Summary

Does Robbe and Sander's relationship survive into adulthood.

This fic takes place in two simultaneously timelines: the past and the present.

The present occurs in one entire day. Both timelines are completely out of chronological order. Everything is in clips. You can be dropped in at anytime of the day in any timeline. So clip by clip you will need to piece together what happen to Sander & Robbe and why the present looks the way it does and what happened in the past that got them there.

This love story is a journey. So be prepared.

In the words of one of our Even's. It's a complicated love story between complicated people.

Notes

Read on this will be multiple chapters with changing pov's, this is inspired by the transitions of Mandag 11:03. This is very much still a depiction of Sander and Robbe's love story but remember Sander and Robbe aren't teenagers anymore. They grew up, got jobs, grew into different people, moved to different cities and maybe grew apart..... or maybe they didn't ?????

Italics is the Past. If not, it's August 15th at any point in the day I chose to drop you into.
Autumn always brought along rich tones of vanilla, cinnamon and all-spice into Robbe’s landscape. Robbe loved the autumn colors, shades of sun-burnt orange, vermilion and chartreuse sprinkle across the leaves that littered the pavement on his route to work. Its like he could taste the change of seasons ahead but it also gave him cause for concern. A visitation session was surely on the horizon. Sander was like a rolex watch when it came to anything Bowie related. Robbe was sure that cat was the love of Sander’s life. He found Bowie abandoned on the streets of Antwerp as a kitten and saved him from certain death. Robbe can still recall the day he came through the door with something nuzzled inside his leather jacket.

“Sander, we can’t keep it.” Robbe retorted as Sander gently cradled the kitty against his chest rocking it back and forth. “We just got this apartment I don’t even know if were allowed pets. I’m slammed at university, your never here, and your always at work or at the studio”.

Robbe knew this discussion was pointless. Sander just kept pouting at all of Robbe’s logical reasoning, flashing his puppy dog eyes at him and holding up the tiny kitten to Robbe’s face as a defense. Robbe just rolled his eyes and threw his hands up in defeat.

“Ugh… okay …. Fine. God I hate you sometimes Driesen.”

“Love you too” Sander replied, pressing a soft kiss on Robbe’s jawline with a victorious smile plastered across his face.

“So, what are we going to name it?” Robbe asked looking down at the tiny creature who was literally the size of Sander’s palm.

Sander frowned. He almost looked offended by Robbe’s question.

“Bowie, of course. I mean his all black with a white lightening bolt on his belly. He's obviously a Bowie.”

Robbe found Sander’s response endearing. So much so he didn’t have the heart to tell him that that white striped looked nothing like a lightning bolt but he went with it anyways.

“Bowie, it is.” Robbe said as he leaned into Sander’s chest to pet the tiny kitten. Sander immediately cautioning him before he even laid a hand on the cat.

“Go slow, his sensitive okay”. Robbe couldn’t help but smile at his boyfriend’s protective reflexes.

There it was. The text Robbe had been dreading since the animal clinic called him earlier in the week to confirm Bowie’s appointment.

**Taking Bowie to the vet on Saturday. I should get to Brussels around 7 tonight. Does that work for you? - Sander**

**7 works. - Robbe**

Robbe grunted and slid down his desk chair.

“What’s up with you?” Lia asked.
“Oh nothing” Robbe quickly perked up and sat up on his chair. He didn’t want to be caught sulking at work.

“Do you think you can have the club estimation ready for next Wednesday?” Lia asked.

Robbe was the youngest architect at his firm. So he always felt like he was slightly faking it or suffering from imposter syndrome. He had only just completed his certification and was lucky enough that the firm he apprenticed at for two years offered him a full time job upon graduation.

Lia was the second youngest she had graduated a year earlier. They spent a lot of time together dealing with all the young trendy clients who wanted to do renovations on shoestring budgets.

“What time is it?” Lia asked Robbe.

“5:21” Robbe shouted back.

“On a Friday” Lia scoffed. “Let’s get out of here. I need a drink after this week.”

Robbe nodded his head towards the door and both of them sprung up off their chairs collecting their paperwork and turning off their computers.

Robbe began to take off his shirt and tie exposing his black tshirt underneath. He hated his nine to five attire but the firm had a strict dress code policy. Shirt and trousers.

“I hate this tie” Robbe grunted loudly as he forcefully ripped it off himself.

“Well you wouldn’t have to wear it if you weren’t so damn cool” Lia teased him.

“Firstly Thibaut is over exaggerating they are not neck tattoos. You can barely see them.” Robbe dramatically threw his hands up.

“I mean you can totally see them…..what are they again?” Lia asked sarcastically.

“Shut up” Robbe started pushing Lia towards the door.

Grabbing his black jacket and man bag off the coat rack on the other side of the office practically skipping towards Lia who was leaning against the door frame waiting for Robbe to hurry up.

As he got to her she held her hand against his chest examining the three tiny icons placed directly at the bottom of his throat underneath his adams apple.

“A lightning bolt, a half moon and…..”

Robbe finished her sentence for her “ The other half of a yin yang. The white half.”

“How hipster of you” Lia said curiously.

“I guess, or better yet the mistakes of a misspent youth.” Robbe smugly replied.

“Misspent youth???” Lia laughed out. “Robbe your only twenty five”.

Robbe rolled his eyes he felt like he was thirty five sometimes. “Almost twenty six for your information. Come on now, I need a beer” he grabbed onto Lia’s hand and started dragging her out the door.

“We aren’t going to Belgica?” Lia shouted back to him as they walked down the street.
“Why not?” Robbed asked confused.

“Because your too pretty for your own good Robbe and we spend half the night fighting off every gay boy in there trying to get your attention.”

“Stop it Lia.”

“It’s true Robbe. You got that whole rebel rebel graduated up skater boy vibe and that damn mop of hair. Your like a billboard for shampoo or something. Plus your single.”

Robbe was blushing. Lia was too sweet she always made him feel special in her own teasing way. She was like the big sister he never had.

“Ok you choose” Robbe surrender.

“Noir it is” Lia responded.

Robbe looked at his phone and checked the time 5:42.

Robbe liked Lia but he didn’t want her privy to his messy love life. She had already lived through Robbe and Lucas’s break up.

Did she really need to know anymore about him.

Robbe paused for a moment and thought fuck it.

Meet me at Bar Noir at 7. -Robbe

As Robbe reached over the sink to grab some paper towels he simultaneously ran his right hand through his hair and looked up into the mirror. His eyes inadvertently darted towards the text peeking out underneath the sleeve of his tshirt. He inhaled sharply vividly recalling the memory of his nineteen year self play fighting with Sander because he wanted to see it.

“Show me, I know you got another one” Sander walked around his boyfriend inspecting Robbe’s body contemplating which part of him to undress first. As he slowly began tugging at his hoodie a huge cheshire grin appeared across Robbe’s face.

“Got him” Sander thought. He finally managed to get Robbe’s hoodie off when he saw the cling film wrapped around Robbe’s right bicep. Sander grabbed Robbe’s right wrist turning it upwards to face him and lifting it slightly to uncover the text on Robbe’s inner arm. It was a simple three word phrase but it was “their” phrase and what Robbe repeated to Sander when things got overwhelming for him. In a slightly hushed voice Sander read the phrase out loud “minuut per minuut”.

Robbe broke out of his daze. Pulling himself out of the memory.

Robbe headed back out the bathroom into the boisterous Friday night afterwork bar crowd.

Another shot of whiskey? Lia shouted from the bar.

“No, no” Robbe was signaling to her. He wanted to make sure he was somewhat sober for his impending meet up with Sander. They hadn’t seen one another since Chernobyl at the beginning of the summer.

Robbe snaked through the crowd till he reached Lia at the bar. They stood shoulder to shoulder as
she knocked back her shot and chased it down with some beer.

“You should know my ex is probably going to show up here any minute now”. Robbe swiftly mentioned.

“You and Lucas are talking again?” Lia said with optimism in her voice.

Robbe quickly broke eye contact and shook his head. It still stung to hear Lucas’s name. It had been a few months but everything was still a bit raw for him.

“No the other one.” Lia instantly scowled at Robbe’s omission.

Robbe jokingly tapped her shoulder with the back of his hand as they walked towards a bar table with their beers in hand “come on don’t do that… you don’t even know him”.

“I don’t need to know him, I know his type.” Lia shouted over the crowd as she scooted herself onto a bar stool.

“Extremely good looking” Robbe acknowledged that as Lia counted Sander’s qualities off with her fingers.

“Mysterious but in that deeply troubled kind of way” Lia formed a peace sign with her hands at her second observation.

“Mindblowing sex” Lia held three fingers up towards Robbe’s face now.

“Oh and let me guess” Lia leaned into Robbe’s face real closely. “He broke up with you?”

Robbe chuckled “You know me too well Lia”.

“No I don’t. Like I said I know the type” She stated as she chugged down more of her beer.

“Speak of the devil”. Robbe gestured towards the door.

Lia looked up wide eye. Robbe was used to this reaction. Years of seeing others getting beguiled by Sander’s beauty.

His lunar white hair a relic of the past. Sander was a brunette now. His natural copper tone brown hair framed his perfectly chiseled face. A jawline for days.

“Oh now I get it. I would have chernobyl(d) with him too”. Lia said a little too enthusiastically never taking her eyes off Sander as he spotted Robbe and started walking over to them.

Lia broke her gaze and quickly looked up and down Robbe’s body. “So what is your dick made out of gold or something” Lia questioned Robbe.

Robbe scoffed. “What”

“I mean you obviously attract a type. Smoking hot with pretty eyes” leaning her body slightly towards Robbe and opening her hand up like she was begging for Robbe to tell her his secret.

Sander reached their table.

Lia let out a barely audible “God I wish my exes looked like yours” as she raised her glass of beer to her mouth.
“Hey” Sander said as he took off his leather jacket exposing his arms covered in intricate tattoos sliding onto the opposing bar stool across from Robbe. The table was one of those cylinder bar tops that had Robbe and Sander awkwardly rubbing shoulder to shoulder both looking strait on towards Lia.

Sander looked at Robbe for a second too long waiting for him to introduce him to his friend.

Robbe’s mind finally caught up with his manners.

“Lia this is Sander, Sander this is Lia. We work together.” Sander reached out to shake Lia’s hand.

“Nice to meet you” Sander responded.

“We’re just going to finish up our drinks and then we can head out” Robbe explained to Sander.

“Yeah that’s fine. Gives me time to roll” as he pulled out rolling paper out of his back pocket and placed it on the bar table.

“How was the driv...?” unbeknownst to Robbe, Lia abruptly cut him out of his own conversation. “You drove here?” she questioned Sander. Sander nodded. Her eager curiosity getting the best of her. “Where from?”

“Antwerp, I live there” Sander responded flatly. He could tell Robbe’s friend was a little curious about him. God knows what Robbe had told her about him.

“What are you doing in Brussels?” Lia questioned some more.

Sander attempting to look busy as he rolled a joint.

Sander hated people trying to figure him out. He was the private type didn't like to give strangers to many details about himself but this was Robbe’s friend so he had to play nice.

Sander rested his right forearm against the table as he sprinkle tobacco onto the rolling paper.

That’s when he noticed Robbe’s friend attentively examining the tattoo on his wrist.

“It's a constellations.” Sander responded in a curt tone.

“Yeah I know what it is” Lia explained. “I see it everyday. It's the same one Robbe has on his wrist right?”

Robbe’s eyes found Sander’s. Sander smirked back at him.

Robbe suddenly turning red at Lia’s discovery.

Sander finished rolling his joint licking it together. When he shifted his body towards Lia.

Robbe thought to himself “here we go”. He had seen this typical Sander performance before fueled with charm and bravato.

“Yeah it's one of mine” Sander shot a flirty smile at Lia as he stuck the joint behind his ear.

“I mean the design of course, not the person.” Sander winked making Lia giggle like a teenage girl.

Sander leaned straight into her personal space. Making her slightly pull back. Sander was making her nervous.
“If your interested I have a tattoo shop in Antwerp I could ink you sometime. You can get this exact tattoo or something personalized from me to you.”

Sander slowly pulled away from Lia’s orbit leaving her slightly flushed.

Robbe chuckled a little to loudly. Sander shot him a boyish grin in return. Well aware that Robbe knew what game he was playing.

Robbe found these exchanges very amusing. It took Sander a mere 5 minutes to get his coworker from denouncing him to having her completely giddy and wrapped around his little finger.

When Robbe was younger these interactions use to really bother him. Make him feel insecure like Sander could get anyone he wanted what was he doing with Robbe.

But now it was just amusing to Robbe. It solidified what Robbe already knew which was no one really knew the real Sander. What Lia was seeing now was Sander peacocking at his best.

Lia broke out of her spell as she fumbled through her words a little and stated. “I think I want something custom. It’d be weird if we all had identical tattoo’s?”

“Oh there not identical” Sander stated as he grabbed Robbe’s beer off the table and took a large gulp into his mouth. Robbe gawked at him unimpressed.

Can you spot the difference? Sander suddenly took a hold of Robbe’s hand and slammed both their forearms onto the table towards Lia direction.

Robbe’s coworker leaned in super closely to examine their forearms as their hands were clasped together.

It didn’t take long for Lia to uncover what made each tattoo unique. Each forearm had a perfectly placed red planet in the middle of it (maybe Mars) with an orbital belt surrounding it. There was a moon and stars and another distance planet in the background (maybe Saturn). There was one thing that looked out of place but also really beautiful. A large blossoming tree was growing out of the large center planet. There was also some cursive text placed horizontally on both Robbe and Sander’s wrist. Lia recited the text from left to right it started from Robbe wrist “All the way” and ended on Sander’s wrist “or no way”.

Lia’s brow furrowed. As she looked at both males. “I don’t get it, what does it mean?”

Sander finally spoke up locking Robbe into his glare as the words slowly dripped out of his mouth. “All the way or no way”.

Robbe let go of Sander’s hand almost violently and spoke. It felt like he had kept quiet throughout Lia and Sander’s entire conversation. Like he just disappeared for a moment.

Robbe shot Lia a calculated smile.

“It doesn’t mean anything. Just something we use to say to one another when we were younger.”

Robbe began to get up and collect his jacket. Obviously implying that this little meetup was now over. It surprised Lia, Robbe was never this brash, almost rude. Lia was about to make some silly joke about ruining the night when Robbe sensed it and he did something he only ever did with clients. He gave Lia one of his stand down asshole smirks that halted anymore conversation. That let their clients know that negotiations were now over and this transaction had come to a close.
Lia scanned Sander’s face for some explanation. She saw a hint of reaction towards Robbe sudden harsh change in demeanor but it amused him. He seemed to like it.

Robbe finished putting his jacket on and soften again leaning into Lia to give her a kiss on the cheek and bid her good night. Flashing that calculated smile at her again.

He glanced back at Sander. He hadn’t moved.

“Get your jacket” Robbe demanded.

Sander began to get up and collect his things. Never breaking eye contact with Robbe a dark tonality hidden behind his eyes.

Lia was so confused. It’s like these two were speaking some unknown language only they understood but it was so strange. Lia knew Robbe but she rarely saw this side of him. It was slightly distance, spikey, but confident almost captivating. Its like this sweet, thoughtful and warm human morphed into someone else in front of her eyes but she couldn’t explain what he morphed into.

She wasn’t sure what she was looking at.

“Text me when you get home” Robbe whispered into her ear as he gave her one final kiss good night and walked towards the exit never looking back at Sander to check if he was coming with him.

Sander leaned in towards Lia giving her a kiss goodnight. Perfectly placing it a little too close to her mouth. It gave her butterflies she could almost taste him as he pulled back.

Lia’s eyes followed him towards the door.

She sat there bewildered, puzzled, thinking to herself.

What was that? or better yet, who was that? and she wasn’t talking about Sander.
Sander sat in the dark. Questioning, why did he have these thoughts, retracing each one, letting one dark thought morph into another. Asking himself why do my thoughts do this. If my last thought had been different from my previous thought I wouldn’t be thinking what am thinking right now but they just kept going and going and going because thoughts never stop. Even when you’re sleeping. Thoughts only ever stop when….

The hospital room door swung open.

The harsh glare of the hallways fluorescent lighting poured into Sander’s room.

Sander eyesight took a moment to readjust and as it did he saw him standing there.

He looked like an angel drenched in a yellowish afterglow.

“Sander…” hearing Robbe say his name brought a small smile to his face. They hadn’t seen one another in awhile.

“I told her not to call you.” Sander grunted as he rolled himself on the bed to face the wall.

“Your mom didn’t call me. The hospital did. I am still your emergency contact.” Sander heard the door close behind Robbe.

He could hear Robbe rustling in the darkness. Curiosity got the better of him and Sander turned back around towards Robbe. Sander hadn’t even noticed that Robbe was in his work clothes. It was such a departure for Sander seeing Robbe like this in a shirt, tie and trousers instead of his usual beat up vans, black Trasher hoodie and slightly too big jeans. Robbe looked good, he looked so adult.

Sander noticed Robbe’s work bag already on his desk chair. Sander watched Robbe unbutton his shirt, slip it off, remove his tie and pull his undershirt over his arms. Robbe was standing in the dark, bare chest. He took a moment to kick off his loafers and head towards the bed.

Before he got under the covers Robbe checked the time on his beat up Casio watch shaking his head at whatever information the device was providing him.

Sander knew the drill. They had this routine down. Sander and Robbe had been in this exact situation several times before. In this exact hospital actually, maybe even in this exact room. All
the sterile white hospital rooms looked the same to both of them now.

Sander’s back felt cold as he pressed it onto the hospital wall. Robbe slid into bed with him. The beds in the observation rooms were all singles so to fit Robbe and Sander onto one bed Sander had to lay on his side with his back to the wall and his upper body sprawled onto Robbe’s chest but Sander and Robbe both already knew this. This wasn’t the first time. As Sander put his ear to Robbe’s chest he felt his warmth radiate onto him. It felt calming. They laid there for a minute until Sander spoke up.

“You don’t need to come back here to take care of me. I am not your sick boyfriend anymore.”

Robbe looked down at Sander and grabbed onto the nape of his neck slightly pulling at the ends of his hair.

“No big deal. I was in the neighborhood” Robbe said in a dry tone. Sarcastic but with a hint of sadness to it.

Both Sander and Robbe knew that he most certainly was not in the neighborhood. Sander imagined that Robbe made up some lame excuse to leave work early and hop on a train from Brussels to Antwerp in attempts to make the 8pm visitation time cut off. Sander was glad he came. He hated that fact. Robbe deserved better, they weren’t even together anymore but Robbe made everything better. When Robbe was around it made Sander feel almost safe. Hopeful that eventually this darkness that clouded him would leave him.

Can I ask you for a favor? Sander whispered.

Robbe nodded. Their bodies relaxing into one another.

“Can you take Bowie with you?” Sander looked up at Robbe trying to find his eyes in the darkness, and when he did, he let some honest truths come out. “I just think i’m going to be here awhile….. am not doing so great.” Sander murmured the last part of his confession.

Robbe responded by giving Sander a kiss on the forehead and pulling him in closer.

“I don’t know if you still remember but it’s …” Robbe finished Sander’s sentence for him.

“Fresh in the morning and a third of a cup of dry food at night. I’ll take care of him. Don’t worry.”

Robbe kissed Sander’s forehead again. He pulled Sander even closer to him. Tighter. Sanders lips were practically meeting Robbe’s jawline now. Robbe cradled him towards his chest as he ran his fingers down his arm and onto his ribcage. Sander buried his face into Robbe’s neck to muffle a sob as he felt Robbe tracing the outline of Sander’s first tattoo. Sander could practically visualize the text.

In Elk Universum

Sander was crashing. Robbe tried to distract him.

“You want to hear a story baby?” Robbe asked ever so softly.

Sander was crying now but he responded in between sobs. “Is it the one about the house by the beach?”

“That’s the one” Robbe said sweetly. Taking a moment to kiss away the tears on Sander’s right cheek.
Robbe began to recant the story about the two boys who fell in love at the house by the beach. He walked his index finger and middle finger across his chest to depict the first boy a small brown hair skater type. Robbe moved his hand which was placed on Sander’s nape, down Sander’s arm and grabbed Sander’s hand. Robbe gently unfolded Sander’s index finger and middle finger and began to walk Sander’s fingers across his chest to meet the brown hair skater boy.

Once both the brown hair skater boy and the artist were standing directly across from one another Robbe continued the story.

“So we had our artist who fell in love with his skater boy.” Robbe took a second to use his index finger to slightly massage the top of Sander’s index finger and then he continued.

“The artist would say that he saw the skater boy in the moonlight and that he just knew….”

That was Sander’s queue. “That he was the one”.

Robbe gave out a long sigh “Yeah, that he was the one”.

Robbe walked his fingers over towards Sanders fingers and placed his index and middle finger underneath Sander’s fingers allowing his thumb to massage the top of Sanders fingers.

Sander broke Robbe’s grasp and clasped their hands together interlacing their fingers between one another.

Sander looked up at Robbe and in a sudden moment of courage he asked him..

“Do you think they make it? The skater boy and the artist?”

Robbe looked down at Sander gulping down on whatever seemed to be stuck in his throat but before Robbe could respond Sander added on.

“You know if the skater boy could forgive the artist for all the shit he put him through.”

Sander then collapsed onto Robbe’s chest before Robbe could even form a response. Sander pulled on Robbe’s hand turning it over while still tightly clasping onto it.

Sander brought Robbe’s hand towards his mouth and gently placed a kiss on the text tattooed across Robbe’s wrist.

Neither of them spoke after that. They just laid together in silence.

But as Sander began to drift off into slumber he heard Robbe faintly say.

“Always. They always make it back to each other. In every universe Sander”.

“Sander”

“Sander Driesen” The nurse rattled off.

Sander popped his head up from in between his legs and walked across the waiting room towards her direction.

He followed the nurse through the double doors into a patient room. Sander despised talking to shrinks. He had talked to so many over the years that he had constructed a well prepared monologue by now. This shrink was new he had never seen her before. He had been referred to her
from his previous therapist because he concurred that he needed a more senior medical professional to evaluate him. It was all the same to Sander. He had this role down. He would be quick, say what they wanted to hear. Maybe throw them an emotional bone here or there and be on his way.

The doctor was roughly in her late forties. A curly haired brunette with strands of grey hair sticking out and large black rim glasses. Sander was perceptive with these medical types they’d been around him his whole life and he already knew by looking at her she was going to make him work for it. Sander threw his leather jacket off and splashed down on her couch and waited for her to start her shtick.

“Hey Sander, I am Dr. Bakker. I hear you came in to request that your meds be recalibrated?”

Sander leaned forward placing his elbows on his knees answering back.

“Yeah, I’ve been edgier than usual” Sander told her, making a hands shaking motion.

“And I’m having trouble sleeping.” Sander was always having trouble sleeping. This was nothing new but the start of autumn always made him blue. He wasn’t sure why, I mean he was but he wasn’t ready to admit that to himself just yet.

“It looks like you have had a recalibration every year for the past 4 years”

The doctor stopped there. Goating him for more information. Sander considered playing his usual game but he wasn’t in the mood. So he gave it to her strait.

“What can I say, I get a little more crazy every year” Sander twirled his index finger in a circular motion around his temple.

Dr. Bakker wasn’t amused.

“Sander, what's your earliest memory?” Sander thought not this freudian shit again. This is why he despised talking to shrinks. Memory this and memory that. Parents this and parents that. So he changed gears.

“Doc, do you ever question memories?”

“How so?”

“I mean do you question the concept of how you remember them. Capture them?”

“How do you decide which one to remember? Which one was good? and which one was bad?”

“I don’t know Sander, how do you remember them?”

“I draw them.”

“On your body?” Dr Bakker said pointing her pen at Sander’s arms. His full sleeve tattoos on full display.

Sander gave the doc a wicked grin. Okay he thought. *Let's play.*

“When I was younger I used to draw my favourite memories. The good ones. The ones I wanted to capture?”

“The ones that made you feel safe?” Dr. Bakker added on.
“Oh, your good doc” Sander giggled making a trigger signal towards her direction.

“Sure” Sander clasped his hands in front of him and replied with a tinge of drama in his voice.

“The ones that made me feel safe”

“I’d draw them and place them around whatever room, surface, habitat I was infiltrating on the day”

“And they made you feel safe” The doc probed again. In a condescending manner. Pressing her pen onto her scratchpad.

Sander was annoyed now but he flashed her one of his typical fall back asshole smiles. In attempts to brush her off. It was the Robbe smile the one he had learned to weaponize long ago. Sander never quite got it right. Sander was always better at obvious distractions, not discreet strategy like Robbe. Robbe’s smile confused his recipient, made you think that you thought of that, when you hadn’t. A smile wrapped up in qanswers a question within an answer. Sander had tried to make that smile part of his arsenal but Robbe was always better at flipping the axis, breaching for impact, navigating the fall outs. He could simultaneously be your guardian angel or your ruthless protection squad.

Sander had drifted off for a second. The doc’s pen taps pulled him out of his own conscious.

He finally responded “The good ones, sure”.

“So how do you decide what's good or bad? black or white?”

“Me” Sander pointed at himself. Acting dramatically astonished that the doc would even consider him capable of making these decisions for himself.

“Wouldn’t have a clue. I only stopped drawing because I couldn’t afford to buy new sketch books everytime I thought about throwing myself off a bridge.”

“Do you know how expensive sketchbooks are doc?”

Sander was entertaining himself now.

He looked up at the doctor. She was expressionless.

His eyes shifted.

“It’s a joke doc. Jeeezz” Sander threw up his hands. In a give me a break fashion.

“Anyways I don’t know anything about good or bad, black or white. I, myself, am a maverick. I operate in shades of grey.”

Dr. Bakker was visibly frustrated by Sander’s grandstanding. So she let go of all the niceties.

“Who’s Robbe?”

And now….Now Sander had had enough. This was going to be a throw away session.

He threw up his muddy Doc Martens on Dr Bakker’s Beige couch and sprawled himself out. He turned his cheek towards her and said.

“Robbe who?”
Dr. Bakker replied sternly.

“You have had almost half a dozen in-patient stints in the last five years. You’d checked yourself out against doctor’s orders every time. Robbe is noted on your personal records as your emergency contact. Who is he?”

She was starting to sound demanding. Sander was getting under her skin.

“Ohhh him” Sander answered back cluelessly. He considered continuing his smart aleck routine but he was generally curious what the doc had to say.

“His my ex-boyfriend”

“And was he good or bad to you?”

Sander popped back up now. Placing both feet on the ground firmly.

Sander wasn’t sure how to reply. He could lie or he could tell her the truth. Robbe was the best. A sanguine type of person, that if the world knew about them they would in case them in amber like some sort of prehistoric jewel to keep them safe.

Sander noticed the time. It was nearly five. The session was nearly at its end. So he told her what she wanted to hear. Tried to expedite the process.

“His a good person”

“What about when he is with you? Is he good then too?”

*Ohhh. That hit a nerve.*

“I wouldn’t know. We haven’t been together in a long time.” Sander said in a steady voice attempting to give away nothing.

“That's a shame. He seems to have shown up for you a lot, and you know what they say?”

The doc was glib.

“People need people”

And time.

Sander couldn’t have got up any faster and headed towards the door. Dr. Bakker noticed Sander immediaicy and asked him. “Somewhere you need to be?”

“One my way to Brussels” he snapped back. He was done playing patient/doctor.

“What’s in Brussels?” Sander paused as he twisted the door handle.

He looked back at her.

“Nothing. Just something I forgot”

As he walked out of the room he heard the door slam behind him.

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*Robbe heard him before he saw him.*
Jangled trucks, Loose hardware, a slab of maple, the grind of steel.

Lucas Van Der Heijden slid into Robbe’s life unannounced via a four foot handrail above ground.

Front side, lip slide.

Roll up, Fakie.

Drop in, ride the bowl, keep it sweet.

Off the edge, Pop, Back Foot Slide, Flip.

Ride the pocket.

Need a break, back side disaster.

**Just for fucks** Lucas thought.

Front side, big air, tail grab.

**Don’t lose it. Speed it up.**

**Last one for the cute guy looking at me**, Lucas clocked.

Tuck knee, chicken wing, front side air.

