# Off of the deep end

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**Off of the deep end**

by [AllHailTheUnderDogs](http://archiveofourown.org/users/AllHailTheUnderDogs)

**Summary**

Diego's got his hands full trying to become his brothers guardian, he doesn't need to add Five's annoying, and obscenely attractive teacher into the mix.
Chapter 1

The argument begins the same as every other time they’ve had it over the last three weeks.

“It’s for six months, that’s it, I promise.” Diego’s never, nor will he ever whine or plead in his life, not even when Sir would kick him from one end of the room to the other did he display such weakness. However dealing with Five has recently made him reassess a lot of things. “I’ve finished the paperwork, everything’s in place.”

His brother is livid. “I’ll be surrounded by infants.”

“They’re the same age as you.”

Five’s eyes impressively turn colder and his scrawny little arms cross over his chest, “This is barbaric, I shouldn’t have to lower myself to their level.”

It’s not like Diego doesn’t know there’s more than just a spark of intellect in Five, he’s like an electrical storm, and Diego who’s never had more than one functioning brain cell, doesn’t want to be the stupid Alpha that messes his genius brothers schooling up. But the rules are the rules.

Five knows this, so despite his fervent complaining he’s currently settling his starched collar over his tie.

“Well when we go and visit Gena on Saturday you can tell her all about it.” He tries to keep the disapproval out of his voice.

“If I must.” Five tuts and Diego flashes him a genuine smile.

Gena, from social (as she likes to drop into every fucking sentence), is only doing her job. Something that she reminded him of as a precursor to every conversation they’ve had since the funeral, and the one thing that he’s bonded with his brother over, is the blatant apathy Five shows the Alpha whenever she tries to engage with him.

He should discourage such behaviour, but whenever he tries all he can see is that false, sympathetic smile and her simpering as she informed him that they’d be keeping a close eye on Five, just to be sure that the living environment of an unmated Alpha wasn’t detrimental to his wellbeing. Of course she’d bristled up when he’d enquired as to whether such questions would be asked of an unmated Omega, but hey, prejudiced stereotyping was alive and well in their great nation.

Diego from there onwards had very quickly deduced, using all of his training, that Gena, from social, was a raging bitch.

It’s not like he hasn’t sacrificed enough to try and make their arrangement work. Diego liked working on Vice, he was pretty fucking good at it if he did say so himself, and moving here was a massive step back. He’s got another week before he starts at his new precinct and god he’s not looking forward to seeing what prat he’s going to end up partnered with.

But it’s worth it if it means Five stays with him, and he’s made a real effort with the new apartment, much to the despair of his bank balance, but it’s in a respectable street and more importantly it’s not situated under a boxing gym. Given it’s been less than a month since their mothers crash, Diego’s pretty satisfied with how well he’s pulled things off.

“I’m ready,” Five’s finishes adjusting his blazer and Diego tries not to wince, schools never easy
and Five doesn’t dress in a way that’s going to do him any favours on the playground. Then again his insistence on using Lillian’s briefcase would screw him over anyway, so in for an inch, in for a mile.

“What’s in your hand?”

Five raises several sheets of paper, neatly stapled in the upper corner and answers in a mildly condescending tone, “My list,” When Diego raises a brow the mildly disappears and Five’s just full blown condescending. “It outlines my requirements for the remainder of the year, details about my current level of education and what goals I wish to achieve.”

“It’s the third grade Five.”

“I know that, I’ve lowered my expectations accordingly.”

There’s no winning with the brat so Diego settles for ushering him out of the door before they can dissolve into another pointless debate. By the time they’re in the car and on the road it’s clear they’re going to be cutting it close, though knowing Five he wouldn’t put it past the boy to have planned everything down to the last second.

He’s unsettlingly clever and Diego actually agrees that entering third grade is practically an insult, but along with all of the other stipulations to the custody agreement, completing this year was crucial, and considering the tenuous relationship with the courts and social services, Diego’s not willing to push his luck.

Five stares stonily out of the window and it’s clear that he’s still of the opinion that Diego’s the one that’s made his life unnecessarily hard, not the drunk driver that’d side swiped their mothers car and sent it flipping through the air, killing both women instantly. No it’s Diego that’s public enemy number one as far as Five’s concerned.

Diego can live, ha, with that, it’s far better than the gut punching shock he’d received when he finally made it to his little brother. Distrust and rejection pooled in those big blue eyes and it wasn’t like he could say ‘hey Five, sorry it took me so long, I was undercover tracking down a drugs ring, but I’m here to look after you now. Oh and sorry your mom and my mom died, tough break’.

Surprisingly Five hadn’t wanted an explanation for why he’d spent a week in a strangers home, in fact apart from informing a judge that he did indeed wish to go with his ‘step brother’ there’d been no real reaction from the stoic child.

He feels sorry for Five, despite the fury such an emotion would inspire, he can handle his own grief, bury it fifty feet deep as much as it fucking sucks. But Five’s clearly compartmentalizing everything, and one day the pains going to splinter that indifferent façade of his, until then Diego will have to wait for Five to make the first move.

“Right, well, here we go.” He makes a point of pulling up half a street down, because he’s not too old to remember how embarrassing most of his school friends used to find it being dropped off by a parent… family member. “Do you have everything?”

Five looks him over with his patented look, the one that indicates you’re insignificant and unworthy of his time. “Apart from lunch, then yes.”

“Fuck!” Before Diego can freak out Five’s patting his briefcase.

“I already assumed you’d forget so I prepared everything last night.”
As he’s reorganising his brain Five elegantly climbs out of the car, taking a moment to straighten his clothing before throwing Diego a bone. “I like my sandwiches how Grace made them, so I wouldn’t have eaten yours.”

“Good to know, do you want me to come in…” And Five’s gone, small legs carrying him with surprising speed, and Diego’s almost impressed because no way in hell would he have been that brave as a child. He can still remember hiding behind his mothers skirt whenever he’d started a new school, needing to be coaxed out with her gentle encouragements.

And now Diego’s reminiscing, which pairs itself with numerous emotions that he doesn’t want to deal with today. So instead of dallying on such things he decides to dedicate his free day to unpacking at least some of the boxes piled up around the apartment, because it’s getting pretty embarrassing having to order from the same Chinese restaurant so they can use the chopsticks to eat with.

Five waits on the sidewalk, in what Diego thinks is the exact spot he’d been dropped off that morning. He’s weirdly nervous to hear how everything’s gone, and it takes a reasonable level of self control not to subtly take a sniff at Five to see if he can detect anything amiss. Not that it’d do him any good, there’s very little he can discern from the small boy, it’s highly irritating.

Diego lets the silence hang for a few minutes before he gives in, “So how did it go?”

“Satisfactory.”

“That good huh, make any friends?”

Five cants his head and Diego almost laughs at the implied ‘are you fucking kidding me’.

“Apparently not, do you at least like the teacher?” Diego’s never been good at small talk but these are general questions, that he’s definitely not looked up online.

“He’s competent, I have no major complaints.”

“Is that it?”

“Well there is one thing.” Five’s scowl deepens. “He’s weird.”

“How do you figure? It’s only the first day.”

“Mr Klaus wants us to use his first name, it’s not appropriate.”

“Sorry buddy not sold, it’s a common strategy all of us oldies use to look cool.”

“You’re thirty.” Five rolls his eyes and it’s the first gesture Diego’s seen that indicates his brothers real age.

“Wait, is Klaus his second name?”

“Don’t be ludicrous, I haven’t been able to find out his full name so I applied the title myself.”

“To be spiteful.”
“Of course.” Five’s mouth gives an aborted twitch and Diego wishes he’d caught it on camera. “He also sings. Out loud.”

Okay, yeah that’s weird, Diego concedes.

“And, he tried to give me a high five.”

“Didn’t you give Mr Klaus the list?”

Five sighs and gives him the look. “Of course I did, and he said that they don’t have rules or lists in his class. He put it in his drawer.”

“So now he’s your nemesis.” Diego tries to joke.

“Incorrect use, he’s my adversary.”

“I feel sorry for the guy,” When Five hums instead of answering it’s clear that the conversations run it’s course, which is fine because Diego’s got nothing left except to talk about the weather. “On a more important matter, takeaway?”

Cue another eye roll, two in one day, Diego’s on fire. “You still haven’t found the cutlery.” It’s not a question so he stays quiet, and just before he can start feeling guilty, Five digs under his dashboard to pull out the crumpled menu and scans it with lightening efficiency.

“I want to try Kung Pao Chicken.”

“Sounds good to me.”

While they’re still chewing through the last of the stir fry Five rescues his old laptop from it’s perch precariously balanced on a stack of boxes and sets about typing furiously, as Diego starts scraping everything into a trash bag he’s distracted by the screen being shoved in front of his nose. “See what I mean.”

“What the hell am I looking at?” He has to blink rapidly against the onslaught of colour.

“Language,” Five chides, “It’s from a musical.”

Now his eyes have adjusted the image looks familiar. “I think I know that one.”

“It’s Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat, Grace showed me a recording.” The thin line of Five’s harsh face softens and Diego’s throat tightens in response. “Anyway, that’s what Mr Klaus dresses like.”

“Well that’s fascinating.” He sounds far too gruff.

“Good, I checked your schedule this morning,” Which is a kind way to say the cheap calendar he’d bought to write important stuff down for Five, “As you’re free tomorrow evening I’ve agreed for you to have a meeting with him.”

“You’ve agreed? What the fuck Five?”

“That’s not what I said. He wanted to meet with you, I presume to discuss my schooling.”
“Do you think it might have been a good idea to ask me first?” It’s not that Diego’s against going, the sudden announcements thrown him is all.

“No.” Five’s blunt as he powers down the laptop, “I thought that you wished to take an active role in my education.”

Diego follows the little shit into his bedroom. “Still would have been nice if you’d asked me.”

“If it’s too much hassle then I’ll inform him you’re busy.”

Diego’s well aware he’s being played, it can’t be more obvious, his tempers flaring. Five’s too thin shoulders curve in, and Diego realises that it’s somehow important that he takes part in this, for Five, not the teacher, and for that reason alone he relents. “Don’t be silly, of course I’ll go.”

Five nods, a quick jerk and his tiny hands clasp together. “Good, well if that’s all I’ll be going to bed now.”

“Got to get those twelve hours,” He gives a half hearted grin when again Five nods solemnly. “Well if you need me-”

“I know where you are.” It’s a dismissal and Diego listens, even if it’s still stupidly early and they both know that Five’s going to lie in bed and stare at the ceiling until dawn just like Diego's been doing. He allows the charade, because it’s not like he can deny his brother the reserved vigil he keeps, the only form of grieving that Diego can begin to understand.

So he retires to the kitchen table, rooting around in the back of the cleaning cupboard for the pack of cheap beer, propping himself up on the sturdiest chair and reboots his laptop to find the bookmarked page he’d been halfway through the previous night. He’s not gotten far into the latest bereavement forum posts before he realises that he’s rereading the same half a dozen lines on repeat, by then it’s too late and he falls asleep on the keyboard with his half finished beer can.
“What are you planning to wear?” Five stands squarely in the bedroom doorway while Diego swears under his breath as he darts between half full boxes and the sparse contents of his wardrobe. Five’s tone leaves it in no way unclear that he thinks Diego cannot dress himself, at least to the picky standards his brother’s set.

“What, I have to put on clothes?”

Five’s brows furrow at the poor humour, “I put a selection out for you.”

Diego’s aware, and it’s frustrating because he definitely would have chosen the dark shirt on top of his covers, but if he puts it on then Five is right. As always.

“Don’t you have homework to do?”

“Finished it whilst you were in the shower.” At Diego’s disbelieving face Five continues, “That’s one of the things that needs addressing, the workload is insulting.”

How in the ever loving fuck did he end up having this sort of talk with a nine year old?

“You’re going to be super popular with the other kids.”

Five lets out the tiniest grumble, “Why would I want to appeal to those that don’t wish to better themselves.”

Diego recognises that there’s a lot he has to unpack with Five, but at the same time he’s going to pick his battles carefully.

“I won’t be gone for too long, but I’ll see what I can do.”

“I assure you I’ll be fine,” There’s a long pause and then an optimistic, “On my own?”

“Let me think about that for a second,” Diego tries to root around in the back of the wardrobe for something that doesn’t look like it’s been left to decompose in a matted ball.

“Well?” Five’s hands twitch and fumble together in an unnecessary clasp that belies his air of ease.

“The answers no buddy, and I’ve already found you a sitter.”

“Who?” And although Five doesn’t walk in, he does lean forward.

“There’s this nice girl a couple of floors up, I spoke with her grandmother and she said it was alright.”

“Wait, that’s the dour creature who bought you the unnecessary welcome pie.”
Diego’s head snaps up, he doesn’t mind if Five acts like a jerk in private, the kid deserves to do whatever he wants all things considered. But Diego’s the adult now, he’s got to draw some sort of line, he knows what Five hasn’t seemed to grasp yet, and it’s that people don’t care what you’ve got going on in private, there’s no free pass in the real world.

“Oi, don’t be rude.”

“I wouldn’t say it to her face.” Five says like that’s the point to take away.

“Doesn’t matter, it’s a shitty thing to think. Just keep that crap in your head like the rest of us.” He catches Five’s eyes for half a second and that’s still too long, for all of his bluster Five slowly shrinks back and Diego’s gut twists.

He knows better than this, it’s one of the unspoken rules they share. Diego can’t tolerate being touched, in any manner, and Five can’t bear to be watched, or more precisely, stared down at.

His brother frustrated him originally, barely five years old when they’d first met on one of Diego’s rare trips home. An aloof child even at that age, and Diego can admit that he didn’t exactly warm to Five, not until snippets of information Lillian sparingly divulged about the boys father to his mom and eventually trickled down to Diego.

There’s no doubt in his mind that Lillian glazed over so many details, just like he and mom did in return, but after hearing those small fragments Diego was sure of two things. The first one being that his brother had an unrivalled intellect, a prodigy through his fathers regime. The second was another aspect of that.

Five was, and is, a scrappy little fucker.

There’s a high chance that you could throw the brat out of a third story window and he’d lie on the ground announcing to the world what a prick you are with words from languages that nobody bothered to learn anymore.

But this moment here, it’s one of the biggest red flags for Five, and Diego can appreciate why.

Because it’s so hard for people who’ve never been affected to understand the power a look can hold. How it precedes the muted inhalation before a hit, the fear of not knowing which punishment was about to be met out. A look can let you know which words might be perfectly acceptable one day and the foulest of transgressions the next, and there’s the impossibility of ever truly being good when you wear proof of your sins across your flesh.

What’s the point in feeling frustrated that such a reactions being levelled at him? Diego knows how deeply ingrained those fear based responses are, he’s got two decades of practice on Five and he can’t really consider himself a well adjusted individual.

And because Diego knows, he doesn’t apologize, doesn’t draw attention to his mistake so it then becomes an issue.

“Wait, before you go, can I have some help?” Five halts and carefully scans Diego, eyes lingering on certain points, assessing the risk of danger and this is difficult to ignore, he’s never so much as raised his voice with the boy. But, again, it’s another habit that Diego took years to iron out, or suppress until it didn’t affect his day to day life.

Any trace of frustration disappears when Five gingerly enters the room and makes a show of standing with only a few scant inches between them. He stays silent in an attempt to eradicate any last trace of hesitation in Five’s slow motions as he picks up one of the shirts and gestures for
Five’s words come out stilted as Diego pulls the soft cotton over his head. “She has muddy hair.”

“That’s...” Well it’s not nice, but it’s something, “a bit better.”

“I like that colour.” Five’s offering his own apology and Diego’s showing his by perching on the edge of the bed and letting the small boy wrangle him into a tie. “Grace used to say boring colours-”

“-only looked that way to those unwilling to properly open their eyes.”

Five stares at Diego’s shoulder for a long moment and Diego would put money on it that Five received his mothers fervent (bias) education in art, probably enjoyed it more than Diego did.

As much as Diego would happily spend the night trying to chip away at that solid wall between them, he’s going to be late if he doesn’t move his ass, and the last thing Diego needs is some old fuck teacher giving him shit for the rest of Five’s school year.

“How do I look?”

Five takes the question very seriously as Diego cautiously stands up, lips pursing together as he pads in a slow circle, there’s a fuzzy memory of his brother doing the same scan of Lillian as she twirled in one of her new pastel dresses for him. Diego’s pretty sure that Five has control issues but then again he might genuinely enjoy such things, and he can remember the soft smile Five never used to hide as he sat with their mothers painting one another's nails.

All Diego gets is a curt, “Acceptable.”

“I’ll take that, right, unless there’s anything else-”

“There is one thing,” Diego nods eagerly and Five’s stern mask settles back into place. “If you could find out his surname that would be most appreciated.”

“I could just go and find out from admin?”

“That’s not the point, Mr Klaus wins then.”

Diego hasn’t got a fucking clue how that’s the case, but Five seems certain and he’s not stupid enough to dare question the small boy.

Five, for all intents and purposes, liked to consider himself a child of science, when he deals with an unknown variable, he gathers enough data until he can discern a definitive answer. If it’s a matter of the emotional kind that he’s learnt to categorise such things until he can safely analyse them at a later date.

A skill that he’s implemented numerous times over the last six weeks.

Because Five’s a child of science and therefore logic, he’s always understood that there is no reason to death. A split second is all it takes to lose a human life. Whether it’s to an intoxicated senior attempting to impress a group of his peers, or an ambulance technician failing to
comprehend that there’s more than one body in the twisted snarl of metal that once constituted as a vehicle.

Incidentally one of the things Five learnt that from the apocalypse, was that he doesn’t have the capacity to show regret for the deaths of foolish teenagers that ignored the states drinking regulations.

On the third day, eleventh hour and twenty second minute post apocalypse Five gave in and loaded a video sharing platform, searching out the sound of an EKG flatlining. Considering it to be the soundtrack that accompanies death, the noise felt woefully inadequate, Five wanted something spectacular, an orchestra to play a dazzling score to usher in the end of his world.

Five had noted the thought and stuck the imaginative pin in it for later consideration.

The funeral was another baffling concept, consisting of a string of consolations, excessive tears and quite honestly it’d frustrated Five. If he was capable of standing there, moderating his reactions in a manner that mother and Grace would have approved of, then why couldn’t these dim witted creatures do the same. It really wasn’t too much to ask of them.

Also what was it with acquaintances asking various iterations of ‘how’re you holding up?’ Was there an appropriate reply for such questions? A polite, grammatically correct answer that didn’t contain numerous expletives or insinuate that the individual had nothing more than heated air particles between their ears. If there was then Five would have appreciated being let in on the secret.

Diego was an unknown quantity at that point, a strange man, one that aside from Grace’s birthday and occasionally the festive period had never made an impact in his life. If anything he’d become more intimate with the numerous photos dotted around their tastefully decorated home than the flesh and blood Alpha. It didn’t take a keen eye to see the gaps between Diego’s formative years and the plethora of photographs detailing his adolescence.

Grace, for all of her vast array of impressive qualities laboured under the delusion that he and Diego created a bond upon their initial meeting, developed from their mutual experiences of childhood trauma. Five had neglected to inform her of the truth, the impossibility of comparing their lives and finding similarities, that one form of abuse didn’t equate to another.

But Diego, despite the lack of attachment, stood steadfast beside him for the entirety of the funeral and through the careful glances Five took it became increasingly obvious that his step brother, under the stony exterior, was inconsolably devastated.

Initially the lost, vulnerable expression irked him, how could a composed woman like Grace have such a weak child? But then Five supposed that Diego wouldn’t have been given the same methods to cope that Reginald installed within him.

It was then that Five realised he was going to have to be the adult in this relationship, that his step brother would spiral without some form of routine now his only familial connection was severed. It’s why he’d agreed to this cohabitation in the first place, insisted with that imbecilic judge who wanted him to select a soft toy from the box before he entered the courtroom. Five didn’t share his own personal reason with the ruddy faced man, or the social worker assigned to watch over them, if only that he couldn’t imagine they’d be very impressed with it.

When you can’t have what you want, then the best thing you can do is search for a suitable alternative. Five wants mother and Grace. He’ll reluctantly settle for Diego.
Five has tried his best, he’s even pulled the box containing the kitchen utensils to the front of the stack in encouragement. He refuses to actually tell Diego, or unload it himself, there’s a lesson for his step brother to learn and Five’s not objecting to eating Chinese takeout until the Alpha gets it.

He understands the reluctance, even if Diego isn’t quite able to, it’s for the same reason he’s left anything that’s not vital in the large suitcase inside of his wardrobe. If they unpack then it’s accepting their new arrangements, something that Five feels neither of them wish to do.

Five can be appreciative, he can vocalise those sentiments, like in regards to the fully stocked cleaning cupboard. A testament to Diego’s willing to listen. To adapt to Five’s need for cleanliness.

The apartment may be bare, vacant almost, but Diego had spent every Saturday since they moved in religiously following the laminated routine taped to the fridge. Five wasn’t sure what to make of the Alpha working alongside him to scrub the bathroom floor, and although the fool didn’t utilise the protective gloves laid out (Five would not be held responsible for the affects of bleach touching his tanned skin)... There wasn’t a single complaint. Not even when Five would track around the apartment with his checklist and point out areas that needed improvement. Diego didn’t object to the entirety of his day being occupied by such menial tasks.

To reward Diego’s behaviour Five will be civilised about the indignity of having a sitter that isn’t even double his age, he’s managed it in face of the insult that is the school, this is no different.

Five, as he avoids the awkward greetings by the front door, cannot work out how a relatively successful detective can be so pitiful with his time keeping. Diego’s hurried voice already echoing down the hallway as Five imagines the Alpha dashing towards the stairs in Lieu of the older lift.

He’s left with the girl. She’s even plainer than the image his memory assigned to her.

“Hi, you must be Five.” She says hesitantly, like Five’s needs reminding of his own name. “I’m Vanya, it’s lovely to meet you.”

No it isn’t. They’ve just met and she’s already telling him a gross exaggeration, even worse is the bony hand she holds out for him to shake. Five intended to be polite, however he cannot abide by this stranger assuming she gets skin contact on their first meeting.

“Did you know that the human hand can contain over three hundred thousand genetically distinct bacteria?” He asks, the quicker he stumps her, the sooner she’ll leave him alone to spend his evening in a more appealing manner.

“Isn’t it something like three hundred and thirty two thousand?”

Five blinks.

“I like trivia.” Vanya confesses. And then she smiles.

There’s a picture book that Five was rather attached to for a period, and dutifully Grace would read it aloud to him every single night. A routine of sorts they’d established between them.

Grace would settle herself on the small stool, a cup of whatever herbal brew she was currently fascinated with cooling on the bedside table and she’d delicately cross her ankles, indoor heels tapping gently on the hardwood floor. There was a variety of characters but the one that most appealed to him was the predictably evil Goblin King. The antagonist that had the heroes run
around on meaningless quests until they finally engaged in a battle for victory at the end.

That’s what Vanya’s smile reminds him of, the Goblin king as he surveyed his enemies with a wild glint in his eyes.

It’s a shame that she probably wouldn’t understand the compliment for it’s true meaning.

Vanya’s prattling on and Five refocuses on the conversation, “- unless there’s anything that you want to do?”

He regrets that he’d ignored her when Vanya takes his silence for acquiescence and pulls out a thick stack of booklets from the rucksack slung over a scrawny shoulder. “Diego said you liked something that makes your brain work, so I found the hardest ones in Babushka’s collection.” She takes the clear spot on the kitchen table and sets everything down for Five to have a look.

Crosswords.

This mousy girl believes he can be stimulated by crossword books.

Mr Klaus’ class is no longer the worst thing about his day.

But in spite of the non verbal apology exchanged between them, Five doubts Diego would be happy to find out that he’d made Vanya upset, so he resigns himself to drawing up his usual chair. Though he isn’t in the mood to accept the pen she offers, not with the half chewed end displayed for all to see.

“Okay, how about you tell me the answers and I’ll fill them in.”

Thus begins the most pointless hour of Five’s life. As anyone could have predicted, the crosswords were, to be quite frank, an embarrassment.

“You’re so good at these.” Vanya states multiple variations of the same sentiment at him and Five want’s to tell her that compliments aren’t worth receiving for pitiful accomplishments.

“How do you remember all of this?” Vanya asks after they answer the fictional kingdom of King Arthur.

Pitiful.

“I try to challenge myself to expand my knowledge daily.”

“Like when teachers used to set us a word of the day.”

Five might shake his head at the continuation of Vanya’s simplicity if it wouldn’t be considered rude. But really, a single word? It’s almost an insulting comparison.

“I can manage more than one!” Too harsh, regather and proceed in a calmer manner.

“How can you remember everything… unless you have an eidetic memory?” Vanya doesn’t seem to be offended by his slip.

“That would make things considerably easier, unfortunately I do not possess such luck.”

“What’s the point?""  

“Mother likes to say that if you’re to do something, do it correctly.”
Present tense… No longer applicable.

Five goes to move the conversation onto something more appropriate, but his mind fades to black.

*Oh.*

Stick a pin in it. Analyse at a further date.

There’s a fizzling sound in his eardrums and for a startling pause in time Five’s unable to draw upon his most prized asset. His eyes settle on, of all things, Vanya’s fingers where they rest on the table, and he will give her this, she has aesthetically pleasing hands.

When he looks back up she’s donning what he assumes is meant to be a softer, more sympathetic look and there’s rigid lines bracketing her face, a contradiction that makes Vanya look far older than her sixteen years. Five’s unimpressed, the goblin smile is immensely superior to this bland excuse for an expression.

“How do I pronounce this one?”

Five straightens his spine and glances at the crossword, eye twitching at the adjective displayed.

*Is she serious?*

Vanya's bemused expression proves her deception and Five is surprised to find that he isn’t necessarily annoyed by the distraction.

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Diego could really do with one of those PSA videos they used to show them at school, anything to give him some sort of guidance on how to handle meeting Five's teacher.

Schools make him uncomfortable, to the surprise of no one he’s sure, even now as a fully grown adult it’s unnerving to go through a house of learning in the evening when most of the classrooms he passes are dark and empty, apart from the nice beta in reception who’d checked he wasn’t some lazy burglar, the whole building seems silent.

The door he wants is sitting ajar and Diego pokes his head inside to another empty room, and he knows that this is the right one because he’s got the meticulously labelled map Five sketched out for him before he left tucked into his jeans pocket.

First thing he notices is the smell, a distinctive aroma that’s a stark contradiction to the stale, musty air in the hallway. It reminds him of the florist who’s shop his mother used to adore, a heady fragrant scent, but where it’s being released from he doesn’t know. The second thing filtering in is that the room is about as chaotic as he expected.

Desks are shoved together in no apparent order and dotted around the room, each one seems to have some sort of colour coded theme, and there’s genuine to fuck dream catchers hanging above each cluster. Along the far wall he spies laminated pictures of different animals, which is normal enough, but then underneath there’s the children’s rendition, glitter coating every square inch of paper, even as Diego watches small iridescent flakes float to the ground. To his amusement there’s still a chalkboard at the front of the room, it’s almost quaint.
It’s like someone dipped into Five’s mind and designed his very own torture chamber, and Diego, if he’s being a prick, is kind of here for it.

There’s still no one around and if it wasn’t that Five would possibly throw a fit so hard he ends up in the ER if Diego goes back empty handed, then he would be use it as an excuse to leave. He looks like a fucking idiot dawdling in the doorway, and before he can think of a valid reason to give his brother there’s a muffled thud from a door beside what he’s supposes is meant to be a reading corner with the shaggy cushions and haphazard piles of books.

*The supply closet.*

Maybe he is a fucking idiot. Or his observational skills have lost their edge in the short space of a month. Diego thinks he’d prefer the first one as he knocks loud enough to echo through the room.

A startled yelp answers, high pitched and rather exaggerative. “I’ll be right there.”

There’s a distinctive, alternating click of high heels, muted faintly by the carpet, and Diego’s starting to frown as Mr Klaus appears with a stack of folders.

Five did not give him enough warning.

Mr Klaus is *not* some old guy.

Diego doesn’t know where he’s meant to look, and his eyes roam without meaning to. Over the knitted metallic sweater a size too big hanging loose over his slender frame, a pleated navy skirt swinging loosely around opaque, *fucking*, pantyhose encased legs, and he doesn’t dare look lower at the heels because that’s a sure fire way to frazzle his one remaining brain cell.

*What the fuck is this?!*

Diego forces his eyes upwards and that’s almost worst, because what is he meant to do about that ridiculously beautiful face. Intelligent green eyes, plush red lips, and he doesn’t know how to handle the riot of curls that demand a hand to snare through them and tug until that long sloping neck is exposed to-

*This is an issue.*

Diego feels attacked, unsettled by this teacher who looks more like he should be lying on his back in a bed, preferably Diego’s. The same teacher who’s said something while Diego stared and is now waiting patiently for him to respond while he’s still gawking like a creeper.

*Calm your shit Diego.*

“Please, call me Klaus.” It’s repeated and from the tilt of those lips the guy knows Diego’s zoned out, a floral note floods his senses as he takes a deep breath to try and calm down.

Is that coming from Klaus? *Oh fucking hell.*

It makes Diego almost lightheaded as he realises that Five’s teacher - *keep repeating that* - is an omega that smells fucking divine.

There’s a god looking down on him because Klaus doesn’t extend a hand for him to shake, Diego’s not entirely sure he wouldn’t act primitively like sniff at Klaus’ wrist or something equally disturbing.
“I take it you're Mr Diaz? I hope so, or this is going to get awkward.” Klaus smiles and it’s like standing in the warmth of the sun, Diego has to wrestle down that shitty lizard brain of his before something really awkward happens. Like Klaus smelling how inappropriately his body is behaving at the sight of the prettiest guy he’s ever met standing in front of Diego like something from his teenage wet dreams.

“Yeah,” Monosyllabic, very impressive of him, “Sorry, you can call me Diego.”

“Come take a seat, wait… Diego Diaz?” Klaus lets the folder in his arm scatter across his desk as the both sit down opposite one another.

“Dad had a shi- bad sense of humour.”

“Could be worse,” Klaus shrugs, still smiling, still smelling incredible. “Anyway, the reason I asked you to come in was the school makes any midyear transfers do this meeting since you missed the parent orientation.

“Right, that’s cool.” Diego almost winces.

Cool… you absolute dick.

“So we talk about Five’s- Is it alright to call him that? Only it says on his registration form his actual-”

“It’s just Five, he won’t answer to anything else.” Diego interrupts.

“Okay,” Klaus pulls out a pen that’s genuine to fuck got pink feathers wafting off of the end. “How about I go through the mandated shpeal from the school and then you can ask anything at the end?”

Diego doesn’t have time to nod before Klaus is talking, repeating out words he must have said a thousand times if the slightly mocking edge to his voice means anything. But Diego actually concentrates now, this is about Five and his brothers the reason he’s here, even if the policies Klaus’ describing seem pointlessly elaborate to him considering their talking about elementary school.

“I don’t know if you want to write anything down? There’s a lot there to keep track of.” Klaus’ suggestion sounds like he expects it to be met.

“I can remember everything, perk of my job.”

“And that is?”

“I’m a detective.”

Klaus looks mildly curious, and for a second Diego’s hesitating because he doesn’t need to know if his brothers teacher is one of those crime fanatics or even some uniform pervert.

Actually the latter Diego could definitely get behind. If it wasn’t Five’s teacher. He’s going to keep saying those two words until his shitty Alpha settles the fuck back down from the randy pedestal it’s mounted.

Klaus doesn’t press for more details, much to his surprise, “If you don’t mind me asking,” Something tells Diego that Klaus would barrel on no matter what his answer, “I’ve only known him for two days and it’s not hard to tell that Five’s a … precocious boy.”
Diego can’t suppress a snort, “That’s one way of putting it.”

Klaus breaks out a full grin and it’s like a gut punch. “So why is he being held back a year? If anything I’d have put him forward.”

Right, well that’s a hell of a question to answer, and a way to redirect his thoughts as the Alpha bristles protectively around his brothers secrets.

“Five’s been… home schooled for most of his life, he’s never been around other kids before so he’s not got the best social skills, when the temporary custody agreement was settled, it was decided that it was in Five’s best interest that he enter the school system with kids his own age…”

“That makes sense, the lack of socialisation.” Klaus hums thoughtfully.

“Why?” Diego frowns.

“He told several children this morning that they were,” Klaus looks down at the notepad for reference, “‘Insufferable dullards’ and he didn’t have time for their nonsense.”

_For fuck sake Five._

“Shit, that’s… Sorry I’ll-”

This time Klaus interrupts Diego. “I spoke with him and it was handled there and then, I wouldn’t worry about it.”

“I swear he doesn’t understand how clinical he is half the time, it’s something we need to work on.” Admitting a flaw of Five’s tastes bitter in Diego’s mouth.

“That’s a healthy goal for us to work on between now and the next conference.” Klaus scribbles furiously as they talk, in what he presumes is Five’s record. “So is there anything you want to ask me?”

There was a few things that Five mentioned, but Diego can be fucked if he remembers when Klaus tilts his head and his sweater slides with the motion, exposing more of the pale skin of Klaus’ neck. One of those policies mentioned earlier snags in his brain, “Five asked for harder homework.”

Klaus considers this before answering with a stark honesty, “I doubt there’s a piece of work in this school that Five will find difficult.”

Like Diego doesn’t already know this. “Is there anything you can give him? Doesn’t even have to count towards his grade.”

“I’ll see what I can do.” The feathery pen bobs wildly.

There’s a residual flare in Diego’s gut that demands he defends Five to Klaus, it’s unignorable and although he can’t deny that his brothers an eccentric little shit whose standoffish nature does nothing to endear himself to others. Five, at the end of the day, is still Diego’s little shit.

“I know Five takes some getting used to, and I’m not trying to make excuses for his crap, and there’s a lot of it. But he’s gone through more in a decade than most people do in their whole lives and then to top it off he’s been dropped into this foreign environment where he’s completely out of his d-depth…” Diego’s, to his absolute fucking horror, stutters resurfacing.

Klaus grins brightly, and Diego's distracted by the realisation that the omega doesn’t make him
think of the sun, he is the fucking sun.

“What?” He asks defensively under such an open expression.

“I think,” Klaus leans back in his chair and there’s this mischievous shine to his eyes that wipes Diego’s mind clean, “That Five is going to do just fine here, with such a supportive brother behind him.”

Like he’s a lust addled teenager Diego’s ashamed to admit that he doesn’t remember leaving the school, or getting home, half aware that Vanya looked remarkably happy as he escorted safely to her floor and the honest girl wouldn’t take the extra bills he tried to give her. Pathetically his brain only really clicks in properly when Five’s nearly finished interrogating around the fifteen minute routine of brushing his teeth.

“Are you paying any attention to what I’m saying?”

“Of course I am.” He is now.

“Well, most importantly, what did you think of Mr Klaus?”

There’s very few words that can be safely used right now, so he settles for “He’s… different.”

*Very eloquent.*

Yet Diego’s somehow managed to lose to the smaller boy because Five nods and the motion comes across as terribly self satisfied, which Diego has no fucking idea how his brother manages it.

“I did tell you.” Five goes back to brushing his teeth and Diego’s can take the hint.

“Alright, don’t rub it in Mr know it all,”

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*Mr Know It All.*

Five, despite himself and the lack of malicious intent, finds the term moderately offensive, it’s not like this is something he’s chosen for himself. He’s always ran at a higher gear, his first verified memory was of Latin conjugation and Reginald’s beady eyes drilling holes through the back of his skull if he so much as twitched.

If it was up to Five then he would empty his head of all of the knowledge he’s garnered and fill it with trivial matters, youthful pursuits like that of his new school peers. Allow himself more frivolous pursuits, there’s a great many number of things he’d have tried if given the chance.

Five thinks he’d have liked to learn how to ride a bike.

But it’s wistful thinking, he’d never had a choice in the matter and Reginald’s teachings will
always have a room in his mind, the patterns already set. To wish for anything else now was a futile endeavour.

Speaking of the Alpha, Diego tracks into his bedroom as Five’s finalising his last few preparations before he climbs atop the bed.

“Forget to say, no dice on the surname, but Mr Klaus is going to try and get you harder work to do.”

Five pauses in the middle of adjusting his sleepwear. “You asked?”

“I mean, you wanted me to.” Diego’s nose scrunches in his confusion.

_He did as Five requested._

The pause stretches long enough for it to seem like a dismissal, “G’night buddy.” There’s a gentle snick as the door shuts.

“Goodnight.” His mouth absently mutters without permission to the empty room.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Five’s utilising the hour devoted to the arts - or what passes for it in this hellscape - to take surreptitious mental notes of his target, tucking himself into the corner of the room where his sequestered spot gives him a little space from the rabble.

Mr Klaus’ chirpy voice reverberates over the rest of the excited din, he’s pushed his overgrown hair back with a pastel fabric headband so it doesn’t fall into his face as he helps girl with glasses to peel herself away from the PVA glue she’s coated herself with.

Personally Five would have left her to devise a strategy as punishment for such stupidity, but maybe that’s the more inconsiderate side of himself showing. Plus she’s kept the overenthusiastic man busy for the last six minutes, and that’s six minutes where he isn’t being badgered into participating alongside his classmates.

Five refuses to take part in any activity that results in him picking holographic pieces of glitter out of his hair for the next month.

Outside of his initial distaste for the flamboyant teacher, there was also the matter of Diego. Seventy two hours have passed since their meeting, his step brother this morning was still flustered, rambling inane nonsense whenever Five attempts to push for further details. Considering their unspoken agreement to be honest with one another it vexes Five that they have this issue.

Though Diego may be a fool with a questionable competency in the basic necessities of life - last night with the iron he’d left on one of Five’s now burnt shirts came to mind. However Diego was unfortunately the only family he had left now and the omega darting around the classroom was to blame for whatever unsettled the Alpha, and it was Five’s responsibility to assess and decide the appropriate path to take in preventing another incident.

There’s no evidence that Mr Klaus was rude towards Diego, but Five’s still going to watch him, just to be sure.

So he’s prepared for the clicking of bangles adorning the omegas arms that signalled his approach, before his teacher drops into a fairly impressive crouch considering Mr Klaus’ wearing another pair of insensible high heels.

“What’re you reading?”

It’s not what Five expects to be asked but he presents the book anyway.

“The Art of War,” There’s a small scrunch to Mr Klaus’ nose before it smooths out, “interesting choice.”

“I like to be prepared.”

“At least I know my class is safe with you here.” Five suspects that in the case of any sort of emergency, he would in fact be the one to turn towards. But he’s been attempting to improve his manners around more sensitive humans, so he keeps this fact to himself.

“So you like reading?”
“Evidently.”

Manners.

“What about poetry?”

“Moderately less so,” there’s a dejected look in the Omega’s face and Five sighs exasperatedly, “what did you have in mind?”

Unsurprisingly Mr Klaus cheers up immediately, “I have someone for you to work with.”

Really it’s shameful of him not to have noticed the girl standing a few feet away from his solitary desk, even though she’s rather bland, he still should have been more aware of his surroundings. Worse is that he doesn’t pay attention to the beginning of what Mr Klaus is saying.

“- the pair of you should be able to blast through this without any trouble.”

He’s about to ask for a repeat when he notices a faint line dissecting the palm holding out two sheets of paper in it’s grasp. No that’s not quite right, it’s more of a curlicue running past the meat of the omega’s thumb , obscured by what Five assumes is some type of makeup, a concealer. A tattoo that Mr Klaus is ashamed of? It’s not exactly a flaw, but Five still makes a note to jot it down into his journal for later consideration.

Five’s almost tempted to decline the offer but then he might be forced to interact with the other children, such as the…

Really?

“I think you may wish to turn around,” Five can’t believe he has to say the next sentence, “before that boy licks anymore glue off of his hand.”

Mr Klaus spins with a startling speed, darting across to deal with the foolish child.

It’s extremely rare that Five agrees with Reginald’s teachings, but the law of natural selection has never rung more perfectly than this moment.

The only issue he now has is being left alone with the girl sitting opposite and what appears to be two different poems set in front of him. Having to confess, even if it’s inadvertently, to his lack of attention already irritates him.

“What’s your name?”

Instead of answering he’s left watching as she pulls out a plain notebook, withdrawing a loose scrap of paper and her hand moves at a remarkable speed before she pushes it towards him.

Delores.

Interesting name. Unusual.

Is she mute? Voluntary or involuntarily? Selective or congenital defect? Is that a rude term to use? What are the alternatives? Five knows what he shall be researching that evening.

Another one of Reginald’s teachings that still lingers is the need to categorize facial features, starting with the most prominent. Five’s always assumed it was some sort of identification matter, but like many things involving Reginald it’s hard to ever be quite sure.
It’s a subconscious action as he sweeps a cursory scan over Delores’ face, and he’s arrested by a pair of glacial eyes staring back at him. Being caught out is unsettling enough without the prolonged eye contact, yet Five - against his better judgement - is intrigued. The rest of her face lacks a distinctive or noteworthy quality, but there’s something quick and sharp in her piercing gaze that promises nothing less than total honesty.

Five can respect honesty.

Delores is waiting, Five assumes for him to comment in some way, so he confesses again. This time directly.

“I don’t know what we’re supposed to be doing?”

He’s left waiting a few seconds, if that.

Comparing the similarities and differences between the two poems.

It’s a rudimentary task, a concession Mr Klaus has made that Five will accept if only to prevent himself becoming like the three boys currently resembling disco balls at the front of the class.

Before he can finish reading the first poem Delores’ hands flying across her paper and then pushing it across the desk. It’s really an untidy scrawl, letters sloping across the page in her hurry, but the points seem valid, and in the time it takes him to finish the second text, another scrap of paper ends up on top of the first.

Thus begins the strangest half hour he’s experienced in a long while.

Five writes - in a far neater cursive - their finished piece to present to Mr Klaus and Delores, for a fellow child, is surprisingly gifted at conveying her opinions across in ways Five’s unused to. Competent, not in the technical terms, but with a superior observational talent, writing out similarities faster than Five can see them, it would be irksome, but he refuses to become the type of human that belittles another for their skills.

Five’s not inept, he can interact pleasantly around other human beings, it’s just unnerving to deal with the empty space where banal conversation would normally sit. Usually he would encourage such behaviour, Diego could benefit from Delores’ influence Five’s sure-

You spelt Heaney’s name wrong.

Five breaks out of his own mind to scowl at the girl, who only meets him back with that steadfast gaze, “I think you’ll find I did not.”

There’s a little more venom that he intended to imbue the words with, but he won’t tolerate being criticised in such a manner.

Fifth line, sixth word in.

There’s a wildly childish urge to ball the paper up and throw it towards her, instead he takes a calming breath, and glares down at his writing.

Huh.

That’s infuriating.

Delores doesn’t smile, or laugh, or show any sign of triumph at his failure, she just pushes her next
point towards him and those shrewd eyes scan the next set of lines.

_Huh._

If Diego was pushed to choose one thing in particular to represent his distaste for Gena’s office, and it’s difficult to only choose one, it’d be the beige leather couch he’s sat in for the last four Saturdays.

It’s almost laughable, the mornings are run by Five as they scrub the apartment until all he can scent is the chemical stench of bleach and disinfectant and then he gets this wonderful hour with a demon incarnate. It’s probably a little exaggerative, but listening to her breach an awkward conversation with Five while attempting to draw the boy into moving past his stilted monosyllable answers was a test in patience.

Five’s face is unreadable which between that and the neutral scent made it near impossible to tell how he felt at any given moment, not for Diego’s lack of trying, and Gena’s. The sneaky Alpha thinks he doesn’t notice, and he’s in no hurry to correct her.

“I think that’s all for this time, unless you have any questions?”

Five shakes his head, and Diego’s back aches in sympathy at how the boy sits, ramrod straight, without the slightest curve to his spine.

“I just need a moment with Mr Diaz before you leave,” Gena speaks up when Five starts to pull on his blazer. Casual shirt today, without a tie, because y’know… it’s a Saturday.

“I’m aware.”

Gena’s voice turns soft and mothering, not the best thing to do, Diego thinks, when talking to an emotionally stunted asshole who lost both Mothers a couple of months ago.

“If you’re cold I can turn the heating up sweetie,”

_Bad word choice Gena._

That’s Lillian’s term of endearment and judging from the slowly crystallising ice in Five’s eyes, the boys furious.

“I’m not cold.”

“Then why are you wearing-”

“Because I wish to. Because it’s mine. Because it indicates that I want to leave at the nearest convenience without appearing overtly rude. Would you like for me to go on?”

Diego glances up at the ceiling and asks a god he doesn’t believe in for the strength to deal with this bullshit.

If he wanted to prove he was a good guardian this would be the bit where he knelt down and spoke with clever words that would show Five how impolite he was, teach him the error of his ways. Then his brother would give a heartfelt apology, maybe squeeze out a few tears to look good, and
then… Diego would wake up from the knockout blow Five would bestow upon him with that bloody briefcase for trying such a stunt.

He’s grinning from the thought of it, and, shit, there’s a tiny wrinkle between Gena’s brows that he suspects is the only type of frown she can show in front of a child.

“Right, buddy, why don’t you wait outside and I’ll be right there.”

Five gives him a curt nod and refuses Gena the usual farewell handshake they share, and Diego needs to work on how he handles his anger because the snub shouldn’t give him such a vindictive pleasure.

Gena, to be fair to her, doesn’t show the slightest reaction, patiently waiting until the doors shuts. “Qui-”

“Five.” Diego can’t stop himself from gritting out, but at the same time screw her for still trying to insist on Five’s birth name when he wasn’t around to defend himself - especially after that fuck up.

“Apologies, my mistake.”

Was it fuck.

“No worries, what can I do for you?”

“I just want to clarify a few things before we see each other next. If I have this right, you’ll be returning to work on Monday, have you made appropriate arrangements for Five’s safety?”

“Yeah, I’ve arranged with my new captain to finish earlier so I can be there when Five finishes school.”

Diego doesn’t mention that it’s meant to be a temporary deal for a few weeks until he sorts his shit out, he can deal with crossing that bridge when they get to it.

“That’s very understanding of them, I’m surprised considering the nature of your job.”

“What can I say, I’m lucky.” He makes a point of looking towards the door to hurry her along.

“I see.” Gena looks down at her pad for a moment, “Five briefly mentioned that he had a sitter the other evening?”

“Yeah, Vanya, she did really well.”

“Did you find her through one of the recommended agencies I sent you?”

You know I didn’t you nosy fucker.

“She’s a girl from our apartment building.”

“I see,” Gena repeats, “I’m a little concerned about the credentials of a teenager looking after a child with more delicate needs.”

Diego’s almost impressed with how in one sentence, she can make Vanya sound like some incompetent juvenile, and Five like he’s about to shatter and crumble at the slightest breeze. The first he can ignore, but she’s met Five and if that’s her opinion… then Diego is definitely not the dumbest one in the room anymore.
Also why the hell does he need some overpriced shit from an agency with dozens of useless certificates to watch over Five? If Vanya could survive the whole night without tearing out of there screaming then who was Gena to judge the girl.

“If Five is happy with her then so am I.”

*So put it in a drink and choke on it Gena.*

Diego might have to look into anger management soon.

“Okay, a reminder that our catch ups will be monthly from here unless there’s any other issues” It’s a real talent, being able to twist the court mandated meetings into something casual, like Diego’s left with any choice in the matter.

“Well I have your number stuck on the fridge if I ever need to call.” He actually thinks he’s free when she has to add one last line in what Diego’s convinced is an ominous tone.

“Don’t forget that there’ll be unscheduled home checks at some point in the future.”

“I swear she’s a demon.”

“Indeed.”

Diego’s being petty and childish, but he’s never seen this dark look on Five’s face and all he can think to do is be a distraction. “I bet she has tea parties with Satan.”

“I suppose only real demons would drink tea.”

“Precisely my point.”

“Although, I didn’t think you believed in religion.”

“I didn’t until I finally met Lucifer.”

“She’s gained a promotion.” Five’s casual tone does little to detract from his tension fuelled march across the car park.

Diego’s fumbling for something more mature when, “coffee?” Is tentatively offered, like there’s a chance that he’ll refuse Five.

“Fuck yes,” Diego groans at the thought of caffeine, and that Five’s hands are no longer clenched in a tight little ball.

“Language.”

“English, what’s yours?”

There’s a strange hum that’s cut off immediately beside him, and god he wants to look but that’ll only deteriorate things again. And it’s alright, Diego can laugh at his own shit humour for the both of them.
Five takes his coffee scalding hot and blacker than Gena’s soul.

Anger management. Before you become anymore bitter… Like Gena’s-

Diego cuts it off at the last moment, and decides he desperately needs to work on his antagonistic inner monologue.

Their usual haunt is fairly quiet for a Saturday afternoon, not that Diego thinks either of them are going to complain considering the protracted silence holding strong since they’d arrived. It’s nice, companionable even with Five’s stubborn determination to maintaining a staring match with his mug, and Diego’s happy that they’ve got this peaceful moment.

Yet he still can’t stop himself from asking, “Are you alright?”

Five, really was an incredibly composed child. Face implacable, apart from the way his pupils narrow infinitesimally. “That’s a broad question, please be more specific.”

“You’ve been… off since Gena said-” Diego cuts himself off.

“Miss King was only doing her job, I take no offence to her… Unlike some.”

Don’t antagonise.

Before he can stress about his answer Five peers around Diego’s shoulder, “Is that Mr Klaus?”

“I doubt it.” Diego twists awkwardly to look even though he’s pretty sure that his brothers only trying to evade talking.

Shit.

Five wasn’t faking, it’s definitely Klaus.

Klaus who’s spotted them and waving with so much enthusiasm that he almost spills the takeaway cup the barista’s just given him as he glides between tables to come over.

The whole ‘Five’s teacher’ reprimand flares up in large neon letters, at least until he gets a clear sight of the omega floating towards them in - what he only knows thanks to Grace’s obsession with the era - one of those starlet swing dresses and Diego’s staring dumbly, just like the other night.

The dresses neckline plunges low enough Klaus’ collarbones peek through, the milky skin of his shoulders exposed, belt cinched in around his narrow waist, the skirt swinging loosely around bare calves.

Diego shouldn’t be looking for a bonding mark, but at the same time fuck it, because it’s bad that he’s this relieved to see the bare expanse of skin, not so much as a freckle marring Klaus’ flesh… and he’s not paid a single iota of attention to the omega’s greeting, or the last thirty seconds of conversation.

“Nice dress,” Five remarks, with none of the enthusiasm Diego’s alpha is showing.
“You think?” Klaus preens delightedly, and Diego wonders how he’d react to other kinds of praise.

“It would look better with gloves.” His brother intones.

_Not helping Five._

Before Diego can remind himself that he’s in public, _opposite his brother_, the omega smiles at Five’s lack of excitement and digs around in the oversized handbag dangling from the crease of his elbow.

Diego’s alpha reacquaints itself with it’s randy pedestal from the other night when Klaus pulls out and wriggles his long, thin fingers into a pair of delicate lacy black gloves and presents them for Five’s approval.

_Who dresses like that to grab a coffee?_

“Moderately better.” Five gives a perfunctory nod.

“Well as long as you’re happy,” Klaus isn’t deterred by Five’s blunt demeanour as he forges on, “So what’s two fine young gentlemen such as yourselves doing today?”

“Cleaning. Meetings. Coffee.”

“Concise and to the point, I like it.” Klaus’ smile turns towards him and Diego realises that he’s effectively sat there silently like a gormless idiot.

And he’s still doing it.

Klaus somehow isn’t put off, if the amused smile is anything to go by. “Well I’m glad I ran into you both, I forgot to say that there’s a class trip coming up and I know it’s last minute but I managed to bribe the principal into letting Five come.”

Diego can feel Five’s entire body snap to attention, “This wasn’t in the yearly planner.”

“It’s there on the class timetable you had me print out.” Klaus quirks a brow at Five’s ransacking of his briefcase.

_What child carries around school schedules… on a Saturday?_

Five scans the paper, mouth slowly dropping. “Aquarium… I’ve never been to one.”

“Then you’ll absolutely love it.” Klaus says with too much conviction.

“But… It’s just fish. In tanks.”

If they were alone Diego would be snickering at the aghast expression on his brothers face. “You’re going to hate it.”

_You finally spoke, well done._

“No he won’t, we’re all going to have a wonderful time.” Klaus flaps a hand at him and that fucking scent fogs over his brain until all Diego wants to do is grab the thin, pale wrist in his fingers and tug the omega forward into his lap.

_There’s a fucking nine year old at the table._
Diego concentrates on his brother and there’s a desperate whirl of cogs and gears in that little genius head until Five looks at Klaus triumphantly. “I’ll need written consent from a guardian to attend.”

Klaus answers Five’s attitude with another smile, “I attached the permission slip to the back.”

Before Five can destroy any evidence Diego reaches around him and plucks the paper from his hand. The outraged betrayal in those large blue eyes would be humorous if it wasn’t that Diego knows the little shits going to find a subtle way to rain hellfire down on him when he least expects it in retribution.

“What about you Diego?” God his name coming from those lips, it’s enough to have him thinking of the ways Klaus might say it, how Diego can make him say it, “- if you’re free then it’d be great to have another chaperone.”

The thought of spending a day with Klaus is one that he can’t spend too long on in a public place, but then it’s easy to extinguish by the thought of that day being infested with two dozen school children.

“Sorry, can’t help this time, working.” He offers lamely.

“Interesting,” Klaus muses, head canting to the side in faux confusion, “I haven’t told you the date.”

Poor Five smirks.

“Well I- I work a lot.”

A obviously false look of disappointment settles on Klaus’ face, “Maybe next time,” Diego doesn’t have time to answer when one of those lace covered hands settles on his shoulder in a brief pat, and there’s an overwhelming wave of Jasmine coursing through the air around him.

Diego fucking hates Jasmine.

But he’s in the middle of inhaling the scent before he can realise what he’s doing, and from the curious eyes watching him intently, Klaus’ noticed.

Shit.

Diego’s become flustered again.

Five notes this with no real understanding of why.

It’s interesting, he’s present for the entirety of this conversation and although it seems that Mr Klaus is far too exuberant, there’s no ill will between them. Not even the thinly veiled animosity that humans seemed to think they were being subtle with.

Five might be able to comprehend the situation better if he didn’t still feel a residual unease from their earlier meeting. Waiting outside of the room whilst the adults discussed him wasn’t a particularly pleasant experience, and even though he’s certain that Diego would address any complaints he might have about Five to his face. The idea that he might not, that Diego might have something negative to say about him… it had stuck tenaciously to Five’s thoughts until a coil of
something acidic snagged and frothed and burned in his abdomen.

The normal techniques have been applied, but for some insensible reason his mind wasn’t waiting until the privacy of his bedroom to analyse, but deeming now as the appropriate time.

He’s fixating, and everything’s starting to run at a higher gear, the quiet hum of the diners slowly transforming into something louder, harsher, and Five is well aware of what will happen when the overload in his head begins, and he’d very much like to be in his own space when it occurs.

_Ah, this is unfortunate._

“I’d like to leave,” he interrupts whatever Diego’s saying, and maybe that’s an undesirable aspect of Five’s behaviour, the type of thing that one might speak of behind closed doors.

Diego, for a self professed idiot, takes only a second before he’s standing, saying something to Mr Klaus, and then Five accepts the large hand that engulfs his shoulder and steers him through the tables and directly towards the cool interior of the car.

Five’s gained a partial control over his errant mind and in the middle of jotting down some theories behind his momentary deterioration, when Diego bumbles into his room a few hours later, hidden behind a towering pile of cushions, soft throws and other assorted items that ends up at the foot of Five’s bed.

“What are you doing?”

“I had this rather brilliant idea-”

“Doubtful,” _stop insulting him_, “do go on.”

_Nesting-”_

“Is a concept primarily for an omega’s wellbeing.”

_Stop!

“Don’t be a brat for a few seconds, and also whoever the fuck told you that was an idiot, everybody takes comfort from a nest.”

_Reginald’s an idiot._

Five quite likes that.

“Do you have one?” He’s genuinely intrigued.

“No.”

“But you did?”

“Maybe, anyway I’ll leave everything there in case you feel like giving it a go.” Diego backs towards the door.
“Are you not going to help?”

Diego grins. “No can do buddy, it’s a personal thing.”

“What if I do it incorrectly?”

“Impossible, there’s no right or wrong way, just throw stuff together until it works for you, I know someone that used to have one in their wardrobe because it felt safer there than anywhere else in their house.”

*You’re clearly referring to yourself.*

Diego takes the pause to slip out and Five’s left alone, staring at the mismatched pile from a safe distance, it seems a pointless exercise with no real reward. Although his education in secondary genders came entirely from Grace, it’s barely a cursory overlook, the barest of essential information at her insistence that he was too young. Five supposes that out of the two of them, Diego is the one with a greater expanse of knowledge in this subject.

*The wardrobe is rather large.*

And he is tired.

Five picks up a particularly shaggy cushion to start with.

Quickly he decides that whatever nonsensical idea Diego has about this sort of endeavour, Five’s not impressed. No matter how he arranges and fusses it doesn’t *work*, nothing inspires a feeling of comfort. He’s about to throw everything out into the hallway when he accidentally kicks aside one of the blankets he hadn’t selected and something pink flashes in his periphery.

He curiously pulls out what ends up being a skirt, irregular black spots dotted along the material. It still smells like Grace, her distinctive scent mixing with Mothers perfume and clinging to the fabric so potently that if he closes his eyes it’s like they’re standing right in front of him. If Five truly *concentrates* Grace is standing over him, clapping excitedly at another one of his paintings for her, framing and hanging it amongst her beautiful pieces.

The skirt’s ironed, well kept, it’s not been left at the bottom of a moving box, or crumpled into a bag, and it’s most definitely not been left within this pile by accident. Sometimes Five doesn’t understand Diego, the stunted nature of his step brother is almost primitive at times, and yet this gesture isn’t one Five thinks he would have thought to make if the situations were reversed.

He slams the wardrobe door shut a little too harshly and curls himself up into a position that’s going to strain his muscles long before the morning. But he’s comfortable at last, in this moment, and despite his petulant reaction earlier, it *is* soothing to be nestled down in a cocoon of soft fabric and familiar scents.

Five will not be admitting any of this to Diego - though he might finally relent and tell the Alpha where the cutlery’s been boxed away.
I ended up writing the last four chapters of this fic in a excited rush before realising I had to get all of the characters to that point, and then I got distracted with Endgame. Which is the laziest way to apologise for this update taking so long, but there we go.

Also, a quick thing to add in is that this in no way represents social work in real life whatsoever. It's only for the this fic and how I imagine how an Alpha raising, what's technically a non blood relative, would be treated, with a lot of suspicion and concern. Plus Diego is a very biased person :)

Chapter 4

Although there’s many things that baffle Five about the public school system, and some that outright infuriate him, the worst offender by far is the time dedicated to recess.

A waste of time and far too long considering lunch is only required as a means to fuel and prepare his body for the afternoon, and the fact that other children celebrate this isn’t something that Five can understand. Surely the extension only means that they’re stuck in the facility longer than is strictly necessary? On his ninth school day there’s very little improvement, aside from Diego finally remembering that adults were normally the ones to prepare the child’s meal - though from the diabolical excuse for a sandwich Five consumed he’d prefer to resume responsibility of this particular task from now on.

When the time comes that they’re encouraged outside to play, Five’s not too proud to admit that he’s perplexed by the activities his classmates participate in, nearly all of them require physical contact of some kind and it’s enough that he shies away from any invitation they attempt to extend to him. Despite his assertion that they’re all intellectually stunted, nearly all of the students at least learnt to stop talking to him after only a week of his carefully executed plan to isolate himself.

Five’s also learnt that the aged school teacher on lunch duty isn’t the most perceptive of creatures, a well meaning, overly jolly man, but an incompetent fool considering his patrol of the playground consists of a lazy amble around a single loop. Five would give the Beta some constructive criticism to aid him in his duties but it seems like it might be one of those occasions where his advice would be unwarranted and unwelcome.

The only positive is the many hiding spaces he’s mapped out over the last week, his favourite is the one he’s utilising now, a narrow strip of asphalt on the far side of some dilapidated play equipment. It gives Five a decent view of the playground, no real room for anyone to sneak up on him, and the dreadful assortment of balls and other paraphernalia don’t seem to bounce this far out.

It allows him to use the thirty minutes of wasted time appropriately without fear of interruption, Five’s eager to start the Bhagavad Gita, it’s been on his list to read ever since Grace gave the text to him last Christmas. The only issue he’s discovered since he marked this spot as his own was this steady, invasive feeling of somebody watching him.

For yet another recess Delores’ eyes catch his, from what he assumes is her own secret nook, tucked around the side of the building by where the large industrial dumpsters live. It’s a spot that Five initially dismissed if only for the eye watering stench and the possibility of other students gathering, like they were now.

She really isn’t his responsibility, despite Mr Klaus’ obvious attempts to encourage their interactions through what’s going to inevitably be a series of joint projects. A pointless endeavour, one that Five could save the Omega his time and effort but somehow he felt that his teacher would still insist on trying, and working alongside Delores was infinitely better than the poor selection of classmates available to him.

These children don’t seem to be malicious, from what he’s garnered from his casual stroll past their position yesterday they just seem to be questioning Delores’ quiet mannerisms. Maybe they lacked the ability to do their own research like he had? Perhaps he could prepare a document for them to read with some information to answer their queries - he could even run it by Diego first to make sure the terminology wasn’t too advanced.
Besides Delores isn’t beseeching with her gaze, she simply watches him, a steady attentive look that should have him ducking away, instead he finds himself giving her a single nod before he settles down with his book, and if that pressure at the back of his head remains for the duration of their recess? Well Five hasn’t the patience nor the inclination to decipher why.

Even if something small itches and niggles in a corner of his brain, refusing to be completely ignored.

Frustratingly he’s still thinking about it later that night, and as if he needs any other complications to analyse today it’s made abundantly clear by the time he’s standing at the sink, Diego beside him washing and handing things across for Five to dry, that something is unsettling his step brother. The usual inane conversation that the Alpha struck up at the slightest provocation - much to Five’s distaste - is lacking, and although it’s not an unwelcome change, Five is aware that he far from excels at social etiquette and it’s a flaw he’s working to change.

Also he’s not prone to exaggeration, but Five is sure he can feel a heavy presence hanging in the air around Diego and if his senses were developed enough there would no doubt be a stench exuding from the Alpha.

“How was your first day at work?” Five enquires, a solid open question.

“How was your first day at work?” Five enquires, a solid open question.

“Not too bad, thanks.”

“You’re lying.” Maybe that’s a little accusatory, but he really doesn’t like deceitful behaviour.

Diego drops the scourer into the washing bowl, frowning as he looks to a point above Five’s head. “You can magically tell?”

“You can magically tell?”

“You glance towards the right when you tell a lie.”

“But that normally means a persons-”

“Recollecting a memory, correct. As a detective I’m sure you’re aware of such things and deliberately or subconsciously adapted your behaviour accordingly.”

Diego laughs, loudly, and it’s a sound that invites others to join in, one that Five firmly declines, though he does wonder what it would be like to participate, how the alpha might react. “The stuff you know Five.”

There’s a trick to getting Diego to talk, and it’s simply to stand there in complete silence. To let it hang over them, weighing down the room until it’s suffocating enough that-

“My new partner,” There we go, “he’s a dick.”

“Is that a moniker or a descriptor?”

The Alpha levels him with a look that’s mild exasperation and Five isn’t phased by the brief focus, not when Diego starts this aimless pacing as if he’s genuinely in distress.

“I’d love to see how you’d cope with such a fucking idiot-”

Five opens his mouth.

“- and if you say you deal with me then I’m pouring that fancy coffee we bought yesterday down the drain.”
Five shuts his mouth.

It’s amusing though, and he’s almost grinning at the blatantly false scowl on the Diego’s face, he steers for a more safer, simpler reply. “You have too much energy.”

“Thanks for pointing out the obvious buddy.”

Not for the first time can Five feel the temptation to roll his eyes at his step brother. “Exercise is usually the preferred method of releasing excess energy. Might I suggest going for a run?”

“I can’t leave you here alone.” Though it’s more like the Alphas reminding himself of a basic parenting rule.

Five’s takes a measured breath before he offers, “I’ll come with you.”

“That’s not going to work, you won’t be able to keep…”

While Diego rambles off excuses Five goes to change into something more suitable for moderate exercise.

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Running with his step brother is very unseemly.

Five’s legs are barely half the height of Diego’s so every other stride he has to fit in an additional step and even then the Alpha’s barely hitting a pace fast enough to work off the excessive nerves he claims.

Yet despite this it’s also companionable in a way Five didn’t expect, the slight panting from himself and Diego’s steady exhales make a rather relaxed soundtrack. He likes the regular thump of Diego’s feet on the sidewalk, his own echoing a half second later, overlaying their breathing and taking up a rhythm in his head that’s soothing. He’s kept up a basic exercise regimen, because one can never be prepared enough, but implementing it alone and having a capable companion is another matter entirely.

For all of his fumbling and awkward demeanour, Diego’s agile and faultless as they weave through people, no concentration given to the smooth flow of his limbs. It intrigues Five despite his reluctance, stokes the part of his brain that wishes to learn, to know whether it’s the man or the Alpha that’s more dominant.

If he were asked to make an assessment Five would favour the former, but he can also remember the countless times Grace would tell him of her illustrious son, well respected - revered for his accomplishments in his career, a bold, fearless man that charged into danger without a second thought. But Five’s not seen any evidence of this, the markers for an Alpha seem so lacking within his stepbrother that he might think there’s something defective with the man.

Unless Diego’s suppressing his inner nature? For Five? Or a subconscious action, like the quirk with lying? It’s confusing, why act in such an inferior way when his very nature and biology said the opposite? There’s too many unknowns and it’s disturbing not being able to comprehend, an insistent, jarring ache in his head, a voice not his own demanding he be disciplined for such a failure.
Diego flashes him a proud grin when he extends his legs and presses forward, as if it’s impressive to run like this, as if Five hasn’t done the same thing in much worse circumstances. There’s no cardiac monitoring here, no wires or the repetitive whir of the treadmill that never takes him anywhere no matter how hard he sprints.

Here there’s passing cars, people that need dodging even at such a late time, buildings with ant-sized workers milling through them, and above all of that din Five can hear the sharp trills of the birds wheeling through the sky. It’s simplistic, watching everything blur past him, but knowing that there isn’t a dead end, that he can simply turn down another street and then another, and another, that’s exciting.

He wants to see more.

So Five pushes faster, through the necessary heat travelling through his calves and along his thighs, he can barely hear a startled sound trailing behind him as he tears down one street and then the next. Charging without any sense of direction is… enjoyable, and there’s a roaring in his ears, and a stabbing pain in his side that isn’t a needle, and nobody is forcing him to do just one more mile.

Five’s in control here and it’s so very exhilarating.

Only when he’s aware that his heart’s pumping dangerously fast does he ease off, blood pounding through his limbs in a furious race to accommodate for the mad dash.

“Jesus, what the fuck was that about?” Diego’s comes to a stop beside him, tall and unaffected. Five would chide the Alpha if it weren’t that his lungs were struggling to operate and he didn’t wish to wheeze or gasp around the words. Instead he shrugs a shoulder and resists leaning forward to brace his hands on his knees to try and regulate his breathing.

“You’re a fuckin’ maniac.” It’s not a chastisement Language!

But there’s also a twitch in his cheek that almost isn’t ironed out in time as he swings to put his back to Diego in an attempt to gain some privacy. It’s when he’s pacing down the sidewalk to prevent his legs from cramping that Five sees what he’s sure is a familiar form a few dozen yards away from them.

