the gay men cometh

by peraltiagoisland

Summary

After Frank joins the gang in 2006, Dee and Dennis’ strike (and crack crusade) ends with them making some changes. Namely, the switching of career prospects. Dee becomes a vet who barely goes into work and Dennis becomes a struggling actor who barely gets jobs, and doesn’t bother to get jobs. Until one day, when he lands a role in a major blockbuster movie that puts him on the map. Now, a rich producer wants to make a movie starring Dennis Reynolds to meet the demands of his newly formed fan base. Everything is going great, until Mac walks in on accident during auditions and the casting director makes Mac his romantic counterpart in the movie.

Notes

hi. friendly disclaimer: this is a fictional universe with fictional rules. it is highly likely that life and the film/tv industry and Hollywood and movie making, tv making, etc etc in this fic will fail to accurately depict what it is like in real life. fret not, this is my universe now, so this universe operates under my rules, and how i want things to go. also, any celebrities/real life personas depicted in this fic is not meant to speculate or in any way, genuinely resemble, how that person is like in our world. if they have been mentioned or featured in the sunny universe at all, they might be (wildly inaccurately) portrayed in this story by me. please note that this is not meant to offend them. and please do not get up in arms about anything i have mentioned thus far. on that note, i am not worried that people are going to get up in arms, but i sure am real paranoid. thank you. this has been a psa (public service
announcement).

See the end of the work for more notes.
Charlie and Frank Eat Lobster Buns

“What’s this about you bein’ a movie star an’ shit?”

Dennis is stuffing his suitcase and more than well aware of the three pairs of eyes that are watching. He ignores them, and walks over to his dresser to pack socks.

“Are you ditching us again?”

“Honestly, what’s so great about North—“

“No, I’m not ditching any of you—“ Dennis huffs, straightening to look at the gang, minus Mac, who’s probably in his room or something, Dennis doesn’t care. No, he doesn’t care at all that Mac isn’t reacting to him suddenly leaving Philadelphia again for another city. Not one bit. “As I said before, I filmed a movie while I was away, and it’s coming out soon, so now they want me on this like, press junket shit. I have to do a bunch of interviews, show up at the premiere, crap like that.”

“A movie?” Dee scoffs, and he knows she’s jealous. The whole acting thing had always been her dream, and to see Dennis so effortlessly succeed at it has got to be painful. But he never would’ve done it if she hadn’t applied for vet school first to try and prove that she could succeed where he had failed. Well, failed is a strong word. Dennis simply realized that path just wasn’t right for him. He liked the fun of running Paddy’s, and ever since he’s been back the familiarity of the bar and of Philadelphia in general has grown on him again. He doesn’t want things to change.

But change they must. The pay from being in this Hollywood stint was enough for Dennis to get away with not getting a job while he was away. Although the pay has nothing to do with why he’s fleeing for Los Angeles. He’s been reminded (several times, in various threatening manners) that he signed a contract when he did the movie, a contract that legally compels him to participate in promoting this movie.

And yes, he wasn’t at North Dakota the whole time he was gone from Philly. He’d been in California most of the time anyway, because by the time he got to Mandy’s she was already with someone else. She told him he was welcome to stay, but after a few nights it got weird and he felt like an intruder. So he left on the first flight available (which was yes, you guessed it, headed for Los Angeles) and started a new life. Going back to Philly wasn’t even an option back then, because if he came back too soon the others would only make fun of him.

It was a shock how easily he got a role in that big movie. Sure, he’s not the main character like he deserves to be, but he’s more than important enough. He met a few cool people. He’s acquaintances with Ryan Gosling. Yeah, the Ryan Gosling. The only reason why he’s been holding out on this information is because he wants to see everyone’s faces when they find out, Mac most of all.

Not because he cares about Mac the most or likes him the most or anything, but because the dude is obsessed. He once spent an entire day trying to convince Dennis that Ryan Gosling was the only actor who had the right props to capture his intensity. But the way Mac’s looking these days, Dennis has a feeling Brad Pitt would be a more suitable candidate. Especially Brad Pitt from his *Fight Club* days. Mm. Oh yeah, he’d be perfect to play Mac.

“Yes, Dee,” Dennis smirks. “A movie. A *real* movie, unlike anything you’ve ever been in,” he sees the look in her eyes as he rubs that in and it is a pained look that delights him.
“Whatever. I went to vet school. I became a vet. Guess I just happen to be the smarter twin.”

He swivels around faster than... something that’s really fast. “Look. Just because I chose not to further my studies and waste four years in vet school, rotting away learning about dumb shit I no longer care about, doesn’t make me the dumber twin. The fact that you were sad enough to go back to college, graduate, and then qualify for vet school just to prove some point that didn’t need to be made... kind of makes you the dumber one.”

Dee crosses her arms and leans against his door. “At least I get to call myself Doctor Reynolds.”

“Well if you’re such a doctor, Deandra, then go to work!” He huffs, shutting his luggage. “Go cut the balls off some dog or cure bird cancer. I have a fulfilling career to get to!”

“Dee can’t go to work, man,” says Charlie. “She quit her job, like, a month after you got back.”

“Not like she was going in much before that anyway,” Frank adds. “She hates being a vet.”

Dee scoffs. “I do not hate being a vet! It, it’s a good job! It brings me a decent salary, definitely more than whatever you dickheads have been paying me for years—“

“Yeah, whatever.” He turns around after walking past them to get out the door. “Dee, go to work, don’t go to work, I don’t care. Just don’t embarrass me, okay, if any reporters, or press people ever come down to Philly wanting to know more about me—“

Mac’s door opens and out walks Mac with a luggage just as big as Dennis’. “Oh cool, you’re all packed. Ready to go?”

“Go? Go where, Mac?”

“Cali. Los Angeles. The movie press shit you said you were doing.”

“Who said I was taking you with me?”

“You weren’t? Why can’t I come?”

“Well if Mac’s going, then I wanna go too,” Charlie says, heading for the door. “Let’s go, Frank, we got a lotta stuff to pack. Do we have suitcases at home?”

“I didn’t buy tickets for any of you!”

“Doesn’t matter,” says Dee, who is also heading for the door. “We can just take Frank’s private jet.”

“You can tag along if you want,” Frank says in a kind voice, surely faked in order to get Dennis to give them access to cool places. “Ditch the Economy hook up and join us in First Class.”

“Yeah, Dennis,” Mac taps on his shoulder conversationally. “Frank’s jet trumps First Class anyway. It could be fun.”

“Or, you might all do something really embarrassing and stupid, ruining my career.”

“Exactly,” Mac winks, slapping Dennis’ bottom before making his way out the house. “Fun.”
“Oh, god...” Dennis digs his head into the back of the headrest, feeling more relaxed than he’s been in days. Frank’s new private jet is out of this world. Why hasn’t he ridden on it before? “This is incredible.”

“Right?” Mac smiles wide at him as a passing air stewardess hands each of them a glass of champagne. Half a strawberry sits on top of both their drinks. This is the height of luxury, literally so, because they’re thousands of feet up in the air right now, and you don’t get much higher than that.

“I don’t think I’ll ever ride normal planes that have other people again,” Dennis trails almost dreamily, sounding drunk on something (it’s not alcohol, because this is only his fourth glass of champagne), sounding drunk on the moment. “Why haven’t we done this before?”

“See dude, told you it’d be more fun if we came along,” Mac taps against Dennis’ arm before downing his champagne. He wants to argue about how Mac didn’t so much as suggest they all come along with Dennis than he packed his suitcase and weaseled his way in at the last minute.

They see Charlie and Dee walk up to their seats, and Dennis quickly realizes Mac’s hand is on his lap. He pushes it away. Charlie and Dee are carrying several bottles of rosé.

“Hey.”

“What’s with the pink wine shit?”

“Oh, I bet Charlie he couldn’t drink more bottles than me. I did something like this on the Women’s March flight. But Artemis, that dumb bitch, spiked everyone’s drinks and we all got super sick. So I never found out what my rosé limit was. Wanna play? We made Frank commissioner, since, well, he’s clearly not a threat in these kind of things.”

Charlie takes a swig of wine, belching. It’s very disgusting to bear witness to, yes. “Yeah, we got Frank to, to thinking he’s like the best at judging stuff. Also he said pink wine’s for pussies.”

Mac shrugs. “He’s not wrong.”

“Aside from that, I’m not gonna show up to this interview tanked as shit. My manager’s gonna kill me if I’m anything short of stone cold sober.” Dennis pushes his very spacious seat into a reclining position. “Think I’m gonna get some sleep.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” Dee tilts her chin and looks at Mac. “How ‘bout you, Mac? Wanna play?”

“Nah, uh, I think I’m gonna get some sleep too. I stayed up late packing last night.”

Dennis cracks open his eyes to look at Mac in confusion. “You stayed up to do that? How long did it take you to pack?”

Mac shrugs. “Six hours? Give or take?”

Dennis shuts his eyes again. He’s not gonna get into that right now.
Dennis stirs to some out of place jet noises, and as the seconds pass his senses wake up with him and he finds himself curled up against Mac. Apparently, be it consciously or unconsciously, one of them lifted up the arm rest separating their seats some time during the flight, and that somehow led to Dennis curling up against Mac in slumber. Wait, no, that can’t be it. Dennis doesn’t know that for sure. It could be Mac who lifted up that armrest, tucked Dennis under his chin, put his head on his chest, and wrapped Dennis’ arms around Mac. Yeah. Now that he thinks about it, it’s clearly Mac who orchestrated all this. Dennis’ only crime was failing to stop it. Which really, isn’t a crime at all, since he was asleep. Mac made Dennis cuddle up to Mac against his will. And he’s lucky Dennis isn’t calling the cops on his ass.

Their plane lands and Mac begins to stir. Dennis pulls away from the man before he realizes what had been going on. What, are you questioning why Dennis hasn’t let go until now? Say what you will about the situation, okay, Mac is comfy. So, even if, perhaps in the situation that Dennis was the one who snuggled up to Mac, it wouldn’t be a bad thing. Dennis is comfortable enough in his sexuality to do such a thing.

“Mm, whas goin on?” Mac mumbles incoherently, stretching his arms above his head. Dennis definitely isn’t watching his muscles flex, neither is he watching Mac’s shirt ride up, exposing even more skin. Dennis certainly isn’t the least bit interested in the ridges and wedges of Mac’s body. There’s definitely nothing lickable or fuckable about it.

“Don’t know,” Dennis unbuckles his seatbelt and stands up. He watches the plane door open and some delivery men carry in crates of—

“Is that rosé?”

Charlie and Dee’s heads pop up. “Yeah,” Dee slurs, clearly intoxicated. “Plane ran out. Frank didn’t stock enough.”

Frank’s head pops up now, and he’s sipping a bottle of the stuff. “Yeah. That was a mistake. But we got more than enough to go around now.”

“Frank, you’re drinking the pink wine?”

“What happened to rosé being for pussies?”

Frank laughs, clearly drunk. “Guess I’m a pussy!”

“Yeah,” Charlie titters, opening a new bottle of wine. “Seriously though, this stuff is so good.”

“Really?”

Mac unbuckles his seat belt and stretches over to the cart of rosé they just have now, stocked to the brim with the stuff. “Guess I’ll have one.”

Well if Mac’s drinking the wine now too, Dennis is gonna look stupid if he doesn’t, right? “Yeah, hand me one.”

“Hi, I’m Sandra Pickles and today I’m here with two stars of the highly anticipated upcoming movie ‘God Said It’s My Turn’, Ryan Gosling and Dennis Reynolds!” She looks away from the
camera now and faces Dennis and Ryan. “Welcome to our show, guys.”

“Happy to be here,” Dennis nods. His publicist told him to let Ryan take the reins of the conversation, since he’s pretty much a completely new face to Hollywood, but he doesn’t care about that. People will see him and people will change their minds about Ryan Gosling and he’ll be the new hothrob in town.

“Dennis Reynolds—I feel like I haven’t seen you or heard of you before. Is it true that this is your first movie?”

Dennis tilts his head to the side. Maybe don’t mention the Lethal Weapon sequels. Not yet. “Technically, yes, yes it is.”

“He’s incredible in it though,” Ryan says, gesturing to Dennis.

“Well, of course,” Dennis shrugs. “It’s my first Hollywood movie, it’s not my first time acting.”

Sandra Pickles laughs. “We have a confident guy here! I like that, I like that, it’s refreshing.”

Dennis shrugs. “I say it as it is, Sandra. And if you don’t believe me,” he looks straight at the camera. “Just watch the movie and judge for yourself.”

Ryan laughs. “Real sneaky way to push the movie.”

Dennis pushes himself deeper in the chair, smirking. “You got me.”

Sandra Pickles looks at the camera. “Well, to our viewers, if the Ryan Gosling hook isn’t more than enough reason to sink your teeth into this amazing action thriller already, we have a new cutie on scene, and he’s a pretty one! Catch ‘God Said It’s My Turn’ in theaters next week!”

“And... cut! That’s a wrap!”

Pickles lady (Dennis is already starting to forget her name) shakes hands with both of them and someone Dennis recognizes as probably Ryan’s manager starts talking to him about some other event they have to go for. Dennis watches on with distaste. He hopes he never gets that busy. Ryan probably has a million other things scheduled whilst Dennis is already done for the day.

“Hey Dennis–” he turns around at the sound of Ryan’s voice–“good work today.”

Just as he’s about to superficially thank him for saying that (seriously, Ryan Gosling can be such a suck up sometimes), someone comes up to Ryan and kisses him on the lips. “Hey, baby.”

“Eva, what are you doing here?”

“Trying to surprise you, loser–“ she looks across her shoulder–“oh, is this your costar? Hello,” she stretches her hand out. “Eva Mendes. I’m married to this guy–“ she juts her thumb out at Ryan–“hope I wasn’t interrupting anything.”

“As a matter of fact you were,” Dennis chuckles, making them think he’s joking so they laugh along too. “It’s fine. Your uh, husband here was just telling me what a great job I did.”

“I’m sure you did some fine work,” she beams. “Do you want to join us for a meal? We’re just going for dinner after this. The more the merrier, right?”
Dennis exhales, tense. “Well that’s, that, that won’t be necessary, actually.”

“Oh?” Eva raises her eyebrow. “You have someone special coming to pick you up?”

Dennis shakes his head, because first of all he doesn’t have a special someone, and second of all, you never know what Hollywood snakes like her might spread around.

“Dennis!” He feels Mac’s familiar, sturdy hands grab onto his shoulder from behind. “When are we leaving, dude? I missed you all afternoon, it’s boring as shit at the hotel.” He looks up and nearly chokes. “Oh my god. Uh. Hi... Ryan. Gosling. It’s Ryan Gosling.” He gulps, looking at Dennis. “Why didn’t you tell me you were working with Ryan Gosling?”

The couple laughs, and Eva winks at Dennis, like his supposed secret is safe with her or some bullshit. “No special someone, huh?”

“Mac, forget that,” Dennis sighs, holding him back and away from A-list actor Ryan Gosling. “The man doesn’t have time for you. How did you even get in here?”

Dennis guides Mac with an arm around his back and he walks them both out of the building so they can get back to their hotel room. Mac only looks back longingly at Ryan Gosling about fourteen times, meaning Dennis more or less has his attention. “Haha, I have my ways, dude.”

“You snuck in while no one was looking?”

“Oh yeah, absolutely. I also told someone I was your bodyguard and they believed me.”

“Well, buddy, I gotta say,” Dennis gives a short chuckle, staring at Mac’s body. “I’m not surprised they believe you. What I am confused by though, is how you got bored at the hotel. I thought you guys would get up to some elaborate scheme or, or random shenanigans while I was gone.”

Mac shakes his head. “Nope. The others are passed out cold right now. Rosé knocked them all out. I’m only fine since I had just the one bottle.”

Dennis nods. “Yeah. Me too. I wasn’t quite so crazy for it. Still prefer beer.”

“Me too, dude.”

“You wanna get some beer and order room service for dinner?”

“Charge it all to the room so Frank pays for everything?”

Dennis lets out a refreshed laugh, one more genuine than the ones he’s offered at any of his interviews today.

“You read my mind.”

“Man. Beer, is so good,” Dennis groans, tossing his empty can into the corner of the room.

“Tell me about it, dude,” Mac chuckles. “And god, this room service steak is so dope. Sure you don’t want any, dude?”
Dennis shakes his head. “Nah. Not hungry.”

“Really? I haven’t seen you eat like, all day.”

“Gotta look good for the cameras,” he says casually, cracking open a new beer. Beer is good. Beer will fill him up but it’s not food, so it doesn’t count and it won’t show on his face.

“You’ve had like, thirty beers dude,” Mac gestures to their pile of empty beer cans in the corner of their room. “How’s that supposed to help you look good for cameras? At least eat your salad.”

Dennis is almost comatose on his bed. They’re both on his bed now, yes, a king-sized bed, one for each of them, side by side in their room. They’ve got the television on and it’s playing something, mostly as background noise to fill in the silences. “Only if you feed it to me,” he says jokingly, because of course Mac wouldn’t do that.

“Seriously, dude?”

“No, I’m not. Because I know you won’t do it. I’m not eating.”

He stretches and rolls a bit and when he turns over to Mac he comes face to face with a piece of steak. Held in front of his mouth on a fork that Mac is wielding. Wow. “Oh. Really?”

“Yes, really. Open up, bitch. Not letting you starve yourself again. If you pass out in front of Ryan Gosling it’s gonna embarrass the crap out of all of us.”

Dennis rolls his eyes and pulls the steak off the fork with his teeth, chewing hard on it, the satisfaction crashing into him like a speeding car headed for a stone wall. “I’m not starving myself,” he clarifies, “just staving off food until I don’t have to be on camera any more. That shit’s all permanent, dude. And I’m not getting videoed looking anything less than a hundred percent. You’ve seen me eat plenty back home, I’m fine.”

“Not taking any chances, bro.” Mac feeds him salad, some fruit, more steak, pasta, chicken (they ordered a lot of stuff off the room service menu, and no, they’re not afraid that Frank will get mad at them even if he checks the hotel bill. Because Dennis is a movie star now and Mac’s... gay) and then hands him a beer when he’s satisfied with Dennis’ food intake for the day. Dennis sits up and slowly downs his beer. When he’s finished, he turns and looks, realizes that Mac’s been staring at him this whole time.

“What?”

“Nothing. You look... good drinking beer.”

“I do?”

“Yeah man,” Mac takes a sip of his beer, and boy if he doesn’t look good too. Maybe people just look really good when they drink beer. Maybe Dennis is really drunk. Chugging beer and whatever other alcohol they ordered is not a solid plan if you’re trying to stay sober. But Dennis definitely hasn’t been trying. “You could like, film beer commercials and shit. I’d watch those.”

He grabs the side of Mac’s neck and holds him close. “You think I’m better looking than Ryan Gosling?”

“Oh yeah, you’re–“

Dennis, drunk out his mind, doesn’t even need to hear the end of that sentence before his lips land
on Mac’s, kissing him like it’s the only steady thing he feels in a spinning, dizzying, world. Everything slows when he kisses Mac. Like it’s a dream. Like it’s not really happening, even though it is. He tastes the same beer he’s been drinking on Mac’s tongue, and addiction tells him to kiss Mac harder so he can keep drinking in the tart flavor he craves. If this is a bad idea, or something Dennis would never consider doing, sober him can decide that tomorrow.

When they pull apart, Dennis sobers up just a little bit. Enough to realize that if he were to wake up the next day, he’d freak out about this. “If you remember this tomorrow,” Dennis tells Mac, who hasn’t looked away, “please don’t tell me it happened.”

Dennis grabs the bottle of scotch they ordered and drinks directly from it. From the corner of his eye, he watches as something in Mac dies, and when Dennis puts down the scotch Mac picks it up and finishes it.

Drinking and forgetting is their stock in trade, after all.

“Mac.” Dennis utters with little ease. They’re both lying down now, too drunk to move, and too drunk to care about sharing the bed. “I’m not sure I like doing this.”

“Doing what?”

“Being here. In Los Angeles. Acting in a movie alongside Ryan Gosling. Doing interview after interview repeating the same things over and over. It’s so boring. I have to listen to people and do what they say. I don’t like it.”

“Hey,” Mac leans in, touching his arm. He doesn’t pull away. “Chill out, dude. It’s just press shit. Bet you Gosling hates it all too.”

“No, he loves it. He’s always happy and smiling and thanking everyone and telling me what a good job I did,” Dennis scoffs. “What a phony.”

“Well, it’ll all be over soon. And hey, after this movie, you’ll have a shit ton of fans dude. Isn’t that what you always wanted?”

“Maybe. I don’t know if it’s worth all this trouble though.”

“It will be. Or, it won’t, and then you don’t have to do it again. We can just make our own movies, man. I’ll write you a movie. We’ll write it together, like always.”

“Forget it!” Dennis slams open the hotel door as he walks into his and Mac’s room, where Mac and Dee are playing some board game and drinking. A lot. Which is not something that surprises him, they’ve been going at Life since he left this morning. “I hate this, I hate all of this, I can’t do it anymore.”

“Do what anymore?” Dee asks without looking at her angry brother, spinning the wheel on the board. She lands on ten and does a fist pump.

Dennis flops onto his bed and spreads himself out. He hates this bed. He’s slept in it for days and all he has to say for it is that there’s always something wrong or off. Some nights it’s too hard, some nights it’s too soft. Some nights he’s too drunk to realize he’s sleeping. And yeah, of course
he’s had to drink copious amounts of alcohol to cope with being here. Sure, he’s shown up to
interviews slightly hungover at times, which would worsen the whole experience, but he doesn’t
care anymore. He just wants it all to end so that he can go home to his bed, his apartment, his bar,
his city. He wants to go back, and perhaps never return. Hollywood is overrated anyway.
Everyone’s always up in your business and questions, the exact same questions that vary only
slightly across all the painted, practiced faces, are asked over and over again and Dennis has had
enough!

“Hollywood. I hate being a movie star. I hate how every single thing I do is reviewed and judged
and picked apart like I’m a painting hung up in front of a hundred art critics!” He sits up. “Being
here... makes me feel like everyone is staring at me all the time. And not in a good way. I don’t
like it, and I don’t want it anymore.”

Dee rolls her eyes and Mac grabs her wrist, shaking his head. “He’s not saying that to rub it in.”
She bites her lip, and it takes a full minute, but she lets go of her resentment and envy. Dee walks
up to Dennis’ bed and squeezes comfort into his shoulder. “You wanna play Life with me and
Mac? He has to drink whenever I spin a seven, and I have to drink whenever he spins a three. We
also drink at many other points during the game. You in?”

Dennis sits up. Silence. For a moment, it seems he wants nothing to do with this and everything is
slow. But then, “oh yeah,” he says, following up very quickly with “of course I wanna play.”

They make space for him on Mac’s bed, even though that’s mostly unnecessary since the bed is
already huge to begin with. “I pick five,” he declares, “if I spin a five, both of you are drinking.”

They nod along, and it’s clear Dennis understands the rules to the game, more or less. Mac and Dee
start over the game to fairly include Dennis, ripping out the little people from their cars. Mac’s car
only had blue people in it and Dee’s car only had pink people. Dennis chooses not to comment.

Mac goes first and hoots when he spins a three. Dee pours Dennis a shot of whisky and they clink
their glasses before they pop their drinks down the hatch. Dennis shuts his eyes after he’s drained
it. That’s a stiff drink right there. He slams the glass down on the dresser next to Mac’s bed. “I
don’t think I want to do movies anymore,” he says as he lands on a two. Which means nothing
other than the two spaces he has to move. What a perfect metaphor for his life.

He draws one of the cards, and groans. Pay $20k to the bank. Jesus fucking christ.

Dee spins next and lands on a one. Of course. No matter how hard Dennis falls, Dee falls and
breaks even worse. Another perfect metaphor, this really is the game of Life, huh? “No more
movies? Not just Hollywood ones? What about your acting career?”

“Don’t think I want to make any more movies, I guess. And I don’t give a shit about my career.”

“What about movies we all act in ourselves?” Mac asks, worried. “Do those count?”

“I don’t know,” Dennis shrugs. “I just... all these interviews, meeting so many obnoxious people I
want nothing to do with and having to be nice to people I do not care for in the slightest? That’s
more acting than I’ve had to do for the actual goddamn movie I’m in. And it’s wearing me out.”

“Ohay,” Mac spins again and lands on a nine. “Then don’t do it anymore.”

Dee nods in assent. “Yeah. Just, like, get through this one last night, I guess. You could totally
relax at the premiere. Take some pictures, get tanked in the cinema, then we’ll fly straight to Philly
and hope no one remembered you from the movie. Which, well, won’t be hard at all, since Ryan
Gosling is in it.” She chortles, amused by her own little dig. “Oh, speaking of the premiere, Mac and I thought we could come up with a cool drinking game to get us through the whole thing.”

Dennis bites on his lip. Dee’s words aren’t sitting quite right with him either. His phone rings and he sighs, because it signifies the inescapable hell he’s in right now. “Stop the game,” he gets off the bed and starts heading for the bathroom. “Gotta take this first, bet it’s more bullshit and dumb crap from my useless agent.”

The bathroom door slides shut and they begin to hear muffled talking noises, mostly belonging to Dennis.

“You wanna steal some of his cash?” Dee whispers sneakily to Mac, looking proud of herself for coming up with the idea. She’s referring to Dennis’ game money, obviously. He deserves it, anyway. Dennis is doing too well in the game, and there’s no way in hell Dee, or Mac, for that matter, is going to let him win at a game they’ve been playing all day.

“I already stole a fifty from him when he stood up to take the call,” Mac brags, blatantly stealing another fifty thousand dollar note from Dennis whilst Dee takes a hundred thousand dollar note so they both benefit equally from this thievery and don’t fight over profits.

Just as they’re about to get tempted to steal more again, Dennis barges out the bathroom with the biggest smile on his face.

“Guys, I just got offered a movie deal with the creator of Thunder Gun Express!”

“What? No way, that’s insane!”

“Dude, tell me you took that deal!”

“I took it! Plus, I convinced them to film the movie in Philly. So we’re going home, and we’re making a movie!”

Mac hops of the bed, eager as a beaver. “We’re making a movie!”

Dee hoots and cheers along with them, getting off the bed in time to turn Mac and Dennis’ embrace into a group hug.

“Man, Frank, I gotta tell ya, these lobster buns? Amazing!” Charlie takes a big bite into his lobster bun that they got from some food truck. They’ve been exploring the city, and it’s all bright, vibrant, and a bit too much to take in, but it’s still a pretty good experience, despite the fact that they haven’t found any good bridges to hang out under. Or any cool sewers they can access.

“Oh, you’re telling me, Charlie!” He messily attacks his lobster bun too. “Don’t know what they put in this thing, but I like it!”

“Think it might be lobster, dude, oh! Look at that!” Charlie excitedly points out a street performer with several birds. “Man, that’s so cool. I hope he has enough bird permits for that.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Frank nods, mostly still focused on his food. “Charlie, I think I have to say it. I love Los Angeles.”
“Me too, dude!” Charlie agrees, high fiving Frank with zero hesitation. “I mean, they got their lobster buns, they got their bird dancers, what more could you want?”

“You know what?” Frank says. “I hope Dennis makes more movies and decides to stay here.”

“Yeah! Then we could, like, move here and live here too!” Charlie’s phone starts ringing. “Oh wait, I gotta get this—“ he shoves the last of his lobster bun into his mouth—“hello?” he chews, and at some instances, he stops chewing, and widens his eyes. Yes, it’s all very riveting. He finally swallows and speaks. “Oh my god, dude, that’s amazing!”

“What, what is it?” Frank asks when Charlie hangs up the phone.

“That was Dennis. He got a movie deal back home so we’re leaving for Philly after the premiere tonight.”

“Oh, thank god,” Frank heaves a sigh of relief. “Charlie, I hate Los Angeles.”

“Me too, dude!” Charlie assents with a laugh. “I hate it so much! Everything is so weird, there’s way too many people here, and the lobster buns are good but, you know what I wish were in the bun instead?”

“Crab?”

“Yeah, dude! God, I miss sewer crabs so much.”

Frank hits Charlie on the back in agreement, chuckling. “Me too, Charlie, me too. Let’s go home and get us some crabs.”

They all dress to the nines for the movie premiere night. Dennis somehow managed to get them all seats for the movie, which is probably not all that unexpected when you think about it. He’s a pretty big deal in this movie. Once again, he’s not the main character, and his character is nowhere near as important as Ryan Gosling’s, but he’s a big enough deal to get four extra seats in the theater.

He takes photos, he smiles, he tries his best to get along with Ryan Gosling. The gang somehow manages to behave themselves because they don’t want to do anything to screw up Dennis’ movie deal with the creator of Thunder Gun Express, right?

“Hey Dennis, you’ve seen the movie, right?” Mac asks as they get their seats. “When should we take a shot?”

“Well I haven’t seen the movie, per se, but I’ve looked through the script, even at some parts that I’m not in. And let me tell you... we should drink whenever a bike shows up.”

Mac raises his eyebrow skeptically. “When a bike shows up?”

“Yeah. It’s an action movie with lots of bikes in it.”

“Sounds awesome,” Mac smiles, and for a moment under the dimming lights, Dennis falls for it.

“Yeah,” he smiles back. “It is.”
Twenty minutes into a movie and they’re all completely hammered.

“Wow, Dennis,” Dee belches after taking a drink from her whiskey flask. “You were right. Shit ton of bikes and bike references in this movie.”

“Yeah, dude,” continues Charlie. “When’d you learn how to ride a motorbike?”

“Oh, that isn’t real,” Dennis clarifies. “The most they had me do was turn the ignition. Most of the bike riding stuff? Stuntman.”

“Man, they did a good job with that. Almost looks like you’re the one riding that bike.”

“You know what would’ve been a really good drinking game though?” Mac suggests. “If we drank every time someone said the word dildo.”

The others laugh.

“Yeah,” Frank guffaws heartily. “A lotta fake dong talk in this movie.”

“That’s a good one, man! They keep saying that this movie. What’s wrong with saying ‘dick’? Why they gotta say ‘dildo’ so much?”

Dee, who’s still somehow managing to pay attention to the movie, laughs at something that happens on screen. “Did Ryan Gosling just call that dude a dildo bike?” she leans over to Mac.

“You two are like, a match made in heaven.”

Mac titters sharply. “Don’t I know it, Dee, don’t I know it.” He sighs. “Man, no one does it better than Gosling.”

It’s probably the alcohol talking, but Dennis feels a sharp rush of jealousy run through him when Mac says that.

“Isn’t it a little soon for an audition?” Dennis asks the casting director that Mr Thunder Gun sent. Yeah, that’s what he and the rest of the gang are calling the creator of Thunder Gun Express now, because his actual name is... what’s his actual name again? He never really pays attention to the credits when he watches that movie. Eh, whatever. It doesn’t really matter. Mr Thunder Gun won’t be showing up any time soon, because after they all got back to Philly, they found out that Mr Thunder Gun won’t so much be writing the movie as he will be Executive Producer of the film. Hence the not showing up any time soon part. “I mean, we don’t even have a script yet.”

The audition director shrugs. “Miss Dubois says she has an idea of where she wants to take this film, but she’ll only start writing the specifics once I cast the other main lead.”

Dubois? That sounds familiar. Where has Dennis heard that name? “Oh. Other main lead?”

“Your co-star, of course,” she says. “Don’t worry. Since you’re the first main lead cast, whoever comes next will depend entirely on your chemistry with them. All the other supporting roles will be cast along the way, when the script is done.” She begins pulling a folder out her bag. “Since we don’t have a script yet, I brought some random script samples with me. They’ll do just fine in helping decide if you and the person auditioning have the right chemistry for the movie. I’ll
probably narrow the actors who work best with you down to like, a top five or so, and then we’ll
have a little improv session to pick the other main lead. Are you clear on that?”

Dennis nods almost uncomfortably. “Yeah, sure, whatever. Uh, can we begin?”

She nods. “I’ll call the first person in.”

The auditions are dreadfully boring, for the most part. It’s all Dennis can do to keep from yawning,
and he’s actually taken the opportunity in between auditions to yawn. He’s also yawned during
some of the auditions. What? Some of these dudes were clearly not getting the role, and were likely
only auditioning in a desperate attempt to be part of a movie from the mind behind Thunder Gun
Express.

