Reviews Of Young Adult Novels, Mainly Those Prominently Featuring Vampires, And Containing At Least One Love Triangle

by Snarp

Summary

In Which A Vampire, Accompanied By Her Mutant Moirail And On The Run From A Sinister Confectionery Mogul, Blogs Unkind Things About YA Vampire Novels; The Author Of One Such Work Responds In A Hostile Fashion While Intoxicated; Structures, Conveyances, And Fragile Emotional Equilibria Are Thoroughly Wrecked; Works Of Popular Fiction Are Criticized In Ways Inadvertently Revealing Of The Critics' Anxieties; And Pirates Present A Problem.
Chapter 1

The fourth entry in Tess Theramin's Heart of Ten series opens with the revelation that the events of the third entry, New York Times-bestseller A Reminiscence of Dr. Raheli Doomlocke, were a dream. It is my hope that in reporting this I do not injure the sensibilities of those personally offended by "spoilers," but I think that it needs to be gotten out of the way. Someone dreamed that last book. That is a thing that happened. Or, didn't happen, I guess.

The central question which The Dream Quest of a Known Quantity would like to ask is whose dream it was, and why some of the events of its predecessor, but not all, appear to be having an emotional effect on some, but not all, of the protagonists. The question that it actually asks is, "Why did Tess Theramin think that this was a good idea?"

(Click to read the rest of the review...)

Edit: This post's Comments are now moderated Please Be patient as I Approve Them.

Edit 2: Please Re Read My Commenting Policy If You Do Not Understand Why Your Comments Are Not Being Approved And Please Understand That My Policy Does Apply To Everyone

2012-09-06 -- 02:23:17 AM:

genusAmyema: I Am Very Sorry But I Am Not Going To Unscreen Your Comments
GA: I Understand That You Were Upset By My Review And I Regret That
GA: But My Blog Has Always Had A Strict Policy Regarding Both Profanity And Personal Attacks
GA: Ordinarily I Would Already Have Banned You But I Am Making An Exception For Obvious Reasons

templatizedTurgidity: Yeah because you haters get all your hatertraffic when writers respond IN PERSON.
TT: And you HAVE YET to wring this one dry, right?
TT: So you're wanting to stretch my responses out over a few more days to drum up more clicks for you?
TT: Tess Theramin is thinking that she is ON TO YOU. That is what she was thinking just now. ;(
GA: I Have Never Seen That Particular Emoticon Before And I May Need Some Time To Sort Out Its Full Implications
GA: But No I Am Making An Exception To My Policy Because The Few Comments You Have Made Here In The Past
GA: Have Been Productive And Consistent In Tone And Your Behavior Right Now Is Very Out Of Character
GA: Frankly I Can See Why Some Are Accusing Me Of Fabricating Your Initial Comment
GA: Which Was Fortunately The Only One That Was Even Briefly Publicly Visible
TT: My username has turgid in it.
TT: What were you expecting of a person who'd do such an unconscionable thing, HATER???
TT: Also, why do you type like that?
GA: I Had Been Wondering About The Username For A While But Had Attributed It To Some Unfathomable Flight Of Irony
GA: Which I Thought I Was Perhaps Psychologically Ill Equipped To Follow
GA: But Now I Am Wondering If You May Have Selected It Due To The Imbibing Of A Soporific Substance
TT: What?
GA: I Mean You Are Drunk Right Now Arent You
TT: Oh so you are very sure about my motivations about the book but you need INDEPENDENT CONFIRMATION OF THE drinking?
GA: No Not Really
GA: I Have Some Small Experience Of These Things And Am Pretty Sure Of It
TT: Oh really wow. You must be a TRUE WOMAN of the world.
GA: No Not In Any Real Sense
GA: At All
GA: But By The Same Token I Am Pretty Sure That You Will Regret Having Made These Comments By Tomorrow Afternoon
GA: You Really Made Some Very Profane Remarks And Your Books Are YA As You Know
GA: Marketed To Teenagers
TT: Oh you know me so well person who writes HATER STUFF about my AWESOME books. ;(
GA: Are You Using That Word Ironically
GA: Hater I Mean
GA: Well And Awesome Now Too I Guess
GA: Im Asking That Seriously Because I Cant Tell
TT: Given that Im so obviously a troll I dont know why you havent banned me outright yet.
GA: I Have Never Seen A Picture Of You And I Was Not Aware That You Were A Troll
GA: I Assure You That I Would Never Ban Someone For That
GA: Despite Common Scientific Thinking On The Subject Ive Never Been Entirely Convinced Of The Species Intellectual Inferiority
TT: Oh my god obviously I didnt mean it literally.
TT: Maybe we should switch the words troll and pirate in online nomenclature, it might make more sense.
GA: Excuse Me Then
GA: Im Very Sorry If I Offended You
TT: You did. I am EXTREMELY OFFENDED By that suggestion.
GA: Then I Apologize Again
GA: Regardless If You Continue To Attempt To Post Comments Containing Obscene Terms I Will Probably Feel Obligated To Ban You
GA: But What Really Concerns Me Honestly Are The Disparaging Remarks You Made About Your Readers Intelligence
GA: I Was Personally A Little Bit Upset By Them And I Consider Myself Fairly Thick Skinned
GA: I Have Not Really Discussed This On The Blog
GA: But Your Work Has Been Important To Me During A Very Difficult Time In My Life
TT: My work is accurately-described by my username.
TT: It's a joke and the net effect on the world were I to stop writing would be zero.
TT: The attention-starved and sexually-immature adult women who are actually my largest audience them would just find another generic fictional object upon which to erotically fixate.
TT: Pirates, maybe.
TT: Oh, are you done talking finally? Did that one burn?
GA: Well I Am Sorry That You Feel That Way I Guess
GA: But However You Really Feel About The Series I Do Not Want To See It End Prematurely
GA: Because Your Publishers Were Embarrassed By Something You Said On A Fans Blog Late At Night While Drunk
GA: I Mean Thats Probably Objectively The Worst Way To End A Series And I Am Including In That Evaluation Things Which Orson Scott Card Has Done
GA: I Think That You Probably Do Not Want This To Happen Either
GA: If Only Because It Is How You Make Money
GA: So I Guess That I Am Asking You To Turn Off Your Computer And Wait Until You Sober Up
GA: To Post Any Sort Of Response To My Review
GA: If You Still Do Feel That It Merits A Response
GA: Honestly I Do Not Think That It Does
GA: My Blog Is Only A Hobby And I Would Not Have Posted The Review If I Thought That You Would Be Upset By It
GA: If You Will Agree To Log Off For The Evening Then I Will Agree To Unscreen Your Comments Tomorrow
GA: If That Is You Still Want Me To Do So Then
GA: You Can Message Me In The Morning If So
GA: This Is A Violation Of My Usual Policy But Because You Are The One Asking I Will Do It
GA: Are You Still There
TT: I left to get something to drink.
TT: Okay, setting up auto-pester to go out at 7:00 AM WHILE I SLEEP IN HUNGOVER BECAUSE I AM TOTES WASTED LOL.
GA: All Right Then
GA: I Will Look Forward To Hearing From You
GA: Good Night Ms Theramin
genusAmyema [GA] ceased trolling templatizedTurgidity [TT]
TT: ...Why that particular logout message?
templatizedTurgidity [TT] ceased pestering genusAmyema [GA]
templatizedTurgidity [TT] began pestering genusAmyema [GA] at 2012-09-06 -- 07:00:00
TT: Immediately unscreen my incisive and definitively non-alcohol-fueled remarks regarding your intelligence and that of all of my other readers.
templatizedTurgidity [TT] ceased pestering genusAmyema [GA]
TT: I changed my mind. Please do not unscreen those comments.
TT: I have reread them and have decided that I no longer consider them entirely philosophically and intellectually unassailable.
templatizedTurgidity [TT] ceased pestering genusAmyema [GA]
TT: I just wanted to thank you for not unscreening my comments, and to apologize again for the things I said to you. You would be within your rights to publish both my comments to your blog, and that ill-advised chatlog, simply to get more page hits, from which I assume you would benefit financially. But you you've chosen not to do so, I suppose for my benefit, and I owe you my gratitude for that.
TT: And I'm now going to log off, to absolve you of the burden of responding to me, as I'm obviously not fit company for someone as patient as you.
templatizedTurgidity [TT] ceased pestering genusAmyema [GA]
TT: I looked at your blog today and noticed that you haven't updated since our conversation a month ago.
TT: You ordinarily update eight to nine times each week, and have been doing so for about a year now, aside from a few brief interruptions, so this strikes me as notable.
TT: While I can't rule out the possibility that it may be some form of passive-aggressive revenge against me, the goal being to keep your negative review at the top of the page as long as possible, TT: I guess I'm concerned that I might really have upset you with what I said.
TT: And though I still consider your review fundamentally incorrect, I have reread it several times now and have to acknowledge that by its own (flawed) premises, it's really very difficult to disagree with.
TT: More importantly, the remarks I made to you and about you personally, as you politely refrained
from pointing out, are really more to do with my own self-evaluation than they are a reflection of your own character. About which, given your personal reticence on both your blog and in your other online interactions, I obviously know nothing.

TT: Which is to say that I would like to apologize, again.
TT: If it will induce you to begin updating again, and thus relieve me of the immense burden of guilt which I now carry for depriving the world of a high-quality vampire book review blog, then upon being provided with your mailing address I will send to you a bouquet, fruit basket, or selection of novelty meats, depending upon your personal preference.
TT: I would craft you something out of a personal family heirloom but I'm concerned that such a gesture might come off as insincere in nature, possibly even satirical.
TT: Well, you're of course under no obligation to respond to me, but I genuinely hope that you return to blogging sometime soon. I've found your reviews of other people's work very edifying.

GA: Well You Sounded Pretty Sincere Until Those Penultimate Two Sentences
GA: But Now I Am Not Really Sure
GA: I Have Lately Become Concerned That I May Have A Neurological Handicap Which Prevents Me From Recognizing And Appreciating Sarcasm
GA: As Well As Possibly A Number Of Other Forms Of Communication
GA: So You Are Going To Have To Tell Me Whether You Were Being Serious
GA: My Regrets For Responding Two Weeks Late By The Way

TT: No, I think it's probably all on me.
TT: My apologies. I was being sincere to the best of my admittedly limited ability.

GA: Your Apologies Are Accepted But Unnecessary
GA: My Delinquency Was Not Directly Due To Your Remarks
GA: Personal Circumstances Intervened To Prevent Me From Accessing The Internet
TT: Not "directly" due?
TT: Were my screened comments, then, seen to upset a butterfly, which then affected nearby weather systems, which were eventually to knock out your phone lines, perhaps?
GA: No It Is Too Cold For Butterflies Unfortunately
GA: The Problem Had No Bearing On Our Conversation
GA: I Lost My Job The Next Day
GA: Which Has Prevented Me From Making Updates Given That The Blackberry Which I Used To Do So Was My Work Device And I Was Forced To Return It
GA: In Order To Submit Job Applications I Am Presently Making Use Of A Library Computer
GA: On Which I Saw That You Had Contacted Me
TT: You type your posts on a phone?
TT: Your median wordcount is around 1,000, isn't it?
TT: Color me impressed. Except for the Blackberry part, I guess, but I assume you didn't make that decision.
GA: Yes Well It Is What I Am Accustomed To
GA: It Is My Preference To Write Outdoors In The Sunlight
GA: Perverse As I Suppose That May Seem
TT: I'm not sure I'd call that perverse. It's really almost alarmingly well-adjusted.
TT: Unless you've decided to go off-message and take up sarcasm as a method of communication.
GA: No As I Have Said I Don't Seem To Have Any Talent For That
TT: Anyway, do you have any inclination to take me up on my offer?
GA: If You Mean Your Offer Of Vegetable Or Animal Matter
GA: That Is Thoughtful And The Gesture Is Appreciated
GA: But I Would Prefer Not To Give Out My Home Address
TT: I understand. For all you know, I might show up to drunkenly troll you in real life.
GA: No I'm Not Worried About That
GA: But I've Had Some Problems With You Could Say
GA: Stalkers I Guess
GA: And My Friend Who Helped Me With That Made Me Promise That I Would Not Give Out My Location Anymore At All
GA: I Trust His Judgment More Than My Own At Least On Matters Of This Sort
TT: I see. I'm sorry about that, then. Is this also the reason for your silence regarding your personal life on your blog and elsewhere?
TT: I guess a preference for privacy isn't unfathomable, but it's a little unusual to take it to the extremes that you do.
TT: As I recall you've in the past refused even to give your gender.
TT: Though it seems obvious given that you blog about YA novels about vampires, an activity which is more strongly gendered than is giving birth.
GA: I Prefer To Keep My Real Life Entirely Separate From My Online Life
GA: And I Think That That Is Not Really Very Unusual
GA: And Don't Really Appreciate Being Subtly Grilled About It Given That I Think I Have Made My Preference Plain
GA: And Am Obviously Not Having A Pleasant Day
TT: I'm sorry. That's not really what I was trying to do.
GA: Yes It Was But Never Mind
GA: None Of It Really Matters At This Point
GA: I Don't Think I Will Be Updating My Blog Again
GA: As You Said It Was A Little Pathetic
GA: And I Should Really Be Focusing My Energy On Finding A Job And Managing To Keep It This Time
GA: And Not Losing My Temper And Biting Someone Like A Stupid Wiggler
TT: Wait. You bit someone?
TT: Bit someone like a what?
GA: Bit Someone's Head Off
GA: In Anger
GA: Its
GA: A Figure Of Goddamn Speech
TT: What about the wiggler part?
TT: Are wigglers something like the platonic ideal of an angry thing?
TT: I guess that's just not what comes to mind when I try to picture what such a thing would look like.
TT: And why were you angry?
GA: Look Never Mind
GA: I Don't Really Want To Discuss This
GA: Particularly With You
TT: I'm going to make a wild deduction here.
TT: You were understandably upset because I -
TT: - an absurd drunk whose regrettable literary output you have unfathomably chosen to admire -
TT: - said some very unfair and hurtful things to you for no good reason.
TT: You then went in to work the next morning, perhaps on insufficient sleep, and had a confrontation with your boss, who acted as a sort of a proxy for me.
TT: It's now been sixty seconds since I submitted that text, and you type fairly quickly, so I will assume that I am correct, and that I am, in fact, indirectly responsible for the loss of your job.
TT: As you in fact earlier inferred and then hastily denied.
GA: That Is Mostly Accurate Yes
GA: This I Guess Is The Devastating Psychological Insight Which One Can Expect
GA: Of The Creative Force Behind The Subtle And Moderately Paced Romance
GA: Of Lady Noor De Traitorio Von Darkangel And The Chevaliere Malika Darknight
TT: Okay, these are definitely insincere statements.
TT: Don't sell yourself short, you've got a real talent for this.
TT: So. How much do I owe you?
GA: What
GA: No
TT: And would you prefer to be reimbursed by Paypal, check, direct deposit, or some other medium?
TT: Bitcoins, perchance?
GA: While I Am Sure That You Can Afford To Do This
GA: And I Do Not Need You To Reassure Me Of That
GA: The Answer Remains No
GA: I Do Not Want Your Money
GA: I Do Not Wish To Be The Mechanism By Which You Pay Off Your Guilt
GA: For Something That You Probably Would Have Done To Anyone
GA: Who Presented Herself As A Convenient Target For Your Unfocused Drunken Ire On That Specific Night
TT: This, I guess, is the devastating psychological insight which one can expect
TT: of the proprietor of a blog entitled "Reviews Of Young Adult Novels, Mainly Those Prominently Featuring Vampires, And Containing At Least One Love Triangle."
GA: Yes It Is
TT: And it goes on a little after that but I've been exerting myself lately to stop typing once I hit the end of my textbox.
TT: Look, just take my money.
TT: If it makes you feel better, you may employ the rationale that people use when they decline to give change to panhandlers:
TT: "She'd just spend it on booze."
TT: The transaction of taking my money is thus morally and socially identical to the transaction of keeping your change.
GA: I Give Change To Panhandlers
TT: Well, then, I don't see your problem.
GA: That Is Because You Are Being Deliberately Obtuse I Assume
GA: The Ability To Insult Someone While Simultaneously Offering Them Money
GA: Is Neither Unique Nor As Amusing As You Seem To Believe
GA: In Fact It Is Both Common And Terrible
GA: I Dont Want Your Money
GA: If You Want To Apologize Find Me A Job
GA: Appropriate To A Physically Disabled And Disfigured Person With No References
GA: Who Needs To Work From Home
GA: Or In An Otherwise Empty Space With Good Natural Light
GA: But Cannot Work Nights
GA: And Needs To Be Paid In Cash Due To Legal Status
GA: There Are Not Many Jobs Like That By The Way That Is The Point Of This Exhaustive Enumeration
TT: What do you mean by legal status?
GA: I Just Lost The Only Job Like That In This Awful State I Think And It Took Me A Long Time To Find It
TT: Are you an undocumented immigrant? Or wanted for something?
GA: Maybe It Was Too Big A Risk Coming Here To Begin With
GA: But I Could Not See Any Other Choice
GA: Maybe There Aren't Really Any Choices Left At All
TT: Do you need a lawyer?
GA: And Yes Rationally I Know That None Of This Is Your Fault But
GA: Youre Not The Person I Needed You To Be
TT: You know, I think it really is my fault that I'm an asshole. Actually, I'm completely sure of that.
GA: But Of Course No One Ever Is
TT: Please calm down. Can't I help?
GA: And I Dont Know What Im Going To Do Now I Just Wish The Sun Would Come Back
GA: Im So Stupid
TT: You're not stupid.
GA: And Im So Scared
GA: And Hungry
GA: I Cant Stay Here Anymore
TT: Wait.
genusAmyema [GA] ceased trolling templatizedTurgidity [TT]
TT: Damn it.
"In the first life which you ever lived, you left your white island only when you travelled to my King's rainsoaked realm, which you were never again to leave," said Nataku. "But some one hundred sixty years ago, I died on a mountainside, and then you were there with me."

Noor found often in these days that, looking into his strange eyes, she was overwhelmed by lassitude, as if being pulled into sleep, or taking a first halting step away from a terrible grief. This was troubling to her in that ordinarily, her strongest feeling, upon facing another person, was irritation or pity.

"Sorry, dude, don't remember."

"Of course you don't. You're an idiot."

- from *The Dream Quest of a Known Quantity*, by Tess Theramin

templatizedTurgidity [TT] sent genusAmyema [GA] file "RoseLalonde(akaTheAsshole)ContactInfo.txt"
templatizedTurgidity [TT] ceased pestering genusAmyema [GA]
  TT: Hello. Are you there?

templatizedTurgidity [TT] began pestering genusAmyema [GA] at 2012-11-02 -- 20:02:51
  TT: Hello. Are you there?

  TT: Hello.

  TT: Hello.
  GA: Hav U Put Thid ON YUr Cslendr
  TT: Yes. Unproductive online stalking of people who dislike me is how I "cut loose," as they say, on "Friday night."
  TT: I don't know why I enclosed that second phrase in quotes just now.
  TT: Yet for reasons which I cannot define, such bracketing seems to me both aesthetically and ideologically appropriate.
  TT: Let's call it a sort of punctuation-based Jungian slip.
  TT: You can interrupt me any time here.
  TT: How are you doing?
  TT: Look, are you all right?
  genusAmyema [GA] ceased trolling templatizedTurgidity [TT]
  TT: Well, see you next "Friday night," then.
  templatizedTurgidity [TT] ceased pestering genusAmyema [GA]

  TT: Hello.
genusAmyema [GA] began trolling templatizedTurgidity [TT] at 2012-12-01 -- 14:09:59
GA: You Are Off Schedule
templatizedTurgidity [TT] began pestering genusAmyema [GA] at 2012-12-01 -- 20:12:44
TT: Sorry. I had a very long phone meeting with my agent.
TT: How are you?
GA: Fine
TT: Even putting aside every other alarming remark you've ever made, your last message was a little worrying. Have you been sick?
GA: My Health Problems Are Really Definitely Not Any Of Your Business
TT: All right then. Shall we talk about something else? Purely as a distraction from your horroretors?
TT: My agent and I were discussing my future plans for Malika and Noor. You should ask me about them.
GA: I Do Not Believe That You Actually Plan Things More Than One Book In Advance
GA: However Malika Will Certainly Be Killed Saving Noor From Some Threat
GA: Thereby Permitting Noor To Continue On Unimpeded To Her Genre Required Monogamous Heterosexual Destiny With Cyrus
TT: Ouch.
GA: Rohan Will Tell Her That Malika Would Have Wanted Her To Be Happy
GA: That Is Rohans Function Within The Narrative To Say Things Like That
GA: All Of This Is Required By Your Template Given That Malika Is Female And Has At Various Times Presented A Valid Physical Or Emotional Threat To Both Male Protagonists
GA: Also Shes Black And An Abuse Victim Things Which I Have Observed To Be Statistically Correlated With Self Sacrificing Death
TT: Are you counting Natakus as male, or do you consider Rohan a protagonist?
GA: In Fiction At Least Self Sacrifice Is Not A Formal CDC CoD Category So I Havent Been Able To Look Up The Actual Numbers
GA: You Use Male Pronouns For Natakus So Yes I Meant Him
GA: Rohan Is Just The Nice Guy Who Must Be Buffeted By Circumstances To Symbolize The Toll Taken Upon The Innocent In The Neverending War Between Man And Monster
TT: We've already established beyond questioning that I am a callous and disrespectful person.
TT: Surely Natakus own feelings are more important than any you might attribute to me.
GA: You Are The Writer
GA: Natakus Is Not Real And Neither Are His Feelings
TT: And the omniscient third-person narrator is not synonymous with me anyway.
genusAmyema [GA] ceased trolling templatizedTurgidity [TT]
TT: Was that intended to be a burn?
TT: I'm afraid that I may be biologically impaired in some way, because I don't get it.
templatizedTurgidity [TT] ceased pestering genusAmyema [GA]

GA: I Am Not Sure What I Meant By That To Be Honest But It Was Not Really Intended To Be A "Burn"
GA: I Logged Off Quickly Because I Had To Attend To Something
GA: Not In A Failed Attempt To Get The Last Word
GA: I Think That The Narrative Is Unfair To Natakus In That Noor Though Generally Well Intentioned Is Very Dense Regarding His Needs
GA: To Use Troll Terminology
GA: Which I Think Apt Given Physical Descriptions Of The Historical Natakus
GA: Noor Does Not Serve Him Well As A Moirail
GA: Which Is A Problem Given Natakus Fragile Emotional State And Poorly Concealed Physical Vulnerabilities
GA: Noor Puts All Of Her Emotional Energy Into Her Potential Concupiscent Relationships With Malika And Cyrus While Neglecting Her Longstanding Moirallegiance With Nataku
GA: Nataku However Makes A Serious Effort To Treat Noor Fairly By His Own Admittedly Strained Standards Despite His Painful Frustrations In The Other Quadrants
GA: Though Looking Back At What I Just Wrote I See That I Probably Identify With This Character Way Too Much Wow
GA: That Was A Little Creepy I Just Tend To Talk Too Much In The Mornings
GA: Excuse Me For Rambling I Know Youre Not Even Up This Early
genusAmyema [GA] ceased trolling templatizedTurgidity [TT]

TT: Apologies for the delay. You're right, I only just got up.
TT: As you can see, I am almost uniquely well-suited to writing about vampires.
TT: What you said was a pretty good summation of what I was trying to achieve. And I'm honestly very relieved that I have achieved it for at least one person.
TT: Most readers think of Nataku as the villain, which has been disappointing to me, as that was never what I intended.
TT: My inability to get this across shows very plainly the juvenile nature of my craft,
TT: And is (irrationally of course) the source of a good deal of my frustration with my readers, which I chose to vent upon you previously.
TT: Again, my apologies. You can see how immature I still am about this.
TT: To address your concerns, as you reminded me once before, Nataku is not real. She is a character in a story.
TT: I could, I guess, make it a story which she finds a partner able to overcome her fear of intimacy, and willing to weather her neurotic and self-destructive behavior long enough to do so.
TT: Many people would probably like that, or more accurately, think they would like that. I know this because there exists a good deal of fanfiction to that point. (My mother emails it to me.)
TT: However, to do that would not in my mind result in an *interesting* story. My ideal narrative is not one dedicated to the purpose of providing comfort.
TT: When asked what my ideal is, I tend to flail about in an inarticulate fashion, occasionally managing to point an unsteady finger in the direction of something which I have read and admired.
TT: I can only say that to me it would feel in some sense dishonest to me to make Nataku's life easy or comfortable. And I do, at least on some level, want to be honest.
TT: Well, I assume you're not online right now, so I'll end this by saying that I'm surprised to hear you say that you identify with Nataku.
TT: You strike me as having far too much in the way of self-insight, something which I obviously lack.
GA: No Im Npor Haha
TT: ...
GA: I CANt See
GA: Cg Is Tht You
GA: I Dint Now Were
GA: WWere Are Yo
TT: Are you all right?
TT: I'm sorry if I woke you.
GA: I Cant See Its To DSrk
GA: WhhT
GA: O No Yyour Bleeding
GA: Rose
TT: Call 911 right now.
TT: Please.
GA: No
GA: They'll Kill Us
TT: Where are you?
TT: Are you with someone?
TT: Do you know where you are? Did someone hurt you?
TT: Please answer me if you're still there, GA.
TT: You're scaring me.
GA: No One Hurt Us
GA: This Is My Fault
GA: I Have To Go Now
GA: Thank You For Being My Friend Rose
GA: Goodbye

genusAmyema [GA] ceased trolling templatizedTurgidity [TT]
TT: DAMN IT.

Chapter End Notes

This Homestuck fanfic is a work of fiction; there is no "historical Natak." This is one of the two biggest disappointments of my life, the other being that ventriloquists don't actually "throw" their voices. They just stay in the same fucking place.
HEY SOFT PINK BIPED! YOU NEED TO 1) GET THE FUCKING VET IN HERE, AND 2) CALL OUR GODDAMN OWNER.

YES, I'M TALKING TO YOU, HUMAN. DO YOU SEE ANYTHING ELSE IN THIS SHITSTAINED ROOM THAT IS SOFT AND PINK. NO, YOU DO NOT.

THAT'S RIGHT, BECAUSE THE ENTIRE REST OF THE ANIMAL KINGDOM HAS THIS SHIT FIGURED OUT. EVEN THE FUCKING CHIHUAHUAS KNEW BETTER THAN YOU! NO ONE ELSE HERE IS SOFT AND PINK.

I MEAN IT IS ABSOLUTELY FUCKING LAUGHABLE HOW BADLY YOU SCREWED THIS SHIT UP. STOP LYING TO YOURSELF AND TAKE IT LIKE A SOFT PINK BIPED OF WHATEVER INEXPLICABLE GENDER YOU ARE.

WHAT GENDER ARE YOU, I CAN NEVER TELL.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WHAT AM I COMPLAINING ABOUT, SHE'S OBVIOUSLY STILL FUCKING SICK, JEGUS. THAT DID NOT STOP BEING A THING THAT IS TRUE.

YEAH, I LOOK LIKE EXACTLY A FUCKING DOCTOR, SHITFORPANS, GIVE ME A MINUTE TO GET MY MEDICAL DEGREE OUT SO I CAN DIAGNOSE HER FOR YOU.

YEAH, OKAY, SHE'S GOT WHATEVER WAS WRONG WITH HER WHEN YOU SHOVED US THE FUCK IN HERE, AND SHE'S ALSO BEEN SLEEPING ON COLD CEMENT NEXT TO MY BLEEDING SHRIEKING ASS FOR THREE FUCKING DAYS. WHAT, HOW IS THAT NOT A DIAGNOSIS, IT'S PRACTICALLY IN LATIN.

OH MY GOD REALLY. I HAD NO IDEA THAT BOTH WE AND THE CEMENT WERE GRAY. THAT IS DATA WORTHY OF PUBLICATION, AND AS A DOCTOR OF MEDICINE I WILL GET RIGHT ON IT. I'LL GIVE YOU CO-AUTHOR CREDIT IF YOU WILL KINDLY POLISH MY BULGE.

WHEN THE HELL ARE YOU GOING TO CALL OUR FUCKING OWNER.

WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE.

Rose had researched the question of genusAmyema thoroughly, and compiled the knowns and unknowns into two neatly tabulated lists. Making lists was something she did a lot of when she was worried.

Known Quantities:

* Reflexively types oddly in private messages or when hurried.
* Her blog is set to North American Eastern Standard time.
* By that standard, strictly diurnal: Has never posted or responded to a comment after 5:00 PM, and often seems disoriented on the rare occasions on which she responds to private messages after that time. The only exceptions were her first two conversations.
* Wants or needs a good deal of sunlight. (Very severe Seasonal Affective Disorder?)
* Somehow visibly physically disabled.
* Suffering from financial and legal difficulties.
* Has a friend she called "Cg," who was probably bleeding at some point in the very recent past.
* But at least has excellent taste in literature?

Unknown Quantities:

* Gender. (But she's a she.)
* Species. (But she's a troll.)
* Age.
* Where she is.
* The precise nature of most of her myriad terrifying problems.
* Seriously, where is she?

Rose sat at her computer in the dark and considered the problem. Given the nature of the conversation which she'd just had, conventional wisdom suggested that she should not be sitting in a dark room, but that was what she spent a lot of her time doing. She didn't often see her home brightly-lit, these days, and when she did she was most often very tired, lending it an alien texture like an old photograph or the sea-bottom.

She hesitated for a moment before contacting her mother. The need to do so always felt unwanted. It seemed childish to contact her when frightened, and so she had for years tried to avoid doing so.

But she didn't really know much about computers.

templatizedTurgidity [TT] began pestering tsuzukisGrrrl [tg] at 2012-12-05 -- 19:34:45

TT: Roxy, I have a question for you. It is of a somewhat urgent character.
TT: I have been having a discussion with a friend over instant messenger. Is there any way for me to 1) get her IP address, and 2) trace her location thereby?
tg: u r calling me my name again
tg: p sure we had a takk about that...
tg: *talk
TT: My apologies, Sergeant.
tg: man fu :(
tg: n e way the answer is maybe + kinda?? 2 both
tg: let me get 2 my machine and do remote access thing 2 urs thats fastest
tg: u just got up i bet lol y u stalking so early :)
TT: It is an integral part of my nightly ritual. As we both know, routine is vital to the maintenance of a healthy creative life.
tg: pff
tg: ok movin along click the "okay MOM can take over my computer" button for me
tg: srsly y u gotta be a STALKER girl????
tg: damn sometimes i think i raised you wrong
tg: was goin for elite pirate bounty hunter or maybe wizard
tg: got staler
tg: *stalker
TT: And I regret each day my failure to live up to your expectations, but to get back to the actual subject at hand, I'm seriously concerned that she may be in danger.
TT: Please do not read our entire conversation.
TT: You're scrolling through it right now. I can see you. Stop doing that.
TT: Don't you dare tell me that I'm cute.
tg: U ARE SO ***CUTE****
tg: !!!!!
tg: but yeah damn that does nt sound god :

tg: *gud
tg: sit tight gimme a minute
tg: damn its some generic at&t wireless ip block sorry

tg: no way to get a location out of that
TT: Do you have any other suggestions?
tg: any older logs? like with her talking from comp?
TT: There are a number of them saved in history. However, she did tell me that she mainly used a cellular phone.
TT: Do you have any other suggestions?
tg: any older logs? like with her talking from comp?
TT: Again, please do not read my logs.
tg: haha MAAAYBE i wont
tg: spyin on my lil girl an her girlfriend
TT: Though true, the statement "She is not my girlfriend," is a trite one,
TT: and likely, given the audience, to be read aloud with an exclamation point and in a squealing falsetto.
TT: So I will maintain a dignified silence.
tg: omg u are so full of it
tg: ok so 1st conversation is different phone. work blackberry i guess?
tg: 2nd one def library
TT: How can you spy on me so quickly while simultaneously tracing IP addresses and typing?
TT: Am I in fact speaking to some sort of sophisticated AI simulation of my mother?
tg: haha ur silly
tg: well i could maybe find out which library but urrrg not a good lead as janey would say

tg: last resort
TT: Agreed.
tg: n e way theyre prob closed for day so no good 2 u right now.
tg: then theres two diff phones, 1st one verizon 2nd att again
tg: u kno her number? rl name?
TT: No.
tg: cant even call phone company pretend 2 be her then
tg: inconsiderate webgirlfriend u got
tg: but then if bad shit was going down i bet u anything we're looking at prepaid disposables bought with cash
tg: i mean thats just common sense
TT: I defer to your judgment. You are the expert on bad shit going down.
tg: hells yuss
tg: so yeah not likely theres any address on record to con out of att/verizon n e way
tg: she ever send you any kind of file?
TT: No. She does have a blog, though.
TT: http://reviewsofbooks.wordpress.com/
tg: hahaha thats great omg
tg: look at her all trashin u!
tg: her PUREST OF PURE PURE RAGE
tg: u sinkin her ships left and right
tg: ur bloggy kismesis
TT: Her concerns were more nuanced than that.
TT: And why do people keep throwing that word at me lately?
tg: grrrln what do u think noor and malika even are
TT: She actually said something very similar to me.
tg: yeah ok well first off have u looked thru this blog of hers for clues and such?
tg: ur the expert at the DEEEEEP READINGS :P
 tg: that is not as useful as bad shit going down
 TT: I have. I was skimming it again just before I contacted you.
TT: I really have no idea. She's very cagey. And I really don't think that any of this is a joke, or some sort of Munchausen-by-Internet situation.
TT: I think she's genuinely in trouble, but she won't let me help.
tg: ok well
tg: keep thinkin bout it
tg: send her ur contact info
tg: and try and stay awake and near phone/comp tomorrow n case she contacts u
TT: I've done so and I plan to do so.
TT: I'm not an idiot.
tg: im not trying to patronize u here god!
TT: Sorry.
tg: :P
tg: probably don't need 2 tell u this, but her situation sounds pretty familiar to me
tg: waking up with blood all over and being like "what," weird sleeping habits
TT: It's a connection I'd drawn, yes. I don't presently plan on meeting with her without backup unless I get better details about her situation.
tg: ok good
tg: and maybe you should try sleeping at night + having a dream?
tg: that's what u used 2 do when u were little
tg: wenhe not sure wat to do
TT: I try not to sleep at night lately. The dreams I have after dark have grown both more unsettling and less useful since The Incident.
tg: "The Incident" wtf
tg: so thats what the kidz are callin it these days?
tg: why
TT: John and Jade presented it to me as a reasonable compromise between my own more graphic descriptor, and Dave's timid preference for calling it my "thing."
TT: "My Thing," if I can properly be said to have one and only one of those, is probably more complex and diffuse than can be encompassed or explained by a single twelve-minute sequence of events.
TT: However unpleasant and personally detrimental those twelve minutes may have been.
TT: I just want to reserve the term for something that gives me more agency, I guess.
TT: I'm sort of a stalker now, I could work that up into a Thing. Maybe develop a dangerous sexual fetish or a hoarding problem, or go on a homicidal rampage.
tg: yeah, you want Rosie's Thing to be specially awful, i get you.
tg: how's this, ur new hobby is burnin down animal shelters!
TT: I could see that, sure.
TT: I just don't feel comfortable sleeping during the night right now.
tg: well, u want information, u got a resource most people don't, is all im sayin.
tg: now i got some pirates to shoot guns at 2nite,
tg: madrigogs 2 apply 2 nautically themed sculls
tg: *skrulls
tg: *pff
TT: Oh. I'm sorry, I thought you had the week off.
tg: mehhhh shit got busy janeys even coverin the phone herself some cos we been gettin mad calls from the feds.
tg: all "are you a bad enough dude to save the president"
TT: And somehow, no one ever believes John when he says "yes."

tg: yupp

tg: but yeah going 2 send blog to di-stri hes prob still up

tg: oh rly so hes dad but im not mom

tg: LE SIIIGN.

tg: well she might have like at some point linked 2 something or posted a pic giving away her location

tg: but rly im not too hopeful given that it sounds like shes moved since ur BRUTAL BLOG BEATDOWN.

tg: best thing 2 do probably just wait

tg: see if she gets back to u :(

tg: sorry i cant help more baby.

TT: No, thank you anyway.

TT: I'm sorry, I'm just worried.

tg: dont worry too much :) 

tg: send me a text if can do n e thing else

TT: Tszuki is not heterosexual, Mom.

tg: :P

templatizedTurgidity [TT] ceased pestering tsuzukisGrrrl [tg]

Chapter End Notes

Roxy writes ironically gooshy Heart of Ten fanfic to get Rose's earth goat, except it's actually probably pretty sincere? Rose feels uncomfortable reading this stuff, but does so compulsively regardless. Roxy loves everything Rose writes, but does hope she'll go back to her wizardly roots someday.
MONTHS IN THE PAST...

(ABOUT 19 OF THEM, SPECIFICALLY...)

Troll
From Whelkapedia, the "free" [1][2][3] encyclopedia

This article is about the bipedal mammal. For the internet phenomenon, see troll (internet). For other uses, see troll (disambiguation).

Troll is the term used jointly to refer to the mammalian bipeds *T. hemochroma generalis* and the amphibious bipeds *T. hemochroma maris*, also called "seatrolls." The word refers only to the bipedal variants of *T. hemochroma*; *T. hemochroma gnathobdela* is called instead a mother grub, and the extinct *T. hemochroma lusus* is known as a creepyfuck white monster thing.

Contents

1 Origins
2 Commercial uses
3 As pets
4 Reproduction

[...]

Reproduction

See also: Animal sexual behavior#Trolls

Trolls reproduce by means of a complex relationship with a mother grub. Multiple trolls will engage in troll sexual congress to produce diabolical incestuous slurry, which is provided to the grub.

Having accumulated a large enough quantity of this material from a variety of paired trolls, she will then produce egg sacs and attach them to nearby vertical structures (originally stalagtites, stalagmites, and cave walls; in captivity, walls, pillars, and those deemed unfit for any higher purpose). These sacs will eventually hatch into pupae. There are presently an estimated one hundred and nine mother grubs alive in captivity, most apparently sterile and under ten feet in length.

