Whats a date?

by Squid Squad (TerminalMiraculosis)

Summary

When Eight is asked out on a date by Agent 3, she's so excited that she forgets to actually ask what that means until the date's almost over. Three does not know how to handle this.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Eight swore.

Pearl had shown her this game on her phone, where she had to maneuver this little inkling around a bunch of obstacles in a construction site, and it was *incredibly* frustrating. Why couldn’t this stupid, dumb, idiot inkling not just stop running for, like, two seconds? Maybe then she could actually *see* all these obstacles, and not have to rely on Eight to tell her when she needed to jump, or super jump, or swim through ink in order to avoid them.

But *no.* She just kept *running.* Forever. Straight into I-beams and wrecking balls, like an idiot.

Inklings were so stupid sometimes.

Suddenly, her phone began vibrating wildly and emitting a chirping melodic tone, causing Eight to jump and almost fall off the couch. Right! This was a call! How exciting!

She pressed the little green button and held the phone up to her ear. “Hello!”

“Hey, Eight, it’s Three. How are you, uh. Doing?”

“Hey, Three!” Eight said. At first, Eight had been absolutely terrified of the other agent; her standoffish demeanor paired with the fact that she had singlehandedly wiped out the entire Octarian military was pretty intimidating. But it turned out she was actually pretty nice, if a bit grumpy. “I’m just sitting at my house. Pearl and Marina are out doing their routine propaganda videos.”

“It’s called the news. Up here it’s not actually propaganda.” Three paused, then quickly added, “Debatably. Anyway, I, um, was actually calling to see if, maybe you, see, wanted to, uh—”

“No, nothing like that. I just—look, I wanna go on a date with you maybe?” She’d pushed the words out at a frantic speed, almost too quickly for Eight to catch. “To like the mall? We could like go to the arcade and eat lunch or something. Have you been to the arcade yet?”

“Not yet!” Eight said. “I’ll love to go!”

“Really? Great!”

Eight nodded before realizing that a nod was not audible. “Yeah!” she said instead. “It’ll be nice to see more of Inkling culture. And it’s been a while since I last saw you.”
“Yeah, it has. Well, I'm super glad I didn't, like, freak you out or anything. I'll come by and pick you up tomorrow at 10, is that okay?”

“Mmhmm! Should I bring some of that money stuff?”

“Oh, yeah, if you could just ask Pearl for some that'd be great. God knows she's got bank to spare. See you tomorrow!”

“Bye!” The line went dead. Hooray! She had a ‘date’ with Three!

She should probably ask Marina what a date was.

Eh, later. For now, she had to help this fool of an Inkling on her phone navigate this stupid construction site. Why was she even running through a construction site? Who knows! But she couldn't stop playing!

Eight walked next to Three in comfortable silence, licking something called ‘ice cream’ that was both preposterously delicious, yet also painful to eat. Truly, Inklings were a strange species, sabotaging their desserts in such a manner. But, to be fair, she couldn’t remember the Octarians having any desserts, so. Still a point to Inklings she guessed.

Today had been great! The arcade Three had mentioned over the phone had turned out to be a place full of computers, but for the purpose of entertainment rather than research or communications or other, productive functions. Eight had been fascinated by the variety of games that were available, especially one called ‘Squid Beatz.’ Three had pretty much annihilated her at every game except for ‘Squid Beatz,’ because, as it turned out, Three had a horrendous sense of rhythm. It was rather amusing.

Then they had eaten lunch, which, as with all Inkling food, was overwhelmingly tasty compared to literally everything she had ever tasted before arriving at the Surface. And then they had stopped for the paradoxical ice cream, which Eight couldn’t help but keep licking, even though she was pretty sure her tongue was numb by now.

As they reached the entrance to the mall, Three stopped. She was looking at Eight with a fond expression, a light smile gracing her face. “I have to admit, I was kind of nervous asking you out on a date, but today has been… really great. Thanks for agreeing to come, Eight.”

Eight snapped her fingers. “Oh, Three, that reminds me! I have a question.”

“Shoot.”

“What's a date?”

Three looked at her in confusion for a second, then started blushing, hard. She awkwardly touched her face. “Well, uh, I, uh. Shit. Fuck. I'm an idiot. I hate myself. I hate myself so much.”

Ooh! Another thing to add to the things-Three-hates list! Wait, no, hating yourself was bad. Also, Three wasn't an idiot, she was actually quite intelligent, especially on the battlefield. Eight was about to tell her this when she realized Three had just run off into the depths of the mall.

Did. Did she do something wrong? She didn’t understand. But it didn’t look like Three was gonna come back.

Slowly, she pulled her phone out of her pocket and called Pearl.
“Hey, kid! What’s up?”

Eight made one last glance around her for any hint of the familiar orange tentacles, but came up empty. “I think I’m going to need a ride home.”

“What happened?” Pearl asked as Eight climbed into the car. “I thought you were with Three.”

Eight shuffled uncomfortably. “Well, I was.”

“And, what, she just left you there alone?”

When Eight didn’t answer, Pearl’s face changed from concerned to violent. “Aw, shit, she did, didn’t she! That jerk! Urg, I don’t care how much training she has, I’m gonna fuck her up big time! She should know better. Oh, just wait until Marina hears about this, she’ll rip out that fucker’s ink sac!”

Pearl continued in a similar manner all the way back to their house, Eight not saying a word.

