Anti Kitten Birthday Party

by orphan_account

Summary

"It'll be funny if people stopped listening to her, that's all. Like, an anti-prom, but for our case, an anti-Kitten birthday party."

"Vic, you're a genius!"

"Yeah, my 4.0 GPA would say so."

"No, I mean, an anti-Kitten Birthday Party! That would definitely be a success."

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Kitten Walker is the well-known schoolmate who is known for creating remarkable birthday parties that seem to get everyone wanting more. The catch? Every year, Kitten creates a list of the top ten 'freaks' who aren't allowed to attend the party. Gar Logan, a transfer, is willing to break tradition, and perhaps get to know this 'Raven Roth' who seems to top the list every year.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Gar Logan didn’t know what to expect in his first day of high school at Jump City High. He wasn’t scared of not fitting in – Gar found himself to be pretty affable and easy-going that making friends wasn’t a bother – it was fitting in too much that made him feel anxious. In almost every school he has moved in during the course of his school life, Gar had become too attached to his easy-formed friends that every time his parents announced that they’re moving, he became utterly distraught.

Of course, Gar had adjusted to this discomfort year after year, and set out three simple rules that became crucial to his adolescent life. Rule number one, is that Gar shall not make any promises that can greatly affect his life, for promises that Gar have made often turned broken. Rule number two, is that Gar shall not talk about his past, as it brings back memories from the past. The most important, and the one that keeps Gar mostly sane, is rule number three, where Gar shall not engage in romantic relationships, as it often led to both parties being broken.

If Gar followed his three sacred rules during his time at Jump City High, then everything will be alright, and the year will be just like a breeze.

Locker 31033, Gar found himself thinking repeatedly, and despite the numerous times of wandering around the corridor, Gar still couldn’t locate his locker. Locker 29830… Locker 29831… How many lockers does this school have?

Gar knew from school interviews that Jump City High was massive in size however he found himself greatly overwhelmed when he experienced the bright white walls and floor blinding his eyes, distracting him when all he wanted to find his locker.

Locker 29835, locker 29836... Gar was extremely distracted that he couldn’t bring himself to notice the big burly guy right in front of him. Unfortunately for him, the guy didn’t notice Gar as well, and it ended up in a head crash.

“Ow!” Gar exclaimed, rubbing his fingers on his forehead to relieve the pain.

The guy remained silent, doing the same to his forehead and temple to regain his focus. Finally, after a few moments of pain, the guy started to talk.

“Sorry, I didn’t see you! Maybe it’s just because you’re too short…”

That got Gar’s attention – however not in the good way. “Dude! I’m not short!” Gar found himself blurring out. “You’re just freakishly tall! And yes, you should be sorry!”

The guy put both his hands to signify that he’s harmless. “Hey, no offense or anything! Loosen up, grass stain!” Gar was perplexed by what the guy meant by ‘grass stain’, and then realized the guy was referring to Gar’s dyed green highlights swimming in his blond locks. “I’m Victor Stone.”

“Gar Logan.”

“New guy, right?” Gar said yes. “What year are you in?”

“Junior year,” Garfield found himself saying, and it wasn’t long until Victor’s face was beaming.
“Me too! Can I see your schedule? Maybe we’re in the same homeroom!” Gar nodded, and reached for his pockets where he found his schedule all crumpled up and battered. As he gave it to Victor, he couldn’t help but snicker at Victor’s look of disgust upon looking at Gar’s schedule.

“What’s that?” Victor shrieked as he accepted the almost destroyed schedule of Gar’s. “First day in a new school and you can’t hide your slob-y tendencies?”

Gar rubbed the back of his neck and grinned. “Yeah, I’m not exactly the neatest person on earth. I find everything when I need it though.”

Victor nodded, however he wasn’t really listening, as he was too engrossed in the new student’s schedule. “We have World History together… and that’s about it. Oh, we’re in the same homeroom!”

“Cool!” Gar grinned, then scowled once he remembered something important. “Yo, where’s locker 31033?”

Victor shrugged. “You’re in the right path, just keep on walking and you’ll find it.” Gar said his thanks, and before he could move any longer, the bell rang. “Oh man, the bell! Biology, right? Don’t worry, it’s right next to my class! Now hurry, grass stain!”

“Dude, stop calling me that!”

“Punctuality. Never a strong suit for students in the first day.” Gar squirmed in his seat; while Gar can be considered tactless at times, he knew that this teacher isn’t one to mess with. Gar watched the teacher pick up her board and read from it. “Ah, a new student. Garfield Logan?”

Gar stood up and felt unnerved by the way the teacher scrutinized every detail of his appearance. “Well, I see you’re passionate about nature.” The teacher mocked, referring to Gar’s green highlights and it took everyone a nanosecond to laugh.

“Well,” Gar imitated. “I am very passionate about nature. Not only that, chicks dig the hair.” Multiple sniggers and snorts clouded the room as the teacher rolled her eyes.

“Introduce yourself, Mr. Logan.”

“Gar,” Gar corrected, waving his arm. “I’m was born in Africa, and I came here from Steel City.” Remembering rule number two, he immediately sat down and noted the puzzled expression of his teacher. Luckily, the teacher did not press it and continued on introducing how her class works. Gar inevitably zoned out, but was pulled back into reality when he felt someone tapping him on the shoulder from behind.

“Psst,” a voice said, and Gar turned around, looking at a girl with pigtails and a knack for the colors black and yellow. “You’re from Steel City? Which school?”

“Steel City International School,” Gar shrugged, hoping that this girl would drop the subject. Fortunately for Gar, the girl just nodded and seemed satisfied.

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“Steel City International School,” Gar shrugged, hoping that this girl would drop the subject. Fortunately for Gar, the girl just nodded and seemed satisfied.

“I attended school there, when I was in elementary school. Moved after sixth grade. Hey, you’re new, and you seem cool, do you want to sit with me in lunch? My friends won’t mind, especially Vic—”

The mention of Victor’s name caused Gar’s ears to perk up. “Victor Stone?” the girl nodded. “I met him, earlier today. By the lockers.”

“That I take,” Gar grinned. “Vic’s taking it too, right?”

Karen nodded. “Great, let’s sit together. My friends sit there too. Plus, the teacher, is completely lazy. I don’t think he’ll ever teach in the year.”

Gar laughed. “Hey, I have no problem with that!”

“Excuse me,” a voice piped out, and Gar turned his focus on the teacher. “Mr. Logan, Ms. Beecher, I know it’s the first day of school and we do not do much, but please do not disturb the class.”

Karen slightly bowed her head and mumbled an apology, and Gar did the same.

Karen was right – the History teacher had no incentive to teach, only focusing on his computer. He told off his class to do some ‘socializing’ and familiarize themselves with the environment. Gar himself was a slacker, but he found it extremely aggravating when someone dismisses their own responsibility.

“Attention, attention!” The whole class turned to a redheaded boy standing on a table and frantically waving his arms. Gar took a second to look, and took note of the teacher’s nonchalant attitude as he continued tinkering with his computer. “Who’s excited for Kitten’s birthday party?” A couple of shouts and catcalls roared across the room. “I know I am! Okay, first things first, if you’re in the freak list, then you’re not allowed in! Also I just wanted to say that the theme for this year’s party is… Horror!”

Almost the whole class burst into cheers and claps. Victor rolled his eyes, as Karen groaned while face-palming herself. I watched as the boy performed a backflip off the table, and once he got off, the boy continuously fixed his hair.

“Amazing,” Karen said in a sardonic tone, while Victor nodded grimly. Gar had no clue what was happening, and immediately asked.

“What was that about?”

“Man, I forgot you’re new,” Victor said. “That guy just now? His name is Roy Harper. He used to be our friend, but I guess popularity consumed him.”

Gar nodded, however he still didn’t comprehend what Roy just said. “Birthday party?”

Karen sighed, placing her cheek on her hand. “Kitten Walker, your stereotypical valley girl, talented at cheerleading and manipulation, but horrible with life, basically. Every year, she hosts this grand birthday party that everyone, for some odd reason, seems to love.”

Victor snickered, earning a glare from Karen. “Yeah, Karen, but you go to these parties every year and you love them.” Victor drewled, putting emphasis on the word ‘love’.

“Shut up.”

“So who’s invited to this grand party?” Garfield asked, and Karen shrugged.

“Everyone in junior year. Kitten loves this grade for some reason. Sometimes she invites other
people from other grades.”

“So I can go?” Karen nodded, and Victor shrugged.

“You’re a junior,” Victor stated. “You’ll get an invitation.”

Gar smiled, happy that an opportunity of making new friends is being given. Victor seemed to notice Gar’s happy vibe and groaned. “Grass stain, no. The party’s nice, and all, but Kitten’s a monster.”

Gar shrugged, and said: “How bad can she be, anyway?”

Gar expected a reply of groans and complaints and felt inevitably disturbed when he got silence as a response. Karen and Victor looked at each other uneasily, and back to Gar. “You’ll see,” Karen said vaguely. Gar was about to press more on the topic however the bell rang, disrupting his intentions. “I have Chemistry now. See you guys in lunch!”

The blond teenager felt a bit uneasy on how Karen and Victor responded his question, but he shrugged it off, and headed off to his Trigonometry class.

A week passed by and Gar found himself steadily going with the flow. He has successfully formed a new camaraderie with a bunch of people. He found a friend in Garth, a boy from some island in the Pacific, and while Gar found him a bit too arrogant (especially considering his good looks), Gar concluded that Garth was mostly harmless. Gar also found a friend in Wally West, a quick-witted classmate who seems to be in a rush for everything. A girl named Nicole Weathers (or Kole, as she preferred), whose locker was right next to Gar’s, also befriended him, and while Nicole and Gar were not very close, both of them enjoy the occasional chats that occur near the lockers.

Gar took a seat next to Victor and pulled out his lunch bag from his bag and placed it on the table. It was his most prized food in the world – a tofu burger. This captured the attention of Victor’s, and before Gar could tell Victor that it’s made out of tofu, Victor grabbed the burger, took a huge bite, and scowled deeply afterwards, spitting out whatever he had bitten. “What’s this?!?”

“A tofu burger! Do you like it?”

“Heck, no!” Victor cried, trying to wipe off the remains off his tongue. “Gross! Why can’t you eat an actual burger like an actual human being?”

Gar scoffed. “I’m vegan,” Gar explained. “I don’t do the whole meat thing.”

Karen nodded, taking interest in Gar’s veganism. “Are you a vegan because of health or moral reasons?”

“Moral reasons,” Gar said. “I just, have this bond with animals, you know? Eating them would be so weird. It would be cannibalism, to me or something.”

“Well with the way your hair looks and how you’re eating plants, I’d say you’re performing cannibalism right now!” Victor retorted, opening a can of Coke to rinse out his mouth.

“Hey!” Gar exclaimed. “Don’t diss the hair! The hair’s cool. And meat is disgusting! How can you stand the sight of–”

Suddenly, the sight of pink crumpled paper caught Gar’s attention. “Hey,” Gar said, pointing at the
pink ball of paper. “What’s that?”

“Oh, this?” Victor said, picking up the crumpled paper that was in front of him. “Nothing. Just some weird list from Kitten.”

Karen cleared her throat. “Definitely weird. Gar, when I say Kitten invites everyone in junior year, I don’t mean everyone. Every year, she creates a list of people who she deems as ‘freaks’, revoking their access from coming to the party, ever. It’s brutal, it’s rude, but usually the people listed don’t do anything but shrug.”

“Sad,” Victor commented, scrutinizing the paper. “It’s like they’re so used too Kitten’s tyrannical personality.”

“Can I read it?”

Karen shrugged, but she nodded, and Gar took the paper and opened it up. “Have fun,” Victor said in a mocking voice.

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**Jump City High’s Top 10 Junior Freaks 2014**

*List made by: Kitten W.*

10. **Nicole Weathers**

Or, to friends and loved ones, Kole. To me, she is the pink-headed ice-loving freak of the school. She’s definitely landed a spot on this list, for two reasons. Reason number one, is that her hair is pink! PINK! She claims she didn’t dye it, and after tremendous stalking on Facebook and looking at former childhood pictures of herself, it’s true, she was BORN with pink hair! I love pink, obviously, but that’s really creepy. And really undeserving of her. If anyone had to be born with pink hair it should be me, of course! Now, reason number two, is that Kole REALLY loves ice, I’m not exaggerating on this one. Like, literally, she usually holds some kind of ice cube, or is seen munching one. Freak.

9. **Mas y Menos**

I’m not sure if Mas y Menos is one person or two people. These twin freaks are literally inseperable! Obviously, I know. I’ve tried separating them once, and they totally gone cray. Freaks.

8. **Mikron O’Jeneus**

Okay, I’m all in for unique names and if it helps my future child stands out (in a good way!) then so be it. But hear this. Who in the world names their child ‘Mikron’? Like, were his parents some techno freaks that couldn’t stop caressing their own microscopes or something? Anyway, obviously there’s a reason he’s on the list, other than his unfortunate upbringing. Once, he initiated this school-wide ‘program’ where he altered everyone’s lockers to act as a portal to classes. And while the idea is cool, the guy with the idea is not. I LITERALLY freaked when I found out he put a dead rat in my own locker. Freak!

7. **Nicole Díaz/Jennifer Hex/Jinx/Pink Freak**
Well first things first I honestly don’t know her name! Like, I heard it’s Nicole Diaz, but teachers call her Jennifer Hex? Some student even call her Jinx. Um, so what exactly is your name, Pink Freak?! She doesn’t look bad, and she’s very athletic, something that could benefit the cheerleading team. The problem with her is that she’s a FREAK! Also what’s wrong with freaks and tainting my love for the color pink?! Pink Freak dyes her hair pink, and she wears pink cat-like contacts which gives me nightmares like every time I see her. What’s worse is that she’s known for bad luck. Literally, I’ve heard this story where she touched someone on the shoulder and the next day that someone broke his back. Freak, and trust me when I say this, don’t go anywhere near her.

6. Antonia Monetti

Already thrown off by the previous people in the list? Well don’t go just yet. This is Antonia Monetti, and I’ve met her in seventh grade, and she was like, such a cool girl! She had this accent and I think it’s British or something, and I tried to befriend her (I know, shocking!) but being the freak she is, she turned me down! …Whatever. She’s a freak, I don’t care.

5. Kori Anders

I know Kori Anders is in the cheerleading group and if we follow stereotypes here, it automatically means that we’re besties! Haha, so wrong! Yeah she’s okay-looking, but she’s so annoying! Way too innocent to be fun and way too naïve to even understand that she’s not my friend at all! She follows weird traditional events too. It’s so dumb, it’s like having my grandma repeat all her superstitions again! Anyway, and she loves mustard so much, she drinks a bottle of it. Freak.

4. Jericho Wilson

Trust me, he’s cute. But he never speaks. That makes him a freak.

3. Billy Numerous

Same with those freaky twins in the list it’s like Billy Numerous is a twin or triplet and is INSEPERABLE but the only thing that’s sad is that he’s NOT a twin or anything. But he talks to himself a lot and with no one else, except teachers and some students. It’s so sad, like if you want friends that much go make some! Is he really that narcissistic, like, there’s nothing to love about him anyway… Freak.

2. Gnarkk

I literally, do NOT know what his real name is and he only speaks one word, which is Gnarkk. I’VE NEVER heard him speak, I don’t even know how he even got to this school? FREAK!

1. Raven Roth

CLOSE YOUR EYES! Wait; OPEN THEM! You must see the HORROR, the TERROR! Raven Roth! Jump City High’s number one freak. It’s stupid; she has this really pale complexion, even paler than Antonia’s, and purple hair! And matching dark purple eyes. She’s so dark and broody, I can’t even – whatever. To match her creepy looks, she talks in this scary monotone and glares at everyone. She’s basically ANTI SOCIAL. Why? I literally don’t know; don’t ask me. She’s usually found lurking in the darkest corner of the library, probably performing some cult ritual or some stuff. Stay away from her. She. Is. A. Freak.

There you go! 2014’s list of freaks in Jump City High! And you know the drill, in a few weeks is my birthday, get ready! All juniors are invited, however other grades that receive an invitation can attend too. So literally, if you’re my friend, and everyone is my friend… Everyone can go! Except
“Kole?” Gar asked, not sure how to take the information that his newly formed friend is considered a ‘freak’ by the school’s queen bee. He also found it uncomfortable to process that Kitten could be so heartless over trivial things. While Gar knew he wouldn’t do anything major, he felt guilty just sitting there and looking at the list.

“But, Kole’s not a freak. I’m sure none of these people are freaks. Just misunderstood, is all.”

“Yo grass stain, why are you so adamant about this? Relax. The people on the list don’t mind either, so I don’t see why you should,” Victor pointed out. “Besides, you don’t really know the people in this list.”

“Kole’s my–”

“Yeah, yeah,” Victor dismissed Gar with his hand. “Look at Kole.”

Victor pointed to another table, where Kole and a large man who Gar did not recognize was conversing, seemingly bliss about the whole world. “They don’t mind,” Victor said. “So you shouldn’t as well.”

Gar dropped the subject, but it still didn’t ease the troubled state of his mind.

“Hi!” A shrill voice came, and Gar closed his locker, only to find out it was Kitten. “I’m Kitten Walker,” Gar nodded, hesitant to make any more contact. “You must’ve heard of me, right?”

“Right.” Gar said, though his voice didn’t express any emotion whatsoever.

“You’re new, right? Garfield Logan. You’re in my Junior English class, but I must confirm it myself.”

“Yeah,” Gar agreed. “I’m a junior.” Kitten put on a big grin on her face, showing off her pearly white teeth that were similar to the bright walls of the school, and it threw him off.

“Great!” Kitten reached out for her purse, taking out a pink envelope decorated with shiny stickers. She held out the envelope for Gar to take, and when Gar hesitantly received it, her grin widened, almost resembling a cackle. “I hope we can be great friends, Gar. See you in English!”

And with that, she turned on her heel and strutted down the hall, leaving Gar scowling to himself. “Got an invitation, didn’t you?”

Gar recognized the voice behind him, and the fact that he knew exactly who was talking made his stomach drop. He turned around, and grimly nodded. “Hey, Kole.”
While Gar’s expression was somber and forlorn, Kole’s expression was bright and exuberant – nowhere identical to Gar’s. “I was on the list on sophomore year too. So I came in freshman year. The theme back then was Winter Wonderland, and that’s when Kitten realized she made a mistake inviting me.” Gar found it inspiring how Kole said all of that without a dejected ring to it. “Nevertheless, the party was fun. You should go, Gar!”

Gar shifted uncomfortably in his place. “I don’t know, I mean… I feel kind of bad about…”

“The list?” Kole inquired, and Gar nodded. “Don’t be! Really, if you’re placing yourself in another person’s problems then you won’t be able to enjoy your own self.” The bell rang, and Kole looked at her watch. “I have Art now,” Kole said, looking back from her watch to Gar. “I’ll see you later!” Kole waved, and headed off the opposite direction.

Gar now had English, and while he didn’t have any problem with the class, it was the students that made him uneasy. In particular, it was Kitten who made him uneasy. Taking a deep breath, he went inside the class, forcing himself to feel better about his unexplained guilt. Gar took a seat next to his friend, Isaiah Crockett. Isaiah nodded his head towards Gar as a sign of hello, and Gar reciprocated, doing the same with a smile.

“Mrs. Prince isn’t here yet,” Isaiah pointed out, shaking his head. “She’s always late.”

Gar smiled cheekily, and shrugged. “That’s not a bad thing. More free time!”

Isaiah rolled his eyes, and once the chatter of the room started building up, the English teacher walked in the room, a pile of paper resting on her forearms. She placed in on her desk, and wiped the little sweat that was trickling on her forehead. “Sorry I’m late class, had to do some photocopying,” Mrs. Prince then placed the stack of papers on the first row of the class. “Give the paper out, thank you.”


“Alright, class, pipe down,” the teacher began. “After tremendous discussion of our summer reading book, it’s time for an essay. You will be writing on the purpose on why Truman Capote wrote In Cold Blood. On the sheet, you can see there are sections for your essay planning. Start on your thesis, and continue on. Remember that along the way use quotations to back up your sources, but only do so in the body, neither in the opening nor the conclusion. Questions?”

The class was silent.

Mrs. Prince nodded, seemingly pleased with herself. “Excellent. Let’s discuss our topic. Why did Truman Capote write In Cold Blood?”

A girl with short hair raised her hand. “I think he wanted to showcase the true events of the Clutter family.”

“Yes, but why? Capote himself wasn’t involved in the case, why would he be suddenly interested?”

“Um, hello?” An ear-pitched tone rang throughout the class, and Gar instantly knew it belonged to Kitten. “Mrs. Prince, this isn’t a psychology class. Capote wrote the book because he wanted to. Like, if you asked me why I painted my nails pink today, it’s because I wanted to! No psychology behind that. Anyway, why are we reading this book? It’s so scary.”

A small chuckle could be heard in the back of the room, and everybody turned their head around. Gar noticed that it was a girl wearing a blue hoodie. He had no idea who she was, but apparently Kitten wasn’t fond of her.
“What was that, goth?” Kitten taunted, her attention fully focused on the blue girl. “Can you, like, shut up? You’ve been doing a great job of that this whole time!”

“I don’t know,” the girl sneered in return, cocking her head to Kitten’s direction. “Maybe the fact that your brain is still defunct after all these years amuse me, that’s all.”

“Why, you –”

“Alright, girls, that’s enough,” While Mrs. Prince was successful in stopping any more fights; it didn’t stop the two girls from deathly staring at each other. “Now, any more opinions? Jason, what about you?”

“Hey,” Gar whispered, elbowing Isaiah on his side. “Who was that?”

“Who?” Gar jerked his head to the girl, who was now looking down on her paper and scribbling furiously. “Oh that. Raven Roth.”

“Raven Roth?” Gar repeated, furring his eyebrows. “As in, number one in Kitten’s freak list?”

Isaiah nodded. “Yeah. Why?”

_Interesting_, Gar wanted to say, but instead he found himself saying: “Nothing.”

Isaiah raised his eyebrow at Gar, but to Gar’s relief, he dropped the subject and picked up his pen, doodling on the side of his worksheet.

Gar found himself drowning in his thoughts. _Who is this Raven Roth? What makes her so disliked by Kitten, and possibly the entire school community? How does she feel about Kitten?_ The way her hoodie implanted a shadow on her face, leaving nothing but the hint of her appearance, made Gar more intrigued than more. How her fingers delicately held the pen, as if she was writing on air. Watching Raven’s scowl made Gar ask himself a question:

_Does she ever smile?_

Gar took note at the soft frown that Raven had on her face, as she flipped the page to continue writing her essay planner. He suddenly felt a pang of dedication rushing through his veins, and as each second of him staring at Raven passed, his curiosity only peaked up.

_I must find out._

Chapter End Notes

_OKAY_ So, this story was originally posted on FF.net. On there, the format is much more clearer than the ones here. Meaning, in the FF.net version, there's timestamps for scenes. This is apparent only after the sixth chapter in AO3, and the reason why it isn’t earlier is because I hate AO3 formatting. I don’t think it'll affect anything though, because flashbacks only begin to happen on the sixth chapter and that is when the format is getting on par with the correct version of the story.

But, if you insist on reading something with consistent timestamps, [here you go](#).
Gar was generally a determined person; if he wanted something, then he will do anything to get it. Whether if it required him to anything emotionally draining or physically drastic, Gar wouldn't stop unless he gets what he wants. However one thing that stopped him from his determination was his fear. If he wanted something but was too afraid of the consequences, he wouldn't try to accomplish his wishes.

That's how he felt about Raven. While he is undeniably attracted to her enigmatic aura, Kitten's freak list constantly pestered him in his mind. Gar had heard from others that Kitten had managed to install a water slide from the top of her mansion. In addition, Kitten was under the process of decorating her house to suit the theme of a haunted house. After seeing the leaked pictures of her house online, Gar had already convinced himself that he needed to go to Kitten's birthday party – for the fun, of course.

"Getting ready for the party!" The caption read.

Approaching Raven, Gar felt, would hinder his possibilities of going to Kitten's party. Everyone, including his friends Karen and Victor, was already certain that they would be attending the party. To be the only one, besides the ones on the list, who didn't attend the party would be very disconcerting, and it would only attract bad attention to himself.

Gar's schedule was more or less satisfying to have. Having two Advanced Placement classes related to history was challenging, but Gar liked History too much to care. Initially he asked for both World History and US History, however the headmaster denied him and told him to choose one. Gar chose World History, however he still wanted to take another history-based course. To fulfill his request, the headmaster placed Gar in Art History. While Gar's art skills were non-existent, Gar liked looking at Art enough to take a course related to its history.

Art History was already one of Gar's favorite subjects. He liked the ambience of the class; lighthearted and seemingly close-knit. The teacher, Mr. Simms, was also out-going and laid-back. It was a class that Gar felt very comfortable to be in, and he felt extremely grateful to the headmaster for putting him in the class.

"Alright class," Mr. Simms mused, successfully capturing the attention of his students. "Has anyone ever seen the actual Mona Lisa in real life?"

A boy with oversized glasses raised his hand. "I don't get the hype, though. It's very… Small."

"Agreed," Mr. Simms said. "Compared to other major artworks, the Mona Lisa can be seen as underwhelmingly small. I think it's psychological, though. All the hype surrounding the painting might have led the people to believe that it's a majorly large painting, when really, it isn't. It's just about 30 by 21 inches. Nevertheless, the story behind the Mona Lisa is very intriguing. Anyone can tell me who the subject of the Mona Lisa is?"

"Lisa Gherardini," one student piped up, seemingly confident with his answer. "I read somewhere
off the internet that a margin note was found in a book. It says that Leonardo was working on a portrait of the lady."

"I thought it was a self portrait." Another female student said, which prompted a scoff from the previous student.

"Then why is it called 'Mona Lisa'? If it was a self portrait, it would be called 'Mona Leo'!"

This caused a roar of laughter across the class, including the teacher. The female student ducked her head in response, but was quick to respond. "No, like, I've seen it in the internet, Mona Lisa's face matches Leonardo da Vinci's self-portrait."

"Marisol's got a point, Jacob. Lillian Schwartz once conducted a thesis that Mona Lisa was based on Leonardo's self-portrait." Mr. Simms explained. "However, the only problem with that was that maybe the picture of Leonardo da Vinci Lillian used wasn't exactly a self-portrait. Most historians believe that the sitter is Lisa Gherardini, and that the painting was made for celebration."

"What do you believe in, sir?"

"Lisa Gherardini seems most plausible – but I still hold the inkling that the painting was made with distant memories of Leonardo da Vinci's mother," Mr. Simms responded. "Even so, if one of the questions in the AP exam is 'Who is the Mona Lisa based on', I'd say you answer Lisa Gherardini, because many theories have been made to back it up. Now, the Mona Lisa is famous for many things, and I would love to go on and on about it, however time is running and we have many topics to cover."

"For your homework, I'd like all of you to individually create a presentation, about the Mona Lisa. However it's not the general history of the Mona Lisa. I've got a bucket here filled with prompts, and I will walk around class, and you lot will draw a piece of paper from the bucket. Whatever you get is what you will be presenting on. Now, there will be no changing topics or whatnot, because I will be immediately recording your topics once you've chosen them."

Mr. Simms picked up the bucket from his desk and headed for the first row of the class. "This presentation shall not exceed five minutes - anymore and points will be deducted by fifty percent," Mr. Simms instructed. "Amy, your topic is… The medium used on the Mona Lisa, correct? Very good."

Once he got to the back of the class, where Gar was sitting, Gar immediately plunged his hand in the bucket and unrolled the piece of paper which had his prompt. "The L.H.O.O.Q," Gar read aloud, which caused some students to giggle. "What?"

"Gar, you'll see in your project." By then, the bell rang and everyone immediately packed their bags and bolted out of their chairs. Before the first person could leave however, Mr. Simms had another announcement. "Before all of you leave, I'd like to say. This is due next class! Late submissions will not be accepted and will result in a score of zero. That's all, you can all leave."

Mr. Simms announcement was followed by mutters and groans that eventually faded as everyone evacuated the room. Gar now had study hall, and he had no idea what to do next. He took his time in packing up his things, and he was now left alone with Mr. Simms, and a redheaded girl who he never talked to. The redheaded girl walked up to Mr. Simms with an apprehensive look on her face.

"I have a question, Mr. Simms."

"Yes, what is it, Kori?"
However before Gar could eavesdrop any longer, he left the room, and headed for the library. So far, Gar usually spent his study halls in the cafeteria gaming on his phone, but Gar decided that finishing his project early would be best. Tossing his books into his locker, Gar headed to the library.

Once Gar entered the library, a peculiar sense of feeling struck him. The library was huge, however it was more or less isolated, with a few students reading a book or using the computer. Gar never liked reading, and preferred listening instead. Because of this, Gar usually spent his time studying by making his computer read an online version of his textbook out loud. Gar moved towards the computer by the window. He noticed that there was an unfinished Google Doc on the screen, however he simply minimized it and started on his research.

It took a while but Gar finally understood why the class giggled when he said 'L.H.O.O.Q'. If said out loud, it almost sounds like a French phrase which translates into: 'This woman has a hot ass'. Once he understood, Gar couldn't stop laughing to himself. However, a cough can be heard behind him, and fearing that it was the librarian, Gar turned around and began a string of apologies.

"I'm sorry I laughed, it will never happen again, I just read something funny, but I know that's not an excuse, yes I disturbed the library, I'm sorry, I really am, please forgive me, don't kick me out--"

"Can you pipe down?" The girl said, and it took a second for Gar to realise that she wasn't the librarian. The girl's red bangs were slightly covering her aggravated expression, however the rest of her hair was black and was kept in a ponytail. "You're using my computer."

"Oh," Gar said dumbfoundedly, before facing back to the computer and re-opening the window he minimized earlier. "Is this yours?"

"Yes," the girl seethed. "First of all, did you look at the document?"

"What-- no?"

"Your hesitant reply is very reassuring. Did you modify the document, at all?"

"Why would I?!"

"Look, green-hair," the girl said, her crisp foreign accent. "I will not have anyone interfere with my grades in Geography. You may be new, so I maybe should be a little less harsh on you, but new student or not, everyone must know I'm not one to mess with--"

"Wait," Gar interrupted. "Geography? I'm not taking Geography! I'm working on my Art History project! And besides, I thought no one was using this computer, so I took it. Sorry!"

The girl seemed to relax at this and she gave Gar a small smile. "No, I apologize for my attitude. You minimized the window earlier, correct?" Gar nodded. "I was in the bathroom. Look, since you're using a Word document, I'll move to the next computer. Log out from my Google account, though."

Gar did what he was told to do, and once he was finished, the girl was satisfied and took the seat next to Gar. She turned to Gar and began introducing herself. "I'm Toni Monetti. I'm from New Zealand."

Toni's name seemed very familiar, but Gar couldn't place it. To his surprise, Toni seemed to read his mind and said: "I'm from the freak list, if that counts."

Gar, unsure of how to respond, simply nodded and muttered an 'okay'. Toni looked at him expectantly and after a few moments Gar realized that he hasn't introduced himself to her. "Oh, I'm Gar Logan."
"Where are you from?"

"Steel City."

Toni raised her eyebrows, and crossed her arms. "Really? You don't look like it." This made Gar cross his arms in return, and Toni noticed his defensive attitude. "Hey, no offense or anything. People from Steel City look more… Work-oriented. No offense, again."

"Oh."

Disappointed by his lack of response, Toni shifted her seat and changed the topic. "Are you going to Kittens birthday party?"

Surprised by the sudden topic change, Gar awkwardly rubbed the back of his neck and nodded. "You shouldn't," Toni mused. "I mean, go if you want, but you seem like the type of person who would break against tradition."

Gar was beginning to get aggravated by how Toni constantly evaluated who Gar was as a person. "I have to work, on my project." He said, hoping that this would stop the conversation between them. Fortunately it did, but not before Toni apologizes for her attitude. The rest of the period was followed by disconcerting silence that made the two itching for a word to be spoken, however the only sound that followed was the loud clangor of the bell.

"That's wonderful, Garth! I'm so proud of you!"

Setting his lunch at the table and grabbing a seat, Gar looked at his table mates with a confused look on his face. "Why are we proud of Garth again?"

"Oh, finally, you're here!" Karen exclaimed. "Where were you?"

Gar waved his hand as a sign of dismissal. "Was held back by Mr. Light in Trig. Doesn't matter - why are we proud of Garth?"

"I got accepted to the national swimming competition," Garth says, a big grin beaming on his face. "It's on November, but I've to practice…"

Karen scoffed. "You're practically the water. You don't need half the practice you think you need."

Garth blushed at Karen's comment, and Gar eyed him suspiciously. While Gar and Garth were friends, he still thought that Garth's persona around people was fake and that he was only trying to draw attention to himself. "Nonsense, Karen…"

"Yeah," Gar said, his voice a pitch higher as if he was mocking the two. "You don't need to practice, at all…"

While Karen glared at Gar's tone, Garth was oblivious to Gar's subtle hostility. "Thanks, Gar," Garth said. "But I want to practice. I think I'll spend most of my time either studying or swimming."

"That's the saddest thing I've ever heard that came out of your mouth," Victor said, who took a seat next to Garth and was followed by Wally who took a seat next to Vic. "So I take you're in some swimming competition or something?"

Garth nodded while Gar rolled his eyes. "Yeah, national championship. Wish me luck?"
Wally took a bite of his sandwich and snorted. "You don't need the luck!" Wally said, his food visibly showing while he was talking. Karen seemed to be extremely bothered by this and asked Wally for proper table manners, only to get Wally's tongue stuck out as a response.

"Where were you guys?" Gar asked, and Victor shrugged.

"Physics, damn boring. Love the subject but hate the teacher."

Karen pursed her lips before opening them again to talk. "Ms. Rouge? Oh I hate her – had her for Robotics club last year."

Victor nodded grimly and took a sip from his soda can. "I was in French," Wally said. "Teacher got mad because someone kept on saying 'L.H.O.O.Q'."

This caused Gar to snigger. "I have that as my theme for my project in Art History, found out what it meant earlier today."

"What does it mean?" Garth asked, only to be dismissed by Wally.

"Google it," Wally said. "Anyway, Jinx hit me with her textbook today."

"Yeah, we saw," Karen said. "Same English class, remember? Anyway, for you freaks that don't take the same English block as we do," Karen pointed at Gar and Garth. "Mrs. Prince told the class to do some 'peer marking' for the essays and Wally was paired with Jinx. Ended up badly because in the end Wally made her so angry that she banged her textbook against the back of his head.

"She wouldn't listen to my criticism!" Wally cried out, and Victor rolled his eyes.

"Last time I checked, 'Can you blow my whistle, baby, whistle, baby', isn't constructive criticism." Victor retorted, which led to the table laughing and Wally petulantly crossed his arms.

"Jinx…" Gar asked. "Isn't she one of the people in the list?"

Wally narrowed his eyes at Gar, crossing his arms tighter. "Jinx's not a freak. Misunderstood, is all."

Victor snorted. "So are the people in the list, man!"

"Okay," Wally said. "Some of the people are freaks though. Like Billy Numerous? That guy aggravates me to no end. Mikron? Kind of like a demented version of you, Vic."

"Hey," Karen interrupted. "Stop it. Although I have to admit. Mikron freaks me out… A lot." Karen's posture changed into one that reflected discomfort. "Do you remember freshman year?"

The table was clouded with a bunch of 'yes' except from Gar, who said 'no. "I forgot you're new!" Karen said, and she raised her hands to visualize her point. "Alright, in freshman year…"

Karen went on about how Mikron was extremely obsessed about mechanics and inventing, to the point where he often broke into school grounds at night just to see what he can build. At the time, he had a fetish for dung beetles, something Karen greatly abhorred. Despite Mikron's love for dung beetles, he still didn't have the courage to touch them or go near them. To resolve this fear, Mikron created a small invention that represented the dung beetle. Instead of feeding on feces like an actual dung beetle would, Mikron's invention was made so that it would feed on lint. Mikron was getting more and more obsessed with his invention that he created more, and in the end there was too much robotic beetles that it got into almost everyone's clothings.
"It was so horrible!" Karen wailed out after her explanation. Garth, who was sitting to her right immediately gave her a pat on the back, and Victor offered her a bite of his sandwich, to which Karen refused. "There were so many on my clothes."

"So, how did this fiasco end?" Gar asked, watching Karen fiddling with one of her pigtails.

"In the end Mikron was getting scared of the whole robotic beetles," Karen explained. "He cancelled the invention and never opened up the case ever since."

"Okay," Gar concluded, crumpling his wrapper paper that protected his tofu burger. "So Kitten was right, Mikron is a freak."

"Not only that," Wally piped in, taking the crumpled paper from Gar's hands and tossing it around. "He has a major crush on Kitten. Every year he's seen begging on his knees for Kitten to remove him on the freak list. Really sad, really pathetic. I don't like him."

As the whole table nodded in agreement, the bell rang, and everyone in the cafeteria began shuffling around and grabbing their bags, heading to their next classes. "Study hall!" Wally exclaimed, pumping his fist in the air. "I love my schedule! See you!" With that, Wally rushed out of the cafeteria, ambiguously heading to some place in the school.

"Art," Karen scowled, and Garth hummed in agreement. "Can't believe I slacked on my VPA credits! Whatever. I'll see you guys later. Come, Garth, let's go."

Gar watched as Karen and Garth plodded out of the cafeteria. "Well, I'm going," Gar announced, waving a farewell to Victor, who was fumbling to get his Calculus textbook out of his bag. "See you!"

"...And, for some reason the Mona Lisa is still safe, no matter how many attacks it has been through. Thank you for listening to my presentation."

The whole class clapped out of respect, and the girl who had presented smiled to herself in satisfaction as she removed her thumbdrive from the computer and went back to her seat. Mr. Simms stood in the corner nodding slightly, and he scribbled a few notes on his notepad. After he was finished, he cleared his throat and pointed at the redheaded girl Gar noticed after class the other day. The girl smiled, and walked to the front, setting up her presentation.

"Good morning, friends!" The girl said, her voice filled with cheerfulness. Looking around the class, Gar noticed that the class's atmosphere was nowhere similar to the girl's positive attitude. Almost everyone either had their hands on their cheeks, were busy doing something else, or worse, sleeping. The girl, however, remained oblivious to her classmate's unenthusiastic reaction, and continued on with her presentation. "My name is Kori Anders, and I will now explain the painting medium of the Mona Lisa! The Mona Lisa was painted on the poplar and…"

Despite Kori's clear voice that rang in Gar's ears, Gar couldn't help but be uninterested by her presentation. He diverted his attention to his pencil case, which was a long green zipper that behaved as a pencil case when zipped up. Gar took out his few stationary out of the pencil case and started unzipping it. Gar was extremely occupied by his pencil case, until a boy's deep voice interrupted his activity and Kori's presentation.

"Yo Kori, can you stop? It's getting really boring," the boy sniggered at his own remark, and a couple of students in the room laughed as well. "Really, man, so damn boring."
"Baran," Mr. Simms interrupted, his voice getting scarily serious. "Kori still has three minutes to go, please do not interrupt."

"Sorry, Simms," Baran said as he rolled his eyes. "Hey, Kori?"

"Yes?"

"Stop presenting. So boring, do us all a favor and learn to present in a not boring way."

"And how do I do the presenting in the method you consider 'not boring'?" Kori asked, putting up finger quotes. Gar could tell that Kori was getting slightly irritated by Baran's rude attitude, but she was holding it in.

"Hmm, I don't know," Baran said, tapping his finger on his chin with a mischievous gleam. "Go back to your weird island home, and do us a favor and not exist here."

"Baran!" Mr. Simms scolded, but no one paid much attention to him, as all eyes were diverted to Baran and Kori.

"Bye!" Baran waved in a derisive manner, and he abruptly grabbed a bottle of mustard from his bag. Fortunately for Baran, his seat was in the front row, which gave him perfect opportunity to attack Kori. He pointed the tip of the mustard bottle at Kori, and began squeezing it, which landed on Kori's purple dress. A small portion of the class laughed out loud, while the majority kept quiet. Kori cried out in distress, and started flailing her hands. This action led to some mustard landing on Mr. Simms's desk, which caused him to intervene in the attack.

"Baran!" Mr. Simms exclaimed, as he walked towards the center of the class. "Principal's office, now!" Baran shrugged as he slung his bag over his shoulders, mouthing the words 'worth it' to his friends, who sniggered in return. He exited the class, and Gar had a strong inkling that Baran wasn't heading to the principal's office. He exited the class, and Gar had a strong inkling that Baran wasn't heading to the principal's office. Mr. Simms sighed in distress, and turned his focus on Kori, who had her head bowed down and was strangely quiet. He approached her slowly, and once he was in her range, Mr. Simms awkwardly patted Kori on the back, muttering a few consoling words. Seconds later, Kori lifted up her head, which was covered in mustard and tears. She opened up her mouth to say something, but instead turned around and left the class. Mr. Simms lightly groaned, and took a tissue at the corner of his table to wipe off the mustard that landed on his desk. After he was done, he picked up his notepad and began scribbling.

"Marisol, you're up next," Mr. Simms announced, and Gar was astounded on how easy Mr. Simms changed the subject. Mr. Simms was always laid-back, but didn't he have boundaries as well? Gar looked at Marisol, who was also staring dumbfoundedly. "Come on, Mar, we don't have much time."

Except, they do have time, as there was twenty more minutes of class time. Marisol snorted and crossed her arms obstinately. "Mr. Simms, Kori was bullied out of this classroom! Aren't you going to find her?" Marisol asked, and Mr. Simms looked away. "And who knows if Baran went to the principal's office! Mr. Simms, you have to take things like these seriously!"

"Marisol," Mr. Simms chided. "My choices are driven by my will to teach this class. If you have forgotten, this is an Advanced Placement class—"

"Still doesn't excuse your attitude of not showing initiative when your class includes a case of bullying!"

"Marisol, if you do not get up and present, you will immediately get a zero on this project!"
The whole class became eerily silent upon Mr. Simms's rebuke. Marisol pursed her lips in anger, but said nothing as she grabbed her stuff and prepared her presentation. Gar couldn't help but notice the vicious behavior Marisol showed as she bumped into everything in her sight. Gar diverted his eyes to Mr. Simms, who was looking blankly at his notepad. Sighing, Gar bowed slumped against his chair and continued toying with his pencil case the whole period.

The bell rang and the whole class silently stood up and left. Gar took note on Marisol's still angry expression, and was particularly surprised when Marisol intentionally bumped shoulders with Mr. Simms, who didn't do anything but sigh quietly. Since he had study hall next, Gar took a trip to the restroom.

Heading out of the restroom, Gar heard a distinct wail that echoed near the men's restroom. After looking around, Gar concluded that it came from the janitor's closet. He turned the knob on the closet's door, and it wasn't locked. Hesitantly, he pushed the door open and was shocked when he saw Kori sitting on the stool, furiously wiping tears away from her face. She looked up from the floor, and her expression slightly changed.

"Are you here to make the fun of me as well?" Kori asked quietly, and Gar shook his head abundantly.

"No, no," Gar said, walking inside of the closet and closing the door behind him. "In fact, I wanted to see if you were okay." This was a lie, but looking at Kori's heart aching expression, he'd rather tell a lie to make her feel better. "Are you okay?"

"What is your name?"

"Gar Logan," Gar said, and paused before speaking again. "Kori, right?"

Duh, Gar thought to himself, obviously she's Kori!

Kori nodded, and sniffled. "I don't understand, the wrong I have done, for I have none!" Kori confessed. "Classmate Baran Flinders decides to attack me out of nowhere, and no one has helped me!"

"I'm sorry," Gar said slowly, unsure of what to do next, so he stepped closer to Kori and rubbed her shoulder consolingly. "Baran's a jerk. Don't waste your time thinking about jerks."

To Gar's surprise, Kori smiled and nodded. "You're correct… You were the only one who cared about me to see how I was doing. Thank you, friend Gar!"

Friend Gar? Gar thought to himself, but before he could react, Kori launched his arms on him, initiating a bone-crushing bear hug that left him out of breath. After a few seconds which felt like an excruciatingly long time period to Gar, Gar regained his breath and spoke again. "Marisol wanted to help you, but…"

"Classmate Marisol is not here, is she?" Kori pointed out. Gar nodded meekly, hesitant of doing something else. "But I will thank her once I see her. Friend Gar, for the expression of my gratitude, please have dinner with me tonight!"

Gar paled, and felt his hands sweating profusely. "Like - like a date?"

"No, no," Kori dismissed Gar by waving one of her hands. "My parents have the shift of the late
times, and my sister is out of the town. I invited my friend over as well, please invite anyone you’d like too! We will be having the soup of friendship!"

"The soup of friendship…” Gar repeated before shaking his head. "Look, it's a nice offer but– wait, aren’t you supposed to be in class?"

"English," Kori shrugged. "I will head there after I get a reply from you, friend Gar."

"I, uh," Gar said, uncertain of what to say. Gar didn't exactly want to spend time with Kori, knowing that she wasn't exactly what normal people would define as normal. "I'll think about it." Gar finally said, and Kori nodded happily.

"Let us exchange the numbers! I will text you the address of my home." Kori said, pulling out her phone from her pocket. Before she could ask Gar for his number, Gar spoke up.

"I don't have a working sim card yet," Gar said. "I have a Facebook, though, send a message there."

Kori hummed in agreement and began searching for Gar's Facebook profile on her phone. After a few seconds, Kori showed Gar her phone screen for approval and Gar nodded in response. "I would love it if you attended!" Kori said, smiling. She stood up from the stool, and headed for the door. Before leaving, Kori raised her hand for a big farewell wave, and Gar reciprocated by lightly waving back. As Kori left, Gar sat on the stool and opened up his phone. One thing that he liked about Jump City High was the free internet connection, and while it wasn't the fastest, it was enough for him to use. He opened up his Facebook app, and swiftly accepted Kori's friend request. Upon accepting, a message from Kori popped up, telling him her address and how to get there.

Gar opened up another chat with Victor, who he hoped was online. He typed a quick message: "kori anders invited me for dinner and wants me to invite a friend but i didnt give an answer yet".

Luckily, Victor was online and quickly replied. "What? Free food, Gar! Say yes! And count me in"

Gar typed in a quick 'ok' and sent Kori a message telling her that he and Vic will attend. Gar locked his phone, hoping that the food Kori will provide is decent.

Dick Grayson, like Gar, was a new student in junior year. He previously attended Gotham Academy at Gotham City, but transferred to Jump City High at the request of his guardian. Gar found Dick a bit intimidating, but in the end Dick was surprisingly easy to talk to. However Dick inconveniently wore sunglasses whether he was outdoors or not, and Gar decided to question him on it.

"Why are you wearing sunglasses inside?"

"My eyes are sensitive to light."

Gar looked around, noticing how dimly lighted it was. "It's kinda dark."

"Still applies."

Nonetheless, Kori found a friend in Dick and invited him over for dinner. Gar and Victor attended as well, albeit late, due to Gar and Victor bickering on which way to Kori's house was faster. In the end, Victor was right and he was determined to rub it in Gar's face.

"Friends!" Kori cheered to the boys, who was sitting awkwardly on a couch. Gar unfortunately sat
on the middle, and was crushed by the both Dick and Victor. "Thank you for coming."

"No problem," Victor said, slightly shifting in the couch. "Nice to meet you, Kori."

"Yes, nice to meet you too, friend Victor! Now come, dinner is ready!" Kori led the boys into the dining room, which was clouded with the essence of Kori's newly cooked dinner. Gar couldn't deny it; the smell was outstanding, and Gar was convinced that Kori was an extremely talented cook, which only made him more excited. To Gar's luck and Victor's dismay, the soup contained no meat and was instead filled with tofu. Once the four of them sat at the dinner table, they immediately took a spoonful of the soup.

What they didn't expect was the bitter and unpleasant taste of the soup. Both Gar and Dick uncomfortably swallowed the soup to be polite, but Victor unceremoniously spit out the soup on a piece of tissue. Kori however was unaware of her guests' reaction and remained eating peacefully.

"How is the soup?" Kori asked, her innocent eyes wide in curiosity. Not willing to hurt her feelings, the boys immediately replied back.

"Amazing!" Gar responded, showing an insincere smile which unsuccessfully covered his disgusted expression.

"One of a kind." Dick supplied, nodding. Gar lightly chuckled at Dick's comment, agreeing that Kori's soup is one of a kind, although not in a good way.

Kori seemed pleased with their feedback and looked at Victor for his reaction. Victor's face was scrunched up in discomfort, but he cleared his throat to speak, trying to feign a smile. "So good…" Victor said, holding up a thumbs up. "So good… I'm already full! No need to feed me anymore, Kori, I'm good."

This made Kori jump in glee and excitement. "Glorious! Let me do the dish washing. May you please retreat back to the living room? You can watch the shows of the television, if you'd like!"

This time, Victor sat on the floor, leaving more room for Gar and Dick to sit. The TV was showing some outdated sitcom which Gar swore he had seen when he was in third grade. Dick cleared his throat, and started speaking up.

"So, Vic, where are you from?" Dick asked, and Victor swiftly replied, eyes still stuck on the screen.


Dick seemed content with Victor's reply, and proceeded to ask Gar, who was twitching uncomfortably in his seat. "Gar, where are you from?"

"Steel City." Gar replied back, hoping that Dick was satisfied with Gar's answer like he was satisfied with Vic's. Unfortunately, Dick wasn't, and decided to pester Gar with more questions.

"What about your ethnicity?"

"My what?"

Dick sighed, and Gar swore that behind his sunglasses, Dick was rolling his eyes. "Your race, something like that."

"Half American, half South African," Gar said. "Why are you asking?"
"Well, don't be offended," Dick began. "but you don't look like you're from Steel City. Steel people look more work-oriented, and I can tell from a distance that you don't really fit the quota. Of course, I might be wrong. Where else have you lived? Twin City? Groves Peak? Lakers Town? Perhaps Lakers Town, you seem to fit the type."

What aggravated Gar was that all the places Dick mentioned were once places Gar lived in and once loved. He remembered Lakers Town, the city he was in before he moved to Steel City, and was hit by painful memories of saying goodbyes to friends he had grown so attached to. And inevitably, he was hit by memories of Tara.

Tara.

Tara was once his girlfriend during his time in Lakers Town. Both instantly got along with each other and enjoyed each other's presence the more and more they hung out. He remembered the way Tara's face broke down when Gar told her he was moving to Steel City, which was on the other side of the country. Tara rejected his idea of having a long distance relationship, and ever since the two broke off all communications with each other.

In his second semester of sophomore year, Gar added Tara on Facebook, only to see that Tara has moved on. Gar and Tara have rarely spoken to each other unless it's one of their birthdays, and Gar couldn't imagine getting back with Tara with who he is now, but Gar couldn't help but think how things could've gone differently if he didn't move from Lakers Town at all.

Pushing back his painful memories of the past and replacing it with fury, Gar stared daggers at Dick, who was scrutinizing Gar's expression. "Who do you think you are!" Gar exclaimed, and it was enough to make Victor look away from the television screen and gape in shock. "Like, honestly, what – what gives – I'm come from Steel City and I'm half South African, isn't that enough!"

By that moment, Kori stepped out of the kitchen, only to see the boys heated up by either anxiety or anger. Attempting to dissipate the tension, she rushed to the couch, and smiled nervously. "Hungry, is it not? I have dessert!"

She pointed to the direction of the kitchen, and Victor, who was extremely surprised by how Gar's angry attitude mismatched his generally easy going personality, rushed to the kitchen for closure. Kori held her hands together in apprehension, and watched as Dick stared at Gar astoundedly.

"Dick? Gar?" Kori said, trying to grab their attention, but Gar only shook his head and stood up. He thanked Kori for the meal, and headed home. He ignored the intrusive questions his adoptive mother, Rita, asked him as he walked to his room, and made a point not to talk to him by slamming his door. Gar was acting foolish, sure, but it was only because he detested being reminded of his past. He looked around his room and paid attention to how his room was covered with unpacked boxes and suitcases. Gar didn't see the need to unpack his belongings and place it into the drawer Rita bought for him because in the end, he was sure he was leaving Jump City once the year ends. Sighing deeply, he jumped on his bed, and began playing games on his phone until it ran out of battery, and eventually, he fell into a deep slumber.

The next day, Gar felt undoubtedly guilty by how he treated Dick, and even though he still felt angered by it, he knew that it would probably be the best if he apologized to Dick. Fortunately, before classes have begun, Gar found Dick by the lockers and started apologizing. He made sure to pinpoint how he was uncomfortable talking about his past, and that he wasn't usually angry.
"...So, yeah, I'm sorry. Hope you can forgive me?" Gar said unsurely, rubbing the back of his neck. To his surprise, the corners of Dick's mouth turned upwards, and Gar instinctively reflected Dick's expression, smiling back.

"Yeah, I forgive you," Dick said. "I'm also sorry on how I was interrogating you. I'm just a curious person."

Gar laughed slightly and nodded. "Yeah, I agree," Gar paused, thinking of what to say next. "We cool?"

"Oh, definitely," Dick agreed. "Oh, on Saturday do you want to join us for a movie night? I'll message you my address."

"Of course!" Gar beamed, happy that his friendship with Dick was more or less reconciled. "Hey, I gotta go, World History."

"Yeah, same here, I need to change to PE uniform." Dick said, and turned around but not before saying bye. Gar watched as Dick walked away, and turned on his heel, heading to his World History class. Unbeknownst to Gar, a hooded girl was walking opposite the direction in which Gar was walking, and was bound to crash one another.

"Oh!" Gar exclaimed, however he was more affected by not knowing where he was heading to than the pain of crashing into another person. Gar looked up, and was inevitably shocked when he finds out that the person was none other than Raven Roth. Intimidated by her cold stare, he began blurting out apologies profusely.

"I'm so sorry. I really am. I didn't look at where I was, and I'm so so sorry, please forgive me?" To his annoyance, Raven merely stared at him, and walked away.

What's her problem? Gar was certainly irritated by her lack of response, and ran to her, grabbing her arm. Raven seemed surprise by Gar's action, and turned her head around, causing her hoodie to drop. Gar took special attention to how her heart-shaped face was now covered by a scowl. "Are we cool? I really am sorry."

He hoped that Raven would at least give him an answer, and she did, but not in the way he expected. It took a while for her to regain her composure, but once she did, she pushed Gar on the chest, commanded him to leave her alone, and walked away. Gar did nothing but stare as he tried to regain his thoughts straight.
"Garfield Logan!"

Upon hearing his name being called, Gar slowly looked up from the score sheet he received earlier in Art History. Gar scored seventy-six percent, which was enough for Gar as he knew he didn't put much effort into presenting his ideas. In addition, Gar was pleased to know that Mr. Simms had a conscience, as the said teacher allowed Kori to present a second time. Much to Kori's exuberance, she scored a ninety-three percent. Regaining his focus, Gar folded the score sheet to see Karen with a less than pleased expression. Gar swallowed, fear growing as he watched Karen's foot impatiently tapping on the floor.

"Uh, hi Karen!" Gar smiled cheerfully, hoping that Karen's frightening expression would diminish. To his dismay, it didn't and it only made Karen more angry than she was before.

"Oh, so you have time to talk to me now!" Karen exclaimed, crossing her arms. Gar did nothing but gape, confused on what Karen's deal was. After a few moments of contemplating, Gar hadn't a clue.

Sensing Gar's cluelessness, Karen huffed and rolled her eyes. "You're all too busy!"

Gar scratched his head, and thought about what he has done recently. Other than working half-heartedly on his homework, playing video games and watching movie marathons with the others, Gar did not do much. Gar didn't join any extra-curricular activities either, so Karen's claim only made him more perplexed.

"I don't get what you mean..." Gar finally said which prompted Karen to shake both of her fists angrily.

"At lunch," Karen seethed, and Gar slowly took a step back to avoid any possible physical harm that Karen might cause. "I sit alone. You and Victor, are busy sitting with Dick and Kori. Which is fine, you know? Like, you're not entitled to sit with me all the time. But it would be really darn nice if you guys, oh, I don't know, tell me about it, so that I wouldn't be sitting alone on the lunch table waiting for you guys and simultaneously looking like a fool!"

"Hold on--"

"And it's not only you two! As we all know, Garth is too busy with his swim schedule that it's like he bought his own home nearby the swimming pool! It's not like, I can go to him and demand that he sits with me, because I would look like an imbecile, and not to mention, a needy whiny little princess. I don't need to be a reincarnation of Kitten the Bridezilla!"

"Uh, what's an imbecile--"

"Oh, and let's talk about Wally. We all know he loves lunch, but for some reason, he's not sitting with me! You know what he's doing?" Gar opened his mouth to answer, but Karen cut him off. "No, you don't know, Gar, because you're too busy with your new friends to even care about your old friends!"

"Karen--"

"Wally says that he's on a 'quest of love'! What does that mean, I don't know!" Karen looked as if she wanted to say more, but she regained composure of herself and took a deep sigh. "I know that I'm the only girl in our friend group but... I don't know. Do you guys trust me so little?"
"Karen, no!" Gar said, and placed both of his hands on her shoulders. "Didn't Victor tell you about Dick and Kori?"

"No, he didn't. I mean, I wouldn't be this angry if he did."

"I thought he did," Gar mumbled, rubbing the back of his neck. "Even so, it was uncool of us not to tell you... I'm sorry. But, you can't possibly sit alone in the cafeteria. Be honest."

Karen looked sheepish as Gar removed his hands from her shoulders. She shrugged, and mumbled to herself. "I do sit with a few people..." When Gar asked who does she sit with, Karen's face flushed. "The twins. Mas y Menos. The one on the freak list."

"Dude, so what about the freak list! Kori's on it and she's cool!" Gar pointed out, and Karen looked away. "And is Mas y Menos their real name?"

"Uh, I don't know. Their last names are Rodriguez, though. But you know what's so aggravating about them?"

"No?"

"They only speak Spanish in casual situations!" Karen said. "They understand English, but refuse to speak it unless you're a teacher or something. It's so annoying. I can't understand them at all."

"Look," Gar said. "You don't have to isolate yourself because things are not going the way as it usually does. Come hang out with us in lunch. Dick invites us over his place to have a movie marathon every Friday, and let me tell you, his place is huge!"

Karen smiled slightly, but her expression still looked more forlorn than cheerful. "I'd love to, but you know... I think I grew a soft spot for the twins," Noticing Gar's confused expression, Karen quickly explained herself. "Even though I don't understand a word they say... It's their actions, you know? They're kind of funny, and they try to comfort me at times... I don't know, I think I feel like a mother with them."

"Okay, mommy," Gar cooed which caused Karen to scowl. "It's not like we're restrictive or anything, the twins are allowed to come with too."

"Really?"

"Yeah, of course!" Gar assured, and held up a thumbs up. "The more the merrier, right? We'd love more people to come."

Gar's statement has been true for everyone but one, that one being Dick. Dick didn't mind the extra people coming but what he did mind was how Mas and Menos mostly captured Kori's attention. To Dick's chagrin, Kori was the only one who understood Spanish, therefore she was the only one who understood Mas and Menos as well. Upon meeting Kori, the twins immediately became attached to her, and it was undoubtedly obvious the two grew an instant crush. While the twins got along with each other perfectly, the two couldn't help but argue for Kori's attention.

Kori, however, remained oblivious to the twin's sudden infatuation with her, and treated both of them more or less the same. Victor was quick to notice Dick's agitated expression and was sure to poke fun of it.
"Whoa," Victor said, fanning his nose. "Is it me or does it smell like jealousy here?"

Dick immediately glared at Victor and immediately responded. "The exit is right there," Dick said, pointing to the staircase that led to the main door. "Want me to take you there?"

"Are you two together?" Karen asked, watching Kori and the twins enter the kitchen, which aggravated Dick even more.

Flustered by Karen's abrupt question, Dick blushed and immediately ducked his head. Gar, who was previously in the restroom, entered the living room and noticed Dick's sheepish appearance. "So," Gar said, taking a seat next to Dick. "What happened?"

"Nothing happened." Dick said, but Victor waved him off.

"The boy wonder here's jealous of the two gemelos stealing his girlfriend's attention."

"Hey--"

"Chill," Gar said, spreading his arms across the back of the couch. "Not like she likes them or anything, right?"

"There'll be no instances of 'chilling' because I don't like her." Dick huffed, and right at that moment, Kori walked in the living room from the kitchen, with the twins following her like a lost puppy.

"Friend Dick doesn't like whom?" Kori asked, plopping herself to the seat next to Karen. Gar and Victor looked at each other with a mischievous glint in their eyes as Dick covered his face with his hands.

"You!" Gar and Victor said simultaneously, and Kori gasped, while Karen shook her head and Dick began frantically shaking his head.

"If you don't like me," Kori said, eyes focused on Dick. "Then why am I here on the night of the movies with you?"

Gar lost it when he saw Dick's disconcerted expression as he waved his hands, fumbling to get the right words out of his mouth. At the corner of Gar's eyes, Karen was rolling her eyes but that didn't stop her from slightly smiling at how ridiculous the situation seemed. Next to him was Vic, who was also losing it as his laughter eventually led him to literally roll on the floor. Despite how loud the situation was, however, the twins remained in their own world, observing each piece of popcorn before devouring it.

"I--"

"You what?"

"Kori, it's not like that--"

"Like what? I shall go out of your house, if you'd like then!"

"No, don't! It's true that I don't like you, but that's in the romantic sense!"

Silence from Kori followed, and after a brief but excruciatingly awkward silence between the two of them, Kori spoke up. "I am not worthy of your romantic feelings, then?"

"What--"
But before Dick could say anything else, Kori held up a hand and stood up from her seat, straightening her skirt. As she motioned towards the staircase, the twins placed the popcorn bowl on the coffee table and immediately followed. Dick, too occupied with what has happened, did nothing but stare, while Gar and Victor looked at each other, hinting that perhaps their pranks may have gone overboard.

Karen stood up from her seat, and walked towards Kori. "Hey, Kori," Karen said, lightly grabbing Kori's wrist which prompted her to turn around, revealing her less than amused expression. "This is all just a misunderstanding, and we're already here! We've already picked the movie together, right?" Kori nodded, remembering how the first thing she and Karen conversed about were chick flicks, something Kori had little to no knowledge about. "If the boys annoy you again, we could just kick their butts and leave, alright?"

Karen's words of reassurance was quick to bring a joyful gleam in Kori's eyes, and the redhead girl nodded, following Karen as they both walked back to the sofa where they were previously sitting. Mas and Menos looked at each other with a confused look on their faces, but after a few seconds, the two merely shrugged and followed Kori as well.

"You know," Karen said, adjusting her seat on the couch. Her eyes was directed at Dick, and he was apprehensive on whether or not Karen would comment on what happened earlier. To his relief, she didn't, and she instead asked something unexpected. "Your house is really big, but empty. Do you live with anyone else?"

Dick shrugged, reaching over the coffee table to get the bowl of popcorn that the twins left. "I live with my guardian. Technically, my brother lives here as well but I never see him around."

"Your brother?" Victor asked, and Dick nodded, plopping the bowl on Gar's lap. "I didn't know you had any."