“Is that Mr Klaus?” He mutters as he blinks through the sweat. Impossible to tell when the figure disappears into one of the buildings but before he can call out a clarification there’s a nasty cracking sound and Five turns in time to see Diego bouncing back from a parking meter in a move clearly trying to downplay his clumsiness.

Graceful.

Diego ducks his head as if he can read Five’s thoughts.

There’s something vibrating in his throat and Five cuts it off before it can let loose, the aborted noise drains away, and yet he feels mildly disappointed at the restraint.

Pin it. Analyse later.

“Come on buddy let’s not hang about, I don’t want anyone seeing that I’ve bought a kid to this sort of place.”
“Why?”

“Because people do unconventional work around here.”

Five isn’t sure he follows but there’s an uneasy expression on Diego’s face and he’d quite like to keep the pleasant, weightless heat suffusing his blood as it thuds through his body.

“Don’t worry I won’t race you back.”

Diego’s far too smug for someone that just waltzed into a stationary object, and Five waits until his stepbrother stretches upwards, arms pulling behind his back before he replies.

“I would worry more about tripping over if I were you.”

Then he’s gone, racing back the way they came and Five enjoys that he hasn’t informed Diego of his fitness levels, if only for the string of expletives the Alpha bites out as he’s left behind.

It takes Diego thirty minutes, or more precisely a single conversation, to realise that Luther is Gods revenge for all of the times he’s called the holy guy out. Or is God a woman? Maybe that’s why she’s punishing him via the prick seated opposite him.

Diego’s suffering because he’s an idiot.

There’s just something about his new partner, he’s too golden, too friendly, a flat, one dimensional shit that outside of being nice had no other personality traits. In fact Diego’s pretty convinced the fuckers a closeted psychopath because nobody can bumble along like some overgrown Labrador like this, and - in Diego’s unbiased opinion - from the pure size of the guy he’s also certain that Luther’s compensating for something.

Though that’s probably just Diego being an antisocial prick, and it’s not entirely his partners fault that he’s miserable. Another contribution is that the precincts one of the laziest, snail paced shitsholes he’s ever worked in, there are too few cases and far too much time spent trawling through paperwork. He’s always understood the need to go through the correct proceedings, crossing the t’s and dotting the i’s, filing for warrants and all of the other pointless motions that lead up to an arrest.

He doesn’t like it, but he gets it, the real problem is the lack of serious crimes, and he can’t even complain about it, because he’s got to be grateful for the transfer. It’s not that Diego’s asking for an armed bank robbery or a new drug cartel to pop up on the radar - though if it happened he wouldn’t cry over it.

There’s only two positives as far as he’s concerned, the first is his new superior officer. Captain Eudora Patch, an Alpha who held his gaze with a cool disinterest and the iron handshake she gave him on his first morning told him that she wouldn’t tolerate any shit. Although he’s only had a week, not nearly enough time to make a fair assessment, Diego’s pretty sure that she’s the only one with brains around here, the reason this place runs at all. Patch deserves a lot of credit really, it’s thanks to her that Diego’s able to leave early enough to pick up Five.

Which leads onto the second decent part of his life, the tentative routine he and Five have slowly started to piece together. They’d even managed to do a proper shop on the weekend, preplanned
with a fucking list written on a piece of paper, Diego obediently trundled behind the tiny dictator as he made a show of ticking each item off as they went along. It’s simple and mundane and oh so very boring, but it’s also a success in normality and he’ll take as many of those as he possibly can.

In spite of this though, half way through the third week and having endured a series of long-winded stories and probing questions from his partner, Diego’s getting ready to set the bullpen on fire and let himself perish in the fucking flames.

He’s finishing up a report when Luther returns from his bi-hourly trek to the break room’s antiquated coffee machine, placing a fresh mug by Diego’s terminal because he’s nice like that. If it wasn’t for the encroaching pyromania then one look at that complacent smile would have him dumping the drink, but because he values having a job he accepts it with a small grunt of gratitude.

“Why did you become a Detective Diego?”

This, this was the problem! Diego can talk, he likes a conversation as much as the next guy, but Luther seems to fill up the silent spaces with prying questions.

Fuck, he’s dreading if they ever have to do a stakeout together.

And double fuck, this is precisely the sort of thing Five likes to accuse him of.

“I don’t like assholes.”

Blunt answer, any self respecting dick would leave it there.

“Good a reason as any, how’s the little guy doing?”

The 'little guy' would snap your neck if he heard you calling him that.

Diego’s still regretting the one time he’d mentioned Five to Patch outside of the privacy of her office and the oaf was close enough to overhear.

“Good.”

“Settling into school alright?”

Diego doesn’t reply that if he felt like burning down the precinct to avoid his partner, Five would incinerate the school to avoid his fellow students. It just doesn’t seem polite.

Plus it’s incriminating if the clever fucker finally ever loses it.

“He’s doing great.”

“How old is he again?” Luther breaks to nearly drain his mug in one, continuing without waiting for a reply. “Nine wasn’t it, you must have been real young when you had-”

“Why did you become a Detective Luther?” Because as much as Diego hates listening to the guy, it’s infinitely better than having to talk about his life. Or unravelling the belief that somehow Five actually was his kid, and even though it’s a little funny to imagine his partners face if he saw them together, Diego’s happy to let it lie if only that it avoids other types of questions.

“I like helping people, just feels good, y’know.”

Original.
God this wasn’t going to work, Diego wonders if this was how his old partner felt whenever he did something particularly bold or rash. This urge to smack him upside the head and forgo the consequences is overpowering, at least until he can ignore his Alpha long enough to remember that Luther could probably bench press Diego and the desk with one grossly muscled arm.

It’s later, when he’s returning from the bathroom - a time slot he’s learnt to extend magnificently because every second away from Luther is one to be cherished - that he realises something isn’t right, Luther hovering over his desk, Diego’s cellphone in his hand.

“I wasn’t going through it,” Luther sounds nervous, good, “It’s just, it kept ringing and I thought it might be important.”

Prick.

“Don’t worry about it.”

“I answered,” Luther confesses.

Of course you did.

“Was it?” At the confused crease forming between that punch-able face Diego adds, “Important?”

“Sorry, yeah, some guy called Klaus, asked for a ‘Mr Diaz’ said he was your kids teacher.”

Diego forgoes his usual reminder that Five wasn’t his in that way, “Well what did he want?”

“Something about coming in to pick up the little guy.”

Why would Klaus call his work cell phone? Unless his brother was hurt? Shit. If anything happened to Five...

“Is that all? He didn’t say anything else?” His vision’s swaying, hazy at the edges and that’s not a good fucking sign.

Luther baulks as he snatches his phone out of his hands, and it’s not until he can feel tension broiling in the bullpen, too many scents clashing together, that he realises it’s him releasing furious, aggressive pheromones and clouding the air around them.

“I’ll tell Patch what’s happened,” Luther gives what’s probably meant to be a reassuring smile, “just go.”

Diego doesn’t take wait for any further encouragement, and it’s bad that he can’t precisely remember the journey from bullpen to car to school, it’s a dangerous re-occurrence that’s fast becoming a habit. This is probably nothing serious, what can really happen in the safe confines of a school? He’ll go in and all it’ll be is that the little shit was rude to a teacher, or another student. Knowing Five the kid will be sitting with a snooty expression and refusing to apologise, fuck he might even be suspended for the day. Can you be suspended from elementary school?

When he finally storms into the reception Diego know his tempers flaring when the first thing he does upon seeing Klaus waiting for him is to bark out, “Where is he?”

“In the classroom, he refuses to see the nurse.”

Something tightens in his chest and without waiting to hear any more shit he’s gone, striding down the corridor as Klaus scrambles after him. Despite his own self assurances, the futile attempt at
remaining calm by trying to expect what he’s going to find, Diego’s not prepared for the sight of tiny Five, *his* Five, sat on one of the chairs, scrawny legs crossed, handkerchief bunched over his nose and there’s a trickle of blood dripping down his chin onto a growing patch on his rumpled shirt.

There’s a primitive part of him that’s screaming *mine, protect, mine, protect* on a continuous loop and Diego doesn’t realise he’s snarling until Five’s head snaps up and the bitter stench of fear hits him.

Five really didn’t intend to engage in a physical confrontation today.

But it happens, and he isn’t sorry either.

Surprisingly it’s thanks to Reginald that Five found himself in this mess, because despite the man’s brutality, he’d never attempted to raise a hand against mother, except to restrain her when required, but never using overt force to do so. He was an extremely clever manipulator, a dark egregious monster, but physical aggression against his omega would never have been tolerated.

So when Five glanced up from his book and caught sight of the same small circle of children surrounding Delores in that secluded area of the playground. No longer curious but intimidating the girl, and her eyes caught Five’s, imploring him for help. Well he had no choice but to answer.

Considering Reginald’s deplorable nature, if even *he* wouldn’t harm an innocent Omega in this way, it said something that these reprobates thought it acceptable to intimidate the odd girl - even if they felt it was in jest. Surely discipline of some kind should be met out for these infractions? He’d only be doing his duty to protect her?

It’s shaky reasoning at best.

However there’s a small group of them, and there’s only one of him, because Delores clearly doesn’t intend to defend herself. So avoiding confrontation would be the preferable course of action, Five is very aware that he’s a paltry fifty three pounds of fragile bones and feeble muscles, his brain is the only useful tool he has for defence. Still it shouldn’t have been so easy to reach Delores and align himself next to her.

From the research he’d conducted Five’s relatively certain how these encounters are meant to go, but somehow it still ends poorly. Yes, he may have aggravated the situation a little, and yes it probably hadn’t helped to insinuate - state bluntly - that they were all intellectually stunted, *and yes* telling the largest boy in the group that he was a ‘primitive knothead’ wasn’t his finest moment. That one Five’s firmly pinning on Diego and his foul language, and with hindsight (and Vanya’s wisdom) Five realises that the terms far more offensive to those in a traditional family. However…

Was there really a need for the boy to punch him?

His very first fight ends within a dozen seconds, a punch and one particularly hard shove that manages to knock him off balance. Whether it would have gone on longer, Five isn’t sure, but there isn’t any time to contemplate when he’s hurtling too fast towards the side of the building. The impacts going to be too much, and when his face smacks into the wall he’s not surprised by the starburst of pain behind his nose, nor when blood showers out, dribbling down his chin and to the ground.
The children around him disperse like a group of rats by the time he’s swivelled to lean his back against the brick, and there’s only Delores and her wide eyes watching as he prods cautiously and winces when a burning flare pulses along what he fears may be a nasal fracture.

Pulling down the sleeve of his sweater and wadding it up underneath his nose prevents any further evidence spreading, he needs to cover this up quickly, those idiotic creatures may have fled for a teacher, one that’ll insist he sees the school nurse, who’ll then demand he answers questions. If Five’s diagnoses is correct - and from memory it’s definitely accurate - then there’ll be a paper trail, the principal will be involved, and not too far down the line all of this will relay back to Miss King.

It’s a downwards slope straight into a temporary foster placement.

Panic is something that occurs when you’re not prepared for all of the eventualities, it’s a sign of weakness, of a sloppy mind deteriorating. Five knows all of this, Reginald drilled it into his head. This is a punishment for not thinking through all of the eventualities when he interfered, for acting spontaneously, and there’s a tendril of something cold that makes his heart race and his breathing erratic as he scrambles to formulate a plan.

Clammy hands hook around his free one and they tug, insistently enough that Five tries to glare up at the girl he shouldn’t have helped. Delores doesn’t flinch as he tries to dislodge her grip on him, and he’s about to lose his temper when she releases a hand to bring a single finger to her lips, as if he’s the one making a fuss.

“I can’t be seen.” He accidentally confesses.

Maybe Five’s becoming slack from the minor blood loss, because he’s certain the single nod he receives shouldn’t inspire the small flicker of confidence that lets him rise to his feet and allows her to lead.

Delores is like a ghost as they evade sight, skirting down the corridors and dropping behind waste bins and groups of lockers. It’s impressive when she grabs Five and hauls him into the shadows seconds before he hears anything, before he can react in any manner, and Five is a little in awe at how they glide so effortlessly from one end of the school to the other without a single glance from another human, a feat made even more incredible considering the wet fluid he can feel dribbling through his sleeve.

However when she pulls him to their classroom door Five wants to draw the line, but it’s as if she anticipates his resistance, there’s a particularly sharp tug as her fingers tighten around his and with a deceptive display of strength she’s pulling him along behind her.

“Hi Delores, need a place to hide?” Five knows the millisecond Mr Klaus scents him - the nearly inaudible gasp of air - and he doubt’s it’s a pretty sight when he steps out from behind the taller girl. His hands slick with blood now and if it wasn’t his familiarity with this particular injury then he’d be a little alarmed. “Shit- Sorry, quick, come and sit down before you fall over.”

Interestingly Mr Klaus doesn’t flap as Five finds himself guided into the teachers chair, high enough that his feet can’t quite touch the ground. “What happened?” A wad of tissues are pressed into his hand and he wonders from the clinical way that Mr Klaus surveys him whether the Omegas been in this position before.

“I tripped.”

“Into?”
“Thin air.” Five tries to level his best unimpressed glare, frustratingly his nose burns at the slightest jostle.

“Let’s get you to the nurse,” Mr Klaus pulls more of those rough tissues out of the box on his desk.

“No,” Five says, trying to think of the simplest explanation when his face aches and burns.

“We need to get you cleaned up, and then work out what happened.”

“I told you that I tripped and fell,” Lies always worked well when based off the truth, “I have exceptionally weak bone structure.”

Mr Klaus isn’t convinced.

“I assure you this is normal, Regi- Father used to insist that I consume a higher quantity of calcium to try and combat it as a child, to no avail.”

It’s not technically a lie.

“We still need to see the nurse.”

“No.” Five repeats.

“Why not…” Mr Klaus trails off, and there’s a flash of something like understanding, an appreciation of some kind, that if Five were less distracted he would take note of, maybe berate Diego for what he’s undoubtedly leaked about their circumstances. “What do you want to do?”

The million dollar question, but there isn’t time for a whimsical answer, “Can you call Diego to come and get me? Without anyone else having to be involved?”

Mr Klaus is silent for long enough that Five thinks he may have asked for too much, when finally the Omega nods, “Yes, I can do that, leave it with me.”

Five doesn’t have any faith in Mr Klaus, though that’s true for everyone, bar maybe Diego, his teacher hasn’t given him any sort of reason to inspire the confidence required to leave his future in those perfectly manicured hands. But he hasn’t got another choice.

Mr Klaus excuses himself and Five’s left alone with Delores, who’s rummaging through her backpack until she pulls out a neatly folded square of material and hesitantly offers it to him. Five takes the handkerchief and although it’s impolite he doesn’t hesitate in surveying the material for any proof of use, after all he’s relatively certain his nose is broken. Defending her. This is the least she can allow.

When he’s satisfied with the cleanliness of the material he exchanges the coarse tissue paper and allows the cotton to rest on the bridge of his nose, resisting the urge to wince when the pain bites sharply.

**Are you okay?**

Interestingly the questions not printed out in ink, he can’t even discern how he knows, there’s no movement to her facial features as she watches him and Five wonders whether it’s normal that he understands her silent query. He can’t even pretend that this bothers him, it’s no exaggeration to say he has very brittle bones, and it’s not the first time he’s broken one of them. It isn’t even the first time he’s broken his nose.
Five doubts Delores would like to hear that though.

Before he can formulate a more appropriate answer the air changes, or more precisely the atmosphere does, there’s a sharp electric crack that has him resisting the urge to jerk to his feet, before Diego’s storming into the room. Mr Klaus fluttering uselessly in his wake and Five would remark, observe distantly if it wasn’t that his entire body succumbs to some ancient command to become so very still.

So that’s the presence of Diego’s Alpha is all Five has time to think.

He’s been preparing for this eventuality, research taken from Reginald’s regime and then his own in case he’s ever at the mercy of another Alpha. However the intensity of Diego’s gaze throws him, dark eyes locking on to him and a twist in his throat doesn’t allow for oxygen, he’s a rabbit frozen in front of the fox as it licks its lips, gloved hands reaching out to grasp his pleading body as he presses away, mother screaming as she’s subdued by a smoking, toxic creature.

But that shadowy form dissipates and Diego’s crouching in front of him, palms resting upwards on his jean clad knees in supplication, body tense and taut and although there’s tiny ripples across his shoulders Diego’s muscles aren’t primed. It’s enough to bring Five present in the room again. Diego’s taken into consideration the embarrassment of such a slip, his broad frame covering Five from his teacher, and only Delores is looking at him with those shrewd eyes as he regulates his breathing.

Diego stares pointedly at his scuffed knees in a far too submissive gesture and Five has to take a fraction of a second to discern the bubbling behind his ribcage, what it might indicate. The Alpha leans forward slowly, eyes darting across his face, assessing without being clinical.

“You look awful.”

Of all the things that Diego could say, the reprimands or consolations, this was not what Five anticipated for.

Maybe it’s because of that he can feel the need to laugh buzzing in his chest, he only just smothers it in time, and yet his reply comes without a filter. “Have you seen yourself recently?”

Diego snorts, “Good to know nothing was knocked loose in that big head of yours.”

There’s a stirring from behind and Five realises that Mr Klaus is waiting patiently to talk with his stepbrother. Diego draws back and glances towards Delores, “Do you mind keeping an eye on this idiot for a few more minutes?”

Before Five can protest Delores nods solemnly and takes the request literally, training her gaze on his shoulder and again there’s this innate understanding between them.

Thank you.

Five for all of his impeccable control doesn’t notice when a hand grips his, probably because Delores’ nose crinkles when she smiles at him, and his brains obviously slowing down from the stress when he notes that she looks… nice.
There really needed to be some sort of handbook for idiots.

A comprehensive guide detailing what the fuck you were meant to do with the blood covered nine year old sullenly staring out of your car window. Maybe in normal families this sort of advice was passed down generationally, a handing of the torch from parent to child, and Diego’s just incredibly unlucky?

Thank fuck for Klaus, throwing out words like vulnerable and emotionally distraught and saving Diego from having to find a reasonable excuse to hold his jacket around Five, shielding him from curious stares as he escorted the little shit out to the car. In fact thank every mystical deity in existence for that perfect little Omega and his promise to take care of everything, when Diego sorts his pitiful excuse for a brain out he’s going to find some way to thank him.

But there isn’t time to feel sorry for himself when there’s more important things to take care of, primarily the boy next to him that smells sick and hurt and wrong under the near bottle of perfume Klaus upended on him to cover his scent.

Clever, resourceful, hot as fuck Klaus.

He manages to wait until they’re halfway home even though he wants to push and interrogate from the moment the car door slams shut, the image of Five’s bone pale face staring at him with undeniable fear when he’d charged into the classroom keeps replaying in his head.

“Who started it?” Diego begins, because it’s as good a place as any.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Was it for a good reason?”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Five’s knee bounces, a nervous tic that Diego’s never seen before.

“Was that girl involved?”

“Delores was minding her own business and aided me when I took a fall.”

“Into someone’s fist.”

Five cracks and swivels in his seat, the glare he’d normally don doesn’t work around the handkerchief still shrouding his features. “This is elementary school, you’re not at work.”

“Kids can be assholes, just the same as any adult.”

“I don’t think Miss King would like that language or opinion.”

“See,” Diego waves a hand over his brother, “Asshole.”

Five hums in agreement and then he’s burrowing down in his seat and Diego wants to reach out and pat his hand in what should be a reassuring gesture, the traffics slow enough he could get away with it. But with his brothers distrust of any physical interaction it’s not worth the guaranteed explosion, and Diego’s really tired of this fragile relationship they have, even if he gets why Five’s needs things a certain way.

“Were you looking after Delores?” This he’s already put together, it’d be hard not to.

“I won’t change my answer.” Five’s defensive, waiting for admonishments that aren’t going to come.
Don’t say it, you’re a responsible adult.

“Good job.”

Five blinks, “For what?”

“For defending your friend.”

You dick.

The boy peers curiously at him as he voices a confirmation of Diego’s thoughts, “You’re an irresponsible adult.”

“I know.”

Then without any pomp or fanfare Five drops the bombshell on him.

“I believe my nose is broken.”

“What?!?” Diego almost turns them into oncoming traffic as he jolts, despite the risk he turns to look towards his brother, and without the handkerchief covering his face there’s no denying it, the swelling and crooked outline is a dead give-away.

Five carefully presses his fingertips along the length of his nose before confirming his assessment so fucking casually, like he was asking for another mug of coffee. “If you wouldn’t mind setting it once we return home, I would be much obliged.

Scrappy little fucker.

“I’m not setting your nose, shit, we’ll go to the hospital and get it done properly.”

“It’s a waste of money.”

“Not important.” Diego works hard to keep the sharp anger in his voice subdued, because the last thing he needs right now is for Five to think this is his fault.

“If we go to a hospital then it’ll end up in my medical record.”

“I don’t care, you’re worth it.”

Five’s face, though he’ll deny it, flushes and it’s an accomplishment considering the amount of blood he’s lost. “I’ll do it myself then.”

Diego almost goes to ask how Five would have the knowledge to do such a procedure before his stupid, fucking, lizard brain catches up. Reginald.

“Don’t you dare Five, I’m not kidding.” When he doesn’t hear a confirmation Diego almost growls. “Let me hear you say it.”

Five’s knee bounces once before he acquiesces, “I will not reset my nose in our home, I give you my word. Satisfied?”

“Yes, well no, look let’s just get you to-”

With a startling speed that Diego catches in his periphery, pale hands reach up and before he can slam on the brakes there’s a sickening crack reverberating through the car.
“You promised.” Great, now he sounds like a whiny brat.

For the first time Five grins at him, a victorious, endorphin fuelled, genuine mess of a smile that shows a smear of blood on those pearly teeth, and Diego wants to both throttle and hug the crazy child at the same time.

“I only promised not to do so within the confines of the apartment.”

“I’m putting all of your coffee down the drain when we get back.” He says lamely.

“You keep threatening to.” Five’s still grinning, like now he’s started he can’t stop.

“I’m serious this time.”

“I wouldn’t advise it.”

It takes Diego a moment to realise.

They’re joking. Together.

*Play it cool.*

Five’s still got the vestigial traces of a smile and around the swelling and bruising, Diego’s little brother looks happy, and despite the fucked up situation he can’t help but grin.

*He really is an irresponsible adult.*

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Five spends the next morning cleansing the handkerchief in a bizarre ritual of soak, scrub, and repeat. Diego doesn’t understand it why he’s so determined to return it to it’s former glory, but it’s clearly important to the boy, and by the time he’s finished the materials starched and pressed on top of his briefcase.

“It’s rude to stare.” Five comments as he lines up his footstool in front of the kitchen counter, because it’s time for one of his allotted fruit portions and god forbid that even if after taking the day off of school that his routine gets messed up. Diego’s relieved if he’s being honest, because neither of them have quite worked out a decent excuse for the bruising, although the swellings mostly gone which is something.

“Don’t think I didn’t notice the convenient timing of your little stunt.” Diego tries for stern and ends up somewhere in the realms of amusement.

Five for his part looks momentarily confused as his face turns to the calendar before shifting into something immensely smug.

Which results in another round of wincing.

The protective Alpha rages and demands he erase any pain from his brother. But Diego plays back that smile - a slash of white and watery red - and stubbornly crosses his arms.

“Entirely coincidental,” Five says as he weighs up two apples, “or are you implying that I’d injure
myself to avoid going to the aquarium.”

That’s precisely what Diego’s trying to imply.

“It would have been your first class trip.”

“And I’m truly devastated.” Five deadpans as he rummages through one of the kitchen drawers.

Diego shouldn’t be as excited about this new, funny kind of sarcasm as he was, “I don’t want you missing out, maybe we should go another time?”

“You’re not going to do that.” Five’s too confident.

But he’s right.

The idea of going into any sort of crowded public space with screeching children and weary parents running around makes his body itch. It’s probably bad to admit but outside of the little shit confidently slicing an apple into pieces - is he meant to allow Five to use sharp knives? - Diego wasn’t sold on children.

“Have you decided on my punishment yet?” Five asks casually as he places his fruit selection on a plate.

“Of course I have,” Diego lies.

“Well?”

“You’re going to spend the day doing…” how the fuck did parents do this, “…school work.”

“School work?” Five repeats.

“That’s what I said.”

There’s a long pause, the two of them standing awkwardly opposite one another.

“Good choice, I feel adequately chastised,” Five intones.

Diego’s going to retort, truly, but there’s a flash of teeth, eyes crinkling, small shoulders rising once and then it’s gone before he can confirm it, and Five’s darting into his bedroom.

It’s probably a bad sign that he can be waylaid by a smile. But it’s Five. His brother smiling twice in as many days after months of impassive disinterest is a cause for celebration as far as Diego’s concerned.

Fucking help him if Five ever laughs, because Diego’s fairly certain he’ll short circuit.

Saying that, by the next morning he’s come to a decision that’s probably not much of a revelation: Doing anything with a kid is a fucking nightmare.

There’s his job to deal with and he has to promise Patch so much overtime that the idea of it’s making him sweat when he calls in for the Friday off as well, though considering how little work he’s had to do then it can’t be that big a loss for them. She’s decent about it, and when he makes another call to Luther - because it’s courteous- the big guy is so disgustingly nice that when Diego hangs up he’s left uncomfortable in the face of it.

But that’s not all, because he’s got to be prepared for the overtime. Which means he’s going to
have to see if Vanya’s free, then there’s paying her, and planning the right days in advance, and fuck. Diego misses when he could just roll out of bed in the morning and be free to do whatever the hell he wanted aside from work, and really the only blessing he has is that at least it’s Saturday tomorrow.

But as if he has this innate sense for Diego’s morose attitude Five pads out for his latest fruit run and instead of disappearing immediately, a plate of carefully peeled tangerine slices is pushed under Diego’s nose. Five, surprisingly, doesn’t scuttle back to his room, choosing instead to confiscate the television remote and sit primly on the edge of the couch.

Diego doesn’t comment on it in case he spooks the boy, and despite the documentary Five selects looking suspiciously like it might have subtitles, there’s probably worse ways to spend an afternoon. He’s even going to go so far as to say that this is one of those ‘bonding’ scenarios Gena liked to waffle on about, and now running is out of the picture for a while, Diego wants to savour this little moment.

Long after the sky turns dark outside and Diego’s marvelling over Five’s ability to become an immobile statue for hours on end finally irritates the latter enough for him to relax back against the cushions, does a light insistent tapping from the front door register in Diego’s head. When Five makes it clear that he’s not going to be distracted from a riveting finale on the Earth’s biosphere, Diego makes a show of hauling himself up to answer.

Klaus stands there in a pastel fringed poncho, long legs bare apart from a pair of shorts ending too far up for Diego’s brain to comprehend, a pile of papers resting on one slender hip and the Omega’s face literally fucking brightens when Diego opens the door.

In a spectacular move he blurts out the first thing that comes to his head. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

Klaus doesn’t appear phased, “I wanted to check if Five was okay, and I bought him something to do.”

“How did you get past the doorman?” The question should really be how the fuck did the Omega know where they lived, the answers obvious and Diego doesn’t know if he should be flattered or worried that Klaus seemed happy to break what’s probably about a dozen different school rules to see them.

“Do you mean Robert? Such a lovely man, he offered to carry all of this up for me.”

From the little he knows of Klaus, Diego’s certain that the Omega could have anyone fawning over him with a wave of that dainty hand.

“Don’t be rude Diego, invite Mr Klaus in.” Five chastises from across the room, and just like that Diego’s standing in the middle of his apartment and trying not to think about the fact that Klaus must have changed after school before coming over because there’s too much skin showing to be considered halfway decent.

Not that he can really complain right now.

“What can we do for you?” Five asks.

“I thought you might be feeling a little bored,” Klaus is watching Five with this scheming glint in his eyes, and Diego would feel concerned if it wasn’t that his brothers watching back just as keenly, “so I bought some work to keep you occupied.”
The large stack of papers thump heavily onto the table and despite his obvious attempt to feign indifference, Five’s curiosity is piqued enough for him to sidle closer to read the top sheet aloud.

“Aquarium conservation efforts,” Five raises a brow with only the quietest of hisses, “What is this?”

“As you missed on our wonderfully exciting-” Five looks cynical and Diego doesn’t realise he’s grinning until Klaus tuts exasperatedly at both of them, “It really was special.”

“Speci-” Diego starts.

Klaus cuts him off, which is probably wise. “Anyway, before you come back to school next week, I want you to write about six endangered marine mammals and write ten thousand words on the conservation work being done to protect them.”

“And this is meant to keep me busy?” But Diego can see that brilliant brain of Five's slowly gearing up as he wanders into the kitchen.

“Yes, and I’m just hoping it’ll stop you from criticising my lessons for a week.”

“Should have made it longer then.”

“Ten thousand words-”

“That’ll only going to buy you a few days.” Really Five’s arrogance shouldn’t be ignored, even if it’s sometimes deserved, but Diego’s not got time to correct it when Klaus smiles so fucking sweetly that his teeth ache.

“You interrupted before I could say I want that on each marine mammal.”

Five’s mouth quirks and it really is like the dams collapsed, he’s throwing around smiles like they cost nothing, although from the immediate grimace that follows it’s not that easy.

“Would you like a hot beverage Mr Klaus?” Five twists and starts to pull down his private coffee tin.

Klaus considers for a moment, painted nails tapping out a disjointed rhythm on the back of a chair. “Coffee for me poppet.”

When Five doesn’t explode at the endearment Diego can’t keep the betrayal from his face.

“He did cover for us, and that means we owe him.” Five states matter of factly as he fills the kettle and Klaus looks delighted.

“He covered for you-” A firm knock interrupts him, as if this isn’t already the most guests they’ve had since moving in, without giving it a second thought Diego swings the door wide open, and then something akin to a gut punch slams the air out of his lungs.

“Good evening,” Gena gives him a courteous smile even as those dark eyes immediately scan behind Diego as if she can actually see through him, “You remember that I mentioned an unannounced home visit would take place.”

Would it be rude to slam the door in her face?

Gena’s here, at their apartment, in all of her pinstripe suited, demonic glory.
“Can I come in?”

Diego’s never truly thought he was stupid, a bit of dick at times, but not stupid. Now, as he 
automatically steps aside without thinking, he realises that he’s a fucking idiot.

It’s like watching a car crash in slow motion, and he’s filled with a growing horror as Gena looks 
between Klaus’ clothing, or what passes for it, to Five with his swollen, bruised face and when she 
finally gets back to Diego he knows that they’re well and truly fucked.
Two chapters so close to one another and completely different lengths is just how I'm rolling with this fic right now :)

This isn’t the first time that Klaus’ inability to leave things the hell alone has backfired on him. It’s not the second or the third or the fourth. But the result is always the same and yet every single time it’s a startling surprise, merging into the overwhelming feeling of regret that tends to accompany these mistakes. Klaus is rash, he is erratic, he is standing in one of his students apartments with what he’s pretty sure is a social worker that’s currently drawing conclusions faster than Klaus can go through a bottle of wine.

Which is really kind of impressive.

Klaus’ eyes dart between the three people standing before him, two of which are in varying states of distress, he can taste it in the air. Diego will never win a poker game, Klaus thinks, unless he can hide this side of him. He’s too open, too blunt, the glances from Five to this heeled woman are a dead give-away. Klaus almost pities the poor Alpha, the tense set of his shoulders, the way he dithers uncomfortably, but it’s also unnerving that Diego doesn’t take charge, that he’s clearly shut down from the moment the other Alpha walked in.

This isn’t Klaus’ mess, his misconception to fix, a little bit of the confusion from his being here he can take account for. But the woman’s gaze is solely fixed on Five’s nose, on the discoloured skin surrounding it, and Klaus knows precisely what she’s thinking, where her thoughts are taking her.

He wonders which of them she’s deciding hit Five, he’s probably got the best odds, the stronger in this bare apartment. Then again from the way she’s eyeing Diego… And it’s still not his problem, he can leave, drum up some meaningless excuse and make a run for it before there’s anymore complications.

But his instincts are screaming at him to protect them, some deep seated need to shield Five away from the woman who’s arrival made his scent turn bitter, leaving an acidic taste on Klaus’ tongue. It’s buried almost immediately and Klaus doesn’t think the two Alpha’s have picked up on it, one shut down, the other too deep in thought to notice it.

Ben would be so disappointed if he could see Klaus now, there would be talking and words strung together that make sense of the confusion, frame his mistakes in a way for Klaus to understand where he went wrong. The Beta never raises his voice with Klaus, his oldest friend is decent and patient and kind - virtues he’s sorely missing.

It’s with Ben’s help he’s carefully crafted this life for himself, he’s good at his job, he likes it, would go as far as to say he loves it, and the children love him in return. Their sweet faces shining with an excitement that feeds Klaus’ need to nurture, better than any of the shit he used to do as a teenager, any of the false highs and blearily remembered nights. None of it can hold a candle to guiding a child through the year and knowing that he’s had some small, positive part in their life.
It settles him, having this role, this responsibility, given him a sense of calm and belonging over
the years, weakened the desire to fall and disappear under the weight of strangers and their
monsters. Expectations of nothing because Klaus was nothing, and there’s a momentary tightness
in his chest, a brittle weight to his bones as he remembers the cruel words that are ingrained in his
head. Over time they’ve become buried beneath the glowing smiles of his students, the years of
faith and love poured into his veins from Ben, but it’ll never leave him, never truly vanish.

Maybe that’s what intrigues him about Five, the antipathy to emotion, bar a sneering disapproval
that he never manages to properly hide behind that adorable face. Klaus doesn’t do so well when it
comes to rejection, he’s not ignorant to the fact, and despite it being only one student in the four
years he’s taught the third grade, well as far as he’s concerned that’s one too many.

Though there’s no denying who he came here for, Diego’s the one he’s been fixating on ever since
he’d been rooting around in that supply closet blissfully unaware of anything around him as he
tidied away plastic bottles of poster paint.

Something drew his focus before he even heard the Alpha, head snapping up and curiously
inhaling, his keen nose wrinkling at the strength of the scent, and Klaus had been glad he was
tucked away. Because he’d been on the verge of wet as the scent settled deep into every chink and
hallowed out space, each empty cell filling with it, he was overflowing and dizzy, hadn’t realised
how many parts of him were bare and cold until just then.

He couldn’t make sense of it, denial churning in his gut, an overwhelming need to stretch out
supine on his desk, feel the weight of a body pressing down on his. But he wasn’t like that
anymore, for obvious reason he didn’t fuck his students parents in his classroom, despite his blood
pulsing, head swimming in pheromones. So he’d taken a minute, almost begged for a dozen more
as he called out excuses, leaving before he was fully composed, and it still wouldn’t have been
enough when he was confronted with the Alpha.

Klaus hadn’t purposefully sought Diego out after that, he’d been good, followed Ben’s rules and
kept to himself, well at least until today, and look where that’s gotten him. He wants to think that
he wouldn’t have broken the schools policy - possibly the law - and shown up on their doorstep if it
wasn’t for that fucking snarl the other day.

To react how he had, it’d been primitive and regressive and Klaus hadn’t fucking cared. Not one
bit. There was only a frayed sliver left of his self control as the sound washed over his skin, a
thread that kept him from dropping to his knees in submission, from baring his neck and whining to
be bitten as his body went lax and hot.

He’d pulled himself together as best he could and lucky really, because they’d left in the most
conspicuous way possible, leaving Klaus to field questions from his colleagues. The rest of his day
there was this heady pulse of excitement running through his body all without a single touch, he
was weak and whimpering and wanting by the time he stumbled into his apartment. Had been over
and over again since, the smallest recollection and he was left shuddering in a bathroom stall of the
aquarium, desperately trying to pull himself together.

He really can walk away, he should walk away, because this isn’t Klaus’ problem - if anything it
could cause them - and although Diego’s been a fun distraction, somebody to pull to the front of
his mind to get the job done, he’s just another Alpha. Klaus could wander down the street and pick
one up with only a smile and a flutter of his lashes.

The woman’s greeting Diego, a cool, clipped tone that has Klaus’ spine cracking as he straightens,
and Five’s watching him, lips moving, mouthing out a name, a title and Klaus was right. This
Alpha’s a social worker, there’s a trickle of fear spooling in his belly, tightening as he realises just
how much he could lose right now. Klaus is going to leave, body angling towards the door, and he’s hollow, he hasn’t felt so small, so… insignificant and useless, in a long, long, time.

“And you are?” Miss King’s attention shifts to Klaus, tone firm, testing, prodding for a weakness in him that he won’t let her find.

Klaus, despite his best efforts and a thin layer of denial, is deeply, terribly invested in these two naïve people, in this moment where everything hangs on how he behaves, and it’s a betrayal of Ben’s rules as he speaks. “Klaus,” stupid mistake, never give a real name, “nice to meet you.”

Miss King turns to Five, a temporary dismissal, all of the moisture in his mouth dries as he darts a look towards Diego and there’s this silent communication, a connection, that Klaus has no explanation for.

Why do I trust you?

It’s stupid to expect Diego to understand when Klaus really doesn’t get it himself, and that might be it, in a world of Alpha’s who’ve only ever tried to seduce him at best, manipulate and break him at worst. He doesn’t have a fucking clue what to do with the tense face as it looks towards Klaus like he has the answer, like his opinions worth something. He’s used to resisting as a rule, or folding under a cruel hand to keep from fracturing beyond repair - never anything in-between. Never this slow nod towards the door, understanding in those brown eyes, a complete lack of judgement.

Diego’s offering him a choice, unlike all that came before him, and Klaus knows that the Alpha could be dangerous for him, a bitter disappointment that splinters and sends Klaus dropping back into that dark place. And Ben won’t like this, he’ll have to keep it a secret from the one person he trusts and that’s terrifying, especially when Diego might ruin him.

But then again, he might be the best thing that’s ever happened to Klaus.

It dawns on Klaus quickly, with an unshakeable certainty, that if he walks out of that door Diego won’t give him up, won’t inform the school or bring any sort of repercussion upon Klaus. He’ll protect him, and isn’t that something.

On the heels of this is another fact, not a thought but a cold, razor edged truth that Five won’t be here for long, not when those damning hazel eyes narrow as they sweep over his face. Diego hasn’t a clue what to do, and Five for all of his blustering is still just a child, neither of them seem to be able to function under this kind of pressure and it really isn’t Klaus’ problem.

But he’s here, he’s still not moving, he wants it to be his problem, and most importantly Klaus might have an inkling of plan. Not a great one, but better than this stilted silence that’s hanging heavy in the air.

Klaus is probably going to regret this, it’s going to be another one of those mistakes that come back to fuck him over in the future. But he plasters on a smile, slides into a soothing, subservient space in his head that really shouldn’t be used outside of the bedroom. Allowing instincts to wash over him in gentle waves until he’s soft and pliant, until his heart no longer feels like a caged hummingbird thrashing behind his ribs.

Miss King’s words cut off as Klaus saunters up to Diego, stubble scraping his fingers as he traces over the frozen Alpha’s cheeks and he can’t help but imagine how good it would feel brushing over more sensitive flesh. He uses the delicious thought to fuel his body’s reactions, to send more of his scent into the air, no threat here, only innocent, foolish Omega.
Klaus takes no small amount of satisfaction from the way Diego burns for him, leans into his touch without a thought, hand automatically splaying over Klaus’ hip and there’s a curl of those long fingers that he wouldn’t mind feeling elsewhere. Diego’s confusion’s starting to leech into the air, Klaus can’t let him ruin his plan, and it’s not like he needs much encouragement as he drags the Alpha forward and into a kiss before he can say a word.

Chapter End Notes

I was never intending to have a pov with Klaus but apparently that's all my brain wanted to write before it'd let me write the next chapter properly. I know this is a heck of a lot shorter than the last one but I didn't want the next chapter to be in the five digit word count so this was the result. I'm not sure if I'll write anymore from Klaus' pov but if it's something people like then I'll try and include him more :)

There’s sixty seconds to a minute, three thousand six hundred to an hour and a hefty eighty six thousand four hundred to a day.

Five is well aware of this.

So he’s more than aware, with a heavy weight settling in his chest, that he simply doesn’t have enough time to compose a lie realistic enough to convince Miss King that he’s alright, not when he can see her own story weaving together as her face hardens towards Diego.

He refuses to allow the mounting distress to show.

His stepbrother distracts Miss King, but Five still can’t piece together any sort of reasonable excuse for the bruising or his teachers presence, though the latter seems significantly less important. Frustratingly he’s distracted by the two additional people that it’s somehow throwing him off so completely that his mind’s refusing to process everything properly.

Five acknowledges that he may be starting to panic.

Even when Mr Klaus looks questioningly towards him and Five’s silently answering he has to remind himself that the Omega has no ties to them, he’s inconsequential to this moment, though for some complexing reason, Five wishes that his teacher might have a solution.

Like his thoughts are broadcasting between them, Mr Klaus tilts his head in acknowledgement, and like a fool Five feels this ballooning relief, airy and warm in his chest.

But then the Omega’s turning, walking away and Five refuses to crumble, to do anything but chastise himself for wasting such precious time on a pointless wish.

Mr Klaus slows, to say goodbye Five’s certain, and he’s filling up with this pitiful urge to pray for help when his teacher reaches towards Diego and then…

Oh.

Huh.

Diego would like to think that he has more eloquent sentiments on the situation, but the three letters sum up his state of confusion pretty fucking well. After an initial frozen moment of time, several things filter in, disjointed fragments registering in his brain, clashing with the exhilaration spiking in his chest and he tries to separate them into small nuggets of information, distinguish the facts to build the overall picture.

Diego thinks that Klaus’ fingers are cold on his jaw.

He thinks that Klaus’ lips taste like some kind of flavoured lip gloss.
He really fucking wishes that he was in any other situation but this one, if only so he can slam the Omega into the nearest wall and kiss him properly.

Klaus kisses in a way that’s at odds with the firm grip he has on Diego’s face, long and deep and gentle. He wants to take this apart and study it, understand precisely what it means because Diego can’t remember the last time someone kissed him gently.

So when Klaus abruptly pulls away Diego leans after him, chasing his mouth, slack jawed. There’s a space between one breath and the next where Klaus - back turned to the rest of the room - gives him this sly grin, and those clever eyes tell Diego one thing.

*Trust me.*

“I can’t believe you didn’t tell this poor woman, honestly Diego.” Klaus tuts, swivelling so he leans against Diego’s side and just like that his entire body turns loose and soft.

“Tell me what?” Gena’s suspicious, he can see it behind the neutral expression and Diego knows that whatever Klaus is about to say he’s probably not going to like it.

“I’m Diego’s Omega.”

It’s said casually, this brand of ownership, and Klaus is looking up at Diego with such a sweet smile, as if he hasn’t just detonated the ground beneath their feet.

“He’s never mentioned-”

Klaus cuts her off, voice giddy and high, and if it wasn’t for the tiniest pinch of his fingers against Diego’s shoulder than he might have also believed that the Omega really was *that* excited. “We were waiting for me to meet Five, it was so important to Diego that we get along.”

It’s clever, making it look like he’s placing Five’s adjustment above all else, but also…

*Five.*

Who’s going to freak out, who’s not going to understand what’s happening, because the poor kids just… well… a kid. But Five’s watching them with such an intensity that even Gena and Klaus have noticed it, and with all three of them staring at him the boy doesn’t look uncomfortable. If anything his small shoulders draw back and Diego sees the precise moment he’s worked out Klaus’ ruse, his game, and then when it’s won him over.

“They laboured under this illusion that I’d require an adjustment period before they committed,” Five says and he gives a slow wave of his hand in their direction.

“That’s probably for the best.” Gena’s thrown, but it's almost impressive how quickly she rallies, “How do you feel about this Five?”

“Klaus is,” Five pauses for a second as if he’s really thinking about it, “flamboyant.”

Diego snorts, speaking without thinking. “That’s one way to put it.”

There’s an overwhelming scent of content Omega flooding the room, Klaus’ lips brush his cheek and it’s almost stifling. Diego wishes he wouldn’t because he doesn’t have it in him to concentrate when Klaus touches him like that, and right now he could do with locating his fucking brain, maybe try and actually say something helpful.
“I just can’t believe he didn’t call and let you know, baby you promised you’d do it.”

“Sorry.” Diego says, voice hoarse as Klaus’ fingers trace small circles at the nape of his neck and it’s such a casual gesture, one that he’s seen countless mates do. He realises that Klaus’ only draped across him in a feeble attempt to coat both of them in each others scent, and it’s impossible to think when all he can feel is Klaus’ head resting on his shoulder, cool breath leaving goosebumps in it’s wake.

“This doesn’t explain everything.” Gena’s voice cuts sharply through the hazy place his brains retreated to.

Klaus glances towards Five and truly oversells his theatrical gasp and the easy smile he gives her is disarmingly sweet.

“Oh bless your soul, no wonder you’ve been confused.”

It’s patronising without being overtly so and Diego’s somehow losing the fight to keep a smile off of his face at Gena’s bristling disapproval.

And from Five’s twitching mouth it’s a challenge his brothers also failing.

Klaus looks up at him, as if awaiting permission to talk and he looks so terribly beautiful with his large glossy eyes and flushed skin, that for a moment, despite this clusterfuck of a night, Diego’s heart races in his chest. He nods, not sure how the hell anything can be salvaged from Five’s damning bruises.

But Klaus has got this.

The Omega’s an incredible liar, words flowing freely from his mouth, where Diego prefers to fall silent, not to trip himself up with something too complex, Klaus has no such qualms. He’s creative, elaborate tales mixing in with the facts, looping back over and over again to solidify a story that isn’t that far from the truth. Not so strangely he avoids his own involvement, a nameless teacher taking up his place, and after a few tweaks here and there it seems like Klaus’ pulling it off.

Diego’s sat in on so many interrogations - led enough of them - that by now he wouldn’t say it was arrogant to admit that he was good at filtering lies from the truth. But with Klaus, well Diego’s almost believing this complex weaving story, and he knows it’s bullshit, because Klaus is… well he’s magnetic. Even Gena’s drawn in, Diego can see it when he tears his gaze away for a moment, though when Klaus comes to an end she seems to have regained her footing.

For the briefest of seconds Klaus glows, jasmine and something sweeter coats Diego’s tongue as he inhales. “We’re really lucky, that his teacher was so supportive, he really seems a decent person, at least according to Five, he’s always talking about how much he enjoys his lessons.”

It’s lucky that Five’s natural face looks like a serial killers profile picture, because it would have given the game away when he flashes this cold, furious smile at them both and Diego can feel this tiny tremor next to him, like Klaus’ silent laughter is clutched between his hands as they reflexively tighten on the Omega’s waist.

“Oh why would a group of children target such a lovely boy?” Gena asks.

And it’s Five that answers almost absently, “Children can be assholes.”

If there’s a better moment to realise just how much he loves his little brother Diego isn’t sure he wants to know, because this, here, with Five’s shocked expression is the best thing he’s ever
fucking seen.

Gena’s reproachful stare is the only reason Diego, with as much enthusiasm as he can muster, says. “That’s terrible Five, you shouldn’t swear.”

Five’s going to kill him.

The manic shine from his disbelieving gaze promises future Diego a whole lot of pain. “I apologise, I should know better than to sink to the language of witless barbarians.”

Ouch.

“Although it stands that bullies can scent weakness Miss King, I should imagine that’s why they acted immaturity.”

“I don’t think anybody could call such a brave boy like you weak.”

Gena probably intends for it to be a compliment.

Five doesn’t hesitate in going for this kill.

“I would say that anybody losing two parents simultaneously could be considered weakened.”

You glorious little bastard.

Gena, through probably years of experience, reacts with only a slow blink and then like a coward shifts her focus to Diego, “Is the school following up with this?”

“Not officially, they, uh-”

“Considering Five’s substantial injury I’m alarmed to hear such a thing,” at some point the devils pulled out a pen and started taking notes on a pad of paper.

Before he messes this up Klaus’ flush deepens, and Diego knows this is an act, and hell if it isn’t the worst time in the world to be staring, but Klaus is so fucking beautiful.

“I know several of the boys mothers from my dance class so we all met up and had them sit and talk.”

“Dance class?”

“I teach one every Monday and Friday evenings, sorry if I knew you were coming then I’d have put something a little more formal on.” Klaus gestures over himself.

“This is what you wear to class?” Gena asks sceptically.

Klaus’ eyes widen and then he’s giggling, the perfect picture of an air-headed, vacuous Omega “No of course not, but this one-” Klaus pats his cheek and Diego’s first instinct is to bite one of those slender fingers, which he doesn’t because he’s not a savage… but it’s a close call. “- would have a meltdown if I only wore my leotard walking home. But it gets so hot by the end that I can’t cope with putting on too many layers.”

“It’s not safe out there.” Diego adds helpfully when Klaus looks adoringly up at him.

Diego looks the primitive Alpha to Klaus’ vapid Omega but it seems that what the latter’s banking on.
“As my injuries came from falling I didn’t wish to cause a stir.” Five interrupts, and the bored expression he adopts is one Diego’s seen countless times when the boy deems something he’s done particularly stupid.

Gena’s silent for a long, long time. And Diego’s painfully aware that they’re all still standing in some weird stand off, but nobody seems willing to move and he’s almost about to try and ease the tension when the devil takes a slow, deliberate inhale and rallies. “I must admit this is all rather unusual, I’ve never sensed an omega before.”

Diego almost winces as the bitch starts scrawling something down onto her pad of paper.

“May I enquire as to what you’re writing?” Five asks.

Gena gives him one of those adult smiles, one that infers he won’t understand, as if Five isn’t the most intelligent person in this room - probably the building world. “I can’t share my notes I’m afraid sweetie.”

_Oh Gena, you fucking idiot._

“Okay.” Five nods more to himself than anyone else, and before Gena can continue those bright eyes light up and Diego’s instantly afraid and excited by what’s going to come out of his little brother.

“I was just worried that you may be jotting down a prejudiced note with an illegal source of detection.”

“I don’t quite follow?”

If Gena wasn’t such a raging bitch Diego might feel sorry for her, an expert at how it feels being on the end of Five’s critique.

“Please correct me if I’m wrong.” Like any of them were idiotic enough to do that, and Five’s quirked brow suggests he knows it as well, “But the use of an Alpha’s olfactory organs were considered a crude method of detection in 2006 after a series of corruption scandals were brought to light with biased Alpha’s taking bribes from less than desirable members of society.”

_Were the fuck did you learn that?_

Diego takes great delight in watching Gena’s hand slowly slide across the page in what he’s sure is a line striking out, though it fizzles out when she addresses him again.

“I’m sure you can understand the confusion, considering there’s never been a mention of a mate before.”

Diego’s tensing, grip reflexively tightening on Klaus’ skin at the not so subtle way Gena’s checking the Omega’s exposed neck, and yes he’d done the same, but not with this dismissive superiority when she finds the skin smooth, unmarked aside from a few freckles.

_You bitch._

Klaus stills under the scrutiny and there’s a growl rumbling in Diego’s chest at the tiny tremor that travels along the Omega’s body that’s not faked as he presses away from Diego. The soothing fragrance hanging around them gives way to a sharp, powerful shameful bitterness that doesn’t quite reach Klaus’ face and Diego can’t think of the correct way to express all of his favourite curses. Not when there’s this pounding in his head, relentlessly demanding he tuck Klaus behind
his back and away from the judgemental fucker watching them.

“There hasn’t been the time.” Diego finds himself saying, words forming without thought. “With all that’s been happening you should be able to appreciate this.”

Klaus startles against him and it’s nothing to do with Gena or Five that has Diego looping an arm around the Omega’s shoulders and pulling him flush against his body. Fingers tracing over that soft sensitive skin where the hollow of his neck meets his shoulder and Klaus shivers uncontrollably as Diego strokes over his scent gland.

And before Gena can come out with anymore bullshit Five’s shifting, treading out of the kitchen and across the room and the concern on his face isn’t entirely put on when he reaches out and settles himself between them, and Diego shouldn’t feel this knee jerking relief at the boys acceptance. Five may be a cold child, and gods if he didn’t deserve to be, but despite the shielded exterior his little brothers loyal and protective and doesn’t entirely hate a world that’s done nothing but try to fucking decimate him.

They’re a unit the three of them together, well not truly, but still… Diego’s startled as Klaus’ protective scent envelops over them and he can feel Five’s fingers blindly grasp for his as if his weaker senses can also pick up on it. There’s this open warmth in Five’s eyes that Diego recognises as the mirror to his own when Klaus’ lips twist into a smile that’s sharper than a blade and as bright as the sun.

“I think that maybe we should have this talk another time.” Klaus inclines his head down to Five without the latter noticing, but the point is loud and clear, the indication at how inappropriate things have turned in front of the child.

So fuck off Gena.

Klaus might be thinking it as well when he finishes curtly. “So if that’s all Miss King, Five and I have to prepare dinner.”

Gena seems to realise how badly she’s fucked up as she pulls herself up to her full height. “As much as I’d like to discuss this properly, there isn’t enough time this evening, not with all of the complications.”

She looks at Diego like she’s waiting for an apology and she’ll be waiting a fucking long time for that. Especially after that shit.

“I think it’ll be best if I set a meeting for next week and we can have this discussion properly.”

And as if it’s that simple Gena’s leaving, feet carrying her across the floor and like every other moment this evening Klaus takes control of her departure. Civilised and polite as he agrees to a date while he lets her out, yet firm when it seems she’s going to linger, and then she’s gone, the door clipping shut with a gratifying click.

“Wh-” It takes the barest shake of his head and Five’s stops, already understanding what Diego can hear. Which is pitiful of Gena really, because if she thinks she can hear them as she lurks in the hallway then she must fucking know he can hear her back.

“What an absolutely delightful woman,” Klaus simpers so sweetly it’s sickening and brilliant in equal measures, and the face he pulls at the door as he starts to reel off exaggerated compliments has Diego’s fighting off yet another smile.

Five’s caught up in it, lost in the pull of Klaus’ presence and their victory - it’s definitely no thanks
to Diego - because the boy turns with his own grotesque expression and it’s a mechanical, pale imitation of Klaus’, but he tries and Diego’s heart thuds painfully in his chest.

Still, he barely manages to wait until he’s certain Gena’s well and truly out of range before he speaks. “What the fuck was that?”

“Improvisation at it's finest” Klaus answers.

Five raises his hands, palms forward and he looks so awkward, like it’s a move he’s learnt from a TV show rather than a natural gesture. “I was following my elders lead.”

Klaus eyes narrow suspiciously. “Where’s this attitude when you’re at school?”

“Whys my teacher kissing my stepbrother?” Five counters, scrawny arms crossing over his chest.

“Ruthless.” Klaus giggles and Diego’s drawn to the sound at the same time that he’d also like the fucking answer.

That and the smirk Five gives Klaus.

Whatever Diego thinks about the Omega, one thing is glaringly clear, Five engages with Klaus. There’s this spark that lights up in his brother even when it’s used to try to spite his teacher, and Diego wants more of it.

“You should be thanking you’re lucky stars that I was here.”

Before Diego can voice his complete and utter disbelief Five smoothly cuts in.

“I believe we need to set some rules.”

Klaus turns a hopeful smile towards his brother. “I think I’ll take that coffee then, if you’re still making one.”

Five nods as he pulls his footstool into position and clambers up to pull down the beans from his designated cupboard. “That’s the first rule, never let Diego near the coffee, he ruins it.”

“I do not.” Diego protests weakly, as if there isn’t more important things to talk about here. “At least let Klaus make up his own mind.”

Twenty minutes and a wasted pot later Klaus’ firmly on the little shits side, literally as they sit across from him, Five’s already compiling a brand new list on his clipboard and although the pair already seem to be subconsciously partnering up against him, Diego finds that he’s not entirely annoyed.

Chapter End Notes

Another massive round of apologies for being late with this chapter and also probably
missing a ridiculous amount of mistakes when editing but I didn't want to leave it any longer without posting an update.

As always thank you for reading and I hope you've enjoyed :)

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

So I actually managed to get this chapter done before I went on holiday :) 

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s a shitty way to leave, he knows that.

Klaus isn’t panicking.

Klaus isn’t overwhelmed.

Klaus most definitely isn’t scrambling out of that apartment the second Diego’s swear riddled questions start to become clearer, sharper, and Five’s stifled yawns open up the risk that he might be left alone with the Alpha.

He’s not ready for that. Probably won’t be for a while.

Not that he’s got a while, no thanks to anybody but himself Klaus has got a week to sort this mess out. A week. Well, eleven days to be precise. But it still counts as a fucking week.

Shit.

But Klaus doesn’t focus on that because the roiling in his gut intensifies with each reminder of this chaos he’s gotten himself into. So instead of ruminating on his more than likely imminent destruction, Klaus does the same thing he’s been doing for the last twenty nine years of his life.

Standing in front of the familiar chipped door - the only variant in those twenty nine years - hand half raised, his knuckles don’t get the chance to meet the wood before it swings open and Ben’s standing there in all of his gangly limbed glory.

“Ice creams on the side.” The Beta says in lieu of a proper greeting, already settling himself back down on the couch to continue whatever campaign he’s started.

“Have I ever told you that I fucking love you?” Klaus swipes up the tub and beams as the sound of gunfire starts back up.

“Just last week,” Allison emerges from the bathroom, “when he dealt with the ‘unholy monstrosity’.”

“That spider was huge.”

Allison stares, wide eyed, as Klaus peels back the lid and swills the melted contents of his ice cream around before tucking in.

Maybe that’s what had his stomach fluttering uncontrollably when Diego’s fingers grazed across his skin earlier. As Ben’s so fond of reminding him, Klaus is a hormonal bitch when he’s hungry.
If there was a whimper ground between his teeth earlier then it could have been his body desperately crying for food. It all makes sense if he looks at it this way.

Liar.

“That’s disgusting.” Allison’s voice pulls him out of his thoughts.

Ben grumbles as he’s no doubt killed. “Don’t bother, he’s been doing it since we were kids.”

“Hey, people used to pay good money to watch this sort of thing.” Klaus protests if only to watch Allison cringe when he deliberately dribbles a little over his chin before swiping it back up with the tip of his tongue with a wink.

He can make these jokes now, he’s got friends that allow him to, encourage him to feel comfortable doing so. It’s not a privilege he’ll ever take lightly.

Ben pauses his game and swivels around, grins cruelly as he says. “You were a whole lot prettier then.”

“Rude, hurtful, most definitely untrue,” Klaus tries to frisbee the lid towards him and winces when it flops harmlessly to the floor, “I’ll be pretty until the day I die.”

Allison shakes her head as she takes up the opposite end of the couch and Klaus, with all of the grace of a wild cat, throws himself across them, head propping up on Ben’s lap.

“Back in the day I’d get-”

Ben cuts him off. “I’m not paying you to lie on top of me asshole.”

Klaus grins, wriggles upright until he’s wedged comfortably between them and returns back to his half eaten ice cream.

This is his life now, evenings with Ben until he fell asleep more often than not on the couch, despite his own apartment a floor below. Even when Allison started to join them, courtesy of Ben, Klaus wouldn’t find it dramatic to say that he loved her from the first meeting, aided by the time she’d thrown two all nighters one weekend to help him plan and finish an elaborate diorama for his class.

The midnight pizza and wine runs might also have helped seal the deal.

“How’s the renovation going?” He dares to ask her around a mouthful of chocolate heaven.

“Don’t get me started.” Allison sighs, arranging pots of nail polish on the coffee table.

“Some idiot messed up the pipework.” Ben adds before swearing softly as his character dies again.

Klaus pushes the now empty tub away and slowly rubs his stomach. “At least you get to stay with us.”

That neither of them question the ‘us’ part of that sentence is another one of those blessed moments. Especially when it means doing nothing fancier than curling up and watching Ben try to reach a new head kill record and Allison working on their chipped nails.

“Klaus, I don’t want to be rude,” Allison says hesitantly as she examines his left hand, “but you kind of smell.”

Not that he could have avoided this, even if he’d showered and scrubbed every inch of skin there’d still be questions. Rubbing himself over Diego’s glands all but screamed to the world that the Alpha owned his ass and Klaus can’t even summon his heat up as a valid excuse.

Allison’s nose wrinkles again and he can see her registering his growing distress, her worry bleeding into Ben who carefully sets his controller down and gently takes Klaus’ hand as if this is one of those times where scent and pain rolled together into one.

Guilt tugs in his gut at the gesture, the implied support and care behind it, why he’d need it.

“Are you okay?”

“Fine, dandy, absolutely peachy.” Klaus smiles at Ben, he doesn’t intentionally turn away from Allison, but she’s a new friend.

Not like Ben.

“Can we leave it.” He asks quietly.

And this is important, Klaus knows that Ben will leave him be, won’t push or exert any control that for so many years he’s needed to cope, to help hold his life together. Simply because Klaus came home, he’s here and not lost in a haze of drugs and strangers dicks, trying to fuck men that he thought he wanted to be, like that special something would rub off on him if only he tried hard enough.

Therefore he’s built up enough goodwill and trust to ease him through this awkward shit. Ben squeezes his hand once, a quick gesture to imply that he knows, that he’s there if Klaus needs him, before returning to whatever gruesome looking game he’s in the middle of.

“Whoever it is, they must be special.” Allison grins to eradicate the last of Klaus’ nerves, a thoughtful hum resonates from Ben, and bless her sweet heart as she pulls his hand onto her lap and plucks one of the little glass bottles from her selection.

You have no fucking idea.

“Maybe.”

Okay, so Klaus may have possibly, at a real fucking push, acted like a coward in running away the second the danger had passed.

He’s been cruel, that much he does know and he doesn’t want to be this worthless idiot. Klaus wants to be supportive and kind, he wants to be everything Ben was in Klaus’ darkest hours, that blessed being that others can rely on. Though Klaus has never had to place another’s needs before his own, work aside he’s never pushed to become better, it doesn’t mean he’s incapable of learning, natures clearly giving him a harsh shove in the right direction at last.

Maybe it’s been dormant within him for far too long, stoked from an ember into an inferno of irrevocable destruction that’ll obliterate him if it goes as wrong as he fears it might.

Klaus finds that his lungs are craving the taste of that cataclysmic smoke.

Dramatic bitch.
He sighs heavily and whilst Allison works to save his pinky finger, starts to form - and he uses the word *loosely* - another plan.

Diego wakes up disorientated, senses coming back to him slowly, like his head consists of molasses.

There’s the possibility that he may have gone blind, or at least the pain splicing through his head is fogging over any ability to open his eyes. He’s tired, real fucking tired. The type of tired that he hasn’t felt in years, the kind that presses down on his limbs until it takes an age to move them from one position to the next. Although the fact he spent the night passed out over the kitchen table may also have something to do with that.

Also, in what’s an utterly delightful realisation he’s discovering that thirty year old Diego can’t drink like eighteen year old Diego used to. Not even close.

This isn’t the type of hangover like the blackout stupors from a solid night drinking with his old partner after they’d finished wrapping up a brutal case. No, this is another beast altogether, one where he’s furious and confused and would give anything to have Grace there, chastising him and holding one of her bizarre herbal remedies to cure his ails.

The problem was he’d needed something to smooth the frayed nerves under his skin, ease the anger curdling in his gut as Klaus fucking *bolted*, not ran, but fled, and it’d taken far too much control to resist the instinctive need to give chase. So Diego didn’t think twice about starting on the first beer from his not so carefully hidden stash. But then there’s the second, and the fifth, and then after the seventh he can’t quite remember much else and the only excuse he has is that it’s been a fucking age since he did something like this.

Five’s hesitantly standing across the table, and when his bleary vision settled enough to see his brothers outline solidify, guilt drifts and coils alongside the shame. Increases ten fold when he realises that Five’s primed, on edge, waiting for what might greet him, the sagging relief when he realises there’s no threat.

A steaming mug of coffee is pressed towards and Diego realises that he’s been a real piece of shit.

He manages a “hey buddy.”

Speaking and moving at the same time is a mistake, a big, neon red sign with flashing fucking lights kind of mistake. Nausea hits him like a gut punch and it’s only through experience that he breathes through his mouth and holds back whatever's bubbling in his stomach.

“I hope you don’t mind but I used your laptop for some research.”

Five potters through the kitchen, back turned to him as if now Diego’s no longer a risk he can relax a little. Before he can question what’s happening a large glass of water is placed in front of him, closely followed by a stack of thinly buttered toast on top of a plate, crusts meticulously cut off.

“The general consensus is that rehydration is the key to recovering.” Five brandishes his own slice of toast at Diego’s open mouthed stare.

God I fucking love you kid.
He dutifully makes his way through the pile if only that’ll give his body one less thing to worry about later on despite it’s current violent protest. Plus it’s stopping him from attempting to leap around the table - if that were even possible right now - and crushing his brother up into a hug.

It’s as he’s chewing that Diego thinks about everything. He can’t be doing this shit anymore, old Diego’s reactions are no longer acceptable, haven’t been from the day he’d shown up at that strangers doorway to find Five, when he signed the paperwork and sat through all of the court meetings and Gena’s bullshit.

“What are we going to do?” Five sounds like he’s going for a casual tone, but it’s not working.

_He had to wait for you to fucking wake up before he could talk to you._

Old Diego, for want of a better word, needs to die. Or at least the parts of him that did fucked up shit like this.

“Don’t worry…” He changes it around mid-sentence. “I’ll work it out by the end of the weekend, promise.”

Five doesn’t call him out for such a weak answer, instead he gathers up the plates, refuses Diego’s offer to wash up and in a truly monumental display leaves them in the sink without obsessively scrubbing them.

“Right, next it says that you’re going to sweat.” Five glances down a sheet of paper. “A lot.”

“Did you make a list for hangovers?” He asks incredulously.

“Of course, one of us needed to be prepared,” _ouch_, “now you’re going to have a shower.”

Much later, and a good way down Five’s list, Diego’s carefully arranged on the couch, blankets weighing him down, and a bowl of soup precariously balancing in his lap. He’s watching some foreign documentary on the laptop Five’s holding between them and it’s washing over his head even if he cared to try and keep up with the subtitles.

“Thanks Five.”

“It’s quite alright.”

And it is, that’s the sad thing, his brother won’t hold onto this, won’t see it for how fucked up it really is. He’s too accepting of these sort of offences and Diego can never let this happen again. He really needs to speak to Klaus.

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By Tuesday Five’s become aware a problem, and to his surprise it’s nothing to do with the ‘situation’ as Diego’s been calling it.

No, much to his disapproval Delores’ status as _Five’s_ has become official and there isn’t a single person in this confounded school that doesn’t know about it.

_Primitive, foolish, idiotic._
Children and rumours seem to go hand in hand Five’s been noticing, the tale of his ‘epic’ showdown has warped and the facts vary and shift depending on who told them, fuelled on by his discoloured features.

Although the whispers about his escort off of the premises by an officer of law wasn’t something he’d gone out of his way to discourage, especially when it guaranteed that nobody came within a dozen yards of him unless forced to within class.

Apparently helping her out one time means that Delores also thinks that she’s his shadow, it’s not something he would have chosen for himself but it’s too late to correct, not when he has far more important things to concentrate on.

He’s not proficient in the complexities of human emotions, however it doesn’t mean that Diego’s face when Mr Klaus all but vanished the other night was hard to interpret. Neither was the lack of any opposition from his teacher when he - and as a result Delores - retreated to the corner of the classroom to read and ignore everyone around them.

Five has been on this planet for nine years, ten in a few weeks he reminds himself, but in that time he’s never encountered a scenario like this, one that niggles and worms through his head until he can think of nothing else.

The only thing he can say with absolute certainty is that dismantling computers and questionable component’s under Reginald’s thinly veiled rage isn’t nearly as nerve-wracking as dealing with these emotional idiots.

Diego and Mr Klaus aren’t panels full of wires, there isn’t a singular one he could cut to defuse the tension between them.

It’s infuriating.