“Bitch thinks just ‘cause she saved your life and shit she can do whatever the fuck she wants,” Pearl mumbled as she fiddled with the lock on the front door. “Thinks she can just fucking leave you on your own in the middle of the fucking mall, I mean, shit, man!” Once the lock clicked, Pearl slammed a boot into the door, sending it clattering open. “MARINA!”

“Pearl?” came Marina’s voice from elsewhere in the house. She rounded the corner, and as soon as she spotted Pearl’s red face, she rushed over. “Woah, Pearl, calm down! What happened?”

“Three just left Eight at the mall! She was her ride and she left!”

Marina’s brow furrowed. “What? No, that can’t be right, Three wouldn’t—I mean, it’s only been a couple weeks, she knows that Eight’s still adjusting and everything. She wouldn’t leave her alone.”

Pearl scoffed. “Well, Eight was there, and Three wasn’t, so you tell me.”

Marina turned to face Eight. “Hey, what happened? Why couldn’t Three take you home?”

Eight shifted uncomfortably. She may as well try this again—hopefully, they wouldn’t run away too. “Um, guys, what’s a date?”

The room froze. The flush of anger drained from Pearl’s cheeks, and Marina’s eyes went wide. Nobody said anything for a good while, until Pearl slapped herself on the forehead. “Aw, shit! We totally forgot to give you the romance talk!”

The what now?

“Alright, buckle up,” Pearl said, “because there’s a lot of shit we need to go over before we can get to what a date is.”

“Um, Pearlie?” Marina grabbed onto her shoulder. “Maybe I should handle this one?”

Pearl looked at Marina, looked at Eight, and then looked away with a huff. “Fine, alright. I’ll be in the kitchen if you need some proper Inkling insight, though.”

Marina giggled. “Right. If we need any of that, we’ll be sure to get you.”

As Pearl left, Marina guided Eight over to the couch and sat her down. “I’ll answer your question in a bit, but first, do you mind telling me what exactly happened with Three?”
Eight nodded. She really wanted answers, but she supposed Marina deserved to know the whole story. Even if Eight didn’t really understand the whole story. “Yesterday, when Three called me and invited me out to the mall, she called it a ‘date.’ I didn’t know what that was, but she seemed really nervous, so I didn’t want to ask her right then. And then you two were out, so I couldn’t ask you, and then I forgot about it.”

Marina nodded; Eight was having trouble reading her face. So she just went on. “Anyway. She picked me up today, and we went to the arcade, and it was a lot of fun. And then we went to this restaurant, Maritime…” Ugh, she couldn’t remember the name. She hated not remembering things, especially names. “Maritime something.”

“Maritime Bliss, probably,” Marina supplied. “It’s a pretty fancy restaurant on the mall.”

“Right, yeah, that,” Eight said. “The food was delicious. The whole, uh, ‘date,’ I guess, was really nice. And Three seemed to think so too, because she told me so. And that reminded me that I didn’t know what a date was, so I asked her. And then she said she hated herself and then she ran away.”

Marina sighed and rubbed at her temples. “And you called Pearl after that?”

Eight nodded. “Is something wrong?”

“No, it’s just… I’m frustrated with Three. She should’ve known you wouldn’t know what a date was.”

“I still don’t!” Eight grumbled in frustration. “Can you please tell me?”

“You know what love is, right?” Marina asked, her face returning to her more typical, gentle expression.

“It’s the emotional bond people form when they’re close to each other. It enhances combat effort but can cause rash decision making.”

Marina rolled her eyes. “Well, yeah, that’s the definition they give us in the military. The emotional closeness is the important part though. So, for example, I feel a certain love for you. I care about you, I enjoy spending time with you, and I don’t want anything bad to happen to you.”

Eight nodded slowly. She understood that. She felt the same way towards Marina.

“I also love Pearl, but I love her in a different kind of way. The connection I share with her is much deeper. Have you noticed that?”

“Yeah, you two always know how the other’s feeling and stuff. And you do that weird thing where you smash your beaks together when you think I’m not looking.”

Marina blushed. “Yes. Well, Pearl and I share romantic love for each other. It’s like platonic or familial love, but it’s much more intimate, and typically you only really feel it for one other person. And if you can foster a good relationship based on romantic love, sometimes people will get married, which is basically a promise to spend the rest of their lives together.”

“Wow,” Eight said, because, like, this was definitely not anything she’d learned in the Domes. Or maybe it was, and she’d just forgotten. But she doubted it. “Are you and Pearl married, then?”

“No,” Marina said. She sounded almost bitter. “We’re still just dating.”

There! That word again! Wait. “So, wait, if you two are ‘dating’ because you romantically love each
“It’s because she’s beginning to have feelings for you,” Marina said.

Eight could feel her face heating up. “Oh my gosh. Wait, like, she-wants-to-spend-the-rest-of-her-life-with-me feelings?”

Marina laughed. “Don’t get ahead of yourself. When two people first start dating, it’s to see if they actually like each other enough to pursue that kind of relationship. A lot of the time, things don’t work out, and those two people decide that they actually just platonically love each other, or maybe they don’t actually love each other at all. But you don’t know unless you try, and so that’s what dating’s for.”

“Okay. But… wait.” Eight frowned. “If she, um, likes me, or whatever, then why did she run?”

Marina sighed. “Well, I’m not Three, but I’d imagine she felt guilty.”

“Guilty?”