**He’s still staring…. One more.**

Front nose, rail slide.

Clips.

**Oh Fuck**

Bails.

Lucas’s board flies out from underneath him. Luckily his feet catching him before he eats any real shit.

Robbe sees the board flying towards his direction. He runs to it, grabs it. Thinking, this is his chance.

Lucas pops back up. Running his fingers through his hair, trying to collect himself as he walks towards the cute guy with the black Trasher hoodie on.

The two men stop a couple of feet away from one another.

“Wouldn’t take you for a guy that rides girls?” Robbe shoots out in the cockiest tone.

Lucas chokes on his own spit. Unable to piece a sentence together after that.

He finally gathers himself and gives Robbe his gutsies reply.

“Only for business purposes. Never for pleasure” Lucas lifts one of his eyebrows looking at Robbe.

Robbe lets out a little snort. He thinks to himself this guys funny and gay.
Robbe finally hands Lucas back his GIRL brand skateboard.

“Robbe” He says leaning in to give Lucas a skater bro style handshake. The kind that happens high on the chest but Lucas stops him and grabs his hand and gives him a real handshake.

“Lucas”

“Your Dutch?”

“Your not” Robbe huffs at Lucas. Intrigued by this little shit.

Robbe hopes he isn’t being obvious as he checks Lucas out.

Lucas is roughly 6ft (1.8 meters). He has somewhat longish Hazelnut hair, long enough that you could see it form curls at the ends and a pair of striking glacial eyes the kind that feel like your peering into the bottom of the ocean. Robbe knew eyes like these, the kind that saw inside your soul and turned you inside out. He had experience.

Lucas was a semi-pro skater, just in town doing the rounds. Breaking in another skatepark crossing it off his metaphorical list.

“Do you mind?” Robbe pointed at slightly elevated pavement.

“Going to need a ledge for class.”

“You teach?” Lucas asked curiously.

“Yeah, I teach the under 14’s, Tuesday’s and Friday’s.

“You must be a pretty decent skater to teach….”

“I am okay. I have my moments.” Robbe gives Lucas a flirty smile.

“Ok, Mr. Okay” Lucas taunting Robbe in a ho hum tone.

“If you’re the real deal. Name your three favorite skaters?”

Robbe shot back like a gun. “Natas Kaupas, Tommy Guerrero, Mark Gonzales”

“Oh shit” Lucas said surprised. Throwing up his hands apologetically for his presumption.

“You are the real deal Robbe and your old school”

“Yeah. I mean I like my skaters like I like my music” Robbe added.

“Just the classics” Robbe threw Lucas a wink.

Robbe was pleasantly surprised. It had been a moment, since he felt giddy. There hadn’t really been anyone significant in his life since Sander. I mean he slept with guys, went on dates but he was never really into those guys it was more an itch he needed to scratch.

Plus Sander was still awkwardly making cameos in his life. Three years after their break up. He stumbled in every few months saying he needed to visit Bowie. He was in town to tattoo a client. He was “just in the neighborhood” and thought he should drop by. It always ended the same. They’d end up fucking, he hung around for a few days, they pretend everything was okay. They never talked. At least not about them. Sander and Robbe were pros at protecting themselves from the
world but never each other.
The set up had become a bit toxic.
Something needed to change.
“So, Lucas. I am here twice a week. How come I've never seen you before?”
“I know most pros that pass through here.”
“How do you know am a pro?” Lucas questioned with a perfectly placed crooked smile.
Robbe rolls his eyes casting them down on Lucas.
“Front side, big air, tucked knee. On a tuesday? Show off!”
Lucas chuckled. Robbe caught him.
“I am not from around here.” Lucas admits. Seemingly a little disappointed.
“Shame, I could have taught you a thing or two if you took to my class.”
“Oh, yeah” Lucas said pressing the back of his tongue against his front teeth.
“I can come now”
“I just won’t be able to keep up with the attendance.”
“Too bad” Robbe replies as he moves dangerously close to Lucas, invading his personal space. Lucas pulls back slightly. Robbe was making him nervous.
Robbe starts to back away from Lucas finding his board on the ground in his path.
“So what do you suggest I do then?” Lucas shouts back to Robbe with his arms spread out wide.
Robbe flashes him a calculated smile. He pops his board’s tail, slams its back down on the ground and begins to accelerate on the asphalt. He throws a Frontside 360 Ollie a couple feet in front of Lucas and pounds the landing.
The ground quakes beneath them.
Robbe slows to a stop.
Lucas raises his chin into the air with his arms out wide again. Waiting for Robbe’s response.
Robbe seizes the moment and yells out to him. “Try bribing the teacher”.
Lucas stands there incredulous, smiling to himself.
Knowing. He was fucked.

He fucked it.
Sander thought as he stepped out into the August night and scanned the curb.
Robbe was lighting a cigarette for some in-shape blonde with a fresh crew cut. Sander felt a twinge
of jealousy. It wasn’t because he was shocked that someone found Robbe attractive, it's because everybody found Robbe attractive.

Sander was witness to the metamorphosis that Robbe went through in his late adolescents. Robbe went from a neutral tone caterpillar into a rare saturated butterfly. Sander could vividly recall when his precious wunderkind began to emanate. They would go out to bars together and as soon as Sander left Robbe alone someone would stroll up and offer Robbe a drink or sometimes more. It didn’t bother Sander at first, he was glad people finally saw Robbe the way he saw him but the doubt set in. Robbe would linger, he would hold someone’s stare to long, he’d flash his signature smile at some guy, he’d flip his beautiful mop of hair to attract attention and he did.

Sander was losing him. He knew it. All his preferential treatment was dissipating. All the gestures he thought were reserved for only him were becoming public. Robbe wasn’t his special secret anymore. He had options. He could leave whenever he wanted. Find someone who wasn’t so much work. Who didn’t spend months hospitalized, who wasn’t so broken, who didn’t need him. Logically, Sander knew this was unfair. If anything when Robbe sensed Sander’s worries he dismantled them. He poured himself into him. Robbe gave Sander everything, his body, his time, he forgave him. He loved him.

After the break up, Sander was selfish. He knew that much. Robbe would call him everyday in tears adamant that he didn’t want this. That he loved him. That he didn’t need Sander’s charity of time. He didn’t need some trial run to test their relationships dexterity. In the end, Sander’s worse fears crystallized and he hurt Robbe. He didn’t mean it. THEY WERE ON A BREAK. On paper Sander did nothing wrong but in his heart he knew he had gone too far. Push their relationship into some fruitless purgatory. Sander was sure Robbe would leave him but he didn’t. He stuck around but in return he took away the one thing that made Sander feel safe. Robbe stop saying I love you. He didn’t look at Sander the same. If they made love when Robbe would let his guard down it wasn’t really making love it was merely a semblance of a once perfect thing. It only made Sander sadder, it plagued him, it took him into some of his darkest corners.

Sander was tired. He wanted off this roundabout without any exit signs. He loved Robbe, why wasn’t that enough. He spent the last few years coping with the aftermath the only way he knew how. In the almost four years apart Sander riddled his body in atonement. In hopes that Robbe would notice it. Tattoos scattered over every inch of his personal surface. Except the blank canvas above his heart. He kept that for Robbe. He had promised it to him when they were younger. He told him that that’s were the faces of their children would go or some other symbol of his devotion.

Sander lost hope when Robbe texted him asking him to take Bowie back because he was moving to Amsterdam to be with Lucas. Sander knew then, it was over. So he began to draw out the design that would go into the blank space on his chest. It was time to cover it up. Time to let it go. Sander had resigned himself to a life without Robbe in it, but then it happened, he didn’t see it coming. Sander and Robbe chernobyld.

“You ready?”

“Yeah” Robbe replied as he waved off the tall blonde trying to retain his attention.

“Where did you park?”

Sander pointed towards the bottom of the street. They started walking shoulder to shoulder towards that direction. Sander pulled out the joint placed behind his ears and lit it.

“Oh my mom said Happy Birthday by the way.”
“I’ve still got five days” Robbe pointed out.

“I know but I just think she wanted to let you know she misses you”

Robbe blushed a little. “I miss her too”.

Sander signaled to Robbe that they needed to cross over the road and as he stepped off the curb.

Two adolescent girls rode by on their bikes clearly unaware of the world around them.

A blonde and a brunette with electric blue streaky hair yelling at the top of their lungs

“Try this one, I promise this one is really good”. Sander could make out that they were passing back a 16oz can between them. The type that should be illegal to upcharge to triple the price at every concert.

“She is.” Sander scoffed back towards Robbe’s direction.

As they reached the other side of the curb Sander turned around to face Robbe.

“Let’s go for a walk” Sander suggested.

Robbe dropped his shoulders and let his neck slightly relax forward.

“Sander am tired. I’ve been at work all day.”

Sander clocked the time on his Casio watch.

“It’s only 7:24. I’ll carry you on my shoulders if that helps.”

Sander pulled on Robbe’s arm.

“Come!”

Sander grabbed Robbe’s hand for mere seconds placing it on his shoulder signaling Robbe to jump on his back.

Robbe shook his head side to side.

“No, no, old man. Wouldn’t want to injure you.”

Robbe walked in front of Sander.

Sander took a moment to lightly punch his shoulder and proclaim.

“I am only twenty eight asshole.”

Robbe gave Sander a smile. A genuine one. He pushed his man bag to the side stepped directly in front of Sander and tapped his shoulder.

“Come...”

Sander was way to cool to be seen being carried around in public but he thought fuck it. For Robbe. He jumped on, maneuvering his arms awkwardly as he held onto whatever was left of his joint.

He settled in. Hovering his chin over Robbe’s shoulder.
Robbe teased. “Remember when I use to carry you all around your house when you were sick.”

“When I was “sick” Sander replied repeating the word sick with a tone of disgust.

“You mean when I was having an episode.” His tone soften.

“Well yeah…. Whatever. Anyways, I use to carry you off the bed, to the shower, down the stairs, to the kitchen. So your mom could feed us.”

“I know. It was great having my own personal mode of transport.”

“Fuck off” Robbe said jokingly.

Sander drew the last pulls of his joint towards Robbe’s mouth. Robbe popped his head out and sucked on it. The smoke of his exhale disappearing readily into the twilight.

“Yeah it was great getting paid”

“What” Sander questioned.

“Oh did I forget to mention that. Your mom was paying me.”

“Sander Driesen. Robbe Izjerman’s first client. Who knew I was such a great personal assistant.”

Sander gave out one of his signature snorts.

Robbe took one final puff of the joint and Sander threw it away.

He finally adjusted his arms and wrapped them around Robbe’s chest. He placed his head onto Robbe’s shoulder a moment of tenderness that took Robbe by surprise because Robbe knew that’s where Sander use to always place his head. That’s where Robbe’s first tattoo is located.

They walked down the road. Robbe pushed Sander up his body slightly adjusting his gripped.

Sander finally broke the silence.

“No, but seriously did she really pay you?”

Robbe let out a thundest laugh turning his head towards Sander and lifting his eyebrow as some sort of admission of truth.

They continued to walk down the street.

Riffing back and forth on this joke.

Blurring into the dusk of night.

___________________________________________________________________

They always made love at dawn.

Before the heat of the day submerged them.

It was the lazy type of love making where your body mostly reacts on instinct versus effort. However this morning was different Robbe woke up slightly feverish a sudden hunger to feel Sander underneath him. Robbe dragged his body on top of Sander, straddling him. He was still a bit sleepy so he moved slowly in no mood to rush through the moment. Robbe pressed his right hand on Sanders chest steadying himself as his left began exploring the plains of Sander’s chest.
His hand slid down till he felt the coarseness of Sander’s pubic hair and then the girth of his cock slewing in his hand as he took a hold of it.

Robbe stretched his body over Sander shoulder extending his right hand to grab the bottle of lube on the nightstand. A souvenir from the night before. Nowadays they weren’t so stringent about condoms they had been together for several years, completely trusted one another and had a couple of dozen STD tests between them.

Robbe poured an excessive amount of lube on his hand letting the overage dripped onto Sander’s dick. He moved his hand up and down Sander a couple of times until he felt a rapture possess him. He couldn’t hold back any longer.

He elevated his hips and pushed them forward. His ass practically hovering over the tip of Sander’s penis. Sander hadn’t participated much as of yet aside from shooting Robbe a smile when he felt the liquid friction on his growth.

But Robbe gave Sander a soft plea signaling for him. Sander used one hand to grab Robbe’s waist and the other to guide himself inside of Robbe.

As soon as Robbe felt Sander enter him he sucked in hot air through his teeth.

He closed his eyes and let his hips crash onto Sander. Waves of pleasure violently dragging him through the water.

The tide beneath him gaining traction. Robbe was mesmerized by the molten sensation engulfing him.

Making him move closer and closer to his own edge.

At first he thought Sander’s voice was a daydream.

“No, Robbe thought. He didn’t want to let go of the moment. His eyelids felt like cinder blocks. Weighted down by his own euphoria.

But Sander implored, “Baby, please”.

It took everything Robbe had to to will his eyes open. Sander’s bejeweled gazed watched over him. Protective but ravenous.

Sander pressed his heels into the linen sheets and picked up the pace. Robbe readjusted and placed both his hands on Sander’s collarbone arranging his thumb directly over Sander’s guardian angel. He had etched Robbe’s charm and chain onto his body. Looking down at Sander’s act of fidelity wound Robbe up so tight he felt like he couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t hold on. Robbe let out a rough gasp as his body uncoiled. The spurts of cum decorating his chest and the back of his elbows.

Robbe began to freefall onto Sanders chest but Sander caught him from the back of the neck and dug his fingers into Robbe’s hair. He pounded his hips into Robbe accelerating the pace faster and faster as he released one final jerk into Robbe. Sanders head and shoulders uncontrollably shoot up causing Robbe to catch his boyfriend’s mouth as Sander let out the longest moan.

Sander fell back onto the sheets as Robbe kissed him deeply.
Once they both stop spurting Robbe peppered Sander with kisses from his lips, down his neck, taking a moment to nip at the three icons right below his adam’s apple. A lightning bolt, a sun, and the black side of half a yin yang.

Robbe nuzzled his head underneath Sander’s chin and just laid still for a moment.

Neither of them noticed when they fell back asleep but the heat woke them.

India was sweltering in the summer.

Sander had surprised Robbe with a graduation present/early 22nd birthday present and booked them a trip.

It was perfect timing as it also coincided with a training course Sander had been dying to attend. He had become bored of his usual work. All the shop’s patrons asked for the same tattoo designs and Sander needed a new challenge. He had become obsessed with hands. He wanted to learn how to tattoo hands but none of that silly juvenile shit like a heart on a knuckle. Sander wanted to learn how to do intricate henna style mehndi patterns. The kind of designs that require a commitment. The shit that was needle to bone. The shit that fucking hurt.

He looked up who was the best in the world at this craft and found out it was a little old lady in Mumbai. She looked like she could be your grandma but she also looked like art. Mehndi patterns all over her body. Sander just had to meet her. He was completely fixated, Robbe wasn’t opposed to India but it wouldn’t have been his first choice but he really just wanted to make Sander happy.

It had been a rough year for them both. Sander had had two in-patient stints at the hospital. One occurring during Robbe’s final year university exams. Robbe was completely burnt out. In between trying to be there for Sander and staying up till early hours every morning studying he was glad that Sander suggested getting out of Antwerp. India completely revitalized their relationship. They made love everyday, Sander began sketching images that actually inspired him and Robbe worked on his portfolio. Somehow between the chaos of Sander’s hospital stints and his late night study sessions Robbe managed to get decent marks at university and landed himself into a master certification program in architecture. Robbe never thought he would consider architecture but over the years by Sander’s side he learned how to somewhat draw at least enough to draft renderings. The rest he mostly did on his computer. Sander was usually by his side showing him what programs to use; guiding him on shapes, colors and dimensions. In truth without Sander, Robbe wouldn’t have made it as far. Sander’s passion for art inspired Robbe to find something to be passionate about too.

“Mama Riddhi is going to love you” Sander snapped Robbe out of his concentrated navigation. Robbe was getting dizzy as they whine through a maze of corridors that seemed never ending.

“I can’t wait to meet her, you won’t shut up about her”

“She’s amazing, a true vet. She knows all about Plato, Darwin, Bowie. She’s got a killer eye too. She’s a visionary.”

It warmed Robbe to see Sander like this again. His eyes wild with eager.

They finally arrived outside the school-like building. Sander guided them inside. Robbe scanned the rooms. He was in awe of their adornments. Multi size vishnu statues sprawled out everywhere, Hindu mantras written all over the walls, lavish carpeting covering the floors. The rooms looked alive.
As they entered the back garden. Robbe saw a crowd of people gathered around who he assumed was Mama Riddhi.

“Mama Riddhi, I brought you someone”

Robbe stepped forward and saw her. Sander was right, she did look like she could be your grandmother but she also looked like art. Mama Riddhi wore a teal Saree her arms completely exposed, her artistry on full display. Patterns upon patterns etched onto her skin; on her hands, her forearms, her elbows. Her designs graffitied onto her body like some sort of second skin.

“Your right, he is beautiful” Mama Riddhi confirmed as Sander and Robbe walked up to her hand in hand.

“I told you so. He’s my inspiration.”

Robbe could feel his cheeks turn a rosy hue.

Mama Riddhi stepped forward to meet them. She took ahold of Sander’s free hand examining it making sure the wrapping had stayed intact.

“Are you ready?” she asked Sander.

Sander nodded like an excited toddler. Robbe knew the likelihood of Sander leaving India without some sort of tattoo was unlikely. They didn’t travel halfway across the world for Sander not to get something but Robbe was a little apprehensive when Sander told him he was going to get Mama Riddhi to do his hands.

Sander insisted that he design the tattoo himself. Robbe had seen early drafts of it and for all intent and purpose the design was pretty tame for Sander. It was a back of the hand design, a horizontal black line down Sander’s middle finger and three vertical black lines on his thumb and a couple of black bands on his pinkie finger. Sander didn’t let Robbe come to the sitting for it he said he wanted to surprise him at the unveiling.

So here they were about to uncover what Sander had decided to do to himself. Mama Riddhi sat Sander down on a garden chair and slowly began unwrapping his hands.

“Oh Mama Riddhi tell Robbe the story you told me”

“The one about humans?”

“That’s the one” Sander said sweetly.

“Do you like love stories Robbe?”

“I mean, sure, yea” Robbe responded looking over towards the grandma as she unwrapped Sander’s hand.

Mama Riddhi began.

“Okay...this one is Sander's favorite.”

Sander scrunched his nose as confirmation.

“So, originally humans had two faces, four arms, four legs, and they were happy like that. Complete.”
Mama Riddhi grabbed Robbe’s hand and pulled him in front of Sander as she spoke. Exposing Sander’s hands to Robbe as she continued.

“Then we defied the gods. So the gods split us in two as punishment. And by doing so they tore us away from our other half. “

Robbe could see Sander’s tattoos now. He looked at them closely. He could make out ornate loops on his wrist, and hidden within the loops was an S on one hand and an R on the other.

“And each of us, when separated, are always looking for our other half because that’s our nature.”

Sander read Robbe’s expression. To see if he had noticed it yet.

“So when one is met with another’s half. The pair are lost, in an amazement of wonder, friendship and intimacy. And one will not be seen out of the sight of the other.”

“And the reason is. Human nature was once originally one.”

Robbe finally spotted it. Sander had carved a black band onto his ring finger.

“We were whole.”

“And the desire, and the pursuit of wholeness is love.”

Sander and Robbe said nothing to each other. They stayed suspended. Lovestruck. Neither of them spoke. Neither of them broke their gaze. They just stood there. Taking in the story, remembering it, frozen, itched into that moment.

Eventually they flew back home.

A couple of weeks later Robbe would move to Brussels to start his certification.

A month after that.

They broke up.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry to pull a hell week but like I said its complicated. Thanks for reading and if you need to mourn please do so in the comments. I also made a tumblr, find me at @lucidpantone if you have any questions.

Also, I know Lucas is near and dear to some of you so just note that his character in this story is more so a point of reference then an extension of Lucas's story. Thats a fic for another day.

Note: Mama Riddhi story is paraphrased off Plato's symposium on Love. I do not take credit for that.
The concrete stairs are overwhelming.

Sander thought to himself as he ascended them coming to a full stop outside Robbe’s apartment door. His reflection looking back at him. The residue of sundown’s volcanic incandescence was high in the sky creating a mirrored effect on the building. It was one of those ghastly mid century modern blocks that was lathered in a matte high shine finish. Giving the entire building a sensation of reflectivity. Sander disliked these types of buildings. They felt cold and soulless. These were the kind of buildings that Robbe would defend as being functional but completely lacking in any of Belgium’s highly regarded Art Nouveau/Art Deco qualities. Of course it would be Sander’s luck that this building’s heinous exterior would be the thing that would make him recognize that he was on the right street about to knock on the right door.

Sander had only been to Robbe’s Brussels apartment once before when Robbe moved into it almost a year and a half ago. He hadn’t seen Robbe since he had checked himself out of the hospital and Robbe had driven him home. Sander was somewhat aware of Robbe’s schedule due to the frequency of his texts over the last couple months but he hadn’t told Robbe he was coming. He wanted to catch Robbe off guard. Lessen the possibility of allowing him to gather any of his usual armor to barricade himself from Sander’s charm. After Sander’s hospital stint he knew he had made a mistake. He had allowed himself to believe a false narrative that he and Robbe weren’t
perfectly crafted for each other. That they both hadn’t found a way to defy the gods and find one another. During his darkest days Robbe would show up ardently. Journeying between south and north to come spend his time by Sander’s side. During their time apart Sander was certain that a fracture would have formed. A crevasse so large that it would have cordon off each of them to their respective lives never allowing them to leap across the barrier but Sander was wrong.

During Sander’s hospital stay he caught a virus that germinated from within an undeniable appetite for Robbe. This sickness was a contagion, a gnome sequenced strait into Sander’s DNA. An ailment that percolated beyond marrow-deep, an essential function of the body. It caused a mutation in Sander’s mental state; he’d sit and sketch just Robbe all day long something he had long stopped doing. He would anticipate Robbe bursting through the door in his work clothes, kicking off his loafer, tearing off his shirt and tie. Unapologetically changing into whichever one of Sander’s t-shirt he could find rambling on about the days occurrences making himself completely comfortable in Sander’s orbit. Sander would just watch him take notes of all of Robbe’s beautiful idiosyncrasies, the way he would tilt his head from side to side whenever he lost his train of thought, the way his eyes followed Sander’s hand when he scooped his hair onto one side, the high pitched giggle that would generate from the back of his throat whenever Sander teased him or he was slightly embarrassed, but also the other side.

You see Robbe had an innate ability. Anytime any medical staff entered their bubble he could morph from his typical bambi-eyed self into a calculated tactician operating under a didactic agenda of inquisition readily observant of negative evaluations concerning Sander’s mental health or the need to further medicate him. It always took Sander aback when he saw this side of Robbe he could be so detached, frigid, coupled with a spikey disposition. This side of Robbe’s was one of the few things he never made public something he reserved only for Sander, only for the things he was most passionate about, the things he wanted to keep safe. Over the years Robbe had surmounted a vast amount of experience when it came to how medical professionals treated the people he loved. Between his mother and Sander’s treatments Robbe had become a battle hardened mutt who’d survived dogfight after dogfight. If he ever sensed your judgement or mistreatment of Sander he could be vicious, react like a rabid animal ready to evasicarate you. Sander’s touch being one of the only things that could stabilize him. Bring him back to himself.

On the last night of Sander’s hospital stay, Robbe delivered one of his high octane good boy next door performances that managed to convince the nursing staff to let him stay pass visitation. He knew their time together was coming to an end. He would go back to his daily life in Brussels and Sander to his normal routine. So, Robbe surprised him. Sander’s episode had kept him from attending the annual contemporary art retrospect at Belgium’s Museum of fine art. Sander loved that retrospect he attended it religiously usually with Robbe by his side. So Robbe found a way to bring it to him. He snuck into Sander’s room during his final therapy session and set up a projector and his laptop up to walk through the exhibition virtually. He accompanied their private art show with one of Sander’s Bowie playlist.

“Art, can be really feeble” Robbe sighed out as Sander and him lay on their backs looking up at the ceiling walking through the exhibition.

“What don’t you like about it?” Sander pointed his arms towards the work.

“Its a 6 foot gold toothbrush, what is artistic about that?” They both snorted at Robbe’s criticism.

They both hadn’t anticipated the potency of the next work. It crash-landed into them like a ball of fire. It was an image of a fireworks display, but it paused at the exact moment at the end of one of those big celebratory new year’s eve fireworks’ display when they turn the sky into a pantone of colors and lingering stardust creates a mirage-like effect as the fireworks dissolve into themselves.
In-turn making the ground underneath you vibrate like some sort of epicenter to a natural disaster. The artist had probably never intended for the viewer of this piece to take it in on their backs, from a ceiling, in a sterile hospital room, but this setting worked. It magnified the piece allowing its luminescence to turn the hospital room’s white walls into a colorful kaleidoscope of radiance. As they lay there staring at the work Sander turned to Robbe who was in a state of hypnosis, completely captivated, and echoed “I love you”. Robbe snapped his cheek towards Sander his beautiful doh eyes gleaming from the stained glass effect the image was transmitting around the room. Without much thought Sander took Robbe’s hand, the one that when clasped together completed the phrase they both had scribbled on their wrist.

Sander had been longing to reach out and kiss Robbe for the past couple of weeks but he was so afraid. Afraid that Robbe wouldn’t kiss him back, that he had truly kicked the habit of their love but he scooted towards him anyway, leaped across the crevasse and closed the gap between them and placed an ever so soft kiss on Robbe’s lips. Robbe stilled for a few seconds, unsure, tentative, questioning the gesture but after a few seconds he didn’t object he accepted Sander’s invitation letting Sander slip his tongue onto his. Amping Sander up as he climbed on top of him and slid his hands under his shirt. Robbe let go of his sobriety that night, let the inertia that surrounded them collapse in on itself and create a vortex. That was the first time Robbe and Sander would sleep together since their separation. The first of the many times that would follow and taint them little by little but in that moment neither of them cared. Robbe and Sander just allowed the rain drops of the fireworks above them melt them into symbiosis.

“Sander what are you doing here?” Robbe inquired as he came hurdling out of the apartment building’s door. Just as Sander was about to buzz in. Before Sander could even respond he noticed a dirty blonde with disheveled hair standing behind Robbe. He felt a flicker of anger for a moment but he managed to divert it and turn on.

“Who’s your little friend Robbe?” Sander struck back with a self assured confidence ignoring Robbe’s initial question. Sander didn’t really care who this transient guy was he just didn’t want to miss the opportunity to make Robbe pay.

“This is David”, Robbe said sounding a bit apprehensive.

Sander waited for Robbe to introduce him but when he didn’t so he took it upon himself to do the honors.

“He extended his hand out to David. Taking notice of the guy’s icy blue eyes the only thing memorable about him.

Robbe interjected himself into their salutations.

“This is my fri--” Robbe wasn’t fast.

“Am his ex, ya know the love of his life, center of his universe, the one.” Sander really emphasized the last part as he delivered his schtick in his most casual fuck boy tone.

Robbe’s jaw dropped.

Sander had Robbe exactly where we wanted him with a cocksure grin painted across his face. Daring Robbe to say something to him.

Robbe didn’t react fast enough.
“So where’s that accent from David? Doesn’t sound local?”

The poor guy clearly confused and a bit flabbergasted by these odd exchanges between exes. Fumbled out an answer.

“Berlin”

“Oh I loooove Berlin. Robbe and I went to this sex show out there once where this girl was sho…….”

“That’s enough” Robbe cut him off in a matter of fact tone.

Sander was clearly posturing now. Enjoying every minute of this transaction.

“Robbe aren’t you gonna let me finish my story?” Sander pouted back at him.

“Come now” Robbe grabbed his date by the arm and dragged him away.

Sander was just hotshotting now and yelled out to Robbe, “That’s what you said. Bye David”.

Robbe looked back at Sander and threw him an are you kidding me look.

Sander started counting out loud. He gave Robbe 90 seconds, tops.

“69, 70, 71, 72……. Ah there you are?”