But Diego says that he’s ‘got this’ and so Five’s going to respect the Alpha’s wishes, or at least keep his observations to himself.

For now.

A light jab to his arm registers and he frowns, drawn out of his contemplations.

“What?”

This one.

It’s emphasized with a firm tap on the word again.

“Umbrage, it’s something that irritates or offends you.”

Delores blinks once, contemplates him and then goes back to the book propped between them.

This is also a new development, yesterday she’d simply sat down next to him, close enough that his skin prickled not entirely out of discomfort and started to read his book.

There’s too many new things colliding into one another and clashing in a mindless roar inside of his head that demands he cut away from her, Diego, Mr Klaus. Isolate himself somewhere safe and regroup his scattered thoughts.

But Five still hasn’t found the words to get Delores to leave him alone. Not really started on them
either.

**Can I?**

She holds the corner of the page up and Five nods absently even though he’s still a few lines off. He’s not sure what to make of this non verbal communication either, the so far flawless interpretation. This morning it’d occurred to Five that he might just ask her and now he’s with her it would be simple, yet watching her eyes dart across the page so rapidly he realises something with an unsettling jolt along his spine.

“Are you my friend?” He splutters.

**Obviously.**

Five stews on this through the rest of the day before deciding that on this occasion he might need some help. He broaches the subject with Vanya when they’re in the middle of one of her history assignments, it’s the first evening that Diego’s required to stay late at work and the timing works out well.

“Vanya,” she hums in acknowledgement, “what do you do with your friends?”

It warrants more attention than she seems capable of giving with her nose in her textbook. “Why do you want to know?”

There’s no judgement in her tone and Five’s satisfied that he made the correct choice in who to confide in. “I seem to have acquired a friend and I’m not sure what to do with her.”

“You must of had…”

She trails off then and Five’s grateful for her understanding, even if now if there’s an uncomfortable pressure hanging over him.

Vanya kindly moves on. “What do you have in common?”

“We read.” That’s it really, all he can think of on such short notice.

“Take her to a book store?”

It’s simple and also really rather clever.

The goblin smile lights up the room when he tells her so.

In the end Diego’s doesn’t work shit out, because Klaus comes to him.

**Kind of.**

He’s lying in bed staring wordlessly at the ceiling when his phone vibrates across the table, not once but multiple times until it almost makes a dive towards the floor. He fumbles for a second before registering the unknown number flashing up, training would dictate he ignores it, the possibility of scams and fraud callers is something he used to lecture Grace and Lillian over constantly.
He looks anyway.

(22:52) **Hey, so I may or may not have illegally obtained your personal number.**

(22:52) **But for the greater good you know, and this is way smarter than messaging a work phone.**

(22:52) **Surely that counts for something?**

(22:52) **Please don’t arrest me.**

(22:53) **I’m way too pretty to go to jail!!!!**

(22:53) **If this isn’t you Diego then I’m sorry random stranger.**

(22:53) **Go about your day.**

Diego stares at the blue bubbles for what he thinks is a reasonably respectful time. It’s obviously Klaus, no one else that Diego can imagine going on a texting spree like this and there’s no doubt that he’s going to reply.

(22:59) **You could have just asked me for it?**

That stupid primitive part of his brains rearing up at his message, how Klaus might interpret it and respond accordingly. If they were in a normal situation, which they’re really fucking not, this might be the moment where they exchange pictures and filth that’s easier to type than say.

(23:00) **But my way was exciting!**

(23:00) **I had to break into the administration office and go through the files.**

He wants to point out that his numbers on at least one of the mountain of forms he’s filled out for the school, but then that’ll just encourage the Omega. He’d be willing to bet this months rent that Klaus could dissolve into a babbling mess via the medium of text just as well as in person.

(23:01) **What do you want Klaus?**

There’s no reply for long enough that Diego starts to panic, just a little.

(23:16) **We need to talk. About yesterday.**

(23:17) **Being in the same room would help.**

There’s another delay and Diego wonders if this is how Klaus is in real life, able to dish out beautiful lies and easy stories but woefully inept at producing anything with substance.

Not that he can really judge on that front.

(23:31) **Want to meet up?**

No. Not really. Not at fucking all.

Maybe he’s an asshole, but it’s disgustingly easy for him to blame Klaus for this mess. Without the physical presence of the Omega distracting him and the relief that space gives his pathetically overwhelmed brain it’s easy to be a prick.
I’m sorry.

I really do want to help.

Tell me what to do!

Fucking Klaus isn’t the problem. Or it is if he takes that thought in another direction… But Diego needs to take responsibility for his own mistakes.

And no matter how he tries to look at it, he really needs Klaus’ help.

Let’s talk.

It turns out that once he’s decided to take Delores to the bookshop everything for the first time seems to go smoothly.

Five informs Diego as soon as he’s home and the Alpha’s tired eyes brighten at the news, agrees without hesitation to take them, though Five is a little suspect that his stepbrother retreats into the bathroom clutching his phone.

The next day he asks Delores, who in turn asks her mother, who then stares distrustfully at Diego after school until he holds up his badge. Although Diego seems to hold no ill will over the incident Five can’t help but wonder how many times he’s had to produce such evidence. How an object that fits in the palm of his hand can change fear to trust, from rabid animal to respectable citizen.

It infuriates him as they climb into the car and Delores’ fingers catch his sleeve, tugging for his attention.

Sorry.

Delores looks ashamed on her mothers behalf and it’s a relief to know that she doesn’t feel like that.

“So what sort of books do you like Delores?” Diego asks from the front.

He never worried that Diego would be rude, he doesn’t seem to have the capacity for such things. But it’s still easy to do, over the last couple of days Five’s almost rushed over Delores multiple times, not on purpose but just through the sheer easiness that her silence allows.

But Delores speaks, in her own way, and Five wants to make sure that she’s comfortable to do so around him and by extension Diego.

Maybe that’s what a friendship entails, considerations made towards one another’s needs, if so it’s exhausting, and Five decides very quickly that one friend will be quite enough for him.

Adventure.

He waits until she gives him a clear nod before translating.

Five feels this odd shroud of warmth settle over him as Diego continues on without blinking and
Delores’ fingers loosen their grip on his sleeve.

By the time they’re standing on the street outside Five’s pleasantly surprised to find that his friend and stepbrother seem to get along as well as can be expected even though the latter seems a little distracted.

“Go mad,” is all Diego says as he hands his card over before disappearing into the coffee shop adjacent to the store, though Five notes that the floor to ceiling glass walls allow a perfect view of them.

Delores’ brow kicks up as he tucks the card carefully into the blazers inner pocket and he almost smiles at her. “He’s really gullible.”

**Trusting.**

“That too.”

They split up initially, drifting in whichever direction takes them and Five’s grateful when at one point a sales assistant catches him straining to carry a sizeable stack and produces a basket, with wheels.

*Maybe not everyone’s an idiot.*

Delores finally joins him in the nature section and there isn’t enough time to hide the marine wildlife book he’s *casually* looking at. Because, he thinks with a scowl, thanks to Mr Klaus his interest may *possibly* be piqued by the work he’d set him.

However all she does is catch his elbow and with that hidden strength tugs him along to a small section, only a few rows of offerings, in the very back of the store.

“Graphic novels.” He reads a small sign attached to one of the shelves.

**We could read them together.**

There’s already a small pile growing on the floor and when Five picks one up he frowns at all of the illustrations.

“How can you read these?”

It’s like watching a film unfold, just bubbles of speech instead of actors voices.

**It’ll be fun.**

Five will be tolerant. He’ll be accepting. He’ll keep his opinions to-

**You read these ones from right to left.**

Five puts his foot down. “Absolutely not, what a ludicrous design.”

Delores' mouth slants upwards in the face of his ire.

They end up with six of them.
Arriving fifteen minutes early wasn’t one of his cleverest idea, as much as it seemed like a gesture of good faith there’s a reason Klaus prefers to be fashionably late. This anxious waiting does nothing to ease the urge to flee, to book it out of there and disappear into the cute little wine bar he’d noted on the way here.

He’s got his battle armour on, dressed in enough clothing that it should show how he knows that this is important, and Klaus is to be taken seriously because he’s wearing his faithful leather lace ups, and Allison’s favourite blouse, one that he’s sworn for the last few months that he has no idea where it’s disappeared to.

Though he’s left the top three buttons undone, maybe that’s too relaxed? The sleeves are also casually rolled up to his elbows but then it has a collar, and a collars a sign of sensibility. Or is it? This is why Klaus doesn’t arrive anywhere on time, it leaves gaps long enough that he becomes unmoored, insecure.

Now he’s glaring at the mug opposite him, was coffee the right choice? Maybe he should have picked something else for Diego… and now Klaus is descending into that murky level of panic and fear, something akin to a fist tightens around his heart. A middle aged man at the table next to his looks over, nostrils flaring and Klaus’ hand jerks up in what he supposes is meant to be a reassuring wave.

Whichever mystical deity reigns supreme is clearly laughing at him because Diego has to walk in then. It’ll probably make it worse if he tries to disguise it in anyway so Klaus lets his hand drop onto the table with a thump and braces himself as the Alpha sits down.

“Thanks for the drink.”

“No problem.”

Five’s not with him, which is better of course, but he can’t help but wonder where the boys gone.

The question must be obvious when Diego gestures towards the windows. “I’m about to go bankrupt.”

He gazes across the street and there’s Five’s distinctive form, perfect posture even when he crouches to select something from a lower shelf and Klaus can barely withstand the surge of pride as it crashes through his body at the blonde haired girl next to him. Not one of his more hopeful pairings, but a wistful notion born from long lunch breaks allowing the sweet child to hide away in his classroom.

“He’s a good kid.”

Diego’s watching him with this confused stare and Klaus is yanked back into the severity of the moment. He’s worked on this conversation like one of his lesson plans, jotting down random details in his head until he’d thought everything was perfectly laid out. But like with his students within the first few minutes everything’s already going awry, maybe if he pretends he’s dealing with one of them… Nope, hell no, Klaus shudders at the thought.

“So.”

“So.” Klaus echoes helpfully.

Diego is fidgeting with his drink, letting his long fingers glide around the rim and Klaus wouldn’t
go so far as to say he was fixated, but, well… he kind of was. He would be content to watch those hands for far too long. But he had a plan before coming here, one that’s getting harder to recall when heat and spice roll through him from the Alpha’s presence.

God this is easier when he’s dealing with the usual rut-drunk assholes and he doesn’t-

“Can we just cut the awkward shit out and talk properly?”

*Well, okay then.*

Diego waits until he nods before starting. “Look, I appreciate your help with Gena, I really do, you didn’t have to do anything, so thank you.”

“No worries.” Klaus waves it off and waits for the inevitable *but.*

“But,” *ha,* “I don’t want you thinking that you’re stuck with what was said, any of it.”

*What?*

Klaus is very fucking confused. “How do you plan to sit in that meeting and explain why I’m not there?”

“I’ll work something out, I’ve got a bit of time.”

“That’s a stupid plan, cross your fingers and just hope for the best.” Klaus’ borderline combative as he leans back in his chair, angry at what should be a golden opportunity being offered up to him. He’s going to blame it on hormones and leave it at that.

He’s *not* feeling rejected.

Diego looks taken aback. Good.

“I don’t get why you aren’t jumping at the chance…This is your get out of jail free card Klaus.”

“I wasn’t asking for a free pass.”

“Why would you want to help us?”

*Because I kind of like you even though I know fucking nothing about you.*

Which of course he doesn’t say.

This whole time Diego’s focus never truly leaves the bookshop, his charges, and Klaus likes that, a lot. He doesn’t like what the Alpha says next.

“This isn’t a joke for us, Five can’t afford for me to fuck up.”

Like Klaus can’t appreciate that. “Then let me help you.”

“Do you have any idea what you’re saying, what this will entail?”

Klaus feels like he’s sinking through his chair and down into the floor, he’s never been good at arguing for himself. A student, Ben, Allison, he’ll passionately defend any of them. For himself he’s useless.

Klaus isn’t entirely aware of Diego’s slow inhales nor his softening features until one of those
hands rests on his arm. He doesn’t want to be touched right now, not when it does awful things to
the empty ache in his chest. Klaus sucks in a breath and composes himself, burying the itch to lean
closer and offer himself up like some kind of cheap idiot.

“How long until you’re officially his guardian.”

“About six months, if everything’s signed off properly.”

“Half a year,” he muses, lingers on it for a second, “I can do that. You?”

That touch ends and there’s this whine, small and unpractised that he can’t smother in time,
Diego’s breath catches and it makes Klaus want to tip his head back, exposed.

Until the Alpha’s tone turns sharp. “All of this shit, everything, is for Five.”

It’s a warning, one that Klaus is happy to heed.

“As it should be.”

“I’m serious, he’ll act like nothing affects him but this is pretty fucked up even without anything
going wrong. So if we’re doing this, then you have to be committed, neither of us can fuck up
here.”

He doesn’t want to look too keen as he nods and it makes Diego’s scrutiny that much heavier,
makes his now outstretched hand waver in the air as he tries to rally some form of composure.

“Mates?” Klaus’ voice trembles oh so slightly with nerves.

A hand engulfs his and Klaus is so distracted by the pads of Diego’s fingertips stroking over the
delicate skin of his wrist that he almost misses the Alpha’s quiet confirmation.

“Mates.”

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Chapter End Notes

So I added the slow burn tag and planned this out and even my brains shouting to get
to the good stuff. Not long yet I promise :)

Thank you as always for reading <3
Diego’s gone undercover before, it’s a given in his line of work, a necessity for his merit file if there ever came a day he actually tried to get a promotion. There’s a talent in stepping into another life, wearing it like it’s your own, Diego’s never found it difficult, if anything he used to relish the challenge of bringing a character from a folder alive.

Yet somehow sitting in his own apartment, trying to remember the carefully constructed lies set before him Diego’s apparently fucking useless.

Pathetic.

“So when did we meet?”

Klaus stands over him, hands planted firmly on his hips, wearing another pair of shorts that ride high enough that Diego’s left with nothing but long, creamy thighs that are fucking begging to be marked right in front of him. He doubts that the Omega would teach his children like this, and fuck if it isn’t a distraction.

“C’mon you know this one.”

“He doesn’t.” Five unhelpfully calls out from his bedroom.

Diego’s silent for too long and Klaus’ clearly exasperated, though to his credit it doesn’t colour his words, that much. “My friend Allison’s a publicist and she used to represent your mother’s art gallery on occasion, we met at one of those fancy parties they like to throw. Always base you’re lies on some small truth.”

Diego wants to counter, snarkily, that it’s not half lies, it’s all murky grey and unknown, but he’s not going to because that’s a shitty thing to do. Klaus is in the exact same boat and he’s not complaining that Diego’s stupidity is going to sink them faster than the Omega can shovel the water out.

Klaus taps a dark nail against his lower lip, as if the fuckers deliberately drawing Diego’s attention there. “I don’t suppose you could break your jaw? Give us a lovely excuse for why you can’t talk, it worked for me as a kid.”

Diego levels the teacher with his best unimpressed scowl, frustratingly it goes unnoticed as Klaus rummages through his oversized bag before producing a small, fluorescent, stack covered in looping cursive. “Are those flash cards?”

Klaus fans himself with the pack. “Clever idea right?”

“I highlighted everything of importance in blue.” Five shouts.

“Everything about me is important.” Klaus frowns as he flicks through the cards as if he was trying to split a deck and Diego swipes them out of his grip to take a look at what’s written on there.

A snort that isn’t entirely unkind echoes through the apartment. “Don’t overwhelm him Mr Klaus or he’ll shutdown.”
Klaus gives a heavy sigh. “So very true.”

“If you’re going to insult me at least do it to my face Five.” Diego closes his eyes as he retries the whole praying to god trick that never seems to work.

“Oppressor.” Five barks.

“Why is he even in there?” Klaus asks curiously.

“He’s sulking—”

“I’m protesting against the dictatorship.” Five shouts.

Klaus looks at him bemused. “What did you do?”

“I told him he couldn’t have another coffee today.”

Klaus gasps with too much emphasis for something so minor. “That’s awful, poor poppet.”

“If you’re not on my side then you don’t get an opinion.” Diego’s determined to stand his ground on this one.

“Fascist.”

Klaus giggles and Diego’s heart stops.

This time he does a pretty good job at recovering, at least enough to shout back. “Which one is it Five, dictator or fascist?”

The boy in question pokes his head out. “Both, and many more until my persecution ends.”

“What’s going to happen buddy.”

“Stop trying to be an adult.” Five snaps and it is a little funny to see his furious face promising future Diego untold misery and torment.

Present Diego still has a backbone, takes no shit and refuses to give into the demands of a nine year old.

*How long is that going to last?*

“I’m not putting the coffee back out so you can drink yourself into a heart attack.”

“Well then I’m starting a hunger strike,” and Five’s gone, retreating back into his room.

Klaus is clearly trying to suppress another laugh. “Surely it can’t be that bad?”

“Have you ever tried to outmanoeuvre a kid with the intellect of a university professor?” Not that Diego can say he’s necessarily hating this child like side of his brother, but god he’s been trying to act like a proper guardian for three days and it’s fucking exhausting.

“Is Five really that bad?” Klaus still doesn’t appear convinced.

“He still has three cups a day, but he’s going to end up addicted if he doesn’t cut down. I caught him trying to pick the lock on my bedside cabinet to get his tin back earlier.”

Klaus must have lost the battle as he bursts into another round of giggles.
“Are you done?”

The Omega’s mouth is still trembling as he takes the flash cards back and Diego’s certain that he’s not making it up but Klaus hovers way too close, inches away from him and it’s hard not to reach out and pull him in.

“Of course my darling Alpha.”

This is something that’s going to be a problem, the constant nicknames and gentle words that Klaus throws out like they have no weight behind them. He doesn’t think the teachers doing it intentionally… or he is and Diego’s next problem is trying to work out what the fuck he’s going to do about it.

Like he can sense the distraction Klaus reverts to his previous interrogation style questioning. “Now where were we, ah remind me where we went for our first date?”

Diego’s well deserved groan of frustration at least gets rewarded with a soft smile.

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As if things haven’t become complicated enough Patch calls him into the office the next morning to drop a night shift on him and it’s not as if he hasn’t used up all of the goodwill circumstances have afforded to him, really he’d be a prick to try and get out of this. The bridge has arrived and Diego’s hasn’t got many options on how precisely he plans to cross it, in the end there’s only one person that he can think to call.

Diego doesn’t want to do this, despite their agreement it feels like a shit thing to do. Question the Omega one day and then on another ask him to bail them out… again. It’s the first time that Diego berates himself for not actively trying to make friends since they moved here, but ruminating on another mistake isn’t going to help.

Instead of pacing or wasting time on hours of going back and forth over ideas with himself until the end result is the same as this one Diego types something quick and honest before he can change his mind.

(20:24) I need your help.

As he’s quickly learning Klaus seems to always have his phone at the ready.

(20:25) Anything for my sweet mate.

And that’s all it takes for him to go from nought to fucking sixty - even if it’s fake, a joke between two co-conspirators. Something in his head clamps down on those words, mulls over and uses them to fuel his hardening dick.

(20:28) Dearest?

(20:30) It’s important.

(20:30) I wouldn’t ask if I had any other choice.
At least make me feel special Alpha.

Fuck Klaus, absolutely well and truly fuck him.

Or Diego could fuck him?

No.

Seriously what’s the matter?

Can you watch Five tomorrow night?

Klaus responds by calling him and Diego fumbles for a second before answering.

“What do you mean watch him?”

“Patch, my boss, she needs me and Luther to work, nothing special but… y’know.”

“Five.”

This wasn’t a good idea. “Yeah, look I’ll work something out if it’s too much.”

“We’re meant to be mates, that means Five’s my responsibili- Ben I’m having a personal minute.”

A burning itch settles at the back of Diego’s neck.

“Klaus what’s going on?”

“I don’t care who you just killed, go tell Allison.” Klaus’ voice comes out hushed, bordering on a whisper. “Sorry I’m with a friend, well in their bathroom.”

Then faintly he can hear a woman shouting. “Ben, I think he’s talking to the mystery man!”

“Should I let you go?”

“Probably - Allison fuck off - seriously I’ll be there, don’t worry about it.”

There’s what sounds like cackling and a door handle rattling. “Thanks Klaus.”

“I’ve got’cha back Alpha.”

Klaus hangs up before Diego can say anything else.

He sits there hot and hard for a pitiful length of time, can’t find the willpower to do much about it really, not when he’s stuck on the fact that Klaus’ friends know about him. Though there’s a good chance that Klaus hasn’t told them the truth, and doesn’t that chafe against his Alpha the wrong way. But then what would Diego know when so far Klaus has done all of the work, crafted the story and done all but smother him with it. Which he’d probably deserve for all of the effort he’s made in comparison.

It’s a wonder that Klaus has put up with his stupidity.
Klaus can hear muffled voices as they rise while he stands outside of the front door and his confidence dives, quickly.

He dithers and considers running, packing up and moving to a new state, country even and although the fantasies of a Klaus eating pastries - that actually require cutlery - in one of those fancy Parisian coffee shops is something he likes to indulge in sometimes. Reality is that Klaus is pathetic enough that the best he’s ever managed is a change from city to town and that’s it. Lounging on sparkling white sand beaches are things that happen to people that are cleverer with their money, haven’t wasted their younger years.

Before he can swing into a morose train of thought he raps his knuckles on the door and Diego almost immediately swings the it open without pausing in his argument.

“He’s your teacher, nothings going to go wrong, if anything Klaus will be ten times better than I am.”

“You don’t exactly set that high a standard Diego, and what if he tries to kill me?” Five’s standing in the middle of the room, eyes narrowed at his brother and completely ignoring the fact that his potential murderer is watching him with a heart that beats so violently that it should hurt.

“Then I’ll have a really easy case to solve. Now promise to be good for me.”

“I’m always good,” Five is all hands on hips, outraged and spitting and… he’s beating down a smile.

Diego grins, “No, you’re not.” There’s a flash of doubt blasting that Klaus doesn’t want to know how it came about, and before it can settle the Alpha adds. “You’re the best.”

The boys skin is too pale to hide the light flush of colour even as he scoffs loudly.

“That’s ridiculous.”

“You like it.”

Five’s lips quirk in response.

Klaus watches all of this like he’s an outcast, separate from these two emotional characters, but then Five turns and draws him in without thought.

“Don’t try and kill me.” Five says, only slightly suspiciously.

“Does that mean I can sell you on the black market?”

Diego’s laughter has him preening. Though it’s rivalled by the greedy look on Five’s face when Klaus digs through the large duffel bag he’s pilfered from Ben, he raises up a bag of coffee that he most definitely hadn’t spent a good half hour in one of those fancy organic overpriced stores before coming here. For one so small Five is fucking fast, Klaus barely extends the hand holding his gift before Five’s taken it and cradles it in his arms.

“Keep this up and I might end up coming to like you.” The boys already halfway across the room with his treasure before he’s even finished speaking.

“I won’t hold my breath.”
Five pauses to deliver what’s probably meant to be a sharp witted line that just ends up being tempered by a half smile. “I wouldn’t recommend it.”

When he turns around he almost wishes he hadn’t, Diego looks like he’s fighting between amusement and annoyance. But the real kicker, the third A that has butterfly’s with iron wings punching the air out of his stomach, is undeniably affection, too much of it. Way too much considering it’s aimed at him, and Klaus is almost grateful that he’d learnt his lesson and left it until the last minute to arrive because neither of them have the time to fuck things up by talking.

He’s given the quickest bare bones tour, impressively neither of them trip over one another, and Klaus can’t resist the urge to let his head thump against the door as it clicks shut. This is starting to get out of hand, even with the messed up bar that Klaus has set for himself this self denial is starting to wear his patience thin.

“You’re both idiots.” Five pipes up from right behind him.

“Holy shit, Five you shouldn’t sneak up on people like that.” Klaus isn’t being theatrical when he pats his chest, because if that hasn’t driven him to a near heart attack then it’s at least added a few silver hairs.

The boy goes to fill the kettle but not without adding, “complete idiots,” as a parting shot.

No Klaus is an idiot much later, when Five’s long since gone to sleep, or at least rather convincingly pretending.

There’s a line in every persons life they vow to never cross, a moral code that they live by, and Klaus - who’s standards have never been particularly high in the first place - is starting to think that he’s reaching the threshold of his control.

He stands in front of Diego’s bed for far too long, indecisive, manners warring with this embarrassingly feral need to mark every square inch of the room. There was no need to pretend he had too much dignity to behave better than this, he’s pretty sure his dignity disappeared a long time ago.

So he takes his blanket from the bag and bundles it on the bed, rolls over it all and then he may or may not have scented the pillows.

Line crossed.

Klaus, unsurprisingly, doesn’t fucking care.

He likes this, lying here in their bedding, in one of Diego’s shirt - yes he’s also that ridiculous - and running his bare legs back and forth across the sheets.

In too deep.

He’s well and truly fucked.

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It’s an anxiety ridden scent that startles Klaus awake. Panic rings, vibrates and then explodes in his
chest, some innate part of him rising and moving through this apartment he doesn’t really know, and it’s only that he properly blinks awake that stops him from stalking into Five’s room.

He tucks behind the half open door, rubbing at his face to clear the sleep from his eyes, instincts screaming and thrashing, tension coiling in the slight muscles under his skin. He has to wait a moment for his pulse to stop beating like a fucking war drum in his ears so he can concentrate, find the distressed reason for his bodies reaction.

Five’s racing heart, his choppy gasps buried in a clenched fist breaks Klaus’ shit excuse for a heart.

The sight of him shifting, stumbling to his feet at least shows that to a degree he’s alright, but then this is the first time Klaus has seen the cranky boy appear his age, shoulders tucking in small, and there’s a shine to his face that Klaus knows intimately well.

Of all the places Five could go, it’s in his wardrobe that he escapes to, silently shutting it behind him and Klaus doesn’t really know what to do. Diego didn’t warn him for this, unless the Alpha doesn’t know, Five made no real noise and if it wasn’t a biological response then Klaus doubts even he would.

He clutches the sleeves of Diego’s shirt, a constricting weight in the pit of his stomach has him feeling sick to his core. Klaus feels useless, unsure and it’s intense, making him feel like his legs are about to buckle. In the end he sinks down to the floor, curling up with his back against the wall.

If the universe would be so kind as to give Klaus some divine guidance he would gratefully accept. As it is the universe has never shown it cares and doesn’t seem in any hurry to change that, Klaus in return lowers himself to mentally offer up a rather creative line of curses for the slight.

Without any real idea of what else he can do, and no time limit in mind, Klaus rests his chin on his drawn up knees, curling into the smallest shape he can manage, and settles down to start a nervous vigil over his self-appointed charge.

Diego’s bleary eyed when he walks in, deciding to risk Five’s wrath when he wakes up as he tosses his keys and bag onto the floor, stepping on the backs of his shoes to lazily kick them off.

It’s barely four in the fucking morning.

If not for Luther’s blundering then he could have been home hours ago.

Bastard.

His brains stuffed with cotton, muffling everything around him, a stark reminder that he’s getting old enough to need proper sleep these days. This is really the only excuse he has for not hearing the quiet purring or scenting the contented Omega until he’s half stumbling into the bathroom and confronted with a mountain of foam where the tub normally sits.

“Morning.” Klaus’ head pops up.

“Jesus, fuck Klaus.”

“If you want.” The Omega cheerfully offers him, hair slicked back off of his face.
“What are you doing in here?”

Klaus snorts as he gestures around him, there’s some trashy romance novel precariously balancing on the bathtubs edge and a glass of something obnoxiously pink and fizzing on the floor.

“Bad night sleep, I might as well have gone to work for you.” Klaus jokes and if Diego’s head wasn’t full of aforementioned fluff, then he might have noticed the evasiveness as the Omega avoids his question.

“You’re naked.” Diego says, pointing out the obvious when really does it need to be voiced.

“Can’t even see me darling, look bubbles.” Like the children he looks after, Klaus scoops up a large handful and blows them into the air.

“You’re naked.” He repeats.

*Head. Cotton. Fucking idiot.*

“Don’t be mean, my place only has a shower, I haven’t had a bath in ages.” Klaus whines, but there’s this blissed out look on his face that Diego wants to be the cause of.

Which is probably why he says, “Well you can have one here any time.”

“You’re the best.” Klaus’ hand emerges and pats at his arm.

Diego without giving it too much thought slumps down, leaning against the side of the tub, because… well fuck it. “I didn’t know that we even had the stuff for this.”

Klaus stretches forward, enough that Diego’s now eye level with the wet expanse of his upper chest as he scoops up his drink from the floor. “Don’t laugh.”

He nods, unwilling to speak in case the Omega sinks back down.

“I may have noticed the bath the other night and bought the right supplies such a beauty warrants,” he raises his glass in a mocking salute.

Diego, as promised, doesn’t laugh. He does give a tired smile, although his body is starting to heat up. Which can he blamed for with someone so ethereal in front of him.

*Naked,* his brain helpfully provides, *ethereally naked.*

“Long night,” Klaus coos and a wet hands cups his cheek before Diego can swat at it, “how was your partner?”

Diego’s face screws up at the memory of Luther tripping and fucking up a part of the crime scene.

“That bad huh? Want to tell sweet little Klaus about it?”

Is it terrible to not care how much of Klaus’ behaviour is for show and how much is really him?

“Sit up here,” Klaus pats the rim and pouts when Diego shakes his head.

“I’ll probably fall in.”

“Tragedy.” Klaus intones, leaning back much to Diego’s inner protests, though his heels kicking up and resting a few scant inches away is almost as good. The fact that he could touch Klaus, if he
wasn’t such a fucking-

“Five had a nightmare.”

“What?” He’s twisting and rising on his knees, forearms resting on the tubs edges to support himself, looming over Klaus in a way that the lanky Omega’s frame hasn’t allowed when they’re standing.

“Around midnight.”

“I should have told you, about the nightmares, they don’t happen often,” because he doesn’t sleep enough.

“I waited until he went back to sleep before I left him don’t worry.” Klaus says defensively, like he’s not done enough already, that in anyway he’s been inadequate.

The fact he stayed and watched over Five, cared enough to do so, Diego can’t quite put into word to properly convey what he wants to this rare, beautiful creature that’s ended up in his life.

“I don’t understand what you’re getting out of this.” Klaus freezes as if he’s waiting for a callous comment, a dismissal and Diego instinctively reaches out to clasp at the nearest bit of the Omega he can reach, hand closing around his slender ankle. “Thank you Klaus, for everything, you’re really… one of a kind.”

It’s how much Klaus gives, how much more Diego’s going to end up taking, and how much he wants to take and it’s too late to turn back now, the only direction left to go is forward.

He traces along Klaus’ skin for a distraction, fingers dipping over bones so fragile that some dark part of him wonders how easy it’d be to just squeeze and snap.

When Diego looks up he’s left breathless, blown out pupils wreathed in green fire watch him, and he’s aware that Klaus is naked underneath his beloved bubbles. Like he knew before, but now it’s louder in his head, Klaus is fucking naked.

By the time he’s worked his way through that paralyzing thought and realised that it’s jasmine that’s sending white hot heat crackling up his spine, Klaus’ nails are digging into the back of his neck, and Diego’s elbows are barely propping him up as the Omega hurtles forward and crushes their mouths together in a kiss that tastes cherry sweet and can’t ever be described as gentle.

Klaus’ hands are everywhere, scoring wet lines down his shoulders, sliding underneath the back of his shirt, palms flattening between his shoulder blades, greedily pressing against every inch of bare skin he can find.

Which is fine with Diego, his mouth moves without thought, teeth sinking into the line of Klaus’ jaw, barely noticing the rewarding whimper before heading towards more sensitive flesh, guided by instincts and a need to inhale Klaus’ scent until he’s surrounded by it.

Diego’s teeth stay bared against Klaus’ skin, the tip of his nose brushing over soft flesh and he can smell… Fuck he can smell Klaus’ desire, taste it on his tongue with each inhalation.

If you’re going to fuck someone like Klaus then Diego’s fucking certain that it’s not something that can be done in hushed tones and hesitant touches. Green eyes twinkle with want, a hazy lust that dilates the pupils that bore into Diego and he’s reaching forward at the same time that the Omega’s grip tightens on the back of his neck.
Klaus really is a baby bird, all hollow bones, fragility wrapped around his gangly form and Diego barely gives any effort to the move as his hands clasp around the Omega’s small waist and lifts him out of the bath.

“Oh.” Klaus’ little gasp shouldn’t feed his ego so much, but Diego’s given up justifying his obsession. Even knowing Five’s fast asleep he’s silent as he carries the trembling Omega to his room, pausing in the doorway to ask again, voice low and rough. “Yes?”

Klaus, brilliant and clever and beautiful and very fucking naked, nods and then when Diego doesn’t continue digs the tips of his fingers into the arms carrying him and whispers his answer.

Chapter End Notes

The argument in my head could literally translate as:

Brain cell 1: We're fed up of waiting!
Brain cell 2: It's meant to be a slow burn, we can't jump the gun too early.
Brain cell 1: But hear me out, what if they're still repressed idiots.

Brain cell 2: ...... Genuis!

Which is the long winded way of saying sorry but I couldn't resist at the end :(
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

What's this, two actual chapters in a week like an organised person, practically a record :)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Yes.”

What started as a morbid curiosity and the stirrings of a heated curl in his belly has quickly gone out of control into a blaze that makes Klaus’ body tremble and ache in desperate waves that he needs Diego to soothe.

Klaus thinks, as Diego shifts him to reposition those muscled arms around the backs of his thighs and effortlessly carries him towards his bed, that it’s not even dawn and he’s almost thirty years old. He’s sober, a high that’s all nature and faux heat fills him and he has no fucking business being this turned on, this slick from nothing more than the wicked smile Diego gave at that one word.

Diego hesitates at the sight of his messed up bed. “What the-”

Klaus slaps a hand over his mouth before the words can escape and his mortification is finally completed.

“Don’t speak.”

Teeth bite down, hard, on his index finger, hands squeezing his thighs and Klaus jolts into the pressure, he swears it takes the Alpha fucking seconds until Klaus is being pressed down onto a bed that’s half Diego’s and half Klaus’ crumpled up sheets.

Too fast.

Klaus is falling too fucking fast, especially now he knows how it feels to be held down surrounded by their sheets and have his wrists effortlessly pinned above his head. A whine travels through his throat, high and desperate, and he’s bucking his hips to draw Diego’s attention precisely where he wants it.

“There’s no rush Klaus.”

Diego’s trying to be reassuring, but he doesn’t know what Klaus does. That any minute the tired Alpha’s going to actually come to his sense and realise who he’s got desperately splayed out underneath him, this sodden, drenched mess.

“I like to do a job properly sweet mate.” He jokes, trying to draw a leg around Diego’s trim waist to pull him closer.

Diego pauses, hands loosening for a second and Klaus starts to panic, not at the disparity between
their states of dress. If there’s one thing he’s fine with it’s his body, but Diego’s shaking his head, disappointment etched deep in the lines of his face, before he’s grasping Klaus’ hair and pulling it hard enough to stretch his neck taut. “Don’t.”

The heat in his stomach freezes, ice crackling up his spine as he stiffens in panic. What has he done? Why does he always fucking do something? Klaus needs to stop-

“Hey, enough of that,” fingers span his jaw, holding him firm, stable, and Klaus blinks up in time to catch a smile that has a duality to it, endearingly fond and stern in equal measures, “no fake shit, not here.”

Relief spreads over him like a forest fire, he nods before Diego’s using his grip to help close their mouths again and Klaus is aware that he’s sloppy, lax under the Alpha’s hold. The thing is he’s always felt that kissing was two people pretending that they can convey a level of intimacy that ruined language and sense. Klaus saw it as a currency, depending on where he puts his mouth it could range from affording him a hot meal to paying his rent for a month, the attitudes never really left him, scepticism drowning childhood fantasies of handsome knights and white horses.

Right now, here, with Diego’s lips and teeth and tongue, he’s never been happier to be proven wrong. Klaus smiles delightedly in the seconds when the need to breathe can no longer be ignored, a hand cards through his hair and he’s overwhelmed by it all. Diego’s looking at him transfixed and it’s all so soft that Klaus almost needs to break something to ground himself, instead he’s making this incoherent, needy sound whenever they part.

“Enjoying yourself?” Diego asks with all the cockiness of an Alpha that knows the fucking answer.

“Take a guess.” He drawls, or he tries too before he’s interrupted by hot fingers making their way between his thighs, teasing, and Klaus realises then that Diego’s still fully dressed.

His hands are trembling when he goes to correct this and he demands that they stop, immediately, which of course they don’t listen and he’s fumbling with the buttons for too long, who wears a fucking shirt to work? With a whine of frustration Klaus takes no mercy and the threads fray and snap as he finally shoves the awful thing from Diego’s shoulders.

“I liked that shirt.” The Alpha doesn’t even try to sound convincing as he grips Klaus’ thighs tighter, gives a hum of approval when Klaus spreads them further.

“Bet you have at least ten more exactly like it.” He aims for a derisive retort and sadly it’s ruined by air punching out of his lungs in a desperate sound as Diego’s teeth sink warningly over his throat and fuck Klaus almost gives in. Almost draws him to that perfect, throbbing spot that begs to be broken, to bleed and connect them so intimately that everything else would pale in comparison.

Too fast.

He’s practically clawing along the Alpha’s shoulders, can feel his cock hard pressing beneath his jeans and Klaus tries to focus his attention on removing the barrier between him and the newly appointed object of interest.

Diego’s a multi tasking bastard, kicking off his jeans and still managing to slide his fingers up, up, until without any preamble he’s tracing through the slick of Klaus’ hole, inhaling slowly and the scent coming off of him, possessive and approving, has Klaus’ toes curling, jaw tight as he tries to quiet a whimper.

“Is this where I’m meant to ask if you’re sure?”
Klaus wants to reply with something witty, he does, but Diego’s grin is wolf-like, sharp and satisfied with how dishevelled Klaus is and it’s doing something to his stomach that has him hitching a leg up around Diego’s waist and again trying to tug him closer.

“Shut up.” He intelligently settles on, hips shifting impatiently.

There’s a moment where he thinks that he’s going to have to beg, already trying to line the right sort of words up when blessed fingers slide and nudge at his entrance. When he presses back Diego’s index finger slides in to the second knuckle and it’s not enough.

But Diego’s inhaling sharply, one becomes two, and as if he knows, a third joins until there’s a searing friction despite how slick Klaus is, and it’s exactly what he needs, harsh and intense and grounding. He’s shuddering, mouth lax and Diego’s murmuring praise in the hollows of his collarbone, nipping them down his chest and licking them into the lines of his ribs.

Klaus moans high in his chest, and he tries to keep it there, keep it quiet, but then Diego’s crooking his fingers up at such an angle, curling just shy of where he needs it and he’s can’t concentrate on anything. The pad of a finger barely clips his prostate, wracking his body with violent shivers as he gives up on covering the noises ripping out of his throat and it’s as if Diego knows because a hand covers his mouth just in time. A chuckle buried against his naval tells him that the Alpha’s getting off to this slow, painful torture, and Klaus can’t fathom what kind of sadistic creature Diego might be during his rut.

“P-please,” Klaus moans against Diego’s palm, thrusting back against those curling fingers, hopelessly trying to force another accidental collision, but Diego’s anticipating it - Klaus is too easy to read.

“No rush, remember sweetheart.”

He really fucking hates Diego right now.

But also… “Again.”

Dark eyes glance curiously at him, hand drifting away from his face and Klaus can’t focus on anything, he just wants to be called nice, pretty names, and get fucked by this Alpha. It’s quite simple really. “Diego, please.”

“What do you want sweetheart?” Diego’s teeth find their newest mark, catching the soft skin of his belly and heat explodes from the contact, and Klaus wants to come so badly. To cut the tether straining inside of him, slowly coiling and winding for what feels like an eternity, since he first walked out of that cupboard, it has him pathetic and sobbing for Diego to look after him.

There’s tears in his eyes and it seems the right answer because Diego’s reaching up, using Klaus’ own slick to wrap his free hand around his cock and it’s enough. Klaus’ gasping out a half-broken sob, colours bursting behind his eyes as he comes, spilling into Diego’s hand, shuddering through the little ripples of pleasure darting up his spine. Diego milks him through it, fingers only slipping free of his hole when Klaus is shivering and trembling from the shock of it all.

Diego’s stroking the curve of his hip, rubbing slow circles at the nape of his neck, arms curved easily around Klaus’ body, and the entirety of the time that Klaus needs to reassemble his sluggish brain there’s a stream of those nice, pretty names confessed into his hair. He’s been called these things before but not with such utter reverence and that’s before he’s even returned the favour.
Klaus sits up fast enough to see stars, manages to hitch a knee into the Alpha’s side, pushing until he’s leaning back on the bed before Klaus’ body drapes itself over Diego’s thighs, swallowing his dick down in one fell swoop until it’s catching the back of his throat and Klaus relishes the growl from above when he doesn’t stop there. He closes his eyes, tongue running along the base of Diego’s cock, checking for a knot that he knows is there, and he can feel it, the slight swell, hotter than the rest of him as if such a things possible.

Klaus isn’t embarrassed to admit that he’s had his mouth knotted, unavoidable really considering everything. But he *hates* it, truly fucking hates it. Yet Klaus knows for Diego he’d do it, not here in this moment, but in the future.

*Future?*

This devotion he’s feeling, stronger than any drug, it’s all encompassing, unwarranted given everything but then again he’s an addict by nature and this is probably the greatest hit Klaus’ ever taken.

The problem, and it’s starting to become a big one, is that he hasn’t really slept in too long, he’s more than a little cum drunk, and Klaus can’t use any of the skills he’s honed over the years. Instead he’s looking up hopefully and for fucking once Diego takes the hint. Or takes pity on him. Either way sturdy hands tangle through his hair and take control, guiding Klaus where he wants him, hips bucking up and it’s a mind numbing relief to let himself be useful.

“Fuck you’re beautiful.” Diego pants, clutching Klaus’ head forcefully and it’s enough that Klaus is moaning, throat fluttering against the intrusion that he’s desperately wanting, *needs* to taste the heat of his release. “Be good for me Klaus,” The Alpha’s voice breaks on his name but it’s not a plea, not begging, nowhere near. “You can take it sweetheart.”

Klaus is pretty sure that he and God - if he/she/they/whothefuckknows even exists - are not on the best of terms, nor is he any sort of believer, but fuck if he isn’t prepared to beg if it means that he never has to forget this moment where he’s someone’s *sweetheart*.

He almost misses Diego’s thrusts turning harder, disjointed, and Klaus moans around his cock as the Alpha stills, coming in hard spurts that he swallows eagerly, hips restlessly moving underneath Klaus’ body until he’s finally done and Klaus can only feel his raw throat and this wonderful thrum of contentment settle under his skin. He can’t help but lap the tip of Diego’s softening dick just to feel the sudden tension in the muscles under his palms, does it again when the rewards the pain of those fingers when they pull his hair and guide his aching jaw away, though the kiss that follows is also just as good.

It’s dangerous, this new addiction, has his body waking up again, rejuvenated by the high of Diego tasting himself on Klaus’ tongue.

“More,” Klaus whines when Diego pulls back and the answering groan has him shuddering as he gets what he wants, rolled onto his back and Klaus’ already writhing.

“More,” he demands and Diego’s sweat and heat sinks into his skin, weight settling between his legs and that’s nice and lovely, but he needs-

“More,” he begs.

“Klaus,” Diego warns him, leaning back and away.
Fuck me.

He knows why not, he’s not stupid, but there’s very little rattling around in his mind that’s giving a good enough reason to not climb into Diego’s lap and settle himself down on his cock. Because he’s pretty sure that the Alpha could take him, in fact it’d be a shame to waste this rare moment before he ruins it, and Klaus shifts so he does just that, kissing and touching and-

Ow.

“You bit me.” He accuses half-heartedly, tongue darting out to press against his lower lip.

“So I did, not the first time this morning.” Diego looks far too arrogant and he may have a little bit of an excuse, but Klaus has been pretty good and he needs Diego to know this, to appreciate it.

So he feels no guilt in giving his own warning bite, teeth digging in first under the hinge of his jaw and then descending downwards, determinedly licking and sucking at flesh that’s an inch too high to really count, and the foul words Diego growls out above him has Klaus purring in response.

The Alpha finally pulls him away, though not before he manages to deliver the softest of kisses to the darkening bruise that’s going to spread out in shades of blue-black-purple. “You’re a little shit.”

Klaus is giddy, drunk on that possessive scent that’s lingering around him, he can’t help rubbing his fingers through Diego’s scruff and he loses himself when the Alpha presses into his touch.

“And you’re a lot more fun when you’re not talking.”

“Should I take that as a compliment.”

“Probably, I prefer it when you don’t say anything stupid.”

Diego’s chuckling and then like he’s this tender, delicate thing the Alpha effortlessly shifts them both until Klaus is enveloped in warmth and their fucking sheets. He’s a mess because only one of them was considerate enough to swallow but he can’t have it all, can’t believe he’s even getting this really.

“How long until you have to get up?” Diego says sleepily.

Klaus strains to scoop up his phone from the bedside table where he’d left it earlier and Diego actually grumbles at this minor separation. It’s…

Too fast.

But then he checks the time and almost chokes on his own saliva. “Thirty minutes, if I skip breakfast.”

“Don’t do that, not good for you…” Diego trails off with a muffled yawn.

“That tired huh,” he twists so he can comfortably trace a pattern on Diego’s bare arm, “do you want me to take Five to school? Well near enough that you know he’s not going to get abducted.”

Big brown eyes blink slowly and Klaus doesn’t expect a proper answer, he’s in the middle of admiring long line of Diego’s arms when the Alpha says “you’re perfect Klaus,” and then promptly falls asleep.

That’s not fair.

Klaus stills completely, staring at the bastard that drops that sort of a line and doesn’t stick around
afterwards, his eyes are a bit too wet and he’s a bit too happy and everything’s just… fucking perfect.

Because, apparently, Klaus is perfect.

He splays a hand against Diego’s chest, steadies himself to the reliable beat under his palm and then settles comfortably to spend the next twenty seven minutes soaking up every last detail he can.

As if Five’s morning hadn’t already started with a terrible crick in his neck from the awkward angle his body had folded into at some point in the night, then this would have been the beginning of his bad luck.

If luck were a real thing.

He stares at the bathtub for a full three minutes in disgust. If there were a stick within reaching distance he might poke at it to make a point, instead he’s now behind schedule and there’s a vat of contaminated water that needs to be dealt with.

Upon a more detailed inspection there’s a paperback novel bent so it’s spines cracked - travesty - a crumpled nightshirt and a half empty glass. Five totals up each indiscretion and before he can decipher how he angry he is about the situation Mr Klaus comes bumbling in draped in another one of those nightshirts. Really he ought to visit a tailor, or select a smaller option because, quite frankly, the materials ridiculously oversized, droops off one of his shoulders.

“Morning Five, why’re you up so early?” Mr Klaus’ hands flutter up to rest at his neck, shoulders shrugging high and the gestures bizarre to say the least.

“This is the normal time I start my routine.” To help his simple teacher he waves towards his toothbrush laid out by the sink before ending at the tub. “Are you aware of this?”

Mr Klaus flushes for some reason, it covers his entire face as he slips around Five to pull out the plug. “Sorry this ones on me. I was going to freshen up quickly and deal with it now.”

“Why would you need to freshen up if you took a bath?”

“It’s a quirk.”

Five thinks that his teachers simply hard work but then again he should be commending such a fastidious approach to personal hygiene.

Mr Klaus gathers up the remaining items, then hesitantly adds, “I’m sorry, if I knew you were up then I would have put more on.”

Personally Five can’t understand the difference, he’s tempted to point out that the length of his nightshirt falls near the exact spot that the shorts he seemed to favour did, but then he doesn’t care if he’s quite honest. “It’s your body therefore I have no say in the matter, do with it what you will. Now if you don’t mind I’m already late.”

Maybe it wasn’t the correct thing because he’s being stared at openly, Mr Klaus’ eyes are too wide
and he’s scuttling towards the door, pausing in the entryway to quickly say, “thanks Five.”

He doesn’t get time to reply, instead feeling off kilter, like he hasn’t quite understood something and it’s irksome. Trying to ignore such a feeling he ducks down and pulls out a spray bottle of disinfectant to attack the tub with.

After the additional eight minutes wasted on the endeavour Five finds that he’s not in the mood to continue any pleasantries when he finally leaves the bathroom for Mr Klaus to dart into.

His irritation peaks at the discovery of Diego’s possessions littered by the front door, and by the time he’s finished clearing everything, dressed and finishing up in the kitchen he’s slowly stewing in discontent and frustration.

“So Diego’s out for the count,” Mr Klaus emerges in his more usual attire, tugging at a pretty pastel scarf until it’s fluffed up high around his neck, “how do you want to do this?”

There’s a fist clenching in Five’s chest at the thought of his stepbrother driving his car whilst exhausted, a dizzy weightless malaise that eases only at the thought that Diego’s safely ensconced in bed.

“What would you suggest?” The idea of using the school bus makes him uneasy.

Mr Klaus takes a moment as he’s stuffing things into a shiny handbag and Five wonders where his larger one’s gone or if it’s being left here for now. “I live close enough to walk normally, there’s always the bus but I don’t think you’d like that.”

No he wouldn’t.

“Why don’t we get a taxi, celebrate me not killing you.”

Five considers this nervous attempt at humour, “If you’d like that Mr Klaus.”

His teacher shifts uncomfortably as if this displeases him. “When we’re not at school you can always call drop the Mr.”

“No. I can’t.”

It comes out too sharp and before he can explain his reticence Mr Klaus is flushing again but this time Five knows it’s not a positive thing. How does he explain that it’s a barrier, a way to control all of these colliding aspects in his life.

*Be civilised.*

“Well, no worries, absolutely fine, I’ll just finish with this then.” The Omega ducks his head to check his handbag again.

There used to be this thing that Grace would tell him over cocoa and old black and white movies, Five snorted every single time without fail, but like with everything she or Mother would say it’d end up stored in a special, sacred place in his mind.

*If there’s a principle to live by, a currency you trade in, then make it kindness. It’ll make you the richest man in the world.*

Grace, for all that she was wonderful and brilliant and intelligent, could come out with utter nonsense sometimes.
He’s straightening his tie, taking twice as long if only that he doesn’t have to look at the dejected adult, but there’s something strung between the three of them isn’t there. A will and a way set in motion by their actions and he can’t easily brush that off anymore than he can jump back in time to prevent Grace and Mother choosing to go out that night.

*Be kind.*

“Klaus,” Five doesn’t want to acknowledge the way his teachers face lights up twofold at the simple drop of a title, “we’ll take a taxi.”

They reach the front door at the same time, Five hesitates for some reason, he feels like this is another step taken that he never planned on, however he’s starting to become adept at change.

“After you.” Klaus gestures with some kind of complicated hand gesture, all bright eyes and willing smile.

It’s unsettling.

But then Five’s plucking the Omega’s handbag and hoisting carefully across his shoulder, picking up his briefcase and marching down the corridor. Mother and Grace raised him to be respectful and he’s been letting that slip for the last few months, Five wants to be seen positively by his teacher and not entirely for academic reasons.

By the time Mr Klaus catches up to him at the elevator, calling him *dashing* and *wonderful* and *my chivalrous knight* for the whole floor to hear, Five’s fighting a smile that might crack his face with it’s shine.

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Chapter End Notes

If anyone's disappointed that we didn't go fully into the devils tango then don't worry Klaus is already making yet more plans on how to get what he wants :)
Many apologies for the delay, I had three weddings in a week and all of them are very... liberal with their alcohol :)

Five is well aware that he’s a child, he knows his age and the limitations it brings, however it doesn’t mean that he can’t resent those limitations.

He clasps his hands first in his lap, then when his clammy palms press together he changes to clutching the plastic water bottle Diego bought from the store down the road. The positioning of his limbs have never really been worthy of much merit, at least in a casual setting. Today Five finds that no matter which angle he cants his head, rolls his shoulders or flexes his ankles, it doesn’t alleviate the nerves fizzing painfully under his skin.

In layman’s terms, Five’s fidgeting.

He hates it.

He also can’t let Miss King’s associate at the desk know how nervous he is, given the furtive glances she keeps taking when she believes he’s distracted.

Which he could do just fine, if his leg would stop jiggling, shifting up and down.

She’s looking again.

He tries to smile at her, but it’s way too much teeth, cheeks pulled back too far and if there were a mirror he’s sure that he’d look like a grotesque caricature of a himself.

“Are you sure I can’t get you anything Qu- Five?” It’s not the first time she’s asked and no doubt she’s noting down his behaviour and deciding whether he’s guilty or not.

“I want to go home.” He says quietly, trying to summon some form of expressive woefulness that might trick the well meaning adult.

She laps it up perfectly, emits a noise that he thinks is meant to be a soft hum but reeks of pity in his opinion. Five’s aware that playing a part isn’t the most honest of options right now but he isn’t going to linger on it, and if there’s a set of karmic scales out there? Then Five thinks that he’s going to have a lot of work to do to level them out, but quite honestly he can’t afford to weigh up whether his actions are kind or good, or even halfway to decent.

His brain feels like a pin cushion as he keeps trying to stick down these errant thoughts, store things safely for analysis later but his usual method is failing him terribly today. Despite it being a dreadfully puerile way to feel, Five can’t help but think that if Diego was here, giving him that easy grin and uttering blatant lies like ‘everything’s going to be fine buddy’ as he had in the car, then Five might genuinely be able to calm down. Actually, he may be veering into the realm of desperation here, but even Mr Klaus and his relentless spiel of stories and anecdote would be welcome.
How long have they been in there? This feels rather excessive, how is Diego holding up under duress? They all know that he’s the weak link. Which considering his job is rather abysmal. Is Klaus propping Five’s future up on those narrow, flowery cardigan draped shoulders?

Five’s readily about to admit that he’s nearing a state of distress when Klaus and Diego walk calmly out of the office and he’s jerking to his feet before halting as Miss King follows directly behind them.

“Hey buddy, sorry we took so long.” Diego’s grin isn’t easy, it’s forced and yet Five can feel his limbs relax, fists unclenching.

In fact he’s staring directly at his stepbrothers face so intently that he has to be prompted into paying attention to Miss King.

“It was nice seeing you again Five.” She casts a hand out as is their routine.

He can’t shake her hand, not now, not when he’s perspiring and she’ll see it as a sign of guilt. She’ll take him away.

“She’ll take him away.

“In some cultures it’s respectable to bow,” he ducks low, head almost colliding against his shins, even though the gesture has his neck prickling, “we learnt it at school.”

When he straightens Miss King and the other woman both look enraptured with his performance. He’s passed.

Thankfully it’s enough, more than enough, he endures the compliments to the state system all the while slowly aligning himself beside Diego and ignoring the painful dash of optimism as their allowed to leave.

“What was that about?” Diego asks as he carefully steers him across the car park and the hand flattened against his back doesn’t matter because Diego won’t care if Five’s disgusting to touch.

Though it doesn’t mean he wants to explain himself. “Doesn’t matter, what did she say?”

Diego doesn’t look convinced though thankfully he leaves it, “Not here buddy, wait until we’re out of the dragons lair.”

“No longer a demon?” This is more familiar ground.

“I like to shake things up.” There’s an easy grin.

Five climbs into the back of the car, the passenger seat is another sacrifice he’d offered in the bid to be kind, though he hopes Klaus appreciates the superior spot. He makes it until they’ve rejoined the main road before leaning forward and demanding. “How did it go?”

Klaus glances between the mirror and Diego who’s driving and Five feels this irrational need to yell at them for making him wait.

“Diego tried his best-” Klaus begins, voice low and sorrowful and Five’s blood turns glacial, heart jumping and snagging painfully.

“- and he didn’t fuck it up.” His stepbrother finishes.

Bastards.
The thought has him rocking back in shock as much as the relief warming his sluggish veins, but really they were evil creatures for putting him though that.

They both appear guilt ridden, or at least pretending so, Five addresses his teacher with his sternest tone. “Your humour is about as appealing as your sense of fashion.”

Klaus gasps so theatrically that Diego’s stifling laughter. “I feel attacked.”

Then because this seems to ease the stiff burn in his muscles Five replies. “You’re sense of fashion assaults my eyes and yet I endure.”

“I have never in my life been so insulted.”

Watching Diego mouth out a silent apology in the mirror and Klaus act… well really Five can only describe it as the Omega behaving in a way that’s unique to himself. It starts to settle in that here they are, Five’s not leaving, this unconventional relationship with his stepbrother isn’t going to change.

“Shouldn’t we do something to celebrate?” Klaus says, changing from puppy tears and into this bouncing excited thing within moments.

_That’s not normal._

_Don’t care._

He’s tired, exhausted really but they’re all here and really it’d be a shame not to do anything. Also he fully intends to capitalise on their misstep, at the very least he’s getting a weeks worth of coffee out of their inappropriate humour.

“What would you recommend?”

The tight lipped smile on Gena’s face as they’d left and the delightful victory aside, Diego’s jubilation is slightly tempered by something that’s been taxing him incessantly.

_Naked Klaus._

It’s ridiculous and juvenile and really fucking pathetic, but apparently Diego can’t control himself anymore. The whole thing should have eased the tension, a physical catharsis that gave some kind of relief, instead he’s left with nothing but a slide show of images stamped into his brain that demand he give them attention whenever he closes his eyes.

He’ll admit that he’s a little bitter that fucking Klaus gave no relief, _didn’t do that properly idiot._ However is it that much to ask that he could sit through, arguably, the most important meeting of his life without comparing the different ways his name can be uttered by the Omega?

Apparently so, though he’d made it through sheer luck and Klaus lying his little socks off. Now however when Five’s clearly unimpressed with their attempt to joke, and thankfully let it slide, all he can do is think about how to navigate through the murky waters they’ve all ended up in.

Also, how the hell did he snare a person like Klaus? How did an idiot like himself manage to appeal to someone so fantastical? Not that Diego hasn’t given it some intense - read: obsessive -
consideration and so far he’s not come up with anything of worth - read: appropriate/intelligent.

_Naked._

It’s all starting to become a real problem.

“You could finally go to the aquarium.” Klaus says casually, drawing Diego away from his inner monologuing.

“I’d rather not.” Five says primly at the same time Diego snorts in derision.

Now this is where Diego should really take some proportion of the blame because if he hadn’t added the casual ‘fuck that’ then maybe Five wouldn’t have latched onto the idea with a terriers tenacious grip. The boy almost vibrates, his body twitching between them and Diego knows that it’s because the little shit can’t decide who he should screw over with his decision.

“Don’t forget that I’m your brother.” He throws in in the hope that it might have some sort of sway.

“Stepbrother,” Five reminds him simply, and Diego knows it isn’t meant in any kind of cruel manner, and it’s the truth, technically, but fuck if it doesn’t hurt.

However it’s a good excuse to concentrate on the road and leave them to bicker about what they want to do themselves, which is a mistake that ends up with him in what must be his own personalised hellscape.

For what might be the first time Diego’s truly appreciating the stoic, standoffish nature of his brother, if only that once they’re inside the aquarium he’s left staring in horror at the chaotic mess of children dashing between tanks, their exhausted parents chasing along behind them. Diego’s fucking certain that he’s chased down easier suspects than some of the children evading capture with joyful shrieks.

Then there’s Five.

Who doesn’t want to see the sharks, nor does he take any interest in the stingrays, bypassing the gaggle of children staring at the seahorses and cutting past the turtles (tortoises? Who fucking knows) before skidding to a stop at a nondescript tank.

“What am I looking at here?” Diego can’t say that there’s anything particularly interesting in this tank compared to the countless other offerings around them.

“Sea anemones.” Five taps at one of two small plaques bolted into the wall.

Diego hums and tries to summon the appropriate level of interest for such a thing as Klaus stops beside him. “They just look like a bunch of underwater plants?”

Five gets this look like he doesn’t know where to begin with Diego’s stupidity but strangely his brothers reply lacks any kind of bite. “They’re much more interesting than that.”

Something small, orange and white drifts through the water. “And those are?”

“Clownfish.” Klaus answers.

He gives a cursory glance at the informational plaques but nothing really sticks out to him. “Seems like the clownfish use the sea anemones?” He asks just to seem engaged.

“Both benefit the other, the clownfish can attract fish for the anemones, keep them clean and scare
off fish like the butterfly fish that will eat the anemones tentacles. I could go on and on, if it wouldn’t go over your head. ” Klaus smiles teasingly.

“Really they can be quite codependent on one another.” Five adds, and Diego’s paranoid but he swears his brothers giving him a look.

But he can’t be, for all the intelligence housed in Five’s diminutive stature he’s still a child that isn’t adept at rationally sorting through his emotions let alone others.

*Neither are you.*

Though Diego’s certain that his brother would compare him to a fish. Without a fucking doubt.

“Honestly come back to the start and go through properly Five, there’s so many other things for you to enjoy.” Klaus suggests and to the surprise of everyone involved, including Five, his brother listens.

Diego knows that this is the first real day out Five’s gone on since… well a fucking long time. However, he also knows that Klaus didn’t take into consideration what a pedantic little bastard the kid is.

Which is why after an hour of Five’s methodical pace, insistence on reading every last line of what seems to be countless displays and peppering Klaus with questions whilst also dismissing half of the answers, Diego’s skulking alongside the quietest tank. Some dull looking creature that listlessly drifts along and Diego can understand the whole spirit animal thing because he’s feeling rather similar to the poor thing. In fact he’s in the middle of thinking about the convenience of an early demise when he realises what exactly he’s looking at.

Klaus is leaning so very close to Five, a painted nail pointing across the large tank in front of them, at what in particular Diego hasn’t got a clue, but his brother looks… young. Wide eyes and open smile, fascination clear in the way he’s hooked on every word that Klaus is saying to him. Fuck if it isn’t the most incredible thing to watch.

And Klaus is the one that’s made it happen.

*Fucking perfect Omega.*

Diego’s sure that he’s the one out of place here, and he realises that he couldn’t care less around the time that Klaus is leading Five along so that he can watch a shark being fed, going so far as to ensure that Five’s standing a comfortable distance from the small crowd gathering around. A man looking a little too guilty at leaving his partner to wrangle a truly rambunctious - read: brat - into behaving passes him, clocks his eagle eyed gaze, follows it and stares with no small hint of jealousy at Five’s calm demeanour before telling Diego that he’s a lucky man to have such a lovely family.

*Already know that thanks.*

He isn’t Lillian or mom, but he’s trying and that there’s something, like a vague, but proud feeling of being recognisable as someone that might be worthy enough to be a parent.

Then again it’s the obvious answer, probably weird if he was standing alone on a weekend staring at a child that’s not his.

An employee is in the middle of getting grilled by one very captivated member of the audience
when he tries to feed a shark when Klaus approaches him with the largest, smuggest grin that Diego’s possibly ever seen and it’s a relief to know that there’s something about the Omega he isn’t instantly enamoured with.

_Liar._

“Can I call it or what.” Klaus angles closer to talk quiet enough that they aren’t interrupting the poor teenager trying to resume the feeding around a volley of questions.

“Possibly.” He simply answers.

The Omega’s pout shouldn’t have his brain turning hazy, but there it was. “I’m a genius thank you very much.”

“Being a know it all isn’t a good look.”

Klaus grins, flushes, and then stretches closer to mutter, “I look good in anything and don’t you forget it, you’re practically in the presence of a national treasure here.”

Diego refuses to be drawn down this path, at least in a public space with his brother standing just out of hearing. But he’s also weak, very fucking weak. “I would’ve said regional trinket at best.”

Klaus’ outraged gasp has him stifling a laugh. “I’m mortally wounded right now.”

“No, you’re fishing for compliments and failing.” From the quiet sigh Diego knows he’s hit the nail on the head.

“Seriously, look, right here,” Klaus flutters a hand over his chest, “you’re cruelty’s maimed my delicate heart.”

Before he can respond Klaus’ hand drops back down, lands against Diego’s and with no fanfare Klaus links them together effortlessly.

Diego feels it deserves a little recognition that his fingers have more intimacy inside of Klaus than anywhere else, so this innocent touch is a new thing altogether. Not that he’s complaining, far from it, but it’s worth noting he thinks.

“Don’t forget who’s the perfect one here.” Klaus grins and Diego’s knee jerk reaction is to refute everything and anything. He’s a prick like that.

But he doesn’t simply because Diego meant it, has no reservations over letting Klaus know it, even if he wishes now that he’d managed to fucking stay awake at the time.

The gradual slope of the floor allows him an inch over the Omega, factor in the darkened room and Klaus having to tilt his head up and Diego wants to kiss him again. Klaus looks so happy, and Diego can’t give a fuck about fake things and pretences and fucking Gena. Five’s furiously taking notes and what looks suspiciously like a scratchy drawing of one of the smaller fishes whilst the employees left free to continue his scripted talk to the rest of the group. Diego’s not really thinking when he pulls Klaus closer. Pulls him until he’s brushing his mouth over the Omega’s cheek and selfishly feeling satisfied when the skin turns a furious red.

Klaus’ face, when Diego leans back, is unreadable, the hand clenching his tightens for a second before releasing it’s grip. “Don’t play with me Diego. No fake shit.”

Diego can’t reply because Klaus is gone, joining Five as he goes to walk down a tunnel made
entirely of what seems to be reinforced glass, and there’s a hollow ache in his side, an outline where Klaus fit perfectly just a moment beforehand.

He’s not entirely sure how what he’s done wrong, but if Klaus feels anything like Diego did then, frustrated at the false displays and pretences, then it would stand to reason that the answers just as simple as it was the other night.

*Look at you working things out like an adult.*

He catches up to them and Klaus is tilting his head back, Five’s only a few feet further down, and his brother will deny it but his nose is barely an inch from the glass. It’s ridiculously busy but then that works in his favour when he reaches out to place his hand at the small of Klaus’ back and nobody pays them attention.

“No fake shit.” He promises, or tries to because if he doesn’t have a clue what the rules are then he can’t quite play the game. But the line has long since been crossed and if he’s learning anything then it’s to let things fall as they may.

Klaus is silent and Diego’ only got half of his attention, the other is solely focused on Five, a habit developed from dealing with a whole class of children. Which is probably why he jolts when Diego grabs his hand again, lets out a quiet ‘oh’ and then flushes violently.

There’s a comparison that Diego’s started to make, or is it a hypothesis? Either way he thinks that Klaus is very much like Five, not in all ways, not even in that many, but both seemed to have this… understanding, of a stern hand. But with soft touches, emotions or otherwise neither seemed to know quite how to accept that kindness. Not that Diego’s going to pretend he truly understands many things in the world, however he doesn’t turn scarlet at the slightest touch.

*No, you turn into a drooling mess.*

He can smell Klaus’ happiness, a balm across wounds that he wasn’t even aware of, lightening of a pressure new and old, and even when Five rejoins them he makes no move to let go.

His brother takes a long look at their linked fingers, clogs audibly whirring before he levels Diego with a fierce glare. “I will not be holding your hand,” then when Klaus is stifling a giggle Five adds, “nor will I do so with you.”

And that is that.

Five still monopolises Klaus’ attention, demands it in some cases, however Diego’s attached to the Omega and therefore very much a part of their odd little group. Watching Klaus’ face light up each time Five defers to him with a question, his patience in answering, honest when he doesn’t know the answer and then helping Five make a list, what a surprise, of things to check when they get home.

Klaus, though Diego’s known this from the very beginning, is a teacher. A really fucking good one.

Five, and this isn’t a new concept, is a clever little shit.

And he… well they both seem to like having him around so Diego’s pretty sure that he has something of worth to give.