“Yeah. She probably felt like she was taking advantage of you. Since you didn’t know what a date was, you didn’t really know what it meant to go on one. Someone could’ve used that to get you to agree to something you didn’t actually want to do, and even though it was likely unintentional in this case, Three probably felt like she’d tricked you. And because she’s profoundly horrible at dealing with her emotions, she ran away.”

“Oh.” Eight looked down and poked at the couch. “I… don’t want her to feel that way. I had a really good time! She didn’t push me into anything I didn’t want to do.”

“Yes, but do you think you like her romantically? Because if you don’t, then you shouldn’t go on any more dates with her. That will just give her false hope.”

“I… I don’t know how I feel.” She groaned, and thrust her head into her hands. This was so weird, and foreign, and she didn’t like it! Too many confusing emotions! “How do you know if you like someone in that way?”

Marina looked thoughtful. “That’s not a very easy question to answer. There are a lot of ways you might know if you like someone, and it’s a conclusion you can really only come to by yourself.”

“Oh, bullshit!” Pearl yelled from the next room. Suddenly, she dashed into the living room, grinning like a lunatic. “I’ve got a surefire way to tell you if you like her!”

“Pearl!” Marina scolded. “Were you eavesdropping on us this whole time?”

“Totally!”

“Can you tell me?” Eight asked in wonder. Like, sure, she understood where Marina was coming from with the whole ‘you have to look inside yourself’ thing, but also it’d be great if Pearl could just tell her. That would make things so much simpler.

Pearl flashed a thumbs-up. “Probably. Here, watch this.”

She walked up to Marina and cupped her cheek in one glove.

Marina raised an eyebrow. “Pearlie? What are you—mmph!” She was interrupted by Pearl smashing their faces together. Their lips locked like some sort of puzzle, and Eight watched in fascination as
they kept doing… whatever this was. She saw Marina’s body language change from surprised to comfortable, and she started running her hands down Pearl’s back. After a short while, Pearl extricated herself from Marina’s grip, panting slightly and wiping her mouth.

“What was that?” Eight asked.

“That’s called kissing,” Pearl explained. “Now, quick, imagine that you’re doing that with Three!”

“W-what?”

“Imagine it! You’re kissing her! You can feel her tentacles brushing your cheek! Your lips on hers!”

Eight started imagining it. Pressing her face up to Three’s, feeling her hands running through her tentacles, Three’s breath on her face. She wondered what would happen if she pushed her tongue—Oh my god.

She could imagine Three’s arms wrapping strongly around her, pulling her in tight as their kissed deepend. Then imaginary Three’s imaginary hand slid down her back and grabbed her imaginary—Oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my—

“Eight? Eight!”

She snapped back to reality. Marina was looking at her with concern, and Pearl was smiling smugly. She could feel her face burning up, and her breath was coming a bit short. “What is this? What’s happening?”

“That’s love, baby!” Pearl exclaimed, throwing up her hands. “Told you I could do it!”

Marina rolled her eyes. “I can’t believe you.”

Eight had finally managed to somewhat wrestle her mind away from thoughts about kissing Three. “So… you’re saying that if I successfully date her… that could be real?”

“Well, I don’t think ‘successfully date her’ is the right way to phrase that, but I guess so,” Marina said. “And there’s more down the line, too.”

“Really? Like what?”

“I’ll, uh, tell you that if your relationship actually gets that far.”

“Oh, c’mon, Marina, they’re both at least eighteen.”

Marina gave Pearl a look. “Pearl.”

Pearl raised her hands in surrender. “Okay! Okay. Later.”

“So… what do I do now, then?” Eight asked.

“You should probably try to find Three,” Marina suggested. “She’s probably still freaking over you not knowing it was a date.”

“And now she’s probably freaking out over running away like that,” Pearl said.

Eight set her gaze. “Right. Find Three, and talk about love with her.”
Marina bit her bottom lip. “Maybe, uh, don’t be so blunt with her?”

“Find Three, and tell her I want to kiss her.”

“No, Eight, that’s—”

“Yeah! Go get ‘er, Eight!” Pearl shouted. “Take the world by storm! I’ll drive you, c’mon!”

Marina scrambled to get off the couch. “Pearl! No! Bad Pearl!”

Pearl grabbed Eight arm, laughing wildly, and dragged her out the door, ignoring Marina’s protests.

“Let’s go get you a girlfriend!” Pearl shouted.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, thanks for checking this out! I’ve wanted to do an Agent 24 fic for a while now and this idea popped into my head, so I went for it.
Battle Your Emotions Away

Chapter Summary

Three is emo for two and a half thousand words

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Thanks for all the warm comments and kudos on the first chapter; they really made my week. I pushed this chapter out a day early as thanks. Hope you enjoy!

Three vaulted around the statues of Inkblot Art Academy, firing her Hero Shot “Replica” right into the back of some kid’s head. He exploded into a burst of ink, and Three continued onwards through the arena, covering the floor in her ink.

She always hated turfing at Inkblot, because whenever it was in rotation, classes were suspended. And when classes were suspended, what did all those pretentious-ass art students do? They battled! Ironically, for literal artists, these damn kids had no idea how to put ink on the ground. They always tried doing fancy shit, like sneaking into enemy territory to place beakons, or doing stupid-complicated bubble blower-bomb launcher team plays. All of their strategies were unfortunately undercut by the fact that they sucked ass at fighting.