"He's adopted," Dick clarified, and Gar felt a pang of nostalgia as he remembered how he was adopted. Due to an accident over a safari trip, both Gar's biological parents died, leaving him in the hands of his adoptive parents, Rita and Steve. Admittedly, Gar didn't feel any remorse over his biological parents due to the fact that he was a toddler when it happened, but Gar still wondered how his life would be if the accident didn't happen. "His name is Jason," Dick said, causing Gar to snap out of his thoughts. "He goes to Jump City High, freshman year."

Karen nodded, seemingly uninterested at the mention of someone in a lower grade level than her. "What are we watching today?"

"Oh!" Kori piped up. "How about the Mean Girls?"

"Do you even have that movie?" Victor asked, and Dick shrugged in response. "You do? No way. No way you have it."

"No way we're watching it!" Gar supplied and Karen glared at him. "How about something cool, like Transformers 4?"

"Boring," Karen said, and Kori nodded in response, although it was obvious she had limited knowledge of the Transformers movie. "That movie was three hours! And I slept in the cinema."

"Yeah," Victor responded, scowling his eyes. "With the ticket I bought you?"

Karen dismissed Victor's complain and stood up to find a movie worth watching. As she looked through the movie rack, Karen was bombarded with movie requests of different genres. Sick of the
ruckus, Karen grabbed a copy of Mean Girls and popped it in the DVD player.

"You're joking," Victor deadpanned, as he watched the TV screen light up. Karen ignored the protests that stemmed from the boys side, and plopped herself back to her seat. Although Victor did nothing but blurt out objections or criticism, he couldn't deny that he actually liked the movie, much to Karen's delight and Victor's chagrin.

"Today we're doing passes! Partner up! I'll be in the office, doing teacher stuff… You know how it goes."

As soon as the coach left the gym for his office, Wally instantly rushed to Gar's side with a basketball in his hands. Gar noticed that Wally's red hair was frazzled and that his PE uniform was evidently stained dark. Deciding not to comment on his friend's look, Gar smiled and took the basketball from Wally.

Gar had no problem with sports but one thing he always hated, other than Math, was PE. It wasn't as if he was awful at PE; in fact, Gar often excelled in the class. It was more of the fact that Gar felt mostly disturbed when forced to perform sports he didn't care about. Not to mention, Gar detested the whole ordeal of having to change outfits for just one subject. Gar wasn't particularly a neat person, and since it was more or less mandatory to keep one's body hygienic after PE class, it was easy for him to hate the class.

As Wally rambled on and on about how his day went, Gar noted the different types of people in his gym class. There were the overzealous students who felt that every move anyone else made was a trigger for competition. Gar had no problem with competition, but he didn't think that something as lame as a gym class should qualify as the Olympics or something. Then there were the apathetic gym students who puts minimal effort in their work, claiming that PE class required too much effort. Next were the students who deemed gym class synonymous to 'break time', and therefore were infamous for their tendencies to slack. These students see PE as fun and games, and do not take anything seriously.

"...So yeah, I'm in a quest for love, and I need your help." Wally said, and it successfully diverted Gar's attention from two mismatched basketball partners on the other side of the court back to him.

"Help for what?" Gar asked, not realizing that his question made it obvious he wasn't listening to Wally. He remembered Karen complaining about Wally and his ambiguous journey for something, but Gar didn't have the chance to ask Wally himself.

Wally rolled his eyes, evidently annoyed that Gar wasn't listening earlier, thus wasting Wally's time.

"Weren't you listening?" When Gar shook his head as a response, Wally pushed the basketball that Gar was hugging, injuring the new student's torso. "On Friday, my dream girl is attending this concert in this club with one of her friends. That's where you step in - you become the distraction for her friend while I get to spend a lovely night with her."

"Why would I agree?" Gar said adamantly, tossing the basketball to Wally's hands. "Besides, aren't you the one who ditched Karen at lunch for this dumb 'quest'?"

"Well, we have that in common," Wally retorted, passing back the basketball back to Gar. "Don't you think? Besides, I told Karen myself that I'd be busy, but you didn't say anything to her. Plus, you're the only friend I have who's new, therefore isn't prone to being biased."
"Actually, dude," Gar said, continuing the passes. "Victor and I made up with her last week. We invited her to a movie night along with some other people in our grade. And enough about Karen - why would I help you?"

"Because if you do," Wally cooed, putting emphasis on the last word as he tossed the ball back to Gar. "You get a gift coupon from the game store." To prove his point, Wally pulled out a folded piece of paper from his pocket. When he opened the paper, it was indeed a coupon, albeit a bit torn at the edges, but still enough to convince Gar.

"No way," Gar said, giving the ball to Wally in exchange for the coupon. "How did you get this?" Wally shrugged and told him he had connections. "Okay, I'll help, but not if you don't tell me who this dream girl is!"

Wally contemplated on whether or not he should tell Gar, and gave in after he realised that he trusted Gar enough. "Fine. But no judging!" When Gar nodded, Wally looked away, looking apprehensive. "It's just… This girl's a puzzle, and I want to solve it. She thinks she's mean and vindictive, and she probably is, but she has a heart of gold somewhere, and I will find it, you know? Plus, she's really good-looking~"

"You know," Gar said, interrupting Wally's description of his crush. "I don't care about the reasons why you like her. I want to know who is the person you like."

Wally dribbled the basketball for a few seconds, then tossed the ball back to Gar. "No judging."

"I already told you I won't!" Gar exclaimed, hitting his friend with the ball.

Wally sighed a breath and looked at Gar with wide and expectant eyes. Gar already had a few girls in his mind but Wally's answer was off the charts.

"It's Jinx."

"Jinx?" Gar asked, and Wally nodded, the corners of his mouth slightly curving up. "But, I thought she hates you!"

Wally nodded again, his slight smile forming into a wide grin. "She does! But that will change on Friday, right?"

Gar shared no mutual classes with Jinx and therefore the only knowledge he had of her were mostly rumours. Now that he thought about it, it made sense that Wally asked Gar for help. Victor and Jinx used to date in freshmen year, and are now academic rivals. Karen had no tolerance for her and it would be absurd of Wally to ask Karen for help. Garth was too busy to help with social problems. In addition, Wally's other friends were influenced by Kitten's freak list to even consider Jinx as a normal human being. Taking these facts into account, it was obvious why Wally chose Gar instead of his other friends that he knew longer and better.

"Wait," Gar said, a thought suddenly popping into his head. It was a well-known fact that Jinx is part of the freak list, and while people on the list get shunned, Gar didn't know if the people who are affiliated with the freaks get shunned too. It wasn't like Gar was flaunting his new friendship with Kori, so not many knew about it. Dating someone from the freak list, however, would surely get attention. "But she's in the freak list."

"So?"

"Isn't it like, an unspoken rule that those not in the freak list aren't allowed to mingle with the freak list?"
"To hell with those rules!" Wally said, crossing his arms petulantly. "Not like I'm attending the party anyway. Jinx is so much more interesting than a dumb party hosted by a dumb blonde."

"Hey," Gar said, reaching for his blond locks and running his fingers through it. "I'm not dumb! And they're mostly green highlights."

Wally didn't look convinced, and he smirked at Gar, who was red by humiliation. "Whatever. So, you're saying yes, right?" Gar nodded. "Good. Meet me by the lockers after school on Friday."

And by that, the bell rang.

Friday came, and Wally felt a mix of excitement and anxiety rushing through his veins. Luckily for Wally, he was able to get two entrance passes to the club from an upperclassman, who dealt with club and concert tickets. Wally stared at himself on the mirror, pondering whether or not he should change to something more romantic. After a few moments, Wally thought that Jinx wasn't the type to care about exterior looks, and he settled on the half-hearted effort he put into using a sweatshirt and jeans.

"What perfume should I use?" Wally asked Gar, who was lying on Wally's bed, playing with his phone. Put off by the question, Gar lowered his phone to show his unamused expression.

"I can't believe you just literally asked that," Gar said, positioning himself to sit down. He put his phone in between his crossed legs and scoffed. "Just AXE yourself, then done. I want to go to the game store, like, right now."

Wally took Gar's advice and sprayed himself with AXE spray. After he was finished, he placed the spray can onto his desk, and plopped himself to his bed, causing Gar to stumble a bit. "We'll go there later, but for now, we have to go to the club. It's nine already!"

The ride to the club was filled with the two of them cracking more or less pathetic jokes, which prompted the bus driver to command them to shut up. Despite the glares that the driver shot the two of them, it didn't stop them from finding ways to continue joking around. In the end, both resulted into texting each other, then laughing after.

Once they reached the club, both Wally and Gar were surrounded by the dim atmosphere of the club, and were immediately met with stares from bystanders who probably thought that Gar and Wally were lost. Gar gulped, not liking how the club was too creepy for his tastes. On the other hand, Wally didn't seem to mind, as he was too occupied with his goal of finding the pink-haired anomaly.

"There she is..." Wally said, pointing to the bar. Gar looked at the direction to where Wally was pointing, and saw Jinx conversing with an unnamed male. Gar then looked back at Wally, whose jaw was clenched. "...With a guy. Billy Numerous."

"Uh, no offense to her or anything..." Gar said, rubbing the back of his neck. "But I thought she was single?"

"She is," Wally huffed, grabbing Gar's wrist and leading him to the bar. "You distract the guy, I get the girl."

"What!" Gar said, struggling to break free from Wally's grip, but to no avail. "I get stuck with the guy I barely know? Look at him! He's wearing a hat and sunglasses, he literally looks like a criminal! I don't want to get robbed!"
"Don't care, let's go." Gar whined and struggled, but in the end, he found himself standing awkwardly by the bar, with an unamused Jinx looking right through their eyes. Gar could tell that although Wally had undeniable feelings for Jinx, Jinx didn't feel the same.

"What are you doing here." It was meant to be a question, but her intonation made it apparent that she was seething, and therefore it sounded more like a sentence.

Wally, unfazed by Jinx's rage, simply smiled brightly. "To see you, of course," Wally grabbed her wrist, surprising Jinx. Another song was starting to begin, and Wally took this as his cue to leave. "I love this song!"

"Do you even know this so–"

"Let's dance!"

Gar watched as Wally dragged Jinx onto the dance floor, completely ignoring the protests that stemmed from the girl. A feeling of uneasiness hit him as he realised that he was left with Billy, whom Gar had no knowledge about. "Well," Billy said. "Didn't expect that."

"Are you two dating?" Gar asked, taking a seat next to Billy. To Gar's surprise, Billy started laughing. "What's so funny?"

"The fact that ya think I'm with a nutjob like her!"

Gar looked weirdly at Billy, who was still managing to recover from his fit of laughter. "So you guys aren't dating?"

"Nah," Billy waved Gar off. "Of course not. Y'all must be crazy to think so. No big deal, I live in the same apartment with her, she sometimes goes to parties, I tag along for the fun of it," Billy suddenly became quiet, then his eyes lit up. "Or to pick up the ladies, if ya know what I mean. Anyway - I understand the redhead, but why are you here?"

Gar rolled his eyes, and took a napkin which was lying right next beside him on the table. "Supposed to be a wingman, but I didn't know her friend would be a dude."

Billy nodded, and took a sip of his drink before talking. "Yeah, well, Jinx ain't much of a friendly person to girls. 'Sides, she mostly hangs out with my grade."

Billy's claimed caused Gar to raise an eyebrow. "Uh, my grade? Aren't we in the same grade?"

"Oh, yeah, you're new," Billy said, as if that solved every problem in the world. "I repeated seventh grade, and never bothered making friends in the grade I am now."

That made sense. Gar had no shared courses with Billy and the only times he has seen the guy is by passing. Now that he thought of it, Gar have never saw Billy hanging out with people from junior year; only upperclassmen.

Suddenly a revelation hit Gar. "Wait, if you're a repeat, then how does Kitten hate you?"

Gar's question caused Billy to groan, and before he spoke, he took a big gulp of his drink and slammed the glass onto the table. Gar found it remarkable how the mention of Kitten instantly gave away negative results. "Because I make fun of her. Duh! Spoiled hag had it in her, she deserved it! Okay, since ya new, let me tell you the deal with Kitten Walker. Anyone told ya yet?"

When Gar shook his head no, Billy hummed in agreement, as if he knew why the new student had
The name seemed familiar to Gar. If Gar remembered correctly, Drury Walker was the owner of the Walker Bioengineering Enterprises, which dealt with biological experiments, particularly gene mutation. "Wait, are you saying—"

"Daddy of Kitten Walker," Billy said, and Gar's eyes widened. No wonder Kitten was so rich – her father was greatly influential. "The guy raised her to be a spoilt brat. If somethin' ain't revolvin' around her, then she throws a temper tantrum. Once someone wore the same pink shirt as she did. Poor girl got half of her hair shaved off."

"No way."

Billy nodded sadly. "Way. Horrible person, that Kitten. I know ya ain't in the list, but trust me, it ain't worth it. I've seen the horror; I attended Jump City Middle School with her along with a few miserable peeps."

"Like?"

"Well there's Joey, Toni, Kole… Oh, yeah, and Raven."

The mention of Raven's name made Gar's ears perk up. "Raven? Raven Roth?" When Billy nodded, Gar spoke again. "Dude, what's the deal with her? She's so… Creepy."

"I don't know," Billy shrugged and looked at his watch. "Raven tops the list every year. Heck, Raven and Kitten have been around each other since preschool. If Kitten had a freak list every year of her life, Raven would top it."

"But why? Why does Kitten hate her so much?"

"Nobody knows," Billy confessed. "Rumor has it that Raven did somethin' bad to her in their childhood years, but it's been so long, can't she get over it, ya get me? Oh yeah, back in eighth grade, Kitten told everyone that she was movin' out of town, and I remember Raven being so happy – she smiled! I know, impossible, right? But on the first day of high school, Kitten surprised everyone, and from then on, she managed to ruin Raven's high school life.

"There was this really bad rumor in freshman year that Raven killed her own mother," Billy said, and Gar gasped lightly. Of course, Gar couldn't deny that Raven made Gar outright scared, he knew that Raven didn't deserve the horrible things Kitten have done to her. Even though Raven might've done something to Kitten in their childhood years, Gar was sure it wasn't something huge and that Kitten was blowing things out of proportion. Raven needed someone to make sure that she was okay, that she wasn't a freak like everyone believes her to be, and Gar was determined to make that someone himself.

Mondays have always been the day Gar dreaded the most. He had English first period, and he was determined to say at least a greeting to Raven. As he walked inside the room, he saw Raven in the
back of the room, attention fully diverted to the thick book she was reading. He headed towards her
desk, only to be stopped by a hand gripping his wrist.

"Uh," a voice said, and when Gar turned around, he found that it was Isaiah holding his wrist. "You
sit here."

When Gar saw how Isaiah pulled out the chair next to him in an expectant way, Gar struggled on
what he should do next. Finally deciding on an option, he sat on the chair next to Isaiah, thinking that
even if Gar approached Raven, Raven wouldn't be happy about it either.

The room was filled with mindless chatter and it immediately stopped when Mrs. Prince walked into
the room. "Okay," Mrs. Prince said, successfully grabbing the attention of her students. "There's
going to be a project in pairs."

A couple of 'yeah's and 'woohoo's clouded the room, as the class scattered to find their own partners.
Gar looked at Isaiah and smirked, who was smirking in return. At least finding a partner for Gar
wasn't difficult.

The class was instantly bombarded with laughter as the students became comfortable with the pairs
they have chosen. Everyone was entrapped in their own business until Mrs. Prince cleared her throat,
and grabbed everyone's attention. She pulled out a small bowl with pieces of folded paper, and gave
it a little shake. "Joke's on you, class. Sorry to burst your bubble, but I will be assigning the pairs."

has a student's name written on it. I'll be pulling out two names, and whatever those names are, they
will be assigned as pairs. Now, first… Garfield Logan."

Gar looked at Isaiah with a worried expression, and Isaiah returned the look. It wasn't that Gar hated
his class, but he'd rather be paired up with someone he knew more than someone he didn't. He held
his breath and anticipated for the next name to be called. "Gar, you're with…" Mrs. Prince shuffled
her fingers through the pieces of paper, and eventually settled on one. "Raven Roth."

The class was silent, and Gar looked at the back of his class, only to see Raven looking back at him
with an apathetic look on her face.
Gar sat still as he continued listening to Mrs. Prince call out the pairs. Everyone seemed pretty satisfied with who they ended up with, and Gar had to restrain himself from rolling his eyes when Isaiah, who got paired up with Toni, boasted how his partner was 'smart' and therefore he didn't have to do anything. Gar turned his head to check on Raven once again for closure, and felt himself slightly perturbed when Raven looked straight back at him with a glare. After a few short seconds, Gar quickly turned his head back to the board, ignoring the strange looks from his friend next to him.

"Alright," Mrs. Prince said as she put the bucket on her desk. "You have the whole period to discuss this project with your partners, and I know many of you are thinking 'free period' right now, but no. I will check at the end of the class what progress have each of you made."

Mrs. Prince eyed the classroom carefully and gave a slight frown to those who looked indignant to her words before continuing. "What I require all of you to do is to pick any topic of your choice. It could be anything, really - skydiving, politics, animals… Anything as long as it is not profane. What I'd like you all to do with your topic is to create a video related to your topic, no less than two minutes but no more than five. Today is the first of September, and these videos should be done before the eighth, which is when you present the videos.

"The next day, each pair has to prepare an oral presentation for the class and a panel of judges. These judges will be teachers, I haven't decided whom. Most importantly, however, on the twelfth, you will all submit an individual reflective essay on your work. Yes, the time span is quite short," Mrs. Prince said as she eyed the corner of the room in which groans came from. "But as you all know, I do have a lot of projects planned up."

"Um," Kitten said, looking absolutely bored with the topic. "What is the point of this project?"

"I'll get back to that," Mrs. Prince said curtly, which caused Kitten to roll her eyes. "This project allows all of you to divulge deeper in a subject of interest. Say, you want to be a lawyer, then this project is a perfect opportunity to develop your research skills. Not only that, all of you will inquire all the skills required in higher education, where you are expected to be more independent in your studies. And lastly, you will develop the skills to work with others and promote your self esteem."

Everyone seemed pretty satisfied with the teacher's points however Gar couldn't help but notice how everyone was paired up with someone they did not know well, which convinced Gar that Mrs. Prince didn't pick the pairs arbitrarily, but instead by choice.

"Mrs. Prince?" A boy in the corner piped up, and all eyes turned on him, causing him to cower in his seat. Mrs. Prince gave him a nod and the boy spoke again. "How do you ensure top marks?"

"Great question," Mrs. Prince responded, and some people sniggered at how much the boy seemed like an overachiever. "I would go over the rubric, but I'd like the rest of the class time to be given to you. The rubric will be posted online in the school website, check it tonight. As for now, I'd like all of you to sit with your pairs and discuss your project. You may begin."

Everyone started moving around the class to go near their partners. Gar watched as Isaiah walked to the front, casually grabbing a seat next to Toni. Sighing, he turned around and faced Raven. "Here?"

Gar mouthed to Raven, and Raven scowled.

"No," Raven mouthed back, and placed her hand to the desk next to her. "Here."
Groaning, Gar stood up and dragged his backpack to the back of the room, and reluctantly took a seat next to her. "I want video games." Gar said, turning his chair to face her. Raven stayed in place, but still managed to turn her head slightly in Gar's direction.

"Absolutely not," Raven seethed, and Gar groaned in response. "I'm not interested in the topic."

"Then what are you interested in?"

"Let's do something related to Psychology."

"Absolutely not," Gar mocked, which made Raven clench her jaw. Gar found Psychology uninteresting, as he found the whole subject mundane. Of course, Gar liked understanding people, but he felt that it shouldn't be one boring, ominous subject. "I'm not interested in Psychology as well. Let's do video games."

Raven glowered her eyes at Gar, and Gar immediately backed away a bit. "I don't want to repeat myself. I am not interested in video games, and that will not be our subject."

"Well, I'm not interested in Psychology either!" Gar retorted. Gar felt an argument coming up, and Gar loathed arguments but he felt the need to persuade Raven to his side. "I came up with my idea first!"

"That doesn't mean anything."

"First thought, best thought."

"Only if it's logical."

"Ugh!" Gar said, crossing his arms. The two remained silent for a short while until Gar got struck by an idea. Throughout his whole life, his adoptive parents always found it hard to settle on a conclusion due to their different mindsets. They would argue for so long until one day, they both decided to flip a coin to reach a decision. "You know what? Let's flip a coin." Gar suggested and immediately frowned once he saw Raven's skeptical look.

"You're going to rely on luck for a decision?" Raven asked dubiously. "No. We're going to rely on logic, not a stupid coin."

"Well this stupid coin," Gar said, pulling out his wallet from his pocket to retrieve a penny. "Will solve all our problems. No need for logic." Gar smirked to himself as Raven huffed. "You're unlucky, is it? That's why you don't want to rely on luck for a decision."

"You know what?" Raven said, turning her chair to Gar's direction so that they were now face to face. "Flip it. Heads."

"Fine," Gar said smugly and maintained his smug look until he realised what side of the coin Raven chose. "Hey, not fair! I was going to pick heads!"

When Raven nudged her head in his direction, Gar rolled his eyes and placed the coin on his pointer finger and flipped it with his thumb. Both watched the coin get tossed up into the air and to their ultimate dismay, the coin ended up landing on the far end of the room, and Gar and Raven didn't do anything but stare.

"Flip another," Raven instructed, and Gar shook his head vehemently. "What?"

"I'm not flipping another coin, it's your turn to sacrifice your own money!"
"Yeah, well, I left my wallet in my locker," Raven admitted, and Gar muttered a few swear words to himself. "We're doing Psychology."

"Fine," Gar said, and when Raven threw him a look of surprise, Gar resumed speaking. "But only if we include video games in it as well."

Raven was silent for a moment before she began speaking. "Combine the two topics together?" Gar nodded. "That's not a bad plan, I suppose. Psychological effects of video games?"

"Yeah, sure, whatever," Gar said. "Can you write it down?"

"On it," Raven said as she began writing on her notebook. "Let's plan the storyboard. I was thinking of a scenario where I'm a psychiatrist and you're the patient, and we discuss your 'addiction' to video games."

"Dude, I don't want to act as if I'm mental or anything."

"You don't even have to act," Gar heard Raven mumble to herself, and scowled, but he chose not to say anything. "Do you have any ideas, then?"

"Cosplay," When Raven glowered his eyes at him, Gar was quick to react. "Hear me out! We dress as video game characters or something and we talk about our topics in character. How cool would that be!"

"Sure," Raven said, and Gar was hyped up for a second until he realized she was being sarcastic. "Let me just exchange my dignity for a costume to wear in that splendid idea of yours."

"We're never going to get a storyline," Gar moaned, and Raven sighed, dropping her pen on top of her notebook. Gar watched as Raven bit the bottom part of her lip, watching the clock pass by. Turning around to see the clock, Gar found out that they had forty minutes left till the class ends. "Thought of anything?"

"Animation? We both don't have to be in the video and I think it would be a fun thing to do."

"No, that takes way too much effort and time!"

"How about," Raven began. "I pretend I'm your mother and I try to stop you from gaming, there I could talk about the negative effects about gaming, and you, as the son, try to convince me that video games aren't so bad and bring up the positive effects about video games."

Gar raised his eyebrows, completely bought with Raven's idea. It wasn't a bad idea, and in fact he thought that it would go incredibly well. Both could argue the different sides of video games and successfully bring their point across. Gar nodded to himself, and pointed on Raven's notebook, silently instructing her to write the idea down. "Okay, so, you're going to be calling my name for dinner and I won't reply to you and you have to check up on me, and turns out I'm gaming. Like that?"

Raven nodded as she continued writing on her notebook. "I get angry at you for not responding to me because you're too busy gaming and I go over the negative effects of video games. After that you try to argue about the positive. In the end, both of us have dinner and we tell the audience to mind their addiction to video games or something."

"Yeah, that's cool. Let's write the script." Gar said, and Raven nodded, pulling out her laptop from her bag. The two finished with their rough draft ten minutes before the end of class, and Gar was undoubtedly relieved when he realized that they finished just in time for Mrs. Prince's check ups.
"Raven and Garfield," Mrs. Prince said as she tapped twice on Raven's desk. "Tell me what both of you have done."

"We finished the rough draft of the script," Raven said, and Gar sighed in ease when he saw Mrs. Prince nodding in approval. "Now we're discussing filming dates."

"Very good," Mrs. Prince said. "I look forward to seeing the end result."

"Thank you." Raven and Gar said simultaneously, and Mrs. Prince walked to the pair next to them. "Filming dates?" Gar asked once Mrs. Prince was occupied with the other group.

Raven nodded, and pulled out her phone to check her calendar. "I'm busy with after school courses in Tuesday to Thursday. The rest of the week I'm free. What about you?"

"Uh, I can't do the project today," Gar lied, and he felt uneasy once the lie slipped out of his mouth. He had a reason for lying, however - Gar simply didn't want to work on the project on a Monday, which is a school night. "Friday?"

"Friday's good, how about Saturday?" When Gar nodded, Raven continued speaking. "We do all video-related activities on Friday and Saturday and if time permits, we'll work on the presentation on Saturday but if not, we continue on Sunday."

Gar grimaced at her plans. He knew that his weekend would inevitably be blown away but having to spend three days with Raven felt very cumbersome. Although he went along pretty decently with Raven, he still can't deny that Raven's mysterious aura creeped him a lot. Gar nodded in fake approval, knowing that whatever he said against her would turn out into another unwelcome argument. "My house?" Gar asked, hoping that Raven would say no, but he knew that in the end Raven would say yes because it was very unlikely Raven would let him in his house.

"Yeah," Raven agreed and Gar inwardly groaned. "Your number?"

"I forgot, and my phone's dead," Gar sheepishly admitted. "Just add me on Facebook."

The bell rang as Raven successfully added Gar as a friend on Facebook. Once she was done, both of them left the room without saying goodbye.

Wally was oblivious to many things, but even he realised how badly his last encounter went with Jinx in the club.

After unsuccessful attempts to persuade Jinx to go on a date with him, Jinx inevitably punched Wally in the face and stormed off the club. Disappointed by the lack of progress, Wally headed to Gar and was ready to head home, however when he saw Gar busy talking with Billy, he decided to go home alone and leave Gar a text later.

Despite how obvious it was that Jinx hated Wally, Wally was still determined to take Jinx out on a date. He successfully obtained Jinx's schedule, which gave him everything he needed to know: her courses, her locker number and her extracurricular activities. When Wally boasted his so-called achievements to Gar, Gar immediately asked him if Wally found his 'achievements' creepy, if not pathetic. Wally was quick to reply.

"No."
Wally discovered that during his study hall, Jinx had French, which Wally felt was perfect to tail her into a date. Not only was France associated with romance, but asking out Jinx on a date in public, Wally felt, would surely highlight how serious he was into dating her.

"Uh, are you sure you want to do this now? The French teacher is quite scary." Gar said as he helped Wally adjust his tie. Wally was wearing a shirt and a pair of trousers with a rose tucked in the front pocket of the shirt. Wally felt as if he looked pretty spiffy himself, but Gar thought otherwise. Gar thought that Wally looked extremely ostentatious, if not a bit feeble.

"Yeah," Wally assured Gar, looking at himself in the bathroom mirror for closure. "I'll be fine, Gar, thanks. What do you have next?"

"English."

"Oh yeah," Wally said. "Mrs. Prince is going to introduce this project thing. You do nothing but talk to your partner and chill."

The bell rang, and it was a sign that Wally should get into business. "Wish me luck, Gar."

Gar scoffed and grabbed his bag from the floor. "Good luck."

Wally waited for the halls to empty out, and once it did he headed to the French class. He groaned at how the French class was at the fourth floor, since he was heading there from the first. Despite so, he continued walking and once he reached the fourth floor, he forgot all his pleasantries and kicked the class door open. On instant, everyone looked from the board to the frazzled red headed teenager panting by the door edge. Wally scanned the room and immediately felt his stomach fuzzy when he saw Jinx's unamused face glaring at him.

"Uh," Wally said awkwardly, entering the French room and closing the door behind him. So far, the French teacher remained silent and Wally was sure to make his point quick. "Excusez-moi, I'm on a quest for... amour."

The class chuckled at Wally's words. Jinx eyed Wally suspiciously and gave him a look that clearly asked what Wally was doing. Wally brushed her off, and walked towards her desk. He ungracefully tossed the rose onto her books, and he heard the class snort at his feeble attempts to woo Jinx.

"Monsieur Jinx," Wally said and the class inevitably roared into laughter. Jinx immediately facepalmed herself and the teacher rolled his eyes. "Wait. No. Mademoiselle?" Wally looked around for approval and felt immensely relieved when a group of girls nodded. "Uh, how do you say... Voudrais-tu sortir... Screw it. Jinx, will you go out with me!"

The class was filled with 'aww's and 'you go, dude!'s. Wally felt proud of himself for a second until Jinx seethed out a 'no'. But before Wally could ask why, the French teacher tapped him on the shoulder and Wally turned around to see an equally unamused, if not angered, teacher.

"Monsieur...?"

"Uh, Wally West, sir."

And with that, the French teacher began rambling in French, and Wally was immediately lost in his words. Once he was finished, he looked at Jinx for translation, who was smirking at him.

"Detention after school today," Jinx drawled out, and Wally felt as if his jaw dropped on to the grown. "And you're never going to score a date with me."
Wally was sure that the teacher did not say what Jinx last said, but he still felt pretty bummed out about simultaneously losing a date with Jinx and earning a detention instead.

"You called her 'monsieur'?” Gar asked, and Wally fumed, grabbing the bag of chips Gar was about to open. "Hey!"

"I don't take French, okay, jeez, give me a break!"

Gar laughed and snatched the bag of chips out of Wally's hands. "You could've sang to her in, like, Mandarin, or something." Gar said as he opened the bag open.

Wally scoffed and grabbed a chip out of the bag. "You and I both know that the only reason I survive in Mandarin class is Google Translate, and my charming skills." Wally pointed out, and he tossed the chip into his mouth.

"Too bad you had none of those when you were trying to win Jinx in her French class," Gar joked. "Sorry, too soon? I'll keep it to myself, mademoiselle."

"You're so funny, I forgot to laugh." Gar laughed to himself and Wally scowled, stealing the bag of chips from Gar's hands and pushing it into his bag. "I don't know what to do."

"You know promposals? Just do one or something for her. Without the prom thing of course."

With that, Wally felt as if a light bulb just appeared on top of his head. Standing from his seat, Wally took out the bag of chips from his backpack and tossed it to Gar's chest, causing some of the chips to fall apart. "Where are you going?" Gar asked as picked up some of the chips that landed on his shirt.

"I'm continuing my quest!" Wally exclaimed as he walked out of the cafeteria.

Wally made a mental note to thank Gar for his contributions and he headed to Kole's locker. Kole, being the only non Asian other than Wally in his Mandarin class, formed a slight camaraderie with the redhead. Although they did not speak on a daily basis, both of them relied on each other for homework help.

Despite the fact that what Wally wanted from her was not homework help, he was convinced that Kole would help him either way. He sighed in relief when he saw Kole idly standing by her locker playing with her phone, and he immediately greeted her once he was in her sight.

"Hey Kole," Wally said, and Kole waved a hello. "Say, can you help me after school?"

"Hmm," Kole muttered to herself, putting her phone in her pocket. "If I have to say the truth, you do sound a bit suspicious."

"It's nothing bad," Wally assured her. To convince her, Wally thought of the best thing that would best persuade her into helping him. "It involves baking. And ice cream."

To Wally's pleasure, Kole was completely interested and nodded her head. "Tell me."

"I cannot believe you baked a cake for her."

Wally scoffed as he walked out to the outdoor cafeteria with Gar by his side. Wally was carrying a box with ice cream cake inside, and on the cake were the words neatly written, thanks to Kole's help, "Will you go out on a date with me?". Wally was grateful that Kole was eager to help him earn Jinx
after listening to his story, and she helped him prepare a cake for her. According to Kole, the best way to a woman's heart is by sweets. Wally never heard of that phrase before, but he was hoping Kole was correct.

"Technically, I didn't bake it~"

"Yeah, Kole did," Gar pointed out. "But that's not the point. I didn't know you were friends with Kole."

"Eh," Wally shrugged. "Same race, same Mandarin class, you get the gist."

"She's there." Gar said, pointing to a big tree next to an empty bench. Wally looked at where Gar was pointing and saw that Jinx was eating alone under the tree. Smiling to himself, he regained his composure and began walking to the tree.

"Jinx," Wally said, sitting next to her on the grass. He ignored the strange looks everyone including Jinx gave him, and handed her the box. "First off, I want to say I'm sorry for what happened on Monday. That was totally, my fault, and not yours."

"I know."

"Second, I still want to go on a date with you," Jinx groaned and prepared to say something, but Wally quickly placed his finger on top of her lips. "Open the box."

He removed his finger off her lips and nudged her to open the box. Wary of what could be inside, Jinx slowly lifted the lid open and was incredibly underwhelmed when she saw the contents of the box. "Cake?"

"Yeah," Wally said. "I made it myself. Well, actually I had someone help me but, you get the point."

Jinx stayed silent for a moment and Wally felt his palms sweat. Questions of doubt began circling his mind and he feared the worst. After a few moments, which felt like a long excruciating eternity to Wally, Jinx cackled. Confused, Wally eyed Jinx suspiciously. "Jinx?"

"Oh, Wally," Jinx purred. "This would've been romantic, if I wasn't vegan." Standing, she closed the box and tossed it into his lap, and walked away. Wally groaned to himself and immediately messaged Gar.

"Fail."

Wally didn't have to wait long for a reply. "lol," his phone read. "wut happen?"

"She's VEGAN," Wally typed and pressed 'send'. He groaned at Gar's immediate response.

"lmfao. such a charmer lol"

Wally didn't bother replying and he stood up, heading to the indoor cafeteria. He quickly texted Kole a brief story of what happened, and groaned to himself along the way.

To Wally's relief, Gar was sitting alone on the benches, listening to music. Although Gar proved himself to be irrevocably useless, Wally still needed him as support. Fortunately for Wally, he devised a plan that involved no public embarrassment or wasted food, and only pure 'love'. Wally plopped himself on to the seat next to Gar, and Gar remained oblivious from his new company.
"Yo," Wally said, nudging Gar on the shoulder. Gar nodded his head to indicate that he was 'listening', but his attention was still diverted to his phone. Gar was listening to loud music and was playing a game on his phone, but that didn't stop Wally from talking to him. "I need your help."

When Gar nodded his head again, Wally took it as a cue to continue talking. "I'd do this myself but I don't have study hall today. Anyway, I need you to fill some flowers inside Jinx's locker as long as a letter I'll give you. Her code is 5-4-8, don't ask how I got it. When she opens it, I'll be right there asking her out on a date. It's perfect!"

Gar was silent for a moment and Wally tapped his shoulder to get a reply. "Flours?"

"Yeah, flowers."

Gar looked up from his screen and eyed Wally suspiciously. Wally was getting perturbed by Gar's confusion. "Um," Gar said, and Wally subconsciously leaned forward to edge out more responses from Gar. "Alright, but… Where do I get the… Flours?"

Wally sighed in relief, under the assumption that Gar understood his request. Wally took out his wallet and handed Gar ten dollars. Gar reluctantly accepted the cash and tucked it in his pocket. "You buy them in your study hall, but give me the receipt after," Wally said, and he handed the letter to Gar as well. "Try to be artistic in the placement… I mean you're taking Art History, you should know."

"Uh, yeah, I probably should."

Not wanting to disappoint his friend, Gar spent half of his free period convincing the cafeteria workers to give him bags of flour. He didn't want to get out of the school because he thought it would be pretty absurd to walk out of school just for flour. Although the workers weren't satisfied by Gar's constant pestering for flour, they relented and gave him two bags of flour.

Sighing, Gar walked to Jinx's locker and unlocked it with the code Wally gave him. Gar was more or less unsurprised with the contents of her locker; it had the obvious school necessities, but it also contained makeup and pictures of ominous looking music groups. Finally, Gar placed both bags of flour in front of her books and placed the letter in the middle.

"done", Gar texted to Wally.

"Great. Immediately rendezvous to her locker at lunch, sharp."

Lunch came and Wally immediately rushed to Jinx's locker, relieved that only Gar was there. "Success?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Great," Wally responded, and he rushed to open Jinx's locker. Gar stood next to him, anticipating Wally's response, and it was undeniably alarming once Wally reacted. "You're an idiot."

Gar was immediately thrown away by Wally's reply. "What?" Gar exclaimed. "I did what you asked me to!"

Wally slammed Jinx's locker shut and fully diverted his attention to Gar. "Flower, Gar, not flour!"

"I don't understand."

"Flower with the petals and stuff, not the one for food!"
"Oh," Gar said, and he crossed his arms. "In my defense, the way you say 'flour' is the same as you say 'flower'! You gotta be more clear about your wants, West!"

"Oh, for the mother of everything holy," Wally muttered under his breath. "I thought I didn't need to clarify the differences between a plant and powder. And by the way, where's the receipt?"

"I didn't receive one."

"What do you mean you didn't receive one?"

"I just asked the cafeteria workers for flour," Gar explained. "And then I used your money to bribe them."

"You moron!" Wally exclaimed, causing a few heads to turn at them. "Not only this mission is ruined, but you wasted my ten dollars!"

"Get in with the times, West," Gar retorted. "Flour is pronounced like flower."

Wally tried extremely hard not to harm his friend. "No, it's pronounced like floor."

"Flahr," Gar imitated, and Wally whacked the back of his head. "Why would they add the '-ur' in the end of the word, then? How do you pronounce the word 'our'? Like flower, right? Not 'flahr'."

"I hate you so much right now it's not–"

"Boys," A voice interrupted, and to both of the boys surprise, it was Jinx. "You're both being ridiculous."

"Jinx!" Wally exclaimed. "I, uh, I didn't expect you, uh, well I did, but–"

"I heard your argument, boys," Jinx said, and both of them did nothing but gape at each other. "In fact, Wallace," Gar had to stifle a snort to prevent getting hit by Wally. "I'll go on a date with you. Only because I find your misfortune so amusing."

"I – What?"

Jinx rolled her eyes. "I'll go on a date with you," Jinx repeated slowly. "Meet me at Jump City Mall, tomorrow, six o'clock. I'll text you the deets. Now, shoo!"

Wally was struck with awe and stayed in one place, gaping at Jinx with an open wide jaw. Sighing, Gar dragged Wally away, and once they were out of Jinx's sight Wally began jumping in joy.

"I love you!" Wally exclaimed and he unceremoniously threw a hug at Gar. "I could kiss you right now! Except I won't, because you're disgusting."

"Hey!"

"Oh Gar, you never wrong me. Help me prepare tomorrow."

"I can't," Gar said sadly. "I have to work on my English project tomorrow."

"Oh yeah," Wally said. "That reminds me, who's your partner?"

"Raven," Gar replied, and when he saw Wally's weirded out expression, Gar was quick to respond. "You know, she's not that bad, I guess."
"Yeah, whatever," Wally said, brushing Gar off. "I'll tell you what happens tomorrow. Wish me luck!"

"I'll wish it to you later."

Unbeknownst to the three of them, Kitten was eavesdropping the entire time, and was undeniably enraged by the interaction between the 'freaks' and those she deemed normal. Wally West, to her, was more or less okay in her list. She never had a problem with him except for the fact that when he talked, he was rushing his words. However, only now did she have a problem with him.

However, Kitten wasn't planning on relegating Wally to the freak list – that would be too rash of her. Instead, she's going to tamper with both of their feelings.

"Gemma," Kitten said to her friend next to her, who was occupied with organising her locker. "Tomorrow is Sabotage Day. Tell Selinda – this is going to be super hilarious."

Friday came, and Kitten rushed to the mall. She saw Wally waiting for Jinx at a table, and she immediately sat few tables away from him. Both she and Wally waited for five minutes until Jinx came. Kitten felt the need to mimic vomiting once she saw what Jinx was wearing.

"Hey," Kitten heard Jinx say. But before Wally could respond or Jinx could sit, Kitten immediately stood up from her seat, ran to Wally, and gave him a hug. "What's she doing here?"

"Uh–"

"Wally!" Kitten interrupted, and she smirked at Jinx's indignant expression. "I didn't think you would actually do it."

"Do what?" Wally said, confused. To his response, Kitten merely giggled and Jinx was even more angered.

"What's going on?" Jinx asked, but Kitten brushed her off.

"But thank you," Kitten said, and Wally's face screamed confusion. "You did exactly what I asked you to. You made Jinx think she was actually worthy of a date!"

Kitten didn't have to wait long for their responses. "What?!" Both Wally and Jinx exclaimed, though Wally's exclamation was masked with bafflement, and Jinx's with wrath.

"I can't believe you," Jinx seethed. "You must think you're all that, don't you? Guess what, you're not." Jinx pushed Wally hard enough for him to stumble, and she stormed out, muttering a string of curse words to herself.

"She's a freak," Kitten said when Wally looked at her in bewilderment. "You shouldn't rank yourself to her level."

"Freak or not," Wally said in a stoic voice. "I like her." With that, Wally ran off to chase after Jinx, however Kitten knew that Wally would never find her.

Kitten took out her phone and posed for a selfie on Snapchat. Smiling to herself, she typed in a caption and sent it to her friends Gemma and Selinda.

"Mission: Freak Jinx success!" The caption read.
The school library was empty once Gar walked in, and he felt a sense of strangeness cloud him. He seldom went to the school library, unless he wanted to work on something during his free period. Gar walked around the library in confusion, and was instantly relieved when he saw Raven sitting by a table, reading something that Gar presumed was the script.

"Sup," Gar greeted as he took a seat next to her. Raven nodded in response, and handed him a script in silence. "Thanks, Rae! Oh, I bought the cameras and all."

"Do not call me that," Raven chastised, and Gar fell silent. "We're going to the park. We'll be shooting the basketball scenes, and then we'll go to your house to shoot the next. Sounds good?"

"Yeah."

The walk to the park was more or less silent, the only apparent sound being the clangor of the camera's tripod against the sidewalk. Once they reached the park, Gar set up the camera and Raven took out the basketball from Gar's bag. She reviewed the script on her phone again before talking to Gar.

"Do you remember your lines?" Raven asked, and Gar gave her a thumbs up. "Good. Alright so go near that tree… And scream at it."

Gar did as he told, and Raven began recording. Along the course of Gar's aggression towards the tree, Raven began explaining about the negative effects of gaming, claiming that prolonged gaming could lead to aggression. Later on, the two filmed nearly half the script. And although Raven mostly had a scowl on her face and Gar mostly complained (except in front of the camera, where Gar said she would have to look more 'approachable'), both of them couldn't deny that they had fun.

"I'm hungry," Gar said, and Raven glanced at her phone to check the time. 17:58, it read. "Can we go to Pizza Corner or something?"

Raven reluctantly agreed, and the two headed to the restaurant. Along the course of ordering their meals, Gar was ultimately disgusted at how Raven ordered 'Meat Lovers Pizza'. "You're eating dead animals," Gar pointed out, to which Raven responded: "And you're eating dead plants, so we're both murderers."

"Let's play twenty questions," Gar said as both of them settled in their seats. Raven took a sip of her soda and Gar continued talking. "I'll start. What's your favorite color—"

"Who said I agreed to playing?" Raven asked, and she played with the straw in her cup.

"What, you want to stay silent the whole time we eat?"

"It's not like we're friends or anything," Raven spat, and Gar raised his eyebrows. Although Raven's words were meant to be menacing, Gar wasn't that affected by her words, as he guessed that she probably said those words to shut him up. "We're not obligated to speak to each other."

"Don't you get tired of being alone or something?"

"No," Raven said. "Actually, being around people makes me tired."

"How could it be tiring?" Gar said. "I love people! I love food too." With that, Gar took a big munch of his pizza, causing Raven to scrunch her face in disgust.
"You're one example why I don't like people." Raven said, and Gar rolled his eyes at her.

"Favorite color?" Gar tried asking again, and Raven sighed. Raven herself knew that she couldn't resist the look Gar was giving her, and if he really wanted to know about her favorite color, Raven guessed she would tell him.

"Purple," Raven replied, and was instantly bothered when Gar replied with a: "I knew it!". "If you knew, why did you ask?"

"Hey, you're playing the game now!" Gar pointed out, and Raven slightly reddened as she didn't realize that what she said to him was a question. "Because I wanted confirmation. Next question. Do you like my hair?"

"Oh, you're serious," Raven commented and Gar nodded his head happily. Raven eyed Gar's hair, noticing how his green streaks were lightly fading away and his blond roots were beginning to show. "I would much rather drink a bottle of soy sauce then have hair like yours."

"What!" Gar exclaimed, and Raven raised an eyebrow in response. "I love my hair. I think I'm going to go full green."

"Why green?" Raven asked, and after a moment she mentally chastised herself for subconsciously complying to the game. "I wasn't supposed to ask that."

"But you did," Gar cooed, and Raven growled at him. "Well I love the color green. I guess that's the reason why. Why did you color your hair purple?"

"It's natural," Raven said, and Gar immediately scoffed. Gar could tell that purple wasn't Raven's natural hair color thanks to the dark roots slightly popping out of her head. Gar eyed Raven suspiciously before she admitted the truth. "If you fell for that, then you're an idiot."

"You didn't answer the question." Gar said.

"I'm not playing." Raven answered curtly, and Gar gave her a pout.

"But we were having so much fun playing!" Gar cried out, and Raven shook her head. "Fine, don't ask questions. But you should answer mines."

"Because I will immediately comply to your requests," Raven drawled sarcastically. "Ask all you want, but I'm not answering."

"Fine," Gar said petulantly, but he shortly forgot what he said when he asked her a string of questions. "Favorite movie?"

"The one in which you shut up."

"Favorite food?"

"Meat, the thing you can't eat."

"Favorite--"

"Stop," Raven interrupted, holding out her hand. Gar fell silent and crossed his arms and sulked. "I told you, I'm not answering any of your questions, so stop."

But before Gar could respond, both of their attentions were diverted to a group of middle schoolers, one of which had her birthday. "Happy birthday, Kara!" A blonde girl, who Gar assumed was Kara,
blushed deeply and softly chastised her friends for being too loud, but before her friends could say sorry, the waiters greeted their table with a small birthday cake. The table instantly sang their greetings, and clapped afterwards.

The majority of the restaurant, including Gar, clapped their hands to fit the mood. Raven, however, remained silent and her face was devoid of expression. "You can have birthday celebrations in Pizza Corner?" Gar asked, watching the group of middle schoolers have their fun.

Raven shrugged, not knowing the answer as she never celebrated her birthday in said restaurant. "I don't know."

"Hey," Gar said, turning his head to Raven. "When's your birthday?"

Raven didn't respond, and continued eating her pizza in silence. Gar was confused by her lack of response, and tried edging out a reply. "Mines on May 3rd."

"Why do you wanna know?" Raven asked after a few moments of silence.

"Actually," Gar said. "I wasn't really interested but now since you don't really want to answer I'm interested."

"I'll tell you my birthday," Raven said. "If you make me laugh."

Gar was perplexed by her conditions. Making people laugh wasn't that hard, and Gar personally thought that he was extremely humorous. But once he saw Raven's vacant look, Gar's doubts instantly popped in. "Psh," Gar said, waving his hand slightly. "I'll make you laugh, alright."

And he would. Although the circumstances were quite petty, Gar himself wondered if Raven ever laughed, or has shown any emotion related to happiness.

The two remained in their seats, bantering about various topics that Gar didn't really understood. One topic, which was vegetarianism, had Gar fired up but before he could say anything more about the topic, Raven pointed out that it was late. With no choice, both of them agreed to continuing the project the next day in Gar's house.

Raven's father's door was closed, which meant that he was busy and Raven didn't need to greet him. The walk to Raven's room was silent, and once she entered her room she turned on her laptop and signed in to her computer account. She changed from her outdoor clothes to her indoor clothes, sat down in front of her laptop, and began reading her emails.

A few minutes later, she receives a Skype call from someone. JasonXTodd calling, the screen read. Raven sighed. Jason Todd was a sophomore, and strangely, one of her few friends. They met in Raven's Algebra 2 class when Raven was a sophomore and Jason a freshman. Both of them got unceremoniously seated next to each other, and got to a bad start. However over the course of time, the two gradually became tolerant of each other, to the point where they would talk about intellectual topics at lunch. The two weren't very 'popular' with the students at Jump City High, and therefore Raven and Jason stayed side by side throughout the ups and downs of their year.

Although Raven didn't share any courses or extra curricular activities with Jason, both still remained in contact thanks to the social networking of the generation. However their contact was usually in the form of text, rarely with calls. Jason knew that Raven disliked talking, so she was curious as to what was the purpose of Jason calling her. Raven reluctantly pressed 'Answer', and was unamused when
she saw his face show up at her screen.

"Hey turn on your camera." Jason instructed, and Raven ignored him.

"Why are you calling me?" Raven asked, but Jason refused to answer unless Raven turned on her video. Growling, Raven activated her camera and hoped that her scowl was enough to menace him.

It didn't. In fact, it made his grin grow wider. "Do you really think that you can leave me hanging like that?"

"Like what," Raven said, crossing her arms. "Get to the point, Jason."

"Off to do some work with green hair," Jason said in a monotone, and Raven instantly knew that Jason was mimicking the text she sent him. But before Raven could respond, Jason continued talking. "You texted me at four, and you're only online at eight."

"Get to the point." Raven repeated.

"Tell me, Raven," Jason drawled. "How did your date go with green hair?"

Raven was silent, and it took a few seconds for her to respond to Jason's question. "It wasn't a date." Raven said softly, and she could feel a blush forming up in her cheeks. Raven hoped that Jason didn't recognize her abrupt blush, but judging on Jason's wide smirk, Raven could tell that he did.

It wasn't much of a date per se, but to a stranger's eye it could've been interpreted that way. Raven never spent long periods of time with one person when working on a project, and she was astonished once she realized how easily Gar made time go by. Time flies when you're having fun, Raven thought to herself. But was today really fun? Did Gar really made it fun?

"Right," Jason purred, interrupting Raven's thoughts. "I'll let you remember how your date goes, but you still have to tell me later. Oh, and today…"

Jason went on and on talking about his day, but Raven paid minimal attention to him, her focus fully diverted on her thoughts.

It was nothing, Raven assured herself, but deep down she knew that she meant otherwise.
Joey Wilson hated Mikron O'Jeneus, and Mikron O'Jeneus hated Joey Wilson. It was only the worst of luck given in the world when they were assigned as partners for the English project. However, it wasn't some dark past story that compelled them to hate each other – funnily enough, both Joey and Mikron never acknowledged one another's presence until the English project. From then on, it immediately became obvious to both parties that they were destined to abhor each other.

Despite their unwelcoming differences between each other, both Joey and Mikron had at least something to respect from one another. Mikron understood sign language, which was great for Joey considering the fact that Joey was mute, and Joey knew a thing or two about technology which was great for Mikron considering the fact that Mikron's life highly revolved around technology.

"The stupid use of bluetooth to assist the stupid use of hearing aids," Mikron said, when inquired about the topic both of them would research, to which Joey scowled upon. "What?"

"Too wordy," Joey signed. "What about, 'bluetooth and hearing aids'?"

Mikron rolled his eyes and gave a dismissive gesture. "Whatever, snotface, just type it in! I want to get over this dumb project so I can never see your face again!"

Sighing to himself, Joey typed in the title of the project and began forming an outline for the project. Both agreed to using animation for the video because none of them wanted to undertake the hassle of filming one another. Once Joey finished the outline, he loudly tapped Mikron's desk to divert Mikron's attention off his phone and to Joey's outline.

"I don't like it." Mikron said indignantly before returning to his phone.

Joey rolled his eyes and scowled. He tapped on Mikron's desk again to grab Mikron's attention and signed, "Why?"

"Other than the fact that my slug-faced grandmother could do better than this crud-piece, it's boring," Mikron began. "Look at it. 'Hello, we are Mikron and Joey and we will talk about bluetooth and hearing aids'? No one will listen. I'm sure you pie-for-brains wouldn't listen to this too. Change it."

Joey looked at Mikron with a confounded look, before shaking his head no. "What do you mean, no?"

"Wait," Joey signed, before standing up to face Mikron. "I have done my work and if you do not like it, maybe you should do the outline."

"No, dumb-face!" Mikron said. "I'm busy with the presentation, because I'm the only one who can perform it!"

"Fine," Joey responded after a few moments of contemplation. "I do not care what you think afterwards but I will do all of the video and you do the presentation. Besides," Joey looked at the clock, which showed six in the evening. "I do not want to stay longer."

Mikron's face scrunched up and Joey almost expected an outburst, but to both of their surprise, Mikron just huffed and nodded. "Fine, just e-mail me the stupid video two days before the deadline."

"Same with you and your presentation."
Unlike most people, Joey didn't hate the wait for a bus. In fact, it gave him time to think and reflect of what happened in the day. To Joey, he was an introverted idealist, and to be given the time to think of possibilities in the future based on past reflections was a privilege. The only time he minded waiting for the bus was when there were loud groups of people, or worse, someone who chewed gum really loudly.

To Joey's left was a young man with blond and green hair, and Joey couldn't help but feel immediate disdain for this man. It wasn't because of his looks, but rather how he chewed his gum. Loudly.

Because Joey couldn't chastise the man, he simply stayed calm and tried averting his focus to something else. However, his goal proved difficult when the man began conversing with him. "Hey," the man said, and Joey turned around with a contrived smile. "I kinda recognize you. Aren't you Kole's boyfriend?"

At the mention of the words Kole and boyfriend, Joey immediately blushed. Joey and Kole was not dating per se, but he did have an undeniable crush on her. Joey immediately worried to himself that if it was obvious to a guy he never conversed, then it must've been obvious to Kole. Regaining his composure, Joey quickly signed to the man that he wasn't Kole's boyfriend, to which the man was confused.

"Um, yeah, I have no idea what you just did there," the man said sheepishly, rubbing the back of his neck. "Joey, right? I'm Gar Logan."

Joey would've signed a 'Nice to meet you' to Gar, but seeing how Gar didn't understand sign language, Joey simply smiled. The bus came, and Joey silently hoped that Gar wouldn't sit with him since it was hard for Joey to converse with someone who didn't understand sign language. To Joey's dismay, once Joey sat down, Gar plopped himself right next to Joey.

"Not much of a talker, huh," Gar noted, and Joey reached for his pocket to grab his phone so that he could type out his thoughts, but his intentions were immediately cancelled when Joey remembered his phone was out of battery. Groaning to himself, Joey nodded to Gar. "Eh, don't be shy. Usually it's the new kid who's shy, but not in this case! Come on, say something."

Joey pointed to his throat and made a slashing movement across it, hoping that Gar would get the message. Unfortunately, Gar misinterpreted it. "Sore throat? Nah man, it's okay, I have some Cepacol in my bag--"

Joey stopped Gar from reaching his bag and taking out lozenges that wouldn't even help Joey at this point. Joey began gesticulating movements that could possibly help Gar understand of Joey's muteness, however his efforts proved futile when the bus finally stopped at Joey's terminal and Gar still couldn't understand. Joey stopped trying, stood up, and smiled quickly at Gar before leaving outside the bus. From there, Gar was left irrefutably confused.

To pass the time, Gar took out his phone and began checking his notifications. He got three snaps from Victor in Snapchat, one text message from Kori asking if he'd like one of her bakings on Monday (to which Gar immediately knew to refuse), and one instant message from Raven asking if ten in the morning was an acceptable time to come. Ignoring the other messages he got, Gar quickly responded to Raven's, typing out a 'yes' followed with a smiley.

Once Gar knew Raven read his message, Gar immediately went on Google for advice on how to make Raven laugh.
Funny jokes, Gar typed as he thought of the possible dates Raven's birthday could possibly fall on. In the midst of it all, he asked himself why did he find Raven's birthday so important to know, and Gar was about to find answers to his self-reflected question, but his thoughts were interrupted once his search for jokes was completed on Google.

Totally making her laugh tomorrow, Gar thought to himself, and he unknowingly smiled to himself imagining tomorrow.

"Hi. Um, is Gar here?" Raven nervously pulled the sleeves of her sweater to cover her hands. The stare from whom Raven could only assume was Gar's mother was unnerving, and Raven began picking at loose strands inside her sweater sleeve to pass by. After a few excruciatingly uncomfortable seconds, the woman smiled and unexpectedly hugged Raven.

"Honey, it's quite early!" The woman said with a smile after letting Raven go. Raven nodded slowly, eyeing the clock in the corner of the living room, which said it was ten in the morning. "But no worries, come in, come in! Gar's in his room, probably sleeping. Wake him up if you need to."

The woman lightly held Raven's wrist and pulled her inside the house. From there, Raven eyed the interior of the house – it was mostly devoid of decorations, and heavily filled with moving boxes and newly constructed furniture from a warehouse. The only ornamentation Raven could spot was a picture of young Gar with wholly light blond hair hugging a monkey. Raven continued scrutinizing every detail of Gar's house until the woman interrupted her thoughts.

"Come, sit down for a bit!" The woman sat down on the couch and urged Raven to sit down next to her. Once Raven took a seat, she was bombarded with the woman's chattiness. "I'm Rita Farr, Gar's mother. My husband, Steve, he's away for a business trip to the north. Now, enough about me. I would like to hear about you!"

"I'm Raven Roth." Raven said simply, hoping that her taciturn nature would prompt Rita to stop talking to her.

"Raven, beautiful name," Rita said with a smile. "I have to leave for work in a few, so if Gar still isn't awake, wake him up, alright?"

Raven nodded, diverting her attention to a door half-decorated with animal stickers. Rita noticed Raven eyeing the door, and chuckled to herself. "Yeah, that's Gar's room. I wanted him to stay away from putting stickers all over the door since it generates stains, but he's too stubborn to listen. Luckily I've stopped him from painting the door green."

"Oh," Raven said. She cleared her throat, uncomfortable with the chatter in the room. "Uh, yeah I sent him a text. But I'll wake him up for you."

Rita nodded, and her mouth formed a huge grin. "Normally I would be mad at my son for keeping a secret from me, but I suppose I'm too happy to be mad." Raven eyed her suspiciously, wondering what Rita meant. "Oh, it's been a while since Gar dated, I suppose. And you are quite the mystery here, but you're very beautiful. I'm glad that you and Gar are together, but if you do anything to hurt him--"

"Rita?" A groggy voice appeared from the corner, and Raven was relieved to see that it was from Gar. He walked closer to the couch, and his the corners of his lips turned upwards upon seeing Raven. "Oh, you're here."
"Gar," Rita said, standing up from her seat. "You never mentioned a girlfriend to me!"

"Well, yeah, because I don't have one--" Gar stopped himself when he realized the connection between his mother's accusation and Raven's perplexed expression. "Oh. Wait, no, Rita you're confused. Raven's not my girlfriend!"

"Really?"

"Yeah," Raven supplied, standing up to eye Rita. "I'm just here to complete an English project with Gar. We have to film a video."

"Ah," Rita's face looked slightly crestfallen, but Raven couldn't tell. "Well, have fun, yeah? Gar, I've got classes to teach until eight, so you're cooking dinner yourself, okay?"

Rita hugged Gar then turned her attention to Raven, mouthing a 'sorry' before hugging her. Once Rita finished her goodbyes, Gar walked to the door to lock it shut and turned to Raven with a smile. Raven, confused with Rita's assumptions, crossed her arms and looked at Gar with an unamused face.

"What?" Raven rolled her eyes.

"Didn't you tell your mother that I was coming over for a project?" Raven asked, and scowled when Gar shrugged.

"Eh, she knows now," Raven shook her head and took her backpack off, taking out a camera and a few sheets of paper. "Great, you brought your things! Wait, my tripod's in my room. Let's go!"

Gar's clumsy attempt to tug on Raven's sweater to drag her into his room failed as Raven lost focus and dropped her camera onto the floor. Fortunately, the floor was covered with a soft carpet, so there was little to no damage inflicted on the camera, but that didn't stop Raven from grimacing at Gar.

"Oops."

"Let's just get it over with."

xx

Four in the afternoon, and Gar and Raven was finally finished with editing their video. All was left for them was to export it into an external hard drive, which required nothing but patience. Hence, Gar was left with the time to fulfill his deal – make Raven laugh.

"Rae--"

"Don't call me that."

"–Ven," Gar said cheekily, to which Raven turned her attention from the computer screen to Gar's goofy expression. "Have you ever seen the movie Constipation?"

"No."

"That's because it hasn't come out yet!" Gar laughed to himself and Raven groaned while opening the presentation files for the project. "Come on, laugh. That was funny."

Raven hummed to herself. "Yes, that was very funny. Ha ha," Gar frowned at Raven's lack of reaction and lightly pushed her shoulder. "Don't touch me."
Gar sat in silence for the next few moments, thinking of another joke that would possibly cause Raven to laugh. Once he thought of one, he immediately jumped in his seat and started pulling on Raven's sleeve. "Why shouldn't you buy velcro shoes?"

"Oh, why, Garfield, please enlighten me." Raven deadpanned, as she placed a few more aesthetic details into the presentation.

"Because they're a rip off!"

Silence followed, and Gar huffed to himself. "Gar, what do you think of the presentation?"

"It's not as great as having you laugh," Gar jokingly said, and Raven shook her head, telling Gar to be serious. "Yeah, whatever, it's great. Now laugh for me."

"Wait, there's a problem," Raven said, with slightly wide eyes that caused Gar to sit straight. Raven looked at Gar for a few seconds, before returning to the presentation. "I must've left my laughter at home."

Gar rolled his eyes and began slumping in his seat, however he sat straight again when he had an epiphany. "You made a joke! You! You can joke!"

Raven looked at Gar as if she was offended. "Just because I don't laugh at your jokes doesn't mean I don't have a sense of humor," Raven returned to the computer screen, however she quickly turned to Gar to say something again. "And to measure my sense of humor based on my response of your sense of humor is insulting."

This caused Gar to pout, and he continued his time looking at Raven looking at the project rubric. However, Gar's attention began to divert away from Raven to a watch in the shape of a dolphin-carved ring on his bed desk. He stood up and headed for the ring to wear it, and once he obtained it Gar walked to Raven and tapped on her shoulder frivolously, which caused Raven to glare at Gar. "What time is it?" Gar asked, with his hand wearing the ring cheekily placed behind his back. Just before Raven could answer, however, Gar pulled out his hand and shoved the ring near Raven's face. "It's time for you to laugh!"

"It's four fifty-one," Raven responded, and she returned back to the monitor. Gar groaned to himself and tossed the ring across the room. Gar plopped himself onto the bed, and continued looking at Raven, thinking of a way to make her laugh. His train of thoughts were interrupted though, when Raven stood up and approached him. "Are you hungry? Do you mind if I order food?"

Gar stared blankly at Raven's impatient glare, grabbed her wrist, and pushed her onto the bed. Before Raven could get off, however, Gar started pinning Raven down with one hand, and started tickling her sides with the other. Gar was laughing while tickling Raven, however Raven's face remained placid. He eventually stopped, when he realized that Raven wasn't responding the way he wanted to – or even, she wasn't responding at all. "You're not ticklish?"