“What The Fock Sander” Robbe let out in frustration but also with a tinge of glee behind his voice.

Sander was resting with his back against the doorway with one knee up and his foot up against the wall.

“What?” Sander shrugged his shoulders with a deadpan expression acting like he was utterly confused as to what he had done wrong.

“Your unbelievable, you know that?” Robbe shook his head from side to side as he walked towards him with his head down trying to hide the smile on his face.

“I wonder if he’ll call you?” Sander was clearly gloating now with a wicked grin across his face as Robbe opened the door.

Whatever game he had initiated he had most certainly won.

“Didn’t realize you were into that whole mopey plant lover vibe though.”

Robbe gave him a smart ass remark, “I dated you for 5 years didn’t I?”.

“Touche, touche” Sander wagged his finger in Robbe’s face.

“But it was actually almost 6 Robin” Sander corrected him as he booped Robbe’s nose while he walked past him and entered the apartment building.

As they walked into Robbe’s apartment. Robbe put his fingers in his ears in anticipation.

Sander took his right hand to his mouth placing his thumb and index finger between his lips and pursed out a deafening high pitch whistle.

All of sudden the clank of bells began to approach them. Bowie had come to Sander on command.
“My boy!” Sander picked up that damn cat and smothered him all over his face. Worshipping him. The cat evidently loving every minute of it. Purring to no end.

Robbe walked over to the fridge and grabbed them a couple of beers. He was about to hand one over to Sander who was holding Bowie up high above his shoulders like a baby when he paused. One of his eyebrows rising towards Robbe’s direction.

“Have you…”

Robbe finished Sander’s sentence as he took a sip of his beer. “Been feeding him the grain-free stuff?”

Robbe nodded.

“He feels heavier”

“Are you sure it’s…?” Sander probed.

“One third of a cup? Yeah. Also, can you not say that out loud? Not in front of the kid, he’s sensitive.” Robbe jokingly reprimanded Sander for commenting on their bowie’s weight.

Sander gave the cat one final smooch and then put him down on the ground. Finally taking that beer off Robbe’s hand.

The inside of Robbe’s apartment had one of those open plan layouts that was situated from right to left. Kitchen, open plan middle space which housed a dining table and living room. It had the icky new build vibe that Sander hated.

Sander examined the apartment with his eyes and looked back at Robbe who was leaning against his dining table staring at him trying to decipher what Sander would say next.

Sander had almost forgotten why he had even come here and now that his whole plan went awry. He felt a little exposed as he had no real reason to be there.

“So….” Robbe egged on the conversation. His eyes shifting back and forth.

Trying to get Sander to participate but Robbe was so good at sensing Sander’s feelings. You’d swear that Sander had little thought bubbles protruding above his head storytelling his internal narrative for Robbe’s personal consumption.

“I know why you’re here?” Robbe finally said. Sounding a bit illusive.

“Oh yeah” Sander asked inquisitively.

“Why am I here?”

“You came here to do that thing we always do” Robbe said as he made a come here gesture with his hands.


Sander walk towards Robbe. Placing his beer on the table behind him. He then placed both of his hands on each of Robbe’s shoulders and pressed their foreheads together as a sign of thanks for what Robbe had just done.

Pulling back and finally saying to Robbe.
“Okay, but no subtitles this time. Promise?” Sander demanded.

“Sanderrrr” Robbe whined.

“What is it with you and all that foreign shit. We end up watching tv shows in 7 different languages” Sander jokingly scoffed at Robbe.

“What's wrong with that?” Robbe asked offended. Thinking doesn’t everyone do that.

“Come” Sander said turning his body to face away from Robbe. Signaling Robbe to get on his back he was going to carry him to the couch.

Robbe jumped on recalling in his mind how many times they had done this exact thing. In the years that Robbe and Sander had been together they had formed their own traditions. When Sander was hospitalized or at home not feeling very well he would lay in Robbe’s arms in bed or on the couch and just marathon shows for hours. It was strange because any other time Sander wasn’t much of a TV watcher but in Robbe’s mind those moments were some of the best of their relationship. They would just lay together for hours. Robbe would just grip Sander so hard he practically left bruises on Sander’s arms but Sander would still have to remind him to hold him tighter and nuzzle himself even deeper into Robbe’s embrace.

“Where's your watch?” Robbe picked up his head off Sander’s shoulder to respond.

“Oh my watch broke. I think it’s the battery or something. I needed a new one anyways.”

“Do you still have it? Sander asked as they sat down on the couch together.

“I can fix it for you” Sander was always the handy one in their relationship.

“You don’t have to do that. It’s old. Just let it go.”

“No come on. I want to. I can bring it back to life for you” Sander said as he gestured spooky fingers.

“What's going on up here?” Robbe twirled his fingers towards Sander’s hair.

“What you don’t like my platinum tips with two inch roots?” Robbe leaned over towards Sander and sweetly rustled his overgrown hair.

This touch of intimacy spurred Sander onto his next thought. He grabbed onto Robbe’s wrist as he began drawing it back from his head and asked.

“Maybe you could dye it for me tomorrow?” His focus shifted downward. As to not draw too much attention as to what he was implying.

There was a pause from Robbe. An acknowledgement of the invisible contract Sander was handing over to him requesting some sort of temporal permanence.

“Only if you cook dinner the night after?” Robbe responded back.

Sander looked up at him with an adolescent grin and leaned in and gave Robbe the most innocent peck on the lips. There was no intent behind it aside from a simple thank you.

“Are you hungry?” Robbe asked.

“I could eat”
“Are you in the mood for anything specific? Italian, French, Greek?”

“Doesn’t matter” Sander tilted his head towards Robbe direction. Tacking on.

“I eat everything”

“Everything” Robbe repeated in a sultry voice.

“Yeah everything” Sander spoke onto Robbe’s lips. This kiss, not so innocent.

“Seriously stop…order please. I am starving” Robbe pushed Sander off him in a playful manner.

Sander took out his phone to start ordering but before he did Robbe grabbed him and twirled him around on the couch and brought Sander’s back up against his chest, positioning his arm around Sander’s chest. Sander placed a small kiss on the base of Robbe’s thumb and continued on ordering.

“Anything but french” Robbe said as he placed his chin atop Sander’s head.

“You know how I feel about french” Robbe added as he placed another kiss on Sander’s temple.

Finally closing out the dinner conversation with “Don’t forget something sweet for dessert”.

“Something yummy,” Sander said playfully.

“Yeah, something yummy” Robbe toyed back as he pulled Sander tighter into his arms.

Salivating...

The silkiest organ

Swirls of sulfates

Mixing...

As the roof of his mouth pressed onto the demerara. Brandishing it’s sugary topcoating onto his enamel.

Relishing it.

“Tasty?” Luc whispered into his ears as he swallowed it down.

“It’s so good” Robbe moaned with a full mouth.

“Don’t forget to go slow.” Luc egged him on.

“I want you to really taste it.”

Luc told his boyfriend.

“Is it sweet enough?”

Robbe took a big gulp down as confirmation.

“Good, because I wasn’t sure if you would like the raspberry sea salt flavor” Luc quibbed.
Robbe and Lucas (he preferred Luc) had now been dating roughly around 9 months and in that time Robbe was sure Luc had fed him every cake in Belgium and the Netherlands combined.

Luc had one rule, you were only allowed sugar if you burned it off and well Robbe and Luc had found creative ways to work off their glucose consumption.

They hadn’t been together long but they had already established their after sex program. Luc would always bring some decadent treat along for them to share in their post fucked out haze.

Luc was so different from what Robbe had previously experienced. A total skate head with a beach bum swagger composed of a wardrobe of cuffed up tight denim, extravagantly printed socks pulled up to his shins, paisley short sleeves shirts which he hardly ever button pass one notch and an array of different colored bucket hats, caps, fedoras and worn down chucks coupled with his signature fur collar denim jacket.

Luc wasn’t an easy breezy type. That wasn’t his style, he was always a little pumped up, boombastic when at his best. Years of living his life on ledges about to drop in into bowls, half pipes or slopes had made him permanently frenetic. He’d learned to meet Robbe in the middle though and give him one slice of cake before he would eventually hijack Robbe’s tranquility and kick him out of bed to hold an impromptu jam session, go skate or find some new concrete hideaway to go vandalize.

Oh and his music taste. There was only one god in Luc’s world, and his name was Marley. BOB MARLEY. Fuck Bowie.

Just kidding, Luc loved Bowie too. He was Robbe’s favourite so he loved anything his boyfriend loved.

If Luc hadn’t impressed Robbe enough during their first meeting well Robbe was not prepared. Luc was a real life wheeler dealer, a bird of prey. He could gnar with the best of them. Play it fast and loose. Go full vertigo. Nothing got Robbe more jacked up then seeing Luc shredding up a storm on his board completely shirtless with his jeans barely hugging his hips and a quarter inch of his boxer’s on display; his washboard abs glistening with sweat. Luc tailspinning through the sky like a stick of dynamite on the path to self destruction.

Luc lived his life like he rode his board. Bitchin fast, at full voltage, bursting with kerosene, no concept of consequences. When his sponsors asked him to ease up on his on the spot celebratory make out sessions with Robbe after his winning runs. He laughed in their face and told them next time he get Robbe to blow him so the kids could get a real show. I mean that was just typical snarky Luc. A real life renegade. Take it or leave it. There was no real way to describe him, a jack of all trades, a real mad hatter, some even called him an artist.

Robbe loved it. Loved him.

Robbe hadn’t realized how much he had missed the familiarity of a known lover. He had gotten so used to the dribs and drabs of affection that Sander schlepped out that he had just sold himself short but Luc was some unexpected pixie prince who blitz in ready to declare Robbe his. No questions asked, stick a fucking fork in it, done, over, schluss.

Luc was uninhibited too. What he felt is what he said. Luc was loyal to the soil and Robbe was his budding flower. The first time he said “I love you” he asked for nothing from Robbe in return. Love wasn’t some sort of payment system for him. Luc told Robbe when you know, you just know. None of that mask your feelings in mystery bullshit. For Robbe it took time but Luc was the catalyst he needed to finally wash away the remnants of his past. He did eventually tell Luc he
loved him and he meant it but the experience in itself was surreal. See Robbe had never even considered the possibility that he would fall in love with someone else. Sander basically took Robbe’s heart hostage from a young age and Robbe never looked back but somehow this magpie dutchman with his steely azure eyes, a bucket hat and guitar finally broke through and broke Robbe.

“Baby, you want the last bite?” Luc brought the spoon to Robbe’s mouth.

Robbe shook his head back and forth on Luc’s chest. He was too comfortable, lazily placed atop Luc, straddling him. Luc sitting up against Robbe’s headboard with one hand through Robbe’s hair and the other carefully balancing a porcelain plate and fork. As Luc went to put the plate down on the bedside table he grabbed the little bit of whipped cream left on the plate and rubbed it straight down Robbe’s nose.

“Luc” Robbe whined.

Luc immediately cupped his hands on Robbe’s face and gave Robbe a wet sloppy lick. Clearing the cream off. Stopping at Robbe’s mouth to push the remnants of the cream onto Robbe’s tongue and into him. Robbe took that as signal, intensifying the kiss and started gently thrusting onto Luc’s hips. Luc smiled against Robbe’s mouth but before Robbe could really get lost into his heat. Luc broke the soppy kiss. He was such a tease.

“Have you been thinking about what we talked about?”

Luc flashed those pretty eyes at Robbe. Robbe instantly thinking he needs to stop doing this himself. Stop peering into eyes that have the ability to dissolve him.

“Mmmmmhhhhhhhh”

“And…..” Luc coaxed him.

“Don’t you think it’s a bit too soon?” Luc placed his hands on Robbe’s hips slightly squeezing them. Assuring him he was listening closely.

“I mean it’s only been 9 months” Robbe said in a barely audible whisper.

“No pressure” Luc ran the back of his hands on Robbe’s cheek to ease his visible tension.

“We’ll do whatever you want. I just want to be able to wake up next to you every morning”

“And Bowie?” Robbe added on. Pointing at the black hair cat watching them at the edge of the bed.

“Oh shit” Luc let out.

“I forgot my apartment doesn’t allow pets.”

Robbe’s hands started to feel clammy all of sudden.

“His coming with me or I am not coming.” Robbe stated harshly in deviance.

Luc laughed at Robbe’s reply finding it a bit dramatic but then he realized Robbe was dead serious. If the cat wasn’t welcomed, he wasn’t coming.

“Ok hear me out. You move to Amsterdam and we look for a new place and come get Bowie. Do you know anyone that could watch him for a month or two?”
Yeah, Robbe knew someone….

“Is he doing better with you?” Robbe enquired tentatively. Knowing this was a sore subject.

“Oh you mean has Bowie tried to scratch my eyes out, bite my fingers off or even let me remotely close to him lately” He let out sarcastically. Knowing damn well that fur ball hated the living shit out of him. He honestly didn’t know why, pets usually loved him but this one seemed to be planning his demise.

“Anyways” Luc said in an attempt to break up the awkwardness. “Sesh time” He picked Robbe off him and headed towards their acoustic guitars resting in the corner of Robbe’s bedroom.

“I finally learned the cords” Luc let out with excitement.

“took you long enough. I’ve been waiting.”

Luc hands Robbe his classic mahogany finish Martin. While Luc sports a zestier walnut burl Yamaha.

“Calling rhythm” Robbe declared as he tuned his guitar.

Luc raises his eyebrows in acceptance. Handing Robbe a black pick.

Robbe moves towards the middle of the bed to give Luc room to hop on. They sat across from one another looking at each other.

“Tempo is 1 and a 2 and a 3……” Robbe tells Luc.

Robbe presses his left fingers on the frets. His right fingers holding the pick and he mouths to Luc E add 9 and begins to strum down, up down down, up down up, down, up down down.

Luc picks up Robbe’s tune and Robbe switches out to the rhythm.

Luc continuous to play the intro.

Robbe starts to move through some bar chords switching from E to G causing the steel cords to whine out gently as Robbe tabs on them through his cord changes.

Robbe and Luc sit there bobbing their heads up and down as they get lost in the music.

Luc starts to sing the intro “Here comes the story of a hurricane”

Cord change [Robbe]

The music begins to ascend, “Cyclone…..You’re on your own”.

The strumming is starting to get heavier now.

Robbe slides his hand down the neck of his guitar to hit some high G’s.

His eyes are closed now. He knows this part by heart. His working the pocket.

Both men are fully swaying now. In the groove.

Luc sings the chorus. The part everyone knows.

“It was bad and I was unable to pull him inside”
Cord change [Robbe]

They’re at the bridge now.

The strumming intensifies as they hit the crescendo.

Robbe is slumped over his guitar shredding it out. Aggressively bobbing with eyes closed.

This next lyric is Luc’s favourite. He sings it directly to Robbe. Robbe opens his eyes to watch him deliver it to him.

“I could never hate you. Even If I tried”

This part is all Robbe, the pick solo.

The music is just flowing out of them now. The pace starts descending.

Luc starts playing a little slap stick to wrap it up.

Robbe is taking the melody home.

Both men are leaning so far back their feet are off the bed as they strum it out.

Their shoulders moving in syncopation with one another.

Robbe winds it down slowly. Not wanting to let go of the moment.

But eventually he stops and lets the music go out.

Both men look up and giggle at each other in perfect harmony and share a kiss.

“I love you” Luc says as he takes hold of Robbe’s chin and kisses him again.

“Love you too” Robbe tells him back.

As they pull away from each other. Luc whisper’s in Robbe ear.

“I am so happy that I found you”


“Are you okay?” Luc asks him.

Robbe hops out of bed muttering something about feeding Bowie knowing that he needs to get out of room.

He runs to his kitchen sink. His body violently letting out a dry heave over the sink but nothing comes up. It’s just a reaction.

He hovers over the sink for a few seconds splashing water on his face. Trying to gather himself.

He feels something massage his arm. He jumps back and realizes it's just Bowie nuzzling him. His aqueducts begin to moisten so he squeezes his eyes shut and looks up at the ceiling. Attempting to will everything away but he sees it, the white studio with the pictures on the walls. His breathing starts to even out after a minute or two.
He opens his eyes, feeling somewhat composed. Thinking he managed to keep it all at bay but little did he know the rot within had begun to permeate, a contagion that was seeping into every orifice of his soul.

Is this where the living come to meet their death?

In the gullies of the earth.

Where tranches of unclaimed dukedoms exist awaiting reanimation.

Oxygenless.

Still.

The soulful, arms up, reacting to the vastness in complete surrender.

Robbe feels the pressure, he moves slowly.

Unable to make out anything. In dire need to escape his holdings.

The laws of thermodynamics pushing him towards the surface.

He finally gives in. Contracting his body and propelling himself vertically upwards. Like a jellyfish moving through the ocean currents. His lungs thanking him as he reappears from his watery submersion.

Robbe’s vision takes a moment to adjust. Still in disbelief that he let Sander talk him into one of his usual clandestine expeditions of break-ins, yacht clubs and late night canal swims.

Robbe wipes the back of his hands against his eyes in attempts to wipe off the condensation clinging onto him. He can’t see anything. Its pitch black, and the canal provides no lighting. All he can see is the deck lights in the distance. Where he abandoned his clothing and all of his usual utilities.

“Sander!” He screams out in panic.

Nothing.

Silence.

Robbe starts to paddle towards the deck. He’s been in the water for what feels like eternity. He’s exhausted so he twists his body towards the sky and begins to backstroke.

The moonlight is shining down on him.

He paddles lightly. Tiny waves billowing around his body. The stars surveillance comforting him.

Robbe absorbs the cosmos above him. His mind blank, calm, reassured. A baptism of the mind via compound elements.

Suddenly a creature from the bowels of the riverbed pulls him under.

He turns to face it.

Robbe and Sander are swimming across from one another. Face to face, the water encasing them.
Sander swims over to Robbe. He goes to kiss him but before he can lean in, Robbe pulls up.

Ripples crack through to the surface as both men reemerge.

“Still don’t know how to swim?” Sander yells out breathlessly. Struggling to grab enough air to even out his slight panting.

“Still cheating?” Robbe taunts.

Sander paddles over to Robbe. He is so close to Robbe's face he can feel his breath on his cheek.

“Something’s never change”, Sander whispers to Robbe. His eyes glistening in the moonlight.

Like shiny emeralds looking back at him.

But Robbe isn’t swayed so easily by Sander’s charm anymore and responds.

“You know I was foolish once. The kind of kid that was impressed by breaking the law and making out in large bodies of water”

“And what about now?” Sander starts leaning in towards Robbe.

Robbe puts his index finger under Sander’s chin and moves his cheek to the side. Dodging Sander’s advances and says.

“Still foolish, but maybe not so young” Unable to contain a cheeky grin.

Robbe starts to paddle away from Sander. Then he stops, looks back at Sander and tilts his head towards one side and says.

“Come, race you.”

Sander gives him a soft laugh and paddles towards him up for the challenge.

“On the count of 3”

“1, 2 ….”

Before Sander could even get to 3. Robbe starts sprinting towards the deck.

Sander yells out to him.

“Cheater”

It seems so juvenile Robbe thinks but he feels so exposed as he stands on the deck putting his clothes back on in front of Sander. Sander has literally seen Robbe naked hundreds if not thousands of times at this point.

“Stop looking” Robbe slips out coyly. Pulling his black pants up onto his hips.

“Am admiring the view” Sander says with a mischievous smile across his face.

“Come on, hurry up. We need to get home, Bowie needs his dinner.” Robbe checks the time on his watch. It clocks 21:21.

Sander turns around to face the Scheldt canal. His back to Robbe now.
“You know I once heard this story” Sander says. Still facing away from Robbe.

“About two boys and a beach house with a moon just like this one” Sander points up to the sky.

Robbe knows where he is going with this but he doesn’t want to hear it. Not now. Not this story. Not after everything that has happened. This story is off limits.

“Please don’t” Robbe says in a stern voice. Sander turns around to look directly at him. Knowing by the tremor in Robbe’s voice that he has hit a pain point.

“Why?” Sander challenges Robbe, annoyed at his lack of engagement.

“You used to love that story?” Sander adds on.

“I used to love a lot of things” Robbe threw back with venom.

Sander wasn’t amused by Robbe’s comment but he was prepared. He knew this moment was inevitable. So he continued.

“These two boys fell in love at the house by the beach”

“The brown haired skater boy…….”

Robbe rushed him, pissed and asked again.

“Stop it, Sander. Just stop it”

Robbe pushed him hard now. Almost making Sander fall off the deck.

“I don’t want to hear your stupid fucking story” Robbe pleaded.

But Sander was relentless. Taking the opportunity to incite Robbe even more.

“Then we had the artist who fell in love with his skater boy.”

Robbe was seething now. An indescribable rage bubbling within him. Sander knew this story was hazardous. It wasn’t meant for retelling unless needed.

But Sander knew how far he could take Robbe until he broke him and he was determined to shatter him into pieces. So he went on with an almost growl in his voice.

“The artist would say that the moonlight was shining down on the skater boy and he knew…..” Sander suddenly charged at Robbe. Cupping his cheeks in his hands but with distinct force. His eyes pierced through Robbe as he slowly queued Robbe into the story while holding his face in his hands, peering down at him and asked.

“What did he know Robbe?”

Sander squeezed his cheeks even harder. It hurt Robbe a little, Sander noticed and lightened his grip up.

“Say it”

Sander’s pupils were fully dilated now. Almost black. It made him look so harsh under the moonlight.
Robbe stayed silent. He didn’t recant the story. He didn’t want to.

Sander was nose to nose with Robbe now. Still holding Robbe’s cheeks in place. Robbe was sure his heart was going tachycardic as Sander said.

“What are you afraid of skater boy? That maybe you’ll speak the story into existence.”

Sander almost violently let go of Robbe making him fall back on himself. Switching up his charm instantly into one of his nonchalant demeanours.

Then he said, “I think it's time to get you home Robbe. You need to feed my cat.”

And now….Now Robbe had had enough and he unleashed.

“He’s not your cat. So don’t come in here thinking you know what's best for him because you don’t. Oh, and just so you know. He hates that fucking diet food you buy him. He likes to be petted upwards not downwards. He sleeps on the right side of the bed because I sleep on the left and I give him half a cup of regular food because one third doesn't cut it anymore. His changed. You don’t know shit about him. You gave him away, you left him, you abandoned him and you have no right to him now.”

Robbe hadn’t realized he was so enraged until a tear rolled down his cheek.

Sander just glared at him, grinding his jaw down. His eyes squinting in a fiery veil Robbe hadn’t seen before. He said nothing as he walked towards Robbe but when they got shoulder to shoulder as he passed him. Sander stopped, looking straight ahead and said.

“I didn’t abandon him. I took him to the only person I knew would protect him.”

Sander walked off into the night. The moonlight shining above them.

“Do we need to protect your scalp?” Genade asked.

“Nah, It's not bleach, it's just hair dye” Sander said.

“I still can’t believe you won’t be a blonde anymore.”

Sander shrugged his shoulders as he checked out his dye job in the mirror.

“Sometimes you just need a change” he said.

“I am thinking of dying my locs too. Maybe purple”

Sander scowled at that statement and shook his head.

“No don’t do purple. I hate purple”

“I love your pink locs. They stand out against your skin. Make you look even more beautiful in the sunshine”.

“Awwwww, thanks baby” Genade pressed a kiss on Sander’s lips.

Genade de Heem was a half dutch/half nigerian hippie fairy with an edge. Sander met her at his tattoo shop's grand opening. Noor had brought her along as her plus one. Sander was instantly infatuated with her. I mean it was hard not to be she was a stunner. She looked like a young
Zendaya. A real life ten.

They hadn’t been dating long. It was all still very new but so far she was close to perfect for Sander. She was a wild child like him. A Bowie fan too she even knew all the b-sides. An ink queen with a huge lettering piece on the back of her arms that read Love Is Love. She meant it too. She had no reservations or premeditations about people, life or love. She didn’t push Sander for a label either. She would say, why need a label? When lost souls are meant to be they will find one another across the dunes of life. So they just existed, and they were cool with that.

“Babe you want to go out tonight? Show off my new look” Sander asked.

Genade agreed but added on.

“Let’s make it an early one though. Remember we gotta bake those croissants tomorrow”.

Yeah, she was an amazing cook too.

“Ok ready?” Sander asked as Genade sat in the bedroom waiting.

“Yes, show me” She said.

Sander walked out of his bathroom into the bedroom as a full blown brunette.

Genade squealed.

“You look smoking hot”

Sander rustled his wet brown hair. It was certainly different for him but like he said he needed a change. Needed to “look” more grown up.

“You know what, lets just go out now. I am in the mood” Sander said, hyped up.

The pair got moving and started collecting their shoes and jackets but as Sander put on his signature Black Doc Martens, he thought nah. In tribute to his old hair he was going to pull out the white Doc Martens. He walked over to his bed and got on his hands and knees to peer under it. Those shoes had to be somewhere in this general area.

Finally he found them but as he pulled them out a litter of other shoes came along for the ride. All tangled up via their prospective shoelaces. Sander picked apart his white Doc shoelaces and dropped the rest of the shoes on the ground as he started the usual wiggle and jiggle to get his boots on. He hadn’t even noticed Genade staring at him from the doorway.

“Your so pretty baby” Genade said in the warmest voice.

“Oh yeah come over here and I’ll show you how pretty I can be”

There was the squeal again.

Genade dropped her bag and jacket on the spots and ran towards Sander who was sitting on the edge of the bed but as she sprinted towards him she tripped and dove past the bed. Sander tried to grab her but her hands slipped off his and she crash landed on the other side of the bed alone.

“Ca’va?”

She pushed herself off the floor and signaled to Sander that she was fine just a little embarrassed.
She went to look at what she had slipped on.

On the floor were some old grey vans.

“Stupid shoes!”

“I’ve never seen you wear these”, Genade stated in a prying fashion. Realizing quickly those didn’t look like Sander’s size.

“I don’t wear them anymore actually. Honestly I should just throw them away.”

As Sander grab the pair of shoes to toss them in the garbage.

Genade stopped him and said, “No keep them, you know how these things go full circle and come back into fashion.”

“They’ll probably be al la mode within the next year or two”. If she only knew.

“If you say so” Sander encouraged her.

“Anyways, let’s go, I need a drink”

Genade nodded in consensus.

As Sander headed out the door, he turned back around and kicked the shoes back under the bed.

Forgetting about them for now.

Sending them back into the darkness.

The clock dials filled up the silence.

Tick …

tock….

Tick…

tock….

It sat above Dr Meyer’s office door.

He would just sit there and passively observe it. The time, passing forward.

He was usually disengaged and uninterested but something felt different today.

His voice pierced through the silence.

“There’s been something lingering” he said with little regard to the allowance of truth he was exposing.

His hands were clammy. So he gripped his fist. Hoping it would provide some sort of comfort.

“When I was younger, I use to let people control me. Influence my thoughts and feelings. Try to tell me what I felt without really listening to me. Or noticing how I was hurting, how I was changing. It made me angry, made me say things I didn’t mean. Hurt the people I cared about.”
"It made me think I am never going to find anyone, at least no one who’ll really love me.”

He exhaled.

“But I did find someone and he was great. Perfect even, but I ruined it and now I keep asking myself why?” This was an unusual admittance for him. Sparking a recollection of last night’s happenings and the nights before that.

Laying in the dark.

A bareless ceiling.

Questions left unanswered.

“Are the sleeping pills not working?” Dr Meyer asked.

“Are they having any negative side effects?”

He hated questions like these, probing ones that were an attempt to calculate the durability of your mind. He also really hated the layout of Dr Meyer’s office. It felt like it was intentionally laid out to make you feel like some sort of dance monkey being poked at to divulge some existential secret about your own reality. He was over this session, he wanted it to end. Thank god he told the doctor he would need to leave early today.

“I haven’t been taking them. I mean I have them. It’s just ...I don’t know. There is so many thoughts going on and on...”

He twirled his index fingers around his temples. A depiction of his minds’ instability.

Dr Meyer took note of that comment and wrote it down.

“Could you maybe benefit from some mood stabilizers?”

That question made him anxious. Made him press his palms together and scratch his nails on the surface of his left hand. An adolescent twitch that became an established habit after so many years of over exposure to medical professionals.

