to wake from a life not worth living, is to be born into something new.

by ChangeTheCircumstances

Summary

Eddie woke up.

He was in a hospital, a fact that wasn't surprising in and of itself. What was surprising was the relief he felt at being awake at all. Or that he couldn't remember why he was there in the first place. The reason why was somewhere, buried deep in his mind. He just had to find a way to remember It.

Russian translation can be found here: https://ficbook.net/readfic/8811301

Notes

Currently don't know how long this will be, but it definitely won't be too long. I simply really wanted to write my own take on how Eddie could have survived. This will pull mostly from the cinematic movies and other characters may make official appearances, but Eddie is definitely the main focus and Richie second.

Also I suck with summaries, so apologies for that, and this story will likely focus on the characters as adults and the events immediately after It: Chapter 2 (2019). There may be a flashback here or there, but again, definitely focusing on the adults more than the kids.
Anyways, the first chapter is very much just setting things up so I hope you enjoy and thank you for reading!
ACT I: Derry

Eddie woke up.

He was in a hospital. This factor wasn’t too shocking. He’d woken up in hospitals plenty of times, both as a child and as an adult. Whether it was sitting in the ER, hunched in a chair in a hospital waiting room, or lying on one of those stiff beds, he was used to the setting.

But he was also used to knowing why he was in them. Right now? He couldn’t remember a thing.

“Good to see you’re waking as expected Mr. Kaspbrak. Please, acknowledge you can hear me.”

Eddie slowly blinked. The spots from the bright lights faded a bit more. He turned to his right. The repeated exposure to doctors at an early age meant the sight was usually a comfort more than anything. They always knew what was wrong. Yet for the first time, Eddie felt he didn’t need to see the woman. He didn’t need a doctor right now. He needed to…to…

“Very good Mr. Kaspbrak. Do you know where you are?”

He almost shook his head. Better to not strain his voice. He didn’t know what was wrong. What if he hurt himself and ended up damaging his vocal cords? Or what if trying to speak was the safer option and shaking his head wasn’t? Maybe the doctor wanted that. He could have hurt his spine. Shaking his head would just—

Something trickled forward. Memories leaked through the crack. It wasn’t enough to break the rock wall, but Eddie could feel them sliding down, pooling in the base of his brain. The usual overthinking and worry was still there. He certainly couldn’t get rid of every statistical probability he had learned. However, he suddenly realized he didn’t care about those numbers as much as he once had.

Regardless of the potential damage, or the fact Eddie didn’t even know why he was there, he spoke anyways. “A hospital. Can I have some water?”

His voice was a little hoarse, but not ridiculously so. It sounded as one sounds when waking up from a particularly long nap or deep dream. It was ruff, but Eddie could already feel it clearing as he swallowed.

“Yes, of course. Let me grab a nurse.”

The doctor was only gone for a few seconds before coming back. As they waited on the nurse, she asked a few more questions. “Do you know your name?”

“Edward Kaspbrak. But my…my friends call me Eddie.” His friends…

“And can you tell me where you live?”

The questions kept coming. They were fairly standard, meant to establish how aware he was of himself and his surroundings. He seemed to be answering them all with flying colors, right up until the end.

“Now. Do you know why you’re here?”

By now, a nurse had brought him his water. He sipped at it through the straw. He should know this
It was connected to everything. It had to do with this new lack of fear. The fact he didn’t feel the need to focus on probabilities or why he wasn’t more worried about waking up in a hospital. Really, he just felt thankful he’d woken up at all. All this was because of it. It…It…

The memory was right there. He could feel it trying to slip out. The doctor spoke before it could.

“It’s alright. No need to strain yourself Mr. Kasprak. It’s normal to have amnesia of a traumatic accident like you experienced. There’s a chance you may never fully remember.”

“But remember what?” His voice felt a little easier now. He tried to push himself up a little. “What was it?”

Right. It. Every time he thought that word, it became stuck again. The trickle of memories attempted to grow. It was all to do with It. It wasn’t nothing. It was something, a thing with a capital ‘i’. A feeling, an event, a memory—

“You were in a car accident.”

“Oh.”

That didn’t sound right. And that thought in and of itself shouldn’t have felt right either. He rarely doubted doctors, but he doubted what this one said. Not to say she wasn’t credible. But he somehow felt more sure of his own thoughts and feelings, even if he couldn’t fully unlock them now. He didn’t get a chance to explore those thoughts though as the doctor began talking again.

“I must say. It’s the most remarkable accident I’ve ever seen. You ran into a construction truck. The odds say you should have been skewered alive, but you only got pierced through your chest, missing almost all vital organs and your spine, along with a cut on your cheek. I mean really. It’s like the kind of miraculous comeback you see in some movie. I would have expected at least severe bruising. At the most, a hundred broken bones. Yet here you are.”

“Here I am,” Eddie murmured. He was alive. After being skewered…and a cut on his cheek…

A little strength had returned after being awake for a bit along with the much needed water. He pushed himself up again. His hands first felt at the clean bandage on his cheek. There was only one. His fingers found no signs of other bandages, nor any cuts or slightly swollen areas in need of treatment. If what the doctor had said was right, it really was a miracle Eddie wasn’t cut up more. But that description didn’t feel right. It wasn’t the reason. It was the—

He carefully took the hem of his hospital robes. He pulled them down but only saw bandages across his midsection. At least it didn’t feel like he had a hole in him. The doctors must have already fixed most of it.

“I’d suggest keeping it covered. We’ll change it when it’s needed, and it might be good to have a physician with you when you first see it. That level of scarring can be a little much for a patient to take in on his first time.”

Eddie nodded in understanding even as his eyes stayed glued to his own chest. He kind of wanted to tear off the bandages then and there. Maybe it would tell him what had really happened. Why It was so important. Of course, exposing the area too soon could be risky. But that usual fear wasn’t there. It certainly wasn’t as big. He felt like he could breath. He could breath for the first time because It…It was truly…

“And if you’re up for it, you already have a visitor.”
The words pulled Eddie from his thoughts and the wound on his chest. He dropped his hands and looked up. Excitement began to build up. He had a suspicion of who the doctor was talking about. He felt young again at the mere thought. He nodded, giving the doctor permission.

The flow of memories got a little heavier.

The people would come in. Everything would make sense. Eddie would understand why he felt he could finally breathe, why he felt like smiling. His friends—

“Jesus Christ Eddie! I can’t believe they let you sit up like that. You need to be lying down this instant. What if you strained yourself? What if you moved your bandages? I mean really? How could you be so careless?”

Oh.

Disappointment hit him in his chest. He slumped down merely from that, even while at the same time he was basically being manhandled so he was fully lying down again.

“Ed? Eddie, you do recognize me, right? The doctors said your amnesia would only affect your memory of the accident, but I knew it could be much worse. Which speaking of, I warned you about your driving. If you had just listened to me, you would be alright. How many times do I have to say that? Just listen! And I bet they’ve been making you talk too much too. What if your vocal cords—”

“Myra. I remember,” Eddie replied, if only to shut her up for a second.

“Well then why didn’t you say anything? Were you trying to worry me for no reason?”

As Myra continued on, Eddie looked for any chance of being saved by the doctor. However, she had already left the room. Next, he looked for something more. He looked for the reason why his heart had felt hopeful, momentarily lighter. He looked for friends…

But the room was empty except for him and his wife. His mind tried to solve what had happened, but it was impossible to finish a clear thought as Myra continued to berate him from his bedside. The only defense he could muster was sinking down deeper into his bed as he hoped he would later find some reprieve in his dreams.
Thanks again for all those leaving comments and kudos! I'm loving writing this and super glad people are enjoying it. I probably won't update this quickly, but I had a bad couple of days and wanted to write something to make me feel a little better. And don't worry! Richie will show up soon. I promise!

Eddie’s eventual reprieve from Myra was when she suggested he go to bed. Finally, something they agreed on. Though that of course couldn’t be easy either. They fought over how he should sleep as he tried to roll over. Myra yelled at him that it would put unnecessary strain on one side of his wound. Eddie yelled back that he really didn’t give a shit now.

At least the outburst got her out of his room for a few seconds. Hopefully he would fall asleep before she came back in.

The arguing had been nearly constant since he’d woken up. It wasn’t exactly like this was new, but something still felt changed. It wasn’t that there was some happier time that had since disappeared. It wasn’t that he was once content and now wasn’t. It was that he was quickly beginning to realize he had never really been content. And happiness? That had been an even more distant concept for a long time. He only just now realized it.

He had been happy. Happy once…so long ago. With friends…those friends were…

As Eddie’s mind worked harder and harder to remember, he finally fell asleep. The flow of memories slowed, but those that had already slipped through were able to sit and gestate inside his brain as he stayed under. The emotions grew…an unbreakable bond…friendship…but also danger…something had…no not something…It…

Eddie woke up in a panic. His chest hurt from the sudden flurry of movement, but the pain was the last thing on his mind.

“Derry! Derry!”

He remembered that place. He remembered the fear, but for the first time in his life, his panic wasn’t from wanting to run away from it. He was still afraid, so deathly afraid. But the fear didn’t matter. He wanted to run towards It. He had to run towards the fear to make sure his friends were safe. And that was the change. He was stronger than he thought. He’d always been stronger than he’d thought and his friends—

*His friends needed him!*

“Eddie, sit down and stop shouting about that stupid little town!”

His panic broke apart as he was effectively shoved back and against his pillow.

“I-I need—”

“You need to calm down!”
“I need to get back to Derry. There’s…there’s something—”

“There is absolutely nothing there for you. Will you just calm down? Why even go back? All it did for you was get you in that awful car accident.”

Eddie finally turned quiet. He knew…he knew now, with absolute certainty, that he hadn’t been in a car accident. But whatever had happened still wasn’t fully coming back to him. He just knew he had to save his friends. Regardless of the risks to himself, he had to save them!

But what…from what?

“I’ll be right back. The doctor should make sure you didn’t tear anything.”

Myra left, leaving Eddie a moment alone to gather himself.

Every bone in his body told him to be thankful that he wasn’t in Derry now. In fact, he should be running away from that place. But he couldn’t. Not yet! Not until he knew his friends were safe. His friends…

He was so sure that he needed to save his friends and yet he couldn’t remember any of their names. What had happened? Where were they and how could anyone possibly believe he’d been in a car accident—

“Now don’t worry Mrs. Kaspbrak. I’m sure it was only a bad dream left over from the trauma. But we’ll check him out and make sure he’s alright. Now Mr. Kaspbrak, how are you feeling this morning?”

Eddie found it hard to fully respond. He was afraid he might say something crazy if he did. He forced himself to show the occasional, uneasy smile and nodded his way through the conversation. At the very least Myra kept quiet during the doctor’s examination.

“It looks like we need to change the bandage. Do you think you’ll be ok to stand?”

“Oh, are you really sure? I mean look at him. He still needs plenty of—”

“I can stand,” interrupted Eddie. Just to prove it, he started to push himself up. He felt a little weak, but then the doctor had said he’d only been out for a little over a day. After the first step, the second step became a little easier.

“There we go. If you want to go wait in the bathroom, I’ll be right back with all the supplies.”

“Ok.”

Eddie started to make his way over. He could have easily done it by himself, but Myra grabbed him and practically carried him the rest of the way. He really didn’t want the help, but he also didn’t want to argue anymore.

He kept his mouth shut and simply pulled himself away from Myra as soon as he could. He used the sink as support while his eyes slowly traveled across his form in the mirror. His hand reached behind the back of his neck, pulling at the string that kept the backwards robe on. He pulled at it. Then he pulled the second one that was closer to his lower back.

“Eddie! You could catch a cold. Here. Let me grab a blanket.”

Myra turned away and as she did, the hospital robe dropped to the floor. He stood in only his
underwear, staring at his pale image in the mirror. His eyes glanced at his bandaged cheek first. Car accident his ass. Just looking at it made a spike of fear go through him. But also…

A level of pride. It had been so long since he’d felt even a little bit of pride in himself.

And then his eyes looked at his chest.

There was a memory there too. The rock wall that was keeping him from seeing the whole picture would break eventually. The torrent of memories would eventually flood back. Maybe…maybe he just needed something to crack it a little more, something to get the process going.

His fingers toyed at the edge of the bandage. One finger slipped in between it and his own skin.

“Eddie, what do you think you’re—”

He ripped it down in one motion.

“Edward!”

His breath became lodged in his throat as his eyes went wide and his blood ran cold. As one hand kept him standing, holding the sink ledge, his other hand grabbed at the spiked claw that had pushed through his chest. He struggled to breath. His feet left the ground. The claw slid out of him as he was flung to the—

“Are you alright Mr. Kaspbrak? Like I said, seeing it for the first time can be a little shocking.”

Eddie looked down. The hand that had seemingly been holding the claw just a moment ago closed on empty air. And the hole in his chest? The stitched together area was still healing, still flushed red, but it was also a lot smaller than Eddie had expected it to be.

“I should be in there in case Eddie—”

“I think I would prefer some privacy,” he muttered. The doctor was already in there with the supplies so Eddie slammed the door shut and turned back to the mirror.

A yell of distressed annoyance sounded on the other side of the door as the doctor looked at him with slight concern. “You know…” she slowly murmured, “stress is perfectly normal after a traumatic event. I’m sure things will settle down between you and your—”

“We were having problems before now,” Eddie interrupted.

“Oh. I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Don’t be. I’m just glad I can finally see it.” And Eddie was glad for that. He just wished he could see the bigger picture beyond it. Just what had happened?

The doctor gave him an odd look but didn’t waste any time before saying, “Well, if you could just sit there Mr. Kaspbrak.”

Eddie did so and then they went through the quick process of cleaning the wound. At one point, he stood up again and managed to catch a glimpse of the other side of the wound on his back. It was larger than the section on his chest, but still nowhere near as bad as he’d expected.

It had to do with believing.

Something in the back of his mind had told him that. He’d believed that It wouldn’t kill him, that It
couldn’t kill him. And so it hadn’t. But that didn’t make any sense. That wasn’t how the real world worked. Your wounds didn’t get better simply because you believed they would.

And yet somehow, that felt right.

The doctor finished putting on the new bandages and went ahead and changed the one on his cheek too. When she pulled the white cotton back, Eddie flinched. There was no real pain. He barely felt the slight sting. His reasons for flinching was because he saw the glint.

It was a metal shine, a sharp image. That feeling of fear accompanied it and yet…yet he was bigger than the fear now. He still couldn’t exactly piece together what had happened, but he knew that it had to do with something batshit insane. Something…something insane that he’d done?

The doctor finished up and then helped him tie the strings of his hospital robe back together. Once out of the bathroom, Eddie could see Myra sulking in the corner. Jesus, what was her problem? He was a grown-up! He could make his own decisions and choose if he wanted privacy or not. Yet she was acting like he was her child that had suddenly decided not to listen—

“Oh, my fucking god.”

“Eddie! There is no need for that kind of language.”

He ignored her though and just laughed. He covered his mouth and laughed so hard he made a painful snort come out his nose. He got into bed as Myra looked at him like he was crazy and the doctor left after some hesitation.

The irony was a bit sad, but honestly it just made Eddie want to laugh even more. The only part that really depressed him was that he was laughing alone right now. He was so sure he knew someone who would have gotten a kick out of this too. Someone…he…they…a group of people that would have felt proud of Eddie for finally coming to this realization. They would have all hugged and then the others would have made terrible jokes about it.

But why was he still unable to remember them?
Eddie’s mood had not improved since that morning. He and Myra were talking less, but she seemed determined not to leave him alone. At this point, literally any other presence would have been preferable. A nurse, some random visitor wandering the halls, just anyone!

He hadn’t had dinner last night, no telling when he’d last eaten, and the nightmare had diminished his appetite that morning. All he’d had for breakfast was half a biscuit and a spoonful of the flavorless gravy that only a hospital could sell as food. However, as lunch time went around, Eddie’s stomach growled in anticipation. Myra got up to grab it from the nurse along with some pills to help keep any pain at bay.

It would have been so easy to just take the plate and shovel the food in, but apparently Myra had taken his small appetite that morning as reason to baby him more. Anyone else and at most the action would have just been annoying. But having it come from Myra? The fact that he could fully see the circle he’d trapped himself in? Now he couldn’t stand it, and it was taking all his energy to not snap at her.

She started to continue the last conversation they’d been having. The only reason they both hadn’t ended that conversation in another argument was probably because the nurse had walked in.

Now she said, “Once your wounds fully heal, we should keep an eye out for any developing scar tissue. It would be expensive, but we could look into plastic surgery to smooth things out, help prevent any further build-up and…”

Myra kept prattling on about the dangers and future pain that could be caused by scarring and what they could do to prevent it. Normally, Eddie might have agreed with her planning ahead. Or, if he hadn’t agreed, he would have eventually given in. But looking down at his chest, he didn’t want to get rid of the scar that would be left behind. If complications arose, he would deal with them at a later date, just like everyone else. But these eventual scars? He felt proud to have them, both the one through his chest and the one on his cheek.

They were marks that reminded him he could be strong-no. He was strong! Stronger than he sometimes realized.

He didn’t say anything at the moment though, knowing another argument would undoubtably erupt. He just wanted to rest. He wanted peace and quiet and time to really analyze his memories. He wanted to find his friends, know their names again, and arguing with Myra wouldn’t accomplish any of that.

Right then, she finally put the tray of food on the sliding table and pushed it over his lap.

Not that the food would have been very appetizing anyways, he still couldn’t help but let out a
disenchanted whine. As he’d been in his own thoughts, Myra had thrown out everything or cut things down to size to what she clearly saw as an acceptable amount.

And then a memory warmed its way into his head.

Almost all the food Eddie had eaten had been prepared by his mother. He was delicate, had to look out for his health, she had said. His wife had often done the same thing. But he could remember times where he’d binged a little, had actually enjoyed the food, even if only for a moment.

Chinese came to mind…

Then an older memory. Ice cream in the town square. Candies from the general store.

Other vague recollections were there and eventually Eddie said, “I want a burger.”

“Nonsense Eddie. You know how much fat and sodium and everything else can be in those. Besides, you need to be especially careful with what you eat right now.” She picked up the spoon and scooped up a wet helping of what looked like old, canned corn.

Seeing her now, so much like his mother when he’d been little, waiting there expectedly with the spoon in hand, he finally snapped.

He suddenly realized trying to avoid arguments with Myra was pointless. He would never be able to look back at his own memories while she was in the room. He could barely even breath with her right there! Perhaps he should have been a bit kinder, but years worth’s of frustrations all came tumbling out at once.

“Stop trying to play airplane.”

“Eddie, not now. Just eat your—”

“No. How about you make a course correction and shove that spoon up your ass.” Myra dropped it onto the tray and stood back up. “How dare you! I don’t have to put up with this!”

“Then leave.”

That made her faulter a bit, like she’d never expected him to say such a thing to her. “Edward, you don’t really mean—”

“Get out before I call security.”

“I—”

“Get out!”

Eddie turned away, looking for the nurse call sign. He jabbed it just in case, but by the time he turned around, Myra was already gone. His eyes moved to the tray, then the empty room, then his own form lying in bed.

He needed to get up and move around, even if only for a moment.

Eddie carefully got to his feet and moved to the dresser on the side. He tried to bend over but had to pause for a second, his chest flaring up with pain. He moved to take the medication that had been left with the food, and then turned back to the dresser. He carefully bent his knees and looked through the drawers. At the very least Myra was predictable. There were clean clothes in there that she must
have brought from home. He pulled out the pants.

“Oh, uh Mr. Kaspbrak,” the nurse said upon finally getting there. "I didn’t realize it was time for your release.”

“I just need to go for a walk-actually. When am I supposed to be released?” Eddie suddenly realized that beyond the basic details of his injuries, he hadn’t been told anything else about his prognosis. Had Myra been talking to the doctor without him knowing?

“Let me check just a moment.”

“Thank you.”

As the nurse left the room, Eddie finished pulling on his pants. He left the hospital robe rather than putting on his shirt though. All he really needed was a moment to walk around and breath without his ass hanging out.

Then the nurse came back. “Um, the chart says they want to keep you one more night. Just make sure no complications arise considering the uniqueness of your main wound. But you should be good to go by tomorrow. Any longer and you would have been moved out of the ER and to a normal room.”

“Then I guess I’m leaving tomorrow,” sighed Eddie. He briefly wondered if Myra had planned on keeping him longer in the hospital despite it not being necessary. He certainly wouldn’t put it past her.

He then tried to bend back down to grab his shoes. Instead, he quickly stopped and gripped his chest again. Hopefully that pain medication was going to kick in soon because the feeling was definitely growing harder to ignore.

“Here. Since you’re just going for a quick walk.” The nurse went to a cabinet and pulled out some hospital issued, no-slip slippers. He set them down in front of Eddie. He murmured a quick thank you as he put them on. The nurse also said, “Patients should be accompanied at all times so if you don’t mind…”

“No, it’s fine. I just need a moment to get some air.”

“Perfectly understandable. Should I grab a wheelchair?”

“I’ll be ok,” Eddie replied.

He carefully started to walk out of the room. He kept close to the wall, just in case he had to grab the support bar that was there. However, at least for the moment, he felt ok. He walked in silence with the nurse behind him. The layout was standard for most hospital ERs and all the signs told Eddie where things were.

He caught a glimpse of one that pointed to the ER waiting room, and he suddenly paused.

His friends…why hadn’t they come to see him yet? Even if he couldn’t remember everything, he could feel how important they were. And yet, it had just been Myra. The doctor hadn’t mentioned that anyone else wanted to see him and yet…if they were his friends…

It was mostly a hunch, but one that Eddie felt determined to follow. He paused at the corner of the hall. Using the wall, he gave himself a moment to breath, gather his strength, and then he started to walk towards the waiting room.
And thanks again! Writing this is a blast and it means a lot that so many people have taken to this story. I can't wait to get more into it and have more the of the Losers show up!

Eventually, the nurse seemed to realize the direction Eddie was going in.

“Oh! We try to keep patients out of the waiting room. It can be a lot more hectic since it’s the ER, and it’s best to keep a certain flow—”

“Is there some reason I absolutely can’t go out there? Like I have some highly contagious, incredibly dangerous, disease?” Eddie sarcastically muttered. He was trying to be a bit more polite, but he was so close now. If he was right about his friends, if they actually cared about him, then they would at least be in the waiting room. Right? If not in his actual room, then they were just right beyond this door.

What had exactly happened, an explanation behind the visions and vague memories, it would all be laid bare before him. No matter what the expected etiquette was, Eddie wasn’t going to let a single nurse stop him.

“I mean no. But you have to understand—”

Eddie didn’t wait for permission. He took advantage of the nurse’s hesitance and pulled open the doors. A few people stared at him with confusion, but most seemed too concerned with their own problems to pay him any notice. A nurse behind the main desk stood up, clearly ready to tell him he shouldn’t be there, but Eddie ignored her too. He turned the corner so he could see the full waiting area in front of him. His eyes quickly went over the people. Some sat with bleeding noses and broken bones, clearly waiting to be seen. Others were friends and family, waiting for some prognosis. It was easy to tell the more serious cases from the more standard ones going by facial expressions and general unease.

Then Eddie’s eyes landed on one figure to the far left.

He was awkwardly splayed out over three chairs. His legs took up one, his butt stuck right in the second, and his back and head rested over the third chair’s armrests in a way that couldn’t possibly have been comfortable. A dirty jacket that looked like it had been through a sewer and worse covered his face, clearly trying to keep the light from bothering him. There was a small side table near his head where large, black glasses lay.

It was familiar…so familiar… He almost had it! He could feel it! The rock wall was starting to break, names were forming in the back of his head, his understanding of It and what It was…

The nurse that had been accompanying him took him by his arm. “Sir, I really must insist you get back to your room now.”

The nurse tried to pull him back.
Eddie resisted.

And then it broke.

The medication still hadn’t fully taken effect because Eddie felt the flare up in his chest again. However, he ignored it as he ripped his arm from the nurse’s grip. “Richie! Richie Tozier!”

The man startled so hard it looked like he’d been shot. He hit the ground. The jacket fell from his face revealing deep circles and a slight beard that really needed to be taken care of. He desperately grabbed at his glasses and finally stood up as Eddie ran towards him at the same time.

“Richie!”

_Eddie could seem him asleep on the bench ahead of him. The day had been planned out so perfectly, so of course something had come along and ruined it._

_The school year wasn’t quite over, but it was already to the point where most teachers had given up on assigning homework. Any normal parent would have let their kid go to the arcade on such an afternoon, but of course Eddie’s mom had given him the third degree. He’d ended up running late because of her, and because he’d been late, he’d ran into Henry Bowers’ gang, and because he’d run into that gang, he was now running for what felt like his life._

 Normally Eddie would have run home, but he’d met up with Bowers too far into town. Of course, Bill had been getting a pass because of what happened to his little brother, but that didn’t mean Eddie, Richie, or Stan got a pass, especially if they were caught alone.

_That was why Eddie had decided to head for the town square where he was supposed to meet his friends. Better to be with friends than alone, even if he did get caught._

_A quick look over the area showed that Stan and Bill weren’t there though. It had been a bad day for Bill so he was probably hold up in his room, and it was a tossup whether Stan’s dad would let him come out too. As for Richie, he’d probably come to the square early on and had then fallen asleep, waiting for the others before they headed to the arcade._

_Normally Eddie would have walked over to Richie, poked him hard with a stick, and told him it was crap like this that led to sunburns and blisters as big as your head. However, since he was running from Henry Bowers, that was really the last thing on his mind._

_Instead, he simply yelled again in a high pitched, breathless voice and with language that his mom definitely didn’t think he used. “Richie, get your fucking ass up!” _

_Richie jolted. He hit the ground hard and his glasses fell off. He just barely managed to pick them up again as Eddie grabbed Richie’s arm and pulled him with him. Eddie had originally just been running in a panic to a place where he’d suspected a friend would be. Now that he was with a friend, he had no idea where to go. Thankfully, Richie grabbed his arm instead and led the way._

_They went off the town’s square and down an alleyway. Richie made a sharp turn and at the last second, pulled him and Eddie behind a large trash bin. Eddie was beginning to wheeze so Richie slapped a hand over his mouth. Eddie slapped his own hand over Richie’s mouth, if only to show he wasn’t the only one being a loud ass._

_Otherwise, they both stayed stalk still. Even when they heard Henry Bowers’ gang run by, they still stayed, waiting just a little longer to make sure._

_When they both decided it was safe, they dropped their hands and Eddie’s labored wheezing came_
through. His hands shook as he desperately tried to pull the zipper and get at his inhaler.

“Why the hell were they chasing you?”

“C-cause I exist. Why do you think!” Eddie yelled back after he got in two good breaths.

“Ok. Fair point.”

Richie paused, clearly expecting Eddie to finally get up so they could stop smelling like trash. He looked ready to make some stupid comment, but when he saw Eddie was still shaking, he put his arms around him instead.

“Ah come on. They didn’t even get in a punch this time.” Richie hesitated, not that Eddie noticed as he was still trying to keep his breathing in check and keep from using the inhaler a third time. Finally, Richie squeezed him a little harder before quickly letting go. “It’s ok. I got you. Now let’s have some fun at the arcade. Yeah?”

“I got you.”

Eddie said it as he gripped Richie’s shoulders. The man looked ready to hit the ground again. But then Eddie’s grip hardened, hard enough to bruise as more pieces started to fall into place.

His friends. He remembered his…

“Bill! B-Beverly and Ben and Mike—”

Richie grabbed his neck and suddenly it was him steadying Eddie. “Woah. Hey it’s ok. It’s—”

“Are they ok! Oh god, please tell me they’re ok Richie! Are they—”

“Ok? They’re all fucking fine! We’ve been worried about you, dipshit!”

And then Richie reached around his shoulders and pulled him into a tight hug. Eddie’s memories were still trying to fully come back, certain things were still processing and there were still parts that he was kind of missing, but for the moment, none of that mattered. It would have been even better if they were all there, but he’d gladly take Richie over nothing.

Since he’d woken up, and perhaps for the first time in a long time, he felt loved.
Eddie really wanted to continue the conversation then and there. He had so many questions. He wanted to know where the others were. However, he could feel the nurses were about to wrangle him back to his room and to be fair, having a conversation in the middle of an ER waiting room wasn’t exactly the best place or time. Because of that, when they finally broke their hold on each other, Eddie grabbed Richie’s hand and quickly pulled him towards the back.

The nurse from before finally stepped forward again and said, “Sir, I really need you to get back to your—”

“Yeah. We’re going.”

“Oh, well he can’t go with you Mr. Kaspbrak—”

“Why the hell not?” snapped Eddie as a frown set in.

“Meow.”

“Shut up Richie.” Yet the way Eddie said it immediately had a smile coming onto his face. There was no real heat behind it, and it was said in a way that made it clear the once annoying comments were more endearing than anything now.

“Well typically we only allow one person back there at a time since it is the ER, and your wife made it very clear that only family should be allowed—”

“He is fucking family. Come on Richie.”

Eddie started to head back to the door. Being the ER, he couldn’t open it from this side, and he threw a quick glare at the nurse behind the desk. He would walk out of this damn hospital then and there if they didn’t let Richie back there.

“Look at you letting your claws out.”

“Hush Richie,” Eddie groaned again, even as that smile still returned. A buzz sounded and Eddie quickly pushed through the door with Richie behind him. Eddie probably could have let go by now, but he still held Richie’s hand. He’d only just gotten back a person he truly cared about. He had to make sure he stayed by his side now.

The nurse also followed them down the halls. When Eddie made it back to his room without another incident, the nurse finally left to go back to his station. In the room, Eddie felt comfortable finally
letting go of Richie and quickly went to sit down. His hand came up to his chest. He had to close his eyes as he tried to ease his breathing.

“Shit, you’re in pain. Do I need to grab that nurse—”

“No. Took some medication. Just still taking a moment to kick in…and me running at you probably didn’t help,” Eddie got out.

“Yeah, no shit. I’m surprised you risked that when you could have just walked over,” snorted Richie.

“I just…I couldn’t remember anything for so long. And then so much of it broke through. This…this happened before. Sort of. Us forgetting until we…until we all met up again. Right?”

Richie nodded.

“Did you forget?”

“No. At least not while I’ve been waiting out there for you. I don’t know if we’ll forget again either. If we all split up. But maybe you forgot because you were uh…under.”

Under. Eddie had questions about that. What had exactly happened to him that had led to him being in this hospital? What had really gone through his chest? For the moment though, he focused on the most important question.

“Is It gone?”

Richie let out a shaky breath. “Yeah.”

“Really?”

“Real fucking dead. No doubt about it this time. The entire place fell apart as we were leaving.”

Eddie couldn’t really remember that. He wasn’t sure if he wanted to. For the moment, he just asked, “And…and the others? Why isn’t anyone else here?”

“Hey! They wanted to be. Trust me. We all came running in together with me and Bill carrying you. But you were being taken into surgery and they said we couldn’t all just be crowding up their waiting room; so, I volunteered to stay.”

“Thank you,” murmured Eddie. His chest was starting to feel a bit better now, the area becoming a bit numb. Those pills were finally taking affect.

“No need to thank me. We’re your friends Eddie. Any one of us could be standing here. I just happened to volunteer first.”

Eddie chuckled at that. He pushed himself back onto his feet and took off the slippers. He grabbed his pants, ready to throw those off too only for Richie to whistle and say, “Wow! And we’re not even down at the quarry.”

“I’m getting back into bed,” Eddie replied with a roll of his eyes. As he did just that, he also asked, “And after I was out of surgery? Have you really just been sitting in the waiting room all this time?”

“I actually didn’t know if you were out. It’s why I was so damn shocked to see you. I tried to get back there, but they said only family would be allowed. I tried to argue otherwise, also tried to basically break in, but they threatened to throw me out, so I passed out on the chairs instead.”
Eddie shook his head. “I can’t believe she fucking did that.”

“Who?”

“My wife! Just Myra not letting you back here. I can’t.—no. I guess I can believe it. Just…no. I’m just done.”

“You’re…done with your wife?”

“I don’t know,” sighed Eddie. “I just know that when I get out of here, it is not her face I want to see waiting in a car for me.”

Richie winced. “Jesus. Bit harsh.”

“I’m just tired of living in a lie. I’ve been living it for nearly forty years. You know?” Richie hesitated. He was biting his bottom lip hard when Eddie finally looked over and added, “Or…I guess that’s just me?”

“No!” Richie said. “I’m definitely—I mean all of us I think…I think we all kind of feel that way.” Richie stopped, like he was about to take up the courage to say something else. However, he seemed to change his mind and instead said, “Which speaking of, I don’t know, living your truth or whatever. Pretty sure Ben and Bev are a thing now. Or about to be.”

Eddie let out a light laugh. “About time.”

“About time?! Am I the only one that was clueless on this whole thing?”

“So much for the sex king, huh? You didn’t even realize there was something going on between Bill and Bev when we were kids.”

“Hey, you all were fucking virgins. I didn’t think any of you even knew how to kiss.”

“Oh, like you weren’t a virgin too.”

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

Both Eddie and Richie devolved into giggles. Eddie was smiling and smiling and—

And then the tears came.


“No, it’s not that.”

Richie frowned. He gently squeezed Eddie’s shoulder. “Wait…then what—”

“I fucking missed you. I missed…I missed everyone,” Eddie got out as he quickly wiped at his eyes. “And I mean, I felt that before. You know, right when we all got together at the Chinese restaurant. But when we all realized why we were here? It was hard to focus on that.”

“Yeah, I definitely get that. I almost ran off more than once.”

“Hey, don’t put that all on yourself. We all were ready to run at a moment’s notice at different times,” Eddie replied.

“I guess…hey!” Richie got closer with hopeful eyes. “When are you getting out of here?”
“Doctor says tomorrow.”

“Well that’s too fucking long. Hold on.” Richie took out his phone. It was cracked but seemed to work fine as he started up face time.

Eddie heard Bill’s voice first. He sounded worried and the stutter came out with the fear. “Richie. Did something h…h…ha…hap…change?”

“You bet it did. Look at this loser’s room they threw me into,” Richie replied as he jumped onto the bed with Eddie.

Bill’s eyes went wide before immediately watering. The stutter fell away as his entire body finally relaxed. “Eddie…” he whispered. Then the camera went everywhere as Bill must have dropped his hand. They heard him yell. “Guys! Guys, get down here!”

More movement occurred as they all tried to get into frame. Eventually Eddie could see all of them.

“Hey losers.”

“Fuck, I can’t believe you’re ok,” Ben got out.

“But we’re so happy you are,” Bev replied. “When—”

“Tomorrow,” Richie said before Eddie could. “We’ve got to do something big.”

“Wait, tomorrow?” Mike asked. “Really.”

“I know. I could have sworn…” Eddie trailed off for a second. He looked down at his chest but quickly focused on his friends again. “Just need to be careful. You know?”

“Like Eddie ever wasn’t careful,” Bill replied, and everyone laughed.

“What about the quarry?” Ben said. “We haven’t been there in years?”

“Sounds great,” Eddie responded as he rolled his eyes. “Get out of the hospital after surviving a killer fucking clown, only to die of some infection from who knows what’s in that water.”

“Point taken,” laughed Mike.

“Why does it have to even be in Derry?” Bev suddenly asked. “I mean, the quarry’s a good memory but…”

“Yeah. Fuck Derry.” Richie said.

“I second that motion,” Bill replied.

“How about this,” Ben put in. “I find us the best fucking restaurant—”

“So obviously not in Derry,” added Richie.

“We go to that fucking restaurant,” continued Ben as everyone laughed, “and we start the first day of the rest of our lives.”

“That sounds wonderful,” murmured Bev.

Eddie nodded. “I like the sound of that.”

“Then I guess we’ll get a chance to see you then,” Mike said. “Don’t want to overcrowd that hospital room anyways.”

“Probably best to let him rest,” agreed Bev. Bill nodded in agreement.

“We’ll see you soon!” shouted Ben.

“Bye guys,” Eddie replied as they all waved and threw kisses his way before Richie and Bill ended the call at pretty much the same time.

“So now we’ve got plans,” grinned Richie. “What do you want to do until then?”

Eddie’s stomach growled just then. “Considering I ate shit for breakfast today and then nothing for lunch, food.”

Richie’s smile widened as he slapped Eddie’s leg before pointing at him. “I am going to get you the best damn meal of your life.”

“Don’t take long.”

“I’ll be back in ten. Promise,” Richie replied. He darted out of the room and Eddie was almost positive that he meant to run all the way there and back.
Crumbled burger wrappers and French fry holders lay on the little hospital table. Once they’d finished the meal, the table had been rolled away so that Richie could move his chair as close as possible. They were deep in conversation, reminiscing about some of the best days of their lives. Most of the moments were set before *It* had even been a thing, and certainly long before adult worries had even wormed their way into their heads.

It was probably the first time Eddie had been stuck in a hospital and he hadn’t been panicking over every little detail too. It felt good.

Richie began doing one of his classic voices, though admittedly much improved from how he’d sounded as a kid. Eddie was in stitches, and thankfully his medication kept it from even hurting. He’d probably be a little sore tomorrow, but he wasn’t bothered by it. He really hadn’t laughed like this in a long time, not including the Chinese dinner before they’d understood what they were in for by returning to Derry.

He was wiping at a tear when his smile suddenly dropped. A few nurses had come in and out to check on him, possibly to make sure he stayed in his room for the rest of the day. One had come in to change his bandages. She’d shown him how to take care of the wound on his chest for when he was released. He would need help with his back, the area being hard to reach, but most of it he could do himself.

She’d also taken the bandage off his cut cheek and said the stitches would be enough going forward. Richie had grinned and said, “Planning on retiring from being a risk analyst and becoming Scarface?”

“Yeah. Just instead of cocaine, I’ll deal in placebos,” Eddie had said with a roll of his eyes.

“I think you mean gazebos.”

“Urgh! Why did I ever tell you about that?”

“Because it’s comedy gold, Scarface.”

Eddie had just groaned even louder, though the smile had still been very present on his face.

Now though, he’d hoped to see his main doctor. If he was really going to leave tomorrow, it would be good to go over any last-minute things and for him to get his prescription out of the way for the pain pills. However, the person who walked in instead was Myra.

“Who the hell are you?”

Richie whistled. “Jesus Eddie. You really—”
“Don’t.”

“Edward, I demand to know who this is.”

“Edward huh? I’m surprised she didn’t throw in a middle name—”

“Richie, please.” It was hard to say if it was the look Eddie gave him, his tone of voice, or maybe both, but thankfully Richie shut up. Eddie would have loved to laugh at Richie’s stupid remarks, but this wasn’t the time. He needed to have a serious talk with Myra, and he couldn’t do that if Richie was trying to pull a routine at the same time.

“I said, who is—”

“Hey!” Richie snapped. “Just give me a second.” He then turned to Eddie. “Sorry. Didn’t mean anything by it, and I definitely don’t want to make this harder on you. I’ll be right outside. Okay?”

“Yeah. Thanks.”

“No problem Eds.”

Richie got up and slipped out, having to squeeze around Myra as she seemed determined to stand in the doorway. It was like her anger had sprouted roots and stuck her to the floor. Eddie really hoped that wasn’t a sign that this would go on for a long time. He knew he’d really have to deal with this down the road, but right now he didn’t have the energy to get through everything that he would need to say.

“Who the hell was that?” Myra repeated once Richie was gone.

“My friend—”

“Is that why you left for that stupid little town? You got in an accident before you came here and look what happened when you got here. This place is nothing but trouble for you.”

“Well that we can agree on,” Eddie muttered sarcastically. However, Myra ignored the comment.

“He looks like he’s been living in the damn sewer! I’m surprised these people even let him in. There’s no telling how many diseases he could be carrying on his person. What if you got an infection? Really Eddie, you should have thought about that. I’ll go get someone to have him removed—”

“No!”

Myra jumped a little. It seemed she thought the last outburst had been a fluke. Eddie was determined to show her that it hadn’t been.

“You shouldn’t have limited my visitors, and you don’t get to say who sees me and who doesn’t,” he said.

“Really Eddie. This is not like you at all.”

“What is me then?”

“What—”

“Did you ever even know—” He had to stop himself. He was too tired to get everything out. There would be arguments in the future. That seemed inevitable now. But for the moment, Eddie just
wanted a break. A nice long break and to get back to someone who actually made him smile. “I’m sorry. But I won’t let you just kick Richie out of here.”

“Well I suppose it doesn’t matter. We’ll have you transferred to a hospital closer to home anyways.”

It really was difficult not to get angry again. He tried to focus on the fact that upping his blood pressure would do him no good right now. It was easier than just trying not to get mad at what Myra was saying. “I’m getting out tomorrow. I already talked to a nurse about it. Even if the doctor, for whatever reason, doesn’t sign off on it, I’ll just check myself out.”

“You can’t really mean that Eddie. With what you’ve been through, you still need time—”

“I need my friends.”

“Since when? When have you ever needed anyone else but me?”

Eddie had to close his eyes at that one. Everything was so much clearer now, he almost wanted to scream. But not now. Someday…but just not today. “They’re old friends. There are still things I need to finish with them,” Eddie replied. He managed to keep his voice forceful but also calm as he finally focused on Myra. He tried not to make it too harsh, if only to keep Myra from yelling again, but he needed to make sure she saw he wasn’t budging on this.

They stared at each other. The minutes were almost painful, and it was clear Myra expected Eddie to break, to give into her demands.

When he didn’t, she almost looked lost. This was uncharted territory for her, and she wasn’t quite sure how to handle it. That alone would have been a big red flag if Eddie hadn’t already cleared his vision. He waited until she spoke first.

“I’m giving you a week.”

He resisted the urge to snap at that too. It was a demand, not a suggestion or anything. But not right now. Just wait, Eddie reminded himself.

“You have a week,” she repeated, angrily stomping over to the dresser set, “to get through this—this mid-life crisis you seem determined to have! But I expect you to pull yourself together and be home by the end it.” She pulled her purse around, looking through it before dropping his wallet and phone onto the dresser.

God, he was thankful he hadn’t lost either in the sewers, and even more thankful that Myra was giving them to him rather than holding onto the items. He wouldn’t have been surprised if she had taken them hostage in order to force him to come back to the house eventually. The car keys for the rental weren’t there though. Considering he hadn’t actually been in an accident, he wondered what had happened to that. Was it still at the little hotel in Derry? Or had Myra taken it somehow?

“Is this understood?”

Eddie resisted the urge to sigh. “Yes Myra. We’ll—I’ll see you soon.” Somehow, we’ll talk about this later, seemed like it would just spark more arguments. Eddie decided to go with the safer option.

“Good. Finally something sensible,” she grumbled. She zipped her purse back up and started to head out the door. She paused though, and quickly added, “And don’t let that man to close to you Eddie. You’ll only catch something from him.”

“Yes Myra,” Eddie replied, having to choke back the sarcasm so she wouldn’t snap back at him.
And then she was gone.

Eddie let out a large groan and let his head hit the pillow. His heart rate may have increased a little, so he waited for that to calm down before opening his eyes again. Richie was already back in the room, sitting right by Eddie’s bed when he did.

“I’m not trying to be rude, but how the hell did you ever live with a woman like that?”

Eddie looked up at the ceiling. He shrugged. “As horrible as she could be, she was familiar. Maybe it’s because I thought I could only live with someone like that. Maybe because I thought only someone like her could love me.”

Richie grasped Eddie’s arm. “Hey, I—we love you Eddie. You’ve got the losers. You always have.”

“Couldn’t remember that then. But,” and Eddie squeezed Richie’s hand with a smile, “I do now. And I’m determined not to forget it.”

“Same here.” Richie let go to lean back a bit and added, “And I don’t look like I live in a sewer. Do I?”

“Not quite, but you definitely smell like one.”

“Rude!”

“You are getting cleaned up before we go to wherever Ben picked out for us.”

“OK, you may have a point there. I’ll go tonight. After you’ve fallen asleep.”

“I mean, you could go now if you want.”

“Do I smell that bad?” laughed Richie.

“It’s still tolerable. I’m just saying—”

“Naw. It’s ok. I don’t want you to fall asleep alone, and that way I know I’ll be back in time before you wake up.”

“You don’t have to do that,” murmured Eddie.

“I know. But I want to.”

“When did you ever become so generous?” chuckled Eddie. “I think I’ve said thank you more times today than I did our entire childhood.”

“What can I say. Grew up into a generous guy,” grinned Richie.

Eddie rolled his eyes.

“I also heard that whole one-week ultimatum. What are you going to do about that? You’re obviously not going to listen to her. Right?”

“I don’t know. I’ll cross that bridge when I get there. Let’s just go back to what we were talking about before.”

“Deal,” replied Richie. “So anyways…”
As promised, Richie had stayed until Eddie fell asleep again. When Eddie did wake up, he jolted upright and grabbed at his chest, more specifics on the final battle coming back. But one glance over showed Richie had returned. He was clean, face shaved back down to short stubble, and had new clothes. Eddie was glad he hadn’t made too much noise as Richie stayed fast asleep and awkwardly splayed out on the chair. Eddie wondered if he knew the chair could be pushed back into a sleeping position or if he preferred to find the most awkward positions possible.

As Eddie watched him sleep, he saw that one of Richie’s hands hung loosely off the side. Eddie reached over, gently squeezing his pinky to make sure he was real. At the same time, a spit bubble burst in the back of Richie’s throat as he let out a sound between a wet snort and a snore.

Eddie had to muffle his laughter as he eased back into the bed. He managed to fall asleep again, and the next time he woke up it was morning and Richie was grumbling about an ache in his back.

The doctor came by as Eddie took his morning pills and had breakfast. They went over payments, prescriptions, and everything else. The doctor mentioned that Myra had originally requested that he be kept in care, but Eddie quickly threw that idea out the window. Thankfully, the doctor agreed that she thought the extra oversight would have been a bit much too. She simply pressed that if anything felt off, he should go to the nearest hospital as soon as possible.

Richie said, “No worries there. He’ll be at a hospital in seconds even if there isn’t a problem.”

Eddie hit him in the shoulder for that and focused on the doctor. “I apologize for him. Please continue.”

The planning was then finalized, and everything was put in order. Eddie went ahead and signed what he could while still in his room. Then he went to the bathroom so he could quickly wash his hair in the sink and his face. He was looking forward to finally taking a shower, but knew they weren’t going back to the little hotel in Derry so better to get cleaned up now. Instead, it seemed they were going straight for whatever plans Ben had come up with.

After cleaning up in the bathroom, Eddie then changed into the clothes Myra had left. Next, he went through his wallet and examined his phone before putting them away. His wallet seemed alright, albeit it had a slight, sewer smell to it, but his phone was completely dead. He’d have to put that at the top of his list of things to do, but he was kind of thankful for the moment. He didn’t have to worry about Myra constantly texting or calling him, or anyone else for that matter.

“Look at you. A new man,” grinned Richie as Eddie smoothed down his shirt.

“Not so bad yourself. Now you just smell like…sweaty comedian.”

Richie punched him in the shoulder. “Hey, that’s a step up from my former redolence. I call it, remnants of killer clown and graywater.”
“Classy,” Eddie replied. He walked out of the hospital room. It felt good knowing he shouldn’t have to go back anytime soon. It felt even better since he was walking out with Richie and not someone else too.

Eddie had to go up to a desk to sign some more papers, and then they went to the pharmacy so he could go ahead and get his prescription. As they waited, Eddie asked, “Was the rental car still at the hotel? Mine?”

“Right…about that—”

“What?”

“Listen, I was going to tell you, but I didn’t want to ruin the day.”

“Richie, just tell me please.”

“Well, we all drove here with you when you were hurt, so I ended up calling Mike to pick me up last night and take me back to the hotel. And that way I could also get my own car for today. Oh, and I found out the address of where we’re going to, which is still a surprise so don’t ask.”

“Ok. But what else?”

“Well um…I also found out from Mike that Myra went over, got the rental collected, closed out the bill on your room, and basically took all your stuff.” That last part came out in a rush as Richie waited for Eddie’s reaction.

It took Eddie about two seconds.

“Are you kidding me!”

“Sir?” one of the pharmacists piped up. “Could you please not yell? This may not be a library, but neither are we a rodeo.”

“Sorry. Sorry,” Eddie quickly said. When the guy turned away, Eddie let out a muffled groan and kicked the wall. The pharmacist snapped his head back in their direction. “Sorry.” Eddie turned back to Richie. “Please tell me you’re joking.”

“Sorry, I’m not.”

“She didn’t give me a week. I should have known she would never be that accommodating.” Eddie angrily took all his credit cards out and threw them in the air. “I bet she’s already put holds on most of these if not all. She wants me to go running right back to her! That was always the plan! Well guess what, oh wife of mine, I’m not going to fuckin—”

“Sir—”

“What!?”

A new pharmacist slowly put a bag on the counter and pushed it towards him with the tip of her finger. “Your uh…prescription sir.”

“Right. Right, I-I am so sorry,” Eddie quickly got out. He grabbed the bag and looked down to see Richie picking up everything he’d just thrown out of his wallet. “You-Richie, you don’t have to do that. Shit, I’m sorry.”

“Hey, I don’t mind it. Lord knows you picked up after my shit all through our younger years. Might
as well help you out now,” Richie replied. He flashed his attempt at a comforting smile. It worked because Eddie’s shoulders relaxed. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you right away. I just wanted today to be a break. You know? Not just from the shit we went through but everything else—”

“No. It’s ok. I appreciate it. Just…I don’t know what I’m going to do now,” admitted Eddie. He took his cards back and started to reorganize his wallet as Richie helped by taking the prescription bag from him.

They finally walked out of the hospital just as Eddie put his wallet back in his pocket and took his pills back. He followed Richie to his car, kind of stuck in his own head as he tried to figure out what his next step should be.

He couldn’t go back to Myra. That was exactly what she wanted. But he was also cut off from everything and shit! His job. He should be able to get more time off, assuming they forgave him for suddenly leaving for Derry. He would use the medical reason or even all his unpaid vacation days if he had to.

But there was his own accounts and credit cards he had to get in order, he still needed a new phone, and he had no idea where he was going to live. Because now he knew his one week apart from Myra would last much, much longer, if only to prove a point.

Maybe he should just try to go back to work and get his expenses figured out. He could get a hotel nearby. But then putting himself through that kind of stress probably wouldn’t be good for his heart and chest. Neither did he want to be that close to Myra with the potential of her just showing up at his door whenever she pleased. Yet that didn’t change that he still needed money and somewhere to stay. Just no matter what, he couldn’t go back to Myra. He couldn’t give in. But where in the world could he go from—

“You could stay with me.”


“Well I mean, after this, I think everyone is ready to leave Derry. You know? Just no one wanted to leave until we knew you were ok. And I know I have tours and shit I need to get to, if I didn’t get fired from them—but that’s beside the point! I got the room and I don’t want you to feel like you don’t have an out from the situation. Because you do. And I am happy to help where I can.”

Eddie relaxed against the car seat. His lips softly turned upwards. “You really mean that.”

“Hell yeah. And I mean, if I live too far away then I’ll still help you find a place closer to your own home so you can go to your job if you need to and…”

Richie was rambling a bit, but it was all things that just made Eddie smile harder and harder. Richie was trying to think of anything that Eddie might automatically start worrying about. And to be fair, a lot of those worries had just been in his head. But now that Eddie knew he had someone willing to help him out? That he wasn’t alone in this? Most of those worries slipped away.

“I’ll take you up on the offer.”

“Really?”

“A hundred percent. Maybe…maybe this is the start of the kind of change that I need,” Eddie replied. “Though…I guess I should ask where you live. Don’t think you got around to mentioning that before.”
Richie laughed good and hard at that. “I’ve got two places actually.”

“Fancy.”

“Ugh, don’t say that yet. You haven’t seen them. And they’re pretty small. Just wanted to be able to have a home that was relatively close no matter where I was so I wasn’t in hotel rooms the entire time when on tour. Got a place in Carson City, Nevada and the other one is in Chicago. Which I realize, even Chicago is still like half a day’s drive away from where you live but—”

“I’m ok with that.”

“Really?” asked Richie.

Eddie shrugged. “Maybe I’ll end up grabbing a hotel closer to work when I go back, but I don’t think I’m ready for that yet. And I’d…I’d rather not be alone right now.”

“Same,” Richie agreed. “And you can stay as long as you want. Whatever you need Eds.”

“Thanks,” smiled Eddie. He glanced at the clock. “So, I know it’s far too early for us to be going to dinner right now. So what’s the plan?”

“Heading to the next city over. Not too long a drive from here, actually a little shorter if you went from Derry so that drive back won’t be bad. But we’re going to meet with everyone, see exactly what it’s like to live in a monster free world, and have dinner at wherever Ben found. Sound good?”

“Fucking perfect actually. Hmm, wonder what’s on the radio.”

“Oh no. I pick the music.”

“Your music sucks.”

“Says the guy who will *willingly* listen to ABBA.”

“So? They’re an award-winning group. Your taste in music was shit then and it’s probably shit now.”

“It’s only shit because you’re not willing to branch out more,” smirked Richie.

“Yeah I doubt that.”

They continued to argue, but it was the kind of arguing that came with a great deal of laughter and grinning from ear to ear. Despite how Eddie really didn’t know what the future held for him, he felt completely at ease as Richie drove them down the road.
Eddie and Richie didn’t get a chance to listen to one full song on the drive over. They constantly changed the music, neither willing to compromise until they finally entered the city. They headed downtown and Richie found a parking garage.

As they got out, Eddie murmured, “I still can’t believe it’s only Tuesday. How the hell did so much happen in just a few days?”

Richie shrugged. “No idea. It feels like a year should have gone by already. This way. We should be meeting everyone for coffee first.”

“So less a dinner date, and more a whole day plan, huh?” smiled Eddie.

“Yeah, Ben and Bev stayed up late putting it all together. And I think I finally get what you meant when you said it was about time. I saw them for point five seconds before I jumped in the shower and they’re already sickeningly sweet.”

“Ben always was a romantic. Glad to see that hasn’t changed.”

And that comment only proved to be more accurate when Richie finally got them to the coffee shop that was there first stop. Instead of being part of a chain, it looked like one of those privately-owned places that had managed to survive largely through its unique personality. If Eddie had to guess, the art on the walls was all locally done. Some had price tags on them ranging from five bucks to a couple hundred. Eddie had never been great at telling good art from bad, so he just assumed the more expensive pieces were from better known people.

It was a cloudy day out so the little lamps that hung from the ceiling were all on, creating a pleasant glow against the gray light of the day. The place was pretty busy. However, the moment they walked in, it was like magnets being drawn together. Richie and Eddie spotted Ben and Bev in line right away, and only a few seconds later they saw where Mike and Bill were, currently talking over a painting. The two groups registered their presence before they even had to shout across the coffee shop. Ben and Bev broke their spot in line and Mike and Bill quickly weaved between patrons to get to them as quickly as possible.

“You’re here,” Bill breathlessly said. “You’re actually here.”

“Yeah I—oomph!”

Eddie didn’t manage another word as Bill hugged him. Eddie imagined he would have been hugged even tighter, but Bill was being careful because of the still healing wound. Everyone followed, Bev kissing him on his cheek, Ben bending down and burying his face in Eddie’s neck, Mike cupping his cheeks. Eddie understood the feeling. As great as it had been getting to see everyone on the phone, this was real. They could now confirm that Eddie was truly alive, and Eddie certainly felt the same as he hugged each one of them.
Eddie wiped at his face before any tears could come. “I wish there were better words than, ‘it’s good to see all of you’—”

They all laughed a bit. Mike put a hand on Eddie’s shoulder. “We get what you mean. I don’t think even Bill could find the right words for this moment.”

Bill nodded in agreement. There were too many emotions wrapped into this, too many fears of what-ifs and utter relief at what had actually occurred. They all formed a group hug. The losers were together again. They had each other.

At least until Richie said, “I realize that we’re starring in our own Twilight Zone episode and miraculously—we just got our happy ending, but I think everyone behind us just really wants their fucking coffee.”

Embarrassed laughter escaped everyone’s lips along with quick apologies as they moved their group out of the area in front of the door.

“So I managed to get a couple of things set up,” Ben quickly said. “We can stay here and chat, or we can finish grabbing our coffee and continue on.”

Everyone looked to Eddie who quickly said, “I realize that I had the closest near-death experience here, but we’re a group. I say we take to a vote.”

They did, ultimately deciding they would grab their coffee to-go. Bev and Ben got back in line along with Richie and Eddie. Mike and Bill went back to examining some of the paintings before going near the entrance to wait for them.

When Eddie got to the front though, he hesitated. There was a chance his suspicions about Myra were wrong, but he really didn’t want to go through every single card only to find out he’d been right. Before he could worry about that though, Richie quickly said, “I got both of ours.”

“You sure?”

“We’re having a good day today damn it. You can deal with that later.”

“I just keep finding reasons to say thank you, huh?”

Richie grinned and handed his card over. Then the group headed out again, holding their coffees close as they went down the street. Ben led the way, and it quickly became clear his passion for organizing, what had once been historical pictures and documents as a kid, had continued into his adulthood. There were plan B’s and C’s and alternate choices if they took too long in one place. It may have been a bit much, but it had everyone grinning all the same.

They went into many different stores. They mostly didn’t buy anything. The whole experience was more about messing around, chatting, and really getting a feel to how everyone had changed as people. The dinner at the Chinese restaurant had involved a lot more reminiscing, now it was seeing how personalities, and likes and dislikes had changed over the years. Depending on where they were also provided everyone with their own opportunity to bring up their own expertise and what they’d learned over the years.

For example, Eddie had to get dragged out by everyone when he noticed a beam in the wrong spot.

“That? That right there is how you collapse your ceiling. What’s above this? Your apartment? You move a heavy enough couch over that, and that beam will go down. Really, you should have a whole supporting wall. Let me guess, knocked it out because you thought it would look better huh?
Never a good idea. Also, there is a leak in the bathroom that has a fifty-four percent chance of leading to pretty severe water damage, and you should probably upgrade your heating system—"

“Ok, time to go,” Richie said.

“Oh, and another thing—”

“Nope, next stop,” Ben laughed, joining Richie in pulling Eddie out of the store.

Their adventure continued. They went to family owned places and clothing stores and bookstores. They stopped for ice cream and then drinks a little later, Eddie making sure to take his dose of pain meds in the middle of the day. There was even one vintage store that was eighties themed that led to a lot of fun. Most of the stuff contained things they recognized, but not actual cloths or items they ever owned because they would have been too young, or their parents never would have bought them these things.

They messed around a lot in there. A bunch of over the top, glam rock outfits led to a mirage of funny pictures too. However, the real highlight was when Bev managed to find a poster that had Ben going beet red.

“Oh no.”

Bev gave him a teasing smile and rolled up the poster. “I am getting this for you.”

“Please don’t.”

“Hey, if Bev didn’t get it for you, I would have,” smirked Richie. He suddenly found a section filled with those old, collector’s lunchboxes. He immediately grabbed the one that had New Kids On The Block printed on its metal cover. “I am saving this for a surprise holiday present someday.”

“Guys,” groaned Ben.

“I bet you’re secretly happy with this. I bet you even still listen to their music,” replied Eddie.

“Nope. Not even a little.”

“He’s lying,” Bill replied. “He totally still does.”

“Alright, time to go to the next stop.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Mike. “I think we could spend another good hour in here.”

“Guys, please!”

They all laughed, eventually letting Ben lead them to their next destination after he begged them to before they found anymore NKOTB merch. There were a few more stops, and then they finally ended at the restaurant Ben had picked out. It was definitely a step up from the Chinese place.

Richie blinked. “Woah there. I know you said you’d find the best god damn restaurant—”

“But isn’t it a bit much?” Bill finished.


“Where did this come from?” Bev asked with a sly grin.
“Listen, I almost never use this for personal expenses so one little dip won’t be a problem. And hey! We all deserve it. This is five stars baby!”

“I’m surprised you managed to get a reservation last minute,” Mike admitted. He looked down. “And I feel a bit underdressed.”

Ben shrugged. “We all are. And I am part of a pretty big company. I was able to pull some strings.”

“Go Ben,” grinned Richie. “Expect at least half of the bill to be alcohol alone.”

“Someone has to drive your car back Richie,” replied Bill.

Eddie shrugged. “I’ll do it. I don’t want to mix alcohol with my pills anyways.”

“Well with that settled,” Ben spun around and walked through the front doors. Everyone followed as he went straight up to the concierge. “Party for Hanscom.”

The man gave a quizzical look first to Ben, and then everyone behind him, but after a quick check of ID and card, the man quickly changed tune. “Right this way sirs and madam.”

Bev resisted the urge to snort. Richie very loudly snorted.

To be fair, most of the restaurant was fancy business attire which meant everyone else there stared at them a bit too, but they got seated at a large, round table away from everyone else and which gave them the perfect amount of privacy. The concierge set down menus and said someone would be around soon to get their drinks. Eddie sat down between Richie and Bev and—

The circle.

The ritual.

The chant.

Richie getting caught in the deadlights.

Eddie throwing the broken bar at It.

And then It—

“Woah, Eddie!” Bill desperately reached across the table.

Eddie could feel everyone grabbing on to him as he very nearly face planted.

Bev brushed his hair back. “Eddie. What do you need?”

“I…I’m ok guys. Really,” Eddie said, even as Richie carefully held his other shoulder. “I…us just now all about to sit in a circle…I remember it all.”

“All of it?” Mike asked.

“Yeah. Every detail and…” Eddie paused. He needed to word this carefully. He didn’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings. He didn’t blame them. He knew that what had happened to him must have been different for them. He just wanted to know what that difference had been. “You…you guys left me.”

“Eds,” murmured Richie. He sounded utterly heartbroken as he slumped back into his chair. The others slowly followed.
“No! No I’m not-guys I forgive you. For whatever happened. I just—”

A waitress came in right at that moment. “Is everyone ready for drinks—”

“One moment. Please,” Bill quickly got out. He turned back to Eddie. “We’re sorry Eddie.”

“No, guys you don’t have to be sorry. You don’t. Honest. I mean, I would have rather remembered this…tomorrow or something. And not ruin today.”

“You didn’t ruin it,” murmured Bev. “You couldn’t possibly ruin it.”

The others nodded.

“I just…now that I remember…” Eddie slowly said. “What actually happened to me?”

“Well what happened from your point of view?” asked Mike. “Because I think it was very different for us.”

“Well…It got me. And I…I thought I might die. I’m not going to lie about that. It felt pretty fucking awful. But I also…I knew that no matter what happened, I wasn’t going to let a fucking clown get me. I just…I knew It couldn’t be the end of me, that after everything, my life wouldn’t go out before his. Because all It was, was a clown. A clown that didn’t hold power on grownups and that feared us in the end. It was like…my own fucking will refused to let me die to a thing like that.”

“So for you, you were there with us? Holding hands? Watching It shrink into nothingness?” asked Ben.

Eddie nodded. “I mean, I was still hurt though guys. Even if the wound somehow wasn’t as big as I first thought it was. When the whole place started to fall down, you guys went ahead. It was like you didn’t realize I was still following behind you. I-I was kind of afraid I’d get trapped down there. I lost sight of you. But then I made it out right before the house collapsed. And then I must have collapsed because everything is black after that. The next memory is me waking up. What happened from your point of view?”

Richie let out a long sigh. He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. “Shit Eddie. What we saw…”
Alright, more flashback time. Don't worry, the fluff will come back soon but I had to show what happened eventually.

Richie fell on his hands and knees in the muddy water. The tears had stopped due to the sheer panic that had ensued after running out of that place. But now? Now that it was over? He felt so fucking numb. Had they even really won? After…after he had just lost…

Mike was by him, trying to get him back onto his feet as—

"Y-you guys c-couldn’t wait?"

“What the fuck!?” Richie scrambled to his feet. He and everyone else turned around just in time to see a very much alive Eddie Kaspbrak fall face first in the muddy water.

Everyone stood still as statues.

Then Richie desperately lurched towards him.

“No!” Bill yelled, grabbing hold of Richie. “It’s tr…try…tr…”

“It’s a trick!” Ben screamed.

They huddled together, hearts racing, eyes wide. Mike said, “But we killed It. We actually killed It this time guys!”

“But if we killed It…” Bev slowly said. “Then that…that could actually be—”

Richie finally broke hold of their grip. Even if it was a trick, he was willing to risk it all. He pulled Eddie out of the muck and turned him around. He was still bleeding. There was still a hole in his chest. However, whereas before Richie had felt powerless, trying to cover the wound up, this one he could easily put his whole hand over. He did that now, trying to lessen the bleeding to the best of his ability.

“Guys, it’s him! It has to be fucking him!” Richie’s cry ripped through his throat. They had to see that! They had to help! His hands shook as he pulled Eddie closer and pressed harder on the wound. Panicked sobs started to escape his chest. He couldn’t lose him again! Not twice in less than an hour! As Richie desperately pulled Eddie closer and closer, his cry seemed to break the others from their shock. They still had no idea how this was possible, but it didn’t matter.

There was a chance they could save Eddie.

They weren’t going to screw up this time.

“We-we need a car!” cried Ben. “Why didn’t anyone bring a fucking car!?”

“Help!” screamed Mike. He broke from the group and started to run down the street towards the
other houses. “Please! Help! My friend! My friend needs help!” He even ran up to doors and desperately banged on them, but not a soul appeared. It was like the entire street, maybe even the town, had died along with It.

Bill was down in the muck next to Richie. He checked for a pulse. “He’s still a…a…alive! H… ho…ow?”

“I d-don’t fucking know,” Richie gasped as he tried to get a hold of himself. His grip on Eddie tightened. “Guys we need to get to a fucking hospital!”

“Help us! Please!” Mike screamed again.

“I-I think I can hotwire a car,” Bev said.

Ben spun around “Wait, what?”

“Hold on!” Bev ran to where Mike was. They quickly talked before rushing to an older station wagon. Mike banged on the door first, but still no one appeared. Not even a head poked out from behind a curtain, curious about all the noise that was happening outside. Bev headed straight to the slightly ajar window on the car.

Richie and Bill started to pull Eddie up. Even if he was a bit shorter, he was still a full-grown man. “Ben, help!”

“Shit! Ok, ok, ok,” Ben gasped. He got a hold of himself and ran over.

They pulled Eddie up and quickly carried him over. No one bothered to ask how the hell Bev broke into the station wagon, or how she knew to hotwire it. That wasn’t exactly important at the moment. Bev stayed in the driver’s seat as Mike jumped into the passenger’s side. Ben, Bill, and Richie helped get Eddie into the back. Then Richie and Bill climbed in with him and Ben jumped into the empty trunk.

“Keep pressure on the wound.”

“I am!”

“Bev, we’re in. Go!”

“Where’s the nearest hospital?”

“Turn left. There isn’t a proper hospital in Derry that could deal with this. The nearest one is almost forty minutes away.”

“I can make that in twenty.”

“Go Bev! Go!”

Her foot was practically flat on the floor as she sped through the town. No one had time to notice just how silent the place was. It was like not a single soul had ever lived there. Of course, if it hadn’t been so empty, Bev probably would have hit someone by now. Instead, the worst damage she did was hitting a few curbs and nicking a mail box on one.

“Hey. Hey! He stopped breathing!” yelled Ben, his hand hovering over Eddie’s mouth.

“What if-what if he’s already dead?” gasped Bill, the tears falling down his cheeks. “What i…i…if this is some sick vision left over from It? What i…i…i…”
“He’s not dead! And he’s not dying!” yelled Richie. “Move!”

In the small space, Bill tried to move out of the way as Richie got Eddie flat on the backseat. Richie checked for the pulse. He couldn’t find one so he positioned his hands over Eddie’s heart.

He pushed down hard twice and then paused. He repeated the action.

“Bev, drive faster!” Ben yelled.

“I’m trying!”

She hopped another curb and then there was just the highway ahead of them.

“Hold on!” Mike yelled as he bent back to try and see how they were doing. “You’re doing it wrong!”

“I am trying to keep him alive—”

“I know! I know! Three times. Then break. And go at a faster pace.”

“Ok, ok.”

Richie took a deep breath and then started at it again. After a while, he checked for a pulse just as Ben moved his hand over Eddie’s mouth again.

“He’s breathing again.”

“Oh, that’s good. We just-we just need to get to the hospital. Mike how much longer?”

“About fifteen more—turn here!”

Everyone barely held on. Ben’s body slammed into the right side of the back and Richie fell into the space between the front seats and the back seat.

“Ow!”

“Fuck.”

“Is Eddie ok?!”

“I g…g…go…got him,” Bill managed. “Still breathing.”

“I’m sorry—”

“No Bev. You keep going. How much longer?”

“Turn here.”

“Ok, where next?”

“Here!”

Everyone quieted a bit, Bev and Mike focusing on the road as Richie, Ben, and Bill focused on Eddie. After a few more minutes, they finally seemed to enter the real world and Bev suddenly had to be a great deal more careful so that she didn’t hit a pedestrian. Miraculously, not a single police officer stopped them as Bev skidded onto the road where the hospital was. The panic began to set in again.
“Where the fuck is the ER?!”

“There! There I saw a sign!”

She slammed on the breaks. Bill and Richie tried to keep Eddie stable as Ben failed to brace himself in time and slammed into the back seat. She turned into the parking lot and sped up to the ER entrance before slamming on the breaks again. Everyone started moving at once.

“We gotta hurry! Come on!” yelled Ben as he jumped out the back.

“I’ll go tell them we’ll need help!” Mike quickly cried. He ran out of the car, leaving the door open as he forced himself through the automatic doors. Bev left the car running as she ran around to help them get Eddie out.

They all carried Eddie into the hospital as Mike and several people with a gurney met them right at the door. They each lingered in holding onto Eddie as they were inevitably pulled away from him. Someone else came up to them with a clipboard and quickly asked, “What happened to him?”

They all stayed completely still. What the hell were they supposed to say? How did they explain something like this—

“A…car accident,” Mike finally said.

Richie made bug-eyes at Mike. No one in their right minds would ever believe something as stupid as—

“And can you explain the wound in his chest?”

Richie resisted the urge to throw his hands up in the air. But hell. As long as they were able to patch up Eddie, that was all that mattered. Otherwise, he stayed silent as Mike managed to get out a response before the person mercifully stopped questioning them.

They all stood there, covered in varying levels of graywater, mud, and blood. Beverly was shaking. Her nerves had finally caught up with her after the reckless driving. And Richie? Richie had just lost his best friend. He’d lost his… Only to find out that Eddie was still…

Both Richie and Bev went weak at the knees and the other three quickly grabbed them and set them down on the chairs.

“I’ll go, um, park the car,” Bill said. “How…”

Bev brushed her hair back with shaking hands. “Just untwist the wires,” she whispered.

“Got it.”

Ben and Mike both collapsed next to Bev and Richie. “How the hell did this happen?” asked Ben. “We saw…”

“We all saw it,” hissed Richie. “I felt him die.”

“So how the hell is he still alive?” asked Bev.

“I don’t know. But…but maybe it was Its doing,” Mike suggested.

Ben sat forward so he could see Mike. “How do you mean?”
“Maybe us seeing Eddie dead was one last attack. One last…attempt at twisting our reality. Maybe It knew It was already losing, but It wanted to try and take one more with It.”


“But why didn’t Eddie actually die then? Everything else It did became real. How the hell wasn’t that real?” asked Ben.

“Maybe what we saw wasn’t real. Maybe what happened to Eddie was what was actually real. Maybe the disconnect was because Its power was weakening,” Mike said.

Bev’s nerves had calmed down, at least as best as they could at the moment. She asked, “But then what happened?”

“I don’t fucking care,” muttered Richie. “I don’t care the reasoning or what the hell was real then and what wasn’t. All that matters is that he’s alive now. He’s alive and he just might fucking make it.”

“He will. He has to,” Mike whispered. He gripped Richie’s hand and squeezed. The others all linked hands too, holding onto each other for support. Bill joined them when he finally came back and at least for a moment, they all had each other.

However, eventually a nurse came over and mentioned the amount of room they were taking up. Though later they would note how odd it was that their own states weren’t questioned, and they weren’t asked more about the ‘car accident’, at the moment, all they cared about was Eddie. They couldn’t leave without knowing he was ok.

“At least tell us how he’s doing now,” begged Ben.

“I’m sorry. If you were on his emergency contacts or had proof of a relationship, then I could. But…”

“We can’t leave. We can’t just leave him,” Mike whispered.

“I understand your concern, but we really can’t have you all taking up room in our waiting area. We’re one of the best hospitals around here, but we’re still not very big.”

“Could just one of us stay?” asked Bev. “Please? Just someone to keep watch.”

“I suppose that would be alright—”

“I’ll stay,” Richie immediately said.

“Are you sure?” asked Bill.

“I’ll…I’ll be ok. And…” Richie paused to check his pockets. “I got my phone on me and—thank fucking god. Still works. I’ll call you guys the moment I find out anything.”

“Ok.”

“If you’re sure.”

They formed a group hug again. Everyone either squeezed Richie’s shoulder or gave him a quick pat before reluctantly leaving the hospital. When they were all gone, Richie collapsed in the chair, ready to wait however long he needed to get information.
ACT I: Derry

Eddie pushed his hair back. He knew it couldn’t have been easy. But just hearing the panic that had returned in their voices as they retold the story? Hearing about his own dead body just…just lying there? His friend unable to do anything about it only for him to seemingly come back to life? “Jesus guys…”

“It was pretty fucking horrible,” admitted Ben.

“But…Beverly. You were covered in blood,” Eddie said. “At least more than us. I remember that. How didn’t they—”

“It was like when we were kids,” Bev replied.

“We probably still looked like absolute shit,” Richie added. “But what they saw wasn’t nearly as bad as what we’d all been through.”

“And the car?” asked Eddie.

Bill let out a long sigh. “That was the really weird part. When we took it back, there was still no one at that house. And when Mike went back again to check—”

“It was just gone,” Mike finished. “I mean, there are still people in Derry. It’s not like the whole town disappeared. But it’s like…it’s like almost half the population vanished with It. There are people who just don’t exist—or I suppose they never really existed. They were just extensions of It. But those that are left? They don’t seem to notice any change.”

“And the fact that no one questioned our weak car accident story? I don’t know,” sighed Ben. “It was like…like…”

“Some weird, remnant o…o…o…of It,” Bill finally got out. “Like the power of It lingered or maybe…maybe flowed outwards in one final burst.”

Eddie shook his head. He wanted to call the whole thing crazy. He’d been stabbed, but from his point of view, he’d been there with them. He’d watched It shrink into nothingness. Yet according to them, they’d all experienced his own horrific death. Richie had been torn from his body, thinking not only that Eddie was dead and would be buried under that fucking house, but also that he’d failed him. Of course, even now Eddie didn’t have any power over what had happened, yet he still felt fucking horrible for them. “Guys, I’m so—”

“Don’t you dare say it,” said Bev. “There is no reason for you to be sorry. We’re just happy you’re here sitting with us.”

“Well me too,” smiled Eddie. “But I still didn’t mean to bring this all up tonight.”

“We were going to have to bring it up eventually. I’m kind of glad it’s over with now. It feels like what happened with It can really rest,” said Bill.

“I suppose. Just…you know I love you guys. Right?” Eddie added.

“Of course we do. You don’t even have to say it,” Bev said as she gave Eddie a quick hug.

“We love you too Eddie,” said Bill.
The others that were sat farther away got up again and a group hug occurred. By that point, the waitress returned, cautiously coming around the corner. She was much more hesitant than before. “Is…is everything ok?”

“Yeah, we’re fine,” Mike quickly said.

“Everything is actually perfect,” sighed Ben as a weight lifted off his shoulders along with everyone else.

“I’d like four bottles of wine,” Richie added.

“Ignore him. Just, one more moment,” smiled Bill. “Just so we can look over the drinking list. If we’re still…”

“We’re staying,” Eddie quickly said. “We’re ending the day strong damn it.”

“Agreed,” Bev replied.

“And I’ll go ahead and help you out,” Eddie said to the waitress. “Just water for me.”

The others looked down, quickly ordering something to start with when Ben quickly looked up and said, “Hang on. Where did you learn how to hotwire a car?”

“It’s nothing as crazy as you think. When I left Derry to live with my aunt, there was a day when she lost her keys. Being late just wasn’t an option at work so she hotwired the car. She showed me how to do it too in case there was ever an emergency,” smirked Bev.

“The more you know,” chuckled Bill.

And from there, the dinner finally started. Though the original levity was no longer there, everyone was able to relax in a way they hadn’t before. Being all caught up, it felt like the end of It and their time in Derry was truly almost there. Just one more night and they would be gone from the place forever. The only promise they would have would be to each other. No twisted pact or pledge to fight some monster. Even Mike admitted that now that his dues were over, he was thinking of moving too.

Bill immediately jumped at the opportunity. “I could come back and help you.”

“Really? Don’t you have work to get back to? A wife?” chuckled Mike.

“I mean, the great thing about writing is you can do it anywhere,” Bill replied. “And…maybe things haven’t been going as well back home as I made it seem. I may have left out some details.”

“I know how that feels,” Eddie admitted.

“Me too,” Bev said. “If either of you need to talk…”

“Thanks Bev.”

Eddie nodded. “I wasn’t even thinking about that. But it would be good to talk to someone who can relate.”

“So we have even more reason to stay in contact with each other,” Ben pressed. “We’re not going to forget. Not this time.”

“Then let’s go ahead and exchange phone numbers,” Bill said. “I mean, we all have Mike’s but…”
They quickly went about doing that, except for Eddie who promised to get everyone’s info from Richie once he got a new phone. As they finished adding each other’s contacts, Richie said, “Hey Mike. Call us all whenever you do move. That way we know where we’re all crashing next time.”

“Why my place?”

“Because my apartments are small as shit. And this way it entices you to get a cool, big ass place.”

“Exactly what kind of salary do you think I have? I’m a librarian,” laughed Mike as the rest of the group joined in.

And with that, they managed to finish their dinner the way it was meant to be. Richie didn’t even get that wasted, though Eddie still agreed to drive them back. Since the others had all come in one car, Bill decided to join them, leaving Mike, Bev, and Ben with the other one.

The drive to Derry was shorter than the one from the hospital to the city, and it was only a little past ten when they arrived in front of the small hotel. They said their goodbyes to Mike, though it was assumed they would all see each other again for one last send off in the morning.

Eddie grabbed his pills and everything he would need to clean his wound. As Mike left, everyone else headed inside and Eddie—

Eddie froze at the foot of the stairs.

“Ah, fuck.”

“What’s wrong?” Bill asked, quickly stopping and turning around on the landing.

“My room. My clothes.” He’d pretty much forgotten about it during the day. For the most part, he’d just focused on enjoying his time with his friends. But now there was no way around it. “Myra came and already took everything.”

“No need to worry. You can use my room,” Richie said.

“And where are you going to sleep? Another chair?” asked Eddie.

“You’re still healing. That’s more important than my sore back any day.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Ben replied. “Richie, you stay in your own bed. Eddie, you can use mine. I won’t need it tonight.”

Beverly raised her eyebrow. “Oh you won’t. Huh?”

“I-I mean I’ll, uh, sleep on the couch out here so um Richie gets a break—”

She rolled her eyes. “You’re all idiots sometimes.” She grabbed Ben’s hand and pulled his flustered form up the stairs and past Bill. “Eddie, please feel free to use Ben’s room. And Richie, please sleep normally for once.”

“Never have and never will!” Richie called back. He turned to Eddie. “You ok with that?”

“As long as I’m not ruining your back,” Eddie replied as they headed up the stairs and after the others.

“Do you need anything to change into?”
“Urgh, I’ll just sleep in my underwear. I’ll worry about getting more clothes and everything else tomorrow,” sighed Eddie. “Though…actually can you help me with re-dressing the wound?”

“You know you don’t even have to ask me something like that.”

“Well, I kind of do or else how would you know I needed help?”

“Ok ass. You know that’s not what I meant.”

Eddie just chuckled and went ahead down the hall with Richie following close behind. Bill entered his own room and Ben and Bev entered hers. As Eddie entered Ben’s room, he asked, “So everyone is clearly ready to leave Derry. What’s the plan for tomorrow?”

“I don’t know. Meet up again. Say one final good-bye. Then get in the car and head home. Which I’ve been meaning to ask you. Do you want to stop by your house to grab a few things or…”

“Once I get my phone fixed, or at least have a laptop, I should be able to figure out which accounts are free from her. Then I can go ahead and buy a few temporary things and get settled for the time being,” Eddie said. He’d taken off his jacket and was in the middle of unbuttoning his shirt when he paused. “I mean, technically getting some things from home would be easier. But I…I honestly don’t know if I could leave again if I did go back.”

“Seriously? I met her for point five seconds Eds. She’s awful!”

Eddie let out a small sigh. “Don’t tell me you’ve never felt trapped by something, no matter how logic says you should be able to walk away or change your ways or tell the truth or whatever.”

Richie quieted and looked away.

“It’s just not that easy for me, even if I am willing to yell and make a fuss over it now. I’d like to say I could cut everything off now, but it’s a process I have to go through. That means staying away from her and that house just to…just to let me breath for once in my life.” A worried look crossed Eddie’s face. “Unless this is because you don’t want me to stay with you any—”

“No! No, I didn’t mean to seem pushy. I’m sorry if I came across as that,” Richie said. “I’m totally willing to work with you. While we were walking around today, I even went ahead and got you a plane ticket too. If that doesn’t say I’m down for a long ass spend the night, I don’t know what does.”

“Wait. You—seriously? I’ll pay you back Richie—”

“It’s no problem. Not having such a damn empty apartment will be reward enough. Now show me what I need to do.”

Eddie threw off his shirt and went into the bathroom. He went ahead and cleaned the front of his chest, showing Richie how to do his back while he did it. Then he turned around. He braced himself against the bathroom sink and let Richie do the rest. He was surprisingly gentle, waiting before he fully finished any motion to make sure Eddie didn’t flinch in any way.

When Richie finished, Eddie gave him the bandages to cover it up. He waited, but frowned and glanced in the mirror when Richie didn’t seem to move. Eddie couldn’t see Richie’s face, his head ducked down low.

“Do you need me to show―”
“I got it,” came Richie’s quick reply.

Eddie didn’t feel anything for a moment longer. Then, ever so gently, he felt a finger trail right along the edge of the wound. It was clear Richie was being careful not to actually touch it, but the motion was so slight Eddie couldn’t help but shiver.

“Shit. Sorry.”

He could feel Richie quickly covering up the area. Eddie shook his head. “It’s ok. I get it. It’s hard not to stare at.”

“It’s not that…I just should have fucking done more.”

Eddie waited until he felt Richie finish before he finally turned around. “What the hell do you mean? It wasn’t your fault Richie. It wasn’t anyone’s. We already established that.”

“Doesn’t change how I feel. All my big fucking talk and you really threw the first punch. You fucking hurt It before any of us even knew what to really do and I-I nearly let you die—”

“I don’t blame you,” Eddie interrupted. He took Richie by the shoulders and pulled him close. “I don’t know how many times I’ll have to say it, but I’ll keep repeating it until you believe it. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

Eddie gently hugged him, pressing his face into Richie’s shoulder and keeping him close. “If anything, I should thank you. Seeing you in trouble made me finally step up and realize what I was capable of. So thanks for that.” Eddie pulled back a little. “And thanks for helping me with my back and everything.”

“Hey, we’re going to be living together. At least for a bit. I was going to have to figure it out anyways,” Richie said.

He looked a little more at ease, though there was still clearly something on his mind. Eddie didn’t pry, but if Richie ever started to doubt his sincerity again, Eddie would simply keep repeating the truth. He would never blame Richie. He was one of his best friends.

“Do you need anything else?” Richie asked.

“I’ll be good for the rest of the night. See you tomorrow.”

“Night.”

Richie left and Eddie went ahead and undressed to his underwear. He carefully got in the bed and tried to get as comfortable as possible. As he started to fall asleep, one of his hands came up near the wound. Richie’s slight touch seemed to still linger. The feeling made him smile and he finally fell asleep.
So I kind of imagine this chapter as the last part of Act: 1 of this story. The planning of this story is kind of divided into three parts, the first with everyone coming to terms with what happened in Derry and leaving. This second part is going to focus more on Eddie getting his new life together and the third part is a surprise :)

Anyways, also wanted to say there may be a bit of a break between this chapter and the next. I have an essay I need to try and devote a whole day to but we'll see what happens. Thanks again for the amazing, beautiful comments and all the kudos! It means a lot and I hope you enjoy this next chapter!

Normally Eddie would have hated wearing the same outfit twice in a row, and the fact he hadn’t had a chance at a proper bath would have driven him insane (a shower would have to wait until the wound was fully healed). He didn’t think people realized how dangerous it could be wearing the same clothes in a row. Not only did sweat and other fluids begin to collect and gather and caused you to sweat more in the long run, but if you waited too long you could even get a yeast infection—

No. Stop. For once, Eddie managed to quiet his normally loud inner voice that was warning him of every possible bad thing that could happen. Besides, wearing the same clothes twice in a day would not kill him and once he was at Richie’s place, he could borrow some of his and order what he needed.

Eddie did take a second to wash his face though before heading out. He passed Ben in the hall who was headed to his room to finish packing.

“Did you sleep ok?” Ben asked.

“As well as I could. Thanks, by the way. Richie didn’t need to sleep in a chair again.”

“That we can agree on,” Ben replied. “I think everyone else is already downstairs.”

“Thanks.”

Eddie continued to the stairs. As he passed Bev’s room, she came out with her small suitcase and followed Eddie down the steps. Bill and Richie were already down there, and Mike was there too. The three were in the middle of a pretty serious discussion that had Bev and Eddie cautiously glancing at each other.

“Everything alright?” Bev finally asked.

Bill tried to speak but Richie put his arm around his shoulders and said, “Oh, this one here is just being an idiot.”

“He didn’t think we’d want to go with him,” Mike explained. He turned to Bill. “Which we obviously will. We want to be there for you, and we want to be there for him.”

“Who?” asked Eddie.
"I wanted…I wanted to say goodbye to Georgie," Bill murmured. "And we managed to end yesterday so well that I…I didn’t want to be the one to bring the mood back—"

"Bill, you don’t have to worry about that," murmured Bev. She walked over and squeezed his hand. "We’re happy to go with you. Unless you want to go alone."

"No. No, I just didn’t want to make you feel like you had to."

"We know we don’t have to. We want to," Eddie replied. "Besides, it’ll feel good to see him once last time."

Bill nodded in agreement. They waited for Ben and then told him the plan. He of course agreed and they all got into their separate cars and drove to the graveyard. Today, the sun was shining and there were few clouds in the sky. It was the kind of day that Georgie would have loved. No one else was at the cemetery when they got there, leaving them complete privacy as they parked and headed in.

Mike and Bill led the way and when Bill finally spotted Georgie’s grave, he froze. "It’s—"

"A lot of families left. The ones who…who lost their kids. And everyone else in this town just didn’t understand or…or seem to care," Mike got out. "So, I took it upon myself to make sure Georgie and the others, any who were laid to rest here, were taken care of. He didn’t go one week without a visit Bill."

In front of them stood Georgie’s grave. It was mostly clean, freshly dusted off. Flowers had been planted by it and from their condition, were regularly cared for. Only a quick glance was needed to find the other graves of the children. Rather than being long forgotten, the headstones were kept clean and flowers also grew beside them.

"Th…th…tha…” Bill had to stop, too choked up over the moment as Mike put his arms around him.

"You don’t have to thank me. I was happy to do it."

Bill wiped at his face. He looked ready to speak, but then stopped himself again. Instead of going forward, he murmured. "If…if you want to say something first…"

"Sure," Mike murmured. He squeezed Bill’s arm before kneeling at the grave. "Hey Georgie. I…I’ve said it before, but I’ll say it again. I wish I could have met you kid. I bet you would have been part of the club too. At least now you and the others can finally rest in peace."

Mike moved back. He glanced at Bill, but he clearly wasn’t ready to speak yet. Richie stepped forward instead and knelt on the ground.

"Hi. I know. I know. I always got upset if Bill brought you along, but you want to know a secret? I always thought you were the cooler brother. I was just trying to be mean so Bill never realized I liked you more.” Soft, bittersweet laughter sounded at that. Bill choked up a little more. "Miss you."

Richie was then replaced by Ben.

“I never got to meet you either. But if you were even half as cool as Bill, then I bet you would have been the coolest kid in the world. I doubt we would have hung out a lot. I always was in the library back then, but I bet I would have been more willing to go outside if I’d had you as a friend.”

The next person was Eddie.

“I don’t know what else to say that hasn’t been said,” Eddie began, “but I miss you kid. You were
the only one who took all my warnings seriously.” That again brought some bittersweet laughter.
“Which I’m sorry if I ever went overboard. Just trying to look out for everyone. I think you knew
that. I’ll always miss you Georgie.”

Then finally Beverly came forward.

“I heard so much about you, I felt like I knew you back then. I wish I could have gotten to meet you
too Georgie. You sound like an amazing kid.”

Bev moved back.

They all put their hands on Bill, holding his own, squeezing his shoulder, supporting his back,
whatever they could do to physically show Bill how much they cared. That they were there for him.

Eventually, Bill walked forward. With each step, he managed to stop his shaking just a little bit more.
He slowly knelt down and took a deep breath.

“You were the best damn baby brother a kid could have,” Bill began. “I wish I’d never forgotten
you, but I promise I won’t forget you now. I love you…I love you so much Georgie. I always have.
And…and I don’t know how it works. What’s after this. But whatever it is, I know you’ll find Stan.
He’ll be happy to have a friend waiting for him, and hey. Maybe you’ll be the one to look out for
him this time. It’ll probably be a while before I see either of you again. I’ve got things to do, a live to
finally live. I hope you understand. Just know I can’t wait for the day I get to run towards you and
swing you around in my arms in that way that always made you scream with excitement. To get a
chance to carry you on my shoulders again. But until then...goodbye Georgie. Bye.”

Bill’s fingers grazed the name on the headstone before his hand slowly fell away. He let out another
long sigh. He stood up and was immediately enveloped by his friends. No words were said. They
didn’t need to be.

When they moved away, Mike said, “Ben, Bev, I know you’re driving back. Let me know when
you make it home safe.”

“Of course,” Bev said.

“Hey, same goes for you all flying out,” Ben added. “Just let everyone know when you land safely.”

“I will.”

“Promise.”

“We’re together again. Which means all of you are going to get to deal with my two AM drunken
texts,” grinned Richie.

“Urgh great.”

“Thanks Richie.”

It did get everyone to laugh though as they hugged it out once more.

“Let me know whenever you start packing,” Bill told Mike. “I’m happy to help.”

“Will do.”

“Well, until we see each other again.”
“Yeah.”

“Bye.”

“See you.”

They all said good-bye in just about every possible way, right up until they were finally getting into their cars and driving out of the cemetery. They all slowed to a stop as they hit a crossroads. Mike drove back into Derry. The other four cars drove away.

Down a little way, those cars split off too, taking different routes and heading in different directions until it was just Richie and Eddie, and the others were out of sight. Eddie expected Richie would be speeding down the road, ready to get out of Derry and Maine as quickly as possible. Yet on the route they took, they went through a familiar bridge and Richie started to slow down.

“Hey, uh…just give me a quick second.”

“Ok.” Eddie’s gaze followed Richie as he pulled over onto the side of the road and got out. He walked over to the bridge. Eddie kind of wanted to get out and follow him. He was certainly curious what was so important that Richie felt he had to stop for it. However, Eddie decided to let whatever it was remain private and waited in the car until Richie joined him again. “Finally done with Derry?”

“I mean, technically not until Mike gets his ass up and leaves, but yeah. I am completely fucking done with Derry now,” Richie replied. He grinned, and there seemed to be a renewed sense of excitement about him. He pulled back onto the road and soon he and Eddie left Derry far behind.
ACT II: Change

Chapter Notes

I was going to have this chapter be their entire first day together in Chicago, but it started to get too long so I've split it into two. So much for taking a break for a day lol. Anyways, here's basically the start of the second Act of this story. The responses to this have been absolutely lovely so thank you so much for that and I hope you enjoy this next chapter as much as you've enjoyed the last ones.

To say there wasn’t a moment where Eddie thought maybe he was just going through an extreme version of a midlife crisis would have been a lie. He definitely wondered if he’d gone insane. But every time those thoughts caught up with him, all he had to do was glance over to Richie. Maybe his choice to do this was ridiculous, but he felt that everything would turn out just a little bit better with one of his best friends at his side.

They got to the airport, and Eddie was again extremely thankful that Myra had at least left him with his wallet. Otherwise it would have been an incredibly long drive to Chicago. Of course, if she’d thought he’d have the balls to do this, she never would have left him his ID. As it was, clearly this would prove her wrong.

As they waited for boarding to begin, Richie said, “I’m surprised flying doesn’t scare the shit out of you.”

“Are you trying to freak me out?”

“I’m serious! Part of me kind of expected you to insist we drive the whole fucking way.”

“Just because deaths involving airplanes are more televised does not mean it’s statistically more likely. Driving in a car is far more dangerous. In fact, I’m more likely to die on a ladder or in the bath than on an airplane.”

Richie raised an eyebrow.

“Not that any of those hypothetical situations matter because I am…moving on from that. Statistics and probabilities are not going to run my life.”

“Good,” Richie said, for once foregoing a joke. “I think you can do it.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.” Richie paused. “Besides, you don’t really have to worry about ladder deaths if you don’t own a ladder. I’m guessing you’ve never owned one in your entire adult life.”

“Nope.”

Richie did laugh at that and Eddie managed his own grin. After that, it wasn’t long before they boarded, and the flight even managed to leave on time. Both Eddie and Richie passed out during most of it. Eddie woke up first to Richie drooling on his shoulder. He pushed him over, not that it woke him up. Instead of forcing him awake, Eddie took advantage of the quiet and looked out the
window instead as the descent began.

He’d been to a couple of major cities over the years thanks to his company, but after his mom had moved him out of Derry, he’d mostly stayed in New York State. He’d never been to Chicago. He knew it had a lot of popular comedy bars, opportunities for stand-up and improv. It made sense Richie would have chosen a place like this to settle.

Richie finally woke up with a start as the wheels hit the runway.

“Are we here?” came his gruff reply as he righted his glasses.

“Actually, we’re in Canada. They asked if we wanted to get off in Chicago, but I told them it was better to let you sleep.”

“Canada?”

“Wow. You were really fucking under weren’t you.” Eddie gently slapped him in the face a couple of times. “Wake up sleeping beauty. We’ve got Canadian Bacon and maple syrup to eat.”

“Wh…you are joking right?”

“Of course I am. Get your ass up. I can’t get out until you do.”

“Well maybe I don’t want to.”

“Pretty sure this is a round flight. You really want to go back to Maine this soon?”

“I’m up!”

Eddie laughed as Richie grabbed his carry-on bags. He followed him off the plane, and they ended up taking a transit to the parking lot. When they got to Richie’s car, Eddie couldn’t help but comment, “Looks a lot like your rental.”

“Yeah, I’m pretty fond of it. Had my assistant make sure I got a rental that was similar enough to it in Maine.” Richie suddenly stopped and let out a large groan as he threw his bags into the back seat. “He’s going to fucking kill me.”

“Your assistant?”

“Well, if he’s even still working for me. I kind of ghosted him during the whole thing in Derry. I mean, I had him help get the plane tickets yesterday, but I wouldn’t be surprised if I checked my email now only to find a resignation letter from him. I mean, it is either that or he’ll show up at my place in the next couple of days and strangle me to death.”

“You’re telling me he agreed to be your assistant and he wasn’t aware of your neuroticism beforehand?” asked Eddie.

“Oh ha ha.”

“Hey. If it makes you feel better, I’ll kill him before he can kill you.”

Richie let out a sharp laugh. “You said that so straight faced, I almost believed you.”

“What? I can be your bodyguard or something. One look at old Scarface and he’ll be running for the hills.”
“Oh, so you like that name now, huh?”

Eddie nudged him. “Hey, might as well embrace the new look. Hmm…Myra never would have even joked about it. Would have said it was too childish.”

“Myra isn’t here Scarface. And having fun doesn’t make you childish. It means you know how to have fucking fun. Speaking of, what’s the plan when we get to my place? It’s only about eleven thirty here.”

