William Cipher comes up behind Stanford and covers his eyes. “Guess who?”
Stanford laughs. “Stanley?”
“Which one?”
Stanford thinks on it.

He’s Bill Cipher in the front, Stanley on the side and it makes Stanford a sad, sad boy.

“I’m sure I’m in your mind somewhere, Bill.” – Stanley Pines
“I’m sure I’m in your memory somewhere, Stanley.” – Bill Cipher
Prompt: "I'm a private detective hired to follow you, but you're endearingly boring and mostly I just like watching you and oops, I sort of find you adorable." Bill's the detective.

A oneshot that got turned into a series and is now just a simple & convoluted story of a Nerd Teddy Bear and his Darling Gangster Kitten/Two brothers estranged by Time that also doubles as a character study of Stanley Pines and Bill Cipher. Unfortunately filled with abstraction and surrealism.
It wasn't planned so expect terrible pacing and jankiness. Later chapters have had their content replaced for narrative purposes.

Feedback is always appreciated!! ⁹(๑ •̀•́ ๑)⁷
He sits across from Bill, at the table densely engraved with every one of his failures. “Wanna hear a joke?” The demon laughs, tap tap tapping his bloodied-black fingers—Ford feels it inside his rib-cage. “Once upon a time, there was an old man who thought he could redefine the concept of Bill Cipher.”

-Dinner with Bill Cipher, The End.

Stanford Pines was halfway through the sixtieth page of his book when a stranger, a young blonde impeccably dressed young man, seated himself across Ford with a loud “Hey, you’re not gonna eat that, right? Let me take it off your hands.”

In disbelief, Ford set his book down as he watched his scone travel from his plate into the young man’s mouth before he could even formulate an argument.

It was chewed carelessly, swallowed and spat back out in crumbs with a crude, “Thanks Ford.”

“How did you know—"

“I’m Bill. Bill Cipher and I know lots of things.” Bill, as the boy called himself, took a napkin and with meticulous precision, began to wipe his mouth. The slow movement brought Ford’s attention to his lips, and then to his face—a very attractive face. Tan skin with hazel, rather yellow eyes; they regarded Ford with curiosity and triumph, as if the attention was what Bill had sought all along.

Bill reached into his mustard trench coat, and produced a stack of post-card sized photos. He dropped them with a deliberate loud PLOP in front of Ford.

Photos. Of Ford. At work, in public places, in taxi cabs and various other public transport—in his house, in his home. Very intrusive photos; he could not spend even a fraction of a second looking at the ones taken of him coming out the shower. Somehow, he knew this was only a small portion of what the boy had taken, of what the boy had seen. He felt his cheeks burn up, his skin flushing with humiliation.

“What the hell is this?!” Ford fought to keep his voice low, lest he want to draw the attention of nosy bystanders. Disgust curled in his stomach and he suddenly felt nauseous. To be followed and observed like some kind of animal.

“Private investigator. Was hired to keep an eye on you.” Bill pointed two fingers at his eyes and then at Ford.

“This is an invasion of privacy! A breach of my privacy!”

“Nah.”

Shooting the messenger was not the correct choice—Ford knew this, but his anger wasn’t rational; anger itself was never truly rational and he had to remind himself of that. He was a private person by nature. Knowing someone had been watching him like this...had documented it...had documented it with the intention of showing it to another person...who would most likely show it to others. He couldn’t rule out that possibility.

“You okay there, kid? You shut down on me.” Bill interrupted.
“Kid? I’m old enough to be your—”

“I don’t care.” Bill was now drinking his coffee as though it were his own. “In case you’re thinking of legal ramifications…”

“I could sue you.”

“I’m a detective. I’m above the law—and consequences, mind you—but nice try.” Bill gestured Ford’s mug back with a nod, “Want some?”

Ford shook his head, teeth still gritted.

“Ah well, suit yourself. I was lying. About it being a nice try, it was actually awful but you know what? You can make it up to me by buying me lunch.”

“Are you insane?! Who hired you?”

“I don’t kiss and tell. Pass the ketchup there, would you Fordsy?” When Ford didn’t comply, Bill made a swift grab for it himself and began pouring ketchup onto Ford’s plate, spelling ‘F O R D’ out in the red.

“What’s wrong with you? Why are doing this? This—why are you here? Did you get what you wanted? Is that it? Your job’s done and you’ve decided to taunt me? Harass me?”

Had the boy gotten the photo he needed? And now sought to mock Ford?

This was all too much. But they were in public, and Ford had to contain himself. The boy had chosen a wise time to approach Ford—it was a calculated, albeit basic, move.

Bill, seemingly unaffected by Ford’s outburst, took another sip of the bitter coffee. The lack of reaction brought a jolt of powerlessness through Ford, but he would not and could not show weakness. Blackmail was a potential outcome as well, he could not rule that out, and should he falter here, he could be looking at a lifetime of being leeched off.

Trust no one. Especially those who held any sort of power over you.

“You’re unbelievably boring, but you get this cute little scrunch—” before Ford could react, a hand was caressing the side of his nose. “Whenever you read something tantalizing, when you’re in the zone. The Ford zone, I like to call it.”

The hand left as quickly as it came, and Bill was now smiling peculiarly. Now that Ford thought about it, the boy had been smiling non-stop; the only changes were subtle contractions of his eyes.

“You seem confused by this. I guess you don’t get hit on very often huh?”

“What?” Hit on? What was this boy playing at?

“Like, romance, people tryna get into your pants.”

“You’ve got the wrong idea.”

“Shut up. You like men, and I’m as good-looking as they come.”

“What makes you assume that?” Ford had done nothing to give such an impression; he knew for a fact that his romantic life and interests were non-existent and he’d done nothing to hint at anything.

Bill did waves in the air with his hands. “I can sense it. I also noticed your pupils enlarge whenever
“You couldn’t possibly have gotten a good look at my pupils from such a distance.” The science was correct but it was absurd that the boy had managed to capture the exact moment Ford’s pupils had enlarged, he couldn’t even recall seeing an attractive male recently—beyond the boy, he supposed.

“High definition camera, kid. When they said high definition, boy, did they mean it!”

Ford looked away, frowning with lips tightly pursed. Something didn’t add up…

“I was lying.”

Ford’s eyes returned to the boy.

“About the high definition camera nonsense. Figured I’d try and smoke you out, and hey, it worked. But you know, your pupils got pretty big when you were looking at me…”

“I’m old enough to be your—”

“Uncle. Uncle Ford. Is that your kink? Say no or I’m outta here, pal.”

The tension briefly forgotten, Ford broke out into a chuckle. “No, god no, I assure you. You seem young.”

“Actually a lot older than you’d think.” Bill patted his cheek lightly. “Great genes. I thank my mom for that every day.”

“I want to see some ID. Your business card, too. Prove to me you’re an actual PI.” Ford said. He would easily go off on a mental tangent if he didn’t remind himself of current circumstances. It was not the time for laughter.

“Sure thing, Ford.” With a careless flick, a wallet was on the table. “Just go on through that.”

There was no reluctance from Bill when Ford took to inspecting the wallet and everything asked for was there. The wallet held quite a bit of money in it, alongside various cards, including business ones, and Bill’s identification card. Bill Cipher, 31 (Ford didn’t expect that). The business card confirmed Bill’s earlier claims; he was a Private Investigator whose business location was situated about twenty minutes from here. Ford recognized the area, but he’d never personally gone that route.

“So, if you’re making contact with me, I assume you’ve given up on the job?” Ford said, as he handed the wallet back.

“Maybe. Maybe I want to get up close and personal. Maybe I want to get a very specific set of photos of you, Ford.”

The flirtatious remark was delivered in such a way that Ford would’ve mistook it for a threat if he’d not considered the nuances of aggression and seduction—especially in this day and age.

“Six fingers. I like that—that weird deformity you have there. Imagine! Six fingers.” Bill held his own darkly gloved hand up in front of him. He spread his fingers and contracted them to a steady rhythm. “If you were thinking whether I’m a toy guy or a finger guy, I bet you have your answer now, huh?”

Vulgar, Ford thought. Something was off; if this boy—no, man—had indeed been watching him for a long time, he would know, or at the very least have some idea, of what would and would not work
when it came to interacting with Ford.

“Let’s go alone somewhere.” Bill suggested.

“I’d rather not.” This was suspicious. An attempt at leading Ford away from a public space caused alarm bells to go off in Ford’s mind.

“Are you scared?”

“…Terrified.” There was sarcasm in there, somewhere.

Ford pulled his book into his lap. “I’m sorry but this—I’m not that kind of man.”

“Okay then. So what you’re saying is, you wanna go for like, dinner and whatever and then we can—”

“No. Who do you work for, and are photos the only thing you were meant to take of me?”

“You think I’m an assassin huh? Sent to seduce you, lure you alone and then CLICK—” Bill made a noise with his tongue as he pantomimed having his throat cut with his hand.

“No. Mind my language if you please, but I think you’re full of shit.”

“I’d rather be full of something else.”

Ford had to know who was paying Bill. Fiddleford? They’d had a falling out, but why now, of all times, to have someone tail him? A chance to get the information from Bill was there, Ford only had to take it.

“Do you think your vulgarity is attractive?” Ford asked.

“So what you’re saying is…if I polish up my language a little bit—”

“No.” Ford straightened his posture and attempted to soften his features, hoping he gave the impression of having calmed down. “I’m saying I’d like to get to know you.”

“I hadn’t intended on that, Fordsy. Was kinda hoping for a once off, maybe twice of trice—if I’m lucky—thing. Hence you know, me coming on to you really strongly and just laying my cards out of the table.” Bill said.

“If that were true, Bill, you’re a rather lousy detective.” Ford pointed out. “You’d have known by now what type of man I am and that your methods would not work on me.”

Bill gave a half shrug with one shoulder. “I thought I was cute enough for you to drop those rules of yours.”

“Are you a pathological liar?”

“You’re a smart guy, Ford. I like that.”

“So it’s a yes?”

“You come around quickly huh? Thinking of ways you and I can blow that anger of yours off?” Bill’s eyes gestured to Ford’s clenched fist hidden beneath the table. Such an observant nature made Ford even more cautious.
“Do you really want to get to know me?” With palms flat on the table, Bill leaned in closer towards Ford, his upper body casting shadow across the table ominously. “Or do you mean you want to get to know who hired me by getting to know me?”

Ford swallowed the jump in his throat, but did not recoil.

“You want to use me to find out who hired me?”

“I—”

“I don’t mind. Use me as you see fit. If you play your cards right Fordsy, I might just end up telling you.”

Bill Cipher stood up and with two fingers, blew a kiss that segued into a casual salute.

“I’ll call you. Gotta say, you might just be my favourite Ford.” As Bill left, his back growing smaller and smaller in Ford’s vision, Ford realized Bill had given him the client’s name.

*My favourite Ford.*

Fiddleford.
Tattooed Fingers

Chapter Summary

Bill Cipher liked them smart, and Stanford Pines might just be the kind of smart that solves the mystery behind Bill Cipher.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You call it identity theft, I like to call it good ‘ol fashioned possession. Get this, you wake up one day, you’re 30k in debt and there’s a warrant out for your arrest for a crime you ain’t never even heard of. The devil doesn’t need your body, nah—all he needs is your social security number.”

-The man who calls himself Bill Cipher, 2 years prior.

“Never heard of him.”

“What?”


Stanford Pines tapped his fingers nervously on his desk while his other hand clutched the phone precariously. On the other end was an old friend of his, Joseph Cummings. His past with Joseph was nothing worthwhile, just old friends who called favours in from one another on occasion. It was a relationship Stanford rather enjoyed; Joseph was the precise distance from Ford that he liked and aimed to cultivate with everyone within his personal life.

“I saw his ID card, Joe.” Ford said, slinking into his chair. “It looked legitimate.”

“Well, fakes improve daily. You try stopping by that guy’s work place? You said it was around the Wellstone area, right? That ain’t too far from where you are.”

“I doubt that’s a good idea. It might be his plan all along, to lure me there.”

“Doubt the guy’s been waiting for days just to jump you, but suit yourself, Ford. Listen, I gotta go. Was great catching up with ya, you lemme know if you need anything else, alright?” Both men said their appropriate goodbyes and hung up.

It had been five days so far, and Bill had not called. Not that a phone call was expected, but rather, it seemed inevitable. He could only assume Bill was watching him now, and had been ever since their meeting, looking to spot any irregularities in Ford’s daily life; anything to imply he’d upset the balance and harmony.

Ford was left to speculate and endure the heavy feeling of someone watching him. Once he’d become aware of his voyeur, wherever Ford went, eyes felt fettered to him. He’d never been the self-conscious type, but now every action seemed to be scrutinized by a panel of judges and immortalized within Bill’s roll of film.
Privacy was no longer a luxury he could enjoy. He hated this, and by extension, hated Bill Cipher.

It was only 2:30pm. He could stop by the area. In broad daylight, it should be fine.

Ford pulled into the drive-way, or rather what was meant to pass for the driveway. Wellstone wasn’t necessarily a bad part of town, but was avoided as though it were. Undesirables frequented the area often, but its reputation had not abated enough to lower property value—not yet, anyway.

He could spot Bill from his car, outside smoking. He wore the same mustard coat Ford had seen him in days prior. Ford took this opportunity to get a good look at Bill Cipher, and began noticing a feeling of nostalgia gnawing at him; he’d seen Bill somewhere before, or rather, someone similar to Bill. (he must’ve spotted Bill when the man trailed him, and his mind was now recollecting those memories)

Despite it, to call Bill attractive was perhaps an understatement. The man was striking, in an otherworldly way. The kind of beauty one’s primitive mind registered as only able to be seen but never touched. His height was a surprise too, and Ford thought he could easily be taller than Ford.

Bill spotted him and waved enthusiastically in a way that made it hard to believe he was 31. Ignoring the feeling of dread and reluctance that overcame him, Ford exited his car and approached Bill with a forced half-smile.

“Oh, let me get a look at you.” Bill let out a low whistle as his eyes wandered across Ford shamelessly. “All this way to see me huh? At my work place, no less. So, what happened, kid? Couldn’t wait anymore?”

“I just came to see if this place was real.” Ford said, suddenly having cold feet. This was not a good idea, it was a stupid move—did he even have a plan? He should’ve drove past here, surveyed the area first rather than acting impulsively. Too inquisitive for his own good. He shouldn’t be under-estimating this man simply because his flaky demeanour made him appear harmless.

"I'll be—"

“Going? Not so fast there.” Bill made a quick grab for Ford’s sleeve and gave an impatient tug towards himself. "My office is empty, come on in."

Ford looked at the tight grip on his sleeve, and surrendered with a sigh. With how pushy he sensed the other man could be, leaving would now be difficult. Curiosity was a factor in play too, and a little peak couldn’t be all that bad. He was led inside by Bill alike to a child eager to show their parents something. It only made Ford feel again, that he was much too old for Bill. Ford always found himself being more lenient with those far younger than him. Even if he knew Bill’s age, the man still appeared to him as a child. Accepting the role of a pushover was likely to backfire with Bill though, Ford thought. Very soon.

The office was what one would expect of a professional environment; standard desk, 3 chairs and absolutely nothing interesting of note. Cipher Investigations was branded on the glass, a sleek, strong design. To see Cipher next to ‘Investigations’ was an amusing sight, considering it was both Bill’s alleged surname and what he sought to solve. The office itself was tidy and clean. Since he’d seen Bill smoking outside, he concluded Bill highly valued a clean environment.

Ford briefly thought it to be the sort of clean you kept when you were hiding something.

“Tell me how I’ve been on your mind lately. Non-stop, I might add.” Bill seated himself behind his desk with Ford following his lead and sitting across from him.
“You’ve been asking about me, asking the big guys.” He continued, crossing his legs.

“How—” Ford began but was once again, interrupted.

“You think I didn’t pay off a couple people up there, make sure not just anybody can get the one up on me?” Bill spun his chair side to side to a rhythm of his own making. “And if anyone tries digging up dirt on me, my little rat rings the alarm and lets me know immediately.” He snapped his fingers for emphasis and drew Ford’s eyes to his fingers. Tattooed fingers. “Got friends in high places huh, Ford?”

“The same could be said for you.” Ford replied, his eyes still on Bill’s darkly tattooed fingers. He’d seen this design somewhere before, but where exactly eluded him. When Ford’s eyes returned to Bill’s face, it now wore an intense look one would wear when scrutinizing another’s actions while expecting a specific outcome. Keeping the mutual eye contact, Bill lowered both his hands into his lap, and they disappeared from Ford’s view. The act was so deliberate, Ford knew Bill had wanted him to see his decorated hands, to glimpse the black—but why?

“Can’t believe you burnt those photos I gave you, by the way. It was pricey to print all of those, you know.”

“So, you’ve still been following me?”

“Nah. I guessed. You’re the type to burn all evidence.”

Ford wasn’t entirely convinced.

“About who hired you…” Ford began, waiting for Bill’s response. Once he got the approval nod to go on, he continued. “It was Fiddleford, wasn’t?”

“Fiddleford…Fiddleford what?”

“Fiddleford McGucket.”

“Yikes, real unfortunate name.”

“Well? It was him, right?”

“I am not at liberty to say.” Bill uncrossed and crossed his legs, legs inverted this time. “But you’ve gotta wonder…what makes you think a bumpkin would be interested in little ol’ Stanford Pines?”

So, it was Fiddleford. The way Bill gave out information was not insidious enough to go unnoticed, but could easily by missed by a simpleton. Bill gave a chin tilt in Ford’s direction, silently urging him to elaborate on the relationship between Fiddleford and himself.

“We had a falling out, him and I. A big one. We both ceased contact with one another, it was a mutual decision. Did he—theoretically, if Fiddleford were to have hired you, would he have told you the reasons? I’ve never been to someone of your trade so I’m afraid I do not know the protocol—or your protocol, for that matter.”

Bill leaned onto his desk, his body weight on his elbows and chin resting on his now folded, gloved hands. “Theoretically…well, it’d probably be some humdrum junk like Heartfelt Redneck Apologies: the greatest hits. Maybe something exciting happened and you’re in danger. But that’s wishful thinking, kid.”

How much had Fiddleford told Bill regarding the circumstances under which they parted? When
they separated, both had agreed to go into hiding for a minimum of three months. Three months had ended two weeks ago. And what exactly did Ford know about Bill Cipher? The more Ford considered his own past, the more he began to suspect things were not as they appeared.

Contacting a PI to get a hold of Ford simply to apologize seemed unlikely. He was hired to follow Ford, to observe Ford. If danger was the real reason, and it seemed the likely reason, there was a possible reason why.

Ford could not share that reason with Bill Cipher though.

“Maybe you hired yourself to follow me and you’re pretending it was Fiddleford.” Ford joked, deciding to take a different approach, but Bill didn’t seem impressed.

“Maybe I did. Maybe I saw you one day, and thought ‘here’s a guy I might like’ and then followed you around.” Bill began laughing, and for the first time, Ford thinks being alone with Bill might not be a good idea. “Maybe I—maybe I pretended there was a client to make myself look a little less creepy!”

“Your jokes are hardly amusing.”

“Right back at ya there, buddy.” A brief silence followed as tension had begun to creep into the room; although most of the hostility was without a doubt generated by Ford, Bill was hardly passive himself.

A sudden loud ruffling noise shot through the air as Bill opened a drawer and pulled out several thick folders. Once he’d managed to free them, he dropped them in front of Ford and urged with a hand to look through them.

“That’s everything I have on you. Dental records, doctor records, college junk. Smart is a bit of an understatement for you, isn’t it? I didn’t know IQs went that high. And twelve PhD.s, how did you even manage that? If you weren’t so smart, I’d suspect you fucked your way to these credentials, Stanford.”

Ford’s eyes narrowed behind his glasses; the shift in Bill’s tone and attitude had anger simmering in his belly. Ford’s intellect being the only thing that made him worthwhile was an insidious belief that haunted him for too much of his life. Although he no longer believed his intelligence was his only saving grace, attempts at reminding that he would be nothing without it angered him.

Revealing and emphasizing just how much he knew about Ford was intimidation tactic—another intimidation tactic, to be exact. The heavy flirtatious attitude was one, too. Ford had slowly begun to understand Bill, all that was left was to adjust his attitude in response.

But God, was Ford awful at social situations.

Bill took Ford’s silence as an expression of resentment. “Are you angry? Don’t be, kid. You’re brilliant, ahead of your time, Ford. You’re the type of guy that ends up changing the world.” Bill tapped a hand on a random folder. “This, this is why I like you. Your vast intellect—and the fact you’re just better than everyone else. But you know how it is, IQ, I can’t fuck your mind. And that desire’s gotta go somewhere, right?”

“I’m to believe your infatuation with me, a man twice, most likely thrice your age, is real and sincere? You take me for a fool.” Ford said, having had enough of this wonderland nonsense. He would contact Fiddleford his own way, to confirm once and for all. Dealing with Bill Cipher was a hassle not worth the effort.
“I’m leaving. I appreciate you seeing me like this. Enjoy the rest of your day.” He stood up hastily, eager to leave as soon as possible. If Bill intercepted him, he knew he’d have trouble leaving.

“Stanford Pines, you really don’t want to leave right now.”

Ford wanted to ignore him, to walk away but besides his own foolish curiosity, there was something unmistakably sinister in Bill’s voice. It happened quickly, and suddenly Bill was between Ford and the door.

He approached Ford with hands up and palms open; they lowered and took both of Ford’s own hands, placing them parallel against his sides, just below his armpits. The material of Bill’s yellow jacket held a distinctive ‘new, just bought and never washed’ feeling to Ford’s fingers. Once in position, Bill wriggled both himself and Ford’s hands until the fit was snug, then pressed his own palms atop Ford’s hands.

Something hard, very hard, rested at Bill’s side, cradled in the nook at his armpit. It was a gun. Of course Bill had a gun. Didn’t all private investigators have one?

“It’s loaded. Are you scared, Ford?”

Ford didn’t respond. A threat? Was Bill threatening him indirectly? Clearly, right? That’s why he’d even let Ford know he had a gun. This was bad.

While Ford considered the situation, Bill wrapped both arms, only at the wrist, around Ford’s neck intimately. “Ask me if I’ve killed a man, Stanford. Go on, ask me.” The voice was low, nearly sensual and very unlike the Bill that Ford had seen until now.

Ford was frozen in place, but found it in him to comply, “H—have you killed a man?”

Bill only laughed.

Bill’s hands slithered down onto Ford’s shoulders, and he side stepped, turning while simultaneously moving Ford with him. Now Bill’s lower back was against the desk, with Ford nearly being pulled onto him. It’s uncomfortable, awkward and Ford just wanted to leave.

There was a rush of cold on Ford’s abdomen and he glanced down, only to realize Bill had slipped a hand beneath his shirt—when had Bill removed his gloves? The hand caressed softly, and then suddenly there were nails dragging across his skin, making circles on it. Bill’s other hand held Ford by the shirt, with a grip that implied to move would result in consequences Ford would not like.

“I think we should do something about that anger of yours, Ford. It’ll only accumulate and before you know, you’ll explode. That’s the theory behind human combustion, isn’t it, Mr Smart Guy?” The hand at Ford’s stomach migrated to his lower back, now clawing at the skin there. “So, are you familiar with the concept of hate fucking?” The last word was punctuated by Bill slipping his hand further up Ford’s bare back, only to drag his nails painfully down again.

Ford does not push Bill away because he begins to understand nothing Bill ever does is unintentional. His skill at wearing and removing his gloves implied dexterity of the hands and Ford thinks if he pushes Bill back far enough, that gun he’d felt would come out quickly and then Ford would have a very hard time saying no.

“Bill, that’s—that’s enough, Bill. I’m not interested.” A jerk of defiance from Ford only seemed to entertain Bill more; he was clearly one for the chase and Ford could only think of running. Bill removed both hands from Ford, grabbing at Ford’s belt next. The sound of it becoming undone was too loud to Ford’s ear, the silence of the room only exacerbating the jangle. He says no but Bill
doesn't respond. Another no, a firmer no this time while clutching at Bill’s wrists, and he can tell Bill is becoming angry. It’s in his movements that gain a sudden hard edge in their touch, and the coiled tension manifesting in his shoulders.

Ford squirmed beneath Bill’s touch, and was met with a, “Don’t run away.” Ford wants to though, and regrets coming here. Ford has so many regrets, and they just keep piling up on top of each other.

Black tattoos surface on Ford’s mind again, and now he knows, knows where he’s seen those tattoos before—on the man whose deal Fiddleford and he had rejected three months and two weeks prior. He knows why he’s afraid of Bill Cipher—it had been accumulating steadily in the back of his mind as he learned more and more about the man; the parallels were there, he only had to accept them.

No—he’s paranoid, it’s paranoia. Finger tattoos were common, Bill seemed the type to like tattoos. No, he was over-thinking. Knowledge of the gun has made him jumpy—that’s it.

And because Bill was too young to be that man.

But Ford is scared, and he does not want to make an enemy of a man who knows everything about him. A man who owns a gun, and who wanted Ford to know he owns a gun and is most certainly not afraid to use it. A man who, even jokingly, says he sees himself above the law.

Was Ford overthinking all this? Can he instead, just push Bill away? Can he? Can he without repercussions? He doesn’t know anymore, he just keeps saying no, even when Bill’s hand is descending his pants at torturous pace, going low, past his groin to first caress his inner thigh—why, god knows, Bill just wants him to sweat—he says no no no but Bill ignores him and begins to crouch, to get on his knees, and Ford is still saying no, and then he says,

“Not yet.”

And Bill stops immediately.

“Not yet.” Bill repeated after him, pulling away almost robotically. “Not yet.” Bill repeats once more, gently grabbing Ford’s chin and tilting his face to plant a kiss on his jawline. It was tender, an action Ford would never had guessed capable of the Bill in front of him.

“I can work with not yet. I can’t work with no, however, so I don’t want to hear that word from you again, Ford.” It’s in a low voice devoid of the perkiness that Ford had come to associate with Bill.

The hand abandoned Ford’s chin, and slid down, dragging across Ford’s chest and stopping in the middle.

“I’m great at taking orders, if you hadn’t noticed.” The other hand’s fingers flicked at Ford’s chin. “I bet you are too. I bet you’re great at things you haven’t tried yet, Ford. I bet you’d be great at me.”

Gripping Ford by the curls, Bill pulled him close, and said, “When this happens, and it’s going to happen, it’ll be exactly what you want and how you want it. I’ve seen your future, Stanford Pines, and I’m in it.”

And just like that, it ended. Bill broke into a grin and stepped away from Ford. “Oh boy, that’s enough for today. You might have a heart attack if I keep this up!” Bill returned to his desk, demeanour as if nothing within the past five minutes had transpired.

Stopping was not what Ford had expected of Bill. He’d expected the opposite, a basic denial of his autonomy, a more determined and forceful approach to Ford’s lack of desire but no. Bill had backed off, unaffected.
“Do you enjoy doing that?” Ford’s voice was slightly shaky but better than he expected.

“Yeah.”

“You—you threatened me with a gun!”

“I told you I had a gun. Telling is not the same as threatening, jeez.”

Another silence settled between them, and this time, Bill broke it. “I have a gun, Stanford. And I’m always watching you.”

“After you said you weren’t? Are you insane?! What is wrong with you?!”

“Me being insane is true but completely irrelevant right now.” Bill pointed at Ford. “I’m watching you, and I’m armed. Let’s say your little country fellow was worried about your safety. If he was, he’d ask, let’s say, a guy just like me, to watch you, maybe protect you if anything goes wrong…”

“Bullshit. Protect me? If you wanted me to know you’re armed and going to ‘protect’ me, you wouldn’t be forcing yourself on me while making damn sure I know you’re armed!”

Bill shrugged. “Hey, my methods are obscure and mysterious and I was just fooling around.”

“You nearly gave me a heart attack!”

“And here I am, apologizing. Take the apology or don’t, smart guy.”

“I’ve had it with your silly intimidation tactics.”

“Intimidation tactics? Plural huh? Oh, please elaborate. I’m dying to hear this, Stanford!”

“Your—that thing you do, whatever you want to call it, where you throw yourself at me. It’s an intimidation tactic.”

“Go on.”

“I don’t need to elaborate. You know damn well what I mean.”

“You get full marks, smart guy.” Bill gave an exaggerated shrug. “I’ll stop.”

“Why? What’s the point of doing it? Of doing this? To me?”

“Maybe I liked seeing you squirm a little.”

Ford dropped into the seat, and focused on steadying his breathing. He’d reached his limit. He couldn’t stay any longer here. But if Fiddleford had hired Bill to protect Ford, God, did he have lousy taste.

“I’ll call you, for real this time. We have lots to discuss.”

Ford sighed, already feeling defeated. If he did not say yes now, he knew Bill would pursue him. Intuition. “The weekend. I’m free…the weekend, you can call me then.”

“I’m never in town on weekends.”

Ford frowned. Something about this seemed familiar, or rather, it seemed like important information but he did not know why yet.
“...I—just, Thursday. It’s Tuesday now. Thursday.”

“I’ll see.” Bill stood up. “I’ll walk you out.”

Bill walked ahead. Before opening the door, he turned to Ford and asked, “How about a kiss?”

“...No. The very idea of you asking that after what you’ve done, after you’ve insulted me is—”

“Wow not even a kiss huh? You made of ice?”

Without warning, Bill took Ford’s hand, and cradling it as if it had impressive value, placed a warm, slow kiss on the back. The rising heat could not go ignored, while the action itself only caused anxiety within Ford. Once Bill’s lips left the skin, he cradled the hand once more. “See you soon, Sixer.” And let go entirely, quickly moving ahead of Ford and opening the door for him. The act, when performed by Bill, seemed incredibly chauvinist.

“Hold up.” Bill said.

“Do me a favour, just one little favour.” The grip on Ford was firm and strong, a grip that didn’t seem possible judging by Bill’s physique but Ford knows now he is more than meets the eyes. “I know you aren’t big on self-satisfaction but the next time, if or when, you touch yourself, just think of me, alright? Even if it’s a split second before, a second after, or a fraction of a second during, just think of me.” Once Bill had finished speaking, the possessive grip left Ford abruptly and he was pushed out the door.

“See you real soon, Sixer.”

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Bill Cipher liked them smart, and Stanford Pines might just be the kind of smart that solves the mystery behind Bill Cipher.

It’s 12am, and Ford should have been asleep exactly one hour ago.

He doesn’t touch himself, but he does think of Bill Cipher.

Chapter End Notes

Are you going to the after-party?
"So, what're you wearing, Ford?"

Chapter Summary

Bill calls Ford and Ford doesn't know what the hell is going on.

“I’m always watching you.”

-Gaspard Giodarno.

Sixteen. The number of times Ford began punching the police department’s number only to end up chickening out at the very end, every single time. A comprehensible story was hard to formulate; for starters, what would he even tell them? Talking about Bill would inevitably bring to light the circumstances under which he’d been hired; the police would go digging and if they’d found out about Ford’s previous dealings with Gaspard Giordano, it would be over for him. Plenty of the police were under Gaspard’s thumb and if the impression he’d ratted the man out was given, he would be killed. He knew how this sort of thing played out. One of the few times fiction accurately portrayed reality.

And now it was already Thursday night, and as promised, Stanford’s phone finally rang. On the other end could only be Bill Cipher for Stanford rarely received phone calls anymore on account of the reclusive lifestyle he’d adopted since his split from Fiddleford. Not that he’d been particular social before that; he’d always been a bit of loner, with his youth primarily spent in the company of his pet dog, Stanley. Those were content days for him but that was such a long time ago.

Who cared about the past, anyway?

Apparently Stanford Pines did.

On the third ring and after rushed attempts at mental preparation, Ford took the call. Even with preventive measures, his hand still shook as it grasped the receiver.

“Hiya Fordster. Did you miss me? Of course you did!” Bill’s voice is clear on the other end and ripe with enthusiasm. Discomfort immediately set in and Ford’s thoughts could only go back to their last encounter, which still left the sticky residue of anxiety all over him.

“Hello Bill. Let’s just get straight to business.” Ford said, very eager to be done with this and found himself surprised at how confident his voice came out.

“Whoa, not even a bit of foreplay? Suit yourself, pal. So gonna assume you want me to give you the dirty details on what I was paid to do?”

“You said you had to tell me something. I can only assume that is what you meant.”

“Alright alright. It’s after-hours, my tie’s off, I can get a little wild with it. Ask questions, and I’ll deliver answers to your heart’s content.”

“Why did Fiddleford hire you?”
“Ah, right to the main course. Okay then. Your little country boytoy is sick with fear about your safety and what have you. Wants to know you’re safe but can’t meet up with you and no talkie walkies. He’s gotta avoid sharing any kind of personal information with you.”

“Why?” Ford had an idea behind his past assistant’s actions but the more he had considered it, the more farfetched it seemed. All this appeared too elaborate.

“You know why.”

“If I knew why I wouldn’t be asking! If this is—I don’t know what he told you about why we separated but, but it’s been enough time. I doubt anything’s going to happen. Especially now of all times.”

“Riiight, by ‘now of all times’, you’ve confirmed my suspicions that for a smart guy, you aren’t very smart. I’m revoking that nickname—and it’s gone, the nickname is gone.”

Getting impatient, Ford sought to realign the conversation at hand. “Elaborate, enough cryptic ciphers.”

“HA! Good one! No really, I really liked that one. A little word play on my name there. So, you know about that little deal you and Fiddleford got offered by the big kahuna?”

“So, you know about that.”

“Yeah, of course! He had to tell me so I’d know what I was getting myself into. Anyway, looks like you don’t know but he’s dead.”

“…What?!” Ford is not sure whether he’s relieved and happy, or even more scared than before. Monsters killing monsters meant monsters remained, regardless of the outcome.

“Oh, so you really didn’t know? Yikes. Entire family—or, most of his family—dead. Some weird freak house fire accident. Don’t really know the details—wait, don’t think it was a house fire. It was a fire something. A few folks who’d been affiliated with him ended up going missing too. All on the hush hush you see, gang crime top news never really…makes the news. Money makes people shut up.”

“…so he thinks whoever was responsible is going to come after us? But we aren’t affiliated with him at all!”

“Yeah well, it’s not like they care. They just know you dealt with the guy and had something he wanted. Also, going into hiding entails years, Stanford. Not 3 months. You need years to fall off the radar and disappear. Years. It’s only a matter of time before they do find you. In fact, I bet they have and are probably waiting to grab Fiddleford first.”

“If we are truly in danger, why does Fiddleford not want to meet up? We’d be safer and stronger together—he should, he should contact me, he should’ve been the one to tell me this. He should’ve —”

“Not so fast there, wise guy. You two staying separate is crucial to your safety. If the big bad guy catches you and tortures Fiddledork’s information out of you, then what? And vice versa. Besides, you two being both potential targets, being together is a bad idea, take it from me.”

“So, what now? I’m meant to just sit here?! I’m a sitting duck at this rate.” Ford frowned, his mind sorting and filing through both the information he’d been given and what he already knew. If they knew where he was, what could he really do? What was the point of Bill being here? What was one
man to an organization of immoral men?

“Keep a low profile, just like you do now, and let me do my job, and all’s well, that ends well.” After Bill finished talking, a loud crunching sound broke Ford’s concentration; his nose scrunched up in response to the unexpected sound. “Are you eating chips?”

“Yeah.”

“I won’t tell you what to do but that’s rather rude.”

“It’s after-hours and I am under no obligation to be nice to you and you bet your ass I will take advantage of that. Anyway, something’s been on my mind and I wanna hear your side of the story. Why’d you say no? To the deal.”

Ford had already previously contemplated whether it was a good idea to tell Bill or not and concluded that if Fiddleford had entrusted this obscure man with the truth then Ford would, too. Even if the man was utterly despicable, the least he could do was show some respect for Fiddleford’s decisions. “We—I— wanted to say yes. And Fiddleford was against it. Eventually, we mutually decided to deny it. Science should not be at the exploitation and suffering of others.”

Bill laughed. “Everything is built of the ‘suffering and exploitation of others’, Ford, come on. How dense are you? Science the only thing you know anything about? Besides, scientists test on live subjects all the time. Helpless, defenceless animals, like come on, that moral bullshit you’re spewing is so lame. Not to mention tediously cliché. Why’d you really say no?”

Ford thought once more about it, and really, he’d said no because of Fiddleford. Sure, Ford thought himself a good man, but you had to make sacrifices in the name of science and he wasn’t one to be bound to a code of honour which existed only to stifle his growth and hinder his potential. He had been willing, more than willing, to wet his feet in the filth. Fiddleford, however, had not.

“I—I just, no you’re right. I claimed to have taken the moral high ground but I really…Fiddleford’s my assistant, I value his opinion. I said no out of respect for him.”

“That really worked out for you, huh? Whatever. I’m surprised you had trouble getting funding for your little projects. Aren’t you like a celebrity? With all these Ph.D.’s and the like.”

“Unorthodox projects are less likely able to gain and sustain funding regardless of the one behind them.” It had been a humiliating experience for him, the denial of his request for funding despite his tenacity. But he didn’t want to think about that right now.

“Aww, poor you. Hey, what was he like? The big guy.”

Ford thought for a second, and then assumed Bill was talking about Gaspard Giordano, the man in question who had offered the deal and was now dead.

“He was…polite, well-spoken, terrifying. Meeting him felt like…there was this whole world I knew nothing about. A world…some feared and avoided while others sought to gain entry. I could’ve gone my entire life never knowing anything about him and his organization. Is organization the right word? It was…it was just… something like out of a dream. You see it in movies, read it in books but when it happens to you, it’s just—just so surreal. I was so ignorant, so ignorant.”

So ignorant…

“Huh. Hey, some more Q and A. So, back then at the office, when I did the whole ‘alleged attempted rape’ thing, why didn’t you fight back?”
“You had a gun, Bill.”

“Well yeah, I had a gun but you could’ve pushed me off, made a run for it, called the cops and boom. Safety.”

“I don’t know. I was…afraid.” Ford had spent a lot of time reflecting on that…incident, while being torn between embarrassment and anger.

“So, no fight or flight for you huh? You just freeze up?”

“I had my reasons, Bill.”

“Time for me to hear them then, kid.”

Silence came between them for a few seconds, now only breathing being exchanged through the receivers. Finally, Ford speaks. “It’s such a little insignificant thing but seems to have imbedded itself within my mind. The tattoos—your tattoos. And, a few minor things, it just came together in my mind and I panicked.”

“My tattoos? Why did they freak you out?” Bill nearly sounds offended.

“Your tattoos…just reminded me a little of his—of Gaspard’s. “

“Oh I see.” A quick-passing silence intercepts the conversation. “What kind did he have?”

“I didn’t get a very clear look but they were intricate and covered his entire hand—even the palms, I think. I recall Fiddleford mentioning they were significant but I couldn’t for the life of me think why. Anyone can get tattoos.”

Shuffling caused by skittish movement could be heard on the other end and when Bill spoke, he sounded more excited than usual. “Time for a little lesson in history, kid. Some cultures, can’t name any off the top of my head, place lots of value on tattoos. They can hold lots of connotations and only certain few may be allowed to receive specific designs. Bringing this on back to the topic at the hand, in the Giordano family, those tattoos are pretty important. They mark one of the Giordano family, serving as an identity card, sort of. Like, you got your credit cards and shit, right? Well a Giordano would just show their tattoos instead. Like maybe a guy will go buy a shirt. He takes the shirt, flashes his hands, and they put it on the Giordano tab.”

“That sort of thing actually happens?” Ford was astonished that something like that actually occurred in reality. The very concept seemed like something you’d pull out of a crime novel.

“Yeah. They have their muddy claws in the roots of this place, Ford. You’ve been living under a rock.”

“But anyone can get tattoos. It’s a lous—”

“No, I told you. Those are special. Anyone caught imitating them gets punished, the 40 lashes kind. I’ve heard some sick stories but I can’t say what’s real. I just know no one’s stupid enough to try and steal a Giordano’s identity. Besides, there are not that many of them at a given time. Like, you’d have 2 sons, or a son and a daughter and whatever so the people will already have an idea of what to expect.”

“And yours, you haven’t gotten—you’ve never gotten in trouble for them? You know, with…with Gaspard?” Ford said.
“Maybe that’s why I wear gloves all the time. They really gotta learn they don’t have a patent on
designs. I’ve been in New York for the past 5 years, I get back and people freak out over my cool
new trendy finger tattoos.” An edge of annoyance coated Bill’s words, and it’s the first time he’s
revealed personal information about himself. New York…

“I’ll show you my tattoos up close sometime. But since you’re sooo scared of me—”

The strange accent Ford heard slip through occasionally was a New York one then? Did Bill have
family in New York? A likely possibility, he did say he left town the weekends. Perhaps he returned
home? Ford put his thoughts on hold and mentally returned to the conversation at hand.

“I think your company is not, well, it’s not half bad when you’re not attempting to assert your pseudo
dominance.”

“I guess I’m better when I’m not threatening you with a gun huh?”

“That’s hardly funny.”

“Wasn’t joking, Fordsy. And what happened to your ‘YOU TRIED TO RAPE ME’ spiel?”

“I’m not excusing your actions and frankly, I’d rather not be alone with you in the future.”

“I was going to stop. You must think highly of yourself if you think you can drive me to some
mindless lust. I don’t like men in their sixties. God, you’re pretty old, aren’t you?”

“Did you miss my earlier statement about your poor attempts at asserting your dominance? The
dominance part is important, don’t overlook it.”

“Poor huh? They seemed to be working. But get a load of you, in all your little bravado glory. It’s
only ‘cause I’m not there in person, right?” Bill’s voice took on a challenging tone, and once again,
Ford felt like he was being threatened.

“You know Stanford, if the bad guys do catch you, they’re going to do something similar what I did.
Gang life isn’t what most people think it is. It isn’t like what you see in your 80’s Italian mob movies.
I mean, sure, maybe in some places you’ll see that, but really, it’s a lot more…gritty, and with more
dicks. Lotta dicks.” Bill spoke with conviction that slowly faded into the ghost of reminiscence.

“I really just wanted to see how you tested under pressure. I’m telling you, Ford…wait, I got a story
for you. I knew a guy, let’s call him Ron, okay? So, Ron tells me he’s gotten an invitation to join this
gang. I’m not going to give you Ron’s life details but it’s a step up from his current life. So, Ron is
chipper, he’s happy, he accepts. So, he goes over to the meeting where they discuss his initiation.
And guess what initiation he gets? Gang bang. I’m not fucking kidding you. The guy died 2 weeks
later his internal organs so fucked, they couldn’t do anything for him. Looking back on it now, I
don’t think they intended to let him join at all. They just wanted to fuck some poor guy to death for
the hell of it.”

Whether Bill was attempting to justify and excuse his actions with this story, or whether he’s truly
concerned for Ford’s safety didn’t matter. The story, whether it was real or not, was vile. Partially
irrelevant, Ford thought. It seemed like a scare tactic. He had no intention of joining a gang, so why
the story?

“They fuck you, Ford. When you’re new, when you’re low rank, as punishment, as reward, just for
the hell of it. You’re a piece of meat until you get at the top. You’re just a dog who gets ordered
around and fucked.”
Ford understood why now, the implication clear—it’s a potential outcome for Fiddleford and himself. Never would he ever have thought he’d one day be faced with threats of sexual violence of this nature. Insane, it seemed so utterly insane.

“You speak as though you have experience.” Ford said quietly. The shift in Bill’s voice did not go unnoticed by him, but dare he strike the bee’s hive?

“Ha. I’ve had enough people close to me fall victim to them. Let’s just say my life hasn’t been all roses, ice-cream and Kumbayah’s around the camp fire.”

Ford rethinks what he knows about Bill Cipher.

Then Bill added, in a tone Ford might’ve considered as frightened. “These people make me sick.” The words appeared to hold such sincerity, that for a second, Bill appeared vulnerable to Ford.

“Maybe we’ll get lucky with the next accident and be finally done with that family.” Bill continued.

“Would it fall apart then? Without Gaspard, surely there should be struggling, and fighting over who gets to be the new leader?”

“Without Gaspard? Gaspard isn’t dead.”

“What? You just said—you’ve just been telling me he died!”

“Oooh boy. You really know nothing, do you? I’m gonna need a drink because I’m about to lay on you life lessons. I’m going to fetch me a drink, don’t go anywhere.”

A series of noises passed through Ford’s receiver and finally Bill returned. “Now, let’s start from the beginning. Okay no, just the important stuff—okay wait. Let’s start with Gaspard Giordano.”

“Are you drinking alcohol?”

“No. Who drinks pure alcohol, Ford?”

“Is there a percentage of alcohol in the beverage you are about to consume.”

“It may have some alcohol content, yes.”

Ford rolled his eyes and removed his glasses, the frames now feeling heavy on his nose bridge. “Just get on with the story.”

“Okay so if you do a background check on Gaspard Giordano, you’ll find it’s a man in his hundreds. Gaspard Giordano has been alive for generations—the name. See, when the boss position is inherited, the inheritee—is that a word? It is now—takes the name Gaspard Giordano, the identity, everything. Their original identity is then erased—scrapped—and then business resumes as usual. So, Gaspard Giordano is always the person in charge, but it’s not always the same person. Cousins, brothers, sisters, daughters, wives, a whole damn farm has passed through the name Gaspard Giordano. I really feel for the women who got stuck with that name. Really, they could’ve picked a more unisex name. Moral of the story: everything started with Gaspard Giordano, and it will end with him, too.”

“So, who inherited the position?”

“His son.”

“So…his son is the one who’s after us?”
“Probably.”

“Why didn’t you say this in the beginning? You made it sound as if you had no idea who was behind this.” Ford said, suddenly suspicious of Bill. “You withheld information from me.”

Bill was young, conveniently had hand tattoos, knew of Fiddleford and Ford’s deal and history with Gaspard Giordano—more and more, skepticism grew in Ford.

“I had to wait for the right time to reveal that juicy bit of information.”

“You’re treating this as more of a game. One would expect you to be upfront and straight-forward regarding matters that apparently affect your safety.”

“Apparently?” Bill asked, seemingly taken aback.

“I’d appreciate a more serious attitude from you in the future, regarding this.” Ford said, deciding not to voice his new found sudden distrust of Bill Cipher. He barely trusted the man before but now, more and more, the possibility of Bill being Gaspard’s son appeared highly plausible. Tattoos, friends in high places, a tendency towards violence and a sense of entitlement were good enough evidence. Not to mention the man was lying about his age, that was certain, and the fact he’d suddenly appeared after the supposed death of the ‘former’ Gaspard Giordano meant that Bill could be seeking to rectify a mistake his father had left behind.

Gaspard and Bill, however, looked absolutely nothing alike. Genetics weren’t necessarily ones to be trusted though, and Ford chose to let his suspicion rest but not die.

“I’ll give it a shot. So, in conclusion, we’re all in this together. I might get killed for having tattoos and you two might get killed because you once upon a time denied ‘Gaspard Giordano’ and he’s a fickle man who changes his feelings at a moment’s notice, if you catch my drift. We all lay low for a little while until we get a good look at what options we actually have.”

“Do you really think they’re after me?” Ford suddenly asked, wanting Bill’s opinion. The man couldn’t have such a devil-may-care attitude without reasoning—even he wasn’t that reckless and foolish.

“Nah. I think this drama is hilarious. Your buddy is damn paranoid. You’d be dead if they wanted you dead. Personally, I think you have nothing to worry about, but this is my job so I gotta ham this up as much as I can to ensure Fidd’s keeps paying me.” Bill’s honesty nearly elicited a smile from Ford, but he attributed it more to the reassurance of Bill’s words—be they true or not. This entire thing did seem messy, as though Bill could never get his story straight; him deceiving Fiddleford, to an extent, now made sense. Money.

“I’m surprised you answered that truthfully.”

“What makes you think I was being honest? Not every day you get to play a part in some conspiracy mafia cat and mouse. But really, play it safe anyway, Ford. Just like I am.”

Bill’s lack of professionalism stuck out; at 31, he should’ve been slightly more seasoned and less inclined to such immature antics. Another flag that Bill was lying; either about his age or his occupation.

“I’m going to bed now, Bill. Thank you for the call.” Ford hung up quickly before the other man could even manage a word of protest.

He had a lot of information to digest.
Bill frowned, dropping the receiver carelessly with the dial tone still blaring through it.

Well, that was *rude*.

Ford's little playing-hard-to-get act was fun though. Not to mention *exciting, risque, dangerous*—

And wow, when was the last time he showed someone his tattoos only for flat-out rejection to follow? Even if Ford didn't know...

He still liked the thought of having been denied. A little *edging* was nice on occasion.

It made the climax that much more intense.

Speaking of climax...Bill suddenly wonders what Ford's face would look like when he came. (he feels like he already knows?)
Breakfast at Casper's

Chapter Summary

Bill does not remember the last time anyone treated him like a child. Bill can barely remember being a child at all.

“The tragedy, Sixer, is right here.” Bill raised both his hands, the tattoos aching beneath the skin.

-some time in the future, date unknown.

Against better judgement, Stanford decided to meet with Bill again. The man mentioned he had important information to share, but only if they met in person. Ford wasn’t sure why he’d agreed—it sounded like nonsense. Was it loneliness, maybe? Bill was in contact with Fiddleford and right now, be it vicariously, Bill felt like the closet person to Ford. The fact Bill was basically conning Fiddleford out of money didn’t sit well with him, but it was not as if he could let Fiddleford know. He could only play along for now. Refusal would most likely cause Bill to say he ‘couldn’t get in touch with Ford anymore’, and his ex-assistant would then have a mental breakdown.

Then there was the possibility of Bill being Gaspard’s son, if that was the case then of course he’d try to lure Ford into a false sense of security. Taking Bill’s words at face value would be a mistake. He would play it safe regardless. Better safe than sorry.

What a nightmare…

He’d chosen a popular café, always busy around this time of day, ensuring the other man could not try anything. The public’s eyes made a good protective armour.

Bill arrived right on time, wearing another mustard yellow coat only slightly larger and open in the front. A white shirt and glimpses of a black waist coat could be seen beneath.

“Well well well well well!” he said, slipping into the booth. “You’re a sight for sore eyes, Stanford.”

“Hello Bill.” Ford said, not bothering to stifle the large sigh that escaped his lips; it let Bill know exactly how happy he was to see him.

Bill raised a hand to get a waiter’s attention, his other hand emptying his pockets onto the table: a cell phone and wallet. When the waiter came over, he ordered without looking at the menu, implying familiarity with the venue. His attention eventually returned to Ford and he regarded the man through heavy-lidded eyes.

“You were going to explain something to me.” Ford said, waiting for Bill’s promised explanation on why it was apparently okay for them to meet in public without arousing suspicion.

“Look at you, now look at me.” Bill said, his fingers gesticulating to Ford and himself respectively. “You look like my sugar daddy. If anyone’s been following you and saw me, my interactions with you clearly imply—”

“Sugar daddy?!” Ford interrupted. “Now hold on—”
“Just relax. This is all according to plan. Don’t get so uppity.” Bill patted his chest. “I have something from Fiddleford for you. I was meant to give it to you the last time we saw but I got a little carried away.”

Bill leaned slightly forward, towards Ford and in a low voice, said, “I’ll hand it to you later. I’ll create a nice little lovey-dovey scenario so it looks like I’m just fooling around with you.”

Ford huffed but sought not to bother arguing. What unnecessary theatrics.

“In the meantime…we can chat. My food isn’t even here yet.”

Ford didn’t say anything, but did not object either.

“How about Q and A? I ask you a question, you answer it. Or we both ask questions that we both have to answer.”

“What kind of questions? And what makes you think I’d be interested in hearing your answers?”

Ignoring Ford’s last comment, Bill went ahead. “I’ll start—what’s your favourite genre of book?”

With a roll of his eyes, Ford decided to succumb.