And yeah, all the people auditioning for the role were men, which leads Dennis to believe that this
movie is something of a buddy cop duo deal, a movie about two dudes being dudes, probably
going on an adventure filled with booze, drugs, and women. Which Dennis is really excited for! So
that’s why he can’t wait for this audition process to end already!

Can it just end? Please? The last guy that came in had two pimples on his cheekbone, and Dennis
just can’t stand for that kind of subpar beauty standards.

“Thank you for your time,” says the audition lady to the loser dude as he leaves. “We’ll be in
touch.”

The next guy walks in and Dennis is shocked at how familiar a face he is.

“Rex?”

“Hey, Dennis.”

“What are you doing here?” Dennis scoffs. “Since when did you become an actor?”

“Uh...” Rex seems to be genuinely mulling over this. “About the time I started modeling?”

“Oh wow,” Dennis picks his own script up, letting Rex pick up his script on his own. “Have I seen
you in anything?”

“Oh, no, I doubt so, man.”

Dennis makes little effort to hide his smile. “That’s a shame, Rex.” He says in his most patronizing
voice. “I am just so sorry to hear that.”

“Well, as nice as it is to know that you recognize each other—” the casting director interrupts—“we
don’t have much time. Can we start please?”

Rex looks down at his script. “Uh, who am I playing?”

Dennis rolls his eyes. “Can’t you see that there’s a character named Dennis and a character named
John?”

“Oh yeah, dude, of course I see that.” Thank god. “So which one am I playing? You still haven’t
told me.”

Dennis shuts his eyes. Could this day get any longer? “You’re playing John.”

“Oh,” Rex nods, what an idiot. He probably never got any roles because of how stupid he is.
“Okay, okay. I’m ready to start now.”

Right before Dennis can say his first line (that he’s repeated, god knows how many times today), the door flies open and slams against the wall. Mac walks in, and for a brief moment, because he’s so sick of being stuck in the same room all day, he wishes for Mac to put his big strong arms to practical use and carry Dennis out, far away from here. Dennis could really go for a drink. Dennis could really go for a meal, Dennis could really go for anything that’s not this right now, really.

He hates acting again, he’s just decided now.

“Sir, you’re supposed to wait outside until it’s your—“

“Hey-oh!” Mac walks right into the room, closer to Dennis than most people would dare to be.

“Oh, hey Mac,” waves Rex.

“Hey Rex,” greets Mac, before turning his attention right back on Dennis. “Are you done with this audition crap yet? I’m starving.”

“God, I wish,” Dennis collapses against the couch in the room. This is the first mention made of the couch in the room, because Dennis has barely had the chance to sit in it. But yes, there is a couch in the room, and resting his entire body against it is phenomenal. “I’m so fucking tired, Mac. How long has it been?”

“Like, three hours.”

“Three hours?”

“Oh yeah, I’ve been bored out my mind waiting for you—” he quickly notices the scripts in their hands—“oh shit. What are those?”

“Scripts. They’re obviously scripts, Mac.”

Mac grabs one of the scripts and flips through it, chuckling. “This script’s dumb as shit, man. Check this out: Hey John, what’s up my man, how’s it going—” he says in a mocking voice—“I mean, how stupid is that? Who talks like that?”

Dennis chuckles, more out of amusement at seeing Mac talk than anything. Say what you will about the guy, but Dennis never gets bored around Mac. It’s why he always chose to hang out with the guy all those years ago since high school. And even when there’s a lull in the air and they have to live through some dull moments together... there’s still something oddly nice about it. “Well. I mean. We kind of talk like that.”

“Oh yeah,” Mac quickly reflects. “Guess I never really thought about how we talk,” he shrugs.

“Eh, whatever. What should we get for dinner, dude?”

Mac’s sat on the couch now, and it’s at this very moment that Dennis realizes that he’s let his roommate overstay his welcome. A quick glance at the audition lady lets him know that she’s—oh wait. She’s smiling. Why is that?

“Uh, Mac? Maybe we can discuss that after I’m done with all these auditions,” he taps Mac twice on the shoulder to send him on his way. “See you later, dude.”

“Allright,” Mac gets off the couch. “Hurry up though,” he takes one last look before he walks out the door. “Oh yeah. Bye Rex, and bye lady I whose name I don’t know.” He looks at Dennis. “I’ll
be outside.”

“I know that, Mac.”

The door shuts and he looks at Rex, who’s still reading through his script, thus explaining his lack of participation in that whole conversation. Of course, Dennis doesn’t care about talking to Rex, hence why he’s only noticed this now.

“Okay, so now where were we–“

“Actually–“ cuts in the casting director–“Rex, you can leave now.”

“Oh, did I get it?”

She snorts. “Usually, I’d say we’ll be in touch but I think it’s safe for me to say no, given how I haven’t seen you act at all. I’m sorry, but I’ve already chosen someone else,” she gives Rex a reassuring smile. “Perhaps we could contact you if we need you to fill in a more minor role?”

“Not that I disagree with you stopping this–“ Dennis speaks up, relief evident in his voice–“but I’m confused. Who did you cast?”

“He just left the room.”

“Mac?” Dennis can’t believe his ears. “You’re casting Mac in this movie? The guy didn’t even audition! What the hell was all this for, then?”

She shrugs. “The two of you had chemistry.”

“Chemistry? How, I, well. I mean, yes. We’ve been friends for years. Of course we’re gonna have a little chemistry. But I barely talked to the guy for a minute before kicking him out. There’s no way you could’ve sensed anything.”

“Well, I just did. That’s all I can say. Sometimes you just know. And I know we just met, but I don’t exactly appreciate you questioning my decision.”

Dennis swallows, biting his lip. Fine.

“Dennis, I think she’s right. I’m not sure what she means by chemistry, but I’m pretty sure you and Mac have it. You’re best bros, right?”

Dennis sighs. He’s not sure he appreciates Rex commenting on his relationship with Mac either. “Yeah. I guess.”

“It’s gonna be great, dude,” he taps Dennis’ shoulder briefly, too quickly for Dennis to shrug him off. “I’m still getting that minor role, right?” He asks the casting director.

“I’ll think about it.”

“Alright!” He celebrates, making his way out the room. “See you, Dennis!”

“See you, Rex,” Dennis responds in a monotone, offbeat, voice.

The casting director starts packing her stuff. “If there isn’t anything else, I think we can both go. As was painfully obvious from your blatant complaining, we’re both tired. I think you’ll see to it that your friend Mac finds out about his new acting job?”
Dennis gets off the couch. “I’m pretty sure Rex is already telling him that outside.” His suspicions are confirmed when he hears muffled sounds of ‘What? That’s crazy, no way!’ through the door.

“Oh, that’s great then. And don’t worry, Mr Reynolds. I’m sure your friend will do great. And if he’s lacking as an actor in any way–“

“Actually I’m not worried about that,” Dennis clarifies. “Mac and I have actually acted in quite a few movies together. Local production.”

“Oh,” she raises her eyebrows, pleasantly surprised. “That’s great then. So, there shouldn’t be any issues, right?”

Her words hold a logic that hit Dennis hard. Right. There shouldn’t be a problem. Mac is his best friend, wouldn’t it be more realistic to let Mac play his best friend in the movie too? Besides, when he compares the times he had acting alongside Mac with the times he had acting with other people... it was always better with Mac.

Yeah. It was always better with Mac. Dennis feels better about the whole thing now, he supposes his initial hesitation was a baseless fear that he can do away with now. He’s gonna star in a movie with his best friend! What could be better than that?

“Yo, we got pizza–“ Mac drops down the several boxes of pizza that he carried all by himself, obviously–“what’s going on here?”

“Yeah,” says Dennis, who didn’t carry any of the pizzas because—look at the size of Mac’s arms. Dennis never has to carry anything ever again. Besides, he paid for the pizza. It’s only fair, and right, that Mac carried them all the way from the car to the bar. “What’s with all those movie tickets?”

Dee, Frank, and Charlie, are all sorting through heaps and heaps of movie tickets. Or to be more accurate, printing movie tickets. They all seem to have their own little jobs too: Frank is pulling out the tickets as they print, Dee is cutting the sheets of tickets so they become individual, and Charlie is stuffing them into boxes.

“They look real, right?” Dee smiles, clearly very proud of her work. “It’s for the movie scheme.”

“Yeah,” Charlie turns to Frank. “How many more of these are we gonna need, Frank?”

“Movie scheme, huh?” Dennis takes a good look at some of the work they’ve done so far. “Sounds fun. When’d you come up with this?”

“What do you mean?” Frank says, bewildered. “This was your idea.”

“My idea?” Dennis gestures to himself. “Since when was this my idea?”

“It is your idea, stupid.”

“Yeah, man. You came up with all the uh, the Thunder Gun creator wanting to work with you crap, and how you’re gonna like, film a movie in Philly–“

“But the Thunder Gun creator does want to work with me. And we are gonna film a movie in
Philly,” Dennis huffs, crossing his arms. “Oh come on. Don’t tell me you’re being serious right now. You actually thought that was a scheme?”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah.”

Dennis exhales in disbelief. “But, but Dee, you were in the room with me when I got the news! And Charlie, I, I, I called you!” He points at Frank now. “You saw me sign the contract for the movie, Frank!”

Frank shrugs. “I thought that was part of the scheme.”

“How would that be part of the scheme?!”

“Who knows. You’re always doin’ stuff with, weird creepy documents. I was just letting you do your thing since this movie scheme was your idea.”

“Once again, it’s not a scheme, how are you all not getting this? Mac—“ he turns around to face Mac, who’s already digging into the pizzas without a care—“Mac, a little help here, please?”

“Dude, I don’t care what they think this is. I’m honestly, I’m just still super psyched they put me in the movie.”

Dee gets up in a near outrage. “They put Mac in the movie? How the hell did that happen?”

Dennis sighs. “Long story, don’t ask.”

“Dude, if you don’t tell us what happened, we’re not helping with the movie scheme—“

“IT’S NOT A SCHEME!” His fingers go through his hair and tug tightly in frustration. “I can’t believe this. What’s wrong with you?”

“Charlie got high,” Dee says like it’s nothing, because, well, given how often he gets high, it truly is nothing. And it’s why Dennis didn’t notice.

“Oh, Charlie got high? Well, guess that explains why he’s been extra dumb these past few days. He doesn’t look that high though—what have you been huffing?”

“Aw, dude, it’s this like, weird mysterious bottle that I found—“

“Who cares about that?” Dee interrupts, looking just as high as Charlie is, now that Dennis is looking really closely. “How come Mac gets a role and we don’t?”

“Because Mac went to the auditions with me and the casting director liked him,” Dennis vaguely explains. “That’s all.”

“That’s not fair,” Dee protests. “I want a role too. Mac’s not even that good an actor—“

“Dee, don’t make me come over there—“

“I mean, if anyone should be in the movie—“

“Oh god—“ Dennis digs the back of his palms into his eyes—“fine, fine! I’ll get you three signed on as extras.”
“Extras?” Dee makes a face. “Uh uh. No. Ew, I’m not settling for that shit. Give me a speaking role.”

“Yeah, I don’t, I think I wanna do the speaking thing in the movie too? I can do one line or I can do three, but I’m definitely not doing two lines.”

“I want a good meaty role in this movie, Dennis, so go pull some strings.”

Dennis is on the edge of the world’s most frustrating aneurism. “I don’t have the power to do any of that. I’m not a producer, Frank, there’s no strings I can pull.”

“What if I signed on as a producer?” Frank suggests.

“That would work.”

“Oh yeah, that’d totally work.”

Mac yawns and stretches as he opens more pizza boxes. “You guys don’t with all that? The pizza’s getting cold and I’m getting bored over here.”

“Yeah, I’m getting hungry,” Dee rubs her belly. “Let’s go eat.”

“But what about these tickets? What, we just gonna throw ‘em away?”

Dennis shrugs. “We could... still do a movie scheme of some kind.”

This piques everyone's interest.

"Ooh... what are you thinking?"

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“Dare I say, Miss Dubois, this is some fine work here;” says the director as she leafs through the pages. “My father was right to put his faith in you.”

“Well, your father was born and raised in Philadelphia, young lady,” Artemis leans back in her chair and crosses her legs. “It’s only right that he would film a movie in this city, and hire a fine, young writer slash actress slash mover of various crystals and other merchandise such as myself.”

She leans forth. She’s mostly bluffing, of course. She got the job because she slept with the creator of Thunder Gun Express and gave him the movie idea a week into their little tryst. “Could I interest you in some ayahuasca?”

Just then, the door is greeted with a series of very frantic knocks from the other side.

The director sighs and opens it. Dennis Reynolds barrels in, script in hand, looking livid. He tosses the script on Artemis’ desk. “What the hell is that?”

“Excuse me?”

“That script! It’s, it is—“ he takes a breath, clearly having ran all the way here—“it’s nonsense!”

“The script is not nonsense—“ she crosses her arms, frowning—“Miss Dubois poured her heart and soul into writing it and it is a masterpiece.”
“Miss—” Dennis turns his head and looks shocked to see her. “Artemis? What are you doing here?”

“I wrote the script, of course,” she interlocks her hands and watches the sad fury of this man.

“You, I—wow. Okay. Did not see that coming, but I probably should have—” he turns his attention back to the director—“but come on! You, you’re supposed to do quality control! What’s with all the, the two dudes kissing and crap?”

“Crap?” she, being the director and not Artemis, scoffs. “Mr Reynolds, this movie is a love story between two men. Of course there’s going to be kissing.”

His eyes widen, and his chin sort of drops from where it was before in dramatic disbelief. “This movie’s a what now?”

“A love story. A movie of the romance genre. Between two men.”

“That just. That just can’t be. Why would the creator of Thunder Gun Express produce a gay, a homo—a gay love movie! Why?”

Artemis snorts at the way he rasps that last word. She stays silent and watches this scared little gay boy dance.

“Because my father is an avid supporter of LGBT rights and believes in the importance of representation?”

Dennis bites his lip and swallows uncomfortably. It takes him a while to find his bearings and arm himself with a proper comeback to that. “I mean, regardless, I still, I still didn’t sign up for that. I thought this was a badass action movie. I was in a badass action movie. The only movies I’ve made, have been, badass action movies. So I can’t screw that up by doing this.”

The director sits down, clearly having had enough. “Mr Reynolds, I hope you know what you’re saying sounds like. You’re saying that you would rather do away with an important piece of representation in media for an entire marginalized community, all because it doesn’t line up with your career and how you wish to be typecast? And furthermore, I would like to add that you did sign up for this. When you signed the contract for this movie.” She lightly shoves him towards the door. “I’ll see you for our first table read come Monday. Until then, please get out of my office.”

“Honestly, dude, I don’t see what the big deal is,” Mac shrugs, still reading through the script, something Dennis hasn’t been able to do since he first laid eyes on that kiss scene. He doesn’t even know how the movie ends yet. Dennis is pacing all over the bar, unable to believe how he’s the only one who sees how crazy this all is.

“Yeah, man,” Charlie chimes in. “Just film the gay porno movie. Lots of movies get real gross these days anyway.”

“It’s not a gay porno movie!”

“It’s not?” Charlie looks for real shocked to hear this.

“Then why is there a sex scene in the movie?” Dee asks with a smirk on her face as she peruses the
“There’s a what now?” Dennis’ entire face freezes over.

“A sex scene,” Dee hands the script over and Dennis’ face seems to go through a whole new meltdown. “Oh, come on!”

“At least you get to do it with Mac?”

“Charlie, are you kidding me?” Dennis huffs, giving him an honest to goodness glare. “Having to do this with Mac is half the reason it’s so unbearable and annoying!”

“Dennis, I’m, I’m like right here,” Mac reminds, looking genuinely upset by this. Goddamn it. This is all a whole mess.

“I don’t mean it like that! I mean, I just mean it would be less weird with a stranger.”

“Why would it be less weird with a stranger? Who you don’t know?”

“Dennis, why do you wanna make out with strange dudes?”

“I don’t–” he grabs onto the corner of the bar to steady himself and keep it all together so he doesn’t lose it and scratch all of their eyes out–“you’re all missing the point!”

“What point? That you wanna kiss dudes you don’t even know, or that you’re too scared to kiss Mac?”

“What,” Mac scoffs, “you afraid you’re gonna fall in love with me or something?”

Dennis shuts his eyes. “Jesus christ, no. Don’t do that.”

“Why?” Dee snorts. “Don’t tell me you’re in love with him already.”

“Of course he’s in love with Mac,” Charlie says to Dee, “I thought that’s why we were even having this conversation.”

Mac, who clearly has more sense than this and is only playing on Dee and Charlie’s combined stupidity to mess with Dennis, offers him a wink and pouted lips in this trying time. Dennis ignores the heat that runs through him because he knows it’s mostly anger.

“That—that is crazy talk! You’re all insane! I am not in love with Mac!”

“Oh, you’re not in love with him? Like, that’s great man, cause–“ Charlie turns to Mac now–“I met some guy at the store the other day, and he’s like, perfect for you dude.”

Mac feigns appreciation and exaggerates his reaction to this, specifically to piss Dennis off, obviously. “Aw, really? No way!”

Dennis has had enough of this. “I don’t need this. I’m going home–”

He ignores all of Dee and Charlie’s childish laughs and taunts, mocking him despite having no grounds to do so. He only lightens up slightly at the footsteps that follow behind him. Mac has to come along, because Dennis drove him here and he’s his ride home.
Not even ten full seconds after the door shuts in their apartment, Dennis slams Mac against the wall and begins kissing him soft and slow and insistent, he presses close, his knee digging between Mac’s legs, and Mac kisses Dennis back with half of everything he has.

The other half, finds the self-restraint to put an end to the kissing once he’s gotten a good enough taste of Dennis, the second he hears Dennis moan into their kiss. He pulls away to investigate, a satisfied smile on his face knowing the effect he’s had on this man.

“Dude,” he asks, licking his lips. “The hell is that about?”

Dennis’ bottom lip shudders as the rest of him freezes in place, as if for a moment even he doesn’t know why he kissed Mac. But as much as he kissed Mac on instinct, and a lack of ability to restrain himself, Dennis knows there’s a reason to this cloud of doubt that sits at the back of his mind.

“Uh... well. It’s because we have to practice. Kissing. We have to practice kissing, for the movie.”

Mac snorts, unconvinced. “Oh, yeah. So, you thought, that the best way to do that, to start doing that, was by slamming me against the wall?”

Dennis clears his throat, cutting off all eye contact between them, looking left, right, up, down, but never center where Mac is. “Well, you—I was testing you—“

“Oh, so you were testing me?” Mac says patronizingly, and that just grinds Dennis’ gears.

“Yeah,” he shoots back, arms crossed, looking confident this time. “And you failed.”

“I failed?!”

“Don’t think you’re good enough at kissing men. Don’t think you’re good enough at kissing at all, which is why this practice is necessary. Because if we’re gonna pull off a romance—“

“Dennis, you moaned—“

“That is irrelevant.”

“Pft. Irrelevant? Dude, don’t give me that crap. You liked it. You liked kissing me. Not sure I can say the same for you, though.”

Dennis scowls, very offended, even though he knows it’s bait, and that Mac is riling him up on purpose. But there’s the very small chance that he isn’t, and that possibility makes Dennis even angrier. “You’ve got to be kidding me. My lips were touched by the gods, Mac. And getting to kiss them? Is worship.”

“Then prove it.”

“What now?”

“Prove it. Kiss me again. Show me I was wrong that first time,” Mac raises his eyebrow at Dennis, and he knows for sure that Mac is definitely baiting him now. He’s dangling the bait right before his nose, actually. But Dennis... just might bite. Just to really show Mac what’s what.

They kiss again and get lost. Kissing Mac is getting on a rollercoaster ride you convinced yourself you were too terrified for before, but when you get on, you never want it to stop. And you always,
always want to go again.

“Oh my god.”

They pull apart in shock at the interruption they were too distracted to hear.

“Frank?”

“What the hell are you doing here?”
“For the last time–“ Dennis sighs, leaning his weary head on his clenched fists, elbows propped up on the table–“I. Am not in love with Mac. That kiss was not the start of a relationship, we’re not gonna be dating, and that’s that.

“And that–“ Dee continues, arms crossed proudly–“is why I don’t owe you ten bucks, Charlie.”

“Yet,” he emphasizes, venom in his voice. “Not yet, you bitch. But that ten bucks will be mine, or so help me god–“

“Oh but that money will never be yours,” Dee smirks, still confident. “Because I placed my bet for after the movie filming ends, and you placed yours for before. And if I know my brother–“ she looks over at Dennis, who rolls his eyes–“I know that he would never date Mac until then in order to make sure I get that money, since he chose to be on my side.”

“Dee, you idiot, I’m not on anyone’s side,” Dennis corrects, so frustrated right now. He can’t believe this is actually happening.

“Then why are you sitting at my table?”

He ignores her. “I’m just saying that Mac and I aren’t a thing. It was just a kiss to test Mac’s skills, since we need to practice for the movie–“

“Why would you need to practice?” asks Frank, still very confused by all this. “Just smooch when they say action, and stop when they say cut. What’s so hard about that?”

“He—he–“

“Oh, forget it, Frank,” says Charlie. “He’s never gonna admit he’s gay as ten dicks tied together no matter what you say—we just need to get Mac on our side–“

“That’s right,” cuts in Mac, who’s been spending this whole time making himself a drink behind the bar, finally just settling on a simple beer. It’s a can, so muscles in his arms clench when he cracks it open. But don’t focus on that. Dennis definitely isn’t. “I don’t really give a shit about all this, so I’m just gonna pick whoever I think is right.”

“Right? Mac, are you insane? What’s right is that you and I are not together! And that kiss meant nothing because we’re not dating!”

Mac looks unfazed by this. “Charlie, what are the terms of you and Dee’s bet again?”

“Well thank you for asking Mac,” Charlie says in a decidedly fancier sounding voice that isn’t objectively fancy in the slightest but is the voice he puts on when he’s trying to be fancy. You get it. “For these are the terms of our bet–“ he whips out this official looking document, piquing Dennis’ interest–“four score and–“

“Can you skip the theatrics and just get on with it?”

“Basically,” Dee begins to explain, since Charlie can’t read a damn thing on their bet contract
anyway (that has some drawings on it, as well as some stains, upon a closer look, so Dennis might have to retract his earlier statement), “well, there’s levels to this thing, but one of the clauses states that if you make a move on Mac before the filming of your gay movie thing ends, Charlie wins that part of the bet.”

“You made multiple bets?” Dennis scoffs, “Mac and I were gone, like, what? An hour? Before Frank dragged us back here for this dumb arbitration—you know what? Never mind, I don’t care, have your foolish bets. I did not, I repeat, I did not, was not, and was never planning, on making a move on Mac.”

“Exactly my point,” Dee winks at Dennis. “That kiss wasn’t a move at all. So the money’s not yours, Charlie.”

“Don’t wink at me like we’re keeping a secret!” Dennis protests in an outrage. “That wasn’t a move.”

“Oh, she winked? Did you wink, Dee?”

“Deandra, if you wink, that gives us reasonable doubt to believe that you think Dennis made a move,” Frank points out with a smirk. He’s obviously planning on splitting Charlie’s winnings by being on his side. What an asshole.

“Except I didn’t wink at Dennis!” She gives him a death glare now. No wink this time. He returns her a look that proves he doesn’t care.

“You did too wink! Dennis saw you, and he’s supposed to be on your side!”

“Once again, not on anyone’s side—“

“Okay, order, order in the court! Everyone shut up!” Mac interjects, tossing his empty beer and cracking open a new one.

“Mac, give me a refill,” Frank asks, walking up to him at the bar. Mac does so, pouring beer with deft and precision.

“It doesn’t matter whether Dee winked or not, dumbasses. It matters what I think,” he smiles, handing Frank his beer, who nods as he drinks. “Whether I, thought that Dennis was making a move on me—“

“Well that’s just not fair—“

“I wasn’t making a move!”

“–Mac, of course you’re gonna see Dennis’ kiss as a goddamn move!”

Mac leans against the table behind him with his arms crossed. There’s this energy and odd confidence to him right now, and no one knows where it came from, nor do any of them know what to make of it. It’s just... odd, and kind of new. “Dee, why do you think that?”

“What?”

“Why do you think, I’m definitely gonna see Dennis pushing me against the wall in our apartment and making out with me like a crazy person—as a move?”

“Be, because—“ she snorts—“I mean, it’s obvious, right? That’s why all our bets had everything to
do with Dennis and potential moves he might make, and nothing to do with what you might do. Clearly he’s the only repressed gay left in our group—“

“Dee, carry on with this line of thought and I will cave your skull in, blend your brain, and shove it down your throat—“

“Jesus christ, Dennis,” Dee rolls her eyes, because his insane threats of murder are a regular occurrence. “Fine, whatever. You definitely haven’t been lying to yourself about your sexuality all your life, and you are most certainly a straight man. Happy?”

“Don’t appreciate the tone, but—“ he turns to look at the rest—“I believe what Dee’s trying to say is that, well, Mac, that you’re in love with me.”

Mac snorts. “No I’m not.”
This leads to an uproar.

“Oh, come on, Mac, really? Not you too!”

“Dude, you’ve been drooling over Dennis for like, years, man. You telling me we put up with that annoying shit only for you to not be in love with him?”

“Okay, okay—“ Mac concedes, which, well, good. It quells the fire in Dennis’ heart, and he doesn’t try to question why the notion of Mac not being in love with him gets his blood boiling. “In the past, I may have had, uh, some feelings? For Dennis. Yeah. I’m man enough to admit that.”

“You’re gay enough to admit that,” Charlie chimes in pointedly, and Dennis has a feeling that’s meant to be a dig at him somehow but he doesn’t take the bait, because what Charlie’s saying is making no sense. He listens to Mac with a furrowed brow and antsy fingers.

“But, whatever I felt for him in the past, I’m over it now.”

“Over it?” The indignant tones to his voice are more than obvious. “That’s ridiculous, Mac. How can you be over it?”

Mac shrugs. “Why not?”

“If you were over me, why’d you kiss me, Mac?” Dennis asks smugly.

“You kissed me first.”

“You kissed me back.”

Mac shrugs. “Well, I’m gay.”

“That’s not a reason to kiss me. Are you saying you’d kiss back any guy that laid one on you?” Dennis continues on without stopping, arms on his hips like a stupid jealous bitch.

Wait, who said that? He’s not a stupid, a jealous, or a bitch! You take that back!

Mac shrugs. “Who knows?”

Dennis scoffs. “Okay. So what, if Charlie kissed you, right here, right now, you’d kiss him back too?”

Mac makes a face, and Dennis’ heart rate slows. “Nah,” he shakes his head, and Charlie looks
more offended than he’s ever been his whole life. “Not Charlie.”

“Oh, come on, dude! What the hell?” Charlie scoffs, his hands stretched open. “You kidding me, man? You’d kiss Dennis but not me? That’s so mean.”

“Charlie, what are you saying? Do you want Mac to kiss you?”

Now Charlie’s making a face. “Uh, hah, no, gross, dude! I don’t want Mac kissing me. Kissing, kissing’s like, so gross.”

“Then why’re you so pissed?”

“I think I cracked it,” Frank nods to himself. “Now, Charlie, he doesn’t want to kiss Mac, but he wants Mac to want to kiss him, because Mac’s gay.”

Mac scoffs, because now he’s offended, and Dennis wants to scream, because apparently now everyone wants Mac to want to kiss them, when the only person that Mac wants to kiss, that Mac should want to kiss, and has ever wanted to kiss, is Dennis! And only Dennis! “What the hell, Charlie? You’re making me feel like a whore.”

“I don’t know, man, you feel like a whore, my feelings are hurt because you don’t wanna kiss me—“

“Mac also said before, that, that he could do a lot better than you, dating wise,” Frank reminds.

“God, you told Frank that?”

“Of course I told him that, Mac, you were being such a bitch about it!”

Mac sighs, relenting. “Fine, fine. Charlie, if you kissed me, I would totally, totally kiss back, happy?”

Charlie exhales, looking almost relieved. “Thank you!”

Frank offers Charlie a pat on the back. “Good for you, Charlie. I’m proud of you.” He looks at Mac. “Your lips aren’t coming anywhere near mine, though.”

“Of course I would never put my lips even remotely close to you, Frank,” Mac says in disbelief. “You’re in your mid-seventies, I’m not putting my lips, or any of my bits, anywhere on you.” He pauses to think. “Unless you were gonna pay me, like, a lot of money.” A realization dawns on him. “Oh wow, guess I am a whore,” he takes a swig of beer like that’s nothing.

“Okay, that’s enough! We’re way off track now.” Dennis cuts in, annoyed, ready to catch Mac’s bluff. “Mac, why, how, and when did you get over this?”

Mac looks confused, like he’s forgotten about everything already, now. “Over what?”

“Me!”

“Oh! Right.” He counts his responses off on his fingers, like a pretentious asshole, who has really thick fingers. What a prick. “Because liking you would be a waste of time since you claim to be straight, I don’t even know whether I want to be dating, and... sometime after I came out to my dad.”

“Oh,” the others seem to get it. Dennis does not. “Good for you, Mac.”
“How does you doing a five minute choreographed dance have anything to do with getting over me?”

“Well, it was a very deep dance,” explains Frank, who gets a smile from Mac. “It had loads of different meanings to it. Kind of covered all the bases.”

“Including getting over feelings that have lasted, what, years?”

Dee sighs. ‘Goddamn it, you dickwad. Get over your stupid ego for a minute, you’re embarrassing our team.”

“Team? We are not a team, Dee!”

Dee looks at Mac. “Okay. I’m convinced you’re like, neutral. Ish. I guess. You promise you’ll decide whether Dennis made a move based on facts and sound arguments alone?”

Mac nods. “Yeah, something like that. Whoever convinces me... they’ll win.”

Dennis exhales with very deeply suppressed rage. “Feel like I’m not even in the room anymore.”

“Okay, let’s start now.” Mac stretches his hand out at Frank. “Frank, our witness to the scene, please come up and give your account of what went down.”

“Honestly, I don’t even know why we had that whole arbitration,” Dennis says in a daze as he hangs off Mac’s shoulder, staring blankly at the rows of liquor before them. “Not like we’d ever tell them. Even if we did, you know, date.”

“Don’t think they were counting on us telling them, Dennis,” replies Mac as he grabs a bottle of scotch for the apartment. They’re running out at home, and usually, they’d just steal stuff from the bar, but Mac and Dennis didn’t have time to form a mini heist today, given all their fake legal dealings. Besides, they always get tempted by the liquor aisle when they’re grocery shopping. Given Dennis’ recent bump in income, they can afford to buy alcohol whenever they feel like it instead of carefully mooching off their place of business. “Think they were counting on catching us in the act.”

“Like we’d get caught,” Dennis continues confidently, choosing some more booze, practically filling half their cart with it actually, before moving to find... beer. “We’d be sneaky about it, wouldn’t we, Mac?” He turns around to give Mac a look, and he shrugs.

“Sure. I guess we’d be kinda sneaky. But then again, we did get caught making out in our own apartment. By Frank.”

“So we’ll change the locks,” Dennis retorts, a sharp uptake in his voice, seeming impatient, almost. “What was he doing at our place, actually? And more importantly, why did he have our key?”

Mac seems to think about this before coming up empty. “No idea, actually. What was Frank doing at our place? Anyway, I don’t know how Frank got our key, maybe, probably from Charlie?”

Dennis’ hand reaches out to grab the front of the shopping cart Mac is pushing, bringing it to a halt. “Follow up question, why does Charlie have our key?”
Mac snorts, continuing to push the cart until Dennis lets go and carries on walking. “What’s next, you gonna ask me why Dee has our key too?”

Dennis looks horrified. What the hell? Is privacy dead? He can’t even have a safe, potentially secure place to hypothetically fuck Mac on a regular basis secretly behind the gang’s back—in peace? “Now Dee has our key? W-when did this happen? Are you just distributing keys to the apartment around town now? Who else has a key to our no longer secure or exclusive place?”

“I only gave it to Charlie and Dee!” He sighs, shutting his eyes for a brief moment. “Look, you were gone, okay? And I was living alone, and I got blackout drunk a lot most nights, sometimes days, so I kept losing my keys. I figured... since I didn’t have you around to open the door for me if I lost my way in, would be good to have someone keep a spare around, right?”