“Hmm…maybe we should wait on whatever insane adventure you’re thinking up. Before anything happens, I want to get my finances in check.”

“Fair enough. I’ll help you get settled, give you the password to my computer, and then run out and grab some food for us. We can have a low thrills movie night tonight and tomorrow we can get you some clothes and whatever else you need.”

“That sounds perfect actually.”

“Cool. We can grab you a new phone tomorrow too. Oh, and you have to promise not to look at my search history,” Richie added with a waggle of his eyebrows.

Eddie made a face. “I would like to avoid bleaching my eyes thank you.”

Richie just grinned as they drove through the city. Along the way, Richie pointed out a few places that he promised he would drag Eddie to in the coming days. He also listed some of his favorite hubs to grab coffee, the best place to grab groceries, a good bookstore, restaurants, anything that could be relevant. He also pointed out a Verizon store that was only about five minutes from his place where they could grab Eddie that new phone tomorrow.

They then finally pulled onto Clark Street, drove a few more minutes, and then Richie pushed into a parking space on the side of the road.

“Sometimes it’s a bit difficult to find a space right in front of the building. It’s just down this way,” Richie explained, grabbing his bags and quickly leading Eddie down the street. They walked by some little salon, an espresso café, and then turned to a door that was sandwiched between it and an H&R Block.

“I would have half expected you to live above a bar.”

“Did so in my college days. Do not recommend it,” Richie replied as he balanced his bags so he could grab his keys. “Worked great on the weekend when I was sleeping all day and trying to get a spot at any comedy club that would let me in at night, but I never got any sleep during the week and missed all my classes. Eventually dropped out. Do have an Associate’s degree in Liberal Arts though. Gotta love a worthless slip of paper I could have printed off the internet rather than wasting thousands of bucks on.”

Eddie snorted.

As Richie opened the door for them, he asked, “What about you? You haven’t mentioned anything about college yet.”

“Do you really think I have any stories of interest involving college?”

Richie took one look at him. “Ok, point taken. Here hold this for me real quick.”
Eddie rolled his eyes as he took the bags. Richie in turn checked his mail and shoved the envelopes under one of his arms. He switched to a different key on his key ring, grabbed the bags back from Eddie, and began to take the stairs two at a time. Eddie went a little slower, just taking in the apartment building and the overall feel of the place. It wasn’t anything special, but it was still nice. They went to the third floor and Richie opened the second door.

They walked in and Richie immediately threw his bags near his couch. Eddie took one look around the living space and a quick glance through the open bedroom door.

“This is exactly how I would have expected you to live.”

“Don’t sound so god damn patronizing.”

Eddie blinked. He focused on the kitchen area. “Has your fridge been open this whole time?”

“Urgh fuck! I thought I’d closed that when I left. Though to be fair, wasn’t really paying any attention to the little things when I left for Derry. Fucking shit. Everything’s probably fucking spoiled by now.”

“No probably about it,” replied Eddie. “And your plant is dead.”

“Oh. That’s been dead for the past six months. Yeah, been meaning to throw it out.”

“Of course you have.”

“Just come here. I’ll get you set up so you can take a bath and put some new clothes on.”

“You’re just trying to bribe me away so I stop pointing out how gross you can be and then you can run around cleaning up while I’m in the bathroom.”

“Is it working?”

“Hmm, yeah.”

“Great! Bathroom is through here.”

It was hard for Eddie not to smile as he collected his pills and medical stuff. Might as well get that cleaned again along with the rest of himself. He got a better look at Richie’s bedroom and he gave his friend a pointed stare after spotting the piles of clothes everywhere.

“Ok. Listen. This better not become one of those fucking odd couple situations. The dirty clothes pile is there for a reason and I don’t want it getting mixed up with the clean ones.”

“Those are not clean if they’re on the floor.”

“They’re perfectly clean. I washed them…more recently than the others.”

Eddie let out a large groan. “I see why you never settled. I don’t know a single person who would willingly live with you like this.”

“You are by agreeing to stay with me.”

“I’m a special case.”

“That you are,” smirked Richie. “There’s the bathroom. And hey, it’s at least not as bad as the rest of the apartment.”
Eddie poked his head in. “It could be worse,” he agreed.

“A stellar review from Eddie Kaspbrak. Here’s some clothes. You can obviously use whatever I have in there. If you want your own shampoo or whatever, we can get it tomorrow.”

“Sounds good.”

Eddie put the clothes Richie gave him on top of the toilet and closed the door. He waited a few seconds and heard the panicked movements of Richie throwing every piece of trash away and at least trying to make his organized mess a little less mess. Eddie chuckled. Richie had been the exact same way when they’d been kids. Eddie had always known Richie wasn’t the cleanest and had a not so traditional way of organizing things. Yet every time they’d made plans at Richie’s house, he’d always tried to make the place look nicer. Whenever Eddie had showed up without notice, that was when Eddie would get shoved out of the room and he’d hear the frantic sounds of Richie cleaning up on the other side, just like now.

Good to know some things never changed.

Eddie focused on the shower and tub. To be honest, he could already see what cleaning supplies he would buy that Richie definitely didn’t have but needed. Still, it wasn’t exactly a space of disease and death. Eddie pushed back the slight worries in his head and simply started the water.

He went over the products Richie had. Again, it wasn’t too surprising. Most of it was cheap, standard brands with names like Wolfthorn and Timber that really didn’t smell like anything specific, just strong. It would have to do for now.

After inspecting what he had to work with, he took his time going ahead and taking the bandages off so his chest wound could breath. He treated the front and made a note to ask Richie to help him with his back later. He also took a closer look at the scar on his cheek. The dissolvable stitches would probably still be there for the next week or two. It looked good though, all things considered.

By that point the water was warm enough, and Eddie took off the rest of his clothes. He slipped in with a long sigh just as a knock came at the door.

“Yeah?”

“I’m gonna go ahead and grab some food since I now have jackshit!” Richie called through the door. “Need anything?! Or any preference for lunch or dinner?!”

“Your pick.”

“Cool! Laptops in the living room! Left my password on a sticky note! See you soon!”

“See ya!” Eddie called back. He listened to the sound of Richie walking off and then…

Ok. Maybe he should have asked Richie to wait. He was alone in a new apartment, in a new city, and Richie had basically been at his side since he’d woken up—

No. Damn it, he was a grown man! He’d been alone before. It wasn’t like he had to have someone there. It was just—

Oh.

Shit.
With Myra, with his mom, with most people in his life, he hadn’t minded not having them around twenty-four/seven. The more often he was with them, the more stress they just added, or the more they put him down. Being around people had felt like a chore for so long. He’d nearly forgotten what it felt like to really enjoy being around someone again. It was why he was already missing Richie, missing the rest of the losers, despite only being alone for point five seconds.

Perhaps in retrospect, it made his life look rather sad, but he wasn’t upset by the realization now. After all, it wasn’t like the losers were leaving him forever, and he knew Richie would be back soon. Even if Eddie was physically alone, he wasn’t actually alone anymore, possibly for the first time since childhood. Those thoughts eased his worries as he finally focused on washing his hair and body, careful not to get the wounds too wet.
After Eddie was done with his bath, he just put on the pants Richie had let him borrow. He’d let his chest wound air out a bit and would wait to bandage the front when Richie got back and could help him with his back. The gray sweatpants were a bit long but comfortable, and it felt good to be in clean clothes. At least clean by Richie’s standards. But he wasn’t going to think about how long this pair had sat on the floor.

Going out into the apartment, the place was still kind of a mess, but Richie had certainly tried. Eddie walked into the living room and kitchen. The fridge door was now securely shut, and the dead plant had been dumped into the trash, the empty pot sitting on the little counter now.

In the living room, there was the couch, a nice TV set with a good collection of DVDs and Blu-Rays, and a desk in the corner where the laptop was. It looked like that was Richie’s workstation, though going by how everything but the laptop looked untouched, Eddie could guess he hadn’t used the area in a while.

Eddie sat down and pulled up the laptop, he looked at the password and started to put it in but froze. He picked up the sticky note and really looked at the password: spaghEdti. That one nickname Richie had sometimes thrown at him…

It reminded Eddie of the times when he’d seen something, or got a program on the TV, and it had… had just reminded him so much of a time he couldn’t remember…

Eddie had never left Richie, even if he hadn’t been able to remember him.

His finger gently traced the writing as he smiled. His chest felt warmer and his heart sped up just the slightest.

He paused, his attention being drawn from the moment so he could carefully feel around the wound. He wasn’t coming down with an infection, right? No, the area didn’t actually feel warm, and otherwise he felt fine. He’d been keeping the wound clean too. The feeling was probably just a fluke. He finally focused back on the laptop. He put the password in and began the long work ahead of him.

Thankfully, Eddie had all his login information memorized and he sat there for over an hour and a half, fingers quickly moving over the keys. He only paused once so he could go grab his wallet and pull out all his cards. He divided them by working ones and frozen ones and then went back to typing at the computer.

He was still hunched over the laptop when Richie came back with bags of groceries. Eddie was so focused on what he was currently typing that he didn’t notice Richie stumbling over his own feet at seeing Eddie sitting shirtless in his living room.

“U-uh this a new look or…”
“Wanted to let the wound air out,” Eddie replied, still not looking up and thus, still not noticing Richie’s slight blush. “Can you help me clean up my back when I’m finished here?”

“Sure,” Richie replied. He pulled himself together and went to the kitchen. As he started putting up everything, he added, “I talked to the others by the way. Ben and Bev are still in the middle of driving and Bill just got onto his connecting flight. I’ll make sure to give you their numbers tomorrow.”

“Thanks.”

“What have you been up to? Learned anything?”

“Well, majority of our accounts are connected and unsurprisingly, they’ve been frozen or locked from my login information. I do have a separate bank account though and my checks automatically go into that one which is good. She has control of most of our investments except for some stocks I have in my job. Not that I really care about any of that. Also been going through a few emails though. Myra’s sent about twelve. Haven’t opened them and no telling how much she’s tried to text or call me. I’ll deal with that later. I did go ahead and email work that I needed more time off though. My boss’s secretary wants me to call so she knows I’m not actually dead and my murderer is trying to cover his tracks. Can I borrow your phone?”

“Yeah here.”

Richie paused in putting everything up and took out his phone. He made sure Eddie had turned towards him before he tossed it over. Then he went back to putting up groceries.

“Passcode?”

“2367.”

Eddie typed it in and then quickly called work. It only took a few minutes before she answered. “Hey Sylvia. No, this isn’t my phone. It’s a friend’s. Been having some trouble with mine, but after tomorrow you should be able to reach me normally again. Yeah, I know. It’s a surprise to me too that I’m alive. No, I don’t mean it like that. I just-there are some very important, personal matters that I need to take-ok. Ok. That’s fair. I did leave without warning. Send the files to my email and I’ll look over them and get back to you. But after that-yes. I am being for real. I need this time off. Everything’s ok though. It really is. If he says no? If he says no then…then…I’m just not coming in. Ok? I’m in Chicago so it’s just not realistic right now on a moment’s notice. I’ll look at the files, but that’s all I can do right now. Ok? Alright, good. Glad to know we’re on the same page. Yes, thank you Sylvia.”

He let out a large groan as he tapped the end button and dropped the phone on the desk. “Urgh, I feel terrible.”

“Well you shouldn’t,” Richie shot back. “Knowing you, I bet you’ve barely missed a day for that damn corporation. You deserve the break. You shouldn’t even be doing what favors you just promised her.”

“Probably not, but don’t worry. After I finish, I’m putting my foot down. I need this break. I won’t give in if they try to shove more work on me.”

“Promise?”

“Promise,” Eddie replied. He started to log out of everything and finally closed the laptop. He looked back to the sticky note and then made his way to kitchen counter. “You ever notice your password?”
“What do you mean? It’s just some letters.”

“Just some—Eddie Spaghetti? Ring any bells?”

“Wh—” Richie froze. “That’s not my password.”

“It most definitely is,” chuckled Eddie. “Don’t look so upset. I’m flattered if anything.”

“I…huh. I guess I did. Hang on! T-that comment you made! Outside the Chinese the restaurant.”

“Which one? There were several. Mostly me wondering how the hell we managed to walk out of there after destroying one of their rooms and screaming at a kid.”

“No. The one about me not writing my own material. The only way you could know that…”

Now it was Eddie’s turn to look a bit bashful.

“You watched my specials. You did!” Richie explained.

“I mean…kind of. At the time I didn’t fully get it. Just…something so damn familiar about you. I couldn’t place you, but I kept getting drawn back.”

“I get that. Pretty sure there was a day where I passed one of Bill’s books in a store and I just stared at it for hours. Wasn’t even a genre I liked to read but something about it made it so hard to walk away.”

Eddie nodded in understanding. He wondered if that had happened to him. Or…or maybe he’d even passed Bev without realizing it. They’d both worked in Manhattan, lived around the area. It was certainly possible.

“I liked your earlier stuff more,” Eddie suddenly commented.

“Yeah, well I actually wrote it myself,” groaned Richie.

“Got in a rut?”

“Sort of. Looking back on everything, I think I just started spiraling downwards because I knew what was coming. I mean with It. I just didn’t remember, but somewhere in my head I stopped caring because I thought we’d all fucking die anyways and nothing mattered anymore.”

“It was a bit different for me, but I think I went through a similar thing. I’d felt like I’d been getting trapped in my old life, but that fight to get out of it just started to shut down. I…I don’t know what I would have done in the long run. But I was spiraling down too.”

Richie nodded. “If only that fucking clown hadn’t been a part of our lives, maybe…maybe we all wouldn’t have gotten trapped in our own personal hells. Or at least hell would have been a bit more enjoyable. Because we wouldn’t have forgotten each other.”

“We have each other now. That’s got to count for something.”

“It fucking better. Or whatever big guy is in the sky is going to get a serious talking to when I die.”

Eddie snorted.

“Want me to help you with your back before we figure out lunch?”
“Sure.”

They headed to the bathroom. This time the process went a little quicker and Eddie finally put on the shirt Richie had left for him. Again, it was a bit bigger and loser than something Eddie would have normally worn. He looked at the logo on it.

“This is the name of one of those comedy clubs in town. Right?”

“Yep. One of the first ones I became a regular at. Got a bunch of merch shit for free early on. Which hey. Starving young adult who’s trying to be a comedian? I’m not going to say no to free clothes.”

Eddie laughed in agreement. “So, what did you get for food?”

“Well I tried not to go overboard with the frozen food.”

“Richie, whatever you got I’m sure is fine. Microwave something or actually cooking, I’m good either way.”

“Ok, ok. How about I pick what we eat then and you pick what we watch?”

“Deal. Do you just have the physical copies?”

“Streaming sights are connected to the TV if you can’t find something you like.”

“Cool.”

Richie went into the kitchen and Eddie went to get a proper look at the DVDs and Blu-Rays. He slightly pulled out those that interested him so he could go back to them as he said, “I know you’ve probably already decided, but I’m really ok with sleeping on the couch.”

“Are you kidding me? You’re not sleeping on the fucking couch.”

“I don’t want to take up—”

“You’re staying in my bed damn it. And if you’re worried about me, the couch is a pull-out.”

“If it’s a pull-out, then I can sleep on it.”

“My bed’s better. You’re sleeping there.”

“The pull-out is—”

“You’re my guest, so my rules.”

“Your rule says guests sleep in your bed?” smirked Eddie.

“It does now. Take it or leave it fucker.”

“Urgh, fine! But the moment I think my wound has healed enough, we’re switching and you’re getting your bed back.”

“We’ll come to that argument when it gets here. Find anything interesting?”

“Still look-holy shit. I remember when we went to see this in theaters.”

“Which one?”
“*Karate Kid III*. You were so fucking disappointed, said it was way too corny compared with the other two.”

“You liked it though.”

“Which is why we saw it two more times.”

“Yep,” chuckled Richie.

Apparently, Richie had all the *Karate Kid* movies as Eddie pulled them all out. “I forgot about the fourth one. Never did see it. I knew about the remake but never saw it either.”

“Remake isn’t half bad. Doesn’t have the charm of the original, but it takes itself more seriously. Fourth one is pretty much as ridiculous as the third one. *Cobra Kai* is fucking rad though.”

“You mean Cobra Kai return as the bad guys in the fourth movie too? I thought they were finally finished in part three.”

“What? No, I’m talking about the show.”

“There’s a show!?”

Richie laughed good and hard as Eddie whipped around to look at him. “Yeah. It even has the original cast all reprising their roles.”

“We are watching all of these for the rest of the day!”

“I did say we’d have a movie night. Sounds good to me.”

“Fuck yes.” Eddie went ahead and got the original movie out. He felt almost giddy, like he was a kid again going to see a movie with Richie and the others. Eddie went ahead and got everything set up as Richie got the food ready.

They ultimately decided on a frozen pizza for lunch. For dinner, they would make soup and do grilled cheese sandwiches some of the ingredients Richie had gotten. If they weren’t prepping food that night though, they were sitting on the couch together, watching everything in the *Karate Kid* franchise back to back.

For an entire afternoon, not a single worry crossed Eddie’s mind. He would eventually have to address work, finances, permanent living arrangements, *Myra*, but at least the remainder of that day proved to be the kind of paradise he’d been needing for a long time.
Eddie slowly woke up. He took in a deep breath. The pillow under his head smelled like Richie, making it feel familiar and safe even though it was his first time waking up in that particular bed. He pulled the pillow closer, eyes screwed shut as he elected to sleep in for once. The night before they’d managed to binge the original *Karate Kid* films before deciding it was best if they went to sleep. Richie said that worked out better though, as going through the remake and then the *Cobra Kai* series could just be their thing for a while. The idea of already setting down a ritual, of both of them finishing a busy day, only to end it on the couch with a good meal in hand and the TV on? It made Eddie feel warm all over, though his mind told him it was probably just because he was still in bed and covered by blankets.

Eventually, he dragged himself out, and even with his lazy start, Richie was still fast asleep on the pull-out. Eddie had tried to help him set it up last night, but Richie had insisted he had it. Going by the one corner that had popped off and was now covering Richie, he either had not had it or desperately needed bigger sheets. Not that Richie cared at the moment. He was basically in one giant cocoon that he did not look ready to wake from.

Eddie went into the kitchen and headed straight for the coffee maker. It took him a moment to figure it out as the model was pretty old. After a few minutes though, he got a pot going. When it finally started to drizzle down, Richie’s head popped up from the back of the sofa. His hair was a mess and all Eddie could see of his face were his sleepy eyes.

It made him smile.

“Coffee?”

Eddie nodded. “I’ll bring you a cup when it’s done.”

“Thank god.”

Richie slunk out of the pull-out so he could grab his glasses and then his phone. He then quickly went back into his cocoon. Eddie waited for the coffee to finish, poured them both some mugs, and then went to sit on the edge of the bed. Richie took his without looking up from his phone.

“Anything interesting?”

“Just making our plans for today. You want breakfast or are you cool if we hold off and grab brunch.”

“Brunch is fine.”

“Cool. First stop will probably be that store so you can get a new phone. Care where we go next?”

“You know this city better than me. I’ll let you do all the planning.”
“K, help yourself to whatever you want to wear today.”

“Thanks.”

Eddie left Richie with the planning so he could go and look through Richie’s closet. A few clothes were hung up, but most were on the floor. It appeared that Richie had simply moved the clothes from his bedroom floor into the closet floor rather than really putting them away. It got a little chuckle out of Eddie as he focused more on the clothes still hanging. They were probably the safer option after all.

There were a bunch of bad Hawaiian style t-shirts, but Eddie left those alone to look through the plain shirts and graphic t’s. Richie hadn’t been wrong. He had a shit ton from that one comedy club. Eddie just decided to grab a cleaner one of those and a pair of jeans. He picked up his own jacket from the floor and then put his shoes on.

When he went into the living room, Richie was finally up and re-filling his coffee cup. “I think I have the day planned out. Let me get changed and we can go.”

Richie did just that and after about ten minutes, they left the apartment.

As promised, they went and got Eddie a new phone first. They were able to thankfully pull the data from his broken one and transferred it over. Unsurprisingly, about a million texts and calls from Myra began to pop up. Eddie resisted the urge to straight up block her and instead turned his phone back off. He’d deal with that later.

They then went to a *Bed, Bath, & Beyond* so that Eddie could go ahead and get whatever products he needed including a new towel. Considering he didn’t know how long he was staying with Richie, it was kind of daunting, just starting his whole life over like this. He imagined getting new clothes would be even more intimidating and thankfully Richie had chosen that for after brunch.

With a new phone and all bath products taken care of, they headed to Richie’s pick for a restaurant. It was small, sandwiched between some sleazy looking pawn shop and an empty space under renovations with apartments above all three. Despite its size, the place was pretty crowded. The style seemed to be going for a rustic feel, though that could have easily been because everything was aging, and the paint was dulling rather than any actual intent in it.

A young woman behind the counter left her spot stocking a baked goods display to run around the corner and through the other customers. “Richie! Where the hell you’ve—oof. Well this is unexpected.”

Eddie couldn’t help but snort as Richie hugged her before she could finish her sentence. Going by her expression, it wasn’t their normal way to greet. When Richie finally let go, she grabbed his arms and said, “Holy shit, are you dying? You’ve gotta be dying. The most I’ve ever gotten from you is a lackluster high five when you said I was only mildly annoying one day.”

“I’m not dying. Just…real fucking happy to be home.”

She raised an eyebrow and quickly looked to Eddie. “You look like a doctor. Are you following him around explaining to everyone that he is in fact dying, but he just won’t admit it yet?”

“He’s definitely not dying,” Eddie laughed. “And I’m not a doctor.”

“Honestly could have been with all you know,” Richie muttered.

“I would have been too afraid that I’d catch a disease from a patient.”
“True.”

“Richie!” the young woman whined. “You gonna introduce us or what?”

“Right, this is Eddie, an old friend that’s staying with me. Eddie, this is CC.”

“What’s that stand for?”

“Don’t know—” groaned Richie.

“And never will,” CC finished with a grin. “Usual Richie?”

“That’s fine, and for him two eggs sunny side up and…blueberry muffins fresh?”

“You know it!”

“Then one of those and a side of fruit. Also orange juice.”

“Ah, gotcha.” CC winked.

“No, I mean actual orange juice this time. He’s on medication.”

“Oh! Sorry,” CC quickly said with an apologetic smile towards Eddie. “But ‘orange’ juice for you. Right?”

“Always.”

“Cool! We’ll have it out in a second. Great meeting you Eddie.”

“You too…” Eddie trailed off as CC was already running behind the counter and into the back. “Jesus she is one ball of energy.”

“Don’t I know it,” groaned Richie. He went to sit down at one of the few free tables. Eddie quickly followed, squeezing into the small, somewhat private space as it was sandwiched into a corner. “I’m assuming I got your order right,” Richie added.

“No complaints from me. Though I am curious about your whole relationship with her. She seemed kind of shocked that you hugged her. And what was that comment about only getting a shitty high five from you?”

Richie actually looked a little guilty. “To be honest, I was always a bit snippy with her.”

“Wait. Really?”

“She just…ok so basically she’s a fan. And she’s trying to get her own name out there, wants to do stand-up too. I just…I don’t fucking know what’s wrong with me, but I hardly gave her the time of day. Never talked with her much. Only warmed up a little when she started slipping me mimosas rather than orange juice. Which are not on the menu by the way. That’s all her. But…I don’t know. I think I’m just now realizing that maybe I wasn’t as annoyed with her as I thought.”

“I don’t think you ever actually got annoyed with her. I think you quite like CC. You were just afraid to let yourself have any relationship beyond mere acquaintances. Probably due to the underlying, foggy thoughts that you might die soon from a killer clown so you didn’t respond to her, but you didn’t actively push her away. I’m guessing that’s what you’ve done with most of your acquaintances around here.”
Richie blinked, honestly a bit surprised by the quick analysis. “Ok, forget fucking doctor and let’s change that to shrink. You’ve known her for less than a minute. How could you get all that?”

“Because you apparently come here often enough that you have a usual, and we came here when we could have gone literally anywhere in Chicago despite the fact that you knew full well when she usually works considering you weren’t surprised to see her behind the counter. And if you’d really been as annoyed with her as you seem to think you were, I doubt you would have come here that often anyways.”

“You have a point,” Richie murmured.

At that moment, CC ran back over with some glasses. As she set them down, Richie looked from her, to Eddie, back to her, and then said, “I’m going to ask Jim to move some things around so you can get that prime time spot at The Comedy Club that you’ve been aiming for.”

CC’s chipper demeanor dimmed a bit as she stood back on her heels and crossed her arms. “Ok, now I’m a hundred percent sure you’re dying.”

“I’m serious CC. Think of it as my apology for all the times I was a grumpy old jerk.”

That chipper demeanor quickly started to come back. “Y-you actually mean this? Oh! Will you finally look at all my notes—”

“Hey. I don’t want to be anyone’s mentor,” said Richie. However, he faltered a bit when Eddie gave him a pointed look. “But yeah, if you want, you can show me what you got when I get the date figured out.”

CC shook her head with a grin. She glanced towards Eddie before going, “Is this because—” She leaned in and whispered something into Richie’s ear.

“Really? You think that?” Richie sighed.

“Yeah, and I’m totally right going by your expression.”

“Hmm, maybe a bit. Kind of one-sided now, but we’ll see where it goes. Let’s just say this change is more about me having dealt with a lot of shit I should have gotten over a long time ago.”

“Well I’m glad to hear it,” CC grinned. “Does this mean you’ll finally let me give you my number?”

Richie groaned in a way that said, “What have I gotten myself into?” but Eddie could tell he wasn’t that annoyed. He pulled out his phone. “Business only. I do not want any drunk texts and there are only so many free tickets I can get you.”

“I won’t be a problem. Promise!” she said. She quickly gave Richie her number, put his in hers, and then added, “I like this new you Richie. Still grumpy but a little less of an asshole.”

“Only a little though, right? Can’t have my reputation completely going out the window.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t tell. Your food will be out shortly,” she added, and then quickly ran back behind the counter.

“What did she whisper to you?” asked Eddie.

“Secret between comedians.”

“Ah, come on.”
“Want the truth? Said you were cute.”

“Wha—”

“I’m joking. Though you are killing it in that t-shirt.”

“Oh ha ha. Get some new material,” replied Eddie as he kicked him under the table. Richie playfully kicked back. “So, are you going to keep doing this on the fly with everyone? Making friends I mean?”

“Oh hell no. CC’s never been half bad. You’re right. I was the grump, but that compliment does not go to everyone.”

“I don’t think that’s technically a compliment, but ok,” Eddie chuckled.

They got their food and ate with CC checking on them regularly. The way her and Richie talked really made Eddie think they’d been friends for a while, Richie had just been more or less in denial. The banter that they had definitely hadn’t come out of nowhere. The only difference, if Eddie had to guess, was that Richie was probably being a bit more responsive than he normally would have in a conversation with her.

Besides Richie’s and CC’s conversations, there was something else that caught Eddie’s attention. Mainly it was how CC kept glancing at him and then she would give Richie some type of knowing look which he would roll his eyes at. The only explanation Eddie got was again, “Comedian secret,” and he eventually gave up trying to figure it out. Depending on how long he stuck around, maybe he’d get CC to tell him, but for now he let it rest.

They eventually finished up and then went to several clothing stores over the next few hours. Eddie didn’t buy a lot as he honestly kind of went into a panic at each one they went to. Eventually, he admitted exactly why to Richie.

“Just what kind of clothes should I get? What style? How many pairs of pants? What’s the correct number of shirts should you buy when you’re living with your best friend for who knows how long —”

“Woah there. This is shirts we’re talking about. There is absolutely no fucking reason you should be worrying so much.”

“But what if I underbuy? Or overbuy? And what if I don’t get enough socks—”

“Then we come back and get more socks,” Richie said, trying to sound sincere even though it was clear he was trying to hold back a small laugh. “Listen, we know you’re staying with me for like a week total. That’s at least five more days, right? And unless you’re planning on quitting your job and finding one here, I think casual will do just fine. Though one nice outfit wouldn’t hurt. I still have a few nicer places we can go.”

“You’re seriously spoiling me. You know that, right?”

Richie shrugged with a grin firmly on his face. “Listen, just get five outfits. Who knows, maybe something will have changed by then, maybe you’ll be able to pick up some clothes from Myra’s. Or maybe we’ll decide to just get a shit ton more or maybe you’ll stick with five pairs of pants and five pairs of shirts and I’ll just do a crap ton of laundry twice a week. Trust me, you don’t have to worry about this. It’s just clothes.”

If anyone else had said that, it might not have calmed Eddie. But coming from Richie? His shoulders
finally relaxed, and he repeated, “It’s just clothes.”

“Exactly. Now let’s finally finish this so we can grab an early dinner and head home.”

“Ok, ok,” chuckled Eddie. He didn’t comment that Richie had basically called his own apartment their home and had already designated Eddie’s former house as just Myra’s. Maybe something like that would happen. The fact that Richie’s assumptions didn’t bother him was probably a sign of what was to come, but Eddie pushed those thoughts aside. Myra later, what mattered now was what was right in front of him. Namely, Richie and finally buying some fucking clothes.

Of course, it still took a while, just with trying things on and wanting to get clothes that were comfortable. They went to two more clothing stores before Eddie finally decided he had enough. The bags got thrown in the back with the toiletries and then they went to an early dinner. The place seemed to be another favorite of Richie’s, but whereas CC had been the only one to really notice him at that small breakfast place, every worker here seemed to know him pretty well.

It turned out the place wasn’t far from one of the clubs Richie did stand-up in. Depending on the night, he often came to the restaurant for a late drink afterwards. The workers expressed varying levels of concern and to Richie’s credit, he stayed pretty bashful during it. Though the manager who said, “Having something happen to you would fucking suck. I don’t want to think about how big a dip in revenue that would be,” made Richie feel a bit more comfortable again and got everyone laughing.

After dinner, they agreed to go back to Richie’s place so Eddie could begin getting properly settled in. Then they could end the day watching the remake of *The Karate Kid*. It was basically another perfect day, and right after the last perfect one, it made Eddie feel like he could really get used to this.
The third day in Richie’s apartment was the one where Eddie decided he did need to start figuring out his life. He would have loved to sit on that couch forever, watching movies and shows, eating food, making jokes and shoving each other every five seconds like they were kids again. But that wasn’t how the world worked.

When Eddie got up, he decided to stay in the new pajamas he’d gotten himself and went to make coffee as Richie was still asleep. Like the other day, the sound of it drizzling into the pot got him up. This time they made a small breakfast in his apartment. Eddie sat at the counter as Richie fried some bacon.

Richie said, “So I’ve got a few other places we could go to. I want to show you some of the clubs I frequent, and there’s plenty of sights to see. Got museums too if you’re interested and—”

“Maybe we hold off on that for tomorrow?” Eddie suggested. “I should probably look at those files work sent over. And I…I need to talk to Myra.”

“She gave you a week.”

“Yeah, but we both know she didn’t intend for me to actually take it. And I’d rather not get a bulletin sent out that I’m missing and probably dead because I feel like she’ll do that if I don’t call her sooner rather than later.”

Richie looked a little disappointed, but said, “We’ll do all that stuff tomorrow then. The day after. We have all the time in the world.”

Eddie warmed at that though.

“And I should probably get some fucking work done too now that I’m thinking about it. And I need to see Jim about getting CC that spot… Yeah. This works. And it gives you some privacy. Want anything while I’m out?”

“Can’t think of anything.”

“Cool. I’ll probably head out around ten then.”

With that decided, they continued their lazy morning. Since Richie didn’t leave right away, Eddie let him have his computer and he put on the news while drinking his coffee. He also went ahead and got all his friends’ numbers from Richie’s phone. While he was in the middle of doing it, he got another
The minutes ticked by slowly before Richie finally got up, took a shower, and got dressed. Eddie had remade the pull-out as something to do, and also so all the blankets weren’t bunched up in one area. When Richie was ready to leave, Eddie had everything he needed set up. Richie’s laptop sat on his lap, the news played in front with the TV muted, and another fresh cup of coffee was on the side table.

“Call if you need anything,” Richie said.

“Will do.”

Eddie was then left alone as he focused on work first. That part was easy, and a good bit of the work was pure muscle memory by this point. A lot of it involved reviewing other reports, approving a few before sending them back. It was simple, just took a while. He was almost done when lunchtime came around. He took a quick break, went to make a sandwich, and then checked his phone.

He’d sent out a few quick texts to the losers, and so far Mike and Bev had responded. They wished him well and expressed happiness about being able to stay in contact with him now. Eddie sent back a few quick replies and then got a text from Richie. It asked, *Everything still ok?*

Eddie replied, *It’s all good. Looked through your search history by the way. You need some new hobbies.*

*What can I say. German dungeon porn just does it for me.* There was a pause, the little text bubbles appeared, and then, *You didn’t actually look though. Right?*

Eddie snorted. *No. Told you. Don’t want to bleach my eyes.*

*And there would be a lot of bleach involved.*

*Gross. Get—*

Eddie paused in the texting. He’d almost put home. Which this was Richie’s home. But by saying it like this, then it was kind of like Eddie was implying it was his home too. Was that ok? Richie had kind of done that yesterday but was it ok for Eddie to call it his—

He took a deep breath. His thoughts calmed a little. If Richie hadn’t meant it, he wouldn’t have said it. That much Eddie knew. So…even if he wasn’t here for long, he supposed he would count the apartment as home too. He finished the text.

*Get home soon.*

*I will. Text me if you need anything.*

With that conversation done and Eddie having just finished lunch, he went back to his work. There wasn’t much left, and it took him less than an hour before he emailed everything back to them. Now came the harder part.

Eddie turned off the TV and put the laptop away. He sat cross-legged on the pull-out and stared at his phone. He’d already gone to contacts. His thumb hovered over the name.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, grounded himself, and then finally called. He’d put it on speaker and set the phone down, which was clearly the right call as her voice might have blown out his eardrum as it came out loud and pissed.
“So you finally call?! You finally call?! I have been worried sick Edward?! What the hell were you thinking?! I’ve called so many hospitals and then I called—”

“Myra. Myra!” Eddie finally yelled. It got her to quiet for a few seconds and he quickly said, “I’m alright.”

“Alright? You call after not answering a single text or call or email al—”

“Myra, I just want to talk. Ok? We don’t have to yell at each other. Just talk.”

“Talk? Hmph, I can’t think of anything you could say to make this better, but let’s see.”

Despite Eddie’s attempt at keeping calm, his temper was already rising. “Make better-you said I had a week.”

“Well yes, but you should have realized that was ridiculous and come home by now.”

“No. No you’re not doing that again. Do you even realize what you did? First off, we didn’t even have a conversation like proper adults should. You just gave me a week ultimatum. Then you tried to make it as difficult as possible for that one week to happen without me coming straight back to you.”

“Well I know what’s best for you Eddie.”

“You are not my mother!” The shouted words came out quick, angry, and unexpected as Eddie threw his hands up in the air.

“Then stop acting like a spoiled child! Edward, I understand you’re under a lot of stress. You’re hurting. But that gives you no right to act the way you’re acting. Just come home and I can get you the help you need.”

“I don’t need-listen.” Eddie tried to calm himself again. “I’m sorry for yelling. I still want a civil conversation.”

“Then simply agree and come home.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?” Myra demanded.

“Because I’m not breaking this time. I’m doing what’s best for me.”

“But I know what’s best for you.”

“Do you? Or are you just trying to control me?”

“Control you? Don’t be ridiculous Edward. Just listen to yourself. Why would I ever want to do that?”

“You’re still doing it,” whispered Eddie as his anger gave way to a gut-wrenching pain. “Christ, you’re still trying to fucking manipulate me.”

“I didn’t catch that. Speak up Edward.”

“I don’t know! I don’t know why,” he said in answer to her last question. “Maybe…maybe it’s the only way you were taught what a proper relationship is like. Maybe…maybe you’re fully aware and you’re trying to gaslight me. I honestly don’t know.”
“What a horrible thing to say! I simply try to help you and you say something awful like that…”

Eddie put his hands over his ears. He had to for a moment. He tried to even his breathing. It only worked a little before he jumped back into the conversation. “You are trying guilt trip me. I know you are so just—”

“Guilt tripping? I would never do such a thing to you Eddie. I’m sorry if it comes across that way, but you really hurt my feelings. I just want you to come back home baby. You’ve never been away this long with no planning, no notice. How could you not think of me when you left?”

Eddie pulled at his own face. His eyes stayed scrunched up. “And now you’re trying to make me feel like the bad guy. Myra, I can’t come back. I can’t.”

“What about work? What about our home? I need you here—”

“Why did we get married?”

“I’m sorry. What?”

Eddie finally dropped his hands. There were tears slowly falling down his cheeks. “Answer me that, and then we can talk about what happens next. Why did we get married?”

“You really are being ridiculous. Because you asked me. What other answer could you possibly want?”

“No. That’s not what I mean. Why did you say yes? Do you even know why I asked you?”

The answer should have been simple. One word, four letters. It should have been obvious.

All Eddie got was silence.

“We…we need this time apart. And I’m starting to think it’s going to be a lot longer than a week,” whispered Eddie.

“No. No you need to come home. Come home and everything will make sense—”

“You can’t answer one simple question.”

“Because I don’t need to be berated like this from my husband.”

Eddie shook his head. “I’m not coming home. Not now. Not…I don’t know. But especially while you can’t answer that question, or at least accept how fucked up this all is, I know I can’t.”

There was another long pause of silence.

Then finally…

“You will call back when you are ready to leave this fool’s errand behind and come home. I don’t want to hear from you again unless it’s an apology.”

“Myra—”

“Is that understood?”

Eddie took a deep, shuttering breath. “I’ll talk to you again when I’m ready.”
“No, you will talk to me again when you are finally ready to come home. Good-bye.”

She hung up first and Eddie was left staring at his phone. He covered his face again. It should have been so easy. It should have been—

“I’m hooooome. Ran by Alliance, it’s this great little bakery. They’ve got some crazy good-shit. Eddie, what’s wrong?” Right away Richie put everything down and rushed to Eddie’s side. He slowly, comfortingly rubbed Eddie’s shoulders as Eddie tried to force himself to calm down, which honestly just made it worse. “Hey. Hey, you don’t have to hold it back for me. It’s ok to cry.”

“I-I’m sorry,” Eddie hiccupped.

“You don’t have to be sorry. Honest. Just let it out,” murmured Richie. “Did you…”

Eddie nodded.

“Fuck man. It’ll be ok though.”

“How can it be ok? I’m married to a woman who can’t tell me why the fuck we got married! It’s just one fucking word and it doesn’t even cross her mind and n-now-fuck! I wasted my entire adult life for her and all she did was say it was all my fault and how I hurt her and t-try to twist everything around and-and—”

Richie pulled Eddie into a hug. He continued to rub careful, soothing circles into his back, though he also made sure to avoid the wound as he did. “You didn’t ok? You didn’t.”

“D-didn’t what?” sniffed Eddie as he buried his face into Richie’s shoulder, pulling him closer in the hug.

“Didn’t waste your whole adult life. We’re here, we’ve got each other. And there are people who love you so fucking much. Ok? Fuck her for any of the shit she said because she’s wrong. I…I’m here for you. Got it?”

Richie could feel Eddie’s nod as he stayed firmly pressed against him.

“I think…I think I’m going to have to stay a lot longer with you,” Eddie whispered.

“Hey not a problem for me. If I could do more, I would.”

“I hate putting you out like—”

“When will you realize you’re not? Everything I’ve been doing so far is because I care. There’s no fucking underhanded, manipulative shit happening. Ok?”

“You sure about that?” asked Eddie. He pulled back a bit and wiped at his face.

“Uh. Yeah. I would never do something like that to—”

“Because something tells me you’re about to grab whatever baked goods you got, tell me we should put on The Karate Kid, and basically bribe me into forgetting about all my troubles,” Eddie said with another sniffle and a little smile.

“What? I would never! Though I did just happen to buy a shit ton of macarons in all the flavors and I do think I’m in the mood to watch another movie if you are.”

Eddie laughed. The smile that broke through was full and real and after wiping at his face one last
time, all the tears were gone. Was there still shit to deal with? Yes, a fuck ton. But he needed the break, and he was so god damn lucky that Richie knew just how to cheer him up.

“Why are you so good to me?”

“Because it makes me happy.”

“You’re such a softy underneath. You really are.”

“Hey! Shh, my reputation.”

Eddie picked up a pillow and hit him with it. “Richie Tozier is a big fucking softy!”

“No, my reputation!” cried Richie as he dramatically flopped down in front of Eddie. “Whatever will I do?”

“I don’t know how to help you Richie. But I hear we have macarons in our apartment and that has to make everything better.”

“You do have a point,” Richie said, propping himself up on his elbows. “Macarons, I help with cleaning up your wound, The Karate Kid, make dinner, and then we can finally get to Cobra Kai. Sound good?”

“Perfect.”

“You’ve been saying that word a lot.”

“Everything seems more perfect with you,” Eddie answered honestly. “Now show me what flavors you got.”
So as you can see, I again changed the estimated chapters for this story. Again, that number could go back down or get a little longer just depending on how things go and average length of chapters, but I really want to do this story justice and the character development justice (and believe me, I want to get to their first fucking kiss too) but I can't help but want things to be as realistic as possible and don't want them to rush into things. So yeah, this is how the story is probably going to continue to shape out. Thanks again, I really will never be able to express how much love I feel from every comment and kudo for writing this story, and I hope you enjoy this chapter as much as the last ones!

For the most part, things seemed to be going well. Eddie still felt a little bad at basically just taking up space in Richie’s apartment, especially considering it would almost definitely be long-term now. However, every time that kind of thought worried him, Richie seemed to immediately catch on. He would say something along the lines of, “Man, it’s nice not having this apartment all by myself.” Or something like, “It used to be so boring watching TV by myself.” It really wasn’t that subtle, but Eddie didn’t appreciate it any less for that.

The next day, Richie took him around the city again. This time, they visited more landmark, touristy type things. Most of it probably bored Richie, but he seemed to enjoy it simply because Eddie was enjoying it. Which he did. He liked learning about the feel and history of the city, especially since there was a chance he’d been in it for a while.

With this more long-term look, Eddie also brought up the idea of him continuing his work from home.

“Seriously?” Richie asked over lunch. They were at another favorite restaurant of his. “You should take your time. You deserve a break.”

“I know. That’s why I’m definitely not going to suggest it until the end of this week. But I need to keep making money. I have a fair amount saved up but it’s not enough to survive the rest of my life on, and I’m definitely too young to retire.”

Richie grudgingly agreed. “Ok. You may have a point. I just don’t want you pushing yourself.”

“I won’t. Promise. And it helps that I’m doing this out of the office since there will be just some things I can’t do. Most of it will just be me sitting at a computer. Hardly strenuous.”

“Ok…”

“Which speaking of, should I get a new laptop? I don’t want to hog yours all the time.”

“Naw, keep it. I know I have an iPad somewhere that I can basically do all I need on it. Just got to find it somewhere in my closet.”

“If you’re really ok with that.”
“Of course I am. Besides, this gives me good reason to use that fucking thing rather than it gathering dust.”

And there it was again. Just little, fairly obvious ways that Richie lowered Eddie’s anxiety with his words.

God it felt good to have someone who willingly wanted to make Eddie feel safe and ok. It had been far too long since he’d experienced that.

On their sixth day, they grabbed breakfast at the same place where they’d grabbed brunch. CC was working that morning too. She tried giving Richie a few of her notes on the set she was working on before Richie finally said, “Why don’t you just come over and show me so you’re not just breathlessly spitting it out in between serving other customers.”

“You mean it? Fuck yeah!”

“CC! Language!” yelled a guy, presumably her boss, behind the counter.

“Shit! Sorry Max!”

The guy just groaned again and face palmed. It was hard to say if CC didn’t realize her mistake or if it was a hundred percent on purpose.

“Sometime next week then?” CC asked, turning back to Richie.

“Yeah. I’ll text you in the next day or two when I figure it out. And I’m still working on getting you that spot. You may have to wait a bit but it looks like one guy may be too sick so you might get to steal his.”

“Nice.”

“CC!” her boss desperately called. He made a desperate wave towards the other customers.

“Catch you later Richie. Eddie.”

“Later.”

“Bye.”

After breakfast they went back to Richie’s place. They had tickets to go to the Music Box Theatre that night which Richie claimed was a must visit for both its personality, historical value, and the unique things you could see there. The movie they were going to see was an indie film called *Holy Trinity*. Going over the synopsis, Eddie was pretty sure it wasn’t something he would ever search out on his own. However, since Richie was excited about it, Eddie was too. And hey, it was good to get out of his comfort zone occasionally.

Until the showing, they planned on the rest of the day being an easy one. Richie had just been keeping the pull-out set up for ease of access. That meant they were laying on it when there was a sudden banging at his door that made them both jump. A shout came from the other side. “Tozier, I swear to god! Open the fucking door.”

Richie groaned. “He found me.”

“Found you?” Instead of getting an answer, Eddie watched as Richie jumped up and quickly pulled open the door.
A man that looked to be about their age walked in. He was fuming and looked ready to give Richie a real talking to when he realized he had company. He looked at Eddie in a quizzical way before staring at Richie.

“Really? You throw me to the curb so you can shack—”

“This is my childhood friend, Eddie,” Richie quickly interrupted, stopping whatever assumption the man was about to spit out. “Eddie, this is my assistant—”

“Wrangler,” the man grumbled.

“Jason,” Richie finished. He focused back on the man. “Before you absolutely wail into me—”

“Wail into you? First, you were late going up. Then you forgot your set halfway through. Then you were violently ill, and then!? Then you fucking leave without notice and the only text I get is several days later asking for help in getting plane tickets! I mean Jesus Christ Richie! If you were planning on shoving your career down the fucking toilet, a little warning would have been appreciated so I could look for a new job.”

“You don’t have to look for a new job. Just sit down. Want a beer?”

“Want a-Richie. Please tell me you realize just how much trouble you’re in.”

Richie gave a little smile and a shrug that said he knew exactly how much trouble he was in, but he was playing dumb just to mess with Jason. Eddie tried to hide the sharp laugh that wanted to bubble out of his throat. Jason looked like a vein was about to burst even as he reluctantly sat down at the counter. Eddie awkwardly stayed where he was since Richie didn’t seem to mind the lack of privacy, but he also didn’t want to shoehorn his way into the conversation by sitting at the counter too or anything.

“You can’t just ghost me like this. I’m serious Tozier!” Jason growled out, even as he accepted the beer. “You know they cancelled your tours in Reno. Right? I tried to convince them that you would be there but without your official word, they didn’t want to risk an empty mic.”

Richie shrugged.

“Did you just-Richie! Will you please just work with me here?”

“Hey, the set was shit,” Richie replied.

“Yeah, I know it was shit. But a shit set still makes money if you—”

“Go ahead and cancel anything official I had planned for the next four weeks.”

“That’s a whole fucking-oh god. I’m going to need another job,” the man moaned.

“You’re not going to need another job. I just need time to write my next set.”

At least at those words, Jason perked up. “Wait you—you mean you’re going to write it? You haven’t written anything in years!”

“Yeah, well I had a surge of inspiration.”

“Seriously? What the hell happened Tozier? And-no offense man,” Jason quickly said to Eddie before turning back to Richie, “but does it have something to do with the new roommate?”
“There was just some personal shit I had to deal with,” Richie replied. “Let’s say it helped.”

“And now you have a friend staying with you? Or is it a friend—”

“He’s going through his own personal shit too,” Richie quickly said. Eddie just tried to follow along. He didn’t really get what Jason was trying to get at, not that it really mattered as Richie set him straight. “We knew each other when we were kids and he’s having some trouble at home right now so he’s staying with me. That’s it.”

“Lifelong friend? I didn’t think you had any of those.”

“We only recently reconnected,” Eddie supplied.

“Oh…well hell. If it gets your creative juices flowing again Tozier, by all means. But do you really want me to cancel all upcoming dates?”

“For the next month? Yeah. Listen, help me get some spots locally for five-minute sets and I’ll start to try out a few new things. If down the road I don’t have enough for longer sets or a whole tour, I may want to cancel some of those future dates too, but I think I should have enough by then.”

“Do you still want me to get some back-up material?”

Richie quickly shook his head. “No, we’re doing a clean slate. It’s got to be all me this time or nothing.”

“Jesus. You are serious about this,” muttered Jason as he took a sip of his beer. “But…ok. We can work with this. Someone uploaded a clip of that fucked up set by the way. So staying out of the spotlight for a bit is probably for the best.”

“Then we’re in agreement. Also, considering what happened last time, Jim doesn’t have complete faith in me. I need help convincing him to get a newbie one of the prime spots.”

“Who?”

“CC.”

“Wait. That kid who you grumbled and groaned about how she never left you alone during your breakfast despite the fact you refused to just go to another restaurant or eat at a different time?”

Eddie piped up. “I told you, you always liked her.”


“Why? You’ve avoided new stand-up comedians like you might catch the plague from them.”

“Yeah, and I’ll continue to do so. Giving advice doesn’t do shit if you just don’t know how to be funny. But—”

“You like her!” Eddie called.

“Hush,” Richie groaned. “She’s tenacious. Ok? Just help me out here so I don’t have to deal with her disappointed, puppy dog fucking eyes.”

“Fine. I’ll see what I can do. And you just want short set times? Because I think I could get you a thirty minute one.”
“Let’s just focus on five- or ten-minute ones. Maybe sign me up for an open mic night or something.”

“Open mic? You really are starting over.”

“Well, like you said, my career kind of was heading for a toilet. It’s change or move over for the next fucking group. Right?”

“Right. Just glad you realized it.” Jason finished off his beer. “So, I guess I should take my resume off ‘I need a job dot com slash, my boss disappeared off the face of the fucking earth and I need money’.”

“Never needed to have it up there in the first place.”

“Says you. I fear everyday suddenly not having a job.”

“Ah, you must stick around for the faith you have in me.”

“Or I’m a bigger idiot than you.”

“That too.”

“Hey, you’re not supposed to agree with me asshole!”

Richie just grinned and this time Eddie did let out a little laugh.

Jason shook his head, but the fuming anger he’d stomped into the apartment with had all but disappeared. He leaned on his elbow and sighed, “At least tell me what you’re going for so I have something to sell to people.”

“I’m thinking about stories from my childhood.”

“Seriously? You’ve never wanted to go near that personal shit. Or if you did, you just straight made it up.”

“I told you. I kind of moved past a lot.” Richie glanced back to Eddie and smiled. He smiled back. “And let’s just say I’ve started to remember and appreciate a lot of the good shit that happened back then too.”

Jason made a motion that dragged Richie’s gaze back to him. He leaned in and whispered so Eddie couldn’t hear. But to Richie, he easily heard, “And this Eddie guy is seriously not a friend, friend—”

“Yeah I’m fucking sure,” Richie replied at a normal speaking volume again. “Just tell them it’s childhood related if they want to know. And if they want specifics, I may bring up that one time me and my friends killed a clown.”

“Killed a clown? What’s that a metaphor for?”

“Wait for the set and you’ll find out,” smirked Richie.

“Ok. Ok. You haven’t renewed my confidence in you Tozier, but you’ve still got me on the fucking payroll. I’ll see what I can do. Text me when you get the first set figured out. And I want to hear it too before I put anything in stone. If we’re doing this, one hundred percent, authentic you, then we’re going to make sure it’s damn good before we put it out there.”

“Good to know we agree on that.”
“And don’t fucking ghost me again.”

“No promises.”

Jason groaned. “At least some warning then.”

“I’ll try.”

“Yeah, yeah. Well have the rest of a good fucking day.” Jason got up and started to head towards the door. He paused to look at Eddie. “Considering you’re the only new thing I know about in his life, I’m going to assume most of this turn around is because of you. Make sure he doesn’t disappear again. Will you?”

“I mean, if he does, I’ll probably be in whatever undisclosed location he’s in so no promises there.”

Richie laughed as Jason just let out another groan. He mumbled, “Just a friend my ass,” under his breath and walked out. Richie went to the door, locked it behind him, and flopped down on the pull-out.

“You know,” said Eddie, “he’s pretty uptight for guy who works with a comedian.”

“Ha! You’re not wrong. Maybe I should use that.”

“I’m sure he’d fucking love it,” Eddie laughed. “You seem to have a relatively good relationship though.”

“He’s good with the technical, planning shit aspect. Definitely hasn’t let me down. But starting prep on a new skit can come tomorrow. Let’s finish this, and then we can start walking to the theatre.”

“I still don’t get why you want to walk.”

“Chicago is a whole other city at night! You’re also about fifty percent more likely to get stabbed but —”

Eddie gave him a pointed look.

“We’re not actually going to be out that late or in any dangerous areas. Ok? Just trust me on this. The city at night is a whole different beast and you have to experience it at least once. Besides, I don’t have to worry.”

“Uh, shouldn’t you be saying I don’t have to worry?” asked Eddie.

“No. It’s me who doesn’t have to worry. I’ve got my Scarface to protect me,” Richie grinned as he nudged Eddie with his arm.

“Seriously?”

“You wounded a giant spider clown with an iron spike. You can protect me against anything.”

“You think so?”

“I know so. Now come on. Finish this and we can start the walk. And I want to have time to grab coffee on the way.”

“Ok, ok. Pressing play,” Eddie smiled as he hit the button and leaned back with Richie.
A few days passed, and Eddie was finally feeling well adjusted at fitting into Richie’s life. He’d had a few good days, nearly a week of nothing but fun. But it wasn’t like they could just support themselves forever on what they had saved up. Besides, Richie had sets to work on. He was even passionate about it which was the best part as Richie’s excitement bled into Eddie. But, if Richie was busy with work, then Eddie would need something to do anyways.

Eddie had already talked to Sylvia and others at his job again. They weren’t really a fan of him not being in the office, but they also weren’t willing to just let the opportunity go. They would start regularly sending everything to Eddie’s email tomorrow which meant one more unofficial vacation day.

Though Eddie had suggested a couple of places or had been the one to make a final decision on dinner or a movie, he again let Richie choose what they would do on their last completely free day. Eddie still needed to get a feel for the city and Richie seemed especially excited about his own plan, not letting Eddie in on a single detail.

It started off with both of them getting up early and walking to breakfast. They got to say hi to CC, and Richie told her that Jason had helped him get her that spot she’d been wanting for the Friday after next. That gave her a little less than two weeks and so they made plans for her to come over to Richie’s apartment next week. Richie had been a little ambivalent, but considering neither CC or Richie could pick a place, Eddie had thrown out the idea and CC had gotten so hung up on it that Richie had finally caved. To be fair, they needed a place they could move around freely but still have privacy, and talk however loud they wanted to. With that idea, the only places that really worked would have been Richie’s or CC’s. At that reminder, Richie had quickly said he’d prefer his place too.

After breakfast, Richie and Eddie continued their walk through the city. They made a detour through Lincoln Park, Eddie simply wanting to take a break from the brick buildings to the beautiful, full trees and the occasional art installation.

At one point, Eddie forced Richie to stop. Eddie grabbed his hand and pulled him towards the water.

“If this is the start of your plan to drown me and then take over my identity, you’re being a bit obvious.”

“You really think I want your identity? I would bomb so hard as a stand-up comedian.”

“But I do have a pretty sweet apartment. And I also have that other one in Nevada that I’ll have to take you to someday.”

“First dinner and now you want to fly me places?” grinned Eddie. “Only if I can buy my own damn ticket. I can make my own money. And I’m pretty sure I make more than you. At least more
consistently.”

“Oh, well maybe I should hit you up on flying me everywhere, huh?”

At that point, Eddie let go. He didn’t notice as Richie tried to hold on just a little longer, his fingers grazing Eddie’s before Eddie fully pulled away. Still, it was only for a moment.

“Ok, stand here,” Eddie said.

“Stand-oof!” Richie let out a sharp exhale as Eddie pulled him close.

They were pressed shoulder to shoulder, Eddie’s arm linked around Richie’s in order to keep him there. Eddie quickly took out his phone and started to go to the right app.

“You know, I don’t think we have any photos of us. I remember all of us as kids splitting our pocket change to run into that photobooth, but I have no idea where my copies went or if anyone else has theirs. Do you?” asked Eddie.

“If I do, they’re at the bottom of a box of my parent’s old stuff in a storage locker I still need to clear out. I really have no idea,” Richie replied. “Why?”

“Because I’m determined to keep physical, tangible memories of you. Everyone else too whenever we see them again.” Eddie paused and looked up at him. “You haven’t begun to forget anything. Have you? Nothing foggy?”

“Nope. I remember every detail in perfect, horrifying clarity. You?”

Eddie looked relieved. “Yeah. Still, just in case. I’m going to need about a million pictures of you.”

“A million pictures huh? You might have to stick around a long time to get them all.”

“Then I better get started.”

“We could have just grabbed one in my apartment or something at some point. Not that I mind the detour.”

“Yeah, well it’s a gorgeous damn day, that view behind us is fucking nice, and I wanted the first one to be really special. But don’t worry,” Eddie said as he finally poised the phone, “I’ll get one of you deep in sleep, drool falling from your mouth and with your legs all tangled up in your blankets too.”

“Will you now?” grinned Richie just as Eddie took the picture. “Well jokes on you. I wake up pristine every morning.”

“Yeah, that’s a fucking lie. But not a bad first picture,” Eddie replied as he un-looped their arms.

“Alright, I’ve had my fun. Lead me the rest of the way to this mystery surprise.”

“You’re going to love this. It’ll be a real nostalgia kick,” Richie said. Though Eddie didn’t notice, he almost reached out and started to drag him in the right direction. However, at the last second Richie shoved his hands into his pockets instead and just led the way.

As they walked, Eddie took in the beauty of the park, occasionally straying from Richie’s side to look at something while Richie seemed to be gunning for the secret location. While Eddie was off to the side at one point though, he did manage to get one more picture of Richie before they started to walk into the residential areas. Richie was perfectly posed mid-stride, hair slightly tousled by the wind as the sun shined in a way that perfectly accented his face. He wasn’t smiling, but definitely not
frowning. He looked completely lost in thought as he let his feet be guided by pure muscle memory.

Eddie wondered what he was thinking about as he quickly caught back up to him. Eddie smiled, thumb hovering over the image. It probably didn’t compare to any professional’s eye, but Eddie quite liked it. On pure instinct, he zoomed in a little and made it his background.

“Did you just take another picture of me?”

“Nope.”

“Oh huh,” Richie slowly said. “Come on. We got about a fifteen minute walk this way.”

They continued on, moving from grassy trails to sidewalks again. Eddie kept looking around. He was trying to figure out what exactly Richie was dragging him to. However, he didn’t think it was more food, though he knew there was still a long list of restaurants Richie wanted to take him to. What could it be…

Eventually, they rounded a street corner. Just like all the others, Eddie’s eyes ran over every building, every sign. Unlike the other times though, he spotted one store and immediately knew it had to be the end goal.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“What do you think?”

“I think I won’t know the first place to start. I haven’t been in one of these in years.”

“Well it’s a regular of mine. I have a deal with one of the managers that he gives me discounts if I can get him the occasional free ticket to some of the clubs I frequent.”

“Wait. That sounds like you have a lot and yet I haven’t seen a single one in your apartment—is that what all those boxes under your bed are holding?”

“At least now I have proof you haven’t snooped around.”

“Like I ever would. Is every box full?”

“Close to it. I need to find some more room.”

“Or maybe not buy as many,” laughed Eddie.

Richie scoffed as they came up to the door. He held it open for Eddie. “Yeah, fat chance of that. You’d have to burn down every comic bookstore in a two-hundred mile radius to stop that.”

Eddie shook his head with a bemused smile as he walked into the place. Right away, some guy was saying hi to Richie. Eddie let them have their own little conversation as he walked to the rows and started to flip through the comics.

He pulled out a Wonder Woman one. After flipping through a few pages, Richie snatched it out of his hands. “Hey Beverly. This should be your first comic.”

The losers were moving around the aisles, quickly grabbing anything of interest. They’d come pretty early so that they had the store almost completely to themselves besides the underpaid teen who looked ready to fall asleep behind the counter.
“Why?” asked Bev. “Because she’s a girl?”

“Naw because whips are hot.”

“It’s a lasso you idiot,” Eddie replied.

“And what the hell is hot about it?” asked Mike.

Richie thrust at Eddie. “Ask Eddie’s mom.”

Eddie grabbed Richie’s face and shoved him back. “That’s a lie cause I was banging your mom and you were fast asleep in your room last night.”

“Bullshit.”

“Bullshit.”

“No, you’re bullshit.”

“That doesn’t even make sense.”

They started to struggle, wrestling in the store as the teenager sighed, “You tear it, you pay for it,” before lazily flipping through a magazine in front of him.

“Guys,” Beverly suddenly cut in. “What about this one?” She pulled out a Spider-Man comic.

“Oh yeah, that’s a good one,” Eddie said, both he and Richie doing a sudden left turn from yelling to talking normally again.

“You can’t start with that one though. That’s issue eighty-seven,” Stan added.

“It can get a…a…a…little confusing,” Bill got out. “I c…c…c…c…”

“Here’s a good one to start with,” Ben quickly said, shoving a comic in between Bill and Bev. “And Peter Parker’s the best superhero to start with. He’s only a little older than us and has to deal with regular day stuff and saving people, and he has a strict moral code he follows. He’s like the best.”

“Black Panther and Doctor Strange are pretty cool,” Mike suggested.

“DC has the best ones,” Stan argued. “Green Lantern, Superman, Batman, they’re way better. And Wonder Woman is theirs too.”

“I like Guardians of the Galaxy,” Eddie said, moving to another aisle.

“No one knows who the hell they are,” said Richie. “They’re as non-existent as my virginity.”

“Shut up Richie,” they all groaned.

Eddie rolled up the Guardians of the Galaxy comic book he had in hand and knocked Richie upside the head with it.

“Ow!”

“You can’t say that. Doesn’t fucking hurt if it doesn’t exist.”

“Well it did.”
“So you’re saying you are a virgin,” smirked Stan. “I always knew it.”

“What-naw. I’m just trying to make you virginites feel better.”

“That’s a new one,” chuckled Mike.

“Well in that case, I can keep hitting you,” Eddie replied, taking another swipe at Richie.

“Hey!”

“Then admit it hurts fucking virgin.”

“Not a chance virginite,” Richie said as he dodged another swipe. Eddie and Richie started running around the store as Mike, Ben, Stan, and Bill tried to give Beverly some good first choices for comics. Eddie and Richie did pause whenever Bev asked a question, but for the most part they continued to argue with Eddie every now and then trying to hit him to prove a point.

Eddie carefully put Wonder Woman away as Richie started to walk over.

“Thoughts?” he grinned.

“I’m warning you Richie. I think this is awakening something in me.”

“It is—you mean the comic books,” mumbled Richie as he face-palmed behind him.

Eddie didn’t notice. “Lot less spandex than I last remember.”

“Not all superheroes either,” Richie said as he managed to bounce back. “Also pretty popular to adapt TV shows into comic books too. Or even continue cancelled ones.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, come look.”

They ended up walking around for hours. It felt like almost everything Eddie touched brought back other memories of his friends. It was hard not to smile through it all. And when it was finally time to leave? Eddie caved and purchased three issues from different series. Richie left with six that the guy behind the counter had been holding on for him.

“Alright, that was basically it for the surprise. It’s your turn,” Richie said.

“Mine?”

“Yeah, I took up most of our last pseudo vacation day. So, you get to pick dinner.”

“Hmm, I still don’t know everything this city has to offer.”

“Pick a type of food then.”

“Hmm…Mexican?”

“You hate spicy food.”

“I’m branching out. And I know you like it.”

“I said pick what you want to eat.”
“I’ll enjoy it if you enjoy it,” smiled Eddie. “So, any good places around here?”

“There is one on the way home…”

“Then Mexican it is. Lead the way.”

They walked back through the city, though obviously taking a different route from before. Along the way, Eddie started to go the wrong way at one point. He didn’t register what was going through Richie’s head, but for Richie, he took a quick chance. This time, he grabbed Eddie’s hand and pulled him in the right direction instead. He let go relatively quickly, but the warm feeling didn’t really leave him. For Eddie, he didn’t really take notice, only that he immediately missed the warmth when Richie let go.
ACT II: Change

Chapter Notes

And here's the next chapter! Thanks again for everyone reading this! I know I keep saying that over and over. But it just means that much and I'll probably continue to say it in every chapter after this. Thank you <3

Eddie had a routine again.

As his chest wound had healed, he’d started doing minor stretching and exercises every morning. He wasn’t really a gym kind of guy, but regular exercise was still important so Eddie would stretch and then do some pushups and sit-ups. He couldn’t do as many as he once could, but he should be able to get back to his regular reps once he fully healed.

Richie was usually asleep during those parts. However, there was one day when he’d gotten up early. He’d stopped in the doorway and had still been standing there when Eddie finished his pushups and sat back on his knees. Eddie had raised an eyebrow. “What? Was my form off?”

“Huh? No. No the uh…form was great.”

Eddie hadn’t been able to decipher the look in Richie’s eyes but had chalked it up to him having just woken up. Other than that day though, Richie usually still slept through the workout. Once done, Eddie would head into the kitchen and start a pot of coffee. That was the real signal that got Richie to drag himself up off the couch. He would grab his coffee, drink it as quickly as possible, and then do his morning shower.

If they were awake enough by that point, they left to go have breakfast and say hi to CC. Otherwise they would scramble something up at home and laze about on the couch. As they ate, they would see what was interesting on TV or watch the news in the early morning until almost ten. Then Richie would start writing on the iPad and Eddie would go to work on the computer. Eddie always sat at the desk, sometimes putting in headphones if Richie was reciting or practicing lines. Richie constantly paced around the apartment as he typed up notes. He never sat down for more than a minute.

By one, Richie would then help Eddie look after his wound. Then what was for lunch got decided. If they hadn’t gone out for breakfast, then they went out for lunch. The nicer the day, the longer the detour Eddie made them take as they would either walk through a park rather or go through streets Eddie hadn’t seen yet rather than going straight to the restaurant. If they had eaten out and seen CC during breakfast, they made something quick at home, might watch or read something together, and then went back to work.

Dinner was always a tossup on if they were going out or not. However, if they were, Richie usually had something else planned too. Either a store they would stop by, maybe a movie they could see. Because Eddie had expressed interest in one of Chicago’s museums, Richie had gone ahead and bought them tickets one night to a special event.

Then whenever they got home, or if they’d eaten at home, they again might watch or read something. Richie would occasionally get a spark of inspiration and start working again, and Eddie would take his shower and go to bed. He was still sleeping in Richie’s bed despite how he said his
wound really was healing now. However, Richie still insisted on the pull-out.

The ritual in general was nothing new. Eddie had led his life in many fine, specific rituals. He’d had morning and daytime and nighttime patterns that he’d rarely ever strayed from. For one, knowing the outlook of a day made everything easier to plan, he didn’t have to worry about being surprised, and yet all those moments were still only that. Just rituals. Patterns that Eddie figured out were most effective and then just never deviated from.

But this ritual? His day to day life with Richie? It made him feel good. It had him excited every morning as he went to make coffee just so he could watch Richie’s sleepy eyes pop up in anticipation. Knowing what was coming next, it wasn’t really for efficiency. It was because he enjoyed doing it. Because he wanted to have nearly every meal with Richie every day, or take walks in the park, or read through comics or whatever. It was a new feeling that Eddie didn’t want to let go, though he was unsure exactly how long it would last.

Of course, the ritual didn’t happen exactly like that every day, even if that was the intention. For example, that day they’d planned to go out and grab groceries right after they ate a quick lunch. However, Eddie had gotten distracted by a work email he’d seen pop up on the computer. He’d gone to check it, and nearly forty minutes later had finally looked around to see an empty room.

He texted Richie.

Did you seriously leave? I told you I would go with you.

What? Don’t trust my taste in food?

Eddie rolled his eyes. You have great taste. Not healthy. But great. But seriously?

I just think it’s funny it took you nearly forty minutes to notice I had left.

I got wrapped up in work.

Which is why I left. You get that done now and I know we can fully focus on finishing the rest of Cobra Kai Season 2 tonight.

Ok. Fair enough. Just make sure you get a new thing of toilet paper. And don’t forget we’re almost out of coffee grounds.

I got the list you made earlier. And I’m definitely not forgetting that.

Good. Get home soon.

Will do.

With that mystery solved, Eddie turned back to his computer. He’d pretty much figured out the issue and quickly sent back his response to work. With that all done, and no idea exactly how long it would take Richie to get back, Eddie decided to try and call Bev.

He and Richie had been texting the others regularly. Sometimes it was quick updates. Other times it was longer conversations, telling stories about their day or ranting about something. Eddie had mentioned he would try to call Bev today anyways, so he hit her name and waited.

At the last minute, she answered and quickly said, “Eddie! Hold on one moment. I have Mike on the other line. Let me merge the calls.”
A few silent seconds quickly passed and then, “You still there?”

“Still here. Hi Bev. Mike?”

“Hey Eddie.” Mike said. “Man, it’s good to hear you. How is everything?”

“Good. Chest is still healing but the stitches on my cheek are gone.”

“And living with Richie? Are you surviving that?” asked Beverly, the smile clear in her voice.

“I’m trying. Found out he brushes his teeth while taking a shower.”

“Yuck,” Bev said.

“What? It can save on time,” said Mike.

“Of course you would be on Richie’s side,” chuckled Eddie. “But no, that’s disgusting and you should stop it now.”

Beverly laughed. “How did you even find out?”

“He likes morning showers. Happened to be getting ready in the bathroom while he was taking one. You should have been there. It was fucking hilarious. I heard the weird noise, spotted that Richie’s toothbrush wasn’t there, and then just said, Are you brushing your teeth? He was silent for a solid minute and then I just heard this muffled, No? The fucking liar.”

“What did you do?”

“Just flushed the toilet.”

“You monster,” laughed Mike.

Eddie laughed too. “How’s everything with you guys? Talked to the others?”

“Bill’s actually going to come down in the next couple of days,” Mike explained. “I’ve got nearly everything packed, but he still wants to help me with the moving process. I told him I’d let him, but only if he let me help him with his move too.”

“He’s moving?” asked Eddie.

“Well, eventually. Still trying to decide on exactly where and when. He and his wife having been splitting up the assets and though he loves his house, not much reason in keeping it all by himself.”

“Oh. Is he doing alright?” asked Bev, understanding what Mike was implying.

“So far. Still stressful, but Bill’s been excited about what’s next for himself. Told me it felt like he was breaking from a cycle he didn’t even realize he was trapped in.”

“Well, as long as he knows it’s the right choice,” Eddie murmured. He could certainly understand the sentiment. “What about Ben?”

“He visits almost every weekend,” Bev replied. “And…no. No, I said I’d let him tell everyone.”

“Oh no you don’t. You can’t leave us hanging like that.”

“We promise that whatever it is, we will react just as surprised and excited whenever Ben tells us,”
Mike promised.

“Ok, ok. Well, he’s planning on moving in with me.”

“Seriously?”

“Ah, Beverly that’s great.”

“I remember him saying he lives and works in Suffolk County though,” Mike added. “Are you looking for a place that’s in between everything or…”

“No. He was really insistent on moving in with me. Said he wouldn’t have to worry about his drive to work very often because he wants to stay at home and work. He certainly has the ability to, and he can just call in for most conference meetings. He said he didn’t want to put me out in anyway and knew my ability to get to work was a more pressing matter.”

“Of course he did,” chuckled Eddie. “He may be as fit as a fiddle, but he’s still the biggest fucking softy in the group.”

Bev made a noise and Eddie could just imagine her trying to cover up the extremely unladylike laugh.

“I’m happy for you,” Mike said. “Both of you.”

“You know he’s planning a trip this summer for us in Europe.”

“Fancy,” said Eddie.

“Technically, I’m not supposed to know about it yet. But I’ve practiced my perfectly surprised face for when he shows off the plans.”

Mike and Eddie chuckled at that. They continued talking for a while, at least long enough for Richie to get home.

“Oh, one second,” Eddie quickly said on the phone. He took it from his ear and put it on speaker as Richie came through with the bags of groceries. “Hey Richie.”

“Richie! Hi.”

“Hey, how are you?”

“Hey guys,” Richie said, immediately recognizing their voices. “Just you two?”

“Yeah, Ben’s at work,” Beverly explained. “Or else I’d have him on this call too.”

“And I tried calling Bill. But he’s either busy with something or has himself holed up in his writing room and forgot his phone,” said Mike.

“No surprise there,” Richie said. Eddie got up, bringing his phone over so Richie didn’t have to talk louder and so he could help with putting up the groceries. As he set his phone on the counter, Richie said, “So what were you talking about? Anything good?”

“Just how sweet Ben is,” Eddie said.

“He really is the hopeless romantic out of us,” Mike added.
“Well, yeah but we knew that decades ago. Tell me what’s new,” Richie replied.

As he and Eddie put everything away, they continued talking to both Mike and Beverly. When everything was done, Mike said, “I got to go. But I’ll talk to you both soon. I’ll try to get Bill on next time too.”

“I’ll do the same with Ben. See if we can’t plan this out a little better to get us all talking.”

“Sounds good. Bye Mike,” Eddie said.

“Good-bye,” said Bev.

“Bye!” Richie called as he walked into the bedroom.

As Mike hung up and it sounded like Richie was going to the restroom, Bev suddenly said, “Is it just you Eddie?”

“Yeah. Richie’s in the restroom. What’s up?”

“I…sorry. You can say no if you want. I just didn’t want to bring the mood down with everyone else still on call…”

Eddie quickly turned off speaker mode and put the phone back up to his ear. He went to sit down at the desk as he said, “Hey, you don’t have to worry about that. You can talk to everyone you know.”

“I do. I just…”

“Is everything ok?” Eddie softly asked.

“It is. Everything…everything with Ben is wonderful. More than wonderful. But…the divorce hasn’t been going smoothly.”

“I’m sorry—”

“No. Never mind,” Beverly quickly said. “I shouldn’t put all this on you.”

“I don’t mind. Honest. You don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want to, but if you need to rant then rant. Please,” Eddie said.

There was silence for a moment as Eddie waited for a response. He almost thought Bev was going to change her mind and hang up. Instead, she finally let out a frustrated groan and jumped into it instead.

“He’s trying to take our company. My fucking husband! And that includes my line. My entire life’s work! He wants it all which is just-just fucking ridiculous! And he’s trying to tell the courts I was abusive because he has evidence of a hospital visit after I kicked him in the face. That was self-defense! I’m abusive? He’s the abusive bitch who could have-just argh!” She let out a frustrated yell on the other end. “God, I’m sorry. I’m so sorry I’m throwing all of this at you—”

“No! No Bev, it’s ok. Really. Just…Jesus Christ. Does Ben know?”

“He does, and he wants to help. Of course he does. But him getting involved would just make things worse. And his, Tom’s, fucking lawyer is already trying to spin that besides being an abusive wife, I’m some fucking adulteress whore and just-I’m sorry. I really am. I just needed to let it all out on someone. And if I tell Ben, I know he’s going to want to do something.”
“I want to do something,” Eddie honestly said. “The only reason I don’t fly back to New York and knock the shit out of him is because I know it would do more bad than good.”

At that moment, Richie walked back in. He raised a curious eyebrow but didn’t say anything and headed straight for the kitchen.

“Well the thoughts are appreciated at least. I mean…I should win this. Most of what he’s saying is conjecture and we have some character witnesses planned that should go in my favor. But just the stress… What about you? How is yours going?”

“My what?”

“Your divorce.”

“Oh…um…”

“Oh god, I didn’t mean to imply anything,” Beverly quickly said. “I just—you’re still living with Richie. I assumed—”

“No. It’s ok. I haven’t actually talked to her in over a week now.”

“That long?”

“She gave me another ultimatum and it’s just…I’m obviously not going to give in. But I just still don’t quite have the energy to deal with another fight,” sighed Eddie. “You know, she couldn’t even say she loved me? I asked her why we got married and she just couldn’t answer.”

“That’s horrible. I’m so sorry Eddie.”

“Yeah, well at least I don’t care what the hell happens to most of our assets. I…I don’t know what we’re going to do. But Bev, please just call if you ever need to. I don’t care if you need a metaphorical shoulder to cry on, want someone to rant to, or you want to pretend nothing’s going wrong and we can talk about something else. Because you can with me. And you can call me at any time. I’m sure my schedule is easier to work around.”

“Thank you, Eddie. That really means everything right now.”

“I just want to do what I can,” Eddie honestly said.

“Thanks.” There was a pause and then, “Listen, I have to go. But I appreciate you taking the time to listen to me.”

“Anything for you Bev.”

“Talk to you later?”

“Of course.”

“Ok. Later then. And hey, I love you. So do the others. You have all of us.”


As he put his phone down, Richie said from the kitchen, “That sounded like it got serious near the end. Everything ok?”

“For the most part. She just needed to rant for a bit. The divorce isn’t the easiest thing.”
“I can only imagine,” sighed Richie. “We should try to visit her at some point. I think it would cheer her up. And it would be good to see Ben too.”

Eddie nodded in agreement. He then noted what Richie was taking out. “You prepping for dinner?”

“Figured I would cook tonight.”

“You know, I’m still surprised you know how to cook.”

“Listen, you can only live on fast food and frozen meals so long. It was inevitable,” smirked Richie. “Want to help?”

“Sure. Just tell me what to do.”

Richie ended up putting some music on, and for the most part they worked in silence with Richie just pausing to take the food from Eddie and to give him another task. As Eddie focused on the simple chopping motions, his mind stayed on what Beverly had said.

*How is yours going?*

*My what?*

*Your divorce?*

Had Eddie been avoiding that thought? Maybe. Or maybe it just honestly hadn’t crossed his mind. But he was living away from Myra, he planned on continuing that. There was no reason to stay married, especially to a woman who didn’t even love him.

But going through the actual process of divorce? That would require a lot of talking with Myra that Eddie just still wasn’t ready for. At the very least, Eddie knew whatever happened with Myra, he would have his friends behind him, especially Richie.
CC had already come over a few days ago so Richie could help her with her set. They’d worked at it for almost three hours, though there had been plenty of breaks throughout and CC had gotten plenty distracted with the apartment. Though Richie had said it was a one-time thing and reminded her he wasn’t interested in mentoring anyone, Eddie really wasn’t surprised when two days later she texted Richie that she was outside the apartment building. Without any argument, Richie went down to let her in.

When they walked into the apartment, Eddie noted that Richie actually looked amused, although he was still shooting her a kind smile as he asked, “Nervs finally got to you?”

“Yes!” she cried out, flopping down on the pull-out. Eddie paused in his work, taking out both his earbuds and leaning back, curious where this would go. “Which is fucking ridiculous because I’ve done open mic before. I’ve tried my style of stand-up. I know I can get people to laugh but—”

She grabbed the nearest pillow and yelled into. She dropped it into her lap and looked at Richie with big eyes.

“I will make you all the mimosas you want. I will buy vodka and make all the screwdrivers you want. Just plleeeeease help me.”

“You bring any of that alcohol with you?” asked Richie.

“Well no. But—”

This time a full smile appeared on Richie’s face. “I’m joking. We can walk through everything again. Only you have to promise to listen to what I’m working with.”

Her eyes lit up. “Wait, like you want my opinion? Mine?!”

“Well everyone gets humor differently. So better to try things out with a variety of people before showing it to a club full of them.”

“Is that our first lesson of the day Professor Tozier?”

“Ok, you start with that shit and you’re out immediately.”

“I will follow that second lesson closely,” she grinned. She glanced over and quickly added, “Hi Eddie. I think I forgot to do pleasantries while I was in my existential panic.”

“No worries. How’s work?”

“The same. Boring but currently pays the bills.”

“Did you bring your notes?” asked Richie.
“Of course I—oh shit! Argh, I can’t believe I came all this way and didn’t even grab them!” she cried as she covered up her face again.

“I honestly don’t get why you don’t have them on your phone. Or at least a laptop. Does this have to do with one of those millennial things?” asked Richie.

“I think the word you’re looking for is hipster. Which yes. It is a hundred percent that. I’ll be right back,” she said as she jumped back to her feet.

“It’s getting kind of late,” Eddie said. “If you’re coming straight back, do you want to have dinner with us? We were just going to order pizza tonight.”

“Argh! What are you doing?” cried Richie. “Don’t you know that if you feed her once, we’ll never be rid of her?”

“Oh, you weren’t getting rid of me anytime soon anyways,” grinned CC. “Pizza would be great. Extra pepperoni please.”

“You got it,” Eddie replied, grinning from ear to ear as Richie let out another groan, though Eddie still saw a quick smile from him.

As CC darted out the door, Richie said, “You are feeding into this. You realize that. Right?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Eddie joked. “And…I don’t know. It’s nice to have a friend. Outside of you and the others of course.”

“Are you telling me you don’t have a single friend at your work? Or a former neighbor you talked to a lot?” snorted Richie.

“Um, I’m sorry. Have you not noticed that not once have I said, ‘Oh, I should tell Bridget in accounting where I am because she would be worried’ or ‘Man, old man Jefferson down the road must really miss our morning chats when he went on his walks’.” Eddie made an exaggerated shrug as he put on the slightly over the top voice.

And Richie? His smile fell away. “Oh…”

“I know that look,” Eddie quickly said. “It’s ok—”

“But it’s really not,” Richie murmured. He slowly walked over and sat on the edge of the pull-out. “You realize that. Right?”

“Do I realize the fact that I could have died, and all my obituary would have said was ‘Subpar husband/Also didn’t turn in last Monday’s report’? Yes, I do. And yes, I realize how fucked up that is. I just try not to talk about it because you get like…this,” Eddie sighed.

“Any normal fucking human being would get upset hearing shit like this.”

“I guess I didn’t surround myself with normal people,” Eddie shrugged. “It’s ok. It doesn’t upset me.”

“How can that not upset you?”

“Because I have you,” Eddie smiled. “I have Mike and Ben and Bev and Bill. I wake up enjoying my god damn day instead of in some deadened daze. And there are others that I talk and chat with that feel like real people and real conversations, like CC or Megan at Chicago Comics and your
neighbor Ms. Torrins.

“If I had realized how fucking lifeless my days were while still in that house? Still at Myra’s side? That…that would be a different story. I don’t know what I would have done. Only that I would have felt utterly helpless and might have…I don’t know. But my point is that I don’t have to worry about any of that now. I have you. At least for as long as you’ll have me here.”

“You’re welcomed here for as long as you need,” Richie replied.

“Even if you get tired of me?”

“I couldn’t get tired of you.” Richie lifted his hand, it wavered a bit, and then he fell on just patting Eddie’s knee. “I mean it. Stay forever even.”

“Forever, huh?” chuckled Eddie. “Doesn’t sound so bad to me.”

There was a small ding on the laptop and Eddie turned away. “Oh, by the way, what kind of pizza do you want?”

Richie stayed silent. He rubbed at his eyes under his glasses and opened his mouth. His lips moved but no sounds came out.

“Richie?”

“Pepperoni is good with me to,” Richie fell on. He mouthed the word idiot and made a motion like he was hitting himself in the head.

Eddie didn’t see, quickly ordering the pizza online before switching back over to work documents. As he finished up on some more related tasks, Richie got up and went searching for the iPad. He found it and started going over some notes again as they waited for CC to come back. It didn’t take long until Richie was getting a text from her again. He hurried down to let her in, and when he came back up, Richie said, “Pizza came at the same time. Talk about fucking perfect.”

“Nice. You have your notes this time?” Eddie asked CC.

“Yeah, all here.” She sat down and pulled her shoulder bag over as Richie grabbed plates. There were a bunch of journals and notepads in there. Eddie had no idea how, or even if, they were organized, but she seemed to know which one she needed as she pulled it out. She also pulled out a bottle of tequila.

“I did say I was joking about the alcohol thing, right? And I’m also pretty sure this is bribery,” Richie said as he put the pizza on the plates.

“Not bribery. Honest.”

“Oh yeah?”

“It’s a thank you. Like, seriously. I mean, I could have totally gotten a spot this good down the line on my own. But like, if I do well enough, it could really help me boost my career and way faster than I was expecting.”

“Which is why your nerves have gotten to you,” Eddie said with a kind smile. He got comfortable in the chair at the desk as Richie handed out pizza.

“Yes! And I mean, every other gig it was kind of like, hey, I got this gig myself so if I bomb, that’s
just on me. But like, you helped me get that spot! I get it’s stupid, but I feel like if I fuck up, then I’ll disappoint you or something.”

Richie looked a bit surprised as he finally sat down on the pull-out with CC. “Jesus. Does my word mean that much to you?”

“Yes just…listen. This is going to sound really corny,” started CC, “but when I was thirteen, I was at a thrift store and bought a CD. You know, when those were still a thing. The cover said it was Beyoncé’s first solo album, and I totally should have checked to make sure it was the right CD, but I had my mom get it because I definitely couldn’t afford it new but when I put it in, it turned out to be your first published album instead.”

Richie let out a sharp laugh. Eddie tried to hold it in, but only succeeded for about five seconds longer. His chest began to hurt as his breath came in quick and sharp. He was pretty much wheezing right away.

“A fucking Beyoncé album?!”

Richie was crying as he breathlessly got out, “At least they threw it away in that and not a Limp Bizkit one.”

That one made Eddie practically cackle.

“Ok, I feel like you’re both teasing me.”

“I’m not. I’m really not,” Richie said as he quickly wiped at his eyes and Eddie shook his head. “Just…wow I started so low they didn’t even want to advertise my work at a thrift store. That…that is actually pretty fucking funny. Might not be as funny for the general public, but I would recommend trying to spin that into a joke.”

“Wait, really?”

“I mean, if you find the right words and the right inflections, you can make a good joke with just about any situation, but that one is especially good.”

Broken coughing escaped Eddie’s throat as he tried to keep himself from laughing again. “Beyoncé.”


CC rolled her eyes. “Anyways, needless to say I was very disappointed.”

Eddie and Richie started laughing again.

“Guys!”

“I’m sorry! I’m just never going to get over this!” gasped Richie. It took him a moment to get his breathing back under control again. “Also, good timing and inflection there. That really got me.”

CC let out a little huff, but it was clear she wasn’t actually annoyed. “My point is that instead of throwing it straight into the trash—”

Richie snorted. Eddie quickly covered his mouth again. CC gave them both pointed looks.

“I decided to listen to it because there really wasn’t anything to do that day besides homework and who wants to do that. Right? So, I did and just…it was the first time I was really introduced to stand-up. I started to branch out from there obviously. But just…that first album still means a lot. I
definitely would not be here, trying to be a stand-up comedian and wasting my bachelor’s in journalism that my mom made me finish if it wasn’t for accidently convincing my mom to purchase that CD in the first place.”

“That is actually very sweet,” Eddie said as he finally managed to stop laughing.

“Sweet?” asked Richie. “She basically just told me she wasted almost forty-thousand dollars on a degree because of me. I’m surprised her mom hasn’t hunted me down and killed me for that.”

CC laughed.

“But seriously that is…I don’t know. Kind of weird? But in a good way? I mean, all I’ve ever done is try to make people laugh. Thinking that my comedy actually inspired someone though…”

“Sorry if that made things a bit weird,” CC winced. “I remember the first time I admitted I was a fan you kind of got—”

“I was being a bit of a grouch then, and the only thing that’s weird is hearing that you listened to the album at age thirteen. It’s kind of making me realize how fucking old I am.”

“You’re not even forty-five,” chuckled CC.

“Listen, you start getting old when you start making unintentional noises every time you’re trying to get out of a seat that was too low for you.”

“I make those noises already.”

“Welcome to being old!”

CC rolled her eyes as Eddie laughed again.

“Uh uh. You can’t call me that until I at least reach thirty man.”

“Fine. Fine. So is there a specific part of your set that has you worried?”

“I mean sort of…”

CC opened up her notebook and she and Richie began going over it again. Eddie mostly just ate, watched, and listened. He enjoyed seeing Richie in his element, and it wasn’t until he’d actually seen Richie work that he’d realized just how much effort went into a single joke and how difficult it could sometimes be to find the right words.

Even though Richie gave her some advice, he also eventually said, “And hey, if all else fails, just know you can’t be as bad as my first open mic night was.”

“Why?” asked CC.

This sounded interesting so Eddie asked, “What happened?”

“Well I walked onto stage, young twenty something with my usual cockiness thinking I could outdo every act that had come before me.”

“And then?” asked CC.

“I immediately threw up on my shoes.”
“You’re joking!” gasped Eddie.

“I wish,” said Richie as he winced at the memory. “Before that, I’d always thought I didn’t get stage fright. Turns out nope. I had just never gotten stage fright before because I had never actually cared about whatever I was doing in front of a crowd. You don’t care about what you’re doing, then you don’t care what the audience thinks, and you don’t have to worry as much about stage fright. But don’t worry. Whatever happens CC, you’ll do fine. And it’s not like this is your first time up there. Just on this particular stage. Now, it’s your turn to listen to what I’ve got.”

They continued into the night, Eddie just sitting on the side and listening to them for most of it. Richie even double checked that he wasn’t getting bored, but Eddie assured him he wasn’t. Watching CC and Richie banter was entertainment enough, and honestly, Eddie just enjoyed listening to Richie talk. It was a little ironic considering how easily Richie’s bad jokes when they were kids had made Eddie groan in annoyance. Now though? He couldn’t get enough of Richie’s voice.

Almost the entire time, Eddie sat with a smile firmly planted in place as he kept his head propped up with his hand.
ACT II: Change

Chapter Notes

Here's a chapter I know a lot of people have been waiting for, and also marks the middle of this fic (assuming I don't drop or add a few chapters sometime from now). Thank you again to everyone reading it, the wonderful comments and kudos. And I'm super happy you're enjoying CC as there is definitely going to be more of her in the future. Thanks again and enjoy!

After the second work session, Richie had agreed to one more before CC’s big day arrived. It ended up being three days before CC was supposed to go on and again, she and Richie were pacing the room, throwing ideas back and forth at each other and practicing. CC didn’t want to burn herself out on her planned set though, so she also was practicing a few others and letting Richie go with his own.

Eddie went back and forth between doing his own work and taking out his headphones for a few minutes so he could listen to what they were doing. Though Eddie would never want to put himself through the stress of writing a set, he did learn about a lot of really interesting rules that could be followed, and he learned to appreciate the art of it even more.

One rule that specifically drew Eddie’s attention was when Richie was talking about numbers. “Now you have to be careful when throwing out numbers because for the most part, you want to make sure it’s a number a person can visualize.”

“Is one hundred not a good number?”

“Can you visualize one hundred people? One hundred rocks? It’s hard. The higher the number, the more general the blob is and the harder it becomes for the audience to understand what you’re trying to get at, especially if the number is important to the joke and not just a flavor word you’re throwing in. And one hundred? Don’t go in multiples of tens or fives. Everyone rounds to those, at least in Western cultures, to the point that hearing those kinds of numbers doesn’t leave the same kind of impact as a random number does.

“For example, saying you told a hotel concierge you needed thirty key cards is pretty ridiculous. But thirty-three? That extra three can catch the audience’s attention because a) you don’t hear the number thirty-three as often as you do a multiple of five or ten, and b) you make the audience think thirty is so much, what ridiculous reason could you possibly need three more for and have to include those three in the joke rather than rounding to thirty. And adding that extra syllable gives you something to really put emphasis on as well.

“But you still can’t choose just any random number besides the fives and tens. Too low and it won’t get the intended laugh. Too high and it could be so ridiculous that it takes the audience out of the moment. There’s no specific rule to where which is the lowest or highest number you can pick though. It’s all about context.

“Ok. Yeah,” said CC, “that makes sense. Let me try that again.”

About an hour and a half into their back and forth, there was a knock at the door. Besides the other
people that lived in the building, Eddie now knew of only one person who did not live in the building but also had a key for it.

Because of that, when Eddie grabbed the door and opened it, he wasn’t too surprised to see Jason. The man had stopped by for a few quick visits to talk shop with Richie before then. He was usually gone as soon as he came, but something about his visits always struck Eddie. It had to do with this look Jason would just give him, seemingly without reason. Eddie hadn’t brought it up with Richie yet simply because it wasn’t a nasty look or anything. It didn’t make Eddie upset or uncomfortable. It was just confusing, and he wondered why he deserved so much of Jason’s attention. As it was, Jason at least didn’t look him over for too long this time as he took note of CC and stopped.

“You’re the one,” he said, starting to walk over. Eddie closed the door and went to sit back at his computer.

“Fancy title. I like it,” CC said.

Jason stopped mid stride and gave Richie a pointed look. “Don’t tell me she’s a mini-you. I can only handle one of you.”

“Excuse you, I’m a mini-me,” said CC. “Except the opposite. Cause I’m almost six feet.”

Jason gave them both a look.

“Makes sense to me,” said Richie.

Eddie snorted.

“Why do I work with you? I don’t have a single other stand-up comedian on my list. I should have none,” groaned Jason. Still, he walked over and put his bag onto the counter. “Still, guess this works. I needed you to sign some things.”

“What for?” asked Richie. “Is this for my last set? Because I swear if this is about damages, I made every drop of vomit go into that bowl.”

“No, it’s not that you moron. I’m talking about her,” Jason said. “I was just going to have you give it to her and then return it to me, but this works too.”

“Wait, what things?” asked CC.

“Standard paperwork. Remember, this isn’t just signing your name on a sheet for open-mic,” Jason explained. He took out a couple of sheets and set them down. “Basically, it’s making you obligated to show up unless in case of emergency issues so they don’t have an empty ten minutes or so in the night. Also, some things about settling how you’ll get paid, tax information, all that. Take all the time you need to look over it. The Comedy Club is pretty straight forward. But you should always double check when you work for a new club. Sometimes they can have some pretty dick requirements.”

“That is true,” said Richie. “And you usually want to be careful of anything that gets handed to you to sign. But I will say you can always trust Jason over here.”

“Maybe I should get you as an agent,” grinned CC.

“Assistant,” Eddie replied.

“Wrangler,” Jason corrected. “And I only have enough time for one crazy son of a bitch. No offense.”
“None taken,” she grinned.

As she started to read through everything, Jason pulled out a sheet and put it in front of Richie. He added, “I do have this for you to sign though.”

“What is?” questioned Richie.

“I thought you said you could always trust this guy,” smirked CC.

“Most of the time,” amended Richie. “Jason?”

“Well speaking of emergency situations, their usual presenter who does the opening slash closing stand-up sets and introduces the people can’t be there this Friday or Saturday. Jim wants you because a) you owe him for that shit show last time, b) you’ll do it for less than some of these fuckers who would try to extort him for a last minute gig like this, and c) I think you should do it. I know you don’t have a full set planned out, but it’ll do your improv skills some good.”

Richie hummed to himself as he looked over the paper.

“I think you should do it.”

The three of them looked up to see Eddie who had turned away from the laptop again.

“You think?” asked Richie.

“Jason makes some good points. And after seeing you practice so much, I’d like to see you really in action,” smiled Eddie.

He hadn’t even finished that sentenced before Richie was already agreeing and signing. Jason raised an eyebrow and silently said a long drawn out, “Wooooow.” Richie hit him in the chest as Eddie added, “And I figured we would be going anyways. To see CC.”

“Yeah, yeah. Already signed and done,” Richie said, sliding the paper back to Jason.

“Wait, so that means you’re introducing me?” asked CC with wide eyes.

“Pretty much.”

A tiny noise escaped the back of her throat.

“You’ll do fine,” Richie reminded her. “Well, it’s set then. I’ll see you in a few days Jason.”

“You better. And thank you,” Jason said as he took CC’s papers and carefully folded everything up. “I’ll see you both this Friday.” He gave a quick nod to Eddie and then left as quickly as he’d come, same as usual.

“Holy shit,” CC immediately said. “This is going to be so awesome!”

“I know I’m excited,” Eddie said. “Especially if you’re going to be improvising Richie.”

“Oh yeah, that’s the best part. Specifically when you start to get a little too dirty and you can see the manager desperately trying to signal you to move on to a different joke.”

“Let me guess. You rarely listen?” laughed Eddie.

