WITH WHOM WE PERFECTLY MATCH, LET ALONE LEGITIMATELY LOVE, IS ASTRONOMICAL.”

“That’s fuckin’ rough.” Eddie says, for lack of anything else to say. Like, he’s pretty sure he’s supposed to say ‘I love you too’, but that just seems kind of wrong for the moment that they’re having.

“So rest assured, Eddie, that there is nothing you can do or feel that would make us want to leave. You are stuck with us, whether you like it or not.” Even though they don’t actually end the sentence with ‘so there’, it’s pretty heavily fucking implied in the tone.

“I mean,” Eddie says, “Just to be clear, I do like it. A lot.”

They nuzzle up more into him, and he feels himself start to sink into something approaching sleep.

“No more of this questioning our choice in partners, Eddie. We have impeccable taste.”

“I’ll try, alright?” He says, his eyes sinking shut. “But—I’m not gonna be—“ He yawns. “—I’m not gonna be makin’ any promises.”
So, the next morning, Eddie wakes up, throws on a pair of boxer-briefs and his robe, and goes out to the kitchen. He’s got a few text messages, but he can’t bring himself to check them yet.

James is lying on the couch, pretending to be asleep for some impenetrable spy reason, so Eddie goes about his morning as usual, having a healthy breakfast of black coffee, a few cigarettes, and some cold, leftover tikka masala from the night before.

After a few moments of alternatively staring at his empty takeout container and staring out the window blankly, he checks his text messages.

Shock of shocks, it’s a string of messages from Scott, ending with a link to a news article.

“Eddie tell me u didnt get kidnapped by nazis”

“Eddie”

“Eddie”

“Eddie”

“Eddie if u dont text back ill show up later”

“Guess im breakin into ur place”

“Not touchin the bucky shit ovr txt”

And then, of course, there’s a link to an article.

“GOO-MAN SLICES AND DICES THEIR WAY THROUGH FASCIST HORDES; HAS ONE ARMED BUDDY”, Screams the headline.

Well, fuck, at least they’ve started to understand pronouns.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

James waves a gun around, Scott eats some croissants, and Eddie can't multiply fractions.

Mostly dialogue and build up this time, folks :)

Eddie writes a bit, waiting for James to ‘wake up’. He’s pretty sure that the other man didn’t actually go to sleep the night before, on account of being a jumpy bastard (with reason), despite all outward appearances to the contrary; he’s also fairly sure that the man needs some goddamn time to himself in a situation where he’s not in mortal danger, and doesn’t want to interrupt whatever mental shit the highly-trained formerly-brainwashed super-soldier is going through unless he can avoid it.

See, he’s got self preservation instincts! Look at how good they are!

Eddie’s watched a fair fit of My Cat From Hell, he knows that you’ve gotta let the scared and edgy animal come to you first, otherwise that could lead to some injuries. Not that James is an animal, right, but the point fucking stands. He’s got his own shit to deal with, and deserves to at least sort some of it out on his own, rather than have literally everyone in his life making decisions for him.

So anyway. Eddie spends most of the morning drinking coffee and writing. He doesn’t technically have to work anymore—the payout (bribe) from the Life Foundation was enough to purchase a medium-sized European principality and have money to spare to fill an entire room with gold coins, Scrooge McDuck-style—but he mostly just needs something to do during the day, something that makes him feel like he’s accomplishing something, you know? And there’s something to be said for doing shit, instead of just spending all his days in a depression-hole on his couch watching Real Housewives and hating himself.

Okay, to be fair, he does that anyway, but it’s nice to have some alternatives.

Anyway.

He’s banging out the first draft of an article about how much he fucking loves used bookstores—specifically the kind where the shelves are super tall and the aisles are about six inches too skinny and there’s at least one cat wandering around—when James gets himself together enough to stand up and pour himself a cup of coffee.
“You type like a damn machine gun.” James says, after inhaling about half of his cup of scalding hot coffee in one long gulp. “You sendin’ fuckin’ telegrams with that thing? Jesus Christ.”

“So I’m a little heavy-handed. Fuck off.” Eddie takes a drag off his cigarette.

“Those things’ll kill you, you know.” He says, sardonic.

“I highly fuckin’ doubt that.” Eddie cracks his knuckles, and changes the subject. “Got a call from Scott earlier, he’s gonna drop by later.”

“Who’s Scott?” James is suspicious, but not necessarily against it. Yet. That’s probably going to change in a moment, however.

“An asshole?” Eddie offers.

James cuts him a look.

“Okay, so he’s sort of a third-string Avenger who’s also a convicted felon and is super retired.”

“I told you, no Avengers shit!”

Okay, Eddie thinks. How do we play this so he doesn’t freak out. How the fuck is he going to convince James, who’s on some sort of magical fucking journey of self-discovery (and on the lam from Stevie Rogers and his fun-in-the-sun all-expenses paid Wakandan hibernation retreat) that he should hang out with the dork who can shrink a little bit sometimes, if he’s wearing his special science onesie?

Okay, not calling it “Stevie Rogers’ fun-in-the-sun all-expenses-paid Wakandan hibernation retreat” is probably a good place to start.

“Right, so I know that you said that, but he fuckin’ knows that you’re here, because he follows local news, and they report on the actions of, uh, Goo-Man pretty fuckin’ regularly. And, yeah, some of
that shit gets out to national news, but not so much, because the X-Men and Avengers and Fantastic Four regularly fight shit like big faces that eat planets and armies of robots that read too much Nietzsche, or whatever the fuck the world-ending calamity of the week is. So yeah, he knows that you’re here, and he’s a pretty decent dude.”

James pauses for a moment, inhaling the aroma wafting up from his coffee mug and turning the words over in his head for a moment. “… Goo-Man?”

“I know, right?”

“That’s what you’re sticking with?”

“It wasn’t my choice it’s just—it’s a process, alright, there’s been this whole arc of them improving —“ Eddie takes a deep breath. “Anyway. Scott’s not really on speaking terms with most of the other Avengers? Like, he showed up at that thing at the German airport, and he spent some time in Tony Stark’s super-secret extra-judicial underwater prison, but other than that, he basically just ignores them, as far as I know.”

“What?” James sets down his coffee mug.

“Oh my god, you broke him out of it.”

James raises his hand, and gestures around his face. “My brain is fucked and my memory of shit before Wakanda is pretty goddamn scattershot.”


“What, are my memories magically fuckin’ returning because I wished upon a fuckin’ star? No, they ain’t.” James picks up his coffee mug again, and takes another long sip. “I remember some shit, and it’s coming back in fits and starts, but it ain’t like I’m gettin’ flashbacks or somethin’.”

“Then what is it like?”

“It just kinda slots in, fuck, I dunno. Some days I just remember more than the day before, like which
place had the best coffee near my apartment in 1938, or who I shot on April 17, 1975 and how long it took them to bleed out.” James sighs. “Let me put it like this: Who was your math teacher when you were 12?”

“Mrs.—fuck, or was it Ms.—Brockman. God, but she hated me, kept talkin’ about how she had my older sister a few years earlier and what a better student she was.”

“You remember her teaching you how to multiply fractions?”

“No? Why the fuck—” Eddie collects himself. “But, she had to have covered it, right? Like, I’m pretty sure we had a unit about fractions, but…”

James nods. “Yeah. It’s just something you know, but you don’t remember learning. ‘S like that, but with memories. They sneak in, and if I focus I can tell what they’re about, but as to when they got there, it’s kinda a wash.”

“Bold of you to assume I remember how to multiply fractions.” Eddie takes a deep drag of his cigarette. “But I get what you’re sayin’.”

They sit in silence for a moment, and Eddie types a bit more. It’s early enough that it’s more of a free-form jazz odyssey than an essay at this point, mostly a stream-of-consciousness collection of half-connected musings.

“So,” James says. “This Scott guy, ‘s he gonna go squealing to Steve about my not being frozen in Wakanda?”

“Fuck, I dunno, probably not?” Eddie shrugs. “But he was on my side when I started growing extra teeth and actively antagonizing a man who used to build nukes, so I trust his judgment on this sort of thing.”

“… I think that might just mean he has no self-preservation instincts.”

“That’s…” Eddie struggles to find a good way to say ‘you’re right, but I don’t want to admit that’, and pauses for a moment. “Not inaccurate.”
“Hmm.” James takes another sip of his coffee. “He give you what time he’s coming over?”

--

Scott has the good grace to shoot Eddie a text before he shows up.

“Headed ur way, abt 10 min out”
“Dnt let bucky shoot me”
“Didn’t tell avngrs”
“Shld I bring coffees”

Eddie replies that yes, Scott should bring coffees, and also maybe some croissants, and by the way, could he pick up a six pack, since he was on the way over?

Scott tells him to go fuck himself.

It takes a while, after that, for Scott to show up, but when he knocks on the door, he’s bearing some very fancy coffees and a bag of hot croissants. Eddie lets him in.

Scott sets the coffees and pastries on the counter before leaning against the cabinets and crossing his arms. “Eddie, please explain to me how the fuck you stumbled on this guy, who’s supposed to be frozen in Africa, while you were ransacking an office building?”

“Okay,” Eddie says, “One, I wasn’t ransacking an office building, I was being tortured by Nazis, alright? So you can cut down on the fucking judgment for that one.”

“Fuck.” Scott says, and takes a long sip of his frozen coffee. “That’s fucked up. Sorry, if certain people who are in charge of avenging would tell me things, like if there were Nazis in my city, I definitely would have planned this conversation out differently.”

“So they just… didn’t tell you?”
“After that whole thing with the abandoned warehouse we aren’t really on speaking terms. Which is apparently, a policy that extends to Nazis.”

“That’s fucked up.”

“Yeah.”

“Definitely would have brought you beers if you’d led with ‘I was tortured by Nazis’, I’m not that much of a dick.”

They stand in silence, looking at each other.

“So why the hell are you here?” James says, suddenly, from the couch. He’s managed to procure a gun, somehow (Eddie’s betting that he lifted it from one of the hordes of HYDRA goons, yesterday), and is pointing it squarely at Scott.

“Fuck!” Scott says, loudly, and reflexively brings his hands up, spilling a little of his frozen coffee down the front of his shirt. “Where the fuck did you come from?”

“My ma might have somethin’ to say about that, if she weren’t eighty years fuckin’ dead.” James doesn’t even flinch. “I’ve been here the entire time, you need to work on your situational awareness.”

Slowly, Scott sets his plastic cup on the counter, and returns his hand to its previous position, palm out.

“I’m gonna ask you again, why are you here.” It may technically be a question, but James’ voice doesn’t change tone through the entire sentence.

“I was jus—okay, fuck.” Scott twitches, slightly. “For some reason I like this dumbass, and when there’s evidence that he’s at the scene of a multiple murder with a former Soviet assassin who I was under the impression was on ice several thousand miles away, I get a little goddamn worried, alright?” He pauses and rolls his shoulders; James’ grip on the gun tightens, slightly. “Chill out, ‘m just fuckin’ lanky, I’m not going for a gun John McClain-style. Fuck, I’m actually, like, really pretty not okay with hurting folks?”
James doesn’t move a fucking muscle.

“And even if I was, Venom and their space-husband skin-suit here probably wouldn’t let me get very fucking far.”

“CORRECT.” Venom says, stretching a head up from Eddie’s shoulder and winding around like a living infinity scarf. “IF EITHER OF YOU DECIDES TO ENACT PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AROUND EDDIE, YOU WILL FIND YOURSELVES MISSING BONES.”

“Oh yeah?” Scott asks, eyes still unerringly focused on the gun. “Which ones?”

Venom pauses for a moment, mulling the question over. “A FEW OF YOUR CERVICAL VERTEBRAE, SOME INTERMEDIATE PHALANGES, AND POSSIBLY THE UPPER SECTION OF YOUR SKULL.”

“Message fuckin’ received.” James says, and lets the pistol dangle from his hand. He doesn’t fully drop it, because it’s probably some sort of bizarre, murdery comfort object, but he lets his wrist and hand relax into a practiced sort of casualness. “Won’t kill your buddy.”

The ‘yet’ is unspoken, but it hangs over the room for a moment, regardless.

“Look,” Eddie says, pinching the bridge of his nose “I’ve got a ruler around here somewhere, so either y’all can take out your dicks and we can measure ‘em, or you can act like fucking adults.”

The tension in the room drops slightly, and so do Scott’s hands.

“Now,” Eddie says, “Let’s all sit down, we’ll eat some fuckin’ croissants, and we’ll talk some Avengers shit.” Eddie picks up the box of pastries and plops it down in the middle of the kitchen table, sitting down at one of the chairs. He pulls out his nearly-full pack of cigarettes and lights up, before looking up at the other two men, who haven’t moved. “Well? Let’s be a little fuckin’ civilized, goddamn.”

James moves over first, quiet and casual in a way that’s clearly rehearsed. Even though Eddie’s wooden chairs are ancient, he manages to pull it out and get settled in while making barely any noise.
Scott follows, afterwards, getting settled in with a fair bit of creaking, long limbs bent awkwardly in the just-slightly-too-short chair. Eddie passes him a croissant.

“So.” He begins. “The Avengers. How much do they know, and how much are we telling them?”

“Personally, my vote is we tell them jack shit, and they can fuck right off.” James says, reaching out to grab a pastry. “They’ve gotten into my life far too much, and ever time they do, things get, somehow, worse.”

“Okay,” Scott says, “But, like, I’m pretty sure they’ve got a google alert or whatever the fuck set up for Eddie—or at least, Goo-Man, I never told them your full name—and there’s fuckin’ articles with both of your pictures in it, so now might be a good time to get your fucking stories straight, is all I’m saying.” He rolls his eyes. “If the text I got from our lord and savior Steve Rogers this morning is any indication, for some reason they think that it’s some sort of impersonator, and that I should ‘iron out the situation and make sure nobody dies’ which seems a little goddamn naïve, but whatever, small fuckin’ mercies.” Scott shoves the entire croissant into his mouth at once.

“They, what, they think that there’re people pretending to be the Winter Soldier wandering around and shootin’ up Nazis?” Eddie asks. “Because that seems a little goddamn farfetched.”

“Some guy with an axe to grind dressed up as me and blew up the UN, it ain’t exactly outside of the realm of possibility, is what I’m saying.” James says, shrugging.

“What kinda fuckin’ idiot jumps straight to doppelgangers instead of callin’ up Wakanda and asking them about you?”

“I may,” James begins, “Have told T’Challa that I was done with Avengers bullshit, and going full-time into the Nazi-hunting business. And asked him to keep other folks out of my goddamn business while I find myself.”

“You’re on a first-name basis with a goddamn king?” Eddie asks, like that’s the important part of the last sentence. And, to be fair, to him, it definitely is the thing that stands out the most.

“He really only has the one name,” James says.

“Like Cher.” Scott adds. When Eddie gives him a look, he elaborates. “Spent a little time in
Wakanda after getting out of Tony Stark’s underwater prison. Ate some food, met some royalty. He’s putting some sort of tech center up in Oakland, I think? We text sometimes.”