This meant that ninety percent of the time she played on Inkblot, she stomped even more than usual. Like, it wasn’t even a challenge. And then the enemy team would whine about how much of a tryhard she was, and her teammates would always gloat that they were so good when Three had literally carried their sorry asses so hard she’d fractured her spine, and it was just not a good time in general.

But the other stage in rotation right now was Musselforge Fitness, and the last thing she wanted right now was a bunch of fucking weight-lifting dude-bros trying to hit on her. So here she was at Inkblot, trying not to be distracted by how much she despised modern art.

She rounded a corner and saw one of her opponents in front of her, wielding a Heavy Splatling. He noticed her after a second, and began revving up his gun; Three almost laughed. He was really gonna try and fight her? At this range? That was so. Just so stupid.

To prove her point, she ran over to him and swept out his legs from under him before he had a chance to fire more than, like, two bullets. He crashed to the ground, and Three formed a couple burst bombs in her hands.

“You really need to switch weapons, dude,” she said. “That was sad.”

His face contorted with rage. “You bitch! What’s your problem?”

Three rolled her eyes, and leisurely dropped the bombs onto his face. What a dick.
By the time the end of the match rolled around, Three hadn’t been splatted even once. As she and her team, who she hadn’t seen doing anything that whole match, emerged back into the lobby, the other team came back up furious.

“Do you get off on beating up lower levels or something? Do you really need an ego boost that badly? Is this some kind of power fantasy for you?” that boy with the splatling asked.

Three gave him an unimpressed look. “No, the match making’s just shit. I’d much rather go up against people who actually pose some sort of threat.”

“Why don’t you do ranked, then, if you’re gonna be such a tryhard?” accused one girl.

“Because I’m not fucking trying hard at all. You guys just suck. If you want to fight people more your level, you should do ranked.”

They shouted something else at her, but she just flipped them off over her shoulder as she walked off.

God. This was really not taking her mind off of the date as much as she had hoped. If she could even call it a date. Which she couldn’t. Eight didn’t even know what a date meant, and she obviously didn’t feel that way about Three. Who was she kidding? She should’ve never called her in the first place. She was so stupid.

Fuck, she was thinking about it again! God dammit! She’d better get in another game quick before she started spiraling big-time.

Soon, she was in another pre-match lobby. She quickly took stock of the other Inklings there: she didn’t recognize any from her previous matches, which was good. Wait, was that—

“Oh my god, Three! What’s up?”

“Four, hey,” she greeted. Four was dressed like someone who thought they were hot shit, but wasn’t hot shit, like usual, and she had her Herobrush resting over one shoulder. “I’m actually so glad to see you. Which is not something I’d thought I’d say ever.”

Four smiled, which caused a shiver to go down Three’s body. “Aw, c’mon, you love me.”

“I’m just glad I’m gonna be able to fight someone who’s actually halfway competent,” Three said with a scoff. “All these assholes from Inkblot are really starting to get on my nerves.”

All the other squids in the lobby shot her angry looks. She ignored them.

“Hey, don’t be too harsh on Inkblot,” Four said. “I went there, and it wasn’t too bad.”

Three’s eyes widened. “YOU WENT TO FUCKING INKBLOT?!”

Four slowly nodded, and opened her mouth to say something, but before she could, they were thrust into the match. As soon as she formed, Three was off, rushing down the middle path. She reached the center at the same time as a girl with a roller, who tried to run her over; she jumped, nailed her with a burst bomb, and finished her off with a few well-placed shots. Before she had time to regain her surroundings, however, she saw an autobomb creeping up on her, and quickly dodged back just as it exploded. She turned her head, and, sure enough, there was Four, smiling at her from on top of a bridge.

“I can’t believe you went to fucking Inkblot,” Three said as she began firing. “This explains so
much. Like why you have such bad opinions about shit. And why you’re just like this in general.”

Four knocked the first few shots out of the air with her brush, then dropped down from the ledge, letting the rest fly over her head. “Why do you think I’m so good with a brush?”

Three swam backwards as Four began her approach. She swung the Herobrush around with a fervor, and Three was struggling to dodge all the spray from it. “No way they taught you how to fight at Inkblot. It’s an art school! For people who, like, write in cursive and shit!”

“Sure they did!” Four said, tossing out another autobomb before continuing her assault. “You need to keep a more open mind. I mean, where did you learn to fight?”

“People kept pissing me off in school, so I taught myself how to beat the shit out of them to get them to stop.”

“Okay. Well. Different backgrounds, I guess.”

Three threw a burst bomb at Four, forcing her dodge back and put some distance between them. She then started unloading into her, while carefully maneuvering around the autobomb. Four dodged to the left, but Three predicted it, nailing her with a couple globs of ink. Grimacing, Four’s eyes began to glow, and she activated her Inkjet.

Three responded by superjumping straight up, and splashdowning straight down, right smack dab on top of Four. Easy.

She took a second to recharge her ink, then ran deeper into enemy territory. She splatted some kid with a slosher on the way—he was predictably awful—and then set about inking up the enemy’s turf.

“So how’d your date with Eight go?”

Three yelped and spun around just in time to duck under a swing from Four’s brush. While she was winding up for a follow-up swing, Three kicked at her stomach, prompting her to jump backwards. “How the hell do you know about that?”

“Marie told me,” she said, before disappearing into her ink and swimming up onto some nearby high ground.

