Summary

(Previously titled 'Meaning' but let's face it this is better.) I’d never really met Romeo Montague, but I’d heard enough about them to write a biography (a very, very inaccurate biography, mind you, but a biography nonetheless.)

I first heard their name mentioned by my father. In the middle of a sea of swears, somewhere between “fucking” and “shithead”, was the phrase “Romeo Montague, the brat”. My brother, Tybalt, who took after my father in every possible way imaginable, picked up on that right away and has hated “that Montague brat” ever since.

Notes

I absolutely required this AU of a Modern High School LGBTQIAP+ Romeo and Juliet.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter Notes

Author's notes:
I am a Shakespeare fanatic. That being said, I've never been very fond of Romeo and Juliet. Still, I've decided to tackle it for this fic.
I have hopes of getting this to 50,000 words and eventually getting it actually published as a novel. Yeah, I know that's a bit of a reach, but my neighbor down the street is an author and I think she could help me finalize this fic, so here's hoping. :)
This is a rough draft. If it ever does get novelized, the novel will have extras and more stuff.
Juliet is genderfluid. Her pronouns will change throughout the story.
Romeo is androgyous and uses the pronoun they/them.
Mercutio is bipolar.

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I’d never really met Romeo Montague, but I’d heard enough about them to write a biography (a very, very inaccurate biography, mind you, but a biography nonetheless.)

I first heard their name mentioned by my father. In the middle of a sea of swears, somewhere between “fucking” and “shithead”, was the phrase “Romeo Montague, the brat”. My brother, Tybalt, who took after my father in every possible way imaginable, picked up on that right away and has hated “that Montague brat” ever since.

I don’t really care. The dispute between my proud family, the Capulets, and the other “dishonorable” family, the Montagues, has been going on since Verona was founded in 1856. Something about cattle or land, I think? I don’t even know, though everyone else seems to.

Anyway, the petty feud between the Montagues and the Capulets was just that, a petty feud, until the first day of school in the 10th grade.

The bell for first period had just rang, and everyone sat uncomfortably in their seats. Well, everyone minus Abram Montague and Sampson Capulet.

Over the quiet tapping on pencils against the desks, yelling could be heard outside.

“Do you bite your thumb, sir?”

“No, sir."

“Do you quarrel, sir?”

“Quarrel, sir? No, sir.”

I turned my head to look in the direction of the yelling, but by then it was too late. I saw Abram lunge towards my cousin Sampson, and both boys fell out of view. I ran outside and saw a solemn crowd gathered around the spot where they’d fallen.
Sampson lie bleeding on the ground.

I watched the light leave his eyes like a candle being snuffed out. There is something in the eyes of the living, I think. Something that burns bright and beautiful and hopeful. When they die, that light is extinguished, and it leaves only emptiness behind. I’ve seen that same emptiness in the living as well.

I’ve seen that emptiness in Romeo.

It was after Sampson’s death the rumors and lies about Romeo Montague really started to heat up.

I heard Romeo was a ‘he’, and a ‘she’, and an ‘it’. It seemed that everyone had decided who Romeo was without feeling the need to ask them.

Except for me. I asked them. They responded very politely with “They, please” and I obliged, because that was the right thing to do.

Romeo and I haven’t talked since then. Every once in a while, we’ll see each other in class or in a store and nod at each other. It’s very casual, and very subtle, because god forbid anyone sees our two houses acting civil together.

Maybe, someday, we’ll talk. Till then, we don’t need words. We have casual glances, small little gestures of friendship that prove that maybe this stupid feud won’t last forever. Because -- god willing -- I’m going to stop this stupid fight before it goes any further.
Chapter Two

My life was going pretty great until my parents decided they had to throw the biggest party the town had ever seen.

Montagues and Capulets were in the business of outdoing each other, you see. The Montagues sponsored the school dance, and so my parents had to put on a dance of their own, of course. Except this one - in true Capulet fashion - had to be the height of decadence and excess. Our house - usually pretty modest - was decked with flowers, food, and gifts. There wasn't an inch of the house that wasn't covered with something pretty.

I suppose that's what bothered me the most about it. It was all so pretty, but it had no substance. It was all for show, all for the sake of making us the best. Capulets always had to be the best, and as a consequence, we were always the worst.

No surprise, Tybalt was delighted with the prospect of being "the best" yet again. He talked about how this would be the most amazing party ever, and how it would finally show the Montagues our family was the best. He told me, "It's not a party; it's a statement. It's a way of saying 'Look what we can do that you can't'."

It felt less like a 'statement' to me and more of an 'attack' move. Just another one of many coordinated blows our house would strike against the Montagues in this year's battle in the neverending war.

Frankly, I was tired of fighting.

I often went on long walks back then. I didn't really have a destination, just anywhere that wasn't home. Most of what I saw was just a blur, background scenery as I rattled away in my head, trying to figure out everything in my life. (I never really did figure anything out, by the way. I still have no idea who I am. The only thing I've actually figured out is that it doesn't matter if you know who you are, because you just are. No knowing required. You don't have to know the meaning behind a painting to think it's beautiful. It just is.)

It was on another one of those walks I saw Romeo again. They were sitting on the edge of this small cliff looking out over the ocean. I thought it was odd that they were just looking, until I realized that I was just looking as well.

Then Romeo turned around and waved at me. I froze, then snapped back into my senses and looked around quickly. If anyone saw us being civil to each other, we'd get in trouble. There was no one. We were on this cliff in neutral ground; far, far away from the feuds of our families and the pressure of society. We were alone.

Stupidly, I approached them.