“Yeah maybe that could help, but I think before I do that, I should try to find some answers. Take care of something that has been gnawing at me.”

“I could refer you to a more senior colleague if needed. Someone that specializes in sleep disorders.” The doc suggested with a sense of empathy.

“Could you maybe come back at 4pm today?”

He shook his head back and forth and started to get off the couch.

“Sorry doc. I have to go now. I did mention I needed to leave early today. I have to be somewhere at 10am.”

He put his jacket on and looked at his watch.

“And looks like I have 19 minutes to get there now.”

He gave the doc a one hand palm up salute to thank him for his time.
He walked towards the exit and as he turned the door handle Dr Meyer tacked on.

“Oh and Robbe”

“Try to come back at 4. So we can try to help you with the sleeping.”

Robbe gave the doc a lackluster sign of acknowledgement.

He left quickly.

Ran out the office, and into the daylight.

The autumn leaves scattered all across the pavement on his route to work.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you everyone for all your kudos and wonderful comments. My apologies it has taken me so long to get you an update. It's truly been hell weeks but here it is.

If anyone is wondering the song Luc and Robbe play together is Cyclone by Sticky Fingers (the village session version).

Note: My depiction of therapy does not imply a mental health crisis. Therapy is normal, people go all the time and that's why he is there. He even tells you that. He has had a lot on his mind.

I also made a tumblr @lucidpantone am there with a coffee or tea to chat. Chapter 4 will be awhile but it is coming.

If you have any questions. Go ahead and find me in the comments.
Chernobyl(s)

Chapter Notes

Firstly, I hope all of you reading this are safe and and with your loved ones. I've seen some of you post on tumblr that quarantine is really stagnating your mental health so if ever you need to talk please feel free to reach out to me @lucidpantone. We can shoot the shit about this fic, skam or anything bowling around your mind.

Secondly, my apologies for taking so long to update this fic but good news is that I come bearing a 13k word long chapter.

Word to the wise this chapter is an emotional roller coaster be prepared to be flung around in every possible direction but I promised fireworks so look out for the final drop at the end.

See you on the other side.

Same rules apply.

Italics is the Past. If not, it's August 15th at any point in the day I chose to drop you into.

Large line breaks are a new memory.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The brass beads caressed the palm of his hand with velocity.

Until the pull chain cranked the lever.

They laid there, enlightened.

The sulfur vapor bulbs color-washing the walls of their habitat in an amber glaze.

It was painfully small. Pre-war, old but in Belgium’s highly regarded art deco style. The schematics laid it out as a 1/1 with a ¾ lavatory. It had good lighting though (a prerequisite for the artist) mainly due to the fact that it was surrounded by a couple of those ghastly mid century modern blocks with those hideous matte shine finishes that would double up as a sun ray reflector into their new apartment. Engulfing the space in a celestial limelight. They took the place on the spot because the artist said it “spoke” to him.

Their move-in date was five days after Robbe’s eighteenth birthday.

It was Sander and Robbe’s first night there.

They had spent all day moving and they were exhausted as they lay on the floor of their new apartment surrounded by cardboard boxes and some scented candles in attempt to clear out the smell of mildew. Their furniture wouldn’t be arriving till tomorrow.

“I like these floors. What kind of wood is this?” Robbe asked curiously.
Sander turned his cheek in the opposite direction as he was laying on the floor on his back and took a guess.

“Mahogany maybe”

Sander turned back to meet Robbe’s eyes.

They had been laying like this for what felt like an eternity. Both lovers drape out on the floor in opposite directions. One with their feet facing north and another pointing south. Both finding a home in the curvature of the other’s arm as they nuzzled their heads onto the others shoulder.

The music had stopped.

“Fuck, I have to change the disk” Sander noted.

Both lovers turned their focus to their Crosley turntable in the corner of the room that was begging to be refreshed spinning aimlessly.

“Do you not want to get up?” Robbe asked Sander sweetly as he twirled his albino hair through his fingers.

“I have zero desire” Sander stated in worned out fashion.

Robbe placed a kiss on Sander’s forehead and began to collect himself off the floor to walk over to the record player. He rummaged through the vinyl case with an effort of determination. Clearly looking for a particular record. Sander was rustling in the background but Robbe wasn’t paying much attention as he thumbed passed vinyl after vinyl sleeve until he located it.

“Ahhh ha” Robbe emoted.

“What are you playing?” Sander asked.

“Wait for it” Robbe placed the turntable arm onto the disk. The lyrics surfed through the sulfur vapor.

[I, I will be king. And you, you will be queen]

Sander laughed a little and then he said, “Our song”.

[Heroes by David Bowie]

Robbe scooted back dragging his knees on the floor back to where Sander laid. His body faced north as Sander faced south. He hovered over Sander and placed a kiss on his opposing lips. The kinda kiss you only ever see in comic book movies inspired by 8 legged creatures. The one where the hero impresses his lover with the ability to find their mouth even when the world is upside down.

Sander reaches up to grab Robbe’s head and pushes his upper body off the floor without breaking the bind of their lips. Both boys are now sitting up. Sander digs his hand into Robbe’s locks and begins to navigate his body towards the wooden surface as Robbe kicks his feet from underneath him to straighten out. Sander guides Robbe’s body back onto the hardwood placing his hand behind his head to protect his skull. The lyrics of Heroes whirlpooling around the room.

Once Robbe finds the floor safely Sander breaks their kiss and says.
“In how many universes are we laying like this right now?” Robbe runs his hand through Sander’s fringe and replies.

“In infinite ones”

“Nowhere as happy as we are” Sander says as his eyes dart all over the room confirming to himself that this feeling he is feeling at that very moment is not a delusion. It’s real.

“Close your eyes” Sander whispers as he places himself between Robbe’s thighs. Robbe squeezes his eyes shut but Sander places his hand over his eyes to make sure he isn’t cheating. Sander pulls out a gold ring box wrapped up in red string with a bow tied to the top and hovers it over Robbe’s head with one hand still firmly placed over his vision.

“There is something right in front of you. Try to find it”. Robbe moves his arms up scanning the air for a possible object. Sander teasing him as he moves the box in and out of his direction until he finally places it in Robbe’s hands freeing his vision. Robbe’s beautiful coffee lashes pop open. He stares at the red string box unsure what to say….

“Are you asking me to mar—” Sander shook his head side to side. Then he spoke.

“No…I mean I don’t know. Maybe…. I’m not sure. I’d be missing a Tesla if I was. All I know is I wanted you to have it and keep it safe. It belongs to you.”

Robbe pulled on the red string and the top of the box fell open Sander’s silver ring landing right over his heart. Sander grabbed the silver and slid it onto Robbe’s ring finger and once placed safely onto Robbe’s hand he kissed the top of his finger where the silver ring belonged.

“What did the artist know under the moonlight” Sander queued Robbe.

“That he was the one”

“And what did the Skater boy do in return” Sander added on.

“He stayed” Robbe deeply suspired.

Sander massaged the tip of his nose against Robbe’s in a touching display of vulnerability. He pulled back and whispered nervously.

“If you’re ever scared, or you doubt me or us for any reason. Tell me that story and we’ll come back to this moment. We’ll come back to our safe place together and I’ll do the same. Promise?”

Robbe nodded and Sander proceeded in reverence to kiss Robbe’s cheek, forehead, nose, lips, every inch of his face.

“I love you”

“I love you too” Sander said leaning into Robbe’s neck and kissed the new tattoo on top of Robbe’s shoulder. He giggled a little to himself.

“I still can’t believe you stole my design and used it to get your first tattoo. It was my idea.” Sander teased.

“I didn’t steal your design. I was inspired by it and made my own custom design as a birthday present to myself” Robbe let out in a machiavellian style.

“I still can’t believe you beat me to our first tattoo.” Sander shook his head in amusement.
Robbe’s eyes widened like he just remembered something important.

“Oh I forgot to tell you that the tattoo shop was looking for an apprentice. You should go in and talk to them about it.”

“I know nothing about tattooing and I have no experience” Sander enforced.

“That’s why it’s called an apprenticeship and half of it is design anyways and we both know you have the best designs.”

Sander looked up to the ceiling in a pensive gaze and then relaxed.

“Ok I’ll go tomorrow” he shrugged out lazily.

“But I guess I just never really thought of myself as someone who would enjoy tattoos. Maybe one or two but not much more than that”. Sander rattled off this thought as if it was meant to be for the withholdings of his mind but he said it out loud.

“Anyways we’re were we at…. Oh yeah the skater boy stayed.” He shot his lover a schemy smile.

Sander had been supporting himself on his elbows this entire time hovering above Robbe. They were starting to burn so he finally collapsed onto Robbe’s chest and just laid relaxed on top of him. He placed his head on the side of Robbe’s so as Robbe turned to face him they were forehead to forehead.

“And what do we say?” Sander questioned Robbe knowing he already knew the answer.

Robbe took this opportunity to wrap his arms around Sander’s neck grabbing each one of his elbow’s with the opposite hand and squeezing Sander painfully tight just like Sander loved it.

“He stays…. and” Robbe continues the story.

They say the next part of the tale in unison.

“We stay”

“If he goes” Robbe adds on.

They marry their voices together again.

“We go”

Robbe looks into Sander’s gaze for the last part. They are bound so close together at this moment their nose, mouth’s and chin’s are millimeters apart.

“If he has to fight for it” Sander asks with hesitation.

Robbe and Sander take a moment to acknowledge the importance of this final vow.

“We fight”

The lovers seal their pledge towards allegiance with a kiss.

As the embers of the candles surrounding them flicker in and out while the lyrics to heroes linger overhead like a protective halo over their union.
The strobe lights flickered in and out as the walls around him began to pulsate. The deep base trembling underneath him. It was making him nauseas or maybe it was the bottle of whiskey infiltrating his blood stream. It was beginning to ravage his body and psyche all at once. The proof torpeding into his personal yellow submarine incinerating him from within. God he was so hot, sweltering even. A heat that could only be found during the times of antebellums when white buds were king and sunburnt subjects were priced by the quick grasp of their hands. It was raw, punishing, a worn out type of heat. It reminded him of India. He wanted to go back there so badly. He hated it here. He had only been back in Antwerp for six weeks and his entire life had gone nuclear.

Robbe and him had broken up, or were on a “break” and Sander was in full blown meltdown. Taking every opportunity to get black out drunk at whatever available college party he called “fun” for the night or dive bar that didn’t attempt to cut him off whenever he got too lethargic. This was day seven in a row into Sander’s deranged journey into piety. The reactors of his mind on the precipice of nose diving into the ozone barely tethering reality but tonight would go down as the night when the bottom finally fell out.

He can’t quite recall the night in its entirety but luckily the age of modernity allowed others to document its happenings for him and upload them onto various social incubators. It all started innocently enough with a game of truth or dare like all fool’s tales do. Sander being the self declared maverick tiptoed outside the lines of safety and went with a dare. A pretty blonde that had been sizing him up since he walked in dared him to kiss her and not one of those cutesy pootsy smooches but a real deep kiss. Why Sander went ahead and agreed to doing this he still doesn’t really know probably a symptom of his debilitating acumen but he did it, and then he did it again, then with another girl, and then a guy. All whilst these regrets were being time capsuled by the crowd around them and uploaded for later revisits.

Sander doesn’t remember the bust up with Jens who was at the same party and witnessed all of Sander’s antics but he was told they fought and it was bad. Well to Sander’s luck the event had been captured for him and on video. It was only a few seconds long but it was a clear take by take splice of Jens’s being pulled off Sander’s body who he had pinned to a wall while he gutted Sander out verbally for embarrassing his friend. Last thing you can hear as the filmed rolled to black was Jens screaming at Sander saying “how could you embarrass him like this”.

Once again Sander will remember none of this. These parts of the night will become blind spots in his mind. All these moments will become images wrapped up in frosted cellophane. All a bit muddled, lacking in clear demarcations for identification. The next real moment he clearly remembers is one he wishes was a blind spot. He recognized his surroundings immediately; it was a place he knew but he was there with someone he didn’t. The blonde from the party, she was sitting on top of him in the driver side backseat of his car with her shirt off as they were tangled up in a steamy makeout session. Lightening struck Sander and he shudder making him come back to himself, making him realize what the fuck is he doing. The blonde starts to grind down on him and ups the pace as she reaches for his belt when she whispers in Sander’s ear “Keep touching me, I’ve never felt something like-”. Sander violently flings her off him and opens the backseat door as the heat of his body finally tackles him to the ground and the dregs of his stomach pour out his mouth. The taste of disgust encircling him. He faintly hears the blonde mutter a ton of hate towards his direction as she slams the backseat passenger side door closed.

Sander manages to step out of the car. His motor skills in complete disarray. Barely able to stand. He finally holds himself up by holding out both arms out onto the car for support as his body convulses in dry heave after dry heave as the contents of his stomach spew out. He needs to lie down, he thinks to himself. He lays out on the grass like some fein off a high in need of
resuscitation and looks up at the sky. The star surveillance looking down at him in shame and disdain. A sob begins to originate from his chest and once it starts it doesn’t stop. He thinks of Robbe and what this night is going to cost him. He rolls onto his side as he feels a gut punch to his insides as the guilt defiles him.

Sander asks himself, was this really worth it?

Even if Robbe had lied to him Sander had only made the situation worse. Robbe also didn’t know that Sander knew he lied but he found the paperwork. It wasn’t the lie that hurt their relationship, it was the reason why Robbe was lying to him. He kept secrets. Sander understood that the last year of Robbe’s university life was hell. Sander had been sick a lot and Robbe’s mom was also suffering so a dark shadow came over Robbe. He was quick to anger and snap at those who dared to harm Sander with their judgements. He started to keep things from Sander. Secrets. The day university decisions came out for certification programs Sander knew Robbe had applied to the best architecture programs across Europe but his heart was set on London or Italy. Decisions came out and Robbe told Sander he didn’t get into those programs but that he did get into Brussels and that he was more than happy to go there. However, Sander found the acceptance letters in Robbe’s backpack as he rummaged through it for a lighter. He did get into both programs he had just lied to Sander about it. Sander could be quick to get paranoid so he gave him the benefit of the doubt and during dinner he asked Robbe why he thought he didn’t get into those other programs. Robbe looked straight at Sander’s face and lied to him again saying he didn’t know. His renderings probably weren’t good enough. Sander put this instance in the back of his mind and thought they just needed a break from Antwerp and booked them a trip to India as an early 22nd birthday present for Robbe.

India was perfect. They were so happy there. Sander totally forgot about the lie but then they came back to Belgium and Robbe started certification in Brussels. He came back to Antwerp after his first week of school mentioning that candidates were allowed to go to London on Erasmus (European study abroad) in their 2nd semester but that he had no interest in going. This sounded strange to Sander, all Robbe could talk about before is how much he wanted to go to London. So when Robbe went to shower after one of their bedroom sessions Sander looked through Robbe’s things and sure enough Robbe had filled out all the Erasmus paperwork to go to London. Another lie. Sander gave Robbe the benefit of the doubt again and during breakfast he told Robbe that he should apply to go to London that it’d be good for him. Robbe looked at Sander again and lied to his face saying he just had no interest in going anymore. A lie on top of a lie. This brought forward a dark cloud of distrust over their relationship. One Sander simply couldn’t ignore, especially because he gave Robbe several opportunities to come clean and he never would. Robbe had taken it upon himself to make decisions about their relationship without discussing things with Sander. In attempts to control him.

Sander had never planned on breaking up with Robbe. The break was just to give Robbe time to think until Sander would eventually come forward and tell Robbe that he knew about the lying. That he didn’t need to hide things from him to simply protect Sander from whatever he thought he was protecting him from. Well it didn’t work out that way. Robbe was pissed and would call Sander every night in tears asking why he was doing this to them, that Sander was being selfish and just rage down the phone making Sander even angrier. He wasn’t the selfish one. Sander would drink to ease his anxiety so he could build up the courage to confront Robbe but he never got to do it in the end. Day seven beat him to it.

Sander’s sobs pulled him out of his own memories. The arrival of his lungs wheezing for air shocked his system. Sander was struggling to breathe. He sat up on the grass and a wave of guilt hit him. He was shaking and sobbing uncontrollably in between heavy wheezes. All he could think of is that he needed to hear Robbe’s voice. He stumbled back into the driver seat of his car and
picked up his phone and called Robbe.

“Hello” Robbe picked up sounding sleepy.

Sander didn’t say anything as he held back sobs in the back of his throat rocking his body back and forth in the chair. Finally leaning his forehead forward on the steering wheel for support. The palm of his free hand rubbing his temple as he tried to muster up words.

“Sander….” Robbe responded again.

Sander steadied his voice as much as he could and suspired in attempts to compose himself and finally spoke.

“I miss you. I love you so much.”

“I love you too”

These words would become ingrained in Sander’s mind. This would be the last time Robbe would say I love you to him. The next time he would hear those words again from Robbe would be five days before Robbe’s 26th birthday. Four years later.

“I don’t deserve you. You’re the best thing that has ever happened to me.” Sander starts to unravel as he continues to speak, wet snot dripping from his nose now. A range of high pitch sounds generating from the back of his throat as he manages to mutter out his confessions.

“I love you [a sob breaks through], Am so sorry” The last part barely audible as he cries into the steering wheel.

“Sander where are you?” Robbe’s voice is in full blown panic on the other end.

“I love you. That’s all that matters” Sander is forecily coughing out all these words as tears flood out, “Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. Promise me?”

“I promise. Where are you right now? Talk to me please.” Sander can hear Robbe welling up on the other end. His voice breaking with concern.

Sander can’t hold onto his consciousness any longer and he finally lets his eyelids give way and passes out. The phone falls to the ground as Robbe’s voice can be heard screaming out for Sander as his face slumps onto the driver’s side window, the after taste of his stomach acids doused all over his mouth and shirt. Sander’s body loses slack and his hand grazes the hazard lights on. A signal to the outside world that he was in need of rescue but it went unnoticed. The streets were hollow.

Dank.

Still.

Lifeless.

Sander doesn’t know what happened the rest of that night but as Robbe hung up the phone to call Jens to go find Sander. He saw the social notifications. His friends tagging him on videos of Sander making out with randoms but the worst of it all was the video of Sander and the blonde getting busted in the bathroom half naked about to dial it up a notch. Robbe’s heart shattered instantly. Hot tears poured out of him as he called Jens to go find Sander because he was worried he would do something stupid. Jens found him eventually and took him home to recover. The
morning after would be the last voice conversation they would have for over a year. Robbe would
ask if he was okay, Sander would just cry and tell Robbe how much he loved him. Robbe would say
nothing more then he needed time and to please not attempt to come to Brussels he didn’t want to
see him but he also made Sander promise he wouldn’t do anything stupid. Sander agreed. Robbe
hung up and that’s the last time they spoke until Robbe showed up at the hospital. Robbe would
end up going on Eramus to London a couple of months after this incident. He wouldn’t even go
back to Antwerp for Christmas break he would leave as soon as the winter semester wrapped up.
He would use his time in London to rehabilitate his heart extending his stay up until the end of
summer and the start of his new school year. Keeping him away from Belgium for almost ten
months.

Sander would plummet into a tour of self induced atrophy that would last for a little over a year.
Finally culminating into one of the worst depressive episodes of his young adult life. He would end
up hospitalized for one of his longest stints yet. He didn’t know it as he hung up the phone to
Robbe and wiped away his tears but his hospitalization would bring forth the miracle of his desire.
His next of kin (emergency contact). Robbe would come back for him. He’d go and find Sander in
the depths of his psychological warzone and drag his body out of the open field and into the
tranches for safe keeping. He’d save Sander from himself. Robbe’s touch finally stabilizing him
and stopping the harmful spread of radiation that emanated from within him. Robbe would nurse
Sander back to health by transporting him back to their safe place for purification and healing. A
rebirth of sorts. This and only this would finally bring Sander back to himself, and finally back to
Robbe.

It felt numb.

Maybe it was dead.

His arm he thought as he slumped his entire body over the passenger side door. His cheek relaxed
atop the icy barrier that separated him and Sander from the world unfolding beyond the glass.

Panoramas of urban sprawls passing them by. A portrait consisting of an earthling oddity in slow
moving time. Silhouettes of shine that aren’t visible to the naked eye that would only appear over
long exposed photographs of light. Phosphorescent squiggles of highways, cityscapes and sulfur
vapor light posts. Sidewalks lacquered in the residue of ash. A vehicle on the drag pulling up to an
act of divine intervention.

The engine cut.

He clipped the lights on.

They stood outside of it. The car's reflection looking back at him through the matte shine finish of
the building’s block.

“We’re here” Sander let Robbe know.

“You should park the car and come upstairs.” Robbe let out.

Sander eyes narrowed questioning Robbe’s suggestion. Robbe quickly realized how that invite
sounded and reframed it.

“I think you should come upstairs because I think it's time you take Bowie back with you. Back to
Antwerp.” Robbe looked beyond the glass as the yellow blinking lights washed the asphalt in front
of the rear of the vehicle.
Sander rolled his eyes to Robbe’s dramatics and then looked out beyond the barrier focusing on an object outside of their metallic glassy encasement. He was sick of this whole ordeal. The fiery veil behind Sander’s eyes lifted as he looked at Robbe. Finally ready to take on another tactic, one he rarely used but always took Robbe by surprise when he did … Honesty.

“You know the shrinks tell me I compartmentalize to much”

This omission caught Robbe by surprise. Sander was never this distilled with his truths. They were usually veiled with dark sarcasm, the kind that would pivot Sander’s audience in a different direction when they got too close to his fiery core.

He continued.

“They tell me it’s not healthy to lock things up, separate things, decide what’s good or bad, white or black and then write those moments off.”

Robbe just listened.

“They don’t get it though. Not everyone is lucky enough to have a safe place or person. Someone you can give parts of yourself to. The best parts even, and forget about those parts for long portions of time and when you come back to them they remain untouched, protected, suspended. So when you fuck it all up and everything goes to shit you always know that the best parts of yourself are in the hands of the person you trust the most.”

Sander moves his focus around at whatever is beyond the windshield. He leans both of his arms on the steering wheel placing his hands on top of the other positioning them at the top of the hour of the circular object. He turns his cheek to Robbe as he lays his temple on top of his hands. His upper body draped over the wheel. He sighs, not moving his focus off Robbe. Robbe continues to stare out at the blinking yellow wash.

“Sometimes I think it would’ve been better if you would have left for Amsterdam” Sander said in the steadiest voice. Not giving anything away.

That hit Robbe like a smack to the face. Robbe’s heart began to race, his hands starting to get clammy, he felt nauseous.

Sander reached out to grab Robbe’s hand. Sensing his tension. His thumb gently stroked the top of Robbe’s fingers. His touch stirring something deep within Robbe. Something he so desperately wanted to push down but couldn’t.

Robbe finally caught Sander’s bejeweled gaze. It felt like it was dissolving him. Sander continued to probe.

“You promised you meant it. So, why are you fighting me? I was there, remember. I know what that was..”

Sander let go of Robbe’s hand and brought both hands up to his temples and made an explosive gesture.

Chernobyl.

That question made Robbe anxious. Made him press his palms together and scratch his nails on the surface of his left hand. Robbe couldn’t bring himself to answer that question. I mean he could but it would be the type of answer that would sound irrational to anybody but him. It was complicated. He was complicated.
Robbe stayed silent; he hadn’t actually spoken since asking Sander to come collect Bowie from upstairs and every time he tried to string together a sentence he kept false starting. He went to open his mouth and Sander gave him a disclaimer.

“Please don’t lie”

Another strike. Both men well aware of what Robbe’s lies had done to them in the past. What consequences his lies had brought onto other lovers too. White lies that turned into lies in differing shades of grey that turned into black lies. Lies so soul crushing that they had created a crater size black mass in his heart. A heart that was in dire need of healing and purification, and consequently saving.

Robbe inhaled and looked up towards the ceiling to summon the courage he needed to express what he needed to say next.

“Am not fighting you. Am fighting me, because lately everything I touch just breaks.”

He shifted his focus back to the hazard lights blinking on the outside world. Disassociating himself from the admission of truth he was about to relay.

“I shouldn’t be around you, or anyone for that matter. Even if my heart wants something different. If we try this again and we don’t make it, it will be over for me. I will shatter like before but this time I won’t be able to be put back together again. I will be irrevocably damaged, a lost cause, ready to be put out to pasture, and you, you won’t be there to save me.”

Sander listened and quickly slung out a half laugh. Mocking Robbe.

“This isn’t funny.” Robbe said in a bitter tone. His voice was shaky.

“Do you see me laughing?” Sander snapped back. Sitting up and wiping the palm of each hand up his temples. He was so frustrated.

“I won’t be there to save you…” Sander repeats the omission out loud and huffs it out in annoyance shaking his head right to left. Offended, puzzled, bemused that Robbe could be so dumb. Lacking so much self awareness.

“You really don’t get it, do you? Even after the music, the art.”

Robbe looked at Sander confused.

“All of this doesn’t matter…”

Sander turned his body so he was face to face with Robbe now.

“When you love somebody you suffer, you suffer if they ignore you, if they’re not with you. It’s like being underwater, unable to breathe and you always carry it with you”.

Robbe could see the pain in Sander’s face as he spoke. His heart was hurting and he just wanted to make it all go away.

“You and I, one hundred precent forever in every universe. No matter the cost.” Sander repeated their truths despondently but with anger underneath it all. The stabbing feeling in Robbe’s heart was becoming unbearable now. He just wanted it to go away. He needed to make it stop.

Sander was so fed up too. He didn’t have any more fight left in him. So he just hurled his last truths
at Robbe.

“I am done. Am sick of it. You can’t even be honest with yourself, let alone me. You won’t even apologize. Even though I have a million times. You never do. Not for all the times I’ve dropped everything to come to you because you asked me to. Not for letting me find out through social about him even though we talked about working it out and especially not for the beginning of summer. It fucking killed me but I did what you wanted because you were adament that you needed to go with him. I even considered letting you take my fucking cat. I love that cat and then you pulled that shit. Again, after everything. Fuck you.”

Sander slammed his hands on the steering wheel in frustration.

“Please stop doing this to me. To us. Sometimes you just have to choose.” Sander’s voice angry but begging Robbe, imploring him to jump across the barrier to him. To stop this martyrdom bullshit.

Robbe felt the schism widening. The plate tectonics shifting underneath his feet moving towards a point of no return where Sander would no longer be within his reach. Everything Sander was saying was true. Yes, Sander made mistakes but Robbe made him pay for them at double the price for triple the time. He was just as much to blame. The tether to their reality was unraveling. Robbe felt what he imagined to be the tip of a shank assaulting his abdomen. He was sure the contents of his stomach were bubbling to the surface about to show themselves any minute now.

Sander interrupted his fast pace thinking.

“Maybe in a different place in the universe we are together. Where the artist and the skater boy make it.” Sander’s voice broke as he uttered the words, make it. He was somber, wishing for another outcome. A better one.

There was a long pause.

Sander then wiggled in his seat and shook out all the tension out of his body as he went to put the car in drive to park and go upstairs and take Bowie back to Antwerp. Sander turned the hazard lights off, a signal to the outside world that he no longer needed rescue and to leave him be.

Robbe flinched as the lights cut out and in that moment it was all instinct. Robbe’s psyche was screaming at him now. Urging him on, to do it. To give in. Robbe finally let his heart and body choose, and it did what it had been longing to do.

Robbe launched himself across the crevasse. Before the schism could cut them off from one another. Before the earth’s fiery core could disengage from the kiss of its mantle.

Robbe caught Sander’s hand as he was about to shift into another gear. Stopping him.

Robbe’s touch startled Sander. Robbe’s voice thawed the silence.

“Push your seat back” He demanded as he took his jacket off and flung it onto the car floor.

“What’s the plan?” Sander questioned unsure at what Robbe was trying to get at. He certainly wasn’t in the mood for goodbye car sex and they were also in neutral on the side of the road but Sander did what Robbe asked of him.