Dennis bites his lip, willing any thoughts of guilt away. Most people live alone anyway. And most people, have the responsibility to keep their keys on them. It’s not his fault Mac’s an idiot who losses crap all the time. It’s what he did. It’s what he does. It’s why he barely owns a thing in their apartment. He’s just, he’s just losing stuff all the time. “Well,” Dennis swallows, a painful lump lodged in his throat for some reason. Maybe he’s coming down with something. Maybe he caught something from kissing Mac, who’s to say? “I’m here now. And I’m not leaving anytime soon. So, we’ll change our locks, and you’re not getting locked out just because you can’t keep a key on your person.”

Mac gives a smile at this, and the lump in his throat feels all that much smaller. “Okay. Then, I guess no one could catch us if we dated. We’d just bang in the apartment all the time in peace, right?”

“Precisely, Mac.” He raises his finger to bring up a point. “And, for dates, we could always just hit up Guigino’s. If anyone saw us, we could just pretend... we were at our monthly dinner.” He chortles lightly, smiling wider than he has all day. “They’d buy that, easily!”

Mac’s smiling too, and Dennis feels lighter than air. He is the helium in a little balloon that a kid just let go: rising up to the sky and out of this world. “That’s all like, great man. But how would we do all that, that couple stuff—“

“Like what?” Dennis asks, confused and determined to have a solution for whatever problem Mac is pitching.

Mac grabs Dennis’ hand, interlocking their fingers. He looks at him, unblinking. “This.”

Dennis seems to take this hand holding almost like a challenge, and he brings their hands up to his mouth, kissing Mac on the back of his palm. He lingers, almost for effect. “We’re pretending to date, I’d say. Fake couple scheme.”

Mac swallows slowly. Dennis knows this because he’s staring at his throat, his neck. Mac lets go of their hands, almost intimidated. And that makes Dennis feel insanely good. This was almost like a test Dennis didn’t plan. One hand hold and Mac is already under his spell. Over Dennis Reynolds my ass. How could Mac ever be over Dennis? Somehow, repeating those words in his mind is oddly reassuring. Why does he need Mac to be in love with him to feel alive? That is a question Dennis is tucking away and saving for... never.

“Right. Fake couple scheme,” he drags his hand through his hair in a fluster. “You’re really smart, Dennis.”

“Smartest guy you know, as I recall,” says Dennis through a sly smile. “I don’t intend on ever
proving you wrong.”

“You won’t.” Mac stops pushing the cart for a second, and Dennis stops short, raising his eyebrow in question. “Dennis, what are you doing?”

“What am I—well—I’m grocery shopping, Mac. We need to keep ourselves fed. And if we’re gonna be in a movie together, that’s gonna put us on the map, and we probably don’t wanna risk eating outside so much in case we get recognized. Or, at the moment, I get recognized. You’re not in a movie yet.”

“I’m not talking about that.”

“Then what are you talking about?”

“I’m asking... why are you so invested in the idea of us having a secret relationship?”

Dennis scoffs. “I’m not invested, who said I was invested? I was just, just fascinated by the mechanics of keeping a secret under wraps, I was just riffing. What’s wrong with riffing, Mac? Can I—“

“What happened to us being out of the question? To us never happening?”

Dennis regards Mac seriously. “Well, that’s still never happening.”

“Never?” Mac sticks his face closer to Dennis, and suddenly the air is so heavy. Dennis feels hot. He feels it warmest around his lips, the lips that are barely an inch away from Mac’s own, and the scene of them kissing against a wall like tomorrow was a deadly hurricane hurtling straight for them, a peaceful house on the prairie doomed to die, briefly flashes before his eyes. “Sounds like you wanna date me, actually.”

“Who says we need to date to make out in this empty cereal aisle?”

“I’m not kissing you.”

They’re still standing far too close.

“Never said you were gonna. Just saying I know you want it—“

Dennis grabs Mac’s face with both hands and pulls him in fast and reckless, before he can form a critical thought about this. Mac, right now, in this moment, is like crack. Crack cocaine. He knows it’s bad for him but he can’t stay away. And he tastes twice as good. The more hits you take, the more addicted you get. A cereal box crashes to the floor and better judgement kicks in. Dennis pulls away like nothing happened and grabs the cereal they need, dumping it in the cart, and grabbing at its handles to push the damn thing.

Mac is laughing to himself, the smug bastard. “What was that? Another test?”

“Maybe,” Dennis responds in a vague, escapist tone. He reaches for the vodka in their trolley, opens it, and downs a good amount. He hands it to Mac, who sighs and takes a swig.
“You’re not getting in, Dennis,” Mac says almost commanding, finishing the bottle of... what are they drinking now? Eh, who cares, both of them are too drunk to read. Or, well, Dennis is too drunk to read. Mac might not be. If you wanna know what they’ve been drinking, then ask him! “There’s no space in the cart anyway.”

“Then we’ll make room,” Dennis insists, “or, we get another empty cart, and we park this one right here,” he bends over the cart and simpers sweetly at Mac. “Make It our pitstop.”

“So one shopping cart is for putting our stuff, and the other shopping cart is for traveling around the supermarket to go get stuff?”

“Exactly my point,” Dennis straightens, stretching, has this feeling he’s going to get what he wants again.

“But the catch is, you’d be sitting in the shopping cart. Like, inside of it.”

“Yes, Mac, and that’s not a catch, that’s a perk!” Dennis snarls, unable to believe how unvalued he’s being perceived to be.

“How is that a perk?”

“I’ll be holding the stuff we need and, and depositing those things in the holder cart that we’ll leave here,” he explains, gesturing wildly and messily. “It’s less tiring for you that way, because you won’t have to push the heavy cart full of random bullshit everywhere we go.”

“But... instead of pushing our groceries everywhere, I’d have to push you everywhere?”

“Precisely,” Dennis slurs, practically batting his eyes at Mac. “That’s the perk!”

“How is pushing you around better than pushing groceries around?”

Dennis crosses his arms over the empty cart that Mac is still, somehow, considering not taking. “Well, I’m hotter. Better to look at than groceries.”

Mac rolls his eyes. “Whatever, dude. Get in,” he says, pushing their not-empty shopping cart to some isolated corner so no one steals it. And why would anyone? There’s a ton of empty bottles in the thing, who would risk taking responsibility for that when there’s so many empty carts just free for the taking?

Dennis tries to climb into their new empty shopping cart, but the world is spinny and the cart’s not stable and every time he tries to get in he nearly causes the whole thing to topple over. And that’s scary.

Mac laughs at his futile efforts. “Shut up,” says Dennis, “and come help me into this stupid thing.”

“You’re weak as shit, dude. Get in,” he teases, and it incites Dennis just a little but he only shows it in a tiny glare that quickly dissipates. “What grown ass man has trouble getting into a shopping cart?”

“I’m not weak, you idiot, I’m drunk,” he says, a little too close to Mac, who makes a face and laughs some more.

“Don’t I know it. You wouldn’t be whining to get into this cart if you were in any way sober, man.”
Dennis scoffs. “Whining? I think you’re the one whining, Mac. What is it?” he taunts, “don’t think you’re strong enough to help me into this cart? Hm, I did notice you’ve been skipping the workouts—“

His jabs work, but perhaps more than he wanted or needed them to. All he wanted was for Mac to hold the cart steady while he clawed his way in, but at Dennis’ insinuation that Mac’s physique and thus, strength, is slipping (it’s not, it’s definitely not), Mac gets this scorned look and scoops Dennis up in his arms like he’s the lightest bride in the world, before gently depositing him into the shopping cart. Dennis loses his next breath, and Mac’s next words spell the beginning of an even better time than was being had.

“Are you ready?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be, Mac. Ready... as I’ll ever be.”

Mac, hands wrapped tightly around the handles on the cart, takes off down the aisle at top speed.

Dennis’ whoops and the occasional scream when Mac runs faster than his heart can handle in his drunken daze fill the aisles of the supermarket. They’ve just been having mindless fun without discussing any of it, but the truth is both of them are surprised they haven’t been kicked out yet.

Although, it might be because Mac runs so fast they can’t be caught. Sitting in the cart, while incredibly uncomfortable given the metal grilles and the design of the damn thing, feels much less so when Mac is pushing him down an empty aisle in the supermarket as fast as he can go, feeling the air cut through as they pass like a windy breeze in fall. Dennis hasn’t felt this good all week. However, and don’t tell Sober Dennis this but... he has a feeling kissing Mac is on par with what he’s feeling right now. Hurtling down an aisle while being pushed by a man at least half as drunk as he is though... it just feels safer to indulge in.

Realistically, Mac and Dennis probably haven’t been kicked out because this supermarket is huge and there’s barely anyone in today. That includes the staff. It seems very unrealistic and oddly convenient to the narrative for that to happen, but somehow, barely anyone is around to stop them. For now. Apparently, at this time of day, most people are at their real jobs that they need to do for a living. As for Mac and Dennis, they’re... living.

“Wait,” Dennis nearly chokes and begins a half-hearted laugh at the thought that he’s actually getting at all affected by riding around in a shopping cart. He stands, turns around, and then sits back in the cart facing Mac.

He quirks an eyebrow up at Dennis. “What’re you doing?”

“I’m riding backwards, obviously. What did you think I was doing? Trying to get a better look at you?”

Mac snorts, a cocky air to the way he carries himself in that moment. “Knowing what I know, I wouldn’t be surprised, dude.”

Before Dennis can even begin to argue or protest this, Mac is pushing him down the next aisle they haven’t visited.
He only stops when he realizes what’s in that aisle.

“Ooh, we should get some popcorn, we’re running low,” Mac begins to look at some of his choices, plus some other types of snacks. “You want anything for movie night?”

Something both tender, nostalgic, and familiar hit Dennis all at once. Wait, tender, nostalgic, and familiar? That’s three things. So why did he say both? God, that’s not the point. Okay. Dennis really is drunk. Which is why he has an excuse to feel this way. He knows Sober Dennis would hate it, but Drunk Dennis is thinking about all those movie nights him and Mac have had over the years, all those laughs they’ve shared, all those great movies they’ve experienced with each other sometimes for the first time, sometimes for the tenth time. The dumb debates and heated discussions they’d get into, and Dennis wants it all. He wants it all right now, and he wants it all to be the same as it always was. He wants those warm nights in, he wants those tireless nights when they’d watch two movies instead of just the one, he wants how drunk they’d let themselves get, he wants those tipsy kisses they’d forget in the morning—wait. What?

He washes the thought away with a swig of beer. Yeah, he’s drinking beer now, trying to sober up. So far, it doesn’t seem to be working that well. He, he’s never kissed Mac. Right? Aside from their moment in the apartment, which was a test, so it doesn’t count, and earlier on, which also... doesn’t count. Because Mac was taunting Dennis and being a dick, so, so Dennis just wanted him to shut up. Yes. Here’s another thought Dennis is ready to wash away the moment he stops having it: Why do Mac’s lips feel so familiar somehow? Like they’re lips he’s kissed more than any other?

“Dennis?”

“What?”

“Did you not hear me? Bro, I asked you what you wanna get for movie night.”

“Whatever you’ve picked is fine.”

Mac looks pleased at this, of course, because “wow, didn’t expect you to trust me like that.”

Dennis wants to ask Mac to confirm his convictions, he wants to make sure he’s not the only one who thinks, knows, that they have never kissed... outside of today. Instead, something else falls from his lips. Words he can’t take back and pretend were a slip up.

“Mac, did you mean what you said back there? Do you... not love me anymore?”

Mac is silent for a moment, processing, as if unable to believe that question would be asked. Unable to believe Dennis possessed such emotional vulnerability, probably. Once again, Sober Dennis, if he knows what’s going on, is not going to like this. “Oh, wow.”

“Well?”

“Dennis, buddy, I said I wasn’t in love with you anymore. I never said I didn’t love you. I’ll never stop loving you, man.”

“There’s a difference?”

“Uh, duh. I mean you’re my best friend. And I love you. Whether I’m in love with you or not... it won’t change that.”

Dennis nods. Okay. That’s fair. He feels less empty for now. But the fuller he feels, the heavier the atmosphere. The moment is practically bursting with awkwardness. Or that could be sincerity that
Dennis is finding hard to deal with. He scans around the place for a distraction.

“Hey,” Dennis starts off, already onto something, seemingly, pointing to the huge stack of blankets about thirty yards away from them. “Push me into that.”

“You mean... you want me to let go so you can crash into that pile of blankets?”

“You read my mind, dude.”

He takes off running.

Upon impact, half the blankets come crashing to the ground, but Dennis doesn’t break anything, doesn’t feel any pain, and Mac nearly loses his mind because of what an awesome job he did, crashing into the blankets like that. He even runs up to Dennis in order to give him a high five so they can return to their shopping.

The bad news? They get caught. Perhaps destroying one perfectly stacked pile of blankets was the last straw to getting reprimanded.

“What the hell did you two just do?!” A shrill little lady of indiscernible ethnicity yells at them, which hurts to hear, kind of like how Dee yells at them when she gets pissed, except more unfamiliar, and thus, even more annoying.

“Uh, I think the question here is—why do you have a huge stack of blankets just lying around in the supermarket, tempting anyone who sees it into ramming a shopping cart straight for it at high speeds?” Dennis slurs, finishing his beer and then passing it to Mac. “Besides, I almost got hurt doing that. This store–” he burps–“this store really needs to examine its safety policy.”

“Yeah, dude, yeah,” agrees Mac. “But like, whether this was our fault or not, she’s not allowed to talk to us like that.”

“She’s not?”

“Oh, yeah man. There’s laws about this crap. She’s the staff, we’re the customers. And the customer is always right, even if they break stuff,” he follows that up by hurling Dennis’ empty beer bottle at the wall, which shatters on impact. They both crack up at that in their drunken stupor, whilst the staff member who had been yelling at them looks horrified, even more so than she had been before.

“But, wait—“ Dennis recalls with worry—“when customers break shit at Paddy’s, we yell at them all the time. In fact, we make it a point to make the customer feel as horrible as possible. Are we, are we gonna get in trouble for that?”

“Oh, no way,” Mac shakes his head. “No, ‘cause we’re a bar, Dennis. The rules are different in bars and supermarkets. See, when you go to a bar, you’re basically asking to get shitfaced, and treated like shit while you’re shitfaced. But in a supermarket—“

“Oh! I get it,” Dennis nods in a daze. “In a bar, we reign supreme over customers because we’re the owners and staff, but in here, it’s the other way around?”
“Yeah, dude! That’s exactly how it works.”

Another lady who’s wearing the same uniform as the pissed off staff lady (thereby also making her a staff member) walks up to them.

“Hey, what’s going on here?”

“Oh thank god,” says Staff Member Lady One, arm wrapping around Staff Member Lady Two. They seem to be friends. “Can you help me chase out these two jerks?” she gestures to the mess behind her, essentially explaining what they got up to.

Staff Member Lady Two squints her eyes at Dennis. “Wait... you look familiar. Like, really familiar. Weren’t you in that movie that just came out?”

Dennis’ heart rate quickens and in that single sobering moment, he and Mac exchange a knowing look, a scared look. The media doesn’t know that Dennis lives in Philadelphia, but it seems Staff Member Lady Two might just be finding this out now. He hasn’t exactly prepared for a situation where people in the city would start recognizing him for his work. And he should have been more worried. Because who could forget a face like his?

“Oh... no.” Denial is his best bet so far.

“He gets that a lot,” Mac gestures to Dennis. “He just... he just looks like other people sometimes.”

Staff Member Lady One looks at Staff Member Lady Two with a puzzled face. “What movie are you talking about?”

“The super good action movie with Ryan Gosling that was out recently,” she explains. “I am more than sure that this guy was in that movie. What are you doing in Philadelphia?”

Dennis groans. “I’m in Philadelphia, because I’m not the guy you’re talking about. That incredibly charming actor who you’re mistaking for me, obviously, given how I am also breathtakingly attractive, probably lives in Los Angeles, like the lot of them.”

Staff Member Lady One rolls her eyes. “Girl, I haven’t seen the movie, but I’m pretty sure you’re wrong about this dude,” she shrugs. “I mean, what would a movie star be doing wrecking havoc in Philadelphia for no reason?”

Staff Member Lady Two shrugs. “I don’t know. I mean, he’s a man. You know how men are.”

“Of course I do, but I’m pretty sure this isn’t one of those cases. I mean, white men tend to look the same, right?”

Dennis nearly lunges at her for that, but Mac holds him back down.

“Dennis,” Mac whispers close to his ear, and somehow, despite the countless times in which Mac has whispered something to him in secret, his breath is hot against his skin, hotter than its ever been, and a shiver runs through his body. “I think we should get outta here.”

“Oh yes, definitely,” he says in his normal voice.

Mac takes off with Dennis at top speed, and when they’re at the entrance he helps Dennis out the cart before they run out the store, choosing to abandon all their groceries. They can buy that stuff at a different store. A better store.
“God, can you believe what that lady said?” He fumes, stumbling on the sidewalk with Mac’s arm haphazardly thrown across his back to steady him. “White men all look the same? How could she say that about me, of all people? I am one of a kind, I am unique, I am a golden god, and she is a savage! A savage and an idiot!”

“Oh yeah, she totally is,” agrees Mac. “What she said was like, super racist.”

“Yeah!” Dennis shouts with conviction. “Wait, it is?”

“Of course it is! She was totally oppressing us back there dude!”

“Isn’t it only oppression if it’s like... a marginalized group?”

Mac chews on this thought for a bit. “Oh. I know what it is now.”

“What is it?”

“It’s reverse racism, bro!”

Dennis claps his hands together. “Yes! What is that?”

“It’s basically them being shitty to us the way whites are usually shitty to them.”

“Oh, wow! You’re totally right!”

“Of course I am, dude.”

“You think we’re gonna get in trouble for the stuff we did back there?”

Mac scoffs, shaking his head. “No way, man! I mean, if they try anything, we’ll just have to come back at them with everything we’ve got!”

“Slap them with a lawsuit for their like, reverse racism and shit?”

“And their rude shit,” Mac points out. “That bitch was yelling at us, and we get points for taking that, because the customer is always right, unless you’re in a bar.”

Dennis squints his eyes and looks straight ahead in thought. “Why do you think they had a stack of blankets out on display like that?”

“Oh, no idea dude. That’s still super weird.”

“That was weird. That’s a strange place. A strange supermarket. In fact,” he looks at the ground, remembering lips on lips on lips. “We should probably just forget and not talk about anything we did in there.”

“Sure, whatever,” Mac shrugs, looking just slightly uncomfortable about this. “Wanna find another supermarket so we can get those groceries?”

Dennis bites down hard on his lip. He looks up at Artemis, who doesn’t seem to care that he’s looking at her. Artemis... has made some changes to the script. Namely, the names.
“Hugh Honey... and Vic Vinegar?” He says questioningly. How... how did she know?

“Frank’s told me some stories,” she clasps her hands together, “he’s very proud of your realty work. Thought I would include it in mine.”

Dennis almost gets distracted by the offhand mention about Frank being proud of him, but he presses on. Somehow, Artemis using names that mean something to him, to Mac, to the both of them... it feels dirty. It feels wrong to let that be included as part of a movie that will be immortalized in its production. Letting the names Hugh Honey and Vic Vinegar get used would be, it would hit too close to home, is what it is. The names, albeit fake ones that they adopted for a scheme or two (and a couple of non-scheme related times just for fun), feel personal and special to them. It’s almost as if Artemis is using the names Mac and Dennis for the script itself.

“Well, you can’t–” Artemis sends a dirty look his way that scares Dennis–“I mean, you shouldn’t.”

“Why not?” asks Mac, who is surprisingly not jumping to Dennis’ defense on this. “I think calling the characters Hugh Honey and Vic Vinegar, makes like, sense. For the story.”

Dennis fully turns around to look at him, discombobulated. “How does calling our characters Hugh Honey and Vic Vinegar make sense for the story?”

The story, or, the movie, in question, is about two men who fall in love over and over again. Across different lifetimes, retaining the same souls (and names, somehow). Only, one of them knows their fate. And in fact, it’s his mission to make sure the love of his lives survives in time for them to be in a relationship for a hundred days. If he does that, and he never tells his love about what he knows, they’ll become immortals who live forever.

So yeah, it’s a stupid fucking plot for what Dennis is sure will be a stupid fucking movie. But he signed a contract, and honestly, even if he didn’t sign the stupid thing, he’d do the movie anyway because a few nights ago Mac went on some dumb drunk rant about how bummed he is when looking for gay movies because there’re barely any. And gay movies about men his age? Practically non-existent as far as Mac is concerned.

He cried.

So yeah, even though Dennis practically got scammed into doing this movie because he thought he’d be working with the mind behind Thunder Gun Express (he isn’t, that was a lie, he hasn’t even met the dude yet), even though this movie might fuck up his entire career and lead to him not being taken seriously as an actor... Dennis doesn’t really care. For some reason.

“I mean... we once called ourselves Hugh Honey and Vic Vinegar. And we pretended to be a gay couple, and it worked great, right?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say–“

“Anyway, since these two dudes are gay and gonna be in gay love and shit, why not call them Hugh Honey and Vic Vinegar? Which are like, proven good names for a gay couple?”

Dennis purses his lips. How can he argue with that? “Whatever. Let’s just start the damn script read.”

“Mac, have you ever heard of method acting?”

They’re on their way to Guigino’s. It’s their monthly dinner today, and they’re dressed for the occasion. Meaning, Dennis is wearing what he’d usually wear all the time anyway, and Mac is sporting a tie. Which is a clear sign that Mac is in love with Dennis, as he usually is, as he always was, always have, and always will be, and it’s so obvious Dennis could laugh on the spot.

He won’t though, he won’t. Because that would be fucking weird.

Anyway, point is, wearing a tie for dinner with someone despite never usually wearing a tie is definitely a key sign, a key indicator of feelings. That Mac has. For Dennis. But Dennis is dressed like he usually is, and Dennis is not wearing more cologne than he usually would, and that means that Dennis is being totally cool and chill about monthly dinner, no matter how excited he is for the damn thing, and no matter how hard he’s yearned for this day since their last one.

“Uh, duh! Of course I know what method acting is, dude. It’s like, a basic acting thing every legit actor who’s serious about the craft has got to know.”

Dennis side eyes him suspiciously. “Okay. So tell me, Mac. What’s method acting?”

He freezes up in his seat, acts like his tongue’s been caught mid-speech, and he looks completely dumbfounded. “I... don’t know.”

Dennis snorts, and begins to explain it to him. “Method acting is when you pretend to be your character, even when you’re off camera, so that you’re even more prepared to play your character when they call action.”

Mac’s eyes widen at this knowledge. “Wow. That, that’s good. I didn’t know you could do that!”

“That is good, and you can absolutely do that, Mac. We—can absolutely do that.”

Mac grins. “Don’t you mean Vic?”

Dennis chuckles, genuinely humored by that. “Hah! That’s a, that’s a good one. Nice work, man.”

“Thank you.”

“But we’ve gotta have some substance to our method acting. We need a mission, some kind of scene objective for our characters to reach.”

“What’re you thinking?”

Dennis shrugs. “Maybe something from the script?”

Mac crosses his arms in thought, before uncrossing them when he gets an idea. “Ooh! Remember that scene where Hugh and Vic go out to dinner as friends, but they get a free soup because the restaurant owner thinks they’re a couple and he likes gay people?”

“Are you suggesting we try to score a free meal at Guigino’s?”

“Well, maybe not a free meal, but we should try to get a free something.”

“Maybe you should try paying,” Dennis says pointedly, and watches as Mac looks away from him.
“I mean, you’re the one making the big time big shot Hollywood money, dude.”

“Well, I was paying for dinners even before that, and besides—“

“Oh look!” Mac taps Dennis on his arm multiple times as he stops the car. “We’re here, we’re here.”

“Jesus, Mac, calm down.”

“Okay, when are we starting this method acting thing? Because you keep calling me Mac, dude, and if it’s because you’re forgetting, that’s just bad method acting.”

Dennis ignores Mac’s insults. It’s coming from a place of inexperience anyway. Dennis is the real actor amongst the both of them here. “Relax. We’ll start this up for real the second we step into Guigino’s.”

Mac nods, and they make their way towards the restaurant after parking the car.

“Reynolds,” Dennis says confidently when he walks up to the hostess. “Party of two. I believe I made a reservation for a table far, far away from the kitchen door?”

“Hugh,” Mac starts off with a grin. It’s one of his more endearing smiles, that gets Dennis feeling lighthearted and free from his usual demons. “Who’s this Reynolds dude? And why’s our reservation under his name?”

The hostess looks at them weirdly but continues looking for their reservation.

“Oh, don’t worry Vic,” Dennis comforts, wrapping his arm around Mac’s shoulder briefly. “Reynolds is a friend of mine. I got him to reserve us a table at the best restaurant in the city.”

“Your table is ready, Mr Reynolds,” the hostess announces, “if you would follow me to your table?”

Dennis gets the shock of his life when they get to their table. Not because there’s anything wrong with the table setting, not because they got a table they didn’t expect to have, no, it has nothing to do with their table at all, actually, and everything to do with the table next to theirs.

“Mac? Dennis?”

“What are you two doing here?”

Sat two by two across one another are Artemis, Charlie, Dee, and Frank. Dennis has no idea what any of them are doing here. Of course, there’s the obvious surface reason of needing to eat dinner, but why would they come here on Mac and Dennis’ monthly dinner?

“I could ask you the same thing,” Dennis presses with a scowl, crossing his arms.

Uh... hey. People I’ve never met. What’s going on with you... people.”

All four of them look very confused by this, and the thought of them finding out about Mac and Dennis’ acting related project they had lined up for this evening sends him plunging into several pits of anxiety that have somehow been stacked one on top of the other, breaking and letting Dennis fall through them in quick succession. So yeah, it’s a very intense feeling, and he really doesn’t want them to know.

“Mac,” he whispers, barely leaning in. “Cut it out, we’re not doing that now.”
“Oh, okay. Sorry, Dennis.”

“What’s up with that?” Dee looks at them suspiciously.

“Oh, Dennis and I were doing this method acting thing—"

Dennis puts a carefully placed hand on his shoulder and secretly glares at him in order to get him to stop explaining. “Yes. It was a random acting exercise, but we’re not doing that anymore.”

“What the hell is a... method acting?”

Dee snorts, coming to a certain realization, before turning to explain to Charlie. “Well, all you have to know is that they’re role playing their movie characters today.”

“Not role playing—“ Dennis sternly emphasizes as the others lose their shit—“it’s method acting.”

“Method my ass,” Frank shakes his head with a laugh. “You’re playing boyfriend and boyfriend!”

“Are you calling each other Hugh and Vic? Mr Honey and Mr Vinegar?”

Dennis feels himself getting very hot, his face in particular, and he wants to explode like a sexually frustrated volcano in this restaurant but he knows that getting that angry would mean letting them win. And they can’t win, because they’re implying that Mac and Dennis are engaged in some gay role play fantasy here which is not what that is, and being the person who suggested what they’re misinterpreting as something illicit and gay, Dennis needs to clear the air.

Or at the very least, change the subject.

“Whatever, shut up. That’s not the point here, and really, what are you four doing here? You know it’s our monthly dinner today, did you plan this?”

“Dude, we don’t give a shit when you and Mac have your like, dates and all that.”

“They’re not dates! They’re not dating! It’s just two dudes, okay, two friends, roommates, who go out once a month to relax and have a good time.”

Dee bites into a piece of garlic bread. “Sounds like a date to me.”

“Forget it. I’m not explaining something that Mac and I have been doing for literal years—any further. What’s this? What’s going on with this?”

“They’re here to discuss casting issues with me,” explains Artemis. “So they’re bribing me with dinner.”

“Artemis, how do you have the power to cast people? You’re just the scriptwriter,” as soon as he sees her reaction to that, he wants to take it back.

“Excuse me? I have power beyond what your stupid, tiny man brain can imagine. The things myself and my body are capable of?” She titters, smiling slyly. “Could send your head into overdrive.”

“Also, she’s sleeping with the director.”

“Yes, and that.”

“I don’t get why you’re talking casting,” says Mac, scratching his head. “Don’t you guys already
“Exactly,” Dennis concurs. “You guys already have roles in the movie, idiots. Frank and Charlie are Merchant #1 and Merchant #2. And Dee, Dee you’re Girl #7.”

“Yeah,” Dee says, voice harsh. “I’m Girl #7. Who doesn’t say more than six words, and appears for one stupid scene in the entire movie!”

“Well,” Dennis shrugs, “yeah. I said I’d let you be in the movie, never said you could star in it like Mac and I am.”

“And I think that’s bullshit, because I am a star. This is, this is what I was supposed to be, what I was made to be! And Dennis, you taking that dream away from me already sucks a bag of dicks, so the least you could do is let Artemis let me have a bigger part. A chance to finally shine.”

They all look wide eyed in response to Dee’s outburst.

“Oh, uh, I don’t care about that,” Charlie says. “I just want more stuff to do in the movie.”

“Me too,” agrees Frank. “I just want more parts so I don’t get bored when you make us watch the damn thing.”

Dennis can’t deal with this anymore. He raises his hands up in surrender. “Sure. Whatever. Do whatever, I don’t care. Mac and I are here for our Monthly Dinner, and that’s what we plan on doing. Mac, let’s sit.”

“You sure you guys don’t wanna like, push the tables together? Feels kinda weird, with you sitting all the way over there.”

“We’re barely a foot away from each other, Charlie. If you wanna talk, just speak up a little.”

“Okay,” Charlie shrugs, looking at the space between the tables more times than he should. “Still feels kinda weird tho.”

“How’s your soup?” Mac asks as he drinks, the same soup, because they both ordered the same thing. Obviously, it’s mostly to prompt Dennis to drink some of his soup, since he hasn’t touched so much as his spoon. He’s listening to the ridiculous negotiations that’s going on at the other table and getting increasingly livid.

Dee’s negotiating her way into two speaking roles. Yes, you heard him, two speaking roles in the movie like it’s some goddamn play put up by a failing theatre with no budget. It makes absolutely no sense for Dee to play two roles. What’s worse about this is, as far as Dennis can recall, Dee wants two roles... from the same lifetime. You know how the movie takes place across multiple lifetimes following Hugh and Vic? Yeah, it would be one thing for her to create an unnecessary theme by playing two characters from two different lifetimes in the movie, but to play two characters? In the same lifetime? How would that be explained?

“Jesus, Artemis, I’ll just wear a disguise or something, relax!” Dee laughs that annoyingly long and dragged out cackle of hers. “No one’s gonna be able to tell it’s the same actress, and that performance, is the thing that’s gonna put me on the map.”
Dennis tightens his fist, he’s just about ready to explode and tell Dee that her disguises are absolute shit and that everyone will be able to tell that she’s one actress playing two roles and that it’s going to look completely stupid and she’s going to singlehandedly make the movie worse than it already–

Mac’s hand is around his wrist, squeezing it gently to bring Dennis back down from whatever high he was on, and then he’s opening up his fist and tracing the nail marks on his palm.

“Meet me in the bathroom.”

Mac gets up and leaves, and after a minute of debating and staring into space and resisting the urge to walk over to the other table and throttle Dee, Dennis gets up and goes to the men’s room to look for Mac.

He pretends that everything is fine, which, well, that’s certainly not true, but he is feeling better just being away from that situation. Mac is washing his hands in the sink. Either he’s been doing that all this time as a cover for being in here, or he actually had to use the bathroom.

“So uh... what’s up?”

“You know, we could always get a new table if you don’t like sitting next to them,” Mac brings up as if they’ve been engaged in conversation about this for a while now, instead of just starting a new talk from the top. “Guigino’s is pretty empty tonight.”

“How are we supposed to do that without them noticing?”

“Why do you think I called you here, dude? We let them think we left already, and we just sit somewhere far away, so they can’t see us. And besides, I don’t think they’d care if we moved.”

Dennis leans against the wall, trying to quell any and all thoughts inside his head. He’s still kinda pissed off, but Mac’s offering a really good solution here, and it is their monthly dinner, a night for Dennis to just relax and have fun with Mac. Why let it be ruined, right?

“Okay. Yeah, yeah, let’s do that.”

“You ready to go?”