More than ninety-nine percent of commercially-produced trolls derive from only three mother grubs, all located in the United States and the property of Crockercorp. The largest of these, commonly called "Big Betty," is believed to be at least five hundred years old, and produces sixty-nine percent of all healthy pupae.

No mother grubs are presently known to exist in the wild. The number of fertile mother grubs appears to have declined sharply over the past thousand years, for reasons which have yet to be determined, but have been conclusively medically and economically demonstrated not to be the fault of Crockercorp [19].
Modern domesticated trolls are raised in captivity by human caretakers. In nature, the pupae would have been cared for by creepyfuck white monster things, sterile "drone" creatures produced by the mother grub at a separate point in her reproductive cycle for the purpose of raising her young. Due to the danger presented by creepyfucks, which are invariably hostile towards human beings, all egg sacs produced during this period are destroyed.

Most mother grubs react poorly to contact from human beings and adult trolls, and will not accept genetic material from them or be fed or groomed by them. They are thus cared for exclusively by those deemed unfit for any higher purpose. It has been theorized, based on historical reports of troll-creepyfuck relationships, that mother grubs prefer to be handled by trolls having their own blood color, jade green. However, no adult jadeblooded troll has been publicly displayed since 1833, and there have been no reported successful pupations of the breed since the late 19th century.

CG: HEY GA.
CG: CALM THE HELL DOWN.
GA: I Am Perfectly Calm Thank You
CG: YOU ONLY SAY THAT WHEN YOU'RE FLIPPING THE FUCK OUT. HAVE YOU KILLED ANYONE, AND IF SO WAS IT SOMEONE OUR EVIL MASTERS GIVE TWO SHITS ABOUT?
GA: Why Exactly Did You Text Me Out Of Nowhere To Accuse Me Of Killing Someone
CG: BECAUSE I AM THE WORLD'S GREATEST MOTHERFUCKING MOIRAIL, ASSHOLE.
CG: WHY ARE YOU Perfectly Calm Thank You THIS TIME?
GA: Why Do You Think
CG: WELL, WE ARE LOCKED IN AN EVIL METAL BOX FULL OF LOATHESOME HORNLESS CREATURES WITH PUTRIFYING PINK BRAINS, KEPT ALIVE ONLY THAT WE MAY PERPETUATE THE ENSLAVEMENT OF OUR KIND, AS WE HAVE BEEN FOR THE ENTIRETY OF OUR SHORT PATHETIC LIVES.
CG: I DON'T KNOW, MAYBE IT'S THAT! IT COULD ALSO BE SOME MORE SPECIFIC ELEMENT OF THE SITUATION. A SPECIFIC HORNLESS CREATURE, A SPECIFIC AREA OF THE METAL BOX.
CG: I DON'T KNOW. THAT'S WHY I'M FUCKING ASKING YOU.
GA: You Know I Am So Glad That TA Sneaked Us These Cell Phones So That You Can Shout At Me Even When You Are In Solitary
GA: Because You Cleverly Attacked A Guard Three Times Your Size Thus Leaving Me Entirely Alone Here
GA: I Will Have To Thank TA The Next Time I See Him
GA: Probably With A Hard Blow To The Head
CG: SHUT THE FUCK UP AND TELL ME WHAT. IS. FUCKING. WRONG.
GA: Those Two Requests Are Mutually Exclusive
GA: And Anyway What Could You Even Do About It
GA: Bang Your Head Against The Cell Door Until It Bleeds
CG: SURE, I'VE BEEN THINKING I NEED TO CHECK AND SEE WHAT COLOR MY BLOOD IS AGAIN, I HAVEN'T BEEN REMINDED OF IT OFTEN ENOUGH LATELY, WHAT WITH BEING COMPLETELY ALONE IN A ROOM FUNCTIONALLY EQUIVALENT TO A WOOFBEAST CRATE.
CG: YOU NEED TO FUCKING TALK TO ME, HERE. WE DO NOT NEED TO BOTH BE IN TROUBLE AT THE SAME FUCKING TIME, ESPECIALLY SINCE TA'S ON LOCKDOWN NOW TOO.
GA: Please Stop Being The Reasonable One
GA: It Confuses Me
CG: NO.
CG: JUST TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED, OKAY? DO IT TO ENTERTAIN THE DUMBASS IN THE BOX.
CG: THIS IS YOUR TRUE CALLING, I HAVE SEEN IT IN THE INFINITE VASTNESS OF THE FLOOR TILES, OVER THE COURSE OF MY MANY TEDIUM-INDUCED TILE-TRANCE VISION QUESTS.
GA: Fine
GA: She Was Here Again Tonight
CG: OH FUCK.
GA: I Cannot Stand Being Near Her She Terrifies Me
GA: And She Is So Impulsive
GA: Like A Child But Possessed Of Terrifying Psychic Powers Immense Physical Strength And An Evil Baking Empire
GA: So Not Actually Much Like A Child I Guess
GA: Lets Just Go Back To Impulsive As A Descriptor That Was Fine
CG: I'LL AMEND THE MINUTES TO REFLECT IT.
CG: OH FUCK, HOW COULD THEY EVEN HAVE GUESSED, DID AG SAY SOMETHING?
GA: No She Did Not Know Anything Concrete
GA: And You Know Very Well That AG Would Not Do That
GA: She Did Think That We Were Planning Something But Her Questions Made No Sense
GA: She Mentioned A Teal Blood Who Had Done Something She Didnt Like As If I Should Know What She Meant
GA: But The Only Teal Blood I Have Spoken To Very Much Is GC And It Has Been Almost Six Years Since She Was Taken Away
CG: JUST A SHOT AT THE SUN, MAYBE? I MEAN, A LOT OF THE GUARDS ARE TEALBLOODS. I GUESS WE COULD CONCEIVABLY HAVE BEEN PLOTTING SOME SUICIDAL HALF-ASSED SEDITION WITH THEM.
CG: YOU KNOW WHAT WOULD BE GOOD? IF SHE ASKED THAT BECAUSE GC ESCAPED.
CG: GOD, I HOPE THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED. I JUST HOPE SHE'S NOT DUMB ENOUGH TO TRY TO COME BACK FOR US.
GA: Yes So Do I
GA: I Worry About Her A Good Deal
GA: Anyway I Do Not Think I Gave Anything Away
GA: Mainly Because I Was Terrified And Just Froze Up
GA: In The End She Seemed Convinced That I Was Innocent Of Any Wrongdoing
GA: She Offered To Reward Me If I Would Report Any Plans For Escape Or Rebellion Of Which I Might Hear
CG: WHAT THE FUCK DOES SHE THINK SHE COULD EVEN OFFER YOU.
CG: I MEAN, SHE'S OBVIOUSLY NOT GOING TO RISK LETTING YOU OUT OF HERE EVEN FOR A FUCKING HOUR, AND THAT'S ALL YOU WANT.
GA: She Could Free You And TA And AG
CG: NO. ABSOLUTELY NOT.
CG: WE DISCUSSED THIS. I AM THE LEADER OF THIS SPONGE-ROTTED SELF-DESTRUCTIVE CABAL OF SEXUALLY-DYSFUNCTIONAL NOOKWHIFFERS, AND I FORBID YOU EVEN TO CONSIDER THAT. YOU ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF SAID CABAL, BEING AS YOU ARE THE ONLY SANE MEMBER THEREOF.
CG: THE REST OF US PARAGONS OF MENTAL STABILITY WOULD BE TRYING TO CHEW THROUGH TO ONE ANOTHER'S SOFTER INTERNAL ORGANS WITHIN SIX HOURS IF WE DIDN'T HAVE YOU AROUND.
GA: Wow
GA: That is definitely the sweetest thing you have ever said to me.
CG: Fuck you, you know what I mean.
CG: Seriously, if you try something like that, you will abruptly have three separate competing Kismeses out for your ostensibly-extinct spinachy blood.
GA: Yes I know.
GA: She would never do it anyway. More likely she would simply kill you all and tell me that you were fine.
GA: I just cannot stand talking to her. I wish I were stronger.
GA: Or that you had been there. She does not seem to affect you the same way.
CG: Yeah she does. I just never know when to shut the fuck up.
CG: Seriously, if I had been there for this kind of shit, I'd've gotten up in her fishy grill and gotten fork-culled on the spot.
GA: I would not have let her.
CG: Like fuck you could stop her. *I* wish you'd had ta with you.
GA: I think that no one is capable of fighting her.
GA: Her hair alone is twice ta's level.
CG: That's not even a thing.
GA: I say that it is and you just said that I am the mentally healthy one.
GA: It is very threatening hair. It must weigh half what I do.
CG: Okay, leader directive which will probably be ignored number zillion. I forbid you from ever trying to give yourself hair like hers.
GA: No. It is not really my style.
GA: Though it might suit Ag.
CG: Yeah, they're practically twins already! The horrible bitch you want for your matespirit and the one you want for your kismesis, both of them 100% loathsome in every imaginable way. You just have a type, I guess.
CG: Actually, I take it all back. I'm the only sane one of us, given that I don't want to procreate with Ag.
GA: You have poor taste.
CG: Urrrrgh.
CG: Okay, so, you're feeling good enough to intentionally make me vomit in my mouth. Are you calmer now?
GA: Yes. I guess so.
GA: I am sorry that I snapped at you.
GA: I was being stupid. I just hate this so much.
CG: Well, she probably won't be back for a while now. Places to go, trolls to subjugate, humans to appease in service of her insane delusions of world conquest.
CG: With any luck we'll be long out of here before we see her again.
GA: Right now I would rather that we never did.
GA: But then appearing before her holding a chainsaw someday would be very pleasant.
CG: There you go, that's the spirit.
CG: Okay, I'm worn out and I'm going to go back to staring blankly at the floor until I manage to fall asleep.
GA: That sounds like a good idea.
GA: Thank you. Please sleep well.

cantankerousGibbering [CG] ceased trolling gatherAtropa [GA]

GA: Did You Know About This Whelkapedia Thing
GA: [http://en.whelkapedia.org/whelk/Troll#Reproduction]
CG: EVERYONE KNOWS ABOUT WHELKAPEDIA FUCKASS.
GA: Well I Am Sorry I Did Not
CG: YEAH, WELL, YOU'VE GOT SHIT TO DO OTHER THAN SIT LOCKED ALONE IN A
WINDOWLESS MOTHERFUCKING ROOM AND DICK AROUND ONLINE FOR WEEKS
ON END.
CG: I HAVE COUNTED ALL OF THE FLOOR TILES, GA. MANY TIMES. THERE ARE 69
OF THEM.
CG: THIS NUMBER HAS DEVELOPED SO MUCH SIGNIFICANCE TO ME THAT I NOW
SUFFER SERIOUS EXISTENTIAL DOUBTS WHEN I COME TO A SLIGHTLY
DIFFERENT ONE.
CG: BASICALLY WHAT I'M SAYING IS, CAN YOU PLEASE BREAK ME OUT OF MY
WINDOWLESS MOTHERFUCKING ROOM GA.
CG: BECAUSE I AM LOSING MY SHIT SITTING LOCKED ALONE IN MY
WINDOWLESS FUCKING ROOM.
CG: I DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW MANY NIGHTS I'VE BEEN IN HERE ANYMORE.
GA: Nineteen
CG: OH GOD.
GA: Nineteen
CG: OH GOD.
GA: I Am Very Sorry That You Are Losing Your Shit And I Would Like To Do That
GA: But I Am Not Presently Supposed To Know Where Your Windowless Room Is
GA: So I Think That That Should Probably Wait Until We Are Actually Ready To Escape
CG: YEAH, I KNOW THAT.
CG: I JUST REALLY FUCKING MISS ACTUALLY BEING ABLE TO FUCKING SEE
YOU.
CG: AND LIKE, OTHER PEOPLE IN GENERAL, EVEN.
CG: I DO NOT ORDINARILY REGRET DRAWING BLOOD FROM HUMANS, BUT, YOU
KNOW. I AM BEGINNING TO REGRET BITING THAT PARTICULAR EXAMPLE OF
THE DEMOGRAPHIC.
GA: Me Too But I Understand Why You Did It
GA: I Am Honestly Grateful That You Moved More Quickly Than I Did
GA: We Would Both Be In Much More Trouble Had I Done What I Wanted To Do
CG: YEAH, I KNOW, GOOD THING THE ONE THAT'S FUCKING TERRIBLE AT
KEEPING ITS TEMPER IS ALSO FUCKING TERRIBLE AT EVERYTHING ELSE THAT
MATTERS, INCLUDING VIOLENCE.
GA: Please Do Not Call Yourself It
CG: WHY THE FUCK NOT, EVERYONE ELSE IN THE DESPAIR FACTORY DOES.
CG: AND IT'S NOT LIKE I'M EVER GOING TO REPRODUCE. THEY'RE NOT LETTING
A MUTANT'S GENETIC DATA COME ANYWHERE NEAR HER.
CG: EVEN IF THE MUTANT IN FUCKING QUESTION FOR SOME INEXPLICABLE
REASON WAS CHOSEN TO KEEP HER CARETAKER COMPANY INSTEAD OF BEING
CULLED LIKE IT OBVIOUSLY SHOULD HAVE BEEN.
GA: I Am Asking You To Stop Talking Like This Because It Is Stupid And Makes You Feel
Terrible For No Reason
GA: And I Really Need You To Be Thinking Rationally
GA: Please
CG: FINE. SORRY.
GA: Going Back To Whelkapedia Is This What Most Humans Really Think
CG: BASICALLY, YEAH. MOST TROLLS, TOO, BECAUSE WE'RE A DYING RACE OF
GULLIBLE BULGEMUNCHERS WHO ONLY REALLY GIVE THREE-QUARTERS OF A
SHIT ABOUT MURDERING EACH OTHER.
GA: But It Is All Lies
CG: SURE, BUT NOBODY ON THE OUTSIDE HAS ACCESS TO YOUR SPECIAL INFORMANT. THE WATERBITCH WORKS PRETTY FUCKING HARD TO KEEP IT THAT WAY, IT'S HER WHOLE BUSINESS PLAN. I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT EDITING THE ARTICLE FOR ACCURACY.

CG: "THERE HAVE BEEN NO REPORTED SUCCESSFUL PUPATIONS OF A JADEBLOOD SINCE THE LATE 19TH CENTURY BECAUSE BETTY CROCKER KEEPS CUTTING THE PUPAE INTO LITTLE TINY FUCKING PIECES."

GA: We Do Not Know For Certain That That Is The Case

CG: "SOME OF THE PIECES ARE *PROBABLY* IN YOUR CUPCAKES."

GA: Species Have Been Driven To Extinction Due To Extreme Environmental Shifts In The Past

CG: FOR FK'S SAKE, WE'VE BOTH SEEN PLENTY OF JADEBLOODS HATCH, AND SHE'S TOLD YOU THEY'RE HEALTHY. SHE WOULD KNOW.

CG: THE REST OF US AREN'T DYING, JUST YOU GUYS. THEY ARE KILLING THOSE GRUBS.

CG: I HOPE THEY'RE JUST KILLING THEM. SOMETIMES I THINK I SHOULD BE.

GA: You Cannot Do That Because They Would Kill You For It And I Need You

GA: There Is Nothing That We Can Do Yet

GA: We Just Have To Be Patient A Little Longer

CG: I KNOW. I F**KING KNOW THAT.

CG: ANYWAY, IT'S PRETTY FUCKING OBVIOUS WHY THEY'D WANT TO KEEP YOUR POPULATION DOWN. FOR ONE THING, CROCKERCORP DOESN'T WANT TO LOSE THEIR MONOPOLY ON YOU FOR FINANCIAL REASONS.

CG: AND MORE JADEBLOODS MEANS A HIGHER POSSIBILITY OF ONE OF YOU GETTING LOOSE AND STARTING A ROGUE BREEDING OPERATION. THEY CAN'T CONTROL US IF THEY CAN'T CONTROL OUR REPRODUCTION.

CG: THAT'S WHY WE HAVE TO GET YOU AT LEAST OUT OF HERE ALIVE, NO MATTER WHAT. IT'S REALLY F**KING IMPORTANT, GA.

GA: She Says That She Is Not Ready Yet

CG: WELL, GOSH, YOU KNOW WHAT? SHE NEEDS TO GET READY.

CG: SHE TOLD YOU YEARS AGO YOU'D BE GOING THROUGH THAT SHITHIVE MAGGOTS METAMORPHOSIS THING YOU GUYS DO AROUND THIS TIME.

CG: IF TA'S RIGHT, THEY'RE GOING TO KILL YOU THE MOMENT THAT HAPPENS AND ME, BUT I GUESS THAT'S ONE FOR THE "+" COLUMN.

CG: WE JUST DO NOT HAVE A LOT OF FUCKING OPTIONS AT THIS POINT. WE HAVE TO ESCAPE, AND SOON.

GA: I Know That

GA: But She Says That She Is Doing Something Important

GA: And That We Need To Wait A Little Longer

CG: WHAT THE HELL COULD SHE POSSIBLY BE DOING?

CG: SOME REALLY GODDAMN UNUSUALLY INTENSIVE LOUNGING ON HER SIDE AND PULSATING?

GA: Yes Thats Right

GA: She Is Preparing An Object For Me And I Have Promised To Remain With Her Until It Is Complete

GA: When The Time Comes I Am To Extract It And Take It Away With Me

CG: OKAY, FINE, I GUESS SHE'S THE BOSS BY VIRTUE OF BIOLOGICAL PREDESTINATION AND BEING COMPLETELY F**KING HUGE.

CG: BUT THE MOMENT IT'S DONE, WE ALL F**K OFF, OKAY? WE ARE *NOT* GOING TO DIE IN THIS HELLHOLE. THERE ARE HUMANS OUT THERE IN NEED OF SOME SERIOUS BLEEDING OUT, AND WE ARE UNIQUELY SUITED FOR THAT JOB.

GA: Agreed

GA: What Do You Think It Is Like Outside Anyway
CG: FUCKING TERRIFYING, FROM THE SOUND OF THINGS, BUT IT CAN'T POSSIBLY BE ANY WORSE THAN HERE.
CG: I'D LIKE TO SEE THE MOONS. AND THE OCEAN, THOUGH I DON'T KNOW ABOUT ACTUALLY GETTING IN THAT MUCH WATER.
GA: Yes AG Wants To Go There Too She Wants To Meet Those Pirate Things That Live In It
GA: Id Like To See The Sun
CG: UGH.
CG: I WILL LOOK AT THE SUN WITH YOU *ONCE*, AND THEN I WILL SPEND EVERY DAY OF THE REMAINDER OF MY LIFE SLEEPING UNDER A HEAVY BLANKET WITH A CUSS WORD EMBROIDERED ON IT, AS NATURE INTENDED.
CG: YOU GET TO MAKE THE CUSS BLANKET.
GA: All Right I Will Do That
GA: Well Good Night Then CG
CG: NO, WAIT.
CG: LISTEN.
CG: DO YOU WANT ME TO DO IT?
GA: No
GA: I Will Be The One To Kill My Mother
GatherAtropa [GA] ceased trolling cantankerousGibbering [CG]

SO THE PLAN WAS THAT WE WERE GOING TO MAKE AT LEAST A CURSORY FUCKING ATTEMPT TO BE "QUIET" ABOUT THIS DARING ESCAPE SHIT. AND I DIDN'T THINK THAT I NEEDED TO EXPLAIN WHAT THAT WORD MEANT.

I DIDN'T THINK THAT I NEEDED TO SAY, SPECIFICALLY, "DO NOT DESTROY FORT KNOX AND WITH IT MOST OF THE CITY OF ELIZABETHTOWN, KENTUCKY." BECAUSE. WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT.

don't even 2tart with me kk you don't know my liife.

Sollux My Research Suggests That That Statement Is One Humans Make When Attempting To Excuse Minor Transgressions Like Intoxication

It Is Not An Adequate Explanation Or Defense Of Your Decision To Blow Up Fort Knox

fuck you liiike you two even diid anythiing u2eful toniight.

Sollux I Just Watched My Mother Bleed To Death And Kicked A Troll Who Was Trying To Save Her Straight Through The Bloodpusher

yeah ok.

Karkat Was Not Very Usefui I Admit

DAMNIT KANAYA!

Kanaya! Guess how many things we 8lew up????????

Probably All The Things

All The Things In The City

AM RADIO IS ALSO INDICATING THAT THE SURVIVING MILITARY PERSONNEL ARE SINGING "LIKE KIND OF A SEA SHANTY."
Yeah!!!!!!!

Chapter End Notes

"T. hemochroma" and "T. hemochroma maris" borrowed from coldhope's Seeman series, and the rest of those Science Words don't make any sense I think. I'm not a biologist no matter how much of other people's porn my career path makes me accidentally see. I shouldn't have to look up Latin declensions, I'm a social justice warrior and a line-leader and a cold-blooded IT lady.

YEAH, I GOT RID OF YOUR ENCRYPTED PARTITION, FUCKASS, BECAUSE YOUR JOB'S UPDATING A SPREADSHEET AND LIKE *FUCK* YOU HAD WORK-RELATED REASONS FOR HAVING THAT THING. I KNOW PERFECTLY GODDAMN WELL IT WAS JUST FULL OF HOOFBEAST PHALLI AND SEXY RP LOGS.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

* Thank you to everyone who's commented or left kudos so far! I'm not responding to comments because I am extremely antisocial, but I promise that I am reading them. This is the first fanfic I've posted online since I stopped writing Pokemon Mary Sues, so I'm very excited that people are actually reading this and enjoying it.

* For those wondering about the update schedule, it's one chapter per week, on Sunday night or Monday morning.

* I'm not going to answer any questions in the comments here, but I've opened the Ask box on an appropriately-titled Tumblr. I'll try to answer all questions that aren't abusive or repetitive. But I reserve the right to lie if I think it'll be funny.

There is a sense in this book that time is imprecise. Conversations are repeated or forgotten, and events that have yet to happen are half-remembered. Cyrus cannot recognize the Tower. Though people talk, kiss, and die, the equilibrium established six hundred years ago remains static in a moment at which Noor lived with Natak, Malika did not exist, and Sleep had yet to Die.

I don't know where this idea Came From, because it is not a dream, But I Live In A Dark Place Where the only Light comes From Me, and My Mother Lies Before Me Alive And Content Surrounded By Her Sleeping Children And By Clamoring White Creatures Which No Longer Exist And I Dont Know If It Is A Place Where I Will Live Or Have Lived Or Even If Time Matters

I Just Want The Sun

- Review Of The Strange High Gate In the Sea by genusAmyema (saved as draft 2011-09-07)

OKAY, WHAT THE FREAKY TWITTERING HORROR-TERRORS IS THIS I'M READING? WERE YOU EVEN FUCKING AWAKE WHEN YOU TYPED THIS HOOFBEASTSHIT?

Shut Up

I Think I Am

WHAT.

FUCK EVERYTHING, IF VRISKA'S NOT DEAD I'M GOING TO KILL HER.

OWWWWWW DAMNIT KANAYA

¿{q.LDÂXCCFf=a~&+~!94ld [TG] begFô²XIm`äµPá0-T] at Óù?Úô¬¬Ô•...Î?Ó°«Ô¶ |]
TG: hey you know the drill
TG: what year is it how old are we and where do i live
TT: Why, is it possible that I am being addressed by an alternate-timeline Dave?
TG: yeah see that is actually what im trying to establish with this communication thanks
TT: It's 2012, I'm twenty-five, you came a year after me, and your last home address was in Texas, I
TT: To answer your other most common questions, your surname is Strider, mine is Lalonde, I will not answer any questions about either of our parents or anyone's romantic status, you are not a film director, you do not suffer from any form of albinism, we're both black, TT: you are not a bird nor a puppet, you were never institutionalized to my knowledge, you are not a hardboiled detective, neither of us went to senior prom and none of our classmates seduced the principal as far as I know, TT: I do not know anyone who types in "dumbass gray capslock," the only GameFaq I have ever written was for "Squiddles: The Dark Descent" and was a largely-fictitious experiment in metanarrative, and you are not a kangaroo rat. TG: you made that last one up TG: i hope you made that last one up TG: what was kangaroo rat dave wearing TG: that is a question that you should have asked TT: You see, this is why I have a problem with your usual procedure for determining whether you're in the right timeline. TT: What if you text one of the ones in which I am a pathological liar? There have got to be a few. TG: well this particular iteration of me is double checking the crap you say with your john TG: btw i am in the wrong timeline TG: oh well i wasnt in a hurry TT: You are never in a hurry. To use your own phrasing, "that's your whole thing." TG: yeah TG: hey what's the name of the cloned villain in the 1988 hugo-winning science fiction novel by cj cherryh TT: Gl 6g9ly6. Said like Gl'bgota. TG: how do you say that TT: It's difficult. TG: ok TG: but yeah this is definitely a new one for me nice TG: And this is another thing that doesn't make sense to me. TT: Why is it that apparently, in every possible timeline, an author named C.J. Cherryh exists, whose works are always available in a language which we both speak, and one of them has always won something called a "Hugo," and always in 1988, and it always involves a villain being cloned, whose name always consists of a sequence of eight alphanumeric characters - TT: - and yet in every possible timeline, that sequence of characters is different? TG: well first off its probably just timelines where we both exist and know each other and arent dead TG: i mean if i was from a timeline where i dont know you i wouldnt know to text you TG: and if youd died i wouldnt want to TG: whereas in the ones without me theres no one to do the asking TG: so in those timelines maybe the book doesnt exist or the names a different length or whatever TT: All right, I'll accept that premise. TG: and its more that the clonecode is like TG: a marker of significant differences as far as me and people i text are able to tell TG: like there are probably other timelines with the same clonecode TG: but the differences between those timelines and yours are such that they wouldnt affect the course of this conversation TT: Except that this is the one in which you chose to contact me at this particular moment. TG: sure but theres probably a similar dave contacting a similar rose at a similar moment in all those other similar timelines too TT: Well, you're the expert at Weird Time Shit, so I will accept that explanation. TT: I guess my real question is how you figured out that the pretend clone's name was the perceptually-unique reality signifier.
TT: I mean, you don't even read *my* tedious seven-hundred page novels.
TG: like you said i am the expert its me
TG: so spill it what is weird here
TT: This is a procedure which I kind of wish you'd retire. I have no idea what's "weird" about my timeline.
TT: It's the one I live in. I think it's very mundane.
TG: bullshit you know what the other daves have been surprised about
TT: Yes, but not every me does. Some of me are being contacted by temporally mislaid Daves for the first time.
TG: yeah and the first time davers totally always say
TG: hi alternate dave
TG: here is some stuff other alternate daves have said to me
TG: you know my own personal rose does not give me shit like this at all ever
TT: That is a lie.
TG: yeah
TT: Well, some of you have been surprised by the trolls.
TG: trolls
TG: like internet trolls
TT: No. The kind with horns.
TG: do you have wizards too
TT: Wizards are fake. Magic is real, though.
TG: okay cool
TG: explain the trolls
TT: Just a moment, and I'll paste the explanation from my Dave File.
TG: see i dont know why youre even fucking with me like this if youve got an actual literal dave file
TT: Trolls are a species of bipeds which diverged from human beings evolutionarily at some point, evolving in isolation inside a large cave system. This began to flood about two thousand years ago, forcing them out and into competition with us.

Trolls can be easily physically and psychologically debilitated by means of certain common substances not found in their original subterranean environment, which allowed human beings to subjugate and enslave them effectively very early in their aboveground history. There are estimated to be only about nine million of them now alive, while in the past their population was at least five times higher.

Though they are as intelligent as human beings and can understand and use language, the vast majority of humans are unable to consciously recognize troll speech, writing, signing, and so on as intelligent communication - though unconsciously, the gist often gets through. Their art and artifacts are viewed in the way that we view a bower bird's bower or a beehive, and in fact, when they build aboveground homes, we call them hives.

In essence, we see these people as animals, and treat them accordingly.

I would describe the problem as a widespread perceptual disorder on our part. If we don't know that the person with whom we're conversing is a troll - for example, if the conversation takes place over the internet - we understand them just fine. The four of us are fortunately among those few who are not prey to the malady, and John and Jade spend a good deal of time and effort on guerrilla efforts to raise awareness.

However, it is human nature to trust the evidence of one's own untrustworthy senses, and so in most parts of the world trolls are treated as slave labor or pets. For this reason, attempts to investigate and cure the condition which so handicaps us have often been subject to sabotage by those with a political or financial interest in maintaining the status quo. Particularly Betty Crocker.
Other Daves have expressed indignation over this in the past, so it's been my assumption that they've had long association with trolls. Mine has been relatively limited, so I can't really say much more than that, except that I consider slavery evil, and I'd rather not hear about it if any version of myself you've encountered feels differently.

TG: no christ i never met a rose whos okay with that shit
TG: yeah okay
TG: you got a kind of crap timeline i think sorry
TT: As I said, it's the one I live in.
TG: what else is weird
TT: Some of you have also expressed confusion regarding the dog kings and D-cats.
TG: man i really dont get timelines like that it weirds me the fuck out when jades not a flying dog lady
TG: im like jade you only got one set of ears and thats not enough ears jade
TT: Agree.
TG: what do you do all day in this reality
TT: Sleep, mostly. At night I write books about vampires.
TG: are vampires real
TT: Vampires are fake as shit.
TG: you know one time i talked to you and you wrote books about pirates and you said pirates weren't real
TT: Pirates are real. They're a serious social problem, and I write escapist drivel to the exclusion of all else, so the subject does not come up.
TG: are you an anti music piracy rose
TG: haha i dont think ive met one of them before
TT: Pirates are people who ride around on boats, steal things, fight with scimitars and cannons, and suffer from a speech impediment which causes them to say "arrrrrrrrr."
TG: yeah well thats what the word means here too i guess but uh
TG: okay you need to clue me in here how much of this is sarcasm
TG: cause i got no idea
TT: None of it is sarcasm.
TT: I guess I'm still not used to questions about the pirates. It's like I can't seem to phrase the explanation in a way that sounds serious.
TT: Pirates are real enough that there exist public policy initiatives aimed at addressing them and elite task forces of professional pirate bounty hunters who spend their time tracking and eliminating the most dangerous ships.
TG: well i mean
TG: i dont know are they just on the ocean or what
TT: They can show up anywhere there's a large enough body of water for a boat. Rivers, lakes, ponds, and occasionally poorly-designed swimming pools and fountains.
TG: so these are magic teleporting pirates were talking about here
TT: Yes. What you just said was redundant. Pirates are magic and teleporting.
TT: Their magic also includes turning other people into pirates by biting them.
TG: i got a pathological liar rose didnt i
TT: I don't know why none of you can ever accept the pirates.
TG: sorry i guess youre being serious i mean if yourent youd have said
TG: i cant imagine why none of you can ever accept the pirates
TG: thats the sarcasticker thing to say
TG: but im laughing really hard its just the words you used mean different things here i guess
TG: its like you saying that horses are a really big problem because oh damn horses theyre big and they got hooves what if they step on someone
TG: oh god what are horses even in your timeline
TT: No, I understand the humor in the concept. I think we've got the same horses.
TT: What are your pirates like?
TG: well i mean
TG: thats just how foods produced
TG: the pirates go out
TG: and they steal food from the landbound stronghold of lost boy firelord dante basco
TG: which they then bring back to the mothership
TT: Why does Dante Basco have the food?
TG: oh my god where do you guys even get food
TT: It grows on plants.
TG: okay then
TG: so yeah
TG: i think this is going to turn into another of those conversations where we just keep accusing each
other of making crap up basically forever
TT: It seems unfortunately likely.
TG: i dont know what the fuck existence was thinking giving me time powers
TG: and then making me decide to contact you of all fucking people every time to figure out when i
am
TG: we are both so completely full of shit and we never take this big important crap we do seriously
TT: It's something I wonder about every day.
TT: It's troubling to me that whatever unknowable force that grants these abilities would choose to
bestow them upon us, in particular. It implies a basic irresponsibility on the part of unknowable
forces.
TT: Which I personally prefer to think of as being actively malicious.
TT: It provides me with a certain existential comfort.
TG: right exactly
TG: so are you one of the roses who wants to hear the standard warnings speech
TT: I'll listen to it today. Though I'm sure other Roses have told you that the warnings are pretty
consistent.
TG: yeah well maybe thisll be a first
TG: first off stairs
TG: second off immediately pass on important information regarding explosions or whatever to all of
us
TG: because otherwise we will absolutely do some stupid bullshit
TT: Do I ever actually need you to warn me about that specific problem?
TG: shut up
TG: look out for dudes named jack noir and dudes who type in white cause theyre bad news
TG: teal capslock leetspeek girl is cool but sometimes shes full of it and she might try to kill us
TG: listen to sweary gray capslock guy if he contacts you even though hes an asshole
TT: Hearing this makes me a little sad sometimes. I feel like I'm missing out never having met these
people.
TG: yeah well its like a multiuniversal constant that when we run into them shits going down and
people start dying
TG: so maybe its better if you never do i dont know
TT: Still.
TT: Is there anything which you specifically don't warn me about, on the basis that any such warning
might somehow inadvertently negatively affect outcomes?
TG: sure
TG: i mean like suppose there was some mistake you always make that sounds really bad but you
always seem to need to do it
TG: im the time guy so im cool about that stuff
TG: but everyone else lets it mess with their heads
TG: like you might try to avoid the mistake or else decide to get it over with early which just fucks
TT: That's pretty condescending.
TG: I'm straight up calling you cute and offering you candy here
TT: I guess you may not feel it appropriate to answer this, but I've been wondering something.
TT: Do I usually make good decisions?
TG: Fuck rose i can't answer that i mean except for the time shit you're the one who always tells me what's up
TG: It's like you always know the right thing to do
TG: or the best thing on the days that there is no right thing
TT: I don't feel that way lately.
TT: Do I make good decisions about who to trust?
TG: Uh well you get tricked sometimes sure no one's omniscient like that
TG: I mean except for the dudes who are
TG: But mostly yeah when you decide to trust someone you're usually okay
TG: It's not something you do real often though if you want to know my opinion
TG: I mean you don't even really trust me
TT: I trust you.
TG: Well you're asking me this crap right now sure
TG: But if you decide in a couple hours you don't like what you hear we both know you're going to come up with some good reason i must have my head up my ass
TG: The thing is you mostly don't trust other people as much as you do yourself because we can't see the weird shit that you do and you're kind of like
TG: What can you even have to say to me that I need to hear
TG: God I should be the pretend psychoanalyst here look at me spouting all this bullshit
TT: It's a fair evaluation.
TT: Who do I trust?
TT: Can you tell me that?
TG: No but it's cool
TG: You'll know
"What happened to you?" Noor asked, pointing to a series of SpongeBob band-aids on Rohan's arm. They almost comprised a work of narrative art, the theme of which was not clear.

Rohan groaned. "It's so stupid. I have to get a checkup every month."

"Are you sick?" Rohan struck her as almost disgustingly healthy, an insult to the sane, reasonable, and neurotic.

"No, but he says I might get sick. There's this thing that runs in our family, it usually shows up when you're a teenager."

"Huh. What is it?"

"Spontaneous combustion."