When they finally leave it’s with a small ceramic - heaven forbid it’d be a soft toy - octopus that Five chose after much deliberation from the overpriced gift shop, and Diego correctly keeps his
thoughts, that the thing looks evil, to himself.

Especially when he catches his brother stroking a finger along the coloured surface with a look that’s bordering on fond but doesn’t quite make it.

“What did you think?” Klaus asks casually, leaning back in his seat to stretch his legs out and Diego thinks that if he’s seen the Omega naked then there’s no shame in ogling now.

Five’s staring at the octopus in his hand when he mutters, “It was unimpressive.”

Klaus snorts, very attractively - Diego’s obviously unbiased in this opinion - and clicks his seat belt in. “I’m so sorry, we’ll never go again.”

“Now I didn’t say I wanted that.” Five narrows his eyes.

“That’s what I thought, now is it that hard for either of you to say ‘wow Klaus you’re so incredibly clever and always right and we’re so damn lucky to have you’.”

Diego cranes his head back to look at Five.

Five raises a brow at him.

“Wow Klaus you’re so incredibly clever and always right and we’re so damn lucky to have you.” They deliver drily, and kudos to Five because he even commits to the curse.

Klaus for his part flutters his lashes and simpers. “Wonderful, slightly sarcastic, but I feel truly cherished.”

Everyone, and Diego means everyone, needed a Klaus in their life. He consider this as he starts the car and listens to Five contemplate food.

“I would like Kung pao chicken.”

“Thought you were fed up of Chinese?” Diego asks.

“I feel nostalgic,” Five says, “Mr… Klaus will you be joining us?”

The Omega looks across the console, seems to realise that Diego’s never going to object to any activity that extends their time together and nods so fast his curls bounce. “Definitely, I love Chinese.”

Which, Diego thinks and Five voices, is the understatement of the century when they get home and watch as Klaus demolishes his way through a buffets worth of food and then eyes theirs when he’s finished. Though protesting, and like it’s the most magnanimous act ever bestowed, Five does generously share a prawn cracker.

Just one.

Klaus heaps so much praise on his brother that by the time he stops Five’s head is ducked low to hide a twisted smile.

However when Klaus turns optimistically, Diego takes a small bit of pleasure in watching the Omega pout while he defends his plate.

“You’re an unbelievably cruel man.”
“I know sweetheart.”

Klaus coughs abruptly on nothing but air, and Diego really needs to utilise the word more often. A moment later a hand finds his and Diego knows he’s forgiven for his transgressions when the Omega snootily replies.

"I'm a perfect sweetheart."
Chapter 11

How was your weekend?

Delores sits down opposite him and Five places the piece of paper he’s currently deploying as a bookmark between the pages so he doesn’t lose his place.

“Interesting, yours?”

Interesting.

Five doesn’t smile but it’s close and only prevented by the spy a slip of brightly coloured construction paper clenched in her hand that she proceeds to carefully smooth on the table. It looks suspiciously like a copy of the one Mr - they’re at school now - Klaus is helping a classmate to stick up on the wall, advertising what seems to be a school production that he has absolutely no interest in.

It’s always fun.

“I’m sure it is, I’ll make sure to cheer you on from the sidelines.”

That’s a generous gesture he feels, however Delores doesn’t look entirely happy and Five’s too intelligent not to recognise that there’s a pattern developing where she suggests something and despite his adamant nature he eventually capitulates.

Thus the graphic novel he’s sliding his book aside to make room for.

We could-

“No.” He tries to emulate the lowest, firmest tone.

Delores does that singular brow raise and Five sets his jaw.

You wouldn’t have to sing, not everyone likes to.

Good lord.

“I’m not doing it, now where were we.”

Delores is rather quiet as she opens the book to start, however it’s not truly worrisome until he realises that she’s building up to something and he’s left through the first class of the day until they’re supposed to be joining in with an ongoing science project that the others are working. Mr Klaus doesn’t bug them as he does with the others, if only that Five will complete it closer to the time and it’s a given now that Delores will join him.

If you won’t do the play with me, will you do something else?

There it was.

Five considers her for a moment, the unusual twisting of her hands in her skirt that he’s recently come to realise is from nerves and he feels a knot in his chest at being the unintentional cause of it. So he doesn’t specify just nods and gives what he thinks is a soft look, mouth tilting up, eyes wider than usual and those light freckles stand out as she considers him in amusement.
Will you come over for Dinner? Tonight.

Well that was a lot less than he was expecting. “Of course, I can’t see any reason not to.”

He’s rewarded with a brilliant smile for the rest of the morning and despite his occasional sighs nothing seems to dim her mood, not even when he instructs her to wait by the playground while he goes to let Diego know what’s happening. He can feel it searing into his back and it’s unsettling to be the reason behind such a joyful expression, not when he can’t understand how his actions have led him there.

Diego’s waiting in his car like usual and Five discovers that it’s quite a pleasant feeling to be able to inform the Alpha that he has plans for the evening.

“Don’t you want me to check that they won’t kill you?” Diego throws out there with a grin.

“I’m quite sure that if they were the type then our care of their daughter the other day would grant me clemency from their murderous ways.”

“Well don’t blame me if you die.”

“At least it will be an easy job for you.” Five pulls from memory.

“Just behave yourself, looks bad on me otherwise.”

Five can’t help but roll his eyes and Diego’s laughter follows him all the way to where Delores waits patiently for him.

“Don’t ask.”

She answers him with a wry smile and Five decides that as this is a day of smiling pointlessly he indulges in answering with one of his own.

Monday nights are hands down, no questions asked, the best. Klaus decreed it a long time back and so far each week they’ve not yet failed him.

He’s curling up with his feet firmly wedged on Ben’s lap, head tucked over Allison’s toned stomach, and normally this would be enough that he’d be near purring in contentment. Klaus swears this isn’t an entirely selfish act, they fall into these roles so naturally and Klaus knows inherently when the Alpha’s had a foul day, when she needs to fuss over someone to ease the snarl and bite within her.

If it means he gets this pampering and protective edge then it’s an unintentional bonus he’s learnt to live with.

There’s two glasses of wine balanced precariously on Ben’s tiny table, Klaus doesn’t even mind that his is predominantly soda with the tiniest sliver of white that makes the worlds weakest spritzer. It’s like Ben points out each time he pours it, it’s the thought that counts and Klaus savours his single drink every week before buckling down again.

Allison offloads about whatever idiots annoyed her on their latest case, Ben works - plays games -
and Klaus mixes it up depending on the mood, this evening it’s trying to think up more exciting, intelligent plans for his class, although for rather obvious reasons he’s a little partial towards Five, he can’t help but feel that he’s been slacking with his other students recently. It’s not really their fault that Klaus doesn’t want to fuck their family members so he should probably pull his head out of his derrière and focus.

Allison’s fingers dig into his scalp perfectly and he stretches out further like a tired cat. “We’ll get it out of you at some point,” Klaus’ confusion must be showing but she continues as if he probably hasn’t been accidentally ignoring her, “this mystery man of yours.” She says it like a promise and Klaus doesn’t doubt it for a moment.

He rather loves Allison, in the way that any friend deeply adores another in too short a space of time, but fuck if his favourite girl in the world can’t effortlessly unravel his secrets with a few choice words and a disapproving glare if he isn’t paying close attention.

“Let him have his moment.” Ben helpfully sticks up for him.

“Don’t tell me you’re not curious.” Allison huffs although she does scratch right behind his ear how he likes it.

“Of course I am, when we find out who he… or she?” Ben’s character dies again and he grumbles endearingly before looking at them.

“He.” Klaus confirms.

“Well I’ll interrogate him then.”

“Oh Benny boy, are you going to defend my honour.” Klaus grins.

The Beta considers for a moment. “I’ll be the moral support behind Allison.”

“Why do I have to be the heavy lifter in this friendship?” Allison protests weakly as if she doesn’t thrive on Klaus’ need for her.

“Because you’re the best?”

“Of course I am.”

“Look I’ll have you both know I’m being seriously careful, think super slow and steady.” Klaus says and it doesn’t have the calming effect he means it to.

“Poor thing, you’ve only got one ace up your sleeve and you haven’t been able to use it.” Ben’s probably aiming for sincerity, but he’s about as subtle as Klaus’ dress sense.

“Don’t act so high and mighty, I’m perfectly charming thank you very much.”

“That’s one way to put it.”

“I was voted prettiest smile every year in high school don’t forget.”

“Only because they were too nice to nice to point out what they where really looking.”

Klaus lifts a single digit before attempting with his kinder friend. “You’d date me wouldn’t you babe?”.

Allison snorts, picks up her tumbler of scotch, sloshing it before taking a considerate drink. Klaus
hasn’t quite worked out yet if she genuinely likes the stuff or it’s just a habit picked up from blending in with the idiots at her firm. “If you were my sort of guy, and I hadn’t seen you with your head down the toilet too many times to count, and you hadn’t put out… then still no. Also stop changing the subject pretty boy.”

Klaus pouts rather spectacularly and rolls so his backs to her but not enough she can’t keep up her ministrations. No point in them both being punished.

But there’s this strange spark of irritation that he smoothers immediately, they’ve been his support network for a long time, his need for their guidance never questioned until recently. So how can he blame Allison’s nosiness when the last time he’d taken an interest in a guy - bastard - she’d stood in his apartment doorway at two in the morning threatening his ex with furious punishment, legal and otherwise. And how can he blame Ben who’d curled around Klaus while he cowered in the bathroom, carefully dabbing away the flecks of blood until he looked human again.

The three of them, for want of a primitive word, are a pack. And Klaus’ decided to bring a new dynamic in on the sly without trusting either of them with even a scrap of information.

He must look put out more than anything because Ben give his knee a reassuring squeeze. “If you’re so in love then why are you sticking around with us lonely stooges.”

Klaus hears the invitation to abandon them loud and clear and he’s rather touched by the offering, though he can’t exactly admit that he hasn’t a clue how to go about seeing Diego next.

What were the rules after bamboozling a social worker, do they unite on the big fronts and have nothing in between? ‘Hey, glad we dealt with that nightmare, now we’ll just see each other at the big events, weddings and funerals, maybe you call me when you adopt a fucking goldfish.’

He doesn’t want that, not after a glimpse of what he could have, but whether Diego sees it in that way is another thing. Klaus can’t imagine how to begin such a conversation, not when he’s sure that they’ve already set a murky line.

Though if he so happened to use Five as the starting point, an opening to dive off, then he’d at least have a valid reason to fall back on if he’s rejected.

He fishes for his handbag where he’d thrown it and through a mass of lipsticks, perfume bottles and questionable items, locates his phone and waves a defensive hand when Allison teasingly tries to swipe it.

(17:52) Did you know Five spent the morning lecturing a group of children about the correct pronunciation for most of the fish we saw.

(17:53) Not surprised, he’ll probably spend the next week doing it, probably aiming for your job.

Maybe it’s optimism blooming to this immediate response like it’s been eagerly awaited and not Diego being conveniently around at the perfect time.

(17:54) He had a great time.

(17:54) Thanks for that.

Klaus grins at his phone and deliberately pushes his shoulder back into Allison’s stomach when she tries to reach around for it again.

“Don’t push it.” She murmurs and Klaus accepts the gentle warning tug on one of his curls,
stretches his neck out in supplication, smiling at her exasperated sigh. “And don’t be so dramatic.”

Klaus tilts further and blows her kiss as he types out his reply.

**17:56** *Told you so. He seems to be getting on with a few of the other students as well.*

It’s not exactly a lie, but it feels like it’d be wrong to truly gossip about any of his children with an outsider, and although Klaus can’t say he’s being professional right now it feels good to set at least a basic standard for himself.

**17:57** Doubt that, but his friend invited him around for the evening. Surprisingly quiet when he’s not here being the boss.

*Excuse me.*

Is Diego fucking kidding him, genuinely is the Alpha that ridiculously obtuse that he doesn’t realise what an opportunity he’s being given. Klaus stares at his phone for a full moment, mouth agape and Ben looks at him in concern.

“You alright?”

“Yeah, just dealing with someone that may be sillier than me.”

Allison lets out a low whistle. “That’s not possible, the world would implode.”

“I know.” He mutters, still staring at the screen and Ben goes back to his game.

**18:06** *So you’re alone?*

**18:06** Yeah.

Deity in the sky give him fucking strength.

**18:06** *No Five to worry about?*

**18:06** Obviously.

Klaus is considering bashing his head against the wall when his phone does a little shimmy in his palm as it announces a flurry of messages.

**18:07** Shit!

**18:07** Didn’t think.

**18:07** Wanna come over?

It feels like that time that he and Ben won the ring toss at one of the travelling fairs and there was a synthetic show of gaudy lights and sirens to make them feel like champions. Completely stupid and an obvious way to trick them into having another go, but they’d both grinned like the teenagers they’d never been. This is close to that, a victory that’s entirely Klaus’ even if it’s a casual invitation and he’d had to prod and poke a little to receive it.

“Right darlings, one has a date.” He announces brightly, sliding with little grace off of the couch before bouncing to his feet.
“Can we expect you back before midnight princess?” Ben says.

“If you don’t see a glass slipper then probably not,” Klaus knows the unspoken conduct that’s expected and adds, “don’t worry if I need an escort I’ll call.”

Allison lets out a growl that’s entirely put on but still sets the hairs at the nape of his neck rising. “If mystery man doesn’t get you home safe then-”

“You’ll defend my honour Ally baby.”

“Always, now go enjoy.”

Klaus presses a kiss to both their cheeks and bolts to the sound of exaggerated retching, detouring down a level to his apartment, for armour so to speak. From experience he knows that good sex isn’t synonymous with it being dark and Klaus is certain that it’s still going to be light before he gets what he wants so he’d like this little boost of courage is much needed.

It’s probably presumptuous to assume that’s what’s happening, but where Diego seems to falter Klaus will have to take charge. Lay it on the line and make his stance clear through the only medium he’s good - fucking amazing - at.

*Be brave.*

Klaus knows precisely what he’s going to do, and it’s with a hastily stacked tower of confidence that he starts rummaging through his wardrobe. Not for anything too forward, those sort of things needed to be built up to, and Klaus, no matter what Ben says, definitely has more than a few cards in his deck to play. But for now he’ll settle for something more impressive than his daily wear.

**(18.16) I’ll be there in twenty minutes.**

What is the etiquette of meeting a friends parents, Five isn't entirely sure if he’s being honest with himself, and it’s the not knowing part that’s leaving him unnerved, even more so when he's climbing into the back seat of what’s effectively a strangers car. His nonchalance to Diego feels woefully inadequate now he hasn’t got the Alpha reassuringly covering his back.

That and he’s still feeling less than kind toward Delores’ mother.

But he shan’t hold it against her. If she behaves. But one comment or snide remark and he won’t refrain from defending Diego.

Five startles, unaware of how he’s come to this point that he’s so invested in his stepbrother that he’d turn hostile to the smallest slight against him.

However it’s a driver that picks them up and although technically he assumes this should be a cause for more alarm Five relaxes in the knowledge that he has a moment longer to prepare himself for meeting Delores’ parents and maybe it’s this distraction that prevents him from realising that they’ve stopped, or where they’ve pulled up in front of until it’s far too late.

They have a house. A big one. A large, imposing, gated property that looms over him, blocking out the sunlight. This is *bad.*
Five can’t make his feet move towards the gates, planting himself firmly on the sidewalk, heart tearing along like he’s about to pass out and he. Just. Can’t.

Delores is in front of him and he can’t interpret what she’s trying to say to him, not even when her lips move exaggeratedly, black spots swimming across his vision as it blurs from how quickly his eyes are darting back and forth seeking an escape.

He knows the layout, through the entrance hall, along the corridor, third door on your left, sixteen steps down and there. He can perfectly recite it, will never forget and there’s a coiling, constricting weight in his stomach that churns up acid.

Five.

It’s spelled out over and over again on the back of his hand, his arm, and he’s replying something that could be ‘I’m fine stop fussing’ but then equally it could be ‘don’t touch me, please don’t touch me.’ He tries to catalogue the symptoms, the merciless way his knees feel like they’ll buckle and his whole body wants to sink to the floor, no, through it.

What a display, he’s conscious of each ragged breath as Delores’ mother comes into view, looks at them and from some cue from her daughter waits for them in the doorway. Five can see her mother anxiously wringing her hands and he wants to demand she wipes the sympathetic expression from her face but if he opens his mouth he might truly be sick.

Garden? Delores spells slowly to make sure he’s got it and he takes a moment to trying to force his limbs into cooperation before nodding and following her gentle hands as she guides him around the side of the building, pausing only at the sight of another gate.

“Here.” Delores’ mother must have joined them, extending a flat palm out to show him a key before tipping it into his. “Just make sure we get it back.”

Five doesn’t want to feel the slightest bit of warmth from her but he’s desperately grateful, appreciative that he’s taken to the far end of the garden and shown into a reclining chair, he’s trying to focus his breathing on the steady thump of Delores’ pulse under his shaking fingers.

“Thank you.” He eventually mutters.

Delores shrugs as if it wasn’t an incredibly understanding act from a fellow child. We’re even now.

“You never said you came from money.” He says disjointedly.

Because that would be common.

If he were more curious he might ask why she doesn’t attend a private school but frankly he can’t put together the words properly and he’s also caught up in wondering if this whole thing means that he now equally belongs to her in the eyes of their peers but that’s a thought for another day.

“How did you know what to do?”

My brother has panic attacks.

Five’s about to snap that he suffers from no such thing until he realises that she’s no longer touching his skin and he can understand her perfectly once more, it’s relieving in a way that he doesn’t expect, intense and overwhelming.
He takes the quiet that follows as a time to fortify himself, observing the substantial outdoor space and trying to calculate just how much money such a property would cost. He weighs up the value of his friend and tries to see if there’s any change in his opinion with this new revelation, pleased to find that no, he doesn’t care in the slightest.

In the end Mrs Filer, and no he will not be calling her Helen as she tries to offer- there’s been enough familiarity between himself and adults recently - beckons him to try a slice of bread from the loaf cooling on the garden table.

“I’ve never had any, Diego’s not particularly apt in the kitchen.” It’s not a lie, although he doesn’t mention that he’s grown fond of the less than desirable creations presented to him most evenings. That and he really wants to get it out in the open now, any hostility or criticism so he knows where he stands.

Her face tightens in judgement that she’s clearly struggling not to voice.

Do it.

Five’s far too antagonistic, it’s a little worrying really, and when Mrs Filer offers him a slice like a peace offering he takes it gratefully.

“If you’d like I could show you how to make it.”

It’s an invitation inside and Five takes a cautious scan of the large doors that she’s pushing open, marking up the obvious points of escape and the way she’s angling everything nearest to those. He doesn’t like the idea that somebody can be both judgemental and understanding at the same time and yet there seems a point to make. Not for Delores or anyone else but himself, a way to prove right now that Reginald hasn’t damaged him irreparably.

So Five draws himself to his full height, clutches the key so tightly the teeth dig into his palm before he imagines that he’s his thick headed, stubborn, brave stepbrother and marches into the house.

Diego would normally perform the hasty pre hook up clean that he’d always done, but there’s nothing to fucking tidy away, the apartments immaculate to Five’ precious standards and although it’s never bothered him Diego’s suddenly resentful.

He needs a distraction, anything to stop from glaring at the time on his phone and counting each fucking second until the Omega arrives. He’s thrown about the idea that Klaus may be coming to talk, to try and help Diego hack through this mess that they’re ensnared in, but somehow he can’t see that happening.

He hears the knock at eighteen minutes.

Klaus is fucking spectacular.

He’s barely calling out that it’s unlocked when Klaus steps in, places his handbag on the floor and blindly feels behind him to slide the lock into place.

It’s almost anticlimactic when Diego sees the sagging sweater, sleeves rolled up to his elbows,
pleated skirt almost skimming the floor and although the sight is still enough that he’s bubbling over, somehow the implication of something else feels confusing.

But Klaus is already grinning, slipping his flats off, fingers tracing along the hemline and deftly pushing the material down until there’s only a dark sheen covering his legs and Diego’s attention snags on the stockings revealed, the hint of lace when Klaus stretches his arms up to pull the sweater over his head, and the…

All of the moisture wicks out of his mouth.

“Klaus, fuck.” He breathes.

“That was my intention.”

Klaus generously gives him a moment to take it in, stands patiently like someone who knows that they look fucking beautiful and wants to be admired for it, a brow raised but teasing. Thin straps holding up a gold bra, layered in a shimmering lace, connected to a sheer gauzy material down that stopped just shy of his panties. It’s not underwear that’s designed for a male body, loose in certain places and Klaus looks breathtaking.

“Not the most exciting but I thought we’d leave that until there’s enough time to enjoy properly.”

Diego registers this, he does, a part of his brain storing the implications somewhere safe, though he gets tangled in a quick imagining of what else the Omega could have hidden away.

“Yes?” There’s a slight hesitation as if he’s someone that’s been deprived this basic right in the past and can’t bear the thought of doing it to another.

Diego nods dumbly, aware that touching Klaus at all holds this chance that things will spiral out of control.

Klaus smiles, glowing in his pretty lingerie, then he’s moving with the sort of intent that shows he’s not here to pass pleasantries or settle his needs with some casual groping. Klaus is on a fucking mission and Diego just about remembers to do his part in time as he catches the Omega.

His hands splay across the curve of Klaus’ ribcage, material bunching under his touch, thoughtlessly lifting him up and Klaus, again showing how fucking perfect he is, wordlessly wraps his legs around Diego’s waist, heels digging into the small of his back. Then Klaus is kissing him like they weren’t in his bed less than a week ago, which fuck that feels like it’s too long, and also a good place to be turning to now.

It’s hard to concentrate on getting them safely there when Klaus’ hands are determined to take up their seemingly favourite spot under his shirt. He’s about to press them both down into the covers when with another flash fire burst of speed he’s being rolled until he’s weighted down with Klaus wriggling comfortably in his lap, pausing to take in the bed itself.

The Omega inhales slowly, grins with far too much teeth and pride.

“Shut up.” Diego warns, pushing up onto his elbows, he doesn’t need to be reminded that he’s not changed the sheets with Klaus’ scent on them, it’s fucking embarrassing enough as it is.

Klaus refrains from talking and instead slender hands ruck the back of his shirt up, sliding against his bare skin and Diego decides it’s only fucking fair that he gets to return the favour. He traces a finger along the lacy edge of those panties, transfixed by the way Klaus drops away from a determined focus and into this trembling, panting mess. He’s vulnerable suddenly, and Diego’s
certain that he was onto something the other day, sure that right now Klaus could be shattered with sweet nothings and a few fingers.

Not that Diego’s going to do that, it’s just a thought for another day. He can feel feels Klaus’ breath on his neck, warm and wet as he pants, and he can’t help but trying a part of his theory. Leaning forward slowly and nosing along Klaus’ jaw, canines sinking in a small ways, before he comes down to the quivering skin above Klaus’ bra. “You look beautiful.” He hums approvingly.

Gold and furious red are complimentary he thinks when Klaus blushes, and Diego can feel the outline of his cock pressing against his panties. He decides immediately and with a whole lot of conviction, that teasing Klaus is his new way to pass the time.

“How many times,” he muses, feeling along the cup of Klaus’ bra, “do you think I can make you come before I fuck you?”

Klaus looks down at him in horror, delight, reverence, it’s an intoxicating mixture. “Don’t you dare.”

“Another time.” The lace around his chest is too loose and Diego slips a hand to cup over the material, thumb brushing a peaked nipple and he’s rewarded with a low whine. He dips his head and puts his mouth to Klaus’ chest, pressing the flat of his tongue against the raised nub.

Klaus’ clings to him in an unsteady, clenching hold, and Diego can feel every shiver running through the Omega’s body, the shaky rise and fall of his chest as he draws in each shuddering breath. Diego gets a little lost in it honestly, hard not to when Klaus reacts so vividly, so beautifully to simply getting touched like this and it’s like a prelude, a glimpse into how wonderfully desperate Klaus must be during his heat. Diego peppers in a few praises, endearments, and the puffs of air as he exhales seems to do just as much as the sweetness and it’s only when Klaus’ grip turns harsh, too close to the wire that he reluctantly pulls back.

“D-don’t waste time.”

As a person who’s childhood was sullied by the choked vowels and consonants that dictated his ability to communicate comfortably, Diego’s suddenly, overwhelmingly fond of the white knuckled grip Klaus has on his hair, the glazed eyes and quivering bottom lip.

He still tries to aim for a put out expression. “If you’re that impatient,” fuck, he can smell how ready Klaus is, “then open yourself up.”

Klaus doesn’t hesitate, shimmying in his lap until his panties are hanging around a small ankle and Diego’s left transfixed as he reaches behind with no shame and sinks a finger inside himself, whimpering as he adds another. Green eyes drift shut, no nervous sighs or uncomfortable shifting as he moves, instead Klaus’ hips roll as he fucks himself on his fingers, curling his wrist as he obediently does as he’s told, so eager to please that it takes Diego’s breath away.

Though he tops it, because that seems to be his talent, and with his free hand Klaus catches Diego's and draws it to grasp the apple round cheeks of his ass, feel the tremors running through his skin like a live wire.

“Shit Klaus- Sweetheart-”

The timing perfectly aligns with Klaus moving on from his slow tease and pressing against his prostate, a keening whine slips from his lips, and Diego’s about to tell him to be quiet before he realises that they don’t have to, and the thoughts about as distracting as the way that Klaus’ ass
quivers in his hands.

Their hips are flush and Klaus is grinding forward into his thigh, pressing closer and his teeth graze against Diego’s jaw, a reminder of his previous actions and something pulls taut and tight inside of him. More roughly than the Omega deserves, but somehow earning another whispered litany of his name that has his dick so hard it fucking hurts, Diego encircles a small wrist and gently pulls him away.

_Fuck_, Klaus looks so beautiful, messy curls, wet mouth and bruised skin and he has no resolve when met with someone so obscenely responsive, and Diego’s harder than he’s ever been in his entire life, pressing a hand against Klaus’ flushed cheek and trying not to focus on the way the Omega leans desperately into his touch.

Klaus is hot and lax and tense and Diego knows he won’t stay upright, so although he’s going to miss the view he carefully twists until Klaus is sliding underneath him and chasing off his clothes with a speed and grace that belies the way his skin’s fizzling as he hooks Klaus’ stockings down and throwing them somewhere across the room.

“C’mon,” Klaus whines, sweat-damp hair mussing against the pillow, “fuck me.”

“Just give me a second,” Diego exhales, fumbling in his bedside table’s drawer, “I need-”

“-To hurry up.” Klaus stretches out supine, gold and pale and perfect.

Diego’s worries for a second that he might explode, it’s a possibility and he’s on Klaus before either of them can change their mind, hitching Klaus’ legs up higher, angling himself right. Giving a quiet warning, “yes?” because apparently his brain gives him this precise moment to remember Klaus’ face earlier with this one worded question.

But Klaus bares his teeth at him and, well, that settles that.

Diego sinks inside him, slow and steady with no pause and it’s… Klaus is, impossible to describe. Melting, throbbing heat and he barely registers that Klaus is gasping something that resembles his name, but Diego’s not fully aware of himself until his hips stutter against the Omega’s raised ass.

“Fuck Klaus.” He bites out.

“Finally.” It’s one word but Diego’s sure that he isn’t doing something properly if Klaus can snark back at him in this moment. He can see Klaus’ cock tapping against his abdomen with each shallow breath, smearing a wet mark across the silk of his lingerie and it’s with that in mind that he starts to move.

Diego pins Klaus to the bed by his wrists, almost bends him in half when he drives into him and nearly rocking him into the headboard with every thrust, egged on by the noises Klaus makes each time - high, breathless little moans and he only moves back against Diego, straining and desperate.

_Shit_, it’s good, and it’s not like Diego didn’t know that already, can’t feel it now with the way Klaus’ ass clings lovingly to him, but still… it’s _really_ good. He can’t put to word why, not even marginally when Klaus commands all of his attention, refuses to let Diego look away from the flushed skin of his chest as it rises and falls, air punching from his lungs in time to Diego’s pace.

Of course he’s aware of all the important pieces, his dick, Klaus’ tight wet heat, but unbelievably it comes second to the way Klaus turns into this shivering wreck when Diego hits that spot that makes him jerk like he’s hit with lightening from inside.
“Please,” Klaus begs, lashes wet and he’s so tight that Diego can’t think to demand more, but he gets it anyway, “Diego, ah, please.”

It’s enough when he’s already a hair trigger away from the edge, stubborn mulish determination keeping him from finishing before Klaus comes, and he can feel how close the Omega is, body thrumming underneath him. It’s a simple finish, hand wrapping around Klaus’ cock and Klaus is coming with a choked out sob, feverish skin burning to the touch.

There’s no rut controlling Diego’s body but he can feel the urge, a need to tie Klaus to him until they’re one person, and it’s only this fragment of awareness that they’re so perfectly alone now but not for long that controls his body for him. Maybe he’s growing sentimental, weak and old, but Diego wants to be able to savour every moment of that first without worrying about traumatising the only family he has left.

So he distracts himself by worrying his teeth into the low slope of Klaus’ shoulder, working his hips harder and Klaus’ shaky arms come up to wrap around his neck, baring his throat further and he’s coming with nothing more than Klaus’ nails cutting into his shoulders and his name panted wetly in that breathy voice.

Klaus’ grip tightens impressively, holding him through it in this possessive embrace while Diego’s orgasm wrecks him, left feeling drained and soothed by this perfect Omega. It’s overwhelming, it’s addictive, Diego wants more and it’s not worrying him that he might never stop wanting more.

He’s boneless and exhausted, but Klaus needs help cleaning so with a sincere reluctance he pulls away, just enough to lazily swipe his shirt off the floor because it seems fitting after Klaus ruined his last that this one also receives equal treatment as he peels Klaus’ lingerie off to help him clean up a little.

Even when he can see from the clock on the table that they’ve got enough time he’s almost hesitant in settling down again, don’t push, but Klaus is wriggling. Pulling the covers up over them both before lazy, shaking hands start rearranging the pillows underneath them until they’re encased by softness and their combined scent, like he’s instinctually trying to nest them down and Diego’s dick valiantly twitches in adoration.

“I take it we’re staying here then?” He tries to sound casual while he’s carefully pulled closer.

“For as long as we can.” Klaus sounds thrilled at the prospect of not having to move just yet.

“Good plan.” Diego confirms.

Klaus cranes his neck up from where his face rests pressed into Diego’s chest and gives a wholly satisfied smile. “All of my plans are amazing.”

“Nobody likes a know it all.”

“But they do like to fuck them.”

Diego will give Klaus that one.
seems that although the three of them never spoke about it, Klaus is to be a part of their lives now.

There are worse people in the world to be stuck with he supposes.

“How did it go buddy?” Diego looks flushed and Five absently reminds himself to check his stepbrother for flu symptoms in the morning if it persists.

“We made banana bread, had dinner and Delores insisted we read more of those graphic novels.”

Two out of three wasn’t a bad number to enjoy.

Plus he stayed in the house for a full two hours before it became too much again. Not that he has any intention of telling Diego any of this, it's an experience that feels personal, his to own.

“Riveting.”

It was one of those things he quite likes about his stepbrother, the way he could allow a single word instead of a thousand pointless ones.

But then Five’s speaking instead. “You’re eating pizza.”

A useless observation. What is wrong with him tonight?

“I was offered dinner but Diego can’t cook so I made the executive decision not to get food poisoning.” Klaus answers.

Five nods in sympathy, eyes up the saucepans piled in the sink.

“This one has pineapple on his.” Diego’s nose wrinkles in distaste.

“Don’t you start again.” Klaus crosses his arms. “It's not a weird choice.”

They both fall silent and Five realises that they’re waiting for him to weigh in. He takes a moment’s consideration. “Pineapple is one of the few ingredients that shouldn’t be on a pizza, however it does have a particular taste that’s quite palatable.”

“I think,” Klaus muses, “that he’s saying we’re both right.”

Diego shakes his head adamantly. “Doesn’t work like that, you’re the tie breaker buddy, we need you to decide.”

It seems the start of an argument that neither will win so Five changes the subject as he makes a beeline for the kitchen. “You should check your appearance before leaving Klaus.” He says, pulling the coffee jar out and scowling at his daily allowance, the pitiful remains that’ll brew barely a half cup.

“What do you mean?” Klaus’ hands run over his hair as if the wild curls can be tamed by a light petting.

Five fills the kettle before levelling the Omega an unimpressed stare. “You’re wearing your sweater back to front.”

Now Five is aware that it’s an embarrassing faux pas, however the horror in both of their faces seems a little over done even to his standards. He tell them as much before he scoops a large spoonful of coffee from the main jar into a mug when he thinks Diego’s looking the other way.
Five will never understand the people in his life, and if their ridiculous behaviour is catching then he’s most definitely better off.

“I saw that you didn’t sign up for the play.” Klaus seems to regain his composure quickest and then striking into another line of conversation.

“There’s a reason for that.” Five prepares for another battle on this subject and emerald eyes hold a lot less sway than steely flint ones so he should be fine.

“I was hoping Delores might get you interested, she was so excited.”

Diego seems to be watching Klaus’ despondent expression and Five wonders if he finds it to be equally ridiculous-

“Wait, you put her onto this?” He asks incredulously.

“Not entirely, she wanted to ask you to join in anyway and I only said that you might see the appeal if she suggested it.”

Five thinks that Klaus is being rather unprofessional and the Omega seems to also realise this by the sheepish smile he gives.

Five raises a hand and starts counting off facts like an amateur legal aid. “I wouldn’t be able to act to a sufficient level, I don’t get along with others,” Diego’s snort is allowed if only it helps his point, “I shan’t be able to resist educating others on their substandard performances, and it would ruin Delores’ experience if I were there, all of my classmates most likely.”

He means it to come across as uninterested, apathetic even, but they both look stricken as if his last point is to be taken seriously.

“Maybe you could help me direct our class?” Klaus says far too hoarsely.

“No, thank you.”

“What other talents do you have, there’s plenty of things I need help with.”

“Five knows how to sew. Mom taught him all sorts of tricks.” Diego clicks his fingers as if he’s a genius.

Five squints incredulously at the traitor he calls family.

“You do.” Klaus must have been sitting at an awkward angle because the simple act of clapping excitedly shouldn’t cause him to wince in such a way. “I’d love some help with everyone’s outfits.”

He scrambles for a reasonable excuse. “Isn’t the child’s family supposed to organise their attire.”

Klaus stiffly rearranges himself although his discomfort doesn’t seem to dim his enthusiasm. “Unfortunately not, there’s always quite a few parents that aren’t... actively involved.”

Five guesses from the thin line of Klaus’ mouth that there’s more to be said than just that but he leaves it alone in favour of listening to the chorus of pleases that the Omega takes up next.

“Please, pretty please, a hundred pleases, a trillion, billion-”

“Fine.” He spits out, feeling trapped in a corner but also not, like there’s a door behind him that he
can open to escape even though he’s not touched the handle, a likening to Mrs Filer’s gesture earlier. “I’ll do it on my terms though.”

“Thank you and you can do whatever you want.” Klaus hesitates as if he can read Five’s errant thoughts. “Within reason.”

Klaus suddenly looks like he wants to hug him and with that horrifying image in his mind Five beats a hasty retreat, pausing in the doorway to utter his final word on the subject.

“I’ll be the one to tell Delores so keep this to yourself for now.”

With that he slams the door shut with a satisfying whack, balances his coffee in one hand and pulls out the graphic novel safely stored under his bed before taking all of them into his nest and settling down for the night.
Klaus is under siege.

Well maybe that’s an overstatement, however he is nervously peering out from behind the stairwell doorway, eyeing up his apartment door and trying to calculate whether his nosy fucking friends will somehow manage to catch him this time. It’s not his fault - well not entirely - that he’s skipped another planned evening in. It’s just when he gets a text from the idiot that finally understands empty space equals good times, he can’t help but take advantage of it. Also he’s incredibly weak willed.

However it’s not Allison or Ben’s fault either, Klaus is the one that’s done the dirty in more ways than one and left the two people closest too him without a decent excuse. Again.

Really he should know better or at least remembered how this sort of behaviour used to typically result in bruises and blood and Ben’s gentle hands cleaning him up. So it most definitely shouldn’t be a surprise when he finally darts towards his door that the pair of them emerge from the elevator opposite, bickering lightly and then freezing when they catch sight of him.

Now Klaus is standing in the corridor, brain drawing an unhelpful blank as to why he might possibly look like he just got fucked other than that he actually got fucked.

Allison and Ben know him, and he knows them, and the three of them are looking equal shades of guilty. Klaus feels like a fraud because they’re smart enough to know the signs of an after-sex flush even when he can already see Allison’s nose scrunching in distaste at the come Klaus definitely didn’t clean off properly.

Though kudos to her that she keeps that little tidbit to herself, Klaus isn’t ashamed of himself, but the idea of Ben hearing that Klaus is still this gross, sweaty thing makes his stomach fizzle.

“You missed wine night.” Ben says, cautiously, apprehensively.

Shit, shit and shit again.

Not a normal night, but his favourite fucking night of the week and it flew out of his head at the first chance to jump Diego. Pitiful.

Allison, like the kind goddess she is, decides to take the blunt route. “We thought you might want some ice cream princess.”

*In case you’re broken.*

*In case you need us.*

Klaus is adept at reading the wonderfully kind intentions behind his friends gestures, a master at interpreting the silent words and even though he shouldn’t be, the kindness behind each action always takes his breath away.

“What sort of monster would say no to ice cream.” Though Klaus can’t reach his door without meeting them halfway and all he wants is to shower properly before Ben’s hopeful smile turns into
a sneer. Never mind that he’s not once in his life seen that sneer directed at him, it’s irrational but that’s how Klaus’ brain decides to work sometimes.

“A crazy one.” Allison takes the lead once more and moves until she’s slanting against his door, carton held up as if he’s weak enough that he’ll stumble into her arms for a single bite of chocolate chip. Which in his defence Klaus has only done once before. “So, are you going to let us in, or am I dragging this moping idiot back upstairs?”

“I don’t mope.” Ben shoots back.

“You kind of do.”

Klaus interrupts, only if that he can cut down the time that they’re standing in the bloody corridor. “Why don’t you guys give me thirty minutes and I’ll come up.” From the shifty glances exchanged Klaus knows what’s coming, it’s only to be expected, and yet he can’t help but feel a small kernel of resentment at them. In fact it’s quite tempting to shrug his cardigan down, expose his bare flesh and let them see that the worst he’s wearing is leftover bodily fluids and a smile.

“Klaus, are you sure that you’re…” Ben stops himself, lets the question trail off and this more than anything removes every last scrap of frustration and fills Klaus with the usual hit of love and affection.

“I’m fine Ben, promise.”

Allison can’t seem to help but ask though, not from a lack of trust but concern. “It’s not that we think mystery man is a bad one, more that he might do something stupid. He might not mean to-

“Diego knows everything about me thank you very much.” Klaus lies far too confidently.

He’s a fucker but he lets Allison reach out and put an arm around him, and bless her that she doesn’t recoil at the sweat still coating his skin. “Ignore me princess, I’m just jealous that I can’t come home looking like this.”

Klaus snorts, feels something in his chest loosen gradually. “You’re far too classy for that.”

“True, I’m spectacular enough that I’d probably end up looking like one of those movie stars instead.”

“The ones where they wake up with perfect makeup.” Ben hooks his skinny arm through Klaus’ and lets Klaus decide where they’re going, which Klaus decides is clearly to his where he can shower while they gossip.

“Exactly, I’d have been a brilliant movie star don’t you think.”

Not a question but Klaus nods enthusiastically, knocks the door open with his foot, leaves the pair on his couch and goes to clean the remnants of his evening off.

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Much, much later Klaus is stretching out in bed, after rearranging his throws not for the first time tonight, and he can’t fucking sleep. Cycling through too many thoughts and emotions and not
coming up with any decent answers to the questions his brain decides needs answering near midnight.

It shouldn’t be that much of a shock that his friends believe he might come home in the same state they’ve found him in countless times, just because Klaus knows the difference doesn’t make it clear for them. But Diego is different, the situations different, fuck, Klaus is different. He actually cares, like really fucking cares. Cares so much that all he wants now is to let Ben and Allison see that Klaus isn’t desperate and alone, but kind of, a little bit, in love.

It’s a knee jerk denial of such a thing that has him defiantly grabbing his phone from under the pillow - something Ben abhors enough to recite fire statistics to him once a month - and sending off a text.

(23:51) Could I ask you a favour?

(23:53) I owe you so many at this point it’s probably good if I start paying them off.

Immediate reply.

Klaus is worth an immediate reply.

He types, then deletes, then types his request again, unsure of why he’s getting nervous about a simple invitation. It’s not like he hasn’t gone on dates, hasn’t had dinner with countless men and he’s never faltered before.

This has gravitas, there’s never been an occasion where he’s felt comfortable enough to try and introduce anyone to Ben, at least officially.

(00:01) You don’t have to say yes.

(00:01) I mean feel free to say no.

(00:01) I won’t take offence.

Klaus doesn’t get a chance to press send on his next message before the screen lights up with the picture he’d sneakily taken the other morning, Diego’s head tucked into his pillow, face relaxed in sleep, the smooth curve of his shoulder above the covers and Klaus is definitely admiring his photography skills. So much so that he almost doesn’t swipe the answer button until it’s almost too late.

“Do I need to worry that you’ve got a body that needs hiding?” Diego sounds amused and warm and Klaus realises that he’d been bordering on losing to the rising wave of anxiety.

“Not tonight, although at least I know who to call in the future.”

“Not tonight, although at least I know who to call in the future.”

“Don’t bank on that, I’m not a dirty cop.”

Klaus almost joking back, wants to point out that he can pay in any way Diego wants, however he’s struggling to put together a simple request and it’s all rather pitiful.

“Anyway, what’s up?” Diego says conversationally as if Klaus hasn’t bothered him so late that it’s technically a new day.

“I have this favour I need to ask you about.” He pauses. A-fucking-gain.
“So I heard,” Diego’s grin is audible, Klaus swears it, “and are you going to tell me what it is?”

“I’m working on it.” He confesses.

“I’m not a mind reader sweetheart.”

Klaus’ voice drops, not entirely on purpose. “Thankfully, you don’t want to imagine the things I think about.”

It’s an invitation for Diego to take them down a tawdry path that allows Klaus to avoid his problem entirely. Maybe on a lesser human it would work but for all of his outright idiotic behaviour, at times Diego was exceptionally intuitive.

“I’m thinking it’s probably about discount glitter sales, but that’s not the reason you messaged me is it.”

“No,” Klaus glares at his phone for a moment, frustration itching under his skin and making his toes curl at his own inadequacy that he can’t even put together a simple request, “it’s to do with my friends.”

Unlike so many of the men that Klaus has known, the shift of attention doesn’t make Diego irritable, if anything there’s an encouraging sound echoing through the phones speakers and Klaus uses it to boost his flailing confidence.

“They’re special to me and obviously I haven’t been that truthful with them recently, and I don’t want to tell them everything but I was thinking that maybe, possibly…”

Fuck, shit, bollocks.

And every other cuss that Klaus can think of. It shouldn’t be this hard when he’s sober, it just shouldn’t. Wasn’t the almighty one in the sky meant to smile at good little Omega’s that turned their lives around, if so why the hell is Klaus struggling this badly.

Then, as if for the first time since their situation began, Diego works it out before he does. “Do you want me to meet them?”

“Yes!” Klaus blurts out, face hot, voice thready where he’s so wound up that this little bit of help has allowed everything to just slow down and now he can’t speak properly.

“No problem, just tell me what you want me to do and I’ll do it.”

He must let out a startled noise because Diego’s responding laughter warms his skin and Klaus sinks back further into his sheets to join in.

Delores is painting.

Five is watching with apprehension because the brush in her hand keeps coming dangerously close to swiping his arm or the script he’s reading. After another near miss he can’t help but snap.

“If you catch me with that I’ll-”
Delores looks up at him expectantly.

“Just stop messing about and finish painting your tree.” He grumbles.

**You’re in a bad mood.**

He most certainly is not.

**You are.**

Any doubts that Five has kept in regards to Delores’ ability to read minds are starting to be assuaged despite the obvious illogical implications. The thing is that he’s, for want of a better word, overwhelmed. It’s started to feel like everyone’s determined to push him recently. *Here Five, take a step up the ladder and then the second you do we’ll pull the last rung out so you’re stuck.* There’s too many things lined up, his birthday falls the day before the play and so far he’s left completely unmoored by everything hanging so precariously around him.

Well that’s not entirely true, he’s been held together by Diego and that’s been enough so far and Five suspects it will have to continue being enough.

Delores’ brush waves suspiciously close to his face before pointing across the room. **Look.**

The boy looks nervous, cheeks ruddy and splotched as he stares at a piece of paper and Five wants to wave his hand at the child, sternly tell him to shoo as he aimlessly drifts closer. He’s about to ask what precisely is he meant to be observing when Delores comes out with a ludicrous notion.

**You should help him.**

“Why on earth would I do that?”

**Because it’s kind.**

If Five were his stepbrother he’d have a particular choice of words to apply right now, instead he’s aware of how this will end, him acquiescing and acting as if he has any vested interest in anybody in this room. Aside from Delores and at a push, primarily because of Diego, Mr Klaus.

Five can’t ignore her and there’s not been a rational reason as to why that he can work out. Really he should be able to decipher precisely why Delores manages to encourage him to act unnecessarily civil with those around him without vocalisation. It’s pointless to argue with her though, he won’t win and probably won’t try that hard to do so in the first place.

Five gives it a last shot anyway.

“No.”

**Be nice.**

“I don’t want to.”

**He’s scared.**

“So would I be if I couldn’t remember a few lines.”

**Now you’re being mean.**
“Honest.”

It earns him a small frown and Five starts to turn away but catches sight of the flummoxed child once more and somehow, like he knew she would, Delores has wormed her way into his head and he feels a guilty tint shroud his thoughts.

“I don’t want to do this.” He tries one last time and it’s shot down immediately. “I’m not feeling particularly fond of you right now.”

I know. She has the gall to smile before returning to her painting.

It’s only as he’s rising and making his way towards the boy, with very little haste that Five realises that he’s no longer climbing the ladder but instead veering dangerously into the territory of socialising. A reasonable explanation for the way his voice comes out at a lower pitch than he originally intends as he stops a healthy distance away, one that he quickly calculates as the perfect amount to prevent accidental touching.

“Hello.” He starts with and immediately regrets caving to his friends whims when the boy looks at him nervously. “What’s the matter with you?”

Whatever Five has done to deserve enduring the glistening eyes as they dart around as if seeking safety he doesn’t know. He suspects that it’s the rumours, the ‘epic’ showdown that he’s done nothing to dispel that adds to the naturally disapproving stare that he usually commands, combining those things together Five is aware that he doesn’t encourage comfort. Not that this has ever been an issue before, now though he’s frustratingly left trying to engage with another it’s more of a hindrance then he’d expected.

“What’s your name?” He tries again, dialling back the sharp edge by at least fifty percent.

The boy doesn’t seem to understand him for a long second and Five is about to write this encounter off, add it to the list of reasons why he doesn’t broaden his already too large friendship circle.

“How hard was that you snivelling creature?"

Five jolts at the venom, can feel his blood cooling and it’s so reminiscent of Sir Reginald that he rocks back on his heels much to the alarm of Henry and Klaus as he sidles into Five’s peripherals. Sir.

He hasn’t used that one in a while.

Interestingly it’s the title that both his and Diego’s father arrogantly donned.

Fear of a title is irrational, and unlike Diego, Five isn’t an irrational person. So he’s always forced out Reginald’s name, not in defiance of the man, for that would give a monster too much power. Instead Five uses the name as a means to belittle the monster, to take Reginald down from the pedestal and force his memory to become his own worst nightmare. Normality. To be so utterly and devastatingly mediocre, and Five will make his fathers memory platitudinous, so much so that the monster will end up as nothing more than a whispered afterthought.

And yet there are Reginald’s words twisting through his mind, snapping eagerly to be let out when he least expects it. Is Five irrevocably tainted by his early years? He’s shakes his head so quickly that Henry looks alarmed, as if Five’s going to hurt him and that pushes down his morose thoughts
and has him firmly holding out a metaphorical branch of peace.

“I’ve memorised the script already so I’ll help you practice.” A command. He’s not Reginald.

*Rewind. Try again.*

“If you’d like?”

Well, it’s an add on, not precisely a friendly entreaty like Diego would use, that was what he was aiming for. But Henry looks moderately less like he’s about to disintegrate and Klaus is retreating away as if Five’s no longer about to implode, something he has no ill will over because for a fraction of a second it felt like he might.

“Yes, please.”

It’s a timid agreement but results in Five spending the rest of the hour - the contents of the actual lesson plan he genuinely has no idea of - practising the same half dozen lines over and over again until Henry can fluently recite them back to him. It’s not particularly fun, nor can Five say he gained anything out of it, however by the end he feels an arbitrary sense of satisfaction and Henry gains a toothy smile.

Delores is looking particularly smug in Five’s opinion when he eventually glances over at her and as everyone’s decided to act irrationally today he can’t help but draw upon a particular scene, one with Klaus and Miss King and the euphoric rush he’d felt as his social worker had left that night which feels like it should be months ago not weeks considering how drastically everything’s changed.

Which is a polite way to say that Five pulls a face at her.

Then he startles himself, Henry and probably the whole classroom when a sound that’s partially chainsaw rough and scrapes on the way out from a lack of use, as he laughs when Delores sticks her tongue out in response.

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Diego is not prepared for this, not in the slightest, and yet he’s following the routine he used to apply regularly in his early twenties. Shower, trim scruff until presentable, root around in his wardrobe for something that makes it look like he’s put in effort and the only difference this time is the nine year old standing at the threshold of his room judging each item he picks out.

The thing is he hasn’t given much thought to meeting Klaus’ friends, as selfish and ignorant as that seems. With everything that’s been going on and the lack of any real clarity between them he never believed that Klaus would even want him to intrude on that vein of his life. But here they are and despite the prerequisite nerves that come hand in hand with such an occasion, Diego feels surprisingly honoured by Klaus’ trust.

“That’s the best it’s going to get,” he finally tells Five and after a calculating stare his brother nods, “So Vanya’s going to come downstairs, although her…” He trails off as his mind pulls up a blank slate.

“I think she called her a babushka.” Five supplies.
“Thanks, well her babushka invited you to their apartment for dinner if you’d like.”

Five mutters something that Diego can’t quite catch or he just wasn’t expecting anything other than an outright refusal to move, instead of taking umbrage Five shrugs, says “sure” and then follows Diego out ten minutes later, slowing only to grab his suitcase.

“There’s school tomorrow so I shall expect you back at a reasonable time.” Five reminds him as they climb up the stairs.

“Yes Mom.” Diego jokes, doesn’t think it through in the fucking slightest and then freezes mid step when he realises Five has fallen behind. “Shit Five, I’m sorry…”

His brother’s face scrunches, head ducking for a moment and Diego’s halfway to a full blown panic when Five lets out a heavy sigh. “I doubt I could wear Grace’s heels.”

“Or the dresses.” Diego says, cautiously.

“Probably not the skirts either.”

"You don't have the grace to pull them off."

"That pun was an atrocity and you should feel ashamed."

Five huffs out an unimpressed sound as he starts walking again and Diego falls into step beside him, hesitantly waiting in case there’s a fallout from his slip up but Five remains calm. Maybe Diego could call him sentimental even, because after the initial greetings Five pulls a script and a sketch pad from his suitcase and gathers around a dining room table with Vanya while Diego profusely thanks her babushka, an elderly woman who makes him miss a grandparent he’s never had.

He’s about to go out of the door when Five calls out, not bothering to stand up but still gracing - again, terrible pun - Diego with the nearest thing to a smile he seems comfortable with in company.

“Have a pleasant evening.”

“Oh, yeah, you too.”

It’s a normal exchange, one that millions of people must have had over the years and yet, very sadly, it’s the best thing that Diego’s heard in a long time.

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Klaus lives in a generic apartment building, although what Diego quite expected he isn’t sure, it’s a quiet area, not one that gets called out to too often and comfortably one he’s never had to visit yet.

Another thing he doesn’t expect is Klaus waiting for him just inside the main doors, pacing a trail into the carpet and when Diego breathes in, inhales down that intoxicating scent he can detect the slightly bitter tinge of his apprehension overlaying it.

“You’re here. Of course you would be, I mean you said you would come and you did and… now I’m rambling.” Klaus stops pacing, fingers twitching and he’s captivating in nothing more than his oversized grey sweater and leather lace ups. Diego doesn’t give much thought in reaching out and
pulling Klaus into his arms, letting out this contented sigh when the Omega collapses against him with a relieved whine. Diego’s aware of the way Klaus reacts so markedly to his touch, whether intentionally in a guise for Gena’s approval or now with nobody around them to witness. He’s been allowed some degree of power over the Omega and he’s not quite sure how he feels about it, other than a frisson of something tender and dangerous.

“’Course I’m here sweetheart,” now that there’s only pure Jasmine filling his senses it reminds Diego that he really should utilise that word more often, “I said I’d be here and I am.”

“Thank fuck for that,” Klaus shifts, a taut line slackening gradually until he’s mostly pliant, “you smell amazing.”

The compliments lost in Diego’s amusement when Klaus’ cold nose presses into his throat, a gesture that might be sweet if it wasn’t obvious what Klaus was aiming to do next. He carefully pulls back just as the little shit tries to drag his teeth down sensitive flesh. “Nice try, you can’t avoid this by jumping me.”

“You could at least give it a chance.” Klaus, to his credit, only pouts for a moment. “I thought you’d be weaker.”

“Try me any other time.”

“Noted.” Klaus leads him away from the elevator, manicured nails digging a shade too tightly to match his casual tone, “next time I’ll come to yours first and get naked. That’ll do the trick.”

It’s not until they’re halfway up the second flight of stairs, taken mainly he thinks for Klaus to try and work off the excessive energy that he’s imbued with, that Diego realises the Omega was waiting for him, required a moment before they did this to calm himself and needed Diego there to help. Klaus has a iron hold over his hand and when they stop in front of a door on the sixth floor and the Omega plasters himself to Diego’s side he takes a moment before rapping his free hand against the wood.

What, or who he quite expects to answer the door Diego isn’t sure, but it’s not the lanky man, hair dishevelled like it’s permanently stuck that way after numerous hands have run through it and a grin so wide and genuine it’s disarming that greets them.

“Hey, it’s nice to finally meet you, come in. I’m Ben.” the Beta looks over his shoulder as he steps aside. “Allison they’re here.”

“I need another minute.” A voice echoes from somewhere in the apartment and Diego swears that the Alpha’s scent drenches the air so potently that it’s cloying.

Ben leads them through an apartment that’s similar to his and Fives, the only difference being that this is clearly a home. A space filled with the usual knick-knacks and sentimental pieces accrued throughout a life and displayed proudly for all to see. Even the fucking couch had an assortment of misshapen cushions and throws that were well used, half burnt candles perched atop stacks of game cases and binders, next to framed photographs of a grinning trio. Its a stark difference to the bland apartment that Diego’s grown used to, if anything it feels shameful that Klaus goes from this warm, cherished place to his, and that’s not even thinking of Five.

His brother needs cleanliness but that doesn’t mean that it should border on clinical, a boy, even one as particular as Five, should have some claim at the very least on his room. There should be
shelves filled with the books he’s currently hiding under his bed or at least some sort of science…
stuff for him to enjoy.

Five should have some fucking science posters on the wall.

Diego’s caught up in this self realisation that he’s still under-performing as a brother when he
grows aware that Ben’s repeating a question and Klaus’ hand squeezes to get his attention.

“Would you like a drink Diego? We have some beer in the fridge.”

“No, thanks. I’ll have whatever Klaus has.” It seems the right decision given the approving nod
and he ends up hovering in the kitchen while Ben boils a kettle and prepares what looks like a
fragrant type of tea, free hand stirring something from one of the simmering pots on a small stove
top.

Diego’s calm, kind of. Relaxed, definitely not. But Klaus is talking with Ben in that quick, easy
manner of age old friends and Diego blows out a stream of air just in time before the
aforementioned Allison joins them.

And, well, fuck.

She’s sharp. Confident. An imposing, powerful figure that cuts straight past Diego to embrace
Klaus and when she pulls back there’s a raised brow at their still linked hands, before she reaches
for the glass of whiskey Ben holds out to her.

“Ally, this is Diego,” Klaus says, voice flat and he’s giving her a look that Diego recognises from
the amount of times he’s secretly flashed it at Five’s back over the last few months. The ‘please
don’t fucking’ start appeal that usually never works and Diego’s thinks it’s absurd that Klaus is
giving his friend such a look. Though considering the closest thing he has to a friend since moving
here is a toss up between his kid brother, the golden retriever that he calls a work partner or Patch,
his fucking boss.

Pathetic.

Allison swirls the contents of her glass for a moment to make them wait in one of those shitty
power moves that shouldn’t be so effective. “It’s nice to finally meet you.”

“Thanks, you too.” Which is most definitely a lie, and from her shrewd gaze the Alpha knows it
too.

Ben seems to be the peacemaker of the group, steering them out of the kitchen after checking his
cooking and into the living room with the ease of someone used to navigating tricky situations with
a serene expression. “So Diego, what do you do for a living?”

“I’m a detective.” He answers as Klaus has him sit on the couch before all but sitting himself down
on Diego's lap. In an effort to sell a tale to his friends or he really needs reassurance to remain calm
in front of Allison, Diego doesn't know but he won't lie that it's satisfying to see the woman's
nostrils flare in response.

“Like Sherlock Holmes.” Ben says, a wide grin spreading over his face.

“Only without a British accent.” Klaus flutters his lashes with a high pitched giggle.

“Local, private or state?” Allison ignores them both, sole focus seemingly on appearing cool, aloof.
Frustratingly she pulls it off effortlessly.

“Local.”

“Homicide?”

Diego shakes his head, confused for a second before it clicks. “Not my area, I used to be in Vice but I don’t think we’ve ever met in court.”

There’s something almost bordering on impressed in her eyes but it’s gone before Diego could possibly be allowed to see it. “That’s not entirely surprising, the junior lawyers deal with the petty suits. I’m only ever called in for newsworthy events, the big boy crimes.”

Diego doesn’t expect - not in the slightest - this feeling deep under his skin that aches to snarl and bite at the slight. He needs to cut it the fuck out, fast, can already see Allison’s head tilt and if it were any other occasion he’d be happy to dig his heels in.

But…

Klaus.

Diego slams a fist down on the furious Alpha clawing in his gut and focuses on the reason he came tonight, who currently is in the middle of flushing a pretty shade of red that’s far more worthy of his attention then some stuck up asshole.

“Anyway,” Ben steps into the awkward silence with a soft chuckle, “I’d love to hear how you guys met.”

Klaus seamlessly takes the stage and spins out a story that leaves Diego to nod when needed as his only responsibility, throw in a few appreciative comments, which he can do just fine. Unsurprisingly he leaves Five out of it, probably to avoid the questions that would follow and although Diego feels this spark of guilt in his stomach, it doesn’t last for too long.

Allison keeps glancing towards Ben while Klaus talks, a terrible tell for a so called hotshot lawyer, and something unlocks for Diego somewhere between the bullshit fairytale of his and Klaus’ first date.

A command issued between a blink and a smile.

*He’s being tested.*

Diego thinks, and he’s aware this shouldn’t be a revelation, that it isn’t Allison he should worry about. The Alpha’s clearly more than most can handle on a good day, but the one that even she seems to defer to, at least about Klaus, is Ben.

Ben who’s goofy expression and easy demeanour doesn’t fool Diego in the slightest, not when he looks at the Beta and his Alpha can suddenly see a harsh warning. A gritty, hard edge hidden under his laughter and there’s no question now who’s in charge of their little group, who Diego really has to impress this evening, who demands respect in this room despite whatever their dynamics demanded of them.

Diego also knows instinctually that the man in front of him isn’t quite right.

*Ben’s not natural.*
And Ben knows the second Diego’s worked it out because he’s obviously clever in that way, it’s there in the sly quirk of his mouth when he feels Diego’s eyes on him.

Diego plasters on the sort of smile that he used to have to trot out at public events back when he was a beat cop and decides then and there that he’s going to meet the challenge shining in those eyes when Klaus’ head is turned. He can practically hear the *impress me* and he’s going to do just that.

Klaus is suitably unimpressed with this protective, good cop bad cop shtick his friends have got going on. He had a sneaking suspicion that they’d pull something like this, he was half tempted to warn Diego ahead of time but naively thought it wouldn’t be quite as obnoxious as this.

At one point he managed to aim an elbow into Allison’s stomach, however his girls got abs of steel and if anything Klaus is sure he’s going to end up with the bruise. She’s an unstoppable force at the best of times, at worst she can be a fucking nightmare and when she’s protecting her family… Well she’s like this. And, he thinks in a semi hysterical manner, this is tame.

Despite the earlier reprieve his nerves have been alight since they stepped inside the apartment and they start to burn when he regurgitates the overly cute meet and greet type story for Ben. It’s when he’s about to pull Diego out of the door behind him and apologise profusely that he feels this *shift*. And then he’s thrown mid sentence because all he can breathe in is Diego, the heat of his hand in Klaus’ (because he sure as fuck needs that contact tonight) and this reassurance Diego exudes suddenly.

Klaus isn’t sure how it’s happened but Diego’s relaxing, understands something Klaus clearly can’t, in that he’s taking up the conversation again, talking work stuff with Ben and calmly ignoring Allison’s blatant attempts to incite something. Intentionally or not his thumbs rubbing the backs of Klaus’ knuckles and it’s distracting in a way that the glass of wine he’d been envisaging downing probably wouldn’t be.

“He only made it through university so he could spend all his time playing games.” Allison’s brand of sarcasm has about as much subtlety as a brick to the face.

“Not entirely true,” Ben starts to defend himself and then as if knowing that it would get him nowhere he resorts to the epitome of grace and rolls his eyes at her, “there’s nothing wrong with doing what you love. Take Klaus for example, he likes attention and not having to work very hard so he found the only job where someone would put up with him.”

“Hey,” Klaus protests but doesn’t deny, “I’d like to see you manage twenty children on a field trip.”

Ben raises his near empty glass in a mocking toast. "Say no more. There’s a reason I work with computers."

“Don’t forget the saying: Those that can, do; those that can’t, teach.” Allison’s voice is softer when teasing Klaus he notices, but then also…

“Fuck you,” He flips her a two finger salute, feels the vibrations of Diego’s suppressed laughter
and can’t help but relax further into the couch, tension bleeding out of him.

“Not in front of guests,” Allison smirks at them, somehow seeing the way Diego’s fingers tighten infinitesimally around Klaus’, “though I can agree with enjoying my work. I suppose that’s partially down to your profession Diego that I’m kept so busy.”

“You’re welcome, at least you meet people in a secure facility. Try catching them first.”

“That’s true. Although it must be easy when officers target innocents.”

_God damn it Allison._

Diego shrugs, grins and doesn’t rise to the dig. “That’s for the jury to decide. I’m sure you’re good at freeing _innocent_ civilians.”

“Obviously.”

“Then you can get them off and take up a case against the state. I heard there’s big money in settlements.”

“I should say thanks for my yearly bonus then.”

“You’re welcome.” Diego intones.

Klaus decides, upon seeing Allison conceal a laugh behind a large gulp of whiskey, that it’s safe for him to leave them alone. At least long enough for him to pour another cup of tea and check the food that Ben’s left unattended for too long (his taste buds have trauma over the burnt flakes coating their last ‘family’ meal).

He leaves them to talk further about law and police work and all of the things in the world that Klaus can say he’s given little thought to in the past, aside from avoiding officers when it’s been necessary. Though now it seems like he might need to take an interest in Diego’s job, a thing that the Alpha seems to genuinely enjoy, albeit this is from the cursory information Klaus has taken in. He just… wants to know everything about Diego, it’s a concept that’s terrifying and thrilling in equal measure.

When he takes the lid off the pot the - Stew? Lumpy soup? Poison? - is bubbling and Klaus stirs it absently, turns the dial down and flicks the kettle switch on. His head no longer feels like it’s about to overload with nerves and Klaus is quite sure he knows the reason why. There’s never been a person that he’s felt proud to stand alongside, to be associated with, and have the world know that they’re together.

_It’s all a lie._

Klaus ignores the whiny voice in his head, refuses to be baited by it. He’s bought somebody of worth home and presented them to the only two people in his life that matter.

_It’s all a lie._

He smacks the voice down, _hard._

Though it rears it’s head when he goes back into the living room and catches the tail end of a conversation, Ben’s earnest voice stands out and Klaus is about to join in when he works out what his oldest friend is saying.
“-I’m glad that you get it, there’s not many guys out there that can act decently after they find out…”

_Lie._

Klaus doesn’t need to hear the rest or how much has been revealed. It doesn’t matter.

_Ben told him._

Because Klaus arrogantly declared that there wasn’t any secrets between them.

Diego heard enough.

Diego knows he was an addict.

Diego knows he _was is_ a whore.

And Diego head snaps up, dark eyes seeking Klaus out before he flinches in disgust.

Chapter End Notes

I think this end notes section needs to be dedicated to all of my excuses for being late with updating. This one is pretty terrible but all I can say is that personal life has been rather dreadful and it’s taken until the last week or so for everything to even out again. This chapter alone was rewritten about a dozen times since the last one until I can at least say it's halfway decent, I love this story a whole lot and the idea of putting anything out that I wasn't happy with would have felt like a failure so another sorry for that :)

To everyone who's commented and been so amazingly kind and supportive with this story, it's been a real inspiration to keep writing and all I can say in return is thank you, thank you, thank you <3
Chapter 13

The warning isn’t unexpected when Klaus leaves the room.

A 'don’t hurt my friend or I’ll kill you' threat that Diego takes seriously because Ben seems like the type of closeted psychopath that would rationalise and pull it off with the right motivation. What he doesn’t expect is that he respects Ben a little more for the devout faith he has to his friend, the need to protect Klaus even if Diego could do without Allison playing the attack dog. He’s being a bit of a bastard and deciding whether she’d be a sleek Doberman or something more graceful when Ben catches him off guard.

“I’ve got to say, I was surprised when Klaus said that he’d told you about his past.”

“That’s an understatement.” Allison sniffs. Diego revises his opinion to one of those fancy long haired hounds.

But then he concentrates because this wasn’t something that Klaus informed him about and going off script was the number one rule he knew not to break. “Thanks, me too.” Simple, but it hopefully leaves him enough room to backtrack if needed.

“It’s not all his fault,” Ben says, thoughtful, reminiscing a time that Diego hasn’t got a fucking clue about, “we didn’t come from very nice homes.”

So a childhood trauma? Diego nods, sagely. Or as sagely as he can manage which is probably to say he looks gormless.

Ben’s clearly in the mood for sharing, despite Allison shaking her head. “You can’t blame him for it though, he did what he could with what he had and his parents let him down.”

“Now that’s an understatement.” Allison seethes, clearly caught in a memory that has her knuckles shine a stark white where her fingers clasp around her empty glass. “Who the fuck sells out their kid for drugs.”

“Allison,” Ben says, voice dropping.

“Don’t you Allison me, who the fuck does that.”

Diego ignores them, tries to parse through the information he’s been given and finding revulsion churning in his gut around flash fire bursts of fury for a young Klaus he never knew. The worst thing about his job, by far, is that he’s more than aware of what’s left after a parent commits such an atrocity. He’s been involved in more cases than he’d like where all that’s left after the dust settles and the prison bars shut is a hollow eyed ghost that’s horrifyingly reliant on the smack they’ve been forced to work for.

Someone did that to Klaus.