“Usually, but I’ll mostly play nice for this one. I’m just the presenter, not one of the headliners for
this,” Richie said. He gestured towards CC. “And I want to hear your set again. From the beginning to the very end,” Richie told her. “No stops this time. No advice. Let’s just hear it and see how it goes. Improvise if you have to because you should be ready for any situation up there anyways. But first I am going to run to the restroom.”

“Sounds good to me.”

As Richie went into his bedroom, CC quickly grabbed a glass of water. She downed it and then walked around and sat on the pull-out near Eddie. “I’m glad you want to come. And thanks too. I don’t think I said that before.”

“You don’t have to thank me for it. Like I said. I’m excited,” smiled Eddie.

“I know. Just…know it’s still appreciated. I haven’t known you long. But you’re pretty cool.”

“I’m cool?” snorted Eddie. “Yeah, not a word normally ascribed to me, but I’ll take it.”

“Good, because you’re stuck with it. You’re officially cool from here on out.”

Eddie rolled his eyes.

“By the way, sorry if this is prying, but I was curious how long you’re staying,” CC added. “Because it is nice having you around. And you definitely manage to get the grouch to smile more.”

“A while I think. At least that’s how it’s looking. Besides the uh…accident, my wife and I have been having problems.”

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Don’t be. Staying with Richie has definitely been good for me too,” said Eddie.

“Well, I’m glad I got the chance to meet you either way. You’re definitely better and more interesting than Richie’s other friends.”

“Other friends? I’d thought I’d met every one of note by now.”

“Well, you know. Not friend friends. But friends? Sometimes after a late night, Richie and the person would end up at the restaurant. So I mean, I met a few just by coming around and serving them breakfast. Richie liked to keep it on the down low mostly, though I could always tell. Not that it mattered much. None ever really lasted long.”

“Ah,” Eddie said, finally catching on. “Is he seeing anyone now?”

“Wouldn’t Richie have told you that?”

“He’s been pretty much focused on me considering what uh…happened. And if he did have a love life, I’m sure he’d probably be afraid that bringing it up would make me feel like I was overstaying my welcome,” Eddie replied.

“I guess that makes since. But as far as I know, there’s no one special. Last person was Taylor and that didn’t last long, same as the others.”

“What was she like?”

“He actually.”
Eddie stared.

CC stared back.

“Oh fuck you didn’t know!”

“No, no, no, no,” Eddie said in quick succession. “I knew. I knew.”

Eddie and CC stared at each other again.

“You didn’t! Oh, fuck me!” cried CC.

“It’s ok! It’s-it’s um-I um—”

“What the hell are you two going off about?”

Eddie and CC shut up immediately.

Richie rolled his eyes. “I realize this is a bit ironic coming from me, but the silent treatment? Real fucking mature guys. Spit it out.”

When neither immediately said anything, Richie’s humorous look started to ebb down. “Guys…”

“Nothing happened,” Eddie quickly said.

“Right,” Richie slowly replied. “So why the sudden silence?”

“Shit,” muttered CC. “Richie, I’m sorry. I really thought he—”

“I don’t care. Honest,” Eddie suddenly said. “…if anything I feel kind of bad you didn’t think you could tell me.”

Eddie wasn’t sure if he was thankful or not that Richie caught on quickly, but he did. The look on his face clearly said, ‘so I guess it’s time for this conversation now’. Richie stayed silent for a moment. He shifted and leaned up against his doorframe.

“It just…didn’t come up,” Richie murmured. He watched Eddie’s reactions carefully. “And I just…don’t really flash it so…”

Eddie hesitated, but then an idea came to mind that would hopefully get Richie to smile. “What do you mean you don’t flash your sexuality around? You were flashing your sexuality around when you were like twelve. Virginite? Remember that bullshit term you came up with? Or all the times you apparently fucked my mom? Guess I should be glad my dad died early on or you would have been fucking my whole family.”

CC gave a look like, ‘what the hell does any of that even mean’? But for Richie, it was exactly the kind of ice breaker he needed. He let out an unexpected laugh. He covered his face, cheeks going a bit red, and Eddie quickly jumped up. He pulled Richie into a hug and after a moment, Richie moved his arms around Eddie’s shoulders and pulled him closer.

“I’m serious. I don’t care,” Eddie said as he pulled back a bit. “Like I told CC, the only thing I was worried about was taking up too much room for you to have a love life. This just changes the pronoun.”

“Well I’d rather have you than any fucking love life,” Richie said. “Honest. I meant what I said about you staying as long as you want.”
“Then I stand by my ‘forever’ comment. You’re going to be stuck with me for a while yet.”

When Eddie and Richie finally pulled back from the hug, CC said, “And I’m seriously sorry Richie. I didn’t mean to let this slip out or anything.”

“I’m not mad CC. It’s not like I’m fucking nineteen and you ruined my stupid coming out plans. It happens. And it’s not like I was in the closet. Just…”

“Keeping it on the down low. Yeah,” CC said. “So…all good?”

“Yes,” Richie stressed. “It would be pretty shitty of me if I did get mad at you. And I mean, Eddie has a fair point about the flashing it bit. It’s not like I wasn’t dropping hints.”

“Wait, so that one comment was a hint?” Eddie suddenly asked.

“Which comment?” asked Richie. He looked just a little bit hopeful.

“The one when you said you couldn’t understand why Ralph Macchio was the heartthrob of the decade. You thought Billy Zabka was hotter, which I thought was just you making a joke at the time, but I guess you were serious…”

“That’s the hint you remember?” Richie asked with an incredulous look.

“Were there others?”

“Were there-yeah. But it doesn’t matter,” sighed Richie as he tried to keep the tortured feeling out of his smile. “Now are we done talking about my sexuality? Because I have a set I need to prepare for and less than three days to do it. And I still want you to run through yours for us.”

“Right,” CC quickly said. She jumped up as Eddie and Richie sat on the pull-out at the same time. “Wait-ah shit. My mind’s gone blank. Where are my—”

“Nope, can’t look at your notes,” Richie said.

“Are you serious? I feel like I just forgot everything after freaking out that I might have outed you.”

“Doesn’t matter,” smirked Richie, maybe taking just a little bit of glee in the power he had just now. “Shit can happen literally seconds before you walk on stage and you just have to deal with it. You forget a part? You snowplow on through as best you can.”

“Right…use this as a learning curve,” muttered CC. “Ok, here goes…”

She turned around, shook her hands out, and then turned back around and started. Richie focused on that, mentally taking notes as CC forced herself through her routine.

Eddie on the other hand wasn’t fully hearing her words. He was thinking about Richie and just…it didn’t matter to him. It really didn’t. He was more focused on just how hard it would have been for Richie, just wondering when Richie had known. Derry had been the opposite of welcoming for anything slightly different. It would have been horrible, living with that as a secret and not having anyone he could confide in.

Eddie wished Richie could have trusted him and their friends sooner, if only so Richie wouldn’t have had to worry now, even for a second, when Eddie found out. Of course, Eddie wasn’t sure what his reaction might have been as a kid what with most of his world and thoughts having been controlled by his mother. But the world had changed considerably, and Eddie had certainly grown up since
Either way, the most important factor, and one that Eddie was sure he would have still held onto as a kid, was that Richie was still his best friend and always would be. Eddie still loved him, just as much if not more than how much the others cared about him too. And Richie still loved him…though…

Eddie glanced from CC to Richie, though again, he wasn’t really paying attention to her set. His mind started to worm its way to a thought, but then it fell away. It was a stupid idea. They were best friends. That was what their relationship was. There was no way Richie thought of him like that. Really, Eddie wondered if anyone could think of him like that. Considering the person he’d been married to hadn’t even been able to say, ‘I love you’, he doubted it. That was ok though. Having Richie’s friendship was better than any romantic partner Eddie could possibly think of.

“Was it that bad?” CC asked, her voice bringing Eddie out of his head.

“Huh?”

“Oh, god it was that boring!?”

“What? No, no you were-ok I wasn’t listening. But not because of you. I just got lost in thought. Honest,” Eddie quickly said. He sat up a little straighter and crossed his legs on the pull-out. “You have my full attention now.”

Eddie’s previous thoughts slipped away. At least for the moment, his focus turned towards listening to CC and Richie prepare for the rest of the afternoon.
Welp, paradise couldn't last forever.

It was Thursday, the day before Richie and CC were going to perform. Eddie was cleaning up the apartment when Richie came home and said, “Catch.”

Eddie did and looked down at the key.

“I’ve been forgetting to do that for a while, but now we don’t have to share one.”

“I feel like this is a sign I’ve officially moved in.”

“That’s a good thing I hope.”

“Definitely,” Eddie replied. He put the key away and started to finish up what he was cleaning.

Richie was going through his mail when he suddenly had a sharp intake of breath. Eddie looked up.

“What is it?”

Richie opened his mouth. His lip trembled before he finally gave an uneasy swallow. “I-it’s…come look.”

Eddie hurried over. The letter was clearly addressed to Richie and the sender—

“That’s-it’s his last name so-so that’s his wife then?” whispered Eddie.

“I think so.”

They looked at each other before Richie was quickly ripping it open and pulling out the paper. They silently read it together, both what Stan’s widow had written and what Stan had written himself. The moment Eddie moved back, signaling he’d finished reading it, Richie folded the letter up and pressed it against his forehead.

“Oh Stan,” he whispered.

Eddie wiped at his face. He turned away, hands on his hips as he slowly breathed through his nose.

“He must have sent everyone a letter,” murmured Richie. “Well…his wife did for him.”

“He wasn’t a coward. Not to me. Not to any of us,” Eddie whispered. God, he wished…he wished Stan was still with them. Of course, he’d had these thoughts before, but with the letter, they were all bubbling up again. Eddie wished he could have known what Stan had looked like. All grown up. What he’d been like. It was a depressing thought that Eddie hadn’t gotten to learn anything about Stan. He didn’t even have anything of Stan’s to remember him— “Oh fuck.”

“What’s wrong?”

Eddie wasn’t listening though. If Stan had intended for everyone to get a version of this letter, then…
Then…

His hands shook as he pulled out his phone. He went to the M’s and hit the name. Richie came over and tried to put a comforting hand on his shoulder, but Eddie pushed him off as he started to pace. It only took a few seconds for her to answer.

“Finally,” Myra said. “When are you coming—”

“I need you to look for a letter.”

Silence fell on the other end. Eddie started to pace faster.

“Myra, I need—”

“This is not what we agreed on.”

“No, it’s not what you agreed on. I never agreed to anything. Now, there should be a letter—”

“Edward—”

“The last name is Uris! It’ll be addressed to me. Please, I need to know if you’ve—”

“Days upon days of nothing from you, and you call over a stupid letter?”

“It’s not stupid! Myra, I am begging you. Please just find that letter and promise me you won’t throw it away. Please Myra.”

Richie tried to stop Eddie from restlessly moving. He even grabbed him by the shoulders to try and keep him in one spot. “Eddie,” he whispered. “It’s ok. Just calm—”

But as soon as Myra spoke on the other end, Eddie was pushing Richie’s hands off him and pacing again.

Her voice came in terse and upset. “Yes, you do have a letter.”

“Ok, ok! Save it for me—”

“No.”

Now Eddie did stop pacing. Now it wasn’t just his hands. His body, his voice, everything shook.

“No?”

“You are coming home right now—”

“Myra, all I’m asking is for you to keep that letter safe.”

“Why do you care? Why care about that and not me? No, I won’t do.”

“Please! It was my fucking friend’s. Just please.”

“Another friend? Remarkable how you suddenly have so many that have popped up!”

“Myra, just save the letter!”

“You can’t tell me what to do!”

“Like how you demand that I come home?”
“Yes, and now if you don’t, I will put this god damn letter through the shredder!”

Eddie snapped.

“Don’t you fucking dare!”

Richie had to jump out of the way as Eddie spun around, pacing in a circle as he continued to yell into the phone.

“This is the last fucking thing I have of Stan’s! Don’t you fucking throw it away!”

“I can rip it apart if I want to because you’re not here!”

“Don’t you fucking dare! I swear to god! That’s the last thing I have of my fucking friend! My fucking friend do you understand me!? God damn it! I swear to fucking god Myra I will—I will—”

The line went dead.

“Myra…n-no. No! You fucking bitch!” Eddie threw his phone across the room, only to suddenly grab at his chest. His breathing was coming in fast and erratic. It hadn’t been this bad since he was a kid. “I…I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe I can’t breathe I can’t breathe—”

Richie grabbed a hold of him and when Eddie’s legs started to give, Richie helped them both to the floor.

“In and then out…in and then out…” Richie quickly said. “It’s ok. It’s going to be ok—”

“B-but it’s not. I don’t care if he wrote one and then fucking photocopied that letter five times! He sent it to all of us and i-it’s the last thing—it’s the fucking only thing that I would have of Stan’s and s-she-she-I swear to god if she fucking—”

“Hey, hey. You’re gonna send yourself into a panic attack,” Richie said. He brushed Eddie’s hair back and kept him still. “Just keep breathing.”

“I can’t let her just throw it away. I-I can’t—”

“Breathe.”

Eddie finally stopped. His shoulders shook as he buried his head against Richie’s chest. After a moment more of labored breathing, he managed to get out again, “I can’t let her throw it away.”

“She’s in New York. You’re in Chicago. What can you do?” whispered Richie. “You have mine. You have Stan’s words. You still have a piece of Stan.”

Eddie shook his head though. “I can’t let her do this. Not…not just the letter. I can’t keep having conversations where she can just hang up and keep any progress from being made.”

“It’s not your fault. She’s made it so you can’t win. But it’s ok because you have—”

“I need to go to New York.” Eddie was a little breathless, but he said it with full confidence as he moved back to look at Richie.

“Ok, that’s not what I was really going for—”

“I’ve been delaying the inevitable.” Eddie’s voice started to quicken. He wasn’t going into a full-on panic again, but there was definitely a feeling of desperation now. “I have. And talking to her over
the phone clearly won’t work because she’ll just hang up every time I say something she doesn’t like. I need to go there. I n-need to get my stuff. Everything that’s mine. And I need…I need to end my marriage. And I can’t convince her of that here.”

“I’m going with you then,” Richie immediately said.

Eddie hesitated. He wanted to say yes. More than anything he desperately wanted Richie at his side for this. So, what did he say? “You can’t.”

“You’re my best friend though! I can’t let you deal with this shit by yourself.”

“Richie, you already made a promise.”

“I don’t care. I’m coming to New York with you—”

“I’m not saying you can’t ever. God knows how long this will take. But you signed a contract. And even if that wasn’t at play, think about CC! No…no you need to go through with tomorrow and Saturday and then you can meet me in New York. But you can’t just throw this all away last minute. Promise me you won’t Richie.”

“I don’t want you going there alone.”

“Listen, Richie. You just gave me a key. A key like I’m welcomed to come and go as I please. A sign that this is as much my place as it is yours.”

“Because it is. This is your home for as long—”

“But it’s not. It can’t be until I finally say goodbye to everything, including Myra for good. And I have to go to New York for this. I-I have to end this before I lose my courage again.”

“But you’d be alone.”

“Ben and Bev are there. I’ll call them up,” said Eddie. “I won’t be alone.”

“I still don’t like this. And this is so sudden…”

“I want to be free Richie. I thought I could be that with you, but not yet. Not u-until this is all behind me. I can’t put it off anymore. Not for another second. And I can’t-I can’t risk her tearing up that letter. I know it probably says the same thing but it’s mine. It’s supposed to be the last thing Stan gave to me and I can’t…”

“You don’t have to explain it,” Richie softly said. He gently brushed the tears away from Eddie’s cheeks. “I understand. I just…I really want to go with you for this.”

“I know,” whispered Eddie. Then he hugged Richie as hard as he could. He could feel Richie’s grip keeping him there, his fingers getting tangled in Eddie’s short hair as best he could. A part of Eddie didn’t want him to let go. He grounded him so well, made him feel so warm. But Eddie knew they couldn’t stay trapped in their embrace forever. Richie thankfully knew that to. He let out a deep sigh and then finally let go like the motion physically hurt him. They helped each other to their feet.

“At least let me help. I’ll get the plane ticket.”

“I don’t want you to buy that for me Richie. Please.”

“I won’t then. Just let me go through the stress and annoyance of finding a last minute flight for you while you pack. Ok?”
Eddie hesitated, but eventually nodded. “Thank you.”

Richie reached out and squeezed his hand. “If there’s anything else I can do for you, I will. Just tell me.”

Eddie nodded. He didn’t want to let go, but he reminded himself that he couldn’t really hold onto Richie. Not while a part of his life was still tied to New York in the way it was. They both reluctantly dropped their hands. Richie picked up Eddie’s phone, and after a quick thank you, Eddie headed to the bedroom to pack.

As he folded every piece of clothing, his hearthammered away in his chest. He didn’t think the beating would slow down again. At least not until he could hold Stan’s letter in his hands again. This sudden trip was of course about much more, but the fear of losing the last thing Stan had given him was certainly the main fuel that was supporting the fire.

Richie came in. He went under his bed and pulled out a duffle bag for Eddie to use before turning back to his phone, still trying to book a damn flight. Eddie got all the necessary clothes into the bag and then went to grab his toiletries. He collected them and then went to the kitchen. He grabbed a plastic sandwich bag and shoved everything into it. He then went back into the bedroom and dumped it into the duffle bag.

Eddie sat down next to it and pulled out his phone. A crack had formed over its screen, but Eddie was just thankful it still worked. He’d thrown it as hard as he could.

Scrolling through his contacts, he tried to call Bev first. However, when she didn’t answer, he tried Ben. He picked up after the second ring.

“Hey Eddie. Bev told me she talked to you recently. Sorry I wasn’t able to get on that call.”

“It’s ok. I—”

“What’s wrong?”

Despite the situation, it made Eddie smile. Just a couple of seconds and Ben understood something was wrong. He of course couldn’t know the details, but Eddie could already hear the want to help in his friend’s voice. “A lot. A fucking lot.”

“Richie’s alright. Yeah?”

“He’s ok,” Eddie quickly said.

Ben let out a relieved sigh. He sounded a bit calmer now, but no less concerned. “So, what happened?”

Eddie gave him a quick overview. As it turned out, Ben had already received Stan’s letter too. So had Bev. When Eddie explained what Myra had threatened, he could hear Ben’s sharp intake of breath.

“Do you want me to—god, I don’t know. Try to go to the house and—”

“No,” Eddie quickly said. “That would probably only make it worse. I’m actually planning to come tomorrow anyways.”

“Are you going to try to get the rest of your things?”
“I’m going to get everything. I—” Eddie hesitated. He thought back to Bev’s words. “I’m going to get a divorce. Or at least try and convince Myra we need to start the process.”

“I’m proud of you Eddie. Proud of you for getting to this place,” Ben said. “Do you know where you’re staying in New York?”

“No. That’s why—”

“You can stay with me. Of course,” Ben quickly got out. “But Bev is closer to where you originally lived so that might be better. I’ll give her an update on everything. She’ll say yes of course.”

“Yeah, I figured as much. Called her first but she didn’t answer.”

“I think she’s in a meeting with some lawyers right now. I’m glad you called me though.”

“Me too.”

“Is Richie coming?”

“Not right away. He’ll probably come out Sunday.”

“Well he can obviously stay with either of us too. Wherever works best for you. And listen, text me when you figure out what time you’re flying in. I’ll pick you up from the airport or I’ll get Bev to. You don’t have to be alone for a second of this Eddie. We’ll go with you to Myra’s if that’ll help.”

“Thank you.”

“Anything for you man.”

Eddie smiled. “I’ll text you then. Thank you for answering Ben.”

“Again, anything for you. Even if I don’t pick you up, I’ll see you soon. Ok?”

“Ok. Bye Ben.”

“Bye.”

Eddie hung up. He felt a little better as he went into the living room, maybe just a little calmer. Even though he wanted Richie with him through it all, having Ben and Bev at his side would help immensely too. Speaking of Richie, he was now on the phone with someone so Eddie waited until he finished.

“I think I finally got something,” sighed Richie as he hung up. “Departure time would be at nine tomorrow morning. We’ll probably want to get to the airport by seven at the latest.”

“Thank you, Richie.”

“You don’t have to say that. Did you get a hold of Ben or Bev?”

“Ben. He said one of them would pick me up tomorrow. Let me text him the estimated arrival time then.” After Eddie quickly did that, he looked up to see that Richie was quickly rummaging around in the kitchen. “What are you doing?”

“I want to try and cheer you up. At least on the night before you go.”

Eddie’s face softened. “Richie, you don’t—”
“I want to,” he interrupted. “Now don’t even think of helping here. I’ll do all the cooking. Your only job is to pick a movie.”

“Ok.”

Eddie sat down. Going through the streaming services and reading the synopsizes at least helped his mind go blank for a bit. Richie added, “What do you want me to tell CC?”

“That I’m incredibly sorry.”

“I know that idiot,” Richie kindly said. “I mean…do you want me to give a reason or just…”

“I already told her I was having issues with my wife. You can just tell her that.”

“Will do.”

As Richie started to organize everything and cook, Eddie continued to look through the movies. For the most part, he and Richie liked to see movies or spin-offs that connected to their childhood, but Eddie wasn’t really in the mood for some adrenaline-fueled thrill ride or one of the many horror movies they’d snuck into as kids. Since the only real comedy movie Richie had was *Hot Fuzz*, a great movie but not exactly what Eddie wanted right now, he continued flipping through the different streaming services.

Eventually, he ran across one that caught his interest in the romance and comedy section.

“What about this one?”

Richie paused and leaned on the counter to look at the movie. He raised an eyebrow. “You realize that just because I came out, I can still love *The Expendables*, right?”

Eddie blushed. “I didn’t mean—”

“Sorry. Just teasing you Eds. May not be the right time for that.”

“No, tease away. Makes everything feel at least a little bit normal.”

Richie smiled at that, then looked back at the film. “*In & Out* is a nice, feel good movie though. And obviously not your typical romcom.”

“You’ve seen it? I can pick something else—”

“No, it’s fine. Haven’t seen it in a while and it is fucking hilarious. Also, the small town it’s mainly set in is like, the most idealistic, great little town you can think of. So trust me. It won’t remind you of Derry.”

Eddie chuckled at that.

“Also, has Tom Sellick without the mustache. Which is ten times better.”

“I think there’s a couple million women in this country that would disagree with that, but I’ll take your word for it,” laughed Eddie. The fact that Richie had managed to make him laugh made the pain in his heart that much more bearable. He clicked the movie and left it ready before getting up.

“Uh, uh. You’re not helping this time.”

“Yeah, figured something like that is a perfect kind of feel good dinner, even if you’re not sick. And it’s more filling than soup.”

“Sounds good enough for me.”

Eddie stayed at the counter until Richie was done. He poured them both bowls and then they sat on the pull-out and settled in for the movie. Tomorrow, Eddie would be going to New York. He would be facing Myra for the first time in weeks. But that was all in the future. For the moment, he enjoyed the food and laughed so hard he nearly cried at the film.

About halfway through when they were already done eating, Eddie leaned up against Richie. He didn’t notice how Richie tensed before very slowly relaxing again. For Eddie, he needed that contact for their days apart. At most, it would only be two, but Eddie knew he’d be missing Richie like hell all the same.
Eddie had insisted that all Richie needed to do was drop him off. They would see each other in a couple of days and there was no point in him waiting for an hour or more as Eddie slowly got up to the first check point. Richie still got out of his car though just so he could hug him goodbye. They lingered, and Eddie tried to hold onto that feeling of warmth. He would need it when he finally faced Myra.

He then walked into the airport and went to get comfortable standing in line for an ungodly amount of time. Since he’d slept plenty the night before, he didn’t sleep once he got on the airplane. He was bouncing his foot about the entire time, feeling anxious more than anything. The only good part was that once he arrived, he would have a buffer with Bev or Ben before he actually went back to the house. It was a three-hour flight, but because of the time difference, Eddie got into New York just after eleven.

He’d only brought the duffle bag which had counted as a carry-on, so he walked by the luggage belt and headed outside. He walked past all the yellow taxis, eyes scanning for Ben or Bev and occasionally glancing at his phone to see if he’d gotten a text from either of them.

Then he felt the pull. It was just like when he and Richie had walked into that coffee shop in Maine. It was like he felt them near before he actually saw them. When his eyes actually landed on Bev and Ben, he could tell they’d already felt that he was there too. Eddie’s pace almost doubled. He threw the duffle bag around his shoulders so that as he came up to Ben and Bev, both his arms were free to hug them.

“You’re both here,” Eddie grinned. They all stayed in the semi-hug, maintaining any kind of physical contact they could.

“Of course,” Bev said.

“I had to move some things, but it was a hundred percent worth it,” smiled Ben. “Your cheek really looks good.”

“And your chest now?” asked Bev.

“Went through all the medication. Don’t have to actually bandage the area but still been keeping an eye on it,” Eddie replied. He paused, thinking about it for a second. “I should probably do a check-up since my primary physician is here. Fuck, and then work—”

“Hey,” Ben said. “Lunch first before you start panicking. Ok?”


“Anything for you Eddie,” Bev replied. “So, how’s Richie doing?”
As Eddie threw his bag into Ben’s car and they got in, they all focused on talking about the good things. At least for now. Ben drove them to a restaurant that it turned out Eddie had once frequented when he’d still been in New York.

“Work is literally about twenty minutes in that direction,” Eddie said, gesturing down the street.

“That’s crazy. Bev showed me this place,” Ben replied.

“I used to come here. Always by myself to just take a break from life. You know.”

Eddie nodded in agreement. “I always came alone too. I tried to bring Myra here…once. Maybe? But she didn’t take to it. I just started coming here by myself.”

How strange to think he could have sat down at a table. Maybe some noise had drawn his attention up, or maybe he had just gotten bored looking at his phone and had looked around the restaurant to see what the other customers were like. Maybe he had just seen a shine of red hair that had made him feel nostalgic. Maybe they had even locked eyes. How strange to think he could have held the door open for Bev on the way in or out, and not even realized it was her.

Considering how none of them talked, it was fair to say they were all kind of thinking of other what-if scenarios. They’d lived the closest to each other compared to everyone else after all. Had all three of them happened to be waiting on the same street corner, waiting for the first person to step out and for everyone else to follow?

The waitress knocked them out of their own thoughts and after ordering drinks, Eddie asked, “So how is work?”

“Oh, you know. Had to go to a couple of mandatory sessions with our company therapist,” grinned Ben.

“Seriously?”

“I mean, considering the responsibilities I have and the fact that I basically disappeared without a word? And my sudden splurge on the company card when we went to that restaurant? It’s understandable,” Ben said with a shrug. “Though I do have this one rival who—”

“Rival?” asked Eddie with a sly grin. “Do you sit in big rooms and compare business cards too, Bateman?”

Bev laughed as Ben kicked at him underneath the table. “Ok, maybe rival was a bit much. You get what I mean. She tried to use my disappearance to make a play. The plan was to get promoted above me, but thankfully everyone likes me more.”

“What did you tell the therapist that got you a free pass?” asked Eddie.

“Nothing major. Just all the parts that wouldn’t have gotten me thrown into a psyche word.”

“And how’s yours?” Eddie asked Bev.

“Kind of in the middle of a civil war,” she answered honestly. “Considering Tom usually dealt with the financing aspects, it makes it all relatively difficult. But the people that truly make the ideas and carry the spirit of everything are more behind me. It’s…difficult but not impossible. I swear, every other meeting is just me surrounded by a room full of lawyers either trying to analyze the business and its next steps or my marriage. It took some major rearranging in order for me to be here today.”
“Well thank you Bev. I’d say you didn’t need to do that,” said Eddie, “but I think I’d rather go back to Derry than deal with a room full of lawyers.”

They all laughed, and Ben and Bev talked a bit more about work, Bev obviously focusing on the better parts and talking about some of her co-workers/employees that she considered friends. After getting their drinks, they went ahead and ordered their food. The conversation about work continued up until they got their food. After a moment, Ben asked, “And what about you? Are you still working as what was it-risk analyst?”

“I am. I obviously took a break for a while, but I’ve been working from Richie’s apartment.” And then Eddie hesitated.

Despite some of the issues they had mentioned, especially Bev, they still enjoyed their work. They still loved what they got to do each and every day. There were people that cared about them there. But Eddie…

There was no denying he was good at his job. He was really good. But it suddenly hit him that there was no one at his own job that actually cared about his sudden disappearance beyond worrying that he could have missed an important meeting. Thinking on every day he’d stayed late in the office, sitting at a computer or listening to some boss drone on, he now realized his own work had never brought any joy to him. If anything, he was now realizing it had done the opposite. It had only helped reinforce the idea that Eddie had grown up with. That anything bad could and would happen. Jesus, he’d mainly been thinking about how he’d trapped himself in his marriage, but he’d trapped himself in every aspect of his adult life, hadn’t he?

“Earth to Eddie,” Ben said with only a slightly worried look. He was waving his hand in front of Eddie’s face.

Eddie gently knocked it down and murmured, “I have to quit my job.”

“Well, considering you’ve basically moved in with Richie, you were going to have to do that eventually. Right?” asked Bev.

“No. I don’t mean… I mean yes my current job. But also, just what I do. I don’t enjoy it. I-I’ve never enjoyed it. It’s only been reinforcing this idea that I should be careful and fearful of every little detail, but all that’s done is add to my own anxiety. I’m good at it. I’m good at numbers. But-and Jesus-I’m just now realizing I fucking hate my job.”

Ben groaned.

“Huh?”

“We were trying to keep you from going into any existential panic,” Ben said.

“It’s not your fault. And… I think I only really understood how I feel about my job by hearing how much you guys praise your own.” Eddie suddenly covered his face with his hands. “I am too old to be starting a career change.”

“No, you’re not,” Bev stubbornly said. Eddie peeked between his fingers. “I believe in you. You’ll be able to find something that you actually enjoy. And hey, you have a hell of a lot of experience and a good degree backing you. If you put your mind to it, you can do anything.”

“Thank you,” murmured Eddie as he put his hands back on the table. “But besides just taking everything from my house and somehow convincing my wife to have a divorce, now I need to return anything I had at work and turn in a two weeks’ notice and then go job hunting and that doesn’t

“Thank you,” murmured Eddie as he put his hand back on the table. “But besides just taking everything from my house and somehow convincing my wife to have a divorce, now I need to return anything I had at work and turn in a two weeks’ notice and then go job hunting and that doesn’t
include the fact I have to change my primary care provider which I’ll need to search—"

“Ok,” Bev quickly said. She put her hand on Eddie’s and squeezed. “I am glad you realized you need to find a better job for yourself, but I am determined that you will not stress out for at least the rest of this meal.”

“You think you’ll succeed?” chuckled Eddie.

“Yeah, we’ll only talk about Richie from here on out,” Ben grinned.

“Don’t you think that subject will run dry pretty quickly? I already told you both a lot,” said Eddie.

“Well what about this CC you’ve mentioned before. How did she and Richie become friends?”

“Oh, well Richie…”

Their conversation continued as they really dug into the meal. They managed to sit for over an hour and when the plates had already been cleared and taken away, Ben and Bev broke into giggly laughter.

“What?” asked Eddie.

“Nothing. Just that we definitely succeeded in distracting you,” Ben said.

Bev leaned against the table with a soft smile. “And you said you would run out of things to talk about when it came to Richie.”

“Pfft, I haven’t been talking about Richie for a fucking hour-oh.”

Bev threw her head back with a laugh as Ben tried his best to hide his laughing. In order to do so, he hugged Bev and hid his face against her shoulder.

“Well, it wasn’t just about Richie…ok maybe most of it was…but it’s not like I could keep talking about Richie. Oh! Though there was this other time that we—”

Ben and Bev started laughing again.

“I’m shutting up now,” Eddie said with an embarrassed smile. “Check please!”

Ben was practically grinning. Eddie gave him a quick kick under the table.

Bev pulled out her wallet and put her card on the table. She gave them both a pointed look. “I’m going to run to the restroom but make sure our waiter takes my card. I’m getting lunch.”

“I thought I was getting lunch,” Ben said.

“You always get lunch. It’s my turn,” replied Bev. “And Eddie, you have my full permission to tackle Ben to the ground if he makes a move for his wallet.”

Eddie glanced at Ben’s stature. “You really think that’s going to go well?”

Bev got up and leaned into his ears. “Just go for the knees.”

Eddie laughed as Bev hurried off. He then looked to Bev’s card on the table and back up to Ben. “You going to go for it?”
“No, no. I’ll let her get it. Besides, I’m planning a surprise for next summer. Here, I actually want your opinion on this.”

Eddie quickly found that it was taking all his willpower to play dumb as Ben started to show off some of the hotels he’d been looking at. After the ninth set of pictures flew by on Ben’s phone, Eddie said, “And I thought I was the worrier of the group.”

“I just want it to be perfect. You know? I’ve tried asking coy questions about things to get an idea of what she would prefer, but I still don’t know.”

“Ben, she’ll be with you. Everything else is just icing on the damn cake.”

“You sure?”

“I’m positive. But if you want my personal opinion, I think hotel three was the nicest.”

“Hotel three. Got it. Marking that down.”

Eddie chuckled as Bev came back. She double checked that it was her card sitting in the little tray with a pen for her to sign. When she saw it was, she quickly signed and gave Ben a kiss on the cheek. “Thank you.”

“Hey, as long as I can get dinner.”

“No, I am getting dinner. I’m allowed to spoil you too.”

“Fine, fine. I yield,” smiled Ben. With that done and the receipt signed, they finally got up.

Despite the joviality they managed to end lunch on though, the moment they walked out of the restaurant Eddie had to stop and just take a deep breath. Softer smiles showed on Bev’s and Ben’s faces. Bev gripped Eddie’s hand and squeezed. “Are you ready?”

“Nope. But I’m not letting that fucking stop me now.”

They headed back to the car. Eddie gave Ben the address and he merged into traffic at the first chance he got. As typical for New York, Eddie probably could have gotten there faster by walking. However, he welcomed the mostly quiet car ride as Bev put on some music.

At first, Eddie tried to think of every possible way it would go. However, he realized that no matter how many different contingencies he tried to plan for, it would all just turn into a shitshow the moment he got to the house. That thought would have led his mind into more of a panic, but Eddie managed to turn his mind to Richie instead. He thought about what he was doing now, imagined him and CC practicing for tonight, just anything that helped distract him. Even if only for a second.

And then, after the long drive was over, Bev was pulling up in front of the house that was sandwiched between all the others. Eddie glanced around and managed to spot his car, still parked in the same spot.

“Thank you both,” Eddie sighed, “but I think it’ll be better if I go in by myself. And um…if you give me your address, I’ll just meet you at your place. I was meaning to get my car back anyways.”

“Of course, Eddie. Whatever makes this easier,” Bev said.

“And we can take your duffle bag,” Ben quickly added. “Don’t want to give her the wrong idea. Right?”
“That’s actually a good idea. Thanks,” Eddie said. He slowly breathed in, then out. “Here goes nothing. See you both soon.”

Eddie got out of the car. He walked up the stairs and his hand carefully traced the edges of the doorbell. He liked to think this would be his last time ringing it, but he somehow doubted that. He practiced a few more deep breaths and then…
And here's the next chapter! It was a doozy to write!

Eddie rang the bell.

He waited a couple of seconds before hearing some type of noise grow behind the door. It became just a little harder to breath. He heard both locks being undone, and then—

“Oh Eddie, you came back! I knew you would.”

He immediately tensed up as he felt her arms come around him. He kept his eyes tightly closed. His heart felt like it had wormed its way up into his throat.

“Oh, these aren’t the clothes I brought to you in the hospital. Of course, you must have had to purchase more. But where’s your bag? No, no it doesn’t matter. You’re home. That’s what matters.”

She kept on talking and Eddie was just thankful when she finally got off him. He didn’t like how the door thudded behind him though. Had it always been so loud? Had that lock always been so sharp, like someone was shoving a fucking icepick through his heart?

As Myra continued to talk, a thumping sound started behind his ears. He put his arms around himself as he looked around the hall. Had it always been this small? It felt like it was getting smaller and stretching out all at the same time. And every piece on the walls, every little knickknack or picture or —

It all felt like props. He couldn’t even pull up some sweet or simple story to put behind the objects. It was like the place wasn’t even real.

Then his eyes lighted on the neat stack of mail. Stan’s letter! That would ground him. Myra abruptly stopped stalking as he flipped through the mail. It wasn’t there. Eddie’s throat started to close up.

“M-Myra—”

“Are you still worried about that stupid letter?” she let out a tired sigh. She opened up a small drawer and started to rummage through it. “That’s today’s mail. Here.”

Eddie snatched it from her. He held it close to his chest as he was finally able to breath just a little bit easier. He had to do this. He could do this now. He’d been so fucking terrified leading up to this point. But as he held Stan’s letter and thought of what he’d sacrificed for his friends, Eddie knew he couldn’t waste his second chance. If not for himself, he had to do this for Stan, for Richie and everyone else who had saved him when he’d been on the brink of death. He refused to get trapped in a cycle again.

“Jesus, you act more pleased to see that rather than me. I mean really Eddie, after everything you put me through, those horrible words you said, and you haven’t even apologized—”

“We need to get a divorce.”
Eddie was still incredibly stressed. His heart was still hammering, now even faster that he’d finally said what he’d come here to say. However, holding Stan’s letter in his hands at least made everything seemingly stop spinning. He no longer felt like the hallway was going to crush him and he knew that if he really needed to, he could just turn around and unlock the door.

Myra stood there in shock, mouth slightly ajar. Eddie glanced around and saw his keys. He quickly went for them, knowing that Myra would have eventually tried to grab them to keep him from leaving again. As he put the keys in his pocket, the shock seemed to finally leave her.

“Do not joke with me Edward.”

He wanted to keep his calm. They needed to have a conversation. But from her tone of voice, he could already tell it wasn’t going to lead in that direction. Still, he tried. “It’s not a joke.”

“Y-you can’t tell me that. After nothing, absolutely nothing but harsh words you only come back to say that? That?!”

“You wouldn’t have let me tell you over the phone,” Eddie replied.

“Because I would have said no then and I’m saying no now! This is ridiculous Eddie. Why in the world would you want a divorce?”

“You really have to ask why?” asked Eddie. His own calm was starting to break despite how hard he was trying to hold it together. Was this all on purpose or was she really as blind as Eddie had once been? “Open your eyes! All we’ve been doing is yelling at each other.”

“Well that’s just because you were away. Now that you’re hear we can—”

“Are you seriously ignoring all those times before? What about the car accident before I even left for Derry? We were yelling then!”

“Well that was your fault.”

“No, it wasn’t.”

“Eddie, if you would just—”

“No.” He wasn’t quite yelling yet, but his voice came out harsher than intended. Should he leave now? Try again tomorrow? No, nothing would change by then. What he needed was for her to agree now, but even if she didn’t, he could at least send a message that this was truly over so she would hopefully come to her own conclusions. He carefully folded Stan’s letter and put it in his pocket. “I am not letting you twist my head around with your words. If you can’t see how horrible our lives have been, then that’s on you. Not me.”

“Horrible? I have taken care of you for years Eddie—”

He started to break. “You couldn’t even say you loved me!”

“I-I of course I-of course I do!”

“Then why did we get married?!”

“We-you know why we—”

“Why did we get married!?” Eddie finally yelled.
Myra blubbered at him, trying to come up with anything to say.

When she couldn’t, he tried to reign it back in. “We’re getting a divorce. There isn’t any fixing this and if you can’t see that by now, I don’t know how else to make you. But a divorce is the only option.”

He waited. For a split second, it looked like she was going to break down. Her eyes watered a little and a small bit of guilt began to creep its way into Eddie’s heart. He didn’t like to yell. But he’d thought that would be the only way. He tried to pull his own heated emotions back in—

She hardened. “No.”

Eddie bristled back tenfold. “We’re getting a divorce.”

“I said no! I don’t want a divorce.”

“I don’t fucking care!” yelled Eddie. He pushed past her and started up the stairs. If she didn’t believe him with words, he would show her with further actions.

“What the hell are you doing?! Eddie, get back here! We’re not getting a divorce!”

“Yes we fucking are!”

“No, we aren’t! I don’t know what the hell is wrong with you—”

“Wrong with me? What the fucking hell is wrong with you!?” Eddie went into their bedroom as he yelled that. He planned to grab his suitcase and fill that up with clothes along with getting any physical work documents he had. He would come back when Myra had calmed down and hopefully seen how god damn fruitless her denial was. However, taking these things would at least send a message that Eddie hoped would stick.

He found his suitcase and threw it on the bed.

“Edward stop! I command you to stop!”

He didn’t say a word. He grabbed everything that he could and started to throw it in without care. Myra rushed forward and tried to start pulling items out, but Eddie pushed her back and threw more in. He got a majority of everything, even grabbed a few random items off the bedroom side table, and then again had to push her back just so he could zip the suitcase up.

“No! You’re supposed to be listening to me! Listen to me!”

Still Eddie didn’t respond. When she tried to completely block the door, he did hesitate. But he wasn’t a child, and this wasn’t his mom. When she struggled to stop him, he put a little more force into his arms and also used the suitcase to get her out of the way.

“You can’t leave me! You are my husband!”

He went into his office. He grabbed his shoulder bag and threw his laptop into it. Then he grabbed a box and started to shove work files into that. With the bag over his shoulder, the suitcase in one hand, and the box carefully shoved under his other arm, Eddie went back to the stairs.

“Eddie stop! Stop! Please j—just talk!” Myra had gotten more and more desperate as it seemed to finally become clear that he’d meant what he’d said.

Eddie paused. He almost didn’t recognize his own voice as it came out cold and hardened. “Then
you agree to a divorce?"

“No, but—"

He started to go down the stairs.

“Eddie stop!”

She grabbed his arm. He stumbled and the box of documents fell. Papers slipped out of folders and clips. They slid down the stairs and floated over the banister into the small hall. Eddie almost bent down to start picking them up, but…

“You know what? You can pick them up,” snapped Eddie. He stepped through the mess and got to the door.

“Eddie! Eddie! This isn’t what we agreed on! This isn’t—”

“No, you want an ultimatum? Here’s an ultimatum! When I come back, you are agreeing to a fucking divorce!”

He unlocked the door and then slammed it behind him. He hurried down the steps and dodged pedestrians as he arrived at the car. He took his keys out and unlocked it. He threw everything into the back and then went around to the driver’s side. He hesitated, glancing back at the door. He’d half expected Myra to come storming out after him. But…

Nothing happened. Finally, Eddie opened the door and got in.

His heart finally started to slow. He wished he could say he felt better after all that. And in a way, he did. He’d finally said what needed to be said and yet… He hadn’t planned on everything devolving into quite the shithow it had become. He hadn’t intended to sound so god damn cruel. It was that part that was making him feel worse rather than better. Of course, Myra had pushed him to this place, and yet still…

Eddie pulled out the letter. He carefully opened it, not even wanting to tear the envelope. The letter itself was mostly the same. There were a few differences in phrases, and it was obviously addressed to himself rather than Richie. Still, reading through it again had him breathing just a little easier, feeling just a little better.

After he folded it up and put the letter in his glovebox, he looked back again. He expected Myra to at least have come out by now. Maybe her fists would already be held high, ready to start banging at his window and yet…

Still nothing.

She’d pushed him to say those things. Years of helplessness and anger and depression had all spilled out in one go and yet…

Was it because he’d just been yelling at an idea? At this point, he’d stopped thinking of Myra as Myra. She’d become more of a toxic cocktail, made up of the trauma of It, his mother, and his own inability to escape a destructive cycle. But she was still a person. And the things he’d just said…

He couldn’t further think on this. Not now. And he definitely couldn’t bring himself to go back inside. No, he’d let her stew with what had happened and see where this would go from here. With a tired sigh, he pulled out his phone and put in Bev’s address. He carefully pulled out of the parking spot and headed down the street.
Traffic was terrible as usual, but Eddie made good time and finally pulled up in front of Bev’s house. It was in a different area of the city, but the street honestly looked a lot like his own. He grabbed the bag with his laptop in it but left everything else in the car. He double checked the number and then went up the steps and knocked.

The noise behind the door brought excitement rather than anxiety this time. When the door opened, it looked like Bev and Ben had literally raced to it. They didn’t even waste time asking what had happened. They just hugged him right away.

At least for a moment, Eddie managed to push all his worries to the back of his mind. When he pulled back, he looked around and said, “Care to give me the grand tour?”

Bev gave him a kind smile that had never looked more beautiful. “Of course.”

She quickly guided Eddie around with Ben following close behind. It was the momentary break Eddie needed as he turned all his focus on looking at Bev’s home. It overall fit her style though some parts seemed a little empty. Eddie imagined anything that had belonged to, or reminded her of, her husband had gotten thrown out. He also got shown the guest bedroom where he would be staying and where they’d already put his duffle bag.

Of course, the tour wasn’t exactly a long one. When they ended up back in the kitchen, Ben finally asked, “So how did it go?”

Bev got out drinks and they all sat at the dining table.

“Not well. She said no, which I figured she wouldn’t agree right away, but it just devolved into this awful shouting match immediately after I said it,” sighed Eddie. “But I grabbed most of my clothes, my laptop. The car is my car and it’s in my name so it’s not like she can call the police for theft on it. I…I think I’ll focus on working through some other things. Like work, getting my banking information settled, medical information, all that before going to see her again. Unless she calls first, but I doubt it.”

“I’m so sorry Eddie,” murmured Bev. “You know you can stay with me for however long you need to. The guest bedroom is yours.”

“Thank you. Having you both here makes it just a little bit easier.”

“So what’s the plan?” asked Ben.

“Well, I have my laptop so I’ll try to get all banking issues done today, not including anything Myra has to sign off on for our joint accounts. If I have to go to the bank physically, I can do that tomorrow. I’ll try to get an appointment with my doctor, have a check-up and see about changing my primary physician. I’ll go to work and get everything sorted out either before or after the doctor’s appointment.”

“Then we’ll give you time to set up and get comfortable,” Bev said. “If you feel like eating out again for dinner, Ben and I already have a place in mind in the next few hours.”

“Sounds great,” Eddie said as he finished off his drink.

They put up the glasses and then Eddie headed back to the guest bedroom. Before he started to get anything out, he sat on the edge of the bed and took out his phone. He went to his messages and moved over to Richie’s name.

He thought about texting Richie just to know what he was doing. But he would probably be going to
the club soon and Eddie didn’t want to distract him now. He hadn't fully told Ben and Bev what had happened, or what was going through his head. He hadn't wanted to put them off, make them feel like they had to carry his own issues. But with Richie, he felt he didn't have to worry with that. He needed to know Richie's take on the situation, needed to just hear his voice.

But no, Eddie ultimately decided he would talk to Richie tomorrow. God, he wanted to hear from him now, but he wasn't going to risk taking Richie's mind off his own work. With a tired sigh, Eddie put his phone away and then went for his laptop.
I've hinted at Richie's point of view and actions and have alluded to things Eddie has just completely missed, but here's the first Richie centric chapter! There probably won't be another one, at least not one that's just Richie again since the story as a whole is very much from Eddie's perspective, but to add to the story and Richie's own actions, this chapter was definitely necessary and couldn't have occurred with Eddie's presence. Anyways, thanks as always and I hope you guys enjoy.

Also added five more chapters (I hate myself) because I realized the final ACT of this story was going to be way to short in comparison to one and two so get ready for even more story (believe me when I say at this point I want to just shove their lips together too but there's still more plot and character building that has to occur first, I'm sorry!!!).

Richie grabbed his jacket. He walked out of the waiting room they often threw the entertainment into before the night actually began, only to immediately run into a woman. He didn’t recognize her as an employee and she definitely hadn’t been one of the people he’d introduced on stage. It made Richie wonder how she’d gotten into the back. She didn’t look like a typical fan. In fact, her gaze was making him feel like he was a kid who’d just been sent to the principal’s office.

“Mr. Tozier?”

“Yes?” he cautiously said.

“I believe you know my daughter.”

“Who?”

“She was inspired to waste a college degree because of you?”

“Oh! CC. Um, very nice to meet you… I hope you enjoyed the show,” Richie quickly changed to seeing as he still didn’t know CC’s full name.

“Hmm, it was interesting. I’ll be honest. I figured she would find herself a real job before ever getting to this point. I’ve been told that’s thanks to you.’”

It was impossible to tell if the woman thought that was a good or bad thing. Jesus, whereas CC literally exuded every single emotion she felt at once, her mother was unreadable. “Well, she would have made it eventually. I just wanted to help her out.”

“I see.”

They stood their awkwardly. The woman almost looked like she expected Richie to say more, though Richie honestly didn’t know what else she wanted from him. Before he could try to awkwardly give a reason to run in the opposite direction though, CC came to the rescue.

“There you are mom! And I see you’ve met Richie. What did you think?”
“You did quite well,” her mom said, her expression not changing. “Though you began to go a little fast at the end dear. Just because I can hear how quickly you talk doesn’t mean others can.”

“Yeah, got a little nervous at the end. Thankfully still landed the joke,” CC said with a wide grin.

God, it was like yin and yang watching them talk.

“Are you headed out Richie?” asked CC.

“Yeah, was going to meet Jason at the Shamrock. You can…come too if you like.” Richie glanced to her mom. Please don’t invite yourself along. Please don’t come. Please don’t—

“Yeah!” CC said. “Just give me a second with my mom. You can go on ahead if you want.”

Well at least CC hadn’t invited her along. “Ok. It was nice meeting you…” Again, he didn’t know her name so he just repeated. “Yeah, it was nice meeting you.”

Richie turned and started to walk away. He was almost down the hall and near the back door when he heard a laugh behind him. He glanced back and noted the mom’s cold exterior had softened as she laughed at something her daughter had said. Looking scary definitely seemed to be a more natural look for her, but hey, at least she and CC seemed to have a good relationship.

Richie headed outside and walked down the street. The bar was only around the corner, yet he hadn’t even gotten halfway there until CC was running behind him to catch up.

“That was quick,” commented Richie.

“She’d said she wanted to talk to me after the show. I wasn’t sure what she wanted,” replied CC. “But she was just worried you were taking advantage of me or something. Ha! Can you imagine that?”

“Urhg, considering I literally just met her and I’m more than a decade older than you, understandable. But I’m guessing she was just acting cold towards me because of that,” Richie said.

“Oh no, her students call her Stone-Cold Jackson all the time. She only smiles around me.”

“Well, she definitely gives off the scary principal vibe.”

“Probably because she is one. Was mine too.”

“I’m assuming you didn’t have the movie, picturesque high school life where you were the principal’s kid and got away with everything?”

“Yeah, no. If something went wrong, she assumed I was at the center of it. Which I always was so fair assumption but…”

Richie let out a slight laugh at that as they arrived at the bar. He opened the door for her. It was just past one and anyone that was out this late to party had moved to the clubs and bars that were more that style. Now the place was pretty quiet. Regulars sat alone with only a few small groups scattered about. The TVs that usually were playing sports or the news were on mute, and though the music wasn’t loud, it was difficult to hear any kind of chatter coming from the other parties.

Most of the people were at the bar rather than the tables and booths and there was only one bartender around along with another worker who was sweeping up. Richie sat down and waited for the bartender to come over. He ordered a shot of tequila while CC just grabbed a beer.
“This a ritual of yours?” asked CC.

“Something like that. Jason will show up soon with the check, probably yours too. But really, it just helps me wind down for the night.”

“Hmm…you know what you really need?”

Richie raised an eyebrow.

“To text Eddie.”

Richie groaned. He’d of course already told her Eddie’s reasoning which she’d been very understanding about. She’d also dropped the matter after one curious question, likely because she’d had a set to work on. Now, with the night over, curiosity seemed to be back. Richie mumbled, “It’s twelve in New York right now. He’s probably asleep. And why do you think I need to?”

“Uh, because no offense Richie, but everyone could tell you were distracted the whole time. Not that you did awful, but clearly your mind wasn’t on the set.”

“Still doesn’t change the fact that he’s asleep right now, so doesn’t matter.”

“Richie, can I ask you a question?”

“I have a feeling I know where this is going, so no.”

CC ignored him. “Why aren’t you just straight forward with him? I mean I was freaking there when you told him he could stay as long as he wanted to, and he literally was like ‘forever’. Clearly whatever flirting you’ve been doing hasn’t caught on considering you didn’t kiss then and there. Just tell him.”

“I don’t think you realize how much courage it takes me to simply flirt with him. And right now, I’m realizing I’m happy he doesn’t understand so we can just leave everything as is. I’ll continue coyly flirting with him, and he’ll just be my best friend who lives with me.”

“You’re seriously ok with letting your feelings wither into that? I thought you were building up to some grand profession of love or something!? You can’t really plan to just keep living like this. Can you?”

“Oh, I most certainly can. Every day I’ll just roll all my feelings into a tight little ball. I’ll collect them within my chest and then one day all those feelings will die with me.”

“Jesus Richie. What if he feels the same way? Ever thought of that? I’m telling you. He was making heart eyes at you every time we practiced.”

“The shit I saw…you couldn’t understand. The point is, I want to hold onto him for as long as possible and I can’t risk fucking everything up.”

“Well you could—”

“How about we talk about your sex life. Hmm?” asked Richie. “What about your boss at your day job because I’m pretty sure you have him whipped.”

“Oh, I totally do, but it’s an open relationship kind of thing. He has girls on the side, I have girls on the side, just casual stuff. But,” and here CC really grinned, “don’t think I don’t notice you deflecting the topic at hand.”
“Well I’ll keep on deflecting until you give up,” Richie replied. He finished off the rest of the tequila and gestured for a refill. At the same moment, Jason came through the doors. He sat down and the bartender automatically gave him his usual.

“Here you go,” Jason said, sliding the respective checks to CC and Richie. “And Richie, please do better tomorrow.”

“I told you,” CC said.

“Is this about the roommate?” Jason shook his head. “At least I now know why you screwed me that one time.”

Richie threw his hands up in the air. “We were just moving past my god damn sex life! Also, we screwed because we were horny. What other reason is there? And why even bring that up? It was one time nearly five yea-oof!”

CC grabbed Richie’s face and pushed him back so she could better see Jason.

“Holy shit. Look at me dead on.”

Jason did with a raised eyebrow.

“Ok, now profile.”

He turned his head.

“Oh, I can totally see it!”

Jason turned back to her. “I know, right?”

“Not perfect, but yeah, there’s definitely a resemblance.”

“What the hell are you guys talking about?” asked Richie as he started to sip at his second shot.

“Nothing much,” said Jason. “Just that you stuck it up my ass ‘cause I look like Eddie.”

“Urg-glu-ack!” Richie made a sound like a duck being strangled as he choked right before tequila shot out his nose. “Oh it burns! That fucking burns!”

CC offered a napkin as Jason hid his sly smile behind his drink.

“You’re fired,” coughed out Richie before blowing his nose.

“No I’m not.”

“I hate you so much right now.”

“Why?” asked CC. “Because he told the truth?”

“I’m telling you,” sighed Jason, “if this is going to happen every time he leaves town, then your attempt at remaking yourself is not going to go well.”

“It’s not about him not being here. If it was just him visiting a fucking friend, I would be ok.”

“I still say you need to just tell him,” CC said.

“What? That he’s over the moon about him? Please do,” Jason groaned. “I honestly thought you
“Heart eyes. Told you,” CC sighed.

Jason took another sip. “Please, for my own sanity and job security just…” His voice fell away. He leaned over a little. “Richie?”

“It is not that simple,” whispered Richie as he wiped at his face one last time.

“Sure it is. You like a guy. You tell him.”

CC nodded.

“No. You don’t-ok. Listen close because I am saying this once and one time only,” Richie sighed, his voice trembling just a little bit. No offense to either of them, but he had a feeling they wouldn’t let up without a reason and Richie really didn’t need someone egging him on in the background right now. “When I explain why Eddie is staying with me, I typically just say there was an accident or he’s dealing with some issues. That’s what I told both of you. But you want to know the truth? The fucking truth? Eddie died. He died in my god damn arms before we got him back so if there is any chance that me admitting to him that I have been in love with him since we were god damn kids drives him away now, I am not doing it. I can’t.”

Now Richie was on a tired, pained rant as he sunk lower and lower against the bar. “And, yeah I won’t lie. I thought about coming out and telling him. There’s a reason I was keeping up the fucking flirting even if he didn’t seem to notice. But you weren’t there last night. I thought his wife was a piece of shit already but you didn’t have to fucking hold him so he didn’t just collapse after everything that came out of her fucking mouth.

“I was just thinking of me because Eddie hides it so damn well. Because he is happy here. I’d like to think I make him happy. But there is still so much fucking shit he has to deal with before he can even be his own man again. The whole physical healing process, the mental healing process, his god damn divorce, if Myra even fucking agrees, and all the shit that is involved with moving from one god damn state to another that he still has to do. I’ve realized I can’t risk confusing him and making things more stressful for him by being fucking selfish and putting my feelings before his. If I ever tell him, it’ll be when he’s in a stable place, but even then, if there is a single chance I could lose him, I won’t. Above everything else, I just can’t lose him. I can’t go through all that again.”

By the time Richie finished, his head was on the counter and his arms around his head. Silence filled their little group for a few moments as Richie gripped his jacket so hard that his knuckles were turning white.


Jason was silent for a moment before finally falling on giving him a semi-comforting pat on his shoulder. “Then I’m guessing the only reason you’re here right now is because Eddie insisted you go through with the contract, hmm?”

Richie gave a little nod while still keeping his head down.

“Well I’ll have to thank him for that. The fallout would have been fucking hell to deal with considering you already screwed Jim over once.”

“If you’re trying at humor, you suck,” mumbled Richie.
“Sorry. I’m guessing you’ve already booked a flight to join him?”

“Sunday.” Richie whispered from underneath his arms.

“Fuck. I’d say get over him and find someone else…but you are in fucking deep,” Jason sighed. He finished his drink. “Just tell me when you’re back in town. And please, fucking text him, call him, whatever you need before going on stage tomorrow so the audience at least thinks you care about them. Please?”

“Yeah, yeah. Will do,” Richie said as he finally lifted his head. “Night Jason.”

As Jason left, they fell into silence again before CC murmured, “You meant every word. Right? He…he actually died?”

Richie nodded.

“Christ Richie, I am…I’m so fucking sorry. Sorry I made you feel like you had to throw all that out on the table too.” CC squeezed his hand. “Do you want to be alone?”

“Not really,” Richie honestly said.

“I’ll stay then. And no more talk about any of that stuff. Promise,” CC said as she gestured for another beer and for Richie a replacement for his second shot. They stayed at the bar for nearly an hour, sipping their respective drinks in quiet, yet still comforting silence.
Eddie had managed to get a fair amount done both Friday and Saturday. Ben had left to go to his apartment in Suffolk after dinner on Friday. Saturday he didn’t plan to come over due to work issues, not that it had mattered as Bev had dealt with work and lawyers all day while Eddie did his own work at her home.

The only big thing of note were the texts with Richie Saturday evening. Bev had recently gotten home by then. They were hanging out in her kitchen when Eddie opened the first text from Richie.

_Everything going ok? How’s Bev and Ben?_

Eddie’s slight smile immediately brightened up even more. _Going as expected. But being with Ben and Bev make it better._

_I wish I could be there._

_I wish you were here too. I miss you._

_Miss you too. Got the earliest flight I could. I should arrive by about nine thirty in New York tomorrow._

_I got my car back. I’ll pick you up. Not much I’ll be able to do tomorrow since it’s Sunday anyways. Means Ben and Bev will be free though. Most of the day can be ours._

_All we’re missing are Bill and Mike._

_Depend on how long we’re here, they could come visit. Bill has been up in Maine helping Mike._

_Would be a nice break from everything._

_How did you and CC do last night?_

_Good. She did fucking great. Fought through her nerves, just like I knew she would. Felt nice being in my element again too. Wished you’d been there._

_Me too. I will for the next one. And whenever you get enough for a whole tour, you should invite the entire gang._

_I like that idea._

Eddie then hesitated. There was something he really wanted to say but he wasn’t…no. Richie would appreciate the words if anything. He’d already given him a damn key after all. He texted, _I miss home too._

_I miss you being home. Feels way bigger than I thought it was now that you’re gone._
Yeah?

Yeah. Don’t think I’ll get used to not having someone with me now.

You won’t have time to. You’ll soon be in New York and then we’ll be back in Chicago together.

I love the sound of that.

Me too. Good luck tonight. I’m sure you’ll do great.

Thanks. Tell everyone I say hi.

I will. Miss you.

Miss you more.

I think I miss you more.

No, I miss you fucking more.

Ok, listen you little shit. I miss you more. The end.

I don’t think so. I miss you way fucking more.

Not as much as I miss you bitch.

Bullshit. Miss you more.

Bullshit right back. I miss you more.

“Eddie!”

He jumped a little and looked up to see Bev trying to hide her laughter.

“What with how quickly you were texting, I would have guessed that you were upset, but you’re grinning from ear to ear.”

“Just arguing with Richie about who misses who more.”

“Of course you are,” laughed Bev. “Well hurry up and decide so you can help me with dinner.”

“Ok, ok.” Eddie texted Richie again. I have to go. Bev’s ready for dinner.

Ok. As long as you know I miss you more.

I miss you more. Then Eddie quickly turned the phone on mute and flipped it over so he couldn’t see Richie’s likely continuing texts. If he did, he might not be able to stop himself from yelling back that he definitely fucking missed him more.

“Sorry. All yours,” Eddie quickly said.

“It’s ok. If anything, it made me smile. Makes me think of all those times you and Richie would get into the stupidest fights.”

“We did, huh?” laughed Eddie. He got off the barstool and walked over to look into Bev’s fridge with her. “So dinner then?”
“I confess, I was thinking of just doing sandwiches.”

“Sandwiches are good,” Eddie assured her.

“If Ben’s over or I’m at his apartment, he usually cooks,” Bev said. “I always tried to get the hang of it, but it just never came naturally.” Her face momentarily darkened, eyes getting lost in the past. “Daddy always said I needed to be more like mom. Tom always got upset if I burned anything.”

“Hey,” Eddie gently said. “That’s behind you. And you want to know a secret? I can’t cook for shit either.”

Bev managed a small laugh, her face brightening up just a little. “I would have guessed Richie would be even worse off if all your stories didn’t mention you both making food together or him just straight up cooking for you.”

“I know right? Out of everything, cooking is the one thing Richie has together.”

“I guess miracles do happen.”

As Eddie helped Bev gather everything and order it on the counter, he paused and went for his phone.

“Eddie,” she warned with a teasing smile.

“I promise I’m not texting Richie,” snorted Eddie. “Just give me a second.” He went through the apps and then, “Ok. Look at me.”

“Are you taking a picture?”

“Yes.”

Bev gave a light chuckle and Eddie caught it perfectly on his phone. “Why do you want a photo of me?”

“I don’t know…just taking pictures makes it feel like I can’t forget anyone. I haven’t forgotten anything yet, but just in case. It’s…a comforting thing.”

Beverly smiled. “You need to capture at least one good one of Ben while you’re here then.”

“Oh, I definitely will. Maybe of you two together.”

“Have any good ones of Richie?”

“Do I have any good ones of Richie? Pfft! You should see all the early morning photos I’ve taken of him.”

“Oh, I absolutely want to see all the early morning photos you have.”

They finished making up their simple dinner. They sat down on the same side of the dining room table even though it wasn’t actually large enough for two to be sitting there. Their knees knocked together as they ate sandwiches and Eddie showed off photos of Richie.

Overall, the day managed to be pretty successful. Eddie had gotten a lot done, he’d texted Richie, and he and Bev had managed to simply have a nice moment together. After Eddie had finally put his phone away, they’d moved to the couch in her living room.
Bev brought up, “I sadly don’t have another guest bedroom, but I can make up the couch for Richie when he gets here.”

“Are you sure you’re alright with both of us crashing here?”

“Of course! Ben’s apartment doesn’t have a spare room anyways and I’m sure Richie would like to be nearby at all times.”

“Well in that case, I’ll take the couch.”

“Are you sure? Your back—”

“It’s fine,” Eddie assured her. “Besides, Richie has continuously refused to take his bed back. At least this way he gets a break from being ousted from his own bedroom.”

“He’ll probably argue that you deserve the bed more.”

“Well he can keep on arguing. If he tries to force himself onto the couch, then I guess we’re both just going to be stuck sleeping on this couch because I’m not changing my mind.”

“Just promise me you won’t stay up all night arguing about it,” laughed Bev.

Eddie grinned. “No promises on that one.”

They continued to talk for a while before both decided to retire. Bev had a lot she needed to get done in the early morning so that way she would have the rest of the day free for Richie. And Eddie would have to leave relatively early so that way he actually made it to the airport on time and didn’t get stuck in traffic.

Eddie got ready for bed and then as he got in, he pulled out his phone again. He’d seen Richie’s reply before but had swiped by it to focus on dinner with Bev. Now he read it.

Miss you more.

Then there was another text about three minutes later from that one.

Ha! Bet Beverly dragged you away. I win.

It made Eddie smile. Richie was probably in the middle of his routine or waiting on the sidelines for the current act to finish so he could introduce the next one. He wouldn’t see anything Eddie texted him until he was done for the night, but Eddie liked to imagined it would make him smile before he went to bed.

Yeah right you won. I miss you more loser, Eddie texted back. Text me when your flight leaves so I have an idea of when to start heading to the airport. See you tomorrow.

With that done, Eddie put his phone on the side table. He settled into bed, ready to go to sleep as quickly as possible so he could see Richie tomorrow.

Eddie slept well for the most part. When he got up, there was a new text from Richie waiting for him. Eddie checked the time and then got up quickly to get ready. He and Bev briefly said hello in her kitchen as they prepped coffee for themselves and then she was hurrying out the door. Eddie took a bit more time, watching the clock carefully before he finally hurried out and jumped in his car.

He turned on the radio as he inched along in the morning traffic. He flipped between music and news when he got bored of something and then carefully made the right exits so that he was parking where
the pickups were.

Eddie got out and waited. He occasionally glanced at the other travelers, mainly just looked at his shoes. He checked his phone a couple of times...

And then he felt it. He was already walking in the right direction, even before his face came up and his eyes lighted on Richie. Eddie hugged him as hard as he fucking could. His throat trembled as he pressed his cheek to Richie’s. He’d been holding in how much his fight with Myra had affected him, but with Richie, he felt like he could be just a little more honest.

“That fucking bad. Huh?” Richie murmured, rubbing soothing circles into his back.

Eddie slowly breathed in. He only pulled back enough to see Richie’s face. “I told Ben and Bev. But I…I don’t know. I didn’t want them to worry more.”

“It’s ok. You can tell me. Or not. Totally up to you,” Richie murmured.

“Thanks. How were the sets?” Eddie asked, wanting to momentarily focus on something more positive.

“Good. Like I said, CC killed it. And she sends her best wishes too.”

Eddie smiled at that.

“Her mom was also there.”

“She as bubbly as CC?”

“The opposite.”

“Really?” Eddie said with a light laugh.

“Yeah, think scary school principal,” Richie said as he told more about the night.

As he continued to talk, Eddie only interrupted to say, “You hungry? We can grab breakfast while we wait for the others to text me they’re done with work.”

“Sounds good. And yeah, so all the acts were fine enough except this one guy who just really bombed. Doesn’t happen often since most of the people were there through auditions, but that was a fun one to do damage control for in the moment,” Richie said, continuing with his stories.

Eddie let Richie talk until they found a place. They went in, grabbed a table, and ordered food. As they waited, Richie said, “You can at least get some stuff done. Even if she didn’t agree. Right?”

“Yes, that’s what I did yesterday and I kind of have a game plan for everything else going forward,” Eddie said. He rubbed at his eyes and took a quick sip of coffee. “Just talking to Myra did not go how I wanted it to.”

“Well obviously. She won’t allow anything reasonable because that’s going against her whole schtick. She’s going to make this as difficult as possible for you.”

“I don’t know,” murmured Eddie. “I just…you weren’t there. I fucking snapped Richie.”

“You’ve been through a lot. No one can blame you for that.”

“I feel like it could have ended differently though. If I’d just held it together and pushed through it
“Hey, don’t blame yourself. There’s no reason for that.”

Eddie let out a slight sigh. “But I’m going to have to face her again. Not right away obviously, but it’s probably only going to be worse now.”

“You just have to stay positive. And you have us backing you at every moment,” said Richie. “Whatever happened is not your fault.”

Eddie squeezed Richie’s hand. “Thank you. Having you here does make it seem like this whole thing will be a hell of a lot easier.”

“I’m here to help,” Richie replied. “Now, today is Sunday and Bev and Ben are going to be free in a couple of hours. So let’s at least make the rest of this day a fucking break from everything. Ok?”

“I think I can manage that,” smiled Eddie. As Richie took a sip of his coffee, Eddie quickly pulled up his phone and snapped another picture.

“Are you still doing that? At least tell me you’re starting to balance it out with pictures of Bev and Ben.”

“I have one picture of Bev. Still need to get one of Ben.”

“Oh, just one huh?” laughed Richie. “That doesn’t exactly balance out with the million you have of me. You’re going to make me feel like I’m special or something.”

“Well I am living with you. Though now that I think of it, Bev’s home is pretty killer. Maybe I’ll just stay there,” teased Eddie.

“Might get a little crowded when Ben finally moves in.”

“You can just move in too then. Like the Brady Bunch.”

“I am sure Bev would be thrilled,” laughed Richie. “Ah, perfect. Food’s finally here. We eat and then just kill time until others can meet up, right?”

“Pretty much,” Eddie replied before they both dug into breakfast.
ACT II: Change

Chapter Notes

And here's another chapter! I've been writing and outlining ahead for a few chapters and I will say we're finally getting close to the end of ACT II. It's been a long one, and is probably going to be the longest in this story, but I'm really excited to be getting close to Eddie finally moving on. I hope you guys are too <3

Also, made another playlist because it helps with my writing. If you give it a listen, I hope you enjoy it too: https://8tracks.com/changethecircumstances/i-want-it-all

Since Richie didn’t exactly have a job or anything he needed to worry about, he was Eddie’s constant companion when traveling around the city. Some things were obviously just easier if Eddie had an hour or two of silence and could sit at his laptop. However, when it came to going places and waiting for god knew how long in lines or waiting areas, it was nice to have someone by his side to talk to.

The first night when it had come to settling down, he and Richie had of course argued about who would sleep where. Bev had already thrown a sheet over the couch and put a pillow along with some folded blankets at one end. Eddie had stubbornly sat down.

“I’m sleeping here.”

Richie had shoved himself onto the other end and kicked Eddie in the face. “What a coincidence. So am I.”

“Go sleep in the god damn bed Richie.”

“I like couches actually. Maybe I’ll just sleep like this.”

“You think I’m going to cave first? I can easily sleep sitting up.”

“Oh really? We’ll see who ends up breaking,” Richie replied as he hit him in the face again.

“I can’t tell if I’m more thankful you took your shoes off first or not.”

“If you don’t want to be tortured anymore, just go upstairs and sleep in the bed.”

“No way. What if I slap you around? Hmm?” Eddie tried to get at him, but Richie just grabbed his feet and forced his legs down.

“Go sleep in the fucking bed Eddie.”

“I like couches. You go.”

“You can’t say that. I already said I liked the couch first. Go on the damn bed.”

“I will push you off this couch.”

“Then I guess we’ll both sleep on the floor tonight.”
“Will you just go?”

“Absolutely not, I’m sleeping here.”

“No, I’m sleeping here.”

“I swear to god—”

“Guys!”

They both jumped, Richie accident kicking Eddie in the chin. They looked up and saw Bev leaning over the railing on the stairs with a desperate look on her face.

“I have work tomorrow?”


She let out an exasperated sigh.

“It’s his fault he won’t sleep in the damn bed,” Richie replied.

Eddie kicked him in the chest.

“I don’t care who sleeps in the damn bed. Trade every night. Both of you sleep in it. Just please come up with a compromise.”

“Ok, ok. Promise,” Eddie quickly said. As Beverly headed up the stairs, he turned back to Richie. “You’re sleeping in the bed.”

Richie shot him a glare. He glanced back towards the stairs. “Ok, for Bev’s sake. I’ll sleep in the bed.”

“Yes!”

“But, no more arguing about you giving my bed back to me at the apartment.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes.”

“I’m pretty much all healed up. It’s not like I need the extra comfort now.”

“I don’t care. Agree, or we’re sleeping here folded in half and with our feet in each other’s faces.”


“And yet you’re still living with me.”

“Well, if I had a better option…”

“Rude.”

“Naw, I’m lying. Even if I had every option in the world, I’d choose you,” smiled Eddie. “Now go get a good night’s rest in an actual fucking bed.”

“Ok, ok. Night.”
“Night.”

So with that settled, Eddie moved some of his things to the living room. Every morning, Richie and Bev usually found him awake and at his laptop, or in the kitchen and prepping coffee for everyone. During the day, Richie followed Eddie around as he started to get things sorted, or Richie would keep him company while he did research on his laptop or just took a break from everything.

They obviously hung out with Bev more than Ben, him still being nearly two hours away. However, he almost always called if he didn’t come and have a meal with them or hang out. Occasionally, they met halfway to make it easier on Ben’s travel.

Besides simply spending time together though, both Bev and Ben invited Richie and Eddie to their respective work environments. It was fun getting to see what they actually did. Ben was especially proud of his sketches and showing off his office. It got Richie to officially invite them to a show when he had one fully planned out. Ben and Bev of course promised they would go.

Moments like that were the perfect kind of distractions that Eddie needed. However, going to his own work turned out to not be quite as enjoyable as it had been when visiting Ben’s and Bev’s.

If he had gone alone, it probably would have been boring at best. At worst, he might have felt like his boss was fucking trapping him in his office, trying to force him to stay as Eddie tried to stay afloat above the pressure. But he didn’t have to worry about either. Richie was with him and he at least made the entire experience a little bit better.

And to be fair, the beginning of the visit started off well. Walking into that building had never been more enjoyable as people noted his casual clothes rather than a suit, and eyes were very clearly following Richie’s messy style and ugly Hawaiian shirt that trailed behind him.

The usual security guard guided Richie through the metal detector before just doing a quick ID check with Eddie. “It’s been a while Mr. Kaspbrak. Everything alright?”

“Turns out I’m moving. Just coming in to give my notice and clear out my desk.”

“Really? If this is a ploy for a pay raise, Mr. Watson will give it to you.”

“No ploy. I’m really leaving.”

“Well, to better pastures then. And your guest?”

Richie spoke before Eddie could as he was given the all clear to walk over to where they were. “I’m his emotional support clown.”

Eddie groaned. “I apologize on his behalf.” He grabbed Richie’s hand and started to pull him away. “Have a good day Mr. Logan.”

“You too Mr. Kaspbrak.”

“You’re not helping,” Eddie mumbled under his breath as he let go of Richie’s hand.

“Hey, I saw a small smile from you. I think that means I deserve a raise.”

“Yeah right. You’re a volunteer emotional support clown. And I’m thinking about returning you.”

“Going to shove a bow on me and send me back?”

“Oh, you came with a bow huh?” Eddie asked as they got into the elevator. “Wonder where they
“Can’t you just imagine it sat on my head just so?” Richie mimed.

Eddie laughed as he held the door for three others before he pressed the floor he was going to. Richie leaned against the wall beside him and said, “You know, if I had to imagine where you would work, this is pretty much it.”

“That bad huh?”

“Even the elevator feels like a fancy coffin.”

“Don’t jinx us.”

“Sorry, but I’m glad you agreed to getting out. Even just sitting at our apartment, I could tell the work bored you out of your mind. Whatever you do next has to be better than this.”

“Thanks,” smiled Eddie. “I need to polish up my resume and CV, but I think I’ll do a quick search around Chicago. Just see what’s being offered now. Still, it could be a while before I find anything concrete.”

“I know you’ll find something. And I can go in with you to your interviews. Who wouldn’t hire a guy with an emotional support clown?”

“You’re still on that? Abso-fucking-lutely not.”

The other people that were still in the elevator with them widened their eyes at the use of language.

“Oh, I’m sorry, we should be using proper business language here,” said Richie as he put on a faux, uppity voice.

Eddie fucking lost it as he hit Richie in the chest. “Stop that now.”

Richie swung an arm around Eddie and pulled him close. “Don’t worry sirs and madams, this is my colleagues’ and mine’s stop.”

“Colleague of fucking what?” asked Eddie as the elevator doors opened.

Richie tutted his finger at him. “Now, my fellow man, where did your proper business speak go?”

“I swear to god Richie,” snorted Eddie as he hit him again.

They walked out of the elevator and Richie dropped his arm as Eddie walked ahead. He went to the main desk where Sylvia was. She understandably looked shocked to see Eddie.

“Is Watson in?” asked Eddie.

“U-uh yes! But he’s in a meeting—”

“Just tell him I’ll be in my office. This way Richie.”

Richie gave a little wave at Sylvia as he went around.

“Wow, all glass. Was that really their only design choice?”

“It’s modern.”
“It’s boring.”

“You suddenly a genius on design and architecture? I think Ben might fight you on that.”

“Ok, fair enough. Don’t want to fight Ben. You got your own office?”

“Well, I soon won’t. But yep,” said Eddie as they moved past the cubicles.

Of course, Eddie recognized all the faces. However, if the people weren’t just outright ignoring him, then all they gave him was a passing, uncaring look before turning back to their own work. God, he had never felt happier knowing he was getting out of here.

“Hold on real quick,” Eddie added. He rushed over to the mail guy who was just then handing everything out. Eddie managed to get a box from him and then walked into his office, Richie still right behind him.

“Cool view,” Richie said. He glanced back to the desk. “You actually going to keep any of that?”

“Mostly no, but it’s the polite thing to clear out your own desk.”

Richie looked over it. They both noted the picture frame that had already been facing down when they’d come in, but neither touched upon it for the moment.

Richie looked at one of the few non-work-related items on the desk. “Of course you would have one of those clack and ball things.”

“Did you just call Newton’s Cradle a clack and ball thing?”

“Totally.”

Eddie rolled his eyes. “I am thinking of keeping that though. I like simple machines like this.”

“Well I guess I have an idea of what to get you for your birthday then. Too bad it just passed.”

“You could do it for Christmas. Or I guess Hanukkah if you wanted us to celebrate that. You haven’t mentioned if you’re still practicing, though I guess that would have come up by now.”

Richie pulled one of the balls back and watched it go back and forth a few times. “Kept it up while my parents were alive. Didn’t want to deal with their disappointed faces every time I visited. You know? The only reason I didn’t complain too much as a kid was so Stan could have a friend. Best damn day was when he stuck it to his old man though.”

Eddie shot a bittersweet smile Richie’s way. “I remember you wouldn’t stop talking about it.”

“It was a fucking badass day,” murmured Richie as he stopped the swinging motion with his hand. He looked over as Eddie finally picked up the picture.

A small tired sigh escaped Eddie’s throat. Had he really been unable to find a better picture to set on his desk? Had they always looked so god damn unhappy? He tossed the picture and the frame into the trash.

“Fancy pen,” said Richie, trying to distract Eddie.

“Boss gave it to me for my last promotion. Though I have a feeling he’s going to try and take it back.”
“Why? It’s a pen.”

“Just the principle of the thing. I think Mr. Watson was looking at me as a successor some day when he retired. He’s going to be fucking pissed when he comes in. And it’s also lined with gold and has a diamond on the top of it.”

“Huh.” Richie looked it over. “Well we’re keeping it.” He unceremoniously threw it into the box.

“I can’t believe you just fucking did that,” laughed Eddie.

“Believe it,” replied Richie as he threw his legs up on the desk.

Eddie put a few more things away or into the trash until he glanced out into the rest of the building. “Shit, well here he comes.”

Richie quickly took his feet back off the desk. Before the man actually walked into Eddie’s office, Richie added, “Wilford Brimley called. He wants his mustache back.”

Eddie started laughing hard and was still laughing when Mr. Watson walked in.

“Kaspbrak, I want to know the meaning of this now. And why the hell are you packing up your office?”

“Well I’m leaving sir.”

“That’s preposterous. Sit down and we’ll talk about this.”

“We can talk, but you’re not changing my mind,” Eddie replied. He gestured towards Richie. “Give us a moment?”

“No problem.”

Eddie’s boss slammed the door behind Richie and then closed the blinds on one side. Richie popped his face over to the other side and waggled his eyebrows. Eddie snorted just as Mr. Watson quickly closed those blinds too.

“Listen, it was hard enough agreeing to you working from…wherever the hell you’ve been, but you are not leaving like this.”

“I am happy to finish any files you’ve already sent my way but after that, I am done. I’ll gather any physical documentation as well and send it your way. I do want to make this as amicable as possible, but I really can’t do this job anymore.”

“If you leave now, then you’re basically saying all the time and money I put behind you was wasted. How do you think that will make me look to the board? I won’t have that kind of reputation thrust upon me just because you’re having a midlife crisis and have run away with your—your gigolo!”

“You think Richie and I—” Eddie let out a loud laugh. “You’ve got it all wrong.”

“I don’t care what the hell it is. You’re not leaving.”

Eddie blinked hard at that. “Do you even realize how awful that sounds?”

“Aawful—you can’t talk to me like that!”

“Well, you’re not my boss anymore, so yeah I can. Listen, I really thought this would go smoother,
but if you want to get upset about it, go ahead. I have enough to worry about without this,” Eddie said, gesturing at him. “I welcome my last paycheck.”

“I’ll dock it!”

“Fine by me. Keep it, in fact.”

“Jesus Kaspbrak! What the hell happened to you? You were my most trusted man and then you do this shit to me?”

“Like I said. I’ll finish up what you’ve since given me. I’ll even write something up so the next guy has an easier time getting acquainted with the position. But after I walk out of this office today, I’m never coming back. I’m sorry for the last-minute notice, but you’re the one who is making this turn nasty. Not me.”

His boss gave a disgusted sniff. “I liked you better when you just shut the fuck up and did as you were told.”

Something in Eddie chipped away at those words, something painful and sharp. However, he managed to keep his head high rather than falling away to anger or something else like he’d done with Myra. “Well I like me now. So agree to disagree. Sir.”

Mr. Watson let out a few more irritable and upset noises before he finally threw open the door again and marched out. He did take his time to painstakingly rip Eddie’s name off the door though before marching away.

“He looked happy,” smirked Richie as he walked in.

“I know, right?” sighed Eddie. He shook his head. “Well I’m nearly done here. Want lunch?”

“Sounds great. But I could tell he really started yelling near the end. Couldn’t tell about what though. You sure you’re ok?” Richie hesitated.

“Of course. Besides, you’re here. What do you want to grab? There’s this great Ethiopian place in Hell’s Kitchen that I highly recommend,” Eddie replied, flashing Richie a confidant smile.

“Ok…yeah, that sounds good. We can take the subway, right?”

“Yep. There’s an entrance right around the corner from this building,” Eddie replied as he finally shoved the box under his arm.

He walked out of his office feeling good.

He did feel good.

He swore he did.

He could mark quitting his job off his list and yet…

A person didn’t just suddenly say such vitriol like that from nowhere. Which meant Eddie had dealt with his boss’s need to control him. And looking back, he could remember times when his boss had taken Eddie’s own concerns out the window and forced him through things for his own benefit. Eddie just…he’d never fought back. Of course, he had fought back now. He’d quit. And yet despite how he’d managed to keep his calm this time, Eddie honestly felt worse now that he was really thinking about it. He of course didn’t express that and it wasn’t like the smile he put on was fake.
Richie certainly made him smile.

But all these realizations were getting to Eddie and he honestly wasn’t sure how well he could continue keeping it together.
Alright, I can finally say that chapter 32 is going to be the last chapter for ACT II. I cannot wait to get into the meat of the final act of this story and I think you'll all love it too. Until we get to that part though, here's Chapter 27 and I hope you enjoy <3

Almost a week had gone by and Eddie had gotten a lot done. He’d also finally gone to a doctor’s appointment. It seemed he’d healed up fine and at least for now, there was no serious sign of scar tissue build up. However, his doctor had said, “Everything else ok? Because you didn’t come in here with a ten page paper and cited sources like you usually do.”

“Right, just um…been trying to do a bit of reinventing of myself,” murmured Eddie with an embarrassed glance down. “And I’m moving actually.”

“Must be headed for a less stressful place than New York if you’re this calm about it.”

“It’s Chicago.”

“Never mind then.”

Eddie snorted. “No, I suppose it’s not much calmer compared to New York. But I was wondering if you had any recommendations of doctors in the area.”

“Sure, let me see what I can do.”

So that was at least one other thing done with, and he was pretty much healed with only a recommendation to have another checkup in three months’ time before returning to a usual once a year pattern. So much was done. Pretty much everything besides the aspects that needed Myra’s approval and the beginning of the divorce itself.

Eddie was so god damn close to it, to being able to go home finally.

She hadn’t called, no surprise there. And Eddie still hadn’t gone back to the house. He would have to eventually. He didn’t want to impose on Bev for too long after all, and it had already been longer than a week. However, before he could finally face his last obstacle, one more surprise distraction seemed to get in the way.

Ben was over so they were hanging out in her kitchen when Richie got a call. “Hey, it’s Bill,” he said. He automatically put it on speaker. “Hey, Bill what’s up?”

“Hi Bill!” Everyone else quickly threw in.

“Hi guys. Is that Ben I hear too?”

“Yep.”

“Yeah,” said Richie, “like I told you. He said he was going to come over today. Though I still don’t know why you wanted to know—” Richie suddenly stopped talking as a loud knock sounded at the
door. Everyone’s hearts felt automatically tugged in that direction. “Oh you cheeky fucker!”

“What can I say? We wanted to make sure everyone was available before we came.”

They all rushed to the front door. Bev opened it to see Bill and Mike standing there with large smiles on their faces. Bill hadn’t even put his phone away before everyone was getting pulled into a hug.

“I thought you said you wouldn’t make it in time before Richie and Eddie left,” said Bev as they pulled everyone out of the doorway.

“Things just happened to fall into place perfectly,” Bill said.

“We have a truck that’s driving everything to Florida,” Mike added. “We fly out tomorrow to meet it down there.”

“Hold up,” said Richie. “You could have moved to any state in America and you picked Florida?”

“What can I say? Maine’s always been too fucking cold for my liking. Sandy beaches, palm trees, it’ll be a nice change. But does this mean you’re not going to come crashing at my place every chance you get?” Mike finished with a smirk.

“Nope. Still visiting constantly once you finish moving in if only for the principal of it,” snorted Richie. “But it’s not my fault for whatever happens. Florida is fucking crazy. I once did a show there and some guy in the front row brought his pet baby alligator.”

“Awe,” said Ben.

“No! Not awe! It nipped my god damn ankles.”

“You’re making this up,” Bill said. “You have to be.”

“Have I ever lied?”

“Yes!” everyone said in unison.

“But would I lie about a baby alligator snapping at my ankles?”

Eddie rolled his eyes. “Probably. But Mike, you’ve officially left Derry behind?”

He nodded. “It feels like I’m finally breathing again. And Bill’s been incredibly helpful.”

“You say that now,” smiled Bill. “It took a crap ton of convincing you to let me come and help at all.”

Mike gave him a pointed look. “Because I didn’t want to add more work to your plate—”

“And as I said, it’s not work when it’s helping a friend,” Bill smiled.

“Hang on,” Bev said. “You said ‘we fly out tomorrow’? Are you both going to Florida?”

“Well I’m not going to leave a man to unpack his entire life by himself,” said Bill.

Mike rolled his eyes. “I just can’t seem to get rid of him, huh?” He said it though with the fondness of someone that definitely didn’t want to get rid of said person, and Bill certainly gave Mike a similar look.
“Well I’m glad you’ve been keeping busy,” Bev replied as she looked to Bill. “I’m sure it’s helped made dealing with homelife easier.”

“It has. I’ve been writing too. And I think I finally have an ending Mike approves of,” Bill said with a kind smile shot Mike’s way.

“Maybe I’ll pick this new one up when you publish it,” said Eddie.

“Or we could all crash a book signing and embarrass him in front of all his fans,” smirked Richie as he playfully pinched Bill’s cheeks. “How does that sound?”

“How about I come heckle you at one of your shows then, hmm?”

“I’d say that would be great. I could throw out some spot on improve lines and everything. Have the clip go viral. But something tells me you couldn’t heckle me for shit,” Richie grinned.

“I-I can heckle you. Your jokes suck. There. How’s that for a heckle.”

“You did say you were a writer, right?” whispered Ben before everyone burst into laughter.

“Listen, I’m not great when it comes to the heat of the moment,” Bill sighed.

“Which is why you would suck as a heckler,” replied Richie.

“You just need to learn to be more like Richie and Eddie,” said Mike. “They can zing out one-liners at each other without any trouble.”

“Please no,” sighed Bev. “Just the two of them rounds out our group well enough. They already kept me awake because they were arguing over who would use my guest bedroom.”

“Hey, in my defense,” Eddie said, “Richie is a stubborn shit.”

“Stubborn shit? Excuse you, it was me who finally caved to your madness of insisting you sleep on the couch.”

“Oh, that’s right. So I won.”

“Just because I gave in—”

“Means I won,” smirked Eddie.

“I swear,” sighed Ben. “We could shove you two in a broom cupboard for a year, open up the door, and you’d still be arguing about the same thing.”

“You think there’s a Guinness world record for that?” asked Richie.

Bill groaned at the thought. “Lord knows you’ve probably already beaten it.”

“Probably,” agreed Eddie.

“Oh most definitely,” Richie replied. He then grabbed Bill and Mike and pulled them in for a hug again. “It’s so fucking great you guys are here though. Where are you staying?”

“If you say here, you’re all sharing the fucking bed together. I don’t care how crowded it gets,” Bev quickly said.
“Don’t worry. We have a hotel already for the night,” Bill laughed.

“Oh thank god.”

“I don’t know,” Richie said. “Might have been fun getting to kick Bill in the face for a change.”

“Hey, you’d have to get through me first,” teased Mike.

“Two for the price of one? I can do that,” Richie replied. “So what’s the plan? Walk around like we did back in that city in Maine? Find some place to eat?”

“Well, considering we did kind of throw this on you,” chuckled Mike, “I say you all get to choose. Besides, I’ve never been here.”


They all grew somber for just a bit, but Richie managed to bring everyone’s mood up as he said, “Well, then I guess I’ll just have to let you crash at my place and see Chicago before I crash at yours.”

“It’s a deal,” Mike grinned. “So the plan?”

“What we did before still works for me,” said Ben. “Any objections?”

“None at all,” Bev said. “We go several blocks to the east and we can hit Central Park.”

“Now that would be cool to see. Only visited New York once and didn’t get to do much sightseeing,” Bill added.

“Then just let us grab our things and we can go,” Richie replied.

They grabbed their jackets, Bev got her purse, and then they were off down the street. For the most part, they all went in twos, Ben and Bev, Richie and Eddie, Mike and Bill, just so they weren’t hogging up the entire sidewalk. Of course, they switched partners regularly. Everyone wanted to take a chance to talk to each other and catch up on the latest information after all.

When they got to Central Park, they huddled more closely together, partially just because the paths were wide enough, and it was getting colder, but also because it just felt nice to be near. They went all over the place, grabbed snacks and coffee rather than getting a proper lunch, perused a number of stores once they were out of central park, and saw some more landmarks. All through it, Eddie took advantage of the moments and took as many pictures of his friends as he could, some more flattering than others but all of them loved. Then they finally found a pizza place where they all squeezed into the large, round, corner booth.

They ate and laughed and talked for over two hours before finally deciding to go. It was understood that as the night continued to darken, the time to say goodbye again was upon them. However, it was even less bittersweet than last time. They hadn’t forgotten, nothing had gotten foggy, and they had all managed to come see each other despite the distances between them. They would stay in contact and they would see each other again. There was proof to back up that promise now.

However, before final goodbyes could be given, Mike and Bill told everyone, “Before we go, do you guys still have time to come to our hotel?”
“Did you get a suite or something? Cause I think it’ll be a tight fit,” said Richie.

“That’s not what we mean,” snorted Bill.

“Just come with us and wait in the lobby for a bit. We have something for you guys,” Mike explained.

“Ok then. We’re all yours for a little longer,” said Ben.

They ended up hopping on the subway and made it back to Mike’s and Bill’s hotel. While they both hurried to the elevator, the others lounged in the lobby as guests came and went.

Richie of course theorized about what it could be. All his ideas were absolutely ridiculous. Bev’s ideas were a bit more grounded. Ben and Eddie both agreed that it wasn’t anything they’d guessed so far. Still, that didn’t stop them from throwing out ideas, right until Mike and Bill came out of the elevator again.

“This was Mike’s idea,” Bill immediately said.

“But Bill certainly helped. I couldn’t have made all this on my own.”

With that, they carefully took out bulky picture frames from a large bag and started to hand them around.

“Some are photocopied obviously,” Mike added.

Bill nodded. “We wanted to make sure everyone had a version. We kind of made it random as to who has what originals.”

“And then we just added what else we could. Little things that fit each of you individually, organized it in ways that we thought would be aesthetically pleasing to you.”

“Figured it would be better than just emailing everyone a bunch of files.”

Eddie flipped the large picture frame he’d been handed over. What he saw was a collage of the photobooth images they’d taken as kids along with other pictures and small stickers that filled everything out. Eddie looked at himself, at all of them.

“This is—this is wonderful,” Ben murmured.

“Like I said. I figured everyone would appreciate it. I managed to hold onto my pictures, but I wasn’t sure if any of you would still have yours. Well now you do again,” said Mike. “And it gives us all just a little something extra of Stan to hold onto.”

“We’re planning on making one for Stan,” added Bill. “We wanted to maybe leave it at his grave, one last goodbye. But we want to make sure we can plan it so everyone can easily get there. We know it’s not the easiest time right now.”

“That sounds like a wonderful idea,” Bev said. “And yeah, just give us a timeframe and we can all see what works best.”

Eddie nodded. He carefully moved his fingers over the pictures. He wasn’t sure where he would put it, but he knew he would cherish it forever. He was the first to hug Mike and then Bill. The others quickly followed.

“You’ll have to send us pictures when you finally have your place set up,” Richie said.
“I will,” Mike replied.

“And just keep giving us updates with whatever,” Bill said. “It’s always great to hear from you guys.”

“You too,” said Ben.

They all hugged each other again and finally wished Bill and Mike a good night and a good flight down south. Everyone else ended up sharing a cab back to Bev’s so they could lessen the chance of them damaging the collages. When they got there, Ben had to immediately get into his car and head back to his apartment. Eddie, Richie, and Bev all went inside and took off their coats.

“That was exactly what I needed,” Bev smiled. “It was good to see them. I just wish Mike wasn’t moving so far away.”

“I still don’t get Florida. Literally anywhere else,” muttered Richie with a dramatic huff.

“It’s not as bad as Washington,” said Eddie.

“Let’s see, hostile winds—” Richie flipped one hand out. “Or crack addicted alligators—” He flipped his other hand out. “I just can’t decide.”

Eddie rolled his eyes. “I bet that when you finally visit him, you’ll end up complaining the entire god damn time about sand being everywhere. Won’t you?”

“What? No, I wouldn’t be that rude to Mike. I’ll complain to you on the plane ride home.”

“Glad I know I have something to look forward to,” smirked Eddie, though it did warm him how Richie just automatically included him in the plans. He stretched with a tired yawn. “I don’t know about you, but today was long. I’m going to get a little work done and then I’m going to bed.”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Bev.

“Ditto. I’m going to take a shower,” Richie said. “You need it first?”

“No, go ahead. If you don’t come back down before you go to sleep, I’ll see you tomorrow morning.”

“Sounds good. Night you two.”

“Night.”

“Good night.”

With that done, Eddie used the downstairs bathroom to get ready for bed before camping out on the couch again. He’d already polished his resume and CV off and had been looking through job listings in Chicago. He’d mostly kept his eye open for any accounting type jobs. Again, he was good with numbers and he couldn’t stray too far from his degree and experience. The kind of work probably would have bored Richie to death, but Eddie didn’t mind it. He just wanted to look for a place that had more personality than Wall Street type goons.

After marking a few of interest, he shut off his computer and got comfortable on the couch. He was almost asleep when his phone vibrated against the coffee table. It kept vibrating, so he could tell it was a call and not a text. Eddie reached over and peered at the bright screen.