“Let’s… table that for now, alright?” Eddie says, because now, officially, all four of his friends are way cooler than he is. He’s not counting his neighbor, because he’s pretty sure that a prerequisite for friendship is knowing somebody’s name.

Also, fuck, does he only have four friends? He used to be better about that shit, but all of his college friends had passed a certain invisible threshold and started being assholes and having babies and getting really in to the work of Ayn Rand, so they just kind of dropped out of his life.

“Anyway,” Eddie says, “Are we just going to tell them that you’re some sort of weird Bucky Barnes fetishist—a Fucky Barnes, as it were—or what?”

James slaps him upside the head. Gently, for him, which means it stings, but he isn’t decapitated. “You think I haven’t heard that fucking joke fifty million times?”

“I was banking on it having been at least sixty years, though, on account of you being frozen and having no personal identity for most of it.” Eddie says, unrepentant.

Scott slugs him. “Dude.”

Scott, on account of being so fucking lanky, can actually get a fair amount of momentum into his punch. It hurts. Eddie rubs his bicep, where Scott solidly nailed him. “So, what do we tell these folks?”

“We tell them that, uh,” Scott pauses, and takes a restorative sip of his coffee. “We tell them that—and, yes, this is going to sound a little fucking weird, yeah, but bear with me—we tell them that you raided a HYDRA base and found a genetically perfect clone of the Winter Soldier.”

“That,” Eddie says, “could never work.”

“Oh yeah? They’ve got fuckin’ life-model decoys, alright, clones exist. Essentially. Sort of. And, it gives us a good excuse for why they look the same, when as far as they know, Bucky Barnes is freeze-dried somewhere in central Africa.”
“How do we explain the arm, then?” James asks, like this is a perfectly reasonable plan that they’re actually going to go along with. “Because I lost the original in a train accident in the 40s, so unless they just cut off the arm of every clone for the aesthetic—“

“No, right,” Scott says, “This is where it gets good. So, like, naturally, HYDRA wanted to get the most use out of their assassin as possible, but there’s only so many times you can wake him up before memories start coming back, yeah?”

James nods. “In theory. I mean, I didn’t ask.”

“Yeah. So. If they want to get the whole thing where the Winter Soldier is the boogeyman of the 20th century, right, they’ve got to have a few spares to swap around to make sure none of their duct-taped together neuroscience falls apart from overuse.”

“This is sounding, fuck, I dunno, increasingly plausible.” Eddie runs a hand through where his hair is growing it. It’s getting a little shaggy, and he needs to cut it. “We’re sure they didn’t just keep a few extra Jimmies on ice in real life, right?”

James rolls his eyes. “They tried. Humans are harder to clone than sheep, every attempt was a non-viable nightmare.”

“Yeah, man, the science just isn’t there yet, and there are some really nasty implications if it ever gets there, so…” Scott shakes his head. “Anyway, the great thing about this excuse is that you get the freedom to still kill as many Nazis as possible without actually dealing with your personal problems.”

“I am finding myself—“

“You’re running away from your big scary emotions, which is fine, whatever, they’re fresh and you’ve had a rough six-or-so decades. But you really need to work this shit out, dude.” Scott grabs another croissant out of the box and takes a bite, bits of the pastry flaking off between his fingers. “You’re gonna have to deal with this Steve shit at some point.”

“Yeah, but that point isn’t now, is it?” James bites out, testy. Eddie is fairly certain that if he had the required amount of limbs, he would be crossing his arms; as it stands, he settles for putting a little extra ‘oomph’ in his death glare.
“Fuck off, my daughter is more emotionally mature than you, and she’s eight.” Scott says. “Of course you don’t have to call him right this second, jeez. ‘S just that this is the sort of thing you don’t want to let fester, you know? Because then it’ll turn into this enormous web of lies, and that’ll make it so much worse when he finds out. Like, alright, two years down the line, he finds out that you’ve faked your clone death or whatever just because you’re bad at talking to him—that’s not a great fuckin’ basis for some sort of sunshine and flowers reunion.”

Eddie bangs his head on the table lightly and sighs. “Fuckin’ okay? I guess we’re going with ‘this James is a secret clone, but don’t worry, he’s not brainwashed’?”

Scott nods, as does James.

“This is—“ Eddie sighs again, and leaves his forehead resting on the cool wood of the kitchen table. “This is nuts.”

“What,” James asks, “Do you have a better idea? Because I’m all goddamn ears.”

“…No, but it’s so insane that no one will believe it.”

“Eddie, you’re literally married to your space-tapeworm—no offense—and random sci-fi shit happens on the daily, now.” Scott says. “It’s honestly a little weird that there aren’t clones wandering around. And, it’s very specifically bonkers in a way that perfectly lines up with something that HYDRA would do.”

“Fuck, man, it’s your goddamn story, I guess, go call Captain America and tell him about the secret clone army the Nazis made out of his best friend.”

Scott pulls out his phone, ready to dial, and then pauses. “Huh, got a text.” He reads it silently, drops the phone on the table, and sighs. “Hey, Eddie, guess what.”

More than a little bit leery, Eddie replies, “…What?”

“Thor’s back on the planet. Apparently I’m needed back at Avengers headquarters ‘forthwith’ so we can all ‘enjoy a celebratory evening of feasting’ because he ‘hath slain the dread beast terrorizing the
citizens of Vanaheim’. They’re en route to my place with a plane so I can ‘partake in the festivities’. Pretty sure Stark sent this text, though, it’s a little too *Masterpiece Theatre*.”

“Aren’t you, like, on the C-team?”

“Yeah, no, I’ve literally never met the guy. He’s really rockin’ the eye-patch, though, from what I’ve seen.” Scott sighs. “Anyway. He’s probably going to catch wind that you’re, you know, *on earth*, so…”

Eddie sighs. “Thanks for the warning, dude. You should probably head out, if they’re flying you out in one of their special spaceship-plane things.”

Scott leans over and hugs him, quick and hard. “I’m definitely going to tell Captain America about the clone thing, face-to-face. That’ll probably work better to sell it.” He stands up, and visibly considers hugging James, but refrains. As he walks to the door, he says, “Don’t fuckin’ fight Thor, alright, that’s not something you can win. Talk to him about *feelings* or the *power of love*, or something, alright? He’s a good guy, and I like you better alive, alright?”

Scott lets himself out of the apartment.

“So, uh,” Eddie says, “You want to watch a movie? Or—I’ve got some books around, that might be more your thing, fuck, I haven’t had a roommate since I was 22, and all we did back then was get completely trashed and watch *ER*.”

“That sounds pretty alright, actually, let’s do that.” James relaxes in his chair, slightly. “What’ve you got to drink?”

--

So, it turns out that it actually takes a lot of liquor to get James properly wasted. Like, enough to where Eddie drags out the mostly-full bottle of Southern Comfort from the back of the liquor cabinet and just kind of shoves it at him. That stuff may be *vile*, but it’s also *very alcoholic*.

‘Happy people don’t drink Southern Comfort,’ He remembers Mrs. Chen saying, a few months back, when he was finally over the worst of the depression after the whole Life Foundation situation. It’s a sentiment that he has yet to see proven wrong.
Halfway through the two-hour long pilot episode of ER—after the scene where the lady has the baby in the taxi-cab, but before Dr. Greene takes a tour of the swanky private practice he’s been invited to join—Scott texts him.

“Just told stv abt the clone army”
“Think he bought it”
“Omg eddy he thnkd me”
“Omg omg he ‘owes u one’”

“Holy shit,” Eddie says, slightly in awe. “He bought it.”

James sighs. "That punk always was a bit of a dumbfuck when it came to me."

But that relief is quashed soon after, when another string of texts arrive.

“Throw wnts 2 tlk 2 me”
“*THOR”
“Gdi”
“Abt symbiotes”
“Gnna try n convince him that ur chill”

And then, a few seconds later:

“Only a partial success”
“Thorns headed to sf tmrw”
“Thnk he wants 2 talk, tho”
“*THOR”
"FUCK"
Eddie sets the phone down, and takes a long drink from his large glass of whiskey. God-fucking-dammit, he’s going to have to fight *Thor*, isn’t he?

And, unlike most fights, at least recently, that doesn’t look like one he can actually *win*. 
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Eddie has feelings, day drinks, and talks to Thor. Thor punches him in the face, a little, and is confused. James sharpens all the knives in the apartment.

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the wait, folks, school stuff has been happening, and Thor's REALLY HARD to write, for me. Like, I'm still not altogether happy with it, but I'm excited to go new places with the story :)

To clarify about continuity-- Thor: Ragnarok happened, except for the post-credits Thanos stuff. Also, if you haven't watched that, you deffo should, because it's a fun movie. (if you're more a comics person, I'm REALLY into the Walter Simonson Thor comics from the 80s right now? It's really good stuff).

So, like, obviously, first off, Eddie and James watch a few more episodes of ER, because it's relaxing in a very specific sort of way, and if Eddie’s going to be psyching himself up to physically fight a deity who’s also an alien prince, he’s going to need to not be freaking out at the drop of a hat.

Also, he’s forgotten how good a of a TV show it is, especially in the beginning, before everything got super sad and they started dropping helicopters on people.

Anyway, he and James get well and truly wasted. Eddie makes a resolution that, provided Thor doesn’t permanently kill him, he’s definitely going to go to the Goodwill nearby and pick up some sweatpants or something for James, because the man needs a second goddamn outfit. He’s not exactly optimist—he’s not, like, actively planning on dying, right, it’s just that him dying seems like it’s by far the most likely result of trying to fight a lightning god, especially when Venom is specifically sensitive to heat and noise.

Eddie levers himself up from the couch, and stumbles to the sink with his glass, rinsing it out quickly and setting it in the drainer. It may not be clean-clean, but Eddie’s a bit too drunk to deal with dish soap at the moment, and alcohol is a natural disinfectant. Technically.

He pads back to the bedroom and collapses on top of the bed, landing with a dull thump in a pile of limbs.
“Vee, baby?” Eddie asks, softly.

YES? They whisper, directly into his mind, soft and sibilant.

“Just want to—wanna let you know, that—that whatever happens tomorrow, if I end up fightin’ Thor on the moon, or whatever, I just want to make sure you know that I love you, alright? No matter what.” Eddie nuzzles into the soft nest of his pillows and toes off his socks, before getting started on wiggling out of his jeans. They’re denim, and his coordination is shot, so it takes a while, but eventually, he manages. “And whatever—whatever happens tomorrow, I just want to make sure you know that—fuck—that bein’ with you has literally been the best thing to ever—ever happen to me,” Eddie’s voice keeps catching, and his cheeks feel a little wet, fuck. He hates crying in front of other people. “An’ I know that I’m not, you know, great, or anything, but it really feels like we’re in this—hic—together, ‘n I’m just—I’m just real glad that you’re here with—with me, alright?”

EDDIE, Venom curls themselves around his shoulders, pressing down, gently, on the knots that have formed since he got acupuncture, a month or so ago. WE LOVE YOU AS WELL. OUR EMOTIONS MIGHT WORK DIFFERENTLY THAN YOUR BRAIN JUICE, BUT WE FEEL THEM, ALL THE SAME.

“If we—if we die,” Eddie says, and hates himself for getting so fucking maudlin, “At least we’ll die together.”

WE WOULD MUCH PREFER IT IF NO ONE DID ANY SORT OF DYING AT ALL. Venom nuzzles into the back of his head, comforting. THOUGH, IF GIVEN THE CHOICE, WE WOULD DIE SO THAT YOU COULD LIVE.

“That’s pretty fucked up, what would you do a dumb thing like that for, Vee?” Eddie sighs, and slowly begins worming his way under his blankets. “I’m not any kinda—hic—kinda fuckin’ prize, I’m just a—just a fuckup who can write half-decent—half-dissent—pretty good.”

EDDIE, WE’VE TALKED ABOUT YOUR SELF-WORTH ISSUES BEFORE. TRUST US, PART OF WHY WE LOVE YOU IS YOUR FLAWS. AFTER THIS SITUATION WITH THE ASGARDIAN PRINCE IS RESOLVED, WE WILL SHOW YOU TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITIES, SINCE TELLING YOU THIS SORT OF THING SEEMS TO BE LESS THAN EFFECTIVE. They rub little circles into the back of his neck, soothing tension out of the muscles. SLEEP NOW, EDDIE. YOU NEED TO BE READY FOR TOMORROW.
Eddie falls asleep at some point after that. He’s not sure if Venom encouraged the process, or if he’s just *that* *tired*, but he relaxes into welcoming nothingness regardless.

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When Eddie wakes up, he takes a shower hot enough to cook meat, and has some very quiet, life-affirming sex with Venom while he does so. It’s nothing particularly fancy, but there’s something very grounding in knowing that he’s not in this alone, that he’s got somebody watching his back.

Also, he was once given the advice to get off before any major life event or decision, because it affects the way you look at things and tends to break you out of emotional ruts; so far, whenever he’s followed that, it’s worked pretty well. The last time he ignored that nugget of information, he ended up bombing the Carlton Drake interview, Anne left him, and he drank an entire bottle of whiskey in two days.

After the shower, he throws on a t-shirt that’s maybe a little too tight on his arms and his fighting jeans, the ones with the diamond-shaped gusset; if he’s going to die, he’s gonna die *looking good*, goddammit. Looking good, and with a *full* range of motion on the off chance he needs to kick Thor in the throat.

He has a few cigarettes, eats some somewhat suspect leftovers while James snores on the couch (mouth open and neck contorted in such a way that has Eddie preemptively looking up local chiropractors), and dicks around on the internet a little, mostly reading the news and getting angry, and checking twitter and getting *angrier*. He also reads some pieces that people he used to be friends with wrote, and takes no small amount of glee at how forced they are—one of his old editors has a particularly pained article about how ‘local teens’ are smoking ground-up circuit-boards entitled “*The Dangerous Truth Your Gamer Children Are Hiding From You!*”. One of the reasons that Eddie kept getting his ass fired form news outlets is that he refuses to write this sort of reactionary bullshit.

And that’s saying something, because if Eddie wrote an autobiography, there’s a non-zero chance that it would, in fact, be entitled ‘*Reactionary Bullshit: The Eddie Brock Story*’.

At around noon, James rolls over and *thumps* on the ground, falling off the couch and onto his face. The empty bottle of Southern Comfort is bumped off the table, and falls to the floor with a worrying noise, though it remains in one piece. James is up an instant later, brandishing it defensively and wearing an expression not entirely dissimilar to that of a spooked cat. He spends a good few moments scanning the room carefully, before relaxing.

Eddie makes a point not to freak out at him or stare too much, just continues going about his
business. After a few moments, James relaxes, setting the empty bottle on the coffee table and stretching, gently. “Can I use your shower?”

“Sure,” Eddie says. “Don’t have to ask. We’ve got plenty of hot water, too, so there shouldn’t be any danger of it running out.” Something occurs to him. “When’s the last time you showered, anyway?”

James shrugs. “Wakanda. That was, what, a few months back?”

“Yeah, but, like, before that.”

“Fuck, I don’t know, probably back when I was in Europe killin’ Nazis.” James shrugs, in a somewhat disaffected way, and Eddie wonders whether he means a few months ago or, like, the 40s. “Ain’t like I remember it real well. I’ve scrubbed up since then, though, Christ.”