“Allison will you shut up.” The Alpha grumbles but listens and Diego tries to place this bomb in a quiet place in his mind so he can carefully disarm it safely in the privacy of his own home. “Honestly Diego, I’m glad that you get it, there’s not many guys out there that can act decently after they find out…” Ben trails off, dark eyes widening and Diego follows his line of sight until his heart stutters at Klaus’ terrified face.
He still doesn’t grasp quite how serious the situations become until he’s physically jerked by a surge of terror that has every muscle in his body coiling in anticipation of danger. It’s a desperate plea for help that he and Allison react to without thought, both moving towards the most vulnerable person in the room and he’s closest, but Klaus is backing away and it’s an act of god that Diego doesn’t growl.

“Ben w-why would you t-tell…”

“Klaus, shit, I thought he knew.” Ben looks stricken, all of the power gone as if the very idea that he’s hurt his friend is enough to crumple him and Diego would sympathise if he wasn’t imbued with so much anger it’s almost throttling. “I’m sorry.”

Then Diego gets it. *Really* gets it. This is meant to be a secret. Klaus’ secret. Like Diego’s but the difference being that Klaus hasn’t been given a chance to share his, that choice has been taken from him and now he’s running, literally sprinting out of the door with a dizzying burst of speed.

Allison’s already making to follow Klaus and Diego cuts her off at the pass, not taking in the way she snarls at the obstruction. “This isn’t your place-”

“I think you’ve done enough.” He throws over his shoulder as he takes off after the fleeing Omega, following the distressed scent so easily he could probably close his eyes and still end up a floor down standing a few feet away from the person that’s scrambled his brain since that day in the classroom.

Comparing then to now isn’t fun, Klaus has his front door half open, hand shaking where his keys are pressing into the keyhole and although he’s not fled inside, he’s also not turning around and Diego can’t stand it.

“It doesn’t matter, what they said. I don’t care.” He’s approaching like Klaus is about to bolt. Which he might just yet.

“Leave me alone.”

Klaus sounds… forlorn.

Diego can’t listen to it though he promised himself to do whatever Klaus asked, but he can’t, not when Klaus’ chest is heaving like he can’t catch his breath and his entire frames trembling. Not when it feels like if he goes through that door whatever the fucked up mess they've started will finish and Diego's not prepared for that to happen. He reaches out, hand sliding along the underside of Klaus’ jaw, feeling the rabbit-fast thrum of his pulse before curling around the back of his neck and tugging him forwards until Diego can collect the Omega in his arms and hold him in a grip that’s probably closer to crushing than comforting.

Klaus doesn’t react immediately, just shivers and shakes, and Diego ends up talking, nonsensical shit mostly. It’s all variations of *easy* and *sweethart* and a mixture of other words until Klaus stops resembling a spooked horse and slowly seems to collect himself at least partially. Fingers grip his jacket and Diego can’t help but sigh in relief when Klaus presses into him, bony chin hooking on his shoulder, the Omega’s curls are soft against his skin and Diego can’t help but press his lips to them for a long, peaceful moment.

“You don’t have to talk about it.” He finally says.

“And leave it for you to think the worst.” Klaus’ voice is tremulous.

Diego fucking hates it.
"I don’t know if you heard sweetheart," he shifts slightly, tries not to focus on the way Klaus keeps his face pressed into his neck, the wetness that makes his entire body scream, “but I have a fucking awful imagination.”

There’s a stifled snort against his skin. “Not that bad.”

For the first time in his life Diego needs to say something good, find words and put them together coherently. He could confess to a myriad of things that’d put them both on the same level and yet he can’t make himself dredge up that particular hornets nest, not without considerable preparation.

“Klaus do you really think I’m going to judge you?”

There’s a pause and then: “You should.”

“Well then you’re a fucking idiot.”

Klaus’ head rears back, eyes shining, hurt and betrayed. “What the-”

“Seriously, after everything you’ve done for us, all of the shit you’ve put up with so Five doesn’t have to…” Wow, his throat scratches for a split second and isn’t that a whole other level of bullshit. “Anyway, if you think I’ll hear that you’ve gone through some shit and then drop you just like that, then honestly you really are an idiot.”

It’s a pretty fucking poor excuse for comfort, doesn’t come close to expressing what he wants to. How Klaus’ resilience is exemplary, more so taking in Ben’s words. He wants to explain how he doesn’t deserve the kindness and humour and joy that Klaus gives out so freely but that’s outside of his primitive attempts at communication.

Klaus gets it because he’s perfect.

“You’re terrible at soothing a sensitive soul.”

“Add it to the list of things of why I need you.”

Unintentionally he hits the jackpot with that one, Klaus gives him this weak smile and the tension releases both of their shoulders. Klaus’ looking at him with this bordering reverent expression and Diego doesn’t like that he hasn’t earned it. He’s done the bare minimum, next to nothing really and he’s being rewarded with this perfect Omega’s attention for it. He gives a quick ruffle to Klaus’ curls before pulling away long enough to gesture to the half opened door.

“Right I have about forty minutes before I have to get back and considering you’ve managed to see just about every last inch of my place I think it’s only fair that I get to do the same.”

Klaus releases this brittle, still tentative, laugh before sliding his hand down to Diego’s, linking them together and leading him inside the apartment. “Don’t you want to ask me about-”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

Klaus stops, nose scrunching in a disgustingly adorable manner, before shaking his head. “Not right now, sorry, another time?”

“Don’t say sorry.” Not when Diego’s still hiding things. “If you want to then we can, if not then it isn’t any of my business.” Though he wants it to be.

“Thank you.” Klaus steps back, grasping his hand still.
“Stop thanking me for not being a prick, anyway we’ve now only got thirty nine minutes and you’re wasting time.”

“It’s going to take you that long to look at my wardrobe.”

Diego squeezes his fingers reassuringly. “Be honest sweetheart, it’ll take me that long to look at your shoes alone.”

This time Klaus’ giggle is free, uninhibited and he gives Diego a grateful smile before dragging him towards his bedroom. Diego was wrong. It takes him an hour to get halfway through. But Klaus is smiling the whole time and he doesn’t care about anything else.

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“So, how was your weekend?” Luther ambushes him before Diego can get into the god damn building. “How’s the little guy?”

“Fine.” He answers both and glares with no effect at the genial giant.

As he expected, Luther rambles on about something inane and Diego tunes him out. He sometimes has to wonder whether Luther is lonely, there isn’t any other explanation he can think of for the Alpha to try so hard at pushing their working relationship into a personal friendship. If he wasn’t so averse to the jerk Diego might feel sorry for him. The problem is that he needs Luther right now, the case they’ve been working on over the last few weeks required more brainpower than the single cell Diego possessed most days could manage, and despite his numerous flaws Luther’s a competent detective.

After poking his head in on the morning debriefings and pre-empting another long shift with two mugs of coffee for himself (Luther’s more than capable of getting his own) Diego has every intention of burying himself in case notes.

Karma, he decides, is a fucking bitch.

“They’re nice.”

“Shut the fuck up Luther.”

“I like them.”

“Fuck off.”

Luther makes the first move, accepting the pink bouquet from the courier while Diego’s still frozen in abject horror. “There isn’t a card.”

“What the hell are they?”

“They’re hydrangeas Diaz, Christ.” Patch shakes her head as she passes their joint desk, laughs at his discomfort and disappears into her office.

“Who would send you them?” Luther asks.

Diego ignores him, primarily because he’s furiously texting.
Not that I don’t appreciate the gesture.

But why?????????

Look it up.

He wastes the next twenty minutes doing just that and when he’s done he slumps back in his chair.

“Do you want me to throw them?” Luther offers.

Diego decides that if a single flower is harmed he’ll throw the Alpha off of the precincts rooftop.

“Don’t you fucking dare.”

You’re perfect.

I know.

“I want to go home.”

“C’mon Five.”

“I want to go home.” He repeats in the hope that doing so the message might finally sink in.

“We’re going whether you like it or not.”

“Then I’d like to object.”

“Overruled buddy.”

Diego, despite Five’s growing respect, is a stubborn man.

It’s the only explanation for the sudden fervour that’s gripped the Alpha, demanding that they start decorating.

“Y’know for someone who acts so maturely,” Klaus muses from the front seat - a position Five’s regretting charitably offering to the Omega, “you sulk like any other child.”

Did he just…

Five ignores every single statistic about road safety and deems it worth the risk to lean forward over the centre console until he can glare up at his teacher with as much vitriol as he can muster.

“You will rescind that statement immediately.”

“I most certainly will not.” Klaus says, eyes shining.

Five decides to use reason instead of resorting to infantile back and forth arguing. “Diego, you said that if I say something that causes offence to somebody then I have to apologise and act like I mean it.”

“Yeah, I said that. Why?” Diego asks, suspiciously.
“And I’ve done it, no matter how ridiculous the circumstances?”

“Yeah, but that doesn’t mean-”

Five interrupts before there’s a type of excuse offered up that adults normally seems to use when they didn’t wish to be reminded of their hypocrisy. “-Then I’m offended and Klaus needs to apologise.”

“Excuse you.” Klaus says.

“Or you can admit that there’s a double standard?” Five offers the alternative.

“Wait a fucking minute.” Diego swears, brain clearly trying to escape the trap Five’s set.

Five puts the final nail in the coffin of Diego’s insecurities. “Or you can ignore this teachable moment and I learn that my feelings aren’t important to you.”

“Manipulative bastard.” Diego gapes into the mirror, almost missing the turn they need.

“Oh, he’s good.” Klaus laughs.

Five leans back in his seat and awaits his apology.

His stepbrother finally acts - correctly - responsibly. “You’ve gotta say sorry sweetheart.”

Klaus sighs, bottom lip jutting out and in a woeful tone says, “I’m sorry Five. Your sulking ability is at the very least near the level of an adult.”

“Better?” Diego grins.

Five, frustratingly, feels something akin to laughter catch in his throat and settles for the haughtiest “quite” and resumes scowling out of the window until they pull up.

It’s a Saturday and the malls as busy as he feared. Five concentrates on storming through the crowds, trying to orientate himself with the layout he’d studied on the laptop this morning.

“So the plan is to wander around aimlessly?” He asks for clarification, because it sounds just as ridiculous as it did at home.

“And make sure you actually buy something for the apartment.” Diego demands as he passes the card over.

“Wait, you’re letting him have your…” Klaus trails off, looks guilty at the half finished statement.

Diego shrugs, shares a look between the three of them. “Five’s better with money than me, so why not.”

Five’s well aware that he’s fiscally responsible - as much as a nine year old can be - and he waits curiously to see if his teacher will pass judgement.

“God, I wish I was that restrained.”

“I can give you some advice. At home. Now?” Five doesn’t expect an answer, nor is he naïve enough to be hopeful.

“You sound like an old man.” Diego snorts, ignores the apathetic stare Five gives him. “Now stop
trying to waste time, we’re going to buy something whether you like it or not.”

“Something. Are you going to clarify what exactly or are we going in without a plan?” The only thing worse than shopping Five thinks, would be to go shopping with no clear aim, a pointless meander through different stores.

“Walking around until inspiration strikes is how the very best do it.” Klaus remarks, waving a hand over his chest. “It’s how I buy clothes.”

“That doesn’t inspire faith like you think it does.” Five is getting good at sarcasm, he’s found that all he has to do is vocalise the observations in his head and deliver them in a certain tone.

Klaus, to his credit, seems to enjoy it. “See you get it, if you’re lucky then you’ll end up looking just like me.”

Five takes in the bright, floral pattern of his shirt and decides that he most definitely will not.

The first stop on the list he’d compiled earlier is a fabric store, although he doesn’t expect it to share the space with what looks like a dress up shop. Neither does he think the pair would follow him, but Klaus is gazing around delightedly and Diego looks uncomfortable.

**Good.**

He shouldn’t have dragged Five here.

It’s a small positive and Five will take it. He ignores them in favour of starting his search, there’s a few things he’d quite like, a selection of threads for the play for one. Children, Five has quickly learned, seem to have an unending ability to tear and rip and shred their clothing and costumes are no exemption to this. As the seamstress it’s his responsibility to be prepared.

The material catches his eye just as Five’s about to pass it, reeling him back until his shaking hand reaches out and pulls it free for a better look.

*That’s... something.*

It’s a near match, he’s mostly sure of it and although it’s not on the list Five wants it. Badly.

He needs a second opinion, goes to call Diego’s name and hesitates before it rolls off his tongue, instead shifting the letters until they rearrange into another. “Klaus.” The Omega’s head pops out from behind a rack of - Five restrains his disdain - feather boas. “Come here.” Thankfully Klaus doesn’t ask and Diego doesn’t comment when Five dismisses him.

“What’s up?” His teacher takes in the fabric. “This is pretty.”

Like he thought, hoped, Klaus doesn’t judge. He takes a minute to turn the material over in his hand, head tilting this way and that in consideration. “What are you thinking of doing with it?”

“I want to make it into a coat.”

“A what?”

“Like the musical?” No reaction, Five surprises himself with the patience he has explaining. “It’s the same colours as a coat worn in one of Grace’s favourite musicals.”

“Grace is?”
“Diego’s mother.”

“Oh.” Klaus nods, looks curious for some reason and then his brows lower slightly. “That’s an incredibly loaded present Five.”

“So I shouldn’t?” He’s shocked that he would truly listen to the Omega’s answer, as if Klaus’ opinion is worthy of following in this area.

“No, I think you should. Really.” Klaus runs a hand down the fabric. “You’ve made a coat before?”

“Grace showed me last year, I can most likely remember the method.” It’s modest, because of course he can recall how.

“I’m sure it’s like riding a bike, it’ll all come flooding back to you.”

“I hope not.” Five shakes his head. “I don’t know how to ride a bike.”

Klaus’ double take is far too much for such an innocuous statement. “What?”

“I’ve never ridden a bike.” Five repeats, unsure why it doesn’t seem to sink in for the Omega.

“Shit- sorry. How did you manage to avoid that?”

Klaus is trying to joke to cover his surprise, Five knows this, he also knows that it means Diego’s kept his secrets, not divulged information behind his back. Something about this inspires a disconcerting heat that flushes his cheeks and has his fists balling.

“That’s tragic.” Klaus tuts. “Shame on Diego.”

“What?” Five says, dumbly (which infuriates him on a base level).

“That’s the role of a big brother, they’re meant to teach you these things.”

Five’s never thought of it in those terms, the idea that he should learn something based entirely on a genetic or familial connection. It’s worth giving further thought to at some point, now however he’s occupied in going to select the thread he wants and Klaus leaves him to pick up each individual spool and inspect it. He’s still contemplating different shades of yellow and not paying attention to the bubbling presence bearing down upon him until Klaus is practically bowling him over.

“Soosoooo,” Klaus drawls out, “Diego’s got to take a work call. He said we should go and do something fun together, said he might take a while.”

“I wasn’t aware he had a busy workload at the moment.” Not that Five would know, his stepbrothers apt at hiding his professional life. As if Five couldn’t handle the knowledge of a crime scene, but Diego’s reaction when he pointed out that at least they weren’t homicide related crimes put Five off pressing the matter.

“Well this is important apparently, so it’s just you and me.”

As much as Five would like for his stepbrother to wallow in the misery of his decisions and continue shopping with them, it does mean he can purchase his items without having to worry about the Alpha being nosy. He’s suitably impressed that the woman handles everything with a respectful touch and doesn’t question when he goes to pay, he thanks her before reluctantly
heading back into the teeming crowds.

Klaus, inspired by some level of satanic influence, decides that Five should try a photo booth. “It’s a right of passage.” Is the only reassurance he’s given before he’s being steered towards the contraption that spells out his next miserable experience.

“I object.”

“Overruled.”

“I could shout stranger danger.”

Klaus smirks and steps inside. “I’ll make you join the school choir.”

*Monster.*

Well he’s in here, there isn’t room to shift about and Five decides quickly that this isn’t an activity he wishes to repeat, especially when the curtains drawn and if there were a time for a belated claustrophobic reaction to rear its head now would be the time. Thankfully Five can say that’s not a trauma related issue for him, more that he doesn’t like the being forced to stand so closely to another human being.

Also…

“I haven’t been in a photograph since-” Five corrects himself, “and I don’t know how to do silly photos.”

Klaus waits and then when it’s clear that Fives’ not going to revisit the first part of his statement, says: “Then think of it like a learning experience.”

“I don’t know what to do.” He confesses again.

Something clicks in Klaus’ gaze, a lock turning and Five is about to flee when the Omega reaches out slowly, hesitantly, and seeing no resistance hooks pale fingers around Five’s arms and turns him the right way.

“Right my little Padawan.”

“What is that?”

“Padawan… Like the film… Are you kidding me?”

“No.”

“Tragic. Absolutely, unbelievably tragic.”

Five glares half-heartedly, relaxing at the familiar speech patterns of his teacher and Klaus capitalises on this.

“Fine, my dear pupil, the key is to shake all of the tension out of those heavy shoulders of yours.”

“This better not be one of those calming exercises you did in class last week.”

“A, thank you for noticing and B, it’s about taking all of that anger and putting it away for a whole ten seconds.”
His frown deepens. How, precisely, Klaus thinks he can manage this is beyond him. It’s cruel really, setting him up to fail like this. Five never fails. He’s never been allowed to fail.

Five tries to force the tremble in his hand down, when it refuses he settles for scoring crescents into his palm and its when he’s doing this that he realises although he can demand that his body obeys his every command, the tangled wreckage behind his ribcage requires a great deal more than that.

A sharp stinging sensation draws his focus and ire to the adult behind him. “Did you,” he reaches up to check, “just flick my nose?”

Klaus doesn’t look in the slightest bit guilty. “Yes. Stop over-thinking.”

“That’s assault.”

“Sue me.” Five considers this for a second and Klaus shakes his head in amusement. “That’s a joke. Plus all I have that’s worth anything is my wardrobe.”

Five shudders.

The lights flash and he startles, blinking owlishly.

“There we go, nothing to worry about.”

“Not ready.” He’s failed.

In the corner there’s a slot that’s whirring before a narrow strip drops out and Klaus picks it up. “God I remember when these used to take forever, now it’s quicker than,” the omega snaps his fingers, “these are good, well apart from the first one. I mean seriously, could you look like you want to strangle me anymore.”

“I still want to.”

But he’s staring at the strip and it’s quite remarkable really, how now the first attempt is over the pressure of success no longer weighs his shoulders down.

“Can we try again?” He asks, quietly.

Klaus is a flamboyant person and so Five shouldn’t be surprised that they don’t just try once, but over and over again until combined there’s a smattering of their faces and Five can see the visual progression from one extreme to the next.

“This one, this is the best by far.” Klaus crows triumphantly, holding it up exaggeratedly while Five is still trying to adjust to the daylight as they step out of the booth.

“I look unhinged.”

“Darling, that’s your usual expression.”

Five ignores this in favour of analysing the other photos. “I like this one.”

Klaus leans over his shoulder and Five allows it, raises his hand slightly to allow a clearer view. “That’s the look of a mad professor. I should call you Dr Hyde.”

“Mr Hyde.” Five chastises and then he catches the smirk on Klaus’ face and realises he’s been caught out. There’s an insistent vibration in his throat again and he wants to laugh again for no
reason other than simply because. He wonders if this is what other people do with their time, going about their day with nothing more worrisome than what to buy and do and it’s then that Five realises he’s a little jealous of the children he’s seen today. None of them have had to work towards their normality.

“Right.” Klaus stretches his arms up, a sliver of his skin momentarily peering out as his shirt rides up and Five is amused by the lack of… shame? Whatever it is he finds it funny today. “I want ice cream.”

“Shouldn't I get to choose? Being the child.”

Klaus’ bright eyes gleam mischievously. “Okay Mr Hyde what do you want to do?”

Five contemplates this, can sense more than see Diego’s head in the distance as he moves towards them through the crowds. The parlour he knows Klaus is eyeing up looks alarmingly busy, people are milling around outside and the queue looks formidable.

But they could all do another normal thing together.

Five sniffs once, loudly, to make it clear that he’s doing the Omega a favour.

“I want ice cream.”
Diego’s gotten pretty good at tolerating Luther’s presence.

Well he’s gotten to the point where the sound of his partner’s voice doesn’t have him wanting to crack his head against the corner of his desk, which is an improvement. Yesterday he’d acknowledged the oversized pencil contributions to their latest case, and quite frankly he isn’t sure what else Patch wants from him.

Patch, it turns out, wants a lot and as his superior officer he’s got no other choice than to come running when she summons.

“It’s not much to ask Diaz.”

It is. A whole fucking lot. And she knows it.

“We’re getting along just fine.”

“Don’t insult my observational skills.”

Diego slumps back in the chair he sat in at her request and is already regretting because he’s starting to feel like this is a warning. An unofficial one, but a warning none the less. “Look, Cap,” at least that gets her to smile, in frustration maybe, but he’ll take it, “not everyone gets along with each other. There’s nothing unusual about that.”

“As far as I see it, there’s only one person with a problem here.” Patch looks like she’s expending every last ounce of patience on him, mouth curving into a frown.

With a lot of therapy, Diego could probably understand why he has such an instinctive reaction to certain people. The problem with that is the slim to fucking none chance that he’s going to ever pay a small fortune to get told he’s fucked up. It’s a stance he’s stubbornly taken since he was a teenager, even when mom’s gallery started earning her proper money, enough to waste on such frivolous bullshit-

“Diaz.”

-And now he’s letting his mind run off on some tangent in front of his boss, which is pretty stupid even in his books. “Sorry. You were saying?”

Patch thumbs through one of the numerous files littered across her desk and Diego catches sight of his name. It throws him and he pauses for a second to uncurl his fists while they’re still resting on his legs. Luther wouldn’t have put in a complaint about him, would he? Just because Diego’s curt with the guy doesn’t mean he’d get their Captain in to deal with it. Patch closes the file before he can try and look further “Look, I know that this isn’t the most exciting precinct you could have ended up in.”

It’s an understatement, although there had been a certain charm in wrapping up the mystery of Mrs Vines stray cats last week. Finding them a floor down being fed by a well meaning neighbour had yielded several rounds of rich chocolate sponge and the pleasure of watching Luther get mauled by a fiery tabby.
Okay, so maybe there’s a chance he’s particularly hostile towards his partner. *Maybe.* But is it complaint worthy? *Not a fucking chance.*

“However it’s still my precinct and I won’t tolerate behaviour that could endanger one of my officers.”

Diego doesn’t argue with that statement in particular; he’s aware of the risks and although he mocks the quiet monotony of the job it doesn’t mean he’s oblivious to these things. “I get it Patch, Captain,” he quickly amends at the sight of the corners of her mouth tightening, “you’re right, I don’t like Luther but it’s not like we don’t work well together.”

“And you expect me to believe that when you haven’t got a single complimentary thing to say about him.”

“I congratulated him on our latest case.” Which he had, though only because there was a high probability that their case had gone so well because the key witness had taken one look at Luther’s golden boy smile and simpered.

“You called him a ‘slick bastard’.”

“I said it nicely.” Diego steels himself, reins in his temper at being called out, even if it’s *partially* deserved, and cuts straight to the point. “If Luther’s got an issue with our partnership then he could have come to me instead of dragging you in.”

Patch is a woman that’s remarkably composed at times and if it wasn’t working against him then Diego would commend her on it, she holds eye contact easily, assessing him from across the desk. “I had him in yesterday, just to talk, you know how I like to keep an eye on everyone, see how they’re doing.”

Diego nods, she’s a good boss, gives a shit about her team and it damn well shows. There’s not many out there like Patch and it’s an honest shame.

“Can you guess what he had to say when I asked him about you?”

“Something that shouldn’t be said in front of a lady?”

“Not everybody speaks like you Diaz.”

“Fair point.”

“Luther reported that you had a mild temper, which is putting it nicely. That you don’t seem to be satisfied with your work and- Don’t interrupt me.” She holds a hand up as Diego opens his mouth to defend himself, he shuts it, teeth gritting for whatever comes next. “He also refused to make any comment when I mentioned the antagonistic way you behave towards him at times.”

*Huh.* Right. Diego reels back from a half-assed rebuttal, brow furrowing in confusion because she’s not *wrong.* If he were pushed, at gunpoint and secure with the knowledge that no other living soul might hear, Diego would acknowledge he’s been an ass to the guy. Again, if he bothered to ever get therapy he’s pretty sure there’d be a remark on how he’s putting all of his frustrations and repressed emotions into disliking the Alpha. The guys an easy scapegoat.

Patch lets out a small sound of amusement at his surprise. “In fact he went so far as to tell me how he finds you to be a competent, intelligent detective that, and I quote here, utilises his cynicism to aid in his work.” Her clipped tone is at odds with the *kind of* flattering assessment. “Do you have anything to add to that?”
“No.” There’s nothing he can say that won’t sound false or insincere. “If this isn’t a warning then what do you want me to do Cap?”

“Treat your partner like he’s a fellow officer and less like he’s something rotten you stepped in on the sidewalk.”

“Yeah, I can do that.”

“Good, then I’ll leave it there and we’ll consider this handled. Unless you have anything else you wish to add.” Patch has this trick she performs whenever she wants a room to empty. Arms crossing, head up-tilted, posture closed off and scent firmly pushing into air around her, Diego’s seen her silence the bullpen, well intentioned politicians and even her own superiors in a second flat and he recognises it being deployed against him now.

He pops something at the base of his spine as he stands, a reminder that fuck he’s getting old, giving thanks as he makes a rather hasty retreat before she changes her mind and slaps a disciplinary on his file. Thirty is the new eighty, he consoles this depressing thought with a particularly brutal mug of coffee from the old machine in the break room, strong enough that it almost gets dumped down the sink. Almost, but not quite.

It’s an afterthought to grab a spare, then a conscious effort to delete the impulse to put a healthy spoonful of salt into the drink. Though Diego immediately regrets wasting willpower on the blonde oaf when he sees the way the guy perks up over a fucking coffee.

Then again, it’s coffee. So Diego gets it.

“This is great. Thanks.” Luther’s grin is too broad. “I finished our paperwork while you were busy, if you want to take a look when you’ve got a minute.”

Who in the ever merciful fucking world took on additional paperwork? Diego suspects that Luther was the type of attention seeking asshole that asked for extra homework.

“That’s cool man, good job.” He realises a second later that he should say thanks, but Luther’s beaming and Diego’s inner monologue’s demanding he verbally tear it down. Much like many things in his life though, he shuts it out and focuses on the computer terminal in front of him.

Their afternoon runs smoothly, it must delight Patch that Diego manages to hold back on insulting Luther no less than eleven times. Eleven. It’s not terrible, but it’s still pretty poor considering the worst his partners done is noisily drain his coffee mug. Fucking irritating. Not worth throwing said mug at said partners face, which is what Diego's tempted to do. He adds anger issues to the imaginary therapists list.

Despite what he sanctimoniously lectures to Five most days, maturity does not come easily to Diego and so he’s pleasantly surprised to find that he makes it to the end of his shift without causing a single crack in his partners genial demeanour. If he can pull this off tomorrow, and the next day and the day after that then he’ll be alright. At the very least it’ll keep Patch happy and frankly that’s the best he can hope for because she’s been damn good to him and, consequently, Five.

“I was going to see if anyone was up for going out after work for a few drinks if you wanted to come?” Luther casually says as he shuts down his terminal.

“Can’t I’ve got to pick Five up from school.”

“Is the little guy okay?”
It’s automatic to bristle at the concern, harder to loosen his spine from ramrod to slouched once more... and Diego now knows why his backs going to be fucked in the future. Of course Luther would worry, as far as he’s aware the last time Diego had to go to the school he’d been in a state and it’s not like he ever offers up information on his brother. An old habit of holding his cards in a tight-fisted grip, refusing to share even the most insignificant detail. “He’s fine. Got after school practice for this class play he’s helping with.”

“Cool.” Luther says. It’s a decidedly uncool thing to say.

“Another time.” He says, grabbing his jacket from the back of his chair and only just barely catching the eager upturn of Luther’s mouth.

Diego wasn’t wrong with his quick assessment when they first met. Luther’s most definitely lonely. No way the Alpha would react so placidly to Diego’s shit otherwise. They live in what’s meant to be the most progressive time in history, secondary dynamics aren’t meant to be defining characteristics anymore and yet everyone knows that’s bullshit. Just like the string of cowering Omega’s that come trailing in most weeks, bruises marking the terrain of their bodies, equally so an Alpha’s innate temper has never been able to be talked away by their eloquent politicians.

Luther shouldn’t put up with so much shit but he does, affably even, and he’s a walking migraine most days, bumbling along with a complete lack of awareness. Still...

“Tomorrow, lunch at Lenny’s?”

It’s an offer that nobody in the bullpen would turn their nose up at. It’s not very often that Diego wants to wreck his arteries with grease but Lenny’s is a staple that he’s quickly becoming accustomed to and when he isn’t eating at his desk in self imposed silence (because heaven fucking forbid that he’d ever be busy enough to skip lunch) then he’s ditching Luther to engage in some rare self love.

“Sounds good.” Luther tries to sound uninterested, and it does nothing hide the excited glint in his eyes.

Diego suddenly feels exhausted. Not entirely out of energy but close, a draining, sinking pit in his chest not at the thought of doing anything remotely sociable with his partner. That’s easy, no it’s that he’s in the position where he has no other choice than to engage with yet another obstacle he has little care for. It’s a childish mindset, one that Five would probably deride him for but it’s there anyway.

The whiplash speed of his emotions stick with him well across the carpark and long after he’s set off. Not that he isn’t a good driver, little other choice in this line of work, but today he’s overly aware of every turn, every clutch release and every fucking time he brakes that bit too harshly. There’s no one to judge him, however this funk he’s suddenly in has decided to tell that little voice in his head to assert itself as his own personal critic. The fifteen minute drive has never felt so dragged out and when Diego pulls up he performs a little pep talk. Reminds himself of the positives.

It’s… nice. Nice that he can pick Five up from a school activity instead of hustling the boy out with a busted nose. Nice that the receptionist doesn’t look at him apprehensively now they have him identified as an adult, nice that he can stop like an ordinary person outside of the classroom and have a reason to be there. It takes Diego a minute to spot Five, which is strange because he’s grown used to pinpointing the boy within a crowd in half a heartbeat. Whether that’s some sort of detective’s trait or the instinctive, overwhelming surge of protectiveness his brother inspires, Diego isn’t sure.
But the reason he takes so long today is that Five’s not sitting at the fringe of the group, he’s front and centre. As in he’s interacting with them, well sniping would be the better description. He’s in the middle of threading (is that the term? Probably not) what looks like multicoloured sheets together, creating a backdrop, and glaring at a script held in front of him at the same time, all while maintaining a conversation with a small group of children that seem like they’re actively interested in what Five’s saying. It’s a cruel thing to admit but it doesn’t make any sense until Diego catches sight of little Delores sat primly on a chair just to the side, reciting from her own script. It’s most likely that this out of place interaction is in part thanks to her.

Diego really is exhausted, at a loss for what to do when he gives much thought to how he came to be here, in this moment where he’s entirely responsible for another life. It’s not that he’s never wanted kids, but those scenarios included a still breathing mother. Mom would have been incredible, she was with him, and Five, and Lillian when they first met.

Five glances up, catches sight of him and offers a half smile in acknowledgement and a spark clashes in place of that blinding loss. Diego know that this would be hard going in, was warned enough times by Gena and the judge and all of his old colleagues that it’d be difficult.

Which is fine, more than fine, it’s a completely normal reaction to feel tired and heavy and overwhelmed sometimes. Five and his rare smiles and his begrudging, shielded, affection is worth the effort.

He’s about to walk over and engage in the age old tradition of embarrassing a younger sibling, or at least try to, a petty revenge for all of the snarky behaviour he gets to deal with on a daily, hourly, basis at home. Or he would if he wasn’t distracted sniffing out the particularly sweet floral scent coming up behind him.

“You do know that it’s weird to stand outside of a classroom and stare in like that.”

“Afternoon to you too sweetheart.”

Klaus snorts, appears in his peripheral, beautiful despite the poster paint staining his hands and left cheek. Glitters stuck in random splotches across his dress and Diego finds it worth a grin that the Omega’s literally shining under the harsh fluorescent lighting overhead. “Familiarity isn’t encouraged between the staff and pupils family Mr Diaz.”

“So it’s forbidden?”

“Oh most definitely.”

“That’s hot.”

There’s a curl to Klaus’ mouth and Diego ruthlessly smashes down the smouldering ache rising at the dizzying scent the Omega emits. He’s swung from one end of the scale to the next so quickly his neck hurts and it’s most definitely not healthy but he’ll take it over the miserable thoughts. “Hot for teacher. How cliché Mr Diaz”.

So he wasn’t aware that it’s a thing, but Klaus’ voice can make his surname sound filthy without trying. Though it’s probably also Diego being a creep, evidence of that being the fact that he’s in a school and his heads gone fuzzy. It tempers his reply and shifts it into something more appropriate, a responsible question, though his brain stores the Mr business into a safe place to revisit at another time. “Looks like everyone’s having fun.”

Klaus nods, a fond twist spreading over his features and again Diego’s reminded that the Klaus
he’s getting to know is very different to the one that spends his day with twenty odd children and clearly loves every second of it. “School plays are always exciting. Every year all of the classes take part, there’s a week of entertainment and my classes performance is always the best.”

There’s something cloying and sweet and so fucking adorable about the proud sniff Klaus gives and if there wasn’t a high chance that they’d be seen Diego would hook the slim man in and pin him against the lockers lining the wall next to them. “What is you’re class doing?”

“Merlin, the musical that's not really a musical but a play with lots of songs sprinkled throughout. So basically a musical if the principal wouldn't be so picky.”

Diego blinks. Finally looks Klaus straight in the eye, definitely doesn’t get distracted, and tries not to sound like he thinks it seems mad. “Alright, I have to know, why aren’t you doing-”

“Something more seasonal?”

“I was going to say appropriate. But seasonal would work. You know it’s the first next week.” Which is troublesome in it’s steady approach. It’s a lucky thing that Five refused point blank to celebrate thanksgiving, muttering about murder and false holidays whenever the subjects bought up.

Klaus lets out an indelicate snort.

“Wait. Is, by any chance, your Merlin gay?”

“You watched that British show didn’t you.”

Klaus grins, wryly. “And if I did?”

There’s something incredibly… Klaus, about the whole thing and it’s helping clear the dull weight that’d descended over Diego so quickly. “You still haven’t answered my question.”

“Think about it Diego.” Klaus pauses, watching his students through the glass. “For most of those kids they have to do the same thing year after year, nativity scenes and religion even if they don’t believe in any of it. It’s always the same, so why shouldn’t they get to do something different this one time, while they can. So we all vote on it, everyone gets a voice and then whatever comes out of it in the end, if they have fun then I don’t care what anyone else says.”

“If a parent doesn’t like it?”

“I’m not here to look after them. I have to maintain a decent relationship with my students parents of course," Klaus winks, bastard, "but I won’t have anyone feeling dissatisfied in my classroom.”

The Omega pats the door gently, lovingly. “To be a dramatic queen, this is my kingdom and I’ll be damned if a single one of my charges feels uncomfortable sharing ideas or being themselves in there. So if that means that they want to do a play or musical about a wizard and a king with lots of monsters and a dragon, then you can bet that’s what they’re going to do.”

Diego lets out a low whistle, not entirely sure how he’s meant to react in the face of Klaus’ power, and it is a power. His conviction, an indisputable belief in his job that Diego can’t remember the last time he’s seen, not even in himself. It’s work that he’s never given much consideration to the importance of, a caring role that he’d subconsciously assigned a mediocre status too. But that’s the ridiculous thing about it, he’s standing beside a man that can encourage the vulnerable and young, empower them and in turn gain a level of trust and respect unlike any other. Fuck, Five respects
Klaus, in his own particular way.

It sheds Klaus in a new light, propels him from caregiver and educator to something special.

Although the revelation is marred by the pale hand waving across his vision. “Hellooo. You still with me.”

“I was thinking about how brilliant you are, until you ruined it.”

“Dang,” Klaus says with about as much sarcasm as a single word can be imbued with and snaps his fingers, “that’ll haunt me for the rest of my life. Now are you coming in or are you going to just stand there looking gormless.”

Diego doesn’t reply, because what else can he do but follow the Omega and go and join his brother.

Five is rather tired.

He is also rather furious with his friend.

It’s a generous way to describe the emotion he feels when a seemingly unending line of their classmates seem determined to gain his attention at all times. It’s ‘Five help me learn my lines’ and ‘Five I’ve got a hole in my shirt’ and no matter the rebuttal or how often he points out that it’s a tunic nobody seems to find him intimidating anymore.

Delores finds it hilarious.

Five does not....

Well… he doesn’t entirely dislike it but if he admits that then it conveys that he finds it acceptable which is far from the truth so he’s settled for scowling at her at random intervals through the day.

“I can’t believe he would dare-”

**Don’t overreact.**

“How, pray tell me, am I overreacting.”

She gestures to the needle he’s stabbing with great emphasis into what’s going to be a beautiful piece of the castle’s scenery. If he’s to do a job then it’ll be to his very best, and the result of this is that the standards of their show will not be hampered by shoddy backdrops.

“He called me Fivey. It’s deplorable.”

Delores has the nerve to roll her eyes and Five almost responds with an equally juvenile response, doesn’t because he’s determined to remain the mature one. It’s close though.

He’s fixated on the injustice of undeserved familiarity for days, fuelled by Diego’s teasing and Klaus’ utter delight that he’s a **reformed** student now.

“It could be worse.” Klaus points out around a mouthful of the Thai food he’d ordered at Five’s
outright refusal to partake in thanksgiving traditions. Apparently the pair of them were in the sort of territory where the Omega believed that just because he was watching over Five for the night while Diego worked it gave him the right to wind him up. “What if they found out your real name.”

It’s old practice now to rein in the vulnerable dash of fear that clashes through his organs and leaves him scrambled. Klaus can’t be aware of the weapon he wields there, he’s not to blame for his ignorance in this case and Five maintains a light tone. “I would say that if they knew then I would sue the teacher for a breach in confidentiality.”

“And you gave me crap for just going by my first name.”

“It’s unusual.” Five remarks, leaves a gap to take a large swig from his mug. It’s the small bonus of having Klaus around, his teacher has no qualms about allowing him to take his fill of caffeine based drinks. “I will find it out at some point.”

“No you won’t,” Klaus raises a cup of something herbal and disturbingly green, “here’s to you wasting your time.” Five toasts it before he can help himself and then resorts to showing his disdain through a displeased sigh. “Hey, at least you get my wonderful company instead of working all night in the cold.”

Five thinks of the stories he’s heard of the infamous Luther, adds in the rather unpleasant temperature outside and decides that the Omega is most definitely right, and for the rest of his evening he alternates between half-hearted hostility and reluctant enjoyment. It only occurs to him when they’re in the middle of a documentary regarding coral reef degradation and the impact of tourism, that he realises he could have sequestered himself in his bedroom instead of sharing the couch with Klaus and cynically mocking the idiots of the world.

What’s more is that he stays there for the rest of the evening and that he enjoys it. A lot.

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For the first time since the creation of his nest, Five has the nightmare. There are plenty of nightmares to choose from, but this one is special.

He’s at home, no not home, home is a place of warm hugs, mothers singing and Grace’s paintings. No this is another building, one that’s larger, colder and he shouldn’t be there. In this realm he’s an observer and there’s nothing stopping his body from travelling through the entrance hall, along the corridor, heart pounding as he opens the third door on his left, each step cleaving his chest in half and at the bottom he’s in hell.

Sir, and he’s Sir, foolish to believe otherwise, looks up from the medical trolley. Eyes that are wholly black and unnatural stare at him and every instrument and machine in the room starts rushing in a swirling mass past Five until a rising wave of nausea has him retching and screaming and Sir stands there and watches him.

Five wakes up with a whimper that he barely catches in time, it inflates and crushes his organs as he thrashes free of Grace’s skirt and Mothers old scarf and finally he’s rolling out of the nest and into the painfully cold air of his room. He knocks over a small collection of comics Delores gave him and in his haste to be free manages to screw up one of the covers.
Unforgivably his eyes blur at the sight as he stands, heart thumping, threatening to jackknife out of his chest if such a thing were medically possible. He takes a minute to press a hand to his chest, forcing it steady, demanding his body obeys him until finally it does, racing heart slowing to an unsteady rhythm and eyes clearing of the watery fog that overtook them.

This is not the first time he’s been assaulted by such a dream and will surely not be the last so reacting in such a way is pointless, there’s no need for the misery that’s lodged deep in his body. Five tells himself this over and over. Starts to believe it even when a sense of something wrong permeates the air.

For a moment he dismisses it as an aftershock, a residual pang of fear taking over his senses. This isn’t right though, it’s not a sense but an ingrained piece of him that knows when something in his world isn’t right, the same way he knew mother and Grace weren’t coming home before the police had confirmed it for him.

Determined to prove he's not being hysterical Five retrieves a jumper to warm his numb fingers, checks his lit up bedside clock, wincing at the harsh numbers telling him that it’s two in the morning. He paces out into the hallway, not needing to turn on the lights to see, it’d been one of the first things he’d done, blindfolding himself and navigating the apartment until he could escape flawlessly if the occasion required it.

He scopes out the bathroom, Diego’s room and thinks he’s in the clear when he catches the spill of light from the bottom of the door leading into the living room. For someone that claims he’s a rational child, Five hesitates for as long as he possibly can before finally twisting the handle and walking in.

It takes a second to locate Klaus, where he stands in the kitchen mobile device pressed to his lips, face splotchy and red and jumping when he sees Five walk in. “Shit. Five, what’re you doing up?” It’s a ludicrous question and Klaus seems to realise it when he releases a wet, choked sound.

“Sorry, I wanted to calm down before I came and got you.”

Oh.

This isn’t good.

This is bad.

Five’s made a critical error.

Never given the breadth of Diego’s work any consideration, the chance that he’ll be put in this position again and now here, with bare feet and cold fingers and a heart that’s started racing again, rabbit fast and burning, he has to deal with his foolishness.

Klaus starts shivering under the pressure of Five’s gaze, no, he’s trying not to cry. That’s worse.

His mouths dry. It isn’t alleviated when he swallows.

“What’s wrong.” He demands.

There’s a siren in his ears, a flatline that drowns out the rest of the room when Klaus smiles, tired and sympathetic and pitying.

“There’s been an accident…”

Five’s overwrought mind shuts down.
Chapter End Notes

Somehow this managed to come out just before I send my laptop off to get fixed until the weekend :) Thanks to everyone who still reads this hot mess and is so kind and supportive, it's very much appreciated <3
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

So who managed to set a deadline and actually keep it for once :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Klaus doesn’t know what he’s doing.

He doesn’t know how he’s ended up in the taxi. How he’s ended up with a child sitting in a rigid line next to him. How he’s ended up this attached to Five and Diego that fears entrenched itself into every vein and muscle and bone in his body.

Five’s remarkably composed.

Klaus is concerned.

Nobody can be this calm. It shouldn’t be possible.

The problem is that the boy won’t talk. He’s silent. A ghost. Klaus has been trying repetitively to talk with him since they’d crashed out of the apartment and flung themselves into the taxi. There’s nothing but a static silence between them. No reaction, no acknowledgement, no tears, Five heard the first few words, grew a distant, glazed look and stiffly walked into his room to dress.

In a cruel, selfish way Klaus is partially grateful for this absence of emotion. It’s given him something to focus on when everything else is going to shit. In the kitchen where he’d resorted to brewing another drink after a restless night seeing Diego’s number light up his mobile, well it’d been second nature to swipe the green button, giddiness fading at the strange voice answering. Then in a way he knows is straight out of a film but in the moment was very bloody accurate, the world slowed down, colours washing clear until all he was left with was splashes of grey and… Five.

Focus.

Focus.

Five is the only thing that matters right now, and Klaus doesn’t care how that’s come about, how the boys had such an impact on him, but this moment right here has left him with no doubt.

“Hey, Five, everything’s going to be alright.”

Five doesn’t answer. Sits there with only the trace hints of something resembling forlorn and lost and this invisible hand reaches out and grasps Klaus by the throat, just under his jaw. There’s nothing he can promise or offer that’ll give the boy the answers he needs, nothing that Klaus can say except what he’s been told, he’s been shot, we’re at the hospital.

He’d thought it might be a hoax, a foul trick played a month too late for Halloween, hanging up with a high pitched yip when another call buzzed in. He couldn’t deny it when a soft spoken nurse called him, confirmed everything and requested they come in and Klaus knows that voice. It’s the gentle pitch that accompanies inconsolable loss.
Focus.

He’s Diego’s emergency contact.

The trust in that sends a knife into his stomach.

And disgustingly there’s a tiny, minute part of himself that’s angry he’s been given this responsibility no matter how much he’s argued for it.

There’s a much larger part of him that’s sending out bargains and bribes to whoever might be listening, might be feeling benevolent that the injuries are insignificant, the bullets path strayed an inch too wide to put Diego in the ground. Not that he’s gotten any response, no shooting star in answer, only a silence that echoes the one in the back seat.

_Fucking focus._

Five steps out of the taxi as they come to a stop and by the time Klaus has thrown a fistful of cash at the driver he has to scramble to catch up. Now comes the next problem, aside from the odd stomach cleansers, the occasional concussions and that one time he’d been resuscitated (actually that was an ambulance job thinking about it) he’s avoided hospitals with a vengeance.

Not that he has the time to linger on that when Five’s weaving through people and marching towards the front desk, ignoring the line and smoothly stepping in when a woman finishes talking. Klaus apologises to the disgruntled queue as he passes, pulls out a look he used to compare to Bambi. If Bambi was a manipulative bastard. It’s one that has Omega’s rallying at the sight of his wide, wet eyes and Alpha’s rumbling into a protective snarl. It never fails.

He catches the tail end of what Five’s saying in a voice rougher than gravel. “Yes. I am family. No we’re not related directly. Yes I’m aware that we look nothing alike.”

That’s bullshit.

And fucking rude.

_Focus._

Klaus turns the Bambi eyes up and comes to a sniffling stop beside Five, bringing a hand up to clutch at the collar of his coat and lets a not entirely fake shiver run up and down his spine until he looks like the mess he feels.

“Please, help us. You have my mate, I can’t- I don’t know what to do.” Klaus lets a stream of tears fall, lets his scent project with the fear that’s been rattling his body. There’s murmuring and sympathetic voices behind him and the man behind the desk looks uncomfortable at the judgement.

“I’m sorry sir, I have to ask that you’ll rejoin the queue, it’s hospital policy that we-”

Whatever he’s about to say, and from the furious scents rising behind Klaus it wouldn’t be well received, is irrelevant because a woman’s storming through the reception, eyes locking in on Klaus and Five.

“Hi, I’m Diego’s captain, Eudora Patch. Luther told me to look out for you both, if you come with me we can go somewhere more private.”

She’s a woman that’s designed to be obeyed, Klaus can recognise an order when he’s given one
and if this Eudora Patch can tell him what the hell has happened then Klaus will follow her anywhere. He’s oblivious to everything other than the tightly drawn shoulders in front of him, the Alpha’s in control here and something minor in Klaus’ chest breathes at the ability to allow someone else to be in charge for a split second.

Five keeps pace, face washed of colour and Klaus worries that he should have gotten the boy to drink, or eat, or just give him something before he collapses. He can’t bring that up now, it’s just another thing he’s forgotten to do, another thing he’s let Diego down on.

Focus.

Eudora Patch gestures them inside, holding open a door that leads into a small waiting room that’s empty except for a single occupant. “This is my sister Gabrielle, she’s a trauma nurse here and she’s promised me that she’ll keep you both updated on everything as soon as any new details come up. The details around the accident aren’t confirmed, once I have a better grasp on the situation I’ll make time to come and see you.”

The nurse, Gabrielle, gives one of those I’ve seen shit you wouldn’t believe and trust me I’ll get you through this sort of smiles that doesn’t touch the stranglehold fear has Klaus in but it’s better than nothing. “Why don’t we sit down and I’ll let you know what’s happening so far.”

“I’m sorry but you’ll have to excuse me, I have to check what’s going on with the rest of my team.” Eudora, whirlwind that she seems to be, leaves in the same way she’d appeared to them, marching out with purpose and Klaus’ subservient brain wishes for a second she’d stay and give him some direction.

Five sits at the very edge of a plastic chair, there’s none of the arrogance in his brow, no disdain at the idea of sitting where sick people might of. It’s like something has cracked him open and peeled out the core functions of the boy Klaus has come to care about.

Gabrielle, correctly, addresses Five when she speaks. “At the moment your brothers in surgery.”

“Injuries?” Five’s voice rasps.

This time Gabrielle glances up at Klaus and he nods immediately. “Diego came in presenting, that means-”

Five lets out a noise that sounds like a hiccup but Klaus is sure it’s his only way of conveying how desperately he needs to hear the truth. Facts. “He knows what it means, just tell it to him straight.”

“I apologise. Your brothers currently having two bullets removed, neither have hit anything crucial, however we’ll know more when they’re finished. They’re also attending to a moderate head injury and what we believe are several fracture ribs.”

Fuck.

Gabrielle clearly has to leave, it seemed busy in the reception and there’s always someone that needs help out there. It’s just Klaus, selfishly, needs her help too. Unfortunately not in a medical capacity. “As soon as I hear more then I’ll come and tell you both.” Five ignores her, sits there, leg bouncing and staring at something that Klaus can’t see.

Time ticks along at an annoyingly sedate pace after that. Gabrielle stays true to her word, returning when she gets a chance to give them the same update and Klaus abstractly thinks she must be missing her break, overworking, and if she’s overworking then so are the doctors, and if a tired doctors working on Diego...
If Klaus can’t fucking concentrate then he might as well give up and bolt down the street to the nearest bar.

Which won’t happen. Although two fingers of whiskey wouldn’t go amiss right now.

He tries to be proactive around the cast iron set of his limbs, a stack of goodwill with the principal will give him a week off, although he’s grateful when upon one of her visits Gabrielle leaves a message on Five’s behalf. The wonderfully kind Beta doesn’t question it and it’s not like the connection probably won’t get flagged up, but it’s the best Klaus can come up with on the fly.

Five’s listlessly organising the pamphlets on a nearby table, sliding them until each sheet is the perfect distance apart, probably down to the millimetre knowing the boy. Klaus wants to join him but whenever he idles closer Five’s blank stare has him retreating, he doesn’t have the vocabulary to explain to a child why everything’s going to be just fine. It might be a lie anyway.

So it goes on for the next hour or so, waiting and waiting and waiting and… fucking waiting. There’s no Ben to fix this for him, no Allison to wave her wand, Klaus can’t bribe, or beg, or even fuck his way through this problem, this disaster and it’s left him completely unmoored. At the mercy of strangers that at any minute might come in and deliver a selection of words that put in a certain order would devastate him.

For a very short time he tries to assist Five in his stringent system, provide a small modicum of reassurance and all he receives for his trouble is a sigh. Now a sigh might be acceptable from any other person, but Klaus has been cultivating an intricate guide in his head on Five. The designated reaction should - at a minimum - be a derisive, curt dismissal. Not this bland, empty shell, and Klaus is trying to work on it when he hears the door opening again.

Klaus is braced for a nurse, a doctor, the prick from reception. He’s not braced for the giant that squeezes his way through the doorway.

That’s… different.

He takes a sniff to confirm what should be obvious, no Omega would overcompensate to that degree. Though the guys build looks naturally obscene and he’s so very clearly not a health care professional.

“Hi,” the giant says, “this nurse said I could find a Klaus in here?”

“What do you want?” Five murmurs, while Klaus straightens up at the sweet sound of the boys voice.

“I came down as soon as they’d let me go.” Klaus takes in the injuries littered over the guys broad body, a gash that’s barely covered and he somehow raises a brow questioningly because no hospital worth a damn would let somebody walk off like that. “Well, I kind of snuck away, but I heard you guys were here, I’m glad you got the message.”

He’s the one that called Klaus first. Which means that he was on the scene and Klaus has questions, too many, and he tries to find the starting point because he has to know what the fuck happened.

“A nurse said that this is Diego’s little guy? Five?” The giant rubs the back of his neck awkwardly and Klaus notes that his arms scraped raw above the hastily applied bandages.

“And you are?” Five says. Doesn’t look up from a pamphlet on organ donation. Perfectly acceptable reading material for a nine year old.
“I’m Luther, his partner, at work.” the giant struggles to speak properly, voice strained like he’s taken a hammer to it (or in Klaus’ experience a good dick).

**Focus.**

“What about it?” Klaus asks, half distracted by the way Five turns slowly towards them.

“I was with him when… It was a routine call, nothing out of the ordinary… I’m sorry, I swear-”

Luther couldn’t look guiltier if he tried and Klaus is about to press for details when they’re both caught off guard by a quiet voice.

“You were there.”

Five’s eyes snap a quick assessment over the man and Klaus is only just putting it together when he realises the intent, cold way that Five’s fixating on the Alpha. That the boy, vastly more intelligent than Klaus, has already put two and two together and found Luther as the insidious answer to the impossible situation that they’ve been put in.

“Five?”

Klaus blinks as Five moves in a way that no child should be able to move.

A silent creature that launches himself at the mountain of a man, tiny hands fisted and furious and lashing out with a startling speed and he’s lethal with it. Drawing blood from Luther’s injured arm before Klaus can jump forward to hook his arms around the boys waist. It’s like trying to move a vicious wildcat only without the hissing and snarling. It’s worse because there isn’t a single noise coming out of Five’s mouth even when he tries to fight Klaus’ grip to get back to the man.

It’s not anger, Klaus realises with a cracking heart as he tries to maintain his hold around the wild thing that’s apparently not above kicking, it’s fear.

Five is fucking terrified.

And he’s can’t dare make a sound in case he breaks.

“Hey. Steady Five. It’s alright.” He’s not Diego, not as good at repeating gentle words in reassurance but it seems to work to a degree so he keeps doing it. Over and over while the blind fury coursing through the boys body finally leaves him trembling violently.

Klaus rocks him back and forth and prays over and over for some sort of help because he doesn’t know what to do and he’s scared.

Eventually Five stills, flint in his eyes when he tries to pull free, a dark look etching itself over his features and there’s no trace of anything kind in there. “I do not apologise.”

“You did everything except take a chunk out of him.” Klaus tries to keep the quiver out of his voice.

“I wouldn’t have minded.” Luther solemnly offers.

“I draw the line at biting.” Five’s already retreating, Klaus can see it in the way he’s folding smaller and smaller, attempting in any way possible to disappear and he will not allow it.

He does something that will most likely backfire but he can’t see any other option. Sliding his arms around the boys body to get a better grip and clutching him in the way he’d always wanted his
mother to do. One hand petting gently through Five’s hair and the other flat against his back.

Five’s frame pulls taut. Tension bleeding out of his skin, and then releasing in a shuddering rush. He curls further into Klaus’ hold, a shaking ball of nervous energy that presses a wet face into the safety of Klaus’ chest.

“I should go, finish giving a statement and check what’s happening on our end. But here’s my number if I can get you guys anything, and when you want to talk... just call me.” Luther holds out a real card, like some old cop show detective and Klaus nods to the table laden with magazines, unwilling to spare a hand. “Again, I’m sorry.”

Klaus thinks he gives a rough reply but he doesn’t pay much attention, can hear Luther leave, ignores it in favour of consoling the terribly fragile child clinging to his sides and shooting off prayers to anyone that might be listening for some help.

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Klaus’ first thought at the sight of Gena walking into the waiting room at a little before nine in the morning is, uncharitably, oh fuck off.

Then fuck off again for good measure.

And maybe for a third time because he’s heard that three times a charm.

Gena predictably doesn’t hear his mental dismissal.

It’s the sprinkles on top of a fucked up situation and quite frankly Klaus can’t take anymore. But the only other person is Five, who’s barely stirred from the spot he’s carved out on Klaus’ lap, although he’s definitely still awake, Klaus can feel the ragged rise and fall of his chest. So he has to keep being the adult, somehow, and deal with this bitch.

“Klaus, Five, how’re you doing?”

Really?

“As you might imagine.” He deliberately holds her gaze, ignoring the quiet submit that ricochets through his body at the challenge.

“I understand.” No. You don’t. “I managed to speak to somebody who mentioned that Diego’s come out of surgery, you should be able to see him soon.”

They already know this, were informed a half hour ago when Gabrielle bought in the steaming mug of hot chocolate that’s sat untouched, cooling on the table. “Thank you, that’s good to hear.”

Gena appears like she cares and Klaus’ jaw clenches at her audacity. “I was hoping, that we might talk. Outside.”

Fuck her for making him move Five.

There’s not much of a choice though, and he’s doing his best to remain calm, appear it at the very least. Klaus can’t help feeling the injustice of the spot he’s been forced into sparking against the carefully hidden embers of his fury. Five slips from his lap and Klaus arranges his coat around the
boy until he’s effectively swaddled and manages not to whine at the lost way Five leans after him.

*What if he’s broken?*

It’s like walking to the fucking gallows when he follows the Alpha into the corridor.

“Can I just say, again-”

“What do you want Miss King?” Klaus aims for direct, anything to shorten his time with the woman and lessens the time he’s away from Five.

Gena’s scent sharpens minutely, releases. “It’s my duty to make sure that Five’s wellbeing is our priority and given the call I received coming into work this morning I would think it’s obvious why I’m here.”

“I didn’t ask why, I asked what do you want?” It’s a bad idea antagonising her but Klaus can’t help it.

“Officially I’m here to see if Five requires a temporary placement.”

Misery and exhaustion fade instantly to the background, replaced by a pure and unfettered rage, the type that boils and burns and sets every nerve in his body alight.

Gena notices, why wouldn’t she and for a second Klaus thinks he might actually lunge for her. Thankfully, in the spirit of not assaulting a social worker in a public setting, she dips her head and concedes. “Which, currently, I see no need to take action. What I wished to speak with you about is off the record.”

“Well, hurry up and say it.” The back of Klaus’ neck feels damp, sweat soaked and he can’t remember the last time he’s maintained a state of anger. He doesn’t do angry. Not for long enough it manifests a physical presence on his skin.

“It’s a rather sensitive issue,” Gena actually gazes around them and deems the janitorial staff a dozen feet away out of range, “regarding Five’s father.”

“What do you mean his father?” Klaus reels back, confusion leeching the strength from his ire.

“When Five’s mother died, the first person given consideration to be his guardian was his biological father. Eventually I had the notion dismissed when a more appropriate person was selected, that being Diego.” Gena sighs softly. “I don’t believe that you’re telling me the entire truth, neither is Mr Diaz and although I will find it out in the end, I also wish only the best for Five.”

“Wait, can you go back a second, why would anyone contact his father if he isn’t in the picture.”

“Nobodies contacted him yet, they’d have to find him first and it appears Five’s mother did an incredibly thorough job of dismantling any connection she may have had with his father, their surnames have been changed and there’s no name logged on the birth certificate.”

“That’s impossible.” It should be, the laws clear on this, it’s somehow a fucking jail worthy offence to not have the father on there. Klaus has never believed the slimy politicians that claimed it was a matter of preserving a child’s right to know it’s parents. The high majority of Alpha’s are male and it’s a perfect piece of documentation to display their right, *ownership*, over their child.

“The most important issue we have is whether a judge would demand we find him if Diego
remains indisposed, depending then on his recovery and a few other factors.”

Klaus, alongside his fellow staff members, sat through the talk given about Five’s circumstances, he’s aware of what a foul hand the boys been given in life, and yet there’s more? “How bad is this guy?”

Gena, for a woman that should have the perfect poker face, appears conflicted, unsure of how much detail Klaus needs given he should probably know all of this. "From what’s been described by Diego and the reaction Five displays at the mention of the man,” Gena’s voice drops, low and concerned, “his fathers not a suitable candidate to be Five’s guardian.”

“Then what’s the problem?” Klaus wants to wring the neck of whatever prick decided that the current system works, because it’s a load of bullshit.

Gena, unbelievably seems to be on the same page as Klaus here. “The problem is that there’s never been any evidence of wrongdoing. Lillian Hargreeves never once put in a complaint with the police, we’ve got no documents from any hospital visits.” What. “It’d be Five’s word against his fathers and given the circumstances most judges would consider him traumatised and an unreliable source.”

“Fuck off.” Klaus says before he can help himself.

“Unfortunately so.” Gena, again, seems to be with Klaus on this one.

“There must be something you can do to stop this then.”

“I’ll have to come back tomorrow, and if there’s any changes I’ll let you know.”

Klaus can’t believe he has to admit this, but it seems in the enemy of my enemy is my friend kind of way that Gena’s on his side. At least until they deal with whatever bastard put the fear of God in a child, and then she’ll probably revert back to her previous goal of sending Five to an appropriate foster family.

On the positive side at least he knows now that he’s a better option than an abusive asshole.

Progress.

“Excuse me, Klaus,” Gabrielle’s voice is the sweetest distraction, “I can take you and Five to see Mr Diaz now.”

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You’re alive.

Klaus is dizzy with the marvel of finding Diego breathing, albeit hooked up to a complicated set of monitors and displays and holy shit, you’re alive.

But…

On the bed, Diego looks fragile, covered in bruises and littered with cuts that if not warranting a dressing, Klaus is terrified to think what’s under the gauze covering the right side of his face.
It doesn’t look right.

It’s too vulnerable, Diego’s roguishly handsome and brilliantly idiotic and rough around the edges in a way that would keep you from bringing him home to your mother (if Klaus’ wasn’t a piece of shit). He’s good. In the way he winks conspiratorially at Five, how he unapologetically burns everything he touches and still manages to make it a joke, in the sweethearts and easy endearments that nobodies ever said sincerely before. The fact that somehow he manages to project this optimistic front when in reality there’s very little to be optimistic about.

People die every day, there’s nothing new or revolutionary about this, it shouldn’t have such an impact on Klaus. But it’s Diego and Klaus shouldn’t feel the way he does, nobody should have to deal with this…

Five reaches out and links their hands in an ironclad grip. “Klaus?”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t leave me.”

Jesus. Fuck.

And thus the last shred of Klaus’ selfish need to run is obliterated.

“I’m not going anywhere. Promise.”

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Gena comes by again later in the afternoon.

The clinical surroundings have drained most of the fight out of Klaus, at least where she’s concerned and when her head jerks in answer to his questioning gaze it has him wondering how quickly can a judge act.

Would they involve themselves now that Pogo, a trauma fellow, said they were out of the woods which is a good sign, surely enough that nobody would try and find some abusive asshole. Yes, there was other sentences like significant blood loss but Klaus is a master at covering his ears to such negativity.

His thought’s are a chaotic mess as it is, firing off in all directions and it’s the first time he’s genuinely felt a real pull towards going out and begging for something chemically euphoric. The thing is he needs clarity more than he can provide in a sober state and although he’d kill for everything to just be silent, Klaus has taken responsibility for Five and that sort of commitment means he needs to stop whining and think of somebody else’s needs first.

Five’s hands are ashen grey around the Biro and sheet of paper that Gabrielle produced for him, pupils fixed on the equipment set up around Diego’s bed. He’s consumed a sandwich, brown, crusts anxiously twisted free between his fingers, in fact Klaus is sure that Five only ate the thing because he told him so.

He’s been entrusted with a power over the cantankerous child, one that he has no idea what to do with, unsure that even if Diego were awake he could make sense of either. It’s another form of trust
and the faith has something sizzle in his stomach.

When Gena disappears to take a call Klaus makes a decision.

Excusing himself to stand out in the corridor he notes that it’s busier now which is better, more background noise to cover the sneaky call he needs to make and he hasn’t been explicitly told not to use his phone but he’s sure there must be some policy against it.

Considering it’s still in the middle of her work afternoon and he’s been avoiding her since that disastrous evening, Allison answers on the third ring. “What’s up princess?”

“Hey Ally. Can I ask you a favour?”

“Depends, can it wait until I’m finished with probate.”

That’s right, he forgot she’s in the middle of some elaborate proceeding between a high profile Omega philanthropist and the offspring of his deceased Alpha. Apparently even philanthropists get shifty about giving up the private yacht. Allison’s spent weeks complaining about the whole ordeal, rightfully so considering it’s below her area of expertise.

Considerable wealth can buy anything.

“Sorry, I’ll t-try again later.”

“Klaus? What’s wrong?” He can hear harsh beat of her heels as she moves, what sounds like her office door opening, the distinctive squeak of the hinge that she keeps meaning to oil.

“It’s complicated.”

“Complicated is trying to get a group of so called adults to decide between a holiday home in Monte Carlo or the London penthouse. Try me.”

The truth will set you free apparently, what they don’t tell you is that once you start it all comes rushing out in a garbled, hushed mess.

“Oh.” Allison says when he’s finished. “That’s different.”

“Really, that’s it?” Klaus glances to the side nervously. He doesn’t feel free, just varying shades of trapped and fucked.

“I mean, it’s stupidly, and I mean **stupidly**, irresponsible of you. But I don’t think you need me berating you right now, and quite frankly I could do with at least a scotch for this.” There’s a bemused sound, and Klaus wants to throw himself down the line and into her reassuring warmth.

“Have you told Ben?”

**Oh god.** That’s a whole other level of stress that Klaus can’t begin to unwind. “No.”

“Okay, well let’s leave it that way for today-” Klaus’ disbelief must be visible from here. “- unless you think he’ll take it well over the phone?”

“No, definitely not. You won’t say anything?”

“I’ll keep quiet, just… don’t leave it too long Klaus, I mean it.”

“Thanks Ally.”
It’s what I’m here for, now let me guess,” there’s an edge of arrogance in her tone and from experience it’s normally followed by the Alpha’s intuitiveness displaying itself in full force, “you want me to see if I can help you out, legally.”

“I need your special approach.” Klaus tries to butter her up with admiration. “Nobody’s as clever as you are baby girl, nobody can make gentle curves instead of sharp angles out of terrible situations.”

“What bodice ripper did you read that rubbish out of?” Allison laughs. “Correct me if I’m wrong here, you want me to waste the goodwill I’ve built up with most of the states judges on finding out where one boys adoption process is at?”

When she puts it like that.

“I can see you pouting from here, enough, of course I’ll do it princess.”

“God, thank you Ally. I owe you so badly.”

“Yeah, you do. I’ll try and be quick but you know what some of these grumpy old bastards are like.” Allison lets out a long suffering grunt that Klaus has only heard after court days and particularly bad depositions. “Do you need me to come over?”

“Nah, I’ve got this… actually, if I text you a list can you pick some stuff up for me?”

There’s a certain confidence that Klaus manages to portray sometimes, a seemingly effortless cloak that covers him perfectly and it works now. By some miracle Allison is fooled by it, after he hangs up Klaus fires off a message, stands looking in through the door and tries to work out just what the fuck he’s going to do now.

Five’s mind is a collapsing mess of flash fire emotions and barely structured thoughts.

He needs to reset himself. Remind himself of who he is.

Five is a child of science.

An only child

Five is logical.

Five is…

Coming up empty as he roots around for something substantial to help him create a basis for his personality.

He is someone that prefers his own company. Error. Delores would disagree.

He is someone that’s capable of maintaining a dignified front. Error. He’s cried in front of his teacher.
Five is keeping his composure barely intact through a combination of monitor watching and Klaus’ nails carding through his hair every other breath. Neither are long term solutions but they do the job for now.

Something in his stomachs causing a horridly erratic pattern of constricting and releasing in roiling waves of bile that become harder to ignore every hour.

He’s keeping what’s meant to be a stringent record of the machines Diego’s relying on. They’re shambolic, times and readings converge and mix into an unintelligible splash of letters and numbers. Five’s ill-prepared, unhinged by this drawn out mess, unable to comprehend the idea that Diego’s still breathing next to him and even if he did believe in one of the spiritual deities then he still wouldn’t pray because the stories have told him that they don’t care enough to listen anyway.