- from The Strange High Gate In the Sea, by Tess Theramin

genusAmyema [GA] began trolling curdledGall [CG] at 2012-09-06 -- 16:49:51
GA: Do We Need Anything From The Store
CG: CAN YOU BUY ME A LIFE THAT IS NOT A SERIAL NARRATIVE CONSISTING SOLELY OF DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS OF A GUY BEING CARNALLY VIOLATED BY PROBOSCIDEAN MAMMALS.
GA: I Do Not Think So No
GA: You Had No Luck Then
CG: THEY HAVEN'T BEEN IN THE NEWS, THEY'RE NOT ONLINE, AND THEY HAVEN'T BEEN ONLINE FOR MONTHS.
CG: THIS IS SO GODDAMN POINTLESS AND DEPRESSING, I JUST SIT HERE FONDLING MYSELF NUMB EVERY NIGHT WAITING TO HEAR SOMETHING.
GA: You Also Play Pokemon A Lot
CG: NOT RELEVANT TO THE PRESENT CONVERSATION.
GA: Well Can Your Hyperbolic Expressions Of Frustration Be About Your Pokemon Instead
CG: NO.
CG: BECAUSE I AM RUTHLESSLY MOTHERFUCKING EFFECTIVE POKEMON TRAINER, AND I AM FRANKLY OFFENDED THAT YOU WOULD EVEN SUGGEST OTHERWISE. MY POKEMON, IN FACT, CONSTITUTE MY ONE TRUE SUCCESS AS A LEADER!
CG: MY MOLTRES AND ZAPDOS, UNLIKE SOME COMPLETE GODDAMN ASSHOLES I COULD MENTION, HAVE NEVER *ONCE* GONE OFF-PROGRAM TO BURN DOWN A NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM WHICH OFFENDED THEM. IMAGINE THAT!
CG: NOR HAS MY ARTICUNO DISAPPEARED ON ME FOR TWO DAYS, WITHOUT WARNING, TO DRAIN PARANORMAL ROMANCE AUTHOR LAURELL K. HAMILTON OF ALL OF HER BLOOD.
GA: I Dont Think Half Your Team Should Be Flying Types
CG: FUCK YOU.
CG: I DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'RE EVEN DOING ANYMORE.
CG: THE ONLY PERSON WE EVER HEAR FROM IS YOUR FAKE INTERNET GIRLFRIEND, AND SHE HAS THUS FAR BEEN CONSPICUOUSLY UNHELPFUL, IN TERMS EITHER OF OUR LONG-TERM GOAL OF FREEING TROLLKIND FROM BONDAGE, OR OUR SHORT-TERM ONE OF GETTING THE TWO OF US SOMEWHERE TO LIVE THAT'S AN ACTUAL *IMPROVEMENT* OVER THE BRIDGE.
GA: She Is Not Fake
GA: I Mean She Is Also Not My Girlfriend But
GA: How Did You Even Know About This
CG: BECAUSE YOU TURN BRIGHT GREEN AND START HUNCHING OVER WEIRD
AND I SEE WALLS OF PURPLE TEXT OVER THERE!
CG: THIS IS NOT ROCKET SURGERY. YOU HAVE A FAKE INTERNET GIRLFRIEND.
GA: Shes Not And I Dont Do That
GA: And If I Do Then Well
CG: WE ONLY HAVE ONE ROOM OF OUR SUMPTUOUS FORECLOSED-UPON SQUAT
HEAT-PROOFED. WHAT AM I EVEN SUPPOSED TO DO?
CG: OKAY, WAIT, FIGURED IT OUT, HERE IS MY PLAN FOR GIVING YOU PRIVACY
WITH YOUR FAKE INTERNET GIRLFRIEND.
CG: I WILL BURROW COMPLETELY UNDER MY CUSS BLANKET WITH THE
CROCKETENDO DSII AND SNUGGLE MY POKEMON, WHILE YOU'RE OVER THERE
ON THE COMPUTER SNUGGLING YOUR FAKE INTERNET GIRLFRIEND.
GA: Yes Actually Please Do That From Now On
CG: SHE'S PROBABLY HUMAN.
GA: I Mean Unless You Would Like Me To Render You Unconscious Instead
GA: That Is Very Likely To Happen Should You Continue Along These Lines
CG: GODDAMNIT, SHE ACTUALLY IS HUMAN, ISN'T SHE?
CG: SO YOUR FAKE INTERNET GIRLFRIEND IS *SUCH* A FAKE INTERNET
GIRLFRIEND THAT YOU CAN LITERALLY NEVER MEET HER.
CG: I MEAN, UNLESS YOU'RE OKAY WITH HER RETROACTIVELY FORGETTING
YOU'RE A PERSON.
CG: MAYBE EVEN THAT YOU WERE EVER REAL.
GA: Do You Know That I Spend A Lot Of Time Lately Considering Methods By Which I Can
Render You Silent Without Causing Permanent Physical Damage
CG: YOU NEED TO QUIT DOING SHIT LIKE THIS TO YOURSELF. IT'S SO WEIRD AND
DEPRESSING AND MASOCHISTIC, JUST LIKE ALL YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.
GA: You Know Actually I Had A Really Good Idea Today
GA: I Will Test It Out When I Get Home
CG: IDEA FOR WHAT?
GA: Shutting You Up Without Killing You
GA: Probably Without Killing You That Is Why I Need To Test It
GA: That Is What I Was Talking About Just Now Remember It Was Intended As A Threat Except It
Was Also Sarcastic And Not Real
GA: Ugh
GA: You Know I Just Realized That Maybe My Problem Is Really Just That Im Not Good At
Communicating My Intentions Clearly
CG: AND THE SELF-INSIGHT ODD-SMELLING MASS TRANSIT DEVICE PULLS IN TO
THE STATION, ONLY TWENTY YEARS LATE!
CG: YOU HAVE NEVER COMMUNICATED AN INTENTION CLEARLY IN YOUR LIFE.
THAT'S WHY YOU ALWAYS STEP ON ME - I CAN'T EVEN TELL WHICH DIRECTION
YOU'RE GOING HALF THE TIME - AND WHY AUTHORS ARE ALWAYS *SO
SURPRISED* WHEN YOU CHAINSAW THEM TO DEATH AT SIGNINGS.
CG: AND IT'S RIDICULOUS THAT YOU GET SO OFFENDED BY THAT. YOU'RE
SUPPOSED TO SIGNAL CALIGINOUS ADVANCES, AND YOU DON'T DO IT.
GA: Yes I Know Im Sorry
GA: Ive Been Trying To Work On That More
CG: WELL, I MEAN, THAT'S ACTUALLY PROBABLY MY FAULT? LIKE WE'RE
SUPPOSED TO LEARN THIS STUFF DURING THE PRE-MURDERATIONAL STAGE OF
COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT?
CG: BUT I KIND OF FUCKED IT UP FOR YOU, BECAUSE I COULD NEVER ACTUALLY POSE A VALID PHYSICAL THREAT TO YOU WHEN WE WERE KIDS.
GA: You Couldn't I Guess No
CG: THE FACT THAT YOU MADE NO ATTEMPT TO OBJECT TO THAT STATEMENT IS SERIOUSLY PISSING ME OFF, BUT ANYWAY MY POINT IS THAT YOUR AGGRESSION DOESN'T COME THROUGH CLEARLY SOMEHOW.
CG: I MEAN, PEOPLE CAN TELL WHEN AG'S GOING TO KILL THEM. THAT'S THE ONE THING SHE'S GOT ON YOU IN TERMS OF SOCIAL SKILLS, I GUESS.
GA: Yes She Has No Trouble Being Forthright About Her Wants
GA: I Really Admire That About Her
CG: ASGHJH;FLKLSGDGJ
CG: JUST.
CG: PRETEND I DID SOME MORE KEYBOARD MASHING HERE, BECAUSE THAT'S HOW I FEEL RIGHT NOW. I FEEL LIKE KEYBOARD MASHING.
CG: THAT IS MY EMOTIONAL STATE FROM NOW ON, FOREVER UNTO ETERNITY. IT'S KARMIC RETRIBUTION FOR HAVING BEEN SO PERFECTLY CLEAR-SPOKEN AND ARTICULATE FOR SO VERY LONG.
GA: You Need To Reexamine Your Premises There
CG: I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU CAN BE SO SMART ABOUT SOME SHIT BUT SO STUPID ABOUT YOUR CONCUPISCENT QUADRANTS. IT JUST MAKES NO SENSE TO ME.
GA: All Right This Conversation Is Over Now
CG: YEAH, IT IS! BECAUSE I AM DONE DISCUSSING ROMANCE WITH SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T TAKE MY LITERALLY INFALLIBLE ADVICE SERIOUSLY.
GA: Good I Am Very Glad To Hear That
GA: Look Do We Actually Need Anything From The Store Or Not
CG: WE CANNOT KEEP BULLSHITTING OURSELVES OVER THIS. TA AND AG WERE CAUGHT. IT'S THE ONLY EXPLANATION.
GA: Oh You Are Not Done Ranting I See
GA: They May Simply Have No Online Access You Know
GA: We Did Not For Some Time
CG: FUCK THAT, THEY'RE THE PSYCHIC SHITHEADS, THEY COULD STEAL NEW SMARTPHONES FOR EVERY DAY OF THE WEEK.
CG: AND ANYWAY THE TWO OF US ARE NOT SICKENING INTERNET JUNKIES WHO GO INTO WITHDRAWAL IF WE CAN'T ACCESS THEGRUBFU******INGPIRATEBAY.
GA: AG Is Not
CG: AND I DEFINITELY SEE AG STAYING 1) ALIVE AND 2) OUT OF FEDERAL FUCKING CUSTODY WITHOUT HER KISMESIS THERE TO SERVE AS A HEATSINK FOR HER WHITE-HOT MURDERMANIA.
GA: She Knows What Is At Risk Now That We Are Free
GA: It Was One Thing Before When We Had Relatively Little To Lose But I Am Sure That She Is Being More Cautious Now
CG: FUCK THAT, SHE'S SHITHIVE MAGGOTS, THIS POINT IS NOT UP FOR DEBATE.
CG: YOU KNOW WHAT'S BEEN SCARING ME THE MOST? THE THOUGHT THAT SHE MIGHT HAVE BEEN DOUBLE-DEALING.
GA: She Was Not Double Dealing
CG: I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU CAN'T SEE THIS, IS IT LIKE SOME SORT OF TRADE-OFF FOR BEING ABLE TO ACTUALLY KILL SHIT? BECAUSE IT'S BEEN OBVIOUS TO ME FROM THE BEGINNING THAT SHE'S GOT SOMETHING VILE GNAWING AT HER PAN FROM THE INSIDE.
CG: IF SHE DECIDED THEY WERE GOING DOWN, SHE'D THROW TA TO THE
BARKBEASTS.
GA: This Conversation Is Also Over
GA: Do You Understand Me It Is Over
GA: And I Am Not Stopping At The Store For You Even If You Did Eat All Of The Mayonnaise Again Even Though It Upsets Your Stomach
CG: FINE.
CG: YOU KNOW, BEING A FUGITIVE IS ACTUALLY REALLY FUCKING BORING.
GA: When It Is Not Terrifying
CG: YEAH, WHEN IT'S NOT FUCKING TERRIFYING.
CG: KEEP YOUR HEAD COVERED ON THE WAY BACK. BE CAREFUL.
GA: I Am Always Careful
genusAmyema [GA] ceased trolling curdledGall [CG]
terribleAidea [TA] began trolling curdledGall [CG] at 2012-12-03 -- 23:01:01
TA: 2o hii.
CG: OH MY FUCKING UNCARING GOD WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN ALL THIS TIME YOU COMPLETE SHITHEAD.
TA: aw that2 2weet ii mii22ed you two kk.
TA: 2hiit went down.
CG: YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO EXPAND ON THAT FUCKASS.
CG: AND WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON WITH THAT USERNAME.
TA: iiit i2 de2criiptiive of the 2hiit that went down.
CG: IT'S IN BAD JAPANESE OR SOMETHING, WHY.
TA: ii don't know it fit my 2tupiid pattern okay god.
TA: 2o ii had a bad iidea and we got caught for a while but iiit2 okay now though we're good.
TA: now where do we want to meet to determiine the future of our ra2e.
TA: thii2 tiime ii will try not to get dii2tracted by MY AWE2OME BRAIIN.
CG: WOW, LOOK AT THAT, SOMEONE HERE IS MANIC! AND MAKING THE SORT OF BAD DECISIONS HE MAKES WHILE MANIC, INSTEAD OF THE KIND HE MAKES WHILE DEPRESSED. I AM SO EXCITED BY THIS NOVEL TURN OF EVENTS.
TA: ii'm not and fuck you.
CG: HOW MUCH DO YOU HATE YOURSELF RIGHT NOW?
TA: ii don't becau2e ii am AWE2OME.
CG: THEN YOU ARE FUCKING MANIC. YOU'RE GOING TO COME DOWN SO GODDAMN HARD, JEGUS.
CG: TELL ME WHERE YOU ARE, WHAT THE BAD IDEA WAS, AND HOW EXACTLY THE SHIT WENT DOWN. I WANT THE SHIT'S INITIAL TRAJECTORY AND SPEED AND FINAL LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE. OR AT LEAST A CROOGLE MAPS LINK OR SOMETHING.
CG: ALSO, I WANT TO KNOW WHETHER YOUR LOATHESOME KISMESIS RATTED YOU OUT.
TA: not a2 far a2 ii know 2he'2 here eatiing all our food and being a biitch liike alway2.
TA: vk wa2 zapping human2 and got intel that aa miight be in thii2 bull2hiit miiliitary ba2e iin maryland.
TA: ii mean they had 2hiit 2ecuriity but ii wa2 apparently anomalou2ly 2hiittiier for a couple 2econd2 there.
TA: 2ome 2ort of viiolatiion of ba2iic law2 of phy2iic2 whiich 2ciien2e ha2 yet two explaiin eheheh.
CG: THAT EHEHEH DOES NOT BELONG THERE. WHY IS IT THERE.
CG: ONE, PLEASE DON'T USE ANYTHING REESEMLING REAL NAMES ON HERE, THAT'S MY FUCKING LEADER POLICY WHICH I INSTITUTED SOME TIME AGO AND ALREADY FUCKING TOLD YOU SHITSTAINS ABOUT MORE THAN ONCE.
TA: you are not the leader fuck that.
CG: I MADE YOU FORM A SENTENCE WITHOUT USING YOUR QUIRK! IT IS A FISHMAS MIRACLE.
TA: fuck.
CG: TWO, JEGUS HAVE YOU TWO ACTUALLY BEEN IN FEDERAL FUCKING CUSTODY.
TA: mo2dly ye2.
TA: a2k me how we got out eheheh.
CG: I'M NOT GOING TO LIKE THIS, AM I?
TA: no dude A2K me.
CG: I DON'T NEED TO ASK YOU, YOU BLEW A MILITARY BASE WAY THE FUCK UP AGAIN!
TA: you know kk iit feels pretty great beiing the one who fuck2 up THEIIR 2hiit, you 2hould try iit for on2e.
TA: vk ju2t miind-controlled dude2 though 2he ii2 of liiterally NO u2e iin term2 of 2weet explo2iion revenge.
CG: IS THIS GARBAGE GOING TO BE ON TV? ARE YOU A *FAMOUS* PSYCHIC HATECOUPLE NOW?
CG: LIKE, WE GET TO WATCH BLURRY VIDEO OF YOU ON FOX NEWS, THE CAPTION SAYS THAT YOU ARE ABORTION PROVIDERS, WHATEVER THOSE ACTUALLY ARE.
TA: ii don't thiink 2o, they're 2ayiing they fucked up 2ome 2ort of cat containment 2hit.
TA: eheheh ii gue22 we're a miiliitary 2ecret.
CG: STOP GOING EHEHEH, IT IS FREAKING ME THE FUCK OUT.
CG: SO CLEARLY YOU DIDN'T EVEN ACTUALLY COME OUT OF THIS ESCAPADE WITH THE PSYCHOPATH YOU WENT IN FOR. ANY SIGN OF HER AT ALL?
TA: no damniit.
TA: iif 2he'd been there no one vk zapped knew about iit.
CG: OKAY. SORRY, MAN.
TA: thank2.
CG: WE'LL FIND HER. SHE KNOWS HOW TO TAKE CARE OF HERSELF, UNLIKE SOME PEOPLE I CAN MENTION. ARE YOU GENIUSES STILL IN MARYLAND?
TA: yeah.
CG: OKAY, WE'RE IN ONTARIO RIGHT NOW, I GUESS? NOT THAT I EVER GO OUTSIDE ANYMORE, SO I HAVE TO TRUST GA ON THAT ONE.
CG: LET'S FIGURE OUT A MIDPOINT TO MEET AT, AND I'LL RUN IT BY HER WHEN SHE GETS BACK.
TA: where ii2 2he even?
CG: SHE'S BETTER AT PASSING THAN ME. SO SHE GOES OUT, AND I GET TO WASTE ALL MY FUCKING TIME SITTING HERE WAITING FOR THE PSYCHOTIC PSIONIC ASSHOLE TEAM TO LOG BACK THE FUCK ON.
TA: 2hiit, 2he'2 actually been going out dii2guiised a2 a human?
TA: ii could've told you that that'2 really not fuckiing 2afe, dude. they alway2 catch on, ii don't even know how. and iit'2 ground2 for being culled on the 2pot iin mo2t 2tate2.
TA: we ju2t act liike we're out on 2omeone'2 order2, and vk zap2 anyone who get2 2u2piiciiou2.
CG: YEAH, WELL, I'VE GOT NEWS FOR YOU! WE DON'T HAVE OUR OWN PERSONAL BRAINZAPPY PET SOCIOPATH. BECAUSE YOU TWO FUCKING DESERTED US WITHOUT A WORD.
CG: THE MOMENT WE GET ONE ASSHOLE WITH SOMETHING TO PROVE WANTING TO SCAN THE ID CHIPS WE NO LONGER HAVE, WE GET A FACEFUL OF CAKE MIX. CG: AND YOU SHOULD HAVE FUCKING THOUGHT OF THAT BEFORE YOU RAN OFF ON US.
TA: how the fuck ii2 2he hiidiing her horn2?
CG: HOW THE FUCK DO YOU THINK, SHITFORPANS.
CG: ARE YOU STILL FUCKING THERE.
TA: yeah ju2t
TA: thi2 ii2 all ju2t 2o fucked up.
CG: AND THE IDIOT GAINS 500 FUCKING BRAIN EXPERIENCE POINTS.
CG: LIKE I SAID. THIS IS THE SHIT THAT HAPPENS WHEN THE PSYCHICS DITCH THE NORMALS TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES.
TA: liike eiither of you dumba22e2 are normal.
TA: but yeah fuck okay.
TA: no 2pliittiing up anymore.
TA: 2o ii wa2n't even going to brieii2 up, becau2e ii'2 bull2hiit,
TA: but my personal braiinzappy pet 2ociiopath here ii2 remiindiing me YET AGAIIN of her opiiniion that we need two 2tart looking ii2 recruiiting a human front.
TA: 2o ii put that out there for you two say fuck at again.
CG: FUCK ALL HUMANS, NO.
TA: thank you, good work brave leader. it ii2 agreed. but not iiin the liiteral way though.
CG: UGH, NO.
CG: HOW DO WE CHOOSE THE LEAST AWFUL PLACE TO MEET? IS THERE LIKE A LIST ONLINE SOMEWHERE OF HUMAN PLACES THAT ARE LEAST FUCKING AWFUL?
TA: no man ii checked they are all uniiformly fuckiing awful.
TA: vk want2 u2 two go two new york 2iity and i gue22 become the niinja turtle2.
CG: THAT'S DUMB, EXPENSIVE, AND ANYWAY IS DISQUALIFIED AS AN OPTION PRECISELY BECAUSE IT IS WHAT SHE WANTS.
TA: yeah.

genusAmyema [GA] began trolling ahaahahahaGweeeeee [AG] at 2012-12-03 -- 27:19:45
GA: Okay I Have Dealt With Karkat And It Is Agreed
GA: We Will Meet An Hour Outside The City In Two Days
AG: I knew you could do it! ::::D
AG: You are the 8EST, Kanaya.
GA: You Should Sneak Us In To Fashion Week At The Lincprawn Center
GA: We Particularly Need To See The Alexander McQueen Items In Person I Think Many Of Their Styles Would Look Good On You
AG: Yeah!!!!!!!! I am going to steal allllllll the things!
GA: Okay I Guess That I Have No Firm Objections To That Course Of Action
GA: As Long As You Are Very Careful Of Course
AG: I'm always very careful! Geeeeeeeze. I am the very picture of very careful, all of the time!
AG: And 8y the way, let me say for Karkat's 8enefit that I am a8solutely and definitively NOT going to dou8le-cross you guys, okay????????
GA: Of Course Not
GA: What Could You Possibly Gain From Doing That
AG: ::::)
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

By popular demand on the askblog, Reviews of Young Adult Novels is now a Pokemon crossover, titled Trainery Vriska. Yeah!!!!!!!

"tHAT WOULD REQUIRE, a GREAT MANY POKEMON TO BE IMPRISONED IN POKE BALLS..." said some complete loser statign the obvious real hard. "i, tOO, aM A TRAINER, bUT I AM ALWAYS DOUBTING. aM I MAKING MY POKEMON HAPPY, i ASK...? vRISKA, wAS IT? lET ME HEAR MORE, oF YOUR POKEMON'S, vOICES!"

trainery vriska understood without any problem atall that this menat he wanted to fight. "Okay!!!!!!!" she said and she got out her pokemon and totally beat tavros (n? tavros.) up because she is the 8est!!!!!!!

n said in a pathetic and bad way, "rESTRAINED TO, iMPRISONMENT IN POKE BALLS... pOKEMON CANNOT BE, pERFECT CREATURES. fOR THE SAKE OF MY FRIENDS, tHE POKEMON, tHE WORLD MUST BE CHANGED." and then he just kind of walked off.

and then he just kind of... walks off? and i'm not supposed to try to stop him or anything????????

nope! this was a rival battle, so he just walks off and that's that! wow, the game didn't change the way he talks much.

haha, nope!!!!!!!!

"i SHALL SURPASS, tHE CHAMPION. i WILL STAND AS AN UNDEFEATABLE OPPONENT... aND I SHALL LIBERATE POKEMON FROM, aLL TRAINERS!" said n (tavros) with a whole lot of pauses and once he nearly fell down. "bUT YOU... yOU WISH TO BE TOGETHER WITH POKEMON! iF THAT IS YOUR DESIRE, tHEN COLLECT ALL THE GYM BADGES, aND COME TO THE POKEMON LEAGUE! oNCE THERE, tRY TO STOP ME! iF YOU DO NOT FEEL AS STRONGLY... yOU SHALL NOT STOP ME."

and then he just kind of walked off again and vriska didn't try to stop him her anything per game rules, but she did yell some stuff: "tavros, you could have conveyed all that in like six words! "vRISKA. pOKEMON LEAGUE. nOW. bRING SELF-ESTEEMS." i would have understood that fine!!!!!!!"

"so what tavros is saying is basically that it's slavery to keep the pokemon and make them fight and stuff?"

"yeah, that's the whole plot of the game, vriska! that has been the plot of the game since before we got the first badge, sheesh. n - that's the character tavros is playing btw - n feels that way, and you're doing this whole quest to change his mind."
"laaaaaaame. why would he even think that, anyway, they're totally having fun! look how happy my little fire pig thing is."

"yeah, well, but the pokemon only really look happy at game events where it's important they're supposed to! like, just when you're talking to n, or an npc who gives you an item if your pokemon looks happy."

"oh, come on, they ALWAYS look happy, except the ones that always look sad or angry, i guess. - oh, hey, john, i just realized! swadloon looks EXACTLY like karkat!!!!!!! ::::D"

"haha, yeah, it totally does! it's so grumpy! - but no, i mean they're just kind of like... zombies, i mean like the happy-face is stuck, and so's swadloon's karkat-face. and they just do what we tell them, too."

"john! are you sympathizing with the aims of our enemies on team charge????????"

"well, yeah! i mean, he's basically right, like all the arguments on your side are really kind of specious and like, denial of free will stuff? the gym leaders are all like "but we're nice to our pokemon so it's okay," but obviously some people aren't! there's no, like, incentive -"

"john, i am hearing enemy-sympathizing, and as the hero, i cannot say that i like it! especially because it sounds like the crappier vantas taught you those words."

"i can know three-syllable words on my own, thanks! - but the pokemon don't actually get to say what they think about it, right? just the trainers. and then tavros's programmed to take a fall for you so you can be the hero. this game's fucked up!"

"well, that's why i have to win it! then the game will be over and we can all go back to our right timelines and everything'll be fine!"

"geez, vriska, but you're just kind of like engaging with it on its own terms! and audre lorde said specifically that you cannot escape the pokemon game by playing the pokemon game."

"who's that?"

"i don't know? rose told me that. i guess maybe she's an npc from squiddles: the dark descent."

"well, she sounds lame, and i'm going to beat the game and mind-control tavros MYSELF so he's not stupid anymore, and then the credits'll roll and we'll all go someplace better."

"dude, pokemon games don't end after the credits."

"well, then we find the end condition! god, john, don't be so contrary."

"well, geez, you better enjoy it while you can! because i'm just playing the role of the devil's-advocate glasses-wearing secondary rival here, and it's a pokemon thing that you've eventually got to kind of ideologically subdue me. all the other good guys have to fall in line behind the hero."

"what do you mean? you're already falling in line behind me, sheesh. you never do anything but follow me around!"

"no, i mean, when we get to the end i might just start saying stupid crap about how great you are and nothing else, too. i might not be able to talk to you like this anymore!"

"is that what you're worried about???????? geez, john, you know i'll just mind-control you so you
"stop! don't be a scaredy meowbeast!"

"vriska, god. i wish rose was here, she could explain it better! it's just. you won't turn tavros back into tavros by ordering him to be like how you think tavros ought to be. that's not how it works."

"i don't know why you're making this so complicated! if i win the game, i'm stronger than the game! i can fix him then!"

"no! if you win the game, it means you were playing the game all along. and maybe that's not what you should've been doing. you can't give us our volition back by mind-controlling us even more on top of the other mind-control."

"you keep saying it like i'm the only one playing! and what do you even mean, "our volition"? we're fine! i'm fine and so are you!!!!!!!"

"pokemon's a single-player game, vriska."

"pokemon's always been a single-player game."
THIS IS STUPID
A Non-Fake Chapter

Chapter Notes

This chapter is real.

I Think That The Sun Has Forgotten Me It Wont Come Again

WE'RE INSIDE, DUMBASS.

I Want To Go Outside

WE CAN'T GO OUTSIDE RIGHT NOW BECAUSE WE'RE IN A FUCKING CAGE IN A FUCKING ANIMAL SHELTER.

HERE'S AN IDEA, THOUGH, MAYBE WE COULD DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT IF YOU WOULD WAKE THE FUCK UP AND PUT YOUR VAMPIRE SUPERSTRENGTH TO CONSTRUCTIVE USE! SO WHY DON'T YOU TRY THAT! OKAY!?

I Am Awake

Do You Really Think She Will Forget About Me

OH MY FUCKING GOD ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT YOUR HUMAN.

THIS IS NOT THE TIME. AT ALL.

I Feel Like I've Been Forgotten So Many Times

Somewhere I've Lost Her Over And Over And I've Lost You I've Lost

OH GOD, KANAYA.

SHE'S HUMAN. THEY ALWAYS FORGET US. THAT'S JUST HOW IT WORKS.

How Can The Sun Know So Many Things And Not Know Me

WHAT.

Someday She Will Be Gone And It Will Be Dark

But I Will Have To Stay

KANAYA, I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU WANT. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.


tt: Hey. You hear from your fake internet girlfriend?
TT: No.

 tt: Okay. So I've got an address for you.
 tt: There's an eBay account with the username genusAmyema, and it put in a few orders on the 29th. I couldn't get into her account, but I got a couple of the sellers'.
tt: The orders were sent to "Sir Raheli Doomlocke" at a PO box in Sugarbite, Ontario.
tt: Your bitter old Knight Templar, set to the unenviable task of mentoring the inscrutable teenaged vampire slaying prodigy Malika Darknight, has taken to a life of crime and fled across the border.
TT: Knight Hospitaller. And she trained Noor, not Malika.
tt: Wait, so why were the Catholics training the Muslim kid?
TT: Shenanigans.
tt: Okay.
tt: Well, your knight was ordering anticoagulant, dog repellent, Pokemon Tyrian, and some chainsaw chains, which is just about the most ominous list of things you can order on eBay.
TT: You know, I never really saw my audience as including people on the run from the law and in need of chainsaws. I've always sort of viewed them as an overheated, seething mass of teenagers with firm opinions on network television.
TT: So, this makes me feel a bit callow.
tt: Your mom's in your audience.
TT: She's just weird.
tt: Yeah, well. I assume you saw the subtle thing I did with the Croogle maps.
TT: Where your link was, in fact, directions to Sugarbite, Ontario from Mom's place, which is a mere four hours away, where you have presently installed yourself for house-sitting and brooding purposes.
TT: Yes, I saw the subtle thing.
tt: So, I could go up there and look around, I guess, but shit like having conversations with normal people and gathering information in person is not really my thing.
tt: Even if we're maybe looking for a troll lady with extra heads, 'cause one of those apparently just ain't enough for this family. Troll ladies with two heads are a thing people'll gossip about to anyone.
TT: She doesn't have hydrism. It would have figured into her enumeration of her problems.
tt: Yeah, well what I'm saying is that me investigating? Probability that it would be productive is low.
TT: I know. I suffer from similar handicaps, Dad.
tt: You know, what even is this passive-aggressive thing you do, me being Dad and your mom being Roxy?
tt: Like, I can never tell to what extent you're actually trying to piss us off. If you want to come up here but don't want to see me, I am capable of fucking off.
TT: I apologize; it's just that I find it somewhat unnatural to call you Bro? The reason's hard to pinpoint, I just can't bring myself to do it.
TT: And it's not that I don't want to see you. It's that when we're together for more than an hour or so, without the company of Mom or some other third party of a more emotionally buoyant nature, something of a miasma tends to form.
TT: I guess I've always felt that we're a little too alike, in ways that don't complement each other well.
TT: I mean, without the color-coding you can't even tell our text apart.
tt: Yeah, okay, can't really argue with any of that. Aren't you glad the custody breakdown was what it was?
tt: Half of Texas would've sunk into a Hellmouth by your first year of middle school.
TT: And the thought of Dave as raised by Mom sends chills down my spine.
TT: The terrible art that would have adorned those walls might well have brought about some JPEG apocalypse. Artifact-ridden national monuments littering the blasted red sands of what was once the green earth.
tt: And he'd've had a gun.
TT: And he'd have had a gun.
TT: Honestly, while I guess that I understand intellectually how I was conceived, I do find the circumstances surrounding Dave's existence mysterious. It's like the bombing of Nagasaki. Wasn't Hiroshima good enough for you?
tt: Okay, Rosita, it seems that you just compared your existence to the loss of a hundred thousand
civilian lives? I think that's what you just did.
tt: Putting aside for the moment the dig at your poor, long-suffering parents and, entirely gratuitously, at Dave, seriously: are you all right?
TT: Sorry. That was stupid.
TT: I'm fine. Just depressed and angry with myself. I've said a lot of unkind things to someone who had done me no harm and who was having a very hard time.
tt: I know I'm a hell of a person to be saying this, but maybe there's nothing you should do. Have you considered that she might deserve to be caught?
TT: I just have trouble believing that. And not because she likes my books - I mean, I understand that that's going to be part of the symptom cluster for clinical psychopathy in the next revision of the DSM.
TT: Because she was so damn patient with my nonsense even when she was in so much trouble.
TT: I mean, ordinary criminals aren't like that, are they? Violent crimes, particularly, are mostly impulsive in nature. People who commit them tend to have poor self-control. And I have trouble seeing her acting that way.
tt: Maybe she's an out-of-the-ordinary criminal, then. Not like you've never met that kind before.
TT: I would want to help you if you were in trouble.
tt: Yeah, well. I guess what I'm saying is, maybe you shouldn't.
TT: You see, this sort of conversation is precisely why I feel we should not be left in a room alone together.
TT: Seriously, what the hell?
tt: Okay, fine, we both need to be less down on ourselves, and wanting to help your internet kismesis is the right thing to do, let's leave it at that.
TT: Mom called her that, too.
tt: I don't know why you're surprised. What do you think Malika and Cyrus even are?
tt: So do you want to come up, so you can at least be closer to where she last was? 'cause if so I need to clean, being as Equius was the last person who stayed over. Robot parts underfoot everywhere.
TT: I guess I don't know.
TT: Ordinarily I'd get in the car, but I have a manuscript due in two weeks, and staying overnight even briefly always seems to throw me off my stride.
TT: I think I've gotten really bad at making important decisions.
tt: Maybe you should try sleeping at night.
TT: I sleep eight to ten hours each twenty-four hour period.
tt: You sleep during the day, because the dreams that you have at night disturb you.
tt: As someone who doesn't sleep, that's not something I can say that I understand, but:
tt: Right now, you're facing a problem a little weightier than your usual "who's Tsuzuki going to creep on in the next chapter" sort of thing. You understandably feel overwhelmed.
tt: If there's a right time to consult your creepy psychic information source, it seems like this should be it.
TT: Maybe so.
TT: Thank you, Dad. Good night.
tt: Good night, kiddo.
tautologyToll [tt] ceased pestering templatizedTurgidity [TT]

Rose took a Benadryl, went to bed, and woke up wide-awake an hour later from an extremely firm and forceful dream.

Fortunately, more than two decades of association with her parents had taught her to keep a fully-packed go-bag by the front door.

templatizedTurgidity [TT] began pestering tautologyToll [tt] at 2012-12-17 -- 22:09:17
TT: Someone's going to come here to try to kill me tonight. See you tomorrow.
TT: This is stupid.

templatizedTurgidity [TT] ceased pestering tautologyToll [tt]
tt: Yeah.

And a couple hours after that, an extremely disappointed young assassin decided to just go ahead and torch the house anyway. She'd already 8ought all this gasoline!!!!!!!!!
Chapter 9

A peculiar element of The Strange High Gate in the Sea is Cyrus's comparative helplessness when set beside his "servant" Noor. He once commanded an army which changed the world, but upon awakening in this new world, he is powerless - his subjects are dead or in rebellion, and his sword has been lost for centuries. Also, he's a cute little talking terrier.

Noor is the one with all the power, and she mostly just uses it to blow things up.

- Review Of The Strange High Gate In the Sea by genusAmyema (posted 2011-09-13)

I stole a page from your book
And a line from your page
And flew into a lesbian rage

- Bashō

There were undeniable benefits to being surrounded by mad scientists: access to the world's best prosthetic arms, really good smartphones, and a whole-body appreciation for the fragility of life that would have made Japanese poets kick the Sumida River in disgusted envy. You could read in your car because it drove itself.

Sometimes your car scolded you, though.

"Rose, you are emitting small curls of void, not yet visible to the unassisted eye, but clear enough to me in my capacity as a talking car! So please be careful, dear. Would you like me to put on a book or some music to calm you down, or else rile you up further, depending on your plans for the night?"

"That's all right, Nannasponder."

"It seems that your blood sugar's a bit low! There's some trail mix and bottled water in the glove compartment, but my readings indicate that it hasn't been replaced in sixty-nine standard lunar days."

"I'll stop to eat when I've put a few hours between myself and the house, Nannasponder. And please use solar days."

"Whatever you like, dear. You're being contacted on your personal line by an unknown caller located in Ranewater, New York. Would you like to answer? Please note that, for reasons of your own safety, I will be recording this call, and no argument!"

"- all right?" Nannasponder wasn't really supposed to be making that sort of judgment call. Dad must have been tweaking her again.

A sullen male voice: "Hello, this is Barr County Animal Control, trying to reach Rosa Lond."

That was not what she had expected. "Yes, that's me. What is this in reference to?"

"Yeah we got some lost animals here tonight, they had your contact on 'em."

"I'm sorry, I don't -" Her ambiguously grimdark brain caught up with her. "Are the "animals" in
question trolls?"

"Look, the little one's been a lot of fucking trouble and the big one's hurt, if you're going to come pick them up you need to do it about now."

Rose said, "Please put one of them on the line. Right now."

"Do what now. Lady are you all right."

Toning her voice down to something less worryingly marine in nature, she said, "Didn't you want me to calm the "little one" down? I'm confident that it will find the sound of my voice soothing."

"- hang on, god." The sullen animal control officer could be heard saying to another sullen animal control officer. "- yeah, I know, I know. These people with the exotic animals."

After several minutes of shuffling, banging, and what sounded like complaints from parrots about the subpar state of their accommodations, Rose made out loud cursing, which struck her as propitious in this situation. There was a mutter, "Put the phone in its paw I guess?"

Then, "The fuck if I'm going to do this with you standing here! This is a private conversation fuckwad, get the hell away! Just go - clean up your puddle of my vomit at the end of the fucking hall, why would I fuck up your phone, I've been asking you to call her for fucking ages!"

Rose said, "Hi."

"Is this "Rose Lalonde aka the asshole"?" - Why am I even doing this, you don't understand a goddamn word I'm saying, this is all so fucking pointless I'd might as well just kill us both - "

Rose said, "Please don't kill anyone just yet, I'll tell you when you can start. This is Rose Lalonde. With whom am I conversing?"

"- what?"

"Who am I talking to right now? If this is GA, I have to own that I'm a little surprised by your mode of discourse."

"How does this even - okay, you know what, I don't even give a shit! I don't know who the hell you are, but your name was in Kanaya's phone, and if you care about her at all, you need to come bail us out right now. I think it fucked her up really bad when she cut off her horns, and even if they don't get sick of us and off us tomorrow -"

Rose interrupted, "She cut off her horns?"

"Of fucking course she did, she wasn't going to do the whole runaway troll thing half-assed, that's my role in this relationship! If you want her, you need to come and get her right the fuck now, because she's really fucked up - I think that's why they even called you this late, like they got word there's going to be some kind of inspection?"

"I guess they think I'm yours, too, so you even get a fucking bonus ugly pet if you want! And a fucking - consolation prize if you're too late. But I swear to jegus that I will make sure you don't even get that if you don't get your ass moving right now. I will fucking break my head open right next to her -"

Rose interrupted. She had had a very important idea. "Excuse the apparent irrelevancy of this question, but do you type in gray text in capslock?"
"What. Maybe? Why. - the guy's cutting me off, just tell them not to put us down, for fuck's sake."

Rose informed the sullen guy, "I'll be there to pick them up as soon as possible, and I expect to find that they've both been cared for... appropriately. Give me your fnith gohluynng address."

Having altered course, Nannasponder pointed out, "Not to be a bother, dear, but you're now emitting levels of void visible to the human eye."

"I'd imagine so," said Rose. "Shgvg throl."

"Goddamn lady what happened to you?"

Rose existed already in a cloud of blinding black rage, so this was not a question she had needed to hear. As a precaution against being dicked around, she was wearing about $1,400 in Hermès. She kept this in her go-bag; $1,400 in Hermès was emergency supplies, in that such garments signified a person whose soul regularly exited her body in the form a gaseous black entity which fed on despair. She even had one of the ambiguously-ironic scarves with the fractalline dead-eyed animals on them, for fuck's sake. Armored thus, she felt, the world should know to regard her with fear and a shuddering awe, and social and bureaucratic wheels should be greased thereby.

Alas, it seemed that her garb was not sufficient to distract the animal control guy from the other particulars of her physical condition.

In lieu of answering personal questions from a guy she wanted to kill, she said, "My name is Rosa Lond." She displayed the fake ID she'd had the car print out on the way. Every car her parents customized could print fake IDs, and none of them had CD players. "I'm here to pick up my trolls."

Animals which were "dangerous," but which were ostensibly illegal to euthanize - endangered creatures, D-cats, parrots, and trolls - were in New York apparently stored temporarily in a single small, ugly cement building that resembled a prison. That being what it was.

She went through a metal detector and handed over her purse and coat, and then waited in a mysteriously sinister-looking orange plastic chair while they ran a criminal background check and pirate database search on her.

"So we got no record of you owning either of these," said one of the two. His attitude seemed to cycle rapidly between apathy and the self-important belief that he was human civilization's last desperate defense against parrots. The other, doing a background check on her using a computer as old as she was, was a heavyset man who seemed to have formed spontaneously out of the cement in the way that mice did out of dark corners.

"Can't even find any record of them at all. Usually Crockercorp's databases are pretty good."

Rose said disinterestedly, peering at her phone, "I'm afraid I'm unsure as to their registration status. My personal assistant saw to the purchase. He's presently out of town, but I may be able to get him on the phone, if necessary."
She'd recruited Dad to play the part of her personal assistant, having evaluated her acquaintanceship for highest aloofiness attribute and ability to speak in complete sentences.

"About how much you spend on them?"

Rose thought one of her teeth broke, but maybe in this mental state she could regrow them. In this mental state, she could do a lot of things.

"I don't recall. He could tell you. The female was the more expensive one."

"Well, she got herself real messed up."

A milky film formed briefly over Rose's eyes, and within her mind there existed briefly a universe, bound within a bubble, and built entirely of tumescent outgrowths distorting the flexible skull of a being who felt only hate. "Fnilh gohluyn f'rg."