Though Robbe was a full grown man he was pretty lean and compact. He climbed over the car’s gear shift panel. Sander breaking a smile watching him as this was actually pretty amusing to observe. Sander took the opportunity to remove his jacket and threw the contents of its pockets on the passenger seat; a couple of broken pencils and a mini sketchpad. Robbe pressed his hand on the
car’s dash for support covering the car’s clock which timed them at 22:21. As Robbe landed on Sander’s lap, and settled, he cupped Sander’s face with both of his hands and drenched Sander with his gaze and said.

“He was the one”

“That's what the artist knew under the moonlight” Robbe finally answerings Sander’s previous question.

Sander’s mouth opened a little in awe. Questioning the gesture but also knowing what it meant. He sought self assurance.

“And what did the skater boy do in return?” Sander whispered out.

Robbe didn’t break his gaze he just said it. Strong and clear.

“He stays”

“.....and” Robbe nudges his nose onto Sander’s cheek. A sign to continue the story.

They say the next part of the tale in unison.

“We stay”

“And If he goes?” Robbe adds on.

The lovers marry their voices together.

“We go”

Sander beats Robbe to the last phrase. He needs to say it but it needs one adjustment. Just to make sure.

“If we have to fight for it?” Robbe can hear the tremble in Sander’s voice.

Robbe wraps his arms around Sander’s neck and holds him really tight just like Sander loves it. Nuzzling his head at the side of Sander’s face and whispers into his ear.

“We fight”

Sander takes a hold of Robbe. Holding onto him so tightly. He runs his hand through his hair. Robbe’s scent dousing him. He kisses Robbe’s chin and tells him.

“I've missed you”

Robbe finally says one of the things Sander’s been longing to hear. He slightly loosens his grip around Sander’s neck to catch more of his face. He wants Sander to see him.

“Am sorry”

“Don’t let go” Sander pleads.

“I won’t. I’m holding onto you” Robbe assures him as he tightens his grip again over Sander.

Robbe and Sander stay in each other’s arms finally fusing together, love struck, itched into that moment in their protective metallic cocoon.
Paused.

Not going back and forth anymore.

But still stalled.

In need of one final gear change.

Come on. Let's go.

Time to keep it moving.

Snap snap. Wakey wakey.

The honk of a horn signaled her to get the fuck going. The light had turned green.

Her chocolate brown eyes darted to the rearview mirror. Some dickhead in an Audi was on her ass.

She lifted her foot off the clutch and pushed on the throttle. Gears shifted straight into 4th.

She loved the feeling of horsepower running through her. The engine’s rumble coursing through her feet, spreading along her chest cavity, up the back of her neck, ending at her lavender pinkish locs.

She needed the boost of energy today. This day was important because she was finally going to go back to them. Well, if they would have her.

She just needed to do one last thing before she left Antwerp, before she left him.

She took a deep breath when she saw the tattoo shop in her peripheral vision.

This was going to hurt she thought. Mainly because she liked Sander. Like really liked him. He was good to her. He had all the mesmeric attributes required to fulfill the role of prince charming. A deep thinker who always acquiesced to her desires. A face chiseled to perfection with a spotless complexion. Eyes that speckled in differing colors when at the mercy of the sun and moon’s changing angles. Manipulative but in a subtle non invasive way, just a typical troublemaker ready to coax you into some submission. A committed lover who attacked sex with verocity but always in complete control and rarily displaying any vurnabilities. He was calculated, a tactician but always perfectly measured.

But he wasn’t hers though. Not really.

He had always been a little removed, apprehensive, a tad frosty. Even when she felt like she cracked his shell she always felt like there was still another door to unlock; a hidden passageway to some underground catacombs where the secrets of his past lied. Sander rarely spoke about his past in detail. He would simply invoke vanilla placed platitudes to pre-empt you from further digging. If you wouldn’t drop it then he would use his charm and bravato to swamp you with his physicality. Made you think that you had suggested the contact, when you hadn’t. Even silly things could spark off Sander’s jester like distractions. For instance the time she asked about the picture of the black cat on his fridge or all the India magnets. He brushed her off by saying the cat was where he belonged, couldn’t remember honestly, and that India was the worst trip of his life. He hated it. It was too damn hot. Okay, she thought but then why keep the cat’s picture if he wasn’t attached or kept trinkets that memorialized the worst trip of his life. Sander had a secret, he was
hiding something or maybe someone.

Genade was an intuitive kind of girl. Plus she had great connections, one day she asked Noor out right what happened to Sander’s cat. She felt that was the best way to frame her snooping. The question made Noor clearly uncomfortable. She kept her answer short and quick. The cat lived with Sander’s ex Robbe. Noor changed the subject but Genade called girl code. Noor was reluctant but gave her the basics. They dated for almost 6 years, lived together for 4, he lived in Brussels and that he and Sander were friendly-ish. She didn’t detail the break up. She then adamantly persisted that they move-on from the subject. Genade agreed upon one request, she wanted to see a picture of the guy. Noor pulled him up on her phone and gave it to Genade. Genade knew Sander dated guys; it didn’t bother her; she rocked a similar aesthetic but she was just curious but as soon as she saw his picture she connected the dots.

“Shit” She muttered.

She slammed on the brakes so hard that she burned rubber. Announcing her arrival. The shop’s facade now directly in front of her.

She took a moment to inspect her makeup in the rearview mirror. She quickly retouched her neutral tone lipstick, pursed her lips and gave her lavender pink locs a final ruffle. If this was going to be the last time she wanted to look memorable. She climbed out of the vehicle and quickly inspected her back tires. They looked okay, good enough to make it back to Rotterdam. Then she headed for the shop’s entry.

There he was standing tall, lean, perfectly carved out but with his signature smile on display. His brunette hair perfectly crafted for his boyish face. He really was easy on the eyes, no denying it, Robbe was beautiful.

Sander had really done him justice and captured his beauty so vividly via his photography. Images of a brown hair skater boy twirling in the air gnaring against gravity.

Robbe caught mid glee in a post jump jubilee with a smile that would make any viewer smile back at him instantly.

Her favourite was the image of Robbe dropping in and Sander utilizing some layered effect to capture Robbe at every millisecond of motion creating a sequence of images that recorded every one of Robbe’s movements. The effect mimicking the snap out thrust of a Geisha’s fan during an admirer’s dance.

Initially when Genade discovered who Robbe was to Sander she felt a deep sadness inside her but not because she was jealous but because she recognized the lens that Sander saw Robbe through. It was the same aperture that she utilized to frame them with as well. The same yearning, compassion, potential and love that Sander enveloped Robbe into within his art mirrored her heart’s pleas for unification. She was weak though or at least that’s what she told herself when she left them. She never gave a fuck about people’s opinions before but something festered deep from within her when all she felt from the world was judgement. It poisoned her well. That’s why she ran, she couldn’t take all the shitty eye rolls that communicated that her relationships were just some fad. Meaningless, purely physical, lacking in any true loyalty. Mocking them, belittling everything they stood for and it made Elodie cry at night. She was always the purest of the three. She didn’t understand why people were so mean, just because they didn’t understand.

Shame, that’s what hit her with force when she looked at Robbe’s image. It resonated a feeling of what she had left behind and needed to go back and address. Try to fix it because though she liked Sander he wasn’t her ones. He didn’t smell of girls, and god she loved that smell. He had no idea
how to regulate her need for cocoa when it would spike once a month or why baby powder was an essential part of her grooming technique. Yeah sure, he could learn those things, but they, they just knew them. The small things that drove forward the narrative of her life and though just existing with Sander was fun she wanted to feel in motion, a full body kinesis, a rotational shift in the orbits and that was only possible hand in hand with her girls. She missed them and their big team hugs that always felt like the sun and moon meeting during shift change to engulf their beloved earth in devotion. Elodie usually stepping in to take on the role of the blue planet. Every now and then Genade but never Hannah she was too orderly for grande displays of emotion but once a season they forced her into the center and the girls could tell she secretly loved it. Even though she would break up the love fest after a few seconds shouting out “enough already” but always sporting a Cheshire cat smile as she broke off.

The memory recall stung her. She hugged herself and stroked the back of her arms. A reminder to herself that love is love and sometimes that means fighting to get to that realization. She looked around the gallery space. White walls interrupted by interpretations of life, family, morality and the general world at large. It comforted her, the human condition. She really was going to miss this space. It was so special, the energy it emanated could be felt from the moment you walked in. It was perfectly architected to make you feel a semblance of wholeness. Equipped in its functionality. The natural progression of walking into a blank canvas of total whiteness that functioned as a viewing space for community artists to the subtle transitions into shades of grey that culminated into a black working space for the business portion. That’s where she found him at his desk finagling over some object. It looked like some beaten down old watch on the last legs of its livelihood.

“Hey baby driver” He called out to her as she moved closer.

God, Sander really was breathtakingly beautiful. His inked arms on display as he wore cuffed sleeves. Hunched over his desk working the watch over. Looking like he was trying to stick a battery into that piece of junk. In attempts to restore time but the dials currently at a standstill. Stalled.

Unable to go back and forth.

“You busy?” She let out in a pitch unrecognizably high for her voice.

He smiled at her. Trying to ease her tension. Expecting this conversation.

“You have 5 minutes?” He said to her in jest.

He got up sluggishly from his desk and pointed towards the back door.

“We got time. Class doesn’t start for another hour or so.”

She unknowingly held her breath as Sander unlocked the back door of his shop. The click of the lock made her flinch. She wasn’t sure why, maybe the anticipation of the immersion into the store’s final space.

The visceral nature of earth tones never ceased to amaze her.

It was such a surprise when travelling in from the white and black spaces at the front of the shop to the final space out back to discover a fully built 14 feet cylinder wooden object sawed right through the middle, gillentined, chopped, split in two halves. A half-pipe skate ramp standing statuesque. The shop’s crown jewel, the thing it was known for around these parts.
As they walked toward the ramp’s flat to sit down on it she noted the slogan sprayed on each side of the ramp. All the way or no way. The artist's initials barely noticeably tucked away in a corner but she could make them out.

R.S.

They both flopped down on the flat Genade crossing her legs Indian style in front of her. Sander leaning on his arms slightly positioned behind him, legs straight out.

She shifted her focus towards the entry and spoke.

“I am driving back to Rotterdam today”

Sander ran his tongue over his teeth in response. A nervous tick.

“I am not big on goodbyes. Just wanted to stop by before I head out.” Genade said as she reached over to grab Sander’s hand. Her forearm tattoo of a large floral centerpiece sitting atop a tripod stand in the tier colors of neon pink, yellow and baby blue on full display now looking up at them.

Sander nodded, and then cheekily pieced together a response.

“We had a good run, it was fun.” Sander let go of Genade’s hand and slipped one of her locs behind her ear. Genade sensed tears surging towards the forefront and quickly tried to pivot her focus. She reached into her back pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarettes.

“Don’t judge. I caved, it’s been stressful.”

Sander scoffed out a giggle.

As Genade lit her cigarette Sander grabbed the pack to join her. Genade raised her brow in surprise. Sander was an avid plant lover but wasn’t one to join in the artificial shit.

“I need it. I am going through a break up. Didn’t you hear?”, He teased out. They both laughed. Genade smacking his arm. Taking a moment to look around the place for a final time. Pausing her gaze at the artifact above the back door.

“I never asked you, what’s with the napkin?”

Sander shifted his gaze towards the framed napkin above the backdoor.

“Oh it’s super cheesy really. I drew my dream outline of this place when I was young and the architect who helped with the renovations gave it to me as a gift for our grand opening. He also gave me the first original blueprint he rendered of this place with the skate ramp included because I didn’t originally draw it in. He thought of it actually something about including community spaces for a tax cut and for lost boys like us to have a place to find one another. It’s on the other side of the door.”

A freudian slip, unusual for Sander.

Genade knew this was her last chance. She didn’t need to know everything because it wasn’t her business but she was so curious.

She took a drag of her cigarette, and mustered the guts to pry some more.

“How did he get a hold of the napkin?” Genade asked.
Sander was surprised by her inquisition. Normally he would shift the conversation another direction but he had a feeling this would be the last opportunity he would get to be honest with her so he let her into his memory bank.

“He was there the day I drew it.”

“So you knew him before the renovations?” Genade kept digging but she was pragmatic. Displaying self control.

“Yeah, Something like that”

Her brows furrowed, eyes squinted. Fuck it, she thought. “He’s the one, isn’t he?”

“What” Sander snapped back a little too loudly, surprised.

“The one for who those are for?” Genade ran her hand on the inside of Sander’s wrist delicately. She then unlocked her legs, discarded her cigarette and shuffled over to Sander bringing her hand to lay on top of the empty space right above his heart.

“I am perceptive you see.” Genade shot Sander a soft smile, not to spook him and continued.

“Your body tells a story”

Sander threw his cigarette on the ground and grabbed Genade shoulders and ran his hands down them stopping at her wrist only to turn them over. The tricolor floral piece staring back at them.

“So does yours”

Genade looked up into Sander’s gem-like eyes. Sensing that he knew.

“We’re fucked aren’t we?”

Sander huffed a laugh at Genade’s evaluation of their perilous journeys.

“Royally fucked”

Genade leaned into Sander and gave him the tightest hug in gratitude. The kind of hug he loved. Pulling back to cradle his face into her hands and give him a soft peck on the lips. Pausing for a moment to look at him one last time.

“I gotta get going”

Sander nodded.

“I’ll walk you out.” Genade leaned in for a final kiss.

The couple walked hand in hand towards the entrance as they reached the gallery space of the shop Genade broke their connection.

“Stay here. I want to remember you in your favorite space.”

Sander stepped back from her and gave her a little bow. His all-black attire standing out against the white gallery backdrop that was drowning him.

As Genade went to turn around Sander said one last thing to her.
“Genade, I hope you get your girls.” Genade instantly felt tears well up as she looked straight on at Sander.

“I hope so too. I mean at least I’ll go down fighting for it.” Genade lifted her right arm and pointed at Sander’s neck.

“I hope your yang comes back to you.” Sander touched his adam’s apple as a reflex.

He threw her a crooked smile and corrected her, “Other way around.”

“What...? “Genade sounding genuinely surprised.

“I am the white and he’s the black.”

“Really..?”

“I know it’s surprising right? but you’d understand if you knew him.”

Genade nodded as she hugged the door knob, pressing her body weight in anticipation for her final transition onto the outside when she caught Sander mutter out one last fact about him. Something that sent a quiver down her spine.

“Robbe, He’s always been the dark”

“Black or white?”

Robbe popped his head up to half mutter an answer to Luc’s question.

“White, it makes the bleach stains less obvious”

“What?” Luc spat out confused by Robbe’s reply.

Robbe quickly lunged over the shopping cart which he was hanging off to grab the pile of white bathroom towels off Luc’s hands in attempts to divert his attention from his slip up.

Luc quickly let it go as another shiney ornament caught his attention and he continued to push Robbe around the labyrinth of household necessities.

Luc had been adamant that they should pick up all their apartment trinkets at one of those large scandinavian founded home furnishing warehouses in Brussels before heading to Amsterdam as that location never had anything in stock.

Robbe had agreed but as he walked through aisles draped out in themes of blues and yellows he was beginning to get anxious, spikey, even a bit curt. Maybe it was the artificial fluorescent lighting or the fact that every artifact in the store inundated him with an array of nauseating polygon’s composed of irregular shapes such as hexagons, heptagons, octagons and decagons but Robbe felt fed up, he wanted out, he wanted to go home.

He kept telling himself that he was just nervous that this was a big move and he hadn’t lived with another non-relative in his life other than Sander and they had dated for almost double the amount of time before making the leap to live-in lovers.

He kept justifying his mood as a mechanism for his lack of patience. His ornery deposition a symptom for his urgency to unplug from his life in Brussels. To finally move on and metabolize a new horizon. That’s why he needed to call his ex-boyfriend at midnight last night demanding he
drop everything tomorrow to come and collect their furry child because he had suddenly changed his mind and decided leaving Bowie behind would be best for both of them. Even though he argued the exact opposite for weeks. Making Sander finally concede and allow Robbe to take their cat with him to his new home with Luc. Then suddenly hours before his departure to Amsterdam he changed his mind and demanded Sander come collect the cat.

So they set a time, an interlude, a moment, to bid the other farewell. Nine, that’s what they both had agreed upon.

Robbe glanced down at the dials of his watch as they danced in adagio in a back and forth motion. Luc broke him out of his trance with a frivolous observation that made Robbe giggle.

“Where do you think this place gets all their furniture names from?” Luc shot out with sarcasm.

Robbe immediately glanced out at all the title tags accompanied by their descriptive labels of swedish origin and summarized.

“They probably scalped their names off the swedish name registry or something?”

Luc pushed the cart to its next sectional destination when Robbe’s patience intervened.

“Are we done yet? We need to get back to my apartment by 9pm remember?”

Luc rolled his eyes, annoyed at Robbe but acknowledging the need to keep time.

“I just have two more items to buy and then we can head out. Have we passed the wall art section yet? I need to buy a frame because I want to print out Plato’s love symposium and hang it up in our apartment?”

Robbe’s sight went bug-eyed as he barked out, “What?”

“Yea, what? Don’t you like love stories, Robbe?”

Luc seemed baffled.

“Hold up, let me read you the one I’m thinking about. It's perfect for us.”

Robbe thinks to himself surely it can’t be that same one.

Robbe was still leaning over the shopping cart as Luc simultaneously pushed the cart down the aisle whilst getting his phone out and locating the text he wanted to narrate back to Robbe.

“Listen” Luc shoots Robbe a wink.

Robbe leans further over the cart as it hums underneath him. The wheels caressing the sleek concrete while he puts all his focus on whatever Luc was about to say next...

“Originally humans had two faces, four arms, four legs, and they were happy like that. They were compl....”

The wheels of the cart suddenly locked up, and jolted the cart violently forward. Robbe’s body catapults through the air as gravity grabs him by the neck and slams him onto a collective of cardboard boxes which to his luck housed aeriform polygons to cushion his decline.

“Shit, Are you okay?”
“WHAT THE FUCK. ARE YOU FUCKING BLIND?”

Robbe said as he dusted himself off and picked himself off the floor as everyone just stared at the scene. He rubbed his right elbow down which brokered most of his fall and gave Luc a venomous stare.

“I am fucking done. Let's go home.”

Luc didn’t object. Robbe in need of space as he was clearly edgey.

The whole check out process took far longer than anticipated. This frustrated Robbe even more as it was clear now that they were going to just make it to their next appointment.

Luc and Robbe walked out into the warehouse’s garage towards Luc’s car with royal blue polypropylene bags slung over their shoulders. The ornaments within the bags crashing together in an uncomfortable symphony of clings and clangs.

“Hey can you take the champagne glasses out and carry them so they don't break?”

Robbe appeared annoyed by this request but agreed as he riffled through the bag to grab the four stemmed glasses with silver trimming. Luc couldn’t stop gushing about them in the glassware section mentioning that as soon as they got to Amsterdam he was going to use them to pour out a glass of sparkling to celebrate their union.

Robbe waddled over to Luc’s car and dropped the blue bag into the trunk as he walked over to the passenger side with the glasses still in hand trying to open the car door. Luc noticed and gave his boyfriend a helping hand and opened the door for him.

Once inside the car Robbe adjusted his seat and unclipped the stems from in between his fingers and laid them down on his lap horizontally.

Robbe was visibly vexed and fed up with this whole housing excursion and radiating a debilitating synergy.

Luc stepped inside the vehicle and as the driver side door slammed shut Robbe recoiled it was something about Luc being in such close proximity to him that irked him.

Luc noticed, his body letting out a guttural sound at Robbe’s treatment of him. He was so done with this shit.

“What the fuck is wrong with you? You’ve been in a terrible mood the whole day. No, actually this whole damn week?”

Robbe felt a pit in his stomach forming and just muttered out.

“Sorry”

Luc just shook his head from left to right trying to brush off the entire vibe.

Luc stuck the key into the ignition and Robbe heard the keychain crank the lever.

The car radio automatically turned on and their song (heroes) seeped into the breathable air of their metallic cocoon.

Luc unconsciously whispered out.
“I love this song. It's definitely our song”

A heat began to take a hold of Robbe. It started incinerating him from within as Luc continued to speak. Robbe needed to stop the rutters of his mind from turning so he slammed the radio off.

“hey, I was listening to that...rude”

Luc turned the radio back on in defiance. He was starting to get sick of dealing with Robbe’s tantrum.

“I am not in the mood” Robbe said as he turned off the radio once again.

“Well I am and it’s my fucking car. So deal with it”

The lyrics of the song began to surf the air once again. Luc started singing along to the song to really incite Robbe. Turning towards him to deliver the next lyric.

The car’s gear sitting in neutral.

“And you. You can be mean. And I, I'll drink all the time”

Robbe just glared at Luc. Luc ran his tongue over his teeth and continued to sing.

“Cause we're lovers. And that is a fact. Yes, we're lovers, And that is that.”

Robbe watched Luc’s mouth as those lyrics dripped out.

“Do you know that Bowie wrote this song for his producer and his wife. It's their love song...”

Robbe was boiling up now the reactors of his mind losing sync. He threw Luc one of his weaponized smiles and cut him off.

“No he didn’t”

“Yeah he did.”

“No he did not”, Robbe’s voice was starting to crack with a darkness underneath.

“Okay expert since you’ve seemed to have passed every Bowie test ever. What’s the song about?”

Internally Robbe’s brain wanted to let this go. Keep this lid sealed shut. Avoid this sinkhole at all cost but he couldn’t contain the accretion of ferality in the dark corners of his mind. Once the lethal delivery of his tongue spewed deathly toxins into the air he couldn’t take it back.

“This song isn’t about the producer and his wife. It's about the other person he really loved. The person he actually wanted to be with but he couldn’t be with because the whole thing was completely fucked and complicated. It’s not about the person that everyone thought he should be with and had to convince himself of that on a daily basis. It’s about the love he buried deep inside himself because if he didn’t do that he was going to drown.”

Robbe had fucked it.

He had gone off the rails.

He’d divulge too much.
Luc was gripping the steering wheel so hard his knuckles were white but his focused transfixed on Robbe.

Robbe swears he could feel the laser endings of his stare firing into him. Like artillery fire aimed to take no hostages.

“Oooh so this is why you called him last night?” Luc spat out with fury.

Robbe said nothing. He just slightly shifted in his seat as the flute glasses clinked together.

Robbe’s silence only served to fire up Luc even more.

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me with this shit”

Luc took a deep breath before he continued. In attempts to keep his composure.

“We’re meant to leave in a couple of hours and you’re doing this now... I’ve asked you so many times about this and you kept saying you were over it. You swore to me you were. You promised me it was done and that I was being unreasonable.”

Robbe managed to croak out a simple, “Luc”.

Luc’s temper unlatched and he began a tirade of verbal assaults.

“So what is this?”

“Have you just been lying to me this entire time? What else have you been hiding? Have you been cheating on me too?”

Robbe quickly dismantled that accusation.

“No of course not. I would never do that to you.”

“Really?”

“Or is that just another lie, huh? Answer me this then. Do you love me?”

“Yes” Robbe assured Luc with certainty in his voice.

“Do you love me more than him?”

Robbe thoughts stopped dead in their tracks. He wasn’t sure how this whole exchange escalated so quickly. Maybe Luc’s insecurities had always been present and he had just ignored them but they were rearing their ugly heads now.

Robbe should have lied and squashed all of Luc’s doubt but he hesitated. God he wishes he hadn’t.

Luc took notice and bit his lip drawing blood. He was furious, running the palm of his hands up his temples. Finally stringing a thought together.

“When you love someone, you don’t have to think about it this much Robbe.”

Robbe just sat there disarmed. Taking the assault. Not knowing what to do mainly because he himself didn’t understand why he was failing to say what Luc desperately needed to hear from him.
He knew it then and there. He had been selfish and he was a shame about it.

But Luc was relentless; he just wouldn’t let off.

“I knew it. I fucking knew it. You’re a damn coward. Is this what you want? To fuck around with someone that fucked you over for years. Who embarrassed you in front of all your friends. Who only comes around when he’s bored and needs to fuck you for some sick kick.”

Lightning struck Robbe and his body quickly reanimated and came to its defenses.

“Luc, stop it!”

“Why? You don’t want to hear the truth?”

“Luc you don’t know what you’re talking about? He doesn’t matter.”

Luc turned his entire body towards Robbe ready to shred him some more.

“No fuck that. I do know what I am talking about. You’re about to ruin us over some piece shit lost boy who you can’t seem to cut off because your fucking weak. Get it through your fucking head. He doesn’t love you Robbe. You’re just a warm mouth to him.”

“Luc stop talking! You don’t even know him!”

“I know his type and he doesn’t give a fuck about you. You’re just to stupid to see it.”

Luc was screaming over Robbe’s cries asking him to stop but Luc was so angry he wouldn’t end the dogfight. Pointing accusatory fingers in every direction.

“Luc stop it. You’re Wrong! You’re Wrong!”

“ARE YOU FUCKING-”

“SHUT UP!” Robbe shouted at Luc in attempts to stop him.

“DEFENDIN---” Luc screamed into the void.

It got louder.

“JUST SHUT UP!”

And louder.

“STOP IT!”

Until’s Robbe’s flight or fight instinct came barreling out of him and like the climax of a slow motion action scene the next take just happened.

“JUST SHUT THE FUCK UP”

Robbe grabbed a flute glass and hurled it towards Luc's direction.

Luc reacted quickly and moved out of its way as it smashed against the driver side window causing the window to crack and the silver shards of speckled glassware to wash over both lovers.

Everything went silent.
Still.

The only thing moving were the toxins that had now infiltrated the air surrounding them. A combination of compound elements acting like a lethal gas around their glassy encasement. Drowning both souls from within.

Luc said nothing. Didn’t even look at Robbe.

He just opened the door of the car to shake off the silver particles doused all over him. He examined the crack on the window. Took out the floor mat which was covered in shards of glass and shook it down.

His nonchalant behavior was scaring Robbe. He wasn’t sure if he should get out of the car. If he was still safe but he stayed frozen just watching Luc.

Luc put the floor mat back in, cleaned off his chair and sat back down in his seat. Robbe moved forward slightly in attempts to engage in some type of exchange. Luc gave him a one palm up salute blocking Robbe’s next move.

“Don’t talk to me, don’t even look at me right now. I am taking you home. Oh and you’re paying for that.”

Robbe swallowed down the knot in his throat and just sat back in his seat as Luc began to reverse the car out of the parking lot.

They pulled up outside of it in no time.

The car’s reflection looked back at Robbe through the matte shine finish of his apartment’s building block.

Luc flooded the dark of the night with the yellow wash of his hazard lights. Their blinking suddenly felt like the pounding of an ailing heart.

“Get Out” Luc said.

Tears started to roll down Robbe’s face. He started to panic. How had all of this accelerated so quickly?

Robbe forced Luc’s hand off the steering wheel and held onto it with both of his. He pleaded with him.

“Please don’t leave like this”

Robbe’s visible remorse finally broke Luc. Tears started to stream down his face too.

Luc’s brought the purlicue of his left hand to his mouth in an attempt to muffle a sob.

“I don’t deserve this Robbe. I won’t be a stand in for someone else. I have been patient even when it hurt me. When you would still go and see him when you told me you were just friends. Nothing more.”

“You’re not a stand in”

“It doesn’t feel that way”

“It’s like your 90% in this but then there’s still some part of you that you have locked away. That he
“ggets to keep.”

Robbe just shook his head side to side as a reflex not really confirming or denying Luc’s accusation.

“I love you” Was all Robbe could muster up as a reply.

“Then prove it?”

Robbe’s eyes narrowed; he wasn’t sure what Luc meant by that request.

“Don’t go inside. Let me do the hand off?”

“If you love me and you mean it. Then stay in the car and don’t go to him.”

Robbe felt the dagger in his chest twist at the mere mention of this suggestion. Hot tears started to pour out of him uncontrollably.

His hands were shaking as they clung onto Luc’s hand.

“Luc, I love you so much. You’re so amazing.”

Robbe didn’t realize it at the time but he was hyperventilating. On the verge of hysterics.

“Fuck, Fuck, Fuck…..” Robbe let go of Luc’s hand and put his head in between his legs to try to catch his breath. He felt a panic attack coming on. The remaining 3 stem glasses fell onto the car’s floor. His chest cavity felt like it was constricting the balloons that resided within unable to inflate. He could feel how tenderly Luc rubbed his back. Making Robbe feel even worse. Making him cough out a distressed sob.