It was Myra.
Eddie pushed himself up and looked at the phone with wide eyes. He looked towards the stairs where Bev and Richie were likely already in bed. He almost didn’t answer. But then on the last ring, his thumb hit the green button and he put it up to his ear. There was silence on the other end. He couldn’t even hear Myra breathing. Eddie readjusted himself so he was sitting up. He threw the blanket off him and sat properly on the couch.

The silence ticked by.

It became more and more painful after each second. Maybe she hadn’t meant to call him. It was just an accident. Eddie should just hang up now and try to have one more restful night—

“If you hadn’t asked me to marry you, I wouldn’t have said yes.”

Eddie felt his heart clench up. It was harder to fall towards complete anger since she wasn’t in front of him. She also wasn’t threatening him with anything, like the destruction of Stan’s letter. Not yet at least. Eddie didn’t want to fall back on anger, but it was difficult to find another defense mechanism without it.

He rubbed at his eyes in the low light. The only one still on was in the kitchen. It was farther away from the stairs so Eddie walked in there and leaned his back against the counter.

“So, you’re basically saying it’s my fault,” murmured Eddie, keeping his voice low so as not to alert Bev or Richie.

“Isn’t it?” Myra spoke equally softly, though Eddie wasn’t sure why. He doubted she was trying not to alert someone. Maybe it was just because of the time of night. Or maybe she also was tired of yelling, even if there was still an unmistakable harshness to her tone. “You keep asking me why I said yes, but you won’t tell me why you asked. Did you ask because you loved me?”

Eddie hesitated. She had a point. That feeling that he’d stopped seeing Myra as a person, despite how she absolutely was, came back. He’d demanded her to answer for so much, but he hadn’t been completely honest yet either.

“No,” he whispered.

“Have you ever loved me?”

Eddie sunk down against the cabinets until he was on the floor. “No.”

“How fucking arrogant of you.”

“Myra, it’s not what you think. I thought I—”

“You haven’t even noticed. You didn’t notice in the god damn hospital. You didn’t say anything when you finally came home only to say horrible things to me and cause a mess.”

“You grabbed me—”

“You don’t care,” she spit out.

“I haven’t thought about this from your point of view,” Eddie admitted. “I understand this must be incredibly hard for you too. But you have to understand you were trying to force me to stay. You
weren’t thinking of what I wanted or even giving me an option—”

“Look at your fucking hands Edward.”

He jolted at the tone, but his eyes glanced down all the same. “I don’t understand Myra—”

“I had it in my hands when you woke up. Do you realize what that’s like? Waiting for your husband to ask for the inevitable, only he never does? They took it off during surgery. They gave it to me when I arrived. That was the first thing I expected from you. I waited, but you could barely even look at me!”

Her tone was harsh but in a different way. She wasn’t exactly desperate. Instead, she sounded like she knew she’d already lost the war, but she’d be damned if she didn’t inflict some damage before she went. Eddie should have hung up then and there. But he was so confused and honestly didn’t know what she was talking about.

“Myra, please—”

Her voice broke at this moment as she had to force the words out. “Your fucking wedding ring.”

And then Eddie really looked. He turned his left hand back and forth. It was something he hadn’t taken off for well over a decade. He should have noticed right away and yet in the weeks afterwards…he hadn’t…

“I-I don’t know what to say.”

“I’d ask for an apology, but you seem to think you’re the victim here.”

“Myra, just because I-I forgot doesn’t equate to what you’ve—”

“You’re upset with how things have gone? You put yourself into this situation. Everything that’s happened is because of you.”

“Me?!” Eddie asked in an angry, hushed whisper. “You threatened to rip up a letter that you could tell was important to me because I wouldn’t listen to you. You twisted your god damn words so that I wouldn’t struggle or fight against what you wanted. I went to every stupid event you wanted to go to, and I stayed home and avoided anything you didn’t approve of no matter my own feelings. I ended relationships. I changed what I enjoyed, what I watched, what I ate. I took the job offer that you approved of. Not me. All of it. It was all because of you. If I did anything that didn’t fit inside your own little world, you put me down and at the very least guilt tripped me into backpedaling. You can’t just suddenly put this all on me—”

“Can’t I?” interrupted Myra. “You asked me to marry you when you weren’t even in love with me. When I hesitated, you convinced me of it. Or did you conveniently forget that part?”

“T-that’s not the full story. You have to understand, it’s not like I did it on purpose—”

“And yet you say you never loved me.”

“I know that in retrospect. I-I know why now, but at the time I thought it was the closest thing to—”

“You convinced me to fucking marry you despite from day one you never loved me and then you cry victim when you realize you don’t like it anymore? No, you know what I think? You like this. You’re enjoying all this attention.”
“N-no—”

“You put yourself into this situation!”

Tears were falling down his cheeks as even then, he tried to keep his voice down. “I-I didn’t realize —”

“Didn’t realize what? How marrying a person you didn’t even love would hurt them? No, everything you’ve had an issue with is of your own god damn making. This is the life you chose.”

“I-I mean I did, b-but—”

“So you admit it.”

“I d-didn’t do it on purpose. I didn’t r-realize—”

“Bullshit Eddie. You chose this life. You could have done anything else, but you married me. You could have left this state, but you stayed. You could have made a hundred decisions, but you put yourself through all this bullshit. I don’t know why, but you need to know that this is all on you.”

“I-it’s not—”

“Everything you have an issue with, you indirectly inflicted upon yourself. You wanted all of this.”

“That d-doesn’t mean I-I wanted—”

“I hope whoever you’ve shacked up with realizes just how god damn manipulative and horrible of a human being you are.”

Eddie’s attempt at keeping quite broke as that comment was like an icpick through the heart. A sob escaped his lips as he shouted. “I’m sorry! I’m fucking sorry but I never intended to—”

“I never intended to marry a man who didn’t love me. But look what you forced me into. You wanted to know what the fuck was wrong with me? Well I married you, so that answers that question.”

“M-Myra please I—”

But she’d already hung up.

Panicked, broken sobs escaped his lips that were only made worse by his attempts at keeping quiet. She had a point, a point that broke through all other defenses and reasoning. He’d wondered about this when he’d gone to the house. He’d even thought about it at work. Had he really been that blind to the people he’d chosen to associate himself with?

Maybe…maybe he had chosen it. He certainly had never fought it before.

And the things he’d yelled at Myra? He’d thought it had been him breaking under the pressure. But that was because he’d been thinking of himself as the victim. But…but maybe he wasn’t. She was right. He had chosen—

No! It hadn’t been an intentional choice. If he’d known what he did now, he never would have asked. He wouldn’t have!

But despite how fucking cruel her voice had been, it hadn’t all been for show. He’d heard some of the words break, the way her breath caught. He’d hurt her. She was still a real human being and her
pain was his fault—maybe this was all his fault.

He’d been the one to ask.

But he’d thought he’d loved her! He hadn’t understood his own emotions at the time and had just thought—

She wouldn’t be hurting right now if he hadn’t. He wouldn’t be hurting if he hadn’t done that. W-which meant it was on him. It was all on him…

The phone had since clattered to the ground. Eddie’s hands covered his face, another fruitless attempt to cover up the noise he was making. Low pitched, breathless, wails left his throat, the kind where you wanted to scream but so much energy was being used up just trying to get a single breath in that the only noise that was left were tortured moans.

“What the-Richie! Get down here now!”

Eddie just tried to hide himself more, ducking his head down and pulling his knees in close even as the noise he was making just became louder. He could feel Beverly pushing him forward just a little. Then a blanket was draped over his shoulders. He felt her arms add pressure to the weight around him, and then another set of arms, Richie. Eddie could feel how Bev brushed at his hair, even as he still sobbed. Richie pressed his face against Eddie’s back, staying as close as possible as he whispered over and over, “It’ll be ok. It’ll be ok.”

They stayed there, huddled on the floor of Bev’s kitchen for who knew how long. But, as with all bodily functions, there were only so many tears Eddie could cry. There was only so much energy that could be used for his sobs before they began to break up more, decrease in noise, and then all but stop so there was nothing but trembling left.

Eddie still hadn’t lifted his head up. Richie was rubbing circles into his back now. Bev kissed his shoulder, continued her soft, petting motions through his hair.

His voice was hoarse when he spoke. “It’s my fault.”

“What is?” whispered Richie.

“M-Myra called and—”

Richie bristled. “Hey. Whatever she said it isn’t your fault—” However, his voice fell away when Bev quickly shook her head at him. She mouthed, Let him speak first.

“It is. I-I asked her to marry me. She didn’t even say yes right away but I-I convinced her and h-how did I repay her?” Eddie’s voice continued, hoarse and low. Every now and then a low moan broke up the words, but for the most part he continued repeating everything Myra had said, everything he had done.

Richie tensed at every word. It was clear he wanted to say something, but every time he almost did, Bev stopped him again. They both stayed silent, right until the end where Eddie began to more softly cry again.

Bev continued her careful motions through his hair until those noises began to fade too. She whispered, “You are not some manipulative, horrible human being. You know how I know? Because you feel bad now. You can acknowledge you made a mistake in the past, but that doesn’t mean you did it out of any ill-intentioned reasoning, no matter how Myra sees it. And however you hurt her does not negate how she hurt you, or how she clearly, intentionally used her words against
you. Even now, she could have carried that conversation in a number of ways, but she chose the one that made her the only victim in the scenario, which she isn’t. What she did in your marriage was manipulative. What you did was make the only rational choices you could out of the trauma that you thought defined you. It’s a lesson I’ve had a hard time learning, but you all helped and we’re here to help you. It’s not your fault Eddie and you’re not the same, and certainly not worse than her. You’re not.”

Richie broke contact, but only for a moment to grab a roll of paper towels. He broke off a few and handed them over. Eddie quickly blew into them and wiped at his eyes.

“I’m s-sorry I dragged you both out—”

“Nope. Don’t say another word of that. You drag me out of whatever if you need me,” interrupted Richie. “I don’t care if it’s the best sleep of my life. You drag my ass up the moment you need someone.”

“It’s ok Eddie. It is,” Bev murmured.

For a moment, Eddie could breath—

Then the emotion just caught up with him again. It wasn’t the wails from before, but the noise still came out broken and pained as he started to cry again without even meaning too.

“You’re not sleeping alone tonight,” Richie said. He waited until Eddie’s tears had subsided a little again. “Come on. You’ll feel a little better if you’re not on this hard floor.”

Bev picked up Eddie’s phone and put it on the counter. Then she and Richie pulled Eddie up, though Eddie almost immediately turned into Richie, hiding his face from both of them.

As they went upstairs, Bev broke off for a moment. She came back with a warm washcloth for Eddie to wipe his face with. She also grabbed an extra blanket as they guided Eddie into the guest bed. After Richie pulled the comforter over Eddie, he backed up and turned to Bev.

She gripped his arm. “You want me to stay too?” she whispered.

“I got this. You get some sleep,” Richie whispered back. He squeezed her hand before going to the other side of the bed and carefully getting in.

Bev had already slipped out the door as Richie laid down and gently touched Eddie from where he was trying to hide his face.

“Hey. No need for that.”

Eddie sniffed, but still moved the blankets down. “It’s so fucking embarrassing. And I was trying so hard not to wake you.” His voice cracked. “You’ve all done so much for me and then I just fucking break—”

“Stop that now,” muttered Richie. “Don’t even finish that thought. You’re not a burden and when I signed up for you living with me, I agreed to all of it.” He gently took Eddie’s cheeks and brushed at some of the new tears. “Including this. And it’s nothing to damn well be embarrassed by. Sometimes you just have to fucking let it all out.”

Before Richie could remove his hand, Eddie reached up and covered it with his own, keeping him there. “I’d say thank you,” whispered Eddie, “but I know you’d rather be here than anywhere else right now.”
A kind smile graced Richie’s lips in the dark. “Now you’re getting it.”

Eddie finally let go of Richie’s hand. He shifted in bed, but didn’t try to cover his face again. Richie lay there, watching and waiting until Eddie fell asleep first. Only then did he allow himself to close his eyes and relax as best he could into his own pillow.
ACT II: Change

Chapter Notes

Was planning on posting this a little earlier but had to study for two tests today and it was hard to find time to edit and fix grammatical errors in between that. Hopefully I found them all as I'm posting this before going to work.

This chapter almost a hundred percent will be the longest one in the story so it was a big one to do and I hope you all enjoy it. Seeing all the comments flooding in after the last chapter was amazing and seriously improved my day. Thanks as always and I hope you enjoy <3

Eddie felt exhausted when he finally woke up. He wiped at his face and rolled over a bit, but Richie wasn’t there. He listened, and it didn’t sound like he was in the bathroom. Eddie pushed himself up into a sitting position. He breathed in…

And then he managed to breathe out. The crying didn’t return. However, he still felt horrible, both physically and mentally. It had been…

It wasn’t his fault. No. He dredged up the words Bev had said. He couldn’t remember them perfectly, but he remembered the essence of the message. He wasn’t manipulative, certainly not how Myra was. But that didn’t mean he was free of all blame. He could carry the responsibility and his own pain, but that still didn’t negate the extreme nature of what Myra had done to him.

He continued trying to keep his breathing slow and even.

Eddie couldn’t deal with this again though. He hated doubting himself, hated how she had managed to tear him up inside for no reason other than to cause damage. He’d heard the defeat in her voice to though. This time if Eddie could keep it under control, if they both could, he had a feeling it would finally end.

Pushing himself out of bed felt harder than when he’d first woken up in the hospital. He managed it though, first going to the bathroom to just wash his face. He checked the clock on his way out of the room. Had he really slept that long? It was nearly eleven in the morning.

He walked up to the top of the stairs and paused. He could hear noises coming from the first level. He slowed his descent, pausing and leaning on the banister when he could get a good enough view into the kitchen.

“Ok, now you do it just so.”

“Richie, I swear to god if that ends up on my floor, or worse my ceiling—”

He flipped the pancake and it managed to land safely back in the pan.

“Alright, mark me impressed,” Beverly said. “Just please tell me we’re not risking it a second time.”

“You can’t make a pancake and not flip it. Nope, we’re doing it every time.”
“I swear.”

“I know. I know. I’ll clean it up,” Richie promised. “Now, that omelet is almost ready to get folded again. You want to try?”

Eddie stayed as quite as possible as he walked the rest of the way down the stairs. He paused in the doorframe. He leaned against it and watched them for a second.

Bev picked up the spatula. After a second, she muttered, “Oh shit.”

“Hey, no worries. Here,” Richie said, guiding her hand this time. “There, we’ve managed to save it.”

“You are good. Definitely more chaotic than Ben though. I’d like to try and see you make something together. I think you would give him an aneurism.”

“Let me guess. He follows a cookbook’s rules religiously?” asked Richie.

“It’s like a battle plan,” Bev chuckled. “He would lose it at the way you measure ingredients.”

“Hey, a pinch is a perfectly fine way to measure things,” said Richie. He checked the underside of the pancake and then slid it off. He poured the next cup into the pan. “Alright, get ready for round two in a few.”

“I fear for the cleanliness of my kitchen, but to be honest you have already turned this place into kind of a shit show—oh. Hey Eddie.” Midsentence, Bev had finally turned around. Richie put the pan down and quickly turned too.

“Sorry,” Eddie murmured, quickly straightening his posture. His voice still sounded raw. He tried to clear it as best he could. “Didn’t mean to sneak up on you guys. Just…enjoyed watching you.”

“We can always turn around and pretend we didn’t see you,” Richie said, trying for teasing, at least for the moment. “Give you another specialized viewing of the Bev and Richie show.”

“At least I get top billing.”

“Anything for you Bev.” Richie’s eyes turned back to Eddie. The smile softened. “How are you?”

“Better. I…I’m s—”

“Nope, not another word of that,” Bev said.

Richie nodded in agreement. He moved forward first and hugged Eddie hard. Bev joined in and they stood in the kitchen like that for a while. At least until Richie went, “Shit, the pancakes!”

“If you burn my house down, you’re getting a second roommate,” warned Beverly. It gave Eddie a reason to finally form his lips into a smile.

As Richie dealt with breakfast, Bev gave Eddie another quick hug and said, “We thought about getting Ben over. Even calling Mike and Bill to cancel their flights. We didn’t want them coming over and doing the opposite of helping though. Thought it might be a bit overwhelming for you. Or make you feel like you inconvenienced everyone.”

“Yeah,” murmured Eddie. “I wouldn’t have wanted them to see me like this. Even…even though I know they wouldn’t have minded.”

Bev nodded and comfortably rubbed his shoulder. “We have a pot going. Want a cup?”
“Water first. And then yes please.”

Eddie walked up to the island, leaning against the countertop. There were a lot of ingredients scattered about, but his phone was still on the counter from where Bev had put it last night. He pulled it towards him. He pulled up the call log, looking at the most recent one. He then backed out of that and went to messages.

“Eddie,” murmured Bev as she put a glass of water in front of him. “Whatcha doing?”

“I’m texting Myra,” he whispered.

Richie froze. “You think that’s a good idea. Literally just after last night…”

“I just want this to be over,” whispered Eddie. “I think she finally does too.”

“Do you want me to go with you if you go over there today?” asked Richie.

Eddie hesitated. He put his phone back down and thought about it for a few seconds, weighing the pros and cons. “I…would like that. Please.”

“Sure. Anything that could help,” Richie replied. Him and Bev carefully watched as Eddie picked his phone back up again.

He texted, *I’m coming today and getting the rest of my things. We need to talk. To really talk this time.*

Eddie sent it and then pushed his phone to the side. “So, you’ve been cooking this entire time?”

“No the entire time. I mean, I had to buy a lot of the ingredients since Bev just didn’t have anything,” said Richie. “But we’ve been up for a while. Wanted you to sleep.”

“Thanks,” murmured Eddie.

He watched as Richie checked that the current pancake wasn’t sticking before he took the pan off the stovetop and looked back to Bev and Eddie. “So, round two?”

“Richie please—”

Eddie laughed. His throat still hurt, but it felt good to have a reason to laugh again. “Do it.”

Richie flipped it, this one just barely making it back in before he set it back on the stovetop.

“You are getting dangerously close here,” said Bev.

“Still landed it. I’ll have this one since I burnt the top though. Alright, now let’s check the eggs again…”

Eddie watched as Richie focused on breakfast, making three plates for them. He split up the omelet, gave everyone a pancake, and finally cut up an apple and split that amongst them. By this point, Bev had set a cup of coffee in front of Eddie too.

“You really didn’t have to do all this,” murmured Eddie. Richie already looked ready to defend himself, but before he could, Eddie quickly added, “But I know you wanted to. And thanks anyways.”

Richie brightened at those words alone. “I’m glad you’re still catching on. And anything to make
your morning a little better.”

“Thanks,” Eddie said again.

With the plates prepped, they went to the dining table. Bev ate quickly and then gave Eddie a kiss on the cheek. “I’m sorry. I postponed as much as I could, but I have to get to a meeting.”

“It’s ok Bev. I’ll see you tonight.”

“You sure it’s ok?”

“Yeah, you can only do so much,” replied Eddie with a small smile.

“Alright. I’ll get Ben over too. We’ll all have a nice night in.”

“Sounds good.”

Bev left after a moment and as she did, Eddie’s phone went off. Richie shot him a worried look as Eddie pulled up the text.

It just read one word. *Fine.*

A small sigh escaped Eddie. “She said ok.”

“I swear to god. If she starts some shit—”

Eddie shot Richie a pained expression.

“Sorry. I just hate seeing you hurt.”

“I know. But I agreed to you coming because I think it’ll help keep us both in check. Please don’t escalate things.”

“I promise. Mouth shut,” Richie said.

“Well we know you won’t be able to keep to that promise,” Eddie murmured, his lips twitching upwards. “Just don’t be too harsh.”

“It’ll be hard not to.”

“Please?”

“Don’t worry, I won’t actually do anything too bad. That I will promise.”

“Thanks Richie.” Eddie ate his last bite and then rubbed at his face again. “I’m going to take a shower. I’ll tell you when I’m ready.”

“Hey, you do this at your own pace. You’re not inconveniencing me,” Richie replied.

“Thanks,” Eddie replied. He started to pick up his dishes, but Richie came around and grabbed them.

“You get cleaned up. I’ll take care of everything down here.”

Eddie nodded. He paused to grab some clothes from downstairs and then went to the guest bedroom. He quickly found taking a shower was possibly the best idea right now. He felt cleaner right away. He leaned against the tile for a second, the coolness of it a nice counter to the heated water. Then he rubbed at his face, ran his fingers through his hair.
He would talk to Myra this time. Even if she tried to stop that, he would at least do an honest conversation on his part. He would make sure he left that house for the last time now. He would break away for good.

The shower was long, Eddie taking his time before finally shutting it off. When he got out, he shaved and noted his hair length. He would have to remember to book an appointment somewhere. It had gotten a lot shaggier than he usually allowed it.

He carefully brushed his hair into place and then got changed. Richie was downstairs and had done a pretty good job of restoring Bev’s kitchen. He noted Eddie looked ready and immediately put his coat on. However, he paused as Eddie started to pace by the front door.

Richie didn’t interrupt. He just let Eddie take all the time he needed. Eddie practiced breathing, deep and slow. He kept his steps timed, an exact pattern that helped keep his heartbeat low. He spun on his heels, one, two, three—

He finally stopped.

“You ready?” murmured Richie.

“Ready.”

They walked out and locked the door with the spare key Bev had been letting them borrow. Eddie decided to drive, and Richie got in beside him. It was midday meaning hundreds upon hundreds of people were probably out to lunch, running errands. Certainly all the tourists were up and out by this point. Richie mumbled random, short comments about what he saw, but Eddie stayed silent as he focused on the road.

When he pulled up to the house, he paused to rub at his face again. “I can do this. I can.” He really believed the words though when Richie squeezed his hand. Eddie’s lips quirled up before he focused on keeping a carefully neutral face.

He quickly took his keys out and got out of the car. Richie followed close behind. Eddie went up the steps and rang the doorbell before he could over think the situation. However, after a few seconds, no response came.

Eddie glanced to the street, but Myra’s car was still there. He looked at his phone but there were no new texts from her. Of course, he had a key on his car key ring. But going in without warning would probably only cause trouble. He rang the doorbell again. This time he managed to hear a distant shout.

A moment later the door was shoved open. “I said I was coming,” Myra growled out.

“I’m sorry. I couldn’t hear…” Eddie trailed off as Myra was already walking away. She’d barely given Richie a second glance, though it was clear she’d recognized him. Behind him, he could feel Richie taking in a breath, but Eddie quickly reached back and gripped his hand, interrupting whatever comment he wanted to say. “Please?”

“Sorry,” mumbled Richie.

Eddie let go and led the way in. Richie closed the door.

A quick glance into the kitchen showed Myra sitting at the kitchen table, her back turned away.

“Myra, I—”
“You came to pack. Pack already,” she bit out.

Eddie hesitated. However, considering he didn’t know how the conversation might turn out, he decided it was best to get all his things first. At least that way there would be one less thing to do in the long run.

“This way,” murmured Eddie, leading Richie upstairs first.

Going through everything took a while, but from the very beginning, Eddie noted the lack of things that actually needed to be packed. He got the rest of his clothes into one small bag. There were other, smaller things that he grabbed. Headphones, another book that he’d been in the middle of reading. But there was just so much he didn’t need, and the rest just wasn’t his.

So far, at least on the second floor, most of his things that he wanted to take with him were in his own study. It seemed all the files from before Myra had gathered into the box and put back in the room. Eddie was tempted to throw it all straight into the trash now, but no, he would probably mail the important bits to his former work. Maybe in the heat of the moment he might have done something like that, but there was no reason to cause unnecessary problems.

With at least a bag and two small boxes filled, Richie said he would take them down to the car. Eddie gave him the keys, and then grabbed everything of his in the bathroom that he wanted. He put those away and then headed back downstairs. With Richie at least needing a moment to get everything situated outside, Eddie took advantage of the privacy to go back to the kitchen.

Myra hadn’t moved yet, and now that Eddie was slowly approaching her, he could see she had some kind of album in front of her. She slowly flipped through a page.

“Are you already done?”

Eddie flinched a little at the words. “O-only the upstairs but…not quite.”

He paused, waiting to see if she would tell him to hurry up and finish. Instead, she just muttered, “Well you’ll be done soon. There was never much of anything here that could be considered yours.”

Eddie nodded in agreement. Her words were said bitterly, but Eddie hoped she was also realizing just how broken their marriage had always been, how much she had always controlled it. He finished his approach. He walked around and finally saw what she was looking at. Guilt weld up in him, but he didn’t let the feeling completely control him this time. He sat down opposite her.

“Our wedding album,” murmured Eddie.

“I want to burn the whole damn thing.”

“If it makes you feel better—”

She gave him a harsh look.

“I’m not trying to be condescending,” Eddie whispered. “I just…Myra, I’m sorry. I—”

“You don’t mean that—”

“No,” Eddie interrupted. However, he managed to keep his voice low and only put the slightest hint of authority into his tone. Just enough to get her to stop. Richie came in at that moment but quickly stopped by the doorframe. He looked away. Having him just within Eddie’s line of sight helped though. He could get this out without turning nasty or breaking down. Eddie focused back on Myra
and murmured, “You said your peace last night. It made me feel horrible. It made me doubt how much agency I did or didn’t have in this relationship. It made me feel like every aspect of this was my fault.”

“Good.”

“No, no not good,” whispered Eddie as he shook his head. “You’ve been doing that in all our time together. You realize that. Right? Not just last night, but you’ve always made me feel like I had no control. I’m a grown man and it felt like I would get yelled at for choosing the wrong god damn socks around you. Do you understand how dehumanizing that feels?”

She didn’t respond. Eddie hoped it was because she understood, but she didn’t show it.

“I’m sorry I asked you. I’m sorry I never loved you like a husband should. I’m sorry for everything I’ve said to you in the past weeks. I never should have stooped to that level.”

“You wasted my life.”

“Now that you can’t just put on me. You can’t Myra because I may have asked you, but you said yes. Sure, I convinced you. But do you remember what I did to convince you? It was simply asking you twice more. I didn’t hold a gun to your head. I certainly didn’t make you feel like marrying me was your only option or something worse like if you didn’t say yes then and there, you would never get married.” At that point, he reached across the table and took her hand. She didn’t pull back, but she did seem surprised that he’d reached out at all. “But even so, it doesn’t mean your life is wasted. I know my life isn’t wasted. We all can have a second chance.”

She looked from his hand on hers, to him. “Why say that? Why not just demand a divorce like you’ve been doing?”

“Because I’m sorry I did that before. And because I am using every ounce of energy in my body to be kind right now, even if that’s a courtesy you never showed me.”

Those words did make her sharply draw her hand back like she’d been stung, but she didn’t outright deny the accusation either. Her eyes focused back on the album. She turned the page. Her fingers grazed a photo. “I loved you. At least at the start.”

“Myra…”

“I don’t want to hear it,” she snapped. She slammed album shut and pushed it to the side. She pulled his wedding ring from her pocket and then took off her own, throwing them both at him. “Take them. Just take them, take your things and leave.”

“Myra, I…”

“I’ll have a lawyer write everything up and send it to you. I never want to see you again.”

Eddie pushed his chair back and slowly stood up. He looked around and then grabbed a pencil and paper. He wrote down Richie’s address. “Here. This is where I’m staying if anything needs to be forwarded to me in the coming weeks.”

He set it down in front of her. She didn’t look, ducking her head low. Eddie finally started to leave her be—

“I said take the rings Edward. Take them and don’t ever fucking come back.”
Eddie quickly picked up both and pocketed them. He walked towards Richie who had thankfully not said a thing during it. Eddie was still happy he’d come along though, even if he had just been in the background. Even now just glancing at Richie made Eddie feel a little better.

“Let’s finish up here,” Eddie murmured.

Richie nodded in agreement and they quickly went through the remaining rooms. If Eddie had left anything else, he didn’t care. He had all he needed now and soon he was walking out the door for the last time. He’d made sure to take his key off his car key ring and put it by the stack of mail. It made carrying his car keys lighter, like now he really could drive just about anywhere he wanted.

As they got in, Richie let out a hefty sigh. “I’d almost feel bad for her if I hadn’t seen the shit she put you through. You know, you didn’t have to be that kind to her. She was a bitch before, and she was a bitch in there too.”

“You’re right. She probably didn’t deserve it. But I feel better for it. That’s what I care about now. And hey, I was honest with her. It’s not my fault she couldn’t be honest with me,” Eddie said with a shrug. “I can’t do anymore. I don’t owe her anymore.”

“No you fucking don’t,” agreed Richie. “So, Bev’s?”

“No quite. There’s one more stop before heading back I need to make.”

“Oh, ok.”

Richie was clearly curious but didn’t ask. He messed with the radio, started commenting on the people that drove by them or that walked on the sidewalk again. Eddie focused on getting as close to Central Park as possible. When he found a parking spot, even though it was a way’s away, he took it.

“You don’t have to come with me,” Eddie quickly said.

“Do you not want me to?”

“No, I just don’t want to drag you—”

“It’s no problem. I’ll follow.”

Eddie’s lips quirked up a little. He got out and locked the car, guiding Richie down the street. They got into Central Park and walked for some time before coming across one of the bridges that went over a section of water. Eddie went to lean against the railing, Richie coming up beside him. He took out both rings, and his own slipped from his fingers. It hit the water without much bravado. He hadn’t meant to drop it yet, but he honestly didn’t care, his focus completely on Myra’s ring.

“This was where I proposed,” murmured Eddie.

“Figured,” Richie said. “Surprised you didn’t care more about your own ring though.”

Eddie shrugged. “It was just a ring. And one that Myra had fitted and designed exactly how she wanted it without ever asking me. If I’m being honest, which I now am, I never felt connected to it. This ring though? It was my mom’s.”

“Oh.”

Eddie managed to find a little bit of humor out of the shocked sound that came out of Richie’s throat.
He leaned more on his elbows, looking up at Richie with a half-smile. “Didn’t see that coming. Huh?”

“What a twist.”

Eddie snorted.

“At least I get why she wanted you to take it. You going to keep it?”

Eddie’s gaze turned back to the ring. He flipped it over a few times, fingers running over its edges and curves. Finally, he shook his head. “She was my mom, and as a kid, especially when we moved out of Derry, I had no one else. I loved her. But I also really hated her at times. In retrospect, she wasn’t that great of a parent, and the last thing I want is for any relationship, no matter what kind or who with, to remind me of her again.”

With that, Eddie straightened up. He took two steps back and then chucked the ring as hard as he could. He managed to get it so far, he could barely see the ripple it made when it hit the water. He took in a deep breath and—

“Hey! That’s a fifty dollar fine for littering!” yelled a passing cop.

“Run!”

“Run? Just-woah!”

Eddie grabbed Richie’s hand. He booked it and Richie was dragged along, stumbling slightly before he managed to pick up the pace on his own. Behind them, the cop took two steps before letting out an irritated sigh and deciding it wasn’t worth it. Eddie kept holding Richie’s hand though as they ran across grass and down the paths.

They slowed eventually after the bridge was far behind them. When Eddie finally let go, Richie walked to the side and leaned his entire body against the nearest tree.

“Why the hell did you say run?” gasped Richie. “You could’ve just paid the fine. Or explained. Bet he would have…have given you a pass if you’d just explained.”

“I don’t know. Just spur of the moment thing. And come on. Don’t tell me that wasn’t a little fucking fun,” Eddie replied, adrenaline still coursing through his veins as he bounced on the balls of his feet.

“Wait until I catch my breath, then I’ll decided.”

Eddie laughed as Richie doubled over for a second. He then pushed his hair back and stopped being quite so dramatic.

“Ok, maybe it was a little fun. Definitely never would have expected that from you,” Richie said with a shake of his head. “Don’t tell me this is the start of you spiraling down into some mad crime spree.”

“Ah yes. Today it’s littering. Tomorrow, the world!”

Richie laughed and draped an arm around Eddie’s shoulders. “You finally feel free?”

“I do,” smiled Eddie. He didn’t push Richie off and they both walked back through Central Park, pressed together as they talked about what they would do that night with Bev and Ben.
Even with Myra finally agreeing, there were still a few things Eddie had to take care of before finally leaving New York. The first was getting a lawyer of his own and figuring out the fastest way to get a divorce. Most versions required a year of living apart or some kind of evidence of cheating, abuse, etc. Because of that, citing irreconcilable differences would be the easiest way, especially since it would be an uncontested divorce now with hopefully no risk of needing to go to court.

Eddie would wait for Myra’s own lawyer to write up how all finances and ownership would be split. If there was anything completely unreasonable, he might have to do a revision with his own lawyer which could cause some back and forth, but for the most part, he would let Myra have what she wanted. He didn’t need the house or anything else. He had what he wanted and would soon be getting a new job anyways.

Getting everything written up would take a little while though, and Eddie expected he wouldn’t get an email detailing everything until he got back to Chicago anyways. Ideally, they would only have to talk through mail after this point. Then, assuming everything got sent into a judge and they found no issues, they would sign off and Eddie would get confirmation of the divorce in a few weeks’ time. He wouldn’t even have to go back to New York from then on, unless he was visiting Bev and Ben of course.

Everything was on track to being right.

Once the issue of a lawyer was settled, Eddie’s formally combined accounts were finally terminated. Since for many of them Eddie had already done what he needed, all he’d needed was Myra’s own agreement and she’d done just that. Though he had no idea what her intentions were afterwards, at least now she seemed as ready to get through this divorce as him.

With those parts done, Eddie finally made it known that he was ready to leave New York. Of course, Bev said they had to plan something special, and on Eddie’s and Richie’s final night with Bev, Ben of course came over and he and Richie took to making dinner. The process of making dinner had gone mostly well, and they’d already eaten. Now Bev and Eddie sat at the kitchen table, each with a wine glass in hand as they watched the new chaos ensue with dessert.

“No, look. It says it right here,” Ben said. He held the cookbook like it was a sacred text and stabbed at a line. “This is already a very sweet recipe. See, it calls for half a cup of brown sugar and half a cup of granulated sugar. Anymore and the whole thing will be way to—Richie!”

Richie was leaning against the counter in the laziest of fashions. One very over full cup was balanced in Richie’s hand before he flippantly dropped it backwards into the bowl. “Oops.”

“There is a balance to these things. Now we need more lemons to balance out the kick with all that sugar you threw in there. Or I guess we could just put less brown sugar in there now. That should be ok—”
“More brown sugar you say?”

“What? No! Give me that cup.”

Richie threw the cup Ben’s way and grabbed the entire bag of brown sugar. “Fine with me.” He started to haphazardly pour the bag into the bowl.

“Richie! Richie, I swear if you pour one more grain of sugar, I am flipping that entire bowl on to the floor and we are starting from scratch again.”

“Yeah right. You wouldn’t willingly make that kind of mess in Beverly’s home. Now let’s see, this should be just enough sugar…”

“God damn it. We need more lemon now,” groaned Ben.

“No we don’t. You just got to trust me.”

“When has that ever gotten me anywhere good?”

“You’re alive, aren’t you?”

“Are you referring to the time you suggested you lot suck the cuts on my stomach? Because one, you didn’t end up doing it, and two, it was a stupid idea and everyone fucking agreed-stop putting in ingredients before I tell you how much!”

Eddie was very happy he’d already gone through his medication and he could drink again. He sipped at his wine as he commented, “This is better than cable.”

“You’re telling me,” snorted Bev. “It’s a shame we didn’t get them to cook together until now.”

“You’ll have to come visit us,” Eddie suggested. “Make a mess of our kitchen.”

“It’s a deal.”

They clinked their glasses together while Richie was smearing flour on Ben’s face and holding the bag of lemons out of reach. Ben of course took the mature route and responded by trying to manhandle Richie into submission.

Watching them make dinner had certainly been wild enough, but the attempt at dessert was definitely the highlight of the night. When the pie finally got put into the oven, Richie and Ben cleaned up as best they could, though the entire area was still a mess when the timer dinged. Then they started arguing over just how much caramel they needed to drizzle over it before cutting slices and setting them down in front of both Eddie and Beverly.

Ben’s hair was completely tussled, his shirt’s top two buttons undone, and his collar uneven with one side stuck up and the other folded down. He still had flour on his face. Richie had lost his Hawaiian shirt at some point. Eddie honestly had no idea where it had ended up. Maybe in the pie for all he knew. Richie’s plain, under shirt was an absolute mess and covered in stains. Some caramel had managed to get in his hair, a few clumps of it stuck together. His glasses sat crooked on his face and he only just now righted them.

When they both sat down, Eddie couldn’t help but laugh. “You sound like you both just got out of a cage match.”

“Next time Tozier, I don’t care if I have to tie your limbs so you’re a god damn puppet. We’re doing
“it by the book.”
“Jokes on you. I’m into that.”
“God I hate you.”
“I don’t know Ben,” Bev suddenly said as she cut into her piece. “I wouldn’t sell his method short. This pie turned out pretty good.”
“What!?” cried Ben.
“Really?” asked Eddie. “It’s a little too sweet for my liking.”
Richie gasped in mock despair. “Traitors! The both of you!”
“I guess you know what that means Richie,” sighed Ben. “Eddie, you’re mine now. Bev, I hope the rest of your life with Richie is as wonderful as our short time together was.”
Bev snorted as Richie said, “Excuse you, Eddie is his own man and will not just be passed from me to you.”
“Well, I guess I’m ok with that arrangement,” replied Ben as he gave a dramatic sigh and leaned his head on Bev’s shoulder.
“Well I definitely don’t think it’s so bad a deal,” she said, giving him a quick kiss on the top of his head before taking another bite. “At least all the fighting really started with dessert and not the main course.”
“That is true,” Richie agreed. “Though I don’t know. I think gravy would be easier to get out of hair rather than caramel.”
“That is all on you,” said Ben.
“How? You squirted it in my hair?”
“Because you thought using your head was a great way to block the pie!”
“I mean, it did work.”
“I just don’t get why you wanted to pour a shit ton of sugar in but then a drizzle of caramel was too much.”
“Don’t like caramel.”
“Urgh!”
Richie grabbed a fork and forced his way into the piece he’d sliced for Eddie. “Well I think it’s perfect,” Richie said after he took a bite. “And I’ll acknowledge the slight contribution you made.”
“Slight? I made the biggest contribution. Keeping you in check.”
“Pfft, like someone has to keep me in check.”
“Eddie,” begged Ben. “Help me out here man.”
“I hold no power over him. Unless it’s in the morning and I’m blocking the coffee pot,” snorted Eddie.

“Bev?”

She shrugged. “I just know that whenever we meet up again, I can’t wait to see you try to cook something more complicated than this.”

“I can only imagine the chaos then,” laughed Eddie.

They finished eating dessert. Eddie and Bev helped with cleaning up and that night, Ben stayed over to wish them well in the morning. Before that, Eddie had reorganized all the things he was bringing in the car and had thrown away anything he didn’t need. They were driving back, and the plan was to try and get to Chicago in a day.

Eddie went to bed knowing he would miss Ben and Bev, but still the happiest he’d been in a while as he looked forward to going home.

The next day, there wasn’t much time for breakfast what with the twelve hour drive ahead of them. Eddie simply got the coffee going, they all shared a quick cup, and then Bev and Ben were finally hugging them goodbye.

“Thank you for everything,” Eddie said.

“I’d say anytime, but…” Bev replied.

“No, I do not plan on a repeat,” chuckled Eddie. “But I’ll still miss the time we had.”

“Text us when you make it home,” Ben said.

“You got it,” Richie replied. “Good luck with everything.”

“You too. And let us know when you go on tour again. I’m looking forward to seeing you keep that promise,” said Bev.

“I’ll make sure of it. Even though I’m sure my assistant will lose it when he hears I need to free up at least five seats in the front row.”

Eddie laughed, just imagining it.

“Good luck on the drive over. Bye guys,” said Ben.

They all hugged again and then got in the car. Eddie chose to drive for the first part and Richie got comfortable in the passenger’s seat.

As they drove off, Ben nudged Bev. “I still don’t get why Eddie was determined to sleep on the couch pretty much the entire time. Do they really think we couldn’t tell?”

Bev shrugged. “Let them come out in their own time. Though I wouldn’t put it past them to not say anything specific until it’s their damn wedding day.”

Ben laughed. “I doubt we’ll even hear of that. It’s going to be some spur of the moment thing in Vegas or something.”

“I can see that,” admitted Bev before she gave him a quick kiss and they both went back inside.
Back in the car, Richie had already pushed his chair back and put his feet up on the dashboard. With a long sigh, he said, “No offense to the comfort of Bev’s guest room, but I am so ready to be home again.”

“Me too. I haven’t been there long, but it’s felt more like home than any other place I’ve lived.”

“Want to watch a movie when we get back?”

“I should probably unpack so the place isn’t too crowded with random boxes and bags.”

“Save that for tomorrow,” Richie said. “You deserve a break.”

“Ok, ok. What movie are you thinking of?”

“Well, Halloween’s coming up soon. Prometheus?”

“Isn’t that the Alien prequel that no one was sure if it was actually a prequel until after it came out?”

“Pretty much.”

“I only ever saw Aliens.”

“Hang on a second, I snuck us both into that film because you convinced me you had seen the first one,” said Richie.

“Ok, I may have a confession to make—”

“You never saw the original!?” cried Richie. “Well at least now it makes since why Aliens fucking terrified you. Why the hell did you lie about that?”

“You said you didn’t want a cry baby to go with you and ruin the experience. And you wouldn’t believe I wouldn’t cry unless I’d seen the original movie. But I just really wanted to hang out with you so…I lied?”

“That is fucking adorable. I hope you realize that.”

“Naw. What’s cute is you letting me crush your hand into fucking pieces for two hours because I thought I was going to have a heart attack,” snorted Eddie.

Richie shot him a teasing smile. “Are you going to need to hold my hand again?”

“I think I’ll manage this time,” laughed Eddie. “But I guess we should watch the original, right? I’m what? A few decades overdue?”

“That’s an understatement. But yeah. Let’s do the original. And order in?”

“Sounds perfect,” smiled Eddie as he continued to make his way through New York traffic and finally left the island behind.

Over the next several hours, they switched every time they made a major stop, bathroom break, food, gas, and they finally agreed on the third hour mark that whoever was in the passenger’s seat would pick the music and the driver just had to shut his mouth so they weren’t arguing the entire time.

When they finally reached Chicago, because of the time change it was almost ten thirty. Eddie and Richie did their best to get everything they could once they’d parked. The few things that got left behind, they decided to grab in the morning.
After Eddie walked in and dropped everything he was carrying, the first thing he did was pick up the key Richie had made for him. There hadn’t been any reason to take it with him to New York, but now he could really appreciate how good it felt putting it onto his keyring. Then he looked around and, ignoring the items they’d just put down…

“Did you…did you clean before you came to New York?” It wasn’t perfect, but there had clearly been a hell of a lot more work put into everything than Richie normally did.

“I wasn’t sure how long we’d be in New York but…yeah. I don’t really care, but I figured you would appreciate it. Even managed to put most of my clothes up on hangers rather than crowding the floor of the closet.”

“Thank you, Richie.” It was such a small, seemingly inconsequential thing to do. Yet for Eddie, it made his already good mood brighten tenfold. He had a feeling he would get used to this feeling of someone thinking about him and doing little things just because. Eddie looked forward to the day when such small acts of kindness were no longer so surprising. “So, Alien then?”

“I’ll grab the popcorn.”
After the first few days of being back, Eddie finally felt settled. He’d unpacked so that his items were truly mixed in with Richie’s now, not just a few shirts and a towel. Though Eddie had been thinking of it as home, now it no longer looked like just Richie’s apartment. It looked like theirs.

Then a fresh haircut, some interviews set up, and Eddie felt like he was finally putting his roots down in Chicago. He and Richie started up their usual routine again, only instead of Eddie spending several hours a day doing work on his laptop, he was looking at job listings or going off for interviews. It also meant they started their usual breakfast routine and on the fourth day back, they met CC at the restaurant during brunch. She was at the cash register when they came in, but the moment her eyes caught sight of them, her face lit up.

“You’re back! Max take over.”

“What—”

CC literally jumped the counter and dodged the customers so she could practically tackle Eddie with a hug.

“It’s so great you’re back! And back for good, right?” asked CC.

“I am fully moved in. Actually, I’m looking for a job now.”

“Nice! And Richie,” she punched him in the shoulder leading him to mouth a dramatic, faux ‘Ow’.

“You look good too. Jason know you’re back?”

“Already texted him. I have a meeting with him later today. You?”

“I managed to kill a couple of open mic nights. Also did a few auditions for some nights in the next couple of weeks. Haven’t gotten a call back yet, but one of them is looking promising.”

“Well done,” smiled Eddie. “Tell me when you know for sure. I promise I won’t miss this one.”

“Hey, it’s no problem about the last one. Things get in the way. You know? So I know, mimosa for you Richie. Eddie? Come on, I know you said you finished up on your prescription before you left.”

“Yeah, why not.”

“Yes! I’ll be right back. And the usual?”

They both nodded.

“Cool!” CC hurried back, dodging around a few people so she could get back behind the counter.
Eddie and Richie sat down. They talked about their plans for the day, Eddie had two interviews lined up, and CC dropped off food and drinks during it. At one point though, Eddie got up to use the restroom and while he was away, CC took advantage to slide into his empty chair and shoot Richie her classic, big puppy dog expression.

“So…”

“If you’re about to ask if I’d told him, no.”

“Damn it. The way you were looking at each other, I thought you had. But things went well right? Eddie got through it all?”

“I wouldn’t say went well is the way to phrase it, but it ended great. Now he just needs to wait for the divorce papers to come through so it’s official in the eyes of the law. But yeah, he’s fucking free.”

“So he’s stable. Right?”

Richie easily saw what she was trying to get at. He looked down. “I mean, he still has to actually get a job, then there’s the time it takes to get accustomed to that job, make sure it’s what he wants to do, finding a new routine—”

“Richie.”

“Yeah?”

“You really still aren’t going to tell him. Are you?”

He shrugged.

“You realize you deserve to be happy to. Right?”

“I am happy. I have Eddie back and I managed to help him get through his shitty divorce. If I have to be fucking blue balled for the rest of my life, so fucking be it. But I got him back. He smiled and laughed before, but now? There’s a weight off his shoulders that was crushing him before, even if he hid it well. Now that weight is gone though. He’s truly happy now. It’s all I could ask for.”

“God damn. You really fucking mean that. I don’t think I could ever promise something like that for someone.”

“You’ve never been in love before.”

“Fair enough. Just…no. I did promise I’d stay out of it. Just know I support whatever you decide to do, whether that’s say something or not.” At that moment, CC paused and glanced back. She saw Eddie headed their way so she changed the subject. “By the way, wanted to know if we could throw around some jokes again? Go over sets?”

“Yeah. Sure. I’ll text you a date.”

CC pumped her fist into the air. “Yes! I am totally your little protégé.”

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

“Don’t worry. I’ll keep it on the downlow. Don’t want to let the other comedians get jealous,” she said with a quick wink before hurrying off.
“You agree to another work session between you two?” asked Eddie as he sat down.

“Yeah. I don’t know what is wrong with me,” Richie replied.

Eddie laughed, knowing he didn’t mean that one bit.

They finished eating, said bye to CC on the way out, and then continued with their plans.

Over the coming days, Eddie went in for nearly every interview he was offered. He made sure to stay on top of calling back for information, constantly checked for other job listings, and then finished solidifying things like his car insurance policy, going around and choosing a new doctor, changing his address on anything official, things like that. He thankfully didn’t have to follow up much with the divorce. After reading through Myra’s terms, he pretty much agreed right away and now it was just a matter of waiting for a judge to formally sign the papers.

A few of the jobs he went in for a second interview. He had a couple where it looked like they were going to hire him. If one asked, he would take it, though his current list wasn’t exactly the change of scenery that he’d been hoping for.

However, before he had to go through the process of weighing the pros and cons of just going ahead and accepting a job offer or waiting, one job that had particularly intrigued him finally called back.

After he answered the phone and the woman on the other end introduced herself, she said, “We were hoping for a smoother transition, but some personal emergencies meant our former head accountant had to quit before his intended notice. Would you mind starting this week?”

“N-no. No, not at all!” Eddie had to keep himself from sounding too excited as he tried to keep his voice professional.

“Oh, that’s wonderful. Would the day after tomorrow work? I’d like to get you in and caught up to speed as soon as possible, though I’m sure it won’t take long for you considering your own background.”

“I mean, if sooner means better I can come by tomorrow.”

“Really? Oh thank god. Yes, perfect. How does ten fifteen sound?”

“I can make that. Where would we—”

“Oh, the lobby in the public entrance is fine. Just go to the first desk and tell them your name. I’ll see you tomorrow Mr. Kaspbrak. Thank you again.”

“Thank you. And what was your name again?”

“Dr. Eason but Jordan is fine. You’ll learn we’re a very welcoming bunch. Thank you again. See you tomorrow.”

“See you.” Eddie put the phone down— “Fuck yes!!”

Richie’s head popped around the corner. He’d just gotten out of the shower so his hair was wet and slicked back and he hadn’t grabbed a shirt yet. “What happened?”

“I got a job! I go in tomorrow.”

“Nice! Where at?”
“The Natural History Museum here. In their interviews, they’d talked about their current head of accounting leaving due to health issues. I think they might have planned to ask me in this week anyways to get acquainted with him, but he had to take sudden leave so they need someone right away. And I got it!”

“That is awesome. Not the health issues thing obviously but you. You getting a job. Now you just have to promise me that if you find a magical tablet and the statues and skeletons come to life at night, you are dragging my ass over there immediately.”

“I promise I will?” questioned Eddie with a laugh. “I don’t think I get that reference.”

“I know what we’re watching tonight then!” Richie called as he headed back into the bathroom.

Eddie smiled at that. He then spent the rest of the time picking out what to wear for tomorrow. He got an email from Jordan as well. Reading through, it gave him official confirmation of the time, who he would meet with, and that he just needed to bring identification for the first day.

Eddie was admittedly so excited it was kind of hard to sleep. If all went well, the job was a perfect mix of a new atmosphere with familiar work that he’d been looking for. Despite his excitement, he managed to get some sleep though and got up early. Richie wished him good luck as he headed out, and Eddie used his car to drive over to the museum.

The place hadn’t originally been his first pick, but after sitting down at the first, then second interview, he’d really liked the people there and the whole personality of the place. It certainly offered to be more lively than any place he’d worked prior too.

He’d gone early, then waited in his car for almost ten minutes, and then finally jumped out and hurried up the steps so he would be a perfect five minutes early when he got inside.

There were two large groups of school children that Eddie had to wiggle his way through until he got to the first desk. One glance at the tired, underpaid teachers that were just barely keeping everything under control certainly didn’t make Eddie envious.

“Hi, my name’s Eddie Kaspbrak. I’m supposed to meet—”

“Yes! I remember you. Talazia Waters. I was there at your first interview.”

“Of course, it’s good to see you again,” Eddie said, quickly putting two and two together as she was one of the main board members for the museum. “Pardon me for asking, but do you usually run the front desk like this?”

“No, not usually,” she said with a tired laugh. “We’ve had several call outs today. Flu season, you know? And it does get so cold here in Chicago.”

“And it probably doesn’t help that it’s clearly school field trip day,” Eddie kindly said with a glance back to the mass of children.

“No, but it is what it is, and we’ve dealt with far worse. Because of everything, Jordan can’t meet with you. Not right away. Instead I have-ah! Here he comes, David Cheung. He’ll actually be working in your department so some of the more basic details he can show you and at the very least get you settled.”

As the man in question came up, Talazia introduced them before running off to where she was needed. David gave Eddie a quick once over.
“So, I guess you’re technically my new boss. You know, I was going to get the position.”

“Oh, I um…”

David hit him hard on the shoulder with a laugh. “I’m just messing with you. I mean, the pay raise would have been nice but the change to hours and added responsibility? Wouldn’t have gone over well with the wife and three kids,” he said as he started to direct Eddie away from the lobby. “So I turned it down. If anything, I’m pretty happy we’ve got you. I took a glance at your resume and I got to say, you’re pretty overqualified. What made you choose a place like this compared to a big cushy, New York job?”

“Mostly just because of the moving. And no matter the pay rate, when the people you work with are so lifeless, it’s hard to want to come into work every day,” Eddie answered honestly.

“I hear you there. Well hopefully you’ll learn to like this place. And if the more professional attire is what you’re in to, go for it. It’s whatever you’re comfortable with.”

Eddie blushed. “Is that your nice way of saying I’m overdressed?”

“Well, I mean unless there’s an official meeting or you suddenly have to replace one of the tour guides, you don’t have to worry about any official standard of appearance here. And the only way you or me would end up as tour guides is if literally everyone else in this building disappeared first.”

That managed to get a laugh out of Eddie.

“But no. You at least scored some extra brownie points with Waters coming in like that, but Roberts, one of the archivists, literally wears flip flops, cameo pants, and kitty sweaters every day without fail. Seriously, business casual, a graphic tee, suits, sweaters, whatever you want to wear short of a speedo or going nude, do it.”

Eddie laughed. “Thanks for the advice.”

“No problem. Now, before we really get into all the magic that happens behind the displays, let me show you the usual employee entrance. It’s fine to come in through the front, but this way will be faster on a typical day.”

David took him around, introducing Eddie to people as he went and first just showing him some of the main rooms and spaces. He then guided him into the office that would be his. It was underground and was a stark contrast from the high-rise office he’d had with a wall of windows. Yet somehow, it felt far homier and more welcoming. David sat him down, gave him log in information, showed him some of the basics. By that point, Jordon was available. She came and replaced David and was able to show Eddie everything else.

“I realize that’s a lot,” she said by the end of it. “But…”

“It makes sense so far,” Eddie smiled. “And I’ll ask for help if I need it.”

“That’s exactly what I like to hear. Now I set up a few small tasks for today,” she set down several files on his desk. “It would be great if you can get them done, but again no pressure. I realize this is your first day. And come to me when you’re ready to go. These first two weeks you’re on hourly pay, just to see how things work out. Though between you and me, I think you’ll stick around for a while. After that you’ll go to salary and in the next couple of days I’ll probably get you the necessary documents to sign for health insurance purposes, bonus policies, all that riveting legal work. But again, just call if you need anything. There’s a list of numbers for all the internal phones and David is also right down the hall if you have any immediate questions. And I also realize that was a lot. Still
“All good?”

“All good,” assured Eddie, though he appreciated her want to make sure he was comfortable. “It feels good to already have a reason to keep busy.”

“Great. And ideally, you won’t have to be here every day for work. Some of it, once you get all your accounts and everything set up, can be done from home. We just ask that at least four of your five workdays you come in. And for you, you’ll only need to come in on the weekend if there’s an emergency. I’ll try to come check in before you’re ready to go. Have a good day.”

“Good luck up there,” Eddie said, noting her slightly frazzled tone.

“Thanks, I need it,” she said with a kind smile before darting out of the office.

Eddie quickly went looking through everything again and also went back over everything David and Jordan had shown him just to make sure he had everything remembered. To be fair, most of the processes were ones Eddie was familiar with. The only real difference was the names of any items, people, or labels.

Going through everything, Eddie honestly found himself enjoying it. The work itself had never bored him, but the setting was already more welcoming and he hadn’t met a person yet that he disliked.

Eventually, Jordan came back.

“I honestly expected you to have asked to leave before now. You have a special hobby in history and the past or something?”

“Not really,” Eddie said after he finished typing in one last thing. “Why do you ask?”

“Just curious if that’s why you wanted to work here. Not every job here obviously requires a degree in history, but most have some type of passion for it.”

“Sorry to disappoint but no,” smiled Eddie. “I’ve just missed working regularly, and you were some of the first people that finally gave me an offer. Still, I’m enjoying it so far.”

“Well I’m glad. And I know you’re new, but we do an annual Halloween event for the public. I know I just said you won’t usually have to work weekends, but extra hands from all the departments is great at that time. And we’ll obviously give you a day off during the week to make up for it. And most don’t mind working on the day as we have a private, work Halloween party immediately after we shut everything down to the public. Anyone you haven’t met in the next week of so you can meet there, and you are more than welcomed to bring a guest. Most do. Now, let me go ahead and show you how to mark your time before you get put on salary.”

Eddie quickly logged out of everything, grabbed his coat and followed her out. After signing off his time, he also got his identification badge and left. Since he was parked closer to the public entrance, he went through the lobby again, taking a moment to just stare at the large structures they had there before finally going out the main doors. He headed down the steps quickly and started to take his phone out to tell Richie how it had gone.

However, he quickly saw he didn’t need to do that.

“Richie??”

He was leaning against Eddie’s car. He grinned and gave a quick wave.
“How the hell did you get here?” asked Eddie as he walked over and gave him a quick hug.

“Just took public transportation. Wanted to surprise you on your first day and take you out to eat, but it didn’t make sense to drive my own car here since you did. You know? So, how was it?”

“It was good. Really good.”

“So, going to come back for day two?”

“Definitely.”

“And did you happen to see a magical golden tablet while you were in there or a really hot mummy?”

“I still have no idea what you’re talking about,” laughed Eddie.

“Fair warning, if you happen to have three old janitors, one who looks suspiciously like Dick van Dyke, they’re going to try and steal it.”

“This is all going right over my head.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll get it after the movie tonight,” grinned Richie as he got in the passenger’s side and Eddie followed.

They drove out of the parking lot and Eddie managed to end a great workday with a wonderful dinner and a perfect movie night.
Last chapter of ACT II here we go! Now, I'll be honest, this chapter was going to be pushed back seeing as in a divorce of no contest and with all paperwork immediately turned in, it usually takes between 6 weeks to several months for a judge to officially approve. However, we're over 75,000 words in, it's been a month, some of the things going forward I decided would work better if they happened after this chapter, and I don't want to torture all of you too much longer. So without further adieu...

If there was one word Eddie would use to describe living with Richie, it would be domestic.

It had felt good before, but now that Eddie was truly settled, he felt like he was really living again. He did miss getting to just stay and watch Richie practice and write up jokes all day, but it was nice to have even more people in his life and to have a work environment he truly enjoyed going to everyday.

He’d even agreed to going to his work’s private Halloween party after they egged him on for a bit, and of course Eddie had asked Richie to be his guest. Richie had agreed right away. Besides the work affair though, Richie also had a private party at one of the clubs that he usually went to that would be even later that night. Somehow, he managed to convince Eddie to go with him too. Then on top of all that, CC also got confirmation she would be performing for a special Halloween show the night before, meaning that entire weekend was going to be a busy but fun one.

Then, as if to make everything better, a few days before that weekend, Eddie got some mail.

Richie had since gotten him a copy of the mailbox key. Since Eddie was the one who usually got home later, he always went ahead and grabbed anything if Richie hadn’t.

That day, he shoved everything under his arm. He headed upstairs into the apartment, flipped through the mail, and then—

Excitement and trepidation shot through Eddie as he yelled out, “Richie!”

“Woah! Yeah? What? What is it?”

Richie scrambled from behind the kitchen counter and rushed over. Eddie had already thrown the other mail to the side. He opened up the one, eyes quickly scanning over it.

“What? What is—oof!”

The paper got crumbled up in Eddie’s hands as he hugged Richie as hard as he could. The final piece was in place. Or more accurately, had been removed. “I’m divorced!”

“Holy shit. That’s so fucking great,” Richie said as he finally hugged Eddie back. “We need to celebrate tonight.”

“Tonight? Well I do have tomorrow off since I’m working this weekend for Halloween.”
“See? Come on. Your first night of being a damn bachelor in years. We can’t stay cooped up in here.”

“I wouldn’t call myself a bachelor,” chuckled Eddie. “Certainly not if I’m living with you. But…”

“Come on. When was the last time you drank without a care in the world?”

“Probably never.”

“Exactly! Think of it as celebrating and getting to recreate the classic college night out you never had.”

“If the night ends with me puking into a toilet…”

“I’ll hold your hair back.”

Eddie snorted. “We’re not getting that bad. But…”

“Yes?”

“Ok! Yes, we can celebrate,” laughed Eddie. “But I am determined to only get slightly tipsy.”

“Deal. And we can go to that bar near us so we can walk there and back without worrying about grabbing a cab.”

“Ok, ok,” laughed Eddie. “Let me take a shower first and then we can go.”

“Yes,” grinned Richie. “And hey, I know you like paying for your own things, but I am paying for everything tonight. Food, drink. You decide you want a pony, I’ll fucking get it for you.”

“Ah yes, because that would fit so well in this already small apartment. But ok. I’ll let you spoil me this once as long as you know this is a onetime thing.”

“Ha, that’s what you think. Just wait until your birthday comes around.”

“You wait until your birthday comes around,” Eddie warned. “Then we’ll see who can spoil who more.”

“You’re on.”

Eddie laughed as he quickly went into the shower and then got changed into more casual clothes. With it already feeling like winter, he pulled a sweater over his shirt and then sat on the bed to tie his shoes. As he came out, he noted how Richie was waving his hands around and mumbling under his breath as he stared at a wall.

“Practicing a new set?” asked Eddie.

Richie jumped a little. “Yeah, um…something like that.”

“Will I get to hear it?”

“Probably not. I don’t think I’ll ever perform it,” sighed Richie. He almost looked disappointed, like there was something more to what he was saying. However, he quickly cheered up again and said, “Come on, let’s go make some memories.”

They headed out the door and were finally out on the street. The bar that was just a couple of blocks
down had been an occasional place to hang out when they felt like leaving their apartment but didn’t want to go too far. They’d obviously gone more often once Eddie had healed up. However, even before then, they’d gone a couple of times, the place having some of the best fries in town. As they sat down, Richie said, “So, how was your day?”

“Got to go into the maze that is the archives searching for Liz so she could sign off on something. They’re trying to digitize a lot but they obviously still have all the physical copies and their computer system isn’t completely up to speed. Not that I mind. It’s nice knowing my day isn’t just me sitting behind my desk.”

“And what about—what’s his name—David? He finally catch on that you’re not a bro and stopped punching you in the shoulder every time you have a chat?”

“It’s changed to a slap on the back. I honestly don’t know which one is better,” laughed Eddie. “I don’t mind though. He’s nice. Talks a lot about his kids. Also just talks a lot in general. Might be as talkative as you are sometimes.”

“I better step up my game then.”

“There really is no need for that. Though I do enjoy listening to you more so I guess if you really want to try and out talk David, that’s ok with me.”

“I guess I better get to talking then.”

Eddie snorted. “And your day?”

They continued to talk, and to be fair, it wasn’t much different from any other time they’d gone out. The only big difference was that there was definitely more drinking involved and Richie was determined to pay for every last cent despite the fact that they usually went back and forth on paying for things and Richie had paid last time.

The night continued on and though Eddie had said he would only get tipsy, knowing he wasn’t going to work tomorrow and just the excitement of finally being divorced kind of caught up with him. They stayed for hours and no amount of fries and glasses of water were completely going to displace the alcohol in his system when they finally stumbled home with Eddie leaning on Richie the entire way.

“I think it was that last shot. That last shot did me in,” mumbled Eddie before he erupted into giggling into Richie’s shoulder.

“Shot? How about those three fancy cocktails? Anymore and you’d be on your ass right now,” laughed Richie. He was equally drunk. However, he just had a bit more control over his hand-eye coordination. Though when they reached the door to the building, it was clear that coordination only went so far. He missed the lock three times before getting his key in which had Eddie in stitches.

They used each other completely for support in order to get up the stairs.

“I think I drank more than all my days in…what’s that place?” mumbled Eddie.

“What place?”

“The school place.”

“School?”
“No, the school place. Adult school place.”

“You mean college?”

“No, not that. The adult school thing.”

“University.”

“No. I think the word I’m looking for is…college.”

Richie laughed hard at that and again had trouble getting his key into their individual apartment door. Eddie was leaning up against it when Richie finally pushed the key in and turned it. With a slight sound of surprise, Eddie went down hard, though he of course grabbed Richie at the last second and they both hit the floor with a loud thud.

“You did that on purpose,” Richie slurred as he rubbed his head.

“Did not. You opened the door.”

“Doors are meant to be opened.”

“Or are they meant to be closed?”

“Hmm, that’s a good point. What is…the purpose of a door?” mumbled Richie who let his arms fall to his side and partially drape over Eddie.

“Who invented doors?”

“Guy named Doormen?”

“No, that would be like…the guy who first waited at a door,” Eddie responded. He pushed himself back so his feet were out of the way. He waited for Richie to get up and grab the keys from the lock. When Richie had them and then fell back onto the floor, Eddie kicked the door shut. His head hit the floor again and he looked back at the inside of the apartment. “I am not making it to the bed.”

“Why not the pullout?”

“I can probably make it to that.”

Eddie sat up way too quickly. He leaned on his hand to steady himself which happened to be pressing against Richie’s face. Richie knocked him off. Eddie fell back on his elbow before pushing himself up again and finally managing to pull off his shoes.

“I’m gonna pass out,” Eddie mumbled. He got back to his feet and managed to somewhat gracefully get on the pull-out. He shoved the pillows together and fell back against them.

Richie got up, tripped, and landed across Eddie’s stomach.

“Smooooth landing,” Eddie said with another laugh.

“You can’t pass out yet.”

“Hmm?”

“Got something to tell you.” Richie rolled over so they could actually look at each other.
“Is this a funny voice thing? Don’t do a funny voice. You can’t do a funny voice drunk.”

“Sure I can.”

They both stared at each other for a hot second before Eddie finally said, “Oh, that was one of your funny voices?”

“Yep.”

“Richie, that was just your voice.”

“No it wasn’t.”

“Was too.”

“Nope. Now stop distracting me. Gotta tell you something.”

“Should have said it when we were sober. Not gonna get out shit now,” snorted Eddie.

“Probably. But…liquid courage and all…all…you keep playing with my hair and I’m gonna keep losing my train of thought,” mumbled Richie.

He pulled himself up and slumped against Eddie’s shoulder. Eddie just shifted positions and kept running his fingers through Richie’s hair. Richie had already forgotten what he was going to say next as he let out a contented sigh.

“Have I ever said I liked your hair?”

Richie shook his head.

“I really like your hair. Always liked your hair. Wasn’t sure if it was alright to do this though.”

“It is completely alright. You can do this forever,” sighed Richie. He didn’t really think about how he threw an arm over Eddie. He just did it and pulled him closer. A moment passed and as Eddie was still running his fingernails gently along his scalp, Richie mumbled, “I feel like you’re searching for fleas.”

“You’ve got a clean bill of health.”

Richie snorted.

“I really like your hair. And your eyes. You’ve got pretty eyes too,” sighed Eddie as he leaned his head back.

“That’s gay Eddie.”

“Is it? Always thought you had pretty eyes.”

“That’s always been pretty gay then,” Richie replied as he looked up at him.

At the same time, Eddie took Richie’s glasses off him and put them on his own face. “How do I look?”

“Don’t know. Can’t see.”

They both burst into laughter again. Richie’s arm sunk lower, practically holding Eddie’s waist as
Eddie moved one leg in between Richie’s.

“I really like your eyes though. Really, really fucking blue,” sighed Eddie as Richie’s glasses fell, resting on the tip of his nose.

“Blue how?”

“Really blue. Blue like…like that liquid thing.”

“The ocean?”

“Minty mouthwash.”

Richie laughed again as Eddie tried to smooth out the slight laughter lines around Richie’s eyes.

“So pretty…”

“Ow! Well you poked my pretty eye with your finger.”

Eddie’s hand-eye coordination was still severely off. “I’m sorry,” he laughed as Richie covered up his eye with one hand. “If I kissed it better, would that help?”

“You can always try and find out.” Richie rubbed at his face, trying to get back on track with that original train of thought. “I still need to tell you something though.”

“Yeah?”

“Really, really important. Just…never mind. Probably better if I shut up now anyways…”

Richie trailed off as Eddie pulled his hands down. Eddie carefully held Richie’s face and smoothed out any slight wrinkles. He gently touched Richie’s eyelids so he would close his eyes.

“What’s doing?” mumbled Richie, his eyes now closed.

“Still need to kiss it better. Right?”

“Well, I mean…”

Richie trailed off again. Eddie went in and completely missed the mark, kissing Richie lightly on the temple.

Then Eddie kissed him just a little lower, near his cheekbone.

Richie’s eyes fluttered open. “This…is real. Right?”

“Yeah. You know. Kissing it better,” murmured Eddie. He pulled back slightly. They were almost nose to nose. “You feel better?”

“Still kind of hurts.”

“How about this?” Eddie kissed the corner of Richie’s mouth first. The second time he managed to hit his target.

Eddie gently pushed against Richie’s lips. One of his hands stayed cupping Richie’s face, slowly dragging his thumbnail along his chin as Richie shivered against him. Their mouths opened slightly, and then Richie gently put a hand between them and pushed Eddie back.
“Do you know what you’re doing?” murmured Richie as he struggled to pull every logical process to the forefront rather than the fog that it so desperately wanted to fall back under.

“Hmm, don’t know,” sighed Eddie. “But I’m happy now.” He pushed against Richie’s hand and gently kissed him again. Then Eddie fully relaxed against him.

Richie relaxed too. He was too tired and too drunk to try and further the conversation and his mind still wasn’t completely sure if what had happened had been real or his mind playing tricks on him.

Eddie just hummed softly, nuzzling against Richie as they both slipped into sleep.
Phew! Did not expect this chapter to be as long as it was but it definitely didn't feel right breaking it up in anyway. I hope you guys enjoy and don't worry, there's a bit of angst but I don't think this chapter will turn out as bad as all of you are fearing <3

“Wow, you look like you had a long night. I’m assuming you want water as a starter today.”

CC already had a glass and set it down in front of Eddie.

“So, where’s Richie?”

“Still asleep,” murmured Eddie. He downed the glass of water in one go and then looked up. CC cocked her eyebrow. He opened his mouth. Then closed it. He tried to dredge up the blurred memories and then… “I think I kissed him.”

“Seriously! What the hell are you doing here then?” asked CC as she sat down in front of him.

“I just…I don’t know. Trying to think things through.” Eddie rubbed at his face, trying to drag some life back into himself. He hadn’t planned to come here. His legs had just kind of moved on pure muscle memory. He’d tried to remember finer details, but they hadn’t been coming through. He’d kissed Richie. He was almost positive of that, but everything else had him utterly confused. He’d planned to just stop in to take a break from walking, but CC had spotted him right away.

Eddie’s mind came back to the present as CC asked, “What needs to be thought through?”

“I mean, he’s my best friend and I kissed him.”

“Yeah. You also live together.”

“So?”

“Ok,” sighed CC. “I can tell this is going to be a long conversation, but I am willing to strap in for you. Now, obviously you love Richie. Right?”

“Well yeah. I love all my friends.”

“Ok. But if you had to choose one to live with, to literally start a life over with, that would be Richie. Right?”

“That’s literally what I’ve done with him. So…yes?”

“And you enjoy being around him. You have rituals. I’m guessing just seeing him smile lights you up. Makes your day better,” suggested CC.

“Well yes.”

“You enjoy walking side by side too. Yeah? You certainly never fight him when he has an arm thrown over your shoulder.”
“I do like being close to him. But that still doesn’t answer why I would kiss him. I mean, I enjoy the company of all my friends.” Eddie was glad he’d come here, even if he hadn’t meant to. Talking to CC at least felt better than being locked up in his head, but he still felt just as confused.

“Yeah, but it does feel different with Richie. Right?”

Eddie was silent for a moment.

“Like, ok. What are some things you notice about Richie that you don’t really take note of in your friends? How about that?”

After a moment, Eddie murmured, “His eyes. I think… I think I talked about his eyes a lot last night. I’ve never told him how much I like them. Actually, kind of always tried to shut those thoughts down before they even occurred. But if I’m admitting it now… I always have.”

CC flashed a comforting smile. “Just knowing he’s looking your way makes you feel good?”

“Well sure. He makes me feel safe. Even a stupid comment or joke from him can cheer me up. And his hair… The curve of his lips… The few times he’s grabbed my hand… Or I’ve grabbed his…”

“And you haven’t hyper focused on any of these details with any of your other friends.”

“Not really. Certainly not to the same degree.”

Now CC resisted the urge to groan. “And you’re still trying to figure out why you kissed him?”

“Well he’s my best friend.”

“Eddie, it’s ok to love your best friend.”

“I already love him—”

“No, I mean be in love with your best friend.”

Eddie stopped again. He leaned his chin on his hand. He opened his mouth a couple of times but just couldn’t find the right words. He finally just repeated himself. “He’s my best friend.”

“Yeah, relationships can be built on that,” CC tried.

“Well I know that. Bev and Ben are great together.”

CC shook her head. “Let me rephrase that. I mean a relationship should be built on friendship. Or if it starts physical, it needs to turn into friendship to work.”

They stared at each other for a long time.

CC rubbed her own face now. “Are you seriously not getting it?”

“No, I do. But it’s… not all relationships are like that. Certainly none of mine were.”

CC’s eyes went wide. “Eddie.”

“Yes?”

“I’m going to tell you something and I want you to take it to heart. Falling in love with your best friend is not the exception. At least it shouldn’t be. Ideally, it’s the rule. Any relationship that has
even a chance at lasting a long time, at being healthy and safe and good, needs that kind of basis. Your partner should be one of your best friends if not your actual best friend.”

“I…suppose that makes sense. Would certainly add to the mountain of reasons why nothing ever worked for me.”

“Well Richie is your best friend. And you’ve already got the attraction thing down. So the next logical step is…”

“Wait. I do?”

“Jesus Eddie! You just told me how much you like every god damn feature on that man’s face.”

“That’s…attraction?”

“Hold on a second. You can’t recognize when you’re attracted to someone?”

“Not really.”

“So you’re telling me you have never felt attracted to anyone you were ever with?”

“…no?”

“Not even at the start when you married your wife?”

Eddie shook his head.

“So why did you marry her?”

“I just…I thought it was love at the time. I thought…I thought she was the only kind of person who could love me like that. I felt like I was just obligated to go through with it.”

“She is definitely not the only one who could have ever loved you like that,” CC said. “And I’m pretty sure she never really loved you like that anyways no matter what she said. A person that does love you like that will remember how you like your coffee. They look forward to waking up with you and just having the chance to see you. They ask you how your day was, and even if they aren’t personally interested in your hobbies or job, they can still find joy just from hearing the excitement in your own voice.

“They’re willing to compromise and so are you because you both want to see the other happy and you both manage to enjoy things you wouldn’t normally enjoy simply because the other person is having a good time. And attraction isn’t always a part of that kind of love, but considering how you went on about Richie, it’s clearly a part of the love you feel for him.”

Eddie looked down at the table.

“You kissing Richie is not some drunken fluke. You kissing Richie is built up on the fact that I think you’ve always known you’ve loved him. You just didn’t know how to express it or feel like you had the freedom to experiment with that kind of expression until you got out of that messed up relationship and alcohol loosened your defenses a bit.”

Eddie finally looked back up, brow slightly furrowed. “I’m…in love with Richie? But if that’s the case…what if…what if he doesn’t…if he doesn’t feel—”

“Ok. I’m gonna stop you right there because I dealt with enough of this kind of angst from Richie and I can’t go for round two. Literally everything I just said, helping you deconstruct how you feel
and think of Richie? That is exactly how he thinks of you.”

Eddie rubbed at his eyes. When he’d woken up, he hadn’t…he hadn’t known what to think or do. He’d slipped out of Richie’s arms and set Richie’s glasses to the side, however those had gotten on his face. He’d just walked out of the apartment because he didn’t know…didn’t know…

Was this what being in love was? Was that why he’d never noticed any of this before because he’d never had anything to compare it to? Eddie certainly had never had that first date that was supposed to make you go all soft inside. He’d never had that feeling that dating was anything more than him fulfilling a societal requirement; it had never been truly fun. He’d never connected with anyone, despite how he felt he had to go forward with it anyways.

Yet he connected with Richie. He connected with the losers but Richie in particular… And he supposed if he compared their outings together, some of them could be almost compared to dates especially from an outside perspective. They’d certainly brought more enjoyment out of Eddie than any actual date he’d ever been on in his life. Which meant…

But with Richie…

He was…

Was he…

Had he always been…

“Uh, you have your phone on you?” asked CC. She had hers pulled out and seemed to be in the middle of texting someone.

Eddie quickly patted his pockets, but he’d been in such a fog that he hadn’t even grabbed his wallet that morning. He was lucky that he’d remembered the keys and hadn’t walked out the door without them. “No. Why do you ask?”

“Because it must be on silent. Richie’s called you like twenty times and—”

Eddie stood up so fast he slammed his knees into the table. He swore at the sharp pain but didn’t let it slow him down. He didn’t say any more as he rushed out of the restaurant, the door slamming open as he made it to the sidewalk.

“Dumbasses. The both of them,” groaned CC. She quickly finished texting Richie.

_He is literally running back now._

And Eddie was. All he could think of was Richie waking up alone. Of him calling again and again and just hearing it go straight to voicemail. Of him thinking…that what? Eddie had just fucking left? That he was upset at him? Something worse?

Eddie hadn’t thought Richie would wake up this early. He hadn’t thought about how all this would look, just too lost in his own head since the moment he’d gotten up. He hadn’t thought. Now though, all he could think of was Richie and how desperately he needed to get to him. He refused to let Richie worry or blame himself a second longer.

Eddie scrambled around corners, barely managing to keep from crashing into other pedestrians. He even ran across the street at random sections with only quick glances beforehand to avoid getting hit by a car. He broke a number of pedestrian laws that he never would have normally broken just to get their quicker. Then he arrived at the apartment. His hands shook as he opened the building’s door.
Then he was running up the stairs, two at a time. It turned out he hadn’t locked their door on the way out, so Eddie just ran straight in.

Richie had been leaning against the counter, his arms wrapped around his head when Eddie barged in. He jumped at the sudden noise but didn’t get a chance to react as Eddie barreled into him. Richie just barely succeeded in bracing himself against the counter so they both didn’t crash to the ground.

Eddie hugged him so damn hard before pulling back and just going, “I’m sorry. I’m so fucking sorry. I didn’t mean to leave you alone. I’m sorry. I’m—”

“What? No. No y-you don’t have to apologize for anything,” whispered Richie. He looked shocked that Eddie was back at all, even though he must have read CC’s responding text.

“I know. I just…” Eddie trailed off. He held onto Richie as he really looked at him. He couldn’t believe he’d made Richie worry like that and he quickly said, “I promise I won’t ever be the reason to make you cry again.”

“Wasn’t crying.” Richie wiped at his face. “Just-ok. Maybe a little. You just…you weren’t answering, and I didn’t know if it was something I did—”

“Something you did? I kissed you. At least I think I did. Right?”

“I mean…yeah. But I just…”

Richie quieted as Eddie took his face in his hands again. Eddie thought about what CC had said. He tried to dredge up exactly what he’d felt last night, but his memories were still blurry. Still, even while drunk, he’d kissed Richie for a reason. Maybe…maybe if he could understand that feeling while sober…maybe he could better understand it all.

Eddie asked, “What did I do?”

“You didn’t do anything.”

“I don’t mean like accuse me of something,” Eddie gently said. He hated that Richie was so ready to put the blame on himself, that he almost expected Eddie to blame him. “What did I do leading up to it?”

“We were pretty drunk. We collapsed on the pull-out and…and at one point you put my glasses on your face.”

Very gently, Eddie took his glasses from him and put them on. “Like so?”

Richie nodded. He whispered, “Now you really look like you work at a museum.”

That at least got both their lips to quirk upwards. However, Richie’s face immediately grew somber and he looked away. Eddie asked, “Why did I do that?”

“I don’t know. Maybe to better see my eyes,” murmured Richie.

“Is that’s what’s next?”

“Yes. You got really fixated on them. Wouldn’t stop talking about how blue they were.”

“Like…like…” Eddie tried to dredge up the memories. “Did I say your eyes looked like mouthwash?”
“Minty mouthwash specifically.”

Eddie really looked at Richie’s eyes as they flickered between Eddie’s face and the floor. “Well, they’re about as bright as that color. The blue ones.”

Richie snorted. It wasn’t the usual pleasant sound though.

“And then?”

“You poked me in the eye.”

“Classy. I won’t repeat that part.”

“Thank you,” murmured Richie.

“And after that?”

“You wanted to kiss it better. Which you tried. Missed terribly. Think you kissed my temple instead. Then just…kind of kept trailing downwards. And…yeah.”

Eddie looked over Richie’s face for a moment. Then he gently moved his thumbs over Richie’s brow and eyelids, making him close his eyes. Now that Richie had walked him through everything, he was relatively sure he’d done that last night too. However, before he did anything else, he noticed something new. “You’re…you’re trembling like I’ve got your fucking heart in my hands.”

Richie didn’t open his eyes. He just whispered, “Kind of do. So…”

Eddie couldn’t help but feel a little shocked. He’d never made anyone feel like this. He’d certainly never evoked such a physical, emotional response. But more surprising still, Richie’s response wasn’t new. This particular situation of course was, but Eddie being able to dredge up some kind of reaction from him? Something far more volatile and raw than had ever even come from his other friends? If Eddie really looked back, it had been there before. Eddie just…it wasn’t so much he hadn’t seen it. He just hadn’t…he hadn’t understood…

According to CC, Richie was in love with him. He’d been in love with him since…since…Eddie didn’t know. But comparing Richie to those Eddie had thought had loved him, he could at least tell this was different. What Richie was feeling was far more pure and kind than anything else directed Eddie’s way.

And Eddie felt…he felt…

He went in and this time didn’t miss. His lips brushed Richie’s eyelids. Then he pressed his lips to Richie’s brow and down his nose. He ended on just barely kissing the tip of Richie’s nose, repeating the actions of last night only with a great deal more accuracy.

Eddie’s heartbeat quickened to a seemingly ridiculous pace. He paused, looking at how Richie’s entire body seemed to be trembling as he kept his eyes tightly shut. Eddie was causing that reaction. And in himself…

He’d thought a quick flush or beat of his heart might be sign of a fever, an increase in blood pressure. He’d always assumed some medical condition might be at play, that he needed to keep an eye on it to make sure nothing more detrimental happened. But now he realized that if he looked back in the past weeks, all those reactions hadn’t led to anything serious. They hadn’t accumulated into a major health problem or been a sign that his wounds weren’t healing right.
Eddie had gone to a doctor’s appointment in New York after all. He knew he was healthy. That he’d been healthy. Which meant…

If he really looked…

Every time he’d felt that flush…

That feeling…

His body wasn’t responding to some virus or unknown bacteria in his bloodstream.

It had been…

He’d always been responding to Richie.

Was this what love was really supposed to feel like? Was this what the books and movies had alluded to? Eddie had always thought it some poetic, over exaggeration. But in reality, had he just never known how love was supposed to feel?

In an instant, everything seemed to click into place. Eddie let go of Richie and put his glasses back on his own face.

Richie opened his eyes, uncertainty clear in them.

Eddie cupped Richie’s cheek again. His other hand held the back of Richie’s neck. His eyes moved over his nose, his lips, the curves, the softly appearing wrinkles, creases to Richie’s forehead, his hair. Then Eddie looked at Richie’s eyes and his heart quickened again. If this was all because of love and simply looking at Richie really did that too him…

Finally, Eddie let his own eyes slip shut as he kissed Richie’s lips. His grip on Richie tightened along with that feeling in his chest. The kiss only happened a moment, but even still Eddie felt breathless as he just barely pulled back and looked at Richie.

“You’re in love with me.”

“What gave it away?” asked Richie, his voice going for humor but sounding just a little too exhausted to fully get there. He looked hopeful, so damn hopeful but still uncertain. Still so sad. Eddie already knew he would give anything to make Richie smile again so he said the first thing that came to mind.

“And I’m…I’m in love with you.” The words fell out of Eddie’s mouth in a way that they’d never done before. Here they felt weighted. It felt like those words mattered for the first time since Eddie had ever said them.

“Yeah?” Richie whispered.

They stared at each other for a second, and then Eddie found himself carefully wiping at Richie’s cheeks with the back of his fingers. “Real love isn’t…supposed to make you cry. Right?”

“Just…you know…really hoping…this isn’t some drunken dream…”

“Does this feel like a dream?” And then Eddie kissed him again. It was gentle, careful. He pulled back just as slowly when Richie didn’t seem to respond though. He just wanted Richie to smile again. He so desperately wanted that. So he tried for humor. He said, “This is new territory for me… but kissing is still meant to be a two-person participation thing. Right?”
“Well, assuming it’s not between you and a leaf blower.” It was a joke, but one that didn’t come out completely right as it got caught in Richie’s throat. The smile he was trying for still didn’t reach his eyes. Eddie hesitated—

Oh. Richie was waiting. He was waiting for Eddie to suddenly pull back, to say something and cause the moment to break. He couldn’t bring himself to respond because he didn’t think Eddie wanted him to respond, or perhaps even worse that by finally acting, that would be the one thing to finally drive Eddie away.

But Eddie didn’t want the moment to end. He wanted Richie to respond. Eddie knew what simply looking at Richie did to him, what being near him did. But this new feeling in his chest that he was finally becoming aware of, just how far did it go? How did it change when it was Richie kissing him rather than the other way around?

He wanted to know.

He realized he’d never wanted to know something as bad as he did now.

“Kiss me.”

Richie blinked in surprise. “You mean that?”

Eddie nodded. Richie’s arms came up around him. He cupped both Eddie’s cheeks, but still hesitated. He was being so damn careful, more careful than Eddie had ever seen him. It was appreciated. It was, but—

Now Eddie just desperately wanted to know. He needed to know how real this was. His own grip on Richie’s neck and cheek tightened. “Oh, just fucking kiss me Richi—”

He didn’t get to finish the sentence as Richie pushed forward like every urge, every reaction he’d felt in the past weeks, maybe in the past twenty-seven years, was coming out now in one go. It was so much that it made Eddie gasp, the kiss automatically deepening. Eddie felt tongue in his mouth, and he thought his heart might just stop.

Well if he had to choose a way to go…

Eddie’s fingers tangled up in Richie’s hair. Since the moment he’d woken up, he’d felt drawn to the others, to his friends. But Richie had made him feel safe in a way the others hadn’t. He’d always been at his side, as kids and now as adults. Even before, despite knowing how unconventional it was, Eddie had wanted to live with him forever. He’d wanted to be near him forever. He could always trust Richie, always count on him like no other. He’d never wanted to leave Richie’s side. And now with Richie as close as possible, with his tongue down his fucking throat?

Eddie realized it somehow still wasn’t close enough. His arms wrapped around him, trying to pull him in, closer and closer. That proximity was then helped when his back hit the fridge. He hadn’t even realized they were moving that way but with something at his back, it allowed him to just keep pulling Richie further into him—

It was Richie who actually pulled back first. “You know, I still got to fucking breath. Right?”

Eddie hadn’t even realized how much he needed air until he felt his chest heaving against Richie’s. He wiped at the tears on Richie’s face. He didn’t look heartbroken, but the uncertainty was still there. He looked so god damn desperate to believe this was real and the tears were coming from that and just an overwhelming feeling of emotion. Eddie pulled him closer, their noses touching.
“You know what?” asked Eddie. A grin grew across his face. Tears were falling down his own cheeks, but they were the kind of tears that fell when you were just so god damn happy that you had to let it out or you might burst. Because he was. He’d finally found that feeling from the night before, of kissing Richie and being in his arms. He’d felt fucking happy. Happier than ever before and now he’d found that feeling again. Only this time sober and fully coherent and it all felt so fucking real—
“Get a fucking oxygen tank then.”

And there it was, the smile Eddie had been searching for as it broke across Richie’s face. Richie let out a ridiculous, breathless laugh and then threw himself back into the kiss, pinning Eddie against the fridge as Eddie tried to take in as much of Richie as he could at once.
ACT III: Love

Chapter Notes

A massive, massive fucking thank you. It seriously means the world how much this fic has resonated with people. Thank you and as always, I hope you enjoy the chapters going forward. Also, I added five more chapters because I can't help myself and I don't want to rush the planned ending for this.

Also, I remember I replied to one comment, can't remember who, talking about how though this fic has become longer than expected, it certainly wouldn't be getting up to like 100k or anything? Yeah, that was a fucking lie. I can't help myself.

+Avatar change because let's be real, with how much I've been obsessing over IT lately, it was going to happen eventually.

Enjoy! <3 <3 <3

After probably a ridiculous amount of time had passed, Eddie and Richie had finally decided maybe the best place wasn’t in the kitchen with Richie pinning him against the refrigerator.

Now they were on the pull-out. Shoes were off. Eddie’s jacket was somewhere on the floor. Richie was partially over and on Eddie, their legs tangled up as Richie continued to deeply kiss him. His left arm kept him propped up as his right hand held Eddie’s waist.

“I love you,” Eddie said in between those short moments they came up for air. He’d been saying that over and over again.

This time, Richie said, “You sound so amazed every time you say it.”

“Because I am. I’m fucking amazed it took me this long.” Eddie brushed some of Richie’s hair back behind his ear and then went in for another kiss. That was mostly what they’d been doing. Eddie was pretty sure he could do nothing but kiss Richie for a full day. Now that everything seemed to have clicked into place, he couldn’t believe how blind he’d been. Of course, he’d never had anything of equal value to compare his relationship with Richie to, so it did make sense why he hadn’t figured it out on his own. Still, he wished he’d figured it out sooner.

As they continued to kiss, it was clear they were going to need to part for air again soon. However, they pulled apart not to avoid suffocating each other to death, but instead because a knock sounded on the door.

The sudden noise caused Richie to unexpectedly bite Eddie’s lower lip. Eddie could feel himself immediately going red as a noise he had never made before escaped his mouth. Forget tongue, that was going to cause his fucking heart to stop beating.

Richie had already pulled back and started to say, “Sorry-hang on.”

“Nope. Nope, don’t you dare fucking look at me.” Eddie grabbed the nearest pillow to cover up his face.
Richie almost said something else, but the knock happened again. With a teasing smirk, he pulled the pillow down and said, “You’re safe for now, but we are exploring that later.”

Eddie could feel himself growing even hotter in the face. He snatched the pillow back to cover it up, even as Richie finally got off him. As Richie went for the door, Eddie sat up and pulled his legs in. He kept hugging the pillow, not quite covering his face but feeling really tempted to do so still.

Richie opened the door and was only marginally surprised to see it was CC. “How’d you get in?”

“Young neighbor saw me downstairs and let me into the building.” She quickly threw her whole body into the apartment, saw Eddie, and then immediately relaxed. “Thank Christ. I swear, you children…”

“Children?” asked Richie. “You hit your head and forget how old I am?”

“No, but clearly you forgot that you were frantically texting me and clearly in a panic and you,” she pointed to Eddie, “ran out of the store in such a state I thought you might get hit by a car. Since neither of you responded, I finally just came here after my shift to make sure you were alright.”

“CC, I’m sorry. I should have checked my phone,” Eddie said with a shake of his head.

“It’s ok as long as this isn’t some god damn habit. I’m just happy you’re both ok. And hey, my momentary panic is totally worth it for whatever you two were just doing right now.” She grinned wide and winked at Eddie, “I’m right, aren’t I? I’m totally right.”

Eddie blushed and his face showed an embarrassed smile. “Please stop. Coming from you it makes me feel like a dirty old man.”

“He is a dirty old man,” Richie whispered with a grin. “You wouldn’t believe the stuff he’s into—”

Eddie threw the pillow at him. Richie just barely caught it before it hit him in the face.

CC grinned. “Well I’m just happy one of you finally made a damn move. Still a bit surprised it was you Eddie, but hey, at least it finally happened.”

“Thank you for talking to me. I don’t think I would have understood everything on my own,” Eddie murmured. He meant that. Without CC’s perspective, he might have just forced everything back down and pretended the kiss hadn’t happened, not realizing that would have been the opposite of what Richie would have hoped for. Or the opposite of what Eddie truly needed too.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Richie. He shot a teasing smile Eddie’s way which brought him out of his head. “It kind of makes sense he’d make the first move now. He is one horny motherfucker—”

“Richie. I will throw the lamp at your head,” Eddie said from behind his hands.

As Richie laughed, CC kept grinning from ear to ear. “Fucking finally,” she muttered. “Well, now that I know Eddie didn’t get hit by a fucking car and you’re ok, I’ll leave you be. Are you still both coming tomorrow night for my set?”

“Wouldn’t miss it,” Richie replied.

“Of course,” Eddie quickly said.

“Cool. I’ll see you two tomorrow then. Bye!”

With that, she quickly disappeared down the hallway. Richie closed the door and then turned around
to see Eddie peaking at him between his fingers. “I hate you so much right now.”

“No, you don’t,” grinned Richie. He said it jokingly, but there was also such a massive feeling of relief behind those words too. He threw the pillow back to Eddie. Eddie caught it and then primed it, ready to hit Richie again.

“I think you deserve this.”

“Do I now?” Richie paused at the edge of the pull-out. Then his smile widened. He struck before Eddie could do anything.

Richie grabbed Eddie’s ankles and yanked, making Eddie come closer and fall back down into a lying position. A noise escaped Eddie’s throat and Richie climbed on top, pinning him against the mattress. Then Richie’s thumb gently ran over Eddie’s bottom lip. Eddie shivered at just how tender the area now was.

“That is definitely going to bruise.”

Eddie hit him on his chest.

“Ah, come on. I think you liked it. Dirty old man.”

“Excuse me? You’re the one who just manhandled me into this position you perv.”

“Perv? You’re the one who liked getting his lip sucked on like that.”

“Did not.”

“Oh really?” Richie went in before Eddie could argue more. The kiss threw Eddie off. He instinctively opened his mouth and then Richie pulled at his bottom lip. This time it was planned. As he lightly sucked and then dragged with his teeth, Eddie let out a long moan that came to a crescendo when Richie suddenly let go. “Oh yeah, that’s definitely going to bruise now.”

Eddie felt himself going beat red again. “Ok, listen…”

“You always get so flustered when you get a hickey?”

“I-I’ve never had a hickey. And I thought that was supposed to be on your neck.”

“Well clearly we’re going to have to change that,” smirked Richie. “And neck is typical. But they could be just about anywhere.”

Eddie blushed again and tried to cover his face. However, Richie pulled his hands down.

“Hey, the best part of this is getting to see you.”

“Yeah?”

“You’re fucking gorgeous.”

“I’m a forty something accountant Richie.”

“Still, fucking gorgeous to me.” Richie gently cupped Eddie’s cheek. He brushed away the tears that started to appear. “Hey, hey it’s ok.”

“I know. It’s just…I don’t know. I never had anyone say something like that to me before.”
“Well I said it and I meant it. You’re fucking beautiful.” Richie’s thumb gently traced the scar on Eddie’s cheek. “Every fucking part too.”

They pulled each other closer. This time it was a little less frenzied, their lips slowly moving together with Richie leading. They only parted to breathe, fingers getting tangled up in hair or stroking the other’s cheek. And Eddie? He’d never felt like this. It was almost overwhelming. Probably was, at least a little, but he had Richie and he knew he couldn’t let him go now. He didn’t ever want to let him go.

Then Richie began to trail kisses down Eddie’s chin. He kissed Eddie’s neck, sucking at the skin as the noises Eddie was making were no longer muffled. Just those simple movements were making Eddie’s stomach do somersaults. And the way Richie was holding him? He thought of himself as average at best, but the way Richie was treating him, it was like he was the most beautiful thing Richie had ever touched.

Eddie could feel where all the blood was rushing though his mind wasn’t really focused on that. He just tried to keep Richie as close as possible, fingers tangled in his hair. Then Richie moved to a different spot closer to his collar bone. Eddie’s breath came in quick. He could feel Richie shifting slightly on top of him. One of his legs moved snuggly between Eddie’s and then he rolled his hips—

It was like an electric shock.

“Richie-Richie hold—”

Richie immediately pulled back. “Shit. I’m sorry. I didn’t—”

“No, it’s…it’s ok,” Eddie breathlessly said.

“You sure? I didn’t hurt you?”

“No, definitely didn’t do that. I just…I don’t think…” Eddie glanced away. His face red for a different reason, embarrassment rising in his chest.

“Hey, no shame in that,” Richie said, quickly catching on. “This is supposed to feel good. You get uncomfortable, just whack me in the head.”

Eddie snorted, his heart finally calming down a bit as he glanced back at Richie.

