Jojo's Bizarre Engagement

by Mikomikono

Summary

Joseph had no idea what he'd hoped to achieve by fake proposing to Caesar on a whim, but it sure as hell wasn't this.

AKA the one where everyone thinks they're already dating and Joseph's practical joke goes terribly wrong.
Proposing doesn't count as a practical joke

Chapter Summary

The gang goes into a jewlery shop and Joseph isn't as funny as he thinks he is.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Joseph wasn’t entirely sure why Suzie had insisted on dragging him and Caesar along when she went to buy a brooch for her mother’s 50th birthday, but she had and so they went. He could sort of see why she’d wanted to bring Caesar—her cousin was a somewhat fashionable guy, he’d admit that—but Joseph wasn’t interested in these things at all. And he had been very vocal about this with his friends, telling them that he had better things to do with his Fridays than look at shiny shit, although, deep down, he did feel a little proud that Suzie wanted his advice on things. Naturally he would never say it out loud to them, but still. Besides, it wasn't really too much of an inconvenience, since he was meeting his mother later that day for dinner and had to go to the city anyway.

The jeweler’s Suzie took them to was a small place, right in the heart of Little Italy, since she always liked to support her fellow countrymen when it came to things like this. The big sign above the entrance proudly proclaimed its name to be “Gioielli da Genti di Pilastro” and Joseph squinted up at its cursive. His Italian was... decent—you couldn't not pick up the basics when you had as many Italians around you as Joseph Joestar did—but the name made no sense to him; was there an inside joke to it, or was he simply misunderstanding the words? What the hell were "pillar men"? He turned to Caesar to ask for his friend's opinion, but he had already entered the shop with Suzie, and Joseph hastily skipped after them in order to not get left behind.

The atmosphere in the shop was, well, unusual. It was a jeweler's alright, Joseph could see the rows of cabinets full of jewelry—bracelets, necklaces, earrings, and the like—as well as fancy watches and actual gemstones, just sitting there in little boxes. The room's décor, however, was beyond baffling, as it seemed more suited for a Hard Rock café than a jewelry shop. The lights were somewhat dim, and Joseph could easily hear the classic rock that drifted from the radio hidden somewhere in the room. Any part of the wall that wasn't obstructed by cabinets had rock band posters all over them, and even the cabinets themselves were like none Joseph had seen in a jeweler's before.

There had been no one behind the counter when they’d walked in, but the little bell that was above the door must have alerted the clerk to their presence, as one soon appeared in from the back. Joseph stopped dead in his tracks.

The shop clerk was... also unusual. He didn't look like a jeweler at all, in Joseph’s opinion anyway, though somehow he did fit the feel of the shop perfectly. His skin was dark and he had a nose ring, and huge, round earrings. He was also wearing an AC/DC t-shirt, the band's name stretched across his buff chest. And he was buff. Really buff. Joseph prided himself on being tall and muscular, he took very good care of his body after all, but this guy was even bigger than him, what the hell??

"Benvenuti," said the clerk, smiling as he leaned his hands on the counter. "Can I help you with something?"
Both Joseph and Caesar turned to look at Suzie, who blinked a few times, looking blankly at the clerk, before she clapped her hands together with an exclamation.

"Yes, I'm looking for something like a brooch," she said, stepping towards the counter. "My mother is turning 50 and I want to get her something special."

The clerk wrapped one of his arms around his waist and lifted the other to rub at his chin thoughtfully as Suzie went on to explain what exactly she was looking for. His deltoid was straining against the tight t-shirt and Joseph wasn't at all jealous of how amazing his muscles were, of course not. He turned away to stop himself from staring, catching Caesar's eye in the process. Caesar quirked an amused eyebrow, the corner of his lip twitching, but Joseph ignored him, turning instead to browse through the display of watches in the corner.

Around ten minutes after they'd arrived Joseph felt a buzz in his pocket and he hastily flipped out his phone, thanking god for providing a distraction. Because really, one could look through the selection of such a small shop only so many times before one went crazy. The text he'd gotten was from his mother.

«Got off work early, want to meet up now?»

Joseph quickly typed the shop's address to her and sent it just as Caesar stepped up behind him.

"Was that Lisa Lisa?" he asked, peering not-so-subtly at the phone's screen.

"Yup," Joseph said as the phone vibrated again. He checked the text before he continued, "She's done with work so she's coming over here. Shouldn't take too long." He pocketed the phone and turned more towards Caesar, who hummed.

"Oh, is Auntie Lisa Lisa coming?" piped in Suzie from the other side of the room. Apparently she'd heard the exchange, but then again her hearing was out of this world. "That's great, I can ask for her opinion as well!" She smiled brightly, turning back to the vitrine of brooches and hatpins. Joseph groaned internally, and perhaps a little externally as well. He'd been hoping he would be able to skip the rest of the no doubt long decision making process under the guise of dinner with his mother, but if Lisa Lisa was going to become a taste judge, what hope was there for him? He glanced over at Suzie who was holding two different brooches in her hands, looking very deep in thought.

That girl needs to learn how to decide on things faster, he thought with a frown. He could hear Caesar chuckle next to him and he turned to glare at his roommate.

"Don't be like that, Jojo," he said. "It's an important decision for her. It is her mother's 50th birthday after all."

"Sure, but I mean really, all those brooches look the same," Joseph argued. "I don't see how it matters whether it's the one shaped like a dove, or the one shaped like the other dove."

"And that is why she's only been asking for my opinion," Caesar said smugly.

Joseph made a very offended gasp, but his amazing comeback was cut short as the bell chimed again and Lisa Lisa walked in. She pushed her huge sunglasses on top of her head—she wore them year round, even in mid-January, although Joseph supposed it was particularly bright that day—and glanced around, spotting Joseph and Caesar quickly.

"That was fast," said Joseph as she walked over. She flicked her hair behind her shoulder.

"Hello, Jojo. Caesar. I had a meeting with a client in the area so the walk wasn't very long," she said,
rummaging through her designer purse. She pulled out her phone, tapped at it a few times and then put it back. "Are you about done here, or...?"

"Auntie Lisa Lisa!" came Suzie's voice before she had time to finish the sentence. "Come here, I need your advice!"

"I'll take that as a no," said Lisa Lisa. She placed a hand on Joseph's cheek for a second, before turning away and walking over to the other side of the store, where Suzie was eagerly waiting for her. Joseph let out a long sigh.

"Can I help you gentlemen somehow?" came a new voice and the two men turned to look at the counter, surprised. Another clerk had arrived from the backroom, probably summoned by the bell that rang when Lisa Lisa entered the shop, and no way, he was not even bigger than the previous clerk, that was unacceptable. He had the same ridiculously big earrings as the other guy, a lip ring, and some kind of weird metallic headband wrapped around his head. He, too, was wearing a band t-shirt, although his said Wham!, which in Joseph's opinion wasn't nearly as good of a band. It was also a lot tighter against the man's muscular chest.

"Uhuh," Joseph said, smartly, eyes fixated on the skin tight shirt.

"We're only here for moral support, really," supplied Caesar smoothly, but then paused. "Although... I've yet to find a present for zia Nina either, so..."

"Et tu, Ceasar?" Joseph whined as his backstabber of a friend walked towards the counter with a grin. He followed, if only because he was tired of just standing around.

The counter had vitrines in it too, Joseph noted when he was close enough. The one Caesar was looking at had earrings and the one next to it had rings. Engagement rings, Joseph presumed, based on their appearance. Since Caesar was conversing in Italian with Mr. Wham!, and Suzie was still keeping Lisa Lisa and Mr. AC/DC occupied by the brooches, Joseph really had nothing else to preoccupy himself with. He leaned in to have a closer look at the jewelry.

Joseph had never understood why proposals were made into such a huge deal. Or well, he did understand it, in a way. Promising to spend the rest of your life with someone was kind of a big thing, but he'd always thought that when he was actually ready to get married it would just come naturally. The words would stumble from his mouth like all his words did, without the need to make an overly complicated, elaborate, and romantic plan involving half the city, memorizing the entire Cats-musical, and an elephant.

At least... that's what he assumed would happen. Marriage wasn’t exactly a thing he spent a lot of his downtime thinking about. Aside from the casual thing he'd had with that one exchange student couple of years back, he hadn't had a girlfriend since high school—and that hardly counted as a proper relationship! Really, it all seemed like it was in such a distant future, a wife and kids, a golden retriever that could run on the backyard of some suburban house, the whole nine yards. That was the American dream, wasn’t it? Truth be told, Joseph wasn’t entirely sure how he felt about it, but he’d figured he had time. He was only 23 after all.

And even if he was older than that, it’s not like marriage was a thing you could force yourself into, right? If he hadn’t found the right person, why should he rush into it? Grandma Erina wanting great-grandchildren hardly qualified as a reason for him to get hitched to someone he didn’t want to spend the rest of his life with. That wouldn’t be fair for anyone.

His mind had wondered for quite a bit when something caught his eye. It was a silver (or maybe white gold, that was a thing, right?) ring with nine round, pale blue diamonds embedded in it. They
were like bubbles, forming a wavy line along it, first growing in size and then decreasing again towards the other side, the middle one being quite substantial in size. It was simple, and elegant, and it somehow reminded him of Caesar. He grinned to himself.

“Do you see something you like?” came Mr. Wham!’s voice and Joseph looked up, sheepish smile on his face.

“I dunno, I was just thinking that this ring is pretty cool,” he admitted, pointing through the glass.

“I see,” said Mr. Wham!, digging a keychain from somewhere and opening the back of the vitrine. “You can look at it closer if you like. This one, yes?” He’d picked it up and offered it to Joseph before he had time to object.

“Oh, no, that’s, well okay then,” Joseph said as the ring was placed on his palm. He brought it up to his face, turning it in his hands. It was even more beautiful up close, now that he could see the fine details and cuts of the diamonds better. There was a wavy groove going all the way around the ring, along which the diamonds had been set.

“Wow, you’re right,” said Caesar, who had leaned in close to get a look at the ring too. “That is a very beautiful ring. Blue diamonds are really rare, did you know that?” Joseph shook his head, still staring at the ring.

“That is quite true, signore,” Mr. Wham! said. “These particular diamonds are actually green blue, which are even rarer. A very special gift for a very special someone, hmm?” He was looking between the two of them with a knowing glint in his eyes. Suddenly Joseph became very aware of exactly how close together they were standing.

Caesar did a double take and then laughed, a little awkwardly. He waved his hand.

“Oh, no, Jojo and I aren’t—” he started but then Joseph had an idea. And, like all his ideas, it was amazing.

“Caesar,” he interrupted, and turned to face his friend, who was slightly startled by the sudden move and took a small step backwards. He locked their eyes, gazing intently at Caesar.

“Jojo?” Caesar asked slowly, looking a bit worried.

Joseph dropped down to one knee and held up the ring.

There was a pause. Caesar’s eyes were wide as he stared at the ring offered to him and Joseph could hear the “cazzo” he whispered under his breath. One look at Joseph’s face though and he seemed to get the joke, the look in his eyes shifting from panicked to amused.

“Caesar Antonio Zeppeli,” said Joseph slowly, keeping his best poker face. Caesar brought a hand to his mouth, to hide the smile tugging at his lips. “That’s a pretty shit last name, don’t you think? I think it’s about time we changed that to ‘Joestar’. Would you do me the grand honor of becoming my wife?”

“Jojo…” said Caesar, his words muffled against his hand. Joseph reached over, taking a hold of his left wrist, pulling the hand in front of him. Then he slipped the ring into Caesar’s finger. Amazingly enough, it fit perfectly. Joseph looked up at Caesar and grinned madly, about to burst out laughing at any moment. Caesar was shaking with barely contained laughter himself, hand still pressed tightly against his mouth.

There was a squeal from behind him and they both snapped their heads to see Suzie jumping up and
down and clapping her hands, huge smile plastered on her face. She had her phone in her hand, its camera very clearly pointed in their direction.

Shit.

“I can’t believe you did that!” she was saying, her voice amazingly high pitched. “Right there in the middle of the shop! Oh my gosh, this is amazing, I’m so happy for you guys! Oh, oh, I need to call mom, she is not going to believe it finally happened!”

Shit.

Before Joseph had time to take two steps towards her, she was outside the shop, phone already at her ear. Joseph’s throat clamped up, the distinct feeling of dread growing in the pit of his stomach. What had she meant “finally”? There was a hand on his shoulder and he looked down to see his mother. Her other hand was on Caesar’s shoulder, and her expression was softer than he remembered seeing it… ever.

“Joseph,” she said, solemn. Joseph swallowed. “While I do think that a proposal is something that should be given a bit more consideration than that, I do want you to know I will always support you and your decisions, no matter what.” She paused, a determined look settling on her face. “In fact, I will pay for that ring for you.”

She pulled out her wallet and stepped up to the counter. Joseph could feel the color draining from his face. That was really not how this was supposed to go. It was just a joke, why was everyone taking this so seriously? Dear god, did they think that he actually—?

“Oh god, mom, no, please, you don’t—” he started, stepping after her. Caesar was looking somewhat alarmed as well.

“Signora Joestar, there is really no need for that,” he said but Lisa Lisa cut them off with a wave of her hand.

“Oh no, I am paying,” she said, and her tone clearly said she wouldn’t take no for an answer. “I’ve only got one son, and I want to do this for him.”

“No, mom, you don’t understand—” Joseph tried again, but goddamn Wham! started talking over him.

“This is really quite unprecedented, I must say,” he said with a smile, punching the right amount into the cash register. “We’ve been in business for many, many generations, but this is the first time I’ve seen someone propose right here at the shop!” He laughed, as Lisa Lisa passed him her credit card. “I suppose when you find that perfect ring you really can’t wait any longer, huh? My most heartfelt congratulations to the both of you! Ah, do you need the ring to be resized?”

Caesar took a moment to realize the question was addressed at him. “Oh, uh, no, it’s a perfect fit, actually,” he said, taking a hold of his left hand, looking down at it somewhat dazed. Joseph whipped his head towards his roommate, expression yelling “Don’t encourage them!”, as Mr. Wham! nodded and handed Lisa Lisa her receipt.

“How lucky,” he said. Then he handed a small box to Caesar. “Here, the ring box. In case you should ever need it. Again, congratulations.” Caesar accepted it with a muttered “thanks”.

Joseph was at a loss of words. How had it come to this? This was really, really not what was supposed to happen. It was a joke, surely they had realized? They were… they were supposed to play along for a minute and then they were supposed to laugh at it together and buy Suzie’s stupid
brooch, and then he was supposed to have dinner with his mother and he really wasn’t supposed to 
*accidentally get engaged to his best friend.*

Suzie chose that moment to re-enter the shop, bright smile still on her face, phone held tightly against 
her chest.

“Mom says ‘congratulations’!” she said cheerily. “Zia Cecilia too. She expects you to go visit first 
thing tomorrow.”

It was Caesar’s turn to go pale as a ghost.

“You called *my mom*?” he wheezed. Suzie blinked and then laughed nervously. Caesar pressed the 
heels of his hands into his eyes and groaned. “Please, *please*, tell me you didn’t call nonna.”

“Of course not!” said Suzie, crossing her arms with a pout. “…although… I think… mom was going 
to do that… after she hung up…”

Caesar gave his cousin a blank look and she squirmed, at least having the decency to look 
embarrassed.

“So basically,” he said, very, *very* slowly, “within an hour… the *entire family* will know.”

“Uhhh…” said Suzie.

What followed was a rapid fire exchange in Italian, Caesar on the offensive and Suzie on the 
defensive. It was too fast for Joseph to follow properly, but he could understand a word here and 
there. “Excited”, “chance”, “problem”, and a few very creative swear words. By the looks of it Suzie 
was getting a proper tongue lashing.

Then Caesar stopped, midsentence, rubbed his eyes, and took a deep breath.

“I need to go to work,” he said in English again after a few more deep breaths. He turned to Joseph, 
who tensed slightly. “We need to talk about this. I’ll see you in the evening.”

“R-right,” said Joseph. “See you later.”

Caesar strode out of the shop, scarf flowing behind him. Joseph really wasn’t looking forward to *that* 
discussion.

~x~

Joseph and Lisa Lisa had only just arrived at the restaurant when her phone rang. It was work 
related, as always, and she had to leave without Joseph having any time to explain anything to her. In 
the end he just wound up going home early, and alone, eating some of the previous day’s leftover 
Chinese and watching reruns of… something. He wasn’t entirely sure what the show was, to be 
honest, but it sure as hell was dramatic.

It was around 8:30 when the front door to their apartment opened and Caesar stepped in with a long 
sigh escaping his lips.

“Welcome home, honey,” Joseph said without thinking as he turned off the TV.

“Very funny, Joestar,” grumbled Caesar, hanging his coat in the wardrobe. He rolled his shoulders, 
trying to get the worst kinks out and then stalked over to the sofa, collapsing next to Joseph. He toed 
off his shoes and lifted his feet on coffee table, stretching his legs. He closed his eyes, relaxing
against the softness, and let out a long breath.

“So…” said Joseph, and Caesar cracked open one eye to peer at him. He wasn’t looking at Caesar’s face though, his eyes fixed instead on his left hand. “I see you took the ring off.”

“I’m not going to wear it to work, are you stupid?” Caesar scoffed, closing his eye again. “It’s bad enough my entire family thinks we’re actually engaged, I don’t need my coworkers thinking that too.”

“Your entire family?” Joseph asked and shifted on the sofa, pulling one of his legs up on it. "I mean, you do have a lot of family..."

“Oh, yes,” said Caesar. “I’ve been getting congratulatory phone calls, voice mails, and text messages the entire evening. I had to switch off my phone or they would’ve driven me crazy.”

“Wow, that’s… actually kinda impressive.”

“Jojo,” he warned the other man, glaring at him from under his bangs. Joseph winced and scratched his neck.

“Anyway,” he said. “What are we going to do about this? You’ve been telling people it was a joke, right?”

“Believe me, I've tried…” Caesar said, rubbing his face and then running his hands through his hair. “No one listened.”

“Hmm. Your family is kinda scary, you know that?” Joseph said, and Caesar let out a laugh, leaning further back on the sofa. He really felt like sinking through it and disappearing into soft nothingness. Just leave this mess behind and become one with the universe. Or something.

“Yeah,” he breathed out. They were quiet for a moment. Caesar stared up at the ceiling wondering how amazingly fast this mess had escalated. “We’re having a family dinner, by the way. Your family is included, naturally.”

“Say what,” said Joseph and Caesar turned his head towards his friend.

“A family dinner. Next Friday. To, uh… ‘celebrate’,” he said, making a face at the word. “My grandma is already arranging the whole thing, so… We should tell them then, when everyone will be in one place.”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Joseph, standing up and stretching. “I think I’ll go to my room now... G’night.” He started to walk towards his door, running a hand thorough his hair and scratching the back of his head.

“Joseph.”

He stopped and turned to look back. Caesar was frowning up at the ceiling.

“Why did you do it?” he asked, turning his head to look straight at Joseph. Joseph was quiet for a moment, considering the question. Finally he made a halfhearted shrug.

“I dunno, really,” he said, scratching his neck again. “It just felt… natural, I guess. Thought it would be funny.”

Caesar studied him for a while longer, Joseph feeling increasingly uncomfortable under the older
man’s intense scrutiny. Finally Caesar huffed and turned to look at the ceiling again.

“Naturally,” he said, a ghost of a smile on his lips. “Good night, Jojo.”

Joseph stood still for a heartbeat, before turning to leave again.

“Good night, Caesar.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey y'all! Thanks for reading the first chapter of Bizarre Engagement. It means the world to me, really. This is my first Jojo fic, as well as my first fic over here on ao3. It's a lot of firsts, actually, since it's also the first long fic I can realistically see myself finishing. And it's gonna be long. Over 20 chapters, probably. Don't know specifically yet.

A few notes:
1. I'm going to be writing this in as real time as I can, which means it'll probably be sometime in September that I finish. So, you know... be prepared for that.
2. A lot of the specifics of the wedding are still largely undecided, so if any of you guys have suggestions drop me a comment and I'll see what I can do.
3. I don't actually speak Italian, so all of that is done with the help of google translate and dictionaries. If anyone notices any mistakes please let me know so I can fix it. Of the Italian in this chapter, zia means aunt and nonna is grandma. The name of the jeweler's (should) translate to "The Jewels of the Pillar Men" or something along those lines.

Also, I'd like to thank my beautiful beta and the one who came up with this ridiculous idea, endles. You're the best, bae~

Now buckle up, 'cause we're just getting started! See you next Friday!
Family dinners are fun, no?

Chapter Summary

Caesar finds out the hard way how much power grandmothers truly hold.

Chapter Notes

Ahh thank you for all the lovely comments guys!! I wanted to reply to them all but I didn't really have anything smart to say except thank you thank you thankyouthankkkk youuuuuuuuuuuuu!!!! Such lovely comments bless you all! You are all the greatest! Another shout out to my amazing beta, Endles, who took time out of her busy school life to beta this to me <3
Again, please tell me what you think, and if you find any mistakes let me know so I can fix them!
And without further ado, please enjoy chapter two!

The highly anticipated—or rather, dreaded—Friday evening finally arrived and Caesar was incredibly anxious. It’s just a dinner, he told himself over and over as he buttoned his dress shirt. Just tell them it was all a misunderstanding, he thought as he pulled on his nicest suit jacket. They can’t be too disappointed, he reasoned as he put on his cufflinks and straightened his sleeves.

Right?

His eyes fell on the small ring box on top of his drawer. He swallowed. What had Joseph been thinking? As usual, Caesar couldn’t even begin to fathom how the Joestar’s mind worked or why he’d thought that pretend-proposing would be a good practical joke. Really, the whole idea reeked of disaster, now he thought about it. But he, stupidly, not realizing any better, had been pulled into it, much like he always was with Joseph’s ridiculous antics. Maybe one day he would learn. Maybe one day he—

Caesar dragged his fingers along the velvety top of the box, frowning down at the offending item. He picked it up, after a moment’s hesitation, and flipped it open. It was a beautiful ring. The light from his bedside lamp reflected on it, making the blue gems sparkle in the box, and just for a moment Caesar thought that this truly was the perfect engagement ring. He allowed himself a small smile as he traced his finger along the diamonds.

There was a loud knock on his bedroom door and Caesar nearly dropped the box. The door opened and Joseph pushed his head through without waiting for a reply.

"Hey, Caesar," he started, fiddling with the top button of his dress shirt. Caesar stuffed the little box into his breast pocket, trying to act natural. "Which tie d’you think I should wear? I accidentally spilled some ketchup on my favorite one, so..."

"Well, that depends on your suit..." Caesar started, starting to turn towards Joseph, but then he froze. Joseph wasn't wearing his suit yet. He wasn't even wearing pants. "Why... are you not dressed yet?"
he managed to ask, voice straining only slightly. Joseph looked down at his state of undress.

"Oh," he said. "Uh. Cause I wanted to ask you which tie to wear?"

"Dio mio..." Caesar muttered under his breath and then ushered Joseph out of the room, closing the door behind them. "You need to have your suit on before you can choose a tie, you should know that!"

"I know, I know, I just..." Joseph started and then trailed off, seeming to realize the futility of any kind of explanation. Well, at least he knew there was no excuse Caesar would accept.

As soon as they were in his room Caesar made a beeline to the closet, pulling it open and shuffling through it to find Joseph's suits.

"Yes, yes," he said, waving a dismissive hand at his friend. "I'll choose a suit, you just... try to do something to that hair of yours."

"What's wrong with my hair?" he could hear Joseph whine behind him but he paid it no mind. They needed to hurry if they didn't want to be late.

~x~

They weren't late, praise the lord, despite Joseph's apparent attempts to make them so. He had been incredibly insufferable while Caesar had been trying to find something for him to wear. He'd complained about the color of the suit and the texture of the tie, and about Caesar's efforts to tame that ridiculous tuft of hair on his forehead that always insisted on pointing upwards. Sometimes Caesar was 100% sure his roommate was actually just a big baby, concealed inside 6'5'' of pure muscle.

"I told you we'd make it in time," Joseph was saying with a grin as they walked in through the door of "Trattoria Trussardi". Caesar shot him a glare and checked his watch. They were five minutes early, but most of their family members had already arrived and been seated, including Joseph's grandparents, Suzie and her parents, Nina and Romeo, and most of Caesar's siblings along with their parents. Caesar could only begin to wonder how long they'd sat there.

Trussardi's was, naturally, an Italian restaurant, owned by one of Caesar's father's cousins. They often had dinner at the restaurant, its homey atmosphere just perfect for family reunions and the like. And with actual family ties to the restaurant itself they often got good deals on their meals. It wasn't that big of an establishment, being a family business, and had only around a dozen tables in addition to one long table at the back of the restaurant for bigger companies. That was where the others were sitting.

Caesar took off his coat and hung it on the hallstand while Joseph's eyes glanced over the seated party, counting them under his breath.

"...nine, ten. We're missing mom, and your grandma," he said, pulling off his own coat and handing it to Caesar. He hummed in response, the nervousness starting to raise its head again. "And, uh... you have four siblings, right? The older girl isn't here, what's her name again, um... Ju-Julie...?"

"Juliana," said Caesar, looking over at the table. The second oldest of the Zeppeli children was indeed missing, but the rest were all present. "She started Uni this year, you know, so she's not living at home anymore, and has to make her own way here." He turned to side-eye Joseph. "And you should really know the names of my siblings by now."

"I do! I totally do! Just had a small blackout there!" Joseph protested and Caesar raised his eyebrows.
"Juliana is the oldest, after you of course, and then it's Elisa, and Ezio, and then Lino, my main man. You know, he hasn't been vining that much recently, is he okay?"

"You're going to have to ask that from him yourself," said Caesar and began to walk towards the back of the restaurant. His mom was waving to them, as was Suzie. "By the way, Ezio is older than Elisa, and you really don't want to make that mistake in front of them."

"Right, right," said Joseph, hastening his steps to stay next to Caesar. Suddenly he let out a small laugh and Caesar gave him a questioning look. "I just now realized that in your family every other kid is a boy and every other is a girl."

Caesar stared at him for a while. He was right, but... What do you even say to something like that? In the end he said nothing, and they arrived at the table, where Caesar’s mom greeted him happily.

"Caesar, you're here!" she said as he sat down. "Why haven't you visited? It feels like it's been forever since the last time we saw you!"

"Come now, Cecilia," said Caesar's father, Mario, from next to her. "The boy is busy, you know! He's working full time and I'm sure there's a lot on his plate right now. Although, you could at least call every now and then." He squinted across the table as Caesar, who suddenly felt like sinking through the ground. "Your mother worries. And I understand there has been a very big development in your life recently, hm?"

"Oh, I heard something along those lines too," chimed in his sister Nina, Caesar’s aunt, who was leaning over Suzie to join the conversation. The girl didn't look like she appreciated it, and scowled at her mother, but was ignored in favor of Nina continuing. "Something about an engagement...?"

"Zia Nina, please," said Caesar, slipping further down on his chair. Family dinners were alright, as long as it wasn't him that was the center of everyone's attention. Joseph didn't seem to mind, chatting happily with his grandparents and Caesar envied him for his seemingly endless supply of energy.

The waiter interrupted whatever Nina might have said next by bringing over water and menus to the table, and Caesar poured himself a glass, taking a sip to cool down his nerves. The others continued talking, but he found himself unable to keep his focus on the people around him, so he picked up a menu and leaned back on his chair, his leg jumping up and down under the table. He needed to calm himself, he knew, but he couldn't stop the terrified feelings circling in his gut and it was driving him up the wall. Joseph, who was sitting on his right side, leaned over and put his hand on Caesar's knee, gently forcing it to cease movement.

"Relax, dude," he said quietly. "There's no need to be so nervous, you know. It's family! They'll understand."

"Right," said Caesar, drawing in a deep breath. Joseph's hand returned to his own lap after a reassuring squeeze, leaving a weirdly cool spot on Caesar's knee. Caesar ignored it, took another calming breath, and let his eyes wander around the table. Juliana had just arrived—as had Lisa—and she'd taken a seat between her sister and Suzie. Suzie, who was sitting across from Caesar, and who had been watching him and Joseph intently the whole time. Of course. Caesar brought his hands to his eyes and rubbed.

"Nonna Maria!" he heard a chorus of girls from across the table a moment later and he turned around to see his grandmother walk in through the front door. She smiled sweetly and waved to the group and Caesar stood up quickly enough for his chair to scrape unpleasantly against the stone floor.
"Nonna, it's good to see you," he told her in Italian, as he often did when conversing with her, walking towards her in brisk steps. She reached up at him, and he leaned down, letting her give him a kiss on both cheeks. "Here, let me help you with your coat."

"Thank you, Caesar dear. It's lovely to see you too," she replied, in Italian as well, the wrinkles around her eyes deepening as she smiled. He helped her out of her coat, hanging it next to all the others, and she took a hold of his arm. "I'm not late, am I? My previous appointment took me longer than usual."

"Not at all, nonna," Caesar assured his grandmother. "You're right on time."

"Well, that's good," nonna Maria sighed. "Oh, but let me tell you, I was so surprised when your Aunt Nina called me last week! My little Cesare, already engaged? I feel like it was just yesterday you were learning how to walk." She laughed and suddenly Caesar felt incredibly guilty, in addition to nervewreckingly anxious.

"Nonna..." he said but wasn't sure how to continue.

"Ahh, but what a wonderful thing it is," she continued, uninterrupted, as they made their way slowly back to the table. "I am happy for you, truly happy. To have found someone you care for so deeply... That is the greatest joy." Caesar helped her take a seat on the chair next to his and then he sat down as well. She leaned in to whisper to him conspiratorially, "You know, I was quite starting to worry I might die before you finally tied the knot." She laughed again and Caesar could feel all the color drain from his face.

_Fuck._

He let out a forced laugh and picked up his water, just to have something to do with himself.

"Well, now that we're all here," he heard Joseph say next to him, and he knew what was happening. Joseph was going to tell them. He was going to tell them, and he was going to break nonna's heart, and Caesar absolutely couldn't accept that. "There is something I need to tell you all..."

He dunked his water onto Joseph's lap.

"Ahh, what the hell?" Joseph shouted as he sprung up.

"Oh no, how terrible, I'm so sorry," deadpanned Caesar, standing up as well. He grabbed a hold of Joseph's shoulder and pulled him after him. "Come on, I'll help you dry it off."

Caesar could feel everyone’s eyes drilling into his back as he dragged Joseph into the men's room.

"What the _fuck_ was that all about?" Joseph demanded once in the privacy of the restroom. He stomped over to the paper dispenser and started to furiously pull papers out.

"I'm sorry," said Caesar, leaning his hands against the sinks. His reflection stared back at him from the mirror and he glared at it. "I couldn't let you tell them."

"Excuse me?" said Joseph, throwing a crumpled up paper towel at Caesar's head. It didn't fly particularly far. Caesar watched it drop to the floor through the mirror. "Why, oh please tell me _why_, couldn’t you?" Joseph continued, sounding quite melodramatic. "It would have been _fine_! You wouldn't have even needed to say anything, I woulda been perfectly happy to do all the talking!"

"No, you don't understand," Caesar started, frowning at Joseph’s reflection in the mirror.
"Then please, enlighten me," Joseph interrupted. He was dabbing the front of his pants and the bottom his shirt with a ball of paper. Very ineffectively, Caesar thought, and momentarily considered offering help, but quickly dismissed the thought for obvious reasons. "Because if I remember correctly, it was your idea to tell the truth when we had everyone gathered up in one place all nice and cozy."

"Well, yes, I know that," Caesar said, averting his eyes from Joseph’s. What was he doing? He should shut up and stick to the plan, even if he'd disappoint nonna. "But something's changed."

Joseph paused, frowned, and looked at him with his mouth slightly agape. "You..." he started, then paused again and pursed his lips. "You don't actually want to get married though... right?"

Caesar didn’t say, couldn't say anything, as they stared at each other through the mirror for a long minute. Truth be told he didn't know exactly what he wanted. Well, no, he was pretty sure he didn't want to get married, per se, he was quite sure wasn’t ready for that just yet, but... He would be lying if he said he didn't consider Joseph a very handsome man, and yes, maybe occasionally his mind did wander somewhat, but those kinds of thoughts usually only occurred during the small hours of the morning when he was too sleepy and/or drunk to think straight. And really, just because he found someone attractive and was perhaps not entirely opposed to dating them, didn't mean he would want to force anyone into anything! Especially something like this! Even if... even if sometimes he could swear that he noticed him standing just a bit closer than necessary and touching him a bit more often, a bit more intimately than others, but that couldn't be anything but his imagination, surely, it would be crazy to read into something like that, he was so touchy-feely with everyone and he wore his heart on his sleeve like nobody else, even if it really was nothing like how he acted with his other friends, how he acted with anyone else, and then there was the New Years—

"Are you shitting me?" Joseph finally said, jolting Caesar from his thoughts as he slam dunked the paper ball into the trash bin. "You are not actually saying you want to...? Wh-why? Why would we...? Why? I don't—"

Caesar still didn't say anything, just watched as Joseph pushed his hands through his hair as he paced the room. There was a lump in his throat.

"Seriously," he said, stopping and turning to face Caesar. "Why? Look me in the eye and tell me why."

Caesar turned around, slowly, and leaned back against the counter. He crossed his arms and Joseph mirrored the move.

"Because of my grandma," he said. Yes, that was why. Joseph raised his eyebrows.

"Nonna Maria?" he said. Caesar nodded. "What about her?"

"She... She's really excited about this," said Caesar. Joseph gave him a look. “She told me she was really happy that I’d found someone to love, and I don’t want to disappoint her, I… She’s really old and she has a weak heart, I don’t know how well she’d take the news…”

Joseph snorted out a laugh. “Yeah, ‘cause grandmas usually have heart attacks when their grandson tells them they’re not getting married to another guy.”

“Nonna knows I’m bisexual, don’t be an ass, Joseph,” Caesar said, glaring at the brunet who just rolled his eyes.

“Come on, Caesar, you can’t be serious! You are not actually considering getting married just
because you’re worried about upsetting your grandma!”

“She told me she was worried she would die before I got married,” Caesar said and he could see Joseph’s thought process stop. There was a few seconds of silence as Joseph struggled to form a sentence.

“She actually said that?” he finally said.

“Yep.”

“With those words?”

“Well, she was speaking Italian, but yeah, more or less.”

Joseph ran his hands through his hair again and restarted his pacing.

“…I’m pretty sure that’s emotional blackmail,” he said finally, his voice weak. Caesar huffed out a laugh.

“What are we going to do about it though?” he asked. Joseph scratched the back of his head, looking into the distance. His brow was furrowed in thought. Finally he turned back to Caesar.

“We could, like… pretend for a while?” he suggested, looking slightly apologetic. “And then just tell everyone we broke up before the actual wedding. Tell ‘em it was too, uh, stressful or something?”

“Yeah, maybe,” said Caesar, rubbing a finger across his lips. “But… Do you think we’d need to act more… I don’t know, couple-y?”

“Not necessarily. I mean… no one’s seemed particularly surprised about this development, you know,” Joseph said, sounding amused. “I’m not entirely sure what to make of that though.”

“Okay, so… Act normal, wait until the biggest fuss blows over, and then… discreetly ‘break up’ before anything permanent happens?”

“Pretty much.”

The two of them regarded each other in silence for a moment until Caesar let out a long breath and turned to wash his hands. It would be fine.

“This is insane, you know that right?” he asked, making eye contact with Joseph in the mirror.

“Oh yeah.” He grinned. “Should be pretty interesting, too.”

“If you say so,” said Caesar, shaking his head with a small smile tugging at his lips. He dried his hands and then pulled the ring box out of the pocket he’d forgotten it in before they left. That had been pretty lucky, in retrospect. “Guess I better put this on,” he said, opening the box. Joseph gaped at him.

“Why did you bring it with you?” he asked. Caesar slid the ring into his finger, shrugging. “…you were planning on telling them in the beginning though, right?”

“Of course!” Caesar huffed. “I accidentally slipped it in my pocket earlier.” Joseph raised his eyebrows. “Shut up. If you’re dry we better get back out there. We’ve been in here for a suspiciously long time already.”

“Shit, you’re right,” Joseph said, as if just then realizing both their families were literally outside the
restroom door, waiting to eat dinner with them. He checked himself quickly in the mirror before saying, “Alright, let’s go,” and hurrying out of the room, Caesar on his heel.

“You took… a while,” said Suzie with a sly smile when they sat back down at the table.

“Have you ever tried to dry your trousers with paper towels?” Joseph retorted, placing a napkin on his lap. Caesar couldn’t help but notice that the front of his pants was still slightly damp. “It’s really not as easy as it sounds. And it’s not like it sounds easy to begin with.”

“At least it was just water,” said Nina, gesturing at them with her wine glass. “Because let me tell you, trying to get red wine stains out of clothes is a nightmare. Especially clothes that the customer wants ready for the next day.” She laughed loudly and took a long swig. Caesar pitied the poor souls who bought clothes from “Quatros’ Dress and Tailor”.

“Mom, please,” said Suzie, looking slightly embarrassed, before addressing Caesar and Joseph again. “We took the liberty of ordering you your usuals. I hope that’s okay?”

“That’s great, thank you Suzie,” Caesar said with a pleasant smile. His cousin gave him a happy grin.

“So, what were you going to say, Jojo?” Lisa Lisa asked, taking a sip of her own wine. Joseph turned to look at her, confused. “Just before the water spilled? You said there was something you needed to tell us?”

“Oh,” said Joseph. He glanced sideways at Caesar, who was giving him his best “oh god please don’t make this worse” – face. “Uhh… We were… thinking of an autumn wedding?”

“My, what a lovely idea!” said Joseph’s grandma Erina from her seat next to her grandson. “Autumn is such a beautiful time of the year. We got married in the autumn too, you know.” She reached over and took her husband Jonathan’s hand in hers.

“Quite right,” he said, squeezing her hands, the corners of his eyes crinkling as he smiled at her. “The trees in the old apple orchard were brimming with bright red apples, but she was the only apple of my eye.”

“Oh, stop it, you!” Erina giggled.

“Yes, please do,” Caesar could hear Joseph mutter under his breath. He barely refrained from snorting.

“That does give me an idea, though,” said Erina, turning back to her grandson. “How about you have your wedding at the Estate?”

Caesar’s eyes widened at the suggestion. The Joestars’ had a huge country house just outside New York City, where Erina and Jonathan currently lived. It was a beautiful house with a beautiful yard, a small apple orchard, a grand ballroom, dozens of guest rooms, and really everything one would assume a Victorian-era nobles’ house had. And it really would be the perfect place for a wedding. There was plenty of room and the ambiance was great and they could hold the ceremony outside in the garden, with the foliage at the peak of its colorful beauty, the last flowers of the year still in bloom, and…

“Ehh, I don’t know,” Joseph said, effectively derailing Caesar’s train of thought. “It would be such a hassle, we wouldn’t want to bother you, granny Erina.”

“Nonsense, dear!” said Erina, waving a hand at her grandson. “It would be no trouble. We’ll be
happy to help with whatever we can, and it’s been so long since there’s been any kind of excitement going on at the Estate. A wedding is just what we need!”

“It is very well suited for a celebration of that size,” concurred Jonathan. “You could have the ceremony out in the garden, and then the reception in the main hall…”

“It’s decided then,” said Erina, with an air of finality in her voice. “You just tell us the date, dear, and we’ll get everything all sorted out.”

“But granny, I… okay,” tried Joseph, but he had to relent in the face of Erina, who was beaming brightly. *What a power grandparents hold*, thought Caesar, as he gave Joseph a sympathetic pat on the back.

The waiter decided on that moment to start bringing the foods to the table, which admittedly took a while since there were fifteen of them gathered around. There was a lot of shuffling until everyone got the right plate in front of them, and a temporary silence fell over the party as everyone grabbed utensils and napkins, and begun to eat.

“Oh, oh, show us!” said Juliana suddenly, mouth full of pasta, making grabby hands across the table at her brother. Caesar looked at her like he had no idea what she was talking about and she rolled her eyes. “The ring, tonto. Show us the ring!”

“Oh,” said Caesar, putting down his utensils and plucking the ring off his finger, quite unceremoniously. He passed it along to his siblings on the other side of the table, Juliana the first to get her hands on it.

“That’s pretty cool,” she said, turning it in her hands.

“I thought engagement rings had one big diamond,” said Elisa, snatching the ring from her big sister’s hands, pointedly ignoring the resulting protesting noises. “But this has a lot of small ones… And it’s all wide!”

“Well, I thought that would suit Caesar better,” said Joseph, digging into his food. “It’s not just about the size of the rock, you know. It’s also about the design.”

“Whatever,” the teen said, passing the ring along to her brothers, looking just a bit disappointed. Ezio took it from her, holding it up at the light.

"I think the design is nice," he said.

"Suck up," muttered Elisa, pulling on her most nonchalant face when her older brother turned to glare at her.

"It makes more sense that it's not a traditional one," Ezio said evenly, giving Elisa one last glare. He turned away in time to miss her stick out her tongue. "I think that a thin band with a big diamond would look funny on Caesar, honestly."

"So if Caesar is the one with the ring," said Lino, leaning over his big brother to get a closer look at the ring, "does that mean he's the girl in the relationship?"

Caesar choked on his wine. Joseph sniggered.

"There is no girl in this relationship," he said, trying to regain his composure as he wiped his mouth on his napkin. "There's two men. That's all."
"Well, yeah, but someone's gotta take it up the butt," said Lino with a grin. Joseph barked out a laugh which gained him a very pointy elbow to the side.

"Lino," Cecilia chastised her youngest, who made a face pretending he had no idea why.

"Whaat? We all know they're doing it!" he said, leaning back on his chair. "I'm just asking who the one that gets pounded is."

"Look, I know you're 15, and your hormones are a mess," Caesar told his brother, his ears feeling like they were about to burn right off his head. "But can we not discuss our sex life in the middle of a family dinner?" He glanced nervously at nonna Maria on his left side, but to his surprise she was looking more delighted than disgusted.

"C'mon, Caesarino," said Joseph suddenly, a wicked grin spreading on his face. Caesar turned to him, his eyes silently telling the Joestar to tread lightly, but Joseph didn't care. This was too good to pass up. "You're usually so shameless in bed, always so loud, calling out..."

"Joseph," Caesar all but growled in warning.

"...my name, oh yeah, babe, just like that," Joseph purred, leaning in a bit closer—Caesar threw his wine in his face.

"Oops, my hand slipped," he said drily as Joseph blinked, his tongue darting out to catch some wine off his lips. The glass had only been half full, but what little there had been dripped down Joseph's chin, and soaked into his previously white shirt. He retreated, picked up his napkin, and rubbed his face with it. Caesar leaned back in his chair and added coolly, "You can ask zia Nina for tips on how to get that off."

There was a short silence, which was broken by the loud hollering by Lino and the immediate rapid Italian scolding by his mother. Caesar sighed, slumping slightly in his chair. A normal, peaceful dinner wasn't too much to ask for, was it?

~x~

They collapsed onto their couch after what felt like forever but was in actuality about an hour and a half. The dinner had, amazingly enough, calmed down slightly after Joseph got a faceful of wine, but it had still been very exhausting. They had been badgered about the engagement and what wedding plans they had, but they had very politely told the prying family members that they hadn't really planned anything yet, so they were able to dodge most of the questions. Joseph's earlier comment about a fall wedding hadn't gone unnoticed though, meaning that everyone assumed that the wedding would be held the following fall. Which was to say they had eight, nine months tops. Caesar had been hoping to be able to get at least a full year before the impending deadline, but twenty months would probably have been pushing it with his family, so he hadn't dared suggest the fall after that.

"Sorry about your shirt," Caesar said after they'd sat in silence for a while. He was staring at the ceiling again, half sunken into the back of the couch. His posture did no favors to his back but he couldn't be bothered to move.

"Hmm? Oh," Joseph said, looking down at the stained shirt. "That's okay, I can take it to the dry-cleaner. I've been meaning to get the whole suit cleaned for a while now, so this is as good an excuse as any."

"Well that's good," said Caesar, not turning his gaze from the ceiling. He was very tired but the
couch was very soft, Joseph's arm was radiating an astonishing amount of heat only inches from his, and he was sure that if he moved even a little he'd ruin the perfect comfort he had going on right now.

"I did kinda deserve it though, didn't I?" Joseph admitted after a moment. "I was kinda pushing it."

"No, really?" Caesar said sarcastically, but there was a smile fighting its way onto his lips. He pressed the heels of his palms into his eyes. "You should really learn to think before you act, Jojo."

"And you should learn to not think so much," Joseph countered, nudging him in the shoulder. He probably had a point. They fell into a companionable silence as they relaxed against the couch.

"Hey, you wanna watch a movie or something?" asked Joseph eventually. "It’s only 8:30 and I really don’t wanna get up and go to bed yet."

"Sure," Caesar said. "Can you reach the remote?"

Joseph shifted a little, reaching over to the side table, small grunts escaping his mouth as he tried to stretch far enough. Finally he slumped back down.

"No," he said.

"Hm," Caesar said.

There was a pause.

"Well I’m not getting up to get it," said Caesar and Joseph whined a little. "It was your idea, now chop chop."

Joseph did get up—although he did mutter something about entitled Italians under his breath while he did—and even went as far as to pick a movie from their extensive DVD and Blu-ray collection instead of using Netflix like his original plan had no doubt been. After a long and intricate selection process he picked *Rush Hour*, which Caesar had seen several dozen times, but he didn't complain. It was entertaining enough, and Joseph’s excitement over the movie was kind of endearing, so he settled more comfortably on the couch and let himself drift off with the movie playing on the background.

And if he was woken up when strong arms gently picked him up from the couch, carrying him into his room and tucking him in, well… Joseph never had to know.
It's all fun and games until you have to plan your fake wedding

Chapter Summary

Suzie is the wedding master, Smokey is the asshole friend, and Caesar is... anxious, probably.

Chapter Notes

Hello again everyone and thank you for continuing to read my silly little (big) fic! Your comments have continued to warm my heart and every time I get a new one I feel like bursting with joy! ❤️❤️❤️ Anyway, not much to say about this one so off you go now, and I hope you enjoy the third chapter!

“That is hilarious.”

Joseph scowled at him, but Smokey kept laughing, clutching his stomach as he almost doubled over. Joseph tapped his fingers against his cup of frankly overpriced coffee. They were sitting in “Irene's Café”, a small place near the university campus immensely popular with the student body. Especially the hipsters. Joseph of course didn't care about things like that, he just thought that the blueberry muffins in the place were the best thing to happen to the world, ever. Smokey often found the constant insistence amusing, though he'd never said anything about it.

Finally the laughter died down and Smokey took a deep breath.

“Only you, bro,” he said, sounding wistful. “Only you could accidentally get engaged to someone. Oh man, I can't believe this is real life. I mean, this is some serious romantic comedy shit right here, Jojo.”

Joseph huffed and gestured with his coffee cup. “I know! It's terrible! It wasn't supposed to go like this, but it escalated way too fast... And now we need a way out.”

“Okay, okay, I'm calling it now, here's what's gonna happen,” said Smokey, his face falling serious. Joseph leaned closer to his friend and classmate, listening closely. “By the time the wedding rolls around... You two will have fallen in love and you'll get married and live happily ever after!”

“Damnit Smokes, this isn't a romcom!” Joseph shouted, swatting at his friend who was choking on his giggles again. He waved his hand at the fuming Joestar and tried to catch his breath.

“I'm sorry, I'm sorry,” he wheezed. “But I do have one very serious question... I will get to be your best man, right?”

Joseph sighed. Smokey's grin was blinding.

“Yeah, Smokey,” he said. The conversation was going nowhere, fast. “Of course you get to be my best man.”
“Nice,” Smokey said with a nod. Joseph waited for him to say something more but he didn’t.

“Well?” he finally exclaimed. “Don’t you have anything else to say? Just ’nice’? What am I gonna do, Smokey?!”

“Relax, bro,” Smokey said, taking a bite out of his donut. “It’s all good. You talked it through with Caesar, didn’t you? You just gotta ride it out, and then bail when the right time presents itself. At this point there ain’t much else you can do... I mean, you can’t really go and tell everyone it was a big joke, now can you? Not after that dinner.”

“Right...” Joseph muttered, feeling a little put down. “I just... don’t want things to get awkward between me and Caesar because of this.”

“Dude, it’ll be fine,” Smokey said, actually serious this time. “I really wouldn’t worry about that. If Caesar’s stuck around for this long, he ain’t gonna leave over something like this. He might pretend otherwise, but he does enjoy your stupid pranks. It’s in his eyes.”

“Yeah, but this? This is pretty big,” Joseph sighed, slumping down on his seat. “Oh man, he was so pissed at me, you have no idea.”

“It can’t be that bad—”

“He stormed out of the fucking store, Smokey! And he threw wine in my face.”

“That you deserved,” said Smokey, pointing a finger at Joseph's face. He swatted it away.

“The point is, things have been feeling super awkward recently. Caesar’s really on edge right now, and I don’t want my stupid mistake to come between us.”

“So basically you're worried you've alienated your best friend,” Smokey said. He stuffed the rest of the donut in his mouth as Joseph slumped even further, grumbling under his breath. He was pretty sure he’d end up on the floor if he slumped any more, but quite frankly he didn’t care anymore. Maybe the floor was where he belonged.

“Look,” Smokey continued, picking up Joseph's coffee and taking an overly exaggerated sip. “You fucked up. You thought you were doing something funny, but you fucked up, and now you’ve caused trouble not only for yourself, but to Caesar as well.” Joseph squirmed on the chair, mumbling something about “not needing to be so direct”, but Smokey ignored him. “If you're worried about what Caesar thinks you need to talk to him. Don't whine about it to me, but talk to him. Caesar is a reasonable person, and he is your best friend, you have literally no reason to not talk to him about this. Do you understand?”

“Yeah...” said Joseph and sat up straight. He took the coffee cup back from Smokey, who grinned at him. “You're right. I'll talk to him tonight.”

“Great,” said Smokey. He checked his phone, which was sitting on the table between them. “We better get going now, the lecture starts in 15 minutes.”

“Shit, yeah,” Joseph said, checking his phone as well. He drained the rest of his already cooled coffee and they left for the university campus, Joseph's mind just a bit more at ease.

~x~

Caesar was anxious. And when Caesar was anxious, he baked.
He'd always found making food a satisfying pastime—he loved combining ingredients to bring out the best of them, to cook up all new tastes and experiences—and baking especially was something he considered very therapeutic. Something about the way he could just stop thinking when he measured the right amount of flours and sugar and butter, mixing them up to create a dough or a batter which would be turned into beautiful pastries and cakes was just so relaxing. And if nothing else, at least he ended up with a cake, or cookies, or a batch of cupcakes. And you could hardly go wrong with cupcakes.

Whenever he baked, Joseph would soon appear in the kitchen doorway, sniffing the air like an overgrown dog, asking for a taste. And sometimes he’d even offer to help.

Today was no different.

“Oh, man, Caesar!” came the booming voice of the Joestar as soon as Caesar heard the familiar clunk of the door opening. “Whatever you are making smells a-ma-zing! I was blown away as soon as I opened the front door, and that’s seven floors down!”

Caesar made a noncommittal sound, acknowledging the other man’s arrival, but focusing all his attention towards the oven. He was pulling the cake tin out as Joseph appeared into the doorway of their small kitchen. He was fidgeting. Caesar barely resisted a groan. A nervous Joseph Joestar was a rare creature and it rarely meant anything good for him.

“Can I help you?” he asked, swirling a knife around the tin to detach the cake from it. He flipped it over, letting the cake fall down on the cooling rack, and covered it with a towel. Finally he turned to face Joseph, leaning his hip against the counter. When Joseph still said nothing, Caesar prompted him again, “Are you just going to stand there, or did you need something?”

“Yeah, uh,” said Joseph, which was a bit weird because nothing made Joseph this nervous. Caesar’s brow furrowed, concerned edging along his mind.

“Are you okay? You seem… uncomfortable,” he said and Joseph took a deep breath.

“I just wanted to talk with you,” he said finally. He paused, and then added, “I guess,” which really did nothing to make Caesar feel better.

“Okay,” he said slowly. “Let’s go to the living room, sit down.” Joseph nodded and turned to leave. Caesar checked that the oven was turned off before following his friend.

He found Joseph sitting on the couch, fidgeting like a virgin on her wedding night. Which, okay, not the best metaphor to use, considering their situation and Caesar quickly shook away all thoughts relating to Joseph and virginity, before taking a seat as well. Something big was clearly bothering Joseph. The time for idle thoughts was not now.


“Oh, right,” he said. Caesar waited, mentally preparing himself for the worst. Joseph bit his lip and then looked Caesar dead in the eye, determination burning behind his blue eyes. “Are you okay?”

Caesar’s mouth fell open as his thought process stopped.

Was… was he okay?

“I don’t…” he said, squinting slightly. Had he misread the situation? Why was Joseph asking something like that when he was the one who was sitting there, a nervous wreck? Had he done
something to indicate he wasn’t okay? Why would asking if he was okay make Joseph so nervous? What was—?

“It’s just,” Joseph continued as no answer presented itself, scratching his neck and looking down at the floor. “You’ve been kinda tense lately, ever since the dinner three days ago and, let’s be real, before that too and I know it’s probably my fault, since I was the one who fucked up with the whole… proposal thing, but I really didn’t mean for it to go this far and I don’t want you to stress over it too much and I really don’t want our friendship to suffer, you know, I just…”

Joseph continued to ramble on as Caesar’s brain finally caught up to speed. His heart did a somersault in his chest as realization spread across his brain.

Joseph was worried. He was worried he had fucked up too big this time. He was worried because Caesar had been anxious and barely talking to him, too preoccupied by his own thoughts. He was worried that Caesar was actually so angry he wouldn’t want to be friends anymore. Joseph was—

Caesar started to laugh. Joseph paused mid word and looked at him, alarmed. Caesar took a deep breath and rubbed his eye, leaning back against the couch.

“Oh, Jojo,” he sighed. Joseph looked confused. “To think you would wind up such a mess because you were worried.”

“Of course I’m worried!” huffed Joseph. It was his turn to cross his arms. “You’ve been really distant ever since this whole mess started… I didn’t know what you were thinking!”

“I’m sorry, Jojo,” Caesar said sincerely. “I didn’t mean to make you worry like that. I suppose I have been quite preoccupied with this whole mess, and the stress from work is not helping.” Caesar sighed again. “But it’ll blow over, don’t worry.”

“So…” said Joseph, frowning. He scratched his neck again. “So you’re not mad… about the engagement?”

“Oh I’m mad about that, alright,” said Caesar bluntly. Joseph winced. “It was dumb as hell and it will be a pain in my ass for the next nine months, but I also know you didn’t mean for it to turn out like that. And I’m glad that you’re able to admit yourself that this one majorly blew in your face. In our faces.” He paused for a moment, studying Joseph’s face carefully, before going on. “But this is who you are. Do you really think I could live with you if I couldn’t handle weird shit like this happening? You never think before you do, and you have a knack of getting pulled into insane situations, or pulling yourself into them. But I’m pretty used to it by now, so no need to worry about that.”

“Well that’s good,” Joseph said, deflating visibly. Heart on his sleeve indeed, Caesar thought fondly. Then Joseph grinned. “Smokey was right, you do love my stupid pranks.”

“Love is a strong word,” said Caesar, the corner of his lip curling upwards in a grin of his own. “‘Tolerate’ is more like it. ‘Occasionally entertained’, perhaps.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” Joseph said, voice thick with amusement. His face faltered momentarily. “So we’re cool?” he asked.

“We’re cool,” Caesar agreed. He gave Joseph’s knee a pat and then stood up, stretching.

“Wait, where are you going?” Joseph asked, alarmed again. The sudden clinginess amused Caesar immensely, but he decided not to comment. He could understand it in the situation.
“There’s a cake in the kitchen that needs to be tended to,” he said instead. “Or did you already forget about the ‘a-ma-zing’ smell?”

“Oh, right, right,” Joseph said, as he stood up as well. Caesar was pretty sure he could detect a hint of pink on his cheeks, but didn’t dwell on it. “Well, I have some homework anyway, so I guess I better go do that. Think you can take care of dinner in the midst of making your next masterpiece?”

“I think I can manage that,” Caesar said with a smile. “You make sure you study well. You do want to graduate this spring, don’t you?”

“Yes, mother,” came the answer. Caesar could hear the eye roll and grin in his voice even if Joseph’s back was turned.

“Your mother is a brilliant woman, and I will take that as a compliment!” Caesar called after him even as the Joestar retreated into his room. Just as the door pulled closed he could hear the resulting chuckle, and he smiled to himself. Joseph had really had him worried for a while there, but he was very glad that they’d been able to talk it through and get their relationship back on solid ground.

Caesar took a deep breath and turned towards the kitchen once more. He had a feeling this would be his best cake yet.

~x~

Things went back to normal after that, or as normal as things could be in a household comprising of Joseph Joestar and Caesar Zeppeli. They fell back into their everyday routine, spending their days at school and at work and having dinner together after coming home, leaving the evenings free for doing whatever. They would bicker about whose turn it was to wash the dishes or choose what to watch, just like they always had, but it was never really that serious, just like it never had been.

Joseph would breathe a sigh of relief as the days passed by and the anxiety his friend had clearly been feeling recently didn’t reappear.

That is, until the following Friday—always a Friday—when Suzie called.

Initially, it seemed innocent enough. She phoned Joseph just as his last lecture ended and excitedly told him that she had something she wanted to show them, both him and Caesar, and asked if they would be free that night. They were. He told her that Caesar’s shift ended at five and he’d be home by half past, but then they needed to eat something, so she could drop by at six if that worked for her. It did. She hung up soon after that, amazingly even more excited than she had been when he’d answered. Joseph didn’t think much of it at the time; Suzie was an easily excitable person.

He sent a quick text about his conversation with her to Caesar, who replied with the OK hand sign emoji, as he always did when he was too busy to answer properly, but wanted Joseph to know he’d seen the message. Everything was normal. Perfectly normal and, indeed, OK.

And then he opened the apartment door for her.

“Hey guys!” Suzie’s cheery voice came from somewhere behind a pile of binders and cardboard boxes. Joseph hurried to take the pile from her, fearing the tower—or she—would fall down and scatter everywhere. “Oh, thanks, Jojo,” she chirped as she pushed past him, pulling the door closed behind her. Joseph carefully carried the pile to the living room table as she peeled out of her thick coat, hanging it in the wardrobe.

“Hey, Suzie,” Caesar said with a smile as he emerged from the kitchen where he’d been finishing up the dishes, drying his hands on a towel. “Jojo said you had something to… show… us,” he trailed off
as his eyes fell on the pile of folders on the table. Suzie skipped over to him and smacked a quick kiss on his cheek, which he was unable to protest to in his stupefied state. “What… exactly is this, Suzie?”

“This is what I wanted to show you,” she said, twirling around with her skirt spinning beautifully, and sat down on the floor across from the couch. She spread the binders around the table, though they could not all fit, so some of them were arranged on the floor. Some of them had labels, which read things like: “Most Romantic Themes”, “Outdoor Venues”, “Catering Companies”, and “Cake Designs”.

Joseph could feel his stomach lurch.

“Suzie,” he started slowly. “Are these…” He couldn’t finish the sentence. The words didn’t come out.

Luckily—although, Joseph thought, luck was a very subjective concept—Suzie completed the sentence for him.

“Yup! These are my wedding planning files,” she proclaimed, none the wiser to the dread Joseph, and probably Caesar if the tenseness in his shoulders was anything to go by, was feeling. This was happening. And it was happening now.

“Are you sure you want to do this with us?” Caesar asked anyway, once he found his voice again. It was surprisingly free of strain. Joseph was impressed. “And you wanna do it now?”

“Of course I want to do it with you, don’t be silly,” Suzie giggled. “Do you two know anything about planning a wedding? Because I highly doubt that! Besides, I’ve always wanted to plan a grand wedding.” She sighed. “And I don’t want to wait anymore! I’m going to shamelessly live through you guys, since there’s no knowing when my prince Charming decides to show himself.”

“I, uh, wow,” Joseph tried, flipping through the nearest binder. It was full of pages with pictures of cakes glued to them, the sides full of notes made with a glittery pen. Several glittery pens. Some of it looked like a child’s handwriting. “How long have you been collecting these, Suzie?”

“I told you, I’ve always wanted to do it!” she said. “Ever since I was little my dream has been to be the most beautiful bride there is.” She sighed again, much deeper and more dreamily this time. Joseph suppressed a cringe.

Were there actually girls like this in the world?

“Would you… excuse us for a moment,” interrupted Caesar, his hand waving in the general direction of Joseph, but his eyes never leaving the binder covered sofa table. “I really need to talk with Jojo for a moment. Privately. Won’t be long.”

“No problem!” Suzie chimed as Joseph stood up.

Caesar ripped his eyes off the table, spun around, and practically fled into the kitchen. Joseph followed at a more reasonable pace and pulled the door shut behind him. Caesar was leaning his hands against the sink, breathing deeply and purposefully.

“You okay there, Caesar?” Joseph asked softly, walking over to the other end of the narrow room.

“Fine,” came the reply. “I’m fine.” He didn’t sound fine.

One more deep breath and Caesar turned around, leaning his hip on the sink and crossing his arms.
“You sure you’re okay?” Joseph asked again, just to make sure.

“Yeah, I am,” Caesar said, and this time he sounded more like he meant it. “Took me by surprise, that’s all. I’m fine now. Thank you.”

“Good,” Joseph said. “So what happens now?”

“Now,” Caesar sighed. “Now I suppose we actually have to plan our wedding. I hadn’t considered Suzie would be so keen to assist, but in retrospect I really should’ve seen it coming. I’ve seen her files many times before.”

“She whip them up often?” Joseph asked, amused. He could easily imagine Suzie enthusiastically showing her hard work off to anyone who’d listen during the Zeppeli family gatherings. Caesar let out a small laugh.

“I remember when she started to make it. She was six,” he replied with a shake of his head and a smile on his lips. “She was going to marry you back then.”

“Whaaaaaat?”

“Oh yeah,” Caesar said with a smirk. “You were real hot stuff, you’d just started school and everything!”

“Awww, man, why did you never tell me?” Joseph huffed. “I totally would’ve dated her if I’d known I had a chance!”

“You really wouldn’t have,” Caesar said, with an icy glare. Joseph sniggered. “And she got over it pretty quickly. Apparently when she started school the following year, the guys on her class were much more interesting than you.”

“Eh, that’s all well and good.” Joseph nodded. “Truth be told, I have always considered Suzie more of a relative than a potential girlfriend, even if we’re not technically related.”

“You would be, if we went through with this,” Caesar said thoughtfully. “She’d only be your cousin-in-law, I guess, but still. Technically.”

“Huh,” said Joseph.

There was a long silence as the two thought about their potential combined family tree.

The Joestars and Zeppelis were practically one big family already. The two families had been close friends since Joseph’s grandfather’s youth, some fifty-five years ago. Jonathan—then a twenty-years-old, wet behind the ears archeology student—had met Caesar’s grandfather, William Zeppeli, who had been looking for interested students to join in on a research expedition to Peru. The Joestar had immediately volunteered, dragging along his good friend Robert Speedwagon. During the trip William had apparently taken a liking to the young Joestar and his companion, and after the initial project was completed, they kept working together.

In the following years, their research took them all around the world and greatly contributed in making a name for all three of the men, not to mention the tight friendship they formed. Even after Speedwagon moved on to the oil business, Jonathan and William kept touring South-America together. It had also been around that time when Jonathan and Erina had moved to New York, and while their husbands were off exploring the Amazonian jungles, Erina and William’s wife, Caesar’s dear grandmother Maria, kept things standing at the home front.
The Joestars and Zeppelis remained friends through the decades and generations, and even when William fell ill 26 years prior, the Joestars, especially Jonathan, had been there to help the family through the rough patch. William’s son Mario had even made Jonathan Caesar’s godfather, to show his appreciation. Or so Joseph had been told.

“I feel like we got sidetracked,” Joseph said eventually.

“Yeah, me too,” Caesar said. “I think the point was… We’re actually gonna have to plan this wedding.”

“Ugh, boo,” groaned Joseph. “That’s gonna be so much work… And it’s gonna be harder to pretend to break up if we’re neck deep in wedding planning!”

“I know, but we can’t exactly turn Suzie down here,” Caesar pointed out. “Unless you can think of a good reason for us to decline her help?”

Joseph opened and closed his mouth several times, but produced no sound.

“My point exactly,” Caesar said and moved to leave the kitchen.

“Aw, come on, I can think of something!” Joseph tried, but Caesar had already opened the door. “Fine…” he muttered as he went to follow him.

“Oh, you’re back,” Suzie said when they reemerged in the living room. For a moment Joseph was worried she’d make a similar comment as she’d made in the restaurant, concerning how long they’d been in the kitchen, but it seemed that she hadn’t even noticed, being too engrossed with her planners to pay it any attention. Thank god for small victories, even if on the whole they were still utterly losing.

“This is quite a lot of info, Suzie,” Caesar said, sitting down on the floor and pulling a box onto his lap. It revealed several wedding magazines. “I have to say, I’m very impressed.”

“Hehe, thanks Cee!” she beamed. “That box actually has magazines I picked out especially for you guys. If anything that I thought you might like caught my eye, I put it there.”

“That’s really considerate of you,” Caesar started, flipping through the magazines. Suddenly he frowned, his fingers slowing down and finally pausing. “Some of these are pretty old,” he said, still frowning at the contents of the box. He picked up a magazine. “This one’s dated 2010! How long exactly have you been collecting these ‘especially for us’, Suzie?”

Suzie flushed a deep red.

“That reminds me,” said Joseph, plopping down on the sofa and staring at the girl levelly. “Back at the jeweler’s you said you couldn’t believe it ‘finally happened’. How long do you think we’ve been together, Suzie?”

“Oh, uh, I don’t know, really,” she stuttered, wringing her hands together. “I just meant, well…” She trailed off and then sighed, collecting her thoughts. “I never actually knew, since the two of you were kind enough to keep it a secret until now,” she gave the two of them a look that spoke volumes on how much she appreciated having been kept in the dark, even if there hadn’t actually been anything to tell in the first place, “but I guess I started suspecting around the time you moved in here together.”

Moved in here—

“But that’s like seven years ago!” sputtered Joseph, his eyes wide. “You think we’ve been together
for seven years?"

“Well I don’t know!” Suzie huffed, pouting. “You two have always been so close, and it was so gradual it’s hard to pinpoint! It’s really more of those ‘in retrospect’ things, even if I’ve been assuming for a while…” She paused and a curious look spread on her face. “How long have you two been together, anyhow?”

That gave Joseph pause, and his eyes flicked over to Caesar. How had they not thought to discuss that? It would have inevitably come up sooner or later, that much was for sure, but they hadn’t considered it would be this soon. Joseph and Caesar held a lightning quick, silent conversation through their eyes to determine who would answer and with what.

“Three years,” Caesar said, after only a few seconds’ delay. As he spoke his eyes were still locked with Joseph’s, in them an expression Joseph had no time to recognize before it was gone and he turned back to Suzie with a smile. “New Year’s. He kissed me when the ball dropped.”

“Oh, oh, yeah,” said Joseph, quickly regaining his footing. If there was something he could do, it was bluff his way out of anything. “We celebrated over on Times Square that year, and I was so smooth the whole evening, being the perfect gentleman I am. We had dinner beforehand, during which I wooed him real good, and then gave him the best New Year’s kiss of his life at the end of it.”

Caesar barked out a laugh. “You wish!” he sniggered. “You were a nervous wreck the whole evening, drank too much, and started to apologize profusely after your sloppy excuse of a kiss. If there was any kind of wooing going on that night it sure as hell wasn’t done by you.”

Joseph gasped dramatically. No one made Joseph Joestar look like the fool in his own bluffs!

“That is so not true!” He pointed a finger in Caesar’s face. He lifted an amused eyebrow and stared down the finger. Joseph could practically hear the “it’s more plausible than your bullshit” he was no doubt thinking. “I did woo you, didn’t I? Or did we not get together?” Joseph grinned, victoriously. He couldn’t go and deny it now, because as long as Suzie was sitting there they had gotten together after Joseph’s kiss. Which would have been amazing, thank you very much. Because Joseph was an amazing kisser.

Caesar’s eye twitched, but then he snorted, which really wasn’t the response Joseph had been anticipating and he squinted at the Italian.

“It hardly matters how suave you think you were, nor does it matter how suave you actually were,” he said silkily. He rested his elbow on the coffee table and leaned his chin against his hand, smirking up at Joseph under his hooded eyes. Joseph wasn’t sure he liked where he was going with this. “So long as you made it clear you were interested in pursuing something more, that would’ve sufficed. You could have been the most awkward, bumbling mess with no idea what he was doing, and we would have gotten together. All I’d need is affirmation.”

Joseph opened his mouth, scouring his brain for a comeback, a thought he didn’t manage to finish, when something in Caesar’s last sentence completely derailed him. All I’d need...? He was no linguistic, but that seemed like the wrong tense. Surely is was “all I needed”, not “all I would need”, right? He scrunched his brow, trying to find the end station for the line of reasoning, to figure out the reason. What was Caesar—?

That thought too was interrupted, leaving him no chance to deliver any possible, and probable, killer comebacks, nor any other kind of comment on using wrong tenses, when Suzie giggled.
“You guys are so cute,” she said with a carefree smile. Joseph frowned at the use of the word “cute” in relation to him and/or Caesar, but she continued, “I don’t need to know all the details… The magical memory is good enough for me.”

“Of course,” Caesar said. “We do have other things to go through right now, don’t we?” He eyed the table full of magazines and binders. Joseph suppressed a sigh.

“Oh, Caesar!” Suzie cried suddenly. “Where’s the ring?”

“What?” Caesar said and then his eyes flicked to his left hand sitting on top of the table. The ring wasn’t on his finger. Joseph paled a little. If Suzie found out Caesar didn’t actually use the ring normally that would cast a whole lot of suspicion on their relationship. “I must’ve forgotten it in the kitchen when I did the dishes,” Caesar said without missing a beat. “I guess I’m not used to wearing it yet.”

“That makes sense,” Suzie agreed, nodding. Joseph let out a small breath of relief. “I sometimes forget my bracelet in the bathroom after I take a shower, and I’ve been wearing one since I was ten!” She laughed.

“In any case,” Caesar said when she quieted once more. “This is a lot of material, and while we do appreciate you bringing this all over, we haven’t exactly planned… well, anything yet.”

“Yeah, maybe it would be better if the two of us went through this stuff a bit, and then you could come over and help us plan more?” continued Joseph. Suzie hummed thoughtfully, looking like she understood the point, but seeming reluctant to leave.

“Jojo and I really ought to talk about this before we decide on anything concrete, and it’ll probably take a while…” Caesar tried again. “It’s not exactly late at the moment, but it would be by the time we’d finish and you would still have to get home after that.”

Suzie let out a long sigh. “I guess you’re right,” she finally conceded. “I’ll let you guys go through that, but you have to promise me you’ll call as soon as you’re done. I want to get on with the planning!”

“Yes, yes, Suzie, we will,” Caesar promised, standing up.

“Tomorrow! Let’s meet up tomorrow,” she said, clapping her hands together, but then reconsidered after seeing Joseph’s face. “Or… sometime next week. But you really do need to get this ball rolling. A proper wedding doesn’t happen overnight, you know!”

“Of course we know,” said Joseph, who most certainly hadn’t known. “We’ll get back to you real soon.”

“Good. You better,” Suzie said, and stood up with a nod. Caesar walked her to the door while Joseph sifted through the papers absently.

“Do you need a ride home?” he asked as Suzie buttoned up her coat.

“No need, I came with the Vespa,” Suzie said cheerily and placed another kiss on her cousin’s cheek. “Bye Caesar. Bye Jojo!”

“Bye Suzie!” Joseph called, and then the door closed and she was gone. The sigh Caesar let out echoed in the apartment.

“I need a drink,” he said, and stalked into the kitchen.
“How did she even carry all this while riding a scooter?” Joseph wondered out loud when Caesar returned with a glass of wine in his hand.

“Don’t question the Suzie Q,” Caesar said, slumping down on the sofa next to Joseph. “It will give you nothing but headaches.”

Joseph nodded solemnly. It was often for the better to not try to apply normal laws of physics—or existence for that matter—to Suzie. She had a habit of getting the most insane things done with ease.

“You think we should start going through these now?” Joseph asked after a minute or two of silence. Caesar hummed.

“I’d rather not, honestly,” he said, rubbing his neck with his free hand. “Work was a pain today, all I really want to do is take a long bath and then relax with a book or something.”

“That bad, huh?” Joseph asked, wincing in sympathy. The clothes store Caesar worked at wasn’t terribly big, but it was rather popular. “Chic” was a word Joseph had often heard in relation to the boutique, though he wasn’t entirely sure what exactly that meant. He assumed that it meant that the shop was visited by people like his mother, and Caesar, and probably fashionistas or some shit. In any case, despite the small size Caesar was a full time employee, and work was stressful, and Caesar carried stress in him like no one Joseph knew.

“We had to do inventory,” the Italian groaned. “Which is already the most tedious job there ever was, but some idiot had misplaced half of our inventory lists and mixed up all the goddamn boxes. There were wrong labels everywhere, and it took me hours to get all of it sorted out.”

“Yeah, that’s not good. Tell you what, you go ahead and relax for the rest of the night, we can go through this stuff tomorrow. You don’t have a shift tomorrow, right?”

“Right. Thank god for that. Not that I’m particularly looking forward to this mess either.”

He was glaring at the coffee table again, as if it had personally insulted him and his family. Joseph couldn’t help his lips turning up into a smile. They sat in silence for a moment longer, before Caesar stood up and closed himself into the bathroom after a quick pit stop at his room. They didn’t have a big bathroom, but it was big enough for a small bathtub, which had probably saved Joseph’s ass many a times. Because a tense Caesar was a snappy Caesar, and a snappy Caesar was outright dangerous.

While Caesar took his bath, Joseph tidied the stacks of papers on the coffee table into more manageable piles and then watched the news. By the time Caesar reemerged from the bath, his hair mussed up and towel dry, already wearing a pajama, Joseph had settled comfortably back on the sofa and was a good ten minutes into the second episode of Daredevil. Joseph watched Caesar stand in the doorway of the bathroom, seeming to consider something, and then, to Joseph’s surprise, he padded over to the sofa and joined him. Joseph appreciated the gesture, even if Caesar was fast asleep against him by episode five. He didn’t mind. It was the thought that counted, and Caesar was often very thoughtful of him. A smile crept up on his face as he looked down at the blond nuzzling against his shoulder and his heart felt like bursting when he ran his fingers through the soft, slightly damp hair.

After finally turning off the TV a few hours later, he carefully gathered Caesar into his arms. He was warm against Joseph’s chest, and Joseph would have liked nothing more than to squeeze him even closer against him, though he didn’t know why. He didn’t though, and instead he just carried Caesar to his bed, just like he had done the week before. He didn’t mind that either, but he did hope it wouldn’t become a habit. One of these times Caesar would wake up, and Joseph was pretty sure that
wouldn’t end well for either of them.
Themes, themes everywhere

Chapter Summary

Shit gets meta, and what are wedding themes even???

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“What the fuck is ’chic vintage rustic’?”

Caesar paused, his hand hovering over the handle of the oven he had just been about to open. He rummaged his brain for context—there had to be context—but came out blank. Empty. Nada. One explanation left: Joseph had officially gone mad.

Just then the dark brown mess said crazy person called hair popped into view in the kitchen doorway. He was holding one of Suzie’s wedding magazines in his hands.

Oh, okay. Context.

“I mean seriously,” Joseph continued, gesturing at Caesar with the magazine. “What is that even supposed to mean? Fucking none of these themes make sense, it’s like they just slapped two fancy sounding words together and hoped someone would buy it.”

Caesar snorted. “You’re probably not far from the mark,” he admitted, continuing his interrupted check up on the pizza. Just a few more minutes. “A lot of them are a bit weird, but some actually sound pretty nice. Like ’Bubbles Extravaganza’.”

“Yeah, you would like that…” Joseph sniggered under his breath.

“Excuse me?”

“I said wouldn’t it be better to have a seasonally appropriate theme?” he said, flashing Caesar a bright smile. Caesar gave him a look, but didn't comment on the obvious lie. “Since we’re planning an autumn wedding and all, shouldn’t we have some kind of autumn-y theme?” The smile on his face turned even more brilliant. “Like Oktoberfest!”

Caesar laughed. Then he looked at Joseph’s face and his own fell.

“You are joking, right?” he asked, because he wasn't sure anymore. Joseph gave a halfhearted shrug. “No wedding of mine will have Oktoberfest as a theme. No, not even a fake wedding.”

Joseph closed his mouth and pouted. Caesar wasn’t sure why he was surprised he had to clarify something like this. Joseph was full of ridiculous ideas, an Oktoberfest wedding was right up his alley. The crazier the idea, the more likely for the Joestar to think it up. And naturally Joseph had no sense of appropriateness either.

“How about Halloween?”

“Joseph, no.”
Joseph pouted again.

Caesar sighed.

“Look, it would be the easiest to just plan a traditional wedding,” he said. “Nothing too big, nothing too fancy. Nothing too complicated. This wedding isn't actually going to happen, you know, so there's no point in planning anything elaborate. It'll just be unnecessary work.”

Joseph hummed, rubbing his chin.

“I suppose that's true,” he admitted. “But consider this: because the wedding isn't happening we can plan as elaborate and impossible a wedding as we want. We can do anything, because there will be no consequences. No actual wedding to hold.”

Caesar turned to check on the pizza again, to give himself a moment before answering. That… actually made sense, in weird a way. And it... it might be kind of fun to plan the most epic wedding without having to worry about the practicality, to just pick the best parts and smush them all together. No worries about actual preparations, no need to stress over all the little details…

Caesar retracted all previous statements about the other man’s sanity.

“That could be fun,” Caesar said out loud. “I have no idea what would happen, but it could be fun.”

“I know, right?” Joseph beamed. “I do have the most amazing ideas, don't I?”

“I wouldn't go that far,” said Caesar calmly, taking the pizza out of the oven and leaving it to cool on top of the stove. “Considering that is was the previous one of your so-called ‘amazing ideas’ that got us into this mess of a situation in the first place.”

Joseph laughed awkwardly and quickly looked away, scratching his neck. While Caesar was glad that Joseph didn't feel so goddamn guilty about the ordeal anymore, he had been walking on eggshells around him for a while, which was making Caesar really frustrated. It was nice to know Joseph tried to be considerate of Caesar's feelings, sure, but it had been absolutely ridiculous lately. He wasn't about to fucking break just because Joseph had acted like an ass. Joseph was always kind of an ass.

“Anyway,” Caesar said, discarding all thoughts of Joseph's ass before they had had time to form properly. “Even if we plan the most amazing, and probably the weirdest, wedding ever, it’s going to be one that we both think is good. Capisce?”

“Yeah, yeah, we'll plan this together,” Joseph said, waving Caesar off. He walked over to the stove, reaching for the pizza. Caesar slapped his hand away.

“It’s too hot, you'll burn your hand,” he explained when Joseph pouted once more. When had he started to pout so much? Or had Caesar just started to pay more attention to it? “I'll cut it and bring it over, you take drinks out and go on ahead.”

After slight grumbling Joseph did just that, taking a few beer bottles from the fridge and grabbing the roll of paper towels from the counter. Caesar could hear the shuffling of paper from the living room—no doubt Joseph's attempt to clean the sofa table—as he retrieved a pizza wheel from the drawer and cut the pizza. Then he followed Joseph to the living room, with it and two plates in hand.

Joseph had managed to clear out the middle of the table, which is where Caesar set the pizza plate. He exchanged Joseph's plate for a bottle of beer and sat on the floor, opposite of Joseph, who dove straight in, while Caesar took a moment to open the beer and savor the taste. He had no idea where
Joseph found the beers he bought, because Caesar for one had never seen any of the labels in their local grocery store, but the man was a genius when it came to them. The occasional impulse purchases Joseph brought home whenever he was in charge of the groceries could easily be overlooked when it also meant that there would be more of this heavenly liquid.