Dennis shakes his head. “Not yet. Let’s... let’s do something. Get my mind off everything.”

“Okay,” Mac moves closer to Dennis, and he feels engulfed by heat, Mac’s heat, his own, he’s not sure. “What do you suggest?”

He smiles, lifting his head up to look at Mac. “Let’s pick up where we left off.”

“Ooh,” Mac rubs his hands together. “Pick what up?”

Dennis sighs, squeezing the space in between his eyebrows. “The, the method acting thing, you idiot.”

“Oh!” Mac nods his head. “Sorry, sorry. But like... how do we do that? Our plan earlier was to get a free dish as Hugh and Vic. We can’t really do that in the back of the men’s room.”

“Who said we had to stick to that?” Dennis says with a shrug in between. “The powerful thing about method acting, Mac, is the level of improvisation you can bring to it. You ever heard of improv?”

“Yeah, it’s like acting without a script or something–“ Mac says flippantly, without thinking, and
Dennis is actually impressed. He feels his heart race, because of how platonically impressed he is by this.

“Oh wow. Sorta, didn’t expect you to know that.”

Mac gets a real cocky look on his face at this. “Guess I’m full of surprises. Also I’m not a fucking idiot, Dennis.”

Dennis snorts, rolling his eyes. “Well, you know what improv is, but you didn’t have a clue about method acting. So, don’t blame me for drawing conclusions.”

“Whatever. So, what are we, uh, improv-ing today?”

“That depends, Mac,” Dennis drawls with a smirk, leaning against the wall. “Get in Vic’s head. What do you think he’d do with Hugh... if they were alone here in the men’s room?”

Mac moves in closer to Dennis and plants a hand on the wall next to his shoulder. “Depends. Why are they in here?”

“Who knows?” Dennis bites his lip. “Maybe they’re sneaking away. Maybe... dinner got hot and heavy and they came in here to take the heat off.”

“Wow,” Mac licks his lips now. “That’s a lot of heat.”

“Yeah,” Dennis agrees, barely thinking now. He can barely breathe, actually. He can barely hear, aside from the thumping of his heart. He’s very much overwhelmed by Mac, though. His smell, his proximity, everything. Method acting truly is something else. “It’s from the tension.”

“You think we should resolve it?”

Dennis pulls Mac in, practically drags him in for a kiss, because he feels like Hugh would take control like that, and yes, he’s kissing Mac as Hugh, no wait, Hugh is kissing Vic, Mac and Dennis aren’t involved in this at all, or at least, Dennis isn’t, he can’t claim to know Mac’s emotions and desires, at least not when they’re method acting like this. Dennis tastes the soup he didn’t eat on Mac’s tongue, he groans into the kiss and slides his fingers into Mac’s hair, Mac’s hair, that is standing in as the physical form of Vic’s hair, because this is still very much method acting, and Hugh is still very much kissing Vic. The only reason it feels as good as it does, the only reason Dennis’ head spins as much as it does, is because he’s feeling Hugh’s desire and emotions. Like he said, method acting.

They hear a door slam and Dennis pulls away. Method acting or not, it’s probably not the best idea to be making out with Mac in the men’s room at a restaurant that the gang is dining out in. Charlie and Frank could walk in at any moment, and if he’s being honest, so could Dee. She walks into the wrong bathroom all the time, and ever since they solved their bathroom problem, she barely notices bathroom signs anymore and walks into whichever restroom she prefers. And there’s no way Dennis will risk being in any compromising position with Mac again, that could risk a stupid arbitration filled with the gang’s nonsensical theories.

“What’s wrong?” Mac wipes his lips, and Dennis can almost make out where his fingers pressed into Mac’s face as he grabbed him by the cheek.

“Nothing’s wrong. I think I had my... fill. Of method acting. For today. Wanna head back in?”

Mac’s not sure what to make of Dennis’ sudden change in attitude, but he goes along with it.
“Sure.”

Dennis grabs his chair the second they get back to their table, actually heading straight for their table, in spite of Mac’s reminders that they’d get noticed by the gang that way. Dennis moves his chair to the gang’s table and sits with them. Immediately understanding that Dennis is abandoning their earlier plan, Mac decides to follow suit.

“Hey, what’s up?”

“Uh, nothing much,” Charlie looks at him very warily and seems to be hiding something on his phone, actually locking the whole device when Dennis showed up at their table. “What, uh, what are you doing here, man?”

“Eh, we got, it got boring on our own over there,” Dennis shifts in his seat, “so uh. How are casting negotiations going?”

Dee sighs at this. “Not great. I’m down to three roles in this movie instead of four.”

Dennis tries his best not to let his smile falter. He even pinches himself, which Dee sees and smiles at. “Cool. Cool, very cool. Uh... are they in different lifetimes?”

“Of course they are,” cuts in Artemis. “I can’t let her mess with the continuity of my movie.”

Somewhere in Dennis’ heart, huge roaring waves become a calm and peaceful sea. He nods. “That’s great.” He takes a bite of the soup he hadn’t touched earlier, but he already knows the taste. “Just... great.”

The next morning, Dennis wakes up to several missed calls from his publicist. And a lot of texts and calls from people on his managing team, actually. This can’t be good.

“What? What happened this time?”

She scoffs. “I could ask you the same question. Did you not see the pictures of you that got uploaded?”

“What pictures?” Whatever it is, Dennis isn’t sure he cares. He just wants to get back to sleep.


“W-What?” His lips tremble. They still taste of Mac somehow, and that taste rots into regret, and regret tastes putrid and awful. There’s no way this is happening. No way, uh-uh, not to him. Not with Mac. Not like this.

“Are you even taking this seriously? Oh god, just sit tight. I’m sending you the link.”

His thumb shakes as he clicks on it, and out pops way too familiar recreations of his and Mac’s moment in the men’s room. That technically, doesn’t even belong to them at all, because they were method acting as Hugh and Vic! Dennis feels the world flip on it’s axis. And then stop turning all together. It’s... that’s him alright. That’s the bathroom tile in the men’s room of Guigino’s. And that’s Mac, for sure, even though the media won’t recognize him. Unless people dig into any social
media platforms containing pictures of them. Then they’ll start connecting dots, and making assumptions and forming crazy theories, ones crazier than the gang could ever be capable of. It’ll be a nightmare, and everyone in the world will think he’s dating Mac, making out with Mac in bathrooms of restaurants.

What the hell will happen to him now?

Chapter End Notes

happy new year bbs!!!!! thank you for reading yet another 10.3k words of my bullshit!! hope you enjoyed it!! kudos & feedback of any kind are much appreciated <3
“MAC!”

His feet barely make it to the door.

“Mac,” he heaves, chest feeling heavy, hands numb, weakly gripping onto his phone, barely feeling his lips as Mac’s name desperately crawls out of them. “Mac, wake up!”

His fingers scramble to open his door, he somehow falls to the floor on his way out. “Mac!” He’s never called for his roommate this desperately before and he doesn’t, he’s not even sure why he needs Mac to be here, right now, by his side, so badly. Preferably holding him too. He’s not sure his legs are working right. His mind seems to have jumped into overdrive, like the back of his head’s been cut on a razor sharp edge. A pain seems to be spreading all over. He feels so hopeless, desolate. His career is over before it even began. He’s a failure, and this scandal is going to ruin his life.

“Mac, please!”

He pushes himself back up and Mac bursts out his door, clearly just having woken up, and he seems to be just as rushed as Dennis feels, “what? What, what’s going on?” he says just as desperate. “Dennis?”

He catches him by the shoulders and pulls him up steady. Dennis stays up, stays still, doesn’t feel like he’s about to go crashing down to the ground and curling up into a ball so he can sob for three hours straight. Why does he want to cry? Dennis feels like he knows why yet is completely confused as to why he’s having such a reaction all at the same time. He hands Mac his phone with the picture on it and he buries his face in the crook of his neck and inhales. Mac’s scent, a mixture of generic brand soap, his musk, the remnants of whatever cologne he last sprayed—all combined manage to calm him down somewhat. It’s the only thing that feels real right now. Mac, and the warmth of his body, is the only thing Dennis can understand right now.

“Uh... ‘God Said It’s My Turn’ Star Spotted Kissing Male Lover... oh wow,” Mac exhales, his hand running up and down Dennis’ back to soothe him. Dennis only grips on tighter to Mac. He doesn’t feel like bursting into tears anymore, but this whole situation is still a disaster he doesn’t understand.

“It’s everywhere,” he laments. “Everyone knows, my, my career is ruined.”

“Hey,” Mac forces Dennis out of their sudden and largely one-sided hug, to make him look Mac in the eye. “No. No, okay? Your career isn’t over, you’re gonna become rich, and famous, and we’re gonna buy, like, six boats. Fancy big ones too. I wanna hear you say that.”

Dennis takes a deep breath. “My career isn’t—but how did they know?” Mac sighs inwardly, as if to say, so close! “How did they find me, Mac, how did they take that photo, how did they even know it was me?”

Well, for one, it’s a very clear picture. Dennis and Mac are both clearly depicted in the image, and surely it must’ve been taken by someone who was at Guigino’s that night, someone who was in the bathroom and saw Mac and Dennis kissing. Someone who they missed.
“I don’t know.” But of course, both of them are too distraught (Dennis more so than Mac) to figure all this out right now. “I don’t—okay. Look. Don’t panic. Let’s look into the whole thing before we jump to any conclusions.”

“But there’s nothing to look into,” says Dennis. “It’s just this one article.”

Mac makes a face at Dennis. “I thought you said this was everywhere.”

“Well, yeah! It pretty much is! Just, this is the source, and everything else is just this, it’s, the same, the same thing. But one article is all it takes—”

“Dude, calm down! What’s one picture of us making out gonna do? Like, I’m sure half of Hollywood actors have pictures of them kissing other dudes, that are, are totally straight.”

“Like who?!?”

“Uh...”

Dennis starts panic pacing around the apartment. “Goddamn it. Goddamn it!” He glares at Mac now. “This is all your fault.”

Mac scoffs, unable to believe this. “My fault? How the hell is this my fault? Look, dude, I know you’re pissed and all—“

“You dragged me to the bathroom!”

“You’re the one who kissed me!”

“Yeah, and that wouldn’t have happened—if you didn’t drag me to the bathroom!”

Mac’s anger fully wakes him up now. “Who cares? Who cares dude? You’ve been kissing me left and right for the flimsiest of reasons these days, and frankly, I’m starting to think you like it!”

Dennis’ entire face goes red. Is it with rage? Is it out of embarrassment? “Shut up!”

“No, you shut up!” And then Mac’s taking those steps, leaning in, and Dennis is grabbing his face as he does, pulling him in, roughly, their lips slamming together, roughly, what they’ve wanted to do all night and all morning, happening again, finally.

Mac is right. This isn’t about love, or sex, or feelings, obviously, but Mac is right. There’s something about kissing the guy that feels so right to Dennis, and he doesn’t want it to stop. Kissing Mac is soft, but also rough around the edges and so, so addicting. There’s nothing gay or straight about any of it. Lips are lips, tongue is tongue, and Mac has proven, over the course of a few days, right from the first time Dennis has ever kissed him actually, that he’s a surprisingly good kisser. Those are just the facts. Why dispute them? The only thing that upsets Dennis about Mac being a good kisser is that he clearly didn’t learn it from him.

“Easy there, buddy,” Dennis mumbles, because good as this feels, Mac’s getting a little bitey. It’s probably the residual anger from yelling at each other, but Mac eases up, thereby indicating that he’s not upset at getting blamed for their scandal (which, is still Mac’s fault) anymore. So, good.

The kiss ends somewhat mutually, and they both almost don’t acknowledge that it happened at all.

“Hey,” says Mac, and Dennis looks up at him with an almost hopeful look on his face. “It’s gonna be okay.”
“Yeah,” but he doesn’t sound convinced.

“Frank’ll bail us out, right? He’ll uh, he’ll pay some guy, and that person will make this go away.”

“Right,” Dennis nods, but he’s not sure how. Then again, they’ve run into a lot of shit over the years and Frank has, to his credit, time and time again gotten them out of it scot free. And Dennis sure as shit didn’t know how he got them out of some of the more complicated messed up crap they did. So... maybe they’ll work something out when they see him? “Let’s go find the guy. Make this go away before it gets any bigger.”

“Yes,” Mac shoots his finger out at Dennis. “Let’s get out of here. Can you drive?”

“Sure, why not?”

“CHEESE MAKES THE SANDWICH WHAT IT IS AND YOU KNOW IT, YOU BASTARD!”

Mac and Dennis walk in on Charlie tossing what appears to be an entire crab at Frank. They realize a second later that the crab is fake, and that Charlie is a bad thrower, because the crab misses Frank by a long shot, and Frank comes back hard at Charlie with a block of fake cheese, hitting him in the head.

Two tables are set up, and Dee stands in the middle of this nonsense, looking exasperated until she sees Mac and Dennis. Oh god. It’s trial time. Again.

“Look who finally decided to show up,” she says resentfully, arms crossed on her high horse... like a bitch. “Where the hell were you?”

“We’re not here for—whatever this is–“ Dennis starts off, very confused by the whole drama, because when and how did this happen? “We need Frank’s help with something.”

“What’s going on?” Mac asks, walking up to the sandwich laid out next to Dee on a small stool, seemingly overloaded with cheese and... crab.

“Oh, Frank and Charlie are fighting for ownership over this sandwich–“

“It’s called the Cheesy Charlie, Dee, if you’re gonna explain what’s going on, do it right!”

“Fine! God!” Dee rolls her eyes. “Frank and Charlie came up with this sandwich—Charlie had the idea to add the cheese, Frank had the idea for the crab—so now they’re fighting over who’s the actual creator of the sandwich.”

Dennis sighs deeply. He has a feeling this is already going to be a very difficult day.

“That’s crazy,” says Mac, more invested in this Cheese VS Crab dispute than he should be, and feeding into their bullshit even though he should be helping Dennis get Frank’s help on making their scandal go away! Or, well, it’s his scandal. It’s definitely just his scandal now. No one even knows who Mac is anyway. Dennis is the one who’s in a successful movie. Mac is just a guy who’s starring in a movie that hasn’t even been filmed yet, alongside him! At the end of the day, Dennis is still the star. And Mac doesn’t care, couldn’t care less apparently! “Why don’t they just share credit for the sandwich?”
“Because Frank has no honor—“

“Because Charlie didn’t invent shit—“

They both glare angrily at each other after saying those cutting insults at the same time.

“Oh Jesus Christ,” Dennis groans. “Can we not talk about this right now?”

“No honor? You’re saying I have no honor?”

“Me? Didn’t invent—you’re the one who didn’t invent shit, Frank!”

“Oh my god, SHUT UP!”

Everyone stares at Dennis.

“Dude, what’s your problem? Only the parties on trial can get pissed,” reminds Charlie, quoting their Big Book of Paddy’s Arbitration Rules and Guidelines.

“Screw the trial—Frank, I need your help, I’m so screwed this time—“

“God, no, enough of that—“ Frank says, waving Dennis off—“help me with this first, and I’ll help you with your thing—“

Dennis is so frustrated right now, but he knows he has no choice. He can’t risk angering Frank, because he’s really probably the only way Dennis has out of this.

“Wait, what thing?” Dee asks, and Dennis feels a great sense of relief.

“Oh, good. You see—“

“No, no—“ Frank interrupts—“you make a good argument for my crab case, then you get to talk about your shit—“

“Fine!” Dennis sits down next to Frank. “I’m on Frank’s side.”

“Oh!” Mac raises his hand. “I wanna be the judge.”

Dee glares at him. “No you’re not, I’m the judge! You got here late, sucker, just represent Charlie or something.”

“But I can’t represent Charlie—“

“Why the hell not, dude?!”

“—or Frank, Dee, because I still don’t know what the hell really happened. Why are they even fighting over this? Don’t they love sharing everything and being on the same side and shit?”

Dee shrugs. “No idea. There’s probably some deeper underlying issue they’re pissed at each other about, that we’ll find out about sometime later in the trial.”

“Oh. Great.” Mac nods. “Okay, then, I guess I’ll sit with Charlie, but I would like to make it clear first—I am not on anyone’s side—“

“Good!” Dennis yells, definitely in anger. “Can we just start the stupid trial so we can get over with this?”
“Yeah, uh,” Mac clears his throat, “just to be clear again, not being on Charlie or Frank’s side means that I am on the fence, so I would like that indicated on the trial meter, which we should bring out, just saying—“

“We’re not using the trial meter, dummy,” says Dee, “there’s like five of us here, I’m sure we can keep track—“

“But that’s not the point—“

“Yeah! That is the point! Because I’m the judge, Mac, so what I say goes!”

Mac, now aggravated, stands up in protest. “Emergency trial! Me versus Dee, about who should get to be judge!”

“NO!” Dennis interrupts, standing up as well, huffing in disbelief. This is why he hates Mac. “No emergency trial, we stick to this trial, so I can argue for Frank to win, and get to talk about my thing!”

“Fine, then you decide who’s judge—“

Just because he knows Mac will start searching for the trial meter board the second he’s assigned even an inch of authority, and also because he’s a little pissed at Mac right now, he says “Dee’s the judge. Dee’s the goddamn—“

Mac makes a sound that is almost inhuman. “Dude! What the hell!”

“Don’t ‘what the hell’ me! I should be ‘what the hell’ing you! You’re supposed to be helping me to get Frank to help us!”

“Okay seriously, what is going on here?” Dee wonders out loud. “You two suing each other or something? Because we can just squeeze that in after—“

“No, no—“ Frank makes a crossing out gesture with his arms—“no talking about that until this is done and I win.” He looks at Dennis. “What kind of representative are you? Hurry up and argue for me already—“

“Frank, I can’t make a case for you if I don’t know what your case is!”

“My case is that I was making a perfectly good crab sandwich, and Charlie added cheese to it so now he’s acting like he invented the damn thing!”

Dennis sighs. “Okay fine. That’s true, you made the sandwich. So that means you invented it, and you win, right?”

“Objection!” yells Charlie.

“Oh,” says Dee. “Are you disputing that argument, Charlie?”

“No, it’s true, Frank was making a crab sandwich, and I did add cheese to it, but, the ‘Cheesy Charlie’ didn’t become the ‘Cheesy Charlie’ until after I added the cheese!”

Mac gestures to Charlie. “I like that, I think he’s right about the cheese thing. I mean, why name the sandwich ‘Cheesy Charlie’ if Charlie didn’t create the sandwich, right?”

“Objection!” Dennis raises his hand. “Irrelevant, a food can absolutely be named after a person, even if that person had absolutely nothing to do with its creation.”
“Like what? Like who?”

“Julius Caesar! The Caesar Salad! Now he definitely had nothing to do with the making of that salad, but it’s named after him anyway—“

“No, dude, no—you’ve got it all wrong—Julius Caesar did invent the Caesar Salad! Yeah, like, he fried up some croutons and dumped it in his veggies, and his friends hated it which is why they all got together and stabbed him! That’s stone cold facts about history right there, dude!”

Mac and Charlie exchange high fives, and Dennis groans. “There is no way that happened.”

“Google it! If you don’t believe me, just google it dude.”

“Actually, it says here that the Caesar Salad wasn’t invented by Julius Caesar—“

“What!” Mac exclaims. “That is crazy talk, okay, you know what? It’s fake! You can’t believe everything you read on the internet anyway—“

“Or maybe facts are just facts, Mac,” Dennis says smugly, giving him a carefully calibrated wave of his eyebrows. When Mac averts his eyes, Dennis smirks and licks his lips. “Just admit you’re wrong.”

“Ooh, Dennis, I don’t think you wanna be saying that—“ Dee cuts in—“cuz it says here that you’re also wrong. The invention and naming of the Caesar Salad was not inspired by Julius Caesar in any way,” she holds up her phone and Dennis scowls as he reads.

“Goddamn it, that can’t be right,” Dennis scoffs, because he knows he’s not wrong, but arguing that the internet is would just lump him in the same category as Mac. “Well, whatever, either way, it doesn’t prove that having your name in the name of a sandwich means you invented it.”

“But it also doesn’t prove that Frank invented the Cheesy Charlie,” Mac points out, jutting his finger out, and Dennis sighs. He does have a point.

“Fine,” he relents. “Dee, strike this line of questioning from the record.” He looks at Charlie. “Dude. Why can’t you just let Frank have this one? What good would come of you being the inventor of this sandwich? It’s not like you had the funds to make it work, or get this sandwich out there. It’s not like you’d move out even if you did get enough money to leave Frank.”

Charlie sighs. Both he and Frank look sad at this notion. “Dude, that’s not why I’m pissed, man.”

“Then what is it?”

“Yeah Charlie, you’re the one who called for this trial anyway,” says Dee.

“Yeah, why’re you so mad at Frank? You two almost never get mad at each other.”

“He made fun of the cheese in the Cheesy Charlie, okay?!” Charlie blurts out, almost as if he didn’t want to admit it, as if saying it, and reminding himself of what can only be assumed as Frank’s hurtful words, makes this all worse. “He hates that there’s any cheese in the Cheesy Charlie!”

“Charlie, when did I say that?” Frank asks, with a tenderness that Dennis wishes could be extended to him too, but like anything he’s ever felt, he stuffs this feeling deep down and doesn’t try to think about it anymore.

“I saw you, dude, I saw you with Artemis, and you were eating Cheesy Charlies, and then she said
that the cheese smelt like crap, and you agreed with her and said you were gonna remove it!” He huffs, looking on the verge of tears. “Just admit it, Frank, you were gonna remove the cheese from the Cheesy Charlie.”

“Charlie, you got it all wrong. That story’s all kinds of twisted up. Artemis wasn’t talkin’ about the Cheesy Charlie, she was talkin’ about the cat poop in our apartment.”

“Cat poop?”

Dennis sighs. He can’t believe what’s going on right now.

“Yeah. Bunch ‘a cats got into the apartment again and left their shit, but I didn’t see it till Artemis and I were eating the Cheesy Charlies. I was talking about throwing out the cat poop, Charlie.”

Charlie’s bottom lip trembles. “So... you don’t actually wanna like, take the cheese out? Of the Cheesy Charlie?”

“Why the hell would I do that?” says Frank. “The cheese brings out the flavor in the crab, Charlie, that’s what makes it so good–“

“Oh yeah, he’s right about that,” says Mac, who’s already chomping down on a Cheesy Charlie, because apparently Charlie and Frank have made plates of the stuff. Dennis just about tells Mac to watch his carbs since filming starts soon but ultimately decides to keep his mouth shut because Mac could literally not be in better shape right now. “This is so good.”

“The Cheesy Charlie is nothin’ without the cheese, Charlie.”

“You really think so?”

“I know so, buddy.”


Dennis lights up. Wait. If Charlie withdraws this case, that means he doesn’t have to represent Frank anymore. “Yes! Oh, this is great,” he gets up, “Frank can I talk about–“

Frank seems open to this, is in a good mood right now. “Sure thing. What’s goin’ on with you?”

“Dennis and I got caught in some gay scandal,” Mac explains as he walks over to them, still eating the Cheesy Charlie. Which, well, is kind of rude of him. Not the eating, the explaining of what happened before Dennis could start. It’s not like Dennis is exactly clamoring to tell this story, but Mac was so distracted by Charlie and Frank’s whole stupid case, and didn’t do a thing to help Dennis get Frank’s attention and help, so the fact that he’s jumping in now to tell this story is just straight up unfair.

“Wait wait wait, what happened now?” Dee asks, looking freaked out about this. Oh right. That stupid bet she and Charlie has, Jesus Christ.

“Relax, Mac and I aren’t dating, we just got caught kissing–“ he purses his lips, this still feels so weird to say to the gang–“look, just. Look for yourselves.”

He whips out his phone and unlocks it, where the article still is, and he shows it to the rest of the gang.
“Look, I know what it looks like, but Mac and I were just—”

“Method acting,” Mac finishes, done with his sandwich apparently, now nursing a cold beer. “So we’re not dating, not kissing for fun, or any of that crap,” he searches for Dennis and gives him a wink. Right. That kiss in their apartment earlier. Mac thinks he’s lying for Dennis even though technically everything he said is the truth. Well, was the truth, anyway.


“That—that’s what now?”

“What are you saying?”

“I took that picture, man. Saw you two making out in the bathroom, and like snapped a pic, so I could rub it in Dee’s face and get that ten bucks.”

“Oh please,” Dee rolls her eyes. “I wouldn’t have taken that at face value. I’d just take you to court again—“

“Dee, shut up,” Dennis heaves. He’s having a hard time breathing. It’s probably all the potential anger boiling inside of him.

“What? No, dude! I don’t even know how I’d do something like that.”

A simpler person overhearing would assume Charlie means he wouldn’t have morally been able to do such a thing to Mac and Dennis (but mostly Dennis, of course, once again, no one cares about Mac, he’s not famous yet), but Dennis knows Charlie literally doesn’t know how he’d go about doing such a thing.

“So how’d it get up online?”

“Maybe someone hacked into his iCloud?” Mac offers, but that seems worse to Dennis somehow, as well as highly implausible. Why would anyone be looking at Charlie’s iCloud to find dirt on him?

“I don’t think Charlie has his stuff backed up to the Cloud, dude.”

“What’s an iCloud?” asks Charlie.

“Okay. So now we have no idea how this scandal started,” sighs Mac.

“I don’t care how the scandal started, Mac,” retorts Dennis. “I care about making it go away,” he turns to Frank. “So can you help me?”

“One thing I don’t get though,” interrupts Dee. “Is why you never showed me that picture,” she continues, “I mean, didn’t you want ten bucks?”

“Well, yeah, I was going to, but after I sold the picture to this guy outside the Guigino’s bathroom for fifty bucks I figured I didn’t need your money yet—“

“Wait, Charlie, you sold that picture?”
“Why the hell would you do that?”

Charlie scoffs. “What, what was I supposed to do, say no to fifty dollars? It’s fifty dollars, dude! Imagine the amount of cat food I could buy with that kind of money.”

“Are you insane?! You traded my career, for, for some cans of cat food? What is wrong with you?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say career,” Dee interjects between clenched teeth. “One action movie and one gay in progress movie isn’t what—“

“Oh, Dee, shut up!” he turns to Frank. “Just, just please help me. Make this go away, you kind of have to take responsibility anyway, since Charlie started this, and, and he’s your roommate and all.”

“How am I supposed to make this go away?”

“Throw,” Dennis exhales. “Throw money at it, or something. I don’t know. Use your connections? Please, just help me out here. For once, just—I can’t let this ruin me.”

Frank averts his eyes, as if trying to escape from the look in Dennis’. “I’ll call Artemis and we’ll work something out.”

Dennis nods. He doesn’t know how Artemis is supposed to be of any help at all in this matter, but if Frank’s willing to help him make this go away, Dennis isn’t going to question his methods.

“Why do you care so much anyway?” Dee asks. “I thought you hated acting.”


“Fine, then why care about a scandal? Just focus on acting.”

“And let,” Dennis takes a deep breath, “and let millions of people think I’m gay?”

Dee snorts. “Oh please, don’t flatter yourself. There is definitely not a million people out there who know who you are.”

“Yeah,” agrees Charlie. “Besides, like, what’s wrong with people thinking you’re gay, dude?” He looks at Mac. “Shouldn’t you be all over this?”

“Well, as a gay man,” Mac starts off with words they’ve heard all too many times, but in a somewhat solemn sounding tone that they’re not used to. “I think I’d be scared. I don’t want random strangers knowing stuff about me. Like, knowing I’m gay and all that.”

“Yeah,” Dennis assents. “And I especially don’t want people thinking that because I’m not gay.”

“Mmhmm,” he hears someone say very patronizingly, but he’s not about to have that fight.

The door to Paddy’s swings open and Artemis walks in, which, well, isn’t surprising, since they all heard Frank call her on his cellphone, but as time blind as they all can be, Dennis is pretty sure she’s walking in here a lot sooner than they all expected her to.


“Is it just me,” says Mac, “or did you get here like... really fast?”
“I was in the area,” says Artemis, “and yes, I’ve heard about your little scandal. I found out about it this morning.”

Dennis scoffs. “This morning? And what, you didn’t think to call, text, offer any solutions?”

“What solutions?” she sits down. “Why, I don’t see how this is a problem.”

“Are you kidding me?”

“Dennis wants this scandal to go away because he doesn’t want people to know he’s gay,” Dee finishes with a pointed smile.

“Yes, that’s—wait. No!” He glares at Dee. “I don’t want people to think, not know, for the last time, I’m not gay, Dee!”

“Sure.”

He sighs, rolling his eyes and turning back to Artemis. “Look, I don’t want people thinking I’m gay, because it’s not true—“ he gives Dee a quick glare again—“so I need to make this go away. Do you have any idea how to go about doing that?”

Artemis sighs, and her eyes glaze over in thought. “I suppose I do know what to do about this.”

“What is it?” asks Mac. “Who do we have to throw money at?”

She mostly ignores his question, by not really addressing it. “We need to announce the movie, so folks know the gay kissing that took place was for a purpose.”

“Yeah, why the hell were you two kissing again?” Charlie asks, in between bites of a Cheesy Charlie. “You guys were just making out in the bathroom, what’s up with that?”

“We were uh, practicing.”

“Yes,” Dennis sighs, knowing very well how flimsy it all sounds, but his best bet right now is to be vague and hope no follow up questions are asked. “We were. So how does announcing this movie work? Do we release a press release? Does my managing team respond to the accusations?”

“I mean... is anyone even accusing you of being gay? You’re making it sound like some kinda crime and that’s real homophobic, bro.”

“Charlie, shut up,” Dennis says with a cutting voice. “You’re the reason any of this is even happening.”

“Fine, whatever dude,” he widens his eyes, continuing to eat.

“Getting the authorization to make a press release or a movie poster could take a while,” she explains. “We haven’t even begun to shoot the movie. It’s far too early to start promoting anything. My advice? Just let your people announce that you’re working on this movie and clear it all up when you appear on a talk show. Until then... you keep a low profile.”

“Low profile,” Dennis repeats. “Okay. I can do that. Play the long game, right. That’ll be... that’ll be fine. Adequate, maybe.”

“Or,” Dee interjects, “you could create a social media account, and address the whole thing yourself.”
“Ooh, not doing that,” Dennis shakes his head. “Don’t trust it.”

Dee rolls her eyes. “Jesus, fine, whatever, have it your way.”

“Ooh!” Mac lights up. “I have an idea. What if you like, made a Twitter, or an Instagram account, so you could tell your fans the truth!”

“Oh, yeah! You could post like, a picture, of you and some chick, or like, a tweet? Was it? And say something like: Not Gay, right?” Charlie adds on.

“The ‘Not Gay’ tweet feels a little too on the nose for me, but other than that...”

Dee sighs. She’s been through this rodeo far too many times. “Let me guess: you love the idea, huh?”

“Where the hell are we?” Dennis looks around at his surroundings. “Actually, scratch that. I know where we are. My question is why did you bring me to a sunglass kiosk?”

“For disguises!”

“For what now?”

“I mean,” Mac explains. “You wanted a low profile, right?”

Dennis sighs, because there’s no way Mac is serious. “Sunglasses? You think people aren’t gonna recognize me because I’ve got opaque glasses on?”

Mac shrugs. “I mean... yeah. How else were you gonna disguise yourself?”

He has a point. “Let’s... try on some shades.”

“Yes!” Mac whoops, making his way over to the nearest standing rack of sunglasses, and he grabs a pair, handing it to Dennis. He then tries a pair on himself.

“These look horrible,” Dennis frowns as he looks at himself in the mirror. “I’m not taking these,” he feels genuinely upset at the heart-shaped sunglasses Mac is wearing and smiling like a goof at. It’s weirdly endearing, but it’s terrible that he’s wearing those sunglasses at all. “And you’re definitely not wearing those.”

“Aw, why not?” Mac whines as Dennis pulls the atrocious thing off his face and browses the kiosk for sunglasses that don’t make him want to throw up. “The sides of that thing are rainbow colored.”

“Well, I’m not kissing you in those glasses–” Dennis freezes up when he realizes what he’s just said–“I mean...”

“Since when were we gonna kiss in our disguises?” Mac watches him like a hawk, his voice teasing, his crossed arms not helping because his arms look good crossed and Dennis doesn’t want to deal with that right now.