“Science fiction, non-fiction and fantasy.” Ford replied, tilting his head curiously at Bill. These sorts of questions definitely weren’t what he’d expected but figured there was no real harm in playing along. Bill was decisive and good at leading conversations. For an introvert like Stanford, it made all the difference when it came to enjoying a conversation. “You?”

“A little bit of everything. Favourite genre of movie?”

“Sci-fi, again. Fantasy and documentaries.”

“Not surprised. Personally, I can enjoy anything if it’s good.”

They continued for perhaps ten minutes before Bill’s food arrived, exchanging trivial information about one another. Among various other details, Ford learned Bill’s favourite colours were green and yellow, his favourite shape was a triangle, he’d grown up here and his favourite animal was a platypus—something about its chaotic and nonsensical appearance appealed to him.

What a peculiar boy.

“You should come over to my place sometime.” Bill took a bite of his pancake and swallowed it whole. Bill did not remove his gloves when he ate, despite the mess. “And sign all your papers I have.”

“My papers?” Ford asked, taken aback. Never mind the offer of going to Bill’s home. That was entirely out of the question.

“Yeah, been reading them. Really liked your one on alternate realities.” Another piece of pancake was devoured.

Ford was nearly speechless. One thing he had not expected was Bill to have read his papers—especially that paper, a paper than had been met with much scrutiny and negativity. The blow dealt to his reputation had not been enough to truly hinder him in any way, but having his integrity insulted in any way left lasting marks in his ego.

“That’s a surprise.” Ford said honestly.
“Yeah we have a lot in common. I wasn’t joking when I said I liked you, Ford. It’s just that it’s one-sided—I’ve seen all of you and you haven’t seen any of me. Frustrating, if you ask me.” Bill said. “Our Q and A might’ve helped but it’s not enough.”

Ford’s brows furrowed, unsure what to make of Bill’s words. Was Bill serious or joking? It was always hard to tell. Did he sincerely believe they could ever become romantically involved?

“That was what you wanted funding for, yeah?” The remainder of the pancake seemed to fight against being eaten, the golden syrup dripping everywhere and the pastry somehow crumbling into pieces before the man could get it into his mouth. “You wanted to try building a portal to an alternate reality.”

Ford did not reply immediately, then Bill took a sip of his orange juice and continued, “Is it really possible?”

“I’d like to try regardless.” Ford said finally, surprised at Bill’s accepting attitude.

“Your ideas entice me, Stanford. Even if they are pretty out there.” Bill said, getting to work on the next pancake. “I’ve been really into that kinda stuff lately—you know, philosophy, the meaning of life, yada yada. Hey, you know, I heard if you screw up your first impression, it’s easily fixed by spending time with the person.”

“Is that so?” Ford said, his hand curling around his cup of tea and choosing not encourage nor discourage Bill. Either Bill was much younger than Ford had anticipated, or he was naïve when dealing with people. Or was Ford the naïve one?

A small piece of paper and pen were shoved towards Ford. “Hey, write my name for me. Real quick.”

Looking down and confused, Ford asked. “For what reason?”

“Just do it, come on.”

Ford did as requested, but not without hesitation and suspicion.

Bill slid the paper from Ford to himself. “Huh. So that’s what your handwriting looks like. Cursive. I like it.” He took the pen, scribbled a few words onto the paper and handed it back to Ford.

It was Stanford written thrice. The first was a messy scrawl, while the second was neat and clean cursive. The last was would be best described as ‘normal’, nothing particularly stood out about it making it incredibly forgettable.

“One for business, one for pleasure and one for miscellaneous.” Once Ford had gotten a good look, Bill snatched the paper up, putting it into a pocket.

“So, kids make fun of you? With your six fingers.” Bill asked, changing the subject while eyeing Ford’s fingers. The man seemed oddly fascinated with Ford’s deformity, it caught his eye whenever Ford’s hands were visible to him.

“Yes. You know kids will be kids.”

“I can relate.”

“What did you do? In New York, I mean. You said you were there for several years.”
Bill’s face suddenly brightened, excited at Ford showing interest in him. “Worked lots of odd jobs. Eventually decided to become a PI, got qualified and then moved here.”

“It’s been lonely, leaving New York behind.” Bill added. “I had to move back though.”

“Why? If you don’t mind me asking.”

“My mother wanted to see me one last time.”

“Oh.” Ford said solemnly. “I’m sorry…”

“Don’t be. It’s not like you killed her.” Bill sipped his orange juice again, discomfort visible in the slouch of his shoulders. Was Bill implying his mother had been murdered, or did she simply die? Ford didn’t want to pry, knowing it’d look insensitive.

“I killed her.” Bill said unexpectedly. Something shone in Bill’s eyes, as though he sought a reaction from Ford. Once Ford tilted his head in concern, he continued. “I left home, against her wishes. She became depressed and when I returned, well…her health had deteriorated. If I hadn’t left—hey, bet she’d be alive!”

Losing a parent was difficult, and in certain cases, the children of the departed felt like they had indirectly played a part in causing the death of said parent. Ford wondered if this was the case with Bill, and despite his happy-go-lucky facade, the man secretly harboured undeserved guilt. It could explain the man’s irrational, bordering on self-destructive behaviour.

Curiosity got the better of Ford and he went ahead. “Do you feel responsible for your mother’s death, Bill? You shouldn’t. It wasn’t—”

Like a light source vanishing, Bill shut down Ford. “Shut the fuck up, Ford.” His eyes narrowed just barely, before widening again. “Look at me, telling you personal details about myself. Nothing like building an emotional bond, huh?”

Unsure of what to say, Ford sipped his tea. Comforting people had never been his forte and more often than not, he put his foot in his mouth—just as he had done now.

“So how about we play a few more minutes of Q and A, and when we’re done, you head to the bathroom and I’ll give you something nice.” Bill said, his voice taking on a playful inflection.

Ford reluctantly agreed, assuming Bill referred to the item from Fiddleford.

Bill continued. “But it’ll be the Not Safe For Work Version. As in, I’m going to pry into your personal life, and ask you about all the sinful things you’ve done, old man.”

“Good luck with that, Bill.” Ford replied dryly, sipping his tea.

“So, do you drink? I’ve never seen you indulge in festivity.”

“No, I don’t.” Ford said, confirming Bill’s theory. Once again, not expecting this type of question.

“Why not? You’re really boring, huh?” Bill said smiling. Something in his face had changed, ever so slightly, as if Ford’s answer caught him off-guard—or disarmed him. One of the two, whatever it was, it wasn’t so subtle that Ford could not see it.

Or rather, Ford was perceptive enough to catch it.

“I’m not interested.”
“You only live once, Stanford. You should let loose—you don’t have that many days left, do you? It’s okay to get a little weird with it. I, myself, love me some fancy beverages that’ll fuck up my liver. So, when did you lose your virginity? Was it a guy or a girl? Which came first?”

And there it was. Ford knew this sort of talk was coming. To play along or just ignore the man? He doubted Bill would get too angry if he declined but at the same time, Bill was a stranger and their time together was limited. What did it matter what you said to a stranger? Maybe he would live just a little…

“At college. That’s a lot of questions at once…let me think. A woman was my first. I’ve only been once with a man, in my late thirties.” Ford was half lying; he’d been with a man, but they’d done everything except penetrative sex. Revealing that differentiation to Bill seemed unwise.

“Ooh pretty late huh? Lost mine early. Before I even hit 18. But really, whoa—you’ve only been once with a guy? And women? Or did you try it once and then think ‘nah not for me’?” Bill’s answer wasn’t surprising. To Ford, he appeared quite clearly on the promiscuous side; although the assumption of losing one's virginity implying promiscuity was not entirely true. Ford had to remind himself.

“I’ve always been more focused on my studies. I’m not one for socialising, it’s hard to meet people—of either sex.”

Bill half-pouted, half frowned—the display comedic. “You don’t get those natural urges?”

“Sex is like dessert, Bill. I don’t always need it but when I do have it, I’d prefer it to be at the end of a decent meal.”

“Nice metaphor, slick. Would you consider this a decent meal?”

“You know Bill, you remind me, oddly enough, of a certain type of student I’ve encountered in my years as a lecturer. The ones who flirt without restraint, to seduce and tempt me in hopes of securing a good grade. Your methods are very alike to them. I thought I’d let you know.”

Bill gave a short chuckle. “If you wanna play teacher/student, I’m very down for it, Ford.”

“I’m implying—” Ford stopped and resumed. “How old are you? Really?”

“You know how old I am.”

“Are you really 31?”

Bill gave a shrug. “Man, I can’t make you believe. Out of curiosity though, why don’t you like dating younger people? Isn’t it every old man’s dream to have a hot young piece of ass?”

“I shouldn’t have to raise my partner.” Ford said, bluntly.

“Ah. I get you, I get you. That’s a good answer, Ford. Real mature. Youngest you’d go?”

“50, give or take.”

“Aw come on! That’s selling yourself short. You’d could go as low as 40, even 30.” He gave a sly smile, nodding mischievously as though he’d told Ford a juicy secret.

“No, Bill.”

“You say my name a lot. It’s nice to imagine how you’d say it under less modest circumstances.
You’re practically a virgin—one guy huh? Only one…if I got rid of him and fucked you, think I could claim I took your virginity?”

Ford was beginning to feel uncomfortable.

Having had enough, Ford stood up and left for the bathroom. He knew Bill would follow soon, and sought to make the best of his alone time. Giving his hands and mouth a quick wash, he went on to fix his jacket and shirt, ensuring no food bits had gotten stuck.

The door opened and in came Bill. “I put the ‘out of order’ sign on the door. No one will come in now.”

“They might come in to check what’s wrong.”

“Nah. If anyone comes in, I’ll kill them.” The nonchalance in Bill’s tone made Ford wonder if the man had brought his gun with him today.

“So…” Bill settled himself against the wall next to the sink Ford occupied, with the intent to watch as Ford, out of spout of nerves, rinsed his hands again. The attentiveness to something so small reminded Ford to a cat.

“Something about you…makes me irrationally angry.” The running water was cut by Bill’s gloved fingers. Crumbs of pastry and hints of syrup went down with the water along with Ford’s sense of security. They’d gotten along fine, and Bill seemed intent on ruining it.

“But I haven’t decided what it could be. The discount senior citizens get on parking, perhaps? I just don’t know, Ford.” The tone used by Bill spoke appeared condescending, but beneath lay a sense of worry.

Still movement between the two broke by Bill placing a hand over Ford’s own that lay at the sink’s side. The older man immediately retracted his hand and Bill responded with, “You shouldn’t have done that.”

“Back to threatening me again?”

“I wasn’t threatening you. I just don’t think you should’ve done that, is all.” Pensive silence passed while Bill seemed to study Ford’s face, eyes slowly wandering from feature to feature.

“What the fuck am I doing? I’ve really lost my touch, haven’t I?”

Sneaking glances at Bill via his peripheral vision, he assumed the other man is referring to his failed attempts at alleged seduction.

“You know, don’t you?”

Ford now assumed Bill was referring to his true age. “It’s not very hard to tell, Bill.”

“What gave it away? Our phone conversation?”

“And today. You can claim to be older all you want, but your youth is very much brazen.”

Bill replied with a defiant and ambiguous guttural noise.

“When I’m with you, alone, everything is different.” Bill’s hands sunk into his pockets, his back supported by the wall. “Like I’m in a T.V show, something make-believe. It isn’t real.” He suddenly grabbed Ford by the arm with both hands. “But you are real, and this is real.”
His hand reached for Ford’s face, hesitating in mid-air briefly. “You’re old enough to be my—” Bill paused. “—Yet nothing. There’s nothing.” His attention moved to Ford’s hands, at those six fingers. “You’re a freak, just like me. Born a freak and you can never escape it.” Bill murmured, talking to himself more than Ford. The older man was unsure how to respond, choosing silence as the best option.

A hand found Ford’s pants and Ford felt something slipped into his pocket. Bill’s mannerisms when doing so could easily, from afar, resemble excessive flirtation. It was a smart move, Ford thought, but still incredibly uncomfortable.

“Burn it when you’re done.” He whispered in Ford’s ear, giving it a nimble lick. Ford had to fight himself not to push Bill off. This was all theatrical, he reminded himself, it had a purpose—but God, Bill took everything too far.

A few pats on Ford’s shoulders and Bill turned to leave. But then, abruptly, he spun around and made a grab for Ford’s jacket at the collar, and next thing Ford knows, he’s against the wall. It was happening again; something had snapped in Bill, and now he was acting like that again.

“Come on, Ford. Say yes—right here, right now. No one will come in. I promise.” A coercing hand pawed at his crotch, cupping it imprecisely.

“No.” After enough observation and introspection, Ford was beginning to theorize Bill’s motives, and the impetus that caused the boy to act so strangely. He was a boy, no doubts in Ford’s mine about it anymore, and Ford now made the conscious decision to treat Bill as he would a child. It was worth a shot.

“When we’re fucking, you’ll ask yourself why you said no. You don’t know what you’ve been missing. I’ll let you do anything, Ford. Do you even know what that means, you senile fuck? Can you even get what I’m offering you?”

Ford said nothing, his face void of expression.

“Ford. Ford. Ford. Don’t make me hurt you. Come on, give it to me.”

“What exactly do you want me to give to you, Bill?” Ford asked monotonously.

“Oooh, dirty talk? Is that what you like?”

“No, I’m asking you. What exactly do you want from me?”

The question somehow subdued Bill shortly, disarray surfacing within his eyes. The window of opportunity was brief, and Ford took it. He grabbed the hand at his crotch firmly and guided the hand steadily away, careful not to push Bill back. “Bill. I’m not interested.”

Grabbing Bill’s shoulders, he said “And I’m sorry about your mother.”

“W—what? What the fuck are you saying?”

“It’s going to be okay, Bill.” A hand made successful contact with Bill’s cheek, lowering and settling in the nook between neck and jaw but Bill quickly shied away from it as though it burned.

“If you need to take your mind off it, there are other things we can do together, if you like. But this is not something I’m ever going to be interested in with you. Do you understand?”

“Oh my god. Are you—are you doing this to kill the mood? Because it worked. It fucking worked. Real clever, Ford! Real fucking clever.”
“You don’t have to punish yourself by sleeping wi—"

“Oh guy, I’m stopping you there. Not punishing myself, just horny. Big difference.”

“You’re treating me like a fucking kid.” Bill starts laughing, and it’s a wider laugh than Ford’s ever seen before. “I can’t believe you, Ford.” He stepped back, shaking his head but still beaming. “You patronizing son of a bitch.”

“How old are you, Bill?”

Bill shook his head once more, his dimpled smile showing no signs of retreating. “Fuck you. Twenty two.”

“I thought so. What’s your degree in? You’re young for a PI.”

“Criminal Law. Gifted child, you know.”

“Your lack of professionalism makes perfect sense now.” Being a gifted child came with its pros and cons—Ford was very familiar with them.

The sudden change in Bill’s demeanour, voice, face—it’s as though the Bill that Ford is talking to now is an entirely different Bill than from just a few moments ago. Perplexing.

“You know, I have a nephew around the same age as you. Come on, let’s go back to the table.”

Bill gave an amused ‘hmph’, still visually baffled at Ford’s unorthodox approach. “My age huh? You should hook me up.”

Ford gave a flighty laugh, and noticed Bill had taken to rubbing the area by his neck that Ford had touched. The boy didn’t appear aware he was doing it so blatantly and Ford said nothing of it.

Once they were both seated, Bill asked, “Do you like chess, Stanford?”

He said yes, and promised to play against Bill. (strip chess was out of the question though)

Sure, Bill missed his mother. Or rather, what his mother had done for him. As if he could separate a person and their usefulness—a person was what they offered to him, no more and no less.

Maybe deep down, he did miss and love his mother.

Maybe.

But for now, this was the perfect angle to play.
“It’s going to be okay…it’s going to be okay….” Ford whispers, fingers trailing alongside the boy’s cheek with cautious touches at the intersection of the boy’s browbone and cheekbone—where an eye should be but no longer is. “How about a new name? How about…William? Do you like that name?” The boy doesn’t respond, eyes still cast downward. “It’s my favourite constellation.”


- Stanford Pines and Bill Cipher, sometime in the future, date unknown.

Hands are in his hair, a dick gliding in and out of his mouth, slowly, gently. He sucks with love and care, and an insatiable eagerness to please. There’s purring in his throat, the vibration just barely audible. The man’s moaning; it’s a deep, smooth voice—a parental(fatherly?) voice, a strong voice. He knows he’s safe if he hears the voice.

He can feel his friends watching as he gets mouth fucked. (can hear them talking about how he’s had it coming, how good he looks getting is face fucked, how they’d love to join in)

“You want me to fuck you in front of your friends, don’t you?”

He says yes, please. please I want them to watch you hurt me.

“Are you sure you’re okay with that, Casper?”

Casper…?

“Gaspard?”

Dad?

“No, I’m talking to you.”

It’s the middle of the night, and he’s emptying his stomach, with his dick rock hard and Ford’s voice still in his head.
Nightmare Fratboy Brutalizes Teen

Chapter Summary

Bill looks at nudie photos and Teeth can’t believe it. 8baller nearly swallows a King Cobra, gets buried alive at the Jersey Shore. Xanthar gets declared Juliet while Paci-fire declares heterosexuality a myth. Contrary to popular belief, Pyronica is not part of the duo The Veronicas.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: violence and language.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Against better judgement, he sticks his head into the portal up to the neck. Seconds that feel like a trillion years pass by; Ford pulls him back out and is greeted by a very surprised and a very awake Bill Cipher.

-Bill Cipher wakes up.

When it begins to discharge black grime, medical attention is recommended. Bill, however, will disinfect the wound himself—with drinking alcohol no less—and stitch it up. He's no seamstress, but this will do. It will do just fine, in fact. Just fine.

Because it doesn’t hurt. The black discharge is simply

a messy inconvenience.

It does not hurt, it does not hurt because no one can hurt Bill Cipher.

(he doesn’t feel much of anything, really. Not much of anything at all.)

“Nearly forgot to ask. So, how’d it go?”

“I nearly fucked him.”

“Sheesh, still got trouble controlling that temper of yours?” The boy called Teeth’s face distorts, his mouth curling lopsidedly and his eyes doe-wide, conveying the cringe heard in his voice with precision. A dramatic shrug passes and he moves his bishop 2 spaces forward, strategy clearly not a strength of his.

The older man, Bill Cipher, rolls his eyes as his knight takes the boy’s bishop. “A couple of outbursts and you all label me a deranged lunatic who whips his dick out at a moment’s notice.”

“But you do that! You literally do that!”
“You’re using the word literally wrong.”

“You can’t get Bill’s dick out of your head for five minutes.”

Another voice, belonging to a woman, Pyronica, intervened. She continued paging through a magazine, her attention wavering according to article length.

“Back off, Veronica.” Teeth lipped.

“Lookin’ to start something, Teeth?” Pyronica’s voice lowered. She hated being addressed by her real name. Only a few letters different, sure, but those letters were an important nuance.

“Bill, Pyronica is mad because I mentioned your dick and you haven’t given it to her since like, 1967 —”

“I will come over there and put my $600 Italian heels deep into your intestine.”

“Bill, Pyronica is mad because I mentioned your dick and you haven’t given it to her since like, 1967 —”

“I will come over there and put my $600 Italian heels deep into your intestine.”

“No one had an outbreak. You normally see it here—” Bill spoke up, his fingers traced the shape of a beard on his face. “All around the mouth area.”
“Speaking from experience, Bill?” Pyronica joked.

“Fuck off. Remind me why I brought you here again? Did I bring you here to talk shit to me?” The unexpected sharpness in Bill’s voice cut through the cultivated playfulness of the atmosphere, and it fell apart instantly.

Bill lit up another cigarette, further contributing to the already strong smell of alcohol and tobacco prominent within the room; most of it generated alone by Bill’s excessive drinking and smoking. He’d drunk far more than the others, having started before they’d even arrived. Having taken a big liking to alcohol recently, he began drinking more and more—at whatever hours he pleased and as much as he pleased. Restraint was still a language Bill spoke but his fluency was nowhere near what it used to be.

Silence visited the room until Bill was a few moves away from check-mating Teeth.

“So, you never really told us that much about him—the nerdy guy. His name, couple of details that you met up with him—got any photos, Bill?” Pyronica asked, now losing interest in her phone.

“Yes.” Bill replied, his next move putting Teeth in check. The boy frowned before attempting to move a piece only for Bill to stop him.

“I put you in check, kid. You have to get your King out of check.”

“No, that move doesn’t get your King out of check. Your next move must, I repeat Teeth, must get your King out of check.”

Teeth made a whining noise while shrugging his shoulders in defeat. “I don’t wanna play anymore, Bill.”

“Suit yourself.” Bill said, unaffected. He went over to his small yet extravagant desk, pulled out a photo and handed it to Pyronica, “The man himself.” The photo was one of Stanford Pines naked, having come out the shower.

“So, this is the Stanford Pines huh? He’s actually kinda cute.” Pyronica said, grabbing the photo and moving it closer to her face for a better look. She didn’t bother asking why Bill had this particular photo on hand because it’s a photo she’d keep on hand too, if she could.

“Nice body too, and really packing in the dick department. Oh, those arms…Bill, please tell me you got those arms all up and around you.”

“What? Let me see that. Looking at nudie photos, Bill…I can’t believe you…” Teeth snatched it from her and after a quick inspection, a look of disgust formed on his round face. “Those are glamour muscles! This guy isn’t in shape at all! He’s barely fit!”

Bill regarded Teeth with half-lidded eyes, as though he knew something the boy did not, and lit up another cigarette. It was his third one in a row, but this particular brand, an expensive one, hit all the right spots his nicotine addiction liked.

“Should you really be passing judgement, fat ass? Glamour muscles eh? Where did you even hear that shit?” Pyronica spat.

“Body building forums. See? Look? Totally superficial. I bet he just does it so he doesn’t fall under ‘skinny nerd’ trope. And and and his chin looks like a baby butt, how is that even attractive?” An exaggerated huff made Teeth’s shoulders slump, giving him a downgrade in height he sorely did not
need. His exaggerated reaction appeared to go unnoticed by the audience it was intended for—Bill, who was absentmindedly staring at the chess board lost in thought. The lack of attention pricked at Teeth.

Stanford Pines. Just looking at the photo reminded him how low on the scale he fell, when compared to Bill himself, and men like Stanford Pines.

“Flaws can be endearing, loser. Maybe you should get out more.”

“That’s something only an ugly person would say, Veronica. Only ugly people talk like that.”

“Are you calling me ugly? We’ll see who’s ugly when I blow half your pigface off, you little dick!” Teeth was hoisted up of the floor by the nape of his shirt and shook violently. Veronica was strong, arguably the second physically strongest next to Xanthar, but due to the latter’s more passive nature, she was considered by most to be the main muscle of the group. Any and every chance she had consisted of her flaunting it.

“Bill Bill Bill Bill! She’s doing it again! Veronica’s threatening me! Bill Bill Bill!!!”

“You’ve been getting really god damn mouthy lately and Bill over here hasn’t done SHIT about it. I’m fed up with your bullshit, you little brat. Bill only tolerates you because you give tremendous head.” Pyronica stuck her tongue out lewdly and flicked it up and down for demonstration. “Like a fucking dog licking an ice-cream cone. Right, Bill?”

“Drop it, both of you. You’re both nightmares to look at.” Bill said, smoke emitting from his mouth and messily punctuating each word. “And stop talking about my dick. Speak of the devil and he shall appear—you ever hear that saying, Pyronica?” A certain look was all it took for Pyronica to get the message.

Teeth fell to the floor, a long way down considering how tall Pyronica was— standing at 6’4” and even taller in her heels. “No need to get mad, Bill.”

The fallen boy scrambled to his feet, muttering about bullying and jealously; Stanford Pine’s photo had fallen too, and Teeth’s chubby fingers made a reach for it, giving it one last look.

“And Teeth.” Bill pulled the boy’s eyes towards him. “He does his little sit-ups and push-ups at home. He’s not the gym type. But you should’ve known that, surely? If you’ve been browsing... those body building forums.” Whatever was present in Bill’s voice, Teeth could not comprehend it.

“Is that like code for gay porn?” 8baller asked and both men snickered. Bill’s eyes pried the phone glued to the other’s hand, not having seen the man put it down once the entire night.

“8baller, who are you talking to you on your damn phone of yours? You better not be ratting me out.”

“Nah.” Turning the bright screen to face Bill, he elaborated. “Kryptos is mad we left him back home, and Keyhole got arrested. He’s not paying the bail, and you aren’t there to do your voodoo dodo.”

“Huh. I should do something about that, shouldn’t I?” The smirk said he probably wouldn’t be doing anything about it at all.

“Hey Bill, so, was this guy all that in person? The pathetic muscle stuff is sad but he’s...he’s cute. I mean, I guess? I guess he’s cute...” Teeth butted in as he reconsidered the photograph.
“He was okay.” Bill said apathetically.

“Huh? Really? But I thought you was all down for this guy?”

“Yeah, I guess. Getting second thoughts.” Bill drawled, laying back and slipping an arm behind his head. “He’s the commitment type. Put a ring on my finger, call me dear and hold my hand while we fuck type.”

“It’s probably ’cause he’s old as shit. Old people got them old ass values.” 8baller added.


Running a hand nervously through his short chestnut hair, Teeth said. “Eehh, well with the con you’re pulling with him, he’s kinda off limits.”

A loud ‘hmmm’ came from Bill, and he stood up. “But what if I could let it be a once off with, with no repercussions?”

“Oooh, let’s hear it. I gotta hear it.” 8baller jittered.

“Xanthar, Paci-fire, 8baller, you guys up for banging a guy in his sixties, ready to die from overexertion at any moment?”

“Maybe.”

“Sure.”

“Nah. Wait—are you guys all doing it? Then yeah, I’m down.” Came the responses, respectively.

“Once he joins us, and he’s gonna, we can just say we initiate new members with a gangbang. Then all you thirst fucks can satisfy yourself and Ford’s gotta comply.”

“How do you know he’s gonna join? What about his pal you mentioned? Didn’t you say he’s all noble and shit to impress the country guy?” Teeth asked, secretly hoping they could all talk Bill out of this. His boss’s unhinged love for violence was becoming too much even for them. They knew they had to curb this as soon as possible. Bill was known to be rather scummy in New York, but now he seemed to flourish at mere thoughts of violence.

Bill closed his eyes and stuck his tongue out, imitating a caricaturized corpse.

“He’s dead?!”

Nodding, Bill said. “He’s been dead awhile. Managed to imitate his handwriting, which is all I need for now. Coupled with the bullshit story I got going, I’m safe.”

“Whoa, if he finds out, Bill. He’s—he’s not gonna be happy.”

“When I’m done with him, he won’t give a shit about some gross hillbilly.”

“Man, just lock his ass up and beat him when he doesn’t obey. Going through all this shit is pointless.” Paci-fire intercepted, scowling. “We don’t need another member. You want this guy to make drugs. Take’em, dangle his family over a pit of piranhas and BAM. You got you a guy more than willing to comply. This thing you pulling, Bill, it ain’t worth it.”

“I want what I want, Paci-fire.” Bill said.
“Yeah well, keep fronting you’re in touch with this country fella of his and you’re gonna trip over your own feet. This cat and mouse ain’t cat and mouse. All else fails, you take him captive, fuck and beat him—and whatever else to get you jollies off—and make’em do the production.”

Bill responded with a thoughtful head tilt. He had thought of that already but it seemed a little too boring for his tastes.

“Okay but—why are you talking like that, Paci-fire?” Teeth looked at Pyronica, expecting her to explain the recent change in Paci-fire’s speech. “What’s going on with your baby boy?”

“He’s trying to give the impression he’s some hard gangster from New York. He’s been marathoning all kinds of retro bullshit.”

Teeth pulled an unimpressed face. “Dude, you drink alcohol out of a baby bottle. There’s nothing hard enough in the world that could balance that out.”

“Fuck all y’all.”

“And you come from an upper-class family, don’t you? Who you trying to impress?!!”

Paci-fire scowled at the remark and ignored Teeth. The boy turned his focus back to Bill. “Hey Bill—about your gangbang deal. I don’t know, man. That sounds really shitty. I don’t think you should be doing that to an old man.”

“If I joined and you guys gangbanged me and I found out later you guys did it just cause you wanted a piece of this action.” Teeth gesticulated with a little dance, rolling his shoulders. ”I ain’t sure how I’d feel. But I know I’d feel pretty damn weird about it.”

“NOBODY WANTS A PIECE OF YOU, YOU FAT ASS!” Paci-fire’s revenge, but Teeth just snorted. Fat jokes were for the weak. Then, Bill is invading his space—

Bill towered over him, eyes still lidded as they always seemed to be lately. “You’d feel weird, hm? What kind of weird?” Smoke was blown in Teeth’s face following the question, and the boy coughed miserably. “The kind of weird where you can’t get me out of your head and suddenly you’re 15 again, popping random boners in your crush’s presence?”

“Aww don’t tease him, Bill.”

“Fuck off, Pyronica. He isn’t a child anymore. So, you gonna elaborate there, Teeth?” Teeth shifted his weight between his feet as Bill’s nails dug possessively into his side, clutching as though he sought to ensure Teeth would not go anywhere. Teeth’s cheeks reddened, and damn why did Bill have to do this—in front of everyone.

“It hurts my feelings, knowing you like Stanford.” Bill’s voice lowered and there’s salacious, threatening touches dragging across his Teeth’s inner thigh, his blood responding by turning cold. He’s scared but—he’s also excited. His sexual history with Bill ensured the line between sex and violence had smudged, and he instinctively found his body responding inappropriately to even the tiniest bit of rough-housing.

It wasn’t unusual for Bill to beat him and fuck him; somehow, he’d learnt to accept it as the inevitable. At least he no longer spent his nights crying in bed when Bill was done with him.

At least.

Bill closed the space between the boy and himself, their lips barely an inch away. Teeth
subconsciously braced himself for a kiss (or a slap), fighting not to close his eyes.

“It’s not—not—”

“I’m your one and only, aren’t I?”

Teeth nodded meekly.

“Then say it. Let’s all hear it.”

Scattered laughter surfaced.

“You’re—you’re my one and only—” Teeth choked out, every word burning his throat.

“Really? I’m still not convinced, Jeremy. Will I have to assign someone to check between your legs every half hour? Make sure you aren’t taking it behind my back?” The hand at his inner thigh cupped roughly and painfully between his legs, causing him to flinch.

“Wah—no, no way! Come on, Bill, you know I don’t do any—”

“As if.” Bill turned around and began laughing—an infectious, cruel laugh that enthralled the entire room, throwing everyone save for Teeth and Xanthar into hysterics. “Fuck that. That’s too much work.”

But then he turned around again, pushing Teeth once again against the edge of the table, hard, and with the clear intention to frighten. Bill took the boy’s chin between two fingers and mused loudly. “But you know what isn’t a lot of work? Fucking you, right now. What do you say, boys? You wanna watch me discipline Teeth here?”

“Depends.” 8baller was the first speak, not missing a beat. He shifted from his comfortable position in a fancy arm-chair, phone still out. “Can I film it and upload it?”

Intrigued for all the wrong reasons, Bill asked. “To where?”

“Lee’s site. You know the one, yeah? You upload content and if you get enough views, they pay you out.”

“Lee got arrested.” Paci-fire revealed, waving a hand to ensure he got 8baller’s attention. “Busted for human trafficking. He’ll be spending all his golden years behind bars.”

Teeth had begun undoing Bill’s belt and pants now, hoping his lack of reluctance and eager submission would inspire a spark of kindness in Bill. Dread fettered itself to his fingers, and the simplest movements felt too heavy.

“Huh. Then nah, I don’t wanna watch. Two dudes banging is not my thing.”

“Anyone wanna point out the hypocrisy in that? Anyone at all?”

“What the hell you tryna say, Paci-fire?”

“‘Oh I’m 8baller, I don’t watch dudes banging but I bang dudes.’”

“I’m straight.”

“Yeah whatever”. Saying ‘no homo’ don’t make the dick any less of a dick.”
Bill chuckled, restraining Teeth’s sudden very enthusiastic, very grabby hands. Another spat was going to happen and he had his money on 8baller winning this one.

“Can you even call your micro-dick a dick?”

The two began going back and forth with another, neither giving memorable insults and Bill’s already bored. Sensing trembling from the boy in front of him and nearly forgetting what the he’d been doing, Bill leaned down close to poor Teeth, who’d already gotten on his knees. “I was joking, Teeth.”

The kid gave an uneasy laugh and began redoing the buttons and belt on Bill’s pants. Once done, Bill stayed crouching with a fistful of Teeth’s hair. “Look at you. All excited to be put in your place. Maybe later. When we’re alone. You’re a good boy, aren’t you?” He leaned in, let his lips linger at the boy’s own for just the right amount of time before standing up again. He grabbed a half-filled glass and seated himself at his usual chair.

8baller and Paci-fire were no longer arguing, neither one had any visible bruises or blood. Boring.

Deciding to resume an earlier topic, Bill stood up. “Get this—Stanford will join us, guaranteed. And we’ll bring drug production local. No more importing, boys. Exporting is where it’s at. We’ll be getting all the big guys under our thumb. We’ll build this empire up and then burn the whole fucking thing down!” They cheered in union; cheered for future accumulated wealth, cheered for retiring to a life in the Bahamas after this, and cheered because why the fuck not?

Flopping back into his seat, Teeth once again had Bill’s attention.

“But you know…if we did let Stanford in…” Bill’s eyes directed towards Teeth. “The hierarchy changes, doesn’t it? Little Teeth here won’t be at the bottom anymore. Stanford’ll take your place.”

Bill’s voice turned sleek, it’s pace slowing. His eyes held Teeth’s own, the boy looking down with docility. “Are you…okay with that, Teeth?”

He took a deep drag and blew smoke in Teeth’s direction. “I’ll force Stanford to share my bed instead of you. Doesn’t that just hurt your little heart?”

Yet, despite the boy’s earlier words, his first thought was—could this opportunity be the remedy he’d subconsciously cried for since meeting Bill? Of course, Bill’s favour was important. It protected him from other things the man liked to do. But…is this why his heart jumped at seeing Stanford Pines? Was it really a gut reaction at the plausibility of the older man being the one to replace him? Was being replaced exactly what he’d wanted…despite implying otherwise?

How did he really feel about Bill? Even if this wasn’t the time to have such thoughts…

Before things could get too heated, Bill snickered loudly. “I’m just fucking around. We’re all pals here, right?” But once upon a time, he had stuck with those rules. Teeth was the last to fall victim to Bill’s own personal brand of scurrility. Some were lucky enough to avoid being Bill’s pet for prolonged periods of time on account of a new member joining shortly after them, shifting Bill’s focus on ‘training’ the new guy (he arrogantly referred to it as ‘putting the fear of God into you’) There was very little resistance; it was fairly common amongst close knit gangs, and even more so among bigger gangs.

Bill’s eyes lingered up and down Teeth, mischief coating his next words.

“So” Bill redirected his attention to 8baller. “What would you have titled the video, 8baller? I wanna hear this.”
“Nightmare fratboy brutalizes teen.” His response caused Teeth’s eye to bulge, the others sniggering.

“Funny. You think you’re real funny huh?” Bill grinned, his tongue partially out, and resting between his teeth.

“Hey, if you switched places I could title it ‘meek subordinate gives his boss what’s coming to him.’”

The sudden drop in Bill’s face was enough of a forewarning for what was about to happen.

Turning his back to Teeth, “Is that what you’d like to see?” dripped out, like a wounded snake’s venom. A provocative step was taken towards 8baller and the latter is sure he’d heard Hell freeze over. “Is it? Answer me, Jason. Is that what you wanna fucking see?” Warm light from the chandelier began bouncing off a sudden reflective surface in Bill’s hand—a knife.

The point stiffly aimed at 8baller.

Frightening silence enveloped the room.

“Bill, it was a joke—”

“Oh really? A joke? A joke, was it? Oh, well sorry.” The knife departed, and out came Bill’s gun, a revolver—King Cobra .357. Considerably rare today, outdated to an extent but Bill liked the name. He aimed it at 8baller. “I didn’t hear the joke properly. Maybe repeat it? Come on, Jason. I’m a little slow, today.”

The hammer clicked back.

“Now, what did you say? I want to hear you say it, flat out. You were tryna to tell me something, Jason, weren’t you? Say it.” The short barrel crudely pushed against 8baller’s face, giving the man little options. “No more jokes, say what you just said in plain old English.”

8baller tried steadying his breathing.

“You want to see me get fucked. Say it. Say ‘I want to see you get fucked, Bill. That’s what you’re telling me, right? Then say it. Say it. If you don’t say it, I’ll put one through your skull. Say it.”

No options, no other options, “I want to see you get fucked, Bill.”

“Oh look! He fucking admits it! You wanna see me get fucked, is that it? That’s what you’re telling your dear old Boss? You gotta a lot of fucking nerve to disrespect me.”

8baller said nothing, jaw clenched.

“I want everyone out. Except you, Jason. I’m going to fuck you. And you, Teeth. Get your phone, you’ll be our camera man.” The gun began knocking into the side of 8baller’s cheek. “We’ll title this ‘Gutter rat from Jersey gets his ass fucked out by his boss.’”

“If you’re good, I’ll let you have a turn. You’ve never gotten to fuck someone like 8baller, right? You’ll feel great once you—”

Enough was enough, and Teeth suddenly erupted. “Okay I’m gonna say! I’m just gonna come out and say it! Ever since we got back, you’ve been really fucking weird, Bill!”

The rest paused, not moving to leave just yet.

“I said we’re here to get weird, didn’t I?” Bill’s narrowed eyes told Teeth he walked on thin ice.
“Yeah but but you’re just…you’re just…man, I don’t know. You’re not you anymore.”

“Clearly. You know what it meant for me to return here.”

Silence comes, the only sound now is of 8baller’s phone he’d not bothered to mute. Teeth’s words were true though, and the entire group had been constant witnesses to Bill’s evolution; from a snarky, smart-talking methodical trickster to a violent, destructive, spiteful full blown assat. They attributed this change to both the stress and necessity that came from this new job, and their big heist—Bill was only playing the part, right? But even when they were alone, away from prying eyes and snitches, Bill never returned to his old self anymore. Whatever mask he’d donned, it remained fixated upon his face, and the Bill they knew and adored never surfaced anymore.

It scared them. Because if Bill is no longer bothering to treat them well, they might not be in his future.

They might not have a future.

“Fuck it.” He pulled the trigger—

it clicked, empty.

“Who the fuck touched my gun.”

Deathly silence.

“Who? Which one of you?” Bill’s voice started calm and rose like hot hot air. “WHICH one of you dead men walking touched my gun? WHO TOUCHED MY FUCKING GUN? Which one of you? Which one? You better fess up. You better fess up right now.”

With a heavy hand, he struck the base of the gun flat against the side of 8baller’s face. A cracking sound barked through the room, and then entirely different cracking sound came when he struck the man upside the chin. He liked his guns heavy enough to use as a melee weapon, but light enough for him to wield casually. A gun shouldn’t always need bullets to be effective.

“Which. One.” He ensnared 8baller’s head with an arm, and began rapidly, brutally, forcing the entire gun—barrel first, naturally—into the man’s mouth. He’d always preferred a shorter barrel just for special occasion like these. 8baller’s sounds are sickly muffled, raw and visceral—an empath’s worst nightmare. A mouth was not mean to be able to take something of this size and the inevitable tearing would be absolutely agonizing. Once he got the gun in, he’d somehow somehow get into 8baller’s throat. He’d make it work. “Of. You?”

8baller is sure this is the day he dies.

“I did.” Xanthar confessed, not moving an inch. Their eyes met and Bill pushed the snivelling mess called 8baller to the side, and came at him slow, knife in hand—it’s steady when it greets Xanthar’s delicate flesh at neck.

“You came into my room, Xanthar? When I was sleeping? You do anything else other than take my bullets? Did you do anything else? Did you? Watching me sleep get your hard? Is that it?” Bill’s voice comes out depleted, coarse but acidic none the less. Xanthar is not scared. He knows it’s just another one of Bill’s episodes, he’d been having them a lot lately.

Bill knew it, saw this coming—he knew they’d turn against him soon enough. It was this house, this town, always, no one was on his side. They were going to stab him in the back. They were already conspiring against them.
Bill couldn’t trust anyone.

*Hell is empty and all the devils are here.*

He had to be careful _careful_ careful—Xanthar had been in his room, while he slept. What if—had the man touched him? What else had he done? What else? What else? What…else?

No, that made no sense. Xanthar would never do something like that—what the fuck was he thinking?

**What the fuck was he thinking?**

*Is he even thinking?*

“Bill, in all my years of loyalty to you, you know I’d sooner slit my own throat than ever disrespect you. Now, I think you would consider who you’re talking to, and calm down.” Subtle trembles in the blade’s stillness manifested, like ripples they travelled to Bill’s core and he pulled away quickly.

The knife returned to its pocket and his back remained facing Xanthar and the man knows it’s Bill’s way of acknowledging he was right. You never showed your back to someone you didn’t trust during situations like these.

A reminder of his loyalty always brought Bill back.

“Bill…have you been feeling okay? Teeth’s right, you haven’t been yourself lately. Ever since we’ve arrived, you’ve been…you’ve been pretty morbid. You don’t sound like yourself.” Pyronica said, careful with her word usage.

“Yeah…you’ve been meaner, nastier, and you ain’t as funny anymore.” Paci-fire contributed.

“When did my job become to entertain you degenerates?” Bill asked, previous signs of boiling hostility fading.

“Is this about your—”

“I don’t regret what I did, Pyronica.”

Silence comes once again amongst them.

“Let’s forget this whole thing, alright guys?” Bill said, wielding a Cheshire grin for good measure. “It’s not _that_ kind of party, after all!”

“So, I guess we’re not seeing ‘nightmare fratboy brutalizes teen’ huh?” Paci-fire attempted to joke, even though bringing up that topic was the worst possible move. “I think “Daddy gives baby boy a good fucking’ would’ve been better.”

“You and your sick incest shit, man, get outta here!” Teeth made shooing movements with his trembling hands.

Bill’s eyes narrowed. “You like the idea of a Dad fucking his son, do you?”

“Uh no, it’s—well, it’s just a term—it’s not actual incest, Bill, c’mon.”

Bill laughed. “Have you ever heard the phrase ‘double anal’, Paci-fire?”

“Bill, I was just joking—”
“I know! And I laughed, didn’t I? I laughed, had a really good laugh! Now answer the question. Hey Teeth, bring your phone over here, will you…?”

It was happening again.

“That’s enough.” Xanthar left his seat. “Bill will be retiring to bed now. It’s late and he has a meeting in the morning.” Xanthar placed a hand on Bill’s shoulder, and began pushing him, marching him forward. Bill retaliated, “You giving me orders?” but Xanthar didn't reply.

Bill shrugged, seemingly diverted.

“Fine. Come see me in a few, Xanthar. I want to have a little talk with you.”

Bill left, and everyone simultaneously released a breath they’d been holding in.

“Yo Xanthar…Xan…man, you saved my life! I owe—seriously, I owe you. I owe you big time.” 8baller said, breathing excessive unrestrained gratitude in Xanthar’s direction.

“You cannot insult me.”

“Seriously seriously, who is that guy? It’s not Bill, it’s barely Bill anymore. You think—think it’s not him?” Teeth asked. “He’s never been like this! He nearly killed Jason! He was never…”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about because Bill’s always been like this.” 8baller said, his voice cracking. “The only difference is, if you really wanna get technical, is that he doesn’t have to hold back on what he does when he has all these guys kissing his ass when he so much as takes a shit. He’s getting full of himself, can’t even handle a little bit of backtalk no more.”

Rubbing his jaw, still shaken up, he continued. “Make excuses for him all you want. You should know better than anyone what a fucker he can be, Teeth. I’m out.”

The rest didn’t have much to say after that.

They knew he was right.

“I apologize for my actions. I will accept any punishment you deem necessary.”

“Wow, why so stoic?” Bill crossed his legs, leaning back on the beige embroidered couch. Fancy. He beckoned the other to come forward, pointing at the floor in front of him. Xanthar obeyed, coming to rest humbly on his knees at Bill’s feet. Bill extended a tattooed hand and he took it, kissing it, nestling it close to his face.

“This place...everything’s been out of whack these days.” Irritation pulled Bill’s face comically and he retracted his hand. “Hey, you’ve been quiet lately.”

“The same could be said for you.” Xanthar did not lift his head when he spoke.

“Huh, I suppose. Something on your mind?” He tilted his head. “Hey, look at me when I’m talking to you.” Xanthar immediately complied, and his dark eyes met Bill’s hazel ones. The curtains lay open behind Bill, the moon is waning—Bill is waiting.
“We don’t need another member.”

“Hey, the more the merrier!”

“Too many cooks spoil the broth.”

“Ha, look at you! You been enjoying our library?”

“I have, thank you for permitting me to use it.”

Bill watched him, and Xanthar could nearly see the gears turning inside his head. “You like this kinda thing, don’t you? Do you imagine you’re the King’s guard?” He turned his nose up. “Getting to be by my side, here, protecting me, entertaining me—you’ve been looking happier, I must say.”

Their eyes don’t stray from each other. “I can’t wait…to take that happiness way from you.”

Xanthar nods his head in acceptance.

“Hey, let’s go on vacation. Let’s hit up the Jersey Shore. Hasn’t 8baller been watching that show? Let’s head on down and bury his ass in the sand and leave him there. Couple shovels, some chloroform—send that jersey rat back to mother nature!”

“You want to return to New York City after that?”

“You know I can’t do that.”

Bill’s smile nearly wavers but instead, it remains.

“If I may—about Paci-fire. Why?”

Bill gave him an elusive smile. “Oh my, it’s a sensitive topic, don’t you know?”

Xanthar’s gave an acquiring look.

“You wanna know if my dearest Papa diddled me? If he fucked me? Is that it?”

Oh.

Xanthar knows better than to answer.

“If I say yes…does it justify my actions? Do I get a free pass? Will you feel sorry for me? Try to protect me from myself? But you’ve already been doing that…haven’t you?” He holds up the gun.

“Then sure. If anyone asks you ‘Did Bill Cipher’s daddy dick him??’ Just avert your eyes real shyly.”

Bill laid back, the ceiling welcoming him. “This is the longest con I’ve ever played, Xan and I’ll see it through right until the end.”

He couldn’t wait to be in Stanford’s arms, fake crying about an alleged traumatic past.

Stanford Pines though. He really didn’t like the guy.

He’d kill him next time. Probably.

“Why didn’t you feel the difference in the weight?” Xanthar asked. “Without bullets, there’s a noticeable weight difference.”
Bill met his eyes, offering only a smile, and Xanthar knows Bill was most definitely not in his right mind during that time, or he would’ve known and felt the difference.

He would’ve.

Bill stood up and began to undress; the process starting off sloppily, he was eager to get into bed, until he noticed the other man’s eyes on him. His movements adapted, and he met Xanthar’s eyes as he began removing article after article with coquettish flare. His chest is bare, and his pants loose, ready for removal—demonstrating the latter by letting the band slip ever so slightly down. Shoulders back and head titled up so he appears to look down at the other—it’s as though he’s challenging Xanthar to do something while knowing his subordinate would never dare.

“Like what you see?”

“When have I not?”

Bill’s lips curl smugly.

“You in love with me?”

Xanthar doesn’t reply.

“I’ll kill you if you are.”

He saunters towards Xanthar with ambiguous intentions, invading the other’s personal bubble and ropes his arms slowly and coyly around the man’s neck; then hands travel up into pitch black hair as thumbs settle at the man’s high cheekbones.

“Well? Do you want to die…?" He takes in Xanthar’s features as he muses. Deep set, slanted eyes, angular face, scarred unattractively—a real mutt, born to a Chinese and Caucasian mother. Not beautiful but eye-catching none the least. In a crowd, he stood out, his features too unusual for the eye to ignore.

“I’ll never understand your dirty talk.”

“Play along, Juliet. Come on, let’s hear it.”

“Evan, wanna…die for me?” He alters his breathing, making it sound as if they were in the midst of fucking—and he’s just breathless with need. It doesn’t affect Xanthar in the slightest; immunity to Bill’s charms was the predominant reason Bill kept him so close.

However, he was only immune to Bill’s superficial charm. The natural albeit eccentric charm his boss had proved a formidable foe for him—but perhaps it merely worked because he desired it to.

“I want to live for you.” His adams’s apple fell under the selfish assault of one of Bill’s hands. Encircling it, he wraps both hands around Xanthar’s neck. But there’s no hardness in his touches, they are playful, and curious.

“How corny and cliché. You’ll never get the girls, floozy.” Bill quips. “Do you want to spend the night with me?”

“I cannot. You’re intoxicated.”

“But not drunk, not drunk at all.”

“I respectfully decline.”
He grips Xanthar’s head. “One day, I’m going to kill you, Evan. Are you…okay with that?”

“I am.”

Bill got up. “I’m going to bed now. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Not looking again at Xanthar, he retreated to his bed.

An older man’s back. Grey curls. Oh, it’s that guy, Ford Pines. Again

Ford says he’s not interested.
But he’s not angry at Ford, he’s happy?

Now Ford is angry
And then Ford is inside him?

Inked fingers grip his dick—his own? No…

Yes, they look just like his. He’s touching himself?

He is.
Then he isn’t

In the corner of his mind, the furthest corner, he thinks he knows
He knows
But until then until then until then

He has Stanford Pines.

He’s emptying his stomach again in the early hours of the morning. Xanthar hands him a cold glass of water, saying “Drink up.”

He half slurs, half perfectly articulates, “You’re so good to me, aren’t you? Think there was something in the drinks?”

“We all had from it. You’re the only one sick.”

He helps Bill back to bed. As he leaves, Bill grabs his hand, places it at his crotch. “Do you want to…?”

“No you want me to?”

Bill shrugs, pushes the hand away. “Nah.”

He lays back down beneath the covers and is still for the remainder of the night.

Ford says ‘Have you been good?’ but in Italian
He says to Ford, I didn’t know you could speak Italian

…?

Ford looks at him peculiarly. Ford’s hands are tattooed.

I didn’t know you could speak Italian.
I
Didn’t Know
You
Could
Speak
Italian

….Ford.

He wakes up, greeted by the sight of Xanthar's naked back. Panic bristles into him before he realizes he’s clothed beneath the covers.

*Of course he is. Of course...*

Chapter End Notes

Be a heavy hitter in more ways than one.
Intruder in Evan's Sanctuary

Chapter Summary

Bill summarizes this chapter as: Ford meets his love rival. Everybody heads off to Jersey Shore. Keyhole gets out of jail, thinks he needs Jesus.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bill staggered from the bathroom, furious, screaming “What did you do to me? What did you DO to me? WHAT DID YOU DO?! Get out! GET OUT! GET OUT!!!” Ford runs for his life.

-Chapter(?), near future, Ford's initiation goes terribly wrong.

Stanford hadn’t been able to get a hold of Bill since their last meeting. Although he wouldn’t exactly consider them friends per say, he did like to think their last encounter had them meeting somewhere on common ground. Even if it was one-sided, it felt like he’d gotten through to the boy. Treating a man in his twenties like a child is something majority would frown at but Ford had lived nearly thrice as long as Bill, and it was all about relativity. Gifted children always grew up much quicker than their peers, so there was that to consider, too. Such talents caused one to be seen as an adult far before their time even came, and it always had detrimental effects.

He doesn’t really see himself in Bill, their personalities strikingly different. But there is still some form of…nostalgia.

Going to Bill’s workplace would always be a last resort, but he’s more confident he can handle Bill this time around. More importantly…

Fiddleford’s letter had been giving him a bit of trouble. By extensive analysis of the strange symbols, he’d concluded the message was encrypted in multiple ways. He’d tried solving it, only to end up with another encrypted message. Was he not using the correct keys?

It looked like nonsense. Why was it so heavily encrypted?

But he knew it was definitely from Fiddleford—the man had signed the letter, adding a ‘thinking of you’ at the top of his signature. It was undoubtedly Fiddleford’s handwriting.