"Hey," I mumbled. Would they even want to talk to me?

Romeo smiled. "Hi. What are you doing here?"

Well, that took me by surprise. "Escaping. You?"

"Same." Romeo patted the ground next to them and I sat down. "What happened, or is that too personal?"

I could probably go on and on for hours, ranting about Tybalt and the damn party, but I decided for
the sake of our sanity not to. "Let's just say the Capulet house feuds with everyone, including itself."

"Huh," they replied, like they were expecting it. "That's surprising."

"Are you really surprised?"

"No."

"I figured."

I know what you think is coming. The romantic setting, the cute bantering, the physical proximity - this is all setting up for some big kiss or something, right? Wrong. Was Romeo cute? Yeah, but dogs are cute, and I'm not attracted to dogs. I can appreciate the aesthetics of something without going any further. And as for the setting, well - not a billion romantic sunsets could make me go against my nature.

Luckily, Romeo was the same.

And so we just sat in silence, perched on the edge of this cliff as the wind blew and the world turned and the waves crashed and the sun set. Though we didn't speak, the air was full of something more significant than words. There was a certain feeling in the space between us. Something between comfort and happiness that I hadn't felt in far too long.

It was at that moment that I realized that home isn't a person or a place; it's a feeling.
Chapter Three

Chapter Summary

In which Juliet pwns a fuckboy and dominates.

Chapter Notes

I'm not a romantic, as you can tell.

Chapter Three

Unfortunately, I had to go back “home” to the Capulet house eventually. Tybalt was there waiting for me, strutting up and down the halls like they were the front lines of some great battle and he was a general. I tried to avoid him, but he stopped me as I was running up the stairs.

“Mom’s waiting for you in the living room.” I don’t have to turn around to hear the smirk in his voice.

Only it wasn’t mom in the living room. It was Paris. And he was in a mood again.

He had a couple of flowers and a whole new book of pick-up lines to try. “I love you.”

Not this again. No matter how many years went on, Paris would always be the child who wouldn’t take no for an answer. To him, I’d always be a damsel in distress, and he’d always be my knight in shining armor.

I always thought it was the other way around. I sighed, “You don’t love me, Paris. You love the idea of me.”

“I’d die for you, Juliet.”

I’d heard it all before. Every line, every romantic gesture anyone could think of, Paris had tried it before and failed. Because no amount of chocolates or compliments or flowers can change me.

I turned and walked back to the door. “That’s nice.”

He ran after me, grabbed my arm and pulled me back. “Don’t you know what that means? I’d die for you.”

His hand was locked around my wrist. “I know, I know.” I’d heard it all before. I may not feel romantic love, but I understand it. And Paris’ twisted, violent version of love wasn’t one anyone should experience. “But I don’t want you to die for me. I want you to live for me. I want you to go live your goddamn life! Because you’re not my blood, or my breath, and I don’t need you to survive. There’s nothing romantic about dying, and if you think there is, you’re wrong.” I ripped my hand from his grasp, and his nails left marks on my palm.

(Want to watch someone go from “I Love You” to “I Hate You” in 0.02 seconds? Reject them.)
What followed was a whole lot of shouting. Paris shouted at me, and I shouted at him under my voice was raw and rough and faint. I shouted at him until I couldn't utter another syllable, but still he went on. He talked about how I “owed him” and how much of a bitch I was.

I knew what was true. I didn’t owe him shit, and if I was a bitch for standing my ground, then a bitch I be. And I certainly wasn’t about to let this whiny, immature, selfish boy decide who I was.

So, I laughed. I laughed and laughed and laughed at him, and I watched his little ego shrivel up and die. And it felt good. It felt right. It felt like justice.

He left after that, and he never talked to me again. I suppose he considered me a lost opportunity, but what he failed to realize was that I was never his “opportunity” at all. Paris’ ego was like wax. Careful and control, but put a bit of fire under it and it melts right away.

I went upstairs with a bag of chips, turned on the TV, and relaxed.
Chapter Four Part 2

Chapter Summary

cake > romance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

And then I saw them. Standing in the door frame, just silhouettes illuminated by the bright lights outside, were two figures in each other’s embrace. Just shadows, they were so close they almost looked like one person.

It was only when one of the figures stepped into the light that I realized that one of was Romeo, and the other Romeo’s friend, Mercutio.
(Well, not friend, obviously. Something more than that.)

It was sweet, seeing Romeo’s quiet, reserved nature combined with Mercutio’s, well, Mercutio-ness. Sort of like a lake meeting a tidal wave.

And plus, there was just something between them. Something in the way they stared into each other’s eyes like they were looking up into the night sky. Something in how their hands touched, like the other was the only thing keeping them from floating away. I don’t know, just something. Something special.

I froze the second Romeo turned and saw me.

Romeo blushed, and I probably did as well, but Mercutio waved.

The second I realized what would happen if anyone but me caught them in our house, all that romanticism vanished in an instant. Go be cute somewhere else, I thought.

I walked towards them, just close enough so I could whisper and be heard. “You can use my room if you want a bit of privacy.”

Romeo’s face had now turned bright red, but Mercutio maintained a suave smile.

Mercutio winked, “Thanks.” Then he took the shocked Romeo by hand and walked to my bedroom.

It was then, when the door slammed and whoever was singing the song that was blasting below hit the high note, that I realized I had nowhere to go. Deprived of my room and banned from the party, I had only my cake to console me.

Well, I really had only two options: I could either kick the two lovebirds out of my room or go sit under the perfect little palm tree outside.

I opted for the tree.