“We’re just kissing. Maybe a few more hiccys. Sound good?”

Eddie blushed but nodded. They went in for a quick kiss but before they could get into it, Eddie slightly pulled back again and said, “Not that I don’t want to. I-I don’t want you to think that. I just…it’s so much all at once and I wouldn’t know…”

“Hey, I am perfectly ok with not rushing things. We go at your pace,” Richie promised. “I can wait.”

“Yeah?”

“Anything for you. If you never want to go that far, so be it. I feel fucking blessed just getting a chance to kiss you.”

“You’ve kissed a lot of people. Probably more than me. I can’t be that great.”

“You’re fucking perfect,” murmured Richie.

And with the way Richie said it? Eddie could believe it. They pulled each other close. Then Richie
moved to the other side of Eddie’s neck, trailing kisses down before fixating on a new spot. Eddie sighed, his fingernails digging through Richie’s shirt and gripping his back as hard as he could.

Then Eddie’s stomach growled.

“Now I will say I’ve never evoked that reaction from anyone.”

Eddie hit him hard.

“You hungry for me?” teased Richie.

Eddie hit him again. “I’m hungry because I haven’t eaten since last night and it’s past midday now damn it.”

“Yeah, you’re hungry for me.”

“Stop it,” laughed Eddie as Richie kissed him again. “And considering how much you’ve been using your mouth, I’d it’s the other way around.”


Eddie put a hand on Richie’s chest. “Richie, at this point if I had to choose between a milkshake and you, I’d choose the milkshake.”

“Well, now that you mention it, I might make that same choice too.”

“You can’t take that choice.”

“Oh, we got a double standard going on here. Huh?” smirked Richie.

“God damn right.”

Richie laughed and kissed him again. When he pulled back, he said, “I will admit I really am fucking starving though. You want to go out?”

“Kind of. We don’t have enough to make something here and we ordered take out two nights ago so…”

“Alright, we’ll go grab something.”

“Ok, but I really need to fucking shower first.”

“So do I. We could…”

Eddie glanced away. He opened his mouth, ready to try and explain himself, but Richie gently rubbed his cheek and drew his gaze back to him.

“Sorry, too much too fast. I’ll keep that in check.”

“No, it’s ok. I just…I don’t know. Never had anyone act like this towards me. Not that…I’m ready. But…if you could do anything right now…”

“You want to know?”

Eddie nodded.
“Anything?”

Eddie’s cheeks reddened again. “If you could just…have your way…with me…”

“Well…I would pin you to that wall over there and fuck you so hard you forgot your own name.”

“Ah.”

Richie snorted. His head fell against Eddie’s chest. Eddie could feel his laughter vibrating through his entire body before he looked up again. “Too much too fast?”

“No, just uh…going to jot that down to the list of things to look forward to.”

Richie laughed. He gave Eddie a quick kiss. “But not today.”

“Yeah. Or tomorrow.”

“You free Sunday? I think I could free up a slot.”

Eddie grinned. “No…and um…that’s also too…”

“Don’t worry. I’m just teasing. I promise,” Richie smiled. “We go at your pace. And never mind physical things. If I even say something that seems too much just—”

“Hit you upside the head?”

“Exactly.”

“Well that won’t be too hard to remember,” snorted Eddie.

They kissed again and then Richie finally moved off him. “You can take the shower first. I’ll start a load of laundry.”

“Sounds good.”

Eddie moved to the side of the pull-out. He started to stand up and then quickly sat back down, his hand gripping the edge.

“You realize we were only kissing, right?” asked Richie with a laugh.

“Come here real quick.”

Richie did.

Eddie hit him in the side.

“Ow, ok ok! Fair enough,” grinned Richie. “Go take your shower.”

“I’m going,” sighed Eddie. This time he got up and managed to stay on his feet. He went through the bedroom, into the bathroom, and— “Oh no.”

Eddie covered his face to keep from looking at himself in the mirror. He was an utter mess. Not only was he still in the same clothes from yesterday, but his hair was sticking out in every direction. There was stubble on his face, his cheeks were so damn flushed. And the marks? Jesus there was no way he was going to be able to hide all of them. Certainly not the slight coloring and swelling to his lower lip.
He quickly stripped and got in the shower before he could feel himself becoming anymore embarrassed. As he scrubbed at his face, his mind started to catch up with him. He finally had a moment to think and…

Love.

Happiness.

Just pure unadulterated joy that twisted up his insides in a way that he’d never fucking felt before…

God, he wished he’d seen it sooner. He wished he’d never moved away, or that maybe he and Richie had moved to the same place. Maybe…maybe…

No. He had him now. He wasn’t going to lose himself in what-ifs and lost moments. He hadn’t actually lost any of those moments. They’d just been postponed by all the shit in their lives. But now…now…

Eddie’s cheeks went red again just thinking about it. God if he acted like this every god damn time he thought of Richie now, he wasn’t going to be able to go out in public.

He quickly finished scrubbing himself. However, as he turned off the water, he realized he’d completely forgotten to grab a spare change of clothes. It wasn’t like he hadn’t had to throw a towel around his waist and walk towards the closet before. But just thinking of Richie seeing him and how he would—

Oh god he was such an idiot! Richie really had always been looking. Eddie had just never connected the two god damn dots.

Well, in for a penny, in for a pound…

Eddie got out and put the towel around his waist. He quickly walked into the bedroom and across the floor to the closet. He grabbed the first items of clothing he saw. Then he just…felt it. He looked down with a small smile.

“You know you blush with your whole body. Right?”

“Richie, I swear…”

“Sorry. Turning away now.”

“You can still look. Just don’t touch.”

“Now who’s the fucking tease?”

Eddie hid his smile as he went back into the bathroom to get changed. He managed to tidy up his hair and thought about shaving, but before he could get a chance, Richie came around the corner. “Alright, out. My turn.”

“Fine,” laughed Eddie. He grabbed his old clothes off the floor and let Richie have the bathroom. He put his clothes into the hamper and then tidied up a bit from last night. He put shoes away, put any pillows or blankets onto the pull-out—

He looked at the couch. He supposed…well it certainly didn’t make since to have the couch like this anymore so…

He decided he’d bring that up with Richie. Maybe to other people it made perfect since that after
kissing each other for so long, they would sleep in the same bed. But this was honestly new territory for Eddie. He didn’t know what was considered normal, what Richie wanted. It was hard to say what exactly even he wanted. The only certainly was Richie. He wanted Richie more than anything.

The thought alone caused Eddie’s chest to go warm as he finished cleaning up and also went through the mail he had ignored yesterday. He threw away most of it and then went in search of his phone. After grabbing it, he first winced at the missed texts from CC. He hadn’t meant to worry her. He texted her another quick apology and a thank you for talking to him. Then he looked at the other alerts of missed calls. His thumb scrolled down as he saw just how often Richie had tried to get in touch with him. There were texts too. He opened them.

_Eddie please._

_I don’t know what you remember._

_You didn’t do anything wrong._

_Or I don’t know. I don’t know what you’re thinking right now._

_I’m sorry. If you’re blaming me right now._

_I’m sorry._

_Just come back._

Eddie slowly leaned up against the counter. His face grew downcast as a heavy weight filled his heart. He continued to read.

_We can talk._

_I can’t lose you._

_Eddie, I can’t._

_Please respond._

_Eddie._

_Eddie are you ok?_  
He wiped at his face. He had to take a slow, deep breath before he continued.

_Eddie, please tell me you’re ok._

_Where are you?_  
_Just let me know you’re ok._

_I just want to know you’re still breathing._

_Just send a period. Anything._

_Please._

_Please. I love you._

_Eddie, I love you._
Please.

Eddie closed his eyes. God, he wished he’d never left this morning. Why hadn’t he thought through that better—

“Hey, you ok?”

Eddie spun around and launched himself at Richie.

“Woah, what—” He glanced and saw the phone still in Eddie’s hands. His face softened. “Oh. You saw all that?”

“I did,” whispered Eddie, “and I am so, so god damn sorry.”

“It’s ok—”

“No. No it’s not, and I’m promising you here and now. I will never hurt you like that again.”

“That’s a really big promise Eds—”

“I’m fucking keeping it,” said Eddie. “I love you so god damn much and I refuse to be the reason to ever make you feel like this again.”

Eddie gently kissed him. “I promise,” he whispered against Richie’s lips.

“Say it again.”

“I promise. I promise with my whole fucking heart.”

They kissed again—

Then Richie’s stomach growled.

“Ok, ok. We definitely need to get something to eat,” he softly laughed, the happier mood managing to come back.

“Agrreed. We should probably grab groceries afterwards.”

“Sounds like a plan. Want me to drive?”

“Sure,” smiled Eddie.

They walked out of the apartment, Richie locking up behind them. They walked outside and headed to Richie’s car. Eddie kept his collar close, though one of the marks was peaking out the top and again, he couldn’t do anything about his lip right now.

Richie noticed as they got in. “Hey, if that embarrasses you too much, I’ll be more careful next time.”

Eddie smiled at just how much Richie was trying to make sure he wasn’t uncomfortable. Eddie shook his head though. “It’s ok. I kind of…like them.”

Richie smiled. “Good. I like them too. And I like knowing others know you’re mine.”

Eddie blushed again, god he needed to figure out a way to better manage that. Then Richie suddenly touched his cheek.

“Is it ok? To kiss you in public that is.”
“We’re sitting in your car Richie.”

“I mean, still within in the public eye. And I don’t want to do anything later on that freaks you out.”

Eddie hesitated. There was a sudden feeling of anxiety in the pit of his stomach but—

Damn it. He’d spent twenty-seven fucking years dealing with shitty relationship after shitty relationship and he’d fought a fucking spider clown. Twice! The only real opinions that had ever mattered to him were his mother’s and then Myra’s. And he only now knew those opinions never should have mattered in the first place. And as far as the rest of society went? He could give two shits. He wasn’t going to let something like a little anxiety keep him from kissing Richie whenever he wanted to. Anxiety had ruled his life for so god damn long and he was fucking tired of it. He wouldn’t let anything keep him from Richie now that he had him. Not after everything he’d been through. Not after everything he had to defeat in order to get to this moment. Not after nearly losing it all and having to fight so hard and so long to understand how much he fucking loved Richie.

Eddie smiled. “Yeah, yeah you can.”

They kissed, soft and chaste before Richie started his car. “So, where do you want to eat?”
ACT III: Love

Chapter Notes

Don't worry, still coming out with a chapter tomorrow (or today depending on your time). This chapter was just a little shorter and felt really connected to the last chapter. Just didn't publish it as one because I didn't have time to write it all as one and also didn't want the last chapter to get too long.

Anyways, think of this as an extra bonus one before I get the next one out. Thanks again <3 Your comments seriously cheer me up so much!

After finally eating, Eddie and Richie went to the grocery store. Richie moved the cart by leaning against it. He grabbed just about everything with Eddie somewhat supervising him by grabbing a few things and putting them back on the shelf. Occasionally, Richie slapped at his hands to try and keep him from putting everything up.

“Ah come on. Strawberry gummies are fucking great.”

“You do not need four boxes Richie. I’m going to get you a real container of strawberries.”

“Well I have been wanting to try that one recipe. Yeah, ok. I’ll cave. And I can go ahead and grab the chicken I need for that. Oo, cookies.”

“You already grabbed a box.”

“Yeah, but those are just chocolate chip. These have fudge on them.”

Eddie rolled his eyes. “Something tells me I should do the shopping solo from now on.”

“You realize you say that every time we go shopping. Right?”

“Do I really?”

“Yes,” laughed Richie. “And every time you somehow forget, and we go together again. Or worse, you let me do all the shopping by myself.”

“I don’t know.” Eddie thought about it for a second. “When you shop by yourself, you mostly bring back sensible things. I’m starting to think you only cause problems when I’m here too.”

“Do I cause problems?” asked Richie with a teasing look.

“You were always a problem child. Lucky for you, I’m into that.”

It was the first thing Eddie had said that had really made Richie pause, a light blush creeping across his cheeks instead. “Well, you know…if you like…” Richie said as he pushed the buggy up next to Eddie. “I could start causing problems now.”

He gave Eddie a quick kiss. Eddie swatted him away.

“We are still grocery shopping.”
“I guess I’ll just have to cause some problems when we get home then.”

Eddie’s momentary win at getting Richie to blush fell away as Eddie blushed again. “Damn it. I’ll find a way to get under your skin.”

“I look forward to it,” grinned Richie.

Eddie pressed his face to Richie’s back before reaching around him. He grabbed the granola bars and threw them into the basket. “I should get these. Can’t do as many breakfasts together since I’ve started working.”

“I miss breakfasts. And brunch.”

“Well, we knew it was going to happen eventually. And we still have weekends. And what about when you go back on tour?”

Richie let out a groan. “I’m guessing you wouldn’t have enough vacation days to cover the entire time. Maybe I could kidnap you.”

“Richie, I would never get any work done. Which I realize sounds like heaven, but it’s not like we can afford to do that forever. Even if I tried working away from the office, it wouldn’t work. We would just spend the entire time fucking around.”

“Fucking around you say-ow!”

Eddie poked him hard in the side, a smirk appearing on his face. “Let’s hurry up and get to the produce section. At this rate we’ll spend the rest of the night in here.” Eddie started to walk ahead, only for Richie to ram him in his heals with the cart. “Hey!”

“Now who could that have been?” asked Richie as he scooted on by.

“I’m going to get you for that.”

“Get me for what?”

Eddie shook his head as Richie continued ahead. “You don’t do innocent well.”

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

Eddie laughed. He caught up with him and kissed the back of Richie’s neck. At least that seemed to surprise him. It kind of surprised Eddie too. They were still in public. But that small amount of affection had just felt so natural. He’d done it so quickly and hadn’t regretted it at all.

“How much more do we need to get?” asked Eddie.

“Not much. This way.”

Eddie and Richie managed to finish the second half of the shopping spree rather quickly. They went through self-checkout and then shoved everything into the car. On the way back, they talked about if they were actually going to do dinner, but considering how late it was, they finally fell on just snacks and maybe watching something.

Once they were taking the groceries up to the apartment though, Eddie asked, “So about the pull-out…”

“Oh. I mean…do you want me to stay on it? Cause I—”
“No. No definitely not. I’m not going that slow,” Eddie quickly said. “So I guess that means…”

“We can finally put it up and make my living room look like a real living room again?”

Eddie smiled. He relaxed, now knowing they were on the same page at least with this. “Yeah. I like the sound of that. We can put it up once we get the groceries organized.”

They made it into the building and did just that. With the fridge and cabinets stocked, Richie threw the washer’s contents into the dryer and then put the old sheets and blankets into the washer. They then folded up the couch and put the cushions back on it. With everything done, Richie sat on it with a small huff. “I think I forgot what it felt like normally up.”

Eddie snorted. “The place does look quite a bit better without the coffee table shoved to the side.”

“And it still gives us something to prop our feet up on.” Richie looked up at Eddie from where he was standing, surveying the newly fixed living room. “You still want to stay forever?” murmured Richie.

“I wanted to stay forever before I even kissed you. You think now that I’m all over you I want to move across state?”

“I don’t know how the hell your mind works,” smirked Richie. “So?”

“Yes. Yes I still want to stay forever.”

“Well then get your ass over here then.”

Eddie walked over and the moment he was within arm’s reach, Richie pulled him down. Eddie used that to his advantage so he could push Richie’s back to the couch. Since it was a couch again, it also meant Eddie was pretty much lying right on top of Richie now. Ever since the first kissed, well coherent kiss, Eddie had felt himself go weak just thinking about Richie. But when he was as close as he was now? That really turned his insides to mush and caused his heartbeat to go out of control.

“You know, I think I like the couch like this,” Eddie commented.

“How so?”

“Means you don’t have anywhere to go.”

“That’s only if you’re on top though.”

“Well then I guess I like being on top.”

Richie snorted.

“What?”

“Nothing. I’ll explain it to you later,” he laughed. His hand came up and gently caressed him, specifically tracing the scar on Eddie’s cheek.

“You know that’s healed, right?”

“Yeah, but I’m guessing this feels nicer than me just shoving a finger in your cheek.”

Eddie softly laughed before a gentle smile formed on his lips. Richie continued to carefully trace the area. “This does feel nice,” Eddie admitted.
“See? I know what I’m doing.”
“Definitely know more than me.”
“Just wait. I’ll make an expert out of you yet.”

Eddie dropped his head against Richie’s chest. He mumbled something and Richie guided his chin up.
“What was that?”
“I said I hate how easily you make my face turn red.”
“Used to do that to you when we were kids too. You remember?”
“You mean like how the teacher would call on me, I’d try to give an answer, and you just kept shooting spitballs my way until I got more and more flustered?”
“Got detention for that a number of times. What a bastard of a teacher.”
“Um, Richie? You deserved every second of detention you got from her.”
“Did not.”
“Oh you totally fucking did,” Eddie replied as he slapped him against his chest.
“I didn’t deserve a second of that punishment.”
“Uh, yes you did. You probably still do.”
“Well if it’s you punishing me, I mean?”
“See!? That! I should have said something and made you blush, but you fucking say that and all my insides just turn every which way.”
“You’ll catch on,” smirked Richie. He drew him in for a kiss. They stayed like that for a moment before Richie added, “Still want to watch a movie?”
“I have to go to work all day tomorrow. And I think I actually ate enough at the restaurant. I’d kind of like…to just stay here?”
“Well I hope not here, here. My entire body is going to fall asleep if we stayed like this all night.”
“So um…bed?”
“Considering the night we had last night, retiring early sounds great.”

Eddie pushed himself off. They turned out the lights in the living room and then got dressed for bed. When it actually came to lying down though, Eddie hesitated.
“How um…”
“Besides the fact that we slept in the same bed once at Bev’s, we also did it countless times as kids at sleep overs. Are you seriously over thinking this?”
“I know. Just…it’s alright to touch you. Right?”
Richie gave him a confused look. “I mean, I would prefer you didn’t kick me off the bed, like when we were kids but…”

“No I mean—it’s stupid. I shouldn’t even let this affect me but I can’t help but remember how Myra always had me sleep a specific way and would get upset—”

Richie sat down. “Get your ass in bed.”

Eddie got closer and then Richie pulled him the rest of the way.

“You want to sleep on your side and kick me over every time I get too close? Fine by me. You want to lie nearly on top of me? Tangle all our limbs around in one giant cuddle pile through the night? Fine by me. Don’t think you have to change what’s most comfortable just for me. I’m comfortable just having you near.”

“That’s one of the nicest things anyone has ever said to me. But you may change your mind if you wake up to an elbow shoved into your neck.”

“I relish the thought.”

“That’s a fucking lie, but I still appreciate it.”

“Good.”

They pulled each other into a deep kiss. For a while, they slowly moved as one with Richie adding another mark to Eddie’s neck before he let his hand rest on Eddie’s waist and finally pulled him close again.

“You cool with sleeping like this all night?”

Eddie nodded. “I like this.”

“Me too. Night,” Richie said with one more small kiss to Eddie’s forehead.

Eddie kissed the tip of Richie’s nose in response. “Night.” He snuggled in close and slowly drifted off to have one of the best nights of his life.
Eddie woke up first, but instead of getting up right away, he turned his face towards Richie’s neck. It had all been real.
Richie was still curled around him, lightly snoring, a bit of drool.
And Eddie…
Eddie loved him. Was in love with him. It somehow felt even bigger thinking that on the second day. It was proof that it wasn’t a fluke. This was starting to become… This would be…
It was his life. Right here in his arms, and he knew Richie would be happy staying right there forever if they could.
Eddie was actually in love.
He lightly kissed Richie’s neck. A small noise sounded in Richie’s throat as he shifted over.
An idea came to Eddie. He’d seen it done in shows and movies, which basing everything he did off of that probably wasn’t the greatest idea, but then Eddie didn’t exactly have any other experiences. Eddie decided to just go for it and gently continued to kiss Richie’s neck. He got to the place right behind Richie’s ear and that really started to wake him up, the area extra sensitive. Eddie would have to jot that down for later.
Richie let out a breathy sigh.
“This going to be a new routine of ours or something?” he asked, voice rough with sleep.
“If you’d like it to be.” Eddie kissed his neck again, doing his best to mimic what he’d felt from Richie the day before.
“Oh…fuck me,” moaned Richie. He moved over a little and they both kissed. “Alright,” sighed Richie, “now I know you love me.”
“Yeah?”
“You just willingly kissed me despite the morning breath.”
“I did. Didn’t I?”
“Yep,” Richie grinned. He pulled him back in.
They kissed deeply until Eddie started to pull back. “Ok, I’m going to be late for work if we keep at this.”
Richie moved to kissing his neck. As his lips trailed the marks, Eddie shivered from the tenderness of the areas. “Be late then,” he murmured.

“It hasn’t even been two weeks. I cannot possibly…possibly…be-god damn…you’re making me lose my train of thought.”

“Guilty as charged.”

Eddie brought him up and kissed him again before putting just a little more force behind his hand that was placed in between them. “I really do need to start getting ready though.”

“I could kidnap you. Then you would be late through no fault of your own.”

“I don’t think that’s how it works, but thanks for the offer,” Eddie laughed. He finally got up, going first to the kitchen to make a pot of coffee.

As that was being made, Eddie quickly went through the closet. He’d been wearing more casual clothes to work but decided to grab a button-down shirt for today. At least the collar would slightly hide the marks on his neck. Richie had already rolled over, dozing in and out of sleep.

Eddie went to the bathroom, washing his face, brushing his teeth. He was going to shave, he really needed to, but one glance at his watch showed he didn’t have time. He would have to try and remember to do that tonight or tomorrow.

He hurried to the kitchen, poured himself some coffee in his thermal, and then went for his bag. He was almost out the door when he felt Richie grab him and hold him from behind.

“Richie…” He sighed feeling how Richie’s lips trailed down his spine. “I need to get to work.”

“You can’t. I’m kidnapping you.”

“Kidnap me later. I really do need to go.”

“You sure about that?”

Eddie laughed. “Richie, I cannot be late.”

“I think it would be ok.” Richie turned him around, capturing his lips into a deep, long kiss.

Eddie held Richie’s face in his hands and—

“I have to go!” he laughed. He gave Richie a quick peck on the nose. “I’m going. I’m serious.”

“You pack anything for lunch?”

“I don’t have time. I’ll grab something in the cafeteria or nearby. I really do have to—”

“No, I know,” Richie quickly said. “I mean do you want me to bring you something?”

“I…yeah.” Eddie’s chest felt so warm at the simple gesture. “Thanks.”

“Anything for you. Now…”

“Nope!” Eddie dodged the kiss. “I am leaving for work! I’ll see you at lunch.”

Eddie finally grabbed his keys and opened the door—
“I love you.”

Eddie closed his eyes. His smile softened. He couldn’t just leave after that. He turned around and pulled Richie in for another kiss. “I love you too,” he whispered.

“Love you more.”

“No! We are not fucking doing this!” laughed Eddie. “I am going to work damn it.”

He hurried out the door before Richie could do something else that could distract him. Thankfully by now, Eddie had an idea of the best routes to take depending on the day and he just barely made it in time. Once he was put on salary next week, it technically wouldn’t matter. But being on time mattered to Eddie, and he certainly liked his coworkers well enough to not bother them with creating a habit of being late.

Eddie rushed in and clocked in his time before heading downstairs to his office. Two of the archivists, Robert and Liz ran into him on the way down. Eddie liked them both though Liz’s lack of social edict had first thrown him off. Now he wasn’t surprised by her first comment though he still blushed a little.

“You have a bruise on your lip.”

“Thanks for letting me know Liz,” Eddie mumbled.

“You’re welcome,” she replied, not picking up on his embarrassment as she continued up the stairs.

Robert paused though and said, “You bringing the person to the Halloween party?”

“Actually…yeah.”

“Cool. I win the bet.”

“The bet?” snorted Eddie. “Is this something you do to all the new guys or just me?”

“Oh no. We always have a monthly bet. And you know you’re the center of the bet if you don’t hear about it within the first week. Just office fun and games type things. But one or two people were wondering if they had a chance.”

“Oh. Well, that’s flattering I suppose but I’m. . .” He had to pause. In some ways, it felt weird to say it so soon after Myra. But then, saying the words had never felt special like they did now. “I’m taken.”

“Nice. I win ten dollars then.”

Eddie laughed.

“I’ll see you later. And I’ve got the notes for this week’s books. I’ll bring them down when I get a chance.”

“Thanks Robert. And I like the new cat sweater.”

Robert grinned. “Glad to know someone knows style around here.” He headed up after Liz and Eddie finished the walk to his desk, smile still firmly on his face. Usually when he got in, he worked by himself for at least an hour if not more. Then he usually went over things with those in his department, had lunch, and finally communicated with the other departments if needed in the afternoon.
He was in the middle of going over some numbers with David and the others when they got a call from upstairs. Eddie picked it up.

“There’s someone here for you Eddie?”

“Right, thanks. Just tell him I’ll be right there.” He hung up. “That marks my lunch break. I’ll be back in about forty-five minutes.”

“This lunchbreak have anything to do with that lip?” asked David.

Eddie let out a small sigh. “This is going to be the talk of the office for a while, isn’t it?”

“At least until Liz sneaks her pet rabbits into work again. Chaos always ensues when that happens,” smirked David. “Also, you owe me lunch sometime too.”

“Oh, I owe you lunch?”

“Yeah, I lost fifteen bucks because of you,” David grinned.

“Hey, you took the bet, not me,” laughed Eddie.

He went and stopped at his office to grab his coat before hurrying to the lobby floor. He went into the public area and spotted Richie chatting with one of the women at the front desk. Richie grinned and stood up straight. He walked away to let the woman take care of some attendants that had shown up behind him.

“It’s been too long.”

“It’s been like three hours,” smirked Eddie. He grabbed Richie’s shirt and pulled him close as he shyly looked down. “But I know what you mean.”

“Where we sitting?”

“It’s not too cold today. Want to just do the steps outside?”

“Works for me.”

They went back out the front and found a space off to the left. There were a few other couples sitting down, one family with two little ones, a few loners, and a group of teens. Eddie was pretty sure those teens were skipping considering there wasn’t any scheduled school field trips today. Eddie scooted closer to Richie, their knees knocking together.

“Anyone comment on your lip?” asked Richie as he handed him a wrapped sandwich.

“Apparently there was a bet on if I was seeing anyone.”

“You could have denied it and said it was a one-night stand.”

“And you think any of them would have believed that coming from me?”

Richie laughed.

“Besides. Anyone who doesn’t know probably will on Halloween. You can still come right?”

“Of course. And I was going to ask if you wanted to just meet at the club for CC’s set tonight. I know you’re working late to help with some of the preparations for the public stuff tomorrow.”
“That would probably work out better. This club is more of a dinner and a show type set up. Right?”

Richie nodded.

“We can have dinner there then.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“And what about yourself?”

“Well, Jason and I kind of have a game plan so…”

They kept talking even after they finished lunch. Eddie kept an eye on his watch though and eventually said, “I should probably be going back in. But I liked this.”

“We could try at least once a week?”

“I like that idea.” Then Eddie leaned in and they softly kissed on the steps. “I’ll see you tonight.”

“Have a good rest of your day.”

“You too.”

They stood up and Richie gave him a quick kiss again before heading back down the steps as Eddie went back inside. He quickly got back to work, Robert got him the numbers he needed, and when the museum closed to the public and the last person left, Eddie went out onto the floor to help with some of the preparations.

Tonight, it was mostly moving some tables into place, double checking all the food and drink that would be offered had already been bought and prepped if needed. They put up some of the decorations too until Talazia announced to everyone, “That seems good enough for tonight. If you’re scheduled to come in early tomorrow, we’ll finish then. Everyone else, we’ll see you later tomorrow. Thank you!”

With that done, nearly everyone left together out the employee entrance. Eddie hurried to his car and double checked the address of the place CC was performing at. When he arrived, the place wasn’t completely full up since there was still about an hour until the first act came on. Still, some were there, deciding to eat before the show started.

Eddie spotted Richie at a small table.

As Eddie walked over, Richie put his phone down and stood up right as Eddie came up. They shared a chaste kiss and then sat down.

“I don’t think I’ll ever be over that,” Eddie murmured.

“What?”

“That I can just kiss you.”

“You can do more than that if you want,” Richie said with a grin.

“I am not ravishing you against the table.”

“Hey, your words. Not mine.”
Eddie blushed and quickly covered his face.

“I wish you didn’t do that.” Richie tugged Eddie’s hand down and intertwined their fingers. He held Eddie’s hand across the table as a small smile tugged at his lips.

“I know. You—”

“Like seeing you.”

“What you like is that you can only say two fucking words and make me go beet red.”

“Damn right.”

Eddie laughed. He rubbed his thumb over Richie’s hand.

“So how’d the rest of the day go. Got the Halloween celebration all set up?”

“You mean having about a thousand bags of candy and containers of face paint for all the little gremlins that are going to be running through the museum tomorrow? Yeah, most of it is done. And you can come a little early if you want. Before we technically close to the public.”

“Is that ok?”

“I asked just in case, but yeah. Figured I could show you my office too since you’ve been curious.”

“A look behind the scenes huh? They let anyone do that?”

“Occasionally. Obviously, you mark it down so they have a register in case something does happen. But it’s the teenagers that work in the gift shop or as temporary tour guides that they’re more worried about.”

“I bet you’ve heard some fun stories there.”

“Definitely. There’s currently this Egyptian exhibit they have where the halls are made up like the inside of a pyramid and it’s relatively dark back there. Apparently, it’s the horniest place of choice.”

Richie laughed. “You want to see if that’s true?”

Eddie let go so he could playfully slap at Richie. “You wish. You’re just hoping to find a Rami Malek mummy back there.”

“Ah come on. He fucking kills it in those movies. You have to admit it.”

Eddie hesitated. “I… I honestly don’t know.”

“Don’t know what?”

“If I’m actually gay. Does being in love with you make me gay?”

Richie chuckled a little, but when he saw that Eddie was asking an honest question, he shrugged. “You could be bi. Or maybe demisexual if you honestly just don’t feel attracted to most people.”

“Wait, there are more?”

“Just go online and type in different sexualities,” laughed Richie. “There are so many. Probably a lot I don’t even know about by now. But demisexual just means you don’t feel sexual attraction towards
someone until after a strong emotional connection is formed. At least I think that’s it. And then that
doesn’t include the fact some people have romantic orientations that differ from their sexual
orientations.”

“Ok, now my head is spinning, and I haven’t even had a drink yet.”

“Yeah, there is a fuck ton of info out there. Pretty easy to get lost in it all, though I guess it’s better
than the shit information we grew up on.”

“That is true. My mom told me that if I shook hands with a gay man I’d get AIDS and die.”

Richie leaned across the table and kissed him. “I thank you for your noble sacrifice.”

They both laughed.

“I think I’ll just settle for Richie-sexual right now.”

“Well don’t I just feel fucking special,” grinned Richie.

They kissed again and then finally ordered drinks. They got something light to eat and then a second,
smaller course when the show finally started up. CC was the third person in the night. According to
Richie, that was a pretty good spot as it was early enough in the night that no one had left yet, but
that any late arrivers had probably already arrived, meaning she had a prime audience.

“Anyone ever know someone whose parent was a teacher?”

A few people clapped or cheered as a way of saying yes.

“Well try being the principle’s kid.”

She continued with her set, most of it a coherent story about some time she’d wanted to make
everyone think she could be a cool kid to hang out with despite the principle being her mom. She
talked about how she and a few others had created a plan to sneak into the cafeteria, steal all the ice
cream sandwiches, and to throw them to the other kids for free.

As she got to that part, a heckler yelled out, “You stole that from Recess!”

CC didn’t miss a beat though, still grinning. “You’re right. My twelve year old self did and let me tell
you. If you’re ever looking for a way to impress a bunch of people, do not use a Saturday morning
cartoon as the basis for your plan.”

Laughter happened, the audience still with her and whoever had shouted out shutting up.

“You see, instead of having a bunch of ice cream sandwiches rain down on hungry, excited kids and
me being crowned king, I soaked about three kids with melted ice cream and then knocked another
kid out when the box slipped out of my hands.”

More laughter occurred, CC using her expressive body language and tone to really send the joke
home. She bowed and got a large applause as she left the stage. She was in the back for a bit but by
the end of the fourth act, she’d come back out, grabbed a chair, and moved to sit near Richie and
Eddie.

“So?”

“You did great,” Eddie said. “But I have to ask. Did you really do all that?”
“Oh yeah. My mom had to suspend me. And since she was the damn principal I couldn’t even fuck around on my three days off. Mom got my homework from all the teachers and I had to do that the entire damn time.”

Richie laughed, though he kept his voice down so as not to distract from the current act. “That’s pretty great. Maybe try adding that into the set next time. Though if you can’t make it better than your final punch, I’d ultimately leave it out.”

“Thanks. And thanks for coming.” She glanced away for a quick second and then added, “I got friends over there I’m going to sit with.”

“So you do have friends outside of two forty year old white men. I’m impressed,” Richie said.

CC hit him in the shoulder with a small smile. “As I was saying, I’m supposed to hang out with them. If I don’t see you again tonight, I’ll see you later. Thank you for coming.”

“Any time CC,” said Eddie.

She put her chair back and hurried over to sit next to a small group of people. Eddie and Richie stayed for a little longer though they ultimately decided to skip the last two sets and go home. When they both arrived in their separate cars, Richie sauntered on over to where Eddie was opening up their building door.

“Fancy meeting you here. Mind if I come on up?”

“I don’t know. You seem like a sketchy character,” said Eddie before he actually opened the door.

“Is there any way I can convince you?”

“Hmm. I can think of one or two ways.”

Richie pulled Eddie into a kiss. “That good enough?”

“More than good enough,” replied Eddie as he opened the door and led the way back into their apartment.
ACT III: Love

Chapter Notes

So I fucking lied again. Before the end of this I thought up another small section/event that I really wanted to include in this story before its end. Technically could have made it its own story but I think the event I have in mind will work really well with this story and everything it's already built up. So yeah, get ready for almost ten more chapters than originally planned *manic laughter and crying ensues because I don't know when to stoooooop*

I'm joking though. I am loving writing this story and all the people responding to it so thank you a lot for that. Enjoy!

Thankfully since Halloween was an unusual day for work, Eddie didn’t have to leave quite as early as he usually needed to on a normal day. He slipped out of Richie’s arms and managed to do some brief exercises first and when he sat back, he saw Richie watching him with sleepy eyes. Eddie suddenly covered his face and laughed.

“What?” murmured Richie.

“Just thinking of that time you were watching me workout and…Jesus. I was so clueless.”

Richie let his hand fall open. Eddie scooted over so he was right by the edge of the bed. Eddie took Richie’s hand, gently kissing his knuckles before Richie started to pet Eddie’s cheek.

“Come back to bed.”

“I need to go to work Richie.”

“You have at least thirty minutes before you even need to get dressed.”

“Well. You do make a good case…”

“That was barely a case. I had about twelve more lines of defense but hey, you want to cave that easily? I’ll take it.”

Eddie laughed before Richie pulled him into a kiss and dragged him back into bed. Richie rolled him over so he was on top. He peppered kisses down his neck and then paused. Since Eddie had just finished working out, he didn’t have his shirt on. Richie stopped from going any lower.

“This ok?”

Eddie hesitated.

“It’s ok to say no.”

“Keep…going for now.”

“Ok.” Richie gave him a chaste kiss and then moved back down. He first gently traced the scar near
the center of Eddie’s chest. “Does it hurt?”

He shook his head. “It may later on depending on how the nerve endings grow back. But it’s less sensitive right now.”

Richie continued to gently trace the knotted tissue before kissing it. Then he went to kissing the more sensitive area around it.

“Ah, Richie…” Eddie squirmed underneath him.

Then Richie paused. His thumb teased the area underneath Eddie’s left nipple, but he didn’t go any farther.

Eddie glanced down. “What?”

“You sure this isn’t too far?”

“No…what are you going to do?”

“Just going to tease you a bit. That ok?”

Eddie sort of caught on, but said, “I don’t get what you can do that’s any more intensive than what you’ve already done.”

“Oh I have an idea,” Richie said with a slight smirk. “But if you don’t want anything too intense, then I won’t.”

Eddie didn’t get how it could be more intense than the lip or the marks on his neck, though he understood where Richie was focusing. Still, he decided to take a chance. He nodded. “Keep going.”

Richie kissed Eddie’s chest again and then gently ran a fingernail over Eddie’s nipple. Eddie’s breath hitched. Richie waited, but when Eddie didn’t tell him to stop, Richie continued to kiss the area, gently pulled. Richie’s other hand moved down Eddie’s back, over his ass. He held his leg up just a bit, massaging Eddie’s thigh as Richie’s mouth stayed focused on his chest. A breathy moan left Eddie’s throat. His fingers got tangled up in Richie’s hair, keeping him there.

Eddie’s toes curled, his breathing quickened as Richie worked him over. Eddie could feel the blood rushing down, his head lolled to the side…

His eyes caught sight of the time. Though to be fair, even if he hadn’t, they were pushing dangerously close to his current boundaries. He whispered, “Richie,” and Richie immediately stopped. Eddie pulled him up and they kissed slowly before Eddie murmured. “I need to get ready.”

“We still have time.”

“Technically, but now I need a cold shower too.”

Richie laughed, giving him a quick follow up kiss. “You know, you can try some things on me next time.”

“You sure?”

“Hey, only way you can learn is through experience. Right?”

“O…ok. Yeah. It’s a date.” They both laughed and kissed once more before Richie got off and Eddie quickly headed to the bathroom.
By the time he got out, a quick check at the time showed he’d run out of time to shave again. Instead, he just hurried through getting dressed and when he walked to the kitchen, Richie already had coffee and a packed lunch ready.

“You did all that while I was in the shower?”

“Not that much work, but yeah. I wanted to make things a little easier on you.” They kissed. “I’ll see you this afternoon.”

“Ok. And you might as well just take public transit since we’ll be together all night. It’ll be easier if just one of us drives.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

They kissed again and then Eddie hurried out to his car. Once at work, he went to his office first. He did some paperwork for about an hour. Then he was about ready to head upstairs when Jordan suddenly came around the corner.

“Have you ever face painted before?”

“Uh, no?”

“Know how to hold a brush.”

“Yes…”

“Cool. Because I need to hurry through this line before a bunch of six and seven year old’s decide they’ve been waiting too long and start making a fuss.”

“I’ve got your back.”

“Thank you so much. Come on.”

From then on, Eddie helped where he was needed amongst the throngs of children running around in their costumes and trick-r-treat bags. It was mostly just the main lobby that was open to them with special stalls set up with crafts and games, many pertaining to some type of historical concept or event though it was clear the majority of the children were just there for the free candy and small toys they won from the games.

Eddie joined Jordan in doing his best to help paint some faces. Thankfully, there was a little template that the kids chose from that he could also look at. They probably didn’t look great, but most of the kids were young enough that they didn’t care. They just laughed and enjoyed how the brushes tickled their faces.

After that line seemed to die down, Eddie helped with some of the passing around of food and then watched a few stalls to give other people a break. When the main rush died down, he went to the gift shop to get the numbers for the day and went back to his office to start inputting everything in.

He was almost done when Liz came in.

“Do they need help—”

“We’re closing in a few minutes. The last groups are leaving. Dr. Eason had me bring your friend.” She reached around the corner and pulled. Richie popped out with a large smile and waved.

“You’re welcome. Dr. Eason added don’t stay down here too long. You can finish any other reports on Monday.”

“I got it. I’ll be up soon. Thanks again.”

“You’re welcome.”

Liz walked back down the hall as Eddie asked, “Did you ask her to do that entrance?”

“Yep. She didn’t get why it would be funny, but I knew it would put a smile on your face.”

Eddie chuckled. “She doesn’t always get the social contexts, but she’s usually game for anything. How’s up there look?”

“Like a million and one kids raided the museum.”

Eddie smiled.

“You’ve got paint on you.”

“I had to help with the face painting for a bit.”

“I wish I’d been there for that. How’d you do?”

“Well I didn’t leave the kids looking like Jackson Pollock’s if that’s what you think. But it probably did look like a bigger kid just painted their faces for them.”

“I’m sure they still loved it.” Richie walked over to the desk and picked up the picture frame on it. “I remember you mentioning you wanted to put this on whatever desk you chained yourself to next.”

Eddie smiled as he glanced at the collage.

“Whenever Ben or Mike get a chance to come here, you should give them a little tour. I think they’d both get a kick out of it.”

“If I could get an opportunity to show them the archives, Mike might really lose his mind.”

“Now that would be the day. I’d like to see us try to get him to jump with joy.”

Eddie chuckled. “It really isn’t in his nature to be too over expressive though.”

“No. I guess not. He’d probably just have this soft expression of wonder as he looked around and let his hand float over everything, too afraid to touch it.”

“True.”

Richie looked around the rest of the office. “I think if it was a different color this would feel more like a cell. But the browns make it warmer. The desk is freaking sweet too.”

Eddie nodded in agreement, focusing on trying to finish up at least his current program.

“I’m guessing that poster isn’t yours.”

Eddie glanced towards the image of an old historical movement that had occurred in Chicago over a hundred years ago. He’d read up a little on it. “It was the last man’s. I still haven’t figured out what I want to replace it with.”
“You’ll think of something. Something vibrant. Maybe a van Gogh print?”

Eddie shot him a teasing look. “I’m surprised you know who that is.”

“I got your Jackson Pollock reference yet you’re surprised I know Vincent van Gogh?”

“Pollock is Pollock. Van Gogh is cultured.”

“I think you’ll find I’m a very cultured man.”

“Well this is news to me.”

“Refined in fact.”

Eddie pushed himself back from his desk and leaned back in his chair. “Really now?”

“Oh yeah. I’m pretty valuable.”

“Not only cultured and refined, but valuable too. I hit the jack pot huh?”

“Yes. You. Did,” said Richie. He enunciated each word, coming closer with each one before leaning over Eddie. He guided Eddie’s chin upwards, gently caressed his scar. When his mouth met Eddie’s, Eddie opened up. A slight moan escaped from in between their lips as Richie drew it out. Each movement was carefully planned. His tongue, sliding across the roof of Eddie’s mouth…

“Let’s…let’s stop,” Eddie gasped, “before the office has another reason to talk about me.”

Richie snorted. “To save your reputation, I’ll do it for you.”

“Thank you,” smiled Eddie. He gave him a small peck on the nose.

“I don’t know why you always do it there, but it’s fucking adorable. You know that, right?”

“I’m not that adorable,” murmured Eddie.

“You are to me. Absolutely fucking beautiful.”

“I thought you said adorable.”

“And adorable.”

Eddie shook his head, a slight blush appearing on his cheeks. “I started doing it because of our first kiss.”

“Really?”

“Not the drunk one. I don’t count it. But…when you were guiding me through what happened that night…and I just trailed kisses down your face…I don’t know. Kissing your nose felt like one of those things you always see couples do in a movie. So I kept doing it.”

“Fucking adorable.”

Eddie lightly hit him before focusing back on the computer.

Richie was silent for a moment leaning against Eddie’s chair, before he asked, “What are you doing here?”
“You really want to know? It would bore you out of your mind.”

“Try me anyways.”

“Seriously?”

Richie nodded.

“Well, right now I’m…”

Eddie walked him through some of the final steps. The work took a little longer because of that, but Eddie didn’t mind. He enjoyed explaining his thought process. When he was finally done, he glanced over at Richie who was giving him a loving look.

“You didn’t understand a word I said. Did you?”

Richie let out a long, contented sigh. “Nope. But I loved hearing you talk about it anyways.”

They kissed. Then Eddie said, “At least I’m done now. Let me introduce you to everyone else.”

Eddie shut off everything, grabbed his coat, and then headed upstairs. They ran into two other coworkers who’d also been doing some last minute work. Eddie introduced them and they all headed up to the main lobby together.

Some of the former stalls for the kids had already been completely put up. Others had just pushed things aside for space. More food, also real food rather than pure candy, and drink had been set out and it seemed the other guests of Eddie’s coworkers had arrived as he’d been working.

One of the first people they really paused to talk to was David. One of his kids was with him.

“This is the youngest one, right?” asked Eddie.

“Yep, this is Jen here. Currently my little-what are you again sweetie?” David asked in reference to her costume.

“A fairy unicorn princess.”

“Wouldn’t it make more sense to just say you’re a Pegasus princess?” questioned Richie.

Eddie hit him in the chest as Jen put on a pouting face and argued, “Fairy unicorn princess!”

“Can’t argue with kid logic,” David smirked.

“Well if there’s one person who would try, it would be this guy,” Eddie said with a roll of his eyes.

“What?” muttered Richie. “I’m just saying, a Pegasus can have the horn and the wings so it makes since to just say Pegasus princess.”

“You a Pegasus,” pouted the kid.

“I don’t think you understand how an argument works,” Richie said.

“Oh, she doesn’t,” David replied with a proud grin. “Doesn’t mean she won’t try though. And your name is…”

“Right, sorry. Richie, this is David. He works in my department. David, this is Richie, my room-no I
guess bo-part-or uh—"

Before Eddie could continue rambling, Richie and David gave each other a firm handshake.

“Roombopart huh?” questioned David. “Never heard of that species.”

“It’s a new one. Very rare. Bonds with people called Eduardo really easily.”

“Interesting. You should talk to one of our historians. Make sure they get all this recorded. It’s very exciting meeting a new species.”

“I’ll get right on it.”

Eddie face palmed. “I hate you both.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Richie. “I think I found my new best friend here.”

“No!” cried Jen. “Daddy my friend.”

“My apologies Pegasus—”

She gave him a look.


“Good,” she huffed.

“You heard her. I guess I’m her best friend,” laughed David. He picked her up. “Good meeting you Richie. I’ll probably see you guys again, but I’ll let my kid pick fights with some of the other employees so she’s not just wailing on you all night. Also need to figure out where Michael and Yong went.”

“His older boys,” Eddie explained to Richie.

“They say they steal grown up drink,” Jen said.

“Oh did they now? I knew there was a reason you were my favorite.” David pinched her cheeks. “Now to go get a handle on those teenagers. Hmm?”

“Yay!”

Eddie snorted as David quickly carried her away and off to find his older children.

“I’m just saying. Pegasus makes a lot more sense.”

“Are you still hung up on that?” laughed Eddie. “Please do not start a fight with a four year old.”

“If it happens, it happens. You know?”

“That is not how it works.” Eddie paused. He looked around and upon not immediately seeing someone he wanted to drag Richie too, he quickly added, “What do I call you?”

“Preferably Richie.”

“That’s not—”

“I know. I know,” Richie said with a kind smile. “Just teasing you. Call me whatever you like.
Partner is typically more common for older couples or people who have been together a while. I’m fine with boyfriend though. Or lover…”

Eddie hit him in the chest, his face going red.

“Or if you’re in a situation where you don’t feel as comfortable as you do here, roommate is just fine with me. Your choice.”

“Thanks. I’ll…have to think about it.”

“Take all the time you need.”

They shared a gentle kiss before Eddie guided Richie to the next coworker.

Time passed quickly as they went around. Some people they spent longer with, others it was just a quick hello, especially as Eddie realized there were still a few he hadn’t really interacted with. It was the perfect way to feel more included in his job though and the only reason Eddie left a little early was because he’d agreed to that other party with Richie. David was the only other person who left early too, holding a sleepy fairy unicorn princess and trailing two embarrassed looking teenagers behind him with his wife blocking their escape routes.

Then they headed to the club and instead of historians and social scientists and archivists, the room was filled with hopeful actors, comedians, writers, and other people hoping to break it in show business. Some of the people Eddie had briefly heard of from Richie’s stories, a few had apparently even gone to school with Richie, but since Eddie hadn’t actually seen Richie do a set yet and the only comedy club he’d gone to was the one where CC had performed at, everyone was pretty much new to Eddie.

Richie led the conversations now. Before going in, he’d made sure it was alright with Eddie how he introduced him though. Eddie had assured him it was ok with whatever he preferred. And because of that, every few seconds Richie was throwing an arm over Eddie, pulling him close, and saying with the proudest voice, “He’s my boyfriend.”

Each time it sent Eddie’s heart into a flutter and he occasionally curled into the crook of Richie’s shoulder to hide his face. When Richie wasn’t embarrassing him in the best of ways though, Eddie did get to know some of the people. It was a great way to get a further look into Richie’s life and it overall went great.

Except for one small incident near the end.

Unlike the Halloween party at the museum where everyone had been in casual dress except for a few kids that people had brought, the club’s party was split between half wearing normal clothes, maybe with a pumpkin or a bat printed somewhere, and the other half actually in costume. Because of that, it shouldn’t have been too surprising that they’d see a particular costume eventually, but it still really caught Richie off guard.

He was in the middle of telling a story when a guy behind him tapped him on the shoulder and went, “Hey—”

Richie had turned around, only to jump and instinctively punch the clown in the face.

“Shit.” Thankfully Richie acted quickly and grabbed the man as swiftly as he had punched him before he fell back against the ground. As Richie helped steady him, he turned his head, looking for the host.
Before he could say anything though, the host, who had seen what happened, yelled out, “Stop punching the guests Richie!”

“I said I didn’t like clowns Frank!”

“It’s fucking Halloween! I’m not banning clowns from a fucking Halloween party!”

Richie let out a slight groan but quickly focused back to apologizing to the person. Thankfully, the person took it pretty well and apologized for sneaking up on him. He even said, “I should have known better with your reputation, but I honestly thought it was a joke. Sorry again.”

“Reputation?” Eddie muttered.

One of the members of their group leaned forward. “This clown makes it number eighteen.”

“Eighteen what?”

“Times I’ve punched someone wearing a clown costume in the face,” groaned Richie. “I’ve tried telling people not to sneak up on me and they still fucking do it.”

“It’s an understandable reaction,” Eddie kindly said.

Others laughed, thinking Eddie was making a joke. Eddie couldn’t exactly get angry though. It wasn’t like many people in the world could ever understand that feeling. He just squeezed Richie’s hand and kept holding it throughout the rest of the night.

Besides that one incident though, they stayed a little longer and the night managed to end on a pleasant note. Neither were really tipsy by the end, but Eddie had made sure to not drink much so he could drive them both home.

The moment they arrived at the building, went inside and closed the door, Richie pulled Eddie into a kiss.

“I feel like we’ve been doing this for years,” Eddie sighed against Richie’s lips.

“I know. Hasn’t even been a week though,” mumbled Richie as he kissed Eddie’s neck. “Bed?”

Eddie nodded.

Suddenly Richie wrapped his arms lower around Eddie and lifted him up.

“Richie!” laughed Eddie. He looped his arms around Richie’s neck, moved his legs around Richie’s waist in a way that felt so natural. They kissed before they both fell against the bed.

“Ok,” huffed Richie, “I can only do that about once a month or I think my back might give out. If there’s ever a special night where you would like a repeat of this, I suggest you RSVP.”

Eddie laughed pulling him into another kiss as Halloween night came to an end.
ACT III: Love

Chapter Notes

Thanks again as always. Also, the beginning of this chapter is dedicated to the fact that my gay ass heart can't take James Ransone with a beard and I'm pretty sure Richie would feel the same way about Eddie.

Also, I don't usually write sex scenes but I feel like exploring this aspect is really important for exploring Eddie and Richie's relationship and Eddie's growth as a whole so here's me trying. Hope you guys enjoy as always!

It was Sunday and Eddie didn’t have to go to work. When Richie whispered, “Stay,” this time he did.

Eddie pushed a little and Richie complied, letting Eddie move slightly over him. When Eddie kissed along Richie’s neck, he laughed.

“What?” asked Eddie.

“Just tickles. Your facial hair.”

Eddie groaned. He started to push himself up. “I need to shave—”

Richie pulled him back down. “I like it.”

“Wait, really?”

“Let it fully grow out. You’ll be like a sexy Bond villain with that scar.”

Eddie raised an eyebrow. “Does that mean I captured the Bond girl?”

“This Bond girl is over Bond. Yesterday’s news.”

“A change of sides huh?” They laughed as Eddie gently kissed him and then moved lower.

“Alright,” he whispered, “I'll grow it out a bit. See if I like it.”

“I know I would. But only do it if you really want to.”

“Thanks,” smiled Eddie as he glanced back up. “But I still think I will. I wouldn’t mind being a sexy Bond villain.”

“You going to tie me up?”

Eddie blushed. “I should have said that and gotten you all hot and bothered.”

“Don’t worry. You’re getting better by the second,” smiled Richie.

As Richie drew him into a kiss, Eddie pulled back a bit. He started to move along Richie’s neck. The motions were slow, soft at first. Just him barely brushing his lips against Richie’s skin in a way that made Richie shiver underneath him. He wanted to pull out the same noises Richie could drag out of
him, so he took another leap of faith.

He planted a kiss behind Richie’s ear, knowing it was particularly sensitive. Richie sighed against him. It was a reaction that made Eddie smile, but wasn’t quite as drastic as Eddie was hoping for. He would have to get inventive, something he had never done. However, he thought about how Richie had made him feel. He thought about the motions Richie had used. If this didn’t quite work, Eddie would try something else. At least he knew Richie would get a kick out of him trying to experiment.

Eddie kissed him, then nipped at Richie’s earlobe and tugged. He hadn’t put a lot of pressure behind it. He’d actually done it so gently he’d wondered if it would even cause much of a reaction. However, it proved a lot more effective than Eddie had planned as Richie arched his back underneath him and muttered, “Jesus fucking Christ Eds.”

Eddie kissed him again. He dragged his fingernail down the right side of Richie’s neck, drawing his attention there, only to suddenly pull on his earlobe again.

“A…ah…oh god fucking kill me. You keep this up and you’re going to make me come without even touching me.”

Eddie momentarily paused. He rubbed his thumb over Richie’s neck, enjoying the feeling of how it bobbed underneath him. “Can I?” he whispered.

He relished feeling how Richie shivered against him. “You actually mean that?”

Eddie nodded. Somehow the thought of touching Richie was an easier step to take than having Richie just go ham on him.

“You sure?”

“Richie, as an emotionally and sexually repressed man who had a control freak for a mother and a bitch of a wife, if there’s one thing I know how to do it’s jack myself off, and I imagine doing that to someone else isn’t that much different.”

Richie covered his face with his hands as he hid his laugh. A grin slowly spread across Eddie’s face.

“Ah, have I finally figured out how to break you?”

“Certainly getting there. You would not believe what you are doing to me right now,” whispered Richie as he tried to keep his breathing under control.

“I’m pretty sure I can feel what I’m doing to you.”

Richie blushed. He threw one of his arms over his face, covering his eyes with the crook of his elbow.

“Hey now. No double standards here,” whispered Eddie. He kissed Richie’s chin and then moved up, pushing Richie’s arm up as he slowly drew a kiss from him. “You’ve already made me feel so god damn good. I want to make you feel good.”

“I’ve barely gotten to touch you.”

“That’s ok. Besides, I want to try. Got to experiment sometime. Right?”

“Well I’m not going to argue,” Richie said as he shifted underneath him.

Eddie kissed his neck again, one of his hands slipping underneath Richie’s shirt. He slowly rubbed
circles into his skin. “Is this ok?”

“Eds, I will not say no to literally anything you do to me right now.”

Eddie smiled. He kissed Richie, his hand moving a little lower. He tugged on Richie’s ear again, and as he arched into him, Eddie ran his lower hand over him. It was different. Obviously, it was different. The only person he’d ever touched like this was himself. However, he didn’t grow too uncertain or went into a panic. He knew what he liked, so he had at least a starting point for Richie.

And even if Eddie got too overwhelmed with some of the things Richie did to him, he wasn’t getting overwhelmed through this. If anything, he felt in control. It was a good feeling, even more so because he could tell Richie was increasingly getting more into it as his cheeks turned red.

“You’re enjoying this,” mumbled Richie.

“You’re enjoying that I’m enjoying this.” Eddie moved his hand. He was just barely touching Richie, yet he could tell Richie was already jumping out of his skin.

Richie pulled Eddie closer. However, Eddie moved his hand back up and pressed it to Richie’s chest.

“I want to do this for you so no god damn humping my leg.”

Richie whined. “You are killing me.”

“Just have some patience,” Eddie softly said. “Please. I want to know I can make someone feel good.”

“You always make me feel good.”

“Thank you for saying that.” Eddie pressed against Richie’s chest again, forcing him down. He laughed. “But I want to do this for you. Which means turn down your horny meter a couple of watts and get it under control.”

“Ahhh…come on Eds. Please.”

“You’ll get there. But I’m doing it.” Eddie moved his hand down and forced Richie’s hips back against the bed when he tried to move those too. “Down boy.”

“Say that again but with more authority.”

“You want me to be authoritative?” chuckled Eddie. Richie tried to push against him again. Eddie pushed down even harder and this time he kept the pressure on Richie’s hip. Richie tried again but Eddie didn’t let him budge this time. “I. Said. Down. Boy.”

Richie groaned into Eddie’s mouth as they kissed. Eddie’s hand moved back down.

He started slow even though it was clear Richie was already achingly hard for him. To think he could cause anyone to be this aroused would have been unthinkable before. But with Richie, it felt right. Even if it was different from his past experiences. Even if he technically was still pretty new to all this, the way Richie squirmed and tried so hard to push against him was one of the best things Eddie had ever seen.

“Urgh. Pick up the pace.”

“Nope.”
“Eddieee…”

“You said we would go at my pace. Right?”

“This is not what I meant.”

“But we’re going at my pace. Just like you promised.”

“I feel like you’re holding me hostage,” groaned Richie.

“Am I?”

“Such a fucking tease.”

“Really? I think you like it.”

“I am dying here Eddie.”

“And you’re enjoying every second of it.”

Richie let out another long groan. His head fell back as Eddie continued the slow, methodical movements. Then he finally ran a careful finger along the edge of Richie’s underwear. Richie tried to press up against him.

“Please…”

Eddie kissed Richie’s neck so he could keep talking.

“Just…touch me. Please. Please Eddie.”

He kissed Richie’s chin. “I love you so fucking much.”

“I…I love you too,” moaned Richie. “So please…”

Eddie slipped his hand under.

“Oh fuck me. Please Eddie just…just a little fucking faster…”

Eddie didn’t comply. Not right away. For one, he was still just getting used to the feeling. It was simultaneously very similar and yet very different. He wasn’t doing this to himself but to Richie, watching him squirm and try so fucking hard to press against him.

It would take him a while to get used to this new dynamic. However, he loved every fucking second of getting to watch Richie be the one to finally turn red in the face and be completely undone by everything Eddie was doing.

“I love you so fucking much. Just…just please…”

“Oh,” whispered Eddie. He picked up the pace just the barest bit. He smiled when he could tell that was even more torturous.

When Eddie kissed Richie on the mouth again, he finally moved at the pace Richie had been hoping for. Eddie went just a little faster, bit by bit and finally stopped trying to keep Richie from thrusting against his hand. Richie pulled him closer, their tongues sliding against each other’s. He could tell when Richie was getting close. His breathing became even quicker and more irregular in the moments where their lips parted.
And then Richie’s grip tightened, his fingernails pressing half moon crescents into Eddie’s skin as he shuttered against him. Eddie kissed him and then pressed their cheeks together.

“You’re so fucking beautiful,” Eddie murmured into his ear.

“Right back at ya.”

Eddie could feel Richie’s tensed muscles finally ease. Eddie gave him a quick peck on the nose and then removed his hand, getting up.

“Hey. Where the hell do you think you’re going?”

“I’m washing my hands.”

Richie groaned. “I can see it now. I’m going to have to chain you to the fucking bed for some post-coitus cuddling.”

Eddie lightly blushed at the thought even as he walked into the bathroom. “Listen, there is no reason not to be clean.”

“Killing me. Absolutely killing me,” groaned Richie.

Eddie walked back in and laid down next to him. He nuzzled against his shoulder, throwing an arm over Richie’s chest.

“Eddie?”

“Hmm?”

“I know what you want to say.”

“Do you?”

“Yeah, go get fucking cleaned up and stop being a god damn degenerate.”

Eddie snorted. “Something like that.”

“Knew it.”

“But when I signed up to live with you, I signed up for everything. Your messy ass and all,” sighed Eddie.

“Technically messy underwear and stomach—” Eddie hit him for that. “But I still appreciate your willingness to deal with me. Mess and all,” Richie replied. He had one arm underneath Eddie and gently stroked his shoulder. “You sure you’re good?”

“I am fucking perfect.”

“I’m glad. But…it sure I can’t repay the favor?”

“…not right now. It’s just…”

“You don’t have to explain yourself.”

Eddie smiled. “I know. I just…I don’t know. Being with you I feel in control of myself for the first
time in my life. I can give over a little of that control. I love how you can say a word and it just…
affects me. But I can’t quite give over all control. Not yet.”

“It’s ok. Like I said. We can take as long as you want.”

“Thanks,” murmured Eddie. He kissed Richie’s cheek. They laid there for a while longer, Eddie
actually dozing for a moment as he kept his nose pressed against Richie’s neck. When he did move,
a quick glance at the clock showed they’d been there for over an hour. It made Eddie smile and he
asked, “Want me to make breakfast?”

“You want to make breakfast?”

“Let me amend that. Would you like me to try to make breakfast?”

Richie snorted. “I still like the sound of that. And I’m guessing it’s your subtle way of telling me to
take a fucking shower.”

“Well now that you mention it…”

Richie laughed and lightly hit Eddie in the chest. “I’m going. Try not to burn down the kitchen.”

“I’ll try,” Eddie replied with a light kiss to Richie’s cheek.

As Richie went into the bathroom, Eddie headed to the kitchen. Though he certainly couldn’t throw
something together like Richie could, he’d picked up a few things and certainly knew some simple
techniques. He threw a skillet on the stove top and grabbed some eggs.

The stovetop started to heat up. Eddie grabbed some bread. He put the slices in the toaster and then
grabbed an apple. He ate it as he tried his best to keep the eggs cooking evenly. After he threw the
core away, he focused on the stovetop as his free hand lightly rubbed the scar underneath his shirt,
just as something to do.

Richie eventually came back in with fresh clothes on him. He walked around the counter and
wrapped his hands around Eddie’s waist. “Not bad. Let me help just a little though.”

Eddie chuckled. “Fair enough.”

He handed the spatula over to Richie. He didn’t move though, simply holding onto the arm that
Richie was keeping wrapped around him as Richie worked from behind. They finished up breakfast
and then sat on the couch together. Eddie flipped through the early morning news as Richie tried to
decide on something to watch. When they finished eating, they put the plates on the coffee table and
Eddie leaned back against Richie’s chest as Richie picked a movie.

“We should plan a vacation at some point.”

“Yeah?” asked Eddie.

“It’s already torture knowing I can only hold you for this long for about two or three times every
morning out of the week. I want a full fucking week of you all to myself.”

“Where would you want to go?”

“Wouldn’t matter. We wouldn’t leave our hotel room once.”

Eddie laughed, nuzzling against Richie’s chest as Richie tightened his grip around Eddie. “We’ll
figure something out,” smiled Eddie. “I could get a few days off to go with you whenever you start
touring farther away from home. Or we could plan it in between your tour dates.”

“I like the second idea.” Eddie felt Richie kiss the top of his head. “Like I said. I want to keep you all to myself.”

Eddie intertwined their fingers and held Richie’s hand. “It’s a plan then,” Eddie smiled. He relaxed in Richie’s arms as they spent their morning watching the movie. The rest of the day, they barely spent a moment separated.
As October left them and November came, a new type pattern became set. For one thing, Richie seemed determined to try and make Eddie late every god damn day. Still, Richie was good at predicting when Eddie had a busier work load ahead of him. Those days it was just a couple of words and a few quick kisses before he let Eddie go. On days when he could tell Eddie was in a better place and wasn’t in such a hurry though, that was when Richie wrapped his arms around him and did everything in his power to keep him there. Richie certainly got close to convincing him a few times, but as Eddie always reminded him, he still had a job to do.

Otherwise though, their routine wasn’t that different. Just when Richie was making stupid comments or messing with him, Eddie now found he had a very specific power he could use to shut him up.

God it felt good being able to just grab Richie and kiss him whenever he wanted to.

When exactly a week had passed, Richie was cooking dinner that night as Eddie read on the couch. Jason was coming over for dinner to talk shop with Richie. However, before he got there, Richie realized he was missing some last minute ingredients.

“Do you want me to go grab them?” asked Eddie.

“No, I know exactly what I need. If you could just keep stirring this so the bottom doesn’t burn and just take that out of the oven if I’m not back in time, we should be good.”

“You got it.” Eddie jumped up. He kissed Richie as he walked by and hurried out of the apartment. Then Eddie got comfortable leaning against the counter. He slowly stirred the pot with his left hand as his right hand continued to hold his book up as he read.

He stood like that for just over five minutes when he heard a knock at the door. He put everything down and hurried over.

“Oh, hey Jason. Richie just stepped out for a moment but come in.”

Jason did. He gave Eddie his usual once over, only instead of moving on and acting like he hadn’t done it, this time his shoulders actually relaxed. His eyes went over the made-up couch as well.

“Thank fucking Christ. Finally,” Jason groaned as he walked in.

Eddie blushed a little as he closed the door behind him. “Um…yes well I guess—”

“Did you make the first move?” asked Jason.

“As October left them and November came, a new type pattern became set. For one thing, Richie seemed determined to try and make Eddie late every god damn day. Still, Richie was good at predicting when Eddie had a busier work load ahead of him. Those days it was just a couple of words and a few quick kisses before he let Eddie go. On days when he could tell Eddie was in a better place and wasn’t in such a hurry though, that was when Richie wrapped his arms around him and did everything in his power to keep him there. Richie certainly got close to convincing him a few times, but as Eddie always reminded him, he still had a job to do.

Otherwise though, their routine wasn’t that different. Just when Richie was making stupid comments or messing with him, Eddie now found he had a very specific power he could use to shut him up.

God it felt good being able to just grab Richie and kiss him whenever he wanted to.

When exactly a week had passed, Richie was cooking dinner that night as Eddie read on the couch. Jason was coming over for dinner to talk shop with Richie. However, before he got there, Richie realized he was missing some last minute ingredients.

“Do you want me to go grab them?” asked Eddie.

“No, I know exactly what I need. If you could just keep stirring this so the bottom doesn’t burn and just take that out of the oven if I’m not back in time, we should be good.”

“You got it.” Eddie jumped up. He kissed Richie as he walked by and hurried out of the apartment. Then Eddie got comfortable leaning against the counter. He slowly stirred the pot with his left hand as his right hand continued to hold his book up as he read.

He stood like that for just over five minutes when he heard a knock at the door. He put everything down and hurried over.

“Oh, hey Jason. Richie just stepped out for a moment but come in.”

Jason did. He gave Eddie his usual once over, only instead of moving on and acting like he hadn’t done it, this time his shoulders actually relaxed. His eyes went over the made-up couch as well.

“Thank fucking Christ. Finally,” Jason groaned as he walked in.

Eddie blushed a little as he closed the door behind him. “Um…yes well I guess—”

“Did you make the first move?” asked Jason.
“Well…yes,” Eddie admitted. He walked over to the kitchen and Jason followed. Eddie went into the fridge and pulled out a beer. It hadn’t taken him long to realize that Richie never actually drank the brand unless Jason was over, showing he specifically got it for his assistant whenever he visited.

Eddie handed it over and went back to stirring the pot. Jason popped the cap off on the edge of the counter. He took a swig. “I am not surprised,” he said, “but damn is it a relief either way.”

“Is…is that why you always had such an odd look on your face when you visited?”

Jason snorted. “That among other comments, but yes. I thought you were together from the beginning.”

“Really?”

“Yes, and it was torture figuring out you weren’t. Fucking glad that song and dance is over with though. Have you found the patch of skin by his right ear? If you really want to do something to shut him up, I suggest aiming there.”

“I actually-wait. So you two…”

Jason shrugged. “It was like once. Sorry, didn’t think of how weird that might sound—”

“No, I’m curious actually,” admitted Eddie. Jason leaned forward, cocking his head to the side. “So you…were together. But you still are able to just…work together?”

“Well first off, together is a big word. One-night stand is more accurate,” Jason amended. “And romance isn’t my thing. Richie knew that going in though he did kind of get lost in the moment.”

“Lost in the moment?”

“He tried to cuddle. I lightly slapped him in the face.”

Eddie laughed. “So just very clear boundaries then?”

“Something like that. Intimacy on that level is not my thing. But even if I was into it, I knew from the get go I couldn’t be what Richie was looking for. Which is why I feel like I can finally fucking relax now.”

“Really? Relax around Richie? Every time you two talk it looks like he’s going to give you an aneurism,” chuckled Eddie.

“He probably will. But listen, even if I look exasperated in every conversation we have together, he’s still one of the closest friends I have.”

“You’ve worked together that long. Huh?”

“Been through it all. And you kind of get wrapped up in each other’s social lives. Even if you don’t intend to.”

Eddie nodded in understanding. He fell silent though as Jason slowly started to go off on a tangent, still sipping his beer. Eddie absently rubbed his chest a little.

“It was hard though. Just watching boyfriend after boyfriend go and…even his work. As he got older it was starting to look like he was living each day like it was his last. I asked him if he had cancer at one point. Or at least something that would explain the downward spiral. It just kept increasing though. Especially in this past year.
“And at one point I couldn’t take it. I threatened to leave thinking it might be the only thing that would snap him out of it. But even that didn’t seem to affect him. And I didn’t leave. I never would do something like that to him.” Jason trailed off for a second. He took another swig.

“But that’s why I was so fucking thankful you showed up out of the fucking blue. I could tell that whatever he’d been looking for, he found it after he disappeared. That whatever he’d been fearing was gone too. Cancelling all his shit was a fucking headache, but seeing how much more life was in him since the last time we’d talked, I wasn’t going to argue with that.

“And I could tell the change, in large part, was because of you. Which is why I thought you should get together, but he was still ready to go fucking celibate for you and just never say anything. I didn’t think it was exactly the right decision, but considering he had his life back in order and just wanted you near, I wasn’t going to push. I’m glad it turned out I didn’t have to though.”

“Jason?”

He glanced up.

“You have a surprisingly big heart.”

“Oh fuck off. And don’t you dare tell Richie. I won’t hear the end of it.”

Eddie softly laughed.

“And I would go all big fucking brother on your ass and threaten you against hurting him because I definitely couldn’t stand to see Richie spiraling downwards again, but thankfully I can see you’re just as fucking into him as he is into you.”

“I would never hurt Richie.”

“I can tell. It’s why you’re the first boyfriend of his that I’ve approved of.”

“I’m honored.”

They both laughed and Eddie found himself actually enjoying Jason’s company. He’d never interacted with him without Richie being around. It felt nice getting to know the man behind the mask so to speak.

“So, let me guess. You haven’t actually had sex yet. Right?”

Eddie blushed. “Anyone ever tell you you’re very direct?”

“Always. I’m not trying to get you embarrassed right now though.”

“What’s your goal then?” Eddie curiously asked.

“Help mainly. I imagine you’re pretty lost. I’ve known a few people in their late thirties or forties that have suddenly found themselves having to re-think what they know about sexual behavior. There’s always that moment of panic where you feel like you’re in middle school going through puberty again.”

“Among other things…that is actually a really good way of putting it,” admitted Eddie. He let out a small sigh. “I could just ask Richie, but…”

“You don’t want him to feel like he’s doing all the work. Right? And it’s hard to surprise him when you’re asking essay style questions every few seconds too.”
Eddie nodded.

“Well first recommendation, topping is going to be easier and more natural for you.”

“Topping?”

“Yeah. In a typical heterosexual relationship the man is on top, woman on her back?”

Eddie went red and quickly covered his face.

“Please tell me you’ve had sex before because otherwise this is going to be a very difficult—”

“I’ve had sex before damn it,” Eddie said as he threw a dishrag at Jason. “I just…I’m realizing why Richie laughed at a comment I made a couple of days ago.”

Jason snorted. “I can only imagine. My point though is that doing it that way first is going to be way easier on you. Also, Richie likes to talk big and raunchy about screwing said person’s brains out, but he really prefers to be manhandled into position so trust me when I say he will not mind the first time going like that. He also has more experience in bottoming.”

“And about um…that?”

Jason laughed again. “You are fucking adorable with how you blush.”

“I have gotten enough of that from Richie. I do not need it from you too.”

Jason held up his hands. “Alright, backing up. But the first thing I would say? Explore your own body. Again, you’ll feel like it’s fucking middle school all over again, but it’s the best way to get comfortable with yourself. Also, the internet is your friend. Fact check things obviously, but there’s still a lot of good information out there and a lot of good people who want to make finding that information easier for the newcomers. And hey, if you ever find something you just aren’t sure about, you can ask me.”

“You actually mean that?”

“Wouldn’t say it otherwise.”

“Thank you, Jason,” he murmured, moderate surprise in his voice. “Even when I was younger, I didn’t exactly have anyone who I could just talk to. About anything sexual. Much less this.”

“Conservative upbringing?”

“I wouldn’t quite say that. More like control freak upbringing.”

“I can fucking drink to that.”

Eddie smiled. He continued to stir the pot as Jason pulled out several documents.

“That looks like a hefty one,” commented Eddie as he noted a large file.

“It’s a side thing I’ve been talking to Richie about. You know, very few do only stand-up as their job and if they do, they’re traveling every god damn second. Considering you, I doubt Richie would want to do that.”

“What is it?”
“Writing for a sitcom. He’s done a couple of things like that before. Sitcoms, wrote in jokes for speeches. Was a writer for a sketch show in his younger years before he actually got big into stand-up. Absolutely hates it,” snorted Jason. “If he’s not the one talking, what’s the point?”

Eddie laughed at that.

“But he’s good enough at it, and it’ll keep him from being on the road twenty-four seven.”

Eddie nodded in understanding. “And did Richie ask you for help in finding other work or did you just do it on his behalf?”

“My whole job description is to make connections and set things up.”

Eddie raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah, yeah fine. I go the fucking extra mile for Richie. Don’t—”


At that point, the door opened. Richie came in with a bag in hand as he said, “Thanks for not burning down the kitchen Eddie.”

“I try.”

“Good to see you made it Jason. You’re still staying for dinner. Right?”

“Yeah. You know, you really need a dining room table.”

“I don’t have a dining room or just the room for anything else in here,” snorted Richie. “You’re lucky I have room for three bar stools.”

Eddie moved back as Richie came over. Richie turned the oven off and took out the food in there, then quickly focused on the pot on top. As he opened up some things and started to mix them in, Eddie wrapped his arms around him from behind, gently kissing his neck.

Richie only paused in stirring when he glanced over at Jason. He snapped his fingers. “Is that a smile I fucking see on your face? You ok?”

“Not smiling damn it,” Jason said as he threw the dishrag from before back at him. “Now listen, so I have the contract here…”

Eddie mostly listened as Jason and Richie went back and forth. There were a lot of details in there, just about how many episodes Richie would write for, how he wasn’t supposed to change any major planned plot structures without discussing things with the head writers, what would happen if the show got renewed and the episodes he wrote for got enough views. Things like that.

Eddie made sure to tell Richie he didn’t have to do it, but Richie admitted that even with all the complaints he’d already voiced, he was honestly happy to do it as it gave him more of an opportunity to be with Eddie.

Then Jason pulled out a proposed list of tour dates.

“I got it so you have one or two tour dates every week in either Chicago or the surrounding areas for November to December. Then a break in January and part of February. After that, have some dates on the West Coast that are spread out amongst February to April, another break from May and June and then some more tentative dates on the East Coast, slightly down into the South from July to
September. As you can see, the later groupings aren’t as structured so you’ll still have time to come home when needed.”

“Nothing in Florida, right? Because if I’m visiting that damn state to see my friends, I sure as hell am not going there on tour.”

“I did not book anything in Florida,” Jason said with a roll of his eyes. “So…?”

“It looks pretty good.” Richie looked over everything again and then added, “Yeah. Let’s go ahead with it. Let me know if there’s any major changes to the sets on the East Coast.”

“Always. And did you figure out a name? They always love to have a name for an act, even if it’s thirty minutes tops.”

“Yeah…Looking Back.”

“Not bad. I’ll write it down.”

Richie signed some things and then Jason was finally packing up.

“Thanks for dinner. And like I said Eddie, just ask if you need help.”

“I will. Thanks again for talking to me. I didn’t realize I needed it until I did. And it was nice getting to know you a little better.”

“Anytime.”

Richie’s head swiveled back and forth like clockwork. “Am I missing something here?”

“Nope,” Jason said. “I’ll see you later Richie. Eddie.”

“What the hell did you two talk about while I was gone?” asked Richie as the door closed behind Jason.

“Nothing much,” Eddie said, a slight smirking appearing. “Maybe a little about you.”

“Alright. Now I’m afraid to ask.”

“All good things,” laughed Eddie. He slowly kissed Richie before leaning back and saying, “How about I help you clean up and then we put a movie? And tomorrow is the first day I’m going to stay home and work here. So…”

“So you’re saying you don’t have a bedtime.”

Eddie rolled his eyes.

“Sounds perfect to me.”

“Good.” Eddie pecked him on the nose. “Let’s get cleaning then.”
ACT III: Love

Chapter Notes

Finally getting to write some more Mike and Bill moments too! Enjoy <3

As the days passed and Richie really began working again, Eddie actually didn’t go to his first show. He’d wanted to, but as Richie had put it, it wasn’t like he had a million and one sets. There was a lot of repeat with only slight variations at times. He wanted the main one he was running with to really feel good before he had Eddie come see it. Eddie had complied. He could have easily listened to Richie every single night, but he liked how important it was for Richie to get it right, especially for Eddie’s first time.

Because of that, Eddie went to bed by himself on those nights. However, he always just barely woke up when Richie came home. If he didn’t work the next day, or he at least didn’t have to physically go in, then Richie would drag him awake with longer, more teasing kisses. Otherwise, after a kiss or two, Eddie would fall back into sleep with Richie’s arms around him.

During it all, they’d obviously kept in contact with the others. Beverly had already gone to her court date over her own divorce. It looked like everything would officially go through before November was over. Ben had also gone ahead and put his apartment on the market and been in the process of selling furniture or getting it moved to Bev’s. Bill mainly talked about his current novel if anything, and Mike had sent everyone pictures as promised when his place had been set up.

Neither Eddie nor Richie had actually mentioned the new development though. It just…hadn’t come up. And neither were completely sure how to break it to their closest friends.

As it turned out, Eddie got the chance when Bill called. Considering the different time zones and everyone having very different schedules, they usually texted when they could. It also meant getting to hear from any of them was always a pleasant surprise though.

Eddie was sitting in the cafeteria at the museum having lunch with some colleagues when he got the call. “Excuse me for just a second.” Eddie walked off, standing in a nearby hall. He leaned against the wall as visitors came and went. Without even thinking about it, he lightly scratched at his chest before answering. “Hey Bill.”

“Hi. It’s good to hear your voice.”

“You too.”

“I’m not interrupting anything. Am I?”

“No, I’m actually on lunchbreak right now. What’s going on?”

“I was actually calling to see if you had plans around Thanksgiving.”

“Not really. Museum is still open, but I don’t have to come in. Richie has a show the day after, but otherwise that whole week isn’t a busy one for us.”

“Well I’m starting to do the second revision of my current novel and my publicist convinced me to
do a short signing tour. Just to kind of get back in the public eye since it’s been a while since my last one.”

“I’m glad to hear it’s coming along.”

“It is. And well, the reason I’m telling you is because I mainly agreed to the whole thing if I got to pick what cities. I chose Chicago and was wondering…”

A smile lit up across Eddie’s face. “Of course. I’m guessing it’s during the week of Thanksgiving?”

“Exactly. And—” Bill paused.

Eddie just barely heard, “Boat’s ready! Packing up lunch now!”

“Alright, I’ll be there in a second!” Bill called back. Then his voice came in clearer as Bill must have put his phone back up to his ear. “Sorry about that. Anyways, I—”

“Was that Mike?” asked Eddie.

“I-um-well yes.”

Eddie chuckled. “What has it been? Three weeks for you guys and you’re already down there visiting him again?”

“Not exactly.”

“What do you mean?”

“I…I…I…I…”

“Bill? You ok?”

“Yes! Just, I…what it is, just I…I…” Eddie could hear him purposefully swallowing so he could clear his throat. There was silence for a moment and then the barest whisper sounded, “Never left?”

“Never?”

“No?”

It took Eddie a moment to follow. “Oh. Are you saying…”

“I-yeah. I mean. We were going to tell you anyways. At some point. Just…working up to it?”

A gentle smile showed on Eddie’s face. “I know what you mean. Are you happy?”

“Well I never thought I’d be the type of guy to go out fishing…”

Eddie laughed.

“But I am happy. And Mike hasn’t tipped the boat yet so fingers crossed. You know?”

“I would rather be caught dead than on a boat, but more power to you,” chuckled Eddie. “So you guys are going fishing now?”

“In a few minutes. I mean. Mike does the fishing. I’m still trying to figure out how to cast a line.”

“When did it happen?”
“I don’t know. Just…I knew at the start I wanted to be anywhere but back at home in California. Kind of why I was so determined to go and help Mike move in the first place and just…it happened.”

Eddie smiled. Bill was clearly nervous talking about it, but also sounded so damn happy. Eddie took his own deep breath. If there was any time to say it, and with Bill now likely coming to their place in a week’s time…well. “Hey, I guess there’s something I should tell you too then. From me and Richie.”

“Are you guys getting married?”

Eddie sputtered and nearly fell over. “Are we what?!”

“Oh, sorry. Is marriage the right word? Or are you guys thinking of doing a non-legal celebration type thing?”

“No! I was just going to tell you we got together!”

“Well we already knew that.”

“How could you possibly know that before we did?”

“What do you—are you telling me that Richie was actually sleeping on his own couch for over a month?”

“Where else would he have been sleeping?”

“We thought you were lying!”

“We?”

“Me and Mike. And Bev…and Ben,” admitted Bill. Eddie started to laugh. “Have you really only just gotten together?”

“I mean, it’s been over half a month now, but…yeah. Not as long as apparently everyone else has been thinking.” Eddie snorted. His mind went back to CC and Jason and just how obvious it had been to them. Or how literally in his first week of work, before Richie and him had even gotten together, apparently over half his coworkers had bet on the odds that he was seeing someone. “God we were so fucking clueless,” he laughed.

“Clearly.” Eddie could hear the eyeroll in Bill’s voice. “So, with all that awkwardness out of the way, I’m basically asking if it’s alright if Mike comes along too.”

“Well, you sure it’s alright? From what you guys have said so far, it’s not the biggest apartment.”

“Well the pull-out is definitely big enough to fit two, and I know I don’t mind. I’ll run it by Richie and you can run it by Mike, but I’d guess it would work out fine.”

“Thanks. I’ll talk to him—”
You ready? Who’s on the phone?” came Mike’s voice.

“Eddie, here hold on.”

“Hi Eddie,” came Mike’s voice.

“Hi. I hear you’re going fishing?”

“Was going to go this morning, but yeah, got pushed back to now. It’s overcast here though so it’s not too hot.”

“Well, according to Bill you’re both now visiting in about a week so I would recommend buying about three layers to wear per day because it is already cold as shit here.”

Mike laughed. “Colder than Derry could get in the winter?”

“Colder than Derry,” smiled Eddie. “It’s good hearing from you. It’s going to be nice seeing you two again.”

“Same to you and Richie.”

“It was good talking to you Eddie,” Bill quickly added. “I’ll text you when we have a better idea on when we’re coming up.”

“Sounds good. Good luck fishing.”


“Bye,” Mike added.

“Bye guys.” Eddie hung up. He stared at his phone for a second before doubling over with laughter. When he finally got a hold of himself, he started to walk back to lunch and texted Richie.

You would not believe the conversation I just had with Bill.

Oh really?

I’ll tell you all about it when I get home.

I’m actually getting ready to start driving. Doing a show outside of Chicago tonight?

Right. I remember now. I’ll tell you when you get home then.

Ah come on. You’re killing me with anticipation.

I’ll tell you when you get home.

Fiääme. I’ll see you later tonight then. Love you.

Love you too.

With that, Eddie sat back down and finished lunch. He got back to work. Since Richie was going to be away part of that night, he remembered that he’d already made plans to go out for drinks with some coworkers. He finished up and then met three of them at a nearby restaurant. He had a good time, laughing and joking for nearly two hours before he headed home.

He wasn’t quite used to coming to an empty home yet, but he knew he would have to get used to it.
once Richie started really going on tour and couldn’t just drive back home every night. Still, he appreciated the privacy for now. It gave him time to…figure things out.

Forget all of Richie’s jokes about bleaching his search history and shit, Eddie’s own was certainly something to widen his eyes over by this point. And just the amount of terms involved? Jesus, he felt like he needed a dictionary. Still, Jason hadn’t been wrong. There were a lot of helpful things out there, forums, people sharing their own personal experiences, some sexual, some just needing to talk through the emotional process of it all. It was helpful, but it didn’t mean Eddie didn’t come across a few things he didn’t necessarily want to see.

Not for the first time, he slammed his laptop shut and threw his head back. “Why are people so fucking weird?” he groaned into his hands.

Eddie rubbed at his face only to pause. That was another thing he was still getting used to, the facial hair. He didn’t mind it like he’d kind of expected to. He’d never grown it out this long before because first his mom had always gotten upset at seeing even a little stubble, and then Myra—

A dark thought crossed Eddie’s mind. Had having a clean face been one of the ways his mom had deluded herself into thinking she still had her little boy? Jesus, it felt like he was learning something new every other day about just how fucking much his mother or Myra had infiltrated his head and affected his own actions, big and small.

But neither of them mattered anymore and Eddie had decided for himself he liked the beard. It definitely gave him a more distinctive look. The scar on his cheek was almost easier to see too compared with the darker hair.

And Richie? Eddie’s lips quirked upwards at the mere thought. Richie definitely fucking liked it.

With another long sigh, Eddie put his laptop away and then went in for a shower. Once out, he threw on his pajamas and got into bed. He read before he felt tired enough to go to sleep. Most nights he went back and forth between the few books he had, or he sometimes went through Richie’s collection of comic books. Now he was reading one of those. After he finished it, he slipped it back into the box and pushed it back under the bed.

Eddie leaned back and went to sleep.

From his point of view, he didn’t dream. It was like only a few long seconds passed with momentary darkness before he felt arms coming around him and kisses peppering his neck.

“Hmm…what time is it?” he mumbled into the pillow.

“Almost three,” came Richie’s voice.

“You could have gotten a…a…” Eddie paused to yawn. “Hotel. Wouldn’t have minded.”

“Rather sleep here. Besides, you said you talked to Bill and would tell me what about?”

“So that’s why you drove all the way,” Eddie got out with a sleepy smile.

“Yes, you were secondary to the information you were withholding.”

Eddie snorted.

“So?”
“Right, three things,” mumbled Eddie. “Bill and Mike are coming over for Thanksgiving.”

“And Mike?”

“That’s the second thing. Them.”

“Them?”

“Bill and…Mike. Been staying together. Bill never…never left.”

Richie didn’t respond right away. Eddie started to drift back to sleep but came a little to when he felt Richie kiss the back of his neck again.

“Ok, not that Mike isn’t a catch—”

Eddie snorted.

“But you’re saying Bill is willingly living in Florida.”

“Not everybody thinks it’s a hell state like you do,” Eddie said with an amused huff.

“Well they should. What good has ever happened in Florida?”

“Disney World?”

“Yeah, but they also have Sea World which the shittiness of that place negates any fun found in Disney World.”

“Not how that works but…too tired to argue,” sighed Eddie.

“Well I’m right anyways. And…good for them. A bit surprising but…good. Definitely good. What’s the third thing?”

“Apparently everyone…everyone in the fucking world,” Eddie yawned, “knew I was in love with you before you or I did.”

“Pfft, I doubt that. What about Bev and Ben?”

“They knew too.”

“Bullshit.”

Eddie felt the warmth of Richie leave him. Eddie shifted around, rolling over until his face was pressed up against Richie’s back. “Whatcha doing?” mumbled Eddie.

“Texting Bev.”

“It’s almost four in the morning for them Richie.”

“Yeah, well she can respond when she wakes up then. Not everyone could have known before us.”

“Apparently they did,” Eddie sighed. “But at least now all our friends know.”

Richie paused. Eddie then felt Richie’s body relax. “Yeah…that does feel good. But at least Ben then. Ben couldn’t have known.”

“He did too. Now just go to bed Richie,” sighed Eddie as his lips quirked up into a smile. He
tightened his grip around Richie and breathed him in.

“Ok, ok.” Richie picked up one of Eddie’s hands, kissing his knuckles. When he let go, Eddie dropped it back around Richie’s middle. “Going to bed now. We can figure out how to exactly plan for Bill and Mike. They’re obviously staying with us.”

“Figured you’d say the same thing,” sighed Eddie. “Love you.”

“Love you too. Night Eds.”

Eddie didn’t respond, already fast asleep again as he stayed pressed to Richie’s back side throughout the night.
A couple of days had passed. Bev had since texted Richie back assuring him everyone had fucking known about him and Eddie before Richie and Eddie had even known. It was pretty ridiculous and made Eddie want to knock himself upside his own head. However, at least their closest friends now knew. That was one small weight off Eddie’s chest.

As for the plans with Bill and Mike, they had finally said they would be arriving the Wednesday before Thanksgiving and would be staying through Saturday. Since Eddie worked Wednesday, Richie would pick them up and get them situated. They would meet afterwards. All day Thursday would of course be spent together, then Bill had his book signing Friday, and Richie had a show back in Chicago which he agreed they could all go to. After that, Saturday would be theirs before Mike and Bill had to catch their plane that night.

However, that Wednesday was still a few days away. It was actually early Sunday with Eddie and Richie still curled up in bed. As Eddie slightly woke up, he pulled the covers closer. He felt surprisingly cold.

“Oh, you have got to be fucking kidding me.”

Eddie felt a draft of air as Richie hopped out of the bed. Eddie rolled over and pulled the sheets and comforter around him. He heard and felt nothing until Richie came back into the bedroom. “God damn it. I fucking told him that it didn’t look right, god damn motherfucker.”

Eddie peeked out at him. He could see Richie sitting on the edge of the bed, quickly texting before he put his phone down and tried to get back into the blankets.

“Hey, give me the comforter Eddie.”

“No,” mumbled Eddie.

“Will you let me get back under?”

He curled in farther. “It’s cold.”

“Yeah, I know it’s fucking cold. The apartment isn’t getting heated properly. Let me in.”

Eddie let out a small grumble. He struggled a little, refusing to move until Richie grabbed him and the blankets. He pulled them close and then forced his way under.

“You said the heater isn’t working?” mumbled Eddie as he woke up a little more with Richie’s arms coming around him.

“Yeah. Went out sometime last April. Ended up living in the apartment in Nevada for a while. Not because of that specifically. It got fixed, but the part that was needed didn’t look fucking right. Told
the landlord that. Guess I was right only it wasn’t until now that it gave out because the heater’s been used so much more with the sudden drop in temperature,” grumbled Richie.

“When will it be fixed?”

Richie’s phone dinged. He moved away for a second. “Hold on…fucking Tuesday.”

“That’s not bad considering the last minute nature of it,” sighed Eddie.

“That’s assuming he fixes it on fucking time. I swear, if it's still like this when Bill and Mike get here, I’m getting a massive fucking hotel room for us.”

Eddie snorted. “It’s not that bad.”

“You didn’t scamper across the god damn apartment freezing your toes off trying to get the thermostat to work.”

“Scamper? You seriously used that fucking word?” laughed Eddie. He rubbed at his face, growing a little more awake.

“Listen, when you have to deal with the cold ass floor, you can use whatever word you want. I’m using scamper.”

“I’m not getting out of bed,” Eddie said with a small smirk as he finally turned to fully face Richie.

“And what about breakfast?”

“You can scamper across the floor and go make me some.”

“Oh can I now? Since when did I turn into your personal cook?” asked Richie. He grabbed Eddie’s hips and pulled him closer.

“Considering you do almost all the cooking, you’ve always been my personal cook.”

“Ok, that’s fair. I’ll give you that.”

Eddie laughed just as Richie moved more on top of him and then suddenly grabbed the comforter and threw it completely over them.

“It is not that cold.”

“Well it probably will be by tonight.”

“Even so, it’ll get stuffy with the comforter completely on top of us.”

“Will it now? And what if I do this?” asked Richie. He pushed Eddie’s shirt up, his head disappearing underneath as he planted soft kisses along Eddie’s chest and stomach.

“Well…considering breathing starts to escalate. Pores open up. Heat is generated more quickly but also more easily expelled and that heat is then trapped underneath this comforter so…”

“Enough with the science lesson,” laughed Richie. He went a little lower…then lower…

Eddie tensed up a little.

“Sorry.” Richie pushed Eddie’s shirt down and came back up to kiss him on the lips.
Eddie responded before murmuring, “No, it’s…it’s ok.”

“No. I feel like I keep pushing you when I don’t mean too. I need to be better at regulating that. Just you’ve been,” Richie slowly drew a kiss from him, “incredibly giving,” and then another, “and I just want to repay you somehow before you get blue-balled or something.”

“You know that’s not a real thing, right?”

Richie pulled back a bit. “Wait, really?”

“I mean, there’s epididymal hypertension but not very many men get it, or that often, and literally just jacking off can relieve it. Getting blue-balled is really an over exaggeration of the whole process. It’s an expression. Not a medical condition.”

Richie started laughing hard.

“Ok, I know. Science lesson over with.”

“You sure about that?” laughed Richie.

“No, positive,” sighed Eddie. Their lips met and then lingered as Richie slid his tongue along Eddie’s, their hands moving over each other in order to pull the other closer. Then Eddie gently moved up to Richie’s face and cupped his cheeks. He pulled his face back and kissed him on his nose. “But I think…pushing a little might be ok.”

“Yeah?”

Eddie nodded. “I don’t think I’ll ever be completely comfortable until I just get past that first hurdle. Just…nothing to major. Still going slow.”

“Of course,” murmured Richie.

“But…” Eddie paused and drew him into another kiss. This one started slow but gradually increased in intensity, the heat increasing as they were completely under the comforter. Richie moved his hand down, their hips meeting. This time Eddie fought against that initial jolt. He rode it out, trying to focus more on Richie’s lips than anything else. There was a feeling in the pit of Eddie’s stomach, like a walnut that had lodged itself in there.

But it was ok. Richie wanted him to feel good. Richie loved him with his whole god damn heart. Eddie wanted to give himself to that. It was ok to give himself to that. Richie would never hurt him. Eddie knew that. He would never regret giving himself over like that. He just had to push past this hurdle. He was safe with Richie. His mind knew that. His body just needed to get past that feeling too.

Eddie pulled back a bit. His voice shook a little. “Touch me.”

“You mean that? You know you don’t have to do this for me.”

“I’m doing it for me,” whispered Eddie as he got his voice to calm down a little. He took a deep breath, whispered against Richie’s lips. “Touch me.”

“You’re sure?”

Eddie closed his eyes but nodded. “Please?”

“For you, I’d do anything,” murmured Richie. He kissed Eddie again and then moved back down.
He pushed Eddie’s shirt up, again trailing kisses down lower and lower. He slowly went over Eddie’s navel. His fingers came around Eddie’s pajama pants. He felt Eddie tense. “We can stop at any time.”

“I don’t want to stop.”

“You’re positive?”

“Yeah. Just…I trust you.”

“Ok.”

Eddie kept his eyes closed. His fingers tangled up in Richie’s hair. Richie hesitated, but when Eddie didn’t try to pull him off, he went lower. Eddie could feel the sudden exposure to air. Richie continued the downward kisses and—

Eddie tensed once. Then he slowly eased into it. Richie was…he was…

Richie dragged his tongue from base to point causing Eddie to tense for a whole different kind of reason. A moan escaped his mouth at the same time he felt Richie’s lips on him. His back arched. He was ok. He was ok. He was—

The knot in his stomach seemed to finally break away. He was ok. Richie had him.

Finally, Eddie relaxed. He kept his fingers tangled up in Richie’s hair. Then Richie did…something. Something that drew out another long groan from the back of Eddie’s throat.

“Richie…that…”

Richie paused. He kissed Eddie’s stomach. “Still all good?”