Joseph was already on his second slice when Caesar finally started to eat. Minutes passed by in companionable silence of eating and skimming through Suzie’s magazines and binders. Occasionally one of them made an offhand comment about something that caught their eye, but mostly they were silent.

That is, until the shrill sound of the buzzer echoed throughout the apartment.

Joseph and Caesar both looked up from their magazines, frowning at each other.

“Are you expecting someone?” asked Caesar, because he sure wasn’t. Joseph looked as confused as him though.

“I don’t…” he started but then realization spread on his face, replaced quickly by the unmistakable look of “oh fuck”. Caesar quirked an eyebrow. “It’s Smokey,” Joseph whispered. “We were supposed to study together today.”

“Okay,” Caesar whispered back. “Why are we whispering? Go open the door already!”

Joseph scrambled to his feet and over to the door. Caesar could hear him talking into the door phone, not paying enough attention to make out the words but enough to recognize the apologetic tone of voice. The talking stopped, followed by a small pause and then the distant sound of the lift jerking into life. A few minutes later a very cheery and a somewhat snowy Smokey Brown entered the apartment.

“Sup, Caesar!” he greeted as he pulled his scarf off. “I’ve heard that congratulations are in order. Marriage is such a beautiful thing, don’t you think?”

“Thank you, Smokey, but there's no need for that,” said Caesar with a smile. “I know you know. Jojo told me.”

“Oh well, that just makes it more fun, right?” said Smokey, strutting into the living room and looking around curiously even though he'd been to their apartment countless times before. “Now you have someone you can open up to, and I can laugh at your hilarious situation to your face.”

“To Joseph's face, I hope,” Caesar said mildly. “This is all his fault after all.”

“Of course! I wouldn't dream of laughing at you, Caesar. You're much too cool for that.” Smokey grinned at him and Caesar returned the gesture. “Hey, pizza!”

“Help yourself,” said Caesar, turning his attention back to the magazine. “I'm sure Jojo won't mind if you take his.” Smokey grabbed Joseph’s plate and two of the remaining four slices.

“Hey!” exclaimed Joseph, finally joining the conversation. “I can deal with you guys bullying me about the stupid proposal, but no one touches my pizza!”

He lunged at Smokey, who easily sidestepped him.

“Come on man, don't be like that!” Smokey said, stuffing as much pizza in his mouth as he could before Joseph could get the plate back. “You'll get to eat his cooking for the rest of your life, let me indulge whenever I get the chance!” And then, to Caesar, “Seriously though dude, your cooking is
amazing. Best goddamn pizza I've ever eaten anywhere, ever. How do you do it?"

Caesar laughed. Joseph grabbed his plate back, and then stole the last remaining slices and sat down with a huff. Smokey sat on the couch, licking his fingers clean.

"It's a traditional Trussardi recipe, actually. Been in the family for generations," Caesar said. Smokey let out a long "oooooh". "Nonna—my grandma—she taught me to how make it, since neither my father nor my aunt are particularly interested the world of culinary arts. Suzie and I are the only people aside from her and the current head chef of 'Trattoria Trussardi' who know it. Until we teach it to our own kids, I suppose.”

"Ohoho, we’re talking about kids already? You guys are moving so fast!” Smokey said with a grin, but continued quickly, “I'm kidding, sorry. That is a cool story, though. Old family traditions are pretty neat, but I guess that means you can't teach it to me...” He paused, a sad look on his face, which was soon upturned again. “Oh, hey, I know! You could adopt me, and then I'd be a part of the family! And since I'm an orphan and all, there's no actual parents to get in the way of the legalities.”

Caesar grinned wide. He could really see why Joseph was friends with Smokey. They were much more similar than they appeared.

"Tell you what, Smokey,” he said. "After Jojo and I have wed, we'll go down to the magistrate and officially adopt you, and then we can all live together as a happy family.”

Smokey blinked. Then he burst out laughing.

"Oh man, thank you," he wheezed, drying tears from his eyes. ‘That made my day.”

“Don’t I get a vote in this?” asked Joseph, but Caesar was pretty sure what his vote would be, considering the grin on his face.

“Daddy, no, don't you want me?” Smokey cried out, suppressing a laugh.

“Oh boy, 'daddy’?” Caesar sniggered. “That's gotta feel wrong.”

“Mommy can shut his mouth whenever he pleases,” Joseph said calmly, pointing a finger in Caesar's face. Smokey burst out into another fit of laughter, joined soon by the other too as well. They laughed for a good several minutes, all gasping for breath in the midst of their giggles, before it finally died down. Caesar's cheeks hurt from laughing so hard, but it was definitely worth it.

“Anyway,” said Smokey after a moment of silence. “What’s with all the magazines? I thought you guys weren’t gonna get married. Or has my prediction already come true?” He grinned at Joseph, who groaned. Caesar was about to ask what he meant by that, but Joseph replied before he had the chance.

“Suzie brought them over,” he said. “She’s got a weird obsession with weddings and wants to plan the thing with us, so now we’re forced to actually plan it. But it most definitely is not happening.”

“Right, right,” Smokey waved him off, leafing through the closest magazine. “So what exactly have you guys planned so far?”

“Nothing really,” Caesar sighed. “We’ve just been going through the material she left us with. I mean, there is a lot of it.”

“No kidding,” Smokey said, looking around the living room floor, which was covered with papers and binders. “You guys want me to help you with this? I could totally plan this wedding with you! I
am the best man, after all.” He grinned. Caesar squinted at Joseph, who gave a sheepish grin in response. Caesar hadn’t realized they were actually naming best men for their *fake* wedding.

“Well, we should probably start by deciding on a theme,” Caesar said, still glaring at Joseph. “And maybe try to narrow down the guest list.”

“Are we really gonna have to invite people?” Joseph asked, blinking in surprise. “It’s gonna complicate pulling this off if we do.”

“I am aware of that,” Caesar said, rubbing a finger over his lips. “But even if we don’t send out the invitations, we need to make a guest list. It would be suspicious otherwise.”

“I guess,” Joseph muttered.

“So themes!” interjected Smokey. “What were you guys thinking? Just a regular wedding, or like… Italian themed, or..?”

“Well Jojo suggested we go with some kind of a seasonal theme,” Caesar said. “Which does *not* mean Oktoberfest. But something related to nature could be nice.”

“Ugh, that’s boring,” Joseph said, rolling his eyes. “Everyone and their mother has a nature themed wedding. We need to pick something more unique!”

“As I said, it was *your* idea.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever.” Joseph waved a hand in his face. Caesar scowled. “I just said it to get you thinking a bit more about this. We should totally have a super weird theme. Like zombies!”

“Jojo, no.”

“Okay, what about underwater?”

“No.”

“You’re no fun… How about Hunger Games? I know you like Hunger Games.”

“What the fuck Joseph? Who wants to have *Hunger Games* as a wedding theme? The series is literally about kids killing each other!”

Joseph rolled his eyes dramatically as Caesar kept glaring at him. This was ridiculous, even by Joseph’s standards.

“If you’re not going to take this seriously,” Caesar told him, “I’m going to have to plan the wedding alone with Suzie. I don’t want you to make a joke of this, Jojo, even if it is just pretend.”

Joseph muttered something unintelligible and then let out a long sigh. “Fine,” he said, throwing his hands in the air. “Let’s hear your suggestions then!”

Caesar cleared his throat, sifting through a binder on the table to appear more composed than he was.

“Well,” he started. “I was thinking something along the lines of a Victorian style ceremony. Since the architecture of the Estate takes a lot of influence from the Victoria era, as well as neoclassicism—”

“Oh god, I’d forgotten you’ve studied aesthetics,” groaned Joseph. “You were saying *my* suggestions were bad, and there you go, trying to make this into some kind of… Downton Abbey wedding!” He paused to make a face. “The only period theme I will accept is Ancient Rome, to fit
“Thanks for suggesting we murder me on my own wedding day... and Downton Abbey isn’t Victorian, it’s post-Edwardian, but, yeah yeah, I get your point.” Caesar rubbed his face and then sighed. That really had been the wrong direction to take the conversation, hadn’t it? “Okay, so if historical themes are out, and nature related themes are out, and everything Jojo has ever suggested is out—” there was a clear protesting noise but Caesar ignored it with a small grin on his lips “—we’ve got, what? Colors, fashions... fandoms? Some kind of, I don’t know... cultural themes, like Italian, which is a bit predictable, I know, but still an option.”


“What video games are you thinking about?” Caesar asked, suspicious. Probably for a good reason.

“I dunno... *The Last of Us*?”

“There you go with the zombies again. We are *not* going to have zombies at our wedding, *god.*”

“Hey, at least my suggestions have some kind of personality to them! Yours are all boring and over-used.”

“People use them because they work! Your suggestions are on par with a ten-year-old’s birthday party themes!”

“Well excuuuuuse me, princess! Maybe you should—”

“How about this?” chimed in Smokey. Caesar and Joseph fell quiet and turned to look at him, startled. He was wearing a shit-eating grin and holding up a magazine with an article open, titled “10 of the Most Eccentric Wedding Themes of 2013”. Caesar blinked. “Here, I'll read it to you,” Smokey continued and cleared his throat.

“No. 6, Bizarre Adventure.” He paused for dramatic effect. “The inspiration for this theme lies in a Japanese comic and cartoon series of the same name. Originally from the late 80s, bla bla, a reboot last year, bla bla, gaining popularity, hummm, designing wedding themes around the ambiguous title. “The show itself, yadda yadda, bizarre adventures of several main characters, bla bla bla, family and friendship, magical powers, uhh, fighting increasingly strong beings of darkness to protect their loved ones, and even the world, huh that sounds exciting.

“Open ended theme, works well for fans and non-fans alike... Family history and familial responsibilities as the main theme... Ah, here we go: Try to include something from your family’s past in the décor, for example something from your parents’ or grandparents’ wedding. You can also try to hold the ceremony at a place that has historical significance to your family. Of course you should not forget the bizarreness of the theme, which can be brought up with unconventional food choices, or perhaps unusual shows or events during the reception.

“Key points to keep in mind: colorfulness, personalization. For more suggestions and guidelines, see issue 04/13.”

Smokey stopped reading, and looked up from the magazine at the two men for their input. There was a short silence.

“Smokey,” said Joseph, a grin of his own spreading across his face. “You are a *genius*!”

“Why thank you,” Smokey said, bowing his head slightly. “All in the work of the best man.”

“You know, I’m actually pretty sure I’ve watched that anime,” Joseph continued excitedly. “The second part was the best; the main character was so great. He wore this ridiculous shirt that
constantly showed his midriff, and he was always running away from fights, so you thought he was just some big loser, when in actuality he always had a plan for every situation. And his friend was pretty awesome as well, when he stopped being an asshole.”

“I wouldn’t know, man, I’ve only seen the one they aired in the 90s,” Smokey said, scanning the article once more. “So hows about it, Caesar? Does that sound okay to you?”

They both turned to Caesar for confirmation.

Caesar bit his lip. He himself hadn’t seen the show, but he wasn’t entirely sure it mattered with a theme like this. It wasn’t explicitly about the show after all, and there was a nice, if a bit weird, ring to “Bizarre Adventure”. And it did fit their situation quite well. Really well. It was absolutely perfect. This was going to be it, wasn’t it? A wide smile spread on his face.

“Alright,” he said. “We have a theme now.” Joseph high-fived him.

“Nice,” said Smokey with a smile and then clapped Joseph on the shoulder. “Jojo and Caesar’s Bizarre Adventure. Can’t wait to get started.”

~x~

Suzie wasn’t as enthusiastic when they told her about their newly decided theme on the following Friday. She considered the theme to be too wide and unspecific to properly work with, even if the second magazine had had some pretty nifty and practical suggestions for all kinds of things. Joseph was pretty sure she was just being difficult on purpose, because she’d been hoping for a theme more along the lines of classical, beautiful, and pure. But this wasn’t Suzie’s wedding, he reminded her. She could pick as touchy-feely a theme as she wanted when she planned her own wedding. However, this was theirs and they had decided. Suzie frowned but conceded.

As soon as Suzie had arrived they’d started going through catalogues to determine some kind of a base for the décor. A solid foundation, onto which they could build their bizarrely adventurous wedding. Which really didn’t work too well when Suzie kept trying to suggest things that were way too frilly, and Caesar kept telling Joseph his ideas—while objectively awesome, no matter what Caesar said—were too “tactless”. It was a mess, really.

After about an hour and a half of getting nowhere but Frustrationville, Caesar gave up and stalked off to make dinner. Joseph allowed his friend the easy escape, despite it actually being his turn to cook, not to mention the fact he wasn’t particularly hungry yet, since it was only half past four. Caesar had had the morning shift, which meant he’d gotten up way too early for any kind of human being, and the long day had clearly taken its toll. Joseph could cover for him on the metaphorical battlefield; he’d had only a few hours of school that day, so he was stock full of energy and ready to rumble.

And, despite continuously suggesting themes he knew Caesar would turn down, he did also know what Caesar liked. He would defend their wedding against Suzie for the both of them.

“You know…” Suzie started innocently enough after Joseph had shot down yet another not-so-subtle attempt at getting him to reconsider the theme. “Next Sunday is Valentine’s Day.”

Joseph paused. He flipped through his mental calendar, slightly surprised by how quickly the year was progressing. *Damn*, she was right, wasn’t she? And he knew he wouldn’t like where she was taking this.

“So?” he said, trying to appear flippant. Suzie twiddled the pen she’d been using to circle things in
her files.

“So,” she said, putting pressure on the syllable like it meant everything in the world. “What have you planned? You have planned something, right? You can’t just not go out with your fiancé on Valentine’s Day.”

Joseph tried not to cringe at the word “fiancé”. It seemed to make everything so much more… real.

“Valentine’s Day isn’t really a thing we do,” he tried, an attempt to avoid the question altogether.

“Really?” she asked, sounding surprised. “Caesar used to love Valentine’s Day when we were younger! It was his favorite holiday, apart from Christmas.”

Joseph huffed out a laugh. Caesar’s love for Valentine’s wasn’t something that had escaped his attention. The guy hadn’t had a dateless year since he discovered dating at the age of ten, and even when he didn’t have a pre-planned date, he would always go out and get one on the fly, the suave bastard. Joseph, on the other hand, wasn’t too much into Valentine’s. Or at all into Valentine’s. Sure, he did try to put a little effort into it when/if he had a date on the day, which quite frankly wasn’t often, but he’d never gone out of his way for it.

Suzie was staring at him expectantly so he cleared his throat and said the first thing that came into his head.

“We’re just gonna have a nice dinner out and then relax at home,” he said, playing it safe. That’s what couples did on Valentine’s Day, right? Like a normal date, but with extra dash of hearts and shit. “Haven’t decided on the place yet, though.”

“You haven’t made reservations yet?” Suzie gasped. Oops, clearly he shouldn’t have said that.

“How do you think you can get a table at any romantic place for Valentine’s Day if you don’t have reservations by now?!”

“How the fuck should I know? I haven’t really done this whole… Valentine’s Day thing often, you know!” Joseph huffed, not entirely sure himself why he was so defensive. It was an imaginary date after all. Suzie sighed and tutted. Then she brightened up.

“Oh! I am about to become your favorite person in the world!” she exclaimed. Joseph really doubted that, as much as Joseph loathed to admit it, in the sense that there was probably nothing in the dating department that Joseph could do that Caesar couldn’t do a hundred times better and with half the effort. But that really didn’t mean he wanted Suzie to get them a table. He didn’t actually want to go out. He was pretty sure Caesar didn’t want to go out either, at least not with him. He’d just been making shit
up like he always did, why was the damn woman so insistent? Could Joseph win at nothing
anymore?

“Hush, you doofus,” Suzie said. “I’m gonna make sure Caesar will think this day is the most magical
day of his life. Until the wedding day that is.” She winked. Joseph didn’t groan. That would
probably have been suspicious.

“Thanks… I guess,” he said instead and made a hasty retreat into the kitchen with the pretense of
going to see if Caesar needed any help.

Chapter End Notes

Hiya everyone! I hope you enjoyed chapter 4! I had wanted to get this out a bit earlier,
but my great amazing the best beta has a lot of school work atm, so she didn't have time.
It's okay tho, cause it's out now and I really appreciate the work she does regardless!
Anyway, tune in next time for a very special Valentine's day chapter~ Can't wait to see
what happens! See ya!
The most romantic day of the year(?)

Chapter Summary

They go on a not-really-a-date dinner date and Joseph has no chill.

Chapter Notes

Heyyyyy guys. Happy Valentine's Day! Thanks for sticking with me this long, it means a lot to know you guys enjoy this silly story. Your comments always make my day~~ This chapter is kiiinda unbeta'd atm, because bae's school work is intense, butt I wanted to give it to you guys anyway. It's Valentine's Day after all. Gotta post on Valentine's Day.

Sooo, I'm not gonna be able to maintain a once a week uploading schedule, because first of all holy shit, and second of all I'd run out of story super quickly. Don't worry, I'll keep writing as long as you guys keep reading, but it will probably be more along the lines of twice a month or so? We'll see.

Next time we'll get back to wedding planning again, heehee~ see you then!

EDIT ON 02/15
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT HAPPENED AO3 CUT THE CHAPTER SHORT SOMEHOW??? It was missing like a fourth of the text ;___; idk I fixed it now I'm sorry for everyone who read the not full chapter I'll mention it in the beginning of chapter 6 in case someone misses it. Again, sorry I guess I wasn't paying attention, I have no idea when the text got cut....

He should have told Caesar about Suzie’s plan to meddle immediately. He should have told Caesar in the days that followed, during the several hours they spent training together at the gym, or the even more several hours they spent at home in the evenings. He should have told Caesar at any point, really, it didn't matter, he just really should've told him. He didn’t. And then it was Valentine’s Day.

Fuck my life, thought Joseph as he opened his eyes, his phone buzzing under his pillow with an onslaught of new texts. He stared at the ceiling for a moment, wanting nothing more than to roll over and go back to sleep, but he was awake, utterly and helplessly awake, and sleep was long gone.

After a while he pushed himself into a sitting position, and reluctantly dug the phone out. It was Suzie. Who else.

Joseph groaned as he noticed the clock in the corner of the screen. Who got up at 8 o'clock on a Sunday, Valentine’s Day or no? Well, he wouldn’t be able to fall asleep anymore anyway, so might as well read the accursed texts that had woken him up. It better be damn important, though Joseph was pretty sure it wasn’t.

« she got u a table!!!»

That was the first of many, many texts. Joseph groaned again. Since there had been no news on the matter for a while he’d been hoping that she wouldn’t have been able to get one.
Much like luck, it seemed greatness was also a very subjective concept in the life of Joseph Joestar.

The next few texts were just Suzie's overly excited expressions of excitement, and then finally one comprised of the exact address and short directions to the restaurant. It also had the place’s name, which Joseph for one had never heard of. He was pretty sure it was French though. He thought that was the end of it, but as he scrolled down there was one more text under that one.

To his horror, it read: «send me snapchats 😊»

Joseph placed the phone on the bed and buried his face in his hands.

They were gonna have to go on this date, weren’t they? If they didn’t, Suzie’s friend would surely ask her about it when they met the next time. And Suzie wanted pictures? Maybe he could’ve blamed their way out of the date, telling her that they did something else instead, but if she wanted pictures, they would have to do something. For a moment he entertained the idea of telling her that he wasn’t comfortable with sending her pictures, but that would be a lie and she would know it. He snapchatted her about anything, and while Caesar was a slightly more reserved about what he sent, he had been known to take pictures during his dates in the past. No, refusing to send pictures would certainly make Suzie suspicious, and if in addition they didn’t even go to the restaurant, all the lies would tumble down like a house of cards in a breeze.

“Fuck my life,” Joseph said out loud, and stalked off to take a shower.

When Caesar finally trudged into the kitchen, Joseph had already taken his shower, dressed, made breakfast and eaten it, and was now enjoying a second cup of coffee, leaning against the kitchen counter.

“Morning, sunshine,” Joseph said with a smile, taking a sip.

“Nngmmph,” said Caesar, eyes still half closed and his hair an absolute mess. Joseph passed him a cup of coffee, which he took and consumed in record time. Then he sighed, stretched and blinked. “Morning, Jojo,” he said, pouring himself another cup. “How long have you been up?”

Joseph checked his phone. “Hour and a half.” He reached behind him on the counter, and picked up a plate with a cover on it, handing it to Caesar. “I made some breakfast for you too. I was thinking of bringing it to you to bed, but you kinda ruined that surprise.” He grinned as Caesar accepted the plate and lifted the cover to inspect its contents.

“Oh, an omelet, how fancy,” Caesar said with an amused smile, taking the offered utensils and turning to leave the small kitchen in favor of the table in the living room. “What’s the occasion?”

Joseph picked up the coffee cup Caesar had set down on the counter and followed his friend out of the kitchen.

“Valentine’s Day?” he suggested, sitting down on the sofa next to Caesar and giving him his coffee back. Caesar chuckled.

“That’s cute,” he said, setting the cup on the table. “But you really don’t need to do something like that for me, since we’re not actually a couple, or anything.” He took a bite and then frowned. “You didn’t get up at eight just to make this for me, right?” he asked, side-eyeing Joseph, who snorted.
“In your dreams, maybe,” he said, at which Caesar seemed to relax slightly. “I was woken up by a litany of texts from Suzie.” Caesar nodded in understanding and continued to eat.

“So what did she say?” he asked after a while. “I assume it was at least moderately important if she sent you texts at that hour on a Sunday.”

“Yeah, about that…” said Joseph, scratching the back of his head. Caesar picked up on his hesitation, because of course he did, and tensed again ever so slightly. “Do you have any plans for tonight? I know you usually have a date for Valentine’s and all…”

“Not this time, no…” Caesar said, wary. “Since we’re pretending to be engaged I’m not going to risk being seen on a date with someone that’s not you. Why?”

“See, the thing is… Suzie seems to be in kind of an understanding that we are going on a date tonight,” Joseph continued, trying to choose his words carefully.

“That’s fine, it’s only to be expected,” Caesar said. “Why is what Suzie thinks we’re doing relevant to what we are doing?”

“Well, she asked me about it last week, and since we hadn’t really talked about it or anything, I told her we were just going to have a nice dinner out and then relax at home. Something simple, y’know,” Joseph explained. Caesar nodded for him to go on. “But then I accidentally mentioned we didn’t know where we were going to go have dinner, because I didn’t want to get too specific about this fake date, and well… She kinda arranged a table for us at a place one of her classmate’s family owns.”

“What.”

“I tried to tell her no,” Joseph hurried to add. Caesar was staring at him quite blankly, which was even scarier than furious Caesar would have been. “But you know how she is, she won’t take no for an answer once she sets her mind on something! So, uh, if you don’t mind… We should probably have dinner at that restaurant tonight? So she won’t be suspicious, and stuff…”

Joseph waited as Caesar stared at him. There was a long silence.

“I need more coffee,” Caesar announced and stood up, disappearing into the kitchen. Joseph waited some more, twiddling his thumbs. Caesar reappeared after a minute and sat back down on the couch, a heavy sigh escaping his lips. “Can’t be helped, I guess. Could be worse. What’s the name of the place?”

Joseph checked the message Suzie had sent him. ‘Le Mouton Noir’. Over on 7th avenue.”

Caesar hummed, stuffing the rest of the omelet in his mouth. “I think I’ve heard of the place. Let’s hope they’re good.” He drained the rest of the coffee and handed the cup to Joseph with a smile. “Your turn to do the dishes. I’m gonna take a shower.”

And then he left. Joseph let out a long breath and stood up, gathering all the dishes and taking them back to the kitchen. As he listened to the shower start to run he thought to himself that Caesar was right. Could be worse.

~x~

It was so much worse.

They arrived at the restaurant at 5:35, after 45 minutes of picking clothes, 25 minutes of fighting with
Joseph’s hair—to no avail, the tuft was unconquerable—and two wrong turns during their half an hour walk, because Caesar refused to take a taxi like a normal NYC resident.

Well, at least the walking had woken Joseph’s appetite.

The restaurant was… not small, exactly, though not particularly large either, tucked away in the street corner amidst the skyscrapers. The little beady eyes on the stylized silhouette of the black sheep which was their logo stared at Joseph from next to the restaurant’s name on the door. Joseph stared back, unwavering, until Caesar rolled his eyes and pushed the door open. A little bell above the door alerted the maître d’ to their presence and she greeted them from behind a podium.

“Welcome to ‘Le Mouton Noir’!” she announced cheerily. She opened up the ledger that was resting on the podium, no doubt holding all the reservations. Sure enough, she asked, “Do you have a reservation?”

“Uh, yes,” Joseph said, stepping forward while Caesar took in their surroundings. “We’re a bit late, but there should be a table by the name of… Joestar?”

For a horrific fleeting second Joseph realized he hadn’t asked Suzie what name the reservation would be under, but the girl’s face lit up with recognition and she smiled.

“Ah, so you’re Suzie’s friends! This way, please,” she said, picking up a few menus and leading the way into the dining area.

The place seemed much bigger on the inside, although it still housed only a few dozen tables. The lights were pleasantly dimmed, not dark enough to obscure vision but creating a nice, intimate atmosphere. There was a fireplace at the far end of the room, with—to Joseph’s surprise—a live fire crackling inside it, and a large mirror with ornamental framing hanging over the mantel. Other than that the décor was pretty generic; there were dark curtains on the windows, as well as draped against the walls, the tablecloths were a pure white, and there were small candles on the tables. And Joseph was painfully aware of the fact that all around them were only couples.

None of them a same-sex couple.

They really stood out, didn't they? Goddamnit.

“Here you go,” the girl said, gesturing at a table in the far corner of the room, quite close to the fire place. Joseph hoped it wouldn’t get too hot. She set down the menus as the two of them reached the table. “My name is Debbie, and I’ll be your waitress tonight. I’ll let you guys settle down, and be right back with some water for you, okay?”

“That would be lovely, thank you,” said Caesar with a charming smile and Joseph could swear he saw Debbie flush. It could’ve just been the lighting, of course, or the heat from the fireplace, but considering the speed at which she turned around and hurried off, he was pretty sure it was neither. He grinned to himself.

“Here you go,” the girl said, gesturing at a table in the far corner of the room, quite close to the fire place. Joseph hoped it wouldn’t get too hot. She set down the menus as the two of them reached the table. “My name is Debbie, and I’ll be your waitress tonight. I’ll let you guys settle down, and be right back with some water for you, okay?”

“That would be lovely, thank you,” said Caesar with a charming smile and Joseph could swear he saw Debbie flush. It could’ve just been the lighting, of course, or the heat from the fireplace, but considering the speed at which she turned around and hurried off, he was pretty sure it was neither. He grinned to himself.

“We’ve been here for a grand total of one minute and you’ve already charmed our waitress,” he said to Caesar, who was draping his coat on the back of his chair and taking a seat. “Should I be jealous?”

“I don’t know. Are you?” Caesar asked easily, a small smirk on his face. Joseph let out a laugh. They studied their menus in silence for a while. “Huh, this place is actually a bit cheaper than I imagined,” Caesar said after a moment. “Still kind of expensive, though.”

“Don’t worry about that,” said Joseph, waving his hand. “I dragged you here today, I’ll pay for the
both of us."

“What? Are you sure?” Caesar said, blinking in surprise. “I mean, I know your family's worth a fortune, but I’m the one with the steady income here.”

“It’s fine, dude. I have enough savings of my own to treat you every once in a while. I shoulda told Suzie to stop meddling but didn’t, so I think it’s what I deserve.”

“Okay… If you say so.”

Joseph grinned at him. Caesar had a look on his face, the one that meant that he still wanted to say something but didn’t know how to articulate his thoughts. Joseph waited for a moment, but that was the moment Debbie arrived with their water, and in the end Caesar didn’t say anything else.

“So, have you guys decided?” she asked after pouring them glasses of water and producing a small note pad from the pocket of her apron. “I can give you suggestions if you need. We have a Valentine’s Day special menu, which includes two appetizers, two main courses, and one dessert to share.”

“I don’t know if we need appetizers,” Joseph said, glancing across the table at Caesar. He shrugged. “So I think we’ll just stick to the main menu.”

“Okie dokie,” Debbie said with a smile. “So what can I get you?”

“I’ll have the *coq au vin,*” Caesar said, closing the menu. Joseph snorted. Caesar kicked him in the shin under the table.

“Are… you okay?” Debbie asked as Joseph made a strangled sound.

“Peachy,” said Joseph through gritted teeth. “I’ll have the lamb stew.”

There was a pause.

“Right,” said Debbie, and scribbled their order in her pad. “What about drinks? We have some very good French wines if you’re interested.”

After a few minutes of wine talk—Joseph didn’t know shit about wines, so he just zoned out for a moment—Debbie left, and Joseph and Caesar were alone again. Or, not alone, there were other diners around them, but as Joseph looked around he noticed that no one was paying any attention to anything but the person on the other side of their table. Joseph was quite relieved to notice it. When he turned back to Caesar, the Italian was studying him quietly.

“What?” Joseph asked, suddenly feeling defensive, though he didn’t know why. Caesar squinted, but then shook his head.

“No, it’s nothing.” He smiled slightly and Joseph’s heart did something very, very weird in his chest. “This is honestly kinda nice. It’s been a while since I’ve been on a date. Even if, you know, this isn’t strictly speaking a normal date…” He laughed softly. Joseph swallowed. “And it’s nice to spend some time with you, somewhere else than at home or the gym. It feels like it’s been *forever* since we last did something fun outside the apartment.” Caesar hummed, quiet and content, his eyes drifting around the dining area, until settling on Joseph’s face again. Joseph felt heat rising up to his cheeks. Caesar blinked. “You okay? You’re looking a bit flushed… Is the fireplace too hot? We can switch places, if you want.”

“No! I mean, it’s... it’s fine,” Joseph hurried to say. “I can manage the fireplace, no sweat.”

The conversation fell into a more familiar—and safer—territory after that, and Joseph decided to worry about his potential heart malfunction later. It was no big deal, really. He could handle a few heart flutters directed at Caesar; he had done so before, and he would do so again. There was absolutely no reason to mention them to Caesar, it was just minor attraction, right? And Caesar was an attractive guy, no reason for Joseph to try to deny that, all smart and witty and very handsome, beautiful blond hair and good physique... He was not as buff as Joseph of course, but still, his muscles were—

Joseph forcibly stopped that line of thinking and returned to the conversation at hand feeling only slightly flustered. Debbie arrived with their food, which provided further distraction from Joseph’s weird thoughts. What was wrong with him today? Must’ve been the Valentine’s Day mood, right, the romance was starting to rub on, despite the fakeness of their date.

Which reminded him.

“Oh, hey, smile,” Joseph told Caesar, who barely had time to look up from his plate before Joseph snapped his photo.

“What are you doing?” he asked, frowning at Joseph. Joseph shrugged halfheartedly.

“Suzie wanted photographic evidence of our romantic night out.” He grinned. “Don’t worry, you look just fine.” He couldn’t be bothered to do much to the picture, filter-wise, but he couldn’t help putting a caption on it.

«not the only time he eats cock tonite»

Joseph snickered as sent the picture. Caesar sighed and shook his head, probably guessing the level of maturity of the caption.

“As long as you only send it to Suzie,” he said and resigned to eating. The reply from Suzie was almost instantaneous, another barrage of texts, but Joseph ignored them, switching his phone to silent and pocketing it with a smile.

They ate, making comfortable small talk while they were at it, discussing Joseph’s studies, his impending graduation and plans for next year, as well as Caesar’s job, casual nonsense, and even the wedding a bit. Neither of them were too keen on a huge ceremony, so they decided to try and narrow the guest list down to their families and closest friends. Around 50 people, hopefully, absolutely not more than 100. Most of them would be Caesar’s family members anyway.

“Your family is insanely large,” Joseph said, leaning back on his chair. He was feeling pleasantly full, his plate practically licked clean.

“Yeah, you’ve informed me about that before,” said Caesar, wiping his mouth with his napkin and then sighing. The soft smile was back on his face. “I must say, the food here was really good. We should come back sometime.”

“Under a bit different circumstances, though,” Joseph said, reaching forward to play with the small, flickering flame of the candle sat between them on the table. Caesar’s eyes flicked towards the flame, and the corner of one twitched, but he didn’t comment on it.

“Right. Maybe we can come here on our anniversary,” he said instead. Joseph laughed.

“What a lovely idea, darling,” he said, just as Debbie walked up to the table. She paused for a
moment, but then pushed forward.

“How’s it going over here?” she asked politely. “Are you finished?”

“Yes, thank you, the food was delicious,” said Caesar as Debbie started to clear their plates.

“That’s good to hear,” she said. “Would you like dessert?”

Joseph and Caesar exchanged a look.

“I think we’re good, thanks,” Joseph said and tried to copy the charming smile Caesar always gave to every cute person ever. “Just the check, please.”

“Right-o, just a moment!” She left again, and returned a few moments later, in her hands the bill in a small leather binder and a... piece of chocolate cake?

She set them both down on their table.

“Compliments of the house,” she explained when both Caesar and Joseph stared up at her in confusion. “Our way of saying congratulations for the engagement.” She winked and left again.

“That was... unexpected,” said Caesar, watching her retreating back.

“Hey, free cake, I’m not gonna complain,” Joseph said with a grin, picking up one of the two forks on the plate. “Finally something good to come out of our situation.” He cut off a rather large chunk and stuffed it in his mouth. Then he groaned. “God, that’s good cake. Here, try it.”

He grinned as he held a piece of cake to Caesar’s face, inches away from his mouth. Caesar blinked, slightly startled, and then a grin spread on his lips as well.

“Okay,” he said and leaned in. His eyelids fluttered shut. His lips closed over the cake. A near sinful sound escaped his throat.

Joseph’s heart leapt out of his chest.

Shit.

“Holy shit, Jojo,” Caesar laughed. “The look on your face.” Caesar sighed and picked up the other fork. “You’re right, though, that is some really good cake.”

Joseph was silent for a while, blinking at Caesar, whose only concern at the moment seemed to be the piece of cake. Then he mentally slapped himself, and picked up the bill.

They left the restaurant after Joseph paid—he left a hearty tip for Debbie—and started their walk home. The weather was chilly but clear, and Joseph could appreciate clear at the moment. He watched his breath come out in white puffs and he wondered what the hell had happened during their dinner. Everything had been fine, except a few instances when it had seemed like his brain had ceased to work properly. It was weird. It was confusing. He didn’t particularly like it.

“Hey, Jojo?” Caesar said at one point. He’d stopped walking.

“Hm? What’s up?” asked Joseph, drawing to a halt next to him.

“Ah, well,” Caesar started, seeming to struggle putting his thoughts to words. “I just wanted to say... thanks, I guess. I know our situation is kinda weird at the moment, and I know this wasn’t really a— But I had fun. I’m glad we did this.”
And then he smiled again, radiant and charming and just a bit cocky, but oh so Caesar, and Joseph smiled as well.

“Yeah? I’m glad too,” he said. “I mean, you’re my best friend. Of course I like spending time with you! Even if things sometimes get weird, I know we can push through.”

Something flashed behind Caesar’s eyes, something Joseph found vaguely familiar, but it was gone as soon as it appeared, replaced by amusement.

“That was so corny, Jojo, I can’t believe you said that,” Caesar snickered. Joseph felt himself flush, though his face was probably already red due to the cold.

“Wha— Excuse me, what about all that stuff you said? You tryna tell me that wasn’t corny?” Joseph huffed, but he was beginning to smile despite himself. “If I’m corny, you’re the king of corny!”

Caesar, who had so far been trying to hold his laughter behind his glove, burst out laughing. Joseph chuckled alongside him. Caesar took a deep breath and smirked.

“Thanks, Jojo,” he said. “For everything. Now let’s go home, if we keep dawdling here we’ll freeze.”

They continued, walking in comfortable silence the rest of the way back.
Just keep (Hamon) breathing

Chapter Summary

Tibetan monks are great at raising babies! And, what is love anyway?

Chapter Notes

So hello everyone! I'm so, so sorry this took me over a month to finish ugh. I meant to take just a small break from writing, but then suddenly I had two conventions to go to and a cosplay to make in a week and a half and sooo much other stuff all at once. And for some reason it was really hard to get the beginning finished I don't know why the rest of it was so easy and fun. Anyway, here's the actual chapter 6. Finally. I originally wanted to delete the little notice-fake-chapter, but then I got such lovely comments on it that I couldn't. So, I'm sorry if you don't get like.. a new chapter notification or something. But yeah, I'll just let you get to the chapter now. Thank you again for all of your support you guys are the best~!

OH! And just to make sure you people know, the previous chapter DOESN'T end with the snapchat. There were issues with my posting it, and I don't want anyone to miss out the rest of their totally-not-but-totally-is date. Just fyi to anyone who hasn't seen the rest of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Please tell me you've finalized your guest list by now,” Suzie said by way of greeting. Joseph, who had overheard the girl's loud voice through Caesar's phone, grinned but didn't comment. His continuous attention to the phone call wasn't subtle, however, even when he pretended to busy himself with the dumbbells.

Caesar sat up and dabbed sweat off his forehead with a small towel he then draped around his neck.

“No, Suzie, believe it or not, we did finish it,” he said. They had already decided on a relatively small ceremony, and after days of shuffling names they finally managed to narrow their list down to 75 people. Most of them ended up being family, although there were also Caesar's work friends and Joseph's classmates. The Joestar estate could, in all likelihood, host a much, much bigger wedding party, but both Joseph and Caesar hadn't been too keen on pretend-inviting a whole lot of people. “Grand, but not big,” was how Joseph had put it. And Caesar had agreed.

“Finally,” Suzie huffed on the other end. “You've been playing at this back and forth for weeks, I'm coming over right now to get it, before you decide it's no good after all.”

“You can't do that! We're at the gym!” Caesar hurried to say, as the girl's statement was immediately followed by shuffling of clothes and keys. Joseph snickered. Suzie huffed again. “How about you drop by tomorrow? Joseph is at school, but I have the evening shift so I am free for most of the day.

“Planning our wedding without me? I'm hurt, Caesarino!” he heard Joseph's dramatic wail, which morphed quickly into another snicker. Caesar rolled his eyes and ignored him.
“Hnnn, tomorrow's no good for me,” Suzie was saying, sounding very disappointed. There was a soft tapping noise from her end as well, like a pen on paper. “Unless I can drop by well before nine, but knowing you that's probably not smart.”

Caesar laughed, a short huff of breath. “Yeah, I've been told I'm not the most agreeable during mornings,” he said. Joseph snorted loudly. Caesar barely managed to resist the urge to kick him in the shin, but he did direct a glare in his direction.

“Ah, well, I'm sure Jojo can manage giving me the list in the morning,” Suzie said cheerily. “Because I want that list, goddamn it. Just make sure you have all the names written down by then. And I can drop by later this week to discuss it in more detail.” Caesar hummed in agreement. The following silence felt heavy. He waited; it seemed clear Suzie had something else to say.

“I'm scared to even ask,” she finally managed, “but have you settled on the date yet?”

He turned to look at Joseph. Joseph looked back. He'd heard the question. They had, somewhat purposefully, been avoiding the topic of the date. It felt like the point of no return, the tangible manifestation of the feeling of “this is going to happen”. They both knew they couldn't put it off forever, they both knew they needed to choose a date or the jig would be up, and it was too early to bail without losing face, they knew it, but… it was impossible to shake off the realness that having an actual date would bring.

Suzie sighed as the silence stretched on, the lack of an answer serving as answer enough.

“Just… try to decide,” she said, voice gentle, but firm. “We can’t move things along until we have a date.”

“Right,” Caesar heard himself say, his eyes still fixed on Joseph's face. Joseph swallowed and Caesar’s gaze dropped momentarily down to trail the bobbing of his Adam’s apple.

Suzie sighed again. “Alright, I'll let you get back to your workout. Talk to you later.”

“Okay. Bye, Suzie.”

The call disconnected with a click. Caesar closed his eyes and pressed the phone against his forehead.

“So… wedding date, huh?” Joseph said after a moment, voice kept overly casual.

“Ugh,” said Caesar. “Can we talk about that later? I'd rather concentrate on this for now.” He pointedly sat back down on the bench and rolled his shoulders, ready to continue his interrupted bench pressing.

“Talk about what later?” came a new voice. Caesar took a deep breath to quell his annoyance and pushed himself up on his elbows to peek towards the sound. Messina and Loggins had made their way across the gym hall to the back, where Caesar and Joseph were. Loggins gave them a small salute as Messina greeted them with, “Evening, boys.”

“Hiya,” Joseph said. “Caesar just got off the phone with Suzie, who’s pestering us about the wedding date again.”

“She has every reason to,” Caesar sighed. “We really should just pick a day.”

“You were planning on having the wedding in the fall, weren’t you?” Loggins asked as he started his stretching. “I don’t know much about organizing a wedding, but I do know it takes quite a bit of
time. I hope you realize you have around six months left.”

“Yes, we know,” Caesar gritted out. “But we just can’t seem to be able to settle on a date. It really shouldn’t be this hard, should it?”

“It’s different for everyone,” said Messina. “Especially if you want the wedding date to have significance beside the obvious. Like the day you first met, or had your first date.”

“We don’t really have significant dates in the autumn, though, do we?” Joseph said. He’d switched to a heavier set of dumbbells at some point. “Most of those are in the winter, I think.”

“You can always just choose a date that looks good,” Loggins suggested. “The first day of a month is a rather popular choice, or dates with repeating numbers.”

“Yeah, I remember the craze of November 11th 2011,” Joseph chuckled. “I guess the first of September could be a pretty good date. What do you think, Caesar?”

Caesar shrugged. “I’m not too partial to any specific day.”

“Well then, there you go,” Messina laughed. “Now you have your date. September first.”

Caesar took a deep breath. Guess they had their deadline. Just under six months.

“Seeing as that’s taken care of,” Joseph said, interrupting Caesar’s thought process before he could start to overthink things. “Are you guys ready to start training?”

“Of course,” said Loggins, rolling his shoulders.

“Shall we?” said Messina. The two older men had apparently done their warmups earlier, and Caesar and Joseph stood up from their benches and followed them out of the gym’s main room and into one of the reservable training rooms. They were spacious rooms, with padded flooring and mirrors lining one wall, used for group exercising, like yoga or Zumba or whatever else the gym provided. Caesar had never personally attended any of the groups, although Suzie was part of a weekly modern dance class.

“I hope you boys have remembered your breathing exercises,” Messina said. “Because future training will not be easy if you keep slacking off. I’m looking at you, Joseph.”

“Hey, what?” Joseph huffed, pressing a fake-offended hand to his chest. “I take breathing very seriously. It’s a matter of life and death for me!”

He turned to Caesar with a shit eating grin on his face. Caesar suppressed the grin that almost made its way to his face and instead raised his eyebrows at the Joestar. Joseph blew a raspberry at him.

“Just because you’re Master Lisa Lisa’s son, doesn’t mean you get special treatment,” Loggins said, nodding. Joseph rolled his eyes, but didn’t retort. “Now, we’ll start with basic Hamon breathing.”

Caesar closed his eyes, and took a deep breath, focusing on the sensation of his lungs filling with air. Breathing properly was a crucial part of the martial art he and Joseph practiced: Hamon.

Basically unheard of in most of the world, it had been discovered by Jonathan and William in one of their expeditions to the Himalayas, when they’d come across a temple deep within the mountains. The head of the temple, a monk by the name of Tonpetty, was a Hamon master, and after deeming the two men worthy, had decided to teach them his art. When Jonathan and William finally left the temple—after extending their expedition several times to learn more about Hamon—they were
accompanied by two of Tonpetty’s former students…

“Wait, wait, wait,” said Suzie, frowning and squinting at Joseph. The man stopped his epic tale of adventure and pouted as Suzie rubbed her temples with her index fingers. Caesar kept watching the scene from the sofa with an amused smile, and took a swig of his beer. “I know the story of how nonno Will and grandpa Jonathan found Hamon in the mountains, but what does that have to do with anything? I asked you why there’s no one from your mother’s side on the guest list.”

“I was just getting to that,” Joseph said with a dramatic eye roll, and leaned his elbows on the sofa table. Joseph and Caesar had managed to clean up quite a bit of the mess all of Suzie’s magazines and binders had wrought upon their living room, packing up everything that didn’t have anything even remotely interesting, but there were still papers and magazines strewn everywhere on the table. Joseph picked up a stray picture of a ten tier wedding cake and set it aside. “Can I continue now? Or are you gonna interrupt me again mid-story?” Suzie moved her fingers across her lips and nodded. “Right then. Where was I…?

“So, when the expedition finally returned to the states, two of Tonpetty’s followers, Dire and Straizo, came with them. Because they didn’t really have anywhere else to be, they lived with granny and gramps at the Estate as they studied different cultures or whatever. I don’t actually know why they left the temple in the first place, but I’ve always just assumed it was to learn more about the world. Anyway, this goes on for a few years, when one day Straizo comes home with a kid. Like an actual, living, breathing, human child. Everyone was so surprised, cause no one knew where he’d gotten her nor had anyone had any idea he’d wanted a kid, but there he was, with a baby. Or like… a toddler, I guess, she was about eighteen months old at that point. At the time, my dad was just turning one himself, so granny Erina had all the equipment to take care of a child that age at the Estate, and they took care of their children together.”

“And that baby was Auntie Lisa Lisa?” Suzie asked, eyes wide. “I can’t believe I’ve never heard this story before.”

“Yeah, but it kinda makes sense,” said Joseph, rolling a pen between his fingers absently. “They had a bit of a falling out, mom and Straizo, when my dad died. So I never really knew him and she doesn’t like to talk about him that much.”

“We should invite him!” Suzie exclaimed suddenly, slamming her palms onto the sofa table, making it rock vigorously. Caesar hurried to snatch the two bottles of beer on the table before they toppled. He directed a glare at his cousin, though she didn’t seem to even notice it. “Weddings are a family celebration after all! Even if it’s through adoption, he is still her father, and your grandfather. I’m sure he’d love to attend!”

“As I understand it, Straizo returned to the Tibetan temple, as had Dire much earlier,” Caesar said, settling the bottles back once the table was stable again. “Nonno Will kept in touch with them throughout the years, and I believe Jonathan has done the same, so contacting them might be quite easy, actually.”

“Ehh, I dunno,” Joseph said, rubbing the back of his neck. “As I said, I don’t really know the guy, and he only knew me as a baby, so… In any case, I should probably talk with mom about it first.”

“But you definitely should talk with her,” Suzie said, pointing a finger in his face. “Family is very important.”

“Yes, yes, I’ll talk to her,” Joseph promised, pushing the finger away. “Now, do you have any other objections to the list, or can we go with this?”
Suzie sat back down and inspected the guest list in front of her once more. She squinted, and hummed thoughtfully. Joseph rolled his eyes again.

“Yep, I think this is good!” she said with a bright smile. Then she sniggered. “Though… I think it’s kinda sad how little friends you’ve invited outside your families.”

“Aren’t you the one who said, literally ten seconds ago, ‘family is very important’?” Joseph countered and leaned back with a self-satisfied smirk. “Your next line will be ‘Doesn’t mean my only friends are my family members!’”

“Doesn’t mean my only friends are—” She stopped, and blinked. Then she slapped Joseph on the arm with a huff. “I hate it when you do that!” Joseph just laughed. Even Caesar chuckled a bit, which was something Joseph always counted as a win. “You haven’t been doing that for ages, why did you have to pick up again?”

“Eh, some situations are easier to read than others,” Joseph shrugged, before smirking at Caesar. “Remember the last time I did it with you, Caesarino?” And to Suzie, “He got so mad, you know.”

“Well, maybe if you didn’t do it at such inopportune moments, then—” Caesar started, but was interrupted by Joseph snorting.

“I was supposed to be his wingman,” he told Suzie, who hadn’t heard the story before and was leaning forward, listening intently. “Not that mister Casanova needs one, but still. And he was… he was talking to this girl, dropping these terribly cheesy pickup lines, and you know I’ve seen this happen countless times, I know exactly what he’s gonna say. And I say ‘Your next line is “I could show you the world, signorina, but nothing in it would compare to your beauty”’, like a second before he actually goes and says it. Oh, man, he looked so embarrassed!” He was barely holding back his laughter.

“She laughed at me, idiota!” Caesar scoffed, and threw a pen at Joseph’s head. It hit him in the cheek, but it did nothing to stop the giggles erupting from his mouth. “And I’ll have you know, she had been very enamored until that point. Sometimes people like hearing cheesy pickup lines.”

“Hold on, ‘last time’?” said Suzie, confused. Joseph’s mind screeched to a halt. Had he said that? He had said that! The implications were crystal clear. “If Caesar was trying to pick up a girl, that means it must’ve happened before you two got together… but it hasn’t been three years since you last did the thing, surely.”

“Uhhhh,” said Joseph, eyes flicking to Caesar, whose face had been drained of all color. It had in fact not been three years since then. Rather, it had been three months, at Joseph’s Uni Christmas party. “D-did I… say that? I just meant, it’s a, uh, one of those times that really stuck to me. Cause it was… funny.”

“Hehe, it was pretty funny,” Suzie giggled. Joseph felt his chest deflate. Crisis averted, somehow. “Our suave little Caesar, getting his ass handed to him while picking up girls.” She giggled again. Caesar was quickly turning from white to red.

“Can we talk about something else, please?” he asked. “Like… anything else?”

“Alright, alright,” said Suzie, shifting her sitting position on the floor. “Sorry. We’re just teasing.” Joseph flashed Caesar a grin, and was met with a glare. Well, he did deserve a glare, he supposed. “Back to the matter at hand,” Suzie said, drawing all the attention back to herself. “Now that you have a date, and the number of guests, do you boys have a caterer?”
“We need to get the caterer this early?” asked Joseph, flabbergasted. How long could the food preparation take?

“I think ‘Trattoria Trussardi’ is kind of a given, and I have no doubt they’ll be happy to do catering, but I haven’t actually talked with Antonio yet,” Caesar said, completely ignoring Joseph. “I was planning on dropping by tomorrow before work.”

“That’s good,” Suzie said, and crossed out a line in her to do –list. “What about a florist? Photography?”

“No florist yet, but the photographer is arranged,” Caesar said, leaning back on the couch slightly and pulling out his phone. “You remember my old college friend, Mark?”

“The Mark who is one of your groomsmen?” asked Suzie with a sly smile. Caesar paused, just for a second.

“Right,” he said, and passed Suzie his phone. Joseph leaned over curiously, to peek over her shoulder at the screen. “Anyway, his fiancée is a freelance photographer, and she said she would be delighted to be our wedding photographer. She even promised us a family-and-friends discount.”

“These are brilliant,” Suzie said with a bright smile. “Great job on landing this.”

Joseph watched as Suzie skimmed through the photographs on the phone, each one expertly taken and full of feeling. The photos ranged from nature shots, to portraits, to kids’ birthday parties, and even to weddings. It was clear that the girl had skills, managing to capture all her subjects smiling, laughing, beautiful. Even the shots with nothing but nature were breathtaking, somehow conveying so much emotion to the viewer with nothing but subtle changes in colors. Suzie handed him the phone as she continued her discussion with Caesar, but Joseph wasn’t paying attention to their words. His full attention was on the photos on the screen. He swiped through them for a bit, and then he stopped, his thumb hovering just above the screen as he couldn’t switch to the next one.

It was a wedding photo, the most typical wedding photo there was, with the bride and the groom, and all the joy they were radiating. They were outside in a garden, situated beneath an arching gateway with flowers in full bloom behind them. The bride was sitting, the hem of her white dress falling elegantly from her knees, the blue flowers of the bridal bouquet on her lap bringing out the blue of her eyes. She was smiling, eyes crinkled at the corners and white teeth all visible, and she was stunning, but not what had caught Joseph’s attention. Because while the bride was stunning, there was also the groom. He was standing beside his new wife, a hand on her shoulder and a smile on his lips, and while the bride was looking at the camera, he was not. No, he was looking at her.

His eyes were soft, gentle, the look on his face so filled with joy and warmth and adoration, that Joseph felt his own heart squeeze in his chest as he looked at the photo. And he thought, this, this is what love is, this must be it, to look at someone like this, and feel like your heart might explode with happiness. And he looked at this groom look at his love, and he felt a yearning somewhere in him, a desperate tug in his heart, pulling him towards something, though he didn’t know what, couldn’t quite figure out—

“Jojo?” came a voice and Joseph gasped quietly and looked up. Caesar was holding his hand out to him and for a moment the urge to take it and just hold on almost won, but then Joseph realized he just wanted his phone back.

“You okay there? You were kinda spaced out…” Caesar said as Joseph handed him the phone. His eyes flicked to the picture on the screen, before he switched it off and put it away.
“Yeah, yeah, sorry,” Joseph said, and cleared his throat. “The pictures were so good, I got kinda absorbed into them. What… were we talking about?”

“We got everything sorted out for today,” said Suzie, who gave Joseph an amused, albeit slightly worried onceover. “So I’m going to head home now.”

“Right! Well then!” He stood up and helped her gather her stuff and then walked her to the door. “It was nice having you over again, Suz. I don’t know how we’d manage without your guidance.”

“You wouldn’t,” Suzie said, accompanied by a soft laugh. She got on her tippy toes and gave him a kiss on the cheek (he only had to bend down a little), and then gave one to Caesar too, who was standing behind Joseph. Then she waved them goodbye and left.

Joseph let out a long sigh.

“So, uh,” he said as they made their way back to the living room to put the papers back into piles once more. “Did I miss anything important back there?”

“Not really,” said Caesar, who was still regarding Joseph with a frown. Joseph was almost certain it was concern in his eyes, but that would’ve been preposterous, right? “I gave Suzie our photographer’s contact info, and then we agreed on going out to find a florist in three weeks.” Joseph nodded along, until the last part gave him pause.

“Wait, why three weeks?” he asked, genuinely confused. Jonathan’s birthday was in two weeks, so that was out, but what was wrong with next week? Caesar stopped, halfway to the kitchen with their empty bottles and Suzie’s water glass in his hands. He turned to look at Joseph, who continued, “Why not next weekend?”

“Next weekend is Easter, Jojo,” Caesar said slowly. “Ah. Right. ‘You didn’t forget, did you? You’re invited over for the picnic on Monday.’”

“Oh! No, no, no, I didn’t forget! I just… hadn’t realized it was already next week…” Joseph scratched the back of his head, trying to think through his mental calendar. His life had been pretty hectic recently, what with the impending finals and a lot of other Uni stuff to do, in addition to his workout regime and all the wedding planning. It was a miracle he had any free time at all. Still, to think it was already almost Easter…

“You should probably get some rest,” he heard Caesar say. When he looked up to his friend, the concern lining his eyes was clear this time. Joseph’s breath hitched, and his throat felt suddenly very dry. “Don’t think I haven’t noticed the way you’ve been overworking yourself. You might play it off in front of others, but I can see right through your little charade. Just… I don’t want you to have a burnout, okay?” Caesar let out a small sigh, just a tiny huff of breath, and Joseph’s chest felt tight again. Caesar gave him a lopsided smile. “I’ll finish tidying up, you go ahead and go to bed. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“R-right,” Joseph managed and then he had to clear his throat. “Good night, Caesar.” He didn’t move. Caesar’s smile grew minutely.

“Good night, Jojo,” he said, and walked into the kitchen.

Joseph got his feet to unstick from the floor, and wandered into his own room, where he sat down on his bed and just… breathed. The evening had been a rollercoaster of emotions, and Joseph couldn’t quite determine where it had dropped him off, but in the end he decided that the best thing he could do was sleep on it. It would make sense in the morning, and if it didn’t… well, that would be future
Surprise end notes as well ahaha. So yeah, Easter is a thing that is next week, and since I figured Caesar's family are probably Catholic (being Italian and all), I decided to give you guys a little treat and get another special Easter chapter for you next week. (this means I really need to finish it in time, get to work me!!) Now, I'm not exactly... an expert on Catholic Easter traditions, so... if anyone has any first hand experience, I would love to hear it! I assume a fancy Easter dinner is a thing that is done... At least we do that here in Finland..? Annyways, keep your eyes peeled for the next chapter, coming your way hopefully on Easter Monday!
There's a WHAT inside my Easter Egg??

Chapter Summary

They go have a nice family lunch with the Zeppelis, so naturally drama ensues. I really don't know what they were expecting.

Chapter Notes

Hey y'all, here's the next chapter! I know I originally said Sunday, but then I did some research, and found out that it's an old tradition in Italy to go out on a picnic with your family on Easter Monday and that fit the bill perfectly! So Monday it is. This chapter is like... twice as long as the previous ones what the fuck :DD Anyway, next chapter is coming to you on Sunday, with a special surprise! Look at me, having a schedule. I do have to read to my university entrance exams on the side tho, so don't hate me too much if it's a bit late! I'll probably hate myself the most haha..... orz

Happy Zombie Jesus day, everyone!

P.S. I'm saying this once more, if someone for some reason still missed it: chapter 5 was the Valentine's day date (which did not end on Joseph's snapchat); chapter 6 came last week and introduced Hamon into the story, as well as opened up Lisa Lisa's backstory. If someone has somehow missed either the end of 5 or 6 as a whole... they're there. Go read them. I won't be talking about this again next time, I promise!

Easter Monday and the weather was, well, unpleasant. As it always tended to be whenever there were any sort of plans for any kind of outdoor events. Still, the main focus of the day was family and fun, so if they had to move the picnic from the yard into the house, it would be nothing but a minor hiccup.

Despite the crappy weather, Joseph was in a good mood. He’d had a week to think about whatever feelings he’d felt when Caesar had so blatantly worried over his general wellbeing instead of being a sarcastic prick, and he’d come to the conclusion that it was all because of their weird ass situation, not to mention the fact that he’d just been staring at the overly romantic wedding photo for god knows how long. Everything was just as normal as it had always been. His heart joining a gymnast team without his consent whenever Caesar did something sweet was nothing more than a temporary thing and absolutely nothing to be worried about. Yes.

Around noon they took a taxi to Caesar’s childhood home—the house where his parents and three youngest siblings still lived—as it was the biggest house available, and it had a backyard, unlike nonna Maria's house, or the Quatros' apartment. And they’d need the space, since the guest list for the day included Caesar’s parents and four sibling, Suzie and her parents, nonna Maria, and obviously Joseph and Caesar. Twelve people in total. If the party had been any bigger they probably would’ve had to organize the picnic at the Joestar Estate.

The house the Zeppelis lived in was a nice place, and a big one too, with enough bedrooms for all
the kids, and a decently sized backyard. There were three storeys, including a basement, which as Joseph understood it, Lino had turned into his own room. Although, according to Caesar, “mancave” was a more accurate description, and one that he didn't seem too thrilled about. Joseph on the other hand thought a basement room sounded cool.

On the outside the house looked the same as ever, the hedges were trimmed neatly, and that silly garden gnome was still standing in the front yard where it had stood for at least 20 years. Joseph had visited the Zeppelis’ house many, many times when he’d been a kid, but not so much recently. He had really only ever gone there to hang out with Caesar anyway, and now that they lived together he didn’t really have much reason to go.

Caesar rang the doorbell when they finally got to the door, and soon enough Cecilia Zeppeli stood in the doorway, smiling brightly. She was wearing a “kiss the cook” apron over her bright green dress.

“Caesar!” she exclaimed and Caesar leaned down to give her a kiss on both cheeks. “I’ve missed you.”

“You literally saw me at mass yesterday, mamma,” he laughed, but she just waved him off.

“Whenever you’re not here, I miss you,” she told him matter-of-factly, and then turned to Joseph, who was standing behind him. “You too, Joseph. You’re part of the family now. Officially.” She winked and then motioned for him to come closer, and after only slight hesitation he leaned down so she could reach to place a kiss on his cheeks as well. She had a very small frame, and she seemed even smaller next to him and her son.

She gave Joseph another bright smile, and then ushered the two inside.

The front door opened into a small foyer, where they left their coats. Immediately to the right was the door to the garage, and the stairs to the second floor, where most of the bedrooms were, Caesar’s old room included. Down the hall was the living room, with the master bedroom through a door to the right, and to the left, behind a partition, the dining room and a door to the kitchen. Along the hall was another door to the kitchen, in addition to the door with the stairs to the basement behind it. Joseph could hear muffled music and some kind of combat sounds drifting up from down there as they walked past it.

“Welcome, boys, welcome,” Mario greeted them as they walked into the living room. “Please, have a seat!”

“Oh, actually I was hoping Caesar could come help us in the kitchen,” said Cecilia, who was walking in after them. “That goes to you too, Elisa,” she told the girl who had just then emerged from upstairs. “I have everyone helping out, and that includes you!”

“Wha—? No fair! Why do I have to do stuff?” Elisa immediately complained, even as her mother took a hold of her shoulders and started to guide her towards the kitchen. “Lino’s not doing anything, have him help!”

“Lino is doing his homework in his room, we shouldn’t bother him.”

“He’s not doing homework! He’s playing video games! You can hear the stupid music all the way up here!”

“Then he’ll clean the table. Now quit complaining, young lady, and—” And then the kitchen door closed and they were gone. Joseph looked over at Caesar.

“Should I...?” he started, pointing at the door.
“No, no, I don’t think that’s necessary,” said Caesar, glancing at the door, and then wistfully at the couches. “I’m sure she has plenty of help already. You save yourself while you still can, I’ll go see what my mother has planned for me.”

He clapped Joseph on the shoulder and retreated into the kitchen, while Joseph went to sit in one of the armchairs. In the chair next to him was Caesar’s oldest sister Juliana, tapping absentmindedly on her phone, while on the sofa on her other side was Mario and aunt Nina, laughing heartily about whatever they were talking about, and on the sofa across from him was nonna Maria, fast asleep. He huffed out an amused breath and turned to Juliana.

“So, I heard you started University?” he said and she looked up from her phone with a nod. “You pick a major yet?”

“Not yet,” she said, playing with a strand of her short, light brown hair. “Still trying to decide between engineering and computer sciences.”

“Those sound pretty interesting,” Joseph said. “If you can’t decide, you can always take one as a major and study the other on the side.”

“I guess I could,” she shrugged. “But still, it’s hard to decide. Engineering is a larger field, obviously, but I’m mostly interested in computers, so it would make more sense to just do that from the start, you know.”

“Been there. I remember when I was trying to decide my major,” Joseph said. “I had no idea what I wanted to do. Mom really wanted me to study real estate, so that I could continue her business when she gets too old. Which, first of all, she’s never gonna be that old. She stopped aging at 40, so I’m pretty sure she’s managed to turn herself immortal. And second of all, wow mom, way to push your own goals on your kid.”

“That must’ve been sucky,” Juliana said.

“Yeah, but then I took a course in real estate and it was actually pretty interesting stuff, so... Ended up picking economy as my major.”

“You’re graduating this spring, right?” she asked, shifting on the armchair. “How’s that going?”

“I feel like I’m gonna get crushed under all the unfinished work and die,” he said and flashed her a wide smile. She let out a small snort and then pressed her lips into a thin line. “So, you know. Pretty normal I suppose. Better than Smokey at least. He’s been so busy with his work I haven’t even seen him outside a lecture hall in weeks. And he's not even graduating yet!”

“Wow, that’s rough,” she said.

There was a clattering noise from the direction of the dining room, and they paused to glance back. A grumbling Elisa appeared through the kitchen door and started to place plates on the dining room table, with just a bit more force than was necessary.

“So what about the rest of the lot?” asked Joseph, turning to face forward in the chair again. “They all go to the same high school, right?”

“Yep. Senior, sophomore, and freshman,” Juliana said, her eyes still lingering on her little sister a moment longer. “So you can imagine what that’s like.”

“Oh yeah,” Joseph grinned. “That’s the same as when Caesar, Suzie, and me were in high school. We fucking ruled that place.”
“I heard my name, what are we talking about?” said a chipper voice from behind, and suddenly someone was hugging him. “Hi there, Jojo,” Suzie said, leaning her hands on top of his head, to balance herself on the back of the armchair.

“Suzie, please, you’re squishing me,” Joseph grunted and she moved, but not after giving him a few light pats on the head. She walked around the chair and sat on the armrest. Good enough. “We were talking about high school. And how the age difference between Ezio, Elisa, and Lino is the same as you, me, and Caesar.”

“Oh yeah, it is,” Suzie said. “High school was a great time! I do wonder though… after four older siblings have gone through, what kind of rep does that leave Lino with? I mean, Caesar was basically the king of the school.”

“Hey, what do you mean, he was the king?” Joseph asked, slightly offended.

“Jojo, please, everybody loved him! I didn’t know a single girl in the school, who didn’t want to date him. And a few boys too!”

“Well, yeah, but…” he muttered. Juliana laughed.

Someone knocked on the front door, and then opened it.

“Helloo?” came a man’s voice from the foyer. Joseph couldn’t see who it was, but there was really only one person missing anymore: Romeo Quatro.

“Papa!” Suzie shouted and sprung up, running off to no doubt give his father a welcome hug. Joseph could hear him laugh as she collided with him with a small thump. Soon the two of them appeared in the living room, and took a seat on the sofa with the still sleeping nonna Maria. Though not before Romeo gave a quick kiss to his wife on the other sofa.

“You get everything done at the shop for today?” asked Nina.

“Yes, finally,” sighed Romeo, relaxing on his seat. “It’s a shame I had to work on Easter, but when you’ve got commissions, you’ve got commissions. That’s all taken care of now, though, so I can spend the rest of the day with all my family!”

“You had really good timing, too, papa,” Suzie said happily. “The lamb should be ready any minute now.”

As if on cue, Cecilia appeared from the dining room.

“Food will be done in five minutes, so get ready everyone!” she announced. “Ah, Romeo, I’m glad you made it in time.” She started to leave, but then paused. “Oh, and Joseph?” she said. Joseph tensed minutely, and then turned to look at the blonde woman. She had the sweetest smile on her lips. “Could you pop downstairs and get Lino? Thank you, darling!” And then she spun around and returned to the kitchen.

“Welp, gotta go,” Joseph said as he stood up. “Got my orders.” Juliana gave him a salute and a grin.

As the others started to get up from the sofas and wander to the dining room—this time remembering to wake up nonna Maria in the process—Joseph made his way to the door leading to the basement and opened it. The sound coming through was unmistakably from a video game, just as Elisa had claimed. He descended the stairs to the basement, curious to see what it looked like nowadays. It had been used mainly as a storage room the last time he’d been here.
The room wasn’t too big, maybe a little over 200 square feet and the first thing Joseph’s eyes landed on was Lino’s desk, pushed against the wall. It was, simply put, a bigger mess than Joseph had ever seen in his life, and he’d seen plenty. He’d caused plenty. But this desk was such a masterpiece of messiness, it was almost art. It was so full of books and papers and miscellaneous items that you could hardly see the desk underneath it. Along the next wall, the wall opposite of the stairs, were bookshelves, which mostly had books, but also quite a bit of movies and games, and a few knickknacks. In the corner between the bookshelves and the final wall was Lino’s bed, which to Joseph’s surprise was (semi-neatly) made. On top of the bed was the boy himself, occupied by whatever game he was playing on his console. From Joseph’s vantage point at the foot of the stairs he couldn’t see what the game in question was, which he was pretty sure was intentional.

“Hey, kid, your mom wanted me to tell you it’s almost lunch time,” he said, still looking around the room. There were game and band posters everywhere.

“Mmkay,” said Lino, and made no effort to move. Joseph walked over and peeked at the TV screen. It was a fighting game, with very unusual looking characters.

“What game is this?” he asked with a frown. Some of the characters looked vaguely familiar.

“All Star Battle,” Lino said, without bothering to pause the game. “It’s getting a sequel this summer, so I thought I’d brush up on my skills a bit beforehand.” He KO’d his opponent and then turned to look at Joseph. “Wanna try it? You’re good at games, right?”

“Oh, buddy. I’m the best at games,” Joseph grinned, and pulled up the chair from the desk.

After a quick explanation of the game’s special features—in addition to standard fighting techniques, each character had a “battle style”, of which there were six in the game—they started a new match. Joseph had played his fair share of fighting games, so he quickly got the hang of the main controls, though Lino was still pretty easily winning most of the time. Joseph berated himself for picking his character based on who was the best looking and not on who had the best ability. What the fucking kinda special power was “Ripple” anyway?

Just as Joseph finally managed to perfectly hit an amazing combo and unleash a hellish bubble onslaught on Lino’s ass, he felt a vibration in his pocket. A millisecond later Roundabout started blasting from his speaker.

“Aw, shit, I was just winning,” he whined as Lino paused the game with a snicker. He dug the phone from his pocket and peered at the caller ID. After a deep breath he answered. “Hey, Grandpa Jonathan. What’s going on?”

“Hello, Joseph,” came his grandfather’s cheery voice from the other end of the line. “I just wanted to remind you of my birthday celebration this coming Sunday. You’re currently at the Zeppelis’, right? You’ll extend the invitation to them, won’t you?”

“Of course I will, grandpa. I’m sure they’ll be thrilled,” Joseph said, and was prepared to say goodbye when Jonathan continued.

“And while you’re at it, tell them Speedwagon sends his regards. I just got off the phone with him, he’s coming to the party too.” Joseph’s face brightened instantly.

“That’s great,” he said, excited. “I haven’t seen old Speedwagon in quite some time, how is he?”

“He is just fine! I mentioned your engagement to him. He seemed quite surprised but sends all his love.”
He paused. He was distantly aware of a door opening somewhere.

“You did what???” he screeched.

“I told him you and Caesar are getting married...?” Jonathan sounded confused.

“Oh god, grandpa no.” Shit, how would he explain this to Speedwagon? It would be so uncool! God, why did everything bad always happen to him?

“Jojo?” asked Caesar, who had appeared from who knows where, but who really even cared where! Joseph put a hand on his shoulder, to steady himself.

“What exactly did you tell him?” he asked Jonathan on the phone.

“Well, I said that you’d proposed, and that you and Caesar were planning a wedding for September,” Jonathan said, slowly, like he was unsure if Joseph would understand. “He told me to congratulate you two and then asked me where his invitation was. I told him you hadn’t sent them out yet.” He paused. “I’m sorry if you’d wanted to tell him yourself. I know you two are close, but I hadn’t realized this was such an important thing to you.”

Joseph made a strangled noise at the back of his throat. Caesar raised his eyebrows.

“I’m guessing food is ready,” said Lino, and got up from his bed. Right. Food.

“I’m sorry, grandpa, I gotta go now,” Joseph managed to get out. “We’re about to have lunch. I’ll be sure to tell your greetings to everyone.”

“Ah, alright,” said Jonathan. “Have a nice meal. And happy Easter!”

“Bye, grandpa,” Joseph gritted out and hung up. Lino had already left the room, so now it was just him and Caesar. Caesar, who was looking very confused and just a bit concerned. Joseph took a deep breath, and then another. “Fuck my life,” he said, slamming his head against Caesar’s shoulder, hitting his own hand in the process. Caesar patted him on the back a few times.

“What… exactly is wrong right now?” he asked. Joseph groaned.

“Gramps told Speedwagon about our engagement,” he said. Caesar inhaled sharply, like he was about to say something, but then didn’t. There was silence.

“So?” he finally said.

“So my life is over!!” Joseph wailed. The door slammed open.

“Quit making out and get up here!” Elisa shouted from the top. “We’re gonna start eating now!”

Joseph immediately flinched away from Caesar, who blinked in surprise. He suppressed a scream for two seconds, and then he stalked past Caesar and up the stairs.

Everyone else was already at the table when the two of them finally sat down. The food looked delicious—the roasted lamb smelled heavenly, and there were potatoes and grilled zucchini and Italian bread and mint jelly—but what Joseph’s eyes honed in on was the three bottles of red wine at the end of the table.

Thank god for Italian Catholics, Joseph thought with a smile.

~x~
In Caesar’s opinion, Joseph was being ridiculous. Sure, he’d appeared very alarmed when he’d found out Jonathan had told Mr. Speedwagon about their engagement, but really, the amount of drama he was pulling from it was absurd, even on Joseph’s standards. And still Caesar couldn’t help but be concerned. And curious.

“I still don’t get it, what’s so bad about Mr. Speedwagon knowing? Even if we weren’t planning to actually send out invitations, he is on the guest list,” Caesar said with a frown, trying to wrap his head around why exactly Joseph was acting like the world was ending. They were sitting on a couch in the corner of the Zeppelis’ living room. The rest of the family were busying themselves with minor chit chat—except for Ezio, who had disappeared back into his room as soon as he’d been allowed to leave the table—and no one was paying them much attention.

“It’s just bad,” Joseph drawled, dragging his fingers down his face. “Because Speedwagon is… Speedwagon is my cool uncle!”

“Your what?” Caesar laughed. Joseph threw an arm around his shoulder and pulled him against his side.

“Cooooool uncle,” he whispered, drawing an arch into the air with his free hand. Caesar slowly bent down from under his arm. Joseph cleared his throat. “You know how I was mostly raised by my grandparents as a kid? Cause mom was in jail for beating up the dick bag responsible for my dad’s death?”

“Obviously,” Caesar said. It was no secret that Lisa Lisa had served time for assault. She hadn’t taken kindly to the fact that her husband’s company’s commander had gotten away scot-free after ordering George Joestar to execute a plan he knew would end up as a suicide mission. In the end the man had gotten his due diligence, and Lisa Lisa had spent basically the entirety of Joseph’s childhood behind bars. The few years after her release had been awkward between the mother and son, even if Joseph had known and visited Lisa Lisa several times before. After all, he had been fourteen at the time, and had had no real recollection of her from before she went to jail. It had gotten better as time went on, obviously.

“Right, so,” said Joseph, clapping his hands together. “You know granny Erina is all super strict about everything, and gramps is always going on and on and on about being a proper gentleman? Well, when you’re, like, ten years old that is the worst thing. But Speedwagon… he was different. He was cool. He told me stories of how he used to be in a gang when he was a teenager, and he went on all these cool adventures, and always brought me back cool stuff, and… And sometimes he’d take me with him on the cool trips and he… he's my cool uncle.”

“Okay, so?”

“So—! It’s—! He’s… He’s always been this, like, free spirit, you know. He never settles down, he just goes where he pleases. And he’s never been married. Ever. And when I was a kid, I promised him I’d be just like him! I’d be cool too, not allowing anyone to tie me down. And now I’m breaking the promise! And he’s not gonna think I’m cool anymore!”

Caesar snorted. And then started to chuckle.

“Oh, Jojo,” he said after a moment of laughing and being glared at. “That's so precious.”

“What!? I’m not precious!” Joseph scoffed. “I’m cool.”

“Of course you are,” Caesar said, rolling his eyes. “The coolest of the cools.”
“I know you’re being sarcastic, you asshole,” Joseph muttered and crossed his arms, slumping down on the couch. “Why are you always so mean?”

“Because you’re being overdramatic!” Caesar laughed. “God, Jojo, get a grip! No one’s gonna think you less cool because you’re getting married. Besides, didn’t Jonathan say Mr. Speedwagon sends his love? To me that sounds pretty supportive.”

Joseph grumbled something under his breath, but Caesar just ignored him, rolling his eyes again. His mother was approaching them, and Joseph instinctively straightened himself.

“Here you go, boys,” Cecilia said with a smile as she offered them a bowl with medium sized chocolate eggs. They both took one, saying their thanks. The eggs looked homemade, no doubt the handiwork of nonna Maria and several enthusiastic helpers. “We didn’t bother hiding them, since we don’t have any little children around anymore.”

“Aw, I would’ve wanted to go egg hunting!” Suzie whined from the next couch, but she was smiling brightly as she received her egg.

Joseph had already devoured almost his entire egg, and Caesar bit into his own before it started to melt on his fingers. It had a whipped ganache filling, which was not so sweet as to leave a bad taste in his mouth.

“Wow, this is good,” said Joseph, licking his fingers clean. “Are these homemade?”

“Yes, they are,” said nonna Maria, who walked in from the kitchen. “It is very traditional in Italy to make your own Easter eggs. We made these with Suzie, Elisa, and Lino.”

“Lino didn’t actually help, he just hung around and took videos,” said Elisa with a scoff.

“I did too! I whipped the filling,” Lino protested. “In addition to taking an amazing how-to video.”

“That hardly counts—” Elisa started, but her mother put a hand on her shoulder and she pressed her lips into a tight line.

“Now, kids, let’s not fight about something this silly on Easter,” said Cecilia, with the calmness and command that one needed to raise five children. All Zeppeli children learned from a young age that you always did as your mother told you, and Caesar was pretty sure the lesson had extended to Joseph as well. It was almost like a conditioned response; when Cecilia Zeppeli said something, you listened.

“Sorry, mamma,” Elisa muttered, before giving Lino the dirtiest glare imaginable.

“Good,” Cecilia said with a nod. “Now, who wants to play cards?”

Caesar and Joseph shared a glance. Other people were starting to get up and make their way back to the dining room table.

“Wanna go check out my old room?” Caesar asked.

“Sure,” said Joseph. And they stood up.

“Cesare, dear, might I have a word with you?” said nonna Maria, before they had time to take two steps anywhere. Caesar looked at Joseph, who just shrugged, so he nodded and followed her into the kitchen while Joseph went up ahead.
“What is it, nonna?” he asked, switching into Italian once they were alone, but then he had to pause. There was a small smile on her lips, and a distinctly mischievous glint in her blue eyes. She was holding something behind her back. Caesar swallowed, suddenly wary.

“I’ve been reading the internet,” she started, which was never a good way to start a conversation. Especially with your 80-year-old grandmother. Despite this, Caesar motioned for her to go on. “And I found a custom that seems to be very popular with the youngsters these days, and I thought, well! I haven’t done much to help you with this wedding preparation yet, and I wanted to do something nice for you.”

“Wha, uh… What exactly did you do, nonna?” Caesar asked, fearing the worst. He could feel the familiar wisps of anxiety fluttering in the pit of his stomach. Nonna Maria pulled her hand out from behind her back.

“Here,” she said, pressing a beautifully decorated Easter egg into Caesar’s palm. There were curvy lines and lines of different colored dots circling it, between them small shapes, like circles and stars and triangles. It was made of milk chocolate and stood about four inches high, and it was wrapped in cellophane with a yellow bow tied around the top. Judging by the weight it was hollow, though Caesar had no doubt there was something hidden inside it. The question, of course, was what.

“What?” said Caesar. Nonna Maria laughed softly behind her hand. “I’m… not sure I understand.”

“It’s a gift from me to you, for you to give Joseph,” she explained. “As I said, I found out about this… new ‘trend’. It’s a new way kids these days propose to each other.”

Understanding spread through him, though it did nothing to quell the anxiety already there. If anything, it made it worse.

“So you’re saying there’s a ring inside the egg?” he asked.

“Oh, yes,” nonna Maria said happily. “Now, as I’m sure you know, it is very customary back in Italy to propose using a family ring. An heirloom of sorts.” She lifted her right hand to her left, fingers absentely tracing the edges of the wedding ring she’d been wearing for nearly 60 years. “Obviously my rings won’t fit him, he has such big hands after all, but then I realized that maybe… There is another ring that would. A ring that has been laying still for 26 years…” She looked up at him, and smiled. “I think he would like you to have it. The ring I gave him when we got engaged.”

“Nonna Maria, please, I can’t take this,” Caesar said, quietly. His heart was hammering in his chest and he could hardly breathe. This was too much, surely. He couldn’t possibly… To take the ring of William Antonio Zeppeli and give it to… to Joseph.

“No, Cesare,” said nonna Maria, closing her hands around his. Had they always been so small? So frail? So wrinkly? She looked up at him with the fondest look in the world, like only mothers can, and Caesar let out a shaky breath. “I want you to have it. Even if you don’t think you can give it to him, I… I want you to have it.”

He sniffed, loudly, and then wrapped her in a tight hug. She laughed again, soft and sweet and wonderful, and he could feel tears stinging in the back of his eyes but he didn’t let them fall.

“Thank you,” he whispered against her shoulder. She petted his hair. For a moment he was a little boy again, sitting on his grandma’s lap, while she made everything in the world better.