Raven hastily removed herself off the bed and faced the wall. "I'm ordering pizza." Raven declared and quickly ran out of the room. Gar was silent over what just happened, but once he processed what happened, Gar smiled to himself.

She was blushing, Gar thought, grabbing for his phone to check his notifications. She was definitely blushing.
"Is it me, or the sophomores this year are just the worst?"

Kitten looked up from her nails, uninterested in what her friend Gemma had to say. Personally, Kitten never cared about anyone outside of her grade, unless she deemed them cool. "Why do you care?" Kitten asked, for the sake of keeping up a conversation.

"This guy nicknamed Fang," Gemma spat, and Kitten rolled her eyes at her friend Selinda, who was sniggering. "Totally wrecked my model in Chemistry. I worked so hard, on that stupid project! If I were you, Kitten, I'd put him in the freak list."

"Not a junior, don't care," Kitten declared, and she eyed her friend Gemma. "Are you finished with your part in English?"

Gemma nodded, and sat next to Kitten to look at Kitten's nail artwork. "That's totes awesome. Can you do my nails?" Gemma asked, fanning her face with both her hands. Kitten rolled her eyes, and Gemma retracted her hands to her sides. "I guess that's a no."

"Wait, both of you are done with your English project?" Selinda asked, to which both Kitten and Gemma nodded. "How?"

Gemma smiled coyly and crawled next to Selinda. "Video animation. We worked on it the weekdays."

Selinda gawked at both of them, which caused Gemma and Kitten to smirk. "I'm jealous. My partner's this girl named Helena, and it's like I'm doing all of the work," Selinda complained, while scrolling through her Facebook feed. She stopped scrolling once she saw something that caught her attention. "OMG, Gem, look!"

Gemma immediately looked closer to Selinda's laptop and laughed hysterically. "She's cray."

"What is it?!" Kitten said, standing up from her bean bag and moving closer to Selinda to get a closer view. "Oh my gosh."

"Don't ever waste my time, you prick?" Selinda read aloud from her laptop screen. "She's so easy to laugh at."

"So much emotions for a freak," Kitten noted, nudging Selinda to move. She quickly pressed the 'Like' button, and looked at Selinda with a smirk, whose face was full of surprise. "What?"

"Why did you like her status?!" Selinda exclaimed, to which Kitten just shrugged. In the corner of Kitten's eye, she could see Gemma quietly giggling to herself. "Now that freak Jinx is going to think I sympathize with her or something. As if I would ever be stood up for a date that pathetic."

"Relax," Kitten said. "Unlike if you want. Whatevs, she'll obviously know that you liking her status is a sign of mockery. Duh."

"Guys, do you think that Wally actually likes her?" Gemma asked, and Kitten and Selinda's attention immediately turned to Gemma's question. "He did seem pretty upset when Jinx left him."

"Please," Kitten responded, and Selinda put on a face of incredulousness. "Do you really think that someone like Wally would fall for someone like Jinx? I'm sure it was a dare or something, and he's just upset that he couldn't ruin the date himself."

Gemma still wasn't convinced. "Oh, what if Wally does like her though? And then what? He asks her to be his date to your party?"
That immediately caused both Kitten and Selinda to become abruptly silent. Only when Selinda quietly piped in did the silence go down. "Even so, Jinx is on the freak list. You shouldn't be worried about having someone like her attend the party."

"It's not whether or not Wally will bring her to the party because obviously, she can't come," Kitten said menacingly. "It's about how in the world does Wally end up liking a freak like her. I mean, what kind of poison does Wally have to ingest to actually have him like her? Jeez."

Gemma eyed Kitten questionably, but she shrugged her thoughts away. After all, Gemma never really cared about the freak list, but she was just interested in having to know more about the freaks for her own entertainment. "Okay," Gemma said slowly. "Whatever. Move on. Time for the grand question, though. Kitten…"

"What?"

"Who are you planning to take as your date to your party?"

That question immediately prompted Selinda to look at Kitten with curious eyes. Kitten looked between her two friends with a bored look, and sighed before responding to Gemma's question. "No one."


"I went with him last year."

"What about the guy you went with in freshman year?" Selinda asked.

"He moved away, remember?" Gemma said.

"Chillax, both of you," Kitten said, interrupting any possibilities of a tirade between Selinda and Gemma. "I choose not to go with anyone because I simply don't want to."

Gemma and Selinda eyed each other suspiciously before asking why.

"Okay," Kitten said, preparing to explain her viewpoints. "Okay. On November 2nd, my birthday, think of this – if I go with someone, then the attention would immediately divert to me and that someone. But if I go alone, then everyone's attention would be on me, only me. Do you get what I'm saying."

It took Gemma and Selinda a while to process what Kitten said, but once they did, they immediately showed signs of approval. "Oh. Yeah." Gemma said, and Selinda immediately butted in. "That's so smart. I totally agree."

"What about you losers, any date?"

"Well," Selinda said with a sly smirk that indubitably caused Gemma to feel uneasy. "If Roy's available…" Selinda trailed off, immediately getting on her laptop to talk to Roy.

"That's so not fair!" Gemma said, to which Selinda responded with a bigger smirk and Kitten simply looked at her nails. "Well. I don't know who I'll go with. I'll just go alone, maybe."

"Sure," Kitten said in a scathing tone. "Decide to go alone right after I announce that I'm going alone."
"Wait," Selinda said, and Gemma looked at her with a hopeful expression. "What about that black-haired guy in your swim team?"

"Oh, Garth?" Gemma asked, and Selinda shrugged. "Well, I can ask, I guess. But I don't really know him that much – the coach tends to separate genders."

"What about his friend?" Kitten asked, and both of her friends eyed her questioningly. "Green hair. Gar."

"...That's why I'm a vegan. Can you imagine eating your own friends?"

Although Gar was mostly unfocused and filled with unexpected moments, Raven had to admit that he was a good storyteller. Because Raven refused to play twenty questions with him while eating their ordered pizza, Gar began rambling about past failed experiences when he was a child. From there, Raven discovered three points about Gar: 1) Gar is from South Africa, and was adopted there by Rita and Steve. 2) Gar was raised with animals, so it was only natural for Gar to be heavily inclined to animals, hence his environmentalism and veganism. 3) In the future, Gar wanted to be an actor like Rita, or a zoologist – in essence, he wants to inspire people.

Knowing these three points made Raven realize that Gar wasn't that much of a bad person. Sure, she was guided by her irritated nature to judge Gar negatively, but once she got used to his presence, Raven was drawn to his general quirky disposition and she didn't know how to deal with that but to be cold and detached as usual.

"Yeah," Gar said after sipping his soft drink. Raven noticed how the straw was filled with bite marks on top when he placed it on the table. "I don't usually talk about my past to people, to be honest." That caused Raven to look up from her pizza slice and look at Gar's thoughtful eyes. "But it's just my childhood. So whatever, really. And it's just you."

What is that supposed to mean, Raven wanted to ask, but she shrugged it off. Raven assumed that since she was quite laconic, Gar wasn't scared about the possibility of having Raven spread around his past. "I can read six languages," Raven confessed, and she bit her inner lip right after she done so because she couldn't think of any possible reason as to why she just told Gar something about herself. To her dismay, Gar's ears seemed to perk up in interest and Raven reluctantly continued. "English, German, Latin, Romanian, ancient Sumerian and Sanskrit."

"Whoa," Gar said in astonishment, and Raven lowered her head in bashful nature. "I only know English and high school Spanish. When did you learn all of this?"

"Childhood," Raven said. Silence followed, and Raven knew Gar expected her to talk more, but in all honesty, Raven didn't know how to continue the conversation. "Are you ready for the presentation?"

Gar's face fell upon Raven's lack of conversation skills, and he shrugged, which gave Raven an uneasy feeling. " Eh," Gar responded, and for a second Raven thought that he was let down by Raven, however her thoughts diminished when Gar's face broke out into a huge grin. "I'll be ready when you tell me when your birthday is."

"Sure," Raven deadpanned, and Gar's eyes immediately twinkled. "It's today."

Gar's jaw dropped, and it took a while for him to compose himself but once he did, he immediately moved closer to Raven, placed his hand on her shoulder and whispered: "Liar."
Raven's eyes widened at how close Gar was to her, and when Gar retracted back to his seat, Raven immediately regretted not wearing a hoodie as she was blushing madly. She cleared her throat to settle herself down, and responded. "How can you tell I'm lying?"

"Ha!" Gar exclaimed, pointing a finger to Raven. "I couldn't. I just said you were a liar to see how you would react. And you just admitted you're lying so… Score 1 for Gar, Score 0 for Raven."

"Alright," Raven said after finishing her final slice of pizza. "It's not today."

Silence followed. "So… When?"

"You still have to make me laugh, you know that, right?"

Gar groaned. "But it's so hard! You don't laugh at any of my jokes and my jokes are genius!"

"Totally genius that I forget to laugh," Raven drawled, and immediately smirked when she saw Gar's unamused expression. "Do you know why I set the deal related to me laughing?"

"Because you secretly like me and my jokes, and you just want an excuse to listen to me talking all day? Please. Just say so!" Gar said jokingly, and winked at Raven for effect.

"Disgusting," Raven said, and Gar pouted in response. "It's because you can't make me laugh. No matter how hard you try."

Gar was not convinced. "Sure," Gar drawled. "I'm sure you'll laugh because of me at one point. Whether I'm trying or not."

"Maybe if you publicly humiliate yourself, sure," Raven said blankly, and was confused when Gar stood up and headed out for the door. "Where are you going?"

"Out to 'publicly humiliate' myself," Gar said, with finger quotes to emphasize his thoughts. Raven rolled her eyes and immediately followed Gar. "What?"

"The deal, Garfield, was for me to laugh," Raven said, and Gar nodded as if it was the most simple thing in the world. "Not for me to feel secondhand embarrassment."

Gar shrugged. "You will laugh at my jokes one day," Gar said determinedly, and Raven raised her eyebrows. "You know, you might be laughing at my jokes deep inside your heart. It's bad to bottle up laughter, I think."

"You think a lot of ridiculous things, including but not limited to you actually having the possibility to make me laugh."

Raven waited for a response, but was met with Gar's blank face. As Raven's frown grew deeper, Gar laughed to himself. "Oh sorry, I couldn't hear you over the sound of you laughing at my jokes in the future."

"Ugh!"

After English class, in which Gar and Raven presented their video and received mostly positive feedback about their content and teamwork, Gar ran into Joey. After meeting Joey, Gar messaged Kole to ask about Joey, and in a moment of extreme embarrassment, Gar realized that Joey was mute. After that realization, Gar felt that it was only appropriate for him to apologize to Joey. Luckily
for Gar, Joey was by his locker. He quickly ran to Joey and started rambling.

"Joey in the bus a few days ago I did not realize that you were mute I just thought that you know it was something else like maybe a sore throat or you were shy or something I didn't think that you were actually, a full-fledged mute, so I'm really sorry about that please don't hit me."

Gar squeezed his eye shut in preparation of a possible blow to his face, but it never came, and Gar slowly opened his eyes to see a smiling Joey. Joey pulled out his phone and showed its screen to Gar, which read: It is fine. :) Talk to you later.

Joey closed his locker and headed to his class, but not before waving goodbye. Gar nodded to himself and quickly ran to the changing room for PE class. Luckily, everyone was still beginning to change into uniform and Wally was also rushing in. Gar waited for Wally to approach him, but instead Wally retreated to a corner in the changing room. Perplexed, Gar headed to Wally after hastily changing his clothes. "Dude, what's up? Long time no talk!"

"Not in the mood," Wally said abruptly, and tossed his bag into an empty locker. Wally walked out of the changing room with a grumpy looked, and Gar quickly followed out, only to see a bunch of his other classmates stretching. The unit Gar's PE class was currently on was track and field, something that he didn't mind, but again, something he was too lazy to do.

"Alright, ten laps around the court, now!" The coach shouted out loud, to which the majority of the students groaned. Gar paid no mind to the coach's request, and instead tried nudging out a response off of Wally who was still in a testy mood. "Now!"

Half of the class started running while the others took a steady jog. Unfortunately, Wally was part of the half that ran, so Gar immediately followed him.

"I forgot," Gar managed to say in between panting. It was their third lap, and due to the extra speed Gar placed himself on, the fatigue quickly built up. However, Wally, who was maintaining a quick and steady rate, seemed unfazed. "That you're a runner. Slow down! Please!"

To his surprise, Wally stopped running. He quickly turned to Gar with an upset face, and started growling. "Stupid, idiotic, moronic, demonic– Kitten! That's what's up, Kitten!" Gar stared at Wally with wide eyes and immediately responded.

"What, wait, what do you mean?" Gar asked, and Wally stared blankly at Gar before taking off again. Gar groaned, and took a heavy breath and started catching up to Wally. "Yo," Gar said, trying to grab Wally's arm but Wally seemed to increase in speed by then. "Dude, tell me, what happened!"

Wally didn't stop running, but he did slow down for Gar's sake. From there, he started talking. "Maybe for some demonic reason, Kitten was there when Jinx agreed to go out with me. From there, she just came up in the spot as if I was playing a prank on Jinx. As if I never wanted to go out with her. Can you imagine Jinx's wrath?"

"Imagining it," Gar said with scrunched eyebrows. "So now what?"

"Now, I don't know," Wally stopped his pace and pulled his hair out of frustration. "She's been ignoring my calls, my texts, everything! I hate Kitten. I hate her so much." Wally continued pacing back and forth, which made Gar nervous seeing that the coach was eyeing them suspiciously. To Gar's relief, Wally stopped his paces but he immediately blew up out of frustration. "If that stupid blonde skank thinks I'm going to her party, she's thinking again!"

Wally resumed running, however he was swearing under his breath. Gar, unsure of what to do,
started running in his own pace, leaving Wally alone. If Gar remembered correctly, Jinx had Calculus while both Gar and Wally had PE. By that knowledge, Gar planned something that would either break Jinx's trust for Wally even further, or mend it back together.

The bell rang, and Wally was still in a grumpy mood, so Gar didn't feel compelled to stay back and wait. After changing, he immediately ran to Jinx's locker. From there, Jinx scrutinized Gar's disheveled look and generally unfocused temperament. "What do you want?"

"On a level of one to ten, how mad are you at Wally?" Gar asked with wide eyes, and Jinx immediately slammed her locker shut and walked away. "Jinx!" Gar exclaimed, running up to Jinx and successfully holding her back.

"I do not know you," Jinx answered evasively, trying to break free from Gar's grasp. "Let go of me!"

"Just answer the question, Jinx."

"Eleven! Twelve! You know what, I don't even want to talk about him anymore, just, whatever!"

Gar sighed, and gently released Jinx's wrist. To his surprise, Jinx stayed, with a petulant expression on her face. Jinx was looking at the ground with her arms crossed, and Gar knew that Jinx wanted to say something, but didn't know what. "Try thinking of the attempts Wally performed just to have you agree to a date," Gar said, blurtin out whatever he could think of to help Jinx reevaluate her anger towards Wally. "Pretty genuine and pathetic, right? Don't you think that if really was a prank, his attempts to grab your attention would be more… I don't know… better? As if it was really thought out?"

When Jinx lightly shrugged her shoulders, Gar continued. "Or when he burst out in happiness when you finally agreed to go out with him. If it was a prank, he wouldn't react that happily," Jinx looked up from the floor and looked at Gar with a worried expression. "And try remembering his reaction when Kitten showed up on your date. Not the reaction you would get after a successful prank."

"Fine," Jinx said, rubbing her eyes. "It's not a prank. It's just…"

"What?"

"It's too good to be true, really," Jinx confessed, and upon seeing Gar's confused expression, she continued. "Some random, decent-looking guy who I've never talked to suddenly shows interest in me. It's easy to assume that their intentions aren't genuine."

"But his intentions are--"

"I know. Do you think it's idiotic of me to make such a big deal out of this?"

Gar immediately shook his head no. "No. No, of course not. Look I'd be pretty upset in your position right now. Dude, just thinking about you makes me upset. But there's only one way to solve this. You talk to him."

Jinx sighed to herself, and she crossed her arms once again. "I've pushed him away way too hard that he might not even want to talk to me anymore."

"Dude, no," Gar said, remembering Wally's attitude during PE class. "You should've seen him in PE, all in his man-period or something. Uh… no offense."

Jinx took a moment to process what Gar has told her, and once she did, she slowly nodded. "Thanks, Gar," Jinx tried to smile at the cheeky young man in front of him but what came out was uneasy
pursed lips. "I'll, uh, I'll talk to him. Right now, in fact."

"That's great! Yeah, he's probably outside the changing room," Gar said, and the two of them awkwardly stood in the same position, slightly fidgeting with an equally awkward smile. Gar and Jinx continued the same position until Gar broke off the silence. "Go, before you lose him."

"Right," Jinx started running away from Gar, but stopped halfway through to look back at Gar with a smile. "Thanks." Gar saw her mouthing.

"You're welcome." Gar mouthed back, and Jinx nodded, and continued running to the changing rooms. Gar quickly took his phone out of his pocket to text Wally, hoping that Wally was still around the changing rooms.

"where are you" Gar texted Wally. He breathed a sigh of relief when Wally instantly replied: "I'm in the changing rooms, why?"

"just stay there," Gar typed back, and put back his phone into his pocket, hoping for the best for both Jinx and Wally.

xx

Gar's afternoon nap was interrupted by the loud ringing of his phone. Groaning, Gar snatched his phone off of his bed desk and immediately picked up the call. "Unless you're Steve or Rita," Gar growled into his phone. "You can screw yourself over."

"Wait," a voice said, and Gar instantly knew that voice belonged to Wally. "Is there a female version for casanova?"

"You talked to Jinx?"

"Nah, she talked to me," Wally said with a tone that indicated happiness. "Long story short, we made up and we're going on an official date this Friday. And it's all thanks to you!"

"What did she say?" Gar asked, adjusting himself to sit down on his bed.

"She just told me you met her after school to make sense of what happened," Wally said, and Gar nodded to himself. "Either way, it's all thanks to you, so I just wanted to say thank you so much, man. Life saver."

"Yeah, it's no problem," Gar said. "Look, I'm gonna go return to my nap so if you don't mind…"

"You're gonna be the best man!"

"Bye."

"I am particularly pleased with generally everyone's performance today!" Mrs. Prince announced as she stood up from her seat of the judicial panel. The judges used for the English project were teachers that Gar didn't have (the psychology, IT, and drama teacher), so Gar wasn't too worried of a hindsight bias coming out. Raven did have one teacher who was on the panel, however it was the psychology teacher who Raven felt was in okay relations with her.

Overall, Gar had to admit that their presentation went really well – Gar's exuberant personality complemented Raven's cool demeanor, and every quirk that they said or presented contributed...
greatly to the presentation. Gar only hoped that Raven felt the same, but judging by the lack of insults Raven struck at Gar, Gar assumed that Raven thought the presentation was a success too.

Gar looked around his class and saw that everyone looked mostly pleased with themselves. He looked at Isaiah and his partner Toni, who both just found out that they attended the same elementary school back in Rose City. Their topic dealt with the importance of topography, and how modern-day students can contribute to topographical studies. Once Isaiah and Toni finished their presentation, Gar flashed both of them a thumbs-up, to which Isaiah reciprocated after Gar and Raven finished their presentation.

To Gar's surprise, Kitten and her partner Gemma didn't do horribly bad. On the contrary, if one were to dismiss their overly irritating valspeak, then one had to admit that both Kitten and Gemma did a pretty good job. Both girls discussed the health benefits of shopping, accompanied by a well-constructed animated video showing what parts of the body benefitted from shopping. Gar, however, couldn't shake off the uneasy feeling he had when he presented with Raven, as Gemma kept on staring at Gar with a blank look.

"Alright," Mrs. Prince began, clapping her hands together to ensure the attention of the class. "I should've told you this before the project began to give an incentive, but I suppose it's too late now. Either way, all of the judges score will be added up to a total of forty, and to the pairing who scored the highest will… Drumroll please," Gar looked at a pairing who began drum rolling on their desks. "Thank you, boys… Well, let's just say the winner will be exempt on one of any test I will assign throughout the year. Mind you, I say test not exam, so none of you will ever have the chance to run away from final exams."

The class was surrounded with gasps and murmurs. Gar looked at Raven with expectant eyes, who returned the look too. Isaiah looked at Gar with a sly smile and pointed to himself, mouthing that he'd be the winner, to which Gar dismissed him. At the corner of his eye, Gar saw that Kitten and Gemma stood straight, as if they were ready to win the prize.

Mrs. Prince smiled to herself, who looked at the other teachers for confirmation and in turn, nodded back. "With a score of thirty-six… The winner of this project is…” Gar fidgeted in his seat, but stopped once Raven placed her hand on his leg, prompting Gar to stop. "The psychological effects of video games, by Raven and Gar!"

The class erupted in applause, with only a few exceptions like Kitten and Gemma who sulked in their seats. Smiling to each other, Raven and Gar stood up to thank the judges, and in a fit of excitement, Gar ran up to the panel and hugged everyone. "Thank you!" Gar said after subjecting the teachers into bear hugs.

Mrs. Prince smiled, and returned to her seat. "Your performance with Ms. Roth was detailed, interactive, informative, and most importantly, well-matched. Congratulations to both of you."

Gar turned to the back of the class, where he saw Raven sitting with a slight smile on her face. Smile growing upon seeing Raven's smile, Gar loudly said the first thing that popped out in his mind: "I guess we're two peas in a pod!" What happened next was unexpected.

Raven laughed. Not enough for the whole class to recognize, but enough for Gar to notice. The bell rang, and Gar immediately ran to Raven and grabbed her shoulders, prompting her to stand up. "You laughed!" Gar said excitedly, in which Raven blushed in response. "No denying it, you laughed! You laughed, you laughed, you laughed!"

"Fine, I did–"
"Raven Roth," A voice appeared out of no where, and both Gar and Raven turned to see Kitten's malicious face, with her friend Gemma by her side. "Well played."

By the sound of Kitten approaching Raven, many students stayed back to see what would happen next. Confused by the situation, Gar let go of Raven, and tried diffusing the tension in the air. "Thanks Kitten," Gar said slowly, and Kitten raised an eyebrow at her. "We've gotta go."

"Was I talking to you?" Kitten asked sharply, which caused Gar to fall in silence. "Raven, you and I both know that I deserve that award. I took a look at the score sheet, and Gemma and I scored a thirty-five."

"So you're saying I'm a point better than you," Raven deadpanned, and Gar's attention immediately diverted to the gasps from the audience. "And I presume you're angry about that?"

Kitten fumed, and to everyone's surprise, she threw a random notebook to the wall. "How does it feel, freak? Always taking the attention away. Guess what, Raven, no one wants to have you in the attention!" Kitten said, and Gar took note of how Raven gritted her teeth. Gar wanted to approach Raven, but before he could do so, Kitten shouted at Raven again. "Stay away from my party!"

"Stay away from my life." To this, Kitten groaned in annoyance and turned to walk outside. Ushering the other students to get out, the audience followed Kitten and Gemma out.

"Raven--"

"November 2nd," Raven said silently, and Gar looked crestfallen at how Raven responded. He approached Raven and gently touched her shoulder, but Raven moved away and started walking out. "That's my birthday."

Gar was left in silence and confusion. November 2nd, Gar thought to himself, trying to think of the significance of the date. He took a seat, and looked at the ceiling, thinking of any clues to help him figure it out.

"Wait," Gar said, sitting up straight. He took his backpack and took out a familiar, messily opened pink envelope that a certain someone gave him before. Sighing deeply, he took out the letter out of the envelope to read it again and closed his eyes shut once he finished. "November 2nd," Gar said, looking at the envelope again. "That's when Kitten's birthday is."

"Kitten! Slow down!" Raven said as she tried to catch her friend Kitten in a game of tag. In an act of childishness, Kitten looked back and stuck out her tongue, before running off. Raven, who had enough of running round, boosted her speed up so that she could at least catch up to her. To Raven's luck, she was fast enough to finally catch Kitten. "Ha! Got you!"

"Unfair!" Kitten wailed, crossing her arms. "You were cheating!"

"I was not!"

"You were--"

"Girls," a voice belonging to Drury Walker said, effectively silencing both Raven and Kitten. "Something wrong?"

Kitten and Raven immediately looked at each other with worried eyes. Although both girls knew that Mr. Walker was mostly harmless, it was still a scary thought to anger an adult. In a fit of nervousness, both Kitten and Raven simultaneously exclaimed: "No!", followed with a strange stare upon one another.

Mr. Walker, who didn't really seem to care much about their responses, nodded curtly and prompted the two girls to follow him into his office. Once the three of them reached his office, Mr. Walker urged Raven and Kitten to sit, to which both Raven and Kitten silently complied. Raven took note on how the room was mostly empty, with the exception of a section of a wall laden with framed pictures of Kitten. As intimidating he could be, Mr. Walker did love his daughter very much, although Raven couldn't determine if Kitten felt the same sentiment, judging from the constant complaints she gave out about her father.

"It's almost both of your birthdays," Mr. Walker stated, to which both girls smiled at each other and nodded. "I've contacted your father, Raven, and he agreed to a shared birthday party between the two of you."

Raven looked at Kitten, who stared blankly at her father. Knowing Kitten, Raven noted how Kitten hated sharing and the idea of sharing a birthday party might not be Kitten's favorite idea in the world. However, to Raven's surprise, Kitten started squealing and gushing in her seat. "Raven!" Kitten said, attention fully diverted to Raven's confused look. "We can share the same birthday party!"

Raven simply nodded and smiled back, then turned her attention to Mr. Walker, who was watching with a slight grin on his face. "Where will the party be held, Mr. Walker?" Raven asked, and Kitten looked at her father with an expectant look on her face. "Kitten?" Raven said slowly, noting her friend's small smile as if she was hiding something. "Why does it look like you know?"

"Oh Daddy," Kitten said, immediately jumping out of her seat for emphasis. "Tell her!"

"Alright, honey," Mr. Walker replied with a bright smile on his face, making his appearance look so much more brighter as opposed to what Raven was used to. "I've talked to your father-"
"You've talked to my dad?" Raven asked, surprised. Even she couldn't talk to her own dad, as he was always in work. "What did he say?"

"Well," Mr. Walker began, "I asked him if he had any plans for your birthday. He said no, for he was too busy," Kitten took note on how Raven's jaw tightened at what her father said. "So I asked him permission to organize yours so that you and Kitten can share the same birthday party, here, right in the mansion."

Raven was at lost for words. She felt unsure, perhaps disappointed, on how little her father cares about her birthday. The last birthdays she had, it was her mother who organized it but since Raven's mother was overseas, Raven truly knows how much her father loves her. On the other side, Raven was happy to have the opportunity to spend her birthday with someone she liked. Kitten, as bratty and spoiled as she can be, treated Raven like her the ultimate best friend. And at the time, Raven was happy, for she too saw Kitten as her best friend.

"That's great," Raven said, finally pulling out of her train of thoughts. "That's really great. I'm so excited - thanks, thanks so much Mr. Walker!"

Mr. Walker gave Raven a smile. "Anytime."

Raven smiled back, but was then startled by Kitten's sudden, ungraceful hug. "Anything for my BFF!"

xx

November 2 2004. Walker Mansion

"Raven!" The shrill voice of Kitten's voice rang in Raven's ear, and Raven was forced to look away from the window, showing the view of a heavily decorated patio dedicated to their birthdays. Raven turned to face Kitten, who was wearing a pink birthday dress adorned with shiny jewels and ruffles. It was strikingly different from what Raven was wearing: a purple shirt with jeans. To Raven, she looked like as if she was a mere other guest in Kitten's party.

"What is it?" Raven replied, and to her surprise, Kitten immediately ran up to her and grabbed her forearm. Raven took note of how Kitten's beady high heels clanked up against the floor, and how Raven hated the noise.

"We have to go! Guests are coming soon!" With that, Raven and Kitten took off down the stairs, immediately intercepting Mr. Walker in the hall. Mr. Walker was wearing a suit with a glittery pink tie, something Raven was sure Kitten picked out for him. Upon seeing the girls, Mr. Walker beamed into a smile, immediately greeting them both.

"Happy birthday, girls." Mr. Walker said, to which Raven said thanks, while Kitten nodded in a bored manner, her attention diverted to the door right in front of her showing the patio. "Can we go?" Kitten asked, to which Mr. Walker laughed. Mr. Walker was intimidating, but whenever Raven saw him interact with his own daughter, Mr. Walker seemed like an entirely different person. Mr. Walker loved his daughter, and Raven felt quite envious of Kitten as she never knew what it like being loved by their own father.

Mr. Walker led the two girls out to the patio, in which both of them were immediately greeted by families, friends, and guests alike. Raven recognized a handful of her elementary classmates, all either wearing purple or pink. It seemed that Kitten set up the party so that it was strictly those two colors. Raven quietly observed her embellished surroundings and took note of how everything was intricately set up, until she was interrupted by a boy with blonde curls.
"Hi, Raven," the boy said, and Raven immediately recognized him as Joey Wilson, one of her playmates. Raven gave him a small smile and her attention diverted to two boxes, distinguishable by its sizes, in his hands. "Happy Birthday."

"Thank you Joey," Raven replied, and she expected Joey to hand her the much smaller box. Raven was pleasantly surprised when Joey grabbed the smaller box with his left hand and handed Raven the bigger box with her right. "For me?"

Joey blushed red, and Raven felt a little tingle inside of her. If she was being completely honest, Raven had harbored a small crush on Joey ever since they were introduced to each other in the beginning of the school year. He was nice to her, and if Raven wasn't seen with Kitten, she was most likely with Joey.

"I hope you like it," Joey mumbled to himself, but loud enough for both Raven and Kitten to hear. Regaining composure, Joey cleared his throat and immediately took note of Kitten's crossed arms and apparent scowl. "Oh, um, here Kitten," Joey said hastily, handing Kitten the smaller box. Kitten snatched it from Joey with a loud huff. "Happy birthday, again."

Raven watched as Joey awkwardly took off. She looked at Kitten, who still had a scowl on her face. "Kitten?"

"I think he likes you." Kitten said after a few silent moments, before taking off to the candy bar. Raven had a feeling that Kitten was jealous of the lack of attention given to her by Joey, but never had she seen Kitten so detached and aloof. Raven stood in place, awkwardly thinking of what to do, but then decided to follow her friend.

The party was, objectively, hosted very well. Decorations were placed everywhere in a delicate manner that struck to one's eyes. Several games, such as a bouncy castle, tug-of-war, and many more were located throughout the backyard. Food from various countries were served and sweets were given out generously. Subjectively, however, Raven felt as if there was tension in the party.

After Joey, Raven thought that everyone else would pay more attention to Kitten. In spite of her thoughts, the exact opposite happened. Guests, whether adults or kids, would approach the two of them and focus first on Raven, strike up a conversation, then greet Kitten promptly. After that, they would just leave. It was a weird shift from what Raven was used to – for as long they were friends, Raven was accustomed to being known as Kitten's friend instead of Raven. Now, it was as if people knew Raven, and Kitten was known as Raven's friend. Raven felt unsure of the change, but she was sure that Kitten didn't like the change one bit.

The party ended, and both girls resorted to the living room. Raven hoped that Kitten would at least calm down, but instead, Kitten merely grabbed one of Raven's gifts from the table and threw it at Raven. Raven, by instinct, pushed the gift away but that didn't stop her from getting hurt.

"It's not fair!" Kitten cried, as she continued picking up gifts and throwing it to Raven's direction. "It's my birthday party, mine, mine, mine!"

"It's not just yours," Raven replied, her voice slightly higher than her regular, monotonous voice. She kicked away the gifts that has piled up in front of her and walked to Kitten. "It's our birthday party. Your father said it yourself."

"It's not just yours," Raven replied, her voice slightly higher than her regular, monotonous voice. She kicked away the gifts that has piled up in front of her and walked to Kitten. "It's our birthday party. Your father said it yourself."

Even if Raven whispered, Kitten was able to hear enough. And what she heard was enough to throw herself at Raven, immediately screaming and pulling Raven's hair. Raven tried to fight back, but
Kitten put so much force in her attack that it was near impossible for Raven to retaliate. Soon enough, Mr. Walker and a few guards ran into the scene and broke apart the two girls.

"Raven, get in the car. We will send you home immediately," Mr. Walker said quietly, but Raven was still able to hear Kitten's screams, telling her to get lost, or worse, die. "I'm very sorry about this."

Raven nodded, feeling tears well up in her eyes. The ride back to her house was long, and filled with reoccurrences popping up in her mind. But the return back to school was worse.

Kitten made it clear for Raven that she would make Raven's life a living hell. Raven didn't like to admit it, but she liked Kitten's accompany, as it meant she wasn't completely alone. Kitten and Raven went from best friends to mortal enemies in a snap, and Raven felt completely dejected by it. Raven would like to say that she still had Joey, but a week after the birthday party, Joey went through a horrible accident that left him mute. Joey still stuck to Raven's side, but it was difficult for both of them to communicate. Sooner or later, they drifted apart, leaving Raven completely alone.

Raven's life at home was dull, uninspiring, while Raven's life outside of home was better, and that was all because she had friends. Now, she had none, and instead of having half of her life dull, Raven's whole life was indubitably somber.

xx


"Oh my gosh, Kitten, is that you and Raven?!

Gemma's shrill announcement caused Kitten to jump off of her seat and drop her phone. S immediately ran to Gemma, who was holding a picture frame. Inside the frame contained a picture of Raven and Kitten's sixth birthday party. Kitten took note of how forced her smile looked in the picture, and how Raven lacked a smile at all. "Burn that." Kitten said, after eyeing the picture carefully.

Gemma was less compliant. "Kitty, why?" Gemma said, ignoring the look of disgust Kitten threw at her from the nickname. "You guys look so cute. I didn't know you guys used to be friends."

"We were not friends," Kitten spat venomously. "And we never will be."

"No," Gemma said. "You guys were obviously friends before. I mean, why else would you keep this picture?"

"Forgot about it," Kitten said, grabbing the picture from Gemma's hands and tossing it into the trash can. Gemma made a sound of protest, but Kitten gave her a look, prompting Gemma to be quiet. "I didn't let you in here to make dumb theories about my nonexistent friendship with that freak. I invited you here to prepare for our cheerleading regionals."

"Chill, Kit," Gemma drawled. "Look, I just wanna know why you have a picture of you and her. School play?"

"We shared a birthday party," Kitten confessed. "Dumb, I know. It was my dad's idea."

Gemma was shell-shocked by Kitten's confession. "What?! But– But you always restricted her from your birthday parties! How is it possible you shared one?"

"Maybe it's the fact that I shared a birthday with her was the reason why I restrict her now," Kitten
pointed out. "She ruined that birthday party. Stole my friends away."

"Impossible," Gemma said knowingly. "Raven's a basket case! There's no way she'd charm her way to your friends. Honestly, Kitten, tell me what happened."

"That is what happened, Gemma!" Kitten said, exasperated from Gemma's buggering. Honestly, Kitten wanted no reminders of how her feud with Raven began. "She just— people paid more attention to her. She did something to everyone. No one would've cared about her. She tricked them, did something!"

Gemma raised an eyebrow at Kitten's outburst. Although Gemma was tactless, she wasn't exactly dumb – Gemma was considered quite smart in the grade. And it didn't take her long to figure out what exactly was the reason behind Kitten's hatred for Raven. "You were jealous of her," Gemma concluded. "Jeez, Kitten, childish jealousy is enough for you to hate Raven that much?"

"Are we going to practice or not?" Kitten asked, and Gemma rolled her eyes in response. "You know where the door is."

Gemma sighed, before replying. "I can't handle you, Kitten," Gemma said, making Kitten's face red up. "I'll practice with you when Selinda's around. I can't."

Gemma tried ignoring the spiteful insults Kitten threw at her when she left.

xx


Kitten was fuming.

As if it wasn't enough that she didn't win the top female lead for the school's newest play, Kitten still had to witness the abomination, the terror, or as someone normal would call it, the friendly conversation between her current romantic interest Jacob, and her mortal enemy Raven.

Raven and Jacob were sitting next to each other closely, perhaps too close according to Kitten, conversing via whisperings. Fortunately for Kitten, Raven was not part of the play. She was, unfortunately, part of the lighting crew, something Jacob was part of as well. That gave the perfect opportunity for Raven to snatch up Kitten's crush, and that angered Kitten to the very core.

Kitten sneaked up to them, mindful of her heels from making sound. She successfully took a seat behind them, using her hair to hide up her face. "Anyway," Kitten heard Raven say. "Mom says you can come over."

How dare she. Kitten felt her cheeks heat up, and took a deep breath to regain composure. "I'd love to visit, Raven," Jacob said, and Kitten hoped it was a decline, or anything really that would make the two separate. "But I'd feel awkward."

"I want you come over."

The two was silent, and Kitten had to restrain herself from doing something painful to Raven. Finally, Jacob replied, but not in the way Kitten wanted him to. "I'll come over, then."

Kitten went all the way from her spot to behind their seats to stop them from talking, and now both Raven and Jacob are off to do something in Raven's house. Letting go of all of her restraints, Kitten headed for the supply box. When she returned, Kitten did something even she didn't expect herself to do in a sane condition.
Kitten snipped off Raven's ponytail.

"What the--" Raven felt a significant weight off her shoulders, and immediately growled once she turned around and saw the culprit. Raven eyed Kitten's smug expression, along with the scissors Kitten was playing around with in her right hand. "You vixen!" Raven immediately lunged to get the scissors back, but Kitten withdrew her right hand back. Raven continued fighting for the scissors, but when Kitten, mindless of the scissors she was holding, raised her right hand, the scissors immediately cut through Raven's forearm, causing a heavy cut.

"I-- Nurse! Somebody get the nurse!" Kitten couldn't even look at Jacob, as her attention was all directed to Raven's bleeding forearm. Kitten tried to formulate a response, an apology, something that would dissipate the tension in the air. But she couldn't, and she knew she wouldn't, because Raven deserved it anyway.

Moments after Raven was treated in the school clinic, both girls were called to the principal's office. While waiting, Kitten observed the antiseptic oozing out of Raven's bandages. It looked pretty horrific, and Kitten immediately felt her stomach drop. She knew Raven deserved it, but just looking at Raven's injury was enough to make her feel sorry.

"I'm sorry," Kitten croaked out, breaking the silence in the air. Raven looked up from the ground and eyed Kitten with a distrustful look on her face. "What? I said I'm sorry."

"For what, Kitten?" Raven sounded tired. "For the hair, or for the injury, or just for your plain malice in the atmosphere?"

Kitten didn't really know what to say. After apologizing and processing Raven's question, Kitten really didn't know what she was sorry for. She thinks it might've been for the fact that she hated looking at Raven's bandages, but now even she couldn't feel bad about it. "I don't know." Kitten finally said.

"You don't know--" Raven sighed. "Why did you do it anyway? Chop off my hair."

Kitten felt as if Raven was at least fortunate because she had her hair tied in a low ponytail. Chopping it off left a short, albeit messy, bob that Kitten felt looked much better on Raven. Kitten didn't know why, but she kept Raven's chopped hair in a ziploc bag. After a few moments of thinking of a reply, Kitten took out the ziploc bag out of her backpack and tossed it to Raven's lap. "I was jealous."

"Of my hair?"

"Of course not your hair," Kitten bit back. "Jacob."

Raven looked perplexed. "What does Jacob have to do with anything?"

Kitten narrowed her eyes, and repositioned herself so that she was facing Raven. "Everyone knows I like Jacob--" "Everyone you talk to." "--It's not fair that he's talking to you, someone so lame and freaky, and not me, someone deserving and worthy!"

The two of them stared at each other. Finally, Raven spoke up. "For a split second, Kitten, I thought you changed--" "What?" "But you're still as selfish as ever."

That comment made Kitten stand up from her seat and burst out in anger. "What do you mean?!"

Raven refused to be looked down at, so she stood up as well. They were roughly the same height, but Raven tried to show dominance by sticking her chin out. "You idiot," Raven seethed. "Jacob's
my half brother! There's nothing romantic between the two of us!"

"Liar!"

"Now, at this point, I just think you're making dumb excuses to ruin my life." If Raven's intention was to anger Kitten, it definitely worked since Kitten picked up her tote bag and flung it to Raven's face. Raven successfully dodged the bag away but that didn't stop her from having her face turn red out of fury.

"I hate you," Kitten spat out, gripping the handles of her bag. "I wish you were never born!"

Before Raven could retaliate, an office member interrupted their tirades. Both of them got chastised on their behaviors in public area and was immediately sent to the principal's office. From there, it was decided that both Kitten and Raven's mannerisms were unacceptable and that they would be suspended for three days.

But that wasn't the worst part – due to the fact that the principal called both of their parents to inform them about the incident, Kitten and Raven's parents immediately took sides, inevitably siding with their own respective daughters. Raven never thought that this would be a problem, but when she and her mom intercepted with Kitten and Mr. Walker, she was proved wrong by the fact that Mr. Walker kept on making snide remarks to both Raven and her mom, indubitably annoying her mom. It was then obvious that Raven and Kitten's hatred for each other wasn't just between the two of them, but instead transcended to their parents.

xx


"I feel like Black Mirror's just the perfect show in the universe," Raven looked up from her cellphone to see Jason holding up a DVD titled Black Mirror. "And I feel like you're the perfect friend in the universe, so I'm making you watch it."

Raven rolled her eyes and resumed scrolling on her phone. "I'll pass."

Jason, not accepting his friend's response, immediately lunged for Raven's phone and successfully grabbed it out of her reach. Jason ignored Raven's protests, using one hand to hold her back and another to use her phone. "Listverse? Really?"

"Yeah, maybe I should make a list on why you're the worst friend in the universe," Raven muttered to herself pushing Jason's hand off her shoulder. She knew that Jason was the type of person who wouldn't give up, so she didn't bother with retrieving her phone back and stood up from her seat, snatching the DVD case off Jason's desk. "What's this about?"

"Anthologies," Jason replied, taking a quick selfie of himself then setting it as Raven's wallpaper. Once done, he showed Raven her own wallpaper to which Raven shook her head. "About how the world could be like if we're not careful. Think British. Think The Twilight Zone."

"I've never watched The Twilight Zone."

"Then think awesome," Jason smiled, tucking Raven's phone in his front pocket. "You've been so MIA with me these days."

"I don't recall you being in junior year," Raven spat out, crossing her arms. She stayed silent for a while, but then a thought popped in her head. "I do recall you having fun in the volleyball team."

"I'm not in junior year. I'm in senior year now."

"But you were in junior year last year."

"That was last year."

"I don't recall you having fun last year."

"I don't recall you being in junior year."

"That was last year."

"I don't recall you being in junior year."
"Guilty," Jason said. "I also recall you having fun with someone… Oh, I don't know… green-haired?" When Raven ducked her head to hide her blush, Jason immediately smirked. "Aww. What's up with the two of you?"

"Why don't you ask him?" Raven asked, to which Jason sighed. "What?"

"You're the perfect friend in the universe," Jason said slowly, to which Raven gave him a look indicating him to continue. Jason looked at her with wide eyes, and continued. "You don't get to hide stuff from me."

Raven rolled her eyes at how petulant Jason was sounding. "I don't know. We scored the highest for our project and then Kitten just blew up stating that I cheated, whatsoever. He also found out when my birthday is."

"That's a shame."

"What is?"

Jason gave her a look. "The fact that you're letting a tyrannical blonde and your birthday stop a blooming friendship. I did not raise you to be like this," Raven shook her head, hopping onto Jason's desk and sitting on it. "Hey, you're going to break the desk!"

Raven ignored him. "Gar's a naturally nice person. It's not like he wants to be friends with me, or something."

"Did he tell you that?" When Raven shook her head no, Jason continued. "So how would you know that?"

"I just do, okay?" But Raven knew that Jason knew that Raven had an underlying message behind her statement. I'm a freak, was what she meant to say, but Jason knew Raven well enough to know that that was a legitimate concern for Raven.

"He doesn't care about the list--" Jason supplied, but Raven immediately cut him off.

"Of course he does. Everyone cares about the list, Jason," Raven said. "People can ignore it all they want, but it's always going to be there."

Jason pursed his lips, then took out Raven's phone and started doing something on it, making Raven worry. "What are you doing?"

"Don't worry," Jason said cryptically. Raven leaned over Jason's shoulder and saw that he was going through Raven and Gar's chats. Ignoring Raven's protests, Jason immediately snorted and started criticizing Raven's worries. "He likes you--" "No he doesn't--" "The way he talks to you, it's not like a 'I'm being nice' kind of thing, it's a 'I like you' kind of thing."

"And how would you know the difference between a 'I'm being nice' tone versus a 'I like you' kind of thing?"

Jason shrugged. "I talk to you differently."

"You don't count," Raven said exasperatedly. "You know me long enough to like me."

"Sure, but--" Jason was interrupted by ragged knockings on the door, to which he responded with a groan. "What?" Jason yelled out, only to be replied with a muffled: "Let me in!"
Strangely, Raven recognized that voice. It wasn't distinct enough for her to pinpoint whose voice it was, but it was recognizable enough for her to know that she knew this person. Raven watched Jason trod to the door and jam the door open, and was pleasantly surprised when it was Dick Grayson, her AP Psychology classmate, standing right outside the door with an impatient look on his face.

"Do you have the Wii remotes?" Dick asked, and Jason sighed in response.

"Aren't there remotes in the living room?"

"I need two more," Dick said, to which Jason rolled his eyes. "You have them, right?"

"Yeah." Jason grumbled and turned on his heel to grab the remotes. Dick stood by the doorframe, waiting for the remotes to come with crossed hands, while Raven watched him silently. It was only after a few minutes that Dick realized that Jason had a guest in his room.

"Raven?" Dick asked, and Raven nodded, mumbling an affirmation followed by a greeting. "I didn't know you were here."

"Yeah, she came while you and your friends were out," Jason said, handing out the remotes to Dick. Dick received the remotes and let Jason continue talking. "You guys know each other?"

"Yeah, we sit next to each other for our Psych class," Dick said. A moment of silence passed between them, and Raven pursed her lips while watching Jason twitch from side to side. "Well, I'm off. Coming for dinner later?"

"Maybe," Jason said, closing the door once Dick was out of the room. He turned around to see Raven with expectant eyes, fully knowing that Jason had something to say. "What?"

"Why is he at your house?"

"Ah, well," Jason mumbled, rubbing the back of his neck. "He's my brother. Adopted. Moved in here in June or something. It's complicated."

Raven nodded, and they left it at that. It was a dynamic between the two of them – they didn't have to say anything to know what they felt. It was perfect because both of them aren't types to open up about feelings and whatnot. However, it was a strange case now because Jason was inquisitive, if not pushy, about about Raven's thoughts on Gar.

"Jason, why are you so obsessed about Gar?" Raven asked, finally coming up with a question after swimming through her thoughts. Jason shrugged, and started playing with Raven's phone case.

"Just curious." Jason said after a few moments of contemplation.

XX

September 13 2014. Dick and Jason's Living Room.

"Got the remotes," Dick announced as he walked into the living room. Kori and Vic was busy having a showdown of a tennis game in Wii Sports, both of them seriously concentrating on the game. "Had to arrogate it from my brother. Who's winning the game?"

"I am!" Vic replied quickly, to which Kori growled in response.

"That's because Friend Vic is doing the cheat."
"I am," Vic said, and for a split second Kori looked satisfied at Vic's 'confession', until he spoke up again. "The cheat of being awesome!"

Both Kori and Dick rolled their eyes, and Dick walked to the sofa behind Vic and Kori in which Gar was sitting on. Gar had his elbow on the sofa's armrest, with a hand on his cheek and the other on his phone. "Gar, you playing?"

"Dudes, look at this!" Gar exclaimed, completely ignoring Dick's question. Dick sighed and looked at Gar's phone screen being shoved onto his face and carefully read what's on it. When Dick asked of it's significance, Gar merely made an affronted noise and started rambling. "Kitten's got a pink helicopter for her birthday."

"Why are you focused on the fact that the helicopter's pink, not the fact that she's getting an actual helicopter?" Dick asked, and Gar shrugged.

"It's annoying," Gar said. "She's flaunting her spoiled brattiness to everyone in the world! As if everyone's going to her party!"

"Well, I am," Vic said, placing his Wii remote on a nearby coffee table, looking smug over his victory in the tennis game. Kori, who seemed less pleased about it, simply stalked over to the couch and sat next to Dick, forcing Vic to sit alone. "Free food, free music, free everything, really."

"You pay your dignity for it, though," Dick joked, although all four of them knew that Dick wasn't completely joking. "You're the only one going in this room, then. I don't know Kitten well enough to spend my time with her, Gar seems adamant about it, and Kori... Well, it's pretty obvious Kori's not going either."

"I think Kitten is disgusting," Kori said, playing with her hair. "You should not resort to the level of Kitten, friend Victor."

"Victor?" Vic repeated, and shook his head before speaking again. "Look, it's not that I like her or anything. But there's so many things offered there, it'll be pretty stupid to decline. And besides, grass-stain, don't tell me you're not tempted."

"I won't," Gar said. "But like Kori said, I'm not going to resort to the level of Kitten. It's degrading."

"What if you get asked to the party?"

"I thought everyone is asked via invitation." Dick said, but Vic brushed him off.

"I mean, someone asks you on a date," Vic clarified. "You're gonna decline on that?"

"I have," everyone turned their eyes on Gar. "Been asked on a date, I mean. And declined too."

"Really?" Dick asked, and Gar nodded.

Gar told them about the incident in English class between Kitten and Raven. It was nothing new that the other three heard before, but Gar still had to repeat the story again for emphasis. "...Anyway, on Friday, after school, Gemma came up to me—" "Gemma?" "Yeah, the one with short, black hair? Follows Kitten everywhere? Anyway, she came up to me and was like 'I know we don't know each other very well, but can we go to the party together' bla, bla, bla. And I tell her, 'I'm not even going to the stupid party' with all the hate I can come up with because she was there during the incident. And you know what she says?"

"I know you're upset about what happened in English, bla bla, that was mostly Kitten. I was upset
because I wanted to be on top' and such and such. And I tell her that I don't care what she says, I'm not going to the party."

Gar paused for dramatic effect, and watched his friends' faces indicate him to continue. "Then, she's like, 'That's okay'. And I say, what?" Gar paused again, and Vic growled, shouting to make Gar continue, but Gar ignored him and played with his shirt. After a few moments, Gar spoke up again. "She tells me to celebrate Raven's birthday."

"Why?" Dick asked, and Gar shrugged.

"Because.' That's what Gemma said."

xx

January 1 2012. Roth house area.

Kitten was surprised. No – she was absolutely shell-shocked. The Roth house, which happened to be Raven's place of residence, was all covered with police cars, ambulance trucks, and a barricade tape surrounding the area. From her window, Kitten saw Raven's father walk out of the house, with Raven following shortly after. Kitten observed that Raven's face was slightly redder than the pale complexion Kitten was used to, but was unsure if Raven was crying. Raven tried to walk over to the ambulance, but the police officers stopped her. Curious of what would happen next, Kitten quickly went out of her house to head for Raven's.

Once Kitten reached the Roth household, Raven was nonplussed at Kitten's sudden appearance. "What happened?" Kitten asked before Raven was able to ask why Kitten was there.

"Why are you here?" Raven asked anyway. Her tone showed no sign of hate or annoyance, just plain confusion. After Kitten announced to everyone before the winter break that she was moving out of town, Raven decided not to act so hostile to Kitten, thinking that her efforts would be useless.

"I was watching the scene from my window," Kitten stated, nudging her head towards her house across the street. "What's going on?"

"My mom killed herself." Raven said quietly, and silence between them grew, emphasizing the loud police sirens in the background. "My mom killed herself," Raven said again, with less composure. Kitten thought that she saw a tear fall down on Raven's face, but was unsure since Raven was ducking her head down. After a few seconds, Raven looked up from the ground, and Kitten's thoughts were confirmed. Raven was crying. "I.. I couldn't do anything– I was too late… I –"

Raven's breath hitched, and that must've been the turning point for Raven's emotions because Raven started bawling her eyes out. Kitten, looking for someone to help Raven out, but quickly realized that she was left alone as Raven's dad was being interviewed by the police officers. Not knowing what to do next, Kitten awkwardly pulled Raven into an ungraceful hug. Inevitably, Kitten took a sniff of Raven and immediately scrunched her nose when she smelled a mixture of blood and sweat. When Raven pulled away and wiped her eyes, Kitten realized that Raven's hands were smeared with blood, which meant that Kitten's clothes were also smeared with blood. She cleared her throat to calm herself down, reminding herself that now wasn't the best time to express her annoyance over her bloodied shirt.

"Raven," Kitten said quietly. "You can sleep over at my house."

Raven looked at Kitten with furrowed eyebrows. She had to scrutinize the situation in which her number one nemesis was suddenly offering Raven a place to stay out of sympathy. Raven knew that
Kitten's intentions were pure, but she really couldn't handle an awkward atmosphere just after her mother's death. Clearing her throat, Raven replied quietly, hoping it was still loud enough for Kitten to hear. "No, thanks."

Kitten nodded slowly, and Raven detected a hint of relief hovering over Kitten's face. She decided to ignore it though, slightly relieved herself too that Kitten wasn't actually looking forward to spending time with Raven. "Raven… Happy new year."

"You, too." Raven said, and watched Kitten walk away from her house. From there, Raven had to rethink what happened and what Kitten's intentions truly was, but she never had the energy to.

Until school came, that is. Raven was usually ignored whenever she passed by the halls, but strangely, she was now greeted with worried stares and hushed whispers. Raven tried her best not to be bothered by it, but she couldn't help but worry what was going on around her. It was painfully obvious that all the fuss in school was about her, but she couldn't figure out why exactly. Raven then found out what was going on in her math class, and was enraged upon figuring it out. From there, she knew that she had one person to talk to.

Kitten.

Easily spotting a majorly pink Kitten across the cafeteria hall, Raven stomped towards Kitten's table and demanded that Kitten stand up and talk to her alone. Surprised, but still delicate over Raven's mood swing, Kitten stood up, following Raven out to the garden in front of the cafeteria.

"What's up?" Kitten asked awkwardly, not knowing what to expect.

"What's up?" Raven repeated, and Kitten unconsciously took a step back. "What's up? You're what's up!"

Kitten did not expect that. She herself thought that her relations with Raven was slightly better ever since she announced that she was moving out of town, which she needed to update Raven on because plans has changed and Mr. Walker decided it would be best if Kitten stayed. "I… What?"

"Honestly, Kitten, you're a selfish shrew and I know that, but I never knew that you could go this far!" Kitten stood there as she watched Raven continue her diatribe with teary eyes. "I cannot believe you'd do such a thing. You can hurt me, insult me, all you want, but you should never include other people in this! And I thought you were smart enough to realize what you did was wrong, but here you are, acting oh so clueless about what evil you've done! Do you not feel guilty? Or do you feel accomplished, knowing that I am in absolute grief because of you?!

"Raven!" Kitten interrupted, feeling increasingly worried about Raven's outburst. She honestly had no idea what Raven was confronting her about, and wanted to know immediately. "I have no idea what you're talking about!"

"You told everyone that I killed my mother!"

Kitten widened her eyes, immediately placing her hand over her mouth to contain her gasp. At this point, Kitten was outright confused, if not scared, about what Raven had to say next. "I did no such thing." Kitten said slowly, hoping that it would alleviate Raven's anger. It didn't however, and Raven continued fuming.

"Am I supposed to believe that? You were the first person I knew that knew about the incident!"

"So? That doesn't make me the bully here!" Kitten exclaimed, not caring how petulant she sounded. She was shocked, absolutely shocked at how Raven could get to the conclusion that Kitten started
the rumor. "Raven, there's the news! Someone must've watched it and thought that you were the culprit or something! How, I don't know, and I would never know because I didn't start the rumor!"

"You're lying," Raven said quietly after a few seconds. "You're lying! You wench, what is up with you? You know you did something wrong, and I called on it, why don't you just admit it?!"

"Because I did nothing wrong!"

That response tipped Raven off, and she started screaming in anguish. From there, Kitten knew that Raven would never believe her, and her feelings immediately shifted from pity to anger. Kitten let Raven regain composure, watching Raven breathe unevenly with a scowl. "I swear I didn't say anything about you and your mother to everyone. But you won't believe that, won't you?" Kitten asked snidely, to which Raven raised her chin higher to show that she wasn't afraid of Kitten. "I'm not moving."

Kitten smirked at Raven's flabbergasted response. "It was confirmed a few days ago that I'm staying," Kitten explained, watching Raven look around her surroundings in distress. "You know what I'll do with my time here, Raven?" Raven didn't answer. "I will ruin you, Raven. You will be outcasted, and no one will be there for you because they will listen to me. And one day, you will look upon this day and regret that you never believed me for a split second."

Kitten's promise didn't affect her life greatly per se, as Raven always stood out as a basket case throughout her grade. But Raven did note how the attitudes against her from the beginning of the year amplified with longer stares and obvious whisperings. Raven took it upon herself to confront the person who called her a murderer, prompting Raven to confront Kitten. Raven asked whether or not he started the rumor, but the guy only said that he only heard it from someone who knew about it first-hand. From there, Raven knew that she was right not to believe Kitten from the start.

After all, Kitten's smirk from across the room upon seeing Raven talk to her classmate told her to believe nothing but that.

xx

September 13 2014. Jason and Dick's living room.

"It is possible that Gemma is setting you up," Dick contemplated after hearing Gar speak about his encounter with Gemma. It did seem strange to him and perhaps Kori, who was nodding in agreement with whatever Dick had to say about Gemma, that Gemma would ask Gar out then suddenly tell him to pay his attention to another girl. "I mean, your friend Wally and Jinx got set up by her, right?"

Gar shook his head. "Yeah, Wally and Jinx got set up, but that was mostly Kitten!" Gar sighed, rubbing his jaw. "I don't know. It's just… You should've been there, dude. Gemma really looked honest and such."

"Maybe she is doing the acting," Kori supplied, to which Dick and Vic nodded. "She is in my drama class and she is what you would call 'quite talented.'"

"I know what acting is and she showed no signs of it."

"It's still strange that she would just randomly tell you to celebrate Raven's birthday instead, though," Dick said. "It doesn't fit with who she is."

Before Gar could retaliate, Vic interrupted him to ask a question. "But you know what's more strange, actually? The fact that you seem to be taking this really seriously."
"Of course I am," Gar said petulantly. "You would be too."

"Maybe," Vic said cryptically. "Or maybe not. Gar..." Vic paused, and Gar watched his friends knowing looks circulate across the area. "Do you like Raven?"

That question threw Gar off, and judging from the flustered looks, the constant spluttering, and the ungraceful hand gestures, Vic, Kori, and Dick knew that what Gar would say next would be the opposite of what he actually meant. "Of course not!" Gar blabbered out, and he felt his face flush even more when all three gave him knowing looks. "I just," Gar cleared his throat for clarity. "I think it's unfair. No one should be treated the way Kitten treats Raven. What comes around goes around, right?"

"Whatever you're planning to do, Gar, be careful," Vic said. "I mean she is pretty vicious, freak list and all."

"To hell with that list!" Gar exclaimed, and all four of them fell silent. After a while, Gar heard Vic chuckle to himself. "What?"

"It'll be funny if people stopped listening to her, that's all," Vic said with a smile. "Like, an anti-prom, but for our case, an anti-Kitten birthday party."

Gar heard Kori and Dick chuckle too, but he maintained silent, drowning in his own thoughts. An anti-Kitten birthday party, Gar thought to himself, that would be perfect! Not only would he be able to actually celebrate Raven's birthday, Gar would also be able to show Raven that she wasn't alone. "Vic, you're a genius!"

"Yeah, my 4.0 GPA would say so."

Gar rolled his eyes at Vic's casual boasting. "No, I mean, an anti-Kitten Birthday Party! That would definitely be a success."

"Wait, Gar--" Vic was interrupted by excited squeals coming from Kori.

"I think a party would be glorious!" Kori said. "Every friend on the list could have party for themselves too!"

"Yeah!" Gar agreed. "And we can invite other people who don't necessarily agree with Kitten's crazy policies. And maybe we'd be able to convince Kitten's friends to go too." Vic rolled his eyes at Gar disappointed look he threw at Vic.

"Hey, I'm not saying that I'm opposed to the idea," Vic said slowly. "But how would we even plan a party if we have no where to celebrate it in?"

Everyone was silent, and Gar and Kori looked at each other with crestfallen expressions. Dick felt uncomfortable at how both Gar and Kori (well, mostly Kori, but nobody had to knew that) looked disappointed. Finally, he cleared his throat and said: "We can host it here."

Gar and Kori's faces immediately brightened and abruptly lunged at Dick for a hug. After a few seconds, both of them released him, leaving Dick with a completely flushed face. Gar bolted to the other side of the room to get his battered notebook and a pen. He returned to face his other three face with a serious expression.

"Let's plan." Gar said, prompting Dick and Kori to shortly follow him to the dining table, with Vic reluctantly following. Gar tried to question why he was so obsessed with Raven and her birthday, but only came up with one answer that he liked himself: He wanted to see Raven smile again.
Chapter End Notes

Nope, didn't abandon this fic! I just post more regularly ('regularly') on FF.net, that's all. Honestly though, I am not a regular FF.net person, I just started this fic there and decided to continue there. Right now there's like seven chapters, and the eighth one will be posted soon on FF.net, which will actually be posted here earlier.

"I told you, you were supposed to complete the geometry homework on Tuesday! She's going to kill you when you show up in class today!"

Vic groaned. It was one thing to be placed in two advanced math subjects in his first year of high school, but to have a completely tyrannical geometry teacher was plain disagreeable. Vic knew that he put himself into this mess by choosing to take the advanced route of taking both Honors Geometry and Honors Algebra 2 at the same time, but he wanted to challenge himself to prepare for the future. Hopefully by the time of his junior year, he'd be sitting in an AP Calculus class filled with other people worthy of competition, because really, it's the sense of achievement that pushes Vic to great heights.

Today, however, Vic isn't feeling quite successful today, as what he said next blew his dignity away.

"Can I copy your homework?"

Karen scoffed and threw a cucumber stick at Vic. "No way! You had time to complete it. Don't bring your failures on me."

Vic groaned more loudly and buried his head in his hands. He heard the chuckles from his other friend Roy, and more scoffs from Karen. "You can copy mines, if you'd like," Vic looked up from his hands to see Garth smiling. "I think I've got all the answers right, but you should fake some wrong answers to avoid suspicion."

"Yeah, buddy!" Vic leaned over the table to give Garth a high-five. Garth grinned and reached under the table to presumably get his homework, only to be stopped by Karen.

"Garth! You're corrupting Vic!"

"How so?" Garth questioned with an innocent look that made Karen roll her eyes. "I'm just doing what friends do."

"No! You give him your homework and it'll be the first step to him being a parasite for your work! Do you really want that?"

"Who said it's not mutual symbiosis?" Garth asked with a smirk, and instead of pulling out his homework, he pulls out a piece of paper with typed code. "You can get my homework," Garth began, eyeing Vic cheekily. "If you give me your algorithm to your code in programming class."

Vic snatched the paper away from Garth and immediately scoffed once finished reading. "No way! Your code is so much better than mines, and my algorithm would make it so much superior!"