Which is why instead he’s currently in the middle of staring down the EKG and daring it to have the nerve to flatline.

“Five, you need to eat. C’mon, I’ve got coffee and-”

Klaus steps into view, a takeaway cup in his hand and a selection of snacks most likely pilfered from the machine a floor down - although there is another one of those slightly stale sandwiches that indicate he may have gone further afield. Five can’t quite work out why a place of health and healing would encourage such inappropriate items, surely it would be a detriment to the-

“- I mean can you believe she had the cheek to call me out, like I’m the one that’s got this crap on display for anyone to buy-” Klaus’ bumbling bleeds in over the unsteady thump of Five’s pulse. “-and if there’s ever a time for somebody to rot their teeth it’s now… and fuck don’t get me started on the dirty look over the drinks, I had to pretend both were mine-”

Klaus’ voice rises and falls while Five eats, a welcome respite from the strain he’s been putting on his faculties to, effectively, reboot themselves. Any irritation he’s ever suppressed at his teacher has been lost in a murky space between the nightmare and attacking that foul creature. Five needs Klaus near at all times right now.

It’s as if he’s imprinted Klaus into the hollow space left bare by mothers passing. Pressed the Omega into the crevice rendered into his heart where Grace’s laughter used to reside.

_Huh_. He can still recall words that are longer than a few syllables. That’s pleasing to know.

“- don’t you dare waste that coffee, I went through hell to get that bad boy. Did I ever tell you about the time-”

Klaus’ grip on his shoulder turns firm, warmer, and Five forgets why he isn’t supposed to relax into the Omega’s comfort as he swallows a scalding mouthful of coffee and follows it with the snack that looks least likely to give him cavities.

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Five can’t sleep.

It’s not exactly a surprise, nor is it that Klaus is stuck in this same arrested state despite the hour.
They should have probably gone back to the apartment, but the thought of leaving Diego alone in this sterile environment makes Five's heart race.

Slowly mapping out Diego’s face is taking up a great deal of his attention, he’s doing the same with the hand exposed to him, taking note of the callouses and a tiny scar along the base of Diego’s thumb that Five’s never bothered to notice.

It’s casts a shameful, prickling sensation along his spine.

He has to keep folding back the sleeves of a ratty sweatshirt Klaus gave him to change into, pulled out of a bag he’d collected from a striking woman earlier. Thankfully Klaus stood fast in the doorway, creating a barrier preventing entry, Five isn’t sure he’s capable of doing much more than existing at the moment and he’d rather not have a stranger witness to this.

Klaus is doing a lot of things for him, too many and Five can't work out why.

“Play me?”

Five turns his head and is mildly surprised to see the Omega’s cutting a deck of cards in half and then - with some flick of his wrist maybe - shuffling them back together with an impressive speed.

“You’re not allowed to say no because you know you’ll lose.” Klaus winks. Five wants to demand he share the secret of how he still manages to retain some semblance of normality given what’s happening.

So he ends up sitting on one side of the bed, Klaus the other, cards balanced precariously at the end and Five thinks Diego would like it that they’re involving him in this way, even if his legs make it a little tricky.

“Where did you learn how to play?” Klaus asks after swearing colourfully as he loses a game. This time it’s three card Brag. The first couple of times they played poker and Five lost miserably, the next had been Rummy which ended up a neutral field of losing and winning and then losing once more.

Klaus suggests Snap at one point. Five isn’t impressed.

He buys time to consider his answer by trying to emulate Klaus’ effortless dealing, he’s far clunkier, cards sticking together, but it’s passable. “Mother taught me. She liked Rummy the best, but I thought it a shame not to learn more.”

“You really are a perfectionist.” Klaus snorts, appears to be genuinely amused by the thought.

“Why do you play?” Five asks curiously, setting up another game while he waits for an answer.

“Something to do. I used to have to lose a lot so it was nice, eventually, to play properly with friends.”

Five doesn’t understand this. “If you’re good at cards, then why wouldn’t you win?”

Klaus hums, low and rough and Five knows that look. He’s seen it in the mirror, reflected in Diego’s face once or twice and now he’s learnt that it’s a universal expression. “Because not everyone wants you to do well Five. Some people will never be happy for others, whether you’re better than them or not. Some people can never accept that you’re anything other than precisely what they demand of you and if they demand that you lose, well then you best lose.”
Five digests this as Klaus pulls a prial next, crowing in delight, the epitome of a poor sport. “Why would you stay around people that want you to lose?”

Klaus hesitates, reluctant to impart something, he gives a too tight shrug of his shoulders. “Can’t help who you’re parents are.”

“You have my sympathies.” Five mutters absently. There’s a compulsion inside his head that wishes to share with Klaus and he isn’t sure if it’s being influenced by their circumstances. But he does know that Diego trusts Klaus implicitly by this point, and so does he.

“I can…” Is he really doing this?

Five is having trouble swallowing, a problematic issue considering his mouth tastes chalky and dry. Klaus offers up a carton of juice he’s been daintily sipping from for a while and Five half drains it before he remembers to be civilised, that it’s had another’s mouth on it and he isn’t retching.

The worlds upside down.

Diego’s here with him. He’s being held together by stitches and medication pumped through an IV but he’s still here where Five needs him.

“I can attest to the-” think of the right word “-difficulties of having a-” he knows so many words, how is this so hard “- troubled relationship with a parent.”

There. That wasn’t that awful.

Klaus taps a pale finger against the stack of cards, absorbing the information that Five’s partially regretting offering even if the experience was decidedly underwhelming.

What he isn’t expecting is: “Daddy issues, that’s shit.”

The idea of calling Reginald daddy is so ridiculously absurd, so terribly disturbing that Five’s throat protests at the crackle of laughter that escapes him.

When he’s finished Klaus is watching him, the green in his eyes standing out, stark and bright in the dim light and Five feels exposed by the affection he sees there. It has him clumsily collecting the cards together, blinking too quickly to avoid another embarrassment and it takes him a minute to figure out why.

This is the first time he’s admitted such a thing, placed the words out there into the world instead of allowing mother to whisper them in a fervent tirade with sweet Grace. Diego knows what he’d gotten into taking on Five, but once again it’s from another that’s spread Five’s story, not a first hand account.

Five has chosen who he tells. He chose. It feels relieving to let go of that first, a tiny, weighted pressure in his back releasing.

He manages a weak smile, tired but not sleepy, and Klaus returns it equally.

“Can we play another game.”
To derive a phrase from Diego, Five would very much appreciate it if Miss King, the Doctors, Luther and mostly anyone aside from Klaus, would kindly fuck off.

This is not the time for self censorship and if it were Five wouldn't care in the slightest anyway. He also, under no uncertain circumstance, will not be moved from Diego’s bedside (toiletry matters aside) and he doesn’t appreciate the attempts to encourage him away.

“Five, we can call you when Diego wakes up.” Miss King's voice is like a rusted nail impaling his eardrums.

“No.” His fingers tighten reflexively over Diego’s wrist, seeking the reassuring warmth.

Go away.

“It’s been two days.” Has it been that long? “You can’t stay here until he wakes up Five.”

“It’s a Saturday, I have no other requirements today.”

Klaus is chewing on a hangnail. The Omega’s fretful. Anxious.

Enough.

“Miss King, would you be willing to make me a promise?”

Klaus looks up at his tone and Five learns that he’s becoming remarkably accepting - weak -of the care he’s done little to deserve in those wide eyes.

“Of course I can.” Miss King also wishes to give him a caring expression. Five might have accepted it begrudgingly if it weren’t that she’s gifted countless others with the same gentle face. He has no use for recycled presents.

Klaus' care is unique.

“Then you wouldn’t mind giving me your word that if anything were to happen to Diego, if he were to…” Pin it. Move past. “No matter what you’d take responsibility for his health, if he were to deteriorate and I missed…” Pin it. Move past. Make your point. “Would you be willing to guarantee that I’d be here before he died.”

Well done Buddy.

Fantastic. He’s hallucinating his stepbrothers voice. Wonderful.

Miss King’s posture shifts subtly, Five sees it though, she’s leaning towards Klaus and Five is certain that she’ll ask to speak to the Omega alone.

Five doesn’t step closer to Klaus to make a point. He very much does it because he wishes to receive a level of comfort that he’s recently acquired through a pair of bony arms. Klaus startles at the contact. Relaxes. Places a hand through Five’s hair that’s so startlingly reminiscent, right down to the gentle scratching along his scalp.

Unfortunately it doesn’t work.

Klaus comes back inside paler than his usual milky complexion and Five’s nails cut into his palms. He feels mulish when the Omega refuses to tell him what’s wrong, no that’s not right, Klaus rudely
plays ignorant and it feels like a slap to the face. Five should know, he's dealt with enough of them.

For some unknown reason Five can’t keep his emotions in check, they’re running rampant through his chest, along his ribcage, crashing down his fingertips.

It’s **exhausting** feeling like this.

“You do understand that you’re not my mother.” Five says bitterly. “You have no right to keep anything regarding me to yourself.”

“I’m not trying to be your mother, not even a little,” Klaus sounds tired and it takes the anger out of Five’s figurative sails, “I wouldn’t do her the disservice of pretending to be. But right now I’m doing the best I can Five. Like it or not you need me, and I need you.”

Crying is a vile side effect of being human, and once again - in more times in the last forty eight hours than the first nine years of his life - Five is teetering on the edge of dissolving. “You can’t say things like that unless you’re going to stay.”

Why would he say that.

*Weak. Desperate.*

“Wanna know something Five, you and Diego are exactly the same in some ways.”

“How?” He wants to know, needs to hear how he has a connection to his brother.

“Both of you say really stupid shit sometimes.” Klaus laughs, a sounds that’s devoid of malice, at Five’s indignant snort. “He’s also pretty bad at understanding why anyone would want to be around him. I don’t have a clue what else I’ve got to do to prove to you that I’m not going anywhere poppet.”

The term should rile something up in him but Five would very much like to be soft for once and let somebody else take care of him. It’s a sensation he hasn’t been able to indulge in for a year now and it **hurts**.

“Oh, no, Five, please don’t cry.”

*What is this disobedient body of his playing at.*

“Seriously, if Gena comes back in and sees you like this she’ll bloody cane me.”

Klaus is kinder than Five deserves right now, arms come up and around his shoulders, dragging him forward until he’s curled up in Klaus’ lap and it’s pathetically easy to fall asleep in this small bit of safety he’s being gifted.

Chapter End Notes
I've only just realised that poor Diego's ended up getting shot twice now in my stories, the poor guy. But I'd like to seriously say thank you so much for all of the incredible comments on the last chapter, it's very gratefully received <3
Diego wakes up for the first time, not with a rush and a bang, but with a lethargic thump, head splintering into unpleasant sparks, much like he’d expect to awaken in a hospital.

He knows it’s a hospital much the way any grizzled detective in the precinct might. Experience. Therefore he knows to take this moment slowly. Pain needs to be respected, given it’s time and then carefully managed. It’s a process he’s gone through twice before and it’s helpful if only that he knows what to do now - recall what’s happened and prepare for the onslaught of pain.

Luther’s what happened. Bastard.

Actually.

Not so bastard Luther. Shit. It’s the effort to think that has something pull taut and crumble simultaneously in his chest, an exercise that at least identifies why it’s hurting to breathe. He’s thinking two or three, no more, hopefully.

Ignoring the broken ribs he tries to draw back the alleyway, which is a cliché in and of itself, he can feel the burrowing pain in his shoulder as it happens, an insistent, violating ache that demanded he dig it out immediately before it set in his bone. Subsequently, on a piece of rare luck, the following impact to his side never truly registered.

Why isn’t Luther a bastard?

It’s not clear, a jumbled mess that’s cracking apart and pixelating when he tries to fine tune it, coming clear when he realises that there’s certain concentrated fragments that’s lost to him. He can recall flying which is ridiculous, everything blurs when he tries to remember why his head hurts quite so badly. This is new. Gunshots don’t equate to mind wrecking levels of pain. No. That’s also not right. This is a distinct line of pain that’s focused solely to one side of his head.

He’s not going to know unless he wakes the fuck up, properly, and there’s a reason he should, something important that he can’t pull up, but it’s enough that with a heavy resignation he commits to surfacing through the bubble of pain.

If he wasn’t experienced in the art of coming out of a blackout - though this is much worse - then he’d be alarmed by the monochrome haze he’s peering through. Blinking is awful, a literal sandpaper exercise that at the very least focuses the muddle before him until he can make out distinct shapes, colours bleeding gradually through his peripheral and-

He’s only looking out of one eye.

That’s…

Shit.

No, he can feel it there. He’s sure of it. There’s something covering his right eye and although it’s not intolerable to screw his face up to check, it’s sure as fuck not nice.

“Oh, hell, you’re awake.”
Diego takes what could be a second or an hour to place the voice and when he does it’s almost more disappointing than the fact that he’s here in the first place.

“You’re not dead.” The prick says. Diego’s been shot, he’s allowed to call him that today.

It takes a bit of searching to find his voice in the dried out husk of his throat. “You’re here. Can’t be heaven.”

“And you’re definitely not brain dead.” Luther’s chuckle jars a loose rattle that vibrates through Diego’s head. That line slicing through his temple sets itself on fire for long enough he croaks out a gasp.

“Hey, I told you to get out before Five comes back in.”

It’s the rush of something heartbreakingly gentle that overrides the pain in his head and it’s easier now to pull words together. "Hey sweetheart.”

Klaus makes it worth it with his high shriek, the intoxicating smell of him, the fact that he full body rushes Luther, barging past him until all Diego can see, in his unbiased opinion, is the most beautiful sight he’s ever had the pleasure of waking up to. There’s tension in the hand that comes to grab his - he still has both hands, that’s relieving to know - Diego can feel the understated strength in Klaus’ grip. It’s anchors him enough to fully come out of the hazy fugue he’d been lost in for-

“How long?”

“Luther, be useful and find a doctor.” Klaus glances over his shoulder. “It’s been 53 hours since we got here.” He’s been counting down the time.

Klaus is so unbearably perfect that he’s already grabbing a tumbler of water, pouring it out, using one deceptively strong arm to help him prop up properly and giving him a moment to reorientate. Diego can’t remember a time where he’s been grateful for being coddled like this aside from mom and it’s that more than the crisp water trickling down his throat that has him grinning.

Well, kind of, it’s a lopsided affair at best.

And it fucking hurts.

“I can’t believe you’re awake, oh shit, sorry, I just…” Klaus is sniffling, crying openly and Diego wants to pull him closer, guilt crackling in his stomach at how fucking useless he is right now.

“D-don’t cry sweetheart, please, c’mere.”

Klaus listens, obedient intentionally or like Diego needing the reassuring familiarity of warm skin. Tentatively Klaus’ cheek presses into the side of his neck that isn’t barking out it’s protest, he’s too hot, flushed, and the scent pummelling Diego’s senses is remedying everything that feels wrong and foreign in his aching body.

He can’t lift his arm up to wrap around Klaus so he settles for sliding his thumb over the thundering pulse at his wrist, feeling no shame at the hitch of breath he gets at the intentional swipe of his glands.

“Where’s Five?”

“Changing, having a wash, he’s refused to leave so I told him he had to do his teeth ‘cos you
wouldn’t want to deal with the smell when you-” Klaus cuts off with another sniff.

“What about you?”

“We’re mates, remember, you’ll get over it.” Klaus smiles. Diego can feel the impression of it against his collarbone. “Oh, I need to get Five, he’ll be-”

“Wildly unimpressed that you didn’t think it necessary to include him in this touching moment.” Five’s voice drawls.

Diego drinks in the sight of him in a way that’s entirely different to Klaus, but in no way less soul shattering. Five’s standing in a far too large sweater, pink, old enough that it’s bobbled in places, his hairs tufting up in the way Diego’s seen it do when the boys not washed it on the rare mornings he gets up earlier. His eyes are weighed down by a heavy circle of purple and black, stark against his pale skin and most worryingly is that despite the proud pinch to his face, he’s cradling this fluffy travel bag to his chest in a way that’s entirely too human. Childlike.

“Hey Five.” It’s lacklustre but Diego can only focus on the gut punching relief that is having his brother here with him.

Five carefully places his bag to onto a chair, taking time to angle it correctly and his fingers are shaking, enough that Diego with his still fuzzy vision can pick up easily. “Do you remember what you promised me before we went into the family court.”

Diego can’t, not that he isn’t straining a particularly tender part of his brain trying to find it.

“If I recall correctly,” shaking fingers turn into shaking hands, “you said that you wouldn’t put me in this position. Ever.”

Oh, fuck, it’s precisely the sort of idiotic thing he’d say, no matter how well meaning his intentions were, and of course Five, in all of his delicately stuck together pieces, would take it as the gospel truth.

“I would say that you’ve failed there.” Five comes up to the end of the bed and Klaus steps back, clearing room for the anger that Diego deserves to hear.

His brother stares up at one of the monitors there for a second before his gaze falls back to watching him and Diego’s braced for whatever vitriol he’s about to receive. Five’s tiny hand ends up resting against his knee, one of the few spots that doesn’t ache, uncurling into an open palm.

Five takes a slow breath. “You look awful.”

Diego doesn’t get it. Then he does and he’s grinning again. “What sort of asshole would say something like that.”

“You.” Five smiles, it’s too much teeth and it’s fucking brilliant.

“Sounds about right.” Laughing is out of the question so he quashes it. “You coming over here or not?”

Five flies.

The resulting scramble of limbs tears four of his stitches and Diego couldn’t care less.
That’s an overstatement when the doctor, a placid Beta, finishes patching him back up, although Pogo kindly asks the nurses for painkillers strong enough that although he can still feel nausea bubbling up when he shifts it’s no longer splicing through Diego’s body in an unceasing wave.

It doesn’t help that he fucking hates needles.

“Biologically your body will aid the process, however there’s only so much that an Alpha’s elevated healing will allow.”

“In other words it’s going to hurt like hell for a while.” Thank fuck he’s no longer stuttering like a fool.

Pogo nods, reels off a load of medical stuff that mostly flies over his head but Five’s furiously scrawling onto a sheet of paper he’s propped up on a fashion magazine that’s undoubtedly Klaus’.

It’s embarrassing but he drifts off for a while. Surfacing occasionally until he’s pretty sure that it’s night time when he breaks through properly. Similar to earlier Luther’s here, his gigantic frame perched awkwardly on a stool that looks comically like it’s about to crumple under the strain.

“Twice.” Diego grumbles, tries to keep it low. “Twice I’ve had to see you’re face when I wake up.”

Luther’s guilt reads off him clearer than a page from a book. “Sorry.”

There’s a lot of apologies going around today and this is one that is definitely not needed. Memories, patchy as they may be, are slotting into place in his head. “For?”

“This.” Luther waves a hand vaguely over him.

Diego runs through it, remembers staggering forward, blood tacky and wet dripping down his side, Luther’s considerable strength throwing him like a rag doll across the alley just as a something blew past his face leaving a burning trail in it’s wake. He knows they were checking out a disturbance, but he can’t find the finer details amongst the scattered pieces still swimming out of reach.

He does know that he’d have an inconvenient hole in his head if it wasn’t for the gigantic bastard.

“When I could do without the busted ribs, couldn’t have chucked me somewhere softer?” He aims for light and Luther must be so deep in that self blaming spiral that he has the nerve to look shocked at the lack of spite in Diego’s voice. “Suppose at least I’m here to give you shit about it which is better than the alternative.”

“It would have been boring if you weren’t around to be a dick.” Luther confesses.

That startles a choked laugh out of him, the rare curse, and Diego wheezes. Inhales something potent enough that he’s craning forward enough to see that Klaus near the foot of the bed, fast asleep.

“So that’s Five,” Luther’s head tilts in consideration, “he’s cute.”

Diego follows Luther gaze, spots Five curled up in a tight ball on top of what he thinks is one of
Klaus’ oversized cardigans, and yeah, he looks fucking cute.

“I’d take another bullet to see you tell him that when he’s awake.”

Luther gives one of those golden boy smiles. “As scary as that is, I’d be more afraid if he was awake.”

Diego looks back towards Klaus. *Really looks at him.*

Klaus’ fingers are closed around Diego’s ankle through the sheets, his heads resting on the edge of the bed and his upper bodies twisted in what must be an uncomfortable angle to allow this. The pheromones he’d scented are rising in a protective wave from the Omega every few seconds and slamming into Diego, sinking through the ache and grind of his bones and settling into his blood in what’s suspiciously like a claim.

“He’s a loyal guy.” Luther says, casts another appraising look over Klaus and a very old piece of Diego bristles. Luther doesn’t comment on it thank fuck because nobodies got time for some possessive bullshit, also Diego now has first hand experience in just how strong his partner is. “Every time I’ve come by I’ve been told, firmly, how unwelcome I am.”

“I’d say I’m sorry-” Diego grins, can’t help it, at Klaus’ scrunched nose as the Omega shifts in his sleep.

“-But you’re really not. You must have rubbed off on him” There’s a flash of something that might just be teasing in his voice and for the first time Diego doesn’t want to ruin Luther’s good mood.

“In every way imaginable.” Klaus mumbles, startling them both and with his eyes still closed he lifts his hand and shows off one particular finger. “Thought I told you,” he yawns and it’s *beautiful,* “to go away.”

Diego really wishes that everyone would stop making him laugh, busted ribs are not conducive to a fun time. Still it’s worth it to see the corners of Klaus' mouth rise.

Luther stands and from this angle he takes up even more room the big bastard - that’s really not one. “ I’ve got to go anyway.”

“See you soon partner.”

Luther lights up and fuck if the man doesn’t trot out of the room like a praised animal.

“Hate him.” Klaus huffs when the door clicks shut.

“No, we like Luther sweetheart.”

Klaus huffs again, long and drawn out, before without opening his eyes, reaching out blindly and sliding their hands together. A minute later Diego can hear his breathing deepen, face tucking in against his thighs and Diego’s slept for long enough that he doesn’t want to go back under, struggles against it in favour of watching over Klaus and Five until morning.

“No. The administrator said that I had a week off as well.”
“I get it Five, I do. But it’ll look good if you’re acting normally and it’ll keep Gena off of my fucking back.”

Klaus tries to stare the mulish child down and he thinks he just about manages it, until…

“Why do you get this week off then?” Five crosses his arms like he’s accomplished the ultimate rebuttal.

“Because I’m an adult.” Kind of. “I had a load of holiday accrued anyway so it’s just worked out well.”

“That’s…” Five looks so close to saying that’s not fair and it’s the first normal thing that’s happened between them in a long time. Klaus is an old hand at managing tantrums, however it would be unfair to Five to compare him to a standard child.

Five deserves honesty.

“Look.” Klaus wishes they could have this conversation somewhere better than the hospital car park. It’s the most private place he could think of on the sly, in the way that nobody lingers, always in a rush to come or go. “I know it’s not going to be easy. But I really need something to show Gena when she comes back in.” And By Gena he means whatever fuckers are still trying to find Five’s dick of a dad.

The small boy unravels slowly, intelligent eyes sweeping over Klaus’ face and probably finding the worries he’s trying damn hard to hide. It’s not that he wants to lie to Five, it’s one more of omission, Klaus just doesn’t know what else to do.

“Fine.”

“Thanks poppet. Just imagine that you’re there to keep an eye on my passion project.”

Five rolls his eyes. “I sincerely doubt that the substitute will have managed to turn Merlin straight in your absence.”

“Oh god, I wasn’t thinking about that.” Klaus lets out a whine and is rewarded by a quick compression of Five’s arms around his waist before the boys marching back towards the hospitals entrance. He’s still a little starstruck by the affection, unsure why Five’s fixated all of his emotional output on Klaus and in no way complaining about it.

“That’s so disgustingly sweet I might retch.”

Allison weaves through the labyrinth of cars until she stops by his elbow, holding another bag of things that he’d messaged her for this morning. “I hope you know that I came out to you on the Lord’s day specially.”

“You’ve never spent a Sunday in church in your life babygirl.”

“Well as we’re all keeping secrets how do you know I wouldn’t.”

Klaus ignores the light dig. “Your twenty sixth birthday.”

“Ouch, that’s a low blow princess. I think I could have been partner by now if I hadn’t poisoned my brain that badly.”

“Senior associate is pretty fucking incredible Ally.”
“Enough of me and my perfect life.” Allison lets out this self-deprecating laugh that Klaus knows is meant to seem insincere to a stranger. She’s never taken compliments well from him, or Ben, or anyone she genuinely likes for that matter. He doesn’t get it, Allison’s perfect in his eyes.

“I’ve been digging about best I can. Had Bowman look into it, and you know what a disgusting perve he is.” Klaus nods. “You owe me a drink for that one by the way.”

“I’ll buy you a bar if it helps.”

Allison’s brow raises slightly. “On a teachers salary? I’d be lucky to get ice in my whiskey.”

“Hey!”

“Trust me it’s not an insult, you guys get paid shit. Anyway, Bowman went on and on about how much the sun shines out of his ass.” This time Allison really does retch. “But he did give up the goods in the end, unintentionally I think, he was saying that there’s this funny case they’ve been working on. A guy they’ve been trying to find that’s, shall we say, elusive.”

Klaus’ heart must be taking damage from the strain it’s been under over the last few days. “Are they close?”

“Doesn’t seem like it, and his team didn’t seem that rushed. I’ve been researching what I can just in case.”

“Sorry Ally, I don’t think I can afford your retainer.”

“I doubt loverboy can either. I’ll consider you’re undying love as my payment.”

Klaus laughs, brittle and tired and Allison’s eyes narrow ever so slightly. “Honestly, I haven’t told him yet. Gena came by when he fell back asleep and I managed to keep her out.”

“Why?” Allison, unlike so many, has never cast a disapproving gaze over him. Not properly, her judgement can be wielded with a sharp tongue but it’s just that.

“He tore his stitches yesterday, can you imagine what’d happen if I turned around and told him that his brother might get taken away by an abuser. Shit. It’d be awful.” Klaus isn’t choking up because he’s upset, well not entirely, it’s mostly for Five, for this whole shitty world.

“Do you want me to tell him? I can do it clinically and he might find it a relief knowing he has support?”

Klaus gives her her most disbelieving look. “You don’t like him. That won’t help.”

“No I don’t really. But you do, and if you think I’m going to lose you as a friend because of something so simple then you’re a fucking idiot princess.”

“You know,” Klaus suppresses a laugh that might turn into actual tears, “he said the same thing, not about this, but still said I could be a fucking idiot for believing something stupid.”

Allison sniffs haughtily and somehow, impossibly, it comes across dignified. “Okay, first, we’re not wrong. Second, if he ever says that again I’ll kick his ass. Third and most importantly so pay attention.” She waits for Klaus to nod. “I could despise the ground a guy walks on but if you think he’s worth knowing then I’ll take the arsenic out of his food and play nice, because I know that you’d do the exact same thing for me.”
It feels like someone’s crushing his windpipe. “I know it’s just-”

“Klaus.” Allison’s stern voice is at odds with her scent, berries and vanilla and something that’s inherently her, home wrapped up in a gorgeous package. “I get that you want to do this independently and I know we smother you a lot, but it doesn’t mean that you have to take every step forward alone.”

It’s a little too kind and Klaus would decline, but she’s also right. He’s too high strung to get the details across to Diego in a way that wouldn’t muddle and confuse the Alpha. There isn’t even the excuse that Diego might be angry at Klaus for confiding in his friend, the guys too decent to do that to him, and here is his steadfast companion, willing to do something difficult to ease the burden on his shoulders.

“I’d really like that, thank you Ally.”

Allison hooks an arm through his, towering over him in those monstrous heels that even Klaus doesn’t think he quite has the nerve to conquer. There’s something reassuring about the fact he can grow without discarding the support beams that have kept him strong for so many years.

Five’s occupied with this sweet girl that Klaus doesn’t recognise, Vanya, Diego said. He’d given the number for Klaus to call earlier to keep the boy company and here she is with a stack of old time crosswords and two obscenely large takeaway cups, one steaming bitter, the other sickly sweet.

It’s the perfect timing and Klaus can’t stop thanking the girl as she shepherds Five towards the cafeteria. It’s a relief that he can keep Five free of all this a little longer, a relief that the boy doesn’t have yet another thing thrown on top of him.

Timing is truly with him, Diego’s in that slightly buzzed stage that means Gabrielle or one of the other kind nurses have checked his medication and adjusted accordingly. Klaus might be slightly jealous of that high if it weren’t for the injuries, he’ll get off to pain in a controlled setting but getting shot seems a little excessive for his standards.

“So Diego’s definitely high enough that instead of cursing he only looks slightly alarmed at Allison following behind him.

Klaus hasn’t got the nerve to speak, cowardly lets Allison clear her throat and project that confident, assured tone she uses at work to catch Diego up with everything that’s happened since he’s been unconscious.

Diego doesn’t interrupt except for a few harsh exhales and Klaus can’t be the only one that can feel this draw, an eruption bubbling inwards ready to implode coming from the man.

“I’ve kept this to myself, none of the juniors know about it and as much as Bowman can be a prick, he’s a reliable prick on this front.”

“You’ve got dirt on him.” Klaus confirms, hopes that this confirmation of confidentiality will elicit a reaction from Diego.

“That’s an understatement, he’ll find this guy, there’s no doubting that, Bowman’s the best at his job, it’s why the state puts up with him.” There’s a shadow of fury effortlessly buried in her words and Klaus wants to thank her in every language available for putting up with the creep to help them. “I know Miss King, through the vine so to speak, if you want me to I can try and see where I
can get with her. Although she seems to be on your side if she’s willing to break the law in confiding with you on these things. How bad is his father anyway?”

“If I could I’d kill him.” Diego says, voice gritty and dangerous.

Klaus jumps, literally, he’s not looked at the Alpha while Allison spoke, nervously awaiting the outburst that should come. Now he’s looking and it’s alarming the change from the Diego that strokes sweet words into his skin to this cold, calculating man. He’s never seen a persons eyes grow that dark, that hard, that violent.

Except he has. Once. A long time ago when he was younger, foolish, turning tricks nightly for his parents love, unable to escape from a community that thought that was all he was worthy for. Desperation and loathing and skin crawling filth that had him hurtling off of a bridge in the middle of the night in a perverse attempt to baptise himself. Only to be bought back by Ben’s palms pounding on his chest, eyes blazing fury and promising something better.

Klaus doesn’t remember much of his parents funeral, only drinking himself silly to forget a truth that he didn’t want to acknowledge about his truest friend, his saviour. The next day, they’d left home. Ben didn’t bother telling the aunt who’d held the pretence of raising him between catatonic stints, and somewhere in between jacking her car and learning to drive it on the go, Klaus realised he was finally free.

They'd worked their way across the states, stopping here and there depending on how long it took for folks to figure out that two fourteen-year-olds shouldn’t have been able to sweep them under the table at cards. It worked well, until Klaus ruined things by burning through his first heat a year later just outside of New York.

They grew up then, and ever since they’ve never spoken of the accident, Klaus doesn’t want to know what happened in the hours that have locked themselves away.

He hasn’t got any regrets about it either.

So, after the initial shock subsides, he realises just how bad the situation must be to warrant such a reaction. He supposes in a healthy world he probably should feel alarmed. Klaus tries to feel perturbed, anxious, and it’s laughable how impossible the task is, like staring into a bottomless pit and knowing there’s nothing there. He’s dealt with the monsters a long time ago and Diego’s smouldering rage holds no fear over him.

Anyway.

Thinking of Five in a situation even a tenth of his has this unknown shard inside of Klaus turn white-hot for a blinding second, ugly, cruel, unquenchable in it’s need to protect the small boy.

“Well, that’s not going to help. Unless you think you can get away with it?” Allison, god fucking bless her, doesn’t react to what must be a crackling challenge in the air, intended for someone else, sure, but the air still reeks of an irresistible call.

“If anyone can, it must be a cop.” He adds. Skims his fingertips across one of the lighter scrapes and Diego blinks, looks up at him slowly and the tension slowly rolls out of his frame, pain and a healthy kick of pheromones taking the edge off. “But nobodies committing a felony today, right?”

The questions remote, rhetorical really, Diego’s mouth curls up in an apology and if they were alone then Klaus would show there’s nothing wrong. He gets it.

Instead he settles down to make plans with the smartest woman he knows and his Alpha.
Five for all of his disgust at the situation, lets Klaus escort him to school in the morning. Admittedly he’s watched from the street corner, hood of his single jacket pulled over his head like a creep.

He’s glad he insisted, Gena comes around lunchtime on the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and by the Thursday Klaus - safe in the knowledge that he’s done a fucking good job - accepts her stiff nod of approval. Not that she’s any further on the whole abusive father debacle, the process seems to be grinding to a halt and although Diego’s going to be coming home soon, his good health doesn’t seem to factor in.

It’s a matter to consider at another time, a less charged time.

Klaus has iterated his feelings for Diego in every possible permutation, except for the obviously big one, and he thinks that Diego understands. However he’s also intimately aware of how your appearance can define you and waiting for the nurse to remove the gauze is becoming an exercise is fucking patience.

Klaus can sense the nerves percolating under Diego’s skin, only because they’re catching the loose ends of his own and by the time the nurse steps out to give them a moment he’s an uncovered live wire as he inspects the face he’s rather attached to.

There’s going to be a wicked scar, a line dissecting from his upper cheekbone and spearing straight through to his hairline. The intended trajectory is horrifying, sickening and so very wrong that Klaus is pretty sure it’s not only nature screaming for him to collapse on top of his Alpha and protect him.

Because Diego is his Alpha.

Much the way Klaus is his Omega.

There’s a time for confessions and emotions and it’s not now, neither is it time to alleviate the mood, place light jokes in this perturbed silence. From experience of scars, transparent and opaque, they needed to be given time to weigh heavy.

Klaus moves slowly, allowing a space for Diego to decline, climbing with carefully placed limbs until he’s lying adjacent to the man. There’s enough scruff that it rasps against Klaus’ cheek when he kisses the underside of Diego’s jaw, can feel it against the back of his hand as he brushes the hair that’s growing long enough to fall over his Alpha’s forehead. He misses the solid heft of Diego’s arms around him, a stinging in his throat eases at the thought that he’ll feel them again, soon.

There’s something monumental in lying here, forgetting the sound of his own voice, in this rare minute of silence before Klaus knows they’ll have to lurch into the next disaster. Diego’s inking words into Klaus’ skin through the unsteady beat of his heart, a question unspoken, gratitude eked out with each buh-bum, and stuttered breath.

A tenderness surges up in him and it’s new, different to anything else, an unexplored entity that might take years to map out. Something in the heat of those dark eyes tells him that Diego wouldn’t mind if it took a lifetime to understand.
Five would like nothing more than to retreat into his books, whittle down the hours until the day ends by marking down fragments of poetry and quotations of minds far superior to his own.

The universe, it seems, does not care for what Five would like. It likes repetition in the form of broken promises and cold machines whirring in the background of his thoughts. But one, minor request from a young child? The universe laughs at his nerve.

It’s intolerably rude.

Unfortunately Five doesn’t think he can win a war with the vast entity so he settles for a mediocre battle with the substitute who has the audacity to masquerade as Klaus’ equal.

In the spirit of remaining honest, Five will admit responsibility for the start of the hostilities.

Substitutes a fairly polite woman, civilised, robotic, mechanically teaching them literacy with none of the flare Klaus employs to keep his classroom exciting.

It isn’t that Five’s ever made an effort to engage in these lessons, however with hindsight he can appreciate the ingenuity of the Omega’s methods. He’s possibly adding a dash of sentimentality to these thoughts and that’s never a clever way of discerning the objective truth. But Five wishes to be sentimental at the moment.

Also the substitute, and she will earn no name from him (especially after her transgressions), messed with his work.

After the obligatory hug from Delores when he walks in, one that he doesn’t quite relish but it’s acceptable, he zeroes in, first, on his fellow students, the electric thrum of the classroom sorely missing. That’s when his eyes narrow on the back wall, which Klaus cleared to make room for their plays set pieces.

It’s… wrong.

His castle is lacking the fluorescent banners Joshua asked for. His moat no longer contains the trio of pretty mermaids Rebecca requested he paper mache. And, most egregious of all, Arthur’s armour is no longer magnificently regal in the rainbow of hues Delores depicted in her drawings, it’s a matte grey that’s dulled further by Merlin’s decidedly bland hat, glitter free and drooping on one side.

In the three school days she’s been in charge, this woman’s ruined their play, taken the heart out of it that Five initially detested and now cares for greatly.

Five glances around his classmates.

They’re all sitting there, glumly, despondent.

Of course Klaus will be back in time to fix this, they aren’t to be faulted for their ignorance.

He really should wait, Klaus will deal with this atrocity.

He makes it a half hour.
Delores’ head dips, face pinched when Substitute attempts to encourage her to come to the board and complete a mathematical question that Five should be helping her with. Klaus would never force one of them to feel uncomfortable.

“What happened to Arthur’s unicorn?” He calls out.

Substitutes taken aback, Five thinks she expected him to sit in the corner, mournful and delicate. “There seems to have been a mix-up, King Arthur never rode a unicorn and we wouldn’t want to do it inaccurately, would we?”

“There’s a unicorn because Millie suggested it and we all voted on it.” He didn’t. In fact he disowned his fellow classmates at the thought. Millie twists in her seat and bestows upon him a beaming smile.

“Oh, of course, I understand where you’re coming from.” Substitute says sympathetically. Klaus would have giggled instead. Not that Five’s keeping track. “We just need to make sure that it’s in keeping with the story.”

“I highly doubt that there were witches and dragons in medieval England, if they’re acceptable why can’t we have a unicorn?”

Substitutes bland smile falters, clearly not expecting the level of stubborn tenacity Five feels he’s famous for at this point. “Won’t it be nice for your parents to see you in a real play?”

There’s a lot wrong with that sentence but the part that he takes offence to most is the implication that his classmates wishes aren’t real. Who is she to decide what’s considered real or not. “Are you suggesting that democracy should be forsaken on the whims of a single individual? On what they classify as correct and proper?”

“I think that’s enough of that, can we please move on-”

“Miss?” Five raises his hand mockingly. Rises to his feet and travels towards the lacklustre, pitiful items, he can feel the woman’s eyes on his back as crouches down to pull out the small box of items he’s stored for safe keeping. Needles, for obvious reasons, have to be kept in Klaus’ locked drawer when he’s not using them. But his threads and buttons and other miscellaneous items are carefully organised in an order that makes best sense to himself.

“Five, I must insist that you sit down.”

“My job is to fix things, it’s very important. Mr Klaus asked me specially. You can check with anyone here.” It’s bizarre, how little he’s done to encourage his classmates, and yet they’re all nodding, excited at his defiance. “Therefore I would be neglecting my post if I didn’t restore our set to it’s original state.”

“That won’t be necessary, come and sit down please.” Substitute has this expression that’s falser than Miss Kings and Five’s fingertip traces a bottle of glitter, selects it from the collection. “Five, I’ll have to send you to the principal. I don’t want that and neither do you.”

*Patronising.*

Is he like this now? Is this what he’s become?

Is it worth being a genius, or trying to, when it’s so much simpler to do the things he feels are right, that make him happy.
Reginald tried to make him cruel, practical, intimidating and resilient.

Five thinks he failed. He’s flimsier than a deck of cards, no matter how extravagant the varnish he coats over it, a fortress made of paper and weak intentions is easily crumpled.

He could scrape out the foundations, cast them into oblivion and try again. It may be a slow, arduous process, but Five is aware that he’s got nothing but time.

Blood rushes in his ears, drowns out all sound and he used to constrict the very emotions that are cascading through his system until there was nothing left. Now he’s been peeled open, rent apart and split into imperfect pieces that, if he accepts the painstaking task of reshaping them to fit something new, might yield something good.

He’s always liked a challenge.

Five observes the substitute coolly.

Then he raises a defiant hand and upends the bottle of glitter across the backdrop of Camelot, iridescent flakes scattering everywhere, and smiles a shimmering smile.

Chapter End Notes

I was intending to be a clever person for once and hold onto this chapter at least a few more days but then I checked the dates and realised it's been almost six months since I started this story :O There's been such incredible support the whole way through this story so pretty please accept this chapter as an offering to apologise for my terrible schedule <3
Chapter 17

Klaus is aware that when life gives you lemons you’re supposed to make lemonade. It’s a generic statement that he’s always scoffed at with little malice, up there with ‘bad things come in threes’ - bad things pile on as little or as much as they fucking like. However he’s starting to think there may be an objective truth behind them, it’s the only reason he can come up with for how he’s ended up lecturing the giant before him and standing downwind of his school like it might magically keep him disguised from nosy eyes.

“Get in and get out. No distractions. You will not speak to anyone. You will not say anything to the principal other than yes sir and no sir and sir I’m really fucking sorry for my partners, brothers poor behaviour-”

“Those are very conflicting orders. Do I speak or do I beg?” The blondes eyes are ablaze with too much humour for the gravity of the situation.

“Don’t fuck with me Luther or so help me-”

Luther yields, with a grin, which isn’t really fucking yielding but Klaus will make do. “I swear I’ll be the perfect man for the job.”

“You’re picking a child up not going on some super secret tactical mission.”

“I’m not a SWAT member.” Luther tells him plaintively. "And I’m on paperwork only for another week."

Klaus considers yelling at him and refrains only because of the bloody scene he’d create in doing so. He hasn’t got this shining faith that Diego’s suddenly found in the guy and, fine, Luther may have possibly done something useful like saving his Alpha’s life (a detail he’s very much wrapping his head around). But Klaus still dislikes him avidly and he’s not in the slightest bit optimistic watching the man lumber off.

The unusually short fuse his tempers sparking along recently is possibly not helped by a combination of factors, the shitty hospitals cafeteria coffee, the downpour of rain that’s currently battering through his too thin jacket (it’s December, where’s the fucking snow?). Throwing the principals call in had been like pouring lighter fluid liberally next to a bonfire for the fun of it. It’s a divine stroke of luck that made the old bastard fall for the croaking sketch of a voice Klaus pulled out that apparently passed as Diego with a really vile cold. Given the circumstances it’s probably the gunshot wounds that excused most of Five’s shit, a guilt trip that Klaus had been fully prepared to deploy if the situation called for it.

Waiting is the worst, Klaus quickly surmises as he passes his umbrella from one hand to the other because today is apparently one where the wind is acting up, much like his temporary charge, and pulling a stunt that’s blowing the rain horizontally until it’s drenched the lower part of his body in it’s entirety. He should have probably taken up Luther’s offer to remain in his truck but there’s a restless energy in Klaus’ limbs and so despite the irrationality of his decision he’s staked out a space on this street corner, the irony of which is not lost on him.

“Klaus.” Five’s voice calls ahead of him, any other time the delighted surprise would create a
mirrored reaction. Not today.

*Maybe a little.*

“You,” he schools his face into what he’s hoping is stern disapproval, “are in so much trouble.”

“No I’m not. And you’re soaking wet.” Five says like it’s not his fault that Klaus is here, the boy turns to Luther with the expression Klaus was bloody aiming for. “Why did you let him stand in the rain? That’s terribly irresponsible of you.”

The concern bounces off of Klaus’ head when he realises that it’s directed through the lens of a sodden pet. “Hey, leave the big guy alone. You should be thanking him for saving our asses.”

“Plus, I’m your ride,” Luther adds helpfully, “and I left the doors unlocked.”

It’s almost as bad as leaving the bloody window down for Klaus to stick his nose out of. *Asshole.*

Five lets out a sound of irritation as they move towards the truck. “I don’t have to be nice to someone that called me emotionally compromised.”

If somebody out there might be willing to give Klaus the holy kind of strength to deal with this he would pray for it now. “The Principal let you off didn’t he?” He receives a reluctant nod. “Well there you go and considering the shit you’ve been up to this week I’d zip it. We’re just lucky that everyone’s feeling sorry as hell for you at the moment.”

“I do think that they’re over-exaggerating.” Five, irritatingly, seems entertained by this whole thing. “I would never do anything without there being a logical reason behind the decision.”

Klaus ignores Luther’s laughter and all but throws himself into the front seat of the Alpha’s vehicle, fiddling with the temperature dial until sweet, sweet, hot air blasts out of the vents and propping the useless umbrella against his damp legs. “Okay then, Mr Innocent, explain why you snuck in Tuesday break time and covered the walls with sheets of paper?”

Five clicks his seatbelt in and arranges himself until he’s sat as primly as ever. Very much the defendant preparing to give testimony. “Substitute told Delores she’d have to stay in during lunch unless she completed her multiplication sheets so I filled them out.”

Klaus raises a brow.

“I may have copied them a few extra times. But only so she’d definitely see them.”

“How many times?” Luther asks curiously.

“That’s not the-”

“One hundred and twenty three copies give or take.”

“- point. Wait, really? How’d you manage to put them up so quickly?” He’s caught up for a second by the sheer tenacity of the boy that Klaus almost loses sight of the fact he’s meant to be the adult. “Never mind.”

“See there’s always a reasonable logic to the things I do.”

Klaus summons his trump card as Luther slows down for a red light. “Then why, the hell, did you put a six-foot inflatable unicorn on top of my desk this morning? Actually, strike that, where did you find one?”
Five looks immeasurably proud of himself and Klaus remains stout through a whole lot of willpower. “Substitute refused to return Arthur’s unicorn so I asked your friend to stop off by that party store down the street when she picked me up yesterday.”

One time. He let someone else take the responsibility one bloody time.

“You tricked Allison into buying you a-”

“I did no such thing. I used my own allowance to purchase an emotional support unicorn.”

“An emotional support unicorn…” Luther all but howls and Klaus slumps back stunned for a second at the shit eating grin he’s faced with. “Then why was it on my bloody desk?”

Five loosens his tie slowly, well aware that Klaus is entranced with the ludicrous lengths he seems willing to go to. “Substitute told me I couldn’t have it by my desk so I placed it on hers.”

Klaus grasps for imaginary straws and comes up empty handed. “Diego was right. You really are a little shit.”

“I know.”

Luther’s enjoying himself too much and Klaus can barely wait until they’ve pulled up outside of the police department before he’s near rolling out of the car, rain and broken bones be damned. Five doesn’t share the same enthusiasm as he steps out, gives the building in front of them a disbelieving stare that turns into something that’s too amused for Klaus’ liking. “I wasn’t aware that my behaviour warranted such extreme measures.”

“Shut up Five.”

The boy presses his lips together and Klaus can’t help but forgive him a fraction. He’s weak. “If Diego asks I was firm and authoritative.” He leans through the open window and tries to show a modicum of gratitude to the helpful man that’s saved him a whole lot of trouble. “And if he asks you then I was perfectly composed.”

“I’ll say I was in awe of your exceptional parenting skills.” Luther nods dutifully. Pulls away to park nearer to the building, not nearly far enough that Klaus can’t hear the obnoxious sound of laughter trailing behind.

“I may end up liking the guy.” He laments.

“That would be to your detriment.” Five says.

“If I can like you then I’m sure there’s enough room for Luther.”

“You’d need a lot of room.” Five follows Klaus across the car park. “Why aren’t we at the hospital?”

Klaus is tempted to draw this out, a little petty revenge, however if someone did that to him he’d be sour. “Diego’s allowed out later.”

“Seriously?”

“Seriously. I’ve just got to find his bloody car, how the hell are there that many damn cars here.” He mutters mostly to himself.

Five doesn’t take the bait like Klaus expects, instead he’s slowing down, not a sign on his face that
he’s in anyway cheerful about the fact his brothers being sent home. “Why do we need Diego’s car?”

“Well how else are we getting him home?” Klaus thinks he spots it right at the end, moved there by Diego's colleagues or the weirdo actually likes walking a bloody mile to his workplace. He's really damn grumpy today and he's blaming it entirely on the rain. “It’s not like we can shove him into a taxi and Luther’s already had to come out to do us this favour.”

“I thought you couldn’t drive, legally.”

“Well of course I can.” He rumbles in his pocket for the licence that he definitely didn’t waste an hour 'rummaging' around his apartment for while Five was at school - being a shit - yesterday. He surreptitiously wipes a thumb over the plastic for any last dust smears and presents it proudly.

“Why don’t you drive normally?” Five’s voice pitches.

“Because I live within walking distance to work.” A healthy distance Klaus would like to add. “Plus I haven’t needed to so what’s the point in driving for the sake of it.” He’s definitely got the right car, he can recognise the collection of takeaway menus littered on the back seat.

Five lets out this funny little exhale, like he’s stuck between wheezing and choking and Klaus pauses in unlocking the door, swivels on his heel and catches the vestiges of what looks like full blown panic being forcefully pushed down. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” Five shifts restlessly. “You know how to drive this sort of vehicle correct?”

“Of course I know how.” Klaus grumbles. And he does, it’s just been a long fucking time. “If you don’t want to, I could…” What can he do? It’s not like he can send the boy off in a taxi on his own and he can’t call Allison out of work for something so minor. Ben? He’s still been too much of a coward to sit down and talk to his oldest friend. Now is probably not the best time to start.

“Let’s go.” Five says in a tone that suggests he’s not willing to answer any questions for his sudden dive from triumphant to despondent.

Klaus slides into the drivers seat and waits the requisite hour that’s apparently needed for Five to force himself into the vehicle, then before he’s even slotted in the key: “Have you adjusted the mirrors?”

“They’re fine.”

“You haven’t put your seatbelt on.”

He’s already in the middle of pulling it over his shoulder and Klaus realises in that moment that this is going to be a problem. So with a growing dread he starts the engine, checks his mirrors to be sure that they’re actually in the right position, and pulls out.

Sending a hasty thanks to whoever’s listening that he doesn’t stall.

He learns rather quickly that Five fidgets. A lot. With everything he can possibly reach, and when he can’t then it deserves an exceptionally ferocious glare.

Five’s glares at the road, at the dashboard, at the glove box he’s opened and shut at least a dozen times until Klaus can’t help the tick in his temper despite trying his best not to. He’d give more consideration to the white knuckled hold the boys left hand has on the front of his seat if it weren’t that every inch of his attention’s being held by the simple act of actually driving.
They continue silently for maybe five minutes before Five starts up.

“The blinker should have been on already.

He slams the stick up a little too liberally considering he was just thinking the same thing.

“Klaus move over, you’re going to hit the curb.”

They aren’t anywhere near but he moves over to try and keep the peace.

“Too far, if something big comes along we’re going to get hit.”

*If you’re there Lord, please help me.*

“Don’t go over the speed limit.”

Maybe he can roll out of the car and brain himself? “I’m ten under.”

Five has the nerve to crane his neck to look, and Klaus manages to keep his eye roll hidden behind a casual side mirror check. The gods send him a break as they pull onto the highway, and it’s quiet for the time of day, Klaus likes this sort of thing, he’s going in a straight line, and if it weren’t that he’s overly aware of every minute movement in his peripherals then he could probably relax. Fuck if he were on his own then he might be able to put some music on, bob his head along to the beat.

Or if Diego were there he could bob his head for another reason. Now *that* would be a test of his ability to multi-task.

*Focus.*

Most importantly - above all else - Five falls into blissful fucking silence.

Until…

“Klaus there’s a car coming up.”

“Really, how dare they drive on the road.” Klaus imbues the words with as much sarcasm as he possibly can.

“You’re too close, they’ll hit us.”

The steering wheels going to end up indented with a perfect fit of Klaus’ fingers at this rate, he takes a look into the side mirror and almost dissolves into laughter at the paltry car pottering along.

“Seriously Klaus, they’re too close.”

“We’re fine.”

“Klaus.”

“*Five.*”

As the car breezes past he can’t resist grinning in triumph.

“Keep your hands at ten and two.” Five scowls. “And there’s a truck coming up.”

This is it, Klaus’ going to make the jump, eyes moving towards the door handle in anticipation. “I should be offended that you don’t trust my driving but you’ll trust Luther’s.” He tries to joke,
laugh, take some of this bizarre weight out of the car.

“Luther’s a Detective.” Five grits out and there’s a release, something foul and bitter that’s hard to swallow when Klaus inhales it, a recognisable scent he unfortunately on first name terms with recently. This little radar ping’s incessantly inside his head, demanding he do something to alleviate whatever is scaring his charge.

Klaus wants to glance properly at him but he doesn’t think that would go down well. It’s just that he doesn’t understand how there can be this much tension between them suddenly and it doesn’t get any clearer when he finally brings them off of the highway.

It comes to a head when some absolute dick decides to fly past, horn blaring obnoxiously and Klaus might have been tempted to offload a whole lot of stress by engaging in the age old act of flipping the guy off with a liberal side of foul mouthed abuse if it weren’t for the shriek that comes from beside him.

“Okay, enough.” He pulls them over, parking beside the pavement in a place that he’s sure is probably illegal but fuck it. “What’s going on Five?”

Five stares straight ahead, eyes darting back and forth and Klaus knows he’s working something out for himself.

“I believe,” Five starts, “that I may have an issue with being in a vehicle.”

“That doesn’t make sense.” Klaus scolds himself for the dismissal immediately. “I mean, you’re fine whenever Diego takes you anywhere.”

“He’s… different.” Five raises a hand to his mouth absently. “He’s safe.”

That makes sense. So does Luther, by his work association. “Have you always had a problem?”

Five’s mouth snaps shut, instantly combative. “Is that supposed to be a joke?”

“No, of course it’s not.”

There’s a space where Klaus, lost and so damn confused, thinks the boy is going to have a meltdown, he might join him to be honest. Five exhales harshly, face still too pale as he asks in a rather accusatory tone: “Did the school not have to be informed about mother?”

Klaus becomes aware that there’s not nearly enough room in the car for questions this large, this important and he shakes his head in lieu of a proper answer because he’s a disappointment like that. He forces out a real one after a protracted silence that Five seems in no mood to break. “I mean, yes, we did have a meeting about your- circumstances. But we didn’t receive anything details, only that you might need more… help.”

“Oh.” Five deflates. Sinks down in his chair and lets out all the hot air that’s propelled his fear so far.

Klaus doesn’t get it until he does.

“Did she…” He nods towards the dashboard.

Five gets what he means instantly. He’s a smart boy like that.

“Yeah. Diego’s… Grace was there too.”
Shit. That’s bad. Really bad. Like all the shades and forms that bad can take wrapped up into one killer punch. A child shouldn’t be able to go through those things, and Klaus understands, he’s intimately aware with how much a child can manage, but this seems exceptionally cruel.

Klaus’ arms and legs feel heavy, in the background of his thoughts he’s grateful the cars turned off, and he isn’t sure how he’s meant to respond. He’s always on the receiving end of these things, greedily taking the affection and love from his friends, and he has no idea how to make it better, unsure such a thing can happen after a certain point.

“I’m sorry, that’s-”

“Klaus, can we not talk about it?” Five asks, fingers drumming over his knees in a nervous gesture. “Let’s go. I’ll be quiet.”

If there was the opportunity to march straight up to God and punch the asshole in the face for putting one child through so much then Klaus would volunteer immediately.

“Please.” Five says finely, delicately. “I want to see Diego.”

Klaus feels despicable.

But he turns the car on anyway. Rejoins traffic and ignores the ball of tension beside him. This is another thing he can understand, about needing time to acknowledge a fault, especially one that’s deserving of the fear that surrounds it and he should be feeling honoured that Five’s shared this monumental piece of information.

But he doesn’t. Not even close. And the idea of leaving things so pensive and taut puts a strain on Klaus’ less than formidable self-restraint, enough that he can’t help but feel like a failure for not anticipating this unexpected fracture.

Assisting Diego into the car is a massive undertaking that Five has to pay his respects to Klaus for managing with an expression that upon closer scrutiny couldn’t be identified as anything less than jovial.

If he were at ease, the circumstances different, then Five might find a little humour in the dozy smile Diego gives him, the medication he’s on creating some sort of imbalance in his brain resulting in this unusual state. Klaus says he looks high. Five wants to verbalise his agreement. He can’t. He’s shut Klaus out and now the Omega must hate him.

It may be that Five’s feeling a little hypersensitive when he climbs into the back seat beside his brother’s half slumped form, he’s overly aware of every cell in his body when they pull away. It’s impossible. He knows this.

Like he knows that statistically they’re highly unlikely to have an accident during the journey to the apartment. He also knows that Klaus is driving in a perfectly acceptable manner for one who’s readily admitted not having done so for a long time, and yet he still can’t release the band that’s tightening around his spine whenever another vehicle comes within a hundred yards of them.

Although he’d been more aware of these things when Luther was driving, it didn’t tap even close to this root fear that seems to have made itself known. He can even recall being driven to the
temporary placement with little more than sweating palms and an empty chest by an insincere social worker.

_Irrational._

How furiously Klaus must think of the distrust he’s undeservedly receiving, how little faith Five’s placing in him.

He’d very much like to curl into his nest when they finally get home, but Diego’s needs him and Five will remain present and focused as long as he can for his brother.

“Can you push the covers back?” Klaus asks when they finally make it to the bedroom.

Five rushes to do it, eager to find a way back into his teachers favour. Klaus is surprisingly good at manipulating Diego into bed, stronger than his willowy form suggests and Five finds that he’s relegated to pillow arrangement and shoe removal rather than anything more helpful.

He wants to be infallible. A person that both of them can rely on.

“Thanks.” Diego mumbles, half asleep already and Five can feel something loosen ever so slightly at the sight of the Alpha home. Safe.

“We should let him rest.” Klaus suggests when Diego’s lids drift shut. Five follows him out silently, trying to draw from the peace he should find now that everything’s sliding back into normality.

He ends up hovering awkwardly while Klaus sifts through the medication Diego’s been given, long fingers carefully plucking out information sheets from each box and reading the instructions before sorting them into piles of morning, noon and night.

“Would you mind keeping me company while I do this?” Klaus asks casually.

_I’d like nothing more._

“I doubt that I’ll be able to help.” He says instead.

“Maybe, but I’d like some supervision.”

Five peers up at him cautiously, sees no deceit or pity, and comes to stand beside his teacher, aimlessly picking up a bottle that feels cool to the touch. He sounds the word out. “What’s Oramorph?”

“Oh that’s the good stuff, real strong.”

“What do I do with it?”

“Keep it away from me.” Klaus jokes, smiles benignly at Five’s questioning stare. “I was thinking about something earlier, y’know how you keep having to share things with me.”

Five tries to formulate a response that encapsulates just how much it’s meant to have the ability to do so. Instead he shrugs. Childishly.

_Because you’re a child._

“I was also thinking that it would probably be fair if I shared something with you.”
Considering how coldly he’d behaved, this isn’t where Five expects things to go. If anything he’s been waiting for Klaus to leave him alone to try and work out how he’s going to look after both himself and Diego.

Klaus thankfully takes his silence as an affirmative, possibly able to see the lump that’s been steadily growing at the base of Five’s throat. “Okay, secret number one I’ve already mentioned. My parents were complete dicks, heartless bastards and all around bad people.”

Five nods, wonders if he should ask questions but then thinks Klaus will be one of the few that’ll understand why he might not want to venture further down that realm. It’s almost soothing having someone that doesn’t need things spelled out for them.

“Okay, let me think, how about this, I stole a car when I was fourteen.” Klaus gives him this mockery of a frown. “You better not tell Diego about it, I’m definitely too pretty to go to jail.”

Despite himself, Five can’t help leaning forward so that his elbows rest on the counter. “Why?”

“Because I needed a car, it was a family member of a friend and she was a raging bitch that probably deserved a lot worse than that.” Klaus shrugs completely at ease with offloading tales of criminal guilt.

Five’s fascinated, there’s no other word for it. “What else?”

“What do you want to know?”

“Can I ask anything?”

“Of course.”

There’s a pause where both Klaus and Five realise what the Omega’s said, and before he can make an excuse Five comes out with the first thing he can think of. “What’s your last name?”

“Ouch. Straight in there you cruel boy.”

Five doesn’t need a reminder of this. “If you don’t want to-”

“Nah, I’ll answer, it’s just difficult to explain to a child.” Klaus ignores the glare he receives for the wording, although it’s precisely the noun Five just used himself. “The easiest way to explain it is that when I was a young, hard-working boy, it sounded a lot cooler to only use my first name, like one of those fancy celebrities. A lot of my… bosses thought so too and for a period when I was unbelievably high I decided it would be a great idea to start the process of removing my last name.”

“That can’t be legal.”

“Surprisingly it is, I put an X in place of a surname so that it would be easier for passports, that sort of thing. It wasn’t like I was that heartbroken about losing my parents name and in the end when I was better it seemed like way too much work to fix so I left it. All of my bosses thought it was brilliant, they gave me lots of work for it, at least I made good money.”

In the spirit of mending the fault line Five created he should be kind with his words, instead he’s blurts out: “That’s ridiculous. You’re bosses were idiots.”

Klaus laughs again, freely, so unbelievably easy that Five’s a little envious. “Yeah, they were.”
Something snags in Five’s head. “What do you mean you were high?”

“Thought you might have missed that one. Okay last secret because I’m feeling really vulnerable right now.”

Five doesn’t wish to judge someone on their exterior, but Klaus looks the very antonym of vulnerable, exposing himself all to make Five feel comfortable can surely be defined only as a type of strength.

“I used to take a lot of things like these tablets when I was younger.”

“Drugs.” Five puts this knowledge into the space he’s assigned to Klaus and finds it an odd thing to place. He’s aware of the principal behind drug addiction, he can’t quite recall why he understands these things, where he learnt about them, but like most things he blames it on Reginald. It’s a clean, easy target. One of the few things the man’s useful for.

While he’s discussing these findings with that inner voice of his, Five realises that Klaus is waiting, a little apprehensively for him to speak. He’s waiting for Five’s opinion, to feel judgement.

“Do you still do those things?”

“Nope, I haven’t done anything like that since I was a teenager.”

“Is that why you wanted me to supervise you?”

“That, and I like your company.”

It’s strange to imagine the sort of Klaus being described to him here. An amalgamation of so many varying components that somehow in Five’s head still don’t equate to the man in front of him. There’s something relieving about it, that Klaus can be such a wildly different person, he’s become seemingly untouched by his past to the degree that nobody would ever think to link him to it. Whether it’s the Omega’s intention to or not, Five feels oddly inspired by Klaus.

He likes the quiet as they finish first with the medication, then unpacking things around the apartment, organising how Five likes it while Diego somehow manages to sleep right through the noise.

“You feeling hungry?” Klaus brings it up late afternoon, around about the time they’d be finishing up at school and although he’s grateful for the weekend upon them, Five feels a twinge of guilt over leaving Delores alone for the day.

“A little.” He admits. “What should we have?”

Klaus hums, haws, makes a wide variety of what are supposed to be contemplative noises(?) “How about mac n’ cheese?”

“No, thank you, the stores brand tastes deplorable once heated.”

“You buy freezer mac n’ cheese?”

Five recognises that this is a loaded question and Klaus is staring down at him in utter horror so he might as well be honest. “Yes. I’ve never had any other kind. It’s not the sort of food we’d have had at…” He slices through that sentence too quickly, a dull pressure building in his body thinking about Grace’s cooking, the lazy Sundays filled with mid afternoon breakfasts of runny eggs and
bacon and pyjama clad art lessons.

Klaus gives him this soft, soft, soft look and goes rooting around in a bag by the door until he pulls out his purse. “Gena might as well be right about me and Diego being unfit to look after you if I let you go another day without having a proper fuckin' cheese sauce. I mean god, who doesn’t know how to roux.”

With full awareness of how the Omega’s going to react, Five can’t help engaging and asking innocently. “What is that?”

Klaus’ outrage lasts the whole way to the store, along the aisles as they purchase the items needed, paying a bemused cashier, leaving, and all the way up until Five's standing over the stove top being lectured on correct technique.

“A sauce. That’s it?” He can’t help the ridicule he projects, sleeves rolled up just below his elbows. His school ties been forsaken in favour of undoing the top button of his shirt, because he’s unbelievably hot performing the manual labour the Omega’s forced upon him.

“What in the ever merciful fucking world did I do to deserve such a sacrilegious child.”

“Speaking like that I’d imagine.”

“Hush, concentrate my little devil.”

“I should also imagine the drugs haven’t helped tip the karmic scales in your favour.”

“Little. Shit.”

Five laughs. He can’t help it. Klaus seems to have that affect on him.

Cooking with Klaus is a whole body affair. Music is a must, playing from Diego’s laptop volume turned low to not disturb it’s owner and when the Omega isn’t instructing, with a surprising level of authority, how best to create this exquisite sauce, he’s moving with a supple grace that Five keeps getting distracted by. He doesn’t mean to, it’s… relaxing to watch the motion of Klaus’ fingers drawing through the air, rhythmically circling, shaping patterns out that only he can see.

“Hey! Don’t you let that burn.”

“I’m not.” He's sure the consistency is coming along perfectly, though he does beat the sauce extra hard for a second, underdeveloped muscles in his arm protesting feebly. “Why don’t we turn the ring down then?”

“Because you have to cook the flour or this is going to taste disgusting.” Klaus peers over his shoulder. “Make sure you get all of the lumps out as well or it’ll be extra gross. Think of it like anger management but a hell of a lot cheaper.”

Somewhere amongst the prickle of sweat on his skin, the ache in his arm that he’s fastidiously ignoring and Klaus’ insistent humming, Five finds that panic has relaxed its earlier grip on his heart. “I assume this is what you’ve done whenever you’ve had a bad day at work.”

“Definitely, it used to be so rare, but now,” Klaus returns Five's earlier innocence, wide eyes and a wider smile, “it’s everyday since you started.”

The wooden spoon slips in his grip and Five has to refocus his energy on stirring instead of spluttering. There’s something to be said for the methodical approach to preparing the food by
hand instead of receiving it in a takeout container or defrosting something that’s more chemicals
than anything genuinely nutritious. He wouldn’t ever say that Diego’s been neglectful in that way,
simply put it’s not something that’s in his wheelhouse.

Klaus may be better for them both than Five’s ever given him credit for.

The Omega disappears into the bedroom, still barking out instructions, and Five can hear the
stirrings of his brother moving, a pained hiss sounding out that reverberates up the length of Five’s
spine and settles like a stone in his throat. It stays lodged there until he hears a small commotion
and spins to see Klaus helping Diego onto the couch.

He’s going to offer his assistance, decides it’s not needed, and watches Klaus brush the hair back
from Diego’s forehead with a remarkably gentle touch and with fonder eyes. Five is aware that
there’s something he isn’t intended to understand about the pair, neither does he wish to push at
something fragile, it’s just that he’s known it’s there but today, now, he can’t understand why it’s
not something acknowledgeable.

“I swear if you’ve messed up my masterpiece I’ll be furious.” Klaus surprises him, which is
impressive considering he’s been staring at his teacher in fascination.

“Stop overreacting.” Five says, jokes, enjoys, and continues because it’s fun. “I scraped the burnt
bits up and mixed them in.”

Klaus lets out a pterodactyl worthy screech and whilst he’s vigorously examining the pot he
snatches up, Five tries to see him through the same lens Diego might deploy. All it gives him is the
exact same picture imprinted in his mind, maybe with a slightly rosier overlay because Diego is
tender and hopeful and much better than Five can aim to one day be.

“Hey, are you going to finish this little devil?” The non-rosy Klaus asks and Five decides that he
likes this clear as daylight image of the man, it’s honest and true and all of the things he likes very
much, a category Klaus unequivocally belongs in.

By the time the grated cheese has been added to the sauce, the spring onions (Klaus insists) cut
into perfect rings and mixed in well amongst the pasta, Five is ready to admit that he’s actually
craving the food he’s made more than anything in a long time.

“This is the best bit.” Klaus says, rooting through the cupboard and emerging with two bowls.
“Giving it to someone you care about and seeing them enjoy something that you made while
eating together. It’s the stuff heartfelt movies are made of.”

Five realises that Klaus isn’t expecting to join in with them. What a monumentally idiotic thought.