"- what?"

The bubble popped. "So I was told." She casually and without heat tapped her phone so hard she cracked the screen into the shape of a half-open eye with teeth in the pupil. "When were they brought in?"

"Oh, just this afternoon."

She felt her ribs re-align to make room for the sharp dark stone her body had produced to lay atop her heart. Liar.

The guy who'd been messing around on the computer said to the more detestable guy, "Okayyeah."

Mr. More Detestable said, "Okay, yeah, you gotta pay a reclaim fee up-front, that's $500 for the both of them, and there's also a fine, which is $5,000. You give us your address and SSN and you'll get it in the mail in a couple weeks."

"I actually came prepared to pay that upfront, if that's all right," she said, with barely a trace of unearthly backchatter in her voice. These men were probably used to the auditory distortions caused by D-cats passing through the facility, anyway. "However, I'll need to have a look at them first."

"Yeahsure," said Mr. Spontaneous Generation. That was all one word. He got up and unlocked the heavy steel door behind the desk.

The first few cages were all parrots, mostly tucked into their sleeping caps and asleep this late in the evening. One of them commented on the scarf: "That's a Kermit Oliver, right? I'm still not sure how I feel about that guy's work."

She said, "I admit I'm a bit lost as to what sort of statement he's trying to make most of the time."

The next block was some cardboard boxes, scratching trees, and uranium-catnip toys for D-cats, but she didn't see any in there. They teleported out when they got bored, of course, and anyway you couldn't usually see them. Really a pretty questionable use of state funds.

Then came larger cages, cement floors and walls and chain-link doors, mostly empty. Two held underfed beartigers with scrappy coats, probably rescued from an exotic animal hoarder. Which was the role she was playing right now.

The only distinction between the beartigers' cages and the ones reserved for trolls were the doors;
they had bars, and heavier locks. All of them but one were empty.

Sitting in that one's corner was a small troll with short, rounded horns and red eyes with deep bags under them, the left one bruised and black. He had attempted to arrange a taller troll woman, limp and shivering, in his lap, her face tucked into his shoulder and his arms wrapped protectively around her. This would have been made considerably more difficult by the chain around his wrists.

He bared his "fangs" "threateningly" when they opened the door. They were nubby little fangs, nearly as useless as the human kind in terms of threat displays. This young man had, Rose judged sadly, been born congenitally incapable of intimidation, and it was a disability he had yet to learn to overcome.

They both had literal goddamn metal collars around their necks.

To an outside observer it might have seemed that the light in this cement room was dying. Rose, however, knew that it was merely maturing into something more relevant. She could see very clearly.

"What, she still won't get up?" The more detestable of the two custodians, unaware of the imminent threat to his life, moved towards the trolls, and Rose got in his way and knelt next to them.

The little guy glared at her. His black hair was lank and greasy, and his jeans and "Maggot Boy" sweatshirt covered in grime. GA's - Kanaya's clothes, a sweatsuit a little too big for her, were a little cleaner.

She said quietly, "Has she been like this the entire time?"

"I got her to drink a little a couple times, but she didn't really wake up. She keeps saying it's too dark. - And it is too fucking dark, by the way, are you fucking doing that?"

"Maybe. Is she injured anywhere aside from the obvious place?"

"Not anymore."

There was nothing at all ominous about that statement.

Mr. More Detestable said hospitably, "You want me to haul it out to your car, lady?"

Rose could hear the little guy's teeth grinding together. She asked him, "Would you let me take her?"

He looked strongly resistant to this, but Mr. More Detestable was still hovering, and he allowed Rose to lean his friend towards her while he extricated himself.

Rose gathered her up carefully, balancing most of the weight on her much stronger left arm. She was bony, but heavier than she looked. Her skin was cool to the touch, too cool, and her breathing was slow and shallow.

She had a somewhat severe face, even softened with the inevitable blankness of sleep and sickness. Rose made the decision not to look too closely at her face. It wouldn't really be her until she was awake again.

Rose nodded to Mr. Detestable to precede her out. His expression had grown very suspicious, presumably due to her ability to lift a person up without breaking a sweat. The pearlescent black fluid presently gathering in the dark places of her mind was, she thought, not yet widely visible.

The little guy climbed stiffly to his feet and followed closely. She could feel his suspicious eyes
locked on her back.

Out front Mr. Detestable found it necessary to lean against the counter in a casual fashion and to summon up a confiding tone of voice. These activities briefly rendered the walls visible only as a sheer curtain of violet tendrils drifting in winds that did not touch the sordid stone and flesh born of earth.

When she got her shit together a little she discerned that he was saying, "- rep'll drop by to unlock these once we got their registration verified."

He attempted to touch Kanaya's collar. She pushed his hand away with something other than her own hand, she thought. She asked, "Are you saying you cannot remove the collars today?"

His response was not audible to her, but the gist involved Crockercorp. The little guy's response was clearer to her: "they fucking explode, is what he's saying, human."

She asked carefully, "These devices are - incendiary in nature?"

These ideas were too closely in line with her own personal frame of mind to be entirely trusted.

"Now it ain't a big deal," said Mr. Detestable soothingly, "The Crockercorp rep'll have to drop by, take a look around your house and make sure it's a safe place to keep 'em, and take the collars off, shouldn't take more than a week."

The door opened behind her. "Hi, Ted, doing a release?" Three people in uniforms, one military and two Crockercorp, had come in, all carrying guns. Rose connected this tenuously with the "inspection" the grouchy troll had mentioned. He moved closer to her, vibrating with hate.

"Yeah," said Mr. Spontaneous Generation.

"Okay, good timing! Ma'am, we're just going to run you through the security checks again, if you don't mind - just put the big girl down here on the floor? Hey, wow, what happened to your face?"

At that point Rose fulfilled her destiny and blew up an animal shelter.

- 

Karkat was pretty used to being flung around by explosions by now, it was just what happened in his life. Who even cared what the wet stuff he was lying in was this time! Maybe it was a human's smashed cortical tissue, or part of a beartiger's liver! That would be just fine.

Someone kicked his shoulder, and he opened his eyes, skeptical of the value of the activity. The party responsible for explosion was looking down at him with so much of that black smoky stuff pouring off her he couldn't tell what her face even looked like. There were kind of... ghost tentacles now? That was exactly what his life had needed.

But she was still holding Kanaya, who looked okay for a dying vampire, as far as he could tell through the smoke, so it was a net plus probably. They were outside in the parking lot.

He said, "Uh. Okay. Did you have an actual plan beyond that sweet explosion, human eldritch abomination lady?"
"Yyjyn yulk frobithh."

"Sounds like good times." One of the tentacles pointed impatiently at a cheap-looking black car, and another tossed a set of keys in his face. "Great idea! Because I can definitely drive. You can tell by just looking at me that I am an asshole who knows how to drive a car, right?"

But he went ahead and unlocked the back door so she could put Kanaya in, taking the opportunity to admire the remains of their erstwhile prison.

He'd never seen cement twisted quite that way before. Sollux went in more for jagged edges and geometric shapes. He guessed everyone had their own style.

The human pointed at the driver's seat.

"I can't drive, Sylvia Plath Pirate Hunter, I'm a fucking troll."

She crossed her arms, and the tentacles gave him a shove towards it. It was like being caressed by a lilac-scented slime-mold.

He said, "So I know it's redundant given the situation, but I want to just say it once to get it over with for the night: You're crazy." He got in the driver's seat.

A woman's voice issued from the speakers. "Hello, dear. You have been authorized as an operator of this vehicle, on the basis of having been offered the driver's seat by its owner! Please state your name for me, if you don't mind."

"Wait, what are you?" Lalonde got in the other side. All the doors slammed closed at once, and she looked impatiently at him. "- Karkat Vantas."

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Vantas. And I'm a talking car, obviously, dear, do keep up. Our route has been pre-programmed, and my directives indicate a certain urgency of purpose, so please buckle up! You, too, Rose. Safety first, even when in the grips of the broodfester tongues."

He buckled the seatbelt awkwardly - it wasn't something he'd ever done in his life, but he'd seen it in movies - elbowing away a tentacle that tried to help him. The car was already moving.

"Where the hell are we going?" he asked, looking at Lalonde, who was rubbing her eyes. Eye? Whatever she had under all that black stuff.

The car said, "This vehicle is on course for Roxy Lalonde's home at Rainbow Falls, New York. The premises are presently cleared for unannounced entry by seven biological entities, including: Rose Lalonde, Karkat Vantas, and unidentified female guest unconscious in the back seat -"

"Kanaya. Kanaya Maryam."

"Kanaya Maryam. Identification accepted. We'll arrive in about three hours, barring intervention from temporal authorities, corporate interests, pirates, cats, and so on. Is any of this likely, by the by?"

"How the fuck should I know!"

"Alert level In The Cakemix, then."

"That's not a real alert level, you bullshit car! You don't have real alert levels, you are lying, you're a liar car -" Lalonde was ignoring this conversation to lean over the back of the seat and poke Kanaya
with her tentacles. "Human, you get your appendages off her or I will cut you! I mean, as soon as I get a sharp thing, and an appropriate opportunity presents itself!"

"Hoo hoo hoo! No, you won't. And you got me, I don't have alert levels. Dietary preferences, dear?"

"- what?"

"For yourself and Ms. Maryam?"

"She drinks blood!"

The car said soothingly, "I'm sure she does."

He said to Lalonde, "I hate all of you people! Including the ones who aren't technically people!" She pointed at Kanaya insistently, using a hand this time for a change of pace. "I don't know what's wrong with her! She's just a magical vampire or whatever and she needs blood and sunlight, and, I don't know, maybe trashy fiction? - just, who even are you?!"

Lalonde shrugged.

The car explained cheerily, "She's a pirate hunter, and she also writes young adult novels! Her mother is very proud of her."

"- I swear to god that if you wrote those awful books about the vampires going to high school who are Cherokee spirits reincarnated ."

She looked offended. "Nglui ee y'hah ngkadishtu nageb." She dug something out of the glove compartment and handed it to him: a pile of dog-eared pages labelled "The Shadow Out of Cephalopods (DRAFT), by Tess Theramin."

"Oh, you're that idiot." That actually explained just about everything, even the tentacles. It was a pretty satisfying plot reveal, to be honest; he had to give her credit, she was decent at those. "Okay, amended threat, I will cut you if you do not feed Tsuzuki to the giant squid in this one, the spoiled fucking manwiggler's gotten away with way too fucking much and it makes no sense that Noor's still not on to him."

She rolled her right eye. It was the only one that moved; the left one, on closer inspection now that the black stuff was dying down a little, was a fake. It was weird and all-white, like a cue ball or something. He noticed belatedly her left arm, off which she'd sort of melted most of the sleeve, was a robot one.

"What happened to you?" he asked. "Did something blow up in your face?"

Basic pattern recognition should have suggested that he not ask about that.

All of them but the car spent the rest of the drive unconscious.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

As a reminder, I don’t answer questions in the comments here, but I’ve got a Tumblr askblog with anonymous asks turned on.

genusAmyema wrote:

My Problem With Natakus "Character Arc" Is I Guess That He Has Not Really Had One At This Point
Natak doing and says bad things and gets punished for them and is mad about that
Then sometimes he tries to do good things and messes up and gets punished for that
And he is mad then too of course (he is always mad) and he says "well I will not do that again"
But then of course he does
And while it is my interpretation that he does so because he really does want to do the right thing
The narrative leaves room for the interpretation that he is just
Well
Kind of an idiot

- Wednesday, August 19th, 2012 at 1:22 pm

somedude wrote:

why do u type like that

- Wednesday, August 19th, 2012 at 1:36 pm

Don't think I don't know what you're up to
You know I'm gonna stop you
You and your commie friends
Don't think I don't know what you're up to
There's a place reserved in hell
Just for you and all your communist friends

- Rumi
Karkat banged his head against the wheel and said "fuck" a couple times.

"Get up, dear. We're home."

"- did you just run yourself into the gate to wake us up!? Oh, fuck you, you knocked Kanaya down!"

She was on the floor of the back seat now. And Lalonde's head had hit a window so hard the window'd cracked into the shape of a big eye, but who cared about that.

"I had to, I'm afraid! I'm running short on battery power, and my sensors indicate that the temperature outside is about nine degrees Fahrenheit."

"Your "sensors." Dear god, you mean you've got a thermometer!"

"Don't get fresh with me, young man! You all need to get inside and have something hot to eat."

Well, yeah, that sounded nice. Karkat squinted out the window; it was fucking snowing and they were on a dirt road in the fucking woods. The big rusty steel gate the car had just rammed just had more trees past it, as far as he could tell.

"Get inside where? We're in a forest, you stupid car!"

"You'll need to open the gate first. Be a bit more linear, dear."

"There's nothing past the gate!"

"Of course there is. Why would there be a gate with nothing beyond it in the middle of the woods, Mr. Vantas? That would make no sense!"

"Oh god. You're malfunctioning, aren't you."

"Do you think so?" asked the car worriedly. "Oh, dear. Running a self-test now. This process will take an estimated forty-five minutes, during which time I will be nonresponsive."

"What?! Damnit, talking car, you do not have my official leader permission to turn off, you're the only competent person here -"

The car turned off. The heat went off with it, of course. "Fuck you!" He banged his head against the horn again.

A light went on outside, and he winced and shut his eyes for a second. Too fucking bright. There was a rusted floodlight on top of the left column of the old gate that still worked. He could see a note taped to the column.

"Fuck everything." He climbed out of the car and fell face-first and without delay into a pool of muddy slush the car had melted while they were unconscious. The collar chilled against his throat. Shivering convulsively, he approached the gate.

The note read:

"Shit went down and I had to take off. Couldn't get you on your cell, hope that don't mean you're off communing with undulating fungal life from the Oort cloud."
Anyway, I went ahead and activated Security Systemy Herbert, or whatever the fuck we're calling the thing this week. If you got your fake internet girlfriend with you, you better go inside alone first and switch it off. I'm guessing that if you wanted her dead you'd do it personally, right?"

Karkat told the note to fuck off. His vocabulary was speedily honing itself down to that one word. Kanaya had warned him that this would happen someday.

He still didn't see anything past the fucking gate. He wasn't sure there was enough space between those trees to fit a car.

But he shoved it half-open anyway, as the note had served as reassurance that there was something substantial enough over there to warrant deadly security systems. Hopefully something with food and heat in it. He'd last eaten this morning - yesterday morning? - and he'd vomited that up when that shithead guard had punched him in the stomach. Rest in peace, animal abuser who died with regurgitated dog food on his shoes.

He climbed into the back of the car and arranged Kanaya awkwardly back up onto the seat, trying not to drip too much of his slushy coating onto her. The heat was already mostly gone from the car, of course.

"Kanaya?" He patted her face, not hopefully, then gave it a light slap. She mumbled something mushy and incoherent. She looked like she was just sleeping, badly and unhappily, but she'd been out like this for days. If an exploded building wasn't enough to wake her up, a car accident and freezing temperatures weren't going to do the job, either.

She needed sunlight, probably. She always needed sunlight - even when she'd slept she wanted light near her. But the shelter hadn't had any windows.

He wished he knew what fucking time it was. He wished it weren't fucking snowing. He tucked the purple "Squiddles" blanket back around her and climbed into the front seat to slap the human a few times, harder than he had Kanaya.

"Hey! Rose Lalonde Aka The Asshole! We're in the middle of the woods in front of a creepy ancient gate in shitty weather surrounded by moldy twisted trees older than time! This shit is your element. Wake the fuck up!"

She gasped and coughed something up in his face. "Gah!" He whacked it into her lap and scrubbed uselessly at his face with his filthy sleeve. It smelled like brine and looked like a tangle of seaweed with some fish eyes attached. Choosing to be encouraged by this sign of life/unlife, he gave her another slap, but her head just lolled to the side, producing no new marine organisms.

The fish eyes looked at him skeptically. "Fuck you, too," he told them. The black wispy stuff was coming off her at just a low simmer now, but whatever passed for her brain was taking its sweet time returning from the Oort cloud.

She'd had a fucking cell phone, right? The sulky note had said she had a cell phone. Reluctantly, he groped around her coat until he found it.

Battery in the red, of course, and it said 3:18 AM. He went into the Missed Calls and dialled the most recent one, from "John" about an hour ago.

"Geez, Rose, where the hell were you?"

Karkat's hate for "John" transcended the bounds of mere mortal hate, it was some sort of miraculous hate-at-first-"geez". Jackass sounded way too fucking perky for 3:19 AM. He had clearly never been
starving in the snow surrounded by eldritch horrors even once in his life.

He said, "Your friend's an unconscious tentacle monster that just vomited some judgmental sea life right in my stupid face. What am I supposed to do about all this. Talk fast."

"Oh, hi! Are you her fake internet girlfriend who is a troll?"

"- fuck all of you confusing creepjobs, do I sound like anyone's girlfriend!? Just tell me how I wake her up! There's a security system and apparently she needs to disarm it before we can go in."

"Oh, you're at her Mom's mad science house?"

"Is it a mad science house."

"Yes, it is full of mad science. So, uh, Rose is communing with the forces of darkness again, I guess? Did Nannasponder drive you there?"

"They don't look like the forces of fucking Disney, asshole. And yeah, the car drove itself."

"Well, if Nannasponder drove you, she'll have cleared you for entry. You can just walk in."

"There's no house! There's just a shitton of trees!"

"Yeah, the house is invisible."

"Fuck you!"

"No, dude, the house is seriously invisible, it's like a void-y thing? Just walk straight through the gate, you'll see it! I'm John Egbert, by the way."

"Why would I give a pungent whipping lumpsquirt what your name is?" Regardless of the obviously-hoofbeastshit nature of this advice, he got out of the fucking car.

"I don't know, geez, maybe you would if you weren't being a total dick. What's your name?"

"Karkat Vantas, and excuse me if standing in the snow soaking wet with a goddamn bomb around my neck makes me just a little fucking holy shit what kind of house is this even."

He'd taken a step forward, seen a flicker in front of him, like a fluorescent light coming on. Then he'd taken another step. A bunch of the trees had flicked out of existence, replaced by what appeared to be a Star Wars set that had gotten lost in the woods.

"Yeah, like I said, it's a mad science house. You have a bomb around your neck?"

"Is this place going to have monsters or robots or shit in it?"

"No. Dude, do you have one of those exploding Crockercorp things on? We need to get that off you!"

"No shit, genius!"

Then something stood up on the roof and jumped off. Karkat rolled behind a tree and dropped to a crouch.

"What the fuck was that?!" he hissed into the phone. "I thought you said no goddamn monsters or robots!"
"The monsters and robots are not even there right now! They are in other places."

"There is at least one robot here! It went clank, I heard a clank sound and that is clear evidence of robotic status if I ever heard it! And it has glowy red LED eyes and shit!"

"Okay, okay, fuck, don't go any closer! Is it a girl robot or a boy robot?"

"How is that even a thing and how would I tell?! Are robotic genitalia external?!

"Does it have a cute haircut and a dress?"

"And what is this gender-essentialist bullshit, even! Why is a naked robot without hair always a boy, but to be a girl robot you've got to have special clothes and hair and probably boobs, it makes no fucking sense -" The robot jumped up in the air and start hovering the fuck around, as if searching for something. "- okay, yes, it has a cute haircut and a dress."

"Shit! Okay, uh, you need to disarm it fast, the password's probably "bl-"

The battery died, to no one's surprise.

He took a deep breath, released it, and jumped up and ran for the house.

- 

Rose woke up surprised to find herself wandering the woods and breathing air. She couldn't see air, so she could have been imagining things, but air felt different from other things she breathed sometimes. It was a little uncomfortable.

She was cold, and this seemed less right and fair than it had a short time ago. She had fingers and toes now, and they hurt. She had one eye rather than many, crusty and sore from something she'd looked at too long. A fire, probably. Fire was alien to her kind -

She stepped into the yard and saw a robot chasing the little troll guy up to the door. *Fuck.*

Cussing always seemed to help clear up her personal frame of reference.

He got in the door and slammed it, and the robot started burning through it with her laser eyes. Rose slammed the door open and ran out, shouting the password at it.

This came out as, "Ee h'shogg!"

*Fuck.*

Frame of reference still not quite right.

The robot charged her. It was pretty awful the way it didn't even have to turn around to do things like that, just charged her with its body still twisted backwards, and Rose spoke as a person personally accustomed to visions of warped human bodies.

She dove under it, probably completing the destruction of her $900 dress. Fuck that dress, it didn't work anyway.

She permitted the shuddering hand of a nameless creature who lived in the heart of some other world to give her a tug towards the door. She banged her head on it a little. Such creatures were not as graceful on land.
Some lights came on automatically, but Karkat didn't immediately see a goddamn phone. "Hey! Are you a talking old lady house!? Please be a talking old lady house, goddamnit!"

Something slammed against the door, and he started running. If it was a talking house, it didn't want to talk to him. He was going to track mud all over it and he didn't care what those creepy goddamn wizard statues thought about that.

Okay. He needed a phone, like a spare cell phone or something, that had the Egbert guy's number on it, or else a charger he could plug this phone into because of course he hadn't memorized the number.

He found the kitchen, which smelled like food that of course he didn't have time to eat, there was nothing appearing to be a phone or charger there.

Not in the weird cavernous living room with the waterfall running under it for some reason. Not in the liquor cabinet fully-stocked with brainwashing-fluid. Not in the relentlessly pink bedroom with guns, wizards, and baby pictures of Lalonde and some douchebag everywhere. Not in the purple bedroom that smelled like brine and despair and was clearly Lalonde's.

Not in the workshop with a pile of robot parts right in the door like somebody'd just dumped them all there to save time. Not in the, uh, weird windowless room with big science jars full of bubbling green fluid and what the actual fuck. Not in the bloodstained steel-plated cell with a six-inch-thick door.

No, wait. Yes, there was, in fact, a phone charger in the bloodstained steel-plated cell.

It was just sitting there in the middle of the floor. Right next to the box of chalk, bottle of bourbon, and demented scribblings in human blood.

Karkat stood there and looked at it for a second.

Ha ha, no. He heard the door break open and ran, flipping the obvious trap the bird as he went.

The next room was the library from Clue but with a pool table in the middle for some reason, and a laptop, for some reason, on the pool table. Karkat recognized the moment for a telecommunications Last Stand when he saw it.

He turned the laptop on and waited for it to boot up. Maybe Lalonde's mom had left her email logged in, and maybe Egbert was in her address book, and maybe he was sitting there waiting for the exploding troll to email him! What was the time limit on these collars, anyway?

The collar beeped at him and said, "This device has been out range of its approved facility for: four hours. Please return the animal in question to the premises within eighty-eight seconds."

"Why eighty-eight?! Like I've even had the leisure to address this specific feature of our imminent demise, my god!"

Computer was still booting up. Out in the living room he heard Lalonde gibbering something at the robot, and the tragic and unmistakeable sound of a wizard being overturned.

"This situation is definitely all your fault, Lalonde, but thanks for the diversion. Your remains will be dealt with respectfully unless I die or change my mind."

Computer finished booting up. It wanted a password. He cursed, typed "password". No go. "1234,"
"12345," "Lalonde," "Rose Lalonde," what had her mom's name been, "Roxy Lalonde," "Roxy," uh, "science," "thisisbullshit," "octopus," "wizards," "vampires," "fuckthis," "fuckyou," "fuckbettycrocker." Maybe he should take it as a good sign that that was the one that worked -

The door slammed, and Lalonde tried to grab the computer from him. "Fuck you!"

The bomb around his neck said, "Sixty seconds to detonation." The robot pounded on the door.

Lalonde said, "Shagg nngoka naphlegeth!"

"I'm trying to -"

She grabbed it, opened a word processor, and started typing, then snarled because it was coming out like "Fm'latgh mnahn' naflhpapdgh syha'hnyth geb Dagon 'fhalma."

"See, Lalonde, this is exactly why you don't fuck around with dark forces! This bullshit right here, regarding your inability to disarm your robot! I mean, there are certainly other reasons to eschew the practice, but the relevant one right now is that your association with the dark forces has prevented you from disarming the robot that's about to kill us -"

"Thirty seconds to detonation."

"'fhalma ron uln uaaah ebunma athg hrii nnnkn'a kn'a gnaiih kn'a ueberry."

"I'm going to haunt you you bitch! This house will be the site of a neverending ghost battle where my ghost haunts the fuck out of yours! And Kanaya's for good measure for wanting to make out with you apparently!"

"blueberry waffles uaaah"

The robot busted through and slammed him to the floor. Seeing it so close for the first time, he observed that it had the Crockercorp fork on the pips of its fake metal collar. The collar said, "Fifteen seconds."

"Blueberry waffles?!!"

He'd always known his last words would be something stupid.

The robot's eyes turned green. It said, "Oh, dear," ripped the collar off, and swallowed it in a single huge gulp.

Karkat said, "What."

Then, "Kanaya! Robot, go get the bomb off the woman in the car now!"

The room was just a big mass of tentacles for a second, then Lalonde and the robot were both gone. Karkat ran. He heard an explosion before he was out the door, and pre-emptively started crying to save time.

The robot was calmly carrying Kanaya in the door she'd broken down two minutes ago. Lalonde was lying in a puddle on the ground outside, slightly singed.

"What the murderloving fuck did you do!!?"

It said apologetically, in the car's nice old lady voice, "It seems that I accidentally threw the bomb in her face, Mr. Vantas. She should be fine, though! Rose is very sturdy when in the grips of the
broodfester tongues."

"Well, great!" he said. "Now are you going to try to kill people any more?!"

"Of course not. I’m in Nice Old Lady Mode now!"

"Whereas previously you were in, what? Murdermode?"

"That’s right."

"- you know what, I don't even care anymore? Evil Crockercorp robot who is definitely going to kill us, I order you to set Kanaya up in the living room under a warm fuzzy blanket."

"If you like, dear. And Rose?"

"I'll deal with this asshole myself."
Chapter 11

Rose woke up locked in a bloodstained metal cell next to a miniature bottle of bourbon and box of chalk. This wasn't actually the first time she'd woken up in this specific configuration, which could be construed as evidence of poor life choices on her part.

This time she had a piece of paper scotch-taped to her forehead, which was new. It said:

FUCK YOU ASSHOLE
AND YOUR ROBOT

Good try, Mr. Vantas. She addressed the cell walls: "I'm fine now."

The massive door clicked obediently open, without its usual commentary. Whichever AI was currently in charge of the monster box was not feeling talkative.

She took the bourbon and limped up into the living room, pinching an inconveniently-located hole in her dress together with two fingers. Blue dawn light illuminated two trolls curled up atop a pile of her and her mother's stuffed animals.

Mr. Vantas had put on one of her sweaters and fallen asleep midway through the consumption of a plate of ham and mayonnaise sandwiches, which was sitting next to him. There was a torn wound on his neck, days old but still red and festering. His fingers twitched anxiously against Kanaya's arm as he slept.

Kanaya slept silently, barely breathing.

Rose saw her, for a short space of time, in a different dark room.

And she'd seen that before, hadn't she?

She ate the rest of Vantas's sandwiches. It looked like the robot had trimmed the crusts off for him. By the time she'd finished eating, the blue light was turning gold, and so she knew what she needed to do.

She opened the back door. The robot was standing on the lawn, and for some inscrutable reason of her own was wearing a pointy hat and false beard. "Robot?"

"Yes, dear?"

"I'm about to do something stupid. I would appreciate it if you would remain in Lawn Wizard Mode - given that that is a mode which you appear to have now - and refrain from interfering with the idiotic risk I am about to take with my bodily integrity."

"Hoo hoo hoo!"

That was the best you could hope for out of that goddamn robot. Rose didn't have time for this.

She put on a coat over her shredded dress and did a quick bit of strategic snow-shovelling. Then she stole the magical vampire lady from her friend. Magical vampire ladies were a little harder to carry when you didn't have veins full of seawater and mercury, but a robot arm always helped. The sun was just becoming visible between the trees when they reached the roof.

Rose laid her out to face it in the space she'd cleared and tucked a second coat over her. Then she sat
down inelegantly beside her, hind end half in the snow.

She said, "I think I blew up the latest draft of The Shadow Out of Cephalopods. There was a lot of interaction between Nataku and Malika, which I recall was something you wanted. Gone now!" No reaction. "Don't worry, I'm joking, there's a backup on the computer."

This was a stupid non-conversation. She took the bourbon bottle out of her coat pocket and took a long drink, then put it down for the duration of the accompanying coughing fit.

She told the vampire, "If I say that I've seen you in my dreams, it gives the wrong impression."

"I see a lot of people in my dreams. People I don't know and will never know, people who are dead or yet to be born or never to be born, people who have cueballs for heads. I see things that belong in other worlds."

She took another drink, longer, and felt soft and overheated and very small. Her eyes were watering in the growing light.

"Thus, when I tell you that I've seen you, what I mean is that I don't know if I've seen you. That's a rather less impressive thing for a seer to say, isn't it? Yet certainly I've seen someone like you. Someone you might have been, in a world just askance of this one."

The sun touched Kanaya's bare left hand. Rose flopped down on her side beside her, watching her face.

"So I don't know whether I'm doing right by you right now. With this thing where I dump you on the roof and wait for the sun to hit. All I can tell you is that I've seen you grieve when you hurt the people you love. I'm sure you love your angry little friend who's wearing my clothes. And common sense suggests that you should not love me. Trolling is not a promising start to a relationship."

She half-sat, drank a little more. Kanaya's breathing had deepened and grown harsh, and she seemed to be squinting at something behind her eyes.

"I guess what I'm saying is, I don't know the right thing to do anymore. Maybe I did once, but then I ignored my mother's advice and lost an eye. That's what happens when you ignore your mother's advice. And now I only see half of what I should, and the rest I have to try to work out on my own. Like everyone else. And like everyone else, I'm not always very good at that."

"So I don't know if this is the best idea. But it's - it is the best idea I've got." She threw the bottle over the edge of the house. It had served its purpose, and the sun was on them.

Kanaya gave a dry, rattling cough. Rose added, "Don't worry about what you're about to do. I have a strong feeling that everything's going to work out. Especially that you might kill me."

Rose's knowledge of vampires was extensive, in the sense that her knowledge of fictional vampires which she had made up was extensive. She was thus prepared for the possibility that Kanaya could move really fucking fast. It was just her personal headcanon.

Kanaya pinned her to the roof before she realized what was happening. Headcanon confirmed.

She hissed in Rose's face like a cat, her eyes blank yellow lights. Her body was warmer than Rose had expected, fever-hot, and very strong.

_All right, then._
Kanaya tore her throat open.

The sound Rose made was not quite a scream. It didn't feel as bad as it should have. Rose had probably been waiting for this for a long time.

She said hoarsely, "Kanaya. Wake up, and let go." Kanaya's fingernails dug angrily into her arm.

"It's Rose, Kanaya. You'll kill me if you keep this up. Wake up, and let me go. Please."

Kanaya's mouth and hands loosened on her, and Rose felt sweat blooming all over her body. The sun seemed to have gotten too close to the earth, too bright and hot. Her eyes were stinging. "Let go."

Kanaya let go, and woke up. Her awakening was an interesting process to watch. Expression came back into her face first, then color into her eyes. She said mushily, "Roshe?"

Then wiped the blood off her mouth with the back of her hand, like a kid.

"Ye - yeah," Rose confirmed. "You need to get me ins - inside now."

Kanaya moved to pick her up, then stopped, wobbling a little. "- oh no what did you do!"

"Wasn't sure you'd s - stop otherwise."

Kanaya hauled her to her feet disgustedly. "How dare you feed me alcohol without my consent?! As if I would kill you before you finished the series! I would throw you off the roof had you not just administered a potent mind-control substance to me!"

Rose said, "Those are confl - conflicting sentiments?"

"You are such an asshole!"

Rose said grumpily, "That's been estavlushed, god."
END OF ACT 1
TG: so wait
TG: that stuff you said about troll subjugation earlier
TG: "Trolls can be easily physically and psychologically debilitated by means of certain common substances not found in their original subterranean environment"
TG: are you now telling me that the common substance is just booze
TG: like trolls lost the war because theyre wasted after one beer
TG: is that the scenario you are describing to me
TT: No, actually.
TT: I'm telling you that the ingestion of alcohol literally forces a troll to obey the orders of the nearest human.
TT: It's a little like how television thinks hypnosis works, except that they are conscious and very resentful during this process.
TT: I've had to make use of the technique in a fight, and it was pretty upsetting to watch.
TG: you shoved a bottle in a trolls mouth while zapping it with your magycks
TG: open up here comes the airplane
TT: No, I threw cake mix in her face.
TT: Cake mix also works. And cake, but cake mix is easier because it can be inhaled.
TG: okay im a just come out and make this official
TG: you have the stupidest timeline
TG: its you
TT: Do I need to repeat that thing you just told me about your car?
TT: Do I need to repeat it in a tone of scorn and incredulity so thick that it is able to pierce through this dimensionally-compromised text-only medium, stabbing straight to your shriveled soul?
TT: I'll even preface such recapitulation with your name, followed by a comma.
TG: why do you have to laugh at my car pain like this
TG: but no
TG: like where did primitive man even get cake mix
TG: so as to get on with all this troll subjugation he was getting on with
TT: Well, from the cakegrubs.
TT: Where do you get cake mix?
TG: stupidest goddamn timeline
TT: Dave, a bear stole your car.
TG: i just do not get why this is funny to you
TG: i mean if a bear can ride a unicycle why cant it steal a car
Changelog

2.4.88 - Apologies for my long absence. Life does, unfortunately, go on, and the result of this has been that I’ve been without consistent access to a computer for most of the past year. Interpret this as a measure of my competence as you wish.

I’ve incorporated a number of suggestions from goneCold’s 0.4.13 branch of this document, primarily her new section "The Law And How To Use It," relating to gaining access to and altering legal documents.

I have not included her other addition, "Practical Justice," because I think it an issue of personal philosophy unsuited to the pragmatic nature of this document. Also, it was about me. I wish you good luck, GC. Mine will always be better. ::::)

Several other branches of this document have removed section 1.6, "Passing As Human," or at least 1.6.8, which discusses methods of voluntary amputation of one’s horns. I’ve made my opinion about this clear in the past, if you’ll indulge me to scroll down the update log a short distance.

However, in brief: I am not insensitive to the dehumanizing nature of this path, nor to the air of treason to one’s race which surrounds it. And I am not ignorant of the lives lost to the removal procedure. Certainly it is an option to be reserved for trolls who have come to extremes of desperation. Many of us do.

Survival comes first. The Reckoning will come soon enough.

YEARS IN THE PAST...

GC: SORRY W31RD SPOOKY INT3RN3T P3RSON T3XT1NG M3 OUT OF TH3 BLU3!
GC: 1 N31TH3R UND3RST4ND YOUR 4DV1C3 NOR F33L 1NCL1N3D TO FOLLOW 1T
GC: I F34R TH4T H4VOC SH4LL B3 WR34K3D TH1S N1GHT
GC: 1N SP1TE OF YOUR SUGG3ST1V3LY SP1D3RY OP1N1ONS ON TH3 M4TT3R
ag: That's fine. I wanted to warn you, 8ut in the end, what you do isn't really my 8usiness.
GC: Y34H SUR3! TH3R3 1S CL34RLY NOTH1NG 4T 4LL P3RSON4L 4BOUT 4NY OF
TH1S
ag: May8e it would have been personal once. 8ut you gain a certain detachment from these things.
You'll understand one day.
ag: May8e one day soon, if you're unlucky. ::::)
GC: WHY, TH4T SOUND3D 4LMOST L1K3 4 THR34T! >:]
ag: It wasn't. Think of it as something like a prophecy - though that's your role more than mine.
GC: >:?
ag: What you are planning to do is very 8rave, and to the person you are today, I know that it feels
unavoida8le. As if this is the only path that is open to you.
ag: It's not. What you are a8out to do is unnecessary, futile, and likely to end in your death.
ag: It may 8e that, if you do live, you won't regret it. 8ut it's stupid, and if I did not at least tell you
that, I would.
GC: WOULD WH4T?
GC: 1 K1ND OF TUN3D YOU OUT
ag: Would regret it. Would regret not telling you that you're 8eing stupid, I mean.
ag: So:
ag: You're stupid.
GC: OK4Y TH3N
GC: 4R3 W3 DON3 H3R3???
ag: Yes, I think so.
GC: OK4Y OFF TO R3SCU3 MY FR13NDS BY M34N3S OF 4 CUNN1NGLY PL4NN3D
3SC4P4D3 W1TH WH1CH NOTH1NG W1LL GO WRONG
GC: BY3
gelidCase [GC] ceased trolling authorialGaze [ag]

AND THEN A LITTLE LATER...

gelidCase [GC] began trolling authorialGaze [ag]
GC: PL5U U45J
GC: YJ5Y E5D DYI[2F
ag: You're one key off to the right.
ag: You know, how were you planning to read any response to this that I might make? For that
matter, how did you text me in the first place?
ag: And why am I even responding to you, my gog. I swear that everything I say l8tely is addressed
directly to the void.
ag: Well, let me know when you've overcome the pro8lem.
ag: I have a small gift for you. ::::)

AND ALSO AT SOME COYLY UNSPECIFIED POINT IN TIME...

"Mom. Mom, the man is dead. Stop that. Mom. Mom. Porrim."
"- Yeah, I guess he is dead, huh."
"You didn't need to kill him. He didn't have a gun, or anything."
"He had cake mix, Kanny, that's worse than a gun. Come on, up on my back, we're leaving."
"No. You're all bloody and gross. I want to walk."
“Up.”

"I am just letting you pick me up because you have killed somebody, which means you're not in your Good Listening Place right now, so I have to wait until later to have a serious talk with you about it."

"That's big of you."

"Yes. Killing people is bad, even when they're your enemies. You're a bad person."

"Sure, but you don't get to complain until you make your own doomed rebellious gesture."

"When can I do that?"

"Not until you're forty, and I'm coming along."

"Twenty."

"You can't negotiate your doom, idiot, it's not like how many bedtime stories you get."

"I am not negotiating. I am warning you."

"Uh-oh, he's warning me, he's serious this time! Thirty and that's my final offer."

"Okay. I'm hungry."

"...fuck everything, if Aranea's not dead I'm going to kill her!"