"That's the point," Garth said, sneakily handing Vic a pen. "Look, if you don't want to share it, then you don't have to. But you'd have to face the wrath of Mrs. Pines later in Geometry class."

"Oh my goodness!" Vic exclaimed, grabbing the pen away from Garth. Before writing on the paper, however, Vic immediately retracted his hand and eyed Garth suspiciously. "How do I know you're not playing with me?"

Shaking his head, Garth pulled out his geometry homework and showed it to Vic to see. "Satisfied?"
Grumbling to himself in annoyance, Vic quickly sketched his solutions to his program and handed it over to Garth. Garth, seemingly satisfied with what Vic produced after scanning it thoroughly, handed him his geometry homework in return. "Finally!" Victor exclaimed, pulling out a pen and paper to copy Garth's solutions.

Roy and Karen, observers of the whole situation, let out a voice of fascination. "Wow," Roy said. "Well played, bro!" Roy immediately reached out to Garth to do their most favorite "best friend" handshake generated from the earliest time period they spent together. Karen shook her head in amusement, watching Vic quickly scribble answers down and Garth and Roy chuckling to themselves.

As irritating as they may be, Karen loved their little friend group. Everyone's quirks were well-matched with each other and everyone was seen as equals, although that may not be the case before. Their friend group formed when Vic and Garth started teaming up with each other for their programming class, and as attached as a loyal dog can be, Roy joined their group in favour of his best friend Garth, despite the lack of interest in programming. Only after they started working together for their rigorous math subjects did Karen immediately garner interest. All four of them signed up for advanced math routes and initially clashed with each other whilst working, but time immediately became all of their friends and in the end, all four blended harmoniously with each other.

In Karen's honest opinion, it was mostly Roy and Garth who held their friend group together. Both of them have been friends for the longest of times, and has been attached to each other for as long as Karen knew them. Whatever disagreements or obstacles the 'clique' went through, it was the two of them that held them back up. And as weird as it may be, Karen was extremely grateful to have friends as fun and caring as the three of them.

"What do you think Jinx would think of your little performance here?" Karen asked Vic, snapping away from her train of thoughts. Vic and Jinx were currently dating, and it was no secret that as much as they like each other, they liked competing more. With the same ambition to enter senior Calculus in junior year, most of Vic and Jinx's dates were laced with disagreements over each other's skills. Knowing that Vic succumbed to the lowest strategy of completing homework for a math class would send Jinx to laughter for days, and Karen knew that Vic knew this.

Smirking at the mention of his own girlfriend, Vic shrugged and gave a concise reply. "She can just suck it." Vic said, to which Garth and Roy howled to. Looking up from his almost-finished paper, Vic saw the unimpressed look on Karen's face and gave her an innocent look. "She doesn't have to know."

"She'll know, dude," Roy said, causing Vic to glare at him. "Not like you'd do well in keeping that a secret, anyway."

Vic chuckled, knowing that Roy was right. As much as he'd like Jinx not to know his little copying fiasco, he knew that he wouldn't be able to keep it a secret. "Whatever," Vic grumbled to himself, and with a little more push on his writing, he eventually finished copying Garth's homework, with 20 more minutes of lunch time to spare. "Finally!"

Roy and Karen clapped their hands in mock celebration of Vic's success, and Garth smiled to himself upon receiving his homework and the algorithm. "Did you make mistakes in your homework?"

"Yeah," Vic said, although he really didn't. Luckily, Garth didn't bother checking and placed his work inside his bag. "So what's up with everyone here?"

"This woman right here," Karen said, pointing to herself proudly. "Is the future, and the first, black
and female student council president. Just wait three more years, and sooner or later all of you will be bowing down." Ignoring the boys' dismissal, Karen continued talking. "You all will be feeding me grapes and fanning me, whatnot."

"I don't think that's what happens when you become president, Karen." Garth said, and Roy hummed in agreement.

"All you'll be getting will be complaints from the lowerclassmen about the lack of progress in the school's society," Roy said. "I mean, look at the current president right now. What a fluke. Did any of you vote for him?"

All three shook their heads. "See?" Roy continued. "If the future generation disagrees, then it shouldn't be done." Roy was silent in his thoughts until he immediately lighted up again. "Man. I should be the next president."

"Yeah, right!" Karen said, shoving Roy's shoulder. "You can be vice president, but that's the limit!"

"Well, in light of another topic," Garth said, garnering the attention of the rest of the table. "I, um… I got accepted to the swimming nationals!"

All three gasped in awe, and immediately showed signs of appreciation. "Congratulations, man!" Vic said, giving Garth a fist-bump. "That's so awesome. When is it?!"

"Ah, the end of November."

"And when did you find out about this?" Karen asked, beaming with pride for her friend.

"Last night, actually," Garth confessed. "I couldn't sleep too."

Vic and Karen nodded in appreciation however Roy frowned to himself. "You didn't call me about this?" Roy said, his eyebrow raised.

Garth ducked his head sheepishly. "Well, I couldn't! I was too busy being shocked. Sorry, Roy. You know I would've called if I had the composure."

Shaking his head, Roy seemed to accept Garth's response and immediately gave Garth a hug. "Congratulations," Roy said, letting go of Garth. "You really do deserve it."

"I know right?" Karen said. "I remember going to your house really shocked. Like, I thought you lived in water."

All four of them laughed, and Garth beamed. "I wish I did, honestly."

In the midst of their moment of joy, a piece of pink, crumpled paper landed on their table. Not knowing where it was from, Roy looked around and saw Kitten at another table nearby, blowing him a kiss, and immediately making Roy blush. Karen, eyeing the whole scenario, lunged to take the paper before Roy could, and read it out loud. "'Call me'? What the heck?"

Turning redder in appearance, Roy snatched the paper away from Karen. "Didn't your mom teach you anything about privacy?" Roy asked snidely before tucking the paper away into his pocket. "Jeez."

"What's going on?" Garth inquired, curious of the whole fiasco right in front of him. When Karen rolled her eyes towards Roy, Roy immediately looked away. "Roy?"
"It's none of anyone businesses anyway!" Roy said, to which Garth threw his head back in surprise.

"Oh, so I can't get away with not telling you about the nationals immediately but you can with your secret love notes thing going on?" Garth asked in an accusing tone, making Roy grumble.

"Fine!" Roy relented. "Guys, I think Kitten likes me?"

It was meant to be said in a happy tone, but Roy unwillingly let doubt in the way. The table fell silent, and after a few minutes, Vic burst out laughing, hoping that others would do the same. "Funny! As if we'd fall for that!"

To Vic's dismay, the rest of the table remained silent. "Vic," Garth said slowly. "I think Roy is being serious."

"What?!

Roy nodded. "I mean, she's been texting me and all that, and she's just..." Looking for ways to articulate himself, Roy took out the crumpled piece of paper out of his pocket. "See? Look here – 'call me'. She wants me to talk to her!"

"Gross," Karen said, to which Garth and Vic let out a voice of agreement. "I bet the paper smells like her too!"

Trying to confirm Karen's hypothesis, Roy sniffed the paper and let out a sigh of relief. "Damn, that smells good," Roy said, and Karen scrunched her face in disgust. "I don't know about smelling like her. I've never... actually talked to her in person?"

"Huh," Garth said. "So all of the sudden, she has interest in you? You don't look like a Casanova yourself."

"Shut up," Roy grumbled. "I just... It's so cool! I'm a cool person, Kitten's a cool person... We'd be so cool together!"

Ignoring his friends' annoyed expression, Roy continued. "Look, she's cool guys. You guys heard of her birthday party, right?"

"I heard she's over exaggerating," Karen said. "No way her house has all of the stuff she provided in her invitation."

Garth nodded in agreement. "I know. I don't think I'm coming."

To Garth's response, Roy immediately expressed disapproval. "What?! Why not?"

"Come on Roy, open your eyes," Garth began. "Where do I start... the freak list? It's just so... mean."

"It's just a list of names not allowed to go," Roy said. "It's not like she provided extra mean details along with them. Besides, you should agree with that list, I mean, who would want a ruined party?"

Rolling his eyes, Garth turned his attention to Vic. "Jinx is on that list, you know."

"Yeah," Vic said. "But she says she doesn't care so..."

Garth crossed his arms. "Of course she'd say that! Do you really think that Jinx would readily admit that she feels inferior to something degrading?"
"It seems like Garth here," Karen said, ruffling Garth's hair much to Garth's dismay. "Knows your girlfriend more than you do yourself, Vic."

"Hey!" Vic said, scowling. "I know my girlfriend well enough, okay. Now shut up. Back to the topic. I still don't know if I should go to the party."

Differing responses emerged from both Garth and Roy. Garth, adamant about Kitten's party, immediately chastised Vic for even thinking about the party. Roy, on the other hand, immediately started going on about the benefits of the party. Tired of the fuss, Karen immediately shut the two up. "Shut up!" Karen said. "I'm trying not to side with anyone here, but do you remember what Kitten was like in middle school?" Looking at Roy's expectant look, Karen continued. "Let me emphasize it for you – a monster."

"Jeez, Karen," Roy said. "I thought you were all about the future and what not. Middle school is in the past! Don't you remember what the sophomores said to us? 'We freshmen must close our middle school lives and open a new book with our high school one.' Ring a bell?"

"So she randomly consumed some magic fairy dust that made her a much better person," Karen drawled sarcastically. "Where can I get some of this fairy dust?"

"I'm serious, guys," Roy said. "She's a better person now. Trust me."

"Sure," Garth said. "I don't mean to dampen the situation even more, but do anyone really know the real problem with Raven?" With the silence from his friends, Garth continued. "Raven."

All three fell silent at the mention of Raven. Vic was the first one to break that silence. "She didn't kill her mom."

Garth rolled his eyes, annoyed with the mention of Raven's late mom. "Of course she didn't! No one really believes that now! No, about Raven, it's the way Kitten treats her," Garth said. "Sure, Kitten may be nice to you, Roy, but that doesn't forgive the horrible things she's done to Raven."

"Come on!" Roy said, exasperated. "Raven is none of our business! Sure her life sucks and all, but Kitten and Raven are barely talking to each other. Raven should be the least of our problems."

"Hello?" Karen said. "Even if the two of them don't talk, look at your surroundings! Kitten has manipulated the society into becoming Anti-Raven. And do you see the 'freak list'? She's on top! It's as if the party's an anti-Raven birthday party or something."

"Why is it that you're defending her so much, Roy?" Garth asked, his eyes peering through Roy's. "You like her, or something?"

"She's nice," Roy said coolly. "Okay, guys, look. You guys may not like her much, and I'm not asking to form a friendship with her! All I want is for my friends to be with me when the party comes. You don't even have to mind Kitten for more than five minutes probably – her house is so huge that we can just run off and do something else of our own interests. Come on guys, think of it as a free venue for fun. Please come with me."

Roy's plea was meant to be directed to all three of his friends, but throughout his whole mini-speech, Roy was looking at Garth expectantly. Sighing, Garth relented and shrugged. "Fine, we'll go," Garth said, to which Roy attempted to lunge at him for a hug. Luckily, Garth stopped Roy before Garth couldn't speak any more. "But once it gets annoying, we will leave. Right?"

Karen and Vic nodded in agreement. Roy, happy with his friend's decision, nodded happily and hugged Garth immediately. "Thanks, bro."
Shaking his head with a slight smile, Garth brushed Roy away. "So what can we do in that party?" Garth asked, to which all three of his friends smiled mischievously.

xx


"Man," Vic said, after moments of silence in which all three of his friends and himself has finished their ordered pizza. "I honestly… Had a lot of fun in Kitten's party."

"Ha!" Roy said, bending over the table from his seat to grab some tissues. After getting some help from Garth, Roy promptly sat on his chair properly. "Told you it'd be great."

"Can you imagine the people cleaning up after her party?" Karen asked, to which all three of her friends hummed in interest. "A venue so large with so many people… Imagine the mess!"

"But it was mess you contributed to, and you loved it," Roy cooed, putting emphasis on the word 'love'. Karen looked away and shook her head, prompting Roy to nudge her shoulder. "Oh come on, you know you enjoyed that party."

"I mean," Karen began. "How can anyone have space in their house to have a hot-air balloon? Honestly, if we were in the medieval times, she'd be the princess or something."

"Yo, Kole's own rendering of chubby bunny with ice was so hardcore," Vic reminisced, to which everyone nodded. "And the chocolate fountain was heaven."

"Garth?" Roy said, grabbing the attention of his lately taciturn friend. "What do you think? We didn't even use the UNO cards we brought." Garth grumbled, and Karen scoffed. "Dance machine or UNO cards? I think I know where my priorities lie."

"Are the cards really your top thought right now?" Roy asked, and Garth shrugged. "She was annoying for the whole party," Garth said. "I can't believe none of you proposed to leave!"

"You should've done so if you wanted us to leave." Vic pointed out, and Garth groaned in response. "I did!" Garth retaliated. "But, no, 'Garth, you shouldn't be such a spoil sport!'" Garth paused, and continued after knowing what to say next. "And Roy, Kitten completely ignored you the whole time! I thought she liked you or something? Jeez guys, she was being such a witch during that party and none of you thought of that?"

"Garth" Karen spoke up. "It's not like Kitten and I are best friends now. We liked the party, we don't like the person. As far as I know, it's not a crime to like a party because the person's hosting it is such a skank. And it's not like her presence was there with us the whole time!"

"Are you kidding me?" Garth asked. "Karen, her face was engraved on the chocolates! Pillows had her face embedded on it! Don't get me started on the walls. Let me guess, all of you are going to her party next year too?"

All three of Garth's friend looked at each other awkwardly. Finally, Roy spoke up. "Well… it's not like that party will be the only party Kitten will hold this year."

Garth's eyes widened. "Oh, that's nice!" Garth exclaimed sarcastically. "Tell me how your best friend Kitten is doing too, please!"
Roy rolled his eyes, and opened his mouth to retaliate, but his phone rang. Excusing himself from the table, Roy stood up from his seat and picked up his phone in another room, ignoring the heavy glares stemming from Garth.

Garth, left silently with the company of Karen and Vic, pursed his lips. "So…” Garth said, trying to diffuse the awkwardness in the air.

"You know," Vic said. "I've never seen you that riled up before. Really, Garth, it's not like we're all going to be buddies with Kitten. Like Karen said, it's a party we liked regardless of who hosted it."

"It's not…” Garth flustered for articulacy.

Garth paused for a moment to think of what to say next. "I hate how everything has been centered on Kitten and her superfluous party. I hate how one party seems to eradicate all the bad that Kitten has done. I hate how none of you seem to realize, or try to acknowledge, how mad it is for Kitten to act as if it's okay to rule the grade. And I hate, I really hate, how my friendship with Roy is seemingly diminished due to the likes of Kitten. Because that sucks. A lot.”

But Garth never had the courage to say his thoughts. Picking a safer, yet inconspicuous answer, Garth opted to say: "You know how the party is themed 'Under The Sea'? Don't you guys realize how messed up it is that most of the food served is seafood. Aren't we supposed to symbolize marine conservation and stuff?"

Karen and Vic looked at each other warily, then laughed. "Is that seriously what you're all hissy about?" Karen asked in an obvious amused tone, to which Garth looked away from. "Aww, for a second I thought you were just jealous about Kitten stealing your Royfriend bromance."

"'Royfriend'?" Garth repeated, and Karen nodded enthusiastically.

"You know, your Roy boyfriend. Royfriend." Karen said simply, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. Garth stared at her for a moment, then cleared his throat awkwardly.

"I'm not really mad at that." Garth said, although he knew deep inside that Karen was somewhat right.

"Sure," Vic said. "Who wants ice cream?"

xx

November 4 2012. Café de Cat.

"Roy!" Kitten said, standing up from her seat. Roy took extra observation of his surroundings. The whole café was surrounded with feline themes, and Roy was immediately sure that this café was somehow Kitten's. Roy smiled from seeing Kitten, and took a seat in front of her. After settling down, Kitten mixed her tea with three turns from her spoon and looked up to face Roy. "You had fun in my party?"

"Yeah," Roy said, distracted by the brightness of Kitten's dangling earrings. He closed his eyes and shook his head rapidly, then cleared his throat. "I had fun."

"And your friends?" Kitten asked sweetly, and Roy noted how her eyes twinkled in amusement.

Roy thought for a second. Karen and Vic obviously enjoyed the party, but Roy was unsure about Garth. When Roy announced to his friends that he'd be leaving to see Kitten for a short while, Garth gave him a look that Roy couldn't comprehend, sending slight shivers to Roy's spine. For some
reason, Roy would much prefer Garth say something scathing rather instead of being glared to death.

"They loved it," Roy said finally, and Kitten raised her eyebrow. "I mean, it was a great party."

"Oh, obvi," Kitten said. "They had great company too." Kitten gave him a wink that made Roy's cheeks flush.

"Ah," Roy said. "It was a fun surrounding."

Kitten smiled tightly. "You sure your friends enjoyed the party?"

Roy blinked. Why was Kitten doubting him?

"I did just say so, yeah."

Kitten tilted her head. "Even your friend, Garth?"

Roy pursed his lips. It seemed like Garth's sulky demeanor throughout the party did not go unnoticed. "I –"

"Whatevs," Kitten interrupted, with a smile so eerie. "Nothing's perfect."

The two of them remained silent and Roy awkwardly looked around his surroundings to pass time. Finally, after what felt like an excruciatingly long eternity, Kitten spoke up again. "You seem to like Garth a lot."

Roy chuckled. "Yeah, he's my best friend," Roy said, smiling fondly at the memories with his friend. "But uh, I don't really know his thoughts on your party, really."

"Never mind the party," Kitten said abruptly. "You seem to really like Garth a lot."

Roy looked at Kitten with scrunched eyebrows, and realized what she was getting into. "I'm not gay, if that's what you're insinuating."

"The party was, like, really fun," Kitten said, and Roy raised an eyebrow at the change of subject. "But the person I went with, I don't even remember his name. It would've been much better if I went with you, honestly." And with that, Kitten immediately shifted her somewhat cold demeanor into a flirtatious, sweet one. Roy blinked twice, unsure of what to think about Kitten's seemingly dual personality.

"Yeah," Roy said, just for the sake of easing the awkwardness in the air however once it slipped out of his mouth he realized how little success it brought. "Totally."

"And, like, I would've totes hung out with you and ditch that boring guy I went with," Kitten said. "But you were occupied."

"Huh?"

"Roy," Kitten said, her face turning back to her mean persona. "I don't like your friends." Ignoring the flabbergasted sounds Roy made, Kitten continued speaking. "I really could've gone and had fun with you, but you spent so much time with your friends that I think you almost forgot who the party was even for. And, like, all those times we could've chilled together, you spent with your friends."

"But the thing is," Roy said tiredly. "They're my friends. You're cool, of course, and I'm sorry but I'd definitely prioritize my friends over… whatever we are."
"Roy," Kitten drawled his name out. "We're dating."

"What?"

"We're dating." Kitten said, and Roy made an exasperated noise.

"Kitten, you're cool and all, but what makes you think you get to decide our relationship status alone?"

"And because we're dating," Kitten continued, ignoring Roy's complaint. "You need to spend more time with me, and ditch your loser friends in the dump."

Roy's nostrils flared at the insult directed to his friends. Here he was, in front of some random girl he chose over his friends, insulting his friends. Roy was having none of that, and in a fit of anger, Roy stood up, causing Kitten's tea to spill over. "That's uncalled for. We're not dating. You may be cool and pretty and stuff, but you're no one compared to my friends."

Kitten glowered at him, and stood up as well to face Roy in the face. "Pick. Your friends, or me?"

"Obviously my friends!"

"Wrong choice," Kitten sneered. "You really want to know what happens when you pick your friends? You attack both me and your friends."

Roy crossed his arms. "How so?"

"Karen's presidential dreams? I can take that away in, like, 5 seconds. All it takes a little snippet of what she really thinks of the student council. Vic's 'successful' program? Please, you and I both know that half of that work isn't really his. And you really want to know what happens with Garth?"

Roy stayed silent. Smirking, Kitten walked towards Roy and caressed his face. "He's swimming for the nationals, isn't he?"

Roy's eyes widened at the mention of Garth's nationals. Roy had no doubt that Kitten would do anything in her absolute power to make her friends suffer, but he couldn't bear the thought of having his best friend's dreams taken away from him. Garth has dreamed about being accepted to the nationals for as long as Roy could remember, and if Roy didn't comply with a powerful young lady, all of Garth's aspirations could be taken away in just a second.

"You wouldn't." Roy said weakly.

"Who do you think sponsors the whole national's competition?" Kitten asked. "My daddy. All I have to do is dial him and remove your little fish friend from the event."

Roy felt as if his heart stopped. After seeing Kitten's treacherous personality, Roy knew that he couldn't stand Kitten's presence. At the same time, however, Roy couldn't bear to have the fate of his friend's happiness be compromised. Roy let out a deep breath, and felt the words coming out of his mouth flow unnaturally.

"I pick you."

xx


Toni was late. To be precise, Toni was 32 minutes and 42 seconds late. But who was counting? All
she knew was that she needed to arrive to the geography classroom immediately. Losing focus of her surroundings, Toni passed by the lockers in a fast pace, and unfortunately bumped into someone along the way.

"What the hell?"

Toni winced from ungracefully landing on her butt from her fall, but she composed herself once she realized who she was talking to. Toni stood up, and watch Roy do the same with a scowl. "Roy," Toni said, realizing how badly out of breath she was. "Sorry."

Hoping that was enough, Toni tried passing by Roy to get to her destination. Unfortunately, it seemed like Toni’s apology was futile. Roy grabbed her wrist the second he could, and that stopped her from going anywhere. Groaning, Toni slithered out of Roy's hold, but stayed behind just to know what Roy had to say.

"Where are you going?"

Toni fell silent. It was never really classified whether or not the meeting in the geography classroom was secret, but even if it wasn't, Toni wasn't in the mood to tell anyone, especially Roy. "I'm late to see some friends," Toni said evasively. "Can I go now?"

Toni watched Roy cross his arms, and waited for a signal to indicate that it was fine to leave. Finally, Roy nodded his head curtly, and turned away. Sighing in relief, Toni ran a few more steps until reaching the geography classroom unceremoniously. As she barged in the room unceremoniously, Toni was met with stares from the people in the room. Regaining her composure, Toni tilted her head and smiled sweetly, and headed to the corner where her boyfriend, Garth was.

"Where were you?" Garth whispered, wrapping his arm around Toni's waist. Groaning silently, Toni leaned onto Garth's shoulder and sighed.

"I got held back in Psychology for talking back to the teacher," Toni replied. "What are you doing now?"

"We were all waiting for you, actually," Garth said, using his free hand to motion to everyone in the room doing their own thing. Toni took a moment to observe her surroundings. On the other side of the room was Kole, Kori, Jericho and Gnarrk, presumably working on a recycling club project together. Toni also spotted Jinx and Billy trolling with each other, simultaneously teasing Wally along the way. On another side were the twins, Mas y Menos, being chastised by Karen for who knows what. Toni also noticed a few other people: Mikron, Gar, Dick and Vic. It took Toni a short moment to realize who was she with.

"Everyone on the freak list is here," Toni pointed out, her voice slightly amazed. To make sure, she scanned the room one more time and realized someone was missing, though Toni couldn't place her finger on it. "Someone's missing."

"Raven," Garth said softly. After Toni gave him a curious look, Garth tilted his head from side to side. "You'll see why."

And in that moment, Gar seemed to realize that Toni was settled in the room. Smiling, he walked to the front of the classroom and stood on top of the teacher's desk where everyone could see him. Curious, Toni writhed out from Garth's touch and took a seat right next to her. Not wanting to be left alone, Garth did the same.

"Alright," Gar said loudly, grabbing the attention of everyone in the room. "I'd like to say thanks to
the four of you over there," Gar pointed to the recycling club members. "For getting access to this room. Um, and thanks to everyone who came here. I appreciate it, a lot."

Toni resumed listening to Gar, but realized that Garth kept on shifting on his seat, looking back and forth from the door's window back to Garth. "What's wrong?" Toni whispered. To her dismay, Garth whispered back that nothing was wrong, although his expression didn't seem like it. Deciding she'd ask about it later, Toni continued paying her attention to Gar.

"Okay so obviously, all of you are here because you received a message from me to meet me here. And as all of you know, most of you are in the freak list," Toni noticed that Gar winced whilst mentioning the list. "So that means you can't go to Kitten's birthday party soon."

Ignoring the blank stares from the audience, Gar carried on. "But that doesn't mean you guys can't party!" Toni raised her eyebrow, and turned to look at Garth's expression, but Garth was still staring blankly at the door. Shaking her head, Toni looked back to Gar. "Look, the list is like saying that you guys can't have fun. Which is definitely not true. That's why I'm proposing the Anti-Kitten Birthday Party!"

The classroom broke into fits of murmurs and whispers. Toni widened her eyes and tried egging out a response from Garth, but Garth remained emotionless. "Pst!" Toni hissed, sick of Garth's lacklustre reactions so far. "What is up with you?"

Garth, tearing his eyes away from the door, turned to face Toni, and sighed. "Toni, I promise I'll tell you what's going on later. Just listen to Gar."

"Wouldn't that be kind of… bullying?" Toni heard Kole ask from the other side of the room. "I mean, to have a theme that's 'anti-someone'."

"Well," Vic stood up, and sat on the teacher's desk Gar was standing on. "It's not like the party will be revolved around Kitten. That would be defeating the purpose, I think."

"Yeah," Gar nodded, and opted to sit down next to Vic instead of standing. "Look, maybe I introduced it wrong. It is somewhat an anti-Kitten birthday party, where all the 'freaks' have fun which goes against what Kitten thinks of you guys – incapable of having fun. It'll be a normal party, with fun and such."

"What if we don't want to go?" Jinx asked, and Gar rolled his eyes.

"No one's forcing you to," Gar said simply. "Why, you have plans?"

Jinx glanced at Wally, who shrugged with a smile. "I suppose not," Jinx replied. "But when will you host this 'party'?"

"November 2nd." Gar said, and Jinx raised her eyebrows.

"The same day as Walker's?" Gar nodded. "Why?"

"Well, to prove a point – "

"What point?"

"The point that you guys are more than freaks, you are individuals with unique quirks and that makes you special," Gar glared at Jinx. "Plus it would be nice to imagine her reaction when something on her 'day' is not revolved around her."
Noticing Jinx's unamused expression, Dick stepped in to answer. "November 2nd is Raven's birthday."

The classroom broke into fits of murmurs and whispers once again. Gar's face turned explicitly red, and Jinx smirked and crossed her arms. "How sweet," Jinx said cheekily. "So you rounded up all of the 'freaks' to serve the 'Queen Freak', am I right?"

"Don't call her that!" Gar exclaimed. "Look, it's a party to have fun, prove a point, and celebrate a friend's birthday. It's kind of a big deal. People only have birthdays once a year, just in case that small piece of information flew out of your reach."

Jinx scoffed at Gar's sarcasm. "Just because all of our names are in the same list, doesn't mean we're all best friends."

Suddenly, a knock rang throughout the room. However, it wasn't a knock that stemmed from the door. Instead, it came from the back, so everyone turned their heads to see what was happening. Jericho, successful in garnering everyone's attention, began moving his hands in a smooth motion. Everyone looked at each other, unsure of what Jericho did or say.

Luckily, Kole stepped in to interpret Jericho's sign language. "Jericho says that he thinks this party is a good idea," Kole paused to allow Jericho some more time to sign more. "He also says it promotes unity and friendship, which is always a good thing. And personally, I agree."

Gnarrk grunted in response, again, nobody seemed to understand him except Kole. "Gnarrk agrees too. Anyone else?"

Kole, Jericho and Gnarrk raised their hands as an indicator. Seizing the opportunity, Gar raised his hand and repeatedly hit on Vic's thigh to do the same too. Sooner or later, almost everyone raised their hand, with the exception of Garth and Jinx.

"Okay, look," Jinx said. "Garth and I disagree, so obviously the plan isn't perfect."

Toni, knowing that Garth was just zoning out, nudged Garth. Garth seemed to get the message, and immediately started talking. "Oh, sorry Jinx, but I do agree with Jericho. Sorry guys. I've been zoning out."

"What do you think this is, Model United Nations?" Vic asked, and Jinx threw her hands up in the air in exasperation. "One veto and the resolution's over?"

Jinx sighed, and looked over at Wally, who gave her a cheeky smile and eventually tapped her nose. In a fit of frustration, Jinx gave in. "Fine! Fine, fine. What's the plan then?"

With that, the class cheered, and Jinx buried her face in her hands as she saw Gar begin to speak. "Well, first we'll discuss the location of party —"

"Hey," Toni said, tuning out whatever the others were discussing. "You're going to tell me what's wrong?"

"Actually," Garth said, standing up from his seat. "I'm going to the bathroom. Talk to you later, promise."

Without regard of Toni's protest, Garth left the room, but not before telling Gar that he was off to the bathroom. Once he was out, he saw exactly what he thought he'd see: Roy Harper, standing by the door.
"Hello," Garth said coolly. "What are you doing here?"

"What's it to you?"

"Well, when you're standing near the door for about twenty minutes without entry, it is quite curious."

"I wasn't eavesdropping!" Roy said hotly, and Garth rolled his eyes.

"Roy, let me tell you, there's only two people with red spiky hair in our grade. We have one of them already."

Roy spluttered. Garth, unwilling to talk to Roy anymore, crossed his arms and motioned his head to the hall. "Just leave," Garth said, in a tone so scathing that it might actually cut if it had the chance. "And don't you dare mention anything about this to Kitten!"

"I won't." Roy said, but he might've been talking to himself for Garth immediately left after what he said.

xx

September 12 2013. Cafeteria.

Garth observed his surroundings. With the loss of Roy in the table Garth knew how empty the table felt, but he still felt content with his remaining friends. Satisfied, even.

Karen, now deserving treasurer of the student council, unfortunately did not receive the same acclamations her friends did in the math department. Instead of joining her friends in Pre-Calculus, Karen has been given a place in Trigonometry. Meanwhile, Vic, after breaking up with Jinx over the summer, has been much more exuberant in the past few weeks. And it seemed like Vic and Jinx still remained in touch – albeit as academic rivals, however Garth wouldn't really be surprised if they got back together. And Wally West, a new student at Jump City High with a knack on the track, fit in tremendously well with Garth, Vic, and Karen.

It was a somewhat good environment to be with in the beginning of their sophomore year. Even though not everything went as planned according to their freshman plans, Garth still found ways to enjoy what was happening around. However, he still found newfound, yet extremely passionate, dislike for his former best friend, Roy.

A few days after Kitten's birthday party in freshman year, Garth, Vic, and Karen witnessed the sudden change in Roy's personality. What was once his hot-headed yet cool best friend turned into an irritable and despicable human being. It was difficult dragging out the truth of what was really going on with Roy due to his unwillingness to comply, but Garth knew exactly what made him the way he was.

Kitten.

And he despised her even more.

The thing is, Garth was in no position confront Kitten of exactly what was happening. As time progressed, Garth developed more and more into a pacifist, and Garth had to contribute that to the times he spent with swimming, which made him calmer despite the circumstances. Garth never really saw the need for problems as he preferred to have a calm disposition. In addition to that, Garth has developed himself more and more into an introvert. While he did miss Roy's friendship, Garth realized how relaxing solitude could be.
Throughout his life, Garth has never been the type to confide in his friends. He always had Roy for that. But now that he doesn't, Garth never really tried opening up to Garth or Vic. It wasn't that he didn't trust them, but… It just wasn't the same.

And because it was the same, none of them knew the status of Garth's love life – enamored with his science classmate, Antonia "Toni" Monetti.

Nothing has happened, except for daily Facebook messages from the two. Garth liked how natural it was to talk to Toni – she was sassy, she was witty, and she was definitely smart. Toni transferred to Jump City High during the second semester of freshman year, and Garth didn't get to know her then. But during the start of his General Sciences class, Toni was seated next to Garth and that's when they started talking to each other. It started as discussions for help, but then it gradually turned to random conversations generated by anyone at any time. It was nice. Garth really liked it.

Garth was sure he wanted to ask her out, but not so sure about the subject 'when'. He hoped soon, though. But with the rigorous and demanding schedule from his swimming lessons, he doubted he'd be able to spend much time with her even if she did want to go out with her.

"Guys!" Wally said, snapping Garth out of his conflicting thoughts. "Look at this."

Wally pulled out a pink piece of paper, and it only took Garth one sniff to know it was from Kitten. Scowling, Garth waited for Wally to continue. "'Jump City High's Top 10 Sophomore Freaks 2013'? What's this?"

Karen looked between Garth and Victor with a wary look. "Um, well you know Kitten Walker, right?" Wally nodded. "Well she throws a party every year, and she lets everyone in her grade come, except people on that list. Are you in it?"

"Well no," Wally said, scanning the paper. "This is my first time being invited to a party. I've never been invited to a party before. But this is really mean."

All three nodded. "I mean," Wally continued. "A freak undeserving of any attention it stabs me to even write about this freak. That's so spiteful."

All three looked at each other with a confused expression. "Um… what?"

"The descriptions!" Wally said, still reading the paper.

"Description," Garth repeated softly. "Give me that."

Ignoring the protests stemming out of Wally when Garth grabbed the paper from his hand, Garth immediately read the paper. Once he reached the first name of the list, Garth's heart dropped. "Toni," Garth whispered to himself. "Tell me who else is on the list later."

Wally immediately let out a noise of protest when he saw Garth slam the paper on the table and stand up. "Where are you going?" Wally asked.

Instead of answering, Garth ignored him and stormed to Kitten's table. Neglecting the stares from Kitten's table and everyone else in the cafeteria, Garth maintained steady eye contact with Roy and spoke coolly. "We need to talk."

Roy blinked. It was the first time Garth spoke to Roy in a long time. Looking over at Kitten for approval, Kitten shrugged her shoulders and resumed eating her chicken wrap. Clearing his throat, Roy stood up and faced Garth. "Talk."
Garth gave him a look. "Alone."

Without waiting for Roy's response, Garth left to the hallway. Once he stopped, he turned around to see if Roy followed, and sure enough, he did. "You're a jerk, you know that?"

Roy's stoic expression broke into a confused one. "What?"

"Ever since," Garth seethed. "Ever since you showed interest for that stupid wench, everything went downhill from there. You kept on trying to force her ways on to us, and in the end where did it get us? One day you turn over a new leaf, however you didn't turn yourself into a better person or anything, you turned into a complete monster! You ignored all of your friends, and when we try to talk to you, you become an absolute bitch to all of us. And remember the swimming nationals? Great support you gave me!"

Garth knew that Roy knew Garth was referring to Roy's absence in Garth's first nationals. Letting out a breath of laziness, Roy spoke. "Didn't you win first place in that thing?"

That did it. "Go screw yourself!" Garth lunged at Roy, but Roy luckily blocked Garth from harming him using his forehands. Struggling for a few seconds, Roy finally grabbed hold of Garth's wrists, and began talking frantically.

"If you just knew what was going on," Roy struggled to say, as Garth kept on fighting back. "You'd understand! Look, you're my best friend, just listen to me."

Sighing, Roy contemplated between telling Garth the truth and letting it go. Roy never expected for his tirade to save his friends to extend for so long. However, he felt as if he'd never know the end of it. Deciding that his friend is worth the trouble, Roy chose to tell him. "Last time, after the party –"

"Ahem," a voice said, and both Roy and Garth immediately knew that voice belonged to Kitten. Letting go of Garth's wrists, Roy turned around to face Kitten. Once he did, Kitten smiled devilishly. "You're missing out on the fun."

"Uh," Roy said, rubbing the back of his neck. "Yeah." He cleared his throat. "I know. Garth decided it was fun to waste my time."

Instead of retaliating, Garth rolled his eyes and let out a huge huff. "Well that's, like, inconsiderate of you, isn't it Garth?" Kitten asked sweetly.

Not waiting for Garth's response, Kitten grabbed Roy's hand and started walking away with him, leaving Garth angered in the hallway.

xx


"You know," Karen whispered to Vic. "I didn't know Garth and Toni was a thing?"

"I don't think anyone does," Vic whispered back. "I think the meeting was their first outing as a couple together."

"How long do you think they've been together?"

"Honestly," Vic breathed out. "I think it's been a long time."

"You have a theatre here?" Vic and Karen turned to look at Wally, who was amazed with his
surroundings. "This place is awesome!"

"It's not as awesome as Kitten's place," Vic said loudly, walking over to Wally's direction. "That's why we need to have superb activities to make up for it. Anyone got plans?"

Whilst the other half of the room started planning activities, Toni was busy trying to squeeze Garth's thoughts out of his head. "Garth, seriously. You've been acting like a princess lately."

"Is this party a secret?" Toni shrugged. "Roy knows about it."

"What? How?" Toni asked. She tried thinking of ways in which Roy could find out, but couldn't think of any. "How?" Toni asked again.

Garth sighed and ruffled his hair. Toni noticed how messy it left his hair. "He was eavesdropping the whole time. I could see his hair through the door window. When I confronted him about it, he insisted it wasn't him, but seriously, who else has spiky red hair besides Wally?"

Toni chuckled. "What did you say to him?"

"I told him to keep his mouth shut," Garth said. "I don't think it'd be nice if Kitten knew about this and tried to destroy it."

Gar, hearing everything Garth and Toni said lately, stepped in their conversation. "Wait," Gar said, with a smile. "Isn't the purpose of this party to undermine Kitten?"

Toni and Garth looked at each other with unamused expressions. "I thought we established this party was about friendship, and celebrating another friend's birthday, not stooping down to another tyrant's level."

Gar dismissed him with a flick of his wrist. "Well, of course, but it's to prove a point too."

"So we're just going to publicize this party right next to Kitten's? What if she tries to destroy it?"

"Oh please," Gar said. "We're all capable people. What is she going to do, tantrum us out of making a party?"

"I'm just saying, we should plan this party as a party, and not as a contestant for 'Jump City's Next Top Party.'"

"Wow –" Gar spoke, but was interrupted by Dick.

"Listen up! I'm ordering pizza, tell me your orders!"

Soon the room was buzzing with varieties of pizza flavors. Gar, knowing that Jinx was vegan, relied on her to order a pizza suitable for the two of them. When he heard Jinx shout a vegan order, Gar took his cue to leave to the kitchen. He was feeling thirsty however he didn't enjoy the fruit juices Dick offered and sought for a carbonated drink.

Walking in the kitchen, he saw another person near the counter. The girl was ducking her head and was wearing a blue beanie, so Gar couldn't really pin point who it was. Deeming her as one of Dick's stepbrother's friends, Gar ignored her and walked over to the refrigerator. Taking out a Pepsi can out, Gar turned around and almost dropped his can once he clearly saw the girl's face.

"Raven?!"

Simultaneously, Raven let out a, "Gar?!"
"What are you doing here?!" Both of them said simultaneously, and as Gar was about to answer, Jason popped in the room, trying to find Raven. Once he found Raven with Gar, Jason smirked.

"What's up?" Jason asked with an amused nod. "Didn't expect you being here."

"What are you doing here?" Raven asked, although much calmer than the last time.

"Um, I'm with my friends," Gar said awkwardly. "What are you, uh, doing here?"

Jason noticed Gar eyeing him suspiciously, and his smirk grew even more. Just to see Gar's reaction, Jason wrapped his arm around Raven's shoulder. "We're just chilling," Jason said, and Gar pursed his lips once he saw Jason around Raven. Rolling her eyes, Raven writhed out of Jason's hold and grunted. "So you seem to have a lot of friends out there, Gar, is it?"

"Yeah," Gar said. "Well, um... we're planning something."

"Oh, must be big," Gar nodded. "Party?"

Gar suspected that Jason heard something from Dick. "Well, yeah."

"What's the occasion?" Gar groaned internally at Jason's curiosity. "Halloween?"

"Um," Gar stuttered. "No."

Jason raised an eyebrow. "All these people for some... insignificant party?"

Gar turned red. "This is not an insignificant party!" Sighing, Gar turned his attention to Raven. Gar noted Raven's slightly widened eyes when Gar looked straight into her eyes. Licking his lips before speaking, Gar tried to find words for what he decided to say.

"I'm throwing a birthday party for you, Rae."
It was a lazy Sunday, and Jason and Raven decided to spend the day wisely by doing nothing but lie down on Jason’s bed and idly do their own thing. It was a very silent environment, but none of them felt the need to change that.

Ever since Dick transferred to Jump City from Gotham City, Jason’s caretaker became much more lenient about houseguests, under the circumstance that Dick kept on pushing for it. This newfound lenience meant that Jason and Raven could hang out in solitude, which was perfect for both introverts.

Raven removed herself off the bed. Jason was sitting cross-legged on the back of his bed, while Raven was now sitting on the mini sofa in front of Jason’s bed. Raven saw Jason’s eyebrow raise at the change of Raven’s position, but Raven gave him no mind and continued reading her book.

After a few moments, Raven looked up from her book and looked for the time. It was almost evening, and Raven had no idea what time her father would be home. Her father’s work schedule hasn’t improved since childhood – rather, it worsened, as Raven couldn’t recall seeing her father for more than an hour. Raven would’ve usually spent time in her own house alone, but because Jason’s volleyball practice became more intense on the weekdays rather than on the weekends like usual, Raven found herself with the company of Jason more frequently under his request.

And because Raven also established a new camaraderie with Dick, Raven has been spending more time in their house rather than her own. They even set up the guest room for her to use overnight whenever needed, and although Raven never felt the need to use it, she might now due to her father’s business trip.

Raven enjoyed the company of the two boys. Jason was cheeky, witty, and very cunning, something that would’ve annoyed Raven to her end, although it did the opposite. Dick was smart, cool, and ambitious, which Raven always thought was admirable. Her friendship with Dick came at a cost though – Dick was always teasing both Raven and Jason about their non-existent romantic relationship. And even though Raven and Jason knew that there was, or always will be, nothing between the two of them, Jason’s mischievous responses to Dick’s teasing never made him stop.

In all honesty, Raven found Jason too sly to date, and dating him would be analogous to dating a brother. Their relationship was purely platonic, although Jason could act teasingly affectionate when he wanted to.

Raven knew that Jason felt the same way about Raven – undeniable sibling feelings. Besides, Jason was too busy focusing on another aspect of Raven’s love life with someone else: with Gar.

Raven blushed slightly at the thought of Gar. Raven shared no class or clubs with Gar except English, and group work for English class would not emerge until later. To Raven, this meant that the two of them wouldn’t be talking as much for it wasn’t needed. However, to her surprise, Gar still managed to talk to her with the likes of online messaging. Their conversations were mostly laden with Gar still trying to make Raven laugh with Raven responding with utmost annoyance.

Raven never understood why Gar always wanted to see her happy. From online meme pictures to badly composed jokes, Raven couldn’t deny that it was nice to see Gar make the effort despite its low quality. Raven couldn’t also deny that she enjoyed talking to Gar. It wasn’t that she liked the...
attention, or the fact that she was talking to someone other than Jason, but just that despite his
cildish disposition, Gar was very likeable. Gar was extremely affable, creating friendships in
anyway he wanted. So it was questionable for Raven, who wasn’t the friendliest person on the earth,
to be constantly pursued by Gar, one of the friendliest people on earth.

Raven never expressed her thoughts about Gar to Jason, but Jason knew her well enough to be
giving her knowing looks whenever Gar, or anything related to him was mentioned. Raven thought
back to their last conversation online. They talked until 2AM last night, where Gar unceremoniously
fell asleep after passionately messaging her about animal rights. It was a weird dynamic between the
two of them – Gar was the one mostly talking, while Raven sent back curt, short replies. Raven,
however, was considering lengthening her responses a bit more, illogically afraid that her taciturn
manner would steer Gar away.

Clearing her throat, Raven snapped out of her thoughts and continued reading her book. In all
honesty, it wasn’t her book, it was a book lent by Dick stating that Raven would enjoy the book. It
was a non-fiction book about psychology, something Dick read over the summer to prepare for the
AP course, and while Raven wasn’t a big fan of non-fiction, she did find herself enjoying the book.
However, it was very hard for her to focus reading the book, as chattering noises from outside kept
on distracting her.

“Jason?” Raven asked, suddenly breaking the comfortable silence between the two of them. “Is it
me, or is the house really loud today?”

“It’s not just you,” Jason said, still not looking up from his phone. “I think he invited extra people
today.”


long as they don’t eat my food.”

“Okay,” Raven said slowly. “But it’s so loud.”

“What’s your point?”

“It’s annoying,” Raven deadpanned, and Jason chuckled at her response. “I want to go to the
kitchen, and the last thing I want to experience is an encounter with another human being.” Raven
paused for effect. “Besides you, I guess.”

“I’m touched,” Jason said sweetly, his hand over his chest to dramatize his reaction. “Just go to the
kitchen. I’ll follow you in a second.”

Sighing, Raven left the book on top of Jason’s bed, and went outside. Luckily, the kitchen was
empty. Craving for a sandwich and knowing that Jason was craving for one too, Raven gathered all
materials to create sandwiches for the both of them. She decided on settling on the end of the
counter, to avoid any possible interaction with other house guests. Raven silently continued making
the sandwiches, when she heard someone scuttle in the room. Groaning slightly to herself, Raven
shifted her body position so that she wouldn’t face the person, presumably finding a drink in the
refrigerator.

Hoping to just avoid the person inside the kitchen, Raven picked up the two sandwiches on a plate
and almost gasped to herself once she saw who was there in the kitchen.

“Gar?!”
Simultaneously, Gar let out a “Raven?!”

“What are you doing here?!” Raven winced at the simultaneous reactions elicited from both of them. While Gar was about to answer, however, Jason walked into the kitchen, much to Raven’s irritation.

“What’s up?” Raven didn’t dare look up from the floor to look at Jason as she knew that Jason was having too much fun with the current situation. “Didn’t expect you being here.” Although the way Jason delivered that sentence made Raven believe that Jason knew Gar was here.

Ignoring Jason’s presence, Raven asked Gar the same question again, albeit more calmly. “What are you doing here?”

Gar took a longer time to respond to Raven, and just right after Gar told her he was chilling with some friends and asked her what she was doing here, Jason slung his arm over Raven’s shoulder. “We’re just chilling,” Jason said, and Raven resented the amused tone lingering in Jason’s response. Annoyed, she let herself go of Jason’s grasp. “So you seem to have a lot of friends out there, Gar, is it?”

Raven wanted to stomp on Jason’s foot. He damn well knew this was Gar and he damn well knew who Gar was. Acting innocent in front of Gar made Raven strangely irritated at Jason, and she bit her lip in restraint.

“Yeah,” Gar said, and Raven noticed how tense his voice was. “Well, um… we’re planning something.”

Both Jason and Raven raised an eyebrow. “Oh, must be big,” Jason said, to which Gar nodded back. “Party?”

Raven eyed Jason suspiciously.

“Well, yeah.” Gar said.

“What’s the occasion?” Raven groaned internally at Jason’s persistent questions. “Halloween?”

“Um,” Raven heard Gar stutter. “No.”

“All these people for some… insignificant party?” Jason’s voice lilted, and Raven knew how annoyed Gar was for she was personally annoyed too.

Watching Gar’s face turn red, Raven waited for his response, and was taken aback at Gar’s sudden outburst. “This is not an insignificant party!” Gar sighed, and Raven was even more surprised when Gar looked straight at Raven. “I’m throwing a birthday party for you, Rae.”

That did it. Jason threw his head back in laughter, taking a few steps back to recover himself, and Raven turned just as red as Gar. “Don’t call me Rae,” Raven said quietly, to which Gar smiled lightly. “And um…” Having been hit by the sudden silence from Jason’s calmer demeanor, Raven grabbed Gar’s wrist and dragged him into a changing room.

Finally surrounded with the silence needed for Raven to compose herself, Raven let out a breath, and began speaking. “What do you mean, you’re throwing a birthday party for me?”

Gar crossed his arms. “I mean exactly that.”

“I mean,” Raven hissed. “Why would you throw a birthday party for me?”
Gar raised his eyebrows. “Why would I?”

“I never asked for one!”

“Rae,” Gar said with a smile. “No one asks for a surprise birthday party.”

“Don’t call me Rae!” Raven exclaimed, and she cleared her throat to regain composure. “Gar, you really don’t have to spend so much time for something that’s unnecessary. You should be spending your Sundays for yourself, and not for someone else.” Raven paused. “Aren’t you going to Kitten’s birthday party?”

Gar snorted. “Kitten versus you? I know where my priorities lie, thanks.”

Raven blushed slightly at Gar’s honesty, and let Gar continue speaking. “Besides, I like seeing you happy. It’s not like a birthday party will piss you off or anything, right? If you really think I’m wasting time, I’m not. I enjoy making you happy.”

Raven felt an uneasy feeling in her stomach. “I don’t…” Raven was desperate for words. Raven never felt so appreciated and flattered for such a long time, and it was a foreign feeling that Raven didn’t necessarily despise, but didn’t know how to deal with either.

Raven looked up from the floor to look at Gar with wary eyes. Gar looked at her with an expression that was laden with so much care, so much friendliness, so much appreciation, and it was so foreign to Raven. “I want to throw you a birthday party, Rae.”

Raven ignored Gar’s persistent use of her nickname and bit her lip. “I mean… if you want to, then sure. I guess.”

“Yes!” Before Gar could hug Raven, however, Raven backed away.

“It’s awfully crowded to plan my birthday party.” Raven pointed out, and as Gar grinned, Raven raised an eyebrow. It wasn’t like Raven had a ton of friends and she couldn’t imagine who would Gar encounter for help.

“Well,” Gar began. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but it’s not one hundred percent your birthday celebration either?”

When Raven eyed Gar suspiciously, Gar continued. “You know how your birthday is on Kitten’s too?” Gar talked again when Raven nodded. “The party’s also… kind of an Anti-Kitten Birthday Party thing! Okay, okay, okay, before you raise any doubts, it’s not like the party will be centred on bullying her or anything like that! The party’s to prove a point, that everyone Kitten’s against doesn’t need her to have a splendid time.”

Raven let Gar’s words sink in. “…Wait. Is… Are you saying that everyone on the freak list is here?”

Gar winced at the words ‘freak list. “With some other people, yeah.”

Raven took a deep breath. Raven either hated or really didn’t know the people on the list. “You’re doing extremely badly for someone who wants to sell an idea.”

Gar rubbed the back of his neck. “Look, it’s just going to be a small party, we celebrate your birthday, we have fun, make new friends, create synchrony and unity, and get to enjoy ourselves once in a while. It’s a great idea, I swear to you. Come on, it’s going to be planned with extra detail and such and it’ll be a great. Trust me on this, Rae,” Clearing his throat upon Raven’s glare, Gar corrected himself. “-ven.”
“And what if Kitten finds out?”

“Jeez, why is everyone asking about what Kitten would do?” Gar said tiredly. “She won’t do anything, and she can’t do anything. We’re all too smart for her and we’ll all be able to counter whatever evil she’ll probably do.”

“You don’t really know what she’s capable of, though.” Raven said silently.

“Well,” Gar said slowly. “You do. And with your help, you can help all of us. Come on Raven. I want to see you happy, and this will make you happy, I swear it. Plus, you only turn sixteen once in your life.”

Raven chuckled lightly at Gar’s last attempt to convince her. Convinced with Gar’s idea but swayed with how his bright green eyes seem to pierce through Raven’s. “I’ll help.”

“Score!” And for once, Raven was ready to have Gar hug him, but to both of their dismay, the doorbell rang throughout the house. “Ah, the pizza’s here!”

“Well,” Raven said awkwardly. “I’ll be going.”

“No!” Gar squeaked, and cleared his throat once he realized how ungraceful he sounded. “No. Jason’s probably out there waiting for you while hogging the pizza.”

Raven relented, on the basis of knowing that Gar was right and suspecting that Jason already ate the two sandwiches Raven prepared for the both of them. As they headed out for the door, a question popped in Raven’s head.

“Wait,” Raven said, stopping both of them in their tracks. “When did you get this idea for a party?”

“Uh, last Saturday.”

“Last Saturday?” Raven repeated, and recalled that she was with Jason discussing Gar. It was a strange coincidence that as they were talking about Gar, Gar was planning something for Raven.

Gar nodded in response. “Yeah,” Gar said. “We were here, actually, playing Wii and joking around and you and Kitten just came up so we all just came up with a party, you know?”

“Wii?” Raven asked, remembering that Raven found out of Dick’s presence in Jason’s house while he was asking for extra Wii remotes. “Were you here in the afternoon?”

“I think so?”

Raven gasped lightly. “Gar,” Raven said. “I was here too.”

Gar’s eyes widened, and his jaw fell open. “What?!?”

Raven nodded. “I was here with Jason. Didn’t Dick tell you he was getting extra remotes? He was getting it from Jason, and from there I found out that Dick had some friends over but… I didn’t know you were friends with him.”

“I didn’t know you were friends with Jason either,” Gar said, and Raven must’ve been hallucinating for she heard a slight edge to Gar’s voice. “That’s so cool though! I was planning you a birthday and you were around the whole time!”

“Gar!” a voice rang out, and Gar and Raven immediately knew it belonged to Jinx. “Come here and get your pizza before I finish them!”
Looking at each other with odd looks, Raven and Gar headed out of the room but not before Gar heard Raven mumble to herself: “I forget she’s on the freak list.”

“Not a fan?” Gar mumbled to Raven.

“Never.” Raven whispered back and the two of them walked in a comfortable silence to the living room.

xx

*September 22 2014. Gar’s house.*

Gar was on a roll. Not only did he have Raven agree to his birthday plans, he had Raven come over to his house after school to do some ‘planning’, although that was self-code for Gar that meant: “All the plans were kind of laid out already and all I want to do is to be with you”, but Gar didn’t dare finding out Raven’s reaction about Gar’s true intentions of inviting her over.

“You still haven’t unpacked your stuff?” Raven asked once she entered Gar’s house. Gar, chuckling to himself, responded promptly.

“Well, we’re not sure if we’re staying here.”

Raven raised her eyebrows. “Did you buy this house or was it rented?”

“Uh,” Gar honestly didn’t know. “I don’t know. Do you want something to drink?”

“No thanks.”

“Okay, grape juice it is.” Raven rolled her eyes at Gar’s dismissal and followed him into the kitchen. From there, she took a seat by the counter just in front of Gar. “Or do you like orange juice?”

“You’re not poisoning anything, right?”

“The only poison I’ll be putting is poison that’ll make you laugh whenever I want you to.”

Raven harrumphed. “Come on,” Raven said, accepting the grape juice from Gar while noticing that Gar took orange juice for himself. “I already laughed at your joke once.”

Gar laughed. “Are you serious? That’s like telling a kid that one piece of candy is enough. It’s never enough.”

“Well, Christmas doesn’t last every day.”

Gar smiled to himself and took a sip of his orange juice. “So what made you say yes to coming here?” Gar asked, hoping that the transition to small talk wasn’t awkward. Thankfully, judging from Raven’s lack of reaction, it wasn’t. “Besides, ‘ensuring that I don’t mess up the whole party,’ of course.”

Raven raised an eyebrow at Gar’s imitation of herself. “I don’t have much to do today, really,” Raven said. “I finished all my work at study hall.”

“All?” Raven nodded. “Wow. When’s your study hall?”

“Third.” Gar threw his head back in surprise.

“Me too,” Gar confessed, and Raven also showed expressions of surprise. “All these coincidences
and we only find out now.”

“Yeah,” Raven said, finishing her drink. “What were you doing in study hall, then?”

_Thinking of you._ “Chilling, mostly,” Gar said inconspicuously. “What about Jason, what is he doing?”

Raven shrugged. “Volleyball, or band practice. Don’t know.”

“Ah,” It honestly surprised Gar upon knowing that Raven was friends with Jason. He couldn’t even imagine how the two became friends, and knowing that Raven felt as comfortable, if not more, as she is with Gar with some other guy kind of irked him. “So, did you here why the people living across the street from the cemetery couldn’t be buried there?”

“Why?” Gar had to contain his laugh for looking at how serious Raven was.

“Because they’re not dead yet!”

Gar laughed to himself and felt an immense sense of accomplishment when he heard Raven mumble to herself how she felt foolish for taking Gar seriously.

“Come on, that was funny,” Gar said with a smile, and Raven scowled. “Come on...”

“What if I bury you in the cemetery instead?”

Gar pouted. “But I’m still alive.”

“All the better.”

Gar resumed making corny jokes in attempts to make Raven laugh, however it eventually transitioned to both of them talking about their classes. Gar didn’t know if Raven realized herself, but Gar learned more about her than he ever did before. Gar found out that Raven was taking AP Latin just for the ironic purpose of looking ‘cultured’, which surprised Gar.

“Seriously?”

“Of course not.”

Perhaps Gar took Raven too seriously. But he learned that Raven took three AP classes and was originally going to take four if she accepted her place in AP English Language. However, she declined, and hasn’t regretted her decision since, and Gar was glad she didn’t because their English class was basically the beginning of how they met.

Gar also shared his love for history which in turn surprised Raven too.

“You sure your brain could handle all the facts presented in history classes?”

“Well, it’s challenging but –” Gar stopped himself when he realized that Raven was insinuating something more insulting. “Hey!”

Gar noted how Raven was opening up to him more slightly. Even though it was a topic related to school, something everyone talked about, it was still progress from before, where Gar was the one talking most of the times and Raven would respond with short sentences. But now, even though it wasn’t like Raven was talking a lot now, it definitely seemed as if their conversations were much more balanced, and that made Gar really happy.
Gar wasn’t sure what he felt about Raven, but all he knew was that he liked being around her, and he hoped that she felt the same way. However, much to his dismay, Vic always made sure to make fun of Gar’s ‘crush’ on Raven whenever possible. Gar would reply vehemently that it wasn’t a crush. It was… not a crush.

The doorbell rang, and Gar raised an eyebrow. Rita and Steve were at work, and Gar wasn’t expecting anyone else, so he couldn’t imagine who would try to visit Gar. “That must be them,” Raven said, and Gar eyed her with surprise. “I invited Kori, Vic, and Dick over. Figured extra help would be needed, right?”

Dammit. Not only did Raven really mean this hangout to be purely for planning, but Gar’s alone time with Raven was compromised. Ruffling his own hair, Gar headed to the door and opened it, frowning slightly when he saw the big smiles of his three friends come inside.

“You have a lot of boxes,” Dick remarked, and Gar rolled his eyes. “Need help unpacking them?”

“No,” Gar said curtly, still quite annoyed by the intrusion from the three of them. “Do you want a drink?”

Gar sighed in relief when all three said no. “How’d you know I live here?”

“Raven texted me,” Dick said simply, and Gar was mildly annoyed at how Raven invited the three of them without telling him. “You have a nice house, though.”

“Thanks,” Gar said. “Now, about the party—“

“Booyah!” Vic interrupted as he stood up to take the stack of UNO cards from the top of the living room bookshelf. “UNO!” Vic exclaimed, as he sat on the carpet and indicated the other four of them to do the same.

“I have never played the game of UNO,” Kori confessed as all five of them settled on the carpet. “May someone please tell me?”

After clarifying the rules to Kori, Vic shuffled the cards for all of them to play. Throughout the whole game, all five of them made adjustments to the game. The person who loses would have to do whatever the person who won first wants. Raven won two games consecutively with Dick losing, and she had him create a smoothie for him. The second time, however, she was at loss of what to propose and Vic stepped in and told Dick to give Raven a piggy-back ride while making chicken noises for a minute. Both of them relented, but not before expressing annoyance at Vic’s creativity.

Raven hopped on to Dick’s back and allowed room for Dick’s hands to carry her legs. Once Dick was ready to carry her, Raven wrapped her arms around Dick’s shoulders and Dick began lifting her. Once Dick got Raven off the ground, Dick mumbled something about Raven’s weight, which made Raven hit Dick’s head lightly.

Dick resumed giving Raven a piggy back ride while making chicken noises, sending everyone in the room to fits of laughter. Gar noticed how Raven was giggling slightly and he couldn’t help but continually compare the current situation to a hypothetical one in which Gar was the one giving her a piggyback ride. He wondered if Raven would’ve laughed, if not more, if it was Gar.

“Okay, a minute’s up!” Vic said, snorting to himself while playing on his phone.

Raven hopped off of Dick’s back, and Dick immediately walked over to Vic, his face red. “Did you Snapchat this?!”
“Duh.”

“Don’t you dare put this as your Story!”

Vic smiled coyly and tucked his phone in his pocket. “Too late,” Vic said, to which Dick growled. “Okay, another game!”

This time, Gar really hoped he won and Raven lost. And to his luck, he did. “Yes!” Gar exclaimed, putting his final card on the stack of cards on the table. “You losers can suck it –“

“Got it,” Raven’s voice rang throughout the room, and Gar saw her place her final card on the stack. “I bet Dick will lose again.”

To Dick and Gar’s dismay, Raven was right, and Gar resented that it was Dick and not Raven. “Um,” Gar said, trying to think of a punishment for Dick. “Just make me a smoothie.”

“Again?!” Dick whined. “No, pick another punishment!”

“Well, what else do you suggest?” Gar retorted, and before Vic could reply, Gar interrupted him. “No piggyback rides or any of the sort!”

Vic pouted. “Just give him a smoothie, Dick.”

“Oh my gosh!” Dick exclaimed, standing up from the carpet to head to the kitchen, leaving all four of them in fits of laughter.

“Is it me,” Kori questioned. “Or does friend Dick truly suck at the game of UNO?”

Raven snorted. “It’s not just you.”

“I heard that!” Dick’s voice rang across the living room from the kitchen counter, and the four of them laughed even more.

“You know, Raven,” Vic started talking. “You’re really cool. I kind of regret not being friends with you earlier.”

“You’re not that bad yourself,” Raven said, and Vic smiled. “I don’t share any classes with you right?”

Vic shook his head no, and Kori spoke up. “Well I have friend Raven in my PE class, and she is skilled at the ball of volley.”

The three of them continued talking to each other, leaving Gar a bit left out. It wasn’t like Gar expected Raven to be completely friendless, but seeing her become friendly with other people and knowing she has other friends too made Gar realize just how little he knew about Raven.

“Here’s your smoothie,” Dick grumbled, shoving the glass to Gar’s hand and taking a seat next to him. “Hope you enjoy!”

Gar laughed, and took a sip of Dick’s smoothie. It wasn’t as horrible as he expected it to be – in fact, the smoothie tasted delicious. “Dude,” Gar said. “This is really good!”

“I had practice,” Dick grumbled at Raven’s direction, and she smirked lightly. “Alright guys, look. It’s the evening and we haven’t planned anything.”

The other four looked crestfallen at the mention of responsibilities. “Right,” Vic said. “Well, we
already covered what’s to be done, right?”

Dick nodded, and he pulled out a piece of paper. “Well the theatre room is being adjusted, the swimming pool’s ready and the play room just needs games.”

“Billiards?” Gar suggested, but Dick shook his head no.

“Don’t have one,” Dick said. “And I don’t plan to get one.”

“Don’t you have table tennis in that room?” Dick nodded at Raven’s direction. “I suggest putting the video games and whatnot in that room instead, because the living room is where people would be eating and conversing.”