Then he let go of her, and kissed her forehead, like she always used to do for him, and just held her hand for a moment. She smiled brightly up at him.
“Thank you,” he said again.

“You’re welcome,” she said. “Now, go make sure that man of yours is alright. He seemed a bit distressed during lunch.” He laughed, loudly and straight from the heart.

“I will, nonna,” he said, and let go of her hand. She turned around and went back to the living room, while he went upstairs after Joseph.

Caesar made it all the way to his door, until he realized he had in his hands a 6 ounce chocolate egg that he most certainly did not want Joseph to see, with nowhere smart to hide it. He looked around him for a while, but there was, unsurprisingly, nothing in the hallway and he cursed internally. In the end he settled for taking off his suit jacket and slipping the egg into the inside breast pocket. Joseph probably wouldn’t notice the egg if he draped the jacket over the back of a chair or something. It’d be fine.

He walked into his old room.

“You know, this place is just like it used to be,” Joseph said as soon as the door opened. He’d sat on the edge of the bed, but then apparently decided that sitting up was too much effort, and plopped down to lay on his back, with his feet still touching the ground.

Caesar paused in the middle of the room and took a moment to let his eyes travel around it. It really was just like he’d left it when he’d moved out after high school. All his old posters were still on the walls, and his old bed and desk were tucked in the corner. The ancient, blocky TV was there too, although he had taken the GameCube he’d had plugged into it as a kid with him to his and Joseph’s apartment, just like two of the three bookshelves that had used to line his walls. He’d left the shelf with all the kids’ books and his old school books behind, obviously.

Caesar let out a long breath. It was always nostalgic to come back here, even if he did—or at least tried to—visit his parents regularly. He could only imagine what Joseph felt like, since he hadn’t been here in at least five years. The man in question had his hand pointed at the ceiling and seemed to be studying, quite intently, the back of it. Or perhaps the ceiling.

“I always thought your ceiling was funny,” he said and tried to slap it. He could reach nowhere near though, and his arm flopped against the bed by his side. “It’s all… slanted and stuff.”

Caesar looked up, slightly amused.

“Yeah, that’s cause the roof is slanted in this spot,” he said, walking over to the other side of the room. He draped his jacket on the back of the desk chair, careful not to hit the egg against it, and then leaned back against the edge of the desk. “I didn’t know you thought it funny.” Joseph hummed in response.

“So what did nonna Maria want?” he asked after a moment, sitting back up on the edge of the bed. Caesar paused.


“Seriously?” he asked.

“Nothing you need to concern yourself with,” Caesar bit out. Joseph lifted his hands in the air.

“Okay, no need to get aggressive,” he said. “I was just curious. You can have secrets with your grandma, I don’t care.”
There was a long silence. Caesar almost apologized, but then didn’t. Finally Joseph huffed out a laugh.

“We were talking about high school, earlier, with Suzie and Juliana,” he said. Caesar turned to look at him, surprised by the change in topic, but Joseph was staring at the Guns N’ Roses poster hanging over the TV. It was clear he wasn’t seeing it though, his eyes unfocused. “About how you used to be super popular. And it reminded me,” he paused for a second, his gaze falling to his hands clasped in his lap, “of the rumour that kept circulating back then. Do you remember it?”

“The one about us being a couple?” Caesar said. “Hard to forget. It used to be funny, but now…”

“I guess this is what happens when you don’t kill off annoying rumours when you have the chance,” Joseph said, one side of his mouth curling up, his voice quiet and devoid of mirth. Caesar hummed as a heavy silence fell over the room.

“Do you ever…” Joseph started after a moment, before pausing and biting his lip. “You ever think about how easy it would’ve been?” Finally he turned, looking up at Caesar with an oddly determined look in his eyes. “To affirm that rumour.”

“Oh,” said Caesar.

“I mean, if everyone keeps assuming all the time, if it’s been going on for eight goddamn years, there’s gotta be a reason, right?” Joseph continued, dragging his fingers through his hair. “Do we act like a couple? I don’t know! I’ve only ever had like one even semi-proper relationship, and as sad as it sounds I don’t have that many friends. I mean, I do have friends, sure, and like acquaintances and stuff, but only a few actually close friends.” He let out an annoyed growl-like noise. “I don’t know how any of this is supposed to work! Are we doing something wrong? Is there a difference between how to act with your best friend and the person you’re dating, aside from the romance and sex stuff? Are we doing something we shouldn’t be??”

“Whoa, Jojo, calm down,” Caesar said, sitting down on the bed next to him and placing a hand on his arm. He realized, about 0.2 seconds later, why this might not have been the best course of action, but at that point it was too late.

Joseph engulfed him in a bear hug before he had time to draw back again. His whole body went tense as Joseph’s fingers gripped tightly the back of his shirt.

“I’m sorry,” said Joseph quietly, making no effort to let go or move away. Caesar finally rested his hands on Joseph’s back, hesitant and awkward. He hadn’t felt this awkward in over a decade. “I’m just… so confused, I guess. And a little scared, to be honest. What if we screw this up? I don’t want to lose this, lose what we already have… You’re my best friend, Caesar. I don’t want to lose you.”

Caesar could feel the heat on his face, the beating in his chest gone to overdrive. His palms were sweaty where they clung to Joseph’s jacket. He wasn’t sure how much more he could handle this. Joseph being so emotionally open, allowing himself to be so vulnerable around him, hugging him like this, it was overwhelming, almost too intense, and so, so—

Nice.

“We need to break up,” he blurted out.

Joseph pulled back, finally, holding Caesar at arm’s length, holding tight to his shoulders.

“Haha… what?” he asked, a smile on his lips but his eyes screaming, scared.
“The engagement,” Caesar said. “We need to break off the… the engagement.” He swallowed. His mouth was still dry, but he pushed on. “It’s not working out, is it? It’s been nothing but bad news from the beginning, so much work and pressure and stress.” He was rambling by now, painfully aware of Joseph’s hands still on his shoulders, the palms warm, almost burning, through his thin shirt. “You should be focusing on your graduation, and I have my job, which is a lot of responsibility… It’s taxing on us both emotionally, way more than we thought it would, it’s just… It’s too much. Right?”

Joseph looked at him for a while, his lips ever so slightly parted.

“So…” he finally said, lifting his hands off of Caesar, and running one through his hair again. “So… what, exactly? What do you think we should do?”

“Well,” said Caesar, who hadn’t thought this through at all. He only knew he couldn’t take this anymore. He had gotten his hopes up before, he wouldn’t get them up again. Nothing would ever change with Joseph, he had to learn to accept it. He’d thought he had. “Well, we can’t just up and break up one day, right? No one would believe that. We gotta work up to it. Starting on Sunday.”

“You want to break up at Grandpa Jonathan’s birthday party,” Joseph said, unimpressed.

“No, of course not,” Caesar scoffed, rolling his eyes. “Didn’t you listen at all? We begin breaking up at Jonathan’s birthday. Just start with a small fight, nothing big, not causing a scene, but enough that people will see there’s strain there. And then make it bigger and bigger, until we can say that we’d rather preserve our friendship than our engagement and people will believe it.”

“Okay, okay, I get it now,” Joseph nodded. “That… that sounds like it could work. Let’s do that.”

“Okay,” Caesar said. There was a long silence, which got progressively more awkward.

“You, uh, you wanna go see if that card game is still going?” Caesar finally suggested.

“Yeah, let’s go,” said Joseph, and stood up immediately.

They made their way back downstairs, where they found that the card game was indeed still going, and they joined in for the next round. Despite everything that had happened, Caesar was able to enjoy himself a lot, and was also glad to see that Joseph’s mood was better than it had been during lunch. He forcibly kept his breathing calm as he watched Joseph laugh unabashed at a joke Lino made, and refused to acknowledge the increase in his heartrate.

When they left a few hours later, his mother packed them a bag with leftovers from the lunch. Caesar slipped the egg nonna Maria had given him into the bag when Joseph wasn’t looking, and when they finally got back home, he hid it in the bottom drawer of his nightstand. And there it would stay, as far as Caesar was concerned, for a long time.
It took a surprisingly short amount of time after the doorbell rang for Jonathan to appear at the doorway, Erina right behind him.

“Joseph, Caesar! Welcome!” he greeted with a wide smile, and stepped aside to let the two men enter. He gave Joseph a quick hug, while Caesar opted for just a handshake.

“Happy birthday, Mr. Joestar,” Caesar said, handing him their gift. Joseph had already moved on, hugging Erina tightly and giving her a kiss on the cheek. “Have the others arrived yet?”

“No, actually, you’re the first ones here,” said Erina, beckoning Caesar over for a hug as well. Joseph quickly checked the clock on his phone.

“I told you we were in no hurry,” he said with a smirk.

“Well, not the first ones, per se,” said Jonathan, pulling the front door closed behind the group. “Speedwagon has been here since yesterday after all.”

“Wait, what? Speedwagon is already here?” Joseph demanded. “Oh man, we should’ve been here ages ago!”

“He will be staying a few more days after today, you’ll have plenty of time to spend with him,” Jonathan said. “He’s in the library at the moment, if you boys want to go say hello.”

“Hey that’s great, let’s go,” Joseph said and immediately started towards the library. He didn’t bother to check if Caesar was following, he knew he would be.
The Estate was a big place, but having lived there for over a decade, Joseph knew the house inside and out and knew the quickest route from room to room. The library was at the back of the second floor, up the stairs, down the corridor, past the upstairs sitting room, and the last door to the right. The door swung violently open as he barged through.

“Speedweed!” Joseph shouted. The man in the reading chair jumped and looked around, alarmed. When he saw Joseph at the door, a bright smile spread across his face.

“Joseph!” he laughed. He tossed the paper he’d been reading aside and stood up just in time for Joseph to collide against him. He let out a soft “ooof” as he wrapped his arms around the Joestar and then laughed again, breathy this time. “Joseph, please, you’re not ten anymore.”

“I know,” Joseph said easily, continuing to hug Speedwagon a few more seconds. Speedwagon clapped him on the shoulder when he eventually let go.

Caesar finally caught up to him, walking into the library with a huge smile on his face. He and Speedwagon exchanged the much more civil one-armed hug and handshake, instead of a tackle hug. Because they were both boring people, apparently.

“It is so good to see you boys! It has been too long,” Speedwagon said once all three men were seated. The library was a large room, with bookshelves tall enough that the top shelves could only be reached with the ladder attached to a rail that ran along them. There was also a reading area at the front of the room, with several comfortable reading chairs grouped together and a low coffee table in the middle. Joseph had found out the hard way that you didn’t put your feet up on it. He did anyway.

“Where have you been? You’ve been out of the country for a while now, right?” Joseph asked, leaning forward in his chair. He could hardly wait to hear about the latest of Speedwagon’s adventures.

“Mm, that’s right.” Speedwagon nodded. “Work related this time, so unfortunately it won’t make for a terribly interesting tale. We’re setting up a Mexican branch for the Speedwagon Foundation and as the CEO I had to go oversee some of the preparations personally.”

“Ahh, that does sound bothersome,” Joseph said, linking his fingers behind his head and leaning back on the chair again. Speedwagon chuckled lightly.

“I did find some interesting ruins on my day off, but that’s probably more Jonathan’s area of expertise,” he suggested. Joseph hummed.

“So what exactly does the Speedwagon Foundation hope to achieve in Mexico?” Caesar asked.

“Oh, we’re just trying to branch out the company some more,” Speedwagon explained. “I feel it’s important to gain as much of a foothold in as many countries as possible. The more global we are, the easier it will be to help make the world a better place.”

“How admirable,” Joseph said, only slightly sarcastic.

“But enough about me and my business trips,” Speedwagon said, shifting on the chair and crossing his legs. A sly smile made its way to his face, and he grinned like a school boy up to mischief. “If I understood correctly there are some much bigger news to talk about.”

“Oh. Right,” said Joseph. He glanced back at Caesar, who gave him a tiny shrug.

“What kind of a reaction is that?” Speedwagon said and then shook his head with a fond smile. “I was kind of disappointed you didn’t tell me about this before actually getting engaged though. If you
were scared about me being unsupportive…”

“We didn’t really tell anyone,” Caesar interjected. “It all just kind of… happened.”

“Well I’ll say!” Speedwagon laughed. “Though I can’t say I’m particularly surprised, there seems to have been a little something going there for a while now.”

“So we’ve been told,” Joseph muttered, a slight heat rising to his cheeks despite his best efforts. Why did everyone keep assuming there was something? What even was something? He still didn’t understand it at all. Why couldn’t he see what everyone else seemed to see?

“And how is the wedding planning going? Jonathan mentioned the date was in September...?” Speedwagon said, letting the sentence trail off into a question.

“September first, yes,” said Caesar. “We’ve arranged for catering and photography, and the plan is to find a florist the next time we have time to go out and look for one, probably next weekend.”

“And I’m guessing the ceremony will be held here?” Joseph and Caesar both nodded. Speedwagon grinned. “Erina managed to persuade you pretty easily, didn’t she?” They nodded again, a little hesitant this time. Speedwagon laughed. “Well, that’s our Erina. She could convince the earth to stop turning if she wanted to. You guys never had a chance.”

“It’s not like it’s a bad thing, in this case,” Caesar said with a shrug. “The Estate is a beautiful place, it’ll make a great venue.”

“That’s true,” Speedwagon said. “I’m sure your ceremony will be amazing.”

There was a brief knock at the door and Jonathan appeared in the doorway.

“I hope I’m not interrupting too badly,” he said, “but other guests have started to arrive. Might I suggest you move to the parlour with everyone else?”

“Good idea, Jojo,” Speedwagon said, standing up and checking his watch. “I hadn’t realized it was already that time.”

The four men left the library and made their way back to the first floor of the house. The parlor was a large room, taking up most of the space in the first floor, along with the dining room and kitchen. There was a fireplace mounted in the wall, with a group of armchairs, a sofa, and a sofa table positioned in front of it. There was also all kinds of ornaments in the room: vases and picture frames on the mantelpiece, houseplants in the corner of the room, and several large paintings hanging from the wall, both portraits and landscapes. Along the back wall was a long table, covered by a crisp white tablecloth, onto which a buffet style dinner was being set.

As Jonathan had said, other guests had already arrived, and kept arriving in a steady stream of people. Jonathan and Erina greeted them at the door, and then directed them towards the parlor, where they began to mingle while they waited.

Joseph looked around the room. He recognized most people, even if he couldn’t quite remember their names. In addition to the Zeppelis, Joseph, Caesar, and Lisa Lisa, there were around 20 guests, all from Jonathan’s past. Several people he’d gone on expeditions with and people from the University, colleagues from when he still had a tenure. There were also a few of his old archeology students and a few University classmates all the way from Britain.

About twenty minutes later, Jonathan and Erina entered the parlor themselves. Jonathan went over to the buffet table, picked up a glass, and tapped on it a few times with the edge of a knife. Everybody
quieted, and turned to look at him.

“Ladies and gentlemen, friends and family,” he started. His smile was dazzling, radiating a warmth into the whole room as he addressed his guests. “Thank you all for coming. It means a lot to me that you could make it here tonight, even as far away as some of you have. Especially when it’s not terribly common to celebrate birthdays after a certain age, aside from the big ones obviously. But when this day was drawing nearer, we thought… why shouldn’t we? Why leave the partying to the young people? There can never be too many celebrations in life, and you should always make the most out of the time you have, especially when you don’t really know how much of it you have left. In any case, I thank you all of you again for being here with us, and now, lest the food get cold before I finish, let’s start eating.”

There was a small applause, and then the guests started to form a line next to the buffet table. Joseph was among the first of them, and he took quite a generous amount of food. There was plenty on the table, and knowing his grandparents, there would be more than enough surplus in the kitchen, so he didn’t bother worrying about running out. Caesar side-eyed his plate as they left the buffet line, but he didn’t actually say anything about Joseph eating too much. He was clearly thinking it though. *Moderation,* or whatever.

With limited places to sit, Joseph and Caesar spent the next thirty minutes standing around the room, eating their food, and talking to a handful of people. Mostly about their wedding. Many people just congratulated them, but others kept trying to not-that-subtly pry out any kind of information. Joseph—who was frankly getting tired of everybody being so goddamn nosy about this, why did everyone keep being so interested in this stupid wedding—let Caesar do most of the answering. He only occasionally said something to try and awkwardly argue with him about things. To get the breakup train moving. Something along the lines of “What, no, we should totally get a DJ! We can have a much bigger music selection that way!” followed by “Sure, Jojo, but a live band sounds better” and whatnot.

Finally he was saved from the wedding hell, when someone clinked on their glass again and a hush fell over the room. This time it was Speedwagon. He walked a little ways off the crowd.

“Thank you,” he said, once he’d achieved silence. “I would like to start by saying congratulations, Jojo. Another year, another adventure.” He raised his glass slightly. Jonathan raised his own in answer. “I remember when I first met Jonathan. Mostly about their wedding. Many people just congratulated them, but others kept trying to not-that-subtly pry out any kind of information. Jojo—who was frankly getting tired of everybody being so goddamn nosy about this, why did everyone keep being so interested in this stupid wedding—let Caesar do most of the answering. He only occasionally said something to try and awkwardly argue with him about things. To get the breakup train moving. Something along the lines of “What, no, we should totally get a DJ! We can have a much bigger music selection that way!” followed by “Sure, Jojo, but a live band sounds better” and whatnot.

Finally he was saved from the wedding hell, when someone clinked on their glass again and a hush fell over the room. This time it was Speedwagon. He walked a little ways off the crowd.

“Thank you,” he said, once he’d achieved silence. “I would like to start by saying congratulations, Jojo. Another year, another adventure.” He raised his glass slightly. Jonathan raised his own in answer. “I remember when I first met Jonathan. Most of you probably already know this story, but I don’t really care, I’m going to tell it anyway. It was 1959, and we were both young men at the time. Jojo was finishing off his University studies and I… I was in a gang back then. And you might wonder… how exactly does a good-for-nothing delinquent even cross paths with someone like Jonathan Joestar? From a wealthy family, a valedictorian, perfectly spotless record? Well, to be honest it was quite simple…” He grinned ruefully. “I tried to rob him.”

There were chuckles from the crowd. Joseph grinned as well. This had been one of his favorite stories as a kid.

“Not my proudest moment, I’ll give you that,” Speedwagon continued. “Life was tough when I was a kid, but I know that doesn’t excuse it. Now, imagine the scene: I have Jojo at knife point in a back alley in London, trying to steal everything he had on him, and what does he do? He offers me his hand. He offers me a chance to redeem myself. To make myself better.”

He looked directly at Jonathan, a somber look on his face. Everyone kept dead quiet.

“He helped me get off the streets, helped me get an education, and helped me when I was starting my own business. And look at where we are now! Every year the Speedwagon Foundation helps fund important research on medical and environmental issues. It helps thousands if not millions of people,
directly and indirectly. It makes the world a better place. And none of this would have been possible without you, Jojo. Without your good heart, and your willingness to offer your everything to the people who most need it. So happy birthday, old friend! And may we celebrate many more in the future!"

There was a roaring applause. Jonathan stepped forward, eyes glistening, and the two embraced for a few seconds. Then he clapped Speedwagon on the shoulder.

“Thank you, Robert,” he said sincerely, with a bright smile. Speedwagon smiled back.

Something slammed loudly in the front hall.

Everyone’s attention snapped to the parlor door.

“What was that?” Joseph said. His question was met with silence.

There were more noises outside. Rapid footsteps. Talking, muffled but clearly distressed. More than one person. They were getting closer. Jonathan frowned, and started towards the door.

“Sir, please, you shouldn’t go in there…” came the quiet voice of the Estate’s butler from the other side of the door.

“Silence. Get out of my way, you fool,” came another voice, loud and commanding. There was a soft shuffling sound. The parlor doors slammed open with a bang.

A collective gasp rang in the room. Joseph, too, stood still, stunned as he looked at the person in the doorway. He had no idea who that was.

It was a man, an older one, though for some reason Joseph couldn’t quite pin down an age for him. He had long blond hair, tied back on a low ponytail and only a sliver of gray on his temples, and his sharp brown eyes glinted orange as he studied the room in distaste. His clothes were immaculate, tailored to fit and probably worth more than everything Joseph owned, and he looked like a king with how he commanded the attention of the whole room. An angry and disdainful king, by the looks of it, but still. His eyes fell on Jonathan and he smiled, like a predator getting ready to ambush his pray.

“Jojo!” the man exclaimed and stepped into the room.

Jonathan’s eyes were blown wide open as he watched the man approach, his mouth moving to form a word it couldn’t quite manage. Erina’s hand had flown to her mouth, and Speedwagon looked just about ready to start throwing punches. Several other people in the crown also showed signs of recognition, while others just looked on in confusion.

Finally Jonathan seemed to snap out of it.

“Dio,” he breathed. His expression shifted, turning into a frown, which made the man pause. “What are you doing here?”

“What do you mean, what am I doing here?” the man said with a shrug and a smirk. “Aren’t I allowed to visit my little brother and wish him a happy birthday when he turns 75?”

Joseph’s mouth fell open. Jonathan had a brother??

“I’m 76, Dio,” said Jonathan, an air of disbelief around him. Whoever the man was, he clearly hadn’t been expected.

“A word in private, if you don’t mind” he said through his teeth, a clear urgency in the tone of his voice. He grabbed Dio’s forearm and dragged him back out of the room. The door closed behind them.

“Holy shit,” whispered Joseph to Caesar. There was a buzzing in the room, everyone murmuring to each other about the scene they’d just witnessed.

“I know,” Caesar said. “I… I didn’t know Jonathan had a brother. I wonder what’s going on between the two.”

“We should totally go eavesdrop,” Joseph said, a grin spreading on his face, and took a step towards the door. Caesar’s hand on his elbow stopped him.

“No, Jojo,” he said. “Let them talk in peace. We on the other hand should probably go talk with Erina. She seems a bit upset.”

Joseph turned and saw his grandmother, mother, and Speedwagon, standing on the far side of the room. They were talking in hushed tones, and Erina was indeed looking very upset. “Right,” Joseph said, and they approached the group.

“How are you holding up?” he asked Erina, placing a soft hand on her shoulder. She took a deep breath.

“I’ve been better,” she admitted, and gave her grandson a small smile. “Thank you for asking though.”

“So, uh… who exactly was that?” Joseph asked, gesturing towards the door with his head. “I thought Grandpa Jonathan was an only child…?”

“He is. Was… well,” Erina said, casting her gaze away. “Dio was adopted by Jonathan’s father, when his own father passed away from illness. Apparently Dio’s father had saved George’s life after a car accident years before, and he’d felt indebted enough to take Dio in when he found the boy had been orphaned. Jonathan was twelve at the time, and they did not get along.” Erina huffed out a laugh, decidedly void of any actual humor. “It got better as they grew up, but then…”

The parlor doors slammed open once more.

“I asked you to leave, Dio,” Jonathan said angrily as the blond man ignored him and walked in.

“Oh my, Jojo! Surely you wouldn’t throw your own brother out, before he’s had even a moment to recover from his long trip,” Dio said, dramatically. He sauntered over to the buffet table and picked up a wine glass, gesturing at Jonathan with it. “One drink, and then I’m out of your grey hair.”

Jonathan gritted his teeth and growled, a deep noise from the back of his throat. Joseph's eyebrows rose, because holy shit. Joseph had been a bratty child, but his grandfather had rarely gotten angry at him about anything, let alone this angry. Honestly, Jonathan wasn’t even just angry anymore, he was fucking furious. And it was scaring the shit out of Joseph.

“One. Drink,” Jonathan said. “And then you leave.”

Dio raised his hands in a gesture of surrender and poured the glass full from one of the wine bottles on the table. Jonathan took a deep breath, rubbing a hand over his eyes. Erina walked over to him
and wrapped her hands around his arm. He gave her a grateful smile.

Joseph looked at the strange man who had disrupted the whole party, disrupted Jonathan’s life this badly, and was now drinking wine by himself like nothing had happened. He just stood there, leaning on the table with more poise than Joseph had probably ever possessed in his life. After a second he seemed to notice Joseph’s staring and raised his eyebrows, looking Joseph up and down slowly. Joseph took this as an invitation for interaction.

“You’re a Joestar, aren’t you?” Dio asked as Joseph approached him.

“Yep,” Joseph said, pausing in front of him and crossing his arms.

“Figures,” Dio said and took a sip. “You resemble Jonathan a lot. The same eyes.” He squinted, just a small bit. Then he offered his hand. “Dio Brando. And you are...?”

“Joseph Joestar,” Joseph said, and took it. Dio had a good grip. “Jonathan’s grandson.” Dio let out a small “ah” and nodded, brushing his palm against his pant leg. “And since you’re his brother, I guess that makes you my… great uncle?”

“I suppose so,” said Dio with an air of indifference.


“Behave yourself, Jojo,” said Caesar who had walked up to them. Dio’s eyes snapped to him, and studied him similarly as he had done to Joseph.

“You look familiar,” he finally said.

“Caesar Zeppeli,” Caesar said, extending his hand in greeting.

“Oh, that’s it!” Dio said and smirked, before snatching the offered hand. Caesar flinched, almost too subtle to notice. “William’s grandchild, right?”

“You knew my grandfather?” Caesar asked, shifting his weight so he was standing just slightly towards Joseph. Joseph wasn’t sure why that was a thing he noticed, but there is was.

“Yes, of course,” said Dio. “Not as well as Jonathan, obviously. But we were… acquainted.”

There was something unsettling about the way he said it, and Joseph could feel the hairs on the back of his neck rise as he shuddered. Caesar’s gaze flicked to him for a millisecond.

Dio was watching the two of them like a hawk. It, and really the whole situation, was starting to make Joseph very uncomfortable, and he wished he had something to distract himself with. Caesar, who still had his wine glass from dinner in his hand, took a sip. Dio’s eyes instantly honed in on his hand.

The predatory smile was back on his face.

“My, my, what a lovely ring,” he said, voice like honeyed poison. “When is the wedding?”

“September,” said Caesar, after a moment. Dio hummed.

“So soon,” he said with a sigh. “Where’s your bride? Is she somewhere here too?” He looked around the crowd for a moment before his eyes returned to Caesar’s unamused face and he smiled. “Or is it a groom? Don’t worry, I’m not one… to judge…” He trailed off as his eyes fell on Joseph and his
mouth opened slowly, the idea visibly forming in his head. “Don’t tell me…” he said, eyes widening as a smug smile settled on his lips. “You two? Oh, that is… hilarious.”

He laughed. Joseph flushed, angry and embarrassed.

“Excuse me?” he gritted.

“It’s just that… I never thought I’d actually see the day the Joestar and the Zeppeli families finally merge.” Dio grinned. Placing his now empty wine glass on the table behind him, he grabbed a hold of both Joseph’s and Caesar’s shoulders and gripped them tightly. “This has been generations in the making, boys. Be proud. You’re a part of history!”

“Dio!” came Jonathan’s angry voice from behind them and Dio looked up, nonchalant. Jonathan marched up to them and grabbed a hold of his arm again. “Say what you will to me, but you will not harass my family,” he seethed. Dio wrenched his hand free and leveled Jonathan with a glare of pure malice. “You’ve had your drink. Leave.”

“Fine,” said Dio. “I have some unfinished business that needs to be taken care of, anyway.” He gave the room one more sweeping glance, before settling back on Jonathan. “Don’t worry, I’ll come back later.” He gave Jonathan’s cheek a gentle pat, which Jonathan— in a feat of unparalleled self-control— allowed. Then he strode out of the room.

“You okay, grandpa?” Joseph asked as soon as the parlor doors were closed once again. Jonathan inhaled deeply.

“I’ll be fine,” he said, giving Joseph a quick smile before turning to the party guests. “I am terribly sorry, everyone, for this… interruption. But now that the uninvited guest has left, we can get right back on track.” He paused momentarily, looking around. “I, uh, I believe next up would be coffee and cake.”

~x~

The party went on, although with clear signs of strain. Joseph tried to ask his grandparents more about Dio during the evening, but neither wanted to say much about it, and Joseph didn’t want to push the subject too much. Dio’s sudden appearance had clearly left both of them somewhat shaken, and Joseph thought it be best to leave the questions for later. Besides, he didn’t want to ruin Jonathan’s birthday any more than it had already been ruined.

Somewhat to Joseph’s surprise, it appeared that some of the older Zeppelis also knew who Dio was, though their knowledge on the subject was somewhat shakier. Most notable was nonna Maria, who clearly knew something about what had happened in the past, but refused to say a single word about the man, good or bad. He had also tried asking his mother about it, since it had been obvious Lisa Lisa had also recognized Dio, but she’d told him it wasn't her story to tell. Which Joseph could respect, even if he could hardly contain his curiosity.

The things Joseph managed to find out during the evening, from various people, were that Dio was a distinguished lawyer, and that years ago he and Jonathan had had a huge fight about something, leading to them not talking to—or about—each other for two and a half decades. Which explained why Joseph had never even heard of him. But what exactly had caused this rift between the two… that Joseph couldn’t find out.

When they finally made it home, hours later, Joseph toed off his shoes before immediately collapsing face first on the sofa with a huge sigh.
“Same,” said Caesar, nudging at his feet until he made room for a second person. Joseph put his legs across Caesar’s lap as soon as he’d sat down.

“I was **not** expecting tonight to be so… exhausting,” Joseph said into the sofa pillow.

“I don’t think anyone was expecting tonight to be what it was,” Caesar said. He started to massage Joseph’s calf muscles absently. It felt amazing after many hours of standing around. “Estranged brother suddenly showing up at your door is probably on nobody’s list of things likely to happen.”

“Mm. At least it wasn’t a long lost evil twin,” Joseph sniggered. “Although I did get a kinda, uh, menacing vibe from him.”

“Yeah, me too.”

The silence stretched on, familiar and comfortable. Joseph hummed as Caesar kept massaging, his fingers traveling lower along his legs.

“I do wonder what the guy did though,” Joseph said. “You know, ‘cause gramps is all about being polite and forgiving everyone. It’s really hard to imagine him completely shutting **anyone** out of his life, let alone an adopted brother, asshole or not.”

“It is weird,” Caesar agreed, rubbing circles on the balls of Joseph’s feet. “It must have been something terrible… Do you think he committed some kind of a crime?”

“Speedwagon tried to rob gramps the first time they met, and he took him **in**,” Joseph pointed out. “So it’s gotta be a pretty heinous crime.”

“Maybe he killed someone,” Caesar said. They both paused.

“No,” said Joseph. “There’s no way. Right?”

“You’re the one who said he had a ‘menacing vibe’.”

“I know! But still… Shouldn’t he be in jail if he killed a guy?”

“He was a lawyer, right? Maybe he weaseled his way out somehow.”

They paused again.

“**Argh!** This is gonna bother me all night now!” Joseph whined, turning around to lay on his back and pushing his fingers through his hair. Caesar lifted his hands in the air when Joseph started to move, but settled them back on his calves when he was still again. He didn’t continue the rubbing anymore.

Joseph rested his hands on his stomach and stared at the ceiling. Caesar shifted slightly under his legs. They were quiet for a long time.

Eventually Joseph started to doze off slightly, at which point Caesar tickled his feet to wake him up and told him to go to bed if he was going to sleep. Joseph got off the sofa with only mild complaining. They brushed their teeth side by side, and then they bid each other good night and went into their own rooms.

And as Joseph climbed into his bed and stared at the ceiling in his room, he wandered what exactly Dio’s comment about their relationship had meant. And how could it be that even a man who had known him and Caesar for a total of *two minutes* could also so easily see *something* in them,
something that everybody seemed to see, something that made everyone think they were *actually* a couple. He sighed, and tried to wrap his head around it once more, just as unsuccessfully as always before.

He fell into an uneasy sleep.
A chain reaction, but with pillars as the dominoes

Chapter Summary

They sure keep hiring a lot of people for a wedding that is *not actually happening*.

Chapter Notes

Hi there. Welcome to the next chapter. Thank you for all your lovely comments again last chapter, I'm glad you guys enjoyed DIO haha. (A lot of you seemed to be worried about terrible, painful caejose drama, but really now, would I do that to you? **yes**.) Anyway, you needn't worry, this one is a lot more on the light side. I do have to tell you though, I *will* have to take a small break from writing (I have 7 weeks to study four physics courses if I want to have a shot at getting to my top pick university next fall, so....... ugh) BUT I have the next chapter all planned out and stuff, I just need to finish writing it. It'll be coming your way in May~ So yeah, enjoy the chapter and I'll see you guys on the flip side.

“How can it be this *fucking* hard to find a decent florist in this city??” Joseph whined as they exited the fifth goddamn flower shop of the day. After last Sunday’s... *well*, the plan to start breaking up had been kind of derailed. Completely derailed, actually. And Suzie, being an overly enthusiastic ball of meddling madness, had decided that the wedding planning must go on and onwards it went. Or would’ve gone if she’d just accept any of the florists. “You are way too picky about this, you know. The first one was just fine!”

“They’ve all been ‘just fine’,” Suzie said, rearranging a few papers in her binder and then stuffing it in her bigger-on-the-inside handbag. “That’s why I’ve taken a business card and a copy of their portfolio from all of them. But none of them have been perfect.”

“What even is ‘perfect’??” Joseph countered. “Like, what exactly are you hoping to find? We don’t actually know what kind of flowers we want yet, and even if we did, you’re apparently living in some kind of delusion that a perfect florist will just magically appear before our eyes as we turn the corner! This isn’t a goddamn fairytale!”

“What about that one? It looks promising,” said Caesar, pointing at something as they turned the corner. Joseph glared at him but he just smirked.

“Fine, we’ll check that one out too, but it’s the last one. I’m tired and I have shit to do, I wanna go home,” Joseph said, stuffing his hands in his coat pockets with a huff. “And don’t get your hopes up. It’s probably just as mediocre as the rest of them.”

Caesar and Suzie both rolled their eyes. Sometimes the family resemblance was obvious enough to punch you in the face.

They crossed the street and continued to the shop. It was a small place, or at least the front of it was, it might’ve continued further back than it seemed. The two display windows had beautifully arranged
flowers in them, and it did—as Caesar had said—look promising. The sign above the door announced the shop’s name to be “Pillar Flora”, whatever the hell that meant. It did ring some distant bells in Joseph’s mind, almost like warning bells, but he couldn’t for the life of him figure out why. So he shrugged it off and entered the shop with his friends.

The interior of the shop was like a sauna, especially after the not-exactly-warm-yet air of the outside. It was humid and warm, which was kinda nice but also a bit suffocating. And the plants, wow. There were plants on every available surface, tables, boxes, chairs… Along one wall were premade bouquets in cold cabinets, no doubt to keep them from wilting in the heat. There were hooks in the ceiling with hanging baskets suspended on them, the lush green leaves of the different plants spilling over the sides.

And behind the counter was the shop’s owner, crouching so that only a tuft of purple—purple!—hair was visible. He stood up as the bell above the door jingled, a spray bottle in his hand. Joseph noticed, to his amusement, that the man had no shirt under his apron, which was weird, but okay. He did have amazing biceps, Joseph could hardly fault him for wanting to show off. But then he stepped around the counter, coming into full view.

He wasn’t wearing pants either.

The clerk was naked.

Well, not completely naked, but the apron hardly counted, and really, it covered only a sliver of his wide torso and (thankfully the entirety of) his junk. His sides and back were completely exposed. And as if the nakedness wasn't enough weird for him, his curly purple—purple!!—hair was also ridiculously long, and his bangs were pushed off his face and kept still with a large hairclip. Which had a tiara on it.

This was not what Joseph had expected.

“Welcome,” said the clerk. “Do you need help with something?”

There was a stunned silence. Joseph opened and closed his mouth as his brain tried to form words and not concentrate on the naked, muscular man in front of them. Finally Caesar managed to say something.

“We are planning a wedding and were wandering if this establishment provides florists for such occasions,” he said.

“Of course we do, we provide flowers for any and all possible needs,” the clerk said. He looked between the three of them. “So, which ones of you are getting married? I know for a fact that polyamorous marriages are still illegal in New York.”

“That would be these two,” said Suzie, stepping forward and indicating with her thumb at Caesar and the still silently gaping Joseph. “I’m their wedding planner. And best woman.”

“Congratulations,” the clerk said, picking up a flower pot from the side table and using the spray bottle to squirt mist onto the leaves of the plant. He didn’t sound particularly sincere in Joseph’s opinion, but at least he didn’t sound appalled either. More like he was just fulfilling his social obligations. “When is the ceremony? How big is it? What is the motif?”

“September first, around 75 people, and ‘Bizarre Adventure’,” said Suzie, whipping out her binder. “‘Bizarre Adventure’?” the clerk asked, making a face. “That sounds… interesting.”
“Yes, it does,” Suzie gritted out, directing a look back at Joseph and Caesar. Joseph rolled his eyes. His brain finally came to the conclusion that this weird man would be naked for the foreseeable future and there was nothing he could do about it, so might as well accept it and move on. He stepped forward after Suzie.

“So, do you have a portfolio or something, mister…?” he asked, motioning with his hand.

“Kars,” said the clerk. “And obviously.” Then he walked behind the counter again and bent down behind it.

When he reemerged, he had a large folder in his hands, which he unceremoniously dropped on the counter between them. He gestured at it, and Suzie opened the first page.

“Holy wow,” she breathed and then grinned. The arrangements were astonishing. They were unique and colorful, each of them bringing to justice the theme which was written next to the pictures. The compositions were beautiful, the flowers in each of the pieces fitting together in harmony, despite their difference in size and color. Joseph had seen flower arrangements before, but this was something else altogether.

“These are amazing,” said Caesar, who had leaned in to take a look at the binder over Joseph’s shoulder. He was practically pressed against Joseph’s side. Joseph purposefully didn’t think about it.

“Do you work by yourself?”

“Mostly,” Kars said. “Other people generally just get in my way. Although I do have a few, ah, subordinates to help me with bigger orders. I take it you like what you see.”

“Definitely,” Suzie said and then elbowed Joseph with a self-satisfied smirk. “And you said we wouldn’t find a perfect florist.”

“This is way too good to be true,” Joseph said, rubbing his arm, and gave Kars an onceover.

“I assure you, I am very true,” said Kars, crossing his arms over his chest. But not like he was annoyed, but maybe more like he was… posing? “I suppose fully comprehending such perfection can be a difficult task, for some. So, what kind of arrangements are you looking for, gentlemen?” The change in tone was so fast Joseph almost missed the jab, but he had had years of practice deciphering passive-aggressive comments and subtle insults. He might have been offended, if he wasn’t so impressed.

“We’re not exactly sure yet,” Caesar said, finally moving back a bit. Joseph felt cold suddenly, even with the high temperature of the shop. “Something colorful, and unique, and maybe a bit weird. Bold combinations.”

“Mm. In order to make the best arrangement I need to know more about the locations of the ceremony and the reception,” Kars said, running his fingers along his jaw. “To ensure that my work fits the surroundings, you see. Photographs will… suffice,” he made a face again, “but it would be best to visit the location itself, if that is possible.”

“I’m sure that can be arranged,” Joseph said. “You’ll have to wear clothes, though. The venue is my grandparent’s house.”

Kars blinked. And looked down. And back up again.

“Of course,” he said, striking another pose. “If that will make you feel better. I do usually wear clothes around the shop, but I had to change pots for several of the plants today. It’s such messy business, I thought it best to forego clothes altogether for the process. I must have neglected to
redress myself afterwards.” He paused momentarily and drew in a deep breath. “Clothing is so very restrictive, you know.”

He seemed amazingly unfazed by this whole “accidentally naked in front of customers” thing, like it was something that happened often. Although, Joseph suddenly realized to his slight horror, maybe it did.

“Well then, Mr. Kars,” Suzie said after a moment of awkward silence. “We’ll be in touch about the venue visit, and once we have an approximate vision of what we want, we can discuss prices. Is that alright?”

“Yes, that sounds acceptable,” Kars said. He took a piece of paper from the other side of the cash register and offered it to her. “Here, my business card. It has the shop’s hours on it as well, you can call during any of those times.”

“Lovely!” she said, accepting the card. It was shaped like an ancient Greek pillar, with a rose on one end. The shop’s name and address were written on one side with golden cursive, while the opening hours and phone number were on the back. “I like your card.”

“Thank you,” Kars said. “It was designed my one of my brethren.” Joseph considered commenting on the choice of words, but Kars seemed to have had an idea, and continued, “This might not be any of my business, but have you already arranged for a cake?”

“No, not yet,” Suzie admitted. “Do you know someone?”

“Yes, in fact I do,” Kars said. “The very same man that designed my card. He owns a small bakery not too far from here. If you have the time, I could give you directions and you could go pay him a visit. He is quite talented, I must admit.”

“I don’t have anything planned,” said Suzie. “And I definitely won’t say no to cake. What about you two?”

“I have time,” said Caesar. “Jojo?”

“I have soo much schoolwork,” said Joseph, groaning. “But I really don’t wanna go do that, though…” He paused and then sighed. “Oh to hell with it! Let’s go meet this cake man.”

“Wonderful,” Kars said, scribbling something down on the back of another business card. “Here’s the address. Tell him that Kars sent you.”

“We will, thank you!” Suzie said cheerily and they left the shop. The cold outside hit them like a brick wall.

As Kars had said, the bakery wasn’t very far from the flower shop. They were back near the edge of Little Italy—where they had started their hunt for flowers that morning, naturally—and after only about five minutes of wandering around they found the shop. “Santana’s Pillar Pastries” (because apparently “pillar” was the word of the day) was also a small business, much like “Pillar Flora” had been, and Joseph could see from the windows that it was a café in addition to a bakery. Which was good, because he could really do with a cup of joe right about now.

The bell above the door jingled as they walked in and the man behind the cash register looked over.

“Welcome to Pillar Pastries,” he said and he was so normal it was almost weird. After the guy at the flower shop, Joseph had honestly expected… well, something. But the guy was just a regular guy. His red hair was tied on a bun on the top of his head, and he was wearing a clean white shirt with a
nametag on it and a black apron tied around his waist. He looked professional and, while not particularly excited, he was smiling at them politely.

“Hello! Are you the owner?” asked Suzie, as the three approached the counter. The man nodded.

“I’m Santana, yes,” he said. “Can I help you somehow?”

“We’re in need of a wedding cake, and were referred here,” Caesar said, looking around the room. Joseph took in their surroundings as well. There were around a dozen tables, most of them small, but a few a bit bigger ones as well. On the shelves along the counter were the pastries and other baked goods that were on sale, price tags next to them: buns and cupcakes and cream puffs, precut cakes and a few pies. Joseph’s mouth started to water as his eyes roamed over them.

“Referred? By who?” Santana asked, blinking. Suzie dug out the business card with the directions on it.

“By a man named Kars,” she said, handing him the card. “He said you were quite talented.”

“Ah, of course. Who else but Lord Kars,” Santana huffed, amused, turning the card around in his fingers.

“‘Lord’?” Joseph asked.

“An old college nickname,” Santana said, waving it off and handing the card back. “You were in need of a cake, were you not? What kind were you thinking about? Vanilla, chocolate, sponge cake..?”

“I’m partial to red velvet, myself,” Caesar said.

“Ooh, yeah, with the kind of cream cheese frosting,” said Joseph, grinning. “Or buttercream frosting!”

“Definitely cream cheese,” Caesar said. “Who puts buttercream on red velvet?”

“Well excuse me, mister master baker. Don’t know why I thought I’d get an opinion too.”

Caesar rolled his eyes and opened his mouth.

“Settle down, boys,” Suzie said. “Let’s try to stay on topic here.”

“I do have some leftover red velvet from this morning, if you’d like to sample it?” Santana cut in. “If you’ll give me a minute, you can try it with both kinds of frostings.”

“That sounds great, thank you,” Suzie said with a bright smile. She directed a glare at Joseph and Caesar. “You two go sit down, and behave yourselves.”


“You can help yourselves to some coffee while you wait,” Santana said, gesturing at the coffee pot on the counter. “On the house, for the friends of Kars.”

He disappeared through a door in the back, leading into the kitchen. Joseph poured himself a cup, and took a huge gulp of the merciful, black liquid life. Caesar watched him in amusement, but he ignored it. He was tired dammit, and he would enjoy this free coffee.

They sat down at one of the longer tables with their coffee cups in front of them, and let their feet
relax for a moment. They’d been walking around for hours now, and while Joseph appreciated the
distraction from his finals every now and again, his legs did need to rest occasionally too. He closed
his eyes with a deep breath, letting the smell of baked goods and coffee fill his lungs.

Santana returned a few minutes later, holding two plates in his hands, both of them with several bite
sized pieces of red velvet cake.

“Here you go,” he said as he set them down and fished three forks from the pocket of his apron.
“This one is cream cheese, and that one is buttercream.”

Joseph immediately impaled one of the pieces with buttercream with his fork and stuffed it in his
mouth. He groaned around it.

“That is really good,” he said, mouth full. Caesar side-eyed him, his eye twitching and mouth pressed
into a tight line. Joseph could see he was about a second away from scolding Joseph for speaking
with food in his mouth. Joseph stuck his tongue out at him, smoothly masking it as licking his lips
before the other two noticed. Caesar looked scandalized.

“Oh, that is delicious, Mr. Santana!” Suzie said before Caesar had any time to say anything. “The
buttercream fits really well with the red velvet.”

“See, Caesarino,” Joseph said with a smirk. “You can put buttercream on red velvet. You should try
it too.”

Caesar glared at him, but dutifully picked up a piece with his fork. He only hesitated for a second
before he put it in his mouth.

“Well…?” Joseph prompted when he said nothing for a moment.

“It’s… pretty good,” Caesar admitted begrudgingly. “Though I still think cream cheese frosting
belongs with red velvet.”

“Yeah, and I think I don’t give a shit about what ‘belongs’ with what,” Joseph said, and snatched up
a piece with the cream cheese frosting, popping it in his mouth. His knees would’ve probably gone
weak had he not been sitting down. “Holy fuck,” he moaned. “That is the best cream cheese frosting
I have ever tasted. Oh my god.”

Santana let out a short laugh. “Thank you,” he said as Suzie reached over excitedly to get a taste.

Caesar had the smuggest face Joseph had ever seen on him, but Joseph ignored him in favor of
taking another piece of the cake. Caesar seemed to realize that he should act fast if he wanted to try it
too, and picked up a piece of his own.

“Wow,” he said, blinking a few times in rapid succession. “I don’t know what I was expecting, but
wow.”

“So, you like that one?” Santana asked. All three of them nodded. “I’m glad. Might I ask, when is
the wedding?”

Joseph was just about to take the last piece, but Caesar beat him to it, and he was left to scrape the bit
of frosting left on plate with the edge of his fork. “September first,” he said, sticking the frosting in
his mouth.

“You’re out quite early then. Usually people don’t get the cake until a few months before the
wedding.”
“Well, we were actually out looking for a florist,” Caesar said, settling his fork on the plate and taking a sip of coffee.

“And that’s how you met Kars,” said Santana and nodded in understanding. “And what is the theme of the wedding? Have you thought about decorations?”

“The theme is ‘Bizarre Adventure’,” Joseph said, sucking on his fork, even though it had been thoroughly cleansed of any frosting remnants by now. “So something big and exciting and weird.”

“‘Bizarre Adventure’? That does sound exciting,” Santana said, tapping a finger across his lips. “Maybe something colorful. And with an unusual topper…”

“We haven’t really put much thought into it yet,” Caesar said, unhelpfully.

“Well, I can draw you up a few design suggestions for next time,” Santana said, stacking the now empty plates. Suzie had finished off the buttercream cakes. “With a theme like that, I can try out some really interesting things. And I can also make a few other bases for you to try, if you like. Or did you already decide you want the red velvet cream cheese?”

“I’ll try some others,” said Joseph eagerly. “If they’re anything like this though, we’re gonna be in for a tough decision.”

“All right then, I’ll prepare some different options for you for next time.” Santana stood up, and picked the plates from the table. “I’ll give you my number, so we can arrange for the next meeting.”

They returned to the counter, where Santana gave them his business card. It was similar to the one Pillar Flora had, except instead of a rose, it had a cupcake at the end of the pillar. Joseph grinned. How cute.

That’s when song on the radio caught his attention.

“What song is this, it sounds pretty good,” he commented out loud. The others stopped to listen as well.

“Oh,” said Santana. “This is actually one of the songs performed by the band I’m in.”

“You’re in a band?” Caesar asked.

“Yes, along with Kars and a few of our brethren,” Santana said. There was the word again, and this time Joseph had to ask.

“Brethren?”

“People from out college fraternity,” Santana explained. “That’s what we called each other. I suppose it does sound a bit weird to an outsider, but force of habit I guess.”

Joseph nodded. Then he had an idea. And like all his ideas, it was amazing.

“You guys should totally be our wedding band!” he said. There was a moment’s pause.

“Wait, really?” said Caesar. “Are you sure we want to arrange for a band right now? Besides, weren’t you the one who kept insisting on a DJ?”

“Well, yeah. But listen to that sound!” Joseph said. “It’s amazing!”

“We’ve never done a wedding before,” said Santana, tapping the finger on his lips again. “I would
have to ask the others what they say, but personally I wouldn’t be opposed. And we do have enough
time to learn the wedding waltz."

“You hear that, Caesarino? They can do the wedding waltz!” Joseph said and flashed Caesar a bright

grin.

"We're not looking for a band, Jojo! We shouldn't..." He stopped himself, glancing towards Suzie.

Joseph took the opportunity to cut in again.

“Come on, it’ll be cool. Plus, if our florist and our baker are also our band, it'll be less people to

worry about.”

Caesar opened his mouth, and then closed it again. He glanced upwards, focusing on the music for a

while as it drifted from the radio. Then he sighed, defeated.

“Do you guys have like... a demo CD or something?” he asked Santana.

“We do have a website,” Santana suggested. “I’ll write the address down so you can check it out.”

“Brilliant,” said Joseph, and took the business card Santana handed him.

“We’ll... be in touch then,” said Caesar and smiled. A little tiredly, but still.

They exited the shop, returning once again to the cool, early spring air of New York.

“This day was a lot more productive than I had hoped,” Suzie said brightly as they walked through

the streets of Little Italy, making their way towards her parents’ shop. “You guys wanna come over

and try some tuxes on while we’re at it?”

“As much fun as that is,” Joseph said sarcastically, “I do have to go home and continue my

schoolwork.”

“That’s fine, I was just kidding,” Suzie said with a sympathetic smile. “Tuxedos take a lot less time

than wedding dresses would, so we have plenty of time for that after Jojo manages to graduate.” She

paused. “You will buy your tuxes from us though, right?”

“Obviously,” Caesar said. “What kind of family would I be if I didn’t commission my wedding suit

from my aunt? Or were you planning on making them?”

“I might,” said Suzie, pursing her lips. “It would look pretty good on my portfolio, no doubt.”

“As long as they look pretty good on us as well,” said Joseph. He checked his phone for time. “No

but seriously, I need to get home pronto, I have so much shit I still need to finish today.”

“Right, right,” Suzie said. “I’ll let you boys get going then, I’m sure I can manage to go the rest of

the way alone. I’ll see you later.”

“See you, Suzie,” Caesar said, leaning down to give her a small kiss on the cheek.

“Bye Suzie,” said Joseph with a wave, and they parted ways.

As soon as they got back home, Joseph shuffled over into kitchen and reemerged a few seconds later

with two oranges, a knife, and a bunch of paper towels in hand.

“Okay, so, I’m gonna need you to not talk to me for the next... 40 days,” he told Caesar and sighed

very, very deeply. “Wish me luck.”
“Good luck, Jojo,” Caesar said, amused. Joseph gave him a grin and disappeared into his room. He was gonna study his ass off.
Caesar's Birthday, Day Edition

Chapter Summary

It's Caesar's birthday, and Jojo has so much planned! Caesar is understandably cautious and does not appreciate the early wake up. (Part 1 of 2)

Chapter Notes

Heyyyy again everyone! Happy Birthday to Caesar! I can't believe he's already 98 years, what a healthy and alive grandpa he is ahahahahaha! In this au he's only 26 tho. Him and José are both 90s kids haha.
Anyway, today's chapter is brought to you in 2 parts, because holy shit it became really long. This is the first part duh, and I'll post the next part hmmmm sometime during the weekend (when I finish it) (probably Sunday evening but I might finish it tomorrow who knows).
I'll see you guys then, I hope you like today's chapter!

Caesar let out a surprised yelp as he was violently woken up by a loud slamming noise.

“Rise and shine, Caesarino!” A booming voice entered his consciousness and he looked around the room, confused and alarmed. Finally, he located the source; it was Joseph, standing in his doorway, a shit-eating grin on his face. Of course.

“What the fuck Joseph??” he demanded, befuddled. “Did you just kick my fucking door in?”

“Absolutely not,” said Joseph, still grinning, and practically skipped to Caesar’s bed. Caesar only realized he had something in his hands when the Joestar leaned down and set said something in his lap. It turned out to be a tray, and Caesar blinked down at it and then up at Joseph, who rolled his eyes. “I made you breakfast,” Joseph said. “‘Cause it’s your birthday.”

“I… wha—what time is it?” Caesar asked, looking around again, trying to locate the alarm clock on his nightstand in his dazed state.

“About 7:15,” said Joseph, way too chipper for that hour of the day.

“Seven—?” Caesar paused and rubbed his eyes. “Why exactly are you bringing me breakfast in bed at seven fifteen, Jojo?” he asked after a deep breath. Maybe he was actually still dreaming and would wake up to find Joseph not in his bedroom with breakfast way too early in the morning on the first free day he had in two goddamn weeks. That would be the best birthday present ever.

“Because I have to leave for school in fifteen minutes,” Joseph said with a shrug.

“Yes, but… why did you even make me breakfast?” Caesar insisted. Joseph looked at him like he’d asked if the sky was blue.
“Because… it’s your birthday,” he said slowly. “That’s what you do… on someone’s birthday. Happy birthday.”

“I… okay. Okay,” Caesar said, blinking. He resolved to examining the tray on his lap. There was a large cup full of coffee, a toast with jam, and an omelet. The last time Joseph had made him an omelet for breakfast tickled in the far reaches of his memory. He felt his lips twitch upwards despite everything. “Thank you, I guess.”

“You’re very welcome.” Joseph smiled brightly, and then dug his cellphone from the pocket of his jeans and checked it, while Caesar took a sip of his coffee. He let out a contented hum. It was just as he liked his morning coffee, one sugar and a splash of cream. And while he knew from past experience Joseph was aware of his coffee drinking habits, it still warmed his heart to see that Joseph had made the effort of getting it right. Especially so, since they had run out of cream yesterday, meaning Joseph had gone to the shop specifically to get more, specifically for this coffee, since he took his own black. Caesar smiled wider into his cup and took another sip.

“Ahhh, fuck, I think I’d better get going,” Joseph said, frowning at his phone. “If I’m late one more time the prof will throw me out. Which could really be problematic, considering that I’m trying to graduate next week.” He laughed, the sound turning into a long sigh at the end. “Too bad I can’t skip this lecture too, but at least it’s just for 90 minutes.”

“Wait, you’re not going to skip all your classes today, right?” Caesar asked, frowning up at Joseph.

“Hell yeah I am,” Joseph proclaimed proudly. That wasn’t really a thing to be proud about, was it?

“You’re graduating next week, Jojo!” said Caesar, setting down the coffee cup. “You just said it yourself. Are you sure you can afford to—”

“Yes.” Joseph grabbed a hold of Caesar’s shoulders and looked him square in the face. His eyes were filled with the kind of determination that made it clear protesting would be useless. “It’s your birthday. And I’ll be damned if I don’t spend as much as I can of it with you. So you just… sit pretty and eat your breakfast,” he gestured vaguely at the tray in Caesar’s lap, “and I’ll be back in a few hours. This’ll be the best day of your life.” He grinned.

And then he smacked a kiss on the crown of Caesar’s head, right in the middle of his mussy hair.

And then he was out of the room.

Caesar stared after him, mouth agape and eyes wide, trying to comprehend what had just happened. His mind was whirring, running wild and then stopping abruptly before repeating the process, coming up with a million reasons and discarding them all in a matter of milliseconds. He could feel the heat rising on his cheeks, his heartbeat hammering in his chest, his breath catching in his throat. He swallowed thickly. He looked down at the tray on his lap, at the simple yet earnest breakfast and the perfect coffee.

He buried his face in his hands and tried to not scream.

~x~

Eventually Caesar decided that he wouldn’t read too much into it. After all, Joseph was a very spontaneous and affectionate person, especially when excited, and had probably meant absolutely nothing by the kiss. It was hardly even a kiss, really, more like a quick peck, and placed on top of his head no less, the most platonic place to kiss another human being. It was absolutely meaningless. Absolutely.
What possible reason would there even be? Joseph never thought too hard about what he did, he didn't have hidden agendas for things. Except for when he did. With everything. Always… But no, he wouldn’t with this. Not with Caesar. No, it was surely just Joseph being… well, Joseph. Just a friendly expression of, of friendship, right? Just… bros… being bros…

Caesar stared out of the window for a few seconds, at the grey clouds amassing high up, preparing to rain down on the waiting earth. He rubbed this eyes furiously.

He was no-homoing himself, this was a new low.

But as much fun as it would be to believe Joseph might have an ulterior motive for his actions, Caesar would not allow himself to hope. This wasn’t his first time in a situation similar to this, and he wouldn’t make the same mistakes again. The mistake of getting his hopes up, only to watch his whole world crash and burn around him. It wasn’t a position he wanted to be in ever again. He could still remember all the sleepless nights he’d spent staring at his bedroom ceiling, wondering what he’d done wrong after—

For Heaven’s sake, he berated himself. No need to get all mopey about it again. It had been three years ago, and he was over it. Of course the memory was still there, the scars still present, but he had learned since then. He had learned about the consequences of getting his hopes up over battles he knew he couldn’t win, over lost causes like Joseph. And that's why he wouldn't read into the kiss.

He couldn't.

He distracted himself from his thoughts by washing the dishes—which Joseph had been kind enough to leave for him—and then taking a long shower and then checking his social network feeds. There were a lot of people wishing him a happy birthday, and by the time he'd replied to them all, Joseph had returned.

Caesar wasn't sure how he'd expected Joseph to react when he returned, if he wanted Joseph to bring it up or definitely not bring it up, if he wanted Joseph to be flustered or embarrassed or uncertain. Joseph was none of those things. He didn't react at all, or even acknowledge that he had done anything out of the ordinary. Which, Caesar reminded himself, he hadn't, because everything Joseph ever did was 100% natural to him. He was thinking too much again.

“You ready to go, Caesar?” Joseph asked with a grin, bringing Caesar's attention back to the present. Caesar frowned.

“Go?” he asked. He checked his watch. “It's twenty past ten, where are we going at this hour?”

“Brunch,” said Joseph.

“Excuse me?”

“With family,” he continued. “Don't you worry a bit; I've got the whole day planned out. I've taken care of everything. All you need to do is relax and enjoy the ride.”

“I… don't know what to say,” Caesar said, running a hand through his hair. “When did you even have time to plan something like that?”

“Well, I'll admit, Suzie had her hand in it too,” Joseph muttered, glancing to the side. “But the awesome parts were all mine!”

“I have no doubt,” Caesar said. Joseph gave him a look. “Are you gonna tell me where we're going after brunch?”
“Nope! It's more fun that way. Now get up and let's go!”

~x~

Joseph took them over to Little Italy and “Trattoria Trussardi”, to absolutely nobody’s surprise. There they met with the “family”, which in this case apparently meant grandparents. Joseph's grandparents and nonna Maria, to be specific. Joseph had also extended the invitation to the rest of Caesar’s family, and his own mother, and Suzie’s parents, but it being eleven o’clock on a weekday, no one who went to work or school could make it. Except Juliana, who as a new college student had quickly learned never to turn down free food, even if she had to skip a lecture to acquire it.

“Did you seriously come here just for the free food?” Caesar asked his sister as they sat side by side at the table.

“What are you talking about?” she said. “Of course I came to wish my big bro a happy birthday!” She clapped him on the shoulder and gave him a wide smile. “No but yeah, it’s mostly the food.”

Joseph sniggered. Caesar scoffed and rolled his eyes. He didn’t berate Juliana too badly though; he’d been a college student once too.

That was when the wait staff appeared, filling the table with foods that Joseph had had the good mind to order in advance. Caesar was also showered with a litany of birthday felicitations, since even the staff members that weren’t related to him were close friends by this point. The entire staff had even pitched in and gotten him a card and a new silk scarf as a birthday present. Caesar was deeply touched.

They ate, and they talked, and they laughed. Joseph’s grandparents tried asking him about his graduation, but he just smiled and said it was “fine”, a very distant look in his eyes. Caesar felt kind of bad that Joseph had decided to dedicate the entire day to hanging out with him, when there was clearly still stuff he had to take care of, but it wasn’t like Caesar had asked him to do that. It was all his own damn fault. And hey, at least Joseph didn’t have to worry about organizing a graduation party on top of it all, since Lisa Lisa had promised to do that, with help from Erina and Jonathan.

They also discussed the wedding, because honestly it was inevitable in the current company, what with the Estate being the venue. They didn't talk about it too much though, just possible dates for the florist visit and such. Caesar always felt weird talking about the wedding, because it wasn’t really going to happen, but all this talk about it was making him feel like it… was. Of course, they had to talk about it, because as far as everyone else was concerned, the wedding was happening, and it would’ve been weird to not talk about it, but it just… Sometimes he got so into the planning he forgot it was all pretend. And it was messing with Caesar’s head, big time.

But despite the slightly uncomfortable wedding-chat, he had a pleasant time at Trussardi’s. He had time to catch up with nonna Maria, and Juliana told all kinds of stories from her first semesters in University. Even after all the delicious food had been consumed, they kept sitting there, talking.

Eventually Joseph checked the time on his phone.

“Oh, we should get going,” he said, putting the phone away again. “Don’t want to be late for the show.”

“What kind of show are we talking about here?” Caesar asked, amused and only slightly worried. He would trust Joseph with his life, and he knew Joseph had planned the day specifically for him, but… this was still Joseph. A small amount of caution was necessary with anything that he’d had his hands in. The “show” could really be anything ranging from movies to a street performance to a magic
show to a strip show, probably. It could be literally anything.

“A play,” Joseph said, standing up. Caesar blinked. That was a pleasant surprise.

“Like in an actual theater?” he asked, corner of mouth tugging upwards. Joseph snorted.

“Why do you sound so surprised? Didn’t think I’d be refined enough for that?” he asked. “Sure, it’s not Broadway, but still. Small scale show by the theater majors of the, uh… theater… school.”

It was Caesar’s turn to snort. Joseph glared at him for a moment, but Jonathan stood up before he had a chance to say anything.

“Well then, you kids better go,” he said, helping Erina up next to him and then, like the gentleman he was, helping nonna Maria as well. Caesar downed the rest of his water and stood too, Juliana already pulling her jacket on next to him. “Oh, do you need a ride?” Jonathan asked as the three grandparents walked around the table.

“Nah, we’ll walk,” Joseph said. “Thanks for the offer though.”

“Alright then,” Jonathan said, turning to Caesar. “Happy birthday again, Caesar. We all have presents for you, but Joseph told us it might be inconvenient for you to carry them around all day, so we gave them to him yesterday,” he explained, shaking Caesar’s hand and clapping him on the shoulder. “I imagine he’ll give them to you in the evening.”

“That’s very thoughtful of you, thank you so much,” Caesar said, impressed by all the forethought Joseph had put into the day. Erina walked up and gave him a quick, but tight hug.

“Happy birthday,” she said. “I hope you enjoy the play.”

“Thank you,” Caesar said. “I’m glad we could do this. It was great catching up.”

“Cesare,” said nonna Maria, and Caesar turned to her, engulfing her in a hug. She petted his back and he kept her hands in his when he pulled away. “Happy birthday from me too,” she continued in Italian. “It’s always so nice when you have time to spend with family. I know how busy you are these days.”

“I always have time for you, nonna,” he told her, in Italian as well. She shook her head with a huff and a smile.

“You don’t need to go that far,” she said, eyes crinkling even further at the corners. “You have your own life, and I understand that. I am very grateful for all the times I already get to see you.” She leaned a bit closer and winked. “You don’t need to worry about me so much, I have a big, amazing family.” Caesar let out a breathy laugh and nodded. “Now off you go, boys. It’d be a shame if you missed your play because of me. Besides, I have someone else to visit today as well.”

“Grazie, nonna,” he said, leaning down so she could reach to place a kiss on his forehead.

“See ya later, bro,” said Juliana, punching him on the arm softly. He ruffled her hair with a laugh. She protested loudly, pushing his hand away, but she was wearing a wide grin on her face.

“See ya,” Caesar said and turned to Joseph, who was bidding his own goodbyes to his grandparents.

“Oh, you ready to go?” Joseph asked when he noticed Caesar looking in his direction and Caesar nodded. Joseph placed one last kiss on Erina’s cheek. “Bye then,” he said to her and Jonathan, and then to Caesar, “Let’s roll.”
“So are you going to at least tell me what the play is about?” Caesar asked as they made their way towards the theater. It wasn’t very far from Little Italy, the trip taking only around 15 minutes by foot. So, even with the less than optimal weather, it wasn’t too much of a drag to walk. They had umbrellas for when the rain would really start.

“Hm? Well, I guess I can tell you that. Though you’ll be seeing it for yourself soon enough,” Joseph shrugged, swinging the umbrella around, before resting it against his shoulder. “It’s a retelling of the original Dracula story.”

“Really Jojo, vampires?” Caesar asked with a smirk.

“Wha— Hey, no, it’s not some dumbass sparkly pretty boys, it’s real vampires. Proper terrifying, drink you dry, kill your dog vampires.”

“I… don’t remember there being a dog in Dracula.”

Joseph frowned.

“Really? There’s a dog in this one,” he said finally and then shrugged again. “And I don’t really know if the dog dies. He can’t actually die though, right?”

“I admire your optimism,” Caesar said. Joseph huffed out a laugh. “So they have an real life dog in the show? Like, on stage with the actors?”

“Yeah, a real dog,” Joseph said. “At least they had a note on the website to warn people with severe allergies and stuff. So either that, or they’re gonna throw dog hair at the audience at some point.”

“Probably not that,” agreed Caesar, chuckling at the mental image. “What made you choose Dracula anyway? Just the dog?”

“Of course not just the dog, although it was a definite plus,” Joseph said. “The story sounded interesting. And the name was awesome! I mean, ‘The Phantom Count’? How cool is that?”

“Well let’s hope they deliver on their awesome name,” Caesar said. “That the place?”

Joseph confirmed that it was, and they crossed the street and entered the theater building. The entrance room was packed full of people, although since the room itself wasn’t that big, it looked to be a lot more than it was. After a quick glance Caesar estimated around fifty people in total. There was a coat rack on one side of the room, a door on the other, and a table near the back, where they gave out brochures and sold… t-shirts and other merchandise, apparently. Everything was brandished with some kind of a logo, but Caesar couldn’t get close enough to make it out. It was probably the school’s logo, he guessed.

“Here you go,” said Joseph, who had managed to wiggle his way to the back of the room while Caesar had put their jackets and umbrellas away, and handed him a program.

“Thanks,” said Caesar, looking it over. It had the cast list and a short summary of the story printed on it. “Wow, this isn’t just a retelling of Dracula. This is a complete revamp.”

“Hah, nice one,” said Joseph. Caesar allowed the grin to spread on his lips, but he didn’t lift his gaze from the brochure.

“So Count Dracula and Jonathan Harker are adoptive brothers, huh? That sounds like an interesting
“Hey wait, don’t spoil it!” Joseph said. “I wanna see the play before I read the summary. The play’ll be more exciting that way.”

“Gee, sorry,” Caesar said with a roll of his eyes. “Don’t know why I thought you’d be aware of the premise of the play you chose we’d go see.”

“I know some things,” Joseph said as he slapped Caesar on the arm with the brochure. “Like that Dracula isn’t a vampire at the beginning. And there’s some kind of an Aztec curse!”

“Well cookie for you,” Caesar said. Joseph opened his mouth to retort. The side door opened and a man appeared in the doorway.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the play is about to start,” he announced. “Please make your way to your seats. We will be checking your tickets at the door, so please have them ready at hand.”

“Here we go,” said Caesar and grinned for getting the last word. Joseph scoffed, but dug out their tickets dutifully, and the two entered the dark auditorium.

When they exited, about two and a half hours later, Joseph looked just about ready to cry.

“Is this about the dog?” Caesar asked, not sure if he wanted to be teasing or not. He knew the amount of love Joseph had for dogs of any and all shapes and sizes, but come on now. It had been a fictional dog.

“He was burnt alive!” Joseph wailed. Caesar patted him on the back.

“You do know they didn’t actually burn him alive, right?” he said. “Look, the dog’s right there.” He pointed at the back of the room, where the dog was indeed sitting by the table, wagging its tail excitedly. A few other audience members stopped by to pet it on their way out. Joseph looked over and sniffed loudly. “Do you want to go over and pet him?” Caesar asked but Joseph was already going. Caesar rolled his eyes with a smile and followed suit.

“Hello,” said the girl sitting behind the table. She was the lead actress, Caesar noticed, and had been quite talented in his opinion. Her character had been Mina Murray, Jonathan Harker’s fiancée, and while she hadn’t had nearly as many lines as the other main characters, her presence on the stage had really been captivating. She was still wearing her costume, a pretty blue Victorian dress which really brought out her eyes.

Joseph ignored her completely.

“Oh,” she said as he knelt down by the dog, giving it his full attention.

“Do excuse my friend,” said Caesar as he approached the table, and the girl turned to look up at him. “He got quite emotional when the dog… well.” She let out a soft, short laugh.

“That’s alright,” she said. “We knew it would stir up a lot of emotion, especially since we’d had a real dog on stage. There were a lot of discussion if we even wanted to include that scene when we were writing the script.”

“Oh, so you were one of the writers as well? That’s amazing,” said Caesar. “It was a very enjoyable play, both on stage and in paper. So I guess that’s doubly thanks to you.”

She laughed again, a little more confident.
“Thank you, I’m very proud of it as well,” she said with a small bow of her head. “I’m glad you liked it. There were some who were worried the story would be too, well, *bizarre* to appeal to many.”

The dog let out a short bark and then continued to pant happily. Joseph continued to shower it with affection.

“Who’s a good boy? Who’s a good boy?” he cooed at it, basically oblivious to everything around him. Caesar let a small smile make its way to his lips as he watched on.

“So, whose dog is this?” he asked the girl, though his eyes lingered on Joseph. “He is exceptionally well trained.”

“He’s my dog, actually,” the girl said, a faint flush raising to her cheeks as Caesar turned his gaze on her and lifted his eyebrows in surprise. “Or my family’s, anyway. My dad is the one who’s done the most training. Here, I’ll show you a few of his tricks.” She turned to the dog and cleared her throat. “Danny, shake.”

The dog lifted its front paw and the noise that left Joseph could only be described as pure, unadulterated glee.

“Danny, down.”

The dog lay down on the ground.

“Danny, stand.”

The dog sat up on its hind legs and brought its front legs up, back standing straight. Based on the look on Joseph’s face, Caesar was sure he’d be furiously wagging his own tail, had he one.

“Good boy, Danny!” the girl said and threw Danny a treat. He caught it midair, then smacked his lips in a pleased manner. Joseph was back to giving him TLC as soon as he had finished eating.

“Wow, Danny hasn’t gotten this much attention in a long time,” the girl laughed, looking at Joseph in amusement.

“Jojo can get a bit… enthusiastic, when dogs are involved,” Caesar said. “But I have to say, I’m really impressed. Writer, lead actress, and animal trainer?”

“And costume supervisor, and assistant producer, and in charge of the merch,” she said and laughed softly again. “I guess when theatre is involved, I get a bit enthusiastic.”

“Who said enthusiastic was bad?” Caesar asked. “It made this great play happen, didn’t it?”

The girl smiled, the corners of her eyes crinkling, all her bright white teeth showing. Caesar smiled back.

“*Holy shit*, what time is it?!” Joseph shrieked suddenly, shooting up quick enough to startle everyone around him. Even Danny let out a surprised “boof”.

“Jojo!” Caesar hissed. “Stop yelling. What’s the matter now?”

“We don’t have time for chitchat! We’ll be late for the next thing!”

“You’re the one that wanted to stay here and cuddle the dog,” he reminded Joseph. “Of course I’m going to chat with this lovely lady while you gush over him.”
Joseph threw him a quick glare as he tried to dig his phone from the pocket of his trousers. Caesar gave his watch a quick glance. Twenty to four. He waited a minute as Joseph battled with his pocket.

“Yeah, okay, we gotta go right now,” Joseph said when he finally managed to get his phone out and check the time. “We can still make it, if the subway doesn’t fuck us over.”

Caesar sighed and turned back to the girl. “Sorry to leave in such a rush. I would’ve loved to hear more about the production, but apparently we’re on a tight schedule,” he said. She shook her head with a smile.

“Not at all, it was nice of you to stop by for this long. I’m sure Danny appreciated it as well,” she said. Danny wagged his tail. Joseph looked down at him, clearly torn. Caesar snorted.

“Okay then, let’s go birthday boy!” Joseph said finally, ripping his eyes from Danny before he gave in and kneeled back down to pet him. He clapped Caesar on the shoulder and walked briskly to the other end of the room to retrieve their jackets.

“Oh, wait! It’s your birthday?” the girl asked as Caesar was about to bid his farewells.

“Well, yes,” he said, blinking. Her smile widened, eyes sparkling.

“Why didn’t you say so! Happy birthday!” she said, and then, “Here!” She handed him one of the tote bags piled on the table between them. “You can have this!”

“Are you sure?” he asked, taking the offered bag. He had been wrong about it being the school’s logo; it was a logo for the play, a simple design with the silhouettes of the main characters reflected against the stone mask that had been at the center of the story, the play’s name in stylized writing underneath it. The bag was a dark blue, with the logo and the school’s name in white on opposite sides. “Thank you.”

“We should go~o,” Joseph singsonged, somewhere behind Caesar, when he noticed Caesar hadn’t moved.

“No problem,” the girl said. “You can return the favor by going to our facebook page and leaving the best review imaginable.” She winked and handed him a card with the same logo, and a few webpages.

“We’re gonna be laaaaate,” said Joseph, poking Caesar in the shoulder.

“I think I can do that,” Caesar said and grinned, stuffing both the tote bag and the card into his jacket pocket. “Thank you again. I, uh, I suppose I have to go now.”

“Finally,” Joseph groaned, and grabbed Caesar by the elbow.

“Bye,” the girl laughed, waving, as Joseph hauled him out.

They ran to the nearest subway station, because according to Joseph, they were already behind schedule. It had started to rain while they’d been inside, and running in the rain, well, not the best way to stay dry, even with umbrellas. Sure enough, by the time they made it to the platform, Caesar’s pant legs were dripping, and he felt damp all over. With two whole minutes to spare, they didn’t have much time to dry before the subway was there and they were still quite wet as they piled inside the already cramped car with the other passengers.

“Were you…” Joseph started as they stood side by side in the jam-packed subway, before pausing and squinting, clearly lost in thought. He seemed reluctant to ask, but it was evidently something he
wanted, almost needed, an answer to.

“Was I what?” Caesar prompted after a few seconds.

“Flirting with the actress?” Joseph finished. Not… exactly what Caesar had expected. He blinked. There was a short silence.

“And if I was?” he asked, when no better reply presented itself.

Joseph didn’t say anything, just let out a soft hum and looked away. The subway lurched as it made a turn, and the mass of people in the car swayed, pushing everyone even closer together. Joseph, too, took a small step towards Caesar to maintain his balance, pressing against Caesar’s side. When the subway resumed its at least semi-stable journey Joseph didn’t step back, even though he’d ended up much closer to Caesar than he’d been before. Neither one said anything the rest of the way.
Caesar's Birthday, Evening Edition

Chapter Summary

It's Caesar's birthday, and Jojo has so much planned! Things get very physical when... wait, no, not like that, jeez. Meanwhile, Caesar tries to decide if this Friday the 13th is unlucky or not. (Part 2 of 2)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“Ta-da!” Joseph exclaimed when they finally made it to their destination.

“Jojo, this is our gym,” Caesar deadpanned. The “Air Supplena Gym” sign stared down at him from the side of the building.

“Yes!” said Joseph with a grin. “But that’s not the point right now. I’ve signed us up for something very special this time.”

“If it’s Zumba, I can’t be held responsible for what happens to you,” Caesar said, giving Joseph a side-eyed scowl before walking inside.

“It’s not Zumba!” Joseph laughed as he followed suit, the two making their way towards the second floor changing rooms. “Although now you mention it, it would have been pretty hilarious to see you do that.” The temperature of Caesar’s glare was very quickly approaching absolute zero. “I’m kidding! This is actually something you’ve said you’d be interested in.”

Caesar mentally flipped through the classes and such he knew the gym provided. Most were group exercises, or dance classes, or yoga, or…

His eyes widened as he realized what exactly they were there to do.

“Wall climbing?” he asked, surprised.

“Bingo!” Joseph grinned wider.

Caesar could hardly believe Joseph had remembered. He’d said it so offhandedly, mentioning maybe once it could be interesting to try when he’d been inspecting one of the gym’s pamphlets. It had been such a long time ago too; he’d even forgotten all about it himself.

“Wow,” he breathed out.

“I know,” Joseph said. “I managed to get us a pair course, so we’ll be attached to each other as well as the anchor. It’ll be so cool, it’s like we’ll be climbing a real mountain together.”

“Well, probably not quite,” Caesar said, but his own mouth was turning up into a grin as well. “But it will no doubt be cool.”

They got to the changing rooms and made their way to their own lockers. Being special members—and very frequent users—of the gym meant they got all kinds of perks, their own lockers
for instance. Caesar was very glad about it, because not only could he hang his still damp suit in the
tall locker, but it also meant he actually had a set of training clothes to use, because he really hadn’t
known to pack a set when they’d left home. He liked to think Jojo would’ve packed them for him if
need be, but honestly, the man was sometimes such a scatterbrain, Caesar was more than happy to
not have to rely on that.

After a quick change of clothes, they went back to the first floor of the building. The man at the front
desk greeted them when they entered the climbing hall.

“Hi there,” he said. “You here to climb, yeah?”

“Yup,” said Joseph, walking over and leaning his elbows on the counter as Caesar took a look
around. Almost the entire floor was covered in a 20’’ thick mattress, and the walls were full of
climbing tracks, ending at different heights. They appeared to have different levels of difficulty, and
some had an anchor in the ceiling, while others were for bouldering. The degree of the walls also
varied greatly and some tracks even went upside down. Caesar could hardly contain his excitement.

“Ah, here we go,” the man was saying when Caesar turned his attention back to the other two.
Joseph had taken care of the talking while he’d surveyed the room. “The Pillar for a couple’s
challenge.” Caesar’s eye twitched. The man continued, “Wait a moment, I’ll go get your harnesses.”

“Did he say… ‘couple’s challenge’?” Caesar whispered to Joseph, grabbing a hold of his elbow as
soon as the man had disappeared to the back room. Joseph look at him and blinked.

“Yeeeah?” he said.

“But you said it was a pair course! You said nothing about the couple’s challenge!”

Joseph blinked again, a few times in rapid succession.

“It’s for people who are actually a couple, Jojo. As in dating. Which we are not,” Caesar said, when
the other didn’t seem to make the connection.

“Oh. Oh. I mean, I guess,” he said, scratching his neck. “It was cheaper this way.”

“You’re fucking loaded, dude,” Caesar said, crossing his arms.

“Well, I just… I didn’t really think about it when I made the reservation,” Joseph shrugged.

Caesar was just about ready to have a stroke when the man came back with their harness and started
asking them about their shoe sizes. Caesar sighed deeply as they began trying different climbing
shoes on. They hadn’t even started climbing yet, and he was already exhausted.

“The Pillar is all the way in the back, down the flight of stairs on the right,” the man at the desk told
them when they were ready to leave. “Can’t miss it. There’ll be someone there to make sure you’re
properly attached to the rope.”

“Thank you!” Joseph called, and then pulled the disgruntled Caesar along. They made their way to
the back, past all the other climbers, and found the stairs down. Caesar stopped dead in his tracks
when they got to the bottom.