“Just checking.” Eddie says, and rolls his eyes. “Thor’s probably going to be swinging by later, by the way, and from what I hear he’s a stand up guy, but I understand if you want to make yourself scarce, or whatever.”

James nods. “Thanks for the warning.” He makes his way to the bathroom, and firmly shuts and locks the door. A few moments later, the shower starts up.

Eddie goes back to half-heartedly writing, but mostly dicking around on twitter.

After a bit, his phone vibrates a few times. Scott has texted him.

“So like I told thru where u live”

“*THROW”

“*THOR”

“FUCK”

“N e way hes headed to urs”

“Probs idk 20 mins”
Okay, fuck, how’s he gonna do this, Thor’s gonna kill him and then James’ll be all alone in San Francisco and Dan will become some sort of medical hermit and Anne will have no one to be kind of a bastard to and his neighbor will break into the wrong person’s apartment and get killed—

Oh, okay, that’s how he’s going to do this, just have a panic attack.

Goody.

It’s not full blown yet, thank god, but Eddie has a sneaking suspicion that unless he can nip this bad boy in the bud, he’s going to end up freaking out after shutting himself into one of the kitchen cabinets.

“Hey, Vee, baby?” His voice is shaking, and his fingers can’t stop moving, tapping out nonsense patterns on the keyboard, but not applying enough pressure to actually depressing the letters hard enough to type them. “You know how a while back I said that you shouldn’t fuck with my brain?”

They manifest out of his shoulder, wrapping around his upper arms. “YES.”

“And how I said that if I was about to have a panic attack at a really inconvenient time, and asked, that I’d be cool with you putting a stop to it?”

“YES, EDDIE?”

“Well, uh, I’m about to have a panic attack, so if you could, uh, deal with it, that would be pretty goddamn fucking great right now.” He’s coiled too tightly, it feels like all his muscles are tensed and twisting around into ropes. “Like, yeah, this is permission to fuck with my head a little bit, or whatever, and make me not want to feel like scratching all my skin off.”

“JUST THIS ONCE, EDDIE. WE ARE NOT OVERTLY FOND OF CHANGING YOUR NEUROCHEMISTRY AT THE DROP OF A HAT.” They reach a tentacle up, and wrap around his head, sinking into his flesh. Almost at once, the panic starts abating, slowly returning to his baseline level of jumpiness. “HOWEVER, YOU DID JUST EXPERIENCE A PANIC ATTACK TWO DAYS AGO, AND WE UNDERSTAND THAT YOU ARE NOT EAGER TO REPEAT THE EXPERIENCE.”

“Yeah,” Eddie says, after a moment, when he’s feeling like something vaguely approaching human,
“This is not exactly going to be an everyday sort of event, Vee, I’ve just got shit to do in a little bit, and I’d really like to not be jumping out of my skin more than necessary while I do it, you know?”

They give him a fortifying squeeze. “WE UNDERSTAND, EDDIE. WE THINK IT WOULD BE WISE NOT TO BE TOO VISIBLE WHILE YOU ARE MEETING WITH THOR.”

“On account of the whole ‘he could kill us’ thing? Good call.” Venom sinks back into his skin, but not before giving his hand a squeeze. “I’ve got this, alright?”

Like saying it can make it actually true. Eddie emphatically does not ‘got this’, but he’s always been more of an ‘act first, pretend you had a plan later when people ask’ sort of guy, anyway. Roll with the punches, think about it later; everything is your gut feeling, except when it’s instinct.

Which is why, fifteen minutes later when someone begins knocking on his door, he fucking walks up to it and answers, instead of just pretending not to be home, you know, like a sane person.

He opens the door, and finds himself face to face with Thor, god of thunder and alien royalty. Mostly, he looks like a benevolent frat guy, which is comforting: Eddie’s always found himself inextricably drawn to big burly dudes with joy in their hearts and questionable hair choices.

“Hey,” Eddie says, “I’m Eddie. You’re Thor, right?”

Thor punches him in the face. Hard. Like, rotates his shoulders and his hips to get that extra power behind it, and everything. Eddie falls to the floor, landing hard on the wood just inside his doorway.

“Good!” Thor says, once he hits the ground, “You aren’t a symbiote!”

“I’m…not?” Christ, Eddie thinks, that man punches like a goddamn semi-truck.

“The symbiote’s first instinct is to defend their vessel when attacked, so a surprise attack is the easy test.” Thor shrugs. “You didn’t try to eat me, so you’re not a symbiote.” He reaches a hand down, and grips Eddie’s arm, hauling him back up to standing.

Eddie can feel a bruise blooming on his cheek. “It’s a little more complicated than that.”
Thor’s grip on his arm turns a little bit steely, but not overmuch so. “Explain.”

“You want to get some food while we talk? There’s this great diner-y sports bar pretty close, if you don’t mind a ride on BART, they’ve got really good margaritas?”

Thor blinks—or maybe winks, whichever is more accurate with regards to having only the one eye. “On Asgard, a feast was required to seal an alliance.”

“Cool, I haven’t eaten breakfast yet, and it’s probably not great for you to hang around here, since I’m kind of roommates with James, and since he’s recovering from all that brainwashing—“

Fuck. See, Eddie? This is why you think before you speak.

“Oh! Steve’s friend! The one he thinks is a clone!” Weirdly, this seems to make Thor trust him more. “It’s good to learn how you define yourself outside of your relationship to other people, and to learn who you are without violence.”

“Uh, yeah. Sure.” Eddie says, a little confused, but deciding to roll with it. Weirder fucking things have happened to him in these past few months. “Lemme just grab my cigarettes, and we can head out. You got a BART card?”

“…A what?”

“Never mind, I’ve got you.” Eddie grabs a pack of cigarettes from the table by the door, and rolls it up in his sleeve, like he’s some kind of high school delinquent and it’s 1986. He does the pat down—keys, wallet, phone, and pocketknife, all accounted for—and steels himself. So far, things are going well. “Alright, let’s head out.”

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Compared to the stories Eddie heard about Thor’s first foray onto Earth, getting him halfway across town on BART goes pretty well, all told. The man makes a few faces at the smell (no city rail system is exempt from the constant underlying stench of industrial cleaners and old piss), and looks a little confused by how dingy parts of the city are, compared to the more touristy areas, but other than that,
things go fine. Eddie was expecting something a little more like the first half of that *Star Trek* movie where they go back in time and abduct whales, so he’s chalking it up as a net positive all around.

Plus, Eddie’s seen enough fish-out-of-water movies to be *intensely relieved* that Thor doesn’t, like, try to shake hands with a moving car or something.

So, they get the restaurant, and get a seat at the outdoor patio, because Eddie’s damned if he isn’t going to need cigarettes for this conversation, and it’s a nice day out; despite being pretty solidly downtown, it feels like if you just turned your head and leaned the right way, you could stare right out into the bay.

After the waiter comes and takes their drink orders (Eddie gets a margarita, despite it being one in the afternoon; Thor gets a hurricane, seemingly choosing it for the name only), Eddie lights up a cigarette and sighs. “So. Are you going to, like, *kill us*, or something?”

“Not if you give me a reason not to,” Thor says, which is far more of a diplomatic answer than Eddie had actually been expecting. He’s pretty sure that it’s connected to him only having the one eye and not carrying around his magic hammer. “I’ve learned recently that the old ways of doing things are not always the best.”

“Oh yeah?” Eddie asks. There’s a story there, he can tell.

“It turns out that I had a sister who had been erased from our history, and she popped back up to destroy Asgard, and then I got banished to this planet of gladiatorial combat, reconciled with my brother, and came to terms with Asgard’s bloody history before it was destroyed by my sister and her big wolf and this guy who was actually a mask? And I had actually killed him earlier, with my hammer, but we brought him back to life and he was *super tall and on fire!*”

“Huh.” Eddie says. God, does he actually like Thor? Fuck, he might. He takes a drag from his cigarette to buy himself some time. “And that made you, what, rethink your actions?”

“Yes.” Thor scratches a bit at his eye patch. A new injury, then, or at least fresh enough that the eye patch still chafes, but old enough that he’s gotten used to having limited depth perception. “Plus, lots of people punched me in the face and told me I was wrong, so I got to thinking that I might be wrong.”

The waiter comes by and delivers their drinks and takes their lunch orders, and Eddie takes a
fortifying sip of his margarita. They’ve gone a little overboard with the lime juice, but whatever, he likes the say it slightly smells like industrial floor cleaner, and it’s strong enough to strip the paint off a car. Thor looks at his large glass filled with pink liquid a little dubiously, but cautiously takes a sip.

“So,” Eddie says, while Thor takes a second sip of his hurricane, slightly befuddled. “You wanted to talk about, like—‘He gestures with his cigarette, loosely, ‘—the symbiote shit? Because if you’ve got questions, I’m more than willing to answer ‘em.”

Thor considers this for a moment, before taking another sip of his drink. His shirt, some sort of strange, tight leather situation with more straps than is at all necessary, has the sleeves torn off, and his arms are muscled to a ridiculous degree.

Well, Eddie thinks, that’s what you get when your primary weapon for thousands of years is some sort of mythical sledgehammer of the gods.

Thor’s eyes get a little flinty. “What are your intentions towards Midg—Earth?”

“I’m just tryin’ to live, dude, it’s not that complicated.” Eddie licks some of the salt off the rim of his margarita glass, savoring the way it somehow makes the drink taste even fresher. “As for Venom, uh, fuck, they’re pretty on board with whatever the fuck I do so long as I don’t get myself killed, or get super sad, or am going to be around loud noises of a specific frequency.”

Thor blinks. “So, just to be clear, you aren’t being controlled and forced to destroy the planet?”

“No?”

“Great!” Thor isn’t quite loud enough to be aggressively out of the social norms, but they get a few looks from other diners. “They do have to eat, though, right?”

Eddie aims to take a fortifying sip of his drink and ends up gulping down half of it. “Yeah?”

Thor looks at him, expectant.

“Fuck, alright,” Eddie sighs, “I wait for them to come after me, first. Folks really like trying to kill me
and kidnap us for their nefarious ends, or whatever. For real, this is the first time I’ve left the apartment in god-knows-how-long and not been attacked, threatened, kidnapped, or half-killed by a secret society.”

“So, you expect me to believe that you just wander around your city and because people are just constantly attacking you, eating them is self defense?” Thor asks, slightly incredulous. He’s still sipping on his drink, and he’s putting away the hurricane fast enough that Eddie would be legitimately worried about alcohol poisoning if the other man weren’t some sort of alien god.

Also, like, the dude greeted him by punching him in the face. Eddie’s not going to be too upset if he’s got a mind-splitting hangover later.

“I mean, sometimes I—my brain turns off sometimes and I wake up standing in a puddle of flesh a while later, next to grateful people talkin’ like I saved their life from hordes of ninjas or whatever the fuck, but yeah, basically folks just keep tryin’ to kill me.” Eddie takes a sip from his drink and tries not to wince. God, he’s a writer, he should be better with words, right?

Thor nods, like that’s some sort of answer that’s at all useful. Like that’s something that makes him look less murderous. “Happens to the best of us.”

“No it doesn't!”

“No,” Thor says, “It doesn’t. But I’ve been told that you are ‘difficult to deal with’ and that I should just agree to everything you say, or you’ll, and I quote, 'start growing teeth' at me.”

“I mean, I only do that when people are being dicks and I want to freak them out,” Eddie says, confirming with his tongue that there are, in fact, the typical number of teeth in his gums. “You hear that from Stark? Because he’s kinda got this thing where he hates me, because of shit I wrote back before this whole ‘Iron Man’ thing started.”

“I’d caught that.” Thor raises a hand to scratch at one of the shaven sides of his head, and Eddie half expects him to sigh. “So, you’ve managed to subdue the symbiote?”

Eddie waits until Thor is taking another sip of his drink to say, “No, but I taught them the power of love, and now we’re basically married.”
Thor chokes on his drink. "What?"

“Well, yeah, right, I was just having, like, a major feelings moment, right, and break into this government lab and Venom hooks up with me, long story short I eat a live lobster and get kidnapped, Venom and I make out, they discover that they love me best of all meat-sacks, or something similarly romantic, they sacrifice themselves to save my life, I go down a depression spiral, they come back through a complicated and unexplained series of circumstances involving sharks and corpses in San Francisco Bay, things happen, I get kidnapped again, they liquefy me briefly to escape, I tell them I love them, and then, you know, we, uh—“ Eddie feels himself blush slightly, and he’s not drunk enough to blame it on the alcohol. “—we, uh, have a healthy and fulfilling relationship.”

Thor coughs, and takes a fortifying sip of his ice water, helpfully brought by their waiter when they brought over the mixed drinks. “What?”

“Like, we’re in love and shit, fuck, I don’t know, it ain’t fuckin’ calculus.” Eddie finishes off his margarita, and gestures to their water for another round. “I dunno, fuck, we’re really well suited, and they’ve been with me through some shit, and it’s just really nice, you know?”

“They eat people.” Thor says, though not particularly meanly.

“I mean, yeah. But they’re also the healthiest relationship I’ve ever been in, and I figure that if we only eat folks in self defense, that’s, you know, not great, but it’s better than, you know, killing folks not in self defense.”

Thor nods, and thinks it over briefly. “I’ve decided not to kill you.”

Eddie feels the tension that’s built up in his body since he first heard that Thor was going to come interrogate him begin to abate, muscles unwinding from the twisted steel ropes he didn’t even notice they had turned into. “Fuckin’ great, holy shit. Because, like, I’m pretty sure if we fought, you’d destroy me.”

“I do have a few millennia more experience, and you’re specifically weak to loud noises,” Thor says, and it’s a little worrying that Eddie’s enemies know how to subdue Venom. “I also talked to your Man of Ants, who told me that you’re an asshole, but if I ever hurt you I would be ‘beset by insects for the rest of my days’.”
“Wait,” Eddie says, “Scott can control ants?”

“It’s very creepy and you should never ask him to do it.” Thor winces, and they sit in silence for a moment. Their waiter swings by, and drops off their lunches (A burger so rare it’s practically mooing for Eddie, a large platter of fish and chips for Thor, complete with vinegar; fried green beans with some aioli for them to share) and refills of their drinks.

“So,” Eddie says, after they’ve both started in on their food, “Fuck, what’s bein’ a space king like?”

Thor laughs. “Well—“

—but it turned out that not only had he just painted over all the murals about all his wars with our sister, but kept an entire army of skeletons under the castle, along with a big wolf!”

They’re on their fourth round of drinks in two hours.

“That’s a little—that’s a little fuckin’ on the nose, there, dude. Like, literally building your empire on top of the corpses of the people you conquered? That’s some fuckin’ imperialist bullshit if I’ve ever seen any.”

“Nobody ever mentioned it!”

“Yeah, that’s how these things tend to go, dude. Folks suddenly grow a sense of shame and decide to delete the gross parts of their history, like if somehow ignoring them super hard will make it like they didn’t ever happen. ‘Course, that only works if literally every other culture that you’ve touched along the way all dies out.” Eddie takes a drag off his cigarette. “You should read King Leopold’s Ghost, maybe Guns, Germs, and Steel, that’ll give you some good perspective on the whole thing.”