“Oh, the food!” Kori exclaimed. “Shall I provide the guests with my lovely home food?”

“No!” The three boys exclaimed, and both girls eyed them suspiciously. “I mean, you can of course,” Dick said awkwardly. “But other people would be bringing food too, and we don’t want any massive leftovers around.”

“We can always give away the leftovers to those in need!” Kori said happily, and Dick blinked.

“Alright,” Dick said. “Well, we need some decorations and stuff.”

“I can buy some later,” Vic supplied. “Is the plans alright with you?”

Vic’s question was directed at Raven, and Raven nodded in confirmation. Deciding to let the guests explore the house on their own, the five of them focused on the interior design of the party. Dick asked if there should be a theme, but Gar pointed out that having a theme would be too similar to Kitten’s party ways. Deciding on regular party decorations and supplies, Dick made a list of what to buy.

It was finally late, and Gar led the other three out of the door, with Raven insisting she stays back to talk to Gar. Once Vic, Kori, and Dick were out of the vicinity, Gar faced Raven with a smile. “You had fun.”

“I did,” Raven agreed. “Sorry about inviting them unexpectedly. Actually, I just told Dick about it because I knew you were friends with him as well. He just invited the other two.”

Gar was so distracted by Raven’s happiness that he forgot he was upset about the extra friends coming over earlier. “It’s fine,” Gar said truthfully. “You need a ride home?”

Gar didn’t even have a car – Rita took it for work.

“No,” Raven replied. “My house is just the next street on the right. I can walk.”


Gar chuckled, and Raven smiled lightly. The two was suddenly met with an awkward silence that was exacerbated by the fact that the two of them did nothing but stand opposite of each other, looking anywhere but each other. “I still need to ask you something, though.”

“Shoot.”

“Why are you doing this?” Gar blinked. “I know you went through the whole ordeal of you wanting to make me happy, but really, after I’ve seen the whole effort made by you and your friends just for me… I don’t get it. We’re only known each other for such a short time. What is it that makes you
so… willing?”

Because I think I might really, really, really like you and that’s probably the only reason I can think of right now. Gar coughed awkwardly. “It’s what’s friends would want to do.”

Raven stared at Gar, and Gar shuffled uneasily around his place. Finally, Raven spoke up again. “I’ll see you later.”

Nodding, Gar watched as Raven opened the front door and walked away. Sighing to himself, he picked up the cards from the carpet, placed it on the coffee table, and took a seat on the sofa just across it.

“Awkward.” Gar mumbled to himself before idly taking out his smartphone.

xx


“And then after Selinda found out that she was an ESFP, I told Gemma to take it, and she got ENTP, which is like, incompatible with my type I think. Oh, I’m an ESTJ by the way, and it’s totally accurate…”

Roy zoned out from Kitten’s ramblings once more. Kitten has took a liking with MBTI personality tests, something Roy didn’t particularly care about. He did take the personality test before, however, and scored an ISTP, but he had no idea what that meant and didn’t bother trying to find out. Sighing to himself, Roy resumed staring blankly at the bright pink walls of Kitten’s room.

Kitten’s presence has always annoyed Roy, but it was the recent encounter with his (sadly) former best friend Garth which emphasized Roy’s irritation against Kitten. He heard enough from the meeting to know that the new kid Gar and friends were planning a party for the freaks and friends as well as celebrate Raven’s birthday. Roy couldn’t care less about Raven’s birthday, but he did pay close attention at the fact that this party could potentially harm Kitten and give her a lesson. It gave him tingles thinking of the possibility of someone showing Kitten exactly how much of a monster she is.

He wanted to help with the party. It sounded like pure fun, something generated by real friendships and not blind greed. It was a nice turn of events, and Roy wanted nothing more but to be part of it. Only, Roy didn’t know how to be part of it. And that made Roy pretty annoyed, as he thought of every way logical to do so, but couldn’t.

“And like, it says that I’m not, like, capable of feeling much empathy, like, hello? Are you talking about me? I am the most empathetic person you could ever meet!” Roy couldn’t tell if Kitten was joking. “It also says that I’m too judgmental, like seriously? I am so not judgemental. I’m a really appealing person.”

Kitten paused for a bit, and it took Roy a second to notice that the room fell silent other than the annoying light pop music playing from the speakers across the room. “Are you listening to me?” Kitten screeched, and Roy winced.

“Of course I was!”

Kitten snorted. “Really?” Kitten crossed her arms. “Then what’s my personality type?”

“ESTJ,” Roy said simply, and he was grateful he tuned in a few times just to check in on her. “Seriously, Kitten, I was listening.”
Kitten’s personality suddenly switched to sweet and amiable. “I don’t think I know your type?”

“It’s –”

“Miss Walker?” a voice came from outside the door.

“What?!” Kitten screamed, causing Roy to cringe at how loud and squeaky Kitten’s voice was. “Don’t waste my time, come in!”

The door opened and Roy found out that it was one of Kitten’s housekeepers. Roy never really saw any of them but judging from the current housekeeper’s frightened expression, Kitten was a monster to work for.

“Miss Walker,” the housekeeper said quietly. “A guest is asking for your presence.”

“Tell them to go away!”

The housekeeper shook her head solemnly. “I’m sorry, but he’s quite persistent… He goes by the name… Mikron… if that helps.”

Roy looked at Kitten with a strange look and Kitten made an odd expression. “How does he know where I live now?” Kitten shrieked. “Fine. Where is he now?”

“He’s waiting for you in the main room.”

Roy wanted to roll his eyes. The main room was synonymous for a living room, but the largeness of Kitten’s mansion made it necessary to call the main living room the main room. The two of them walked downstairs just to see Mikron stand up once he saw Kitten. Roy blinked. He wasn’t sure if Roy was just tall, or if Mikron was just unfortunately short. But after seeing Kitten stand near Mikron’s vicinity, Roy was sure it was the latter.

“What do you want?” Kitten said, sitting on the arm rest of one of her luscious sofas. Mikron sat on the sofa next to her and Kitten groaned at the sight of Mikron on her property.

“I have news.”

Roy also forgot how Mikron’s voice sounded like, and he hoped for every method possible to forget. “Stop wasting my time,” Kitten snarled. “And get to the point!”

Mikron cowered at Kitten’s raised voice. “The other snot-freaks are planning an Anti-Kitten Birthday Party!”

Kitten blinked. Roy blinked. All of them blinked at how blunt Mikron’s statement was. Roy scrunched his face in confusion. Now that the truth is out, Roy dreaded Kitten’s reaction.

“A what?” Kitten asked, and Mikron bit his lip.

“It’s all planned by the new green kid. He’s making a party for the freaks to prove that they’re better. And he’s going to be celebrating Raven’s birthday too.”

Kitten raised an eyebrow. “Gar?” Mikron nodded slowly. “He’s cornering up all of the freaks to serve the queen freak?”

Wow, Roy thought to himself, that’s what Jinx said. “Yeah, it’s all against you. I was invited but I’d never agree. My loyalties stay with you.”
Roy rolled his eyes. He knew that Kitten was fully aware of Mikron’s crush on her, and he also knew that Kitten found it quite repulsive. It was a fact that Roy couldn’t argue with – Mikron’s desperate attempts to win Kitten’s heart and undermine Roy was so pathetic that it made Roy cringe just thinking about it.

The three of them were met with sudden silence, and Roy wished that Kitten would speak up just so that he knew what he was thinking. But to his and Mikron’s surprise, Kitten burst out laughing.

“I really didn’t see that coming,” Kitten breathed out as she stopped her unexpected fit of laughter. “But seriously, who would go to the party other than those freaks? Personally, I don’t care what they do as long as they don’t ruin my party.”

“But…” Mikron whimpered.

“Gosh, this is funny,” Kitten smiled wickedly. “Do send me some clips about how bad it’s going. And do update me on anything important. But other than that, this meeting has been a load of rubbish waste of time. Get out of my house.”

Mikron hurriedly ran out of the house, leaving Kitten and Roy alone in the large main room. “That reminds me,” Kitten spoke up. “I’m not going to the party with you.”

That threw Roy back in surprise. “What? Am I on the freak list?”

Kitten gave him a look. “No?” Kitten said. “Why is it the first thing you mention is the freak list – ugh, whatever. No. Look. I need to bring the attention to me. Having a date would detract attention, so…”

Roy was unsure of what Kitten was saying. “I don’t get it.”

“I’m breaking up with you.”

“But we were never really truly dating –“

“Don’t worry about the aftermath,” Kitten said, ignoring Roy’s reply. “Honestly, Roy, you’re still one of my favorite people in the entire school, but I need to focus on myself to be truly happy.”

Yeah, Roy thought to himself, because that’s how narcissism works. “Um…” In essence, Kitten just told Roy to sod off to another planet so there was more space on earth for herself. That meant that Kitten’s hold of Roy was less tight now. “What’s in it for me?”

That made Kitten think for a short while. “Don’t know, don’t care,” Kitten admitted. “Spend your time on yourself too, maybe. Everyone should love themselves in this world. But of course, not more than they love me.”

Roy pursed his lips. “You sure this is not, like, a prank?”

Kitten narrowed her eyes. “Express one more sign of doubt and it will be more terrible than an unexpected prank.”

That caused Roy to raise both of his eyebrows. Finally relenting to Kitten’s wish of extended narcissism, Roy shrugged his shoulders. “Well,” Roy said. “I can go?”

“Yes, but don’t be too busy,” Kitten said, waving her hand dismissively. “Just because we’re exes doesn’t mean we can’t still be friends.”
Rolling his eyes, Roy left and headed out of the mansion. Roy resented that the area Kitten was living in was devoid of taxis, because most of the residents were mostly pretentious rich people who found no need for public transportation. This meant that Roy had to walk back to a bus stop so that he could get back to his apartment. Sighing, he plodded on the sidewalk and after twenty to thirty minutes, he sat on the bus stop, noting how lonely his surroundings were.

Bothered at how isolated he was feeling, Roy snatched his phone and did something impulsively unexpected.

He called Garth.

Garth picked up after three rings. “Hello?” Roy paused. It has been such a long time since he heard Garth say something to him that wasn’t malicious. “Hello?”

Roy realized he was being silent. “Oh, Garth?”

“Yes,” Garth said, and Roy took note of the shuffling papers in the background. Garth must’ve been working on something. “Who is this?”

Roy blinked. What does Garth mean, who is this? As far as Roy remembered, Roy didn’t change his cell number and Garth obviously didn’t too. So there was no reason for Garth not to know who was calling – unless…

“You deleted my number?”

The two of them fell silent for a second. “Roy?”

“You deleted my number?” Roy asked again, and he heard Garth sigh slightly.

“I – yes?” Garth said tentatively. “Gosh, we sound like girls.”

Maybe because we’re acting like it, Roy wanted to retort, but he held back. The first few seconds of calling Garth, Roy was completely unsure as to why he did it. But after a few moments of contemplation, Roy had a logical reason. He felt lonely, and he wanted to talk to a friend, but he quickly realized that his ‘friends’ were all tied to Kitten, something he really didn’t want to be associated with any more. Noticing that his ‘friends’ weren’t exactly ideal, he just called an old (ex?) friend.

“What do you want?” Garth asked, after another few moments of silence that Roy wasn’t really paying attention to.

“Um,” Roy stuttered. What did he want, exactly? “What are you doing?”

“Seriously?” Garth sounded tired. “You’re calling to check up on me?”


“Oh, Kitten!” Roy winced at how fake Garth’s sarcastic enthusiastic tone was. “Boy, how I love her. What does she know?”


“Oh,” Garth said after a few moments. “So… Why are you telling me?”

“Thought you should know.”
“Not really? You should be telling Gar,” Garth said, and Roy knew he had a point although Roy and Gar didn’t exchange a word throughout Gar’s stay in Jump City. “Is that why you’re calling me?”

No. “Yeah,” Roy said. “Isn’t this stuff… important to you or something?”

“…Thanks for telling,” Roy wondered how could it be so awkward between the two of them. “Later.”

“Wait!” Roy exclaimed, not ready to be met with utter silence again. The bus wasn’t arriving any time soon, so Roy had to think fast. “Dude, Kitten broke up with me.”

Roy grimaced at how awkward and contrived that sounded. “Good for you.” Garth said coolly, and before Roy could say anything more, Garth hung up.

Roy could only wonder if Garth added his number as a contact once again.

Kitten couldn’t explain it, but the schism between her party and Gar’s party was getting… increasingly noticeable. When she was the only party holder around, everyone was asking questions about her. But now that Gar’s party was in the way, everyone was asking questions about the other party instead, asking things about who was going, what was it going to be like, would it better… And it annoyed Kitten, of course, but she decided not to do anything about it. Kitten found solace in the fact that Gar wasn’t spreading out invitations, but she was also weirded out at how everyone knew about it.

Word spreads fast, Kitten thought to herself. Kitten knew she had to be confident in herself. Her party was larger, better, superior. Anyone other than the freaks and friends would have to be crazy to pick Gar’s party over hers.

Kitten sighed in her seat. There was only twenty minutes left until the end of her Trigonometry class, and then it would be finally lunch time. To her own, and possibly everyone’s, Kitten was actually pretty good at trig. It was very easy to her as all she had to do was apply rules. However, Kitten had little regard for academics. So the potential of Kitten being the best in class has gone to waste all because of the fact that Kitten couldn’t care less.

The bell finally rang, and Kitten bolted to the bathroom stall in relief. Once she finished her business, however, she heard two distinct voices chattering outside the stall and decided to eavesdrop a bit.

“…And then Rose was like, it’s probably going to be really fun!” Kitten recognized that it was Selinda currently talking. “I’m like, how do you know? And then she reminds me that she lives with Jericho.”

“Wait, what?” It turns out it was Selinda and Gemma talking to each other, and Kitten had a feeling they were discussing Gar’s party.

“Rose and Jericho are like, cousins, or whatever, apparently! I never knew,” so did Kitten. “Anyway, she says that Kitten’s party might be in trouble.”

“Hm?”

“She says that there are more allies for the freaks than for Kitty herself,” Kitten heard Gemma gasp.
“But, she might be right…? Oh my gosh, don’t tell her that I said this, but almost everyone goes to her party for the party and not because of her. I heard someone say that they’d rather go to the other party than hers.”

“Honestly,” Gemma said. “I’m actually curious to see their party.”

“No!” Selinda said. “You can’t be seriously considering their party over Kitty’s!”

“But it would be such a nice turn of events,” replied Gemma. “Plus, Kitten’s getting more annoying with the whole “Love Myself” campaign she has this year.”

Kitten heard Selinda chortle, and it took all of her might not to burst out of the bathroom stall and slap them right in the faces.

“But you can’t go,” Selinda insisted. “Gemma, she could put you in the freak list!”

“Please,” Gemma said. “That list is history. With Gar’s party going around, the list wouldn’t be taken that seriously anymore.”

Kitten’s heart dropped. She couldn’t believe that her ‘best friends’ were essentially ganging up against her. In a fit of nervousness, she dropped her phone, which might’ve made a significantly loud noise for Gemma and Selinda both shrieked.

“Oh my god, who’s there?!“ Selinda exclaimed.

“Ugh, let’s just go,” Gemma said. “Kitten’s probably waiting for us in the cafeteria anyway.”

Kitten waited a few minutes before knowing the coast was clear. Unexpectedly intersecting with an unknowing freshman on her way out, she screamed at the freshman and tried her very best to compose herself whilst heading to the cafeteria. Kitten internally freaked out at how much attention the other party was getting. It wasn’t like it was going to upstage her own party, right? And with a bunch of freaks lying about, why are people so interested in the party’s premise?

Finally, Kitten reached the cafeteria, and before she could sit with Selinda and Gemma, who has been comfortably laughing at each other the whole time, Kitten spotted Roy. At the table.

Not just any table, the table. The table in which Roy used to sit before Kitten snatched him away for her own good. Granted, Roy was only sitting with Karen, which meant that Garth and Vic were probably somewhere else or disinterested in Roy’s presence. But looking at how laidback Roy was with Karen, Kitten clenched up her fists. They were laughing at who knows what, and only then did Kitten realize that Karen was a threat.

Not because she was talking to Roy.

But because she was an ally of the freaks.

Groaning to herself, Kitten realized how isolated she was in the party wars. That’s when she had an epiphany – Raven was a part of this.

Irrationally angry, Kitten cursed under her breath and resented how pathetic she was for heading to the IT lab. Once she did, she saw exactly who she was looking for.

“Tell me everything you know about the party,” Kitten said, slamming her hand on the desk. Mikron looked away from his monitor and took his headphones off. “Well, don’t waste my time, tell me now!”
Mikron stood up, presumably to feel on the same level as Kitten, but his unfortunate height made the attempt futile. “What do you want to know?”

“Didn’t I say everything?” Kitten seethed, then buried her face in her hands. Realizing that Mikron could’ve been more idiotic than she thought, she decided to elaborate. “Was Raven up to this?”

Mikron shrugged. “No. She wasn’t there and Gar said she didn’t know.”

“So it was all… Gar’s idea?”

“Yes.”

Kitten’s heart skipped a beat. Gar was up to this the whole time?

But what did she even do to Gar?

“Why?” Kitten found herself asking, and she regretted doing so the moment the question slipped out of her mouth.

“Because,” Mikron said, as if the answer was the most obvious thing in the world. “That pie-brain has something against you and wants to please his snot-faced girlfriend.”

Kitten scrunched her face. “Gar is dating Raven?”

Mikron shook his head no, and Kitten narrowed her eyes. “It’s a figure of speech,” Mikron elaborated. “They’re all making cruddy plans and such.”

“What are they planning?”

“Nothing big as your party,” Mikron said, and Kitten found comfort in that one little fact. “It’s being hosted in Grayson’s house, and the activities are just boring stuff like hanging out and such.”

Kitten raised an eyebrow. If it was such a… ‘normal’ party, why is everyone making such a big deal of it? “Is there a theme?”

“No.”

“Who do you know is coming?”

“Everyone on the freak list, Gar, Garth,” Kitten scowled at the mention of him. “Karen, Vic, Dick, Wally…”

“So that’s like, sixteen people,” Kitten surmised. “Then why is everyone making such a big deal of it?”

“I don’t know.”

Kitten sighed to herself. For such a small party, it was generating so much attention. Kitten couldn’t remember a moment lately in which both parties weren’t mentioned or compared. But as far as she was aware, no one other than the sixteen mentioned were invited to the party, so Kitten had to find comfort in that. However, Kitten was also aware that she didn’t know if the party was invitational or open to everyone. And if it was the latter, then Kitten’s party was at risk of being seriously neglected.

Kitten had to do something.

“I can’t believe I’m asking you,” Kitten found herself saying to Mikron. “But I need your help.”
Mikron’s ears seemingly perked up at Kitten’s words and Kitten bit her lip in apprehension. “What is it?” Mikron asked sweetly, and Kitten had a second to ponder what kind of name ‘Mikron’ was, as usual.

“You need to infiltrate everything that relates to their party,” Kitten began. “And ruin it.”

September 26 2014. Garth’s apartment.

This is it, Roy thought to himself, getting off the bus. He looked at the tower in front of him. The apartment was not as lavish as the one he was living in, but it was decent enough. Gathering all the courage he could muster, he walked in the apartment and registered as a visitor, and was given access to the elevator.

Kitten’s ‘break-up’ and the upcoming party for Raven had Roy reflect on what has happened recently. In sophomore year, even though he didn’t like it, the status quo was equal and balanced. But now with the arrival of Gar Logan, some random guy from Steel City (which Roy had to pay respect for as he was born in that exact place), everything was changing.

Roy thought to himself, that if some other guy could defy Kitten’s strange sense of power throughout the whole grade, then Roy could too. He needed closure, assurance that he wasn’t such a complete monster for succumbing to Kitten’s wishes. And to do so, he needed to talk to his former best friends.

On Wednesday, he went over the table and was a bit surprised when it was only Karen sitting on the table. Nevertheless, he took a seat, and was fortunately welcomed by Karen. It was silent between the two of them, but suddenly Roy found himself blurring everything that has been going on – from Kitten’s blackmail, to her breakup, and asked her to forgive him. Karen smiled and told him that his attentions were noble, and that she didn’t entirely hate him, although he needed to regain closure with Vic and especially Garth. Roy agreed, and smiled at how level-headed Karen was being.

As lunch passed by, Roy found himself immensely enjoying talking to Karen. Their conversation inevitably went by with some petty banter, but to Roy it felt like as if everything was back to normal. From there, Roy found out that Garth was dating Toni (secretly at first, but then eventually opened up), Vic has been accepted to an engineering competition in December, and it was now Wally, not Vic, who was dating Jinx. Knowing all of this made Roy realize that he really was left out throughout being with Kitten.

But even though the conversation with Karen, who relayed the apology to Vic in advance and made Vic give him a bear hug before leaving, made Roy feel a tad bit better, he knew he still needed closure from his best friend.

Finally reaching Garth’s floor, he rang the doorbell and waited anxiously. To his luck, it was Garth who opened the door, and Roy impulsively threw his arms around Garth, muttering apologies under his breath. It took Garth a while to respond, but Garth eventually hugged Roy back, muttering words of assurance, and Roy felt immensely relieved.

The two of them resorted to sitting on the couch, and Garth waited for Roy to speak. Swallowing his nerves away, Roy opened his mouth to talk. “In freshman year, after the party, I met with Kitten because she needed to talk to me. She asked all sorts of questions about my thoughts of the party, your thoughts of the party… And eventually she told me that she didn’t like you guys. At first it was like, alright. So? But then, she started throwing herself on me… Telling me that we were dating and I had no say in it. I declined, but then she threatened me.
“She said if I said no to her, she’d pull you out of the nationals and other stuff to Vic and Karen. And it was… actually legit, because her dad was sponsoring the nationals and such… So I said yes to her. Even if I was ‘dating’ her, I still needed to make it seem like we weren’t friends at all. That’s why I became such a… douche throughout. In sophomore year I thought she’d let me go, but she was extraordinarily clingy to me the whole time, and it was hard to get things back to normal.

“Only now though, did she ‘break-up’ with me. And… The whole party thing by Gar made me realize that I shouldn’t fear Kitten,” Roy paused for a bit, and the two was hit with unexpected silence. “I guess… I needed to realize you guys meant more to me.”

Roy stopped talking, and waited for Garth’s response. Garth, however, did nothing and stared at Roy, making him feel nervous. Finally, Garth responded, but not in the way Roy expected him to.

Garth slapped him.

“Ouch!”

Garth slapped him again.

In fact, Garth slapped him a total three times, then stopped, a smile growing on his face. Roy had to rub both sides of his cheeks just to alleviate the tension, particularly the right one, as Garth slapped that twice.

“Those were for Karen, Vic, and I,” Garth explained. “Thanks for trying to protect us, but didn’t we always say that we’re stronger together?”


“Me too,” Roy said, and his face hurt from smiling so much. Garth pulled in Roy for a hug, and Roy took a sniff of Garth just for that one piece of closure (he smelled like chlorine, like he always did, and Roy remembered how Roy ended up having a scent of chlorine too from spending so much time with Garth) “Me too.”

The two let go of each other, and laughed at each other, calling each other ‘wusses’ for what just happened. Roy had to agree, but he really couldn’t care less for he was so happy that he got his best friend back.

“Don’t worry about the threats from Kitten being real,” Roy said, remembering to assure Garth from all the things he said earlier. “I pulled some strings to make it impossible. You don’t really need to know what I did for Vic and Karen, but basically my uncle Oliver is sponsoring the nationals with his own company. He’s no Drury Walker, but eh, he’ll do. So don’t worry about it.”

Garth gave him a look, with a hint of a smile. “I’m not worrying about it,” Garth said. “Sounds like you are.”

Roy took a sofa pillow and hit Garth’s shoulder with it. “Shut up,” Roy said, causing Garth to laugh. Garth asked if Roy wanted to play some video games, but then Roy remembered he also had something else to say. “Oh, I need to tell you something else.”

“I have a girlfriend, dude,” Garth said, and Roy grabbed the sofa pillow again to hit Garth out of irritation. After a few fits of laughter, Garth regained composure. “I’m joking. Jeez. What is it?”

“It was Mikron who told Kitten.”
“Well, damn,” Garth said, and Roy nodded. “Seriously?”

“Yeah, happened when Kitten was breaking up with me,” Roy told Garth. “Kitten was strangely okay with it, but knowing Kitten and Mikron’s massive crush on her, something bad is bound to happen.”

“Not unless we stop it,” Garth said determinedly. “And I must say, I am not surprised.”

“Do we tell the others?”

Garth shook his head no. “Nothing has happened yet,” Garth rationalized. “We can’t attack without knowledge.”

That answer satisfied Roy.

“Oh, by the way,” Roy said, grabbing Garth’s attention. “I ate fish for lunch today.”

That confession terrified Garth.

“Are you serious?!” Garth shrieked, standing up from the couch. “I hugged you! Wash your hands!”

That order amused Roy, and Roy couldn’t help but laugh at how normal their reunion was. Roy stood up, about to follow Garth’s command, but a mischievous idea popped in his head. Smirking, he poked Garth, which triggered Garth into another fit of shrieking, and continued prodding at him until Garth dragged him into the bathroom.

Roy realized he hasn’t smiled this much for a long time ever since freshman year.
Nine


The recycling club has always and will always be Kori’s favorite club. Opened up to the students in the second week of the first trimester, Kori immediately jumped in the opportunity to join. Kori was indeed part of the cheerleading club, but that was only because she thought it would be fun. She didn’t expect a community like Kitten Walker’s posse to be completely dominating the club, and that was when she realized the cheerleading club wasn’t as fun as she thought it would be.

The recycling club, however, was very amiable and enjoyable. With projects focused on recycled crafts and advocacy, it was right on Kori’s interests as she enjoyed environmentalism. The club currently has ten people, all either juniors or freshmen, but Kori was positive that soon the club would gain more members.

The current president of the club was Kole Weathers, and that was because she was integral in opening the club up again. During sophomore year, the majority of the members were seniors and once they left, it meant that the club would have insufficient members as the school requirement for clubs is about eight people. Kole couldn’t stand the possibility of having no club dedicated to recycling, so she took it upon her own volition to attract some lowerclassmen to join. And to her success, six other freshmen joined, and the club was opened up again.

The juniors in the club consisted only of Kori, Kole, Jericho, and Gnarrk. Kori took a liking to all of the juniors, and was proud to say that they were one of her closest friends. Kori didn’t really know the other freshmen, but she hoped she would in the near future.

The club was currently split up into two tasks. The freshmen were outside collecting the recycle bins, while the juniors were organizing what has been compiled. What Kori was currently doing was separating the bottle caps from the plastic bottles for use in the future.

Whilst working, however, all four juniors found way to spend time gossiping. Although, in truth, it was mostly Kori and Kole gossiping – Jericho and Gnarrk were too occupied with their own work to contribute.

“Kori,” Kole chirped up, and Kori looked up from her work with a smile. “Are you excited about the party?”

“Oh, truly!” Kori responded, and Kole smiled back. “I am so happy that it is happening. Gar is a glorious friend to do this for all of us.”

“I know, right?” Kole said, and she shuffled near Kori so that it’d be easier to talk. “I’m so excited to bake the cake! I was thinking either a cake shaped like a raven, ’cause, well, that’s Raven’s name, or a cake of stacked books because she’s always reading some. What do you think?”

“I think the raven cake would be wonderful!” Kori said. “But perhaps the cake of books would be easier to share?”

Kole rested her head on her hand and blew a raspberry. “Ah, why not combining the two cakes together?”

“Yes, that’s a great idea!” Kori exclaimed. “Oh, a raven could be reading some books!”

Kole squealed. “Oh, I love all these ideas in the air!”
Kori giggled. “Yes, they are marvellous.” Kori responded, and she noticed that Kole was giggling to herself while blushing. “What’s wrong?”

“Forgive me for sounding so dumb, but,” Kole had to stop herself to giggle. “I honestly imagined myself baking a wedding cake for this party.”

“A wedding cake?”

“Yes, for Gar and Raven!” Kole confessed, and Kori laughed. “They’re so cute together, and do you see how defensive Gar gets about Raven?”

“Agreed,” Kori said back. “They are splendid together.”

“Are they dating?!” Kole asked, and Kori vehemently shook her head no.

“Not yet,” Kori said with a glint in her eyes. “But they will soon, most likely. Oh, I hope so! Gar becomes very happy whenever Raven is mentioned, and the passion placed in this whole party is just clear how Raven means to Gar!”

“Oh, but do you hear the jokes Gar says to make Raven laugh?” Kori giggled. “They are so bad.”

“I think that the jokes of laughter said from Gar is quite hilarious,” Kori admitted, and Kole gave her a look. “I apologize.”

“Deep down, Raven’s probably laughing,” Kole said with a smile. “Seriously, though, the party is so sweet. And Gar is so thoughtful for thinking of everyone’s happiness before his. Raven is so lucky to have someone like Gar like her.”

Jericho, wanting to join in the gossip, quickly typed out something on his phone, and let his phone’s speakers do the work. “Gar definitely likes Raven,” Jericho’s phone said out loud with its robotic voice, catching the attention of Kole and Kori. “What about Raven?”

Jericho’s question caused Kole and Kori to ponder. “Hmm,” Kole said. “You’re right. How does Raven feel about Gar?”

“I sadly do not know for I have never talked about the topic of Gar to friend Raven,” Kori confessed sadly. “It’s sad to say, but I’ve seen Raven more with Jason than friend Gar.”

Kole sneered. “Jason and Raven are not a thing. It can’t be.”

Jericho typed out something else on his phone and let the speakers do its work. “Raven and Jason are always seen close to each other.”

“They’re just best friends!” Kole replied passionately. “Plus, I’m sure Jason thinks that it’s Gar and Raven that’s meant to be.”

Jericho shrugged, and quickly typed out another thing to say. “Let the time reveal the truth,” Jericho’s phone spoke. “But for now, both of them need to get to know each other more before jumping to anything new.”

xx

*September 27 2014. Café.*

“You need to know each other more before jumping to anything new.”
Raven blinked at Jason. A second ago Jason was just discussing the benefits of young relationships and now he was giving warnings for it as if he was some father giving precaution to his daughter. Raven knew exactly what Jason was trying to get at, but she tried her very best not to pay it any attention.

Ever since the news of the party broke out, Raven couldn’t stop thinking about how definite Gar was about the plan. A minor, irrational part of Raven’s brain thought that Gar was setting her up, but in the end, it was feelings of happiness and endearment that made her irrational thoughts fade away. However, these thoughts of Raven’s has been clouding her attitude recently, and even Jason pointed out that Raven has been even more laconic and mellowed out, if that was even possible.

Even though Raven’s taciturn nature caused Raven to not disclose her thoughts, Jason already knew exactly what she was feeling. And with all of his mischief and amusement, Jason seemed determined to bother Raven about it ‘till the very end.

Strangely, however, Raven had no idea what Jason felt about Gar. He was usually vocal about his thoughts to Raven, but about Gar, he frequently beat around the bush, and it was irritating Raven for she was extremely curious of what Jason had to think about Gar.

Raven sighed and took a sip of her latte. Raven didn’t even enjoy latte – Jason just got it for her out of impulse and she had to, as Jason eloquently put it, ‘suck it up’ as he spent money for her anyway.

“And you always need to remember about protection,” Jason continued, and Raven immediately face-palmed. “Can’t have mini Raven’s walking around at this point of life.”

As Raven was about to interject, Jason held up a finger to silence her and resumed talking. “Besides, children are expensive! They’re manipulative brats and then you send them off to college which sucks all your money away. So, do whatever you want, but always be ready for the consequences –“

“Jason!” Raven exclaimed loudly, gathering the attention of nearby customers. Clearing her throat and ignoring the weird stares from her surroundings, Raven took her pencil and jammed it on to Jason’s hand. “What are you talking about?”

Jason’s hand flinched in pain and he retracted his hand away, hissing whilst soothing the pain. “Ouch,” Jason said bitterly. “And I’m preparing you for the real world.”

“What?”

Jason gave her a look. “Relationships are a tricky thing, and it’s always good to be ready during the calm before the storm.”

Raven stared at Jason blankly and blinked twice to regain composure. “What in the world are you going on about?”

“Your future boyfriend, silly,” Raven knew that Jason knew that Raven knew exactly what he was referring to. “Gar.”

Raven rolled her eyes at the sight of Jason moving his eyebrows up and down in a suggestive way. “He’s planning a party, not a mating ritual,” Raven hissed. “And what drug are you on to be telling me precautions on dating?”

“For someone so smart,” Jason’s voice lilted at the last two words. “You’re so stupid.”

Raven took offense at his words and jabbed his hand again with her pencil, causing Jason to grab the pencil away and tuck it in his bag. “Stop that!” Jason said. “Don’t you see? Gar likes you.”
“And so you’ve said,” Raven responded. “A lot of times.”

“No,” Jason said, his tone seeming as if he was talking to someone of below average intelligence. “He likes you, romantically.”

The bluntness of Jason’s reply threw Raven off. The thought of Gar liking her more than a friend made her blush heavily (which she resented for she knew her pale skin would give it away to Jason), and while it was a strange thought, it was nice to think of its possibility. Honestly, Raven did have a feeling that Gar did like her, but she couldn’t be too certain as she barely knew Gar. Observing his personality with other people made Raven realize how little she knew about Gar and how amiable Gar naturally was. To assume that Gar liked Raven would be too… risky to think of.

To her dismay, Jason did spot Raven’s growing blush and smirked. “He doesn’t,” Raven insisted, and Jason made a disapproving sound. “Drop the subject, Jason, we have a Pre-Cal test to study for soon.”

Jason shook his head at Raven’s desperate attempt to change the subject. “Are you serious?” Jason asked rhetorically, and Raven clenched her jaw. “You’re the one always telling me that I need to face reality, whatnot.”

“That’s because what you do need to face is reality,” Raven retaliated. “Your… hypothesis on Gar’s crush on me is unsubstantiated, and therefore invalid.”

“‘Hypothesis?’” Jason repeated, astounded at Raven’s choice of words. “Alright, if you want to play that way, here’s some facts for you.”

Raven rolled her eyes as Jason started talking. “One, he tries so hard to make you laugh. Honestly, you observe him with other people and you don’t see him try that hard. Only when he’s with you does he put the extra effort and why else would he put it? Because he’s ‘nice’?” Jason made a ridiculous face at the word nice. “No, because he likes you.”

“That’s subjective –“

“Shut up,” Jason interrupted. “Continuing on to my second point before I was so rudely interrupted… He spends more time than needed with you. The messages you send each other ‘till midnight? Don’t think I don’t know about that. He dedicates more time with you because he likes you. What else would it be? Because he’s ‘bored’?”

“But look –“

“Did I say I was done, you wench?” Jason snarled, and Raven mockingly bowed her head down to express a fake ‘sorry’. “I’ll let you speak when I let you. And lastly, he’s throwing a party for you. Why? Actually, I’m not going to answer it. You answer it, since you seem to know yourself well.”

Raven grumbled.

“What was that?” Jason asked sweetly.

“You know the answer!” Raven hissed, and Jason tilted his head left and right.

“Wuss,” Jason whispered to himself, loud enough for Raven to hear. He then returned his voice back to normal and resumed speaking. “Because he wants to make you happy. That’s just… Seriously, Raven. He’s known you for such a short time and you garnered his interest so much that he’s dedicating his time for you.”
“It’s what friends would do.” Raven defended, and Jason scoffed.

“Raven, honestly, in another universe where Gar doesn’t exist, we’d be married,” Jason said. “For the tax benefits, of course. And never can I think of one possible moment where I’ll be throwing you a party to make you happy.”

“You just admitted that you don’t care about my own happiness,” Raven said. “Like a friend would.”

Jason put his hand over his chest to feign offense. “Of course I do. I make you happy in the smallest ways possible. However, I wouldn’t aggrandize my efforts to do so because I don’t like you the way Gar does,” Jason paused, knowing he had to say more. “Look, it’s not only that he wants to make you happy. The party is… a lot of effort, and I honestly think it’s for him to prove how important you are to him. And to coax you to think the same way, but vice versa.”

Raven fell silent, and stirred her latte three times counter-clockwise before responding again. “Suppose,” Raven said, and cleared her throat for clarity. “Suppose! That he likes me. So what?”

“So what?” Jason said. “So, you obviously like him back too!”

Raven pursed her lips together, and Jason fell silent. “I mean, you do… right?” Jason said uncertainly, and Raven tried looking anywhere but Jason.

Finally, Raven mustered enough courage to reply. “I—”

Both Raven and Jason’s attention diverted to Raven’s buzzing phone, moving by vibration on the table. Raven looked at the caller ID to see who was calling, and groaned lightly to herself when she found out who he was. Jason, also knowing who was calling, chuckled to himself.

“Speak of the devil,” Jason said, and Raven had to agree. Raven stared at her phone blankly until Jason snapped her out of it. “Well, Christmas doesn’t last forever, answer it!”

Sighing, Raven picked up her phone and awaited a response. “Hello?” Raven said, whilst Jason was pushing her to put it on speaker. Sighing, she grabbed her earphones so that Jason could hear as well.

“Hello?” Raven saw Jason grin widely once hearing who was speaking. “Raven?”

“Gar,” Raven breathed out, and she noticed some other distinct chatter at the end of Gar’s side. “What is it?”

“Okay, so the theatre room in Dick’s house has been fixed,” Gar began, and Jason nodded in confirmation. “And we’re now having a movie night. I don’t know what we’re watching but I really want it to be Jurassic Park! But other than that, I really wish you were here! Can you come over?”

Jason had to cover his mouth to stifle some laughter. Raven stayed silent, her face heating up, but constant probing from Jason prompted her to respond. “I’m—” Raven said, unsure of what to say next. “Busy.”

Jason snorted at Raven’s choice of words. “Oh?” Gar said, and Raven thought that she heard a hint of disappointment in his voice. “Uh, so, what are you doing?”

“I’m—“

Suddenly, Jason grabbed the speaker part of Raven’s earphones to his side and began talking. “She’s doing me,” Jason said cheekily, and Raven’s eyes widened in shock. “If you get what I mean.”
But before Gar could respond fully, Raven grabbed the mic away from Jason and started talking. “I’m studying,” Raven said, and the line between them became awkwardly quiet. “Rain check?”

Jason raised an eyebrow in amusement regarding Raven’s attempt to alleviate the awkwardness in the atmosphere. “Uh, yeah, sure,” Jason heard Gar’s voice crack. “That’s cool. Really cool. Yeah. Um, see you, like, later. Uh. Bye.”

With that, Gar hung up, and Raven removed an earphone out whilst yanking out Jason’s with force. “Why do you always do that?”

Jason stared at Raven. “Do what?”

“Act affectionate whenever he’s around.”

Jason’s face showed no emotion, but after a while he gave his trademark smirk. “May I borrow your calculator?”

Deciding not to pursue the subject even further, Raven nodded and handed Jason her calculator. After Jason received, Raven picked up her pen and sighed.

I do not like him, Raven tried repeating in her head as she worked on some practice questions. And he does not like me either.

But in the back of her head, Raven knew that she was lying slightly to herself.

xx

September 27 2014. Dick’s house.

“Is she coming?”

Gar looked up from his phone and took a second to recover before replying to Dick’s question. “She’s with Jason,” Gar muttered. “’Studying.’”

Dick raised an eyebrow at Gar’s reply, but mostly at how bitter he sounded. “You okay?”

Gar ruffled his hair and nodded slowly. “Yeah,” Gar said, hating how awkward his voice sounded. “Yeah, of course, why wouldn’t I be?”

Dick looked outside from the kitchen and made sure that Kori and Vic wouldn’t burst in the room. Dick just finished preparing the snacks for all of them, so he decided to pester Gar about what he was thinking about. “You’re not okay,” Dick pointed out. “What’s wrong?”

“Not that I care or anything,” Gar said. “Really, I don’t, but… Are Raven and Jason a thing?”

Dick chuckled lightly at Gar’s question. Having seen how Gar behaved when Raven was around or mentioned, Dick put two and two together and immediately knew that Gar liked Raven a tad bit more than he did for his other friends. However, Dick was also aware of Raven and Jason’s extremely close friendship and he had a feeling that Gar was beginning to be aware of it.

Ever since Dick got to know more of Raven via Jason, Dick immediately found it fitting to tease the both of them about their relationship. Eventually, Raven’s constant chastising made Dick realize that Jason and Raven were nothing more than sibling-like friends. And as hard it was for Dick to believe it at first, his observations of their dynamic made him realize so. He wondered how long it’d take Gar
to realize too.

“No,” Dick replied. “They’re just really close friends.”

“But who studies at a Saturday?”

Dick snorted. “Pre-Calculus students,” Dick said lightly. “Look, pay them no attention. I’ve never took Pre-Calculus here but it is hard. Raven can join us anytime later.”

Gar nodded solemnly and picked up the bowl of popcorn from the counter. “I’m fine, though,” Gar remembered to say, and he internally groaned at how Dick’s raised eyebrow was visible even with the sunglasses. “Really.”

“Sure,” Dick said sceptically, and before Gar could retaliate, Dick’s phone rang. Dick picked up his phone from the counter and scowled when he saw an unknown number calling. “Do you know who this is?”

Gar scrunched his face in response to Dick shoving his phone to Gar. “Do you think I can remember numbers? Of course not.”

Dick sighed, and decided to answer the call to find out. “Hello?”

“Dick, this is Garth,” Dick covered the mic of his cell phone and whispered to Gar that it was Garth calling. In response, Gar raised both his eyebrows in surprise. “Are you busy right now?”

“Why?”

“I mean if you’re not, then that’s good,” Garth said, and Dick noticed the background noises well enough to know that Garth was in a car. “Roy and I are on the way to your place.”

“What?” Dick exclaimed, and Gar constantly pestered Dick to tell him what was going on, much to Dick’s irritation. Dick slapped Gar’s hands away and resumed talking on the phone. “Wait, Roy?”

“Yes,” Garth said. “We’ll be there soon. Sorry for the sudden intrusion but this is quite important.”

“But –“

“See you!”

With that, Garth hung up, leaving Dick in an extremely confused state. Dick quietly put his phone into his pocket and sighed at Gar. “What did he say?” Gar asked, and Dick shrugged his shoulders.

“Garth and Roy are coming over.”

“Roy?” Kori asked, and both Gar and Dick looked at each other with a wary look. “But it is the
night of movies, is it not?"

“I know, right,” Gar grumbled, placing the food next to Dick’s. Kori crossed her arms and Gar frowned, taking a seat next to Kori. “When are they coming?”

“Probably in –“ the doorbell rang before Dick could respond. “Now.”

Sighing, Dick walked over to the front door and grimaced slightly when Roy and Garth revealed to themselves. He welcomed them in and walked over to the living room, where everyone immediately frowned at the sight of uninvited guests. “Hey guys,” Garth said awkwardly, and Roy was standing uneasily behind Garth, not knowing what to do. “Sorry for interrupting, but we need to talk. May we take a seat?”

“Go ahead,” Dick said, taking a seat next to Vic, allowing free space for the two guests on the other couch. “What is it?”

“Well –“

“Dude, hurry up!” Gar exclaimed, and Garth grimaced at Gar’s exclamation. “We don’t have forever!”

“Just show them the video.” Roy said, and everyone looked at his direction, as if they forgot Roy was there in the first place.

“Just a sec,” Garth said, and he placed his laptop on the coffee table and adjusted it so that the rest of them could see. When he opened the laptop, the screen revealed a paused video of some chemicals in a flask. Garth made sure to adjust the volume louder, and once he did, he resumed speaking. “Listen to the sound.”

“What’s this?” Dick asked, and Roy adjusted himself on his seat to reply properly.

“It’s my AP Chem project. I have to record the changes in the chemicals for observation so I left my camera there until today where I picked it up from school this morning. When I played the video to check, I noticed someone talking… Just play the video.”

Garth nodded, and hit the space bar on his keyboard. From there, all of them listened intently to what the video said.

It turns out, Kitten and Mikron were in the room, unaware of the camera recording everything. It became pretty obvious by then that they were both building something, but the purpose was unknown. After a few seconds of playback, the video showed someone’s hands grabbing a glass bottle behind Roy’s chemicals. It took Dick only a second to realize what it was.

“Hexanoic acid?” Dick asked, and Roy nodded then told Dick to continue watching the video. Dick fell silent shortly and at the end, all four of them gasped lightly when they realized what Mikron and Kitten was doing.

“This will definitely stink up their snot party.” The video said at the end, and then the screen turned black. Dick, Kori, Vic and Gar looked up from the laptop to Roy and Garth, giving them a look that demanded answers.

“Kitten knows about the party.” Garth explained, and Gar crossed his arms.

“Everyone knows about the party, dude,” Gar pointed out. “It’s not exactly a secret now.”
“Kitten knows about the party,” Garth repeated, with much more emphasis on the subject. “What do you think they’re in the school lab on a Saturday for?”

“Chemistry?” Gar asked, and Roy and Garth rolled their eyes.

“Dick, what’s hexanoic acid known for?” Garth asked, his attention directed at Dick, completely ignoring Gar’s presence.

“Their bad smell,” Dick answered promptly, and Garth tilted his head forward to urge Dick to continue. It took Dick a while to realize what Garth was saying. “They’re making stink bombs?”

“Yes,” Roy said. “You see, Kitten’s allying herself with Mikron to sabotage your party. The stink bomb is one of their efforts.”

Vic shook his head in disapproval, and gave Gar a look. “I told you we shouldn’t have invited Mikron.”

“That’s so out of the point to leave people out of our inclusive party, though!” Gar argued back, and Kori and Dick paid them no mind, though Kori’s face showed confusion.

“I’m sorry,” Kori said lightly. “But why are you here?”

Roy realized that Kori was referring to him, and was unceremoniously interrupted by Gar who seemed to comprehend Kori’s question after a few seconds of interpreting it.

“Yeah,” Gar said in a hostile tone. “Aren’t you an ‘ally’ of Kitten too?”

Garth jumped in to interject, but Roy placed a hand on his shoulder to placate him. “No,” Roy hissed. “Look, it’s a long story. All that matters now is that I actually like the idea of your party and it would suck if it was wrecked by Kitten.”

“Should we trust him?” Gar whispered to his other friends, and Roy rolled his eyes at how bad Gar’s whispering skills was. Roy noticed that Vic tried urging Gar that Roy was to be trusted, and when Dick leaned over to whisper something back to Gar, Gar sighed, and nudged Dick to reply.

“So I suppose you’re coming to our party, then?” Dick asked, and when Roy stuttered, Garth jumped in to reply.

“Yes,” Garth replied vehemently, and Dick raised his eyebrows. “So what are we going to do about Kitten?”

“Huh?” Gar said. “You’re the one who found out!”

“That doesn’t mean it’s our own responsibility,” Garth replied with a smile that made Gar want to shred Garth into pieces. “But aren’t you hosting the party?”

“Well, I don’t have an idea,” Gar grumbled. “Screw them back with a better stink bomb?”

Roy shook his head no. “The chemicals used in stink bombs are horrible, and frankly, I don’t know how Mikron got a hold of hexanoic acid. It’s not provided by the school.”

All six of them fell silent, unsure of what to do next. After a few moments, Kori perked up, as if an idea hit her mind all of the sudden. “How about we perform the act of countering the screw?”

All the other boys in the room looked at her in confusion, and Kori continued. “Kitten is intentionally ruining our party, is she not?” When Kori saw Garth nod in response, she continued. “Instead of
ruining her party, we shall ruin her plans of ruining our party.”

“I think,” Gar piped in. “I understand. Look, when Mikron’s trying to hurt us, we should totally make his plans backfire!”

Dick nodded in response. “Inconspicuously, of course,” Dick said, and the rest of them hummed a sign of approval. “But that means we need to be on the alert of his actions.”

“Fine by us,” Roy said, using his pointer finger to indicate himself and Garth. “We already are on the lookout, anyway.”

“We also need to exclude Mikron out of the party planning,” Dick pointed out. “At this point, I don’t think he will attend our party, but we still need to pretend as if we don’t know anything, just to throw Mikron in surprise when Kitten’s plans don’t work out.”

“Yo!” Vic exclaimed. “We should aggrandize the party to make Kitten freak out.”

“But not too superfluous,” Dick countered. “Remember, even though our party is now publicized, it’s still on the low-key. We don’t want it to spiral out of hand.”

“It won’t,” Vic assured. “Objectively speaking, Kitten’s party still has more stuff than ours. Who else would go other than friends?”

xx


Wally felt as if he was in cloud nine. Ever since Jinx agreed to go on a date with him earlier (which Wally seriously owed to Gar), both of them enjoyed each other’s company and sooner or later they were spending more time with each other than with others. This little fact did not go unnoticed in the school, and sooner or later rumors of their relationship started buzzing and while Jinx disliked how everyone made such a big deal of it, Wally paid no mind of it for he was with Jinx, and that was more than enough.

Honestly, Wally felt as if he could spend his entire life with Jinx. She was sassy, cunning, intelligent, determined, everything Wally admired. Wally learnt that Jinx’s ambitious streak has made her somewhat less friendly, and she often struggled internally as to who she should be – a nice person, or a mean one. And while her struggles intrigued Wally, he made sure to remind her to be exactly what she is and not what she should be. Wally may be imagining things, but Jinx surely was in a lighter disposition ever since he gave her advice.

Wally took a sip of his iced ocha tea and smiled. Wally never really ate Japanese food, but when Gar suggested this Japanese-stylized restaurant to eat in for the sake of experience and convenience (“They have really good vegan stuff!” Gar insisted), Wally decided to try it out with Jinx.

After coaxing Jinx to dress up fancy for this dinner date, Wally had to give himself a pat in the back. Jinx looked… extremely attractive. Not that she was any less attractive to Wally while dressed down, but Wally did enjoy looking at how gorgeous Jinx was in her dress that well shaped her body and… Well, Wally had to restrain himself from thinking more uncontrolled thoughts.

Wally was always a fan of Jinx’s pink locks but the lighting of the restaurant really emphasized its vibrancy and Jinx’s loose strands from her ponytail heavily accentuated her face. Wally smiled to himself, unaware that Jinx was snapping her fingers in front of Wally’s face to grab his attention.

“Wally!” Jinx said more loudly, and Wally snapped out of his thoughts, and realized that his food has
arrived. “Were you thinking about me again?”

Wally chuckled as he picked up his chopsticks to begin eating. “I always think about you.” Wally said truthfully, and Jinx jokingly threw a crumpled tissue to his direction.

The two of them eat silently, with Wally occasionally trying to steal Jinx’s food unsuccessfully as Jinx always steered him away.

“You’re going to get your meat germs all over my food!” Jinx would exclaim, and Wally would pout in his seat before trying again.

Finally, Jinx resorted to handing over her food using her utensils, leaving Wally satisfied. “Yours is really good.” Wally said as he finished trying her food.

Jinx smirked. “Vegan power.”

“Sure,” Wally said teasingly, and laughed when Jinx jokingly stuck her tongue out. It was weird to acknowledge, but Wally and Jinx has gone to a total of five dates in the span of two weeks. It may be a lot, considering that they were junior students, however Wally paid no mind to the time, instead relishing every moment. Jinx, however, might’ve been mindful of the pace the two were dedicating to each other. So Wally decided to find out. “Jinx?”

When Jinx nodded her head, Wally continued speaking. “Are… are we dating?”

Jinx gave Wally an odd look. “Do we have to?”

Wally stared at Jinx, stuttering, and stopped when Jinx laughed. “You should’ve seen your face!” Jinx exclaimed amusedly, and Wally scowled. “Yes, we are dating. That is, if you want to.”

“Of course I want to,” Wally said, after calming himself down. “That was evil of you.”

“Surprise, surprise,” Jinx lilted. “Besides, I already told Billy we are so… If you were to reject, that’d suck.”

“Actually,” Wally responded. “I already told Gar that we are too.”

Jinx stared blankly at Wally, then laughed. “The first thing we need to work on is definitely communication.”

“Agreed,” Wally said, amused. He couldn’t imagine the night going wrong any further – he felt too happy about the fact that his relationship with Jinx was mutually confirmed. Wally considered calling Gar to help him change his relationship status on Facebook, but Wally decided against it, not wanting to be that guy. “Gar says it’s weird of me to say that we’re dating even though we’ve never established it.”

“Speaking about Gar,” Jinx said, stirring her drink with a straw. “Does he have a thing for Raven?”

“Duh, he’s in love with her,” Wally said easily. “But he’s not admitting to it.”

“The whole party and thing is… nice, and all, but it’s so grand for two people who just met like, two weeks ago or something.”

“More than two weeks, actually.” Wally pointed out, and Jinx scoffed in response.

“You’re counting?” Jinx said. “I’m just saying, they know each other for only such a short amount of time. Isn’t it too early to have feelings for each other, and act upon it?”
Wally frowned. Didn’t they just start dating after two weeks of getting to know each other? “I hate to break it to you, Jinx,” Wally said dejectedly. “But we’ve only been seeing each other for two weeks and we’re dating now.”

Jinx chuckled. “But the difference is, you’re not in love with me or anything.”

That struck a chord. Wally fell silent and before he knew it, he felt his heart racing rapidly. “Hypothetically speaking,” Wally countered, and Jinx raised an eyebrow. “I mean. Well. Well, what if I am in love with you?”


Wally said nothing, and resorted to playing with his left over food with his chopsticks. Jinx, not knowing what exactly happened, tried easing the awkward atmosphere by asking bland questions, but Wally would only reply with short replies. Finally, after a few minutes, Wally asked for the bill, and once they’ve paid for their food, the two of them walked out of the restaurant in silence.

Wally and Jinx walked around the boulevard, and not standing how awkward it was between the two of them, Jinx stopped their banal walk and confronted Wally. “What’s wrong with you?” Jinx said, and Wally scowled.

“I’m not actually an idiot,” Wally said, and Jinx scrunched her eyebrows in confusion. “I’m not taking millions of advanced classes like you are, but I did take the last version of the SAT during June of sophomore year and I scored a 2040. I think that’s an accomplishment.”

“It is,” Jinx bristled, unsure of where Wally was going with this. “I never said you were an idiot, though.”

Wally raised an eyebrow. “You just did –“ “When?” “I am in love, Jinx!”

Wally’s response threw Jinx back in response. Not knowing what to do, Jinx laughed awkwardly and stepped around her spot. “You can’t be,” When Wally’s nostrils flared in response, Jinx was quick to defend herself. “You can’t harbour that strong feelings for someone you don’t know very well yet.”

“Sorry,” Wally said bitterly. “Must’ve missed that in the weekly tabloid of ‘How to be in Love.’”

“I prefer your existence over others, Wally,” Jinx said. “Really. But I’m not in love or anything.”

“Can we not talk about love like it’s a disease?”

“Can we not talk about love at all?” Jinx retorted, beginning to feel her face warm up. “You don’t love me, Wally! You like me, of course you do, but you don’t love me! Love is… whatever, but it’s not what you feel for me.”

Wally stayed silent for a while, and Jinx was about to prod him to say something, but Wally started talking. “When I wake up,” Wally began, his voice calmer than what Jinx expected. “I think of you. I think how nice it’d be if you were right next to my side, half-asleep, but still unwilling to deal with the rest of the world. I think of how I’d play with your pink hair until it annoys you and you fully wake up and scowl.

“Throughout the day, whenever I’m not with you, I think of how fantastic the world would be if I was. I have friends, I have family, but none of them make me feel more amazing than you do. Even if I’m with you, I’m insatiable.” Looking at Jinx’s distraught expression, Wally continued, even more
determined to prove his point. “I love to see you smile, I love to hear you laugh, and sometimes I consider recording you talking to me because I can listen to your voice all day. I love how you scratch your head when you’re solving a hard math problem. I love how you play with your necklace every time you feel playful. And damn it, I love the dress you’re in. But most importantly, I love it when you’re with me.

“And you know what, I may not be truly in love with you. I don’t know. But what I do know, is that you can’t invalidate what I think of you just because it doesn’t fit your perceptions of life. I know how I feel about you, and nothing’s going to change that. I’ve always felt this way for you ever since the start of junior year, and again, nothing’s changing that. Time to wake up, Jinx, and realize that not everything can go your way.”

“Slow down for a bit,” Jinx said. “I take back everything I said about Gar and Raven. They are definitely not in love with each other. Gar feels different around Raven, yes, but he’s not doing anything about it to rush it. Wally, telling yourself that you’re in love doesn’t create love.”

“Oh, silly old me then!” Wally exclaimed, throwing his hands up in the air in exasperation, and Jinx sighed in irritation.

“You’re falling too fast,” Jinx said slowly. “And that will jeopardize the both of us in the end. We have so much more to know about each other, what if we intercept with a bad deal breaker along the way?”

When Wally responded with only an aggravated look, Jinx continued tiredly. “Maybe…” Jinx began, and she had to recollect herself before speaking again. “Maybe we shouldn’t date for now.”

“We just literally got together a few minutes ago,” Wally snapped, and Jinx would’ve laughed if she wasn’t placed in this terrible situation. “I think I should trust what I think is best for myself.”

“You should,” Jinx replied. “But you’re not. You’re trusting what you feel is best for yourself. There’s a difference. I really like you, but this thing between us is going really fast. If we’d slow down, then it’d be much better.”

“All I did was say I was in love with you.”

“And then you proceeded with a lengthy tirade as if you were proposing to me!” Jinx exclaimed. “Stop rushing things in your life for once! Why don’t you want to take it slow for just once?”

“Why are you putting so much barriers in between us?” Wally retorted, heaving an irregular, heavy breath. “Why can’t we go with the flow and enjoy what’s between us?”

“The flow?” Jinx repeated, flabbergasted. She fumbled for articulacy, but after a moment, she took a deep breath, and began talking again. “Recover yourself before you fall too hard. Otherwise, no one might even be there to catch you.”

With that, Jinx turned on her heel and stalked off, but Wally grabbed her wrist before she could go. “Get off of me!” Jinx shouted, but Wally shook his head no.

“Why are you being such a wuss?” Wally hissed, and Jinx struggled to break free of Wally’s grasp. “Are you that scared of affection?”

Jinx didn’t immediately reply, however. She tried every method she could think of to have Wally let go, and finally, with all of her might, she broke free of Wally’s hold. Wally, worried that Jinx would run off, tried making her stay, but Jinx held up a hand to stop him. Wally, realizing that he should respect Jinx’s personal space, backed away a few steps, and sighed. The two of them stared at each
other, and Jinx lips quivered before she could speak again.

“I’m not scared of affection,” Jinx’s voice pierced through Wally’s ears as he realized that where they were was practically empty. Wally bit his lip, waiting for Jinx to reply, and resorted to biting his inner cheek when he saw Jinx sigh. “I’m scared… I’m scared of losing it. You’re so sure that you want me, but you have to realize that we actually have more to learn. We’re going too fast, Wally. What might be our next best five days of our lives might be our last together. I can’t… I can’t risk that, especially when I really like you.”

“But –“

“It’s getting late,” Jinx said, and she slowly walked backwards. “Please don’t be mad at me. This will be good for us in the future.”

Once he saw Jinx run off, Wally’s anger immediately boiled. “Your loss!” Wally shouted, and grumbled to himself as he kicked a random tree in frustration. Sighing to himself, he sat next to the tree he kicked and mumbled a sorry just to placate him. Wally, not knowing what else to do, stood up from the grass and walked back home, trying too hard to forget what just happened.

xx

October 6 2014. Recycling Club.

“Guys,” Kole said, once all of the members settled in the room to continue their tasks. When the freshmen in the room turned their heads to face Kole, Kole smiled sweetly and told them nicely that she was referring to her junior friends. Shrugging their shoulders, the freshmen turned away and continued working. After dealing with the freshmen, Kole returned her attention back to her friends. “Guys. Wally and Jinx broke up.”

Jericho typed out something in his phone, and played it on speaker. “No wonder Wally’s in a sour mood lately.” The speaker said aloud, and Kori nodded in agreement.

“Yes,” Kori said sadly. “He is saddening in all of the classes I share with him.”

“Gnarrk.” Gnarrk said in a devastated tone, and all three of them nodded in sympathy.

“I know,” Kole said, rubbing Gnarrk’s shoulder. “Jinx didn’t tell me details, but she told me that they did when I asked her for some help about hair.”

Kori, after seeing the auburn roots stemming from Kole’s mostly pink hair, nodded in understanding. “It must’ve been a breakup of the bad,” Kori mused, and all of her friends nodded in sympathy as well. “They are in such woes right now.”

“I wonder how bad the breakup could even be,” Kole pondered out loud. “But what’s strange is that they seemed so happy with each other. Before Wally, Jinx would cut my head off if I tried asking her for hair tips. But now, she just gave it to me like it was nothing.”

“Should we try to do the cheer-ups for friend Wally and Jinx?” Kori suggested, but Kole shook her head no.

“I think we should let them ride it out,” Kole said. “Time will heal all scars.”

All three of them hummed in agreement, and was left with the dampened atmosphere created after the discussion of Wally and Jinx’s breakup.
“Oh!” Kori perked up, and all three of her friends looked at her with intent curiosity. “Did you hear about Mikron?”

Kole nodded, and decided to explain it to Jericho and Gnarrk who eyed her curiously. “Gar messaged me about it,” Kole began. “The thing is, Mikron told Kitten about our party, and they’re planning to sabotage it.”

“That’s horrible.” Jericho signed immediately, not even bothering to type it out on his phone. Kole hummed in agreement, and continued talking.

“Gar has informed us to keep on the lookout,” Kori said. “Honestly, I think friend Garth and Roy are covering for us.”


“Roy is now… to be trusted,” Kori said. “Kitten and Roy has done the breakup.”

“Seriously?” Kole asked. “So many breakups! What next, Toni and Garth?”

“Don’t jinx it!” Jericho signed rapidly with wide eyes, and Kole muttered an apology.

“Well, on a lighter topic, Gar told me to make the party seem like a big deal,” Kole said, shrugging her shoulders. “But I think everyone has been talking about it already.”

“All you guys talking about the party?” All four juniors turned around to see Lorena Marquez, a freshman in the club, speaking. The four of them looked at each other with a look then Kole nodded.

“Yeah, why?”

“Just curious,” Lorena said, and a boy (who Kole knew his name was Zachary) snorted. Lorena scowled and flipped Zachary off, and started talking. “Well, actually, it just sounds really cool. Everyone has been talking about your party.”

“Good things?”

Lorena nodded at Kole. “Okay I don’t want to seem like I’m intruding and all, and like, I’m a freshman and we don’t really talk,” Kole interrupted saying it was fine, and Lorena smiled and continued. “But your party sounds really cool!”

“All the juniors showed expressions of confusion with the exception of Kori, who squealed. “The party is indeed ‘cool!’”

“Honestly, we were eavesdropping the whole time,” Lorena confessed bluntly, much to the amusement of her freshmen friends and the embarrassment of the juniors. “And we noticed that your party is currently battling with Kitten Walker’s.”

“It’s not really a battle,” Kole said. “I mean, it seems like it because she’s being jealous of it.”

“Yes, and I hear she’s horrible.” Lorena said, then nudged her head to who Kole recognized as Luke.

“She screamed at me a week ago for being in her way,” Luke said, ruffling his short platinum locks. “And she told me to go to hell.”