It still seemed a little strange though…a little too…

Out of character—it didn’t seem like something Fiddleford would write. Then again, that would be the best thing to do, right? Write something to invoke doubt as to who the true author of the letter was?

Ford was so tired of this already. (but it brought excitement to his otherwise humdrum life)

Until he deciphered it, he decided in the meantime to write his own letter to Fiddleford and ask Bill to deliver it. It was a simple letter asking about his ex-assistant’s well-being—encrypted for good
measure so the man would feel safe. He couldn’t wait for this to be over so they could meet again. Ford was not the type to miss people but...

Humans were naturally social creatures, he supposed.

*Oh who was he kidding? He missed Fiddleford terribly.*

Bill was not outside this time, and his office door was closed—there was movement inside though. He tried knocking, once, twice—then went in.

It wasn’t Bill, but a man Ford had never seen before. Once he caught sight of Ford, he immediately took a defensive stance, body language stiffening and eyes thinning with suspicion. The first thing Ford noticed, of all the man’s features, was the large scar on the right side of his face—already healed but one could tell it had been a deep gash. Even now, it looked painful. A harsh face—severe but he resembled more a youth who’d been having a rough time than a grown man. Tall too, and donned a dark suit rather casually—with an undone tie and half buttoned shirt.

“Oh, excuse me, but I’m here to see Bill—is he around?”

“No, he isn’t.” Came the abrupt reply. “You should call before you show up. Intruding upon someone’s work place without so much as a phone call?” The man had an accent reminiscent of Bill’s, voice low and deep.

“I tried calling, actually. He wasn’t answering.”

“You could not take a hint?”

Ford was taken aback by the man’s uncalled for cold demeanour.

“I thought he might’ve had phone troubles. Where is he?”

The man remained silent, leaving Ford to wallow in uncertainty. Sizing up Ford once more, he eventually answered. “Not here.”

“Well yes, I gathered that.” He gave a sheepish smile, a chuckle accompanying it. *This man was difficult.* “When will he be back?”

“Why?”

“I’d…like to discuss something with him? I’m sorry, but who are you?”

“His assistant.”

“Oh, I wasn’t aware he had an assistant.” That was surprising. “Could you let him know I stopped by?”

“You never introduced yourself.”

“Aha, where are my manners…! Stanford Pines. And you are?” He feels embarrassed now—in his sixties and still can’t manage simple social interactions without doing something stupid.

“Evan.”

“Ah well, Evan, sorry for showing up unannounced. Please let Bill know I was here. Enjoy the rest of your day.” Ford turned to leave, and he was out here with speed that made his discomfort glaringly obvious. He’s not surprised that man is an acquaintance of Bill’s—it seemed like someone
Bill would hang around, even if their dispositions were drastically different.

He’d just have to wait until Bill contacted him again. In the meantime…there was Fiddleford’s letter to deal with.

His phone’s ringing. Xanthar picks it up while watching Ford leave through the window.

It’s Bill.

“You done cleaning up? We’re ready to leave. Get here fast before Paci-fire back-washes into all the drinks.”

“I’m on my way. Ran into a little trouble.”

“Oh?”

“That man, Stanford Pines, was here to see you.”

“Is that so…? Ah who cares, hurry up. Up up up, man, he’s already putting his mouth on all the bottles—Ronnie, get him to stop or I’m throwing him out the—” A louder voice cut off Bill. “—CHOKE HIM OUT! CHOKE HIS BALD ASS OUT—”

The dial tone came, signalling the end of the call.

Xanthar returned his phone to his pocket, and left.

Stanford Pines. The man who’d met Bill’s father, rejected him and lived.

Xanthar did not trust the man in the slightest.

Finally finally finally, he was out the slammer. God damn god damn god damn.

Kryptos was such an asshole.

Joshua ‘Keyhole’ fumbled around in his crummy, cramped one bedroom apartment for his phone. He hadn’t had it on him when he was arrested and couldn’t even remember where he put it. The battery was probably dead too, so calling it would be useless. Not to mention…it was a burner, so there's that.

But he’d find it, he’d find it and oh, he was gonna squeal hard-core on Kryptos because that was just the last and final god damn straw. Once Bill found out the bullshit Kryptos had been pulling, Bill was going to be mad. Mad mad mad.

Well, most likely not mad, more amused…BUT STILL.

Ugh, why did he get stuck here? Sure, he had a few issues and whatever, but leaving him to rot here like this was cruel even for Bill. First Bill ditches him here, then he gets arrested, then he loses his phone—what was next? Bill cutting his allowance?

The world just hates him, doesn't it?

When last had he been to church? Was that it? Was that the issue? Damn, where was the nearest church even at?
He should stop by, maybe that’ll make his phone appear. If not, he’d have to fork out cash for a new one, but where the hell would he get everyone’s number from? He’d forgotten to write that shit down.

Aaaah god damn god damn god damn.

He was hungry too…pizza or Chinese? Pizza or Chinese? PIZZA OR CHINESE?

Where was Bill to make these decisions for him?

God damn god damn god damn.

Chapter End Notes

You barely remember any of this.
Nightmare at Jersey Shore

Chapter Summary

Bill and pals go to Jersey Shore, get decimated.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Utter stupidity. Sexual content (consensual/dubcon/noncon, depending how you interpret the relationship between Bill and his underlings.). Drugs. Language.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“My father didn’t make me. I made myself.”

-Gaspard Giordano (?)’s eldest son, the man who now calls himself Bill Cipher.

They’re loading up the car and it’s just them. Bill’s men aren’t accompanying them and they’ve complained the entire morning about not being able to travel in style. Xanthar’s driving, Bill called shotgun and everyone’s stuck in a god awful… minivan?

They’re already in the car when it starts.

“We’re actually going to drive to Jersey Shore? This is an awful idea I don’t wanna be stuck cramped up with you pigs!”

“Too bad Ronnie. Get ready for a several hour drive with hot, sweaty disgusting men.” 8baller said, finger-gunning at her.

“Speak for yourself.” Bill snorted. “Your manly funk isn’t doing you any favours if you’re planning on getting lucky this trip.”

“I get lucky every day of my life, Bill. I’ll have you know ladies like a man’s natural smell.”

“Sure, but you’re batting for the other team. So step up your game.”

“For the last and final final time, I’m straight. Real funny joke you guys have going on, but enough is enough.” 8baller frowned; they could beat a dead horse and somehow keep it entertaining—which was great when his sexuality wasn’t the damn horse. “Let’s go back to making fun of Paci-fire for being an ungrateful debutante.”

“Shut up, you plebeian.” Paci-fire said, his pitch going higher, voice taking on a fake offended tone.

“What’s all this?” 8baller said.

“Whatever. I’m finally going to the Shore for the first time and I’m going to have the time of my life. None of you are ruining this for me.”
“How have you not been to the Jersey Shore? You lived in Jersey your whole life.”

“No, I could never afford to go to the Shore because I was living on food stamps, Veronica.”

“Oh yeah. And your mother was a crackhead.”

“MY MOTHER WAS NOT A CRACKHEAD!”

“She was, and you were a total crackbaby.”

“YOU TAKE THAT BACK. YOU TAKE THAT BACK YOU BITCH!”

“Call me a bitch one more time…” Pyronica clenched her fists.

“And you’ll do what? What? WHAT?”

“Bill, I’m going to kill him, I swear—”

“OOOOOH so now you gotta cry to Bill, huh? Well shows how—”

Bill casually intercepted. “Jason. One, your mother was a crackhead. Two, your mother was an absolute crack head and three, you’re a former crackhead. So we can conclude it’s genetic and you’ll be flat lining from dear old nose candy in about, what? Three months tops? Even that’s pushing it.”

“Whooooo, glad I didn’t inherit crackhead genetics.” Teeth snickered.

“YOU INHERITED FAT GENETICS!”

“There is no such thing.”

“SO YOU ADMIT IT THEN! YOU JUST ADMITTED YOU EAT A LOT AND THAT’S WHY YOU’RE FAT!”

“I DON’T EAT A LOT! I HAVE A THYROID ISSUE!”

“BULLSHIT BULLSHIT BULLSHIT!”

“He’s fat because he eats lots of protein, right Bill?” Pyronica snickered and Bill and her erupted into awful laughter. Bill managed to choke out between breaths “Regularly feed your boys if you want them to be nice and voluptuous.” They both laughed harder.

Teeth and 8baller scowled in sync. What assholes.

Having already recovered, 8baller said, “So, we need Jersey Shore names. For the duration of our trip, we will be addressed by these very special names.”

“No. Absolutely not.” Teeth stated.

“What’s a Jersey Shore name?” Paci-fire asked, tonguing his bottled drink.

“—I’ll be Jason ‘The Situation’—”

“Oh my god.” The scenery was suddenly looking very interesting to Pyronica.

“Nobody will ever call you that!” Teeth pointed accusingly at 8baller.

Bill jigged in his seat, snapping his fingers. “I’m calling dibs on Illuminaughty.”
“Don’t encourage him, Bill!” Teeth yelled.

“Pyronica, we’ll just call you Ronnie because there’s actually a guy on the show named Ronnie. So you’ll be our Ronnie.” Pyronica shot Bill a look that said she was very very close doing something regrettable.

“Evan, Evan! Evan…’from heaven’!”

Xanthar hit the brake immediately. He turned to face 8baller, “Get out.”

Bill laughed loudly. “Now you’ve done it!”

“Did I stutter?” Xanthar asked, calm as ever.

“Okay, I take it back. I take it back. No Evan from Heaven. Nope nope. Not gonna do that.”

Xanthar gave him one last look as a final warning, and resumed driving.

“So, no Jersery Shore names then? Yeah? Well, you guys still gotta call me The Situation.”

“No one’s doing that, 8baller.” Pyronica sighed. This guy never shut up.

“Why can’t you guys just give me this one little thing?!”

“I’m still using Illuminaughty.” Bill cut in.

“If you continue this, I’ll turn the car around.”

“Who died and made you Daddy Xanthar?”

“If Xanthar is the dad, does that make Bill the mom? HAHA!” Teeth snarked obnoxiously.

“I’ll throw you out this moving car and you and the pavement can get to hard-core second base.” Bill said.

“I, for one, do think that’s pretty accurate. Do you think we could—” Paci-fire said, waving his drink around.

“No. Nooooo. Keep your weird incest fetish shit out of my face for like at least 24 hours. No one wants to hear about it.” 8baller sent a shove Paci-fire’s way, the other’s bottle spilling on him.

“What? I wasn’t going—man, watch the drink!”

“Shut up, we all know the weird shit you say. Bill, if he says any weird fetish shit, throw him out the car please?”

“He’s going out the car for sure.” Bill flashed a thumb up.

“Did you guys know that people like Alex, who are into that weird baby fetish stuff, actually do it because they’ve been overwhelmed with responsibility since they were kids and feel like they missed out on being a child?” Teeth said, nodding sagely.

“Where’d you hear that?” 8baller, asked.

“The internet.”

“Whoa, they never tell lies on there, do they?”
“I’m just saying maybe Alex has his reasons—"

“Can you guys not talk about me like I’m not here? For chrissake.”

“Okay but I’m right though? I’m right.”

“Guys, stop talking about that shit. You’ve had your fun, now drop it.” 8baller huffed. Jesus, barely five minutes in and things were already getting weird.

“Why does everyone here have daddy issues?” Disgust stuck to Pyronica’s face as she put on designer shades he snatched from Bill when he wasn’t looking.

“Okay changing the subject, someone change the god damn topic.” Paci-fire waved his drink around.“ Put the radio on, Bill. Just put the radio on.”

“DON’T PUT THE RADIO ON!” 8baller yelled, finger extending to the radio threateningly.

“What? Why not?”

“I’M STILL TALKING, ASSHOLE. I GOT LOTS OF SHIT TO SAY AND IM NOT GONNA BE COMPETING WITH THE DAMN RADIO.”

“Oh so now we’re supposed to just listen to you blab for several hours? God dammit Jason.”

“Hey Bill, you should’ve invited that Ford guy! We could’ve met him and stuff!” Teeth banged his hands at the back of Bill’s seat, ignoring 8baller’s tantrum.

“He’s too chronologically challenged.” Bill said, while trying to imagine a quiet introvert like Ford at a place like the Shore. Maybe he would take Ford sometime…just to see what happened.

“Yeah who wants an old guy to tag along? This ain’t senior citizens gone wild.” Paci-fire scowled.

“Hell, I wouldn’t mind seeing Ford go wild.” Pyronica nudged Bill in the arm with her fist, winking. Bill smirked, arching an eyebrow and noticed Xanthar’s eyes had narrowed ever so slightly.

*Interesting.*

“We’re already running a damn daycare.” He sneered at Teeth. “Last thing we need is to be hosting a private old age home.”

“I’m 18!” Teeth rebutted and 8baller just sorted loudly. They both huffed at each other and brief silence visited.

“It’s so damn good to not be stuck wearing suits all the time. “ Paci-fire said, still wiping off his shirt off.

“Yeah man, it’s cool at first but then it’s just…like every day? Every day?” 8baller threw a clumped up tissue paper at Paci-fire and the man glared death rays at him.

“I look damn good in a suit.” Pyronica added.

“No one will argue with you on that, Ronnie. No one.” Teeth said, shooting her a dirty look. She was such a narcissist, second only to Bill.

“Oh, I should let you all know, Jersey Shore has weird rules on alcohol.” Paci-fire said, getting himself another drink. “Everyone under 21 won’t be able to publicly drink there—you know, usual
shit—but we can drink in our hotel room because Bill, Pyronica and Xanthar are over 21.”

“Wait so we can drink if we’re…with someone who can drink?” 8baller said, eyeing Paci-fire’s new drink. This guy had been drinking a lot—wasn’t that like his third drink in the course of like, three minutes?

“Yeah but in private.”

“Oh cool cool, how’d you know?”

“Thought about coming here a few years back. Just remembered. Also, we gotta ditch these drinks too. No drinking in cars.”

“Jesus. Guess we better finish these before we get there.” 8baller said, figuring that’s why the drinks were going up so quick.

“It’s like, hours away. There’s no need to down this shit.” Pyronica said, checking how much they had left.

“The way Alex is drinking, you’d swear the Shore was like, ten minutes away.” Teeth pointed out, noticing too.

“Oh Bill Bill, I’m gonna need you to be the translator between the hot Italian girls and me.”

Bill turned around to face 8baller. “What’s in it for me?”

“Jason, you know those Guido people can’t actually speak Italian right?” Paci-fire said, swishing his bottle around.

“What? They’re Italian-American like Bill, yeah? Shouldn’t they speak Italian then?”

“Yeah but Bill can actually speak Italian. They just call themselves Italian but are barely Italian. And do you—do you even actually watch that show? When have those orange people ever spoken Italian?!”

“Hey Bill, how come you don’t speak Italian no more? You used to always do that pretentious shit, throwing your shitty lovey dovey European sex words around all the time. Now you don’t anymore.” 8baller asked, digressing.

“Sex words?” Teeth hopped in, brows furrowed.

“Italian is the language of sex.”

“Uh…I’m not—I’m not touching that one.” Teeth cringed, and in the corner of his eye, noticed Bill smirk slyly.

“Ha. I hate the language.” Bill said, facing the front again.

“Okay but can you actually speak it or do you know a few buzz words?”

“It’s my first language, Jason.”

“BULLSHIT. WHERE’S YOUR ACCENT THEN? DON’T YOU LIE TO LOOK MORE EXOTIC.”

“Being bilingual at a young age means you don’t get stuck with the accent.” Teeth chirped in.
“I spoke Italian before I spoke English.” Bill shot a smug look at 8baller. “What? Did you fall in love~?”

“Fuck off, man. For the last time, I’m straight.”

“Suuuure. You love to the hide the sausage but only if it isn’t your sausage.”

“I’m fucking dead, man!! You’re the best!” Paci-fire high-fived Bill and they both laughed while 8baller turned red.

“I’m gonna get both of you for this.”

“Oh? I might like that, Jason.” Bill’s eyes went partially lidded and 8baller eyes fled to the scenery. God damn Bill.

“I’ll prove to you all I’m straight.”

“And I’ll prove you aren’t.” Bill said, making a hole with one hand and thrusting his index finger into it; eyes saying to 8baller he's probably going to get the fear of God put into him. Like old times.

8baller thinks maybe going to the Jersey Shore is going to be the worst experience of his entire life.

Pyronica and Paci-fire share a room.

8baller and Teeth share a room, much to Teeth's dismay.

Bill and Xanthar share, having the biggest room, declaring it the main hang out room.

Current Members: 6

Pyronica decides they’ll all go shopping first, scope out the stores. Since they’d all been complaining how dreadful suits were, now’s the time to pick up new clothes. (that they’d probably only get to wear off duty—not that they were ever off-duty…)

Bill, for some reason, found himself wondering if he should get Ford something. Something big, something small—it didn’t really matter.

Just something.

Cologne maybe? Ford seemed like a guy who played it safe when it came to perfume, perhaps a daring smell would be something new…

Why was he even thinking of Ford?

A brief argument between Teeth and 8baller took his attention; apparently Teeth had asked for everyone’s opinion on a shirt and 8baller had called him white trash because ‘only white trash wear wife-beaters’. Teeth, in turn called 8baller white trash, only for 8baller to point out he is not white. Teeth then reminded him that his mother is white and therefore he inherited her white trash genetics on top of her crackhead genetics. Their bickering got them escorted out the store.

He asked the store clerk about the cologne—he needs help choosing, said he it’s not for him.

“Sure. So I was thinking maybe this one? I’m looking specifically for one that’s assertive, and assaults your senses, if you will…a little dark…do you smell mine? Something that goes with this, too.”

---

“Is your jaw still sore?”

“Nah.”

Tattooed fingers trace his upper lip. “Would you like it to be…?”

---

“Told you he wasn’t straight.”

“Man, fuck off. It doesn’t count if you scare me into it!”

“You had a noticeable issue downstairs the entire time.”

“I was CONFUSED!”

“And you clearly still are!” Teeth remarked.

“God, I hate all of you. That was rape and I’m done here.”

Bill, grinning, shrugs his shoulders. “He kissed me first. That’s what happens when you grow up in a religious household, kids. You’re stuck denying your ambidexterity.”

“He’s so good with his mouth though….” The trip was long, Bill’s sure he’ll have another moment with 8baller soon enough. Who knew the guy was so…talented?

It’s been such a long time since they were together. Jason had clearly been practicing.

--

Pyronica hands 8baller a drink, says “Hey you should thank Bill. He knew you wanted to come here since forever.”

8baller takes the drink, frowning skeptically.

“It’s his way of saying sorry. You know Bill never says sorry.”

“Yeah right.”

“He’s back to his old self, too.”

8baller takes a sip, makes a retching noise in his throat and says what everyone’s been thinking:

“We never should’ve left New York.”

--

He’s kissing 8baller the entire time as he fucks him with his hand. The boy leaning back with Bill nearly on top of him, half-way straddling one of his arms.
“I’ve played plenty of video games as kid. I know how to work a joystick.” He told 8baller, who will only get that reference months down the line.

Jason finishes all over himself and Bill’s now planting vine kisses all along the man’s face with no protests. When Bill feels the man’s hands reach for his pants, he grins into the skin. “I knew you weren’t straight.”

8baller doesn’t have it in him to argue; he just opens his mouth and accepts Bill’s tongue again.

(he doesn’t like men. He doesn’t but who says no to Bill? Who says no who says no and lives?)

--

“See how good I am to you?” It feels like there’s a sun in his belly and Bill’s fingers are antagonizing it, until it burns him from the inside out—

*til it incinerates them both and he’s begging for forgiveness in the afterlife.*

“Ti piace? Do you want to go all the way…?” He makes a whimpering sound, a sound he’d die of shame should anyone else have heard it. Bill, so ardent with *compassion*, says “We don’t have to.”

No one’s been so kind to him. And so…

….so

mean.

--

Veronica and Alex play video games while Bill watches and verbally abuses whoever’s losing. 8baller comes in, “I wanna play too, quit hogging the consoles.”

“Oh fuck off, Jason.” Pyronica mouths, not looking away from the screen.

“DON’T TELL ME TO FUCK OFF.”

Bill beckons him closer with two fingers, pats the empty area next to him. He hesitates but moves anyway.

They sit together, and every so often, Bill’s hand would caress his inner thigh.

He doesn’t hate it, he doesn’t love it. He just accepts it—Bill’s apology, that is. That was the reason for this tenderness, right?

Bill’s apology…

“Hey, let Jason play next, Ronnie.”

“Fine fine. He’s such a baby.”
Bill’s apology.

When he plays against Paci-fire, Bill insults Paci-fire even when he’s the one winning.

…

--

8baller asks Teeth what the hell ‘ti piace’ means. He struggles to say it properly and they take forever to discover the proper spelling. Teeth says the internet says it means ‘do you like it?’

He asks how to say ‘I like it’.

--

He tells Bill "A me piace."

Bill laughs. “A little too formal. Try…’mi piace…davvero’.”

He pulls 8baller towards him. “Repeat it after me…”

---

He asks Bill “Ti piace?” pronunciation a little off. Bill thrusts himself back into 8baller's swollen mouth, kneading the man’s scalp and manages to mutter “A me… mi piace…”

8baller thinks Italian is one hell of a confusing language.

---

They all play Poker, with losers having to grant a request of the winner.

If 8baller wins, everyone shaves their head.

If Teeth wins, he has to get treated like royalty for the next month.

If Pyronica wins, they all have to wear bikinis whenever they go to the beach.

If Paci-fire wins, the trip officially becomes ‘Alex week’, with everyone at his mercy.

If Xanathar wins, they stay inside for the duration of the trip (“Seriously man? We didn’t come all this way out to be out on house arrest.”)

If Bill wins, they all have to agree to eat whatever he demands them to eat. Possible delicacies include sea sand, live crabs and barnacles. (“We could get really sick, Bill!”)

Pyronica won.

--

Bill’s stuck in a yellow bikini. Pyronica eases him up against the wall, singing “dressed in yellow, he says ‘hello’, come sit next to me you fine fellow ♫”

His interest piqued, she continues. “Wanna make a deposit?”

He laughs, says he’ll think about it.

--
Bill asks Pyronica, “How about a ménage à trois?”

“Oh?” She says, clearly interested. “With…?”

His eyes gesture to Xanthar and she surveys him, giving him a once over, and shrugs. “Sure, why the fuck not.” He kisses her, fingers in her hot pink hair, asks “Mouth or?” And she laughs, puts his hands on her ass and he gets the message.

His back is against the headboard as she rides him—she’s tall and when she’s upright, her breasts are straight in his face and he thinks, god he loves tall women. Digging his nails into the supple skin at the cleft her ass, forcing her open further—nice and wide—as Xanthar fucks her.

Bill’s never done this sort of thing with him, and boy, is he surprised because the man was a fucking animal. He always figured being stoic 24/7 was impossible but seemed the man saved all his energy for when he fucked. He has no idea how Veronica takes it; Xanthar’s grip in her hair is tight, and he must be deep in her because he can only hear skin on skin and Veronica sounding like she’s on the verge of dying—he’s not sure if she’s in pain or enjoying it but she’s tight around him thrusting into her feels incredible. (he wants to tell Evan to slow down, that being too rough is really not good when you’re fucking someone in the ass, especially a woman but he can’t formulate words right now? Somehow…)

Suddenly, she breathes, “Hey—don’t cum in me, Evan. “

“Where else would I fucking cum?” The response comes with such…ferocity? Unrestrained and and…and…and…vindictive? Bill feels an electric jolt straight into his cock. No no no

Xanthar continues fucking her hard, and says again, after a hard thrust “I said where else am I supposed to fucking cum, Veronica?” He gives a hard spank and…

Bill is sure he’s died on the way here because…

Xanthar is looking at him as he fucks Veronica. Looking at him in the eye; he’s not smiling but there’s tugging at the corners of his eyes—

(he’s holding onto Veronica by her hips and his hands touch Bill’s and…)

—he’s aware of exactly what he’s doing to Bill.

Xanthar pulls her hair, arching her back even more, his tongue comes at crudely licks at her ear—and he’s still looking at Bill.

He feels…shy? No no no, he meets Xanthar’s gaze but something in him is twisting like he’s a fucking schoolgirl with no underwear on in his favourite teacher’s class.

Xanthar makes her beg for it, makes her beg for him to keep her fucking in her the ass, hard and deep—it’s so vulgar, not really to Bill’s liking; claws at her tits and—doesn’t stop looking at Bill.

It’s as if…he’s talking to Bill. Bill responds every time inside his head.

Yes yes Fuck me like you’re tearing me apart, hurt me —and

He’s already done, and Xanthar is still going. Jesus Christ.

---

Straight, his ass. He might as well have been fucking Bill with that performance.
“If you ever change your mind…” he says to Xanthar, and the man only replies with “Of course.”

He gets shitfaced before the others, the look in Xanthar’s eyes is still on his mind and he wonders—What it’d be like with Ford and Xanthar together.

He thinks he’s probably a sick fuck as he passes out.

“Let’s play spin the bottle!” Paci-fire yells, holding up an empty beer bottle. 8baller grabs the bottle immediately, sternly says “Uh no.”

He throws the bottle into the bin. “No.”

“Have you even considered the magnitude of our current circumstances?”

He pointed at Pyronica. “Straight.”

Then at Paci-fire. “Straight.”

Then at himself. “Straight.”

Then at Bill. “Depraved bisexual.”

Then at Xanthar “Allegedly straight.”

Then at Teeth “Gay Baby.”

“GAY BABY?!” Teeth shouted, clearly upset.

“GAY BABY!! GAY BABY!!! WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!! “Paci-fire began howling and everybody joined in instantaneously.

“Depraved bisexual! Nice. But we gotta talk about this gay baby thing!” Bill’s laughing, and watching him, 8baller feels incredibly proud of himself.

“Why am I gay baby??!!”

“Because you’re gay and a baby?”

“How am I a baby?”

“Well you’re crying right now about being called gay baby, and you’re gay so that confirms you’re a gay baby.”

Everyone laughs all over again; Teeth is fuming but the laughter is contagious and soon, his eyes are leaking too.

Bill, laughing, slumps his arms around 8baller, and their faces touch as they come together. Jason can smell Bill when the man curls into his neck, cheerful laughter still pouring out his throat; the warm merry air is soothing against his skin.

Teeth, still giggling himself, manages to get out “You’re gonna—gonna have no eyebrows when
you wake up tomorrow.”

“YOU TOUCH MY EYEBROWS FATTY AND I’LL KILL YOU. I’LL KILL YOU!” 8baller yells leaning towards Teeth and Bill pulls him back into the embrace he’d nearly slipped out. It’s possessive, but—childlike.

There’s nothing dreadful in Bill’s touches. (anymore)

They’re all still laughing, and 8baller wishes they could stay like this forever, and the Bill next to him would never change…

And they’d never have to leave here.

_Nostalgia, it feel so nostalgic._

They hit the beach.

Instead of burying 8baller, everyone opted to bury Teeth instead.

They left him there for several hours.

He suffered heat stroke and was forced to retire for the remainder of the trip.

- Current members: 5

“Push your luck and you’ll be pushing daisies, get it?”

Xanthar says nothing, regarding him with attentive eyes.

So composed, so indomitable, so quiet—

God, he just wants to make the man _scream_. Scream until the reason he doesn’t talk is because he barely has a voice left. Feels like his 12, crushing on an adult who won’t give him a second look. Reminiscent of Ford, except Xanthar was only 5 years older—

…the circumstances under which they met—he’s sure it’s the reason Evan won’t do anything.

Because there’s no way that fucker is straight.

And if he is, he’s one sadistic bastard, that’s for sure.

He’s whispering in Jason’s ear “’Baby, I’m a sociopath. Your sweet serial killer. On the warpath, cause I _love_ you…just a little too much ♪”Arms laced around his neck—it’s innocent affection, there’s nothing dark, nothing decadent in Bill’s touches.

And 8baller thinks…

He does…accept the apology.

If only this Bill was always around…

(not the one who’d pretty much shot him in the head)
Xanthar walks out the shower, and the boy watches him intently from the bed. He regards the boy as usual, with respectful disinterest, and the boy bares his teeth.

There's no reaction. He removes his towel and begins dressing, unbothered by his clearly frustrated audience.

With gritted teeth, Bill asks himself ‘What is with these older men acting so damn elusive?’

--

He's sitting on the bed, scrolling through the newsfeed on his phone. Suddenly, he hears Xanthar's voice say: "Spread your legs."

He looks up, eyes wide and does as instructed. No hesitation.

"A little more."

He complies...

and the man drops a bag of peanuts between his thighs, then turns to leave.

Between laughing and growling, he thinks he might kill Evan.

--

“What are you doing to me?” he grabs Xanthar’s hand as the man passes him. “What are you doing…?”

“Do you still think about Stanford Pines?”

Shit, he’d barely thought of the man lately.

Xanthar pulls away before Bill can answer.

Is he jealous?
Or is he attempting to distract Bill from Ford?

…

Is Xanthar rethinking his sexuality? OH he hopes so.

He thinks of forcing Evan but

that’s not it. He doesn’t want to, he doesn’t want—

He wants it
the other way around.

Why the fuck does he always get so high strung with older men?

But he didn’t know Xanthar could be so… cruel?

He’s getting hard thinking about it. But the last thing he needs is to be acting so foolish around his what? Right hand man?
Ah fuck it. Fuck this.

He lays back on the bed, imagines Xanthar on top of him.

What is wrong with him.? They’ve always teased and flirted playfully with one another; Xanthar loved to entertain Bill’s little games.

Why is it different now?

What…is wrong with him?

---

He doesn’t want to go home. Looks out the window, thinks of something he’d heard one of his old lovers say,

*I wish I could have…*

*just a little more summer.*

The asks Pyronica if she wants to have fun again. She says no, she’s still tender from last time and Xanthar gets carried away too easily. He says Xanthar can take her mouth instead.

Her eyes narrow but she agrees.

*(he can’t get Evan out of his mind)*

He fucks her from behind, while Xanthar goes to town on her mouth.

And he does it, *he does it*—he slips out, thrusts himself into her ass—hand over her mouth so she doesn’t scream, pulls her back and Xanthar already knows because he immediately sticks himself into the now free hole. Pyronica struggles but it’s more erotic than anything *(she was going to be so pissed off)*

He waits and *waits* and when Xanthar leans in close to get deeper, their faces are *so close* and he licks the man’s cheek daringly. The man only looks at Bill as he fucks Pyronica in the front, but never says anything—even when Bill is licking him like a puppy while restraining Pyronica by the hair and waist, and imagines he’s giving it to Xanthar.

…

He leaves bruises all over Pyronica.

“You are sooo cute! Like, what are you?”

Paci-fire popped his head out from behind Xanthar. “He’s half Asian, half white. Totally exotic, right?”

“Yeeah! You totally inherited the best of both worlds! Where did you get those scars? And those tats, oooh, I love guys with tattoos! Hey wanna come hang with my friends and me?!” Xanthar looked over at Bill, who nodded impishly in approval.

“Sure.”
The girl pulled Xanthar away eagerly, her friends waving and laughing.

“Look at this asshole. Already macking on chicks. And I’m way better looking than him.” 8baller ranted.

“No, dude. You aren’t.” Paci-fire said.

“What? Look at him. Look at his hair. He’s got that thin sloppy Asian hair.”

“He has great hair. “

“Oh for sure. It’s so soft and shiny looking.” Pyronica added. “As someone who extensively values hair care, I give the guy a solid 9.”

“Oh okay no, Bill has great hair. And Pyronica, your hair’s been fried to hell and back with your all shitty bleaching and dyeing.” Pyronica gave him a hard punch in the shoulder and he flinched dramatically.

“I do indeed, have the great hair you speak of. Xanthar’s a close second though.” Bill piped.

“Okay, well whatever. Ladies love my shaved head so hair is irrelevant anyway.”

“Yikes….Ronnie, you wanna decimate his ego?” Paci-fire innocently sipped his juice.

“Jason, you look like the personified version of a bowling ball.”

“That’s so cliché, it doesn’t even hurt. Also, your boytoy is bald too.”

“Yeah but I make it work baby because my ears don’t stick out like yours do.” Paci-fire stated nonchalantly. “You look like the missing link.”

“What does that even mean?”

“He’s saying you look half monkey, half human.” Bill said, smile wide and unnerving.

“That’s fucking racist, man.”

“What? You can’t play the race card against your own race, yo.” Paci-fire shrugged.

“Fuck all of you.”

---

“XANTHAR IS IN JAIL, BILL!” 8baller is screaming.

“What?” Bill nearly spits out his drink.

“THAT GIRL WAS UNDERAGE! UNDERAGE! HER DAD FOUND OUT AND HE’S BEING HELD NOW. THEY MIGHT PRESS CHARGES OH GOD DAMN! DAMN IT.” He was so happy; sweet karma was on his side.

Bill worked his magic, but Xanthar wasn’t feeling it anymore.

He retired to his room for the remainder of the trip.
A good ’ol fashioned drinking game is what the trip had been missing.

Pyronica, 8baller, Bill and Paci-fire go at it.

Bill won, but drank far too much, resulting in a trip to the hospital.

He was forced to retire for the rest of the trip.

Current members: 3

“We are in a land filled with Italians and our only Italian is down for the count!” 8baller freaks.

“For the last time, there are not only Italian people here. Have you even been paying attention? This is a normal place with normal people. It’s not your god damn T.V show!” Paci-fire is losing his patience.

“Don’t bother, Paci-fire. 8baller can’t tell reality from television. Bill gets that same issue sometimes, remember?” Pyronica folded her arms.

“Ugh don’t remind me. That guy thinks it’s so funny to re-enact weird shit he sees in his creepy horror snuff films and—like that guy, from a few weeks ago? That was—I don’t even have words, Veronica. Bill should not be allowed near the internet.”

“Hey, that was funny, okay? Gruesome but funny.” 8baller says, sounding offended.

“Of course you’d think it was funny. Of course…” Paci-fire sighs, walking off. “It’s all fun and games until it’s your dick being bisected…”

An officer stops Pyronica for being loud. She says “Yo babe, I’m from New York! We’re always screaming! It’s just how we do!”

She meets the same officer again when she beats the shit out of a guy for using the wrong tone of voice with her.

Current members: 2

“This place is obliterating us! This is a fucking nightmare! We’re down 4 men, including our Boss! Bill didn’t stand a chance! Look at him!” 8baller pointed to Bill fast asleep in bed. “Defeated by alcohol! Bill! What do they put in the drinks here???”

“This place is Hell.” Paci-fire said, clearly worried.

“We are dropping like flies, man. IT’S THE CURSE OF THE JERSEY SHORE IS WHAT IT IS!”

“There is no such thing, okay? No such thing. Did—did you do—are you high right now?!” He looks carefully at 8baller. The guy seemed more jittery than usual and—
“Maybe had a little coke, no no, but listen! I’m telling you, ugh NO. NO. I’ve lived in New Jersey my whole life and never ever got to come here so I’m riding this god damn trip out even if it kills me!”

“Look man, it’s obvious we don’t know shit about the Jersey Shore and your STUPID T.V show was all lies!” he looked back at Bill out cold. “It’s like a god damn ethnic cleansing.”

“If it was an ethnic cleansing, WE’D HAVE BEEN THE FIRST TO GO!” 8baller yells, spit flying out and Paci-fire is furious.

“DON’T GROUP ME IN WITH YOU, YOU TARZAN FUCK.”

“Have you all gone fucking mental?” Teeth staggered in, still lobster red and smelling of aloe vera. The sun had roasted him mercilessly—not to mention everyone else had too. He took a short good look at both of them and knew. “YOU GUYS ARE HIGH AS FUCK. DOES BILL KNOW? HE’S GONNA FREAK!”

“SHUT YOUR FAT MOUTH, BILL IS ASLEEP AND SICK AND ON THE VERGE OF DEATH AND YOU SHUT YOUR GOD DAMN PORK MOUTH!” 8baller screamed, getting up in Teeth’s face.

‘YOU’RE YELLING TOO YOU JACKASS!”

“I’VE HAD IT WITH YOU! THIS LITTLE PIGGY IS GOING TO THE MARKET!”

8baller and Teeth got into a shuffle, with 8baller getting stabbed in the hand.

He was forced to retire for the remainder of the trip.

Current members: 1

“Look who outlasted all you BITCHES.”

Paci-fire sat comfortably in a chair, sipping a martini.

“Alexander the fucking great.”

He figures he’ll go visit an amusement park and enjoy the rest of the trip by himself.

Leave it to the low class to not the make best of a vacation to the Shore.

Then again, Bill came from an upper class family too.

Paci-fire shakes his head in disappointment.

‘Show me your friends and I’ll tell you who you are’ they always said.

They were right.

Chapter End Notes
Stop going into the light.
To whom it may concern: visions are seldom what they seem.

Chapter Summary

He sees his future, and Stanford Pines is in it.

Chapter Notes


See the end of the chapter for more notes

[ The girl who lost her lover goes to the mountain to confide in the Master about the pains of her heart.

…the Master engraves a tattoo on the girl. After that day, the girl dreams of the man.

But then she falls in love with someone else. The tattooed dream soon becomes a nightmare and the tattoo aches severely. ]

-North Eastern Japanese folktale.

He’s 14, and at the police station. He’d snuck out the house after befriending one of the men’s kids who’d loiter outside the mansion often—Jamie was it? He’s a little too drunk to recall.

They’d been drinking, got rowdy—the usual. First time it happens, first time for everything, they say.

“Oh Sir Giordano! Wow, I—I can’t believe you’re here in person! Honour to meet you, sir!” (he thinks the officer sounds like a green brown-nosing jackass)

—Shit, that guy’s here already.

He can hear them talk about adult shit, ‘boys will be boys but he expected more from a Giordano, from one of his own’. The man’s Italian accent is thick, he wonders if the officer can even understand what the man’s saying.

The man greets him, clearly not happy. Says he will be punished severely at home.

“Gonna spank me?” he snickers. (god, can he ever just shut up?)

The man’s eyes have wrinkles fanning out; his eyes harden and the lines become more prominent.

He’d disrespected the man in public, on top of humiliating the family name.

The man was going to kill him. The man was going to kill him.

No…
The man was going to—
He was going to…
He’d probably say it’s what happens to cute boys in jail. *but it happens to boys in general, doesn’t it?*
He’s already sweating. He can smell it through his ruined alcohol-spattered thousand dollar suit.
Will he finally cry this time? Is this the time it happens? He never cries, has never cried. It bothers him because *where does it go? where does it all go?*
But he’s not scared. He’s not scared *he’s not scared*
No one scares him. Because no one scares Gaspard Giordano.
Not even—
*himself?*

There’s a hand around his neck, a hand down his pants stroking him.
He’s being berated and
it feels good? The man’s hands feel so good
Is he even angry?
Does he even hate this?
He does *he does he does.*
He definitely does.

-----
The man is so deep in him, figuratively, literally, and he doesn’t feel much of anything anymore. (when had he ever, anyway?)

He dreams his mother is giving him the talk about the Birds and the Bees while Ford stares at him over her shoulder.
There’s hands around his waist, demonstrating her words.
Hands in his pants, demonstrating her words.
Hands in his mouth, hands hands and they’re branded with markings of dead people.

and
Ford isn’t happy.
and
He doesn’t really feel much of anything.
Ford says, Ford says (in his mind)

"You were so young, Bill. You were so young. You couldn’t feel it, you’d have died, Bill. You’d have died."

And Bill thinks,

*So what?*

Ford is giving him The Talk while his daddy looks on from behind, disappointed.

Ford still tells him he’s too young and Bill just doesn’t fucking get it.

-----

He leans in to kiss Ford. Ford says he’s too young then that he’s too old.

His hands are around Ford’s throat and he says *come to me come to me come to me. I'm not finished with you yet. come to me. only you can only you can—*

Xanther is giving him the Talk with hands choking Ford to death.

He tells Papa he likes Ford. His daddy just smiles.

-----

He tells his father what a failure dear papa has been through out his life and that he knew he knew—

Papa knew what Ford was doing to him.

*You knew didn’t you, Papa? you always knew.*

He’s dreaming *dreaming* dreaming, and he’s at dinner with that Ford guy.

*Your glass is looking a little on the slender side. Want a refill?*

I don’t drink, Bill.

*What? What the hell are you saying, old timer? You always have a drink before we fuck.*

Ford is confused. Ford’s hands are not tattooed.

*…?*

But I don’t drink, Bill. Did you forget?

*What?*
I don’t drink.

No, I mean—why are you calling me that?

Bill? It’s your name?

My name?

Bill. Bill Cipher.

What? My name is—

You’re Bill Cipher, aren’t you?

He stares at Ford, says you’re crazy crazy you’re crazy. Says

I missed you. I’ve missed you so much. Where are your tattoos?

Bill, you’re confusing me with someone else.

No, I’m not. Are you angry? At me? I won’t run away again…

Bill, where’s Fiddleford?

The two of us are enough

Bill—

I’ll kill him if he tries to take you

Bill—

Ford’s hands are tattooed.

Do you want me to fuck you?

Oh yes, please. I thought you’d never ask. Please hurt me like you used to

I

missed you so much

so much.

He barely makes it to the bathroom this time, his stomach rigorously purging itself, thinking if it heaves hard enough, something else will come out too.

He hardly sounds like himself in his dreams.

When will Ford hurt him like he used to?

Ahaha, oh, the human mind was such a strange thing.

It’s intriguing but such a…

messy inconvenience.
Chapter End Notes

Liar.
Papa, are you there? It's me, Casper.

Chapter Summary

Oh daddy dear, you know you’re still number one, but Bill just wants to have fun.

Chapter Notes

Shout out to everyone who’s dealt with the dichotomy between the person you are and the person abuse created.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Old men repulse me, man.” He crushed the cigarette. “But there’s nothing quite like getting fucked by one. They give it to you like they’re scared you’re gonna come to your senses and run away.” He laughs obnoxiously. “—yeah, I got issues, hey, go fuck yourself. I’ve seen your fucking magazines, you god damn fag. Go point fingers at the man in the mirror.”

—The Prodigal Son; too many beers in, and no gun in sight. New York City, 4 years ago.

Since their return from their ‘vacation’, Bill had spent more time than ever isolated in his room. They all speculated it was maybe due to possible food poisoning from the trip, or maybe he was just busy planning the ultimate heist. Allergy season, maybe? Maybe maybe maybe.

No one knew anything; no one knew anything to even pretend to know anything.

Even though this habit of confinement had begun blooming early, around the time they’d first arrived here, it slowly escalated until Bill spent hours and hours at a time alone in his room. Meetings were attended, some skipped but hardly anyone appeared to make a big deal out of it. The assumption he mourned for his family was widespread and accepted readily. It was the biggest tragedy to occur in the Giordano family.

Eventually, Bill’s presence in the mansion ebbed away, and one had to go out of their way in hopes of encountering him at all.

For now, Bill was in a meeting and earlier had requested Pyronica fetch him the police report and autopsy reports regarding the accident. Who knew why Bill wanted to read them again?

She knocked on his door, by habit, and went in.

The room was brightly lit by the calming sun. Bill’s room was one of the better looking ones she’d seen—all red, subtle golds, beiges. She gave the outside a quick peek, a perfect view of the garden; then dropped the papers at Bill’s desk.

As she left, something at the bedside table caught her eyes. Curiosity, getting the better of her as it always did, she snatched it and eagerly gave it a once over.
Photos.

The first photo is of a young boy and a man, they both look alike, clearly related. The back states

**Casper and Isaac.**

The next one has a woman, and a younger boy and girl who look nearly identical. The back states

**Leanne, Ginevra and Casper.**

And the final one has a young boy, an older man and a much older man. All resembling one another, enough to know they are family. The back read

**Gaspard, Isaac and Gaspard.**

…? Pyronica frowned, and surveyed the photos once more. The second one is obviously Bill’s mother, his sister and himself. The first is…his…brother? Bill never mentioned an older brother—then again, the man looked a little too old to be his brother. Isaac? She’d never heard Bill say that name before.

The boy in the third photo was obviously Bill but why was the name Gaspard there? His real name was Casper—or so he had told them. Bill had always been a bit of mystery to everyone, even his gang, and it was hard to verify what was and wasn’t true. For a while, they had even believed he had stolen the identity of a Giordano as opposed to actually being one.

This photo was clearly the strangest one; two Gaspards and an Isaac. If the small boy was Bill, the older man was Gaspard? Was that Bill’s father then?

What the hell was this?

Giving a quick glance around the room, she didn’t spot a family album anywhere.

So, Bill was missing his family…or that’s what she *assumed.*

She knelt on the floor, checking if there wasn’t anything else that might’ve accidentally fallen, and found one more photo.

A photo of the young boy, and the much older man, with soft grey curls and tattooed fingers. It read

**Gaspard and Gaspard. Jr.**

So…the older man was his father?

As she observed the photo, something else caught her attention—

There’s a bottle of whiskey tucked near the foot of the bed.

He’s been drinking non-stop.

He’d been drinking while looking at photos of his family.

Oh Bill…

“Hey, you get the papers?” Pyronica chirped at Bill. His door was open this time, surprisingly, and she took advantage of it.
“Yeah, got’em.” Bill replied, not looking away from the window. His voice sounded weak—guess he really was sick?

Now was a good time as any…

“So, when I came in earlier…” her thumb darted towards his bedside table. “Spotted those photos. Mind explaining’em to me?”

“What’s there to explain?” Turning around, he slouched against the window, a look of interest barely manifesting. The sunlight was weaker now, it bounced off the blonde in his hair, and the black roots looked silver when so close to the window pane.

“Who’s Isaac?” she held up the photo, swishing it side to side causing Bill’s attention to draw to it.

“My…dad?” He said, confused face breaking into an oblivious smile.

His father? Bill never mentioned him by this name.

“And this? Gaspard and Gaspard? This is you, right?”

“Yeah…? What’s this about, I’m getting impatient.”

“Your name is Casper here, and Gaspard here.”

He rolled his eyes. “Gaspard is my birth name, technically. My birth was never registered so it doesn’t really matter. I was one of the lucky ones to be actually named Gaspard.” Shrugging he turned to face the window again. “Mom called me Casper because two Gaspards is confusing and she had shit taste in names.”

“And this guy? The one called Gaspard?”

“My grandfather.”

“You never mentioned him.”

“I did, all the time.”

Why call himself the son of Gaspard if Gaspard was his grandfather—

Oh, right. When his father came into power, he’d have taken the name Gaspard. That was so weird.

God, Bill’s family made no sense with how they ran their freak organization. She didn’t really get it, but decided not to press further.

“You and your sister look like twins.” She said, attempting to lighten the mood. They really did. Both had short dark hair and bore uncanny resemblances in their features.

“You could say that. Irish twins. Born a year apart and all.” Bill turned to face her again, an eyebrow raised with a surprisingly agreeable smile.

“We both looked like our dad but acted like our mom.” He gave the window pane a light tap. “It was rough on my dad. He was a real old fashioned introvert. Liked to hide away.”

An elaborate shrug of his shoulders. “Funny thing, really, is that I was always told I acted more like my father when I grew older.”
“Quiet, introverted and never quite there.” His voice began to wane, and he thinks…his father probably…

endured it too.

Pyronica cackled, as though she’d heard the dumbest thing. “That sounds nothing like you!”

Who was his father before Gaspard had hurt him? Now he was just assuming things, wasn’t he? Wasn’t he…?

She gave the photos another quick inspection. “Now that I look a little closer…your granddad…kinda looks like that Stanford guy. The jaw…and curls. Wow, that’s weird.”

She laughed. “Imagine banging a guy that looked like your grandfather.”

All old men look alike.

Bill remained quiet until she left.

“We have to get together to discuss the Kryptos issue.” Xanthar said adjusting Bill’s collar as his Boss sat in the chair, seemingly transfixed by the view outside the window. It was only the courtyard but it held Bill’s attention as though there were something Xanthar’s eyes could not detect.

“Ugh, that kid. I showed him a little bit of courtesy because of you.” He lazily looked up at Xanthar. “Clean up your mess. Buy the kid a nice pair of cement shoes, on me.”

“Bill, he’s spreading around the rumour you’re dead.”

“Kay.”

Xanthar blinked his eyes tightly, letting a few seconds pass.

“Ooooh, shit! Bill Cipher is supposed to be in cahoots with Casper and if Casper’s dead—well, shit. I’ll have to take care of this, won’t I?” He stood up, rolling his shoulders back and buttoning up his blazer. “Hey…bring me the Dreamcatcher.”

Bill never liked Kryptos. The boy was the son of Xanthar’s former boss, Hectorgon. Funny enough, Hectorgon had attempted to return Bill to his family after finding out his true identity. Unfortunately for the old timer, Xanthar had a thing for the Giordano family—something something about Bill’s family having done something for his family, Bill didn’t even really care—and betrayed Hectorgon in a heartbeat. Kryptos was young though, and when Xanthar chose to work for Bill, he had asked Bill to take care of Kryptos.

Bill said sure, but boy, did he really not like the fucking brat. He didn't like younger people in general.

Xanthar disappeared and when he returned, a medium sized sleek, black case rested in both hands. Bill’s face lit up when he saw it, hands stretching out to take it. “There’s my baby, my pride and joy.” He took it and sat down again, settling the case in his lap. “Tell everyone to gather in the usual meeting room. We’ll have ourselves a little talk about banishing some of these damn Nightmares.”

“Will do.”

Before Xanthar could turn to leave, Bill continued. “Not really in the mood to go to New York…wanted to visit Stanford for a bit, first.”
Xanthar’s eyes constricted, and Bill noticed his unfavourable reaction.

“What’s with you? You get all uppity anytime someone so much as breathes Ford.”

“I do not trust him.”

“You ever hear of contractions, Evan? “ Bill leaned onto his elbows, upper body covering the case. “Where you shorten words, so do not becomes ‘don’t.’” Snickering, he continued. “It pisses me off when you don’t use them. Makes it seem like you’re drawling.”

“And…” he stood up, putting the case on the chair and pulling the man towards him by the shirt. “I haven’t forgotten, you know. About the little stunt you pulled at the Shore. I wouldn’t recommend teasing me again. Consider this a warning.” Leaning into the other’s ear, he hissed “Or I might just put the fear of God into you. Really deep into you.”

He would love that, but he always abstained from doing anything of that sort with Xanthar.

The man met his eyes, but gave nothing away.

“As for the Stanford Pine fiasco, why don’t you trust him?”

“He said no and lived.”

“Oh boy, the good ol ‘no one says no to a Giordano and lives’ urban legend, huh?” He laughed. “Ford is a deadman walking. If I hadn’t returned when I did, Daddy dearest would’ve killed him the same way he killed the farm guy.”

Xanthar frowned.

“Ford owes me his life, the ungrateful bastard.”

“You never mention—”

“Of course not, it’s none of your business.” A mischievous smile settled into Bill’s lips. “You guys sure believe every little thing you hear, huh?”

Xanthar isn’t sure how that’s related to anything; Bill was purposely leaving out information and had confirmed saying no was fatal.

“What’s going on with you?” He eyed Xanthar. “You’ve been acting weird ever since I tried killing Jason.”

“It’s not that.”

“Then…?”

“It’s a sensitive topic.”

Bill’s eyes widened and then one slightly narrowed as he laughed in disbelief. “Are you serious right now? Oh boy, you actually think my dad gave it to me, is that it? Come on, I told you I was fucking around! Do you actually believe that?”

Xanthar is quiet.

“My dad was a good man, okay?” Bill touched his own face, hands making rounds about the skin, alluding to past devastating violence that resulted in a need for plastic surgery. “Despite this, he was
a good man.”

“Don’t ever talk about my father like that.” He held Xanthar by the shirt and the man isn’t sure whether Bill is being serious or not.