Aw, fuck.

“So let me get this straight: I haven’t done wall climbing before, and neither have you,” he managed
to get out.
“Yup,” Joseph agreed cheerfully. Caesar’s eye twitched again.

“So… why the fuck did you pick the ‘Hell Climb Pillar’?!” he all but screeched, pointing at the very, very tall pillar in the middle of the room. How had he not realized…? The man at the reception had said “pillar”, several times, it should have connected!

The Hell Climb Pillar was infamous for its difficulty. The pillar itself was nearly 80 feet tall and round, and it very clearly got wider towards the top, meaning that the higher you got the harder it was to keep yourself up. The grips were also rather small and haphazardly placed, with no clear, straightforward path to the top and several points from which you couldn’t advance further. Needless to say the thing didn’t have a very high success rate.

And they were supposed to climb this thing attached to each other?

If they didn’t fall to their death, Caesar was going to murder Joseph.

“Well I mean, the description said it was for the bravest and toughest climbers, and I think we’re pretty brave and tough, you and me!” was Joseph’s brilliant response. Caesar closed his eyes, breathed deep and counted to ten.

“It says it’s for the bravest, toughest, and most experienced! Jojo, we have absolutely no experience!”

“Shhhhh!” Joseph hushed him as someone started to get closer to them from the sidelines. “Would you quiet down? You have no idea how difficult it was to sign up for this thing!! If they figure us out, they won’t let us climb!”

“And that’s bad??!” Caesar asked, aghast.

“Hey, I’m Chad. You’re the ones here to climb the pillar?” asked the employee, as he approached the two. He was a young man, maybe around 20 years old, longish chestnut hair pulled back into a loose bun, a sparkle in his warm brown eyes. He looked very cheerful, which normally would have annoyed Caesar quite a bit considering their situation, but somehow the boy seemed too genuinely happy to be there to really be annoying. His “Cher Guevara” top also made Caesar feel a little better.

“Yes we are!” said Joseph, grabbing Caesar around the shoulders and pulling him forward. Caesar shoved his arm away and glared. Joseph didn’t seem deterred. “So how exactly does this work?” he asked, looking up. “Where do we attach the rope? There’s nothing on the ceiling or anything.”

“You, uh, you read the description on the website, right?” Chad asked, looking uncertainly between the two, swiping some hair from his face and tucking it behind his ear. “You attach the rope to the pillar.” Joseph blinked slowly. Caesar looked up, and yep, there were metal rings scattered here and there in the pillar. This just kept getting better.

“We need to keep moving the carabiner from protection to protection ourselves, as we ascend,” he explained to Joseph, who was still staring at Chad, a dumb look on his face. Chad nodded, gesturing towards Caesar to confirm he was right.

“Ohhh,” Joseph said. “Oh, that makes sense. Yeah okay, that’s. That’s fine. It did say something like that on the site, yeah.”

“Mamma mia…” Caesar muttered, rubbing his eyes. “I can’t believe I’m about to do this with you.”

“So you will do it!” Joseph immediately perked up. Caesar froze. “No take-backs!” Joseph laughed and smacked him on the back. “Come on, let’s go, let’s go!”
Caesar grumbled under his breath, but allowed himself to be attached to Joseph and the belay rope. Fifteen minutes later they were a little under halfway to the top and Caesar regretted everything.

His arms were slowly starting to ache from the exertion, and his climb was slow. He was doing better than Joseph though, who had climbed himself into a dead-end about three feet below him, because he had insisted on making his own path. Now he was forced to backtrack, which wouldn’t just waste precious stamina, but since the grips were tiny and hard to hold onto, any unnecessary moving might end up making him slip and fall. The climbing shoes did help with the footing though, so it wasn’t as terrible as it might have been.

“How’re you holding up there?” asked Chad from the ground, where he was acting as the belayer for them.

“Questionably,” answered Caesar.

“We’re holding fine!” Joseph shouted. “Although I really don’t know where to hold onto next…”

Caesar huffed out a small laugh despite really not liking Joseph very much at the moment. This was all his goddamn fault, and Caesar seriously couldn’t believe he’d actually gone along with this.

“How… how long do most people take to complete this track?” he asked Chad as he was trying to look for the next place to put his foot.

“Most people don’t complete it, period,” Chad said. “There’s like… maybe five people in total who have managed to get all the way to the top, and only one of them did it in less than an hour.”

“An hour?” Joseph shrieked. “How can someone stay up here for that long?”

“Wouldn’t know, I’ve never managed more than twenty minutes before falling,” Chad shrugged. “Got up fifteen feet. The people who complete this are way out of this world.”

Caesar didn’t know what to make of that. Sure, they were only halfway there, but considering the apparent difficulty and their lack of climbing experience, that seemed to be an amazing feat. He set his jaw, his chest filling with a burning determination at the thought of actually managing to pull this off against all odds.

“Come on, Jojo,” he said and Joseph looked up. “We’re gonna climb this.”

“Oh, hell yeah,” said Joseph with a grin.

It was another ten minutes and they’d managed to get up a whopping four feet.

“So are we climbing or are we not?” Joseph asked, prodding Caesar’s shin, which was really not helping. Caesar gritted his teeth and tried to find a grip he could reach.

“I don’t see you making any progress down there,” he bit out.

“Yeah, I guess,” Joseph said, glancing around. “But you’re the lead climber, you’re supposed to find the path!”

“You didn’t have any problem going your own way fifteen minutes ago,” Caesar reminded Joseph. Then he saw it. He clipped the carabiner into a new anchor as he prepared himself. “But now it’s suddenly my fault we can’t get up?”

“Well it certainly isn’t my fault you haven’t moved in five minutes,” Joseph said. Caesar jumped,
springing himself to the right with his left leg, grabbing a hold of a grip previously outside his range with his right hand, and settling much higher than he had been before. He turned back towards Joseph, his lips curled up in a smirk.

“You were saying?” he said, getting up a bit more, staring at Joseph all the while.

“Shut up,” muttered Joseph, following only a little begrudgingly.

Fifteen minutes more and Caesar was so close to the top he could taste it. If he could just reach somewhere, he would be able to lift his left leg and then he could take a hold of the edge and use that to pull himself the rest of the way and then he’d be done. He was sweating bullets and his arms were screaming for a break, but he was too concentrated to really notice. He was so close.

Joseph had decided he didn’t want to follow Caesar anymore—again—and had continued more directly up. He’d been able to, since he was taller than Caesar was, and could reach grips Caesar couldn’t. Three and a half inches made a big difference on a climbing wall. Clearly not big enough though, because he had managed to get stuck again, just a bit lower than Caesar, to his left.

Joseph groaned, frustrated beyond belief.

“Screw this, I’m coming over there,” he said and started to edge sideways towards Caesar. Which meant he’d be stuck behind Caesar until he could find the route. He looked around frantically, trying to ignore the pressure. He could find it, he knew it, there had to be something he could reach. It couldn’t end here; they were so close! There needed to be a grip somewhere, if he could just—

“Dude, chill,” Joseph’s surprisingly calm voice entered his consciousness and Caesar forced himself to pause and draw a long breath. “There’s a grip right there, above your left hand. You’re gonna have to jump a bit, but you can reach it.”

Caesar blinked, surprised, and looked up. True enough, there it was, the missing piece, his way to the top, and he berated himself for not noticing it at the same time as he thanked god that Joseph had spotted it. He didn’t sigh in relief just yet though, because even if had the path, he’d also need to make the climb. He’d relax when he was out.

He drew in another deep breath, and leapt.

He caught the grip, pulling himself up enough to get his foot on the last grip, and reached for the top. He reached.

“Nice one, Caesarino!” cheered Joseph from behind him. Caesar grinned, triumphant. He leveraged himself up with his arm, and finally managed to get his knee on top of the pillar. He pushed himself all the way to the top and promptly collapsed onto his back, a panting mess, legs still dangling over the edge.

“Fuck me, they actually did it,” he could hear Chad’s amazed voice from way down below. He grinned again.

“Move your legs, they’re in the way!” Joseph called, poking him in the bottom of one foot.

“Right, right, sorry,” Caesar said, still out of breath, and sat up. He unattached the carabiner from the wall and then peered over the edge of the pillar at the still climbing Joestar.

“Told you we were brave and tough enough,” Joseph said easily, reaching the final grip with very little effort, through his extra height. He hopped a bit, lifting his left foot and then grabbing a hold of the pillar’s top edge.
“You sure did,” said Caesar with a huff. He was just so happy they’d managed to climb the damn thing. It was a miracle, really.

Joseph’s foot slipped.

It all happened very fast. Joseph managed to get out a short “oh shi—” before his overworked fingers lost their grip and he dropped, his hand shooting out to grab something, anything, to stop the fall. Caesar’s breath was stuck in his throat, his heart stopped in his chest, nothing but ice cold horror filling his body as he watched Joseph fall, down, down, down—

And the next thing Caesar realized was lying flat on his stomach on the edge of the pillar, his fingers curled impossibly tight around Joseph’s left wrist. They stared at each other, both of them wide-eyed, both of them breathing hard. Caesar’s heartbeat was like thunder in his ears now his heart was working again.

For a while neither moved. Then Joseph laughed, breathy and short and terrified.

“Holy shit, that was close,” he breathed out. Caesar was still speechless, all the words trying to get out at the same time, all of them getting stuck in his throat, like too many people trying to go through a door at once.

“Amazing catch!” shouted Chad from the bottom. “You still have grip left!? Aren’t you exhausted?”

“Ah, I forgot,” said Caesar, his arm immediately protesting to dangling Joseph’s body midair as he realized it. His fingers twitched.

“Whoa, whoa, Caesar! Don’t let go! Don’t you let go!” Joseph cried out, a little more than slightly panicked.

Ten seconds later, after repeating “Don’t let go!” 13 times, Joseph managed to pull himself to the top. He collapsed down face first with a huge sigh, while Caesar lay on his back again, resting a hand on his forehead.

They stayed still for a minute, breathing heavily, catching their breaths.

“This was, hah, your stupidest, haah, idea ever,” Caesar panted, smacking Joseph on the upper arm. Joseph laughed, winded out.

“Well, hahh, it’s good to finally, hah, have a point of reference, haahh,” he said. Caesar groaned, smacked him on the arm again, and rolled over.

“How do we get down?” he called at Chad.

“You can either jump, or you can cross the bridge to the other side and come down the stairs,” Chad shouted back, pointing at the wall behind the pillar. “Detach the rope if you take the stairs though.”

Joseph was all ready to jump, but after one look at Caesar’s face, they both decided to take the stairs. Chad greeted them at the bottom.

“That was mad cool, bros,” he said, eyes shining with excitement. “I’ve never actually seen anyone complete the Pillar before! I am mind blown.”

“Hahah, thanks,” Caesar laughed, still slightly breathless. “It’s kinda hard to believe we managed to do that.”
“Hard for you maybe, I never doubted us for a second!” Joseph said, grinning, pulling Caesar closer by the neck again. Caesar allowed it this time, too tired and in too good a mood to protest. For a moment he even entertained the idea of resting his head against Joseph’s shoulder, but that was just the exhaustion talking. He knew better than to do something like that.

“Oh, hey, do you guys mind if I take a picture of you?” Chad said suddenly, already digging his phone from his pocket. Caesar couldn’t help but notice he had Cher on his lock screen too. *The boy must really like Cher*, he thought as Chad explained: “We have pictures of all the people who’ve completed the Pillar up on a Wall of Fame sort of thing.”

“Hell yeah!” agreed Joseph, understandably excited about the prospect of getting his picture on a wall for another reason than “most hours of detention in the school’s history”. High school had been a wild time.

“Great! You’ll also get like, a plaque type thing, as proof of completion. The gym should mail it to you, I think. So, just stand there in front of the pillar,” Chad said and Joseph and Caesar moved to where he was indicating. “Okay, now… *pose*!”

They posed. Oh boy, did they pose.

Chad laughed under his breath as he took a few pictures.

“That’s awesome,” he said. “You wanna see them?” He walked over and showed them the photos.

“That’s the best one,” said Joseph, pointing at the one where their pose was the most exaggerated. Caesar snorted.

“Yes, that’s the best one,” he agreed.

“Oh, oh, can we see the wall?” Joseph asked Chad, bouncing on the spot. “I wanna see the others who’ve climbed this thing.”

“Yes, sure, it’s just up there,” Chad said, pointing back up to the upper floor. “You probably passed it while coming down here.”

The three of them returned up the stairs, Chad leading the way, and indeed there were pictures hanging on the wall by the stairs. There was also a small panel describing the Pillar, listing its measurements and other trivia.

There were six pictures in total, five with individual people, both men and women, and one with two men. Caesar was surprised to recognize them as Messina and Loggins. But not as surprised as he was when his gaze turned to the first picture, depicting a young looking woman with long brown hair and bright blue eyes that seemed to look right through him even from the clearly older photograph. Caesar blinked.

“Is… Isn’t that…?” he managed to get out, pointing a finger at the picture.

Joseph slammed his palms against the wall.

“Oh my God!” he all but shouted, leaning close to the picture.

“Are you okay?” Chad asked, alarmed.

“Who is this? Tell me!” Joseph screeched, grabbing a hold of poor Chad, who hadn’t known any better and had taken a step closer to Joseph.
“Ahhhh, it says it right there!” Chad wailed, as Joseph shook him by the shoulders. He instantly let go and leaned in against the wall again. Indeed, the name “Elizabeth Joestar” was etched into the picture frame. Unbelievable. “Most people here refer to her as master Lisa Lisa, since she used to teach a martial arts class here like 20 years ago. She doesn’t anymore though, I think she went to jail or something? I don’t know, it was way before my time!”

“I can’t fucking believe this,” Joseph muttered, squinting at the picture.

“She, uh, she’s the one responsible for the construction of the Pillar,” Chad continued, a little hesitant, rubbing at his shoulder. “She was also the first one to climb it, and still holds the record for the fastest climbing time. He paused. “You, uh, you know her?”

Joseph laughed, loudly.

“It’s my mother!” he said.

“Whaaaaaaaat??”

“It’s true,” Caesar confirmed, slightly amused by Chad’s shocked face. “But I didn’t know Lisa Lisa was a good climber.”

“I didn’t either,” Joseph said, scratching his neck. “I knew she used to teach Hamon here, but… I guess there’s a lot of stuff from her past I don’t really know about.”

“Do you think this has something to do with Hamon training?” Caesar wondered. “Messina and Loggins are up here too.”

“Huh, you’re right,” Joseph said, only now looking at the other photos. “Hah, imagine if they try to make us to climb it. Can’t wait to see their faces when we tell them we already did!” He laughed.

“I don’t think they’d make us climb it,” Caesar said, side-eyeing Joseph as he continued to be loud. “They know we don’t have experience, and being good in Hamon doesn’t translate to—”

“You didn’t have any climbing experience??!” Chad interrupted. “How the heck did you manage to climb the whole thing?? How did you even get the permission to try??”

“Oh, uh,” said Caesar, who had quite forgotten Chad was an employee at the gym and would know about the requirements for climbing the Pillar.

“Oops,” said Joseph, not even pretending to look apologetic. “Guess the cat’s out of the bag. Yeah, we have like, zero experience. Had to pull some strings and drop a few names to make the reservation.”

“I… I suppose if they knew who your mother was, they’d be inclined to let you try without too much of a hassle,” Chad said, rubbing a hand across his cheek. “But still, to imagine you had no experience…”

“Are you going to tell someone?” Caesar asked. They had, technically, broken the gym’s rules, and he wasn’t sure what the repercussions might be.

Chad blinked up at him. “Oh, no, I’m not gonna tell,” he said, continuing with, “On one condition.” Caesar prepared himself for anything. He was somewhat taken aback when Chad flushed slightly. “You think you could get me into a Hamon class? They’re really tough to sign up for, and I’ve wanted to try it ever since I found out about it.”
“Of course!” Joseph said, smacking Chad on the back, quite hard.

“We’ll bring it up with our teachers, but it is ultimately up to them,” Caesar said.

“Nice. Thanks a bunch,” Chad said, smiling happily.

“Hey, we should probably start our cool down,” Joseph said, tapping Caesar’s arm. He was looking up at the clock on the wall, which showed the time to be ten to five. “We need to leave for the next place half past five at the latest, so now we still have plenty of time to flex and stuff.”

“Next place?” asked Chad as they moved to the side of the room where they had more space.

“It’s my birthday today, and Jojo’s planned a full day of activities for me,” Caesar explained, just a bit mocking in his enthusiasm. “This being one of them.”

“That sounds cool! Happy birthday, man,” Chad said.

“Thanks,” Caesar said with a smile. His genuine happiness really was contagious.

Chad kept them company the whole time they did their cool down, chatting with them about this and that. Caesar found him an amusing guy, very passionate about the things he liked and easily excitable. Reminded him of Suzie, in some distant way. They’d probably get along easily, he thought. After they were done, they said bye to Chad and returned to the changing room for a quick shower before changing back into their regular clothes—which thankfully had dried—and leaving the gym.

~x~

“I do hope the next place includes food,” Caesar said, as his stomach growled.

“Of course it does,” Joseph said. “You know the importance of eating properly after a workout.”

“Mm,” Caesar hummed. The rain had died down into a soft drizzle at some point, leaving the ground wet and full of puddles. Caesar wasn’t really paying attention to where they were walking, completely lost in thought, his feet automatically keeping him next to Joseph, who set their course. So when they turned down a street that was more than familiar, he stopped and blinked.

“Why are we back home?” Caesar asked, staring up at the apartment building they lived in. Joseph stopped when he started talking. “I thought you still had something planned.”

“Yeah, but I just gotta stop by real quick,” Joseph said, continuing towards the building. “Don’t even worry about it, we’re still on schedule.”

“Okay then,” Caesar sighed. “I would’ve thought you’d take everything you need before we left. I mean, you were the one who knew what we’d be doing.”

“Oh hush you,” Joseph said, jabbing the lift button with his finger. It screeched loudly into life and they waited for it in silence.

“You’re not going to take long, right?” Caesar asked as Joseph dug out his keys and unlocked the door. “Because I am seriously hungry and—”

“SURPRISE!!!”

Caesar had flicked on the lights, unassuming and unprepared, and suddenly he had confetti in his face. He flinched back, surprised, but he didn’t scream or punch anyone in the face, so that was a
win. Suzie, Smokey, and Mark and his fiancée Angela all smiled brightly at him.


“Happy birthday, Cee!” she said. Caesar hugged her back, still stunned.

“Thank you,” he said. “I had no idea you had planned this. I mean, I knew there were plans, but I didn’t expect this.”

“That’s kinda the point of a surprise party,” Smokey said with a grin.

“Well, the original plan was to take you somewhere out to eat, and then I’d thought about maybe karaoke, and going to that club you really like…” Joseph started, hanging his jacket in the wardrobe.

“But then I reminded him that you were gonna go wall climbing right before this,” Suzie intervened.

“Right, so we thought maybe it’s best to just have a little party here!” Joseph finished. “Y’know, nice and cozy. We have pizza and drinks and Smokey brought Cards Against Humanity if people wanna play…”

“That sounds like it’ll either be amazing or end in disaster, but honestly?” Caesar cut him off. “Right now I just want food.”

~x~

By 10:30 PM everyone had left and they’d cleared up most the living room. Caesar allowed himself a deep breath and a smile. The familiar quiet of their apartment was more than welcome after the long day.

The couch let out a long protesting creak as Joseph collapsed onto it, kicking off his shoes and lifting his feet on the coffee table, a long sigh escaping him. Caesar settled down as well, sitting on the old thing a bit more carefully, but sinking against the softness almost instantly.

He hadn’t realized exactly how tired he was, but now that he finally started to relax, he could feel every bit of tension flow out of him, leaving him a boneless puddle on the couch. It shouldn’t have been that surprising, really; it had been a demanding day, both mentally and physically. Amazing, but demanding. And the buzz from the drinks was doing wonders to get him to stop thinking.

“Today was fun, huh?” mumbled Joseph after a minute.

“It was, actually,” Caesar agreed. “I had my doubts in the beginning, but…”

“You doubted me? I’m hurt, Caesarino!” He gave Joseph a pointed look. Joseph grinned lazily but then perked up. “Oh, right, I need to give you your gifts!”

He stood up, wandering into his room. Caesar turned slightly on the couch so he could watch him. He swayed only a little.

“The ones from your grandparents and nonna Maria?” Caesar asked, staring through the open door at Joseph’s back.

“Yup,” Joseph said, returning to the living room with three gifts of various sizes. “And a card from mom. She told me to congratulate you on her behalf, and to say sorry she didn’t have time to see you at all today. You know how it is with her work.”
“Yeah, I understand, it’s not a big deal,” Caesar said, accepting the presents Joseph dropped in his lap. “I’ll see her next week at your graduation after all. But, uh, what about that one?” He pointed at the present still in Joseph’s hands. It was a small box with a bow tied around it.

“Oh, yes,” Joseph said, turning to face Caesar better on the couch. “This one’s from me! I’ll give it to you last, so open those first.”

“Oh,” said Caesar. “I thought that the whole… taking me all over the place all day was your present.”

“Well, it could’ve been,” Joseph shrugged, “but I found something cool I really wanted to give you as well.”

“Alright…” Caesar said, slowly. Joseph was grinning widely, excited enough that one might think it was his birthday. Well, he was also pretty drunk, which probably had something to do with it. After a few seconds Caesar turned back to the presents and started to open them.

It was the shape that gave the first one away as being from nonna Maria and Caesar knew exactly what he’d find inside before even beginning to open it. Sure enough, he had been right and a bag of cookies revealed itself from under the wrapping. Nonna Maria always gave him a bag of the same homemade cookies, because she knew they were his favorite, a tradition from way back when. He smiled softly as he set them aside onto the coffee table. The second present was hard and rectangular, and it didn’t really surprise him to find it was a book. Jonathan and Erina often gave books and other practical things as presents.

“I have to remember to thank everyone when I see them again,” Caesar mused as he set the presents on the coffee table. Then he turned to Joseph, who was basically vibrating with excitement next to him. There was a short pause. “Well?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Okay, okay, here it is,” Joseph said, finally handing over the small box. “Happy birthday, Caesar.”

“Thanks,” said Caesar, amused, pulling the ribbon off and opening the box. His breath hitched in his throat. With slightly trembling fingers he reached into it and retrieved the item inside.

It was a silver lighter, three inches tall and shaped like a dove, with the lighter part on its back. It looked old but well-kept, its metallic outside polished to a shine with only a few scrapes on it. It was… It was… wow.

“Do you like it?” asked Joseph, nervousness edging into his voice as Caesar continued to say nothing. “I saw it on etsy, and I know you haven’t gotten any new lighters for your collection in a while, and I thought, well, you would probably like that one, so…”

“It’s beautiful,” Caesar cut him off before he could babble too much. He turned to look Joseph square in the face. “Thank you.”

Joseph relaxed, his expression softening. “You’re welcome,” he said with a small smile.

There was a twisting in Caesar’s stomach.

This wasn’t the first time he’d felt it, but Caesar had no idea what it was. It didn’t quite feel like anxiousness, or nervousness, or anticipation, nor was it the alcohol because he’d felt it sober too, but it was something strong. He tried to calm it down, to control it or to ignore it, but it wouldn’t stop. It just kept twisting, and twisting, and twisting. The word escaped his mouth before he had time to even realize it had formed.
“Why?” he asked. Joseph blinked. Caesar could feel a heat rising on his cheeks as he hurried to amend. “I mean… why did you go this far for today? And yeah it’s my birthday, but it’s not like it’s a special birthday. Like, I get why you went overboard last year when I turned 25, but…”

“I didn’t go overboard last year!” Joseph protested.


“Yeah, that was pretty funny.”

“It was expensive is what it was.”

“Suzie’s using it though, so it’s not like it was wasted!”

“Maybe so, but that’s beside the point…” Caesar paused, letting out a soft sigh. He looked back up to Joseph, studying his face. The Joestar seemed oddly… concerned, a small crease between his brows and eyes slightly squinted in confusion. “Why did you go so out of your way to make this year so special, when it was just another birthday?”

Joseph was quiet for a moment, thinking it over.

“I just…” he started, looking away and rubbing the back of his neck. “I just wanted to do something nice for you. I didn’t really think I needed any other, like… bigger reason for it. It’s your birthday, isn’t that enough?” He paused as he locked eyes with Caesar.

“Twisting. It’s what gramps said too, remember? There can never be too many celebrations in life?”

Joseph was quiet for a moment, thinking it over.

“I just…” he started, looking away and rubbing the back of his neck. “I just wanted to do something nice for you. I didn’t really think I needed any other, like… bigger reason for it. It’s your birthday, isn’t that enough?” He paused as he locked eyes with Caesar. Twisting. “It’s what gramps said too, remember? There can never be too many celebrations in life?”

Caesar looked at Joseph, all open expression and face plastered with cheerfulness, to hide behind it the insecurity. At that moment Joseph looked more vulnerable than Caesar had seen him at any point during his life, save perhaps after his father’s funeral. Caesar huffed out a laugh and looked away, uncertain how to deal with this level of honestly.

“Okay then,” he said, reaching over to the coffee table to pick up the book and cookies. “That’s good enough for me.” He stood up.

“You going to bed?” asked Joseph and he nodded.

“Yeah, I think I’m all done for the day. Today was a lot more active than I thought it would be.”

“I guess it was,” Joseph agreed. “I’ll see you tomorrow, then.”

“Not at 7:15 though,” Caesar said, pointing a finger at Joseph’s face. “Or I will punch your teeth in.”

Joseph laughed heartily and Caesar let a small smile onto his face.

“Not at 7:15,” he promised. “Good night, Caesar.”

“Good night, Jojo,” Caesar said, and retreated into his room. He set his things down on his desk and prepared for bed.

Just before getting into bed he stopped in front of the desk for a moment, looking down at the silver dove. He picked it up, its form cold below his fingertips as he turned it around in his hands, studying it. He thumbed at the button and then pressed it down, the flame sparking into life. He stared at the flickering flame for a moment, watching its dance next to the dove’s head. Then he blew it out and set the lighter on his windowsill, next to the others.

The dove watched after him as he settled into bed and closed his eyes.
And here's the second half of Caesar's birthday! It's a bit later than I had hoped, but it was such a long thing and then I really needed to cut shit out because it was too long and ugh.

Btw, I'm sorry if the wall climbing thing is inaccurate or something, I've only ever been bouldering and even that like two times, and I don't know any of the terms in English ahahaha... And I know that there's probably no way someone could actually hang off a wall for 45mins, but in canon they climbed the pillar for like... 60 HOURS so... let's just suspend our disbelief on that, kay?

ALSO, I really wanted to actually write what happened at the party in the end, but as I said this thing was already too long and I had to cut it. I have been entertaining the idea of (after the main story is finished) writing little bonus scenes and stuff for this fic, if people are interested in that? So let me know if that is a thing that you might like to see sometime much later.

Ah, the next chapter is Joseph's graduation, which technically is set two days from now, but I haven't finished that and I don't know if I can finish it in such a tight schedule (I still have physics to study) but I really want to get it done at least during this week so hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh it should be out sometime soon? (Caesar's birthday being so long really messed with my schedule ahhhhhh)

But yeah, I hope you liked and I'll see you in the next one~

OHHHH YEAH I totally forgot, that dove lighter is actually a real thing. Y'know... if one of y'all wants to actually buy it. [https://www.etsy.com/listing/268827926/antique-dove-lighter-working-vintage]
Graduation? More like... uh, grade... I got nothing

Chapter Summary

Joseph had been under the impression that graduating would mean a reduce in his stress level, but that would be sensible.

Chapter Notes

JESUS CHRIST ON A BIKE SOMEONE DREW FANART?? OF BIZARRE ENGAGEMENT?????? I'M JUST??? SO HAPPY????????!! Y'all can find it here: [http://teamcdonut.tumblr.com/post/144457029355/some-fan-art-from-jojos-bizarre-engagement-by] if you wanna see it. I suggest you go see it. And reblog it. They also have a lot of other good caejoese pics ahhhh go shower them with love!!!!!(btw, I'm also on tumblr as mikomikono, so if any of y'all wanna come, idk, chat about caejoese or something, please do i'm very lonely) Ahh, you guys are too good for me ;v;

Hey hey hey, look who managed to finish another chapter! That's right! It me!!! (it did help that I've had the end half of the chapter written since easter ahaah)

But wow, three chapters in less then an week? Holy macaroni! Originally it was gonna be just two chapters, but as I mentioned before, the birthday chapter was so fucking long it became two on its own haha. UNFORTUNATELY THO, now that I've gotten this insanity out of the way, it's time for a little break again. It's time to put the stuff I've studied to a literal test. An... exam. The entrance exams. I think I'm gonna die oh boi! SO, it's gonna be like... June before I can update again, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. After that though, I should be able to get back to a more, uh, schedule. A more consistent schedule, yes that. One chapter in two weeks approx. It might vary, but approx. I've also given a chapter count for the fic (yay!). IT MIGHT CHANGE. It shouldn't, but it might. According to my plan there's 21 chapters and an epilogue. But again, it might change, if I end up removing uninteresting chapters, or making one chapter into two, or whatever. Until I actually finish this thing, it will be a directional number.

See you on the flip side!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was finally happening. After four years, countless sleepless nights, and a gazillion work hours, the time had come.

Joseph Joestar was graduating.

The graduation ceremony, while long and occasionally tedious, was nothing out of the ordinary, which in itself was a bit out of the ordinary considering that Joseph was put on the stage as a representative of his class. In a display of almost uncharacteristic maturity, Joseph didn’t perform any kind of stunt while he was up there. Caesar wasn’t sure if it was because of the lack of sleep, or respect for his fellow graduates, or if he actually understood and appreciated the significance of the situation, but it’s not like it mattered. This was Joseph’s day.
And Caesar was proud of him.

~x~

After the commencement ended, the guests piled out of the stadium in a massive stream of people. With the crowd as big as it was, they’d agreed on meeting at a nearby parking lot and make their way to the Estate together from there. Joseph and Smokey piled into Lisa Lisa’s car with her and Joseph’s grandparents, while Caesar drove alongside on his motorcycle. It had looked like rain for a while, but luckily the roads were perfectly dry and driving the motorcycle was possible. Joseph had no idea how they would have been able to fit all six of them into a five-seat car if it hadn’t been.

Joseph really was glad that nearly all of the most important people in his life had been able to attend the ceremony. It was a weekday and he had been a bit worried, especially that his mother or Caesar would have something massively urgent at work, but no, they had both made extra sure they got the day off. It helped that Lisa Lisa was basically her own boss, and Caesar and his boss, Tiffy—the fashion designer whose boutique he worked in—got along swimmingly. Speedwagon had also wanted to attend the commencement, but his plane didn’t arrive in New York until 3PM and so he had had to miss it and would meet them the Estate instead.

The preparations at the Estate were basically taken care of by the time they got there, so Joseph had a moment to catch his breath before the guests would start arriving. It wasn’t a long moment, because soon after Speedwagon showed up, and that’s when the real party started.

“Congratulations, Joseph!” Speedwagon said after Joseph had released him from his death-hug. They were making their way along with Caesar and Smokey into the first floor sitting room, to be out of the way of the final preparations taking place in the parlor. “It’s finally over, huh? How does it feel to be a graduate?”

“Amazing,” Joseph sighed. “It’s like a weight has been lifted from my heart. And sure, now I gotta get a job, but boy is it nice to not have to worry about school ever again!”

“Yeah, frigging rub it in even more, why don’t you,” Smokey grumbled. “I still have two more years of that hell.”

“You’re doing fine!” Joseph waved him off. “You’ve always been much better at the whole studying thing than me.”

“Being better than you at studying isn’t saying much, though,” Caesar said casually. “What exactly was your high school GPA again?”

“Wha— hey, aren’t you supposed to be on my side here?” Joseph said, pressing an offended hand to his chest. “I did fine in high school.”

“You did ‘fine’ in history and economy,” Smokey corrected. “As I recall, the rest were Ds and stuff.”

“I’ll show you Ds,” Joseph growled, getting ready to strangle Smokey. Smokey just sniggered, getting ready to dodge.

“Whoa now, let’s calm down a bit,” he said with a bright smile as they started to circle each other. “You shouldn’t go around showing your D to just anyone! You’ll make Caesar jealous!”

“What the fuck—” Joseph managed to get out before it connected. Caesar snorted behind him, immediately slapping a hand over his mouth. Even Speedwagon looked amused, though he was trying to keep a straight face. Joseph turned to look at Smokey again. Smokey waggled his eyebrows. Joseph huffed out a laugh, defeated.
“Oh, that reminds me,” said Speedwagon, which is probably something you never want to hear your older uncle-type person say after someone has made a dick joke. Joseph swallowed, only a little frightened for what was coming next. “Have you thought about the wedding ceremony?”

That… was simultaneously a lot better and a lot worse than what Joseph had been expecting.

“What… what exactly do you mean by that?” Joseph asked, because he had no idea.

“Of course we’ve thought about the ceremony,” said Caesar, frowning. “But I’m sensing there’s a specific part of it you want to know about.”

“Yes, indeed,” Speedwagon nodded. “I know you’re having the ceremony here at the Estate along with the reception, but I was just wondering who you’re having as your officiator. Is that something you’ve talked about?”

“Well, we…” Caesar started, but then stopped. “Oh.”

“I guess we haven’t really talked about that,” Joseph admitted. “Is it important?”

“I’ve always just assumed that father Styx would perform my marriage, whenever that happened,” Caesar mused. “He’s always been very supportive of my sexuality, but I guess I don’t know if he’s willing to officiate a same-sex marriage… and with Joseph being an atheist—”

“Agnostic,” corrected Joseph.

“Not Catholic,” said Caesar.

“You could get a civil officiant?” Smokey suggested.

“Which brings me to my original point,” Speedwagon said. They all turned to look at him. “I wished to offer you my services on this matter, should you want and need them.”

“You… you want to officiate our wedding?” Caesar asked. Joseph blinked. Nothing in this conversation was turning out as he was expecting.

“I can. If you want me to,” said Speedwagon and then smiled a bit sheepishly. “Everyone else is doing things for your wedding, with the venue and the rings… And I wanted to show my support somehow too.”

“That… would be so amazing!” Joseph grinned. Speedwagon as the officiator? The only way this wedding could get cooler was if it was actually happening! “Can we do that, Caesar? Can we?”

“Technically,” said Caesar, rubbing his lips in thought. “But…” He turned to look at Speedwagon. “I appreciate the offer a lot, truly, but we can’t give you an answer yet. I need to talk about my priest, and—”

“That’s okay.” Speedwagon laughed, waving his hand. “I don’t need an answer right now. I just wanted you to know it was an option.”

“Okay,” Caesar said, seeming to deflate a bit. “Okay. Thank you.”

The conversation turned to other, safer and more normal, topics after that, and soon the first guests arrived.

People kept coming and going steadily throughout the evening. At the beginning Joseph was nearly constantly at the door, greeting new people, having new toasts, receiving new gifts. After about an
hour and a half the pace slowed down, guests arriving much less frequently. Joseph sighed in relief, finally having time to get some food for himself and talk with some of his guests. Some had just stopped by to congratulate him and have some coffee, while others stayed a longer time, like the Zeppelis and many of Joseph’s friends.

Joseph liked socializing, he really did. He liked people, he liked talking to people and spending time with people. What he didn’t like, was answering the same five questions about his future a thousand times in four hours. He was pretty sure that the next time someone asked him if he was going to go work for his mother’s company now that he had graduated, he was going to start punching people.

“Jojo!” called out Suzie as she approached him with her parents. “Congratulations!”

“Thanks, Suzie,” Joseph said, hugging the girl back after she practically jumped at him. “It’s good to see you all.”

“Congratulations. We’re sorry we’re a bit late,” said Romeo, shaking Joseph’s hand as soon as his daughter had let go. “The shop had us busier than we had assumed.”

“That’s alright,” Joseph waved him off. “The beginning was pretty crowded anyway, so it’s good that you came a little later.”

“Aw, but I would’ve wanted to attend the ceremony,” Suzie pouted.

“No you wouldn’t have, it was boring as hell,” Joseph said. “I wouldn’t have wanted to attend, but I didn’t really have a choice.” Suzie giggled.

“Congrats, Joseph,” said Nina as well, slapping him on the shoulder and pulling him into a one armed hug. “Here’s a present, from the whole family.” She thrust an envelope in his hands. He blinked. “There’s a suit in there,” she stage whispered with a wink. Joseph blinked again.

“It’s not a suit in there!” Suzie huffed. Her mother laughed. “But it is a promise to make you one. ‘Your next suit free!’ is what the card says.” She got a sly look on her face. “And I think we all know what suit that will be…”

“How about we go into the parlor?” Joseph suggested quickly. He was not in the mood to get into a wedding conversation with the Quatros at this point of the day.

The Estate’s old butler, Roses, met them at the parlor doorway with a tray of champagne glasses. Joseph had had quite enough of champagne for one day, but he still took one and they toasted, before the Quatros went off to get some food. Thank god they weren’t expecting many more guests.

Suzie found him again after a few minutes, by the edge of the room talking with his mother. She had a plate full of sweets in her hands.

“Auntie Lisa Lisa!” she exclaimed, hugging the older woman briefly. “Hi again, Jojo!”


“It only started on Monday, you know,” she said. “But yes, I am. I do have a summer job at the tailor’s, but I do that every summer. And spring. And fall and winter. So I don’t really count it against my holiday anymore.”

“Your parents are lucky to have you as help,” Lisa Lisa said. Suzie beamed. “Oh, if only I was so lucky…”
“What do you mean?” Suzie asked. “Surely Jojo’s coming to work for you now that he’s graduated.”

“No way, man,” said Joseph, stealing a chocolate off of Suzie’s plate while she was distracted. She let out a high pitched protest. “I don’t want any pity position at mom’s company. I wanna make my own name for myself.”

“So he says,” Lisa Lisa said, shaking her head. “I tried offering him several different positions, but Jojo’s always been a stubborn one. Oh well, I suppose I’ll manage… somehow…”

“I actually already have a place in mind,” Joseph told Suzie, completely ignoring his mother’s fake drama. “They haven’t officially hired me yet, but I’ve already done one interview and they really liked me. I’m being called back in a few weeks.”

“Oh, congratulations!” Suzie said with a smile. “But… Auntie Lisa Lisa…”

“Don’t worry about me, Suzie,” Lisa Lisa said, smiling first softly at her and then almost predatory at Joseph. He turned to look away. “He’ll come around. Let him play at this little rebellion for now. I’ll give it five months, tops, before he’s crawling back.”

“Excuse you, I will not be crawling anywhere,” Joseph said. “And don’t speak about me like I’m not even here!”

“So, do you have any other summer plans, Suzie?”

“And don’t ignore me!”

The rest of the night went by quickly. The only people to arrive after the Quatros were Chad, with whom Joseph had chatted a lot on facebook, and Tiffy, to both Joseph and Caesar’s surprise. She didn’t stay very long though, returning back to her boutique after only half an hour. After that the amount of people started to slowly dwindle down, until the only guests left were the Zeppelis and the Quatros. And Smokey, of course.

Joseph, Caesar, and Lisa Lisa had already decided to stay over at the Estate for the night, to spend some extra time with Jonathan, Erina, and Speedwagon. After everyone else had left and everything was cleaned up, they stayed up a bit longer to chat in the sitting room. It had been a long day though, and after a while they decided to retire for the night. Joseph and Caesar were the first to leave, making their way to Joseph’s old room in the second floor.

~x~

“I am beat,” said Joseph, collapsing face first onto his old bed.

“You can say that again,” said Caesar, taking off his suit jacket and rolling his shoulders. He hung the jacket on the back of the chair pushed in front of Joseph’s desk, and leaned against it. “You wanna go straight to bed?

“Why? You got something else in mind?” asked Joseph, propping himself up on his elbow and grinning. It was perfectly clear what he was insinuating.

“Well, we could just talk through the night,” Caesar said, not raising to the bait, although for a moment he humored the idea. “You know, like old times.”

“We never talked through the night, you were always out cold by midnight,” Joseph laughed, falling onto his back and staring at the ceiling.
“I was out cold? I very distinctly remember lying awake nearly every time, listening to your earsplitting snoring!”

“I do not snore!”

“Yes you do! It’s like a horde of elephants constantly marching by.”

“Well, at least I don’t have to get up to go use the toilet every five minutes.”

“No, you just roll around so much you fall on top of your guests when—” Caesar started and then paused. He looked around the room. “Wait,” he said.

“Why? What’s wrong?” asked Joseph, glancing around as well, trying to see what Caesar was seeing. Or rather, what he wasn’t seeing.

“There’s only one bed,” Caesar said. Joseph blinked, and looked down at the bed he was sprawled on.

“There’s only ever been one bed,” he said.

“Yes, but normally there’s also been a futon on the floor that we have to fight over because nobody wants to sleep on the floor,” Caesar said. “Now, there is not. There’s only one bed.”

Joseph’s eyes widened as realization set in and a distinctive flush rose to his cheeks.

“Oh,” he said.

“Oh,” confirmed Caesar.

“I mean… It’s okay,” Joseph said, sitting up and rubbing the side of his neck. “It’s bit of a tight squeeze, but we can both fit on the bed. Would’ve been easier when we were ten though.” He laughed, a little forced. “And I mean, everyone does think we already sleep in the same bed, so of course we shouldn’t need a futon. I just hadn’t considered… Sorry.”

“What are you apologizing for?” Caesar asked.

“I could’ve easily brought us a futon up here, but I didn’t think about it,” Joseph explained. The flush got deeper. It was almost cute, in a weird way. “Do you— It doesn’t bother you, does it?” he asked, blinking up at Caesar and looking unexpectedly concerned.

“Does it bother me to sleep in the same bed as you for one night? Of course not,” Caesar assured. It was only a little bit a lie, but it wouldn’t be the kind of bothering that Joseph was referring to that he’d be experiencing, so it didn’t matter. As long as he didn’t wake up spooning Joseph in the morning, he—

He was totally going to wake up spooning Joseph in the morning, wasn’t he? Oh bother.

“I’m pretty sure neither of us have an ego so weak it won’t survive this,” he said instead, giving Joseph a reassuring smile.

“Right, right,” Joseph hurried to say. “Of course. This is no big deal.”

It was. It was a big deal.

“No big deal,” said Caesar, screaming internally.
“So, uh,” Joseph said after a moment of awkward silence. “While we were still… kinda on the topic, I was asked a lot of questions about the, uh, wedding today.”

“Not surprising,” Caesar said, miraculously managing to maintain his collected face. This night was not going to be good for his blood pressure, he could already tell.

“No, especially since nearly everyone who was invited here today is also on the guest list,” Joseph sighed. “They all kept asking when we’re sending out the invitations…”

“Ugh,” said Caesar. “Suzie’s been pestering me about papers for weeks now. Apparently designing invitations is one of the things you start doing immediately.”

“Anyway,” Joseph said, dangling his legs over the edge of the bed. “What should we do about it? We had that whole ‘fight in public’ plan, but it got kinda sidetracked back then, and today I barely saw you…”

“I know,” Caesar sighed, rubbing his eyes and then crossing his arms. “I know. Today would have been so good for that too, but not much we can do about it now. We’ll just have to… I don’t know, fight more often in front of Suzie, or something. She’s a gossip, she’ll tell everyone.”

“I don’t really want to fight with you though,” Joseph admitted, rather quietly.

“That doesn’t matter,” Caesar said. “The wedding date is in three and a half months, we don’t have the luxury of being picky about this anymore.”

“I know that! But I still hate it! What if we just, like,” Joseph said, his face shifting as the idea formed and was blurted out without filter, “went through with it?”

Caesar’s heart leaped out of his chest and lodged itself in his throat. Joseph was wide-eyed, like a whole new world had opened up before his eyes.

“Shut the fuck up,” Caesar said. Joseph blinked and looked up at him. “This isn’t a joke, Joseph.”

Joseph looked startled. “I… I didn’t mean that it was,” he got out.

“What the fuck did you mean?” Caesar asked. “Because this is serious, like actually serious. If you’re just playing around—”

“I’m not playing around!” Joseph snapped, standing up and facing him. He was now looking down at Caesar, the tall bastard. Caesar straightened himself as tall as he could get, more subconsciously than anything else.

“You sure about that?” he asked, standing his ground. “Because suggesting that we actually get married because you don’t want to accidentally get your feelings hurt sure sounds—”

Joseph closed the distance between them in two steps. Caesar tried to back away, only to hit the edge of the desk. He steeled himself.

“What if we got married?” Joseph asked. His voice was low. Dangerous. Close. Caesar felt a shiver run down his spine. “For real?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” he hissed. It was so hard to concentrate when Joseph was leaning into him, obstructing his personal space and blocking his escape.

“I’m not,” Joseph said, seriously.
Too seriously.

And then Joseph was kissing him, hard and insistently and just a little sloppy, and all his thoughts screeched to a halt, the steel inside him melting into a puddle of goo. Caesar’s eyes were blown wide open—whereas Joseph’s were screwed tightly shut—and he couldn’t even make himself breathe properly. With one of Joseph’s hands on his hip and other on the side of his neck, he was effectively trapped between the pointy edge of the desk behind him and the unmovable wall that was Joseph’s muscular chest.

And it was just like last time, the wetness and uncertainty, the taste of Joseph’s lips an almost intoxicating mixture of champagne and chocolate and something that was just so inherently Joseph. His lips moved against Caesar’s, almost bruising in their intensity, and when he took half a step forward, pushing his leg between Caesar’s thighs, Caesar couldn’t help the soft hum on the back of his throat.

And then Joseph seemed to realize exactly what it was he was doing and staggered back, flinching like he’d been burned. Caesar remained standing still, breathing hard now that his lungs worked again, leaning his hand on the desk for support.

“Shit,” Joseph whispered into the quiet room. His face was flushed, and not only because of the excess drinking he’d been doing that evening. “Shit,” he said again, louder this time, raking his fingers through his hair. Caesar finally managed to find his voice.

“Jojo, I...” he started, but was immediately cut short by the now panicked Joestar.

“No! No, no, no nonono, Caesar, please, wait,” he said hurriedly, as if scared that if he slowed down the words wouldn’t come out anymore. Caesar blinked, surprised into silence. “Please, I didn’t—that was—I did not mean to do that, I—” He stopped, only momentarily, like a deer caught in the headlights, whole body rigid. Then he seemed to deflate, his shoulders sagging. It was like he shrunk several inches. “I am so, so sorry. Can we... just pretend this didn’t happen?”

Caesar felt the words hit him, like a shotgun to his chest, and he clenched the front of his shirt. It was the same, just like last time, the kiss and the words and the pain. Three years. It had been three years, he had dealt with this. It was pointless. Pretend it didn’t happen. He couldn’t escape it, couldn’t escape Joseph. The pain was back, it would always be back. Why couldn’t he let go? Pretend it didn’t happen.

It was impossible.

Joseph Joestar you goddamn idiot.

Suddenly, inexplicably, a new thought formed in Caesar’s head, a completely different thought. The thought of the beautifully decorated Easter egg hidden hastily in the bottom drawer of his nightstand, untouched and unthought-of for nearly two months. The thought of the golden band it hid within itself. The thought of his grandmother’s face when she’d given it to him, so warm and hopeful and happy. The thought of the man the ring had belonged to before him, of his grandfather whom he’d never known, but had heard so many amazing stories of.

He looked at Joseph, standing in front of him, rubbing his hands on his face.

He pushed himself off the desk and walked out of the room.

~x~

What the fuck was wrong with him?? This was not—this was not at all what he’d been planning.
He hadn’t meant to… to do that to Caesar!

The panic was rising quickly in Joseph’s chest as the silence stretched on in the room, and he rubbed at his face furiously, before pushing his fingers through his hair again.

Joseph would blame it on the alcohol, except that he hadn’t actually drunk that much, and to be honest—and it was about time he was honest with himself—he had already been thinking about it sober. He’d been thinking about it since Caesar’s goddamn birthday. And… and maybe even before that. But he hadn’t meant to do anything about it! It was—it was just attraction. Right? He wasn’t in love with Caesar or anything.

*Right??*

Joseph was still in full panic-mode when, without warning, Caesar pushed himself off the desk and rushed past him. At first he was too stunned to react, until he heard the door close with a soft clack, at which point realization set in and he snapped into motion, stumbling hastily after him.

“Wait!” he shouted, but Caesar didn’t slow down. His shoulders were a tense line as he speed walked down the corridor. Joseph sprinted after him, grabbing a hold of his wrist and spinning him around when he caught up. “I said wait!”

Caesar slapped his hand away, hard. Joseph recoiled from the hit, but not as much as he did from the look on Caesar’s face.

He was pretty sure his heart was literally, not to mention violently, ripped into two inside his chest.

Caesar was glaring at him, brow furrowed and teeth gritted. His whole body was stiff, strained, his hands clenched into fists on his side. And his eyes… His eyes were filled with more pain and sadness and anger than Joseph had ever seen, the corners glistening with tears held back purely with willpower.

“…Caesar,” Joseph whispered, reaching out at his friend, to comfort, to reassure.

Caesar smacked his hand away again.

“No,” he hissed through his teeth, pointing an accusing finger at Joseph’s face. Joseph tensed, involuntarily. “I will not let you do this to me again, Joseph Joestar. Not again.”

“A-again?” Joseph said, confused. “I don’t understand… Caesar, what is wrong?”

“You are wrong!” Caesar shouted. Joseph could hear shuffling behind the other doors along the corridor. They were waking up the whole house. “Everything is wrong!”

“Whoa, whoa, calm down, Caesar!” Joseph tried, raising his hands, in surrender, in appeasement.

“Don’t tell me to calm down,” Caesar seethed. Joseph inhaled sharply, flinching back. “You do not get to tell me what to do, and you do not get to just do whatever you want, without giving a shit about how other people feel! I can’t—! I can’t do this again.”

“Why do you keep saying again?” Joseph demanded. “What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about new year’s!” Caesar yelled. The sadness was all gone, completely overtaken by anger and hurt. “Three goddamn years ago. I’m talking about you oh-so-casually waltzing in and uprooting my whole world and then forgetting everything!”
“Wh-what?” Joseph felt his face drain of color. That… that was the date they… the date they’d told Suzie. “What did I—?”

“You kissed me, you asshole!”

Hazy memories started to flood Joseph’s mind. New year’s… three years ago… They, they really had gone out to celebrate for a change, at Time’s Square, that much had been true. They’d had dinner before and, uh, he had drunk quite a bit and. They’d been on the square, yes, and Caesar had looked to happy and nice and then the ball had started to drop and he had—

_Had he?_

“I… I don’t—” he tried, eyes roaming over Caesar’s face, like he would find the answer there. He only found animosity.

Caesar scoffed, throwing his hands in the air.

“Of course you don’t,” he huffed. There was the distinct first prickle of annoyance in Joseph’s chest, and it quickly festered into something much, much worse, as Caesar continued. “You never do, do you? You don’t think about your actions, about the consequences. About other people’s feelings! And it’s—! Ugh, it’s all your fault! If you’d just stop _messing_ with my head—!”

“Oh, I’m messing with _your_ head?” Joseph laughed, flat and morose. There was a small voice in the back of his mind, insisting that this wasn’t the right approach, he’d make things worse, but he ignored it. Not for the first time. “I’m sorry, I didn’t think it was possible to mess with your head, Mr. I’m-so-above-it-all! Thought you’d be much too _smart_ for that.”

The corner of Caesar’s eye twitched and his scowl deepened.

“You arrogant little…” he gritted out and then paused. “You think this is a fucking _game_, huh Joseph? Is that what _I_ am to you? You trying to see how far you can push me, and still have me come back for more?” He barked out a laugh, void of anything even remotely resembling amusement. “Well the joke’s on you, ‘cause I’m done. I don’t care about your bullshit anymore.” Then he added, a little quieter, “I can’t.”

That probably would have rung all kinds of bells in Joseph’s head, if he hadn’t been so fucking pissed.

“And you call _me_ overdramatic,” he said instead, gaining another glare from Caesar. “It’s not my bloody fault you can’t deal with your goddamn issues—”

“_Issues_?” Caesar shrieked. “You have the, the audacity to tell me to deal with my issues, when you are literally the cause of all my problems!”

“Oh so everything is _my_ fault now?”

“Yes! If you hadn’t been a fucking dumbass and stirred the pot with your little proposal stunt—”

“You were the one that went along with it! No one’s forced you down this road, buddy! If you’d let me clear everything up in the first place—”

“Don’t you _dare_ try to blame this on me, Joseph! You are the one who keeps pulling shit, making me question everything! Just when I think everything is back to normal, you do something else for me, like Valentine’s, or my birthday! And I can’t deal with it anymore, with constantly… _second guessing your motives_!”
“I do not—”

“Yes you do, you stubborn fuck! And you don’t even realize, because you’ve got the emotional maturity of a fucking cabbage! And I refuse to put up with this for a second longer!”

“So, so, what? You’re just gonna run away or something? Not deal with the mess that is also your problem? ‘Cause that’s a lot more mature—”

Caesar punched him in the face.

The split second Caesar’s fist connected with his cheek was intense, the pain rippling across his face, before settling into a dull, throbbing ache. The force of the punch was enough to send Joseph staggering back, colliding hard with something behind him as he tried to maintain his balance. He was very distantly aware of steadying hands on his shoulders, but his focus was on the man in front of him, his eyes burning.

Caesar was panting hard, his chest heaving with his deep breaths, mouth slightly agape. His hands were once more clenched against his sides, his back painfully straight, as he stared down at Joseph. A single small teardrop had spilled over his eyelid, rolling down and leaving a wet stripe down his cheek.

For a long, agonizing moment the world stood still.

Joseph lunged.

Caesar flinched, taking a step backwards, and Joseph would’ve stepped right in after him, but he was held back. The hands on his shoulders were now keeping him in place instead of upright, and he clashed for a moment against them, before he could fully grasp the meaning of it. Caesar’s eyes were focused above his shoulder, and he whipped his head around to find Jonathan and Speedwagon, even the two of them seeming to struggle with holding him still. A quick glance around revealed his mother and grandmother in the corridor as well and he suddenly felt small, looking up at the shocked, terrified eyes of his family. The anger seeped out of him, his whole body feeling oddly foreign.

He turned back to Caesar, who drew in a quick breath when their eyes locked. They held each other’s gazes for a long while, Joseph searching Caesar’s eyes for something, anything.

Then Caesar turned around and ran.

Whatever had been left of Joseph’s heart, shattered into a million pieces.

“Fine! Just go! Get the fuck out!” he screamed after Caesar’s quickly retreating back, the words fighting their way through the lump in his throat without his permission. He hadn’t given them permission, who said those words were allowed out? Those weren’t the words he wanted out! His eyes were stinging, his vision blurring as he let out a broken sob. His chest hurt, a painful constricting feeling, like something had wrapped around his heart and squeezed, squeezed. Another sob, followed by a shaky breath. He didn’t want to— he didn’t mean—

He collapsed on the floor and cried.

~x~

“Are you alright, dear?” Erina was the first to ask, placing a warm hand on Joseph’s back. They had gathered into the library, after finally managing to pry Joseph off the hallway floor. He had been sat down on one of the armchairs, and he hadn’t moved since, his elbows on his knees and fingers
buried deep into his hair. The others were standing around the chair and someone had brought him a glass of water, but it stood untouched on the coffee table.

A shaky breath and a sigh were the only answers Joseph managed. There was silence.

“Correct me if I’m wrong…” Jonathan started softly. “But based on your, ah… exchange just now, one might come to the conclusion that you and Caesar… aren’t actually… together?”

Joseph tensed. He clenched his fists tighter in his hair, the painful pull on his scalp grounding him, at least a little. He knew they would have realized, but still…

“You’re right,” he finally succeeded in biting out, teeth gritted. It was the truth, but for some reason admitting it felt horrible. He had planned on elaborating, but his throat clammed up again and in the end he just swallowed thickly. Erina was rubbing small circles between his shoulder blades.

“But what I don’t understand,” Speedwagon said from his seat on the chair opposite of Joseph’s, “is why you felt the need to lie about it in the first place?”

“It… It started as a joke,” Joseph admitted. “I didn’t actually want to propose to Caesar, you know, I just— I don’t know, thought it would be funny? But then everyone took it so seriously and we had to go along with it, because… I… I don’t even know why anymore, we, we didn’t mean for it to ever go this far, but it kept escalating and escalating, and then… well…” Joseph sighed deeply again. The stinging in his eyes was back, his vision blurring, but he steeled himself against the rush of emotion.

The quiet was suffocating.

“I’m sorry, Joseph,” Lisa Lisa said quietly, placing a hand gently on his back. She didn’t say anything else. Somehow it helped.

“I’m just… so tired right now,” Joseph said after a while, pushing his fingers through his hair and rubbing his face. “So tired…”

“Maybe it’s best we all go to bed,” said Erina. “Try to get some sleep, clear your head. We can still talk about this in the morning, if you like.”

“You… do you mind if I stay in a guest room for tonight?” Joseph asked, finally looking up at her. “I don’t really want to go back into my own, after…”

“Of course,” she said, on her lips a soft, understanding smile. “Whatever you need.”

They bid each other goodnight and they all retreated back into their own rooms. Joseph made his way into one the guest room, slipping in quietly. It was still and dead, and painfully empty, but not so much as his own would’ve been. He loathed to be alone at the moment, but he didn’t want to bother the others anymore, so he sucked it up. He would be fine.

He spent the rest of the night tossing and turning in the bed, unable to sleep, unable to relax, despite being dead tired. Thoughts of Caesar kept filling his mind, the fight replaying itself over and over and over. Whatever shuteye he managed to catch was broken and his dreams more exhausting than anything else. He ended up leaving the Estate very early the following morning, only to find himself with an empty apartment, and an empty heart.
oops.
This hardly counts as couple's therapy

Chapter Summary

Suzie will gladly play the owl for now, if that means the two idiots will just start talking to each other again.

Chapter Notes

Helllllo everyone! It's June, my entrance exams are over and my little sister is graduating high school! How excited I'm super proud of her too, she had THE BEST exam scores in the whole school (and apparently by a large margin wow she's so smart). So, uh... the previous chapter. Y'all seemed to have a lot of emotions after that one, it got like... almost three times as many comments as the others haha wow. Thank you all so much!! And, uh. Sorry? not really tho
Oh, the super amazing teamcdonut made more fanart!!!! [http://teamcdonut.tumblr.com/post/144632167580/more-fanart-from-jojos-bizarre-engagement-by] It's so great! It's from chapter 5. Back when everything was all nice and happy. Ah, good times.
But! We must go onward! This chapter is a bit shorter than the rest, but I hope y'all like it anyway. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Caesar ran.

He didn’t know where, he just knew he had to. Somewhere, anywhere. He took his bike and he drove into the night.

He couldn’t go home. There was nothing for him there but more pain. He couldn’t. But he had to go somewhere.

His body knew where it was going, even when his mind didn’t.

He’d barely managed to keep his emotions bottled to the point Suzie opened her door.

“Caesar?” she asked, surprised, worried. “What’re you doing here so late? What’s wrong?”

It all rushed out and he was powerless to stop it.

~x~

“Oh, Caesar,” Suzie said after he’d finished talking, placing an arm across his shoulders. She’d been understandably upset at first, but as he kept explaining the situation to her through his sobs, she’d grown more and more sympathetic. “That’s terrible, I’m so sorry.”

“Do you… mind if I stay here for a while?” he asked, nursing a cup of tea in his hands. It was
pleasantly warm after driving a motorcycle gloveless through the night. He’d even left his suit jacket behind like an idiot. “I can’t go… home.”

Suzie sighed. He couldn’t look her in the eyes.

“Of course you can stay here,” she said. She stood up and brushed his hair back. “You’ll have to sleep on the couch though. I’ll go get the extra bedding.”

She left the room. He gripped the mug tighter and grit his teeth.

~x~

«What the hell did you do?» her first text said. Joseph ignored it.

«Talk to me Joseph» said the next one. The correct spelling was somewhat unnerving, coming from Suzie.

«Don’t you fucking ignore me» was the third. There were several after that, most of them just his name.

«You better let me in or I will climb through the window» was the final one. The sound of the buzzer filled the apartment and Joseph reluctantly opened the door.

~x~


“You’ve talked to Caesar, you know what happened,” he said. It wasn’t a question. He hoped she would leave him alone. He hoped she wouldn’t.

“I have. And now I’m talking to you,” she said, crossing her arms. She had a frown on her face. “I’m giving you the opportunity to explain yourself. Which I suggest you use, because I don’t particularly care for you at the moment.”

“Welcome to the club!” Joseph snapped. “Because I don’t care much for myself at the moment either!”

They stared at each other for a while.

“Fuck this, I’m going to the gym,” he huffed finally, turning around and walking off. “So kindly get out of my apartment.”

He could hear her grumbling under her breath as she left. He wasn’t sure how to feel about it.

~x~

“This is so frustrating!” Suzie groaned to Smokey over coffee a few days later. “They won’t talk to each other! They won’t even talk about each other.”

“I know, it’s weird,” Smokey agreed. “Before, whenever Jojo’s been mad at Caesar, he wouldn’t stop badmouthing him. Now it’s like the guy doesn’t exist.” He shook his head. “It’s creepy as fuck. How’s Caesar doing?”

“Not much better, but at least he doesn’t pretend Jojo’s nonexistent,” she sighed, stirring her frappé with her straw, watching it swirl in the cup. “Avoids the subject though, shuts off whenever I try to bring it up. He seems to blame himself more than anything.” She bit her lip. “We need to do
“Something, right?”

“What exactly?”

“I don’t know! Something!” She rubbed her face. “They can’t just break up over something like this! I mean, I know they weren’t really together or whatever, but they’ve been together since forever, it can’t just end like that, right? We gotta— we gotta—”

“Ooookay, calm down there,” Smokey said, raising his hands. “Come on, breathe.”

She breathed, tried to control herself. It would be okay. They could fix this, right?

“Okay. Okay, I’m calm,” she said and then looked over at him. “As are you. How are you not more, I don’t know, upset about this? I mean, this is pretty big news.”

Smokey opened his mouth.

“Ah,” he said. Suzie squinted at him. He looked away.

“No,” she whispered. “You did not know.”

“I, uh, I did,” he admitted. “I’ve known from the beginning.”

Could she trust no one?

“You should know,” she said, smiling sweetly at Smokey, who swallowed. “I really don’t appreciate being lied to, but I’m willing to let it slide for now… Provided you go talk to Joseph and smack some sense into him.”

“Ma’am, yes ma’am!” He gave her a salute. She nodded and finished her coffee.

~x~

Smokey was slightly nervous when he pressed Joseph’s buzzer. He was slightly more nervous when he was let in and he took the elevator up. By the time he pressed the door closed behind him his stomach had twisted itself into a very impressive knot. Why was he so nervous?

Oh, that’s right. Joseph was angry, confused, and utterly unpredictable. Smokey wouldn’t be too surprised if he started throwing things around.

Which…

“What the fuck happened here?” he asked, staring at the pile of broken glass on the floor by Caesar’s bedroom door. It looked like it had once been a picture frame.

“What does it look like?” Joseph grumbled, disappearing into the kitchen. Smokey made his way carefully across the glass filled floor.

“It looks like you threw a goddamn tantrum,” he said, bending down to pick up the picture. “Glass is sharp, bro, you should— oh.”

“It came in the mail today,” Joseph said behind him and Smokey whipped his head around. Joseph glared at the picture for a moment, before turning away and taking a swig of the beer. Beer was good, Smokey had been dreading something stronger.

“So… did throwing it against the wall help somehow?” Smokey asked, turning to look at the picture
“For completion of the Hell Climb Pillar,” the inscription said, above it a picture of Joseph and Caesar, posing, laughing. They looked worn out, but happy. The glass was shattered and the frame busted, but maybe they could still fix it. Maybe they could get a new one?

Joseph shrugged, collapsed on the armchair. He looked away, out of the window. It was a beautiful day. He wasn’t really feeling it.

He was feeling something though, but he wasn’t sure what it was. He didn’t like it, regardless. It was a weird twisting in his chest, in his stomach. It made him confused, and angry. It made him sad. He didn’t like being sad.

“We seriously need to talk about this Jojo,” Smokey said. He came to sit on the couch, setting the picture on the coffee table. Joseph turned to look away. “This is getting out of hand. And you ignoring the root of the problem isn’t helping anyone.”

“It’s fine,” Joseph grumbled.

“Of course it’s not fine!” Smokey exclaimed. “Why— How could this possibly seem fine to you? You’re a wreck, Jojo! Caesar’s a wreck too, not that you seem to care about that. But you can’t stay angry at him forever. You can’t stay angry at yourself.”

“That’s what you think,” Joseph bit out.

“It wasn’t a challenge, you dumbass,” Smokey sighed. “You’re still hurting, I get that. But… you really should talk to someone. I can be that someone, if you want, but just… please, Jojo, you need to work this out.”

Joseph bit his lip, tried to make sense of his thoughts, of his feelings.

“Whatever,” he huffed out. He knew he shouldn’t be so insensitive, Smokey was just trying to help, but he didn’t care.

No… That was a lie.

He did care, he cared a lot.

Honestly he couldn’t stop caring, and that was the worst part. Because caring made him feel terrible. About himself, about what he’d done… about Caesar. He wished he could stop caring about Caesar, he wished, but he… Well…

He was a mess.

~x~

“I’ve been thinking,” Caesar said one evening. He was staring out of the window at the city outside. Suzie bookmarked her book and turned to face him better on the couch. “Maybe… we can still fix things.”

The book fell on the floor. A wide smile was spreading on Suzie’s lips and her hands were clasped over her chest. She looked positively excited.

“Of course you can!” she said quickly. “You just need to talk to Jojo. I’m sure you can work something out.”
“Right, right,” Caesar nodded. “I mean, I know I said I was done with dealing with his shit, but… you know, it was mostly the wedding thing, right? We can still go back to the way we were before.”

Suzie’s smile died down, and she frowned a little.

“…before?”

“Yeah. Just get rid of this goddamn wedding business, I’m sure that things can go back to normal!”

“Caesar…” Suzie said, a little quiet, a little hesitant. “You… you do know things can’t go back, right. They shouldn’t go back. You’ve been bottling this up for years, you can’t go back to that, it’s not healthy, and Jojo has an assload of issues of his own he needs to sort through, but… It’s not going back.”

“But… It has to,” Caesar said, frowning deeply. He felt the anxiety growing in his stomach. He couldn’t deal with that right now. “I mean…”

“I’m sorry Caesar, but there is no more ‘back to normal’ for you guys,” Suzie said. Caesar inhaled deeply. She put her hand on his, gently. “Normal is not what it used to be. Everything has already changed. The status quo has been irrevocably shifted.”

“No, no, I—” Caesar said, shaking his head, pulling his hand back. They could undo this, right? It would be okay, right? “No, if I just talk with Jojo—”

“Goddamnit Caesar,” Suzie huffed, exasperated, but not malicious. “You might be comfortable living in huge denial, though I highly doubt that, but Jojo won’t be. He might not have realized it before, but he knows something is different now. Going back is no longer an option. You can only go forward. And figure out what you want already, for Pete’s sake!”

What he wanted, huh? Caesar looked out of the window again. He wanted… he wanted…

He wanted to not hurt anymore.

~x~

“Alright, enough of this!” Suzie shouted, slamming through his front door. Joseph looked up from his phone, startled. He hadn’t let her in, what the hell?

“How did you get in?” he asked, standing up, but she’d stomped to the living room and shoved him back on the couch.

“I stole your key,” she said. “Now listen here. It has been weeks, and I’m sick of this so I’m going to work out this thing between you two it’s the last thing I do. So you’d better tell me exactly what happened right now, Joseph Joestar, or I will smack you into next week!”

“I don’t—”

“I swear to god, Joseph,” she growled. He shut his mouth, his blood running cold.

Then he scoffed and crossed his arms, looking away.

“Why are you being so difficult?” she groaned. “I know that being stubborn is like your thing, or whatever, but come on!”

“You know what happened,” he said, without much gusto.
“But I want to hear your side of it,” she said. She sat down next to him, and she softened her tone as she continued, “Tell me. Please.”

He was quiet for a moment.

“You know what, fine. Fine!” he said, throwing his hands in the air. “You wanna know what happened? Fine. We were talking about cancelling the wedding, okay. And he said we need to fight more, to make it believable. But I don’t like fighting with him, so I said… I said maybe we could go through with it.”

“You what?” she nearly shrieked. Apparently Caesar hadn’t told her the whole story.

“I said we could actually get married,” he said. He could feel a heat rising on his neck, embarrassment taking over the annoyance. “It… it’s not like I’d thought about it before that! But it just… came to me, then. And I told him and, oh god. Then I kissed him.” He buried his face in his hands. His heart was doing all kinds of weird things in his chest. He hated it. “I kissed him! And he got mad and we fought and he punched me and I tried to punch him back… And he… he ran away.”

He was so angry. So very angry, but also sad. Devastated. And… something. He didn’t know, didn’t understand… His vision was blurring again, but he didn’t care enough to do anything about it. Everything was horrible. Everything was pointless.

“I don’t know what to do anymore,” he said, pushing a hand into his hair and pulling at the strands. The tears had started to flow, but he wasn’t crying. They were just… falling. He felt oddly empty. “I just… I miss him so much, but it hurts, Suzie, it hurts, because he probably hates me now! And it hurts because I hurt him, and I never wanted to do that! I didn’t—” He swallowed, a lump in his throat. “I just want him back. I don’t care about anything else, I just… I want him to come back.”

“Oh, sweetie,” Suzie said, pulling him into a hug and petting his head. “I’m so sorry. God, I didn’t realize you’d fallen this badly.”

“I’d what?” Joseph croaked, pushing her away and frowning. She looked sad, but also oddly happy.

“You love him!”

“Wha— I don’t—”

“Of course you do!” she said, cupping his cheeks and squishing his face. “And you’d see it too, if you just took your head out of your ass.”

“No, but—!”

“No buts! Think about it. Really think about it. How does he make you feel?”

He paused. He considered it.

“I… He makes me feel happy,” he said, trying to put the feelings circling inside him into words. “Whenever I’m with him, even if he’s being supper annoying, it’s still fun. Because he’s funny, and smart and cool and interesting… and, uh, sometimes when I look at him, there’s this… this weird feeling in my chest, like, like I might just burst with— oh.”

He knew that feeling.

“You love him,” Suzie said softly.
Joseph stared down at his hands in wonder.

“I lo—”

His phone rang. They both jumped.

“It’s mom,” he said, checking the caller ID as he rubbed a sleeve across his wet face. “Hold on a bit, I gotta answer this. Hello?”

His mother’s voice was strained and fast.

“Hold on, what?” he asked and she started over after a deep breath. His eyes widened. “When?”

Joseph pushed a hand into his hair and gripped.

“Is he okay? Uhhuh. At the... okay. And she’s—? Good. I’ll come as soon as... Here? Okay. Okay, see you in a bit.”

He hung up. He stared at the blank screen of the phone for a while, before turning back at Suzie. She looked at him, scared. His throat felt dry as he tried to get the words out.

“Grandpa Jonathan had a heart attack.”

Chapter End Notes

ooPS.
Oh God, grandpa NO

Chapter Summary

Joseph doesn't watch many hospital dramas, but they go something like this, right?

Chapter Notes

Oh man, this is sooo much later than I meant for it to be. Sorry about that! Didn't mean to let you guys stew in that last cliffhanger quite that long haha....
Y'all had a lot to say about that too tho. Like goddamn twice as many comments as usual! (still not as many as ch12 tho hah)
Anyway, here's chapter 14!! It's a bit shorter again, buttttttttt..... I hope the content makes up for it? aahahahahahahaaha pls don't kill me

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Joseph didn’t like hospitals, never had. The impersonal hallways and the weird, sterile hospital smell were bad on their own, but the pain… The pain was by far the worst part. He’d been very accident prone as a kid, and had been to hospitals for all kinds of bruises and broken bones, and it always hurt like hell. And it was always terrible.

Hospitals were the worst.

But not even that time after the plane crash when he was ten was as bad as walking into a hospital with nothing wrong with him was. Oh how he wished there was something wrong with him, because if he was there to patch himself up, then… Then he wouldn’t be there to see someone else laying in a hospital bed.

Joseph hesitated for a second before he knocked on the white, wooden door in a row of perfectly identical white, wooden doors. The soft sounds that had been drifting from inside stopped. Normally Joseph would have just walked straight in after knocking, but this time he was frozen on the spot, his feet refusing to move until a voice called “come in” from the room. He opened the door and stepped in.

Jonathan was sitting on the bed, pale and tired, bags under his eyes and hair an absolute mess, but he was smiling. Erina was sitting on the chair next to him, holding his hand in her own ever so gently, and Joseph felt his heart constrict in his chest, both with relief and with sorrow. Suddenly they looked so very old and vulnerable, and Joseph was scared. This could have been it. This really could have been it. And the last memory he would’ve had with his grandfather would’ve been—

“Well?” said Jonathan, smiling softly, eyes crinkled and kind. “Are you going to stand in the doorway the whole day? Come in, come in!”

And Joseph swallowed down the lump in his throat and rubbed his eyes dry and went to his grandparents.
“I, uh, I brought you flowers,” he said, awkwardly, thrusting the bouquet of tulips at Jonathan. “That’s… a thing, right?”

“Oh, thank you Joseph,” Jonathan said with a smile. He looked at Erina, who took the flowers and went to fill the vase that had been on the small bedside table. “That was very considerate. They’re very lovely.”

He just kept smiling. Joseph fidgeted for a moment, before he pulled up the chair and sat on it.

“Are you okay?” he asked. The desperation in his voice was loud even in his own ears.

“I’m fine,” Jonathan assured. “Or, well, I will be. It was only a small heart attack and I got help quickly. I just need to stay a few days for surveillance.”

Joseph let out the breath he’d been holding and let the relief wash over him. Erina returned and set the vase on the side table, before sitting on the edge of the bed.

“Uhh,” said Joseph, feeling a bit awkward all of a sudden. “Mom should be here soon too, she stayed behind to talk with the doctor. She, uh, called me as soon as she’d found out and we came here pretty much right away.”

“I’m sorry I’ve made you worry so,” said Jonathan. “But I’m grateful you’re here now.”

“Mm,” hummed Joseph. There was another silence. Joseph couldn’t think of anything to say, what was wrong with him?

“Are you okay, Joseph?” asked Erina and Joseph blinked up.

“Am… I okay?” he parroted back.

“Well, we haven’t heard from you in several weeks,” Jonathan explained. “And the last time we saw you was… well, not the best of times.”

“Oh,” Joseph said. “Right.”

“So?” Erina prompted again after a while. “How have you been?”

“I… I’m okay, I think. I mean, I’m better than I was,” Joseph admitted. “Suzie shouted some sense into me, although… I haven’t talked to Caesar since… back then.”

“That is good to hear,” Jonathan sighed. “And I’m sure once you talk with Caesar you can fix this all right up.”

“I sure hope so,” Joseph said, allowing a small smile onto his face.

There was a knock on the door.

“Ah, I suppose that’s Lisa Lisa. Come in!” Jonathan called. The door opened and Joseph’s heart lodged itself in his throat. It wasn’t Lisa Lisa.

It was Caesar.

It took a moment for the Italian to spot Joseph, but when he did he froze, eyes widening.

“Merde,” he whispered under his breath. Then he whipped around and ran. Again.
“Wai— Caesar!” Joseph shouted, standing up on his chair so fast it clattered onto the floor behind him. His heart was hammering in his chest. He turned to Jonathan, uncertain what to do.

“Well, what are you waiting for?” Jonathan said, making shooing motions. “Go after him!”

“R-right!” Joseph said, blinking. “Thanks, gramps!” He dashed out of the room and down the corridor. He barely managed to see which way Caesar turned.

Joseph caught up with him in the elevator. He stuck his hand between the door to stop it from closing. Which it did, thank god. He really didn’t need a broken arm right now.

“Stop… running away… goddamn,” Joseph panted, entering the elevator. The doors closed behind him with a soft ding.

Caesar had pressed himself against the far wall, his arms crossed and gaze cast away. Defensive. Joseph took a deep breath and pushed the button for the ground floor. The elevator slid into motion.

“We need to talk,” he said. Caesar bit his lip and then finally, finally met his eyes.

“Yes,” he agreed. “We do.”

~x~

The hospital cafeteria was not much, but it’s not like either had expected much of it. They just needed a place to talk, for that it was as good as any. Joseph bought them mediocre hospital coffees and they sat at the table as far away from everything as possible.

Caesar leaned back on his chair, crossing his arms across his chest again.

“So,” he said.

“So,” Joseph echoed.

There was silence. The obvious question was pressing against Caesar’s mind and though he slightly dreaded to ask, he had to know.

“How… is Jonathan?” he asked. Joseph took a deep breath.

“He’s fine,” he said. Caesar deflated slightly, relieved. “It wasn’t anything major, thankfully. How did you—?”

“Suzie called me,” Caesar said. Joseph nodded. “She, uh, didn’t say anything about you being here, though I suppose I should have… realized.”

He really, really should have realized. Of course Joseph would be there, it was his grandfather for crying out loud. Caesar just… when Suzie had called, he’d been so worried he hadn’t thought about anything else. He’d just hopped on his bike and driven straight to the hospital. Maybe that had been a mistake…

“Huh,” said Joseph and then huffed out a laugh.

“What?” asked Caesar, directing a glare at the Joestar.

“No, no it’s nothing,” Joseph hurried to say, waving his hands in what was clearly meant as a placating manner. “Never mind that. We have, uh… a lot of other things to talk about.”
“I know,” Caesar said, crossing his arms again. “I’m waiting for you to start talking.”

“Right,” Joseph said. “Fair enough. First things first, I guess… I’m… sorry.”

“Oh?” said Caesar. Joseph was a very straightforward person, but he was also stubborn, and Caesar hadn’t expected him to be quite this direct with admitting guilt. It was a nice change though.

“Yeah,” Joseph said, fiddling with the coffee cup, not meeting Caesar’s eyes. “I, uh, I did and… said… some pretty dumb stuff. I mean, dumb even by my standards, and I ended up hurting you, which is… I never wanted that. I never—” He looked up, suddenly, and there was clear urgency in him. Caesar blinked. “I’m so, so sorry.”

Caesar’s breath was stuck in his throat, the honesty in Joseph’s voice and face almost too much for him to bear. He was silent for a long while.

Joseph started to fidget again. Right. He should probably… answer, or something.

“Thank you,” was the first thing out of Caesar’s mouth as he opened it. “I’m… glad. And, well, I’m sorry too. I probably shouldn’t have punched you.”

“That’s okay, I probably would’ve punched me too,” Joseph said, rubbing his neck.

“Still…” Caesar said. He had been so angry he hadn’t been able to stop himself. The whole conversation had escalated out of control so quickly, it had been a mess. Which was something that applied to way too many things between the two of them, more than Caesar was really comfortable with. Although he wasn’t sure if there was anything to be done about that.

“I gotta ask…” Joseph started, slightly hesitant. “Did I really… kiss you? Three years ago?”

Caesar felt his eye twitch. He knew Joseph didn’t remember, he’d known all the time, but… It still struck a nerve, no matter how much he pretended he was over it.

“Yes,” he said, somewhat more bitterly than he’d hoped for.

Joseph hummed in thought. Caesar felt slightly annoyed, though he couldn’t quite pinpoint the reason. Which, in itself, was rather annoying.

“So what we told Suzie…” Joseph trailed off.

“The only lie was the outcome,” Caesar confirmed. “Because you drank yourself to oblivion.”

“That’s a bit—!” Joseph started to protest, but then stopped. “Although I guess I did kinda black out at the end there.”

“Kinda,” said Caesar.

“Mmmm, but still!” Joseph insisted. “You… could’ve said something! The following morning, or—”

“I could have,” Caesar said, unimpressed. “If you hadn’t made it clear you would rather us both pretend it never happened.” Joseph blinked. “Your words.”

“Shit,” Joseph said. He pushed a hand into his hair. “Shit, that’s— I’m sorry.”