“Yeah…keep going. Keep going Richie.”

“You got it.”

Eddie laughed, though the noise got cut off by another groan. Richie’s lips moved around him, up and down. Then his tongue slowly dragged…then lips again. The only reason Eddie wasn’t completely arching his back and tensing up was because Richie had all his weight pressed against Eddie’s hips.

“I-I love you so fucking much,” gasped Eddie. His grip in Richie’s hair tightened but he pulled him closer rather than pushing him off. He felt Richie pull his lips back before kissing him softly.

“Still good?”

“Y-yes. Richie…”

“I got you,” Richie whispered. His head went down again. Eddie moved his hands away so he didn’t risk instinctively pushing Richie’s head down too hard. He held his hands up above him. One of them clenched into a tight fist. His other hand found the wall behind the pillows and pressed against it, stabilizing himself.

“F-faster?”

“That a question?”

Richie complied.

“Ah…fu…Richie…yes…y-yes…Richie…”

Eddie groaned. His back arched again as Richie’s teeth just barely grazed him. Then Richie swallowed him all, sucking and holding Eddie there as Eddie’s gasps and groans increased even more.

“Y-yes. R-Richie. Richie…R-Richie…fu-ah!”

He could feel his entire body shuddering. He’d never felt more sensitive in his life as Richie seemed to pull away so god damn slowly. Eddie slowly relaxed his legs around Richie. He unclenched his hand, wiped at his face.

“That feel good?”

“It felt…fucking amazing,” sighed Eddie. He pushed the comforter down, needing at least a moment to feel the colder air on his face.

Richie’s face popped up, hair a mess as he was practically grinning from ear to ear. “And no need for you to feel like you need to run off to the bathroom.”

“Wait…you…”

“Swallowed every last drop.”

Eddie blushed hard as Richie drew him in for a slow kiss. Richie pushed himself up a bit more and as he did, Eddie moved his hand down Richie’s abdomen.

“Sorry I’m not completely repaying the favor,” murmured Eddie.

“No,” Richie said with a sigh as he arched into Eddie’s touch, “this is payment enough. I’m just happy I could finally bring some enjoyment to your side of things.”

“You always bring joy to me,” chuckled Eddie, “but thank you still.” Eddie pressed his face into the crook of Richie’s neck, hand slowly and lazily moving along Richie. He’d gotten a lot more used to this feeling and as he continued to stroke him, he murmured, “You will have to teach me that sometime though.”

“Oh I am…am totally teaching you that,” sighed Richie.

Eddie laughed into his neck.

“And I-I…” Richie paused as his voice shook and Eddie’s hand quickened. “I am…appreciating you not being such a fucking tease this morning.”

“Well you weren’t a tease to me. Figured I’d repay the favor.”

“I wasn’t going to be that much of an asshole and draw out your first blowjob.”

“That wasn’t my first blowjob Richie.”

“Really? Because I can feel your face heating up against my neck as we speak.”
“Oh look at that. I’m removing my hand now—”

“I am sorry,” whined Richie. “Please, just please don’t be that big of a fucking tease.”

“Well as long as you’re sorry,” smirked Eddie. He kissed Richie and then went back to picking up the pace as the rest of his body lay against Richie.

“Ah…thank fuck.”

Eddie continued to softly press his lips to Richie’s neck as he dragged Richie to completion with a long moan leaving Richie’s throat.

“Oh, you are far too good to me,” sighed Richie.

“Seriously? I just gave you what? Your three thousandth hand job after you gave me the best blow job of my life?”

“Only your best because it was your first-ow!”

Eddie laughed after he kicked him.

“Just promise not to get up yet. It’s still too damn cold. Please?”

“Fine,” sighed Eddie. “I don’t think I could stand anyways.”

Richie snorted, though the noise was cut short too. “Ow! Ok, ok. Stopping it.”

“Thank you,” sighed Eddie. His eyes slipped shut as he snuggled against Richie. He had never felt so exhausted but in simultaneously such a good fucking way. If this was how he felt after that…his cheeks flushed at the very thought. He still felt good though. He felt so good. He’d never thought sex could feel this fucking good and they hadn’t even pushed all the way yet.

When Eddie opened his eyes again, the light coming into the apartment was even brighter. The comforter was higher up around his neck than he remembered it, and Richie was more lying down.

“Did I fall asleep?” he mumbled.

“Yep.”

“What time is it?”

“Hold on…almost eleven.”

“When did we first wake up?”

“Going by my text to the landlord…about seven ten.”

“Jesus,” sighed Eddie. He snuggled in close. “Hmm…I’m hungry.”

“I bet you fucking are-ow! Don’t kick the cook or you might find an eggshell in your breakfast.”

“I surrender.”

“Good,” murmured Richie. He gently kissed him before letting out a tired sigh. “God damn it. I do not want to get out from under this comforter.”

Eddie pulled back a little. He kicked the comforter partially off.
“God damn it. It’s too fucking cold.”

“Stop complaining so much and just put on a long-sleeved shirt.”

Richie rolled his eyes as Eddie went to the restroom and closed the door. He cleaned himself up and after scrubbing his hands, he paused. His hand touched his stomach. Then he went lower. He stopped just at his pelvis bone…

He took a deep breath and suddenly leaned against the sink, body shaking from relief. Richie had touched him. And he’d touched him so fucking gently, so kindly. He’d touched him and it had felt good. Eddie had enjoyed it. Richie had enjoyed it. It felt…

Right.

That was what had been holding him back. The fear that giving himself over would somehow feel like the other times. That it would be almost painful and so god damn emotionless like signing a god damn business contract. But it hadn’t. He’d gotten over that fear and the small pit in his stomach was completely gone.

When he got out, Richie was already in the kitchen. He’d changed into a long-sleeved shirt and sweatpants and socks. He glanced up. “You ok? You were in there for a bit.”

“Definitely ok,” whispered Eddie with a small smile. “One hundred percent ok.”

“Good. Now what do you want to eat? I can make breakfast or something else since it’s basically lunch time.”

“Whatever you want. Surprise me.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

They spent the rest of the afternoon mostly in the kitchen. Eddie grabbed a blanket at one point, keeping it over his shoulders as he mostly stayed behind Richie, kissing him softly and just watching him cook. They ate, cleaned up, and then camped out on the couch. Richie grabbed the comforter since it was colder in the apartment and they bundled up as Richie put on a movie.

“I swear,” sighed Richie. “If it gets any colder, I am going with you to work tomorrow.”

Eddie snorted. “How about you go bother CC at her job? Hmm?”

“Actually, that’s not a bad idea. Need to keep working on those scripts for the TV show anyways. I can do that there on the iPad.”

“See? Problem solved. And then everything should be fixed Tuesday.”

“Assuming he fucking fixes it.”

Eddie snorted. “If you really really want to, we can grab that hotel room like you suggested. But all else fails we could just camp out on the couch together.”

“Us and Mike and Bill? Elbows are going to get shoved in people’s faces and knees will be pressed into people’s backs no matter what positions we’re all in.”

“We’ll figure something out. And I’m sure it’ll be fixed by then.”

“Better,” grumbled Richie. He pulled Eddie closer as Eddie snatched up the remote.
“Alright, what are we in the mood to watch?”
Eddie scratched at his chest as his other hand tapped the down arrow on the computer. He continued to look over everything when his phone suddenly buzzed. He looked over one last number before he opened the text message.

Look who’s flight landed early. Early! Talk about a fucking miracle. Right?

Attached was an image. Richie had taken the picture, his face in it with a large smile and Mike and Bill talking behind him, oblivious to the photo. They were in the lobby. Eddie jumped up and practically ran up the stairs in order to get there quicker, the badge around his neck swinging back and forth.

When he came out the door into the public space, Eddie forced his legs to slow down just a bit as he weaved in and out of people. He went in the direction that he felt automatically pulled to, strings of fate that only grew stronger when they were near. Then, Eddie spotted them at the front. Bill and Mike were staring up in wonder, especially Mike at the large skeletal structures. However, Richie hit Bill in the chest. He jumped a little and more gently nudged Mike as they all spotted Eddie heading over.

Eddie dodged the last visitor and grabbed hold of Mike and Bill.

“Look at you,” Bill said in amazement, one hand cupped Eddie’s face as he ran his thumb over Eddie’s beard.

“He’s hot. Isn’t he?” Richie said. He sounded so fucking proud. Eddie looked down and blushed as Bill dropped his hand.

“You look really good, alive,” Mike added. “Not that you didn’t before but…”

“No, I get what you mean,” Eddie replied. “I feel alive.”

He then hugged them both individually as Mike said, “Sorry for surprising you at work.”

“No, I would have insisted you visit right away,” smiled Eddie. “Do you have plans yet?”

“No really,” replied Bill. “We just dropped everything off at your apartment and Richie here has been re-telling us the exciting tale of the heating problem.”

“Complaining more like it,” snorted Eddie as he rolled his eyes. “It’s fixed now, and it wasn’t that bad.”

“It was terrible. I felt like an icicle.”

“If you hate the cold so much, why’d you settle more here and not in your apartment in Nevada?”
asked Mike.

“Chicago has more character. And Las Vegas is fun for a couple of days and work, Reno isn’t horrible, but the rest of Nevada is boring as shit. I’d rather cold and interesting than dry and desert.”

“You heard him, he chose this place,” smiled Eddie. “And yet he still complains so fucking much.”

“You love it.”

“Do I?”

“You do.”

They almost kissed, but at the last moment paused and looked at Mike and Bill. Mike waved his hand. “Don’t stop on our account.”

“Richie, I’m going to be honest,” said Bill. “I knew you were into Eddie since we were kids.”

“How the hell did you know that?”

“Because you liked to say stupid shit to us, but you focused all your ‘sexual conquests’, ” Bill made sure to put physical air quotes around that as he said it, “towards Eddie like you were trying to make him jealous every five seconds. It was just like any other hormone raging idiot of a kid who thought bugging the girl he liked would somehow get her to like him.”

“I did not!”

Eddie cocked his head to the side. “You know…I don’t think Bill is completely wrong on that front.”

“Remember the first time he claimed he wasn’t a virgin?” Bill said. “He wouldn’t stop yelling across the classroom, ‘Hey Eddie! Hey Eddie! Guess who has experience with his dick now!’ and you yelled, ‘Don’t say that word in class!’ so Richie yelled out just about every other euphemism under the book?”

Eddie laughed. “And Richie got detention for it.”

“Totally unfair,” muttered Richie with a huff.

“Hearing you lot talk about school actually makes me happy I was homeschooled,” chuckled Mike. “Something tells me I wouldn’t have learned anything in a class with you.”

“You missed out on a lot though,” Bill said with a soft smile. “And of course the teacher could never shut Richie up. The only one who could come up with a killer comeback that managed to stop him was—”

“Stanley,” Richie, Eddie, and Bill all said at once with kind looks.

“I’m sure he did,” smiled Mike. “And I’m sure the whole class was incredibly thankful for it as well.”

“It was the only time anyone in our group was moderately cool. It was always when Stan was managing to get Richie to shut up,” Eddie said.

“Excuse you. I think everyone appreciated how I managed to keep the teachers from teaching us and made them forget to assign homework,” Richie replied.
“Maybe on the first day,” Bill said. “After that, it got annoying.”

“Liars, all of you,” snorted Richie.

Eddie smiled. Then he glanced at his watch. “Listen, I should be getting back to work—”

“Hey, we barged in on you,” replied Bill. “It’s no problem at all.”

“I’m sure Richie can figure out somewhere to drag us to,” Mike said.

“Well if you want, or you could explore the museum if that interests you until I get off.”

“Wait, really?” asked Bill.

“Sure, I can get free passes for a few. Just have never had to use them since Richie would get bored out of his mind wandering around here by himself,” Eddie smile.

“I wouldn’t say bored,” replied Richie. “It’s just I can run through here in about twenty minutes without reading every last plaque and see all I need to see.”

Eddie rolled his eyes.

“But you guys are visiting us. If you are honestly interested…” Richie said.

“I would love to walk around here,” Mike said.

“Yes. I would love to see the other exhibits.”

“I’ll be right back then.” This time Eddie did give Richie a quick kiss before walking over to the first desk. He talked with the woman there for a bit and then got the tickets. He walked back. He handed each over and then said, “I will see you all on the steps at five then?”

“Sounds good,” Bill said.

“Hang on. That gives us over three hours to walk around here,” said Richie. “You seriously can’t expect to kill that much time here. Right?”

“Are you kidding? I doubt we’ll even make it through half of this place before it’s closing time,” said Mike.

Richie groaned. “You’re killing me. But I still love you both. Save me in a few hours Eddie?”

“Of course,” smiled Eddie. He kissed him lightly and then quickly headed back to his office.

As Eddie went back to work, Richie followed behind Mike and Bill. Richie was certainly interested in what he was getting to see. The only part that had been really open during Halloween had been the lobby. However, whereas he could look at a display, appreciate it, and move on, Mike and Bill weren’t really like that. Mike had to see everything from every which angle, taking note of every little detail as he went. Bill’s nose was practically pressed to every piece of writing, making small noises in the back of his throat to indicate when he was taking note of something particularly interesting.

Half the time, Richie was standing behind one of them, tapping his foot as his thumb quickly scrolled through his phone. “You have been staring at that for ten minutes.”

“It’s been two minutes,” said Mike. He glanced over, taking note of the phone in Richie’s hands.
“You should have been born at least ten or more years later. You were made for the age of technology.”

“And you should have been born in the stone age.”

Bill let out a small laugh.

“Rude,” said Mike.

“I’m sorry. I would never agree with Richie against you.”

“Thank you.”

“Now who’s being rude?” Richie rolled his eyes. “You’re both impossible. I hope you know that.”

“That’s very rich coming from you,” Bill said.

“Why do you think they call me Richie?”

“Alright, that was an especially terrible joke,” Mike smiled with a slight shake of his head. “You sure you’re good at stand-up?”

“I’m a god damn genius.”

“If you say so Richie,” Bill said with a teasing glance.

They continued on to the next room. Each one seemed to take a torturous amount of time from Richie’s point of view. However, he didn’t actually hate it. If he had been alone and forced to go at the same slow pace, then he truly would have been dying. At least being with Bill and Mike meant he was enjoying their company and the teasing that was going back and forth though.

As they finally moved to another room, Richie glanced up from his phone. He was still moving behind Mike and Bill, letting their own interests lead them. They walked close together, but not actually touching. At one point, Bill clenched and unclenched his hand. Richie watched as his fingers stretched out. Then he clenched his hand again and put it in his pocket.

A soft smile showed on Richie’s face. Going from the way Mike’s own hand tensed up, it wasn’t like he was oblivious. He just couldn’t quite bring himself to reach out too. Richie didn’t push for now. He wasn’t sure if they wanted him to press anyways and they weren’t exactly in the right place for that kind of discussion. Richie would just wait if they needed to talk.

They continued on with the achingly slow pace until an announcement sounded over the PA system.

“The museum will be closing in fifteen minutes.”

“We have to come back. If not during this trip, then another time,” Mike said.

“I don’t think we even made it halfway through.”

“All I can say,” said Richie, “is you are not dragging me with you on any second trip.”

Bill laughed. “Did you really hate it that much?”

“No, you two are just way too slow,” snorted Richie. He checked his phone again. “Eddie said he should be done a few minutes. Let’s head out.”
“Hey, we have at least ten minutes left,” Mike said.

“So we have just enough time to look at one more display going by how quickly you two walk.”

Bill hit Richie in the shoulder before quickly moving on.

As they finished up, Eddie waited outside on the steps. He was in the middle of texting Bev, promising that they would all call her and Ben tomorrow, when the others finally came out.

“So you survived until I got off,” said Eddie.

“They did. I didn’t,” Richie replied. “What happened to saving me?”

“I’m saving you now,” replied Eddie with a quick kiss. “Dinner guys?”

“Richie said you’d take us to a favorite place of yours?” Bill questioned.

“Right! I remember we were talking about that. Did you drive?” asked Eddie.

Richie shook his head. “Good old city transportation. Which means you children,” he looked to Bill and Mike as they finally started to walk down the steps, “get to sit in the back.”

“That assumes you get shotgun,” Bill replied.

“Of course I get shotgun! Eddie, tell him I get shotgun.”

Bill grinned. “Which car is yours?”

Eddie pointed it out.

Richie gasped at both of them. “You wouldn’t—”

Bill darted down the steps.

“Oh no you don’t!”

Eddie laughed good and hard as he and Mike continued their slow walk down the steps.

“It’s like they’re eleven again, racing off the edge of the rock quarry,” Mike commented.

“Pretty much,” snorted Eddie. “Want to sit up front?”

“Sure.”

Eddie laughed as they finally walked up to the car. Richie and Bill were struggling to stand closer to the passenger’s side when Bill managed to push Richie a little farther back. Richie grabbed Bill and tried to spin them around so he would be closer to the car, only for Eddie to suddenly unlock it and Mike to slip right in.

“Hey!” cried Richie.

Bill shook his head. “Now that is just unfair.”

“Both of you get in. I’m starving,” Mike said.

“I can’t believe you did this to me,” Richie groaned. He threw open the back door and got in. Instead of walking to the other side, Bill went in the same way, shoving Richie over and closing the door.
“All hands and feet inside the vehicle children?” asked Eddie.

“I do believe Richie is the only child here,” Bill replied.

Mike shook his head. “You were totally a willing participant in all this. If anything, you made the first move.”

“What? If I hadn’t ran out, then Richie totally would have stolen the seat.”

“And yet now I am in the seat,” Mike replied. “It really is amazing how that happens sometimes.”

Richie threw his head back. “You are such an asshole.”

“Ok, now you’re not allowed to say that,” Bill responded as he gave Richie a little kick.

“Should we drop them off at daycare?” asked Eddie.

“As long as the caregivers keep them separated. I think Richie is a bad influence,” Mike replied.

Both Richie and Bill cried, “Hey!” at the same time.

Eddie and Mike burst into laughter as Eddie finished driving them all to dinner. It turned out to be a good night. Richie talked a bit about the set he was doing Friday though he wasn’t giving anything big away. Even Eddie wasn’t sure which one he was doing. Bill talked about his current book and they all teased him about the upcoming book signing with Richie going, “Eddie may be stuck at work, but I’ll be bugging you the entire god damn time.”

Mike talked about just getting settled at home, exploring the town. Eddie and Richie got to hear all about how Mike had convinced Bill to go fishing in the first place, and Bill admitted that before they’d come up, he had managed to tip the boat.

“It was because I told you I hadn’t so far,” Bill groaned. “Shoved my foot in my mouth is what I did.”

Richie snorted. “What tipped you over?”

“I saw an alligator.”

“You mean a rock that looked like an alligator.”

“In my defense, it was a very convincing rock!”

“What did I tell you?” sighed Richie. “Crack addicted, gator infested hell hole.”

“Well now that you mention it,” Bill said, “it did look like it was smoking a pipe.”

“It was a rock,” laughed Mike, “and you know it.”

They kept talking even after finishing their meal. When Eddie did drive them back home, Eddie saw that Richie had already done up the couch for both of them. They all watched a movie on it. Once it was over, Eddie took a shower and Bill after him, and then they all retired for the evening.

Eddie threw his arm over Richie and closed his eyes. “The only way this could be better is if Ben and Bev were here,” he murmured.

“Well if that ever fucking happens, they’re sleeping on the floor. Or one goes to the couch and the
other with us. I say we steal Bev. Less likely she’ll kick us onto the floor.”

Eddie softly laughed. He curled in closer before finally falling asleep.
When Eddie woke up, it was quite a struggle to get Richie to let go as he curled in closer and closer. The only thing that finally got him to move back was Eddie saying, “Do you want fresh coffee or not?”

“You are free to go,” mumbled Richie as he shoved his face back into the pillow.

Eddie gave him a quick kiss on the top of the head and then got up. Walking towards the kitchen, he saw Bill and Mike were already awake. Bill was on his laptop. A quick glance suggested it was that manuscript. Mike was reading a book that either he had owned for a long time or had been bought secondhand judging by its cracked spine and how Mike had easily folded it in half.

“Richie still asleep?” asked Bill.

“He’s trying. Just wait until the coffee’s fully done. Then he’ll be up,” Eddie said as he went ahead and started to get that going. “You hungry?”

“Not really,” Mike replied.

“Does Richie allow fruit in the house?”

Eddie laughed. “He tries to avoid them if at all possible, unless he’s cooking with them. That being said, there are apples.”

He waited until Bill slightly turned around. Then he tossed it over.

“If you want to take a shower Mike, go ahead. If Richie takes one today, it probably won’t be until ten or something.”

“Sounds good. I’ll do that then.” Mike put his book down. As he grabbed some things out of his bag, Eddie waited by the coffee machine. He pulled out four mugs and when it was done, filled up two for him and Bill.

Eddie walked over and leaned against the armrest of the couch as Bill continued typing for a moment. When he finally paused, he closed his laptop and pushed it away. He took the cup with a grateful smile, taking a quick sip and finally taking a bite of the apple.

“So, what’s it like going through a draft a second time?”

“Annoying. You read through something and think ‘Oh! I should add this little section or this little quip, it’ll sound so much better or make more sense!’ Then you scroll down two paragraphs and it turns out you already wrote those parts in. You’ve wasted an hour trying to force that former section in, only to find out you already wrote it, and then you waste another hour trying to figure out which
Eddie laughed. “You almost sound miserable.”

“I love writing. I swear.”

“Are you sure? Is this a safe space to talk? Your laptop is glaring at you I think.”

Bill shook his head with a small smile planted on his face. He shoved Eddie. “I do enjoy it. Honest. But the biggest vice of any writer is his writing.”

“Well you enjoy your own self torture. I love my job,” smirked Eddie. “Though you can share that vice with Richie if you want. He’s been writing for a sitcom. Almost ready to email his first drafts over.”

“I don’t know if I could do that.”

“I would have thought it would be easier than a full novel.”

“Maybe, but one, I suck at jokes.”

“Well we already knew that.”

Bill lightly hit him on the shoulder. He took a sip again and said, “Writing for something media related is more of a group effort though. Especially for TV. Even if you’re the head writer or showrunner, there’s a lot of back and forth. I prefer it just being me and my head.”

“Fair enough.”

“So, are we going to start cooking or are we waiting for Richie?”

“Richie,” chuckled Eddie. “He’ll probably be ordering us around the entire time.”

“So, like when we were kids.”

“Something like that. Only I would suggest listening to him now. He knows what he’s doing. At least with cooking.”

“I will keep that in mind. At this point, I think I’m an expert in cooking fish. That…is about it.”

Eddie laughed. “You really catch that much?”

“We actually let most of them go. Only take enough for dinner if that’s what we’re in the mood for,” Bill explained.

“When did Mike start fishing?”

“In Derry. It was one of the few ways he could just…escape. Out in the open water…it was like It couldn’t touch him there. His words, not mine,” murmured Bill as his face grew somber for a moment. “He always did it alone. It was his chance at having a private moment, and I would write my story, and then he just…asked if I wanted to come one day. I don’t know. Obviously, we’re close. All of us are close. But…I don’t know. It was like he was letting me in. It felt special.”

“That when you finally kissed him?” Eddie softly asked.

“I-I clammed up. Stopped halfway,” Bill admitted. “Which Mike of course caught on immediately
and just went ‘Oh’ and then I started stuttering so god damn bad I thought I would never say a word clearly again and then he just…took my hand and it all seemed ok.”

“Well that’s nicer than mine and Richie’s first kiss.”

Bill looked up with interest.

“I got really drunk after getting divorced and told him his eyes looked like mouthwash. Which, I don’t even really count that as our first kiss. If you really want to count our first kiss, I went into an existential crisis, and Richie was in full on panic mode before we realized how morainic we were both being. Yours sounds a lot more fucking romantic.”

Bill let out an embarrassed laugh. “Well, we didn’t even kiss on the boat. It was about…two days afterwards.”

“Did you both get embarrassed and clam up?”

“No, we still talked about it the entire time.”

“For two days! Jesus, look at you two being all adult.”

“I don’t know,” sighed Bill. “You and Richie look so comfortable. My palms sweat whenever I even think about holding Mike’s hand in public.”

“You can’t compare us to you guys.”

“Yeah?”

“Well, like you said. Richie’s been into me for…forever.”

Bill snorted.

“And I…I think I always kind of had a crush on him. Even when I was a kid. I just didn’t understand it back then. But we’ve…we’ve always loved each other,” Eddie murmured with a far-off look. He let out a small, contented sigh. He focused back on Bill. “But for both of you, this is new. It’s technically new for us, but it’s also not. And even if I’m lost at times, I’ve got Richie’s experience.”

“I do not want to know anything about Richie’s experience.”

They both laughed. Eddie nudged Bill. “But you get what I’m saying. Right? Don’t feel bad because you haven’t gotten there yet. And hey, at least you’re not alone in this. You always have Mike.”

“I do,” smiled Bill.

Eddie glanced up. “Would you look at who’s awake. Mike’s in there by the way.”

“I just need to piss. He can deal with it,” Richie said with a long yawn.

Eddie rolled his eyes. He got up and went back to give himself a refill. Bill got up too and followed. He finished off the apple and threw it away. “Should I change or…”

“We’ll be here all day,” Eddie said with a shrug. “Think of it like one of the sleepovers we had as kids.”

“As long as there’s no jumping off beds into piles of pillows thinking that will protect our landing. I don’t think my knees would last.”
“That we can agree on,” laughed Eddie. He finally noticed Richie coming out. He went ahead and filled up his coffee mug. However, he frowned at the way Richie was rubbing his head. “What the hell did you hit your head on?”

“My hand,” Mike replied as he came out from his quick rinse off. He went over to his bag to grab a fresh shirt. “He flushed the toilet before I was out.”

“I didn’t notice you were there.” Richie said with a dramatic wave.

“No, you were just being a dick,” Mike said with a roll of his eyes.

“I have to side with Mike on this,” said Eddie. “We all know you did that on purpose. Lucky for both of you, coffee solves everything though."

Mike came over and took a cup. “It certainly helps.”

“Hell yes,” Richie said.

As Mike sipped at his, he asked, “What’s exactly the plan? You don’t have a lot of kitchen space.”

“Hey, it’s not about the size. It’s about how you use it.”

“That a reference to yourself Richie?” asked Bill, hiding his smile behind his cup.

“You motherfucker!”

“Will you look at that? Bill actually made a good joke,” laughed Eddie as he watched them struggle for a bit. “Try not to spill burning hot coffee on each other though.”

Bill shoved Richie back with a grin. “I yield. Now what do you want us to do?”

Richie let out another huff and smoothed his clothes down. “That’s more like it. I prepped a few things, but we still got a lot of cooking to go through before it’s ready. Let’s see…”

Richie went through everything he had before planning out exactly what he’d need everyone to do first. As the morning went on and the coffee ran out, they changed over to whatever else was in the fridge. It was just after eleven. Almost all the food was done, the turkey only had twenty more minutes. Eddie quickly went to check his phone and grinned.

“Hey guys, Bev’s good for a call.”

“Hold on just a second,” Richie said as he quickly shoved dessert into the fridge. “Ok, all good here.”

Eddie went to facetime instead of just a normal call, wanting to actually see Bev and Ben as he was sure everyone else did too.

Eddie scratched his chest a little, but stopped when Richie came up behind him. He wrapped his arms tightly around Eddie’s waist as Bill and Mike quickly got into view.

“Hey!”

“Hi guys!”

They shouted hellos back and forth, smiles bright and pure.
“Damn it looks crowded in there,” Ben said. “I guess it’s a good thing we couldn’t come down.”

“You would get to sleep in the cupboard,” Richie said. “Bev, we’d put you up in the closet.”


“It’s tomorrow actually—”

“And you best believe I am embarrassing the shit out of him,” Richie interrupted. Bill gave him a little shove. Richie shoved back.

“Where are you guys? Doesn’t look like your house Bev,” Mike asked.

“We’re in Canada right now,” Ben explained.

“I mean,” Eddie started, “I get Thanksgiving is a pretty hypocritical holiday when you really think about it, but damn you must have been committed to not celebrating it if you left the country for it.”

They both laughed. “No, no, it’s work related actually,” Bev said. “On my end. Ben managed to get off a few days and came with.”

“We’re in the hotel right now. We’re going out to dinner later.”

“Sounds like fun. What part of Canada?” asked Bill.

They all went back and forth a few times. Seeing as they all kept in touch, it was only the truly recent stuff that they needed to catch up on. Richie told Ben and Bev about the painfully slow walk he’d taken with Mike and Bill through the museum. As they all laughed, Bev gave Ben a careful look. They silently shared something and then Bev turned to the rest of them.

“There is something Ben and I both have to tell you though,” she started. “So, the court date for my divorce came and went, and though everything isn’t completely finalized, it should all be over before the end of next month.”

“That’s great Bev,” Eddie smiled.

“Well, that’s not the only thing. Again, technically we’ll have to wait but…” she glanced at Ben again. The two shared a loving look before she finally held up her left hand. They all looked at the engagement ring on her finger.

“Hell yeah!”

“Fucking finally.”

“I’m so happy for you two.”

“Yes. Ben, how did you propose?”

Ben let out an embarrassed laugh. “I didn’t.”

“Ben didn’t want to push,” Bev said with a kind smile. “Which was appreciated.”

“But sometimes a little push is good,” Ben finished.

“I hear that. So let me guess,” Richie said. “Bev got down on one knee, put the ring on her finger, and said ‘Surprise Ben! Guess who you just hitched your post too!’”
“Not even close,” laughed Bev.

“A little close though. Right?” asked Richie.

“No,” Ben grinned. “So what have you guys been cooking up? It looks like an absolute mess in there.”

“Oh, it is. You would have lost your mind several times,” Richie grinned.

“Urgh, I can only imagine.”

They talked a little longer, Richie only leaving from Eddie’s side when he had to turn off the oven. Eventually, Bev said, “We’ll let you guys get to eating. Tell us how everything goes in the next couple of days. And Richie, tell us when you do a show in New York. We’ll be in the front row.”

“Of course. Have a good day guys,” Richie replied.

“You too.” Bev blew them a kiss.

They all said good-bye, waved, blew kisses back, then Eddie finally put his phone down. Richie went to grab plates.

“Now who’s ready to eat?”

They divided up the food. There was more than enough for lunch and dinner. Eddie imagined he’d be carrying plenty of it in little plastic boxes to work.

Since they didn’t have a kitchen table and the counter wasn’t spacious enough for all four, they camped out on the pull-out, each sitting on a corner. Richie just had to promise he would wash the sheets afterwards so Mike and Bill weren’t sleeping in crumbs for the rest of their time there.

The day proved to be a perfectly lazy one. They all ate too much, Richie and Bill got into a wrestling match which of course ended with both of them hitting the floor hard, and by the end of the day, Bill was working on his manuscript again, Mike reading, and Richie and Eddie argued over what movie to watch for so long that it was almost nine o’clock by the time they decided.

Even though it was late, they still went ahead with watching it. Eddie rested in the crook of Richie’s arm, holding the hand that was thrown over his shoulder. Throughout the movie, Eddie glanced over and watched as Bill just barely rubbed his finger against the back of Mike’s hand. It made Eddie smile and a quick glance at Richie showed he was proud of them too.

After the movie, Eddie took a shower and they all retired.

As he gently kissed Richie’s neck, he murmured, “Don’t mess with Bill too much tomorrow.”

“I’ll try not to,” whispered Richie. He dragged his finger along Eddie’s chin, guiding him up so their lips met in the dark. They stayed like that for a moment until Richie pulled back. “I love you.”

“Love you too. Night.”

Richie and Eddie stayed tangled up in each other and fell asleep.
Eddie typed in his last number for the day.

He let out a satisfied sigh. Richie’s set was tonight. Assuming everything else had gone as planned, Bill and Mike would be back at their apartment, having finished with the book signing. Richie would probably be headed for the club now if he wasn’t already there.

Eddie packed up and said goodbye to a few people on the way out. After tonight, Bill and Mike would stay Saturday and then catch their flight that night. They would need to be at the airport by six which meant the whole day would still be theirs. It was a shame they had to leave so soon, but it wouldn’t have made since to stay much longer what with Richie still driving out to do sets on the occasional night and Eddie working all day. Besides, Bill had the rest of that book tour to finish.

They would have to try to plan something big with everyone. Just a few days, no jobs, everyone there. It might be hard to work out all the logistics, but Eddie imagined everyone would love to try. Maybe renting one of those big cabins since no one’s place was exactly big enough to fit so many people for so long. Eddie would run that by Richie and the others. They would figure something out.

He drove home. When he got into the apartment, Bill and Mike were sitting cross legged on the pull-out playing Uno.

“Where did you get that?” asked Eddie.

“It’s ours,” said Bill.

“We grabbed it before we left for his book tour. We figured it would be a fun way to pass the time.”

“I don’t think Richie could pay attention long enough for a card game,” chuckled Eddie.

Mike smiled. “He would probably throw everyone’s cards up in the air, get them mixed up, and then say he won by default.”

“Probably,” Eddie replied. “How was the signing?”

“I just walked around and looked at a few books. I got a new one,” said Mike. “Richie actually stayed with me most of the time.”

“Really?”

Bill nodded. “He was only mildly annoying. Though he did run over and plant himself on the table for a second when he got too bored. The person in charge of keeping the event timely was not so thankful.”

“Not too surprising, but I’m glad he didn’t bother you too much,” chuckled Eddie. “And you can go ahead and finish the game. We don’t have to leave right away.”
“Gotcha,” Bill replied.

Eddie ate something small as Bill and Mike finished up their game. Bill grabbed a quick shower and then they all jumped into Eddie’s car. They drove over to the comedy club. It was more of a standard set up. There was a small bar and then the stage area with rows of chairs up front.

They all sat down, front row. This was a longer set-up with only five performers though each had about twenty to twenty-five minutes. Richie was second.

Eddie sat through the first act, enjoying it fine enough. However, he’d admittedly been distracted just wondering what Richie had planned. Eddie had of course heard bits and pieces. He’d watched Richie get an idea for a punchline and then work backwards. He also knew Richie wanted to work with more personal stories, but he still had no idea what he’d been recently working on.

Then the presenter introduced Richie.

He walked out, shot Eddie a wink as he grabbed the mic from the stand.

Eddie rolled his eyes even as the blush crept up underneath his beard.

“So, I’m sure everyone here has about a million and one apps on their phone. And at least one of them is some boring game that you just mindlessly play. Right?”

Some people just nodded as others vocally agreed.

“They kill time, sure, but it’s when that one annoying friend gets distracted and stops bothering the group when you thank god for those apps. Yeah? Well, if you remember back in the stone age before cellphones, you didn’t have a perfect little machine that put that friend in their own little world, even for a few seconds. Instead, that one little, annoying friend was constantly chattering behind your ear. And if you were really unlucky? He had a wooden paddleball.”

Eddie had to keep from completely bursting out laughing. God, the moment Richie said it, he remembered that so clearly and…he had been quite a little shit. Hadn’t he?

He was practically in tears, trying to keep from being that one obnoxious person who laughed above all others. And he could tell Richie was noticing and enjoying every god damn second. Bill and Mike were equally trying not to be too loud, though they looked like they were getting an equal kick at how Richie was weaving the tale as much as they were loving how Eddie was trying not to choke to death.

Up until that paddleball had broken, Eddie had tortured his friends relentlessly with it. To say there weren’t a few good stories to tell centering around it would have been an understatement.

When Richie finally said goodnight and walked off stage, Eddie wiped at his face and leaned over. “I’ll be right back.”

“Oh. We’ll stay here,” smiled Bill. “Come grab us if you decide to leave early.”

“Will do.” Eddie left before the next set could take place. He went past the bar and then paused. Where to—

“The restroom is just down that way sir.”

“And actually, I’m looking—”
“He’s with me.” Eddie turned to see Jason. “Figured you’d be looking for him. Come on back.” As they moved to the behind the scenes area of the club, Jason said, “I’m guessing the annoying friend was you?”

“Actually, Richie was the annoying friend. I simply learned from the best.”

“Now that I can believe. Quick tip, the broom closet back here is crowded as shit. Unless you want a less welcomed foreign object pressed against your back, use the restrooms. The locks do work.”

“Exactly what kind of person do you take me for?” laughed Eddie as he blushed at the insinuation.

“Just giving you some good tips,” Jason said with a shrug. He glanced over. “Everything going well though?”

“Yeah. Thank you by the way. I realize it must be weird—”

“Trust me. I actually enjoy talking to you and answering your questions. You have sensible ones. I have dealt with much worse and much weirder.”

Eddie laughed.

“He’s been just doing that set for the last couple of shows though. He really wanted to get it right for you.”

“Well he sure as hell succeeded.”

Jason pushed open an ajar door. Richie was chatting to one of the other comics though he stopped immediately upon seeing Eddie.

“So?” asked Richie with a grin.

“You’re an asshole. An absolute asshole,” Eddie laughed.

Richie walked over and threw his arms over Eddie’s shoulders.

“So, you think of me as the annoying little friend, huh?”

“I only stated facts.”

“That’s a lie.”

“I didn’t speak a single lie. And hey, you’re my annoying little friend.”

“Am I now?” Eddie drew him into a kiss.

“So, you enjoyed it?” asked Richie.

“I loved it. And... and it was good to think of Stan with a smile on my face.”

“Yeah. It’s partially why I wanted to get it right before you heard it. Wanted to do him justice. And I definitely wanted to make you laugh.”

Eddie smiled. “Well you succeeded on both fronts.” He pecked him on the nose.

“Disgusting. The both of you,” Jason sighed.

Richie tried to swat at him, “Just because you’re allergic to intimacy doesn’t mean the rest of us are.”
Jason knocked his hand away even as he was carefully hiding his smile. “Very funny.”

Richie kissed Eddie again and then introduced him to some of the other people in the back. A few, it turned out, Eddie had met at the Halloween party. They talked through the next two sets and on the last one, Richie and Eddie headed out to grab a drink at the bar and wait.

They immediately met up with Mike and Bill as they walked out. “So?”

“It was good,” Mike said. “Next time you should include the fact that Eddie only became a little shit because he hung out with you too much.”

“I did no such thing to him,” Richie smirked. “Bill, want to drive with me as we go to dinner?”

“Yeah, I’m cool with that.”

“Alright Mike. You’re mine then.”

As they walked out of the club and headed to their cars, Mike commented, “By the way Eddie, there’s something Bill and I wanted to ask you. It may be weird timing, but since Richie talked about Stan it just…seems kind of relevant.”

Eddie caught on immediately. “You’re talking about all of us visiting Stan.”

“Yes. We already mentioned it to Richie, but we were thinking the end of January to finally go say goodbye. Does that give you enough time to ask off?”

“Yeah, more than enough. If it works for Bev and Ben, it works for me,” Eddie replied with a soft smile. “It’ll be good to see him one last time. And then everything that It did will be far behind us.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” murmured Mike.

From there, they split off in Eddie and Richie’s cars. They drove to dinner, enjoying the night together before heading back to their apartment.

The next day, Mike and Bill packed early so they wouldn’t have to worry about it later. Eddie and Richie then took them around the city, letting them see a few of the major landmarks and just enjoying the sunny day, even if it was cold as shit.

All day they walked around. They had lunch, then a few hours later they drove back to the apartment so Mike and Bill could grab their things. Both Richie and Eddie went with them to the airport, saying goodbye there as they hugged each other with as much force as they could muster.

“We’ll see you soon,” Bill said.

“And now you just have to come to our place,” Mike added. “You won’t hate it that much Richie.”

“We’ll see,” he laughed.

“Bye guys,” Eddie smiled. “And we promise. We’ll come down there soon.”

They all hugged again as Mike and Bill headed to their first checkpoint. Eddie and Richie went back to Richie’s car.

“I hope they know,” Richie said, “I am not going fishing with them. I don’t care how much Mike enjoyed it or how he and Bill talked about going out there, I’m not joining them.”
Eddie rolled his eyes. “Trust me, he won’t ask you onto the boat. And it’s not like that’s the only thing you can do in Florida.”

“Right, I forgot. We can all get addicted to drugs, fight a giant catfish, and then get chased down by the cartel.”

“Ok, first off, cartel is more present in lower California, Texas, New Mexico, that area. Second, you are never going to stop with the Florida jokes, are you?”

“Nope.”

Eddie rolled his eyes. “You want to grab dinner before we get home?”

“I’ll just throw something together. And we still have leftovers.”

“Sounds good.”

They drove for a bit before Richie quickly added, “And I will admit I miss them already. But it’s also nice to have the apartment empty again.”

Eddie nodded as Richie stopped at a red light. “Yeah, it’s also just hard sharing one small bathroom amongst four grown men—” He stopped midsentence and smacked at the hand that had wormed its way over to his thigh. “Oh, so that’s where your mind is. Huh?” asked Eddie with a cheeky grin.

“Just be happy I didn’t try anything last night.”

“If you had tried something then with Mike and Bill literally in our living room, I would have killed you.”

“I know,” smirked Richie.

“An animal. That’s what you are.”

“You’re not so bad yourself Tiger.”

“Listen, if we’re going for nicknames, I much prefer Scarface or sexy Bond villain.”

Richie laughed. “You going to capture me when we get home?”

“Maybe if you’re good.”

“Such a fucking tease.”

“You know you like it,” replied Eddie as he gave Richie a quick kiss. The light turned green and they finished their drive home.
The days passed. Eddie worked and continued to enjoy the company of his coworkers. Some of them he even began to regularly hang out with either during lunch or after work, especially if Richie was away. He saw CC at least once a week, either because he and Richie had a chance to go to the place she worked at to grab a bite or because she was at their apartment working with Richie. Jason, Eddie saw less as he usually only came over if there was something specific he had to go over with Richie. However, Eddie had definitely grown far more comfortable around him and they could hold their own conversation as Richie read over whatever Jason had brought him.

And then Eddie constantly texted the others with quick updates along with getting updates from them. When Bev’s divorce was finally settled, everyone got onto a group call. They expressed their excitement and asked Ben and Bev when the hell their wedding would be. Obviously, they would all find the time to go.

Bev was thinking spring, maybe a little closer to summer depending on what they could book. They weren’t really interested in making some big fuss of the thing though. Getting married quickly was more important than spending a ridiculous amount of money on some big venue that would only be used by about six people. There were some personal friends in both their work lives they mentioned inviting, but obviously if the core of their group couldn’t make it, it was worth pushing the date around so they could all make it.

With December upon them and the full feeling of the holidays coming into swing, it wasn’t surprising that Eddie’s work was throwing a Christmas party. However, this one Eddie declined. Even though Christmas as an idea was pretty damn commercialized, it just didn’t hold the appeal to either Richie or Eddie. Richie just because he’d never celebrated it, Eddie because every god damn Christmas he could remember had been one of the most miserable days in his existence. Better to just cut that completely out. If he and Richie celebrated anything, it would just be the holiday feel in general. Maybe they would do something for New Year’s Eve. But that was it.

Because of that, neither made any real plans. However, Eddie did take note of the last tour date Richie had before his break throughout January and part of February. It was on a Friday, and one of the early sets. Richie usually stayed at least for a couple more, talked to people, liked to see who he had to compete with, but this one he specifically said he’d get home as early as possible, probably by ten o’clock.

So once Eddie got home from work and settled, he decided to stay up reading in bed. All the pillows were pressed up behind his head keeping him propped there with just the bedroom light on when he heard the front door open.

“How was the set?” Eddie called. He finished reading the paragraph he was on and then put the book to the side.
“Good besides some tech issues. It happens. That’s why I’m a little late.”

Eddie glanced over at the clock. “Not that late. You going to take a shower?”

“Naw, do it in the morning,” sighed Richie. He’d already kicked off his shoes when he’d walked into the bedroom. His jacket had probably gotten thrown over the edge of the couch. “Your day?”

“I don’t know how it happened but one of the formulas in the excel sheets got messed up,” Eddie said. He leaned back, watching as Richie stripped out of his jeans and changed into pajamas pants.

“Sounds riveting.”

“You asked,” laughed Eddie. “We spent a solid thirty minutes or more trying to figure out why the hell nothing was adding up right. And when you stare at the same thing day in and day out, you never think it’s a small issue like a minus sign replacing a plus.”

“I can just imagine all you nerds getting headaches as you huddle around the light of a single computer.”

“You realize David has like five trophies from playing football in his younger years. Right? And you’re the one who wears glasses.”

“You’re accountants. Which means you’re still nerds,” Richie replied as he walked up to the side of the bed.

“Oh yeah? You think a nerd could do this?”

Eddie had moved over. He started to pull Richie into a kiss, but right before their lips could touch, he pulled him into the bed. Richie landed on his back just as Eddie straddled him and finally drew out that long kiss.

“Hmm, something special happen that I missed?”

“Not really. But you’re done with this group of tours which means I get you all to myself for almost two months.”

“What? You thinking about quitting work for that entire time?” laughed Richie.

“Now that would be a wild move to make. No, but we’ll still get more time together until you go on tour again,” Eddie replied. He pushed his hands up underneath Richie’s shirt. Richie sat forward a little, making it easier to get it off.

Richie threw his shirt on the floor. They kissed, Eddie slowly moving his lips over to Richie’s earlobe. “You saying this is what I was missing out on every night I was on tour? Well now I have to retire early.”

Eddie softly laughed, still trailing kisses along Richie’s neck. “So, in the mood?”

Richie shot him a teasing look. “Well I am pretty tired…”

“I’ll do all the work.”

“You sold me.”

They laughed, Eddie drawing him into another kiss. He then went down lower. By now, he’d gotten an idea of where every tiny scar, every mole, every birthmark or lack there of peppered along
Richie’s chest was. He’d gotten comfortable with that. He’d become comfortable touching Richie, had figured out exactly what he liked. He’d also grown more used to Richie touching him. Richie had done more for him, but that was kind of why Eddie had kept this night in mind.

He leaned back a bit. His fingers looped onto the elastic of Richie’s pants.

“You know, you could have given me some warning and I wouldn’t have changed into sleepwear.”

Eddie laughed. “But then how could I surprise you?”

“Hmm, good point. And I do enjoy feeling you strip me down.”

“Because you like when I manhandle you.”

“I do,” hummed Richie. He squirmed a little as Eddie kissed his stomach, his beard gently scraping against Richie’s skin. “Beard was a great idea by the way. Perfect idea in fact. Fucking magical is what it is.”

When Richie felt Eddie moving his boxers down, Richie raised an eyebrow and looked down. “You’re kind of low to be using your hands.”

“Who said anything about using hands?”

“So you’re taking that leap huh—” Richie’s head fell back hard. “Oh-oh ok. Yeah. Definitely not your hands.”

Richie tangled his fingers up in the sheets. He tried to keep from arching his back too much.

“Where the hell did you learn to do that?” groaned Richie. “You been watching porn?”

Eddie pulled back and slapped Richie on the stomach. “No, I have not been watching fucking porn. And anyone with half a brain knows that shit isn’t real.”

“You been practicing then?” Richie asked with a breathless laugh.

“And just who the hell would I have been practicing on? I am not that flexible.”

“Just asking.”

“If you must know, I read forums and blog posts.”

Richie let out a sharp laugh. “Of course you-ah. Ah! Fuck Eddie.”

“Are you going to keep asking me questions or are you going to let me blow you?”

“Second option please.”

Eddie snorted. “You’re fucking ridiculous.”

“And you’re fucking great. You could have just gone for it. Wouldn’t have judged.”

“I know. But I wanted you to feel good. Really good.”

“And that is one of the many, many reasons I love you,” gasped Richie. “You put in so much god damn effort just because you want me to feel good.”

“What are the other reasons?”
“Hmm?”

“You said there were many, many reasons. I want to know them.”

“Now who’s doing all the talking?”

“Tell me.”

“Ok. Ok,” Richie sighed. He relaxed for about two seconds. Then immediately tensed. He tried his best not to push too much. “Ah…ah ok. I love that you love me. T-that’s definitely the first one. Feeling loved is such…ah…right there. It’s such a good feeling. I’m sure you know that by now though.

“Second thing is when you get stuck on a problem. Work related, something at home? A-anything. So…it’s so fucking sexy when you’re getting into something, when you’re working. I t-then…oh fuck. I won’t knock the blog posts anymore because fucking Christ that’s good…oh fuck me. Where was I?”

Eddie pulled back. “You said I look sexy when I work.”

“Yeah, well you look really fucking sexy working now.” Eddie pinched him for that and Richie let out a small noise from the back of his throat. After Eddie went down again, Richie managed to start talking. “But when you finally solve something? And…and you’re so fucking proud of yourself? You try not to show it too much, but I can tell you are. I love…love that. And what you’re doing with your tongue right now. Definitely love that.

“And that you’re willing to try anything new that I’m cooking. I love that too. I love your laugh. I-I love watching you when we watch a movie. I love seeing your facial reactions. I l-lov-fuck. I love going places with you. I love that you enjoy walking through the parks when we get a chance. Little detours that I never would have thought of. But you think of and it’s…fuck me. It’s so fucking nice.

“I love your smile. Especially the smile you make when you don’t think I’m watching. I love how it reaches up into your eyes, how your…oh god damn it. I love how your face all lights…lights…up. Oh god fucking damn it. I-I think…I think…shit. Don’t push yourself too much. O-ok. I think…I think I’m going to…oh fucking hell Eds…Eddie-fuck! Ah…”

Richie’s knuckles turned white as he held onto the sheets. He heard Eddie cough slightly. It was difficult to think right in that second, Richie all nerves, but he knew Eddie would likely be pulling back now to go to the restroom.

As quickly as he could, Richie stopped that from happening. He got a hand on the back of Eddie’s neck and pulled him into a kiss. He drew it from him slowly, tasting himself on Eddie’s lips.

“God damn. If I didn’t feel so fucking spent that would make me come again,” whispered Richie before he pushed their lips together again. They moved in tandem and when Richie finally moved back, he pulled on Eddie’s lip before finally letting go. “How are you doing?”

“Good,” gasped Eddie. “And you…”

“Don’t even start to doubt yourself. You felt fucking amazing,” replied Richie. He pulled him into another kiss. “Want me to take care of you?”

“Surprise me in the morning.”

“Surprise you in the morning huh? I think I can do that,” Richie whispered with another small kiss.
Eddie started to get up. A whine left Richie’s throat as he pulled him back. “Just a little longer…”

“I am not risking your semen drying in my god damn beard Richie.”

“I could clean it for you—”

“Richie, I will be gone for a minute tops and having your saliva soaking my beard is not much
better.”

“Rude.”

Eddie gave him another quick kiss before getting up and going to the restroom. When he got back, Richie had leaned out of bed to grab his shirt and put that on, but had otherwise just readjusted himself and threw the comforters over himself.

“Really?” asked Eddie.

“I’ll clean myself up tomorrow. Just get your ass in bed.”

He raised an eyebrow.

“Stop being my damn parent and start being my boyfriend. Get in here,” Richie replied as he pulled the comforter up a bit.

“Well I do prefer being your boyfriend.”

“Good. Now hurry up and get over here.”

Eddie turned off the light and did. He curled against Richie’s chest. He loved being able to feel him breath, the flush of his body, the slight motion of a finger grazing the back of his hand or his cheek. He curled in, eyes starting to slip shut. Then he felt Richie suddenly grab his hand.

“That can’t be good. Right?”

“What can’t?” murmured Eddie as he peeked out with one eye.

“Scratching your scar. Even through your shirt.”

“I wasn’t scratching it.”

“You were. I could hear your fingernails.”

Eddie paused. Had he really…

“Does it hurt?”

“No.”

“Would you tell me if it hurt?”

“Of course.” Eddie kissed his knuckles. “You’re starting to sound more like me. Are you ok?”

“Yeah, I just want to make sure you’re ok. I’ve noticed you bothering with the area lately.”

Had Eddie really? He shrugged. “I feel great. Probably just messing with it because I can now, since it’s all healed. You know? It does feel weird.”
“As long as you’re ok.”

“Of course I am. And I would tell you the moment I wasn’t,” Eddie promised. He leaned his head up and kissed Richie. He kept their hands intertwined. “Love you.”

“I love you too. Sleep well. You certainly earned it.”

Eddie hit him for that but curled in anyways.
Eddie got in just before the clock hit four.

Richie was splayed out on the couch, his legs looped over the armrest so that way his back was completely flat on the cushions. He was holding his iPad over his head, sliding one finger across the screen in steady strokes.

“I can’t believe they made you work on New Year’s Eve.”

“We closed early, and I got to go home early too,” said Eddie. “Besides, we’re not doing anything. Are we?”

“Want to go to the bar down the street? I’m in the mood for their fries too.”

“Richie,” Eddie said with a pointed look.

Richie paused so he could shoot Eddie a quick smile. “Don’t worry. I’m not thinking of giving us both killer headaches again. I know you work tomorrow. Just a reason to get out. And they won’t be as busy as some of the bigger places downtown. We can watch the ball drop too.”

“I never did watch that tradition.”

Richie put his iPad fully down so he could prop himself up on his elbows. “You lived in Manhattan though!”

“You think I would ever want to physically go there?” scoffed Eddie. “That’s how people get trampled to death.”

“TV?”

“It’s not really fun if you’re watching it alone.” As Eddie said that, he was walking by the couch. Richie quickly put his tablet on the coffee table and then pushed himself up. He grabbed Eddie and pulled him onto the couch. Because of the sudden motion, Eddie failed to properly brace himself and hit Richie hard. “Oof! You alright?”

“May have misjudged and your elbow just broke my rib,” muttered Richie as Eddie rolled his eyes. “But no, we are definitely going out then. Ever been kissed at midnight?”

“What do you think?”
Richie grabbed him and pulled him into a kiss. “Well we’re definitely going to change that,” he whispered.

Eddie smiled at the thought. “Fine. But we are leaving right after twelve because I have work.”

“Yes sir.”

Eddie rolled off him and went to the kitchen to grab something to drink. “So, what have you been working on?”

“A second draft of that stupid sitcom script shit. God I wish it was a streaming service or something. Some dirty adult humor is exactly what the show needs.”

Eddie laughed.

“Hey, I’m not just saying that to say it. The plots are plain enough that the humor just needs to be a bit more wild and out there to keep people interested. If the head showrunner would just see that though—”

“It’s just a job. And there’s no guarantee you’ll have to go back for another season. Just finish this now and then focus on your sets.”

“You’ve got a point.”

“Of course I do. You want to watch a movie before we go out? No reason to sit in the bar for over six hours.”

“Yeah. Let me just finish this real quick. And do you want to do a movie? We could start that Breaking Bad spin-off.”

“Works for me.”

Eddie went to grab a book. He went back to the couch and Richie automatically leaned upwards. Eddie sat down and Richie rested his head in Eddie’s lap, working on the script while Eddie leaned against the armrest and read. Even after Richie finally finished and put the iPad down, he stayed where he was. Eddie turned the TV on and then ran his fingers through Richie’s hair as they watched the show.

They watched a couple of episodes and stopped right before eight o’clock. Then they grabbed their coats and walked down the street. At the bar, they casually talked, ate, and drank, though both were a bit more mindful of just how much they downed.

The first hours went by rather quickly. A few people came and went, but most who came stayed. The place grew more and more crowded. Richie and Eddie sat on one side of a booth, the other side empty until they saw a familiar face.

“Is that who you were texting a few minutes ago?” asked Eddie.

“Yes, apparently a party she was going to fell through. Invited her over,” Richie replied. “And I think that’s one of the friends we saw at one of her shows.”

It turned out Richie was right. As CC slid in across from them, she introduced her friend and immediately ordered drinks for both of them. The new company proved to be just what they needed as the last few hours started go by more quickly again. At eleven their time, all the TVs were changed to watch the ball drop in New York. Then the entire bar got even more excited as only an
It turned out there was another reason she looked familiar as she and CC worked at the same restaurant, though their shifts didn’t always line up. Alisa was going to school for her masters in organic chemistry and Eddie was listening intently to her talk about one of her projects when CC suddenly slammed her hands on the table. They all jumped, Alisa especially, and she knocked CC in the shoulder for that. CC’s excitement didn’t diminish.

“We’ve got eight minutes guys!”

A few people in the bar cheered even louder.

The last few minutes lasted ages. Then it got down to the last thirty seconds. A few people went ahead and started counting. Then as it got closer and closer, more joined in. Their table started right at ten seconds along with about half the bar.

“Ten!”

“Nine!”

“Eight!”

“Seven!”

“Six!”

“Five!”

“Four!”

“Three!”

“Two!”

“One—” Eddie’s final shout got stuck in his throat as Richie grabbed him and kissed him hard. Eddie grinned against Richie’s lips. When Eddie moved back, it was just in time to see CC making kissing faces at her friend and Alisa knocking her away with a laugh.

“Ah! I feel cheated.”

Alisa gave her a quick peck on the cheek. “Does it count if it’s a few seconds after twelve?”

“Hmm, not twelve o’one yet. I’ll accept it.”

Their table laughed as they called for one more round of drinks. They finished them off and then left the bar. A few other groups were leaving too, but many stayed behind to celebrate the new year a little longer. They moved out of the doorway but stayed in front of the bar.

“Did you guys drive?” asked Richie.

“I did,” Alisa replied. “It’s a pretty busy night, even for this area. We had to park a block down that way.”

“We can walk you if you want,” Eddie said.
CC grinned. She looped her arm around Eddie. “I think I would manage to fight off some muggers a bit more easily than you, but I accept the invitation anyways.”

Eddie laughed as they walked down the street. Richie quickly threw an arm around Eddie’s shoulders on his other side. “Sorry CC. He’s mine.”

“Well I knew that Richie. I wouldn’t dare take him,” CC laughed.

Alisa rolled her eyes. “I’d say I feel left out, but I am perfectly happy walking over here.”

Richie chuckled as he planted a kiss on Eddie’s cheek—

The words that were suddenly muttered by a different passing group had them all reacting differently. CC looked like a bristling cat. Alisa had been closest to the group and had gotten rudely shoved. She stumbled, trying to right herself. Richie looked ready to flick them off. However, Eddie slipped from both CC’s and Richie’s arms before any of them could react.

It wasn’t that Eddie hadn’t expected this to happen. If anything, he’d kind of expected to encounter more assholes than he had so far. However, he’d only ever had to refer to Richie as a roommate or a friend in the very rare uncomfortable situation and things had been left at that. And if it had just been Eddie getting called that, he probably would have done his best to ignore it and continue walking.

However, Richie had clearly been more their focus and Eddie wasn’t going to stand for how they’d shoved Alisa out of the way, even if he had just met her.

So, with those simple thoughts in mind, Eddie moved away from them and grabbed the one who had specifically said the word. The guy was bigger than him and it was only because Eddie had clearly surprised him that he was able to shove him against the wall. His friends didn’t appear to be very close as after one glance, they continued walking.

“What the fuck—”

“From now on. You’ll learn to mind your own fucking business,” interrupted Eddie.

“And what the hell are you going to do about it. Huh fa—”

“I think you should be asking yourself what I can’t do to you. You see this right here? A fucking killer who brutally murdered his own father stabbed me in the face. And you want to know what I did? I ripped that knife out and I stabbed him right. Fucking. Back. So, if my boyfriend wants to kiss me in public, he’s going to kiss me in public. Do you understand?”

With each enunciated word, Eddie had jammed his finger into the man’s chest. He didn’t blink as he waited for an answer.

“Jesus-just-you’re a fucking psycho.”

“Fine by me. But you didn’t answer the question. Do. You. Understand?”

“Yes! Fucking hell,” the guy pushed Eddie slightly, which he allowed, as he quickly backpedaled. The guy stumbled over his feet, actually hitting the ground, before he finally rushed to his group that was now a ways down the street.

Eddie finally blinked and his face relaxed. He looked up. “You think I over did that a bit?”

“No! You scared the shit out of that piece of crap,” laughed CC. “How the hell did you come up
with a story like that?"

“What makes you think I made it up?”

“Richie, are you living with an undercover assassin? Is the job at the museum just a front?”

Richie let out a nervous laugh. “Well Scarface, looks like your cover’s been blown.” He shook his head and quickly wrapped an arm around Eddie, this time a little tighter and a little more protective. “Let’s get both of you to your car. Huh?”

“Yes please,” Alisa said.

“Yeah, I take back what I said before Eddie,” CC snorted. “I think I might just higher you as a bodyguard.”

Eddie rolled his eyes as he stayed snuggly under Richie’s arm.

They got the girls to Alisa’s car and then said goodnight, turning around and heading back to their apartment. Now that they were alone though, Richie said, “Not to knock how fucking sexy that was, but it was also incredibly reckless.”

“Yes…I wasn’t really thinking in the moment,” admitted Eddie.

“Well that’s a first for you,” sighed Richie. “He didn’t hit you. Did he?”

“No?”

“Cause you’re rubbing at your chest again.”

Eddie dropped his hand. He hadn’t even noticed that. “I’m fine Richie. Really. And I’m sorry if I worried you. I just…I didn’t want him calling you that.”

Richie finally smiled and quickly kissed him. “There are assholes like that all around. You just got to learn how to ignore them. But I thank you all the same. And you were still scarily sexy back there. I won’t lie.”

“That’s only because I was using my authoritative voice,” snorted Eddie. “If I could pick you up and shove you in bed, I would, but I don’t think I have the strength to do that.”

“Hmm, you could order me to take you to bed?”

“Could I now?”

They finished their walk home without any other events. Once inside, Richie picked him up and carried him to bed. Eddie immediately flipped them over. He straddled Richie, pinning him against the sheets as he slowly began kissing down Richie’s neck.
ACT III: Love

Chapter Notes

I have to admit, a part wants to go down into the comments and individually assure each and every one of you that things will be ok (but also my bastard man side is like cackling right now and enjoying watching the chaos ensue).

Anyways, thank you all again, it's great seeing people theorize and all your comments and kudos are appreciated as always. This chapter was a hard one to write and one that I know at least a few people have been hoping for. Warning, it's a bit of a tear jerker <3

The end of January started to draw near. Eddie and Richie made some final preparations to their trip to Atlanta, Georgia, along with Eddie double checking that he had the time off. They’d kept in touch with the others, making sure everyone could still make it. Then they had coordinated things like flight times so none of them had to really wait on the others. They weren’t going to be spending the night. The plan was to get on the earliest plane, get there to see Stan, perhaps spend all day with him, and then leave on some of the last planes out of the city.

Eddie and Richie’s flight was at six in the morning, meaning at close to five thirty they were sitting in the waiting area with dawn still over an hour away.

Richie was dozing in and out of sleep, his head slumped against Eddie’s shoulder. Eddie let him rest as he scrolled through his phone. When the PA system finally called out for first class to board, Richie jolted.

“Is it time to get on?”

“Not quite. Probably won’t be long though.” Eddie checked their tickets. “We should be part of the first group after first class finishes.”

Richie let out a long yawn. He stretched, throwing an arm around Eddie’s shoulders. “This feels weird. Right? I don’t want it to turn out that I’m the only one that feels off about it all.”

“Well, we’re putting the last of our past behind us and saying good-bye to a best friend,” Eddie softly murmured. “It’s going to feel at least a little weird.”

“Well, we’re putting the last of our past behind us and saying good-bye to a best friend,” Eddie softly murmured. “It’s going to feel at least a little weird.”

“As long as I’m not alone in that feeling,” sighed Richie. He paused for a second, then asked, “You think he’s with Georgie?”

“What makes you say that?”

He shrugged. “Just remembering what Bill said when we left Derry.”

“If there is anything after this, he’s definitely not alone,” Eddie replied. He thought back to Bill’s words too. “He would have picked up Georgie and hugged him as tightly as possible, I know it.”

Richie let out a small laugh. “I can imagine Georgie screaming with laughter as Stan tickles him, kisses him on the cheek and says, ‘that’s from your big brother, and this one is from me, and this one from all the great people you haven’t met yet’.”

“I think he would have been a great dad,” Eddie replied. Though he tried not to think on the afterlife too much, he decided to just assume the best for now. “He’ll definitely look out for Georgie.”

“If Georgie isn’t looking out for him,” Richie smiled.

The PA system went off again.

“That’s us,” sighed Eddie.

They got in line, waited a while, and then finally were allowed to get on the plane. Richie was asleep again before the plane took off, slumped against Eddie. Eddie texted the others, double checking that everything was going as planned with them. Eddie had only brought one carryon bag. Everyone had discussed about what they would bring, small things, memories. Eddie had managed to fine some old candies that he remembered all of them eating and sharing when they snuck into a movie or were playing at the arcade. They would always throw their pocket change together so that no one was left out. Eddie had made sure to pick out all of Stan’s favorites.

The flight was uneventful and in the last thirty minutes, Richie fully woke up again. Due to the time change, it was just after nine o’clock now. They left the airport right away, Richie grabbing them a cab as Eddie double checked how everyone else’s flights were going. It turned out Bill and Mike were already in the city.

As they got in, the taxi driver asked, “No bags huh? Not staying long?”

“We’re just visiting a friend for the day,” Richie replied.

“Always good to see friends. What’s the address?”

“1173 Cascade Cir SW. Greenwood Cemetery.”

Eddie couldn’t help it. The way the driver immediately looked uncomfortable, just the way Richie had said it, he had to duck his head down. Richie nudged him and when Eddie looked up, he was trying so god damn hard to hold back a laugh.

“You ok?” asked Richie.

“Y-yeah. I-I’m good,” Eddie said, still trying to keep the laughter from spilling out as light tears fell down his cheeks. “Just imagining how fucking annoyed Stan would have been, hearing you say that. He would have hit you upside the head as hard as possible.”

“You’re not wrong. He would have said I purposefully said it like that just to make everyone else feel awkward.”


Richie rolled his eyes and kicked at Eddie.

“I-it’s ok,” the driver quickly got out. “I’m uh…sorry for your loss.”

“Thanks,” Eddie sighed. He wiped at his face.

“Stan would rather I say something like that than be all sad and serious though,” Richie quickly murmured. “Laughing, making jokes. His whole point was that he was hopeful we’d be able to go forward after everything, keep living.”

“He’d probably ask us what the hell we were doing wasting time at his grave,” Eddie said with a sad
chuckle. “Stop looking back and all that.”

“He’d still be happy that we all felt we needed to say goodbye. He would be happy we remembered him and kept remembering him.”

“You never really die as long as there’s someone to remember you,” murmured Eddie.

“You get that from a book or something?”

“Or something. I know I’ve heard it before. I think Stan would have liked the sentimentality of it.”

“He definitely would have.”

They both grew quiet. Eddie looked out the window and tried his best to picture Stan in the city. He wondered if his parents had moved him to Georgia and he’d just stayed, or if he’d moved all around. He wondered how long Stan had lived here. He wondered how many other people he’d left behind, not just the losers but possible work friends, regulars he might have seen at his synagogue, at a favorite restaurant. Maybe they drove by someone who had known him, who’d gone to his service.

Eddie stayed lost in his thoughts. So did Richie until they arrived at the cemetery.

“Are you staying long or…”

“We’ll call for another cab when we leave,” Richie replied. He paid for the cab since Eddie had already said he would pay for the fair back. He made sure to leave an extra tip as an apology for throwing the guy off like he had.

“Where exactly is it again?” asked Richie as they stepped out.

Eddie looked around. “I think this way. Mike and Bill are already here so we should spot them at some point.”

“Bev and Ben?”

“Their flight landed. They’re making a quick stop though. Should be here in a few more minutes.”

Richie nodded in understanding as they started to walk down the main path. It was a mostly sunny day and not too cold despite being the middle of winter. Not many people were out this early though. A guy who might have been a ground’s keeper was walking around, checking on all the graves in general. It didn’t take long to spot Mike and Bill sitting down.

They started to get up, but Eddie waved at them to stay seated.

“Hey guys,” Eddie softly said. His eyes didn’t really look at Stan’s grave until he was seated too. Underneath his name and date, it simply said Loving Husband and Friend. Eddie didn’t know who had added the Friend part or why, but at least it felt a little directed their way.

“What have you been talking about?” asked Richie.

“You know, just catching Stan up on everything,” Bill replied. “It’s been over twenty-seven years. There’s a lot he hasn’t heard.”

“That’s true,” Richie smiled. “Good thing we have all day to tell him, huh?”

“Bev and Ben almost here?”
Eddie nodded. His eyes glanced to some dead flowers on the headstone. “I wonder who left those for you.”

Mike shrugged. “Clearly has been a while. But don’t worry buddy. We got some of your favorites. You grabbed what you could?”

“Got it all right here,” Eddie said as he pulled the bag around. “Remember that one day we spent at the arcade? It was like the second hottest day that summer.”

“We were there for hours,” Bill replied.

“And I kept hogging the machine from you and Stan,” laughed Richie.

“Ben eventually ran off to get the candy because none of us wanted to leave,” Mike said. “We were all trying to replace Richie once his character died.”

Richie showed off a proud smile. “Which he didn’t.”

“And Ben probably would have stayed too, but then Bev was getting tired of us and said she was going to go grab the snacks,” Mike started.

“Ben jumped at the chance,” Bill laughed. “I forgot about that. I was too busy trying to make Richie lose.”

“You and Stan were. I remember you both even tried tickling me and poking me in the sides.”

“And you kept yelling out, ‘Cheaters!’,” said Eddie, “which didn’t even make sense because they weren’t playing.”

“It totally made sense,” Richie replied.

“Quite.”

“Not even a little.”

“There’s Ben and Bev,” Eddie said. He leaned back on one hand, waving to them and catching their attention. They quickly walked over and sat down around the grave.

“Sorry it took so long,” Bev said. “Can’t bring bottles over a certain amount on a plane so we had to buy Stan’s favorite drink here.”

“Um, Beverly?” asked Mike. “Last time I checked, they don’t sell seven packs of anything.”

“You guys are not going to believe this,” groaned Ben.

“I stole it.”

“Bev!”

“Holy shit.”

“Y—you’re serious? Oh, you’re serious.”

“Damn. Why though?”

“It wouldn’t have felt right if one of us got left out,” Bev said, “and it’s kind of fitting. I mean, I met
Ben beforehand, but I really became friends with all of you when I helped you steal those medical supplies.”

“Well shit. Talk about coming full circle,” Richie laughed.

“I guess it does kind of fit,” chuckled Bill. “Glad to see that wild streak isn’t gone.”

“Pretty sure it never left,” grinned Ben.

Bev took the extra bottle and passed it down. Bill set it on one of the corners of the headstone. Mike finally pulled out the collage. It was the first time the others had a chance to see it.

“That’s perfect,” Richie said.

Eddie nodded. “Stan definitely would have loved that.”

They set the collage near the bottle before everyone grabbed their own bottles and cracked them open.

“So,” Ben said as he got comfortable. “What have you been telling Stan?”

“Just catching him up on everything,” Bill said.

“A lot has happened,” Richie added.

“Well, I guess we should all get started. If we’re not careful, we could all be here for over a month, still telling him stories,” Ben replied.

Everyone softly laughed in agreement. Then they began to take turns.

Someone would talk for a few minutes, then someone else would jump in with a thought or a passing comment. They might take over for a bit and then someone else would jump in too. They kept changing back and forth, talking about the past twenty-seven years, talking about their current lives and the way they’d managed to improve themselves. They didn’t talk much on It, only telling Stan that It was gone and gone for good.

Besides telling Stan about their own lives, they also retold stories about Stan. Some were favorites of theirs. Others were just quick thoughts and memories that suddenly popped into their heads again. Food got passed around, always with some being left for Stan next to the drink and collage.

When midday had passed, they’d really gotten comfortable talking to Stan and each other. Of course their hearts were heavy. They would always weigh a little bit more without Stan by their side. But it felt good to be able to truly smile and laugh with Stan and at least imagine that Stan could hear it all.

People had come and gone during that time with more having visited the cemetery once it had become a little later. Some people glanced their way, but nobody actively bothered them or interrupted their celebration of Stan. Not until a person started to approach.

Bill noticed her first. She stopped suddenly, her eyes clearly on them. Then she started walking again, only at a slightly slower pace. One glance at the flowers in her hands showed that they were fresh versions of the rotting ones on the gravestone.

“Guys,” Bill started.

Bev looked next. “Oh crap. Um…”
They all awkwardly kind of stilled before jumping to their feet. Richie started to talk, a quick
explanation and apology to whoever was standing in front of them. However, before he or anyone
else could get out a word, the woman spoke first. Though confused at first, an understanding had
passed across her face.

“You’re them. You’re his friends. All of them.”

Mike was closest. He softly asked, “And you’re Patricia?”

“Patty, please.” Then she hugged him before he could say anything else. Mike jumped a little, but
quickly put his arms around her in return. When she pulled back, she softly said, “Now…now let me
see if I can get it all right. I’m guessing you’re Bev. That’s easy enough.”

Bev nodded.

“And you…you look like a Richie.”

“Yes ma’am.”

“And let’s see…” She guessed all their names correctly.

When she was done, Eddie murmured, “We’re sorry if we were imposing on you. We just—”

“No. No don’t even think that. Seeing…” she paused, covering her mouth. Bev gently touched her
arm. “It was surprising, but seeing all of you here…thank you for this. It’s wonderful to see how
much love my husband had to share.”

“He was our best friend,” Bill murmured.

“The best of the best,” said Ben.

Patty sniffed, wiping at her eyes. “I always told him that. He liked to say I was biased because I was
his wife. But I’m…I’m so glad others knew that too.” She walked forward, everyone moving a little
out of the way.

As she started to put the flowers down, Richie said, “Sorry for the clutter. We can move it.”

“No, no it’s a kind gesture.” Her handghosted near the picture. “Is that…may I?”

“Of course,” Mike quickly said.

She picked it up, a sad smile on her lips as she looked at the young images of Stan. “He never really
had anything from his childhood. Wouldn’t talk about a lot of it. I…I knew he might never let me
into that part of his life, whatever happened to him. Whatever demons he wrestled with. But that was
ok. I just wanted to love him as much as I could and if he was ok with that, then I was ok with that
too. It’s good though, seeing his childhood brought him some joy.”

“All we’ve been doing is talking about it,” smiled Bev. “Would you like to listen?”

“Would you?”

“Of course,” Eddie replied. “And maybe…maybe you could share with us what he was like. All
grown up.”

“That…that sounds wonderful,” she whispered. “Thank you.”
She sat down with them. It was a little weird at first, Patty simply being an unexpected addition. However, when she began telling her own stories, everyone else was able to relax and get into the celebration of Stan’s life a little more. She even did them the honor of showing some photos, photos that she apparently hadn’t looked at for a while judging by her own expressions. However, she seemed to take some small amount of joy at seeing all their expressions as they got to see Stan all grown up. As her shoulders relaxed a bit more, the process seemed almost therapeutic for her.

Patty stayed with them for almost an hour before she glanced at her watch. “Thank you all so much. You can’t know…no. I think you do know. I think you know how much this meant to me, even if it was pure coincidence on all our parts.”

“Maybe it was,” Bill murmured. “Maybe…maybe it was Stan, wanting us to meet at least once.”

“Maybe. I like that idea.” Patty let out a shuttering sigh. She checked her watch again. “Thank you all again, for everything you shared with me. But sadly I need to go pick up the kids from school now.”

They all shared shocked looks.

“K-kids?” asked Richie.

“What? Oh…oh I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you think-no. No I…we tried. We tried for so long and just…” she paused, dabbing at her eyes. “You know, my family wanted me out of the house. They said it was no good, staying in the place where he had passed. But they just didn’t seem to understand. It was the place he had passed, yes, but it also holds some of my best memories of him, of us. I couldn’t leave it behind, yet it’s such a big house all by myself and…and I’ve recently started fostering. It’s helped me keep busy and…and I know Stan would have been thrilled, seeing kids run down those halls. He would have been so overjoyed.”

“I’m sure he would have loved that,” Bev agreed.

“Thank you. I’m glad you think so.”

They all stood up along with her. Mike hesitated but then picked up the collage. “Would you like to keep it?”

“You…you mean that?”

“I mean, it would only last so long here. With weather and everything.”

She hesitated, but her hand slowly came out and took it. She hugged the picture frame close to her chest. Tears fell down her face. “Thank you,” she said again.

They all hugged her before she left. When she started to walk away, she murmured, “This is you saying goodbye. Isn’t it?”

They silently nodded.

“Thank you for that. I’m glad you’re able to do it one last time. He would have wanted that. I’m sorry I can’t quite do that for him yet, but I’m getting there.”

“You really cared about him,” Ben murmured.

“He was the love of my life.” She looked down at the picture frame again. “Thank you. I never will be able to say that enough after what you’ve given me.” Then she slowly walked out of the
graveyard, still holding the collage close.

It took a moment before they all felt comfortable sitting down again.

Eddie murmured, “It’s not fair. It’s still so not fucking fair. But I’m happy it seems he at least was able to develop a good personal life unlike most of us.”

“She was really lovely, Stanley,” Bill murmured.

“I hope you two had good years together. I wish you could have had more,” Bev agreed.

Slowly, they began talking again. When it got late enough, they began to clean up. Richie readjusted the new flowers Stan’s widow had brought, leaning them against the grave and taking the decayed ones off to throw away.

“Goodbye Stanley.”

It was said by each of them. A gentle hand placed on the headstone, a bowed head, and then they slowly walked out of the grave as well, throwing any trash they’d made away near the gates. Since they were all going to the same airport, they ordered one of those larger taxis so they could all pile in. This driver didn’t say a word but to ask the destination.

They remained quiet throughout the drive. Once at the airport, they split the fair and walked through the sliding doors.

“Have a safe flight back.”

“You too.”

“I’ll text you when we get home.”

“Ditto.”

“Of course we will too. I love you.”

“Love you too.”

“I love you guys.”

“Love you.”

“I love you so much.”

“Everyone get over here.”

They hugged as a group, arms around each other, pressing their face to a friend’s cheek or touching foreheads. They slowly parted together.

“Until next time?” asked Bill.

“Always,” Richie replied.

They hugged individually now and then finally went through the airport. They parted, heading towards their own separate flights. Richie and Eddie got on theirs, both leaning against each other the entire time. They arrived back in Chicago at about eight thirty.
“I’m glad we did that,” Richie finally sighed as they headed out into the airport parking lot in search of his car.

“Yeah?”

Richie nodded. “I feel better. Like I had an itch that I didn’t realize was there until it was relieved.”

“Something like that. I’m glad we met Patty. I’m glad he had a good wife.”

“Me too,” murmured Richie. He let out a long yawn.

Eddie softly laughed. “Really? You slept on the flight over and you slept on the flight back.”

“Long day. Want to go straight to bed?”

“I certainly won’t argue with it,” Eddie replied with a small smile. He squeezed Richie’s hand. Then they got in his car and headed home.
Eddie was sat at the desk, doing work from home as Richie cooked lunch. He finished up what he was working on before moving back and asking, “You ever wanted a pet?”

Richie shrugged. “I mean yeah. I guess.”

“Can we have pets in this building?”

“What brought this on?”

Eddie fully turned around. “I was just thinking about how while you were gone, it might be nice to…you know. Have something around.”

“If you think I’m going to be gone too long, I can shorten the tour schedule—”

“What? No! No I would never ask that of you,” Eddie said. He got up and walked to the kitchen. He leaned against the counter. “If you don’t want a pet, I’m ok with that—”

“It’s not that I don’t want a pet. I just want to make sure you’re not asking because you’re going to be lonely.”

Eddie laughed. “Look at us, going round in circles wanting to make sure the other is comfortable.”

“I don’t want you to feel like you’re alone if I can help it,” Richie replied with a soft smile.

“And I appreciate that. But I have people at work I regularly see for dinner and or drinks. I have CC who I can always bother. I can still text and call you. Same for the rest of our best friends. I’m not afraid of being alone. Just…besides the regular everyday things I might do at home, it would just be nice to have…you know. Something to look after.”

“Ah, I see now. You’re going to miss looking after me. Is that it?”

Eddie rolled his eyes. He walked around and gave Richie a quick kiss. “I’m just saying…”

“No, it’s not a bad idea.”

“So does the building allow pets?”

“Technically.”

“Technically?”

“Well, cats and dogs are specifically forbidden in the paperwork. Everything else someone has been
brought in at one point or another, and the landlord hasn’t been able to raise a problem. So…”

“Anything besides a cat or dog?”

Richie nodded.

“Hmm, what would work here?” mused Eddie.

“We can go shopping this weekend. We don’t have to pick anything right away. I don’t leave for another two weeks so we can pick something out later if we want.”

“Sounds like a plan then,” Eddie said with another small kiss.

They spent the rest of the day in, Eddie working on and off as he was regularly distracted by Richie. The next day, they went out to a few pet stores, getting a feel for what they had to offer. The first one didn’t have too many different choices as it was focused more on cats and dogs. They decided to go to a second one.

At that one, they split up. Richie looked around at everything, but even though he’d said no dogs, he still found himself in that section as one of the workers had them out and running around in a closed off area. A few other people were meeting the dogs. When Richie got the go ahead, he leaned over and let the nearest one sniff him. Then a Pomeranian came closer. Richie flinched a little.

“No. Just Pomeranians. And I wouldn’t say I don’t like them…just a complicated history,” Richie said. The woman gave him an odd look as he hesitantly offered his hand again. It certainly wasn’t an exact copy of that demon creature and it was pretty cute…

No, they couldn’t get a dog.

Though maybe if Richie snuck it in…

“There,” he quickly said to the lady. He decided to go find Eddie. Maybe…no they should look for something else. Though maybe they could sneak a dog in…

Richie went through a couple of rows before finding Eddie in the reptile section.

“They’re definitely one of the friendliest types of lizards. Most don’t mind being held and it’s alright to let them roam around in a controlled environment. Just know that you have to be mindful that their body temperature doesn’t get to cold.”

“Got it,” Eddie replied.

Richie watched as the bearded dragon walked up Eddie’s arm, carefully clinging to his jacket. It got onto Eddie’s shoulder and hugged him there, one set of claws curled around Eddie’s collar.

“Ok, I’m not going to lie,” said Richie as he walked over. “That is fucking adorable.”

The worker smiled. “The initial price of buying everything can seem a bit costly if you’ve never owned a reptile before, but in the long run, they’re not that expensive. They are a relatively long-term pet though. This one is two years old. If you make sure to take good care of him, he’ll likely live for ten, maybe eleven more years. Some have lived even longer.”

“He got a name?” asked Richie.
“You’re not going to believe this,” started Eddie.

The worker said it. “Eduardo.”

“Oh we totally are getting him. I love him, and he’s mine now.”

Eddie snorted. The worker helped show him how to safely unlatch the bearded dragon from his collar and set him back in the cage.

“So we’re interested?” she asked.

“I think so,” Eddie replied.

“Let me show you everything you’ll need to buy right off the bat, and we have a helpful list of things that are ok and not ok to feed them. Lettuce for example? A bearded dragon will definitely go for it, but it holds no nutritional value for them. Kale is a much safer alternative.”

She walked them through everything. Richie eventually went back and got a cart. They were looking at some different parts to throw in the cage so the bearded dragon would have something to entertain himself with.

As Eddie flipped one over, giving it a few quick glances, he asked, “You sure you’re ok with this?”

“Yeah. I mean, a lizard is going to be easier than a rabbit or something.”

Eddie laughed at the thought.

“And I think a bearded dragon kind of fits you. I can see you working at home, your namesake here sitting on your stomach. And they do require pretty regular attention. You like patterns and routines. It suits you. And it’ll be easy to find a space in the apartment for him. I just can’t believe his name is actually fucking Eduardo.”

Eddie laughed again. “Well just about each one of them had some type of Spanish or Mexican name. Except Linda.”

“Linda? Ok, just for how fucking weird it is to think of a bearded dragon called Linda, I kind of want to go back for her.”

“Nope. We chose my namesake. Remember?” Eddie grinned. “And bearded dragons are better solo pets.”

“Fine. I guess we’ll just have to deal with Eduardo,” sighed Richie.

“Hush. You already know you love him.”

“I think I do,” grinned Richie as he slowly drew a kiss from Eddie.

As Eddie went through the whole checkout process, Richie ran off to get the car warmed up. Eddie and Richie then took everything else out first. The last thing they grabbed was Eduardo himself, Eddie taking off his jacket and throwing it over the cage for extra insulation against the cold.

They got everything situated and then headed straight home to get everything set up for their new little friend. They’d of course gotten him food and when they had Eduardo in his new home, Eddie fed him. He stayed leaned up by the cage, watching the lizard slowly move as Eddie scratched at his chest.
“They’re very satisfying to watch.”

“You happy with our decision?”

“Definitely,” Eddie replied. He moved back, letting Eduardo be as he turned around to see Richie splayed out on the couch. Eddie got on top of him and kissed him slow. “Just two more weeks. Huh?”

Richie sighed against him. “I don’t want to leave.”

“I don’t want you to either.”

“Then what if I just—”

Eddie pressed a finger to Richie’s lips. “You enjoy stand-up?”

“Of course I do. But—”

“No matter how much I fucking love you, I don’t want you to stop then,” Eddie murmured. “What if our positions were switched? What if my work involved lots of travel and yours didn’t?”

“Well that wouldn’t matter. I would never ask you to stop doing what you enjoy.”

“Exactly. And I’m not asking that of you. We knew this day would come eventually. I want you, and I want you at your happiest. And even if that means having to let go every now and again, that’s ok.” With that, Eddie gently kissed him. Their lips slowly moved against each other. Then Eddie pulled slightly back. “Besides, it’ll make the reunions that much sweeter.”

“Hmm, you think?” whispered Richie as he kissed him back.

“Well, we’ll at least have to do one test run.”

“That another way of you telling me I definitely need to continue with this?”

“That. And I think you really would finally give Jason an aneurism if you cancelled last minute.”

Richie laughed. “True. It’s still so weird you two talk.”

“But still ok?”

“Yeah! I’m glad you actually like each other. Just still weird,” Richie said with a slight chuckle. He kissed Eddie back and asked, “Want to look up different hats we can buy for Eduardo?”

Eddie rolled his eyes. “You are not putting him in outfits.”

“The lady said bearded dragons are cool with that.”

“Listen…”

“I already have some great ideas.”

Eddie groaned. “The moment he seems even the slightest bit uncomfortable…”

“Oh yeah, totally. But that can’t stop me from at least trying at first.”

“God I hate you.”
“No you don’t,” laughed Richie. He pulled him into another kiss, both choosing to stay splayed out on the couch rather than moving right away.

“Want to watch a movie?” Eddie eventually said.

“Sure.”

They moved around a little, getting more comfortable so they could both see the TV. Halfway through, Eddie grabbed his laptop and finished up a little work as Richie leaned up against him. They had dinner together, Eddie checking on the bearded dragon before he actually ate.

He decided to let the little guy explore since he seemed kind of restless. Eddie cleaned his cage as Richie kept an eye on him.

“He’s acting a lot more like a dog than I would have thought.”

“Like the woman said, they’re sociable.”

“He’s going to be a troublemaker.” Richie carefully grabbed him and placed him away from the dangerous object. “Yes you are. You are totally going to be a troublemaker.”

“That’ll be because of your bad influence.”

“Yeah right. I’m the perfect parent for a lizard.”

Eddie rolled his eyes at that. He finished cleaning up the cage, added some food, and then carefully put Eduardo back in.

Richie and Eddie then had a nice dinner together, finished the movie they’d started, and then retired early. Eddie actually wanted to read a little, but Richie just curled into his side, hiding his face from the light. Richie was asleep by the time Eddie put the book down. He gently rolled Richie over so he could turn off the light and then lie down himself.

Eddie wrapped an arm around Richie, slowly starting to drift asleep—

Darkness…

Something was there…

He felt something in his chest…

Eddie’s eyes opened. It was dark, and a quick glance at the clock showed it was still very early in the morning. Richie continued to snore besides him as Eddie wondered why he’d woken up. There’d been some dream… Or maybe a feeling… A warning—

But no, Eddie couldn’t remember. The worry he should have felt disappeared too. With a small sigh, Eddie got comfortable again and fell back asleep. In the morning, he didn’t even remember he’d woken up the night before.
So this chapter is really early (for me at least, who knows what time it is for you guys) because I'm opening and will be working all day. I could have updated when I got home, but it would have been late and hey, at least getting to see all your reactions will be a nice surprise when I get home. So, here's the next chapter! Hope you guys enjoy, and to all those freaking out in the comments-

Patience my dear readers...

It was the night before Richie was supposed to fly out to the West Coast. He’d made dinner, something special since as he put it, Eddie would be suffering through restaurant food and cold cut sandwiches until he got back.

“Oh, so now you’re better than the restaurants?” asked Eddie with a grin.

“I’ve always been better than the restaurants.” Richie flipped the spatula. Instead of catching it though, he stumbled several times before the utensil went straight into the sink.

“Oh yes, a first-rate, class act.”

“That was a fluke, and I should not be judged on that alone.”

“Oh, I’m judging you. I am so judging you right now.”

Richie grabbed a pinch of salt and threw it at Eddie.

Eddie just barely dodged and shot back in a sing-song voice, “You fucked up.”

“Maybe I meant to do that. Ever think of that?”

“Sure,” grinned Eddie.

From there, Richie finished with prepping dinner. Eddie went to feed the new pet and laughed. “I hate you for starting this.”

“It’s not my fault he likes it,” grinned Richie.

As promised, he’d gotten Eduardo several different little hats. His favorite? A little sombrero that even when Eddie took it off, if he left it in the cage then Eduardo buried underneath it to sleep. He was doing that now though he immediately came out of the sand in order to get to the feeding area.

Eddie left the little hat there since Eduardo liked it, though he had continued to keep an eye out to make sure he hadn’t tried to eat any part of it yet.

Richie finished setting up the plates. “Alright, dinner is served. You have Temple of Doom set up?”

“Raiders of the Lost Ark.”
“Temple of Doom comes first!” cried Richie.

“It was made second. We’re watching this in order.”

“But that’s not the chronological order.”

“Richie, the only reason we’re starting this marathon so early is because you insisted Kingdom of the Crystal Skull should be included. Which just hearing you utter those words, I should have kicked you out.”

“You couldn’t have,” Richie said as he handed Eddie his plate and sat down. “The lease is in my name.”

“I think the landlord would have understood once I explained. Crystal Skull is awful.”

“It has aliens! Come on. That’s cool.”

“Just because something has aliens in it does not make it automatically cool. And aliens don’t belong in Indiana Jones anyways!”

“Listen, I realize you’re still arguing because you’re hoping it’ll get too late and we can’t watch the last one. However, I will stay up as long as I need to in order for us to get to that movie.”

“You have a plane to catch tomorrow.”

“I’ll postpone. Damn Jason’s headache, I’m not leaving until we watch every single movie.”

Eddie let out a dramatic sigh. “Well to save Jason the headache…”

“Ha!”

“I’m still not admitting it’s a good movie.”

“Oh, I know it’s not a good movie. But it’s better than Temple of Doom.”

“Now that’s some fat fucking bullshit!”

“I stand by what I said.”

“What kind of person have I shacked up with,” gasped Eddie, “that he thinks Crystal Skull is better than Temple of Doom?”

“No taksies backsies.”

“Oh, is that how it works?”

“Yep.” Richie snatched the remote and changed it to Temple of Doom. “Now we’re watching this one first.”

“At least tell me we can agree that The Last Crusade is the best one though. Right?”

“Oh, of course. No contest there.”

Eddie laughed. He caved and let Richie keep it on the second movie. They slowly ate through the film. Richie got seconds during the Lost Ark but Eddie declined. Besides, he could use some of the leftovers for lunch tomorrow. Besides that, Eddie had a few glasses of wine. Richie stuck with his
tequila. Despite Eddie’s opinion on the latest *Indiana Jones* movie, he did try to stay awake once they got to it.

However, the last thing he remembered was Indy running through the jungle trying to escape Soviet agents and then—

Credits.

“I swear I did not fall asleep on purpose,” he mumbled as he pushed himself off Richie’s shoulder.

“It’s ok. It is past twelve right now.”

Eddie stretched. “Hmm, not that late. And I did say I would work from home tomorrow so I could see you off at the airport.”

“Well I still won’t make you re-watch the half you slept through.”

“Thank Christ.”

Richie laughed. “I’ll clean up.”

“You’re leaving. Shouldn’t I clean up?”

“I don’t mind. Besides, I thought you were going to take a shower.”

“I was until you distracted me earlier with cooking. Hmm…fuck it. I will take it now.”

“See you in bed then,” Richie said with a quick kiss as he grabbed the remaining plates.

As Richie took care of the kitchen, Eddie took an extra long shower. When he got out, he was hesitant. Since knowing that Richie would be gone for several weeks at a time now, he’d sort of planned and built himself up for this. But was he actually ready? Well, there was no way to know until he finally just acted. The pit that had once been in his stomach wasn’t back or anything. This certainly wasn’t the same feeling. It was more just simple nerves than any actual fear.

Eddie took a deep breath. He was ready. At least he thought of himself as ready. Richie might have other ideas, but he would just have to risk it and see.

When Eddie came out of the bathroom, he’d just put on some new underwear. Richie was in the bedroom, throwing his shirt into the laundry basket. He looked ready to grab one to sleep in. However, Eddie walked over and slowly kissed down his spine before he could.

Richie turned around and drew Eddie back into a kiss.

“Hmm, you gonna miss me?” murmured Richie.

“Yeah,” sighed Eddie. “You’re still going though.”

“I know. I know,” murmured Richie. The kiss deepened as he pushed Eddie back towards the bed. Eddie got on it, carefully moving over until Richie was on the bed with him. Then he flipped them.

Eddie moved to that one spot, lightly pulling at Richie’s ear as he arched into him. Eddie pushed back. They hadn’t been in this position often, but Eddie had gotten more comfortable with moving in tandem with Richie rather than taking turns.

He rested comfortably between Richie’s legs. This time, Eddie’s lips pushed and probed more,
guiding the kiss as Richie arched into him again. Eddie grinded back, capturing Richie’s moan in his mouth. Eddie pushed a little harder. He felt Richie growing more and more worked up. He rolled his head back when Eddie moved lower, mouth slack and breathing growing more erratic.

Eddie kissed his neck. He sucked and gently pulled along Richie’s neck. He’d grown increasingly better at that, learning to mark Richie like how he left traces on Eddie’s skin.

Richie tried to pull him up into a kiss when Eddie let go. However, Eddie pushed back. Their noses just barely touched as Eddie kept himself posed above. Richie cocked an eyebrow, clearly waiting for Eddie to explain.

And Eddie did. He said it softly, lips brushing against Richie’s lips.

“I want you to fuck me.”

Richie blinked in surprise. He pulled back just a little. “Not to uh…knock the romance of the moment out of the park, but it’s not something you really should just jump into. And it would honestly be easier if you—”

Eddie captured him into another kiss. He pushed forward, feeling Richie react through their clothes. “It’s ok,” Eddie murmured. He kissed him again. “But it’s a lot harder to surprise you if I say I’m going to fuck you.”

“I don’t know. That would be pretty surprising too.”

Eddie laughed.

“But my point is I want it to be good for you. And there is a certain amount of prepping—”

“I know.”

“You know?”

“That’s why I want you to fuck me. I’ve been…practicing.”

“Practicing huh?”

“I wouldn’t say it if I didn’t think I was ready. Please,” whispered Eddie. “I want you to fuck me.”

Richie groaned and pushed up into him. Eddie pressed him back against the bed.

“That doesn’t exactly work if you manage to get off by grinding against me.”

“I can’t help it. It’s just so god damn hot hearing you say that.”

Eddie leaned forward. He whispered, “Fuck me then.”

Richie groaned again. “Ok…ok hold on.”

Eddie moved back so Richie could roll over and reach for the side table. He pulled open the drawer and then raised an eyebrow when he glanced back to Eddie.

“What? I looked it up and it said it was one of the better ones. Especially for a first time. Also, obviously by down I realized you had that stuff in the drawer.” Not that Eddie had specifically been looking for it, but…
“Of course you looked it up,” laughed Richie. He pulled Eddie into another kiss before softly saying, “Get on your back. I want to be able to see you.”

Eddie complied. Richie leaned over again, grabbing what he needed. He bent forward into a deep kiss, one hand roaming down. He helped Eddie lose the last of his clothing before slowly stroking him. Richie’s lips trailed down to Eddie’s throat.

“You still good?”

Eddie nodded.