He let go and circled Xanthar playfully; the man’s eyes followed his erratic movements, turning his body to continuously meet Bill. “My father is a good man. To even imply he’d ever do something like that…! It’s disgusting, despicable. Get out of my sight. You fuck off for how many years? 5? After you threaten my life? After you threaten MY life? You were gone so long! We’re all worried sick about you!” His voice raised, word by word. “If he heard you talk like this—you’re lucky he’s not here. Count your lucky stars he’s not here.”

*His words aren’t coming out right…the word order is wrong, isn’t it?*

Bill grabbed Xanthar by the face, lips moving close to the man suggestively. “You come back and you talk this shit? To me? In my house? IN MY HOUSE?” With a grin, he pulled away rapidly and threw over a nearby desk with ease. The aptness of the chaos and crashing sound complimented Bill’s performance and if not for his smile, one would think he truly was angry.

“You’re a good-for-nothing. Unfit to be an heir, unfit to be here, unfit. Unworthy. You are Gaspard’s biggest disappointment. A filthy liar liar liar. A snake. Leave, get out of this house and don’t come back.”

Bill stopped, and beamed at Xanthar. “So…we’re playing impersonations. Can you guess, can you guess who I am…?”

“You father.”

“Bingo! You’re so smart, Evan. So smart….”

He took out his cigarette holder. It’s empty. Xanthar already has one for him and he takes it, hand shaking but he’s smiling—bright as ever.

“He never did anything like that to me. He never would’ve.” He lit up the cigarette, the flame illuminating Bill’s face as the smiling mask he wore perpetually dropped for those few moments.

“I mean, if—fuck, if my son came to me and said my dad was fucking him, I’d just…who knows what the fuck I’d do. He was a good man, yeah?”

He inhaled deeply.

“It’s always the good men who stick their dicks where it doesn’t belong.” His New York accent broke through; subtle but noticeable.

“I did everything… I could not to be a good man.” Smoke fled from his lips as he spoke. “And the gutter stench is still sticking to my 2 grand designer shoes—life is funny, isn’t it?”

“My father, my father, my father was a good man.” Bill reiterated.

“My father never believed me.” Bill grinning again, and the smoke surrounding him almost gave the impression he was the one burning. “Papa never believed me, that’s all.”

Neither men spoke for awhile. The only sound between them was Bill’s heavy breathing and the sound of cigarette ash being flicked. The unevenness of Bill's breathing hinted that he desired to say something but indecision held him too tight.
Was there a point in saying anything? Would he be called a liar over and over again?

Would Evan believe him? Or think he’s disgusting?

...

It’s okay... to talk about it? Is it okay? Is it really okay?

...

“My language sure is rough these days.”

He hesitated.

...

He told Xanthar, and the man can only apologize in his gruff voice, incapable of sounding sympathetic. But he knows Xanthar means it.

Looking out the window, he said “The birds sure are noisy today, aren’t they?”

Xanthar couldn’t hear any birds.

—

“Everyone’s dead. So why is it, why is it, I’m still here? Stuck looking out the window at the birds in the fucking courtyard...?”

—

“Postpone the meeting until tomorrow. I’m going to bed.”

“It’s 3pm.”

“Don’t wake me up.” Bill began undressing; midway, he stopped to look at Xanthar.

“...if anyone finds out about... about that, kill them.”

He dreams he dreams

Xanthar is fucking him and laughing at him and saying how he trusts too easily and he’s been waiting, waiting for so long to hurt Bill like this that he knew when he met the boy that the boy loved to get fucked like this

And really, had Bill ever thought about retiring? Letting Xanthar be the boss? says Bill would make a great pet, he can spend his days backbiting and following orders and then cry while getting fucked into submission, a game they can play until he’s too old.

It’s the middle of the night, someone’s outside his door.
It’s that man, that man…

He held Dreamcatcher; it’s definitely fully loaded and burning bright as ever in the dark. This…this could kill Evan. This will kill Evan.

He knows Evan’s outside. He knows Evan’s coming to fuck him.

Predictable. He’ll kill him before he has a chance.

*Maybe he should hide under the bed instead…?

No, there’s something beneath his bed…

You drop your guard a little, just a little, and…

Bill couldn’t trust anyone.

He pointed the gun at the door, finger on the trigger. Waits.

Wait, why would Xanthar betray him? That made no sense. The man had plenty of chances to do whatever he wanted to Bill and he never had.

*What was he thinking? What was he doing?*

He lowered the gun. The door opened, slowly.

“Bill, what are you doing?” The man eyed the gun in his hands apprehensively.

He glared at Xanthar, words coming out with no feeling and no power. ”I—I have a gun. Don’t…don’t…no closer, don’t come closer…"

“Don’t come near me!…It’s loaded and…and all! I’ll… blow your head off. Just…try me.” His threat comes out choppy and awkward, as if he doesn’t believe the words himself.

*Again. Why does he not sound like himself?*

Xanthar came closer and Bill barked meekly, “Don’t come near me—nearer…I’m warning you.” Dismay lessened the impact of the decisive words but it never hurt to try. Fighting was necessary, he had to fight a little bit, even if it was done passively or in ways the man didn’t notice—he had to fight.

It never hurt to try.

*No, it did hurt to try. What was he doing?*

And then Xanthar is on top of him, wrestling the gun out of his hands. He doesn’t scream, only whines *don’t touch me don’t touch me don’t touch me please don’t do this to me*

“Not so loud or I’ll have to kill everyone.”

…”

“Did you forget? If anyone finds out about that, I have to get rid of them. Get it together, *Cas*. Don’t turn me into a mass murderer because you’re afraid of the boogeyman.”

Bill only laughed pathetically. Xanthar let go of him, and took the gun. He could hear the man
removing the clip, putting it back in the draw. Probably fetching lube too, right? Of course...

When he was done, he approached Bill and leaned down to kiss him but hesitated, unsure if it was too much too soon. Opting for something lighter, he kissed Bill on the forehead with a hand dragging across a cheek, hoping comfort could be exchanged between their skin. Bill always responded to touch.

Of course…of course Evan was going to hurt him...

“No Evan…what are you doing? You’re straight—you’re straight, aren’t you?”

“I think everyone has one exception to that.”

“No I don’t want to…”

Bill tried retreating from the touch but Xanthar held his chin with a hand. “What are you talking about? I don’t want to—”

“No don’t. Don’t ask me to, I don’t want to.”

“Bill, are you drunk? What’s wrong with you?” He felt Bill’s forehead, it wasn’t warm. Now that he thought about it, Bill didn’t smell of alcohol either.

What was wrong? During Bill’s previous episodes, he seemed to want to—

Now fingers had begun to lace themselves into the belt loops of Xanthar's pants; the boy was undoing his belt and—

“Just…just don’t make it hurt too much. I’m really…not feeling so good right now—well? I’m not feeling well, sorry… I messed up my speech…It’s well—I’m not feeling well…not…I’m not feeling good…” his face crumpled, fingers self-consciously bundling by his lips as if they sought to protect from incoming attacks before returning to work on Xanthar’s pants.

Xanthar grabbed Bill’s hands, visibly unsettled by the way his Boss was acting. “Bill, Bill are you alright?” To hear Bill talk like this…he sounded like a feeble child. It was frightening, and very little ever scared Xanthar.

“Non mi sento bene…male male.” Bill muttered, causing Xanthar to softly pull him in. “I don’t know what you’re saying, Bill.” He stood upright, turning to leave to fetch a glass of water when Bill grabbed him by the wrist, stopping him.

“No no no where are you going? Are you angry at me?” He was out of it. Somehow, Xanthar had to wake Bill the fuck up before…

“No no, don’t go.” Bill pleaded desperately. In quick succession, he escaped Bill’s needy touches and returned with water, not sure if it would do any good but anything was worth a shot right now.

“Open up.” He forced the water down Bill’s throat, ignoring the boy’s weak protesting. After deciding enough had been swallowed, he wet one of his own hands and patted at Bill’s face.

“Wake up, wake up. Are you in there, Bill?”

“…Evan?” Bill’s voice, his regular voice.

There’s a short silence as Bill takes his time to compose himself, the difference is perceptible—primarily in his face and body language. A distinct lack of shame was present in Bill’s face; instead,
Bill seemed angry. At Xanthar.

Bill ran a hand through his hair, sighing deeply.

"Why the fuck did you kiss me? Lost your mind huh?" The trademark grin is back, and something else that pulled unequally at Bill's ashen eyes. "Or is this a death wish of yours, Evan?"

Now Xanthar is apprehensive for an entirely different reason.

"If you ever...touch me, when I'm like that again. I'm going to kill you. Do you understand?"

Holding Evan's face, their lips touching with the promise of ultraviolence. "I can't live like this. I need you to kill yourself for me. Can you do that? I can't can't have anyone knowing about this. You understand, don't you, Evan?"

Straightening his spine to confidently meet Bill's lips, Xanthar replied, "I can't. I promised I'd kill those who found out. If I'm dead, I can't do that."

Loyalty. He has to remind Bill of his loyalty…

"Kill yourself." Their lips meet, but it’s not persuasive enough for Evan, whose tenacity was his strongest trait. "Well? How about it? We can fuck and then you can kill yourself. Do you want to...?"

"No."

Bill’s getting angry—it’s in the way his lips begin to twitch, the way his eyes sporadically widen, the way his voice’s pitch modulates. "I hate that word! Oh boy, do I hate that word, Evan. I really hate it. Let's try this again, hm? Answer me, one more time."

Xanthar said no once more and Bill struck him across the face.

"You're disobeying your boss. Are you acting out? Do you want me to fuck you? Is that what this is about?"

Opening his arms, smiling, Bill said, “Okay then. I'll accept your no. I am a generous man, Evan! Oh am I generous…” His arms dropped, and eyes narrowed in a way that made Evan’s chest tighten. “But it’s going to cost you.”

Bill grabbed a fistful of black hair and gave a nice hard tug back, jerking the man’s head to face upwards. His face met Xanthar’s and breathing densely, between licks at the man’s cheek, he whispered “Take your clothes off.”

Evan doesn’t fight, but doesn’t participate either. It doesn’t matter, he kisses him, licks and sucks him in all the right places, and thinks how much he’s going to enjoy breaking Evan in. Because it doesn’t matter anymore.

It doesn’t matter.

He had to fuck Evan before Evan fucked him. It was the only way to keep him around and the only way to keep him docile—the only way, he tells himself.

But...5 years...Evan had been loyal for nearly 5 years...why now? Why now?

“Just relax, Evan. Yeah, just like that—no, it’s not going to hurt, unless you make me angry, then it might a little—is this your first time with a guy? Really? You’re just filled with surprises, aren’t you? So I was the first you liked…Bet you’ve been waiting for me this whole time, hm? Like destiny—
relax, I told you to relax…”

He thinks Evan might make a great pet.

…”Look at me. No no, keep looking. Rock your hips a little more to meet mine—there we go. You’re so good at taking orders, aren’t you? Like a dog. Is that what you are?...Then I should fuck you like one, right? Turn around.”

…”Where do you want it? On your face? Maybe in that dark hair of yours…”

…”Round two? You’re so eager...Don’t forget who you work for, Evan. You...work for me...make some noise, I want to hear how much you hate this...oh? You’re loving it, aren’t you?...why haven’t we done this before? I should’ve had you...the first time...we met…”

Dear papa called him a liar so he

Sliced open the side of his father’s face.

Thinks ‘Hey looks kinda like Evan’s scar.’

“Are you there, Papa? It’s me, Casper.” The boy held the receiver with little care, palms sweaty inside his gloves—he isn’t sure why. There's hesitation in the man's breath on the other end before he speaks, “I never thought I’d hear your voice again. You sound different.”

—6 months ago, New York City.

Are you still there, Papa? It's me, Gaspard.

Papa

Papa, are you there?...

...

Papa...

Casper, won’t you please come home?

Chapter End Notes

This wouldn't happen if you stayed in New York.
Catching Bill Cipher

Chapter Summary

Too much sun.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The snake etched into his hands burrows and hollows him out from deep within. The water takes him and he knows, no blood is thicker than the water of the womb.

— Alternate Universe: Bill Cipher and Stanford Pines never connect, Bill self-destructs.

There’s only a black stain where Bill Cipher should be.

Bill Cipher was here.

He’s gone now.

Chapter End Notes

Sun-burnt.
Chapter Summary

Mr Sandman, bring him a dream.♫ Make him the cutest that Bill’s ever seen.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So you’re the smart guy around here. Let’s hear it—think there’s a universe where we live happily ever after?” The boy said, fiddling with his eyepatch, face illuminated by the blue of the portal. But the man only gave a rueful smile. “There are an infinite amount of numbers between 7 and 8, Bill, but none of them are going to be 9.”

—The distant future.

He’s dreaming? Looks like it.

A vortex of everything that could have been and already has been accumulates in the sky, while colours of static attempt to imitate the stormy blue of the sea. He thinks it looks like a painter’s palette if the painter only liked morbid blues, greys and blacks. Doesn’t really like those colours…

He sees himself. With black hair, dressed in blue.

He wipes his doppelganger’s face as if cleaning a steamed mirror and sees a gold Stanford Pines.

…?

This is the next life.

....?

He looks past his lovesick doppelganger’s shoulder and sees Ford. Ford’s upset.

“No, this is the wrong one. I said to send me back!”

“I did! Sheesh!”

Whose voice is that…?

“The only difference is he has both of his eyes! His hair is still blonde as well!”

“Nuh uh. This is like, way before you guys had…a thing? A thing. “

It’s coming from…himself?

“No, I need to go further back.”

“Well how far do you wanna go back then? Gimme some specifics here! One eye, handicapped, going in blind here!”
“He has to be younger. Much younger.”

“Whoa okay. ....How young?”

“Perhaps 4 or 5.”

“INTERVENTION!! Stanford Filbrick Pines! I’m drawing the line here! The line is DRAWN—"

“We had a deal, Cipher!”

Ford is talking to him…?

“Jeez alright alright. Don’t blow your top, pops. ...You got issues, man.”

Ford looks intensively at him.

“He’s not going to remember this?”

“Nah.”

What is this…?

“Listen, if you want a mini-me, why not let me de-age your current one, wipe his memory, and DONE! You got yourself a whipper snapper, ready to be moulded into your bonny dream boy!”

“You can do that?”

“I control the big 3, IQ!”

“Then why didn’t you offer this before?”

“Not my job to give you awesome options. But I got a soft spot for myself so I’ll sweeten the deal a little. Just a little though, so don’t get ahead of yourself, kid.”

“I have to think…”

Ford rushes to him, grabs his face.

“Listen. Listen carefully. We are…nothing more than a product of our experiences, environment, culture—I’m going to—I’m going to fix this. I’m going to fix everything.”

He kisses Bill on the forehead.

“I’m going to make a place where we’re happy. Do you understand? It’s going to be okay, Will.”

My name’s not—

“Ah, forgive me. I’ve gotten used to calling you that…”

Ford smiles.

“I love you, Bill.”

He tries to kiss Ford but the man eludes his lips, saying “No, no, not like that. Not like this, okay? We’re not—I never should’ve—What I did was wrong. Go to sleep, Bill.”
Ford is resisting his touches.

“Don’t…don’t come see me. Don’t stay there either! Go to a hotel—no, you won’t remember this. You won’t remember…”

“Chop chop, Sixer! Quit smooching me and let’s bolt! I got a party waiting for me, ya know!”

“Alright alright! I’m going to fix this! I’m going to take care of you, Bill. I have to take care of you—”

Black hands take Ford, his eyes flicker yellow before the dark swallows him.

...?

There’s something in his ear—

**BUY GOLD BYE!**

He dreams the tattoo on his hand told him to

*Buy gold.*

Once again, he awoke with Xanthar’s naked back in his view. Red marks lingered on the no longer clear skin—the end result of Bill clawing at his skin as he’d fucked him face down; what wonderful reminders of last night. Too bad Xanthar couldn’t see them himself.

Last night was a substantial turning point for Bill and Xanthar’s relationship. Although Bill welcomed change, this change invoked uncertainty within him. Overcome by a frantic state of mind, a hasty move had been made; and now a vital piece might end up taken from him: his queen. Life lacked an ‘undo’ option, and Bill was left to fix this somehow.

Putting aside introspections and chess allusions—what was he to do when Xanthar insisted on playing the part of a dog? Wasn’t it a given that he should entertain that notion? Take advantage of it?

It’s in his nature; the proverbial scorpion, stinging the frog.

So then why is something off?

Is this regret? Bill rarely regretted anything. Regret was something you felt if you believed an action you took was wrong, and Bill was *never* wrong. He’d enjoyed sleeping with Xanthar but the circumstances under which it occurred could’ve been…well, better. Forcing himself on a close friend was naturally going to have detrimental effects—be they subtle or conspicuous. But any damage Bill had dealt to Xanthar remained a mystery to him, the man never giving anything away as usual. Xanthar’s reticence always delighted Bill—who didn’t enjoy a good mystery? But now it was nothing more than an annoyance; a hindrance that prevented him from obtaining closure.

Fuck Evan.

He has to fix this, even if he’s unsure what requires fixing to begin with. But it must be dealt with, whether Bill is in the mood or not.

Having Evan fuck him to even the score was a possibility. For any other leader, such a thing would be entirely out of the question. As Xanthar’s Boss, he should never allow that. Rules were never
Bill’s strong point though, as he’d demonstrated time and again.

He could fuck whoever he wanted.

But still, why does something feel off?

He’d done this plenty of times with others—why is this leaving a foul taste of decay on his tongue? Because he’d fucked Evan after knowing him for so long, where the others endured it as initiation? No, he’d fucked them regularly after that. It meant nothing.

Was it because Evan had been the one to save him from prematurely returning here? Or that Evan hadn’t hurt him, while having every opportunity to do so? Or because Evan was older than him, bore his father’s scar and yet was everything his father was not?

Wait, no. He reminded himself that it’s not Evan who wears his father’s scar, it’s his father who wore Evan’s scar.

Why did it matter? What was it that ate at him so? The introversion? The distance? The fact he rarely talked to Bill, reminiscent of his real father? Or was it, that despite Evan sharing similarities with his father, he is a man that does not remind Bill of his father in the slightest…?

Introspection was the worst, and a waste of time. He doesn’t understand how he feels or why he feels, or if he even feels to begin with.

What matters is that Bill Cipher doesn’t apologize.

—

They shower together, and Evan is on his knees. Bill leaned back against the cold tiles, and thought how amazing Evan was with his tongue, and how this couldn’t last forever. In the heat of the moment, without thinking, he gets on his knees too. He can tell by the grip in his hair Xanthar is trying hard not to thrust into his mouth but he wouldn’t have minded.

When the call of submission, graven into the ink on his hands through years of abuse rang through his ears, there was very little he could do. It pulled and whined at him, telling him to be good, to obey and everything would be okay; it was for the best. But it was a lie, wasn’t it? It might’ve saved him once upon a time—a utile method he’d adapted to survive, but now it only hindered him, weakening him. Leaving him perpetually at the mercy of men who were older, always older.

What to do what to do? It didn’t matter in the end anyway, he could only make do and answer the call; to not lift the receiver and deny it took strength that the black on his hands drained every single time.

(And the sound at the end of receiver, was so comforting, reminding him of his days as a child. He only wanted to be safe…to be safe. )

He lets Evan cum on his chest, the water washing it away as though it was never there to begin with. It washes the white but it cannot wash the black.

They kiss one more time, before finishing up.

—

Stanford Pines’ blood will short-circuit the origin of the call, finally quietening it. He’s certain of it.
“Oh golly, now you’re even dressing me! I could get used to this!” He announced, arms spreading for emphasis as Evan buttoned up his shirt, quiet. Today was a good day—no, a **great** day.

“Woof.” A kiss was planted on Xanthar’s jaw, Bill beaming derisively and the man resumed dressing in silence.

“You know, I gotta say, *Scarface*, can’t believe I wasted time on teeth when I had you this whole Man, if I’d known how good it felt to bury myself in you, phew. Teeth would’ve been put out of commission before he was even in the game!” If the words stung, Xanthar gave no indication.

“Hey, kiss me.” Bill requested and Xanthar complied but not without a fleeting hesitation in his eyes that Bill’s attentive nature caught immediately.

“You know… You can’t even kiss me without flinching. It’s because you’re fucking straight, Xanthar.” A flick on the man’s cheek was delivered, Bill still smiling; plenty of amusement in his eyes, with matching hostility in his body language.

“I think you can’t tell the difference between romantic love and platonic love. Because love is new for you, isn’t it *wittle* Evan?” Bill’s expression is unreadable but Xanthar knows this game well enough. Spite of this nature came when Bill sought to nourish animosity with the intention of creating distance between them.

“Look at me playing Dr. Phil…” Closing the distance between them, Bill lingered near Xanthar’s neck; more red marks visible. “How are you feeling? I was gentle enough, wasn’t I?”

“I’m fine, Bill.”

“Ask anyone Evan, and you’ll find what happened last night is nothing like what happened to the rest.” He pulled away, finger-gunning.

“I was thinking of having your hands tattooed but now that I’ve fucked you nice and good, maybe not, huh?” Bill sat down in a nearby chair, folding his arms behind his head as he watched Xanthar fixedly.

“You were going to tattoo my hands?”

“Yep, like a ‘make you part of the family’ type deal. But a dog can’t join the family…can it?” An eye narrowed accompanied by a lopsided smile. Dropping his arms, he leaned forward, eyes widening menacingly.

“I fucked you in the ass. Where’s your pride as a man?” Bill grinned darkly.

“If I believed my pride was located there, I’d have to bring attention to your sexual history.”

Bill’s grin didn’t fade but his eyes narrowed dangerously.

“And the men you’ve had inside you.”

Bill slapped him.

**What** men? If they’re dead, they never existed exist! As far as I’m concerned, I’m a delicate virgin, untouched by any *filthy* man. You’d be *wise* to keep that in mind there, Xanthar.” Death wish, Xanthar must have a death wish. Bill would gladly grant him that should he continue to *want so* audaciously.
Xanthar said nothing, face dropping all expression.

Bill stared at his blank visage in silence, neither men spoke for a few minutes. Then, with no fear, Xanthar trailed a thumb at Bill’s cheekbone delicately, as if admiring craftsmanship.

“Real cute, Juliet.” Bill snickered, curious about Xanthar’s sudden arbitrary action.

“I don’t want to see you like that again.”

An eyebrow was raised at that, confident smirk widening as if he’d been challenged to a game he held a world title in. “I won’t. It isn’t me after all.” It was the truth. Whoever that was last night, it was not Bill Cipher. Noticing Xanthar’s gaze lingering, Bill asked, “What are you looking at?”

“I miss your old face.”

Bill let out a soft giggle, a child’s sound; it contrasted with the entire atmosphere. Having enough of idle standing, he pushed Evan onto the bed, straddling him.

They stared at one another in silence; Bill smiling and Xanthar waiting in anticipation.

“I dreamt…you fucked me.” He kissed Evan, softly. Hands exploring still wet black hair. His face went into the crook of Evan’s neck and hid there. “When I woke up, I was afraid.”

Before Xanthar could respond, Bill added “You’re going to try to kill me, aren’t you?” A fretful hand circled at his shoulder, where a tattoo they both shared lay hidden beneath.

“I intend to delay my death.”

Bills eyes fluttered open and close.

“As well as yours.”

“Did you like it? When I was inside you?”

“It’s not for me.”

“If I had asked you, would you have?”

“I would have, yes.”

“Why?”

“I see no reason not to. It means nothing.”

“How cute. Correct me if I’m wrong but your little ‘loyalty to my family’ deal you play, expired, didn’t it? Your debt was paid off. When?”

“After the first year.”

“I figured as much, yet you’re still here.”

“I am a creature of habit.”

“I can believe that.”

Bill vibrated his slips into the skin at Xanthar’s neck, the man squirmed letting Bill know he was, unfortunately, ticklish. This was valuable information…Bill logged it away, eager to use it when the
time was right.

“Ugh, being stuck here leaves us talking about our feelings. We should be out there causing hell!”

Again, he assaulted the skin, tickling and again, Xanthar tried desperately not to move away.

“We have plenty of Hell to deal with right here.”

Bill chuckled, and blew raspberries into Xanthar’s neck. This time, the man tried to stop him with a hand but he intercepted it, swatting it away while laughing.

“Nice to see you’re obeying me. I like hearing you talk. There’s no reason to be shy. Your enunciation is perfect and your voice is sexy. Bet you’d make a great salesman.” As the night ended, he’d told Xanthar a new rule was in place: he’d have to reply with three words or more when speaking to Bill. Thus far, Xanthar had obliged well enough.

Bill sighed deeply, moving slightly to put distance between them.

“Last night you could’ve fucked me and I’d have taken it. And thought it was a nightmare.”

“I would never do that.”

“I would do it to you. Without remorse. I’d fuck you puffy and swollen, and drown you in my body fluids.”

“You are entitled to do as you please.”

Bill laughed. Again, he huddled into Evan’s neck, masking his face with the man’s skin. Humming lowly, “Protect me from what I want.”

“I intend to.”

Bill nipped at the skin in his neck. “Let’s run away together. Let’s go to Vegas.”

“We should all go.”

Bill made a contemplative hum, the air tickled Xanthar’s neck and he mentally cursed Bill for teasing him.

Silence visited again, and having enough of it, Xanthar softly touched Bill’s neck. “I forgive you.”

“I never said I was sorry.”

“You don’t need to say it for me to know.”

Bill nipped him again in the neck, but didn’t argue.

“Do you want to fuck, one more time? Before we go downstairs.”

“Do you want to?”

“Nah.”

He rolled to the side, and laid beside Evan. Staring at the ceiling, the familiar ceiling he’d hated; that conjured painful memories should he stare too long.

“Do you want to share my bed? Not sex, I mean, if you want it can be…but I—I don’t want to sleep
alone anymore. It’s not working.” Frowning and grabbing Xanthar’s hand, he continued, “And besides…some eye candy at night would be nice, and distracting.” He can only think how much he hates this ceiling.

Squeezing Bill’s hand, Xanthar replied, “Of course.”

“Not like you haven’t let yourself into my bed before…let’s make it official.” Having enough cliché heart to heart, Bill jumped up from the bed.

“Time to go downstairs! Chop chop!”

As Bill made his way to the door, Xanthar, not entirely satisfied yet, said, “Bill. I’m sure your father is proud of you. I know I am.”

Without turning around, Bill barked, “Shut up.”

Immediately, he wondered what there was to be proud of. Having returned here to satiate a fleeting and now regrettable lust for power? Or that he’d finally welcomed this life, having embraced his origins and family name, despite all it entailed? One could call it bravery—or utter stupidity. Bill was inclined to go with the latter, not bothering to lie to himself any longer. He’d come here, unprepared and was paying for it.

Bill Cipher was never wrong, however. It was only a matter of time before he brought his demons to heel.

“You’ve come a long way since the scared boy I met in New York.”

An undeniable truth; hardly relevant now.

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Come here.”

“Fuck off.”

“Come here, Cas.” On the verge of snarling, he approached Xanthar. Before he could physically retaliate, the man began rubbing his head, as one would do to pacify an unruly child. The other hand came to rest at the meeting of his neck and shoulder; cold hands.

“You don’t have to be afraid while I’m here.”

“Go fuck yourself, Evan.” Bill is sure he’s going to start seeing red soon. “You’re making me angry, Evan.”

“I know I am. But some things need to be said.”

There’s a flicker in Bill’s eyes, and his knife is already out, hungry, at Xanthar’s throat. It’s steady and sharp; murderous intent reflecting in its shiny surface.

“You believe in soul mates, Evan?” Fingers smudged against Xanthar’s jaw, pinching skin and trying to get the man to move; the blade would nick skin if he did. All he had to do was move…

“Bet you’re mine.” His switchblade left as quickly as it came, his lips replacing it and Xanthar isn’t sure which is sharper. “Evan, remember: Death comes in threes.”

Picking up the black case that held Dreamcatcher and armed with a sunny disposition, he departed
out the door. “Come come…”

If he could love, he’d certainly love Evan Xander.

He’d love him hard with his blade, and maybe with *something else* too.

“No no, abstract art is bullshit. Abstract art is for people who can’t art. It’s a cop-out.” 8baller said, hands gesticulating dramatically as usual.

“Just because you can’t understand the notion of abstract art doesn’t make it not art.” Paci-fier retorted, between glances at his book.

“Fuck notions.”

“I’m sure the notion would say the same thing about you should they have sentiency.”

“Wow, fancy language. Sentiency.”

“It’s an incredibly basic word. Are you fucking retarded?”

8baller was ready to explode. “Why don’t you go fuck off back to New York with your law degree, you sack of shit.”

“Gladly if that’s what Bill wants.” Paci-fier’s thinned. “You sound all upset. Is it because you don’t even have a high-school education, Jason?”

“Sometimes I almost forget what a fucker you are. Almost.”

“Cry me a river, Jersey rat.”

“Wait, Paci-fier has a law degree?” Teeth interrupted, looking utterly confused. “Yo, how old are you?”

“You don’t know how old I am?”

“Nah, answer him, Alex. How old are you?” 8baller asked, curious himself.

“None of you know how old I am?” He asked again, directing the question at everyone present. Pyronica shrugged, her magazine being more important and the rest clearly didn’t know.

“Well if that’s the case, I ain’t saying shit.”

“What! Come on! How old are you, man?!”

“Nah.” Paci-fier went back to his book.

“God damn. GOD DAMN ALEX.” 8baller yelled but Paci-fier ignored him, having plenty of experience in the art of ignoring 8baller’s incessant loud whining.

“Hey, you guys wanna see photos from our trip to The Shore?” Teeth chirped excitedly. “Got some good ones.”

“Hey, you got any ones of Jason blowing Bill?” Paci-fier asked innocently. “I’d like one for my scrapbook.”

“You picking a fight with me, Alex? You wanna fucking go?”
“What’s the problem? You did suck Bill’s dick didn’t you?”

“You’re testing your luck, man…”

“Hey remember those times when you’d talk about how bad homosexuality was?”

“Alex…”

“Being gay is wrong, said Jason with a big thick cock in his mouth.”

“GO FUCK YOURSELF ALEX!!” Everyone erupted in laughter, prompting 8baller to pick up a chair and throw to the other side of the room. It made a loud crashing sound, but the awful laughter didn’t falter in the slightest. “Bill raped my mouth and you guys think it’s funny!”

“Whoa the R word is pretty heavy. Pretty sure you enjoyed it.” Paci-fire said, eager to push more of 8baller’s buttons.

“Man, I’m outta here. I hate everyone. All of you can go fuck yourselves.”

“Now boys, language. We’re all adults here, high class adults, in a high class mansion with high class affairs—ah what the hell. What’re you guys crying about now?” At that moment, Bill and Xanthar wandered in, the former having overheard the last sentence.

“Playing nice?” Bill asked, interested in this morning’s current drama.

“Bill, Jason said you raped his mouth.” Paci-fire went straight to the point.

“Is that so? I’ve never raped anyone.” Bill said, fake concern in his voice but none in his eyes.

“Bill, you admit it now. It was rape, it was borderline rape.”

“Ha,” you have rape fantasies, Jason? Is that why you want it to be rape?” Bill’s eyes narrowed, and 8ballers first instinct is to get the hell out of there.

“Bye.” 8baller spun around, ready to run for it the second Bill came too close.

“Aw, don’t be like that.” Bill hadn’t moved yet. “I thought I fixed things between us, hm? Magic healing cock.”

Laughter exploded in the room.

“Ain’t that the fucking truth.” Paci-fire said between hiccups of laughter. He pointed at 8baller. ”You sucked Bill’s dick a few times and now you’re all lovey dovey over him again after he tried killing you.”

”Fuck you.” 8baller gave up. It wasn’t worth it.

“Alright, let’s settle down, fellas.” Bill said, the room quietening down in response.

“Guess what I have…?” He patted the black case. “Dreamcatcher.”

“OH SHIT. YOU BROUGHT IT! YOU BROUGHT IT!” 8baller exploded for an entirely different reason now.

“God damn, I still can’t believe you had that shit made, Bill.” Paci-fire put his book down. “You gotta be the only asshole who’d ever pay what? 5grand to have a fancy gun made which sole
purpose is to kill members of your own damn gang.”

Of all the weird things Bill did, having that gun made was something no one in the gang ever forgot. The fact he’d had something created with the sole intention of killing them seemed absurd. An undeniable red flag.

“Hey, it’s theatrics, Alex. Theatrics. We’re all Nightmares, and you can’t just kill a Nightmare.” He banged harder on the case. “You gotta use a Dreamcatcher, dontcha know?!”

8baller stood in the back, flashing thumbs up continuously. It was like something out of a B grade movie. Bill and he always loved flamboyant shit, adding drama in their lives and pretending life was one big movie. It was what drew Bill to 8baller and what kept 8baller glued tight to Bill. No one was a sadist quite like Bill was, and did Jason ever love gore. The things they’d done together…he couldn’t imagine separating from Bill unless the reason was fucking good.

“TAKE IT OUT, BILLL. I WANNA SEE IT. I WANNA TOUCH IT. I WANNA—”

“Calm the fuck down, Jason. God damn.” Paci-fire cut in.

“Fuck off. Go be a killjoy somewhere else.”

“You know Bill, a gold-plated gun is absolutely useless and pointless. It’s flashy, that is all. I just don’t get the point of it.”

“Well no one knows why you drink out of baby bottles but here we are, Alex.” 8baller shot back.

“Settle down, boys. We can get rowdy later. Wipe that sour look off your face, Paci-fire. You’re killing the fun.”

The case opened and Bill carefully removed the current object of discourse.
A Desert Eagle .50 caliber. Gold-plated, ivory handled, accented and engraved with

*We’ll Meet Again*

It was the romantic in him. But it was true, wasn’t it?

“Recoil’s a bitch on this baby, but the pain is worth it.” He stroked the gold with tenderness usually reserved for his dick. “This is the only thing that can kill me.”

He turned his attention to everyone in the room, finger lewdly thrusting in the trigger hole.

“Figured we’d take care of Kryptos and Keyhole. I’m tired of dealing with these people.”

“These people huh?” Paci-fire said, sounding unimpressed and somewhat offended.

“Yeah *you* people.” Bill pointed the gun at Paci-fire causing him to flinch instinctively. “It’s loaded.”

Lowering the gun, Bill resumed his speech. “Now, someone’s gotta stay in New York to replace those two dead bodies. Volunteers? Anyone? Anyone at all?”

“Send Alex and Pyronica.” 8baller suggested.

“Pyronica doesn’t leave my side.” Bill said sternly. “Xanthar either.”

Bill nodded at Paci-fire.”You and 8baller can go.”
“Why not send Teeth?”

“Teeth is a fucking baby.” Bill laughed, and the rest did too, agreeing. Teeth muttered nonsense underneath his breath, not looking to start anything.

In the corner of Teeth’s eye, he noticed Bill staring at him; the look was ominous—he isn’t sure if Bill wants to fuck him or kill him. Ignoring the bristling of his hair, he gave a sheepish laugh, hoping Bill would laugh again too. But he didn’t; the stare never broke and the eyes never softened.

“Anyway. I’m going to see Stanford Pines tonight.” Bill announced, standing up. “I gotta give him the gift I bought him, and test the waters a little, see if he’s ready to have the question popped to him.”

“Seems a little sudden, though?” Teeth asked, tilting his head inquiringly. There was no way the Stanford guy would want to join now. Bill had hardly worked on the guy.

“Hmmmm, who knows. We’ll see.” Bill left them with that, returning to his room, Xanthar following him.

______________________________________________

“Do you want to even the score…?” The hand around Xanthar’s tightened dangerously; this question was loaded.

“No. I’m not interested in men.”

“Ah, I see. Too bad. I had an entire post-fucking conversation already played out in my head.”

“Is that so?”

“Hey…you don’t have to reply with three words. Just reply, okay?” Bill let go of the hand, and laid back on the bed while Xanthar took the seat next to the bed.

“I’ll have a short nap…” Bill murmured, turning to his side.

“You haven’t eaten yet.”

“Bring me something then. I don’t want to go downstairs again.”

Xanthar stood up and obeyed, fetching Bill breakfast. When he returned, Bill was already asleep.

______________________________________________

He’s dreaming, as always.

“Cas Cas Cas! Where are you going?” His sister is yelling.

There’s a lady, with bright pink hair. He’s never seen a pink so…shocking.

Miss, your hair…! It’s so—

She extends her hand out to him.

He takes it, and she says ‘I do’.

His hands are burning now, there’s blue fire in them—fire fire

“Cas? Hey, what’re you—” Ginevra grabs his hand and
turns to ash.

He can still feel the woman’s hand holding his as the blue burns around his skin.

He stands at the alter, Pyronica at his side

She says I do
he says I do

She holds his hand and burns everything.

He tells Ford we’ve got to now, right now, now now now before I get old.

When Casper Giordano wakes up, he’s afraid.

When Gaspard Giordano wakes up, he’s afraid.

When I wake up…

I’m afraid.

Xanther heats up the food and he wolfs it down. 1pm and his first meal of the day.

Again, he asked Xanther if the man wants to fuck him good, even the score.

Again, the man says no.

Again…he asked, “Let’s run away together. Do you want to…?”

Again, the man says no.

He occupies himself until it’s time to see Stanford.

In the still of night, with neon lights settled as their destination and determination cementing their hands together, they flee. The engine bustles loudly as they talk and talk. Exchanging both touches and saliva, they ask each other ‘Where do we go from here?’

**Alternate Universe:** Goodbye Bill Cipher. Evan and Cas run away together.
listen to Afraid by The Neighbourhood.
Intermission: Inertia

Chapter Summary

His mindscape is a heartsick and desolate rusty carnival.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“
You want 9 to be between 7 and 8? I can do that, Stanford! Math is obsolete, objectivity is for schmucks! Don’t believe the hype!“ His eye vibrates with laughter, black hand with blue flames reaching out to Ford. “All you gotta do is shake my hand! Well? We got a deal, Sixer?”

—The distant future.

Papa, did it happen to you too?

Papa, talk to me.

--

He sleepily traces Xanthar’s face with a hand, the scar calling to him.

“Did it happen to you too…Papa?”

Xanthar says nothing, rubs Bill’s face; the boy squirms, closes his eyes and goes back to sleep.

--

3pm.

He has a drink, still half asleep.

It doesn’t take him long to go back to sleep.

Dreaming dreaming…

His fingers grasp the sheet, the man’s grunting vigorously, chest occasionally touching his back; he can feel the sweat slime its way everywhere.

He says no stop

Yes that feels so good. Please don’t stop.

He is always in control of what happens to himself. Always. This is something he wants, he tells himself. It’s something he’ll teach himself to want. He will want it, he’ll like it— because he always controls what happens to him.
“Cas Cas Cas!!” She appeared next to him, running, nowhere near out of breath compared to him.

“Mama says you should get to a big city and disappear into it! Like in those movies we watched! Get it? Okay, here—I— go!”

She raced up ahead

…like a **shooting star**

and opened the gate for him.

He ran past her, and swears

he smelt Mabel’s hair.

…?

Mabel? That girl from…oh right, with the twin brother…

*His Shooting Star.*

--

Ford says “Come to me. You never should have run away.”

He says

*I know I know*

*I missed you so much*

--

He’s in Ford’s house, in Ford’s bed, in Ford’s arms.

Ford gives him the Talk about the birds and the bees, and then says

he’s too young.

He doesn’t stop crying.

--

His mindscape is a desolate rusty carnival. The rides have been desecrated, the prizes stolen, the employees dead.

-

He rides the Love Tunnel with his grandfather, and throws up afterwards.

Xanthar’s rubbing his head as he buries his face within his hands.

He reaches for the man’s belt but his hands are swatted away.
Xanthar forces water down his throat, and puts him back to bed.

He falls asleep clutching Xanthar’s hand.

--

*God, maybe he should just shoot himself in the fucking head.*

*Put an end to all of these Nightmares.*

--

“You called me your father, earlier.”

“Is that so.”

“I remind you of him?”

“Nah. You just have the same scar.”

--

“I’m too young to be the heir. I’m too young. I bet everyone thinks that.”

“Since when do you care what people think?”

“My father came into power in what? His early 40’s? I’m too young…”

“Don’t worry about that. Just relax, Bill.”

“I’m too young, Evan.”

“Go back to sleep, Bill.”

“Don’t go anywhere…”

“I won’t.”

6:45pm.

“Should you be leaving soon?”

“Yep yep.”

“Hey Evan.” Bill leaned forward towards Xanthar, who sat in the chair silently observing Bill dress —his tie currently still undone, buttons still unclasped. “You should fuck me when I come back from Ford’s place.” Stroking the patch of exposed skin at his chest to attract Xanthar’s attention, he continued. “If you don’t, I’m going to go to some bar, pick up an old guy, let him fuck me and then kill him.”

Bill wasn’t joking—he’d done it before. Xanthar was always left to clean up the mess.

“You said you’d protect me, didn’t you?” He playfully dragged the loose material of his undone tie back and forth at the back of his collar. “Well?”
“That includes protecting you from your feelings for me.”

“Not feelings, you’re smarter than that, Evan. Compulsion, right?” He straddled one of Xanthar’s knees, grinding himself under the guise of adjusting his seat.

“If I had known how you fucked earlier, I never would’ve slept with other men. I’d have just asked you to give it to me on the regular.” One of Xanthar’s buttons dropped, courtesy of Bill’s now present blade. “Why’d you hide it from me? I might’ve been spared having those disgusting men in me…”

More buttons fell until Bill’s hand could access the hidden skin; wasting no time, he rubbed circles onto Xanthar’s breastbone. “Do you know how disgusting it was? Doing that?” The underside of the blade traced a path across Xanthar’s neck. “And this whole time...it could’ve been you.”

“You owe me.” The hand inside Xanthar’s shirt made a hard grab for his throat. Bill could feel Xanthar’s Adam’s apple pronounced against his palm and he wondered what it’d look like if he cut it out. “You owe me for letting me get fucked.”

“We could fuck like we did with Veronica. We invite a woman every time. Think about it.” The hand loosened but did not let go. “Her riding me while I suck you off. Me giving it to her from behind while she sucks you off, and we kiss. “A piece of black hair took Bill’s attention, and he abandoned Xanthar’s throat in favour of twirling it around between his fingers. “We can make this work.”

Xanthar grabbed Bill by the collar, in seconds, he had the boy pinned onto the bed.

Bill thinks, for a fleeting second, 

*just fucking kill me.*

“You have the same look you usually have when you’ve just had a nightmare.”

“Oh fuck off, Evan. Give it to me. Right now, before I see Stanford.” Cupping Xanthar’s face, he pulled it in and began licking a cheek. “Imagine, just imagine, you fuck me and somehow, Ford and I are about to fuck and he sees oh someone’s used me already, sloppy seconds. Then he fucks me hard, trying to outdo you.”

“Bill, this is getting out of hand.”

“I don’t care.”

“If you return, and you still want to, we’ll work something out.”

Bill laughed. “That’s it?”

“I won’t fuck you, but we can do something else.”

“Not good enough.” Patience wearing thin, Bill pushed against Xanthar’s chest. “Get the fuck off me.” Said hands were pinned at Bill’s side and a wave of excitement travelled directly to his groin.

“I’ll consider it, with some stipulations.”

“I’m all ears.”

“You’re mine, if we do it.” The confused look Bill gave incentive to continue, “You won’t fuck
“anyone else except me.”

“Like…a relationship? Come on, that’s lame.”

“No. You’re mine or no deal.”

“First you say you don’t like men, then you say I’m an exception to it, then you say you don’t like men—big fucking shocker there—and now you want to date me. Make up your fucking mind.” He arched his back and dropped it, Xanthar’s eyes acknowledging the intent of the movement. “You either play for both teams, or you get off the field.”

Snickering, Bill added, “You and 8ball should start a ‘Sexuality Issues R Us’ club.”

“8ball is straight. You know that.”

“And fucking a straight guy is the best. You can just feel it in the way they tighten that they’re fucking hating it.” Bill’s eyes went half-lidded and Xanthar understands the implication.

“You should see someone. I’ll book an appointment for you.”

“Therapy? No.”

“Bill.”

“If you wanna fix this so badly, Evan, fuck me. Fuck it right out of me.”

“No.”

“You fucking coward.”

“All you have to do—”

“—is be yours?” Bill finished for him.

A lone hand pressed between Bill’s legs, nudging boldly at the apparent hardness. Bill wriggled his hips in response and Xanthar breathed in his ear, “I’m going to fuck you so hard that no one will ever be good enough.”

Bill rolled his eyes; this was ridiculous now. “This was boring. Get off me. Now.”

Xanthar obeyed.

“You’re so traditional.” Bill sat up and regarded him with lazy eyes. “Next thing you know, you’re going to want to marry me.”

He stood up, smoothing out his clothes. “Is keeping me to yourself meant to protect me? You think I’d honour that?” A Cheshire grin was offered at Xanthar. “Real cute.”

“It’s a shame you won’t just wreck me. Figured you’d like that kind of thing, especially after what I did to you.” Bill mused, looking for his knife. “Remind me never to be gentle with you again. I’m sure, somewhere deep down, you want to fuck me as revenge.” Once he found it, he pointed it at Xanthar. “It’d be my absolute pleasure to nourish that desire.”

Letting the blade plant a delicate kiss at Xanthar’s jaw, he revealed, “It’s going to happen, it’s going to happen and I’m going to choose how, when and who does it to me. It’ll be different this time. Don’t fuck this up for me, Evan. Don’t fuck it up.”
Tossing the knife on his desk, he let out a groan. “I need to take a cold shower before I leave.”

“Who’s after Ronnie?”

“Bill. I guess.” 8baller replied while envisioning his new work on the blank paper. “Gotta teach you bitches realism art triumphs all.”

“You doing a study?” Paci-fire asked, poking his head at 8baller’s sketch book; 8baller’s eyes narrowed at Paci-fire’s invasive movements.

“You know what a study is?”

“Of course I do. I went to fucking school.”

8baller turned to Pyronica, who sat by the window. “Ronnie, you know what a study is?”

“Uh…no?”

He directed his attention back to Paci-fire. “So Alex, how do you know what a study is?”

“I repeat, I went to school.”

“I did too, you fucker.” Pyronica growled, throwing a book at Paci-fire, which he dodged effortlessly.

“Doubt you paid attention to anything other than what? Chemistry?”

“Shut up. What’s a study?”

“Replicating an image.” Paci-fire smirked.

“I’m doing this shit from memory.” 8baller revealed. “No studies here, Alex you bitch.”

Paci-fire snorted. “Which face?”

“His old one.”

“Huh. His new one is better looking.”

“His old one was perfect.”

Paci-fire rolled his eyes and pretended to hold back laughter. “Gaaay.”

“I ain’t even mad. You don’t have an artist’s eye. Wouldn’t get it. Bill’s original face was symmetrical. Ask anyone who does this shit, and they’ll tell you those faces are the ideal ones you wanna work with.”

“His new one is symmetrical too though?” Paci-fire mused.

“Yeah but it’s fake. His natural face was symmetrical, and that’s what I’m gonna replicate.” 8baller said with conviction. “Besides, I bet he’ll be over the moon when I give’em a nice stylized drawing of himself. You know what a narcissistic fucker he is.”

Day-dreaming about Bill’s reaction, 8baller continued. “Maybe I’ll make something that’ll blow Bill’s mind. Maybe he’ll even hang it up in the mansion…”
He paused.

“Hey Ronnie, can I sketch you naked?”

“Go fuck yourself, Jason.”

“Okay then.”

“Are you taking Dreamcatcher? Or your Cobra?” Xanthar asked as Bill edged towards the door.

“Nah. I won’t be long and I’m not in the mood to fuck with the Pines guy.”

In an alternate universe, Bill never confides in Xanthar, is never pacified. He takes Dreamcatcher when he goes to see Stanford Pines.

Chapter End Notes

You're so afraid.
Keep Talking

Chapter Summary

But you must not forget, Stanford Pines. You become responsible for whatever you tame. Forever.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

For millions of years, mankind lived just like the animals. Then something happened which unleashed the power of our imagination…

We learned to talk and listen.

―Stephen Hawking

There’s a knock on Ford’s door—at this hour? It was nearly 8pm and Ford rarely received guests to begin with. He checked through the peephole and of course, it’s Bill Cipher. Who else would visit him at this time of night?

And he still had so much work to do…now he’d have to deal with Cipher.

Giving his posture a quick straighten, he opened the door and greeted the man reluctantly. “Hello Bill.”

“Stanford Pines! Am I glad to see you! So, you were looking for me?” Enthusiasm bounced off Bill and Ford randomly thought the colour yellow, which Bill donned even now, really suited him.

“I was, but I don’t appreciate you coming to my house. I explicitly stated I do not want you to come to my home nor do I want to be near you in any other—”

“Yeah yeah you only wanna meet me in public. I broke the rule because I’ve been away for a while. Wanted to see you.” He placed both hands in his pocket, shrugging, shoulders dropping into a slouch. “Gonna invite me in? Consider me a vampire, I won’t come in unless you give me permission. That make you feel better?”

Ford said the first thing that came to mind. “Are you armed?”

“Do you have to ask that every time we’re alone together? Nah.” He lifted up both arms in submission. “Well? Gonna check?”

Ford raised an eyebrow, the implication impossible to miss.

“Check, Stanford. Your safety is allegedly at risk.” The smirk Bill wore told Ford everything he needed to know, and he thought back to their day at Bill’s office, when he had Ford feel him to discover the presence of the hidden gun.

Warily, Ford went ahead and let his arms roam beneath Bill’s cushy jacket; there was something hard, in the shape of a bottle? But no gun. Whenever he met Bill’s eyes, there was only immense
satisfaction in them. As Ford’s hands brushed against the curve of hips, Bill chimed, “If you wanna know if I regret that time in my office—nope. Moments like these are what made that worth it.”

Ford huffed and stepped aside, letting Bill inside. The man teetered into the house, removing his jacket once he was inside and draping it upon his forearm.

“Was on vacation with a few friends. Had a great time. Notice I’m a little tanner than usual?” Bill revealed, flashing a charming smile at Ford that the older man was completely immune to. “What’s going on over there? You working on a new paper?” He directed his gaze to Ford’s messy desk; papers sprawled across the surface, and a half empty mug of something sat forgotten.

“No, no, grading papers.”

“Boo you.” Bill sat down on the cream couch, elbows on his knees. He muttered something under his breath, “Mi sei mancato così tanto.” but Ford could not understand it, only barely hearing it to begin with.

“I—I didn’t catch that?”

Bill replied only with an ambiguous cocky smile. He reached into his jacket and pulled out the packaged item Ford had felt earlier. “Like I said, was on holiday. Got you something.”

Ford eyed the package with suspicion, but courteously accepted it. It didn’t appear to be alcohol, the bottle was far too small. Unwrapping it carefully, much to his surprise, he discovered it was cologne. By the look of the brand name, it was an incredibly expensive one.

“Oh Bill, I can’t accept this…” To accept such a lavish gift somehow seemed rude. Not to mention the giver was Bill Cipher—that alone was suspicious.

“Of course you can. Smell it. Do you like it?”

Ford opened the bottle carefully and had a quick sniff. It was a glamourous, unusual smell—very distinctive. Before he could comment, Bill spoke up, “What you currently wear smells good too, don’t worry. I just wanted you to have options, expensive options.” He winked and then laughed, earning a smile from Ford—Bill’s cheery nature could be infectious, he had to stay focused.

“I—thank you, really.” Ford placed the bottle with care onto the nearby table. It was best not to use it too soon, not until he determined the price Bill would demand for it. Such an expensive gift could never come free.

“Nah, I should be thanking you. The last time we saw each other, well, it was pretty weird. You’re a strange guy, Ford. But a good one. I appreciate it.”

Ford genuinely smiled at the remark. So he was right—be it small or big, he had indeed made some form of impact on Bill Cipher.

“So, why were you looking for me?” Bill asked.

“I wanted you to give something to Fiddleford for me.”

Bill’s face dropped. “Ah that guy. Haven’t heard from him in a while.”