Caesar hummed. At least Joseph seemed to understand how terrible it had been for Caesar. He supposed it was something. A beginning, maybe.
“In any case…” Caesar said, because honestly, he wanted answers, and he wanted them during this century, if possible. “Your behavior three weeks ago was strikingly similar to what it was three years ago, and I’m no longer interested in trying to decipher your weird ass thought process. So I suggest you get to the part where you explain what exactly you hoped to gain from kissing me, if you were instantly going to tell me to forget about it anyway.”

“Oh, I, uh,” said Joseph, struggling to find an answer. “I… panicked.”

“Panicked?” Caesar repeated. That was… well, honest if nothing else.

“Yeah, well…” Joseph scratched his neck. “Neither of those times were really… planned or anything, I just kinda went with it you know? And then when I realized what I’d done I got scared that I’d ruined our friendship or something and I just… Panicked. And I know expecting you to just forget about it is kind of a jerk move, but I couldn’t bear the thought of losing what we have. Of losing you.”

And Caesar tried to stay mad, he tried to stay detached, to not let Joseph’s words sway him so goddamn easily, but… That was a battle he’d lost before he’d started, he already knew it. Joseph was so earnest, so fucking sincere in his words, that Caesar could feel himself melt on the inside despite everything.

He hated it.

He loved it.

“So what exactly does that mean?” he said.

“It means I like you,” Joseph said, his bluntness returning with a vengeance. “I really, really like you, I get that now.”

Caesar let out a long breath.

“But—!”, Joseph hurried to say, because of course he’d panic again. “I mean! If you don’t like me back, that’s totally fine! I can just ignore it, I mean—I’m fine with being just friends! I am very happy if we’re just friends! I don’t really care—I mean of course I care, but like I don’t need— No, wait. I want us to be together. Not like together together of course, unless that’s what you want but like just together as friends, you know, like we used to before—”

“Jojo,” Caesar said, because while it was very amusing to watch Joseph flail, there were other more pressing matters at hand. “Shut up.” Joseph’s mouth closed with an audible snap.

“Alright then,” Caesar continued after Joseph had calmed down for a few seconds. “So what you’re saying is that you like me, and you would maybe like to… get together?” Joseph nodded, still pressing his lips tightly shut. “And you hadn’t realized this before, and that’s why you freaked out after kissing me?” Joseph nodded again. Good. Progress.

“And—” Joseph started before pausing for a second. “What about you?”

It wasn’t really much of a question at this point, was it?

“Of course I like you too, idiota!” Caesar huffed, though he couldn’t help the smile tugging at his lips.

“So…” said Joseph, too amazed to care about—or perhaps notice—the insult. “If you like me... and I like me…”
Caesar blinked. He hadn’t heard that right, had he? “Excuse me?”

“You!” Joseph shouted. A few heads turned to look at them, and Caesar was reminded of the fact that they were in public. Maybe they should finish the conversation at home. “I... like you,” Joseph corrected, glancing around as well, before sinking into his seat slightly. “Sorry.”

Caesar huffed out a short laugh. He’d missed this. He’d missed Joseph.

God, how he’d missed Joseph.

“Alright, I think that’s enough of that,” he said, standing up. Joseph whipped his head to look up at him.

“What?” he squawked.

“I mean, we should probably talk more about this in private,” Caesar explained. Joseph let out a small “ah” before standing up as well and throwing back the rest of his coffee. “Besides,” Caesar continued as they went to leave the cafeteria, “I’m still worried about Jonathan.”

~x~

It was nice to see that the people Jonathan cared about were worried for him, but really now, this was getting ridiculous. Lisa Lisa had stood awkwardly—or as awkwardly as was possible for her—in the corner of the room since she’d come in, and after Joseph and Caesar had returned from their little trip, they had gushed over him like he was a sick child. It was endearing in a way, but only up to a point.

“You’re sure you’re alright?” Caesar asked, not for the first time. Jonathan laughed and waved him off again.

“I am fine, Caesar, thank you,” he said, stressing the syllable to try to make it clear to the boy that he really was alright now. Caesar nodded and leaned back on his chair, though he didn’t look much more reassured.

“Life has to try a lot harder than this if it wants to take my Jojo from me,” Erina proclaimed from her seat on the edge of the bed. “Nothing short of a fiery explosion during a shipwreck will do.”

Jonathan laughed again, taking a hold of her hand. She smiled at him, on her lips the same slightly mischievous smile he’d fallen in love with as a youngster, and she squeezed his hand. Joseph and Caesar were both looking at them in confusion. Lisa Lisa smiled slightly.

“We watched The Titanic yesterday,” Jonathan explained to the boys. “I suppose it left an impression.”

“Oookay?” said Joseph, shifting his weight slightly. He subconsciously leaned towards Caesar, Jonathan noticed. Things were back to normal, it seemed, at least somewhat. That was good.

Lisa Lisa’s phone let out a high pitched beep. She tutted, but pulled it out nevertheless.

“I need to go,” she said, frowning at the screen. She put the phone away and came up to the bed. She gave Jonathan a hug and a quick kiss on the cheek, letting her hands linger in his as she pulled away. “Get well soon.” Erina stood up and gave her a small embrace as well. “I’ll drop by again when I have time. Jojo, do you need a lift home?” The last part was directed at Joseph, and he blinked as he looked up in surprise.
“Uh,” he managed to get out before Caesar cut him off.

“I can take him home,” he said. “I’m here with my bike and I’m… going back there anyway.”

He shared a look with Joseph and they both smiled, just a bit awkwardly.

*Oh, this is better than good,* Jonathan thought. *This is great.*

Lisa Lisa left and the boys stayed a bit longer to talk about things. The doctor came around some time later, telling them visiting hours were almost over.

“Might I have a word in private before you leave, Joseph?” Jonathan asked, before his three visitors had gotten to the door. Joseph glanced over at Caesar and they locked eyes for a second.

“Sure,” Joseph said, turning back.

“Let’s go find you a cab, Mrs. Joestar,” Caesar said, guiding Erina out of the room. “I’ll wait for you downstairs, Jojo,” he added to Joseph. Then they left.

“So, what’s going on?” Joseph asked, walking back over to the bed.

“I just wanted to know how your little chat with Caesar went,” Jonathan said. The flush that rose on his grandson’s cheeks was *surprisingly* satisfying.

“I, uh,” Joseph said and then cleared his throat. “It went well,” he said, a grin spreading on his face. It was good to see him cheerful again. “We both apologized and then we talked about… our, uh, feelings, I guess.”

“And…?” Jonathan prompted. “You finally told him you like him, right?”

“Oh, yes,” Joseph said, frowning at Jonathan.

“And he likes you back.”

“Why are you even asking me when you seem to already know everything?” Joseph huffed and looked away. Jonathan chuckled lightly.

“I am very happy for you two,” he said instead of answering. “But I must know… what about the wedding?”

Joseph opened his mouth, closed it, and then swallowed.

“That… is definitely on hold for now,” he said and made a face. “We still have some things to talk about, regarding this whole liking each other business, and the wedding is pretty much the last thing we want to worry about right now. Besides, we should probably try like dating or whatever for a bit before we get married.”

“Yes, of course,” Jonathan nodded. “Bit of a shame, but I understand completely.” There was a short silence.

“Was… there something else you needed?” Joseph asked finally.

“Oh, no, that was all,” Jonathan said. “You best get going now. You mustn’t keep him waiting.”

“Right,” said Joseph, a small smile on his face. “Get well soon, grandpa. I’ll see you later.”
“Goodbye now,” Jonathan said, waving as his grandson left the room.

Jonathan took a deep breath as the door closed with a click. He leaned back against the headboard of the bed, relaxing, and stared out of the hospital room window. He smiled.

It was a beautiful day.

Chapter End Notes

HAH you thought I’d kill off Jona??? Shame on you. (how worried were y’all when you saw there were end notes again? tell me in the comments)
Seeeee you next timeee~~
Dating is HARD, okay???

Chapter Summary

Imagine the worst possible first date... Wow, that's pretty terrible. Yikes. That is cringe-worthy, my friend. Anyway, the boys go on an actual date finally, took them long enough.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I hope you're doing well. I'm... okay, I guess. I mean, I hate to be a downer, but after Orlando I've just been so pissed and also sad. But, uh, I feel like getting these gays together and bringing their nonsense to y'all helps somehow. I dunno. It's not all doom and gloom tho! Because it's Juhannus, or midsummer this Saturday! It's a big thing in Finland, tho I don't think it's that big in other countries (except the other nordic countries or w/e)... BUT it's very important to me and I'm spending it with the bae, the one, the only... endles!! (and another one of our friends but i don't think she has an ao3 account so i can't give her a shoutout hah she's not even reading my fic bc she doesn't want to read it while it's unfinished boo) So I'm very excited about that. I, uh. Feel like I wanted to say something else but I can't quite remember what it was. Well, it'll come to me, or it won't.

Next chapter will be out on the 4th of July, because that's apparently some kind of big deal for you Americans? Or, like, whatever, I don't know. (i do actually know i'm just making a joke jeez i'm not dumb) SO look forward to more family drama then!

Now enjoy this chapter I was supposed to post tomorrow morning but couldn't wait any longer to publish! Cheers!!

Joseph pulled the front door closed behind them, feeling suddenly very nervous—he had no idea what to do in this situation. Caesar had stopped a few steps into the apartment and looked around the place silently. It had been several weeks since he’d been here. Joseph waited.

“It’s nice to be home,” Caesar said quietly, a soft smile on his lips and in his eyes. Joseph’s heart suddenly felt too big for his chest.

“It’s nice to have you home,” he said before he could stop himself and Caesar turned to look at him. Joseph could feel his face heating up again. “A-anyway,” he said, rushing past Caesar and making his way into the living room. He blinked down at the state it was in and started to quickly gather up the bottles and dirty dishes that had piled onto the coffee table during the Italian’s absence. “We still had stuff to talk about, didn’t we?”

“Yeah, we did,” said Caesar as he walked over and sat onto the couch. Joseph dumped the pile of plates into the kitchen sink and came hurried back to sit next to him.

“Okay, so,” he started, wetting his lips. His mouth was oddly dry. “If... if this whole ‘liking you’ thing is mutual, does that mean we’re... together now? God, that sounds corny.”
“It does, a bit. Well, I’d say ‘if you want us to be together’, but you already made it pretty clear at the hospital that you do,” Caesar said, pulling one leg up on the couch and tucking it under himself. “So… I suppose it does mean that.” He paused. “How do you feel about it?”

“I… don’t know, exactly,” Joseph admitted. “I mean, I know I like it!” he hurried to add. “It’s definitely something I want, but still… thinking about it feels, well, almost unreal.”

“Yes, it’s something that requires some getting used to,” Caesar agreed. “Change always does. But I think this a good thing, right?” Caesar reached over tentatively and took Joseph’s hand in his own. Joseph swallowed thickly. “And I know this is a bit of a cliché, but who the fuck knows what tomorrow brings. Everything could go to shit so quickly, it’s terrifying really. And I don’t really know if there’s fate or some kind of divine, ineffable plan or if everything is just random happenstances, but what I do know is that I want to stand together with you to face that tomorrow.”

The only warning Caesar got was the loud sound—which technically could be described as a sob if you really wanted to—a fraction of a second before Joseph lunged at him, crashing into him with basically all of his weight. The next moment Joseph had Caesar on his back, pinned against the couch, his hands gripping the back of Caesar’s shirt and face buried in his neck. Joseph’s eyes were definitely not getting wet again because he definitely wasn’t about to cry over this. He rubbed his eyes against Caesar’s shirt while Caesar himself placed his hands on Joseph’s shoulders and rubbed them softly.

They lay there for a while, one on top of the other, unmoving except for Caesar’s fingers against Joseph’s arms. Joseph breathed in Caesar’s scent, focused on the way they were pressed together. It was somewhat similar to the way they’d sat on the drive home from the hospital, Joseph clinging to Caesar’s waist as they zoomed through the city on the motorcycle, but also decidedly different. Maybe it was the setting, or the fact that they were chest to chest, or maybe it seemed like Caesar was closer now that he didn’t have his jacket on anymore. Joseph wasn’t sure, but he didn’t actually care that much.

Caesar smelled really nice, by the way. Like citrus and soap and something Joseph couldn’t identify, but also couldn’t get enough of. Had he always smelled this nice? How had Joseph never noticed? Or rather, how had he managed to ignore it after he most certainly had noticed? Thinking back, it seemed almost insane that he hadn’t realized his feelings until now. Well, nothing to be done about that anymore.

“Oi,” said Caesar, poking him in the side. Joseph flinched. “Did you fall asleep or something?”

“Of course not!” Joseph said, crossing his hands on top of Caesar’s chest and resting his chin on them. “Although, you are very comfortable to lay on, it’s amazing. I really wouldn’t mind sleeping here.”

“Well, I would. You’re fucking heavy,” Caesar said, poking him again.

“That just means there’s more of me to love,” Joseph said airily. He grabbed a hold of Caesar’s finger when he was about to poke him for the third time. “Stop that.”

Caesar blinked. Then he grinned. Joseph swallowed.

“No,” he said slowly, sitting up, but Caesar’s grin just grew. “Bad Caesarino,” he said. Caesar wiggled his fingers. “Do not do that.”

It was too late.
The tickling onslaught was merciless. Joseph defended himself to the best of his ability, but it was really quite difficult when he was almost doubling over with laughter. Finally he found an opening himself and jabbed a finger right into Caesar’s side. The resulting noise was a very high pitched yelp. Fingers halted for a moment as the two stared each other down. Then it continued.

It really was an odd sight. Two grown—not to mention big—men trying to out-tickle the other in a heap on a couch that was really too small for them to be doing something like that on. There was a short moment of nothing but grunts and giggles as the two wrestled, but then gravity decided to fuck Joseph over and the next moment he found himself on his back on the floor, between the couch and the coffee table. He blinked up dazedly.

Caesar was looking down at him, eyes blown wide with surprise and a hand over his mouth.

“Cazzo, are you okay, Jojo?” he asked, clearly worried.

Joseph blinked again. Then he snorted. And then he started laughing. Caesar joined in after a moment.

“So that went well,” Joseph said finally as he pushed himself up on his elbow. “Maybe it’s time to go to bed, what do you think?”

“Sounds like a plan,” Caesar said, sitting up. “I actually left work in advance today to come see Jonathan, so I promised Tiffy I’d do the morning shift in her stead tomorrow.”

“Oh, yeah, you should definitely be in bed by now, in that case,” Joseph said. “Assuming you want to appear human in work without drinking every last drop of coffee in the house.”

Caesar smacked him on the arm, but there was a smile on his face.

“Sorry, sorry,” Joseph laughed and stood up from the floor, dusting himself off. “But seriously, go to bed. I’ll just do the dishes and then join you.”

Everything screeched to a halt.

“You’ll… join me?” Caesar asked, slowly.

“I MEAN—!” Joseph shouted, face red and flailing his arms around quite dramatically. “I didn’t mean join you like physically join you! I meant I’ll go to bed as well, my own bed! Not your bed! Not that I’d mind sleeping in your bed I just—I would never sleep in your bed without your permission, that is—! I just thought, I mean, I don’t think we’re really ready to sleep in the same bed yet, you know? Not that I’d mind sleeping next to you either, in fact I’d very much like that but—no wait! I mean that maybe we’re not really ready for that quite yet maybe—”

“Jojo!” Caesar interrupted and Joseph’s words stuck to his throat, unable to push through the sudden knot there. “Calm down.”

Joseph took a deep breath to calm himself. That was—that was bad. What the fuck had he said that for?? That was the dumbest thing that had escaped his mouth in a long time.

“I know what you meant,” Caesar said and Joseph forced himself to focus on him and not his own thoughts. “And… I know it wouldn’t be the first time we share a bed, but frankly this is very different than a sleepover when we were kids.” He paused, to collect his thoughts or to figure out his words before saying them out loud. Joseph should probably try that too, sometimes. “We’re just starting this relationship and with no idea where exactly it’s headed, keeping things slow is probably the smartest thing to do in this situation.”
“Yes. Definitely, yes, I agree,” Joseph said, pushing a hand into his hair. And then he continued, perhaps against his better judgement. “It’s… weird in a way though, going slow. Because I have known you for… always. And we’ve been so close for so long and… I dunno.”

“I get that,” Caesar assured him, standing up and coming to stand in front of him. Joseph was very aware of their close proximity again. “Honestly, everything about this is slightly weird. But let’s just… try to progress as naturally as possible. Go slow for now, do things when we’re comfortable doing them.”

“Okay,” Joseph said. “Okay.” Then he enveloped Caesar in a tight hug. Caesar tensed for a moment, but then relaxed against him, raising his arms and wrapping them around Joseph’s waist.

They stood there for a moment, Joseph breathing in Caesar again, before pulling away. His hands lingered in Caesar’s.

“Okay then. Bed time for you. Dish time for me,” he said and gave Caesar a bright smile. Caesar smiled back. “Good night, Caesar.”

“Good night, Jojo,” said Caesar, and gave his hands one final squeeze, before retreating into his own room.

Joseph had never been as happy washing dished as he was then.

~x~

“So, you have tomorrow free, right?” Joseph asked Caesar one night a few weeks later as they sat on the couch not really watching the open TV.

“Yes, finally,” Caesar sighed, shifting so that he could rest the back of his head against Joseph’s shoulder. Joseph didn’t comment, though his breath did catch in his throat for a second. “Tiffy’s been working me like a dog. She’s been coming up with new designs nearly every day and I need to be constantly changing the display.” He sighed again and then turned slightly to look up at Joseph’s face. “But yeah, I don’t have a shift tomorrow. Why?”

“You wanna go on a date?” Joseph blurted out before he chickened out, again. He stared at the TV screen, not really seeing the images flashing on it. He could feel Caesar tense against him.

“Like… an actual date?” Caesar asked after a few seconds of silence.

“Yeah,” said Joseph simply. There was another short silence.

“Yeah okay,” Caesar said. Joseph let out the breath he’d been holding. “Do you… have something planned, or…?”

“I thought something simple would be good,” Joseph said, finally braving a glance at Caesar. He was glad to see he wasn’t the only one with a red face. “Tiffy’s been coming up with new designs nearly every day and I need to be constantly changing the display.” He sighed again and then turned slightly to look up at Joseph’s face. “But yeah, I don’t have a shift tomorrow. Why?”

“You wanna go on a date?” Joseph blurted out before he chickened out, again. He stared at the TV screen, not really seeing the images flashing on it. He could feel Caesar tense against him.

“Like… an actual date?” Caesar asked after a few seconds of silence.

“Yeah,” said Joseph simply. There was another short silence.

“Yeah okay,” Caesar said. Joseph let out the breath he’d been holding. “Do you… have something planned, or…?”

“I thought something simple would be good,” Joseph said, finally braving a glance at Caesar. He was glad to see he wasn’t the only one with a red face. “You know, dinner. And maybe a movie.”

“Mm, a classic formula,” Caesar said with a smile. “Am I to assume you’ve already arranged everything?”

“Well, I’ve reserved a table,” Joseph said, scratching his neck, “but I didn’t know what movie you wanted to go see, and… since I hadn’t asked yet…”

“Did you think I might say no?” Caesar asked. Joseph didn’t answer. Caesar let out a small huff of a laugh. “Either way, I don’t think there’s any specific movie playing at the moment that I really, really
super want to see, so I’m sure you can just pick something for us to watch. I usually like the movies you do, after all.”

“Alright,” said Joseph. “I’ll check the selection tomorrow morning.”

“That sounds great,” Caesar said and sat up straight, checking his watch. “Oh, it’s getting late, isn’t it?”

“I suppose,” Joseph said, switching the TV off as Caesar stood up and stretched.

“We best go to bed, then. Gotta be well rested for the big day tomorrow.” He grinned. Joseph laughed softly, until he was cut off by Caesar suddenly leaning over him and his breath catching in his throat again. Caesar was gripping the back of the couch next to Joseph’s shoulder and just— kinda hovered there, a little uncertain.

Joseph’s heart was hammering in his chest because holy shit was Caesar going to kiss him??? They hadn’t kissed yet, not after that one bad, bad night, but it was happening now wasn’t it? It definitely was, oh god, Joseph didn’t know what to do! Caesar had already made up his mind though and was now leaning closer, was— was he supposed to lean in too?? Or would that be bad, because he really didn’t want to mess this up now, oh dear god Joseph was going crazy, he didn’t—

Caesar placed a small kiss on his cheek and then leaned away again. Joseph couldn’t breathe.

“Good night… Jojo,” Caesar said gently and then turned away. Joseph couldn’t help but notice that his ears were red.

When the door to Caesar’s room closed with a soft click Joseph’s head exploded and he slumped down on the couch. He buried his burning face in his hands and tried to focus on breathing, but he couldn’t think, that was— that had been—

Holy shit.

~x~

The next day was Friday—as always—and it was warm and sunny, which Joseph took as a good sign even though they had zero outdoor activities planned. This would be a great first date! Even if they had kinda already been on one date back in February… But that didn’t really count, right? They hadn’t been together back then. Although… they were barely together at the moment, were they? They were… well, they were working this out as they went along. It would be fine. They were always fine.

Good god, Joseph was nervous.

“So where are we going for dinner?” asked Caesar at breakfast, snapping Joseph out of his panic cycle. “Or rather, how fancy should I dress?”

“Oh, not too fancy,” Joseph said, waving a hand. “I thought we’d go to that one Russian place you like—”

“‘Borscht Bowl Club’? Yeah, that’s definitely not fancy,” Caesar laughed.

“Your next line is ‘Their stroganoff is delicious, so I don’t really mind!’” Joseph quipped, just as Caesar continued with, “But their stroganoff is delicious, so it’s not like… I mind.”

He gave Joseph a look. Joseph grinned.
“Not quite,” said Caesar.

“Close enough,” said Joseph.

They both snorted and then started to laugh.

“So what time is the reservation?” Caesar asked after they’d laughed for a moment.

“At five,” Joseph said, still grinning. “We’ll have plenty of time to eat and get to the movie theater by 7:30. And we should be home by half past ten.” He paused as a realization hit him. “That’s not too late, is it? I know you have work tomorrow.”

“It’s fine,” Caesar reassured him. “I have the evening shift. Besides, it’s Saturday, the shop doesn’t open until eleven anyway.”

“Oh, okay.” Joseph let out a small breath of relief. “I meant to ask, but I forgot.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Caesar waved him off. “Which movie did you end up picking, though?”

“‘The Steel Ball Run’, Joseph said, complete with a sweeping hand gesture. Caesar struggled to keep a straight face. “It’s about cowboys or horse racing or something,” Joseph explained and then frowned a bit. “Plus I think there’s like… dinosaurs in it? And… a mummy?”

Caesar burst out laughing.

“What kind of a plot is that?” he managed between his giggles. Joseph grinned as well.

“I thought it was the perfect combination of weird and awesome for us,” he said. “I don’t actually know shit about it though, it might be terrible as all hell.”

“It’ll no doubt be an experience though,” Caesar said after finally calming down. “Good choice.”

~x~

They left for the restaurant at half past four, just to make sure they’d be on time. Joseph had been pacing around in front of Caesar’s room for nearly fifteen minutes before that, as Caesar had gotten ready, clearly anxious to leave. It was—surprisingly—more endearing than annoying. Still, Caesar continued with his preparations calmly, because even if they were dressing casual, he was intent on looking good, and occasionally he liked to take his time with it. Unlike Joseph, who apparently had just thrown on the first clean shirt he’d come across in his closet and paired it with the dark green button-up he’d worn right through last week and his only pair of black jeans. And he hadn’t even tried to comb his hair, which stuck out in defiance of gravity as it always did.

He looked so goddamn good, the glorious bastard.

Caesar wasn’t jealous, though. Obviously.

And he was definitely not distracted by Joseph’s forearms when the Joestar rolled up his sleeves once they got outside. Or by how tight the jeans really were on him, oh wow. Or by how his hand occasionally brushed against Caesar’s own as they walked side by side down the streets of New York.

Obviously.

He almost took Joseph’s hand on seven separate occasions. Not that he’d counted.
“There it is!” Joseph said as they turned onto the street the “Borscht Bowl Club” was on.

“Finally. I’m starving,” Caesar sighed. He hadn’t eaten a very big lunch that day, because he knew the portions would be big and the food would be delicious.

They crossed the street and Caesar had only a moment to wonder why the inside looked so dark before Joseph tried to push the door open. It didn’t open.

“What the…?” he said, giving it a small shake despite the obvious “closed” sign hanging in the window.

“Stop shaking it before you break it,” Caesar said, stilling Joseph with a hand on his wrist, before he leaned in to read the notice taped on the door. “‘Unfortunately, we have had to close temporarily, because our…’” He paused, blinked, and frowned. “…‘because our resident pianist has been arrested for murder’?? What??

“Are you kidding me?” Joseph said, leaning in as well.

“That’s what it says!” Caesar’s eyes flicked over the rest of the text quickly. “‘And our senior waitress is a key witness in his trial today! The Borscht Bowl Club apologizes for any inconvenience this might cause, and welcomes You back later for a special discount.’ Signed by the management. Wow.”

“That is… not something I’ve seen before,” Joseph said, scratching the back of his head. “I mean, I knew this place was a bit sketchy, but I never saw this coming.”

“Well, we…” Caesar started but was interrupted by his own growling stomach. “We better find another place to have dinner at then.”

“That’s fine! It’s fine,” said Joseph, with a bit more volume than he had probably meant. “We’re practically in the foodie district! There’s plenty of good restaurants around. How hard can it be to find someplace else?”

It was hard. It was very hard.

Every place was either full, closed, or out of their price range. Joseph had expressed his willingness to pay a bit steeper a price, but most fancier places also had a dress code they didn’t exactly meet. They did pass by a few coffee shops that sold sandwiches and stuff, and that might’ve worked on another day, but Caesar was seriously hungry, and if they weren’t going to get home before 10:30 he needed some real food.

“How is it possible to not find a single restaurant in New York?” Joseph groaned as they exited a small pizza place where the oven had just broken down. “This city is full of places to eat!”

“I don’t know, but we’re running out of time,” Caesar said, looking at his watch. They’d wasted way over an hour just walking around. Joseph checked the time on his phone.

“Aw, shit,” he said and pushed a hand through his hair. Caesar’s stomach grumbled again.

“Let’s just go somewhere, before it’s too late,” he pleaded.

“I know, I know! I just can’t think of any other places,” Joseph said, looking up and down the street. “If you have any ideas, I’m open.”

“Well, there is a McDonald’s around the corner,” Caesar suggested and Joseph whipped his head
around with a flabbergasted look.

“A McDonald’s??” he shrieked. Caesar looked at him, unimpressed. “You want to go to a fucking—?” He paused and then hissed, “On our first date?”

“It’s not exactly my first choice, but I need to eat,” Caesar said, trying to keep himself calm. His heart had done a little summersault when Joseph had said “first date”. “Don’t worry about it, your original plan was great and I really appreciate it. And it’s not your fault Borscht Bowl was closed. So let’s just go get something to eat so we can go through with the rest of that great plan, huh?”

Joseph muttered something under his breath, but finally conceded. They walked the few blocks over to the McDonald’s, which was thankfully neither full nor closed for some kind of bizarre reason, and they finally managed to order themselves some food. After paying, Joseph took the tray with their fries and sodas, and they went to look for a free table, which they were able to find at the back, nice and secluded. At least that worked out okay.

“I still can’t believe Borscht Bowl was closed, today of all days,” Joseph complained as he dipped a fistful of fries in ketchup.

“Do you think the pianist actually did it?” Caesar asked, fiddling with the straw in his coke. “I’ve talked to him a few times, he hasn’t really seemed like someone who would kill a person.”

“I don’t know, man,” Joseph said. “He is really weird. Like there’s something more to him. And he is always chugging wine, isn’t he?”

“Grape juice.”

“Sure.”

The little contraption started to buzz on the table to indicate the rest of their food was ready, and Joseph went to pick it up. He dug straight into his Big Mac once he was back, while Caesar continued on the fries.

“If you had to kill someone, who would you kill?” Joseph asked suddenly, barely managing to swallow the huge mouthful he’d just taken.


“No, no, no,” he said and pointed a fry at Caesar’s face. “You gotta pick someone.”

“Fine. Donald Trump,” Caesar said. Joseph gave him a look. “What? You didn’t say I had to know or like them.”

“I guess so,” he said, though he didn’t seem pleased with Caesar’s answer. “I still think that’s cheating though.”

“Well what about you? Who would you kill if you had to?” Caesar asked, amused.

“My new boss,” Joseph said without pause. Caesar snorted.

“You haven’t even officially started yet!” he laughed.

“Yeah, but that guy is an asshole, I can tell already,” Joseph said, stuffing the rest of the burger in his mouth. “I’m good at reading people, remember?”
“I’ll give you that,” Caesar said, picking up his wrap and unwrapping it. “Let’s just hope he won’t be enough of an asshole that you actually want to kill him. Or punch him in the face, which I can actually see you doing.”

“It’ll be fine, don’t even worry about it,” Joseph said, waving him off.

They continued to eat and chat and then eat some more. Joseph even insisted on getting an ice cream for dessert, but they were running out of time, so he had to bring it with him when they left for the movie theater.

~x~

Everything went fine at the movie theater. Or, well, they almost didn’t get the tickets Joseph had reserved because the ticket printed got jammed, but the cashier managed to get the thing working after a minute and they didn’t quite miss the start of the show. And there were plenty of free seats left when they got there just in time for the trailers, and they found themselves pretty private seats near the back, so it was all good. They settled down to enjoy the movie.

And they did enjoy it. It was funny and interesting, the cast was great and the plot wonderfully bizarre. At least the first 20 minutes of it was. After that the screen cut black and stayed that way.

“You think this is part of the movie?” Joseph whispered to Caesar after a few minutes of nothing. “Like it’s some kind of… modern… stance on something?”

“I don’t think so, it’s a bit too long to be something like that,” Caesar whispered back. Many of the other viewers were whispering amongst each other as well. Something had to be up.

After a little while an usher arrived with a flashlight and made her way in front of the screen.

“I’m terribly sorry ladies and gentlemen,” she started and Caesar already knew they weren’t going to be able to watch the movie. “But there seems to be a minor power outage in the area, and we are unable to get our backup generators working. As such, we unfortunately have to cancel all screenings for the foreseeable future and, unfortunately, it is unlikely we’ll be able to get the power back on tonight. All of your tickets will be refunded or rescheduled free of charge at the front desk.” She sighed and bowed. “We’re very sorry for the inconvenience. Now, if you could all just follow me…”

The crowd streamed out of the dark room after the girl with the torch—many turned on the lights on their phones to see better—and indeed the whole building was dark. In fact, as Joseph and Caesar noticed when they finally got outside, the entire block was dark.

“Well this night keeps getting better and better, doesn’t it?” Joseph said, sounding uncharacteristically defeated. He checked his phone. “It’s only ten past eight, do you still want to do something? I mean, we did come all the way downtown.”

“With the luck we’ve been having today…” Caesar said with a shake of his head. “We might as well go home and enjoy a quiet night in.”

“I guess, but…” Joseph said, scratching his neck. Then he perked up. “Hey, isn’t that one club right around here?” Caesar looked at him in confusion. “You know! The one with the DJ that had that crazy neon hair.”

“Oh, yeah, that place was pretty good,” Caesar said, considering it. It had been a long time since they’d last gone clubbing, so it could be fun. Or it could be absolutely terrible. Which did kind of apply to everything in life, didn’t it?
“Come on, let’s do it!” Joseph said. “We won’t stay long, I know you still have work tomorrow.”

Caesar drew in a deep breath and blew it out slowly.

“Yeah okay,” he said. Joseph pumped his fist in the air. “Lead the way, Jojo.”

~x~

“Okay wow,” Joseph said.

“Yep,” Caesar agreed. He moved slightly to let a fireman walk past.

They watched the bustling in front of the club in silence for a while. Firemen were still going in and out of the place and many of the former patrons were still hanging around, whether to get medical attention or to just see what happened next. The air smelled like smoke, the ground was wet, and emergency lights were flashing all around them.

It hadn’t been a big fire, thank god. Some idiot had apparently dropped a lit cigarette into the paper bin in the men’s room. And, in a stroke of genius, had poured his drink in after it to make sure it didn’t catch fire. The effect had been instantaneous, as well as the polar opposite of the reaction the clearly drunk man had intended, which made Caesar very concerned about the contents of the glass. By the time the fire brigade got there, the burning trash bin had scorched one of the men’s room’s walls, but hadn’t caused a lot of other damage, luckily.

Still, the club was closed and would be closed until they could renovate the bathroom.

“What if,” said Caesar, after a long sigh. “What if we just went home?”

“Yeah, that sounds great,” said Joseph.

They turned around and walked away.

~x~

Joseph pulled the front door closed behind them, suddenly feeling very nervous—the whole evening had been a bust after all. He’d never been on a date that had gone that badly, and he’d been on plenty of bad dates. Literally everything that could’ve gone wrong had gone wrong, and he wasn’t even exaggerating. Why did life hate him so?

Caesar had already made his way into the living room and relaxed on the couch with a huge sigh. Joseph followed.

“So today was interesting,” Caesar said, staring at the ceiling.

“Today was a disaster,” Joseph said bitterly, collapsing onto the couch next to Caesar. “I had all these great things planned for us, but no! Nothing could work out nicely, could it…”

“Oh come on, it wasn’t that bad,” Caesar chuckled, turning to face him slightly on the couch. “Although… I guess it wasn’t all that good either.”

Joseph’s heart sank into his stomach. Caesar started to laugh.

“Don’t look like that!” he said. “I didn’t say you weren’t good. None of tonight’s fuckups were your fault. And I still enjoyed myself, even if nothing went according to the plan. So thank you.” He smiled, radiant and charming and just a bit cocky, but oh so Caesar, and Joseph…
Joseph kissed him.

It was that simple, honestly. He just leaned in until their lips met and then he stayed there. He could feel Caesar’s sharp intake of breath against his face, but all he could really focus on was his lips. God, his lips. They were so soft, how was it even legal to have lips that soft? And they tasted so nice too. It was kind of like Caesar’s smell was, but slightly different, sweeter, and somehow even nicer.

Joseph’s hand had made its way up to Caesar’s face and cupped his jaw. He—

He jumped back, suddenly, and slapped a hand on his mouth. Caesar blinked a few times, looking startled.

“Shit,” Joseph said. Caesar’s face shifted ever so slightly, the beginnings of heartbreak shining through the cracks in his facade. He’d done it again. God damnit, he’d done it again! He should’ve— “I should’ve asked first, I’m sorry,” he said. Caesar’s face shifted again as he blinked, twice in rapid succession. “I just— I couldn’t stop myself, you were too—”

At first Caesar’s fingertips were gentle against his cheeks, but the next moment their mouths were crashed together again with almost bruising force. Joseph’s brain melted into a puddle of goo as Caesar kissed him with a burning passion, fingers pressing into his jaw and holding him still. For a moment he forgot how to breathe.

“Never,” Caesar said, pulling back slightly and staring Joseph square in the face, eyes serious and a frown on his face, “ever apologize for kissing me again.” He emphasized his point by pulling Joseph into another kiss before pressing their foreheads together. “Never,” he hissed through his teeth. “I’ll punch you the next time you do, don’t try me.”

“Okay,” was all Joseph said. Then he grabbed Caesar by the waist and pulled him as close to him as physically possible. Which meant, after slight shuffling, that Caesar ended up straddling him on the couch, knees on either side of his hips. Caesar’s cheeks were flushed. Joseph just smiled widely up at him. “Does that mean I can kiss you whenever I want to?”

Caesar drew in a deep breath. “Yes,” he said finally, and then pressed a finger on Joseph’s lips when he started to lean in. “But, it also means that you have to stop immediately if I tell you so.”

“Of course!” Joseph said, drawing back in surprise. “I would never— I mean... I don’t want to do anything that would make you unhappy.” He pressed his head against Caesar’s chest and squeezed his middle. Caesar lifted his arms and wrapped them around his shoulders. "I could never hurt you like that…”

“Aww, Jojo,” Caesar said, rubbing circles into Joseph’s shoulders with his thumbs. “That’s so sappy.”

“Hey, what?” Joseph huffed, pulling away again, looking scandalized. Caesar sniggered. “I’m trying to have a moment here, and you just— How dare—? I can’t believe you would— Rude.”

Caesar started to laugh again. He laughed loud and hard, taking a hold of his stomach with one hand and resting his head on Joseph’s other shoulder in its stead. Joseph couldn’t help himself either, the laughter bubbling up from inside him and erupting without much he could do to stop it.

They laughed for a long time, until they were out of breath, just shaking with silent laughter as they both struggled to breathe.

“Oh man,” said Caesar finally, not bothering to lift his head from Joseph’s shoulder. He took a deep breath. “I needed that.”
“Mmm,” hummed Joseph, resting his own chin against Caesar’s shoulder. It was nice. This was nice. Just sitting here, with Caesar on his lap. He wouldn’t mind doing this every evening.

Caesar’s stomach grumbled loudly.

“Oh,” he said, sitting up straight and looking down at his stomach. Joseph snorted quietly.

“How about we eat a little something, watch a movie, and then go to bed?” he suggested. Caesar raised his eyebrows.

“The same bed?” he asked with a sly smile.

“If you want to,” Joseph said with a matching one. Then he stood up.

Caesar let out a loud yelp as he clung to Joseph’s neck and wrapped his legs around his waist. There was some strain on Joseph’s legs, but he managed to get them upright without falling over. Caesar stared at him with wide eyes for a moment, like he couldn’t believe Joseph had just done that.

“Kinky,” he said after a while. Joseph squeezed his thigh with a smirk. Caesar’s lip twitched upwards and he leaned down to give Joseph a soft kiss on the lips. Joseph hummed happily into it.

“Alright, you pick a movie and I’ll go make us some sandwiches,” Joseph said as they broke apart, letting Caesar set his legs back on the ground. “Be right back.”

He pressed one last quick kiss on Caesar’s mouth and then he retreated into the kitchen. When he returned with two plates, Caesar had already picked the movie and changed into his pajamas, and was now waiting for him back on the couch. Joseph handed over the other plate and Caesar pressed play on the remote, and they settled down to enjoy the rest of the evening.

And it was nice. Of course after the epic failure that had been their attempted date, anything was nice, but it was really, really nice. The sandwiches was good, the random Netflix-movie Caesar had chosen was surprisingly good, and the feeling of having Caesar lean against his side, unabashed and relaxed, was—it was so much more than good, actually, it was fucking brilliant. Joseph couldn’t have been happier.

They watched the news after the movie ended, and when Joseph finally turned off the TV, he noticed Caesar had fallen asleep against him—again. He smiled softly and brushed a few stray hairs from Caesar’s face, before leaning down and pressing a kiss over his brow. Caesar let out a soft hum and shifted slightly closer. Joseph’s heart felt like bursting.

That was it, wasn’t it? That feeling.

As carefully as possible, Joseph gathered the sleeping Zeppeli in his arms and carried him over to his room. But just as he was about to set him down, Caesar cracked open one of his eyes. Joseph froze, but Caesar just smiled sleepily.

“Hi,” he muttered. “Did I fall asleep again?”

“Yeah, but that’s okay,” Joseph told him. “I was just bringing you over to bed.”

“Mm, thanks. Sorry,” Caesar said, his eyes slipping closed again. Joseph smiled, put Caesar down and pulled the blanket over him. He hummed again and shifted slightly. He was really too adorable. Joseph turned away.
“You’ll stay, right?” Caesar asked so quietly that Joseph almost didn’t catch it, but he did and he turned back around to see Caesar looking at him. A stupid grin spread on Joseph’s face.

“Of course,” he said just as quietly. Caesar nodded with a smile and then his eyes were closed again and his breathing was evening out.

Joseph made his way to the other side of the bed, kicking off his jeans and slipping out of his button-up in the process, and climbed into the bed. It was soft and warm and as the mattress dipped with his weight, Caesar immediately rolled over, draping his arm over Joseph’s waist and resting his head against Joseph’s shoulder. Joseph smiled. Caesar had always been a clingy sleeper. Not that he minded.

He didn’t mind one bit.

“Good night, Caesar,” he said softly into the silent room, pressing a kiss on top of Caesar’s mussy, blond hair.

“G’night, Jojo,” came the muttered response, before they both fell asleep.
Given the survival rates, it was a win

Chapter Summary

The Estate is a crowded place, occasionally. Everybody feels... conflicted.

Chapter Notes

Happy America Day or whatever.
As said, a special 4th of July chapter just for y'all. I hope you enjoy it. It's actually past
midnight where I live, baaaahhhhh I really wanted to get this out tonight. The bae already
went to bed like at least 45mins ago, after she finished the beta and I'm just sitting here
in the living room trying to come up with a good title for the chapter hah. I wanna go to
be soon too, tho, so these notes won't be too long.
Some of you might have noticed, the chapter count went up. By two! Because I realized
that I have waaaaaay more story than I could fit in the fucking... 4? 5 chapters I had in
my original plan haha BUT it's still kinda just a guideline, the chapter count might still
change. Until September rolls around I just don't know what'll happen hah.
On a separate note, I have an important question for y'all... how explicit are you
expecting this to get? Because we're kinda starting to get to the territory where it maybe
might start to get explicit. And I don't know how old y'all are and I don't know how
explicit you wanna read, so I'm not really sure how explicit to write... Like I've said that
the rating may change, and the current teen rating is b/c of all the swearing and the
occasional talking about sex and stuff but like... idk what you guys wanna read. If you
have strong opinions in either direction, leave me a comment down below? leave me a
comment even if u don't pls i live off of comments
The next chapter is coming some time next week maybe probably! Ciao!!

“Joseph!” called Erina from somewhere behind him, and Joseph turned to see her approaching the
garden from the direction of the estate. She was carrying a tray with two glasses and a pitcher, and
suddenly Joseph realized exactly how hot it was. He stood up and pulled off his gloves, dusting his
knees with them.

“You’ve been working for so long,” Erina said as she set the tray down on the dark wooden table
that had been set up in the garden. “I thought you might like a small break. Have some lemonade.”

“Thanks, grandma,” Joseph said with a smile. “That actually sounds amazing right now.” His
grandmother reached for the pitcher, but he stopped her, picking it up himself. She smiled softly as
he poured them both a glass. Then they sat down on the lawn chairs.

It was a beautiful day, warm and sunny, and Erina’s lemonade was cool and refreshing. Joseph
stared up at the fluffy white clouds as they sat side by side in silence.

“I’m very grateful that you decided to come here and help us prepare for Monday,” said Erina after a
while.
“Well, it’s a lot of work, and I couldn’t just leave it to you two,” Joseph said. “Well, three I guess, but Roses is getting way too old to do any actual butlering. And grandpa shouldn’t try to exert himself too much either.”

“You try telling that to him,” Erina said with a soft smile. There was a short pause, and then, “How much do you have left?” she asked, looking past Joseph at the flowerbeds. Joseph glanced over as well, rubbing a hand on his neck.

“I’m almost finished with the back row, but I still have to plant the smaller ones up front,” he said. “It’ll probably take me another hour or so.”

“It’s going to be beautiful once they bloom,” Erina said, her smile soft. “I think this was a very lovely idea of you. Finally put those seeds to good use.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Joseph shrugged. He could feel his face want to heat up, but he refused to let it. “I just thought it might, you know… liven up the place.”

It wasn’t a lie exactly, though it really wasn’t the main reason for his sudden interest in gardening.

“Mm,” hummed Erina. She knew. He could tell she knew.

He said nothing.

“How are things with Caesar, by the way?” she asked after a moment of silence. “No news is good news, I hope?”

“Kinda,” he said and took a deep breath. “Yeah, I think we’re doing good now. I mean, everything is kinda different, but it’s a good different, I think.” He paused and leaned back on the chair slightly. “He’s been kinda busy with work recently, what with the summer collections and junk coming out, so we haven’t had too much time to do anything… couple-y yet.”

“Is that so?” asked Erina.

“Yeah. We did go out once, on a, uh, date,” Joseph said, pausing slightly before the word. He wasn’t sure it actually qualified as a date. “Last week. Pretty basic though, just a dinner and a movie. It went… fine.”

“That’s nice,” said Erina. Joseph paused again, staring up at the clouds.

“It’s kinda weird how… similar everything is though,” he finally said. “Like, I’m a lot more aware of him now, but the way we act together isn’t that much different from before. Although nowadays he’s a lot more open about wanting to cuddle.” He grinned.

She laughed softly, hiding her mouth behind her hand. Joseph was incredibly happy to see her smiling and laughing so easily. It hadn’t been that long since…

“Yeah, I guess that’s the only thing that has really changed,” Joseph continued to keep himself from dwelling on his grandfather’s heart attack. “There’s a lot more physical contact. I mean like, just in general, not—” He stopped talking. He seriously hadn’t meant to insinuate to his grandmother that they had a shit ton of sex with Caesar. They didn’t. They hadn’t. Even once. They did sleep in the same bed now, after the date, but all they did was cuddle, really. Occasionally make out.

It was not because of a lack of interest though, at least on Joseph’s part. He was very interested. More than interested. It was just… he wasn’t sure how to bring it up. They were still kinda new to the relationship after all, and things were still a bit awkward occasionally, and he really didn’t want
to rush Caesar into anything and—

“Well, I don’t know about that,” said Erina, completely unfazed, and Joseph’s attention returned to the present like a snapping rubber band. “The two of you have always been very physical with each other.”

“What do you mean?” he asked with a frown.

“Haven’t you noticed?” she asked, looking genuinely surprised. Joseph’s frown deepened. “Well, you’ve been doing it ever since you were small. You two are almost constantly touching whenever you’re close enough. Why, I remember when you were still kids and you would hold hands wherever you went.” She giggled. Joseph flushed scarlet. “I think I have pictures of that, actually. You were so cute as little boys.”

“Grandma…” Joseph groaned.

“Yes, well. Aside from that, you still do it. Just small touches, generally, but it’s really quite often. Not to mention the way you seem to almost gravitate towards each other, standing just a bit closer to each other than strictly necessary.”

Holy shit, they did do that, didn’t they? Joseph had only been noticing it recently, how he sometimes used to lean just slightly towards Caesar whenever they stood side by side, but was it that obvious? Had they really been doing it since forever? Did… did Caesar do it too?

That explained a lot though, didn’t it?

Joseph had never really paid much mind to the way he touched Caesar, he’d never had reason to. But as he thought back through the years, he realized exactly how often it happened. Casual touches, mind, nothing weird, but still. Caesar did it too, he realized as well. Oh boy.

No wonder everyone had kept assuming they were together, holy shit.

Joseph buried his face in his hands.

“I can’t believe I hadn’t noticed that,” he managed to get out, strained. Erina didn’t quite manage to stifle her laugh.

“Don’t think about it too much,” she said, sounding way too cheery in Joseph’s opinion. “There’s nothing wrong with being a physical, affectionate person. You just—”

Erina cut off. Joseph looked up, surprised. She was looking past him, clearly displeased with what she saw and he turned around in the chair. Someone was walking towards them from the orchard.

Someone who was not Jonathan.

“Wait,” said Joseph. “Isn’t that…?”

“Dio Brando,” Erina sneered. She didn’t look happy in the least to see him, but she didn’t seem surprised either, which struck Joseph as a bit strange.

“What the hell is he doing here?” he asked. “Didn’t grandpa Jonathan tell him to beat it?”

“He did,” Erina said. “But that was before he was hospitalized.”

“Good afternoon, dear Erina!” Dio called as he approached the two of them.
“Dio,” Erina acknowledged, icicles in her voice and eyes. Dio didn’t seem too deterred as he turned to Joseph.

“And you’re the grandson,” Dio said, a sly smile on his face. “What was it again…” He snapped his fingers as he thought. “Jo… Jo… John— Joseph! That’s it, right?”

“That’s right, grunkle Dio!” Joseph said, mock gleeful. A strangled sound left the back of Dio’s throat. It was just as satisfying as the last time.

“Is that any way to talk to your elders?” he asked. “You ought to show me the same respect as your grandfather, since I am his older brother, don’t you think?”


“I’m 19,” he said. Joseph snorted. There was no punchline.

“Wait, what?” Joseph asked when he realized Dio had been serious. “You’re joking. You’re not 19!”

“I’m not joking,” said Dio. “I had my 19th birthday this year.”

“Dio was born on a leap day,” Erina said, sipping her lemonade.

“Ohh,” said Joseph, quickly doing the math in his head. So Dio was… 76? Same age as Jonathan, huh?

“Granted, I only have a birthday every four years,” Dio admitted, side-eyeing Erina. “Makes no difference. Age is hardly of meaning anyway.”

“Well, in that case you being my elder has no bearing on how much respect I ought to show you, right?” Joseph asked with a grin.

“Ohh, a smartass?” said Dio, a dangerous smile spreading on his thin lips. “I’m going to enjoy you.”

Yeah okay, that was just freaky.

“So, what are you doing here anyway, grunkle Dio?” Joseph asked, just a little unnerved. “I though you and grandpa Jonathan weren’t exactly on the best of terms.”

“Well, that is true I suppose,” Dio said, looking away in a disinterested manner. “But after his release from the hospital he called me up and invited me over. Of course I was terribly worried about his wellbeing and I agreed to move here when—”

“Hold up,” Joseph interrupted. Dio looked at him, unimpressed. “‘Move here’? You’re telling me you’re living here at the Estate now?!”

“Yes I am,” Dio said. Joseph turned to Erina, stunned. She was looking away in what Joseph would describe as disgust if she wasn’t too refined for that.

“It’s true,” she gritted out. “Jonathan wanted to patch things up between them, bless his heart. He didn’t want any regrets in his life.”

“So, I’ve been moving in for the past few weeks,” Dio said almost smugly. “In fact, my last belongings arrived just yesterday, which means I now officially live here.”
“Isn’t it delightful?” said Erina sarcastically.

“Yes, indeed,” said Dio and smiled, predatory.

“I think I better get back to work,” said Joseph and stood up. “Those flowers won’t plant themselves.”

“I was under the impression that the wedding had been cancelled,” Dio said casually as he took the seat Joseph had just freed. Joseph’s blood ran cold inside him.

“It has,” he said, pulling his gloves back on and purposefully not looking back. “What made you think it hadn’t?”

“You, here, on a beautiful day like this, planting flowers,” Dio said. Joseph could hear the smirk in his voice even without turning around. He kneeled down by the flower bed and picked up the trowel he’d set down earlier. “You don’t exactly strike me as the kind of guy who generally spends his free days gardening for his grandparents.”

Joseph didn’t say anything.

“Let me guess, those are his favorite?” Dio said.

Joseph still didn’t say anything, but his face did heat up.

“That’s enough of you,” said Erina, followed by the soft clinking of glass. “Stop bothering Joseph, he still has a lot of work to do. And if you lack entertainment, there’s a lot of housework you can help with. Since you officially live here now and everything.”

“I’m sure I can find something to do, thank you,” Dio said, voice only slightly strained. He stood up just as Joseph finally turned around. “Well, it was… nice to meet you again, Joseph. I’m sure I’ll see you around again.”

“Bye, grunkle Dio!” Joseph called as Dio started to leave, waving the trowel after him. He didn’t slow down a bit. He sped up if anything.

Erina let out a deep sigh as soon as Dio was out of earshot.

“I don’t know how I’ll manage to live with that asshat,” she said. Joseph snorted at the insult. “But I can’t exactly throw him out, since Jonathan really wants to work things out with him.”

“If there’s someone who can keep an asshat in check, it’s you, grandma Erina,” Joseph said and she gave him a smile. “I should know, I’ve experienced it firsthand.”

She let out a short laugh.

“Thank you, Joseph,” she said and then picked up the tray. “Guess I better leave you to your planting now. Come in when you’re done. I could use some help with dinner, and I know Dio will be of no help whatsoever.”

“Alright, grandma,” Joseph sighed. He waved after her as she, too, left, and then he turned back to the flowerbed. Just one row to go.

~x~

He was back at the Estate just a few days later, with Caesar in tow. Even though both their families
were from Europe and as such didn’t feel as patriotic as many, *many* others did, it was still the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and they celebrated it together as a family. And honestly, the Joestars and Zeppelis would take any excuse to organize a family gathering they could get.

It was a warm day, and decently sunny, the clouds in the sky not looking to be rain clouds, so they had a barbeque out back in the garden. Caesar was manning the grill while Joseph helped, carrying the food to the tables and whatnot. Everybody was eating and laughing and chatting, and generally having a great time.

Well, almost everybody.

Dio was sitting alone on a lawn chair slightly to the side of the group, sipping on a glass of wine and *just watching*. He seemed to be radiating a rather unpleasant aura, and whenever someone accidentally glanced in his direction his piercing gaze quickly forced them to look away again. Only a few remained unaffected; Lisa Lisa, who was naturally unfazed by everything; nonna Maria, who was once again refusing to even acknowledge the man; Erina, who treated Dio with the same disdain she had three days prior; and Jonathan, who was as cheerful as ever, and actually went to talk with his adoptive brother a few times during the day.

But despite Jonathan’s cheery demeanor, Joseph couldn’t help but notice that there was still some serious strain there. Although that was to be expected, really. You couldn’t just instaconnect with someone who you hadn’t talked to after he'd fucked you over 25 years earlier.

Which reminded Joseph, he still had no idea what Dio had done all those years ago. He decided to make it his day's mission to find out, one way or another.

And so he found himself approaching the lonely figure after a while. Dio’s eyes were on him like a hawk the second he started to move. It was only a little unnerving.

“So, great uncle Dio,” Joseph said, because he needed Dio to not hate his guts at the moment. Dio’s eyes narrowed; he knew Joseph wanted something. “What exactly do you do for a living?”

He couldn’t just out and ask, now could he?

“I have my own law firm, although I rarely do any actual legwork these days,” Dio said and took a sip. Joseph hadn’t noticed him refilling the glass at all during the day but still it stayed as full as ever.

“Right, I heard you were a lawyer,” Joseph said, trying to ignore the wineglass. Its contents were awfully red, weren’t they? “What kind of work do you do? Defending, prosecuting…?”

“Whatever gets me paid,” said Dio with a smirk.

“Okay,” said Joseph and quickly excused himself, returning—*not* fleeing, thank you very much—to the grill. Caesar gave him a quizzical look but he just made a face. Caesar’s eyes flicked to Dio and then back and he raised his eyebrows. “I’m fine,” Joseph told him, waving Caesar off and picking up the plate Caesar had just stocked full of hamburger patties.

He’d find a different way to acquire his info.

~x~

The next opportunity presented itself when they were clearing out the table and he and Jonathan were carrying dishes inside. There was no one in the vicinity, the others staying behind to gather things up at the tables, and Dio had stalked off into the garden some time earlier, presumably to escape cleaning duty. It was the perfect time to ask his grandfather about it.
“So,” Joseph started airily. Jonathan turned to look at him but they continued walking towards the main building. “Could you tell me… what exactly happened 25 years ago?”

“I’m not sure I follow,” Jonathan admitted with a furrowed brow. “Plenty of things happened 25 years ago, you will have to be a bit more specific.”

“Well, you know,” Joseph said and glanced around. He wouldn’t put it past Dio to suddenly appear from behind one of the shrubberies. His voice dropped to a whisper. “Between you and Dio.”

“Oh,” said Jonathan, his face falling. He looked away and considered it. Joseph pulled open the backdoor and they kept walking into the house.

“It’s actually been over 26 years by now,” Jonathan said after a while. “And he was the one who said he’d never come back. I suppose Dio only keeps his promises when they’re convenient for him.” He huffed out a humorless laugh. “We had a pretty big fight, over his… legal practices.” He hesitated. They had made it to the kitchen, and they set the dishes onto the table by the sink.

They continued to stand in kitchen for a while longer, as Jonathan stayed silent.

“I’d really rather not think about it though,” he said finally. “The past is in the past, and I’m trying to make things better with him, so bringing this up now might not be the best idea.”

“Yeah, no, I get that,” Joseph said, because he could sympathize, he really could, but honestly it was still eating him alive. Jonathan gave him a small smile, just a tug on the corner of his lips.

“Thank you for understanding,” he said. “Now, if you’ll excuse me…” He turned to leave.

“Right. I’ll catch up with you in a bit,” Joseph called after him, screaming internally.

The kitchen door closed and he was alone. He sighed and turned to the pile of dishes he needed to load into the dishwasher.

One way or another.

~x~

“I need to know what happened,” Joseph said, staring intently ahead, to the general direction of the rest of the group. Caesar turned to look at him.

“What?” Caesar asked. They had come in after they’d eaten and cleaned the garden, and were now spending time in the first floor sitting room until it was dark enough to shoot some fireworks.

“I need to know what happened,” Joseph repeated and then shuffled his hair with a sigh. “What the hell happened between gramps and Dio? What did they fight about? What the fuck does ‘legal practices’ mean??”

Caesar opened his mouth.

“I know what ‘legal practices’ means!” Joseph hissed and Caesar sniggered. “I need to know what it means in this case.”

“And you’ve asked Jonathan?” Caesar asked. Joseph nodded. “And you’ve asked Dio?”

“I didn’t get that far but fuck naw, I’m not talking to him again,” Joseph said, slumping against the back of the couch. “That guy is way too freaky. Something about him just ain’t right.”
“Mmhm,” Caesar hummed. “I suppose your only choice is to ask Erina. I don’t think she’ll have any qualms about defaming him.”

“Yeah, I guess I have to,” Joseph sighed. “Couldn’t you try asking nonna Maria? She clearly knows something as well.”

“I don’t think she’ll agree to talk about him, honestly,” Caesar said, his eyes wandering over to his grandmother. “To her, he doesn’t exist. I am somewhat curious as to why though.”

Joseph swallowed. Something about that made him feel uneasy. Had whatever Dio had done had an impact on nonna Maria as well? 26 years though… It was awfully coincidental. But that’s what it must’ve been, a coincidence. He couldn’t have had a hand in… that, right?

Joseph’s eyes flicked between nonna Maria and Caesar, and he hoped that Caesar’s murderer-theory was incorrect.

~x~

He managed to corner his grandmother much later in the evening, as they were gathering outside for the fireworks. She had fallen behind after detouring by her room to get a shawl for the cool evening.

“What happened between grandpa Jonathan and Dio?” he asked and she paused, blinking up at him. Caesar was hanging behind a few steps to the side, uncertain if he should stay or not. “Please, grandma Erina, I need to know.”

She hesitated. Joseph stared at her with what he hoped were pleading eyes.

“Well alright then,” she finally sighed. “I suppose I can tell you, you do have the right to know. You too, Caesar, this does concern you as well, after all.” Caesar blinked in surprise as he was addressed, and then walked up to them. She motioned for both men to follow her and they continued down the hill towards the backyard, deviating from the path so that they weren’t in the midst of everyone else. Nobody seemed to notice, except for Dio, but he didn’t do anything.

“November of 1989,” Erina started after a moment, “Jonathan and William were on a fieldtrip in the northern parts of Scotland. They didn’t often visit European countries, but Jonathan had been told of very promising ruins at the edge of a small fishing village, and the two wanted to visit them. Sure enough they were able to discover several different items from several centuries ago. Most notable of these was a sword, in extraordinary shape, one that they thought had belonged to a knight back in the day. There was a single word engraved into it…” She paused, glancing over to the rest of the group, who were setting up the first rocket to launch. “‘Pluck’.”

“Pluck?” Joseph mouthed at Caesar, but he just shrugged.

“They took their findings back to the University, to be examined,” Erina continued and Joseph refocused his attention on her. “But after a while two men appeared, claiming that the sword belonged to them. That it was some kind of heirloom, having belonged to their ancestor, and that the original engraving read ‘luck’, not ‘pluck’. Will told them to beat it, which… they didn’t approve of. It turned into a legal fight. And the lawyer the two men had hired was… It was Dio.”

“No way,” Joseph breathed out.

“His law firm had gotten quite a bit of wind under its wings by then and he was well known for his ruthlessness while trying to get exactly what his clients wanted. It was a perfect fit for the two men.” Erina made a face and then continued, “Jonathan confronted him about it, but Dio assured him that it was just business, there was nothing personal behind it, and there wasn’t much to be done about it.
Several months went by without an agreement, and eventually the case went to court. It was February of 1990 by then. Which is when…” Joseph held his breath. He’d fucking known it. “…Will’s cancer made itself known.”

The first firework shot into the sky and exploded into a colorful spray of sparks that drifted softly down.

Caesar was unnaturally still by Joseph’s side and even in the dim light he could see how pale the Zeppeli was. His breathing was forcefully steady and his expression was kept tightly in control. Joseph’s heart squeezed in his chest and his hand moved on his own accord, his fingers brushing softly against Caesar’s before he could do anything to stop it.

A broken exhale left Caesar’s lips and then he inhaled deeply and forcefully and grabbed Joseph’s hand in his. He was nearly crushing Joseph’s fingers with how hard he was squeezing, but Joseph said nothing.

After a moment, Erina continued again.

“You both of course know what happened to Will,” she said softly. “After he had collapsed and was taken to the hospital and diagnosed, Jonathan met with Dio again, begging him to change the court date, because it conflicted with Will’s surgery. One of them would have to appear in court after all, but he wanted to stay by Will’s side until the surgery in case he wouldn’t… Changing the date would have been easy for Dio, but he didn’t really care, and told Jonathan that he’d have to make his case quickly if he was in such a hurry to get back to Will’s bedside. There were some… unpleasant words exchanged, but that wasn’t the end of it.”

Another set of fireworks illuminated the yard for a moment.

Caesar’s grip had loosened somewhat during Erina’s explanation, but he was still as tense as ever. Joseph absentmindedly rubbed circles on his palm with his thumb.

“They went to court, finally. Jonathan won. Something about contradicting family lines, I don’t really know the details,” Erina said and then let out a huge sigh. “But he got a phone call before he could leave the court house. Will hadn’t woken up after the surgery. Both Jonathan and Dio hurried to the hospital, where they found out that Will’s liver hadn’t been able to process the anesthetic properly, because of some kind of a genetic disorder. Jonathan was devastated, as were we all, and he confronted Dio right there in the hospital room. It was ugly, and it would’ve turned into a fistfight, had Speedwagon not been there to restrain him. Dio left, for good we thought, but Jonathan never stopped blaming him for not being able to be there for Will before he…”

An exceptionally loud and bright rocket burst in the sky and her voice finally broke and she clasped her hand over her mouth. The beginnings of tears were glistening in her eyes. Joseph stepped towards his grandmother and wrapped an arm around her shoulders. His other hand was still in Caesar’s and he tightened its hold.

They stood in silence for a long while, the fireworks making quite a show behind them.

“Thank you for telling me, grandma,” Joseph said finally, pulling away. He wiped an errand tear off her cheek. “And I’m sorry you had to relive through that.”

“No, it’s alright,” said Erina with a shake of her head. “You boys deserved to know the truth.” Another firework and all three of them looked up. It sparkled and then disappeared. They were quiet for a second more, until Erina said, “Well, it’s about time we join the festivities as well, don’t you think?”
“I am beat,” Joseph said as he collapsed face first onto his old bed. They had decided to stay overnight at the Estate again, though this time they were the only house guests. Well, them and Dio, though he wasn’t technically a guest anymore. Caesar walked over and sat on the edge of the bed, toeing off his shoes.

“You can say that again,” he said and rolled his shoulders. Joseph’s head shot up from the bed and he frowned.

“I just had the strongest déjà vu,” he said and turned to look at Caesar, who blinked.

“Oh,” said Caesar. He looked down. Once again there was only one bed but this time he didn’t think he’d mind if he woke up spooning Joseph in the morning. He smiled slightly.

“What’s so funny?” asked Joseph, flipping so that he was on his back. Caesar leaned over him and pressed a soft kiss on his mouth. Joseph blinked up at him when he pulled back again. “Okay,” he said with a dumb smile. “What’d ya do that for?”

“No reason,” Caesar said as he settled down on the bed, half on top of Joseph. “It’s just nice to know I can.”

Joseph considered that answer for a moment, before cupping Caesar’s cheek and pulling him into another kiss. His thumb was absently tracing one of the birthmarks decorating Caesar’s cheekbones. He wasn’t going to lie, sometimes he felt slightly self-conscious about them, but the way Joseph stroked them when his hand was on Caesar’s face was so sweet and soft, that he didn’t know why he’d ever disliked them.

They broke apart after a moment and settled back down on the bed, Joseph resting one of his arms around Caesar’s shoulders and the other behind his head. His legs were dangling off the side and he kicked them into the air like a child. Caesar pressed his ear against Joseph’s chest and listened to his heartbeat. It was strong and steady.

When it started to speed up Caesar turned to look up at Joseph’s face. He was worrying his lip between his teeth and was looking at the ceiling with a frown.

“What’s wrong?” Caesar asked and Joseph blinked down at him.

“Oh, sorry,” he said, a sheepish grin spreading on his face. “I was just thinking about Dio.” Caesar could feel his jaw tighten at the mention of the man. He didn’t particularly want to think about him, especially after Erina’s revelation earlier in the evening, but he didn’t stop Joseph as he continued. “I don’t really know how to feel about him, honestly. I mean, sure, the guy is an asshole, and a major one at that, but… it’s not like he knew Will would fall into a coma, right? And the surgery went well, so if it hadn’t been for his liver problems, he would’ve been fine, right? So blaming Dio—”

“Wait, wait, hold on,” Caesar said, pushing himself up on his elbows. “What did you say?”

“Uhh,” said Joseph, his eyes darting around the room.

“What did you say?” Caesar asked and Joseph blinked down at him.

“About a coma? I… I always thought he died on the operating table,” Caesar said and Joseph looked surprised.

“Really? I don’t think he did?” Joseph said. “I mean, I don’t actually know, but… You know, I was in the hospital a lot when I was a kid, and before the first time I was put under, gramps made extra sure that the doctors tested that I didn’t have anything that might make it harder for me to wake up.
He told me later that that’s what happened to his best friend, and I was offended, because I’d always thought Speedwagon was his best friend, but I’m pretty sure he was talking about Will.” Joseph paused and furrowed his brow for a moment. “And, like, isn’t that what granny Erina said earlier? He had some kind of liver thing? So doesn’t that mean he didn’t die, he just… didn’t wake up?”

“Oh yeah, she did say that, didn’t she,” Caesar said, rubbing a finger on his lips in thought. “I was never told any specifics when I was a kid, so I guess… Although… what is the difference between dying and not waking up?”

“I dunno, a coma?” suggested Joseph. They both snorted. And then laughed. And then Joseph’s laugh turned into a yawn, face-splittingly wide. Caesar chuckled.

“Should we go to bed?” he asked.

“Sounds good to me,” said Joseph with a smile. They got up from on top of the bed and shuffled under the blankets after changing quickly. Joseph pulled Caesar close to him as they settled in and yep, this time Caesar most certainly wouldn’t be even a little bothered by having to sleep in the same bed as him. Quite the contrary.
The Mandatory Beach Episode

Chapter Summary

The gang goes to the beach. It's very hot. Also Caesar seems to keep having trouble staying upright (it's not his fault).

Chapter Notes

Hello y'all! I hope you're having a nice summer!
I'd actually wanted to post this on Wednesday (which was endles's birthday!!!!!! everybody wish her a happy birthday!!!!) but I've had the busiest two weeks. We had a presentation (is that the word? a panel?) on genderbending and cosplay at a convention last weekend so I'd been doing that since... forever, actually, but it was super intense last week. And this week I started my summer job (which i could tell you about but then i'd have to kill you not really but i am working with confidential material so) so I've been super busy with that this week. But here it is finally! I finished it! Yay!
Soooo there's really not much to say about this one, so maybe I'll just let you get right to it. Next chapter will probably come in a few weekssssss? See you then!
(also pokemon go is taking over my life send help)
Oh, right, DISCLAIMER: I've never been to Coney Island, personally, so... keep that in mind.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Let’s go to the beach! The beach!” Suzie squealed into Caesar’s ear one afternoon. Caesar pulled the phone further away from his head and grimaced.

“I’ll go to the beach,” said Joseph, who had just walked into the living room from the kitchen. Suzie had been loud. “Which beach? When are we going? Who else is coming? I’m gonna invite Smokey.”

“Well, Jojo’s game,” Caesar told Suzie, who giggled. “When were you planning on going exactly? Some of us have jobs, you know.”

“Yeah, I know, I have one too,” Suzie huffed. Caesar wasn’t sure helping out at your parents’ shop qualified in this case. “When are you guys free? You and Jojo are probably the ones with the least flexibility.”

“Jojo doesn’t actually start at his new job until August, so he’s free all the time,” Caesar said, glancing back at the Joestar who had walked up behind him and snaked his arms around his waist, leaning in so he could hear through the phone. Caesar could feel his cheeks heat up and a smile tug at his lips. He forced himself to focus on the conversation. “I’m free next Wednesday, if that works?”

There was the soft sound of pages flipping on the other end. Caesar frowned slightly; if Suzie was using her planner, she really did have a lot to do. She’d never had that much to do during summers before. “Yeah, I have nothing on Wednesday!” she continued after a moment, unaware of Caesar’s
musings. “And next week should be sunny so that’s great!”

“So, which beach?” Joseph asked again, his mouth inches from Caesar’s ear. Caesar suppressed a shudder as the puff of air brushed against it despite the phone between them.

*Good God, get a grip,* he berated himself. It’s not like they hadn’t been this close to each other before, why was he suddenly acting all jittery around Joseph? Well sure, the tension between them recently had been almost unbearable to Caesar, but they were going slow and he wasn’t about to fuck things up because of his pent up sexual frustration. He could deal with Joseph being handsy sometimes, he had to. Joseph probably didn’t think much about his touching anyway, always so casual about it.

Although things were different now, weren’t they? Maybe Joseph was more aware of the things he did, and what those things did to Caesar. When Caesar thought back to just a few months before, the touches between them had certainly been different. They hadn’t necessarily increased in quantity, but they had somehow changed in quality. Like they were somehow… loaded.

He was reading too much into this, wasn’t he?

“Well, I was thinking maybe Coney Island,” said Suzie, shifting Caesar’s thoughts to actually pressing matters—which was not to say that Joseph’s chest wasn’t still firmly pressed against his back—such as the conversation he was currently having with his cousin.

“Yeah that might work,” he said. “Transit’s pretty straightforward, though it’ll be a drag to sit in the train for 50 minutes.”

“Actually, auntie Lisa Lisa promised me we could use her car,” Suzie said cheerily and before Caesar had had time to react, Joseph had snatched the phone from his hand with a very loud “What??!!?”

Caesar grimaced again, pressing a hand to his ringing ear and glaring at Joseph, who had turned around and was now shouting into the phone.

“What do you mean mom promised you could use her car?? She doesn’t even let me borrow her car!” Caesar couldn’t hear the reply, but he could guess the content when Joseph huffed, frowned, and said, “Excuse you, I’m a perfectly good driver! This is some bullshit right here, how the hell did you even manage to convince her??”

“Gimme that,” Caesar said yanking the phone back and ignoring Joseph’s loud protests and flailing hands. He put the phone to his ear again. “Sorry about that Suzie… So, we really have a car, huh?”

“Yes! I thought it might be more convenient, since there’s at least four of us and we probably have a bunch of stuff,” Suzie said, not sounding too shaken by Joseph’s sudden outburst. Joseph, who was now poking Caesar in the side, trying to get his attention. “We can pack a picnic!”

“Sounds good to me,” Caesar said, turning away from Joseph again, as the Joestar tried to circle around to poke his stomach. Caesar threw him a quick glare. “So have you invited someone else too?”

“I’ve talked with Smokey, and he said anytime next week works,” Suzie said, flipping through her calendar again, if the rustling sound was anything to go by. “I’ll send him a message to tell him we decided on Wednesday.”

“That’s great, thanks,” Caesar said with a soft smile she couldn’t actually see. He grabbed a hold of Joseph’s finger as it darted towards his side again and twisted it backwards. Joseph dropped to one
knee, taking a hold of his wrist and trying to bend his hand back with the twisting, a string of "ah"s escaping his mouth. He whipped his head to look up at Caesar, eyes wide and mouth working around the words he couldn’t quite get out. “Stop that,” Caesar mouthed at him and Joseph snapped his mouth closed and nodded emphatically.

“I’ll see you on Wednesday then!” Suzie said, oblivious, as Caesar shoved Joseph away by his finger and he fell onto his ass on the floor. He scowled gloomily up at Caesar as he rubbed his finger.

“Alright, see you then, Suzie. Bye,” said Caesar, staring Joseph in the eyes. The call disconnected with a click.

“That was mean,” said Joseph as Caesar slipped the phone back into his pocket.

“Next time don’t bother me when I’m trying to talk on the phone,” Caesar said easily and extended his hand to Joseph, to help pull him up. Joseph took it, but instead of getting up like he was supposed to, he tugged on it, hard, making Caesar lose balance with a yelp.

Caesar fell down, hitting his knee on the floor and only managing to balance himself by throwing his hands under him. After a moment of disorientation, he managed to steady himself again, and immediately flushed as he realized where exactly he was. Joseph was leaning back on his elbows and Caesar was on top of him, nearly straddling him, one knee between his legs, a hand pressed to the floor next to his waist and the other planted squarely on his chest. Their faces were inches apart.

Caesar’s face was burning and he glared at Joseph, who had the gall to just grin up at him. Oh, he was going to get it.

But at the exact millisecond Caesar had gotten his mouth open, Joseph’s own mouth was pressed against it and all noise died in his throat. Well, all noise except a soft hum that he definitely hadn’t been planning on letting out.

Caesar wasn’t sure his face could physically get more flushed by the point they broke apart. He breathed hard the air between them, trying to regain any semblance of composure. Joseph’s tongue darted out of his mouth to lick at his lips and Caesar immediately stood corrected.

Now that’s just unfair, surely.

“Fuck you,” he said, because that was the only thing his brain provided.

“Maybe later,” Joseph said with a wink, before pressing a quick peck to the side of Caesar’s mouth and climbing up from the floor. He extended his hand to Caesar and grinned. “Food’s been done for a while now, it’s starting to get cold.”

Caesar glanced towards the kitchen, where Joseph had indeed been cooking before Suzie had called, and then he glanced up at Joseph again. He let out a long exhale.

He took Joseph’s hand.

~x~

The four of them met on the outskirts of Little Italy on Wednesday morning around ten and piled into Lisa Lisa’s extravagant car. Caesar drove, while Suzie was chosen as the front seat map reader via popular vote and Smokey and Joseph—all of whose complaints were immediately overruled—sat in the back. His mood did brighten slightly, when Caesar permitted him to stick his head out of the window as they neared their destination. It was kinda cute, he was like an oversized dog.
The traffic was manageable, and it took them around forty minutes to arrive on Coney Island. The beach wasn’t too full yet, but it was still early and it no doubt would be later in the afternoon, since it was such a warm day. After finding a parking space they started to walk up and down the beach in search of the best place to settle down as quickly as possible. They found a great spot fairly near one of the few shower/toilet buildings along the beach, and Joseph set up the beach umbrella while the other three lay out the large blanket they’d brought along.

“Alright, let’s go!” Suzie exclaimed once they were all set up.

“But we just got here!” said Joseph and then sniggered as Suzie pouted, cheeks puffed. “Your next line is ‘I meant let’s go swimming’!”

“I meant let’s go swimming!” Suzie huffed. And blinked. And kicked sand at the laughing Joestar. “Sorry, sorry,” Joseph said, though he was still chuckling. “But you did walk right into that one.”

“You are insufferable,” she said, crossing her arms.

“Do you have sunscreen on already?” asked Caesar from where he was kneeling on the blanket, digging the basket with all their stuff in it. Suzie turned to look down at him. They had all been already wearing their swimsuits before leaving home, but Caesar for one hadn’t put any sunscreen on beforehand. And no amount of Mediterranean heritage would save Suzie from burning in this sun if she didn't put it on as well, especially with her midriff showing. She tugged at the ruffles on her polka dot bikini, looking smug.

“I do, actually. I had the good mind to put that on before we came into the sun,” she said. “Unlike you two, apparently.”

Caesar glanced over at Joseph, who was already slathering the sun lotion all over himself. Joseph blinked and looked up.

“Oh, I did put some on at home already,” he said, resuming the rubbing of his shoulders. “I just thought I’d freshen up a bit. I already managed to burn myself slightly a few weeks back and I’m not too keen on repeating that experience.”

“Sucks to be you,” Smokey said. “I don’t need sunscreen to protect me from burning, my beautiful skin does it for me.” He dragged his fingers along his arm, in a way he probably intended to be sensual.

“No it doesn’t,” scoffed Joseph before grinning. “Remember two years ago, when you burned your entire upper back? I had to put salve on you for weeks.”

“Shhh, dude,” Smokey hushed him, glancing around. “You’re blowing my cool, bro.” Suzie giggled softly. “No but seriously, I did put some on at home. Waterproof and everything, I’m ready to swim.”

“Wait… does that mean…” Joseph said slowly, “…that out of the four of us Caesar was the only one unprepared?”

All three pairs of eyes turned to look down at Caesar. He opened his mouth to retort but no words came out.

“Well this is new,” Suzie said, placing a hand on her cheek.

“Don’t——” Caesar started before pausing for a second. “…read too much into it. I had a busy morning making all of you lunch, so I didn’t have time to concern myself with sunscreen.”
“Or so he says,” Joseph stage whispered the other two.

“Does that mean you don’t want any food, Joseph?” Caesar asked, crossing his arms.

“Would you like me to help you with the sun lotion?” Joseph asked quickly, squirting a generous amount of the stuff onto his palm. Caesar raised his eyebrow, eyeing the pile of white goop with disdain.

“Well, you boys have fun with that!” Suzie chirped, grabbing a hold of Smokey’s forearm. “We’re gonna go on ahead!”

“Hey what?” Joseph said, whipping his head around as the two ran off towards the waterline, laughing. “Wait up, I wanna come too!”

Caesar cleared his throat and Joseph let out a long defeated sigh.

“I can manage most of this myself,” Caesar said, scooping some of the lotion from Joseph’s still extended hand. “But since you so graciously volunteered, you can help me with my back, thank you kindly.”

“Yeah, yeah,” muttered Joseph, walking closer to him on his knees. Caesar turned slightly, so that Joseph was behind him, and started to apply the lotion on his arms.

The first touch of Joseph’s fingers against his back was sudden and cold, making Caesar tense up instinctively and he just barely managed to hold in the soft gasp. For a second he thought Joseph was about to apologize from the way his fingers instantly froze, but in the end he didn’t, and instead started to move.

The original point of contact had been between Caesar’s shoulder blades, and from there Joseph’s hand traveled down and across, spreading the lotion on them. The hand retreated for a moment, before returning with more lotion, still cool against Caesar’s back, and rubbed at his spine. Joseph’s other hand joined in soon after, his broad palms smoothing down along Caesar’s back, brushing over his sides before returning to the middle again and repeating, inching their way down. Caesar swallowed thickly and simultaneously tried to focus and not focus on the sensation. It was… overwhelming. Joseph’s hands were on his lower back now and he held his breath as they stopped just above his waistline.

When Joseph’s fingers dipped just slightly into his swimming trunks and rounded to his sides, Caesar was pretty sure he was on the verge of a heatstroke, and it had nothing to do with the blazing sun and the 85° weather.

Joseph let his palms drag up Caesar’s back, his fingers splayed and touch feather light. He paused as he reached Caesar’s shoulders, getting some more lotion before starting to rub them, fingers pressing softly into the tense muscle there. His thumbs were making circular motions on the nape of Caesar’s neck and Caesar dropped his chin to his chest to allow for a better access. His eyelids had fluttered closed and he was trying to control his breathing, though he wasn’t sure how successful he was, he wasn’t exactly thinking straight at the moment. Nothing in his life had ever felt this nice.

Slowly Joseph’s hands stopped rubbing, but he made no move to remove them from Caesar’s shoulders. In fact, his grip on them tightened and Caesar waited with bated breath for him to do something. Then Joseph sat up on his knees and leaned over, pressing his chest against Caesar’s back—as if Caesar hadn’t already been through enough—before leaning in closer, his mouth right next to Caesar’s ear and Caesar shuddered because he could no longer stop it. Joseph opened his mouth and inhaled sharply, about to say something—
“I’m gonna go swim now,” he whispered.