“… ‘M not really much of a reader. More of a learning by doing kind of guy.”

“Maybe you should look into audiobooks?”
Conversation continues like that for a while, meandering to and fro and haphazardly drifting between topics. It’s nice and relaxing, having someone that he can really tie one on with without it becoming a big event conversation. Yeah, sure, Eddie had to convince Thor not to kill him earlier, but other than that, it was just hanging out and getting companionably sloshed with space royalty on a Thursday afternoon. It’s a nice fucking change of pace to have a conversation that isn’t just wall-to-wall big shit.

“So,” Eddie says, after a lull in their conversation. Him and Thor are slowly working their way through a second plate of mozzarella sticks. “You’re not going to tell the rest of the Avengers about James, right?”

“If they ask directly, I will tell them. It is a betrayal of trust to do otherwise, and they are in talks to find my people asylum. However—” Thor shrugs, and it’s impressive enough what with the lack of shirt sleeves to merit a complete pause in the conversation, “—If I do not give them a reason to ask, they won’t. And given the way they’ve handled him in the past, it’s probably healthier for everyone if we don’t give them a reason to.”

“Good, because he’s kinda dealin’ with some shit right now, and I think it’d be better if he didn’t have to deal with fuckin’ Avengers drama on top of it, you know?”

Thor nods, and sips contemplatively at the dregs of his fifth hurricane. It’s still garishly pink, and he now has a small collection of little, plastic cocktail swords. It suddenly occurs to Eddie that he’s probably going to be paying for this meal, fuck. At least he’s still got scads of money from the Life Foundation payout.

Eddie discretely motions for the check. When it arrives, he’s reminded of exactly how expensive buying ten mixed drinks is.

“So,” Eddie says, once they’ve exited the restaurant, “You’re actually not going to kill us? This isn’t some kinda—some kinda trick, right, because I should really write a will before I die.”

(Actually, yes, he should probably go get a will drawn up, if only because he’s got no dependents and he’d rather not have his assets revert his family members, or, god forbid, the state of California, if the appointed executor was really incompetent)

“That’s more my brother’s sort of thing,” Thor says. “If I was going to kill you, I would just kill you.”
That’s… less comforting than Thor probably intends, but Eddie’s going to take it. “And you’re not going to rat us out to the space-cops, or whatever?”

“No. The Nova Corps turned a blind eye —” Thor makes a facial expression that’s somewhere between a grin and a wince, and Eddie immediately hates himself for being amused, “—to the destruction of Asgard. If I saw a Herald of Galactus, I would inform them. Anything less, and they can deal with it themselves.”

Eddie’s not entirely sure what a Herald of Galactus is, but he nods anyway. If something’s a big enough deal to make Thor go narcing to the space cops, there’s a good chance that it’s, like, planet-destroying.

There are some thoughts that Eddie doesn’t allow himself to entertain, because otherwise he’d become a complete mess and never leave his apartment, let alone be able to remotely function as a human being. Enormous cosmic things that have heralds and destroy galaxies? That’s one of those thoughts. It’s too big for his mind to even begin to comprehend without crashing out like a faulty computer program.

“Don’t you have, like, a people to lead? Why’re you even on earth?” Eddie asks. He’s generally opposed to kinging, but since Asgard is, like, 500 people in a communal space van and Thor actually seems to be pretty fucking decent at ruling, he’s not too fussed by the whole thing.

“It was suggested that I come down to earth to investigate ‘weird alien shit’ because ‘he turns to liquid and eats people, Thor, you should kill him and bring honor to your family’.” Thor puts on a slightly shrill voice, and Eddie’s pretty sure it’s some half-assed impersonation of Tony Stark. “Also, for some reason, the Avengers don’t believe me when I tell them that I regularly slay dragons. So I brought a newly slain dragon, and they felt inclined to hold a feast.”

“Wait,” Eddie says, “Where the fuck were you when you found a dragon?” They’re walking to the BART station, now, and getting a few looks. Not because of their conversation, but because Thor looks like he could rip a city bus in half, but, like, sexily.

No, Eddie tells his mind, do not thirst after Thor. Or at least be a little less up front about it. He’s in a committed relationship, and Thor spends most of his time off planet being king, which is emphatically something that Eddie wants no business with.

“We had landed near a small civilization on one of the moons one system over from Xandar to refuel
and purchase some supplies. We had no money, and they had a dragon problem.” Thor says, like ‘dragon problems’ are a normal thing for people to deal with. “So, I slayed the dragon, and was close enough that I could stop by.”

“Wait,” Eddie says, rethinking the last few moments of their conversation, “Tony Stark asked you to kill me?”

“Yes? Though he may have been being sarcastic.” Thor sighs. “Though he is my friend, he occasionally has problems thinking through his actions.”

“Oh yeah?” Eddie asks, fully knowing that this is the case. “What do you mean by that?”

“Due to his precious Accords, what’s left of Asgard can’t settle anywhere on your planet without all legally registering with your Union of Nations as weapons of war to be used at their discretion.” Which, woah, Eddie had not actually thought of that. And, since everyone but Wakanda and North Korea signed on to that particularly odious piece of legislation, that left precious little room to actually have a community.

“That’s really fucked up.” Eddie says, for lack of anything else.

“Yes,” Thor says, “It is.” He doesn’t quite sigh, but something about the other man deflates, a bit. “We are considering neighboring systems, but it’s taking a while. Asgard hurt a lot of civilizations, and they have long memories.”

“Best of luck with that, holy shit.”

“We’re trying, at least.” The rest of the walk to the BART station, and afterwards, Eddie’s apartment, is done mostly in silence.

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Eddie unlocks his door, and is met with the sight of James, standing at his kitchen island, methodically sharpening all of the knives in the apartment. He looks up. “Not gonna get killed?”
Eddie shakes his head, and Thor follows him into the apartment. “He punched me, we had a lot of mixed drinks, and we talked a lot. How’s shit been here?”

“Went out and stole you a whetstone, because you didn’t have one. Your neighbor came over, I almost shot him, he didn’t seem too upset by it. Is all you have to eat protein bars, liquor, and cigarettes?”

“I mean,” Eddie says, toeing off his shoes near the door, “I cook, sometimes.”

“Sure.”

“Fuck off.”

“Why’s he still here?”

That’s a good question, Eddie thinks. “Yeah, Thor, why are you still here? Don’t you have, like, a people to lead?”

“I let the Grandmaster’s orgy-ship with the Avengers, and I have no way of getting into contact with your Man of Ants to arrange transport back.”

“So,” Eddie says, “Do you want me to text him, or…?”

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It takes about twenty minutes for Scott to show up, during which time James sharpens a frankly obscene amount of cutlery (Eddie is fairly sure that, if he wanted, he could shave with his breadknife now), Thor pokes around the apartment and spends enough time staring at his bookshelves that Eddie shoves a few paperbacks at him (Stranger in a Strange Land, Sirens of Titan, and Naked Lunch, because they’re handy and good and he can easily replace them). But, eventually, Scott shows up, he and Eddie high-five in celebration of him not getting killed, and he herds Thor off, back to, presumably, transportation to his orgy spaceship.

Eddie calls out for Chinese food, which shows up piping hot, and he and James get settled onto the
couch, in front of the TV. Eddie flips it on, and before he can switch to the channel guide, *Access Hollywood* starts playing.

“—And tonight, we’d like to leave you with this. It’s a little different from our usual stories, but I’m sure it won’t shock any of our viewers.” A cellphone picture pops up on screen, of Thor sitting at a very familiar looking table.

“Fuck,” Eddie says, and feels a chill crawl down his spine.

“*Just this afternoon, on the streets of San Francisco, The Avengers’ very own god of thunder was seen enjoying a romantic meal with none other than San Francisco news personality himself, Edward Brock. With love in their hearts and smiles on their faces, the couple spent hours in a small local restaurant, relishing in each other’s company.*” It changes to another image, where not only is his face clearly visible, but he’s leaned back in his chair and flexing his arms in a way that makes him look, like, fifty times hotter than he actually is. They’ve adjusted the color balance on the picture, as well, making his white t-shirt look almost radiant as it bulges, slightly too small, over his arms. It also makes the bruise on his face from where Thor punched him look more ‘rakish’ than ‘painful’. “*Sorry, ladies, but it looks like this thunder… has found his lightning.*”

The broadcast throws to commercial.

“Fuck,” Eddie says, “He’d literally just agreed not to kill me.”

His phone starts ringing.

“Fuck.” Eddie sighs. “Well, at least it’ll fuckin’ confuse the shit outta Stark.”
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Eddie uses a landline, and has a conversation about relationships. James is a shit. Tony has a quiet morning.

Chapter Notes

I was on spring break last week, but hopefully we should return to the regular pace of updates soon :)

(also, I'm considering just adding a bibliography to the end notes of previous chapters? bc i've ended up doing a decent amount of research for this and some of it has been really interesting!)

After a few minutes of his phone ringing constantly, Eddie bites the bullet, levers himself up from the couch, and calls Anne on the landline.

“Hey, Annie,” He says, far more calm than he feels, before she has the chance to get a word in, “Did you watch Access Hollywood tonight?”

“No, Eddie, I have better things to watch, like paint drying.” She pauses, and Eddie can tell that she’s rolling her eyes. “Any particular reason why you’re calling me about one of the most inane shows ever conceived?”

“Uh, yeah, actually,” Eddie takes a fortifying breath. “I was kinda on it tonight.”

“Bullshit.”

“No, really!”

She pauses, and Eddie can just tell that this is the sort of conversation that could turn into a fight. He
can feel her cramming all the patience she possesses into her tone when she replies, “Why were you on it?”

“That’d be because I maybe kinda went on a platonic lunch-date with Thor, and we drank a lot, and because Thor’s an alien, kinda, and built like a brick shithouse, and is also, like, super famous, somebody took a few cellphone pictures that make it look like we’re dating?” Eddie says, all in a rush. “One of them is, like, really good, and I might try and weasel out info for who took it just so I can spot them a little cash and use it as my headshot.”

“How good are we talking?”

“Practically fuckin’ editorial.”

“Damn.” She pauses, taking a breath. “So I assume you’re calling for legal advice, then, not just to complain?”

Eddie nods, and then remembers that, fuck, he should actually say words. “Yeah.”

“Well, I mean, it’s not actually illegal. Even if you weren’t a semi-public figure, you were in a public place with a guy who’s literally saved the planet. It’s not great, yeah, but even if you were to take it to court, you wouldn’t have a case.”

“So is there anything I can do to stop this from getting around?” Eddie asks, and can’t keep the wince out of his voice. James cuts him a look, and wisely stays silent, watching whichever bland police procedural came on after Access Hollywood wrapped up.

“Short answer? Not really.”

“Is there a long answer?”

Anne sighs. “The long answer is that you call a lawyer to draft up several cease-and-desists, by which point other folks will have picked it up and it’ll be out of your hands, regardless. And that’s ignoring that you don’t actually own the picture, so it’s not really your call as to who uses it and how, so long as it isn’t used for promotional purposes.”
Eddie sighs. Fuck. “How am I going to get these people to talk about something else?”

“Just wait. Something will replace this in the news cycle, and people will forget. Just—” She sighs, figuring that this is already a forgone conclusion. “—Just don’t do anything stupid, alright?”

“C’mon, Annie, you know me, when have I ever done anything stupid?” Eddie hangs up before she can respond, because the last time he asked that question, Anne literally brought out an itemized list.

Eddie stares at the dangling coiled cord of the phone, where it trails halfway down the wall, a holdover from the last time the whole building was renovated, back in the eighties.

His cellphone hasn’t stopped vibrating for twenty minutes straight.

“James?” He asks, not looking over, “How fucked am I?”

James gives a dark laugh. “Very.”

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Venom’s been… quiet lately. Not gone, but quiet. They push feelings back and forth with each other, and they’re still incredibly tactile, but… They aren’t as—verbal isn’t the right word, quite, because they don’t have a mouth most of the time—communicative, as they have been in the past.

Eddie grabs a book and heads out to the fire escape, ostensibly to give James some alone time in what’s functionally become his bedroom, but also to have a cigarette or five and talk to Venom.

He’s muscling his way through the start of The Magpie Murders, by Anthony Horowitz, when he feels Venom crawl up his spine and settle around his left bicep in an amorphous blob.

“Vee, baby, are you doing alright?” He asks, trying to keep the worry out of his voice. He really hopes that they haven’t fuckin’ wised up—or hell, that they aren’t jealous of whatever the fuck he feels about Thor.
WHY WOULD WE NOT BE DOING ALRIGHT? Venom replies, not even bothering to manifest a mouth. Eddie’s slowly getting used to hearing voices in his head—and having that be a good thing—but it’s still a little strange.

“It’s just—ever since we brought James back to the apartment, you’ve been super quiet, and I was just wondering what the fuck was up with that? Because if you’re jealous, like, he’s hot and all, but he’s so far gone for Captain America it’s a fuckin’ wonder that he hasn’t written a rock opera about it, Vee.”

WHAT? They sound a little baffled, inasmuch as whatever mental voice they’re using can express emotion. WE HAVE NOT BEEN QUIET?

“You kinda have, Vee, ‘n it’s a little fucking worrying, if I’m bein’ honest.” Eddie shrugs. “If you don’t want to tell me, that’s fine, but I really don’t want this shit to fester into some kind of big relationship-abscess, you know?”

Christ, he’s been spending too much time around Dan, hasn’t he?

EDDIE. NOTHING IS WRONG.

Eddie’s not exactly sure how to respond to that, so he just stares at his own bicep in contempt.

EDDIE.

He stares slightly more dubiously, and feels a little goddamn ridiculous.

IT’S NOTHING, EDDIE.

“C’mon, Vee, you know that’s my line in these conversations.” Eddie rolls his eyes. “Anyway, things are clearly not fine.”

Venom begins to wind themselves down his arm, thin tendrils intermingling with the tattoos down his forearm. WE ARE DEALING WITH IT.
Something occurs to Eddie. “Fuck, am I dying, or something?” He asks, a little manic and slightly less worried than he probably should be about imminent death. “Because, like, you’d tell me if I was dying, right?”

YOU ARE ONLY DYING IN THE SENSE THAT EVERY ANIMAL ALIVE IS SLOWLY LURCHING TOWARDS THE INEVITABLE REALITY OF THE VOID.

“Gee, Venom, fuckin’ thanks for that, Jesus Christ.” Eddie Brock and existential dread have always been a match made in heaven, but his tendencies generally ran more towards stark nihilism than gothic, flowery language. “Stop fuckin’ dodging.”

YOU COULD HAVE DIED, EDDIE. They say, squeezing his arm in a way that’s less comforting and more a reminder of those electric blood-pressure cuffs that they used to have at grocery stores. YOU COULD HAVE DIED, AND WE COULD NOT HAVE STOPPED IT.