“Ok. I’m going to go lower. Tell me the moment it gets too much—”

“Richie, I’m not going to break. Keep going.”

Eddie pushed up into a kiss. He dragged Richie down, their bodies flushed and pressed against each other before Eddie finally let go. “Keep going.”

Richie softly moaned. “So fucking authoritative.” He kissed him again and then kept moving the hand lower. He used his fingers first. Eddie tangled his own up in Richie’s hair. Richie peppered kisses along his stomach as he slowly pressed and stretched inside Eddie.

“Keep it up,” whispered Eddie. He moved slightly, becoming as open as he could be, getting his body to relax against the still foreign motions. His mind focused more on Richie’s lips as he kept up those gentle kisses.

“You actually prepped. You fucking prepared for this,” Richie said, voice ghosting against Eddie’s skin.


“Now those are probably the second most beautiful words I’ve heard leave your lips.”

“And the first ones?”

“I’ll tell you when you say them,” replied Richie.

He kept slow, stayed gentle. He remained at that pace until he finally heard Eddie’s breath really hitch, his muscles tensed.

“All good?”

“Fuck,” whispered Eddie. “Yeah.”

“Reading up on things and actually doing it is a bit different, huh?”

Eddie lightly hit him in the head. Richie curled his fingers in response.

“God damn Richie.”

“Shh, relax your muscles again.” Richie kissed his chest.

“I got it…” Eddie let out a shaky breath. “Are you…”

“Not yet. Don’t want to rush things.”
“Ok. I trust you.”

“Hmm, those are probably the third ones,” whispered Richie. He kissed Eddie at the same time that he moved his fingers.

“Your third favorite words, huh?” Eddie got out. “I want you.”

He felt Richie’s sigh against him, the way his body shivered.

“I trust you.”

Richie groaned, aroused by Eddie’s voice alone.

“So then the first words…”

“Can you figure it out?” whispered Richie.

“I think so. I…ah!” He gasped as Richie pushed into him again. “I love you.”

“There they fucking are.” Richie finally pulled away, that alone creating Eddie to squirm and gasp. Richie drew the groans out of him, kissing him as he grinded against him. “You ready?”

Eddie nodded. “Please,” he softly murmured, “fuck me.”

Richie groaned against his neck. “I am never going to get tired of hearing that.” He moved back. Eddie tried to stay as relaxed as possible as Richie added more lube and put the condom on. Richie leaned down and kissed him again before he slowly pressed forward. He kept slow, not going all the way, pulling out slightly and then carefully pushing back in.

One of Richie’s hands found Eddie’s he held it tightly as he pushed again. Eddie tried his best to keep his legs relaxed, open. Richie kept at the slow pace. He didn’t want Eddie to feel even the slightest bit of pain. Even for a second. Whenever Eddie did tense, Richie backed off for a second. He waited until Eddie managed to relax again before getting back to the exact same placement and then pushing again.

After a long moment of that, Richie felt Eddie tense but in a different way. He groaned into the open air. Richie could feel him shuddering. “Oh, fuck Richie.”

“Say it. Say those words,” whispered Richie. He rocked their bodies together, keeping the pace slow but constant.

“I trust you,” whispered Eddie. Richie shuddered against him. “I want you.” Richie bent forward, he kissed slow and long as he kept up the rocking motions. “I need you.”

“Best add that to the list.”

Eddie laughed. He kissed Richie back. Then Richie finally felt good about really pushing, his hips moving in regular motions. Eddie moaned, “I love you.”

“I love you too,” whispered Richie.

As they kept going, it was clear Richie wanted to pick up the pace. Eddie kind of wanted him to as well. But later. They would have other chances. Right now, Eddie put all his faith in Richie, in trusting him to know what pace to stay at.

Their bodies stayed locked. Eddie never let go of Richie, keeping his arms around him. Kissing his
lips and cheeks and neck and nose. Occasionally, one of Richie’s hands wandered lower. He stroked Eddie in time, doubling the stimulation as Richie controlled the motions.

Richie pushed his hips forward—

“Ah! Ah…Richie…fuck…”

“So fucking beautiful,” whispered Richie as he soon followed, body shaking against Eddie’s as he kissed him again. “You all good?”

“ Fucking great…ah. Ah fuck.” Eddie gasped as Richie pulled out.

He threw the condom into the wastebasket. He leaned forward and slowly drew a kiss from Eddie. “I promise to clean everything up later. But please tell me…”

“I couldn’t stand up if I wanted to.”

Richie laughed. His body completely relaxed against Eddie, pulling him close and kissing him again and again. “You still feel good?” asked Richie.

“Fuck, of course.”

Richie laughed again.

“I love you,” Eddie mumbled against his neck. “Love you and need you and want you and trust you. So…so fucking much.”

“You too. Like I said. So fucking beautiful.”

“I believe it when you say it.”

“Good. It’s true.” They stayed curled in each other’s arms, Eddie giving Richie one last kiss on the nose before his eyes slid shut.
ACT III: Love

Chapter Notes

Another early chapter because I'm going to be gone all day and at my sister's first recital woo! Also, thank you for the love you've given Eduardo. I know it's a lot of people's headcanon that they get a dog, especially a Pomeranian, but I just wanted to change it up a bit and I really felt like a bearded dragon fit, so thank you for liking it! Anyways, here we go! Only three more chapters after this until ACT IV <3

Darkness…

Pain…

It was so close…

Eddie woke up. It was early morning as he nuzzled against Richie and held him a little tighter. Richie woke up a few minutes later. They stayed in bed longer than they normally would have. Eddie was reluctant to leave. If he got up, then he really had to face the fact that Richie was going…

But there was Eduardo to feed and Eddie didn’t want to make the poor bearded dragon wait because he felt like being lazy. Richie whined but let him go. Otherwise, Eddie did go a little slowly. He put off a lot of work, deciding he’d finish it that afternoon as he stayed close to Richie and made sure he’d packed everything he would need.

When it was finally time, Eddie drove Richie to the airport. Eddie got out and grabbed the suitcase as Richie threw his duffle bag over his shoulders. As they hugged each other, an exasperated groan came from nearby.

“There you fucking are! Come on. We’re going to miss the flight.”

“We’re not going to miss the flight,” Richie said with the roll of his eyes as Jason came into view.

“You’re killing me,” groaned Jason as he leaned against his own suitcase. “And you!” He pointed at Eddie. “You’re supposed to help me keep this nutcase on task.”

“I’m sorry. Next time we’ll get here on time,” laughed Eddie.

“The flight is still almost an hour away! It’s fine,” Richie said with a quick wave of his hand.

“Killing me. Absolutely killing me,” Jason muttered. “Eddie, you ever thought of taking my job?”

“You’re on your own,” replied Eddie.

“Fuck. Ok. Let’s hurry up and get in line for the first checkpoint.”

“Hang on. Just because you’re allergic to romance doesn’t mean I can’t take a second.” Richie turned to Eddie and drew him into a long kiss.

“I’m allergic to being late and having to deal with rescheduling everything. Checkpoint. Now.”
Eddie laughed as he gave Richie a quick peck on the nose. “You better get going. Don’t be so hard on Jason while you’re out there.”

“He can handle it.”

“I’m about to handle you all the way through airport security,” Jason replied. He tapped his watch. “Please?”

“Text me when you land,” said Eddie.

“I will. I’ll call every day.”

“I’ll answer.” He kissed Richie again—

“I am begging you both. Please!”

“Go,” Eddie said with another laugh. “I love you.”

“Love you too.”

Towards Jason, Eddie said “Sorry. I’ll buy you lunch when you guys get back.”

“I deserve a full course meal for this.”

“You got it.”

Richie rolled his eyes. Eddie waved and then waited by his car until they both entered the building. Eddie got in and then finally drove away as Richie and Jason got in line.

And then a new pattern started.

Rather than taking that free day to work from home that he usually got, Eddie chose to almost always go in during the coming days. It was more enjoyable having the company and he started saying yes a lot more to offers for dinner or going out with coworkers. He still made sure to always be home in time to feed and check on Eduardo though.

And, without Richie always distracting him, Eddie started to get a good feel for figuring out the bearded dragon’s personality. From what he could observe and what he’d read, bearded dragons were a lot more personable than other lizards, though obviously not quite like a cat or a dog. After a while though, he managed to really tell not just the difference between happiness and anger but slighter emotions like tiredness, annoyance, calm, content. He also got a feel for when it was best to let the little guy run around and always managed to put him back before there was even a slight risk of the lizard’s body temperature getting too low.

Eddie also saw CC. Sometimes it was if he stopped at her restaurant. Other times she called him up and asked if he wanted to grab coffee. Then there were obviously the times when he texted or got to call the others. Mike was the easiest to talk to, then Bill. Bev and Ben’s jobs didn’t always line up perfectly with Eddie’s so they mostly stuck with quick texts back and forth when they could.

As far as Richie went though, Eddie got a call from him around lunch every day, and if not that, at least a text. Since Richie was two hours earlier and often slept in, it was usually the best time to do it.

Eddie missed him. Of course he fucking did. But every time he got to listen to Richie explaining how a show had gone or just what he’d done that day, it brought a smile to Eddie’s face. He missed him, but he was more than happy to deal with that for a short time and still get to hear just how happy
Richie was as he continued working again.

Sometimes Eddie also got to hear the other side of things from Jason too. The man had other business he was doing out there, but he was still at almost every one of Richie’s shows and almost constantly by his side.

Plenty of calls started with Jason groaning, “It was a Dairy Queen this time,” or some other fast food place. “I think he tries to get me to stop because he knows it drives me up the wall that every unnecessary stop could mean we might be late.”

Eddie always tried not to laugh too hard. Depending on what stop it was, Eddie would usually respond with something like, “He shove a fry in your mouth again mid rant?”

“Like it was a god damn pacifier. I realize you care very deeply for each other, but I may just have to bury him in the desert.”

Eddie always laughed, knowing Jason wasn’t suffering as much as he put on. It felt good thinking of Jason as a friend and continuing the dialogue between them too.

The first week passed. Then the second one. One more week and then Richie would return home for a few days before going back on tour. Before that happened though, there was a night when Richie managed to call him. It was a special night as instead of performing in a club, Richie was supposed to be performing a segment for a late night program. Eddie had the TV turned to the right channel though it was currently muted. He was reading with Eduardo’s tiny claws hook into his shirt. He’d let the bearded dragon out a couple of minutes ago. He had walked around for a second but had almost immediately chosen to crawl up the couch and onto Eddie. He’d decided to let the lizard stay though he kept track of the time so he knew when to put the guy back in his cage.

A few minutes passed. When Eddie did go and put Eduardo back, the phone rang. Eddie laid back on the couch and answered.

“Hey, Richie. If you’re calling to ask if I’m watching, I’ve got the TV on,” said Eddie. “How did the filming of it go?”

“Good,” Richie replied. “I’ve been on the show a few times so I know a lot of the crew, the band members, that kind of thing.”

“I remember you mentioning that. Everything go as planned?”

“Well…”

“What exactly does that mean?” asked Eddie. He chuckled at Richie’s tone of voice, able to tell that whatever was going on wasn’t anything bad.

“Just wait for it. So how was the rest of your day?”

They talked for a bit, Eddie still lying down, one hand holding the phone and his other hand scratching at his chest. He only really moved when he glanced at the time and saw the show was almost on. He was going to leaved it muted until Richie came on, but Richie said, “I’d pay attention.”

“Pay attention?”

“Well to put it simply, the usual host had a family emergency and…”
Eddie fully sat up. The premade title screen came on, but instead of the usual man, he watched as Richie ran out onto the main floor.

“As you can see, I am not Matthew Schmidt, but they sure as hell tried to make me look as close as possible. Put me through the car wash that late night hosts all are required to go through.” Richie ruffled his hair back into his usual mess. “I realize the hair and make-up crew are frothing at the mouths on the edge of the cameras, but let’s be honest. No one was going to mistake me for Schmidt.

“Now, before you worry too much, Schmidt is fine. In fact, we should all give him and his wife a round of applause for the baby girl that just came into the world, albeit a bit early.” He paused for the audience’s reaction before quickly going. “With that out of the way though, how about we talk some of the crazy-BEEP-that’s been happening in the country. Oh, wait I got to remember this is cable.”

The audience laughed as Richie went into the opening monologue.

On the phone, Eddie asked, “How the hell did you end up hosting?”

“Like I said, the guy’s wife was pregnant. Wasn’t due for about another week and a half, but things happen. You know?”

“Why you though?”

“I feel like I should be offended by the way you just said that.”

Eddie laughed. “I’m honestly just curious.”

“I mean, I was coming in to shoot anyways. And I was free during the times they needed to shoot all the other segments. Jason managed to get me pretty well compensated for it too.”

“So that’s why you keep him around,” Eddie chuckled.

“That and it’s nice to have someone near who I can constantly annoy.”

Eddie rolled his eyes. “That poor man. What was it like? Did you enjoy it?”

“The monologue bit is basically stand-up. Only you’ve got a teleprompter in front of you and nowhere near enough time to memorize it all. Though they usually air the second take.”

“And the other aspects?”

“It’s definitely a team related operation. And it turns out I talk too much during interviews.”

“Well I could have told you that. So, I guess no late night career for you then?”

“Are you kidding me? Too much politics and again, I’ve been writing my own shit now. Would feel weird if I just suddenly did a one-eighty and got a whole team to write my words for me.”

Eddie was silent for a moment, watching the TV. “You’re good with the adlibbing though.”

“That part’s fun. Even if I could deal with everything else though, the only late night studios you hear of that are worth a dime are either are on the east or west coast. And I sure as hell am not moving to either area.”

Eddie gave a slight nod as he heard several loud beeps sound from the television. “And surprise surprise, you can’t control your mouth well enough.”
“Oh yeah, the censors had a field day with me,” Richie replied. Eddie could hear the grin in his voice. “The audience certainly got a kick out of it.”

“You’re good with interacting with the band.”

“That’s just because I knew them beforehand. If this was a show I had never previously been on, I wouldn’t have done nearly as well.”

Eddie hummed in agreement. He watched a little longer. Then he murmured, “You look good in a suit.”

“Oh do I?”

“Yeah. Glad they didn’t go with the tie though.”

“They tried. Believe me, they fucking tried,” laughed Richie. “When they didn’t listen to me, they listened to Jason at least. He walked by and ripped that sucker off before it could even be tightened and just went, ‘Absolutely not.’”

“I can only imagine.” Eddie continued to watch. On the TV, Richie finished up the monologue and gave an idea of what would come next. Then it went to commercials.

“So…” Richie slowly said. “What are you wearing right now?”

“I am not having phone sex with you.”

“Ah come on.”

“I’m watching the TV.”

“Cockblocked by myself? I must be the only man that-hey! It’s on commercials right now!”

Eddie laughed. “You caught me. Still not having phone sex with you though.”

“Damn.”

“Come on. We’ve got about a week left.”

“That’s too long. And then I have to go on tour again.”

“We’ll just have to make the most of those three days then.”

“But you’re working for all of them,” whined Richie.

“We’ll have to make the most of the night.”

“The man with all the answers, huh?”

“Your words. Not mine.”

“Hmm, well you do have the best answers for me.”

“I try.”

“How’s the kid doing?”

Eddie snorted and leaned up to get a glance at the cage. “Asleep right now. He was hanging out on
my chest a while ago.”

“He just really loves clinging there.”

“I don’t get it either. Not even changing up the types of shirts and the material they’re made out of convinces to go elsewhere. The whole point of letting him out is so he can roam around.”

“Lazy little bastard.”

“He’s allowed.”

“Oh, so he’s ok to be a lazy bastard, but if I’m lazy I get yelled at.”

“When you become a cute lizard that likes to bury in the sand, I’ll get off your case,” grinned Eddie.

“Well I am in Nevada. If there’s any time to learn how, it’s now.”

“Oh dear lord.”

“I’m joking.”

“I hope you are.”

Richie laughed on the other line before they both turned silent again. They watch the show for a bit, occasionally making comments or finding some other topic to discuss. When it was finally over, Eddie leaned over and turned off the TV.

“Just a few more days,” murmured Eddie.

“So fucking close. What if I decide to just go back in time? Forget all of this?”

“Going back?”

“Instead of continuing my stand-up career, I could find a job as a waiter.”

“Oh, that kind of going back. Don’t you dare,” laughed Eddie.

“Just saying. Or maybe I’m a stay at home guy. Someone needs to take care of the kids.”

“We have a lizard Richie. No.”

“It’s not a horrible idea.”

“No, you are not throwing away your career to be a stay at home lizard sitter!”

They both laughed as Eddie snuggled down and got as comfortable as he could.

“I miss you though,” murmured Richie.

“You too. But once you’re done with the West Coast, we have over a month to spend together.”

“I’d rather hold you permanently. For forever.”

“Forever is a long time.”

“I’m ok with that.”
Eddie smiled at the thought. “Still miss you.”
“I miss you more.”
“Oh really. How do you know that?”
“Because you could keep going without me. I could never go on without you.”
“Don’t sell yourself too short. I don’t know if I could stand life without you.”
“Yeah?”
“Knowing you always call is the only thing that keeps these days manageable.”
“Ah, it’s not like I’m the only thing in your life.”
“Well no. Work is still enjoyable. I actually went over to David’s house for dinner.”
“I bet that was fun. You get into any arguments with his youngest?”
“Of course.”
They both laughed.
Eddie added, “My point is I keep busy. I enjoy pretty much every day. But you? You’re the best part.”
“Ah, well aren’t you just a fucking softy. You’re the best part of my life too.”
Eddie smiled. “And saying that doesn’t really lead us to arguing.”
“That is a good point. We can both equally be the best part of the other’s life. But I miss you more.”
Eddie laughed. “Oh really now!”
“Yep. I signed a contract. Says I miss you more.”
Eddie glanced at his watch. “Well, I’ll let you win tonight. I need to go to work tomorrow. But trust me, tomorrow it’ll turn out that I miss you more.”
“You sure about that?”
“Positive.”
Richie laughed on the other end. “I love you. Can’t wait to say that to your face soon.”
“Same. Love you too Richie. Good luck on the next few sets.”
“Thanks. Night.”
“Good night.”
ACT III: Love

Chapter Notes

Alright, only two more chapters and then onto the final ACT! And I do mean that this time haha. We are getting close to the end, even if it has been slow but sure going. Also, quick note-
EDUARDO IS NOT EVIL! HE IS A HAPPY LITTLE LIZARD WHO IS JUST CLINGY I SWEAR!

But I do love all the theorizing and seeing people try to guess what's going on. I just based Eduardo off a friend who had a bearded dragon and he enjoyed clinging to her shirt/shoulder. I honestly didn't think about how that might be seen in the story considering the hints I've been dropping haha.

But anyways, onto the next chapter! Hope you enjoy <3

Though only three days, Richie’s time home was exactly what both Eddie and Richie needed. After that, there was about a month and a half left of Richie’s tours before he had a full two month break. Richie would have three more opportunities to visit before he was officially on break, but other than those few moments, most of Eddie’s days were spent working along with the occasional outing with co-workers. The main exception to those times were when CC asked him out for those quick cups of coffee or something else depending on the time of day.

One day after several weeks had passed and Richie was on his last slew of tours, she invited him over to another show of hers. It was a longer set and one that she’d been running with for a bit. Since Eddie didn’t go in the next day, he agreed to go out for drinks afterwards.

“So, you honestly used to go through the sewers for fun,” Eddie asked with a raised eyebrow.

“I mean, I say sewers. It was really more the drainage system that ran underneath the parkway near our house. It probably connected to the sewers though.”

“And that was fun for you?”

“Oh yeah! It was so cool. We could run under five lanes of traffic. There were strip malls on the other side. We could even walk to Burger King rather than sitting in a car waiting at red lights for a ridiculous amount of time. It was fun.”

Eddie shuddered at the thought. “At least tell me the homeless guy was made up.”

“Oh no. Mr. McCready was one hundred percent real.”

Eddie threw his hands up in the air. “I am amazed that you still have all your limbs after the crazy shit I’ve heard you do.”

“You and my mom,” grinned CC. “Let me guess, you definitely weren’t a risk taker as a kid.”

“I tried not to be. My friends, namely Richie, always somehow dragged me along though.”
“I bet. They ever drag you into some gross places? Maybe a local haunted house?”

Eddie closed his eyes at the images that immediately popped up.

“Oh, sorry. I’m guessing there’s a story behind something like that?”

“Something like that,” Eddie sighed. “It was a long time ago though.”

“We still don’t have to talk about it.”

Eddie smiled. He didn’t mind the subject matter. He just didn’t want to be the focus so he posed the question to her. “What about you? Have any famous haunted houses in your hometown?”

“I guess. Nothing major though. At least nothing I interacted with. A kid who became my best friend in middle school moved into a house where some old guy died. Supposedly there was a cold spot on the stairs and somehow everyone started thinking he died right there.”

“He didn’t?”

“Nope. Passed away in the hospital. Just old age crap from what I heard. But I think even now there are rumors floating around about it being haunted.”

“Hmm, it can be fun to come up with stories. Even if they’re not true.”

“You’re not wrong I guess.” CC took a swig of her beer. “So, when’s Richie coming back?”

“He’s actually coming back at the end of the next week. Then two solid months of him being home before he goes back on the road.”

“Didn’t you mention some friends of yours were getting married?”

Eddie nodded. “Bev and Ben. They chose a time within those months so Richie could definitely make it. I also already asked off.”

“You guys really must be close if they’re willing to plan their wedding day to make sure you guys can make it. I think…Alisa would do that for me. Everyone else would say you’re on your own,” laughed CC.

“We’re just that close.”

“Yeah. It’s cool that you are. And what about the namesake? If you want, I could watch the little guy while you guys are off for the wedding.”

“Really?”

“It’s no problem at all! Depending on how long you are going to be away, I could move his stuff into my place or just run over to yours two, three times a day.”

“That works with me. I’m sure Richie will be thankful too.”

“Cool. So what’s your plan tomorrow?”

“Depends. Robert invited me to this exhibition thing downtown. I still have no idea what it’s about, but it probably has something to do with rocks.”

“Rocks?” laughed CC.
“He’s really into them. Anyways…”

They continued talking for a while. It started to get late, close to one in the morning. Eddie was in the middle of listening to some ideas CC had for album titles. She didn’t have quite enough for a full forty-five minute or hour long show. Not one that flowed well enough and that she liked. However, if she got a good name, she felt like she’d have a better idea of how she wanted to guide the show and could work backwards instead.

Then, during mid-sentence, she stopped. Eddie gave her a careful look. “You ok…”

“I was just about to ask you the same thing.”

“Wait, me? Why?”

“You aren’t noticing it?” CC asked.

“Noticing what?”

CC made it a point to glance down at Eddie’s form. He followed her eyes, looking down at his chest. He slowly pulled his hand back and put both of them around his glass.

“It’s nothing—”

“You’ve been doing that for like the past twenty minutes,” CC shot back. “Don’t tell me it’s nothing. Does…does it have to do with your accident?”

Eddie sighed. “Something like that. I’m ok. Really.”

“So it doesn’t hurt? Itch? You were really scratching at it.”

“Was I?”

“You seriously didn’t notice.”

Eddie shook his head. “I wonder…”

“What about Richie? Do you know if he’s taken note of it? Anyone else?”

“He’s noticed a few times,” Eddie admitted. He tried to really think about if the whole bothering with his scar had been increasing. However, he could only remember the times when someone else had noted the scratching and made him stop. But if no one had been there to make him notice…

Eddie pulled his shirt forward and looked down at his chest. He frowned.

“Did you freaking cut yourself or something?” asked CC.

“No, it’s just red,” Eddie said as he forced his palms to stay flat on the table. He closed his eyes.

“Is it like…something to do with the scar tissue?”

Eddie looked over.

“My uncle had an accident. The scar that formed later caused him a lot of problems. That’s a thing that can happen. Right?”

Eddie nodded. “I don’t think it’s…that. But maybe it is.” It was easier to believe it was the nerve
endings growing back and causing issues. Not—

His brain kept him from even thinking up a different reason behind the scratching.

He quickly grabbed his phone and went to his calendar.

“Are you sure you’re ok?”

Eddie nodded. “Yeah. Just figuring out when I could schedule a doctor’s appointment.” Even as he said it, it was like there was a part of him saying not to. He didn’t need it. They would find nothing. The only reason that was pushing him to do it was to keep Richie from worrying. But his own usual worry was squelched, and he couldn’t even recognize that that should have been worrisome in itself.

“You think it’s necessary?”

“No. But I don’t want Richie to worry and if this continues, he’s definitely going to.”

“Well keep me updated. Don’t need anything bad happening to you,” smiled CC as she gave him a pat on the shoulder.

From there, they talked a little longer before Eddie headed home and went to bed by two. He tried to consciously keep from messing with the scar, but it seemed impossible to keep track of if he was messing with it or not. At least without having someone there to point it out for him. As the next couple of days passed, Eddie didn’t tell Richie about the upcoming doctor’s appointment whenever he called. Eddie kind of hoped nothing would show up and he wouldn’t even have to tell Richie. However, as he was waiting in the doctor’s office several days later, he got a call.

Eddie waited a second to see if the doctor was going to show up and then quickly answered. “Hey Richie. What’s up?”

“Nothing much. Just wondering where you are.”

Eddie snorted. “If you’re going to try and convince me to do phone sex with you, it’s going to be a hard pass again.”

Richie laughed. “No, nothing like that. I’ll be honest I’m actually home early. I was going to surprise you at work, but I called. They said you left early today.”

Shit. “You’re home early? I thought you had sets tonight and tomorrow.”

“I did. Some drunk ass made a pretty big fucking mess of the place though yesterday. A lot of things got postponed or cancelled. I could have stuck around longer, but I figured screw it. I’ll make up the money some other time. So, want to grab lunch?”

Eddie tried not to sigh so hard. He didn’t want to worry Richie, but he sure as hell wasn’t going to lie to him. “I’m in the hospital.”

Richie’s tone changed right away. “Is this about your chest? Have you still been scratching it?”

Well that caught Eddie off guard. “Still?”

“Eddie, I’ve caught you doing it every time I’ve come home this past touring schedule.”

“Wait-really? Why didn’t you say anything?”

“I did a few times. But I didn’t want to make you feel like I was fucking hovering or something.
Didn’t want to make it a bigger deal than it was but…should I be worried?”

“No! No,” Eddie quickly said. “Listen, it shouldn’t be much longer. I’ll meet you for a late lunch. Ok? That one Mexican place you like? I’m happy you’re home. Just let me get through this first.”

“Ok, if you’re sure,” murmured Richie. “Love you. I guess I’ll see you soon.”

“Yeah. Love you.”

Eddie hung up around the same time the doctor finally came in. He dealt with the questions, the proposed tests, but thankfully the solution seemed to be one that didn’t suggest something worse was happening underneath the skin. When he met Richie for lunch, after kissing him hard and murmuring how happy he was Richie was home, Richie asked, “So?”

“The doctor gave me a card for a therapist,” sighed Eddie.

“So there’s nothing physically wrong?” asked Richie with a hopeful expression.

“There are some tests they’re running. Should get the results by tomorrow. But yeah. The doctor just said stuff about built up anxiety and unresolved trauma.” Eddie let out a sharp laugh. “Not that I’m going to a god damn therapist. They’d just lock me up in padded cell.”

“Not wrong,” sighed Richie. “But it’s not…work or something? That hasn’t gotten stressful? Or…or is it because I’ve been gone. If that’s the case I can call off—”

“No, no Richie,” Eddie quickly said. He squeezed his hand tight. “It’s all good. It is. I honestly can’t think of anything of late that could be triggering it. And it’s not like anything in Chicago reminds me of Derry. But if it persists…maybe going to a therapist could help. I’d just have to lie out my ass about what actually happened.”

Richie managed a small laugh at that.

“But I’m still ok. Nothing hurts. Whatever’s going on, I’ll get over it. Besides, you’re here for two long months now. Right?”

“Yeah, I am.” Richie leaned over, slowly drawing a kiss from him. The romantic moment turned serious though when Richie pulled back. “But if for whatever reason you need me…”

“I’m not asking you to stop touring for me.”

“I know. But you know that I’ll do anything for you. Right? Absolutely anything. If you need me, I’m here for you.”

“I know,” smiled Eddie. “And hey, maybe it is a little anxiety at having you gone, but that’ll pass once I get into the swing of things. And Bev and Ben’s wedding is coming up in a few weeks. That’ll definitely put my mind on other thing.”

“Yeah, it’ll definitely be fun.”

Eddie smiled, his mind pushing back in worry that had been his stomach as he kept holding Richie’s hand. “So, tell me how the last couple of weeks have been.”
ACT III: Love

Chapter Notes

One more chapter and then onto ACT IV! I'm excited to be getting to it and don't worry, all questions will be answered soon ;)

It felt good having Richie back again, to be able to get into the routine of waking up together, going to sleep together. Eddie was obviously happy that he was close with many of his coworkers. But it felt even nicer when on occasion Eddie had reason to decline an offer in order to say, “Richie and I already made plans,” or, “Richie’s already taking me out to dinner.” Sometimes he did the opposite and invited Richie along and the fact that his private and social life could mix so easily was something that warmed Eddie’s heart.

As far as the test results from the doctor went, all came back negative. There was nothing floating around in any system. A scan revealed no particles or pieces left behind. The doctor had again urged him to see the therapist. Eddie had made one visit, if only to say he had. The visit was painfully dull and not very helpful though. He told Richie about it after he left the office and met up with him for lunch.

“What did you say?” Richie asked as a way of opening.

“I lied and said I had amnesia over the initial accident. That all I knew about it came from others,” Eddie sighed. “Better that than coming up with some ridiculous story on the spot.”

“And what did she say?”

“Anxiety!” groaned Eddie. “That was her answer for everything. She wanted me to come back but when I made it pretty clear this was probably a one time thing, she tried to suggest two things that might make me keep coming back. One, medication for the anxiety. But since I honestly don’t feel anxious, that would probably work like jack shit. The second? Just to learn how to keep my hands busy and to try to be conscious about where I put them. Load of fucking help that is. And I don’t need to pay over a hundred fucking dollars to learn how to do that.”

Richie let out a small sigh.

“I mean, maybe it is just a natural irritation! Scars itch! They hurt sometimes! That’s certainly possible.” Eddie rubbed at his face. “Whatever the reason, it’s not like it’s life threatening. I don’t have anything to worry about and this whole thing will probably go away with some time anyways.”

Richie snorted. “I like how you keep saying that, but I’m the one who’s been worrying.”

“Yeah, we do seem to have switched places a bit in that regard,” Eddie said with a soft sigh.

“I just want to make sure you’re ok.”

“And that’s appreciated. It is,” smiled Eddie with a quick kiss. “But scars can be tricky, and this one went straight through me. I’ll keep an eye on it, but you don’t need to worry.”

“Hmm, I’ll try to remember that.”
“Besides, we have enough on our minds with Bev and Ben’s wedding coming up. Did you look up that list of stores like you promised?”

“I did.” Richie took out his phone and slid it over. As Eddie started sliding through the options, Richie added, “I just don’t see why we need to go to one of these fancy places. What about—I don’t know—Target?”

“We are not getting suits from a god damn department store for Bev and Ben’s wedding.”

“Well we are also not getting one of those couple thousand dollar fucking things either.”

“Most people don’t buy them. They rent them.”

“Well we’re not renting them either.”

Eddie rolled his eyes. “I’m not saying we have to spend more money than they even do on their own wedding, but I’ll be damn if we both don’t look nice. And anyways, we’ll buy the suits. It’s good to have at least one fashionable piece.”

“Ok, hear me out then.”

Eddie cautiously looked up.

“It’s in the Spring so… Flip-flops, shorts, Hawaiian shirt. Done!”

“You are not fucking wearing that to their wedding,” laughed Eddie.

“Let’s be honest though. Bev would fucking love it.”

“I don’t care what Bev might think. I want to see you in a suit. How’s that for reason enough?”

That made Richie laugh. “You did get a kick out of that penguin suit they stuck me in when I was on late night.”

“You were hot. Also, Jason was right. Not doing a tie definitely suited you. We’ll stick with that again, no bowtie either. Better to keep the collar open.”

“Oh yeah? Show a little skin?”

“Not that fucking low.”

Richie laughed.

“At least not right away.”

That really got Richie laughing. “You just want to see me in a suit so you can tear it off me.”

Eddie didn’t miss a beat. “Why do you think I said we’re not renting?”


“Serious?” Eddie glanced up from the phone before slowly putting it down. “Richie, I plan to have you looking fucking pristine. If even a hair goes out of place, it’s because I’ve done it to you. Understand?”

Richie gulped.
“Understand?”

“You know, you’re really starting to get the hang of this.”

“Going by your blush, I’ve already gotten the hang of this,” Eddie replied, still grinning. He gave Richie a quick peck on the nose. “Now, we’re not buying anything today, but it’ll be good to get your measurements because I know for a fact you’ve never done that before.”

“Measurements? Don’t they just have like, medium sized suits?”

“Please tell me you’re joking.”

“Just messing with you, promise. But no, I have no idea what the hell my measurements could be.”

“Well, we’ll definitely get that done today and get an idea of what we like. We should make sure we buy them enough time in advance so if anything needs to be tailored, we’ll have time to do it.”

“This sounds like it’s going to be painful.”

“How about a deal?”

“A deal?”

“If you don’t complain, not even once, well…” Eddie leaned forward with a grin.

Richie did the same. “Yes?”

“It’ll be a surprise.”

“Such a tease.”

“Are you going to behave?”

“Fine,” groaned Richie.

“Good,” smiled Eddie. He focused on creating the best route as he and Richie finished eating. When they were done, Eddie showed Richie the route and he drove them to the first store. Since Eddie wasn’t familiar with the stores in Chicago, he first just tried to figure out which places really spoke to him. After going by many of them, they backtracked to one that Eddie had felt comfortable in and liked their variety.

He got Richie into being measured and he only barely complained. By the time they were done, Eddie had an idea of what they would specifically look for on their next visit.

“I will admit black and white is boring and a colorful jacket would probably suit you better,” Eddie said.

“Something floral?”

“Really?”

Richie shrugged. “They had some fun designs. What about you?”

“I’ll probably stick with something black. It would have been that or navy blue but since Bev and Ben are going for a light blue, I wouldn’t want to clash. Which means whatever color your jacket, it should stand out from theirs. Maybe something with warmer colors like red and pink.”
“You know, I’m not going to lie. I usually hate dressing up for shit, but having you do it for me is almost bearable.”

Eddie smiled. “Now I just need to decide if I should wear a tie or not. What do you think?”

“I’m surprised you trust my opinion.”

“I warily trust your opinion. I’m used to wearing a tie but…”

“Hmm, a tie can definitely be fun. I can think of a number of things we could do with it.”

Eddie rolled his eyes.

“But it’s probably too formal feeling. Especially if you’re just going to have a typical black suit and white undershirt.”

“Good point. Though if I could find a tie that fits the jacket we pick out for you, that might actually work. We’ll just have to wait and see. We’ll go to that one store again this weekend. Maybe one other store if the options they have don’t suit us.”

“So soon?”

“The wedding isn’t really that far away.”

“True. I don’t know how they’ve put it together so quickly.”

“Well, as Ben said, he would be happy getting married in a god damn Waffle House in Tennessee if that was the one place everyone could afford to be at the same time. Location and the fluff is really secondary.”

Richie let out a sharp laugh. “Don’t tell me you don’t wish you could see that too.”

“Maybe a little.”

“You know they do weddings at McDonalds?”

“No they don’t.”

“Not here, in China. Found that out when I was going down the usual rabbit hole of videos online.”

“What the hell is the cake? A giant fucking Big Mac?”

“A collection of apple pies if I remember.”

“Fucking crazy. Should have convinced Bev and Ben the only place we could all go was a McDonalds in China then.”

Richie laughed at the thought. “They would probably do it too if it was literally the only way for us all to be there.”

With that thought, Richie finally turned on their street. He parked and they headed up to their apartment. Eddie immediately checked on Eduardo, giving him a small treat before joining Richie where he’d flopped on the couch, legs hanging over one of the armrests.

“You really can’t sit normally, can you?”
“Nope.” Richie then only leaned up far enough so Eddie could sit down and he could rest his head in Eddie’s lap. “So, what’s my reward.”

“Reward?”

“Oh come on! I totally didn’t complain today.”

Eddie gave him a look.

Richie pushed himself up and sat correctly. He leaned his shoulder against Eddie. “Ok, maybe a little. But I still think I deserve something.”

“Do you now?”

“Ah come on…”

“Hmm.” Eddie leaned forward. His lips brushed against Richie’s with such care, it caused Richie to shiver. Eddie slowly trailed the motion along Richie’s jawline, down his neck. Richie was already so high strung that when Eddie fully put his lips to Richie’s neck and gently sucked, Richie audibly gasped.

Then Eddie moved back.

“Really Eds?” Richie practically whined.

“That’s the first half of the surprise.”

“The first half?”

“You can get the second half if you behave this weekend when we actually look to purchase a suit for you.”

“You know what, I think there was a suit that I liked and was just my size. Let’s go back now and get it.”

Eddie laughed. He leaned back and pulled Richie with him so that Richie was lying on him. “You’ll have to wait.”

“Such a fucking tease.”

“You know you like it.”

“I do. Though God knows why.” Richie kissed him, and then settled comfortably against his chest.
ACT III: Love

Chapter Notes

And the last part of ACT III is here!!! Hope you enjoy it and thanks as always for reading!

Ben and Bev’s wedding was to be held in upstate New York at a church. It was in a much smaller city where Ben had grown up after Derry and before moving to the big apple. It was going to be small and simple, but not very traditional.

Eddie and Richie flew out a few days beforehand. Mike and Bill arrived near the same time, all of them of course were put up in the same hotel, along with the few other friends Ben and Bev had felt like inviting. They didn’t become officially introduced until the rehearsal dinner though. Some Eddie and Richie had said quick hellos to when they had visited Bev’s and Ben’s work during Eddie’s time in New York, but they truly got to meet them through dinner.

The others all seemed to be shocked by just how close they all automatically were as they watched the main group interact during dinner. It was a little understandable as from their point of view, the losers’ group had come out of nowhere as had Ben and Bev’s relationship.

“I’m guessing you just lost touch. How’d you meet up again? Find each other on Facebook or something?” asked one of Beverly’s friends.

“Mike found us when we were needed most,” Ben murmured. “And we never really lost touch just…forgot for a bit.”

“Beverly, I don’t know how to break this to you, but your husband to be is a bit weird.”

“He’s not weird,” Bev laughed. She hugged Ben’s arm and gave him a quick kiss. “He’s poetic.”

Bill nodded in agreement. “I couldn’t have said it better myself.”

Richie raised his glass. “To the losers and never forgetting. Yeah?”

“Hell yes,” Eddie said, clinking his glass against Richie’s. The others in the group were clearly lost which honestly just made the main group erupt into laughter.

Even with the disconnect from the others, the dinner was still fun. Afterall, any time they got to spend with their closest friends was appreciated. Eddie also enjoyed the chance to look into Bev’s and Ben’s individual lives again.

The entire wedding group stayed out together, even long after they’d finished eating. However, considering the big day tomorrow, it was eventually agreed that it would be best if they went to bed in a timely manner. With that decided, they shared a final round of drinks and headed to their individual hotel rooms.

Eddie and Richie had a quiet night in with only the biggest thing of note being Eddie double
checking the clothes for tomorrow were still in good shape and wrinkle free. They went to bed with Eddie having one arm thrown over Richie’s body—

There was darkness.

And something…

Something near him?

No. In him.

Going through him.

Trying to pull him under—

Eddie sat up. He felt tired, like he’d just run a marathon rather than being asleep in bed. He glanced at Richie. He was still fast asleep, softly snoring. A quick glance at the clock said it was almost two in the morning.

And the reason he’d woken up?

His brain almost hurt as he tried to figure out what had woken him up. There’d been a dream—

Or had he dreamed at all? He’d felt something—

But no. The feeling was gone. If he’d even had a dream, Eddie couldn’t remember it. His heart calmed and any worry slowly washed from his mind. He wiped at his face before pushing himself back down. Richie shifted slightly but didn’t wake up as Eddie easily fit back in at his side.

Despite how Eddie was almost always the one to wake up first, this time he woke up to Richie’s gentle fingers and soft lips.

“I’m beginning to think,” murmured Eddie, “that you try and stay asleep on purpose. This…ah…this is a really nice way to wake up.”

“But I know it,” Richie replied. He softly kissed Eddie on the lips as one hand cupped his cheek. Richie gently rubbed his thumb over Eddie’s cheek, even when he pulled back. Their noses were touching as Richie asked, “You stay up after I went to bed? Maybe a read a bit?”

Eddie slightly shook his head. “Went to bed with you.”

“You look a bit tired.”

“I think I woke up last night.” Eddie shrugged. “Probably just missing our bed. This one is too soft.”

“I fucking love hotel beds. I swear, I’m this close to stealing one of these pillows too.”

Eddie laughed. “Well you’re paying for the fine if you do.” He kissed Richie on the nose before pulling back. He jumped out of bed and went to their bag of clothes, pulling out his spare pair of pants and a shirt. As Bev and Ben’s wedding was non-traditional, it made sense that it started off non-traditionally too.

The whole idea of not seeing the bride before the wedding had already gotten thrown out the window as the entire party had reservations for breakfast. It was still a little chilly so only after Eddie threw on a jacket was he ready to go. He and Richie met Bill and Mike on the way to the elevator.
“Morning,” Richie said as he stretched his arms. “This place better have good coffee.”

“We’ll tell them to move the entire machine onto our table,” chuckled Bill. “Sleep well Eddie?”

“Yeah, just missing home.”

Mike yawned. “I feel that. I finally have the bed at home all set up. And the guest bedroom is good to go too and the couch is pretty comfy.”

“Right, we need to invade your home now,” grinned Richie. “When can we get Bev and Ben down there too?”

“Well after this, they have that trip to Europe that Ben’s been planning for forever,” Bill said.

“That’s right!” Eddie cried. “Does he still not realize that Bev knows?”

“Nope,” laughed Richie. “And he never will. Bev will put on her best acting chops to make sure of that.”

“It’s nice that it can kind of act as their honeymoon,” Mike said, “though somehow that word feels too flippant.”

“That’s because the word assumes newlyweds and that the honeymoon period ends after a month or two,” Richie replied. “Let’s be honest, it’s never going to end for them and newlyweds? They act like they’ve been married for forever.”

Bill nudged Richie with a sly grin. “I’m surprised you even know what it means for a word to have connotations.”

Richie shoved him back.

“Guys,” Mike warned, “I am not afraid of leaving you here at the hotel.”

“I second that,” said Eddie.

“Ok, ok. I yield for Bev and Ben’s special day. But I’ll fucking get you back,” said Richie.

Bill groaned. “Please not another wrestling match. My bones can’t take that.”

“You should have fucking thought of that before you said anything.”

Eddie and Mike laughed as the doors finally opened and they walked out into the lobby. They grabbed a cab together and met the rest of the party at the restaurant. A section had been coordinated off with tables pushed together. They all hugged Bev and Ben immediately upon seeing them. It was another thing that the other friends of Bev and Ben didn’t quite get. They didn’t understand why they all felt the need to hug each other immediately upon seeing each other and when leaving, even if they’d just seen each other the day before. Eddie doubted there was any way to explain the need in words. There was just something so purely instinctual about needing to hold each other the moment they were near.

As they all sat down to eat, one of Ben’s friends said, “You’ve been a bachelor this long and now you’re risking superstition on your big day?”

“I don’t believe in it,” Ben smiled.

“In fact,” Beverly said, “he’s helping me with my makeup today.”
“You’re helping each other get dressed!? That’s asking for trouble,” said another.

Eddie and the rest of their closest friends just made noises and quick words expressing how sweet they were being, some more teasing than others.

“I just don’t understand why I don’t get to walk you down the aisle,” Richie said with a dramatic sigh.

“Because of that,” Eddie said as he hit him in the chest. “You would try and steal the show.”

“I wouldn’t dare!” gasped Richie as the table laughed.

“I love that idea, I really do,” smiled Bev. “But if I had each of you doing something, then everyone would just be standing around us while we said our vows.”

Mike chuckled at the thought. “Considering our small party, I like the way you have everything planned out anyways. We’d all be fighting to be the man of honor or best man.”

“I’m still peeved neither or you wanted to do a party beforehand,” Richie said. “Bev, I would have given you a killer bachelorette party.”

“Oh god, I can only imagine!” she laughed.

“Hey! What about my hypothetical bachelor party that didn’t happen?” asked Ben.

“Oh, I’d throw that all on Eddie. You guys, Mike, and Bill could all have your cute as shit little book club or something. Bev and I would be getting turned up at the strip club.”

Bev laughed so hard she let out a very un-lady like snort. “You know what, I may take you up on that offer.”

“Well that’s very rude,” said Ben.

“Would you like to come with me?”

“That’s not what I’m saying—”

“Then I guess it’ll be just you and me,” said Bev as she and Richie shook on it across the table.

“It’s a date.”

“Now hang on one second,” Eddie said as he tried to keep from laughing too hard. “I think I have a problem with this too.”

“And you and Ben can discuss those problems over a nice glass of wine,” grinned Richie. He stood up. “In fact, why not right now?”

“I like the way you think.” Bev stood up too before Ben and Eddie both grabbed them and forced them to sit down again.

“Now that would be a story,” laughed Bill. “Bev and Richie eloping on her wedding day.”

“To a strip club,” Richie made sure to add.

“Ridiculous, all of you,” Mike laughed.
At that point, the food arrived and they all dug in. The main group tried to also give the other friends room to talk too, knowing they could easily take over the entire conversation if they weren’t careful.

Once done, they headed back to the hotel in order to get ready. Since it was a relatively early wedding, they would be skipping lunch and eating afterwards at the reception. Eddie and Richie killed a bit of time since Ben and Bev would definitely take longer to get ready. However, it wasn’t too long before Eddie was forcing Richie into his suit with only mild complaining. Eddie even managed to get Richie’s hair in a somewhat organized fashion. Eddie had also found a tie that matched Richie’s blazer which he put on, but he’d otherwise stuck with simple black and white.

When they got to the church, Mike and Bill were already there having agreed to be the ones to make sure everything was running smoothly so Bev and Ben weren’t doing absolutely everything on their wedding day. Bill wore a simple black and white suit like Eddie but with a simple black bowtie. Mike was in a dark purple one with a black undershirt and a dark bowtie.

As Eddie hugged Mike, he asked, “Everything all set for them?”

“Down to the last detail.”

“And I double checked with the banquet hall at the hotel,” Bill said. “The final preparations are being done. It should be all ready by the time we get over there.”

With that said and done, they greeted the other guests as they arrived and figured out where everyone wanted to sit. Exact seat placements hadn’t been needed since they all barely filled up the front row.

Bill texted Ben when the last thing was in place. Everyone waited. The doors opened. Then they stood up.

Ben and Bev walked down the aisle arm in arm. Rather than one of the more traditional songs, an instrumental song of Ben and Bev’s choosing played. As they’d mentioned, they weren’t wearing white. They’d chosen a light, eggshell blue. Bev’s dress was simple with no veil or long train. Her hair stood out thanks to the dress color. She’d forgone the usual bouget, instead just holding onto Ben and then taking his hands when they actually stopped up front.

Despite the largely untraditional beginning, once they were there, it went the more common route. The priest said his part, short and to the point. Then Bev and Ben said their vows. Bev’s was practical and a little cheeky, Ben’s poetic. They fit each other perfectly.

“You may now kiss the bride.”

Ben and Bev took each other into their hands. Their lips pressed against each other—

“Fucking finally!” whooped Richie.

Well there went the small moment of tradition. Everyone laughed except the priest who gave a less than amused look Richie’s way. They all jumped up and hugged the new bride and groom. They stayed there, talking and laughing until Bev finally said, “I’m starving. What about everyone else?”

They all carpooled so as to use as few cabs as possible as they went back to the hotel. The tables were all put together so that they could sit side by side with the food laid out banquet style in the center of them. Everyone sat and passed the portions left and right, laughing and grinning with Bev and Ben at the center of attention.

The last part of the wedding was marked by the cake and finally for the newlywed’s dance as tables were pushed to the edge of the room. Afterwards, instead of a father/daughter or mother/son dance,
everyone coupled up. Bev and Ben parted with Beverly grabbing Eddie’s hand and pulling him forward. Ben grabbed Bill.

“Oh, no no and no,” Eddie said with a quick shake of his head. “I don’t dance.”

“Not even for me?” asked Bev with a bat of her eyes.

“Urgh, you know I can’t say no when you look like that,” groaned Eddie.

“Good, because Ben and I agreed the perfect way to end this would be to dance with each of you.”

“A little warning would have been nice. I think Bill agrees,” Eddie laughed as he glanced over and saw Ben dragging Bill’s ass to the dance floor. At the same moment, Richie nudged Mike who was desperately shaking his head and clearly hoping Richie wouldn’t decide to pair up with him.

As Eddie and Bev carefully held each other, mostly just swaying back and forth because at least Eddie could do that, he asked, “Does Ben still think you’re in the dark about the whole trip?”

“Of course,” said Bev. “Now that it’s so near it’s hard to express outright excitement. And I know he’ll have planned everything down to the most perfect detail, but I have some ideas I’d like to fly by him too.”

“Do that after you’re already there. I’m sure he has a big reveal planned and everything. You can’t ruin it now.”

“I won’t. Wouldn’t want to miss out on seeing his eyes light up as he finally tells me the entire trip.”

“I’m sure he’ll look adorable in the moment. Snap a photo if you can.”

“Oh absolutely.”

They laughed as they continued to dance for a moment longer. Then Bev went and stole Richie while Ben dragged Mike onto the dance floor next. Bill and Eddie happily took a break, talking as they shared a drink together. Then Ben grabbed Eddie as Bev traded off with Bill. Then Bev and Mike danced and Ben and Richie.

A slower song started and as Richie went around, he gave Eddie a quick look with a raised eyebrow. Eddie groaned, pretending it was more of a bother than it really was. At least it was a slow song. If it had been anything faster paced, Richie would have had to drag him onto the dancefloor with even more force than Bev had initially used.

Eddie did walk over though and smiled at Ben. “Mind if I cut in?”

“Not at all.”

As Eddie stepped in and put his arms around Richie, Ben went back to Bev. Mike took a seat right next to Bill, both more than happy to stay out on the sidelines for the majority of the time. As Richie gently guided them round and round, Eddie did get a glance at one of Ben’s friends clearly asking if Bill wanted to dance. It almost looked like Mike even told him to go if he wanted to.

Bill hesitated…

Then he fully took Mike’s hand in his own. He squeezed it and then murmured something. The person smiled, stated a quick apology, and then found herself someone else to dance with. Mike and Bill shyly looked at each other before Bill leaned his head against Mike’s shoulder.
“Mike and Bill are being adorable.”

“Spin me around.”

Eddie laughed as they turned. Richie let out a wolf whistle. In return, Mike immediately picked up his glass and gave Richie a warning look like he would throw it their way if Richie wasn’t careful. Richie took his hands off Eddie only for a moment to show he surrendered before he went back to gently dancing with Eddie.

After the slow song was over, Richie tried to get Eddie to stay on the dance floor but Eddie murmured, “I’ll let you have run on the dance floor and how about we later have some fun in the hotel room. Hmm?”

“Fine, you convinced me,” Richie grinned with a quick kiss.

From there, Eddie mostly stayed on the sidelines with Mike and Bill until the party really wound down and everyone agreed it was time to retire. They would of course get a chance to say goodbye to everyone in the morning, but it was always somewhat sad saying goodbye to their friends, even though they knew it would always be temporary from here on out.
Happy Halloween! It's the beginning of the end, though technically the next chapter is more in tune with the Halloween spirit...

Thanks so much as always! Though bittersweet, it is exciting finally being able to wrap everything up with this story. Thank you again for all kudos and comments and reading this! It means a lot!

A little while had passed since Bev and Ben’s wedding. They’d texted everyone when Ben had finally revealed his big plan and they’d gone to Europe on their honeymoon/vacation. The time was of course for themselves, but they regularly sent pictures to the others when they got a chance.

As for Eddie and Richie’s lives, it was still a little while until Richie was meant to go on tour again. That meant when Eddie wasn’t working, it was them taking advantage of every moment they could get. When Richie wasn’t visiting Eddie at work, bothering CC at the restaurant, or trying to give Jason a heart attack, then he was usually writing for another project that had come his way. It was a way to keep him busy, though Jason also managed to help him get a few local times before he truly went back on tour again.

Eddie was actually supposed to go to one of those tonight as he finished up work. Or at least he thought he’d been finishing up work only for Jordan to shake his shoulder.

“You alright?”

“I’m fine—I fell asleep,” murmured Eddie as he cut himself off.

Jordan moved back a little and crossed her arms. “I’ve seen that a few times now.”

“Wait…me falling asleep?” Eddie shook his head and rubbed at his face in confusion. “I—I’m so sorry if my work hasn’t—”

“No. As far as I can tell, you’ve kept up with your usual workload. I just want to make sure you’re alright. Haven’t been sleeping well at home?”

Eddie almost said yes. A part of him tried to pull out that feeling. Something in his dreams told him more.

He started to scratch at his chest.

Something right on the edge of his mind. He should be fucking terrified right now. He should be worried. He needed to know, to find a way to become aware again—

Then it slipped away. Eddie couldn’t even grow worried. He couldn’t connect the dots as something blocked him from even doing that.

“Maybe a little. It’s probably just this change in the weather or something. I feel fine otherwise.”
“As long as you’re ok. And hey, if you need a lighter workload…”

“No! I enjoy working. It’s perfectly alright,” replied Eddie. “I’ll try to stop falling asleep on my desk though.”

“Thanks, though I hope you know I care more about my employees’ well-being. Just keep me updated if you need to take a short break or anything.”

“Will do,” Eddie said. As she left, he turned back to his work and quickly finished up the last file before getting up and leaving for the day.

He met Richie at home, both of them having a quick dinner together before heading to the club he was going to perform at. Like that first time, Richie hadn’t wanted Eddie to come to the first one Jason had booked. This was actually the third showing he was performing in Chicago. Because it had felt different than Richie simply wanting to get his work right before showing Eddie though, Eddie had asked Jason out of curiosity what Richie might have planned. The moment Jason thought Richie might be planning something though, he’d just groaned.

“Urgh, I wish you hadn’t told me that. I swear, if he does some dumb fucking shit…” Jason had said.

“I honestly don’t know if there’s anything planned. Just the way Richie wanted me to wait before coming was noticeable,” Eddie had replied, trying to calm Jason’s worries. Jason had just groaned louder and longer. The only solace Eddie had managed to give Jason was a semi-comforting pat on the back.

Now though, Eddie sat down. He waited at a small table by himself, ordering himself a drink as he flipped through his phone. Instead of it being several different comedians, this would be all Richie’s set for about forty-five minutes. Richie had mentioned that he was probably going to open with the story about them as kids with Eddie and the paddleball. However, there would definitely be more new stuff, some of which Eddie might have heard him working on.

By the time Richie was supposed to be on stage, Eddie had ordered a second drink. He was sipping at it as Richie was introduced and he came on stage. Eddie wasn’t right at the front, but he could tell when Richie spotted him. Richie’s smile grew just a little brighter as he said hello to the audience. He actually started with an older story. He talked about all the antics he’d gotten up to as a kid, how he’d first met Bill. He did retell the paddleball story and the only reason Eddie didn’t cry laughing was because he at least had been warned it was coming.

Richie weaved in other stories. A few came from after he’d moved and it was interesting hearing about that part of his life in such a humorous fashion. But then he started to mention more recent stories, including weaving tales of Ben and Bev’s wedding.

Eddie’s face flushed and he was pretty sure he was turning red.

It wasn’t like Richie was saying anything particularly racy or even that wild. The jokes were good, the situations ridiculous and maybe a bit overexaggerated, but then it wasn’t the stories that was causing the heat in Eddie’s face to increase. Was this why… Was Richie really doing it like… Oh god… Oh of course this was how he was doing it! This was so totally him! Eddie had to hide his embarrassed smile. He was of course still laughing at the jokes, but he was too focused on one specific word Richie kept using.

He kept using it again—

And again—
And again—

And—

“Now, as we come to a close for the night, I have to admit I may have fibbed in my stories a little,” Richie said. He had the microphone in his hand but leaned against the stand anyways.

A few people laughed and one guy yelled, “Well yeah! Half the stories you’ve told can’t be real!”

Richie laughed. “Nope, all true. Even the time I woke up hungover under one of my college professor’s desks.”

More laughter occurred. A different person asked, “What’s the fib then?”

“It’s a small one. It is. Now, I noticed a few got surprised when I mentioned I have a husband. Sorry ladies, this disaster of a man is off the market.”

“We wouldn’t want you anyways!” a woman cried jovially. People laughed and Richie made a faux look of hurt before laughing as well.

“Fair enough. But the fib is that I don’t technically have a husband. At least he doesn’t know it yet.”

Richie grinned. Everyone laughed. Eddie covered his face. Of course this was how he wanted to do it. Of course!

“Now to be fair, if it’s a no, I do have jokes planned. And yes, before any of you ask, he is here and this is how I propose because let’s face it, it’s more fun this way.”

A few people gasped in surprise while others laughed. Some even looked around, immediately trying to figure out who it could be while others said they didn’t believe it. Eddie covered his face. He shook his head. He should be lucky Richie hadn’t tried to go bigger with this.

“Welp, it looks like it was a no guys,” sighed Richie.

Eddie glanced up. Richie must have seen how he’d shaken his head, though the look he was shooting his way was pure teasing.

“It would appear I am back on the market. I guess I should have tried and convinced my friend to go to that strip club with me after all—”

“Yes!”

Eddie yelled it on pure instinct. His heart hammered away in his chest as he looked down and hoped no one had actually been able to tell it was him that had yelled out. People laughed as Richie said something humorous, but slowly it died down. The room actually quieted. When Eddie looked up, he saw why.

“Too much?” asked Richie as he leaned against Eddie’s table. Richie had placed the microphone back on the stand before jumping down so that way what he said couldn’t be heard by everyone. At least not right in this moment.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Eddie whispered with a small smile. “It’s very…you.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes. I can’t believe you.”
“Well I did think about doing it at Bev’s wedding, but I didn’t want to prove you all right and drag the attention away from her and Ben.”

Eddie laughed at that. He could only imagine how that might have gone.

“So, it’s still a yes?”

Eddie glanced around. He realized the audience was waiting with rapt attention. He was suddenly incredibly grateful for the low lighting as his face heated up more. He quickly grabbed Richie and pulled him into a kiss, if only so he could avoid the other eyes. When he pulled back, he murmured, “Of course it’s a yes. Now go finish your fucking show Richie.”

As a few people cheered and others clapped, Richie actively whooped before running back to the stage and hopping back up onto it.

“A child. A god damn child,” groaned Eddie as he hid his face again.

“Welp, looks like I can throw out those bachelor jokes. So anyways…”

Eddie laughed hard, still covering his face for most of it as Richie finally finished with some of his best jokes of the night before ending to a mountain of cheers. Instead of going to the back like he was supposed to, he put the mic back in its stand and walked off stage again. He said hi to a few people and accepted some congratulations before sitting down in front of Eddie. Thankfully, most walked by and let them be. He heard a few whispering how the whole thing had been too wild to not have been planned beforehand.

“Still not too much?”

Eddie shook his head and kicked at Richie’s feet. “I really can’t believe you just did that.”

“Ah.” Richie leaned forward and whispered so only Eddie could hear him. “I think I’ve only seen you that red when I’ve done you know what to you.”

“A fucking child,” Eddie groaned. “What have I agreed to?”

“Only the best decision of your life?”

Eddie finally peaked out from behind his hands. “Hmm, you think so?”

“I’d bet money on it.”

“Really?”

“Hell yeah. I’m going to be honest though,” Richie said as he stole Eddie’s unfinished drink and took a sip, “I was going to do something a bit more traditional.”

“Yeah?”

“But everything I could think of involved already having a ring.”

“Wait, you’re saying you just proposed to me in front of over twenty people and you don’t have a ring?”

“I wanted us to pick something out together. I remembered…well before you mentioned not even getting a choice. Everything just got chosen for you. I wanted us to choose something out together.”
Eddie’s smile softened. “I would have loved anything you chose for me. But…I like the idea of us choosing something together too.”

“I thought you might.”

They both leaned forward at the same time, softly kissing across the table. “So,” murmured Eddie, “first Ben and Bev, now us. That just leaves Mike and Bill.”

“Ha! It would be even funnier if immediately after us getting married, they told all of us they’d just gotten engaged.”

“It would be,” smiled Eddie. He took Richie’s hand and rubbed his thumb against him.

“So, feel any different?”

“Not really,” Eddie honestly said. “And that’s the best part. It just feels…right?”

“At least you no longer have to panic over what to call me,” teased Richie.

“Ah yes. Now I can simply say you really are my full-time job.”

“I’m not that much work, am I?”

“More in fact,” Eddie gently brought his hand up and kissed Richie’s knuckles. He hesitated before whispering, “Fiancé.”

“I really like the sound of that.”

At that moment, Jason came over with a shake of his head. “I can’t fucking believe you. You’re god damn ridiculous,” he groaned. He handed Richie his check. “Also they need to come in and clean up the place before closing so…”

“Right. Drinks?” suggested Richie.

They stood up and Eddie pulled Richie close. “Not tonight. Considering how much you embarrassed me already, I’d say it’s my turn.”

“You think you can embarrass me—” Richie stopped talking as Eddie leaned in close and whispered in his ear. Richie quickly turned bright red.

“I don’t even want to know,” Jason said with a flip of his hand. “I am going to go grab a drink. And Richie, you owe me one soon after all the stress you caused me.”

“Yes sir,” laughed Richie, though his voice shook just the slightest as he was still very much reeling from what Eddie had said.

Eddie took Richie’s hand and guided him out of the club. Richie drove them home, maybe speeding just the slightest bit. The moment they stepped through the door, Richie started to move forward—

Eddie held a finger to Richie’s lips. “I should check on Eduardo first.”

Richie let out a long, drawn out groan. “First cock blocked by myself on TV and then a god damn lizard? I must have the weirdest track rec—”

He didn’t get a chance to finish the sentence.
Eddie had already checked on the bearded dragon and had then grabbed Richie by the collar and kissed him. Eddie started to push him back as they tried their best to take their clothes off while still keeping their lips practically glued to each other for as long as possible.

Richie’s leg hit the couch and he stumbled back. They both laughed, Richie taking the momentary break from the kiss to go ahead and throw off his shirt. They started to kiss Eddie again, going farther back until they bumped into the doorframe to the bedroom. As Eddie threw off his shirt, he laughed again. “You’d think you’d know your own apartment by now.”

“You try being manhandled backwards through the place and see how you do,” grinned Richie.

“Like I’d ever give you a chance to do that.” Eddie went in for another kiss before Richie could argue.

Eddie first started to undo Richie’s pants as they went farther back. Then Richie’s legs hit the bed and Eddie pushed him the rest of the way down. Richie arched up, kicking his pants the rest of the way off as Eddie stripped in front of him before climbing on top.

“If I’d thought the prospect of marriage would make you this horny, I would have suggested it ages ago.”

“Just wait until the honeymoon.”

Richie let out a low moan. “Fuck me.”

“Maybe tomorrow,” whispered Eddie as he grinded against Richie. “I don’t want to waste time for that right now though.”

“Me fucking either. But it’s a date tomorrow.”

“I look forward to it,” Eddie said against his lips before pushing them open with his own.

Richie arched his back into Eddie while one of Eddie’s hands roamed down and pushed Richie’s hips up to meet him in time. Their lips barely left each other as they moved fast and hard against each other. Then Eddie’s hand moved between Richie’s legs and he really arched into him. Their tongues slid across each other, their breath and sweat mixing with their bodies pressed together and flushed.

They came together, Eddie’s lips still on Richie’s as he whispered his name before slowly trailing kissed across his cheek and down his neck.

Richie’s head lolled over and he lazily captured Eddie’s lips. “Jesus Eds. That was fucking hot.”

“Hmm, I try.”

Richie let out a low laugh. He drew Eddie into another slow, lazy kiss. They stayed pressed against each, limbs tangled up as Eddie got his fingers comfortably threaded in Richie’s hair. They lay their together for a while, Eddie nuzzling his nose against Richie’s cheek when their lips weren’t pressed together.

Then Eddie gently kissed along Richie’s neck. He pulled at Richie’s ear in just the way that made him shiver before rolling his hips against Richie.

“Did you fucking take something?” groaned Richie. “Because your libido is just fucking going for it.”
“What? Not up for round two?”

“No, I didn’t say that.”

Eddie laughed. He drew another kiss from Richie as he moved himself more on top of Richie and slowly pushed against him. He whispered, “Fiancé.”

“I love when you say that,” murmured Richie.

“Just wait until I can say husband.”

Richie let out a soft sigh. He pressed their lips together and softly said, “Wait until I can say it.”

“I eagerly do,” replied Eddie. He pecked Richie on the nose, right before drawing out a long, gasping groan from him.
Richie was driving as Eddie slowly moved the ring round and round his finger. It was less an engagement ring and more just a straight up wedding ring, especially since Richie had his already on too. The only thing that really needed to be done was the actual signing of a wedding contract, but they were going at their own pace. Even if they still legally needed to do it, it warmed Eddie’s heart to already think of Richie as his husband.

He remembered when Bill had thought they were getting married when in actuality, Eddie had just been trying to tell him that he and Richie were together. They still needed to tell the others and figure out what they wanted to do. Despite how Eddie had put a lot of work into how they looked at Bev and Ben’s wedding, now that it was in front of him, Eddie really just wanted to convince Richie to take a left instead of a right and get it over with.

Marriage as a concept had once been one of the many things to cause anxiety in his life. He’d hated it, hated how he’d felt so trapped by it. It had felt like some kind of fucking requirement he had to do despite how wrong it had felt in his gut. To Richie though? This felt more than right. It felt perfect. Eddie wouldn’t want to choose anyone else.

“Hey, are you listening to me?” asked Richie.

Eddie slapped at the hand Richie had shoved in his face. “Watch the road.”

“I am watching the road,” snorted Richie. “We’re still going to CC’s show tomorrow, right?”

“Of course.” Eddie let out a small sigh. “I hate that you’re leaving within a week.”

“I could always go back to a career as a waiter.”

“Don’t you dare,” chuckled Eddie. “But are you still ok with going over to David’s for dinner the night after tomorrow?”

“Totally! I love that you have work friends. And I still need to finish that Pegasus princess argument with his smallest one.”

Eddie rolled his eyes. “God, I can only imagine. You met his wife at the Halloween party, right?”

“Briefly.”

“Well she makes some killer pickled jalapeños. Way to spicy for me, but I think you’d like them.”

“That like a hobby?”

“I guess. She likes to make bread too. Pretty good.”

“That’s the one thing I haven’t risked in a while. I just don’t do good with bread. It always falls,” snorted Richie. “Are we still watching Dead Poets Society tonight?”

“Yep.”

“Why? It’s so sad though.”

“But it’s so good! Come on Richie. I haven’t seen that movie in forever, and it’s my pick tonight. It’s still a really sweet, funny movie.”
“But it’s sad,” Richie continued to whine.

“Just because it ends. Which everything does.”

“Ok mister philosopher,” snorted Richie. “On the contrary, I’m never going to die.”

Eddie rolled his eyes.

“And you want to order in? Or we could pick something up right now before we get home. I don’t really have enough to make—”

“Richie, look out!”

The sudden force had Eddie’s head hitting the window hard. His vision went black, but not only that. His body, all feelings, they disappeared. It was like he was floating. And then…

His head lolled to the side and his eyes slightly opened. Everything was a haze. Things shifted and blurred. Eddie couldn’t pull up a concrete thought and nothing came in clear. He tried to look down. He saw a limp hand lying by him and finally one thought moved through his head.

“Richie—”

But Eddie couldn’t focus, and before he could fully look up and try to check if Richie was ok, the sound of his door opening occurred. As the world itself continued to shift and change, all noises echoed from an impossibly long way off. It was like he was in a tunnel and the door had been opened on the other side, the noise bouncing off the walls and towards him.

Eddie tried to reach for Richie. He could have sworn his hand grazed him. However, he couldn’t fight the force that was dragging him out of the car. He felt like a ragdoll. The sun blinded him. His eyes burned and still it felt like he didn’t have control over his own body. When his vision cleared, it still wasn’t even that clear. Everything moved, slow and jagged, like someone had put on slow motion but had also lowered the frame rate at the same time. Things skipped around him. His eyes tried to follow. His mind tried to process. But nothing was sticking.

It was an ambulance. Medics shined lights in his eyes. Machines beeped. Then just as quickly they were pushing him out. A flash of light—

He was rolling down a hallway now. Doors and people moved by in quick flashes. Eddie couldn’t see any of their faces. He could barely focus, only the barest forms showing through. He tried to speak, but it felt like he didn’t even have a mouth, lips to move.

It was so cold. He felt so numb. If only he could just focus—

Another flash.

Eddie blinked. He was…he was in a hospital room. He was lying flat on his back. Yet still his vision wavered. Time still didn’t feel real as he tried to get just one thing to remain in focus. Nothing seemed to work though. Doctors and nurses moved by. Their forms skipped at irregular intervals. Eddie’s vision was never able to follow them for long.

With his body not in control, his eyes not working, Eddie tried to force his mind to at least comply with him. R…

Rich…
Richie…

He needed to see him. Whatever had happened, Eddie could deal with it. He just had to know Richie was ok. A nurse walked by.

“I need to see Richie.”

It almost didn’t sound like his own voice. It felt so god damn distant. And the nurse? He felt like she was responding, but nothing was processing correctly for Eddie. He still couldn’t even focus on her face, no details coming through.

Richie. He had to see Richie—

He was on his feet. When had he gotten to his feet?

Looking down, the clothes from before were gone. He was wearing a classic hospital gown and leaning against the wall. He grasped onto the handrail like his life depended on it. He pulled himself forward, his feet barely working before finally giving out. He hit the ground hard—

Or he should have. He was back in the bed. He couldn’t fully move his head to see, but it felt as if restraints were on him. Something was crushing him, trying to crush—

No. No that metaphor wasn’t quite right. Not crush but…tear. To rip from inside to outwards and—

Richie.

It was still the one thing that made sense to Eddie, that calmed his mind. If only he could get to Richie.

Faces that refused to come into perfect clarity flashed in front of him. The room felt so cold and dark, like everything was being sucked into an empty void. But no! He couldn’t give in! He couldn’t collapse and let it be. He had to know what the hell had happened to Richie! Why wasn’t anyone telling him anything? Why couldn’t he use his words properly, his own body? Why did he feel so god damn out of control?

Richie—

As long as he saw him again—

If only he could see him again—

This would all make sense.

It had to.

And then Eddie was suddenly in the hall again. His legs started to cave but instead of hitting the ground, arms came around him and dragged him the rest of the way. The voices came in, distorted and bouncing off the walls. It was a sound that could only be described as the voice of an old friend, one that you hadn’t heard in years that had been put through a modulator and then had chunks cut out like a paper snowflake. It made his hair stand on end.

The hands that held Eddie felt like they were breaking his bones. He could have sworn the hallway was getting smaller. It was getting too crowded. He couldn’t breathe!

His head hit the ceiling. Now the nurses were pressed up against him. He then had to duck his head. Had to bend his entire spine over. He was going to be forced down until he was folded six ways—
Eddie stood in a hospital room. He was still in the standard gown. His feet swayed side to side, but he didn’t fully fall over. A bed was in front of him. A sheet covered the form as a doctor stood over it. Eddie tried to focus on his face, his voice, but nothing was sticking. It was like trying to follow a single water droplet’s movement in an ocean.

The doctor’s hand grasped the edge of the sheet. Large warts with hair could be seen covering the back of the hand and fingers. The bones jutted outwards, unnatural and all hard edges. It looked like you would cut yourself from a handshake alone. The doctor pulled the sheet back with a flourish.

Eddie turned around and threw up.

Chucks of bile covered green hit the floor with a splash. Eddie could barely hold himself up. What he’d just seen…

The corpse utterly mutilated and yet…

It had been—

Eddie threw up again. Pain and anger and utter vitriol came down, pressuring him on all sides, trying to crush him into nothingness. And the strongest feeling? Fear. Fear was the sharpest, the most forceful as Eddie began to dry heave now, unable to get the image out of his head.

Behind him lay a corpse. The corpse with ripped flesh and broken bones that stuck out and stretched the skin like latex.

Eddie spit out bits of vomit that hadn’t fully made their way out before beginning to dry heave again. As the emotions pushed down, the pain in his chest pushed out. It was like something from inside and outside was trying to crush him in one go.

Richie was…

The body was right behind Eddie.

Richie would never…

“This doesn’t make sense.”

It was the first thing besides Richie’s name that seemed to really stick in Eddie’s mind. His voice was hoarse and pained, but he still managed to get the words out.

“This shouldn’t be happening.”

This time his voice didn’t sound so far away. He managed to completely stop dry heaving, even though he was still bent over his knees with filth dribbling down his front.

“This can’t be happening.”

He had to hold onto that. If nothing else, he had to hold onto that one thought. Because if this was happening, if he wasn’t dreaming or there hadn’t been some massive fucking mistake then…

Then Richie was…

Richie was actually…

Eddie threw up again.
ACT IV: Endings

Chapter Notes

Just got home from work. Wow! Thank you all so much for your comments! Seeing how passionate you've gotten about this story is just phenomenal and getting to see all your ideas about what's going on has just been wonderful. I will say, no one's exactly got it, though a few ideas have been sort of close.

Decided to release this chapter now. Hopefully it will relieve some of the immediate pain. We can't get back to the fluff yet, but hopefully this chapter will help explain what's happening some and give everyone hope for a good ending (and there will be a happy ending, I swear!).

Also, with this chapter, this story is now the longest story I've ever written! Seriously, thank you all for getting this story to the place it has gotten to and thank you all for sticking with it for so long! I can't wait to get to the ending with all of you too!

Thanks again and enjoy!

Richie got out of his car, slamming the door shut.

“What the hell man!?”

“Hey! You hit me.”

“You mean you hit me,” scoffed Richie. “You had a stop sign!”

“No I didn’t!”

“Yes you—” Richie stopped as he glanced over. The usual pole was bent far left and the actual sign was nowhere to be found. A quick look to the right showed that the opposite stop sign would have been near invisible from the man’s point of view. Though Richie was still pissed, the anger became a little less directed and he managed to calm down. “Well that would be because—”

“Oh shit! I-shit I’m so sorry! I didn’t see it.”

“It’s not your fault,” groaned Richie. He glanced at their cars and the slightly crushed bumpers. Overall, it could have been a lot worse if either of them had been going faster. Richie started to turn around. “Just give me a second-Eddie?”

He’d been immediately pissed and had just reacted, jumping out of his car and yelling. But now? Now, Richie jumped around his own car and rushed to Eddie’s side. His heart hammered against his chest. He pulled open the door and Eddie limply fell against him. B-but it was barely even an accident! M-more of a-a fender bender than anything. What had…

“Eddie?”

Richie turned his head towards him. He could feel a pulse. He felt alive. But…
He looked at where Eddie must have hit his head on the window. But it was such a small spot! Maybe it would bruise a little, but this still didn’t… Why wasn’t he…

“Eddie. Eddie wake up.”

Richie lightly hit his cheek. Then he shook him.

“Eddie!”

The other driver cautiously approached, face going pale. “Wait. I didn’t-this isn’t my fault. Is it—”

“Call an ambulance now!”

“R-right!”

Richie turned his focus back to Eddie. He unbuckled him and pulled him closer. There was movement behind Eddie’s eyelids. It almost looked like he was going to open his eyes but…

Nothing.

“Eddie, come on. Please. Please just…”

Richie didn’t understand. He’d just bumped his head, his fucking head! Why wasn’t he waking up? Why wasn’t he reacting to anything?

The time that passed felt impossibly long. He cradled Eddie in his arms, hoping for any type of reaction. But nothing was occurring. What was wrong?

Then Richie felt hands on him. The voices that came in felt muted as he was asked to step back. He watched from a distance as they checked for a pulse, ran a light over Eddie’s eyes as they forced them open. Finally, they got him out and on a stretcher. Richie immediately followed and went into the ambulance with them. A police officer made it clear he wanted a statement, but Richie just whispered his name and number to the man before the medics closed the door. He would deal with that later. Right now, all that mattered was Eddie.

As the ambulance started to move, one of the paramedics asked, “Does he take anything?”

It was like all the noise from before finally caught up and blew out his ears. He could suddenly hear again. His body still felt numb, but his head was able to respond more quickly. “What?”

“Legal or illegal. We’re not the police. We need to know for—”

“I know you’re not the fucking police,” whispered Richie. “And he doesn’t take anything. Antibiotics a few months ago but that’s the most recent thing."

He quieted for a moment, at first just focusing on Eddie and the heart monitor that started up as they clipped something to his finger.

Beep…

Beep…

One of the people gave him a disbelieving look.

“What?” Richie harshly asked.
A different one said, “Sir, it’s just that what we’ve already been told, this man simply became unconscious. Like he slipped into a sudden coma. But his eyes are moving like he’s going through REM sleep and his heart is beating like he’s running around. T-there has to be some other explanation—”

“You’re saying there’s no natural reason for this?” asked Richie.

“You don’t go through REM in a coma, and you certainly don’t fall into it this quickly. It’s simply impossible.”

“I’m telling you what I know! He hit his fucking head on the window! On the god damn window! I don’t know what else to say!”

“Sir, please calm down.”

Richie bit back a retort. He covered his face instead. If he didn’t look, didn’t have to see Eddie fucking lying there like that—

One of the paramedics started to ask for other personal, medical information about himself and Eddie. Richie didn’t know it all, but he answered what he could, whispered through his fingers. They checked him to see if he had a concussion, but as he said, he hadn’t hit his head on anything. When they arrived at the hospital, Richie quickly followed. He got to a corridor where he was asked to wait as they continued to wheel Eddie away. Richie couldn’t bring himself to sit down beside the other exhausted and broken looking visitors. He paced instead, pulling at his hair, his face.

Eddie had been fine! He’d been ok!

Richie continued pacing for…he couldn’t tell how long. There were no windows here and the bright lighting of the hospital didn’t change, only a few people left or went to find rooms along with nurses and doctors walking left and right. Richie sometimes paused to try and catch their faces, to see if they were looking for him, but they just kept walking by with no news.

“Richie—hey! Woah man.”

He’d practically jumped out of his skin at the hand that had touched his shoulder. He turned to see Jason standing there, confusion in his eyes.

“W-why are you here?” Richie whispered.

“I’m still on your emergency contact list. They said you were in the hospital. Why isn’t Eddie here?”

“I-it’s not me. It’s…fuck.”

Understanding passed over Jason. He took Richie and guided him to an empty set of chairs, forcing him to finally sit down.

Jason hesitated. “Is he…”

“I don’t fucking know. He just…he just bumped his fucking head and now…”

Richie trailed off, keeping his face in his hands as he felt Jason gently touch his shoulder. This wasn’t happening. This wasn’t real. It couldn’t be real. Eddie would be ok. He was ok! This couldn’t be…

Not after everything…
“You came in with the patient Edward Kaspbrak. Correct?”

Richie practically jumped to his feet. He looked at the doctor who had spoken and nodded.

“I need to ask, did he take anything?”

“Why do you people keep fucking asking that?!”

Jason jumped up and tried to calm him down. “Hey, Richie. The guy is just trying to help—”

Richie shoved him off. “No! I want to know why the hell you guys keep asking that!”

The doctor let out a small sigh. “Because it will be easier to know what has contaminated his system. It doesn’t necessarily have to be something he’s taken. Maybe some type of chemical he came in contact with that was out of the ordinary—”

“What do you mean?” interrupted Richie. “Why does there have to be some type of contaminant in his system? Did you find something?”

“Not…quite. But it’s…I have to be honest with you. We don’t have a clue what’s going on. None of his symptoms match up. I’d say it’s a coma, but his brain and body aren’t functioning like they’re in a coma. In fact, it’s almost like he’s awake and moving around, at least his mind thinks he is even as his body is lying in the bed. This doesn’t match up with any natural disease or virus, at least nothing we’ve tried looking for yet and those tests have come back negative. Perhaps there’s something inside him? Anything that you could tell us could be helpful.”

The doctor waited, expecting, hoping for some kind of answer.

Richie just stood and stared. His mouth went dry, his hands felt clammy. No…

Something inside…

The scratching.

Eddie had said it was probably natural irritation but what if…

Unexplainable symptoms…

His brain working in excess even as his ability to respond shut down…

Something could be in him…

He’d seemed to be growing more tired over the past days but Richie hadn’t worried.

Because Eddie had told him not to.

Because each time Richie had begun to worry, Eddie had reassured him, had brushed it aside.

And he’d never fully been aware…

He would even forget that he was scratching his chest at times…

Couldn’t remember why he’d woken up in the middle of the night…

Forgetting…

Something was in him…
The warning signs had been right in front of him but he hadn’t seen. He’d been too blind to fucking see!

“No!” Richie jolted forward, even as he felt hands holding him back. “No! You won’t fucking take him from me! You won’t!”

“Richie! Richie just calm down please!”

Jason managed to get him back in the chair as Richie broke down. This couldn’t be…

Not after everything…

They’d killed It! Pennywise was gone! It was dead!

But if something had gotten left behind, waiting, gathering strength, re-growing, then what would that look like? Could a piece have survived? Just preparing itself for the right time to strike?

When Richie looked up, the doctor had left, presumably after Jason’s urging. Jason was kneeling down in front of him, one hand on Richie’s knee as he murmured, “What do you mean, ‘you won’t take him from me?’”

“I-I can’t explain it to you Jason. I can’t.”

“Try then.”

“I just-if It survived…I swear to god if It fucking survived…”

“Richie, I’m not going to lie, you’re scaring me.”

“You should be scared. You should be fucking terrified,” whispered Richie. His breath caught and he fully covered his face again. If that was what this was…god he hoped he wasn’t right. He would give anything to not be right. But if he was…

“Let me have your phone Richie,” Jason gently urged.

Richie’s hands shook as he gave it over.

“I’m going to go ahead and cancel the next two weeks of shows. Who do you want me to call to take care of the pet? Is CC good?”

Richie silently nodded.

“Should I call Eddie’s work?”

Richie silently nodded again.

“I’ll do that for him then. Anyone else? Is there anything I’m missing?”

“M-my friends. They need to know. Bill should know. Bev…” Richie trailed off. He took the phone back and pulled up the group chat before handing it to Jason again. He hid his face. “Tell them what we know so far. Tell them about It.”

“About what?”

“Just It,” hissed Richie. “They’ll know.”
Jason didn’t understand, but he did the best he could. He called up CC and talked briefly to her. She said she’d run right over and borrow Richie’s key so she could go up and feed the lizard. Then Jason called Eddie’s work, doing his best to explain what he could as he took in their concerns and promised to pass them along. He managed to get a hold of a few managers and workers who ran the places Richie was supposed to be at. He cancelled what he could then and there, argued with others and said he’d call them back. Then he went back to the group and went from name to name, quickly realizing he only had to call two of the four numbers.

Each conversation only confused him more and more. Bill and Mike had reacted instantly, saying they would be right over and were looking up flights now. They hung up before Jason could ask questions. Bev and Ben didn’t hang up right away though and he managed to at least ask, “But what is it? What’s got all of you so worried?”

“You wouldn’t understand,” Bev murmured. “Just…just promise me you’ll be there for them until we can get there. Please.”

“Of course.”

“Thank you. Tell Richie we’ll be there soon.”

“I will.”

With that, the last of the calls were done and Jason finally sat back next to Richie. Jason checked Richie’s phone as a text came in. It looked like CC was almost there. Jason handed the phone back to Richie who finally had to drop his hands to put the phone away. Tears lay on his cheeks, his glasses had slipped down his nose, smudged and wet.

“Richie he…what ever this is, he’ll be ok.”

“You don’t understand. You…you just don’t fucking understand,” whispered Richie as his voice shook and he curled in on himself. “He barely survived It the first time. And now that he’s all fucking alone…”

Richie broke down again, the tears came harder as Jason hesitantly put his arms around his friend and pulled him in. He didn’t understand. In fact, he almost felt afraid at the thought of even attempting to try and understand. It was a confusing feeling.

Ultimately, all Jason could do was hold Richie, one arm keeping him close while his other hand slowly moved through Richie’s hair in a calming motion.
I must admit, part of the reason I wanted to do one last bout of angst is largely because of this chapter. I love anything that's trippy and mind bendy so with that in mind, I hope you enjoy!

“This can’t be real.”

Eddie said it, and this time it felt even more right on his lips. He could feel himself getting just a little stronger, pushing up and against the pain and fear that was trying to crush him. He pulled in logic and reasoning as his mind tried to clear away the fog.

No doctor, no medical professional in their right mind would ever show him something like that. And then the flashes. The fact that he couldn’t remember when he moved to a different room, couldn’t see anyone’s faces. All of it and the implications finally could process in his mind. None of this was real. It wasn’t possible.

“This is not real,” Eddie repeated. His voice came out normal, clear. Eddie straightened his back and finally felt strong enough to turn around.

When he did, the bloody body was gone. So was the bed and doctor. He looked down. His clothes resembled the last ones he remembered wearing and the bile was gone from the floor.

As his head quickly turned to look at the main door, his vision didn’t spin. He managed to keep his stomach down and he could see clearly. Eddie walked forward and out into the hallway. He looked to the left and stepped forward.

He couldn’t see the end.

It just kept going, endless and cold.

Then a loud sound like a breaker being flipped echoed down the lifeless hall. Eddie turned around and saw the same impossibly long hallway. Only on this one, with each loud sound, the lights went off one by one. As the darkness started to get closer, red emergency lights came on behind them. It looked like the halls were being bathed in blood.

Eddie stepped back as the light above him went out and then a red light came on. His shoe made a squelching noise.

He looked down and realized he was standing in blood. Thick and semi-dried as Eddie stepped back again, smearing the floor. It was on the walls, dripped from the lights. It was everywhere.

The hairs on the back of his neck started to rise. His breathing escalated. His throat started to close up like when he’d been a kid. He instinctively reached and found an inhaler in hand. Just before he could put it to his lips though, centipedes crawled out and around his fingers. A startled cry left his throat as the inhaler hit the bloody floor. Eddie desperately shook his hand. The centipedes were thrown at the surrounding walls and floor. As they hit the blood, they stuck to it before slowly sinking inwards and being totally consumed. He stepped back again—
“Eddie—”

He spun around just as the claw went through his middle and lifted him up. Blood shot out of Eddie’s mouth as he desperately held on. His feet dangled below him as the clown came face to face with him.

“Hiya, Eddie.”

He tried to respond. Whether to actually say something or to just fucking scream, he didn’t know. It didn’t matter. More blood just came coughing out of his mouth as a gloved hand came up and bopped Eddie on the nose.

“Almost had ya. Didn’t I, Eddie?”

The claw that was holding him up twisted. A pained gasp got caught in his throat as blood bubbled out instead. His hands were slick with it even as he tried to grasp the claw.

“You almost left me. Left poor little Pennywise, but I never left you. Oh ho ho! Isn’t that funny? I didn’t! I didn’t!”

Its head opened up in three places, all teeth, and then the deadlights—

But Eddie didn’t get caught like a small amphibian trapped by an anglerfish. They weren’t capturing him like they should and the pain—

Oh, Eddie was in so much god damn pain. But he should be dead by now after how much blood he’d been coughing up—was still coughing up! But he wasn’t. He was still breathing despite how his lungs should be full. He still had his mind and autonomy despite what the deadlights should have been doing to him.

It was enough to give him some small amount of hope as his hands finally found a good grasp. He squeezed. He squeezed as hard as he fucking could. It snapped apart in his hands, bits of exoskeleton and meat spraying the walls. The part that had been stuck through his midsection slipped out as Eddie hit the ground.

His hands and feet slipped on the blood, unable to grab a footing as it covered him. Finally, he managed to get back up though and he ran.

He ran and ran, bloody shoeprints and smeared streaks from where he fell trailing behind him as he tried to outrun the devil. Metal filled his nose and mouth as the blood seemed to get thicker, to fill the hallways. It still dripped from his mouth, the occasional cough causing a spray to occur in front of him. He glanced back.

Pennywise’s distorted form followed so god damn close. Its grotesque mouth opened up with a roar.

Eddie’s face whipped back around as he tried to run even harder. He moved close to a door and tried to open it. The first one didn’t work. The second one didn’t work.

He wasn’t getting tired despite the blood that was covering him, most of which was his own. That being said, he was tired, but not in a physical way. It was his mind that needed a break desperately. He needed time to process what the hell was happening—why this was happening! He tried another door. And another. And—
The door opened and Eddie fell through. His body rolled on misshapen, lumpy forms. Down and down he went before he hit the floor. He pushed himself up on one hand. It was difficult to get a good hold on anything. One of his fingers slipped into something wet and gooey. Eddie blinked hard and looked down.

The rotting corpse whose eye socket Eddie had just stuck his finger into let out a long, haunted moan as dead teeth fell out of the bleeding mouth.

“Ahh!!!!”

Bodies! Bodies all fucking around him!

Hands with broken nails tore and sunk into Eddie’s skin, trying to pull him down to the center of the pit. The moans and cries filled his ears. Flies flew around him, getting into his mouth and nose and eyes. He was going to choke to death! On flies and bile and exploding puss—

He should be dead.

He should already be dead, but he wasn’t.

He wasn’t going to cave. He was going to get the fuck out of here, whatever here was. He had a life waiting for him, people-Richie! He had to get back to Richie! He had to find him and make sure he was safe!

Eddie coughed up flies and more blood as he pushed against the suddenly weak and brittle arms. The bodies snapped and broke underneath him. Fluid and tissue oozed out. He wiped at his eyes, looking for the easiest way to climb out before grabbing hold of an arm and pulling. The withering masses still tried to pull him back down. They really would drown him, or if he couldn’t physically drown here, then at least trap him forever under the piles and piles of diseased limbs. But he had to keep moving, keep climbing.

Eddie pushed himself up and up. He couldn’t see a door or even an end to the upward hill. Still, he didn’t stop. He would keep going! He wouldn’t let this consume him—

His foot broke through a skull. Eddie almost thought he would fall backwards, all the way down, but he fell forwards instead. The bodies enveloped around him, trapping him in darkness and stench. He couldn’t even scream for risk of some grotesque piece entering his mouth.

Then his back hit something solid. He rolled over and looked up, back in the hospital hallway. It was still drenched in red from the lights, but the actual blood was gone. Pennywise was nowhere to be found but Eddie didn’t risk it. He pushed himself to his feet and started running again.

The hallway in front of him hadn’t changed though. It still continued into nothingness.

The doors. Maybe if he kept trying them…

Eddie pushed at them all, but only a select few opened. When he went through them, it was like he was stepping from the hospital into another world. Sickness and death seemed to always greet him. He started to drown in water in one. Another just had mutilated body after mutilated body. The only untouched thing was always the hand.

Richie’s hand—

But it wasn’t Richie! Eddie held onto that thought. It was anger and hatred and fear! Fear above all else that It fed on. Eddie just had to push past the fear. He couldn’t let it drag him down. He kept
pushing and pushing.

Each time he got out of a room, he arrived back in the red lit, hospital hall. He couldn’t tell if they were the same one or different. He didn’t have a clue of what a door might reveal either, only that it would undoubtedly contain something horrific.

But no matter how much he wanted to puke, to lay down and just end this torment, he couldn’t. He had to find Richie. He had to make sure he was safe!

Eddie tried again and again. It was trying to crush him, but Eddie’s mind was too aware now, too strong. And with the thought of Richie sounding again and again right in the back of his skull, the need to see Richie again pushed him to move on. Considering that just running down the hallway did nothing, he continued to try the doors. He continued to be confronted with horrors in the hopes that one might reveal an exit. He continued—

Eddie walked in. His mouth went slack as he recognized the back of the woman. “M…Myra?”

She turned around. Eddie had to rub at his eyes and when he looked again, he saw his mother towering over him. She was massive. She was—

He looked down at himself.

No, he was small! His voice came out high pitched and scared. “Mommy?”

“You are never seeing those friends of yours again!”

She grabbed at his arm, her grip painful as he tried to dig his heals into the floor to no avail. “Stop! Mommy stop!”

“They think they can take my precious boy away? Not a chance! You’re mine Eddie. You’ve always been mine!”

“You’re hurting me. Mommy! Mom! Ple-please! Stop!”

She dragged him through the kitchen and finally Eddie started to desperately reach for something, anything.

“You’re mine and nobody else’s!”

Finally, Eddie’s hand found the handle of a pan. When he looked back at his mother, they were the same height again. He was an adult and he put all the force he had behind his arm as he slammed the pan into her head.

The object clattered to the floor as he watched his mother’s head crack and split apart, revealing It underneath. The clown’s face oozed out. Its voice and his mother’s mixed together in horrific dissonance. The grip on his arm tightened. Blood formed underneath the fingernails digging into his skin.

Eddie yelled back, his voice his own and the fear gone again before it could truly take root. “I was never fucking yours!”

He hadn’t even been looking, yet somehow a butcher’s blade was in his hand. He slammed it onto his mother’s wrist. It sliced through the flesh and bone with ease. The hand that had been around his
own arm fell to the ground. Crab legs sprouted out of the bloody stump, the hand crawling over Eddie’s feet before he jumped back.

His mother/Pennywise tried to reach for him again.

Eddie just barely dodged the arms, his mother’s blood spattering across his face. He ran out the back door of his childhood home—

And back into the hospital hall.

It roared from somewhere nearby. Eddie didn’t risk trying to look for the origin of the noise. He just started running again as fast as his legs could carry him.

The monster was trying so hard to wear him down, to make him stop, but Eddie never would. He’d run for fucking ever if he had to. He would fight this!

Eddie could hear the sound of It drawing near so he tried a door again. Eddie immediately ran in the moment it opened. The door slammed shut before It could get in and—

This separate world was home.

Not his childhood home or the other places he’d lived with his mother. It wasn’t the house in New York or anything like that.

It was the apartment. His real home.

Eddie turned around, seeing the usual apartment door that normally led into the hall. He half expected to hear a noise on the other end, some type of banging. Maybe blood would begin to drip from the walls, or the floor would open up and swallow him whole.

He waited…

But not a sound was heard.

Eddie didn’t fool himself into thinking it was over. This definitely wasn’t over. But at least for a second, it seemed he was safe. Looking down at himself, the torn clothes and blood and shit that had covered him was all gone now. He was in normal clothes. Nothing was torn. There wasn’t even a hole in his chest anymore. He took a deep breath.

Now to figure out what the fuck was going on.
After getting nowhere, the doctors had finally moved Eddie to a private room and had given Richie permission to sit in. They were still running tests, but Richie doubted they would find anything. Or even if they did, it probably wouldn’t get them any closer to a solution.

Richie held Eddie’s hand as he kept his face buried against the sheets. Jason had left a moment to go grab coffee. It gave Richie a moment alone as he silently begged and begged for Eddie to wake up again. Was being near helping? Richie didn’t know. He just hoped it was.

After several long minutes passed, a knock sounded near the door.

“Richie?”

He pulled back a little, wiping at his face before he got up. CC awkwardly stood at the door, holding his keys in hand.

“I um…took care of him,” CC murmured. “Do you want me to check on him tomorrow morning?”

“Oh. Right. Uh…yeah. Yes please. Just go ahead and keep my keys. I should have told you to do that before,” sighed Richie. When she’d come to pick up the keys, she’d gone quickly to help Eduardo. Now she hesitated in the door, eyes flickering from Richie to Eddie.

“Have they figured out—”

“No,” Richie whispered, cutting her off. It had only been a few hours but already he felt exhausted.

“Are you hungry?”

Richie shook his head.

“You…you need to eat Richie.”

“I know,” he whispered as he collapsed back in his chair. “Just not right now. Ok?”

“Ok.”

She stood there expectantly. Richie tiredly rubbed at his eyes underneath his glasses. He glanced back at Eddie and then added, “I’d rather be alone right now.”