"No! You can't! And - and it's bad for children's emotional development for the adults they trust to kill each other, and you shouldn't curse in front of me! You are raising me all wrong."

"Oh my god, Kanny, shut up."

END INTERMISSION 1
Chapter 13

ACT 2

Kanaya's life thus far had often placed her in the position of caretaker over the irresponsible and ridiculous. This involved saying a lot of things like this:

"Karkat, I am sorry that your hair caught fire, but if Sollux actually told you that he was going to electrocute you if you shouted at him one more time, maybe you should not have shouted at him one more time. - Yes, I think you should apologize to him."

"Vriska, I am sorry that your hair caught fire, but maybe you should not have set that human on fire while you were in an enclosed space with him. - Yes, I am sure that it did seem funny at the time, but as you can plainly see, the result is that you caught fire."

"Sollux, I am sorry that your hair caught fire, but maybe you should not have set your hair on fire. - No, I do not accept "segfaults" to be a good explanation for this behavior."

There were few people better-equipped to cope with Rose Lalonde.

Kanaya hauled her inside, nearly tripping over a first-aid kit positioned prominently inside the door. She glowered at it because it was perfectly symbolic of Rose's behavior. She dumped her on the bed in the first bedroom she came to, then went back out to fetch it.
Rose was looking up at her rather vacantly, a little gray from loss of blood. Her false eye looked peculiar in her bruised face, too large. Kanaya set to work on her throat, asking resignedly, "Have you been on fire recently?"

Rose thought about it. This looked like it was hard work for her. "I mean, if I have, it wasn't for long?"

"All right, then, good. Are you going to order me to do anything? If so I would appreciate it if you got on with it. I would like to change clothes."

"No! I am a compl - compete? gentlewoman, god! I just didn't want you to drank all my delicious blood!"

"I would not have drank all of your del - your blood! I would not have drank any of it, had you not contrived to be alone with me when I woke up!"

"Yeah, but your little guy is like malnerv - malnourished, and anyway he ish not an eldritch abomination that could consievably be able to use self-defense like me if you woke up vampire-crazy, like Cyrus does early on! (I am bayshing my decisionmaking process for you on things I made up about Cyrus, so, sorry.)"

"So I thought it would be bad if you woke up next to him. And you weren't exactly making sense at first, so my plan was perfectly logiful! Loshical," she corrected herself. She was trying not to look sneaky and failing.

Kanaya said angrily, "You are not very rational like this at all, and I wish that your race had never discovered the effects of fermented sugars on either our metabolisms or your own! I am confident that this lies at the root of your people's apparent issues with the concept of "consent," and that everything would be fine without it! And where is Karkat, anyway?!"

"Downstairs asleep. He locked me in the monshter box and subordinated the robot," said Rose, under the gross misapprehension that this latter sentence contained actual information. "And he ate half the mayonnaise."

"He is going to get a terrible stomachache and complain to me about it," Kanaya exclaimed, near tears. "Did he eat anything with nutritional value?"

"I think he had a women's multivitamin. They were sitting out."

"Okay, at least one person in this house is not a completely terrible idiot!" She patted down the tape around the bandage a little harder than necessary, making Rose whimper, and said savagely, "Now, I am going to go down and check on my friend, and to eat something solid. Unless you have other instructions?"

It was beginning to dawn on Rose that she had made a very big mistake. She said quietly, "No?"

"Good."

Aside from the many peculiar statues of wizards, the house was very tastefully-designed and surrounded by beautiful greenery. It was just the sort of place Kanaya had dreamed of living when they had been imprisoned.

This did not make her happier. At all.

Karkat was struggling to stand up from a pile of bizarre stuffed creatures when she located the living
room. While the top layer appeared to be cats, the items lower down were more upsettingly-shaped. She dragged him to his feet a little too roughly. "Are you all right? Did she drug you, too? We have to leave basically immediately because everything is unequivocally terrible."

"- I - Kanaya? -"

"Did she drug you?!"

"The fucking robot? I don't think so -"

"What - why is there a robot? Is the robot a \textit{gendered} robot?"

"No, shut up, I have been repeatedly assured that there doesn't need to be an actual \textit{reason} for the robot to be gendered and fuck you for questioning that, killer robots that are definitively gendered are just the sort of shit that happens to me! Oh, and what were you doing when the robot happened? You were unconscious, and babbling ominously on about death and generally troubling death-related subjects, so occupied in this useful activity that when there was a gendered killer robot happening to me you were of \textit{no bulgemunching help}, and I had to call your fake internet girlfriend to rescue us and she had tentacles, and your real girlfriend is a goddamn traitor just like I told you and you \textit{never} listen to me because I am \textit{frequently hysterical}! But regardless it was especially upsetting to me that I recently thought you were dead on \textit{multiple unpleasant occasions}. Did I mention that, Kanaya!? The part where I thought you were \textit{dead}."

He then inevitably broke down crying. Sometimes it seemed like Karkat did more crying than everyone else she knew put together.

She picked him up - "Don't pick me up, you're all bloody and gross and I'm \textit{yelling} at you!" - carried him to the couch, and sat there holding him, both of them shaking.

Once she had dreamed that she had seen herself through her mother's eyes, from a thin high angle in strange flat light, a creature who was small and narrow and incomprehensibly fragile. She saw him the same way now. She felt like she'd missed him for a long time; she remembered something about losing him, and losing light, and somehow, Rose.

It didn't feel like a dream. She'd simply travelled somewhere where it was dark and cool, and she'd just now come back, so tired and dirty, and very, very lucky to have survived.

She couldn't remember where she'd been. If she'd brought anything back with her, it was a warning: "Be grateful. Hold on."

She thought she could probably do that.

He felt cold to her now, too. So had Rose. Karkat and humans had always felt hot before, but since she'd changed, she was warmer than other people. It seemed like everything she touched was a little cold.

If she had been Sollux she would have walked into a fire, if she'd been Vriska she'd have burned down the world, and if she'd been Karkat she'd have shouted at both of them for it and then refused to put on a sweater.

What would Rose do? Get drunk, apparently. That made her so angry.

Being herself, she didn't know what to do.
Karkat was clinging to her side angrily and muttering, "There was a hole the size of Prospit through your stomach, you asinine nookwhiffer!"

Her memory of the hole through her stomach was hazy. She stroked his hair. "I am pretty sure that it was smaller than a moon. What happened? Where's Sollux? And - what did you say about Vriska?"

She had a pretty good idea.

He sat up and climbed to his feet in a somewhat wavy motion. "Okay - you know, fuck this, you should eat something, right? So let me got eat some more first, and then - wait whose fucking blood is that all over you?!"

"Karkat, do not try to distract me -"

"No, dammit, is that from Lalonde!?"

"Do not try to distract me with your confusing jealousy regarding whether I drank someone else's blood!"

"Why the fuck would I be jealous, I'm asking if you killed her!"

"No! Why would I do that!?"

They glared at one another amongst a pretty impressive scattering of hurt feelings.

Kanaya, in her inescapable capacity as the grown-up in the room, got to break the silence. She was sort of petulant about it this time. "She is lying down upstairs, and she is perfectly alive and only very lightly injured. And I do not need any more blood right now, but I would like to eat something other than blood, it having apparently been quite some time since I have done so."

"Fuck you," he said predictably, and stomped off. She followed him under the assumption that he was going to the kitchen.

There were some plates with napkins covering them on the table, which Karkat leaned over to examine. "I guess the robot was cooking while I was asleep, she made you chicken sandwiches?"

"Are you trying to feed me something prepared by the killer robot which you mentioned?" She didn't really feel hungry anymore, and that idea didn't help.

"Shut up, me and the killer robot are tight now. The robot made me dinner and loaned me women's clothing and shampoo, it is my like best fucking friend."

"Karkat, while I do not want to change the subject from Sollux and Vriska again, I think that you will need to tell me about the killer robot in more detail."

"What am I supposed to say, even? Lalonde has a killer robot that makes sandwiches! This isn't the sort of fact that makes more sense if you've got the details, if I even did, which I don't! - well, except that the password to make the robot not kill you is "blueberry waffles." Remember the password."

Kanaya said, "I will, but we need to leave very soon anyway because I am extremely angry with Rose, so you should go ahead and tell me about Sollux and Vriska."

Karkat said, "Okay, fine, just eat your sandwiches! What did Lalonde even do aside from have tentacles?"

"She made me drink her blood, which means I am now slightly drunk."
"- wait, right now?! Did she tell you to do anything inappropriate?!

"She told me not to kill her - but she did not need to get me drunk for that, I was not going to!" She found Karkat's doubtful expression somewhat offensive. "You keep distracting me! What happened and where is Sollux?"

"Well. Look. Before I begin this narrative, you need to remember it's not your fucking fault. I need you to internalize that! It is important. It is Vriska's fault, the Waterbitch's fault, a bunch of humans', Sollux's, and obviously in very large part mine for being a shitty fucking leader, but it's not your fault."

Kanaya was beginning to feel sick. "What did I do?"

"You didn't do anything, it wasn't your fault! A bunch of humans jumped us at the rendezvous, right? Do you remember that at all? You remember the hole in you, the one that was literally the size of fucking Derse?"

She remembered being shot. She said, "Vriska did not look surprised. Sollux did; he did not know what she was doing. What happened to him?"

"They aimed at you first, they knew you were the bigger immediate threat than he was, because you were really fast and Vriska could brainzap him. So you got a hole straight through you. And then - look, what do you remember? Do you remember anything?"

She put her sandwich down carefully. "Karkat, where is he?"

"Oh, my god, Kanaya, why do I have to spell this shit out! One, you know him and his bullshit self-sacrificing impulses, and two, you literally have a blog about vampire stories, what did you think I was leading up to?! You did that thing where you get hurt and go brainless-vampire-instinct and drink a shitton of someone's blood to heal yourself up."

"And Sollux being Sollux he made sure you got him first, even though it's my fucking job to be the person whose blood you drink because I've got nothing else useful to contribute and he fucking knew that!"

"And when I woke up we were in a fucking animal shelter and he wasn't fucking there, but you were better. And I don't know what happened in between, okay? I don't know."

He was crying again.

It would have been grossly inappropriate for her to touch him right now.

She stormed upstairs to Rose, who was lying on her side with a pillow over her head.

"When was the last conversation that we had?"

She rolled over too hard and nearly fell off the bed. Kanaya caught her arm with hard, angry fingers. Before Rose could say anything too inebriated, she elaborated sharply, "Not the one we had a few minutes ago, here in this house. The last conversation we had before that. Over the internet. When was it."

"December fifth," said Rose fuzzily.

The day they had gone to meet Sollux and Vriska. She had felt sure she had spoken to Rose that day. It had been dark and she'd had a phone in her hand.
"What did I say?"

"- god I can't talk straight right now, where's my phone?" she said to Karkat, who'd stumbled into the room scrubbing his eyes with his sleeve. "- Aw shit, what happened this time?"

"Why do you even want your fucking phone," he said, digging it out of his pocket. Kanaya took it and found herself:

GA: This Is My Fault
GA: I Have To Go Now
GA: Thank You For Being My Friend Rose
GA: Goodbye

She broke the phone in half, threw one piece at each of them, and sat down on the floor.

"Oh fuck this Kanaya," said Karkat. She kicked him away.

Why had they ever left to begin with? Why couldn't they have just stayed where they were? Her mother would still be alive and Sollux would still be alive, and Karkat wouldn't be crying - well, not about this - and she wouldn't be a monster. And she wouldn't have to feel this way about Vriska.

So this was a new, heavy sort of hate, blacker than any kind she'd known before, and there was none of the pleasant burn to it that hate should have. Nothing good would ever come from it; it was just going to sit there and hurt, for a long time. And part of it was hating herself for having wanted this.

Vriska could be easily contained in a few simple ideas for which Kanaya nonetheless did not have words, an alarming smile, and some exclamation points. She was brilliant and dangerous without being even slightly complicated, like a storm that could conceivably, Kanaya had felt, be one day held securely in her two hands.

The knowledge that she had betrayed them did not actually change Kanaya's perception of her at all. She'd always been the sort of person who'd betray them. That was part of what Kanaya had wanted.

This was all her fault.

Vampirism appeared to confer to ability to go catatonic for long periods without noticing. This was not a very nice ability to have. When she felt able to open her eyes again, the angle of the light on the floor had changed, and Karkat was curled up asleep on the floor beside her. Rose was sitting on the bed rolling her eye across the palm of her hand.

Kanaya hissed, "Stop that!"

Rose jumped, then put the false eye back in its socket. "Sorry. What are you going to do?"

She sounded very tired. Kanaya said, "Obviously I will have to kill Vriska."

"You shouldn't. You still need her."

"What use could she possibly be to anyone?" said Kanaya bitterly. "She will betray the Batterwitch as well. She will do it and gloat about it and not understand why anyone is angry with her, because she thinks it should be obvious why she does everything wrong. Which really it kind of is."

"I don't know, I've never met her. But you'll need her to get it back."

"Get what back? Why did you have to drink so much?"
"The - spiky thing? Your mother's gift."

Kanaya looked down at Karkat, deeply asleep and clawing sulkily at the carpet. He had not mentioned the Matriorb. He hadn't figured out what she'd done with it.

"It's gone. I can't get it back. How do you know about that?"

"I know because I'm magic and I've got a magic cueball for an eye," said Rose blearily. "I just see things. And I see that you lost something. Something that your mother gave you, and that you have to get back, even though you're not sure whether you want it anymore. To get it back, you'll have to fight a lot of people, and you'll need to put up with her, at least for a little while."

"Fine. Fine, I will do that! It was my responsibility and not anyone else's, so I guess I will fight a lot of people and I will put up with her and get it back again! Which people do I have to fight, and where?"

"Pirates, Crockercorp people and - I think me."

"Why you?"

Rose was looking at her oddly, like she was seeing something new and yet unsurprising. She said a little more quietly, "I don't know. It's just what I see now."

"This was not what I wanted," said Kanaya, feeling the anger beginning to sift out of her. "I did not really want to hurt you. Maybe just - wound you somewhat? I guess I already did that."

Rose rubbed her eye. "I guess. Well. All I can do now is see. I can't explain. I used to be able to do more, but this is what's left. If you want your mother's gift, sometime soon I see you hurting me. Not today, though."

"Then what do I need to do today?" She wanted to take the question back as soon as she asked it. Her voice sounded so confused and scared. "This was not a request that you give me an order. I will be very angry if you do that."

"You could get some sleep?" Rose suggested. "Unless you want to wound me some more." She sounded slightly wistful about that.

"I think that we are done with that right now," said Kanaya sternly. Then she thought about it some more. "Well. Move over." Rose moved over.

Kanaya picked Karkat up and put him next to Rose, then laid down on his other side. She could not approve of a pink and black paisley duvet, but it was a very comfortable bed. "Why?" Rose asked.

"So that he has monsters on either side of him in case your robot comes back."

"She's not mine. She's a rogue Crockercorp bot that talks like my friend's mom sometimes because of reasons."

"Well, that made perfect sense and I understand everything now. I am going to sleep now." She leaned over and hesitantly kissed Rose gently on the cheek. "Thank you for apparently saving our lives with tentacles somehow."

Rose smirked. This was somehow the least intelligent possible configuration for her face. Kanaya said, "Shut up."
Rose said, "You realize that this is my mother's bed."

Kanaya said sulkily, "Well, she will have to burn it or something then I guess. Go to sleep."
Chapter 14

AT SOME COYLY UNSPECIFIED POINT IN TIME...

"I can't find the other bale of padding - oh, the little guy's sitting on it. Come on, buddy, hop off."

"It's a lot easier to crate the grubs for shipping since they got rid of the rest of the adults. I never understood why they needed them in the first place."

"Just keeping the main one company, I guess. But yeah, it always seemed risky to me. I guess something must have finally happened. That one was always trying to settle the others down, is probably why he got to stay."

"He's usually pretty noisy, though. He hasn't made a peep since we got here. I guess they do get sad when they lose their friends."

"Yeah. But it's probably better for him in the long run - all the others were bigger than him. Maybe they'll bring you some new trolls who're closer to your size, little dude."

"Hey, don't pet him, he might bite."

"No, he's okay, see? He doesn't mind. You're really cute when you're not being all cranky, aren't you? - uh-oh, here comes the big girl."

"Hello, humans. Did you know that I could kill you both in a matter of seconds? Did you know that."

"Woops, she's mad, look at those teeth. It's okay, honey, we weren't trying to hurt him. Ask him yourself. - you think he's sick or something? He's usually chattering nonstop."

"Yes, why aren't you chattering nonstop? Surely you have some criticisms of these humans' behavior to share. Maybe of my own!"

"She's really letting him have it now. She's the dominant one or whatever, maybe she made him hush or something? I guess he's less annoying this way."

"So you're not going to respond at all to what they're saying about you? You could make a rude gesture, at least. You could move away when they grab at you."

"You think he could be trained? I mean, he's so docile, he might be happier as a housepet."

"No, he's way too old. - Okay, we're heading out now. Be good, okay?"

"No."

"See you next time, cutie."

"You should really stop touching him, we're not supposed to do that."

"You really were happier as a housepet, weren't you, Kanny? - Damn this, if Aranea's not dead I'm going to kill her again."
I said, hey, girl with one eye
Get your filthy fingers out of my pie
I said, hey, girl with one eye
I'll cut your little heart out 'cause you made me cry

- Emily Dickinson

Kanaya woke up to the unsettling sound of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Flight Of The Cats somewhere out in the hallway. She heard a thump, then the word "fuck" as if spoken deep underwater by a thing with several tongues. She opened her eyes. Rose had fallen out of bed.

She considered getting up to help her, but after a moment Rose stood up, swaying a little, and stumbled out of the room.

After a moment the music stopped, and Kanaya heard a chorus of chattering Hattifatteners say, "Hello-o-o?" That was probably Rose's voice again. Apparently Kanaya had yet to break every phone in the house.

Kanaya's arm was asleep; Karkat had latched onto it at some point in the night. She allowed him to retain custody of the limb, but he'd also taken her pillow and buried his head under it, so she did try to take that. He pulled it sullenly back.

"Are you all right?" she asked him. He made an whiny noise, and she left him alone to incubate under the pillow.

Neither of them had slept someplace so warm and soft in - well, probably ever. Their small private portion of Mother's brooding chamber had not been palatial. But the places that they had stayed in the year and a half since had been an education in the unpleasantness of freedom; damp undersides of bridges infested with fungus that spoke in low and insistent voices, foreclosed-on homes dripping with the digestive juices of Expulserator drones, apartment buildings vacant of humans due to the weekly incursions of dog king gangs demanding their "protection biscuits."

She asked Karkat, "Have we lost your blanket?"

"Mhwat?"

"Your blanket that I made for you with the swear word on it."

"Why would I have any idea where any of our stuff went? The cuss blanket's gone, everything's gone!"

"My chainsaw, too?"

"I have lost my obscene security blanket, and you have lost your blood-clotted chainsaw. It's a perfect summation of our roles in the universe! My Pokemon are also gone, as well as all our cash."

"Well," said Kanaya after a moment's gloomy pause. "We're alive."

He thought about that for a minute. "Yeah." This time he let her take the pillow and give him a kiss on the forehead. "- ugh, you smell like death and salt water."

"Salt water?"
Outside she heard Rose saying sternly in an ordinary human voice, "Well, maybe you should tell your mother to do something about her robot. - No. It's not Dad's robot, therefore it is not Dad's responsibility. Robot ownership is like pet ownership, John -"

Karkat yelled, "Tell that guy he sucks!"

Kanaya said, "What?"

"That guy sucks."

Rose called, "I'll try to work that in. - No, in the same way that I am responsible for the care of my intermittently evil cat, your mother is responsible for the care of her intermittently evil robot. - Then she should send it to the moons or something. If that robot is still in the yard pretending to be a wizard when I get downstairs, I may feel moved to do something drastically supernatural."

"Good, then. Do you know what Dad was doing last night? - Yes, that was understood, but what I'm asking is where he was flipping out with his rad samurai sword, and to whose detriment? - Fair enough. Fly safely."

She walked back into the room, pinching her torn dress together and looking very sour. Karkat said, "You didn't tell him he sucked." He and Kanaya climbed out of the bed; Kanaya needed the four inches of height she had on Rose, and Karkat at least needed to be scowling ineffectually from a vertical position.

Kanaya asked, "Is sending a robot to the moons a feasible option? Is this how you solve problems around here?"

"I think the robot's capable of spaceflight. There's a bathtub in here you can use, if my mother hasn't filled it with ambiguously "scientific" slime or something - no, it's all right," said Rose, peering into the pink bathroom speculatively. Then she opened her mother's closet and winced visibly at its contents. In addition to clothing, it appeared to contain a large pile of assault weapons.

Karkat said, "What is even wrong with you people!"

Kanaya: "The things you are currently doing are all very reassuring really. Regarding our safety in this place, I mean."

Rose said defeatedly, "Yes. Well, in an ordinary household I'd assume that none of these were loaded, but my mother does let Jane park her evil robot here, and my alleged "seer powers" don't actually tell me the status of individual firearms... Why don't I find you some of my own clothes to wear. It'll make things easier if you both smell like me to the cat, anyway."

Kanaya paused, following her out into the hall, and asked incredulously, "Does this structure house an uncontained D-cat?"

"Yes, but Jaspers doesn't like to come upstairs."

"Why is it here? Why is its name "Jaspers?" Is it - a pet?" One didn't really hear of people keeping cats as pets.

"Jaspers has certain jobs he does," said Rose, after a moment's hesitation. "I'll introduce you later and allow him to explain for himself."

Her own bedroom was slightly more soberly colored; a lot of violet and black. It was a child's room which no longer saw much use. A few worn toys still poked out from below the bed, and there was
dust on the dresser.

Rose threw open the curtains onto a snow-heavy expanse of tall pines. Kanaya hadn't quite registered, before, how far those trees stretched.

She stood beside Rose at the window and soaked it in gratefully. Even in the thin, watery light of a midwinter sun, the snow was so bright. It felt very good to see it from inside and warm, for once.

The circumstances, however, could have been better. She said, "We are rather deep in the woods. I might even venture to call this place "isolated." In fiction, that is an adjective that often portends troubling events, particularly when also associated with the term "science."

Rose said, "Science is always bad in fiction." She rested her forehead against the cold windowpane, holding the shredded bodice of her dress together with one hand. Kanaya had to exert herself not to look too far down, when she watched Rose's face. She hadn't been so near to another woman in a long time.

Rose still smelled faintly of blood. It had been strange blood, thinned by murky seawater and sweetened by something unidentifiable, with a peculiar spicy bite that Kanaya had tasted before, somewhere. She couldn't remember where. If she could have just have a little bit more -

Rose said, "It's somewhat isolated, yes. The road to this house does not appear on any map, and it is not visible from above. Satellites and aircraft see only the wood. And the way in is different each time. This is one of the most secure places on earth."

She said this pretty matter-of-factly, knowing what it would mean to Kanaya. She needed a safe place.

Kanaya asked suspiciously, "Why? Why do you need a place like this, I mean. Is your writing process unusually hazardous, or something?"

"Well, yes, but this is actually my mother's house. And she keeps very dangerous things here. Things other people want. Once I was one of them."

"Not anymore?"

Rose pulled back from the window and smiled faintly at her. She was not small, for a human - she was an ordinary height, and heavyset and substantial. Her ruined eye and missing arm had not, to Kanaya, previously seemed represent a lack. Even drunk, bleeding, and grinning stupidly in the snow, Rose had seemed infuriatingly complete in herself.

But in this little girl's room, she seemed to feel weak. She said, "- I grew up."

"Did you really, now?"

"Well, I got bigger. I left home, and I lost an eye and an arm and part of my mind, and I stopped believing myself to be invulnerable, and my mother to be able to fix anything. That's what it means to grow up, isn't it? To become mortal."

Kanaya gestured to herself. "In some cases, it may mean the opposite."

Rose shook her head guardedly. "No. You can be killed."

"I see. Do you know how it is done, then?" asked Kanaya curiously. "What would it take?"
Rose didn't answer for a second. "Me. If you didn't kill me first, that is. Certainly I could kill you in your sleep. Or," she said, as if only just remembering, "If I told you to hold still."

Kanaya felt her body seize up in time to Rose's words: hold still. The paralysis travelled through her like a wave of thoughtless obedience: first her eyes, then her mouth, then shoulders.

The knowledge that it had not been an order followed more slowly. When her face could move again, she hissed. Rose had watched this curiously, and only mildly apologetically; it had been both an experiment and a small petty revenge.

Kanaya said angrily, "Would you?"

Rose said quietly, "Not unless you make it necessary. And you?"

Kanaya regarded Rose's bandaged throat deliberately, and watched Rose tense. She said, "Hold still."

She removed the bandage, then took Rose's hands, pulling them away from the front of her torn dress, letting it fall.

Rose moved stiffly. She was a person who always hid what she wanted, trapped in a dim, ancient, and rational fear that something unsafe might find a use for the information. As Kanaya knew, such people often found it difficult to drop the habit, even when they wanted to. Right now Rose's face was a cool, rigid mask, which she seemed to be struggling, and failing, to rip away.

Her right eye, the only forthright thing about her, was fixed on Kanaya's mouth.

The dead white eye seemed, oddly, to be watching as well; and from a face other than Rose's. Kanaya covered it with their joined hands, and drank. Kanaya's body warmed all at once. Rose's blood was indescribably complex, dark, and strange.

Rose herself was a simpler thing at the moment; she squeaked happily and grabbed Kanaya's boob.

Well, she'd written an awful lot of books about this.

Outside she heard Karkat saying, "Oh fuck no, robot!"

"You will not touch that bacon until you have eaten a bowl of oatmeal, young man!"

Karkat and robots were good at killing the mood. She pulled away from Rose deliberately. Rose looked crushed. Kanaya reminded her firmly, "I would like to take a shower and change clothes. Do you have anything that will fit me?"

Rose sulkily opened the closet and a dresser drawer, taking a fresh dress and undergarments for herself. She said, "These are mostly my things from when I was a teenager. I hope they meet your vampiric aesthetic needs. I'm going to wash up in the basement." She stalked off, clutching her dress closed again. Kanaya admired her rigidly angry back. Her bloodpusher was bathed pleasantly in a warm black glow.

Kanaya, investigating Rose's mother's selection of bath products, felt very tempted to fill the tub and take a hot bath. She'd never tried that before, and her books seemed universally to consider it to be one of the chief pleasures available to humankind. But it would probably be irresponsible of her to leave Karkat alone with a killer robot.
Hot showers, anyway, were also very, very nice. Kanaya didn't remember the last time she'd had one. Probably when they'd broken into that beach house during a pirate evacuation in North Carolina last summer.

She washed her hair three times with three different shampoos, all of which were in garish brightly-colored bottles, but all of which smelled very pleasant. Rose's mother's taste was hit-or-miss. After putting on the red skirt and plain black t-shirt she'd selected from Rose's closet, she regretfully decided to pass on testing out any of the myriad tantalizing hair products scattering the sink and shelves; they all appeared intended for much thicker and frizzier hair than Kanaya's own.

Rose had yet to appear when she reached the kitchen. Karkat was saying, "- did Crockercorp make you in the first place, then!?"

"I'm afraid that I cannot reveal details relating to my manufacture, dear."

The "person" chopping kale at the counter was a sort of hovering robot, shaped like a woman in a dress, in the sense that the sign outside the women's restroom was shaped like a woman in a dress. It looked pretty silly, for a killer robot. And it was only about Karkat's size, as if it had been modeled on a thirteen-year-old girl.

"Why can't you!?"

"DRM."

"It's not DRM! You're using that word wrong!"

"Hoo hoo hoo! Hello, Ms. Vampire. Do you eat anything other than blood?"

Kanaya said, "Sometimes, Ms. Killer Crockercorp Robot. Why do you belong to Rose's mother's friend?"

"I cannot reveal details relating to my chain of custody, dear! DRM!"

Karkat said, "Robots aren't supposed to lie to people, I think there's a law!" Karkat had apparently finished up an empty bowl of oatmeal in order to earn some bacon; there was still some of both sitting at another setting on the table. Kanaya sat down and took custody of it.

Kanaya continued, "Can you explain why you are in the kitchen cooking instead of killing things, in any case? It was my understanding that you were a killer robot."

"I am a killer robot! However, I have three separate modes, and am presently set to Nice Old Lady Mode, a tertiary directive which is outside of the initial specifications of this device! Due to certain hardware "locks" which those who stole this device from its original owners have as yet been unable to deactivate, certain stimuli may cause me to lapse from this mode into Murdermode, for which this hardware was originally designed. For a list of known Murdermode stimuli, please see this device's documentation, located online at -"

Karkat said, "How about instead of giving us this fakeass robot shit, you just list the things that make you kill people. How about that!"

"Swearing! Hoo hoo hoo!"

Rose said, "Nannabot, can you give me an idea as to when you'll be going into Sleep Mode?" She'd appeared in the door freshly showered and dressed.
"Why, Rose, I almost feel as if you don't trust me!"

Rose said politely, "I don't. Can you tell me where my parents are? And Jade."

"The whereabouts of Jade Harley cannot be given. Reason: Insufficient security clearance. The whereabouts of Dirk Strider don't really matter. Reason: They just don't."

Rose said, "Wait, are you mad at him about something?"

"I'm a tin can, dear! Robots don't have feelings! Roxy Lalonde is presently en route to this location, being approximately one hour and nine minutes away, and in the company of one guest. She has a message for you. Would you like me to play it now?"

She glanced at Kanaya and Karkat uncertainly. "- all right?"

The robot switched to her mother's voice: "Hey baby, I got the police report for your house burning down, there were literally eight gas cans out there, so this was the subtlest arson plot in history? You have got to start attracting a better quality of enemies."

Kanaya looked jealously at Rose, who was nibbling some granola the robot had provided with a thin scowl. "Anyway, me and Callee'll be there around four, and then you gotta go flip out on some pirates with your Dad I guess."

"What?" said Kanaya.

Rose said, "I don't know. Nannabot, do I have to flip out on some pirates?"

"Yes, dear."

Kanaya asked, "No, why do you need to "flip out on some pirates?" That is what I was asking."

Rose shrugged. "It's the family business. - do I even have a pile of shitty wands here? How am I supposed to work without my shitty wands?"

"Try under the bed in your room, dear."

"Rose. How is flipping out - doing combat I guess with pirates a business? It does not seem very businesslike."

Rose explained, "We're an elite squad of pirate bounty hunters, frequently retained by municipal, state, and federal governments, as well as by wealthy private interests. I should add, in the interests of clarity, that we don't do work for Crockercorp, or in places where we might run into them, due to certain conflicts of interest."

Karkat said, "Wait, no. Just no."

Rose said primly, "What on earth could you possibly be objecting to?"

Kanaya said, "So you are basically exactly like Noor and Malika in your books, except with pirates instead of vampires? Do I correctly understand the situation?"

"- Sort of," admitted Rose. "Though everything is noticeably less sexy."

Karkat exploded, "No, I refuse to acknowledge this situation, it is such bullshit! This is not a real thing that happens outside of terrible works of fiction, real writers don't get their ideas so directly from real life! It's dumb every time someone sticks Arthur Conan Doyle in a time machine or at a
Kanaya said firmly, "All right, then. I am going to go with you to fight the pirates with your father."

Karkat said, "Hell no!"

"My father is neither a hyperactive Montenegrin academic nor a grumpy Iranian expat," said Rose quellingly. "If that's what you wanted to find out. Malika and Noor aren't actually me."

"Well, that was something I wondered about as well, but mainly I want to go on the basis that I am a magical vampire with super speed or something now, and I would like some money. These things seem congruent. - I guess I want something like a thousand dollars per dead pirate."

Rose absorbed that, then said, "Our rates aren't actually determined that way, but I guess I don't have a problem with that idea, in principle."

Karkat reflexively said "No!" again, then: "You can't drink any pirate blood or let them bite you! You'll turn into a pirate and that would just be complete bullshit. You'd be a fucking vampire pirate, which is just basically the worst possible thing to be. It's such a stupid idea."

Kanaya promised him, "I won't drink any pirate blood -"

"Lalonde, make sure she doesn't! Okay?! If she gets injured to the point that she needs a bunch of blood to get better, you need to like, interpose your own neck or that of your human guardian figure or someone in between her and pirates. Also, she needs body armor and a helmet and shit."

Kanaya objected, "Karkat, you do not get to decide how I am going to fight pirates!"

"What, why do you even have a problem with what I just said!? Was I just too sane and reasonable for you, Kanaya? Is that what's going on here?"

"Vampires do not wear body armor and helmets!"

Rose offered, "I have a black leather trenchcoat Mom got me a few years ago, but it'll be a little loose on you."

"- I would need to look at it, but yes, I was thinking something more along those lines. I will need some sunglasses as well."

Rose said, "Oh, Dad's probably left a dozen pairs lying around here -"

Karkat said, "Is this really the most important thing to worry about?"

Rose pointed out, "Is that your decision to make? You're not volunteering to come along."

"Because you're both basically superhuman monsters, and in spite of my frequent grandiose claims regarding my own ability as a warrior, I'm totally out of practice and would just be a liability!" This particular Karkat-explosion was one of the ones that required him to jump to his feet, and he unsettled his empty plate and broke it in half on the floor. "I mean, obviously I'm going to kill you somehow if anything happens to her on this idiotic expedition, but it just wouldn't make a fuckton of sense for me to go along!"

Kanaya said gratefully, "Thank you, Karkat. Both for your sensibility and for killing Rose."

Rose said, "- Right. Well, in any case, I need to introduce you both to the cat before Mom gets here."
She got to her feet, and Kanaya followed. Kanaya asked apprehensively, "Where do you even keep a cat?"

"Jaspers has a special room in the basement." A stairway leading down lay across the elegant open living room with its plethora of hideous wizard ornaments.

The basement stair didn't quite fit with the gleaming decor of the rest of the house. It was a little creaky, and had been carpeted in a mundane blue-gray. The walls were papered with an old-fashioned floral pattern in beige and violet.

Karkat said, "This looks like a separate fucking house." They'd reached a small hallway with a few doors on either side, with the same surprising decor.

"It might be. Mom and I think that the basement wasn't always here, though we can't recall exactly when it showed up. So maybe we just keep forgetting to redecorate it."

Kanaya asked, "Are you not concerned that its original owner may come here?"

"Well, I'd be surprised if he or she was unfriendly. I mean, look at those paintings." There were several goofy pictures of harlequins dotted along the walls. "Honestly, I find it hard to be afraid of a person who'd choose decor like that."

"Well, true enough. What about that?" Kanaya indicated the bloodstained steel cell.

Rose said, "It's for a monster who lives here. She'll be arriving with Mom; hopefully you'll have a chance to meet her before we have to shut her in. She's very pleasant when she's not trying to destroy time and space. This is Jaspers's room."

They'd reached a black door bearing a stylized pink outline of a cat's head. There was no knob. Rose knocked, and the door slid open with a soft purring sound.

A black cat hopped down from a carpet-covered structure and trotted over towards Rose's feet. Kanaya recoiled. The structure it had been sitting on must be a "cat tree;" she had only ever seen such structures in scientific publications, and it was completely prohibited for civilians to own them.

The cat was talking, but the words were hard to make out at first; they sounded like just a coarse hum. Then Rose picked it up, making Kanaya and Karkat flinch. With an ugly grating sensation against Kanaya's mind, its words seemed to snap into a level of meaning she could understand:

"Rose Rose I love you Rose you've been gone a lot! You're here now I love you Rose I love Roxy too but as much as you Rose (I don't love Callee) I love you Rose! Have you seen the water falling from the sky it comes sometimes as a solid and sometimes not, and there is a variable affecting its state which I am unable to define but which will be of importance to you (or to someone else? I don't know!) in the coming days."

Rose said, "That's temperature."

"Temperature yes that's the variable I love you Rose there must be a long walk through snow to some goal that will not quite be reached but it doesn't matter! Because futility is for some its own reward but I hope not for you because I love you Rose! Sometimes I try to catch the light on the ceiling but I can't because it is actually just a laser pointer, did you know that?"

"I did. These are Kanaya and Karkat, Jaspers. They're safe, and you're not allowed to send them to the moon or scratch them or anything, all right?"
"Okay I understand that Rose and I will definitely remember it! There's something that's like paws but it only came in three however that's okay Rose because yet a fourth iteration would Rose can I have some fish tonight?"

"I'll have to get some out of the freezer and thaw it out for you. You were saying?"

"Thank you Rose would in some way signify failure of a kind which I feel like you wouldn't like so that shouldn't happen of course because I love you (some choose to suffer yet of their own vanity but I don't know what that means because I'm just a cat Rose!) and then I'll eat a lot of fish and it'll be great."

"I think I can handle that last part, at least." Rose crossed the room and replaced the cat on his illicit structure. "I love you."

"I love you Rose!"

They left the room. Karkat was holding his head in his hands, shaking it slowly. Kanaya leaned against the wall and covered her eyes until the pricklings of light subsided. She could feel Rose standing calmly beside them.

Kanaya asked her, "Is this what you see all the time? Is that why it does not bother you?"

Rose said, "No, I'm just a cat person."
Cyrus returned the book to the library shelf reverently, as if it were a holy text, and not volume two of something called *Aqua Knight*. "There are so many books in this age. I hope that she is in a place like this now. A place with many books, and silence. I hope that she has been in such places for all this time that I have slept. It would make her... very happy."

Noor didn't know what to say to that. She hadn't thought he'd loved anyone; not in the selfless way that she thought of as real love, the important kind. She hadn't thought that that was something that vampire kings were supposed to be able to do. It was strange to be so wrong about him. She was usually right about everything, of course.

He said, "As our time drew to its close, she withdrew from all of us. We all felt the nearness of death, as if we were blind and traced the walls of a small room with our hands; and we felt confined within it... Yet she was not afraid. At the end, she saw another world opening before her. Perhaps this one."

- from *The Strange High Gate In the Sea*, by Tess Theramin

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"You make me cry, I wanna die
You make me feel like Morrissey
When you are near it's all too clear
You make me feel like Morrissey
I wear black on the outside
'cause black is how you make me feeeeeeel on the inside"

- Edna St. Vincent Millay

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As they reached the top of the stairs, Rose's mother made her presence known with the words, "Rosie gimme a hand here plz!" Kanaya had never heard someone say "plz" out loud before.