Three shot up the wall and climbed up after her, materializing just in time to see an autobomb waddling towards her. She leapt over it, letting the explosion go off behind her, and chucked a burst bomb at Four. “How the hell does Marie know about it?”

Four sidestepped the burst bomb and shrugged. “It’s Marie.”

“I bet she has my phone tapped or something. Wouldn’t surprise me.” She threw another burst bomb.

“That’s besides the point, anyway,” Four said, slamming the flat of her brush into the bomb mid-flight. It exploded prematurely, and Four was only hit by a few stray splatterings of ink. “How’d it go? Did she enjoy it? Didja kiss?”

Three sighed as she continued firing at Four. “Well, it was going really great at first, but it ended… suboptimally.”

Four wove in between Three’s shots, stepping inside her guard and whamming her brush into Three’s face. Damn, that hurt! “Suboptimally? What does that mean?”
Three dropped her shooter as the brush came in for a backswing, grabbing the handle before it could reach her and stopping it in its tracks. “Well, uh, when we were about to leave, she asked me what ‘date’ meant. Because she didn’t know.”

Four cringed as they struggled for control over the brush. “Yeah, that’s rough. You said the rest of the date was good, though, right? So at least she had fun, even if she didn’t really know what you were… after.”

“I guess,” Three said. Damn, Four was stronger than she looked—they’d been arm-wrestling over this brush for, like, ten seconds now, and it had barely moved. “But I kind of ran away after she asked me what a date was. Because, like, how do you answer that?”

Four rolled her eyes. “Gee, Three, I dunno. Maybe try ‘honestly?’ Also, you might wanna watch out for that autobomb.”


Splat.

After the match had ended (Three had won, of course. Obviously. That bullshit autobomb had been only a minor setback), Four had insisted that they go grab something to eat at the cafe and talk. Three had initially protested, but, though she would never admit it, she would kind of like to talk to someone about this. And she could settle for Four, she guessed.

“So, let me get this straight,” Four said, looking at Three disapprovingly over a glass of sparkling water. (Sparkling water. Fucking sparkling water. Three hated her so much.) “After poor Agent 8, our friend, whom you have a crush on, innocently asked you to explain dating to her, you ran away and abandoned her in the middle of Arowana?”

Three buried her face in her arms. “Yes, we’ve established that I’m a stupid asshole, thanks.”

“You, uh… you realize she probably thinks this is, like, her fault, right?”

“Four, this is the opposite of helping.”

“Right, sorry.” She took a sip of that sparkling water. Three was surprised she didn’t gag. “Look, you just have to talk with her. Tell her it was a misunderstanding. And be honest about how you feel.”

Three groaned and laid her chin on the table, her arms hanging limply at her sides. “Ugh, but I hate being honest about how I feel!”

“You’re such a child.”

“Hey, shut up! You’re only, like, two years older than me!”

“I meant mentally. But, seriously. Talk to her.”

Three sighed. “Yeah, you’re probably right. The last thing I want is for her to think she did something wrong.”

Suddenly, Three’s phone started ringing. She pulled it out and looked at the contact.

Eight.
“Aah! Shit!” Three shouted, before pounding the ‘decline call’ button. “Whew. That was a close one.”

Four raised an eyebrow. “Who was that?”

“Eight. God, I almost had to talk to her! Imagine how much of a disaster that would’ve been.”

Four didn’t say anything, instead opting to just look at Three.

It only took a few seconds for Three’s rational brain to catch up with her. “Okay. So. As I said, we’ve established that I’m a stupid asshole.”

Four shook her head. “Three, girl, you’re my friend, but goddamn if you aren’t the biggest mess of person I’ve ever met. Like, wow. This is some impressive buffoonery right here.”

Three slumped in her chair, throwing an arm over her eyes. Four was right; she was a mess. “Well now I definitely can’t fucking call her. What the hell am I gonna do?” She groaned. “I wanna fucking die.”

Four giggled. “You never cease to amaze me, Three.”

“Hey. If this is fucking Danny, stop fucking calling, I’m not fucking interested. Otherwise, like, leave a voicemail or some shit, I don’t care.”

*BEEP*

“Three?” Eight asked. That had definitely been her voice. “Is that you? Are you there? What’s a voicemail?”

Pearl looked over at her. “That means that Three didn’t pick up, so you can leave her a recording for her to listen to later.”

“Oh! I get it.” Man, the walkie talkies and radios they had underground were so much easier than these phones. “Um, hi, it’s Eight! I was just calling to tell you that I love—”

Instantly, Pearl snatched the phone out of Eight’s hands, wedging it between her cheek and her shoulder as she refocused on the road. “Three, if you get this before we find you, tell us where you are. Eight wants to talk. We’re not mad. Well.” Pearl paused. “Eight’s not mad. I’m still on the fence. That’s all.”

She hung up and tossed the phone back to Eight, who caught it and looked at it in slight confusion. “I don’t understand. Isn’t the point of this to tell her that I love her?”

“Well, kinda. But you don’t want to come out of the gate that strong. You gotta build up to it! Like, after you’ve been on a few dates, and you’re walking out by the docks late at night, and the moon’s shining, and shit’s real romantic, you turn to her and tell her that you love her. But your first time saying it shouldn’t be in a voicemail! That would ruin it.”

Eight made a grunt of frustration. “Why is this all so stupidly complicated?”