“Point is,” Lorena interrupted. “Not a lot of people like her. And it seems like you’re trying to prove that to her.”
When Kole realized that Lorena was about to suggest something, she urged her to continue. “What are you trying to say?”

“Point is,” Lorena said. “We can help all of you prove that she’s not the centre of the universe. You can invite other people. It will diversify the party, making it seem like you’re more significant.”

“Like us!” Lorena’s friend, Megan, chirped, and Lorena smiled.

Kole and Kori looked at each other seemingly communicating with each other with their eyes. After a while, they looked at Jericho and Gnarrk for a response, who just shrugged impassively. Finally, Kori and Kole looked back to Lorena and the freshmen, and smiled.

“Alright!” Kori said, and all the freshmen cheered. “But all of you shall know that this party is of the birthday category.”

“Oh?” Celine, another freshmen, asked, tilting her head. “Whose birthday?”

“Raven Roth’s.” Kole replied, and when it seemed like the freshmen did not really know who she was.

“Sounds cool,” Zachary said. “Don’t worry, we won’t trash the party. I think it’s a nice cause for the school’s society. Plus, it sounds nice to meet new people! And this Raven girl seems really nice to have a party thrown for her.”

“But…” Kole turned her head to another freshman, Miguel, and realized that she really needed to strengthen the relationship between the juniors and freshmen in the club. “Can we invite extra people?”

When Kori and Kole didn’t reply immediately, Jericho typed out something on his phone and let the speakers say it out loud. “The more the merrier, right?”

All the freshmen smiled, and Kori nodded excitedly. “Please put your best effort to maintain the party in the key of lows.”

When the six freshmen eyed Kori curiously, Kole stepped in to elaborate. “She means to keep the party low key.”

“Got it.” All the freshmen said in synchrony, and the four juniors smiled to themselves, knowing that they’ve made the party much more significant now.

xx

October 9 2014. Cafeteria.

“Whatever happened,” Dick said slowly, and Kori, Raven, Gar, and Vic all held their breaths, scared of the possibility of Dick blowing up. “To keeping the party low key?”

“It is low-key,” Gar said, confused. “There’s only twenty people coming or so.”

“Try forty!” Dick exclaimed, shoving a piece of paper to Gar. When Gar took the paper, he found out it was a list of people attending, and was shocked at how long the list was. “See?” Dick said, and Gar nodded slowly, sliding the paper to the middle of the table where everyone could see.

“I know some of these people,” Raven said, scanning through a few names with her finger. Upon Raven’s confession, Dick eyed her curiously, and Raven glared at him. “They’re sophomores, and
no, I did not invite them.”

“Whoa, there’s some seniors here too!” Vic pointed out, indicating to the bottom of the list. “And some other juniors who don’t really care about Kitten’s party.”

“I don’t know half of these people!” Gar referred to the list using his two hands. “Who invited them?!”

When all five of them fell silent, Dick groaned to himself. “The plans were fitted for an amount of twenty people, not its double.”

“Friend Dick?” Kori said meekly, and everybody eyed her with a puzzled look. “Please do not be angered, but I think Kole and I are responsible for this.”

“How?” Dick asked.

“Well,” Kori began. “The freshmen in the club of recycling told us that the act of diversifying the party would throw Kitten off. And it did, did it not?”

Vic and Raven nodded slowly, but Gar and Dick spluttered. “It threw me off too!” Dick exclaimed, and Kori winced.

“Sorry.”

“Honestly,” Vic interrupted. “I don’t see the big deal. The people coming are not that bad. And your house is not mini-sized.”

“Thanks,” Dick responded. “But no. The plans were set to accommodate us, and not some other random people!”

“Isn’t the point of a party to get to know more people and have fun?”

“Look,” Gar piped in. “It’s not that I’m against meeting new people. That’s cool! I’m worried that these people might take away the true meaning of the party.”

“It won’t!” Kori assured Gar. “Everyone on that list has been informed of the true intentions of the party.”

“But it’s not like all of them know who we are, or more importantly, Raven,” Gar pointed out, and Raven ducked her head. “By the time we’re singing ‘Happy Birthday Raven’, half of the people in the room will be awkwardly singing along!”

Dick sighed, and eyed the list one more time. “Can we… un-invite some people?”

“No!” Kori and Vic simultaneously said. “The plans are flexible, and it’s not like extra people will take away the true meaning of the party!” Vic said, trying to coax Dick and Gar into relenting. “And it’s pretty clear that whoever is on that list, is against Kitten and her semantics. That’s good, right?”

“We’re not trying to prove that we’re better, than Kitten, Vic.” Dick said tiredly, and Vic shook his head no.

“But that’s exactly what we’re proving! We are better,” Vic said. “Besides, her party has more people than forty.”

“She has a house the size of Mars,” Dick retorted. “And she knows everyone she’s inviting.”
“Is she best friends with you? Last time I checked, you and grass-stain were invited.”

“Guys,” Raven said, looking up from her phone. It seemed like she just finished texting someone, but none of them could place whom. “The extra people are fine. It’s being handled.”

“What?” Dick asked, and Raven dismissed him with a wave of a hand.

“Let’s just say that they’re not going to wreck the party.” Raven said, and made sure to glare at Dick with enough threatening looks. To her success, Dick retracted and a while later, all of them resorted to normal conversations.

Little did they know, however, a special someone from Raven’s request was currently rounding up all of the other extra party guests to do some damage control.
Gar Logan was annoyed. He was annoyed at how his schoolwork seemed to pile up as each day went, leaving no time for him to do anything. He was annoyed at how his phone seemed to be operating really slowly thus leaving him with little portable resources of entertainment. He was annoyed at how his latest green hair dye was a failure which left him with a weird ashy hair colour that he couldn’t describe further. He was annoyed that he ran out of money to buy his favourite comic. But most importantly, he was annoyed by his friend, Wally West.

Gar looked up from his Biology sheets and scowled at the sight of Wally grabbing a seat next to him. He had no idea where his other friends were, and was hoping with all his might that they would pop in any second. Not that Wally wasn’t his friend, but…

“Gar,” Wally whined, and Gar braced himself for a long-winded rant about Wally’s trials and tribulations. “Mandarin is so hard. I don’t know why I ever enrolled for the advanced class. I don’t even speak Mandarin out of the class! And the teacher always makes fun of my accent. Who asked the Chinese to make a billion tones for words! Why is it so easy to say horse instead of mother?”

Gar tuned out what Wally was saying and focused on keeping track on his latest biology project. What was peculiar is that Wally always ranted to Gar about trivial things and Gar never minded for he did the same thing too, but now Gar found himself really annoyed at Wally’s antics lately. He prepared himself to listen again, knowing what exactly will be brought up…

“And that was exactly what Gar was annoyed about.

Ever since Wally and Jinx reportedly broke up, Gar witnessed a distraught and disoriented redhead clinging to his side whenever possible. Gar knew that Wally was a bit gloomy than his usual perky self, but he initially thought that everything was alright when Wally came up to him to complain about his schoolwork. However, at the midst of his seemingly normal rant, Wally would mention Jinx and ramble on from there. Gar dismissed it at first, but then Wally’s habit of incorporating Jinx into his daily complaints about school kept on persisting and Gar couldn’t stand it.

“…Maybe if we knew each other longer then we would’ve never broken up, but then again…”

“Dude,” Gar slowly interrupted, and Wally looked at him with a confused look. “Shut up!”

Wally blinked. Gar blinked after registering what he said. Gar was usually a light-hearted person, and both of them took surprise at what Gar did.

Shoving his Biology sheet into his bag, Gar looked at Wally straight in the eye. “Look,” Gar said. “You’re one of my best friends here, and I respect our brotherly code of conduct.”

When Wally raised his eyebrows, Gar continued. “And as a loyal follower of our code of conduct, I think that I have the right to say that you’re being extremely annoying lately!”

“What?”

“Seriously?” Gar asked. “Do you not hear yourself when you speak? Jinx this, Jinx that. Everyone is sick of you pining over Jinx and lamenting over the breakup and so much more!”
Wally sighed. “You don’t understand.”

“Duh,” Gar said simply. “Because when there’s a breakup, I either let it go or I pursue the
relationship again! You’re doing nothing! Look, do you want to be with her?”

“Yes,” Wally said seriously, lightly slamming both his hands on the table. “Yes, I liked her since the
start of the year! But she’s avoiding me like the plague, and every effort I try to reach out to her she
throws away.”

Gar raised an eyebrow. “When you want to fix a relationship, I don’t think leaving crumpled post-it
notes in someone’s locker is the best way.”

“You’re right,” Wally said, placing his crossed arms on the table and leaning on them. “But it’s
just…”

“What?”

“It’s so awkward now.”

Gar leaned over to whack Wally in the head. “Of course!” Gar exclaimed. “You’re avoiding her like
the plague too!”

“Because she’s avoiding me!”

“Wow,” Gar said, leaning back on his seat. “I thought I was the immature one between the two of
us.”

Wally narrowed his eyes at Gar. “It’s not immature. Approaching her is just simply not easy.”

“Have you tried to?”

“Of course –“

“Nope,” Gar interrupted. “I can’t stand watching you clam up in front of her and ramble about her
without her! Make a move, dude! Either you want to date her or you don’t!”

Wally groaned, and for a second Gar wondered if it was possible for Wally’s face to be as red as his
hair. “Duh, I want to date her!” Wally blurted out, and Gar looked at him sceptically. Thinking of a
comeback, Wally quickly asked the first thing in his mind. “And why are you telling me what to do
about relationships? Last time I checked, your progress in ‘Project Woo Raven’ is negative thirty
percent.”

Gar blushed at the mention of Raven, and grimaced at Wally who knew that he had successfully
struck a chord. Crossing his arms, Gar eyed Wally and began talking. “Don’t bring Raven into this.
Unlike you, I’m not sulking about my ‘negative thirty percent’ progress,” Sighing to himself, Gar
scooted closer to Wally and awkwardly patted him on the shoulder. “What happened to the confident
guy I met in the beginning of the year?”

Wally didn’t reply. Instead, he planted his face onto the table and remained stagnant for what felt like
an eternity. Groaning lightly, Gar picked up his bag and tried poking out a response from Wally to
no avail. “Text me when you’re back to normal.” Gar said, leaving his distraught friend alone in the
cafeteria to head to the school greenhouse to check on his biology project.

For his latest biology project, Gar was assigned with a certain type of plant to grow and care of for a
specific amount of time and record progress on it. Gar was given the tillandsia, a plant that required
little to no watering, much to his delight and Karen’s annoyance. Karen, who couldn’t seem to care less about plants, was given the *dahlia*, which required high maintenance. This fact amused Gar, and he made it his personal life purpose to annoy Karen endlessly about it.

But because Gar’s plant required little maintenance, all Gar had to do was take snapshots of its growth which actually served… quite redundant, as the plant looked the same throughout the beginning ‘till the present. *But anything to get away from Wally*, Gar thought to himself, as he walked outside of the school building and immediately saw the greenhouse. Walking in with no thoughts of who might possibly occupy the room, Gar found himself in quite a shock when he realized that Raven was there, focusing on some chemical setup under the UV lamps.

Smiling to himself, Gar realized that Raven wasn’t wearing a sweater – odd because throughout the entire time of knowing her, Raven was always wearing one. Now, however, Raven was wearing a light blue T-shirt and Gar took instant pride at how she was matching his own light blue shirt.

With all the courage he could muster, he dropped his bag nearby his plant, walked over to Raven’s side and poked her in the sides, causing her to jump in reaction.

“What the –” Raven immediately turned around and saw Gar smile cheekily at her. At the sight of Gar, Raven scowled but then chuckled lightly. “Hello, Gar.”

“What’s up?” Gar asked, pointing to her setup behind her. Raven took one more look at her project and shrugged.

“Chemistry,” Raven explained. “The greenhouse is the only place I can use UV lamps without permission, so here I am. What are you doing here?”

“Actually,” Gar began, rubbing the back of his neck. “I went here to avoid Wally.”

Raven scrunched her eyebrows in confusion. “Why?”

Gar gave her a look. “Do you share any classes with Wally?”

“One, but we don’t really talk much –” Raven stopped, as she realized what Gar was getting to. “Oh. Trouble in paradise?”

“Worse,” Gar groaned. “I’ve never seen him *this* desperate. And I saw him trying to woo her, so that’s one thing. It’s just that, every time I’m around him, he’s *always* complaining or talking or *whatever*-ing about Jinx and it’s getting on my nerves. It’s getting on everyone’s nerves! I just wish that I can bang his face to a wall of concrete just to whack some sense into him!”

The two of them fell silent. Raven blinked, having witnessed the first time Gar showed true aggravation. In turn, Gar sighed, and mumbled an apology about how he got carried away.

Raven nodded solemnly. “Yes, well, for the mean time, I think you should give him some space. Once he realizes that he’s unconsciously pushing other people away, he’ll come to his senses.”


“It’s fine,” Raven said. “But out of all of the places you could go to avoid Wally, you picked the greenhouse?”

“Actually,” Gar said, scooting over to the side to pick up his *tillandsia* plant to show Raven. “I have to take pictures of this baby.”
Raven picked up the bowl from Gar’s hands and observed it with intent curiosity. “Biology?”

Gar nodded. “I got lucky. This plant requires nothing but just air and the humidity. So I turned on the humidifier ever since.”

Raven scowled, and gave back the bowl to Gar. “No wonder I was sweating buckets here,” Raven said, pointing to her sweater placed on top of her bag on the floor. “You really couldn’t leave a note warning about the humidity here?”

Gar gave it a thought and shrugged. “Eh, too late now.”

Raven rolled her eyes, while Gar grinned. Ever since Gar confessed about the party, Gar found more excuses to talk to Raven, something he was highly happy about for he found Raven too intimidating to talk in person sometimes. But as time went on, he realized that they were talking less about the party and more about other things. From there, Gar knew that he didn’t need an excuse to talk to Raven, and Raven didn’t need an excuse to talk to Gar. It was great. Gar was happy.

“So,” Gar said, putting his plant bowl on the table behind him. “What’s up? Why are you still here after school?”

“I was just doing my finishing touches for my Chem report,” Raven explained. “Now I’m off to the library.”

“Can I come?” And Gar winced once he realized how awkward he sounded. To his luck, Raven shrugged him off and gave him a sad smile.

“No, sorry,” Raven said. “I work at the library for part-time. Having you there would distract me.”

“What do you even do in the library? Just read?”

Raven tilted her head from side to side. “Something you’re not capable of, I’m sure,” Raven said lightly, and Gar pouted in response. Smiling to herself, Raven grabbed her bag and her sweater off the floor, set her chemistry setup aside, and turned to Gar. “Well, I’m gone.”

“See you,” Gar gave a small wave with a smile, and took out his phone to take a picture of his plant. But as he heard the greenhouse door open, an idea popped in Gar’s head. “Wait!”

Raven stopped in her tracks and turned around to see Gar looking at her with wide, hopeful eyes. “Yes?”

“Are you free this Sunday?” Gar blurted out, and before he could backtrack his thoughts or have Raven respond, Gar continued. “If you are, are you down for a meet-up between the two of us, you know, just chilling, having fun… I totally understand if you don’t want to, though, that would be totally… fine.”

Raven raised an eyebrow, and for a second Gar thought that she would say no, but when Raven gave a small smile, Gar gave a huge grin in return. “Sure,” Raven said, and Gar would literally perform a backflip if 1) he could perform one and 2) he was in open space. But for now, Gar grinned, and stared at Raven with intense joy in his eyes. “Okay, now I’m off. I’ll be late if not.”

Gar nodded dumbly, and watched as Raven waved goodbye to him and left. When he was sure that Raven was not around the vicinity, Gar rushed to his plant and raised it up high in the air with both hands.

“Who’s the man?!” Gar exclaimed, playing around with his plant as if it was a new born baby
looking for fun. “I’m the man!”

And before Gar could get carried away, Gar took a quick snapshot of his plant and presumed playing with it with joy.

xx

October 15 2014. Jump City Mall Food Court.

“Girls,” Kitten said slowly, as Gemma and Selinda looked at each other with worry. “Pray tell, could any of you tell me… Why are people going to the freak party instead of mine!!?”

Gemma and Selinda winced at Kitten’s shriek. Recovering themselves from how much Kitten’s voice rang in their ears, Gemma and Selinda shrugged and resumed looking everywhere but Kitten.

“You don’t know?” Kitten asked. “Yeah, right!”

“Maybe you should ask other people instead,” Selinda suggested, and Kitten huffed in annoyance. “What? It’s not like we represent the entire student population!”

“But they talk to you about the party,” Kitten said, pointing an accusing finger between Gemma and Selinda. “They don’t talk to me about it because that would be dumb! I know they talk to you about the party and I want to know what they say!”

“Oh my god, relax,” Gemma said, rolling her eyes. “We’re not, like, your personal messengers or something. Jeez, get a life!”

Selinda widened her eyes. Kitten clenched her jaw. And Gemma raised an eyebrow, ready for any taunt that Kitten would throw at her. “Excuse me?”

“I’m serious,” Gemma said. “If you want to know why people are attending their party instead of yours, ask them. Selinda and I are not the school newspaper.”

Kitten eyed both of them, and Gemma was half prepared and half worried for the next thing that Kitten would do. But unlike her thoughts, Kitten just simply sighed, and sat down on the chair across the two seats Gemma and Selinda were occupying. “I don’t know what to do.”

“Don’t worry about it, Kitty,” Selinda said, trying to comfort Kitten which all three knew was not working. “All of the people going there are like, freaks or something, right?”

“But my party is so cool,” Kitten lamented. “It’s always been cool. What are they going to do? Play Jenga the whole night? Where’s the fun in that?”

“You should ignore it,” Selinda advised. “The people are going are people you call… freaks, right? And it’s not like, you want anything to do with them. Just enjoy yourself and ignore other things in the way.”

“It’s all that stupid green guy’s fault!” Kitten exclaimed, ignoring everything Selinda said, much to Gemma and Selinda’s annoyance. “Pulling this stunt as if he’s the messiah and I’m the villain. I am so not the villain! I made that dumb list so that people can be careful in this society! But now he goes around, strutting around, making people think that I’m the bully. I’m doing everyone a favour here!”

Gemma and Selinda fell silent, awkwardly looking at each other trying to process what Kitten just said. Kitten took note of how tense her two friends were, and scowled. “What?” Kitten barked out, trying to figure out what exactly was wrong.
“Maybe…” Selinda trailed off, looking at Gemma for solace to which Gemma just urged her to continue with a nod of her head. “Maybe you are?”

Kitten looked at her confusedly. “Maybe I’m what?”

Selinda, not wanting to cause any more conflict, backed out before anything bad could happen. “Nothing,” Selinda mumbled, and Gemma eyed her with annoyance. “Nothing.”

“No, you clearly have something to say,” Kitten said, standing up once again. “Say it.”

Gemma, not liking how Kitten was acting towards Selinda, stood up as well, leaving Selinda awkwardly hunched over in her seat. “Leave Selinda alone.”

“No, you clearly have something to say!” Kitten exclaimed, forcing Gemma and Kitten to look at her. “Can we all just sit down and chill? We’re in a food court and we haven’t grabbed anything to eat!”

Sighing in defeat, Gemma sat back down with Kitten reluctantly following. The three of them fell silent, with Selinda twitching in her seat waiting for the tension to diffuse down. But to her dismay, the silence seemed to linger for so long that Selinda, not willing to tolerate it, stood up, and declared that she would be buying food, in hopes that Gemma and Kitten would do the same.

Instead, Selinda left alone, leaving Gemma and Kitten in a fit of passive aggression.

“Honestly,” Gemma said, breaking the silence between her and Kitten. “I’m considering going to their party.”

Kitten raised an eyebrow. “But you can’t go to both parties at the same time.”

“That’s the point.”

Once Kitten realized what Gemma was saying, she slammed her hand on the table and shrieked. “Excuse me?!” Kitten said. “Did you not hear what I just said?!”

“I did, and it helped me realize how much I don’t want to go to your party!” Gemma said. “You’re a bully, Kitten, you manipulate people in your favour and when it doesn’t work, you find ways to make it worse!”

“I am not a bully,” Kitten said vehemently, to which Gemma scoffed. “What?”

“You made a list against people you dislike out of irrational hate!” Gemma exclaimed, flailing her hands around to make a point. “And as a result, you ostracize people out even though they’ve done nothing wrong!”

“Have you ever realized why that list exists? Do you even know who’s in the list? It’s people who deserve it!”

“Like Roth?” Gemma countered. “She has done nothing to you. You’re just against her because everything goes in her favour!”

“Because she’s a manipulative brat,” Kitten said. “You know this!”

“I don’t, because everything negative in the school is all shaped by you, and I don’t know who you are anymore except a lying, cheating, and manipulative bitch!” Gemma said. “All this time I’ve been in Jump City, I’ve seen nothing but Raven be a victim of your mess. Fine, I don’t like everyone in
the freak list. But that doesn’t mean that you should make their lives more miserable other than putting them in the list! And then you go around saying that you’re not a bully? Maybe in your eyes you aren’t, but you have to realize that you are a hypocrìte, and no one deserves to be friends with a hypocrìte.”

As Gemma finished her own diatribe, both of them were interrupted by the sound of Selinda placing her food tray on the table and taking a seat. Fully aware of what just happened, Selinda cleared her throat and sweetly asked if any of them were buying food. But to her surprise, Kitten stood up, flipped Gemma off, and left the two of them.

As she headed towards the bathroom, Kitten immediately grabbed her phone to call someone. Luckily, as she reached the bathroom, the person she was calling picked up. Not waiting for a response, Kitten immediately began talking.

“You idiot,” Kitten seethed into the phone. “Who hated you so much to make you useless in life?!”

“I… What?”

“Mikron,” Kitten said. “Why aren’t you achieving anything?! Why are people going to the Pro-Raven party instead of the Pro-Kitten one?!”

“I tried,” Mikron pleaded. “I really did! Remember? I handed out flyers for you –“

“Flyers?! What do you think this is, new student orientation? What are they doing? Are they forcing people to go to their dumb party?!”

“Kitten, they’re doing nothing!” Kitten scoffed at this. “No, seriously! They’re doing absolutely nothing! It’s the people who are deciding which party they’re going to.”

“I don’t buy it,” Kitten said. “Look, freak, you’re going to do whatever it takes to have people come to my party. Or else.”

“Or else…?”

“You don’t want to be held accountable for all the times you ‘experimented’ with the school database, don’t you?” Kitten smirked to herself when she heard Mikron gasp lightly. “After all, expulsion is something people don’t look forward to…”

It took a while for Mikron to respond. But when he did, Kitten smiled devilishly.

“I’ll do my best,” Kitten heard Mikron say. “Anything for you.”

xx

October 17 2014. Dick’s house.

Dick, Gar, and Vic all looked at each other in worry upon seeing their friend Wally scattered on the floor, mumbling words to himself. Because Raven and Kori were off doing their own thing, the three boys were left with themselves to continue their weekly movie night. However, to the dismay of all three, Wally seemed to cling to them the whole school day, ending up with him lying on Dick’s carpet, and the other three boys feeling annoyed.

“You guys are like… my best friends,” Wally slurred, and Dick crossed his arms while Gar and Vic had to stifle their laugh at how pathetic Wally looked. “No, you guys are my best friends.”
“Is he drunk?” Dick whispered to Gar and Vic, who chortled simultaneously.

“No,” Gar said. “Drunk in love, maybe.”

All three of them heard Wally sigh to himself, and was pretty surprised when Wally regained composure and sat on the carpet Indian-style. “What are we watching?”

Dick eyed him curiously. “We’re not doing anything until you fix yourself,” Dick reprimanded. “It’s been three weeks. Get over it.”

Wally narrowed his eyes at Dick. “I am over it, Richard,” Dick scowled at Wally’s use of his real name. “I really am. I am so over it, and I want to watch movies with my best buddies in the entire world.”

“Oh, you’re over it?” Dick said. “Then what do you call your… stunt earlier on just now with the carpet?”

Wally fell silent. “Meditating.”

Vic snorted. “I know breakups are hard,” Vic began. “But bro, you either need to let go or fight for it. You’re… doing nothing of the sort.”

Wally scoffed in response. “And what do you know about dating?”

“I dated Jinx too, remember?” Vic said drily, and Wally scoffed. Oh, he remembered, alright. His first year in Jump City High was filled with bets and discussions about Vic and Jinx’s past relationship. Wally remembered he even participated in a bet on whether or not the two of them would come back to each other. Wally felt a sense of small pride upon reminiscing the fact that he betted against Vic and Jinx becoming a couple again which was eventually true. But even if he was glad that Vic was out of the picture, Wally couldn’t help but worry if it was the same for him and Jinx.

“But you never got back with her in the end.”

“I think it’s too soon to tell when is ‘in the end,’” Vic said blandly, and immediately backtracked when he realized Wally was glaring at him. “Whoa, yo, don’t murder me! I’m just saying, if it’s meant to be, it’ll happen. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but someday. Also, if you find yourself pushing for it to remain existent, then perhaps it really isn’t meant to be.”

Wally sighed and bit his lip. “I should talk to her, shouldn’t I.” Wally said, to which Dick and Gar immediately groaned out approvals.

“For the love of the heavenly tofu gods, yes!” Gar exclaimed. “I told you, leaving random post-it notes on her locker or staring at her whenever you can or talking about her every chance you have is not stuff you should do!”

“If it’s any consolation,” Dick offered. “She keeps your post-it notes.”

That seemed to perk Wally’s ears up. “Really? How do you know?”

“Chemistry,” Dick said. “She folds them in to miniature frogs and penguins.”

“I don’t know if that makes me feel better.”

“On the bright side,” Gar said, joining Wally next to him on the carpet and wrapping his arm around
Wally’s shoulder. “At least it’s not in the trash!”

“You know what,” Wally said, removing Gar’s arm from his shoulders and standing up. “I’m going to talk to her right now!”

All three of them cheered and howled in approval, but then realized what exactly Wally said. “Wait!” Dick said. “You’re going now?”

“If not now, when?”

“Dude, what are you even going to say?” Gar asked, and scowled when he realized how much it ached from looking up to Wally who was standing. “Ugh, sit down, my neck hurts.”

Luckily, Wally sat down and shrugged. “I don’t know,” Wally admitted. “Sorry for being a wad, let’s hang out?”

All three of them resisted the urge to face palm themselves, but did so anyway. “Dude… What do you think she’s going to say to that?!?”

“Schedule a meet up, or talk to her when you can, don’t just barge in wherever she’s living and demand a conversation,” Vic said. “Again, don’t try to force it.”

“Ugh, this sucks,” Wally complained. “Should I just talk to her tomorrow?”

Vic shrugged. “See if she’s free,” Vic said, and he noticed how Wally still looked down. “Hey. You okay?”

Wally pursed his lips and let out a huge breath. Vic noted that Gar and Dick left the living room together to head to the kitchen, leaving Vic and Wally alone. “It’s like,” Wally began, and Vic noticed that Wally began picking on stray strands from the carpet. “I’ve been committing myself to her since the beginning of the year, and she’s… not? This whole time, well maybe not before, but certainly now, I realize that it may just be… one-sided?”

“She just has a hard time letting people in,” Vic explained. “Her life is full with mistrust, and here you are, some random guy that she never talked to, showing huge interest in her. I’m sure she’s happy, but maybe she’s not used to the pace.”

Wally was silent for a moment and then eyed Vic with a blank look. “You seem to know a lot about her.”

“Yeah,” Vic said. “Well, don’t worry about me. She’s all yours.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means,” Vic replied. “That she’s an annoying individual and I’d rather relegate that to someone else other than me.”

Wally chuckled. “Well, I think she’s worth it,” Wally said, and Vic rolled his eyes with a smile. “Say… When she broke up with you, how did you deal with it?”

Vic gave him a strange look and Wally felt a surge of confusion rush inside him. Finally, Vic broke the silence, shocking Wally with what he had to say. “Dude, I broke up with her.”

Wally raised an eyebrow. “But,” Wally said, flustered. “Everyone says that…”

“She broke up with me?” Vic chuckled. “Because it seems like it, right? But I broke up with her. She
was fun and all, but we were too competitive for our own good. Two alpha people suited together? Not the best thing.”

“Did…” Wally stumbled on his words. “Did you ever consider getting back with her?”

“Multiple times,” Vic confessed. “But in the end, it wasn’t because I wanted to be with her. It was mostly because I didn’t want to be alone.”

Wally nodded. “Do you…” Wally said, and Vic eyed him with intent curiosity. “Do you think that Jinx is the one for me?”

“Think of it this way,” Vic said. “When you date someone, you either break up with them or you marry them. Which is more dreadful to you?”

Wally paused to think. Honestly, the whole time Wally was sulking over Jinx, Wally thought that it was because he was saddened over the fact that he lost someone he really liked. That still played a major role in his reasons of sulking, but after talking with Vic, Wally realized just how much he clung to his friends.

Ever since he started seeing Jinx, he hung out less with Garth, Karen, Vic, and Gar. As time passed, Vic and Gar eventually hung out more with the likes of Dick, Kori, and eventually Raven, while Garth and Karen welcomed Roy back into their friend circle with the company of the Spanish twins Mas y Menos. As he focused more and more on Jinx, Wally realized that his friend circle wasn’t the same, which left him with mostly Jinx. But now that he doesn’t have Jinx, Wally found it difficult to return hanging out with his old friend circle. It didn’t help that Karen specifically asked him to back off until he “grow a backbone and stop looking like a dreaded zombie.”

Wally eventually resorted to clinging to Gar, one of his closest friends, who in turn clung to Dick and Vic. And even though all three of them were nice, Wally knew that he was getting on their last nerves. But he couldn’t help it – he felt lonely, and it really didn’t help that Jinx seemed to be back to normal while Wally looked like as if he got hit by a truck every day.

Wally thought it may just be the loneliness that’s making him desperate to run back to Jinx’s arms. But he knew it wasn’t that – Wally really did like Jinx, and even though they may not ever be back together, Wally couldn’t stand the idea of losing Jinx even as a friend.

“I don’t want to be insignificant in her life,” Wally said, after a few silent moments between him and Vic. “I don’t want to be some random redheaded guy who freaked her out from liking her too much… I still want to be a part of her life, in some way.”

Vic had nothing to say to Wally. Instead, he removed himself from the couch to sit next to Wally on the carpet, and invited him to play video games with him. Wally said yes.

Over in the kitchen, Dick and Gar were discussing about their party. Dick noticed that throughout the whole week, the school was bombarded with advertisements and embellishments promoting Kitten’s birthday party. Dick wasn’t ignorant about who was behind these projects – in fact, Dick knew exactly that it was Mikron.

Dick had to give credit to Mikron, though. All of his inventions created were of superb quality, and Dick took quite a big interest in a holographic project that Mikron invented to showcase Kitten’s house and its features. Unfortunately for Mikron and Kitten, while everyone was interested in the inventions, no one took extra attention about the content of it, which rendered the invention quite useless in the end.
Kitten was also trying hard on her part to promote her party and convince less people to go to Raven’s party. Dick noticed how Kitten would approach different tables in the cafeteria trying to coax them to her side, which was weird for everyone as Kitten was one to be approached, not doing the approaching. In the end, however, her efforts proved futile. The school was guided by their own choices and not any other influences.

“Gar,” Dick said, interrupting Gar who was cutting apples for himself. “Do you think the party is going... too smoothly?”

Gar set aside the knife to the sink, placed his apples on a bowl and looked at Dick with a strange look. “What do you mean?”

“Nothing’s going too badly,” Dick began. “Mikron and Kitten’s efforts to promote Kitten’s party are more useless than the boy’s bathroom on the third floor, and people who are attending are actually contributing to the party thanks to Raven and Jason. I can’t shake off the feeling that something will go wrong.”

“Dude,” Gar said, after swallowing an apple piece. “Shove your Murphy’s Law somewhere else. If anything will go wrong, we have each other! Besides, the worst case scenario I can think of is us being forced to eat Kori’s cake instead of Kole’s.”

Dick chuckled at Gar’s comment, but then fell silent at the mention of Kori. Gar, as oblivious he may be, didn’t fail to realize this, and decided to comment on it. “Speaking of Kori,” Gar lilted his voice. “How is she?”

Dick rolled his eyes, knowing exactly what Gar was getting into. Deciding to play difficult, Dick replied curtly. “She’s fine,” Dick said, then he smirked at the thought of what to say next. “How’s Raven?”

Dick’s smirk grew bigger as he saw Gar lower his bowl and narrow his eyes at Dick. “She’s fine,” The two of them proceeded to perform a staring contest, but then Gar laughed at how ridiculous they were being. “Seriously, how’s Kori? Don’t you like her?”

“Of course I do,” Dick replied vehemently. “She’s my friend.”

“Yeah, sure,” Gar said dismissively. “When are you going to ask her out?”

“When you ask Raven out,” Dick retaliated, feeling brilliant for his comeback but then faltering back a bit when he realized Gar was smirking. “What?”

“Already did.”

That caused Dick to drop his jaw. “When?”

“Tuesday,” Gar said. “Well, I just asked her to meet up. But I don’t know where to go.”

“Just go to the mall,” Dick suggested, grabbing an apple piece from Gar’s bowl. “Watch a movie or something.”

“No, that’s too standard,” Gar said. “I want it to be special, you know?”

Dick snorted. “How special do you want it to be? Cuban paradise? Norwegian highlands?”

“My fist on your face?” Gar suggested. “Something cool. I don’t think she thinks of it as a date. Nothing too overwhelming.”
“Well, what does she like?” Dick asked. “Maybe you can do something related to books.”

“She likes reading,” Gar said. “But I am not spending my time with her in the library!”

“What else?”

Gar shrugged, rubbing the back of his neck. “I don’t know,” Gar admitted. “Any suggestions?”

“Actually,” Dick said, grabbing his phone from his pocket to find something on the internet. “I know a place. Kori wanted to go there with me but we never really got around to talking about it. It would be nice if someone went there and gave me a first-hand review.”

Dick showed his phone screen to Gar, showing him a location which amazed Gar greatly. Gaping at the screen, Gar handed Dick his bowl of apples and grabbed the phone, scrolling through the images of Dick’s recommended place. “This is amazing,” Gar commented. “Where is it?”

“It’s actually pretty far from here,” Dick confessed. “Approximately an hour drive from here. Maybe half an hour if you take the train.”

Gar considered it. “Not a problem,” Gar said. “This place is awesome! You think this is the place?”

Dick nodded. “Do you think it’s the place?”


“You’re welcome,” Dick said. “I never thought you’d grow the balls to ask Raven out.”

“Well, some things are not what it seems,” Gar commented. “Looks like I have more balls than you.”

Dick grimaced and grabbed his phone away from Gar’s hand, forcing Gar to hold his bowl again. “I’m just waiting for the right time,” Dick said. “I think she likes me, but I still want to ask her in the right time.”

“Well, whenever the ‘right time’ is for you, I’ll be having fun on Sunday,” Gar said. “I wonder what we could do though in that place.”

“Probably walk, talk,” Dick said. “I’ve got to say…” Gar eyed him curiously, munching on his last apple piece. “I really appreciate your initiative to make everyone happy. I don’t know how it feels to be left out in this school because I’m on the same boat as you are, but I’m glad to be a part of something nice.”

Gar smiled, setting aside his bowl away. “Thanks for being a great sport in organizing the party,” Gar said. “I know we weren’t really cool with each other in the beginning but you’ve been a great friend so far.”

“That went more touchy-feely than I thought it’d be.”

Gar laughed. “Yeah, you think Wally and Vic are done being touchy-feely with each other too?”

“Let’s find out.”

xx

October 17 2014. Jump City Mall.

“I am so delighted to be spending time with you, friend Raven!”
Raven smiled to herself. It was originally going to be movie night with Dick, Gar, and Vic, but after hearing that Wally would be coming over, Kori immediately took the initiative to run away from Wally’s mess and grabbed Raven with her. Kori was told that Raven and Gar would have a date on Sunday, so Kori planned to prepare Raven for it.

“Where are we going?” Raven asked, feeling a bit of an ache after being pulled around throughout the mall by Kori. Kori just simply laughed and presumed leading her to a store filled with bright lights and pastel-coloured outfits. Raven eyed Kori curiously. “What’s this?”

“You have the date with Friend Gar, do you not?” Kori asked happily. “You need to be prepared!”

Raven squinted her eyes at how bright the store was. “Um,” Raven said. “No offense, Kori, but this store... Isn’t really where I go for shopping.”

“Oh?” Kori said. “Then where do you usually go for the shopping?”

“Uh, I don’t think I need to buy any clothes for this date,” Raven said, blushing slightly at the mention of a date. “I think I’ll just go as myself.”

“But is this not a special occasion?” Kori asked.

“Sure,” Raven said. “But it’s not that big of a deal, Kori.”

The two of them were interrupted by a bored-looking store clerk chewing gum. “You buying or not?”

“No, sorry.” Kori said, and Raven and Kori headed out.

As they were walking around, Raven asked Kori a question. “How do you know I’m meeting Gar this weekend?”

“Friend Gar informed me about it during the class of Art History!” Kori said. “He seemed very excited.”

“Ah,” Raven said, and Kori smiled at how Raven’s blush seemed to redden even more. “Alright.”

“Since our shopping period is now cancelled, shall we eat the dinner together?”

Raven nodded, and Kori led them into a similarly bright-coloured café. Raven recognized café as one with allegedly the best bakeries in the city, but Raven never really got the chance to verify that. As Kori and Raven were seated, the two immediately scanned through the menu, ordering a main course and various desserts.

“Friend,” Kori said, after sipping her drink she received a few moments ago. “May I ask a question?”

Raven nodded, pouring syrup into her drink after realizing her iced tea was too bitter. “What do you think of Gar?”

Raven eyed Kori curiously. “What do you mean?”

“Do you like him?” But before Raven could answer, Kori continued speaking. “Do you like-like him?”

“I don’t see why this is important.” Raven said curtly, and once she saw Kori pout, she sighed. “I suppose... I suppose I see him differently than I see Jason or Dick or Jericho or something.”
That answer seemed to satisfy Kori, and before she knew it, Raven kept talking. “See, Jericho is a nice friend and he has always been there for me, but lately we’re both too busy to settle down and relax with each other. I think he has a thing with Kole, too. Jason, as loyal as he is, is too volatile for me to consider settling down with him. And Dick… Well, Dick is too occupied with something else, I suppose. Those three are three of my closest male friends, and none of them are as interesting as Gar. Which is weird, because I don’t know him that well. But there’s something about him that makes me want to stick to his side, as strange as it may be.”

Kori remained silent, in case Raven had more to say. But to her surprise, Raven sighed and shook her head in contempt. “I’m sorry,” Raven said. “For dumping all of that on you. I don’t even tell that stuff to Jason, and the heavens forbid he knows exactly what I think of Gar.”

“Friend Raven,” Kori said sweetly, placing her hand on top of Raven’s. “You can do the dumping of emotions all you want. This is the night out of the girls, right?”

Raven smiled, having realized that Kori was one of her few female friends that she could trust. “Thank you,” Raven said. “I don’t think it’s a date, though.”

Kori removed her hand from Raven’s and scowled. “What do you mean?”

“He asked if we could ‘meet up’,” Raven said. “I don’t think that’s really code for ‘date’?”

Kori gasped, shocking the server who was placing their food on the table. Raven promptly thanked the server to which the server smiled anxiously while eyeing Kori curiously. “Of course it is a date!”

“I don’t know where we’re going,” Raven said. “What if it’s a prank?”

“Raven,” Kori began. “Never in my entire time of knowing friend Garfield Logan can I think of a scenario where he will maliciously throw a prank on someone who doesn’t deserve it. Smile, friend, and remember that you have a friendly young man interested in getting to know you!”

Raven ducked her head to hide her blush, and played around with her utensils to start eating. “Well, Kori, what about you?”

Kori tilted her head to the side and Raven resumed talking. “With Dick.”

“Oh,” Kori said sadly, cutting her fish steak into pieces. “I don’t think friend Dick is as interested as I am in him.”

Raven raised an eyebrow, having experienced several experiences in which her and Dick’s topic of conversation was nothing but Kori. “Why do you think so?”

“He has not done the activity of asking me out,” Kori said solemnly. “Friend Dick is so nice to me, and I feel so appreciated with him. But it feels like he does not want to pursue anything else than a friendship with me.”

“Have you considered that he actually might?” Raven said, trying not to give anything much away. “He might just be looking for the right time.”

“But the right time is now!” Kori said. “You have the date with friend Gar. Forgive me for sounding jealous, but why can’t I?”

“You don’t sound jealous,” Raven reassured. “Trust me when I say that it will go in your favour in the future. You don’t want to Wally it.”
Kori giggled at the reference of Wally. “Do you think the boys are alright with the company of Wally?”

Raven shrugged, and swallowed a piece of her food. “Sure,” Raven said. “It can’t be that bad.”

The night between Raven and Kori went swell. Raven couldn’t recall ever feeling that much comfort with a friend of the same gender, having been surrounded by friends of the opposite gender. The closest girl-friends Raven had other than Kori were Jason’s sophomore friends, but even they didn’t fill the void in Raven’s life for a female friend. Kori, as perky as she may be, was really good company for Raven. Even though the two of them have been acquaintances throughout the entire high school years, Raven and Kori only started becoming closer with the existence of the party.

Which is all because of Gar. Raven never thought that it was necessary to make more friends other than Jason, but Gar showed her how fun it could be with more friends. I’ve ‘ought to thank him one day, Raven thought to herself. I should also thank Kori for this night out too.

“Hey, Kori?” Raven said, after their desserts arrived on the table. “Thank you for this night out. I haven’t been friends with a girl for a really long time, so it has been a refreshing change.”

Kori gave her a huge grin as she cut her cake slice apart. “I know this may not be what you want to do,” Kori said, and Raven eyed her questioningly. “But may we do the act of manicures and pedicures together as one last activity?”

Raven immediately looked down at her chipped nails, and shrugged. “Sure,” Raven said, and for a second Kori looked like as if she was going to hug her, but then was stopped by the table between them. “I’d love that.”

**xx**

*October 18 2014. Local Park.*

Wally was nervous. After having a pep talk with Vic, Wally immediately took the initiative to arrange a meetup with Jinx the next day. To his surprise, Jinx curtly accepted, and now Wally was met with the excruciating wait on a park’s bench.

After minutes of twitching and shaking his legs, Wally felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around, and saw Jinx taking a seat next to him. As both of them settled down, none of them dared to speak up, which left Wally and Jinx in a moment of extremely awkward time.

“Have you eaten?” Wally asked to diffuse the tension, but it only contributed to the uneasy atmosphere in the air.

“Yeah,” Jinx said, looking everywhere but Wally. “You?”

“Yes,” Wally said, although he really hadn’t. The conversation died pretty quickly then, and the two of them resorted to individual mind activities to at least reduce their boredom. Wally ended up counting the trees in his sight while Jinx resorted to imagining figures with the clouds. Finally, the two of them spoke up, albeit unceremoniously at the same time.

“Look,” Wally and Jinx simultaneously, and immediately stared at each other in shock. “You first.” Wally insisted, to which Jinx nodded slowly.

“I’m sorry for what happened between us,” Jinx said slowly. “But I don’t really take back what I said to you before.”
Wally shook his head vehemently, and spoke up. “No, no, I get it,” Wally began. “I now realize that… I might have been too eager in our relationship. You were right.”

“No,” Jinx said. “I mean, yes, but I’m not done. I’m sorry for pushing you away afterwards. We still had much to say but I just couldn’t admit to myself that I needed to have closure with you. Then you texted me asking me to meet up and I knew I couldn’t turn it down. Look, you’ve only been here since last year?”

When Wally nodded, Jinx continued. “So I didn’t know who you were at all. But here comes junior year and suddenly you find interest in me and as a person surrounded by bad luck all her life it’s hard to know if someone’s being genuine or not. It didn’t help that you were trying to rush things either,” Jinx sighed. “But it’s also my fault. I could’ve talked to you. I could’ve trusted you. Instead, I pushed you away. I’m sorry.”

“I talked to Vic,” Wally said, to which Jinx immediately looked at him with shock. “He told me that he considered getting back with you before because he didn’t want to feel lonely… Look, I think you’re interesting as hell. You’re smart, you’re sassy, and you’re a nonconformist. You’re fun to be around with and honestly, I really, really don’t want to lose you. I don’t want to be unimportant in your life. I still want to know that I can be the reason why you’re happy, together or not. The reason I rushed so much is because I felt that time wasn’t on our side, that we’d fall apart if we don’t make the best of our time…”

Wally chuckled bitterly. “Guess that didn’t work out,” Wally said. “I’m sorry for trying to rush things. I’m sorry for not trying to take initiative to fix us. I’m sorry for a bunch of other things too but those are the things that come up to mind right now.”

Jinx smiled. “You won’t be unimportant,” she said. “You never will be.”

The two finally relaxed in their seats, unknowingly scooting closer to each other.

“I just realized how little I know about you,” Wally said, breaking the silence between them. “I’ve been so focused on dating you that I don’t know if we’d be friends, like… ever.”

Jinx chuckled, then slightly turned her torso towards Wally. “Well, maybe we should start over. This time, at a slower pace,” Jinx started, letting out her hand for a handshake. “Hi, I’m Jennifer Hex. Call me Jinx. I’m known to set fires of bad luck throughout the school.”

Wally chuckled, and performed a handshake with Jinx. “I’m Wally West. I was the anchor in a relay race in seventh grade and I tripped over my shoelaces.”

The two of them enjoyed the rest of their day getting to know each other.
“Garfield Logan, if you step out of the house wearing that, so help me, I will force you to find another family.”

Gar looked down at his outfit and scowled. Personally, he saw nothing wrong with what he was wearing – a *Star Wars* t-shirt and beige cargo shorts. It seemed perfectly fitting with where he was going today, and Gar had no idea exactly why Rita despised it. “I don’t see what the problem with this is.”

Rita tutted and leaned against the doorway of Gar’s room. Sighing, Rita spoke up. “Change your top. Or put a shirt on top of it. You sleep in that t-shirt, don’t you?”

“Yeah, but the purpose of today is to feel comfortable in your skin and all that,” Gar said. “Besides, it’s hot.” It wasn’t really, but Gar wasn’t looking forward to finding another change of clothes.

Rita narrowed her eyes and walked inside Gar’s room, heading to his drawer. On her way in, she accidentally bumped into one of Gar’s moving boxes, and scowled. “You should really unpack, you know.”

“Yeah, but I’m lazy,” Gar said plainly as he lay on his bed idly using his phone. “Besides, aren’t we moving later?”

Ignoring Gar’s comment, Rita took out an olive green shirt and tossed it to Gar’s face, causing Gar to groan in response. “You are not heading out with that shirt in these circumstances,” Rita said, also handing Gar a white tank-top. “Change.”

Sitting up, Gar frowned at the garments he was holding in his hand. “Seriously?” Gar asked. “I’m going to sweat in these!”

“ Aren’t you heading to the east?” Rita countered. “It’s colder there.”

Sighing, Gar stood up with his change of clothes and headed out to the bathroom. After a few minutes of waiting, Gar returned back to his room, looking dishevelled and out of place. Rita sighed and immediately fixed Gar’s outfit, from the sleeves, the collar, and the tank inside it. After feeling satisfied with her work, Rita immediately sighed in relief and cooed.

“Aww!”

Gar scrunched his eyebrows. “What?”

“I knew you liked Raven all along.”

Scowling in embarrassment, Gar looked away to which Rita immediately laughed and pinched his cheeks. “Rita,” Gar groaned. “Go away.”

Smiling, Rita took her hands off of Gar and crossed her arms. “Is Raven not coming here?”

“ To see you?” Gar said. “No. I’ll pick her up in a few minutes or so.”

Suddenly, someone else stepped in Gar’s room and spoke up. “How long will you be gone?”
“Nine?”

“Eight. It’s a school night.”

Sighing in defeat, Gar nodded his head.

Grinning to herself, Rita spoke up. “Aren’t you excited, Steve? Gar has a date!”

Chuckling, Steve brought Rita closer by wrapping his arm around her waist and smiled. “Treat her well, Gar,” Steve said. “And don’t forget to call Rita or me if you’re heading home.”

“Yes, Steve,” Gar said. “Well… Can I go now?”

Rita and Steve looked at each other momentarily with a smile, and then turned to Gar and nodded. “Have fun, dear.”


June 4 2011. Midway City Middle School.

“So what do you say?”

It took a second for Gar to recover. Gar realized that his best friends were staring at him as if he’d grown another head, and Gar quickly acknowledged that he was being quite laconic these past few days. Sighing, he ruffled his hair and eyed his friends.

“What did you guys just say?”

His friend, Nathan, sighed, and hit his other friend Terrence on the shoulder, commenting on how Gar was being idiotic lately. Terrence did nothing but chuckle back, and Gar didn’t have the energy to fight back. “We’re talking about full blown camping trip in the summer! Over at the north, perfect weather, perfect timing. It’ll be perfect before we start eighth grade. You’re coming, right?”

Gar winced at Nathan’s question. “Yeah, about that…”

Nathan ignored him and resumed talking. “It’ll be so cool. My dad helped book us a place. Some of the other girls are coming too, score! The Zhang twins are coming as well, so that’s double score!”

“Oh, and there’ll be loads of activities too,” Terrence piped in. “From zip-lining to hiking, it’ll be so much fun! Gar, you’re a genius for planning this!”

“I don’t think I’m going.” Gar interrupted, causing Nathan and Terrence to ogle at him in shock.

“What?” Terrence said. “What do you mean, you’re not going?”

“I’m moving,” Gar decided to be upfront to his friends. “To Ivy Town.”

“All the way to New York?” Gar nodded. “Why?”

Gar scowled at Terrence. “My dad.”

All three of them fell silent. Gar really didn’t want to move away from his friends, but his dad’s job almost always required him to work across the country. Gar just transferred from Hub City which crushed him, but after settling down in Midway City and meeting new and wonderful friends, Gar hoped he could stay in Midway City forever. But during the weekends, his parents sat him down for a talk, revealing that Steve was to be transferred to another town in a few weeks, leaving Gar in a lot
of mental duress.

Terrence seemed to remain calm, which contrasted strikingly with Nathan’s angry expression. Gar waited for a response.

“What the hell, Gar?” Nathan blew up. “You were the one who planned this trip! We all cancelled our plans just because you had an idea! You promised!”

“Hey, it isn’t my fault!” Gar said. “I didn’t know I was going to be moving!”

“But you promised,” replied Nathan. “You promised that we three will stick together like the bestest buddies in the world and now you’re bailing on us?”

Before Nathan could continue, Terrence butted in. “When are you moving?”

Gar sighed. “June 14th.”

That caused Terrence to widen his eyes and Nathan to scoff. “Seriously?” Terrence asked. “Wow.”

“You only tell us now?” Nathan asked harshly, to which Gar immediately glared in response.

“I only knew this weekend!” Gar exclaimed. “I’m sorry I have to bail, but what’s done is done. I’m really, really sorry.”

Nathan and Terrence didn’t reply. Instead, they stood up from their seats, and left Gar alone.

Gar didn’t miss how the two of them muttered words of how much Gar was a ‘traitorous jerk’. Gar also didn’t miss how his last few days in Midway City was filled with isolation and hostility. All because he made a promise that he couldn’t keep. From then on, Gar made it his personal rule to stay away from making promises, as who knows what might happen in the future.

xx

October 19 2014. Gar’s car to the date location.

“You’re not telling where you’re taking us?”

Gar hummed in his seat and smiled coyly at Raven. The two just left from Raven’s house after a few moments of teasing and bickering from their parts (Gar remembered how he couldn’t stop insisting how ‘cute’ Raven looked in her pink sweater, to which Raven would just whack him at the back of his head, causing him to comment even further), and now were headed to Gar’s location. It would take them a forty minute drive to reach there, but Gar didn’t mind the wait – as long as he was with Raven.

“Why would I tell you?” Gar said. “That would be killing the suspense.”

Raven scoffed. “You could be taking us somewhere dangerous,” Raven countered, to which Gar laughed. “How do I know I could trust you?”

“Well, you’re in my car,” Gar’s voice lilted. “Trust me, Raven, where we’re going is completely safe and cool. We’re going to have fun!”

“Judging by your definition of ‘fun’, I think I’d have the exact opposite.”

Pouting, Gar let go of one hand off the steering wheel to lightly nudge Raven on the shoulder. Raven growled, and forced Gar to focus on driving for the sake of keeping them alive, to which Gar
complied. “So tell me something about yourself,” Gar said, deciding to keep the conversation between them lively. “Anything.”

Raven looked at Gar with a raised eyebrow. “Why would I do that?”

Gar’s jubilant expression immediately fall flat and he glanced at Raven with a blank look. “I need to know as much as I can about you so I can report you to the NSA,” the two of them fell silent, with Gar looking at the road with a stoic expression and Raven looking at him weirdly. However the silence was broken once Gar broke down laughing. “You should’ve seen your face!”

Raven scowled and crossed her arms. “Funny,” Raven said. “Real funny.”

Gar laughed. “Well, tell me anything about yourself.” Gar urged to which Raven hummed in thought.

“How about this,” Raven said. “I say three things and you guess the lie.”

“Awesome,” Gar agreed. “Go ahead.”

“Um,” Raven paused to think. “I used to be in ballet. I’m allergic to chickens. I play the guitar.”

Gar scoffed. “That’s easy,” Gar said. “Do you know the way you walk sometimes?”

“Huh?”

“It’s kind of like, you’re floating or something,” Gar pointed out, and Raven rolled her eyes in amusement. “So you definitely took ballet at some point.”

Raven chuckled. “Go on.”

“I don’t know about chickens, but something tells me that you’re like, a chicken lady or something. And you look like you play the guitar,” Gar surmised. “So here’s what I say – you used to be in the ballet, you play the guitar, but you’re not allergic to cats. Am I right?”

Raven pretended to think. “Nope,” Raven smirked, and Gar muttered a few curse words to himself. “I don’t play the guitar.”

“Seriously?” Gar complained. “So you’re allergic to chickens?”

Raven nodded. “A mild allergy.”

“Damn,” Gar breathed out. “That sucks. I love chickens. Well, I love all animals. But cats are great too. You seriously don’t play the guitar?”

Raven shook her head. “I play the piano,” Raven said. “Not much now, really. It’s never been a hobby of mines.”

Gar took a second to observe Raven’s long and delicate fingers. “Yeah, now I see it,” Gar mused as he returned back to focusing on driving. “My turn!”

“Who said I want to know anything about you?”

Gar ignored her and continued. “Okay, um, I can do origami. I once peed my pants in a tree house because I had no idea how to climb down. I speak Spanish.”

Raven took a moment to ponder on her choices. “You don’t speak Spanish.”
Gar smirked. “Eh, I never said I did fluently,” Gar said cheekily, to which Raven groaned in response. “Guess again.”

“You can’t be artistic,” Raven said. “So you can’t be skilled in origami.”

“Rae,” Gar said, and Raven scowled at the use of her nickname. “I’m in Art History. Of course I can do origami!”

“So you never peed your pants in a treehouse?”

“Oh, no, I did.”

Raven eyed him with suspicion. “What?”

“I said that I peed my pants in a treehouse because I had no idea how to climb down,” Gar said. “Well, I do know how to climb down. I peed my pants not because of that but because I felt that the treehouse was haunted.”

“I cannot believe I fell for that,” Raven said. “That was sneaky.”

“Score one for Logan, and none for Roth!” Gar cheered.

The rest of the ride was filled with a few more rounds two truths and one lie, with Gar learning that Raven was a fan of *My Little Pony*, for “ironic” reasons. Gar also shared his dislike of using socks which made Raven subsequently squirm in her seat whilst commenting how “oddly disgusting” Gar was. As their car ride was nearing its end, Gar decided to sing Lady Gaga songs with Raven constantly hitting him on the sides to stop.

“I’m beautiful in my way, ‘cause God makes no mistakes, I’m on the right track, baby, I was born this way,” Gar sang, causing Raven to repeatedly groan in annoyance. “Don’t hide yourself in regret, just love yourself and you’re set, I’m on the right track, baby, I was born this – hey! We’re here!”

Raven took a moment to observe her surroundings, but could not place exactly where she was. From what she could see, Gar was currently finding a space at the open parking lot. “Where are we?” Raven asked, to which Gar chuckled.

“I’m not spoiling the surprise, Rae!” Gar said, finally parking at a secluded spot. He stopped the car engines, removed his seatbelt, and went out of the car whilst Raven did the same. As both of them closed the car doors, Gar locked the car and dragged Raven by the hand to reach the main entrance. After a few struggles in convincing Raven to comply, the two of them finally reached the main entrance, with Raven gasping once she knew where both of them were.

“Oh my god.” Raven said, and Gar let go of her hand, worried.

“What’s wrong?” Gar asked. “Oh my gosh, you don’t like this place, don’t you? And we travelled so far… I knew I should’ve told you something, I’m really sorry, Rae, I didn’t mean to – “

“Gar,” Raven slowly interrupted, and Gar noticed a soft smile on her face that made Gar feel a bit better. “I’ve always wanted to go here.”

Gar felt his body surge up with pride. “Are you serious?”

Raven nodded. “I never got the time to,” Raven said. “This is amazing. Let’s go inside.”

The two of them walked in the main entrance and was met with an employee. “Good afternoon!”
The employee chirped. “Welcome to Jump City Botanical Garden. Do you have your tickets?”

Gar nodded to Raven’s surprise. “You bought tickets already?”

“Yeah,” Gar said as he took out two sheets of paper out of his backpack. “Remember when I asked you to scan your student ID for me?”

Before Raven could respond, the employee quickly scanned the papers and gave out two smaller tickets to the both of them. Raven and Gar took hold of them whilst uttering their gratitude, while the employee proceeded to give out a map for their convenience. “Up ahead is the conservatory,” the employee said. “Please feel free to walk around to see our delightful collection of botany. As you walk out you can choose to either hop on the tour tram or explore the garden yourself. Mind you, the garden is vast, so it might be ideal for the both of you to use the tram to quicken your experiences seeing as it’s twelve right now, which leaves you around five to six hours to explore because the garden closes at six. The tram stops at several checkpoints as located in your maps, so that every tourist is able to explore the gardens with the time constraints. That is all from me, and oh! Don’t forget to visit the Seasonal Walk garden to get a full sense of the fall season. Thank you, enjoy your trip.”

Smiling, Gar tucked in his ticket in his front pocket and lightly nudged Raven to follow him into the conservatory. As they entered the conservatory, both were awe-struck with how beautiful their surroundings were. In almost all corners that Gar could see, a myriad of plants were intricately yet beautifully arranged to surround the hall. Gar noted how breath-taking the scene was and revelled in the exotic species of plants around him. Gar never had a profound interest in plants, but just seeing how astonishing his environment looked was enough for Gar to look into botany in the future.

Gar noted how Raven was in her own world, walking around slightly to observe the plants around her. Gar smiled. Raven looked so peaceful. “Hey Rae,” Gar called out. “Let’s walk around.”

Nodding, Raven headed to Gar’s side and the two started walking through the conservatory together, occasionally stopping to take pictures of anything that caught their interest. Something that Gar noticed quite a lot was the vivacity of colours in his surroundings. There was a mix of violet, auburn, emerald… all sorts of colours that made Gar want to stand in his place and ogle at his settings.

After touring the conservatory, the two of them decided to use the garden tram for convenience. Raven and Gar took a seat in the tram and waited for it to fill up. As the tram started its ride, tourists were led through the Children’s Garden, attracting the attention of none of Raven and Gar’s for Children’s Garden looked quite empty at the fall season. Throughout the ride, a tour guide at the front offered detailed description of the garden, however Gar was starting to get annoyed by the tour guide.

“Rae?”

“Don’t call me that.”

“-ven?” The two of them hopped off from the tram to explore the Azalea Garden, filled with varieties of flowering trees, shrubs, ferns, and so many more in the colours of the season. “Do you mind ditching the tram? I’d rather explore things myself than have some tour guide tell us everything.”

“Actually,” Raven said. “I was going to suggest the same thing.”

“Great!”

Raven and Gar proceeded to walk around the garden, with Raven taking snapshots of her
surroundings and Gar taking secret snapshots of Raven. As time passed, both of them found themselves strolling through the wooden-fenced path of the garden’s forest. Raven and Gar were quite isolated, so Gar took the current opportunity to strike up a conversation.

“Do you know what you’re going to study in university?” Gar asked Raven, and Raven kicked a few orange leaves off her way.

“Psychology,” said Raven.

“So you’re absolutely sure you’ll be taking psychology when the time comes?” Gar asked. “Do you want to be a psychologist?”

“Honestly,” Raven said. “I don’t know. Psychology seems to be an easy answer because I’m good at it. But it’s not something I’m dying to do.”

“Oh,” Gar replied, ignoring a fallen leaf that fell on his shoulder. “So you don’t really want to study psychology?”

“Oh don’t get me wrong, I do,” Raven said as she brushed off the leaf off of Gar’s shoulder. “But with a world full of chances, who knows what exactly I’m set out to do.”

Gar chuckled. “Yeah,” Gar said. “I don’t know what I want to study. I’m kinda good at Biology, which is nice if I’m really pursuing being a zoologist, but vet school takes forever. History’s cool too, but I don’t really know what you can do with a history degree. I guess planning stuff is not really my thing.”

“But you planned the party.” Raven said softly, to which Gar lightly dismissed her.

“Yeah but that was, like, a collective thing, you know?” Gar said. “I’m not really good at planning my own stuff. Guess that’s what moving a lot does to you.”

The two of them continued their walk silently until they reached the Rock Garden. From there, Raven and Gar decided to take a few snapshots then rest for a few minutes at a bench nearby the Rock Garden’s waterfall. As they sat down on the bench, Gar seized an opportunity to try to wrap his arm around Raven’s shoulders, but to his dismay, Raven called him out on it before he could actually try to do so.

“What made you choose this place?” Raven asked, and Gar shrugged.

“Well,” Gar said cheekily. “I figure that since I asked you out in the greenhouse, better have the date in something similar.”

Raven eyed him suspiciously. “Right.”

Gar laughed in response, knowing that his answer sounded like complete nonsense. “Dick recommended this place for me,” Gar said finally. “I figured, why not, and bought the tickets straight away when I could.”

“Impressive,” Raven said. “Ever since I was a child, my mom would take us to gardens in her hometown, Azarath. It’s pretty far from Jump City, but it was worth it – it was so beautiful. In the end, the town got abandoned due to radiation exposure.”

Gar stared at Raven, not sure what to say next. He knew about rumours and facts surrounding Raven’s mother, and didn’t know how to deal with it in front of Raven. “That sucks.” Gar finally said.
Raven nodded. “When I heard that the Jump City Botanical Garden was opening, I was excited,” Raven confessed. “But nobody wanted to go with me. Nor did I have the time to go alone.”

“You’re lucky you have me then,” Gar said, careful to make his voice sound a bit lighter.

To Gar’s happiness, Raven smiled at Gar. “There’s something about nature that speaks to human beings. Look at how beautiful everything is here. It doesn’t need to try hard to achieve all this wonder – what is required is only patience. It’s great,” Raven mused. “I’m glad I’m here. Even if it’s with you.”