Then he smacked Caesar in the middle of the back with an open palm and ran off. Caesar stared after him, clutching his own arm so hard it was starting to hurt.

He buried his face in his hands and didn’t scream.

~x~

“Heyy, Caesarino!” Joseph shouted as Caesar approached the shoreline a few minutes later. He was waving gleefully, the water level up to his chest where he was standing several feet off the shore. “Took you long enough!”

Caesar threw him a glare and Joseph sniggered, submerging himself into the water so that only his head was above the waves now. Suzie had started to wade towards the shore while Smokey was nowhere to be seen.

“Come on, Caesar, it’s nice and warm,” she said, placing a hand on Caesar’s shoulder momentarily as she walked past him onto the sand. “I’m gonna go get the beach ball! I’ll be right back!”

“Yeah, come on Caesar!” Joseph’s head shouted, bobbing up and down in sync with the waves brushing past him.

“I’m coming, I’m coming, jeez,” Caesar muttered, stepping into the water. A chill ran up his body. It was not warm!

Joseph sniggered again, clearly having interpreted Caesar’s face correctly. Caesar, however, wasn’t about to give him the pleasure of admitting anything though, and he walked into the waves with determination. His whole body was tense despite his best efforts.

“Where did Smokey go?” he asked Joseph, to distract himself from the cold, cold waves licking at his legs. Joseph stood up and pointed out towards the sea. Caesar frowned and squinted and finally noticed… something, some hundred feet away. Right.

Caesar inhaled sharply, pulling his stomach in slightly as a particularly high wave swept against it. Joseph, who was back to being almost completely underwater, was watching him intently. Caesar had a very bad feeling about that.

“Whatever it is you’re planning,” Caesar said levelly, slowly making his way deeper, “don’t.”

“What makes you think I’m planning something?” Joseph asked easily, floating around, getting ever so slightly closer to Caesar. Caesar narrowed his eyes.

“You’re always planning something,” he said. Joseph paused for a moment, looking thoughtful, and then shrugged, not even trying to deny it. The water was past Caesar’s waist now, he was almost there. He could do this.

“Caesar! Catch!” came Suzie’s voice from the shore and Caesar turned around just in time to see her smacking the rainbow beach ball into the air, sending it flying not too straight towards him. Caesar stumbled backwards a bit to align himself better, barely managing to catch the ball in the end. Suzie cheered. Caesar huffed and shook his head. Then he turned back towards Joseph, about to say something—

Joseph wasn’t there anymore.
For a second Caesar’s blood ran cold, before something collided hard with the backs of his thighs and he was flung violently into the air. He had only a moment to register the mess of dark hair between his legs and the wide shoulders against them, and then he tipped again and was falling backwards. The wind was knocked out of him on impact, the cold water submerging him immediately, wrapping him into its embrace. He flailed slightly before managing to regain his footing and broke the surface with a large splash, coughing and gasping for air. He pushed his bangs off his face and his eyes honed instantly on the culprit.

Joseph was laughing loudly, collecting the beach ball from where it had flown as Caesar had lost his grip on it when he’d been launched into the air. Caesar glared daggers at him. He turned back around and snorted when he saw Caesar’s face.

“Come on, Caesarino, don’t look like that,” he said, waving his hand. “It was funny! You were taking so long I thought I’d help you out.”

“I am going to murder you in your sleep,” Caesar said. Joseph snorted again.

“That was quite a flight, Caesar,” said Smokey, who had apparently returned from his little swim. “Hey, Jojo, can you throw me too?”

“Sure!” said Joseph with a grin, making his way back towards the other two. “See, Caesar, some people can appreciate the little things in life.”

He thrust the beach ball into Caesar’s chest and Caesar grabbed a hold of it reflexively as Joseph passed him.

Caesar closed his eyes and breathed *deep*.

“That… didn’t go quite as planned,” said Suzie who had finally gotten back into the water and was now standing next to him. “Sorry.”

“No need for you to apologize,” Caesar said, watching Joseph dive underwater and Smokey launch into the air a few seconds later. “You didn’t do anything wrong.”

Joseph dragged his fingers through his hair with a wide grin on his face. He glanced in their direction and they locked eyes for a moment with Caesar, Joseph’s smile faltering just slightly. Smokey burst out of the water with a loud “whooo” and the moment broke, Joseph turning his gaze away again.

Caesar hummed in thought.

“Oi!” he shouted, throwing the ball upwards. “Jojo!” He smacked he ball as hard as he could, sending it hurtling towards Joseph, who had just turned around at his name. It hit him square in the face and dropped onto the waves.

Joseph blinked a few times. Smokey was barely keeping his laughter in check behind him. Suzie had pressed her hand to her mouth, but Caesar knew it was to hide a smile.

“Yeah, that was good,” Caesar said, making his way casually towards Joseph. “Although it could still be better.”

“Better?” asked Joseph, frowning. Caesar lifted his hands in the air and then in one smooth motion brought them down and created as large a wave as he could. “Shit!” Joseph shrieked, trying to shield himself from the splash. Caesar chuckled. Joseph flicked water from his hands. “Ohh,” he said, low and dangerous. “So that’s how it’s gonna be, huh?”

Caesar raised his eyebrows and smirked.
“Bring it, Joestar,” he said. He got a faceful of water and retaliated immediately.

Joseph let out another yelp and then shouted, “Hey, Smokey, back me up here!”

“Wha— hey, don’t drag me into this shit!” Smokey protested, but started to splash in Caesar’s general direction anyway. And after Suzie was hit by the stray splashes it turned into an all-out war. Caesar and Suzie against Joseph and Smokey. The kinda-Zeppelis versus the kinda-Joestars.

They were all laughing though. Suzie had been right. It was nice.

~x~

Once they were all exhausted and utterly drenched they returned to the beach and sat down on the blanket to have some lunch. Caesar had made them sandwiches and some salad, as well as cookies, which had turned out pretty good if he did say so himself. They also had a cooler full of bottles of water and soda—no beer, because it was a public beach, Joseph, and they weren’t about to start drinking at one o’clock in the afternoon. Joseph had pouted and cuddled Caesar when he had said as much, nuzzling his neck to get some pity, but Caesar had stayed firm. So firm.

After they had all eaten themselves full, Suzie rolled out from under the umbrella to sunbathe and Caesar—who hadn’t had time to relax properly in ages—took out the book he’d brought along just for the occasion, while Joseph and Smokey dicked around with Pokémon Go. There was occasional chatting, but mostly they all just sat there and enjoyed the weather.

It was about an hour later when someone approached their little picnic.


Surprisingly, it was Suzie who first greeted the boy.

“Chad!” she exclaimed, sitting up and clapping her hands together. Caesar blinked in surprise; he hadn’t known the two were acquainted. Even Caesar didn’t know Chad too well, and they bumped into each other at the gym fairly often, now that they—or rather, Joseph—had convinced Messina and Loggins to take a second class of Hamon students. He did get along with Joseph swimmingly though.

“Oh! Suzie,” Chad said as he noticed her, his eyes flicking over her form, from head to toes. Caesar wasn’t sure if he imagined the blush on his cheeks. “You look lovely. The… the bikini really suits you.”

Suzie giggled. “Thank you!”

Chad’s eyes moved over the rest of the group and he spotted Smokey, who was looking him up and down curiously.

“I… don’t think we’ve met, properly?” he said, extending a hand towards Smokey, who gripped it after shuffling a little closer. “Chad Gabriels, I work at the Air Supplena Gym, on the wall climbing side.”

“Smokey Brown,” Smokey said, shaking Chad’s hand before letting it drop and leaning back again. “Officially Jojo’s best friend now that Caesar’s been upgraded to boyfriend.”

Joseph flushed a deep red, opening his mouth, but unable to produce a single sound. Caesar could feel his own face heat up, but there was also a warm feeling curling in his chest at the idea, making
him smile widely. He promptly hid the smile behind a water bottle.

“Oh yes, I heard about that,” Chad said, which was all kinds of surprising after Joseph closed his mouth slowly and turned to look at him in confusion. Clearly he hadn't told him. “Congratulations you two.”

“How… how exactly did you hear about that?” Joseph asked with a frown.

“Suzie told me?” Chad said after a moment’s hesitation.

“Ohhh,” said Smokey, which was kinda weird, what the hell had he understood?

“And why exactly have you been talking about our relationship status with Suzie?” Caesar asked, directing a look at his cousin. She feigned innocence and turned away.

“Well, we’ve been talking about a bunch of things,” Chad said, seeming slightly confused. He wasn’t the only one. “After she dropped by the gym to request a new frame, we’ve been—

“Hold up!” interrupted Joseph, pointing his finger at Chad who quieted instantly. “What ‘new frame’?”

“Hushhhh!” hissed Suzie, shaking her hands to indicate that Chad should stay quiet.

“The… the new frame for the diploma?” Chad said anyway, and Suzie sighed deeply. “For when you guys completed the Hell Climb Pillar? She said it broke or something…?”

“Aw, man, it was supposed to be a surprise!” Suzie whined and sighed again. Then she turned to Joseph and Caesar and explained. “Smokey told me you busted the frame, so I went over to the gym to see if I could get another one for you guys. It was gonna be a symbolic thing, the pillar representing your friendship and ability to endure together, or whatever! The point is, it was really sad that it was broken so I wanted to get you a new one. And Chad helped me with that."

“I… I didn’t even know we’d gotten the diploma,” Caesar said, blinking. It must’ve arrived while he was— “I’d forgotten all about it.”

Joseph rubbed his neck and looked away.

“Well, uh, it’s on its way, now. Again,” Chad said, rubbing his cheek. “Should probably be a few days, but it’ll come to Suzie’s house, since it was ordered to her address.”

“As I said, it was supposed to be a surprise,” Suzie pouted.

“It’s the thought that counts,” said Caesar, squeezing Suzie’s shoulder gently. She gave him a lopsided smile.

“Anyway, I just wanted to say hi when I noticed you here,” Chad said. “But I guess I better get going now.”

“Wait, I’ll come with you!” Suzie said, slipping on her kaftan and putting on her sun hat and sunglasses, before snatching her phone from the ground. “You can buy me ice cream!”

“Oh. Okay,” said Chad as Suzie stepped into her sandals and looped her hand loosely through his. This time Caesar knew he didn’t imagine the soft red tint on his cheeks before the two left, walking arm in arm along the beach.

It would be interesting to see if that little crush would survive the thirty minutes it took Suzie to pick
They got back home sometime after seven, since they’d walked around Coney Island and had dinner there after everyone had gotten tired of laying on the beach. Suzie had rejoined them fairly soon after leaving with Chad, who stayed to hang out with them for a while longer, before he had to go find the friend he’d originally come there with. It was nice to catch up with the boy, and it was nice to get to know him a bit better since both Joseph and Suzie seemed to know him quite well already.

Not just running into Chad, but the day had been nice all around. The beach hadn’t gotten too crowded at any point, the weather had been warm, the food good, the company great. Even if he’d been slightly pissed off about Joseph’s initial stunt, Caesar couldn’t be too mad. It probably had been funny, objectively. Besides, he was used to Joseph doing insane things, even if more often than not they bit Caesar in the ass as well, at least to some degree. This had been tame compared to some of the things he did.

Sometimes Caesar wondered why exactly he liked the Joestar so much. Sometimes there was no question. Sometimes it felt almost inevitable.

Sometimes—

“Today was fun!” Joseph said cheerily. “It was quite a surprise to see Chad though, but I’m glad he’s doing okay.”

“It sure was,” Caesar agreed, taking his bag and dumping it on the bathroom floor to be worried about later. Normally he’d put the stuff away right away, but… He returned to the living room, where Joseph was still standing, stretching in the middle of the room. Caesar looked at his wide back, the muscles that shifted under his skin as he moved, and bit his lip. He had been wondering for hours now, but wasn’t sure if he really wanted to open that can of worms.

Joseph turned around and looked at him, his expression shifting as he noticed the look on Caesar’s face.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, immediately concerned. Point of no return.

“What happened to the original frame?” Caesar asked before he’d stop himself. Joseph’s eyes widened slightly and he blinked, before looking away.

“Wait here,” he said after a moment and walked briskly into his room. Caesar could hear him shuffling through a drawer, before he reemerged with something in his hands. It was, without the doubt, the diploma. Or rather, had been.

“I…” Joseph started, offering the pile of wooden frames and cardboard to Caesar. The frame was completely broken, and the back had bent into an odd angle. At least Joseph had thrown the glass pane away, though judging by the state the picture was in, it had burst into a thousand pieces when— “I kind of… threw it against the wall,” he admitted as Caesar turned a piece of a picture frame around in his hands.

“Yeah, that’s… what it looks like,” Caesar said, looking up at Joseph’s face again. He wasn’t meeting Caesar’s eyes and rubbed the side of his neck. “Why?”

“I couldn’t handle it,” Joseph said softly, lifting his gaze and finally looking Caesar in the eye. “I hated myself so much, and I missed you even more, and I… I was a mess, honestly, I couldn’t make head or tails of what was happening inside…” He let out a small sigh. “And then that thing came in
the mail, not even a week after— and I felt like it was mocking me, shoving how it used to be in my face, and I just, well…”

“Reacted poorly?” Caesar offered. Joseph made a noncommittal sound.

“That's one way to put it,” he said and then turned to look away again. Caesar’s breath caught in his throat.

“Hey,” he said, cupping Joseph’s cheek and turning his face gently back. He looked oddly small, considering that he was three and a half inches taller than Caesar. “We’ve worked past this. Don’t beat yourself up over it anymore. Besides, you’re not the only one who… reacted poorly.” Joseph glanced to the side, but returned his eyes to Caesar's almost immediately. “But it doesn’t matter anymore, right? We’re in a better place now.”

Joseph tried to keep his face serious, but his mouth was twitching, trying to form a smile despite his best effort to stump it. Caesar huffed out a small laugh and shook his head.

“Sorry,” said Joseph, though he didn’t look nor sound sorry. “But… ‘in a better place’?”

“Yeah, yeah, I heard it as soon as it left my mouth,” Caesar said, letting his hand drop from Joseph’s face, and started to turn around.

He was stopped by Joseph’s hand on his arm and his mouth on his lips. Caesar smiled into the soft kiss, taking a hold of Joseph’s sleeve with his free hand. He still tasted slightly of salt.

“Thank you though,” Joseph said against his mouth after pulling away slightly and resting their foreheads together. “Even if you made it sound like we were dead.”

“You're welcome,” said Caesar, ignoring the second comment and instead reveling in their close proximity. He planted another quick kiss against the side of Joseph’s mouth, and then stepped back.

“Now, let’s put the stuff away so that we can relax the rest of the evening.”

“Right, right,” said Joseph, going to get his own bag and moving into the bathroom to—hopefully—rinse his salty swimsuit. Caesar set the busted frame down on the side table, dragging his fingers gently over the picture, and followed.

After hanging their stuff up to dry they both took showers to properly wash away the seawater and then piled onto the couch. Joseph watched some kind of crime show, while Caesar continued with the book he hadn’t quite managed to finish during the afternoon. It was nice and cozy and Joseph was warm and steady behind him, his arm against the back of the couch and his hand in Caesar’s hair, playing with the strands absently. Eventually Caesar put the book away, to relish the sensation, calming and intimate. He might’ve started to doze off at some point.

He could hear Joseph turn off the TV much later, though he didn’t bother opening his eyes yet. He’d get up once Joseph did, until then he’d enjoy the moment. He waited. Joseph didn’t get up. Instead he brushed Caesar’s hair from his face and pressed a soft kiss on his temple, before carefully getting up from the couch and gathering him into his arms.

Caesar’s heart was going haywire in his chest, but he kept his eyes closed.

It wasn’t until they were nearly in Caesar’s—or perhaps more accurately their—room that Joseph opened his mouth.

“I’m starting to think you’re doing this on purpose,” he whispered to Caesar. Caesar cracked open one eye to peer up at Joseph’s grinning face.
“I admit nothing,” he said, wrapping his arms around Joseph’s neck, pulling himself up slightly. Joseph hummed softly.

“Who would’ve thought you’d be so into being carried *bridal style*,” he said, goading. Caesar took half a second to decide where to take the conversation.

“Honestly, I just like taking advantage of the fact that you *can* pick me up, bridal style or not,” he said conversationally. “I might be shorter than you, but I’m by no means *small*.” He paused, looking at Joseph from under his lashes, a sly smile spreading on his face. “And I know plenty of fun ways to utilize this kind of strength…”

Joseph swallowed, seeming momentarily taken aback, before he grinned too.

“Yeah?” he asked and then slung Caesar over his shoulder. Caesar let out a short yelp, balancing himself with hands on Joseph’s back. Joseph patted his ass twice before continuing his interrupted journey. “I’m gonna hold you to that promise.”

Then he threw—literally threw, it should *not* have been as hot as it was—Caesar onto the bed. Caesar bounced up and down a few times, the bedsprings making a soft creaking sound under his sudden weight. He didn’t have time to worry too long for the wellbeing of his bed though, before Joseph was leaning over him and kissing him like there was no tomorrow. Not that Caesar minded.

Joseph had already pulled Caesar’s shirt half off when he suddenly paused. Caesar peered up at him curiously.

“You sure you wanna do this?” Joseph asked against the side of his neck.

“*Hell yes*,” Caesar said, wrapping his arms around Joseph’s shoulders and pulling him as close as physically possible. Joseph huffed out a laugh and placed an open mouthed kiss on Caesar’s neck. “And for future reference,” Caesar said after a short sound between a hum and a moan. “You don’t have to ask permission every time. Just be prepared to get your ass kicked if you do something I don’t like.”

“Fair enough,” said Joseph and kissed his mouth.

Caesar’s shirt was tossed onto the floor a few seconds later, followed by several other articles of clothing.

*Chapter End Notes*

If you think I'll ever get enough of Joseph's ability to just *pick Caesar up* you are gravely mistaken (~ - .cwd - ~)
(sorry if you wanted them to frick frack, that's gonna be in the bonus content~~~)
"You’re free this Saturday, right?” Caesar asked as they were eating dinner one evening. Joseph blinked and nodded.

“There’s really not much going on with me until the job starts on the first of August, you know that,” he said, impaling a piece of zucchini with his fork. “Why, were you planning something?”

“I was thinking we could go on another date,” Caesar said calmly.

Joseph didn’t choke on the zucchini. Caesar sniggered softly as Joseph downed an entire glass of water.

“I thought it might be appropriate, it’s been almost four weeks since the last one,” Caesar continued when it was apparent Joseph could breathe again. “Now that Tiffy’s finished with her summer collection marathon, I have actual free days again.”

“Yeah, I...” Joseph said, scratching the back of his neck. His face was flushed, but that might have been because of the vegetable recently lodged in his throat. “I’d like that.”

He smiled, brilliant white teeth showing. Caesar smiled as well, a small private thing.
“Saturday it is then. Prepare to get shown how it’s really done,” he said, turning back to his plate. Joseph huffed.

“Hey! What’s that supposed to mean?” he asked, pointing the fork accusingly a Caesar.

Caesar just grinned.

~x~

“Ooh, bowling!” Joseph exclaimed that Saturday as they approached the bowling alley.

“It’s been a while so I thought it’d be fun,” Caesar explained as he pushed open the door to “Steel’s Bowl Run”. There were several people already there, the sound of bowling balls rolling and hitting pins creating a soft rumbling that echoed in the large hall. The room was divided into two by a low partition, at the back the twelve bowling lanes and up front a few dozen small tables, which at that time of the day were mostly empty. To the right were the coat racks and lockers with bowling shoes, and to the left the counter with the cash register and the bar, which didn’t actually start serving alcohol until 7PM. They did serve coffee throughout the day though, as well as soft drinks and snacks.

Even further back to the right were four pool tables, that could be rented out while waiting for a free lane, or just for the fun of it. One of them was occupied by two men, a tall man with long hair and his back turned to them and a guy with a beanie, sitting on the edge of the table, lining up his shot. Caesar watched them for a while, the sound of the pool balls colliding after the boy’s masterful strike drowning under the thunderous noise of the bowling. Then Joseph’s voice claimed his attention again.

“Man, we used to come here all the time as kids! And it still looks just the same!” he was saying, excitement in his voice and a glimmer in his eyes as he looked around the room. “Hey, you think the old geezer is still running the business himself?”

“See for yourself,” said Caesar, pointing towards the shoe lockers, where the man in question, Stephen Steel, had just walked in through the “employees only” door with a pile of papers in his hands. He looked up and noticed the two of them, a wide smile spreading on his face.

“Caesar! Joseph!” he greeted them as he walked towards them. “My, how you’ve grown! Haven’t seen you boys here in years. How are you doing?”

“We’re doing fine, Mr. Steel, thank you,” Caesar said. “I guess University and work have kept us too busy to visit much, huh?”

“How’s that going then?” Mr. Steel asked as he started to lead the way to the counter. “You two graduate yet?”

“I graduated just this spring,” Joseph said. “Got a job lined up too. And Caesar’s been working for two years now.”

“Well, it’s good to see you’ve got your lives in order,” he said, and then looked around, seeming slightly confused for a moment, before his eyes landed on the two men by the pool table. “Oi, Julius!” he shouted. The long haired man flinched. The other man, who was still sitting on the edge of the table, sniggered. “Customers!”

“I’ve told you a thousand times, old man,” the long haired man started, turning around, “it’s—” He stopped, his eyes locking with Caesar’s.
“Gyro?” Caesar asked, blinking. Well, this… was a coincidence. “I didn’t know you worked here.”

“Caesar,” said Gyro Zeppeli, and finally started to approach them. There was movement behind him and Caesar glanced back just as the other man hopped off the table and soon rolled around it in a wheelchair, following close on Gyro’s trail. “Haven’t seen you since new year’s family gathering,” Gyro said and stopped in front of the three of them. No, scratch that, the two of them, apparently Mr. Steel had already continued on his way and disappeared from sight. Gyro looked over at Joseph. “You look familiar… What’s your name again?”

“Joseph,” said Joseph, extending a hand for Gyro to shake. “I’m Caesar’s—”

He hesitated. Caesar could feel the slight change in Joseph’s stance in the air, could sense the eyes that flicked to him for confirmation, could see the word dying on Joseph’s tongue even though he wasn’t looking at him. It took no longer than a second.

“My boyfriend,” Caesar supplied. Gyro’s eyes switched to him and his eyebrows rose slightly.

“The same boyfriend that you got engaged to but then didn’t six months ago?” he asked with a goading tint to his voice and a sly grin on his face. He had gotten some kind of a… jewel embedded into his front tooth since the last time Caesar had seen him. It was… well.

Caesar knew that Gyro was trying to rile him up on purpose—he was an asshole like that, they didn’t get along too well, never had—and he tried his best not to rise to the bait, but he couldn’t help the heat that was rising to his face.

“Well… yes,” he admitted. “But the whole engagement thing was a big misunderstanding, although we are actually dating.” He sighed slightly. “I can’t believe the news got all the way to you too…”

“Are you kidding me?” asked Gyro, grinning even more widely. “There isn’t a Zeppeli in the whole world who didn’t hear the news. Your nonna Maria is a very resourceful woman when it comes to networking.”

“Great…” Caesar muttered, but Joseph piped in.

“Sorry, I know I’ve probably met you before, but how exactly are you two related?” he asked.

“He’s my third cousin,” Caesar said.

“Third?” Joseph asked, his voice dropped to a whisper, as if to conceal the fact he didn’t understand. He even hid his mouth behind his hand. It was sort of endearing.

“My grandfather and his were cousins,” Caesar explained.

“Ohhhhh,” Joseph said. “I don’t really know about all that cousin business, the Joestars have been only children for like, I dunno, five generations now.”

“Wait, Joestar?” said the man in the wheelchair, who had so far just been watching the scene unfold with an amused curiosity. All three turned to look at him.

“Right! This is Johnny,” said Gyro, gesturing to his companion. “Johnny Joestar.”

There was a pause.

“Excuse me?” said Joseph.

“What he said,” said Johnny. “The name is Johnny Joestar.”
Caesar was quite stunned honestly. He didn’t know what to think about this. Was… was it fate? Were the Zeppelis and Joestars somehow inherently connected by, by destiny or something? That seemed a bit ridiculous, surely. He wasn’t even sure if he bought into the whole predestination thing, but the fact remained that Gyro had somehow found and befriended a completely unrelated Joestar… One that they hadn’t even known about. And sure the Joestars were an old family, but they weren’t terribly big, and their roots were in Britain, not America, and what were the chances—

Caesar stopped thinking about it. It was making his brain hurt.

“Uhh,” said Joseph, scratching his neck. “Well, if I recall correctly, gramps’s father might’ve had cousins or something? So I guess we could be like…”

“Fourth cousins?” Johnny suggested. Joseph shrugged. Which, in Caesar’s opinion, was much too blasé a reaction to finding out about a cousin you’d never even heard of.

“I’ll have to ask gramps about it though, I don’t actually know about the family tree outside our own branch,” Joseph said.

“Hey, it’s a small world,” said Gyro, rather unenthusiastically, and then walked to the other side of the counter. “You wanted to bowl or what?”

“Right. Yes,” said Caesar and turned to him. “I’ve made a lane reservation, under ‘Zeppeli’.”

Gyro clicked on the computer mouse a few times.

“Huh, would’ya look at that,” he said. “Maybe I should check the reservations more often, I’d’ve known you were coming.”

“Maybe you should do that anyway,” Caesar said, raising an eyebrow as he dug his wallet out of his pocket. “You do work here, right?”

“Eh, it’s just a summer job,” Gyro shrugged. “Helps me get by until I graduate. That’s twenty bucks.”

Caesar slapped a bill onto the counter. Gyro slipped it in the cash register and handed back a receipt.

“Thanks,” Gyro said. “The shoes are over there. Lane 2 is yours, as soon as the guys there finish their game.” Then he walked around to the other side again and clapped Johnny on the shoulder as he walked past him. “Come on, we were in the middle of a game!”

“Right behind you,” said Johnny before turning to Joseph for a moment. He seemed to consider something, and it was painfully clear he wanted to say something but wasn’t sure what, or perhaps how. Finally he made up his mind and opened his mouth.

“Johnny, come on!” Gyro shouted from the table. “It’s your turn! Or do you want me to shoot instead?”

“I’m coming! Jesus,” Johnny called back. He huffed. “Oh well. See ya.” He gave Joseph and Caesar one last grin and then rolled over to the back.

Caesar stared after them. They very clearly started bickering about something as soon as Johnny got over to the pool table and continued it through him hopping back on it and then pocketing two balls with one shot. Gyro looked to be gritting his teeth as he gripped his hair and Johnny gave him a victorious smirk.
“That… sure happened,” Caesar said.

“I’ve never had a cousin before,” Joseph said with a smile. “Cool.”

~x~

It only took about five minutes for the previous players to finish their game, and they left, one man victorious and the other two muttering under their breaths about goddamn lucky shots. Caesar was by no means an expert when it came to bowling, but even he had thought the last throw had been pretty amazing. It was almost a miracle that the man had gotten a strike, what with the way he’d just haphazardly thrown the ball down the lane. Some people just had all the luck.

“So, Caesarino…” started Joseph, picking up different bowling balls from the shelf as Caesar went to the computer to input their names. “Want to make this a bit more interesting?”

“You mean a competition?” Caesar asked, pausing for a moment. Joseph was grinning as wide as humanly possible. “Do elaborate.”

“Two games, total point score,” Joseph said, hoisting a light purple bowling ball onto his shoulder. “The loser has to do whatever the winner wants.”

“Feeling confident, aren’t you?” Caesar said with a smirk. “‘Whatever’ can be a lot of things, you know.”

“Oh, I know,” Joseph purred. “You in or not?”

Caesar hummed, thinking it through.

“Not that I’m afraid I’ll lose to you,” he said and Joseph gasped, fake offended, “but I do want to make a little amendment to your… ‘anything’.”

“Well aren’t you boring,” Joseph huffed, placing his free hand on his hip. Caesar ignored him.

“Two things,” he said instead, raising his fingers into the air. “Nothing illegal. And nothing that will cause harm to anyone else.”

It was Joseph’s turn to mull things over, but Caesar wasn’t particularly surprised when the man shrugged.

“Yeah I guess that’s reasonable,” he said. “Not that I had planned on making you rob a bank or anything, but if it’ll give you peace of mind I think I can agree to your conditions.”

“Oh, you’d already decided what you wanted me to do?” Caesar asked, standing up and walking over to the shelves with the bowling balls. They were standing chest to chest. “Maybe you shouldn’t have… you’ll be even more disappointed when I wipe the floor with your face.”

“You’re so cute when you try to trash talk me,” Joseph said, leaning down slightly so their noses were only a few inches apart. He had a rather condescending grin on his face, made even more painfully clear by his unfair height. Caesar forced himself to not react outwardly. “We gonna play, or are you already chickening out?”

“Game on, Joestar,” Caesar said. “It’s your turn.”

~x~

The game was very intense. They both sucked.
Or well, they didn’t suck as much as they were terribly out of practice. It had been several years since either had gone bowling after all. Halfway through the first game they did considerably better. It wasn’t until Caesar made the first strike of the game on his second to last throw that the pace really picked up.

Caesar wasn’t sure if he’d ever seen Joseph as concentrated on anything as he was on the first frame of the second game with Caesar in a 20-point lead. It was very amusing. Also very endearing, in a weird way.

It took Joseph an insanely long time to throw the ball. He just stood there, staring down the lane at the pins, his eyes squinted and his ball lifted in front of him. Caesar waited, patiently. Then Joseph took a step, and another, and then another, and then he swung the ball and it rolled down with incredible force. It rolled and rolled and then crashed into the pins, sending them flying with an enormous racket.

They all fell down. Joseph pumped his fist in the air with a triumphant shout.

“Nice job, babe,” Caesar said, honestly pretty impressed by the force behind the throw. “Keep that up and you might just catch up to me.”

Joseph scoffed.

“The first game was just warmup,” he said, walking just a bit closer than necessary to Caesar as they passed each other at the end of the lane. “This is where the real game starts.”

“Mmhm,” hummed Caesar, walking backwards the few steps to the ball retrieval machine to keep his eyes locked with Joseph’s. “But you did say the total score of two games, which means that I do have a twenty-point advantage.”

“Yeah, ‘cause of your lucky strike,” Joseph mumbled, plopping down onto the small leather couch separating their area from the next lane. Caesar lifted an eyebrow, picked up his ball, rolled his shoulders, and took a deep breath. A moment’s concentration and then he was moving, his feet taking the steps and his hand swinging back and then the ball left his fingers, gliding smoothly along the hardwood floor and then it collided with the pins and they toppled down one after another. A precise, simple movement.

He turned back to Joseph, who was staring at the pins, mouth just slightly open. When he noticed Caesar looking at him though he quickly turned away with a ‘tsk’.

“How’s that for lucky?” Caesar asked, a triumphant smile on his face.

“Yeah, whatever,” said Joseph, pushing himself off the couch. “It was just the first shot, it’s my turn now.” He pushed past Caesar and Caesar chuckled softly as he took a seat to watch Joseph’s next throw.

After two more frames it was abundantly clear that their little contest had become a game of Joseph’s strength and intuition versus Caesar’s strategy and execution. And it was a close call. Joseph got more strikes with his sheer power but Caesar was able to get most spares where Joseph couldn’t. It was slightly frustrating on both sides, when neither could pull ahead, and Caesar’s advantage had dwindled down to basically nothing.

All too soon it was the final turn. Joseph had taken the lead just slightly and Caesar needed that strike, he would lose if he didn’t get it. He’d managed to get a spare in his tenth frame, he just needed to get all ten pins with his extra ball to surpass Joseph’s score.
He stood still, breathing steadily, staring down the lane at the ten pins arranged neatly on the other end. He could do this. He knew he could do this. He’d done this several times already. He exhaled deeply and pulled himself as straight as possible.

He took the steps and swung the ball and pushed it out of his hand—

_Fuck._

His middle finger caught just slightly in the hole as he let go of the ball but it was too late to stop it now. It hit the floor, it slid and then rolled. Caesar held his breath. The trajectory didn’t seem to have changed too much, it could still work. It might—

Contact. Pins fell down as the ball pushed through their formation. One pin was still standing, the right corner, but it had been struck by the one next to it. It wobbled, it wobbled, it—

It stilled.

The world was silent for a second as Caesar stared at the final pin still standing, even though all around him people continued to bowl. He sighed.

“Yes!” came a voice behind him and he turned around to see Joseph jump off the couch with a laugh. He was grinning widely again, stupidly brilliant, looking up at the monitor with their scores and Caesar couldn’t believe how happy the Joestar was about winning. It was ridiculous, really, how radiant his smile was, how light the laugh that bubbled up from his chest, how bright the glimmer in his eyes. It was _ridiculous_ , it had been just a silly game to pass the time, but here Joseph was, looking like he’d won the world championship or something.

And Caesar’s heart felt like bursting in his chest as he looked at that smile, a tight pressure and a warm feeling, and it was so goddamn ridiculous, Caesar couldn’t believe how much he loved Joseph at that moment, couldn’t understand why, but he did, by god he did.

_I want to see that smile every day for the rest of my life_, he thought and then realized what exactly he’d thought.

He quickly turned away from Joseph and stared down the lane again, desperate to hide his face which was probably the deepest shade of red imaginable at the moment. Joseph noticed, of course, and drew his own conclusions from this. Of course. He laughed again.

“Aw, are you jealous of my amazing bowling skills?” he said, which surprised Caesar a bit, that he’d misread the situation that badly. Although it did make sense, kind of, since as good as Joseph was at reading people he was also very self-centered and tended to project onto other people when it came to things like this. “That’s so cute, Caesarino! But c’mon, I know I’m good but there’s no need to be that jealous. You were pretty good too!”

Caesar let out a soft laugh and finally turned around again.

“I’m not jealous,” he said. “You won by one point! And I won the first game.”

“Yeah, but I won the whole thing,” said Joseph and grinned. “You can admit it, there’s no shame in that. I don’t judge.”

“Whatever, _tu idiota_ ,” Caesar said with a roll of his eyes and walked over to the couch before crossing his arms. “Okay, so what do you want me to do?”

“Ohoho,” said Joseph and then licked his lips. A chill went down Caesar’s spine and he braced
himself for anything. Then Joseph said, “The power to command you… I think I’ll save it for a little later. Who knows when it’ll come in handy. And don’t you try to weasel your way out of it then!” He shoved a finger into Caesar’s face. Caesar smacked it away.

“Of course not,” he said. “I am a man of my word.”

“Good,” said Joseph and nodded. “Well, should we get going then? It looks like the next guys are already waiting.” He pointed, not that discreetly, towards the tables on the other side of the partition, where a man in a raptor shirt and a girl with a pink bob cut were eyeing them impatiently.

“Yeah, good point,” said Caesar. “Let’s go.”

They were putting their shoes back on when Gyro and Johnny approached them again.

“So are you two getting married or not?” Gyro asked without any kind of preamble. Caesar inhaled a bit too sharply and felt like he was about to choke on air.

“No,” he exhaled and then inhaled again, deeply. “Not… anytime soon anyway.”

“Told ya,” said Gyro, poking Johnny with his elbow. Johnny let out an unconvincing hum.

“We’ll see,” he said. And then to Joseph, “Hey, add me on facebook or something. If we’re actually related it might be cool to get to know you, or whatever.”

Then he turned around and rolled away.

“O… kay?” said Joseph, a little belatedly.

“Well, see you in the next family reunion,” said Gyro, making fingerguns at them and then swirling around and walking after Johnny.

“Why are both of our families weird as fuck?” Caesar asked after a while.

“I wouldn’t exactly say we’re the paragons of normalcy ourselves,” Joseph said. Caesar considered that.

“Fair enough,” he said. “Let’s go get some dinner.”

~x~

They got dinner at one of Joseph’s favorite steakhouses and then returned home, where they relaxed together the rest of the evening, as had become a tendency for them. Caesar enjoyed their quiet nights at home, just the two of them, something personal and intimate in those moments that was different from how it was when there was someone else around. Which wasn’t to say Caesar didn’t enjoy spending time with other people, it was just… being with Joseph, alone, not necessarily even doing anything other than being, existing there in close proximity, well, there was something special about that. The feeling of belonging. The feeling of being appreciated, just as he was. The feeling of unconditional acceptance.

There really was nothing else quite like it.

Chapter End Notes
i can't believe i read 50 chapters of sbr just to make that shitty pun (O_Ọusable)
also the bae was of the opinion that Gyro and Johnny should've been hamsters and had a hamster ball run. which, as hilarious as that is, isn't something i could work with here
hah (i might someday tho if i write something else ever again)
How to: Domestic

Chapter Summary

It's funny how much time you can spend without really doing much (and how much that time can mean to you in the end).

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I'm very happy to be back again! I hope y'all are doing fine. I know I am; I just moved! Hurrah!! I can't remember if I told you guys, but I got into school! So I'll start studying computer sciences this September in Helsinki University. I'm so excited!!! And in addition to getting into the school I wanted, I also moved back to Helsinki and am now living with my super mega amazing girlfriend Endles!!!! I am so excited!!

This chapter is kind of on the slower (and shorter) side again, but I'll be back next week (Friday, probably) with the next one and that's when things start to pick up their pace again. Oooooooh I have so much fun stuff in store for you I can't wait!! Well, I hope you'll enjoy this chapter, as always please leave a comment if you do (they are my life force haaah) and I'll see you next week! Ciao~

Caesar woke up with a jolt. He couldn’t remember what had happened in the dream, but the unpleasant feeling still lingered in the pit of his stomach. Nightmares weren’t uncommon, unfortunately, especially when he was stressed, but they never got any easier. He was always left with his heart pounding in his chest, pulse in his ears, and a haunting sensation that something was just slightly off. Still, he tried to ignore it, forcing himself to relax and maintain a steady breathing. He focused on the silence of the room to calm down.

Except it wasn’t silent. There was a periodic, solid rumbling sound coming from somewhere nearby. Caesar blinked, because that was a weird, loud noise he couldn't quite identify, and suddenly it was the only thing he could focus on. What was that? Where was it coming from? He glanced around, looking for the source in the dark room. It was so close, like it was right next to him, he could swear it was—

It was Joseph.

As a loud snort escaped his lips again, Caesar remembered that his boyfriend was a snorer. It hadn’t really been an issue recently—not since they were kids—because Caesar had grown into such a heavy sleeper and Joseph woke up before him and fell asleep after him almost without fail, so Caesar was rarely awake when Joseph was asleep. Amused by the fact he'd managed to forget something like this, he marveled for a moment at the loud noise, wondering how on earth such a sound could leave the human body, but very quickly it grew tiresome and finally, annoying. It was the middle of the night after all, and with the leftover tension from the nightmare gone and forgotten, Caesar was more than ready to continue sleeping.
He couldn’t though, because of the noise.

Caesar had had the fortune of almost never having to sleep next to someone who snored, but unfortunately that also meant that he wasn’t entirely sure how to make it stop. You had to get them to change their position, or something, right? To get them to sleep on their back, or… not sleep on their back? In either case, Caesar was pretty sure getting Joseph to move would do something. Very carefully he prodded Joseph’s side.

Nothing happened.

He jabbed a bit harder. Still nothing. A sharp stab with three fingers right under the ribs seemed to do the trick though, because Joseph twitched and snorted again. For a second Caesar thought that he’d woken up, but in the end he just rolled around and continued his sleep.

And with that problem solved, Caesar settled down to continue his own.

But then it started again.

Caesar resisted a groan and pushed himself onto his elbow. He glared at Joseph, even though the man couldn’t see it. *He* was fast asleep after all, just like Caesar very much wanted to be. Instead he was stuck listening to the snoring.

Maybe if he managed to change the breathing pattern? Caesar reached over and pinched Joseph’s nose shut between his fingers. Joseph made an aborted snore, before sputtering and then drawing a deep breath through his mouth. It was snore-free, but Caesar continued to hold his nose just in case. After five silent breaths Caesar let go and Joseph continued to breathe, steady and quiet. It really seemed like it had worked.

It hadn’t.

No sooner had Caesar closed his eyes than Joseph started again. Caesar screamed internally, dragging his fingers down his face, and—with no more options left—grabbed Joseph’s face and crashed their mouths together.

And sure, it might’ve not been the most orthodox of reactions, but Caesar was beyond frustrated, so it was either that, or turning Joseph’s face into a punching bag.

It ended up working very well though. Joseph was surprisingly responsive—considering his level of consciousness—and it was rather hard for him to snore with Caesar’s tongue in his mouth. It was also hard for Caesar to sleep, but kissing Joseph was pretty good too, as far as alternatives went. He dragged Joseph’s bottom lip between his teeth, eliciting a soft moan from the younger man. Joseph’s eyes fluttered open as he roused.

“I was having the best dream ever,” he said dazedly as Caesar pulled away. His voice was thick with sleep and his eyes barely open, but his lips were drawn up in a goofy grin. “S’ppose those do come true after all.”

Caesar gave Joseph another kiss, to stop himself from laughing in his face. Joseph wrapped an arm around Caesar’s waist and pulled him closer.

“Hi,” he said after they broke apart again. Caesar smiled.

“Bye,” he said, and turned around.

“Wait what?” said Joseph, but Caesar didn’t answer. He just closed his eyes.
“Honey, I’m home!” came Joseph’s voice as the front door clicked open.

“Welcome home, dear,” Caesar said dutifully before sniggering and setting his book down on the coffee table. “How was the first day at the new job?”

Joseph collapsed onto the couch next to Caesar, dropping his head on the other’s shoulder.

“Ugh,” said Joseph.

“That bad?” Caesar asked.

“No. I mean, yeah. I mean… I dunno,” Joseph said. “The work is fine, even if it’s just an internship so it’s bound to be kinda boring, and my co-workers seem like nice people, but…”

“Your boss?” Caesar guessed. Joseph had already complained about his boss before he’d even started the job. Joseph nodded against Caesar’s shoulder.

“He is such an asshole,” Joseph said emphatically. “Like, grade A asshole, through and through. And he treats the other interns like shit. Especially the girls, who he just sees as his personal coffeemakers or something?? It’s like… the 60s called, they want their sexism back. And I really wanna tell him off, but…”

Joseph sighed deeply. Caesar carded his fingers into Joseph’s hair, massaging his scalp softly. He seemed to appreciate it, if the soft hum in the back of his throat was anything to go by.

“It’s such bullshit though,” he continued after a moment of silence. “Because that’s not how he treats me at all. Because I’m good and he knows I’m good, but I also have a name and that makes me ‘valuable’.”

The bitterness in his voice was clear and he scoffed. The fact that Joseph was this pissed off on behalf of his co-workers was… well, it made Caesar’s heart do little flips in his chest. A warm smile spread on his lips and he pressed a kiss on the crown of Joseph’s head. Joseph turned his head to look at him, a small grin on his own face and Caesar kissed him again, on the mouth this time. Joseph let out a contented little noise.

“Are you gonna be okay?” Caesar asked after a moment. Joseph was back to leaning against him and Caesar’s fingers were in the brunet’s hair again. It was so soft.

“I’ll be fine,” Joseph said, waving his hand dismissively. “The boss won’t be breathing down our necks this badly once we really get started, so I can just ignore him after that. I just hafta endure for now, and then I’ll be on my way to replace his ancient ass!”

Caesar smiled and picked up his book again.

“Watcha baking?” Joseph asked, snaking his arms around Caesar’s waist. Caesar smiled softly and leaned back into the embrace. He hadn’t heard the Joestar come in, but it was a pleasant surprise.

“Banana bread,” he said. “From those bananas you insisted we buy but never ate.” He gave Joseph a pointed look. Joseph hummed as he started pressing little kisses against Caesar’s neck. Hopeless.

“So, how was work? Any better than last week?”

~x~

“Of course,” Caesar said, reaching into the cupboard for the flour container. It was rather empty, he noted. “You can start by filling this.” He handed it to Joseph. “Then you can mash the bananas in a bowl with a fork or something.”

“Sir, yessir,” Joseph saluted and squatted down to rummage through the cupboard where they kept their canned foods and surplus flours and other dry ingredients. Caesar went back to breaking eggs into the batter.

He glanced over at Joseph after a moment.

“No, Jojo, wai—” he started but it was too late. Joseph had turned the bag of flour upside down and its entire contents had whumped down into the empty box, a gigantic cloud of flour erupting from within.

Caesar closed his eyes and waved his hand in front of his face to blow away the flour dust as Joseph succumbed into a coughing fit. It was all his own damn fault though, so Caesar didn’t have too much pity to share. He opened his eyes carefully and assessed the damage.

There was a delicate layer of flour everywhere. It was on the counter, it was on the floor, it was on Joseph, his clothes and face and hair. Caesar sighed. This would be a pain to clean up.

“Haha… oops,” said Joseph once he had stopped coughing and took a look around.

“Oops?” said Caesar. Joseph grinned sheepishly and pushed a hand through his hair. A small puff of white dust rose into the air where he touched. “Please tell me, Joseph, what on earth made you think dumping the entire bag of flour into the container at once was a good idea?”

“Uhh, I really hadn’t expected it to… explode like that,” Joseph said. “Sorry about that.”

Caesar groaned softly.

“I am not cleaning this up, just so you know,” he said, pointing a finger at Joseph’s face.

“Right, right, of course,” said Joseph raising his hands in defeat. “I’ll just go get the vacuum—”

“You are not going anywhere!” Caesar exclaimed. “Look at yourself, you are covered in flour. You will stand there while I get the vacuum and then you will vacuum the entire kitchen, yourself included. And if you leave behind a speck of flour so help me god…”

Joseph hummed and looked away, pouting slightly as he drew little swirls into the sheet of flour on the counter. Then his eyes widened and he grinned and oh hell no he was gonna do something stupid Caesar knew that look he saw it in his nightmares—

Once again it was too late. Joseph dipped his hand into the flour container and grabbed a fistful, throwing it at Caesar. Caesar jumped back but he was still hit on the side of the face and he coughed a few times as he inhaled the dust that floated down.

Joseph was grinning, wide and stupid and brilliant, so proud of himself for hitting his target and Caesar was having a hard time being pissed in the face of such glee. He was still pissed though. He was very pissed.

“Joseph,” he growled in warning. Joseph snorted, slapped a hand on his mouth, and then dashed out
of the kitchen with Caesar on his tail. “Get back here, you asshole! I am going to strangle you!”

Joseph laughed, rounding the coffee table and putting it and the couch between the two of them.

“Why would I want to come there if you’re just going to strangle me?” he asked, still grinning widely.

“Because that is what you deserve,” Caesar said, taking a step right. Joseph countered it. “Accept your responsibility.”

“Never!” Joseph proclaimed, dashing to the side again as Caesar moved around the sofa. There was only the coffee table between them anymore. A light bulb lit behind Joseph’s eyes again and Caesar let go of any attachments to life because that man was going to be the death of him.

“For glory!” shouted Joseph with a laugh and then he stepped onto the coffee table. Caesar had a second to thank the lord that the table was as sturdy as it was before Joseph crashed into him and they both toppled down.

Joseph pushed himself into a sitting position on top of Caesar, laughing loudly. Caesar stared blankly at the ceiling.

“You okay there, Caesarino?” Joseph asked, after managing to calm down slightly.


“You want me to fix your boo-boo with a kiss?” Joseph asked with a grin. Caesar was decidedly unimpressed.

“You’re gonna have to kiss a little more than that if you want to fix this,” he said, sitting up and ushering Joseph off from on top of him. Although, he wasn’t too angry anymore. Their little chase, however short-lived, had been quite exhilarating. And just a bit fun.

No way he’d let Joseph know that though.

“Aww, Caesar, come on!” Joseph whined, snaking his arms around Caesar’s middle again as the blond turned to leave. “It was funny! Don’t go!”

“I have a half finished banana bread on the counter and an oven that’s probably hot by now,” Caesar said, prying Joseph’s arms from his waist and turning around. “And you have the entire apartment to clean, instead of just the kitchen.” He flicked Joseph’s nose with his index finger. Joseph whined loudly but Caesar gave him a look and returned to the kitchen.

Joseph did clean the apartment, after mild complaining. It ended up spotless.

~x~

“Hey! Caesarino!” Joseph called moments before Caesar stepped into the grocery store. Caesar turned around to see Joseph jogging towards him, a wide smile on his face. Caesar checked his watch quickly. Joseph was off work early.

“You’re off work early,” he said as Joseph smacked a quick kiss against his temple.

“Yep, all the interns got off early,” Joseph said, the both of them walking into the store. Caesar picked up a basket. “There was some kind of… incident.”

“‘Incident’?” repeated Caesar, picking up a cabbage head. Joseph took it from his hands and put it
back down. Caesar rolled his eyes.

“Yeah,” Joseph said, picking up a lettuce head instead and placing it in the basket. “I’m not 100% sure what exactly happened, but I think the guy in charge of integrating us, like, got attacked or something? Someone found him in the men’s room, hunched over a toilet bowl.”

“Haha, what?” Caesar laughed. He glanced at the shopping list and then at Joseph. “Seriously? Is he okay?”

“Yeah, he’s fine. A minor concussion maybe, but other than that no problem,” Joseph assured him, picking up a bunch of bananas. “At least that’s what they told us. Anyway, they were trying to figure out what happened and we weren’t getting any work done, so the boss let us go home. And we won’t have to come in tomorrow, so long weekend! Can we buy bananas?”

“You do remember what happened to the last bananas, right?” Caesar said, but didn’t protest when Joseph put them in the basket anyway. “Go pick up a few tomatoes, will you?”

Joseph did, and returned with the largest goddamn tomatoes Caesar had ever seen in his life. They continued to pace the store, picking out foods and talking about this and that, occasionally bickering about minor things like which toothpaste to get, or why Joseph shouldn’t buy three bags of Doritos at once.

Still, it was fun. The kind of casual intimacy that they’d certainly experienced before, but with a new, delicate layer of a different kind of domesticity. A fondness that swelled in Caesar’s chest when he watched Joseph consider between two packets of ground beef, his face serious and scrunched up in concentration. It was an amazing sensation, fascinating and exhilarating and just a bit terrifying, but ultimately so, so… nice.

And Caesar couldn’t believe how lucky he was to have found it, to have found it in someone who was already so dear to him, and he prayed to god he’d never have to lose it.
Lazy Day, or whatever

Chapter Summary

What could be better than spending the whole day in bed with your boyfriend? *Well...*

Chapter Notes

Sup. So, apparently my dad has managed find this fic, so... Hi dad! Enjoy the rest of this trainwreck!
I hope y'all are enjoying the end of the summer. I know I am! Today was an especially warm day and I spend most of it outside playing pogo with my friends instead of sitting here and finishing the next chapter like I should've haha. Next weeks weather is hardly of concern anymore, since I probably have to write nonstop for the next two weeks or so if I actually want to finish this thing on timeeeee~~
In any case, we're gonna be picking up the slack of the past few fluff chapters. Things are gonna start happening again!!!!! Amazing, I know!!! I mean, I could write these two being all happy domestic fluffly until the end of the times, but if I ever plan on finishing the *plot*, things will have to move forward again.
And move they shall.
Seeeee you next time~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Joseph blinked his eyes open slowly and started at the ceiling for a while. Then he reached under his pillow and pulled out his phone. 7:43. He sighed deeply. He didn’t have to go to work today but his internal alarm clock had still decided to wake him up before 8. Naturally. He glanced to his side, at Caesar who slept peacefully next to him, curled to his side, his hand resting on top of Joseph’s stomach and Joseph’s arm trapped under his head. Joseph let out a small sigh, his lips curling up into a soft smile, as he turned to his side to face Caesar.

He lay there for a long while, watching his boyfriend sleep.

*Like a creep*, a part of his brain commented.

*Like a romantic*, another corrected it. There was nothing creepy about it if they were already together, right?

Joseph leaned in and pressed a kiss on Caesar’s nose. It twitched as he sniffled and then shuffled a little closer. Joseph’s heart nearly burst in his chest and he grabbed Caesar to pull him in, suppressing a squeal. Because Joseph Joestar didn’t squeal, no matter how adorable Caesar was being. Caesar let out a small groan and stirred a little as Joseph pressed him tightly against his chest.

“Mmmmn… Jojo?” Caesar mumbled, managing to open one eye. He yawned. “What time is it?”

“About eight,” Joseph said. Caesar blinked.
“No,” he said, and turned around. Joseph chuckled lightly and allowed Caesar to resume sleeping. He’d try again after nine, he decided, and picked up his phone.

~x~

“Morning sunshine,” Joseph said around half past nine when Caesar stirred again, rolling back towards Joseph.

“Mm, morning,” said Caesar, yawning and pushing himself into a sitting position, with only slight difficulties. He blinked and looked back towards Joseph, who had sat up and was leaning against the headboard. Joseph smiled. “You’re still here,” Caesar said after a heartbeat.

“Yes,” said Joseph.

“I thought it was Friday,” Caesar said, scratching his head.

“It is,” confirmed Joseph.

“Don’t you have work then?” Caesar said, again after a moment. Joseph’s smile widened. Caesar really was out of it in the mornings. It was cute.

“Not today,” Joseph said easily, leaning forward to push his fingers into Caesar’s hair. The blond leaned in instinctively. “I told you, we don’t have to go in while they investigate what happened yesterday.”

“Oh, right, the fight in the men’s room,” Caesar said. He stretched and then leaned back against Joseph’s side. “So neither of us have work today. What do you want to do?”

“Hmmmm, I don’t really want to do anything,” Joseph said, his fingers massaging lazy circles into Caesar’s scalp. Caesar raised an eyebrow. “And by that I mean I want to do nothing for the whole day.”

“A lazy day?” Caesar asked with a small grin. “Just lay in bed?”

“Get up only to eat and piss,” continued Joseph. “I like the sound of that.”

“Really? What would we even do in bed the whole day?” Caesar asked, closing his eyes again as he relaxed. Joseph grinned.

“I can think of a few things,” he said, pinching Caesar in the side and nipping at his earlobe with his teeth simultaneously. Caesar flinched slightly and then huffed, looking at Joseph, not as disapproving as he probably meant to be.

“I bet you can,” he said, and then smirked and moved until he was straddling Joseph. He wrapped his arms around Joseph’s neck, pushing his hand into his hair and swirling a bunch of the strands around his finger. Joseph enjoyed the soft tug on his scalp. “I can think of a few myself,” Caesar said easily.

“Yeah?” asked Joseph, running his fingers up Caesar’s sides, keeping his touch feather light against Caesar’s warm, bare skin. “I’d love for you to elaborate.”

“Sure,” said Caesar with a smile. “But first…” He leaned in closer to Joseph, until his lips were almost brushing against Joseph’s ear. There was a soft puff of air as he inhaled. “Breakfast.”

He hopped off the bed and sauntered out of the room. Joseph stared after him, not entirely sure if he
should be disappointed or if he really should’ve seen that coming. When his stomach make itself be known via a loud grumble, he decided that a breakfast break wouldn’t be too bad and stood up to follow Caesar.

~x~

After breakfast—and thorough elaborating—they did find themselves staying on the bed, Caesar reading a book as he leaned against the headboard and Joseph using his thigh as a pillow while he tapped on his phone. The room was mostly silent except for the rustling of paper, but it was a comfortable silence, a familiar and easy camaraderie that the two shared as they continued to just be. It was moments like these that Joseph found himself enjoying far more than he would’ve originally imagined. It was almost crazy how much he appreciated, how much he relished the moments that they just existed side by side with Caesar. They weren’t even doing anything, and still Joseph couldn’t imagine being more content with his life.

And that was kind of a scary thought, if he thought about it too much. He tried not to, but he couldn’t help it. Because as scary as it was, it was also exciting. And he thought about his future, about their future because he couldn’t imagine his without Caesar in it. He thought about it throughout the day, when they got up for lunch and while he did the dishes and when he returned to the bed to find Caesar playing Piano Tiles 2 on his phone. He thought about their life together, tried to imagine what it could be like.

He imagined them in their thirties, working hard during the days and then coming home in the evening to be together, just like this. He imagined them in their forties, with a kid, which was all manner of freakout material, and not only because it was a huge responsibility, but also because he was lowkey looking forward to it.

He imagined them as old men, grey and wrinkly but full of life, laughing together at their grandkid’s weird hat and saying stuff like “kids these days” and “git off my lawn”, but never really meaning any of it. He imagined their whole lives in his head, ups and downs and twists, but never once did he imagine they wouldn’t be together. And it felt amazing and terrifying and natural.

The most natural thing in the world.

And it was an incredible feat that after all that thinking, Joseph still managed to speak without thinking.

“Do you,” he started, innocently enough, and Caesar looked up at him from the foot of the bed. “Do you think we should really get married?”

There was a tense pause. Joseph stared unseeingly at the ceiling, not yet having fully comprehended what he’d said.

Caesar let out a flat, breathy laugh. Joseph turned to look at him.

“Are you fucking serious right now?” Caesar said, staring at Joseph with a frown, his eyes unamused, offended. Scared? “Can we not do this again?”

“No, no, dude,” Joseph hurried to say, sitting up properly and grabbing Caesar’s hand in his. “Listen, Caesar, I’m serious.”

Caesar opened his mouth, but ended up just staring at him for a second.

“Why?” he asked finally. “Why would you bring this up now? It’s not— Haven’t we been playing around with this enough?”
“No, but—”

“Seriously, Joseph, this isn’t funny,” Caesar cut him off. “Nor is it appropriate, after everything that… Besides, we’ve only been dating for ten weeks, don’t you think it’s a bit early to be talking marriage?”

“Yeah, in other circumstances maybe!” said Joseph, who was starting to lose his temper. Why was Caesar being so difficult about this? “But I’ve known you for ever! Literally my whole life! Don’t you think that counts for something?”

“I don’t—” Caesar started but then cut himself off. Panic was shining through his expression. Joseph took a deep breath, to try and calm himself.

“I’m not saying this to hurt you or anything,” he said. “I just thought—”

Caesar’s cellphone exploded into life, blasting his ringtone in the room and both men jumped slightly. Caesar checked the caller-id as soon as he located the phone in the midst of the sheets.

“It’s my dad?” he said, seeming surprised. “Hold on,” he told Joseph and then to the phone, “Hello?”

His eyes widened. Joseph’s heart sank into his stomach.

“What?” he said. Joseph held his breath as Caesar turned to look at him, an indescribable look on his face. “Wh—How?”

Joseph extended a hand slightly towards Caesar, who immediately gripped it tightly.

“What does that— okay? Okay. At the—? She’s— Dio mio… Should I—? Yes, we can both… yes. Right now? Yeah, okay. We’ll meet you there. Bye.”

Caesar didn’t disconnect the call, he just let the phone drop onto his lap. He was staring through Joseph, his eyes unfocused.

“Caesar?” Joseph asked quietly. Caesar’s eyes regained their focus and he opened his mouth. Then closed it again. Joseph’s heart was hammering in his chest, he could hardly keep it contained. “Is everything okay? Is… is nonna Maria…?”

He couldn’t finish the sentence. He couldn’t even finish the thought.

Caesar licked his lips as he opened his mouth again, finally managing to produce words.

“Nonno William has woken from a coma.”

Chapter End Notes

OOP-- wait what?
Caesar’s mind was still reeling as he parked his motorcycle in the parking garage of the Speedwagon Foundation’s research hospital. He couldn’t believe what was happening; the whole situation felt much too surreal to be true, like a bizarre dream. His grandfather… couldn’t possibly—

“Do you think he’s actually woken up?” Joseph asked, pulling off his helmet as he got off the back of the bike. Caesar took his own helmet off as well, pushing a hand through his hair, and looked at Joseph.

“What’s the alternative? That everyone’s just playing a huge prank on me?” he asked, and it sounded ridiculous, he knew, but he wasn’t entirely convinced himself of what was the truth. He leaned back on his bike, then sighed and threw his leg off. “We’ll just… have to go up and see for ourselves.”

“I guess,” said Joseph, looking around to find the elevators to the main floor. “Where did your dad tell us to meet them?”

~x~

They made their way to the reception, where they met with Caesar’s parents and siblings, as well as Suzie and her mother. Only Romeo Quatro was missing, apparently having had to stay at the shop, but the rest of Caesar’s immediate family was there, on their faces somber, and in some cases confused, expressions.
Suzie’s hand gripped Caesar’s sleeve when he got close enough. It reminded him vividly of when they were young and she would hang onto him not to get left behind.

“I can hardly believe what they’re saying…” she whispered, and he could relate. “I always thought he was dead, I never thought…”

“I know,” he said. There wasn’t much else to say.

“What… happens now?” asked Joseph softly. He was holding onto Caesar’s other hand, for which Caesar was immensely grateful. It kept him grounded. It also kept him from turning tail and running as fast and as far as he could.

“Now,” he said, gripping Joseph’s hand a bit tighter, “we go meet my grandfather.”

~x~

They went into the room in smaller groups, as to not overwhelm him. Mario and Nina were first, along with Cecilia, and their children sat in the hallway, waiting to be called in. And the waiting, oh the waiting was horrible. It was nerve-wrackingly awful. It was like waiting for the job interview of your life, or maybe sitting in front of the principal’s office when you had no idea what you’d done wrong, except much, much worse. Caesar’s mind was whirring like always, jumping from scenario to scenario, each worse than the previous, each less and less likely.

But truth be told, he had no idea what to expect from when he would finally enter the room. He’d never met the man after all, he had died just three months before Caesar had been born. Or well, not died, apparently, but how could he have known? It wasn’t like anyone had made any effort to tell him his grandfather had actually been alive for the past 26 years.

Caesar rubbed his eyes and let out a sigh. The door opened and Nina peered around it, beckoning Suzie to enter the room. She swallowed as she stood up from her seat and Caesar gave her a reassuring smile, despite the tight knot forming in his own stomach. He could only imagine how she felt. She gave him a grateful smile back. Then she disappeared into the room and the door was closed again and the waiting resumed.

~x~

Caesar had no idea how long had passed until the door opened again and Suzie walked out with her mother. Nina hugged her daughter tightly and pressed a kiss on her cheek, her face almost uncharacteristically serious and tears evident in the corners of her eyes, before walking down the hallway and around a corner. She was wiping his eyes on her sleeve as she passed Caesar.

“She had to get back to the shop,” Suzie said quietly as she sat back down next to him. He nodded wordlessly and extended a hand to her. She took it and squeezed it. She didn’t say anything else and Caesar didn’t want to ask her.

Cecilia came out and looked over her children before her eyes finally landed on Caesar. She motioned with her hand that he should come in.

He froze. Completely froze.

His heartbeat was in his ears, loud and fast, his muscles tensed up, his breath caught in his throat. His eyes must’ve been the sizes of saucers and suddenly, despite the horribleness of waiting, the thought of entering that room was too much to bear. His whole body was locked up, he couldn’t make himself stand. He just… he just couldn’t.
Cecilia scrunched her brows and he could feel his siblings’ eyes on him and he was struggling to breathe, a cold sweat rising on his face. Joseph’s hand squeezed his arm and he managed to draw in a deep breath but—

Juliana stood up and Caesar’s eyes snapped to her. She was looking at him and then she nodded, understanding in her blue eyes and he let out a shaky breath as he managed to relax again. She walked slowly over to their mother and Cecilia let out a soft sigh before the two women disappeared into the room.

“Are you okay?” asked Joseph. Caesar put a hand over his where it was still on his arm and gripped.

“Not really,” he said truthfully. “But I’ll manage. Somehow.”

Joseph let out a small hum and rubbed his thumb on the side of Caesar’s arm. It was kinda nice. Despite the feeling in Caesar’s stomach that the world was falling on top of him.

~x~

The rest of Caesar’s siblings entered when Juliana returned, the three of them going in at once, staying in the room for an amount of minutes that Caesar couldn’t quite determine due to his slightly panicked state. It wasn’t as long as Suzie had been in though, and all too soon they came out and Caesar was the only one who had yet to go in.

Well, he and Joseph.

Joseph, who stood up and extended a hand to him, pulling him up from the chair and gently guiding him towards the door, never once letting go of his hand.

Caesar’s heart was going berserk again.

The room was rather dim. The lights weren’t on, but the blinds weren’t drawn either, so the late afternoon sun was illuminating the room well enough. It was a hospital room like any other, not too cramped but not terribly big, a door to the bathroom in one corner, a cupboard and a small counter with drawers against one wall. A bunch of hospital machines beeping, tubes coming out of them, crisscrossing on the floor and climbing up onto the bed. The bed. A man. An old man, leaning against the headboard, his hair and mustache gray, his face filled with wrinkles, his body shriveled due to lack of exercise.

His eyes, sharp and blue and full of life, crinkling at the corners as he grinned at the sight of the two men entering.

Caesar pressed a hand on his mouth. He couldn’t help the shaking.

Joseph put his arm across his back, squeezing his shoulder softly but steadily, and Caesar was grateful he didn’t have to stand there alone.

“Our oldest,” his father was saying somewhere off to the side, hugging Cecilia against him and looking at Caesar proudly.

“Hello, Caesar,” said William Antonio Zeppeli, his voice hoarse but strong and Caesar didn’t know what to do so he didn’t do anything. His grandmother was there, sitting on a chair by the bed, holding Will’s left hand gently between hers. “I have heard a lot about you.”

“I…” started Caesar, but he had no idea how to continue the sentence so he let it die on his tongue. His eyes were stinging.
“And you must be Joseph,” Will continued, turning his gaze to Joseph and smiling again. “You look just like your grandfather, you know that?”

He glanced towards Jonathan and Erina, who were standing on the other side of the bed. Caesar blinked, momentarily surprised to see them, he hadn’t even realized they were there, but of course they would be, it only made sense. They were best friends, weren’t they, of course Jonathan would be there by Will’s side as soon as he woke up. Come to think of it, Caesar would’ve expected to see Lisa Lisa somewhere around as well, but the woman probably had work—it was a Friday and still the working hours.

“It’s been said before,” said Joseph from next to him, and Caesar envied how at ease he seemed to be. Of course, one look at the Joestar, and he knew that it was mostly for show; Joseph was almost as shaken up as he was. And while that wasn’t a good thing, per se, it did make Caesar feel a little better about his own state of mind.

Will chuckled and then let out a small sigh.

“Well, I assume you both have some questions,” he said, his head lolling slightly to the side. “I sure did. Still do, actually.”

“How are you alive?” Caesar blurted out. Will blinked twice rapidly and Caesar turned red. “I mean, I’m glad that you are, but I just don’t… understand. What happened?”

“Ah, well, I might not be the best person to answer that question, honestly,” Will admitted, turning his face slightly towards nonna Maria. “I only just found that out myself after all.” He addressed her in Italian, “Would you mind telling them, dear?”

“Oh, alright,” she said, patting Will’s hand and letting out a longsuffering sigh. She was smiling widely though, a softness in her eyes that Caesar had seen before, but not quite like this. “Although I do believe you boys already know most of the story.”

Joseph and Caesar glanced at each other and then took a few steps further into the room. Nonna Maria started to explain.

“As you know, there were complications after the surgery,” she said, her voice calm and steady. “The surgery itself had been a success, but when Will wouldn’t wake up when he was supposed to, we started to worry something was wrong. The doctors were worried too, though they tried to calm us, saying that sometimes anesthetics worked differently on people, and then they started to do tests like crazy. Eventually they found out that he had… oh, what’s it called again?”

“Cyp4e2 polymorphism,” supplied Jonathan.

“That’s right, thank you Jojo.” Maria smiled, before continuing, a bit more somber. “Essentially Will’s liver couldn’t process the anesthetic properly so he ended up staying in a prolonged comatose state.” She spoke the words with the precision and emotionlessness that came from hearing the same thing told her over and over again. By doctors, no doubt. What Erina had said during the 4th of July had been nearly identical. “As time went by, the doctors became more and more certain he wouldn’t wake up. After all, the longer a coma persists, the more unlikely it is to recover from it. One by one they gave up on him…” She paused for a moment with a sigh, and then she smiled up at Will. “But I didn’t give up. I visited him every week since that day, as well as his birthday and our anniversary.”

Something clicked in Caesar’s head.

“Wait, so this is where you always disappeared to on Friday afternoons?” he blurted. Suddenly a lot
of things made sense. Ever since he’d been a kid, she had always been busy on Friday afternoons, despite being available almost always on other days, and he could never figure out why. Now that he thought about it, she had had some of her mysterious “appointments” a few times this year too, on his birthday and before that one horrid family dinner back in January.

“Exactly,” nonna Maria said happily.

It was unbelievable. What was even more unbelievable was how easy it could’ve been to find out; he had no doubt she would’ve told him had he only asked.

“Wow,” said Caesar. He didn’t have much else to say. “So, do you… do you get to go home now?” he asked Will.

“Well, I do have several months of rehabilitation ahead of me. After all, I can barely move as is,” Will said, surprisingly chipper for a man who couldn’t do literally anything. “But after that… I suppose I can.”

“If I know anything about your resolve,” said Jonathan with a twinkle in his eye, “You’ll be back home in no time.”

“How does that feel?” asked Joseph, tilting his head slightly. “It’s been so long, isn’t everything different?”

“I suppose it is,” Will admitted slowly. “But I don’t think change is necessarily a bad thing. Even before the surgery, I had accepted the possibility that I might die, and I had made my peace with it. Now, I am alive again, and I can’t be bothered to worry about the changing of the world, so long as my wife is by my side in it.”

Nonna Maria placed a soft hand on his cheek and kissed his temple.

“And I have kept the house mostly as you remember it,” she said. “I haven’t even touched your study at all! Once the doctors say it’s alright, you can clean it right up and continue your work like you’d never paused.”

“Mamma mia, Maria!” exclaimed Will. “It’s been 26 years, please tell me you’ve at least dusted in there!”

The only answer Maria gave was a giggle and another kiss on his cheek. Will sighed and shook his head. Or tried to, anyway.

“Sorry to interrupt,” said Mario, looking at his watch. “But I ought to get going. I still need to get back to the office tonight.”

“I’ll drive you. I can take the kids home as well,” Cecilia said and Mario nodded to her, grateful.

“Oh, I see,” said Will. Mario came over to the bed and clapped his hand on his father’s shoulder.

“I’m so glad you’re awake, padre,” Mario said, squeezing the shoulder before pulling away. He gave nonna Maria a quick hug and a kiss on the cheek as well. “We’ll come by again tomorrow, alright.”

“Have a safe trip,” nonna Maria said as Cecilia went to give her goodbyes to her in-laws, and to Joseph’s grandparents as well.

“We’ll see you tomorrow then,” Will said. Mario and Cecilia left, pausing briefly by Caesar to give him a pat on the shoulder and a hug, respectively.
“So, boys,” said William, looking back up at Joseph and Caesar. “Why don’t you two tell me a bit about yourselves?”

“Us?” Caesar asked, blinking.

“Yes, of course,” Will said with a wide smile. “Maria’s already told me something, but I’d like to hear about you from yourselves.”

“Okay then…” Caesar started, glancing at Joseph. He paused for a second, to gather his thoughts and try to decide what he should say. “Well, I turned 26 this year. I live with Jojo in an apartment in Greenwich Village. I, uh, I’m a design major. I graduated two years ago and have been working with a fashion designer called Tiffany Blews at her boutique since then.”

“Clothes, huh?” said Will and Caesar’s heart leapt into his throat. He hadn’t thought it would be a problem, it never had been a problem, but he was aware of how a man working in the fashion industry could, and often was, viewed. He waited for Will to continue, his own throat clammed up.

“Do you like it?”

He blinked.

“Yes, yes I do,” he hurried to say. He felt a heat rise to his cheeks but he couldn’t stop the smile from forming on his face. “Tiffy is a great boss and the work is very enjoyable.”

“That’s good,” Will said with a small smile and a nod. “You are lucky to have found your calling so early on in life. And I’m glad you have the courage to pursue it.”

“Thank you,” Caesar said.

“Oh, yeah, Caesar is great at his job,” Joseph chimed in, because it was physically impossible for him to not contribute to a conversation for a certain amount of time. “I sometimes go stalk him in the middle of his workday, and all the other employees totally look up to him. I swear, it’s like he’s the real boss.”


“Well, what about you, Joseph?” Will asked and Joseph’s eyes turned back to the man in the bed. “What do you for a living?”

“Oh, I just graduated university this spring,” Joseph said. “Economy. I work at a pretty big real estate firm as of three weeks ago.”

“Oho, real estate? Following in your mother’s footsteps then?” Will asked. “I heard she’s a big name in that business these days.”

“Yeah, kinda,” Joseph shrugged. “Though I don’t work for her company.”

“I see, I see. You’re trying out your own wings, then.” Will nodded. “Understandable. I hope that works out well for you.” Joseph’s grin widened.

“From what I’ve heard, he beat dozens of other candidates to the job,” Erina said with a smile. “It really shows that he’s in the right business, especially when you compare his success now to his grades in high school.” She gave Joseph a look. He laughed awkwardly and looked away. Jonathan hid his smile behind his hand.
“So, anything else?” Will asked, saving Joseph from further scrutiny by his grandmother. “If I understood correctly, you two were some kind of… an item?”


“Yes, it’s true,” said Caesar, who miraculously managed to keep the yet again rising panic out of his voice. “Jojo and I have been dating for about ten weeks now.” He paused, glanced at Joseph. “Are you… okay with that?”

“Of course I am!” Will laughed. Caesar felt himself deflate. “Why wouldn’t I be? As long as you’re happy, I’m happy. You have to stand by your family, right?” Will gave them a wink.

“Hell yeah!” said Joseph, and pulled Caesar against his side by the neck. Caesar let out a small shout at the sudden move but then laughed softly as he was hugged against Joseph’s firm body. He felt like a weight had been lifted from his heart. From what he’d heard about his grandfather over the years, he had gotten the impression that the man would be okay with Caesar’s choice of romantic partner, regardless of gender, but it still always made him a bit nervous when he revealed his orientation to a new person. He wasn’t ashamed of it or anything, but sometimes it was hard to predict how people would react.

“Isn’t young love sweet?” asked nonna Maria from her husband in Italian.

“It is indeed, love,” Will answered, and Maria took his hand once again.

Suddenly Caesar realized something.

“Ahh!” he nearly shouted, and everyone turned to look at him. “I have…” he started, suddenly finding it difficult to form the sentence in English and reverting to Italian, more subconsciously than anything. “I just realized… Nonna Maria, she gave me…” He motioned vaguely towards Will’s hands on the bed. “Your engagement ring.”

“Oh! Yes, she told me as much,” Will said and then smiled. “That’s alright though. She was right, I do want you to have it.” His eyes fell onto his lap, onto the simple gold band he had in his left ring finger. “I do still have the other one, after all.”

“Wait, what are we talking about?” asked Joseph, who apparently hadn’t understood the word in Italian. Caesar turned to him, somewhat uncertain how to explain that he’d had William’s engagement ring hidden in the drawer of his nightstand since the beginning of April, and that he’d meant to have given it to Joseph. At some point. Maybe.

He hadn’t decided yet.

He opened his mouth to say something—

The door to the hospital room slammed open and everyone in the room jumped. Dio Brando was standing in the doorway, grinning widely.

“William!” he exclaimed, throwing his hands into the air, and paraded into the room. “I’m so glad that you actually woke up!”

“Dio Brando?” said Will, sounding equal measures surprised and annoyed. It didn’t go unnoticed by Dio, who stopped and pressed a hand onto his cheek.

“My, my, what’s with the hostility in your voice?” he asked. “I would’ve thought you’d be glad to see me!”
“I don’t know where you’d get that idea,” Will said, unimpressed. “The last memory I have of you is when you sued both me and Jojo, and then refused to change the court date to accommodate my surgery.”

“Yes, well, I can see how that might leave a bad taste of me in your mouth, so to speak,” said Dio. “But, instead of focusing on what I didn’t do for you 26 years ago, you should really focus on what I did do for you this year.”

“What did you do to him?” asked Joseph. Dio gave him a look.

“For him, not to him,” he corrected and then grinned again. Joseph leaned instinctively slightly towards Caesar. “I helped wake him up.”

“Seriously?” asked Caesar, looking over to nonna Maria for confirmation. She let out a small sigh and turned to look at Jonathan.

“He did,” said Jonathan, his face carefully guarded neutrality. Erina’s face was clearly displeased, and she was looking out the window. Neither Joseph nor Caesar could hide their surprise.

“Well, well, seems like you might have a heart yet,” Will told Dio, who smiled sickly sweet at him. “What was it in for you, though?”

“Nothing, of course!” Dio said and it was clear there was something in it for him. “Nothing but to see my favorite brother happy. And for you to be awake again,” he added, almost as an afterthought.

“Sure,” said Will, evidently not believing Dio for a second. “How did you do it, then?”

“I have connections,” Dio said, smug. Joseph rolled his eyes dramatically and Caesar resisted a snort. “I heard of an experimental drug to help people recover from long term coma through one of my clients, and after some persuasion, Mr. Chan was good enough to help me procure some. Of course when I told Jojo the good news, I did stress that it was experimental, so there was no guarantee that you would actually wake up.” He shrugged. “It was ultimately his, and of course Maria’s, choice to use the drug, I simply felt it my duty to bring it into their awareness.”

“We consulted the Speedwagon Foundation’s doctors after Dio suggested the drug,” Jonathan said. “But they weren’t very convinced it would do anything, good or bad.”

“After some deliberation, we decided to give it a try,” said nonna Maria. “It’s not like we had much to lose.”

“And as you can see, William did wake up!” Dio concluded, gesturing with his hand at the frowning Zeppeli. “So in the end everything worked out great!”

“Hm… I suppose I should thank you then,” Will said. Then, to Caesar’s surprise, he started to raise his hand, extending it for Dio to shake. It clearly was a hard task for him, there was a tension in his jaw, but he did get it slightly off the bed. It was a miracle, really, and Caesar could hardly believe that Will would make such an effort for Dio’s sake.

Dio looked at it for a moment, a glint of disgust in his eye, and then grabbed it, and shook it briefly.

“You did come around eventually. Better late than never, isn’t that what they say?” Will said, a hint of sarcasm in his voice and a strained smile on his face. Guess it hadn’t been a sign of solitude after all.

“Indeed,” said Dio, wiping his hand on his pant leg, not that discreetly.
Caesar had had quite enough for the day.

“We should probably get going,” he said, drawing everyone’s attention to himself.

“We should?” asked Joseph, cocking his head.

“Yes, we should,” Caesar said, pointedly. “There’s starting to be quite a crowd here, don’t you think? It’s better if we leave for now. Besides, it’s starting to get late and I for one could use some dinner soon.”

“Right, okay,” Joseph said, catching on Caesar’s discomfort quickly. Caesar turned to address his grandfather once more.

“It was great to meet you, I’m so glad you’re actually alive,” he said, smiling widely and meaning it 100%. “We’ll probably drop by again in the next few days, if that’s alright?”

“Of course,” said Will. “It’s not like I have a lot else going on right now. It was lovely to meet you as well. That means you too, Joseph.”

“Likewise,” said Joseph and saluted. Then he continued, to his grandparents, “I’ll see you two later, too!”

“Good bye, Joseph, Caesar,” said Erina with a wave of her hand as Jonathan said, “Good night, boys!”

“Good night, Mr. and Mrs. Joestar,” said Caesar and the two of them, finally, turned to leave.

“A moment of your time,” said Dio Brando and Caesar felt a chill up his spine. “If you don’t mind, Caesar?”

“What?” said Caesar, turning around and staring the man down.

“I was just wondering if I might talk with you in private for a second,” Dio said, silky smooth and thoroughly unpleasant. “Won’t take long.”

Joseph took half a step closer to Caesar, like he was getting ready to physically fight the man if he so much as looked at Caesar funny—which, frankly, he kinda did, but he looked at everyone funny.

“Alright,” Caesar agreed after a heartbeat and Joseph settled back down.

“I was just wondering if I might talk with you in private for a second,” Dio said, silky smooth and thoroughly unpleasant. “Won’t take long.”

Joseph took half a step closer to Caesar, like he was getting ready to physically fight the man if he so much as looked at Caesar funny—which, frankly, he kinda did, but he looked at everyone funny.

“Alright,” Caesar agreed after a heartbeat and Joseph settled back down.