The thing about that tree is, it’s by the main road, right where everyone can see it, because the fact that my family is able to keep a palm tree alive and well in the snowy slums of Verona is a point of pride like no other in our family. Everyone in town wonders how we keep it alive, but it’s a family
The secret is, it’s a fake tree. It’s plastic, and it smells like a department store and it looks just too perfect to be real.

My point with the vivid description of this tree is, nothing perfect is real.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the fact I had literally no idea how to end this chapter, so please except this crappy tree metaphor as a symbol of solidarity.
Chapter Four Part 1

Chapter Notes

Because I only probably have time to write this much today... Enjoy!

Chapter Four

The next day was the day of the party, and even though I knew I shouldn’t have been excited for it, I was looking forward to seeing a bit of fun in my house, even if it was to spite the Montagues. Also, cake.

And the party started in a perfect way, too. Its started with an argument.

I wanted to wear this short (about thigh-length) dress. My mother, of course, was having none of that.

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Rant time: I love wearing short dresses, and I don’t care what anyone else says. I love showing off my legs, shaved or not; I love feeling confident and beautiful, and I don’t see what’s wrong with showing skin. My mother always tells me to “leave something to the imagination” when dressing, but what the fuck does that even mean, really? What else could be under there except skin? Salami? Money? Flowers? No. I’m going to wear what I want, because I should be able to wear what I want. It’s my body, not anyone elses’, and my body my rules.

Rant over.

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So, after about an hour of arguing upstairs, my mother arrived at an ultimatum: ditch the dress or ditch the party.

I ditched the party. I only wanted to go for the cake, anyway. (At least that’s what I’d convinced myself.)

But as I sat up in my room, staring up at the ceiling while muffled rap music echoed below, listening to people dance and laugh and sing out of key, that I realized that I did kind of want to be down there with them.

Plus, I really wanted some cake.

The cake was the tipping point, the deciding factor that made me sneak downstairs.

Luckily, everyone was so distracted by the music and the dancing that I was able to sneak into the kitchen easily.

And there, sitting on the table, perfectly intact and uncut, glazed over with frosting and adorned with about a dozen candles, was a giant chocolate cake.

I almost screamed from delight.
But, I then had to wonder how I was going to extract a slice of cake without anyone noticing.

After thinking heavily for several minutes, I decided to just take a giant slice of cake and blame it on Tybalt.

It tasted amazing. Cake is a lot like love, I think. It’s sweet and soft and fresh and wonderful, until you run out of it. And then it’s just gone, and there’s the faint traces of it on your tongue and a hollowness in your heart because you don’t think you’ll ever experience that again. But sure enough, another cake comes along. Sure, it’ll be different than the last cake, but that’s actually a good thing. It’ll be different, a new experience, a new memory. And who knows, maybe you’ll like it even more.

Anyway, I got my cake and a glass of milk and started walking back to my room.
Chapter Five

Chapter Summary

Prelude to the balcony scene!

Chapter Five

I didn’t see Romeo or Mercutio again for about a week, until Romeo popped up behind my locker at school.

I jumped back, not expecting them. It was probably the least-threatening thing I’d ever been scared shitless of.

“Hey,” they said, a little louder than usual. Their usually messy hair was parted neatly down the middle, and their shirt was tucked into their jeans. An attempt -- a poor attempt, but an attempt at least -- had been made to make them look formal, and I admired them for it. I certainly wasn’t one to judge, what with my custom of throwing on whatever clothes were closest to me when I got up.

“Hey.” There has to be another way to start our conversations. “What’s up?”

They checked over their shoulder before they spoke. “I need to be more romantic.”

I froze. What? “What?”

“In your room, you’ve got all those books of poems and stuff, and you’re pretty romantic, right?”

No. “No.” Hell no. “Exactly the opposite, really?”

They shrugged, “Okay, so you’re not romantic, but you know how to be romantic?”

“I suppose, yeah.” I’d read enough books and watched enough TV that I could probably seduce someone if I wanted to (the keyword there is ‘if’).

“So you can help me be more romantic?”

I was going to say no, and then I thought ‘Why not?’ I had free time. “Yeah, okay, I’ll help.”

Their face lit up with an unusual amount of joy. “Great! That’s amazing, thanks. Do you know where Mercutio lives?”

“No.”

... 

And that’s how I ended up riding in a beat-up old pick-up truck at midnight, with my hoodie pulled way over my head to hide my identity, parked in the bushes next to Mercutio’s house.

Mercutio’s room was two-stories up in this despondent motel complex, and the ground was covered with dirty snow, and the only way to talk to him was by shouting up at his balcony and hoping for a response.
“This is a terrible plan,” I remarked.

Romeo scoffed, “This isn’t even a plan.”

A few moments of tense silence passed before we both burst out laughing.

I looked up at the motel, at this dirty, creepy place that Mercutio called home. Although I’d never talked to Mercutio much, the few times I had talked to them had been… interesting. I wondered what Romeo saw in him.

Stupidly, I decided to ask as nicely as I could. “What is it that makes it -” what’s the right word “- click with you two?”

“Oh, it’s a lot of little things.” Romeo smiled. “Mostly it’s his jokes. And the way he laughs. And sometimes, when everything’s shit for me, and it seems like it’ll never get better, it’s how he instantly makes it all worth it. All the bad stuff I go through, it’s worth it for him. Sure, he’s got problems -- scars that never had a wound and scars that did -- but doesn’t everyone?” They paused. “How do I make that poetic?”

I smiled. “That’s pretty poetic already, you know.”

“I know, but I want it to be, like, fall-into-my-arms poetic.”