“Hey!” Gar said jokingly, putting a faux pout on his face. “I’m sure your heart’s just fluttering at how charming I am.”

“Sure,” Raven said sarcastically. “I am falling so hard.”

Gar gave her a goofy grin. “I’ll be there to catch you.”

That caused Raven to smile back and blush slightly, causing Gar to feel more excited than he was before. Before he could say something, however, Raven asked him a question. “So where have you lived so far?”

Gar gave her a look. “Well, if you really have to know… South Africa, until I got adopted by Rita and Steve. Then we moved to Midway City until eighth grade, and that’s where I grew up. Rita was a big star back then too but I was never allowed to watch her works because she claims it’s too ‘raunchy’. I just think she’s embarrassed. Then we moved to Ivy Town, then to Fawcett City, next Steel City, and now… Jump City.”

Raven looked confused. “You grew up in Midway City, that’s in Michigan?” When Gar nodded, Raven continued. “You don’t sound like Michigan, though. You sound like California.”

Gar chuckled and shrugged his shoulders. “Hollywood exposure, baby,” Gar sang. “You know, I considered being an actor, like Rita was. But I was like, nah, too much instability.”

Raven raised an eyebrow and scoffed. “You? The epitome of stability?”

“Hey, when you move a bunch of times, you tend to aim for that instead.”

“I see your point,” Raven said. “If you had the chance to pick, where would you stay?”

Gar took a moment to consider. To him, Midway City was the closest thing he could call ‘home’, but Gar never really had a connection with the customs of Midway City. Ivy Town was… aesthetically pleasing, but Gar never liked the community. Fawcett City was too sad to think of. Steel City was… nice, but its determined and hardworking atmosphere didn’t fit well with Gar’s light-hearted and ambitious personality. “I think…” Gar began. “Jump City. It’s where I feel most at home.”

xx


“I hate it here.”

Rita smiled sadly at her son. “You will adjust here, Gar,” Rita said softly as she finished setting up the table where Gar was sulking. She took off her apron, placed it on the counter, and took a seat across Gar to start their dinner. “I know the move was hard. But look on the bright side, sweetie. The town is beautiful. And the house Steve got us is amazing. Aren’t you glad there’s a swimming pool
Gar scoffed as he played around with his peas with a fork. “I don’t like swimming,” Gar said petulantly. “And it’s no fun doing it alone. I have no friends here.”

“Honey, I’m sure you have friends,” Rita said. “Your school is filled with wonderful people.”

“Yeah, on the brochure!” Gar let go of his utensils. “Mom, I hate it here. Everyone thinks they’re better than everyone else here because they have the newest iPhone or whatever. And they’re always going on and on about things I don’t care about.”

“But you’re not being bullied, right?” Rita asked. “I didn’t win an Olympic gold medal for swimming for nothing, Gar, and I can stand up for my son if I have to.”

“Ugh, no,” Gar said. “I’m not being bullied. I have someone who sticks by me named Ryan Choi. But I think he only does it because nobody else likes him. Including me, I guess. He’s always taking about stuff I don’t care about.”

“At least he’s someone you can talk to, right?”

Gar shook his head no. “He’s always talking about himself,” Gar said. “I just really hate this place, Mom. Everyone is so pretentious here.”

“Gar, I know moving was not what you wanted at all,” Rita said. “But you have to let go of the past and keep moving forward. It’s how we live.”

Gar sighed, and started poking on his tofu steak from various sides. “Nathan and Terrence called me earlier today,” Gar confessed. “They forgive me for what happened but I think they just did it so that they don’t feel guilty about having loads of fun without me. I don’t like thinking about what they were doing without me. It’s weird, and I hate it. I hate not being a part of my friend’s life. I hate thinking that I’m not important at all.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t think of it all.”

“But that’s hard,” Gar whined. “I always think about what could happen if we didn’t move, and it sucks. A lot. And I don’t see why Steve got us some really fancy house, either.”

Rita paused her eating to eye her son suspiciously. “What do you mean?”

“I heard, Mom,” Gar said. “We’re moving to Fawcett City next year, aren’t we? That’s why this house is so empty. Because we’re going to move in a year anyway.”

“Gar…”

“Forget it.” With that, Gar left the dinner table to head to his room. Once there, he immediately slammed the door shut and lay on his bed, curling up to fetus position. Gar sighed to himself. Ever since Steve was promoted at his workplace, he was given the obligation to travel around the country. At the end of it all, however, it was easier for the family to move with him when he transferred offices. Easier on the surface, but so much harder for Gar on the inside.

Gar heard Rita come inside the room and promptly scooted near the wall. He did not want to listen to whatever Rita had to say next. “Go away.”

Ignoring what Gar said, Rita sat at the corner of Gar’s bed, making Gar growl in response. “Aren’t you happy for Steve, Gar?”
Gar was still facing the wall. “Whatever.”

Sighing, Rita nudged Gar to turn to his other side so that he would be facing her, but was unsuccessful. “Gar, I need you to be a bit more mature about this. Sometimes, we face things that we don’t like. And it becomes hard to accept it. I know moving is hard. But you have to have faith in yourself that everything will be alright in your favour,” Rita sighed. “Yes. We are moving to Fawcett City after you graduate middle school. But that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t enjoy your time left in where you live because you’re leaving. Cherish the moments you can have. Live your life. Look forward and never dwell on the past.”

After a few moments, Gar turned around and crawled to hug his foster mother from the side. Relieved, Rita turned her body to Gar’s direction to hug him better. “Honey,” Rita said softly. “As you grow up, you change. Then you realize that the people you once loved may not even think the same way as you do. Overanalysing the past gives nothing but pain, and Gar, you may not like that, but you’ll find myself right in that sentiment.”

Gar said nothing, only snuggling Rita even more. As time passed by, Gar eventually accepted that Rita was right – moving was hard, but overcoming the pain was even more difficult. It was easier to not think of it. It was easier to not think of it at all.

xx


“You idiot!”

Gar laughed, running away from Raven’s wrath. The two of them decided to tour the garden again, and as they reached near the riverside, Gar found a pile of raked leaves ahead of them. Once the two of them were in considerable near distance of the pile, Gar immediately pushed Raven into the pile, causing the leaves to fly in erratic manners. Once Raven stood up from the pile, she ran towards Gar for revenge, to which Gar absconded away.

“Aww, Rae,” Gar cooed, from a safe distance away of Raven. “You’re never going to catch me!”

Gar proceeded to dance around in faux victory, much to his disadvantage as Raven immediately caught up to him and pushed him into the ground. However, as Raven pushed Gar to the ground, Gar took a hold of Raven’s wrist, causing Raven to fall on top of Gar.

“Oh,” Gar said awkwardly, as Raven immediately removed herself from Gar whilst hiding a blush. Smiling, Gar sat up, waiting for Raven to do the same as well. “Never attack the Gar.”

As Raven settled on the grass, she lightly nudged Gar’s shoulder with her own. “You’re an idiot.”

Gar laughed, deciding to let Raven have the win. “Hey, what time is it?”

Raven took out her phone from her pocket and unlocked the screen to check the time. As she did so, Gar realized that her wallpaper was a selfie taken by Jason showing the two of them in close proximity. Jason had his trademark smirk, while Raven had her trademark frown. But even when their expressions seemed to clash, something about the picture just screamed how well-matched the two were. And this made Gar feel… odd.

“Four thirty,” Raven said, tucking her phone back in to her pocket. “I saw that the cable cars open at five, do you want to take a look then?”

“Sure,” Gar said, his voice sounding tight. “Nice wallpaper.”
Raven eyed him with a confused look, then realized what Gar was talking about. “Oh,” Raven said. “Yeah. Jason changed it for me and I never bothered to change it.”

Gar pursed his lips. “Ah,” Gar said, hating how contrived he sounded. “You guys seem close.”

Raven snorted. “Yeah,” Raven said. “I mean, there are times I want to sock him in the face. But there are also times that I’m so happy he’s even breathing. It’s weird.”

Gar didn’t miss how light Raven’s voice sound. “So…” Raven raised an eyebrow. “Do you guys, like, like each other?”

“No. Jeez, no. Jason is too… whatever for me to like. But… I care about him. I care about him a lot, I guess. Even though I might not show this to him, I’m so grateful that he’s my friend.”

That didn’t really do much to assuage Gar’s tense feelings. “How did the two of you become friends?”

Raven chuckled hollowly. “We saved each other,” Raven said cryptically. “It’s a long story.”

“I have time.”

“I don’t,” replied Raven. “Besides, it’s not my place to tell, I think. Let’s talk about something else. How did you become friends with Kori and the others?”

Gar paused to think. “In Art History,” Gar began. “Kori was being full-time bullied by Selinda’s brother, Baran. I later found her in the janitor’s closet crying, and she invited me for ‘the dinner’. I told Vic about it and he tagged along, and Dick was also there too. We ended up having weekly movie nights together.”


“Mustard,” Gar said bitterly. “Lots of mustard.”

“Ah,” Raven said, seeming to understand. “It’s nice that you were there for Kori. You ended up making good friends.”

Gar said nothing, his thoughts still lingering on the previous topic they had before. Gar couldn’t help but be a tad bit satisfied at how Raven didn’t seem to hold any feelings for Jason, but he couldn’t stop thinking about if the same applied for Jason. For the short time Gar got to know Jason, Jason always seemed so affectionate whenever Raven was around. And even though Raven seemed as if she didn’t like it, she didn’t seem uncomfortable either. It was weird to think of. Gar didn’t like it.

“Hey,” Raven said softly, and Gar’s thoughts seemed to diminish at the sight of Raven’s eyes looking straight into his green ones. He didn’t know how to explain the colour of Raven’s eyes – one second it was blue, and then the other it was violet, and sometimes Gar didn’t know at all. But now, Raven’s eyes seemed to be a blend of blue and violet, much like the flowers they had seen blending through the air earlier that day. They were beautiful. “Want to go the cable cars now?”
“Sure.” Gar croaked out, and the two did exactly that. Before lining up, the two of them headed for a snack vendor to satiate their hunger. Gar bought himself cotton candy while Raven settled on caramelized apples. Wanting to take a bite of Raven’s snacks, Gar tried (and failed) to bob his head slightly to do so, however ended up having his nose touch the caramel parts of the apple.

As they got their own cable car, Gar thanked the heavens that it was a self-driven ride rather than having someone witness their time together. Their cable car headed up, and Gar immediately saw the garden in bird’s eye view, and was enthralled at how magnificent his sight was. Gar looked over at Raven’s direction, and was distracted at how comfortable Raven looked. From afar, Raven always looked like as if she had an expression screaming to others to get away. But now, Raven’s face looked so in peace, and so serene… Gar had to look away before his thoughts carried away.

“It’s so beautiful here,” Raven marvelled. “What do you think?”

“So beautiful,” Gar said, but then he wasn’t sure if he was referring to his friend in front of him or the garden. “Yeah.”

The two proceeded to take out their phones to take a few snapshots of their view. Raven tended to take aesthetic pictures of her view while Gar took simple snapshots then proceeded to doodle obscene images on it on his Snapchat. Once both of them were satisfied with their results, Gar asked Raven a question.

“How does it feel to be on the list?”

Raven shrugged, not really knowing how to answer. “A lot of people think that once your name is on the list, your life is doomed,” Raven said. “But really, a lot of people in the list are not that bothered by it. Sure, the descriptions are… spiteful, and the heavens know why she added them last year, but in the end, all that matters is that we know ourselves. We’re confident that we are not what Kitten say we are.”

Raven smiled, and continued talking. “We are freaks,” Raven said. “But we’re the best freaks you could ever have.”

Gar smiled back, loving how unbothered Raven was about the list. He had another question in mind. “But… why you? Why does Kitten hate you?”

“Believe it or not, Kitten and I used to be friends for some odd reason,” Raven snorted at Gar’s confused expression. “I know. But as we grew up, she kept on thinking that I was intentionally ruining her life by stealing ‘what’s hers’, so she intentionally ruined mines.

“A lot of people wonder what exactly made Kitten so… Kitten,” Raven continued. “But the truth is just simple as it all – she needs attention. An unhealthy, large dose of attention. Honestly, there are times where she seems so friendly when she’s not focusing on herself. Remembering her as a child makes me think how it would be nice if she was still my friend. But…”

“But?”

“Most of the times, I just want to burn her alive.”

Gar laughed. He didn’t know how to digest what Raven told him. Raven essentially informed Gar that the only reason Kitten was so… Kitten was because of her own drive of selfishness. Gar half-expected a long-winded story about how something tragic between the two of them changed the course of destiny forever. It seemed so funny yet sad that the truth was so simple.

“Gar?” Raven said, sounding apprehensive. Gar, worried about what she had to say next, simply
nodded, urging her to continue. “I want to thank you.”

Gar raised an eyebrow. “For what?”

Raven sighed. “For everything,” Raven began. “Look, all my life I thought that I never needed anyone else other than me. I thought that nobody needed me. But then… Jason came in the picture and reminded me that sometimes you just need someone to lean on. But we never bothered to come out of our shells to make new friends. I have Jericho too. He’s a good friend of mine, though we never talk much nowadays. But he reminds me that not everything in the world is out there to get you. There’s Dick too, and even though we don’t spend much time together, he understands me. He reminds me that no one is too complex to understand. But you…”

Gar’s heart skipped a beat. “But me?”

Raven turned her body so that she was facing Gar straight on. “You reminded me that everyone deserves to be happy. That everyone is special the way they are. That there is so much to learn in life. I never had a female friend to confide in, but now I have Kori. I never had much friends, but somehow you united all of the ‘freaks’ and friends and created one community. Most importantly, I never felt so… appreciated.

“I don’t know if you realize this, Gar,” Raven said. “But for the short time you’ve been in Jump City, you started a revolution, and you’ve changed a lot of people’s lives. It’s hard to imagine a junior year without you, and… Thank you. That’s all I wanted to say.”

Raven retracted in her seat, shaking her head slightly to cover her face with her hair. Smiling, Gar reached out to brush away the few strands away from Raven’s face, revealing a flushed face. “Thank you,” Gar said softly, his hand cupping Raven’s cheek. “I’ve moved so many times that I thought I didn’t have a purpose in any town I was living anymore. You gave me a reason. Raven… you think that you’re alone, but you’re not. You have me.”

Raven’s face grew furiously redder, and she softly removed Gar’s hand from her face, and clasped her fingers with Gar’s. The two remained silent for the rest of the cable car ride, and none of them bothered letting go of each other as they hopped off their cable car. Gar felt so complete. How could anything go wrong?

xx


Gar was confused. His girlfriend, Tara, was nowhere to be found, and even after making detailed plans about their date later, Tara was being unresponsive to Gar’s texts, calls… everything.

“Hey,” Gar said, intercepting with his fellow classmates in the hallway. “Have you seen Tara?”

His classmates looked at each other, confused. “Sorry, dude,” one of them said. “I thought she was with you?”

Gar shook his head no, and walked away. Ever since Gar revealed that he’d be moving away to Steel City, he and Tara has been planning their daily schedule around them. Lunch dates, movie dates, beach dates… Everything to maximize their time with each other. Even though they never discussed this, Gar was so sure that they would remain boyfriends and girlfriends even after he moved. He was so infatuated with her that the four months they spent together was enough for Gar to want her for a long time.

Tara was… fun. She was lively, adventurous, and charming, much like Gar. The two were so similar
to each other that they were often called ‘two peas in a pods’. Gar was convinced that Tara was the one, and with their myriad of similarities and interests, Gar was sure that he could spend his entire life with her. Gar was also confident that Tara felt the same. Their time spent dating each other was full of fun and mischief, and even though it came at a cost at times (Gar was suspended for three days after pulling consecutive pranks on teachers much to Tara’s request and enjoyment), Gar felt it was worth it.

When he was told that his family was moving to Steel City, Gar expected himself to be full-blown disappointed. But for some reason, he couldn’t. Gar expected the move, but he supposed that what made it a tad bit better was his faith that Tara would remain by his side.

The halls were empty, save for a few students staying after school a bit late to discuss their works. Gar tried finding Tara in the gym, the classes, the roof, and heck, even the library even though both of them sworn an allergy to books, but he was unsuccessful. Tara couldn’t be found.

Gar thought of giving up, until he heard a few mutters from his right. He turned his head. It was the janitor’s closet. He leaned in to hear what was going on…

“Sh,” A feminine voice said with a giggle, and Gar had to restrain himself from gasping. “Someone might come in.”

Could it be? There was only one way to find out. Using all his might and courage, he banged open the door, revealing his girlfriend Tara tangled in some upperclassman’s arms. Gar felt his heart sink into a million pieces.

“Shoot,” the other boy said, but Gar paid him no attention, focusing entirely on how shocked and… relieved? Tara was. “I’ll see you later.”

The boy sped away, and Gar remained in his place, watching Tara look at him back with a disappointed look.

“Gar, he approached me, I swear –“

Gar held up a hand to interrupt. “But you didn’t stop him,” Gar said tightly, and felt his cheeks burn. “Don’t you dare think it’s entirely his fault.”

Sighing, Tara stood up from her seat and faced Gar eye to eye. “How long?” Gar croaked out, and Tara looked away.

“I don’t know what you’re saying –“

“How long?” Gar repeated again, raising his voice.

Tara winced, and let out a huge sigh. “A month.”

A month. Gar told her that he was moving a month ago. “Why?” Gar said. “I thought. I thought. I thought we’d be still together.”

Tara let out a bitter laugh. “Gar!” Tara exclaimed. “Look around you! You’re always moving, do you really think that I want to be held back by someone who I might never see again? I wanted to end our relationship, I really did. I had so much fun with you and I’m so thankful for everything that we had. But you grew too attached to me and you’re leaving. In the end, it’s not me who gets hurt the most. It’s you.”

Gar clenched his fists. He was so sure that they were meant to be. But just one change was enough
to change everything. And now, Gar was unsure that the girl he admired so much was really her all along. “You could’ve told me earlier.”

“I’m so sorry,” Tara insisted. “But we can’t be together. It hurt so much knowing that you’re leaving, and… and I hated being tied down to my thoughts of it. And frankly, with the way you grow so attached to people and your tendency to move a lot, I don’t think you can be with anyone for a long time. It is what it is, Gar.”

Gar refused to believe her. But by the time sophomore year arrived and flowed through, Gar realized just how honest Tara was. Gar got attached to people easily. So easily, that it didn’t take much for him to get hurt once he had to leave something away. Maybe, just maybe, Tara was right. Maybe Gar couldn’t be with anyone. It only hurts everyone.

xx

October 19 2014. Raven’s front yard.

The rest of their date consisted of Gar buying Raven souvenirs from the gift shops, much to her irritation (though Gar was pretty sure Raven was happy). Once the garden reached its closing time, the two of them headed back to Raven’s house with Gar’s horrendous singing accompanying them the whole ride. Gar couldn’t help but notice how… lonely Raven’s house looked, even from the outside. Her front yard was filled with nothing but grass, and even the grass looked seriously neglected. He wondered what Raven’s house was like on the inside.

“Um,” Gar said, following Raven into her doorstep. “Is anyone home?”

Raven looked behind her, as if she could tell by instinct whether someone was home or not. “I don’t think so,” Raven said finally. “I think my dad’s away.”

At the mention of Raven’s dad, Gar’s ears perked up. “What does your dad do, anyway?”

Raven shrugged. “He’s a purveyor of pharmaceutical goods,” Raven said cryptically, and Gar didn’t understand a word she said, but because it sounded cool, Gar let it slide. “And your parents?”

“My dad’s a businessman,” Gar replied. “I don’t know what he does but he’s somewhere on top on the corporate hierarchy. My mom’s an acting teacher. Sometimes she does freelance swimming lessons if needed.”

“Cool,” Raven said, and the two of them fell silent, though the silence was in no way uncomfortable. Finally deciding what to say, Raven spoke up. “Thank you for today, by the way. I had fun.”

Gar smiled. “Me too.”

Is it me? Gar thought to himself. Or are we getting way too close to each other?

For a second, it looked like the two of them were leaning for a kiss. And for another second, Gar considered pursuing said kiss.

But he couldn’t.

Gar immediately stepped back, making Raven’s eyes widen. Gar saw traces of confusion, sadness and… hurt in Raven’s expression. Gar swallowed, feeling as if he just swallowed a lump of concrete.

“I - I’ll see you tomorrow,” Gar stuttered, and walked away to his car, not bothering to look back in
Raven’s direction out of fear. As he rode off, Gar realized major things about himself.

*Rule number one: Don’t make major promises.* But Gar did. Gar promised everyone around him that he would host a major party laced with fun and friendliness in the air. And even though Gar was sure that he wasn’t moving this semester, it might be enough for Gar to make some more promises that might jeopardize him and everyone else in the end.

*Rule number two: Don’t talk about the past.* But Gar did. Throughout his whole journey of knowing Raven, Gar subsequently let out facts about himself that he wouldn’t let anyone else know. He groaned. Thinking about how he broke rule two made his heart ache in remembrance of his past lives in other town. Gar couldn’t handle thinking how much it would hurt thinking of his life in Jump City once he moved.

But Gar was safe from one rule. *Rule number three: Don’t get into any relationships.* Gar almost let himself slip into that trap. But he remembered Tara. He remembered Ryan, who turned out to be a pretty good friend throughout his stay in Ivy Tow. He remembered Nathan and Terrence. He remembered everyone important to him that he left, and how much it hurt them and him because of it. Gar liked Raven, a lot. But some part of him couldn’t handle putting Raven in the same pain he left his loved ones in his past. Gar thought it was too cruel.

But some part of Gar wondered if it was actually relevant. He didn’t self-destruct upon breaking two thirds of his life rules. He didn’t break down when he was slightly remembered how his past life was like throughout the day.

In the end, however, Gar couldn’t bring himself out of guilt. He became so attached to Raven and he was so sure Raven felt the same way. But he *couldn’t.* And he *wouldn’t* hurt Raven. Raven deserved better. Raven deserved stability, happiness, and comfort. Gar thought he couldn’t possibly provide all three. Sighing to himself, he focused on driving home, trying his best to ignore how painful his thoughts were.
October 22 2014. Geography classroom.

“Where’s Kori?”

Gar and Vic shrugged at Dick’s question. The three of them were in the geography classroom, planning to discuss the party organization. Much to their dismay, however, Kori was nowhere to be found and Raven… Well, Raven was occupied.

After their date, interaction between Gar and Raven slowly and slowly diminished into a state of null. Not that Raven was to blame though – Gar was the one pushing her away, which was odd for the both of them. Gar remembered how once he reached home after dropping Raven at her house, he received a message from Raven thanking him for the day. Not knowing what to do or say next, Gar simply sent her a cat sticker with confetti flying around, and from there, their cyberspace interaction simply vanished.

It wasn’t much better in real life either. While Raven didn’t exactly act unfavourable to Gar, Gar didn’t miss how every time Raven was in sight, Jason was by her side every. Single. Time. And it didn’t help that every time Gar snuck a glance at Raven’s direction, Jason would immediately eye him with a dirty look that made Gar feel unworthy of living. So even though Raven wasn’t necessarily upset or angry (visibly, at least) at Gar, Gar knew he had to deal with Jason’s wrath to keep on living.

Sighing, he shook his head and focused on Dick, who pulled out a ripped page from a lined notebook with scribbles on it. “Alright, listen up,” Dick said loudly, taking a seat across Vic and Gar. “The party is coming soon, and we need to finalize our plans. Thanks to Raven –“ Gar ducked slightly at the mention of his crush. “– and Jason, all guests have at least something to contribute. The seniors were great help with providing entertainment, with Wally, Billy, and Jinx helping. Kole, Gnarrk, and Jericho are also helping out with the food supply. Toni, with the help of Garth and Roy, is screening guest members and any conflicts that may arise. Other guests are doing something else too, but Jason won’t tell me what so I guess we have to find out on our own when the time comes.

“First, we celebrate the occasion, of course,” Dick continued. “Happy birthday to you, and so on. And then the guests are free to go wherever, and that’s when the food is served. You all remember your jobs, right? Okay, well, Kori is in charge of the entertainment room, helping out whenever needed. Vic, you’re in charge of the theatre. I’m in charge of the swimming pool, and Gar, you’re in charge of the main hall where most of the fun happens. Be alert. I know it’s her birthday but Raven said she didn’t mind helping out, so she’s helping the kitchen people with the food. Everyone understand?”
“Yeah, wait,” Vic said, leaning forward. “So I’m not allowed to leave the theatre at all?”

Dick rolled his eyes. “Of course you can,” Dick replied. “All of you can run off to have fun, but all of you still need to be alert in your designated stations.”

Shrugging, Vic relaxed back into his seat. “You make it sound as if we’re going to war.” Vic commented, to which Dick smirked.

“Tendencies,” Dick said, and noticed how quiet Gar was for a change. “Hey, Gar. You alright?”

Rubbing the back of his neck, Gar decided to tell his friends what was going on. “Dudes,” Gar said solemnly. “I think I messed up with Raven.”

“You mean the date?” Gar nodded at Dick, making both Vic and Dick groan in response. “Gar, what did you do?”

“Nothing!” Gar shrieked. Well, that was true, partially. Gar did nothing in favour of the romance aspects of life. “It just… It didn’t work out, okay?”

“But I thought Raven liked you?” Vic said, and Gar shrugged his shoulders in defeat.

“It’s not her fault,” Gar admitted. “I think it’s mine.”

Vic and Dick exchanged looks, exasperated at how idiotic Gar was at the current situation. “Gar,” Vic said. “You need to get over yourself and fix whatever mess you made! Her birthday’s coming soon, dude! You made this party for her, remember?”

Gar sighed. “You know how I’m always on the move throughout my school years?” Both of his friends nodded. “I don’t want to get both mines and Raven’s hopes up just to find out I’m leaving in the end of the year. She deserves someone better than me, someone who can actually settle down and make her happy.”

Dick and Vic stared at their friend for a long period of time. “Are you serious?” Dick said finally. “You’re backing out of something that makes you happy?

“Yeah,” Vic supplied. “You don’t think you’re worthy of her time? Hell, you made the ‘ice queen’ open up to a lot of people! You changed her life for the better, and you’re thinking ‘Oh, I don’t deserve her’. You do!”

Nodding, Dick contributed again to the discussion. “And why are you letting the future stop you? Stop thinking about the end, you’re not going to enjoy the present if you do.”

“And don’t you think Raven needs to know what you’re thinking?” Vic said. “You need to discuss things together and communicate! It’s not good to leave her in the dark, she must be thinking that everything that went wrong because of her, when really it’s not. Talk to her!”

“Yeah,” Dick agreed. “Gar, you should talk to her. And you shouldn’t punish yourself from happiness because you’re not getting the full package.”

Not willing to hear any more of his friends’ nagging, Gar blew up. “I get it!” Gar exclaimed. “But you guys don’t understand. You see, me getting attached to something only ends up in pain because I end up leaving anyway. It’s complicated.”

Dick rested his head on his right palm and sighed. “Are you blind?” Dick asked, and Gar felt Dick’s ice blue eyes peer into his dark blue ones. When Gar spluttered for a response, Dick continued.
“Didn’t you attach yourself to Jump City just by planning the party?”

“Yeah, but that was a mistake,” When Dick and Vic eyed Gar questioningly, Gar immediately realized what he said and tried to fix himself. “No, No I didn’t mean it that way. I mean,” Gar sighed. “I realize that I fell into a loophole throughout my date with her and I don’t know if I can handle any more trips.”

Gar sighed, and his two friends followed suit. “Gar,” Vic spoke up. “You can’t be tied down just because there’s a high chance you’re leaving. I mean, it sucks knowing that you might, I really enjoyed having you as a friend. But I don’t want my memories of you to be all about sulking because that stinks! I’m sure Dick doesn’t want that. And I’m hella sure that Raven doesn’t want that. You need to seize the moment. Carpe diem, right?”

“Carpe diem.” Dick agreed.

Gar shook his head. “No,” Gar said. “I don’t want to end up hurting her. It’s too risky.”

Vic gave his friend a strange look. “Risky?” Vic said. “Gar, you’re throwing a revolution against the school bully! You sitting here is just risky!”

“Okay,” Gar said slowly. “But even if I wanted to talk to Raven, she’s being full time body-guarded by Jason! I can’t even look at her direction without having Jason shoot eye lasers at me. The only time Raven is sans-Jason is in English, but we can’t talk there.”

“You hurt Raven, Gar,” Dick said. “You should at least expect her best friend to be angry.”

Gar chuckled bitterly. “Why don’t she just date Jason then?” Gar said, missing the surprised looks on his friends’ faces. “I’m sure she’ll be much happier then.”

“Whoa,” Vic said. “Is Jason the reason you’re being all mopey too?”

“No!” No, but Gar felt like a lie escaped his lips. “No. I don’t care about Jason.”

Dick raised an eyebrow. “I know my brother’s an annoying twat at times,” Dick said. “But trust me when I say there is nothing, and will be nothing between Raven and him. I thought you knew this.”

Gar knew, but he couldn’t help but wonder what the hell made Raven and Jason’s friendship so special. He hated thinking about it. As far as he could tell, Jason would be perfect for Raven. He didn’t seem like he was moving anywhere, so he could provide Raven stability. Raven seemed happy around him, so of course Jason could give her happiness. And obviously, Jason already assumed the role of a body guard, so he was eligible to provide her comfort. Gar’s heart missed a beat.

“Gar,” Vic spoke again. “I do not want a Wally situation again. See, he mustered enough courage to deal with his problems with Jinx and now they’re buddies again! I don’t know if they’re dating but eh, they look happy. You can’t be tied down out of fear, Gar. You will never be happy.”

Maybe I shouldn’t be happy, Gar thought bitterly to himself.

xx

October 22 2014. Jump City High Library.

Selinda squirmed in her seat. Ever since Gemma and Kitten had a fallout in the mall’s food court, Selinda was left with Kitten’s tyrannical presence out of societal obligation. Selinda really didn’t
know what exactly went wrong, but her once bubbly and cheerful friend turned monstrous and spiteful. Or maybe, her friend was always monstrous and spiteful. Selinda didn’t know.

All she knew was that Kitten was growing more and more vindictive as each day passed. With the existence of Gar’s party, Selinda witnessed Kitten’s attention towards her own party diminishing. It didn’t help that Kitten enlisted Mikron, out of all people, to help her overthrow the other party. It was pathetically sad, yet terrifyingly shocking at the same time.

“All of our plans are failing,” Kitten said aloud, and Selinda instinctively nodded. Kitten had tried so hard to steer away guests from Gar’s party to no avail. From cool inventions to personal schmoozing activities, it seemed as if Kitten’s prevalence in the school society was diminishing day by day. And it was obvious that Kitten had a problem with this. A huge problem. “People are still going to the green guy’s party.”

“I tried, Kitten, I really did,” Selinda noticed how less star struck and more anxious Mikron looked around Kitten’s presence. Selinda wondered what exactly Kitten threatened him with for Mikron to be that scared. “But nobody’s paying attention to me.”

“Of course, you’re Mikron,” Kitten sneered, and Selinda tried estimating how long it would take for Mikron to snap and leave Kitten in misery. “Look. We can’t do anything at this point now. The party is coming, and we need to plan something else. Which is why I propose we mess up the party when it happens. It’s genius.”

Selinda immediately knew that Kitten was referring to the stink bombs she created a few weeks ago with the help of Mikron. She didn’t know exactly how potent the chemicals were, and wasn’t planning on figuring out any time soon. “Wait,” a thought struck into Selinda’s head. “If you’re too busy stinking up their party, how will you celebrate your own?”

Kitten groaned in response to Selinda’s question. “Duh I won’t be there!” Kitten exclaimed. “Mikron will be. He’s obvi still not invited to my party, but he’s invited to theirs. It’ll be easy to infiltrate them there.”

Selinda eyed Kitten in curiosity, not sure what exactly went wrong with her (former?) friend. “Kitty,” Selinda said. “I don’t understand why you’re so obsessed with this party.”

“Shut up, you freak,” Kitten said venomously. “Go run back to Gemma for all I care. I don’t need you.”

Kitten said Gemma’s name as if it was a curse. Selinda looked away. Gemma had been her best friend for so long, and ever since Kitten came up in the picture, the two of them were left with a huge elephant in the room about their friendship. But when Gemma broke all ties with Kitten out of exasperation, Gemma expected Selinda to do the same. However, Selinda backed out, not willing to create any more tension needed.

Inevitably, Selinda did. Gemma, although Selinda was ninety-nine point nine percent sure that she didn’t mean it, acted much colder to Selinda, to Selinda’s dismay. She didn’t like having Gemma hate her. She didn’t like having any conflict around her. She didn’t like anything at all, at this point.

But Selinda didn’t know what to do. Sure, she was deemed ‘popular’ among the students. But losing Gemma and being stuck with Kitten made her realize how pretentious that label was. Popular didn’t mean Selinda had a lot of friends. Popular just meant that she was noticed by a lot of people. And because Selinda never bothered to make strengthen any other friendships she had, she didn’t know who to hang out with but Kitten.
Even her brother, Baran, wasn’t much of a comfort either. Although Baran loved his sister, there was no doubt that he had a crush on Gemma (although Selinda was convinced that Gemma didn’t feel the same way, much to her relief), so when the conflict between the three of them arose, Baran immediately sided with Gemma. Selinda’s extended friends were also Baran’s friends, albeit closer, and they inevitably sided with Gemma too. Selinda never felt so alone.

“I never cared about their party,” Kitten spat. “But ever since they started stealing my guests away, I needed to take action. Thieves need to be punished.”

Selinda wanted to point out that the other party members did nothing but be themselves, but she didn’t have the heart to do so.

“You’re with me, right?” Kitten said sweetly, and Selinda felt sick to her stomach. “Besties forever?”

Selinda wanted to say no. Selinda wanted to run away to Gemma, and tell her how sorry she was and how much she loved her and how Kitten’s a horrible, horrible freak that needed to be punished… Selinda wanted to do so many things.


xx

October 24 2014. Jump City High Hallway.

“Logan.”

Gar jumped in front of his locker, not expecting someone to be in the hallways an hour after school ended.

For the fun of it and for the sake of relieving stress, Gar decided to audition for the winter play. It wasn’t something he was dying to do, but after being persuaded by Jinx (and nagged as well about how ‘Wally’ Gar looked), Gar relented and ended up having more fun than expected. Gar hoped that he got a role, even a minor one. He enjoyed the drama crew.

But now his feelings of happiness were quickly replaced with feelings of apprehension as he saw Jason next to him, looking at him with disdain. Gar swallowed and slowly closed his locker shut.

Jason, seeming satisfied that he got Gar’s full attention, leaned against a locker and crossed his arms. “I don’t know you well, Logan,” Jason said. “But I never pegged you as a coward.”

“Shut up.” Gar didn’t need any other commentary about how idiotic he was, especially from Raven’s best buddy Jason Todd.

“You know,” Jason began, smirking. “I actually thought you were good for her. She would’ve never agreed to your dumb little date if it wasn’t for me. I thought you made her happy. I thought that finally, someone likes her the way she is. But maybe I was wrong. You did nothing but crush her hopes, and for what? For a sick little game? To prove that you’re hot shit even for a newbie? I don’t get it, Logan. She trusted you, and you just pushed her away? She’s hurt, Logan. And even though I told her against it, she’s still willing to be friends with you, even after you messed up. You don’t deserve her.”

That caused Gar to flinch, but he decided not to say anything. “You’re a fake, Garfield Logan. You make promises and you screw it up in the end.
“Shut up.”

“I don’t get why anyone fell for your ‘nice guy’ act. Hell, I don’t know why I fell for it.”

“Shut up.”

“Raven deserves better. You do nothing but hurt her.”

Gar snapped. “I said, shut up!”

Jason, however, didn’t back down. “Do you like her?”

“I –“

“Do you like her?” Jason repeated louder, not willing to wait.

“Yes!” Gar exclaimed. “Yes, I like her! I want her to be mine so badly. But I can’t. Jason, you know I move a lot. I can’t hurt her anymore.”

“You sure you’re moving?”

“Yes,” Gar said solemnly, then thought again. “Well, no. But I always move.”

Shaking his head, Jason sneered. “I can’t believe you’re running away from something so good because you’re scared of the future,” Jason said, and Gar noted the uncanny similarity between Jason and his brother, Dick. “I can’t believe you’re letting yourself worry about the past instead of living in the future.”

“You don’t understand.”

“I understand this, though,” Jason began, and he ran a hand through his hair, looking tired. “You come here and all of the sudden, Raven opens up to you as if she knows you forever and she likes you. And you didn’t have to do anything, although throwing the party was a bonus. I’ve been by her side for a long time. I brought her back up every time she fell. I gave her comfort. But in the end… It’s you. It’s not me, but you.”

Gar looked at Jason, confused. “What?”

“You’d be wrong if you think you’re the only one who thinks that Raven is special,” Jason said blandly, and Gar looked at him with wide eyes. “The only difference is that I’ve known her for a long time.”

“You –“ Gar stuttered. “You like her?”

Jason looked at him darkly. “It doesn’t matter,” Jason said, looking away. “She chose you. And I pushed her to choose you, even though I never told her to look at me. You make her happy, Gar. She wouldn’t want to be with me. She wants to be with you, she chose you.”

Gar wanted to tell him that Raven didn’t need to. That Raven was Jason’s, and Gar would back away before causing any trouble. But he couldn’t. Gar felt selfish, but he still wanted to keep Raven to himself.

“You never told Raven?” Gar asked softly, and Jason sighed.

“No,” Jason said. “I’m her friend, and only her friend. Nothing’s ever going to change that.”
Gar searched for a sign of expression, anything to reveal what Jason was thinking, but only saw an apathetic look smacked on Jason’s face. He felt conflicted. Raven sounded so convinced that she and Jason were purely friends. But knowing that Jason didn’t necessarily think the same way, had Gar spinning in frenzies of confusion. Gar was half-sure that nothing would ever happen between Raven and Jason. But he was also half-sure that something could happen between Raven and Jason, and Gar didn’t know how to deal with that.

“Once, I was falling apart, and she saved me,” Jason spoke up again, and Gar looked up to Jason’s face, but his face still remained apathetic. “I was sure that we were meant to be after that. But she didn’t, I don’t think. She sees me as a friend, and nothing more. It sucks that I have to play along, but you know what else sucks? Seeing someone you love get hurt by someone they love. Because even though you can give the comfort they want, it’s never the comfort they need.”

Jason composed himself, and Gar looked at the floor, not knowing how to deal with the current turn of events. Finally, Jason spoke again. “Look,” Jason said, and his voice sounded harsh. “You’re either going to fix what you messed up, or you’re leaving her alone. She doesn’t need any more trash in her life. She has enough of it.”

And with that, Jason turned on his heel, walking away. Gar stared, feeling his heart sink to the ground.

xx


Jason must be such a good actor, Gar thought to himself, as he tumbled on his bed. To have Raven see Jason purely as a friend and nothing more was a feat, considering that Jason must’ve liked her since they met. Gar groaned. He hated thinking about Jason and his dumb feelings for Raven. He hated it all.

Gar knew that he shouldn’t see Jason as a threat, but he did anyway. Gar’s stomach felt hollow as he imagined the possibilities of Raven being with Jason right now, probably having more fun than she did before.

He glanced at his clock. Six thirty. Wally invited him for dinner earlier on, but Gar declined, citing ‘dude not feeling well’ as his reason. It was a bad excuse, and Gar knew that Wally knew that Gar was lying, but in the end, Gar really didn’t feel well. He felt too conflicted.

Gar heard someone walk in his room, and he immediately knew it was Rita. Gar groaned, silently telling Rita to go away, but Rita sat on the edge of his bed, waiting for Gar to turn around to face her. After realizing that Rita wouldn’t walk away without a response, Gar petulantly turned around, frowning when he saw Rita give him a disapproving look.

“What?” Gar asked, and Rita tutted.

“Honey, you should really unpack.”

That made Gar sit up. “I told you,” Gar said, exasperated. “There’s no use. We’re moving anyway.”

When Rita didn’t respond, Gar immediately felt worried. “What?”

But then, a smile crept up on Rita’s face, leaving Gar confused. “I insist,” Rita said, her voice lilting. “You should unpack.”

“I don’t get it,” Gar said finally. “Where’s Steve?”
“He’s in a meeting,” replied Rita. “He’s discussing an important topic with the corporates.”

“Okay,” Gar said slowly. “So?”

“Do you want to know what he’s discussing?”

“Not really.”

“You sure?”

Gar rolled his eyes and let out a breath. “Fine,” Gar said. “What is it?”

“Jump City has been a particular success for Steve,” Rita began, and Gar tilted his head to the side. “Not as successful as Midway City, but definitely close. So successful, that the corporate decided to extend Steve’s designation at Jump City for five years.”

Gar processed what Rita told him, and gasped. “So…”

“So I really encourage you to unpack,” Rita said. “I really do.”

“We’re not moving?” Gar said, his voice excited, and Rita nodded with a smile. “Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh, this changes – this changes everything. We’re not moving! Rita, we’re not moving!”

Rita chuckled as she watched her son hop off his bed to jump around. “Yes, I believe I told you so.”

Gar felt as if a large burden was taken off his shoulders. Finally. Finally. Gar was settling down. Gar was settling down at a town he loved, and he never felt so relieved. He smiled. “So what now?”

“Well,” Rita said. “Once the holidays start, I’m really looking forward to painting the house.”

“Yeah,” Gar said, his voice light with happiness. “Yeah, that’s a good idea.”

Rita stood up from Gar’s bed, and gave her son a hug, muttering words of comfort and solace. Gar did nothing but snuggle back. “I told you everything will turn out okay in the end.” Rita said, letting go of Gar, to which Gar snorted.

“You never said that, but okay.”

Rita smiled. “Oh,” Rita said, and a smirk “Your girlfriend’s waiting for you in the living room.”

“Tell her to go away.”

Rita blinked. Gar blinked. It took half a second for Gar to realize what just happened.

“She’s not my girlfriend.” Gar said slowly, and Rita snorted, heading out to the living room. After a few moments, Raven stood in Gar’s room, watching Gar twitch in his place.

“Hey,” Raven said, and Gar knew it was stupid, but he missed her voice. “Can I close the door?”

Nodding, Gar watched as Raven closed the door behind her. Biting his lip, he sat down on his bed, urging Raven to do the same. Raven complied, and the two of them sat next to each other in awkward silence.

“I heard what happened,” Raven finally said, breaking the silence between the two of them. Gar looked to his left to see Raven watching him intently. “Between you and Jason that is. Sorry about that.”
Did Jason tell her everything? “No, I probably deserve it,” Gar said, his throat dry. “What did he tell you?”

“Nothing much,” Raven admitted. “Though I have an idea.”

“Oh.”

The two of them fell silent again.

“Gar,” Raven said, breaking the silence once again. “Look. I… Ugh, there’s no easy way around this. I, um.”

Watching Raven fumble for words, Gar instinctively put his hand on Raven’s thigh. He immediately considered pulling back, but after seeing how relaxed Raven was after that, he decided against it. “I like you,” Raven blurted out, and winced. “Sorry, that was blunt. But I do. You make me happy and… you make me feel loved. I’m pretty sure I told you all the details about how I felt in the date. I’m telling you now, though, just in case it didn’t permeate through your brain.”

Gar opened his mouth to respond, but Raven spoke up first. “I know you don’t feel the same way,” Gar scrunched his face and confusion and didn’t miss how Raven’s nervous behaviour right now mismatched with her usual cool and composed demeanour. “But I just wanted to tell you, just to clear things up.”

Gar wanted to stand up and drop on one knee, and tell her how he does feel the same way. He wanted to pick up Raven bridal-style and enjoy each other’s presence throughout the night. But instead, Gar blurted out something he didn’t expect to say. “I’m not moving.”

Raven looked perplexed, but remained calm in her seat. “Good for you?”

“I like you too.”

Just how ungraceful could you be?!

Raven blushed, clearing her throat. “Good for me?”

“Rae,” Gar said, and for the first time, Raven didn’t bother correcting him. “I really, really like you too. Like, a lot. Ugh, I’ve been liking you since forever. What happened in your front yard that night, that was completely my fault – “

“No,” Raven interrupted. “I was being too forward.”

“Listen,” Gar said, holding up a hand to silence Raven. “All my life, I’ve been hurting myself and others just by moving around. I get attached to people, and then I leave. It… becomes a cycle, and I was so willing to break it. But then you came along and before I knew it I fell for you, but then being so close to you just made me back out, out of fear that I would hurt you even more by having you attached to me then leaving. You know what I’m saying?”

“You shouldn’t let the fear of something happening keep you from being happy.”

“I know,” Gar said. “I realize now.”

“I’m scared too,” Raven confessed. “I’m scared that all good things have to come to an end. But sometimes we just need to get out and see what’s best for you. I think… I think I’d rather live my life knowing that I tried instead of regretting how much I didn’t try.”
Gar watched Raven with intense passion. Slowly removing his hand from her thigh, Gar brought his hand on the back of Raven’s neck, pulling her closer…

“Dinner’s ready!”

Gar and Raven winced, pulling away. Gar was annoyed at how a major opportunity was interrupted, but all feelings of aggravation diminished when he saw Raven laugh.

“Timing.” Raven said amusedly, and Gar marvelled in the fact that Raven laughed.

Standing up, Gar turned on his heel to face Raven and let out a hand. “Do you like pasta?”

Smiling, Raven took Gar’s hand, and stood up. “I love pasta.”

xx


Jason smiled bitterly after viewing Raven’s snap showing her and Gar having fun at a local arcade. He tucked his phone away. As long as she’s happy.

Jason didn’t exactly know when he started having feelings for Raven, but he knew the incident contributed a lot to his feelings. After hanging out with Raven a tad bit more than usual, Jason felt himself observing every little quirk that Raven had, from her tendency to tap her fingers on the table as if she was playing the piano, to simply staying up at late hours for the sake of just reading.

It was odd, thinking that Jason had feelings for the particular purple-haired girl when initially, he wanted to whack her face in a math textbook. But even though the two of them resolved any initial differences between the two of them (again, Jason contributed this to the incident), Jason knew that there was no way Raven would reciprocate his feelings. He hated thinking this, but he had to admit it – he was forever stuck in the friendzone.

When Gar popped in the picture, Jason seized the opportunity. Although it was weird, it was easy for Jason to behave as if he was Team Garfield all along, and in the end Jason truly did want Raven to end up with Gar. He needed to get over Raven, and Gar was the perfect key.

But then, Raven called him and broke down about how beautiful and disastrous their date was. It was so tempting for Jason to pick her up, and whisper words of comfort and love, and reassure her that Jason was there, that Jason would always be there for her. But he couldn’t. Jason needed to get over Raven, and maybe, Jason and Raven weren’t just meant to be.

“Hey bossman,” Jason’s thoughts were interrupted by his friend, Jaime, looking at him with inherent worry. “You okay, amigo?”

Jason smirked, pushing away his thoughts aside. “Damn right.”

Jason looked around his surroundings. After being asked by Raven and later Dick, Jason was in charge of ensuring every extra guest had a role to fulfil. Luckily, the majority of the freshmen were in or related to the recycling club, and they had an idea already. The freshmen would be incorporating their collected bottle caps and their knowledge of technology to create a mural for Raven’s birthday. It was initially supposed to be their entry for a national recycled arts contest, but the freshmen decided to tackle two things at once, providing their artwork as decoration for the party.

Jason remembered their sketch. It was beautiful – a raven, surrounded with nature in the woods. One of the freshmen admitted that they were going to use an eagle, but immediately changed it once
Raven’s birthday party popped in.

Meanwhile, Jason enlisted his sophomore friends to help him with something more special. Jason, along with his friends Jaime, Eddie, Donna, and Kiran, were part of a band formed during freshman year. They mostly dealt with experimental music and never performed live in front of anyone, so Jason seized the opportunity to have his band perform for Raven’s birthday. After deciding what to perform, the band was intent on practicing, with Jason unwilling to tell Raven the reasons for his latest absences from their usual hangouts.

Jason was the band’s drummer. He initially opted out of joining the band, but after persistent coercion from Donna’s side, Jason finally relented and provided the band with what little drum skills he perceived himself to have. Not that Jason’s perceptions really did matter – Eddie and Jaime were convinced that Jason was a ‘professional drummer’ or some sort.

Their singer, Kiran, was lively and upbeat. Jason knew her the least from his sophomore friend circle, but he enjoyed listening to her melodic voice fill the air. Their two guitarists, Eddie and Jaime, were almost like two peas in a pod, completing every sentence and mischief together. But as light-hearted as the two could be, nobody could deny how focused they were when Eddie and Jaime were playing with their bass and electric guitars, respectively. Lastly, their keyboardist was Donna. Donna was… nice. She was strong-willed and independent, but Jason admired her. She was also one of his closest friends, next to Raven. He wondered…

“Hey,” Donna said to Jason, after sipping a drink from her water bottle. “How are you?”

Jason smiled at Donna. “Good,” he replied. “You?”

“Great,” Donna returned the smile. “It’s nice that you’re helping out with the party.”

“Nah, it’s mostly Dick and his friends.”

“Hmm,” Donna tilted her head. “Well, you seem to care a lot about Raven, is what I’m saying.”

“Yeah,” Jason said blankly. “She’s family.”

And for once, Jason found himself completely in comfort with what he said. Family, Jason thought. Raven was family all along. He stared back at Donna’s blue eyes, and smiled.

“Practice again?”

Donna nodded with a grin, and announced to their other band members that their break was over.

xx

December 2 2013. Jump City High.

Raven groaned. After an unsuccessful meeting with the two freshmen Eddie Bloomberg and Jaime Reyes, Raven realized that she was alone in her quest of finding her partner for her latest math project, Jason Todd.

Raven groaned again at the reminder of the sad fact that the two were paired together for her math project. As if it wasn’t enough that I’m sitting next to him already.

Jason was… cocky, yet angry at the same time. He was so confident in himself, but Raven wondered if he was secretly insecure because it was so easy for Jason to get riled up. Raven noted how his friends had their own defining quirk. Kiran was bubbly. Eddie was loyal. Jaime was mischievous.
Donna was independent. But Jason… Jason was angry. Jason was happy. Jason was complex, and Raven didn’t like bothering with his dilemmas in class.

But the heavens just had to frown upon her existence and pair the two together. Throughout the whole period of their project, they worked quite civilly with each other, much to Raven’s relief, but Raven didn’t miss the tension in the air between them. Whatever, Raven would think, as long as it’s over soon.

Their project was near finished, and all Raven needed was Jason’s part to finalize the project. But to her dismay, he was nowhere to be found.

Raven was worried. The deadline for their project was tomorrow, and who knows what bickering Raven would encounter with Jason that would hold them back. Raven needed a top score to receive the GPA that she aimed for, and this project was the key. No way is she letting Jason hold her back.

Sighing, Raven headed up to the roof. She remembered him saying in passing that he liked being on the school rooftop, despite it being forbidden for students to access. Raven looked around. No teachers were in sight, so Raven immediately walked up the stairs to the rooftop. Once she opened the rooftop doors, she saw a man lying on the ground, his face covered by his hair. Raven wasn’t sure, but she had to check…

“Jason?” Raven asked after brushing his hair away from his face. Jason seemed unconscious, and Raven felt her heart sink. There was only one way to find out.

Raven sat cross-legged on the floor next to Jason’s body, and pushed him slightly so that he was lying on his back. And Raven was surprised. Well, to be honest, surprised would be an understatement. But Raven didn’t know exactly how to describe her feelings.

Pills. Pills everywhere. Raven picked up the medicine pouch next to him, and read its prescription. Zoloft, it read. Raven held a breath. She knew exactly what Zoloft was – she often saw her father dealing with it. But she couldn’t tell exactly why Jason would consume a bunch of antidepressants. Pushing her thoughts aside, Raven immediately grabbed Jason’s wrist and placed her pointer and middle finger on his wrist. Raven felt her heart drop when she felt almost nothing from Jason’s wrist, but was immensely relieved once she felt a light heart beat drumming against her fingers.

But it wasn’t enough. Jason overdosed on drugs, and he needed help. Raven did the first thing that popped in her mind.

“911,” Raven breathed out, feeling relieved after having her call picked up. “A student is unconscious. I think he overdosed on Zoloft… I’m on the rooftop… Yes, the rooftop, is that a problem?… Jump City High… Thank you.”

After a few minutes, the emergency officials immediately arrived. Jason was placed on top of a stretcher, and Raven watched as other officials picked up the substances around them. As they entered the ambulance, Raven followed suit, ignoring the stares she received from the people inside the ambulance.

Raven eyed Jason. Although it may not seem so, Raven was worried. Raven didn’t necessarily like the guy, but that didn’t mean she wanted him to be in danger. Raven noticed how pale Jason was on the emergency bed. He might even be paler than me, Raven thought to herself.

As the ambulance reached the hospital, Jason was immediately rushed into the ER, leaving Raven waiting in anxiety in front of the emergency doors. Raven sighed. She left her bag in her locker, too.
Raven made a mental note to phone her dad once she had the chance. Raven tried assuaging her worries by reading magazines stacked next to her. Not that it helped, though. Raven couldn’t help but worry at Jason’s fate was in the emergency room.

After what felt like an eternity, the emergency doors opened, and Raven immediately stood up from her seat, walking straight into the room, only to be stopped by the doctors. “No visitors.” One of them said strictly.

*Think, Raven, think!* “Please let me in,” Raven pleaded, surprised at how distraught her voice sounded. “He’s my boyfriend. It’s our anniversary today. Please, I just want to know if he’s okay.”

After a few deliberations from the doctors’ parts, the doctors sighed, and let her in. Raven had to squint her eyes upon entering. It was so bright. Finally finding a seat next to Jason’s hospital bed, Raven sat down, and stared at Jason.

“Jason,” Raven said softly, and felt herself run out of breath once she saw how low the line was on the EKG monitor. “Wake up. Please.”

Jason didn’t respond. “Dammit, Todd,” Raven cursed to herself. “Stop ignoring me! Wake up, please. Please be okay.”

Raven never imagined herself pleading Jason to stay alive, but she supposed witnessing attempted suicide does that to people. “I don’t know what’s wrong with you,” Raven said. “But, um… I’m here. Even though we don’t like each other. I’m not letting someone die just because they wanted to.”

Memories of her mother popped in Raven’s mind. Raven tried her best to ignore it.

Realizing that Jason wouldn’t wake up for a while, Raven ended up grabbing another magazine nearby to read. It was a *tween* magazine, and Raven couldn’t fathom how *idiotic* the majority of the articles were, but she was desperate to let the time slide. Raven couldn’t handle the thought of someone committing a *successful* suicide. It was too dark to think of.

“Raven?”

Raven immediately let go of the magazine, stopping her progress in the ‘*Which Color Defines You?*’ personality test. She stood up, and gasped once she saw Jason awake and conscious.

“You’re so pale,” Raven commented. “I should call the nurse.”

“No, don’t,” Jason’s voice sounded tired. “Why are you here?”

Raven sighed. “I found you on the school rooftop, Jason,” Raven said, allowing herself to use Jason’s first name in front of him for the first time. “You were surrounded by pills.”

Jason winced. “I’m alive?”

“You’re alive.”

Jason let out a breath. “Look, the only reason I did it was – “

Raven raised a hand to interrupt. “There’s no need to defend yourself,” Raven said curtly. “What matters now is that you’re okay. And that you’ll *stay* okay.”

Jason felt his heart flutter. “Thank you,” Jason croaked out. “Though I still don’t know why you’re
“Me neither,” Raven said truthfully. “I don’t want you to die, though.”

“Me neither,” Jason finally said, and he looked away, looking disappointed in himself. “I messed up.”

“Everyone messes up,” said Raven. “But everyone recovers.”

Jason groaned. “My head hurts.”

“I should call the nurse, then.”

“No,” Jason pleaded. “I… I want to stay with you for a while, if that’s alright.”

Raven stared at Jason. Knowing that Jason was alive, Raven could simply turn around and leave, but she couldn’t bring herself to do so. She needed to see further if Jason would be alright in the future. Raven felt a surge of overprotectiveness rush inside her. “That’s alright,” Raven said finally. “Take all the time you need.”

The two ended up conversing about various topics. Jason and Raven discovered that the two of them weren’t that different from each other. Jason screwed up a lot, and Raven was screwed up. They complemented each other so well.

It would take a while for Jason to open up about his problems (“I’m kind of screwing my head up on purpose.”) to Raven. It would take a longer time for Raven to do the same (“People screw my head up on purpose.”). But once they did, the two ended up being synonymous to family. And for as long as the two of them were by each other’s sides, both of them never witnessed a major incident happen again. She was happy. Jason was even happier.

xx


Garth pulled himself out of the pool, laughing a bit once he saw Roy’s smirk implanted on his face. He looked to his side. Gemma was doing the same, with the help of his girlfriend Toni.

Garth smiled to himself. Ever since Gemma and Kitten had a… conflict of interest (it was hard for Garth to ignore, everyone was practically talking about it), Gemma hung out more and more with other people, particularly Roy. Garth didn’t like the feeling of his best friend being taken away from someone else. So to dissipate that anxiety, Garth simply invited Gemma over to their hangouts.

And it turns out, Gemma wasn’t exactly bad company. She was self-centred (although less so than Kitten), but she was intelligent. And she was part of the girls swim team too, which meant that he and Gemma often enjoyed battling each other for speed. Garth looked at Roy, who was holding a stopwatch.

“So who’s faster?” Garth said, drying himself with a towel. Roy smirked, and simply nudged his head towards Gemma’s direction, who high-fived Toni. “Are you serious? By how much?”

“Two seconds,” Roy said, tucking the stopwatch away. “Sorry, Garth, you suck.”

“Oh please,” Garth shot Gemma a sneaky look. “Another round?”

“You’re on!”
“No!” Toni interrupted. “Roy and I have been sitting on the benches for like forever. I am not letting you guys battle each other again. We have Halloween to celebrate!”

Garth and Gemma didn’t argue, but no one could deny their disappointed looks on their faces. Gemma sighed. “Well,” she said. “Better go change to our costumes.”

“Gosh, yes,” Toni agreed. “Both of you take a shower and change.”

“And you guys?” Garth asked.

“Roy and I will change, then we’ll be in the front hall. Meet us there.”

The four of them split into two, and after half an hour, both of them rendezvoused in the main hall. Garth took a second to observe his surroundings. Roy, much to his aggravation and everyone’s amusement, was told to dress like Robin Hood, to match his interest with archery. Toni, in a fit of artistic inspiration, was dressed as a steampunk cheerleader. Garth loved it. Gemma, as uninspired as she can be, simply dressed up as a gymnast. And Garth was wearing a wet-piece with drawings on it, citing himself as an Olympic swimmer. His friends laughed. Garth scowled.

“I still don’t get why we have to dress up,” Roy grumbled, playing around with his toy bow. “Can’t we just knock on someone’s door, ask for candy, goodbye?”

“Roy,” Toni said, her voice disapproving. “I already told you what we’re doing! We’re going to be around the neighbourhood asking candies ourselves, and we’ll see who out of the four of us got the most candy.”

“Then?”

“Then, the winner gets bragging rights. And candy, of course.”

Roy scoffed. “But why do we have to dress up?”

“No one’s going to give candy to a random, dishevelled looking stranger,” Toni pointed out. “You’ve got to look the part.”

“Alright, mate.” Roy said in a faux cheerful voice, making sure to imitate Toni’s accent. He won a glare from Toni, who kicked him in the shin. “Ow! Toni.”

“Stop fooling around, and let’s get going!”

The four of them started their conquest, relieved that the neighbourhood was already surrounded with Halloween participants taking part in the local trick or treat customs. After an hour, the four of them met up in a random sidewalk, sharing their results. It seems that Garth was the clear winner, having his Halloween bucket overfilled with varieties of sweets, while Roy was the clear loser, his bucket near empty. Roy grumbled.

“No one wanted to give me their candy.” Roy said, causing everyone to laugh.

“Didn’t you just flirt your way to candy, though?” Gemma asked, and Roy shook his head.

“Nah, that didn’t work.”

“See,” Garth said, flashing a cheeky grin. “You’ve got to possess the natural charm.”

“Natural charm my ass –“
“Guys,” Toni said, interrupting Garth and Roy before they could actually get into a physical fight. “Do you see that?”

Gemma, Garth, and Roy looked to where Toni was pointing, and saw a hooded figure tinkering around someone’s fence. It took them a second to realize it was Dick’s house. “Isn’t that Grayson’s house?” Gemma asked, and the three nodded. “Then who’s that...”

All four of them walked towards the figure, and gasped collectively once they found out who it was. “O’Jeneus.” Gemma spat, and Mikron glared back, dropping whatever equipment he was tinkering with before.

“De Mille.” Mikron said with tantamount venom. “Nice seeing you here.”

“What brings you here?” Garth spoke up, his arms crossed.

“Yeah, and what are those?” Roy supplied, pointing to Mikron’s equipment. Mikron scowled.

“None of your business, snotfaces!”

Toni’s nostrils flared, and she immediately lifted Mikron off the ground from his collar, causing Roy and Garth to snicker and Gemma to gasp. “Listen, you little munchkin,” Toni said, her voice hard. “Harper can kick your ass, New York style, and he wouldn’t even have to bat an eyelash. De Mille right here? She’s going to hurt you, French style. Garth’s going to harm your sorry little self, Pacific style, and you won’t be able to witness the sunlight the next day. And me? I will slock your face so hard, no one will ever recognize you. New Zealand style. You wanna play with us?”

Mikron squirmed. “Let me go!”

Toni clenched her grasp on Mikron’s collar more firmly. “Not until you tell us what you’re up to.”

“Fine! I’ll tell you!” Mikron relented. “Let me go, let me go you crud, let me go!”

Toni dropped Mikron, causing him to lose balance. “You don’t understand, she’s a monster.”

Roy raised an eyebrow. “Are you talking about Kitten?”

“Yes!” Mikron said. “She’s... she’s threatening me.”

“With what?” Gemma said coldly. “Not like you have anything to lose.”

Mikron glared at Gemma. “It doesn’t matter what she threatened me with, you moron!” Mikron retaliated, causing Gemma to clench her jaw. “What matters is that I have to do this.”

“No you don’t,” Gemma said. “I escaped from her, and you could the same. Tell us what’s going on.”

“Wait,” Garth interrupted. “How do we know you’re not messing with us?”

Gemma, Roy, and Toni looked at each other in unison and hummed. “Yeah,” Gemma concurred. “How do we know?”

Mikron groaned and stomped his feet to the ground. The four of them instantly thought of a petulant child protesting for their ‘children rights’. “I tinker with the school database sometimes!” Mikron confessed. “Just to change my grade a few percentages up! But that’s against the law, and somehow Kitten found out.”

“What?”

“Everyone knows you were 0.01 points short from a 3.5 GPA,” Roy pointed out. “And suddenly the next day you get a 3.6 GPA? Everyone figured it out. Even the teachers.”

“What?”

“She gave you a cheap threat, O’Jeneus,” Gemma supplied. “She’s not as smart as she thinks.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“We don’t believe you too,” Garth said. “Guess we’re on the same page. What are those?”

Mikron sneered. “None of your business –“

“So you do want to play?” Toni said, towering over Mikron, making Mikron cower in response. “Cause we can play. We can play right now, mate.”