“…Fuck, Vee.” The big ugly wad of emotion that they push into him is a writhing mass of guilt and despair, twisted together into horrific Gordian knots of shame. “That’s fuckin’—that’s fuckin’ intense, holy shit, Vee, you don’t have to do that to yourself just because I got a little hurt, I mean—“

A LITTLE HURT, EDDIE? A LITTLE HURT? They squeeze tighter, and Eddie’s almost sure he can feel his bones grinding together. WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO YOUR LEG WOUND IF WE HAD NOT BEEN THERE, ACTIVELY HEALING IT? FEMORAL ARTERIES DON’T JUST STOP BLEEDING, EDDIE.

That cuts deep. Not that Eddie’s never confronted his own mortality—one of those fun things about depression is that you do that a bunch—but that he would go out like that, easy and fast and entirely out of his own control.

HAVE YOU EVER DROPPED A GALLON OF MILK, EDDIE?

What the fuck, Vee? Eddie thinks. But regardless, he nods. He was, what, nine? Ten? Old enough to be left at home alone. And, like, there wasn’t much food in the house, because his sister was out with friends and his Dad was off doing god-knows-what, so he got out a bowl down, and was going to have a little cereal. And, somehow, the open carton of milk had slipped out of his hand, and absolutely covered the brown laminate tile of the kitchen floor with a puddle of white, the same color as glue. More liquid than seemed to be able to fit in the container. It looked so opaque he could dive into it, and in his memory it’s so large it completely fills the kitchen.
The memory is particularly vivid because of his father’s reaction, but Eddie cuts that train of thought off right quick, because otherwise he’ll end up dragged back into memories of exactly why he’s decided to cut off all contact.

*TO PUT IT IN YOUR EARTH TERMS, MULTIPLY THAT BY FOUR, AND THAT’S HOW MUCH BLOOD YOU LOST.*

“…*fuck*.” Eddie says, softly. “Doesn’t the human body only have, like, twelve pints of blood, though?”

*WE MADE MORE. WE HAD TO…RECYCLE A FEW ORGANS, BUT AFTERWARDS, ONCE WE HAD RECOVERED ENOUGH RAW MATERIAL, WE REPLACED THEM. WE ARE NOT ENTIRELY COMFORTABLE WITH EATING VITAL PARTS OF YOU TO ENSURE YOU REMAIN ALIVE, EDDIE.*

It’s like someone’s poured a large glass of ice water down his back. “What—what the *fuck*?”

*EDDIE, WE WERE MORE CONCERNED IN THE MOMENT FOR ALL THE BLOOD LEAKING OUT OF YOU THAN WE WERE FOR SOME OF YOUR MINOR, MORE REDUNDANT ORGANS.*

“…”Such as?” Eddie asks, for lack of anything else to say.

*LARGE PARTS OF YOUR LIVER WERE NOT BEING USED. YOUR FLOATING RIBS, YOUR GALLBLADER, A FEW FEET OF SMALL INTESTINE. ONE OF YOUR LUNGS.*

Oh, Eddie thinks. *Fuck.* Like, he knew that the situation was *rough,* anatomically, but *that bad?* Generally, when one’s thinking about expendable body parts, the *lungs* are fairly low down on the list. Like, yeah, *hypothetically,* at least according to his fifth grade health teacher, you could survive with one lung. For a while. Maybe. But it was always couched in those sorts of phrases, and essentially boiled down to ‘in some situations, you could survive, but not very well’.

*Jesus Christ.*
“I’m sorry for, uh, scarin’ you like that, Vee,” Eddie eventually manages to force out, after a moment. “It’s been really—like, you’ve been here a lot for me through, well, fuckin’ everything, and I haven’t really been doin’ you the same.”

WHY WOULD YOU NEED TO—

“Fuck, Vee, relationships are supposed to be fair, and shit, Jesus.” Something clams up in Eddie’s insides, cold and sloppy with the realization of, oh fuck, he’s actually been kind of a bad boyfriend (husband? Body roommate? Terms are… difficult) about this whole thing. Like, yeah, Eddie’s kind of, uh, practiced at the relationship thing at this point, but Venom isn’t.

They don’t quite seem to get that together, they’re equals. Which, yeah, is complicated a little by the whole body autonomy issue, but still.

“We—we’re fucking equals in this, Vee, alright? We’re partners.” Eddie can’t help how his voice sounds a little fucking bleak. “I’m here for you, just the same as you’re here for me. Except—with the healing your injuries part, I guess…” He trails off.

Venom is silent for a while, and gradually releases the pressure on his arm. Feeling and blood flow back into his arm in a heady rush, sending little jolts of tingles up all the way from his elbows to his fingertips.

“Like, fuck, Vee, even though we share a body most of the time, we’re still fuckin’ individuals. I’m here to help you with this sort of shit, alright? This whole being there thing is a goddamn two way street, and I’ve really been letting my part of that down.” He reaches up, to where they’re perched on his arm like a gigantic leech, and runs his hand over their flesh, letting his fingers sink in, slightly, and toy in the eddies and currents of their body. “I’m fuckin’ here for you, Vee, and if you need anything, you’d better tell me, alright? I’m kind of a dumbfuck sometimes, I need this shit spelled out.”

They don’t respond. It feels like they’re thinking, but Eddie’s not about to go retracing their mental connection into his partner’s mind. Something about it feels… invasive. Which is a little ridiculous, right, because they’ve got their gooey little fingers all through his grey matter, but the rules are a little different for him, as far as he’s concerned.

“Shit’s just—“ Eddie pulls out a cigarette and attempts to light it, the lighter flashing once, twice, before finding the flame for long enough to light one end. “I’m not great at this relationship shit, Vee. Fuck.”
Venom snakes their head out of his shoulder, then, their long, stringy neck wrapping loosely around his upper arms before turning, and looking Eddie straight in the eyes. “WE THINK THAT YOU ARE DOING WELL AT THIS ‘RELATIONSHIP SHIT’, EDDIE.”

“Well, babe, you don’t really have a very good fuckin’ basis for comparison,” Eddie says, wryly. “Take it from my list of exes, or, fuck, anyone who I’ve ever fucked up with. Hell, call my fuckin’ father, he’ll have a goddamn litany of my failings for you, Christ.”

“EDDIE. WE HAVE PLANS FOR YOUR FATHER, SHOULD THE NEED EVER ARISE. SPEAKING TO HIM IS RATHER LOW ON THE LIST.”

Eddie really shouldn’t be charmed by his alien parasite spouse offering to torture his father, but he super is. It’s really… refreshing to have someone so clearly in his corner, someone so ride or die on his side that they have no need to hear the other side of their relationship, no need to try and put themselves in the other man’s shoes. At which point Eddie usually remarked that he knew exactly where he’d like to put those shoes, and that location was emphatically not on his feet.

“That really means a lot, Vee.” Eddie sets his book down, and take a long drag off his cigarette. “We should probably, like, talk about that sorts’a shit, though, you know? Because some things make me just drop the fuck out of reality, and I—I really don’t want to hide that shit from you?” He doesn’t mean for it to come out like a question, but it does.

Venom doesn’t have to deal with his bullshit. This is, after all, a strictly opt-in part of being in a relationship with him.

“WE HAD NOTICED THAT YOU TEND TO LOSE BITS OF YOURSELF WHEN YOU GET ESPECIALLY ANGRY OR AFRAID.” They say, like it’s not a big deal. “WE ARE HERE FOR YOU REGARDLESS, EDDIE.”

“It’s just—“ Eddie sighs, and takes another long drag off his cigarette to play for time. “It’s just, I’m so used to just sectioning off that part of me, because I’ve seen what that sort of anger looks like, and—fuck, it’s just something that I’ve tried to ignore about myself, I guess.”

“EDDIE.” Venom says, not unkindly, “YOU NEED A PSYCHOLOGIST.”

“Yeah, I’ll just tell them that I married my space alien parasite, but don’t worry, that’s like, the least
fucked up thing about my life, and my issues extend far beyond falling in love with a sentient oil slick.” That comes out a little sharper than Eddie actually intends. “Fuck, sorry. That was—that was a little goddamn harsh on my part.”

“WE UNDERSTAND THE THOUGHT BEHIND IT, EDDIE.” They give his shoulders a comforting squeeze. “WE KNEW GETTING INTO THIS THAT YOU WERE NOT THE MOST DIPLOMATIC OF YOUR EARTH LIFE FORMS.”

“Yeah, well…” Eddie trails off, and crushes the butt of his cigarette against the brickwork of the outside of the building. “You gotta—you gotta tell me if something’s botherin’ you, Vee.”

“WE SHALL TRY. WE ARE NOT THE BEST AT EXPRESSING OUR EMOTIONS.” They snake a tendril down his arm, splitting and branching it before twining it around and between his fingers.

Eddie smiles, slightly. “I get that. “

Venom hums, content, and sinks closer to Eddie, nuzzling at his neck, and settling on one of his shoulders letting Eddie take some of their weight.

“So,” Eddie says, after a moment, “You aren’t gonna be all fucky about this Thor situation, are you? Because, like, if it’s going to bother you, I’ll definitely outright deny everything.”

“EDDIE, WE KNOW YOUR EVERY EMOTION. THE FEELINGS YOU HAVE FOR THE ASGARDIAN RULER ARE PURELY CARNAL, AND WE ARE NOT BEYOND A BIT OF AESTHETIC APPRECIATION OURSELVES.” They say, softly, into Eddie’s ear. “THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT SUCH STRENGTH THAT APPEALS TO US IN A VERY BASE FORM.”

Well, Eddie thinks, at least he’s not alone in thirsting after Thor. He doesn’t really have any intent about the whole thing—although, if he and Venom had discussed it beforehand and Thor was offering, he wouldn’t say no—but it’s nice to know that Venom’s not against Eddie being able to admit that he likes objectively hot people. “Yeah, but I’m talking about the thing where folks think me an’ Thor are dating?”

“IF YOU DID NOT HAVE US, THOR WOULD BE A WORTHY MATCH, ALTHOUGH YOU COULD DO BETTER.”
“Oh… Kay?” Eddie blinks, and shakes himself. “What I mean is, if I let this whole ‘dating Thor’ thing play out—don’t deny it, actually start answering my phone calls, that sort of thing—would you be cool with it?”

“NO, EDDIE, THAT IS A TERRIBLE IDEA. AND PERHAPS, IF YOU ARE ATTEMPTING TO ANTAGONIZE TONY STARK, YOU SHOULD NOT INVOLVE ANYONE WHO COULD BE ACCURATELY REFERRED TO AS ‘GOD-EMPEROR’ WITHOUT THEIR KNOWLEDGE.”

“You’re right, fuck.” At any rate, antagonizing the richest man on the planet is probably a bad idea. “So, d’you think I should hire a publicist, or something?”

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He does not, in fact, end up hiring a publicist. What he does is call Scott’s roommate Luiz, who’s niece’s softball coach’s wife knew a guy who was on the same bowling team as a former personal assistant to the Kardashians with an axe to grind, who was more than happy to talk to TMZ.

So hopefully, within a few days, the story will die and be forgotten. As it stands, Eddie’s enjoying having more twitter followers and more clicks on his articles.

The day after the whole situation with Access Hollywood, Eddie finally checks his phone messages. The usual cadre of old editors, positively begging for insider information on Thor, on the record; a long string of question marks from Dan; an email from his editors at the current website, asking him for private clarification of the situation; a long, rambling voicemail from his old editor back in New York that managed to be delivered entirely in a shout and never repeat itself; and a text from Scott that simply read “Omg eddie *GET IT*”.

Obviously, Eddie replies with the eggplant emoji.

After breakfast (eggs, nice and runny, sausage patties, a cigarette, and some strong black coffee), he pulls out his wallet a rifflles through until he finds a couple of twenties.

“Hey,” He passes them to James, who has been quietly making very short work of his food. “Take this, there’s a goodwill a few streets over, get some more fuckin’ clothes. Maybe stop by the Supercuts, get your hair fixed.”
“My hair’s fine.”

“You look like a professional wrestler from 2004; the only way it would be worse is if you also had a perm.”

“The fuck am I gonna do with 40 dollars, buy dinner at the fuckin’ Ritz?” James says, rather than attempt to refute the earlier remark.

“I’d like to see you fuckin’ try, this city has the worst fuckin’ economic disparity in the entire country. And that’s not even touching the fuckin’ inflation here, dear god—“ Eddie pauses, and takes a breath, course correcting. “You should at least be able to pick up a few shirts, or something, ‘s what I’m saying.”

“I’ve already got a shirt.” Bucky says, a shit eating grin stretching, unbidden, across his face.

“Oh, fuck you,” Eddie laughs. “I hope you only find POWER 99 shirts with the sleeves cut off.”

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A few thousand miles across the country, and a few hours earlier, Tony Stark begins his morning routine. He rolls out of bed, brushes his teeth (and uses his water pick), and looks in the mirror. It… could be better—he’s gotten about ten hours of sleep in the past seven days, and it shows on his face.

He climbs in to the shower, turning the water hot enough that he can feel the blood rushing around his body, and washing himself, before activating the frankly excessive number of water jets.

After a while, he steps out, towels himself off, and throws on some comfortable clothing.

“Hey, FRIDAY,” He asks, shrugging into a worn-out Mötely Crüe shirt that he’s had since his freshman year of college, “Anything happen while I was asleep?”

“Well, sir, the president—“
“I’m really not prepared to deal with him, right now. What else?”

“Nothing world-changing, sir. There is some paperwork that Miss Potts has asked you to look over while she is travelling.” Pepper’s in Hong Kong, doing CEO things, at the moment. God, he wishes she were back, it would be really nice to have someone to ground him, especially now that there are mind-controlling alien parasites and clones of the Winter Soldier running around.

Yes, he knows that the X-Men fought mind-controlling alien parasites in the 80s, but those were bugs, not tar.

He also knows, intellectually, that until a few years ago, the Winter Soldier was a prisoner of war being routinely brainwashed and tortured. He’s having a hard time applying that knowledge to the visceral twist in his gut that comes from knowing that the other man murdered his parents. It’s a rather slow-going process.

Tony pads, barefoot, into the kitchen. “Did Thor make it back okay?”

“Thor returned to his ship safely, and departed the planet late last night. It seems that he evaluated the Goo-Man as being not a threat to the wellbeing of Earth.”

“Yeah, well, he would know.” Tony says, reaching a mug out of the cabinet and pouring a cup of coffee from the piping hot carafe sitting on the counter.

“There is one more thing, sir,” FRIDAY says, almost nervously.

“Yeah?”

“According to several gossip sites, it seems that Thor is romantically involved with the reporter, Eddie Brock.”

“What,” Tony asks, “The fuck?”
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Eddie has a few conversations; James goes shopping, gets a haircut, and meets a fan. Very low-key this time, folks.

Chapter Notes

Guess who's got two thumbs AND NOW A COLLEGE DEGREE!!! (me!). Stuff should be coming faster now, folks.

“So, Eddie,” Mrs. Chen says, as he ducks into her bodega, “Are you fuckin’ Thor or not?”

“What?” It’s been a while since he’s been into the bodega—too busy having big, emotional crises and being kidnapped by Nazis and eating take out—and Eddie’s still not quite used to the new familiarity with Mrs. Chen, ever since he ate a dude in front of her. This isn’t how that sort of shit played out in Hannibal, there’s a lot less weird sexual tension and meaningful eye contact.