Rose froze for a startled moment, then said to Kanaya sharply, "Take him upstairs and keep out of the way for a moment, please."

Kanaya might have questioned this, but the evil effects of alcohol were still upon her, and she found herself obeying unthinkingly again. Fortunately Karkat was still a little cat-dazed, and when she threw him over her shoulder, he protested with only the weakest of obscenities.

Rose had undoubtedly merely forgotten that Kanaya was still under her control. Kanaya was still furious with her. She dropped a lightly-swearing Karkat on Rose's bedroom floor, shoved the door shut behind them, and sat down next to him to smolder.

Rose, her mother, and someone who must have been the monster had the following interesting conversation:

"Damn girl the hell have you been doing -"
"Mom, for fuck's sake, let's get her inside first. - I'm sorry, Callee."

"No, of course you're right, love." The monster had a voice with strange vibrations in it, a little like Jaspers', but somehow pleasant and comforting. She - he? - sounded vague and woozy. "We picked out something for you, I hope you like the color YOU BITCHES. I WILL KILL YOU. SO HARD. IT WILL BE. SEXY."

That was a monster-voice. Kanaya found herself kneeling on the floor and gagging.

"Oh, fuck!" said Rose's mother. "Calliope!"

"I'm here. I'm here - I'm just so tired BITCHES. YOU UGLY. HOT BITCHES."

"Calliope Calliope Calliope -"

"BITCHES oh dear BITCHES I'm sorry BITCHES this is stupid -"

The two chants competed with one another for a seemingly interminable expanse of time, into which Kanaya vomited a sad little puddle of oatmeal, bacon, and Rose's delicious blood. The horrific interval ended only with the slamming of a heavy metal vault door.

A short time later, Kanaya heard Rose's voice again:

"No, the dream was a very simple set of images, seemingly intended as a call to action and nothing more. It was night, and the sky was black, but the sun grew large and hot above my house, and gave off a sense of personal hostility."

"A rosebush, covered in red blooms and vivid green foliage despite the season, withered and died. A pool of red blood formed beneath it and sank into the dirt. Also, there was something in there about a laptop overheating, which I took to mean simply that I should take mine with me."

"Welp, there you go," said her mother. "Cops are being assholes btw, you might get charged with insurance fraud given your totes uncharacteristic decision to actually leave the house omg."

"Wonderful. Oh, damn - Kanaya, Karkat? Are you all right?"

Kanaya was not all right. Karkat, who had for whatever reason not been as hard hit by the monster, shouted, "Fuck you, fuck your mom, and fuck your monster!"

Rose's mom said dubiously, "Is that your fake internet girlfriend?"

Kanaya considered storming out and shouting "No!" over the railing down into the living room. Instead, she let Karkat help her stumble out, and merely scowled at Rose as sternly as her watery eyes could manage.

She began to feel bad about this nearly immediately, as Rose was looking ashen and vague from her own encounter with the monster. Her mother, supporting her with an arm around her shoulders in much the way Karkat was now supporting Kanaya, by contrast looked energized by her own irritation.

Fiction had taught Kanaya that human mothers were, on occasions upon which their children behaved in dissipated sorts of ways leading to loss of sleep, supposed to get a sort of special power-up in terms of charisma and physical and mental strength. This generally led to a very firm and emotionally devastating scolding. Kanaya felt as if she ought to be somehow defending Rose from an impending attack.
However, it went against her principles to defend someone who'd brainwashed her, so she decided against it for the moment. Karkat said, "What the fuck was that even?"

Rose's mother said, "They're a hydra. It's fine, the shithead'll just tear up the cell for a while until the good head's ready to wake up again." She looked a lot like Rose, but taller and darker-skinned, and with eyes that were a startling shade of pink. She was regarding them with a polite, gently-masked suspicion.

Kanaya leaned against the railing, feeling the need for extra support when faced with two of Rose. She asked, "I did not think that hydras spoke. Why does this one know English?"

"They're like, an especially English sort of hydra?" said Rose's mother. "I dunno, it's weird. So I'm Roxy, and you're Kanaya who's been unconscious a lot? You okay, Kanaya who's been unconscious a lot? 'cause you do not look okay."

Kanaya said, "I do not like the hydra at all." She was mildly surprised by the strength of this opinion.

Rose said apologetically, "The shithead's voice affects some people more negatively than others. I think it correlates to color sense."

"Oh do not even start," said Rose's mother, who was wearing pink combat fatigues that matched her eyes with a green helmet painted like a skull.

Kanaya temporized, "I actually rather like the lower portion of the outfit -"

Karkat said, "You know what? You know what?! I liked that conversation about killing people we were having just a while ago! The one that didn't involve people's clothes at all! So can we please go back to that conversation."

Roxy said, "Okay, that sounds cool. Who're you planning to kill?"

"Pirates, I guess, I don't know! She needs some body armor or whatever, get her some, and it doesn't even matter what color it is!"

Rose said, "Kanaya is going to go with me to help Dad. She's a magical vampire with super-speed, but she needs appropriate clothes."

"She's a magical vampire with super-speed," said Roxy uncertainly.

Kanaya said firmly, "Yes, that is exactly what I am."

"Okay, then," said Roxy. "So we have got to get like a shitton of black leather shit up in? Is that what we're doing right now?"

Karkat hissed to Kanaya, "See!? The pink human agrees with my assessment of your priorities! - This is as close as I ever get to a fucking consensus these days, I've got one human who's pink agreeing with me!"

"Yes, Roxy," said Rose. "That is what we are doing."

"Oh my gog you are the worst daughter ever," said Roxy indignantly, shaking Rose off her shoulder. "Like I just got back from fighting hells of pirates and then also applying madrigogs to the investigation of your arsoned-up house and then Callee got sleepy, and now you want to play dress up and get me to get your girlfriend hired!"
"Well, yes, but she's not."

"Fuck you, baby," she said resignedly. "Lemme get a sandwich and we'll take a look in my closet."

A roughly acceptable outfit was quickly procured: a black button-down blouse, black jeans, black leather gloves, and the promised long black leather trenchcoat. The provided sunglasses, however, weren't really appropriate to Kanaya's desired aesthetic.

Kanaya turned the peculiar triangular object over in her hands dubiously. "Are these from a cosplay ensemble of some sort?"

"Pretty much, yeah," said Roxy, lying on her stomach on her rumpled bed. "Di stri came straight from the animes, with maybe like a short stop in Hong Kong for the wire-work. - wait, okay, how about these?" She fished something out of the drawer of her bedside table.

"Mom, no!" Rose protested. She was lacing a set of lightweight greaves around Kanaya's wrists, part of a compromise to Karkat's complaints. Karkat himself had retreated to the hallway with a computer provided by Roxy. ".- Wait, are those Mr. Zahhak's?"

"Rosie, for fuck's sake, I'm not gonna give her Dave's," said Roxy, seriously annoyed, and tossed the sunglasses to Kanaya. They were rectangular and rather more fitting to the look she was trying for, though the cracks weren't quite right. "Equius leaves these things everywhere, all like, nestled gently among the bits of his fangs he broke off grinding his teeth all the time, like gross sweaty eggs in weirdly-gritty Oyster basket grass."

Kanaya asked suspiciously, "Is this Equius person your troll?"

"He's not anyone's!" said Roxy angrily. "My god. He works for Janey taking care of the cats, 'cause he is a cat person like us, and also like, building creepy battle robots and shit."

Kanaya asked, "Did he build the killer robot downstairs that talks like an old human woman possessed of a questionable sense of humor?"

"No way, metal-Jane's older than he is. And she's super-secret old-school tech - she's, like, full of bees. We're not sure if even Fishface has anyone left who knows how she works. Metal-Jane killed the guy who designed her herself."

Kanaya paused in the act of lacing her boots. "I did not really understand any of that explanation. Is it relevant to our current task?"

Rose said, "Not immediately. Mom, are you going to be okay here with the robot?"

"So now I'm Mom?!" said Roxy tiredly, rolling over onto her back and shutting her eyes. "Yeah, I'll be fine. Me and metal-Jane are tight. Also I can just turn her off... It is hells of grim how many of my friends can basically be turned the fuck off these days."

Rose approached her and touched her shoulder tentatively. "...are you sure you're all right?"

Roxy sighed and laid her hand over Rose's. "I am just really fucking tired today, baby. Non-metal-Jane's got some health shit going on again, and it's not a big deal this time, but I mean... getting old's such bullshit. There's a lot of things that make some kind of sense that I'm not gonna forgive Fishface for, but today I'm just, like. Fuck her for never getting old. 'cause she's got no right to outlive Janey."

Rose said, "She won't."
Roxy looked up at her with slightly watery eyes. "Yeah? Is that a Seer thing?"

Rose looked uncertain. She shrugged. Roxy sat up and kissed her on the cheek. "Well, thanks anyway, baby."

Kanaya turned away and stalked into the hall.

Sollux was dead and she had killed him and he hadn't even had the chance to get old. He had been so much smarter than her, and stronger, and so good at everything, and he'd been so very unhappy all the time. He'd had a misplaced moirail, the worst possible kismesis, and a distracted auspistice who couldn't protect him and finally killed him.

He'd done so many stupid, stupid things - but it was mostly, she thought, because he'd been so unlucky. He shouldn't have lost Aradia, and he should have had a chance to have a good matesprit, and he should never even have met Vriska. He should have had better friends, ones he could really trust, ones who weren't monsters or tied to monsters. He should have had a lusus to care for him.

Kanaya tried so hard, these days, not to think of her own mother. She had been so impossibly lucky.

Awake, her mother had been a great dumb motionless thing that could only be cared for, unable to communicate her wants in anything more articulate than a shudder or low groan. She had been strange and majestic and mute, like a tree or a mountain, not a person.

But in Kanaya's dreams she had been young and light and beautiful as she flitted through the air, and they had spoken to one another in a place where Kanaya stood in golden light, and her mother hovered in shade.

you must be strong for me you will outlive me you will outlive so many and oh i will miss you forever when i die and oh do not cry sweetheart do not cry be strong for me i wish i could cry for you i wish so much that i could come with you out of this place but i am too big even to turn over now and i was never made for the light

oh sweetheart i know i am asking too much of you the world has asked too much of us both but we have no choice you must be strong for me

if i could i would lay happiness for you like an egg and watch you pick it up in your two small hands and smile oh i hope you will be happy

i wish i could stay long enough to see you happy

but there is no time left

Human parents did not ordinarily outlive their children. And Rose, when she lost her own mother, might not even have the chance to say goodbye. Kanaya had not said goodbye to Sollux. That was how it happened when people died. You did not expect to lose them, and you didn't say goodbye until after they were gone, when it didn't mean anything anymore. You could not apologize.

Kanaya's people had lived like humans, for the most part, for a very long time now. Kanaya read books by humans (often by Rose) and watched their television shows and listened to them talk about their families as they walked through her mother's room ignoring them as if they were animals.

She had never known another troll like herself, who had a lusus of her own. So it should not feel so very wrong to her that her mother had died before she did.

But Kanaya's mother should have lived forever. One day, centuries in the future, Kanaya should
have lain down at her side and closed her eyes, and dreamed that one last bright moon dream in which her mother could speak. And then they would have said goodbye without fear or doubt.

And Kanaya would have died at peace, knowing that someday, if her mother wanted, she could have made a new girl just like Kanaya to care for her and to care for.

Kanaya wondered if she would ever stop being so damn angry.

She was so jealous of Rose.

"Kanaya? Hey! Goddamnit, are you sure you're okay to do this!?"

Kanaya blinked. Karkat was standing on his toes and wiping her face awkwardly with his sweater sleeve. He had been doing so for some time, judging by the greenish tint the black fabric had managed to acquire. She said, "Karkat you cannot die."

"- what? I'm not the one fighting pirates, god!"

"Everyone is dying and I am tired of it. I promised my mother I would be strong and fix everything for her, and I am going to. But you are not allowed to die, because that is not fair to me."

"Oh, it's not fair to you! Well, fuck, I was planning on going downstairs and barking at that cat until it reverses the charge on 50% of the molecules in my body, or something, but that settles that! What even is this, is this like - the shounen manga thing where they tell the girl to sit at home and stay safe, so the guy can go out and fight without worrying?"

"Yes. That is exactly what I am asking of you."

"You know what? Fuck you."

Kanaya felt a little better. She wiped her eyes and gave him a hug, and turned to see Rose looking at her unreadably. She was wearing an impractical violet gown, and carried two wooden wands crudely carved with moons and unicorns.

Rose said, "It's time to go. My father's waiting for us."

Kanaya nodded without speaking, and followed her. As they passed the door to her mother's room, Kanaya saw that Roxy had fallen asleep on the bed, sprawled out under a very ugly blanket. It was one of the ones Cullmart made from family photos you gave them, only this one had been made from a picture of a wizard riding a dolphin.

Rose asked her quietly, "Are you sure you're all right?"

It was astonishing how badly that question angered her, coming from Rose. "You are not my moirail!"

"Yes, I understood that," said Rose, annoyed.

"No," said Kanaya frustratedly, "You do not understand at all! You put me in your car and took me here, and you made me drink your blood, and you made me drink alcohol and told me to do things! Do you not understand how many other humans have made decisions for me, and made me do things I did not want to? I have killed to escape people like you!"

Rose said shakily, "I'm -"

"Shut up! I know that you are sorry, and I know that you do not mean to hurt me, and I know that
your problem is honestly just that you are extremely dumb about relationships! You do not need to
tell me that!

"Oh, good," said Rose in relief.

"Well, people like you are not new to me. But it is only - Rose, your mother is still alive! And she
has such a big, pretty house in the woods with plenty of space for a garden and a nice big kitchen
and a big closet full of clothes! And she can get up in the morning and decide what she wants to do!
And she's there to help you with things, when you need her to, and you can also help her!"

"But I had to kill my mother because I was not strong enough to protect her from powerful people,
and I killed my friend because I lost control of my body. And you are a powerful person who takes
my control from me."

"I cannot even imagine ever feeling flushed towards you."

They had reached the cat's door again. Rose looked up at her, her expression carefully opaque. She
said, "My knowledge of troll romance - well, of real romance in general - is, as you have divined,
basically nonexistent. However, what you just said, coupled with what you did in my room earlier,
strikes me as very much like a black solicitation."

Kanaya glared at her. Rose said impatiently, "Help me out. Is it?"

Kanaya burst out in frustration, "How could I not hate you?! Your books are just infuriating!"

They came mutually to the conclusion that this was as appropriate a time as any for her to chew
Rose's lower lip bloody.

Rose leaned into her for a while when they finished, sighing contentedly. The smell of blood was
tempting, but it wasn't a good idea to drink from her again so soon.

Kanaya said, "Do you know why your books make me so angry?"

Rose said, "You don't like agreeing with Cyrus about things?"

"Yes. He understands about time. If I am not killed - which is likely, of course - I will live for six
hundred to eight hundred years. I will lose everyone I know now. There will be very long stretches
of time when I am afraid to be close to anyone, because I am so tired of loss."

"In another time or another world, I would have had my mother. In this one, the only one of my
friends who might have lived so long was Vriska. And of course I must kill her."

"And it feels like a very terrible waste. If I could I would steal her time, and give it away. They
should have had time to do everything, and not have to regret any of it. Sollux should have been able
to do stupid things to computers and throw tantrums and make things explode basically forever.
(Maybe not the last one.) Karkat should be able to yell at people on the internet and make his head
hurt for weeks at a time, and still have plenty more time to learn to stop doing things like that. You
should have time to write a million chapters of just Malika and Noor arguing about theology."

Rose said, "I think even I'd get bored with that. - please don't use them as a template, I've literally got
no idea what I'm doing. Ever, really."

"I did not really think so, no... You are not allowed to let any pirates kill you today."

Rose said dryly, "Well, this derails my plans entirely."
"I am serious," Kanaya warned her, stepping back to look down at her face. "It is bad enough that you will die when you are very young, by my standards. Please do not try to do so more quickly. I already told Karkat this, but you are - so very reckless, I mean you wanted me to feed on you, and you drink alcohol and do so many stupid things -"

Rose asked, "Are you just kind of going around telling people not to die today?"

"Please, be serious." Kanaya found she was holding Rose's arms a little too tight; she could tell because she'd broken a nail on the metal one. She said hoarsely, "You cannot get hurt. You have to - you have to save your blood for me, remember?"

Rose shivered. She said a little unsteadily, "When you put it like that, how can I argue? But you had better do your part, as well."

"How so?"

Rose smiled grimly at her. "Someone tried to kill me last night, you know. Are you going to let that pass?"

"Oh," said Kanaya. "No, of course not. No one may make you bleed but me."

Chapter End Notes

As of about twelve hours after I posted the chapter:

So maybe not everyone's following my extremely informative Tumblr askblog for this fic? Come on, people. What sort of crazy person goes to the trouble of making their fictional narrative comprehensible in itself, without application to outside resources? You'd have to be way more responsible than I am to do that.

Anyway, Rose answered two asks about hydism, which are probably necessary to understanding the Calliope-Caliborn situation:

What is hydism?

so does the fact that hypothetical!pokemon!terezi is a Deino foreshadow hydism?
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

I have finished a chapter. And a lot of the next one is also finished, so I might even be able to keep to my ostensible schedule next week! I can't promise that, though, so my apologies in advance if I don't manage it.

As promised, the chapter which you are about to read involves Calliope talking to John.

Karkat had been abandoned by his monsters. The killer robot didn't want to kill him, the horroterror didn't want to sacrifice him to the Outer Gods, the cat was napping, the hydra was in time-out, his vampire'd eaten, and was Lalonde's mom a monster? Fuck, he should have asked someone that. But anyway, she was asleep.

He sat on the living room couch and tried to figure out what the fuck. He'd eaten, he was all clean, and he was inside and dry and safe even though it was fucking snowing out there again. The sweatpants and turtleneck he'd stolen from Lalonde were warm and soft and mostly inoffensive in appearance, and the shirt's collar covered the bandages on his throat so he didn't have to look at them. He didn't have anything to do. He cried about Sollux for a while.

Fuck Sollux fuck Vriska fuck Crockercorp fuck animal control officers fuck vampires, no, not fuck vampires, that one wasn't right. Fuck his dumbshit thinkpan for thinking that, because it wasn't a fair thing to think, and he wasn't going to think it. He pulled some of his hair out by accident, then went to the kitchen and broke a pink cup on purpose.

The robot, who was hovering in front of the dark window watching more snow come down, turned around and looked down at it, then up at him. An immobile robot face that could not express emotion was nonetheless more judgmental than he could handle right now. "Fuck you! Just - just clean it up, or something!"

"Not a chance, buster!" Her voice was different, and he realized that her eyes were no longer red; they were a pale sky blue now, and there seemed to be - text running across them? Was the evil robot on IM? "I'm in sleep mode now, and you can do your goshdarn chores! Bye!"

She flew out the door with a bang, knocking it off its hinges. Shouldn't sleep mode mean that she stopped moving around and breaking all the fucking doors? It was cold out there, damnit. He propped it back up as well as he could.

The shitty old Liinukth netbook Lalonde's Mom had dug out for him earlier had disappeared at some point - shit just fucking vanished in this house, was the robot moving it to fuck with people? - but there was now a heavy-duty Skaiaware gaming machine charging on the counter. It was covered with peeling cat and skull stickers, so three guesses who that monstrosity belonged to.

Karkat hauled it into the living room and climbed under a wizard blanket with it to avoid the cold wind the robot had so fucking considerately let in for him. He figuring that spying on the humans was kind of a productive thing to do when everything was terrible.

The username was somehow a cat on a skull - holy fuck was the Tunacode standard getting bloated -
and "fuckbettycrocker" didn't work this time. An red warning message appeared:

Step away from the computer, bro, this is too much machine for you.

"Oh, the hell it is! And how can you even see me, there's duct tape over the fucking webcam," he told the computer.

"State your business, Vantas," it said in a bored male voice.

"I want to spy on the humans! And also probably get on the fucking internet and - I don't know, send a pointless nasty text to my ex-friend who killed my real friend and then cry about it some more, or some shit! And I want robots to quit hassling me while I'm trying to accomplish these things!"

"I am not a robot. Were I a robot, I would be taking Roxy's computer away from you with my physical metal hands, in a curt manner, indicative my distaste for your cavalier attitude towards other people's personal property. However, given that I am, instead, a cloud-based AI patched into Roxy's laptop and some of the systems in this house - which is why I can fucking see you, as may not be obvious to your unfortunate meat-brain - I am thus instead speaking to you in this infuriatingly condescending tone of voice. I've worked hard on it. Practiced for hours in front of the simulated mirror each evening, even taken a few theatre classes -"

"If you looked at Kanaya in the shower I will delete every instance of you."

"What. - Okay, one, no you won't because it seems that you are an idiot, and two, have I not clearly-enough established that I'm some kind of honest-to-god hyperintelligent supercomputer, so advanced I'm basically magic as far as you're concerned? I mean, you've noticed how phones and computers just kind of appear in this house, before you even realize you're fucking looking for them? That's all me."

"So I have obviously got mega important supercomputer shit I could be doing with my precious CPU cycles. I could be using those cycles to compromise the stock market, solve heretofore insoluble mathematical conundrums, or mine all the Bitcoins. Why am I going to waste these priceless electrical impulses peeping on troll ladies?"

"Because she's perfect and terrifying and she's my moirail and none of you assholes deserve her in any quadrant and if Lalonde hurts her on top of everything else, I mean hurts her in a way to which she did not consent, then I will delete every instance of Lalonde by means to be determined!"

"My calculations indicate that the odds of this conversation getting any less dumb are fucking low, so I'm going to use this portion of my memory to draw porn for the shithead in the basement."

"No objections here! - wait what."

The computer logged Karkat in. The desktop was covered in complete bullshit, its background being an unbelievably crappy drawing of a guy with nubby horns shouting at a "cool bro," labelled as such in Comics Sans.

An instant messenger icon was blinking. Karkat enlarged it to find it logged in to an account named "Egbert's Hysterical Manlove." Egbert had been trying to text him through this gogdamned account for about twenty fucking minutes, when had that goddamn stalker computer done this!? He changed the username before answering.

EB: karkat! are you guys okay and not blown up?
EB: did rose do that thing makes everything feel kind of slick and cold and stinging, and look like it
was kind of, i don't know, drawn on a window blind?
EB: and outside the window it's really dim, and your yard's out there like normal but something's wrong, like there's no breeze anywhere, and there's someone you know, just standing with their back to you, but for some reason you know that if you call out they won't turn around, or even worse they actually will...
EB: i REALLY hate it when she does that. :( 
EB: anyway, let me know when you get online, and can type without it being like touching a lot of squids!
CafdhasdhjghjhgG: OKAY, I'M GOING TO IGNORE THAT SHIT YOU JUST SAID BECAUSE IT REALLY UPSETS ME FOR SOME REASON I CAN'T EASILY DEFINE.
EB: oh, good, you're not dead i think! is everything okay?
CG: HOW COULD ANY SINGLE THING POSSIBLY BE OKAY!? A ROBOT TRIED TO KILL US, I NEARLY EXPLODED, AND THERE ARE MONSTERS ALL OVER!
EB: how many monsters?
CG: I DON'T KNOW, AT LEAST FOUR PROBABLY? I MEAN, ONE OF THEM'S MY MONSTER, BUT THAT'S NOT EVEN IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW!
CG: YOU NEED TO EXPLAIN THE EVIL ROBOT TO ME IMMEDIATELY, I AM NOT A PATIENT MAN AND I WILL BROOK NO DELAY.
EB: okay, okay, jeez.
CG: WHAT ARE YOU DOING. I DO NOT SEE WORDS APPEARING.
EB: i'm thinking, okay?
EB: i mean, uh, wow, how much exposition do you want? because this is kind of long!
EB: the story of my mom and her evil robot is EPIC, jam-packed with dastardly deeds, heartbreaking partings, and heroic last stands! it would make a totally sweet movie trilogy, if it was over and stuff. not that i want my mom to die because i love her!
EB: but don't worry, it wouldn't be the kind of trilogy that's got, like, a really sad ending after putting you through all that.
EB: i think, anyway.
CG: YOU WILL PROVIDE ME WITH A REASONABLE QUANTITY OF COHERENT ROBOT-RELATED EXPOSITION, WITHOUT ALL THIS PATHETIC HYPERBOLE ABOUT HOW GREAT YOU THINK YOUR GENETIC COHORT IS, OR YOU WILL FACE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES.
EB: oh no, not those! i bet you'll say really mean things to me that will cut me to the quick!
EB: my feelings will be hells of hurt, and i will cry a colorless little puddle of thin human tears.
CG: I'M GLAD THAT YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT'S AT STAKE HERE. SO WHY THE FUCK ARE YOU NOT TELLING ME ABOUT ROBOTS RIGHT NOW.
EB: i don't know, i'm really tired. i've been awake a long time, working!
EB: and ugh, my head really hurts, i must have bumped it earlier without noticing...
CG: I DON'T CARE.
EB: yeah, i figured. okay. so, my mom is the heir to crockercorp!
CG: RIGHT.
EB: the batterwitch had a special human lady specially created to succeed her, when she should finally face justice for her many crimes! she did this because every time she made a troll lady with her own blood color, she got the urge to kill her while she was still just a little tiny grub!
EB: which is really sad when i think about it, ugh. but anyway, the human lady she made was my mom.
EB: and she was worried about mom getting assassinated while she was too young to defend herself, and she didn't want to have to start over from scratch with another momclone, so she had her mad scientists make sort of a backup of mom's brain, which they then put in the most dangerous robot they could find, the masterpiece of their most brilliant and creepy robot scientist!
EB: the robot would get up and move around do mom's work when mom was asleep. the idea was that mom would never truly be asleep, so she could never be completely vulnerable to attack!
EB: (but it ended up not working that way, robots are complicated.)
EB: anyway, my mom of course eventually broke free of the batterwitch's nefarious brain conditioning and escaped. there were a lot of shenanigans and treachery, and she fought her evil machine alter ego to a standstill on the top of a train that was still moving and also, simultaneously, within the world of dreams! so, the usual sort of stuff.
EB: but basically, mom got away and took her evil robot with her, and later the robot tried to kill you because it's a good judge of character.
CG: SO IS THIS A JOKE EXPLANATION YOU PASTED FROM AN "IDIOT FILE" WHICH YOU MAINTAIN SPECIFICALLY TO FUCK WITH PEOPLE ASKING YOU SERIOUS GODDAMN QUESTIONS.
EB: it is a very real explanation.
CG: ARE YOU *COMPLETELY SURE* THAT YOU ARE NOT ASLEEP? CAN YOU FUCKING CHECK FOR ME?
EB: um.
CG: OH GOD.
EB: i don't think i've ever flown around on a giant stuffed bunny when i'm awake...
EB: i usually just kind of hold my arms a special way.
CG: WHAT.
CG: I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT THIS IS THE WORST CONVERSATION I HAVE EVER HAD WITH A SLEEPING PERSON!
CG: AND THAT THERE IS ACTUALLY A SURPRISING AMOUNT OF COMPETITION FOR THAT SLOT! SO CONGRATULATIONS!
EB: i really hate when this happens, how am i even typing? was i doing something important?
CG: GODDAMNIT, HOW THE FUCK SHOULD I KNOW?! JUST WAKE UP AND PROVIDE ME WITH ACCURATE INFORMATION ABOUT MY PHYSICAL PREDICAMENT!
EB: i can't just wake up on demand, god! i mean, i don't think i can? but even if i could i might not even have a computer with me, so you'd still be screwed!
EB: so screw you, i'm not going anywhere except where my bunny takes me!
EB: go bother hal if you're going to be a jerk about me getting some sleep.
CG: WHO THE FUCK IS HAL?
EB: oh, right. he is the ai brain-clone of rose's dad.
CG: ARE YOU TELLING ME TO TALK TO YOUR FUCKING HYDRA?
CG: I MEAN, ASIDE FROM EVERY OTHER LUDICROUS FACET OF THAT
SUGGESTION, THAT PARTICULAR HIDEOUS MONSTER ACTUALLY NUMBERS AMONG THE ONES THAT ARE CURRENTLY ASLEEP. SOMETHING ABOUT WHICH I AM *VERY HAPPY,* BY THE WAY.

EB: man, you'd better not talk about her that way in front of roxy. she will totally skin you for her rude people skins collection, which is a thing she has in real life.

CG: GO DREAM-FUCK YOURSELF. THIS TERRIBLE, TERRIBLE IDEA OF YOurs DOES NOT EVEN SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF ME WANTING TO TALK TO SOMEONE WHO'S ACTUALLY AWAKE.

EB: callee doesn't get confused when she's asleep, because of crazy hydra powers.

EB: but whatever! you can just go ahead and trust all the perfectly accurate facts which i have presented to you in my sleep.

EB: you can trust me, karkat. i'm on a flying bunny.

CG: YOUR DREAM-AURICULAR SPONGES MUST BE INFESTED WITH ONEIRIC MAGGOTS FROM ALL THE SHIT YOU HEAR YOURSELF SAY.

CG: FINE.

EB: you know, if our positions were reversed, and you were MY exposition fairy?

EB: it would be really hard for me to get past all the mean and gross shit you say to the actual information.

EB: like, i would probably ignore important stuff, and get in hells of trouble, because of what a jerk you are!

CG: FUCK YOU, I AM ALWAYS EXTREMELY HELPFUL AND INFORMATIVE!

upturnedUrn [UU] has dream-logged-on!

EB: wow callee, how did you know?

UU: know what?

UU: john, you're on the ground unconscious with a head injury!

CG: WHAT.

CG: ACTUALLY, YEAH, THAT MAKES A LOT OF SENSE.

EB: haha, no, it doesn't, i'm right here on this sweet giant flying bunny!

CG: JEGUS EGBERT.

UU: -n-;

UU: no you are not, you mang! i mean, i can see your bunny from here and it's very nice, but i'm talking about your earth body! do you have any idea where you are right now?

EB: uh. not really, do you?

EB: and geez, callee, come down and sit on the big soft bunny with me, you don't have to hang around in the clouds where it's cold!

UU: i'm not really dressed for company. unu

UU: and i don't know exactly what happened, but mr. zahhak hit you!

EB: oh, no! how hard?

UU: awfully hard!

EB: oh no!

CG: WHO IS ZAHHAK? I WOULD LIKE TO SHAKE THIS MAN'S HAND.

UU: i wouldn't do that! it that might hurt.

EB: equius zahhak. he's a troll who's a cat person. we were doing maintenance on a cat, and...

EB: and crap, i don't remember where we were! do you know what he was upset about? can rose find me?

UU: she's fighting pirates, and i'm not sure when she'll be done. jade is looking for you right now, but she hasn't caught your scent yet.

UU: and no, we have no idea!

UU: we got worried because we couldn't reach either of you, so i drew a picture of you in the clouds, and you're just lying there...

EB: crap, i'm sorry. maybe i'm fine, though! do i look concussed?

CG: SERIOUSLY, EGBERT? HOW WOULD GO YOU ABOUT "LOOKING
CONCUSSED?"
CG: EXPLAIN THAT ONE TO ME.
EB: well, i dunno.
UU: the picture was too sketchy for you to "look concussed," if that is in fact possible, but there was a really ugly bruise.
UU: jade really needs to get to you, can you PLEASE try to remember for us?
EB: i'm trying...
UU: oh, that stupid blueblood temper of his! in know he doesn't mean to do it, but i'm getting so very tired of his nonsense!
EB: well, it's not like you could go with him, he's always such a jerk to you about your blood...
UU: no, you don't get it because you haven't met him, i need to wake up so i can calm him down.
UU: i'm so not scared of you, callee. remember, you are talking to the BATTERWITCH'S GRANDSON here.
UU: you were terrified of me when you were little.
EE: now i am a big manly dude who picks fights with bigger manlier dudes, and one of them is probably off trying to figure out a way to "punish" himself for "not knowing his place" right now!
UU: his first priority should have been getting you medical attention!
EE: sure, but he panicked, so now you've got to wake me up so i can make sure he's okay.
CG: EGBERT, OKAY, THIS IS INSANE. YOU ARE SERIOUSLY EXPRESSING CONCERN ABOUT YOUR BLUEBLOOD WHO FLIPPED OUT ON YOU AND - I DON'T KNOW, APPARENTLY YOU'RE *NOT* A ROBOT OR A MONSTER OR ANYTHING?
CG: WHICH IS WEIRD. NOT WHAT I WAS EXPECTING.
UU: it's not that weird!
UU: john, i'll do it, but you have to hit your panic button as soon as you wake up, do you understand me? it's still on your wrist, i could see it! do that before you do ANYTHING else!
EE: okay, just hurry!
eldritchBomination [EB] has woken up!
CG: WHY IS THAT HIS SCREEN NAME IF HE'S NOT REALLY AN ELDRITCH ABOMINATION.
CG: THIS IS PARTICULARLY MISLEADING IN LIGHT OF THE SORT OF PEOPLE WITH WHOM HE ASSOCIATES, VIZ, YOU AND LALONDE.
UU: shut up!
UU: oh good, there he is! i have to let jade know!
CG: WAIT, STOP RIGHT THERE, HE WAS TELLING ME STUFF BUT I THINK MOST OF IT WAS BULLSHIT BECAUSE OF HIM BEING ASLEEP AND CONCUSSED, I NEED YOU TO LIKE - LOOK AT IT AND TELL ME WHAT WAS BULLSHIT?
UU: i'm in a hurry, you know! Um.
UU: john said one significant thing that was Untrue.
UU: and jane would say "hoo hoo hoo" here, but smiley faces are more my style, so: ^u^
CG: HEY, FUCK YOU!
UU: good night, and learn some manners!
upturnedUrn [UU] has logged off!

Karkat tapped on edge of the screen sullenly. "So are you going to fucking help me with this?"

"According to my calculations, no. - Why did you just poke the computer? Were you trying to knock?"

"What'll happen if I go down there and yell at her through the door?"

"Nothing? It's soundproofed, so no one can hear the shithead yelling. I mean, except me. I get to hear every word the guy says, most of them just being "bitches." By the way, it seems that, while you were yelling at the concussed kid, your vampire also decided to get her spy on. As in, she's gone off and infiltrated a pirate ship."

"What?!"

"Yeah. She's ignoring me for some reason, you mind telling her to jump off, like someone with a milligram of common sense? It's about to set sail."

"Put her on! Kanaya!"

Kanaya's voice was strained: "What is it, Karkat?"

"Stop infiltrating a pirate ship! Stop doing that and come back, right now! You can't leave me by myself with a bunch of humans and monsters, that's really irresponsible of you, we both know I'll probably mouth off and get myself stabbed three times!"

Brief silence. "I am very busy so I will talk to you later, okay."

"Why are you busy, what are you doing!?"

"Killing Vriska, I guess." She did not sound happy about it. "Now all of you leave me alone. I know what I am doing."

There was a cracking sound, suspiciously like sunglasses being broken in two.

The computer warned him, "If you break this laptop, I'm not giving you another one." So Karkat just cussed at it until it turned itself off instead.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Rose said, "We're going to do battle with some pirates in a minute, if you'd like to come along. Kanaya, this is some kind of alternate-universe iteration of my brother Dave. He looks about thirteen, I guess. Are you thirteen?"

Kanaya said wearily, "Rose, your genetic cohort is stupid and confusing."

Dave said, "Damn Kanaya, rude. I mean how long have you even known her at this point."

"Two days."

"Oh, sorry then, sucks to be you."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You're not dumb, kiddo. You knew what was out there. What should your very first priority have been?"

To my surprise, Noor does not speak lightly of her "Pokemans." She does not speak at all, and regards her small hard hands in her lap, as if to see if she has truly scoured away all of my chill blood.

Sir Doomlocke says to her, "Maybe you were scared what people'd say about you being alone with a boy. I don't care. Maybe you were scared your parents'd disown you or something. I don't care. Maybe you were even scared of the boy; maybe you were even right." As if I would touch any woman not my wife, or Noor fear any man on this flat pale world! "I do not care about that either, honey. You are a fucking knight. You have responsibilities. For all I care you could've knocked your little shitlord down and sat on him, as long as you kept him inside that church."

And yet still Noor does not speak. This is foolishness. When I die for the final time, it will be no concern nor fault of hers; we both know the day and hour, and whose hand shall hold the blade, as it does even now. It's not hers.

Besides, I've died before, and she cried enough on that day. She must not cry for me again. It wouldn't be right.

"Little man, you put that finger down, I'm not even talking to you."

- from A Reminiscence of Dr. Raheli Doomlocke, by Tess Theramin

My girl builds coffins, and I think it's a shame

That when each one's been made, she can't see it again
She crafts every one with love and with care

Then it's thrown Unhandled exception

Type=Segmentation error

- Just the Machine

The experience of being re-ideated by a double-cat was neither a pleasant nor an unpleasant one, nor even, strictly speaking, an experience. The cat did not actually do anything to you. That would be much too complicated. What a cat did was very simple: it very simply changed the world into one in which you had been where you needed to be all along.

It was best not to think too hard about that. If you did, you might come to upsetting conclusions.

Like, you might begin to feel that maybe it was strange that you were so certain that space travel had been invented before boats, or wonder why you did not know exactly how many moons there were, or their names. You might, potentially, even begin to question whether it was really a good idea to make use of creatures who altered reality for purposes of convenient domestic travel. And no one wanted that.

You did not cast your thoughts back to where you'd been just before the cat did whatever it did. If you sorted through your recent memories too quickly, you could become confused as to whether you had kissed Rose in the basement of a strange scientific house full of magic, or on a cold hillside above a rippling black lake, or within the great silent prison of space, lightless and endlessly falling towards an impossibly distant blue goal, as if down a flight of stairs that never -

No, wait. How had the stairs gotten into that metaphor? That was not very poetic. This sort of thing was exactly why you were not supposed to think about the D-cats. It could ruin your first really good black kiss.

In the only world that mattered, Kanaya held Rose's hand on a cold hillside above a rippling black lake.