Five uses the ladle to fill both bowls up and without stopping to see how he might react thrusts one
into Klaus’ unsuspecting hands, storms towards Diego and more delicately places the second on
his lap.

“Thanks buddy.” Diego has to strain to arrange himself and it’s this that stops Five from realising
that he’s not been followed. It takes him until his brothers first bite to realise that Klaus isn’t with
them, Klaus hasn’t moved.

“Are you going to eat it or not?” Five finally works up the nerve to ask his teacher. It’s not weird to
feel apprehensive awaiting critique.

“What’re you-” Diego pauses in between inhaling the food up with a fervour that if he weren’t
relieved to see Five would chastise for gluttony. The Alpha catches where Five's looking. “Oh, he’s
going to have a meltdown.”

Diego’s… not wrong. Klaus is stuck staring at his bowl like it’s a gift that he must cherish like a newborn, mouth shaping a perfect O and eyes so wide it should be comical.

Five thinks he might be forgiven for his earlier transgressions.

“Sweetheart, are you going to join us?”

Klaus blinks, once, twice, and then he moves towards Five with an intent that promises affection. “I knew you’re cold and bruised heart would open up to me one day my little devil. You see Diego all it took was a soul as gentle and beautiful as mine to- Hey that’s mine.”

Five withholds Klaus’ bowl until the Omega finally caves, amidst Diego’s laughter, and reels off in every way how Five’s a horrible, horrible person.

Frustratingly the brunette’s grin perfectly mirrors his the entire time.

“Sweetheart, I’m not being trying to be a dick-”

Klaus pauses, turns, and puts down the spatula to show he’s listening.

“-But you do know that you don’t have to do any of this.”

“Really! I thought we were past that.”

“No, I mean… This.” Diego lifts a hand up to gesture vaguely.

Klaus looks at his patient and fails to see what’s the matter.

Diego shifts, slowly, wincing at every movement and Klaus is across the room, reaching out to help before he’s waved off with a low grunt. “I’m serious, I don’t want you thinking that I want you here just to-” another vague wave “-look after us.”

That’s not what he’s expecting, Klaus glances to the kitchen counter where Five’s still carefully peeling and chopping the vegetables to precise measurements. It’s a thing the boy wanted to try, a roast dinner that used to be one of his favourites, apparently a Sunday tradition that Klaus has now been trusted with.

It’s so fucking sweet that he’d almost burst into tears when he’d been tentatively approached with the idea this morning.

“We’re making dinner, I’m not exactly popping on the maids uniform here.” Interestingly Diego flushes and Klaus carefully folds that piece of information into the folder he’s mentally created dedicated to the man.

“I know, it’s just…”

“He believes you’ll feel used if you continue to take care of him.” Five’s eye roll shouldn’t be audible in his words, but the kids good like that.
If it wasn’t for the grimace, Diego’s attempt at frowning might be adorable, instead Klaus can’t help the guilt that laces his movements, has done all weekend. In a way, if he didn’t feel terrified to leave him alone, going back to work tomorrow would allay the nervous edge he’s feeling with every interaction between them. Logically he knows that this hasn’t got anything to do with him, it doesn’t mean that ancient, subservient piece of his brain isn’t overloading at the mere thought of causing harm and when he was younger such an instinctive reaction would have really pissed him off.

Now everything’s different.

He wants to stay awake until late to make sure Diego’s sleeping comfortably, to pull the blankets up when he’s cold, have steaming mugs of hot chocolate laden with marshmallows now that he’s discovered his Alpha’s sweet tooth. It’s second nature to prepare breakfast in the morning, to show Five how to cook, to get ridiculed for taking too long to get himself ready in the bathroom, to laugh and joke with the pair of them.

Despite the less than optimal parts of the last week, and there’s been plenty, Klaus can’t help but feel a partial sense of mourning, as if he’s waiting for things to revert back to a place where he doesn’t get to curl up amidst a pile of blankets in the evenings and force Five to binge watch Merlin while Diego lies safe on the couch.

He’s had three days of something *special* and it feels like it’s coming to an end.

*Dramatic bitch.*

“-that’s not what I mean.” Diego’s grumbling at Five pulls Klaus back into the present. “Will you come over here?”

Five shouldn’t appear so terrifying when he turns from the chopping board, though he’s considerably less so when he puts the knife down. “Why?”

“I want to throw this at you.”

Klaus looks between the cushion being brandished and Five’s smirking face and decides that he may not be the silliest person in the room.

“Well I for one would like Klaus to stay.” Five says, fumbles with a half peeled carrot when he sees the surprise on their faces, before raising his chin stubbornly. “This is the first time since we moved here that I’ve been reaching my five a day.”

For a second Klaus’ heart is on tenterhooks, pounding obnoxiously loud in his ears, then he decides to do them all a favour and speak like an actual adult. “Not that I don’t enjoy hanging out with you Five, but I can’t be here all the time, as much as I’d love to.” Now he’s fumbling at the flash of something twisted and hurt in those blue eyes. “It’s just that I have my own place I have to look after as well. Plus there’s nowhere near enough room for all of my shoes here.”

“He’s not joking.” Diego gives him this grateful look and Klaus gets it. He’s not getting rejected in the slightest, and although it feels like longer, he’s known them for coming up to three months. Only a fool would take such a commitment like that on and Klaus is a fool, but he wants to do this properly, when the times right.

“You’ll still be around though?” Five aims for casual and when it doesn’t land he quickly resumes cutting and Klaus thinks it’s to stop him from hugging the boy. Fool he may be, but he’s going to avoid getting stabbed thank you very much.
“Of course I’m going to be about, most days and,” he checks and Diego’s nodding reassuringly, “a lot of nights.”

“Okay. Does that mean you’ll keep leaving the toothpaste cap off when you stay over?”

Klaus almost laughs at the slight petulance years of teaching has given him the know how to pick up on. “I’ll probably need you to keep reminding me.”

Five considers this. “I suppose if I must. Why are we even discussing this?” The boy adds when Klaus opens the oven door to check the meats cooking properly.

“You’re brother’s an idiot,” Klaus informs him solemnly, “and having his head knocked about hasn’t changed a thing.”

It turns out Diego can throw the cushion from his supine position with an unerring accuracy.

Klaus is still pouting and rubbing his side exaggeratedly when they settle down later, popcorn piled high in a bowl and he deliberately skirts around the hand Diego holds out for him.

“Uh-uh I don’t think so, hugs are for people that don’t injure their wonderful Omega’s.”

There’s a reason he and Five are snuggled (a word the boy’s refuting passionately) down amongst a mishmash of soft items, mainly that for all his blustering Diego’s still teetering on a wire of okay and fuck, back to the hospital. Every movement has Klaus monitoring his stitches religiously, checking his temperature hourly and fastidiously removing every possible instrument the idiot could hurt himself with.

Which, for an officer of the law, is way too fucking much.

So Diego can sulk, and that’s definitely what he’s doing, all he wants. Klaus is quite comfortable on the floor with his new… friend? He still isn’t sure what to call Five aside from student/charge/devil. It’s an unknown territory the two of them seem to be navigating with about as much grace as can be expected of Klaus, which is to say that it’s tumultuous at best. He kind of likes it though.

“May I ask,” Five says halfway through the episode, and most definitely not leaning into Klaus’ side, “how the power levels work in this show, how can the troll deceive the entirety of the kingdom so easily?”

“She just does.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s in the script.” Klaus uses the excuse Diego gave him yesterday to use because it turns out his Alpha’s right when it comes to Five’s incessant demand for facts where they don’t belong.

And he fucking protested about a unicorn.

“Okay.”

Klaus waits for the next problem. He’s rewarded eight minutes later.

“May I ask, why would Uther threaten his only child over a person that he’s known for such a short period?”

Klaus answers this one with his own Five stopping answer. “Because he’s a dick sometimes.”
The boy nods, shuffles infinitesimally closer and Klaus risks lifting his arm up in a casual stretch, smiling when he feels Five tuck into the space he’s provided. Like the sneaky fuck he is, Diego catches Klaus’ hand before he can drop it, fingers curling around his and something pleasant simmers in Klaus’ belly. It’s not particularly comfortable to try and do both, a tingle in his bicep promising future soreness, however between Five’s warm body and the gentle rumble from behind it’s a very small price, he’s more than willing, to pay.

Chapter End Notes

So I’ve been trying to get a definite outline for the last set of chapters to get a rough idea of how many will be left so this fic doesn't drag on unnecessarily. However apparently my brain wanted Five and Klaus to have yet more bonding. Apologies, but also meh. I love them both too much :D
Chapter 18

Diego, knowing that it makes him an ungrateful fool, is fucking bored.

Now he’s aware that he should feel nothing but gratitude to Five for forgiving his sorry ass, to whatever God is out there for keeping him alive, actually to Luther for that one as well, and most of all Diego knows he should be grateful to Klaus for… well, everything.

It’s just…

If he weren’t an uptight asshole he’d say that it’s decidedly lonely without the other two with him during the long hours of the day. That the years of living alone once he’d finally moved out as a young adult should have given him plenty of practice in the art of filling the quiet hours, that this should be a time where he stops whining and simply concentrates on feeling better.

But he’s an uptight asshole so all of that gets locked away in that packed old chest in his head that one day is probably going to fucking explode on him for being such a repressed idiot.

The first day without Klaus and Five wasn’t too bad.

The second was pushing it.

Gena comes out the third afternoon and the update she brings is entirely predictable considering the messages he’s been receiving from the group chat Klaus set up.

“We’re in a better position than before, there seems to be an unprecedented delay in the search for…”

_Allison._

If she pulls off some miracle…

“I’m fine now so why the hell are we having to go through this shit?”

Where precisely he blurred the line between cussing and less than appropriate language Diego doesn’t know but he’s pretty sure that Gena isn’t writing it into her report.

“It’s unfortunate but there’s been a concern that Five may be put in a compromised position in the future if such an event ever happens again. Which, given your line of work, can’t be ruled out.”

“Klaus looked after him just fine.” He did more than fine. Diego isn’t entirely sure what to make of this new version of Five, or he might actually be a fraction of his personality resurfacing, it’s not as if Diego can claim to have made that deep of a connection with him before things went to shit, so he has no reference to go off of.

“He seemed to do an adequate job, I have no doubt about that.”

Diego can feel blood rising tight under his skin. “He did more than adequate.”

Gena tilts, bearing her weight from one foot to the other because he’s spread across the couch in a way that doesn’t make him feel like his innards are about to throw a revolution, and she doesn't
wish to use one of the table chairs. He’s not so fond of this bit, the persistent ache like there’s still shreds of a bullet deep within his muscles, imprisoned in his bones and that’s par for the course as far as he’s concerned, how it was the other occasion he’d found himself shot. He’s just been spoilt because when Klaus and Five are here it’s so damn easy to distract himself.

“If you were to… part ways then Five would be left vulnerable in these situations, there’s no guarantee in the long run that Klaus will be around.”

He looks at her stupidly for a moment. Hey, he’s been shot, fucking right he’s allowed to be confused. Plus he can’t understand how thinking in hypothetical terms is going to help because if that were the case then single parents across the country should have the children taken away surely?

“Diego, he’s not your mate.”

That’s… a frustratingly fair point.

And there’s nothing he can do about it.

He’s entertained the idea sure, a fantasy to ponder when he’s been stuck behind his desk, the thought of Klaus in one of his pretty dresses floating about the apartment like he’s been prone to do the last few evenings, the pale slope of his neck marked and bared proudly.

It’s a problem that he doesn’t know how to solve, a limitation on the things he can ask. God he’s not even taken the poor guy on a proper date, just the two of them, that’s how backwards this whole process has gone. He has no doubt that if it were mentioned in front of Klaus that the Omega would all but impale himself upon Diego’s teeth, he’s incredible like that.

When Gena leaves she makes it worse by giving him this sympathetic nod, pity dancing in her expression for Five.

It saps the colour from the rest of his day.

Klaus, when he gets home, says he’s in a snit.

Diego almost flips him off. He doesn’t because that’s truly being an asshole.

The Omega raises a brow at the aborted gesture and the humour dancing across his face is so unbelievably beautiful that even Diego acknowledges that the knock to his head may have messed with his brain a little.

Worse is that Klaus doesn’t call him out for his obnoxious behaviour with sharpness, he disengages Diego with sweet gestures, repetitively, without the slightest expectation of it being reciprocated. Soup warmed up to the perfect temperature, blankets (that he’s most definitely rolled in) heaped over Diego most nights, proud chin pressing into Diego’s side while he sleeps, the way he dances about the apartment with a floating grace that wicks the moisture out of Diego’s mouth every. Single. Time.

Diego knows he can have a temper, can stew in things that aggravate him, and yet it’s not possible to do so when he’s leant back on the couch watching Five’s brows lower in concentration while he meticulously follows Klaus’ instructions to a T as he makes a dish. In fact Diego would challenge anyone to manage a flicker of anger while Klaus dashes around the furniture impatiently, a stack of paper waving in front of his face and ranting about last minute changes to his beloved play.

“But if I put the girls over there their voices will sound better-”
“If you put Ralph and Jacob near Millie and Charlotte you’re asking for trouble.”

“How?”

“Millie pushed Ralph over last week and they're still fighting about it.”

“Shit! I thought we'd dealt with that.”

“There’s a line of compromise I’m sure that we can have them reach.”

“We have less than a bloody week-”

“Sweetheart,” Diego says, because it’s gloriously wonderful to wind them both up in one fell swoop, “it’s only a winter play.”

If looks could kill then Five’s ice shards for eyes would do a better job than getting shot.

It’s… ridiculous. And funny. And fucking impossible not to watch them without laughing, which hurts.

Life like this could be good, he thinks watching Klaus and Five pour over the final plans for the rest of the night. It’s not necessarily conventional but it’s happy and Diego finds himself wondering whether it would really be that bad to ask Klaus to move in.

After he gets his shit together and works on the whole first date business.

And keeping Five. That’s kind of a big one.

The next morning he’s caught between a series of messages from Allison, same as last time and moderately reassuring, and trying to come up with a viable plan where he could keep everything together just right when there’s a perfunctory knock at his door.

One time, Diego can chalk up to a fluke, if Klaus could ever be called such a thing, the second was a little suspicious and now the third uninvited guest on his doorstep is making Diego think that somehow his address must blaring in neon colours across the sky and his luck is really just that bad.

“I assume you don’t normally greet a visitor with such a gormless expression.” Ben says.

*Shut the door in his face.*

“What you wanna come in?” He says instead.

Ben started his pursuit of the truth with a mild sense of optimism. A sense that knowing Klaus, the truth cannot be that difficult to uncover.

The probability of discovering this truth, in actuality, drops low and keeps falling.

He understands why Klaus is upset with him, a vile mistake he’s still trying to think of an appropriate act of penitence for, a demonstration of his contrition.
Over time Klaus will decide when he wishes to talk. Ben is understanding of this and were it any other circumstance he would be content to leave things as they are. It’s Allison’s fault really, well not precisely, he chides himself for the accusatory thought. However she’s not being truthful with him and the situation is one that he’s never been a participant in before, a lone piece of the trio left out in the dark.

He truly had no ill intention upon seeing Klaus with the small child. None at all. He never actively sought them out, simply found himself passing the school more regularly in his pursuit of baked goods from their favourite store.

Ben is under no illusion as to how flimsy a justification that is.

He queries after Klaus again that evening.

This time he spots the blatant lie when Allison feigns ignorance.

Whether she’s comfortable enough with him, or those with more emotion based dynamics forget that simply, because he cannot scent her doesn’t mean he’s incapable of detecting a lie, either answer speaks of a weakness. If it were anyone else the arrogance of that assumption would infuriate him.

It’s not that he doesn’t trust either of their rationale, Allison is a competent woman he can respect unconditionally. However there’s no safer hands than his own and decades of protective instinct cannot be alleviated by anything other than the truth.

Which is why he finds himself inside the home of a man that he can’t understand the appeal of, a man that’s antithetical to Ben in every way.

“So I want to know how you worked out where I live?” Diego asks.

“Not particularly.”

He purposefully blocked the definition of stalking from his mind earlier. Its another thing he’ll add to his list of crimes to atone for before he dies. Hopefully. Although he’s tempted to point out the hilarity of how easy the situation was to manipulate. All he needed was to know Diego’s job, be lucky enough that one Chuck Beeman was employed within the same precinct, and then dangle an early release of a gold star game above the man’s head to convince him Ben was a distant relative, and bang, it’d been simple. Human beings are unbelievably simple at times, weak, dynamics only aiding Ben’s ever growing derision as the man caved instantly for a reward.

Diego doesn’t react in any sort of manner that Ben might have suspected. There’s none of the blustering or aggressive mannerisms one might expect from an Alpha caught off guard in his own home.

A glance about the place gives him the answer. A pile of prescription medication, tucked neatly atop the kitchen counter. A temptation Klaus surely doesn’t need, and yet Ben would know if Klaus relapsed. Would he? He doesn’t like it.

“So,” Diego draws out long enough that he stiffly makes his way into the kitchen and Ben doesn’t miss that he turns his back to him, a display of trust, or idiocy, “what can I do for you?”

Small talk is a novelty that Ben rarely indulges in and he cuts straight to the point. “I wish to ensure that Klaus’ wellbeing is maintained.”

There’s a whistle of a kettle going and Ben nods once at the brand of coffee when it’s presented
to him. He’s learned over the years that sharing a drink can aid in loosening a persons defences and he has no intention of coming away from here anything less than satisfied that Klaus is safe.

“Well, it’s being maintained just fine.” Diego’s cautious. Good. But then: “If you want to know if he’s happy, you’ll have to ask him yourself.”

Ben assumes he means it to be a reassurance, an attempt to assuage his concerns. It’s needless, he isn’t swayed by empty words and the basic acknowledgement of Klaus’ autonomy. People spill pretty words that hold little meaning for most of their lives. He wants to know if Diego is one of those people.

“That I will.” He accepts the mug offered to him, momentarily thrown by the familiar blonde head on the front. Ben’s used to Klaus’ obsessions and usually they flit by with little consequence, one that’s survived the test of time is a British show that Ben found offensively inaccurate. The prince is possibly the main reason for this, though he does ruefully remember the Morgana phase, a time of disturbing outfits and even more disturbing hair styles.

The question is, why is one of Klaus’ favourite mugs is casually residing in Diego’s cupboard?

Ben starts off with something easy. “I doubt that the child is you’re son, the age difference is too low for such a thing, and there’s the more obvious reasons.”

Diego doesn’t react to the information Ben clearly shouldn't posses, only pauses in shuffling back toward the couch and if Ben were a more courteous intruder he would offer a hand. As it is he refrains. “You mean you don’t think he’s got my brilliant looks.” It’s meant to be a joke but the delivery comes across flat towards the end. “He’s my brother.”

Though Ben has his issues with the institution, much the same as any out there that defied societal normality - he despises the pheromone, jacked up Alpha’s usually found in such places - equally he has no qualms over paying respect to those willing to obtain injuries in the line of duty. “I’m going to assume that this,” he taps his index finger against his temple, “was on duty.”

Diego doesn’t answer aloud as he arranges himself comfortably and Ben, already sure, but now certain, suspects that there’s more then superficial damage that he’s not seeing. The Alpha finally settles, enough that he seems to have braced himself appropriately and it’s really not how Ben expected to be treated. He’d anticipated the normal levels of aggression, embarrassing displays of possessiveness, maybe a little posturing, typical reactions, ones he’s encountered in the past when dealing with particularly unpleasant Alpha’s.

This is unusual.

“What do you want Ben? Honestly.”

“I’ve already told you the truth, It’s an imperative of mine that Klaus is safe.”

“And it’s your job to make sure of that?”

Ben considers him, considers the lack of accusation in those words. It’s usually enough to allow him to gauge a person’s temper. In this case it barely registers. “If not me then who? Are you stepping forward?”

“Why can’t Klaus protect himself?”

“We seem to be caught in a circle here-“
“You’re awkward without him.” Diego remarks, blandly, without any form of malice. “Or is this how you really are?”

Ben knows this, he’s quite aware that he doesn’t feel the need to expend more energy than required on those he finds unnecessary. Right now, he isn’t quite sure that Diego is worth anything. “You’re awfully rude for a wounded man.”

He can see the truth of his statement settle in, it’s not intimidating to the Alpha though, from the brief period of time he’s been allowed to observe the man, Ben is roughly ninety percent sure that Diego seems the type to throw himself against dangerous objects if the occasion calls for it.

It’s rather primitive.

Although, he’s pleasantly surprised by the flicker of awareness he sees catch fire in Diego’s eyes, a recognition of his vulnerability right now, no fear, just an awareness of his situation.

He finally finds something pleasing.

The thing is, one cannot care properly for somebody like Klaus without at the very least learning to outmanoeuvre and defeat those around him. That requires a certain je ne sais quoi that most cannot achieve. There’s nothing wrong with that, humans as a whole, are prone to imperfections, errant behaviour that leaves them unreliable in predicting the needs of others accurately.

Ben himself has been on that line these last few weeks. It’s not acceptable.

Diego seems to find his lack of reaction unsettling, diverting along another path of conversation that Ben has heard so many times now it’s unoriginality bores him. “Isn’t it… weird how close you guys are? It’s like you’re in love with him.”

An unsubtle probe for a threat disguised as a joke. Can Klaus really be interested in a man that needs reassurance like this, that cannot see past his insecurity. It’s distasteful. “I love him much the same as any brother would.”

Like he wished it to, Diego’s brow furrows in concentration, for a person who’s career must rely on his ability to see situations rationally, without confusion, the Alpha seems remarkably flustered at times. It’s a little disappointing truth be told, he’d been hoping for more of that… awareness. He doesn’t get to see it often, finds little excitement in the minutiae of his daily interactions, family aside, and in this knothead he’d been optimistic for a little more.

In no way does Ben ever wish to demean Allison’s gift for seeing to the core of people, it’s just that she never turns that gift towards him, and Klaus, he’s… Klaus is still, somehow, undeniably pure in so many ways. Ben has a role to play for Klaus and his friend needs him to be a reliable source of protection, it’s a part that helps Ben feel like himself in the truest way possible.

But sometimes it’s like wearing a coat, delightful in the winter, not so much come summer, and Ben on occasion, feels this need to shed out of that warm embrace every now and then.

It’s delightful to be able to be seen as rotten.

And Diego is truly letting him down on that front.

Ben should really blame himself for thinking that the man might have any redeeming qualities to show he’s a match for Klaus.

And that question was laughable at best. It’s not as if Ben could ever imagine finding a fault worth
fixating over in Klaus, nothing even close springs to mind. What Ben can’t understand though, is the euphoria the Omega describes his sexual encounters with when he offloads. It all sounds like sweat and heat and too many fluids to count. It’s enough goosebumps raise along his flesh at the mere thought of such a filthy endeavour.

“Does Klaus know, about this whole two faced business?” Diego asks, his tone indicates a casual indifference that might be convincing if it weren’t for the flint of his gaze.

“Can a person not have different facets to their personality. Or, are you as bland as you appear?”

“Some would say it’s the sign of a disorder.” Diego isn’t ruffled by the insult, again.

What a generic statement and a little too pointed to be brushed off. Ben sighs in disappointment. “And may I ask where you keep you’re psychiatric degree, or are you claiming textbook information is enough to diagnose somebody?”

Diego’s head tilts, intrigue clear as day on his face. “Normally that sort of denial ends up in a dead body and handcuffs.”

A ridiculous conclusion to draw. A muscle in Ben’s jaw ticks without his permission. “That’s the kind of thinking I would expect from a person with little to no knowledge of personality disorders.”

“I know, it’s a stupid fucking thing to say.” There’s a curl to Diego’s mouth. “It got you riled up though. Why is that?”

Ben pauses his thoughts, reassesses the man in front of him rapidly and finally finds that first inkling of why Klaus might find Diego interesting. There’s something to be said for being tricked, even in a minor discretion, it allots a token scrap of intrigue to the amount already gathering behind in his gut.

“Ah, ignore me crazy guy, I’m just being a dick.”

No, you’re surprisingly intuitive.

“I don’t believe there’s anything else for me to gain here. I shall leave you to your…” He takes another look around trying to suss what precisely the Alpha’s got to entertain his day. “I suppose if I say vacation that might come across impolite.”

“That’s it? You’re not going to beg me to get Klaus to talk to you?” Diego appears offended by his departure.

Ben smiles at that, it’s such a rudimentary response. “I assume that you know nothing of true friendship Diego. Klaus will talk to me when he wishes too, not because you’ve guilt tripped him into it. When he’s ready I’ll be there.”

“Then why do the whole stalking act?”

Truly and utterly primitive.

“I wished to make sure that he wasn’t coming to any harm.”

He doesn’t need heightened senses to acknowledge the staunch opposition to his words, in fact Ben thinks that in this aspect Klaus may have found his match in the Alpha. Neither can disguise their emotional output, it’s nauseating in one, breathtakingly refreshing in the other.
There’s that flicker again.

“I’m thinking that if I was hurting Klaus—” Diego cuts off as if the mere mention of it disgusts him and Ben marks it down as one of the few positives about him. “-which is never going to happen.”

Unlikely.

“I’m thinking that it wouldn’t be Allison that I’d have to worry about, would it.”


“Do you believe that I would be that foolish to answer you Officer?”


Diego laughs. It causes a ripple of pain that Ben notes abstractedly. “You’re a fucking horror, man.” Ben accepts this, allows the slight if only that it’s to be expected considering he’s accosted Diego in his own home. “And you’re pretty fucking lonely.”

However.

This.

This is an affront.

“I beg your pardon?”

Diego grins. It’s insufferable on him.

“You miss Klaus. That’s why you hate me, at least for the most part, because he’s spending so much time here and not with you.”

Ben wants to give him this one, but he’s not quite there. “Klaus has had partners before you.”

The subtext is clear.

You’re nothing special.

And there’s it is again, the fire in his eyes that Ben finds interesting to acknowledge.

“But I bet I’m the first one that he’s been serious about.”

Bullseye.

“And that terrifies you.”

Very intuitive.

“Are you quite finished?” He waits for the smug expression to slide off of Diego’s face and when it becomes clear that it’s not likely any time soon, Ben concedes defeat with a graciousness that the other man’s earned. “I believe that you may last longer than the rest of them.”

“I’ll cheers to that.” Diego raises his coffee mug.

“Indeed.”

At the very least, Ben thinks as he copies the gesture, Klaus’ choice may provide him with some
genuine entertainment before they break up.

Much as he’s loathe to admit it, Klaus is in safe hands for now.

“I told you.”

“Nobody likes a know-it-all Five.”

“It still doesn’t change the fact that I was right.”

Klaus will not admit this aloud because Five doesn’t require anymore of an ego boost than he’s already received today. He’d honestly been waiting for his class to start cheering for the boy at one point in the day.

Even worse, Five was right.

How, in one fucking week, can a substitute fuck with his play that badly?

It should, and Klaus isn’t exaggerating here, be punishable with at the very least a serious jail sentence. He tells Five this as they climb the final flight of stairs.

“I would, once again, like to tell you that I was right.”

“I shall never doubt you again my little devil.”

Five seems satisfied by this as they unlock the door, and Klaus can’t help but feel that comfortable thrum of happiness when he thinks of how far they’ve come, that he’s come this far where he’s carrying a shopping bag in one hand, a deflated unicorn in the other. It’s not often that he thinks he’s done well in life, a few occasions aside, but this feels like he’s slotting into a role not dictated to him but that he wants and enjoys.

His good mood lasts until he steps inside and breathes in, deeply, eager to fill his lungs with the warmth and spice of Diego’s scent. Instead he’s pulled up short, placing the bag and unicorn on the table while Five makes his greetings, turning in a slow circle to suspiciously sniff the room.

“Diego,” the man in question looks up at his tone, “did you fucking clean while I was gone?”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

Klaus is apoplectic. “Then what’s with the bleach asshole?”

Diego grins up at him and just like that Klaus is appeased. It’s a roller-coaster of emotional bullshit that he hasn’t got the time or really wants to unravel. He keeps the frown to make a point though.

“There was a funny smell.”

“Oh,” Five’s mortified face looks up from his attempts at bringing life back to his new best friend, “we don’t have a pest problem do we?”

“Nah, whatever it was I think it’s been dealt with.” For some reason Diego finds Five’s comment funny and Klaus ignores him, choosing to focus on rucking up his Alpha’s shirt to check the stitches he’s been fanatical about maintaining. “Fuckin’ hell sweetheart, at least warn a guy before
you attack him.”

“Can I please make it known that I’m very much within earshot.” Five laments.

Klaus doesn’t know when the boy really started to pick up what’s going on between them, it’s a conversation they should all probably have, but Five seems content to throw the occasional jab for now. He’s earned it truthfully, they’ve gotten away with a lot of shit thanks to Five’s good graces, and it’s also probably a conversation best held between brothers. “I doubt anybody could forget that you’re in the room Five.”

The boy coughs pointedly, though Klaus can smell the contentment in the room, it’s pervasive and so very welcome against the harsh sting of disinfectant.

He’s focusing on the skin around Diego’s wounds, gently pressing his fingertips around tender flesh and trying hard to ignore the burning awareness of the man staring intently down at him, aiming for a distraction before he gets caught up.

“Did you miss me?” He whines prettily.

It’s a gift.

Diego hums. “Nah, I had a fun day.”

“Watching TV is as good as me?” Now he whines properly.

A look passes over Diego’s face, disappears when Klaus tries to get a good look at it, and then his Alpha’s reaching out towards him. In favour of not letting him overdo it, Klaus submits himself to the chore of being pulled up and arranged until he’s tucked tightly into Diego’s warm chest.

“You smell good.” Diego hums and Klaus melts. Lets their legs tangle together and gives in with no complaint because he’s weak like that.

“Five minutes.” He says sternly. “I’ve got a lot to do.”

“No you don’t,” Five calls from somewhere in the kitchen, “I know how to prepare the vegetables.”

“You shouldn’t be using a knife without supervision.” He protests half-heartedly.

“Klaus?” Diego mutters into his hair.

“Yeah.”

“Shut up sweetheart.”

Well. That’s rude.

Klaus means to tell him but for some reason, maybe that he’s been so keyed up for what feels like forever, he falls asleep, fast and hard.

He can remember stirring briefly to the feel of a blanket being pulled up high over his shoulders, blue eyes flashing in the dark, and then he’s drifting off again. Stress finally easing out of his body at the musky scent settling in until it surrounds every inch of him.
Klaus slides out of sleep naturally, a gentle awakening, almost as soft as Diego’s lips on the back of his neck. He isn’t sure how he ended up lying back to chest like this but he isn’t willing to find the effort to complain. One of the throws he’d snuck from his apartment is rumpled between them and Klaus takes an indulgent sniff of it, of their scent coating the material.

A kiss turns into another and another, each radiating this pinprick of awareness that has Klaus’ still sleep clouded brain humming pleasantly. The kiss pressed to his cheek is painfully drawn out, Diego’s scruff leaving a trail of sensitive skin and Klaus can’t help the smile that erupts at the motion.

He’s faintly aware, as in the voice in his head tries to firmly remind him, that Diego’s shoulder must be hurting in this position, and yet he can’t do anything but sigh as long fingers splay across the line of his ribs. There’s a moment where he tries to turn to try and convey how much it means to be able to wake like this, feeling safe, and Diego’s hand curls around his chest and, with the barest impression of force, holds him with such surety, that it has unexpected tears dripping down his cheeks before he can stop himself.

Diego lets him have this, and for a few minutes that’s all there is, the two of them in every sense of the word, Diego’s thumb rubbing across his collarbone where his shirts ridden down and each drag of skin leaves this soothing concoction of heat and emotion. Klaus floats, unwilling to work out through the tired haze what time it is, or what he’s meant to be doing outside of savouring this quiet moment.

“Would either of you like any breakfast?”

Diego’s body tenses, bleeds through to Klaus as he pitches upright, guilt finding an easy perch in his chest. Five’s deliberately sat atop the counter, posture too forced to be casual, his legs swinging lightly back and forth and if Klaus wasn’t busy feeling like the worlds worst adult he’d be sure that the boy was enjoying himself.

“Five, I’m so sorry. You should have woken me up.” Not that the onus should have been on the nine-year-old to do such a thing.

"I had quite a satisfactory evening, your presence wasn't missed."

Klaus isn't sure what he's meant to say to that, and Five grins, hops down and sets about finishing a slice of half-eaten toast. "You must have been hungry, I should have cooked you something."

Five shrugs, it’s still an awkward gesture for him but Klaus’ heart swells at the sight of him trying. “I ordered takeout.” He points to the fridge. “There’s leftovers if you’re hungry.”

“Takeout for breakfast?”

“Plate it up buddy.” Diego groans from the couch. “Remind me next time that I’m too old to sleep all cramped up like this.”

“His card paid for it.” Is all Five offers up for the scandalous look Klaus gives him as the boy genuine to fuck serves cold noodles in a bowl at seven in the morning.

“Of course it did.”
“And you’re not old. Just damaged.”

“Five,” Klaus tries again, “really, I’m so–”

The boy holds a hand up to stop him. “There is no need for an apology. It was to be expected that you might run out of energy.” There’s this mischievous shine that makes Five appear a little sinister when he pauses. “Besides I was quite content watching the rest of season two.”

“You didn’t!”

Diego snorts in amusement and tucks into his food with a grateful nod at his brother. Klaus liberally butters his own piece of toast that Five thought to make him, and tries to understand how he’s found his people, at least those dysfunctional enough he can slip right into their lives like this.

He’s got no decent answer by the time he’s rushing to make sure all of his stuff for the day is together a half hour later, Ilsa the unicorn firmly placed under Diego’s custody, away from Five’s attempts to bring her along.

“She helps me regulate my emotions.” Five repetitively claims in a brazen attempt to test Klaus, a suitable punishment for his transgressions really.

“That sort of thing may work on everyone else, but not a chance here little devil.”

“Look on the bright side,” Diego says, “she’ll keep me company. Which I think I’ll need today, I haven’t felt this old in ages.” His Alpha sighs and there’s a heaviness to the last bit that Klaus knows isn’t aimed at anyone in particular but he still feels awful for. If he had his way then he’d spend every moment like this morning, in those precious minutes, engulfed in Diego’s warmth.

He’s in the middle of sliding his heels on when he catches Five’s lips quirk.

“Will you be able to get up safely today?”

“Probably.” Diego replies warily and with good reason.

Five’s features martial into a more serious expression. “What if you can’t? I’m a little worried about you being stuck in case you need to relieve yourself.”

“What?” Klaus echoes Diego’s sentiments without the swearing.

“I assume you might be opposed to a catheter.” Fives says.

Klaus laughs hard enough that he has to catch himself against the table at Diego’s horrified expression.

“You bet I fucking am.” Diego growls.

Five turns thoughtful. “There’s many other options available.”

“Enough.” The Alpha glares at them. “Both of you fuck off to school.”

“You know,” Klaus points out to Five as they make their way down the stairwell, “that he may snap and kill you one day.”

“Maybe so,” Five says, briefcase swinging at his side, “but it distracted him from feeling miserable about us leaving.”
Klaus, despite the protest he receives, runs a hand through the boys hair fondly.

Chapter End Notes

Ben's little section was the first thing I wrote when I came up with this fic, I have no idea why but I was obsessed with some hc's that a friend and I were coming up with of Ben being a little more cold than the normal soft version of him I love. His whole segment really made me sit down and plan OOTDE out properly (at least an outline that semi made sense) and so it would feel like this story would be incomplete to me without adding it :(
“I don’t wish to be rude Delores—”

Then don’t be.

Delores pays Five little attention as she helps stitch the soft felt stars they’d stencilled and cut out yesterday onto the nights sky, a backdrop that had suddenly needed something a little more… exciting.

“Well if you don’t hurry up then we’ll be behind schedule.”

A needle stabs dangerously close to his left hand and Five tries to convey his displeasure in her actions from the tight line of his spine as he tries to sit straighter, gaining a precious inch of height over her and considering that in itself a partial victory.

Would you like to do this on your own?

No, he wouldn’t.

This isn’t a primary task on his to-do list, nor is it a secondary, or even a tertiary objective. No this should be right at the very bottom and instead he’s here because he couldn’t resist indulging her silent request, it’s an indicator of how far he’s fallen in terms of self restraint that her solemn face can sway him so effortlessly.

It’s not as if he’s never been overtaken by Delores’ influence before, and yet it seems more prevalent now, in a way that he might have shied away from pre Diego and Klaus. Now he finds it quite lovely to be able to indulge in a friends request, to feel a pleasant sensation whenever he completes a task that brings her joy.

Though this doesn’t stop his disdain for everyone else showing like firework flashes of light and noise.

“Ralph, do grow up. Millie apologised, you’re only indignant about it because her water bottle spilled over your workbook.”

The ruddy faced boy sniffs and nods slowly. He’s not the only one who’s taken Five’s words to heart, somehow despite the apathy he tries to inject into each word this is not the first time this morning that he’s been approached.

Apparently questioning injustice and totalitarian regimes tends to lend one a level of adulation from the masses.

Klaus says he’s getting hero worshipped for being a dick.

Five likes to, graciously, think that it’s strays along a line down the middle of the two.

You’re getting an ego.

“That’s not fair, I prefer to think of it as providing a model of behaviour to ascribe to.”
A gold star hits him square in the nose and Five’s quite proud that he doesn’t flinch at the unexpected projectile.

**Should I leave you alone with your ego?**

He marvels, not for the first time, how he’s managed to find someone that despite being afflicted with the same youthful visage as himself, has a core of wisdom, an intellectual strength that runs parallel to his own.

“Don’t sulk, you know you’re still my favourite, *my dear.*” Five pitches the last two words, coats them in sarcasm and presents them in a manner that has her small shoulders twitching. He’s pleased the attempt lands.

**And your everyone’s.**

“That’s not entirely true.” It isn’t. Five’s pretty sure that he exists in a distant realm to most of his classmates, they seem to make it a pastime to watch when he’s performing in a way that entertains them. However they all still freeze when he focuses on them at an individual level and it’s not that he finds that distasteful, no if anything it’s quite reassuring to know that they seem to like him in the superficial way most humans manage.

**Five?**

“Am I yours?” He asks without thinking, then for some damnable reason feels the need to voice his enquiry again for clarification. “I mean, am I one of your favourites?”

Delores must catch something in his voice that he doesn’t mean to project, she carefully places her needle in the pink case Klaus provided for safety and in this time Five lets out a disbelieving sound as if even his body finds his question ridiculous.

This ordeal of friendship and all of the rules feel, to be frank, quite ludicrous, he isn’t sure what he’s trying to ask is coming across correctly and he has no practical experience to make a comparative analysis as to why his hearts running double time all of a sudden.

There’s something disturbing in the soft smile Delores gives him, the agonisingly gentle hue of her eyes as she regards him and Five’s may not excel in social etiquette enough to recognise blatant rejection, yet he thinks it would look a little like this. Absurdly he feels an urge to bury his face in the crook of his arm.

**You’re my best friend.**

Well, there it is.

Five nods, smiles, nods again. “Good.”

Delores resumes fixing a particularly large star. **Good.**

"Perfect."

**Perfect.**

And unsurprisingly it really is.
Ben surprises him at the front door, lean body awkwardly stretched out in a casual pose that, in other circumstances, Klaus would have laughed at. “I assume it’s the same as last year.”

The camera (honestly Klaus’ use of technology extends far enough that he can use his phone, this could be fucking anything as far as he knows) looks nothing like the one he used last year. But that’s not the point, Ben’s ruining his hastily assembled plan with his attempt to circumvent interacting longer than absolute necessary, and that just will not do.

He’d convinced himself of his goals on the way here, determined to try and sort out the underlying tension that left unchecked might turn toxic, as well as answering a question that he’s been mulling on for a few days.

“Actually, I was hoping that you’d have something… better.” Klaus is sure that he can see the Beta’s brain calculating this unknown variable, shifting through all of the permutations until he’s found the answer he best likes and it’s done so quickly. A few seconds, a twitch at his jaw, a quirk to his brow and that’s it, done.

“What sort of thing are you looking for?”

A bloody question, if Klaus wasn’t feeling the brittle cage of his willpower creaking then he’d laugh. As it is, he’s not feeling particularly brave in this moment where he isn’t sure where they stand on the shaky platform that he keeps whittling away at with his lies. “Do you have anything that can record and stream to another source. Like those video things you do on a laptop?”

Another pause, another round of calculations, and then another question. “Why would a third grade class need their winter play to…” Klaus doesn’t know if Ben trails off because he’s magically worked it out, or he’s feeling awkward considering the maze of bullshit that Klaus has left out for him. But then the Beta, almost petulantly, adds, “If you need something superior then Allison might be better suited to assist you.”

After so many years, Klaus is aware that this is Ben’s way of saying, *I know that you’re all keeping secrets together without me.*

“Yeah, but she doesn’t know much about this sort of thing.” Which she does, however that’s not why he composed himself (had a pep speech in the staff toilet) and came to the Beta.

“I imagine she’ll can competently handle any enquiry you may have.”

*I feel left out and I hate it.*

If there were a way to describe himself than Klaus wouldn’t ever consider it to be mature. It’s just not something that he can refer to, despite tying hard over the years to work on the little kinks and emotional burrs that have long clogged his system, he’s pretty sure that there’s still a lot to do.

Ben is antithetical to him in every way, and yet right now Klaus realises that for the first time in their decades old friendship, he’s the one that’s most secure in this moment. It’s an odd sensation, to feel like he has comfort to give instead of greedily take.

“I need your help. Please.”

Ben shrugs, slopes back into the apartment and Klaus follows him still considering the revelation that he’s the *adult* tonight and watching the man in front of him with an appraising eye. It’s always amused Klaus to watch the difference in his friend, how Ben can move from one state to the next.
When he’s focused, alert, plotting something dastardly with cold intense eyes, then Ben’s sleek like a wild cat silently stalking along, a pretty shell covering something dangerous.

And yet, when he’s not like this, which is about ninety percent of the time, Ben’s…

Well, he’s a clumsy bastard.

To prove his point beautifully Ben’s hip collides with a bookcase as if he’s completely unaware of his proportions and Klaus has to stifle a laugh at the slew of articulate language that constitutes the Beta’s swearing because right now he doubts that it’d be well received.

Klaus has a plan to correct the imbalance between them, and it’s quite simple: Fix this fucking bullshit.

He’s quite willing to accept the accolades that such ingenuity should afford him, and while Ben’s shifting through the organised chaos that Allison and Klaus have long called his ‘tech’ cupboard, Klaus uses the time to try and iron out the details of his plan - chiefly, where the hell does he begin.

“We haven’t done wine night for a while.” He muses absently.

It should probably be alarming, the ripple of tension down the Beta’s back and Klaus finds himself instinctively reaching out to soothe the tight line of Ben’s spine before aborting the gesture a hairsbreadth from landing.

“You’re usually busy with work around now, seems a little inconsiderate to distract you.” Ben finally turns on his heel, implacable in expression and scent and Klaus is almost jealous of that tightly leashed control of his. “Here you go, this should do the trick. Do you need me to show you what to do?”

“I’m good.” The camera he passes looks no different than the other and Klaus makes an appreciative sound because he suspects the things cost more than this months rent knowing Ben.

“Good, is there anything else?”

“Yeah, before I forget,” Klaus says casually as he twists the camera back and forth like he knows that fuck he’s meant to be looking at, “did you find out everything that you needed the other day?”

Ben blinks. “In what capacity?”

“Don’t insult me asshole, like I don’t know what my best friend smells like. You guys might have thought you were being sneaky, but didn’t think to hang an air freshener up in the corridor did’ya?”

Ben laughs, hard, and Klaus grins as the small fist that’s been tightening around his chest loosens at the sound. When Ben calms himself back into that more polished veneer in lieu of a natural finish he sighs happily. “After all of these years, somehow you still surprise me Klaus.”

“Stop pretending that you’re so suave.” Klaus grumbles, throws himself until he’s half slanted on the couch, heels propped up on the coffee table, determined to at least appear casual.

“Is this the part where I apologise?” Ben asks curiously.

It’s interesting because Klaus knows in this regard he’s being serious, if Klaus demands it of him, then Ben would spend hours reflecting on his actions before delivering a truly heartfelt plea for forgiveness, could list all of the ways that his actions might be wrong even if he doesn’t actually
feel the remorse.

In another world that might bother him, but Ben’s different, special, a brother in every way that matters, water purer than blood, and Klaus thinks that he gets it as well. If he were the one cast out of the circle, if Allison and Ben conspired without letting him in, then Klaus knows his, at times, fragile grip on this normal life of his would crumble so fucking quickly.

So he says, and it’s easy, and maybe it shouldn’t be, but fuck it: “We’re good, we’re always good Ben.”

Ben, sags, a little, in him it’s more like he removes the stick from his ass and loses an inch of height in the process. It’s a reaction Klaus has seen countless times and it’s still endearing to him after all these years. There’s a vulnerability in the motion and he knows that the Beta can’t tolerate anything other than the controlled releases of emotion he displays on his own terms.

And again, maybe Ben doesn’t deserve it, the stalking fucker, but Klaus takes pity on him, a gesture that he’s greedily demanded for most of their life. “Although I’m kind of curious what you thought of him? Aside from the outright hatred, don’t be too cliché here Benny.”

Like he expects, Ben’s reply comes quick and yet without the usual character assassination. “He’s bland, mediocre, unworthy of your energy. Would you like me to go on?”

“But you didn’t hate him?”

Ben pauses, contemplates to himself and Klaus has always appreciated that about him, although he’ll keep things quiet, a lie of omission occasionally deployed, Ben has never outright lied to his face. If Klaus asks for his opinion then he’ll get it, even if the sharp edges cut him open, Ben will never gloss over his more unpleasant thoughts and Klaus needs that.

“I believe there may be a slim possibility that he has the capability to prove himself.”

“You’re a prissy bitch at times Benny.”

Sometimes there’s this niggling voice in Klaus’ head that demands he acknowledge a particular truth. He’s not blind to the fact that he’s been granted some degree of power over his friend, a special place in Ben’s heart that no other’s allowed and the Beta has a parallel spot in his own, but Klaus thinks it’s different for Ben. His hearts a clinical piece of equipment that he methodically maintains, cutting away at any pieces he dislikes efficiently and with no further thought than that of a gardener vindictively attacking the weeds creeping through their prized rose garden.

Allison, of course, is allocated a space, however it’s not so deeply rooted and tangled up like Klaus is, and he should find such a heavy investment scary, he knows this.

But it’s Ben.

It’s creating silent languages so they aren’t punished for being noisy, it’s jumping on Ben’s shitty mattress where it rests on the floor because it’s his birthday and no one else will remember, it’s Klaus telling paramedics that he tripped and fell and yes he’s really that clumsy a child while they sew him back together and Ben holding his hand so tightly he could scream from the relief that somebody cares.

Fuck, it’s all of the twilight hours that Ben sat resolute by his side as he weaned himself off the drugs, and the only person willing to push him though his degree, to help him find an apartment and convince his landlord that he’s a good bet, to delicately holding onto his paper body and keeping it grounded when he’s lost in the haze.
But most of all it’s Ben yelling at him, while he lay on the ground still coughing up water, that he has to live, for himself and no one else because ‘the world doesn’t deserve to lose you Klaus, it needs you’.

There’s so much and too few words to describe what Ben is and Klaus would do him an injustice to try pretend that he’s even slightly affected by the Beta’s occasionally questionable actions.

*Ben is his brother.*

And Klaus has been a terrible sibling far longer than Ben’s been an overprotective one.

“Did you want,” Ben leans against his bedrooms door frame, “to talk about it?”

“I know it’s a lot to ask, and I’m being a complete and utter dick,” he starts, and then thinks that this is the perfect band aid moment, a chance to spill everything in one large gush and just pray that it all lands perfectly, “actually yeah, I do.”

The plays tomorrow night, Five’s birthday follows shortly after that, Christmas racing at it’s heels and Klaus has a lot to do, instead of this he finds himself slipping his shoes off, arranging his skirt so he can tuck his feet underneath him and waving a hand imperiously through the air for the glass he already knows Ben hopefully keeps half filled for him in the kitchen.

If he can’t make time for his friend then he surely doesn’t deserve such a treasure, and honestly a few hours curled up with his diluted glass of wine sounds like that tiny bit of space that he needs to rejuvenate and hit the ground running once again.

“So,” he wrack’s his brain for a good starting point while Ben sits beside him, “I suppose we should begin where I found myself stuck between a social worker and my students guardian…”

Ben, to his credit, rolls his eyes only a few times while Klaus fumbles his way through the mess that’s somehow yielded one of the best things he’s ever had in his life. By the time he’s come to a natural stopping point the Beta’s face is almost comical in its grumpiness. “You understand that I now have to dislike him out of principal.”

It’s an olive branch, and Klaus who’s really *that* damn good at hearing the truth behind the surly delivery knows it’s more something along the lines of: *I can’t believe you’re serious about this man and I may have to put up with him forever.*

“If you’re not careful then you’ll be stuck with me.” Klaus smiles sweetly. “Unless you’re volunteering to help me through my heats?”

The sentence strikes gold, and Ben shudders violently, listing against Klaus’ side in the process. “I can’t imagine anything so grotesque.”

“Y’know it’s lucky that I know all about your issues Benny, if not that might have hurt my feelings.”

“There’s nothing irregular about finding intercourse to be distasteful.”

“I’ll remember that when I’m holding a candle lit vigil for your sex life.”

Ben lightly pinches the soft skin of his arm and Klaus whines loudly, more than it probably deserves, it makes them both laugh. “He asked the question.”

“Ah, which one?”
“Whether I loved you.”

Klaus snorts. “They all ask that. What did you say?”

“I informed him that you were my brother.” Ben sniffs like the haughty little bitch he is.

“Well if it’s any consolation, if I was going to fuck a brother then it would definitely be you.”

He gets a harder pinch at that and it’s more than worth it to feel the last vestiges of awkwardness simmer away around the sounds of Klaus’ tittering and peace long since settles in the air by the time Allison returns home and raises a brow at them. Klaus lifts a tumbler of whiskey in one hand and a slice of pizza in the other as a gesture of goodwill (he’ll ignore the last four he devoured, he’d ordered an extra large for a reason).

There’s something to be said, Klaus thinks around a mouthful of melted cheese, about the meaning of friendship. He can’t proclaim to have anything revolutionary to add to the concept, only that as he’s groaning theatrically at the latest atrocity Allison’s client has come up with, and ribbing Ben’s job - because it’s definitely real work if you have to run a character into a wall again and again and again to check that said wall isn’t glitching - he remembers a quote he once liked enough to write down.

*What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies.*

Klaus thinks Aristotle was wrong, very wrong, or he’s so very lucky that he shares a soul not with one but two beautiful people, and he’ll never take that for granted long as he lives.

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Diego gets their reasoning, he truly does, and yet when Klaus and Five hurry out of the door after what feels like a pit stop return it still has him feeling like an immense let down.

It wouldn’t be too bad if he wasn’t genuinely improving, biology can have some benefits he thinks that morning, lightly skimming a finger around the angry red splash across his ribs. Considering he’d been in a hospital bed less than a fortnight ago, Diego would say that the white shine of scar tissue is pretty good going.

Though he pointedly refuses to look in the mirror, even when he can feel an itch, because there’s only so much one guy can deal with.

Ignoring the issue with an arrogance that he blames on nature, Diego thinks at the very least he deserves some credit for his ability to traverse around the apartment with relative ease now.

Granted, he accepts Klaus’ observation that he looks like a geriatric on a treadmill, all jerky movements and frustrating groans when something twinges if he moves too fast. Give him a week though and he can guarantee he’ll be back to normal (two at the most.)

So it’s very reluctantly that he agrees spending a whole evening cramped in the school auditorium wouldn’t be that advisable.

“Plus,” Klaus reminds him between Five barking orders and checking his list, “you don’t half smell.” The Omega winks, leaps away from Diego’s reach and darts out of the door.
He’s not wrong. Diego knows that if they were even in the same building it wouldn’t take a genius to realise that he’s been imprinted with jasmine, not even the fresh scent the Omega had rubbed into his shirt, *accidentally*, when it’d come back from the wash. But also that they’re both layered with older traces of one another, and although he’s reached the point of no longer caring about pretences and the trail of lies they’ve set down, Diego also has no intention of getting Klaus into trouble.

So he’s mournfully glaring at the television, sombre at the consequences of the actions that have led him here, and it’s not that he’d take another path given the chance to try again, more that Five deserves to be told that he’s been brilliant on a night where everyone else gets to shine on the stage.

To appease the discontented grumble that’s reverberated through his chest on a loop for a few hours now, Diego’s fixating on Five’s birthday, something that he *needs* to be better for. In fact he’d say that his brothers rubbing off on him in some regards, a rigid list breaking down the day has been forming in his head, right down to the types of candles on his cake.

It’s quite a satisfying way to distract himself, so his phone sounding off in his pocket takes him aback and he’s surprised to find Klaus’ name pop up, more so when he reads the message.

*(18:35)*  *If you wouldn't mind turning on your laptop, I’d be most obliged. Kind Regards, 5.*

*(18:36)* Shouldn’t you be busy?

*(18:36)* And why have you got Klaus’ phone?

*(18:37)*  *I’d only be busy if I was foolish enough to be unprepared. I was not. So please do as you’re asked. Kind Regards, 5.*

*(18:38)*  *I asked to borrow it for a minute. Kind Regards, 5.*

A part of Diego, as he boots up his old laptop, has to know whether Five actually signs off all of his correspondence in this way, and if so why the fuck has he never known about it before. It’s hilarious to him. Fucking adorable!

Five is adorable, and hilarious, and he’d be disgusted to be labelled so. Diego can’t help but love his brother all the more for his irregularities.

*(18:39)*  *Stop procrastinating. Kind Regards, 5.*

The scolding is audible through the text and Diego finally connects to the dodgy land-line that he still hasn’t gotten around to doing much about improving. He doesn’t get time to mourn it for too long because a box pops up on the screen demanding he accepts a video call and with only a little hesitation he clicks the green button.

“Finally, you really don’t have a sense of haste, Diego.” Five’s irate face comes in, first pixelating and then, after a few lags, jolting into focus. “It’s not as if I have a schedule to adhere to.”

“What the hell are you doing Five?”

Sadly, Diego has to admit that it takes him multiple attempts at the same question until realises the sounds must be turned off, the screen too considering there’s only a generic outlined profile picture where his end should be connected.
“I imagine by now that you’ll have finished squawking?”

It’s a test of patience not being able to snark back at his shit of a brother.

Five smiles like a little sadistic fuck as if he knows Diego’s thoughts. “I’m sure you can appreciate that I can’t have you swearing as you please whilst on school property. Now, I suspect you’re wondering why I’ve contacted you this evening, to be short and to the point, as you’re incapable of coming in person I thought that this might be the best alternative. This is a recording instrument that also allows a live stream to whomever I connect with using a--” A pause as Five examines something off camera. “- Mr Benjamin’s laptop, actually there’s a myriad of functions I haven’t got around to looking at, I should like to speak to it’s owner if Mr Klaus would permit it.”

Diego’s gut instinct thinks not a fucking chance before he reins it in, his Alpha rising fluid and furious at the thought of Five anywhere near Ben (Benjamin, really), it’s not because he thinks the Beta would actually hurt him, it’s just… the guys off. Diego’s met some fucked up people in his life, his job demands that he sees some of the horrifying things that one human can do to another. In no way would he say Ben’s like that, only the itch at the nape of his neck he gets was the same the other day as when he’s stood behind two-way interrogation glass staring into the disturbingly clever eyes of a criminal.

See, he’s not saying the guys nuts or dangerous, he just feels similar.

Although, the thought of Five - in a controlled environment - interrogating the stiff Beta brings a savage glee Diego forgot he was capable of feeling.

But that’s not important right now, he can get a better scope of Klaus’ friend another time, right now he’s possibly being given the greatest early Christmas present he could ask for. Though he does have to check one thing.

(18:47) I’m pretty sure it’s illegal to film in a school like this?

The visuals go a bit haywire as Five pitches the camera upside down, presumably to read the message he’s been sent. A second later it returns to normal, albeit no displaying a rather disgruntled face.

“Honestly do you believe I would allow such an activity let alone participate if it weren’t acceptable? Don’t answer that. It’s customary for the play to be recorded Mr Klaus mentioned, I just took the initiative to suggest that we tape a behind the scenes addition to this years offering and the consensus from the parents was that they’d very much like this. Thus why you need to be quiet, I can’t have your voice in the background when we edit the final copy.”

Diego goes to reply, stops, starts to nod, and stops again.

Five must understand anyway, his little face brightens imperceptibly. “Thank you for your cooperation, now we shall begin with Delores’ initial design work…”

There’s something wholesome and good for the soul about listening to Five’s people voice tell him the artistic decision behind having a singing dragon, the development of the songs and so many other things that Diego’s head reels from the thought behind what should be something so simple.

He’s purposefully blocked out these sort memories from childhood, obvious ones aside, (a stutter isn’t conducive to standing on stage in front of a crowd). Yet when Five’s classmates filter in and start getting ready - amid the deadpan monologue of information being reeled off about the correct ratios for paper mache - all Diego can see is excitement before the camera pans to a wide shot of
the scenery once again whilst they all change.

When the children race back around to twirl and show off, Diego can’t help but wonder whether he’d have had even an inkling of their joy if he’d had a teacher like Klaus. There’s a palpable buzz that he can feel through the screen and it shouldn’t surprise like it does that he’s watching a group of children act like… well, children.

Klaus has given them this, there’s no hesitance, no tears, only a class that’s jumping about, ready to perform without a single shred of nerves. That has to be real magic, the ability to give such shining confidence to the point where even Five’s voice warms despite the stern words he tries to project about potential costume damage.

There’s something incredibly tender about Klaus, Diego’s caught in the thought when he should be focusing but he can’t help it. Can’t get past the fact that he’s never met someone so willing to give every last piece of themself away, and Klaus does this every day and Diego can’t get his head around it. He wants to understand the nature of a person that gives and gives and gives without ever seeing how brilliant he is.

By the time Five’s class is about to begin his brothers set himself up in what looks like an auditorium, it’s dark and filled with parents milling about getting seated, paper cups held aloft to prevent spillages. To his surprise Five’s stopped no less than seven times on his way to a special table at the back where the space in front is clear for filming.

There can be no greater joy in the world, Diego thinks, than to listen to his brother curtly answer the same series of well meaning questions.

“Yes, I created the outfits, scenery and props.”

“Yes, I’m aware that they look professional.”

“Yes, I know that it’s incredible for my age.”

And the very best of all is a series of choking rasps and splutters when one Omega coos over how adorably scrummy he is.

Diego died in hospital, there’s no other reason he’s been given this incredible moment to enjoy.

“Don’t you dare,” the camera swings around to Five’s incandescent face once he’s ducked behind the table, “ever mention this again!”

(19:27) You’ll have to edit that out.

He can tell when it’s read because if Five were a crass adult (Diego) he would be flipping a finger up, instead he tries to project his best disappointed face. “You’re not nearly as funny as you think you are.”

The camera’s set on the tripod just as the first knight totters onto the stage when Diego’s phone vibrates again, he’s not had time to read the message he taps on when the door goes as well. Considering his luck with guests recently he finds himself weighing up the worth of opening it versus remaining in a bent out pretzel shape on the couch because the odds are most definitely not in his favour given past experience.

In the end he’s glad he makes the effort to fling the door open, because if not he wouldn’t have the pizza a delivery guy hands over.
Diego’s about to lift the lid and complete what must be his millionth thanks to the big guy in the sky for giving him this rare, lightning in a bottle, Omega when he catches the second, third and fourth messages.

He also, and I quote, says that you should enjoy the pineapple darling. Kind Regards, 5.

I forgot to add, and please note that I protest this, - ;)

Kind Regards, 5.

Diego takes a second to appreciate that he may have found perfection in a six foot, skirt twirling, curly haired twink. He gives in and takes an exploratory bite of his pizza - pineapple is still awful, but the grease and cheese makes up for it - and sits down to watch the wildest fucking play that an elementary school may have ever thrown.

Five wasn’t fucking about when he said that Klaus let the class decide how they want to perform.

It’s chaotic.

And the best thing, by far, is at the very end when everyone’s clapping and the children are excitedly bouncing to the praise, is watching his brother storm onto the stage, scowling for all he’s worth when summoned not by Klaus but that sweet little Delores holding up a sign with his number on it.

It’s fucking brilliant.

When he first met with Gena, admittedly in a less than positive head space, which is probably putting it far too lightly, Diego remembers one question that out of the plethora probably shouldn’t have stood out.

What can you provide for Five?

Six words that have fucking stuck in the back of his mind, only to be played back when he’s feeling particularly terrible.

Now though…

It’s not that he’d ever begin to think he can compare to mom or Lillian, not even close, he’s an inferior replacement at best. It’s just in this moment Diego, with the help of one perfect Omega and the sweet girl, has given Five an experience that he may never have had.

There Five is, with all of the stiff mannerisms of a mid-scandal politician and the eloquence that most could only dream of, and still he’s stood on the stage surrounded by his classmates, claspin Delores’ hand and looking every bit like a normal schoolboy, bathed in a shimmering blue light from a stage light.

Diego can’t do better than their parents, or even the same, but he can do it differently, and it’s not what he or his brother might have chosen for themselves, and yet looking at Five now, Diego thinks for the first time since they’ve started down this mess of a road, that they’re doing alright.
Chapter End Notes

So after compiling the list of things our boys have left to and outlining them down - Five's birthday, dealing with Reginald, Klaus' date (cos he *needs* pampering) and we still haven't gotten around to Klaus' bloody heat somehow- I've tentatively set a finish line for 25 chapters, whether that happens entirely depends on how trash I am for writing excessively so apologies in advance :)
Winter break starts, Five’s home for two weeks, and Klaus is still in his apartment.

Diego can’t remember the last time he’s been quite this happy when there's something shadowy and dark looming around the corner. It’s all so very soft and delicate and brilliant that he’s a little bit confused as to how this all managed to come about some days, how he’s sat watching the strangest argument of his life.

“If I remember right Diego should be the first person to read your report card.”

Five completely ignores this in favour of reading from the sheet of paper in front of him like he hasn’t already memorised every single pen stroke. “Five needs to work on applying his conscientious attitude towards his fellow pupils rather than his work.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

Five’s eyes narrow, seek Diego out and he has to suppress a laugh because there’s no fucking chance he’s giving an opinion on this one.

“You make it sound like I’m rude to them.” His brother gives up and goes back to addressing his teacher.

“And you’re not?”

“I treat my classmates respectably.”

_Bullshit._

Klaus sniffs, drums his fingertips against the kitchen counter. “Fine what about the next bit?”

Five pauses in his outrage and the hot airs literally draining out of him. “You may have implied that I’m exceptionally gifted.”

“Well there we go, what more could you ask for? I don’t get why you can’t treat you’re _classmates_ like Delores.”

“You can’t treat everyone the same or there wouldn’t be anyone special.”

“So Delores is special?”

Just like that they’re done (for the third time this evening), Klaus wiggles his eyebrows theatrically and Five threatens to lead a miniature revolution when they return to school.

Diego has been watching it all much the way one might watch a pack of animals take down their prey, fascinated and in no fucking way willing to step into the middle of the fray. He’s not so much afraid, but he’s also not stupid enough to put a foot in the ring while the pair mutter and gripe around preparing dinner. It’s like ruining the magic of the moment if he interferes, there’s something endearing about them, how Five’s already swiping through the music Klaus has hooked up to a pair of speakers he came home with the other day, _a gift from a friend._
Honestly he’s also grateful for any sort of distraction from waiting on Allison’s near daily update. It’s not that Diego doesn’t know he owes her just for trying but like waiting for a search warrant at work, he’s struggling for patience in the face of a system that feels like it’s deliberately out to f**k him up some days.


“If you don’t shut you’re mouth then you’ll catch flies.” Five reprimands - calls him out really, because he’s been staring at the floating creature twirling to the beat of a song in his kitchen.

Klaus likes attention, it’s something that Diego’s learnt, and all Five’s words do is ensure that Diego’s treated to a radiant smile before the Omega goes back to cooking.

“You’re a little-”

“Shit. I’m aware. You need to expand your list of insults.” Five’s on form, his eyes glinting through the steam curling up towards the ceiling like some sinister villain from a knock-off budget horror.

“He’s got a point. You do like to use the same old words all the time.” Klaus sides with his brother, because that’s a thing now despite their spat and Diego just has to accept it.

He doesn’t mind in the slightest.

Though he has to feign offence to save a little face sometimes. “I’ll remember that sweetheart, sorry, shouldn’t call you that anymore.”

Klaus responds with a cheerful middle finger the second Five’s attention is drawn in the opposite direction and Diego gives in and laughs.

“Let’s move onto something more exciting, how about-”

“Don’t.” Five’s voice drops, low and cold.

There’s a removal of anything resembling joy in the room and Diego for once knows where it’s gone. Five’s made it clear to him that anything even slightly veering into the realm of celebration is not to be tolerated when it comes to his birthday.

I won’t allow it. His brother warns repeatedly over dinner, a fork waving aggressively in the air whenever Diego attempts to push his luck a little.

“I don’t get it.” He remarks later when Five’s preoccupied in his room. “He’s never enjoyed Christmas, I won’t push that, but mom always said that he had great birthdays.”

Klaus gives him this look that’s equal parts affection and exasperation. Diego is equally obsessed with it. “C’mon Mr Detective, how can you not have worked this out yet?”

The Omega’s in the middle of painting his toenails on the couch, knees tucked up under his chin and it’s all so very normal. There’s no reason for Klaus to be here so often now that Diego’s comfortable enough walking around the apartment, and yet the longer they leave this perfect dynamic alone the happier all of them seem to be. So Diego’s very much keeping his mouth shut for once. Well except to say “tell me”, and then he’s definitely shutting up.

Klaus waits until he’s flicked the brush over each nail and then only when he’s secured the pot (none of them need to deal with Five’s thunder if he marks the couch). “I’d of thought that every
Diego drops his head back with a groan at his own incompetence. It's a perfectly valid way to feel, he can understand how Five feels because quite frankly he'd agreed way too fucking quickly when his brother had vetoed Christmas. Neither of them feel that attached to any festivities despite the fairy lights Klaus had strung about the place the other day in protest. There's a hollowness to the day without mom's gingerbread men, or Lillian's dried fruit decorations, or the tree that they waited until Diego could make it down each winter to use him as free labour to lug it up eleven flights of stairs to their home.

Christmas is a time that neither of them want to dwell on and Diego's got no wish to push on that. But birthdays...

“Don’t panic so much.” Klaus carefully shifts so that his bare toes are wriggling in the air while he shoulders his way under Diego’s arm, stops squirming only when Diego gives in and threads a hand through the Omega’s curls. “You’ve got his present, just wait until the right moment to give it to him. Preferably when I’m at least twenty feet out of the explosion zone.”

“Yeah, ‘spose so.”

“I’m the teacher so just trust me you idiot.”

“Teachers are meant to be nice.”

Klaus grumbles against him and then he’s quiet and Diego can’t help but watch the slow sweep of his lashes as they lower, like he’s fighting sleep. “I’m always nice.”

Diego forgoes answering, concentrates on rubbing concentric circles through the soft texture of Klaus’ hair, can’t help but grin as Klaus hums his approval, scent permeating around him in a swirl of heat and contentment. “You’re perfect.”

There’d been a time in his life where Diego came to the point that he accepted gentle and intimate and all of the things that came along with finding somebody entailed, just wasn’t in the cards for him. He thought he was so far from needing those things, that he was fine with work, perfunctory drinks with his co-workers and bi-yearly trips home to see mom, a satisfactory, contained life. Then Klaus had to come along with his… well everything, and upended all that he’d come to define himself by.