“Are you. Fucking Thor.” She pauses. “Or not?”

“… I’m not?”

She sighs. “You should really get onto that, Eddie. These opportunities don’t just come around every day.”

Eddie blushed. “I am happily married!” Which, considering what he and Venom had talked about, wasn’t actually a deal breaker, but still. “Sorta.”

“Eddie, I lived in this town in the 70s. Try again.”

He grabs a basket, and goes over to look at the vegetables. “I’m morally opposed to monarchy and he’s technically a god-king from another planet?”
“Hey, don’t get any of the Bok Choy, one of my regulars put it in a stir fry and got sick. Might be a bad batch.” She shifts a little on her stool behind the counter. “Why haven’t I seen you around lately?”

“That’d be because I got kidnapped by Nazis last week, Mrs. Chen. Kinda makes you not want to go outside or feel like a person.”

“What?” She sets her tea mug down a little hard on the glass countertop next to the register, and Eddie hears a small crack as the surface chips.

“Yeah. It’s—It’s not a big deal, really,” Eddie says, abandoning all hope of finding something among the leafy greens, and picking up a bag of baby carrots. “I have a roommate now, too, that’s pretty fun.”

“Eddie.”

“Look, alright, things are a little shaky right now, but I’ve kinda got a support network for the first time since—“ He doesn’t say ‘since Anne left me’, because that’s not strictly true. Because before then, his list of people he could go to started and ended with her name; his sister hadn’t even been on that list since he was a literal kid, on account of that thing with Mom—

Eddie’s brain slams the fucking brakes on that train of thought, because down that line is only a deep mash of misery and guilt and a sort of stomach-churning despair. He’s been ignoring and shoving things into that unexploded bomb of feelings for years, and the time to take care of it is emphatically not while standing in the middle of his bodega.

He sighs. “It’s not gonna be as bad as last time, Mrs. Chen. I’m not gonna go flying off the rails.”

“Good.” She picks up her tea, a little gingerly, and takes a sip. “What’s this about you getting yourself a roommate?”

“Well, I rescued him from a Nazi torture bunker, but he’s in hiding from the Avengers, on account of him being recently brainwashed and trying to kill most of them, so we’re pretending he’s just a biologically perfect clone and also that I maybe killed him? Shit’s a little weird. We’re kinda playing it by ear.”
“When do I get to meet your young man, Eddie?” She asks, rather than something reasonable, like ‘what the fuck’.

“He’s kinda working on getting his shit together right now, on account of being brainwashed for, like 70 years, but we’ll see.” Eddie moves over to the canned goods, and picks up a few of the less dented containers of tomato bisque. “He’s kinda just living on my couch right now?”

“Eddie, your friend was tortured by Nazis for the better part of a century, and you don’t get him a fucking bed?”

Ah, fuck, he hadn’t actually thought about it that way. Yeah, his couch is deep and comfy and he’s definitely passed out on it more than a few times, but it’s still not a bed. “You—you might have a point there, Mrs. Chen.”

She pauses, for a moment, as Eddie moves toward the freezer and picks up a few different steamer-bags of vegetables. “You listen to those meditation CDs I got you, yet?”

“C’mon, Mrs. Chen, you know that I don’t speak Mandarin.”

“It’s an easy language, Eddie! There are no tenses!”

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Meanwhile, at the Goodwill, James—not Bucky, not yet, maybe not ever again—stares at the near-endless racks of clothing. Is he a large? How do sizes even work now?

He reaches his arm out, and fishes a random shirt out of the rack.

Goddammit.

It is, in fact, a Power 99 shirt with the sleeves cut off. But hey, it looks like it’ll fit.
Then again, having only one arm, and the other being essentially a metal socket with extra bits of metal sticking out, forgoing sleeves is probably going to be a good idea.

He throws the shirt over his shoulder—the one without an arm attached—and grabs another. Iron Maiden, he thinks he’s hear of that before, some band, probabl—

Fuck, right, that was in the Avengers dossier that he was made to study back when he was the Winter Soldier. Not that he’s not the Winter Soldier anymore, that’s not so much a title or alter ego so much as it’s just an aspect of who he is, nowadays, but it’s an easier way to differentiate.

He’s not that guy anymore, but that’s still part of him. He looks at the hangers, all plastic with metal hooks, and instinctively knows exactly how he’d kill every other person in the store with just one. It’d take, what, two minutes, max? If no one was in the stalls, changing. Maybe three, he’s basing his estimates for time from situations where he had another arm to work with. More like ten, if he wanted to do it quietly.

He looks at the t-shirt. It’s soft. Stark likes this group, he knows. Not as much as he likes other groups, but it apparently comes up in his rotation enough to be notable. Though exactly why knowing Stark’s 17th favorite band would be useful is fucking beyond him. He doesn’t remember what they sound like, or if he likes them, or why the fuck he’s got a very specific drumbeat stuck in his head. That’s fine. He’s used to not knowing these things.

There’s a lot of shit that he doesn’t know about himself, or that he knows, and just has zero context for.

The shirt is soft. If he’s smart about it, he can probably cut the sleeves off with one of the kitchen shears he sharpened the other day.

He grabs another shirt, at random, just to make his mind go to something else. In large, bold letters, it proclaims, “BORN ON A MOUNTAIN, RAISED IN A CAVE, TRUCKIN’ AND FUCKIN’ IS ALL I CRAVE”.

James isn’t surprised to find that the sleeves are already cut off of that one.
Eddie drops his groceries back at his apartment—James is still off acquiring worldly possessions—and changes into something slightly more presentable. Or at least, something that isn’t the sweatpants he slept in. Not that he’s planning on leaving his apartment again today, but since breaking into his apartment seems to have become the nation’s favorite pastime after baseball and getting angry on twitter, he figures it’s a good idea to be a little bit more together.

He pours a large cup of scalding-hot coffee and settles in front of his laptop on the kitchen table, intent on doing some writing. He needs to get some shit done; not because of deadlines—he’s got a few articles pre-written, so he’s not constantly down to the wire—but because if he doesn’t do something, something that’s unconnected to vigilantism and purely his own shit, he’s going to lose his goddamn fucking mind.

Eddie takes a sip of coffee. It’s so strong it’s practically tar, and he loves it. He fishes a cigarette from the packet on the table, lights up, and opens his laptop—

—And finds himself staring straight into the face of none other than Tony goddamn Stark.

“What the fuck.” Eddie says, and it isn’t a question. His computer background is a stock picture of space, for chrissakes, he wasn’t expecting this shit.

“Hi there, Brock,” Stark says, and Eddie immediately hates everything. “You and me need to have a little talk.”

Fuck that. “No we don’t.” Eddie says, and slams his laptop shut. “Have fun talkin’ at my fucking keyboard.”

He has a moment of silence to catch up with his racing heart, and then his television pops on of it’s own accord. It’s Tony Stark.

“It’s cute that you think closing a laptop can stop me, but by all means, continue. You gonna try throwing your tv out the window next?”

“Oh, come on!”

“Yeah, maybe you should have thought before getting a smart tv with skype pre-installed. Jesus Christ, do you not have a VPN, at least? A firewall?”
“I don’t have to listen to this.” Eddie says, and already feels part of his willpower fraying. He’s gone on record—multiple times, even—about his… disagreements with Tony fucking Stark.

“Oh yeah? You want to do this over Facetime on your phone? Every fucking internet-connected device with a screen can show my face, alright, unless you literally decide to become a hermit in the mountains somewhere, you can’t avoid me.”

Eddie is immediately struck with a horrifying vision of standing in Times’ Square, and all the electric billboards displaying Tony Stark’s face, talking directly at him, as crowds of tourists stop to gawk on their way into the Times’ Square Olive Garden and the M&M’s Store. It makes his stomach turn, and makes his mind teeter on the precipice of that sharp panic that he usually manages to keep at bay.

“Jesus.” Eddie says. “There’s no fuckin’ need to go that far.”

“Yeah, please don’t make me go all Videodrome on your ass, really don’t think Pep would forgive me about that.”

Pep, that’s—fuck, right, Stark’s… engaged (?) to Pepper Potts, the lady who he gave his company to, after all that shit with Stone—no, Stane—when he sunk a big reactor into his chest. Eddie honestly doesn’t quite know what’s up with that situation, but since it’s also pretty fucking clearly not his business, well, he’s pretty alright with not knowing everything. “What do you want, Stark?”

“What exactly,” Stark taps a few keys, just out of sight of the camera. It pulls up an image of one of the many stories about him dating Thor, “Do you mean by this?”

It’s a question, technically, but his tone doesn’t change in the slightest, nesting somewhere between fake-friendly and downright icy.

“Look, fuck—“ Eddie starts, and then doesn’t actually know where he’s going with this. Like yeah, he was planning on just fucking with Stark for a while, there, but also, that seems like kinda a dick move, now that he’s thought about it a little more. “—It’s not, like—goddammit, alright, we got drinks! That’s it!”

“Sure.” Stark says, and Eddie looks down at his mug of coffee and wishes he could drown himself in it. It would take some doing, he figures, and Venom wouldn’t go for it, so it’s probably not even worth the trouble of trying.
He takes a sip instead. “Look, if it makes you feel any better, he punched me in the face, first, and then he stuck me with a bill.”

That does, in fact, visibly make Stark feel better, apparently. “Good for him!”

“Fuck off.” Eddie says, without much heat. He sighs, and desperately wishes for this whole Thor circus to be over and done with. “Was that all you wanted to talk about?”

“Yeah, Brock, some of us have lives to lead.” Stark says, and begins typing something on his unseen keyboard. “I’ll be in—“

“NO, YOU DON’T GET TO DO THAT,” Eddie and Venom say, as one, before Venom oozes out of his shoulder, and wraps around his neck like a python.

“Oh, What the fuck?” Stark looks genuinely emotionally effected for the first time in the entire span of their conversation, so Eddie’s tentatively chalking that up as a win. “Why’d you have to go and bring your tapeworm boyfriend out?”

“First off,” Eddie says, “They don’t align with the gender binary—which is bullshit anyway—so jot that down. Secondly, uh, you basically told a god-king to kill us, did you think we were just going to let that lie?”

From the look on his face, that answer is pretty definitively a ‘yes’. Which, you know, Eddie’s no too surprised by; after you accumulate a bunch of money, you end up surrounded by yes-men who don’t call you on your bullshit. “… Kinda?”

“Jesus, Stark, you need more friends.”

“Why, you auditioning?”

“No, sorry, I’ve got enough assholes in my life, but I can probably loan you my neighbor—let’s get the fuck back on topic, please?” Eddie shakes himself. “What the fuck are you doing, telling Thor to kill me?”
“I told him to deal with you, there’s a difference!”

“Oh-Oh my god. You’re an idiot.” Eddie looks directly at Venom, and gives them a little pet, staring into their eyes. “Vee, baby, Tony Stark is an idiot, oh my god.”

“I am not—“

“Oh my god, babe,” He says, still looking at Venom in wonder, “I’ve managed to find the one rich guy in New York who isn’t mobbed up. Fuck.”

“Mobbed up? I am not—“

“Yeah, yeah, Stark, literally what I just said. Do you just not listen when other people talk, or what?”

“You done?”

“Not quite.” Eddie runs his thumb, gently, around where one of the curls of Venom is drifting down his shoulder to his bicep. “Are you planning on threatening my life any more? Because me and Vee, well, we take that a little personally, get me?”

“That depends,” Tony says, slowly. “Are you going to keep killing people?”

“IF WE DO NOT FEED, WE DIE. IF WE DIE, NO ONE WILL BE HERE TO KEEP EDDIE FROM IMPLODING.” Venom says, and nuzzles into Eddie’s chin like a contented cat.

Oh god, not this shit again. “Vee, we talked about the whole ‘sharing the emotional load’ bit. You aren’t my therapist, you’re my partner, alright? It isn’t your job to fix me, or whatever.”

“YES, EDDIE, BUT WE ARE A KEY PART OF YOUR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT NETWORK, AND WITHOUT US—“
“I know, baby, it’s just not fair for our relationship to be that uneven and codependent, other than, you know, the biological necessity. That shit just ain’t healthy.” Eddie presses a soft kiss onto what would, in human anatomical terms, be their forehead. “It’s good for us to have other folks in our lives, alright? Me an’ you, we need some touchstones outside ourselves, Vee. You liked hanging out with my neighbor, right? Maybe we could make that into more of a thing, so you get some of your own experiences, not filtered through me.”

“**EDDIE, THE LAST TIME WE HUNG OUT WITH YOUR NEIGHBOR YOU GOT TORTURED BY NAZIS.**”


“Yeah, I got kidnapped and tortured by Nazis last week. Wasn’t fun. Really trying hard not to think about it, actually.” Eddie shakes himself, slightly, as if physical movement will derail that particularly nasty train of thought. It’s not that he’s avoiding it, exactly, but, you know, there are better times to deal with his bullshit than when he’s on the horn with Tony Stark talking about feelings. “But, yeah, you chucklefucks managed to miss a HYDRA compound in the middle of a major American city, that *easily* had, what, thirty, forty full-time Nazi employees?”

“**WE ATE TWENTY NINE.**” Venom says, a little proudly. “**JAMES TOOK CARE OF FIFTEEN, THOUGH UNDOUBTEDLY SOME MANAGED TO GET AWAY.**”

“Forty-four—you killed *forty four* people?” Stark asks, his voice going shrill. “What? And who’s *James*?”

“I mean, to be fair, they had torn my femoral artery apart with a drill. It’s not—I’d really prefer *not* to revisit that right now? Because, like, Vee and I *just* got into this yesterday, and I’m *really* not circle back just yet.” Eddie sighs, and collects himself. Time to sell Tony Stark on the clone thing. “And James was down in the HYDRA bunker with me, strapped to a chair for god-knows how long. Technically, he’s a biologically perfect clone of James Barnes that HYDRA kept in case they needed a spare. He’s got one arm and memory issues and a terrible haircut and now he’s my roommate?”

“Brock—“ Stark sighs. “This is too weird for me. You sure that’s just a clone of Barnes?”

“Of course,” Eddie lies, “Isn’t Bucky-prime kickin’ it in Wakanda and getting de-programed?”

“That’s what Steve says, but I don’t know whether or not I believe him.”
Well, Eddie thinks, there’s a good reason for that. “I mean, to be fair, you did lock up everyone who sided with him on what was essentially a philosophical argument in your secret extra-judicial underwater prison in international waters.”

“It wasn’t a philosophical argument, the Avengers can’t be seen as taking sides in international conflict, and we should be held accountable for our actions—”

“Yo, there’s probably a better way to do that than by having everyone who remotely has powers or tech or moonlights as a vigilante register with the government. That’s a slippery fuckin’ slope, is all I’m sayin’.”

“I’m just saying—“

“Look, I know you’ve got this whole guilt/control thing from where you fucked around and made an AI that destroyed an entire eastern European country, but you should really consider maybe listening to other folks when they point things out about your ideals, is what I’m saying.” Eddie’s not sure when this conversation with Stark got civil, let alone constructive, but he’ll take it. “Look, I’m not sayin’ you’re completely wrong, because you have a point, but really, you should probably think before you act, fuck.”