“Oh my god, why?” I asked before thinking.

“Why not?”

Good point. “Well, if you really wanna get poetic, you could say “Mercutio is the sun that kills your jealous, sick and grieving moon.””

“Why would I want to kill the moon?”

Good question. “I don’t know it’s poetry. It’s pretty but it doesn’t have to make logical sense.”

Romeo nodded.

Mercutio’s bedroom light turned on, and almost on cue, Romeo’s eyes lit up like stars. That look, that bright-eyed, beautiful, hopeful look in their eyes -- that’s love. I couldn’t help smiling. “Ready?” I asked, but I already knew the answer. Of course they were ready. Romeo was probably ready to jump out of the car and fly up to Mercutio’s window.

They just nodded and smiled, their eyes never leaving the window.

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Chapter Six

Chapter Summary

The balcony scene!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Chapter Six

Skip to a few minutes later and snow had begun to fall. It was light and airy, sort of like someone was sprinkling powdered sugar on a cake, but only if that cake was nearly hypothermic.

Romeo and I were hiding in the bushes below the window, just out of Mercutio’s view.

“Romeo! Romeo! Where the fuck are you, Romeo?” Mercutio asked, and I almost burst out laughing.

Romeo snorted. It was adorable. “Should I speak now, or wait?” he asked.

I had no idea. “Wait,” I guessed. Things got more romantic the longer you waited, didn’t they?”

Mercutio started to sound impatient. “Romeo, get the fuck out here!”

On cue, Romeo popped out from under the balcony and into view. “Love,” they called, hopping up onto the windowsill of the room below and extending their hand out to Mercutio, who did the same. Their hands almost touched, less than an inch apart, the distance probably felt like miles to them.

Mercutio blushed and pulled his hand back. “If my dad sees you, he’ll –”

“I know, but I couldn’t wait till tomorrow, and it’s too dark for him to see,” Romeo interrupted. Then Romeo gave me a confused look, and I knew they were stumped as to what to say next.

Oh shit. Um… “Say, ‘Love is blind, so it belongs in the dark,” I whispered.

Romeo repeated it.

Mercutio laughed. “If love is blind it can’t hit a mark.”

Romeo gave me a look that ‘well, fuck’ look, and I almost sighed. This was going to be harder than I thought.

I tried to think of the most romantic thing possible. “Your eyes are like shining stars,” I whispered.

“Your eyes are like crashing cars,” Romeo said.

I facepalmed. You had one job, Romeo.

Romeo looked at me frantically. Yeah, because it was my job to fix it. I shrugged. I had no idea what to do. This level of fuck-uppery was beyond me.

Romeo quickly said, “Your eyes are like crashing cars because they… stop me suddenly and leave me paralyzed.”
I nodded. Nice save. I gave Romeo a thumbs up.

Romeo continued. “And afterwards, I can’t even think, because we’ve just… collided so beautifully.” Romeo topped it all off with a charming smile.

Okay, damn. That was good. I had to hand it to Romeo for that remarkable save.

Mercutio laughed. “Romeo, I appreciate you trying to be poetic and everything, but if you love me, just say so. No amount of fancy words or metaphor is going to make your love any more true.”

Romeo sighed with relief and looked down at me. I shrugged. Yeah, like I’ll know what to do.

I was starting to panic. I feared I’d let Romeo down; they were counting on me to help them and I thought that if I couldn’t --

“I do love you,” Romeo said, cutting off my thoughts. “And I swear by the moon --”

“DON’T SWEAR BY THE MOON,” Mercutio shouted, and I jumped back and knocked my head against the wall. “Dude, the moon isn’t constant.” Mercutio laughed. “You really need to get ahold of all this poetry stuff.”

Romeo looked down at me, more confused than ever. “Then what should I swear by?”

I didn’t know. “Don’t swear by anything.”

Through a smile, Romeo mumbled, “I have to swear by something.”

My brain froze. I blurted out the first thought that surfaced. “Swear by yourself. There’s nothing more true than you.”

Romeo did so and Mercutio seemed satisfied.

Somewhere from in Mercutio’s house, I heard someone who could only be Mercutio’s father call to him. Mercutio screamed back, “In a minute!” He then turned back to Romeo and whispered, “This seems to sudden, too fast. Like lightning. What if it doesn’t last?”

Romeo looked at me out of the corner of their eye helplessly.

“My love for you is as deep and limitless as the sea,” I whispered.

Before Romeo could repeat this, Mercutio’s father called again, and Mercutio shouted back “IN A BLOODY MINUTE” again. Then he turned back to Romeo and smiled. “I have to go.”

“I understand,” Romeo said, but something in their eyes said they didn’t. This begging look like they would’ve given anything to have one more minute -- hell, even one more second -- with Mercutio. The desire to not be apart might even be worse than the desire to be together.

‘That’s love,’ I thought, thanking god I didn’t have to deal with that. ‘Painful, fast, and unforgettable. Like an injury.’
Chapter Seven

Driving home with Romeo was surprisingly awkward. Considering we'd just tagged-teammed some serious romance, I found it odd that there seemed to be something almost conflicting between us.

I really didn't have a good "social radar" (or an ability to tell when something was awkward) so I just decided to go ahead and ask if anything was up. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah," Romeo responded, but their face wasn't very 'yeah'. "Well, I was just thinking, you know."

"That's…" I paused unsure. "Good?"

"Yeah, it's good. I mean -" Romeo cleared their throat awkwardly. "I was just wondering what I'm going to do when you're not there."