It’s a different upheaval than with Five, and actually maybe this never would have worked before, Diego can’t pretend that he was ever that good to the occasional partners he had. He was nice sure, but there’s a lot more to a relationship than being nice. Without Five maybe despite his best intentions he’d never have managed to bring enough to the table, to have been present enough to act less selfishly, to want to be better.

Plus the whole never meeting Klaus in the first place would have been a problem.

“You’re thinking so loudly that I can’t go to sleep.” A sleepy voice mumbles against his chest.

Diego finds that he doesn’t give a fuck about how everything came about between them, he’s happy to accept that for once he’s the lucky one. “You can’t fall asleep on the couch.”

“Watch me.”

Which he does, easily, suffers the ache in his spine the next morning with a fondness he didn’t know he was capable of and a smile for the blanket carefully draped around the pair of them.
Usually the run-up to Christmas fills Klaus, not with anxiety, that would be a tad dramatic even for him, but he does feel a sense of unease over the period. The day itself is exciting, wild really considering he’s spent every single one cooking and sharing the deliberately cheap gifts between his friends with glee, drinking more wine than he does for the rest of the year combined, and then finally collapsing on the couch watching an absurdly cheesy film together. It’s perfect. The lead up to it however isn’t so much and he can only blame it on suppressed memories and all of the therapy he probably should have taken up the offer of when Ben first suggested.

This year he’s felt nothing more than a few occasional flickers from the dying fire in his chest and it’s positively delightful, it’s a thing that he finds hard to explain, to put into words why he’s happy. But he is. Madly so. And Klaus may not know how to profess his happiness in any meaningful way, however he sure as fuck knows how to show it. He’s pretty good at it too.

“Fuckin’ hell sweetheart.” Diego groans, head tossed back, probably still half asleep from whichever dream Klaus so rudely dragged him away from so he can take the Alpha in his mouth. He has to screw his eyes shut tight before he does something humiliating when his stomach clenches with heat, drags his tongue along the vein on the underside of his cock, teases along the ridge of his knot and… shit he’s somehow fucking close and he’s only just begun.

It’s not as if Diego’s particularly hard to please, in fact Klaus is sure that he could do the barest effort, swallow him down until his cock hits the back of Klaus’ throat, pull back, and repeat. He does it a few times to check and sure enough he’s taken aback by the heavy scent, the taste of Diego’s cock on his tongue where it’s leaking copiously and the whole thing feels a little surreal, and maybe if this is what it’s like to bond with someone then he’d have signed up for it years ago. Or not, because he can’t imagine ever wanting someone this much.

“Fuck, Klaus, just… shit.” Diego’s shifting beneath him, hips restless. Right. He has a job to do. Klaus pulls back long enough to level a pretty fierce glare at his Alpha. “You’re meant to be resting. Just let me do all of the work.”

Fingers sink into his hair and Klaus almost whimpers at the harsh tug, and Diego doesn’t apologise because he’s a fucking quick learner. “Well get back on with it then.”

“You’re so bossy.” Though he can’t resist casually licking the traces of precome smeared across his stomach, relishing the strangled groan above him before he takes pity and swallows Diego’s cock down in one fell swoop, savouring the rough edge in his throat that’ll make speaking later sore, cares only that it brings about another stream of foul language from the man he loves. Which… Shit.

Before he can fuck this up by doing what he always does, diving in too deep and too fucking hard, Klaus makes good use of his hands, selfishly of course, feeling out the hard lines of Diego’s abdomen, the play of muscle where his touch lands and it feeds this new addiction that Klaus has
been cultivating. How he’s resting between Diego’s thighs, can feel each shuddering breath the Alpha takes, the smell of him imprinting on Klaus’ skin until he’s too distracted to feel the hand curving around his neck.

He’s almost resentful being pulled away, he wants to feel the heat of Diego’s release on his tongue, wants the taste of him there for days to come, so he knows precisely how good he’s been. But then Diego’s tongues in his mouth and his hands closing around Klaus’ cock, holds both of them together in one blessedly large hand and Klaus has to get a grip on Diego’s hips so he doesn’t fly off from the wet, gliding friction.

Klaus doesn’t understand why Diego doesn’t want to fuck his mouth, why he doesn’t want to selfishly take his pleasure and- And then Klaus gets it, and it’s fucking everything that he’s cherished enough to be put first in someone’s mind, and Diego’s fingers are perfect, and Klaus comes between them, borderline painful and sticky and his lungs hammer without taking in any oxygen until he’s gasping roughly against Diego’s mouth.

He’s a little dazed, a little bleary eyed, and a whole lot in love by the time he’s squirming and Diego’s spilling between their stomachs with a low grunt. Klaus may actually be high off of the look on the Alpha’s face when he brings that beloved hand up to clean the mess away, the wide eyes when he sucks each finger, the pad of Diego’s thumb pressing lightly on his tongue has Klaus’ pulse ticking up harshly and those unspoken words desperately trying to run free.

“Do I want to ask what that was about?” Diego asks after they firstly cleaned up, and secondly checked that there wasn’t a terrified child in the hallway waiting for them. Five’s asleep. Klaus wants to tell Diego that he loves him. And it’s not even six in the fucking morning.

“He just felt like it I guess.” He can’t help taking his teeth to the line of Diego’s collarbone, needs to feel real when the thoughts in his head feel like a fantasy.

Diego’s quiet for too long and then, when Klaus is starting to slip into the realm of panic, there’s a hand travelling over his shoulder and resting at the hinge of his jaw, cradling him with a gentleness that Klaus isn’t too sure what he’s supposed to do with.

He loves Diego, but he doesn’t know how to translate the sweet gestures the Alpha gives him. Klaus gets it. He’s a mess.

“Go on a date with me?”

“Are you serious?” Klaus has heard him wrong, he’s sure of it.

“No I was joking.” Diegos disbelief would be funny under other circumstances. “Of course I’m being serious. Not that I can promise it’ll be the greatest date you’ve ever had-”

Klaus cuts him off before he can ramble any further, before he can insult himself like Klaus knows he’s about to try and do. “It won’t be that hard to impress me, I’ve not been…” Now he’s the one trailing off and he sends a quick prayer, that Diego might not have caught that, won’t think he’s a complete idiot.

“What do you mean-” Diego’s confusion appears and then clears instantly. “No.”

“Don’t be mean.”

“I’m not, it’s just… really?”

“I’ve had dinner.”
“That’s it? You’ve been taken to dinner? No-ones actually spoilt you properly.”

Klaus refrains from adding that he’s been taken to far worse places, so a cheap diner had been the epitome of class back in the day. Plus Diego’s definition of *spoiling* Klaus probably didn’t line up with the sort of people he used to fuck’s definition of romance. “Like you’re not the type to think sitting in your car under the stars so you can hook up counts as a date.”

Diego takes pity on his growing discomfort, presses a quick kiss to his lips and then gives him a cocky grin. “Of course not, I’d save that shit for the third time, I’m not a savage. Please tell me you’ve heard of the three date rule.”

“Apparently not.” Klaus gestures between them and finds it ridiculously easy to join in with Diego’s laughter.

“Okay you definitely win, you have the most pathetic back story sweetheart. Never going on a proper date is terrible.”

Klaus rolls onto his knees, albeit on shaky legs, and swoops into a half bow to accept the mocking applause Diego gives him. “An absolute honour, and what do I win?”

“Me.”

*Oh, fuck you.*

“Very smooth.” He manages instead, scrambles to shrug nonchalantly

“Thanks, I thought so too. Though the deal comes with a certain little shit as well.”

Klaus smiles. “Can I just have the little shit? He sounds much more fun.”

He tries to be mindful of the mostly healed scars on Diego’s chest as he’s pulled down with an arm hooked around his waist, it’s just hard not to let out a high pitched squeal when he’s held in such a tight grip that his heads going light with relief that once again Diego’s taken something that should have felt like a thorn in his side and gently removed it with a clumsy reverence.

“I tell you what, after Christmas we go out, properly, and we’ll do all of the things that some idiots fucked up on treating you too when-”

This time Klaus cuts him off with a kiss and he can’t decide which he prefers more. Diego strung out in bed staring down at him like he hung the moon while he sucks him off, or Diego who unknowingly picks apart all of the hastily stitched together pieces that Klaus has held onto over the years.

Fortunately, through the grace of some god, he’s allowed to have both it seems.

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Five wakes up to discover he’s ten-years-old.

Not that it was unexpected. Twenty-third of December, same as every year. Of In fact he stayed awake until three, fifteen precisely to herald in the start of a new decade of his life. It should probably be exciting he supposes.
For that alone he allows an additional three minutes in bed to celebrate. He for some illogical reason thought that maybe there’d be something different about this morning, his body might feel older perhaps. Instead as he unfolds from under the covers he feels very much the same and when he inspects himself in the mirror whilst he brushes his teeth there’s nothing unusual about the sight.

His face appears the same, skin still a shade too pale from the winter weather, his hair could do with a trim truthfully but he’s also been contemplating whether to grow it past it’s current length for a while, he’ll see. There’s light rings of purple and blue under his eyes, his nose though is much better, in fact apart from a tiny bump marring the straight line, he’d be hard pressed to identify where a break had occurred without prior knowledge.

He might try running today. It could release a rush of endorphins which could be pleasant. He’ll decide later, after he’s had breakfast and evaluated whether the adults have taken heed of his decision or not.

Five is satisfied when he joins the pair that there’s no balloons or ridiculously large banners displaying the numbers of his age. Only the smell of scrambled eggs (Klaus) and toast that’s a shade too burnt for a normal humans liking (Diego). Most importantly is the glorious waft of freshly brewed coffee sitting in the pot ready for him, he’s generous enough that the lurid pink bow taped to the side of his mug has his mouth curling at the corners.

“Happy completely normal, utterly ordinary, truly banal and boring day Five.” Klaus deadpans.

“Good morning Klaus.” Five nods, grateful that this is as far as the Omega’s eccentric nature has gone. He’d temporarily feared what he might have come out to and it seems he’d been too cautious. “I do hope you remembered what I said.” He warns just to be safe, eyes narrowing at the sheepish expression on Diego’s face.

“Course I did buddy, though if everything’s meant to be normal today then I don’t think that you should be drinking coffee this early.”

Klaus decides to be the reasonable one, stepping around the Alpha with a graceful twirl, mug held high and reaching Five’s waiting hands without a drop spilled. “Don’t be such a sourpuss.”

It’s a remarkably average morning, aside from the occasional displays of affection that seem to be a thing now, although it could be that they’ve always been a thing and Five has just never noticed until recently. He seems to be getting rather slow, maybe it’s an age related issue.

“I’ve got to go into the precinct for a few hours.” Diego pipes up, seemingly oblivious to Klaus’ spread eagled position over his back.

Now that he mentions it Five recognises the cliché shirt, jeans and leather jacket combination that his brother wears to work. “Today?”

“Yeah I’ve got some paperwork to fill in before I go back on desk duty for a bit.” Diego pauses in devouring a round of toast to look at him with a little too much curiosity and even more exaggerated innocence. “ I didn’t think you’d mind. I can call in if-”

“No. Thank you.”

Five waits his brother out, gains a small dose of satisfaction when he wins and then resumes drinking his coffee and ignoring the small stone that’s lodged itself inexplicably in the lining of his throat.
For a distraction he observes the cut of Klaus’ torso where it curves around Diego’s shoulders and it’s interesting, the way they merge together seamlessly. How they look a little bit… less as they part when Diego leaves.

“Well that’s decided then. It’s a bonding day for us my little horror.” Klaus claps his hands together and once where he’d have found it ludicrous, Five now finds he’s feeling something akin to warmth across the back of his neck at the prospect.

They have a pleasant morning really, Five is quite grateful that he’s been allowed to drift through it with no more fanfare than a single cupcake that Klaus had him buy from one of the bakery’s. He’d go so far as to say he’d enjoyed perusing the shops they’d gone through, although it isn’t something that he’ll admit aloud because Klaus needs to keep his enthusiasm curbed at times, otherwise Five thinks that he might end up being decorated in lieu of a pine tree.

The only thing that he’s surprised at himself for is the negative tinge Diego’s absence lit within him. A dull edge creeping over his senses and he shouldn’t be surprised, no Five is aware that it’s precisely what he wanted, an ordinary day, and he’s… disappointed. It makes no sense and yet without his sibling Five is a little lost.

Emotions and the ilk are truly exhausting.

He refrains from discussing this with Klaus on their way home, listens instead to the plans for dinner, the thinks the Omega thinks they should do over the holidays, opinions on the validity of leaving a glass of milk out for Santa. Okay on that one Five gives Klaus a look, it isn’t a cruel one, just an are you being serious look.

“Hating everything doesn’t make you cool.”

Five is preparing to de-construct those six words and begin his rebuttal when he realises that Klaus is busy reading something on his phone. “Would you like a minute?”

Klaus doesn’t act in anyway embarrassed at having been caught rudely engaging with his device, more he develops a rather sinister expression that Five finds he doesn’t quite trust, less so when he realises that they’ve paused outside of the apartment building and the Omega has no intention of going inside.

“Now Five, don’t be mad-”

“That sounds like I have something to be mad about?”

“Well yeah, but it’s just I- We couldn’t miss the opportunity to treat you.”

Klaus was right. He is mad. Painfully so. “I told you that I didn’t want there to be any attention.”

He didn’t. Doesn’t. Can’t let this day overshadow last years, or the one before, or any of the birthdays that mother woke him up with pancakes in bed, honey dripping down the sides, freshly squeezed orange juice in his usual coffee mug. The paintings that Grace made just for him, abstract and colourful, or explosions on a canvas, or the mural she’d painted over her favourite wallpaper his first year with her. Five doesn’t want to taint or dilute those birthdays, he doesn’t want presents, and he doesn’t want to feel comfortable around Klaus and Diego because they aren’t his parents and yet he’s become terribly invested in them and it feels like a betrayal.

“Hey buddy.” Diego’s somehow here, crouching in front of him, and Five takes solace that he shouldn’t need in his brothers presence , blames it on the fact that it’s dismally cold. “How you doing?”
“I’m not impressed.” He croaks out. "Where have you been?”

Diego likes to disarm Five with his intelligence sometimes and they both know Five needs something he refuses to ask for. So Diego hugs him and Five's stiff and unyielding and that's completely fine. 'I did have to go into work, but only for an hour.'

Five nods, understands the insinuation, understands that he's collected a gift for him and that Five now has to receive it and not shake like the child he is.

“Trust me?”

Five does, and he’s discombobulated by that, angry even when he thinks of how close he came to losing his brother. But Five lets Diego take his hand and guide him towards the buildings front doors where he can see a strange shape just inside. He makes out a bow, larger and pinker (somehow) than the one earlier and apprehension coils in his stomach until he finally realises. Five stares, thinks he asks something outright ridiculous like what is that in a voice that’s airy and light and not his.

Diego’s got the biggest, smuggest grin on his face and he’s entirely too satisfied with himself. “What do you think genius.”

Five thinks its a bike. He just isn’t sure why they’ve given it to him, or why his fingers are tracing the handlebars with a reverent tremble. “It’s mine?”

“Well I don’t think either of us are gonna fit.”

“I can try if you want?” Klaus offers.

Ignoring them both Five analyses the bike, takes in every last feature with greedy eyes. There’s a basket, perfect size for his briefcase, as if someone’s measured it precisely for this purpose (Klaus' input, he’ll find out later). The wheels are sturdy, wider than usual fare, tread designed to ride through rain and snow with nary an issue (Diego’s idea) and it’s… Purple. A rich, captivating purple. His favourite colour.

Five loves it.

Forces himself to say: “There isn’t a bell.”

Diego gets it, a large hand ruffling through his hair affectionately. “You’d have hated the sound.”

He would have. Absolutely despised it. Diego knows that.

“I wanted to get you tassels but I was overruled.” Klaus pouts.

Before they can dissolve into the kind of bickering that’s sweet and nauseating, Five takes control of the situation - and his shaking hands. “Who’s going to show me the correct method?”

“The method?” Diego laughs and it’s warmth and it’s Five flushing despite himself at the fact that he’s the recipient of such affection.

“Oh baby boy, we have so much to teach you.” Klaus produces a helmet (from where Five has no idea) and he’s vibrating with excitement.

It turns out that riding a bike is considerably harder than Five anticipated. But when he’s sat on a chair in the apartment an hour later, scuffed knees receiving first aid from a frantic Klaus, I told
you he should have had bloody knee pads, and receiving his first ever dinosaur plasters while Diego grumbles back, he was fine, bounced back like a champ.

“Well did you just say that he ‘bounced’. He’s a bloody child asshole.”

There they go, bickering, for hours after and Five perches on a kitchen counter while they have the softest argument he's ever witnessed, chewing on his slice of their ordered pizza with a buzz of excitement that feels foreign and oh so welcome.

Later he’s firmly wedged between them as a buffer on the couch, something he’s surprisingly fond of - watching a film that he’d seen discussed on a blog Klaus follows - and pretending that he isn’t aware of the clasped hands the pair are hiding while also hinting at it enough that Klaus’ pale complexion paints a furious red.

Five decides, as he's preparing for bed, that if all birthdays are like this one going forth, then maybe it’s alright if he has fun.

Chapter End Notes

How the heck has this reached 100k words, that's just madness to me. Everyone that's stuck by this thank you so much <3

Also sorry for the shorter chapter length, the next one will definitely make up for it :)
Chapter 21
Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Christmas is alright.
It really is. Diego makes sure of it. Snow falls like something out of one of those cheesy films and
he drags Five out to inspect it, later they attend a midnight mass at the nearest church because his
brother wants to light a candle and he mimes along to the hymns he should probably have
remembered from his childhood.
But neither he or Five call each other out when they simultaneously breathe a sigh of relief when
Klaus crashes back into their home on boxing day brandishing a bottle of mulled wine and a brand
new scarf.
Frankly it’s a reminder that despite all of the shit hanging over their heads, if things somehow turn
out perfectly, he has a lot of important things still left to sort out.
“You’re not paying attention.” Five chastises him when Diego zones out of the moment for the…
well he’s lost count of how many times.
“Sorry buddy.”
“Don’t apologise, just do better.” Five’s clipped tone leaves no room for bargaining and his brother
storms ahead with the cart.
“And I thought that I had the bossy teachers voice down to a T.” Klaus snickers at his expense.
“Who’s fault is it that we’re here?” Diego grumbles, because he's stuck in the store on a sluggish
day mid festive break when all he wants to do is hibernate with the Omega until spring.
“Oh, I’m sorry, how terrible of me to ask for some company while I try and make sure that you
two eat something out of a takeaway carton.”
“You’re right, that is terrible of you.” It’s cartoonishly easy to duck the hand swatting at his
shoulder, to catch it and watch Klaus’ skin colour when he squeezes his fingers. “Go out with me?”
“Already am.” Klaus has the cheek to roll his eyes, and Diego has to wait until that pretty face
turns towards his. “Wait, you’re actually serious."
"Yeah, and you're breaking my fragile heart."
"What about Five?”
“Vanya’s already agreed to have him tomorrow, her babushka adores him, apparently the last time
they had him he fixed her dishwasher.”
Klaus fixes him a disbelieving stare. “You’re telling me that a nine- shit a ten-year-old fixed a
dishwasher?”
“It’s Five.” Diego shrugs. “Apparently he spent three hours searching stuff up on the internet and
then, poof, done. Now neither of them will let me pay them for looking after him.”


“To be fair, that sounds about right. He’s such a weirdo.” Klaus grins at the retreating figure at the end of the aisle. “So you weren’t kidding. Tomorrow?”

“Yeah, if you fancy it.”

Diego busies himself with seemingly comparing packages of wholemeal and seeded bread to give the Omega time to decide.

“What time?” Klaus says.

“All day.”

“All day?”

“We’ve got a lot of missed dates to catch up on.”

Klaus is quiet long enough that despite everything, Diego thinks he may have misjudged the situation. Which is stupid, but Diego’s never claimed that he’s particularly intelligent.

“Okay.” Klaus kisses the word into the back of his hand. “I suppose I can make time.”

Trying to explain why he’s so very excited for today is impossible. Klaus doesn’t have it in him to articulate why, to string together words like he usually manages when his brains at full capacity. No, he’s much more occupied trying not to chew on his lip and get a mouthful of lipstick.

He's been given a time, midday, and the only clue is that he's not to wear a dress. Which given the four inches of snow fresh on the ground this morning, it isn't going to be a struggle to convince him to cover up for once. Diego's seen his wardrobe, would be impossible for him not to given the situations that have coincided into leading them to this point. There'd been no point in telling himself that later when he'd gone scurrying home in the early hours to despair amongst his clothes like an idiot.

Klaus knows he looks good. He just doesn’t realise he looks that good until he’s stood in front of Diego and the Alpha’s staring at the curve of his ass, the dark material of his leather pants clinging to his legs and it’s ridiculously flattering that he has to wave his hand in Diego's face to finally gain his attention.

“Is this the bit where I pretend that I woke up like this?”

“Oh yeah, and I have to ply you with compliments until you blush and giggle.” The Alpha recovers enough that his slack jaw isn’t too obvious.

Klaus can’t resist fluttering his lashes and letting out a high pitched sound. “Well then I most definitely didn’t spend the last three hours obsessing over what to wear.”

There should probably be a part here where he acts coy, all of his many years avidly consuming romcoms have left him reliably informed, a wealth of knowledge at his disposal. The problem that they have is that everything’s very much in reverse and Klaus isn’t nervous, there’s no need to titter and wonder whether Diego will find him pretty. He has that knowledge firmly wrapped around every minor insecurity, smothering the fuckers whenever they try to rear their ugly heads.
Diego’s apparently in the mood to go the whole nine yards with this date, Klaus can’t help but be amused (and a little flattered) at having the car door opened for him. There’s something to be said for being made to feel special, it’s charming and Klaus, if he could move his brain away from admiring the width of Diego’s shoulders in his jacket, needs a reminder that this is his life now.

“So what’s first on the list?” He asks partway through the drive.

“Well you have to start with the basics.”

“And that is…”

“Movies.” Diego states like it should be obvious.

“Dark room, loud noises for cover. Got it.” Klaus snaps his fingers, stumbles at the wry grin on his Alpha’s face as they pull up.

“Uh-uh sweetheart, remember that three date rule.”

“You’re not fucking serious?”

If it weren’t for the soft chuckle he receives then Klaus might have been tempted to stage a protest, because Ben was right a while back, Klaus has one particular card that evens the playing field and he’s hobbled without it, entirely reliant on Diego to guide him through the social guidelines.

Which… really isn’t that bad, is it.

Aside from the fact that Diego is just as much a fool as he is, the blind leading the blind has never gone well before.

But Klaus isn’t going to focus on that.

He’s going to focus on the hand that clasps his, the film that Diego lets him choose - quite frankly he couldn’t care less, but it’s the thought that counts - and the fact that not once does Diego question the glee he takes in choosing different snacks at the concession stand. Well he does on one, though it’s born more out of bafflement than any real criticism.

“Really?” Diego eyes the churning ice.

“Don’t pretend that you wouldn’t still find me hot with a blue tongue.”

There’s something so enticing about the way the Alpha stares at him then and Klaus suddenly finds the dated carpet worthy of having his full attention, though he can feel the blood pound in his ears at Diego’s quiet affirmation.

If Klaus is honest he pays no attention to the film playing, and that’s probably made the whole excursion a mute point. But he’s happily preoccupied with the arm curled around him, the chest under his cheek, the distinctive scent that blankets his body like a well loved friend, and Klaus finds he can scarcely remember what it’s like to settle for anything less than perfect.

When they come out, blinking owlishly into the daylight, Klaus gets a reminder in the many different ways to smile, he likes to think that he’s become a professional at deploying the right expression at any given time. He’s learnt that there’s a difference between something brittle and false, and something that’s genuine. Like right now, he can barely hold it back as he displays his tongue for Diego’s amusement.
The next *date* has him raising a brow though. “An arcade?”

“Hey, don’t judge. Sixteen-year-old me would have impressed you on the pinball machine and you know it.”

Nodding, Klaus adopts a very serious tone. “Oh I wouldn’t have been able to resist blowing you when you were finished. Fuck the three date rule.”

“What, right in front of everyone?”

“As if you’d turn me down.” The Alpha nods and Klaus doesn’t think he could in a million years get tired of being stared at as if he’s a falling star. “Though I’d be just as happy for you to bend me over that slot machine and rail me.”

Diego’s eyes close as he inhales slowly. “You’re something else.”

Klaus takes the opportunity to stretch up and press a fleeting kiss to the sharp underside of Diego’s jaw before prancing back and out of reach.

The arcade itself turns out better than he’d have thought, Klaus has surprisingly decent co-ordination and reflexes when it comes to retro games. He’s also competitive, terribly so, and Diego does nothing but laugh at his pouting, *because fuck trying to beat an actual cop at shooter games,* and stare at his ass whenever Klaus leans over - in a totally necessary manner - one of the games machines.

He makes a point to complain for the fun of it when they leave, a stream of tickets stored safely in Diego’s jacket pocket, about the bullshit pricing system on the prizes.

“That’s the whole point of me bringing you here,” Diego consoles him when they leave, “you have to come back and it guarantees me a second date.”

Klaus lets out a long suffering sigh. “I suppose I’ll have to allow it.”

“Wow, I can feel the enthusiasm, thanks sweetheart.” Diego’s hand squeezes his waist, squeezes the air out of his lungs, and still the fucker evades Klaus’ attempts to climb him like he’s a particularly gorgeous mountain and kiss him until neither of them can think straight.

“Uh-uh. Kissing comes at the end of the date.” Diego strokes his thumb along the sliver of skin exposed above his jeans.

Klaus decides that Diego is a sadistic prick. Tells him as much. Frustratingly he can’t hold onto his disgust in the face of the man’s laughter, it’s kind of terrible, and he kind of doesn’t mind either.

Though he’s adequately distracted on their next destination.

“It’s not that bad.”

“I’ll die.”

“No you won’t.”

"I'll fall over."

"I promise I won't let you."

Klaus would like to indulge in the dramatic flair he’s so adept at, but Diego’s stood a foot away,
strong and sturdy and so disturbingly handsome that, after some mild trepidation, Klaus succumbs.
Takes the large hand held out to him, and crawls onto the ice with about as much urgency as one
can muster when one is fucking sure that they're about to face plant spectacularly in front of the
person that they love.

“You’re doing just fine.” Diego comments.

“When you said don’t wear a dress you meant for this didn’t you asshole.”

“Of course.” Diego’s grin presses into the crown of his head because despite their similarity in
height Klaus is taking no chances of damaging his pretty face by hitting the ground. Therefore the
reasonable option is to plaster himself around Diego like a particularly attractive limpet. “Though
I’m the one suffering from that decision if you really think about it.”

Klaus would like to imagine he comes across as graceful, but he’s pretty sure he looks every bit as
wobbly and uncoordinated as he feels. Ice skating it turns out, is nothing like running in heels,
really he should have taken into consideration the slipperiness of the ice, the narrowness of his
skates and the result is that he’s toeing the precarious line and teetering on the edge of whiting out.

On the other hand…

“You bought me onto this death trap, the least you can do is put up with some gratuitous groping.”
Diego snorts hard enough Klaus can feel it ruffle his curls, he ducks his head to deprive the Alpha
of his smile.

“What if I let you go?”

“Then you’ll have to take responsibility for my sore ass and rub it better.” Klaus takes the cheap
shot and he’s still vindictively pleased by the involuntary tremor of Diego’s hand over his.

Unsurprisingly Diego doesn’t let him fall, keeps a steady arm around him the entire time, and
Klaus finds that once the immediate fear of injury is removed, ice skating isn’t too awful. That’s
mostly because the second he teeters, even slightly, most of his weights supported in a crushing
grip that has him swooning a little too much.

He’s still swooning when they get something to eat, a small diner named Griddies that Klaus has
passed by but never thought to go in and now adds it to his list of favourites solely on the fact that
Diego’s entire body tenses watching him lick sugar off of his fingers, and if he flicks his tongue a
little excessively between the digits then that’s his business.

When Diego goes to use the bathroom Klaus uses the break to check his phone (a habit that he’s
given up trying to shake) and sees that Ben’s been trying to call him, there’s no message, just a
little counter in the corner and Klaus ignores it. Turns it to silent and doesn’t feel that guilty about
it either.

“So, we’ve done the teenage years. Where would adult Diego take a date?” He smiles at the Alpha
when he returns.

“Normally it would be a bar, but I didn’t think you’d want to- y’know…”

A little bit of affection zaps Klaus’ heart at the consideration Diego’s taken into planning this for
him, and Klaus wants to do this because it’s normal, he wants to be the type of guy that can sit in a
bar not because he’s trawling for the most likely person that’ll sell him the pills he needs.

“I’ve heard that a lot of places do alcohol free these days. I could look somewhere up if you want?”
Diego’s answering grin makes Klaus’ lungs hitch and seize momentarily. “Sounds like a plan.”

There’s a moment of indecision as Klaus decides on where they go and Diego isn’t going to be one to push when the choice seems so important to the Omega, and when Klaus’ appearance is still making it hard for him to concentrate at times he doubts there’s much he can contribute anyway.

If it were anyone else, then Diego would say that the effect is accidental, and yet because it’s Klaus he knows without a doubt that the man knows precisely what he looks like, the beauty he uses subconsciously and on purpose as a weapon. If Diego had the time or the space to feel off-put by that maybe it would be an issue, but he’d seen the tremble of Klaus’ fingers earlier, the colour in his cheeks, the spike in his scent that bled through when waiting for Diego’s approval. Klaus knows he’s beautiful but somehow, despite everything, he doesn’t seem to really believe in it either.

Under the darkening sky, the tacky Christmas lights still strung up around town, Klaus shines, he’s poised, and pretty, and fucking painful to look at for too long. With anyone else the patches and ruffles of his coat might appear shabby, but like with anything Klaus elevates it with the glide of his wrist, the tangle of his limbs swooping about his body in his excitement. It’s all rather lovely truth be told.

The bar Klaus chooses in the end is pretty much what Diego expected, upmarket enough that they have one of those shiny plastic menu’s with a list of mocktails, and still lower on the scale that it doesn’t feel like the pitiful sum of Diego’s bank is about to bleed out for a few fancy cocktail umbrellas in a frosted glass. Festive garlands are still strung up and the place has that hushed edge, a pause in the manic rush just before New Years kicks in and no doubt rampages the place.

“No pool table.” Klaus snaps his fingers as he flounces onto a stool (yeah, Diego has no idea how he does it either).

Plus he can’t say he’s complaining, if Klaus can make him half-hard over a few innocuous comments then he fucking dreads to imagine what the Omega could manage with a pool cue. Well he’s also curious, but that’s for another night. He busies himself with the menu and trying not to feel the unnecessary pinch of expectations, arbitrary ones that he’s set himself, but there none-the-less.

“Wait, they say you can tell a lot about a guy by his choice of drink, let me guess yours.” Klaus eyes him up and Diego happily does as he’s told when there’s such a beautiful distraction on offer. “I’m thinking it should be something overly masculine… gold rush?”

“Are you saying that I’m bitter, sweetheart?”

Klaus blushes spectacularly and Diego can’t help but imagine how far it travels past the material of his shirt. “No, more…”

“I’m waiting.”

“You’re so impatient.” Klaus isn’t looking at the menu, seems content to stare Diego out, chin raised defiantly at his teasing, cheekbones a ruby hue. “I could have said snakebite.”

Diego mimes retching without having to pull up a single theatrical bone in his body.
“Come on give me a hint, vodka, gin, rum—”

“There we go.” Klaus perks up and Diego feels the immediate need to add: “And don’t even try the spicy jokes.”

Klaus lets out a huff of annoyance. “I wouldn’t dream of it and I’m offended that you’d think I’m that lazy.”

“No, you’re far too elegant for that.” Diego remarks solemnly. “Why don’t you surprise me.”

Klaus’ eyes darken, fixate on him so intently and Diego finds himself on the receiving end of some serious ogling and it probably says a lot that all it does is stoke the heat in the pit of his stomach. It’s nice to be objectified when the culprit is someone that’s doing it with such a reverent gaze, and not for the first time Diego’s unbelievably grateful that Klaus isn’t some timid, obedient, boring little thing. *This* Klaus is breathtaking.

“Come on, do me.”

Diego would if it wouldn’t be considered rude to in a public setting, instead he settles for scanning the ridiculously long list in front of him. By the time they’ve ordered and the mixologist has placed two very different looking drinks in front of them, the easy nature of simply *being* around the Omega has lent the air a hazy feeling.

“And this is?” He holds up the glass, it’s contents a direct contrast to Klaus’ lighter one.

“Just give it a try.”

He does, and immediately has to give Klaus his due, the ginger beer mingles pleasantly with the rum and it’s slips down his throat a little too easily. “That’s pretty good.”


Diego’s saved spluttering over the address by Klaus’ nose scrunching as he swirls his own glass to examine it’s sunshine contents. “What in all of the sugary depths of hell is that?”

“Citrus punch, y’know because—”

“If you say it’s because I’m sweet then you lose at least ten IQ points.”

Diego shouldn’t be laughing this much, but how can he not when Klaus makes everything so simple and bright. “You don’t have to drink it.” He feels the need to add when Klaus seems intent on downing the it in one.

“Hey,” the Omega pauses to wink at him, “don’t let it ever be said that I don’t swallow.”

*Fucking hell.*

“Fuckin’ hell, Klaus.” He actually says.

“Mind out of the gutter my darling Alpha. Three dates remember.” The man actually has the nerve to wink at him, gaze briefly skirting lower and then slowly up again.

“You,” he goes to gesture with his hand, forgets there’s a drink between his fingers and barely stops from upending it over his fingers, “are the worst kind of temptation.”
“Really?” Klaus’ legs cross, his foot running down the length of Diego’s thigh, burning through his jeans like they’re nothing. “Some would say that you shouldn’t indulge in such unhealthy pursuits.”

Now Diego’s aware that they’re in public, there’s people around them, and the mixologist’s standing not a metre away, and yet he can’t focus on much else but the man next to him. “Wouldn’t life be boring if you didn’t indulge?”

“Life’s a restless game that’s hard to win, and even harder to please.” Klaus murmurs, speaks with the surety of someone that’s spent most of his learning this. “Any other observations about me you feel like sharing?”

Diego’s starting to become tired of deceptions, he’s never had much of an issue summoning the truth, taken enough hits in his life and come too far to shy out from the truth. “You make me want to bite you.”

Klaus just looks at him, pretty green eyes framed by their long dark lashes, and simply says, “Do it then.”

Klaus’ patience is starting to run a bit fucking thin. His neck aches, his glands are stiff from the tension thrumming through his muscles and joints, and he’s so ridiculously turned on that he wouldn’t put it past that he stinks of pre-heat, it’s gotten that bad.

“So where are we on that time-line of yours?” He asks as he walks into his apartment, the last sliver of said patience crackling up into flames. Fuck, it went up in flames the entire taxi ride home.

“This is the bit where I wish you a good night and promise to call.” Diego’s way too cocky, he’s probably drank a little too much and Klaus would love to pretend that he’s not into the arrogance of his Alpha.

“Then why are you on this side of the door?”

“Had to make sure you got all the way inside safely.”

Klaus decides it’s time to call the fuckers bluff. Smiles innocently and relishes the strangle thrill that courses through his body. “Then you’ve done a good job, now if you don’t mind I’ll retire for the night.”

There’s something immensely satisfying about the flash of confusion on that handsome face as he steps towards the bedroom, at the sharp breath when he drags his shirt up and off, hands drifting to push his unbuttoned jeans down just as he goes through the doorway.

Modesty, he’s long since burned the bitch’s number.

Like Klaus planned, he manages to kick his pants free and make it maybe three steps to the bed when he’s suddenly airborne, spinning delightfully in the air and landing with a small bounce on the sheets before getting pinned by the heat of his Alpha.

Klaus hums, excited, skin itching to feel Diego press marks across him, and wraps his legs around
the man’s waist, delighted by the hard length of his cock. Crashing straight into the deep end the moment Diego’s lips touch his, bruising and hard and wet, enough that Klaus’ brain slips away and leaves him sighing.

“Shit.” Klaus breathes, tilts his head up without question, throat exposed.

Diego’s tongue tastes the sweat of his skin, hums approvingly and there’s the barest impression of force against the elastic stretch of Klaus’ flesh, a here and there pressure that has him crumbling apart too easily. But then that spear of heat travels lower, glides across his collarbone and sets about lighting a warpath down his stomach. He says something like turn over and impatiently lifts Klaus up before the words can align in his head so he can comply, positions him around onto his knees and there’s a split second confusion until he feels a brush of lips across his tailbone and-

And Klaus goes a bit blank there, full of heat and desire, unable to vocalise much apart from yeah and please and fuck and press his ass higher in air because screw the pretence that he isn’t desperate when Diego asks if he wants it. As if Klaus can say no.

“You’re so fucking wet sweetheart.” Diego’s hands, large and hot, spread his cheeks and Klaus would like to reply with something witty if it weren’t that he has no words left to speak, and he couldn’t feel the first shallow swipe of Diego’s tongue.

“Shit.” He startles forward, realises that without his knowing one of those strong arms have snaked around his waist supporting his weight, which might be something considering his thighs are already trembling from Diego’s unfairly clever mouth.

“Good?”

The arrogance in those four letters has Klaus’ brain scrambling to snark back, settling for an unoriginal (and totally fucking valid in the moment) “no, it’s awful.”

Sharp teeth bite into the back of his thigh and Klaus keens low in his throat, pushes back against the sting, shivers as Diego’s teeth sink in a little higher, just under the curve of his cheek and swears blind that he hears something about a sore ass over the blood roaring in his ears.

Then Diego’s tongue is back where it should be, doing unbearably wicked things to Klaus’ hole that has him moaning, his whole body shaking at the press of a single finger, the ease of it slipping into him and curling with a precision that should be illegal as it finds that hidden spot that has him whining incoherently.

Amidst it all, in some constricted space in his head, Klaus finds it in him to whisper stop.

If there were ever a time for him to evaluate how much he loves Diego, to point to a place for evidence, it would be in this moment where the Alpha’s entire body freezes despite how badly the muscles in the arm around Klaus’ stomach are twitching, the heavy weight of his cock pressing against the backs of Klaus’ thighs. “What’s wrong?”

“Don’t wanna… Almost there…” He scrambles to put it together.

Diego heaves a relieved sigh that sends cool air over his tender rim. “Sweetheart, we’ve got time.”

“Don’t want you to think…” that he’s being selfish, inconsiderate, not making himself useful and only taking.

Diego falls back onto his haunches, effortlessly tugs Klaus up so he’s perched on his lap. “I don’t think that we’re too old to get it up more than once in a night.” The teasing tone relaxes a lump in
Klaus’ throat.

They’ve got time.

Klaus thinks about it when he comes, shuddering and gasping against the curl of Diego’s tongue against his pulse, fingers restlessly spreading him open and a hand loosely jacking him off. He thinks of it when he returns the favour, throat aching in the aftermath, and he savours the idea of it when he’s climbing into his Alpha’s lap and rides him until they both collapse.

They’ve got time.

Ben would like to point out that he’s remarkably unimpressed.

It’s not a new state of mind, but overall considering the circumstances it’s justified given the vicissitude of his life recently.

He’s become an errand boy, delivering a file Allison’s rightfully too busy to deal with. If it weren’t that he’s clued in on the situation, then he might have refused out of spite. But he does know. Plus it’s Klaus. Sweet, facile Klaus.

“The things I put up with for you.” He muses, scowling at the apartment building he’s bearing down upon, and Klaus must be there because where else is he these days.

The man who once, with great affection, called him a monster. Ben isn’t sure why, he’s never attempted to exude menace, it’s other people that seem to categorise him under such a title. It’s not that he’s tried to change their minds, so who precisely is to blame is anybody’s guess.

Monsters come in all shapes and forms. They have talons and sharp teeth and forked tongues hidden behind wonderful lies. Ben would like to think that he’s more refined than that, more restrained. The one joy of that designation is that he has a rather wonderful ability to locate fellow monsters from nary more than a glance.

This fellow is the worst kind of monster.

He’s not particularly tall, old without the restrictions of withered hands and aching bones, dressed in a suit cut to fit his form well enough that Ben can see money interspersed through the quality of the stitching. Cruelty rests in the lines of his face and there’s nothing in those fathomless eyes that say there’s ever been a scrap of warmth in them and their focus is drilling straight through Ben’s rattiest hoodie. Like calling to like.

Though the monocle is a tad over dramatic.

Ben realises then that he has a rather unfortunate task ahead of him here. Because he knows this man, knows who he is, and what has to be done. Has to be endured so that Klaus is safe even though for once he isn’t the one being targeted.
Klaus needs to be looked after. He needs protection.

Any self respecting monster would understand that this is his spot, would smell it much the way an Alpha might scent his mate. Ben’s walks have been deliberate recently, laying down invisible trails that no dynamic could detect, but there none-the-less for those cunning enough to see.

This man’s ignored his ownership and subverted his will.

For a brief second Ben imagines what he might do, pictures the spray of red that might splatter, he can imagine every last droplet bursting free, how it might pool at his feet. Then he snaps back quick enough that he won’t allow himself guilt over lingering on the preconstruction.

It’s hard to ignore instincts, much the way he imagines it’s hard to ignore the blatant claim he’s made over this building, on the sole occupant that’s the whole fucking reason he’s out here tonight.

Who’s going to be so disappointed in him.

It begins raining. The old horror cliché activates a live wire in his spine, annoyance coiling around each vertebra until he’s pulled taut, minute tremors running down his limbs.

The stranger raises his closed umbrella, an acknowledgement, a greeting, an invitation. One monster to another.

Ben smiles, tongue curling behind his teeth, straightens his hoodie and strengthens his hands, before he follows the man down a nearby alleyway.

Chapter End Notes

So this chapter was originally ridiculously long and I wanted to cut it up a bit a while back so this seemed like a good point to end with. :)

EDIT 12/11/2019: I promise I haven't disappeared and abandoned this, I've just been caught up with a sickness bug and haven't been up to much more than moping in bed. I've just got to finish editing so hopefully the next chapter should be out in time for the weekend :)
Allison barges into his apartment a little after nine in the morning.

Which is a bit of a buzz kill truth be told, Diego had been perfectly content sat cross legged on his couch finishing up his back to work paperwork, Five puttering about in the kitchen and Klaus humming along to a song while he hunted around for his phone charger.

“If you hadn’t been out so late last night then you wouldn’t have a problem.” Five tuts when he’s asked where the charger is before pulling it out of a pot of cooking utensils. “You left it there after we made lasagne.”

Klaus whoops with delight and refrains from blaming Diego for their tardiness when it’d definitely been his fault.

It’s just so calm, easy, and there’s nothing ahead for the day except a lazy commitment to some foreign film that Five wants to watch and stretched out hours of his favourite company, and it would have been perfect if the content, heady mix of home and sweet Omega scenting the air didn’t plunge faster than a lightening strike.

“What’s wrong?” He asks carefully, doesn’t vault over the back of the couch like he wants because Klaus is deliberately remaining impassive as he stares down at his phone, a direct contrast to the rank, sullen bitterness etching its way through Diego’s senses. The Omega’s going to go opaque if his skin keeps bleaching of colour, a reaction he can’t seem to hide.

Five looks up, intuitive shit that he is, and without being able to scent the air, knows something is up. “Can I help?”

Klaus smiles plainly. “No, sorry, there’s nothing wrong, I just… Can we talk?”

The last bits directed at him and Diego’s throat closes up because whatever this is, it isn’t good. “Five, can you give us a few minutes.”

His brother looks between them curiously, a little alarmed, but he nods, collects his glass of water and makes his way towards his room. “I shall use my headphones until you come in to collect me.”

Klaus taps his fingers nervously against the counter the second Five shuts his bedroom door. “That’s not good enough, we need to speak. Properly.”

Diego gives it thirty seconds and then shouts as loudly as he dares without worrying about the neighbours thinking he’s sex pest. “I bent Klaus over and fucked him in every room in his apartment last night.”

A spatula comes flying past his head and Klaus looks like one of the church ladies that Lillian used to sit with in one of her prayer groups, all he’s missing are the pearls and a bible to clutch to his chest. “Are you fucking kidding me!”

Maybe the cussing would have made him stick out. “C’mere sweetheart.” Diego gestures to Five’s door, opens it, and then swings a hand in his brothers direction. “See, no problem.”
Five peers up from one of those comic books that Diego can’t understand when the whole thing reads backwards. “Are you finished?” His voice is far too loud and when he sees Diego’s shaking head the boy rolls his eyes. “Don’t insult my integrity, I won’t remove these until you come back in.”

The raising of his comic signals that he’s done with their conversation and Klaus’ shoulders sag a little when he realises that Diego’s not deliberately traumatised a ten-year-old child. “Sorry, I panicked.”

“It’s fine,” he frowns only a little when Klaus strides back towards his phone, still charging, “just, will you tell me what’s going on?”

“Read this.”

Klaus doesn’t duck away when Diego slips an arm around his waist, reads over the bare skin of his shoulder where his shirts too big to cover him properly. He’s waiting for something bad, something worthy of such a reaction, that has Klaus’ skin clammy and cool to the touch. The text makes no fucking sense though.

And that is where Allison all but kicks in his front door. Not entirely an exaggeration though, because he isn’t sure whether he locked it or not, but one moment he’s reading, the next she’s barrelling through his living room, heels stamping out a drum beat against the floor.

“There you are! I’ve been trying to call you Klaus, do you ever answer your phone?!”

If Klaus is surprised by her appearance he shields it with an owlish blink. “It’s been dead.”

“I’ve been worried that you were bloody dead asshole.”

Diego thinks that this is the moment to step up. “What the fuck is going on?”

Clever. To the point. Not his best, but it’ll do considering he’s still only wearing his sweatpants.

“Where’s that kid of yours?” Allison addresses the room at large, and completely ignores his question.

“He’s in his room, and no before you start, he can’t hear us.” Klaus says mildly, like he hadn’t just had a panic over the same thing. “Did you get one of these?”

“A text from Ben? Yeah. You?”

Klaus nods. “What’s yours say?”

“Let me see yours first.”

“Wait a minute.” Diego says. “Why the hell are you here Allison? Not that I don’t appreciate the early company-” he doesn’t “-but why are you breaking into my home.”

A shade of frustration and impatience paints across her features. “Because I woke up to our secret code for trouble in capital letters, no Ben even though he was meant to be coming here last night with some files for you both, and then Klaus won’t answer his phone.”

Diego’s still confused, but Klaus lets out a shushing sound and it’s clear that the only way he’s going to get answers is to shut up for a second. Klaus’ skin is the same ashen hue it’s been for the last twenty minutes when he holds his phone up for Allison to read.
“What the fuck does that mean?”

Diego would very much like to know as well.

“It was a thing, our code I suppose.”

“Well you’re going to have to include us in that then princess.” Allison’s tone gentles minutely, possibly when she registers the shivers wracking through Klaus’ body that has Diego’s arm tightening around his waist as the Omega presses back into him.

“We moved about a lot after we left home, jumped through the states whenever we felt like it, living in this old impala when there wasn’t any money. Ben was so smart even then, he picked up a load of shit from this mechanic we played pool with one night and he would do these odd jobs for a bit of cash. It was all pretty fun to be honest.”

And well, shit, Diego's an idiot, but he never lingered over the fact that Klaus went through just as much, if not more, than he ever has.

“There was this guy, a trucker, that was a bit too handsy, y’know, the type that doesn’t understand what no means. Thought he might pay us back by… You get it.” Klaus lets out a bitter laugh and Diego presses his thumbs into the divots of his Omega’s hips and rubs firm little circles to distract both of them. “Anyway, he must have followed us a hundred miles across state and then he finally caught up to us just outside of this shitty bar, a real hole in the wall kinda place.” Klaus halts, seems to take a minute to work out what he wants to say next and what he can tuck away.

“What happened, Klaus?” Allison softens considerably, given the strength of her ire a moment ago.

“Right, so we were playing cards with this group of guys, Ben’s got them all right where he wants them and I’m about to start… distracting them, not like that though. I swear.”

Diego realises he’s the one that Klaus is looking up at desperately and it honestly never crossed his mind to be anything other than angry at the circumstances that must have led to two teenagers living like that. “Nobody was thinking any different sweetheart.”

“Okay, so I’m about to do my thing when this asshole comes sauntering up and starts telling the table that I’m his idiot son, that I need to come home now and stop avoiding my punishment, and nobody bats an eye at it.”


“Yeah, everybody laughs and then Ben plays his hand, calm as you like, and wins the game. So they’re all busy losing it that they’ve been beaten by a kid, and nobody gives a fuck when this shitbag starts dragging me towards the door.”

“What did Ben do to him?” Diego asks, because he’s pretty sure he knows where this is going, and it may be the first time he’s going to like hearing about the Beta.

Klaus coughs something under his breath, capitulates after another second of silence when it’s clear he won’t get away with keeping shtum. “He snapped a pool cue in half and staked him through the hand with it.

Yeah, Diego can get behind that.
“So that’s it. That’s what the text means. Fourteen, how old we were. Michigan, the place. Royal flush, the stalker makes his move… oh, fuck.”

It should never be said that Klaus isn’t intelligent. Out of all the attributes that Diego’s assigned to the Omega, he probably doesn’t give that big, beautiful brain of his much credit. “Care to share with us?”

“Ben’s telling me that somebody’s watching us, Five. It’s been going on for a while now… and the fucker’s probably about to make a move.”


Diego wishes he had a minute to unpack the fact that according to Ben, a guy that he instinctively has the creeps about, they have a fucking stalker. Or maybe he could find the correct way to provide support for Klaus after confessing another piece of history that he clearly didn’t want to.

Allison’s nails tap against her phone as she finds her messages. “Look.”

(02:35) Do you ever think about how our first night together?

“Considering Ben would hurl if you even held his hand, then I’m guessing that means something else?” Klaus mutters, his voice a little too cracked and weak for Diego’s liking, and yes he’s aware that he’s fixating on his Omega more than the stalker shit.

His ability to take multi-task has taken a momentary break right now.

“It took me a moment, but yeah, the first night I stayed over was when you broke up with that prick Lucas.”

Klaus’ nose scrunches in disgust. “The one that tried to bite me.”

If Klaus has a type then Diego’s kind of hoping that he doesn’t fit the profile.

Allison nods. “After I…”

“Handled him.” Diego helpfully provides, and judging from the way she flexes her left wrist, the lawyer most definitely did something illegal.

“Yes, well Ben and I had to deal with the buildings surveillance footage because Lucas may have been thrown into the dumpster a few times. Accidentally of course.”

“Of course.” Diego nods approvingly. “So you’re saying that Ben wants you to check our building’s camera’s for evidence of this stalker?” Really, he should probably be offended by the surprise on her face. He’s not great at many things, but his job is the one thing he excels at and putting shit together is a key part of that. “The real question is, how do we get the tapes?”

Klaus hums and it’s a miserable sound. “That’s where I come in.”

Before Diego can argue, Allison beats him to it. “No princess, that’s where I come in. You’re doorman’s offensively straight Diaz, just leave it to me.”

It’s not that Diego isn’t aware that Klaus’ friend is beautiful, in a striking, imposing manner that takes a whole lot of confidence to try and stand beside. It’s only that next to Klaus, it’s kind of hard for Diego to take much notice of other people anymore.

Allison slips out a whole lot quieter than she arrived, and this should probably be the moment
where Diego should assess what the hells happening. Instead he focuses on Klaus who’s swivelled in his arms, face tucked against his neck, cheeks undeniably wet.

“I’m sorry.’”

“Why?”

“This is all my fault. Whoever’s stalking you, it could be any of my crazy ex’s.”

Diego thinks that he should scratch his previous thought, because he’s observant, and that niggling voice at the back of his head has already worked it out, he just needs proof, and it shows that none of this is Klaus’ fault. Not even slightly. “Hold up, let’s not get ahead here, Ben might be talking out of his ass.”

Klaus sniffles and his scent evens out a little. “But he’s not, is he?”

If Diego’s right, then Ben’s a fucking genius, or lucky. Either one. “Wait and see.”

Allison’s worryingly quick - Diego adds checking his buildings security to his growing list of things to sort out - and she brandishes a USB stick in her hand. “I forget how good I am.”

After a check in on an oblivious Five and loading up his sluggish laptop, Diego finds he’s almost reluctant to press play on the file that shows in a neat little folder, before a furious surge rises in his chest that he can’t even have one fucking day without something coming in the way of his family.

They speed it up after the first ten minutes yield nothing, and Allison points out that Ben didn’t leave their building until nearing midnight.

“He prefers it if he can avoid people.” Klaus points out, a pale flush colouring his cheeks.

“Sounds more like a vampire.” Diego replies absently, concentrating on the flickering video playing.

“There.” Allison says just as he’s about to hit pause.

It’s the outline of a man standing in the corner of the screen, just enough that his profiles blurred in the poor quality footage, but he’s there none the less.

“Couldn’t that be anybody?” Klaus asks as they all lean closer. “What’s so weird about him?”

Allison’s pupils narrow as she mulls over her own assumptions and Diego’s pretty sure that they’re perfectly aligned with his own. “I bet if you checked the last sixteen days then you’d find that the same persons there every single night.”

Diego checks, speeds through every single clip until at precisely the same time, a few times there’s a long elongated object and Diego would put all of his money, what little is left, that it’s a cane.

“Holy shit.” Klaus swears, chin hooking onto Diego’s shoulder. “Please tell me I’m not the only one that finds that disturbing.”

“Looks like Ben was right, you have a stalker.” Allison projects a powerful scent that Diego has to physically suppress the urge to snap at, because his temper and pride haven’t got a place here. “And I think we all know who it is.”

Klaus’ body tenses behind Diego in realisation and he’s about to apologise when the Omega sniffs at his neck and plasters himself across his back and says in a tone that brokers no argument: “Well,
looks like we have a problem to fix.”

Diego should at least try to object, insist on distancing them away from the Omega, and as if he senses this momentary hesitation, sees Allison’s concern, Klaus wraps both arms around his neck and there’s a strength in his hold that belies the awkward stretch of his limbs. “Say one fucking word and I’ll choke you.”

Right. Well that’s that then.

“I don’t want to know about your weird kinks.” Allison huffs, but she’s already sagging into a chair and tapping the play button. “Can we please see what the fuck happened to Ben.”

“You think he got this far?” Diego asks as the spectre doesn’t move an inch while the timer in the corner ticks away the minutes.

He’s saved an answer by the Beta appearing onscreen, a hunched, coltish movement to his limbs that looks foreign from the haughty demeanour Diego remembers.

Klaus hums, his breath hot against Diego’s ear. “He’s clumsy when he’s on his own.”

Ben’s profile is hard to read from the gritty visuals, but there’s an arrogant curl to his mouth, a casual transformation from one frame to the next, an atavistic response curdles Diego’s stomach even when he’s viewing it through the medium of a screen.

Hargreeves steps forward, lifts up not a cane but an umbrella, and Diego’s vision smokes red at the corners that all of this time while he’s been lounging about recovering there’s been Five’s literal boogey man, not a hundred metres away.

“What the hell is he doing-” Allison cuts herself off, leans back and stares in disbelief at the screen. “Why the fuck is Ben following him?!”

Diego also wants to know the answer to that because there’s no decent answer that doesn’t conjure up a taped off crime scene.

“I haven’t got a clue.” Klaus says, his pulse thumping so loud that it’s a war drum in Diego’s ear and the lie kind of bothers him a lot more than it should.

Allison doesn’t seem to have any reservations about demanding the truth. “Don’t bullshit me Klaus, you know Ben better than anyone-”

“He’s dealing with it.” Klaus springs back suddenly and the loss of his touch is almost as jarring as his words.

“What do you mean he’s ‘dealing’ with it?”

Klaus’ jaw tightens, his shoulders curving in, glancing upwards for an answer and despite everything Diego wants to draw him into his lap and cradle him away from all of this.

“Whatever you think _dealing_ with it means, then you’re probably right.” Klaus says, shrugging and there’s a wild shine to his eyes that declares he’s going to give nothing else away.

Allison’s tone sharpens, demands attention. “This isn’t the first time he’s _dealt_ with something is it?”

Klaus shrugs again.
“Oh, fuck me.” Allison reels back, physically shunts her chair back a few inches. “I don’t suppose you ever thought it was worth telling me that I’ve been living with a psychopath for the last year.”

“He’s not a psychopath Ally. He’s just…”

“If you say complicated I’m going to lose it at you-”

“Alright let’s just take a fucking minute.” Diego interrupts solely from the fact that they can’t afford a meltdown right now.

“Klaus, you realise what sort of a position you’ve put me in.” Allison’s tempers howling in the air between them. “And him, Diego’s a cop, how do you think that’ll look spread across the papers-”

“He wouldn’t be in this if it wasn’t because of me.” Diego snaps back, mainly to avoid thinking about the fact that holy shit he’s fucked if this comes out. He’ll have to add it to the list of sackable offences he’ll no doubt accrue over the years.

“God it’d be easier if I’d never met any of you.” Allison sags, the fight shuddering out of her in a rush.

Klaus looks close to tears. “I’m so sorry Ally, I should have-”

“Stop. Just, shut up. I love you so fucking much, but I don’t like you very much right now.” Allison grimaces, head landing with a loud thunk atop the kitchen table.

“Ally?” Klaus hovers tentatively over her. “What’cha doing babygirl?”

“Consulting with this fine piece of furniture about my terrible life choices.” Comes the muffled reply.

Diego’s tempted to join her, it’s up there with grabbing Klaus and Five and jetting the fuck out of dodge, though considering that’s not a real option (yet) he resigns himself to a plan that doesn’t consist of fleeing. “We can’t do anything official can we?”

“Gee whiz, let me think about that for a second. Idiot.” Allison’s disdain drips into every letter, a considerable feat with her face mushed against the table still. “I wonder how the law would react to you two playing happy families, or that I spent the better part of a fortnight sneaking around a dozen confidentiality laws, or our secret murder Beta we keep entertained with video games and fucking chocolate chip cookies.”

Klaus swallows loudly. “When you put it like that.”

“Both of you just give me a second.” Allison mumbles, fingers darting across her phone where it rests in her lap.

Diego gives her a hundred and sixty four. He busies himself with firmly reattaching himself to Klaus’ side, taking the cold, shaking hands in his and allowing the idea that if he can ease the Omega’s distress then they’ll jump back to this morning and everything will be perfect again.

Allison rises like a disgruntled phoenix and ruins his delusion. “Right, I take it that you’re not going anywhere Klaus?”

Klaus shakes his head.

“Great. The first thing we need to worry about is keeping Five safe, I doubt Hargreeves will make
a move in public, or that he’ll be back tonight after Ben approached him—"

“What about Ben?” Klaus asks quietly. “Shouldn’t we do something?”

“We can’t guarantee what Ben’s doing, though by the sounds of it we’re waiting for a body now. Entirely depends on who shows up.”

Diego was thinking the same thing, he only wishes that Allison could have phrased it a nicer way when Klaus flinches.

“Anyway, we can’t control any of that, and it’s probably best if we keep as oblivious to everything as we can. I think the best thing to do is to make sure that Five’s covered at all times, and that means you too Klaus.”

The Omega lets out a hiss, offence staining his scent as he bristles. “I can keep Five safe as well as you guys.”

Diego doesn’t doubt it, but he’s on Allison’s side for this one. “You’ll be with him at school sweetheart, that’s the best place. Outside of there though, it would be better if we had extra precautions in place don’t you think?”

“I’m not asking for anyone’s opinion here, you’ll stick to the plan or I’m out.” Allison waits for protest, nods when she receives none. “The only problem we’ll have is that between you and I Diaz, we’re not going to be able to cover all of the time, not properly, and I don’t like to do things in half measures.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’ve got somebody who can help, now before you complain, he’s in tight with me anyway so even if we don’t tell him everything he’ll still help us.”

Diego’s got about a few dozen expletives about to trip off of his tongue when he catches a particularly vicious shade of fuck with me dart across the Alpha’s face. “You’ve already contacted him?”

“Messaged actually, and guess what? Neither of you have a leg to stand on right now so you’ll let me sort this out like good little boys. Am I clear?”

There’s no arguing with her even though the challenge sparks and itches at his skin, a significant and heavy weight wreathed around the civilised part of his brain that knows they need Allison’s help and yet still wants to snarl and bare his teeth at her like a primitive fuck.

Diego can’t ever remember being grateful about somebody knocking at his front door, but there’s a first time for everything.

“I’m gonna get that.” He takes the opportunity to escape, opens the door without thinking and has to ask himself a quick question. Why the fuck does he never learn?

“What the fuck, man.”

“Hey.” Luther has the decency to look as confused as he does.

“Great, I forgot you already knew each other.” Allison lifts her head high enough to shout across the room. “That’ll make things so much easier.
“I can’t believe I was starting to like you.” Klaus scowls not for the first time in the last half hour.

“That’s a shame because I quite liked you.”

Apparently Luther has a set of balls when he’s stood next to Allison, that and he’s now privy to a fuck ton of shit that should have probably sent him running off to his and Diego’s Captain to tattle on them.

Still…

“Seriously, how the hell didn’t I know about this?”

Allison rolls her eyes, and if it wasn’t that he could cry with relief that she seems placated from her earlier rage then Klaus would maybe put some real disgust into his questions. “Because, unlike you, I actually shower after I fuck someone. Plus I don’t roll all over them scenting myself like a bitch princess.”

“There’s nothing wrong with smelling.” He pouts without thinking and the familiar warmth in her eyes eases his chest a little further.

“I need a drink.” Diego says mildly, expression dazed like somebody who’s taken one too many hits to the brain in quick succession. Klaus rubs his shoulder reassuringly.

“If you’ve got a scotch I’ll take one.” Allison turns her attention back to Luther. “Now, I’m going to assume that you’re still willing to help?”

Luther waits for a second before he nods in the end. “Yeah, I’m in.”

Allison flashes him a smile that’s the most genuine thing Klaus has seen in a long time from her. He feels a hot iron stir in his gut that she looks younger, softer, and he’s never taken the time to find this side of his so called friend. Which what does that say about him?

“I’ll work out a schedule and then we’ll go over what else we can do for now.”

“Like what?” Diego shuffles back into the group, a half full bottle tucked under his arm and four glasses balanced between his hands. One’s full of cordial.

Klaus really does love him.

“Like what sort of defence I’m going to prepare when we all get arrested.” Allison takes a glass and a liberal splash of liquor. “But seriously, we need to sort our shit out.”

“Look, I need to give you all the choice,” Diego says, “nobody has to deal with this, you can leave and if things go to shit I’ll take the-”

“Shut up Diaz.” Luther grunts.

Klaus’ mouth drops open without his meaning to.

“Fuck, you big bastard, do you actually get how serious this is?” Diego snarls back. “You could do time-”
“I think we all get how serious this is, but what else can I do if the little guys in trouble and what you’re saying is true.”

“How are you the one trying to be the voice of reason?” Klaus accidentally says aloud.

He’s blocked from getting an answer by a hard thumping sound that has Klaus jumping before he realises that it’s coming from inside the apartment and there’s no imaginary monster waiting to swoop in and ruin them.

Five’s got a hand splayed over his face when Klaus opens his door, his headphones still firmly fixed over his ears and the lines bracketing his face where his eyes are scrunched close underneath has a lump form in Klaus’ throat.

“Can I have some toast please?” The boy asks far louder than he would normally, senses blunted because they’ve asked it of him, because Five trusts them.

Klaus will make him toast. He’ll give him the world if he can. But first he’s going to be selfish and kneel down to hug his little horror just to keep his own fears at bay.

Five makes a startled sound, tenses, and then unfolds into his arms with a delicate submission.

Ben has seen a great deal of unpleasant things.

He knows the sound a bone makes when it cracks under a certain degree of pressure, he’s seen the spray of a femoral artery carved in half, and there’s always the classic impalement of objects between the delicate bones of a full grown man’s hand.

Now, keep in mind that a great majority of this hasn’t been administered by himself. Aside from that last one, that he’s rather proud of even to this day. It’s just that he always seems to find himself in situations that are far from ideal, and yet Ben has never been that bothered by it either, and he’s never degraded down to the baser instincts, he’s not that weak.

The point, is that he’s seen a great deal, and yet this tests the steel of his stomach quite considerably. He supposes to a degree he should be grateful that he can feel such a revulsion, for a worrying period of time he’d been straining to recall the loose tendrils of his emotions as they flailed about uncontrollably. Now he’s aware of the churning acid in his gut, how it almost has his eyes stinging.

His plan was a relatively easy one, extricate Klaus from danger. However… No, he doesn’t change a plan partway through because he’s taken aback by the severity of a monsters lair.

Ben runs a finger a hairsbreadth above the examination trolley to his left. It’s a great deal more complicated to successfully implicate a process that protects The Boy. It’s the designation he’s given the small child in a tried and tested attempt to distance himself from the situation.

Klaus loves The Boy.

A thousand problems with a thousand convoluted plans.

“I take it you’re suitably impressed.”
Hargreeves sounds dead, voice lacking the human essence behind it, and Ben unfortunately has come to revelation that if he lost The Boy, then Klaus might very possibly become a similar wraith like creature.

“It’s rather dreary.” He remarks, contemplates the statistical probability that Klaus will survive - thrive - without the Alpha and his sibling. It’s abysmally low.

“You favour a more ostentatious approach?” Hargreeves appears like he’ll clap a hand against his back and Ben’s thoughts go a little haywire here. *Fuck, fuck, fuck, touch me and I’ll kill you, you fucking cunt.*

There’s a lot to unpack when it comes to his inner monologue. But now isn’t the time for such self reflection. He has to decide, save Klaus and guarantee his own safety, or help the child and dreadfully complicate matters.

Hargreeves isn’t a half addled piece of scum in some hick town. He’s sinfully clever, evidently twisted, and Ben lacks the resources this man can conjure up with a snap of his fingers.

There’s the most obvious solution, and yet he’s hesitant to cross that line, just yet.

*Keep Klaus safe. Protect The Boy.*

Doing the latter might compromise the former and Ben isn’t sure why he’s hesitating when the decision is clear, illuminated as it’s always been in filigree threads of gold and amber. He’s never been one to tolerate the dissolution of a child’s innocence, much less the extremes he’s viewing around him.

The choice is probably helped along with every snapshot observation he takes of the room around him, the files left open for him to peruse, charts and graphs and statistics all painting a rather disturbing picture of the abusive man standing opposite him awaiting his opinion.

“You have an unusual taste.” He finally summons, feels the bile in his throat shift in a warning lurch as he catches a few lines from one particularly invasive procedure. He isn’t fluent in medical terminology, a mistake he’ll rectify immediately once home, *if you get home.* But amongst the foreign words and numbers littering one page he’s mostly certain that this particular girl is dead.

“We all have our sins. I do like to partake in a little aesthetic indulgence.” The man gestures around him like a showman displaying his finest creations instead of a sick fuck caressing his torture chamber.

It’s exhausting having a conscience, but Ben is going to have to listen to it this one time.

*Keep Klaus safe. Protect The Boy.*

Hargreeves tuts at his silence, impatient when he’s not in control of the dialogue, and the image of peeling him apart like a tangerine blossoms in Ben’s mind for a satisfying moment.

“So, Benjamin.” The man raps his cane once, eyes hungrily demanding his submission. “Tell me, what do you know about my son?”
Chapter End Notes

Time for the obligatory sorry we're late. This time I'm blaming it on my body failing to stop a sickness bug and sticking with that :)

Thanks as always to everyone that's still reading and being so supportive even when we have super dialogue heavy chapters that come out a fortnight late <3

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