“I mean, just. Hypothetically. Why wear a disguise at all if I’m not going to be kissing anyone?”
Mac raises an eyebrow. “True. But like... why kiss me?”

Sliding a random pair of sunglasses on, Dennis pulls Mac into a slow, tender kiss. He tastes the remnants of beer and cheese on Mac’s tongue and drinks in his lips, feeling the weight of the world fade away with every small touch. When he’s made his point, he pulls away.

“Because I like kissing you, dumbass.”

Mac stands pressed against the wall like Dennis is still pushing him against it, and when one says ‘wall’ one really means ‘rows upon rows of sunglasses that could fall off their display if Mac isn’t careful’. Dennis feels powerful. Mac feels weak. He has his lips pouted as he exhales, shaking his head like he can’t believe any of this is real.

“Wow. Those sunglasses really are ugly.”

Dennis smacks Mac in the chest, which nearly backfires because it reminds Dennis of how firm and sturdy it is and he really does not need a reminder. Mac goes to the gym. He works out every part of his body religiously now. Whatever. He gets it. Everyone gets it. Mac is jacked as shit. And annoying as shit too, so, nothing too new.

“Shut up,” he scowls, putting the sunglasses he had randomly picked earlier back on the shelf. “I’m never kissing you again.”

“Stop being a pissy little bitch, I was kidding,” Mac insists, prodding Dennis on the shoulder. “You know I’d kiss you no matter what sunglasses you’re wearing.”

“Wow,” Dennis leans against this random glass counter that also contains sunglasses. He bites down on his lower lip then quickly glides his tongue over it. “You sure? Any pair?”

Mac leans in, planting his hand on the counter and bringing himself close. Dennis feels his skin burn, he aches so good it hurts. Then again, he’s a man well acquainted with pain. “Oh yeah,” Mac says, voice slow and low. “Any pair.”

“Even the ones where the lenses are shaped like dicks?”

Mac chuckles, and his laughter could outshine the sun. “That can’t be right, dude. There’s no way there’s dick sunglasses.”

“You sure about that?”

Dennis pushes Mac off his body when he moves away from the counter, he pulls out the pair of sunglasses that had caught his eye during his search for appropriate pairs he and Mac could wear. He holds it up and shows it to Mac, who scoffs.

“Those aren’t shaped like dicks.”

Dennis looks at him weirdly. “How are they not shaped like dicks? There is clearly something very penis-like about the shape of these lenses–“

“No, dude! Those are biceps,” he insists, and Dennis proceeds to sigh.

“Mac. This is like the party mansion invitation thing all over again. I know better now, Mac, why can’t you? These sunglasses,” he holds them up to Mac’s face, “are dick-shaped.”

Mac stares at the sunglasses for a good second before his eyes widen in realization. “Oh crap,
“You’re right.”

“Of course I am.”

Mac snatched the sunglasses away from Dennis. “I’m taking these. I’m buying them.”

“The hell you are, put them back–“


“Yes, Mac, we all know you’re gay. But–“ Mac has this pleading look on his face that’s so puppy like, and for someone who hates dogs Dennis hates how well it’s working on him–“fine, you idiot. You can get those. But find another pair too, because I’m not letting you wear them in public.”

Mac unleashes himself on the sunglass rack when Dennis spots a more elegant selection, shades that would more perfectly frame his chiseled face, accurately display the features crafted by the gods. They are of a pricier range, but Dennis can afford to splurge. He taps Mac on the shoulder.

“Let’s go over there,” he says, fingers circling around Mac’s wrist because let’s be real, he doesn’t trust Mac to follow, and he feels more in control getting to guide Mac to his destination.

“Oh wow,” Mac marvels as they lay their eyes on the more branded products. “These look... crazy expensive.”

“We can afford it,” he says, and Mac quietly notes with a smile that this means Dennis is paying for everything again. He picks out a pair for Mac and passes it to Mac, who tries them on without question. Dennis takes a little more deliberation before he settles on an elegant pair on his own.

He tries it on and looks in the mirror, pleased with his reflection, and turns to face Mac. “How do I look?”

Mac licks his lips. “Like you’re begging to be kissed.”

They lock lips again in the kiosk. Mac tastes of familiarity and relief, Dennis delights in kissing Mac like it’s a job he’d do for free, snakes his hand up Mac’s back. It feels good curling his hand up like that, pressing his hand down on his back like that. “You really think I look good?” he asks hastily in between kisses, and Mac kisses him back again.

“I always do,” and Dennis feels passion pour into his heart, his chest tightens and feels full, he channels this into kissing Mac, moving on from his lips rather quickly and attacking his jaw, biting and making his way down to his neck, sucking hard on a spot that has Mac groaning.

“I’m telling you, Ma’am, either there’s two blind guys making out back there, or they’re weirdos who like putting on sunglasses to make out!”

Dennis pulls away from Mac and they both react in fear when they hear the approaching footsteps and voices.

“Haul ass, dude, haul–“

They ditch their sunglasses and off they go, taking to their heels and running as fast as they can.

When they’ve gotten far enough away to be safe, they’re laughing, and Dennis throws his arm around Mac’s shoulder. “So much for disguises, huh?”

“Eh, we’ll find another kiosk,” Mac waves his hand dismissively, “they’re like hundreds out there.
But you know what’s one of a kind?”

“What?”

“This.” Dennis gasps when Mac pulls out the dick-shaped sunglasses from his pocket, laughing at his petty crime.

“God, no way, you stole that?”

Mac shrugs. “We steal crap all the time anyway.”

“That’s true. But then we’re also supposed to keep a low profile.”

“Eh,” Mac waves his concerns away. “It’ll be fine, dude. We always get away with this stuff.”

“How the hell do you have so many board games?” Dee grumbles as she unloads a literal stack from the shopping cart they found abandoned on the street and decided to use. “And why did I agree to help you move them from your mom’s house?”

“I didn’t ask you to do shit, Dee, you nosed your way in again. Seriously, like, you gotta find some friends.”

“You’re my friend, you jackass,” she sighs as she unloads yet another stack. “And fine, maybe I did nose my way in a little. But why the hell does your mom want all these games out the house? She’s had them for what, decades? Why now?”

“I dunno,” Charlie shrugs, turning around to start unloading their second shopping cart. “She said somethin’ uh, about making space for something for Mrs Mac, I don’t—“ he sighs—“whatever, who cares? If I don’t get my games out the house, Mrs Mac’ll probably move out, and then my mom’ll go back to bugging me every two days again. Don’t want that.”

“Yeah, sure,” Dee sinks in thought. “You ever feel like your mom and Mac’s mom are like, lesbian lovers are something?”

Charlie prods Frank on the leg. “Yo, Frank. Mind helping out here? God—“ he turns back to Dee—“did you say something?”

“Yeah, I asked if your mom and Mac’s mom are lesbian lovers—“

He responds in the most scarred way at this. “Eugh! What the hell, Dee?”

“Bonnie’s no lesbian,” Frank comments, foot aimlessly kicking at a board game to move it. It seems he basically has little to no intention of helping. “I banged her, remember?” He laughs to himself. “More than once if you get my drift.”

He elbows Charlie repeatedly, who moves away in disgust. “Shut up, Frank, I don’t wanna hear about you, and my mom, and banging, none of that crap! Okay?” He looks at Dee. “And I don’t wanna hear about my mom,” he makes a disgusted face again. “Banging! Mrs Mac. I’m pretty sure she hates gays or something like that. Pretty sure they both do. Also, Dee, seriously, since when did you care so much about lesbians?”
Dee goes red in the face. “Wha... what are you talking about? I don’t,” she laughs nervously, “I don’t give two dicks about lesbians. Okay? And besides, Frank, banging Bonnie doesn’t mean she’s not into women. I was on that flight with her, I thought I noticed something. Something dyke-y.”

Charlie rolls his eyes. “Takes one to know one.”

“Shut up.” Dee walks over to the piles and stacks of board games and various other games that crowd around Charlie’s already very overcrowded apartment. “Seriously though, you can’t be planning on keeping all of these games. How did you even get so many?”

“Some of them are Mac’s,” Charlie shrugs, moving the trolleys out of the apartment. “He gave me some stuff he got sick of, stuff he had no space for, and sometimes he’d bring a game he really liked for safekeeping and forgot all about the game.”

Dee makes a face. “Safekeeping?”

“Oh yeah. Sometimes Mac’s dad would get pissed and smash whatever was in sight, and Mac, well, he’d gotten a few games smashed, so yeah, he’d bring them to my house and I’d... keep em for him. Out of reach from his dad and all that.”

Oh. That’s a new dark insight into Mac’s childhood. The way Charlie talks about it makes it seem like even he normalized the way Mac’s father treated his son. She doesn’t want to think about that too deeply.

“How are you even planning on keeping all of these games?” she says to change the subject.

“By keeping them,” he says simply, like there’s any space to walk in their apartment.

“You can’t possibly keep all of these games,” she insists, looking around for something to make her point, settling on a few boxes of different versions of Monopoly. “I mean, how many of these do you need? They’re basically the same game.”

“They’re all different and fun in their own way!” Charlie argues. “Come on, Frank, back me up here.”

“Sorry, Charlie,” Frank shrugs. “We can keep some of this stuff, but some of these things gotta go.”

Charlie groans. “Fine. But you gotta be fair about this.”

“How do we go about doing that?” asks Dee.

He gets a wide almost treacherous grin spread across his face. “By playing all of them.”

“Uh uh, no! You know you gotta buy Kentucky Avenue before you even think about forming that dick!”

“Aw crap!” Frank groans as his pirate pops out the barrel. “Just lost pirate roulette again.”

“Ooh, ooh! That means you gotta drink! And you lose your railroads! Also Charlie, seriously, help
Okay... so they did not intend for this to happen, but at some point, not sure what point but at some point, trying to play every single game turned into... trying to play every single game at once. It is unclear how that happened, but the three of them seemed to have either consciously or unconsciously mixed the games together to form one huge, very confusing game, where the rules all blend together and nothing really means anything anymore.

Drinking was probably involved. Heavily. Obviously, they either drank to make playing the games more fun or they straight up came up with a drinking game right from the start. Either way, it’s a big, big mess.

So what’s the game? Oh, yeah, right, it’s simple really. They’re playing a mixture of Monopoly, Scrabble, Pirate Roulette, and Snakes and Ladders. The way the game works is like this:

You start off with Monopoly, as one would. Every time you land on a property, or anything you’re allowed to buy and own, you have to stick a knife into the pirate roulette barrel. If the pirate doesn’t pop up, you’re safe and can buy properties. If it does, you’re shit out of luck, huh? But yeah, you have to drink, and you also lose your railroads (if any). If you buy a railroad or an entire color set of properties, you get to pick a letter out of the scrabble bag. The goal of the game is to form a cuss word. Simultaneously, every time you roll the dice in Monopoly, you also get to move on the Snakes and Ladders board (they clearly added this when they got bored of the game moving too slow). If you crawl up a ladder, you get a letter. If you go down a snake, you lose a letter. And you also have to drink. You lose a letter in scrabble when you lose any of your railroads or properties, meaning you can’t sell them off if you go bankrupt.

“Boardwalk Avenue? Okay, that’ll be five coins and one ring, Frank.”

Charlie is banker. He insisted on it, because these are his board games, but also Dee thinks it’s a bad idea. Charlie can barely read, let alone count. Or do math convincingly in any way. Plus he’s replaced the Monopoly money with rings and coins.

“Wait wait wait—“ she interjects—“I thought we agreed that Boardwalk Avenue was five rings and two coins. You’re forgetting how much everything is supposed to cost, see, this is why we should’ve just used—“

“Dee, what did I say, like, five minutes ago?”

Dee rolls her eyes. “Your board game... your rules.”

“Thank you! So can you please roll the damn dice? It’s your turn, Dee, so can you please goddamn hurry it along? Jesus, Dee, you’re really boning me here, it’s like—“

“Alright, alright!” she huffs in resentment. “I’ll roll the damn dice, just hand it over.”

She knows it’s not best to fight Charlie when she’s so close to winning the game. She just needs the letter ‘D’ and then, like Charlie said earlier, she’ll form that dick. Right now though, she’s just got an ‘ick’ and that’s not fun. Although it’s very representative of dicks. They’re all very icky, aren’t they?

“Yes! Railroad. I’m buying it, bitch,” she claws at the scrabble bag and picks a letter as she crosses her fingers. “Oh goddamn it. A ‘P’? That just forms pick! That’s useless to me!”

She fails to realize that from her previous failed attempts to get the letters for ‘dick’, she’s actually picked up the letters ‘U’, ‘S’, ‘S’, and ‘Y’.
Someone is pounding on the door and they all groan. It’s like they’re hungover already.

“The door’s unlocked, dude!” Charlie says in frustration.

Frank pulls out his gun, cocking it and aiming it at the door.

“Oh, goddamn it, Frank!” Dee’s eyes are wide. “Why are you pulling that out?”

“Who knows what kinda nasty yahoo’s poundin’ on the door right now?” Frank says, waving the gun around, which makes Dee roll her eyes.

Dennis barrels through, eyes filled with worry like they haven’t seen them be in a... long while.

“Guys, guys!”

“Dude, you look like crap.”

“Yeah, what the hell’s going on? You’re never here these days,” Dee crosses her arms. “Definitely not unannounced. And definitely not without—“

“Mac’s in jail!”

“What?”

“Oh. So?”

“So?” Dennis chokes. “So, I need your help to get him out! I don’t have, I don’t have enough money for bail, and your apartment was closer than the ATM.” He appeals to Frank especially when he says this. “Please, Mac needs our help.”

“Dude,” Charlie interrupts. “What are you talking about? We get arrested all the time—Mac gets arrested all the time—“

“This is serious!” Dennis interrupts, angry. “Mac isn’t gonna get out with a, a slap on the wrist or anything this time, he’s facing actual charges. I think he might have to go on trial.”

“But we go on trial all the damn time, what’s the big deal?”

“The big deal? The big deal is that Mac could be facing actual jail time! The big deal is that whoever’s pressing charges, isn’t doing it for money! This isn’t about a, a series of parking tickets, or a stupid fine, this is serious, so please!” He sighs. “Come to the station with me.”

“Oh wow,” Charlie chokes. “I am too drunk for this.”

“What did Mac even do?” asks Dee as she picks her stuff up. She will never admit it, but the thought of any of them going to jail... terrifies her. She knows the thought of Mac going to jail however, terrifies Dennis most of all.

“He stole a dick-shaped pair of sunglasses.”

“God, how long more do we have to wait?”
“Can we just let Mac go to jail? I mean, do the crime, do the time, right?” Dee laughs, to Dennis’ unamused face. Jesus. Him being secretly in love with Mac yet unable to realize it in anyway is a real buzzkill.

“Mac would probably like it there anyway,” Frank comments. “All the dudes. He’d go nuts.” Dennis glares at him. “Except Mac can’t go to jail whether he likes it or not, Frank.”

“Why not?”

“Because we’re filming a movie together!”

Dee snorts. “Oh yeah. Because this is all about Mac not ruining your career.”

“Of course it is. I can’t be costars with a recently convicted criminal.”

“I still don’t get it, dude,” Charlie says, staring aimlessly at the ceiling.

“Don’t get what? What about this don’t you get?”

“Like, dick-shaped sunglasses. How does that work? How do you get the whole sunglass to like, be a dick and all?”

Dennis takes a deep breath. He can’t believe this is the shit he has to deal with right now. “The lenses are shaped like dicks, Charlie.”


“No it doesn’t,” Dee scoffs. “How does that make sense? What about the lenses of a pair of sunglasses is, is remotely dick-shaped? You’d have to make a really short and thick dick. And that’s just disgusting.” She sighs. “I mean, I guess they were screwed from the start. The sunglasses would look like shit no matter what dick they were using as a frame of reference. All dicks are kind of ugly when you think about it, actually—”

“Can we not talk about this?” Dennis blurts out, distressed. “I’d just like to not talk about the dick-shaped sunglasses that Mac presumably stole.”

Charlie snorts. “He didn’t ‘presumably’ steal it, dude, he actually stole it. That’s why we’re here, right?”

“Jesus, Charlie, will you shut up?” He scowls at the man. “We’re in a police station.”

“Yeah, Charlie. Don’t say anything that’ll indict Mac for sure. Or coming here would’ve been a waste of time.”

A cop walks in front of them, and they all jab at and pointlessly tell each other to shut up.

“Mr Reynolds?”

Dennis raises his hand. “That would be me. We’re here to pay,” he can’t help but crack a smile. “Ronald McDonald’s bail.”

The rest of them all break out into giggles. It’s still funny, after all these years. It just never gets old.

“Actually, I’m afraid you can’t do that yet.”
“What? Why not?”

“You’re wanted for questioning, Dennis Reynolds. You’re being charged for aiding and abetting a crime.”

“This is insane. This is crazy! I didn’t do anything, Mac didn’t do anything! And you’re not gonna get anything out of us, so forget about making your quotas and arrest someone else.”

“Mr Reynolds,” a lady officer sits across from him. Great. She probably hates the patriarchy or something. This just makes everything harder for him. “Please give me a detailed account of the events that took place last evening.”

Jesus Christ. “It’s simple, lady. Mac and I were at a sunglass kiosk, trying out sunglasses. We thought we were gonna get chased out by the manager, so we ran. Mac must’ve forgot he had the sunglasses in his pocket, didn’t think to check, and accidentally brought it all back to the apartment. I’m sure he would’ve returned it if he knew. Can I go now, please?”

“No so fast, Mr Reynolds.”

He groans.

“What else could you possibly have to ask me?”

“Several questions, actually. And god knows how many follow-up ones.”

“Fine. Let’s get this over with.”

“Why did you think you were going to get kicked out by the manager of that sunglass kiosk?”

“I—” he purses his lips. Oh well. He might as well say it. There’s gonna be witness accounts and probably some surveillance footage if he doesn’t. “I was... kissing Mac.”

She nods. “Thank you for your honesty. Now, what is your relationship with Mr McDonald?”

His breath catches in his throat. “Uh, we uh, we’re friends. Yeah.”

“And you... live with Mr McDonald?”

“Yes.”

“But his name is not on the lease. So I assume, this is a new arrangement.”

Jesus. “No, it’s not a new arrangement. Mac and I have been living together for years.”

She looks almost surprised. “Oh. How long have you been living with him?”

“Uh... twenty years. Give or take.”

She’s taken aback by this, he can tell. “Twen—twenty years. Oh. Alright. I see. So you’ve been in a long term relationship with—“

“Oh don’t put it like that,” he waves her off, uncomfortable. “We’ve been friends for twenty years.
Friends. Just,” he inhales, “friends.”

“Friends who... kiss each other at sunglass kiosks?”

He shrugs, smirking. He looks almost proud of himself. “Gotta spice the friendship up somehow.”

“I believe there are better ways.” She glances down, as if contemplating asking her next question. “How does... kissing Mr McDonald make you feel?”

Dennis gives her a suspicious look. “This is a police questioning. Why are we discussing my feelings about my roommate?”

“I take your unease regarding the matter to mean that you feel some sort of romantic attachment to your roommate.”

He scoffs. “Romantic attachment? Oh, come on.”

“Alright, if it makes you uncomfortable, I suppose I could just refer to it as an attachment. You feel an attachment to Mr McDonald, and given your, your decades of history living together, I can fairly assume that you are close, to say the least.”

Dennis feels himself sweating. This room is very hot and he does not want to be in it any longer. Not like he wanted to be here in the first place anyway.

“How is any of that remotely relevant?”

“It is relevant to me, Mr Reynolds. I believe that because of your attachment to this man you feel the need to defend him or, protect him. You came all the way here to pay his bail, officers reported you seeming anxious about his well-being.”

“That’s a, that’s a violation of my privacy.”

“But you do care about him?”

“You know what? Fine, if it makes you happy, I’ll say it. I care about Mac! I care that he doesn’t get sent to jail for a crime he didn’t commit!”

“So wouldn’t it be fair for me to assume that you care about Mr McDonald so much that you would lie about him stealing in order to protect him from being convicted of a crime?”

Oh shit. She’s a snake, this one. “Oh, who cares!” He breaks after a pause. “It was a pair of sunglasses. It was what, ten bucks? Fifty bucks tops? We’ll pay for the damn thing and be done with this–“

“The price of that pair of sunglasses is valued in the thousands, Mr Reynolds. I believe you’re mistaken there.”

“Thu, thousands? Jesus Christ, that’s just not possible.”

“It is what it is, Mr Reynolds. Maybe you should’ve told your friend to check the price tag before stealing it.”

“For the last time, it was an accident–“ he huffs–“are you really going to convict a man for being forgetful? This is ridiculous!”

“Oh, I beg to differ, Mr Reynolds. You see, we’ve picked up some surveillance footage just twenty
blocks away from the sunglass kiosk showing yourself and Mr McDonald. I’m sure you’ll be very interested in it’s contents.”

Shit. Technology really has gone too far. What happened to finders keepers after you’re a good distance away from the crime scene?

He swallows nervously. “I want a lawyer.”

“I’m sure you do.”

“What happened in there?” asks Dee when Dennis emerges from the interrogation. Mac is already with the rest of them, and looks just as worried, if not more.

“Well, so, we’re definitely not getting out of this without going to trial,” Dennis remarks, and the others don’t look so fazed.

“Oh yeah, we knew that.”

“Who the hell prices a dick-shaped pair of sunglasses in the thousands? That’s just stupid.”

“We did, suckers,” says an all too familiar voice from behind them.

“Oh, you gotta be kiddin’ me.”

“What are you creeps doing here?”

It’s the McPoyle brothers, and they both look as gross as usual. Weirdly though, they also look richer than usual.

“Giving our statements. What’s it to you?”

“Statements? For what?”

“The horrible crime that was committed at our sunglass kiosk.” He puts on a pair of sunglasses for effect. It’s a very dumb effect.

They all collectively groan.

“There is no way you, you guys seriously own that place?”

“What the hell happened to your video rental store?”

“Well, like you said it was a dying market when we bought it. So it died.”

“Oh.”

“We liquidated our assets and bought a chain of sunglass kiosks.”

Liam McPoyle raises his unibrow. “Jealous?”

“Jealous? Why the hell would we be jealous?”
“Because we’re business owners. And we’re rich.”

“Hah! Big whoop.”

“Yeah, that doesn’t mean squat. We’re business owners.”

“Well,” Dennis shrugs. “Mac, Frank, and I are business owners. You and Charlie don’t own shit.”

Dee scowls at Dennis. “Would you shut up, for once in your goddamn life maybe?”

“Yeah, whatever, man,” Charlie interjects. “Frank’s like. A multi-millionaire and rich as shit. He has way more money than you two ever will. And like, Frank’s money is basically our money, so that makes all of us richer than you two, so suck on that.”

“No it’s doesn’t. You kids are dirt poor.”

“Can you just go along with it for once, Frank? Tryna make a point here, and I can’t do it if you’re boning me like that!”

“Well, regardless of whether we share Frank’s wealth, I’m not poor. I was in a Hollywood blockbuster. I’m doing fine for myself.”

“Yet you couldn’t bail yourself out of jail.”

“Oh, shut up Frank. What did you want? For me to go to jail? You’re a producer on the movie we’re working on!”

“Not for long you’re not,” Ryan interrupts, with his eyes sinister and gross.

“Oh yeah. See you in court, suckers.”

Chapter End Notes

im so tired not even sure if this is good but uh. here. take this. pls i hope u liked this in any way. say something. u can even kick me in the face please say something. cue the scene where dees like tell me im good but instead of good its anything
Coming home never felt this good.

“Well, we sure dodged a bullet back there,” Mac sighs, actually somewhat happy right now, as he sprawls over their couch. His shirt rides up again. It's getting ridiculous how none of his shirts fit right these days.

“Are you stupid?” Dennis tosses his keys on the table. “We’re going to court against the McPoyles. There’s a chance we’re facing some real jail time here, Mac,” he gestures, fingers shaking just a tinge. “You could go to prison. We could go to prison.”

Mac sits up. “You’re not actually worried, right?”

“Oh, and all of a sudden you’re a hardened criminal who doesn’t give a shit whether he’s in or out of the slammer? This is serious, Mac, we’re starring in a movie together! Now, more than ever, we just can’t go to jail! We just can’t!”

“Hey hey hey—“ Mac throws his arm around a Dennis who might be starting to hyperventilate a little—“Dennis. Breathe with me. Come on, buddy.”

He begins to calm down slightly, enough to reach normal respiratory levels, but he’s still not convinced. “Mac, this is bad—“

“No, no it’s gonna be fine. Chill out.” He sits Dennis down on the couch with him. “We’ll get through this shit, okay? We’ll come out just fine like we always do, dude. And like you said— we’re gonna be movie stars.”

“The trial is getting held way before our movie gets released—“

“Still, you’re already a movie star. And I’m going to be a movie star. They can’t just throw movie stars and almost-movie stars in jail, right?”

Dennis decides to humor Mac. In a way, humoring Mac feels like humoring himself. Maybe Dennis really is overreacting, but the intense fear that took over like an anvil falling straight down on his head when Mac got arrested... that just freaks him out. Mac getting arrested and thrown in jail, the concept just messed with him so bad. He feels like holding on tight to Mac so no one will take him away again. He nearly regrets not doing that when the cops came earlier.

But right now... Mac is here, hand gently stroking his thigh to calm him down. Looking at him so worried... and Dennis wants his lips again. He wants his everything.

“Yeah,” Dennis blinks once, staring deep into Mac’s eyes. His eyes are so pretty. “We’ll probably get away with it. We’ve done worse. Maybe they’ll just slap a fine on us.”

“Then we’ll just get Frank to pay for it. He can’t let us go to jail, right? He’s one of the producers on our movie.”

Dennis nods. Their faces are barely an inch from each other. “Don’t talk about Frank right now.”
“Why not—“

He cuts him off with a kiss, and Mac meets him with a fury, half-pulling Dennis into his lap as their tongues slide together. Mac tastes sweet, not like sugar, but like bliss. Freedom. Happiness. He tastes everything he’s ever wanted in kissing Mac, and his mind is going fuzzy with want as Mac touches him. Dennis notes that Mac’s decidedly not touching him in any particularly sexual way, being careful so as not to freak him out.

That’s not what Dennis wants right now.

“I was so scared when they took you away,” he admits, sloppy against Mac’s neck. “Don’t get arrested ever again.”

“Yeah, sure,” Mac moans, his eyes shut as he holds Dennis tight against him, eyes shut from the pleasure. His neck, strong as it may, is weak for Dennis. “Okay. Mm. You’re so good at that.”

“I know,” Dennis says, accepting the compliment with no resistance whatsoever, contemplating whether to suck a hickey into Mac’s neck, but then deciding against it. No one would believe it was from anyone other than Dennis. “Get your shirt off.”

Mac’s eyes widen. He clearly did not see this coming. “Oh... okay.”

He’s decided not to question it. Mac whips off his shirt and Dennis starts removing his belt. He goes as far as unbuttoning Mac’s pants when he feels the man tense up and he looks. “You okay?”

Mac definitely hasn’t expected any of this, but he trembles with want as he nods almost feverish in his desire. “Please don’t stop. Whatever it is you’re doing man, keep going.”

Dennis chuckles low and unpronounced. He palms his crotch and watches in delight as Mac groans, his entire body reacting to Dennis stroking him slow. He gestures for Mac to help him along and it’s almost funny how quickly and desperately Mac tugs his bottoms off, sliding his own hand up his erection, as if displaying it for him.

Dennis raises his eyebrows at Mac. He can’t seriously be trying to show off something Dennis has already seen countless times. When Dennis doesn’t immediately proceed to slobber over his dick, Mac starts touching himself, using slow strokes and hungry stares directed at Dennis to get off. He bites his lip as he gets into a rhythm, his free hand sliding up Dennis’ thigh.

Dennis knows he’s hard too. Perhaps Mac can tell, although he’s too busy tugging at his own pecker to really confirm this, and he pushes his hand off, stopping Mac’s little jerk off session. He lets the hand that’s on his lap stay.

Dennis raises his hips and they slide along. He can’t seriously be trying to show off something Dennis has already seen countless times. When Dennis doesn’t immediately proceed to slobber over his dick, Mac starts touching himself, using slow strokes and hungry stares directed at Dennis to get off. He bites his lip as he gets into a rhythm, his free hand sliding up Dennis’ thigh.

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Dennis hears Mac grasp at their couch, as if trying to find balance, before settling on his shoulder. He nearly pushes Dennis down on his cock with the strength he expels, but swatting his hand away gets the message across well enough. Mac whines about Dennis going faster, and even starts moving his hips in tandem with his mouth. Dennis holds his hips down and comes up, glaring hard at Mac, who scrambles for an apology.

He only laughs at the way Mac begs him to continue. It’s not like he was mad at Mac for trying to
fuck his mouth anyway, but it’s fun making Mac think he is. Dennis starts pumping his cock, slick with spit, and licks his lips. He tastes of Mac.

“T wanna watch you,” he says, almost explaining, and Mac can barely keep his eyes open, his face contorting into a multitude of expressions, Dennis going faster and faster, relentlessly driving him to climax, before slowing down suddenly when he sees Mac on the edge. He knows how Mac looks like when he’s on the verge of orgasm almost too well now, the long hours spent touching themselves side by side equipping him with knowledge he finds especially handy.

“Dennis, please–“ Mac chokes out in a small voice.

“Please what?”

“I wanna,” he gulps. “You know what I want, just please–“

“Let me hear you beg for it,” he says, going slow again just to see Mac’s fists tighten. He’s almost curious to see how they could be put to use.

“Please let me come, Den,” he begs, “I want this so bad, I’m dyin’ over here–“

“Oh yeah? How bad? How long?”

“So bad and so long just–“ he makes a grab at his dick but Dennis pushes him away again.

“Don’t even think about it,” he warns. “Don’t make me hold you down.”

Mac makes a pass at his own penis again, definitely on purpose, and so true to his word, Dennis pins his hands over his head with little resistance.

“Can I come now? Come on, you know how long I’ve wanted this–“

“You’ve thought about it?” Dennis still keeps to his slow pace, he wants to hear more. “You’ve wanted this how long?”

“Years, dude,” Mac licks his lips. “You know I always think about you,” he looks at Dennis in a way that nearly has him breathless. “Wanna come in your mouth.”

Dennis starts to speed up, leaning down to suck at the top of his pretty cock, going fast without any thought of stopping, not caring for Mac’s grunts or groans or moans or what have you—although they do turn him on.

Mac comes in his mouth, which Dennis swallows, all of it, well, as much as he can manage anyway, and then he keeps slowly jerking Mac off until he falls flat. Mac lays down on the couch for a moment, before sitting back up with a speed that can only be managed because of how much he works out. Mac charges towards Dennis, lips sliding together again, his tongue slipping between Dennis’ lips, determined to taste his semen—oh that’s right—he likes the taste of himself.

Dennis doesn’t refuse him this want, but he’s starting to feel like he might explode. He aches so hard with want, and he fails to keep kissing Mac without wanting to fuck something, anything, he could fuck this couch actually, somehow, he’d do it. Unable to take it anymore, he begins undoing his belt, and Mac moans against his lips.

“You’re needy as shit, dude,” Mac chuckles as Dennis flings his belt—somewhere—then continues to undo the button on his jeans, feeling a euphoric rush just from getting naked.
“Shut up,” he chides. “Easy for you to say, you’ve had your turn.”

“I know, I know,” Mac says to soothe him, biting down hard when Dennis unveils his cock, locking eyes with him as he spits in his hand, then rubs it over his shaft. “Fuck.”

“You wanna get in here or what?” Dennis slowly unbuttons his shirt with one hand as his other hand occupies itself. Mac helps pull his shirt off, and when he does, he pins Dennis down on the couch, hand pressed against his shoulder, and straddles his hips. He’s perched atop of him as he begins to help himself to a generous handful of Dennis, who whimpers at the contact. He’s slow and far too gentle with his touches, and it’s clearly on purpose. “Mac, hurry it up.”

“Uh-uh,” he refuses with a smile. “It’s your turn to beg, bro.”

“What’s going on here?”

Mac comes up from behind, wraps his arms around Dennis’ hips, chin dipping into his shoulder, and Dennis feels warm being enveloped like this. They’ve got nothing shy of underwear on now, and Dennis has been moving around the kitchen, getting stuff out their pantry, their fridge. He’s got a pot boiling on the stove, so.