“Well, kinda. But you don’t want to come out of the gate that strong. You gotta build up to it! Like, after you’ve been on a few dates, and you’re walking out by the docks late at night, and the moon’s shining, and shit’s real romantic, you turn to her and tell her that you love her. But your first time saying it shouldn’t be in a voicemail! That would ruin it.”

Eight nodded, taking a moment to process all of that. “Well, okay then. If Three isn’t answering her
“Hello? Oh, hi, Eight.”

Three’s head snapped up, eyes bloodshot.

“Oh, you’re looking for Three, huh?” Four locked eyes with Three and winked. Three gave her a look that she hoped conveyed the sentiment that if Four wasn’t extremely careful with her words in the next few seconds, Three would not hesitate to snap her neck right then and there. “Yeah, I was having a bite to eat with her in the Catfish Cafe a little while ago, actually.”

What.

Four stood up “Mmhmm. I just left, actually, but she should still be there.”

What.

“Yeah, no problem! I’ll catch you later.”

Four hung up, and Three glared daggers at her. Glared fucking katanas at her.

“Alright, so you just chill here and wait for your soon-to-be girlfriend to show up. I’m gonna bounce. Good luck!”

“Four don’t you dare leave! I will break your neck! I will track you down and fucking rip out your intestines! FOUR!”

She smiled, waved, and left, the door to the cafe closing with a soft chiming sound. Three proceeded to slam her head onto the table, nearly causing Four’s abandoned glass to fall off.

“Hey, kid, are you okay?” the cashier asked in a worried tone.

She groaned into the table. “I’m fucking dandy, thanks for asking.”
Eight approached the entrance to the Catfish Cafe. She felt nervous. Almost like she was running out of time on a test, waiting for the bomb on her back to go off.

Except there was no bomb this time. Just Three.

As she laid her hand on the door handle, she could hear a sharp, repetitive thumping emanating from inside the cafe, accompanied by the rattling of glass. What was going on? Was there some sort of extremely slow-paced fight happening?

Curious, she opened the door and stepped inside. The bell on the door jingled, but it was quickly drowned out by another loud thump. She could now see the source of the strange noise: Agent 3, banging her head into her table, repeatedly.

Thump.

All the other patrons were staring at her with concerned expressions, but nobody was making a noise. One jellyfish was idling awkwardly at the counter, looking like he wanted to order something but not wanting to be the first one to speak.

Slowly, Eight walked over to Three, and took a seat across from her. There was a half-eaten croissant and some weird-looking water here. It seemed like someone had left in a hurry.

“Um.”

Three paused right before her head slammed into the table another time, and she looked up. Immediately, she shuffled to sit up straight, grabbing the edge of the table tightly with her hands. Her face was white, except for a small trail of blue blood trickling down from her forehead. “Oh, hey, Eight. Didn’t see you there.”

“You’re bleeding,” Eight pointed out.

“Am I?” She reached up and pressed her hand against her head, then looked at her palm. “Hmm. Gimme a sec.”

She stood up, pulled out her gun, and shot some ink on the cafe floor.

“Hey, uh—” began the cashier from across the room, but Three turned and looked at him, and he immediately shut up. Eight couldn’t see Three’s face from where she was sitting, but she could imagine. She had very vivid images in her head of Three about to kill her.

As Three bathed in her ink for a bit to heal up, Eight curiously raised the glass of not-water. It was bubbling. Why would water bubble? Her curiosity got the better of her, and she raised the glass to her lips.

Three emerged from her ink just in time for Eight to spit out the drink right in her face. “BLUH! Eww! The water attacked me!”

“Yeah, that’s sparkling water, one of man’s many sins against god,” Three explained, reaching for a
napkin. The wound on her forehead had now been reduced to a tiny blue discoloration. “It’s like regular water but with carbonation.”

Eight made a face. “What? That’s so stupid. It’s already so difficult to find clean water that won’t harm us, and then you go and make it hurt to drink? I swear, half of the things Inklings invent are designed to be a waste of resources.”

Three laughed. “Yeah, I’m with you there. I hate sparkling water with a passion.”

Oop! Another thing that Three hates! She added it to her list. Out of all the things on this list, that was the one Eight agreed with the most. Barring, of course, ‘Kamabo,’ ‘that dumb phone,’ and possibly ‘DJ Octavio,’ though Eight didn’t really have many precise memories of him.

“Why didn’t you answer your phone earlier?” Eight asked.

Three shifted uncomfortably. “Oh. Right. Sorry, yeah, I, uh, freaked out. I didn’t think you wanted to talk to me.”

“Of course I want to talk to you!” Eight said. “I love talking with you!”

“So, uh, did Pearl and Marina tell you what a date is, or…” she trailed off.

Eight nodded. “Yes. And love, and romance, and stuff. It’s all really confusing, honestly.”

“You’re telling me,” Three said, then sighed. “Look, Eight, I don’t have a lot of experience with, you know, healthy relationships. You didn’t know what a date even meant, and then there I was, trying to start something with you, and… I’m sorry. And I’m sorry I ran. I’m… bad at… I didn’t know how to explain to you that I’d just spent the last three hours thinking that you liked me when you didn’t even know what it meant to like someone, and… ugh. I guess I’m just sorry I dragged you into the clusterfuck that is being close to me.”

“But… I did like you,” Eight said. “Do like you. So you weren’t wrong. I mean, sure, I didn’t really know what it meant, but… even knowing what I do now, I would do it again. I had such a great time, and I want to continue having great times with you. Especially in a, um. Dating, kissing, romance context.”