“But you can keep the note, and give it when you see him, right?”

“Why does that even matter? You aren’t in any danger so.” He said, eyes inquisitively wandering
around the area; once they reached Ford’s desk, they remained there. “You really miss him, huh? Can’t stop talking about him.”

His eyes returned to Ford. “I don’t get it. You’re miles ahead of the guy. I’d be more inclined to call him deadweight than your friend.”

“Please don’t insult my friends, Bill.”

“Friends don’t hold you back, Ford.”

Those words piqued both Ford’s curiosity and incertitude; he wondered how much Bill truly knew about the relationship between him and Fiddleford for such a conjecture. “Why do you say that?”

“Bet you’d have had your little science experiment all built up and ready if Fiddle Diddle hadn’t given you a hard time.” Bill leaned back on the couch, eyes limpid with his attention thoroughly fixed on Ford. “I think you are amazing and people hate that. So they look for ways to sabotage you, to ensure you’re always stuck in the rat race like the rest.”

Bill continued, voice more forceful, “A lecturer? You should be building future technology in some secret lab, Ford! Come on! We both know what you’re capable of. We both do, and others do too and they can’t stand it.”

There was obvious truth to Bill’s words, Ford having dealt with plenty of spiteful colleagues, but he knew Fiddleford was not like that. He wasn’t jealous of Ford…was he? Why would he be? The man himself was brilliant!

“But hey…” Bill said, voice evening out. “He’s your friend, I get it. But sometimes that biasedness can cloud your judgement, Fordsy.” He put both hands up defensively. “I won’t say anymore, but from what I know of you, I think if you didn’t give such a damn what your country crush thinks, you’d already be at the top.”

Ford frowned, unsure what Bill was trying to say. “Can you elaborate…?”

“Like when that deal was offered and you were all ready to take it. Ride of the backs of exploiting the low-class.”

Ford looked away. This was not a topic he wanted to get into.

“It’s what I like about you, you know. You’re adorable. And beneath all of that, is a man who’s not afraid to bend some rules, and get a little dirty.” A seductive tone took hold of Bill’s words, forcing Ford’s eyes to return to him.

“That doesn’t matter anymore, Bill.”

“I suppose.” Bill shrugged, and removed his gloves. Ford found the action to be very curious, considering they had indirectly mentioned Gaspard Giordano. Nothing Bill did was ever unintentional, he reminded himself.

Bill noticed him looking, and grinned.

“They really do…look like his.” Ford said, not realizing how inappropriate—and perhaps insensitive—the remark was. Especially after Bill had spoken about the possible penalties he could endure due to the resemblance; being reminded of it must hit a nerve.

“You want to see how far they go?” Bill asked, unfazed, fingers curling back to point at himself.
More than just his hands were tattooed? Fascinated and not considering what it entailed, Ford said, “Perhaps… if… it’s not too much—”

Without letting Ford finish, Bill began to undress. As the tie came off he caught Ford’s eye and winked with a sly smirk, eventually removing his shirt, too. A white vest was underneath, but he modestly draped his white shirt half over himself anyway. More tattoos could be glimpsed on Bill’s body, but the shirt covered them, preventing a good look.

He extended his arms out to Ford, whose eyes were already captivated by the markings. “Have a look.”

The tattoos, surprisingly, extended all the way up just below Bill’s elbow, resembling long tattered black gloves at a quick glance. He hesitantly reached out for a closer look and Bill accommodated him by leaning forward and letting Ford take gentle hold of him.

To a fleeting eye, they could pass for chaotic geometry, but upon closer inspection, the discord held peculiar shapes composing very specific designs; was the intention of the clutter to disguise? Or rather, the viewer is meant to project what they see in said designs? Ford could see a snake. The ankh symbol. Maybe a lion, but he’s unsure. There are flowers, which bleed into something else—the lion’s mane? There other definite symbols, but ones he has no knowledge of. The miniscule space between shapes appeared to be what allowed them to form images; the precision meticulous. The time taken to not only design this, but to have it tattooed… he had to hold himself back from asking for photos for further extensive analysis. It reminded him of those illusions where one had to spend time staring to see the true picture. There’s no doubt now either—these are the same tattoos Gaspard Giordano had.

Who exactly is Bill Cipher?

“These are really… finely done. Geometrical in places, and more romantic in others. It must’ve taken the artist quite some time to able to get all of these symbols to harmonize this well.” As his fingers explored the black, he noticed that even Bill’s palms were tattooed but much more scarcely—bearing only a triangle with an eye in the middle of each palm.

“Very illuminati.” Ford blurted out, earning a chuckle from Bill.

“Believe, Ford. Believe.”

Bill allowed him a few more minutes that passed as mere seconds, to inspect his skin. Every so often, Ford’s eyes would wander further up, and as much as he would never admit it aloud, the boy was attractive. It was something he’d noticed when they’d first met, and it was still very much true now. As he stole peeks, he took this opportunity to once again take in the boy’s features, including previously unnoticed details. Blonde hair with dark roots, appearing wet in some places; he must’ve showered before coming. Gold piercings were present in his left ear. One..? Two maybe. No no, three—two in his lobe, one in his cartilage, and one in his right earlobe. Long, dark eyelashes and hardly a trace of facial hair. One of those men whose hair barely grew on their face? It only made him appear that much younger to Ford.

22… he was only 22. (and most likely the son of that man…)

“I notice, you know.” Bill said, raising an eyebrow, not upset in the least, and Ford mentally kicked himself for not being conspicuous enough. “When you look at me, like that.” With delicate caution, as if seeking contact with a wild animal, he placed his hand upon Ford’s own that still held his other forearm.
“Who knew? After everything I’ve done, that this sort of thing is what gets you flustered?”
Reassuring pressure was applied upon Ford’s hand. “I’m glad to know you are, in fact, human.”

“I really—” Ford got up quickly and half flew, half powerwalked over to the kitchen counter. Bill’s laughter followed him there and escape is all he could think of. “I’m really thirsty.”

“Oh? Is that so?” Bill started laughing louder and it took Ford a few seconds to understand the reference. Dammit.

Bill kept laughing as he dressed himself—Ford’s gaze in his peripheries, and he made sure he dressed to entice, spending a little more time here and there when buttoning up his shirt.

Ford went to hide his face in the fridge, the cold air brought him much needed mental clarity, and it felt great against what he assumed to be a very red face. What is he? 13?

When he returned to the counter, Bill was seated across from him, watchfully. “Can I have something, too?”

Ford complied, handing him a glass of juice—the only beverage he currently had. As Bill took it, his hand made contact with Ford’s and Ford’s eyes were immediately drawn to Bill’s, the glint in them far too provocative. Ford’s heart jumped into this throat, and something lower threatened to jump as well.

No no no.

As Bill drank, his eyes contemplated Ford contently; whenever Ford’s eyes met his, they did not shy away as one would expect—instead they met him boldly, and thinned slightly as if there were an intimate joke between the both of them that Ford himself knew little of.

Ford has to find a way to defuse the situation. Fast.

“Are you…attracted to me?” Bill asked daringly, already knowing the answer. If the brazen act sought to make Ford uncomfortable, it worked.

Ford didn’t verbally respond, opting to shake his head unconvincingly with a dumb smile that broadcasted ‘yes, Bill, I very much am’. He always ended up defaulting to ‘nervous laughter and smiling’ as a defence mechanism, but now it seemed like it would backfire. He had to change the topic somehow.

“I’m very attracted to you, Ford. But you already know that.” Bill sipped his drink thoughtfully, mind wandering to ways of capitalizing on the current predicament. “I like you, you like me…seems like this works out just fine. Dare I put all my chips into play…?”

The last line brought apprehension into Ford, flashbacks to Bill’s aggressive behaviour rushed in, sinking his stomach with heaviness.

Bill did nothing, however.

They sat in a pleasant silence, with their eyes occasionally meeting, and every time, every time, Bill offered a coy smile; with the smile itself promising to offer something more should Ford express desire to instigate this—to say or do something, anything, that might escalate things further.

It’s a sinkhole—one he knows should he fall into, he would not be getting out.

“Do you wanna go out sometime?”
So straightforward…

“Bill, I—”

“The too young thing again? I’m over 20 already.”

“Your frontal lobe hasn’t even matured yet.”

Bill’s dimpled smile appeared (and it’s beautiful), as his head twisted to the side in mock disbelief. “Really, Ford? Really?” He took a gamble and leaned forward towards Ford, the other man not recoiling as he expected. “Yours is deteriorating as we speak. You only live once.”

Holding a hand open towards Ford, his eyes encouraging Ford to take it—and to Ford’s own surprise, he did. Bill carefully guided the hand to his drink, dipping two fingers adeptly in, and then bringing them up to his mouth, accepting them inside. The sucks were gentle, done with a strange care that somehow didn’t invoke thoughts of vulgarity, despite vulgar being the only way to describe it.

Ford’s slipping.

Bill’s tongue was on Ford’s fingers as though they had the most delicious substance known to mankind smeared upon them. Every lick and suck travelled directly to his groin, and he can only think how bad this is, how weak he’d become and how attractive Bill was. Skilled too—no doubt, with his tongue. And fingers too, naturally.

Why is he thinking of this…?

When Ford’s fingers left the sultry heat of his mouth, Bill began laughing as if he’d just pranked the man. Ford just shook his head, laughing and on the verge of dying inside. That was too much…too much for him. He really shouldn’t be encouraging and rewarding Bill’s behaviour like this; any positive response he gave would only incite Bill to persevere.

But…it didn’t sound too bad.

While he thought of way to break their current moment, he neglected to notice he was holding Bill’s hand—or rather, Bill was holding his. Bill himself didn’t seem to notice either, his eyes staring blankly at his own unoccupied hand.

Regardless of feverish attraction, he barely had anything in common with Bill…they were simply too different. He could already make a list of where he knows they will be incompatible—beyond age, that is. The age still bothered him. Of course…he still…had Fiddleford…

But that was unrequited, probably not even real. He put Bill and Fiddleford side by side in his head, the comparison even more absurd when visible in his mind. There’s no common ground and it’s even more obvious his attraction to Bill is purely physical.

Volatile and unpredictable Bill Cipher. The boy’s flippant nature was unusual even for a man his age. He’d pulled a gun on Ford, for God’s sake, as though it were nothing; had sexually harassed him, multiple times; took compromising photos of him and had followed him for a while.

And and…

“Will you forgive me?” Bill’s voice is distant.

Ford’s eyes darted to Bill; was he talking about the past? Coincidence…?
“I know I’ve done some stupid things. But I came back…so I won’t do it again. I learnt my lesson? Is that good enough? I didn’t think I’d be talking to you like this again.” Both of Bill’s hands were on atop Ford’s, obscuring it—only mass of tattooed skin was visible and Bill’s dreamy eyes stuck to it.

Strange word usage…

“I won’t run away again. I promise.”

“Bill? What are you—saying?” Going on vacation was hardly what Ford would’ve referred as ‘running away from him’. Bill’s life was independent from his.

He smiled at Ford, and kissed the man’s hand again, like he’d done the second time they met. The reminder of the past clashed with the present—the Bill in front of him is so different.

“Do you…want to touch me?” He asked against the six fingers, voice uneven, as if the words strained his throat. Looking up at Ford ruefully—Ford thought of the expression ‘a doe in the headlights’—he muttered, “Ah it’s too soon, right? Can I…touch you?”

Again, Ford wasn’t sure what to say. This was incredibly strange. Silence again, it is.

“Can I have a kiss?” He doesn’t know why but he does not pull back when Bill’s lips meet his timidly. Short lived, Bill’s lips are airy, barely leaving an impression. No confidence in the action—it’s apprehensive? It happens so quickly.

So tame… so unlike the Bill he’s known up until now.

“Sei una…persona in gamba.” Foreign words came reluctantly against Ford’s lower jaw. “Ho bisogno di sentirti dentro di me.” A finger worms its way to his neck, wiggling across the skin there. “Lo so… che vuoi farmi male.”

“Bill…” he pulls back enough to convey discomfort but not disinterest. “I…I don’t know what you’re saying.”

“You really do look like him.” Something in Bill’s hazel eyes trembled, and despite looking directly at Ford, they seemed to be overlooking him. “I believe…I came back here, to meet you, Stanford Pines.”

Something in Bill’s eyes held Ford still; he isn’t sure what Bill is saying or what he means, but part of him wants nothing more than another kiss while another part thought it was time to let Bill go home. He’s dangerous, Ford told himself. This boy should not be in his house.

“Have I overstayed my welcome? Would you like me to leave?”

Yes, please leave Bill. Please leave…

Ford froze up further, as if a spotlight had beamed on him and he was now the centre of attention of the entire world. It’s the eyes, Bill’s eyes—

His own eyes dart from Bill’s eyes to lips, back and forth like a magnet confused at the direction it should be taking; which is closer? Which is better? He shouldn’t even be thinking about this…

Was he the type to be swooned by an exotic language? And a few sentimental words?

No, of course not.
It’s…the mystery? The utter obscurity of Bill’s words and actions that intrigue him? He wants to know why. And Bill’s confession earlier, about his admiration for Ford…
All things considered, to have someone like Bill infatuated with him, was a compliment in all its glory. Was it wrong to want to bathe in such attention? If only for a little while…?

As long as he didn’t lead the boy on.

“Do you…want to do something with me?” A hand is demurely caressing at his neck, every stroke is a convincing argument.

Yes.

“Bill I—”

“It’s okay, Ford. You only live once. We could just have…mild fun.” He leaned forward against the counter, back arching suggestively. “I’m an adult, you’re an adult.”

He kissed Ford again and Ford accidentally retaliated by deepening it.

Oh no.

When he pulled back, Bill was smiling and he felt himself being reeled in all over again. “Please?”

So captivating—and willing? Not like he’d been all the times before. There’s no aggression; instead, a subtle invitation to more was promised in all his actions—from the flick of his wrist, to the shy flutter of his eyes as he waited for Ford’s answer. It came insidiously at Ford, crawling into him without permission and he just can’t stop coming back to it—the concept of receiving more from Bill. He supposed he was a sucker for danger and mystery, considering some of what Bill had done to him previously; those interactions ingrained themselves and surfaced within Ford’s mind during every interaction with Bill.

So why do those actions mean nothing now? Hormones? At his age even?

Or was it perhaps that Bill was evidently multi-layered, and the unknown and strange always called to Ford. He was a natural problem-solver, mysteries enticed him, and the mystery of Bill Cipher has enthralled him, much to his dismay.

Flings were not for him, but didn’t everyone break their own rules every now and again? It had been a long time. Ford wandered if breaking his ‘rules’ for Bill Cipher was a good idea though. The boy was notorious trouble—but perhaps that was part of the charm? Trouble and mystery.

No sex was worth his life though.

Bill waited patiently for Ford’s answer, with a finger trailing up and down Ford’s hand suggestively. Ford suddenly wandered how it would look if Bill’s hand was around his—

Ah, this wasn’t good.

Bill moved from the opposite end of the counter, grabbed and pulled at Ford, dragging him to the couch—

Oh no.

“Bill, this is—”

“Come to me, Ford.” Ford still hesitated, and then Bill added in a darker tone, “Now.”
Bill pulled him towards the couch and pushed him into a sitting position, straddling him once he was comfortable. Ford’s hands were heavy, too scared to touch Bill—be it to push him off or to embrace him, and he isn’t sure which he prefers.

“You’re so cute. Did you ever do…what I asked you to?” Breathing heavily at Ford’s jaw, he elaborated further, “Did you…touch yourself while thinking of me?”

“N—no, I didn’t.” Ford hardly touched himself at all.

“Too bad. Now I’m going to touch you, so you’ll have no choice but to think of me.”

One of Bill’s hands moved down, unzipping Ford and Ford began squirming, making Bill hesitate.

“What? You don’t want me to?”

“Bill, this isn’t…I told you I’m not interested.” He didn’t sound convincing at all, his body not even attempting to back up his claim.

“We both know that’s a lie.” It was. “I want you, Ford. I know you want me, too.” The blossoming hardness at Ford’s crotch was grabbed for emphasis and Bill’s body rocked against Ford’s, further encouraging the growth of his erection. “I want you…please?”

Then Ford’s hands are cupping Bill’s rear-end, courtesy of Bill having moved them there. Bill arched his back, pushing against Ford’s hands, hoping to inspire the man’s hands to get a little greedy.

“Bill I—” He doesn’t finish because Bill’s tongue is down his throat; it’s hard, primal and spine-chilling. Bill’s going to devour him, his lizard brain said. Devour.

Ford feels overwhelmed but submits to the kiss as his fingers bravely explore the suppleness of Bill’s ass; he can only think how annoying the pants are. The kiss ends—Ford’s mind protesting as their lips part—and Bill licks at Ford’s lips before pushing the man into his neck; Ford understands and begins kissing across the thin skin. Beneath the now flushed skin of Bill’s neck, he could feel a fluttering pulse. He kissed slower, seeing to pacify it.

So much for fighting against this.

Bill’s hands roamed across Ford’s still clothed chest, venturing into his hair. Abruptly, Bill pulled away and stood up. With a hand, he spread Ford’s legs and stood between them; loosening and discarding his tie, he kept Ford’s eyes to his, and descended to his knees. Leaning up and forward, he kissed Ford again, and began undoing his belt. Ford found his hands resisting Bill’s movements, and consciously told himself not too.

“Wait.” Bill stopped. “Lie back on the couch. I want to be on top of you.”

Ford obeyed immediately, internally screaming how quickly he’d surrendered to this.

With smooth movements, Ford found himself on his back with the boy on top of him. Kisses were felt on his neck, and near his ear; Bill’s hands roamed passively across his body, a hand slipping underneath to stroke hidden skin. He flinched unexpectedly when Bill pinched a nipple and he could hear the boy chuckling in his neck. “Too much for you, old man? Don’t worry…let’s move on. I’m getting impatient.” Before Ford can inquire, Bill’s already pulling down his pants.

“I’ll make sure you cum so hard…win one for the reaper.” Ford thought it sounded more like a threat than dirty talk. Thoughts left him as soon as he felt Bill’s tongue on his length—God, how long had it been? He burrowed his fingers into Bill’s hair as the boy sucked him, experience evident in the glorious tongue movements. When he looked down, he noticed Bill eyeing him inquisitively.

“Do you want to watch? I can do the whole ‘slow and soft’ or whatever is.”
“Do whatever you want, Bill. I’m in your care.”

“What the fuck does that mean?” Bill laughed. “You’re terrible at dirty talk.”

“It wasn’t dirty talk.” Ford smiled gently, a hand touching the side of Bill’s face. The boy leaned into the touch immediately, the way he’d seen cats do, prompting him to become more generous with the affection. Bill stared at Ford briefly, a look of confusion phasing in and out of his features, and Ford suddenly felt guilty. Placing one of his own hands over Ford’s, Bill pressed it firmer against the skin of his cheek, closing his eyes and caressing himself against Ford’s skin.

Ford’s guilt didn’t lessen. Instead, it increased. Why did it feel like he was taking advantage of Bill…?

“I want to choke on you…” Bill muttered and Ford grabbed his head before he could so much as move—the idea not sounding tantalising in the least. “Careful careful, don’t hurt yourself. Go nice and slow, Bill.”

Confusion again surfaced in Bill’s eyes, but he complied, engulfing Ford’s length slowly, the member going slightly deeper as Ford instinctively thrusted his hips forward. Regretting his lack of control instantly, he rubbed Bill’s head to apologize, but the boy didn’t seem to notice.

Choking one’s partner on their genitals hardly seemed erotic in the slightest—he really had nothing in common with the youth of today.

Then again, he never had much in common with people in general. To Ford, sex was never something worth pursuing at the rate everyone around him seemed to. Yes, he had natural urges, but found they were easily forgotten once he lost himself in his intellectual pursuits. An odd self-orgasm here and there never hurt either.

Every sexual encounter he had had, however, had been intimate and caring. ‘Vanilla’ was not a term he resented, but rather, he found it annoying when it was used to refer to people like himself, who didn’t particularly care for anything extreme. He was meant to feel bad that he was capable of satisfying sexual experiences without resorting to nonsense like toys or violence? To each his own though, but he knew it had to do with how little the world around him affected him.

Where Bill was a product of his culture and environment, Ford was the product of isolation.

Stanford Pines had made himself.

With a hand rubbing Bill’s head and the other stroking the side of his face on and off as the boy’s head bobbed up and down, Ford watched intently. Bill’s eyes were not looking at him, they faced down, but he caught glimpses, noting the boy had a glazed neutral look—not one of discomfort, but rather…necessity? It didn’t particularly seem like he enjoyed it. Then again, Ford wasn’t sure what he himself looked like during such an action so who’s to say his observations were even valid?

The pace of Bill’s sucking increased and Ford fought against every instinct in him that demanded he fuck Bill’s face. The boy was just too good—

Bill swallowed with no complaints. After taking a long final suck that nearly killed Ford, he plopped himself on top of Ford, all smiles. “Having the cum sucked out of you is amazing, isn’t it? Satisfied?”

“Not quite.” He pushed against Bill’s broad shoulders, telling the boy to climb off. “Let’s switch, first…” Pulling his pants on again, he moved onto lacing fingers underneath Bill’s white collar. “I’m going to undress you. Is that okay?”

Bill’s hands grabbed his own, irritation in them. “You don’t have to ask for permission in the heat of
the moment, old man.” Ford chuckled at Bill’s feisty attitude, not minding it in the least.

He slowly unbuttoned Bill’s shirt; once it came off, he went on to exploring the skin, touching with wonder. Bill seemed amused, a little perplexed but his body responded to the places Ford touched; breathing slowing down. Ford seemed to like touching his tattoos.

“When I lay in bed at night…” A six-fingered hand massaged a tender spot at his collar bone, causing Bill to flinch. “All I do is think of you, Ford.” Their eyes met; Ford’s shone with interest while Bill’s, with careful scrutiny, shone with desperation. The pants were next, Bill’s breath jumping at every tug down.

“I’ll do my best not to disappoint you then, Bill.” Both laughed.

With careful guidance, he pushed Bill onto the couch, tossing Bill’s pants to the side, and climbed on top of him.

It’s just like all his fantasies, all his dreams—here it comes. Ford was going to fuck him now. With no mercy and no regard for his pleasure—a good proper and hard fuck. Fuck Xanther, if anyone was going to fuck him good, it was going to be Ford. Ford was perfect for it, in so many ways…

He can’t wait to see what methods Ford’ll use to hurt him. Weird bondage, maybe? He hoped it wasn’t that whipping-with-a-belt shit. Although Bill could take it, it hurt to sit down afterwards and lacked the intimate touch of skin on skin. Choking? …Six fingers around his throat. It’d be even more confining then a normal hand.

He can’t wait.

Bill squirmed under Ford’s looming body-weight—most of the man’s weight was on his knees, allowing him to manoeuvre freely. The fact they could do this so comfortably on the couch surprised Bill; the size of Ford’s couch was rather large and for someone who was supposedly anti-social, it seemed strange to invest in large furniture if you were never going to utilize it.

Unless this was what it was meant for. In that case, Ford was a dirty old man as he’d suspected.

Ford kissed him, and then again and again, and suddenly, the man was planting kisses all over him. They began at his lips, working their way out to his jaw, cheek, ears, neck—focusing on a single side of his body at first; they are slow, deliberate and done with…tenderness? It feels weird. He expected Ford to use tongue too, but the man only used lips. The kisses are plenty wet on their own though, dampening the skin ever so slightly.

At his neck, the kisses slowed, becoming longer and deeper. A sucking sensation occurred here and there, but not hard enough to form a lovebite; a shame. Bill longed to be marked in some way, but they’d only just begun. There was time.

Eventually his shoulder too—kissing at the indents and dips at his collar bones. As Ford’s mouth roamed, Bill’s laughter accompanied it; the stubble at his chin tickling. Triggered by the laughter, Ford cupped his face and returned to kissing his lips; they departed quickly to resume where they’d left off, leaving Bill baffled.

What started out as ordinary kisses soon morphed into something more visceral than Bill realized; suddenly, there’s a heady need coiling at his groin. It began quiet, with abortive stutters and jabs, turning into full blown arousal before he’d noticed. A desperate need for Ford to touch him more manifested; containing it physically hurt.

Taking careful hold of Bill, Ford rolled him onto his side allowing his body’s neglected other half to
become the centre of his focus, and began giving it the same treatment. The progress of how flushed Bill’s skin became and the pace of his breathing was Ford’s guiding point, and Bill was coming along nicely. Surprisingly quiet though, and Ford began to think perhaps Bill was a lot different in the bedroom than he’d led on. One of those romantically aggressive but sexually submissive types? He isn’t sure but intends to find out. Regardless of what surprises Bill held for him, so far, Ford found the boy to be rather sweet and endearing. He readily accepted Ford’s lead, objecting to none of it and remaining quiet, and he felt himself worry about the lack of commentary, considering how talkative Bill normally was. Certain Bill would give him hell should he do something unwanted, he proceeded with that knowledge as the foundation for his confidence.

But they are only just beginning, he shouldn’t get ahead of himself.

A particular kiss had the boy squirming, body arching and twisting—lovely, really…what was he doing with someone like Ford?

“Do you like it?”

Bill, surprised by Ford’s sudden vocalness, replied, “I guess? I mea—” Ford cut him off with a kiss, a harder one than usual.

When the man pulled away, he asked again, “Do you like it?”

Again, when Bill tried to respond, Ford kissed him, hard.

Once more, he asked “Do you like it?” and Bill only nodded. Ford kissed him, but not hard this time.

Bill laughed hysterically within his mind. Stanford Pines was not what he’d expected at all. He should’ve known…he was an older man, after all. The idea of him being shy and gentle and all that sappy bullshit was unlikely.

Here he was training Bill to shut up. How typical.

Hooking his fingers within Bill’s own, Ford pulled the boy up and forward, then touching at his slouched shoulders (after a quick kiss), spun him around(ever so gently) and pushed him, head first, into the couch. Now Bill, flipped over, laid on his stomach, back towards Ford.

Ah, so here it was coming. He was going to—

He applied tender pressure onto Bill’s bare back then leaned down and began kissing him at the ear, working his way down the neck and eventually his back. Bill could feel Ford’s hand in his hair, resting and occasionally massaging lightly as Ford planted the awful awful slow kisses everywhere. Another hand stroked him at his hip bone, tugging teasingly at the band of his underwear; a finger occasionally slipping in, but never venturing further nor pulling the material down. It seemed to ask ‘Do you want to? Yes? No? Maybe?’

Bill is growling inside his head.

Double kisses made an appearance and it took Bill a minute to realize Ford planted those at his scars. ‘Kiss and make it better?’ What nonsense. It’s all Ford was doing, just kissing him everywhere, never even going too low, where the main event was located.

What the fuck was this man doing? Did he want Bill to beg for it? Was that it?

He was trying to lure him into a false sense of security—Bill knew this game well. They pretend to be nice and gentle—their main goal the money shot you make when they suddenly thrust into you,
rough and hard, completely naïve and unprepared for such boring brutality—

Ford was so typical.

Then the hand travelled to Bill’s front, at his groin and cupped the hardness that had been hiding.

“I should return the favour.” The hand slipping inside, warm skin surrounded his member and Bill lifted his hips to allow it more space to work. The rubbing began soft and lenient; Ford’s hands are placate, seeking to pacify. No need, no desire—the touch is curious and eager to please, and alien to Bill. Fingers poke curiously at spots, the pressure just not hard enough. Impatience got the better of Bill and he desperately began grinding himself against Ford’s hand.

“You’re incredibly excited already, aren’t you? All I did was kiss you.” Another kiss planted at his neck had Bill overflowing. He wants to mouth off, to tell Ford to fuck off—“You’re cute, Bill. And awfully quiet…” Another kiss came and he tried to shy away from it, but Ford’s other hand halted him by pushing flat against his forehead, keeping him still. “Don’t run away, Bill.”

Something charged into Bill with those words; he’s seeing red, he’s seeing red—the good kind. It’s flaring up in him, lava’s rising; they’re both going to melt, then merge—becoming one with Ford? Ford inside him…oh please. …Where would he run? Ford has him down and is holding him down with kisses and light touches. It was madness.

“Hey…wait a minute—” Ford gripped him tightly and all he could do was moan pathetically. Damn. “I’m not quiet, I’m just…letting you do your thin—” Ford gave several rigorous tugs on his dick, Bill’s back arching into the touch for more more more. Shit shit. “Ford, Ford don’t stop, please—”

“Sshhhhh. I’m not going to, don’t worry.” He could hear the grin in Ford’s words. The rubbing continued and then stopped; now Ford held his member while resuming kissing his neck and shoulders. He wanted Ford to stroke him...

Finally, his underwear came off, with Ford’s hands returning to their previous position. He could feel the man’s eyes on him and longed to return the stare.

“Change…positions. I can’t see you.”

“You want to see me?”

“Don’t fuck around, Ford.” As soon as those words left his mouth, one of Ford’s fingers gave a quick press against his lips.

“No need to get rowdy, Bill. They’ll be time for that later.”

“Are you kidding me? Are you trying to do dirty talk? Because it’s just—” Before he can complain further, Ford’s hands let go and he could sit up. He scrambled up, still hard as ever and fixated on Ford. The man looked like his usual self, only his eyes were sleeker, calmer with a strange smile—mischievous? No…

Content?

“Come here, Bill.”

Turning away was his first instinct. Going to Ford now somehow seemed dangerous—a danger that is unfamiliar to Bill. He shot the man a cocky smile, not saying anything. No stranger to playing touch and go, he wanted the man to work for it. Up until now, he’d been shockingly compliant.
“Come here.” Ford said again and Bill did as instructed, feeling compelled to this time. So much for holding out. There’s no sternness in Ford’s voice however, he spoke…lovingly?

“Here I am, Ford.” Upright on his knees, he curled his arms around Ford’s neck as the man’s hands sheathed his member. Burying his nose in the man’s neck, he began thrusting himself, fucking himself on Ford’s hand while the man…kissed him again, wherever his lips could meet skin—kissing and kissing. Kisses soon became intoxicating and he wondered if Ford uses specific method because every damn time the man’s lips hit his skin, an electric charge travelled immediately to his dick. Licking had always been what Bill considered to be the go-getter but Ford’s kisses outclassed licks completely.

God, he could sit here and be kissed forever.

Bill pulled back, keeping eye contact with Ford, he put his palms flat behind him with his body weight transferred there and began thrusting upwards into Ford’s hand. He fucked himself like that for a minute, never looking away from Ford, imagining it was Ford taking it. The look in his eyes told Ford what he was thinking quite clearly, and the man returned his gaze with an amused, albeit intrigued stare.

The hand around Bill’s member left and Ford’s hand did the come hither motion. Bill carefully crept closer and Ford spun him around, so the boy’s back was against his chest, both pairs of legs spread out.

For a split second, Bill thought Ford was going to sit him on his dick, just like that.

“Spread your legs a little, there we go.” Ford whispered in his ear, massaging his inners thighs. He began kissing Bill in the neck as his hand, six fingered hand, began fucking Bill. Still only kissing… and Bill can’t take his eyes off the man’s hand.

The breathing in his ear is ragged but still controlled. “Do you like it?”

Before Bill responded, Ford’s hand pulled his face back to meet him for a kiss. His lips never left Bill’s until Bill came; stomach and six fingers splattered with white.

He didn’t know

It could ever be
so—
a man could be so
an older man could be so
gentle

Ford’s arms wrapped around him snugly, and the man smelt so good. He seemed to smell better and better as time went by…

Ford began kissing him again, and he tried closing his legs but was stopped. “No no. I like looking at you.”

Bill gave him a look, prompting an explanation. “I just like how you look, like this.” Ford smiled as if explaining a joke to a child, and his hands rubbed circles into Bill’s thighs.

“Do you want me to give you another one? Can you handle it?”

The more pleasure he got, the more pain he was going to get later, right? Ford was clever.
He lay back on Ford’s chest as the man, again, fucked him. There’s fear thrashing inside his diaphragm at the future and he struggles, ever so slightly against Ford’s hands. This time, he can’t be quiet. Moaning and panting—only thinking: God what was Ford going to do to him? What was Ford going to do—

and all Ford could say between dreadfully loving kisses was "Sshhh there there. I’ll go slower, you’re still sensitive, is that it?"

He’s scared now. A ‘no’ slips out, and Ford freezes, dead still. Now he’s cold. Inside and out.

*Why no? why are you saying no to me?*

*oh is this a game? You want me to fuck you like it’s your first time, is that it?*

*it’s supposed to hurt more than usual, it’s your first time after all, right? Come, play along ca—*

“Bill, are you alright?” Ford’s question vibrated in his head and he quickly responded “Yes, yes, just…it slipped out. I’m fine.”

“If you want me to stop, I will—”

Ford stopped when he said ‘no’. Something broke inside him; whatever it was, was too far inside him to inspect the shards and make sense of what its previous state was. *Ford stopped*. Without realizing, he relaxed more into the man’s embrace.

“No no, Ford. I’m fine. Like you said, just a little sensitive, yeah? Don’t stop. You’re so fucking good at what you do, don’t stop.”

If someone filmed this and played it to him, a few years ago, he’d have told them it was fabricated bullshit and special effects sure came along way because that was definitely not him. That voice was definitely not his—when the hell had he ever spoken like that? What a joke, fuck off.

There’s something hard pressing at his entrance now. Finally finally, Ford was done playing nice.

Any second now, he’s going to start throwing up his internal organs ‘til there’s nothing left inside to hurt when Ford fucks him. Then maybe he’ll just die like that and it’ll be over. Or not, maybe Ford will fuck him even when he’s dead—maybe there really is no rest for the wicked.

“I’m sorry, give me a second.” Ford took a hold of his hips and lifted him, scooting back a bit. He sat Bill back down, and the hardness was gone…?

“My belt was digging into your tailbone, wasn’t it? Is that better?”

*What the fuck is wrong with this man.*

Bill didn’t know what to say, but it didn’t matter because Ford was once again back to touching him. The man held one of Bill’s hands while his other went back to fucking him. Below the clasping six-fingered hand, Bill caught glimpses of his own black-stained skin—the contrast stuck out to him, but so did the way they appeared to complement one another. Both weird. Ford’s hands were much bigger than his…he’d only *really* noticed now. It was probably the extra finger that helped.

Bill’s free hand slithered down and settled atop Ford’s working hand as he continued to jerk Bill off, his caressing grip was encouraging, urging the man not to stop. Ford squeezed his other hand in acknowledgement. Tilting his head back, Bill retreated his face into Ford’s neck—a new comfort zone for him. He closed his eyes as Ford held his hand and fucked him off.

Ford was quiet though…and as much as he didn’t want to admit it, he liked how the man spoke to
him. The tone was clearly meant to be sexual but his enunciation? The way he breathed every word? The words used? Bill’s dirty talk, giving or receiving, had always been on the rough and vulgar side; occasionally bordering on blatant threats.

Ford’s words were the exact opposite, coming at him softly, benevolently; delivery that struck hard and effective but held none of the foul after-taste that Bill was accustomed to afterwards.

He didn’t feel ashamed saying yes, he liked it. He didn’t feel shame at all, when Ford addressed him.

Yet there was always the shadow of shame, whenever he did things like this. Always always. Of course, as long as he never thought about it, what did it matter?

“You’ve gotten a little quiet, Bill.” Ah, there it was again. That velvet tone…in his ear…oh, the man said his name—

Hey, Ford was the one quiet…

“And…you’re nearly close, aren’t you?” The grip around his length tightens in a way that makes him just shiver with need, his face jerking out of Ford’s neck unexpectedly. But also with more than just need…it makes him shake with…

…desire? Actual desire. It’s not the need, the god awful gnawing black hollow inside him that takes whatever it can, consuming grime and scraps as they came about, leaving him used and empty, filled with bodily fluids of a man that should be dead. (he thinks if Ford asked him, whatever Ford asked him then and there, he’d do and he’d do without feeling bad and disgusting)

He doesn’t say yes, instead he turned his neck back to accept a kiss from Ford, and the man delivered. He could feel Ford smiling into the kiss, and it seems he got the message right; Ford liked it when he said yes in this way, with his lips.

What a strange thing to like…

Again, he reaches climax with Ford kissing him, but there’s a tongue in his mouth this time.

The heat in his body is peaking, but it never seems enough. He’s came twice already but still, he’s alight. More more more…

“You…you like to be in control, don’t you?” Bill managed to mutter.

Ford nuzzled at his ear and in a tone Bill is sure is meant to be sarcastic as hell, said “No, this is called passion, Bill.”

“I like it, when you talk to me.” Bill confessed, voice still breathy.

“Do you?” Ford hands fondle his naked skin, but it’s barely sexual, instead tight roping the line between sensual and soothing. “Would you…like another one?”

Ford was crossing the line between generous and plain torture.

“No one can handle three in a row, Ford…how about, I give you another?” He really wants to feel Ford thrusting in his mouth, maybe? He just wants the man to wild and rough and to just—

He tried to push Ford down and get on top of him, but Ford intercepted his movements surprisingly skilfully, and Bill was once again, at the bottom. Keeping Bill’s legs separated with a knee while taking one of Bill’s hands, he placed it around himself, and started kissing Bill at the jaw. “Like this. Like this.”
He rocked himself slickly into Bill’s hand as his mouth spilled kisses everywhere they could, everywhere—Bill could barely take it anymore. Rougher, he wanted Ford to be rougher with him—was gentle his only setting?

To have Ford fuck him hard and kiss him simultaneously…

“No no, be more rough, Ford. I want—" Ford takes his mouth captive again, and he can’t speak anymore. The gentle rocking in his hand continued, with Ford sometimes thrusting further so more of himself made contact with Bill’s skin. The tongue in his mouth is more aggressive this time and he meets it timidly, unsure of why he doesn’t fight back. With older men, refusing the intrusion and provoking them into being forceful was his favourite, but here, the need to simply relax into Ford’s actions overcame him. Hell, even Ford’s aggression was gentle in its nature.

Now Ford’s hand is gripping his hair, not painfully but there’s need in it, and snuggles at Bill’s ear. The action is so affectionate and cozy that Bill is at loss of what to think. Restless, breathing in his neck, Ford’s breathing, and his free hand moved eagerly, deciding to occupy and explore soft grey curls.

No more rocking, it’s now thrusting and he holds Bill’s face, looking him in the eye as he fucks himself into Bill’s hand. It’s an unfamiliar look, not anger…not primal lust…

It’s…passionate and…adoring?

Whenever he’s been made to look them in the eye, they’ve always met him with zealous unkindness. People revealed a lot about themselves in the heat of the moment—

They…revealed a lot about themselves… Up close, he realized that Ford looked absolutely nothing like that man. He isn’t even sure why he thought it to begin with—why anyone else would have thought it. Randomly, he noticed Ford’s overall body is bigger than him—bulkier, when he hovered above Bill. He thought it comforting…

Warm wet splattered on his hand, Ford’s lips sunk into his own, yet again; there’s a warm tongue submerging itself—and it’s so kind. He broke the kiss and pulled the man against his neck, feeling Ford begin to kiss him again—does it ever stop?

They do stop; now he’s only breathing in Bill’s neck, and Bill wants to fall asleep like this. With Ford over him, shielding him from whatever lay beyond the couch.

“What are you thinking?”

“I want…you to fuck me, please Ford.”

“Would you like me to put fingers into you?” He pushed Bill’s hair to the side, slightly damp with sweat. “I don’t have lube. This is fine though, isn’t it?”

“Ford—"

“It’s just fine, Bill.” He kissed Bill again, and Bill is sure Ford’s methods of kissing him and making him orgasm into submission worked just perfectly. This is an obscure form of sadism—he knows it.

“How about another one? I’ll use my mouth this time.”

“Ford, are you insane? You can’t.”

“What’s your refractory period? You should be ready for another one.”
“What is wrong with you—why are you talking about how long it takes me to get my dick hard, stop.”

“We can just wait and see.”

“I am not sitting here with you watching my dick until it gets hard, Ford.”

“Are you shy?”

“Did you forget who’re you’re talking to?”

“You’re shy, aren’t you?” Ford shifted Bill and himself, returning them to their previous positions and massaged the area at Bill’s inner thighs again. Bill leaned backward enough and the man smelt so good—

“There we go. Ready for another one?”

Ah shit, he’d gotten hard.

“No no, don’t do this to me…” He fought against Ford’s touches while laughing because it was all so silly and ridiculous, and he was saying no not out of fear but just because the man wanted to make him feel good too much, too soon, and he’d never said those words (no stop don’t do this) in circumstances like this, never and what was wrong with this man?

“I want you to cover me in your cum.” Bill nipped at Ford’s neck.

“I appreciate the offer but I’ll pass.”

“You being a second hand virgin, made me think you’d be terrible and shy but you blew my mind, Ford.” Bill admitted shamelessly. “Really. I’ve never been with anyone like you. We didn’t even fuck and I’m fucking out of it.”

“Your language is so vulgar.”

“I want you.”

“You have me.”

Bill’s eyes thinned suspiciously. “Do I….? This isn’t a once off thing?”

“It depends on a few things.” Ford said, sounding more serious.

“Like?”

Ford gave him a contemplative look.

“I enjoyed our time, Ford. Did you enjoy it too?”

“I did.”

“Then, do you want to make it a regular thing? Want to become lovers?”

“Bill, who are you? Really?”

Bill smiled mysteriously. “You know, don’t you, Ford?”
“I might.”

Bill laughed.

“You…really…like the bad boys, don’t you?” Bill’s eyes fluttered seductively. “Don’t worry, I like you too.”

Turning around, he pushed Ford down, topping the man. “My turn.” He nibbled at Ford’s throat, teeth bared. “Sugar…and spice.”

Pinning the man down with his hands, he smiled devilishly. “I want to fuck you into the couch, Ford.” A lick at Ford’s chin. “I want you. You’re mine, aren’t you?” A barrage of licks assaulted Ford’s neck, dead centre at his sensitive spot. Ford’s quiet, but his hands settle at Bill’s lower back, sinking down to massage Bill’s rear shyly before retreating back up.

“Why am I the only one half-naked?” Bill said, pouting in a way that wouldn’t work on Ford in any other circumstance.

“Because you’re the only one worth looking at.”

“Self-deprecating. Let me see you…”

“Later. Come.”

Ford carefully pushed him off. Standing up, he took Bill’s hand and led him to the bedroom.

Panic rushed into Bill—he knew Ford would do it, he knew…

“The bedroom huh? Oh Ford…”

“You can spend the night.”

Bill’s eyes widened. “What…?”

“Look at the time. It’s late.” Ford nodded in direction of the clock but Bill didn’t bother looking. “I’d rather not have you leave immediately, especially after what we just did.”

Caught off guard, Bill asked, “Why not?”

“It’s inappropriate.”

“Riiight. You shouldn’t let someone like me spend the night with you, Ford. It’s not safe, you know.”

“Oh?”

“Of course, what if I fuck you?”

“I think if you were going to do anything to me, you would’ve by now.” Ford stated matter-of-factly. “And really, you’re one of those romantically aggressive and sexually submissive types, aren’t you?”

“Watch your mouth, old man.”

“I bet if I had taken up your offer any of the previous times, you’d have acted just like you did earlier.” Ford closed the distance between them and Bill sensed a challenge. “You are incredibly
cute, Bill. Really.”

Somehow, Bill’s face felt hot…

“You think I’m not the type to hold you down fuck you?” Bill grinned. Oh man. Ford was naïve. “You’re in for a rude awakening, Sixer.”

“I am exceptionally diverse.” His arms found Ford’s shoulders, wrapping around them possessively. “But if being submissive turns you on, I can—”

“It doesn’t.” Ford kissed him—seems it was all the man did lately. “But if it’s your natural reaction, than it does.”

“I don’t get it…?”

“You’re still a child, that’s why.”

“I’ve fucked way more people than you have, mister ‘two people’.”

“I don’t doubt that, but that’s irrelevant.”

“Hey…don’t call me a child. I don’t like it. You just rubbed your dick all over this child.” Bill said.

Guilt shot Ford.

“Too bad you never had lube. I’d loved to have gotten fucked by you.”

“I’m not interested in that.”

“What?” Did he hear that correctly…?

“Penetration. It doesn’t interest me.”

Ford was a virgin?

“You’re telling me I’m not going to be putting my dick into you and you’re not going to be putting your dick into me?”

“That’s exactly what I’m telling you.” Ford said sternly.

Bill couldn’t believe it. “You have a dick. It’s supposed to go somewhere.”

“Your logic is flawless. However will I argue?”

“Real cute. Try it with me.”

“I’d rather not.”

“Oh come on. I’ll teach you everything.”

“No thank you.”

“You’re like 60, you don’t have many years left to do this.” Bill pushed.

“Bill…” Ford said, becoming agitated.

“Ford, come on. We could fuck each other’s brains out.”
“I’m not interested in penetration. That’s the end.”

“Why not?”

“Large items going into my rectum, or yours for that matter, is not erotic.”

“It’s mighty erotic.” Did Ford just consider his own dick to be large? Bill wouldn’t argue with that, but still…surprisingly self-confident.

Still unsure, Bill sought clarity. “You really haven’t ever gotten fucked?”

Ford threw him a dirty look, causing Bill to grin with apologetic shrug. Looks like Ford really was a virgin.

“I don’t want to hurt you, and I don’t want to be hurt.”

“It won’t hurt if you do it right, Ford.”

“No, Bill.”

Bill let out an exaggerated sigh, not discouraged in the least. Ford would change his mind soon enough. He’ll be fucking Bill and Bill will make sure to remind him of this conversation.

A virgin though…

Bill loved virgins.

Ford’s bedroom was hardly neat and tidy; the bed was unmade, clothes were scattered here and there. It did little to dampen the mood—it was nice to see where Ford slept.

“Please excuse the mess…I didn’t know I’d be having company.” Ford apologized, rubbing the back of his neck self-consciously.

“Clearly.” Bill said, his tone letting Ford know he wasn’t put off by the mess.

“You can take the left side.”

“Okay.” Bill began to undress, but Ford intervened, undressing Bill himself.

Laughing, Bill asked, “What’s going on? Feeling it again?”

“I wanted to touch you again.” Ford said; very nonchalant, very unexpected.

Bill raised an eyebrow. “You’re really…I’m pretty flirty, aren’t you? Didn’t expect that.”

With a comforting smile, Ford said “There are sides of yourself you only show certain people, Bill.”

He turned to move to his side of the bed, but Bill followed, tugging at his shirt. “Let me undress you.”

Ford sighed, but complied, his face cringing as his shirt came off—as if Bill hadn’t already seen that dreadful tattoo.

“It’s okay. You should get it removed.”

“One day.”
They climbed into bed and Bill was the first to speak.

“I liked that thing you did, with all the kissing. It’s weird, but I like it.” He tugged at Ford’s shoulders. "Hey, do it again.”

“Maybe tomorrow.”

“Then how about I do it to you…?”

He rolled over onto Ford, and straddled the man. “I like you, Ford.”

He lowers himself until their naked chests are touching, their body heat a fire—meeting itself and pulling itself into itself to become one. “I really really like you…” His nose hides in Ford’s neck and he feels the man take hold of one of his hands to embrace—fingers entwining; flushed skin comforts him and

within the crucible of Ford’s body heat, he stays still, cauterizing.

Ford kissed him deep into the night. Kissed him, kissed him, until he was rather

alive.

And perhaps even a little

lovesick.

Ford’s on top of him and he’s so tired…he isn’t sure what the man’s doing anymore.

Kissing him? Still?....

He dreams he’s talking to Ford.

It’s 5am. Leaving the bed, he stole a look at Bill, who appeared fast asleep. As he left the bed, something snatched his hand.

“Where are you going…?”

“The bathroom. Go back to sleep, Bill.”

“No, don’t go…”

“I’ll be right back.” He managed to free himself and left.

Well, that was surprising. Who knew Bill could be clingy?

When he returned, he climbed into bed, snaking an arm around Bill’s waist to pull him close.

“You were gone awhile. A lifetime.”

Ford laughed quietly.

“I dreamt I was talking to you.”

Smiling tiredly, Ford whispered, “Go to sleep, Bill.”
“…I missed you, Ford.” He felt Bill hold one of his hands, taking his time to feel all his fingers, as if counting. His other hand touched Bill’s face, prompting the boy to lean into the touch with closed eyes; the reaction pulled at Ford’s heart strings unexpectedly.

“You’re really not what I expected, Bill. I’m not sure what I expected, but I know this wasn’t it.”

Bill only responded with a humming noise. He settled at Bill’s neck, going back to sleep.

In Ford’s mindscape, a yellow flower with roots **vantablack** begins to bloom.

- 

In Bill’s mindscape, the **ferris wheel** powers on.

It **doesn’t have** to be like **this**.

All we need to do
is make sure
we
**keep talking**.

In another universe, he tells Ford who he is, who he **really is**. He’s hostile. They get into a shuffle. Ford shoots him, with his own gun; Xanthar did not take the bullets this time. He dies hearing his Father’s voice calling him a liar.

—Alternate Universe: Bill Cipher makes the **wrong choice**.

- 

**But this isn’t that universe. It isn’t that universe.**

Bill Cipher does not make the wrong choice in this one.

---

*Keep talking.*

---

Chapter End Notes

Please listen to Pink Floyd’s *Keep Talking*. 
Chapter Summary

He’s crying now and Bill is still screaming.

Chapter Notes

Here’s a divergent chapter, that branches into an open ending and a closed ending. Divergent chapters only show up every now and again and can be skipped. This was the third chapter I wrote of this story and was the original path that Billford was going to go down but as I wrote the chapters that came before this, the dynamic changed too much for this to occur.

This route is called ‘Good Morning Bill Cipher’. The opposite version of it, which is reverse!Billford, is called ‘Goodbye Bill Cipher.’ But I’m getting ahead of myself...

Differences: Bill never confides in Xanthar, spends all his time drinking and sleeping and takes his gun when he goes to see Stanford.

I’m feeling weak now. But
I can’t show my weakness.

Isolation can put a gun in your hand. It can
put a gun
in your hand.

-Unknown Mortal Orchestra - From The Sun

Ford’s phone rang. A phone call, at this hour?

He answered, and of course, it’s Bill Cipher. The boy held a certain talent for inconvenient timing.

“Fordsy! Hey! You busy?” Bill’s voice rang cordial on the other hand; not unusual but Ford felt suspicious anyway.

“Bill? Yes, I am. Where have you been? I—” Ford began but Bill cut him off sharply.

“I want to see you.” He tapped the phone, the noise echoing in Ford’s ear. “I think you should reconsider your answer, Stanford.”

“What?”

“The deal I offered you.”
Ford was at a loss. “What deal?”

“Do me a favour real quick. Go to your front door—is your phone lead long enough? You’re using a land-line right? Whatever, just head on there real quick.”

Ford’s patience waned. He was not in the mood to deal with this boy’s nonsense. “Bill, if you are outside my house, I’m calling the police.”

“Awww that’s not it. Go.” Ford warily did as instructed and found a suspicious brown envelope in his mail slot.

“Do you see it? Just pop it open and have a look inside.”

Again, Ford did as instructed and found multiple photos of Fiddleford, of the same kind that had been taken of him—intrusive, in various locations and the subject entirely unaware.

“You…you’ve been watching Fiddleford.”

“Uh huh. Now ask me why and how.” Bill sounded incredibly pleased with himself.

“Did he hire you to keep an eye on him—no, Fiddleford moved away, quite a distance away—" That wasn’t how private investigators worked either; they weren’t bodyguards.

“I want to talk to you about that deal, Stanford. The one you rejected.”

“What is this about?” The word ‘deal’ only brought back memories of Gaspard, and if Bill was implying what Ford thought he was, then…

“I think you know who I am. You know, funny thing really, when I showed you my tattoos at the office, I thought you’d know immediately. So when you gave me that cold attitude, boy, did you surprise me! No one’s ever disrespected me like that, or rather, no one who’s known who I am has disrespected me—anyway, you get what I’m saying, Stanford?” Bill’s voice was affable as ever. The friendliness did nothing to soften nor conceal the razor lips of his words.