“Excellent,” Dio said and walked briskly out of the hospital room ahead of them. Out of the corner of his eye, Caesar could see the people left in the room exchange slightly concerned glances.

Dio took them a few doors down the hall, to an empty hospital room and opened the door for Caesar to pass through. Joseph put a hand on his shoulder as Caesar walked past.

“I’ll wait here,” Joseph said, leaning in and pressing a quick kiss against his temple. Then he whispered, “If you need me to come in and help you kick his butt, just shout, okay?”

Caesar couldn’t help but laugh a little.

“Thanks, Jojo, but I think I’ll be fine,” he said and gave Joseph a grateful smile. “I’ll be right back.”

Then he entered the room with Dio.

“Alright, so what do you want?” Caesar asked as soon as the door was closed.
“No need to be so snippy, I just wanted to have a little chat with you,” Dio said, smiling widely, his bright white teeth showing. Caesar had never seen anyone with canine teeth that sharp.

“Chat away,” he said and crossed his arms.

“Ooh, so defensive,” Dio tutted. “Alright, let’s skip the pleasantries.” He looked Caesar dead in the eyes and Caesar suppressed a shudder. “I wanted to ask you if you are actually serious about marrying that oaf of a man?”

Caesar paused.

“What?” he asked.

“Come now, Caesar, it wasn’t that hard of a question,” Dio sighed, overdramatic. “Are you serious about wanting to marry Joseph Joestar?”

Caesar stared at Dio for a long while, trying to wrap his head around why the man would want to call him into a private room to ask him something like this. He couldn’t understand. It made no sense. Finally, he shook himself out of his confused stupor, and answered.

“Okay, first off, we’re not actually engaged anymore,” he started with, just to get that out of the way. Even if Joseph had kinda asked him to marry him earlier on the very day, there was no way Dio would be the first one to hear about it. He hadn’t even answered Joseph yet! He hadn’t decided himself if he wanted to get married. Why the hell had Dio even assumed they were getting married again?? “Second off,” he continued to distract himself from the conversation he knew he’d have to have with Joseph later that night. “How is that any of your business anyway?”

“It’s not, I suppose,” said Dio easily, examining his nails, completely disregarding Caesar’s first point. “But you intrigue me. Remind me of myself when I was younger.” Dio looked him in the eye again and this time Caesar couldn’t stop the shudder. The look in his eyes, those light brown eyes that glinted almost red, unnerved Caesar somehow even more than his words did.

Caesar didn’t yet know much about Dio Brando, but he did know that he never wanted to be compared to the man, past or present.

“That’s why I want to look out for you,” Dio continued, finally leaning back again, and Caesar drew in a deep breath. “And I can’t help but worry that your… commitment to the Joestar might be ill-advised.”

Something flared up in Caesar’s belly at that, something burning and strong and angry.

“What do you mean?” he gritted through his teeth. Dio seemed very unconcerned for someone who claimed to be concerned about someone else’s wellbeing.

“Well, I don’t want to seem rude,” he started, which in and of itself was utter bullcrap, “but it does seem to me that Joseph is a bit, how do you say… childish.”

Caesar said nothing, just kept studying Dio in silence.

“Is that really what you need in your life right now? A manchild?” Dio continued, looking Caesar up and down, leaving goosebumps in the wake of his gaze. “I’d think you’d need more permanency in your life right now, you are 26-years old after all, and with suddenly having a grandfather out of the blue? Yes, you’d definitely need a solid foundation for your life, which is why it’s understandable you’d want to get married, but…” He paused, gave Caesar a pitying look. “To him? Really?
“Now, of course I am an outsider here, and you know him much better than I could ever hope to, but I can’t help but worry he won’t give you the stability you need.” He paused again, for dramatic effect. “I mean, he doesn’t really take things seriously, does he? He’s always goofing around after all, making jokes and pulling pranks. As I understand it, your entire relationship is built on one of Joseph’s practical jokes, isn’t it?”

At that point Caesar had had quite enough. Again.

“Alright look,” he interrupted and Dio fell silent with surprising ease, a sly smile still on his lips. “I’m not going to pretend I like you, and I don’t need you to pretend to give a shit about me. What I do need, is for you to shut the fuck up about things you clearly don’t know jack shit about, okay?”

“Very well, no need to get worked up,” Dio said, raising his hands in apparent defeat. “I was just trying to give a few words of friendly advice.”

“Friendly my ass,” muttered Caesar, and then strode past Dio to the door. “Thank you for your concern, but it is not necessary, nor appreciated. Good bye, Mr. Brando.”

“Good bye now, Caesar,” Dio sing-sang, not in the least bit offended, and Caesar closed the door behind him.

“You okay?” asked Joseph as Caesar walked past him, still fuming.

“I’m fine, don’t worry about it,” Caesar huffed. Joseph fell into step with him when he caught up.

“You sure about that?” he asked, but didn’t wait for an answer. “What did he want?”

“Nothing important, he was just goading,” Caesar said, though he couldn’t shake the feeling there had been a deeper meaning to Dio’s questioning. He tried to push it out of his mind though, he had enough to think about without that smarmy bastard.

“Caesar?” Joseph said when he realized Caesar’s growing discomfort. Caesar sighed.

“It’s nothing, really,” he said and gave Joseph a smile. “Let’s just go home.”

~x~

Home was a comfort, when the front door was finally closed and Caesar felt like he could breathe again. The day had started out so nice, and yet… He was more emotionally exhausted now than he’d been in a long time.

“Today… sure escalated quickly,” Joseph said with a laugh that sounded just a bit forced.

“Mm,” said Caesar, collapsing onto the couch and rubbing his eyes. He was probably pressing a bit too hard, starting to see stars, and he let his hands drop limp to his sides.

“You sure you’re okay?” Joseph asked, the couch dipping as he sat next to Caesar and pushed his fingers into Caesar’s hair. Caesar hummed again, in appreciation this time.

“I’ll be fine,” Caesar said and he was pretty sure it was true. He wouldn’t let Dio’s words get to him. They weren’t even true. Sure, Joseph often faced the world with a grin and a joke, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t reliable. Caesar trusted Joseph immensely, more than he trusted himself sometimes. Joseph would make a great husband, Caesar was sure of that, and he would love to be married to him!
He would… love to…?

Caesar paused to think for a second, to really think about their future, something he had tried not to do because there were so many ways that could go wrong.

“Did you really mean it?” he asked and Joseph let out a small confused hum. “What you said before my dad called?” Caesar turned to look at him, straight in the eye. “About marrying me.”

Joseph’s face fell serious, the look in his eyes calm and collected. Caesar held his gaze, studying it just as Joseph studied him and a moment passed between them, a heartbeat and an eternity.

“Absolutely,” Joseph said and his eyes confirmed.

Caesar stood up from the couch and left the living room.

“Wait what?” said Joseph, understandably confused, but Caesar was on a mission. “Where are you going all of a sudden?”

“Just shut up and hold on a minute,” Caesar said, pulling open the bottom drawer and carefully sifting through it. He could still hear Joseph’s voice from the living room.

“I can’t believe it,” he was whining. “We were having a moment and you just up and leave!? I was practically proposing here! The most important decision of our lives and you can’t even give me an answer before running off!” Caesar rolled his eyes and ignored him. Joseph was just being an overdramatic ass like he always was.

He finally found the egg, still wrapped in cellophane, still with a small bow on it. It looked just as good as it had when he’d gotten it, but that didn’t really guarantee anything. Although chocolate didn’t spoil that easily, did it? Caesar felt like he should know this.

Well, in any case, that was Joseph’s problem, wasn’t it?

“There you are!” Joseph huffed when he re-entered the living room. “What was so damn important it couldn’t wait two minutes?”

Caesar’s hand moved reflexively and before he had time to stop it, he had thrown the only thing in his hands at Joseph. It hit him smack in the middle of his forehead and ricocheted back into the air, spinning around a few times and finally dropping down onto the floor.

“Oops,” said Caesar.

“What the fuck??” said Joseph, rubbing his forehead and frowning. “What the hell was that for?? What even was that?”

“It’s—” Caesar started, taking half a step towards the couch, but Joseph had already bent down and retrieved the shattered chocolate egg from the floor.

“What the hell?” he said, turning the cellophane bag full of crumbled chocolate in his hands. The golden ring stuck out like a sore thumb from the midst of the dark brown. Joseph turned to look up at him, and Caesar’s face was on fire. “Caesar… what is this?”

“I can explain,” said Caesar.

“Is this an engagement ring?” Joseph asked, looking up at Caesar, eyes wide. Caesar drew in a deep breath and wet his lips.
“Yes,” he said.

“Why do you have an engagement ring??” Joseph yelled. Caesar sighed. He’d known this would happen. “Why was it inside a… a chocolate egg? Holy shit, is this an *Easter* egg? Have you had this since *Easter*??”

“Jojo…” Caesar tried to interject, but Joseph talked over him.

“Oh my god! I never even knew! Why did you have something like this planned? Have you wanted to get married since *Easter*? We weren’t even together back then! This is insane, I can’t believe—”

“Joseph!” Caesar shouted and finally, finally Joseph snapped his mouth closed. “Just… listen for a minute, okay?” Joseph nodded and Caesar rubbed his eyes.

“Nonna Maria gave me that ring during Easter dinner,” he explained, walking over and sitting down on the couch, leaving a good 20 inches between them. “She’d heard about an Italian custom where you propose with a ring in an Easter egg and she wanted to do something for us. I tried to decline, but she insisted, and since I had no intention of actually marrying you back then, I just hid it in my nightstand.”

“So nonna Maria gave you this…” Joseph mused, inspecting the ring closer. “Is… is this some kind of family heirloom?” he suddenly asked, looking up at Caesar again. “That’s a thing in Italy, right?”

“It is, actually.” Caesar confirmed, slightly surprised Joseph would know something like that. Had he… studied Italian engagement customs? “It’s nonno Will’s old engagement ring.”

“Woah wait what?” Joseph said, starting backwards a bit. “The nonno Will who just woke up? Shouldn’t we give it back to him then?”

“No, he said he wanted me to have it,” Caesar said with a shake of his head, his eyes on the ring still on Joseph’s palm. “They both still have their wedding rings, that’s apparently good enough.”

“Wow,” said Joseph. He looked down at his hand for a second, before reaching down with his other hand and carefully pulling open the bow. The knot slid open and the cellophane straightened and Joseph picked up the ring, holding it against the light. It glinted brightly, even if it had just a bit of chocolate on it.

“So you bringing this out now,” Joseph said. “Does that mean you do want to get married?”

“I…” said Caesar but words fell short when Joseph looked him in the eye, on his face an expression of pure joy and excitement. His heartbeat was in his ears and his face must’ve been as red as physically possible, judging by the heat that kept piling up. “…maybe.”

The cellophane dropped from Joseph’s hands and the chocolate flew everywhere as he grabbed the sides of Caesar’s head and pulled him in, kissing him earnestly. Caesar let his eyelids fall closed, helpless in the face of Joseph, like he always was. The kiss was great and lasted for a good while—Caesar wasn’t sure how long exactly, he wasn’t really paying attention to trivial things like time—and after tracing his thumbs across Caesar’s birthmarks, Joseph finally pulled away.

“Awesome,” he said and grinned. Caesar couldn’t help but laugh. Joseph pressed another, much more chaste kiss on his mouth and then slipped the ring into his finger. “It feels like it’s gonna be really hard to get off,” he said, giving it a tug to demonstrate his point, “but it’s not like I have plans to do that, so it’s alright.”

“Well that’s good,” Caesar said with a smile, and then sighed. “It’s too bad though… I think I’ve lost
the one you gave me, I have no idea where it is.”

“Oh, I know!” Joseph said, hopping up from the couch and dashing into his room. Caesar blinked, and looked after him with intrigue. Soon enough Joseph returned, his hand in a fist against his chest. “It was in your jacket pocket,” he explained, sitting down and opening his hand. The diamonds sparkled as the light hit them and Caesar had forgotten how beautiful the ring really was. “The jacket you left behind at the Estate when you, uh… ran away that night.”

“Oh,” said Caesar. Or course.

“I found it there in the morning, and I considered flushing it down the toilet,” Joseph admitted, scratching the back of his head sheepishly. “But then I couldn’t make myself do that, and I just… put it in a drawer and tried to forget about it.”

“I see,” Caesar said. He extended his hand, to pick up the ring from Joseph’s palm but Joseph closed it suddenly.

“No, wait,” he said as Caesar looked at him, surprised. “I wanna do this properly.”

He got off the couch, and kneeled down.

“Well, Caesar?” he asked, offering the ring, eyes shining even brighter than it did. “Will you be my wife for real this time?”

Caesar smiled softly.

“No,” he said. Joseph looked extremely confused. “But I will be your husband,” he continued and this time it was his turn to pull Joseph into a kiss.

“That’s fair,” said Joseph when they broke apart, and slipped the ring into Caesar’s finger.

It fit perfectly.

~x~

“Oh my god I knew it I knew it I knew it!!!” Suzie squealed on the other end of the phone line and Caesar winced. The phone hadn’t even been on his ear—it was on speakerphone—but that had been loud. “Oh this is the best day ever!! First nonno Will and now you guys?? Ahhth this is so great!!”

“Alright, alright, calm down Suzie,” Caesar said, rolling his eyes. Joseph just sniggered.

“Calm down??” she shrieked. “Are you kidding me? I’ve been waiting for this phone call since I heard you two had actually gotten together!”

“Wait what?” said Joseph, who was still amused, but now also a bit concerned.

“Don’t you two worry about one thing, I have everything under control,” Suzie was prattling on. There was a shuffling noise on the other end and then the sound of pages flipping. “I’ve kept the original plans, and I’ve been in touch with people, I can work this out…”

“Hold on Suzie, what??” Caesar interrupted. “The original plans?”

“Yes! I mean, you’re going to use those, right??” Suzie said, a steady tapping sound on her end, probably a pen on her notebook.

“No??” Caesar said, locking eyes with Joseph, who was looking just as panicked as he was feeling. “I
mean, that’s two weeks from now! We don’t have time to organize a wedding in two weeks!”

Suzie scoffed. “Weren’t you listening? I’ve got everything under control!” she said. “I’ve been keeping the preparations going, everyone’s been kept on hold. We’ll have to switch the date to Friday though, otherwise no one will be able to come with this short a notice. Then there’s just a few details that need to be finalized, the cake and your tuxes, but most things are all packed up and ready to go.” She paused to take a breath. Caesar had no words. “We knew you’d come around in time.”

That… sounded weird.

“Wait, ‘we’?” Caesar said, frowning. “Who’s ‘we’?”

“Me and Auntie Lisa Lisa of course! I couldn’t’ve done this without her!” Suzie said cheerily.

“Mom???” shouted Joseph. “What the fuck has mom been doing, helping you plan our wedding??”

She laughed. “Are you kidding me? She’s the reason I’ve been able to maintain everything in order while we wait for you two knuckleheads to realize your big gay love for each other!” She laughed again, a soft giggle. Joseph kept muttering “mom?” under his breath over and over. “But anyway,” she said after a moment. “I am so psyched for you guys but I gotta go now! I’ll call you tomorrow about the preparations, okay? Bye!”

“No, wait, Suzie!” Caesar tried, but she’d already hung up. He swallowed thickly and turned to Joseph.

“Dude, two weeks,” Joseph said.

“I know,” Caesar said.

“Do you think we can do that?”

“I don’t know… Maybe? It is very soon.”

“No time to change our minds?”

“Are you implying something?”

“No, no, of course not,” Joseph said, patting Caesar on the head. Caesar smacked his hand away and then sighed.

“I guess…” he said slowly, but he couldn’t help the tug of a smile in the corner of his mouth. “We’re getting married in two weeks.”

Chapter End Notes

FUCKING FINALLY AMIRITE???
Never fear, Tequila is here!

Chapter Summary

It could've been worse. They almost went to Tibet.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I know I said Saturday, butttttt I've had a surprisingly social few days, so I didn't have time to write. But it's done now, after quite some difficulty. I hope you like!

I don't really have much else to say, except I am going to die next week because Uni starts and I need to finish the final chapter and

Anyway, bye~~~

REMEMBER TO DRINK RESPONSIBLY!!!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Caesar straightened his collar as he smiled at his reflection. Suzie had really outdone herself this time.

This was by no means the first suit he’d commissioned from “Quatros’ Dress and Tailor”, but it was the first Suzie had made all on her own, and it was considerably fancier than his previous ones. It was a wedding suit, after all. And Caesar was impressed.

It was a creamy white three-piece suit, the peak lapel and the vest a slightly darker shade than the rest. The shirt was pleated in the front, and instead of a traditional necktie, Suzie had gotten them ascot ties, a beautiful sky blue. The lining of the coat had a barely visible patterns of bubbles, which Caesar thought a fun detail. According to Suzie, Joseph’s suit was otherwise identical, except the coat’s lining had small stars. Caesar hadn’t seen that suit for himself yet, but it was bound to be amazing, if this suit was anything to go by.

“Oh, Caesar, it fits so well!” Suzie interrupted his musings as she exited one of the dressing rooms in the back, and he turned to face her. She came to stand in front of him and smoothed his lapels and his shoulders, setting the fine fabric better into place. “I was worried I’d taken too much off the shoulders, but it fits like a glove! Oooh, you look so dashing!” she added giddily, clapping her hands together.

“All thanks to you,” said Caesar, leaning down to place a small kiss on her cheek. She giggled and then bit her lip, her bright smile filling her whole face. He glanced around the room. “Say, where’s Jojo? Is he still in the dressing room? It’s been a while.”

“Ah. Yes,” said Suzie. Caesar squinted at her. She turned to look away, face feigned innocence. Something was up.

“Jojo?” he called out, still staring intently, and disapprovingly, at Suzie. She looked back up at him, smiling slightly, almost nervously, as she scratched her neck. The door to the dressing room opened
behind her, and Caesar’s eyes were drawn to the movement. He froze.

“So? How do I look?” asked Joseph, leaning dramatically against the doorframe.

_Holy fuck._

Joseph was… in a dress. In a wedding dress. And it fit him.

It was a strapless dress with a corset top, sequins on the front and a string of small pearls running along the neckline. The hem was a layered ball gown, falling beautifully from his hips, the pure white gossamer on top of it all giving it a lovely sheen. It only reached Joseph a little over mid-shin, but he had put on pure white stockings for reasons only god knew. He’d even gone as far as put pearl earrings on.

Caesar couldn’t look away.

“I know, I look so good you’re speechless,” Joseph said, spinning around and posing again. Suzie started to giggle mercilessly. Joseph pushed a hand into his hair and winked at Caesar.

“I still can’t believe you actually wore it,” she said, still laughing lightly.

“Why do you even have a dress that fits him?” Caesar managed to get out, finally finding at least some of his voice.

“Oh, it was commissioned by this one pro-wrestler lady,” Suzie explained. “I happened to notice that she had the same measurements as Jojo, although she was shorter, and then when I mentioned it to him, he wanted to try it on.”

_He wanted to try it on? Seriously?” Caesar asked, flabbergasted. He could not drag his eyes off Joseph, goddamnit. “Why?”_

“Why not?” Joseph shrugged. “I got to see your cute little stunned face. I really am… stunning, aren’t I?”

He sniggered at his own pun—which was honestly barely even that. Suzie’s phone rang.

“Oh, it’s mom, excuse me a bit,” she said and left to the backroom as she answered the phone.

Joseph looked after her with a small pout. Caesar was still staring at him.

“So, Caesarino…” Joseph said after a minute, turning his eyes back to Caesar. “Suzie did a great job, huh? That suit looks _gooooood_. It really brings out your waist.”

“You’re one to talk,” Caesar said. Joseph grinned, dragging a hand down his sides.

Caesar wasn’t sure how much more he could take.

“Sorry for the interruption, guys,” Suzie said as she returned. She was tapping her phone. “But unfortunately I’m gonna have to leave for a bit. There’s apparently some kind of a delivery that needs to be picked up that mom had forgotten about. She and papa are gonna be tied up all day, so I gotta go get it instead.” She looked up at the two men. “You’ll be fine by yourselves for a bit, right? I should be back in an hour or so.”

“We’ll be fine,” Joseph assured her. “Right, Caesar?”

“Of course. Take your time,” Caesar said.
“Great! We don’t have any scheduled clients for today, and I’ll flip the sign to closed, so nobody will accidentally wonder in, and you won’t have to worry about that either,” Suzie explained, stuffing things into her handbag which had been behind the counter. “I’ll be back as soon as I can. See you!”

“Bye, Suzie!” Joseph called out after her and then they heard the bell tingle and the shop fell quiet. Joseph’s face split into a grin.

“So… alone at last,” he purred, leaning back against the doorframe again. “…groom.”

Caesar had Joseph pushed against the back wall of the dressing room before he had time to move an inch. He pulled the door closed behind him, sealing them in.

“Haha… what are you doing, Caesarino?” Joseph tried. Judging by his face, he hadn’t expected his advances to work quite so well.

Goddamn.

“What am I doing?” Caesar asked, lifting a hand between them and running a finger along the neckline. Joseph shuddered ever so slightly. “I think the more appropriate question is… what are you doing?”

“Ahhh, I just…” Joseph said. Caesar ran his hands down his sides and he paused to take a deep breath. His face was beet red. “I wanted to see your reaction?”

“Well, mission accomplished,” Caesar said surprisingly easily. His hand had found its way into the giant, poofy hem of the dress. “You’re seeing my reaction. Are you enjoying it?”

There was hem everywhere. He let his fingers swim in the fabric and around Joseph’s waist. He pushed their bodies closer, pressed tightly against the back wall.

“Well? Are you?” he whispered, their lips so close but not touching. Not quite. A heartbeat passed between them.

“Yes,” Joseph growled and crashed their mouths together.

~x~

“I’m back!” Suzie called, accompanied by the bright jingle of the bell above the door. Both Caesar and Joseph looked up from what they’d been doing as they waited.

“Welcome back,” said Caesar, checking his watch. “You were fast.”

“Yeah, the whole process was pretty quick as soon as I found the place,” she said, letting the heavy looking box slam onto the counter. Then she turned to the boys with a frown. “But where did you go?”

“What do you mean?” Caesar asked, glancing at Joseph sideways. Joseph’s ears were the faintest hue of red. “We’ve been here the whole time.”

“Really?” Suzie asked, tilting her head. “It’s just that, I returned pretty soon after I’d left because I forgot to take the order list, but I couldn’t find you here.”

“That’s weird,” said Caesar, barely resisting the smile fighting its way to his face. “What do you think, Jojo?”

Joseph flinched, slightly. Suzie turned to look at him.
“Well, we,” Joseph said, trying to come up with a more appropriate answer than the correct one. “We did go into the back for a bit, didn’t we?”

“The back?” Suzie repeated, her eyes flicking to the back of the room, and the row of dressing rooms. “But if you went into the dressing rooms, why are you still wearing the same thing you were when I left?”

Joseph looked down, as if only then realizing he was still clad in an honest to god wedding dress. His cheeks exploded with color. Caesar was having way more fun watching the scene unfold than he probably should’ve; after all, he would get chewed out too if Suzie found out what exactly had been going on in the dressing room when she’d come back.

“You see…” started Joseph. The bell above the door jingled again. Joseph’s entire posture deflated when Suzie turned to address the person walking in.

“I’m sorry, we’re clo—” she got out, before realizing it was Smokey. “Oh, it’s you.”

“Well that was kinda bland,” Smokey said, looking mildly displeased. Suzie gave him a halfhearted shrug and turned back to the box on the counter. Smokey on the other hand turned to Joseph and Caesar. “Hey guys, you ready gooooooo what the fuck are you wearing, Jojo??”

He started to laugh. Joseph grinned.

“You like?” he asked, standing up and giving a quick twirl.

“Oh my lord, that is brilliant,” Smokey wheezed out, holding his stomach. “That is… amazing, really, I can’t believe…” He cleared his throat, tried to regain his composure. “Okay,” he said. “Okay.” Then he threw one of the paper bags in his hand towards Caesar. He caught it easily, and opened it up.

“What is this, exactly?” he asked, pulling out a long slice of fabric with a zigzag pattern on it. Joseph had been thrown a similar bag, and he was now holding up an olive green top that looked at least three sizes too small and would definitely show his midriff, if he somehow managed to get it on.

“Suit up, gentlemen,” Smokey said with a grin. “It’s time for… a bachelor’s party!”

~x~

Their outfits were awesome. At least that’s what Joseph thought. Clearly Smokey and Suzie had put a lot of effort into them; they’d actually watched the show that Joseph and Caesar’s wedding theme was based on, and tried to recreate the costumes of some of its main characters. And the costume they’d made him was one of the coolest things he’d ever had on. Even if he had bare arm and his midriff was showing, making it kinda cold walking outside. Joseph didn’t know why Caesar was complaining, at least he had a jacket.

Smokey led their party of four to one of their not-so-usual bars, the Santa Mexicana, which is where everyone else—Mark and Angela, some of Joseph’s old Uni friends, and a few of their other closest friends—were already waiting. And already drinking. There was a loud cheer and a raise of glasses when they entered the bar.

Joseph was starting to get excited.

“Say cheese,” said Angela, snapping a picture of the four of them before they had time to react.

“Angie, please, you gotta give a girl some warning!” Suzie said, trying desperately to groom her hair
into place. “It was so windy out there, my hair is a mess!”

“Sorry Suzie,” Angela laughed. “But I want these pictures to be as natural as possible, so I can’t give people too much of a notice.”

“Sounds like my kind of a photographer,” Joseph said with a grin. “Hey, try to get a pic of Caesar when he’s eating something, he has the funniest faces.”

“Yeah, and you look like a hamster, with your mouth stuffed so full it looks ready to explode,” Caesar retorted, crossing his arms over his chest. “Ever hear of ‘chewing’ and ‘swallowing’?”

“Oh, I swallowed alright,” Joseph said and Caesar looked like he almost choked on air. Smokey sniggered.

“Let’s go get some drinks!” interrupted Mark, before Caesar had a chance for any kind of rebuttal, leaving Joseph the winner of that round.

Soon enough they were gathered up into a large booth at the back of the bar, everyone with a drink in front of them. Joseph and Caesar had been told they weren’t allowed to order anything by themselves, but instead everything would be ordered for them by someone else. The first drinks had been picked by Smokey, who had decided to start easy with two shots of tequila for the both of them. Joseph was so glad he’d eaten a proper dinner that day, because if he’d come here with an empty stomach…

“Bottoms up, boys,” said Smokey, toasting with his own pint of beer.

Joseph picked up the salt shaker, sprinkled some on his palm and handed it over to Caesar, who looked rather grim. Joseph hadn’t actually tried tequila before, but he knew Caesar had, so that face wasn’t really encouraging, but he was somewhat curious. He licked the salt off his hand, picked up his shot, glanced at Caesar one last time, and then downed the tequila.

It burned like hell as it washed over his tongue, the salt leaving a trail that was simultaneously better and worse than the taste of the alcohol. It had tasted horrid. Were there actually people in the world who enjoyed drinking these? Maybe he just needed to be more drunk to not care about the taste. Oh god, the taste, he needed something to get it out.

A wedge of lemon was shoved into his mouth and he blinked. Right, that. Caesar rolled his eyes again, before wincing slightly at the sourness of his own lemon. Joseph for one really liked the taste of lemon, so this was a really great way to get rid of the tequila’s aftertaste.

“You wanna do the other one right away?” asked Smokey over the murmur of conversation filling the bar, leaning his chin on his hand. Joseph made the face at the thought of another one of those.

“It’s better to just get it over with,” said Caesar, who was already putting more salt on his hand. “It’ll haunt you for the rest of the night if you leave it hanging.”

“Always the voice of reason,” Smokey said. While Joseph wasn’t too happy about it, it was a pretty valid point. He squinted at the 1.5 fluid ounces of pure horribleness resting in the shot glass, and then, to not give himself enough time to think about it, he threw it back and swallowed.

“You forgot the salt,” said Caesar calmly as Joseph fumbled for the lemon and stuck it in his mouth.

“Don’t care,” Joseph said around the wedge. Then he got an idea. And like all his ideas, it was amazing.
“Suit yourself,” said Caesar, licking the salt and downing the shot. Then he reached over to the plate that had previously had one more lemon wedge on it. It didn’t anymore. His eyes widened and he whipped his head to look at Joseph, who had put the last slice of lemon between his own teeth, and was now grinning at him. There was a collection of "ooh"s from the rest of the party.

“That’s mine,” Caesar said, frowning. It was probably at least partially because of the taste still in his mouth.

“Come and get it,” Joseph said challenged, wiggling it between his teeth. Caesar’s eye twitched slightly, but the next second he had already lunged forward, wrapping his own mouth around the part that was still sticking out of Joseph’s. Their lips touched for a millisecond, before Caesar jerked back again, dragging the lemon from between Joseph’s teeth.

“Happy?” he asked, leaning back on his chair and pulling the chewed out lemon peel from his mouth. Joseph shrugged.

“I had been hoping to make out for a bit,” he admitted, twirling the shot glass in his hand to appear nonchalant.

“In front of everybody?” Caesar asked, gesturing to the rest of their friends, all of whom were very much staring at them, on their faces looks ranging from giddy to curious to mildly uncomfortable. “I didn’t know you had such voyeuristic tendencies.”

“Oh, don’t mind us,” said Suzie, who seemed the most content to just sit and watch Caesar and Joseph do… anything, probably. “You just keep doing you.”

Joseph glanced at Caesar and waggled his eyebrows. Caesar rolled his eyes again.

~x~

An hour or so passed without much event, catching up, swapping stories, and just generally chatting. Joseph and Caesar got new drinks, this time ordered by Suzie, who got them some kind of fruity cocktails. It wasn’t something Joseph would’ve likely ordered himself, but it was pretty good, so he wasn’t about to complain. After the tequila, he wasn’t going to complain about anything.

Smokey stood up and cleared his throat. The conversation died down and everyone turned to look at him.

“Alrighty then, it’s time for our first event,” he declared, and took something out of his pocket. He pressed a small cardboard box onto the table and Joseph grinned. “Poker.”

“Regular…” Joseph asked, and then locked eyes with Caesar, giving him a sly smile. “Or strip poker?”

“Funny you should ask,” said Smokey and started to dig through his bag. Caesar gave him an incredulous look. “The first round is solely between our two grooms-to-be, and will feature a surprise punishment to the loser.”

“A punishment?” asked Caesar.

“Yep. I’ll give you a few hints though,” Smokey said. He took out a big, big, bottle of tequila and put it on the table.

“What is with you and tequila tonight, Smokey?” Joseph asked, strained. He didn’t think that anyone would be able to drink that bottle by themselves and if that was what Smokey was planning, he was
going to escape, even if it was his own bachelor’s party.

“Don’t worry, you won’t have to drink the whole bottle,” Smokey assured, because apparently Joseph’s face was easy to read. Then he put another item onto the table, a small oval shaped... something. Joseph picked it up. It was purple, and plastic, and had some kind of a clip on the other side and several ribbons coming from it. It was the weirdest thing Joseph had ever seen.

“Smokey, what the fuck—” he managed to get out before Smokey pressed a finger to his mouth.

“Shush, you’ll find out,” he said, and then picked up the deck of cards from the table. “Let’s play.”

They were both given five chips and Smokey started to shuffle the cards. Joseph needed to win this, he needed to win _bad_, but _ensuring his win_ without touching the cards would be hard. He didn’t even have sleeves to slip cards into... _wait_. He did have something didn’t he?

“You both know how this works,” Smokey was saying as he dealt them both five cards. “One chip to start, the one who gets all the chips wins. Questions?”

“You only dealt me four cards, Smokey,” Joseph said, spreading the cards in his hand and true enough there were four of them.

“That’s weird, I thought I gave you five,” Smokey said, slid one more card across the table. Joseph grinned behind his hand and went to pick the card up, only to get a hand slammed on top of his own.

“Hold up,” said Caesar and reached over. Joseph tried to lean back, but with Caesar’s hand still holding his he couldn’t move, and Caesar easily reached inside his scarf and pulled out the card he’d slipped there. “What’s this then?” Caesar asked, holding it between his fingers, showing it to everyone.

“Oops, you caught me,” Joseph said and stuck out his tongue. Caesar sat back down on his chair with a huff.

“Are you really so desperate that you need to _cheat_, Joseph?” Caesar said and tutted.

“I don’t know what Smokey’s planning with that tequila but I’m really not keen on finding out,” Joseph said, picking up the new cards that Smokey had just dealt them. The man in question just grinned at Joseph. “Besides,” he continued, leaning over the table to stage whisper, “it’s not cheating unless you get caught.”

“That seems like a really bad life philosophy,” Caesar said with a frown, looking his own cards over. “And you _did_ get caught, so...”

“Whatsoever, let’s just play,” Joseph said, flipping one chip onto the middle of the table.

They played six rounds. Caesar seemed to be getting lucky reading Joseph’s bluffs, and so was in the lead with seven out of the ten chips, but Joseph had a winning hand and he would turn this around right now.

“You ready to end this, Caesarino?” he asked, dropping the remaining two chips on top of the starting two. “All in.”

Caesar squinted at him, glanced at his cards and then picked up his chips.

“Alright, Joestar,” he said, dropping them onto the pile. “Let’s dance.”
Joseph grinned.

“Straight flush,” he said, setting his cards down, and leaning back on his chair. There was another chorus of ‘oooh’s from the crowd around them. Joseph would’ve been impressed too. It was a pretty good straight flush, seven to Jack, there was absolutely no way Caesar could beat it, unless he had—

Caesar smirked. Joseph’s heart stopped.

“Royal flush,” he said and the party erupted.

Joseph stared at the cards on the table, his mouth hanging slightly open, as people patted Caesar on the back. Joseph glanced up at the Italian, and he seemed much too pleased with himself, staring down his nose at Joseph.

“So close,” he said, condescending. Joseph gritted his teeth and then something caught his eye. A beam of light, reflecting from the floor. He looked down just in time to see Caesar pull his foot away. He looked up as Caesar slipped the small pocket mirror into his jacket pocket.

“What the…” Joseph said, frowning.

“It’s not cheating unless you get caught,” Caesar mouthed at him and grinned even wider.

“Aw, too bad, Jojo,” said Smokey before Joseph had time to start picking a fight. “Good gamble, but you know what this means…”

Joseph’s eyes widened slightly and flicked to the tequila bottle. He swallowed.

“I’ll tell you what to do with that in a moment,” Smokey said with a smile way too gleeful for his own good. “But first, it’s time for a little costume change.”

~x~

As they waited for Joseph and Smokey to return from the men’s room, Caesar and the rest of the party got a new game going. Angela was the dealer, allowing her to snap photos of everyone when she didn’t have to hand out cards. That peace lasted for about twenty minutes.

“Would you like some tequila, good sir?” came a rather high pitched voice from behind him, and suddenly Caesar was uncomfortably aware off someone standing right behind him. Someone big.

Everyone else was looking behind him, on their faces expressions ranging from surprised to confused to amused.

“Uhh,” Caesar started as he turned around. The first thing he saw was purple. “N-no, thank youuu…” he continued as his eyes traveled up the impossible anatomy and he trailed off when he finally saw the person’s face. “Jojo?”

“Right in one go!” laughed Joseph, propping the bottle in his hand against his hip. “Am I pretty?”

“Who the fuck did your makeup?” Caesar’s mouth asked, instead of much more sensible questions, such as “why are you in drag again?” or “why did you even agree to this?” or “is this going to become a thing now?”

“I did it myself,” Joseph said with a blink. Apparently that wasn’t what he’d expected Caesar to say. That made two of them. “Why, is there something wrong with it?”

Caesar didn’t even know where to start telling Joseph what was wrong with it. He was interrupted
by Smokey however.

“It’s punishment time!” he called out. “Jojo’s task is to get rid of the contents of the whole tequila bottle by offering it to the other patrons. The thing is, he has to wear this get up!” He gestured up and down Joseph’s ridiculous dress. “Only after the whole bottle is empty can he change back to his other clothes.”

Caesar thanked god he had won the poker game.

“You say that like I want to get out of this amazing outfit,” Joseph laughed. “Alllllright, time to find my first victim!”

He dashed away from their booth.

“Don’t—” Caesar started to call after him, but he was already talking to a guy at a different table. “…harass people…” Caesar sighed.

“He’ll be fine,” said Suzie. “Probably.” Caesar gave her a look. “I mean… Jojo has a certain kind of charm making it hard for even strangers to dislike him too much.”

“I suppose…” he said, rubbing his face. “Still, I should probably go after him, before he accidentally starts a brawl.”

By the time he’s crossed the bar to Joseph, it did seem like a brawl was already close. The man he was talking to was big and annoyed and clearly drunk, not to mention his blond hair was cut in a military-esque flat top, so his muscles likely weren’t only for show.

“Verdammt, Mann, get out of my face with that tequila!” he was yelling and Caesar was getting ready to step in with an apology, but then Joseph paused.

“Hold on,” he said and squinted at the man. “Stroheim?”

The man stopped—as did Caesar—and frowned at Joseph. Then recognition seemed to hit.

“Joseph Joestar!” he shouted and all of a sudden the mood had changed much better. “I didn’t recognize you under all that paint! Why the hell are you wearing that atrocity?”

“Oh, uh, well, that’s…” Joseph said, looking down at his outfit. “It’s actually my bachelor’s party, so…”

“Ohh, that explains it,” the man apparently called Stroheim said with a nod.

“Uh, Jojo?” Caesar said, drawing Joseph’s, and Stroheim’s, attention to himself. He tried to put on a polite smile. “Who is this… exactly?”

“What’s up with your getup then?” Stroheim said before Joseph had time to reply. “It’s not your bachelor party too, is it?”

“Well,” said Caesar.

“Actually!” said Joseph, putting a hand on Caesar’s shoulder. “Stroheim, this is Caesar, the one I’m getting married to.”

“Oh,” said Stroheim, looking surprised, but Joseph didn’t give him time to say anything else.

“And Caesar, this is Rudol von Stroheim,” he continued. “I met him in Mexico once, when I went
on a trip there with Speedwagon. Gramps had been supposed to go with him, but he couldn’t make it so I went instead and Stroheim was one of the expedition workers. He…” He paused and then looked at Stroheim. “Wait, I thought you died.”

Stroheim laughed loudly.

“Sure the pillars broke down and the whole ruins collapsed on me, but that’s nothing a little German science can’t fix!” he said and then took off his right hand from the elbow. “It’s a prosthetic! Latest technology, works just like a real one. Ziemlich cool, ja?” He reattached the arm.

“That is so cool,” said Joseph, a childlike twinkle in his eyes. “So you’re like a cyborg!”

Stroheim laughed again.

“I suppose I am!” he said and then jabbed himself in the eye. It fell out. Caesar flinched back, surprised. “My eye is a fake too, but that I can’t use yet. But with German scientists, it’ll be no time before they can make me a working eye.”

“I hope they do,” Joseph said with a grin. He was poking the fake eye rolling on the table. Caesar could feel his own eye twitch.

“Anyway,” he said, to distract himself from the eye that he could swear was staring right at him.

“Weren’t you supposed to get rid of that tequila, Jojo?”

“I’ll take the tequila,” Stroheim said, slapping the eye back into its socket. “If you drink one with me.”

Joseph made a face.

“Fine,” he said, after a sigh. “For Mexico.”

“For Germany,” Stroheim corrected, pouring them both a shot into the glasses Joseph had been carrying around with the bottle. He picked one up and toasted. “Prost!”

“P…prost?” Joseph said and threw the drink back. Caesar watched with amusement as Joseph made another face and then stuck out his tongue. “That’s nasty,” he said and then, “Shit, we don’t have any more lemons!”

“You still have some of Mark’s beer though, you can wash the taste away with that,” Caesar suggested.

“Great idea!” Joseph said and then pressed a very hard kiss on Caesar’s cheek before pulling away with a grin. Caesar had no doubt that there was a gigantic lipstick smudge on his cheek now, and he gave Joseph an unimpressed look. Joseph ignored him completely though. “Well, it was nice meeting you again Stroheim,” he said instead and Stroheim gave him a salute. “Good to know you’re not… well, dead, I guess.”

“It was nice to meet you,” Caesar said as well, offering Stroheim a smile he hoped was polite and a bit apologetic.

“You boys have fun!” Stroheim said. “Thanks for the alcohol, and Glückwünsche!”

They left the German to his newly acquired tequila and started back towards their booth. They were almost there, when Joseph’s chest started to buzz. Caesar blinked in surprise as Joseph pulled his phone out of his fake tits and frowned at the caller id.
“Hello?” he answered, pressing a finger into his other ear. “Who… Tomoko?”

Caesar frowned. He couldn’t remember a Tomoko in Joseph’s friend group.

“Is this important, I’m kinda in the middle…” Joseph said. “Wait, I can’t hear… here, I’ll move to somewhere less crowded.” Then he turned to Caesar, covering the phone’s mic with his hand. “I’ll be right back, okay?”

“Sure,” said Caesar, and Joseph left, walking to the back where the restrooms were. Caesar stared after him for a moment, before his attention was caught again by the rest of the party.

Joseph came back pretty soon, but then disappeared again about twenty minutes later. Finally, Caesar found him, walking back into the bar with a dazed expression on his face.

“Jojo?” he called, and Joseph blinked, his eyes focusing on Caesar. “You okay?”

“I’m… yes,” said Joseph. “Uh, sorry, I just… Had to meet someone outside for a bit. Did I miss something?”

“No really, but I think the next… ‘event’ is just about to start,” Caesar said, glancing back at Suzie, who was smiling deviously. “What happened outside? Was it about the phone call?”

“Yes. No, it’s—! It’s…” Joseph said, somehow managing to look panicked and out of it at the same time.

“Jojo! Caesar! Come on!” Suzie called.

“It’s a long story, I’ll tell you later,” Joseph settled on, and clapped Caesar’s shoulder as he pushed past and back to their booth. Caesar could swear he said “probably” under his breath.

Caesar was slightly concerned.

Chapter End Notes

The original plan was to make Stroheim an actual nazi butttttttttt that didn't go exactly as planned. Now he's just super patriotic (like he is in canon heyy)
Also disclaimer; I haven't studied a minute of German in my life, this is all from google translate (pls tell me if it's wrong)
The Night Before

Chapter Summary

Everyone has trouble sleeping the night before their wedding, right?

Chapter Notes

Hello hello my lovelies~~ It's almost time! (i know the original date was 1st of September, but they decided to move the date because who has time to attend a wedding on a thursday with two weeks of notice? no one, that's who also suzie was supposed to mention it when they tell her but i forgot to include that. I've corrected it now tho) Anyway, that's all for this one, it's just a short little thing until we get to the monstrosity that is the final chapter. I hope you like it ^^ Bye~~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s nearly up to his knees as he trudges through the snow, cursing softly under his breath all the while. It had been a dumb fight, a goddamn dumb fight, and he hates that he’d let it escalate so far even after he’d promised himself he’d try to be more reasonable. He had tried to do the smart thing for a change and this is where is had got him.

How was I supposed to know about his goddamn daddy issues, Joseph thinks to himself, in all honesty more annoyed at himself that at Caesar. But the Italian had never said anything about his father or his past, how could Joseph had known? Although, in retrospect, Caesar not talking about it should probably have been a huge red flag that something was fishy. After all, he’s so proud to be a Zeppeli, to be a legacy, that not talking about his dad is…

And now Caesar’s run off again, going out all alone, with no backup, like he always does, that idiot. All alone…

Joseph sets his jaw and walks faster.

He’s almost out of the woods, finally. The snow level isn’t much easier to manage out in the open, but at least the tall metal gate looms just up ahead. Behind it is the house, in all its grandeur. It’s a bit menacing, honestly, as Joseph looks up at it. Caesar’s footprints are still clear in the crisp snow and he hurries to follow them, a bad feeling in his gut urging him to walk faster. He reaches for the gate that Caesar had left open and grips the thick metal bar.

The ground shakes violently and a jolt of energy blasts through him, like a shockwave of an explosion, a tidal wave rushing past, and he freezes on the spot. Even after it’s passed, he still feels tingly, the undercurrent of the wave lingering inside him. His breath is caught in his throat, his heart hammering like crazy in his chest, a burning dread gathering into the pit of his stomach.

There is no doubt about it. He recognized the energy, he’d recognize it anywhere, anyplace. He’d recognize it in his dreams, the spark of it so familiar to him, the flow of it no more foreign in his body
than his own, almost comforting in its own way…

Caesar’s ripple.

His feet unstick from the ground and he dashes towards the house.

Joseph enters, carefully, through the remnants of the doorway and looks around the foyer. The signs of combat are as clear as they are everywhere, and Joseph forces himself to breathe steadily. The walls and the floor are in pieces, cracked beyond repair, the stairs near completely destroyed. A huge piece of the ceiling has broken off and fallen down, resting with finality in the middle if the room. The slab is shaped like a cross and Joseph drags his eyes off of it, unable and unwilling to look at its almost mocking form.

Something moves in the corner of his eye and he whips his head around, suspicion in his head, but hope in his heart.

“Caesar?” he calls the room before he can stop himself, but it’s not Caesar. It’s not Kars either, or Wamuu, it’s—

It’s a bubble, floating alone in the air near the middle of the room, its red hue stark against the earthy tones of the rest of the foyer. There’s something inside it, Joseph can barely make that out, something like a rope coiled on the bottom.

Joseph swallows thickly.

“Caesar?” he calls out again as he starts to make slow progress through the room. He rounds the piece of ceiling as far as possible, something about it making him uneasy.

“Caesar, come on! This… this isn’t funny, Caesarino!”

His eyes are fixated on the bubble, his throat feels like clamming up, his heartbeat is in his ears.

“Caesar, please… you can come out now!”

He stops and stands completely still, terrified beyond belief.

“This…Caesar…” he says, further words dying on his tongue.

He reaches directly up with his hands, hesitant at first. The bubble starts to float gently down towards him, and Joseph is holding his breath, waiting, frozen. He’s scared, he doesn’t want this, he doesn’t want to see it, but he watches its steady descent anyway, watches until it’s all the way down, in his hands and it touches his fingertips—

It breaks with a soft pop and Joseph’s world breaks with it.

The last remains of ripple surge through his body, in his veins and in his lungs and in his heart, and he clutches the blood soaked bandanna in his hands and he cries out Caesar’s name. He cries and he cries and he howls, he sobs, big fat tears rolling down his cheeks and he shouts through them. He screams at the universe, he curses it to hell and back, he cries… and he clutches the bandanna, the ring it’s tied around. He cries.

A soft hand on his shoulder, Lisa Lisa’s, and he thinks she’s saying something, but he doesn’t know, can’t hear from the tears and the pain.

“…o,” she tries a little louder, but he still can’t hear.
“…jo,” she says, more demanding, the grip on his shoulder getting more forceful than comforting and he clashes against it. He doesn’t want it! He can’t handle it! His chest hurts, his head hurts, he hurts so bad he can’t—

“Joseph!” says the voice but it isn’t Lisa Lisa. He’s being shaken, strong hands on his shoulders, and he cries, in pain, in sadness, and he cries, raw and emotional. He cries, he—

His eyes snapped open and he gasped loudly.

“Jojo?”

In the dim light of their bedroom, he could see Caesar’s face in front of him, worry lining his eyes and brow furrowed. Joseph dragged in a shaky breath and reached a shaky hand towards it. His fingertips collided with Caesar’s cheek, warm and soft and firm and real, and he grabbed a hold of that precious face and dragged it in, crashing their mouths together.

Caesar let out a surprised sound but Joseph didn’t care.

Joseph’s face was wet and probably snotty as all hell, but Joseph didn’t care.

The kiss was hard and sloppy, their teeth clacking together and their lips not quite meeting right, but Joseph didn’t care.

Caesar was there, that he cared about.

He pulled Caesar close to him and clung onto him for dear life. Caesar wrapped his own arms around his torso, rubbed circles in his back as Joseph buried his face in Caesar’s neck and inhaled.

After a moment Joseph let out a long breath.

“You alright?” Caesar asked quietly, though he made no effort to move.

Joseph made a noncommittal noise and a movement not unlike a shrug. They sat there in silence for a while longer.

“You died,” Joseph whispered into the silent room.

“What do you mean?” asked Caesar.

“You died, and I felt like dying too. I was dying,” Joseph said. Caesar had tensed ever so slightly in his arms and his hands had stopped their previous rubbing motion. “And you… you sacrificed yourself to ensure I would make it. Why, I don’t— I didn’t want you to do that, why did you do that?” He clutched the back of Caesar’s shirt in his hands, his knuckles turning white under the power of his grip. “Why?”

Then his voice broke and a half a sob escaped his mouth.

Caesar stayed quiet, continued the rubbing.

“It’s okay,” he said finally, quietly. “It was just a dream. I’m not dead, and you’re not dying, and we’re both okay.”

Joseph nodded, face still pressed into Caesar’s shoulder.

“I know,” he said. “I know. But it felt terrible nonetheless. It was so real…”
Caesar hummed softly, a resonant vibration in his chest and Joseph focused on that. That was what was real, that right there, Caesar warm and steady and alive against him, not cold and crushed and dead under—

Joseph stopped that line of thought immediately.

“I’m sorry, I woke you up,” he said instead and he could feel Caesar shake his head.

“Don’t be,” he said quietly, pressing a kiss against Joseph’s temple. “I wasn’t sleeping very well anyway. Must be the nerves or something.”

Joseph huffed out a short laugh. “I guess,” he said, and then flopped down on the bed, pulling Caesar along with him. “Tomorrow’s finally the day, huh?”

“Yeah,” Caesar sighed, resting his head on Joseph’s shoulder. “Hard to believe this is actually happening.”

“I know, right!” Joseph said, the thoughts of the next day pushing out all the rest of the negativity that had seeped through from the dream. “But it’s gonna be great. I know it.”

“Yeah?” said Caesar. “I hope so too.”

They fell into a comfortable silence. Joseph stared at the ceiling, smiling dumbly at nothing in particular. It had been a wild year.

“It’s crazy, though,” he mused out loud, “how much family I’ve gained this year.”

“Mmhm,” said Caesar, shifting a little, already half asleep again.

“And I don’t just mean having your insanely large family as in-laws, but somehow I’ve gained actual, Joestar family members.” He was just prattling on now, just saying whatever came to mind. It helped him relax again. He pushed his fingers into Caesar’s soft hair and then chuckled lightly. “I mean, not many people can say they’ve found out about a great uncle, a cousin, and a baby in the span of—”

He slapped a hand to his mouth.

“A what?” asked Caesar, his voice rising dangerously as he pushed himself up on his elbow.

“A, uh… a couuuuuuuusin?” Joseph tried and Caesar slapped him on the shoulder.

“Where the fuck did a baby come from??” he demanded.

“Yeah, that is usually how babies are made,” Joseph said. His head was running empty and all his useless mouth was providing was this shit? That pun didn’t even make sense! Caesar glared at him.

“Joseph,” he growled in warning.

“I didn’t get a baby!” Joseph huffed. He was getting defensive, great. That ought to go well with Caesar. “I just… apparently have a baby.”

Caesar paused.

“What’s the difference??” he shrieked, sitting up abruptly. “What the hell does that even mean??”

“Calm down!” Joseph said, with a bit more force than Caesar was probably willing to tolerate at the
moment. He quickly continued, sitting up as well, before Caesar had time to butt in. “Do you
remember Tomoko?”

A flash of recognition passed Caesar’s eyes, but the frown on his face said that he didn’t.

“She was the exchange student from Japan we had for the spring semester three years ago,” Joseph
explained. This time Caesar really seemed to remember. “We had a, well, a fling back then, while
she was still in the States.”

“She called you,” Caesar said, his eyes shifting as he thought, a frown on his face. “During the
bachelor’s party, I heard you say her name on the phone.”

“Yeah,” Joseph said and pushed a hand into his hair. “They’re visiting New York and she wanted to
tell me about—”

“They?” Caesar said, because of course he noticed. Joseph cursed internally. “She was there with the
baby?”

“Uhh, well… yeah.”

“And you’ve known… since Sunday?” Caesar asked. “You’ve actually seen the baby…”

“More like a toddler, I think he’s like over two…”

“Joseph! That is not the point!” Caesar sighed, rubbed his eyes. “When were you planning on telling
me?”

Joseph paused. That was a bad response.

“Seriously?” Caesar asked. “You weren’t even going to tell me you had a son?”

“No! No, of course I was gonna tell you!” Joseph hurried to say, panic rising in his chest. “I just
didn’t… I didn’t know how, or when, I mean… it was kind of a shock for me too, I had no idea
Tomoko was pregnant when she left. Hell, she didn’t know she was pregnant when she left! I…” He
paused. “I was still trying to wrap my own head around it…”

Caesar sighed softly. It looked like he’d calmed down a bit and Joseph let out a relieved chuckle and
swallowed. There was a lump in his throat but his mouth kept talking despite it.

“Besides, it doesn’t really matter much,” he said. Caesar stilled beside him, but he was still a bit too
shaken up to notice. “Tomoko’s going back to Japan next week and taking the kid, so it’s not like—”

“Oh my god,” Caesar said, his voice barely above a whisper. Joseph stopped dead on his tracks.

“Doesn’t matter? It’s a goddamn child, Joseph, of course it matters!”

“Whoa, wai—!” Joseph tried but Caesar talked over him.

“How can you be so nonchalant about your own child?” he nearly shouted.

“Noncha—” Joseph paused, took a breath. “It’s not like there’s much I can do about it! Tomoko is
raising the kid! In Japan! What the fuck do you expect me to do?!”

“Be responsible!”

“What does that even mean? You want me to marry her instead??”
Color drained from Caesar’s face.

“Don’t even joke about that,” he said, voice low and full of contempt. His eye twitched and he looked away. “You always…” he said, much more quiet. “You always…”

His eyes widened.

“He was right,” he whispered and pushed a hand into his hair, gripping it tightly.

“What?” Joseph asked, much more confused than annoyed, reaching a hand towards Caesar. Caesar slapped it away and then looked at him, like he’d startled himself. Joseph blinked. “Caesar?”

“Cazzo,” said Caesar, and then, “I can’t— I need to—”

“Talk to me, Caesar,” Joseph said, extremely worried now, trying again to reach for Caesar. He dodged the touch.

“No,” he said and then stood up. “No, I need to… I need to go.”

“Go?” Joseph asked, getting out of the bed on the other side. “Go where? It’s the middle of the night, Caesar!”

Caesar was pulling on pants. He looked up at Joseph and Joseph died a little inside.

“I’m sorry… Joseph,” he said and then rushed out of the room. Joseph was too stunned to move for a second, but then he sprinted after him.

“Caesar!” he yelled, finally catching a hold of his arm seconds before the other man disappeared through the front door. Caesar wrung his arm away and Joseph stepped back.

“No, you don’t—” he said and then swallowed. “I can’t do this. It won’t work.”

“What are you talking about?” Joseph asked, his heartbeat in his ears again. Caesar was… he was… “It’ll work. We can… we can make it work.”

“No, Joseph,” Caesar said, voice barely audible. “Good bye.”

He turned around.

“Cae—!”

The door closed on his face.

Joseph was frozen on the spot for a second, everything was frozen. Then he punched the door, hard, and rested his forehead on it.

“Shit,” he gritted out between his teeth. He stood there for a while.

Then he pushed himself off the door and went back to bed. Not much else he could do. Caesar would cool off for the night, get his head back on straight, and he’d meet Joseph at the Estate tomorrow.

And if Caesar didn’t show up, well… that would be future Joseph’s problem.

Chapter End Notes
OOPS.
Something Old, Something New; the Ceremony

Chapter Summary

The wedding day. Probably. (Part 1 of 3)

Chapter Notes

Oh. My. God. I am dead. And the chapter is not finished. (this is like cesar's birthday all over again orz)
Seriously, this thing blew up in my hands so much I had to cut it into two parts. I just... really needed to get at least something out for you guys on the actual wedding date.
UNFORTUNATELY I am currently not at home, I'm in Tracon for the whole weekend so I won't probably finish the chapter before... Monday, maybe idk man I'm so sorry.
(also posting on my phone is helllllll it fucks up my italics and line breaks fffffffuuuuuu they're probably still fucked, ignore it pls i'll fix it when i get a computer)
But yeah, I see you guys just loved the last chapter (hah) and I hope you'll like this one too~~
See you when I finish the second part haha.............

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Friday—always, always a Friday—was a beautiful day. Sure, there were a few clouds in the sky and the autumn wind was a bit chilly at times, but it was a really beautiful day. Just the kind of crisp, clear day that was well suited for outdoor activities, say... a wedding.

That was, of course, assuming that the other groom showed up.

Joseph paced the floor in his make-shift dressing room, which had been set up in one of the rooms near the kitchen that had used to be a servants’ room back in the day. He was anxious, even more so than most grooms in their wedding day were. At least most people knew where their future spouses were fifteen minutes before the ceremony.

The door creaked as it opened and Joseph’s heart leapt into his throat.

“Oh,” he said as Smokey walked into the room, and he couldn’t quite mask his disappointment.

“Sorry. I’m not him,” Smokey said, giving Joseph an apologetic smile.

“Any news?” Joseph asked.

“Not really...” Smokey admitted. “But all the guests have arrived and been seated, so everything’s ready. Or, well...” He paused, glanced to the door. “He’s cutting it kinda close, isn’t he?”

“What about Suzie?” Joseph asked and Smokey sighed. “Any word from her?”

“No, no one’s seen her,” he said, tugging at the small braid at the nape of his neck. “I’ve tried calling
her many times, but she hasn’t answered yet.”

Joseph whined and shuffled his hair.

“I am losing my mind here!” he groaned. He grabbed a hold of Smokey’s shoulders, making the smaller man jump slightly. “He’s gotta come, right? There’s… there’s no way he won’t, right?”

Smokey opened his mouth, but then just shrugged, on his face an expression much too hopeless for Joseph’s liking. He groaned again and dropped onto a chair.

“I don’t know what I’ll do if he doesn’t show up,” he said quietly. “And I don’t mean just the wedding… what if he doesn’t come back at all?”

“What do you mean?” Smokey asked with a frown.

“Caesar… he’s always been there, you know,” Joseph said, pushing a hand into his hair again. “Even before I was born, he’s been… there. And the thought of this wedding getting cancelled pales compared to the thought of him… not being there anymore.”

“Man, Jojo…” Smokey said, rubbing his neck. “I don’t even know what to say to that.”

“I don’t even know what I did,” Joseph sighed. “Or, I mean, at first he got mad about the whole baby thing, but he then it seemed like he’d understood, but then he suddenly got even more angry!”

“Did you say something?” Smokey asked.

“I don’t know! Probably!” Joseph shouted. “But I always say stupid shit, he doesn’t usually take it this badly…” He paused, sighed again and looked back out the window. “Last night I thought the best thing to do was just let him clear his head, but now… now I’m worried he’s actually run off.”

“Dude, no way,” said Smokey. “He wouldn’t do that.”

“Are you sure? Because I don’t know! I don’t know anything anymore!”

“What a shame… seems like the poor bridegroom is a bit fickle.”

Joseph whipped his head around, startled, to find an unpleasant visitor leaning against the doorframe.

“Excuse me?” he said, glaring at Dio, who just gave him a look of feigned innocence, as if he hadn’t just chimed in uninvited for the sole purpose of insulting Caesar.

“I’m just saying,” Dio said, tugging at the sleeve of his garish yellow suit—who in the world had told him he looked good in that? “That if he runs off the night before the wedding, perhaps he has some… personal problems with the matter. Not the best husband material, that’s for sure. Commitment issues, you know how it is.”

“No, I don’t know how it is,” Joseph said, annoyed. “And I don’t remember asking for your opinion. This is a private conversation, thank you very much.”

“Well, haven’t you people ever heard of closing the door?” asked Dio with a grin so unapologetic that Joseph simply marched over and slammed the door in his face. He could hear soft chuckling through the door, and then receding footsteps. He sighed.

“I thought you said everyone was seated,” he said to Smokey, giving him a glare. It didn’t have much behind it.
“He was,” Smokey said, crossing his arms. “He must’ve slipped out after me.” He paused, looking pensive. “You don’t think… he has a point?”

“Of course not!” Joseph answered immediately. Then he paused and thought about it. “Or, well… I don’t know. No, no, it’s not like he said, he made it seem all… terrible.” He set his jaw. “Caesar might have some issues, and I know I have issues, but that wouldn’t stop him from keeping his promise. Caesar will show up.”

“Let’s hope you’re right,” Smokey said, checking the time from his phone. “Because we gotta get to the ceremony site.”

“Right,” Joseph said. “Let’s go then.”

They left the dressing room and made their way out back and into the garden. Joseph took a deep breath when they stepped outside into the cool air.

Caesar would show up. He had to.

~x~

The guests were getting jittery. Joseph was getting jittery. It was 2 o’clock. 2 PM. 1400 hours. The ceremony should start. There was muttering in the crowd. Speedwagon looked around, uncertain.

Joseph was sweating bullets.

Smokey leaned in from behind him.

“You okay?” he whispered.

“Not really,” Joseph hissed through his forced smile. “But it’s okay. He’s gonna come.”

“If you say so,” Smokey said quietly as he stepped back again.

Another tense minute passed. A voice rose over the rest of the chitter, just loud enough that Joseph knew it was on purpose. He gritted his teeth.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if the whole wedding gets called off,” Dio was saying to whomever was unfortunate enough to be sitting next to him. “I heard that the two fought quite a bit last night.”

“Huh? Fought?” said someone else. Just like that it was spreading all across the crowd, like wildfire.

“Fighting before the wedding? Do you think they’re calling it off?”

“The whole thing did seem kinda rushed, maybe they’re not ready?”

“It was already cancelled at one point.”

“I heard the entire relationship is actually a practical joke.”

All through this Dio was staring straight at Joseph, looking so incredibly smug that Joseph was just a second away from walking over there and punching his teeth out. Smokey put a hand on his elbow, to stop him.

“Just a little ass kicking,” Joseph said, but Smokey tightened his hold and shook his head.

“Too bad,” said Dio, smirking. “I guess that’s the end of that.”
That was as much as Joseph would take.

There was a loud yelp from behind them and everyone turned to look, stunned into silence. Joseph could hear shuffling and whispered arguing from behind the hedge that stood between the house and the garden, and he waited, breath caught in his throat, for something to happen. Finally, two people stepped into view. His heartbeat tripled.

~x~

“Are you a goddamn idiot?” Suzie said, smacking him in the arm. Caesar glared at her. “You did not break up with Jojo because of something a creep like Dio Brando said!”

Suzie had been kind enough to let him in in the middle of the night when he’d appeared at her door with no explanation, but now it was morning and Caesar was starting to regret his choice. He had had to explain everything when she had pointed out that they should get going to the Estate if they wanted to be on time.

“Did you not hear what I said?” he asked, huffing. “He has a baby. And he talked about it like it was no big deal!”

“Oh my god!” she exclaimed, throwing her hands into the air. “Jojo always says the dumbest things! You should know better than to take him at face value by now! And he did have a point.” She shoved a finger in his face when he tried to open his mouth. “If Tomoko is taking the baby back to Japan, there is nothing he can do about it. At least not right now.”

“Well… yeah, but…” he tried.

“This isn’t really about Jojo, is it?” Suzie said, her voice much more tender than it had been. She touched his shoulder gently. “You’re doubting yourself, and then lashing out on him.”

Caesar didn’t say anything.

“I get it, I really do,” she sighed. “You’re scared. That’s understandable. This is a big step, and a life changing one at that. But you need to be honest with yourself. Do you want to break up with Jojo?”

“No!” Caesar shouted much faster than he would’ve imagined.

“No!” Caesar shouted much faster than he would’ve imagined.

“Do you love him?” she prompted.

“I… Yes,” he said. “Yes, I do.”

“Good. Then I really think we ought to get going,” Suzie said with a smile. “It might seem like you’re not ready for marriage, but I think that both you and Jojo really need something stable right now. Otherwise you’ll just end up running around in circles like headless chickens again in a few months.”

She laughed.

“Really? Headless chickens?” Caesar asked, but he was holding back a smile as well.

“Well, it’s not like much will change after the wedding,” she said, as she stood up from the couch they’d been sitting on. “You boys already act like an old married couple anyway.” She paused, thoughtful. “Hmm, you think I should’ve pursued a career in psychology instead? Constantly sorting out your relationship problems really makes me feel qualified.”
“If you do end up changing your field, I hope you don’t forget about doctor-patient confidentiality,” he said, standing up as well.

“Hush you, chicken,” she said and then grabbed his arm. “Now that you’ve got your head back on, you need to get dressed, we’re suuuper late already.”

Caesar checked his watch. Discounting the time it took them to get to the Estate, he had exactly fifteen minutes to prepare, and even then he’d get there at the exact time the ceremony was supposed to start.

“Cazzo, when did it get so late?” he cursed, hurrying into Suzie’s room with the girl at his heel.

“While you were busy running around,” she said and Caesar would’ve glared at her but he didn’t have time for that. “You are super lucky I had to reattach that one button and have your suit here, otherwise you would’ve been late.”

“We might still be late,” he said, pulling his t-shirt off. “I’m just glad you’ve already dressed.”

Suzie twirled around, her blue dress spinning.

“Now hurry up and put your clothes on,” she said. “Jojo is probably dying out there.”

~x~

Caesar parked the motorcycle in front of the Estate and pulled off his helmet. He stared up at the large house, his heart beating loudly in his chest.

“It’s two o’clock, we can still make it!” said Suzie, checking her watch as she hopped off the bike. She dusted her hem and corrected her hair a bit. “My hair probably looks super messy, but no time to do anything about that. At least it’s not open, so… Caesar?” She’d started to walk briskly towards the house, but stopped when she realized that he wasn’t following.

Caesar was still staring up, holding his helmet in his hands.

“Oh my god, you are not starting to second guess yourself now!” Suzie huffed, returning to the bike and snatching the helmet from Caesar’s hands. He blinked, slightly startled, and looked at her.

“But Suzie,” he tried. “What if I’m not ready? What if neither of us are ready?”

“I’m going to be frank with you here, Cee,” Suzie said, setting the helmet down. “Joseph Joestar is the best goddamn thing that has ever happened to you. You are so much happier, so much more lively with him, and you are not going to let your goddamn commitment issues ruin this for you.” She huffed out a small puff of air, and with it she closed the conversation. “Now get moving, we’re late!”

“Right,” said Caesar. “Right.” He threw his leg over the bike and they hurried to round the house. Caesar nearly slipped on the wet grass as they rushed down the small hill leading to the garden. They came to a stop next to the arch that was cut into the hedge that circled the garden. On the other side waited the wedding party.

Caesar’s heart was still beating wildly in his chest.

“This is it!” Suzie said, smacking Caesar on the ass. Caesar yelped loudly, turning to his cousin.

“Suzie! What the hell!” he hissed. She gave him an innocent smile. “What did you do that for?”
“What?” she asked. “It’s for good luck!”

“How was that good luck?”

“Don’t question it, let’s go!” She grabbed a hold of his elbow and tugged.

“No, Suzie wait—!” he started, but she’d pulled him into the gateway. The garden opened up before him.

Caesar gasped softly.

The garden was brimming with sunflowers. They were tall and beautiful and bright and Caesar’s breath was caught in his throat. They were so vibrant, he had never seen sunflowers as alive as these in September. It was stunning. He hadn’t been back here since the 4th of July, so he’d had no idea…

He blinked, his eyes drawn to the high white arch at the back, to the figure standing underneath it.

Joseph.

They locked eyes and Caesar’s breath was caught in his throat all over again. He was pretty sure he was close to tearing up, and by the looks of it Joseph wasn’t doing much better. The whole world stood still as they looked at each other.

Then someone started to play music and everything jerked into motion.

He walked down the aisle, Suzie next to him. He never broke eye contact with Joseph, not until he was at the end and he had to pause to kiss Suzie’s cheek. She moved to the side, to stand next to Mark and the other groomsmen.

Joseph extended his hand and smiled softly. Caesar took it and stepped up to the dais. Neither let go.

“Dearly beloved,” Speedwagon’s clear voice rang over the crowd as the music faded into nothingness. “We are gathered here today to celebrate the union between this man, and… this other man.”

There was an amused murmur in the crowd. Joseph sniggered quietly. Caesar rolled his eyes, but a smile was tugging at the corner of his lips too.

“Hey, stop that snickering in the back row!” Speedwagon called, pointing accusingly towards the back. “You think you can do better? You come up here and try using traditional wedding lines when it’s all about a man and a woman!” He cleared his throat. Joseph was really trying to hold back laughter now, as seemed to be many of the guests.

“Love is a beautiful thing,” Speedwagon continued, like nothing had happened. “It is a grand thing; it is a compelling thing. And when you’re in it, it can feel like the only thing. Immersive, enticing, endlessly captivating. It is one of the most powerful feelings there are. But love is more than a feeling. It is a choice.”

Caesar inhaled sharply. Joseph squeezed his hands tighter in his own.

“This might sound like a contradiction,” Speedwagon said, “but when you think about it, it is true. Every day we make choices, big and small and medium sized. Inconsequential choices, choices that forever change our lives. We constantly choose things in our relationships too. When we encounter a problem, we can choose to work it out, or we can choose not to and instead walk away.” He paused. “We choose who to give our time and effort to. We choose who we want to marry. We choose who
we spend the rest of our lives with.

“These two men have chosen each other,” he said, placing a hand on both Joseph’s and Caesar’s shoulders. “It was chance, or perhaps fate, that pushed them to cross paths, but they themselves were the ones who chose what to do after that. And I, for one, am more than happy to see that their choices have lead them here today, to stand proudly in front of us all.”

Caesar looked over to him. He was smiling, soft and pleased and Caesar smiled back, incredibly glad that they’d chosen Speedwagon as the officiator.

“No,” Speedwagon said, clapping his hands together. “This is mostly a formality, but if anyone here has any objections to this couple getting married, let them speak now or forever hold their peace.”

There was silence. Caesar turned towards the crowd, letting his eyes roam over the people’s faces. Finally he found the one he was searching for and slowly he let go of Joseph’s hands with his right one, lifting it up and raising his middle finger. There were confused murmurs.

“Well I never!” he could hear Dio’s scandalized scoff and it filled him with an unbelievable about of joy as he stared the asshole down. Joseph, who’d known from the beginning exactly who Caesar was flipping off, let out a small laugh. The exclaim had been loud enough to be heard across the crowd and, as the guests started to realize who the finger was meant to, they seemed to—mostly—find it funny.

“Well then,” said Speedwagon, who, when Caesar looked back at him, was also trying to maintain a straight face. “I guess that settles that. Do the best man and maid of honor have the rings?”

Smokey and Suzie stepped forward, both of them holding a small pillow with a ring resting on top. They were the same rings that they’d given the other as engagement rings, but they’d gotten them engraved. Now they both had the date and their names written in them.

“Excellent! We can proceed to the vows.” Speedwagon cleared his throat. “Do you, Joseph Henry Joestar, take Caesar Antonio Zeppeli to be your legally wedded husband, in sickness and in health, until death do you part?”

Joseph squeezed Caesar’s hands a bit tighter.

“I do,” he said.

“And do you,” Speedwagon continued, turning to Caesar, “Caesar Antonio Zeppeli, take Joseph Henry Joestar to be your lawfully wedded husband, in sickness and in health, till death do you part?”

Joseph leaned in and whispered, “Your next line will be, ‘I do’.”

He was grinning, but in his eyes Caesar could see the fear that he would be wrong, that his next line would be something else. There was a painful twinge in Caesar’s heart at the look, even more so when he realized that he was the reason that doubt existed.

He let out a soft breath and smiled, small and a bit tired, but so, so happy.

“I do,” he said and Joseph’s face brightened up immediately. His smile was so wide and so radiant that Caesar barely managed to resist the urge to just pull him into a kiss right then and there, and that was mostly due to Speedwagon beginning to talk again.

“Place these rings onto the other’s finger, as a symbol of your love, and your promise,” he said and
moved back to let Smokey and Suzie step next to the wedding couple with the rings.

Joseph took the ring from Smokey’s pillow with one hand and Caesar’s left hand with the other. Then he knelt down, before slipping the ring into Caesar’s finger and kissing the knuckle above it. Caesar pressed a hand to his mouth, surprised—and moved—by the gesture. Joseph grinned up at him and then stood up again.

Caesar took the other ring from Suzie, feeling it only proper to kneel down as well, after what Joseph had done. He wrapped his fingers around Joseph’s and just squeezed his hand for a second and just breathed. His heart was racing but not with anxiety, not anymore.

He slid the ring into Joseph’s finger and then kissed it, the knuckle, and the back of Joseph’s hand. Joseph grinned down at him, and he kept their left hands linked as he stood up, no longer trying to hide his own wide smile. Joseph threw their hands in the air in triumph, turning slightly to the gathered party. A wild cheering started immediately.

“You may now kiss the husband,” Speedwagon tried to say over the crowd, but it was mostly drowned out. Even Joseph hadn’t heard, and Caesar had to reach over with his free hand to cup his face and physically turn his face towards him. Joseph blinked, but didn’t have time for anything else before Caesar had brought their lips together.

The applause got louder. Someone wolf-whistled—Caesar’s money was on Lino—and someone else shouted something that sounded kinda like “woohoo”.

Caesar just kept kissing his new husband.

He liked the sound of that. His husband.

He smiled up at Joseph when they broke apart, probably flushed but he didn’t really care. Joseph grinned back at him and then pulled him into another kiss.

“Get a room you two!” came a shout from the crowd.

“Shut the fuck up, Lino!” Caesar shouted back, breaking the kiss. There was stifled laughter in the crowd. “Although we should probably get the show on the road,” he told Joseph with a low voice and Joseph whined only a little. After one more quick peck the two of them turned towards the crowd once more and started down the aisle.

The music started once more and this time Caesar noticed who was playing it. The Pillarmen—as the band’s name read on the drum set—was tucked into the side of the area, and the four players were Kars, Santana, and to Caesar’s surprise the two men who had worked at the jeweler’s that they’d purchased the ring from way back in January. It had a weird kind of poetry to it, Caesar thought, watching them play at their wedding. The one with the lip ring nodded to him as they walked past. Caesar nodded back.

As the walked down the aisle, people started blowing bubbles. They had decided to forego the traditional rice throwing in favor of giving out bottles of bubble solution instead. It was more fun and more ecofriendly; uncooked rice was terrible for birds. Also it looked much nicer, the air filing with dozens upon dozens of different sized bubbles that floated up and away, glinting in the sunlight. Caesar couldn't help but smile.

They were finally all the way down the aisle and they walked through the hedge and were out in the open once more. Caesar breathed deeply, letting the fall wind brush past his face and through his hair.
“We need to talk,” Joseph said and Caesar flinched.

“Right,” he said, not meeting Joseph’s eyes. “Of course.”

A gentle touch along his jaw and Joseph turned his face around. He kissed Caesar softly, sweetly, and then pulled back again.

“Come on,” he said, a ghost of a smile on his lips. “We have some time as they set up the reception. Let’s go find somewhere private.”

~x~

They went back into the dressing room, and this time Joseph was sure to close the door. He didn’t need any more grunkles spying in on his conversations.

Caesar had sat down on the chair in front of the vanity, and Joseph pulled up the chair from the corner of the room, sitting down across from him.

“So, last night,” he started and Caesar looked away momentarily, before meeting his eyes. “You wanna tell me what all that was about?”

“I… panicked?” Caesar said.


“Because… I don’t know,” Caesar admitted. “Because Dio Brando messed with my head.” He sighed. “Back at the hospital, when nonno Will woke up and he pulled me aside, he said all kinds of things about you, about our relationship. About how everything is a joke to you. I mean, I know it’s not true and I told him to fuck off, but the thought kept nagging in the back of my head.” He looked away, ashamed. “What if he’s right?”

“He tried to mess with my head too,” Joseph said and Caesar blinked up at him. “Just before the ceremony. He came here and tried to convince me you’d run away. Said you were ‘fickle’ and ‘not the best husband material’.” He huffed and shook his head. “Told me you had commitment issues.”

“Suzie said the same thing,” Caesar said quietly. “Maybe I do have commitment issues…”

“Maybe you do,” Joseph said with a shrug. “And maybe you don’t. But you came anyway.” He took Caesar’s hand in his own. “And I think that that is what really matters in the end.”

“Thank you,” said Caesar, and gave Joseph a soft smile. Joseph smiled too, but then frowned.

“I’m a bit worried though,” he said, rubbing a hand on his neck. “What the heck does Dio want? What could he possibly gain from trying to break us apart?”

“I don’t know,” Caesar said, thoughtful. “Do you think he has a purpose? As they say, some people just want to watch the world burn, and he does seem like the kind of man who would enjoy chaos for chaos’s sake.”

“Nah, it’s too methodical,” Joseph said, shaking his head. “He’s gotta have an end goal, but what…?”

The door slammed open. They both jumped.

“I hope you’re decent!” shouted Suzie, an arm over her eyes.
“We’re decent, Suzie, Jesus!” Joseph shouted and Suzie put her arm down. She was grinning widely. “Haven’t you ever heard of knocking??”

“Sure!” she said happily. “The ceremony went great! Even if we were a bit late.”

“Oh, right, why didn’t you answer your phone?” Joseph demanded, pointing a finger at her face. She made a face. “I was so goddamn worried and you couldn’t be bothered to even send me a text, like ‘he’s here I’m working on it, smiley face’, or anything??”

“Well, I could’ve,” she said. “But that would’ve ruined the suspense!”

“The suspense??”

“How’s the cocktail hour? Has everyone settled down okay?” Caesar asked while Joseph fumed.

“Yeah, I think so,” she said with a smile. “Smokey’s entertaining everyone in the garden. I came here to see if my favorite newlyweds were doing fine!”

“We’re fine, thank you Suzie,” Caesar said. “Right?”

Joseph blinked, looking at Caesar. He looked a bit scared that Joseph might say no. Joseph grinned.

“Of course we’re fine,” he said and Caesar deflated.

“Ah, that’s good,” said Suzie, clapping her hands together. “But if you boys ever need someone to talk to, I’ll be more than happy to listen. You know, I’m seriously considering taking a course in psychology, just to see what it’s like.”

“You do that, Suzie. You do that,” Caesar said and stood up.

“Wait, what’s this about psychology?” asked Joseph, who felt like he’d missed the main part of that conversation.

Suzie’s phone buzzed and she pulled it from her teeny tiny purse.

“Aw shoot, someone messed up the sound system,” she said, frowning at the phone. “I gotta go help them out. You boys have about half an hour, but don’t get any funny ideas!” She pointed a finger in Joseph’s face. Joseph let out an offended gasp. “You gotta be standing behind the outdoor tent’s door in 35 minutes, sharp. And be prepared to dance the first dance.”

Joseph paled a little.

“Don’t worry, Suzie, we’ll be there,” Caesar assured his cousin and she nodded sternly and then left the room. Caesar turned to Joseph. “So, what do you… Jojo?”

Joseph turned to look at him, with probably a quite manic smile on his face.

“I don’t know the steps to the first dance,” he said.

Caesar stared at him for a moment.

“What?” he shrieked. “How… why didn’t you mention this before?”

“I forgot,” Joseph croaked out, burying his face in his hands. Caesar took a deep breath and let it out slowly.
“Okay,” he said. “Okay. We have 30 minutes. You’ll just have to learn the steps in that time.”

“Are you kidding me?”

“Absolutely not,” Caesar said. Suzie had been the one to choose the wedding song, a song called “Tidal Wave”, by the reasonably famous pop artist Andy Flurry. Whether it would’ve been easier for Joseph to learn a song with a slower beat… well, nothing to do to that at this point. “Now get here, I’ll show you the steps. And you’ll pay attention like your life depends on it.”