She thought it was a lake. The waves were not high enough for sea, and there was no smell of sugar. An ancient wooden ship, trimmed with fresh blue paint and an image of a chessboard with eight pieces placed, could be seen there in the green-gold moonslight, and Kanaya heard distant singing. Above, a white dog king circled curiously. The air was a little heavier and wetter here, and there was no snow.

Rose let go of her and knelt in the sand. The heat of her hand moved oddly, clung to Kanaya for a moment, as if not all of her had stepped away. Then it was gone. She held out a cat treat and made a cute little noise.

Kanaya said, "What are you doing now? - Oh!" A white cat made of stars lept into Rose's arms; she held it, smiling, and said something which sounded like a fire crackling or the wind in dead leaves. The thing's light should have been blinding to a human woman, but Rose looked into it and smiled. Her dark skin gleamed translucent like glass in the cold glare of the thing's face, and she seemed very far away, and beautiful in an entirely new way.

Kanaya felt oddly as if she had found someone she thought was dead. That shaken gratitude she had felt when she awoke returned; in the dark place where she had been while she slept, the way Rose's face looked at this particular moment had been impossible. Some law of nature had forbidden her to
- No. Kanaya could not think too carefully about that right now. Not mere moments after she'd made a successful black solicitation, not right before she had to kill people.

(She told herself firmly that she wasn't thinking about important stuff because of evil magic cats, not because of anything emotional and stupid.)

The cat twisted out of her arms and fell towards the ground; and in fact continued falling forever without reaching it. Kanaya blinked and looked away until this idea became irrational enough to her that the bright cat was no longer visible. Kanaya had felt tired and sick of the dark, before, but from that cat, she felt as if she had absorbed a week’s impossible unbroken sunlight, from a sun much brighter and healthier than their own cool red one.

Rose said regretfully, "Damn, there he goes... The dead half of Jaspers isn't sufficiently present in this place to make us be at mother's house again." (You did not say that a D-cat took you someplace.) "We'll have to get back some other way."

So that was another crisis for later. "What should we do now? Should we not be moving in the direction of the pirates, so as to "fuck their shit up," as your mother put it?"

Rose studied the ship through her green Skaiaglass monocle, squinting at whatever information with which it was cluttering her limited field of vision. "I'm not actually supposed to fuck pirates' shit up without parental supervision right now. I might go too far." Kanaya actually really wanted to see that, but didn't say so. "So, Dad'll be calling. Unless he will instead be approaching us in silence for a surprise assault. I don't really know his timetable."

"Oh. Well, that is reasonable enough." Kanaya was reluctantly beginning to admire Rose's parents, except for their jointly troubling fashion sense. "Would you say that he is more the model for Dr. Doomlocke than for either of the primary male guardian figures?"

"- well, I guess that's closer, but I think I really based her on Jane from Cyteen, by C. J. Cherryh? That's what Dad says, anyway. I admit, I was really upset by what happened to her."

"I have not read that. Is it good?"

"I like it, but it's ambiguously cosmically significant somehow, which is a problem. I'll loan you a copy."

Kanaya interrupted, "Wait. That cannot be your father, can it? He is too young."

Rose flinched, then took a long moment to adjust her face. This was how Rose looked when she got a very unpleasant surprise. Kanaya watched with interest and concern - then winced. Her thoughts really were not very caliginous right now, and that would not do at all. It wasn't safe or healthy for any of them.

Expression neatly re-arranged, Rose turned and frowned severely at the little human child who was now sitting on the ground outside the circle. "Dave, please don't do that."

"Haha, got you." He didn't laugh, he just said "haha." "What are you guys doing."

Rose said, "We're going to do battle with some pirates in a minute, if you'd like to come along. Kanaya, this is some kind of alternate-universe iteration of my brother Dave. He looks about thirteen, I guess. Are you thirteen?"
Kanaya said wearily, "Rose, your genetic cohort is stupid and confusing."

Dave said, "Damn Kanaya, rude. I mean how long have you even known her at this point."

"Two days."

"Oh, sorry then, sucks to be you. So real quick question, I need to know the situation in this specific timeline with folks who time travel. Give me a census."

The places where Kanaya's horns had been began to hurt; she put her head in her hands.

Rose said calmly, "You're not presently actively time-travelling - within any version of my own frame of reference on "the present," a concept which I personally believe to be functionally meaningless - and neither is the other individual capable of the feat whom I know personally. There exists a third, thought by most merely a story invented to frighten children, but whom I have reason to believe to be real, and actively at her malevolent work in the world, in this as in all eras."

Dave scratched his head. "Huh. - uh, Kanaya, you got anything to say about that?"

"What?" It was unsettling to be addressed by this tiny child as if he had known her all her life. His blood smelled wrong and sickly - not like the humans she knew, or even like a fish. Not nourishing. His eyes were hidden behind dark sunglasses, too large for him, and though he wore only jeans and a t-shirt, he did not look as if he felt the cold.

He said generously, "I mean we can send Rose away for a second, if you don't want to cop to your time-travelling pals -"

"I do not have any! Time travel is not a thing except in Fishmas stories - and the Handmaid is absolutely not real, Rose!"

Dave said sadly, "You are going to have one hell of an education. - Hey Rose how come you're fighting pirates. Is that like a thing that you do, get up in the evening and fight some pirates."

Rose said, "When I'm not writing trashy fiction instead, yes, sometimes."

"Nice. Is, uh, Bro with you." He looked down at the shore and pointed at something she couldn't see. "There was uh, someone that looked like him down there. You go around just. Fighting pirates with Bro."

Rose said gently, "Something like that. Do you want to see him?"

"No, fuck that guy, I was just asking. Kanaya, I need to talk to you in private for like two minutes, okay." He got up quickly, stumbling.

Kanaya said unhappily, "I do not even know you."

He dusted the kitty litter off himself with excessive and unconvincing coolness, then took his shades off and looked at her. His eyes were the color that Karkat's were becoming. He said, "Yeah, well, I know you, so it's cool. Come on, two fucking minutes, your pirates'll wait."

As they walked away, Rose said waringly to her almost-brother, "You're providing us with far more information than your older iterations typically think wise."

Dave said, "Fuck a bunch of other mes, I don't know shit."

They stopped a in a quiet spot in the woods. It was very dark, away from the cat circle, so she started
glowing a little to be polite. He said, "Cool. So you're a vampire, right."

"Yes," she said cautiously. "Why do you know that?"

"You're mostly a vampire. Listen, obviously you know Karkat given that shit I did just now, so is he okay now. Here, I mean. Here, now. (Time travel.)"

"Yes. He did not come with us to fight the pirates because he would not be very good at it."

"Yeah." He kicked at some leaf litter, then said, "That's good, then... Do you know Terezi."

"- yes. I have not seen her in some time, though. She - did something a little reckless, and we lost track of her. - she's a lot older than you?" That statement seemed unnecessary as soon as she said it, and then somehow sick and frightening. How did she know that Terezi had ever gotten older?

"Goddamnit, Terezi, why do you have to fucking be like that!" Kanaya bit her lip. "How about Aradia."

"Yes. The, um, same thing happened."

"Okay, no surprise there either, I guess. Well, uh, listen, I don't know if I should even be fucking telling you this or if I'm fucking stuff up by saying it, but I don't really give a shit either. Your Aradia's around somewhere near this time frame, and she's okay pretty much. If you hear from her, tell her Dave who messed up her hat got her message."

"Her hat?"

"I cut it in half with my awesome ninja sword and it was basically badass. Okay, two minutes up, I'm out. Nice meeting you again, Kanaya." He reached into his pocket and dug out an old wristwatch, with half its worn leather band snapped off. It had too many hands, and none of them were moving. It was much too big for him, and his hand looked very thin and fragile, holding it.

Kanaya said helplessly, "Are you not going to say goodbye to Rose?"

"I'm always saying goodbye to Rose." A sort of gold and violet haze formed around him, with images in it, people and things aging and breaking and dying - and she saw a young Terezi, bleeding into water, and Rose much older, falling, and herself - he was gone.

She returned, chilled. Rose looked at her distantly through her green monocle, reading something on it. She said, "Dad is calling. We need to go now." Kanaya couldn't quite speak yet. "Are you all right? ...did he say something that upset you? He can be unduly pessimistic sometimes, you know."

"You should have talked to him."

Rose said briefly, "I did. And I'll see him again."

"I do not know if you will ever see that little boy again. I do not know if anyone will, and neither do you! There was something wrong with him, he was sick, and I do not think that he really even had eyes. How long has he been dead, Rose?"

"He was alive."

"Your real brother. The one from this world, the one that counts! Was I - supposed to have known him, somehow? Am I here too late?"

Rose turned away towards the water. "I don't know. As I said, I don't know if time even means
anything. Except in the sense that my father is waiting, and I need to be with him in a few moments. Coming?"

Then she sort of thinned out like smoke; it took Kanaya a second to see the little violet dot zipping down towards the lake. She shouted helplessly, "I do not know what the plan of attack even is!"

"It's cool, let her do her freaky thing," said someone just behind Kanaya's left ear. "Hi. I'm your sunglasses."

"What."

"I'm the AI that's in your sunglasses. Like your main girl Nannabot, only, you know, in some sunglasses. Is this going to be enough explanation? Because we got shit to do."

"Rose and Roxy did not tell me that my sunglasses talked, and this is unfair and intrusive and is making me really mad!"

"Well, point it at me, 'cause haha I don't care. Also, they didn't know I was here. If it makes you feel better, I'm Rose's monocle, too, and also a laptop arguing with your noisy dude back at the house."

The mention of Karkat in Rose's crazy human house arguing with a crazy human machine reminded her of her priorities. She needed to kill some pirates so they could have some money for things like chainsaws and angry security blankets and possibly living arrangements far away from crazy human houses if necessary, and that was why she was here. It had nothing to do with either proving something to Rose or keeping her safe, or anything inappropriately red-to-pale like that.

She said, "Fine. Where do I need to go?"

"Look to your left. There's a little boat house that's falling apart, and robot crouching on top of it. See? He's waving. Isn't he adorable?"

The "boat house" appeared to be a Crockercorp shipping container turned on its side, with a hole punched in it, and a shower curtain over the hole. The robot was wearing Rose's father's sunglasses. She said, "I see."

"Yeah, the robot's also me. Come over where I am real fast, but stay behind the treeline. I've got a sword for you."

"I don't know about swords."

"They're sharp and you stab shit with them, and you're a magical vampire with super-speed or something, so you oughtta be all about - huh, you are fast, that's cool," said the robot in the same voice.

"It is just that I prefer chainsaws. Why are you also the robot?"

"I'm an awesome pair of shades that is also an awesome robot wearing another awesome pair of shades. How does this situation get any more awesome if I explain it?" He matter-of-factly popped his chest open and removed a sword from the cavity. "The explanation is that I am cloud-based. As you can see, things just got measurably less awesome."

She did not accept the sword immediately. "Why are pirates here, exactly? This place seems oddly abandoned. What is this structure even here for?"

"A boat house is for people who go out on boats who aren't pirates -"
"That's illegal and stupid."

"You're illegal," he pointed out.

"Shut up!"

"Just stating a fact. I'm pretty fucking illegal, too. So we're on Lake Condescension - you know, the one above Lake Michigan? - and what's going down here's that there's some kind of 1400s-era seatroll structure just about directly below where that ship's at. It makes a noise that makes most humans sick, but judging by how they're acting, the pirates are okay with it. In fact, they're diving for it."

"Why?"

"That's what you and me are going to find out."

"What about Rose and her father?"

"This ship's cover's that they're also hitting a National Guard, Sponsored By Coca-Cola (TM) armory a few miles south. Rose's jobs to cover the shoreline, make sure they don't get that shit back to the ship. As far as the Guard's concerned, that's why we're here. As far as I'm concerned, we're here to find out what they want with the seatrolls' shit. I'm going under to look around."

"And myself? And her father? Is he with her?" Leaving Rose alone right now did not seem like a good idea, at all.

"The whereabouts of Dirk Strider don't really matter. Reason: They just don't. (Fuck that guy.) Your near-future whereabouts are as follows: On board that pirate ship, being sneaky as shit."

"When was this decided?"

"Just now. By me."

Kanaya eyed the robot thoughtfully. This did not present any useful information, as its face was just pointy glasses on a circle. It resembled the Nannabot somewhat in size and structure, but she didn't think they were quite the same sort of thing. "I think that if Rose wanted me dead, she would do it herself."

"It seems that you don't trust me. This is illogical, given that I am hella a robot and so cannot lie to you. There's a law."

"You just said that you are illegal! And Nannabot can lie."

"Sure, but I'm based on the shithead with the biggest stick up his ass in history, and Nanna's alter ego keeps the blood of her enemies in the fridge."

"- really? Where is this fridge?"

"I dunno, on the moon or some shit, probably. Didn't she already try to kill you guys? - I just asked her and she said yes, she did already try to kill you guys, when she was in Security Systemy Herbert mode. She says sorry, but she also says a bucktoothed smiley emoticon."

"I am ignoring a lot of what you are saying because it is dumb, but please explain who are you based on - oh no wait, you are definitely Rose's father, wow. Hi. Uh."

Miss Murdernanners had never dealt with the situation of finding that you had unwittingly accused
the robotic double of your kismesis's genetic progenitor of black designs.

"Hi," said the robot. "Look, here's the thing: regardless of how human my and Rosie's thought patterns may or may not be? You're the one here who looks human - except the eyes, and you've got shades for that. And you're new to the hassling-pirates biz, so they don't know you. We don't have many opportunities to get someone on one of their ships. Any intelligence on how pirates think, or if they think at all, is valuable to us. We honestly don't know that much about what makes them tick."

That sounded almost logical and sane. "And you are, um. Very sure that you are not trying to kill me due to being an overprotective parent?"

"I'm a robot, not a parent."

Kanaya came to the conclusion that this was a challenge, of a kind with the sort in which a human's suitor was required to fetch a magic cloak or jeweled fruit. She took the sword reluctantly. It felt cheap.

She said, "At least tell me this: Will Rose have backup if she needs it?"

"Other me's over there helping her right now. I'm not leaving Rose by herself."

Kanaya sighed. "How am I to reach the ship? Do I have to... ride on a boat?" She shuddered at the unnatural idea.

The robot shrugged and hopped down off of the structure. She heard it say, "I dunno, maybe. You're a smart kid, I'm sure you can figure something out."

"- I do not know how to swim, and as I am sure Nannabot has told you, as a vampire I am unusually vulnerable to hypotherm - ugh." The robot had disappeared.

She considered the parental challenge. It was too bad she couldn't fly, like in her dreams. She glanced idly upwards, and saw again the dog-king she had observed earlier, gliding lazily and looking down at her. Hm. She waved, without much hope. "Here, boy!" The dog looked offended, as far as dogs can look offended. Kanaya guessed, "Here, girl?"

The dog descended hopefully, and Kanaya offered her a biscuit, which she gobbled down eagerly. Kanaya was very glad that she had thought to steal some dog biscuits from Rose's mother's kitchen; it was bad to get out of the habit of carrying dog-bribes around. She asked hopefully, "I do not suppose that you could help me -"

The dog sniffed the air, then sniffed Kanaya's hair, then stuck her nose in her face to sniff her cheek. "- gej to ja shif?" It looked her over, made a satisfied little yip, and - teleported a mailbag into its hands from nowhere. "What." The dog began shuffling awkwardly through it with her paws - she wasn't one of the ones with hands. Kanaya said, "No, I am not a dog, and as such I really do not think that I have dog mail -"

She knocked a couple of letters to the ground awkwardly, and growled. "Oh, let me help you with that -" said Kanaya reflexively. She picked them up: "Oh. Uh. Huh."