“You’re…you’re Gas—" Gaspard Giordano’s son.

“Whoa, don’t say his name! I hate hearing it, but yes, I am that man’s son. His biggest disappointment too, and now look who’s running the family business! Whoo, papa must be turning in his grave!”

Ford always knew, but the confirmation had him believing the phrase ‘ignorance is bliss’.

“I think if you and I sat down and had a little talk, you’d take the deal. Forget Fiddleford. You don’t need to amuse yourself with skittish fools. Science is about why not, not why, Ford. When an opportunity presents itself, you should take it.” Bill said smugly, and Ford thought his holier-than-thou attitude comported well with his lineage. That sense of confidence and entitlement—Ford had noticed it before. The pieces had all come together.

“If we discuss it in person and you say no, I’ll accept your no. How’s that?” Bill said, and Ford struggled to believe the words. He might’ve believed Gaspard had accepted his no, but Bill Cipher had made it exceptionally clear he did not accept ‘no’. His doorbell rang, the noise startling him.

No…
Hesitantly and already knowing who it was, he checked the peephole. Bill Cipher. 
Not opening was smart, yes, but opening was wise. Making an enemy of this boy would be disastrous. Bill was unstable and Ford had to ensure he avoided provoking him at all costs.

Ford opened the door, and Bill broke into sing song, “Smart boy! Who’s a good boy? Who’s a good boy?” Ford felt like a dog, but that was the intention, he supposed.

Bill pushed past him, instructing him to close the door behind him. Ford complied, uneasiness waving over him as he shut the wooden door—but not before stealing a glance outside. There were quite a few cars outside. Bill hadn’t come alone.

“Hey.” Bill said coyly after clearing his throat for attention. “Fancy meeting you here. Let’s talk!” He took a seat at the single coach, pointing at the opposite one. “Come on, what are you standing around for?”

Bill was dressed sloppier than usual— with shirt untucked and tie undone—and that little detail screamed at Ford that something was wrong. He took the seat offered by Bill, sitting across from him with the fireplace illuminating the boy’s features. They seemed vacant now, as though his features held no depth to them.

“Let’s talk. So, that deal, you know… that deal.” Bill folded his hands in his lap demurely. “You do the whole ‘produce drugs for my little business’ and you get handsomely rewarded…hey, have you ever seen that series Breaking Bad? Kinda like that, yeah? The main guy?”

Ford rarely watched television and so he had no idea what Bill was talking about. “I’ve never…seen that show. Bill, I—I’m not interested. I’m sorry.”

Bill frowned exaggeratedly, features becoming cartoonish. “Nah, think about it. You didn’t think about it, Ford.”

“Rejecting me again…I can’t believe you.”


“3 months ago, I asked you. And now again, you say no.”

“Bill, three months ago, your father asked me.”

“Yeah same thing.” Bill shrugged. “My father, me, what’s the difference? We’re both unimpressed and disappointed in you.”

“Your father is dead, Bill. What are you saying—”

“Gaspard Giordano is not dead. I’m right here.” Bill said, his delivery sent a grim chill straight to
Ford’s core. This boy was delirious.

“I’ve been around for generations. I remember you rejecting my deal, Stanford Pines.” Bill’s breathing became rapid, Ford could hear it loud and clear. Then it slowed and Bill gave a charming smile. It did everything but charm Ford.

“However…” Bill covered half his face with a hand, the black caught Ford’s eye. “I’m not my father, you see. Rejection? Not my thing. I take what I want, IQ.”

In a flash, something shiny flickered in Bill’s fingers but Ford could not see what it was.

“I’m gonna fuck you and throw your body in some garbage compacter.” Bill said, and Ford knew he wasn’t joking. Ford could feel and practically hear his own heart quivering inside his ribcage—thump thump thump. Morse code. It told Ford it wanted to get the hell out of there and away from Bill, away from this house, this town. From everything.

“You said—you said—"

“What? I said what? Speak up, Stanford.” Bill hadn’t moved an inch, and Ford knew he was waiting for Ford to make a move—the first move that topples the dominos. Proverbs related to the ‘first strike’ pop into Ford’s head, his mind desperately trying to disassociate itself from its current predicament. Now wasn’t the time for that…

“Please don’t do this. I won’t tell anyone…” Ford begged, out of options already and not willing to take any risk. Even if he took down Bill, there were plenty of men outside who’d come to avenge their Boss(?).

“Don’t you get it? You’re going to die. You’ve just humiliated me and you think I’m gonna let you live after that?” Bill laughed, and it’s a death rattle. “You shouldn’t be surprised. I tried raping you the second time we met. I’ve been pretty honest about how I am for the get-go, Fordsy.”

Before Ford can make more excuses, Bill grabs him quickly and Ford’s cheek makes contact with his coffee table hard enough that he’s sure the glass is ruined. There’s a pulling at his right arm and it takes him seconds to realize Bill is silently threatening to break his arm. Breakage never occurs because there’s a tug at his belt, and now he knows—Bill’s undoing his pants. He can’t find it in him to say anything. The shock is overwhelming, Ford’s sure his heart is going to stop. (it’s going to stop after giving him a lecture about all the bad choices he’s made in his entire life)

It was happening so quickly. No no no.

Ford doesn’t know where the time went but just enough time had passed because he can feel Bill’s hand at his entrance. The sheer force of the thrust—he doesn’t know how many fingers, it just feels awful, it’s so awful—and Ford can’t help himself. His body jerks involuntarily and he violent heaves, his stomach emptying itself all over the table. Bill recoils and Ford flops awkwardly to his knees, still vomiting, his own clothes being stained and the area around him soiled. Bill is screaming profanities at him and God, Ford just wants to die now.

He’s crying now and Bill is still screaming.

Dormant feelings within Ford began spilling out too. This was disgusting, he was disgusting—and God, he misses Fiddleford, misses his family—where had it all gone wrong? When had he last seen or heard from his brother? His niece and nephew? Where had it all gone wrong? Now he was alone, covered in his own vomit, alone with a deranged lunatic who was going to fuck and probably dump his body somewhere—they should’ve gone into hiding together, they never should’ve separated…
God, he just really missed Fiddleford. How long had he denied that to himself? How long would he continue to pretend he wasn’t pathetically lonely and so utterly desperate for companionship? Why else had he gone to see Bill Cipher, other than the little bit of hope that Fiddleford and he would rekindle their friendship?

Friendship. Were they really just friends? Had he ever though to Fiddleford as more?

Why, why did Stanford Pines never know how he felt himself? Why were his emotions always such a damn mystery to him, something forever eluding his understanding? Always inexplicable, always neglected.

Bill began striking him with a nearby blunt object—a book? It’s hard. A compound of tears and foul smelling saliva smeared across Ford’s face as he attempted to shield his face with his hands. A voice in the far corner of his mind is telling him he must look so pathetic but did it even matter when you were going to die? Did it matter what you looked like?

“What a fucking mood killer. Was that your plan, huh? Get yourself a little dirty so I won’t fuck you? Very clever, Ford.” Ford is being blamed for something he never did and he has nothing in him to defend himself. He’d never meant to, he’d never meant to—

“Pathetic. Really, this is it?” Bill struck him a few more times with the book, the final strike being a hard throw, the book bouncing off Ford with a hard thud and landing near the foot of a couch. The fleeing book stole Ford’s eyes—he didn’t want to look at Bill right now. Anything else was better.

A rough grab by both his neck and hair gets Ford’s attention and he still avoids looking at Bill’s face. “You’re really weak, aren’t you, Brainiac? The only thing working is your intellect. Beyond that, you can’t do anything.”

Bill’s right, Ford can’t even argue.

Bill’s heart thumped ferociously in his chest; a drum of war. God, he’d been waiting for this. How long? How long hadn’t he wanted to do this? To come around full circle and give that man what he’d been given for so many years? Karma was a bitch and it was about time Gaspard Giordano was someone else’s bitch.

Because that man wasn’t dead. Autopsy reports lied, the man had probably paid off those fucks at the hospital and police—as usual. That man had obviously just taken a new identity.

That man had become Stanford Pines.

The resemblance is uncanny—who the fuck was he fooling? Did he think Bill was an idiot? That he wouldn’t recognise him? Sure, his Italian accent was gone—speech therapy. Tattoos? Laser removal. Minor face changes—surgery, like Bill himself.

If Stanford Pines was real, he’d have taken the deal. But that man wouldn’t because he knew jackshit about chemistry.

Liar liar liar.

Bill’s no idiot. How dare the man make a mockery of him?

But those six fingers…? How…?

There’s cold at patches of his skin, he’s sweating underneath his coat, the dampness is freezing him.
His fever is burning him, and all traces of a sound mind. He’s done with this shit, and done with this man. He wasn’t scared now, not anymore. There was no reason to be scared.

He cups both of Ford’s cheeks with a hand and squeezes them together, the man grimacing at the harshness of the grip and now looking like a stupid fish. “You thought you hide from me? Really? You’re terrible at being inconspicuous, thought I’d let you know.” He slaps Ford across the face, laughing at how deplorable the man looks. What a sorry excuse for a former leader of the Giordano family.

He thought back to their last meeting again, at the diner, and the gong of reason struck itself, ringing loudly; an alarm clock demanding Bill wake the fuck up.

He hit snooze.

Even if Ford was obviously not that man—did it really matter? He has to purge himself, suck the poison out of the wound that refuses to respond to drinkable antiseptic and night coma any longer. If beating Stanford Pines to death provides him with the cathartic relief he sought for several years, he’d do it. He’d do it gladly.

“You promised…you promised—do you even remember what you fucking promised? Do you?” He slammed Ford’s head into the ground, as if disciplining an unruly dog—nose into its shit. Everything was this man’s waste; he only left shit and devastation in his wake. A god damn parasite—taking taking taking.

He’d taken so much, from everyone—from Bill and his father, too—and Bill would take what he’d taken. If he could not take it back, then he would ensure that man could never take again.

Bill stomped a foot repeatedly onto Ford’s bowed head, the man making funny bleating noises at every impact and Bill can only laugh. Sweet justice. “Beg for mercy. Beg for it. Beg. Do you remember? Remember how to beg?”

The man begs, but Bill ignores it. He didn’t actually mean beg, *it was a rhetorical question, you fucking idiot.*

“By the way…you know Stanford is the name of a university, right? Worst name ever. You might as well be broadcasting ‘I’m a complete fucking retard at picking new names for myself’.” He kicked Ford in the side and a pain that burned Ford cold shot through the area. A few more kicks, and tomorrow, they’ll be an ugly purple bruise to remind Ford he survived an encounter with Bill Cipher.

He stops, backs away slowly with a grin, and says, “I’m going to kill your fake family, too.”

Something in Ford snapped.

No…he could take Bill hurting him, but not his family. Not his family.

He staggers up; Bill seeming very entertained at Ford’s sudden spunk.

They wrestle, awkwardly at first, Ford practically flails himself at Bill expecting it work and it’s only when their body weight collides in push and shove and Bill falters, that Ford realizes he is physically stronger than Bill. It’s shocking but it’s all he needs to gain a much needed boost in confidence to *keep fighting.*

A weak punch hits Bill’s jaw, the amateur of the precision meant Bill wouldn’t be seriously injured by it in any way but it was enough to push him back a bit for Ford to get away. Ford runs, and Bill
calls out: "If you leave, they’ll kill you! I have them waiting outside, Sixer! With very specific instructions and if you go out there, just like that, they’ll shoot you on sight!"

All it takes is moment of hesitation from Ford for Bill to gain the upper hand—a quick punch in the lower back surprises Ford and next thing, he’s in a chokehold. It doesn’t last long, he has no clue how to get out of it, but Bill knows exactly how to get Ford into the position he wants. Bill’s movements held experience in them, every punch and shove was simply a test in revision.

His head slams once twice into the coffee table; glass finally shattering and shards enter his left cheek. He barely feels the pain—adrenaline was one hell of a hormone. Wetness of the blood dribs down, he feels *that*—the warmth and life seeping out, telling him it’s not over yet. Bill laughs and smears the fresh blood across his face. “You look like a fucking clown.”

In Bill’s few moments of arrogance, Ford manages to get up and punches him in the lip and this time, he sees damage; blood at Bill’s mouth. Fury is bursting out of Bill’s eyes, making Ford regret his actions—but only for a split second. There’s no time for regret.

Bill stops, touching his lip to assess the damage. Having no real qualms, he spits the blood out on the floor, unfazed.

When Bill speaks, his voice is still hard, no hint of his tenacity dying out yet. “See my lip here, Sixer. Look what you did to my lip. *Look at it.* I’m going to split your asshole just like you split my lip—”

Intimidation did not frighten Ford, not when his lizard brain is awake and screaming in his skull to fight and *fight*, and now Ford barely understand words anymore. He can feel it in his blood, the need to survive, it was all or nothing, all or nothing.

He had nothing and so had nothing to lose.

He pushes against Bill again, the other man staggering and yes, he could do this. He was stronger than Bill. He could just keep pushing and pushing and pushing—

And then Bill hits him so hard, the only thing he can do is fall down. When his eyes can focus again, Bill’s face is barely recognizable. The personification of a bellowing vibrant red is what comes to Ford’s mind, even in his disoriented haze. He thinks it’s the colour of Hell as Bill’s fist rains down on him. Sharp pain, shards of ice hitting every organ with too much precision.

“*You FUCK!* How DARE you raise your hand to me! Who the fuck do you think you are?! You’re NOTHING, Stanford. NOTHING!” Bill’s still screaming, expecting Stanford to recognize the words he recites from his memories of his father. All his father’s words, of course. Bill doesn’t realize it, doesn’t understand why they flow out of him so easily, as though they’d been programmed into him from the very get-go. The wraith of his father etched black into his hands, guiding every action. Daddy’s little puppet.

No, not his father…

How long would he blame his father…? But he was his father now, wasn’t he? He’d replaced him—and his father had replaced…that man…

Ford’s glasses lay at an angle a few feet from Ford, and in them is the face of Bill’s father. In this moment, there is no Bill, only the ghost of his father’s violence and temper, internalized unknowingly despite his insistence he’d never suffered scars. When Bill comes to later, he would deny it as he’d always done. He will insist ‘I made myself, my father did not make me.’ The mantra Bill Cipher would take to the grave, but Ford does not know of this yet. Ford only knows the Bill he’s known up today: a violent, lying, sadistic youth with self-control issues.
But that is not who Bill is, it’s who Gaspard Giordano is, the man who should be dead. The men who should be dead.

Right?


Gears change inside Bill’s head. He lets go.

A fistful of Ford’s grey hair is grabbed and Bill snarls, “No wonder your little southern bum chum left. Bet he made some valid reasons, right? He just wanted to get away from you, Ford. “

A sudden thrust by Bill’s finger into Ford’s mouth forcefully parts his lips. “Look at this. You’re fucking gross. Jesus Christ. I stuck a few fingers into your ass and look at you!”

Bill couldn’t forget his original plan: to fuck this man and then kill him. It wasn’t enough to just hit him a few times. Like hell that was justice.

“Maybe I should use that mouth of yours, hm? It’s all nice and ready. Might have to clean myself off afterwards but hey, this is worth it. You’re worth it.” Bill said lewdly, hands surrounding Ford’s neck again. This time, with less pressure and clamping snugly, holding his neck like a collar. “Blow me, Ford. With that filthy fucking mouth, blow me. Blow me, Ford.”

The hands around Ford’s neck loosen quickly when the metal pokes at Bill’s chest. Bill’s gun. Ford had stolen Bill’s gun. The anger in Bill’s eyes dimmers, and morbid curiosity fills them. Amber eyes so side so wide and waiting and wanting—

Sobs from Ford came to halt as he held the gun. The barrel pointed at Bill’s chest, while the gun itself sat supported by both a joint effort of Ford’s hands and Bill’s—primarily Bill’s—who every opportunity to take it back. Bill’s fingers gnarl themselves around the gun, migrating and intertwining themselves around Ford’s fist — encouraging him.

“Blow—” He took a step back. ”Me.” Another step. “Away.”

Now Bill stood in front of Stanford, a gun aimed at his chest, held by Ford’s shaking hand, the aim awful. “If you don’t shoot me, Ford, if you don’t kill me, I’m going to fuck and kill you and oh, it’ll be brutal. I’m going to make you scream. You’re gonna hit notes musicians never knew fucking existed. I might even fuck you with the gun. Might even call a few friends in too.” The glazed look in Ford’s eyes began thinning more and more as Bill’s words began to clear his mind.

“Do it. Shoot me.” Bill said, and Ford’s grip around the gun tightens—he’s serious now.


Ford had pulled the trigger. Ford had pulled the trigger and nothing had happened.

Bill laughs. “Safety, Ford.” With an expression as though he’s doing Stanford the smallest favour, he removes the safety from the gun with Ford’s hand still trembling, and he steadies them for a second with his own.
“Now, let’s try this again. Shoot me. Do it, Ford.” The serenity in Bill’s voice is unnerving. “I’m waiting.”

_This bitter earth._

He pulls the trigger.

_This bitter bitter earth._

The gun is empty.

_Might not be so._

“No bullets…?”

_So bitter after all._

The gun had been empty. Horror broke out on Ford’s face and he dropped the gun, stepping back in complete disbelief. He’d been set-up. It was all a joke, the little bit of hope was a ruse—Bill just getting his kicks, of course, why one earth would Bill suddenly give up and want to die? Of course, of course... Now Bill was going to kill him. And then Fiddleford, he’d ruined everything. Now Fiddleford was going to pay too. Why…?

Bill pulls him by the wrist and closes in on Ford, with eyes wide with intrigue and satisfaction. Both hands cup Ford’s face, but Ford isn’t looking at Bill, he can’t meet his face, much too afraid of repercussions. He’d just tried killing the man.

Bill pushes him away, and begins twirling around excitedly. A playground’s merry-go round—_round and round._

“I didn’t die! Even Dreamcatcher can’t kill me!” Bill is laughing as the bell’s tolling goes ignored; he was never one to do as he was told, and even Death had learnt that.

If the inevitable could not take him, then the evitable could not either.

He’d won.

Bill Cipher is laughing as Death’s alleged defeat powers up the carnival within his mind.

_—You’ve begun to interest me, Stanford Filbrick Pines._” Bill’s eyes, more yellow than ever, riveted Ford in place. “Who are you…? Really?”

Ford doesn’t understand Bill’s question.

Bill’s smiling, and as a child would, grabs Ford’s hand—tattooed fingers feeling six fingers. “You’re…Sixer. Yeah, that’s right. Stanford Pines.”

“You’re a good man, aren’t you?…”

Bill embraces him, almost genially, the vomit not yet hard and the pain below not yet gone.

He’s quiet, and Bill is still laughing.

He has no strength to fight when Bill’s tongue forcefully invades his mouth.
His right eye is bleeding.

“Do you believe in soul mates, Stanford?” His knife cuts through Ford’s shirt. “Bet you’re mine.”

—

“Whoa, easy there Sixer. Just taking’em off so you can climb on into bed. Easy there, boy. There we go…” Bill chatted endlessly while cautiously undressing Ford, and helping him into bed.

“Wow, you know—I didn’t expect this. I mean, just, have you never been with a man before? Is that it? Like, you’re a virgin? If I’d known—well, I mean…I’d have been more careful because your first time can be a hell of train wreck. I thought…I thought you said—ah forget it.”

“I’m just gonna…go clean that up. I actually dealt with this sort of thing back in New York a lot. Lotta god awful frat parties and you know how it is, daddy dearest always said to be a good host and the guy I was living as didn’t have any servants so guess who cleaned up vomit? This guy. Speaking of this guy, I can actually repair sinks, to an extent. So if you ever got issues there, you just let me know—”

Bill laughed sheepishly.

“Living as other people teaches you alotta tricks of the trade.”

Bill was still talking, trying to calm Ford down. As long as he remained here, Ford would not recover; Bill knew.

Time passes and Bill’s still talking, making idle purely one-way chit chat with Ford, but his father’s voice is still echoing in his mind, like the pitter patter of small feet.

It's only when he climbs into the bed beside Ford, taking one of the man’s arms to use as a pillow, that the noise starts to mellow. His father’s voice lowers, octave by octave first, then the volume, until there is nothing but static within Bill’s mind. In Ford’s embrace—the embrace of an older man—for the first time, Bill Cipher does not think of his grandfather.

“Fiddleford is dead already. My father killed him.” He confesses, and he can hear the despair as Ford’s face constricts to mourn.

His tattoos are burning but when his hands make contact with the wetness of Ford’s eyes, the aching quiets.

He watches Stanford sleep.

Gaspard ‘Casper’ Giordano is dead, the dreamcatcher having spirited him away to the place where the spineless and unloved sleep while Bill Cipher, beneath a sky of today yesterday and tomorrow, can hardly remember what he was afraid of.

Fear overcomes Bill. There’s bullets in the clip.

Bill’s fist hesitates but Ford is in too much pain to retaliate.

He takes Ford’s neck, hands tight and damp with sweat.
“Leave me alone…okay?” His voice quiets, not a whisper but straining is required to hear it all the same. “Stay away from me. I—I don’t belong to you! I don’t…I’m not yours. Don’t you…don’t you ever touch me…. I’ll fucking kill you. I’ll kill you—

Ford can’t hear Bill’s words, his airway restricted.

What if he wasn’t strong enough to choke the man to death? The man would kill him, the man would kill him—

No he would…

Bill’s hands tighten.

Stop? Stop and beg for mercy…? Take the punishment…? No no, the man was going to share him. The men in suits are going to fuck him they’re going to take turns—he’s not the heir, he’s too young—Gaspard Giordano always keeps a pet—he’s he’s…

Crying now, he lets go of Ford’s neck and takes out Dreamcatcher. He spaces out, mind already heading to the afterlife, and a six fingered hand grabs it. He doesn’t expect it and the gun leaves his shaking hand, makes brutal contact with the side of his face and is now pointed at him.

The man was so tough…

Through the blur of his tears, he spills apologies in a language Ford doesn’t understand and grabs the barrel, now laughing “Tag you’re it, nonnino. Tag.”

Ford shoots him and he swears he heard his father tell him

he’s a liar.

__________________________________________________________

But while a voice
Within me cries
I’m sure someone
May answer my call
And this bitter earth

*May not be so bitter after all*

—Dinah Washington - This Bitter Earth

__________________________________________________________

Keep Talking.
This could be messy, but Ford doesn’t seem to mind.

And Kenn's art: http://ratattacksaw.tumblr.com/post/151317131909

“Still got that hero complex, eh Ford?” The demon laughed, flicking Ford’s nose, reddening it even further. “But who ever thought that complex would be directed at lil’ ‘ol me?”

—The distant future.


Ford stirred; someone’s singing?

Doctor Pines, Doctor Pines, calling Doctor Pines! Doctor Pines, Doctor Pines…Wake up now!

Ford opened his eyes, and sat up, vision blurry and nose cloggy. He immediately checked next to him for Bill but found only empty space.

“Finally! I’ve been serenading you for a full five minutes and not even an applause.” Bill sat slouched in the room chair, eyes half-lidded. Ford attempted meeting the stare, but his vision proved too blurry.

“What time is it?” Ford asked, still groggy. His limbs felt heavy, as though he’d barely slept at all.

“2pm.” Bill leaned forward. “No work today?”

“It’s that late already? No I’m—I have papers to grade now. No lectures,” He replied, putting his glasses on and looking at Bill again, who was wide awake and fully dressed.

“How long have you been up?”

“Awhile, Ford.” Bill said, leaning back in the chair. “I’ve showered already, and eaten. I borrowed the brand spanking new tooth brush you kept in your cupboard. I’m not reimbursing you, just FYI. As your lover, I’m entitled to everything you own.” Amusement was present in Bill’s face and voice, but his eyes had Ford thinking about what they’d discussed last night, about the nature of this relationship.
“I made you an omelette, want me to heat it up for you?” Bill asked, straightening his posture and Ford smiled in surprise. “You made me breakfast?”

“Brunch.”

“How did you know I like omelettes?”

“You had an omelette maker, genius.” Bill snarked, breaking into a smile that infected Ford.

Ford laughed to hide his embarrassment. “Yes, please…breakfast in bed. You’re spoiling me.” Bill raised his eyebrows, but said nothing, leaving to fetch the omelette in question.

Ford found himself wondering if Bill bleached his eyebrows lighter. If his hair was naturally black, his eyebrows should match but they appeared to be more of a brown. He sighed at his mind working overtime to detect inconsistencies related to Bill Cipher.

Regret still nagged within Ford and it loved to repeat how young Bill was and how Ford had taken advantage of the boy. What was he to do now? He’d certainly said some stupid things last night, and he’s sure Bill remembered. Things about them possibly continuing this…

He had to find a way to fix this mess without upsetting Bill.

Bill returned, and Ford thanked him.

“Do you bleach your eyebrows?” Ford blurted out and Bill raised an eyebrow before replying.

“Yes. Bleach then dye.”

“You’re very appearance orientated, aren’t you?”

“Shut up and eat, Doc.”

Embarrassment had Ford wolfing down the omelette. To his surprise, it was better than he expected. Imagining Bill cooking was quite a sight — somehow not out of place but still strange to envision. Ford tended to struggle with even the basics.

“It’s delicious. Better than I make it.” Ford confessed, slowing his eating pace to savour every bite.

Again, Bill only regarded him quietly, with eyes perpetually half-lidded.

“I’m waiting.” Bill said abruptly, with a tone Ford knew to be seductive.

Feigning naivety, he asked, “For?”

“You know what. I’m getting impatient, Ford.” Bill sniggered as Ford quickly broke eye contact. “Finish eating and shower. I can’t kiss you if you haven’t brushed your teeth.”

Surprised, Ford laughed gawkily between mouthfuls while trying not to embarrass himself further. “Ah, so you did have ulterior motives!”

Again, Bill only stared at him quietly. Bill’s silence bothered him, but bringing it up seemed risky. Ford had other things on his mind, too. Things like…

“I’m curious…” Ford put down his fork. “Where did you get those scars from? On your back?”

Bill grinned and waved a hand dismissively. “Oh you know…a few stabs here and there.”
“Some of them looked like cigarette burns.”

Bill’s eyes thinned, but his smile didn’t waver.

“Who gave you those scars? Am I prying?” Ford asked and Bill shrugged.

“Ever been so drunk you let someone put out cigs on your skin?”

Ford wasn’t convinced and his face showed. The marks were too big to be cigarettes. Ford had purposely lied about that detail to see Bill’s reaction. The circles were larger—cigars, most likely.

“Also, what’s on your shoulder blade? The tattoo? Looked like a...triangle?”

“A party-hat!” Bill gestured excitedly with his hands, very child-like, and Ford gave a puzzled look.

“A party hat…?”

“A geometrical one.”

Strange, but suited Bill’s whimsical nature.

“One more, if you don’t mind…what language did you speak last night?”

“Italian.” Bill said, tapping the chair’s arm.

“You’re fluent in it?”

“It’s my first language.”

What a surprise. A pleasant one, at that.

“You’re Italian…? From Italy?”

“No, my grandfather is. He took care of me when I was younger, so naturally…he’d teach me the language he preferred.” Bill said. “He kinda hated English, funny enough. Always got mad when I spoke it to him.”

“I see. That’s interesting.” Ford said, pleased with Bill’s apparent honesty.

Something clicked in Ford’s mind. Although Bill was not from Italy, he’d no doubt have been raised with leftovers of Italian culture and from what Ford knew of it, said remnants were observable in some of Bill’s actions. Not wanting to admit it aloud, Bill was a lot more interesting than he’d anticipated.

“Want me to whispers words of love into your ear?” Bill snickered, making exaggerated kissy faces.

“Oh no, please no. You’d embarrass me.” Ford laughed at the ridiculous display. “What did you say to me? Last night. When you spoke Italian.”

Bill pulled his bottom lip with a finger continuously, drawing Ford’s attention to the area. “I told you that I missed you. That you’re a good man. And that I want to fuck you.” The last one was a lie but not like Ford would know.

“Oh…” Ford’s eyes retreated to his plate. “Straight-forward, weren’t you?”

A good man? Peculiar thing to say to Ford. It wasn’t exactly romantic or sexual by any means.
“You’re sure full of questions.”

“I prefer to be open and honest about things that bother me. It sets a good foundation for a—” He hesitated. For a what? Relationship?

Bill cocked his head to the side, awaiting Ford’s next word.

“…relationship.”

“Yikes. That’s heavy.” Bill laughed with obvious fake nervousness, rolling his shoulders back. “Gosh, look at the time…I should get going…” They laughed together.

“Okay but really, commitment isn’t what I’m here for, Ford. So let’s…not.” There was no intention to hurt in Bill’s words and Ford knew that, eventually agreeing with Bill. Neither of them seemed the relationship type.

There were other types of relationships though.

“Bill, I didn’t mean to take advantage of you last night.” Ford said, broaching the topic. It was now or never.


“No, it is. I’m older. I shouldn’t have given into your advances. It wasn’t right. I’m sorry.”

“…you regret what happened? So, you don’t want this to be a regular thing?” Bill’s voice took on a worried inflection; Ford expected anger.

“Bill, it’s not right for me to be with you. You’re just too young.” Ford said, attempting to convince both Bill and himself. It was wrong on principle, but desire was not always logical nor righteous—and Ford prided himself on being both. He was righteous only to an extent though, not above doing the morally ambiguous for the greater good, but that did not apply here. This was selfish desire.

Bill pouted. “You won’t fuck me. And now you’re apologizing. Where do they make men like you…?” He stood up, and Ford found the act intimidating.

“I’ve wanted this for so long. You don’t understand anything, Ford.” Knitting his arms around Ford’s neck, he leaned into an ear. “Shower. We have lots to talk about afterwards.”

He let go of Ford’s neck, standing straight again. “One more thing…I scoped your place out, couldn’t find your dirty magazines. I guess you watch everything online?”

“I don’t watch porn.” Ford said, putting his plate at his bedside table.

Bill chuckled, unconvinced. “Ford, come on. We’re both guys.”

“I’m not joking.” Ford pressed.

“So what do you do when you touch yourself? If you ever do, you prude.” Bill flicked Ford’s cheek hard enough to redden it. As it came in for another assault, Ford smacked it away.

“I read. Erotic literature. On occasion.”

Bill was intrigued. “So you don’t watch your porn, you read it?”
“You could say that.” Ford said, intercepting yet another flick from Bill while trying to contain his laughter.

“What do you like to read? Sweet, tender, make love?”

“Do you think that’s all I like?”

Bill raised an eyebrow, a devious smile forming. Hinting at an unmapped territory of Ford’s desires enthralled him, akin to baiting a shark with blots of blood. Ford knew he’d made a mistake, but it was too late now.

“Personally…I prefer more ambiguous scenarios.” Bill said, coming to stand next to Ford’s bed. A lone hand prodded at Ford’s body that lay hidden beneath the covers, more so for fun than to initiate anything sexual.

Eyeing him suspiciously, Ford asked, “Elaborate?”

“Like you aren’t sure whether the person getting fucked wants it or not, but they’re forced to take it anyway.” Bill’s eyes moved to Ford as the last few words left his lips.

“That sounds like rape.” Ford said firmly, resisting the urge to put distance between Bill and himself.

“Nah, that’s an exaggeration.” He ran a finger in the baby hair at the back of Ford’s neck, the man’s body flinching at the touch. “You don’t think that’s a turn on? You fucking me whether you I want it or not?”

So Bill imagined himself on the receiving end of such a fantasy? Ford had expected him to be the one giving. Masochistic fantasies were common, and could have originated from multiple places. If given time, Ford could pinpoint their origins, but again, he was getting ahead of himself.

Dissecting Bill Cipher would have to wait. For now.

“No.” Ford said, grabbing the hand at his neck and holding it. Bill seemed to like that.

Bill tilted his chin up with an uneven smile as he looked down at Ford. He seemed simultaneously unimpressed and satisfied. Running a hand across Ford’s broad naked shoulders, he leaned in, lowered his voice and said, “Shower time. Get naked, Ford.”

Bill watched him the entire time as he undressed and left for the bathroom. During the quiet, Ford kept anticipating Bill to pounce on him—his heart never slowed once as he envisioned what he believed to be the inevitable. He thought Bill might even offer to join him for a second shower.

Bill, however, did nothing.

Ten minutes into his shower, he realized he hadn’t fetched a towel. Switching the water off, a tapping at the glass of his shower door startled him.

“You’re pretty absent-minded, aren’t you? Ford.” Bill said handing him a towel, his eyes never leaving Ford’s own. Ford expected them to wonder lewdly, but they seemed intently taken by his face.

He thanked Bill and the boy, with eyes never wandering, turned and left.

--

When Ford entered the room, Bill sat in the chair still, waiting and watching. Again, Bill’s eyes
seemed entranced by his face. Ford ignored it. If he thought too much about it, he’d become anxious and Bill would detect it. Of course, he thought about it more, mind going wild and—

Now he was nervous, and Bill noticed.

“You’re making me nervous.” Ford attempted to joke, seeking to defuse the situation.

“Nothing I haven’t seen before.” Bill’s voice was flat but sinister all the same.

Without bothering to argue, he went ahead and began drying himself off further. Something cold slipped at his skin, and he found Bill’s hand wandering across his warm skin. It slithered as if daydreaming, hypnotized by the skin which invoked flashes of last night’s events.

“Looks like you’re the one half-naked this time. Or rather…fully naked.”

Bill swallowed him whole before he could object. It didn’t take long for him to cum, and when he returned the favour, as Bill neared his climax, he made sure to take the boy’s mouth and finish him with a hand.

“Cheater…” Bill muttered, and proceeded to complain. Soon though, Bill would understand the purpose of Ford’s actions. It wouldn’t take long for the results to show. That is, if he persisted with this relationship…

“One more.” Ford’s hand returned to Bill’s length, despite the boy’s protests, and once more, Bill came while Ford made sure his tongue was inside the boy’s mouth. When Bill sought to return the favour, Ford denied him. Further complaints were silenced with Ford’s lips, with Bill not fighting back.

In Ford’s hands, Bill became fragile and harmless, easily subdued with simple touches and kisses. He enjoyed it, the vulnerability shown made him feel as though Bill truly loved being with him, enough to the point where he’d drop his guard and let go.

Bill Cipher in his bed. What a time to be alive. How had this even happened?

Not done yet, he removed Bill’s shirt, and again, kissed the boy’s scars. Paying attention to it might spurn a backstory reveal and Ford was too curious for his own good. As his lips left the last scar, one that was particularly big, he declared “All done.”

Bill didn’t get up. He remained face down, unmoving. Images of a body lying at a crime scene flickered in Ford’s mind like a broken no vacancy sign.

“Bill?”

Finally, Bill got up. Looking over his shoulder at Ford, a hand asked for his shirt and Ford took it upon himself to dress Bill again. Unlike before, Bill did not respond to any of Ford’s touches.

“I’m sorry…you don’t want to talk about it, right?”

“I never said that. I’ll tell you. Later.” Bill said, voice flat and refusing to meet Ford’s eyes. Maybe he shouldn’t have done that…but he had confirmation now that Bill wasn’t being entirely honest about the scars origins.

Guilt hassled him again until Bill took one of his hands while still refusing eye-contact. The grasp was hard, as if he feared Ford would run and needed the extra leverage to anchor him down. Ford rubbed at the fretting hand gently, Bill’s eyes scurrying towards it.
Ford begun to feel something else—protectiveness towards Bill. He’d put off thinking about it, but it was definitely there. Only in these moments, when Bill was at his most vulnerable. The contrast between Bill’s demeanour inside and outside the bedroom triggered something in Ford, and solicitousness had slowly manifested.

Everything was happening so quickly with Bill. Too quickly.

Freeing himself from Bill, with the boy attempting to keep him back, he dressed quickly while being watched.

“You said you wanted to talk?”

Bill’s wide eyes narrowed, and he pulled Ford onto the bed, straddling him.

“You know who I am, right?”

“Gas—” But Bill cut him off.

“Don’t say his name. Just say that man. But yes, I am that man’s son, and technically, I’m that man, if you recall what I told you about the Giordano family.” Bill ran his fingers across Ford’s five ‘o clock shadow. “You remember, right?”

Ford nodded. Bill would take the name Gaspard Giordano.

So he was that man’s son…

“If you told anyone you had me in your bed, like this, no one would believe you.” He let Ford’s hands take his neck. “How does it feel to have the most powerful man at your mercy?” Ford’s fingers laced together, forming a freak necklace of twelve fingers, before pulling away.

“You were terrified of my father, weren’t you? Ford. But you aren’t scared of me.” Bill playfully pulled his ears and they reddened under the assault. “Am I not…intimidating?”

Bill’s father had been a chill that if neglected, froze you dead. Bill, however, was alike to a forest fire; what you saw was what you got—inevitable destruction.

Or so he had thought. Bill might be more like his father than Ford recognized.

“That’s not it. You’re simply…different than your father, and I assure you, I have been plenty fearful of you.” Ford said bluntly, and Bill slapped both hands at the sides of his cheeks—the force stinging lightly—while proclaiming, “Boo! Scared?”

Ford laughed and pulled Bill’s hands off his face. “I am utterly terrified.” A kiss came at him and he met it. Bill smelt like his shampoo and soap, and when he pulled away, Bill’s face came to rest in his neck.

“Being close to you makes me horny.”

Ford laughed again, rubbing the back of Bill’s neck. “It’s called the honeymoon phase. When you start to have sex with someone, you may find yourself getting aroused in their company frequently. It dies out eventually.”

“Huh. I didn’t know that…”

“Oh? You’ve had more experience than me, haven’t you?”
“Not with relationships.”

That word came again. Relationship.

“Bill…when you told me Ga—that man’s family died…your family…your entire family is dead?” Ford asked, holding Bill’s face and moving his hair away from his eyes, and Bill immediately tried leaning into the touch. The boy appeared excessively starved for physical affection, despite being physically affectionate himself. Ford took mental notes on all of Bill’s actions, especially one’s that stood out as being peculiar.

“Yeah.” Bill said nonchalantly, his facial expression unchanging.

“I’m sorry…to hear that. That must’ve been tough on you.”

“Not really. I hated them and ran away from home when I was a kid. No big deal.”

Ford frowned at the sudden information reveal. “You ran away when you were younger?”

“Yeah, I’ll tell you the story sometime.” Bill smiled and Ford thought of the scars on his back.

Bill had clearly dealt with a lot, and was no doubt still dealing with a lot. Memories of what Bill had said about his mother, back at the diner, surfaced in Ford’s mind and he wondered how much truth there was to that.

Again, he began to feel guilty. If Bill had been abused when he was younger, than he truly was taking advantage of someone vulnerable. The masochistic fantasies Bill mentioned earlier could be a product of his past abuse, but Ford was over-thinking, and getting ahead of himself again.

“Ford…you’re amazing, in every way. In ways my father couldn’t even see if he wanted to kill you.” Ford gave Bill a confused look and he continued, “You were on his little black list, you know…”

Ford leaned back against the headboard, huffing in relief. He really had dodged a bullet.

“Would you reconsider the deal…if I was the one offering?”

Was this why Bill had been pursuing him? The end goal was to seduce Ford into working for him?

Ford shook his head. “I can’t, Bill.”

“Fiddleford isn’t here to hold you back. Why don’t you think about it?”

“I’ve thought about it…and it’s not for me.” He had to remember to find out about what had actually occurred between Bill and Fiddleford, but now was not the right time to mention it.

Bill didn’t seem upset. “Fine. If you don’t want to take over production for me, join my gang. At the very least…”

“Your gang?”

“Mmm, you met one of them. Evan.” He snuggled into Ford’s neck, and Ford embraced him instinctively. Again, Ford felt that Bill’s actions were too familiar and affectionate. Not that he was complaining.

“Oh, that man.”
Bill’s laughter vibrated through his skin. “Did he scare you?”

Ford stroked Bill’s hair. “He’s...he’s got a presence, hasn’t he?” Bill hummed into Ford’s neck approvingly, enjoying Ford’s touches. “He’s a monster but a good guy. You’d like him, Ford.”

Entertaining the idea out of curiosity, Ford asked, “What will I have to do, if I joined you?”

“Whatever you want.”

Ford laughed. “Are you sure it’s a gang? Sounds more like a club.”

“Hey, you’re welcome to think of it that way. We haven’t been doing much here anyway. And when we do, we go over-board. Overcompensation and all that.” One of Bill’s hands sought out one of Ford’s to hold.

“Oh? How so?”

“I don’t kiss and tell...”

The idea of joining Bill’s, who was young enough to be his grandson, gang was ludicrous. Bill clearly hadn’t thought it through at all, and despite it being nonsensical, Ford tried not to think too badly of him. Bill was young, foolish and a little rash. The very concept of gangs was silly enough. Especially here, in their quiet town. The only big name was Bill’s family, but Ford likened that more to a shady business than a gang.

Seeking further clarity, Ford asked, “Do you actually have that criminal Law degree you claimed to have? You aren’t a PI, after all.”

“Nah.” Bill pinched Ford’s cheek. “I have a high school education, but that’s about as far as it goes.”

Ford frowned, pulling Bill’s hand from his face. “Why don’t you enrol? Get a degree in something?”

“When you said you were a gifted child, were you lying?”

“Nope. But—”

“No buts. You should take your education seriously, Bill.”

“Oh man...come on, Ford. Don’t go all Dad on me.” He struggled to get away, but Ford held him in place.

“What are you interested in?”

“Ford, I am the scion of a powerful—” Ford cut him off.

“That doesn’t matter. What are you interested in?”

Bill pulled a disgruntled face. “Okay, back to the topic of you joining me...”

“I can pull strings and get you any amount of funding you want. Even if you don’t want to do drug production, just join me. I’ll give you everything.”

Negotiation wasn’t Bill’s strong point, Ford noted. This method might've worked on someone younger, but not on a man of Ford’s age. ‘Everything’ was vague and held no meaning until the speaker properly defined it.
“I’m not keen on needing help to receive funding. I’m more than capable of getting it on my own.” Ford said sternly. “The deal with your father was that he would fund a specific project.”

“Ah right…” Bill seemed to shrink at the sudden change in Ford’s voice; it was subtle, but Ford was perceptive. He rubbed Bill’s cheek, letting the boy know he wasn’t angry. “Think about your future.”

“I am.” Bill closed his eyes into the touch. “I can’t.”

“Then how about I teach you what you want to learn?” The offer was accidental; Ford had no idea why he’d said that, the words sputtering out with a life of their own.

“Huh?”

“Would you like that?”

Instead of retracting it, he reinforced it. He berated himself mentally while wondering if this was the true extent of his loneliness or if his subconscious saw something in Bill his conscious mind had not. Ford had an eye for potential and talent, but when had Bill demonstrated either of those things? Claims of being a gifted child could easily be a lie but…why would Bill lie now after having been honest so far? If he had been honest. Ford felt caught between wanting to believe Bill and maintaining his detachment from situations, accessing them logically with skepticism. But relationships (again, that word), were trickier and required a gentler, sentimental touch.

Bill was useful, too.

Still, why one earth would he want a relationship with such a flippant, impulsive person?

“I suck your dick once, and now you want to play teacher?” Bill seemed amused.

“It’s not like that.”

“I know there’s a voice in the back of your head telling you not to trust me. Maybe you should listen to it.” Bill said, hands ghosting around Ford’s neck, as if desiring to ensnare.

Trusting his intuition, Ford pushed ahead. “I told you, Bill. If you were going to hurt me, you would’ve done so.”

“How do you know?”

“The second time we met. Do you remember what you did?” Bill nodded and Ford continued. “That’s what you do when you’re aggressive. You aren’t acting like that now.”

“You just really want to like me, don’t you? Look at you, justifying your behaviour…” Before Ford could defend himself, Bill kissed him. It lasted a minute, neither men eager to pull away.

Bill was right and Ford was self-aware.

“You’re so open-minded, Ford…” Bill muttered as he pulled away. “Didn’t take you for the kind to fall in love after one night.”

Ford laughed within, finding that ironic considering how clingy Bill had been acting. Both of them, in fact.

Ford was lonely. What was Bill’s excuse?
“I’ll give you time to think about it.”

“You’re so desperate for company…imagine if I had spread my legs for you? Would you be asking to marry me?” Bill pulled a lock of grey hair and Ford swatted the hand away. His eyes told Bill how much he disliked the boy’s current train of thought and Bill swerved into another lane. “Join me and I’ll let you educate me. How’s that?”

“Bill, I’m not interested in joining your gang. I’m too old to be doing such…silly things.” In truth, he was fearful, but he had to be smart about when to show fear in front of Bill. As long as he persisted with thinking it was ridiculous, his fear shouldn’t surface and would hopefully die through neglect.

“Silly?”

“Of course, why would I join you?”

Bill smiled wryly. “You like danger, Ford. Know how I know? You let a sexually violent youth into your house, and your bed.” Bill pushed Ford against the headboard. “You’re reckless. I bet…I bet…you like this kind of thing. And you’re too scared to admit it.”

“Bill, let go of me.”

“If I don’t?”

“You have to leave.”

The pressure on Ford eased, Bill eventually letting go and Ford struck immediately, grabbing Bill’s face and kissing him.

**Hypothesis:** The best method for dealing with Bill Cipher was either to take control before he could OR to take control from him.

One held a snake with confidence, and reached for it with no hesitation. If one hesitated, it would strike, assuming harm was meant.

Bill was a snake.

Trying to make sense of Bill’s past actions had led Ford to arrive at this for a potential and apparently successful solution. Feeling Bill submit to Ford’s kiss, his body relaxing and not resisting Ford’s lead in the slightest, proved the theory. As long as he intercepted Bill before things escalated, it should be fine. Should he attempt to take the lead once things have gone too far however, it would be too hard to get the boy to back down.

Maybe Bill was right; Ford did like a bit of danger.

There were no protests when Ford pushed Bill onto his back, with a hand seeking entry into his pants, yet again. Bill’s body stiffened, and Ford hesitated.

“I knew it…” Bill muttered, with an air of defeat. “I knew you’d want to do this kind of thing…”

He spread his arms above his head, letting them sit upon each other at the wrist, as if presenting himself to Ford. “You don’t have to slick me up. You can use spit. Go ahead.” Bills eyes were vacant and unfocused as they observed Ford.

“You must like…disgusting shit, huh? The kind you can’t keep a record of. What is it?” Bill’s finger
trailed down Ford’s cheek.

“Bestiality? Do you want me to get fucked by a dog…?” Ford kept his face neutral, but disgust burned him inside. Is this what Bill thought of him?

“No? You aren’t a paedophile are you? Ford.” Bill asked and Ford remained silent.

“Is it gore…? Do you need to cut me up a bit? I’ve never done any of the extreme stuff…but I can if you want me to.”

Why was Bill so eager to please him? More importantly, why did he think Ford would ever be interested in such things? When had he ever given such an impression?

“What about—” Lips crushed against Bill’s before he could continue, Ford having had enough. His lips continued their attack until his hand brought Bill to orgasm. Before Bill could talk again, Ford repeated it, wanting to persist until Bill was too worn out to talk about vile, factitious things. Two was plenty however, and Bill could barely formulate words now.

“None of that. I don’t like any of that. Don’t ask me again, Bill.” He let two of his fingers into Bill’s mouth. The boy tried sucking but could barely control his mouth’s movements. “I’ll show you what I like. Leave the assumptions and pay attention, alright?” His lecturer side came out, but he didn’t bother restraining it.

“Now how about I try giving you another one? Maybe that will cement my words in?” Pain hit him, Bill having bit his fingers. Ford wasn’t angry though, laughter came instead.

“You’re mad?”

“Fuck… you, Ford.” Bill’s voice was rough and Ford loved it. The way his lovers looked and sounded after orgasming had always been a favourite of his. Something about flushed skin and a husky voice… It suited Bill, and he’d be lying if he said he didn’t enjoy making the boy cum for his own visual pleasure.

“I’m going to. For the third time in a row.” Ford paused. “Actually…this would be the fifth time, wouldn’t it?”

Bill struggled, barely.

“Ssshhh, you don’t have to do anything.”

“No Ford, I can’t…not again…it’s too much…”

“Let’s try anyway.” His fingers lingered at Bill’s crotch, the impending pleasure making Bill writhe, but they went no further.

“I’m sorry…I got carried away.” He rubbed Bill’s head and the boy reacted as he always did, eyes closed and wanting more.

“That... was overreacting?” Bill panted and kissed Ford’s hand. “That was exciting… That’s what you’re like when you’re angry?”

Ford laughed at the boy’s levity, secretly glad he hadn’t upset him. “Bill…”

“You’re a good man…aren’t you? Ford.” They stared at one another in silence, until Bill’s hand travelled to Ford’s cheek.
Ford looked at him curiously and Bill continued, “I’d do anything for you, you know that, right?”

“Bill, you’re so…” clingy. Excessively clingy. In a way Ford couldn’t quantify yet. “…cute.”

It wasn’t a lie. Bill was cute. And without a doubt, extremely suspicious. Bill held a type of charm that made it easy to overlook his bizarre behaviour; bizarreness itself was something Ford very much appreciated, but nothing would make Ford overlook the incredulous nature of Bill’s familiarity towards him and excessive affection. They were blatant manipulation tactics, but Ford was immune to such methods. Or so he liked to think.

The main issue was the non sequitur nature of Bill’s actions. The Bill he’d first met, the second Bill, the third and now the fourth—they all had various things in common but were all ultimately very different. Nothing agitated Ford more than being unable to detect a pattern that should be present.

Bill propped himself up on his elbows. “Don’t you have work to do?”

“I do.”

They left for the living room, Bill following Ford, dragging himself—still tired from Ford’s torture. Ford held in laughter at the sad sight—he hadn’t been that tough on Bill. The boy was so dramatic.

“I’m going to be grading papers now.” Ford said. “Make yourself at hom—”

“Oh hey…wait.” Bill grabbed his wrist. “Want to go to New York with me this weekend?”

“What?” This was out of nowhere.

“Do you?”

“Bill, I have work…”

“Yeah, but it’s only 2 days. I’ll pay for everything.” Bill insisted. “And now that I think about it, you should have plenty of time to do these papers, right?”

“Yes, but procrastination is my worst enemy. I want to finish it as soon as possible.”

“Ford…”

“No, Bill.”

“Can we have a sex filled weekend then? Nights only, Mr. Busy.”

“I’ll consider that.” He couldn’t find it in himself to be annoyed at the request; Bill was young and far more physical than himself. Not to mention he’d enjoyed their time together…

Bill seemed satisfied. “I guess I’ll…leave then.”

“No, as I was about to say, you can stay, but there’s not much to do while I work. Do you like to read? Want to read something?”

“Sometimes. What do you have?” Bill didn’t sound enthusiastic.

“I’ll recommend you something. Would you like that?” Ford asked and Bill nodded.

He had to make a mental note to not talk to Bill as though he were a child, but it was hard. And Bill responded positively towards it, making it harder for Ford to break the forming habit.
“Do you have a favourite author?”

“Lovecraft!” Bill exclaimed and Ford laughed. He’d been laughing a lot since Bill arrived. “Mine too, what a coincidence.”

Deciding to give Bill something different, since he assumed they must have similar taste, he handed Bill a worn book. “This one. You might like it, but it’s a bit nerdy.”

Bill took it, gave it a once over and looked inquiringly at Ford. “The stars, my destination?”

“Give it a try. It’s a favourite of mine.”

“Okay, I’ll go loiter on the couch then.” As Bill passed him, Ford grabbed him, kissing him in the neck before pushing him towards the couch. Bill tried pulling him with, but Ford wasn’t having that.

He’d been grading papers for two hours without getting distracted. A new record. A break was needed and Bill was quiet. Too quiet. There hadn’t been a peep out of him. When Ford checked up on the boy, he found him napping peacefully.

He trailed a finger across Bill’s upper lip and the boy’s eyes fluttered open in response, grabbing the hand and holding it loosely.