Robbe looked up at Luc who just wiped away tears off his cheeks.

Luc didn’t budge though.

“You have to choose. You either stay in the car? or you go to him?”

Robbe responded with a broken symphony of high pitch sounds.

He sat straight up and as he did he caught a glimpse of a silhouette behind the apartment block’s glass front door. He turned to Luc.

Robbe was sobbing, rocking back and forth rubbing his temples with his fingers.

Shaking his head from side to side. His body reacting in juxtaposition to his mouth.

“Am sorry”

“Am so sorry”

“I…”

“can’t…”

Robbe rested his elbows on his lap and buried his face in his hands.

“You deserve so much better than this.” The guilt was swallowing him whole, eating him alive.
He couldn’t even look at Luc in the eyes as he turned around to pull on the car’s door handle. Robbe stepped one foot onto the pavement. His body seesawing between two worlds when Luc delivered his final words. Striking Robbe down.

“I’d be fucking ashamed of myself if I were you”

And that’s the last thing Robbe ever heard Luc say to him as he shut the car door.

Robbe’s street was hollow.

Comatose.

Lifeless.

The night was icy and silent. The only thing visible was the yellow wash of the lights reflecting off the building’s exterior.

Drenching Robbe’s body in the color of rescue.

As Robbe walked towards his apartment’s stairs and the car lights faded to black. He plummeted. A quorum of his thoughts arrested his psyche from within. The knobs of his personal motherboard unable to respond. He just broke down and dragged himself to the bottom of his apartment stairs.

The concrete stairs felt overwhelming.

As Robbe ascended them to his front door. He came to a full stop outside of it.

The spray of moonlight shining down on him as he stuck his key in the lock and twisted it.

The front door swung open.

And as it did, there he was, staring back at him.

Sander.

Sander was pissed.

He couldn’t believe this shit. Robbe had some damn nerve to call him so late last night and demand that he come collect Bowie after weeks of arguing over why Bowie belonged to him.

God he was so ready to be done with this shit.

Of course after all of Robbe’s bitching he had the nerve to be late too.

Sander just slid down the wall of the lobby and sat on the floor drawing. He was known for always carrying pencil and paper.

He sat there killing time.

About half an hour or so passed until he finally saw a yellow wash glaze the lobby’s windows. He peeked his head out and he was sure it was Robbe in the vehicle but he couldn’t see who was driving. He didn’t want to run into Robbe’s boyfriend and make it awkward so he just waited in the lobby.

Five minutes clocked by, then ten and at almost 15 he heard a car door slam shut and the yellow
glaze washing the windows disappeared. Sander picked himself off the floor. His heart was suddenly racing for no reason at all. He heard the dangle of keys outside the front door.

He sucked cold air through his teeth in anticipation. Sander felt a pang of something heavy across his chest, the same pang that pushed him forward towards the door and as the door swung open and he caught first sight of Robbe. He knew immediately as he locked eyes with him.

He was crashing.

Robbe’s body went limp and abandoned all prior knowledge of its own motor skills.

He began free falling towards the floor but Sander caught a hold of him before he bottomed out into disarray. The prism of Robbe’s mind began to circle the drain. He was in quiet hysterics incapable of divulging what was exclusively happening within the walls of his psyche.

Sander went into immediate high alert. He knew what to do. This had happened once before. Robbe was teetering on the edge of possible medical sedation. A feeling Sander knew well. Sander needed to try to iron him out and flatten all the creases as the chainlinks of his mind all began to snap off.

He dragged Robbe’s body onto the elevator and up to his floor. Robbe was shaking uncontrollably as Sander patted Robbe down looking for the apartment keys. Once he found them he opened the door and headed straight to Robbe’s bedroom. He sat Robbe on the bed and took off his shoes and denim jeans. Sander flung off his jacket and boots and crawled onto the bed grabbing Robbe by the waist and pulled him in to lay down next to him. Robbe buried his face into Sander’s chest. He didn’t move much but Sander knew he was awake due to the tempo of Robbe’s hiccups shocking his muscles every 30 seconds between sobs.

Time went back and forth for a while until Robbe finally spoke.

It was barely a whisper, raspy, and throaty but Sander made out what he said.

“I am not going to Amsterdam. I’m staying.”

Sander was unclear what he was expected to reply to that admission but his response was selfless.

“I am sure you guys can get over it. I can drive you up there in the morning if you want. You two can work this out and fix it. You love each other right?”

Robbe coughed out a cry and shook his head right to left.

He pulled himself back from Sander’s chest, he wanted to be able to scan Sander’s face as he spoke.

He picked up the volume in his voice.

“He kept saying that you didn’t love me. That I didn’t mean anything to you.”

“He was so loud, screaming at me and I just wanted to make it stop.”

“He just kept saying it, over and over again.”

Robbe couldn’t stop crying as he spoke.

“He doesn’t love you, he doesn’t love you...and I promised.”
Sander finished Robbe’s thought for him.

“That you would never let anyone tell you otherwise.”

Robbe nodded.

Sander was rabid, feral, afire. The rage within him soaring into kelvin measures as he heard Robbe replay the incident but he kept calm for Robbe. He pushed his emotions down, and willed himself to stay in the moment. Robbe needed him.

Sander moved his face closer to Robbe’s as he thumbed a tear off Robbe’s cheek.

Robbe closed his eyes and Sander could see the water droplets on his coffee lashes as he moved towards his mouth.

Sander pulled back before their mouths connected.

“Hey….I don’t want you to do something you’ll regret tomorrow.”


Sander pressed their foreheads together and lit a flame to Robbe’s doubts.

“I love you more than anything in this universe. I just want you to mean it? Whatever the cost.”

Robbe felt as if Sander’s gaze sought to peer into his soul for some sign of permanence. His devotion comforted him and yet terrified him all at once but his heart's lack of self control refused to restrain him.

“I mean it”

Sander searched Robbe’s face for some alternative meaning but there was none. His confirmation was literal.

So, Sander closed the gap. He jumped the crevasse. Sander surrendered himself, he gave Robbe everything, his body, his time, he loved him, he forgave him.

But Robbed needed more; he grappled for an act of divine intervention, for purification, for healing.

He needed to be beamed up to their safe place.

In need of a cleanse, a baptism, a rebirth.

Sander knew this, he could feel everything he was feeling.

So he followed Robbe into his psychological holding cell, into the open field, into the shades of grey and poured himself into him.

Falling off the precipice together.

Arriving at a containment room of their own making.

White walls.

Bare less ceiling.
A nebulas surrounding. Foggy.

Lovers intertwined in a whirlpool of their own affection.

The ergonomics of the human form in full body kinesis.

The vortex.

Closing. Unclasping from the past.

The lethal toxins in the atmosphere eradicating.

Silence.

A delayed response of the universe’s sound waves engulfing.

The schematics of their containment room’s drywall chipping.

The intense colors of autumn infiltrating. Lacquering their orbit.

Vermillion, chartreuse, amber and mahogany.

The color of hemoglobin being induced into oxygenation, whipping, swirling, ricocheting.

Complex proteins and blood kissing. Fermenting a new season for mother earth.

A mosaic of their love muraled onto the surface.

Lovers spinning.

A dance in allegro.

Subtle skin. Dissolving.

The core of the earth and its mantle mutating.

An organism.

Transcending.

The tempo of their bodies unraveling. The seed of life committing.

A sentient being in utero.

Awaiting, Deliverance.

The elixir of life drawing them out into the light.

A quasar, bursting.

Sound waves arriving.

Hold your breath. It's coming.

Euphoria treading.

Their falling. Aeroform collapsing.
The whirlpool unwinding. A universe calming.

A master of their love painting.

Smutters of their story brushing.

Drawing, Itching. A work of art.

Completing.

The skater boy and the artist, mending.

Going back to the place where it all began.

To exchange a thousand thoughts.

Sorry for scaring you. Sorry for hurting you. Sorry for not telling you all my secrets. I was afraid of losing you. I’d forgotten that it’s not possible to lose someone, that all people are alone anyway.

In a different place in the universe we are together for all eternity.

Remember that.

Chapter End Notes

How we doing? I see you made it to the end. Probably a little emotionally bumped and bruised but in one piece. What a ride. When we started this story I told you it wasn't going to be what you thought it would be. This story though a love story is really just a life story. All different types of life stories.

Though the skamverse focuses on teens. People in general are complicated. They mess up constantly, they hurt one another, they breakdown but they have various ways of demonstrating their love for one another.

Things are rarely black and white and though you have seen the ugly sides of most of the characters in this story. Trust me when I say they are all good people, they are human and they are flawed. They certainly don't all belong together but they are learning to live with their own permutation's of shame and that is true love & acceptance.

Big thank you for all the kudos and comments on my work. Next stop is the end. It's been such a pleasure. Let's get across the finish line together.

To: She, Her, hers, He, him, His, They, Them, Their, Ze, Zir, Zirs, Ze, Hir, Hirs, [nolabels]. I wrote the last memory of this chapter for you. You're all deserving of love. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Remember that.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

As you can see I have added another chapter to Visitations. I took a poll on Tumblr to see if you guys wanted one massive 16-18k chapter or for it to be split into two parts. People chose split so here it is.

Same rules apply.

Italics is the Past. If not, it's August 15th at any point in the day I chose to drop you into.

Large line breaks are a new memory.

Thank you for reading and all your support!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Just one?”

“Yeah” Robbe responded, acknowledging the cashier.

“To Amsterdam?”

Robbe nodded.

“1st or 2nd class?”

“1st please.”

“That will be €54”

Robbe shoots the cashier a nondescript smile as he sticks his credit card into the card reader and enters his pin to complete the transaction. The cashier hands him over the purchase receipt and signals for the next customer to proceed. Robbe begins to walk away and clumsily walks back a couple of steps and asks “In what direction is platform 3?”. The cashier signals towards the left hand side exit of the post office. Robbe sees the platform in the distance as he exits the store and runs towards it with a couple of minutes to spare before departure. He makes it in just the nick of time and settles into a window seat, anxious to reach his final destination.

The nostalgia of his final stop always caught Robbe off guard. Every time he came back here whether on his own, or with him, everything seemed to have stayed exactly the same since the first time. This place was a strange kinda of place wrapped up in its own personal deja-vu. Housing an unknown poltergeist where earthlingly oddities roamed and mother nature dared to roll around with the solar flares of the sun between her legs. A consequence of all the zygotes that got produced here seasonally. Robbe really didn’t care though, he loved it here, he always found himself here. There was something about this place; rudimentary in its makeup at best but possessing a sense of serenity, with a dose of mystery, even some romance, a portal to another universe. This place always felt like home. Robbe would visit old haunts, walk the dunes of time, revel in the taste of sodium in the air. He’d hit up familiar store stalls, check out the best vantage
points but eventually he’d always find himself back at their old place.

-  

It was restaurant style. Not the fancy type made out of linen. It was white with miniature clams embossed atop, 2ply, 15 inches across but folded down the middle, then folded into 4’s and then once more to emulate the size of a standard envelope. Robbe had seen them in different colors but most people in the world only saw them in that pearl white that the standard restaurant napkins were made of. He just stared into the pattern recalling the day when this senseless artifact became an urn that stored the ashes of his love story.

“This is so stupid, I mean it's basically a pipe dream. It’s never gonna happen.” Sander told Robbe as he pulled out a marker from his back pocket.

“Come on just do it for me.” Robbe begged. Sander chuckled because he knew once Robbe made a request he was going to appease it.

“Okay…. So my dream tattoo shop would look something like this.” Sander drew out three squares lined up horizontally next to each other like carriages on a train atop the restaurant napkin.

“So the whole concept would be based on the idea that it wouldn't even look like a tattoo shop but a gallery space. Operationally it would be a place of business but functionally it would double up as a tattoo shop/community art space. You know people always associate tattoo shops as these dark and dengy out posts but when you’d walk into mine you’d be flushed with a burst of light making the whole place feel airy. Like a sense of wholeness or something.”

Robbe found Sander’s light up smile endearing as he walked through his imaginary tattoo shop schematic. Robbe rubbed the top of Sander’s hand with his thumb encouraging Sander to continue explaining his future’s prospects.

“I love the way you think baby. You're always so thoughtful and creative.”

“Like I said it's never going to happen but you never know right….life is full of surprises.” Sander was downplaying how much he wanted this future to become a reality.

“No no no. Don’t say it’s never going to happen. We’ll find a way to make it happen.”

“Oh are you going to learn how to tattoo now?” Sander gave Robbe a cheeky grin because Robbe couldn’t even draw a rectangle correctly. Well at least not yet...

“No but I’ll find a way to chip in. I could run the reception or something.” Robbe knew that wouldn’t be much help but that’s the best his nineteen year old self could come up with at the time.

“Promise we’ll find a way to make it happen?” Robbe always did this to Sander. Whenever Sander lacked belief in himself Robbe would make him promise on whatever desire he was discounting.

“Only if you promise we’ll do it together?”

“Deal, I mean that’s not a hard request. You know I always keep my promises.”

Robbe and Sander both giggled because both of them knew that Robbe’s promises never faltered. Robbe was the most reliable person Sander knew. Sander couldn’t help but indulge Robbe’s interest in their never gonna happen future.
“Anyways I’m thinking the color scheme would go something like white in the gallery, black in the tattoo shop and then maybe an entry to a garden or patio area.”

Sander rambled on and on about how eventually the gallery space could host events or have fun community sessions. He could teach art to youths since he knew how much art had helped him when he was younger. He had completely mapped out the potential of a place like this and the excitement in his voice was insatiable to say the least.

Robbe loved hearing the sound of Sander’s voice in this particular amped up pitch. It was so tranquil and soothing to him.

“Excuse me, do you need this? It was stuck in between the euros on top of your bill.”

Robbe looked up from the napkin and took inventory of his surroundings. He had got lost in his own memories again. It was becoming a frequent occurrence as of late. He looked up at the waitress who was attempting to hand him over a waxy piece of textured paper. He thanked her and took hold of it.

It was the post office receipt.

Robbe had almost totally forgotten about the dread of having to text Luc to let him know he had mailed back his stuff today. Specifically his GIRL brand skateboard that he adored so much. They hadn’t spoken since their break up but as Robbe went to grab his phone to text Luc he saw a text from Kes.

“Sorry, this is awkward but Luc asked me to ask you if you mailed back his stuff yet?” - Kes

“I did it today. It should get to him in 3-5 days. I mailed it 1st class.” - Robbe

“Umm how’s he doing? Has he said anything to you?” - Robbe

“Look, That’s my best friend. I don’t want to get involved. All he said to me was that you weren’t ready to invest in love….” - Kes

Luc always had a way with words. Always knew how to make Robbe feel guiltier than he already felt. Luc was as blunt as a knife's edge so when he stabbed you he made sure it was torturous and never swift.

As the waitress laid down Robbe’s change from his paid bill he took one final glance over to the broken down booth that he and Sander used to call “their spot”. It stung seeing it empty but he still smiled at the memory of his younger self sneaking the diagram that Sander had penned atop the napkin into his brown jacket. Not knowing then that eventually he’d get to remind an older Sander that sometimes dreams do come true.

The walk back to the house on the beach was refreshing. A light zephyr surged around the pier’s promenade creating an idyllic breeze that seemed to galvanize the local pelican community into flight. The whole ambiance of this beachy hideaway gave Robbe a much needed reprieve from the
conflict ensuing in his mind. A litany of doubtful thoughts with no real answers. Continued avoidance was working so far in his favor but Robbe knew that Sander’s patience would wear.

They hadn’t spoken much since the break up. Sander had stuck around for a few days after the initial night to keep Robbe company but the whole ordeal lacked morality. They’d lay in bed together watching TV while Sander just held Robbe tightly. Practically bruising Robbe’s arms. Every few hours Robbe would be stricken with a wave of guilt over what he had done to Luc and he’d need Sander to fuck it out of him. The situation was dire and the irrational had somehow become the rational. Robbe needed to get his shit together and stop his dopesick lifestyle. Sander could not become the dragon he needed to chase to stop the withdrawals. He didn’t deserve that. Robbe had done what he had done and he needed to learn to live with it.

He did eventually kick Sander out after 4 days of this delirium stating that he needed time and space and he just needed Sander to respect that for now. He also called his boss explaining the situation and begging him to forget his resignation. Robbe was lucky that the firm was understaffed and had just signed on new business because otherwise Thibaut would have never agreed to it. At least that was one crisis averted, his apartment on the other hand was in shambles. Everything was in packing boxes and everything needed to be rehoused which was a painstaking process but he did it. It took him a couple of weeks but he did eventually put the pieces of his life back together. Finally waking up one morning after a three week haze with an impulsive craving to head to the house on the beach. Robbe wasn’t sure why he needed to go there, he just knew that it was calling and thus why he now found himself wandering down the promenade on his lonesome. A sherbet sky as his backdrop.

Robbe welcomed the change of scenery of his beachy escape. A part of him loathed his apartment now it was covered in a slime of memories he could not scrub away. Though the house on the beach was nothing more than some worn down furniture he welcomed the opportunity to grab his guitar and lay out on the garden bench outside his room and just strum the night away. It was that time of the day anyways. Sander and Robbe barely spoke or texted during this reflective period but they did communicate in the best way they knew how. See these siloed lovers had their own traditions. Sander had established it but Robbe had developed it. When either one of them didn’t feel like talking, usually Sander they communicate in their most comfortable non-verbal formats. For Sander this was his usual set of drawings and for Robbe it was always his guitar. So keeping in line with their usual pattern Sander would text Robbe pictures of his drawings daily and Robbe would return to sender a voice clip of whatever chorus he had strummed together for the day. So that was what he was in the middle of doing when he saw it.

Robbe looked out onto the rainbow sherbet sky; it was an apparition in the distance. He blinked to make sure it wasn’t an illusion then a second time for confirmation but it wasn’t a trick of the mind. A figure began to materialize over the sand dunes in an all black attire sporting some laced up Doc Marten’s.

Robbe’s body tensed up. How could it even be possible that he was here too... but as soon as the affliction of concern took over him it quickly dematerialized as the apparition in the distance came into focus and took on corporeal form. Robbe definitely didn’t know her but he couldn’t stop observing her. She had a juggernaut presence, he was in awe, curious too but more so because she felt so familiar. Her lavender pinkish locks stood out; they helped frame her face with a dose of softness which was in opposition with the rest of her appearance.

She made a b-line towards Robbe’s direction approaching him with haste. She passed the candy strip ballards and walked onto the wooden planked walkway that paved the entrance of the house on the beach. She stopped at the teal colored Kalise cooler. She opened it and evaluated whatever she found inside and walked right over to the wooden garden bench where Robbe sat legs up
strumming his guitar. Robbe shifted his focus downward in an attempt to avoid her gaze.

“Are you the manager here?”

Robbe looked at her completely bewildered recalling the previous time he was asked that same question. Before he had time to think of a cheeky retort she interjected into his thoughts.

“I just wanted to pay for a beer from the cooler”

Robbe kicked his legs off the bench and sat up.

“Oh those are mine actually but feel free to grab one. Free of charge of course”

Robbe shot her a wink.

She was pretty, he thought. Robbe had to double check his senses for a moment. He had never been drawn to a woman like this before. He took a moment to evaluate his entire life choices but it definitely wasn’t that. It wasn’t that kind of connection but there was something about her. It’s like his body was reacting to some strange paradox in the universe that had hashed out this otherworldly eidolon sitting in front of him.

“Ummm do I have something on my face or something?” She asked as she brought the rim of the bottle to her lips.

“No…” Robbe replied with a hint of embarrassment in his voice.

“Ok so what are you staring at?”

“Shit sorry, you just seem so familiar. Am just trying to put my finger on where I may have seen you before. Are you from around here?”

“No…” She slapped back with a hint of sarcasm.

Robbe felt like an idiot as soon as the sentence left his mouth. She clearly had a heavy accent and she definitely wasn’t from around here. Her Dutch was terrible but conversational. Her whole vibe screamed from somewhere south.

“So whose heart did you break?”

“What?” Robbe scoffed in disbelief. The reminder of guilt sinking him back into his seat.

“Come on..a pretty boy like you strumming his guitar with this as his backdrop” She pointed out to the sherbet bleeding sky; currently highlighting a color mixture of tangerine and cadmium rouge.

“A bit cliche don’t you think?”

“How’d you know I broke someone’s heart and they didn’t break mine?”

“With a face like that. You’re definitely the culprit.” Robbe was blushing but he didn’t disagree; he just stretched out the bottom half of his jaw in a slight twitch.

“Come on I can smell the guilt coming off you? Trust me I should know, it’s my favourite scent.” The pretty girl shot him an eyebrow raise to check Robbe’s temperature. Making sure she hadn’t offended him.

“I don’t even know you….”
“That’s the best part. You can tell me everything and I’ll be honest with you”

At first this sounded ludicrous but then again Robbe hadn’t told anyone the events that had actually occurred that had caused his downward spiral. He was deeply ashamed of how he handled everything and couldn’t bear to see the judgement across Jens or Lia’s face.

“I am Robbe, perpetual dumpster fire of a person. What’s your name?”

The pixie doll apparition shot her focus downward and whispered out, “Whatever you want it to be Robbe?”

“Pick a name for me?”

Why all the mystery? Robbe thought to himself. A didactic approach, Robbe could recognize a fellow strategist when he encountered one.

“No no no, you don’t get to do that. I can’t be the only one telling my secrets.”

She scoffed.

“Fine fine. Call me C.J.”

Robbe pulled a face, “That is not your real name.”

“You said you wanted a name, you never said anything about it being my real name. Take it or leave it.”

God she really did remind him of someone.

“Ok Robbe, I kept my end of the bargain. So tell me your secrets.”

Robbe rolled his eyes at her. There was something about her that was positively unbearable but also highly comforting.

“I recently broke up with my boyfriend…..” Robbe murmured out. She waved her hand in a circular motion indicating to Robbe that she wanted more details and to keep going.

“Because I think i’m still in love with my ex….”

“You think? Or you know?” C.J. questioned.

Robbe put his guitar down on the side of the bench and buried his face in his hands as a display of his frustration.

“I gather that means you know.”

C.J. pivoted her entire body towards his and scooted over rubbing Robbe’s shoulder very lightly. A strangely intimate gesture to exchange between strangers.

“It’s okay, I mean it’s not, but you know what I mean.” C.J. attempted to quell Robbe’s worries.

“Ok your gonna need another beer so you can tell me what happened.”

C.J. got up and scurried to the Kalise cooler and hurried back with a beer in hand.

Robbe took a large gulp as soon as she put it in his grip.
“I slept with my ex-boyfriend as soon as me and my new boyfriend broke up”

C.J. shocked her head back and forth as a sign of some weird understanding.

“How long after the break up?”

Robbe buried his face back into his hands. He didn’t want to look at her reaction.

“Like an hour…..”

Robbe clearly heard her shocked snort which was preceded by heavy coughing.

“Sorry, choked on my beer there for a second. An hour? How? Did you drive a ferrari to his house?” She was definitely mocking him now.

“No he was waiting on my doorstep?”

“You got him delivered? His not takeout Robbe.”

“But I gotta admit you Belgians are impressive. We don’t have those types of delivery services from where I’m from. At best you can get a lukewarm pizza to your doorstep.”

Robbe looked at C.J. who was clearly trying to ease the tension and crack a joke. Robbe felt a genuine smile come across his face. He’d been struggling to get one of those to appear as of late.

“Look, I am not gonna sugar coat it. You’re a real life asshole.”

“Excuse me?” Robbe responded a bit offended.

“Yeah I mean who breaks up with their boyfriend and has their ex delivered to them within an hour? Kinda of an asshole thing to do.”

“You know what, I don’t need to explain myself to you.” Robbe’s tone had hardened.

“You don’t, but you want to, right? I know because I’ve been there. Am the biggest asshole I know.”

“So here we are two of the biggest assholes drinking a beer together. Cheers!”

C.J. tapped her beer onto Robbe’s.

Though his instinct was to feel offended by the words coming out of C.J.’s mouth his heart and his head felt a bit of relief finally letting it all out. No matter how ugly his truths sounded out loud.

“Have you ever done something like that yourself?” Robbe questioned C.J. hoping for a bit of camaraderie.

“Not something like that but I’ve put my girlfriend through some serious bullshit. Why do you think I'm in some foreign country driving towards home?”

C.J. pointed at herself. “Total asshole remember”.

“Look Robbe when you’re young, a teenager even. You can make mistakes like that and people give you the benefit of the doubt but when you’re older everything counts. It’s harsh but true. If you keep messing up at our age you become a pariah, a write off, beyond repair, ready to be put out to pasture.”
“But at the same time life’s complicated. People are complicated. Your love story sounds complicated. So ask yourself this, would he really stick by you through the good times, the bad and the motherfucking worse? Because everyone swears they would but in reality that’s not really true. They have no idea how bad it can really get. How bad you can really get. So I’d ask yourself this, would he fight for you? No matter the outcome?”

Robbe just stared at her. He kept wanting to say something but he couldn’t seem to construct a sentence. Then it clicked like osmosis.

“You remind me of him, you know. The way you talk. Your whole vibe.” Robbe did a wax on/wax off gestures in C.J.’s direction.

“Who knows..maybe we’re the same person. Do you believe in parallel universes?”

Robbe’s head violently spun around. A tidal wave of deja-vu was submerging him. He just nodded in confirmation. Robbe was definitely a believer of parallel universes.

“Yeah I thought so. Kindred spirits and all. We tend to find each other.”

Robbe knew what she meant. It was weird but somehow he felt like they had been here before.

Robbe and C.J. just sat there in silence for a while watching the colors of tangerine and cadmium rouge disappear into midnight hues. Robbe occasionally strumming some chord changes into the air. C.J. humming out some impromptu melodies both go them going back and forth discussing guitar legends that one another should check out. Until it was time for their rendezvous to end.

“I should go. I have a long drive ahead of me tomorrow.”

Robbe frowned a little disappointed. He didn’t want her to leave.

C.J. noticed and pouted in response. Both man and woman giggled into the breezy night. Before C.J. stood up she left Robbe with a nugget of truth as she drank the dregs of what was left of her last beer. Wiping her mouth down on her long sleeve shirt as she finished her drink.

“Robbe……” She sounded somber.

“The world never wanted people like you and I to be lovers. They bullied us into becoming fighters and we’ve been trying to get back to loving ever since. Just look at the past”

“My advice, look out for the small stuff. Signs. You can build a foundation off those. If you’re willing... and don’t doubt or it won’t work. Believe in it. All the way.”

C.J. began to get up from the bench.

“You’ll be fine either way Robbe but if you do have someone worth fighting for I try to protect that from the world. Remember through the good, the bad and the mother fucking worse. No matter the outcome.”

Her words struck a chord in Robbe.

“Promise me if you find that. That you’ll jump?”

C.J.’s dark brown eyes felt like they were pinning down Robbe’s soul down. Holding him to some unknown truth but he couldn’t say no to her.

“I promise” Robbe affirmed.
C.J. smiled and quickly broke the seriousness of the entire exchange.

“Right time to go. This was great. Best one night stand of my life. I didn’t even have to put out.”

“Are you ever just normal?” Robbe teased.

“What’s so great about being normal… am an enigma Robbe.” C.J. began to walk down the wooden sandy planks when Robbe shouted out to her.

“Hey, How do I find you again?”

“You don’t Robbe. This was just a random anomaly. We were never meant to meet in the first place.”

Though normally this would seem like a brush off. Robbe somehow understood the dyadic transaction that had just occurred.

“I guess we’ll meet again in another universe?” He let out.

C.J. stopped dead in her tracks.

She twirled back around, her entire self looking back at Robbe and said.

“I’ll be waiting for you.”

A 8 inch butcher knife.

A 4 inch serrated blade.

A sharpened down dagger.

A razor sharp slicer.

Cast iron, chopping block, a slab of bloody meat, porterhouse, grade A.

He begins his production towards sustenance by a turn of knob. He inspects the hob [click click click].

He remembers, you have to push down on the button. Flames [ignite] the black disque in front of him. He [slices] through the fatty churned dairy and throws a dollop into the cast iron pan as he props it atop the hob. While he waits for the dairy to liquefy he reaches for the chopping block to undress a clove of garlic and lays it down on its flat side [chop, chop, chop].