Three blushed. “So you do like me? Like, for real? Wow, um, that’s great! I—I’m super glad, I, um —wait. Kissing?”

“Yes!” Eight said, perking up. “I saw Pearl and Marina doing it, and now I can’t stop thinking about it. Can we do that?”

“This is not how I imagined this conversation going when it was playing out in my head,” Three said, her face all but melting.

“Can we do it though?”

“Um. Um. Okay, um.” Three grabbed her by the arm and dragged her out of the cafe, the poor cashier sighing in relief as they left.

“Where are we going?” Eight asked as Three led her through the mall.

“Well, if we want to, uh, kiss. That’s kind of personal. So we should go somewhere more private. Superjump with me.”
“What?” Before she knew what was happening, Three had superjumped onto the top of a nearby clothing store. Eight followed, shifting back to her humanoid form just as she landed on the flat roof. Three was standing behind a large billboard that jutted upwards at one side of the building, blocking the view from the ground. “Are we allowed to be up here?”

“Oh, nobody cares, really. Besides, I’m Agent 3. What are they gonna do, throw me in with DJ Octavio?”

“Isn’t there something where nobody is above the law? Marina told me that early on.”

“Eh.” Three made a so-so gesture with her hand. “It’s pretty wishy washy, honestly. We’ll be fine. Besides, we didn’t come up here to talk about how I exist in a legal grey area.”

“Right! Kissing!” Eight said.

“R-Right.” Three’s blush was back, but she seemed more confident, her eyes staring at Eight’s lips.

“So how do we start?”

“Just go for it.”

Eight nodded slowly. How had Pearl done it? She’d put her hand on Marina’s cheek like this, then leaned in, and—

Three rolled her eyes, smiling softly. “Here.”

Eight yelped as Three grabbed her face and pulled it onto her own, and then, wow.

Eight didn’t know what she’d been expecting, but this was—this was something else. Three’s lips glided along hers as she wrapped her arms around Three’s back, and the bustle of the mall below her faded into nothingness. She didn’t exactly know what she was doing, but Three sure did, so Eight just kind of let her take the lead.

After a few seconds, Three pulled back, and the two of them stood there, looking at each other, panting.

“So, uh, yeah,” Three said. “That’s kissing.”

“More,” Eight breathed. She was so overwhelmed right now that one word was all she could manage; but she wanted to be so much more overwhelmed, if this was what that meant.

Three laughed, and pulled her in again. “Alright.”

Eight had no idea how long she’d been on that roof, but it was long enough for Pearl to start texting her worriedly. That had ‘killed the mood’ as Three put it, and so the two had said their goodbyes and gone their separate ways.

Presently, Eight climbed into the car next to Pearl, buckling her seat belt. It felt so weird to be going through these everyday motions as if her entire world hadn’t just exploded.

“So.” Pearl gave her a curious look. “How’d it go?”

“We kissed,” Eight answered. “A lot.”

Pearl blinked. “Oh, shit.”
“It was very ‘oh shit.’ I think I understand why you and Marina do it so much now.”

“Well, that’s good. I think.”

“Question. Does Marina ever pull on your tentacles when you’re kissing?”

“Uhhhhhh.” Pearl swallowed. “Did Three do that to you?”

“No, I did that to Three. She seemed to enjoy it though. After she got over the shock.”

Pearl stared ahead at the road in dead silence for a few seconds. “Huh.”

Eight busied herself looking out the window. There was still so much she didn’t know about how the surface functioned. Now that she was paying attention, she could see a lot of Inklings and other creatures that seemed to be more affectionate with each other—holding hands, sharing food, that sort of thing. There was this whole new avenue of relationships and emotions that she had barely even begun to explore; but now she had Three to help her.

“Moving on, then,” Pearl said. “Are you and Three, like, an official couple now or whatever?”

Hmm. Good question. “I don’t really know. I think so?”

Pearl shrugged. “Eh. If you were really kissing that whole time, then I guess it’s probably safe to say that you are. Man, the rest of us are gonna have so much material to tease Three with.”

“How do you mean?”

“Eight, Three is a paradoxical combination of emotional repression and teenage angst, which manifests in her basically closing herself off to everyone. So it’s gonna be really, really funny watching her try to navigate a relationship with someone who’s so… you.”

Eight narrowed her eyes. “And what do you mean by that?”

“Don’t worry about it.”

Eight was worrying about it.

“Hey Three!”

“GAH!” Three jumped, spun around, and grabbed her attacker by the arm, twisting them around into a headlock.

“Jesus christ, lady, it’s me! Four!”

Three squinted, then begrudgingly released the other squid from the headlock. “You shouldn’t sneak up on me like that.”

“Yeah, I got that from your paranoid ninja instincts, thanks.” Four massaged her arm where Three had grabbed her, frowning. “Did something happen, or are you always this on edge?”

Three’s mind backtracked to the make out session she’d just completed. “I’m actually in a really good mood right now.”

“Okay, so you’re always like this. Got it.”
“I’d think you’d know that about me by now.”

Four crossed her arms. “Seriously? You’re the most private person I know. You won’t even tell me your real name.”

“Well, sorry if I feel like upholding the whole ‘secret identity’ thing we’re supposed to have.”

“You’re kidding, right? Over half of the agents in the NSS are literal pop stars.”