We were parked outside my house now, and I looked around to make sure we were alone. "You did pretty well on your own. Plus, Mercutio doesn't care about all that poetic stuff. He loves you no matter how poetic you are."

"Naw, he doesn't love me. He accepts me."

"Aren't those the same thing?" I asked.

"Not necessarily." Romeo sniffed, and I realized they were near tears. "I'll try to explain: Love needs acceptance, but acceptance doesn't need love. He accepts who I am, but he doesn't love who I am. I don't think he does, anyway."

"He said he did."

"Well, how often do people actually say what they mean?"

They had a point, but I certainly wasn't about to say that. "I'm sure they do…"

Romeo was crying now, and I was banging my head against the wall internally.

My lies weren't working. I had to resort to the truth. "Even if he doesn't love you, that's not your fault. If he doesn't accept you for who you are, than he's missing out. And, if it doesn't work out between you two, that's okay too. You're young, you don't have to settle for anything yet. Your life isn't dependant on his."

"I know," Romeo mumbled. "But he completes me."

"Nonsense, you're already complete, you've always been. People aren't born in half," I said, harsher than I meant to.

Romeo nodded. "I take it you don't believe in soul mates then. Or fate."

I resisted the urge to rant for about five-seconds, but eventually gave in. "I object to the idea what someone else is required to make your life whole. I don't believe in fate or destiny, either."
"Oh, what do you believe in, then?" Romeo asked flippantly.

"Coincidence."

"Everything can't be a coincidence."

"Why not?" I shrugged. "I don't know, it's just what I believe."

"You don't seem like the kind of person to believe in something without a reason."

That was also true. I didn't know what to say, and I just wanted the conversation to be over. "Let me explain, okay? There are two kinds of people in this world: the kind that believe in fate and the kind that believe in coincidence. You're the kind that believes in fate, and I'm the kind of person who believes in coincidence." I smiled, but Romeo wasn't listening. They were looking out the car window with a horrified expression on their face.

Tybalt was standing on the sidewalk outside our house.

It was too late, he'd seen Romeo and I together. I saw his face transition from shock to disgust, and then anger. I gasped and cried out, "No!" but it was too late. Tybalt had already started to run back to our house.

I ran after him.

I think it was the sheer panic that powered me as I ran that allowed me to catch up with him. I grabbed him by the shoulders and spun him around. Frantically, I begged, "No no no no no, you can't tell anyone!"

"You - you and that bastard!" Tybalt backed away, but I reached out and grabbed his hand.

He slapped me so hard the world fell off it's axis.

I punched him in the face and he fell on his ass.

"You aren't going to tell anyone," I yelled, and I saw Tybalt flinch like I was going to hit him again. My brother rubbed his face and scowled up at me. "And why not?"

I smiled smugly, "Because if you do, I'll tell mom about you and Benvolio."

Tybalt froze, his eyes wide. "You wouldn't, and even if you did, that wouldn't matter! It was just one time!" Tybalt's voice had reached an alarmingly high pitch.

"Yeah, I would." I crossed my arms. "But mom would still kill you! And saying 'no homo' doesn't do shit when you've got your -"

"Alright! Alright! I won't tell!" Tybalt stood up slowly, still holding his bruised face.

I felt victorious. Tybalt looked like he'd just been shot.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not very happy with this chapter, so I think I'll re-write it later when I don't have a
horribly sore throat. Please let me know what I should change. Also, Tybalt/Benvolio is the best ship fyi.
Chapter Eight

Chapter Summary

T/W Pretty vivid description of a panic attack, also quite depressing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter Eight

My self-confidence started to die as soon as I got to my room. Something about being in that familiar and comforting environment made me feel safe enough to fall apart. Everything felt completely, vividly, unrealistically real. Too real. Slow and still and stagnant, like time had frozen.

And then BANG! All of a sudden, the reality of everything hit me, and I felt like I was being pulled down into something I wanted no part of. My body tensed up and held me in place, and the room started to spin like I was twirling, and my heart pounded against my ribs like it was trying to burst out of my chest, and my breath became ragged as I gasped for air, and my stomach turned and my thoughts raced. Incoherent, random, persistent thoughts that flooded my mind and drowned out everything else like a torrential rainstorm.

"If Mercutio's dad finds out about -"

"If mom finds out about -"

"If Tybalt tells -"

"What'll happen to Romeo -"

"What'll happen to me -"

What would happen to me?

'I'd be fine. I always have been, and always will be. I will endure.' And that was the truth, I knew that; I had that burned onto my heart as a constant reminder.

Panic, sheer panic filled every inch of my mind. I started to sob, gross crying that wracked my body and cracked my soul.

'It's okay to cry. It's okay to break down. It's okay to not be okay,' I told myself. 'You can always put yourself back together again. You always have, and you always will.' I started to calm down.

Panic replied, "But what if it doesn't get better?"

I tried to reassure myself, 'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.' But I knew that wasn't true.

Panic knew it too. "What doesn't kill you doesn't make you stronger. What doesn't kill you makes you used to it. Over time, what doesn't kill you erodes away at you until you become tired and used to it. What doesn't kill you doesn't make you stronger, it makes you numb."
I buried my head in my knees and rocked back and forth. Everything ached.

"This isn't numbness," I thought. "This is the opposite - this is pain. I'm not numb yet - not to this pain, at least."

Panic took over again and started plaguing me with the same thoughts over and over and over and over again. I couldn't stop it, couldn't make it go away. And it hurt me so badly that all these things were happening in my head - in my head - like my mind was at war with myself and I couldn't stop it. I'd had panic attacks before, but nothing that really completely devastated me like this.