“I think it’s pretty obvious,” he says, bending down and out of Mac’s embrace, making his way to get a frying pan. “We haven’t eaten since we got back.”

“You’re cooking for me? Wow,” Mac leans against the fridge, smiling warm and pleased. He’s being very distracting.

“Don’t make this into a thing,” Dennis warns, elbowing him so he moves and Dennis can actually open the fridge and get out some butter. “I’m just making dinner because we’ve been eating takeout for a week. Getting sick of it. Besides, it’s healthier this way. It won’t set us back so much physique-wise.”

“Okay, I’ll go set the table,” Mac says, thankfully not making a big deal out of Dennis cooking dinner anymore. “And dude, you don’t need to worry about physique, okay?”

Dennis turns around, nearly dropping the jar of pasta sauce he’s been trying and failing to open. “What does that mean?”

“I mean you look great, dude,” Mac says, laying down spoons and forks on the table. He slides over to the cabinets to get plates, and gives Dennis an appreciative once over. “You could afford to pack on more mass too, so you should like, eat more.”

“I’ve been eating plenty,” Dennis insists. “Probably too much,” he pauses as he opens the packet of spaghetti. Maybe he shouldn’t boil too much pasta.

“Dude, that’s crazy talk. You hardly eat—I mean, sure—when we’re all together you eat but when we don’t see the gang you skip meals all the time. You gotta stop doing that, man.” He looks at the noodles boiling. “Hmm. Add in more, dude. I’m starving.”

Dennis sighs, obliging him. Maybe he could afford to eat more. He’s had a long day and he did just emerge from a kinda sorta rigorous work out with Mac, so...
“Okay, I’m done setting the table,” Mac announces. “How can I help here?”

Dennis hands Mac the jar of sauce he’d been struggling with, and he’s not sure if it’s humiliating or arousing to watch Mac unscrew the lid in one try. Maybe it’s a little bit of both.

“You never usually offer to help when I’m cooking,” Dennis remarks. Mac messes around in the kitchen sometimes too. Neither of them ever try to interrupt or barge in to help. There’s often a process at play when either of them are cooking, and they both usually respect that. What’s different now?

“Well, you did just suck my dick,” Mac shrugs, and Dennis decks him in the arm. It makes him laugh.

“Shut up, asshole,” he sighs, and focuses on cooking. He snatches the sauce away from Mac and dumps it into the pan.

“And also, I saw you struggling to open that jar,” Mac shrugs, and then he walks over to the fridge and cracks open a beer. “Couldn’t leave you alone after seeing that.”

“Whatever. Get me one too.”

When Dennis finishes cooking, they sit down, opposite one another at their table, and there’s something... very intimate about it. Mac went all out setting the table, there’s placemats on there and coasters for their beers. He doesn’t know how and when Mac found it, but there’s a lit candle on their table too. It smells faintly of vanilla and marshmallows. Oddly, Dennis can’t find it in himself to complain because the air smells delicious.

The quieter it is, the more uncomfortable Dennis feels, because there’s something strangely okay and routine and normal about this. Having dinner with Mac. A quiet night in. Sitting with him at a table and eating and neither of them feeling like that’s bad, because they’ve known each other so long now. A moment silent somehow isn’t a moment wasted, and there’s something so wrong with that.

“How’s the pasta?” Dennis asks, but as the words leave his mouth, he realizes he’s just made this worse. He’s made the situation more intimate somehow, more domestic. No bro cooking for another bro cares to check whether they like the food or not.

“Noodles are uh, a little hard.”

Dennis frowns. Whatever. Mac is such a bitch. “Oh, and what? You wanted soggy noodles? Noodles that mush up and break if you so much as touch them with a fork?”

“Dude, chill,” Mac snorts. “It’s fine. This is uh, it’s good. I love it.”

Dennis sighs. “You’re right. The noodles are kinda hard.”

“It’s still edible though.”

“It is still edible!” Dennis says, his hand stretching out in a gesture, enabling the celebration of this low bar. He purses his lips. “But... it’s not very good.”

“Oh yeah, it’s really not.”

“You wanna get takeout?”
Mac grins, clapping his hands together, then pointing at Dennis. “Yes, dude!”

“Yeah,” Dennis pushes his plate away, picking up his phone. “It’s not like I put that much work into making that anyway,” he reasons, ordering pasta and some sides.

“Oh yeah,” Mac nods. “You were distracted and I was uh, I was distracting you.”

Dennis shrugs. “Yeah, sure, I’ll take that. Maybe I was just tired from this whole day, and it reflected here. Because my food is usually top shelf stuff, right?”

Mac laughs nervously. “Uh, yeah! Yeah, dude, your food is usually like... great.”

“Guys, guys! I got it, I got my handle,” Dee says, nudging Mac as she stares at her phone. It’s a strange but not unexpected, and to be honest not even strange, scene for Dennis to walk in on. “@sweetdeereynolds. Isn’t that amazing? I can’t believe @deereynolds and @deandrareynolds were taken already. Stupid bitches stealing my names.” She frowns. “Whatever. I like this one more anyway.”

“No one cares, Dee,” Mac says, brow furrowed and eyes trained on his phone. He probably didn’t even notice Dennis walking in.

“Oh shit!” Charlie screeches next, half standing up from his seat in excitement. “I got it! I got my username!”

“What username?”

Charlie scoffs. “@charliekelly. Duh! What else would it be, you’re supposed to put down your real name for this stuff—“

“Hm, not necessarily. You’re thinking about Facebook.”


“You know... it’s weird to me that @charliekelly hasn’t been taken,” remarks Dee. “Feel like someone else would’ve snatched up that handle long ago.”

Dennis cracks open a beer from behind the bar. He feels inclined to agree with her.

“Why would it be weird?” Charlie says, voice highly defensive. “I’m Charlie Kelly, there’s only the one Charlie Kelly—why would anyone be stealing my name, dude?”

“Are you kidding me, dude?” Mac scoffs. “There can’t be only one person named Charlie Kelly. That’s definitely a common name.”

“Oh yeah, definitely a bunch of white guys named Charlie Kelly lying around—“

“Or black—“ Mac points out—“black guys could totally be named Charlie Kelly too, Dee, don’t be a racist bitch—“

“Fine! Or black! Or white or Asian or Uranian—“
“What Asian guy is goin’ around with the name Charlie Kelly?” Frank points out, snickering, which prompts the others to laugh too.

“Yeah, Frank, exactly,” continues Charlie. “So like, I’m probably the only Charlie Kelly alive. I mean, I’m the only Charlie Kelly I know anyway—“

“Mm, no, no...” Dee pipes up, reading from her phone. “No, it says here that there’s actually about 153 Charlie Kellys in the US alone.”

“What?!” Charlie looks outraged. “What the hell, Dee, that’s crazy!”

“Yeah, now there’s no way I’m believing @charliekelly isn’t already taken—“ Mac reaches over to Charlie—“gimme—“

“Maybe the 152 other Charlie Kellys just didn’t want—“

“Oh, nope,” Mac snorts as he looks at Charlie’s phone. “No, dude, this just says @trundlekellog.”

“What?”

“No way, let me—“

Charlie’s phone gets snatched up and passed around which amuses them all but upsets the man. Now Dennis gets curious. “Does it really say @trundlekellog?” he walks over to where the gang’s now crowded around Charlie’s phone, refusing to take their eyes off the screen.

“Oh, hey Dennis,” Mac smiles. “Didn’t see you come in.”

“Yeah, idiot, I’ve been here a while now,” he says, rolling his eyes, then laughing at Charlie’s username. From the app interface, it looks like they’re creating Instagram accounts. Oh god. “Oh wow. You’ve been spelling your name as Trundle again, man?”

Charlie sweeps his fingers through his hair, clearly sweating. “I mean, I call myself Trundle, like, all the—“

“No you don’t, dude.”

“He almost got the Kelly part right though,” Dee remarks with a shrug.

“Oh yeah! He just missed the ‘Y’ part, hey, good job!” Mac high fives Charlie, who’s starting to smile again.

“Proud of ya, Charlie,” says Frank, rubbing his shoulder.

“See, told you there’s no way @charliekelly wasn’t taken,” Dee says, smug, drinking her beer.

“Well, hold on just a second there—“ Dennis says as he taps on Charlie’s phone—“yup. Okay. Got it.”

“Got what?”

“@charliekelly,” Dennis shrugs. “Wasn’t taken.”

“It wasn’t taken?”

Charlie whoops and takes his phone back from Dennis. “See?! Told you guys there was only one
"No one having taken your name as a username on Instagram does not mean—" Dee groans, giving up—"whatever, I don’t care. I can’t believe this."

"Yeah, Dee, I know how it is," says Mac, empathizing with her, for some reason. "I can’t get a username on here for shit," he complains, tapping harder on his phone out of frustration.

"What usernames have you been trying?"

"Oh, just the one," Mac explains to Dennis. "They keep telling me to like, try again or some bullshit, and I think the system’s jammed."

"Okay, but what username is it?"

"My name of course."

Charlie accidentally spits out his beer laughing. "Oh wow, dude, you gotta be kidding me, man."

"What? What’s going on?"

"Come on Mac, your name would clearly be taken as a username already," Dennis says, also failing to hold back a smile. "Even if no one else in America had your name."

"By who?"

"Who do you think?"

"Probably the official McDo—"

Everyone shushes her, and she only rolls her eyes as Mac give her a warning look, reminding her of the golden rule. The one mascot they’re not allowed to bring up.

"The official... burger store." She sighs. "They probably use your name for their account."

"Yeah," Mac huffs. "Maybe, but they didn’t show me which account had that username!"

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"What do you think we’ve been doing here this whole time?"

"Okay, okay," Dennis holds him by the shoulders just in case he lashes out. "Mac, talk me through this. What’s your thought process?"

"I just thought that, if your username was taken, you’d get shown the account with the username you wanted."

"Why?"

"For negotiations! So I can make them give it to me!"

"That’s not how Instagram works."

"Well," Dennis shrugs. "Some people do pay for usernames, but I won’t get into that. Mac," he touches him again. "Just try another username, okay?"

Mac taps at his phone. "Oh. Got one."
“What is it?”
“@ronaldmacmcdonald.”

“Guess that works.” Dee looks over at Frank. “Frank, what’s your username?”
“@paddyspub.”

“What? Dude, that’s not fair, that’s like the best one!”
Frank shrugs, seemingly proud of himself.

“Wait, Frank, so is that account for the bar or for yourself?”

“What’s the difference?”

“I want the @paddyspub username, man, that sounds cool,” Charlie whines. “Frank, let’s switch.”
“No way! I don’t wanna be you.”

“Why wouldn’t you wanna be me?!”

“Because being a bar is far cooler than bein’ a person,” explains Frank. “And I got that username first, so I get to be the bar.”

“If anyone should be the bar, it should be me,” says Mac. “I protect this place from all evil, so I’m basically, like, the soul here.”

“None of you have souls,” says Dee. “It should be me. I’d be the bar. I’d be a good bar.”

“But I own most a’ the shares!”

“And I clean the damn place from head to toe!”

“Alright, alright! This makes no sense,” Dennis cuts in. “I mean, first of all, I bartend, and that’s pretty much the most essential position in running a bar, and second of all—this whole argument is ridiculous—it’s meaningless! Why are we arguing over who would best, best personify a bar?! And lastly: why the hell are you all making Instagram accounts?”

“Oh, for publicity, of course,” explains Mac. “I mean, I am gonna be in a movie. We all are.”

“And you didn’t think to give me a call?”

“We figured you already had an account. You’re the one who’s a movie star.”

“Well, I don’t. Clearly, I would’ve—“

“Dude, you don’t have an Instagram account?” Mac widens his eyes at him. “Why the hell not?”

“Because he has no idea how to be a movie star—“ Dee digs with a smile.

“Aww, man, we were counting on you to like, get us followers and stuff. This sucks,” Charlie laments.

“Get your own followers, Charlie! And besides, there’s no need to have an Instagram account, even if you’re famous. Why can’t I want to separate my personal and professional life?”
“Who gives a shit about that?”

“Yeah, dude. That’s tacky as shit.”

“Whatever, okay?” Dennis exhales. “Just trust me, there’s no point to that stuff,” he argues.

“I thought Artemis told you and Mac to make Instagram accounts so you could clear up your scandal.”

“Oh. Right. I almost forgot that happened.”

“Yeah, don’t think people really cared much about that. That kind of blew over real quick.”

“You aren’t even that famous, man.”

“I am too that famous!”

“Are you Ryan Gosling famous though?”

“Ooh!” Mac hops up. “You should get Ryan Gosling to promote your account on his Instagram!”

Dennis successfully manages to get @dennisreynolds as a username. “Why would I do that? Dude’s an asshole.”

“Oh, come on. He’s not an asshole, he’s the nicest guy ever, and a great—“

“Dude, you met him once. Get over it.”

“Asshole or not, you could still get him to give your a account a shoutout.” Mac shrugs. “Then we’ll all get followers.”

Dennis groans. “Fine. I’ll drop him a text.”

“Four hundred and two, four hundred and three, four—“

“Dude, you gotta stop rubbing your follow count in our faces, it’s annoying as shit,” Charlie complains, sharpening a knife behind the bar.

“He’s doing it to spite me,” Dee says pointedly, glaring at Dennis who only smiles. “You’re an asshole, you know that, right?”

“Of course,” he says, very proud of himself.

“I don’t get why Ryan Gosling can promote your Instagram, but you can’t promote us,” Mac grumbles, upset. “That’s a load of bull, bro.”

“I already explained this,” Dennis starts. “I can’t be promoting random people on my account.”

“But we’re not random people, we’re your friends.”

“Exactly. You’re not professionally linked to me in any way. I don’t want fans digging and finding connections between us and finding out where I live, then flying to Philly to stalk me. No, I’m not
having it. People think I live in LA like most Hollywood actors.”

Dee raises her eyebrows. “Wouldn’t consider you that actually, since you made just the one movie.”

“Dee, shut up. You have nothing to your name.”

“I’m a doctor!”

“An animal doctor, and you barely qualified.”

“At least give my account some followers,” interrupts Frank. “It’s for the bar, not me.”

“That’s even worse, Frank,” Dennis refuses. “The bar would very easily tie me to Philadelphia. I’d promote the others before I said a word about your Instagram.”

Frank sighs. “Fine.”

Charlie begins sharpening another knife.

“Charlie, what are you doing? What’s with the knives?”

“For the business.”

“What business? We don’t really need knives here. Definitely not more than one.”

“The Cheesy Charlie food stand,” Frank explains. “I bought the empty lot down the street. We’re gonna sell our sandwiches. Make a buttload of dough.”

“You gotta—” Dennis stops himself—“actually that might not be a bad idea.”

“Yeah, they make good sandwiches,” Mac adds on. “I wouldn’t mind some free sandwiches.”

“Who said you jerk offs are gettin’ our sandwiches for free?”

“Oh, come on, Frank, that’s—“

“You want a sandwich, you gotta work for it. Or make one your damn self.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” asks Mac. “We have to help run the food stand now too?”

“Mac and I have acting to do, Frank,” Dennis points out. “We’re already helping you make a buttload of money. The least we could get in return is some sustenance.”

“Fine,” Frank relents. “Those working and contributing to my wealth can get free sandwiches.”

“Yes!” Dee, Mac, and Dennis celebrate this in various ways.

“Dee, what are you so excited for? You’re not getting shit.”

“Why not?” she whines. “I work! I’m in the movie too.”

“Barely. You’re hardly in the movie. You don’t do shit at your job, or around here, Dee.”

“Fine, if I pick up some shifts at the animal clinic can I get some free sandwiches?”

Frank considers this. “Only if it’s my animal clinic.”
Dee sighs. “Fine.”

“Frank, since when do you own an animal clinic?”

“Since I knew people paid through the teeth for their pets,” Frank says with a smirk. “It’s making a shit ton, but it’d make more if Deandra worked instead of lazing around like she always is.”

“Point taken, Frank,” Dee downs her beer. “I’ll come in tomorrow.”

“Not tomorrow,” Frank shakes his head. “No, tomorrow’s the opening. You’re gonna be helping out.”

“What? That’s ridiculous.”

“Yeah, you guys are opening up shop sooner than I thought,” Mac approves with a nod, raising his bottle up at Frank and Charlie.

“That’s not the point here!” Dee argues.

“I don’t care,” says Dennis. “As long as I don’t have to do shit.”

“Who said that?” Frank continues. “You’re working tomorrow too.”

“What? What happened to us being let off because we have acting jobs?”

“You got filming tomorrow?”

“No,” says Mac. “They’re doing scenery shots tomorrow so we don’t have to show up.”

“Then you’re workin’ for me.”

“This is ridiculous,” Dennis protests, “I’m a paid actor. I don’t need to work in the food service industry.”

“And I’m a medical professional,” adds Dee, “how do you think this makes me feel?”

“Dee, stop calling yourself a medical professional. You treat dogs and cats.”

“Shut up, Mac,” Dee retorts. “You never even went to college.”

“But I’m making more money than you, bitch.”

“Yeah,” she says, “and yet, despite how much money either of us make, tomorrow we’re serving up subs.”

“Frank,” Dennis sighs. “Why can’t you just hire a bunch of workers to do this shit for you?”

“Look, you want free sandwiches or not?”

They all sigh.

“Yeah,” Dennis groans. “We do.”
“Oh shit, this is actually... this is a weirdly sweet set up.”

“It’s way cleaner than the bar,” Dee observes as she looks around. “There’s space in the back to rest too.”

“Oh wow,” Mac fumbles in the kitchen. “This is a huge oven.”

“Frank sprang for the best stuff man, I dunno what to tell ya,” Charlie shrugs, giving Frank a smile. Dee rolls her eyes. “And yet he couldn’t hire any staff.”

“Of course I’m gonna hire staff,” interjects Frank.

“Then where are they? And what are we doing here?”

“We can’t hire people to run a business if we don’t have one yet. I’ll get some people to work here once this thing really takes off.”

“I guess that does make sense.”

“So how’s this thing gonna work?” Dee asks, fiddling with the cashier. “What are we supposed to do?”

“Charlie?” Frank says expectantly, turning to the man.

“All right, okay, all right here now look—“ Charlie rubs his hands together and talks as if he’s either very amped up and ambitious today, or he’s huffed a bunch of glue. It could very well be a bit of both, actually. “We’re gonna need someone up front, taking orders, collecting the money, that’s gonna be Dennis—“

“Of course,” Dennis affirms, subtly trying to stretch his arms, or so he thinks, and smiling. “You need a good front man. Someone to be the image of the—“

“Yeah, yeah, whatever—“ Charlie interrupts, cutting him off, much to Dennis’ chagrin—“Mac, you’re gonna be receiving the orders from Dennis and giving them to us, the kitchen, and you’re in charge of sending the orders out. Can you do that for me, man?”

Mac looks just as intense as Charlie right now, his hands balled into fists and held upright. “Yes!”

“That’s my man right there!”

They high five, and this upsets Dennis. He’s not sure he enjoys this camaraderie between the two men right now when Charlie had the audacity to cut him off earlier.

He didn’t even get a high five for his troubles.

Mac is laughing and putting his arm around Charlie, and they’re laughing together, and it’s like pulling teeth for Dennis to have to watch this.

“Okay, knock it off, what am I supposed to do?”

“Oh, you chop the bread.”

“I chop the what now?”

“The bread!” Charlie shrieks, picking up the loafs and raising it up.
“Like a sub, Dee, like a sandwich—are you stupid?”

“No!”

“Jesus, Dee—" Mac says—‘you’re a vet and you don’t even know how to chop bread? Didn’t you get enough training from the balls?”

“Balls? What balls?” Dennis snorts.

“Cutting balls off dogs and cats and shit.”

“Goddamn it, Mac,” Dee sighs, looking on the verge of an aneurism. “Of course I can chop bread, I just didn’t expect such a basic job!”

“Oh look at me!” Charlie exclaims, gesticulating wildly. “Queen Dee! Who’s too good to chop some baguettes for her friends! I’m sorry Dee, is the job too easy for you? Should I, should I upgrade you to the kitchen where you can peel crab meat from boiled crabs?”

“No, no, okay? It’s fine, I’ll chop the stupid bread.”

“Thank you!” He smacks the table. “Can I count on you not to screw it up?”

“It’s slicing a loaf of bread in half!”

“She’s gonna fuck it up,” Mac whispers to Dennis, who snickers quietly.

“Shut up,” says Dee, annoyed, as she can clearly hear them. “What are you and Frank gonna do?”

Frank, who had disappeared into the kitchen sometime during all this, re-emerges with crabs in his hands. They look like sewer crabs. Maybe Dennis will pass on the Cheesy Charlies today. And everyday, from this day forth. “I’m boiling the crabs. Charlie’s cracking em open and diggin’ the meat out.”

“Then I’ll pop it on the bread that Dee hopefully won’t fuck up—“ she rolls her eyes—“dump some cheese on it and into the oven it goes!”

“Okay, nice,” Mac praises. “So, we’re just selling Cheesy Charlies?”

“For now,” says Frank. “Next week we’re bringing in Grilled Franks. Then Grilled Charlies. Work our way up nice an’ slow.”

“What about the Mac Attack?”

“The Mac what now?”

“What’s that, Mac?” Dennis asks, curious.

“Oh, that’s my sandwich,” he explains. “The one I invented.”

“You invented a sandwich?”

“Since when?”

“What?” He’s offended now, Dennis can tell. “Oh, so Frank and Charlie are the only ones around here allowed to cook and invent?”
“Well, no–“

“But we can’t sell the Mac Attack until we’ve all tried it and confirmed that it’s... good.”

“My sandwich is good!” Mac’s starting to get angry now. Dennis might have to touch his shoulders. “My sandwich is better than your piss poor shit!”

“Woah, woah, now, calm down, Mac.” Dennis holds his hands up to Mac and he stops yelling. “We never said we weren’t gonna sell your sandwich, we just need to taste it first, okay buddy?”

“Fine,” Mac crosses his arms. “I’m too lazy to make it now anyway.”

“Great. So we’ll just be selling Cheesy Charlies today? Is that final?” Dennis asks around, and everyone nods. “Okay. Let’s open up shop.”

“So what’s in the Mac Attack?” Dennis asks, leaning over the counter, looking at Mac who is similarly poised. He smiles at the question. They haven’t gotten much business yet. Just the occasional curious passer by. Most of their social circle is either broke or hates them. It’s good though, mostly, just a bit boring standing up front. It’s hell in the kitchen for Frank, Charlie, and Dee. Turns out mass boiling crabs and cracking them open for flesh is a more daunting task than previously assumed. Obviously, Dee got roped into it. She’s most definitely doing a bang up job though, or barely helping, that’s for sure.

“I’m glad you asked, bro. Okay, so—we start off—with the bun.”

“The bun?”

“Yeah. Top bun, and the bottom bun. Like in sex.”

Dennis snorts. “Okay.” He doesn’t see why Mac has to add top/bottom dynamics to a sandwich, but he can’t say he’s surprised at this point. “What comes next?”

“Oh, beef patty. But like, it’s flat, so it’s not like a burger.”

“Won’t that make the sandwich taste bad?” Dennis notes with concern. “People tend to like a lot of beef.”

“Oh, yeah, I thought about that! So that’s why I put in multiple thin beef patties,” his points to his head like that makes him clever. “Can’t compromise on taste.”

“So... it’s a bunch of thin patties stacked on top of each other. And how is that different from just one thick patty again?”

“It’s sliced.”

“Right.” Dennis smirks. This is ridiculous. “What else is in the sandwich?”

“Oh, fries. Like, I put in a nice, classy layer of fries. And then crushed potato chips. For that crunch factor. Gotta make it pop.”

“Yeah, sure, of course–“ Dennis pretends to think—“wouldn’t that make your sandwich a bit dry?”
“There’s oil in the fries, so–“

“So you want people eating a soggy sandwich?”

“Well, there is sauce in it–“ Mac frowns–“I’m gonna, I’m gonna add sauce to it. Not cheese though–“ he points out–“my sandwich is nothing like Charlie’s or Frank’s. Completely original.”

“Oh, I’m sure,” Dennis says patronizingly, but Mac doesn’t catch on. He makes no comment about how Mac’s sandwich is basically a beef burger stuffed with potatoes. “It sounds great.”

“You like that?” Mac’s face lights up, his grin uplifting and pure. “Because I’m working on another one.”

“Another sandwich?” Dennis feels relaxed. There’s something weirdly nice and familiar yet refreshing about running the counter with Mac. The air is cool today and the sun gives even the sidewalk a nice glow but not much else. He’s not even worried about a sunburn, that’s how good the weather is today. Sure, he’s got a layer of sunblock on still, but that’s beside the point. He’s having a good time. It’s not too hectic, not too boring, and he’s getting amused by Mac and his ramblings. He wouldn’t ask for much else.

“Yeah! It’s called the Dennis Delight.”

“You...” Dennis swallows, clearing his throat, straightening in surprise. “You named a sandwich after me?”

“Yeah! I kind of am making it for you anyway. It’s still a work in progress, but don’t worry dude—no carbs in it.”

He’s unsure whether to be touched or uncomfortable. He’s leaning more towards the former at the moment. “Thank you.”

“You’re gonna love it, dude.”

“Maybe.”

“Hi,” a voice interrupts, and they realize there’s a customer that’s been standing there. It is unsure how long they’ve been waiting. “Can I have one... Cheesy Charlie? Is that what it is?”

“Yes,” Dennis nods, putting on a smile. “That’ll be... eight dollars.”

The customer hands him the exact amount in cash. “You two are a cute couple, by the way.”

“Thanks!”

“We’re not a couple.”

They say that at the same time, and when the words leave their lips they look at each other at the same time.

“Thanks?!?” Dennis says incredulously.

“What do you mean we’re not–“ he raises his eyebrows–“oh, okay okay, I got it.” He smiles, which gets Dennis very scared and suspicious. He walks away towards the kitchen. “Guys! We got an order!”

“HOW MANY?!”
It’s clearly very tense back there. Really, they shouldn’t be this stressed out. This is their first order this entire hour. But that’s not what Dennis is worried about right now. What did he mean? What did he get? Why did he smile?

“Just one!”

“Just the one? Just the one sandwich?”

“Yeah, dude!”

“Dee! The bread!”

“On it!”

Dennis thinks about but never ends up bringing up the subject the entire work day. For one, he’s afraid that the others would hear and make all their little assumptions and shit. He’s also worried that any discussions he has with Mac about the matter could blow up into a fight and Mac could throw a tantrum which Frank would probably make him take the blame for if they lost any customers.

Plus, they get very busy the whole day. All of a sudden it’s order after order and Dennis no longer blames the three for all the panicking and wild work they did in the kitchen. He has no idea who’s been spreading the word about their store.

Finally though, finally, they all get tired and make enough money for Frank to let them stop for the day. Everyone (with the exception of Dennis, who’s too disgusted by the fact that those crabs were sewer crabs to ever really eat a Cheesy Charlie again) grabs some loose crab, cheese, or messily assembles a Cheesy Charlie and they get to eating, and leaving.

Dennis first brings up the whole thing on the drive home. Probably not the best idea, but also at least they’ve got some privacy.

“What did you mean earlier?”

“Earlier what?” Mac leans back in his seat with a sigh. “Dude, I forgot most of today. There were so many people, and like, I almost died.”

“I meant,” Dennis bites his lips, making a sound in his throat. “When I told that guy we weren’t dating and you said you ‘got me’, what did that mean?”

“Oh, that’s easy. You don’t want anyone to know we’re together yet, and I let some random dude in on it. Sorry about that.”

“No, no–” Dennis can’t believe this is happening–“that’s not–“

“Oh, you mean you don’t mind if people know we’re together? That’s–“

“No!” Dennis slams on the brakes. But that’s mostly because the lights went red and he didn’t have enough time to speed past it. “I meant—why do you think we’re a couple?”

“Did you–” Mac looks confused–“dude did you forget what happened?”
He looks legitimately concerned. “No, Mac. I remember everything perfectly. I’m saying—we never agreed we were dating. I never agreed to be your boyfriend.”

“I thought that was implied,” Mac’s cracking his knuckles, but in a sad way.

“What about it was implied?”

“Oh, I don’t know Dennis,” he seethes, “maybe when you climbed on top of me and demanded I put my dick in your mouth, I started getting ideas! And I’m sorry, for any assumptions I made when you blew me on our couch!”

“Oh, don’t you go saying that like I’m the crazy one.” Dennis nearly laughs at the absurdity of this. “So, I guess every girl who’s ever blown you, your girlfriend? Every time you messed around with some dude in shady ass places behind my back, you were in committed relationships with them? I’m sorry Mac, I had no idea sex was so meaningful to you!”

“When it’s with you? Yeah, I guess it is,” he says that loud and hurt and almost proud before they both go silent.

Dennis keeps driving. He can’t breathe, he has nothing else to say, all of a sudden.

They arrive back home, and the first real noise they produce is the slamming of doors, as they get out the car and walk back in through their apartment.

“Fine, you know what?” Dennis turns around to look at Mac. Here it goes. “If you’re gonna be like that, fine. But I’m withholding sex.”

Dennis nearly bursts out laughing at that. “Withholding sex?”

“Yeah,” Mac nods. Oh god, he’s serious about this. The man is clearly in hysterics. “If you don’t want this—“ he gestures to his heart—“then you don’t get this.”

He places both his hands on either side of his crotch now, as if the message weren’t clear enough.

“You’re an idiot,” Dennis huffs, rolls his eyes, but Mac doesn’t seem to be bothered by it.

“Dude, I think you’re the idiot.” he crosses his arms. “If you don’t wanna date me, we can’t have sex.”

Dennis throws his hands up in the air. “Fine by me!”

This seems to throw Mac into disarray, as he comes back quickly and panicked with “okay, fine. We can have sex—“

“I don’t care if you’re willing or not willing to have sex with me, Mac!” He takes a deep breath. “It doesn’t matter to me, because I’m not planning on having sex with you.”

“Dude,” Mac sighs, clutching his head. “I just do not get you. You say you don’t wanna kiss me, and then you kiss me. Then you fuck me, and now you say you don’t wanna fuck me? So, what, at some point you did want to fuck me, but after—“

“I never wanted to fuck you,” Dennis sneers, “what we did, what happened that night,” he balls his hand into a fist and twists it in anger. “It wasn’t sex. And it was, it only happened because of what we had just been through.”

“It wasn’t sex?” Mac snorts now, a pompous air to the way he carries himself. “You gotta be
kidding me dude, ‘cuz that was at least oral. You gave me head, dude, there’s no pretending that didn’t happen.”

“Fine, if it makes you happy, Mac, I’ll admit I gave you head! I sucked your dick, it happened once, because you got arrested, and I thought you’d get thrown in prison and that I wouldn’t get to see you for a long time! So that made me scared! And vulnerable, and, and—” he starts to lose his breath and his stability, his head is starting to spin, and maybe it’s from the anger, maybe it’s from how worked up Mac’s gotten him to be, maybe it’s because he hasn’t gotten a bite to eat all day especially since he didn’t so much as touch a Cheesy Charlie. The almost complete lack of water definitely didn’t help either, he was so swamped taking orders he never had time to step aside and take a drink. He didn’t even get to have beer.

“Hey, what’s wrong with you?” Mac catches hold of Dennis’ arms immediately to steady him. “Yo, look at me. You okay? Did you eat?”

A sigh follows the shaking of his head. Mac guides him, slowly, to the couch where unspoken events had once taken place, he gently coaxes him into a horizontal position, tucks a pillow under his head, and as he does, their faces get so close, Dennis mistakes it as an attempted kiss. It shakes him how disappointed he gets when he realizes it wasn’t meant as such.

He blinks idly at the bright lights on their ceiling, turns around and sees their living room, and he hates it, because he can’t see Mac. He turns the other way, and he’s facing the vertical bit of the couch. Right. He hears Mac fumble around in the kitchen, listens as he clumsily gets a pot or pan, Dennis can’t tell, he just hears clanging, and stuff getting open and shut, open and shut. He hears the occasional crinkling of plastic or foil or whatever it is. Trying to paint a sound picture of what Mac is doing gives him a headache so he stops.