“Whatever. I don’t ask you probing questions, so don’t ask me any. Okay?”

“Asking your name is a probing question?”

Three rolled her eyes. “Oh my god, why do you have to make everything so difficult?!”

“I’m not the one who’s—” Four stopped, taking a deep breath. “Look, that doesn’t matter. What does matter is how your meeting with Eight went. You said you were in a pretty good mood, so I’m assuming it went well?”

“It was fine,” Three answered nonchalantly.

Four smirked and slung her arm around Three’s shoulders, like they were ‘friends’ or some shit. Disgusting. “Oh, come on, you have to give me more details than that! Like, are you two official now? Or is it more like you—” Four stopped dead, staring at the base of Three’s neck. “Oh my god is that a hickey?”

Shit. “…No?”

“How would Eight even know what that is? Did you, like, show her?”

Three ducked out from under Four’s arm and shoved her hands in her pockets. “Well she wanted me to tell her more about what people do when they kiss and stuff, and I didn’t want Pearl or Marina to catch her with one, so…”

“Ha, this is rich! Wait until Marie hears this!”

Three grabbed Four by the collar and pulled her in, growling. Suddenly, the fact that Four was a good head taller than her didn’t seem to matter any more. “Don’t you dare tell her, you tiny little sack of bad opinions.”

“Or what?” Four asked, voice shaky. She seemed torn between fearing for her life and wanting to tease Three as much as possible.

“Or I will remove your blood and replace it with sparkling water.”

“Alright, whatever, I won’t tell her. Now please let go of me.”

Three did, reluctantly.

“You know, you’re really kind of violent.”

“Only with friends. If I don’t know someone very well, I just threaten them instead.”

Four smiled at her sweetly. “Awww, are we fweinds, Thwee?”

“Not anymore. Goodbye. Please never talk to me again.” Three performed a 180 heel turn and
started power-walking away from Four, who she could hear cracking up behind her. Unfortunately, Four decided to follow her.

“So do you have a second date set up or what? Or, wait, would it be your third date?”

“I think it would actually still be our first date,” Three mused. “And no.”

“You better get on that then. You don’t want to leave her hanging after making out with her for, like, an hour.”

“Yeah, I’m going to, dumbass,” Three grumbled. “I literally just said goodbye to her. I’ll call her tomorrow or something.”

Four smiled. “Sounds like a plan! I’m gonna hold you to that, though.”

“Oh my god. Didn’t they teach you how to mind your own business at Inkblot?”

“Nope!” Four chirped, sticking out her tongue.

Three made a face. “Ew. Put that away.”

Four shook her head, her tongue still hanging out of her mouth. Three just sighed; she could feel the ever present bags under her eyes growing heavier. She needed new friends.

“GOD—URGHHH! I HATE THIS STUPID GAME!” Eight screeched, throwing her phone down against the couch as hard as she could.

Marina poked her head out of her studio. “Um, Eight? Are you okay?”

“No!” she exclaimed, pointing accusingly at the phone. “I had the dumb little Inkling running through the dumb stupid construction site for seven thousand meters and I still didn’t win!”

“Oh, is that that one app Pearl likes?” Marina asked. “Yeah, there’s no actual end, it just goes on forever. You can’t win.”

Eight froze. Then laughed, hollowly. “Ha ha ha. Good one Marina. That was a funny joke. Of course there is an end. If there wasn’t an end then that would mean I just wasted several hours chasing after a goal that doesn’t exist.”

“Not joking,” Marina said, and Eight began to fume. “There are actually a lot of games like that for your phone. They’re just time wasters, really. The goal is supposed to be your previous high score, sort of, but there’s no hard end point.”

“That. Is the dumbest thing. I have ever heard. Marina, how do you deal with all of this?”

Marina giggled. “When Pearl first took me in, I almost got arrested trying to re-engineer the fuel efficiency of some dude’s sports car. Inklings spend an obscene amount of money on things that are societally high class but functionally worse than cheaper options, and it drives me up the wall. I just try not to think about it.”

“How did creatures so dumb beat us in the Great Turf War?” Eight asked. “Wouldn’t they have been too busy playing their silly little video games that go on forever?”

“Beats me. I wasn’t alive back then.”
The conversation was interrupted by Eight’s phone, still abandoned on the couch, beginning to ring. She grabbed it and turned it over, her face lighting up as soon as she saw the little ‘3’ at the top of the screen. As she brought it up to her ear, Marina smiled, and retreated back into her studio, closing the door.

“Three! Hello! How are you?”

“Alive. You?”

“Oh, I’m just sitting in my house. Again.”

“…Right. Well, uh, I was calling to ask you on another date, actually. For real this time.”

Eight smiled. “I’d love to.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey, thanks for reading! And especially thanks for the kudos and all the wonderful comments. You guys are the best!

You may have noticed that this is now part of a series. You also may have noticed that I ended on something of a cliffhanger. These two things are very much related: the sequel is at this point mostly written, and I’ve got a few more short stories planned for these two. So if you want to see their relationship continue to grow, then I’d encourage you to subscribe to the series, because I’m certainly not finished yet! The sequel will premier next week, probably, for those that care for the specifics.

End Notes

Thanks everyone for reading!

Hey, if you want to ask me any questions about this fic and its extended universe, or just want to look at the cute agent 24 art I reblog, come visit my tumblr! You’ll find me at operation-24.tumblr.com.

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