“Ugh, fine!” Mikron stepped aside to show his equipment.

The four of them took a moment to observe. “Stink bombs?” Garth asked, and Mikron nodded stubbornly.

Gemma scrunched her face in disgust. “Ew, seriously?” she said. “You guys are still planning to use that?”

“Remove them,” Roy ordered. “Now.”

“I can’t, Harper,” Mikron said venomously. “Kitten’s orders.”

“Oh my god, get over yourself!” Roy said, exasperated. “Kitten’s using you. She doesn’t care about you! I’m pretty sure you’re not even allowed to attend her party! She has no power, no influence. Drop her!”

“But –“

“Don’t you dare use your sick crush on her as an excuse,” Gemma threatened. “Because you and I know both know that that is going nowhere.”

Mikron sighed. “But she’ll ruin my life,” Mikron whined. “She’ll make it worse!”

“Your life is already ruined,” Garth said, his focus on Mikron’s equipment. “Remove your trash from Grayson’s property, and step away before you mess up anything else.”

Sighing, Mikron complied. The four of them watched with intent supervision. Once Mikron shoved everything he owned into his backpack, he frowned. “Listen,” Garth said. “What are you going to do next?”

“I don’t know,” Mikron said. “I don’t want to be under Kitten’s hold anymore. But I don’t want to be near you snotfaces!”

Garth had to restrain himself from whacking Mikron in the head. “Here’s what you’re going to do,” Garth said. “You’re going to stop any help you’re giving to Kitten. And you’re going to stay away from our party. Otherwise the four of us will stay true to Toni’s words.”
Mikron gulped.

“Wait,” Roy interrupted, a smirk on his face. “There’s no need to be so harsh, Garth.”

“Oh?” Garth’s voice lilted. “And what do you propose, my Royfriend?”

Mikron gulped again. “You’re going to make me do something stupid, aren’t you?”

Roy scoffed. “Is Kitten a brat?” Roy asked, causing snickers from his friends. “The answer is heck yes.”

October 31 2014. Dick’s house.

“Pizza’s ready!”

Gar, Dick, Kori, and Raven immediately ran to Vic’s side, who was holding a tray of freshly baked pizza. “Yo, move, I’ve got to put this on the coffee table.”

Vic’s friends complied, watching the pizza with intent fascination. “I love pizza,” Gar said dreamily, to which Kori and Raven hummed in agreement. “Dick, is the movie ready?”

“Yes,” Dick said, his hand holding a remote. “Halloween game on!”

“Yay!” Kori cheered. “I have never celebrated the holiday of Halloween. Shall we scare each other to ensure proper celebration techniques?”

But before anyone could respond to Kori, Gar was already ahead of her, scaring her from the behind. To Gar’s dismay, Kori simply looked back at Gar, confused. “What?” Kori asked, and Gar’s face fell as he took a seat next to Kori.

“That was me trying to scare you, Kori.”

“Oh!” Kori’s eyes lit up, and she faced Gar with two of her hands held up as if they were claws. “Boo!”

Gar laughed, and so did the rest of his friends. “That’s the spirit.” Gar said.

Vic watched his friends good around with a smile. At one point, Gar and Kori were practicing ‘scare faces’, pulling out the most ridiculous expressions Vic ever seen. And at another point, Raven and Dick resorted to playing an arm wrestling match, with the two of them surprisingly even. Vic’s smile grew wider. He loved his friends.

He remembered the table. It wasn’t as if he ended his friendship with them, but he certainly drifted apart to a new friend circle. But it wasn’t all that bad – Karen seemed to welcome Roy back into the table, and she introduced Mas y Menos as well. The table seemed to settle down with its members, and Vic’s friend circle seemed to be happy as well. It helped tremendously that Karen wasn’t bitter about Vic drifting apart from his former friend circle. She told him that as long as they kept in touch, where Vic sat in lunch or hung out after school didn’t matter.

Vic took a moment to observe his friends. Gar, his closest friend in the circle, was rambunctious and mischievous, and although Gar had his idiotic moments, Vic truly did enjoy the times spent with him. Dick was the unofficial ‘leader’ of the circle. He was organized, determined, and structured, and even though Dick’s rigid personality sometimes clashed with Vic’s laidback one, Vic enjoyed Dick’s
company. Kori was bubbly and sweet, and despite all the pain garnered in Vic’s body after pretending just how much he liked Kori’s horrible cooking, Vic saw Kori as a sister. And lastly, Raven. Raven was the last one to assimilate to the friend circle, but she truly made an impact. She was calm, cool, and collected, and for a second, intimidating, but it didn’t take Vic to realize that Raven was actually one of the nicest people he knew (save for her tendencies to bite back sarcastic replies).

“So,” Dick said, grabbing the attention of all of his friends. “Movie time?”

Vic heard his friends cheer yes. There was only one thing left to do.

“Boo-yah!” Vic exclaimed, his hand pumping the air. Dick smiled, and set up the movie, and the five of them enjoyed their time together.

“I love you all,” Vic muttered to himself, though it was loud enough for everyone to hear and smile in their seats.

“We love you too,” Raven said softly, and the five of them resumed watching their movie in silence.
"Happy birthday!"

Raven woke up from her slumber to the sound of loud confetti popping and cheering. She adjusted her eyes – Jason and Dick were on her bed, towering over her still body, their eyes full of excitement and joy. Raven was reminded of two over-excited twin dogs waiting for their owner to wake up. She groaned. "Get off me."

Jason and Dick complied with a goofy grin on their faces. "Happy birthday," Dick said, sitting down on the edge of the bed whilst Raven sat up. He took out a small box and handed it to Raven. "This was from your dad."

Raven took a moment to shake the box to figure out what it was. "My dad?" Raven asked, slowly pulling the ribbon tying the box closed. Dick nodded.

"Well, yeah," Dick said. "Someone came here at dawn and said it was for you."

"But it wasn't my dad."

"No."

"Huh."

The day before her birthday, Raven's dad unceremoniously announced that he was needed at the Ivory Coast. For what reason, Raven didn't ask, but it meant that Raven would be spending her birthday alone, once again. But then, she was reminded of the party. That for once, she actually had friends to celebrate with. She smiled, and she proceeded to ask Dick and Jason if it was alright for her to stay over in their guest room for the night. The two of them eagerly accepted, and the three of them spent most of their Saturday night watching British television.

"What's inside?" Dick asked, and Raven opened the box, revealing a pair of raven-shaped earrings. Underneath was a small folded note, which Raven took out and read aloud.

"'Happy Birthday,'" Raven read. "'Make sure all doors are locked.' Thanks, Dad."

Jason snorted, and took the gift and the note away from Raven's hands, placing it on the bedside table. "Enough about your dad," Jason said. "Ugh he's scary."

"Comes in the genes," Raven said drily, and Jason rolled his eyes. "What time is it?"

"Ten thirty," Jason replied, and he nodded in confirmation when Raven widened her eyes in shock. "Yep. Get up and shower! The party starts at six, and we need to prep."

But before Raven could get off her bed, Dick interrupted her. "Wait," Dick said, and Raven readjusted her seat on the bed. Waiting for a response, Raven inevitably frowned when Dick and Jason stayed in their places, but once Dick gave a knowing look to his brother, Raven felt nervous. After Raven urged him to continue, Dick and Jason gave a smirk, and Raven was amazed at how alike the two of them were despite not being actually related to each other. Awaiting their response, Raven was thrown back when Jason and Dick immediately lunged at her, giving her a crushing hug.

"Happy birthday!"
Raven was physically restrained by their hug, and grunted. "You guys said that already." Said Raven once the two of them let her go.

Dick dismissed her with a wave of his hand. "Yeah, but you weren't really awake by then," Dick said, and Raven watched Jason lift another birthday gift from the floor. With approval from Dick, Jason handed Raven the gift. "Open it."

"Jeez," Raven said as she unwrapped the gift wrapper. "I feel the love."

Jason chuckled. "Hurry up, you nerd."

Raven opened her gift, and laughed in delight once she found out what it was. "Scented candles?" Raven asked, lifting the gift up for her to observe. Dick chuckled, and Jason shrugged with a smile. "Smells like the library." Thanks, guys."

Jason frowned. "Are you being sarcastic?"

Raven frowned back. "No," Raven said. "I actually like the gift."

"Oh," Then the three of them laughed. "Well the candle is Dick's idea," Jason said, pointing to his brother who grinned. "I have another gift for you, but that's like a collective thing… Um, you'll see later."

Raven chuckled, and set aside the gift on the bedside table. "Thanks," Raven said. "Really. You guys are very thoughtful."

"So you know how tomorrow is the start of fall break?" Raven nodded at Dick's questions. "I've been thinking that we should go on a road trip."

Raven tilted her head and pointed at Jason. "With him?"

Jason shook his head no. "Ugh, sorry," Jason said with a scowl. "But I hate road trips."

"It's just going to be the five of us," Dick said. "What do you think?"

"I think that's a great idea."

Suddenly, Dick's smartphone rang. "That must be Wally." Dick said, promptly leaving the room.

Raven stared, confused.

"Wally?" Raven asked, and Jason shrugged. The two of them were met with silence that consisted of the two of staring at each other. Finally, Raven broke the silence by laughing. "A staring contest. Great way to start the day."

Jason chuckled. "That was unplanned, yeah."

"Well, I'm off," Raven said, standing up from the bed. "Go accompany Dick or something."

But before Raven could leave the room, Jason grabbed her wrist to stop her. "Wait," Jason said, and Raven turned around to see Jason staring at her with a blank look. She tilted her head, waiting for a response. "…Does Gar make you happy?"

Raven blushed. After Raven told Jason what happened after her date with Gar, Jason was inexplicably overprotective towards Raven. Raven was quite bothered with the surging attention she received from Jason, but decided to let it flow. After all, the two of them often quite meddled with each other's affairs whenever a problem arose.
But ever since Jason revealed that he had an altercation with Gar, Raven took the initiative to fix things herself, fearing that if things were left unaltered, then Jason would be far too possessive over Raven. And to the relief and surprise of Raven, everything worked quite in her favour. Not only did Gar actually like her back, Gar wasn't moving out of Jump City. Raven felt so elated.

Does Gar make Raven happy?

Every time she hears a notification from Gar's messages, Raven immediately feels a small twinge of excitement rushing through her veins. Every time Gar would crack a silly joke to make Raven laugh, Raven's heart would flutter at his attempts. The way Gar would grin once seeing Raven in sight. The way Gar would send her a morning text with a corny joke or picture. The way Gar would invite Raven over just to show her a new piece he learned on the guitar. The way Gar would lean on Raven's shoulder whenever he was tired. Anything Gar would do, whether big or small, was enough for Raven to feel bursts of glee.

So, does Gar make Raven happy? "Yes," Raven finally said, smiling fondly at her thoughts. "Yes, he makes me happy."

Jason simply looked at Raven with an unreadable expression, and after a while, he let go of Raven's wrist with a smirk. "Thank goodness," Jason said, sounding relieved. "I don't think I could handle babying you anymore."

Raven gasped in mock offense and hit Jason's shoulder. "That was on your own volition, Todd-ler."

Jason laughed. "Ouch," Jason said, placing his hand over his chest. "My heart, it burns with pain."

"I'm going now, you dolt."

"Yeah, you better shower," Jason called out once Raven walked out of the room. "You stink!"

Raven laughed, pulling out an obscene hand gesture for Jason to see. Raven couldn't see his expression, but she felt immensely proud of herself once she heard Jason gasp in mock attitude.

After an hour, Raven was finished with her shower. She didn't mean to spend that long in the bathroom, but Raven supposed she was occupied with her thoughts. A shiver ran through her spine. She couldn't believe that in a few hours, people would be over at Dick's house celebrating her birthday. The attendees were a variety of people from the freak list, to a number of juniors, sophomores, freshmen, juniors, and some other extra invites that Raven hadn't bothered to check. It surprised her that much amount of people coming knew what they were celebrating and weren't bothered.

So much has changed, Raven thought to herself, and for the better too.

Raven took one last look in the mirror. Before coming over to Jason's, Jason specifically told her to bring some "decent-looking clothes to wear and not some hipster-looking goth kind of crap" clothes. Raven, not sure what exactly Jason meant, simply chose a blue draped neck top and black pants. There wasn't any specified dress code, but Raven was sure that no one would dress over the top for everyone would most likely fall in the pool at some point of the party. Raven decided against putting any make up now, as she was certain it'd be smudged in a few hours even before the party.

She tilted her head. Honestly, Raven couldn't remember when she dressed up for a birthday party on her own request. The closest thing she could remember was her failed joint birthday party with Kitten when she was six. Raven laughed bitterly. She wondered what Kitten was doing right now.

Raven wasn't oblivious; she knew that Gar's party has taken a toll on Kitten's mental health. Not that
she cared – after seeing Kitten's desperate attempts to regain party guests, Raven wasn't sure exactly why she was anxious of Kitten's moves against the party. For some reason, it was satisfying to see people unbothered with Kitten's antics. Kitten has been so domineering throughout high school, that it was nice for Raven to see that Kitten wasn't exactly influential anymore. Raven tried to set aside any hatred between the two of them, to simply ignore everything that has happened between the two of them, but one listen of Kitten's sinister laugh was enough for Raven to dream of snapping Kitten into two. Raven was ever so grateful for her inner patience that she thought she never had.

Regardless, Raven hoped that one day, Kitten would wake up and realize how monstrous she has been to everyone. Maybe it would be today.

After cleaning her mess, Raven turned off the bathroom lights and left. She headed to the living room, and was pleasantly surprised once she saw the furniture pushed away with a platform to perform in the front. Raven saw Dick talking to Wally and two other people she recognized as Charlie from Pre-Calculus and Isaiah from English. Just as she was staring, Isaiah blindly turned his head, and smiled once he saw Raven.

"Hey, Raven!" Isaiah called out, and Raven headed to the four of them, noticing a bunch of technical set up in her view. "Happy birthday."

"Thanks." Raven said, and she said the same to Charlie who greeted her as well.

"Raven," Wally said joyously, and hugged Raven, to which Raven reluctantly returned. "Happy sixteenth!"

"Thanks, Wally," Raven and Wally never conversed much, but Raven did enjoy talking to him in her AP Psychology class about various scientific topics. "What are you guys doing here?"

"We're setting up the main hall," Charlie replied, and Raven wondered exactly who invited him, for she didn't recall anyone being particularly close to him. "Lighting, the stage... Stuff like that."

"Huh?"

Wally gave her a pointed look. "You can't seriously expect us to party in the dark," Wally said, then paused to think. "Well, actually, that'd be cool. Do we have glow sticks?"

"That's not what I meant," Raven said. "I meant, why do we have a stage?" Raven looked at the platform next to her.

Dick stepped in to answer. "The sophomores are performing," Dick replied. "In fact, I think they're practicing right now."

Raven gave it a thought. "Jason's band?" Raven asked, and Dick nodded. "I see. Is everything else ready?"

Isaiah shrugged. "Theatre's ready, yeah?" Everyone but Isaiah and Raven nodded. "The swimming pool is already prepped with stuff and such... Basically, yeah. We just need to test the lights here, set up the stage, and wait for Kole's crew to come in and set up the food."

"I can't believe this is actually happening." Raven muttered to herself, and Wally, who heard her, laughed and patted her on the back.

"Believe it, Raven," Wally said, his voice full of mirth. "It's happening. It's happening right now."

Raven took a second to take in her surroundings. "Where's Jinx?" Raven asked, and Wally
scrunched his eyebrows.

"Why is everyone asking me that?" Raven blinked at how purely curious Wally's voice was.

_Aren't you dating?_ Raven wanted to ask, but decided against it. "Never mind."

Dick raised an eyebrow. "Well," Dick butted in. "As much as it's nice to have you here, Raven, I think I say this on the behalf of everyone when we'd rather keep the element of surprise."

"You're kicking me out."

Wally chuckled. "Kind of, yeah," Wally admitted. "It's weird to set up something for someone right in front of that someone."

Raven scowled. "Where would I go?"

Wally shrugged. "Gar's? I don't know."

"Actually," Isaiah interrupted. "I think he's with Jinx and the seniors setting up the entertainment. He's coming here soon."

"Oh, so that's where Jinx is," Wally said to himself, and Raven was genuinely intrigued at how laidback Wally was regarding Jinx. "But still. It's weird having you here."

"Wow," Raven wheezed out. "I'm being ostracised at my own birthday."

Dick rolled his eyes jokingly. "Sorry, Raven."

"I think I want to stay back and help," Raven said determinedly. "I don't want it all about _me_. Isn't this party about having fun together? I think… I think it'd be best if I contribute too. Otherwise I'd feel like everyone's slaving for me."

The four guys looked at each other, then finally shrugged. "Fine," Dick relented. "But trust us when we tell you to look away. We _still_ want to keep the element of surprise."

Chuckling, Raven accepted, and the five of them resumed working in peace.

xx

_November 2 2014. Kole's house._

"Oh! Friend Kole, the cake looks marvellous!"

Kole blushed at Kori's comment, revelling at how amazing her own work looked. Her idea of a cake consisting of ravens and books was executed perfectly – in a fit of artistic inspiration, Kole simply designed the cake so that a debonair-looking raven bird was standing on top of a stack of books. To ensure representation of the freak list's independence, Kole, with the help of Kori, made nine more miniature birds coloured with every member of the freak list's favourite colour. Some people, like Jericho and Kori, had the same favourite colour, so Kole decided to add some more defining elements such as their hairstyles. Kole smiled. The cake was perfect.

"Gee, Kori, thanks," Kole said, and she looked to the left of her own cake and saw a beautifully adorned cupcake tower made by Gnarrk and Jericho. She sighed in fascination. "The tower looks amazing, boys."

Gnarrk and Jericho, who were standing in front of Kole and Kori, simply smiled and blushed.
"Thank you." Jericho signed.

Kole smiled at her best friend, and signed back: "You're welcome."

"Shall we place the desserts in their cases of protection?" Kori suggested, and Jericho nodded, walking to retrieve the cases.

"Hey." Kole said, watching Jericho and Gnarrk carefully place the desserts in their cases. "What time is it?"

"It is four-thirty," Kori said. "I think we should head over right now."

Kole nodded, agreeing. "Sure," Kole said. "I'll tell the others in the living room."

Kori smiled, and proceeded to help the boys wrap the other foods, while Kole headed out of the kitchen. After she heard that the freshmen of the recycling club had problems agreeing with a location to meet up in to work on the birthday mural, Kole proposed that the freshmen work in her house instead. Lorena, who was dating Eddie of sophomore year, asked if it was alright for the sophomore band to prepare in Kole's house as well, and Kole agreed, thinking it would be a good idea if many people prepared at the same spot.

Kole walked into the living room to see the freshmen covering their finished artwork with black cloth. On the other side of the room, Kiran of the sophomore band seemed to be practicing singing, with other members of the band practicing their own acapella noises. Kole quirked an eyebrow. She didn't know the sophomores very well, but after getting to know them prior the party, Kole found them to be extremely good company. She blushed at Jason's presence, slightly guilty and tempted to confess to him that he was a recurring topic of gossip during the recycling club, but she decided against it.

Kole, noticing that the school had a lack of promotion for community service projects, decided to open up a community service club that would operate right after fall break. Following the school rule of requiring a minimum of eight people to start a club, Kole was immensely relieved when the freshmen and the sophomores in her house agreed to joining.

"Hey guys," Kole said, attracting the attention of everyone in the room. "We should go – it takes half an hour from here to Dick's house!"

Humming in agreement, everyone in the room wrapped up what they were doing and headed out of the house, with the freshmen slightly bantering on methods of delivering their oversized mural to their destination.

Satisfied, Kole returned to the kitchen, happy that the food supply was ready to be brought. "Guys," Kole said, her voice airy. Her three friends looked at her in interest. "I am so excited!"

Kori squealed, and immediately ran over to Kole's side. The two of them jumped up and down, squealing in excitement, and once they calmed down, Kole and Kori giggled. "I, too, am feeling the excitement!" Kori said. "Have you greeted friend Raven the 'happy birthday'?"

Kole's face fell. "Oh," Kole said. "No, I haven't! But I suppose I will wait until I see her in person."

"Agreed." Kori said.

"I have," Jericho signed. "On Facebook. She says she cannot wait to see what you have prepared and help us out."
"Gnarrk." Gnarrk supplied, and Kole raised an eyebrow.

"You greeted Raven already, too?" Kole asked Gnarrk, and Gnarrk nodded in response. Kori and Kole pouted.

"Are we bad friends?" Kori asked, and Kole shook her head no, reassuring Kori that an in-person greeting would be much more meaningful.

The four of them proceeded to carefully bring the food supply to Gnarrk's van. Once they finished, the four of them settled down inside the van, with Kole being interrupted from her buzzing cell phone.

"Hold on," Kole said, picking up the call. "Hello?"

"Kole!" Gar's voice said at the other end of the line, and Kole immediately put her phone on speaker, mouthing to everyone that it was Gar. "Are you guys coming over?"

"Hello, friend Gar!" Kori chirped in, and Gar laughed, greeting Kori back.

"Yeah," Kole answered. "We might be there around five fifteen? Gnarrk's driving right now. What's up?"

"Is it weird of me to say that I'm completely nervous?"

Kori giggled. "Do not be nervous, friend Gar!" Kori said. "I have faith that everything will go well in the end."

"Thanks," Gar paused. "I just called to check in. I'm with Jinx right now — " — Hey. — " And some other seniors. We'll be reaching in just... Right now, actually. Remember to enter from the back door, yeah?"

"Yeah, Gar, we've heard it all from the almighty leader," Kole said, and giggled slightly at her nickname for Dick. "See you there!"

"Bye!"

With that, Gar hung up, and the four of them conversed together again. Their conversation fell short, however, when Kori immediately pointed out her view. "Friends! Is that Bette and Rose?"

Kole, not believing what Kori said for they just passed the local park, tilted her head to see Kori's view, and gasped. "What are they doing there?"

"They are attending the party of Kitten, are they not?"

"Yeah," Kole said. "But the local park is like a fifteen minute drive to Kitten's house. What are they doing there?"

"How odd," Kori said, her voice tracing with confusion. "Are they not attending the party of Kitten?"

"Who knows," Kole said, relaxing back in her seat. "Maybe they got sick of Kitten."

xx

Kitten was fuming. It was eight past five, and only a total of thirty people were present. That was a stark difference from last year's seventy, and Kitten felt like as if she wanted to faint. She had a sinking feeling in her stomach that her party was going to be a flop, and Kitten didn't like that feeling at all.

"Where is everybody?!" Kitten whined, and was further annoyed when Selinda shrugged next to her. Kitten groaned. Kitten had a tendency to start her parties early, so even though her invitation said five, it was usually customary for her guests to appear thirty minutes earlier. But after moments and moments of waiting outside of the mansion's gates for guests, Kitten grew increasingly impatient. Every car, every van, every…one who passed by Kitten's house would raise her hopes up and then inevitably crush it when she realized that people were only passing by her house to get to Grayson's house.

Kitten frowned to herself. Honestly, it was so weird. Everyone used to be on their knees asking about details about her grand party and buzzing in excitement about how amazing Kitten's birthday party would be, and now every time Kitten even tried to approach the subject of her party, people would just give her a small smile telling her that they'd "think about it".

"Well?!" Kitten demanded. "Bette and Rose are supposed to be here any second, where are they now?!"

"Oh my gosh, Kitty," Selinda said, and Kitten narrowed her eyes at how exasperated Selinda sounded. "I don't know. Stop asking me and ask them."

Kitten tilted her head in annoyance. "I have been, like, texting them since forever!" Kitten exclaimed, and she didn't miss how Selinda shot her brother an annoyed look, to which her brother responded with a similar sentiment. "Is everyone going to the freak party?!

Kitten paused in her tracks, and widened her eyes. "Oh my gosh," Kitten said, feeling as if she had a grand epiphany. "No one's going to my party because they're all going to the others!"

"Or maybe," Baran supplied. "Less people are interested in going to parties this year. It's junior year."

"Bull," Kitten spat. "Everyone was dying to go to my party until that freak party showed up. What's the difference now?"

"Jeez Kitten," Baran groaned, and Kitten watched Selinda try to pacify her own brother to no avail. "Not everyone wants to go to any of the parties because you made it such a big deal!"

"What do you mean?"

"He means nothing," Selinda interrupted. "Right, Baran?"

"I don't get why you're so hyped up about this party," Baran said, completely ignoring everything his sister said to his sister's dismay. "Some people are going to the other party, some people are going to this, and some people just can't give a rat's ass about this whole party war going on! People are already here, Kitten, can't we start the party already?"

"No!" Kitten shrieked. "I invited everyone. Well, except the list, of course, but that's not my point. Everyone usually goes to my party, and now that they have a choice, they're actually picking the freak party over mine?! Are they insane?! And where are the others? Bette? Rose? Oh my gosh, I'm pretty sure they're with that ugly, dumb, stupid backstabber Gemma in that freak party right now!"

"Kitty!" Selinda exclaimed. "There's no need to be mean!"
Kitten eyed Selinda curiously. "Are you serious?" Kitten said. "What is this, breaking news, the Flinders twins are now pro-Gemma? Don't try to deny this, I know you have this weird best friend obsession with Gemma and I know your own brother has a freaky crush on her, which, by the way, Gemma will never reciprocate because you're a freak! Both of you are freaks!"

Baran narrowed his eyes. "Well maybe Selinda and I should just go to the other freak party then! Maybe we'd be more respected there!"

Kitten ignored the other party guests crowding in to see what was going on. "Don't you dare leave my party for theirs!"

"Kitty," Selinda said, her voice quavering with worry. "Please calm down. The people coming in the other party are just, freaks, right? They're not worth it… Please, Kitty, look around. Can we just party now? Look, everyone is staring."

Kitten couldn't calm down. Every thought that popped in her head was enough for Kitten to wish impending doom on everyone. She hated knowing that her party wasn't the centre of attention anymore. She hated that people cared less about Kitten. She hated it, and she hated that she couldn't do anything about it.

Unless…

"Attention!" Kitten said loudly, attracting the attention of all of her guests. "This party is now postponed."

Kitten ignored the gasps and murmurs she generated across her surroundings, and proceeded to text someone of importance. A few minutes later, a long, sleek, fuchsia-coloured limousine drove past Kitten's front yard, and stopped once Kitten held up her hand. Everyone watched with intent curiosity, wondering what Kitten was up to this time.

Selinda was the first to speak up. "Kitty… What are you doing?"

Kitten looked at Selinda with fierce determination before getting inside her limousine. "I'm bringing back my people," Kitten said. "Anyone who wants to fix the atrocity before us will join me."

Once she finished speaking, everyone started rushing in to the lengthy limousine. Kitten was half-sure that people were more interested in the fact that they got to ride a limousine, but she couldn't care less. She needed to fix things, fast.

xx

November 2 2014. Grayson's house.

Kitten stepped out of her limousine, with everyone else behind her following suit. She marched towards Grayson's front yard, surprised when she learned that their party hasn't started and everybody was just collectively gathering outside, waiting for the front doors to open. Kitten took a moment to observe the other party's guests. She felt a rush of anger flow inside her body when she realized that there were more people in this party. Not as much as Kitten had before, but it could definitely happen. And Kitten was not letting that happen.

She scanned through her view, trying to find someone to talk to (or rather, yell at, but Kitten would like to see herself as composed). She tried looking for slightly ashy-green hair throughout the sea of people, and frowned when she couldn't. Kitten did, however, spot Raven in one area, talking to Wally and Dick. Frowning, she headed over Raven's spot and shoved her, making everyone gasp in shock.
"You bitch!" Kitten shrieked, and before she could push Raven any further, Wally and Dick stepped in front of Raven, with some other people gathering closer to see the action.

"Whoa, Walker," Wally said, holding up both of his arms while Dick held Raven's forearm. "Back off."

"Go screw yourself, West," Kitten spat. "This is between me and Roth."

Kitten knew perfectly well that it wasn't Raven who started the party. It wasn't Raven who invited a bunch of other people. It wasn't Raven who stole Kitten's party guests away. But Raven was the reason for the existence of the party, and that was enough for Kitten to be angry.

"You're a selfish, self-righteous bitch!" Kitten exclaimed, struggling to get past through Wally who was now driving her away with his hands. "Jeez, West, I get it, get off of me!"

Wally gave up trying to restrict Kitten from moving closer, and moved next to Raven, who let go of Dick's hold. "Are you talking about yourself?" Raven bravely said, and Kitten resented the howls generated from the spectators.

"How many people are in this party?!" Kitten demanded.

"Why is that important?" Dick asked, his voice calm.

"Just for your information, you freak," Kitten spat at Raven. "I have significantly less people in my party this year. Want to guess why?"

"People realized how much of a monstrous individual you are lately?"

Kitten's nostrils flared. "Because you," Kitten pointed a finger at Raven. "Stole my guests away. You can't help but be selfish and take my friends away! I can't believe you're being so inconsiderate right now!"

Raven's eyebrows shot up. "Are you listening to yourself right now?" Raven asked drily. "You have your own party and we have our own. Mind your own business and bring your mess somewhere else."

"Look at yourself!" Kitten said, her voice rising. "How could anyone want to spend time with you? You did something to everyone. You poisoned them!"

"What's going on?"

Kitten immediately turned around to see the culprit in crime. Gar Logan. The starter of it all. Kitten had to restrain herself from lunging at him. "You," Kitten said venomously, pointing at Gar with an intricately manicured finger. "You started this. You took a bunch of rag-tags and formed some kind of… freak cult!"

Gar eyed her confusedly. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about your party, you idiot!" Kitten screeched. "You took my people away for this dumb excuse of a party. What did you do, huh? Did you poison people? Blackmail? Threats? What the hell did you do?!"

"Are you serious?" Gar said, his voice disbelieving. "All those methods are stuff that you'd try! Newsflash, Kitten, I – we – didn't do anything. People came here because they wanted to, nothing else!"
Kitten scoffed. "Am I supposed to believe you?" she said. "For years people have been dying for the day that is my birthday. And suddenly you come around, gathering a revolution, for what? You've been strutting around acting as if I'm the bully, but no. I'm the damn martyr. I've been doing everyone well throughout my whole life, and this is how everyone repays me? By going to this freak party? And most importantly, you, Garfield Logan, you stole my friends away."

"Kitten, just leave."

Kitten turned to see Gemma looking at her in disdain. Kitten scoffed.

"I should've known you're here," Kitten said. "You've always had a thing against me."

"Do you want to know why?" Gemma shrieked, and everyone fell silent. Everyone gathered around the scene, forming a quasi-semicircle with Gemma and Kitten in the middle. Kitten's party attendees were at the side, watching at a close distance with apprehension in their eyes. Kitten hated it.

"I've been friends with you since freshman year," Gemma began, and Kitten noticed that her voice had a French lilt to it. Kitten scrunched her eyebrows. "And I thought that you were great. You were so nice to me back then and then one day you create this grand party and I was so excited. But then the next day you publish a list of names that you didn't allow to go to your party and you ruined their lives. And even though I feel guilty now, I joined in because maybe I thought that the list was actually legitimate and you had a point. Later in sophomore year, however, you publish another list with descriptions and the past me thought it was funny, but now I think it's a low blow. Then you continue to do the same thing again this year.

"It sickens me that I thought it was funny. That I thought you were right and everyone else here is a freak. But you know what, Kitten? You need to wake up and realize that not everything is about you! I don't know what you see or think in that list, but it's not everything. I'm standing here right now wondering why all of us let that stupid list rule us. Why we ever let you control us. Because I'm sick of it! We're all sick of it!

"You stomp in here wondering why people aren't going to your party. Well, let me tell you why. It's because you are a bitch! Because you are a bully! And most importantly, because you're a hypocrite. You walk around asking why you're the victim. Look around, Kitten! We're the victim here! We're the victim of your own selfishness, of your own... your own bitchiness! Not everyone wants to go to your party because you've turned into a monster. And by the way? If you want people to go to your party, terrorizing them with words and inventions is not the way! You want to know the best way? It's by friendship. It's by respect. And generally, it's by being a nice person!"

Gemma stopped, and walked away to find something. Kitten, feeling hot tears in the corner of her eyes, wiped them away and stomped her foot.

"How dare you--"

"I'm not finished." Gemma hissed, now speaking in her natural French accent rather than her fake Californian one. She returned with a chair in her hand, and placed it on the floor. Gemma shot Kitten one more dirty look, before standing on the chair, adjusting a bit from the instability caused by her high heels. Once Gemma settled on the chair she spoke up.

"My name is Gemma de Mille," Gemma began. "And I'm standing here before all of you to tell you that I should be on the freak list. You know why? I'm a freak! For years I've been trying to hide my French accent for an American one and I never felt good about it. I cried for three days watching Blue is the Warmest Colour and I'm scared of turtles. I'm a freak and I'm proud!"
Gemma hopped off the chair, and waited for a response. Everybody stayed still in their place, unsure of what to make of what just happened. Suddenly, someone stepped out from the crowd, and stood on top of the chair.

"I'm Jaime Reyes," Kitten heard the sophomore crowd cheer. "I sometimes talk to myself when I'm nervous? Or sometimes when I'm not… Uh, the point is, I'm a freak, sometimes. And sometimes I'm proud!"

And with that, a total of twelve other people stepped on the chair to speak up.

"I'm Kole Weathers, and I love ice. I'm a freak and proud!"

"I am Kori Anders, and I have a pet silkworm. He is the Silkie and I love him the way he loves me, even though I am a freak!"

"Isaiah Crockett here, and uh, I actually have this weird burn scar across my torso? I'm a freak."

"I'm Jinx, and I'm freaky fabulous!"

"I'm Billy Numerous and I hate studying… Oh, that's normal? Whatever. I'm still a freak, though!"

"I'm Victor Stone and I dreamt that I married a toaster once…"

"I'm Dick Grayson, I think I'm too bossy sometimes."

"I'm a freak!"

"And I'm proud!"

There were so much more. Even Roy, Roy freaking Harper, stood on the chair. Kitten gritted her teeth.

"I get it!" Kitten exploded, facing the crowd. "All of you are freaks! See? But some of you still have a chance. Remove yourself from the presence of all these freaks!"

Kitten heaved heavy breaths, waiting for someone to react. After a while, Kitten felt herself undergo extreme stress when no one did. However, Kitten's anxieties were mitigated when Selinda walked towards the centre, but for a reason Kitten was not expecting.

"I'm sorry Kitten," Selinda said with a sad smile, and Kitten felt her blood boil when she saw Selinda kiss Gemma on the cheek. Selinda murmured an apology and stood up on the chair with the help of Gemma, and spoke. "Kitty, I remember you as my best friend… I'm so sorry to say this, but you're being extremely cruel lately. Why can't you let people decide how they want to have fun? Who they want to hang out with? I've had so much fun with you throughout high school and it scares me to say this but… Not everything is about you.

"I'm Selinda Flinders," Selinda raised her voice, looking at the crowd. "I'm allergic to peanuts, and I love eating pie. I get scared in the dark, I sleep with a nightlight, and I got teased growing up with my accent. I am seen as a freak, and that annoyed me so much that it was easier for me to call other people freaks too. But you know what? I'm sick of everything. I'm sick of this, I'm sick of that… I'm tired of fighting. That is why I'm here, right now, coming out of the closet as a freak. A freak, and proud!"

Selinda stepped off the chair, and the crowd cheered, with her brother Baran lifting Selinda off the ground to carry her from his shoulders.
Kitten couldn't believe what was happening. All her friends… Her preparation… It all seemed futile now. Kitten wiped an angry tear off her face, not caring if she smudged her makeup or not.

"Kitten," Kitten heard Gar say, but she didn't dare turn around. "You can be happy. All you have to do is learn to love others like you love yourself."

Kitten was silent. Was Gar right? Was Kitten the one subconsciously pushing her friends away?

*Of course not*, Kitten thought angrily. With that, she turned around and screamed.

"Mikron!" Kitten shrieked, and Mikron immediately winced. "Give me the bombs."

Kitten ignored the shocked murmurs and patiently waited for Mikron to hand her the stink bombs. Mikron, seemingly docile, walked over Kitten and held out his hand to reveal one of their made stink bombs. Kitten reached out to grab it, but suddenly, Mikron pulled back and sneered.

"Are you deaf?!" Kitten shrieked. "Give it to me, now!"

"No." Mikron said angrily, and Kitten took a slight step back, surprised. "I am done with your cruddy, snot-faced, dumb plans! You want an evil genius, fine. But you've messed with the wrong evil genius."

Kitten watched in horror as Mikron threw the stink bomb on the ground, waiting for the bomb to… do nothing?

"I broke it," Mikron explained, looking at the ground in disdain. "Because it sucked! And I am not being held accountable for some crap invention!"

Kitten felt like breaking down.

"Kitten," Dick said, interrupting the scene. "I think it's time for you to leave."

Kitten huffed. "You know what?" Kitten said, throwing her hands up in the air. "I'll leave. And once I do, all of you will regret what just happened today. Come on, let's go."

Kitten turned on her heel, and walked away, expecting her party guests to do the same. But when Kitten realized that the only footsteps to be heard was her own, she stopped in her tracks and turned around. "Seriously?" Kitten asked.

Kitten wanted to throw a tantrum. She considered reaching down to take off her stilettos and throw both of them at Raven and Gar. She considered pushing everyone in her way and hurting anyone who resisted. She considered pulling her party guests into her limousine so that she could save face.

But Kitten couldn't.

It was hard to accept, and Kitten didn't want to accept, but…

Kitten lost.

Kitten lost her friends, Kitten lost her party, and most importantly, Kitten lost her dignity. Kitten wanted to ask Raven why Raven always ended up stealing whatever was meaningful to Kitten. But maybe, Kitten had nothing meaningful.

It was an awful, awful feeling. To feel *alone*, to feel *ridiculed*. Kitten would fight back, but she wasn't stupid. She knew any attempts to do so would be futile – no one would be there to support her. Sighing, Kitten bit her lip, then spoke up in a quiet voice.
"You win."

Kitten saw Raven eye Gar questioningly, to which Gar responded with a confounded expression. Raven walked closer, and she held up a hand.

"This was never a competition, Kitten."

"It doesn't matter," Kitten responded. "You just… win."

The two of them fell silent, and Kitten had the unnerving urge to whack Raven on the head. However, Kitten was tired. All she did next surprised everyone.

"Happy birthday, Raven."

With that, Kitten walked away. Her mind told Kitten to fight. But Kitten was lethargic. She considered sobbing on her way home. But even that seemed tiring. With a sigh, Kitten entered her car, but not before hearing a soft whisper from Raven's lips:

"Happy birthday, Kitten."

xx


Everyone was in shock. Raven, particularly, had no idea how to decipher what just happened. Did Kitten just… give up? Would Kitten return for something more? For some reason, Raven couldn't imagine Kitten returning. She seemed… hopeless. A minor part of Raven felt bad for Kitten, but essentially, Raven thought what happened was well-deserved. Raven hoped that Kitten would remain functional, however. She wouldn't want to be pinned as the main reason of Kitten's mental breakdown.

Raven turned around to see everyone stare back at her with confounded expressions. Raven looked at her watch. Five fifty-seven. Raven realized that not everyone attending their party was present in the crowd. Some actually stayed back to set up the party, and Raven chuckled at just how much they were missing out.

Finally, Wally stepped in to break the silence. "Okay, so that was weird," a collective hum of agreements sprung out. "But everything inside has been ready for a while, so… Let's party!"

Everyone walked in the house, with the new unexpected guests settling in buzzes of excited murmurs and giggles. Finally entering the house, Raven felt herself gasp in shock once she saw the main hall.

The living room was finely decorated with a variety of banners, balloons, and confetti. The lights that were put up seemed to be incandescently colouring the room with various sets of hues that seemed to change in periods of time. The sofas were pushed back to the edges of the room to maximize space on the dance floor, and next to the left of the living room Raven could see the kitchen intricately adorned with the food supply. To her left was a miniature snack bar and to her right was a corner for the DJ to work with, whoever the DJ was.

But the one thing that entranced Raven was the platform ahead of her. As opposed to the white wall Raven saw earlier, the wall was now covered with black satin sheets which made Raven wonder what was behind it. In front of the wall was a band setup, with the drum set located in the middle, the keyboard on the right and the two guitars placed on the left. Raven took quick note of the two microphones nearby the front of the drum set.
Raven was amazed. She *did* see the set up while she was working with Dick, Wally, Charlie, and Isaiah earlier in the day, but to see it in action was fascinating. Raven smiled. Raven knew the party would be spectacular, but what she was witnessing right now was beyond words. Raven never felt so captivated.

Suddenly, a loud pang rang from the platform, gathering everyone's attention. Raven made sure to sneak in a spot in front of the audience. As she settled in a place, she tried looking for Gar. Honestly, Raven hasn't talked to Gar throughout her birthday, and although Raven understood that Gar probably was saving time for something more special, Raven longed for the moment where the two of them could be alone.

After deciding that she'd find Gar later, Raven saw Roy and Garth scuttle on the platform, with the sophomore band preparing for their acts. Raven tilted her head, wondering if it was planned for Roy and Garth to host the parties, or if it was a spur of the moment kind of thing. Regardless, Raven was curious.

"Hey there!" Garth exclaimed, and everyone cheered. "So even with whatever happened just now… Welcome to the 'Pro-Freak' party! I'm Garth and here's my friend Roy;"

"But to start off the night," Roy supplied, and Raven felt slightly unnerved when Roy was looking straight at her. "Let's remember what today is. Happy birthday Raven!"

Raven blushed at all the howls and cheers generated from the crowd, unsure of how to respond.

"So we've got an interesting party ahead of us," Roy began. "We've got the sophomore band behind us preparing to perform some awesome songs later, and some other special words to be said by special people."

"After the speeches, then it's party time! Remember to check the map," Garth said, pointing to the poster on the left wall near the platform. "There's the entertainment room, the backyard, the theatre, and of course, this living room right now to enjoy the night! And some other places if you're feeling mischievous. Just a reminder though, if you decide to hop in the swimming pool in the backyard, make sure to completely dry yourself before entering back in!"

"Alright, mother Garth," Roy said slyly, earning a few chuckles from the crowd and a glare from Garth. "We heard the rules, we heard the crazy cat, and we heard… Literally everything, really. Let's start the party!"

With that, Roy and Garth left the stage, leaving the sophomore band ready to perform. Raven watched the crowd cheer, and smiled when she saw Dick stand next to her with a smile on his face. "Everything looks amazing," Raven commented, and Dick grinned. "Thank you for organizing almost everything."

"It was no problem," Dick said, then he slightly frowned. "You're okay, right? With everything that just happened?"

Raven, however, simply chuckled. "I'm good, actually," Raven said. "Relaxed."

"That's good."

"Yeah," Raven said. "Ready to see Jason inevitably fail with the drums?"

Dick snorted at Raven's insult thrown at his brother. "Yes."

"Hi everyone!" Dick and Raven looked up to see Kiran of the band speak into the microphone. "I'm
Kiran Singh, and the two guitarists to my right is Eddie Bloomberg and Jaime Reyes. Our wonderful keyboardist is Donna Troy, and the drummer behind is Jason Todd. With the formalities aside, it is my pleasure to introduce all of you to our sophomore band, *The Titans*!

Raven smiled. "But before we actually perform as a band…" Kiran trailed off, a glint of mischievousness apparent in her eyes. "I want to invite all of you to sing a very important song with us tonight. Raven, I've had so much fun knowing you throughout high school and more fun preparing for this party. This one's for you."

With that, Kiran started to sing a few verses of 'Happy Birthday', with the crowd either signing along or clapping in rhythm. Raven felt her cheeks heat up with fascination. After Kiran finished singing, the stage became quiet. After a while, however, Jason livened up the stage again with tapping his drumsticks together three times. The band then progressed into a lively remix of the traditional festive song, with Kiran's singing stopping occasionally for the two guitarists to start their solo. After the guitar's solo, Donna stole the stage away with her tremendous display of skilled musicianship with the keyboard. Once Donna finished her part, the band was left with a quieter, yet melodic tune from the guitars and the keyboard, with Jason's drumming dominating the stage. Kiran then sang again.

"Happy birthday to you!" The song finished, and the crowd was howling in joy, with the band uttering *thank you's* to the crowd. Raven was entranced. What Raven heard from the band was experimental music, and even though Jason would often talk about it to Raven, Raven never bothered to explore the genre on her own. Raven felt extremely privileged to find out how amazing experimental music could be.

"Thank you!" Kiran said to the microphone. "Our next song is…"

The crowd ended up dancing in their places or singing along to the songs. The band performed a total of three songs, and whenever Raven had the chance, she would smirk at Jason with a thumbs up, while Jason would respond with an equally matched smirk and a wink. The band was so in sync with each other – it was like as if every quirk of each member complemented well to the identity of the musical group. Raven wondered why Jason didn't bring up his band much in their conversations. They were amazingly skilled. And much to her delight, Jason was extremely talented with the drums. It made her laugh inside thinking of all the times Jason insisted that he wasn't that great using the drums.

As the band was finishing their last song, Gar stepped walked to the platform, looking at Raven with a smile. Raven smiled back, her heart fluttering. Gar looked extremely splendid tonight – it turns out, when Gar couldn't hang out with Raven the day before, he was actually getting his hair done by dying it green, getting rid of the ashy-green coloured hair that he so resented before. Raven actually remembered a fleeting glance at Gar during the altercation with Kitten earlier in the day, but Raven was much more occupied with the occasion rather than the colour of Gar's hair. Now that Raven had the chance to view Gar, Raven found it extremely endearing how Gar dressed up for the occasion. He was wearing a green dress shirt with brown pants, and Raven made a mental note to insult Gar about how he looked like a tree.

Kiran finished the song, and cried out a few formalities to the crowd, which were chanting words of appreciation. Smiling, Raven watched Kiran step aside for Gar to speak in front of the microphone.

"Hey guys," Gar said happily, and the crowd howled in response. "So, uh, I'm Gar. Most of you know me as the one who started this all, but really, this party could have never happened without the help of my friends. Thanks, by the way. Anyway, I've only been here for a short amount of time, but I really enjoyed my time here so far. I just want to say that we all have our quirks here and sometimes we're called out on it but in the end, it's *ourselves* who define us, not anybody else. And to Raven…"
I have a lot to say but I'll keep it for later. All I wanna say now though is happy birthday. You look beautiful tonight.

As Gar left the stage, Raven felt her face furiously redden as she heard the audience express their delight over what just happened. Raven saw Dick walk away with a smirk, leaving space for Gar to stand next to her. Gar gave a Raven a hug once they were near, and let go once somebody told them to 'get a room!'. "Happy birthday." Gar said once again, and Raven gave a gentle smile, holding his hand.

"Thanks."

"Aww," Roy interrupted their moment as he cooed into the microphone. "That was so sweet. Well, moving on, we have –"

"Wait," Raven eyed Jason with a quirked eyebrow, who walked over to the microphone to say something. "I have something to say."

When Raven urged Jason to continue with a small nod, Jason spoke up.

"I don't want this to sound like some maid of honour speech in some wedding," Jason said lightly, making the crowd giggle. "But uh, remember how we sat next to each other in Algebra 2 last year? I don't think you remember this, but on a Friday you told me that your birthday was on the next day. I said, 'well why should I care?', and you gave me a look and told me that I should care because you had a grand birthday party prepared from your friends. At the time, of course I thought that was bull and you were obviously being sarcastic. But then, seeing the situation now, it's funny.

"Raven, you are my best friend. You are so brave, and even though I shiver sometimes whenever I'm around you because you're so cold, I know you have a golden heart. I am so happy to see that everyone in here has pushed aside their differences and saw you who you really are – a human being. You're flawed, but you're perfectly flawed. I don't think I can ever ask for a better friend in the entire universe and… yeah. I can only be happy if you're happy."

Jason then turned his attention to Gar. "So I'm going to be super brotherly here and give you a warning." Jason said half-jokingly, and everyone in the room laughed. "If you ever dare to hurt Raven in any form ever, the last thing you'll see in your life would be me laughing at your death."

Jason chuckled. "But yeah. Gar, I admire you for setting this whole party up… Everything. Not only had you made my best friend happier than I've ever seen her… Which is probably, like, never… but you also united a bunch of people for the right cause. It's… Amazing. Yeah, amazing. So I propose that everyone give a round of applause for this tree over here."

Raven squeezed, Gar's hand, who revelled in the applause generated across the room. Raven felt slightly annoyed that Jason was the first one to call Gar a tree, but she gave Jason a grin regardless, to which Jason returned with his trademark smirk.

Once the applause died, Jason spoke again. "Well that's my impromptu speech. I want to show one more thing," Jason nodded at Eddie and Jaime, who immediately removed the black satin covering the wall, revealing a beautifully ornamented mural with recycled bottle caps, showing a figure of a raven flying through the forest. Raven widened her eyes, not believing the masterwork right in front of her. "So as ambiguously talented as I am, I did not make that thing behind me. That credit goes to the recycling club over there. Hope you like it.

"And one final thing. You juniors are kind of weird. But keep doing you, I guess," with that, Jason let go of the microphone and placed it back on its stand. Suddenly, Kole and Jericho walked in front of the platform, placing a food trolley in the middle, with Kole and Kori's raven cake on top of it.
Everyone gasped at the sight of it. "Lastly, happy birthday, Raven."

"Blow the candles," Jericho signed to Raven, and Raven nodded slowly with a smile, walking behind the trolley so that she was facing the crowd. "Happy birthday."

"Thank you," Raven signed back, though she felt clumsy doing so as she hasn't practiced her sign language in a while. "And thanks, Jason. To everyone. Um, I don't want to delay the party anymore with some more words so…"

Raven blew the candles. Once she stood up straight again, Kole and Jericho threw her a hug from both sides, taking Raven aback. After a while, the two let her go, and Raven heard Roy shouting from behind her: "Let's party!"

As the guests scuttled to get some cake, Raven felt herself become dragged from the hand by someone. Once the two of them broke free from the crowd, the two went out to the backyard, and although Raven was fascinated by the beautiful illumination from the night lights, she playfully scowled at the culprit.

Gar laughed, and brought her closer by wrapping his arms around her waist. Raven simply sighed in relaxation as she rested her head on his shoulder. The two of them remained in their quasi-hug until Gar pulled away, holding her hands.

"You look weird," Gar said lightly, bopping her nose as Raven gave him a grimace. "I mean, you look great, but you also look weird."

"Thanks," Raven said sarcastically, letting go of Gar's hold. "I guess I'm just weirded out at how everything turned out."

"You mean with Kitten and then your birthday celebration?" Raven nodded. "Unbelievable, right? Nah. I think you have to have faith in yourself that everything will be alright in your favour. That's what Rita would say to me all the time."

"Everything around us, it's real?"

"Yes."

"It's not some big joke?"

"Gosh, no," Gar said, pulling Raven closer. He ran his hand through her arm and finally settled on the back of Raven's neck. Gar breathed out a sigh of relief. "Nothing's a joke here."

Gar leaned in, his lips just a few distances away from Raven's… And inevitably pulled away once someone obtrusively interrupted.

"Hey guys!" Dick said, and once he realized what was going on, cleared his throat and blushed. "Oops."

"What do you want, Dick?" Raven grumbled, and Dick glared at the usage of his name.

"Vic's been looking for the two of you," Dick explained. "There's a photo booth in the entertainment room, and he wants a group photo of us five before everyone else takes a spot!"

Dick ran off, expecting Raven and Gar to do the same. Raven and Gar reluctantly followed, with Raven mumbling under her breath how Dick's nickname was a perfect description for their friend, making Gar chortle and Dick groan.
November 2 2014. Local park.

Kole tended to skip whenever she was happy.

The party, much to everyone's relief, was an immediate success, despite the previous quarrels from earlier in the day. Kole chuckled. It was weird seeing a shift of influence in just one night, but Kole wasn't complaining.

Kole headed to the store. Seeing that the party had run out of candies to put in the candy bowl, Kole took the initiative to buy some from a convenience shop. The closest convenience store near Dick's house was the one in the local park, so Kole headed there. As she passed by the benches, Kole spotted a blonde female figure weeping while sitting. Kole took a step closer, and was pleasantly surprised once she found out who it was.

"Kitten?"

Kitten looked up and Kole was surprised that Kitten's makeup wasn't destroyed entirely. "Go away."

Instead of running off, however, Kole simply took a seat next to Kitten, ignoring Kitten's malicious growls. After a while, however, Kitten broke down sobbing.

Kole didn't do anything, though. She simply sat there, waiting for Kitten to calm down. After what felt like an eternity, Kitten calmed down, and wiped away her tears.

"Why are you here?" Kitten's voice hitched.

"I'm actually heading to the convenience store," Kole said. "Why are you here?"

"I read online that being one with nature calms you down. I'm testing that out."

You're stupid, Kole wanted to say, but she held back. Instead, she said something else: "Can I ask you a question?"

"You already did."

Kole ignored her. "What was the purpose of the list?"

"You guys are really freaks!"

"Come on."

Kitten sighed. "I don't know. You know how everyone on the list stood out in some way? So people pay more attention to them? Why would I have other people pay attention to people that aren't me?"

Kole raised an eyebrow. "How do I detract attention?"

"I don't know, people like you! You're all environmentally friendly and such," Kitten paused to think. "Remember how you weren't in the list in freshman year and you went to the party with your ice tricks and whatnot? People paid a lot of attention to you there."

Kole chuckled. "I remember," Kole said. "But really, that was the shallowest reason I've ever heard. The list itself was already superficial, but your response really went there."

"Good to know."
"I'm not here to tell you some nice things," Kole said. "Because frankly, I think you deserve everything that happened to you today."

"I know."

"I will tell you to suck it up, though," Kole said, then scrunched her nose. "Wow, I sounded just like Jinx!" Kitten raised an eyebrow. "See, you kind of pushed your friends away. Friends won't come to you anymore but you can make the effort to come to friends. It's not like the entire school population went to the party, so you're not losing all hope. The recycling club may not be ideal for you, but I am opening up the community service club after fall break. I'm inviting you to join."

Kitten snorted, and crossed her arms. "Why would I do that?"

"Well first, you need the community service of course," Kitten said. "But really, it's all about practicing selflessness. Spending time for other people instead of yourself. I think it would be a great lesson for you. Plus, I have a community service trip planned to the Dominican Republic to help out with Habitat for Humanity. It'll be cool!"

Kitten fell silent, deep in thought. Then, she finally responded. "I'll think about it."

Kole huffed. "Actually, you're not going to think about it," Kole said. "You're going to join the club, and you're going to love it."

Kitten gave out a hollow laugh, then shook her head. "Fine. What other choice do I have?"

Smiling, Kole stood up from her seat, and before she left, Kole asked Kitten another question. "Want to join me to the store?"

"No," Kitten said.

"Well, happy birthday, then."

"Thanks," Kitten said, and before Kole could walk any further, Kitten spoke up. "And thanks for just now."

Kole nodded curtly, then left. She wondered how Kitten would do in the community service club.

xx


Jason sat on the doorstep, not willing to socialize with anyone. As the party started, people immediately rushed to his band, complimenting them on their musicianship. Some girls even tried flirting with Jason, dropping not-so-subtle hints about their interest. Jason, desperate to leave the scene, gave the girls a fake number much to their oblivious content, and left.

As Jason wandered around the house to occupy himself, he learnt a lot of things throughout.

For once, Jason learned that Garth was really skilled at being a DJ. So skilled, that Jason saw Kiran, Eddie, and Jaime ask Garth to collaborate with their band in the future. Garth accepted, and Jason was excited for what was going to happen next. Jason learned too that as peculiar as she could be, Kori was actually a great conversationalist, and she was definitely not unattractive. Jason understood why his brother, Dick, was pining over her. Jason also learned that Roy Harper, who Jason never talked to or heard about before, complemented together really well. Jason and Roy playfully bantered along the course of getting to know each other, but when Roy made plans for the two of them to chill
together, Jason knew that he had earned a new, wonderful friend.

But as Jason listened to Roy ramble on about his achievements in the field of archery, Jason's attention gradually migrated to Gar and Raven, who was amiably conversing with two girls Jason recognized as Gemma and Selinda. Jason focused entirely on how Gar and Raven held hands throughout the entire time and throughout the entire course of Jason watching the two of them, Jason only realized in the end that he was holding his breath. It was weird seeing them hold hands. Raven was never a fan of physical contact and although that didn't stop Jason from trying, Raven would always push him away. But to see Raven completely trust another person to hold her hand for a prolonged period of time caught his attention.

As the seniors approached Roy for a game of UNO, Jason took the opportunity to leave.

Jason stared at the lawn in front of him. He sighed. Jason was truly happy for Gar and Raven, but he still couldn't shake off the odd thoughts of 'what-if's circulating in his head. Jason felt a bit resentful towards Gar. Oh, who was he kidding – he completely resented Gar. But Jason knew that as long Gar made Raven happy, Jason would be okay. After all, he loved Raven, but her happiness was much more important.

Jason felt someone else take a seat next to him. He turned his head. "Donna," Jason said, and Donna gave him a smile. "Hello."

Donna tilted her head. "Penny for your thoughts?"

"Please, my thoughts are worth much more than a penny."

Donna laughed. "Sure," Donna said, nudging Jason's shoulder with her hand, and Jason felt himself relax. "So any reason you're out here alone?"

"I'm waiting for my package from space," Jason said jokingly, and laughed when he saw Donna roll her eyes. "1800-Space-Hardware-Store. It's like the IKEA of space."

"Oh? And what exactly did you buy?"

Jason gave her a wink. "It's a surprise."

Donna laughed. "Seriously," Donna said once she regained composure. "Why aren't you inside?"

Jason shrugged. "Felt like being here."

The two of them fell silent. The sounds of the party music was faint in the background, but the silence of the front lawn balanced it well. Jason felt extremely at ease. He snuck a glance at Donna, who was staring at the lawn in front of them too. Jason remembered that as sophomore year started, he spent less and less time with his friend circle due to rigorous volleyball training, and whenever he had free time, he would spend it with Raven instead of Kiran, Donna, Eddie, Jaime, or even the five of them together. Jason felt bad.

"We should hang out." Jason said his thoughts aloud, and Donna scoffed.

"You think?" Donna said. "Honestly, band practice is the most time we've spent with you lately."

"Sorry," Jason replied. "Volleyball… you know how it is."

Donna raised an eyebrow. "Just volleyball?"
Jason wanted to curse Donna's keep perception. "Fine, Raven too."

Donna chuckled. "You know, we all had a bet," when Jason tilted his head, Donna continued. "Kiran and Jaime thought that you'd end up with Raven while Eddie and I betted against it."

Jason glared at Donna. "You betted on Raven and I?"

"Is that bad?"

"For how much?"

"Seven dollars each participant."

Jason stared at Donna, confounded at the new piece of information he heard, but then laughed. "Why seven?" Jason asked lightly, and Donna shrugged sheepishly.

"Eddie wanted ten, while Jaime proposed five. Kiran came up with the middle ground."

"Wow," Jason said. "So you have fourteen dollars now?"

"I can give you four, if that makes you feel better."

The two of them stared at each other with blank expressions, then broke out laughing. "You guys suck," Jason said, pushing Donna lightly with his shoulder. "Go rot in hell."

"We'll see you there," Donna said teasingly, and Jason stuck out his tongue playfully. "Want to talk about it?"

Jason thought about it. "Nah," Jason said finally, and he meant it. Jason had enough of pining over the past. "Besides, I think I'd much rather discuss ways to obliterate the four of you."

The two of them laughed. Jason felt as if a huge weight was taken off his shoulders.

xx

November 2 2014. Rooftop.

"You're going to make me fall."

"Raven, for the hundredth time, I'll be there to catch you."

Gar and Raven finally settled down on the roof, watching the skies ahead of them. Gar smiled.

The two of them decided to retreat on the roof when they realized that alone time together was virtually impossible inside the house. The front lawn wasn't an option either for Raven didn't want to be disturbed. In a fit of adventurousness, Gar suggested the rooftop. Raven initially declined, but after constant persuasion from Gar's part, Raven relented.

Gar had fun. He didn't want to seem boastful, but the party was a huge success. The main hall consisted of people either dancing or conversing with one another. The backyard was filled with miniature physical games or stimulating pool games. The entertainment room was filled with people playing their own sets of games, or simply playing with the photo booth. Gar didn't visit the theatre, but according to Vic, people watched one movie before deciding to play a game of charades. While Gar didn't exactly join the activities in any of the rooms, Gar had fun talking to various people in the party.
Selinda and Gemma, who were enjoying their time by singing random songs on the platform, approached Gar and Raven when they had the chance. The two of them promptly apologized with whatever they did to Raven in the past, with Raven brushing them off stating that she forgave them. But the highlight of their four-way conversation was when Gar recalled who exactly prompted him to celebrate Raven's birthday.

"Oh, did you know? Gemma here was the one who told me to celebrate your birthday, Raven."

Selinda and Raven were pleasantly surprised, but applauded them both. Gar smiled thinking about the camaraderie formed in the night.

Gar broke the silence. "You want to know what's weird?" Gar continued when Raven asked. "Wally and Jinx aren't dating."

That was enough for Raven to be taken aback. "Really?" Raven asked, and Gar nodded. "Huh. But they're still friends?"

Gar shrugged. "Great friends, actually," Gar said. "It's weird. Wally told me that the two of them decided to stay friends instead of wreck their relationship by being together."

"I actually liked the two of them together," Raven commented. "They were rushing, yes, but the two had chemistry. Is Wally completely okay with this?"

"Apparently so. You know Jade Nguyen, the senior?" Raven said yes. "Well, like, she has a half sister named Artemis I think, and Wally met her in a Model United Nations conference a few days ago. Wally claims that he hates her guts but personally, I think she's the next 'the one'."

Raven chuckled. "May the gods have mercy on this girl."

Gar felt the urge to talk about something else.

"We are dating, right?" Gar asked once he felt Raven lean her head on his shoulder. Raven hummed softly in response.

"You're mine," Raven said. "And I'm yours. That's all I know."

Gar grinned. "Cause, like, if we were, I'd feel like a pretty shitty boyfriend."

Raven stood up straight and eyed Gar questioningly. "Why is that?"

"I didn't get you a gift."

Raven widened her eyes and shook her head fervently. "As far as I can tell, you did."

Now it was Gar's turn to eye Raven questioningly. "What?"

"Look around you Gar," Raven said, pointing to their view below, showing the backyard. "You gave me a party. You gave me a way to find friends. You gave me happiness."

Gar felt like the world was complete. "You know," Gar said, and Raven tilted her head in curiosity. "When I first saw you, I wondered if I can make you smile."

"You did more than make me smile, Gar," Raven said, and Gar scooted closer to her and slung his arm around her waist. "I wondered if I can make you cry."

"Cry with happiness, yeah."
The two of them laughed. Gar wondered what exactly he did to win this amazing girl. Gar tightened his hold on Raven, not willing to let go. Not now, not ever.

"You know," Raven said, her voice sounding light. Gar hummed to make her continue. "If you still feel bad about not giving a gift to me on birthday, there is one tiny gift that I would love."

Gar's ears perked up. "What's that?"

"Kiss me."

So Gar did.

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