He palms the slab of meat and [pats] it down. [Dab, dab, dab] pepper and salt coat his hands. He turns on the faucet and lets the water cleanse his palms clean. The pan begins to [sizzZZzle]. He throws a bit of olive oil into the mix as the temperature begins its ascent; he goes on gut and eyeballs it. He’s done this many times before and carefully places the slab of meat into the iron [zZZzzzZZZz]. He tears apart a bushel of tyme and throws a few sprigs into the buttery mixture.

The smell of medium rare coating the air. He’s careful not to over cook it and mismanage the timing. After a few minutes it comes out seared on each side perfectly browned. Robbe begins to plate his perfectly executed meal. It’s pristine, deliciously edible, done to perfection but Robbe just stares it down. It’s not what he wants, not what he’s in the mood for. He reaches for his phone and begins to swipe through the user interface until he finds what he is looking for [tap, tap, tap].
Let’s go to Japan? - Robbe

Tonight? On a redeye? - Sander

Yeah - Robbe

Two hour journey at most - Sander

See you there - Robbe

Robbe grabs the perfectly done steak, throws it on a plate and opens his refrigerator door, discards it and [slams] the door shut.

Japan on the horizon.

His wall clock does one full rotation and halfway through the next he hears him come a [knocking].

He springs up and practically runs to the door fixing his hair along the way. He swings the door open to reveal his lunar beauty. Robbe’s breathe hitchs a little when he lays his eyes on Sander.

“Hey there stranger” Robbe greets him in the most sickliest sweet tone.

Sander doesn’t even hesitate as he captures Robbe’s lips; mouthing “hi” somewhere in between these exchanges. Robbe can’t contain his giggles as their kiss intensifies.

“Calm down picasso, where’s Japan?”

Sander lifts his right arm up holding up two plastic bags. Robbe takes them off him and walks over to the kitchen and begins to unpack everything.

“Got your usual: 14A, extra crunch, extra ginger. Also, how dare you insult me and call me a cubist?”

Robbe laughs back at Sander.

“Have I taught you nothing?” Sander teases out. “By the way I brought more of the kid’s diet food”

Robbe didn’t dare tell Sander that he had bags of that stuff stored deep within his cupboards taking up space and unused.

As Robbe glances up to look at Sander he can see him sitting on the dining room table petting Bowie and fixing the tangled up trinkets on his collar. He grabs a couple of beers from the fridge
and walks both plates of food over to the table.

[Snap] the chopsticks come undone easily.

“Thanks for bringing this. I was starving and I didn’t feel like cooking”

Robbe practically inhaled his rolls. Not because they were utterly delectable but more so because he was confident in their quality. They were his go-to, his on the regular.

“The guys at Japan always ask me about you. They’re like what happened to that good looking brunette who used to come here with you? and I have to break it to them and tell them you broke my heart and moved an hour down the road”

“Oh shut up!” Robbe throws his chopstick at Sander.

Sander’s quick witted humor barrels out.

“See now your going to have to finish eating with your hands for attempting to assault me”

Sander’s smart aleck routine envelops Robbe in a sense of overwhelming relief. He’s misses it, misses him, his off the cuff charm, all his silly innuendos but mostly he misses how Sander looks at him. He can’t explain it but no one else’s stare makes Robbe feel the way Sander’s gaze makes him feel. He was attempting to replicate but it felt impossible.

“I've missed you?” Sander tests out the room.

“It hasn’t been that long” Robbe responds back.

“6 weeks or so but who’s counting…” He adds on.

Robbe was counting, he was definitely counting. It had become almost routine by now. Sander was the tweety bird to Robbe’s cuckoo clock. He’d materialize every four to six weeks. They’d play pretend for a few days, he’d perform the role of boyfriend and then disappear again. It was never too much or too little but it was always consistent and timely.

“So what's been going on in your life? Dating much?”

That question made Robbe nervous. Made him press his palms together and scratch his nails on the surface. Robbe thought he was smart, if he only knew that this specific gesture was his tell tell sign.

“Life’s … ya know … the usual. Nothing new to report back.” Robbe performed a passive shrug. Simultaneously wishing to infuse his beer with some supplementary cleansing beneficiary. Alkaline or one of its cousins.

“Nice casual avoidance towards the dating question there Ijzermans”. Robbe just rolled his eyes and out of nowhere he fell back into bad habits.

“I am not dating anyone”, Sander sucked down his beer and just stared at Robbe.

“You don’t need to lie about it if you were”

“Well am not” He was. Robbe was definitely lying about it.

Sander knew it too. He could read Robbe like a book. Robbe also knew that Sander knew but he didn’t consider it lying because everything was so new that it wasn't worth mentioning.
Robbe got off his chair and went and sat on Sander’s lap. Placing a kiss on his forehead, tugging on his ear lobe, kissing his chin, cheek and nose. Placing a kiss on the side of his mouth and moving slowly towards the middle kiss by tiny kiss.

“You’re killing me” Sander sighs out.

Sander can feel Robbe smiling against his lips.

“Kom” Robbe latches onto Sander’s arm attempting to pull him out of his chair. Sander makes himself limp for a moment but then gives in and stands up off his chair and follows Robbe into his bedroom.

The shimmer of the rock in the sky peers in-between the jacquard curtains through which yonder window breaks. The lovers entangled in a position that draws its name from the femine tropes of classic westerns but performed backwards. The release of serotonin fills the air as the rhythm of Sander’s pelvis pushes Robbe’s body upwards like the break of a wave. His arms resembling those of a deanimated puppet, weightless and loose limbed. The sense of rapture is arresting and yet Robbe feels distant and almost out of body. The sensation of Sander’s body, a familiar source of comfort, now feels foreign under the moon’s beam. Sander pulls Robbe’s body back towards him, Robbe’s back caressing Sander’s chest. Sander runs the palm of his hands down Robbe’s shoulders, elbows, forearms and wrist. He flips his palms upwards as he snakes his hands pass Robbe’s wrist and spread his finger to lock them in between’s Robbe. Robbe inhales at the intimacy of this gesture making him recall the past. In this moment it's like Sander can sense his unease and he decides to rest his head on Robbe’s shoulder a top of his ink stained skin. It burns Robbe’s thinks to himself. This molotov cocktail of nostalgia. He's trying to catch his breathe and shake off this sensation of cognitive dissonance when Sander leans himself back into the wingback leather chair, breaks their clasp and digs his fingers into Robbe’s waist.

The jack hammering pace wrings through the mechanisms of Robbe’s inner workings [slap, slap, slap]. Robbe’s body juts slightly forward and he grabs onto the arms of the chair. The tufted leather feels ragged under his touch. Robbe presses his index and middle finger into the button upholstery and lifts his hips slightly off Sander’s in attempts to decrease the rhythm. His entire weight lifted up by these two miniscule anchors on the verge of breakage. Sander notices him pulling away and slows down the entire melody for their song.

“Everything okay?” He asks.

Robbe looks back behind his shoulder for a long second.

“Am sorry, but can we stop?”

“Right now” Sander counters frustrated. Clearly on the verge of ejection.

Robbe nods and maneuvers his body in a gymnast like fashion to swivel around so he can look at Sander face to face. Sander lightly brushes his back up the leather chair to meet Robbe at eyeline.

Robbe scans Sander’s gaze for that beautiful herbage green that is always present and full of rapture but he can’t find his green-eyed monster in the ocean dark of the room. This oculus rift is unsettling. Like making love to a shadow of the human form. Sander thumbs over the creases of Robbe’s face attempting to iron out his concern. Sander, always the ancillary guard to their human hearts. Robbe shifts his focus downward, embarrassed that he just ruined the mood.
Sander sharp tongue cuts off Robbe’s mental discourse.

“Hey...it’s not a big deal. Don’t worry about it”

Sander tips his head slightly back and reaches up to catch Robbe’s mouth. His kiss working in tandem with the sticky brew below the lovers waistlines but for Robbe it all lacks synchronicity. His mouth doesn’t fit perfectly onto Sander’s anymore; their kisses feel empty. The saturated butterflies that once communed in his belly have succumbed to a backwards metamorphosis and turned into neutral tone caterpillars preparing for chrysalis. Robbe was losing him, and he knew it.

“Can we lie down for a little bit?” Robbe pleads.

Sander gives Robbe a soft peck on the chin and lightly slaps Robbe’s thigh in agreement. Robbe places his hands on each side of Sander’s shoulder and pushes off him. Sander slivers out of Robbe’s body causing the light sensation of a [clack] within his stomach. Robbe grounds his feet on the floor and moves back a tad to stand up. He grabs onto Sander’s wrist and pulls him up off the armchair. Sander steadies himself and places his hand on Robbe’s chin and gives him a reassuring peck. The lovers walk themselves to Robbe’s bed and as they walk past Robbe’s bedroom window a gradient of light bounces off the moon and reflects back onto them momentarily as the blind follow the blind into the ocean dark.

They settle themselves onto Robbe’s bed and Sander takes the opportune time to rid himself of the condom they are no longer going to utilize. Both of them are still a bit sweaty and overheated from their tryst on the leather chair. Robbe brings the flat sheet over the beads of sweat adorning their bodies. Cuddles were never off the table for these two lovers but the introduction of them was always a bit nerve racking for the initiator. Both men a bit jaded by prior circumstances, both pussy footing around this act of intimacy with brevity and restraint. However, Sander felt the need to triage Robbe’s visible distortions. He couldn’t exactly read the thought bubbles protruding from Robbe’s skull but he could feel them. He felt elsewhere, distracted, displaced, homeless. In need of a sanctum so Sander delivered one and tugged Robbe over to him and nuzzled him into the curvature of his underarm. He could feel Robbe’s smile against his skin.

Robbe’s fingertips began to explore the panoramas of Sander’s chest, his index finger and middle finger danced around his white lacquered skin. Sander pops his head up to witness Robbe’s S.O.S and gives into the brunette’s request. He drags his own finger to meet Robbe’s. Robbe trots his index finger and middle finger upwards towards Sander’s beautiful face and stops atop the empty space above Sander’s heart. Sander quickly walks his fingers over towards Robbe’s fingers and places his index and middle finger underneath Robbe’s fingers allowing his thumb to massage the top of Robbe fingers. Robbe loosens the emotional purse strings of his heart and pushes himself up Sander’s side and lays his head in the vast empty space. Robbe and Sander both acutely aware of the non-verbal conversation that is occuring. A conversation based solely on gestured colloquialism, a labyrinth of familiar corridors, habitual patterns, but classic in it’s motif not to be confused with contemporary, or to be mislabeled as current.

“I know....” Robbe clears his throat harshly [ahem] before proceeding.

“I know you said it’s not healthy or fair but could you...[ahem]....?”

Sander yanks Robbe’s body upwards so they can be touching nose to nose as he complies with Robbe’s request.

“I love you”
“Don’t let anyone ever tell you any different? Got it?”

Robbe could feel his cheeks turning red. He thanked god for the midnight hues.

“Got it”, all of a sudden Robbe’s body was twirling through the air and he was on his back being pressed into the mattress.

“Oh so that’s what you want? A love sick puppy to worship you?”

“Sander” Robbe half scoffs half giggles out.

“No?” Sander gives Robbe his signature one-eyed eyebrow lift.

“No”, Robbe says in the softest most innocent tone as he shakes his head back and forth.

“You’re a terrible liar Robin?”

“I am not lying…”

“Ok then I won’t say it again”

Robbe pulls his chin to his chest attempting to hide the sting of Sander’s comment.

Sander rectifies the misstep quickly.

“Am joking” he presses a kiss onto Robbe’s forehead.

Sander can hear Robbe’s faint breathing. He fears that he’s killed the moment until he feels Robbe lightly nip at his chin. It’s a light bite tentative and cautious, a signal that Robbe was in need of a life raft or some sort of confirmation.

So Sander calls a cease fire and quits the debate. He kisses Robbe deep and true pulling back momentarily in between kisses to affirm his devotion. The more I love you’s that spread into the airflow the more obvious it becomes that Robbe was in need of quenching his dehydration. He misses hearing Sander say those words to him though he understands why Sander makes a point of reframing himself from delivering them. It was clear to Robbe, Sander wasn’t going to say them unless he was gonna hear them back but every once in a while he would break. Mainly for Robbe, because he would practically beg for it and Sander’s biggest flaw was being unable to say no to him.

The deeper Sander kissed him and whispered his love affirmations the more that an uncontrollable set of moans slipped through Robbe’s mouth. Robbe tugged Sander’s body tightly onto his. They were practically both panting when Sander paused and stretched his body to reach into Robbe’s nightstand for a condom. Robbe stretched out his arm and pulled Sander back.

“Can you not? I just need you here with me right now” Robbe was begging again.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea. It hasn’t been just us two in a while.” Sander cautions back.

Robbe knew Sander was right. He shouldn’t be irresponsible but he longed for closeness, a closeness he had only ever experienced with Sander so he dared to tiptoe outside the lines of safety.

“Please…..” Robbe asked again.

Robbe’s white flag induces Sander’s addiction as he parts Robbe’s knees. The palm of his hands always find parking when he presses down onto the biceps of Robbe’s legs. Robbe squeezes his
eyes shut in anticipation as a yellow wash colors his vision. As Sander penetrates him with the jagged edge of the familiar he feels the butterflies emerge from chrysalis. A large school of sherbet colored flying beauties speed-skating around the schematics of Robbe’s room. Moving in a syncopated rhythm of [1’s and 2’s] emulating the motion of hot blood animals mating. The school interchanges from rhythms of [1,2] and then quickens into a pace of [1,2,3,4] and then back down again. The butterflies swirl in and out of a hurricane inspired formation until the eye of the storm looms directly on top of the lovers; directly in its path of carnage. The lovers completely unaware of the catastrophic consequences ahead or rather acutely aware but gripping onto plausible deniability.

Robbe and Sander’s a pair of vagabonds suffering from their love’s dysentery. The kind of love that requires commitment, a love that’s needle to bone. A love that fucking hurts. The school of butterflies continue to sprawl outward and then inward to tighten around the eye of the storm. Water begins to hit landfall as the floodgates of the sky open and droplets begin to descend. The pace quickens [1, 2, 3, 4] and then quickens again [1, 2, 3, 4] a monsoon about to pour out of Robbe’s body on the verge of destruction when the rain suddenly cuts out.

He’s practically panting as he begins.

“Baby, why aren’t we together?” The pace was now relentless [1,2,3,4], [11,22,33,44], [111,222,333,444], [1111,2222,3333,4444].

“I love you” Robbe’s eyes snap open as lightning strikes.

Sander takes a moment to ease off the pace and pulls back so he can read Robbe’s reaction.

Robbe can’t help but think Sander is the most beautiful being his ever laid eyes on with his stark white fringe hung over his face and his cheeks rosie from the heat. His eyes begging for Robbe’s direction. Sander’s act of courage equally a turn-on at this moment.

“And I know you love me. I know you do”

Robbe’s mind can’t seem to form the words Sander wants to hear but he acknowledges Sander’s observations and nods his head in agreement.

“So let’s fix this?”

Finally Robbe manages to say something.

“Okay”

“Yea?” Sander responds back. Thoroughly surprised.

“Yeah” Robbe whispers out, pulling Sander back down for their lips to meet.

The droplets begin again. This time in the pace of downpour. Fast and unrelentingly. Submerging everything in their wake. A literal and figurative monsoon appears. The water levels around the lover’s are rising, but they don’t notice the immediate danger they are in. If they don’t pull up now they’ll drown but they don’t. Instead they get lost in the algae green darkness of the ocean. The stillness eventually suffocating them. The lover’s completely unaware that this would be the last time they would make love outside of the presence of disgust and self loathing. This would be the last time they would be able to reach the summit of their universe.

This was it.
“Robbe....”

“Baby, come on”

Robbe continues to muffle the outside world as he dawns a pillow over his face. Finally taking a peek to glance up at a showered wet Sander.

“There you are. Good morning.”

Robbe sits up on his bed, a sting of soreness washes over him but it quickly disappears as Sander kisses him awake.

“I have to go. Jann is waiting for me to walk through the shop with the electricians”.

Robbe pulls his knees to his chest and sighs.

“Okay” Robbe acknowledging their time is up.

“Okay.......”

“Does that mean I can have my pants back now”

Robbe looks around the room acting like he clearly does not understand Sander’s accusation.

“Your sitting on them Robbe”

“No am not” Robbe states with a cheeky smile.

“I told you, you’re a terrible liar. Unless this is a trick to make me come and get them then you’re pretty smart”

“I guess i’m pretty smart then.” Robbe shots Sander one of his cutesy open mouth smiles that simply destroys him.

Sander launches himself at Robbe and begins to tickle him into submission. Robbe’s giggles fill up the morning brew as he paws Sander off.

“Got them” Sander revels in his victory. He quickly notices the frown that appears across Robbe’s face. He hates leaving him like this. Sander quickly gets dressed before he suddenly finds himself back in bed with Robbe. He laces up his boots and gets ready for the day ahead as Robbe watches over him with his hard to resist puppy dog eyes.

Sander sits on the edge of the bed and turns his body to face Robbe. He cups Robbe’s face with his hands and assures him he won’t have to wait weeks to relive this sensation.

“I meant what I said last night”

“Promise?” Robbe asks tentatively.

“100%” Sander seals his promise with a stream of tiny kisses all over Robbe’s face. Until the kid interrupts them.

“He's hungry”
“Yea yea am getting up” Robbe slugs out of bed trying to find his boxers somewhere on the floor.

“It’s good to see you treat it well”

“What?” Robbe asks, confused. Looking up at Sander who has Bowie on his back, paws up, in the air as he revels in Sander’s neck scratches underneath his collar.

“See, protected.” Robbe points at Bowie who’s completely spread out in comfort on his back.

"I mean does he not instill fear in you or what?”

Sander looks down at his youngin, “I think your dad is mocking us”.

Robbe holds his hands up and flicks his fingers outward and inward. A signal to pass the kid over.

Sander gets off the bed and hands Bowie over to Robbe.

Sander gives Robbe one of his signature mind melting kisses.

“I really gotta go. These guys cost a fortune and they charge by the hour. Plus Jann will kill me.”

Sander plants a kiss on Bowie too.

“Love you guys. Call you later” he tells them as he walks out the bedroom and dashes towards the front door. He’s in such a hurry that he doesn’t even lock the door behind him.

Robbe walks out into his open plan living space and takes note of the mess him and Sander left on his dining room table. Overnight sushi left to spoil, completely inedible now. Robbe puts Bowie down on the kitchen counter as he is in dire need of a glass of water. He grabs a glass and heads for the fridge to pour out the contents of his water filter when he opens it he finds his perfectly cooked steak staring back at him. He [slams] the door shut immediately and walks over to the faucet thinking he prefers room temperature water anyways.

He knocks two glasses down back to back. Bowie’s stares him down blatantly guilting him into action.

“Ok, ok, jeez keep those eyes to yourself”

Robbe grabs Bowie’s plate out of the cupboard and finds the orange hard food bag, not to be confused with the purple one and serves Bowie up ½ cup of breakfast. As Bowie’s guzzles down his meal Robbe walks over to the door and [snaps] the door’s lock back into place. Robbe begins to walk back to the counter when he hears the double chirp of his phone pinging him.

He immediately thinks it’s probably Sander sending him some silly text and grabs it off the dining room table.

Hey... it’s been a few days and I haven’t heard from you. Sorry for bringing up the whole exclusive thing. I’m not trying to rush you but I just wanted you to know how I feel about you. Dinner this Friday? - Luc

Robbe reads the text and reframes from responding right away. Friday’s five days away and surely Sander will call before then. If he’s serious about their promise, he’ll call but there’s doubt lingering in the air.

Robbe walks back on over to Bowie. Who is still devouring his breakfast as Robbe pets him in upwards strokes. He runs his fingers down his collar and pulls the set of trinkets dangling off it to
face him. He thumbs over the silver ring meticulously as he dares to loop the ring partially down his finger but ultimately reframes from doing so.

Thinking to himself that it's safest to leave it where it currently belongs.

Chapter End Notes

Firstly, always practice safe sex. Robbe and Sander's decisions are an allegory to mirror their stupidity.

Also, am sure you have some questions about their drowning. Yes, their loved drowned. What I wrote is what I meant. They do not experience that type of happiness again in this universe. That was the last time.

Now don't panic and take a deep breathe and read it again. What am I trying to tell you? The form and structure of this chapter is almost as important as the words so take a moment to let it all percolate.

Also I did a Visitations Q&A on Tumblr. Check it out.

Preview for the final chapter Of Visitations out now.

Thank you for reading and namaste. Catch me in comments. Next stop the finale (I mean it this time).
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

It's long awaited and long overdue.

Thank you everyone for coming on this ride with me!

I'll see you at the finish line.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

His atop a precipice.

A vantage point where all things come into view.

Where the decision to plunge himself into the abyss invites him in like a gaping wound but he chooses the latter a dance around the hardwood.

A dance.

Is that all it is?

Love and life a mere tango between two forms battling for governance; for the lead. The notion of control dangling in the air like some token of chance, a lucky charm, a rabbit’s foot. He’s frozen. Paused. In mid-air transition.

A live wire at a stop light waiting for the green. A brethren of the craniate in the peril of deoxygenation, mere seconds away from contorting his skeletal structure into hyperextensions.

He inhales.

Shoulder and neck slanted on an incline. He pushes towards gravity and lets the slab of maple [swish] the surface. The wheels of his board drawing everlasting as he brushes figure eights. The male body truncating in the air like an oversized bolt drilling down a sealed vault. His thoughts [swirling] through him like a polar jet stream. Icy and ferocious. Early day discussions on fast forward and repeat.

“I need my meds recalibrated doc” Sander mumbles out.

“Hmmm” The doc sounds apprehensive.

“It looks like you have had a recalibration every year for the past 3 years.” The doc thumbs through Sander’s medical chart.

“Are you sure this isn’t a symptom of all the stress you’ve been under? The grand opening tonight? The financial pressures?”

“NO!….I mean yes, but no, I’ve been edgier than usual but that's not why” Sander states adamantly.

“Plus, I'm having trouble sleeping.” Sander tacks that one for good measure knowing if anything
they will re-up his sleeping aids.

They weren’t all lies he thought to himself as he swung like a pendulum from side to side on the crown jewel. Loud cheers and celebratory adorations coming from the gallery space; breaking him out of his reflections. He can’t avoid the crowd much longer. The party is in full swing and he needs to go make the rounds. Poetic discussions about his vision await him; descriptions about the counter duality of dark and light, functional or utilitarian, for profit versus non profit but he wasn’t in the mood. He was proud of himself, he knew that much and though he relished in his attendees jovial shoulder taps and glass raises it all felt empty. His exterior soaked up in white lies when questioned about the space’s interior. His slapstick smile perfected to compliment his pheasant plumage as he peacocked around the room; hosting duties increasingly onerous as the guest list questioned him about the young hot shot architect that he had collabed with to create such an impressive view.

“Can we meet him?” They’ll ask, but they won’t be able to.

He bailed, or so that’s what he texted Sander that morning. His usual slew of excuses that he hid behind as to why he couldn’t make it back to Antwerp. Back to Sander. Same reasons as to why he’d always be the first to drop off on a conference call between him, Sander and the contractors. Why he’d walk the space with everyone but his counterpart. Purposefully avoiding displays of patronage or binary settings on life’s stage. An agenda via obstruction; creating an alternative universe in which the skater boy and his artist were destined to miss each other every time.

As Sander continued to surf the half pipe the laws of thermodynamics began to dilute his intentions. Velocity and gravity leaving him as the wheels underneath screeched to a halt cutting off the tracings of eternity he had swiveled onto the plywood.

It was time for the dog and pony show.

Time to hot trot around man made obstacles displaying prowess in form. Sander kicked up his board and walked off the ramp’s flat and jumped down onto the cement floor. Leaving the amber coated world that housed a statuesque half pipe in the backdrop with the autograph R+S marred onto its body when he heard the [click] of a lock. He’s body instinctively flinched as the knob to the door twisted open and the sounds from the other world serenaded their shangri-la.

Sander took a step back as a shadowy figure emerged from the darkness of the tattoo shop’s working space. Hues of black splaying across the cement finish. Sander’s eyesight travelled from the floor to the figure holding onto the door and gave a mocked laugh in disbelief.

Robbe took another step forward, let go of the door, and let it slam shut. Instantly killing off the volume from the outside. Entering the space where the other half of a war torn love story survived. The story of a pair of star crossed lovers enveloped in a love quagmire.

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Robbe cranked the lever.

The car door flew open.

“Careful there. If you don’t treat it well you’re going to break it” Luc teased out to Robbe.

Robbe pushed himself off Luc’s ride, his body seesawing between two worlds when he stepped out onto the pavement.
The night was inviting. The spirits of the dead were amongst the living. Or so, that’s how the legend goes..

Of course Sander would choose ole hallows eve to host his Grand Opening. It was fitting for him. A night wrapped up in the witching hour. Where the spirits of the past are able to walk side by side amongst those prepared to sin. Unknown entities, ghouls and those who feed off the darkness of others dancing around the room whispering bad intentions into well intentioned beings.

This night was a trap but neither of them knew it yet.

“Can you hold this?” Robbe asked Luc as he handed him two black frames wrapped up carefully with black tissue paper to protect the glass from any scratches. He took a moment to fix his black shirt and ruffled out his black mid length pea coat and then took back the frames off Luc’s hands.

Robbe noticed Luc’s slight displeasure at his primping and quickly readjusted the frames underneath his right arm and went to grab Luc’s hand with his left.

“Hey don’t get in your head. Ten minutes and we are in and out and then we can go to dinner with my mother. I know it’s weird but Jann is a client who owns a ton of other businesses and it’d be stupid of me to mess up future possibilities. This is strictly business nothing else.”

“Promise?” Luc questioned.

Robbe narrowed his brow and tilted his head to one side in an inquisitive manner.

“Don’t you trust me?”

Luc tipped his head downwards and plastered on a fake smile in agreement. Luc squeezed his lover’s hand and they walked towards the shop’s facade as the Halloween vibes speed skated around them and the veil between two worlds began to thin.

“ROBBEEEE!!!!” Jann screams out amongst the crowd.

“You came” Robbe gives Jann a little wave as he walks over to Robbe clearly a little intoxicated enjoying the celebrations. Jann was the majority investor in Sander’s tattoo shop and someone he and Sander had known for years. Jann was practically a giant. He towered over the crowd at 6’5ft (195cm). He claimed his height was a genetic trait of being born in Eindhoven. He was in his mid fifties but you would never be able to tell. He was covered in full sleeve tattoos and wore his black t-shirt and leather pant uniform everyday since the first day Robbe met him on his 18th birthday.

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world. It was such a pleasure working with you.” Robbe schmoozed him.

“Jann this is my boyfriend Luc. Luc this is Jann he is the investor in this project and the poor soul who trusted me not to mess it all up” Jann roared out a half drunken laugh and gave Robbe a slightly to forceful pat on the back.

Jann leaned into Robbe’s neck which caused Luc to raise a brow and began whispering secrets at a low volume.

“We got approved” Jann confirmed. Robbe looked up at him and pointed his index finger downward towards the white floor of the gallery space. Jann shook his head in confirmation and continued to add on.

“And the community park license so we can teach lessons out back in the skate park” Robbe’s face
lit up like a light bulb. He never thought the crazy plan he concocted months ago would actually work. His idea to try to register the gallery and public park as charity spaces actually came through and most importantly saved Jann a ton of money meaning he wouldn’t try to refurbish them into business spaces anytime soon.

Robbe scanned his white surroundings in attempts to find a mop of lunar hair sticking out but nothing in sight.

Jann noticed Robbe scanning the room so he pointed him towards the back.

Robbe excused himself for a moment and as he walked towards the back of the tattoo shop Jann yelled out.

“Robbe don’t forget about our appointment to cover up that shoulder tattoo. It's on the house.”

Robbe didn’t even acknowledge Jann as he transitioned from the white gallery space to the tattoo shops black working space. His all black outfit practically blended him into the wall paint. He got to the back door and twisted the handle. It was locked.