“What happened?” Bill asked, dazed.

“You fell asleep.”

“Oh, damn.”

“You got pretty far. Are you enjoying the book?” Ford asked, shaking off Bill’s hand to move the hair from his eyes. The eyes were beautiful, always managing to capture Ford—even if only for a second.

“Yeah… it kinda reminds me of the Count of Monte Cristo.”

“It’s often called the Count of Monte Cristo in space.” Ford said, pleased Bill noticed the similarities.

“Really?” Bill laughed, attempting to sit up, but Ford pushed him back down.

“You can go back to sleep. I was just taking a short break and thought I’d catch up with you.”

“Ah, no, I gotta get up and leave.” Bill sat up, hair messier than usual.

“Do you want to stay the night again?”

“Wah?”

“You should head home and fetch clean clothes, at the very least.” Ford turned to leave and Bill stopped him by taking his hand. “I can stay again?”

“I don’t see why not. You aren’t much of a distraction as I thought you’d be.” Ford replied. “You don’t want to?”

“No…no I’d love to. Yeah, yeah, I’ll head on home and fetch clothes.”
He knew Bill was clingy and this would only encourage it, but the boy’s company was pleasant and the need he approached Ford with came off as more childlike than smothering. He wondered if the reason he interpreted Bill’s actions as childish was due to his own continuous reminding of Bill’s age. Perhaps if he stopped thinking about it…

Before he could return to his desk, Bill gripped his belt and tried pulling him to the couch. He succeeded and attempted undoing the belt before Ford stopped him. “What are you doing?”

“I want to…”

“There’ll be plenty of time for that later, Bill.” He rubbed the boy’s head and all Bill could say was, “Don’t go anywhere, Ford…”

“I’m not. I’m just going to be at my desk. Go fetch your clothes.”

Bill reluctantly let Ford go. Straightening his clothes and half-heartedly fixing his hair, he turned to leave.

“Oh and Bill.” Bill turned his head to meet Ford. “No guns.”

The boy left laughing.

The mansion was quiet, as usual. Upon entering the grounds, Bill was immediately bombarded with questions regarding his whereabouts. Bill dismissed them, fleeing to his room before they could bleed him dry.

On his way, he spotted 8baller, up to no good loitering by a big window. Passing him, Bill made sure to comment how glad he was at 8baller growing his hair out. Apparently, both 8baller and Pacifire were growing their hair, in an attempt to try something new. Bill wondered why he only noticed it now. They were preening, most likely, to ensure they looked their best when they returned to NYC, even if for only a day or two.

When they parted ways, 8baller revealed he had a surprise for Bill that would be ready soon. Bill wondered if today could get any better.

Once Bill entered his room, Xanthar was there, awaiting him. He wasn’t surprised.

“You didn’t come home last night.” Xanthar’s voice had a disapproving edge that Bill laughed at.

“I didn’t indeed.” He winked at Xanthar and the man's lip curled in annoyance.

“Did you fuck Stanford Pines?”

“Nah.”

“Did Stanford Pines fuck you?”

“Nah.”

“Bill. If you neglect your duties because your health is compromised, I understand. But if you’re going to fuck off and at Stanford Pine’s house doing God knows what, I’d like to be informed in advance.”

“Bill.”

“I don’t like the tone of voice you’re using with me, Evan.” Bill’s eyes thinned. “Come on, lighten up. I’m finally in a good mood.”

He shuffled through his wardrobe, packing clothes into a bag he’d grabbed off the floor. It was one he’d brought from New York, and hadn’t bothered storing after he’d emptied its contents. He wanted to finish quickly, and return to Ford’s house. The sooner he returned, the sooner they could have X-rated fun together.

“What happened between you and Stanford Pines?”

“Just fucking say ‘Ford’. Christ.” Bill swung the half-opened bag at Xanthar and the man caught it with one hand. “We sucked and jerked each other off. Happy?”

Xanthar sighed, holding the bag open to allow Bill to pack more items in.

“I know you wanna give me an earful, so why not do it?” Bill picked out a yellow shirt, scrutinizing it. “Things were a lot more fun before I came back here. Now it seems like you’re too scared to talk to me like I’m…your friend? Is that it? Ah, forget it. What do you think of this shirt?” He held up a silk black shirt. “Too flashy?”

“Too flashy.”

“I was thinking...” Bill tossed the black shirt back into the cupboard, grabbing a cotton white one instead. “Remember when I mentioned getting your hands tattooed? Maybe I might do it. Have you handle things when I don’t feel like that.”

“That’s allowed?”

“Sure, my grandfather did it frequently with my father. Mainly to prepare him for taking over…” Bill rummaged through his ties, trying to remember what colours Ford liked.

“Flattering, but that’s not what we came here for Bill…”

“What did we come here for?” Bill asked. “Money, right? Money.”

A goofy tie, which had been given as a gag gift, caught his eye. “There’s plenty of time for us to milk this family. We’re in no rush. Okay? No rush.”

Xanthar couldn’t argue. They had arrived recently, but he was getting impatient. There was already much to deal with. The last thing he needed was Bill to gain the habit of playing hooky.

“So what happened between you too? Did you convince him? …Did he force himself on you?” Xanthar had worried that Bill’s extra-curricular activities had bled into business. If he’d somehow provoked Ford into forcing himself on Bill—no, provoke was not the correct word…neither was force. Bill just liked to play pretend.

“God I wish.” Bill muttered, fixing his tie in the mirror and watching Xanthar. “Then I could’ve killed him and be done with it.”

“But it turns out he’s a real softy.” Bill said “And not yet, he doesn’t seem interested. Thinks it’s a joke.”
“Once I convince him to join though, you wanna have a three way?” Bill asked, facing Xanthar. “I could take both of you, it’ll be something else.”

“Ford all soft and gentle, you all rough and hard…” He grinned while Xanthar raised an eyebrow. “Hey, then we can both fuck him. He’s a virgin and all. I’d love to break him in, teach him how to take dick like a pro.”

“I’ll consider it.” Xanthar had no interest in such a thing.

“Anyway, I’m postponing my trip to New York.” Bill said, packing a flask filled with whiskey into the bag along with lube.

“What?” Xanthar’s voice hardened. “You can’t.”

“I can. Ford can’t come with me this week. So I’m moving it.”

“Bill, Ford has nothing to do with this.”

“I think 8ball and Pyronica should go see what’s up first, before I personally head on down.” Bill said, looking for excuses. “Don’t you think that’s a good idea? It’s best to have them scope out.”

But Xanthar was accustomed to Bill’s last-minute attempts at excuses. “No.”

“Okay, tell you what. I’ll try and convince Ford to go this weekend. If I fail by Thursday, I’ll postpone it.”

“And if he doesn’t?”

“I’ll make him say yes.” Bill said in a tone that had Xanthar believing him. “New York is the ideal spot. Isolating him from everything he’s familiar with is an important tactic if I want to get him to agree to my…demands? My demands. I like it. Demands.”

Bill slung the bag over his shoulder. “It’s like I’m holding him ransom.”

As he walked out the door, he gave one last look towards Xanthar. “Hey, don’t miss me too much. I’ll keep my phone on this time. I’ll be busy, but you’re welcome to send me dumb shit. Tell everyone else, yeah?”

He finger-gunned Xanthar. “Ciao Evan.”

Instead of knocking, Bill tried the front door first and it was unlocked. Risky. He’d have to have a talk with Ford about that. Even if the man was expecting him, he shouldn’t be so careless.

As he walked in, Ford greeted him. “I heard you out in the front. Your car’s quite loud.”

“Yeah…your door was unlocked.”

“I unlocked it when I heard you outside.”

“Oh.” Damn. Now he couldn’t reprimand Ford.

“If my car is so loud, then you must’ve heard me last night.”

“I didn’t.”
“You were in the Ford Zone, right?”

Ford rolled his eyes and Bill, after dropping his bag on the couch, went to stand opposite him at the kitchen counter.

“I’ve been waiting for you.” Ford pushed a mug towards Bill. It was filled with a dark brown liquid with little white pieces.

“What’s this?” Bill asked, swirling the strange, warm liquid in the cup.

“Hot chocolate with marshmallows.” Ford replied, taking a sip of his own. “You like hot chocolate, right?”

Bill frowned. “I guess…? You like sweet things?”

“I do.”

“Then why’s your coffee so bitter?”

Ford looked confused.

“That time I drank your coffee, when we first met?”

“Oh! I was having a rough day.”

Bill sipped the drink and it was delicious. More sips followed, the marshmallows livening up the beverage and adding a twist. He’d never had anything like it.

“I have a surprise for you.” Ford produced a DVD. Who watched DVDs anymore?

“It’s a film based on Lovecraft’s work. In the Mouth of Madness. I hope you haven’t seen it or I’m going to look incredibly foolish.”

Bill hadn’t seen it.

“Do you want to watch it tonight?”

“Is this…a date?”

Ford laughed and Bill is sure the man’s cheeks reddened. “It can be.”

“Oh how your attitude has changed. Did time apart make you realize how much you like me?” Bill joked, a colourful bag on the counter catching his eye.

“Are those jellybeans?”

“Yes, I’m a big fan.”

Bill eyed the bag. “I prefer them sour.” He popped one into his mouth and kissed Ford intensely. He pulled away, leaving Ford a blue sweet passenger on his tongue. Ford chewed it, swallowing it with a red face.

“I can’t believe you’re blushing. You’re so cute.” Bill tugged on his shirt, arms soon surrounding Ford. “You’re going to regret letting me into your home, Stanford Pines.”

“I already regret it.” He kissed Bill, tasting unbelievably sweet. Cannibalism was a thing because of
men like Ford, Bill thought.

“I missed you, Ford.” A needy hand slipped beneath Ford’s shirt, his lower back trembling at the sudden cold of Bill’s skin.

“You’re so clingy, Bill.”

“I don’t mind…” Fingers clawed into his skin as Bill kissed his neck. “Do you?”

“Not particularly.”

“Tell me you missed me.”

“Of course, I did.” Ford looked away, not wanting to meet Bill’s eyes.

Bill bit his neck—both as punishment and to get his attention. “Tell me.”

Ford’s breathing sped up, exciting Bill. “I missed you.”

Bill kissed the spot he bit, tongue coating the area multiple times as an apology. Ford tried to pull away, and Bill knew why; the hardness forming in Ford’s pants was hard to ignore.

“We’ll watch the movie and then we’ll do this, alright?” Ford said.

“Looks like I’ve already jumpstarted your engine. Let me take you for a ride…”

Ford couldn’t argue when Bill took his mouth.

--

He licks Ford’s neck as he strokes him, most of Ford’s clothes still on. Had to make this quick.

Ford’s on his back. He straddles a leg, grabs grey hair to let Ford know he can’t escape; lets his tongue lick and suck a nipple while he squeezes Ford as hard as he can without breaking the man. Breaking Ford sounds amazing, but not yet. His tongue becomes greedy, venturing across Ford’s chest, eventually returning to his cheek and ear.

Ford cums, hips bucking in a way that makes Bill harder. If only Ford had been inside him…

What a waste.

He forces eye contact with Ford as he jerks himself off in front of him, not allowing the man to touch him. He cums on Ford’s face.

“You’re mine. Had to mark you in some way.”

Ford doesn’t seem happy, but he shuts the man up with a wet, disgusting kiss, his cum in both of their mouths. Knowing Ford’s going to complain, he deepens the kiss anyway. Fuck consequences.

Ford’s washing out his mouth and face and Bill’s drawling, “It came out while thinking of you. The least you could do was taste it…”

They watched the movie, with Bill never initiating anything sexual. The level of restraint and disinterest he held at the time surprised even himself.
Was it the movie or Ford?

He didn’t care either way.

Holding hands in bed, they discussed the movie. Both fell asleep before either could instigate things further.

“Ford…?”

Ford’s hands go to his crotch.

“Sssh, morning wood.”

“Are you serious…?”

With Ford breathing in his neck and his own hand submerged in grey curls, he cums still half asleep.

Ford doesn’t kiss him. Morning breath most likely…

He’s disappointed.

But there was plenty of time for payback later…

Ford holds his hand and he falls asleep again.

It’s the early hours of the morning, still dark outside and inside. They’d gone to bed too early, both of them waking now.

“My grandfather gave them to me.” Bill muttered, turning to face Ford. The pillow supporting his face obscured half of it, making Bill seem more mysterious in those few moments.

Ford didn’t know what to say. He regretted asking, imagining that he must’ve forced Bill to conjure painful memories.

“I’m sorry…”

“Don’t be. It was such a long time ago, Ford.”

“Where is he now?”

“Dead.” Bill’s hand caressed Ford on the cheek. “Dead.” Ford took the hand, pulling Bill into his arms. The boy wiggled down to let his face rest in Ford’s neck. A need to protect Bill came to him again, but he expelled it. Emotions were confusing and nonsensical, and here, with Bill in his arms as though they’d been lovers for months…

Ford worried about the future.

It was nearly 11am, and they still hadn’t left the bed; both falling in and out of sleep.

“Hey, change your mind. Go to New York with me this weekend. You said you’re only horse-loading yourself because you’re like, a victim to procrastination. 2 days won’t kill you.”

“Yes, but…”
“Come on, Ford…live a little.” Bill flicked his cheek and Ford caught the hand, holding it close to his face. “I know there’s a part of you that likes getting weird.”

“How’s getting weird related to this?”

“You’ll see.” Bill smirked. “Well…?”

Saying no to Bill, when the request was harmless, turned out to be surprisingly difficult.

“…Alright.”

“Ha! You actually said yes! Holy shit!” Bill grabbed Ford’s hair and began tugging on it childishly. “You said yes! You said yes!”

Ford managed to restrain his hands, while topping Bill.

“Oh, what’s this…?” Ford kisses him before he can talk further.

- 

“You haven’t brushed your teeth! You’re an embarrassment to mankind, Ford.”

“How am I the embarrassment? You haven’t either.”

“I’m not the one kissing people. Go be disgusting elsewhere. Sheesh!”

As Ford gets up to leave, Bill pulls him back into bed.

“I never gave you permission to leave…” He wrestles the man down, pinning him. “I’m going to have to punish you…”

Ford pulls him in until their chests touch and rolls them both over. Ford’s on top now, fingers interlaced in Bill’s own.

“My bed, my rules.” Ford’s voice nearly sounds dangerous.

Bill laughs at how the words don’t suit Ford while a certain six-fingered hand wanders between his legs. “Look how excited you are already…”

Dammit.

Ford watches Bill dress.

“Bill?”

“Yes sir? Ford rolls his eyes, smiling at Bill’s silliness.

“Does Fiddleford know?”

Bill looks at him, and in the most facetious manner possible, says

“Who?”
Ford: my lovers are also my own personal projects.

Ford is such a typical INTP.
It’s up to you, Ford

Chapter Summary

He wants you, Ford. And then he wants a little more.

Chapter Notes

Oh F.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With both hands flat on the wall at the sides of Ford’s head, he leans in too close for comfort. “I’ll show you, I’ll show you the scar…” A hand migrated to Ford’s crotch, settles there like it’s a native. “Where all my urges bled.”

-???

[BC]: Verdict?
[PF]: Overdosed, as you said he would.
[BC]: Aww that’s too bad. I liked the guy
[PF]: Sure you did.
[BC]: Hey I like to spoil the people I like. Not my fault he killed himself
[PF]: Clean up? Or?
[BC]: Nah leave him. Let him be found
[PF]: K.
[BC]: *Okay
[PF]: Ffs

Ford watched Bill’s lone figure through the lounge window. The boy stood outside smoking, puffs of wispy grey clouding the air around him. With the grove background and gloomy weather, it reminded Ford of a horror movie: Bill the unsuspecting victim, isolated after an unfortunate and convenient fight with his lover; the killer skulking in the distance- Bill’s yellow coat advertising his state as easy prey, like an inviting neon sign: Girls Girls Girls!

A flick of Bill’s wrist discarded ash to the side and the scenario changed within Ford’s mind. Now the smoke appeared as an evil spirit, seeking entry into Bill, who was none-the-wiser. As more fog left Bill’s mouth, it changed once again—Bill now appearing as the origin of the grey haunters, expelling them in colonies, who swore loyalty and to protect. They embraced him with second-hand smothering, unintentionally suffocating him, and choking anyone who came too close to their infernal master.

What an overactive imagination.

To conjure such elaborate and fantastical scenarios told Ford he’d begun to like Bill even more, despite their minor falling out. His mind worked overtime—gears screeching with no extra pay—
whenever he observed the boy, be it from the growing infatuation or the allure of the mystery that held the boy firm and in turn, ensured his attention never strayed from Bill.

Although Bill was now being allegedly honest, Ford felt the boy still hid much from him. He wanted to know what else stalked Bill’s haunted woods—from what was buried to what would be buried. Would interest wane once he knew all there was to know? Or was Bill mutable to the very end?

The latter was Ford’s bet.

He turned his full attention to Bill once more. Really, Ford was unsure how many cigarettes he’d had by now; Bill was a chain-smoker, consuming cigarette after cigarette. He’d be out for almost thirty minutes, not bothering to glance back at the house even once. A phone materialized a few times and left as quickly as it came.

It surprised him Bill never texted him. Then again, they hadn’t exactly been an ‘item’ until very recently.

An argument had broken out due to Bill refusing to talk about what had actually occurred with Fiddleford. All Ford asked from Bill, not aloud though, was honesty and the decency to not use violence against him. A good helping of respect would be greatly appreciated as well. The boy didn’t have to revere him but he was an esteemed man, and to ignore that was to deny important aspects of Ford and his reputation. If his intelligence had warranted such infatuation from Bill, surely he deserved the respect that accompanied it?

He told himself should Bill break his rules, he’d talk with the boy or break it off. What they had could not continue if it jeopardized his safety or his ego. He’d taken enough risks up to now, still unsure why he had, and wanting to still take even more. Curiosity killed the cat. Satisfaction brought it back.

Schrödinger’s cat popped into Ford’s mind.

And Bill had eaten all his jellybeans. Out of spite, most likely. The boy didn’t even like the normal ones.

Bracing himself, he walked outside, his mind running through what he would say when he was near his target. All potential conversation openers sounded poor and forced, but there was no right choice. He had a feeling Bill would react the same regardless of what line he chose to open with.

“What number is that? Your cigarette.” Light conversation opener. Ford mentally patted himself on the back.


“If you don’t tell me about Fiddleford, you aren’t—”

“Allowed in the great Stanford Pines’ bed, right? Yeah, I got the message loud and clear.” Bill said, blowing more deathly smoke out; foot tapping impatiently on the cement—he was nervous?

“Why won’t you tell me?”

“I don’t wanna upset you, is all.” Leftover smoke left Bill’s nose, and Ford was tired of hearing that.

“Bill, all I’m asking is for you to tell me. It won’t change what I think of you.” Provided Bill hadn’t been lying about the entire Fiddleford fiasco, and Ford had a feeling he was.
“Listen. I’ll tell you soon.” Bill leaned in for a kiss, but Ford denied him.

“Ford, kiss me.” Bill said, and it wasn’t a request. Their previous interactions had Ford feeling brave, and he said nothing and did nothing.

Beginnings of anger twitched in Bill’s face. “Ford, come on. Things were going great between us, despite all fucking odds. You wanna fuck it up because you’re still hot for that fucker?”

“You’ve missed the point completely. I’m upset because you’re being secretive.”

“My surname is Cipher, for fuck’s sake.” Bill said, as though it justified past, present and future dishonesty.

“All I’m asking from you, right now, is honesty.” Ford said. “You’ve told me the truth recently, haven’t you? You’ve lied a lot to me in the past and I forgave you rather easily. I’m giving you a second chance, Bill, don’t ruin it for yourself, for us.”

As predicted, Bill reacted at Ford using ‘us’. Whether the boy admitted it or not, Ford knew he desired something somewhat official. He’d implied so yesterday, when he referred to himself as ‘Ford’s lover’. Whatever prevented Bill from confessing it, be it pride or not, Ford didn’t mind. He’d prefer an official label, too. Last thing he wanted was for Bill to sleep with others and jeopardise Ford’s sexual health.

“Us? Who the fuck do you think you are?” Bill hissed, chest puffing out and fist clenching.

Ford should’ve known Bill would retaliate by seeking to distance himself emotionally. He was a runner, Ford thought. Once problems became too much or he’d be on the losing side, he’d flee. Not a cowardly thing, mind you, cowards generally tended to live another day.

But Ford did not want Bill to run from him, rather, he’d prefer he be the one Bill run to.

Again, he’s getting ahead of himself. The sooner the left-over distance closed between them, the sooner Ford could detect how compatible they truly were.

“You called yourself my lover—did you forget?”

Bill smirked and blew smoke into his face. He sputtered at the density of the putrid grey this time—it was a direct hit, and burned, his throat attempting to close to protect itself. How anyone could enjoy smoking…

“Please don’t do that again.” Ford said, and Bill shrugged with no remorse.

“Bill…”

“Ford, don’t make me angry.” Bill’s voice lowered as he dropped the now burnt out cigarette and Ford began to worry. “Really, don’t. It won’t be pretty.”

Ford hesitated, knowing Bill’s temper would indeed be an ugly thing to witness. No gun though, and that made all the difference.

“Language, Bill.” The authoritative tone in his voice only served to agitate Bill further.

“Fuck you. Don’t tell me what to do.” Bill said, and it was such a change from when he was eager to do as Ford said. This Bill Ford didn’t like and subduing him using sex wasn’t an option. It would be rewarding the boy’s unruly behaviour, teaching him that acting out would make Ford initiate sex.
What Ford had done yesterday in response to the boy’s obscure questioning had been a poor choice on his part and he regretted it, but he’d be more careful in the future.

“Just tell me. I won’t be upset.”

“You will. I’ll tell you soon. Let me have you to myself for a little while.” Bill grabbed Ford’s arm, pulling him close; Ford not resisting. “Hey…” a hand went to Ford’s crotch and he recoiled, considering it inappropriate timing and an altogether manipulative action. “I wasn’t very nice to you earlier. Let me make it up to you.”

“Bill, that’s not going to wor—“

Bill kissed him, the rest of his words never getting out. The kiss was smoky, tasting dreadful with Bill’s tongue first seeking to dominate Ford’s mouth before relaxing, as if waiting for a response. Ford pushed him away, hard enough only to separate their mouths. If he provoked Bill… why was he worried about that? He shouldn’t be scared of such a thing, but Bill’s past actions still haunted him.

Maybe this thing with Bill…wasn’t a good idea. Although they had a strange connection, Bill was innately dangerous. Was there a point in keeping someone close only for the moments during the night when they showed you a different side?

It was illogical, and Ford was a logical man.

“The name Fiddleford comes up…and suddenly, you want nothing to do with me…?” To Ford’s surprise, Bill sounded hurt. The boy had completely misunderstood his words, again.

“No, that’s not it. I told you…just tell me.”

“What does it matter? Ford, the man is fucking married. With a kid. You think he’s gonna give all that up for you? He doesn’t even like men. Grow the fuck up.” Bill spat and Ford lost his patience. A temper tantrum was what this was, no more and no less, and Ford was not having it. To disagree was one thing, to act like a disrespectful brat was another.

“You grow up. You assume every relationship has sexual undertones to it. Stop acting like a child, Bill.” Ford said, resisting the urge to step back from Bill. Backing down would escalate things down the wrong path and he had a point to make.

“Stop treating me like one.” Bill said, ironically in a tone that Ford couldn’t help but think of as childish.

“I will when you stop acting like one.”

“Oh nice. Just went and spun that around there, did you? Nice smart guy. Real fucking original. First person in the god damn world to use that line.”

“How do you know he doesn’t like men?” Ford asked, rethinking Bill’s alleged relationship with Fiddleford.

“Straight is the most common sexuality, Ford. Thought you knew that.”

“No, you spoke that with conviction. Being married doesn’t imply he doesn’t like men.”

Bill’s eyelids drooped. “Maybe I tried sucking his dick. That what you wanna hear? Maybe I threw myself at him just like I did with you. Maybe he didn’t say no.”
“Fiddleford’s not like that.” Ford said and Bill laughed. Bill was getting his story confused—if Fiddleford didn’t like men, why on earth would he want oral sex from Bill? The boy only sought to provoke him now, and really, it was immature.

“You wouldn’t know. You never made a move.”

“Bill…did you and Fiddleford have something?” Ford asked, needing clarification, despite the loopholes.

Bill closed the distance between them, Ford feeling sudden chills. “Jealous?”

“Answer the question.”

“You thinking about it? Me fucking your crush? Him fucking me? Giving it to me the way I asked you to?”

Vulgar. “No, Bill. I don’t want to think of you sleeping with other men.”

Ford’s response struck a dent in Bill’s cheaply put together cut-throat mask. His features relaxed, providing Ford with an opening to hook fingers in and tear off the facade. But timing was important.

“Here.” Bill reached into his pocket, pulling out a clumped mess of green and forced it into Ford’s hand. “500 big ones, baby. I had a great time. Buy yourself something pretty and don’t spend it all at once!”

“I don’t want your money.” Ford held onto Bill’s sleeve before the boy could escape. “Do you think you can mask your hurt by pretending this was nothing more than a transaction? You insult me.”

“Get your hands off my $1500 coat, Stanford.” Bill’s voice was now taut, a piano wire that might wrap around Ford’s neck if he faltered.

“You’re acting worse than a child. Stop this juvenile behaviour.”

“Don’t tell me what to fucking do. Don’t make me repeat myself.”

(In Bill’s mind, Ford is forcing him into the house, unbuckling his belt and—)

In reality, Ford would do no such thing.

He let go of Bill’s sleeve, taking the boy’s hand instead. The bold action attracted Bill’s eyes, appearing to him leave him vulnerable for the moment.

“What you’ve done, Bill, there’s no way for you to know how I will react unless you tell me.” Ford said, fingers tightening around Bill’s own. “You can speculate and make all kinds of assumptions, but you don’t know.”

Acting quick and with care, a hand reached for Bill’s cheek, cupping it as if it were too delicate for anything other than the lightest touch. “Tell me what happened.”

Bill leaned into the touch, as always. “You’ll hate me, Ford.”

“You don’t know that. Tell me.”

Bill remained quiet, his belligerence dwindling, subdued by the placating physical contact.

“Worst case scenario, is what you’re doing, Bill.” Ford said. “You’ve already played this entire thing
out in your head, and you can only imagine the worst case scenario. You can’t tell the future. So tell me. Better to tell the truth now then let me find out you continued to lie to me.”

It worked.

“I’ll tell you. Don’t be mad at me. Promise you won’t be mad.”

He stroked Bill’s hair, parting the scruffy locks from his eyes. “I can’t promise anything, but I’m quite good at controlling my emotions.”

Bill took out his phone, and after rapid button pressing, handed it to Ford as if it burned hot. “Don’t be mad…” He said again, fleeing inside the house.

Running away was the first hint Ford had at how bad whatever he was going to be looking at was. Still, he could not have prepared himself for it.

A photo was present on Bill’s phone. Fiddleford. The man looked abysmal, barely recognisable at a glance. A disorientated look in his eyes, hair scraggly and long, skin pasty and bruised, teeth missing, and—

semen at his mouth?

What the fuck was this?

Piecing together the subtleties of photo…it might have been taken after…after…

He went after Bill, clutching the phone far too tightly.

What had Bill done? What had he done to Fiddleford?

What had he done?

He found Bill in his room, sitting on the bed, shoulders slumped as though he feared the worst.

“What is this?” Ford asked, and Bill flinched at his tone.

“It wasn’t me, don’t get the wrong idea…”

“What is this, Bill?” He asked again, raising his voice and Bill’s doe-eyes reacted as if a brighter headlight shone at them. Intimidation was not his intent, but Bill seemed to get frightened easily by him. Now wasn’t the time to think about why, but Ford would remember to come back to it.

“Okay…okay…” Bill stood up, hands up as if it helped to argue for his innocence. “Ford…”

“Sit down and tell me what this is.” Bill obeyed immediately, even more fearful than before. The timid reactions began to make Ford feel guilty. Perhaps he was being too forceful…

“He’s a junkie.” Bill said, reaching for one of Ford’s hands to seek reassurance. Ford allowed it and relief softened Bill’s distressed features.

“I…when I came back here to see my family again. I snooped in my dad’s things—well, long story short, I found out about you and Fiddleford. I decided to get in touch with both of you.”

“You were too easy to find so I started with Fids first. I found him in some place called Gravity Falls. Told him you hired me to find him. When I met him, he was an opiate addict already. Didn’t really pry into his life all that much, but I know he’d been doing a lot. I tracked him by sending his photo to all my contacts, and they did the same, until someone said they knew him, and they were his dealer.”
Bill squeezed Ford’s hand. “He was nice…but as I kept seeing him, he kept getting worse. He was on china white the last time I saw him…”

“China white?”

“Heroin.” Bill stared at Ford’s hand, clutching it as though it were his saving grace. “He hadn’t contacted me…and I received a text saying he’d overdosed.”

Oh no…this couldn’t be. Fiddleford could never be so reckless…

“Don’t be mad…” Bill whispered, both hands holding Ford’s in a prayer position, seeking absolution.

“I’m not.” And Ford wasn’t. Getting angry would accomplish nothing. He’d known that Bill had lied about many things, so this was no surprise. Ford had done soft drugs in college, they all had. It wasn’t a big deal but it was a slippery slope. Brilliant minds were always more susceptible to the call of psychedelics. It was the curiosity, the desire to explore the unknown.

Fiddleford…
He didn’t feel Fiddleford’s death now, but he knew he would, later in the night.
Or maybe only months down the line. His emotions never had much of a pattern to them.

“This photo?”

“Sent by his dealer. You know…kinda like bragging at what Fiddleford would do for his fix. He ran out of money and had to pay some other way.”
Ford turned his face to the side, disgust twisting his features, but his hand remained with Bill.

“Don’t be mad, you said you wouldn’t be mad…”

“I’m really not, Bill.” He rubbed at boy’s head, and it seemed to call him down.

Bill began tugging on his belt. “Ford…you’re going to, aren’t you? I brought lube so don’t take me dry…”

“What?” Ford stopped Bill’s hand, completely lost at the direction the conversation had swerved in.

“I lied to you. You’re going to…”

“Going to what?” He grabbed Bill’s face. “Why would you think I’m going to have sex with you after that?” Treating Bill like a child always appeared as the best option, and Ford would continue to trust himself.

“You’re going to hurt me, aren’t you…”

“No…no, Bill.”

Why would Bill ever think Ford would punish him in such a manner? The only way he would think that was if it had happened to him in the past.

What had happened to Bill…?
This was getting tedious. What did it take to get Ford to lose control?

He’d played nice and submissive—nope, Ford wasn’t the type to want to ruin something cute and innocent.

He’d tried aggressive—nope, Ford wasn’t the type to want to put an unruly bastard in his place.

He’d tried flirtatious behaviour—nope, Ford wasn’t the type to hate sluts and want to hurt them.

Should he try playing coy? Saying ‘no Ford not yet…’ But Ford would just back-off and agree.

He’d showed the man a photo of his former partner post-hard face-fucking (maybe he should’ve confessed the semen was his?) and the man wasn’t even angry.

What now?

When when would he pay for Ford’s kindness? What was the man planning? And how long could Ford keep up this ‘nice’ façade? Bill would find his buttons, push them hard and then Ford would be unable to keep it together. He’d find out what Ford was really like—soon.

*Kindness don’t come cheap*, he tells himself, all the time. It’s a debt you pay, one way or another.

At the very least, he’d gotten in the man’s bed and under his skin, even if only the first layer—one of many, surely. It hadn’t been entirely intentional. Being with Ford brought out a side of himself that he didn’t like, but you rolled with the punches given.

Playing dumb worked well too, it appealed excellently to Ford’s ‘nurturing teacher’ side. Ford underestimated him now, probably believed he was an inexperienced, lost kid. The backstory of abuse helped too, although he wasn’t sure why he told Ford about that. Regardless, it’d help in the long run. He was unconsciously competent with lying, he had to award himself.

Lying…but he hadn’t even been lying that much.

Telling people juicy, intimate secrets made them more inclined to believe what you said later on. If Bill had told the truth about his scars, why would he lie about anything less important?

Now if only Ford would scratch that itch…

To be wrecked by someone who’d been so kind to him…reminded Bill of past memories he let sink at the bottom of every spirituous bottle only to consume them once more on impulse.

“I don’t know…” he said, grabbing Ford at the wrists and rubbing his face against the hand. He loved doing this, touching Ford’s skin. The man never appeared bothered by it and he wanted to do it over and over again...

“Bill…it’s Fiddleford’s own fault if he gave into drugs.” Ford said and Bill looked at him, hopeful.

“I don’t appreciate you lying to me about it, nor do I appreciate the type of people you associate with. But I’m going to assume it’s related to your work.”

Of course it was. Ford seemed to be forgetting quite often who Bill was. Or rather, Bill had neglected to show Ford the real him.

Soon though…soon…

“You told me the truth, and I appreciate it.” Ford said, smiling.
Oh god, how sappy.

“Really, Bill. Thank you for being honest. You didn’t have to and I know it’s not in your nature to.”

Bill tilted his head to the side, waiting for an explanation.

“Your surname is Cipher.”

Bill looked away, laughter breaking what was left of the tension.

Ford kissed him, and he nearly swooned as he felt the man reach for his pants. Finally…

“We can do this later. I’d like to be alone for a while.”

Damn.

“Are you still coming to New York with me?”

“I need time to think.” Ford said. “I still haven’t even asked you about that trip. I have questions.”

Bill stood up, disappointed, getting the message. “Alright, call me then or whatever…”

“You can stay the night again, if you like.” Bill’s eyes shot towards Ford and he beamed. “But you can only come here past 9. Only the night. Don’t linger here the entire day.”

How mean…but better than nothing.

Sleeping beside Ford was exactly what Bill had been needing this entire time. He stopped having nightmares, and waking up to someone who liked to get frisky so early was every hot-blooded male’s dream. Xanthar was good for company, but Ford was the entire package. He’d never have suspected Ford to be so good in bed, let alone so physical.

The man liked to live dangerously, and Bill wanted to show him how dangerous life could really be.

And how dangerous he could be.

But he had hours to kill before he could return here and here was the only place he wanted to be.

Deciding why not, he told Ford.

“Ford…I don’t want to leave. I don’t want to be away from you right now. Can I stay here?” Good word usage. Should work.

“Bill…” Ford began, sighing. “I’m happy you’re honest with your feelings.”

Bill fiddled with his coat, giving the impression of insecurity. Take the bait, Ford.

“I need to think. Why don’t you take that stack of money you flaunted earlier and go buy us dinner?”

Bill could work with this.

“Lots of pizza good with you?”

“Of course. Take your time.”

He leaned in for a kiss, Ford welcoming it. He just wanted to stay and get fucked by Ford, but…
Ford continuously asked himself what he was doing with Bill Cipher. He was treating this too much like a game, and such reckless actions were deleterious when dealing with someone as volatile as Bill. He’d seen how quickly the boy turned against him at the slightest hint of Ford’s interest shifting and if Bill had a gun on him at that time, what would have happened?

Yet as long as Bill continued to imply his aggression was a defence mechanism, Ford would persist. All he had to do was convince Bill he was not the enemy, and to not bother acting tough or domineering when around him. It had to be an act, the boy could be so docile and sweet, and for such two different sides to co-exist—one had to be fabricated.

At the very least, if they were both genuine sides of Bill, his aggression should be not so concentrated. At most, he should be assertive. Such aggression implied emotional issues.

Who didn’t have their fair share of issues?

He thought back to something a colleague mentioned about relationships—the more vulnerability you demonstrated early on, the faster relationships and feelings progressed.

Sometimes science was a real bitch. He’d have to wash his mouth out with soap after this.

He felt affection for the boy, but as far as feelings went, it was still up for debate. Most of what he felt now came from hormones released due intensive physical and sexual contact with Bill. To be so stupid as to confuse those for real emotions… Ford knew better.

He left for the store to pick up a few things before Bill returned.

Bill returned with too much pizza for two people, claiming they could eat pizza for days now.

Ford explained he hadn’t meant Bill should buy $500 worth of pizza, and the boy pretended to be shocked. They ate in silence; Bill still uneasy about what he’d done and Ford lost in thoughts of Fiddleford.

Bill sat on the bed, wasting away on his phone.

Ford threw a packet at him, hitting him in the chest. “Yours.”

Bill inspected it: Sour jelly beans.

Ford held up the normal, plain kind. “Mine.”

Bill inspected the packet once more and then began juggling it between hands. “You remind me a little of Evan…”

“Really?” Ford asked, taken back. He didn’t see what he could have in common with that man.

“Yeah…he’s really…nice, Ford.” Bill clutched the packet, grip tightening. “He’s a little like my dad, except the better version.”

Ford raised an eyebrow. “That’s…strange.”
Was Bill indirectly implying Ford reminded him of his father?

“What? You never hear of daddy issues?” Bill joked, and Ford wasn’t sure if it was truly a joke.

“You…remind me of…” Bill said.

“Of?”

Bill didn’t reply until Ford asked again.

“Some famous science guy I saw on T.V once.”

Ford could tell that wasn’t what Bill wanted to say.

They both got ready for bed, Ford having managed to get hardly anything done today.

As Bill’s maroon tie came off, he turned to Ford. “I’m sorry…you and Fiddleford were long-time friends and my father took that way from you.”

Ford had wondered what Bill had been thinking this entire time and now, specks were finally visible.

“It’s not your fault, Bill. Don’t apologize.”

“Is this okay? You don’t hate me…?”

“Of course not. You had nothing to do with this.” Ford said, helping Bill undress, with the boy loving it a little too much. “You aren’t your father.”

“Well, that’s debatable huh?” Bill said and Ford understood the reference.

“No…no you aren’t.” He draped Bill’s shirt neatly over the chair.

“And what if I had been there? What if I was there when the deal happened? Would you hate me then?”

“No, because your father’s actions have nothing to do with you.”

Adamant, Bill said, “That’s not how it works. If someone is there and didn’t do anything, you can hold them responsible.”

“I suppose, but there’s much to consider. Your father was in charge. I doubt you could’ve stood up to him, if you wanted to, that is. We’d have been strangers then, after all.”

Bill said nothing and Ford continued talking as he worked Bill’s pants off, with the boy focused more on his words than actions.

“Power imbalances in relationships make it difficult to speak openly. It’s one of the reasons why your age makes me uncomfortable. But that’s an entirely different topic. Do you understand?”

“I guess I do.” Bill sat down to allow Ford to pull his pants off.

“Where does the name Bill Cipher come from? Since it’s not your real name.”

“Dollar bills, baby.”

Ford shook his head as he laid Bill’s pants atop his shirt. “Of course…” A thumb trailed Bill’s
bottom lip. “What’s your real name? Before you took your family name?” Bill took the thumb into his mouth suggestively before replying. “It’s actually the same as the name I took.”

“Your name is actually Gaspard?” It certainly didn’t suit Bill.

“Ugh…don’t say it. I normally go by Cas. Short for Casper, my mom called me it.”

“That’s cute. A lot cuter than Bill.” He let his thumb brush against the boy’s cheek. Casper. What an adorable name. The boy was full of surprises.

“Oh yeah?”

“I think I’d like calling you that.”

“Don’t. My name’s Bill now.” Bill swatted his hand away. “Some of the members of my gang still call me it sometimes. The fuckers.”

“So if I join you, I can call you that?” Ford asked, leaning into Bill’s face while placing both hands flat between Bill’s legs, the boy spreading them to accommodate.

Bill sneered. “Don’t push your luck, Ford.”

Ford leaned in as if to kiss Bill. “I’m not, Cas.”

Bill’s poised smile vanished, face cracking into a mournful expression—completely startling Ford. He appeared close to crying and Ford immediately embraced him at the neck, holding the boy close. “Bill…?”

Bill didn’t answer immediately, first moving one of Ford’s hands to his cheek, rubbing his face against it as if seeking to satiate itself.

“Say it again.”

“…Cas.”

“You really…you really aren’t that man…you really aren’t…” He gave Ford a quick kiss, holding the man by the shoulders. “I’m…”

“Wait, which man? Who are you talking about?”

“No one. No one, Ford.” He nuzzled his nose in Ford’s neck, while his right thumb pulled down at the man’s bottom lip.

“He hated that name…hated it so much…” Ford heard Bill mutter in his neck, leaving him confused and suddenly very worried.

“Let’s go to bed, Ford…”

Rubbing the back of Bill’s head, his fingers combing through perpetually untidy blonde hair, Ford agreed.

They spent time talking before escalating things. The darkness a protective cover, their own little confessional booth. It was easier to talk if all you had to do was stare at the ceiling.
Bill was the first to speak.

“Why are you so calm? So forgiving or whatever? Tell me. I wanna hear your bullshit reasons.”

Ford laughed before answering. “I believe your pursuing of me was more of a joke. And once something occurred between us, if I may be so bold, you realized you liked me. More than intended.” Ford said, feeling Bill’s hands take his one of his own.

“Now you're worried the past will ruin the future, yes?” Ford asked, sneaking a peak at Bill’s face in the dark. It held a mix of relief and worry that disappeared as Bill took on a more neutral expression—he must’ve felt Ford’s eyes on him.

“That's exactly it... Are you psychic?”

“Perceptive. All I ask is honesty and for you to not use violence towards me. A sliver of respect would be nice too.”

“Violence, huh?” Bill sounded amused.

“Yes. Are we clear?”

“Sure. No more ranting about me being too young?”

“I'm not pursuing you because of your age. I've decided to be less hard on myself, but I do intend to be careful.”

“Careful?”

“Yes. I'm older. I have to know better and such.”

“Great. You treat me like a child all the time and it’s only gonna continue.”

“I can't help it, darling. You seem to like it.”

“Darling...?” His grip around Ford’s hand tightened.

“You don’t like it?”

“I do... A lot.”

Bill snorted. “What do you mean I like it though?”

“You do. And you interpret any sort of affection as treating you like a child.”

“Whatever, Ford.”

“You don’t have to hide behind aggression with me, Bill.”

“Huh...?”

“Never mind. You’ll understand soon enough.”

“Did you like Fiddleford? Romantically...”

“I think I did.”

“You think?”
“I have trouble acknowledging my feelings sometimes.”

“Oh…”

“Don’t worry, I’m quite certain I like you. If anything, for the sex.” Ford said, taking on a playful tone near the end.

“Wow thanks.” Bill gave him a light shove.

“I have to call his wife, ask about the funeral. Or wait for her to contact me…”

Bill kept quiet.

“Let’s try and put this behind us.” Ford said, and he meant it. Fiddleford was dead, there was no need to dwell on it.

“Ford…” Bill said. “What angle are you playing?’

“Hm?”

“Why are you so…accepting? Tell me, what’s the price?”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s no way you can brush this off so easily…and still let me into your bed again.”

“I’ll deal with it my own way, Bill. Not everyone handles grief the same way.”

“I guess…but you don’t mind me?”

“You don’t know much about how relationship work do you?”

“What does that have to do with anything? No sane human being lets someone like me into their house, let alone their bed.” Bill muttered. “Tell me…what are you planning? Do you want me to do something bad to you…? Is that it? You really do have a kink for weird shit huh?”

Ford thought back to yesterday, and what Bill had tried to do. “You really don’t know how human connection works. Would you like a lecture on it?”

“Are you serious? A lecture on that shit? You’re too socially inept to be an expert.”

“I’m well versed in theory, not in practice.”

Bill let go of his hand to pinch Ford in the side. The man grabbed the hand afterwards, holding it captive.

“I’m responding to you.”

“Huh?”

“You told me quite a lot about you. Personal information. When you do that, people respond to it.”

“Most people find that annoying.”

“Not if there’s romantic or platonic interest.”

“So hearing about my family, about how my grandfather put out cigars on my back and I ran away
from home—that makes you like me? Not really helping your case.”

“Bill, have you never connected with anyone?”

“That’s so awkwardly phrased…yikes.”

“Let me try again, who’s the closest person to you in your life?”

“Evan.”

“Why?”

“Hmm. I trust him. I can tell him anything.”

“There you have it. Communication and honesty.”

Bill rolled over, a hand reaching for Ford’s intimate area. “This is boring. Do you want me to jerk you off?”

Ford didn’t want to just yet, and again, took note of Bill attempting to run by diverging the topic to something else. “What did you want to do with me in New York?”

“We can do whatever you want. See some places, or just stay in a hotel and have fun. Well?”

“A romantic getaway. You surprise me, Bill.”

“That sounds awful…” Bill said. “Hey can I move closer?”

“Of course, dear. Come into my arms.”

“That sounds eugh. Gross.”

“You’re already here.”

“Fuck off.” Bill said, burying his forehead into Ford’s chest.

“Is that what you want from me…?”

“Hold on…” Fighting against Bill, who refused to let him go, Ford got out of bed, putting on the lamp as he went to his dresser.

A minute or two passed and Ford held up a small bottle that Bill recognized immediately.

“Is that…?” His bottle of lubrication he’d brought with him.

“I went through your bag, to make sure you didn’t bring anything I asked you not to.”

“Ford, are you going to…?”

“How about a finger or two?”

“Please…I’d love that…”Bill could barely contain his eagerness. To have Ford inside him…even if it’s only fingers…

“Then we’ll try it.”

“So fingers are okay…but no dick. Gotcha.” Bill said critically. Double standards.
“Fingers are nowhere near as big.”

“True, but if you had a microdick…?”

“Bill…”

“Come on, answer the question. Would you stick it in me if your dick was tiny?”

“We’re not having this conversation.”

“Yes or no, Stanford.”


“You know the rectum can expand to accommodate different sizes, right? If you’re okay with small stuff, you should—"

“No fingers for you then.”

“No no no no wait, sorry. I take it back…please finger-fuck me.”

“Language.”

Bill scoffed. The man only bothered him about his language when he felt like it. “Hang on, how big are you? You look around 7 inches? Let me measure you.”

“No…”

“Come on. At least let’s compare sizes.”

Ford reluctantly obliged.

“Huh…you’re slightly bigger. That kinda pisses me off… but I’m taller so it evens out.”

The intensity Bill used when looking at Ford’s genitals made him uncomfortable. What an awkward scenario…

“Aren’t you lucky? Smart, good-looking and you have a nice dick.” Bill fell into Ford’s arms.” I’m the luckiest man on the planet.”

“Aren’t I…? You know I am.” Bill licked at Ford’s ear, once, twice then came a nibble. Hands wrapped around Ford’s neck and the man swallowed under the hold.

“You’re perfect, Ford. You’re above everyone else. And you know it…” He let go of Ford’s neck. “You gonna fuck me with those circus-freak fingers of yours or what?”

--

“You’re so loud, Bill.”

“I can’t…I can’t help it, fuck you. Oh Ford Ford…” He can’t shut his mouth. Ford’s so good at what he does. His fingers move with far too much skill, and he knows Ford must’ve done this hundreds of times with others. Fuck that virgin bullshit. He must have a map of Bill’s insides because he knows precisely where to poke and rub.

“Say my name.”
Ford’s voice is endearing, he hates how warm it makes him feel.

“I am…Ford…”

“No, keep saying it. Over and over again.”

“Ford Ford Ford…” he repeats himself over and over while Ford swallows his cock, sucking him dry while he finger-fucks him to orgasm.

As he attempts to catch his breath, Ford cradles his head, six fingers in his hair, supporting it.

“Who made you cum?”

“You…”

“No, what’s my name?”

 “…Ford.” Bill says, post-orgasm leaving him flushed and perfectly obedient. “Stanford…”

“You’re so cute. But I’m still going to pay you back for what you did yesterday.”

Bill squeezes out a confused look and then he understands as Ford begins jerking off over him. The man was going to cum on his face…?

He watches, hypnotized.

Ford’s breath deepens, and Bill opens his mouth only for Ford to stick his tongue in it, letting go on his chest instead.

“I thought…”

“I changed my mind.”

“You should’ve…you could’ve washed me off afterwards…”

“I can go again. Do you want me to? I don’t actually like the idea, but—"

“No please…please cum on my face and then—"

“Wash you off in the shower?”

“Yes…”

Ford kisses him. “If you want, Bill.”

Again, Ford chickens out. Plants kisses all over Bill’s face and Bill thinks maybe the kisses are better anyway…

--

They decide to rest before going again. Ford had a surprising amount of stamina for an old guy.

“This reminds me…” Ford got up, leaving to the corner of the room where Bill’s bag laid.

“What’s this?” Ford held up a plastic container, filled with little white tablets. “I came across it when I was searching through your belongings.”
Ah shit. He’d found that.

“You don’t wanna know, Ford. Just put’em back where you found’em.”

“Bill, no more secrets.”

“No, Ford. Trust me, you don’t wanna know.”

“Bill.”

“You’ll get mad.”

“I’ll get mad if you don’t tell me, so I’ll get mad either way then, so it’s best you tell me.”

“Okay then. You asked for it, Doc. Rohypnol.”

Ford’s face flipped.

“Why do you have this? It’s illegal.”

“Yeah yeah…I always keep some on me.”

“Bill, why do you have a strong tranquiliser on you?”

“You wanna know if I was gonna use it on you, huh?”

Ford’s face said yes.

“I would never, Ford. You put out, why would I need to?”

The joke went over the man’s head.

“And what if I don’t ‘put out’ as you say?”

“Ford…”

“Don’t ever bring something like this into my house. Ever again. If you do, you won’t be allowed here ever again. Are we clear?”

“Loud and clear, sir.” Bill saluted, Ford being irritated at his waggish behaviour.

“I’m flushing it down the drain.”

“Aww come on. It’s good for when I have issues sleeping!”

“Don’t lie to me, Bill. If you had issues sleeping, you wouldn’t carry it with you.”

Ah, Ford got him there.

Ford paused before leaving.

“Have you ever…used this on anyone?”

“You don’t want me to answer that.”

“Bill, have you?”
“Of course.” Bill said, not ashamed in the slightest.

“Don’t use it ever again, on anyone. Understand?”

“Not even myself?”

Ford’s brows furrowed.

“Hey…think about it. You and me, having dinner, you spike my drink when I’m not looking. I’m fucked up, drugged up and you have your way with me. I can’t fight back…you don’t like that?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“If you aren’t enjoying yourself, and aren’t responsive, can you call it sex?”

“Oh for fuck’s sake, Ford. Enough with your moral, conservative bullshit.”

“You’re fond of those fantasies, aren’t you? Being taken advantage of.”

Bill laughed. “Hey, when you’re stuck being in control all the time, it’s nice to let go.”

“Letting go is not the same as being left helpless.”

Bill shrugged and Ford left to dispose of the tablets. The man was so uptight. Always eager to sprout psychology bullshit no one cared about.

But what if he hadn’t gotten rid of them…? What if he was storing them to use on Bill?

How exciting…

Ford returned, still stiff with apprehension. “Never again. Yes?”

“Yeah…sorry Ford.”

If Ford knew Bill Cipher never apologized, he might’ve treasured Bill’s words more.

“Hey…” He kissed Bill. “It’s not too late to start over. No more drugs, no more lies.”

Bill stuck his tongue out, already fed up with Ford’s sentimentality.

Sensing a challenge, Ford’s hand reached between his legs. “Now, let’s make you forget about those fantasies…”

--

“Grip the headboard and arch your back a little more.”

He’s on his knees, Ford’s fingers, two this time, entering him at the perfect angle while the man’s other hand fondles him with expertise and technique he’s come to associate strictly with Ford. Only Ford could do this with just fingers. The man was gifted. If he could mass produce Ford as a sex toy, he thinks he’d be a millionaire.

Ford kneaded his cock at a particular sensitive spot near the head, a horribly sweet spot, and multiple ‘Fords’ poured out his mouth between pants.
“There we go…do you like this?”

“Y—yes…of course…”

Ford began paying more attention to that spot, Bill’s mind getting hazier with every six fingered touch. “Isn’t it nice to let go? Have someone else take care of you?”