“More of a big-picture guy, Brock.”

“Well, fuck,” Eddie says, a little meanly. “If you’re that much of a big-picture guy, how’d it take you this long to learn that your actions have consequences?”

Stark points a finger at the bigass glowing reactor in his chest. “Dude.”

Ah, fuck, that’s fair, yeah. “I see your point, fuck, that was a little insensitive of me.” Eddie sighs. “Look, Stark, if you want to come over, we can get drinks—“

Stark’s face gets a little cloudy. “I don’t drink any more.”

Fuck, didn’t Stark used to—but then, yeah, probably a good call for getting himself cleaned up; Eddie has a lot of fuckin’ respect for that shit, mostly because of how fucking difficult it was for him
to quit smoking when he and Anne were together. “—We can get coffee, talk this shit over.”

“You gonna keep killing people in the meantime, or like, are you going to Edward Cullen it and start only eating shit you find in the forest?” Stark rolls his eyes.

“Fuck you, Stark,” Eddie says, without much bite. He’s warming up to the other guy, he can’t help it. “Lemme be straight with you, every time I leave the apartment, people try to murder me, alright, my life is a fuckin’ nightmare. So, uh, no, we won’t stop fighting back when folks try to gut us.”

“It can’t happen that often, I mean—“

“Stark—“ Eddie begins, and it suddenly doesn’t feel right. Like they’ve somehow passed the animosity window for solely relying on last names. “—Tony, fuck, do you know how many times I’ve been just mortally wounded just, like, goin’ down a few blocks to the bodega to buy groceries? Like, at least three times in the past month and a half. And that’s not counting all the times I get kidnapped—” His voice goes shrill, and he takes a fortifying breath to steady himself. If he weren’t already sitting on the couch, routinely clenching his fists, he’d be pacing up and down the room, gesticulating wildly with his arms like some kind of fucking televangelist. “It’s a bad fuckin’ scene, dude.”

Stark blinks.

“Look,” Eddie soldiers on, “Fuckin’ text me or whatever, I’m sure your 1984-ass knows my number, and we’ll do coffee or some shit. But this fuckin—this fuckin’ animosity is kinda bullshit if we’re both gonna be on world-saving teams, or whatever the fuck.”

“Full offense, Brock, but there’s no way you’d be on my world-saving team.”

“Needs fuckin’ must, or whatever, alright, listen, this whole thing, where you act like your fuckin’ interpersonal conflicts are fine and can be allowed to fester is kinda bullshit when you’re working on an international scale and whether or not you’re talking to someone actively affects the fate of the world, alright? We’re fixing this shit.” Eddie sighs, “Get at me, or whatever, alright?”

Tony Stark sighs, on the television, and it suddenly occurs to Eddie that on the other man’s list of priorities, ‘call up the murderous alien couple to talk about their romantic entanglements’ is probably pretty fucking low down on the list. “Yeah, sure. Fine. If I’m in the area, I’ll look you up. Until then, I am done talking about your marriage.”
Stark clicks a button outside of the view of the camera, and the screen goes black.

Eddie sinks down into the couch, letting the plush cushions engulf him like some sort of strange, soft embrace. Fuck, he needs a cigarette.

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Getting a haircut isn’t actually that bad.

Okay, James thinks, that’s inaccurate. It is that bad. He’s a jumpy bastard at the best of times, having someone routinely bring what’s essentially a knife up near his neck is astonishingly unsettling.

By the time his stylist—beautician, his mind keeps stubbornly correcting, like being old-timey is something that’s just ingrained into his bones—unsnaps the black plastic cape and brushes the stray hairs off the back of his neck, he’s pretty sure he hasn’t blinked in at least seven minutes.

It’s fine, he’s gone longer. HYDRA was very keen on testing the physical limitations of his body, seeing what sort of damage their weapon could endure before—

Fuck.

The shrinks in Wakanda had drilled into him about shit like agency and depersonalization and once, very memorably, stop talking about yourself like you’re some kind of fucking engine. Fuck, he should probably call them up, let them know that he’s alive and relatively stable. Maybe see about getting in some therapy sessions over the phone, or something.

His hair is shorter now, by about three inches; the cut is a little more purposeful, so it no longer looks like he’s just let it grow out. It’s long enough to put up, still, is the important thing. Bucky always had short hair, slicked through with pomade and meticulously styled, like he was some kind of movie star. The Winter Soldier’s hair always hung lank, thick and snarled on the sides of his face. It’s good to have something that’s just his own, something that no other version of him has done.

It’s good.
Things get less good as he’s walking back to the apartment, however.

“Hey,” Someone says, when he’s two blocks from the building, large, perpetually-lit neon sign in his sights. “Do I know you?”

James blinks, and looks at the other man’s face. No bells are ringing. “I don’t think so?”

“No, I’m pretty sure I know you from somewh—were you on tv, or something?”

“Or something,” James says, instead of ‘yes’. “Just got one of those faces, I guess.”

“Huh.” The man looks him up and down, and something sparks on his face. “Anyone ever tell you that you look like that Wintery Soldier guy?”

“Never.” Generally, when someone recognized him as the Winter Soldier, James just killed them. This was a rule that he started breaking about the same time Stevie showed up in the future somehow and started looking at him with sad eyes. “Must just be a you thing.”

“Nah, man, I’m pretty sure—Look, alright, let me pull some shit up on my phone—“ The man pulls a phone out of the front pocket of his shirt, and begins prodding at it. “What happened to your arm, anyway?”

“Train accident, completely crushed it. We done?” Fuck, he really wants to get away from this fucking conversation as soon as possible.

“I mean, the Winter Soldier dude only has one arm, too—“

James breaks out into a dead sprint. Fuck this. This ‘finding himself’ shit was pretty fucking dependent on not being recognized as a former world-class assassin with a body count higher than that of some smaller European wars. The bag from Goodwill hangs from his hand.

Down an alley, some very dangerous jaywalking, another alley, another alley, through a tour group
that’s looking at ‘the real San Francisco’, yet another—another alley, and he’s lost the tail.

He takes the most circuitous route back to the apartment possible. It involves a fair bit of doubling back, darting through alleys, a couple nonsensical rides on BART, and only a little bit of parkour off of rooftops.

And then, of course, he opens the door to find Eddie swallowed up by the couch and halfway through a pack of cigarettes.

“Oh hey,” Eddie says, not looking at him, “You got a haircut, looks good.”

James blinks. “Dude.”

“What?”

“What the fuck happened?”

“Uhh,” Eddie starts, and this is clearly going nowhere pleasant. “Tony Stark hacked our tv to ask me if I was sleeping with Thor, and then things got kinda heavy. Fuck, I dunno.”

“Well, that’s kinda the least of our problems, pal,” The endearment comes out automatically, the same way his voice becomes slightly more rhythmic and sharp. “Some guy recognized me while I was out, earlier.”

“…Fuck, that isn’t great. You think he, like, tweeted about it, or something?”

“I don’t know, fuck, is that the one where you share pictures?”

“Not hardly.” Eddie pulls his phone out, and begins poking at it. “Oh, what the fuck.”

“What?”
“Didn’t you know? Apparently, you’ve been spotted.”

“I just told you—“


"Fuck."
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Eddie and James buy a mattress, build a conversation pit, and have a deep talk about feelings. Scott writes avengers rpf. Venom and Eddie begin talking like actual adults for the first time in a while.

Chapter Notes

conversation pits are actually specific things, not just shoving a few couches together. please do not use this fic as any sort of authority on interior design. :)

“Bull. Shit.” James stretches the word out until it’s two distinct sentences, the capital letters and periods entirely fucking apparent. “The only way I’m getting back to that city any time soon is in a fuckin’ coffin.”

“I mean,” Eddie starts, “Are we sure you haven’t secretly been cloned?”

James blinks. “Do you know how hard human cloning is?”

“No? They did that sheep back in the 90s, right?” Eddie shrugs. “I mean it’s been, like, over 20 years, and there’s kinda a cottage industry on rich people cloning their pets now, it’s not that out of the question, is it?”

“Good Christ, pal, my memory is fuckin’ shot, and even I know that human brains are more fuckin’ complicated than a fuckin’ sheep’s.”

Eddie sighs; in retrospect, that does seem to be fairly fucking obvious. “Anyway. Fuck. What do you think is up with some copy of you runnin’ around New York, then? Do jackasses just regularly put on their assassin cosplay just to fuck with you?”

“More often than you’d fuckin’ think.” James sits down on the couch net to him. “God, why is this my life.”
“I dunno, maybe be better at not falling off trains,” Eddie says, before thinking, and—fuck, this is why no one likes him, isn’t it. “Fuck, sorry, that was—“

“Really fucking insensitive? Yeah, probably.” James huffs a small laugh that’s devoid of actual humor. “Would be if I actually fuckin’ remembered it.”

“You mean you don’t—“

“No. My head’s a fuckin’ mess.”

“…Fuck,” Eddie says, for lack of any better response. “That blows.”

“Yeah.”

“So.” Eddie pauses, and just awkwardly throws the conversation to another topic, if only to keep James talking. “What do you want to do about your New York impersonator?”

“Kill him, I guess.” James shrugs, and Eddie’s suddenly reminded of why he was kept as an assassin for seventy years, instead of just traded in for a newer model who didn’t require constant re-application of brainwashing.

“I don’t think killing people is the way to solve all your problems,” Eddie says, knowing full well that he is, in fact, being a massive hypocrite. As it stands, since hooking up with Venom, other than communication issues with Anne, there has yet to be a problem he’s encountered where the solution doesn’t include murder. Or, at least, manslaughter, if you’re being very generous with definitions.

Eddie tends not to be very generous with his definitions, you know, since his job is writing.

James cuts him a look. “So what, am I supposed to sit here with my thumb up my ass until fake-me just kinda fucks off?”

“No.” Eddie says, not even bothering to think before he speaks, running solely on stream-of-
consciousness. “We’ve gotta—we’ve gotta get the gang together, hold a war-council, or something, because I’m honestly drawing a fuckin’ blank here, and we can get together with Scott and Dan and maybe Anne—you haven’t met her yet, we used to be engaged, we both really dodged a bullet on that one—and maybe go out for drinks, or something, and figure this shit out.”

“Or,” James says, “We could let Steve deal with this shit.”

They could just let Captain Americ—Steve deal with this shit. Actually, short of calling up Tony Stark and telling him that they’re gonna be kickin’ it in New York for a while hunting clones of the guy who killed his parents, calling up Steve and having him deal with it is probably the best option.

Fuck, having someone else to bounce ideas off of is really fucking handy every so often.

“Fuck, you’re right. We could just let Steve deal with this shit. Like, he already thinks that there’s clones of you wandering around, he’s probably lookin’ into that shit.” Eddie scrubs a hand down his face. “You got any suggestions, Vee?”

Venom pushes themselves out of one of his shoulders, and extends a bit, facing the two of them. “DO YOU BELIEVE THAT ANY OF YOUR HUMAN JUDICIAL FORCES CAN APPREHEND THIS PRETENDER?”

James laughs darkly. “They got me. And I wasn’t stupid enough to leave witnesses alive, let alone with fuckin’ photographic evidence.”

“To be fair,” Eddie cuts in, “you were working for them at the time.”

“I spent two and a half years successfully on the run from literally every world government, and that was when I couldn’t remember shit from one day to the next. This guy? Fuckin’ amateur hour. Doesn’t know the first thing about being on the run.”

“Oh yeah? Enlighten me.”

“Well, for starters, going to one of the most populous cities on the planet that’s filled with tourists taking pictures is a stupid move if you don’t want to get caught.”
Eddie sighs, and pulls his phone out to text Scott. “This isn’t—I mean—fuck.” He takes a moment to finish the message, sends it, and tries to unscramble the words in his head. “Do you, like, have a plan if your clone shows up?”

“Kill him, and go through his pockets for change.”

“No, but like—“ Eddie stops, and takes a breath. “Are you gonna tear ass over to New York and start stabbing anyone who looks like Brandon Lee in *The Crow*, or what?”

James looks at him, blankly.

“It was this movie, it’s pretty good, Brandon Lee was in it? Really sad story, we can circle back to that later. Anyway, the point is that the main dude was tall, had some greasy-ass black hair, and was back from the dead.” Eddie shrugs. “Also, the soundtrack was pretty good, if *very* 90s.”

“God,” James says, after a moment, “You’re just *always* like this, aren’t you?”

It’s not, Eddie notices, an answer to the actual question he asked. He sighs, and moves on. “Yeah. Pretty much.”

“*ACTUALLY,*” Venom says, “*HE USED TO BE MUCH WORSE.*”

Eddie thinks back to the first week after Anne and him broke up. Or rather, Eddie thinks back to the few shreds of memory he still has from that week, the unconnected snapshots of what could diplomatically be called ‘poor life choices’. “That’s… not incorrect.”

They sit in silence, for a moment, Eddie staring down at his sent text, blankly. ‘*apprntly theres actually a bucky clone n ny, pls tell stevie so he cn deal w it*’ is not, probably, the *best* way he could have broken that news.

“So, uh, fuck,” Eddie sighs. Friends don’t let friends who are also Nazi POWs not sleep on actual beds. “You think we should get you a mattress, or something?”

“What?”
“It’s just—Mrs. Chen, she runs my bodega, she’s great, one time I ate a dude in front of her and she was really cool about it—Mrs. Chen said that if you’re staying with me, it’d be a dick move not to get you a bed? So like.” Eddie coughs, slightly, just to break up his words. “Do you, uh, do you want a bed?"

“Not really?” James says, unsure. “That’s, uh, that’s really not an issue.”

“What, do you, like, not sleep?”

James rolls his eyes. “Of course I sleep, what the fuck. No, ‘s just—like, alright, you get really good at not needin’ a bed when you’re in the army. And when I was workin’ for—bein used —goddamit—“

“When you were Winter Soldiering,” Eddie fills in, sensing the landmine that they’re skirting around.

“Yeah—that. When I was doing that, I was basically sleepin’ upright in a block of ice, in a prison cell with a fuckin’ camp mattress, or wherever I could find on-mission. Trust me, compared to all-a that shit, your couch is a gift from the fuckin’ gods.”

Fuck, that’s depressing. “Yeah, but like, have you ever tried memory foam?”

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James has not, in fact, tried memory foam. He changes his ‘oh no, the couch is fine’ tune after a trip to the mattress store. Eddie maybe knows a guy who knows a guy, and he gets one cheap—the bed frame is another matter.

After the extensive, two hour comedy of errors that is moving a mattress through downtown San Francisco and up to his apartment, they mutually decide to break for beers.

“So, you got any idea about a bed frame?” Eddie asks, Venom oozing down his arm and twinning themselves between his fingers.
“Can’t I just put it on the floor, or somethin’? That’s how we did it when Stevie and I were kids.”

“Fuck, you don’t got to live like it’s the fuckin’ Great Depression any more, alright?”

“She what?”

Oh good Christ. “Back in, like, 1929, the stock market fucking crashed hard enough that it completely fucked the country for, like, a decade. Everyone was pretty near destitute, I dunno, there were bread lines? Everyone was sad?” Eddie sighs. “Fuck, dude, you lived through it. You made a goddamn joke about it when I brought you to my apartment!”