A few minutes pass, or maybe it is hours, or maybe it is days, Dennis can’t tell and he’s far too delirious to even try. Mac comes up to him with a sandwich that is thankfully not the Mac Attack yet also somehow not the Dennis Delight (then again, Mac did tell him that sandwich was a work in progress), assists Dennis in sitting up, and he frowns over his first bite.

“I...” he swallows. “Need water.”

“Oh shit,” Mac’s eyes ignite in this realization. “You haven’t drank all day, bro. How the hell are you alive?”

“I didn’t even get beer,” Dennis says half-bragging as Mac moves back across the room to their kitchen and Dennis gulps down the glass of water he brings like he’s never tasted anything better.

“You didn’t even drink beer? All day? Dude, that’s crazy. The others had tons of beer stashed in the kitchen. I drank a bunch of it when I went back there to grab orders.” Mac grabs the empty glass that Dennis has drained. “You can’t not drink beer dude, we gotta stay healthy. You know that.”

“Well, I wasn’t going to walk away from a never-ending line of customers just so I could slack off and get hammered, Mac.”

“Why not?” He asks. “We do that all the time at the bar.”

“The bar—“ he hesitates—“the bar is different. ‘S got a looser feel to it, our customers are chill, and they’re drunk, so there’s that, they’re less demanding too, and they definitely don’t line up in a straight line for drinks. Something just. There’s just something so pressurizing about the sandwich place.” And also, deep down, he knows staying busy and occupying himself with the customers all
day was a simple solution to the awkwardness and doubt he felt earlier today when Mac was assuming they were dating and Dennis was too scared to ask if he really did think so.

But that was all hours ago and now Mac is tender and taking care of him with no visible resentment and that’s just how it is. Just like that, their argument is over and words are no longer traded because Dennis is hurting so nothing more needs to be said.

“Just finish your sandwich dude,” he reminds, shoving it in Dennis’ hands, sprawled out on the couch next to him, yet still cautious and ready to catch Dennis, should he ever fall.

He doesn’t mean off the couch.

“Mac, for the last time, you gotta stop doing that Irish accent,” Dennis sighs after the director calls cut. They’re filming and it’s pretty exciting actually, but Mac’s doing his horrid Irish voice and since you’re asking, yes, it’s terrible, and yes, Dennis hates it. “You’re lucky the director hasn’t yelled at you yet.”

“Dude, I told you—that’s part of the character! I’m not doing it on purpose or fun–“

“That’s just ridiculous, Mac.” Dennis rolls his eyes. “Fine, you know what? If you’re gonna do it–“

The director calls action and Dennis pulls out his best English drawl. Mac laughs (in character, hopefully) and touches his cheek, gently stroking it. He leans in for a kiss (they skipped a few lines they needed to say before the kiss, but it makes sense for this take at least), and they move together, soft, sweet, tender.

The director cuts the scene.

“What, what’s wrong?”

Dennis nods. “Yup, it’s Mac’s bad Irish accent. Go ahead, yell at him.”

“I’m not here about that, Reynolds. What was with the British accent?”

“You’re not here to yell at Mac about the Irish accent?” he says incredulously. “If he’s gonna do it, why can’t I do a British one? Which, if I may add, is superior to his pale impression–“

The director sighs. “Did you even read the script or listen when I explained the direction for this scene? Look, in this particular timeline, Hugh and Vic are meeting for the first time–“

“Of course I know that–“

“Then you should know that Vic’s putting on an accent so Hugh doesn’t find out he’s American!” she yells, hands on hips.

“Why?”

“Because that’s the scene! And Vic is an undercover spy.”

“Then why can’t Hugh also be an American undercover spy who’s pretending to be British?”
The director bites her lip. She beckons Artemis over.

“You know, he does have a point,” Mac points at Dennis, watches as Artemis and the director exchange whispers and nods.

“Fine. I approve of this change,” says Artemis, before walking back to her chair and resting. She’s got on sunglasses. Dennis recognizes it as a pair he saw with Mac at the McPoyles’ sunglass kiosk.

“Okay. So now the scene is: both Hugh and Vic are pretending to not be American because they’re both spies in this war. Fantastic. Action!”

“Alright, the time has come,” they’ve been told this scene they’re about to film is the last of today. Their director clears her throat. “It’s time to film the sex scene. First of the whole movie.”

“Oh, shit,” Mac’s eyes are wide and he’s smiling. He rubs his hands together. “Okay, cool. Y’all got any lube?”

They both look at him strangely.

“You mean... as a prop?”

“No, no, for us to use. I mean, you don’t want Dennis to get hurt filming the scene–“

“Why would I get hurt filming the scene?!”

Mac takes a deep breath. “Look, okay, I’ll explain it to you both. You see, when two men have sex–“

“Wait, wait–“ she holds up her hand–“do you think you’ll have to actually penetrate Dennis to film this scene?”

Dennis cowers at the word ‘penetrate’, shivering.

“I mean, yeah–“ he comes to a realization–“oh! We’re only doing mouth stuff?”

Dennis sits down on the bed, speechless. He hates that he’s a part of this conversation at all.

“No...” she says slowly, very confused.

“So it’s just hand stuff.”

“Mac, we’re not actually going to have sex on camera,” Dennis says, practically hissing his words. “That’s not how this works.”

“But if we don’t have sex, how are they supposed to film the sex scene?”

“Do you know nothing about how anything is made?” Dennis snaps, running his fingers tight through his hair. “It’s fake, Mac. All sex scenes you see in movies are faked. That’s why it’s called acting.”

“I thought it was called acting because you’re supposed to accurately portray shit from real life,”
Mac argues, still trying to debate this somehow. “Which includes sex. Feels lame to not do it.”

“Mac, I’m not having sex with you on camera!”

Mac rolls his eyes. He has no idea, the fool, how lucky he is to have Dennis as his co-star, instead of literally anyone else. He’d only embarrass himself in front of more people.

“Okay, is this all cleared up?” their director confirms, a pained smile on her face. “Can we start the scene now?”

“Yeah, sure,” Mac nods, getting back in place. “Just answer me this: is it fake in porn too?”

“No, Mac. Porn sex scenes are actual sex being filmed.”

“Oh thank god,” he heaves a sigh of relief, chuckling. “If porn was fake too that’d be a huge boner killer.”

“So what you’re gonna do is start kissing against this door here—“

They’re half listening as the director explains the blocking of their sex scene. It seems tacky to plan out sex, but that’s how stuff is done on set, and unlike Mac, Dennis is well aware of that. She’s moving around explaining how they get from the door to the wall, then to the bed, and it’s a whole thing. Mac pokes Dennis in the rib and he looks up.

“What?”

“Ten bucks says I make you moan on camera.”

Dennis rolls his eyes. Mac is ridiculous, and they’re supposed to be professionals here. “Mac. It’s a sex scene. I’m supposed to moan on camera. You should too.”

“You wanna hear me moan, huh?”

Dennis wants to beat him in the head with a baseball bat. “Shut up, stop being weird.”

“Bet I can make you moan louder than you need to.”

“Filming this scene,” he says slow and begrudgingly, “is not, supposed to be sexual. Repeat after me.”

“Not sexual? We’re gonna be kissing. I know you miss that.”

“I don’t miss kissing you.”

“You told me you like kissing me.”

“That’s beside the point,” he whispers harsh. “Liking something and missing something when it’s not happening are two different things.”

“So you do like kissing me—“ and his smile makes it clear his words were a trick. Dennis just slipped up and told him something he wanted to hear. He can’t do this right now.
“Is that it?” Dennis interrupts in a deliberately loud voice, stopping their director in her tracks.

“Uh... yeah. Do you understand the scene?”

“Oh yeah, totally,” He swallows, but the tension stays in his throat. “Both of us do,” he stares at Mac until he nods.

She murmurs assent and returns to her chair, calling for certain stuff to be set up. Dennis shakes his head and does some stretches to prepare himself for the scene. One thing’s for sure here: he’s not going to let Mac win. In fact, he’s decided he won’t be making any noises indicating pleasure during this scene. Who said sex has to be filled with sounds of passion and desire anyway?

The director calls action and Dennis finds himself getting slammed back-first against the fake door of the fake room of the set. If Dennis were any shorter than Mac, his feet would be hanging off the floor with the way Mac has him pinned.

Dennis can’t let himself get beat like this, he thinks, as he kisses Mac fervently because this is still a scene and if he lets himself get pushed around like this, Mac will gloat about it for days, and that just won’t do. He stops pushing back and lets Mac think he’s admitted defeat. When Mac tones down the strength with which he used to restrain him, Dennis pushes and soon he’s got Mac pressed against the wall. Hah! He’s following the scene direction whilst taking back the upper hand.

Bad idea. Mac holds him close still, back against the wall, now pressing their bodies together, grinding his hips against Dennis’, and a moan slips from his lips before he registers it happening. Mac moves to kiss his neck and he can feel him smiling against his skin. Fuck. Dennis hates how good it feels. This isn’t supposed to feel good. None of this should be pleasurable in any way.

But it is. Mac bites down on his collarbone and Dennis gasps, losing his balance, and they fall in a messy heap on the bed. Mac straddles him and begins unbuttoning his shirt, winking, and Dennis glares back, pushing against him and reaching to pull his shirt off in an attempt to feel some form of control. Mac shakes his head and pins Dennis’ hands above his head. He traces a finger down his now bare torso, chuckling at Dennis as he shudders.

Dennis kicks him, or well, more of nudges him, with his foot, in retaliation, and Mac only reaches for his zipper, dragging it down. He pulls off his jeans, plants his lips on his inner thigh and kisses gentle. He sucks at the skin right by Dennis’ concealed scrotum and he hisses.

It hits him how much he likes this, then scares him in equal measure. In a panic, he kicks Mac again, this time hard, and Mac falls off the bed. Fuck.

“CUT!”

Fuck. Shit. She’s mad. Mac isn’t. He wipes his lips, smiling from the floor. Smirking, actually. The smug bastard. Dennis wants to beat him half to death. Dennis wants to smother him with a pillow. Dennis wants to be pinned down, and pounded till he sees white. Dennis wants to kiss him soft and slow again.

So, mixed feelings.

“What the hell was that?” Their impatient director has her arms crossed. “You kicked him off the bed, I never said to do that.”

“Uh, I...” Dennis is nervous, and his mind is blank right now, because he can’t come up with a valid lie, and the truth is out of the question. “I got—“
“Ticklish,” says Mac, who Dennis resents for saving his ass. “I think I touched him somewhere where he gets all squirmly and he had like, one of those knee-jerk reactions, but with his foot.”

“Oh,” their director looks away. “Right, I didn’t think about that, it’s been a long day. Well,” she clears her throat, “if you’re accidentally triggering each other’s tickle spots I think that clearly means you two need more practice. Rehearsals of some sort, so you don’t ruin takes with juvenile issues.”

“Uh–“ Dennis attempts to interrupt, failing.

“I’ll let this one go because it’s the first time we’re filming this scene, but if this happens again, you won’t hear the end of it from me. Do your homework, okay?” she turns around to face the crew. “That’s it. We’re done for the day.”

She walks away, but Dennis still has questions. “Homework? Practice? What the hell do you mean by that?”

She doesn’t respond, or seem to hear him, apparently, but someone else does. That someone drapes his arms around his shoulder.

“It means we’re gonna have to practice having fake sex.”

Chapter End Notes

sup! wassup! back at it again w my 10k chaps! hope u liked this! hope it was funny! hope it was sexy (and by sexy i mean funny again)! hope u hated it and want me to die xoxo say something
Mac and Dennis Burn The Shop Down

Chapter Notes

hi! it's been what... seven? months? since i updated this fic? sorry for the long wait (if u were ever waiting). also thank you for bringing the kudos count for this fic up i had no idea when it went from 100 to 169 (NICE) but i am grateful! and i see the value in this fic now and i am excited and having fun writing it again, so don't worry, the next update will surely not be in seven months :) it will be in six months :) dhfjsfhjd jkjk love u all! hope u like this!

also, the reason i typed this author's note out was to give a quick recap of the important relevant moments in the previous chapter, since you might get confused reading this chapter if u haven't read the prev chapter or read it a long time ago. it's like a tv show recap when the show goes on hiatus and comes back. anyway! u can choose to reread ch4 for a full experience or reread the whole fic or u can just read my recap below!

LAST CHAPTER: mac and dennis return from the police station. they paid bail and everything, but they are set to go to trial w the mcpoyles over the dick-shaped sunglasses mac (allegedly) stole on purpose. dennis is so relieved that mac is not imprisoned that they have oral sex on their couch. frank and charlie open their sandwich shop, which mac and dennis are forced to help out with. mac reveals to dennis that he's inventing a new sandwich for him called the Dennis Delight. a customer mistakes mac and dennis for a couple and mac agrees w the customer, shocking dennis. dennis tells mac they're not dating, and this upsets mac, who threatens to withhold sex. angered too, dennis insists he has no further intentions to have sex with mac. mac and dennis are filming their movie. mac bets he can make dennis moan more than he needs to for their sex scene. he is proven right, and at some point, dennis kicks mac off the bed, angering their director, who tells them they must practice their sex scene.

end of recap, have fun reading!
like a dead duck that’s having sex with an even deader goose. Dennis tugs back at it hard to keep him from flipping it over, pushing back so he can get the tables set up. Clearly, Charlie and Frank are both incredibly opposed to having this trial at all, but they lost 3-2 in the vote to have a trial, which upsettingly, isn’t enough to get Mac and Dennis off.

Dennis does that thing where he yells a bunch in Charlie’s face to snap that guy out of whatever rampage he’s on. Mac, meanwhile, finishes setting the tables up with Dee. She does a piss poor job of holding the tables and the edges keep bumping against his elbows, it doesn’t even feel like she’s putting any strength into it at all. He gets back at her by hitting her in the elbows using the edge of the table, before she gives him a look, reminding him that she holds the decision, the power to turn a 3-2 decision (favoring Mac and Dennis) to a 2-3 decision (not favoring Mac and Dennis). He looks down, upset at the momentary power balance shake up. She grins in the most annoying way at this. What a fucking bitch.

Charlie stills for a second before smacking Dennis out his way, his anger distilling tactics failing here. He loses his balance, which throws Mac off until he sees Dennis steady himself, and give Charlie a ‘what the hell was that about?’ look and gesture to match.

“Hey, man! We saw that tape. You two burned down the shop. What’re we even supposed to trial about, man?”

“The trial is supposed to determine the severity of Mac and Dennis’ punishment, Charlie,” Dee explains, clearly only here because she wants to see how bad they get it. And also because she has nothing better to do and no other friends.

“No no no no,” Dennis hastily corrects, “that’s not what this trial is about.”

“Yeah, you dumb bitch,” Mac concurs mostly to mock Dee. He then turns to Dennis in a quiet voice. “So, uh, what is it about, Dennis?”

Dennis rolls his eyes. “It’s about determining whether all the damage inflicted onto the shop was actually our fault. I mean, there were a bunch of exposed wires in there. Gas leaks. Short circuits. Plenty of code violations to absolve us.”

Frank has a scowl on his face, all those enunciations and gay word stretching has clearly rubbed him wrong. “You shut up. This entire trial is a sham and I’m not taking part in any of this shit!”

“What? They can’t do that—” upon Dee’s confirmation that they in fact can do that, Charlie scrambles for Frank and the table he’s sat at. “C’mon, Frank, we can’t let them get away with this shit! We gotta do the trial, man.”

“Fine, fine, we’ll do the stupid trial,” he grumbles. “I still think it’s stupid that you jerks aren’t just gettin’ punished right now—“

“But if we gotta prove it and make it clear in a court of law, that’s what we’re gonna do, right Frank?”
He lets out a rotten sigh. “Right.”

“So,” Dee leans against a pillar, arms crossed in something resembling delight. “Mac and Dennis should... lay out what happened up till what happened in that tape, right?”

“Uh, duh,” Mac says, sounding as close as he can to rolling his eyes without actually rolling them. Like he thinks Dee’s doing a shitty job of managing this fake court, because of course he’d do more better.

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COURT TRANSCRIPT OF WHAT MAC AND DENNIS WERE DOING BEFORE THEY GOT TO THE SANDWICH SHOP AND ALLEGEDLY BURNT IT DOWN (ACCORDING TO MAC AND DENNIS)

MAC: So, we were having a chill walk down the street, completely sober–

Dennis swats at Mac, looking flustered. He appears to have wanted Mac to omit that statement. He appears to have regretted not starting sooner, and inadvertently allowing Mac to speak first.

DENNIS: Jesus, Mac! Shut up. You’re–you’re being weird–

DEE: Sounds like you two were drunk.

CHARLIE: Of course they were drunk, you kidding me?

FRANK: They was stumblin’ around in that video. If they weren’t drunk, they were high.

It is important to note that Frank is nursing down a beer at top speed. However, it is equally important to note that all participants in this court of session are also somewhat engaged in the imbibing of several alcoholic drinks.

DENNIS: We were mostly sober. And yes, Mac is completely right, I just… hate the way he said that. You made it sound like you were hiding something–

MAC: But Dennis–

DENNIS: What?

He says this slow and gives Mac a warning glance, which has Mac backing down immediately.
MAC: Dennis tells it better.

DENNIS: Yes, thank you, Mac. But there’s really not all that much to the story. Mac and I were walking past the sandwich shop on our way home when we noticed the place wasn’t locked up. So we, well, we thought the worst. Who knows what could’ve happened between closing time where the door should’ve been locked and when we were passing by? Could you blame us? Two hapless souls? For walking in when we did? Worried about our humble—well, one of our—humble establishments, and all the work we put into it? Our heart, our blood… all the tears shed. How could we just walk away?

DEE: Jesus christ, Dennis, could you just get to it?

He sighs, sitting down.

DEE: You’re just boring me, is all. Thought I was here for a crazy bitch fight. You’re making me all sleepy.

Frank’s snores can be heard scratching their way out his larynx.

CHARLIE: Was he being boring? I just like, didn’t get any of that, bro.

MAC: Yeah… me neither… Sorry dude, but like, I was there. And I have no idea what the hell you’re talking about.

Dennis sighs, clearly frustrated but also unopposed to just moving on.

DENNIS: Fine. We were walking past the sandwich shop. It was unlocked. We went in to see what the hell was going on. Pop goes the weasel, something caught fire, the store turns to ash. Happy now?

DEE: Oh. Well, you could’ve just said that. Does that conclude your official statement?

She’s trying to sound all smart and official. She sounds only annoying and plain boring.

DENNIS: Yes.

MAC: Dennis, is it okay if I second that?
He sighs. But Mac infers from it.

MAC: Seconded!

DEE: Charlie? Frank? Your statement regarding the matter?

CHARLIE: Frank?

He taps Frank on the shoulder until he wakes, and Frank seems to choke on his spit as he stirs, leaving Charlie to awkwardly scramble.

CHARLIE: Uh, we object! All of that is bullshit, and...

FRANK: They weren’t in there to check on no fire! They were there makin’ a sandwich!

Silence befalls the fake, unconvincing court room. Mac and Dennis, especially, look nervous about this. Dee looks fascinated. She has not yet watched the surveillance footage submitted by Frank and Charlie as of yet, in order to maintain her impartiality, which we all know is non-existent. Dee will likely vote for whoever insults her the least throughout this session. Charlie and Frank look absolutely smug. They seem to think they have bested Mac and Dennis. They might well be right.

DEE: Well? Mac? Dennis? Do you… deny these accusations laid before you?

MAC: Uh… We do?

Dennis snaps out of whatever trance or panic he’s plunged himself into to scowl at Mac.

DENNIS: Of course we do, Mac. Don’t go sounding so unconfident.

MAC: We firmly deny the accusations!

He turns to look at Dennis.

MAC: Dennis, is that better?
Dennis merely sighs, his exhale clearly strained, as are the hands he extends over the surface of their table. Slowly, he reaches for his beer and takes several paced gulps. This is going to be a very long afternoon.

DEE: Well, I guess we should let the evidence speak for itself.

Smiling, she pops the tape into the VCR.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED LEADING UP TO AND DURING THE EVENTS OF THE SANDWICH SHOP FIRE (BECAUSE MAC AND DENNIS WERE OBVIOUSLY LYING TO SOME DEGREE)

He’s never felt this tense in his own home.

Like eggshells make up the tile on their floor, and he’s trying desperately not to make a noise. He is also, literally, trying not to make any noise. He’s afraid, he’s wary, he feels incredibly awkward. He feels stupid for his feelings, justified as they may be.

He can’t stop thinking about it. Like he’s waiting for it to happen, to pounce on his back like a rabid wolf meeting prey.

“Yes, Mac is right, however suggestively he’s saying this. You two need to come more prepared to film a sex scene at our next shoot, okay?”

She had said that like it was nothing, their director. Smiled and walked away and with her departure she left a heat that started to cling to his body, wrapping tight like shrinking vines around a helpless tree.

The heat’s still here, it hasn’t left.

His fingers grasp onto the tiniest of spoons, slowly stirring a cup of tea that’s had to sit there, cooling far beyond necessary. His heart is lodged in his throat, and his eyes could only wish they were on the back of his head, watching Mac sit at their table, drinking his tea.

What is Mac in this situation? Does he incite fear? Or anticipation? Dennis doesn’t know. All he knows is... he is a walking fire hazard, waiting to walk into him; flame and a bottle of Merlot. If Dennis is a ticking time bomb, Mac is a ringing phone waiting to set him off. Dennis is a ravaged forest in a drought, and Mac is the scorching heat that will set him ablaze.

He is so caught up in the euphoria and symbolism of his thoughts that it distracts him long enough,
long enough for Mac to have finished his tea and to brush past him when he puts his cup in the sink, but it’s enough to send him reeling; his heart is exploding, his mouth falls agape as he turns around, on the defensive.

“Not now!” he yelps, and he catches genuine surprise on Mac’s face.

“Not now what?” Mac watches Dennis, eyes compelling his face and lips and teeth and tongue for an... explanation. He was just putting his cup in the sink. Mac runs tap water into his cup, then shuts it off.

“Never mind,” it seems paranoia has gotten the best of him.

Momentarily, it appears Mac is willing to drop the subject when he opens their fridge to retrieve a half-eaten sandwich. Dennis considers scolding him for leaving the thing in there unwrapped, germs and other gross shit would’ve killed any nutrition or inherent value that had by now.

“Come on, Dennis, just tell me,” he nearly sighs at this response. He should’ve been faster with his considerations. Perhaps it’s not too late to pick a petty fight. “You’ve been weird since we got back from filming.”

Fucking great. So he’s noticed. So he’s sensed Dennis and his discomfort and he’s just reveling in it, isn’t he? Fucking guy.

“Oh, and I’m expected to be completely, what? Ecstatic? Jumping up and down the whole night at the thought?”

“What thought, dude?”

“The, the thing!” he yells. “God, us! Having to practice!”

“Ohhhhh,” Mac only seeming to just get this is frustrating and almost patronizing to Dennis. As if Mac hasn’t been thinking about this the entire time since filming wrapped up. He’s been waiting to get his hands on Dennis, he bets. Any moment now, he’s going to remind Dennis that they were told to practice by the director, one of the highest powers working on the film, and that he can’t avoid it, can’t run away, can’t say no...

“Oh?”

“Yeah. I thought she was just messing with us.”

“Messing with us?” Dennis scoffs. “She was dead serious, Mac! How could you not get that?”

“I don’t know,” Mac shrugs. “I mean, we were just messing around. What’s that bitch’s problem?”

“Her problem, Mac, was that we couldn’t film a sex scene without—” he hesitates, to absolve himself of blame—“you, you causing me to kick you off the bed.”

“But that was us messing around too!”

“Right,” he purses his lip in agreement, for something to do.

“Well, we don’t have to do it,” continues Mac, and this, this is what catches Dennis off guard.

“What?”

“We don’t have to do shit. We can just chill, right? I mean, it’s not like she asked us to video
ourselves fake doin’ it, so, and like, we know we can act that sex scene out just fine. You with me?”

Dennis is unsure what to make of this. “Yes.” Mac is definitely bluffing, somehow. Maybe he thinks that by saying no and not wanting to practice having fake sex he will be appeasing Dennis. And that will cause Dennis to let his guard down and then he’ll trick him, he’ll delude him into doing his bidding. Somehow. “So... you don’t want to. To practice?”

“I mean, it’s not even real sex. Who cares? We’ll figure it out at the next shoot,” Mac tosses his sandwich and begins making a new one. Finally realized that bread is stale now, he has.

But that’s not what bites at Dennis right now. Mac seemed perfectly appreciative of getting to film that sex scene with him yesterday. He seemed perfectly delighted at the notion that he and Dennis practice said sex scene when it was asked of them yesterday too. He’s been slobbering over his body for years and still yearns for more even after he’d gotten a taste that day on their couch and now he dares, he has the audacity to say he doesn’t want to practice having fake sex with him? He would rather just ‘chill’ and figure it out later? How is any of this supposed to make sense? It doesn’t make sense. Mac is lying, but to what end?

It eats him up, all-consuming and he is surrounded by a new yet familiar kind of heat.

The day rolls around and starts coming to close and Dennis is still a mess. The more he thinks about it, the more it doesn’t make any sense. Mac thinks they don’t need to practice? He knows next to nothing about what they’re doing. He’s gonna screw up the scene with his incompetence isn’t he? And Dennis is going to get blamed and scolded somehow, and that’s not a good look.

He can’t let Mac’s shortcomings reflect on him like that, no, he has to make it right.

Mac walks out from the shower, rubbing a hand towel through his damp hair, and Dennis is idly tapping his finger on their script.

“Hey, Mac?”

Mac stops mid-rub and gives him a soft smiled look. “Yeah?”

“I think we do need to practice.”

“Oh, you’re talking about... our lines, right?”

“Well, yes, but also—” he sighs, he can’t believe he’s doing this—“I’m starting to wonder if you’re taking the sex scenes seriously at all.”

“I mean. I guess I am?”

“You think so?” his fingers stretch over the manuscript. “Because I’m finding your attitude to be rather blase. What with, the, the avoidance of practice sessions that could be very much instrumental to our performance. If you screw this up for us, Mac, it’s going to reflect very badly on me. And I can’t have that. Can’t have your lack of professionalism screwing up my career.”

“Oh,” Mac lowers his eyes. “I mean, I just thought you didn’t want to do it. I’m cool either way.”
“You... you are?”

“Yeah. You just looked so stressed out, y’know, it was worrying me.”

“You were... worried? About me?”

Mac shrugs. “I don’t want you to be. To be scared of me. I don’t wanna scare you. If you don’t want me touching you outside of like, acting scenes and shit, I’m not gonna. Is that... was I wrong?”

Dennis goes silent. He had not expected this turn of events. It wasn’t a trick or a scheme to get what he wanted at all, Mac just. Cared about his feelings? And wanted him to feel safe. Hm.

“I wouldn’t. Say it’s wrong. But I’m not that fragile, Mac. I can handle a work-mandated sex scene rehearsal.”

“Oh, okay.” Mac pulls up a chair. “So what do you want me—I mean—us, to do?”

“Well—” Dennis straightens in his seat and flips through the script. “There are several scenes we’ll have to do, many of them varying in speed and, and tempo. Intensity, all of that. I for one, do not think you understand the nuances enough to put up convincingly distinct performances.”

“Right,” he looks a tiny bit discouraged, and perhaps that tugs at Dennis somewhat. He doesn’t aim to be cruel. He should’ve revised what he wanted to say.

“I mean I don’t know if you. Have the nuance. You might, I’m not saying you don’t, but in order to prove that I’ll have to test you on this stuff. Okay?”

Mac nods, a bit more upbeat this time. “Sure, dude. Where do you wanna start?”

He flips through pages again. “This one,” he points. “The direction calls for sweet, slow. Something emotional. You, well, currently you seem like you’re gonna be raw dogging me for all the scenes. And we can’t have that.”

“Oh,” Mac scratches his head like he’s confused and just finding out that there are other ways to have sex. “So, I gotta be more romantic and shit?”

“Kind of. Try, try being more... subdued. Kiss me tender, Mac.”

“Kiss you tender?”

It’s like he’s trying to hold back a laugh, and Dennis doesn’t appreciate that. See, this is the kind of attitude shit he was talking about.

“Yeah. See? You can’t do it, can you?”

Mac snorts. “I can do tender. I’ll do tender for you.”

“Well-“

He is cut off when Mac leans forth and pulls him in by the shirt, and his lips lock with his, soft. He drinks him in, like a warm sweet coffee sip by sip, determined to stay awake. Slow and steady does the kiss move, and Dennis can’t help but flutter his eyes shut. He feels something at the base of his torso tighten, perhaps shiver, and a headache he hadn’t been aware of till now dissipates. Mac takes his pain away moving his mouth against his, the kiss slick but not wet with desperation, the minty scent of Mac’s body soap lingering in the air, and he inhales it, he wants to breathe in everything
about this, wants it to never end, wants it to escalate, wants it to be more.

He never thought Mac knew the art of subtlety. The man wears his heart on a gigantic LED sign in Times Square; everyone sees, everyone knows, and they’re kind of tired of it. His ability to be coy is practically non-existent, doesn’t leave anything to the imagination, surely not his sexuality. Even when he was in the closet what he was could be pinpointed by the dullest of minds.

But god, those lips. They taught Dennis something today, they were withholding something, keeping secrets, and he wants to know so much more, wants to know what else he’s hiding.

He catches at Mac’s shirt, slipping a hand up his thigh, and that’s when he proves himself more, by pulling away. He just kissed Dennis like he was a good Christian girl who can make out your face into a begging, pleading man, but waves you away when you want more because, her inherent value is her virginity, and she knows it.

And Mac’s no virgin, but, fuck, he sure makes Dennis feel like one. Like everything he’s ever experienced in the, sexual or romantic field, has been nothing. Subpar. Incomparable. Not even a warm up to this. Dennis has never done anything with anyone else that has felt even remotely close... to a warm up for this. Has he ever been kissed if it wasn’t Mac’s lips against his? Has he ever been touched if it weren’t Mac’s hands?

These may be the wistful yearning thoughts of a man in his forties, you would think this magic is not lost on Dennis, maybe you’d think that this is something he’s been searching for his entire life. But no. He’s been avoiding this. He’s so scared, of his own thoughts, of his own desires, he’s almost grateful Mac’s stopped kissing. It makes this easier to stuff away in a box in the back of his mind that he’s going to bury several feet deep. Later.

Right now, his lips are quivering, and he wants to tell Mac he is in love.

But that is stupid, and no one falls in love from a kiss. And as good a kisser as Mac has proven himself to be, a good, nuanced kisser, who has more settings than desperate and horny, he is. Well. Color him impressed, at least. Impressed. That’s not love, right?

Please god, don’t let it be love.

“How was that?”

Dennis nearly purses his lips together, but when he does, the taste of Mac’s lips assault him, and that alone is enough to set his lips apart. “That was. That was good.”

His eyes light up, with that innocence that won’t die. He isn’t looking, of course, because looking would require eye contact and his heart is too busy overworking to do anything else. Also, he doesn’t need to look. Dennis remembers that innocence, he’s seen it staring him in the face for thirty years. Sometimes his glimmer is enough to light up his own eyes, whose lights died out years ago.

Mac is running his hand through his hair. Dennis wants to lick his arm.

“You really think so?”

“How’d you learn to... kiss like that?”

He lifts his shoulders sincerely in doubt. “I dunno. I just thought, thought ‘tender’ and had at it. Guess that worked.”
Great. Like things weren’t bad enough already, now Dennis has to find out that Mac is supposedly a natural at kissing.

“Yeah, yeah, it. It worked.” Dennis feels like he needs to lie down. Forever. Six feet under. “I guess you’re not so bad at this.”

Mac beams, in a way he probably finds subtle, and his cheeks are rosy red, and he’s reaching for the script with a held back excitement. “So, what scene do you wanna do now?”

“Well,” Dennis clears his throat. He is going to be fine. This is going to be fine. “After that kiss, there were lines. You haven’t read those lines.”

“Oh,” Mac nods obediently, flipping the pages back. “Sorry Dennis.” He clears his throat and reads the lines out. “Hey, hey. Don’t go. You can’t say you still wanna leave. You can’t lie to me, man. Not after a kiss like that. I know you want me too.”