“Right! Sorry. Just um…please, just tell me if something changes.”

“I will.”

“Ok. Um…if there’s something you’ll need tomorrow from your apartment I can grab it for you. Like fresh clothes or anything.”
Richie just shook his head again.

“Well, text me if you change your mind,” murmured CC before she slowly walked back out the door.

Richie could tell she wanted to stay and help somehow. He felt a little bad at pushing her away. However, he wanted her as far away as possible in case something...something else happened. He’d already tried to convince Jason to leave, but apparently he’d promised the others that he would stay until they arrived. He knew Jason was trying to help, but honestly having him near scared Richie more.

Part of Richie didn’t even want Bill or any of the others coming. He didn’t want to put them in unnecessary danger. However, considering how important It was tied to all of them, he hadn’t been able to lie. And of course they’d agreed to come without hesitation. They never would have said no.

Still, just so many people and families had been hurt by It. So many had been permanently scarred and damaged. They’d thought they’d stopped It, stopped that damage from happening ever again. And now...

He couldn’t let Jason get hurt. He would have stopped the others from coming if he could. He didn’t want anyone else to get hurt either. If Richie could get Eddie away from the doctors and nurses and hospital staff, he would have done that too.

Doing such a stunt would probably get him thrown into a room of his own though, and he couldn’t risk getting torn from Eddie like that. So he stayed, hair standing on end as he took Eddie’s hand again, holding it tightly.

Around that time, Jason came back and carefully set Richie’s cup near him.

“Thank you,” Richie whispered, even as he didn’t move to take it. Then Richie’s phone went off. He continued to hold Eddie’s hand as his free one checked the messages. It looked like Bev and Ben would be arriving late that night. The closest flight Mike and Bill had grabbed would have them arriving tomorrow morning.

Richie put his phone away and took Eddie’s hand again, clasping it with both.

Jason stayed by them, sitting off to the side as nurses and doctors visited on occasion, checking to see if anything had changed, looking at his chart. When Richie finally glanced at a clock, he noted Bev and Ben would probably be there within the hour. He turned back to Eddie—

A twitch happened in his arm.

Richie’s breath got caught in his throat. He moved one hand from holding Eddie to brushing his hair aside. “You can fight this,” Richie softly said. Eddie had to fight it. He fucking had to.

The time passed, slow and painful. The only moment Richie left Eddie’s side was when he had to as the doctors needed to wheel him away for another set of tests. Richie went out into the hallway and started pacing, finally holding the coffee Jason had gotten him. He took a sip and made a face.

“Don’t blame me. I got that for you three hours ago,” Jason replied.

Richie didn’t argue, just took another sip of the cold, bitter coffee. He walked round and round like he was trying to create a hole in the floor. He only felt slightly better when he saw Eddie coming back. At least he could keep an eye on him. However, before Richie could go back in, a new doctor walked over and gestured for Richie to stay outside.
All he had to do was take one look at the doctor’s face and Richie could follow.

“What did you find?” Richie softly asked.

“I-I why didn’t you-I mean what-you knew? Sir, we really need you to work with us, and if you
know what’s happening—”

Richie crossed his arms. “Let’s be honest. Whatever you were getting ready to tell me was going to
be some vague, halfcocked idea trying to make me think you knew what you were talking about, but
in actuality, you have no fucking clue what you’ve found. Do you?”

The doctor turned silent.

“That’s what I thought.” Richie rubbed at his face. “Just…just tell me what the hell you did find.”

The doctor took in a shaky, hesitant breath. “I…I don’t know. There is something there. But none…
none of our tests are coming back conclusive. Even going back and doing the same test doesn’t tell
us the same thing. Our machines have never been that inaccurate. And without any understanding of
what…what’s in there, we can’t risk going in—”

Richie patted the doctor on his shoulder and made the man stop talking. “Trust me, you’re just going
to hurt yourself the harder you think about It.”

“But what is it?”

“Exactly,” sighed Richie. He walked back into the room. The doctor didn’t follow, and one quick
glance back showed him whispering to a colleague with a scared and worried look on his face. They
couldn’t help. At least Richie didn’t think they would be able to. Maybe once Mike got here, he
would have some answers. He’d studied It and knew more about It than anyone else. But even with
that, Richie was careful not to get his hopes too high.

Jason stayed near as Richie threw away the half-drunk cup of cold coffee and went back to holding
Eddie’s hand. Richie gently kissed his knuckles before leaning forward in the same position as
before. He closed his eyes and stayed there. He didn’t fall asleep though, too strung up to do so.

When he finally did move, it was because he felt it. He glanced at the clock and let out a shaky
breath. He knew when they were at the door before he even looked.

Jason spoke first. “Beverly and Ben?”

Richie turned around just in time to see them nod. Richie rubbed his eyes. “You can go Jason.”

“Are you sure?”

Richie nodded. Ben stepped towards Jason and softly agreed. “We’ve got this, but thank you so
much for staying with him.”

Jason let out a small sigh. “Let me know if you need anything else Richie. And don’t worry about
the car or anything. I’ll get all of that sorted too.”

“Thanks,” he murmured.

They all waited until Jason was out of the room before Ben suddenly said, “The doctor’s found
something, right? It’s not…it’s not really It. Right? It can’t be that. It—”

“They found something. But…I think it only confirms it.”
Bev slammed her fist against the wall. “Fuck.”

As Ben put his arms around Bev, he asked, “When are Mike and Bill getting here?”

“Tomorrow morning.” Richie turned back to Eddie. He gently rubbed his thumb against his hand before finally standing up and hugging Bev and Ben. “I should have fucking seen it. I’m so fucking stupid—”

“Don’t put this on yourself,” Bev said. “We all thought we’d killed It. You couldn’t have known.”

“There were fucking signs. Eddie told me not to worry but I shouldn’t have listened. Why—”

Ben hugged him individually, squeezing him as hard as possible. “If Eddie didn’t notice, if he was telling you not to worry, then it was probably because It was already messing with his head. Maybe It was even messing with yours, keeping you from pushing any harder. It’s not—shit. I didn’t—Richie, I…” Ben trailed off for a second as tears began to fall down Richie’s face. “I was trying to convince you it wasn’t your fault.”

“I know. I know,” whispered Richie. Bev and Ben gently held him as tears continued to fall down Richie’s face and his breathing came in broken, sudden motions.

“Mike might be able to help when he gets here,” Bev tried.

“Maybe.” Richie still couldn’t bring himself to put all his hope in that though. He wasn’t sure what he could put his hope in right now as—

“Eddie!”

Richie turned around just in time as Eddie’s body seized upwards in the bed and the heart monitor spiked.
Would you look who may have added a few extra chapters (the end is coming but again, don't want to rush things and I felt a few added chapters would make the ending feel like less of a hard cut). Anyways, enjoy! This chapter is a bit longer than yesterday!

Eddie looked at the ground as he heard scuttling go first through the floor and then across the wall. He waited. A show of Its form went across the kitchen window. It attempted to bang Its head through the glass. Eddie flinched, but it didn't even crack. Banging started on the ceiling then. The room didn’t shake though, cracks didn’t seem to form, and dust didn’t fall.

He finally breathed. He walked over and collapsed on the couch. He took a second to just calm his racing heart. Then he sat up a little straighter. Now to figure out what the hell was going on.

His hand carefully ran over the couch. It felt so real…

But that wouldn’t have made sense. Even if It wasn’t running round and round the apartment, trying to get in, if Eddie considered everything that had happened leading up to getting here, then he knew this place wasn’t real. It was…

In his head?

That might make sense. The last clear thing he remembered was being in the car with Richie. Then, when his head had hit the window, a cold hard cut had occurred. It was only after that things had moved in slow motion, everything had stopped making sense, and he’d been unable to see anyone’s face. And everything that had followed…

It twisted Eddie’s stomach thinking about it, but then, that had been the point. He’d very nearly succumbed to it. He’d felt it crushing him from the inside and out and then—

What? He would have died? It would have consumed him?

It had certainly tried. Only Eddie’s logical thinking and the thought of Richie had kept him from giving in. And now? This place? What was it? Perhaps a backup? Something to keep him trapped in and an attempt to tear him down if the initial attempt didn’t happen?

Eddie could see that. It was some type of mental prison that It had formed, had been preparing for quite some time—

Other memories fell back into place. Bad dreams and impending terror that had been washed away at the bat of an eye. It had been trying to pull him down from the very beginning! Eddie just hadn’t been able to connect the dots. So It had grown stronger and stronger before making this final attempt at consuming him, so then why this place?

Eddie covered his ears so as to keep Its noises out and to better focus on his own thoughts. After the mixture of horrors and traumas Eddie had already seen, why build the apartment? Eddie had already been confronted with Richie’s corpse in varying forms, so It had already tried to exploit that fear of losing Richie. The apartment didn’t make sense. And if It was trying to use it to tear him down, it
would have happened by now and It certainly wouldn’t have any trouble getting in.

That left one last explanation.

It hadn’t re-created the apartment.

Eddie had.

Though he hadn’t been able to completely destroy the horrors It had formed, he’d still held enough power to overcome them. When he needed some type of weapon, an object had appeared either nearby or even in Eddie’s hand without him having realized it. Other times, once strong arms became brittle and Eddie had a better chance to break through, or some other object trying to obstruct Eddie’s journey broke and crumbled in front of him.

The thoughts hadn’t been conscious, but as his will to fight back had grown, so had his ability to break Its torture. He’d—

More memories came back. The scratching was recalled along with just how much he’d done it. His body and mind had been trying to warn him! But every moment of panic that should have taken hold had been washed away, like the stilling of a fly in a spider’s web after being stung. Yet something must have gotten through. He hadn’t been consciously aware of the threat, but subconsciously? His mind must have been preparing him for the inevitable fight.

“You can’t stay in there forever,” came Pennywise’s voice. The demonic, broken tones from before had somewhat disappeared. The sing-song tone was still dissonant in a way that made Eddie shiver though. He avoided looking at the window as It spoke again. “You can’t hide from me. You can’t hide from your mother.”

At the change in pitch and tone, Eddie glanced over against his better judgement. His stomach turned, but he stayed strong. His sanctuary didn’t crack under the pressure and It still didn’t have a chance to get in.

It seemed to realize that. The monster’s attempt at luring him out fell to anger. Eddie covered his ears again, putting his head between his knees as It raged around him. However, the lights didn’t even flicker as It was unable to get in. When the banging stopped, Eddie slowly dropped his hands.

“You think you can escape me? I will be reborn inside you.”

“I think the fuck not,” hissed Eddie. “I did it twice before. Three won’t be that fucking hard.”

“Oh really? Oh ho ho! But you can’t escape what’s inside you. C̖̭̣̹̘̟̹̅̃̈́̅̉̇̒̔̀͘ ̤̫̼̓̌ ̲̣̉̔̔̚ ̪̺̮̖̩̹̱̣̒̀ ̔̔”

Something inside Eddie pushed him forward and he landed on his hands and knees. Shit! So whatever had been left inside him in the physical world, that applied here too. He could feel It trying to push him from the inside, trying to get him to the door so he could let It in.

Eddie pushed against the force and went to the bathroom instead. At least in there he couldn’t actually see It. However, the pressure was building. He needed to do something and do it quick.

His hand opened up the medicine cabinet on instinct. Despite how his fears had often been unfounded as a child, the cabinet had always held some form of relief for his anxiety. He automatically looked for something in there to help him now. All that sat there was a large steak knife.

It was difficult to say if Eddie had put it there or if Pennywise had. Either way, he could tell this
wasn’t going to be easy. His stomach turned at the thought, but as he felt another painful tug from It, trying to pull him back, he knew he had to do it. To get back to his life. To get back to Richie.

He threw his jacket and shirt off first before finally grabbing the knife. He closed his eyes, knowing that if he actually looked, he risked backing down.

“You won’t do it.” The voice came from above him, muffled by the ceiling. Then it came from inside his own head. “You’re still trapped and you’re never ever e... Eddie jumped back as he watched Its head slam against the window. “You think that saves you!”

He pulled out the lighter he and Richie usually kept in the kitchen and set fire to the silks on the counter. They withered and moved as if they were alive before turning to ash. The ash disappeared into the air and all that was left was the small bit of exoskeleton. Eddie used the butt of the lighter to smash that to pieces before brushing what remained into the sink. He washed it away.

As Eddie felt the painful push, he pushed back. The knife pierced his chest and he gasped in shock and pain. Things still hurt here and this was arguably the most painful thing he’d attempted. He still managed to keep his eyes closed though as the knife went deeper and deeper before Eddie forced it down.

He could feel his own blood spilling onto him, making the knife and floor slick. With one final scream, he pushed down and then dropped the knife with shaking hands. He leaned against the sink, barely able to stand as he felt his own warm blood continuing to spill to the ground.

One hand went to the open chest wound. He couldn’t stop the shaking as he pressed inwards. Between the skin and muscle and tissues, his fingers searched until—

There!

His fingers grasped the foreign object. He wormed his hand back out and then finally risked looking down. In his hand was a small shard, a piece of an exoskeleton left behind by It. Connected to it though was colored yellow string. And connected to that, a red one. And then a white one. And then a blue one—

Eddie started to pull with both hands, faster and faster as the colored clothes fell at his feet. One last final tug did happen though. As he felt the greater resistance, he wrapped his hands around the cloths and pulled tenfold. The last knot came out with a wet pop. He finally looked into the mirror.

To say standing with a gaping, open wound with blood spilling everywhere after having just pulled out a near infinite number of multi-colored silks like it was a god damn party trick was a bit disconcerting, that would have been the understatement of the century. But Eddie had done it and he was still standing despite the impossibility of it. He glanced down at the pool of cloths and noted how they were starting to shift and move. He quickly gathered them all up and went straight to the kitchen.

He pulled out the lighter he and Richie usually kept in the kitchen and set fire to the silks on the counter. They withered and moved as if they were alive before turning to ash. The ash disappeared into the air and all that was left was the small bit of exoskeleton. Eddie used the butt of the lighter to smash that to pieces before brushing what remained into the sink. He washed it away.

“You think that saves you!”

Eddie jumped back as he watched Its head slam against the window.

“You’re still trapped and you’re never ever...
Eddie straightened his back and walked closer. In response, he said, “At this point you’re just wasting precious energy, so how about you shut the fuck up clown?”

It seemed to whither at that, perhaps even growing smaller. Then it grew tenfold, a wretched scream releasing from its teeth filled mouth as it crawled and scuttled left and right, trying to find someway to get in. It couldn’t.

Eddie quickly went back to the bedroom. He found a sweater and threw it on so he wasn’t staring down at the gaping open chest wound. Now to figure a way out.

Considering he’d created this place subconsciously, he doubted he could just blink himself out of here. Still, he closed his eyes and just thought…

He opened his eyes again. No. Still here. But he had been able to twist its creations to escape them. So maybe there was still a way to escape this place?

Eddie closed his eyes again. Instead of the just picturing the entire place gone and him awake, he pictured a path. He saw it laid out before him. A way out if he was smart enough. If he was careful enough. Slowly, he opened his eyes again and looked around the apartment. Now above the door shined a bright, neon sign that said exit in green letters.

“Ok.” Eddie shook out his hands. It began to bang harder and harder around the room.

Eddie tensed his muscles. “Fucking watch me.”

He launched himself at the door. He tried to keep the idea of a path in mind as he threw it open. His eyes went left and right. Now a green exit sign stayed lit to his left. Eddie took off running towards it. As he got closer, the floor started to deform and Pennywise’s arm came out of it. Eddie dodged it once, but the second time he hit the floor hard as it grabbed his ankle and pulled. The exit sign disappeared as Eddie’s concentration broke.

As it tried to drag him towards its gaping mouth, Eddie kicked and pushed back as hard as possible. He wouldn’t let it take him!

Eddie threw his hand at it. Rather than hitting it with a fist, he hit it with a crowbar that was suddenly in hand. Eddie continued to throw all his force into the strikes until it finally let go. He started running down the hallway again, trying as hard as he could to focus on an exit.

Exit.

Exit.

Exit—

The sign appeared again and suddenly the hall changed. Rather than being endlessly forward, it made a sharp right. Eddie followed it, just barely glancing back to see its lumbering form crawling up on the walls, trying to get to him as quickly as possible.

Eddie momentarily moved his mind to thinking about it being impeded, and like that, hospital doors appeared out of nowhere and slammed in its face. Eddie focused back on the path forward, even as he heard the sound of tearing metal behind him as it forced itself through. Eddie kept running and
running—

“It won’t be that easy!”

Suddenly, instead of running on a flat surface, the floor started to tilt forward.

“Oh shit!” yelled Eddie. He hit the ground and started to slide. He looked up and Its mass could be
seen sliding after him down the hospital floor, gaining speed. Eddie looked down, immediately
knowing he was going to hate this. However, he pushed the idea of the floor going at an even
steeper angle.

With a cry, Eddie was then falling straight through the air. Then with a sudden crunch, he hit the far
wall and then fell against the flat floor again. He got up running and finally came to something other
than a hospital hallway. It was a concrete staircase. The exit sign shined above the entrance. Eddie
ran in and paused, looking up at the massive staircase above him. Of course it was still going to be
fucking hard.

Eddie didn’t let it stop him though. He started to run up the stairs. The fact that he didn’t get
physically tired could be used to his advantage as he ran up and up, taking two steps at a time. It
roared from beneath him, but this time Eddie didn’t risk looking back. He just focused on the idea of
the exit, of getting out even as blood started to seep from the cracks and follow him upwards.

He would get to Richie again. He would get out of here and It would be gone for fucking good this
time.

Finally, the stairs stopped getting higher. A door waited at the top and Eddie burst through it,
stumbling onto a roof. He looked around and saw—

Nothing.

Technically, he shouldn’t have even been able to see the roof as there was no light source, but he had
thrown out the idea that physics worked correctly here a while ago. Eddie quickly turned round and
round. Still, there was just nothing. Where was he supposed to go? This had to work! It was getting
closer and closer as Eddie waited. It would nearly have him again if he didn’t—

There. The exit sign. It shined a good several feet over the edge and into the black abyss.

“Oh, you’ve got to be fucking kidding me.”

The idea kind of made sense though. This place had been created by It. If Eddie escaped it well,
hopefully he would wake up, or he would at least be able to take another break before planning his
next escape route. But the point was, he couldn’t stay here. He would die if he did.

Eddie quickly walked to the edge and stared into nothingness. One foot came off the ledge—

A metal spike shot through his leg and pulled him down. Eddie cried out in pain before his head hit
the concrete. His skin pulled and bled as he was dragged across the roof. The spike was connected to
Its arm and it bounced back and forth like a giant spring, pulling Eddie closer and closer.

“You are nothing! I’ll feed on you and your friends and the cycle will start again!”

Eddie barely even listened to It. His hands came down and he tore out the metal spike in his leg. He
kicked at Its attempt to grab onto him again and managed to use the metal spike to shove into It. The
tip broke Its skull. Blood spurted outwards as cracks started to break across Pennywise’s skin like
porcelain.

“You had your two bit fucking sequel,” Eddie growled out as he shoved the spike in harder. “But this isn’t your god damn trilogy!”

It roared as blood shot upwards like a fountain and Eddie finally managed to pin It to the roof, the spike going straight through It and piercing the roof underneath It. This time Eddie didn’t hesitate. He turned around. His legs pushed as hard as possible and when one foot hit the ledge, this time he launched himself off as hard as possible.

God he hoped this fucking worked!
So after thinking it over, I decided to go back down to 65. I think I still may add an extra chapter or two, but I'm currently writing out the baseline for 64 and it's made me think I might not need THAT many more chapters to wrap up. I don't know. I may also just make the last chapter a little extra longer rather than add one or two more chapters because I like ending stories on intervals of five. Still not sure yet but I should know and be able to tell all of you tomorrow or the day after.

Anyways, massive thank you as usual and please enjoy!

After Eddie’s seizure, the doctors had taken him away for more testing. The night had passed, slow and painful, and no one had slept a wink. Bill and Mike had arrived early the next morning. Richie had grabbed onto them as tightly as he could. Ben had desperately asked Mike if he knew anything. However, he answered as Richie had expected.

“Something must have gotten left behind when he was attacked. But beyond that I don’t… I don’t… fuck. I’m so fucking sorry, but I don’t know.”

Richie had hugged Mike tighter at that, just trying to make sure his friend knew it wasn’t his fault for not knowing.

When Eddie had finally been wheeled back, Richie had barely even glanced at the doctors. They didn’t have any fucking answers for him anyways. He knew Ben spoke with them on his behalf, but when Ben came back into the room, it was just as Richie had thought. The doctors knew even less than any one of them did.

This time Richie sat on the other side. His fingers gently traced the ring before he pressed Eddie’s hand against his forehead. His shoulders shook. The fucking clown couldn’t take Eddie from him. After everything they’d been through, how they’d had to fight to find their happiness so fucking hard. It would be the ultimate, cruel irony if after all of this, if It…

“When did you…” Bill’s voice trailed off as he looked away.

“Less than a week ago.” Richie paused. His mouth opened to say more, but the words got stuck in his throat. He closed his eyes and gripped Eddie’s hand even tighter. Tears slipped down his cheeks as Bill came around and put an arm around him.

“I’m going to grab us some food,” Ben said as he reentered the room again. “What do you want?”

“I’m not hungry,” whispered Richie.

“You have to eat,” pressed Bill. He rubbed soothing circles into Richie’s back.

“I don’t care.”

Ben let out a small sigh. He just mumbled, “I’ll get you something anyways. Just in case.”
Richie didn’t respond. He just kept holding onto Eddie like it was a fucking lifeline.

After a while, Ben did come back with food. The others ate even though it was clear they had no appetite. They tried to urge Richie to, but he just couldn’t bring himself to do it. The hours ticked by as he refused to let go. The only time Richie left Eddie’s side was to use the restroom. Otherwise their fingers stayed intertwined. Richie kept his head leaning against Eddie, or he stayed sitting up a little straighter as he watched for any signs of life on Eddie’s face. His eyes still moved beneath his eyelids, sometimes faster than other times. Something was happening, but Richie had no way to know what.

It began to get darker outside. It started to look like another day would pass them all by with nothing from Eddie. Ben was beginning to try and get Richie to eat again. Richie hadn’t eaten anything he’d previously brought, the food growing cold and stale until Ben had finally thrown it away.

Now Mike was sitting in the big armchair with Bill leaning against the armrest. Bev was next to them in one of the plastic chairs. Richie was in the other one, of course right next to Eddie. Ben was leaning against Eddie’s bed and was currently on Richie’s left.

“Please just promise you’ll eat something small. Anything.”

“I don’t care.”

Now Bev spoke up. “Well we care about you. And wasting away won’t do anything to help Eddie.”

“I’m not hungry.” Richie ducked his head to avoid his friend’s faces. Ignoring the fact that being near this remnant of It could be dangerous for them, Richie was glad they were there. He definitely didn’t want to be alone right now. However, he wished they’d stop pressing for him to eat. They were just trying to take care of him, but Richie still couldn’t bring himself to agree to it.

He could feel Ben starting to get up, reluctantly giving in to Richie’s opposition. Richie would have let him go only right at that moment something happened. He felt it first, a reaction from Eddie. It was the most he’d gotten from him since the seizure. Richie looked up. He waited to see anything more. A tick of his cheek. Maybe his throat would bob.

Everyone around him waited too. Ben had stopped heading towards the door. He looked a little hopeful, but above all, he looked fearful. Richie gripped Eddie’s hand a little tighter. He wanted to feel him gripping his hand back. He hoped he would.

The seconds ticked by.

Slowly, everyone reluctantly eased. Ben dropped his head. He looked ready to head out again and grab the food he’d promised—

Eddie’s back arched, his muscles seized.

“No, no no no! Not again! Please not again!” Richie stood up, the chair clattering to the ground beneath him. One hand still gripped Eddie’s. The other wavered as he blanked on what to do. Restrain him? Just keep him somewhat steady on the bed? Yell for help from the doctors and nurses, even though he doubted they could do anything? Richie didn’t know.

The others were standing up. Ben had stepped back towards the bed, eyes wide and equally unsure what to do.

Then Eddie’s hand tensed, the one that was being held by Richie. And it wasn’t just a muscle contraction. It felt different than that. Eddie was actually holding his hand back—
His eyes flashed open.

“Eddie!”

Eddie shuddered. He wrenched his hand from Richie and went over the other side. Ben didn’t react in time and Eddie hit the floor hard. The IV ripped from the back of his hand. The heart monitor flatlined as the clip fell off his finger. Richie reacted the fastest. He ran around the bed and started to lean down, to grab him—

But Eddie held up his hand behind him, keeping Richie and everyone else at bay even as they tried to draw closer.

Eddie pulled himself up on shaking arms, one hand leaning against the bed as the other hand still held out behind him, keeping Richie at bay. He coughed. His throat sounded clogged. He coughed again and this time, he dropped his hand and reached into his mouth. With one final cough, Eddie managed to grasp something and push it through.

It looked like a small egg trapped in some type of wet membrane though the color and broken nature of it made it seem decayed and dead. Eddie went from leaning against the bed to leaning against the side table. He dropped the object onto it and shot it a tired grin.

Though his voice was a little hoarse, he sounded fully at ease. “I told you I’d fucking win.” Then he picked up the phone of the side table and completely crushed the form with one loud thud. Eddie lifted up the phone, gave the area underneath a quick once over to make sure the thing was truly destroyed. Then he put the phone down, grabbed the small trashcan on the side, and pushed everything into the can. He dropped the trash can back on the ground and dusted his hands off. He then felt against his chest for a second, face wrought in concentration…

A satisfied sigh escaped his lips as he dropped his hand. Finally, he turned around. He blinked in shock.

“Oh. How long was I out?”

And with that, everyone broke forward. Richie grabbed onto Eddie, tears fell down his cheek and his shoulders shook. The others quickly came around-Bill actually jumped over the bed-and they all grabbed onto Eddie so hard that he would have fallen over if not for all the arms wrapped around him.

Eddie’s shock at seeing everyone fell away. A soft smile fell on his face and he finally relaxed. His arms came around Richie first, just hugging him tight as he slightly rocked their bodies back forth.

“It’s ok. It’s ok,” Eddie whispered. He pulled Richie back a bit and kissed his forehead.

“Is it?” asked Mike. He still looked the slightest bit warry but so damn hopeful too.

Eddie hesitated. He kept one arm around Richie as his other one gingerly touched his chest again. He…

He hadn’t noticed it before. It must have kept him from noticing, but now that he was fully aware, Eddie realized he’d always been feeling something since the moment he’d woken up. Yet as that feeling of something trying to crush him had grown, Eddie’s awareness of it had drastically dropped. It had tried to lull him into a false sense of security before finally striking in such a way, Eddie wouldn’t realize what was and wasn’t real and would succumb with little fighting.

But that feeling was completely gone. He’d felt like he were growing into himself after the battle
with It. He’d felt like he’d become truly alive again. Getting away from Myra had been one of his best decisions ever. Kissing Richie had certainly been the first best one. But now? Now he felt truly whole and aware of every little piece of himself. He knew It was gone because he could actually identify the absence of It now and Eddie breathed in relief at that.

“It’s gone. Really gone. I can explain everything later but…we’re all safe. I’m safe.”

Richie started to cry harder as he held onto Eddie with all his strength.

“How long was I out for?” Eddie asked as he soothingly rubbed circles into Richie’s back.

“Less than two days,” Bev said. “It…it’s just been a very long few hours.”

“Wait. Less than…and you’re all here?”

“Of course,” Bill said. “We would do anything for you Eddie.”

He smiled at that and looked at all his friends’ wet eyes and tear stained faces. Eddie wasn’t crying. Maybe he would later. He was so fucking happy and thankful, but also too tired to let every emotion he was feeling out in that second. He just focused on Richie as he gently wiped at the tears from underneath his glasses.

“It’s really ok,” pressed Eddie. “And I’d kiss you just to prove it. But after throwing up an ethereal egg thing from a demon monster, my own tongue tastes about as bad as you would think so I won’t torture you with that.”

Richie finally let out a slightly broken laugh as he wiped at his own face. The others started to relax.

“What do you need now?” asked Mike. “What can we do for you?”

Eddie thought about it for a second. He’d fought It solo and had somehow come out the other end breathing and kicking. He was able to hold Richie again, for the rest of his life from now on without any fear of the supernatural trying to steal him away. All of his friends were there with him. Eddie was awake and walking after nearly two days of being out. And…

“I am really fucking hungry.”

Ben let out a breathless laugh. “Ok, Richie, please tell me you’ll eat now.”

“Y-yeah. Yeah if that’s what you want to do Eddie.”

“Please. I’m fucking starving. And not fucking hospital food. I can’t believe I’m saying this, but if I never have to step foot into a hospital ever again in my entire life, I think I’ll die happy.”

That really got everyone laughing as they all went into a group hug again and enveloped Eddie in warmth and love.
Alright, I have chapter 64 written (obviously need to edit it and chapters 62 and 63 hence why I'm not coming out with all of them in one go lol). However, now that I've started writing chapter 65, I will say it's going to be the last chapter. I think it'll work out well ending the story there and I don't want to overstay my welcome (though I know how many of you would probably still love it if I did haha).

The only big difference with the last chapter is that for the first time I may skip an update day for it so that way I can publish the final chapter Nov. 11th rather than the 10th so I can say I officially finished writing this story in two months. That idea just seems really aesthetically pleasing so if you don't get the final chapter on the 10th, don't panic. It's coming the next day <3

Anyways, with that in mind and with this story almost over, thank you as always and I hope you enjoy this next chapter <3

The doctors had eventually come rushing in as the machine had continued to flatline. After that, several long, interesting minutes passed as the medical professionals tried to process what was going on. However, they were oddly already forgetting pieces, missing bits of information and one openly admitted, “I thought this room was empty. When did we put a patient in here?”

The best answer any of them had was that It had unknowingly influenced the whole event, similar to when Eddie had woken up outside of Derry. Even after Eddie had asked Bev to borrow a lighter and had then completely burned the remnants of It in the trashcan, the hospital as a whole hadn’t seemed to register exactly what was going on.

Though a bit frustrating, ultimately, it turned out to be easier than if they all remembered the details of Eddie’s reason for hospitalization. Thankfully, they also hadn’t thrown away his clothes. He’d liked that shirt and had been a bit afraid they had torn it. However, sense no immediate medical emergency had been occurring, all his clothes were intact and in a bag in the side table. Eddie changed and then essentially walked out of the hospital as according to them, he hadn’t even been admitted.

Eddie leaned against Richie almost the entire way. Part of the reason was because Richie clearly needed it. Eddie supposed everything hadn’t affected him the same way because he’d understood what he’d been fighting. The others had been left in the dark. And if Eddie had failed to stop It from growing any larger? He probably would have just died and they would have been none the wiser. Or worse, It would have used his body in the physical world, using Eddie himself to torture his friend and finally finish what It had started all those years ago. That certainly twisted Eddie’s stomach.

But it didn’t help anything to dwell on that thought because Eddie had won. He kept his arm looped around Richie, fingers intertwined and head sometimes resting on Richie’s shoulder. He wanted to do everything in his power to make sure Richie knew everything was ok now.

Of course, there was the other reason Eddie held him so tightly which was simply because he personally kind of needed the support. Though it hadn’t even been two full days, being bedridden
and not having eaten anything took a lot out of a person. Especially when Eddie’s body was convinced he’d been running around the entire time trying to out chase a clown. When he’d said fucking starving, what he really should have said was he’d give up fucking anything—besides his friends of course—for a bite to eat.

The others seemed only too happy to comply though, especially as they reiterated Richie needed to eat something too.

“Richie,” Eddie gently murmured. He kissed the back of Richie’s hand before squeezing it gently. “Not that I am ever going to be put in this situation again, and I really fucking mean it this time, but I don’t want you ever putting yourself through unnecessary pains for me. Ok?”

“I know. Just…”

“I get it. I do. I just don’t like seeing you suffer either.”

Eddie rested his head against Richie’s shoulder as they waited for the public transportation system. Since the others had obviously grabbed cabs from the airport to the hospital and Richie’s car was being repaired, it made the most sense. It also assured they all stuck together rather than taking separate taxis to a place to eat.

They ended up at some fast food place, Eddie really not caring about quality and just needing something quick he could shove in his mouth. He went to the restroom after ordering, washing out his mouth and then checking to see if anything had been left behind. Nothing seemed to be cause for worry. However, when he’d temporarily felt his chest at the hospital, he had noticed something different. He’d been too focused on getting back to his friends to double check, even when he’d changed, but now…

Eddie looped a finger around his collar and pulled out. Looking down, he saw a nice long scar going from top to bottom across the original scar left behind by It. So that had bled into the real world. Eddie felt over his shirt, slowly dragging his finger down as he remembered taking the knife and carving himself open. He shuddered at the thought.

He would have to explain that to Richie, at least partially. He decided to do that later when he was in a better place and had healed a little from the mental trouble at thinking he was losing Eddie again.

With that decided, Eddie left the bathroom and sat back down with his friends. Since the food was already there, he immediately dug in. He could have probably eaten it all in one go. However, he did pause when he realized everyone was carefully watching him. Eddie paused and wiped his mouth with a napkin.

“Sorry,” he mumbled with an embarrassed look down.

“No!” Bill quickly said. “No, uh…just still making sure you’re ok.”

Bev nodded. “Please keeping eating if you need to.”

“Well I have been running around a hospital for several long hours so…”

“Running around a hospital?” questioned Mike.

Eddie paused. He carefully looked at each of them. “Are you sure you’re ready to hear about all of it?”

“Are we ready? What about you?” asked Ben.
“I’m ok to tell you.”

“You’re really sure?” Bev gently asked as she touched his arm.

Eddie nodded and showed a soft smile. “I mean, on the one hand it wasn’t real. Not physically. But everything that happened…it just proved to me how much I’ve overcome. I mean…no matter how descriptive I get, I don’t think I can get the real horror of the situation across. But despite It throwing everything at me and trying so god damn hard to get me…I fought. I really found my courage.”

“You’ve always had courage,” murmured Richie as he held Eddie’s hand again.

“That means a lot to hear you say it. But…it’s still different really seeing it in action. If that makes sense? And thinking that I had overcome my mother’s hold and having proof that I did are still two different things.”

“The doctors said it was like you were moving around. That your body was acting like that even though you were bedridden,” Bill slowly said. He repeated what Mike had asked. “So, you were running around a hospital?”

“Well, I use that term loosely. It was the hallway of a hospital with red, emergency lights illuminating everything. Not every door opened, but those that did basically were attempts to tear me down. It was a backup in case the original plan failed.”

“The original plan?” asked Mike.

Eddie nodded. “It was trying to make me think Richie had died and was using that immediate moment and the small car accident to Its advantage. There were…other moments where It tried to make me think Richie was dead, but by that point my ability to reason had become conscious and strong enough again.” Out of everything, thinking about Richie’s mutilated body was honestly the hardest. He moved to a different topic quickly. “But most everything else was diseased limbs, a fear of choking. I wacked my mother over the head with a pan.”

Ben instinctively snorted from the way Eddie had said it and then quickly covered his mouth. “I’m so fucking sorry. That’s probably so insensitive—”

“Not really,” Eddie replied. He managed a more easy-going smile, trying to make sure his friends knew they could relax. “If anything, it was oddly therapeutic? Standing up to Its manifestation of her, even if it was in an incredibly overexaggerated way.”

He spoke a bit more about it. Though he could tell everyone was worried that confronting everything so soon could prove negative, it honestly helped Eddie to compartmentalize everything and process it beyond the immediate emotional reactions he’d had in the moment. Then he talked about the apartment, the safe space. He kept out the detail of carving himself open to get It out. Besides the fact that it was gory imagery no one wanted to hear, Eddie was pretty sure Richie would have started crying again if he mentioned it in any small part. Considering that was the last thing Eddie wanted to do, he just said, “Basically, I think I mentally took out the part of It inside me, which physically was when I threw up what was trying to grow in me.”

“Yes,” murmured Mike. “It must have been re-growing itself in a sort of asexual process. I remember reading up on Its eggs but didn’t find any specific details on them or that It could keep Its original consciousness and forms alive in them.”

“Hold up. It could lay eggs and you didn’t fucking tell us?” asked Ben. However, just as quickly he said, “Wait, no. Never mind. I’m glad you didn’t. Otherwise going back to Its lair would have felt
like climbing onboard the pre-cursor ship in Alien. Fucking Christ.”

“From what It told me, that’s essentially what It was going to do,” Eddie added, focusing more on what Mike had said. “Finish me, consume you guys, and start the cycle again.”

“God Eddie,” whispered Richie. “I’m so sorry.”

Eddie started to eat again. It was probably good he’d paused. It would be fucking stupid to choke now, but he was still pretty fucking hungry. He managed out a muffled, “It’s ok. It wasn’t that bad.”

“W-wasn’t that-did you hit your head?” asked Ben. “I mean like, a second time or something?”

Eddie rolled his eyes. He swallowed. “No. I mean, it was freaky and shit. I certainly wasn’t immune to flinching or jumping and the pain sure as hell wasn’t fun. But once I realized what was going on? I knew I could stop It.”

“Really?” asked Bill.

“Without a doubt.”

“How?” Mike asked.

“Because my love for you guys was always stronger than any fear It or the world threw at me. And this time I finally knew that unabashedly.”

Though a bit surprised by his words, the looks on his friends’ faces quickly changed to pride and kindness. It warmed Eddie’s heart seeing them look at him like that. And then, despite how much Eddie had been trying to avoid it, Richie started crying again.

“Hey. Hey it’s ok,” Eddie gently urged. He put his arms around Richie and pulled him in. Bill, who was on Richie’s other side, touched his arm in a comforting manner.


“No need for that.”

The others softly agreed.

“Still, sorry,” Richie sighed as he successfully wiped at his face again. “Just…you know. Coping.”

Eddie nodded in understanding. He gently kissed Richie’s cheek before leaning his head against Richie’s shoulder. Richie leaned his head against Eddie’s. Eddie decided to go ahead and change the subject from It, hopefully for the rest of their lives. They’d discussed what had happened and knew the important facts now. Hopefully he could get Richie to think about something else, for his smile to fully light up and reach his eyes. Eddie wanted to get him to laugh openly again.

“Hey,” Eddie softly said. “Do they know?”

From the way Eddie said that and glanced down at his hand, Richie caught on. He took the offered lifeline and as Eddie was still leaning up against him, he could tell Richie was relaxing at the topic change. “They noticed but yeah. We’re engaged.”

“Richie said it was recent?” asked Bill.

“Yes, hence why we hadn’t quite told you yet,” Eddie smiled. He could tell everyone wanted to jump to the lighter subject. He continued with it. “I’d say you wouldn’t believe how he fucking did
“I would have thought you would have asked first,” Bev said. “Or that it might have been a mutual discussion.”

“I can see that,” Mike said, “but only if Eddie initiated that conversation.”

“Fair enough. I guess if it had been on my mind, it might have gone that way.” Eddie said. “But I just honestly wasn’t thinking about it. I mean, even with how quickly Richie and I jumped into things—”

“Hold on. Quickly?” asked Ben. “You both were painfully oblivious!”

“He was painfully oblivious,” Richie quickly amended. “I was voluntarily blue-balling myself.”

They all groaned as Bev kicked him underneath the table.

“And hey! You thought we were practically together from the beginning,” Richie added.

“Yeah, but it was painful when we realized you hadn’t been,” laughed Mike.

“True, but hey. I want to hear about this proposal now,” Bev said.

“Yes, how Richie-like was it?” asked Bill.

“Very,” Eddie said with a roll of his eyes. “Should I tell it or…”

“We can both tell it. I with my magnificent comedic timing and the charm I held over the audience. You with your adorable panic as I watched you get redder and redder throughout the set,” Richie said, a full grin finally lighting on his lips.

Eddie smiled back, glad that his plan had worked as Richie looked more himself now. “Bullshit. It was nearly pitch black and you know it. No way you saw how red my face was getting.”

They laughed and Eddie and Richie went into telling their friends of how ridiculous Richie’s proposal had been.
After Eddie finished eating, he was actually the one who recommended they retire. Personally, he was pretty sure he could stay awake all night thanks to the adrenaline burst he’d felt at reentering the real world. However, despite not getting physically tired in his head, he could tell those aches and pains were coming. His body would thank him if he went to bed at a reasonable time. Besides, the others were clearly exhausted and there was no reason to keep them up.

“Right. A hotel room,” murmured Bill. “What do you—”

“You’re staying with us,” Richie immediately said.

Bev couldn’t help but laugh. “All of us?”

“We’ll figure something out.”

Eddie rolled his eyes. He really had no idea how everyone was supposed to fit in their two-room apartment. However, he understood Richie’s feelings. At least one more night of everyone being together would help settle nerves and assure everyone that things were ok. However, besides the fact that they weren’t sure who would sleep where, there was one other thing that would need to happen as they went to their apartment.

Since Richie had been driving last time, Eddie didn’t have his keys on him. And Richie—

“I need to text CC. She still has my keys,” murmured Richie as he pulled out his phone and started flipping through things.

“To take care of Eduardo?” asked Eddie.

Richie nodded.

“Well I’m glad-hang on.” Eddie thought about it for a second. Then— “What about work? There was that report that was due at the end of the week—oh god I must have missed the deadline. And then I had a meeting in my department—”

“Eddie,” Ben earnestly said, “only you would get out of a battle with It and then proceed to worry about work of all things.”

“It’s ok Eds, honest,” Richie quickly said as he finished texting CC. “Jason took care of everything.”

His shoulders relaxed a little at that. “I’ll have to thank—” Suddenly, Eddie’s worry came back. “Wait so he knows? Have you called him yet?”

“When would I have had time? You literally just—”

“Call him damn it! He’s probably been worried sick about you.”
“And you!”

“Even more reason to call him,” groaned Eddie. When Richie didn’t immediately react, he added, “I’ll call him.”

“No! You’ll give him a heart attack if you just call him out of the blue.”

“Jesus, both of you,” Bill cried. “I’ll call the guy if it helps.”

“I got it. I got it,” Richie said with a wave of his hand. “And CC said she’ll meet us outside the apartment. By the way Eddie, she said you should probably plant your feet in the ground because she is going to tackle you at full speed.”

Eddie rolled his eyes. However, the idea at seeing CC and knowing those outside their close-knit group cared about him warmed his heart. He could have lost so much only a few hours ago…

But he hadn’t. He’d made it. Eddie reached out and held Richie’s free hand as Jason picked up Richie’s call right away.

“Everything ok? Anything happen?” Jason asked Richie.

“Only good things,” Richie immediately said.

“Only—he’s awake?”

“Yeah. Hold on.” Richie handed the phone over to Eddie.

“Hey Jason. I hear I should say thank you for sticking with Richie before Bev and Ben made it.”

“Oh thank fucking god. Y-you’re ok. How the hell are you ok? What even—” Jason stopped himself from talking. There was silence for a second and then, “Never mind. I can’t explain it but…I don’t want to know.”

“You don’t,” Eddie kindly said, “but thanks for everything you’ve done for us already. It’s certainly above and beyond what you had to do.”

“No, it’s exactly what I needed to do as your friend. And just so you know, if you ever fucking die, I’ll follow you into the afterlife and drag your ass out for Richie. I refuse to deal with the fall out of that on my own.”

“Deal,” Eddie smiled.

“Still, I just don’t understand what…no. No I really don’t want to. Listen, I’m sure you both need rest. I’ll stop by the day after tomorrow though. Check up on everything?”

“Sounds good. Thanks again,” Eddie replied. He handed the phone back to Richie who spoke briefly with him before thanking him again and ending the call.

From there, they took the public transportation system to their apartment and CC was already waiting for them there. She was leaning against the brick wall, tapping her foot as she desperately looked around. When she spotted the group, her eyes lit up and her shoulders clearly relaxed.

As promised, she rushed over. Her arms got thrown around Eddie’s shoulders and he returned the hug, albeit not quite as intensely.

“Thank fuck you’re ok. I still have no idea what happened but thank fuck.” Her eyes turned to
Richie. “And please tell me you’ve finally eaten something Richie.”

“Don’t worry,” Bev said as she walked over. “We’ve looked out for him too. Beverly.”

“CC,” she replied as she offered her hand.

Introductions happened as CC passed over Richie’s keys. They only spoke briefly before CC hugged Eddie again. See promised to catch up with them later but mainly just wanted Eddie and Richie to get the much-deserved rest they needed. She said goodbye to their other friends before she headed off to where she’d parked. Richie finally walked over and opened the building door.

“You know, even though you’ve already told us about your place,” Ben said, “I always imagined you to live above a bar or something.”

“Funny you should say that,” Richie replied. He started to retell the same story he’d told Eddie when he’d first arrived about college and sleepless nights. Once in the apartment, Richie quickly pointed out everything for Ben and Bev. Eddie went straight to Eduardo, but there was nothing to worry about regarding the little lizard. CC had done an impeccable job taking care of him. However, the bearded dragon’s little tongue repeatedly darted out until Eddie finally agreed to pick him up and the lizard comfortably rested on his shoulder.

“So this is the guy we’ve seen in those pictures you’ve sent,” smiled Mike. “He’s a lot bigger than I expected.”

“He should grow a little more actually. Want to hold him? Well, I say hold. He likes to cling where he likes to cling,” chuckled Eddie. He got a little closer to Mike. Giving Eduardo the opportunity to move over. When the lizard did, Eddie made sure to tell Mike how to safely unhook him and put him back in his cage.

With the others focusing on Eduardo, Eddie turned to Richie and said, “I’ll let you figure out how the hell we’re all sleeping. I need a shower.”

“Ok. Let me know if you need anything,” Richie said with a quick kiss.

Eddie returned that with gently squeezing Richie’s hand. From the glances Richie was giving him, Eddie could tell a little reassurance was needed. He leaned in and softly murmured, “It’s just a shower. I’ll be right at your side again in a second.”

“I know,” murmured Richie. He gently kissed Eddie again and then went to the fridge to grab something to drink for the others.

Eddie walked to the closet and grabbed a fresh shirt. Then he grabbed some sleep pants and closed the bathroom door behind him. He paused, looking at the medicine cabinet. Obviously things were different. The apartment existed in a rational, physical plane. His friends were here. Eduardo existed here. But still, it couldn’t hurt to check…

He opened the cabinet.

Nope. All good. Everything was where it was supposed to be and no random knife sat there either.

He let out another sigh of relief and started the shower. He fully stripped. Now that he was in a better lit bathroom, Eddie could really look at the newest scar running down his midsection. With this he was really starting to look like some kind of fucking Bond villain.

Eddie snorted at the thought, but decided he’d save it for later when it would be more likely to make
Richie laugh rather than wince. He got into the shower when it got warm enough. Eddie’s muscles fully relaxed. No physical blood had ever touched him besides the band-aid on the back of his hand from where he’d ripped out his IV. However, he still felt so much cleaner with the water moving over him now.

He took his time scrubbing his scalp, his face and arms and everything else. When he finally got out, the adrenaline from before had mostly diminished and he felt like he could fall asleep now. He got dressed. Walking out into the crowded kitchen, it wasn’t too surprising they were all still figuring out how they were going to sleep. They really didn’t have a large apartment and there were only two beds if the couch was unfolded too.

Everyone went back and forth a bit. Obviously, Eddie and Richie would be in their own bed, but who would get the couch? And then who would share the couch and who would share the bed with Richie and Eddie? Or maybe four people in one bed? Or maybe—

They kept going back and forth until finally they went on a whim and figured they would try something.

Eddie and Richie grabbed spare sleepwear for everyone since they’d literally dropped everything to fly to Chicago. Even Mike and Bill had neglected to bring anything despite not being able to fly out until that morning. As they explained it, they’d been too panicked to think about packing toiletries or clothes or anything like that.

Once everyone was ready for bed and Eddie had checked on Eduardo one last time, they piled in.

Richie was on the right edge. Eddie was partially on top of him with Ben’s pack pressed against his own. Ben’s arm was thrown around Bev and keeping her close. Mike’s arm was also partially thrown over Bev with Bill having his arms wrapped around his back. Bill’s back was just on the left edge of the bed.

To say it was a tight squeeze would have been an understatement, but the close proximity was what they’d all been looking for when trying to decide where to sleep. And, as long as Richie and Bill didn’t get kicked off at some point in the middle of the night, they were all happy to be squished in together.

As Eddie shut his eyes and got comfortable sandwiched between Ben and Richie, he finally fell asleep on the first day of the rest of his life.
Miraculously, Richie and Bill did not find their asses on the floor in the morning. However, Richie nearly fell off when Eddie started to wake up. It went slow and then he shot forward—

“I have work-ow!”

Ben knocked him upside the head and Richie grabbed him, pulling him back down.

“You’re good, remember?” Richie said.

“Just rest a little longer,” murmured Bev. She curled into Ben, throwing her arm over him and resting her hand on Eddie’s shoulder.

Mike leaned upwards a bit. “I mean it is nearly seven—”

“No you don’t,” mumbled Bill. His grip tightened around Mike and he buried his face against Mike’s backside. “There’s no god damn boat to go fishing on around here. Just sleep in damn it.”

“Sounds like there’s a story there,” chuckled Ben.

Bill just grumbled against Mike’s backside as everyone softly laughed. They shifted around a little before holding onto each other again and easing back into the bed. Almost an hour passed until Bev pushed against Ben and Mike.

“Alright, now I need to use the damn restroom.”

“I’m hungry,” mumbled Richie.

“You got eggs?” asked Ben.

“You cooking?”

“Well I sure as hell don’t want to deal with the chaotic mess you’re bound to create in the kitchen.”

“I’ll cave this once. You have free reign,” Richie replied as he curled in closer to Eddie and kissed his cheek.

Bev and Ben both got up. When Bev came out of the bathroom, Mike managed to get out of Bill’s iron grip so he could use it too. Bill just rolled over and grabbed Eddie so that way Eddie was being hugged from both sides.

“And what if I wanted to get up?” asked Eddie.

“Not a chance,” mumbled Bill.

“Well I’m not letting go,” Richie snorted.
Eddie rolled his eyes but let them hold him. He closed his eyes again. The three of them dozed while Ben, Bev, and Mike got comfortable in the kitchen. Eventually, Eddie decided to go to the bathroom though and after a very weird game of twister, he managed to get out from under both of them. Richie let out a small whine as his hand reached out and failed to grab Eddie.

“You still have to get up at some point,” Eddie said.

Richie whined again.

“If you’re so desperate, cuddle with Bill,” snorted Eddie. From behind him, he heard Richie make kissing noises. Then the sound of Bill hitting him somewhere before Eddie used the bathroom.

Afterwards, he fed and checked on Eduardo. The lizard ate and then immediately went back into the sand. Eddie supposed it was a lazy morning for him too. Eddie turned around and walked to the kitchen where Ben, Bev, and Mike were all helping each other.

“I am relatively certain this place is cleaner than it was last night,” snorted Eddie.

“I also alphabetized the spices,” Ben said.

“You absolute bastard,” Richie respond as he and Bill finally left the bedroom. Richie tried to hold back a yawn as Bill stretched. “I had those in order.”

“Of what? Color? Most used ones?”

“Which ones rhyme together.”

Ben groaned. “Most of these don’t even rhyme with one other spice!”

“He’s fucking with you,” Eddie said with a roll of his eyes. “It was color. Though alphabetizing makes more sense.”

“It’s not aesthetically pleasing and I’m changing it the moment you leave.”

They laughed as Bev gently squeezed Eddie’s arm. “And how are you doing?”

Everyone looked.

Not that it wasn’t appreciated, it still put Eddie on the spot. He held up his hands and said, “Maybe dial down the concern a little and don’t turn your heads at the same time like we’re in the Body Snatchers?”

Mike let out an embarrassed laugh. “Sorry.”

“It’s ok,” Eddie replied with a soft smile. “But I am good. Not even a nightmare last night. And let’s face it, if I’d woken up in the middle of the night, you all would have noticed.”

“True,” Richie said. He threw his arm around Eddie’s shoulders and kept him close. “So what about all of you? What next?”

“Urgh, finding a flight,” groaned Ben.

“We don’t want to continue to crowd your apartment,” Bill added.

“I am fine with all of you staying indefinitely. Want to move in?” asked Richie.
Bev laughed. “A nice thought, but too idealistic.”

“Well, we might have to stay one night more,” said Mike. “It’ll be hard getting a flight this last minute.”

“I realize we’re all different sizes, but if you want to borrow more clothes so you can take a shower and we can wash the other ones, you can,” said Eddie. He looked to Ben and Bev. “I know you two were awake all last night. And you two probably didn’t get much sleep either.”

Mike and Bill nodded.

“A shower would be nice,” Ben said.

“That still gives us the rest of the day though,” said Bill. “What do we do with that time?”

“Stay in or something?” asked Mike. He shrugged. “We could all go out and eat if we’re in the mood to later.”

“I’m hungry right now,” said Richie. He looked at what Ben had been cooking. “And Ben, not a half bad job.”

“Oh like you could do any better. Precision is key.”

“Pfft, this argument again? Give me the spatula.”

“No!”

Eddie rolled his eyes as he watched Richie and Ben fight over breakfast as plates started to get pulled down. Eddie leaned against the counter. He looked down for a moment and tried to think of something they could all do before everyone had to leave again.

Besides maybe going out to eat, he doubted they really wanted to sight see or do anything touristy. But what else was there besides crowding the couch and watching TV or something? Well—

Eddie looked up and smiled. “Hey Richie?”

Richie finally stopped terrorizing Ben. “Yeah?”

“Let’s just get married.”

Richie instinctively laughed and then focused back on Eddie. “Wait. Really? Now?”

“We were mainly worried about not having our friends there, well we have them here now.”

Richie walked over and leaned against the counter opposite Eddie. A slightly worried look crossed his face. “You want to do this because you want to, or do you want to do this because you’re afraid we might not get a chance if we wait too long?”

“Definitely not the second one,” Eddie said as he reached over and squeezed Richie’s hand with a reassuring smile. “Sorry, didn’t think how that might sound. But no. Even before all this, I was kind of always on the verge of ‘let’s just do it’. I don’t care about having some traditional celebration. I’ve already done it and could care less about round two. I just want to be your husband already and if all our best friends can be there for that moment, well that’s all I need.”

Richie smiled and they shared a quick kiss across the table. “Ok then. We’ll get married.”
“It’s not the sudden, elopement that I thought would happen,” started Ben, “but still definitely fitting.”

Richie grinned. “And that means I can wear a real outfit—”

“Hawaiian shirt and shorts, fine. It is summer. But if you wear god damn flip flops I am leaving you on the courthouse steps.”

They all laughed and Richie walked around so he could fully pull Eddie into his arms and kiss him. “Deal.”

“A wedding then,” said Mike with a shake of his head. “As fast as this is, I would like to be clean for this.”

“I call the shower first,” Bev said. She downed the plate of food that Ben had handed her and then went straight for the bathroom.

“Grab whatever you want to wear from the closet. Doesn’t matter to me,” called Eddie.

“Or me,” Richie said.

“Hey, you’ll have a theme then,” said Bill.

“What theme?” asked Eddie.

“You. Both of you,” chuckled Mike as he caught on. “Because we’ll be wearing your clothes?”

Richie let out a bark of laughter, banging on the counter as Eddie just rolled his eyes. “Shit! You’re right! That’s fucking hilarious. I need to remember that for later.”

“Of course you do,” Eddie replied. He kissed him on the cheek before grabbing his plate and starting to eat. He was still hungrier than usual though he expected by the end of the day, his metabolism would be a bit more normal.

After he cleared his plate, he went back to Eduardo who looked ready to run around the floor again. Him and Mike watched him as Ben and Bill cleaned up the kitchen with Richie bothering them. Once Bev got out of the shower, the others slowly switched out. Eddie took his time looking up and calling the number for the right courthouse and figuring out if it was physically possible to do it today.

As he was put on hold during one part of the conversation, Richie came up around him and wrapped his arms around him.

“You know, we could technically get married anywhere.”

“We are not going to some two bit lover’s chapel. Is there even one of those around here?”

“I was actually thinking—”

“We’re not getting fucking married at a god damn Waffle House either,” interrupted Eddie, even as he laughed at the inside joke.

“So no McDonald’s wedding in China huh?”

“No,” Eddie laughed. He swatted Richie away as the call came back on. Eddie briefly talked with them before finally thanking them and ending the call. “One o’clock today?”
“That’s going to be a pretty tough squeeze to plan and throw a bachelor party for Richie between now and then, but I think I can get it done,” Bev replied.

“Not talking to you,” Eddie said with another grin. He pointed at Richie. “And don’t you even think about it.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it!” Then Richie very clearly gestured at Bev which had everyone laughing again.

After everyone had a chance in the shower, Eddie gathered up the clothes and started the laundry. He checked on Eduardo and then they all headed to the courthouse. They took public transportation so that they could all sit together and once there, Eddie talked with the people and got everything organized since he’d been the one on the phone with them.

The only real question was, “You know, you only really need two witnesses. Correct?”

“Yeah. These people are just important enough we want them all here,” Eddie smiled.

“Alright. Well you’re both up. In here.”

There wasn’t even a little pomp and circumstance like at a small church wedding. The man who officiated the weddings was very straight to the point and quick. Eddie didn’t mind. If anything, the efficiency was preferred. He just wanted to officially be able to call Richie his husband and after exactly three minutes and fifty-two seconds, he could.

The rings went from simply symbolic to truly official as Eddie grabbed Richie and kissed him as hard as possible.

With everything done and all of them on the steps of the courthouse now, Ben said, “You know, I liked that. It saved us all from hearing Richie’s vows which, let’s face it, would have been a forty-minute stand-up special in its own right.”

“I feel like I should be offended…no. You’re right. That’s exactly what I would have done.”

“And every second would just be you trying to embarrass me,” groaned Eddie, even as he shot Richie a loving smile.

“What? Me? Never! If anything, you’d get me all flustered being so fucking sweet and shit.”

“Hmm, maybe.”

“What would you have said if you’d done vows?” asked Bev.

Eddie shrugged. “I don’t know. I guess I had a few ideas but…really any thought of this has just been getting married. Not any of the details leading up to it.”

“That’s very un-you,” chuckled Bill.

“Blame Richie. He’s a terrible influence.”

“You mean the best!” Richie cried. “And speaking of influence, I’m hungry. Any chance I can influence you all to lunch?”

“Yes please,” said Mike.

Richie and Eddie looked at each other. “Favorite place?” They asked each other at the same time,
both laughing at that and nodding.

“Oh, is that the one you took us to the first night we were here?” asked Mike.

“Yep,” Richie said. “Vamonos!”

As they walked down the sidewalk, Eddie didn’t let go of Richie once. He’d succeeded in so many ways. He’d won the final battle and now, after everything, everything really was perfect. From here on out, Eddie was ready for a normal and loving fucking life.
Quick reminder that the last chapter won't actually come out tomorrow. Which, considering I managed to update every single day (sometimes twice a day) I'd say I'm pretty proud of the consistency haha. Part of the reason is just because with it being the final chapter, I wanted a little extra time to make sure it ends exactly how I want it to. Secondly, I started uploading this story Sept. 11th so ending it exactly two months later is just a very satisfying idea to me.

Technically this could be the last chapter, but I think you'll be glad there's one more after this. I just wanted to get one last hit at a little angst before the last chapter goes out in tons of fluff and sweetness. Anyways, thanks as always and enjoy <3

Eddie curled into Richie. “How’s it feel waking up married?” he mumbled before giving Richie a morning kiss.

“Bev’s bony elbows are a surprise.”

“Bony huh?”

“Ow! You know you’re just proving my point right-ow!”

“Take it back or I’m kicking you off the bed.”

“You’d have to kick Eddie off too then. He’s on the edge this time.”

Eddie gave Richie another kiss and then moved out from his arms. As Eddie stood up and yawned, he said, “Kick away Bev.”

“You traitor-ow!”

Eddie laughed as did the others as they grew more awake. Unlike the day before, everyone got up relatively quickly since both the flights were earlier than twelve. It felt hard letting go of their friends so soon. Eddie could tell everyone wished they had a little more time, maybe just a day, to help decompress from everything.

It gave them reason to begin planning another get together though as best they could.

“We should have it at our place,” Mike said. “It definitely won’t be anywhere near this crowded and since we’ve each invaded your place and yours Bev, it seems only fitting.”

“I like that idea,” chuckled Bev. “Maybe near the end of the summer when it isn’t quite as hot.”

“I think that gives everyone enough time to move their schedules around,” Richie said. “So sometime by September. And we need to have a date decided by August at the latest.”

“I like that idea,” said Ben.
Obviously, they wouldn’t be able to tell if everything would work out until the moment arrived, but it felt good already having plans with each other before having to leave again.

As the others changed into their clean clothes, Eddie did the laundry and Richie prepped a simple breakfast for them before they went to the airport. Eddie and Richie discussed if they should drop their friends off. However, even though Eddie’s car was ok, it wouldn’t fit them all. Richie suggested they all take public transportation or get a big enough cab or uber. However, Bill shook his head.

“It’s a nice thought, but I’d rather you both rest. And if you’re not driving us, no reason for you to have to pay a cab to drive you to the airport and back home again.”

Bev agreed. “We can share a cab with Mike and Bill. Both of you relax.”

“You’re sure?” asked Eddie.

“It works out better,” Ben said, “though we do appreciate you wanting to come. Don’t worry though. We’ll text you when we get to the airport.”

“And when we arrive home,” Mike said.

“Well in that case…” Richie walked over and grabbed hold of Mike who was closest. The others walked over and got in on the group hug. They didn’t say goodbye right then, still finishing their breakfast and needing to call to be picked up. When that time came though, they grabbed hold of each other and hugged again. Then Eddie and Richie walked them outside and hugged each of them individually in front of the building.

“Thank you for everything,” murmured Eddie.

“You did all the fighting,” said Mike, “but we’re always happy to help in any way we can.”

“Love you Eddie,” Bill murmured as he went in for his hug.

“Love you too,” Eddie replied.

With that, their car was there. Eddie and Richie waited until everyone was in and driving away before they went back inside. Richie led the way up the stairs as Eddie said, “I should probably call work and make sure everything is all good. I need to figure out when I should go back or if there’s any work I can get done today. And Jason said he was coming over today right—”

Richie doubled over the moment their apartment door was shut.

It hit Eddie all at once.

Of course.

Of course Richie had been trying to keep it in check for their friends. Of course he hadn’t quite let out just how hard this had all been. Once the mood had finally gotten to a pleasant feeling, he hadn’t wanted to be the one to bring it down again. He’d been trying so god damn hard to keep up the smiles and to laugh and make the others laugh. To be the funny man.

But he hadn’t fully let it out, and understandably, the emotion was so painful and volatile that now that he did, it exploded forth.

Richie stayed bent over, arms wrapped around himself as he openly sobbed, tears hitting his glass and the floor beneath. Eddie immediately walked over and wrapped his arms around him. He didn’t
try and stop him. He just pressed himself to Richie’s back so that he knew he was there. Eddie stayed as Richie’s support but let him get it out in his own time.

When the broken, gasping sobs started to ebb and the wet spot on the floor stopped getting any bigger, Eddie gently kissed the back of Richie’s neck.

“I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry,” whispered Eddie.

“S-s-sor-s—” Richie stopped, the sobs coming back like a second wave. However, it was smaller and didn’t come out quite as broken. When the noise eventually started to drift away again, he got out, “W-why are you sorry?”

“I hate how much this hurt you. And I know! I know it’s not my fault Richie. I do. But I hate seeing you in so much pain.”

Richie’s shoulders and stomach shook again. Eddie held him just a little tighter. Then Richie breathed in, too big and too quick. The sobbing picked up a bit more as Richie dropped his head. “It’s gone? P-please-c-can you-is It g-gone? C-can y-yo-y-you even kn-know?”

“It’s gone,” pressed Eddie. “I… I’m not sure there’s a way I can physically show you, but It is. Now that I’m fully aware of It, I can identify Its absence and It’s not there. It really isn’t Richie. It’s dead this time.”

Richie started to cry again even as his arms loosened slightly. He made it so Eddie could intertwine their fingers as he remained pressed to Richie’s backside. After a moment more, Richie got out, “Y-you’re not hurting again? P-please tell me you’re n-not hurt.”

“I’m not Richie. Honest.”

“B-but y-you-your chest. I can-I could f-feel it through yo-our shirt. L-last night. Thi-is morning. What—”

Eddie let out a soft sigh and gently kissed Richie’s neck again. He’d wanted to break it to him when he was in a better place, but it seemed the time was now whether he liked it or not. Eddie finally urged Richie to turn around. He only let go so he could start to pull up his shirt. “It’s ok. It is. It’s even healed.”

“B-but w-what—” Richie’s shoulders started to shake more as his eyes moved up and down the new scar that lay over Its original. “W-what did It fucking d-do to you?”

“I did it to myself,” whispered Eddie. “I had to in order to get It out. Symbolically speaking at least. I guess…I guess the actions bled into the real world.”

Richie’s fingers gently traced the scar down, his entire hand shaking as he went over the tissue. Then Richie grabbed Eddie with such force that for a second, the only thing keeping him up were Richie’s arms. Eddie steadied himself. He tangled his fingers in Richie’s hair as Richie stayed slightly bent over, face buried against Eddie’s chest. Eddie closed his eyes for a second, simply holding Richie steady. When he opened them again, three tears silently slid down his face in quick succession.

“I will do everything in my power to make sure you know I’m not leaving you. Ok?” whispered Eddie. Richie’s shoulders stopped shaking even as his tears still fell and soaked into Eddie’s shirt. “I will wake you up every day. Even when you’re away for work, on tour. I will call you. My voice will be the first thing you hear every morning. You’ll always know I’m alive and ok and you’ll always know you didn’t lose me. You got that? You’re not getting rid of me Richie. Not ever.”
A broken attempt at a laugh escaped Richie’s throat as he clung to Eddie harder.

“I love you. I love you so god damn much and you want to know what? Not even death will part that.” A thought came to Eddie. He continued with, “You wanted to know what my vows would have been if we’d done it properly? That. Not even death will part us. I will be there for every second of laughter. I will be there when you need someone to hold you up, and I know I won’t ever fall again because you’ll have me when I need that support too. I’ll be there when you’ve caught a cold and look gross and terrible. I’ll be there when you’ve made a mess in the kitchen and it looks like a hurricane has blown through. I’ll be there for all the gray hairs and each new wrinkle and problem that comes with being old. And whether we live here the rest of our lives or move, or even if we end up in a fucking nursing home decades from now, I know I’ll be ok because I’ll have you to sleep next to. Because my real home will always move with you. And I will love you through it all, even the mess, even when we’re apart, even when you somehow insist on loving an absolutely terrible sequel. I’ll love it all. I’ll love you, and you’ll never be rid of me. Not ever again. I will be your husband, to have and to hold and not even death will part that. I love you.”

Richie cried harder, even as Eddie finally encouraged him to look up.

“It’s ok Richie. It really is. And it’ll be ok for the rest of our lives.”

Eddie moved forward and gently used his sleeve to wipe at Richie’s face, cleaning up some of the tears and snot. Then he kissed him, slow and gentle. He didn’t grab and pull Richie towards him. He simply let his weight naturally keep Richie close, two pieces perfectly pressed together to form one. When they parted, Richie started to speak. However, Eddie pressed his finger to Richie’s lips. Then he gently stroked Richie’s cheek.

“It’s ok. You don’t have to say sorry to me. I said I take it all, remember? That includes even getting tears and snot all over me. I take it all. I take you.”

Tears started to fall down Richie’s cheeks again. However, finally the motion was truly softer. His breathing didn’t come in all erratic and his shoulders didn’t shake. He managed to take in a deep breath and let it all out even as the tears rolled down his cheeks. This time when Richie started to speak, Eddie let him.

“I love you too,” he said, voice hoarse and just barely wavering now. He closed his eyes, leaning forward a little. Eddie closed his eyes and rested his forehead against Richie’s. “I won’t let you go ever again.”

“I won’t let go of you,” Eddie replied. He moved back and gently brushed his lips against Richie’s nose. “Do you want to take a shower? A bath?”

Richie silently nodded.

“Let’s do that then.”

Eddie didn’t leave Richie’s side once. Though they’d had the occasional heated attempt at bathing together and there’d been one time Eddie had been running late so he had forced himself in despite Richie’s protests, this moment was far more intimate.

Eddie sat on the toilet, gently washing Richie’s hair during the bath as he leaned against the edge nearest to him. Eddie kept the motions gentle and consistent, helping Richie to find something to breath in time to. Even after Eddie washed the suds out, he kept up the soft motions of combing Richie’s wet hair with his fingers for some time until he was sure every muscle in Richie’s body had relaxed.
Then Richie finally turned his head and looked up at Eddie.

“Better?” Eddie whispered.

“Better,” Richie replied.

Eddie kissed him. “I’m going to get some tea going. Coffee’s too much for right now. You want to camp out on the couch or in bed?”

“The bed.”

“Ok. I’ll be right back.”

Eddie got up. He paused to clean Richie’s glasses for him and then went to the kitchen to heat up some water. When that was done, he took the cups back to the bedroom. Richie had already dried himself off and was putting new shorts on. Eddie put the cups on the side table and then got in, leaving a space open so Richie could crawl in and curl up around him, slightly propped up on the pillows.

As Richie got comfortable, he murmured, “This has got to be one of the shittiest mornings after a wedding ever.”

“I wouldn’t say shittiest. Just…emotional.”

Richie managed a small laugh at that. He sat up a little more when Eddie offered the cup. Richie sipped for a second and then handed it back. He said, “Sorry for-yes I know I don’t have to say sorry. Same as you. But don’t try and stop me just…still. I’m sorry I threw all that on you this morning. I was trying not to.”

“I realize that now. And of course I’ll never put you through this again, but I want you to know that you never have to hold back how you’re feeling to me. Even if you feel like crap. And the others would say the same thing too.”

“I know. But if I had broken down in front of them, they wouldn’t have left. Which would have been nice in its own right but…”

“I get it. Didn’t want to be a nuisance. Not that you would have been, but you didn’t want them missing their flight and the process of getting home to be any more difficult than it already was,” Eddie said. “I probably would have tried to do the same thing.”

“Yeah. But you? You’re ok?”

Eddie nodded. “I am now that I can hold you.”

They kissed and Richie leaned his head against him. They stayed like that for a moment before Richie murmured, “I know you do have work to check in on. You can still do that if you want to.”

“No, I was probably worrying a bit too much earlier. I can leave all work-related things for our second full day of being married. Right now, I just want to be with you.”

Richie leaned away a little and grabbed at his phone. “I’ll tell Jason to come by tomorrow then.” Richie did that and then put his phone down. He leaned back over and rested against Eddie. “I just want to do the same thing too.”

For the moment, they curled into each other.
Of course there would be a lot to deal with tomorrow. Richie and Jason would have to do damage control for the shows they’d had to cancel and then figure out how many more Richie should put on hold. It would be difficult finding a balance as too soon would be too hard on either of them, but Richie also couldn’t fully stop working either. Then there was his car and that whole police report to take care of. Which, considering how the doctors had reacted, it was hard to say how that would all go with Its influence having affected those even near Eddie.

And Eddie would have to come up with some excuse for work. He’d need to get caught up and there were personal plans to reschedule and just—

It was a lot to say for sure.

However, no matter how difficult it would be to get back into their normal lives and to have a routine again, Eddie wasn’t actively worried. They would figure everything out by each other’s side.

Eddie leaned a little more against Richie. He took up his left hand with his own. Their rings shined together before Eddie gently pulled Richie’s hand over and kissed the back of his knuckles. Even with everything they’d soon have to deal with, for the moment at least, Eddie and Richie lay together in bed with no intention of getting up anytime soon.

“I love you.”

“Love you too.”
"Currently don't know how long this will be, but it definitely won't be too long." Oh how naive I was when I first started writing this haha.

Just wanted to say a quick few words before I finally finished off this story. This is by far the longest story I have ever written. Also one of the quickest stories I've gotten out as well. That, along with the constant updating is honestly thanks to you all. Getting a chance to see just how much this story touched people and how much people enjoyed it really encouraged me to write it as quickly as possible and I'm so happy I was able to put a smile on so many faces. I know that by reading my story you guys definitely put a smile on mine.

Could I technically still continue this? Would some people probably want me to? Yeah, totally. However, again I want to end this on a high note. I also don't want to risk ending this in a random or weird place because my muse completely leaves me and I just stop writing. And all the major problems the characters had to overcome have been settled so it does make sense to end this sooner rather than later.

I will say I'd like to return to the It fandom again, at least once more, but I also have to say there's definitely going to be a break. At least for a little bit! I have essays and tests and work pilling up and all my free time is getting turned to playing Death Stranding now lol.

Again though, this is one of the most popular stories I've ever written, it's the longest, and I'd definitely put this story in my personal top ten as far as it being some of my best writing. All that, including the dedication I put into this story is thanks to you guys. I just want you to know that. So thank you again and again.

Now, without further adieu <3

If there was anything amusing that could be found from everything that happened, it was all of Eddie’s co-workers and Richie’s acquaintances that were totally shocked by their sudden and unexpected marriage. After all, they hadn’t even had the rings long. Some people hadn’t noticed them, and those that had clearly expected some announcement for a wedding to occur in about a year, six months at the earliest.

At least Jason hadn’t been surprised. He’d honestly expected the moment Richie had asked in that comedy club that they would go and get married that night, rings or no rings. On the other hand, CC had been aghast. She couldn’t believe she’d missed out.

“And you didn’t invite me?” she had cried.

“It was a very quick affair. We didn’t even prepare vows or anything,” Richie had replied.

“Well if you ever renew your vows, you have no excuses that next time. I expect to be there for it!”
Eddie and Richie had both rolled their eyes at that. It was all meant in good fun, though they did promise that if they ever did something more official like a vow renewal, then they’d make sure to invite her that time. Otherwise though, after the initial shock most had, congratulations were always given. Eddie and Richie went from being seen as a couple to being seen as husbands. Otherwise though, nothing changed.

After their wedding, Eddie had gone back to work more quickly than Richie. It made sense. He didn’t have to travel, and he and Richie could still see each other every day. As for Eddie’s explanation for suddenly leaving work for several days, everyone else brushed it under the rug. Jordan thought it had to do with his falling asleep and chastised him for not taking better care of himself. Otherwise though, he was welcomed back. Thankfully, his department was also competent enough that there wasn’t a mountain of backlog for him to deal with when he had returned. He managed to fall back in like nothing had even happened.

With Richie though, they had extensive conversations in the following weeks. It was clear one of the reasons he wasn’t ready to leave was because he didn’t want to leave if Eddie broke. And to be fair, Eddie did wonder if he would have his time too. Maybe something would just set him off and he’d have to lean over and cry his eyes out as well. However, that feeling never came.

He assumed it was because he’d eventually become aware of the situation and had some control. The others had held no control, Richie most of all. But Eddie managed to move past everything relatively quickly. He was ready to start the rest of his life. Richie was a different matter though. Eventually over dinner at home, Eddie gently brought the topic up again.

“Have you and Jason thought about you going back to work yet?”

“Not right now. I mean, it’s only been a few weeks—”

“It’s getting close to a month Richie.”

“Well when you put it in those terms, everything seems longer—”

“Richie.”

His shoulders sunk and Eddie could tell that he was dialing back the humor and sarcasm. Eddie put his plate down and wrapped an arm around Richie’s.

“I’m not going to disappear because you travel to the east coast.”

“I know. I just…what if—”

“I’ll be ok. I will.” Eddie tried to think about a way to make this easier and added, “What if I go with you? I use my weekend and my work day at home, maybe ask off for one or two more days if possible, and I spend them all with you. Just until you get comfortable. Do you think that might help?”


“You guess? Or do you think this might honestly help?”

“Help,” Richie amended. “I just hate the idea of you coming with me and then leaving again. I just…I can’t lose you again Eddie—”

“Hey. You never lost me. I’m still right here. And you won’t ever lose me. I’ll make sure of that. Jason even promised he’d drag my ass out of the afterlife if it was necessary.”
Richie unexpectedly laughed at that. “Did he now?”

Eddie nodded. “He refuses to deal with your depressed ass. And hey! Jason will be traveling with you. So you won’t be alone. And since you’ll be on the east coast, you can find a show that works for Bev and Ben to come see. Spend at least a day with them. And you can keep your promise about getting them front seats. I bet seeing them will ease any underlying anxiety. Yeah?”

“Not a bad idea honestly.”

“Of course it’s not. It’s my idea.”

Now Richie really laughed, shoving Eddie just a bit. “Ok, ok. Just…give me a few days to figure everything out with Jason. I’ll tell you as soon as possible so you can ask off for a bit of time.”

“Sounds good,” Eddie replied.

And like that, Richie finally managed to go back to work. As promised, Eddie went with Richie for almost his whole first week. CC of course took care of Eduardo during that time. It was enjoyable being able to mess around, have a nice hotel room all to themselves and have almost no obligations. Eddie went to every show Richie did that week and he could tell that actually being there helped Richie ease into his set again, find his funny bone so to speak.

Of course, Eddie did have to leave to go back to work sooner rather than later. However, by the time he left, he felt much better about Richie staying on tour now.

As they kissed outside the airport, Richie murmured, “And I’ll still have the occasional weekend I can fly back in and see you. And it’s really not that long if you—”

“Richie. It’ll be ok,” Eddie promised. He gave him another small kiss on the nose. “I’ll call you every morning. Got it?”

Richie softened just a little. “Not if I call you first.”

“See? That’s the attitude I want to hear. I’ll be ok and you’ll be back home soon. Promise.”

“Promise,” agreed Richie.

They kissed once more and with that, Eddie flew back alone.

The first day was the hardest. Even after Eddie had tried to ease Richie into it, even with him having Jason with him, he still called the moment Eddie was off the plane. Richie just had to make sure Eddie was ok. And Eddie hadn’t chastised him of course. If anything, he’d thanked him for wanting to make sure he got home safely. Soon, Richie’s worry would drift away, but until then, Eddie continued to be as gentle as possible. He also kept his promise. He called every time. And Richie answered, even when it was clear he was maybe a little hungover from drinking with Jason and staying up all night.

And with that, their life and routine really began to settle. They kept in contact with their closest friends of course, Eddie continued enjoying his work relationships, some he slowly came to call friends, and Richie managed to begin enjoying his work again. Still, even after everything, Eddie thought one last gesture would be appreciated.

He’d been talking with Mike and Bill fairly regularly to try and figure out when everyone was coming down. If they could all do a group chat, then they did, but more often than not Mike and Bill acted as the mediators between Bev and Ben, and Eddie and Richie.
When they had an idea for a date, Eddie also ran his own idea by Bill.

“So, what do you think?” finished Eddie.

“I like it. A real vacation is definitely what you two need. And I know Richie will appreciate it.”

“I figured as much, but I did want a second opinion. And you still think that’s a good place?”

“Well you said Richie hadn’t been there. And it seems like a good mix of nature and city. Since it’ll still be summer, Richie won’t complain about the cold either.”

Eddie laughed. “That’s true. And then afterwards—”

“He can come down and complain all he wants about the sand,” laughed Bill. “I definitely think it’s a great idea.”

“Thanks. So, any more boating accidents?”

“Not of late. I think I’m finally getting used to being on the water,” Bill replied. “Though only because I have Mike with me too. By myself, I would be a wreck.”

“You would somehow succeed in stranding yourself in a pond of two feet of water.”

“Ok, I don’t think it would be that bad.”

They both laughed, talking a bit more before they ended the call so Eddie could finalize some plans. As far as talking to Richie about it went, Eddie just made sure Richie had a passport—which he did thanks to him somewhat regularly doing tours in Toronto—and that his current schedule ended when Eddie suspected it did.

Otherwise, Eddie kept Richie in the dark until he was coming home for a much longer break in work. Eddie helped him unpack as Richie yawned and stretched.

“It’s a good thing everything worked out like it did. I’d hate to go off tour and straight into the sandy hellhole that is Mike and Bill’s home.”

Eddie rolled his eyes. “Are you going to make jokes like that the entire time?”

“If I get stung by a fucking jellyfish, I’m gone.”

“You’re not going to get stung.”

“Says you! I have a terrible track record.”

“Oh huh. But you are glad you have a break before then?”

“Yes of course!” Richie wrapped his arms around Eddie with a teasing grin. “I get you all to myself before we have to worry about keeping it down.”

Eddie hit him in the shoulder.

“Ow!”

“Ow away. You try any shit while we’re sleeping possibly right next to Mike and Bill or Bev and Ben, and I will kill you.”
“I’m willing to risk my life.”

“Ha ha,” Eddie sarcastically replied. “We’ll just have to get all that out of your system before we go to Florida. Maybe even stay holed up in a hotel room.”

“A hotel room huh? What have you been planning?”

“Well, you’re the one who first said the word didn’t really fit Ben and Bev what with its connotation so let’s just say I planned a vacation for us right before we got a few days to visit Mike and Bill.”

“You planned—wait seriously?” Richie shook his head. “And you—wow! Where?” Then a more flirtatious look crossed Richie’s face again. “Or are you going to blindfold me and drag me along?”

“It’s Quebec,” Eddie deadpanned with a roll of his eyes, throwing that whole idea out the window. “You said it was one of those places you’d just never gotten a chance to visit. I looked up some other locations too, but that city was closer and seemed to have what we’d be looking for. And Quebec seems like it might even be an interesting enough city to convince us to leave the hotel room more than once. Also, it has some great restaurants.”

Richie grinned. “I love it already.”

“Really?”

“I mean, I would have loved anything you planned short of going to some sandy hellhole.”

“So Florida.”

“And Death Valley. I feel like that would be an equally shitty vacation. Or the middle of the Sahara. But Florida is worse than the Sahara I’m pretty sure.”

They both laughed before Richie pulled Eddie into a slow and gentle kiss. When they parted, Eddie added, “And CC will just take all of Eduardo’s stuff to her apartment and take care of him while we’re gone. And obviously I have work off. And I’ve got the plane tickets, the hotel, everything.”

“Really everything, huh? This is going to make it pretty damn hard to one-up you.”

“You don’t have to try to outdo me,” chuckled Eddie.

“Oh no, I totally do now. At some point, I will plan the most perfect vacation and I’ll even blindfold you so you don’t know where we are until we finally get there.”

“I will not let you anywhere near me with a blindfold.”

“I accept the challenge.”

Eddie rolled his eyes, only imagining the antics they would get into when that day came.

“So when are we flying out?”

“Day after tomorrow. Didn’t want to force you onto another plane that quickly.”

“Thank you.”

“But I do have work tomorrow.”

Richie whined.
“Don’t worry. Just one more day and then you’ll have me all to yourself,” smiled Eddie with another small kiss against his lips. “And I’ll have you all to myself too.”

“I like the sound of that.” And with those teasing words, Richie pushed back, guiding Eddie to the bed.

“Hmm, you still need to finish unpacking,” Eddie murmured against Richie’s lips.

“I’ll do it tomorrow while you’re at work.”

Well, that was all the convincing Eddie needed.

There first time together after the last battle with It had been a slow one. Richie had at first just pressed his face to Eddie’s chest. Then, ever so slowly, he had trailed kisses down the scar. He’d murmured, “I love every part of you.”

“I already know that,” Eddie had whispered. “But I still love every second of what you’re doing right now.”

“Good. I’ve only ever wanted to make sure you were happy.”

“Except for when you’re relentlessly teasing me about something.”

And with the help of a little humor, Richie had laughed and had finally stopped being so damn careful with Eddie.

Now, there was no hint of trying to be careful, especially as it was eventually Eddie who flipped Richie onto his back and forced him into the pillows.

As planned, the next day Eddie ran off to work to get as much done as he could. Richie stayed home, doing laundry and tidying up since he knew Eddie would appreciate it when they got back from the long trip. CC also came over and Richie got everything packed up for Eduardo.

He helped her downstairs with the bearded dragon and all his amenities. As CC got Eduardo secure in her car, she turned to Richie and smiled.

“I’m proud of you. You know that?”

“Proud of me? Shouldn’t I be saying that to you? You’ve come a long way. Even doing a bit of traveling yourself with your own tour.”

“Well obviously you should be proud of me.”

Richie laughed.

“I’ve been fucking nailing show after show. But no, I mean it Richie. You’re happy. It can be really hard to get to being happy, but I’m glad you’ve succeeded.”

“Me fucking too.”

They gave each other a quick hug and as CC pulled back, she added, “And good luck after your whole vacation thing. You know, in Florida. Try not to get stabbed with a needle or anything like that.”

“Thank you! No one else seems to take my concerns seriously.”
They laughed before CC got into her car and drove off. Richie went back up to finish cleaning before Eddie got home. That night, they went to bed early so they could catch their flight on time. Then the following morning they flew to Quebec with everything they would need for that trip and for their three days at Mike and Bill’s.

Getting to see the city as they drove to their hotel definitely solidified the idea in Eddie’s head that they needed to really explore the city at least once. However, he’d leave that for another time as the moment they dropped their bags onto the floor of their hotel room, Richie was picking him up and dropping him on the bed.

“That your one time act of dominance on this trip?” teased Eddie.

“More like the only time for the next two months. Phew, my bones are not going to thank me for that.”

Eddie laughed as Richie rolled off him. Eddie easily moved in tandem. He straddled Richie, slowly drawing a kiss from him before moving down his neck and then pushing up Richie’s shirt. Richie propped himself up just enough to get his shirt off so he could throw it on the floor. Eddie’s lips went back to Richie’s neck, slowly going back up before gently pulling on Richie’s earlobe. Richie arched underneath him, mouth slack and shoulders tense.

“Fucking hell. I do not want to leave this hotel room ever.”

“Hey, I have some pretty cool spots lined up for us tomorrow or maybe the day after,” Eddie defended.

“Screw the plans. I want you to fuck me in just about every corner of this room.”

Eddie’s cheeks turned red as he laughed good and hard before managing to lean down and give Richie a quick kiss. Against his lips, Eddie softly said, “What makes you think we can’t get that done today?”

“Today?! You realize I’m not fucking eighteen anymore right—oh god!” Richie let out a long groan as Eddie slowly grinded against him.

It was just enough so that Richie could ride out the noise in the back of his throat, hitting the crescendo before the sound slowly fell down again. Eddie was fully grinning as he said, “From what I already feel, could have fooled me.”

“Ok wise ass,” laughed Richie. He pushed himself up, pulling Eddie into another long, drawn out kiss as Eddie readjusted himself so he was wrapped around Richie and basically sitting in his lap.

“Listen, the rest of today, we’ll stay in here. The only reason we’ll open our door is for room service,” Eddie whispered.

“Now that sounds like a fucking plan.”

“But tomorrow we’re doing some sightseeing. Deal?”

“Only if you fuck me in the big ass bathtub the day after.”

“Deal.”

They both laughed together, even as they started up another rushed and sloppy kiss, the rest of the clothes quickly getting thrown off and strewn across the floor.
It was exactly what they both needed.

Admittedly, despite Eddie’s intentions, the majority of their time was probably spent in the hotel room. However, there was the occasional adventure outwards, usually with the intention of food behind it. The way things went, Eddie still saw it as a win. And if anything, it made him pretty positive he wanted to do this at least once a year. Just one good week, maybe more, and nothing but themselves to get wrapped up into.

He didn’t even have to throw the idea by Richie to know he approved of it.

So in the almost Autumn air, they walked around the city, going on little adventures as they usually ate on the go except for two fancier restaurants that they went to. Otherwise they got breakfast at the hotel since it had an actually nice restaurant built into it. And all other times they stayed in the hotel room. Occasionally they watched a movie, but more often than not things escalated at one point or another.

On their final night, they were wrapped up in each other’s arms, the only thing on being a blanket thrown over them and the rings on their fingers.

“You know, Jason talked about doing a more extensive tour list in Canada. Or even the UK next year. You should ask off,” Richie suggested. “We can make it another mini vacation.”

“I like that. Where else would you want to go? If it wasn’t touring centric and just us traveling?”

“Hmm, anywhere outside the US. I feel like I’ve seen everywhere twice,” said Richie.

“So not the US and preferably somewhere warm,” chuckled Eddie. “Got it.”

“And I would rather have indoor plumbing.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Eddie replied. He kissed Richie, their lips slowing opening. The kiss deepened for a second longer before Eddie pulled back and said, “We can plan it together. Or the next trip can be yours and you can try and one-up this one.”

Richie laughed. “Kind of hard to surprise you if you already know there’s going to be a trip.”

“I’m sure you’ll figure out a way to do it. But no blindfolds!”

“You’re no fun.”

“No fun?” Eddie pushed Richie’s back to the bed. He moved on top of him, their chests resting against each other. He kissed at Richie’s collarbone before gently focusing on one spot and sucking.

“If…ah. If this is what happens every time I question how entertaining you may or may not be… well…”

“May or may not be?” Eddie rolled his hips against him.

“Oh fuck me! I stand very corrected. But I think you’re going to have to keep giving me proof.”

“Will I now?”

“Oh yeah. I need tons of evidence to back up how fun you are.”

Eddie laughed, pushing himself up and into another kiss with Richie. He was only too happy to oblige.
And with that, their personal vacation came to an end and they finally took the long flight down to visit Mike and Bill’s place for the first time.

The slightly more Fall clothes got traded for shorts and t-shirts as Mike met them at the airport. After hugging him, they asked where Bill was and Mike explained, “He’s been on the phone with his publicist all morning. Hopefully the meeting will be done by the time we drive back, but we agreed I’d come grab you two and he would drive over and pick up Bev and Ben when their flight landed.”

“They’re getting in at about five, right?” asked Eddie.

“Yes, which the traffic will be hell, but I figured we could end up meeting them for dinner somewhere.”

Richie rolled his eyes. “Let me guess, seafood.”

Eddie nudged him. “You like seafood! You’re just complaining because we’re in Florida.”

“I would never!”

“More like always,” snorted Mike. He picked up one of their bags. “And for the record, the restaurant is a pretty nice steak place. Now come on. The car’s this way.”

As they piled in, Mike asked about their own vacation. Eddie and Richie talked as much as they could about it. However, they quickly realized there weren’t that many stories they could tell short of making it, as Richie put it, “Just telling you a straight up porno.”

Since Eddie was in the front, he reached down and released the latch on the seat so it slammed back and hit Richie in the knees.

“Ah fuck! That actually hurt,” groaned Richie.

“Good.”

“Listen,” Mike tried, “all I’m going to say is that you’re washing your own sheets while you’re staying with us if that’s the page we’re on.”

Eddie’s face went beet red as Richie laughed good and hard. Richie unbuckled and shifted over. It was both to give himself more leg room and also so he could lean up in between Eddie and Mike.

“We’ll take you up on that offer.”

“No we fucking won’t!” Eddie cried as he grabbed Richie’s face and shoved him back.

“Sometimes I wonder how you live with each other,” laughed Mike.

“With quips and sarcasm,” grinned Richie. “And very thick walls. Let met tell you, we probably would have had an upset neighbor by now if it weren’t for those walls because Eddie sure as shit likes to—”

“Mike, please take a right turn. Right now. Straight into the ocean. I think that’s the only way to salvage this trip.”

“Let me just give Bill one last call then. I’m sure he’d like to know that the reason we’re late returning home is because we had to introduce Richie to some coral.”

Eddie at least laughed at that, even if his face was still very red. It didn’t look like it was going to fade any time soon.
“I’m just saying,” said Richie. 

“You’re impossible. You know that?” asked Eddie. 

“And yet somehow you still love me.”

“God knows why,” Eddie said with a roll of his eyes, even as he leaned back and gave Richie a quick kiss on the cheek since he was leaning forward again.

The drive continued without much more fanfare and Richie mostly kept himself in check. Though another comment had Eddie trying reach back so he could hit him again. By this point Richie had come to expect it though and expertly dodged out of the way.

When they got to Mike’s home, Richie actually whistled as they got out of the car.

“I’m a bit surprised,” admitted Mike. “I would have expected a shriek of horror or something.”

“Well you’re not right on the fucking beach so no sand which is chill.”

Mike rolled his eyes.

“Also, I know you said you had two floors but damn. Definitely bigger than I thought. I guess you took my promise to use your place as a hub to heart, huh?”

“I did not buy this house so you could crash at it every other month,” Mike said. “I got it because I liked it, it’s very nice, and the price I got for it was pretty lucky.”

“Not built on an ancient burial ground or anything right?” asked Eddie.

“Or skeletons in the attic?”

“Trust me, I checked,” laughed Mike. “Double checked in fact. By the end of the whole thing, I knew more about the house than the real-estate lady.”

They walked in through the front door. The house had clearly been renovated and was in very good condition. However, Eddie would have guessed that the design had been based on older homes. Or maybe this was a much older house that had just been renovated to the max. The front hall went straight through and Eddie imagined that on a perfect day, they didn’t even have to turn the air on.

Eddie glanced into several of the rooms they passed before going up the stairs. Considering Mike and Bill had been living here for almost a year now, the place was fully furnished and lived in. There were knickknacks all over the place, Eddie spotted Mike’s fishing equipment in the living room, and unsurprisingly there were books absolutely everywhere. Clearly despite retiring early, Mike had basically decided to make his own library in his own home.

“Since you got here first, you get the bedroom. We’ll set Bev and Ben up in the living room,” said Mike as they set the bags on the guest bed. Mike then led them back to a room on the second floor they’d just passed. Mike lightly knocked and pushed it open. Bill was finishing up on the phone. He grinned at seeing them, holding up his finger and then quickly going, “Ok, I really have to go now. Yes really. Like three days really. I won’t answer if you call during that time. I mean it. Ok. Ok I’ll talk to you on Tuesday. Yes, that works.”

Bill rolled his eyes. He left his phone on the counter after ending the conversation and then quickly walked over to Eddie and Richie. They all hugged each other and as Richie pulled back, Richie added, “This is definitely your office. Looks fucking nice professor book.”
“I don’t know rather to say thanks or to wince at that horrible nickname you made up.”

Richie just grinned right back.

“Are you two hungry?” asked Mike. “We can fix you something up in the kitchen and then figure out the game plan for later.”

“Sounds good to me,” said Eddie.

They all headed back down, this time Mike and Bill pointing out the rooms they passed. They also sometimes paused to point at some small figure or even pick it up, mentioning a quick story behind the objects or mentioning which of them had bought the object for the other. In the kitchen, Mike and Bill started pulling out everything for sandwiches as Richie said, “Oh yeah. Ben and I are going to have the time of our lives in here.”

“You’re cleaning up any mess you make,” Bill warned.

“I’m down with that. We’re going to make some real food here.”

Mike just shook his head as he set out plates for everyone. “So, Ben and Bev should be getting here in about three or so hours. I figured we would let you two rest, unless if you want to do something. We can figure something out I guess. Or we could watch a movie. But later as Bill picks them up, we’ll meet them at the restaurant. Tomorrow we can walk around the city. And either later that day or the day after we can go to the beach.”

Richie let out a large groan. They all rolled their eyes.

“Did you experience some type of traumatic event involving sand that you just won’t tell us about?” asked Eddie. Then he suddenly held up a warning finger. “And don’t you dare quote the Prequels at me again! You cannot use Anakin as your reason for hating sand.”

“Well he wasn’t wrong.”

“We’re going to the beach Richie,” Bill said. “And you’re going to enjoy it.”

“Oh really? You can’t know that.”

“Of course he knows you’ll enjoy it,” defended Mike. “You’ll love it in fact. And you want to know why? Because we’ll all be there together.”

“Well aren’t you just a sap.”

“I accept that title.”

They all laughed as Bill finished setting out the ingredients. He then leaned against the counter. “Well because of that reasoning, you can’t fault us for any of our plans. You’re going to have the time of your lives with us.”

“Really? Because-ow!”

Eddie elbowed Richie in the side. He gave him a quick kiss to make up for it but focused back on Bill and Mike. Even with all his complaining, Eddie knew Richie didn’t mean it. At least not most of it. Eddie imagined they would have the time of their lives with everyone together. The whole trip was made even better because Eddie also knew it wouldn’t be their last. With a teasing glance Richie’s way, Eddie said, “Don’t worry. Just ignore anything else Richie says. It sounds perfect.”
And it was.

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