“You know how my fuckin’ memory is. Some days are better than others, but that doesn’t mean that it’s fuckin’ consistent.” James takes a sip of beer, and ends up swallowing pretty near a third of the bottle. “Stevie used to put newspapers in his shoes, on account’a them bein’ too big and us bein’ too poor to get any others.” He laughs, and it’s not particularly happy. “He’s a little younger than me, and he was always sick. If both of us got to eat, that was great, but if it was only one of us, he ate first, and I’d wait until after he went to sleep to go down to the five and dime and see if I couldn’t hustle together enough money for whatever they had that was cheap.”

“Jesus.”

“Don’t think he ever figured that one out, or he’d’a never let me hear the end of it.” James starts picking at the label of his beer bottle. “All we had back then was a shitty apartment, a few sets of clothes, a couple cheap books, and a shitty, straw mattress.”

“Wait,” Eddie says, lighting onto something. “Just the one bed? Did you share it, or…”

“It wasn’t—That motherfucker was always rollin’ over and—look, he was real bony back then—“ James takes a deep breath, collecting himself. “Look, even if I did want to write sonnets about his eyes, or whatever the fuck, I wasn’t about to risk my best fuckin’ friend on something that could get me fuckin’ killed, you know? Shit was different in the army, but back in Red Hook, that sortsa shit could get me sent up state and lobotomized.”

Okay, yeah, Eddie has nothing to say to that. No quips, no attempt at kinship, nothing other than an increasingly emphatic litany of, ‘Jesus Christ, Jesus fucking Christ, holy fuck,’ repeated ad nauseam. Like, growing up queer in the late 80s, early 90s was no fucking picnic, that’s for sure—he’s got the scars to prove it, in a far more literal sense than is generally implied by that sentiment—but fucking
lobotomies were never on the goddamn table. “That’s, uh—fuck, I can see why you’re dealin’ with some shit about that, then.”

“Plus, it’s Stevie, and— why the fuck am I telling you this?”

“I’m easy to talk to. Chill.” Eddie gives Venom a little squeeze where they’ve interlaced with his fingers, and they return the pressure. “Like, obviously, I’m not going to say shit to anyone about this conversation. My mental shit may be ridiculously public, but that doesn’t mean that yours has to be, you know?”

James takes a long pull from his beer, seemingly only setting it down when the biological need to breathe takes precedence over avoiding the conversation entirely. “Fuck, right, when we were on the front, and it was just—can I please have a fucking cigarette?” His voice breaks, and Eddie wordlessly hands him the pack, and his lighter. It takes a moment for him to light up—he keeps moving his empty shoulder with some sort of practiced motion for an arm he no longer has, but eventually he gets it lit. “When you’re one lucky shot away from dyin’ every day, folks’ll take comfort any way it comes. Fuck, I haven’t thought about this shit in years.”

Judging by the way he sucks on the cigarette like it’s a lifeline, he hasn’t smoked in years, either, but Eddie keeps that to himself. “I mean,” Eddie says, “You have been brainwashed and frozen and on the run from every major government in the world, to be fair.”

James huffs a laugh, and takes a drag off of his cigarette, looking at it pensively. “You know,” He says, after a moment of staring off into nothing, “I don’t think I actually need a bed frame.”

“Oh, this shit again?” Something occurs to Eddie. “This isn’t, like, you being figurative, or anything, we are talking about the physical piece of furniture, and not your weird complicated mess of feelings for Steve, right?”

“No, I’m talkin’ about the furniture.”

“You need a fuckin’ frame for your mattress, alright, I made that mistake when I was 22 and finishing up my journalism degree and I’m pretty sure my back—”

“Look,” James says, “You ain’t got the space for another piece of furniture in this room, because you’ve got two goddamn couches, for some reason.”
“When the Life Foundation re-did my place, they just kinda left the shitty one against the wall—“

“Yeah, yeah, I’m sure there’s a good two hours worth of backstory. Anyway. What if we just took the cushions off and shoved the couches together, and had that hold the mattress up, if you’re so goddamn set on me sleepin’ in an actual bed.”

It’s not the worst idea that Eddie’s ever heard, to be fair. And he’s right, there really isn’t enough room for a fucking bed frame in his living room. “But if we do that, where will we sit?”

“Well, for one, you’ve got chairs.” James grins, slightly. It’s not quite there on the ‘legitimately being happy’ front, but it’s not too obviously forced to be worrying. “And for another, ain’t you ever heard of a conversation pit?”

--

After shoving the couches together and putting the mattress on, Eddie brings a full bottle of bourbon into the conversation pit. Upon further thought, it is, actually, a great idea.

He wakes up the next morning, sprawled across the mattress in the living room, to find James staring at him.

“Fuck, you’re a goddamn acquired taste in the morning,” is what manages to worm its way out of his lips, first thing.

James grunts. “Funny enough, you aren’t the first person to express that sentiment. Your boyfriend and I have been talkin’, you should really hang onto him.”

“Dude, you gotta—you gotta stop with this gender binary shit.” Eddie yawns. “Google is free, fuckin’ educate yourself.”

Something’s gnawing at the back of his mind, but he can’t quite put a finger on it. He pulls out his phone, checking his texts. Scott has, in fact, replied. Several times.

“Lmao ur kiddin rite"
“Rite?”
“R I T E ?”
“Oh fuck”
“Oh fuck”
“That’s not great”
“Do I gotta tell stv?”
“CHECK UR TEXTS EDDIE”
“Venom”
“Venom”
“Venom check ur texts pls”
“Fuckit ill tell stv”
“Aprmtly hes ‘ ‘ lookin into it ‘ ‘ ‘
“ ‘ ‘ omg scott ur the best avngr ‘ ‘ ‘
“no really stv u don’t have to say that”
“ ‘ ‘ no scott i cnt hide our love any longer ‘ ‘ ‘
“omg stv what are you saying”
“ ‘ ‘ I wanna hv ur avngrs bbs scott ‘ ‘ ‘
“But steeb how can u take me? a fallen woman?”
“ ‘ ‘ my lv 4 u is deeper thn the ocean, n wider thn the sky ‘ ‘ ‘

It… goes on like that for a while. Eddie’s honestly a little impressed that Scott can go on that long without repeating; only about a good third of it is cribbed from song lyrics. “Jesus.”

“What?”

“Nothing. It’s just—“ Eddie lets the phone fall onto his face. It hits his nose. “Ouch, fuck. It’s just that Scott wrote a weird romantic role-play about Steve over text because I didn’t reply to him fast enough, and it got a little out of hand.”

“What?” James’ arm snakes out and snatches the phone, quickly, unlocking it.
What the fuck. “How do you know my password?”

“You unlocked it in front of me.” James thumbs over to the texts. “Got a good memory for that sortsa shit, courtesy of HYDRA.”

Eddie makes a sympathetic noise.

“What the fuck is—‘I wanna stand with you on a mountain, I wanna bathe with you in the sea’? What the fuck?”

“Song lyrics, dude. ‘S from ‘Truly, Madly, Deeply’ by Savage Garden.” Eddie shudders, slightly. “Real cloying 90s shit.”

James is silent for a few moments, scrolling through the near endless text chain with a single-minded sort of determination. “This is—“ He says, suddenly. “This is nuts. ‘I wanna gay marry you and move to Montana together and start an alpaca farm and sell our goods at local craft faires’? Ed, he has Steve saying this?”

“What, you can’t see Steve marrying my favorite convicted felon?” Something occurs to him. “Did you just—Did you just call me Ed?”

“Yeah?”

“Why?”

James looks up from the phone for the first time in about five minutes, and peers at him, curiously. Eddie’s fairly certain that the amount of time it’s been since the other man has blinked is approaching astronomical levels. “It’s a generally accepted nickname for Edward?”

Something inside of Eddie clams up, the way it always does when he hears his full name. If he could get it changed on official documents, he would. It must show on his face, because he’s too tired to monitor his own facial expressions. “I’d really, uh, prefer if you didn’t. Is all.”
James nods. “Any particular reason?”

“Don’t want to get into it.” Eddie says, instead of any of the other, more honest, reasons that are trying to claw their way up his throat. Edward is something else, some small part of him that will always be nine-ish and have a shiner like he just went ten rounds in the octagon.

Ed just feels wrong in an extremely primal sort of way, like those shock-value videos where someone breaks their leg, and all of a sudden it’s bending in entirely the wrong way at an obscene angle.

James nods. “Your, uh—what do you call them?”

Eddie tries to say the word ‘parasite’, but Venom takes over his mouth before he can start saying the first syllable. “OUR RELATIONSHIP IS DEEPER THAN YOUR PITIFUL HUMAN TERMS CAN EVEN BEGIN TO COMPREHEND.”

Eddie stretches his jaw, and it cracks, loudly. “I dunno, dude, we’re space-married.” There’s something gnawing at the back of his mind, but he can’t quite put a finger on it. He probably just needs to coffee. “Spouse comes closest, I guess, but it isn’t quite right.”

“Right. Well.” James takes a deep breath. “You should probably talk to them, because from what they’ve been sayin’, shit’s been weird between you two for a while, and—”

“Nah, man, everything’s fine.” That’s, uh, not strictly true, but Eddie doesn’t particularly want to re-litigate his relationship in front of someone he’s known for, what, a week? “All copacetic.”

He feels Venom churn their way up his torso and writhe around his throat, just under the skin. Eddie feels the little, black tendrils undulate around his neck, contorting the skin like it’s a bag full of live snakes. They don’t use his mouth again, though.

James looks at his neck, clearly dubious. “…Right.”

“Look, I’ll get it sorted—“ It hits him, then, what that nagging feeling is. “Christ, but I’m hungry.”
Eddie picks up the empty bourbon bottle that lies between them, and before he can stop himself, brings it up to his mouth, and bites the top off with an obscene *crunch*. The sharp glass cuts his lips to ribbons, but he doesn’t notice other than in passing. In the grander scale of things, bleeding heavily from the mouth is pretty fucking negligible. The blood drips down onto his shirt as he chews on the glass, flaying open the inside of his mouth like it’s an illustration inside of an anatomy textbook.

“You should—“ Eddie begins, paying no heed to the say that speaking is tearing open his lacerations even further. “You should probably go—*fuck*, you smell *good.*”

Hot and wet and full of juice, like an expensive ribeye. Eddie’s tongue lolls out of his mouth, too long, and tastes the air. Confusion, mostly, and fear. An undercurrent of disgust.

“*Fuck.*” Eddie says, because he really, really doesn’t want to eat James. “*Fuck. I gotta—I gotta get the fuck out and eat somebody, Jesus.*” Eddie levers himself up, and vaults over the edge of the conversation pit. “Sorry about the bloodstains, really don’t want to eat you—“ *liar,* whispers something in his mind that he’s steadfastly ignoring, “—I just, I need to turn my brain off and *feast on some goddamn BRAIN JUICE.*” His voice turn’s into Venom’s as they talk. “WE MUST PAINT OURSELVES RED WITH THE BLOOD OF THE UNWORTHY.”

Fuck, Eddie thinks, his last coherent thought before he throws himself head-first out of his window rather than attempt to discern the suddenly-complex technology of *doorknobs,* Venom’s such a fucking drama queen.

--

James sits in silence for a few minutes trying to figure out what the hell he’s entirely supposed to do with *that* bullshit. He can deal with Nazis—not very well, mind, somehow they keep *finding him,* but generally, he pulls through—but being roommates with a guy who’s essentially a skin-suit for an incomprehensibly powerful alien that feasts on human flesh?

Shit’s weird.

James levers himself out of the makeshift bed/conversation pit, and makes his way over to the kitchen island, grabbing a few paper towels. First things first, taking care of the *bloody shards of broken glass* that are just laying in the middle of his bed.
He doesn’t miss his metal hand very often. *Having two hands, very much so, but the metal one?*

Not particularly. He remembers, *vividly*, getting it, for lack of a better word, *installed*. It’s something that, really, he wishes behaved like the *rest* of his memory, wishes that it would occasionally flit away. It doesn’t. Ever. One day, he woke up screaming, with white-hot recall of *bolting* the underlying supports to his spine, and it never left.

But, very rarely, he *really* wishes he had that other hand.

This is one of those times. Cleaning up small slivers of broken glass with one hand and no dustpan is, really, fantastically unpleasant. He cuts his fingers up, little drops of blood falling onto the yellow-white of the mattress. He knew what this color was, once. From all the time with Steve, and his, whatsis, fuck, oily color-y sticks, god what were they— *pastels!* Right. Stevie and his pastels and the fancy, thick paper that cost more than their fucking food budget.

They little slivers are healed by the time he’s thrown away the glass. The blood is still wet on his hand. James rinses it off, and then fills the sink with cold water.

He takes a deep breath. Another. Blinks, *hard*, and dunks his head under, shutting out all sounds but the pulsing of his heartbeat.

His mind goes *blank*, completely, hard and fast. It’s not *too much* like going into cryo-stasis, or whatever the fuck the technical term for his time being frozen was, but it’s not exactly *dissimilar*. It’s something he used to do when he was on the run, when the memories were sliding in and out of his brain, hard and fast, crashing into each other and leaving only slag in the remains.

He stays under, cut off from the rest of the world in a bubble of silence, until the burning in his chest becomes inconvenient. He can stay under for longer—has, even, when necessary—but he isn’t exactly eager to test it, now.

James unplugs the sink, and pats some of the water off his hair with a dishrag.

Fuck, he needs to take a shower.
Eddie does not come back to himself amidst a scene of outrageous carnage, for once.

Once the blood stops singing in his ears and he can finally think about *something* other than *eating*, he finds himself on top of a roof. In Oakland. The hunger has disappeared into nothingness shockingly quickly.

*Suspiciously* quickly.

“Vee, baby?” Eddie asks, feeling them bubble up and out of his shoulder, turning to face him with their enormous, opaque eyes. “What the fuck?”

“**EDDIE.**” They say, one part acknowledgement, one part acceptance.

“Did you—did you just *fake* that?” He doesn’t have the energy to be angry right now, just bewildered and confused.

**“WE NEED TO TALK, EDDIE.”** They say, seriously.

“Is there some kinda secret society, again? Does this have to do with James’s clone in New York?”

“**NO, EDDIE.**” They say, wrapping around his shoulders and squeezing. They’re holding up against *something*, and the pressure is completely immobilizing his upper arms. **“WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT US.”**

“What, like, your planet?” Eddie’s fairly seriously confused, now. There’s a pounding in his head he can’t explain, the sort that used to happen about an hour or two before he would get migraines.

“**NO, EDDIE.**” They say, and they sound a little fond. It’s almost an omen. **“WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP.”**

Fuck.
Thinking back on it—ever since escaping the HYDRA compound with James in tow, their relationship has been fairly... unbalanced. Venom’s been there for him a lot, and Eddie really hasn’t been returning the favor.

“You know,” Eddie says, “Think you might be right about that.”

It’s far too easy to say for something that hurts that badly.

End Notes

you can find me on twitter @technic_direct, and feel free to hit me up there!

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