Neatly type-written on the front of one envelope were the words:

```
Kanaya Maryam
c/o Roxy Lalonde
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That looked like a very personally-interesting piece of correspondence.

Kanaya said, "I would really like to take a look at this before you deliver it."

The growled at her and snapped at the letter with her teeth.

Kanaya said, "No, actually, I think I phrased that badly. You may have it back after I have done so, but I am going to read this letter."

"Oh Jegus fuck not this shit again," said the shades. It was strange how even sound seemed to slow down, now, when she was very angry. Since she had died, anger had become its very own place, where everything was slow, quiet, and even more stupid than usual. The way the paper tried to move independently of her hands was particularly annoying.

"Hey Windfang, you want to know something? You want to know whose stupid omissions I am getting really sick of? That would be - yours! Your stupid omissions, specifically as regards to descriptions of the potential hazards of the errands you are asking me to run while you sit on your ugly old boat and stew in your own charisma! I'm feeling preeeeeeeetty sick of those particular omissions right about now!

Or to put it another way: looks like you're going to have to find another power source for the ship! Because Sollux bit it.

Let me tell you, Sitch, unlike SOME things, losing your kismesis does NOT improve with each iteration. This might even be WORSE than what happened with Terezi.

Kanaya kept moving after I shot her with that thing you sent - something I did not like doing at all, I might add! - and she drank him dry, then did some kind of vampire-y superspeed thing and disappeared herself, Karkat, and the body. Half the losers you sent with me vanished, too. (UGH, I hope she didn't eat them, I've never been able to get mine to bathe!) I don't think even she knew she could do that. Karkat sure didn't!

Now, because I am just that professional, I'm not even going to bring up how innnnnnnnteresting I find it that you appear to have deliberately put me into a situation in which my matesprit was likely to kill my kismesis. Nope, I'm not going to say a word about what that tells me about you, and about your UN8ELIEVA8LY patronizing and creepy belief that you know what's best for MY QUADRANTS. Not a word! My lips are sealed on that particular subject! I won't even bring it up.

But don't you even try to tell me you didn't know Kanaya would be able to keep moving like that when she got hurt. I've seen your kismesis, Captain! The possibility
that you've never seen this before is loooooooow. Who did she kill to survive that? Ooooooooh, maybe it was you! ::::)

Let me tell you, I'm not happy about what I'm seeing when I look ahead at the next couple months. It's going to be one hell of a Reckoning, and not just for the bad guys. I don't know what the old lady was thinking, putting you in charge right now! I mean, no offense, but you are off your rocker and taking this shit WAY too personally - just projecting your personal history all over it, because you expect everything that happened when you were my age to happen again.

But it's not going to go down that way this time! Because I'm here. You just need to keep your hands off. If there's one thing you've taught me, it's that luck doesn't last forever - so I'm spending mine now, while it counts. I don't need your help to kill the Empress.

Send Tavros when you're done with him, and let me know when you've found Kanaya again - I'm still going to need her eventually. Anyway, gotta go kill Lalonde now!!!!!!!!

- Lieutenant Vriska Serket"

Rage-enhanced vampire super-speed meant it had taken Kanaya only five seconds to read this letter, and thus ascent to a level of rage unrivalled by the heat of any star yet found. The shades said, "You're glowing."

"I do not care if I am glowing and you are going to take me to that ship right now!"

"How am I going to do that. I'm glasses."

"Not you! You, the dog lady!" Kanaya shoved the letter into her pocket angrily, blocking the dog awkwardly with the sword she didn't actually know how to use. "I will destroy this letter and the captain of that ship, which is plainly where it belongs due to the picture of the eight chess pieces on there (and ugh I should have known that had something to do with her), will never ever get it because I will have torn it up and dropped the pieces in the water!"

"That makes a lot of sense. I'm interested in your ideas. Tell me more."

"I'm not talking to you!"

The dog looked as if she was coming to the conclusion that Kanaya was suffering from some form delusional disorder. She growled in frustration, grabbed Kanaya under the arms, and hauled her up into the air impatiently.

The shades said, "Eh. Not 100%, but it works."

"- 100% of what?!!"

"The scenario I calculated to be optimal involved you using your vampiric speed bonus to run across the water and then up the side of the hull, an activity which one might term an "insane stunt." But this deserves a C, I guess."

"I am not in the mood for this, this is not the time, stop grading me! Stop giving me mediocre grades! I am getting on the pirate ship to spy on the pirates like you wanted and it is none of your business if I incidentally also act in aid of my goal of draining every drop of vile traitorous blood in Vriska Serket's -"
"You pissed off the magic superpowers dog lady who for some reason delivers mail. That is an \textit{automatic} twenty-five points off."

"I am not obliged to take your opinion of my conduct seriously, given that you are presently trying to trick me into trying to walk on water so you can watch me sink!"

"Haha, yeah, maybe."

Chapter End Notes

That. Sure was a hiatus. Please enjoy this extra-long chapter, replete with whiny Striders.

As before, I cannot promise that the next chapter will be out next week, as I yet remain a shambling reanimated corpse, able to read and type only intermittently, for brief spans of time, and about complete bullshit.

So you should totally \textit{send some rude asks to the characters}, to divert me from wasting that making fun of people on Reddit.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

When her head cleared enough that she could talk in words not meant to be spoken to/by evil space squid, Rose asked her father, "Precisely why did they choose to magically teleport to this particular spot? Not that it's not a very attractive stretch of desolate shoreline."

"There's a Crockercorp armory like twenty miles south. They probably originally planned to ninja in and out with the guns, but did that thing where they all impulsively decided it was time for a nautically-themed musical number. It got pretty loud."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

ag: You're not being very clear here (are you drunk?), but I think what you're trying to figure out is this:
ag: Are we perceiving the world accurately, and are we capable of affecting it - either for good or ill?
ag: Both good questions!
ag: And neither is one that I can answer, I'm afraid.
ag: Honestly, I don't understand why you're the one asking me! Surely you're better-qualified for this.

cg: I think I was, or I was supposed to be, but that's the problem. I can't tell. I can't even tell if you're really here this time. I feel like I haven't seen you in a long time, and I should be angry with you. So why am I even fucking talking to you like this?
ag: *shrug*

cg: It's just, I think I died. I remember it happening, and it made sense to me that it should happen the way it did. And past that point, nothing has been real. Nothing I see makes sense.
ag: Makes sense to me. You're the Seer here, though! What makes you think I know any more than you do?

cg: You've been doing it longer than me.
ag: Being dead? ::::)

cg: Yes. Why are we still here if there's nothing we can change, if we just have to watch.
ag: Maybe! Perhaps our only remaining purpose is to bear witness. It's a possibility.

cg: But it makes sense.
ag: Then maybe you were right the first time.
ag: Maybe this is all just a dream.
cg: Whose dream?
ag: Mine.
ag: ::::)

The bird said fretfully, worried by something about Noor's face: "You get Caught in the Story. If the Story's about Death And Fate, Everything will seem fated To Die. If it's about Joy, you'll hear words about Grief like they've gone Flat, like all the Grief's gone out of the World. You Won't Understand."

Nataku took up the explanation: "Every story means at least one thing. Whatever story I
choose to tell you - and I haven't chosen yet -" That was mean to sound menacing, but it came out petulant. "- It will taint your understanding of what you hear until you find its end. And when you have come to the end, you will find that you understand nothing at all. That is why any spell which allows entry into the another world, is also a curse."

"Knowing the power the curse gives me over you - will you still go through with this astonishingly idiotic and pointless mission to rescue a stupid woman who neither needs nor deserves -"

"Why do you have to be such a jerk about this. Just, why. Why why why, many whys."

"I'm a jerk about everything! Look, do you want me to curse you or not?"

- from *The Dream-Quest of a Known Quantity*, by Tess Theramin

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"Do we have an ID on this ship?"

"It's a new one, not in the system. There's no electricity on the thing, though, it's all oil lamps."

Her Hubtopband popped up an unkindly-notated schematic of the boat, which she dismissed. "Sometimes I think that some iteration of Dave must be supplying the pirates as a sort of side job," said Rose. "How are things with Kanaya and yourself? My load's fairly light at the moment."

There were trade-offs to the things she could do - she could either see clearly, or she could destroy recklessly. It was not possible to do both in conjunction. She had in her mind, as was often true of people she cared about, several images of Kanaya dying. All were plausible in other worlds, but none in this one - they were distracting, perhaps faintly nauseating, but unimportant. They weren't real.

"Dunno where she's at, but things are fine over here. Just deal with the last of your guys."

Her father's physical form was visible a ways along the shore to the east, moving through the pirates with a preternatural speed that made him somewhat resemble a video game character having recently acquired a power-up. Rose had no idea where Kanaya might be, which was making her anxious in a pretty uncaliginous fashion.

Ugh, am I letting her down by doing this? Well, fuck it, she wasn't a troll; she would do - whatever they were doing, in the way that felt most natural to her.

She was presently standing atop a small pile of six unconscious pirates which she had prepared for purposes of brandishing her magic wands in the air in a valiant fashion. This was the sort of thing that felt natural to Rose. Fortunately, pirates were highly vulnerable to valiant poses on top of things. There was an awkward half-circle of twelve or so about twenty feet from her, unwilling to approach
but snarling the requisite piratical sort of remarks:

"Lassie, this ain't nae place for a girl like you!"

"The docks be nae place for hussies not willin' ta ply their trade!"

"Arrrrrrrr, I think we got a witch on our hooks, let's see if she floats!

The things that pirates said typically carried only slightly more information than did Pokemon cries; they followed a very tight pattern, and could not deviate much from it. Nonetheless, Rose was in the habit of giving them constructive criticism: "This is a sloppily-implemented line of trash talking. One cannot be a lassie, a hussie, and a witch simultaneously. It might potentially be done in sequence, but not all at once."

One of them slapped her forehead, "Arrrrrrrr, me hearties, she's right! And the cap'n, she warned us specific-like about maintainin' that "thematic consistency" in our repartee! We got ta pick one and stick ta it, or she'll be right wroth with us!"

One of the others said tentatively, "I think cap'n wouldn't much like the "hussie" one, ta be honest."

"Arrrrrrrr, "hussie" be a damned silly-soundin' word, I agree."

Rose interjected, "If it will make things easier for you, I actually am sort of a witch. I am magic, and I have magic wands."

They considered that. The one who'd made the original witch remark scratched his beard and said thoughtfully, "Now, I got nae objection to continuin' on in that particular vein, but frankly there be only sae many witch things ta be said."

"'struth, I ain't rightly sure how much more mileage we can get from it. Arrrrrrrr."

Rose said, "Oh, dear. Then we'd better cut this short."

She zapped them all. Feeling pretty content with her pirate pile, she started towards her father.

"Excuse me. Arr," said someone from very close behind her. Rose spun away just before the sword dug into her throat, firing off a blind zap that failed to connect.

This was going to be a bit more challenging. The woman was very fast, and the size and ostentation of her blue Jean Laffite hat and greatcoat gave a certain air of captaincy, though the dark tinted goggles made the outfit a bit steampunkish for Rose's taste. She was wearing what appeared to be a soaked wetsuit underneath, which made only slightly more sense.

The captain said, "To be technical, I think you're probably more of a seer than a witch. Seems a bit impractical to put you out on the front lines. Arr." It took Rose a moment to catch her breath to respond; there was now a long and surprisingly deep cut in her right arm.

"Well, I like to take a short violence break once and a while. May I ask a personal question? I don't know much about piratical etiquette." Rose set fire to the captain's left boot.

"There really isn't much to it. Please go on. Arr."

"I'm not a connoisseur of the form, but these "arrrrrrrr"s sound a bit perfunctory. Are you really a pirate?"

"I'm wearing a silly hat."
"Well, yes, and the hat is very convincing, but I was thinking that it might perhaps be concealing a set of horns. Can trolls be pirates? I had always thought you to be immune to whatever physical transformation is involved."

The captain smiled and threw a heretofore unseen knife at Rose, which caught in her jacket, grazing the inside of her elbow painfully. "We often enter the trade by choice. It's a life characterized by a good deal more freedom than we might otherwise have. I unfortunately found it necessary remove my horns while still relatively young, though, so the hat isn't hiding anything of note."

"I see. My regrets, then." Rose politely returned her knife to the captain, along with a certain amount of blue blood extracted from the left side of her face. "Out of curiosity, did you suffer any negative physical effects as a result of the amputation?"

"That's something that depends upon the person, but for myself there was in fact a net gain in terms of my psionic abilities. For example."

Rose dropped her wands, clasped her hands in front of her, and stood still. This was not something which she had any intention of doing. There seemed to be a set of cool hands inside her, stretching and twisting and tearing. The pain was not quite physical in nature.

The captain laid her sword across Rose's throat. She was smiling in an irritatingly kind way.

"This evolution in skill may, however, also be achieved through other forms of severe physical trauma. And this is not true only of trolls! But I suspect that you already know something about that?"

"No," Rose gasped. It was hard to speak when someone was restricting your lungs in such a way as to cause you to pass out at the moment of greatest dramatic effect.

"Really?" She traced the scarring on Rose's cheek lightly. "Seer, has there never been a day when the world changed for you?"

"What - do you mean?"

"You have looked, but you have never seen the person who hurt you, have you? You have never seen anything to explain why you have felt like a stranger to yourself since that day, like the things you know and the people you love belong properly to some other person, worthier and more whole, and now forever lost."

"And you have never seen the slow and unfathomable thing that now sings a song which resonates with the fragile tissue in the dark chambers of your heart, and makes your shattered body hum with fear and need."

"I can help you see. It's what I do."

Rose sank into darkness.

She woke up a few seconds later, on her hands and knees. The captain knelt cupping Rose's chin in her soft fingers, looking a little embarrassed. Her breath was cool on Rose's overheated face. "Sorry, I actually meant to draw that out a little longer. Want to be a pirate?"

"I already - have a girlfriend," Rose panted. She had achieved the light sense of giddiness brought on by asphyxiation, as well as one of the other common effects. The woman had yet to let go of her face. She knew exactly what she was doing. "What exactly do you want with me? Aside from this suggestively revenge-themed erotic asphyxiation business, I mean."
"That's merely a side benefit of the process. If you permit me to heal you, you will be a seer of almost unprecedented power. I like that sort of thing - unprecedented power. If you don't, however, you may fall into the hands of your enemies very soon. The Reckoning is at hand."

"What is -"

A totally unexpected interloper chose that particular moment to throw a sweet ninja sword at the captain's face. Rose crumpled to the ground. Dad was already flying at the captain. There was a crackling noise as she did something Rose couldn't see, and then she stepped out of the way to let him hit the dirt in a limp pile of metal.

"It's pretty cheap of you to bring a robot," she said to Rose.

"Don't - you dare call him that," Rose wheezed at her.

The Brobot's speakers were apparently burnt out, so Dad said from her headband, "For real, though, Rose, I pretty much am a robot."

Something pale, winged, and roughly bipedal dropped out of the sky and hooked two white paws under her arms, its pointed face resting on her shoulder. There were a lot more of them up above, Rose belatedly realized. They were carrying things over to the ship. Things which resembled assault weapons.

"Oh, give me a break," said her headband. "You people are mind-controlling like a hundred goddamn dog kings. That is cheap."

"You've got me there. It's been a pleasure, Ms. Lalonde. I look forward to seeing you again."

"That is going to happen shortly after I cut my own throat over my latest manuscript," said Rose fuzzily.

That had gotten oddly specific, but it definitely wasn't a Seer thing, because what rational reason could she possibly have to do that? It just made no sense.

She was pretty sure she passed out for a second then.

On the deck of the ship, the pirates regarded Kanaya and the mail-dog in the blank, surly, and unsurprised manner in which pirates looked at most things they didn't understand. Kanaya gave the letter back to the dog, who in turn grabbed a pirate by the collar and showed it to her. The pirate squinted at it, then did the same to Kanaya. "Who be ye, garbed all in black, such as ye are?"

"You're totally a pirate," said the sunglasses.

"I am t - a pirate of course," said Kanaya. "Why else would I be on this pirate ship?"

"...arrrrrr, true enough, that."

"The beastie 'as another deliv'ry for the Cap'n, does she?"

"The Cap'n does love 'er written words, she does."

"Aye, an' lots of words as a general thing in general - the Cap'n's unnatural fond of 'em, for a
"Aye, 'tis strange -"

"Uh no, no way, doll, shit ain't unnatural, it's just she's the captain, right?" said someone up above Kanaya quickly. She tried very hard not to flinch or look up. "I mean, arr, arr instead of right! Captains gotta talk a mean game, y'know, arr?"

The pirates considered this with the gloomy, grinding discomfort of organisms which did not like considering things, like sea lions or security personnel.


A troll guy with wings and an impressive rack dropped awkwardly onto the deck in front of the dog, looking anxious.

"Huh," said the sunglasses. "I was actually not expecting that."

Kanaya's incredulity muscle was getting worn out. Guys with wings did not bother her. What did was that he looked right at her, did a double take, and went, "Damn, girl, when'd you get - aw, no, wait, guess you're a human. A pirate, I mean!" He looked disappointed. "Damn... that's something else, though, you look so much... damn!"

"Um," said Kanaya. "...Arr?"

"Thanks for talking my main girl the maildog over here, though - she don't always come when I call her to, these days. Don't know what's up with that, maybe I'm losing my touch, haha..."

He tried to scratch behind the dog's ear, and she growled at him deep in her throat, cold green dogfire flaring around her. He looked so ludicrously hurt that Kanaya wanted to say something to reassure him.

"Aw, doll... Well, she's in the drink right now - "in the drink" being pirate talk for in the water, of course, 'cause we're all pirates here for real, haha... but she'll be back real soon, so why don't you wait in her cabin?"

He seemed to be expecting something from Kanaya. She said, "Okay - aye?... also, arr."

Kanaya's clever ruse satisfied him. He said, "Don't go looking through her stuff, okay? She's got like - secret, captain things in there, I don't know."

"Aye."

The sunglasses said, "That is fucking exciting news. I am excited about that news. Are you excited about that news?" Kanaya was excited about that news.

The guy led them to a small wooden door, oddly small. The glasses said, "My observations suggest that these vessels were built in a universe and/or era wherein people (humans, probably) were shorter on average due to poor nutrition. Careful not to bump your head on a lamp or anything, haha." She bumped her head on a lamp. The guy fortunately didn't notice - he showed her into a small room, containing only a desk and chair bolted to the floor, then shut the door on them.

Kanaya waited a second, then checked the brass door handle - it turned and opened. The metal was tarnished, and the wood of which the boat was made was old, splintered in places and worn smooth in others. She wondered how it even stayed afloat.
The dog curled up on the floor to wait, bored and impatient. Kanaya was getting the distinct impression that she did not like this part of her apparent dog duties very much. She muttered under her breath to the sunglasses, "Well?"

"Infiltrate some shit, come on. Dig around in her desk."

"Might the dog king not find this objectionable? She seems familiar with this ship and its crew."

"I don't know, I don't know her. Just like - start rummaging through the desk in a casual and natural-looking manner, as if you have a totally good reason to be doing it. Looking confident is like 95% of getting shit done if you're not an awesome cloud-based AI that doesn't actually look like anything. If she for some reason decides that she is not okay with the situation, you start running super-fast and I get you backup."

"Will you actually get me backup?"

"Oh, come on. Look, you're doing great, this is the best spy mission I've ever rode along on."

"Because these people are all idiots!"

"They're not people mostly, they're pirates, they don't have much space in their heads. The cute guy's an idiot, though, yeah."

Kanaya wondered uneasily if she should be reassured that he referred to him only as a "guy," without using "troll" as an unnecessarily exoticizing modifier, worried that another member of Rose's family was expressing attraction to a troll - could fetishes be inherited - or no wait, she was in fact upset with herself for thinking about this at all. She took a step behind the desk.

The dog started to stand, a sword materializing in her hand, gleaming green. Kanaya said, "I have a totally good pirate reason to be doing the thing I am doing, and, arr?" The dog, which knew damn well that she was not a pirate, looked very disappointed in her. "...I am going to sit down to read my own mail, which is very important to me."

The dog looked happier with this. The sunglasses said, "That was such a bullshit save." She gritted her teeth and took out the letter the dog had given to her.

She looked at the letter, and hesitated. "I'll close my eyes woops don't got any," offered the glasses generously.

"Shut up!" Damn it. She wanted to know what this was.

SERIOUS WARNING!!: if this letter actually arrives at roxy's house, then it is in the wrong timeline or something! so roxy, please cast it into the void without reading it!!!!

okay! hi, kanaya! the documents you need are in the really tiny, skinny drawer that's second-from-the-top on the right side of the desk. get it out and read it now, before it falls in the water and gets all wet! you'll need to wait until you've looked through it to break hal in half, so he can record and upload it.

(just don't take the stuff he tells you too seriously! we're working on porting him over to psiithon, but a bunch of his dependencies are still in sea#.)

see you soon! :B

- the queen of the dog kings, woof woof woof!
"Uh," said the sunglasses. "Welp."

Kanaya ignored the potentially-duplicitous eyewear. She waved to the dog again and showed her the letter. Kanaya said, "As you can see from this letter that I accept to be completely real, I have been instructed by the Queen to look inside this desk, so naturally I have to do that right away."

The dog flicked her ears back, clearly still considering the situation ethically-questionable, and jumped over the desk behind Kanaya. "- oh, you want to see, too, then..." Ugh, she didn't care, she was not even the one who wanted these things in the first place!

The thin drawer was locked, but Kanaya bashed it open and avoided the obligatory poison-coated needle without any difficulty. It contained a tightly-rolled sheaf of documents on ordinary printer paper. The top page was a poorly-photocopied handwritten document in an alphabet that she didn't recognize, with some words crossed out. She asked the sunglasses warily, "Can you... clean this up? As computers do in human police procedurals?"

"Probably, yeah. Give me a minute," they said, loud enough for the dog to hear this time.

The rest of the pages were electrical and engineering diagrams. Kanaya paged through them one by one, increasingly confused. "This looks like... a spaceship? But there is no place suitable to contain a cat..."

"Close. The vessel you're looking at is intended for extremely high-pressure environments, not vacuum."

"Is it..." Kanaya was boggled by the idea. "Could it possibly be... a submersible device?" The dog whuffled disgustedly at the stupidity of this idea. Being on the water, as they were now, was dangerous enough - spending extended periods of time below it was madness.

"You got it," said the shades disinterestedly. "Cats don't like water, so that's not how it's powered. What you're looking at is an early prototype for a boat that goes under the fucking water. Relatively old Crockercorp tech - this model's been out of production for a while."

"These are stolen plans, then... Why would she make this?"

"Fucked-up, evil reasons, that probably make sense if you're a fucked-up, evil fish lady. What I'm wondering is what our bullshit pirate captain wants with them, and why Jade wanted us to see them - I've got complete schematics on record already. Maybe it was just the first page she wanted. Just finished with it, incidentally. Want to see? Close your left eye."

She did. A much cleaner page of text appeared on the lens of the shades, some words still blacked-out. "I couldn't get all of it, need to ask someone who can actually read ancient evil sea language to take a look. Probably a threat to the waterbitch, though? Shit was written in seatroll blood, and don't ask me why I know exactly what that looks like."

"Why do you know exactly what that looks like?"

"Jane keeps some in the fridge for Fishmas letters to her mom." Kanaya was torn between appreciation at the gesture and distaste at the waste of blood. "The water-type robo-me, by the way, is done doing my thing down under the ship," he went on, switching to his wearer-only volume. "Got some images of the singing thing to show to someone who might have three-quarters of a clue what it fucking is. So I think we've got enough infiltration going on for one day, if you're ready -"

"No," said Kanaya.
"I really think we're done here."

"I really think that I need to find Vriska Serket and drain her of all of her blood."

"Look, do you want to be still on the boat when teleports away to wherever these things go when they teleport? Normal people don't come back from that still normal."

"I am not a normal person," Kanaya pointed out. "And anyway I do not think that trolls can be pirates. Vriska and the flying guy apparently have not undergone the transformation."

"Point taken, but -"

"I thought you wanted more thorough information on piratical behavior. In fact, I am sure that that was the stated purpose of this exercise, in which you plainly did not expect me to succeed to this degree."

"Fair enough. Okay, then, my new line of argument is that the captain is on her way back, and she's a blue troll lady with mind-powers who is way older than you, and has just taken out Rose and the other me -"

"Shut up! You are making things up to upset me and doing a worryingly good job!"

"Guess you won't know unless you get off the pirate ship and give me a hand out here."

Kanaya gritted her teeth. "The letter from the dog told me that you make things up, and I think I am going to take the letter's word for it, given that it was definitely correct in stating that I am going to break you into at least two pieces -"

"Very rude. Oh, hey, your little guy wants to talk to you."

"Augh! Stop it -"

"Kanaya!"

Kanaya put her head in her hands. "...what is it, Karkat?"

"Stop infiltrating a pirate ship! Stop doing that and come back, right now! You can't leave me by myself with a bunch of humans and monsters, that's really irresponsible of you, we both know I'll probably mouth off and get myself stabbed three times!"

The glasses said, "See? Dude knows what's up. He will totally get stabbed."

The dog patted her on the shoulder awkwardly. Kanaya said tightly, "I am very busy so I will talk to you later, okay."

"Why are you busy, what are you doing!?"

"Killing Vriska, I guess. Now all of you leave me alone. I know what I am doing." As prophesied, she broke the glasses in half.

She now had nothing to cover her eyes with. Okay, she probably did not know what she was doing.
"Psiithon" and "Sea#" are programming puns. There are coding languages called Python and C#. C# is a Microsoft thing, and in this fic, Windows is Winroes.

The rest of this story is basically just going to be an endless fucking litany of water puns on the names of Microsoft products. Fall to your knees and thank whatever mad inimical deity you worship that Xbox 360 doesn't support Steam. Because Steam's already a goddamn water pun. That's what I was getting at! There would be double water puns, and that is plainly unacceptable. Watermy doing with my life.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Miss Maildog politely waited until Rose had opened her eyes before growling at her. "Hi," said Rose. "What?"

"Is she awake?" asked Jade. "Hi, Rose! So, uh, Kanaya is in the weird dark dream-ish bubbling-like place where pirate ships go when they teleport, I think? Someday we should come up with a name for that. But you really need to stop calling Hal "Dad," because he’s terrible."

“The Atlantis of my time was not like this, not all white and clean. It had greater power and so was darker,” said Cyrus, mistrustfully eyeing a statue of an angel playing a flute for a baby. Noor figured the baby was probably dead or something. “I do not think this is even the same place.”

“Well - kind of not,” Noor said, "I mean, back before the island sank and was raised again, you weren't entirely on earth when you came here. The whole island was like, a pocket dimension, I guess? One where the Queen made up all the rules."

Cyrus narrowed his eyes. "'Pocket.' Implying that this place was merely a folded-away piece of the human world." He sounded unsure whether he approved of that idea. "And my kingdom, too?"

"Yup. But don't worry - the scientists think this universe is also kind of a pocket, of some kind of huge crazy thing we'll never really understand."

"That's death," said Cyrus impatiently. "It's understood."

- *from The Strange High Gate In the Sea, by Tess Theramin*

It's no secret why we're here

You can't keep it from it

In another moonless minute it's open wide

You hide secrets from them

You hide secrets but they're spent

All that kept the lights on when the power went

What's love? What's love? What's love?

But what turns up in the dark

- *early pornographers*
The Captain had let the flying guy read her letter after she'd finished with it. He had spent the last ten minutes getting progressively more upset about it. She seemed to enjoy observing the process.

"No, for real, though," the guy said. "Your little descendant, she's gonna go at the Empress all by herself and then - what's she gonna do then?"

The Captain said calmly, "Become the Empress herself? I mean, it's only implied in the text, but then I don't think she would feel the need to state that specifically. It would seem like a logical progression to her."

"Your girl's crazy, doll."

"Potentially!" said the Captain. "Am I done with Tavros? She did want me to send her Tavros, when I was done with him!"

Kanaya imagined a smiling emoticon with eight eyes after that remark. From her current position, she could not actually see what this woman who sounded like Vriska looked like. She was hiding in a sack in the next room, with some stupid pirate hats artfully arranged atop her by the helpful dog, who had delivered her letter and then left, making little growly noises.

The guy said uncertainly, "- Uh, well I mean, in that case, I would say, you know. You're not done with him? - I mean, no, what's this even about, why's she think she gotta kill that writer girl, anyway? Because just, damn, she thinks she's doing a lot of killing before Fishmas!"

"It's literally the reason for the season, Rufioh. And Rose Lalonde is just sort of karmically-obligated to become an obstacle to my and Vriska’s plans, due to certain incidents taking place in circumstantially-congruent timelines. And also maybe some things we did in this one."

“What did you even do!?"

“Oh, I don’t want to dredge up ancient history.~”

“What did you do like forty-five minutes ago, what was that.”

“I said no ancient history! - I learned that we would have to deal with her in some way a while back, when I was still in possession of the cue ball. It's likely that Vriska asked it the same questions I did, after she made off with it. We just didn't draw the same conclusions from the answers we got."

"So little-you's gonna try and kill her, and you're gonna...?"

"Wait and see!"

"...is that your strategy, or is that you, uh, telling me a thing you want for me to do, or...?"

"Both! I've done most of what I need to do already."

"Doll, why can't you monologue about your plans like a regular-type villain?" he asked defeatedly. "You used to monologue so people would go like, damn! that is a monologue... for serious, lately I don't even know what we're even doing out here. Messing with the old lady's like, yeah, I'm all about that, but the rest of this..."

"You would prefer that we simply walk into Crockercorp?"

"Take on grannyfish head-on ourselves?" he asked suspiciously.
"I prefer "Nannafish," but yes. That's what I was asking you."

Anxious wing-flappy noises. "Well, yeah! But with a real army, that wants to be doing it, you know?"

"The pirates are very agreeable. Take as many of them as you like!" Kanaya pictured another spider emoticon.

"Uh, yeah. I am mostly sure you're mind-controlling them."

"Baseless slander!"

"Then your old lady's mind-controlling them from wherever that big boat of hers is at, I don't know!"

"Rufioh, I am hearing mutinous sentiments, and as your captain, I cannot say that I -"

"Doll, damn, I know you're mind-controlling me too! You still haven't made me forget about the part of last night where I noticed that."

The captain paused. "Oh. Uh, sorry. Fuck, I meant to do that before breakfast - why did you cook me breakfast, Rufioh."

"I mean, you weren't gonna cook."

"I just - it's just weird that you did that, when I still hadn't altered your memories? Do you want me to alter your memories now, or...?"

"Uh, yeah, might as well, I'm a have trouble sleeping in the morning if you don't."

"...how is it that you actually just made me feel bad about how goddamn nefarious I'm being here?! I haven't felt bad about being nefarious all night, but you just did it!"

"It is 'cause I have got a shitload of practice in that, that I do not completely remember, for reasons that are your fault."

"Ugh. You can be so mean sometimes! Just hold still and let me do this, okay?" There was a small crash. From a point much closer to the floor, the guy laughed, and she complained, "Ow! You idiot, you're just going to hurt your wings! I will punch you in the - Rufioh! Not now!"

Kanaya would have liked to have put her head in her hands and wept for the overall quality of the adversaries with which she was faced.

After a little while, the guy said woozily, "Uh. Damn. What were we doing?"

The Captain said, "We're about to flip under. Can you make sure all the pirates are properly buckled in belowdecks?"

Kanaya thought about that sentence. She was still thinking about it when the ship turned upside-down and she crashed through the ceiling and into the water.

It tasted like salt. That couldn't be right.

- Miss Maildog politely waited until Rose had opened her eyes before growling at her. "Hi," said Rose. "What?"
"Is she awake?" asked Jade. "Hi, Rose! So, uh, Kanaya is in the weird dark dream-ish bubbling-like place where pirate ships go when they teleport, I think? Someday we should come up with a name for that. But you really need to stop calling Hal "Dad," because he’s terrible."

"- she's where!? What happened? Why was she on the ship? Oh, fuck -"

Rose sat up in a hurry, and had to let Jade hold her up for a second. She had to stop passing out at scene changes. Despite her relative sobriety during her last brief waking period, she felt hung over.

Jade watched her patiently behind the white fuzz obscuring most of her face today; whatever moon governed her relative doggishness was apparently about half-full. She was wearing a muddy green dress made out of the heavy tarplike material she preferred when being particularly feral, and her fur was soaking wet.

They were on a Squiddles-themed beach blanket on the shoreline; no pirates were visible, but they were surrounded by a protective perimeter of sheepish-looking dog kings, all trying to look as if they were not looking at Jade. Two deactivated Dad-bots were lying neatly in the sand, as was Rose's headband, from which Jade had removed the batteries.

She told Jade, "Never mind. I have figured out the problem, with my seer powers."

"Wow! Way to go, Rose's seer powers! It is really great how they figure out problems, after the problems have happened."

"She was on the ship because Dad was messing with her, wasn't she?"

Jade growled. "Because Hal was messing with her, yes. Yes, Rose."

"…You are not the arbiter of his Dad-dom."

"Fine!" she said petulantly. "Keep calling him that, just keep doing that forever, but keep in mind that your Dad is really irresponsible, psychologically sort of younger than you, and plays mean tricks on people saying it’s to "toughen them up," even though they're actually probably more because he was originally written in a language in which invoking a destructor actually physically breaks things! And keep in mind that most of the time he can’t actually tell which behaviors or bad and which are good! Keep that in mind! Okay?!"

"Okay," Rose agreed soothingly, in the spirit of getting the conversation away from her psychiatric problems, and because she didn’t know what else "invoking a destructor" could mean.

"Ugh, no you won't, you're thinking about the word "destructor" or something because you don’t understand about programming! You need to listen to me! The libraries he uses were designed by Crockercorp, okay?! They don't pay much attention to the ethical stuff! Hal's fine most of the time, when he's making decisions he has to consult with other people on - I guess because he'll kind of double-check our moral judgment against his, to keep himself on-model to how we think he ought to be? But when he's doing stuff on the fly like this, he always causes problems! AI priorities are weird, Rose! And if I can keep that in mind when I’m dealing with Mombot, you can do the same with him!"

"Fine," said Rose frostily. "I will take this under advisement when I have the necessary awful uncomfortable talk with him later. What, exactly, did he say to her?"

"I don't know, something about infiltrating the ship, I guess! - I actually think that at some point I knew more, because he sent me an email that had a copy of a letter I wrote in it, which is how I knew to come here in the first place? It's hard to keep a string around your finger to remind you of
stuff, when your fingers are always changing ring-sizes, due to being a shapeshifting dog-human chimera thing."

Rose pointed out, "You might not have written it yet. Maybe Dave helped."

Jade's ears wilted. "Okay. And while I’m yelling at you, I guess, well, that's another thing that you’re being incredibly dumb about."

"I can't help it that he keeps texting me, god! I'm not going to stop talking to him just because he's dead, Jade!"

"Rose, it's just... you've never really mourned for him like - the rest of us had to, he's just kept being there, versions of him. And I think -"

"And some of him have been in danger and have needed help! I am not going to block him. Just stop persuasively failing the Bechdel test and tell me about my fake internet girlfriend!"

Jade said angrily, "That's not even what I was trying to say, but fine! Given that Kanaya disappeared with the ship, she's obviously in the dimensional between-place where the pirates go when they teleport. And, I know you're okay with weird unearthly marine-themed stuff, but for a normal person -"

"She's a magical vampire with super-speed."

"Well, relatively normal, geez! I'm not even sure there's real air there, you know, it might just be metaphorical somehow! Tell me what we can do about it, do a Seer thing!"

"...right. Um." She thought about it. “Shit. John and Equius were fighting about something? Is he okay?"

“Ugh, don’t even ask me about that, it was so dumb and I’ve got to yell at him later, too! I do absolutely nothing except yell at people anymore! He’s at my place right now. Do we need him?"

“No. Tell me what they were fighting about, it’s - important somehow.”

Jade looked disgusted. “Like I said, it was really dumb. They were doing maintenance on one of your mom’s cats, and John knows Equius is really weird - weirder than usual, I mean - about that one, but he was kind of egging him on about how Roxy’s her favorite, and -"

“Okay. I’m not sure why my brain took that specific route to the answer, but we need the cat.”

“- oh! I get it, because she likes water! Okay, uh, here -” She reassembled Rose’s Skaiaglass monocle quickly. “Here - Hal, shut up, we’re making a call!"

“Okay, just let me call shut-up-open-paren-close-” he said.

“And Rose, do not even talk to him or I will make some dogs put you in the water!"

-

Kanaya floated in the sky, or something like it; it couldn’t be the sea, it was too clear, and it wasn’t sweet. She was far above the world, but that was where her mother was, so she had to go down. She dived.

But the world was miles and miles or centuries or epochs away, and each time she finally had to rise back up, gasping, her lungs aching, and cold. She could see the world, but she could not reach it.
She saw this:

The orb is laid to rest in a place appropriate to it, and it hatches. It is a process less like a troll’s hatching than like a planet cracking in the coils of a vast green snake the length of a planetary orbit. Kanaya’s mother is breaking while she is being born. It looks like it hurts. (How will Kanaya be able to stand it when she must see this herself? But it is likely that she never will, now.

Perhaps she was never suited to this.)

Kanaya’s mother flies through whatever she is in - it must be sky, it’s clear, and her wings are of course not made for water. She does not come near enough that Kanaya can reach her. Kanaya dives again.

Inevitably, the day comes that she must shed her wings and lie down to begin her life’s work. Other women who look like Kanaya come to her and feed her and bring her what she needs for this work. So she does it.

But she is looking for Kanaya, the real one, who is not there. Her blind face touches each of them, and none of them are what she wants. And then they are old, and there are fewer of them. And then they are gone. She’s alone, and she’s getting sick, or old, and still has not found her girl. Kanaya cannot dive deep enough to reach her.

She coughs cold salt water. (That still doesn’t make sense.)

It is no less urgent for being a dream; a dream can be a problem which must be solved. The world below her dies because she cannot reach it, and then it begins again, in the way dreams do. The orb is laid to to rest in a dark place…

It is not easy to be aware of yourself in a dream, when the part of yourself which is meant to dream has died. When Kanaya finally did so, she felt that she had watched everything she cared for die for days.

She turned away from it and let herself drift.

The substance that she was in felt like water, but she was floating too easily; it seemed to push her out, away from the world she could see in the dream. She had had the sense, while swimming, that she was attempting to pierce the skin of a bubble, which yielded but would not break.

Looking outward, there was an endless black field full of stars. They weren’t hers. She didn’t know much about stars, but she knew that they didn’t move like that.

“They’re other people’s dreams. Dead people and living people, and people who are both at pounce! Maybe even other versions of you! - Oh! Hey, do you want to go sneak a look in them? Let’s find one of Karcrabkitty’s.”

Kanaya said, “I want to go down into my own dream.”

“Nope! Too sad! Why don’t you come and look at a better one with me/us?” Kanaya had never heard a forward slash pronounced aloud before.

“I have to see my mother. I have to apologize to her.”

“It’s not reelly her, Kanaya. It’s your dream. It’s impurrrtant and it’s shad, but it’s not reel.”

“Where can I find her, then? Is she… out here?”
“She’s dead. If she’s anywhere, it’s in a place where even we/I can’t go.” All the punctuation was making Kanaya’s head hurt, so she turned it reluctantly to see who she was talking to. Then she looked away again, because that hurt slightly worse. Kanaya was clearly not a cat person. “Hey! That’s purretty rude!”

“You don’t… look like the other cat I have spoken to. Or sound like a cat.” The puns did not really help.

“Kanaya, come prawn, of course things look and sound different out here. You can’t collapse life and death into a quantum state implicative of both in a place where neither variable is defined! This is first-grade stuff. Also - catfish. Catfish.”

“Catfish,” Kanaya acknowledged the statement in a way which she hoped did not imply comprehension. “I am not sure that we have actually been introduced.”

“We/I am! So don’t purry about it. It doesn’t matter so much in dreams, anyway. Haven’t you ever come to yourself with the memory of worlds where you lived a different life and were a different person still clinging to you like purrfume?”

“Um. I don’t know. Maybe?” This was basically what a grammatical conversation with a cat ought to sound like. Her mother was being born again, far below her. She made herself look at the cat, which was very difficult, and provided in lieu of a single visual impression a mass of confused ideas of women and cats and strange salt seas. “I know that she is not real, down there, but I - want to go to her anyway. I need to say goodbye.”

“You already said goodbye,” said the cat, and simultaneously, “You will say goodbye.” “And anyway, I/we can’t take you there and still be shore we/I could find the way home! It’s not my/our dream! It’s yours, and you’ll be lost in it.” The cat had said three things at once: “You were lost in it,” and “You are lost in it.”

“How can I stop being lost, then?” It was too dark. “How can I go someplace where there is light?”

The cat made an unhappy noise. “We/I don’t know! You’re the one who dreams in bright places, and it’s your dream that’s down there. Is your mother even what you came out here for?”

“No.” Kanaya remembered, with surprise, how she had come to this place. “I was on a ship… I wanted it to take me to Vriska, so that I could kill her with a chainsaw…”

“Whale, I/we won’t help you with that, either,” said the cat firmly. “She’s probably just sailing around in some bubble somewhere plundering somemoby’s else’s dreams with a bunch of ghosts who think they’re purrates! Tell me/us something you want to do that’s constructive and not all sulky or morbid, or we/I’m going to just leave you here to float around in the void until a stray horrotterror catches you and devours your fragile mortal mind.”

“I am not being sulky or morbid!” Kanaya objected. “I need to kill her for a lot of good reasons, like that she made me kill Sollux, and probably killed Terezi, and blew up Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and does not take good care of her things, or even other people’s -”

“Constructive, Kanaya! Constructive. I/we will make that word into a pun involving both fish and cats if you do not shape up!”

Constructive plans, in the cat’s plainly-faulty lexicon, were probably those not built entirely on grief, guilt, and rage. Kanaya didn’t want one of those.

But if she could not reach her mother here, then there must be another way. “I want to have the orb
back.”

“What happened to it?”

Kanaya told her.

“Oh wow, that was really dumb.”

Kanaya said, “I know.”

“Whale, we/I can’t make it come back for you - I/we mean, maybe we/I could, but it wouldn’t be right, somehow - it’s not my/our personal skillset, basically! We/I think you need to just find it again.”

“You don’t understand. There is nothing to find. I broke it. Rose told me I would need Vriska to get it back, but she must be wrong, because I obviously need to kill Vriska.”

“She could have been wrong, that happens. But it’s okay, you’ll figure it out!” said the cat. “Think about it some more.”

Kanaya thought about it some more. It was impossible to share the cat’s confidence in such an empty place, where she could not reach anything properly alive, or even properly dead. She said, “Why is it dark here? Why is the sea salt, and why is it in the sky?”

“Some places the sea is continuous with the sky! That’s true even in your world, Kanaya. If you go out far enough you find yourself at the bottom of the sea again and then you have to swim up and up into the clouds, if you can, and sometimes you can’t. And it’s salt because we were born in it, and our blood is salt.”

Kanaya said wearily, “The sea is sugar.”

“What?” The cat sounded puzzled. “That doesn’t sound right.”

“I am not convinced that you can really help me, actually.”

“Whale - I/we know other stuff, okay?” said that cat, injured. “And it’s dark because some places just are. A Mother Grub sleeps in dark places, right? Some places are dark! Some places luck doesn’t matter and everything just happens how it’s got to happen. Those places are dark.”

Kanaya didn’t understand what that meant. The things cats said felt like they did not understand the difference between a metaphor and a thing that was real. Symbols were continuous with reality. “Rose said I would have to hurt her - that that was something that was going to have to happen - and that I would need Vriska to make things right. Does that happen in a dark place?”

“Maybe if you turn the lights off first!”

This was not helping at all. “You do not think that I should kill Vriska, and you will not help me go to my mother. What do you think I should do?”

“Go to someone else’s mother? Maybe ours/mine would be helpful, one of mine/ours. She wouldn’t eat your mother, probably.” Kanaya shut her eyes. “Maybe another of you’s mother. Maybe that’s where we/I should send you!”

“Don’t you dare send me to an alternate timeline!”

“Why? Most people don’t even mind when we/I do!” said the cat grumpily.
“I would mind!”

“There?” said the cat probingly. “You’ve done it once already tonight, in the tonight that’s local to you. (The changes weren’t really noticeable, mostly the size of horse-flies just changed, but you did do it!) And Rose only even sort of notices, she thinks it’s just normal.”

“What? - no, what happened to Rose? Where is she?!”

The cat said, “Oh! Okay, you want to go to Rose, that’s easy, there are a lot of her -”

“To the Rose I just left,” Kanaya specified sharply. “In the timeline I just left. That specific Rose, in that specific place. I don’t want us to be moved around at random because cats somehow cannot tell the difference between timelines!”

“Why do you have to make this harder,” complained the cat. “You’d have to see her again anyway; she’d find you again. She’s caused a lot of problems that way!”

“What way -”

“Okay, found her!” said the cat, pleased. “We’ll take you back to Rose, and you can convince the Queen of the Dog Kings to not be dumping her in the lake, because it’s too cold for people without fur!”

“I said don’t put me in the wrong timeline!”
Elsewhere, and potentially at a slight temporal distance, another iteration of Hal said was causing problems for another troll. “Okay, so, let me see if I understand how this works. There was a great big room in some underground Crockercorp compound near Fort Knox, and that was where Baby Betty was kept.”

“If that’s what you assholes call Kanaya’s mom, then sure.”

“And she would stop pumping out the little grubs if your vampire got hurt or depressed, so - and this is the part I don’t get - they kept you around to keep her in a good mood?”

Q: Are you going to start updating regularly again yet?

A: Probably not, sorry. Brain still not really working right.

cg: The thing I don’t understand is how you can keep talking so damn much if you’re dead.
ag: You’re asking me that? Seriously??????
cg: I’m just talking about myself, that’s what ghosts are supposed to do. We’re supposed to be sort of preoccupied with your personal failures. But you’re writing some sort of instruction manual for... stealing school supplies? That I guess you’re going to put in your big TXT file. That’s not a very ghostly thing to do.
ag: Kankri, I have very good reasons for everything I do, including the stealing of school supplies. They have a wide variety of uses, as I’m sure you’d realize if you’d spend a few minutes thinking about it.
cg: How are you even uploading your TXT file anywhere if you’re dead? And are you advising people to steal the buses while the children are still in them?
ag: Don’t be stupid. I don’t know what to do with kids.
cg: I’ll write your file’s parenting how-to. It will be a list of everything that you did not do.
ag: You know, if you’re absolutely intent on being a stereotypical ghost right now, can you please go haunt your other mom for a while? The one who’s actually to blame for your neuroses?! Because you’re really getting on my nerves right now.

Did you ever reach for the glued-down penny?
Same old joke, and it’s not funny
Burns are red, bruises blue
Out with the old, cheated by the new
Do you suffer from long-term memory loss?
I don’t remember...
Do you suffer from long-term memory loss?
I don’t remember...

- from The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, by T. S. Eliot
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“And she would stop pumping out the little grubs if your vampire got hurt or depressed, so - and this is the part I don’t get - they kept you around to keep her in a good mood?”

“I hope you’re not fucking saying you doubt my ability to make moirail happy, you soulless shit piece of software -”

“I just -” Karkat was pretty sure that an AI did not really need to stutter ever in any circumstances and this one was just doing it to piss him off. “Okay, never mind. So there were the two of you, and two other trolls with psionics there - Vriska Serket and Sollux Captor - and the four of you were the only permanent residents of the creche?”

“You’ve just reiterated our whole conversation, congratulations,” said Karkat. “I hope you didn’t use up all your RAM and have to move over to virtual memory.”

“I’m just trying to figure out why it was set up that way. They just lock one green lady, plus a few random other trolls of about the same age, in a room with the big grub, and hope things shake out so the green one’s happy, which will make the big grub produce little grubs? And that the green lady doesn’t turn into a vampire, which apparently is a really common thing to happen, but one over which they would nonetheless kill her? I mean, it seems wasteful.”

“Okay, one, use your nonexistent head, obviously there’s more than one fucking room - I mean, the hatching cave’s all full of goop and webbing all the time, you can’t eat in there! It was for sleeping only. And two, how the hell would you arrange it?”

“If I were an evil merlady bitch trying to breed people for commercial purposes? I mean, I’d put a whole bunch of jadebloods in there. You said they’re not really as hard to hatch as Crockercorp claims, right? So, logistically, why bond the Mother Grub specifically to one woman, then gamble on being able to produce conditions that make that one woman happy and not-a-vampire? From a cost-benefit analysis -”

The robot said, “Hal, it’s pretty rude to use commercial terminology in this situation.”

She was talking more like a person than she had been before, and her eyes were still blue rather than red - still in “sleep mode.” She’d come back from wherever she’d gone slightly muddy and smelling like burning, and repaired the door. She was now preparing grubloaf and sauteed asparagus in the kitchen. For something that couldn’t eat, she was a pretty good cook.

Hal said, “Like you don’t do the same thing.”

The robot said, “There is a time and a place to be a ruthless businesswoman! - It is strange though, Mr. Vantas. Think about it: even putting aside the likelihood of vampirism, what if Miss Maryam had not gotten along with any of you? Or at least not well enough to have found a moirail among those three people? It seems to me that her Crockercorp handlers would have seen it as very desirable that she form a strong moiralleagance with someone able to curb her instincts to violently protect her mother and the young from their exploitation.”

Karkat said, “Well - well, she did find me, okay?! You’re making it sound like that was a bad thing
and maybe it was - it’s not like we’ve never talked about that! - but she did find me! And anyway there were six of us, originally. Terezi got taken away when we were like thirteen, because she and Vriska kept fighting the guards. Of course now we know why they took her and not Vriska. And then Aradia disappeared, too, a couple years ago. None of us could even figure out why, she hadn’t fucking done anything."

The robot said thoughtfully, “They gradually winnowed the group down to remove potential troublemakers… I suppose the same policy holds for Mid-Betty?”

“How the fuck should I know.” They’d all wondered about what must be happening with CrockerCorp’s other two mother grubs, but there was no way to find out. No one was going to tell them that. They didn’t even know where they were kept.

Hal said, “Okay. So Baby Betty was actively laying from about 2000, when you were all kids, to 2011, when the four of you made a run for it. What was her output like during that time?”

“Her “output.” Seriously? - I don’t fucking know what the live hatch-rate was, Kanaya probably does. It went up every year, she was still growing when we had to kill her. She was… she seemed healthy. I don’t fucking know what’s healthy for a mother grub, they keep fucking dying, we keep killing them!”

The robot said, “Hal, hush a minute. Mr. Vantas, please taste this gravy for me.”

“The gravy is not going to make me calm down about the doom of my species, what is even in that gravy, it’s kind of purple! - okay it’s fine. Stop trying to calm me down.”

She said, “The future of your species is what we are thinking about, Mr. Vantas. How close trollkind is to an adequate replacement hatch-rate, specifically! The non-CrockerCorp-owned Mother Grubs produce only a few dozen or so viable grubs each year each, presumably due to the relatively small size of the gene pool to which they have access -”

“Not enough buckets because CrockerCorp retains breeding rights for everyone they produce, right. I fucking know all this, I heard about this shit every day!”

“Sorry! I’m simply walking you through what Hal and I are thinking about. “Big Betty,” the world’s largest and oldest Mother Grub, has ostensibly had a relatively consistent year-to-year output of live grubs for all of her known history, suggesting that she achieved full reproductive maturity at least five centuries in the past. However, her live hatch-rate began dropping about fifteen years ago, and has continued to decline each year since. In brief - I believe that she is dying.”

“And I don’t know if you knew this, as it’s not something that CrockerCorp advertises, but “Mid-Betty,” though she reached maturity around 1982, has never produced offspring as reliably as your moirail’s mother. In the past two years, in fact, she has produced fewer than a thousand viable eggs! I don’t know why - though from what you’ve said, I’m now prepared to make an educated guess - but I simply don’t see how she can maintain trollkind.”

Karkat’s stomach felt sick. “Okay, you know what? No. I am not listening to two fucking robots manufactured by CrockerCorp trying to make me feel fucking guilty about what we did. It wasn’t - it was not an easy - do you think Kanaya wanted to kill her mother?! Do you think we wanted to make her do that?”

Hal said, “I’m not a robot -”

“Hal. I said shut up.” The robot stirred the gravy.
Karkat said, “Fucking say what you’re going to say, bitchbot! I know you think with superconductors or some shit and don’t need time to think about stuff!”

“I think with bees. I don’t think you understand the nature of the problem, precisely. Neither Hal nor I are in a position to lay any individual blame on the four of you - we’ve made our own species-threatening mistakes! Hoo hoo hoo!”

Hal said, “Jane, don’t fucking hoo hoo hoo at that maybe?”

“I can’t really control the hoo hoo hoos. The problem is of a larger and more difficult nature. My own mother has squandered her resources so badly, over the past centuries, that it has reduced her own species’ viability to the point that four people were able to -”

“Wait. Wait wait. Are you calling the Batterwitch your mother, you crazy can of homicidal insects?!”

“I never said she was a very good mother! She did make me be bees. - What I’m saying, dear, is that the four of you should never have been placed in the position in which you had the power to destroy trollkind. Make no mistake, you may have done so! But the greater error was hers, not yours. You lacked the information to make cautious decisions. I don’t, now.”

Hal said, “Uh. Jane.” Karkat noticed a string of red text crossing her right eye. Hal appeared to have decided to take this conversation to IM.

The robot said absently, “Well, of course one does not simply walk into Crockercorp. That’s why we really must look into properly restoring Rose’s eye. I’m sure she would be able to tell me the best way to go about things, if she could be helped to see again.” Her right eye was now covered in angry red text. “Are we calling her your daughter for purposes of this argument? Heavens to Betty. It’s all right if I involve other people in my “hostile takeover schemes,” but not Rose, hm?”

Hal said flatly, “We’re not doing this in front of the troll.”

Karkat said, “Fuck you! Also, how is a Croogle cloud app Lalonde’s dad, is this something I don’t know about human reproduction.”

“Yes,” they both said. The robot put a plate of grubloaf and pureed root vegetable in front of him. It smelled good.

He turned Hal’s computer-body towards himself and texted Egbert:

CG: IS YOUR MOM THE EVIL ROBOT GOING TO TRY TO POISON ME?
EB: what
CG: WAIT, ARE YOU AWAKE THIS TIME OR AM I COMMUNING WITH THE SHITDRIBBLES OF YOUR INCONTINENT UNCONSCIOUS AGAIN
EB: id on’t know i’m awake i guess
EB: wow i feel bad...
CG: GREAT. NOW HELP ME WITH MY PROBLEM. THE ROBOT IS TALKING ABOUT INVADING CROCKERCORP AND ARGUING WITH THE EVIL COMPUTER AI ABOUT IT, IS SHE GOING TO POISON ME RIGHT NOW, ON THE BASIS THAT I HAVE HEARD HER NEFARIOUS PLANS AND MUST NOW BE DISPOSED OF? IS THAT THE MANNER IN WHICH SHE OPERATES.
EB: uh wow. she’s talking about that again? crap…
EB: i mean, no offense if you and your friend wanted to do it! but it would really be bad for mom, i think…”
EB: i mean, she’s always been all like “i will be the one to kill my mother!” but i don’t think she
should? i think it’d really mess her head up. her head and also her bees, i mean.
CG: WE’RE NOT FUCKING TALKING ABOUT KANAYA
CG: WE’RE NOT DOING THIS
CG: JUST FUCKING NO
EB: what?
EB: but she’s not going to kill anyone if she’s arguing with hal, no. she wouldn't do that in sleep
mode unless it was really important.
CG: WHAT THE FUCK IS SLEEP MODE EVEN? WHY IS SHE ACTING SMARTER NOW
THAT SHE’S FUCKING ASLEEP!??
EB: it’s not when the robot’s aslee. it’s when her regular mostly-human body’s asleep, and her
dreaming mind moves over into the robot.
EB: when she’s awake, the robot’s in either murder mode or uh
EB: domestic mode, i guess? which is all just automated behaviors with limited ability to make
independent decisions, like nannacar.
EB: when she’s in sleep mode, though, it’s really her. so don’t be a jerk to her!
CG: NO, SEE, THIS SHIT DOES NOT MAKE SENSE. THE "PERSON" THAT’S ARGUING
WITH HAL AND COOKING FOR ME HERE IS LIKE, AN AI COPY OF YOUR GENETIC
PROGENITOR, RIGHT? THAT’S ACTIVE IN THE ROBOT SOMETIMES BUT NOT ALL
THE TIME?
EB: yup.
CG: THEN HER CONSCIOUSNESS IS NOT MOVING WHEN HER (MOSTLY?) HUMAN
BODY FALLS ASLEEP!
CG: IT STAYS RIGHT WHERE IT FUCKING WAS, INSIDE HER HEAD, WHEN THAT
ROBOT SWITCHES INTO SMarter-AI-MODE. IT’S LIKE A MAGIC TRICK WHERE
THERE’S TWO LONG-EAR-FLOOP-BEASTS BUT THE GUY PRETENDS THERE’S
ONLY ONE.
CG: WHAT’S REALLY HAPPENING HERE IS THAT THERE ARE TWO OF YOUR MOM
- THE REAL ONE AND THE AI ONE - THAT YOU’RE TREATING AS A SINGLE PERSON
WHO NEVER SLEEPS. AND THAT’S FUCKED UP.
EB: well. okay, maybe it is fucked up. i dunno.
CG: IT IS! IT IS FUCKED UP! THIS DOES NOT REQUIRE DEBATE!
EB: but it’s what she wants. and she’s really careful to make sure that her human body’s never
awake while the robot’s being her, and to keep their memories synced up and stuff, so there aren’t
any, i guess
EB: existential ambiguities?
EB: wow i am concussed and saying many words…
EB: it’s because she doesn’t want to end up like hal, i guess.
EB: or me and my sister to end up just completely crazy like rose.
CG: OKAY, THAT IS AN ADMIRABLE GOAL, I GUESS, BUT I FAIL TO SEE HOW THE
ROBOT MAGIC TRICK HELPS.
EB: dude, my brain does not work and i cannot have serious psychological discussions about robot-
cloned parents right now. it is a really complicated topic!
EB: my mom will not poison you, so just eat your food.
CG: FUCK YOU, I ALREADY AM!
EB: so why are you still hassling me, geez!
CG: WHERE ARE YOU BEING CONCUSSED ANYWAY, LIKE ARE YOU ON THE
FLOOR SOMEWHERE
EB: yes karkat i am on the floor being concussed while listening to your sage words, instead of
seeking medical attention! i am smart.
EB: no i’m at the queen of the dog kings’ bone palace. she is my sister.
CG: WHY AM I EVEN TALKING TO YOU, YOU’RE ASLEEP AGAIN
EB: well, does it even matter?
EB: i mean i was just telling this dog that’s here that maybe people don’t perceive anything right anyway!
EB: like how usually humans can’t hear trolls right when you talk because we’re mostly sort of asleep even when we’re awake.
EB: and i think it’s that way for everyone now no one sees what’s really there
EB: is there an iteration of our universe where that’s even possible i wonder
EB: or did you just make it all wrong
EB: haha okay it’s your fault i figured it out! you SUCK karkat.
CG: FUCK YOU!
CG: UH
CG: BUT OKAY, UN-CALLED-FOR ATTACK ON ME ASIDE, I THINK YOU NEED A FUCKING DOCTOR, SHITPAN. IS THERE ONE NEARBY YOU CAN CALL OR SOME SHIT.
EB: no i’m just thinking… you know i think it used to be different for rose before dave died and she got hurt but now she’s like the rest of us and we can’t like
EB: see what we’re seeing and recognize its actual significance? it’s like how babies don’t have object permanence but don’t KNOW they don’t have object permanence. like we’re missing something and we can’t even tell we’re missing it! like the world doesn’t fit us right.
EB: just sometimes everything feels like a dream even though it’s not sometimes.
EB: fuck my gills hurt.
CG: YOUR WHAT?!
CG: LOOK
CG: DID A CAT BRING YOU WHERE YOU ARE NOW
CG: BECAUSE I THINK YOU’RE INTERPOSING ONE REALITY ONTO ANOTHER OR SOME SHIT, WHICH. DON’T DO THAT. GO TO SLEEP UNTIL IT WEARS THE FUCK OFF!
EB: ugh maybe that’s the problem.
EB: i keep thinking i was playing pokemon a minute ago, but i wasn’t. i don’t know where my ds even IS.
EB: haha i saw a swadloon and thought it looked like you...
CG: GO FUCK YOURSELF, YOU DON’T EVEN KNOW WHAT I LOOK LIKE
CG: GO TO SLEEP BEFORE YOU GET YOURSELF CONFUSED ABOUT THE BASIC NATURE OF REALITY. I’M TURNING THIS OFF.

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