It went on and on and on until it just stopped.

It happened.

I was numb.

I decided to live for the chance that I wouldn't always be.

Chapter End Notes

This was short and sad because I'm a bad person.
Chapter Nine

Chapter Summary

Sorry this took so long! I was sick and then suffered a serious lack of motivation. This chapter is short but essential to close the gaps my shitty writing left before. Thanks!

Chapter Nine

By the next morning I felt a bit better. I'd gotten to a point in my life where I had had so many mental breakdowns that they were now almost a casual occurrence to me. One minute I could be crying harsh tears and cursing anything and everything, and the next, I'd be watching TV like nothing happened. It was no exaggeration and disturbingly true to say that anger, bitterness, sadness and I were all old friends.

Of course, being Tybalt's sister meant that I had to get used to a fair share of abuse. The bruise on my face from where he slapped me healed easily enough, but the bruise on our relationship was an entirely different matter.

Whether I liked it or not, Tybalt was the only one who knew about my secret "relationship" with Romeo, and since I wanted to keep it that way, I had to be nice to him. That meant shutting up and sucking it up.

So the next morning, when Tybalt cornered me in the kitchen and asked me point-blank what was between Romeo and I almost told the truth, because the thought of Tybalt's abuse, and the potential catastrophic consequences that could result from my actions if I continued to lie made me feel sick.

But then I thought about Mercutio's father, who was arguably the most homophobic man in Verona. I thought about all the times I'd seen Mercutio, covered in bruises and crying because of the pain his father inflicted on him for being who he was.

Then I thought about Romeo and Mercutio, and the way they looked at each other, and the way Romeo's soft, reserved nature clashed so perfectly with the human-party that was Mercutio.

There was only one way to protect that bond between them. I had to lie.

So I lied.

"We're in love," I insisted. The second I said that cursed word 'love' Tybalt looked like I had just punched him again. "It's true love. We're star-crossed, destined for it." I almost laughed, just because of how ridiculous that sounded. "Soul-mates," I added, just because I knew it would piss Tybalt off even more. "We're meant to be together."

For the first time in far too long, Tybalt was speechless. When he finally came to his senses, his face softened and he started to laugh.

"You stupid, stupid girl," he says between fits of laughter. "Do you really believe that?"

"Yes, I do." No, I didn't. But I lied, hoping that Tybalt would be shallow-minded and stupid and just
write me off as some silly, idiotic dreamer.

Tybalt shook his head. "It's never going to work. You're an idiot."

"Probably." Definitely. I held my breath. "What are you going to do?"

Tybalt smirked. "Let whatever happens, happen." He turned around and walked away, a kind of terrible glee in his step. "Just remember that violent delights have violent ends, sister."

I knew that all too well.
Chapter Ten

Chapter Summary

Just a little chapter while I get my act together.

Chapter Ten

I had hoped that that was the end of Romeo and my's secret "romance", but it was really just the beginning. My days and nights were now spent dodging Tybalt's suspicious glances and questions. Often he'd ask why I wasn't with Romeo, and I'd have to come up with some stupid excuse like "they went bowling" or something. I didn't dare tell Tybalt that Romeo and I had broken up, because that would only solidify Tybalt's idea that all Montagues were cowards, liars, and losers.

I was stuck in an imaginary relationship, but it was better than being in a real one.

It didn't stay imaginary for long.

I didn't expect Romeo to show up, seemingly out of nowhere, sitting behind my laptop in the library.

As soon as I saw them, I jumped.

"Hi," they said casually.

"Hi." Well, at least it wasn't 'Hey' again. "What's up?"

Romeo closed my laptop for me, which was a quite rude but also very polite gesture. "We should go on a date. Not, like, a date date, but a date. You need to teach me how to be romantic. Pizza at Escalus Bridge. Tonight at 8. Can you make it?"

"What?" Did they realize they were asking someone who didn't feel romantic attraction to teach them about romance?

If there was a facial expression that personified '?!' I was making it. I didn't really want to go, but I also didn't want to be rude, so I was trapped in the fine line between 'piss off' and 'have a nice day'. Hope burned bright in Romeo's eyes, so I really couldn't be rude. "Okay."

"Cool. See ya." Romeo opened my laptop again before strutting off without another word.

I nodded to myself as I just sat there in stupid, stunned silence.

A date? Not a date date - god, the use of the term 'date date' reminded me of something painfully pre-pubescent - but seriously, if not a date date, then what? Were we hanging out? Just chilling? I didn't even know.
Chapter Eleven

Escalus Bridge had been the site of many grisly murders and tragic suicides over the years, so with all that scary history, it had naturally become a popular romantic hangout for love-sick teens and psychopaths.

"Is this date romantic enough?" Romeo asked.

Romeo had put an unusual amount of effort into making our "date" authentically romantic. Candles, checkered table cloths, salad forks - the whole deal. It was cliched, but sweet in it's own, corny way. It reminded me of a standard 90's romantic comedy, which I suppose made me Meg Ryan and Romeo Tom Hanks. The bridge was quiet, the stars were bright, and the ocean endless. It was - according to all my extensive knowledge on the subject - the most romantic date imaginable.

I nodded, because my mouth was full of pizza and the next time I opened it, it would be to eat more pizza.

We sat on top of one of the bridge pillars, right next to the edge where the cement dropped off into nothing. Romeo thought the fact that death was about an inch away from where we were sitting somehow heightened the "romance" of the place.

"So this would be a good place to take Mercutio?" they asked, looking hopeful but confused.

"Depends…” I peered over the edge, down into the abyss below us. "Is he afraid of heights?"