He pushes the script over to Dennis. He lets out a tiny sigh before reading. “Want and need are two different things, Vic. I want to stay. But I need to leave. You can’t do this. You can’t make this unfair for me. I have a woman back home. A woman and a... kid.”

Out the corner of his eye, he sees Mac avert his gaze. He isn’t the only one feeling called out by this situation, perhaps.

“But I wanna make it unfair,” Mac continues. “I wanna make leaving me hurt more than staying. You don’t get to just, just make me love you like that then leave me all by myself. We can make a family too. A real one. Because this one will actually be true. Because in this one you won’t be lying to yourself when you lie in my bed.”

“Don’t do this, Vic.”

“Oh yeah, Hugh?”

“Cling on too hard, stay this stubborn and selfish—you’re gonna push me away. And lose all of me.”

Mac scoffs, as Vic. “Like hell I will. Your eyes give you away every time.” He pauses. Breaks character. “And then, uh, after this they’re kissing again and it’s the sex scene—“

“I know.”

Mac’s eye shift left and right. “You... you still wanna do this?”

Dennis gets up, going over to their fridge and getting two beers out. “No,” he says, setting them on the table. “I wanna get unbelievably wasted.”

Mac is hesitant in the eyes, but his fingers, as if on instinct, immediately reach for the can, cracking it open and taking a gulp. Dennis wishes his eyes hadn’t followed his fingers, saw the way his muscles flexed in that movement, watched as his throat bobbed when he swallowed, wishes he hadn’t salivated seeing that, chasing his thirst with beer but still coming up empty.

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He stirs to savory smells and sizzling, pushing himself up on the couch, his eyes creaking open to
see multiple empty cans on their coffee table. Oh. He must’ve drifted off after the what, fifth beer? 
Dennis slept shy of a wink last night, so he supposes this is not an unforeseen occurrence. He 
 cracks open another beer, drinking it as he walks over to the kitchen, standing over Mac’s shoulder 
as he nearly burns a very thin beef patty. He appears to be making the Mac Attack, the sandwich he 
claimed to have invented a while back.

“Didn’t we have dinner?”

“This is supper,” Mac replies, turning off the stove. “Also, we did not have dinner.”

“We had two packs of beer.”

“That’s not dinner, dude.”

Dennis continues to sip his anyway, like the shooting pains he’s feeling aren’t at all ironic to his 
hunger denial. “I read somewhere that humans can get all the nutrients they need from beer and 
potatoes alone.”

“Well, I didn’t see you eating any potatoes,” Mac reaches for the bag of chips he’s already opened, 
and the plate of fries he must’ve made while Dennis was asleep. He begins plating his sandwich, or 
burger, or whatever Mac wants to call it, and Dennis looks on in distaste. The whole thing is 
overloaded with sodium and sugar and carbs and definitely gluten. “Want some fries?”

“All the oil...” he trails off tiredly, frowning and waving his hand dismissively.

“I didn’t use oil, I made those in the microwave.”

“Still. I can see the oil. It’s frozen fries, Mac, the oil was there before they sealed it in the damn 
bag.”

“Uh, I could... take out the chips and fries if you want half of the other stuff,” he offers once more, 
genuinely trying his best to make the thing look appetizing. “I can add a, a lettuce to it.”

“A lettuce?” Dennis snorts. “We have lettuce?”

“Maybe.”

This is easy to confirm. Dennis turns around and opens the mostly empty fridge. “No, not a single 
fruit or vegetable in sight. This thing is a ghost town.”

“Aw, shit, for real? Didn’t we go grocery shopping the other day?”

Apparently that wasn’t as recent as we thought,” he shuts the fridge. They’d been relying on 
eating meals provided on set and heating leftovers they stole. Guess they’ve run out. “It’s fine.”

“It’s not fine, Dennis. Come on. I’ll make you anything you wanna eat. Or we’ll order something 
in.”

Dennis shifts his foot from one side to the other. Usually, he’d continue to push Mac’s pleas aside. 
He’s not even that hungry, aside from his stomach being empty and acidic. But he actually has a 
request. Something on his mind.

“I want... a Dennis Delight.”

“Oh.”
He seems hesitant now, like he doesn’t want to make it. Knowing Mac, the Dennis Delight probably doesn’t even exist and he was only bragging about it earlier to impress him.

“You know, the, the healthy sandwich you said you were making for me. That wasn’t a lie, was it?”

Mac shakes his head. “No, no, it’s real. And I can make it. But... we’d have to hit up a supermarket. And it’s pretty late.”

“I’m sure some places are open,” Dennis grabs the apartment keys. “We’ll find it. Be good to get some fresh air anyway.”

Turns out, most places are closed. Or, well, places that sell what Mac needs to make a Dennis Delight. They end up hitting a lot of convenience stores and buying beer they shouldn’t be drinking anymore instead, but it’s fine, because they have money, and the air is cool, and the sky is clear, dark. It makes all the things beneath it seem like secrets.

“You think we should head home?” Mac drains his beer, smashes the can flat and kicks it aside. He takes a bite of their apple slices and then hands it to Dennis. Oh yeah. Mac made him buy a pack of sliced, peeled apples for them to share. His way of tricking Dennis into eating, except it’s not a trick, because Dennis is voluntarily eating the apples. They’re not that sweet, and crunchy enough for him. He takes a few bites, starts to finish it all, lengthening the silence between them, but Mac makes no attempt to break it. He seems to want Dennis to finish the apples. Probably got sick of pretending he wanted to eat something so healthy anyway.

“Maybe. It’s still a little nice out. We can head back later.”

Just then, they walk by a somewhat familiar establishment.

“Hey, isn’t this our sandwich shop?”

“Yeah. Why’s the door unlocked?”

Mac lights up. “Oh, Dennis! I can make your sandwich!”

“Really?”

“Yeah! All the ingredients I need for it are in here–“

Mac pulls the door open, rushing in, and Dennis begrudgingly follows behind him.

“How do you know that for sure?”

He’s already in the kitchen, rummaging through everything and opening the fridge, taking stuff out.

“I got Frank to stock this stuff,” he replies, “I finished inventing your sandwich based on everything here. Then we were gonna launch it as the newest menu item. Told Frank it would attract those like, uh, hippie health crowds. It was gonna be a surprise.”

Dennis grimaces, biting his lip. He doesn’t exactly appreciate being referred to or compared to a
hippie. But it is... not horrid of Mac to want to surprise him. Maybe he even appreciates it. “W-well... if you knew all the stuff was in here, why didn’t we come here in the first place?”

“I thought it was locked.”

“Could’ve tried breaking in.”

“I guess,” he shrugs, having amassed all his ingredients by now. “But this turned out great. I can get your opinion on the Dennis Delight now before we launch it. You know, in case I gotta make any changes.”

“That’s true. I’m probably going to have many opinions.” Dennis inches closer to Mac to watch him. He’s just curious about the process that goes into a Dennis Delight, and it’s kind of dark in here. Turns out their shop relies a lot on daylight to see things. Typical of Frank to cut costs like that. Mac’s sandwich must have really impressed Frank for the guy to splurge on ingredients like this.

Mac doesn’t give that a response and quietly begins assembling the Dennis Delight. As much as he wants to be skeptical of all this, cracking half-hearted insults and jokes of the like, he can’t help but admire how much care is being put into this. The base of the “sandwich” is two large fresh looking layers of romaine lettuce. He sees how the length of the lettuce is meant to mimic the look of a sub, and he can’t help but appreciate the thought. Then again, Mac probably got a lot of his inspiration from this via googling and finding recipes people already invented. But somehow, he doesn’t let that thought cloud the optimism he feels watching Mac at work. He proceeds to lay down thin slices of chicken breast down, along with some cold cuts that, as easily observed by Dennis, aren’t at all fatty. Mac tosses on some chopped tomatoes, in tiny cubes, and then some tiny chopped mushrooms.

“This looks good, Mac,” Dennis says in an approving voice, and Mac turns around, smiling at him as he squeezes something of orange on top.

“Oh, just wait. The last bit’s gonna blow your mind.”

“Yeah?” He has to admit this makes him skeptical. What if Mac’s finale for the Dennis Delight is to dump on a shit ton of oil, or, sugar, or something fatty that’s gonna appeal to him but will turn Dennis off altogether.

Mac reaches under in one of the drawers, and pulls something out with glee.

“Is that... a blowtorch?”

“Yeah!”

He shakes and aims. The result noise and heat causes them to jump back.

“Fuck! Shit, that’s--“ Dennis opens his eyes in fear--“is that a fire?”

Mac is already dragging him by the arm, tossing the blowtorch in a corner. “We gotta get outta here! This place is gonna blow!”

At risk of burning to death in this establishment, Dennis wants nothing more than to roll his eyes at Mac’s very obvious attempt to sound like a badass movie star in an action movie. But Mac’s tugging at his arm, and he’s really strong so, Dennis gets pulled out rather quickly. Soon, they’re running out of the burning shop, only looking back once or twice to see and panic at the sight of growing amber flames.
It’s been a day now. They did all they could in that situation: they went home, they went to bed, they woke up, and the fire’s probably out by now. Someone probably called in the damn thing. Now all they have to worry about is... making sure no one finds out. Definitely none of the gang should know. God forbid the cops think it’s a case of arson and come knocking. This would make their upcoming trial against the McPoyles close to impossible to win. Fuck. Right. They’ve got a trial coming up. Mac and Dennis can’t afford to get arrested again, definitely not right now. They can’t afford to lose the trial either.

Great. Now he’s all tensed up and it’s only morning. He moves over to the counter for another cup of tea. At this rate, he’ll be lucky if he sleeps for even a minute.

“Dennis,” he hears Mac from the table. “You okay?”

“Oh, just fantastic,” he sneers. He shakes the pot, realizing it’s empty. Great, now he has to make more tea.

“It’s just, that’s your third cup of tea. Sure you don’t wanna switch to coffee?”

“We’re out of coffee, Mac.”

“Really? Didn’t know that.” He taps at the table nervously. “We should like. Talk about yesterday, right?”

“Why?” he says, more like a statement than a question.

“You seem pretty freaked out is all. Plus, I’m pretty freaked out. We didn’t speak last night. I don’t even know if you’re like, physically okay. Let alone... mentally.”

Dennis loosens his exterior. Perhaps Mac being just as scared is... somewhat comforting. Safety in numbers, he supposes. Feels less alone.

“I didn’t really take a good look at myself, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“Lemme see your arms, dude,” Mac beckons, and Dennis looks down at his hoodie. Maybe he really does have some bruises he can’t see at the moment. God forbid they get worse or even infected to the point where he can feel them.

He whips it off, leaving only his tank top on, and stretches his arms out, presenting them to Mac. He gently examines them, actually examines them, turning them over every now and then to get a more thorough look. His hands are... rough but soothing. Dennis realizes he’s never really held Mac’s hand. Never really felt it like this, fingers on his wrists tracing his arms. Or, well, at the very least, he has no memory of it, definitely not in recent years. Suddenly, like an irresistible instinct taking hold, he grabs on. Grabs onto his hands.

Mac freezes up in confusion. “Uh, Dennis?”

He lets go slowly, like something in him is begging to hold on but something else that’s only a tiny bit stronger is screaming at him to shove Mac right this instant. He clears his throat. “Nothing. Stop, just stop. There’s clearly nothing wrong with me. You can stop checking now.”
He backs off immediately, not physically, no, he doesn’t walk away or anything. He stays in his chair, eyes just that little bit glazed over. But something about his demeanor tells him he’s run away from the walls Dennis has just built on the ground where he used to stand.

“So, we’re really going to be practicing the sex scene this time?”

“For the thousandth time, Mac, yes. But we won’t just be doing the sex scenes, of course, we’ll be doing all the lines in this scene too. We gotta, we gotta make sure we can keep up the pace and the flow, everything.”

“Our... okay. Wait, lemme take one last look at my lines—“ he reaches for it, reading—“okay, I’m done.”

That’s a very fast and insufficient read if Dennis ever saw one. Either Mac is overestimating his ability to memorize lines or he’s somehow doing it to impress. He’s sick of trying to figure it out.

They begin the scene.

“I’m telling you, Vic, I don’t turn tricks,” Dennis starts off, his voice slightly sultry, his words meant to tempt, entice. “Though, I could turn a trick or two for you. Make an exception.”

Mac bites his lip slightly. He hates how good Mac is at this. He never expected him to be a sort of decent actor. Mac invites desire as Vic, a desire Dennis can’t quite explain except by dismissing it as the pleasure you can derive from watching good acting. “You’d really do that?”

“No,” Dennis gives a half-hearted snort. “I was just trying to see if you’d take the bait. Besides, you could never afford me.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that.”

“Really? You, Vic Vinegar—a rich man?”

“I don’t mean money—“ Mac has his finger tracing down his chin—“I mean I can make it worth your while.”

His shirt comes off, then Mac’s, and then they’re kissing. It’s fast, he can’t describe it, it’s a kiss
that’s moving so quickly and changing so quickly that he can’t form a thought without having to discard it just as soon. All he can say is... good. Mac, as Vic, is running his hands over his body, and it feels like heaven is descending down upon the earth and choosing to inhabit only Dennis, uh, wait, he means... he means Hugh. Hugh feels great. Dennis is merely helping the guy out, you know, helping him realize what’s good and what to feel.

“Lift–” his lips tremble as the word breaks free–“lift me up.”

“For the scene?”

He rolls his eyes. Perhaps Mac is not so great an actor after all. Can’t even stay in character right.

“Yes for the scene,” he’s kissed him silly, maybe. “Hurry up.”

Mac grabs his legs, and his back slams against the wall now, as he feels Mac between his thighs, warm and solid. He wraps himself around his body, arms circling tentatively, and he feels so starved. He wants to taste, he wants to be touched, he kisses his way down Mac’s jaw, and he moans as Dennis licks a stripe down his neck. There’s this space between his neck and shoulder that he can’t help but be drawn to, he kisses him there, sucks him in, he absentmindedly grinds against the man, and some sort of to-die-for groan releases from the back of Mac’s throat, but it upsettingly coincides with Dennis falling to the ground with a thump.

“Oh! Fuck–“ perhaps something like that groan isn’t to die for after all–“you dropped me!”

It’s just dangerous, in more ways than one.

“Oh shit, sorry,” Mac pulls Dennis up fast, much too fast, maybe. He gets dizzy, and this coincides with him getting a good close look at Mac. Shirtless. He swallows, because there is excess saliva in his mouth. Probably produced as a defense mechanism when he fell. Just his body trying to protect itself. Good. If his body’s working, that’s one thing less to worry about.

When Dennis doesn’t speak for a full minute, seemingly just staring into... a lower than eye level space, Mac gets worried. “Hey, Dennis, you okay?”

“No thanks to you,” Dennis clears his throat. He looks away, and then back at Mac’s chest again. His defined muscles, his skin tone. He realizes... when their movie hits theaters, this is what everyone will get to see too. Mac, his body, free to view if you pay ten measly freaking dollars! Or just, free. If you wait a little while and pirate it. This, this does something to him, he’ll admit.

And then it hits him. He’ll be seen too. He’ll be known. His body... his body will be open to all kinds of scrutiny, his skin up for grabs, anyone could, anyone could–

“Dennis?”

He sinks to his bed and starts to shake.

“Dennis? Dennis, look at me, what–what’s wrong?”

“They’re gonna see–“ he presses his lips together but a tear falls anyway, his throat fills up with something unmovable and painful anyway.

“See what? See–“ he seems to realize he’s not helping, and then he stops. “Dennis, breathe. Breathe with me, man.”

It helps a tiny bit.
“You want water?” He doesn’t wait for a response, he gets up to go get it anyway, but then something scary sets off in Dennis when he tries to leave, and he grabs onto Mac for dear life, pulling him back. “You... don’t want water?”

He takes a few breaths, regulates it back to something that’s somewhat regular. The tears have stopped, they were very brief, actually, which is a relief. It’s quite manly of him, to be honest, to cry but only a little and not a lot.

“No, I do want water. Let’s get it together, at the, in the kitchen.”

Mac pours a cup of warm water for Dennis, and as he sips it, he pours a cup of tea too, for good measure.

Then he pours another for himself because he’s a copycat, and he sits with Dennis, drinking in silence and waiting for him to say something, anything.

“I... I’m worried. No. More of... afraid.”

“Of what?”

He asks this like he really doesn’t want to but also he desperately has to, because he wants to help but doesn’t want to make things worse.

“We’re gonna be doing sex scenes, right?” Dennis swallows. He can feel his throat now, it works somewhat. “That means, that means people are gonna see our bodies. My body.”

“Oh...” he fixes a look at Mac, who gets flustered and goes “but, but you look so great, Dennis. Why-why’d you be scared?”

“Yeah, maybe you’d think that,” he half-heartedly huffs. “Mac, I don’t know--“

“What is it?” he asks gently. “You can tell me. You can tell me anything, man.”

Dennis looks around subtly, as if they aren’t aggressively alone right now, but he’s paranoid about revealing what he’s about to say, and perhaps he’s never wanted to say it, never wanted to think about it, either.

“Look. It’s, it’s been a hard time. A bit of a... rough patch.”

“What? But, but you’re a, you’re a--“

“I know, Mac. I know. But I haven’t managed to. Get with. A... woman. In ages. And it’s gotten so tiring. I don’t know what they’re not seeing, or, or not liking. I’ve been trying to figure out what I’ve been doing wrong, trying to get back to my peak. Even with the movie, and with the occasional chick recognizing me, they. They back off after a while. And I’m at the point where I don’t bother chasing anymore. Something, I’ve lost something. And now I–I don’t want--“ he choke up--“they don’t deserve--“ he feels his eyes burn hot again--“they shouldn’t get to see--“

“Hey hey--“ Mac reaches over and embraces him--“Dennis shh, shh... It’s going to be okay. All those fucking women are shit and don’t know what they’re missing out on. I’d punch them all if I could,” he strokes Dennis’ back, “and hey, if you don’t want anyone to see you, don’t feel like showing skin, I’ll--“ he pauses quick to think--“I’ll hide you.”

Dennis looks up at him like he’s a sharp beam of light and he desperately wants to get blinded. “You will? You can?”
“Sure. I’ll try. I don’t care if people see me, point at me, laugh. They won’t get to do that to you. If you don’t wanna show skin, I’ll make sure I... block all the shots. We’ll work it out.”

He smiles. It is a tired one, but still, he smiles. “Thank you, Mac.” He means it.

“Hey, and who knows. Maybe it’s not that the women don’t like you. Maybe they think you don’t actually—“

Their apartment door slams open and they jump apart, watching as Charlie barges in, rambling in several emotions. Uh oh. He’s talking about how the sandwich shop burnt down, how he discovered it, freaked out, how he’s so upset, how he just wants to make sandwiches, oh who could have done this, oh he could just kill them—and then he stops.

“Hey, uh. Why’re you guys shirtless?”

Mac and Dennis look down, as if they’re just realizing this fact as well. Fuck. They forgot to put their shirts back on.

“Uh...” Mac looks to Dennis for an explanation, his eyes widened. Of course he’s looking to Dennis to get them out of this. Typical of him to be unable to think for himself.

“We got—“ he pauses—“we got jam on our shirts. So we had to take them off—“ his eyes circle the room—“to wash them.”

“Oh. You guys have jam? I want some of that jam, man, jam sounds good right about now—“

Of all the loopholes in his excuse, including valid questions a sane person might ask, such as ‘Why are you in the kitchen and not in your wardrobes getting new shirts?’ and ‘How did both of you get jam on both of your shirts at the same time?’, he did not expect Charlie to be searching for actual jam in their apartment. But of course he is.

“Oh, we–we threw out the jam,” Mac covers shakily, and Charlie looks very bothered by this fact.

“What?” He clutches his face in pain. “You threw out all the jam? Perfectly good jam just sitting in the tra—“

“The jam went bad!” Dennis blurs out, smiling sheepishly.

Charlie narrows his eyes suspiciously. “Did the jam really go bad, or did you think it went bad?”

“Oh, it totally went bad,” Mac continues. “So bad, and, and the jam we got on the–our shirts. It was the last of the jam. Jar’s empty. Practically licked clean. So we tossed it out.”

Dennis nods with a clenched smile. None of this is making any sense, which means it would just about work in convincing Charlie. At the very least, he seems to have forgotten about the whole sandwich shop burning down thing.

He seems to approve more now. “Did you smash the jar?”

“Oh yeah, completely.”

“In smithereens, it is.”

He nods. “Good, good. Can’t have unsmashed jars lying around. That’s dangerous.”

For who? He desperately wants to ask. But that would just make matters worse, and frankly, he
“You know who I think coulda done this?” Mac says. “Cricket.”

“Who now? Oh, Cricket.”

“Oh yeah, I’m with Mac,” Dennis continues patronizingly. “This whole thing reeks of Cricket. I bet he did it. Bet he did all of it, whole thing, by himself. Guy’s jealous of our success.”

“Yeah!” Charlie’s eyes widen, remembering something. “You know what I bet this is? He’s still pissed Frank and I chased him out with that stick!”

“At the sandwich shop?”

“Yeah, at the sandwich shop. He kept like, begging for scraps of food and shit? Annoying the hell outta us.”

“God, what a creep. Like, get your own food, am I right?”

“It’s not our fault he’s homeless? Right? And hungry? Like, get a job dude! Get a house if you’re so sick of the streets.”

Dennis nods slowly. “You know, this is definitely revenge then,” he declares. If he didn’t know he and Mac did it, he would’ve totally pegged Cricket for the arson too. “We should go find him. Shake him down for answers.”

Charlie seems to be in agreement. “And like, make him pay us back in full, right? We can’t just let him go off free like that.”

“Uh–”

“Well, maybe, uh. Maybe we should agree that–“ Dennis hesitates–“whoever did this–“

“Cricket–“

“Yes, definitely Cricket, but. Speaking hypothetically, maybe we don’t need to make anyone pay for the damages.”

Charlie looks very skeptical and confused. “But... why?”

“I mean, Cricket’s broke as shit, right?” says Mac. “He’s got no money. He can’t pay us.”

“That’s right, Mac is right,” Dennis agrees carefully. “I say, we go down to whichever trashed up back alley he’s in, and, uh. Kick his ass.”

Now they’ve got Charlie on board.

“We’ll go, we’ll go whoop his ass!”

“Oh, we’re gonna kick him up so good. And then Frank, who has the money to pay for the damages, he’ll pay for the damages. But definitely we’re gonna make sure we teach Cricket a
lesson. Right?”

“Yeah, yeah, lemme call up Frank to meet us there—“ Charlie says half-heartedly, because he’s already got his phone up and ready to dial—“he was so pissed this morning, he’s gonna want a piece of this.”

When they find Cricket, he’s sat under some bridge, devouring a sandwich he clearly dug up from the trash. He looks even more banged up and filthy than they remember. Burned, even. Which is good for them. Dennis is immediately perturbed by the smells, tempted to puke right here.

“Shit, you see that Charlie?”

“He’s got a sandwich!”

“Oh yeah—“ Dennis gags—“I bet he, he got that from—“ he covers his mouth and nose—“Mac...”

“I think Dennis is tryna say that he’s pretty sure Cricket got that sandwich from our shop.”

Charlie looks incensed. “Oh, this guy... this guy’s gonna get it. He stole from us? He stole?!”

“You know what I think,” Mac says with an air of innocence but it is entirely conniving. “He broke into our place, made himself some food, probably took some for his other homeless friends, and then burnt the place down. As revenge.”

Dennis finally collects himself. “I bet,” he continues, “they’ve got all our food stashed somewhere. Think about it Charlie. This was a heist. They’ve got all your, your sewer crabs.”

“Shit,” Charlie looks panicked. “We gotta find that food!”

“The—what now?”

“I thought we were just gonna beat him up.”

“Well, yeah, like, we’ll still do that, but we gotta make him tell us where he hid the food, man! We gotta get it back, right guys?”

Mac and Dennis exchange uncomfortable looks. This entire experience has already been very draining, and going on a wild goose chase with Charlie to find some food that they know burnt to shit in that fire... sounds exhausting.

“Charlie, wouldn’t the food be spoiled by now?”

“What? No, food can’t spoil. It’s all the same once you cook it up. Come on! We stocked so much expensive shit. We have like, a duty, you know? To the food! We gotta find it. You guys with me or not?”

They exchange a look again, coming to a wordless decision.

“Let’s go beat that son of a bitch up till he tells us what we wanna hear.”
“Guys, I swear!” Cricket cries out. He shields his face with his banged up hands. Christ, is he missing a finger? “I got, I got no idea what you’re talking about!”

“Like shit you don’t!” Charlie screeches, arms crossed. “Mac, hit him again.”

“Wait!” Cricket screams. He raises his arms up in surrender. “I took it! I took it, okay? You got me, I’m sorry.”

“What?”

This is a strange turn of events. Perhaps they’ve banged Cricket up bad enough for him to give a false confession.

“Well, where is it, you bitch?” Charlie presses on, kicking Cricket in the shin. “Tell us!”

“It’s behind the Wawa!” he cries out. “Last night, me and my friends saw Mac and Dennis run out your burning shop, so we went in, and someone tried to put the fire out. But it was too big, so we just stole the fridge,” he confesses, crying. He seems to be telling the truth, and if he is, Mac and Dennis are fucked. “We brought it out and connected it to some electric thing behind the Wawa.”

Charlie looks over slowly at Mac and Dennis, his face seems raw and hurt. Betrayed.

“Ch–Charlie, you know you can’t trust this guy–“

“Yeah, he’s probably tryna get us to turn on each other so he can get out of this.”

He sighs, looking conflicted. “Which Wawa?”

“I’ll take you guys there. Y-You’ll see. I’m not lying, I swear!”

“Fine, take us there–“ Charlie motions at them to leave.

“Wait, we’re really going to the Wawa?”

“Charlie, you can’t possibly–“

“We’re going to the Wawa! Maybe he’s lying, maybe he’s not, but like, we can’t not check.”

Dennis is uncomfortable with how this situation is playing out. “Uh... he’s too filthy. I’m not letting him in my car.”

“We’ll toss him in the boot! Let’s go–“

“I value my boot too!”

“We’ll get a mat or something!” He puts his arms on his hips. “I’m starting to think you guys really did this. Did you guys do this?”

Mac and Dennis sneak a look at each other. At this point, the best they can hope for is that Cricket’s bluffing.

“Guess we’re going to the Wawa.”
It’s unbelievable how this series of events has turned out.

Cricket was telling the truth. Somehow, through his and his homeless gang’s poor desperate efforts, they carried that fridge out the burning sandwich shop with no casualties.

Charlie looks incredibly wounded when he sees Cricket pull open the fridge that clearly belonged to their shop, showing all the familiar produce they remember seeing.

“Charlie, please—“ Dennis beckons him to see sense—“he wasn’t lying about this, but he was definitely lying about me and Mac. Don’t you see? He was clearly setting us up so we’d get screwed when we got here. Make him look less bad.”

His eyes avert and he fully moves away from them. “I’m gonna call Frank. He said he was gonna check the tapes.”

Mac and Dennis visibly freak out at this. There were cameras in the shop? Where? Thankfully, Charlie does not see their minor meltdown, with his back turned and all.

“C-come on now...” Mac laughs sheepishly. “I mean, let’s face it. The cameras definitely burned in the fire.”

“Yeah! You’re not, you’re not gonna find anything there, buddy.”

Charlie shakes his head. “Uh-uh, Frank says the camera feed is sent somewhere as it records. So whatever happened before the fire, we’re gonna know.”

He swallows. This is it. They’re screwed. The jig is up.

The video goes fuzzy then black from the fire burning the wires, and then Frank clicks on the remote to stop the video.

“See! They went in there, and then they caused that fire with that blowtorch, and then they ditched! Causing Cricket to steal the fridge! They can’t go unpunished, right?”

“Must you credit us with Cricket’s crime? We didn’t put a gun to his head and make him steal that fridge.”

“But if he hadn’t stolen that damned fridge, it’d have burnt in the fire with the rest of the stuff!” Frank argues. “You should be thankin’ that son of a bitch!”

“Okay, okay, hear me out—“ Dennis stands up, drawing attention to himself—“let’s take a look at the facts, shall we? Mac and I allegedly caused the shop fire. The damages of which, are covered by insurance, since obviously, we’re not telling the cops we had a part in this. The only thing left that’s unaccounted for is the fridge Cricket stole! Which you guys would never have found if it wasn’t for Mac and I.”

“But Cricket never would’ve stolen the fridge if it weren’t for you running out of the burning shop!”
“Plausible, plausible, yes,” Dennis agrees patronizingly. “But would Mac and I have entered the shop if we hadn’t spotted it, unlocked?” He turns to Mac. “Mac, wanna help me out here?”

“Oh! Uh...” Mac hastily gets up. “I was gonna make a Dennis Delight and we couldn’t find shops open. I only ended up making the sandwich because we saw that, that the door was open.”

“Right. More of a veggie wrap than a sandwich, but, I digress. If you check footage around the neighborhood, you’ll see that Mac and I were tirelessly searching for stores that had whatever ingredients Mac needed. If our plan was, all along, to break into the shop, we would’ve done that from the start. The door was always unlocked. Cricket was always bound to find out, and had the shop not been burning, those low lives would’ve stolen even more shit! Which, consequently, you two would’ve never been able to find. In this situation, at least you’ll get stuff back from insurance payouts. So really, Frank, Charlie, the both of you should thank us. We helped save you a good deal of cash.”

“Man, I don’t really get what you’re saying, but I’m starting to buy it. Frank, I think they’re right,” says Charlie.

“So... what are you saying? That it’s not your fault?” continues Dee.

“Precisely. The blame, of this entire incident, should thus go to whoever failed to lock the place up.”

“How are we supposed to know that?”

“Well, we have the footage, don’t we? Frank, wind it back up to closing.”

He struggles with the remote at first, but they eventually wind back the footage. What happens next shocks the gang to their core.

Just kidding. The guys all start laughing.

“Holy shit, that’s Dee!”

“That’s Dee!” Mac’s eyes widen in glee, and he high fives Dennis. “We did it!”

“What? That can’t be me!” Dee moves in closer, only to be proven wrong. The footage clearly shows her turning the key to lock the door but messing it up because the door wasn’t shut right when she locked it, causing the thing to slowly inch its way open as she leaves. “Oh, fuck off. You guys, this is crazy! Mac and Dennis burned down the shop! I–I I’m the judge! I’m the judge!”

“Not any fucking more you aren’t. You’re the one who left the shop unlocked. This trial just became about you.”

“But I didn’t do it on purpose! It was just an accident, you assholes!”

“Oh, and you think me and Dennis intentionally burned down the shop? Come on, Dee. Stop being a bitch and just admit that this is all your fault,” Mac titters, gargling the beer in his mouth then swallowing it.

“Okay, fine. This is my fault—you said the insurance will cover everything, right? So I don’t have to pay for shit? Because I’m not paying. You can all fuck off if you think I’m paying a single cent,” she huffs, crossing her arms and sitting down.

“Ooh... I wouldn’t be too sure about that,” Dennis chuckles. “You see, we’re trying to get
insurance to pay for the damages. They might not let our claims go through, so..."

“What?!” Dee straightens in anger. “Then I’m not taking the fucking blame! Mac and Dennis burnt that shithole down, they should pay for the damages!”

“Uh, okay, why don’t we take a vote—“ Mac decides cockily—“all those in favor of this being Dee’s fault and her having to pay for all the damages if our insurance claims don’t go through say aye—“

Four hands shoot up excitedly and Dee shrinks in her seat dejectedly. The guys all break up into laughter amongst themselves.

“Guess that settles it!”

Dee takes a long tired sip of her beer. “Yeah, fuck all of you bastards.”

Chapter End Notes

hope y'all liked that ghdfjsdfjs pls kudos/comment/send asks! if u had a fave part, pls do tell me! if ur a new reader, pls hmu w ur fave bits too! i need feedback for my sanity apparently, and i can't write if i don't feel like people are liking what i'm putting out, apparently. no pressure tho! any feedback of any detail or lack thereof is appreciated :)

End Notes

this fic is TENTATIVELY ten chapters because it would be cool to resemble a sunny season, however, i may be unable to fulfill such a daunting task. or, i might end up writing more than ten chapters, so the total chapter count is likely to change. anyway, i hope you all have enjoyed this fic so far!!!

also: i have never had rosé. i have no idea how good it is

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