He twisted the bolt and heard it click.

As he pushed his body into the third space the amber earth tones consumed him and as serendipity should have it Sander was waiting for him.

Robbe took one more step forward and let the back door slam shut. It felt like all of sudden him and Sander were stuck in zero gravity.

In some type of suction vacuum where oxygen was limited.

“Hi” Robbe tried to cheerfully break the ice but that was short lived.

“What are you doing here? I thought you bailed?” Sander’s tone was loaded with so much poison that it stung Robbe.

“Well I changed my mind. I thought it’d be nice to finally see the finished product. You know since Jann, you and I have spent so many months working on it.”

Robbe was nervous. He kept fiddling with the frames. It felt like Sander’s gaze was dismantling him.

“It looks great by the way. The contractors did a great job. I mean it looked great when I walked the space last month with them but it's really impressive now that it's all done.”

“You were totally right about keeping the layout white, black and into earth tones. Oh and I brought you a gift.”

Robbe tried to hand Sander the frames but Sander made a hands all full gesture as he held up his Element skateboard. Sander walked over to a table that looked like it had been set up for drinks placement and slid his board underneath it.

“Just put the frames on top. I’ll grab them later.” Sander directed Robbe.

“I didn’t know you still had the old Element I brought you.” Robbe stated.

“Old habits die hard.” Sander threw back at him.
Robbe just shook his head up and down in agreement.

Robbe looked out towards the ramp and just took it all in for a moment.

“Remember when we went to go get this thing from that crazy guy in Ghent…..” and before Robbe could even finish the story Sander cut him off.

“I thought you were here for business? Or are you ready to go down memory lane now?” Sander’s tone made it very clear that he wasn’t in the mood for Robbe’s fake banter.

Robbe turned his body to look directly at Sander. It always took both of them aback how each other’s gaze always felt like they were baring their souls to one another.

Robbe and Sander could find so much tranquility in one another and yet so much turbulence at the same time.

Robbe finally broke the silence.

“I should have told you about my boyfriend”

Sander’s eyes widened and he bit his bottom lip. Robbe recognized this gesture; Sander was pissed.

“So, why didn’t you?” Sander shot back.

“Honestly, I didn’t think you cared. You never called me after the last time I saw you.”

Sander enunciated the next part.

“I DIDN’T CALL YOU?”

He then repeated himself again.

“I DIDN’T CALL YOU?”

“I am sorry that I’ve been busy trying to make one of the most important business deals of my life happen and didn’t have the time to fucking wait on you hand and foot.”

Sander ran his hands over his face to calm his temper. His cup runneth over with emotion.

“If you weren’t so damn selfish you would have realized I am stressed out of my damn mind. I literally have no money because I sunk it all into the shop and that I could easily lose everything if things don’t go well but of course you wouldn’t get that since you’ve never made those types of sacrifices for anything in your life.”

Robbe was really biting his tongue. He knew Sander was just stressed out and venting at him but Sander knew very well that Robbe had made those types of sacrifices time and time again for him above anyone/anything else.

“I think I should go” Robbe stated.

“I think you should go too. We should try to keep this little arrangement copacetic.”

Robbe turned his body to head for the door when Sander just couldn’t leave it alone.

“You were never one to stay anyways”
Robbe turned back to look at him knowing very well that Sander was harping on their esoteric love sonnet.

“I always knew you didn’t really have any fight in you” Sander was just slicing knife wounds in Robbe now and they both knew it.

“You know why I didn’t call…..”

Robbe looked straight at Sander. His beautiful brown eyes pleading with him to stop. Sander was starting to drag their love into purgatory but his impulsive need to punish Robbe apexed and Sander ran the spite laced knife right through Robbe’s heart.

“You were right. There is no us.”

He was reveling in the pain.

“There hasn’t been for a long time….and there’ll never be again.”

Sander drew out the knife from Robbe’s heart.

His hands coated in disgrace allowing his love to bleed out right in front of him.

It surprised Sander when he saw Robbe’s eyes darken and glaze over. It scared him. He got the reaction he wanted but seeing it materialize in front of him instantly made him want to take Robbe in his arms and tell him that he didn’t mean it but before he could even react Robbe ran out the door. Practically running over Jann in the process.

“Where is Robbe going?” Jann questioned.

“I told him it would probably be better if he left. He’s just so selfish”, Sander answered back.

“What?” Jann looked genuinely astonished.

“Jann stay out of it. It’s none of your business.” Sander forgot who he was talking to.

“Look, I’ve known you two since you were a pair of teenagers getting sappy tattoos for one another so whatever it is, fix it, but more importantly this is my shop. So everything that concerns it is my business. Do you understand that? ”

Jann rarely took on the authoritarian stance he was exuding now. So Sander knew he meant it.

“I understand”

“Good because tomorrow I am calling Robbe and offering him the Brussels project for next year and if you happen to not fuck up before then I may get you in on it too”

Sander gave Jann a head tip in understanding.

Jann heads for the door to leave Sander to stew when he decides to teach him a lesson.

“Oh and next time, why don’t you check the books before calling someone selfish. That selfish kid ran around for months trying to get the right paperwork so we could get on the right registry to save thousands in taxes and his boss called me today letting me know he forfeited his personal architect fee. Something about he had a prior agreement with you that he wanted to honor.”

Point taken.
Sander practically felt like Jann had slugged him in the face. He quickly exited the amber coated world and ran past the black and into the white gallery space. Sander could hear he’s friends calling out his name and people tugging at him to get his attention but he just wanted to catch up with Robbe before he left.

He finally made it outside but the street was empty, dead, comatose.

“Fuck” Sander yelled out in frustration.

“You just missed him” Sander turned around to find the voice speaking to him.

A brown-eyed beauty stood in front of him. You’d swear she could be a doppelganger for a young Zendaya.

She walked towards Sander.

“Good looking guy with great hair in all black right?”

“Yea” Sander confirmed.

“Yea he jumped in a taxi with some tall guy about 2 minutes before you ran out.”

“Thanks”

“No problem…. You look like you need a drink”

“I do, are you buying?” Sander flirted back lightly.

“Well if you mean am I inviting you to the free bar then yes am buying”

Sander threw the pretty girl a smile.

“Sander, by the way” he held his hand out to her.

“Genade” she slipped her hand into his.

“Come on let’s go get you that drink” Genade joked out as she dragged Sander back into his own shindig.

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White walls.

Bareless ceilings.

Sleep, it was simply a stranger to him. He grabbed his phone and checked the screen. Nothing. No calls, no text, he’d even take a voicemail cussing him out at this point but nothing made him feel more like a piece of shit then seeing the blue light of the witching hour (3am) looking back at him. He rested the phone on his chest and Sander could swear in that moment the weight of the world was on top of him.

He turned his cheek to the other side of the bed to check if Genade was fast asleep. She was, Sander wasn’t sure how this night had unraveled so suddenly and how he found himself in bed with such a beautiful creature and yet still left so unsatisfied. He slid out of bed carefully and managed to somehow find his boxers in the dark of the night.
He twisted the door knob to his bedroom open as carefully as possible not to wake her. Once he heard the click of the lock as he closed it shut his entire body relaxed. He walked into his kitchen to get a glass of water and as he walked passed his kitchen table the black frames caught his attention. They just sat there waiting to be opened.

Sander had been so wrapped up in his own unconscious revenge that he had missed Robbe’s white flag of surrender. He picked up the first black frame and began to tear at the tissue. It was Robbe’s first initial blueprint of the tattoo shop which included the skate park. Sander could still recall how excited and nervous he was to pitch the added addition but that he was adamant that it would compliment the whole vision of the space while additionally giving young kids a place of refuge. He even whipped up one of his guilt trips when he asked Sander why he didn't think it was important to provide a place where young boys like them could find one another.

Sander gulped down the memory.

He put the frame down and picked up the second frame. He tore off the paper and when he saw it looking back at him he literally felt the spit laced knife dig into his chest. He practically stopped breathing for a moment. He pulled off the white post-it off the frame that read We made it happen in Robbe’s hand writing and behind it encased in time was the white napkin that Sander had used to map out his dream tattoo shop all those years ago sitting across the booth from Robbe. In that moment Sander felt like he hit rock bottom and he didn’t care that it was 3 a.m. or that what he was about to do was far from appropriate because all he could think of is that he needed to hear Robbe’s voice. Luckily he had brought his phone with him from the bedroom; call it instinct or intuition but something made him take it with him. He texted Robbe immediately.

Are you awake? - Sander

Sander was sure Robbe wouldn’t text back after all the horrible things he had said to him just hours earlier but something deep inside him told him not all hope was lost and before he started to whirlpool into panic his phone vibrated.

Yes - Robbe

Can I call you? Please... - Sander

Two minutes went by..

K - Robbe

Sander never thought the ring of a phone could make him feel so nauseous but he felt like his heart was in his stomach when he heard Robbe’s voice on the other end. It was practically a whisper...

“Hey”

“Am a fucking asshole. All the shit I said to you tonight, I didn’t mean it. I mean I did but am frustrated. I never thought this is how we would end up. I just don’t understand why you didn’t talk to me about your boyfriend after everything...... I don’t know I just thought....... We had agreed.....”

Sander could hear Robbe sigh out on the other end of the line.

“I just want you to be happy, baby. I don’t care if it's with me or not....”

Robbe didn’t react to Sander’s statement so he continued.
“I opened up your frame. I can’t believe you kept that dirty old napkin for the last 5 years.”

“6 years” Robbe corrected him.

“Yeah…. 6 years.” Sander forced out a sweet toned chuckle.

The line went quiet for a moment.

“You still there?” Sander asked.

“Yea”

“Thank you for registering the space. Thank you for figuring out the tax credit thing. Jann won’t shut up about how I introduced him to the best architect he has ever worked with. Thank you for…..”

Sander started to get choked up, so he composed himself before he continued.

“Thank you for chipping in. You didn’t owe me that”

“I did actually. I promised you I’d find a way, remember?” Robbe questioned.

Sander just ran the palm of his hand on his forehead and through his hair recalling the promise Robbe made to him so long ago.

“And you always keep your promises” Sander tacked on.

“Always” Robbe confirmed.

“Can I ask for one last one?”

“Sander….” Robbe sounded slightly dejected.

“Whatever happens..I love you. That’s all that matters. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. Okay?”

“Sand--”

“Please” Sander pleaded.

“Promise” Robbe agreed not knowing then that to fulfill this promise he would need to forsake another.

The silence crept back in. Sander knowing the call was nearing its end. So he said his final words.

“I am so happy that I found you. That we got the time we got together and that we are one of the few people in the world that can actually say they found their soulmate.”

5 seconds of silence filled up the call.

“I love you baby. I always will. Am so sorry I hurt you tonight.” Sander added on.

“I….. I....” Robbe false started but he was so close to getting off the blocks in that moment and running towards the finish line but he faltered.

Then doubt took a hold of him.
“I have go now” Robbe stated, and before Sander could even respond he hung up the phone.

Once Sander heard the dial tone go dead he walked over to his couch and plopped down. He grabbed his sketch pad off the coffee table and began to draw the design that would go above his heart.

Robbe just looked down at his finger laying over the end call button and stood there in silence.

He wasn’t sure what he had just done but it all happened so fast.

His body and mind had completely shut down hearing Sander say those words to him. He stood there in his living room in between two minds. A big part of him wanted nothing but to call Sander back and tell him how much he loved him too. Another part of him was so angry that they were in this position. Robbe had done everything he could in his life to protect them from the world but he never planned that the thing that would ultimately tear them apart would be each other. He crossed his arms over his chest and sat down on his couch. He leaned forward slightly and rested his elbows on the top of his thighs. His thoughts made him anxious. Made him press his palms together and scratch his nails on the surface of his left hand.

Robbe took a big inhale and as he exhaled out all his doubts got caught up in his throat and he began to cough up sobs. Hot tears began to stream out of him and like the collapse of a dam the water pressure broke the walls of his interior. He crumbled. He just fell on his side and curled up like a young child. He buried his cries on the couch pillow and cried himself to sleep and in this moment of his despair Robbe felt Bowie come over and lie down next to him.

There’s a void at the heart of the universe.

A place where space and time collide. Where the boundary lines of the event horizon can be found. Where a choice lies to leave the remnants of the mother, or to enter the ergosphere; the grey place where time ceases to exist and everlasting is a perpetual promise.

Man has sensed the presence of the black mass for quite some time but only until recently did we find ourselves asking: if no light can emanate from within then should we defy the gods? and cross into a plane that could potentially spaghettify the human body: two faces, four arms and four legs pulled into threaded form. A fruitless purgatory? or maybe, all together something else, an unknown, an entry door to another universe.

The lovers essence is mirrored here; splashed across the buildings exterior as they stumbled out of their metallic cocoon placed into park. They dance atop the asphalt in embrace; need, and desire. A rendezvous of their lips tangled up in an act of amnesty. The automatic lightening levers flicker into automation. The sulfur vapor caresses their skin as they stand outside the apartment entry door. Robbe fumbles through a set of nickel, copper and brass finally identifying his right to pass. His hands are shaking suddenly, his body aware of his nervous system, reacting to what’s sure to come, their unspoken contract. Sander notices the delay and comes up behind him. He places his palm on top of Robbe’s hand and begins to guide it towards the keyhole. Robbe takes note of the fact that his Casio watch is looking right back at him. The dials in full functional spin.

Robbe unknowingly holds his breath as Sander assists him in unlocking the entry door. The [click] of the lock makes Robbe flinch. He isn’t sure why but suddenly he feels the axis shift. Robbe has no time to wallow in his concerns as he and Sander stumble into the lobby’s backdrop. The vapor wash has vanished and they find themselves amongst the whitest of all fluorescent lighting. It gives off a celestial feeling. The change of ambiance is almost cleansing. Sander focuses his attention on a chunk of real estate on the lobby floor it once served as temporary housing on the night Robbe
jumped in between worlds. He smiles at the thought that he sat there that night, pen to paper calling on the properties of general relativity. Yearning for a distortion in time, a tear, an entryway. He disregards that flashback quickly as he senses Robbe’s shadow dance on screen. He grabs Robbe’s hand without much thought and the duo rush into the steel vault like a pair of runaway bandits. The interior of their metal forge covered in a reflective surface. Sander navigates the route and makes his floor selection. As they travel from south to north they inch closer to their glass ceiling they run through their usual rolodex of the familiar. Violent pants interrupted by wet kisses, eager petting complimented by hair pulling, a bareless ceiling being balayage(d) by photo negatives that echo past dealings but the denominator of time begins to unravel and they are interrupted. The vault doors swing open.

Times up now.

They’ve arrived.

Sander departs the steel vault first. He holds his hand out to Robbe who doesn’t hesitate to interlace it into his own. They walk hand in hand to Robbe’s personal refuge. The twosome accelerate towards the doorway and Robbe stumbles mid step as the seed of doubt creeps in and grips him. His feet hot trotting underneath him, violently pulling on Sander arms and slamming their bodies onto one another as Robbe grabs the door knob of his apartment to balance himself. The touch of metal kisses Robbe’s palm. He can't help but question if the mile ahead of them is the finish line or just more stone to pave. He lets go of Sander’s hand and turns to face him.

“Are you sure?”

The smile placed across Sander’s face drops momentarily and his cool glaze is unmasked. The shell of his controlled veneer decays in front of his lover’s vision exposing the toll fees it took to alight his desires aboard their personal orient express. Robbe takes note of his verbal fumble and instantly begins to justify it.

“I mean after everything…? What if we don-”

Sander's right palm comes up to meet Robbe’s mouth, locking out all doubts as Robbe attempts to regurgitate the vestiges of their past pictures.

“Not in this universe” Sander spits out on command.

“In this one, I stay with you” Robbe’s sight goes wide eyed. A phrase all too familiar but he can’t help but sum up their commonplace nomenclature as sugar coating to inedible arrangements.

Sander lets his arms drop to his sides as he feels weighted by Robbe’s lapse of judgement and his lack of belief in their life’s direction.

Robbe turns his body back to face the door and starts unbolting the entryway as the locks humm operatic tones of [click, clacks] reverberating off the walls like chromed out pinballs zigzagging from edge to edge. Robbe pushes his body weight forward; neck and shoulder slanted on an upward ascent finally transitioning through the entrance into their wildlife paradise. The cat of their prideland emerges from the plains of Robbe’s quarter. The sudden sound of bells begin to approach the pair.

“My boy” Sander screams out to Bowie practically shoving Robbe out of the way to pick up the cat. Sander quickly begins his usual sycophantic praise that only makes Bowie melt into a barrage of incoherent purrs, meows and cheshire cat style yawns.
Robbe leaves the pair in their love bubble as he glances over to his wall clock and checks the hour 22:44. He eagerly starts rummaging through his cupboards to grab Bowie’s food. He pulls out the orange bag of cat food and quickly glances over his shoulder and decides to trade it out for the purple bag all the way at the back of the cupboard. Robbe grabs Bowie’s bowl and begins to unseal the bag when he feels an elbow thud at his side.

“Try this?” Sander lulls out softly and hands Robbe the orange bag.

“But...it’s no-”

“He needs a change up anyways. Even if it's just the small stuff.”

Robbe bites the side of his lip and gives Sander a nod. The gentle chimes of the cat food hitting Bowie’s aluminum bowl filled up the silence. The air suddenly becoming filled with past consequences, vengeful spirits and all things left unsaid. The sands of time begin to slow in their pear shaped encasement. Robbe takes Bowie’s bowl and walks it over to the dinner table. A sad habit he has established off all those lonely nights where he sat alone eating dinner across from his only companion.

He pulls out a chair and lets the legs drag across the hardwood. The loud screech irritating his ear drums. He plops down on the chair and hears Sander’s foot steps approaching. He doesn’t even look up in fear that he has ruined the moment and allowed his wavering resolve to spill onto the ground underneath them. Robbe sees Bowie jump out of Sander grasp and onto the table out of the corner of his eye.

“Do you like love stories Robbe?”

Robbe whips his head towards Sander as he begins to talk.

“I once heard this story about an artist and his skater boy.”

“Oh did you?” Robbe instantly perks up, a pavlovian response to their personalized call to action. Robbe could barely contain the curious smirk plastered underneath his smile as Sander looped through the rhapsodies of their love.

Sander’s auspicious foretellings, recantings, and correlated matrixes begin to subdue Robbe into hypnosis and then the ride stops.

Interrupted by past interrogations.

“Do you ever question memories, Robbe?”

“How so?”

“I mean do you question the concept of how we remember them. How we've captured them? Which ones were good? and which ones were bad?”

Sander steadies himself on the edge of the dinner table as Robbe’s glances up to him from his chair. Robbe’s elbows rested atop the table.

“I know how you remember them Sander” Robbe delicately discloses his confessions. Robbe walks his index and middle finger over to Sander’s hand and lightly massages the black band marred onto Sander’s wedding finger.

“You draw them for me, on your body. So I can read our story.” Robbe softly closes his eyes.
Sander can’t help but admire his beautiful coffee lashes. He hangs his head slightly downward in attempts to hide his embarrassment from Robbe’s evaluation.

“Do you know how I remember them?” Robbe whispers out sweetly as to soothe Sander’s obvious discomfort.

Sander nods back and forth.

“I replaced the bad memories with good ones.”

Robbe huffs out a discomforting sound and continues.

“Like today for example……”

Sander immediately finds Robbe’s sight. His irises are the color of embers off a crackling fire. Robbe didn’t need to finish the rest of his sentence. Sander knew very well what Robbe was reminiscing on. That incident that had happened exactly four years to the day. When their universes diverged and a metaphorical fork in the road eroded fault lines into their love story as the mother and mantle kissed in tectonics measures.

Robbe cleared his throat and harped on.

“Today for example…. is Bowie’s birthday.”

Sander pulled his head back with a slight frown plastered across it and responded in defense.

“No it’s not. Bowie's birthday is **Bowie’s** birthday.”

Robbe rolls his eyes and lets out a tiny scoff.

“Sander I know that’s how you remember Bowie’s birthday but I remember today as the day you walked in with him in your arms into our apartment. I still consider it….one of the best days of my life. ”

Sander noted the warmth of Robbe’s tone as he recalled the day he ran into their celestial fortress with the gatekeeper to his heart. Robbe’s continence quickly interrupts Sander's positive thinking.

“Plus it helps me forget the worst day….”

Robbe's admittance makes the petals of Sander’s heart wilt instantly. He Instinctively kneels down towards Robbe so he can process their exchange at eye level. Robbe lets his nerves get the best of him and unconsciously shuts his palms and sits close fist watching Sander.

And like the function of fast forward and repeat a splice of time unravels between them and Sander’s left hand grabs onto Robbe wrist and he presses his forehead onto Robbe’s knuckles and drags his lips onto their skin. Sander speaks softly, never breaking his gaze. Retelling their story, itching them into this moment.

“You know sometimes life is like a movie in which you get to choose what your life will become… all you have to do is envision it. Make it reality. Put it on paper.”

Robbe shook his head back and forth his cynicism at play as he interrupts Sander’s optimism.

“You say that now but we’ve been here before….and I’ll just end up hurting you.”

“Like I hurt you” Sander cuts Robbe off. Robbe looks away as the feelings from four years past
sneaks up on him and he feels Sander’s lips kiss his skin once more.

“We’re just so toxic now Sander. All we do is create problems. Am scared if we don’t stop we will end up broken and hating each other.”

Sander lifts his lips off Robbe’s knuckles and states, “Yeah….It’s a possibility. I am not going to lie….but am also not worried about that right now. In this minute all I know is that I love you”.

Every synapse in Robbe’s mind is taking on artillery fire as he fights back the desire to return Sander’s love concession.

No other option is left for Sander. He has to prove it. He stick his hands in his jacket’s pocket and pulls out some broken pencils and a mini 3x5 sketchpad. He discards the pencils on the dining table and begins to flip through the pages of his pad. Robbe quickly catches glimpses of familiar images, some of Bowie, a beach, another that Robbe could swear were his eyes and then Sander found it.

“Look at me” Robbe shifts his entire body from underneath the table so his legs are now directly between him and Sander and focuses on what Sander was showing him.

“What’s that you used to tell me?” Sander questions Robbe.

Robbe whispers the saying under his breathe barely audible.

“You touched me and I never felt something like that” Sander gently grabs Robbe’s right hand as he speaks and places it above the empty space above his heart and lays the sketch pad atop Robbe's knees.

Looking back at Robbe is an image he knows too well. It was Robbe’s index finger and middle finger standing at salute with Sander’s fingers directly mirroring his. The backdrop the planes of Robbe's chest.

“If you go, I go. Remember?”

"So...come with me now.” Sander asks courageously.

Robbe’s heart swells, he feels like he can’t breathe and his face is emanating rosie hues.

“Where are we going?” Robbe questions.

“To another universe” Sander clarifies.

“Where we aren’t so toxic and the past can’t follow us and we can meet again.”

Robbe makes a high pitch sound. A flimsy attempt that threads on light encouragement. As his curiosity begins to play the role.

“And how do we find each other there?”

“Won’t need to” Sander ensures Robbe in a rather curt tone.

“Why?”

Sander lets go of Robbe’s hand and begins to rummage through his pockets. Clearly looking for something. Sander’s face displays a pensive glare but quickly softens as he pulls out his phone with his right hand and begins to get up onto his feet and pull Robbe up via his left and delivers his explanation.
“You won’t need to because…”

Sander looks straight into Robbe’s eyes.

“I’ll be waiting for you.”

A cold chill runs up Robbe from the ball of his heels to his cranium. As this fever dream becomes him.

Robbe stands there looking at Sander fiddle with his phone slightly bewildered. Noting the time in the blue light 22:53.

Sander comes to life again.

“Oh, so I set my phone to count down one minute once. That’s how long it takes to get to the other universe.”

Robbe nods in comprehension with an adorning sweet smile. Sander was always a creative being about these things.

“But first they’re some rules. We can only get there if we let go of the past. We can’t take it with us. So close your eyes, take a deep breathe and try to remember it all at once and then let it go.”

Robbe knew that one minute would never be enough time to wash the pain of all the memories away but he knew he needed to go with Sander and so he followed his direction.

“You ready baby?” Sander asked sweetly.

“Yeah, I’m all in” Robbe nodded in confirmation.

And as Sander was about to press start on the countdown. He paused for a moment, reached into his jean pocket and pulled out Robbe’s ring.

“Can’t forget this” Sander gave Robbe a sly smile as he grabs his hand and slips Robbe’s ring onto his wedding finger.

“Any last words?” Sander asks Robbe.

“I love you”

Sander’s face white's out. He just stares at Robbe. Almost as if he was questioning if he had just hallucinated what he had just heard and so Robbe said it again.

“I love you Sander. I mean it”

Sander just blinks at the second disclosure but still frozen. Robbe leans straight into Sander’s personal space cupping one of his cheeks as their lips stay separated by the tiniest centimeters and whispers out via a hot breathe.

“Start the timer before something bad happens”

And on command Sander [presses] play, closes his eyes and met his lips onto Robbe’s and recalls their past dealings one last time. Going back to the place where it all began.
They laid there, enlightened.

What did the artist know under the moonlight? His voice pierced through the silence.

Slow....... 

............... 

............... 

Minuut per minuut.

Into the daylight.

Or Life?

Let's make love at dawn.

Suspended.

Defying the gods.

A charity of time.

The Black.

His body.

His time.

The white.
Hollow.

..........still.

In need of rescue?

An angel?

- Don’t

Steel.

A volcanic incandescence.

The blind following the blind.

Coating the air.

Always? or no way s?

Butterflies succumbing to a backwards metamorphosis into the dusk of night.

Displaced.

Distracted.

The Moonlight......
Shining.

[Cord change]

It requires commitment.

It’s needle to bone.

It fucking hurts.

Maybe it’s dead? numb?

A Full circle?

Into the darkness.

Toxins in the air.

Seesawing between two worlds.

Silhouettes of shine. Pulling up to an act of divine intervention.

Everything’s silent.

Still.

Infiltrating.

Rainbow sherbet skies.
Deja-vu.

An apparition in the distance.

Speed.

Now?

Promise?

Promise.

Robbe and Sander exhale into space committed to the virtues that lie pass this event horizon. The sound waves of their future now visible in the high tide of an alien nation. Pass what's known to man and the rules of relativity. A place only accessible via a commitment to futility. An oligarchy of the dyadic. A place where the soil of urban legends is harvested and the only thing expected is threaded form and the shards of time that mirror previous ventures. But only here in the blacken spot in the sky is a portal to another universe present. A monorail to their safe place of purification and healing. Where the generation of currency for their one way passage requires a redrafting of an adolescent agreement. A simple promise once marred when legality took form of a brown haired skater boy and now dancing atop the cataracts of his green eyed artist. The star cross pull back from their embrace and peer into the black void of their gaze and utter those words without hesitation in breviloquence: We stay, you and I. Always. And the boundary limits of time begin to dissolve as the ground gives way underneath them and forces their departure out of the grey space, out of the rapture of the yellow wash. To a new universe paved in monochrome parallellity and rose tinted skylines. But they go forth together, hand in hand, fearless and in fidelity. As they iterate on a previous promise and encase it in formaldehyde suspending it in a portrait of time. Preparing for the inevitable.
For life.
Into the gutters of a timeslip.
Even....
If it kills them.

Chapter End Notes

So.... I suspect you have a lot of questions.

I think for you to find the answers to those questions you need to take a big breathe and read this fic from the beginning or maybe read just this chapter a few times but overall the ending of this fic means whatever it means to you personally. You can interpret this ending 1000x different ways.

What was the first thing I told you when you started reading? not everything is black and white. Love is a messy affair.

Am going to leave you with this. I gave you a disclaimer at the very beginning of this story I told you that this fic would be a journey but I never told you it would be Robbe's & Sander's journey. Maybe this was never about them to begin with.... or maybe in a way we are all Robbe & Sander. Their story is our story. Much to think about.

Thank you for everyone who read this fic. Came on this crazy ride with me and gave me so much love. Stay safe & namaste everyone.

Until next time!

**Almanacs are still coming so I will definitely end up covering most of your questions in there but feel free to bug me in the comments if you can't wait. Also please sign(or resign) my Moyo season petition [here](#), if you haven't yet.**

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!