"I don't know…” Romeo looked confused. "Should I know?"

I didn't know, so I shrugged. "Might be a good idea to know what scares them? Find out there likes, dislikes, fears, hopes, dreams, goals - you know? Get to know them. Otherwise, what are your conversations going to look like?"

"Hmm. We don't really talk. We just kind of have sex." Romeo smirked.

Oh, yeah, the sex thing. "But you want something more?"

The smirk faded from Romeo's face. "Well, yeah."

"Have you considered maybe your relationship doesn't need to be romantic?" I was probably being too serious, but hey, that was my nature.

Romeo looked surprised at that. "Isn't that what relationships are?"
"Naw," I said flippantly. "Relationships are like candy, I think. They come in all kinds of variations, flavors, types - each one is unique, satisfying in its own way. But eat too much -"

"And you get a stomach ache -"

"Or a disease," I laughed.

Romeo nodded. "And what about you?"

I smiled. "I don't have much of a sweet tooth."

Romeo laughed.

I suddenly became really curious as to why Romeo had chosen me to teach him about romance. I asked them. They said, "You're the only person who'll talk to me."

Oh, poor Romeo. "I am?"

They nodded.

Then silence. I'm not good with silence in conversations. It makes me feel uncomfortable because I never know what's going to happen next.

I broke the silence in the worst way possible. "Oh, by the way, I told my brother we were dating."

Romeo nearly spit out their pizza, and then nodded. "That's fine, I guess. But we're not dating."

"No, we're not," I confirmed.

"Okay, cool."

Now the silence was truly awkward.

I, not being an expert on not-awkwardness, decided to try to make it less awkward. "But if we were dating, I'd be very flattered and impressed."

Romeo looked pleasantly surprised at that. "Ah, okay. Anything else I can do?"

I thought back to my extensive knowledge of cheesy 90's rom-coms and picked out a few tips. "Chocolate, alcohol and junk food are your friends. Always ask for consent. Sweaters are the most romantic item of clothing. Mistakes are endearing, puns are golden, and you can never go wrong with a sonnet."

To my surprise, Romeo actually took out a pen and paper and wrote my advice down, but the last bit seemed to stump them. "Sonnet? What's a sonnet?"

I quickly explained what a sonnet was.

"So, it's a fancy poem?" Romeo surmised.

Pretentious jerk I was, I was actually offended. "It's more than a fancy poem. It's a very fancy poem. The fancier something is, the more romantic it's considered to be."

Romeo still didn't seem to understand. "Give me an example."

"Urgh. I left my poetry skills in my other pants."
With a few clever words of their own, Romeo talked me into it.

"Alright, well, urm…" I scooted closer to Romeo. "But you have to help me out, okay? Let's see…" Impromptu-poetry wasn't really my thing, but I took Romeo's hand all the same. "If I profane with my unworthiest hand. This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this… Okay, now you go."

Romeo froze, their eyes wide. "Um… My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand. To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss. Is that good?"

"Nice." Damn, Romeo was good at this. "Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much, which mannerly devotion shows in this. For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch, and palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss."

Despite the romantic nature of our words, I didn't feel anything remotely romantic about the fancy hand-holding Romeo and I were doing.

Romeo had a goofy smile on their face. "Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?"

"Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer. O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do. They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair."

"What does that mean?" Romeo asked.

"Our hands are making out," I explained.

Romeo gave a curt nod. "Ah, okay."

We both laughed.

I took a bite of pizza and said, "Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake."

It took Romeo a few seconds to come up with a reply. "Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take."

That didn't sound quite right to me. "I wouldn't go with that. It's kind of creepy."

"Oh, okay." Romeo shrugged. That's fine. Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purged." Romeo's responded were becoming quicker; they were getting the hang of this.

"Then have my lips the sin that they have took."

"Urm. What now?" Romeo asked.

"If this was a movie, we'd kiss."

"Why?"

I didn't know. "That's just what happened in movies."

Romeo excepted this instantly. "Okay, so we kiss - then what?"

"Urm." After a kiss in a movie, two things usually happened: the movie ended (happily) or the sex happened. Since neither of those options seemed at all plausible, I went for the most likely option. "You'd… kiss again."

Romeo stretched their arms out and said in a deeply silly yet dramatic voice, "Sin from thy lips? O
trespass sweetly urged! Give me my sin again."

Romeo made a loud, incredibly fake kissing sound.

"Ew." I shuddered childishly.
"So," Romeo clapped," how was that?"

"Surprisingly good," I admitted. "Though, you should -"

My words were cut off by an abrupt honk that came out of nowhere and nearly sent me toppling over the edge of the bridge.

"WHAT THE -" The honk cut me off again, and again I jumped. Romeo reached out and touched my hand, a small but comforting gesture.

"What the hell are you two doing out here?" yelled a familiar voice from behind the glaring headlights that now focused on us.

"Tybalt," I whispered. I felt Romeo's hand leave mine, and before I knew it, Romeo was walking away from the whole disaster.

The car door slammed and Tybalt's figure dashed across the headlights to Romeo. I jumped up and ran towards Tybalt, getting to him just in time to separate Romeo and my brother. I stood between them, my hands on both their chests, the only thing stopping them from fighting.

"Get your hands off my sister!"

"My hands weren't on your sister!"

"Yeah, they were. You were holding her hand!"

"Oh my god, you stupid man, are you sexualixing hand holding?"

"SHUT UP! SHUT UP! OH MY GOD, SHUT THE FUCK UP!" I was so tired of their bullshit. "Tybalt, if you can just pack your precious masculinity back in for like four-seconds, I can explain what's going on here."