Chapter End Notes

Virtual cookies (or actual if we ever meet) for anyone who figures out the reference behind Joseph’s middle name.
Also Antti Tuisku is the best~~☆
Something Borrowed, Something Blue; the Reception

Chapter Summary

The cake is not a lie, thank god. At least something in this wedding goes right. (Part 2 of 3)

Chapter Notes

Fuck. I just... fuck.
Howdy y'all. So university is a thing that happened to me. I love it but my god it takes a lot of time. BUT I did finally finish this. Or, well...
You might've noticed that the chapter summary says part 2 out of 3. Yeah, so funny thing. This goddamn wedding is so long I had to split the second part into two parts. Not to worry though! I'm just missing the final scene and then that'll be done, so I'll definitely post it tomorrow (Friday tops)! Also you'll be getting the epilogue in like... four days, so there will be soooooooo much for y'all to read! And the epilogue is already fully written so it is definitely coming out!
But hey! It was Joseph's birthday yesterday!!! Happy birthday to my favorite buff son!!!! Wow, 96 years old and still going strong, what a champ. I had wanted to post this part yesterday to celebrate a bit but the bae didn't have time to beta until today (school and work, you know how it is) but a day late isn't too bad, right? So happy birthday Joseph!!!
I can't believe we're almost at the end though hhhhhhhhh (we'll see if i ever reach the end tho this thing has been hanging so long and it just keeps getting longer and longer hahahahahahahaha orz)
Anyway, please enjoy this part and please look forward to the final part in the next few days and then the epilogue on Sunday!!! Cheers!

“Prrrrresenting!!!” Smokey called into the microphone on the other side of the fabric of the large tent that had been set up further into the garden. Joseph was hopping on the balls of his feet, he was that excited. Caesar thought it was very endearing. “The newlyweds, the husband and husband, everyone’s favorite beefcakes…”

“Beefcakes?” muttered Caesar with a frown, but Joseph hushed him.

“Give a loud welcome tooooo…” Smokey continued as Caesar slapped Joseph gently on the arm. “Jojo and Caeeeeeaaaaaar!!!”

Joseph threw the flap open. Everyone cheered loudly, many guests blowing bubbles as they walked past. They were really making the most of those, huh?

“Thank you, thank you,” Joseph was saying, waving to the crowd and dragging Caesar behind him by the elbow. “You’re too kind! Thank you for coming!” Caesar rolled his eyes. Lovingly.

“Here they are folks, aren’t they just the adorablest?” Smokey continued his announcing. “And now,
“it is time for the first dance!”

They finally made it to the empty space left in the middle of the tent. The dance floor. Caesar let out a deep breath. They took their positions face to face.

“You know what you’re doing?” he asked Joseph, who was staring at his feet.

“Left foot back and then just follow your lead.” Joseph said with a grin and looked Caesar in the eye. Caesar’s heart skipped a beat. “Lead me well.”

Caesar took another deep breath and then stepped closer to Joseph, placing a hand on his waist. Joseph settled his own on Caesar’s shoulder. It was hot even through his shirt and suit.

There was a moment when nothing else existed in the world than the two of them. Then the music started. Caesar stepped forward almost reflexively and then stumbled, because Joseph didn’t. Joseph gave him an apologetic smile. Caesar gave him a small scowl and regained his composure.

Two beats and he was back in rhythm and he stepped forward again. This time Joseph was prepared for it and stepped back in sync with him.

Leading a significantly bigger man than he was in a dance was, well, significantly harder than it was with Caesar’s more common dance partners—usually women, exclusively shorter than him—and Caesar had been prepared for that. But what came as a pleasant surprise to him was how easy it actually was to lead Joseph. He was not the most graceful dancer there was, certainly not, but he had gotten a good grasp on the basic steps so he didn’t stumble or step on Caesar’s toes, and it seemed like he’d given full control of their dance pattern to Caesar, moving back with barely a push and coming forward again with the smallest tug.

It was kind of exciting, really, to have the usually so stubborn Joestar this… malleable in his arms.

Joseph leaned down a bit, resting their cheeks together. Caesar breathed in his cologne. Everything felt intoxicating.

“I’m pretty sure it’ll be bad form to get a boner during the first dance,” Joseph whispered in his ear.

“What??” Caesar sputtered, losing concentration and stepping on Joseph’s foot. The foot that Joseph had just tried to move, resulting in them both losing balance. Caesar let out a yelp as they toppled down.

There was a collective gasp from the onlookers. Joseph was on his hands and knees, grinning on top of him and Caesar let his head drop onto the makeshift floor. He felt like melting through it and disappearing from the face of the earth.

Someone wolf-whistled again.

“Goddamnit, Lino!” he shouted and Joseph burst out laughing. There was laughter from the crowd as well, and even Caesar huffed out a laugh despite himself. It wasn’t the perfect first dance, but it was… nice. It was rather fitting for them, wasn’t it?

Joseph stood up and helped pull Caesar to his feet as well. Then he bowed to the crowd, turned around and bowed to the other side of the room. Caesar gave small bows as well.

“That seemed about right,” Smokey’s voice came from the speakers and soon the man appeared from the crowd. “These two… always falling head over heels for each other.” The crowd laughed and Smokey winked at Joseph and Caesar. “All right, let’s give one more big hand for the happy couple
and then the dance floor is open for everyone for the rest of the cocktail hour!”

There was roaring applause, which was quite a feat when there was only about 50 people gathered into the tent, and then the crowd started to disperse, couples moving to the dance floor. Lisa Lisa approached the two of them.

“I have to get back to organizing the parlor, but before that, might I have one dance?” she asked, extending a hand to Joseph. He grinned and took the hand.

“Of course, mom,” he said and then twirled her around once. He turned to Caesar and said, “See you in a bit Caesarino~!”

Caesar let out a short laugh. “Bye, Jojo,” he said, and then walked over to the side, probably to find his own mother to dance with. It was a custom or something, right?

The Pillarmen started the next song and Joseph looked down at his feet, suddenly realizing he should probably be able to lead.

“Don’t worry,” said Lisa Lisa, taking a hold of his shoulder. “I can lead.”

“Oh, okay,” said Joseph, wondering if it had been clear that Caesar had done all the leading during the first dance.

“Actually, I wanted to tell you something,” Lisa Lisa admitted, looking uncharacteristically hesitant. “I wanted to apologize.”

“Apologize?” he asked, surprised. “Why?”

“For meddling so much in your relationship with Caesar,” she said. “Convincing Suzie to organize the wedding behind your backs.”

“You convinced her?”

“Yes, although truthfully she didn’t need much convincing.” She let out a small sigh. “And I was the one who bought the ring that started the whole mess.”

“Well, yeah, but you thought I was serious, right?”

“Actually, I knew from the start.”

Joseph stopped, or tried to, but Lisa Lisa pushed him back into motion.

“What?” he asked.

“I knew you weren’t together when I bought you the ring,” she said. “Do you really think I wouldn’t know if you’d been dating in secret? But I could see the love that was there, and I… I just thought you needed a bit of a push.”

“Wow, mom, that’s…” He didn’t have a word for what it was.

“It was a gross invasion of privacy and I wanted to apologize for it.”

“No, you don’t have to…” Joseph started and then stopped. “Thank you,” he said instead. “For apologizing, and for everything you’ve done for us. Because you were right, we did need a push.” He gave her a smile and she smiled as well, finally looking like herself again. Uncertain and apologetic didn’t suit her.
“Maybe next time don’t meddle quite this much though,” he suggested after a moment. She laughed.

“I make no promises,” she said with a smile.

They danced the rest of the song in pleasant silence.

The music continued as the cocktail hour carried on. Joseph danced with a few more people—Suzie and Caesar’s mom, namely—before finding Caesar himself again and dancing some more with him. It was fun; Caesar still lead most of the time but since the dancing wasn’t nearly as formal as the first dance had been, Joseph tried his hand—or more accurately foot—in spinning Caesar around the dance floor as well. It went… more or less well.

Soon enough the dinner was set up in the parlor and the guests moved there. There were six round tables for around ten people each in the room, and two longer tables along the sides that held the buffet. The centerpieces were fairly large, with sunflowers as the main flower, surrounded by a ring of sage flowers and forget-me-nots and oak leaves and long blades of grass along the edges. When he’d heard the combination, Joseph hadn’t been entirely sure about it, but actually seeing it, he had to admit it really was pretty.

He had wondered if maybe he’d gone overboard with the whole sunflower thing, but he was pretty sure Caesar liked it, judging by the way he dragged his fingers along one of the sunflower’s petals as they sat down.

Smokey hit his wine glass with the edge of his knife a few times. The crowd quieted as he stood up and cleared his throat.

“Now that everyone’s been seated,” he started. “I believe some kind of a… speech by the best man is customary in situations like these. But before we get into that, there seems to be a few cards that arrived for the happy couple.” He picked up one of the two envelopes that had been sitting on the table. “‘Congratulations to the newlyweds!’ this one says. It seems to be a gift cards to ‘Steel’s Bowl Run’. how nice! Oh, and it’s signed by Mr. Steel himself, along with his wife and their daughter Lucy.”

“Oh, haven’t seen her since she was ten or something,” Joseph said with a grin. Then he leaned towards Caesar and whispered. “How old is she now?”

“Around 18 I think,” Caesar whispered back. Smokey cleared his throat and cast the two of them a glance.

“And now for the other one,” he said after Joseph raised his hands in apology. He produced a generic congratulatory card from the second envelope and started to read. “‘To Jojo and Caesar: Glück…’” He paused, squinted at the paper. “Gluck… wansh? What?”

“Glückwunsch,” supplied Caesar, who had studied German for a number of years and recognized the word despite Smokey’s butchering of the pronunciation. He was also pretty sure he already knew who had sent the card.

“Right. That,” said Smokey and then cleared his throat again. There was slight sniggering in the crowd. “‘It was nice to see you. Come to Germany on your honeymoon.’” He blinked. He turned the card around. “That’s it, that’s all it says.” He shrugged and dropped it onto his plate. “Well, I assume you know who it’s from, so let’s not dwell on that. Onwards to the speech!” He paused for a moment.

“I met Joseph and Caesar when I entered high school,” he started. He didn’t have anything written
down, Caesar noticed, and wondered if that was because he’d memorized the speech, or was improvising. “Or well, I heard of them at first, they were kinda famous in the school. Infamous, in Jojo’s case, heh.” Laughter. Joseph directed a glare towards Smokey. “There were all kinds of rumors flying about them way back then too, but that’s nothing new in high school. Now, it wasn’t actually until Caesar had graduated that I first talked to Jojo. He was retaking chem 101, which he’d flunked during his sophomore year. Something about an accident involving fire…”

“Hey, that toupee was a crime against humanity,” Joseph protested. Caesar snorted, and there were chuckles and disapproving murmurs in the crowd. “I did everyone a favor when I torched it!”

“Yeah, and that favor meant you couldn’t take the class again until Mr. Payne retired,” Smokey said with a smirk. “But hey, if you hadn’t, we might not have met. So I’m glad you got detention for four months!”

“Well, I guess it was an even tradeoff,” Joseph shrugged, leaning back on the chair.

“You guess?” Smokey asked, raising his eyebrows, but then shook his head. “Anyway, that’s when I met Jojo. We were assigned lab partners, and you can all probably guess how well we did in that class.” More laughter, this time muffled. “We didn’t really hang out outside the class back then though. Not until the Incident.

“I don’t know how many of you know this, but I’m actually an orphan,” he said. Caesar was slightly surprised; he knew Smokey wasn’t ashamed of his past, but that had come somewhat out of the left field. “That’s not really a good thing to be, especially combined with having no money and my ethnicity.” He made a face and then sighed. “People like to pretend racism is over, but, well. That’s really something for a different day though. In any case, you could say that in high school coming from where I am, I was somewhat of an easy target.

“So there was this asshole, and this time I don’t mean Jojo,” he said and Caesar only barely caught the snort that tried to escape him. Joseph glanced at him from the corner of his eye. He’d noticed. Caesar gave him an innocent smile. “He and his posse were often giving me trouble, and then one day when I was minding my own business, about to head home they rounded me and dragged me behind the bleachers. At this point I know I’m getting a beating and that’s if I’m lucky, but then they start spewing shit about someone breaking into one of their lockers and stealing a buncha junk. “At this point I’m just confused, because what do they want me for, but then they start spewing shit about someone breaking into one of their lockers and stealing a buncha junk.

“‘You okay?’ he asked me,” Smokey said with a surprisingly good Joseph impression. At least Caesar was impressed. “When I told him I was fine, that they hadn’t had time to do anything this time, he asked if they did it often. They did, but I was hesitant to tell him. Teenage pride, you know how it is.” He shrugged. “He got so pissed when I finally admitted it that he followed me around like a guard dog for the next two weeks, and after that the whole school knew that if you did something to me, you’d get Jojo on your ass. And no one wanted Jojo on their ass.”

“What was I gonna do, let those assholes bully you?” Joseph asked, crossing his arms across his chest. “Not likely.”
“I know,” Smokey said with a smile, a genuine, happy smile. “And that’s what makes you special. I mean, you hardly knew me back then, but you went out on a limb to help me out, and made sure that I’d be safe even after that. That is… that is something no one had ever done for me before. And I’ve always wanted to thank you.” Joseph rubbed his neck, looking embarrassed. Caesar smiled.

“I met Caesar sometime soon after that,” Smokey continued his interrupted story after a short pause. “They’d moved in together after Caesar had graduated high school and I met him when I went over to work on a project with Jojo. I will admit, I was a bit anxious before going over, because as I mentioned before, Caesar had a bit of a reputation at the school. Mostly good things, mostly from the girls, about how charming and amazing and suave he was. You know, a real life prince charming.” Joseph snorted. Caesar didn’t elbow him in the side. “Based on the rumors he seemed like this impossibly perfect man, out of reach for us normal folk. But that was as far from the truth as possible.

“I mean, he is charming and amazing and mostly suave—” Joseph snorted again, louder this time. Caesar did elbow him in the side. “—but he was also kind and attentive. He made the effort to get to know me, even though I was just his roommate’s random chem lab partner. He helped us with the work when he had time and he made sure we remembered to eat, he even made food for us, occasionally. Like a real team mom!”

“Hey!” protested Caesar. There was laughter from the crowd. Joseph snickered too, while Smokey flashed him a bright smile.

“The point is…,” he said, addressing the crowd again. “Dolphins.” There was a loud hoot from the crowd, but Caesar didn’t quite catch who it had been. Smokey chuckled. “No, the real point is that these two men gave me everything when I had nothing. They gave me kindness and compassion and support, and they are my best friends in the world, and I couldn’t be happier to see them find something special together. No one deserves a happily ever after like these two do. That is all I wanted to say. Thank you for listening.”

There was enthusiastic applause as Smokey finished and sat down. Suzie stood up next, from Caesar’s left side.

“Wonderful speech, Smokey,” she said, smiling. “I wish I could top that, but unfortunately I haven’t prepared anything of the sort.”

“Hey, I didn’t prepare much either,” Smokey said with a shrug.

“Right,” she said, giving him a quick glare. “What I do want to say is what a lot of you are probably already waiting for. Dinner is served!”

Despite her humble speech, the applause she received was nearly as vigorous as the one after Smokey’s.

50 people trying to form a line, or in this case two, always ends up a bit chaotic, and this time wasn’t much different. Joseph and Caesar went first, naturally, and then the rest of their table company while the other guests waited a bit more, before getting up from their seats and wandering over to the tables. The selection was mostly Italian food—two types of pastas, *spaghetti al nero di seppia* and a simple spaghetti bolognese, along with “*Trattoria Trussardi’s*” specialty *insalata caprese* and a few other dishes—but Joseph’s special request to include “breaded and fried chicken fillets” had also been fulfilled. It had basically been a roundabout way for him to say that he wanted chicken nuggets at their wedding, which was tacky at best, but Caesar had let it slide. There was no harm in serving them, and Joseph’s face when he thought he’d fooled Caesar into believing it was actually something fancy had been priceless.
The dinner continued on with pleasant chitchat. There was plenty of food, and plenty of drinks, and the merriment was palpable in the parlor. People mostly mingled with the other people in their table as they ate, since they were all sitting there, but as they finished some started moving around to go talk to people they hadn’t seen in a while and introducing themselves to the ones they hadn’t met before. The seating arrangement had been a pain in Caesar and Suzie’s asses for several days—Joseph had been of no help, suggesting they just pick randomly who went where—as they’d shuffled the places around. Most people got along fine, but there were some that absolutely couldn’t be put into the same table, and they didn’t want anyone to feel uncomfortable so there had to be at least one familiar person for everyone in the table, but they also wanted people to get to know new people, so they couldn’t just put the closest people together and call it a day.

Caesar thanked god they only had 50 guests, managing any more would’ve been a nightmare.

As it became clear that everyone had eaten their fill, the staff came in to exchange the main course for the desserts. The panna cotta and the tiramisu had been made into portion sized cups to make them easier to take and there were several bowls of freshly cut fruit on different points of the table. There were also plenty of nonna Maria’s delicious cookies and other small pastries.

Between the two buffet tables was an empty space, but it wouldn’t be empty much longer. Joseph was outright vibrating with excitement as he stared at the side entrance to the parlor. Caesar watched him in amusement.

Finally the door opened and everyone’s attention was drawn to it. Santana pushed the wedding cake through.

It was enormous. It had five tall tiers, or not precisely tiers, as the cake was actually a long, circular slope towards the top. The fondant was a gradient, ranging from a baby blue to lilac, with white swirls painted along the surface. Along the path were white sugar sculptures of pillars—which seemed to be more of an inside joke than necessarily a requirement for this particular cake—and of various things from their past, things that Suzie had provided Santana pictures of. At the very bottom were their favorite childhood toys, Joseph’s old teddy bear and Caesar’s bubble blower, with bubbles rising up the side of the cake. There were books and miscellaneous items, some flowers and a graduate cap, two rings, and all the way at the top was the topper. And it wasn’t just any topper. It had been handmade, like probably all the small items along the cake, and the two of them weren’t just standing there next to each other, they were struck in amazing poses. Poses, that Caesar recognized as the ones they had in their Hell Climb Pillar diploma.

It was… it was goddamn impressive.

And impressed muttering could be heard from the crowd as well, as Joseph and Caesar stood up. Smokey stood up after them and announced to the crowd, “Ladies and gentlemen, would you look at that cake! Now that is a wedding cake if ever I saw one!”

“Santana, this is amazing,” Caesar told the baker as he brought the cart to a stop between the two long tables. “It looks astounding!”

“Thank you,” said Santana. “I’m glad it pleases you.”

“Man, if it tastes even half as good as it looks, we are in for a treat,” said Joseph. “And I know it does, because we test tasted it, hah!”

Santana gave him an amused smile and then backed away with a small bow of his head. Smokey and Suzie appeared next to the two.
“Here we are, ladies and gentlemen,” he said. “The cutting of the cake! Feels almost a shame to cut into this masterpiece, but it’d be even bigger a shame to let all this cake go to waste.” She produced a knife from somewhere and offered it to them.

“If you would, boys?” she said and Joseph accepted up the knife. “Go to that side, so that everyone can see.”

She pointed to the other side of the cake and then smiled. Joseph and Caesar shuffled around the cake a bit.

“Ready?” asked Joseph, raising the knife in his hand.

“Ready,” said Caesar and put his hand on top of Joseph’s. Together they brought the knife down.

The knife sunk into the cake like, well, a warm knife into butter. They cut a slice—a rather big slice, thanks to Joseph—from the top tier and pulled it out onto a plate. It stood there, perfectly upright, perfectly even, and perfectly red. It looked like the text book example of what a red velvet cake should look like. Even if the frosting was blue.

“Are you excited? I’m excited,” Joseph said, grinning excitedly.

“Really? I hadn’t noticed,” said Caesar, who was excited, but also very amused. Joseph’s smile widened impossibly more. “You wanna try the cake first?”

“Hell yeah,” Joseph said and opened his mouth. Caesar paused for a second.

“You actually want me to feed it to you?” he asked and Joseph closed his mouth again, the beginnings of a pout on his face.

“Well yeah,” he said. “It’s tradition right?”

“I guess,” said Caesar, looking over to the guests. Everyone was staring at them expectantly. Man, he suddenly felt embarrassed. He turned back to Joseph, focused on only him, like there was no one else in the room. “Alright, here goes.”

He picked up a fork from next to the cake and cut a piece off the slice. Joseph put a hand on his before he had time to lift it.

“With your fingers,” he mouthed. Caesar flushed. Then he drew a breath and calmed himself. It was fine, he could do that. Suave was his middle name. Joseph grinned, seeming to almost sense his change in mindset.

“Okay,” Caesar said and picked up the piece with his right hand. “Say ‘aaah’.”

“Aaaaaaah,” said Joseph, closing his eyes and opening his mouth once more. He leaned in a bit and even stuck his tongue out slightly. Caesar would’ve rolled his eyes, but… well, it wasn’t an entirely bad look on Joseph’s face.

Caesar pushed those thoughts back immediately. There was a time and place for everything, but not now.

Instead he lifted the piece of cake up to Joseph’s mouth. Joseph took it in, completely, his lips closing over it, brushing against Caesar’s fingertips. Caesar’s tongue darted out to wet his own lips for a millisecond, before he forcefully calmed himself again. He was fine.
He would’ve been fine, if Joseph hadn’t let out the filthiest moan that had no place in such a setting, nor in public at all, really.

Caesar paused, breathed deep and counted to ten in his head.

“I will never get over how good this cake is,” Joseph was saying and then surged forward to lick frosting off the fingers Caesar had neglected to pull back in time. He quickly yanked it back, while there was applause and cheering from the crowd. He turned to look over the crowd, slightly worried to find displeased faces, but everyone was smiling. Caesar let out a breath; some mushiness was to be expected at a wedding, he supposed.

“Alright, your turn,” said Joseph, pulling Caesar’s attention back to the cake not a second too soon.

“Whoa, slow down,” Caesar said, leaning back before he got a faceful of frosting. Joseph drew his hand back and pouted. “I don’t want that thing smeared all across my face.”

“Right, right, wouldn’t want that,” Joseph said, an odd note in his voice. Caesar squinted at him. “Come on now, open wide.”

Caesar eyed the slowly approaching piece of cake but eventually gave in and opened his mouth. That was when Joseph slapped it onto his cheek.

Caesar stood there for a second, contemplating his life and his choices, wondering how he hadn’t seen it coming, before reaching up and scraping the cake off.

“Well, there goes that moment,” he said, turning away from the sniggering Joestar and eating the cake from his hand with as much dignity as was possible. It was good cake though. From the corner of his eye he could see Smokey trying to stifle his laughter behind his hand and Suzie glaring disapprovingly between him and Joseph.

“Now that that’s out of the way,” said Smokey once he’d calmed down a bit, addressing the crowd once more. “I think it’s time for some desserts!”

The crowd started to move, once more forming two lines along the tables. Joseph seized his chance to be first in line by whipping around and just leaping forward, quickly gathering a plate full of sweets. Caesar wasn’t as interested in that as his new husband clearly was, instead going to get some coffee first. They still had a long night ahead of them, so he really needed his caffeine intake.

People were much more willing to move from their designated seats during the dessert and coffee phase of the dinner, going over to chat with other people at different tables, or standing around at the sides of the room. That was also the time that the people who hadn’t done so during cocktail hour came over to Joseph and Caesar to congratulate them in person.

Or… not congratulate them, as was the case with some people.

“Well, well, well, looks like you actually managed to pull it off,” said Dio as he walked up to their table. He sounded as unpleasant as ever, no longer even pretending to hide his disdain now that they’d seen his true colors. Apparently they were mustard yellow and bright green, if his suit was anything to go by, which—ew. Caesar tried to ignore the man’s horrid outfit even while the designer inside him was screaming in agony. “I suppose I ought to congratulate you.”

“Honestly, I don’t really care what you do,” Joseph said, shoveling cake into his mouth, not even bothering to look up at Dio. He didn’t seem to like that though, his jaw tightening. Caesar sipped his coffee, gladly letting Joseph handle this. “We’re not gonna listen to a single word you say now that we know what you really want.”
“Oh, you know what I really want, do you?” Dio asked smugly. “I rather doubt that.”

“I mean, it’s pretty obvious, right?” Joseph said, setting down the now empty plate and gesturing towards Dio with his fork. “You tried to make sure Caesar and I broke up, or at least didn’t get married.” He glanced over at Caesar. “I don’t know why you wanted to do that, but I can make a few guesses. And most of them have something to do with the inheritance of the Joestar fortune.”

A twitch. A minute, barely there twitch, but Caesar saw it. He’d been looking for it. Joseph had as well, if the sly smile spreading on his face was anything to go by.

“Yeah, I’m not really surprised it was about money,” he continued, leaning back on his chair and sipping his coffee. “Although I kinda thought you had money of your own, what with the successful law firm and junk. Besides, isn’t this kind of an ineffective way to get money? I mean, first you gotta try to make up with your estranged adoptive brother and hope that he wants to see your stupid face and then hope that he puts you back into his will and then hope that he conveniently dies sometime soon after all that. So even without trying to meddle with the true love that is Caesar and me, this whole plan is a little more unstable than I’d’ve thought of you. Unless you were planning to take care of that last step yourself.”

Dio flinched back, pressing a hand to his chest. Caesar couldn’t quite determine if the horrified look on his face was because he was offended or because Joseph had hit spot on. He scoffed loudly and turned away.

“Think what you want,” he said with a sneer, waving his hand dismissively. “It is of no consequence.”

Then he walked away.

Joseph whistled. “Wow, didn’t think he would actually be willing to kill a guy,” he said, nudging Caesar on the arm with his elbow.

“I mean… I can’t say I’m too surprised, but…” Caesar said and then shook his head with a sigh. “Anyway, I’d really rather not think about him right now.”

“I hear ya,” Joseph nodded in agreement. “Come on, let’s eat some more cake.”

Before they had time to move though, Lisa Lisa approached them, behind him an older man Joseph didn’t recognize.

“Hey mom,” he said, glancing between the two of them. “Who’s this?”

“Hey mom,” he said, glancing between the two of them. “Who’s this?”

“Whaaaaaaaaa…?” Joseph trailed off, blinking up at the man. He was well built, even if he was old, his hair gray but long and luscious, drawn back on a low ponytail. He looked stern, and he was simultaneously exactly and not at all what Joseph had expected. “Youuuu… what?”

Caesar, who was considerably more articulate at the moment, stood up and offered his hand. “It is nice to finally meet you, sir,” he said. “We’ve heard about you a lot.”

“What, whe— how is he here?” Joseph asked, standing up as well. “I mean, no disrespect or anything, but I thought you… were in Tibet. And also that you guys didn’t speak to each other.”

“Well, yes, I was certainly surprised when Elizabeth suddenly contacted me,” Straizo said. “But when she explained the situation, I thought maybe it would be about time to reconnect. And I will
admit, I was rather excited to find out what kind of young men you two have grown to be.”

“I went to get him a week ago,” Lisa Lisa said. “He’s been living here at the Estate since then.”

“Wait, you went to Tibet?” Joseph asked, incredulous. “And he’s been here for a week? And you told me neither of these things?”

“I wanted it to be a surprise,” she said with a shrug.

“Well, I’m certainly surprised,” Joseph said, pushing a hand through his hair. He turned to Straizo again. “So, uh… Could you maybe… tell us about yourself?”

“About me?” Straizo asked, slightly surprised. “I suppose I can, if you really want to know. And if you don’t mind me asking some questions about you two.”

“Of course not,” answered Caesar for the both of them, smiling.

“Good then,” said Straizo and pulled up a chair. Lisa Lisa sat down as well. “Where should we start?”
Happily Ever After Party

Chapter Summary

Families are always a hassle, but rarely to this degree. It's just Joseph's luck, apparently.

(Part 3 of 3)

Chapter Notes

Here it is! The final chapter! I can't believe I finally finished it. I mean, there's still the epilogue but this ends the main story. It's been nine months and I'm so grateful to each and every one of y'all who've stayed with me during it (especially this last month wowee i'm so sorry) AND of course I'm also grateful to the newer readers and any possible future readers, I just can't thank you guys enough. You've been great. Well, I hope you like the conclusion to the wedding, and I'll see you on Sunday with the epilogue~ Enjoy~~

After dinner was done the reception moved back to the tent in the garden to continue in the form of music, dancing and more drinks. As Joseph and Caesar began to move towards the garden, nonna Maria approached them, pushing Will in a wheelchair before her, and they paused.

“This has been a lovely experience,” Will said after the usual greetings and congratulations were done with. They started walking towards the front door as they talked. “But I’m afraid I do have to get back to the hospital. They won’t like it if I stay much longer. I am still in rehabilitation after all.”

“That’s okay, we understand completely,” Caesar assured his grandfather. “It was amazing that you could attend at all, we’re so glad you came.”

“The hospital staff should be here any minute to come pick him up,” said nonna Maria. “I’ll make sure he gets going safely and then I’ll come back to the reception.”

“Alright,” said Caesar.

The doorbell rang.

“Oh, that’s them I assume,” she said, turning towards the door.

“Here, I’ll get it,” he said, walking over with brisk steps. She smiled at him. He opened the door, fully expecting to find an employee or two from the Speedwagon Foundation’s research hospital.

He didn’t.

Instead he found an Asian woman with almost shoulder length straight hair pushed off her face with a hairband, wearing a carmine cocktail dress with a small white cardigan. Caesar blinked. The woman blinked. Something moved around her legs and he looked down. A toddler hid himself behind her legs.
“Ah, Tomoko!” Joseph said, smiling as he approached the door. Caesar looked at him and then back at her.

“Jojo, good,” Tomoko Higashikata said, letting out a small sigh. “I was worried this was the wrong place.”

“Nope, right place! And right time too, the party is just getting started in the garden,” Joseph said. “I’m glad you could make it on such a short notice.”

“Uhh, Jojo?” said Caesar.

“Right! Caesar, you remember Tomoko, right?” Joseph said as if Caesar could somehow not remember. They’d talked about her less than 12 hours ago! “Tomoko, this is Caesar Zeppeli, my new husband.”

“It’s nice to meet you,” Tomoko said, offering her hand to him. He took it. “Jojo did tell me about you when I called him last week. Congratulations.”

“Ah, thank you,” Caesar said, feeling only slightly awkward. “It’s nice to meet you as well. Although I do think we met a few times while you were still an exchange student.”

“Oh that’s right! You were Jojo’s roommate!” she said.

“Still am,” he corrected, giving her a smile.

“Oh, yes, of course,” she said.

“Excuse me?” came a new voice from behind her and they all turned to look outside. The kid hugging Tomoko’s legs jumped a bit and scuffled to the other side of his mother.

This time it was the hospital staff.

“We’re here to pick up Mr. Zeppeli,” said one of the men, tipping his cap slightly. Tomoko turned to Caesar.

“My grandfather,” he said by way of explanation, and turned to his grandparents. They were still exactly where they had been when the doorbell had rung, poorly pretending they hadn’t been listening in.

“Well then, it’s my time to leave,” said Will, and nonna Maria pushed the wheelchair back into motion towards the door. “Thank you again for the lovely day.”

“Thank you for coming,” Caesar said again. “I’ll come visit you later, okay?”

“We should probably get out of the way,” Joseph said and the three—well, four, including the kid—moved into the house as the others went outside. Will gave them one last wave, which he managed without too much strain now, and then the door closed. “So,” continued Joseph. “Should we go to the garden? Everyone else is already there.”

“Probably,” Caesar said and then turned to Tomoko. “Unless we can get either of you something to eat? We just finished dinner, but there’s still plenty left if you’d like.”

“I’m fine, thank you,” Tomoko said and then turned to look at the boy. “Josuke,” she said, which Caesar guessed was his name, and when he looked up she asked him something in Japanese. He
looked thoughtful for a moment, glancing up at Caesar and Joseph a few times. He looked shy, but also curious.

Then he answered his mother, one word of Japanese, but it was fairly obvious what it meant. Cake.

Tomoko hummed thoughtfully, tapping a finger on her lips. Then she asked him something else. Caesar didn’t know any Japanese so he had no idea what it was, but it was entertaining to watch the two interact. They were clearly discussing the cake though, since the word got repeated several times.

Josuke looked confused for a second and then said something, sounding very serious.

“Oh?” asked Tomoko and then smiled. “Okay~” She turned up to face Caesar again. “Is it okay if he gets a small piece of cake? I might’ve already mentioned to him there would be some. Just a small piece though.”

Joseph sniggered behind his hand.

“Of course it’s okay,” Caesar said with a smile. “We can stop by the kitchen and get him a piece.”

“It’s really good cake, by the way,” Joseph said and winked.

“Well then, maybe I should try it too,” Tomoko said, smiling in return.

They left towards the kitchens, Josuke hanging tightly on his mother’s hand as they walked. He kept glancing over to Joseph and Caesar every now and again. When Joseph grinned and waved at him he ducked back behind Tomoko’s legs, making Joseph chuckle. Caesar couldn’t help the small smile spreading on his lips. It was endearing.

It was also amazing how easy the family connection was to see. Of course Josuke’s Japanese heritage was the first noticeable thing, but there was something about him that was very clearly Joestar as well. He was a very cute little boy; he was wearing very situationally appropriate clothes, a vest and a clip-on tie, and his hair had been combed back in the smallest pompadour Caesar had ever seen. He would likely grow up a very handsome man.

Not that he could grow up otherwise, considering what both his parents looked like.

“Here we go,” said Joseph, pushing open the kitchen door. The room was quite full of staff, putting away food and taking care of dishes, but they all stopped as the door opened, looking over in surprise.

“Joseph?” asked Erina, furrowing her brow and setting down the plates she’d had in her hands.

“Grandma Erina, what are you doing here?” Joseph asked. “You don’t need to clean, that’s what we pay all these people for!”

The people in question looked at each other, mostly amused, and continued their work.

“That’s my line,” Erina huffed. “It’s your wedding, you should be out in the garden with your guests. And the same goes to you, Caesar.”

Caesar chuckled nervously. “I know, Mrs. Joestar, we were just on our way there.”

“Oh, there’s no need for you to call me that anymore,” Erina said with a smile. “You’re family now. Officially.” Caesar could feel a slight heat rising on his face and he nodded. Erina’s eyes shifted onto
Tomoko. “Oh, who is this lovely lady? Did you just arrive?”

“Yes, ma’am. Thank you for having us,” Tomoko said and smiled.

“Grandma, this is Tomoko,” Joseph introduced. “She’s, um, my old, uhh…”

Josuke peeked from behind Tomoko’s legs and Erina’s eyes widened a little.

“Oh,” she said. “Oh my.” As said, the family resemblance was fairly obvious. “And who is this strapping young man?”

“His name is Josuke,” Tomoko said, taking the boy’s hand and pulling him forward a bit. “Unfortunately he doesn’t speak English.”

“I see,” said Erina, looking over at Joseph. Joseph ducked his gaze away. Caesar had a feeling that Erina did indeed see. “Well, seeing as you came into the kitchen, I’m assuming you wanted something to eat?”

Tomoko kneeled down next to Josuke and asked him something. Josuke shook his head and grabbed a hold of her cardigan. She took a hold of his hand again and said something else. Then he nodded and turned towards Erina.

“Keh… keeki,” he said.

“Please,” Tomoko said.

“Purees,” he repeated. Then he quickly turned to her again and hugged her tightly. She rubbed his back, said something again in Japanese—encouragements, by her tone—and then picked him up, propping him against her hip. He hid his face into her neck.

“If it’s alright,” Tomoko said. “Just a small piece of cake for him.”

“Of course, dear. Wait just a moment,” Erina said with a smile, turning around and walking over to the back where the rest of the cake was waiting its turn to be put away. She stopped by one of the cupboards on the way, to get a small plastic plate which Joseph was pretty sure he’d used when he’d been living there as a kid. Why did they still have plates that old? She cut a small piece of cake and put it onto the plate. “Is this good?” she asked, showing the piece towards them.

“That is fine, thank you,” Tomoko said and Erina returned to where they were still standing just inside the door. She offered the plate to Josuke.

“Here you go,” she said and his face lit up. Tomoko addressed him again.

“Sank yuu!” he said, smiling widely as he finally got the cake. He showed it to Tomoko who smiled and said something again.

“There’s tables at the tent, right?” Joseph said. “Should we go there? It’s probably more fun to eat there than here in the kitchen. Unless you need like a… a baby chair or something for him, which might be a problem ’cause I don’t think we have those…”

“No, as long as there’s a table, it’s fine,” Tomoko said. “Let’s go to the garden then. Josuke?” The boy looked up at her again. She put him down and said something, holding out her hand. He looked hesitant, but when she continued, he finally gave her the plate. “It’s better for me to carry it, so he won’t drop it,” she explained to Joseph and Caesar.
“Makes sense,” Joseph said and turned to his grandmother. “Grandma, you should come too. You should be having fun with us.”

“I know, Joseph, I know,” Erina said, waving her hand. “I’ll be right there, don’t worry.”

“Alright then,” he agreed, before turning to the others again. “Let’s go.”

They left the kitchen through the back door, which lead almost directly to the back yard. As they were going down the small hill towards the garden—the grass was still slightly wet from the rain in the early morning—Joseph felt someone grab his hand. Someone small.

He looked down to find Josuke’s tiny hand curled around his fingers as the boy tried to not fall down on the slippery grass. It seemed like he hadn’t even noticed he’d taken Joseph’s hand instead of Tomoko’s, being so concentrated on his balance. Joseph’s heart was suddenly throbbing, looking down at the small child.

It was almost as if Josuke sensed something was different, because right at that moment he looked up and their eyes locked. The boy seemed surprised for a second, probably to find someone other than his mother there, but then he turned to look at his feet again, like he’d decided that it didn’t matter. He’d already taken Joseph’s hand, might as well hold it. He squeezed Joseph’s fingers just a bit tighter.

Joseph clutched the front of his shirt. Caesar gave him a supportive pat on the back.

As they got closer to the tent the sound of music became clearer and clearer. It wasn’t as loud as to hurt the ears, or even disrupt conversations, but it was still loud enough to travel all around the garden. When the tent came into view Josuke let go of Joseph’s hand and dashed towards it. Tomoko called after him and he stopped, looking only a little disappointed when they caught up.

The flap of the tent had been pulled back, leaving an opening for people to come and go through as they pleased. At the very back of the tent, past the bar and the dance floor and the band, were several tables for people to sit around and talk. Many of them were already taken, but they managed to find one which was empty and the four of them sat down.

“There you guys are!” came Suzie’s voice almost the second they’d sat down. Joseph turned to see her nearby. “Hold on, Chad, I gotta go talk to these idiots,” she told Chad, who has her date for the evening, before marching over to Joseph and Caesar. “Where have you been, I’ve been looking for—oh.” She’d noticed Tomoko and, probably more importantly, little Josuke on her lap, finally getting to stuff the cake into his mouth.

“Oh, he is just the cutest!” Suzie squealed. “You know, I think I saw another small child running around just now…” She looked around for a second, worrying her lip between her teeth. Joseph frowned; he didn’t remember anyone with small children on the guest list. Then Suzie said, “Oh well. Excuse me a moment, but I need to talk to these two in private for a bit. Won’t be long!”
“Of course,” said Tomoko, and Suzie grabbed a hold—a **tight** hold—of Joseph’s forearm, dragging him to the side.

“What the hell?” she hissed once there was no one in the immediate vicinity. “What the **hell**, Joseph!” She smacked Joseph on the arm.

“Oh, hey, what!?” Joseph protested, rubbing his arm. It hadn’t actually hurt that much, but Joseph still didn’t appreciate getting hit for no reason.

“You invited her to the wedding?” Suzie demanded, not quite pointing straight at Tomoko. “Why? And why the hell didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t tell you because you didn’t answer your **fucking** phone!” Joseph countered, incredibly pissed at Suzie’s frankly unwarranted hostility. “Don’t you goddamn lecture me about not telling you something when you were MIA the entire day! I was standing at the altar for almost ten minutes not knowing what was gonna happen because you couldn’t be bothered to pick up a goddamn phone!”

Suzie’s face was flushed, both in anger and in embarrassment. Joseph was breathing hard. Caesar put a hand on his shoulder and he drew in a deep breath.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “But seriously, I was so scared you two wouldn’t show up.”

“I’m sorry too,” Caesar said quietly, and Joseph turned his head towards him. He was looking away. “We should have called you. I guess it… slipped my mind in the panic to leave.”

There was a tense silence for a moment.

“But honestly, I’m wondering the same thing,” Caesar said finally. “Why **did** you invite her?”

“I…” started Joseph, before pausing for a moment to gather his thoughts. “I guess I wanted you to meet her. I wanted to be open about it, or something. After last night’s, well, I thought it might be good? Also I wanted to ask her if she needs me to support her somehow, like, I don’t know, an alimony or something. That’s the best I **can** do, really, since she’s going back to Japan and all.”

“That’s…” said Caesar and then paused. He blinked, his face hard to read. Joseph readied himself for the worst. “That’s really mature of you, Jojo,” Caesar said and it was Joseph’s turn to blink. Then he grinned.

“Thanks,” he said and Caesar smiled slightly too.

“Well, okay then,” said Suzie, rubbing her neck. “If Caesar’s fine with it, I guess I am too. I’m sorry I yelled. And hit you. I was just surprised to see her.”

“It’s cool, Suzie,” Joseph said and patted her head.

“Hey, mind the hairdo!” she said, pushing Joseph’s hand away, but she was smiling. They started to move back towards the tables. “Anyway, Smokey and I have been looking for you. We were just talking about starting the—”

“What’s up, homeboy!” came a new voice from behind them and someone smacked Caesar on the back hard enough to have him staggering forward a few steps. Suzie grumbled slightly under her breath. They turned around to find Gyro grinning widely, Johnny just a few steps—their steps, not steps, behind him.

“Gyro,” Caesar said with a glare. “Hello, Johnny. Glad you could make it.”
“Heya,” said Johnny. “And congratulations. I knew you would end up married.”

Joseph laughed. “R-right,” said Caesar, looking just a bit uncomfortable.

“Thanks, Johnny,” Joseph said, clapping Caesar’s shoulder. Caesar gave him a look. “You enjoying the party?”

“Yeah, it’s been fun,” Johnny said. “Right Gyro?”

“Totally,” said Gyro. “Really liked how you almost didn’t show up for the ceremony.”

Johnny elbowed him in the side. Caesar’s glare intensified.

“Anyway, we, or, well, I brought you a little present,” Johnny said, turning back to Joseph, who blinked.

“Oh, thanks,” he said. “I, uh, I thought the presents were collected somewhere before the ceremony?”

“Yeah, no, it’s not a thing, I’m broke as fuck, I can’t afford shit,” Johnny said, waving his hand. Joseph blinked again. “Remember how you said you didn’t know you had family? Well, I invited some family here tonight.”

“Oh,” said Joseph, taken by surprise.

“Yeah, only a few could make it, but I thought you might want to meet some anyway,” Johnny said, looking around. “There’s one now. Jotaro!”

A man in a long white coat and cap that had been walking a bit further away, glancing around the room, looked at them and then walked over. As he got up to them, Joseph noticed he was basically as tall as he was.

“Have you seen Jolyne?” he asked by way of greeting, glancing around once more.

“Oh, uh, no. Not recently,” said Johnny, taken aback. “I’m sure she’s here somewhere.” Jotaro hummed, a deep resonant sound. Then he looked at Joseph and Caesar. His gaze was unreadable.

“You are Joseph and Caesar,” he said, not really a question. “Congratulations. I am Jotaro Kujo.”

“Cu-cujoh?” Joseph asked, looking at Johnny while he shook the hand Jotaro had offered.

“Jotaro’s dad is Japanese,” Johnny explained. “My aunt moved there way back when and started a family. Jotaro’s back States-side to get his doctorate in oceans and junk.”

“Marine biology,” Jotaro said, his expression not shifting at all. Joseph thought it was pretty impressive. It might be fun to play him in poker if they ever had time. “And I already completed it.”

“Oh, well, I guess it’s doctor Jotaro Kujo then,” Johnny said. “Congrats.”

“Thank you,” said Jotaro.

“By the way, have you seen Gappy?” Johnny asked. “I think he said he was—”


Following Jotaro’s line of sight, Joseph’s eyes fell on a small girl, around two years of age with dual
colored hair and a poofy butterfly patterned dress, just about to reach into the bag sitting next to Tomoko on the bench. Tomoko looked just as surprised as the rest of them; apparently she hadn’t noticed the girl walk up. The girl seemed rather startled herself, the beginnings of tears starting to form in her eyes.

Jotaro was walking up to the table with brisk steps, speaking sternly in Japanese and picking up the girl when he got to her. She pressed her face into his neck and he petted her hair.

“I am very sorry, ma’am,” he told Tomoko, finally looking at her. She smiled and answered in Japanese, and for the first time Jotaro’s face shifted, a subtle wave of surprise passing over it, before settling for a slightly more pleased version of his regular face. They exchanged a few more words in Japanese, both seeming glad to find another person who understood it.

“Good for them,” said Johnny, breaking the silence and Joseph glanced at him, getting the feeling he meant something with the statement beside the obvious. Tomoko picked up Josuke, who had finished his cake some time ago, and they returned to the others.

“She yours?” Joseph asked Jotaro, indicating the girl in his arms, who was smiling widely once more, reaching a hand towards Josuke in Tomoko’s arms. Josuke seemed a bit timid, but ultimately curiosity won out, as he reached over too and took the hand.

“Yes, this is Jolyne,” he said and Jolyne spun around, looking at the people gathered around.

“Hello!” she said cheerily, without any prompting from Jotaro.

“Wow, she’s very brave,” said Suzie, smiling. “And so cute!”

“How’d’you get her hair like that?” Joseph asked and Jotaro glanced down at Jolyne’s hair, his already frowning face frowning just slightly further.

“It’s like that naturally,” he said, and Joseph would have thought he was joking if not for the deadpan he said it with.

“O…kay?” said Joseph, and then, failing to come up with anything better, “Is her mother somewhere here too, or…?”

“I… am no longer together with her,” Jotaro said, turning his gaze towards Jolyne. He looked… almost sad.

*Shit.*

“Shit,” said Joseph. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to—”

There was a tap on his shoulder and his grandfather’s voice saying “Excuse me,” behind him, and he had never been more glad about an interruption before. He looked back to find Jonathan and, for some reason, Dio standing there.

“Hi, grandpa, can I help you?” he asked, turning to face him better.

“I was just wondering if you’d seen Erina around,” Jonathan asked. “I lost sight of her after dinner.”

“Oh, she stayed behind to oversee the kitchen staff for a bit,” Joseph said. “I told her to leave it to them and join us here, but you know how she is.”

Jonathan laughed. “I do indeed,” he said with a shake of his head, a fond look on his face. “If she
doesn’t appear soon, I’ll have to go get her I suppose.” Then he looked over the group, seeming to realize he didn’t really know any of them. “My, who are your friends, Joseph?”

“Actually,” said Joseph, grinning, “they are relatives.” Jonathan looked at him in surprise. “Remember when I told you about meeting another Joestar at the bowling alley?” Jonathan nodded. “That was Johnny.”

“Howdy,” said Johnny, waving.

“Oh, yes, you’re one uncle Jordan’s great-grandkids,” Jonathan said with a smile. “I apologize for not staying in touch, we fell out of contact after he moved to the west coast.”

“Nah, no need to apologize,” Johnny said, waving his hand again. “It was much more fun meeting Joseph this way.”

“I see,” Jonathan laughed. “Well that’s good.”

“Yeah, it was surprising,” Joseph said with a huff of a laugh. “Just like the fact that Johnny brought some of his own relatives here tonight. That’s his cousin Jotaro Cujoh and his daughter Jolyne.”

Jonathan greeted them while Jotaro tipped his cap and Jolyne waved her hand enthusiastically. “And finally Tomoko Higashikata—” Tomoko bowed her head slightly “—who is not a Joestar, but whose son Josuke… is.”

“Indeed?” said Jonathan, his eyes focusing on the boy still in Tomoko’s arms. “Might I ask who the father is then?”

“Me,” said Joseph.


“Oh,” said Jonathan. The silence stretched on. “Well, it’s nice to know there’s so many Joestars States-side. Maybe we should start arranging family gatherings!”

“That sounds fabulous,” said Dio, and Joseph blinked because he had almost forgotten the man stood there just behind him. He’d been so quiet, just observing the scene. It felt like a very dangerous thing to do, forget where Dio Brando was. “But I think I’ll pass on that. I believe I’ll turn in for the night now, I feel quite partied out.”

“Already?” Jonathan asked. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m quite sure,” Dio said, flashing his adoptive brother a fake sweet smile. “Must be the age.” Then he muttered, quiet enough for Jonathan to not hear it, but just loud enough for Joseph to catch it, “Or all these goddamn Jojos…”

He turned to leave.

“Oh, Mister Brando,” came a new voice and Dio stopped dead on his tracks, a strangled noise escaping him, before he caught and recomposed himself.

“Giorno,” he said, turning and addressing a golden-haired teenager in a dark blue suit with ladybug buttons. “Hello.”

“Wait, who’s this kid?” Joseph whispered, leaning towards Caesar.

“He’s my second cousin from nonna Maria’s side,” Caesar whispered back. “His father is… very
influential.”


“Mister Brando, what are you doing here?” the boy, apparently called Giorno, asked and Dio looked uncomfortable.

“I am family,” he said simply. “And… what might you be doing here?”

“I’m family too,” Giorno said just as simply.

“You… you’re related to the Zeppelis?”

“From my dad’s side.” Dio hummed uneasily to acknowledge the words. “Isn’t that a funny coincidence?”

“Yes… funny,” said Dio and he was looking more than ready to slip from the scene when, yet again, a new voice joined in.

“You!” it said and soon enough a small Asian looking woman stormed through the crowd and grabbed a hold of Giorno’s shoulders, pulling the slightly surprised boy back. “What are you doing talking to my son?” she barked at Dio, who looked offended.

“Your son?” he asked, which struck Joseph as a bit odd. It was a perfectly normal statement, why would Dio have a problem with that, unless…

Holy shit.

As Joseph gaped, Giorno turned to his mother. “Mom, what’s the matter? I thought you knew him?”

“I do, and he is no good at all,” she said, giving Dio a glare. “I don’t want you talking to him.”

“Oh, but he…” Giorno said, furrowing his brow as he looked over to Dio. His mother paused.

“You… Has he come to talk to you before?” she asked him and he nodded. Her nostrils flared.

“I’ve run into him a few times after school,” he said. Dio seemed like he wanted to physically stop Giorno from talking. Joseph was almost holding his breath as the scene unfolded before him. “He told me you were old friends.”

“You… worm,” she hissed. Dio pressed a hand to his chest. “I told you to stay out of my sight and now I find out you’ve been trying to make cozy with my son? I don’t know what you’re planning, but I know it’s not good and I’ll be damned if I let you worm your way back into my life.” She bared her teeth in a predatory smile. “I’ll enjoy burning you to the ground,” she sneered.

“And I will enjoy seeing you try,” Dio sneered back and then strode away, past Jonathan and Giorno and his mother, and out of the tent.

Joseph blew out the breath he’d been holding.


“I am terribly sorry for that scene,” said the woman suddenly, addressing Joseph and Caesar.

“Ahh, that’s okay, no need to apologize,” Caesar said, waving his hands.
“Yeah, if anything we should thank you,” Joseph said with a grin. “I’ve been wanting to give that asshole a piece of my mind for a while now.”

“Ah, that is…” she said and then took a breath. “I’m sorry to ask, but why was he here?”

“He’s my adoptive brother,” Jonathan said and shit, Joseph had forgotten he was there. Luckily he didn’t seem to mad at Joseph for calling Dio an asshole.

“Oh, I’m sorry I didn’t know,” she exclaimed, her eyes widening in surprise.

“You don’t have to apologize, I understand completely,” Jonathan said giving her a reassuring smile. “Dio can rub people the wrong way easily. If he’s done something to upset you, that is his fault and I will not make excuses for him.”

“I see,” said the woman. “But Haruno! What are you doing, talking to strange men? He could have been anyone, stalking around your school like that! You shouldn’t trust strangers, especially shady ones like him. I expected better from you.”

“Yes, mom,” said Giorno, looking down. “I’m sorry.”

“Well, I hope you learned your lesson,” she muttered. “I really must go now though, I have to go find my husband and talk to him about this… unfortunate situation.”

“Okay mom,” he said and she left, still clearly annoyed. Then he looked back at the group, all of whom were staring at him. “Did I interrupt something?”

“No, nope, not at all,” Joseph said, grinning. “Why’d she call you Haruno? I thought your name was Giorno?”

“Haruno is my Japanese name,” Giorno said. “She always uses that name for me.”

“Cool,” said Joseph, nodding. “Wow, we have a lot of Japanese people here today, don’t we. Aren’t we multicultural?” He nudged Caesar with his elbow.

“Aaaaalrighty, folks!” came Smokey’s voice through the speakers. “Now that the groom and groom have finally blessed us with their presence once more, I do believe it’s time for some activities!”

“Well isn’t he snarky,” Joseph said.

“Well yeah, we waited for you forever,” Suzie said, rolling her eyes. “I tried to tell you earlier.”

“Come on up now, boys,” Smokey continued, and Joseph and Caesar gave each other a look before walking over to the small stage the band was also on. “Here they are! Happy to see you!”

“Sorry, sorry,” said Joseph with a smile. “Had to talk with some family members.” Smokey looked over the crowd to where they’d come from, spotting the group of Joestars they’d left behind, among them Tomoko and Josuke.

“Ooooh, isn’t that…?” he asked placing a hand over the microphone and leaning closer to Joseph.

“Yes,” said Joseph. “I’ll introduce you later. Now what was this about activities?”

“Ladies and gentlemen!” Smokey announced. “It is time for the first event of the evening! The garter toss!” There was laughter and applause from the crowd.

“But Smokey, neither of us are wearing a garter,” Caesar said with an amused smile.
“You might not be,” Joseph muttered and then grinned when Caesar choked on air. Caesar’s eyes flicked down his leg and then back up again.

“You remember the last time you wore a garter?” he asked. Joseph’s grin widened.

“Vividly,” he whispered.

Smokey had continued to talk into the microphone during their little exchange and then he addressed the newlyweds once more. “Stop your chittering, did you listen at all?”

“Not really, no,” Joseph said and Smokey gave him an unimpressed look.

“Would it kill you to pay attention? Since we have neither a garter or a bouquet, we’re gonna be throwing these.” He dug into his jacket pockets and produced two white bird figurines. Joseph blinked.

“Are those… doves?” Caesar asked.

“Yup,” said Smokey.

“Why doves?” Joseph asked.

“Because they’re a universal symbol of peace and love,” Smokey said, closing his eyes, probably aiming for a serene look. It… didn’t really work out, especially when he grinned widely. “Also ‘cause it will be hilarious.”

“O…kay?” said Joseph, exchanging a look with Caesar, who shrugged.

Alright then!” Smokey said into the microphone again. “Everyone who wants to participate, please form a group in the middle. Everyone else, please move to the sides!”

The group of people moved, some going to the sides and others gathering closer to the middle. Smokey guided Joseph and Caesar to the front of the tent so that there was a good ten feet between them and the crowd.

“Ooh, can I go first?” Joseph asked, excited. Smokey looked at Caesar who shrugged.

“Here you go,” Smokey said, giving one of the birds to Joseph. It was soft, kinda like a rubber duck. Made sense, Smokey wouldn’t have them hurling hard things into a crowd after all. “Is everyone ready?” His question was met with loud cheering.

“Awesome,” said Joseph and turned his back to the crowd. He took a deep breath, felt the smooth bird in his hand, and then threw it back. There was cheering, a quiet scuffling, and then an intense squeak. Joseph burst out laughing. “What the hell?” he asked, turning around, his eyes roaming the crowd to find the one with the bird.

To his not-surprise, it was Suzie.

Her face was tinged red and when she squeezed the small dove in his hands it squeaked again.

“A squeaky toy, Smokey? Really?” Caesar asked, turning to the best man. Smokey was pressing a hand to his mouth, to stifle the laughter.

“Congratulations Suzie!” Smokey said between his soft giggles. “You’re our first winner! Come on up here.”
She glanced around and then moved out of the crowd.

“Your turn,” said Smokey, offering the other bird to Caesar, who accepted it slowly. Then he turned, again slowly, away from the crowd. Then he prepared himself for the throw.

“Mister Joestar!” someone shouted and Caesar jumped, the bird leaving his hand with way too much force. There was a short shriek from the crowd and both he and Joseph quickly turned see who had gotten hit.

Tomoko blinked, the back of Jotaro’s hand mere inches from her face with the dove gripped inside his fist.

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry!” Caesar called out, taking a few steps towards them. “Are you okay?”

A slow whine escaped the bird as Jotaro’s squeeze lessened and wordlessly he offered the bird to Tomoko. Everyone was dead silent. She blinked again, and picked it off his palm.

“Thank you,” she said. Her face was flushed. He nodded slightly. Josuke reached over towards her hand and touched the bird. She let out a breath and asked him something in Japanese. He nodded and she gave him the bird. He squeezed it and it squeaked.

The silence in the room broke. Caesar blew out the breath he’d been holding.

“Mr. Joestar!” someone called out again. It was Roses, who hurried over to Jonathan. “I have some… unpleasant news.”

“What’s the matter, Roses?” Jonathan asked, concerned.

“It’s your brother, sir,” Roses said. He had the immediate and undivided attention of most party members. “He’s, well…”

“Ten bucks says he’s skipped town,” Joseph whispered to Caesar, who jabbed him with an elbow.

“He’s disappeared.”

“Called it!”

“Joseph!” Caesar hissed.

“He’s disappeared? How?” Jonathan asked, brow furrowed in confusion. There was buzzing in the crowd. “He doesn’t even have a car.”

“Ah, yes, about that… he seems to have… stolen one,” Roses said quietly, rubbing his hands together.

“Holy shit,” said Joseph.

“Whose?” asked Caesar, probably a bit louder than he’d meant.

“I— I’m not entirely sure, unfortunately,” Roses admitted. The buzzing got louder. “I just heard a loud revving sound and looked out the window just in time to see him disappear down the road.”

“Oh my god,” said Joseph. “Oh my god. This is insane!”

“Let’s go,” said Jonathan, walking briskly past Roses towards the exit of the tent. Joseph exchanged a look with Caesar and they started to move after Jonathan, Smokey at their heel. Lisa Lisa broke out
of the crowd as well. “We need to get to the bottom of this.”

~x~

In Dio’s room they found signs of haphazard packing and a quick escape. Clothes had been thrown around and drawers were left hanging open, all the closets emptied with just the few random items that had spilled out left on the floor. It was clear that he had run away in a hurry. Joseph glanced around the room, running a hand through his hair.

“Oh my,” said Jonathan, picking up a forgotten shirt and laying it on the bed. “He really did leave.”

“Well obviously,” said Joseph, picking through the pockets of the jacket that had fallen to the bottom of the wardrobe. “I woulda run too, if my evil plan had been foiled and I was threatened by the missus of a mob boss.”

“I knew he was up to something,” Jonathan sighed, shaking his head. “I kept hoping that maybe he wasn’t, but I knew he was. He always is.”

“Don’t blame yourself too much, grandpa,” Joseph said, tossing the jacket back in the closet and walking over to Jonathan, placing a hand on his shoulder. “You just wanted to reconnect with him. It’s not your fault he’s a great big bag of dicks.”


“Found something,” said Caesar, his head popping up from behind the bed where he’d been kneeling. He lifted up a small card. “It had fallen between the bed and the bedside table.”

“Lemme see,” said Joseph, and they all gathered around Caesar, who stood up. It was a pretty plain white card, like a business card, one side empty and on the other a design of a pink seashell. There was no name, no contact info, no nothing. Just the shell.

“Holy shit, is that what I think it is?” said Smokey of all people, taking the card from Caesar’s fingers and turning it around.

“Unbelievable,” muttered Lisa Lisa.

“Wait, you know what that is?” Joseph asked, surprised.

“Well duh, do you not?” Smokey asked and when he was met with confused silence he rolled his eyes. “Man, don’t you ever watch the news?”

“It’s a hitman’s calling card,” said Lisa Lisa.

“I’m sorry what?” said Joseph.

“A hitman, really?” said Jonathan, picking up the card himself. “I’m… disappointed that it doesn’t surprise me that much.”

“So wait, he had hired a hitman?” Joseph asked. “Or was planning to?”

“I guess that explains the sudden need for money,” Caesar mused. Right, that. Joseph grimaced. Dio became a more and more unpleasant person the more he learned about him, didn’t he? Well, they could be pretty sure he hadn’t actually payed the guy yet, since he still has none of that sweet, sweet Joestar money. At least Joseph really hoped so.

“Who was his target though?” Smokey said out loud what they were all wondering. Joseph scratched
his head. Killing off Jonathan to get money to hire a hitman to kill off Jonathan would be redundant at best, so it had to be someone else, but who? The guy probably had a ton of enemies, being such a slimy bastard, but Joseph couldn’t shake the feeling that there had to be something bigger behind it. Someone that stood in his way, someone who was a threat…

“Wait,” he said as something occurred. “You don’t think—”

“Giorno’s mother,” said Caesar, who had come to the same conclusion. He rubbed a finger across his lips. “Might be.”

“Who’s Giorno?” asked Smokey, who hadn’t been present when the boy had been introduced.

“He’s my second cousin,” Caesar said. “His father is, well, basically a mob boss.”

“So you are actually, literally related to mafia though?” Joseph said and Caesar turned to look at him. “You’re not joking about that?”

Caesar blinked. Then he shrugged.

“Oh my god,” said Joseph.

“In any case,” Caesar said, turning back to Smokey. “Apparently Dio has been approaching the boy. He probably wants to use him to his own advantage somehow, which could be a lot of advantage, considering Giorno’s role as the future head of the family. His mother didn’t seem too keen on that however, so getting her out of the picture would be a smart move.”

“I… guess that makes sense?” Smokey said, scratching his neck. “But why would Dio have leverage over Giorno? It’s not like he’s his… wait, is he?”

“Probably,” said Joseph. “Judging by the way she talked to him.” He let out a huge sigh and stepped away from their little circle. “Oh man, this just got a lot more complicated.”

“I suppose we should call the police,” said Jonathan, placing the card on the table. “If there’s a hitman involved…” Then he paused and turned around quickly. “But we shouldn’t let that interfere with the party! Go back out there and enjoy the rest of the night, I’ll handle things here!”

“But grandpa—” Joseph started, but Lisa Lisa put a hand on his shoulder. “Ahh, okay then,” he huffed. “But I want you to keep us posted! I want to know everything that happens!”

“Of course, of course,” said Jonathan as he started to shoo them out of the room. “I’ll tell you everything in the evening.”

“Right,” said Joseph. “Let’s get back to the party then.”

~x~

The reception was still in full swing when they got back to the garden tent. The evening was rolling around and the air was getting chillier, so the heaters along the sides of the tent had been turned on. The mood was good, luckily not soured by the sudden grand theft auto by everybody’s least favorite great uncle. The car he had stolen turned out to be Lisa Lisa’s, of which she was incredibly pissed, but at least that meant that he hadn’t stolen the car of any of the guests. That might’ve been a tad too awkward.

Smokey made it his sworn duty to keep everyone’s minds off the unpleasant scene earlier, going straight for the microphone and announcing the next activity: the shoe game. Of course they couldn’t
use their shoes since they were essentially identical, but Smokey had prepared for that, digging even more toys from somewhere; teddy bears for Joseph and rubber ducks for Caesar. Joseph didn’t question the decision.

They spent the next hour or so arguing about who did more house work, or who had better taste in movies, or who was more likely to skip leg day.

It was fun and the guests seemed to think so too.

Still, slowly but surely, the evening turned into night and everyone started heading back home. Joseph and Caesar were stuck at the door for a good while, saying good bye to everyone, thanking them for coming and whatnot. When the final guests left—Tomoko and Josuke, who surprisingly enough left with Jotaro and Jolyne, because apparently the two had bonded over being single parents—Joseph was utterly beat.

“Oh, Joseph, there’s something I’ve been meaning to ask you,” said Lisa Lisa as the front door closed for the final time. Joseph looked at his mother. “Have you booked a honeymoon?”

“I, uh, what?” said Joseph, smartly.

“No, we haven’t,” said Caesar, blinking. “I completely forgot about it in the midst of everything else.”

“Yeah we kinda figured as much,” said Suzie, coming up from behind the two and linking her arms through theirs. “So we totally got you one.”

“Really?” Joseph asked, a smile forming on his face.

“Yes,” said Smokey, dropping himself onto the nearest chair with a long suffering sigh. “Well, more like Lisa Lisa got it for you, but we helped her choose. Congrats guys.”

“Thank you, signo—,” Caesar started, catching himself mid-word. “Ah, should I... call you Lisa Lisa now?”

“Well, since you are my son-in-law, there is no need for formality,” Lisa Lisa said. “But you can call me however you wish.”

“Thank you so much mom!” shouted Joseph, practically lunging at his mother. She dodged. He hit his foot on a leg of a table. A chill ran up his back and he knelt down to grab a hold of the dully throbbing foot.

“Dude, you okay?” asked Smokey.

“Peachy,” Joseph wheezed. It hadn’t hurt as much as it could’ve, he was wearing shoes after all.

“In any case,” Suzie said, uncaring about Joseph’s agony. “The flight leaves Sunday morning and the trip will be four weeks. Auntie Lisa Lisa has arranged everything with your workplaces too!”

“That’s so nice of you, mom,” Joseph said, standing up and this time managing to hug Lisa Lisa. Or, well, pull her against his side with one arm anyway.

“Where are we going?” asked Caesar.

“It’s a surprise,” Smokey said with a grin. “You’ll find out on Sunday.”

“Love me a good surprise,” Joseph said and then yawned. Widely.
“You boys can go ahead and get to bed. It’s been a long day,” Suzie said, nudging Caesar with her shoulder. “We’ll handle everything here.”

“The main guest room has been set up for you,” Lisa Lisa said, placing a hand on Joseph’s cheek for a moment. “It’s a bit more festive than your old room.”

“Thank you, uh, Lisa Lisa,” Caesar said. She gave him a smile.

“Good night,” said Suzie, standing up on her tiptoes and placing a small kiss on his cheek.

There was the usual chorus of “good nights”, and then Joseph took a hold of Caesar’s hand and pulled him towards the staircase. They made quick way to the room and then he stopped.

“Wait,” he said and Caesar had exactly two seconds to wonder what was going on before he had been hoisted up into Joseph’s arms.

“Cazzo!” he exclaimed as the floor disappeared under his feet. Joseph grinned. Caesar glared. “I’m starting to think you’re the one who’s into this whole carrying thing,” he said and Joseph kissed his cheek.

“I admit nothing,” he said and then, “Open the door, would you? I have my hands full.”

“You really should have thought about that before you picked me up,” Caesar said, but did take one of his arms from around Joseph’s neck and reach over to the doorknob. It turned and the door slid open. Joseph stepped inside, careful not to hit Caesar’s head on the doorframe.

Caesar switched on the light and they took in the room. It was nice. Simple, but nice. It had a wardrobe, a small desk under the window, and a large bed that took up most of the space in the room. A bed, which was covered in rose petals. That, along with the matching pastel linens and throw pillows and curtains, had Suzie written all over it.

“How considerate,” Caesar said with an amused hint to his voice. There were thick candles on the nightstand and Joseph didn’t need to open the drawer to know what he’d find inside.

“That’s one word for it,” he said and walked over to the bed, but not before kicking the door closed behind him. “Alright, husband,” he said, his voice dropping low. Caesar raised an eyebrow, a smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. He dropped Caesar on the bed and crawled on top of him.

“Yes… husband?” said Caesar against his lips, wrapping an arm around his neck, and they kissed, slowly, like they had all the time in the world. Which they did, now, didn’t they? All the time they wanted. They could go as slow as they wanted.

Which at the moment, at least if Joseph had a say in it, wasn’t all that slow.

With great effort Joseph pushed himself off the bed again, dragging Caesar up with him as the other momentarily refused to let go. He did, eventually, and Joseph walked back to the door and locked it. Then he spun around, leaning back against it. Caesar looked him up and down, his eyes roaming over Joseph’s body and Joseph grinned.

“Now then,” he said, pulling off his tie and tossing it to the side. “Consummation time.”

~x~

“He fled to Egypt? Are you kidding me?” Joseph asked, pulling behind him a large suitcase as they navigated through JFK. He and Caesar had spent most of Saturday lazing around, enjoying the
domesticity of married life before packing chaos hit. They still didn’t know where they were going—someone had self-checked them in and Suzie was keeping their tickets hostage until the security check—but they had been told it would be warm, but not like super warm or anything. That was according to Smokey anyway.

“That’s right,” said Jonathan, and sighed a little. “Apparently he bought the earliest flight as far as he could get. Of course there’s no saying if he still is in Egypt or not.”

“What about the card?” asked Caesar, rounding a trashcan. “Was it… legitimate?”

“According to the police, yes,” Jonathan said.

“The calling card’s actual design has never been publicized, only a description,” said Smokey, who apparently was really into this kind of stuff. “So they can be pretty sure of its authenticity.”

“The lengths a man will go to to get power,” Joseph said with a tut and a shake of his head.

“Well, let’s not dwell on that now, you two have much more fun things to look forward to,” Jonathan said, trying to bring the conversation away from motherfucking Dio. Understandably.

“Yeah, like finally finding out where we’re going,” Joseph said, leaning towards Suzie and glaring at her.

“We’re almost at the checkpoint, hold your horses,” the girl said, uncaring. Joseph grumbled a little under his breath, but the security checkpoint was already in sight, so he didn’t complain too much. “Alright, we’re here!” she said cheerily when they got to the back of the line. Luckily it wasn’t terribly long at that hour. She started to dig through her bag.

“Please tell me you didn’t forget them,” Joseph said.

“I didn’t forget them, dumbass,” Suzie said, giving him a glare. “Here we go!” She pulled out two envelopes and held them out for Joseph and Caesar. They both took one. Joseph pulled out the ticket from inside it.

“Rome?” he asked, his eyebrows rising.

“Well, more like a tour of Italy,” Smokey said, leaning an elbow on Joseph’s shoulder. “You start in Rome and then you go places: Naples, Milan, Venice… I mean you’re gonna be there for a month, you might as well tour the entire country, right? You can even stop by Switzerland on one day if you wanna.”

“I’ll email you the full itinerary so you can see all the hotels and stuff that have reservations,” Suzie said with a smile. “I hope you’ll enjoy it.”

“I’m sure we will,” said Caesar, smiling back. “Thank you, Suzie.”

They said good bye to their three-person farewell party, and then the lined up for the security check. It was slow and tedious, like it always was, but they got through it without unnecessary complications. As Caesar collected his jacket from the conveyer belt Joseph reached over and took his hand. Caesar met his gaze and he smiled, they both smiled. Ahead of them awaited a month of Italian adventures, and after that, a whole lifetime.

Joseph couldn’t wait.

“Hey Jojo!” Smokey shouted and the moment broke, Joseph let go of Caesar’s hand and he rolled
his eyes as he turned to look to the other side of the checkpoint. “One last thing before you leave!”

He exchanged a look with Caesar, who shrugged. “What is it?” he shouted back. Smokey grinned, a chesire cat in the flesh, and a chill ran down Joseph’s spine. There was something, something from a long time ago, something he’d forgotten, something—

“I called it!”

End
EPILOGUE: Just another day at the office

Chapter Summary

Customer service is a demanding job.

Chapter Notes

Well, this is it. This is finally it. The Final Chapter. The Epilogue. I can't believe it's really over for good. I already said this in the last chapter's notes but seriously, I just really want to thank every single person who's made it this far, all the readers who've been here since chapter one in January, all the readers who've come in midway or just found this fic, thank you to everyone who's commented, each and every comment has made my day so much better (special thank you to the ones who've left a comment in like every single chapter... you know who you are♥) AND thank you also to readers who haven't commented, but have still kudo'ed (is that a word?) or bookmarked or WHATEVER or just read the fic I mean that's really all I wanted when I started writing. That maybe people would read it and get something out of it. EXTRA SPECIAL SHOUTOUT to HikaruMcDonut (teamcdonut over on tumblr) who drew not one but TWO pieces of amazing fanart for the fic like holy shit I can't even fathom that properly. That was the most amazing feeling. (by the by, if someone wants to talk to me or sth on tumblr, i'm over there by the same name, so like... come talk caejose to me)
FINALLY THE BIGGEST shoutout to my bff, gf, bae, now and forever, endles! I'd dedicate this fic to you but I already did, so........ ♥
But yeah, I don't think there's much else for me to say here. I've really been keeping y'all here long enough as is probably (does anyone even read author's comments? i do but i'm weird, so...) so off you go I guess. Ciao~~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been a slow morning at the magistrate, as Sunday mornings tended to be. Lucy wondered why they even opened so early on Sunday mornings, but she wasn’t about to complain; she might’ve been a part timer, but she got paid a weekend bonus and that was more than good enough for her. She pushed the button to call the next in line.

“What??” came a loud voice from the back of the room and she jumped just a little. “What do you mean you got arrested, how the hell did you get out?”

It was a group of three young men sitting in the waiting area who were making the commotion. The African-American, the one who had yelled, looked reasonably normal, but his brunet friend on the other hand was ridiculously tall and also very, very muscular. The third man, who was blond, was also on the tall and muscular side, but next to the mountain of a man he looked downright dainty. He was really pretty though, at least in Lucy’s opinion.

“Jeez, Smokey, calm down, you’re making a scene,” said the brunet.
“You’re one to talk,” said the one apparently called Smokey, crossing his arms.

“We’ll tell you the rest when we have the time, but it’s our turn, now come on,” continued the brunet, ignoring the other one, pointing at the sign that displayed the queue number. Lucy paled a little, realizing they were about to come to her counter.

*Come on now, just because they were yelling doesn’t mean they’re bad people,* she berated herself as the trio started to move. *Even though the big guy apparently had just gotten himself arrested…*

That’s when she noticed the surprising amount of luggage the three had with them. Were they going on a trip? No, *coming* from a trip, if the bags under the blond’s eyes—and his somewhat dazed expression—were anything to go by.

The biggest guy dropped himself onto the small chair on the other side of her window and she winced on the chair’s account.

“Hiya,” he started, giving her a wide, happy grin, and suddenly he didn’t feel *quite* as threatening.

“We’d like to adopt someone.”

Lucy blinked.

“What?” she said.

“What?!” said the blond.

“Wait, is *that* why we’re here?” asked Smokey with a smile spreading onto his face.

*Mamma mia, Jojo, when you said we needed to come to the magistrate immediately I thought it was about something important!*” the blond huffed, rubbing his eyes. “Like, I don’t know, the marriage?”

“Why would I need to do something about the marriage?” the Jojo person asked. He waved his left hand in the direction of the blond man. Lucy’s eyes were immediately drawn to the glint of gold in his ring finger. “All of that was taken care of beginning of September. You should know, you signed all the same papers.”

*Oh.*

“Excuse me, sirs,” she chimed in and all three men turned to look at her. “Ah, I’m sorry, but I’m a bit confused. What… exactly do you need help with?”

“Absolutely nothing, *dolcezza,*” said the blond with a smile so bright she had to blink. She could feel a heat rising to her cheeks and she tried to stammer a response, suddenly flustered.

“No, we *do* need help,” interrupted Jojo before she could embarrass herself properly.

“You are not seriously—”

“Come on, Caesar, don’t be such a killjoy!” he interrupted again and Caesar huffed and threw his hands in the air. Jojo turned back towards her. “Right, we would like to make an adoption, is that possible?”

“Well, the magistrate isn’t really the first place to come for that,” she said, looking between the two apparent newlyweds. She wondered if they’d actually talked about this beforehand. “I can refer you to some orphanages, if you—”
“No, no! That’s not what I mean,” Jojo laughed and she blinked, confused. He grabbed a hold of Smokey’s shoulder and pulled him down, pointing him in the face. “We want to adopt this guy.”

The man grinned and waved at her. She opened her mouth, unable to produce words for a moment.

“I’m sorry?” she finally managed to get out.

“Well, he’s an orphan, and we’d like to adopt him so we could be his new parents!” Jojo said gleefully.

“But… he’s not a minor, is he? He doesn’t need legal guardians anymore,” she tried. “Not to mention you’re practically the same age, what’s the point?”

“Exactly, Joseph,” Caesar joined in again. “That is the point?”

“Hey, it was your idea,” Jojo said, giving Caesar a pointed look.

“It was a joke.”

“Whatever, I thought it was a great idea.” He turned back to Lucy. “Can we do it or not?”

“I…” she started. Jojo looked at him with pleading eyes, and oddly enough she suddenly found he looked very familiar. “I suppose it’s technically possible,” she said, turning on the computer monitor. “Not very common and definitely unorthodox, but…” She tapped her password into the database. “What’s your name again?”

“Smokey Brown,” said Smokey, leaning in a bit. She typed it in.

“Social security number?” she asked. He told her. She started the search as the couple started to bicker again.

“I can’t believe we’re actually doing this,” Caesar said, shaking his head.

“What, this is great! Haven’t you always wanted to be a daddy?” Jojo asked.

“Maybe, but not to a grown man!” Caesar huffed. “That’s just… weird.”

“Strange weird… or kinky weird?” Jojo asked, waggling his eyebrows. Caesar’s face turned red.

“Oh my god, I don’t wanna hear about your daddy kinks!” Smokey exclaimed.

“I do not have a daddy kink!” Caesar nearly yelled, clearly flustered, and Lucy thanked god there was no one else in the vicinity. Then her computer beeped.

“Oh,” she said and the three men turned to look at her once more. “I’m sorry, but you can’t adopt Mr. Brown after all.”


“Because he’s already been adopted,” she explained, looking over the form. “Five years ago, by Jonathan and Erina… Joestar?”

Suddenly everything clicked in her head.

“…what?” said Jojo, looking slowly up at Smokey. “By…?”
“Oh yeah,” said Smokey. "Riiight."

“What?” shrieked Jojo.

“Calm down, Jojo,” said Caesar.

“When on earth did this happen?” he continued anyway. Smokey scratched his cheek.

“Well, basically as soon as your grandma found out I was an orphan,” he said. “It was the end of my sophomore year, I think.”


“Yeah, I guess I kinda forgot about that,” Smokey said. “I mean, it was a lovely gesture, but it’s not made much of a practical difference in my life, so…”

“No, but…” Jojo started. “But… what about the plan? The recipe?”

The… recipe?

“Dude, it’s not that big of a deal,” said Smokey, patting Jojo on the back.

“Besides, I think my husband’s adoptive brother is family enough to tell the recipe to, if that’s what you’re really worried about,” said Caesar, also giving Jojo a small pat.

They were about to adopt their friend… just so they could give him a traditional family recipe?

“Well, technically.” Lucy found herself saying through her stupor. Jojo turned to look at her with a glint of hope in his eyes. “If it was your grandparents who adopted Smokey, technically he’s not your brother, but your uncle.”

Jojo’s mouth fell open. Both of the other two hid their sniggers behind their hands.

“Wow, this is amazing,” Smokey said, trying his hardest to not start giggling. His shoulders were shaking though. “You’re my nephew, Jojo!”

“I am not hearing this,” said Jojo, suddenly standing up and turning away. “This is… this is too weird.”

“Strange weird, or…” Caesar said, smirking.

“No,” Jojo said, pointing a finger in Caesar’s face. “Shut up. Let’s go.”

“Hey, Jojo, why are you running away?” Smokey asked, collecting the suitcase Jojo left behind as he started to march away. “Come on, let’s do some uncle-nephew bonding!”

“Shut up!” Jojo called, but it was starting to get faint. Caesar chuckled and then turned to Lucy.

“Thank you, stellina,” he said with a smile. “I’m very sorry for bothering you with this nonsense.”

“Oh, uh,” said Lucy, the flush rising on her face again. “That's alright. I'm glad I could help?”

“Hey, seriously Jojo, wait up!” Smokey called as he hurried after his friend. Caesar picked up the rest of the luggage and left as well. Their voices carried a long way through the building, until finally they didn’t. Lucy stared for a moment after them, blinking, as her brain caught up to speed.
Then she buried her face into her hands. That was not at all what she’d expected when she’d come to work that morning. That wasn’t something she’d expected ever to happen. What even had happened? She rubbed her temples.

She needed a coffee break, she decided and closed down her station. She also needed to call Johnny and tell him all about this.

**End of Epilogue.**

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! ♥ See you in the next one~ (■‿■*)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!