Tybalt eased up, as did Romeo.

I was able to string together a somewhat-decent explanation in about five-seconds. "We were on a date. A nice, romantic, non-sexual date. Believe me, Tybalt, the hottest thing here is the pizza - and that went cold an hour ago." I started jabbering, something I commonly did when I was extremely nervous. "Isn't that right, Romeo?" I winked at Romeo, frantically.

Romeo nodded slowly, their eyes never leaving Tybalt.

Tybalt glared at me, so I glared right back at him. "It's none of your business, what we were doing, Tybalt. It will, however, become mom's business what you and Benvolio have been doing if you don't back off."
Tybalt's eyes went wide as he swallowed his pride. "Fine. But you're coming home with me."

"Okay," I agreed. Tybalt turned away and started walking back to the car. I almost started to follow him, but when I looked down at Tybalt's hand and saw it was clenched into a tight fist, every muscle in my body tensed in fear and I felt like running away.

I stood my ground. I wasn't going to go with him. I wasn't going to get hit again. "No," I said with as much authority as I could muster.
Tybalt froze and turned slowly. His knuckles were white. "What?"

I wanted to run away, to get away from the inevitable emotional and physical abuse that was standing right before me, but I just couldn't do it. I couldn't back away, not now, not again. I remembered the Capulet family motto: "I will endure."

I will endure.

I stood my ground.

"What the hell did you just say?" Tybalt grinned, like I had just made a joke.

"You heard me." I stood my ground. My feet, though shaking, stood firmly on the ground.

Tybalt scoffed. He took one step towards me. I reached behind myself and pushed Romeo back. Tybalt dragged his foot as he took another step. I knew exactly what he was trying to do: he was trying to intimidate me. There was a line, and each step Tybalt took brought him a little closer to crossing it.

So I had to cross it first.

I pushed Romeo back one last time and stepped forward towards my brother. I put my finger on his chest and my face an inch away from him. I grit my teeth as I say, "Get. Out."

There was this terrible, uncomfortable silence that lasted seconds but felt endless. I knew one thing for certain: I was not backing down.

I was expecting the first punch. I wasn't expecting the second in the stomach. I started falling backwards, like the world slid out from under me, and before I even had time to take in the night sky, my head hit the pavement and my mind went blank.

And as I just lay there, unable to move, staring up at the endless sky while Tybalt walked slowly towards Romeo, my brain went to autopilot. My action's weren't my own; they were pure instinct.

I picked myself up off the ground as the world spun around me and every bone in my body started to ache. It took every ounce of effort I had to stand up and not collapse. Romeo and Tybalt were fighting. (Romeo stupidly stood their ground, but it was clear they didn't know anything about fighting because they were getting beaten mercilessly.)

Before I knew it, the knife we'd used to cut the pizza was in my hand and I was walking towards Tybalt. My heart was beating calmly and my mind was clear.

And then it happened. I stabbed Tybalt.

He grabbed me by the arm and made me look into his eyes as he died. It was just like Sampson's death all over again, except for one slight difference. I didn't feel bad for Tybalt, and I didn't pity him, or regret what I'd done. I waited for the light to leave Tybalt's eyes, just as it had done Sampson's, but it never happened. Tybalt's cold, dead, empty eyes looked no different than the one's
he'd had when he was alive.

I wondered if my eyes looked the same.

Chapter End Notes

This was the hardest thing I've ever written. I haven't gotten reviews in a while, and I'm wondering if anyone reads this anymore? Anyway, hope you enjoyed!
Chapter Twelve

Chapter Summary

*Faint Chicago soundtrack plays in the background*
*he had it coming... he had it coming... he only had himself to blame...*

Now we had to figure out what to do with the body.

It was Romeo who suggested we push Tybalt off the bridge. In retrospect, I should have thought of it - it was that perfect. Plenty of people jumped or fell off the bridge, so Tybalt's death probably wouldn't be questioned. There was the matter of the stab wound, but that could probably be attributed to the fall, maybe?

We didn't have time to think about it. Romeo stayed silent as I dragged Tybalt's body to the railing. It took all of my strength to hoist him up onto the ledge and roll him over. I looked away as his body fell and I flinched when I heard it hit the ground.

I turned to see Romeo dry heaving on the ground. I approached them and reached out my hand to comfort them, but they pushed me away.

"I understand how this may seem..." I realized I was yelling, and Romeo looked like I was about to kill them as well. I softened my voice and backed away. "But you have to trust me, okay?"

"Trust you?" Romeo spat. They backed away across the ground. "You just killed your brother!"

I thought back to the years and years I'd spent with Tybalt. All the fighting, all the screaming and crying, emotional manipulation to unquestionable abuse. All the bruises, scars and broken bones he'd inflicted on me.

And I realized something. I realized family isn't who's in your home, it's who you feel at home with.

"He wasn't my brother." I turn, tears in my eyes, and pick the bloody knife up from the ground with my jacket. I blinked out the tears and looked back at Romeo. "You going to help me or what?"

I'm afraid I can't tell you what happened next without incriminating myself and Romeo.

Later that night, when I got home, I lay in bed and thought about what I had done. What I'd done didn't really sink in until I got home that night. There was a part of me that wished I hadn't; that wish I'd stopped and hadn't killed him, and that he was still alive and with me.

The other part of me knew better.

I was at peace with what I'd done.

End Notes
Follow me at elsinore-snores on tumblr for Hamlet stuff and updates!

Works inspired by this one: No Homo by Erin_Alekto

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