He knows Ford’s talking about what he’d said earlier, but he can’t think properly. Who cared about any of that now…?

Ford moves closer—chest touching Bill’s damp back, mouth in his ear and hovering at his neck. He imagines Ford’s fucking him and feels the itch getting scratched. It’s enough, for now.

A kiss at his neck and Bill’s hands fumble with the headboard, losing strength. He’s going to…he nearly…it’s too soon…

“Bill, answer me.”

Fuck this man.

“I—guess…Ford I…” he can’t answer, doesn’t know what to say. Words can’t convey so he lets his left hand clasp Ford’s left wrist as the six fingers continue to stroke him. He rubs it up and down, enjoying the feel of the man’s skin, letting his own skin tell Ford how much he likes it. Twisting his head to accept a kiss informed Ford quite clearly, and the man accepted the offer, tongue entering deeper than usual. He’s close, Ford’s lips the final piece…

But not yet…

He pulls away, breathing “Ford, tell me you’re going to cum in me.”

Ford knows what he’s doing, and answers with, “Relax, dear.”

“Don’t call me…that when you’re…fucking me…that’s weird…” He struggles getting the words out.

Ford pulls him into his lap, fingers still in, takes Bill’s mouth once more as the boy cums—the intense orgasm leaving him limp, quiet and dazed.

“For you mind if I put the head in?”

What? No no no Ford was going to fuck him? No no…

“What…” he asked, pretending not to have heard.

“Do you mind if I go ahead?”

Ford had manoeuvred Bill’s hand over his own length.

Oh…

“No no, I’ll suck you off. Let me just…catch my breath…”

Ford kisses him until he does.

--

“I’m too tired…how about you fuck my face? Just…or whatever…”
Ford objects and Bill keeps insisting until the man gives in.

Ford uses his face, does all the work (he sucks Ford here and there) but…Ford’s so careful, so gentle, Bill enjoys every second of it.

And doesn’t choke once.

--

He lays on Ford’s chest, still exhausted.

“You’re the best, Ford…the best…” He licks Ford’s cheek over and over again like an excited puppy, the man wrapping his arms around the boy and submitting to the onslaught, unbothered.

“Don’t call me dear when you fuck me. That’s so…”

“Why not?”

“It’s just…”

Ford pulled him close. “It suits you.”

“Stop treating me like a child.” Bill dug his nails into Ford’s back, intending to hurt him, but Ford didn’t respond.

“Go to sleep, Bill.”

“When can I stick my fingers into you?”

“We’ll see.”

“Hey Ford?”

“Yes?”

“…don’t go anywhere.”

How quickly a relationship progresses depended on a multitude of things. Ford knew quite of a few them, his line of working letting him interact with some of the brilliant minds in various fields, and Ford realized this thing between Bill and himself was progressing far too quickly. And Bill is not doing it deliberately, as much as Ford wished he was.

Attraction and then excessive vulnerability, with a large side helping of honesty.

But he’s certain Bill’s age factored in. Bill was young, a third of Ford’s age, and whatever feelings Ford developed would cusp between fatherly and romantic and the very thought disgusted Ford. The age gap was a power imbalance in their relationship (although one could argue Bill being who he was is an imbalance itself, but Bill had not used that power to manipulate Ford yet. Ford however… his experience could not be turned off.)

Bill stirred in his sleep, suddenly reaching out for Ford with eyes still closed. Ford met his hand and Bill pulled it in, holding it close to his face, becoming still once more.

The familiarity Bill showed Ford made him uncomfortable. Something about it…
It wasn’t true, that Gaspard Giordano always kept a pet; just a lie told to keep Bill quiet, ensure the boy accepted things.

But if it were true…

If Gaspard Giordano always kept a pet, did Stanford Pines too?

More importantly…was he taking applications?

He thinks it’d be nice to…go back to the way things were…

Only it’ll be better this time.

But…

It’s up to you, Ford.

It’s up to you.

In Bill’s mindscape, as he sits on the summit of the Ferris wheel and looks through the window of the cab, he sees his grandfather waving at him.

He doesn’t wave back.

- 

In Ford’s mindscape, he stares into outer space, talking. The yellow flower blossoms at every word.

Chapter End Notes

For what happened to Fiddleford, here's a little chaotic drabble:
http://archiveofourown.org/works/8346634/chapters/19121389
Chapter Summary

He's Pinocchio, the boy who can't stop lying. Ford is his Jiminy Cricket. Now, he can hear Ford say, "You can't predict the future."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Come on, Fordsy!” The demon floats around him too quickly for his eyes to catch, only the after images left in its tracks are visible. “Come on, darling! Come on come on, dearest!” It morphs into its human shape it took once upon a time, in another life.
“Don’t you want us to be happy, dear? Take the deal! Take the deal, Stanford!”

-Distant distant future.

Bill Cipher was beginning to disturb Stanford Pines. Not necessarily in a bad way; one could disturb in a delightful manner, as demonstrated periodically by Bill Cipher. But the boy was just so strange. The strange and unusual were right up Stanford's alley, but an alley was one thing—a city whose foundation was built entirely of obscurity and eccentricity was another.

Beyond being overly-attached to Ford, there was something else that Ford could not yet put his finger on. It wasn’t that Bill was dangerous or had a potentially ugly temper—although those were exceptionally valid concerns that Ford continued to overlook. It was something else.

Bill had done a complete reversal from the Bill that Ford had first met and knew. No matter how Ford tried to dismiss it as Bill letting his guard down, the change was too extreme. It bothered him persistently, and brought on further speculation—what other Bills would he learn of, and what if they weren’t as nice as this one?

He was the son of that man, too; Ford could not forget that.

He didn’t trust the boy just yet, even if his actions implied so. And—who was he kidding? There were definite touches of trust between them already. If the boy wanted to hurt him, he would’ve done so. If he wanted to scare Ford into joining him, he would’ve targeted Ford’s family. But Bill had done no such thing.

And if he had been responsible for what happened to Fiddleford, why reveal the man’s fate? Why not continue to lie, and claim Fiddleford ceased contact? Bill had taken a big gamble. But it had paid off.

Nothing the boy had done recently implied he sought to harm Ford. Bill’s future actions were also important to consider though.

What was Bill’s end game? A relationship with Ford? Why would such an attractive young man, who came from a rich family no less, want anything to do with himself? Too much wasn’t making sense, and things were progressing too quickly. He had to sort this out before it got out of hand. (but
he knows he’s going to procrastinate it and become distracted yet again… Bill was good at
distracting him)

“Ford…” Bill called out, leaving the kitchen where he’d just finished early lunch; the smell of waffle
batter still perfumed the air. Peeking over Ford’s shoulder to feign interest, he went on to tie his arms
around Ford’s neck, hands sliding down and across his chest, obviously annoyed by the fabric
separating their skin. A much-welcomed distraction, but Ford couldn’t afford to let his attention
wander further.

“Bill…I’m busy.” He restricted Bill’s movements at the forearms, the hold firm; the boy pouted,
pretending to consider Ford’s words, not too upset just yet.

“Come on, fifteen minutes…” Ignoring Ford’s reluctance, the hands tightened possessively. Bill’s
breath tickled in his neck; in a ridiculous display, the boy hunched over Ford’s shoulder attempting to
let his mouth roam across the front of Ford’s clothed body. A brazen hand broke from the clutch and
crept to Ford’s crotch, hoping to inspire a rise in attention; it was stopped before reaching the
finishing line.

“I can’t, my darling. I have to finish work before the flight.”

Bill surrendered immediately, abandoning Ford and leaving him to his work. Not an ounce of fight in
him and not a word of complaint. Only a disappointed kiss left in his wake.

Bill took an extreme liking to pet names, particularly ones of endearment. Ford spent the morning
testing its authenticity. As long as he added ‘darling’ ‘dear’ or even ‘dearest’ at the end of a sentence,
whatever he requested would be done, and whatever said acknowledged. Although Bill still liked to
imply it annoyed him, it never stopped him from responding emphatically to it.

Despite the oddness, Ford enjoyed this nameless thing with Bill. Normally the age difference would
be unacceptable, but Ford found his experience worked well to subdue Bill’s more frivolous
behaviour brought on by his youth. Bill accepted his guidance almost too easily.

A partner who didn’t need to be led would be ideal, but this arrangement wasn’t as bad as Ford
imagined it to be. Perhaps because he’d grown accustomed to dealing with young people that having
one in his personal life was now tolerable.

There was much he could teach Bill, and what harm was there in sharing what you knew with your
lover?

Lovers… (Bill using the term ‘lover’ was unusual, too. He’d hardly heard someone of Bill’s age
speak that way. But that might be anecdotal…)

Ford had forgotten how good it felt to have someone beside him in bed. Whether Bill’s intentions
were ominous or not, the boy was fantastic company at night. Unbelievably affectionate while still
giving Ford space, never stole the covers, slept the same time as Ford no matter the hour.
The sex was good, too. Bill was something else in the bedroom; diverse and easy to lead.
Surprisingly sweet, too, if Ford handled him the right way. Often Ford would think how easy it
would be to take advantage of someone like Bill, who with the right touch, became overly
submissive in the bedroom. But intuition told him it was Bill’s reaction to him, and not one that saw
the light of day often. Bill still had an occasional aggressive lead during sex, but was far more keen
on Ford taking the lead. Either was fine with Ford. (although Bill’s lead often led to messy situations
he was not fine with)

Having no way to test his theory regarding Bill’s passiveness during sex, he decided to pry into Bill’s
sexual history when the time was right.
He was glad, too. That it was him to have this particular Bill…to think of Bill being taken advantage
of angered him. Less on his feelings and more on principle. He’d finally made sense of his protective
urges—it stemmed from Bill triggering his default reaction towards children. Bill acted like a child
and was a child in comparison to himself.

For him to be fucking someone who he compared so frequently to a child…

And who was ‘that man’ Bill had referred to yesterday? It had been gnawing at Ford quietly,
reaching bone before he knew it.

*You really aren’t that man…*

Bill referred to his father as ‘that man’, but it didn’t seem to fit in this instance. Who had Bill thought
Ford was? And why had he seemed so upset? He was starting to wonder, again, what Bill’s age was. He looked younger than twenty-two—what if he was lying about that, too? And had not come clean
about it?

He was young enough…if Bill turned out to be even younger…

If he was younger than eighteen, Ford would have a serious problem on his hands.

“I guess I should head out and pack.” Bill said, pulling Ford from his lengthy introspection that
distracted him from his work.

“The flight is at 3pm, right?”

“Yes, and it’s only a four-hour flight. And I booked us dinner at 8:30 at an expensive place.” Bill
revealed; this was the first Ford had heard of a planned dinner. Meant to be a surprise? He wasn’t
sure he’d want to go to dinner so soon after flying. Flights left him tired and cranky.

“Pack for three days. It’s a three-day weekend.” Bill flashed three fingers. “Might have forgotten to
mention that…”

“Three days…we leave Monday afternoon?” Ford asked and Bill nodded. Last minute information
—he’d have to pack more clothes.

“Something like that. So… who are you meeting?” Bill asked and Ford felt as though his privacy
had been violated. How did Bill know?

“You know…?”

“Of course.” Bill smiled as though knowing intimate details of Ford’s personal life was completely
normal. “Friend? Colleague…?”

“Colleague.” Bill must have overheard his phone conversation. Possessiveness manifesting? He’d
need to have a talk with Bill about this. Their arrangement didn’t give Bill a free pass to invade
Ford’s privacy. Not that he was upset, but if Ford didn’t draw a line, Bill would walk all over him—he’s sure of it.

“Knew you wouldn’t have said yes unless you’d gain something academic from it.” Bill flicked
Ford’s cheek lightly and Ford took the offending hand captive, holding it in his lap.

“You don’t seem to mind.”

“Nah, I’m going there on business anyway.” Bill said, pulling his hand away and turning to leave.
“We need to have a talk about a few things.” Ford said, and Bill turned his head over his shoulder, a bored look on his face.

“About…?”

“It’s a lot to discuss.”

“Then we can do it at the hotel. Or are you chickening out? Ford.”

“We have to slow down, Bill.” Ford reached an inviting hand out that went ignored by Bill.

Bill curled his lips in a derisive way, clearly disinterested in Ford’s words. “I’ll be back soon.”

“One more thing…what is this?” Ford held up the note Bill had given with claims it originated from Fiddleford.

“Oh…aren’t I great at forging handwriting?” Bill said, proud of his deception.

“To trick me into thinking Ford was doing well…” Ford said, airy with concern. The code was truly nonsense, then? That explained why it appeared unsolvable.

“Yes.” Their eyes met, with Bill’s goading Ford into instigating a fight. Fiddleford appeared to be a divisive topic now. Beating a dead horse served no purpose, but what caused the horse’s death was still a topic worth thought.

Brief silence came, broken by Bill.

“I hinted at it, you know. At the diner…when I showed you the different handwriting I had. I thought you’d understand what I was telling you.” Bill said. “I tried being honest in so many ways, Ford. You just never picked them up.”

“When I showed you my tattoos in the office, too. That’s me confessing my identity. And nothing…you didn’t get it.” Bill held up both hands for emphasis.

“I’ve always wanted you to know, everything.”

They stared at one another; the reality of Bill’s obsession and infatuation with Ford finally dawning on the man. Once he considered Bill lied about Fiddleford, it meant Bill had in fact, stalked him. How had that little detail slipped from his mind? Bill had followed them, taken photos of him, watched him…

To convince Ford he was a PI? He could’ve done that without doing any of the aforementioned activities.

Ford’s face revealed too much, and Bill noticed.

“To say I lied to you might actually be a little bit of an exaggeration, don’t you think? Ford.” Ford extended a hand towards Bill, the boy moving near to grab hold of it.

“I don’t understand why you do what you do. I don’t.”

“Figure it out. I have to go now.” Bill said, amused at Ford’s confusion and not willing to let the man indulge.

“Why did you follow me? And watch me for so long?” Ford asked, purposely leaving out the offer of Bill’s deal to see the boy’s reaction.
“I told you to figure it out, smart guy.” Bill said, turning around and heading towards the door and
confirming to Ford that Bill had not been following him for the deal’s sake, or Bill would’ve
mentioned that he’d already explained to Ford what he wanted.

What did the boy actually want from him? Was Ford meant to believe Bill was genuinely smitten
with him?

“Drive safely.” Ford called out and Bill looked back at him as if he’d spoken gibberish.

“Yeah…I will.”

Bill made it to the door, before abruptly turning around, giving Ford a quick kiss and rushing to the
door again; the action making Ford break into a bashful smile.

“Okay, I’m going now. Going…going…gone.” Bill finally left.

_Fiddleford’s dead…_ simmered within his mind.

He might have to call off the trip, but Bill would be upset and they’d just reached an equilibrium
again.

_Fiddleford’s dead…_

Was Bill honest about his involvement?

His thoughts are all over the place.

---

It’s the first-time Stanford flew First Class. The exorbitant prices put him off, the money better left for
something other than simply making a flight more comfortable. Bill had insisted. A sincere waste of
money, if you asked Ford.

Other than Bill continuously tempting Ford into getting frisky in the bathroom, the four-hour flight
went by painlessly. An hour in, Bill had fallen asleep; his head lolling on Ford’s shoulder while
holding one of Ford’s hands—clearly not one ashamed of public affection.

As soon as they entered the hotel room, Bill was on top of Ford, confessing how he’d nearly died
enduring four hours so close to the man without being able to do anything—and really, had Ford
ever endured four hours of touch and go with an alleged hard-on?

Ford laughed in fits as Bill kept licking him in the neck, over and over—the boy’s desire as fervent
as ever. Hopefully it would be kept on a leash soon enough.

“Easy there, darling…”

“You’ve been abusing that word.” Bill purred between licks.

“Have I?” Ford said, feigning ignorance.

“Mmmm why can’t you abuse me the way you abuse that word. Just use me over and over—”

“Easy there,” Ford shifted, rolling Bill over to switch positions; the change exciting Bill even further
as told by the come-hither glimmer the warm light caught in his eyes.

A gloved hand reached for Ford’s face, but was intercepted and stripped of its covering, revealing
the black-marked skin. Ford took it to his cheek, letting it brush against the stubble of his emerging
beard; bringing a peaceful smile onto Bill’s face that spread to his own.

Bill pulled hard at Ford’s shirt, causing the man to fall onto him, and embraced him snugly; his nose rubbing itself onto his neck’s skin while Ford struggled to keep his weight on his knees in the sudden position change. If he hadn’t acted quickly, his weight would’ve come down on Bill, and he knew he was heavier than the boy.

“I’m so glad you came with me…here, with me…”

Bill continued, “Didn’t think you would…especially since, you know…figured you’d be mad at me over Fiddleford…or that you wouldn’t trust me enough…”

“I think I’ve gotten the hang of handling you quite well.” Ford joked, and Bill nicked the thin skin at his neck.

“I love it when you’re on top of me…” Bill’s voice had lowered, telling Ford he was definitely in the mood, but now was not the time.

“Well, I have to get off now.” Ford said, trying to move, only for Bill to tighten the embrace.

“We’re going to dinner later. Did you bring your fancy clothes?”

“I did.”

“Dinner and then when we get back…you can have your way with me. And vice versa. We’ll take turns…” One of Bill’s hand massaged at Ford’s crotch, his voice dreamy—mind clearly in the gutter already.

Ford felt his body respond, and again, tried breaking free. “You’re insatiable.”

“Says the man who always tries making me cum three times in a row.” Bill shot back while cupping Ford hard between the legs; the man wincing.

Laughing away the pain, Ford finally broke free, sitting upright as Bill remained laying down. “You’re going to get there eventually, trust me. I’ll have you cum thrice and thank me.”

“I like that idea…thanking you after you’re done with me…” Bill’s voice went lighter, as it tended to during sex.

Ford laughed, embarrassed. It was only a joke… “You like such strange things, but I’ll accept your gratitude in whichever way you wish to give it.”

Bill’s hands trailed across his upper body suggestively. “Even if I offered my entire body?”

“Bill…” Ford said, not liking the direction of the conversation. “We both have to shower and get ready.”

“Oh…my friends…we’re meeting them, tomorrow, okay?” Bill grabbed one of Ford’s arms possessively. “I can’t wait to introduce you to them.”

“But tonight…dinner and you ravishing me. With your fingers. Or anything else you want to…” Bill added in a wispy tone at Ford’s ear.

Ford laughed to defuse the situation and went to grab his bags. “I’ll shower first.”

“Let’s shower together…” Bill suggested, slowly unbuttoning his shirt.
“Yes…or no? Doctor Pines.”

Ford said yes.

-

They held hands as they kissed beneath the cascading warm water; Ford’s back to the tiles, with Bill eventually holding both of Ford’s hands against the tiles, at the side of his head, pinning the man in place. Between kisses, he’d part their lips, moan Ford under his breath and return to the kiss.

Ford loved that; the boy learnt quickly what he liked, and knew how to put it into action depending on the circumstances.

When Bill attempted to get on his knees, Ford stopped him.

“They held hands as they kissed beneath the cascading warm water; Ford’s back to the tiles, with Bill eventually holding both of Ford’s hands against the tiles, at the side of his head, pinning the man in place. Between kisses, he’d part their lips, moan Ford under his breath and return to the kiss.

Ford loved that; the boy learnt quickly what he liked, and knew how to put it into action depending on the circumstances.

When Bill attempted to get on his knees, Ford stopped him.

“Not yet, darling. Let's save it for after dinner.”

Bill frowned in disappointment but didn’t argue.

-

Bill watched him dress intently, smugly helping him with his tie. A grey suit with light blue tie was Ford’s choice of attire, always fearing dark suits made him seem too harsh. No waistcoat, he’d forgotten to pack it in, but it wasn’t mandatory, and Bill hadn’t said anything regarding its absence. (he found it far too restricting anyway, especially since he’d gotten bigger…)

Bill, on the other hand, wore as usual an expensive black suit, complete with a waistcoat and a floral rose gold tie. A peculiar colour Ford’s never seen Bill don until now, but fitting for a…date?

“It suits you perfectly…” Bill said, grinning. “Suits. Get it? Get it? Oh, come on, it’s totally funny…”

“I know I told you before…” Bill laid the napkin upon his lap. “But you look incredible in formal clothing.”

“I appreciate the compliment no matter how many times you repeat it.” Ford smiled, mimicking Bill and folding the napkin given in his lap. The boy was clearly accustomed to this sort of life—with is perfect table manners, upright posture and clean-cut appearance—Bill fitted right in. Ford on the other hand, felt like a bumbling mess. Following Bill’s lead had been the best choice.

The romantic light lit up Bill’s face in lovely ways—Ford wondered how well Bill’s face fit the Golden Ratio mask. Roots were still black, growing further out now, but still more blonde than black. Tan skin appeared softer and warmer - the light catching just the right undertones.

He wondered how he looked to Bill.

“I can’t wait to undress you…is that why you like undressing me? All the layers? Like opening a present?” Bill asked, eyes surveying Ford repeatedly—a spoiled brat in a candy store who knows his parents are going to buy him whatever he wants; and Ford would, he would give Bill whatever he desired. Within reason.

How weak he’d become…

Bill’s passionate gaze began to make Ford feel as though his eyes were forcing him to do a strip-tease; layer by layer coming off, revealing the prize at the centre. The boy’s advances too often
blurred between threatening and flattering—exciting, but not something Ford enjoyed in excess.

“You’ve caught me.” Ford said, smiling, suddenly finding the bread-stick basket interesting.

“I’m surprised you aren’t worried about people seeing us together…or have you acknowledged you look my dad?”

Ford scoffed. “You’re the only one thinking such things, I assure you.”

The waiter came. A friendly man, whose eyes wasted no time appraising them both. High class venues always had these types, Ford thought.

Ford chose lobster. It was expensive, but Bill said he’d be paying and Ford knew Bill’s family had quite the fortune. The entire trip had come out of Bill’s pocket and Ford wondered if Bill would seek to collect payment for it in another way.

“And what can I get for your son? Grandson?”

“I’ll have what Papa’s having.” Bill said. Ford’s eyes murdered him in cold blood and he felt the sudden need to take out his phone and order a coffin.

Of course, he’d asked the waiter to say that specific line, knowing it would irritate Ford.

The waiter nodded, wrote down their order, including drinks, and left.

“What’s wrong, Papa?” Bill asked, deciding to push his luck.

“Stop that…it’s inappropriate…” Ford said, flustered and annoyed. Bill’s love of taunting him about the age difference eluded him; the boy knew how much he disliked it and the compunction it brought had barely dimmed.

“Oh wait…you English natives say Daddy don’t you?” Bill mused with fake innocence.

“Bill…”

“I’ll stop. It’s really creepy, actually.” Bill cringed. Making Ford uncomfortable was funny, but even he had his limits.

“What that waiter did was very inappropriate. I should have a word with the manager.”

“No, leave’em Ford. I’ll have a talk with them.” Close call.

He held Ford’s hand—no gloves tonight. “What I wouldn’t give to suck you off underneath the table…”

“Let’s not talk about sex tonight.” Ford squeezed his hand. “Let’s discuss your education.”

“…Seriously?”

“Yes. Have you thought about it?” Ford was taking this thing too seriously and Bill was getting cold feet. He had to find a way to get out of this.

“It’s been like…2 days or something. Give me some space to think.”

Bill was right, it seemed like forever had passed since Ford invited the boy into his bed.

“It seems like longer…” Ford confessed. They’d spent much time talking and in each other’s
company—he’d known couples who rarely saw this much of each other, some speaking weekly only a fraction of what Bill and himself did in a day. More importantly, they spoke about private matters, not merely simple small talk, and it made all the difference.

“It does, doesn’t it? Like we’ve been together for years and years…and well, you get the idea.” Bill said, popping a breadstick piece into his mouth and chewing messily. “We go together just perfectly, Ford.”

“Sexually, yes. We haven’t done much else, you know.” Ford said, watching as Bill slobbered all over his plate. It appeared to be a deliberate mess, as if he aimed to entertain Ford. Not wanting to disappoint, he chuckled at the display.

“Hey…when we get back, how about…we do more stuff together? I saw you had a few board games. Let’s play Dungeons, Dungeons and More dungeons together.” Bill wiped his mouth, satisfied at Ford’s attention.

“You’ve played before?” Ford asked, getting excited. He hadn’t deemed Bill as one to enjoy geeky past times.

“Yep. Hey…what’s your favourite alignment? Or…let’s pry a little…what’s your alignment?”

A great question, Ford thought. It showed Bill had knowledge of the game, while also letting them get to know each other better. “Hmmm I think…I think I’d be perhaps…neutral good. You?”

“Ha! You’re way more of a true neutral. Come on…you can’t be that good. Me? I’d go with…Chaotic Neutral, maybe bordering on evil…” Bill winked, leaning forward. “I can’t wait to take you captive.”

Bill’s voice lowered, the lighting now making him appear menacing. “You know what bad guys do once they capture their opponent, right…?”

Ford looked away. “Not this again…”

“It’s fantasy! If I want my character to fuck yours into submission, you can’t stop me.” Bill declared. “You can’t stop me, old man. It’s gonna happen. And there’s gonna be tentacles.”

“Oh my god…” Ford couldn’t stop himself from laughing, and he had willed every nerve and muscle in his body not to. Laughter only encouraged Bill.

“Lots of hands too…real weird shit.” Bill said. “Doesn’t that turn you on? Hands everywhere…fingers inside you, fingers stroking you…fingers ravaging your mouth, drool leaking out…fingers taking the drool to lube you up before something else comes to enter you…”

“Bill.” Ford used his strict voice, but it had no effect on Bill this time.

“Doesn’t it get you going? Tell the truth.”

Refusing to meet Bill’s intensive gaze, Ford answered truthfully, “A little.” He wouldn’t deny the idea intrigued him.

“Knew you were a freak.” Bill smirked in triumph, the remark earning a loud scoff from Ford. “If I had a monster form, Ford…the things I’d do to you. And you wouldn’t be able to stop me.”

“Good thing you’re human.” Ford tried to imagine what sort of monstrous creature Bill would be had he not been human, but nothing specific came to mind. A siren, perhaps? No…
“I guess. I’d be something like…something hardcore, like Cthulhu.” Bill mused, as if reading Ford’s mind. “Get me some tentacles while still having a dick, too.”

Lovecraft. Of course.

“I’d burn brighter than the sun…like some golden yellow god…” He reached for another breadstick, but Ford stopped him.

“No more You’ll ruin your appetite.” Ford said sternly and Bill broke into laughter.

“Okay, Papa.”

Ford’s eyes narrowed, telling Bill all he needed to know. The boy ceased his laughter immediately, pouting innocently.

“Maybe I'll have to tame the monster called Bill Cipher. Teach him the ways of the hero.” Ford proclaimed in the most heroic voice he could muster. Bill's face alone said he was now questioning his life choices.

“Ewwwww! God, that sounds awful. What—why would you say that? Jesus.” Bill sounded disgusted, but smiled all the same.

Ford squeezed Bill’s hand but didn’t say anything further on the topic.

“You said you wanted to talk…” Bill reminded him.

“Yes…this…this thing we have. Is moving rather quickly.”

“Uh…? How so? All we do is fuck and spend some time together.”

“Yes, but for me…it’s…too fast.” Ford said, unsure of how to phrase his thoughts coherently.

“Wow okay…so slowing down means what? We fuck and then I leave? Or I hang around, but we don’t fuck?”

“No…no…nothing like that. I—I can’t quite express in words what I want to say.”

“Well, when you figure it out, let me know. I thought things were going great…but…if you wanna change it, alright.”

“What do you hope to gain from this?” Ford asked, hoping for honesty again.

Bill folded his hands at the table. “Who knows? You’ll never be serious about me. I’m too young.”

The answer surprised Ford. “Serious? What happened to only being lovers? And your dislike of relationships?”

Bill tapped his fingers with a look that said even he didn’t know what had changed.

“So that’s how you feel?”

Bill shrugged a shoulder, pulling a dopey face. “Maybe.”

“I’ll think about it.” Ford said, uncertain how truthful his words were. To date such a younger man… Bill looked floored, clearly not expecting Ford’s answer. His shoulders slumped slightly, implying
he’d been momentarily disarmed. “Really…?”

“Yes.” Ford pressed. It was safer as well. For them to sleep with each other only.

Bill took Ford’s hand again. “I’d love to be yours…only yours.”

The reaction didn’t seem in line with Bill’s character. Ford had suggested restricting his freedom and he didn’t appear to mind. Ford wasn’t one for rules, but… he felt Bill was even more the rebellious sort. And promiscuous—someone who didn’t like to be tied down and wanted to taste everything and everyone. That was Bill Cipher to Ford. For him to be satisfied with one person, and someone as old as Ford…

It was so strange.

Their food came. A few minutes in, Bill continued the conversation.

“Do you want to make this official so you can insist you’re too good for a fuckbuddy?” Bill asked, and Ford gave him an irritated look, knowing the boy sought to start a fight.

“That’s it, isn’t it? The Great Stanford Pines! Can’t be fucking around like the rest of the monkeys, nope. He’s the evolved human.”

“That’s not it, Bill. Don’t look for trouble. Eat your food.”

Bill gave a lop-sided grin, one eye narrowing, and obeyed.

Ford suggested Bill order wine for himself but the boy refused, despite Ford’s insistence he wouldn’t mind.

“I want to be sober…when you touch me.” Was the only thing Bill said on the matter, leaving an impression on Ford.

“Pull my hair, Ford…” Bill mutters between pants, knees pushed deep into the bed—a hand holding the headboard for support while he touches himself with the other. He’d prefer seeing Ford, but maybe later…

Ford holds Bill’s hair with a soft grip as his fingers move in and out—never going too deep, despite Bill’s attempts at pushing back to take more. The hand in his hair feels more like Ford’s petting him and he thinks he likes this better than the usual rough hair-pulling. The hand quickly loses interest in the hair and settles at a shoulder, Bill’s hand moving from the headboard to greet it.

“Ford…For—” Bill’s speech is cut off by Ford’s fingers entering his mouth, and he sucks happily. He holds Ford’s intrusive hand at the wrist, keeping it there as he sucks and sucks; imagining it’s Ford’s dick; imagining it’s Ford’s mouth; imagining imagining…Ford.

“You’re doing such a good job with your mouth, darling. Do you want something else in there?”

His fingers leave long enough for Bill to breathe out, “Yes…yes please…” Bill intertwines his fingers with the ones belonging to the hand previously in his mouth, the act akin to begging.

“You remembered to say the magic word. How can I say no?” Ford coos in his ear and he melts.

Ford’s dirty talk…Every time the man opens his mouth…

Ford lets go of Bill’s needy hand to pull Bill’s head close, and lets his tongue enter the boy’s mouth.
This wasn’t what Bill had in mind, and he knows Ford is teasing him. Doesn’t matter, he sucks Ford’s face as best he can.

Seconds in with Ford’s tongue in his mouth, he climaxes with meek moans into Ford’s mouth, and Ford devours them all, drawing out every last one with the utmost care.

He rubs his cheek against Bill’s own as the boy catches his breath, collapsing into Ford’s arms. He holds the shaking boy, remembering something Bill had said earlier.

“You didn’t say thank you.” Ford trails his thumb across Bill’s lips, and the boy’s eyes flutter, heavy with lassitude.

“Than—thank you…” Bill voices always came out light and passive during these specific moments, making him seem utterly helpless.

Ford stole a kiss, Bill relinquishing it gratefully. “No, try again.”

“Thank you…Ford? Ford…”

“Yes, that’s perfect. You’re so cute, Bill.” Dozens of kisses across his lips and face was the reward—the lips being the main attraction, receiving much of the prize. The swarming kisses stopped too soon, Bill’s skin still parched and wanting more.

Ford took Bill’s mouth again, the boy submitting and relaxing as Ford pressed him into the bed while climbing on top; this kiss promising to never end.

Ford took Bill’s mouth again, allowing the boy’s body to let the quivers of post-orgasm ripple off before continuing further. He let a hand stroke across flushed skin absent, calming the jittery breathing that sought to only make him harder. Always—the view of his lover after an orgasm was ideal. The satisfied tremors of their muscles, the hazy look within their eyes, and the desire to continue because with Ford’s methods, once was never enough. And so they were always eager for more and more. Ford, of course, was generous to the very end.

“Now, hold me tightly, okay?”

“Yes, sir…”

“Don’t call me sir.” Ford kissed him, then pulled away with a loving smile that only made Bill desire to call him ‘sir’ again. “Just call me Ford, as you always do.”

If anyone was deserving of Bill’s devotion, it was Ford; and every ardent yet gentle touch was a testament to that. He would do anything asked of him—anything. Ford had still not grasped the depth of what ‘anything’ entailed, and Bill hoped he would one day incite the man to take full advantage of his dedication.

“Sorry…” Bill’s fingers encircled Ford’s length taut. It was wet with desire, literally, and he’s pleased with himself, knowing Ford is this excited for him. As long as he kept this up, Ford had no reason to end things between them.

“Don’t apologize, dear. You’ve done nothing wrong.” Reproving had not been the intention, so he kisses Bill at the outer edge of his lips, the boy brightening at the reassurance. Sudden shyness overcame Bill and his eyes remained down casted, too afraid to meet Ford’s. It was cute and out of character for the Bill he knew.
“Look me in the eye, darling, when you touch me.” Bill obeys, Ford kissing him in intervals as Bill pleasures him. He made sure to let the boy know how much he enjoyed it with clusters of kisses and words of encouragement; ‘like that, just like that. Don’t stop…’ it seemed to raise Bill’s morale. Heavy breathing appeared to be the best communication, as Bill reacted physically to that.

The Bill who’d held him down and had pleasured himself with hard eye-contact and had climaxed messily on his face briefly flashed in his mind, and Ford wondered what summoned that Bill’s appearance. When would he see that Bill again?

“Finish…in my mouth…” Bill mutters between kisses and Ford complies, filling his mouth. The boy held such a blissful dreamy look as he swallowed Ford down that Ford kept envisioning hearts fluttering about and around the boy. Such a level of charm could not be faked, Ford thought. He rubbed Bill’s head approvingly, and the hearts tripled.

When done, Bill collapsed into Ford’s arms. “If you want to do anything else…tell me…I’ll do it…”

“That’s enough, darling.” Ford crooned, arms closing protectively around Bill.

“You’re the best…”

Ford kisses him, not bothering correcting how many times he’s repeated himself. Bill returns the kiss, and then transitions into kissing and licking Ford in the face and the neck. He does it without rest, overwhelming Ford, but the man doesn’t restrain him, only says “Settle down, dear…” to which Bill responds with “Sorry…I’m so…I really like you…Ford…” he nuzzles his nose back and forth at Ford’s jaw.

“I know you do, my darling.”

He’s sure he sees hearts flutter around the boy again.

Something’s wrong, but Ford still can’t put his finger on it.

He was Ford’s darling…Ford’s…

It reminded him of when his…

dolcezza… Mia Dolcezza…

“You’re such a liar. You definitely like being in control.”

“I don’t think things are as black and white as that.”

“Come on…or is that roleplay? Where you take on a more assertive presence?”

“You’re seeing it that way because if I recall, you said you prefer relinquishing control in the bedroom.”

“Maybe…”

“But you’ve been quite forceful plenty of times, let’s agree that we both like diversity.” Ford ended
it, but then decided to poke fun a bit. “You called me sir.”

“Yep. You sounded pretty commanding in that moment.” Bill said, unashamed as ever. But then changed the topic.

“I love hearing you call me darling, especially when you fuck me.” Bill confessed, back towards Ford. “I love it so much…I hate it.”

Ford couldn’t restrict his laughter. “I knew you did. You don’t have to worry.”

“It doesn’t fit when you’re murdering my ass with your fingers and calling me ‘darling’.”

“What violent language. Darling suits any occasion.” Ford let a hand rest at Bill’s upper arm, Bill’s left hand moving to lay atop it.

Bill made a ‘hmphing’ noise. “You know what I really like? That you’re different to all the other old men I’ve been with, but you’re still an older man.”

“What do you mean?”

“You still like to fuck younger men.”

Ford applied pressure on Bill’s arm. “Bill…you know it’s not like that.”

“Yeah yeah…”

“How many older men have you been with? Besides me.”

“Ah…I dunno. Lots.”

Ford was curious; so, there was a pattern in Bill’s choice of lovers. “You prefer older men?”

“Nah, I hate them.”

Ford frowned. “Then…?”

“They just know how to fuck, that’s all.”

Something about this bit of information stood out to Ford, but he decided he would come back to it later.

Bill turned around and began lapping at Ford’s jaw, migrating slowly upwards. “I wanna go again…but I gotta get up early…I have a hair appointment, and then I gotta do business stuff.”

“A hair appointment?”

“Gotta get my hair bleached and cut. My hair can only be handled by the finest hands…” Bill smirked, hands tugging Ford’s hair.

“Now that I think about it, your hair was quite different when I first saw you.” Ford mused. “You change it often?”

“When I feel like it. I get lazy sometimes…which do you prefer?”

“I think you look good no matter how you choose to wear your hair, darling.”

“…shut up.” He nestled into Ford’s chest; the man kissed his eyelids, eliciting childish laughter.
“Hey…you’re wearing the cologne I bought you…”

-  

Bill pulled and poked Ford’s face while making an overly contemplative humming noise. “You know, you don’t actually look that old.”
He pinched Ford’s cheek. “If you dyed your hair, you’d look loads younger.” Pulling his hands away, he grinned. “Let me let me…dye your hair.”

Ford laughed. “How will I explain that to my colleagues?”

“Fuck them. Say your cute, young boyfriend likes it.”

“Boyfriend, you say?” Ford’s face and tone had a sardonic touch to it.

“Of course…”

“That escalated tremendously.”

“Are you rejecting me? Still thinking of Fiddleford?”

“That’s— "

“Quit pining for him, Pines. I’m better.”

“I’m not going to touch that one.”

“Oooh? I’ll have to teach you just how much better I am…” Ford felt Bill’s hand creep between his legs. Getting up early was the last thing on Bill’s mind.

“Even a guy with 12 Ph.Ds. can learn a thing or two…”

-  

“I’ll take care of you, just relax…”

“But I wanna—” Ford’s fingers plug his mouth as his cock, guided by Ford’s other hand, fills Ford’s mouth fully. He lets his hands sleep in grey curls as the man brings him to orgasm again.

“The best, Ford…you’re the best…”

Ford’s ego agreed.

Bill woke up earlier than Ford, and was gone by the time Ford woke up.

He wondered what Ford was discussing with his colleague. Probably gave the man Bill’s details in case he went missing.

The man was still so suspicious…and Bill had done plenty to curb that suspicion.

Oh well.

He stopped by a store to pick up new clothes, since he couldn’t be seen wearing his usual attire, not if he planned on being inconspicuous. Casper, former leader of the Nightmare gang, always had impeccable and expensive taste in clothing; meaning: no one would recognise him in ordinary
civilian clothes. A new face meant nothing when you had an incredibly distinctive taste in clothing.

Jeans was a new thing for Bill, having only worn it when he took on identities of people with poor fashion sense. (he might’ve worn it once or twice at the shore, but that was necessary, too)

Blue jeans, a white shirt and black leather jacket. He’d heard of this popular combination, and if he was going to wear casual clothing, damn right he’d wear the best possible kind. Style should not be sacrificed for espionage.

Completing the look with cheap square, white-framed sunglasses—he had to admit, he looked good. The perks of being attractive: any outfit looked amazing on him. The plainest outfit went from a 5 to a full 10 on the right person and Bill was always Mr Right.

What would Ford think of this outfit…?

He couldn't wait to find out.

Stall three, marked with an Out of Order sign, in a white bag beneath the toilet.

He checked it; Dreamcatcher sound asleep, hidden beneath miscellaneous clothing items.

Everyone had driven here two days prior to Bill’s arrival—guns not allowed on planes and someone had to do the transporting. Someone meaning everyone except Bill. They were too unruly to put up with on a flight and he wanted to be with Ford.

Stanford...

Xanthar would be at the hotel soon. He had to hurry back.

“I have a surprise for you.”

“What is it?” Xanthar asked following Bill into the room, scepticism in every stride. “I hate surprises.”

“I know you do. And you’re going to hate this one.”

Bill had a seat in the chair near the door, legs slightly spread and hands folded—the position he usual took when he wanted to discuss something serious. Xanthar stood in front of him, at enough of a distance that he wasn’t looking too far down at Bill. No kneeling or kissing Bill’s hand—that only occurred at the mansion, and Xanthar was a stickler for rules of such nature.

Sunglasses came off, and Bill began, “I’m sober, Evan.”

“I haven’t been fully sober in quite a while. I’m always drunk, on the verge of being drunk or dealing with a hangover.” Bill said. “But since I’ve been crashing at Ford’s place, I haven’t drank. Even though I went through all the trouble of filling my expensive flask with expensive whiskey, I never touched it. Never had a chance to.”

“Now…” From beneath Bill’s jacket, Dreamcatcher emerged. “I’m going to ask you a series of questions. You’re going to answer them. If you talk shit, I’m going to send you to meet your fucking ancestors. Are we clear?”

“Crystal.” Xanthar said, unaffected by the introduction of threats.
“First things first. Let’s think back to our time back home. Did you drug me? Put anything in my drinks?”

“No.”

“I’ll believe you.” Bill’s face said the opposite.

“You slept like a rock entirely on your own. That had nothing to do with me.”

“You know… I’ve learnt a lot from you. Almost everything I know about surviving here.” A cigarette was lit up, the grey malice filling the empty in the room.

“And you’ve learnt a lot from me, haven’t you? I’m curious. What the fuck were you pulling back home?” Bill inhaled deeply, smoking coming out as he spoke further.

“You being all cute and supportive, holding my hand, telling me how you wanna fuck me and all this weird shit that you’ve never done in your entire heterosexual life. I mean, I didn’t see the fucked-up ness of it at first because let’s be honest here, I was perpetually drunk and so far up my ass that shit clogged up all my senses.” Bill laughed, the laugh ending on a note that made it seem as if crying would follow.

“You get uptight whenever Ford was mentioned—that was pretty strange. Then… you say I gotta deal with Kryptos, but you want me to do it personally instead of just have you off the kid.” Bill offered a cigarette to Xanthar, who shook his head, declining. “Now you’re going to be honest with me. Were you buttering me up so that when I had to deal with Kryptos, you could convince me to show him a little bit of mercy and not decimate his ass?”

Xanthar gave a light tilt of his head in acknowledgement. “Yes.”

“Were you worried that if I took an interest in Stanford, you wouldn’t be able to manipulate me anymore? That why you wanted to date me? It might give you a little more power over my decisions?”

“Yes. I won’t lie, you’ve seen through everything at this point.”

“I’m pretty proud of you, I might add. You had me fooled. Then again, I was also wasted so you had a good handicap.” Bill crushed the cigarette into his palm, the pain meaning nothing. “So there’s no softer side to your cold, stoic nature is there?”

“I was genuinely worried about you. Not everything had ulterior motives, but I’m sure you can figure out which ones did.” Xanthar said, face and voice not giving away any emotion.

Bill told himself he’s not disappointed, but he knew there was a part of him that was.

“So, did you like it when I fucked you?” Bill asked, grinning coldly.

“Why are you asking this again?”

“Because you should remember you work for me, not Kryptos.”

“I can’t believe you though. I think maybe, you know, somewhere in my drugged-up state, I thought you were acting strange. But I figured I’d told you about that so maybe it unlocked some paternal side of you.” Bill’s face broke out in concern. “But that wasn’t it, not at all.”

“You decided to use it to your advantage to save that fucking kid. That’s it, right? That’s the
conclusion? Because that side is reserved for Kryptos, right?”

“I’m sorry. I did what I thought was necessary.” Xanthar said, voice softening barely, but enough for Bill to notice. “The latter is not true. I’ve always taken care of both of you.”

“I told you in confidence, and you turn around and use it against me.”

“It’s not as black and white as that, and you know it.”

“Fuck you.” Bill said, smiling. He wished he hadn’t told Xanthar now. He wished he’d never said anything. Then, he wondered what Ford would do, if he knew.

Dreamcatcher went back beneath the black leather.

“Why don’t you fuck off with Jerry and go start your own gang? Just fuck off. Since that seems to be what you want.”

“It’s not. It’s time to put this behind us. You know and it’s been cleared up. Deal with Kryptos, and —”

“Be nice to him?”

“He’s just a boy, Bill. Same age you were when we met.” Xanthar said. “I met you when I was your age and you were his age. Put things into perspective.”

“Evan, I’m so tired of this fucking kid. It’s been how many years? And he’s still blaming me for the shit you do. You could run over a fucking kitten with me all the way in Norway and he’d find a way to say it was my fault all along.”

“I was mistaken. Keyhole gave false information. I spoke to Kryptos. It’s not what you think, Bill. Talk to him.”

Bill raised an eyebrow. “So, I didn’t have to come down here?”

“Talk to him.”

“You talk to him. Tell him again and again that you killed his fucking father and it had jackshit to do with me. You betrayed his daddy dearest, it wasn’t my fault.” Bill folded both arms behind his head and leaned back.

“It’s not about that. Talk to him.”

“Enough secrets. And why did you not clarify with Kryptos back home then? If this whole thing ‘isn’t what I think it is’?”

“He wasn’t answering any of my texts or calls.”

Bill growled. “That little shit…”

“There’s no need to look for a fight. Both of you have always gotten along very well. I’m not sure why you’re intent on ruining this—why the both of you are.”

“You know jackshit about what’s between Kryptos and me.” Bill said, lowering his voice and patting Dreamcatcher through his jacket.

“You’re so nice to this kid. Because what? You babysat him when he was younger?” Bill asked,
pretending to barely contain nasty laughter.

“I’d fight for you the same way.”

“You killed Kryptos’s father for me, a stranger. What’s stopping you from killing me, to protect Kryptos?”

“I swore loyalty to you.”

“No, to my family name. You swore your loyalty to a bunch of dead people. Since my family name is all you care about these days.”

“It’s never been like that. You know that.” Xanthar said, patience dropping. “This is unnecessary drama, Bill. All because your grandfather dicked you too hard, one too many times. I’ve never ever done anything that meant you harm. You know this. If it had been anyone else, Cas, at every opportunity presented, they would’ve fucked you senseless and put you in your place. You know it.”

Xanthar’s voice raised slightly. “So don’t ever try to make it seem like I’ve never had your best interest in mind because I always have.”

Bill felt the sparks of anger.

“Did you have my best interest in mind when you held my hand and played daddy? Did you? What about when you held me down, saying you’re going to fuck me hard? Did you care about me then? Or when you asked me to fuck only you. Did you care about me then?” Bill asked, voice becoming stiffer. “I’m not fucking Kryptos. I don’t need a father. I’m not looking for a father. Don’t pull that shit ever again with me.”

“I don’t recall you complaining when I did it.”

“Why would I? I had a crush on you for quite a long time.” Bill confessed the obvious. “To have you return those feelings, even at a time when I didn’t feel the same way anymore… What the fuck ever.”

Xanthar didn’t reply.

“We’re done here.”

As Xanthar went for the door, Bill grabbed his sleeve. “One more time…did you ever drug me?”

“No.” Xanthar replied, face finally softening fully as he looked down at Bill, who was now nothing more than a small animal wary of accepting kindness from a human.

“Promise. Promise me you never did.”

“I promise I never did.”

Bill let him go.

“When I had Dreamcatcher made…I thought of you, Evan.” Bill said, before Xanthar disappeared out of hearing range. “Because a normal gun could never kill you. Don’t forget this.”

It was just a piss poor attempt at manipulation. It wasn’t real, it’s not real…

He’s glad, even though he won’t admit it. He doesn’t know what he would’ve done if he had to
worry about Xanthar wanting to fuck him.

Why was he alienating the most important person to him? Tomorrow, he’d get drunk, swallow his pride and apologize to the man.

Evan would never drug him. Why would he?

Why would he…?

Such thoughts were…the worst-case scenario.

He wants to tell Ford...

What would the man do? Try to manipulate him, too?

No, that would also be...

the worst case scenario.

Chapter End Notes

You can’t predict the future.
Cold Breath & even Colder Blood

Chapter Summary

A loverboy at play — he don’t play by rules. When it comes to true love, with him there’s no one home. Ford, don’t play the fool now.

Chapter Notes

Keep talking.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hey Ford, why did the old man do this?” Bill held both hands up.
“This?” Ford imitated the action and Bill struck: immediately pushing against them, slamming Ford into the table, pinning him down. Laughter bustled in the background.
“See, boys? He wants to be dominated. I’m telling you, everyone’s got that primal instinct…” Bill nudged a knee between Ford’s legs, forcefully parting them. “To be mounted and fucked. Right, Fordsy?”

-A few hours from now.

[Bill]: I’m a grade A steak
[Bill]: You aint nothing but dog food
[Bill]: 😆
[Ky hypertos]: Yeah you act like got you some class
[Ky hypertos]: But do you know how to back 🖤 that 🖤ass 🖤 up?
[Bill]: Watch me drop the hurt 🧣
[Ky hypertos]: make money money make money money work.
[Bill]: 🤣
[Bill]: Where are you?
[Ky hypertos]: Around.
[Bill]: Why the cold shoulder? Come on kid
[Bill]: Ky hypertos…
[Bill]: JERRY
[Bill]:…shoming
[Bill]: Did I spell that right?
[Ky hypertos]: It’s Shoi-ning.
[Bill]: I know. I knew spelling it wrong would make you say something
[Bill]: Hey kid…talk to me
[Ky hypertos]: I don’t have anything to say to you, Bill. Sorry
[Bill]: When I see you, I might not be so nice as to wanna talk
[Bill]: if you catch my drift
The colleague Ford had met was nothing special. Another old guy who was already balding, the back of his head reflected the fickle New York sunshine—if one could call it sunshine. Bill’s freshly bleached hair was sunnier in comparison.

Ford was laughing and smiling as they chatted; jealousy nabbed at Bill, quickly dissolving at his command. Ford could have friends. Friends were useful. The older man was hardly the social butterfly either, he needed to get out more and brush up on those lacking social skills. Bill should play teacher; the idea of punishing Ford when he disappointed was too appealing to pass up.

Ford laughed again, reminding Bill the last thing he needed was to become overly possessive. Unhinging his emotions never ended well. Attachment was a fun-sucker, fettered you and affected your decisions. Bill’s main goal was always fun, not controlling Stanford Pines—unless there was a way to make controlling Stanford Pines fun.

To think—tedious humdrum interactions as the impetus for Bill Cipher’s newfound possessive streak. Rapacity for another rarely visited Bill; toys were replaceable, and he’s had plenty of ones cuter and more willing than Stanford Pines. The only person Bill truly regarded as belonging to him was Xanthar. But that came from competition, Kryptos being his rival for the man’s attention. A rival he’d deal with soon enough.

The humiliation brought on by Xanthar’s actions still ruffled his feathers—or what was left of them, and he considered pulling them all out to avoid ever dealing with something like that ever again. The things he’d said to that asshole…

No feathers meant nothing could be ruffled. Really, he was surprised he could still feel as much as he’d been feeling lately.

The other man must’ve said something incredibly fucking amusing because Ford broke out into loud laughter that knelled too loud and clear through Bill’s ears.

Bill’s lip curled in annoyance.

His eyes wandered from the shining round beacon of old age to Ford’s thick grey curls. Ford must have great genes to have retained a full head of hair. It’d be fun to pull hard on it sometime. Maybe tonight. Maybe cover Ford in cum to remind him who he belongs to… Especially his chest… it’d be nice to watch Ford work out sometime. With testosterone riling him up, it might be the best time to convince him to fuck.

He kept watching Ford, deciding he’d stay as long as possible before meeting up with 8ball and Paci-fire. Reminded him of old times, when he’d follow Ford around; the man oblivious to his presence, which still surprised Bill to this day; he was never one to be ignored. But Ford was the type to be completely unaware of his surroundings. He’d seen the man walk into a Stop sign while being distracted by nothing but his thoughts.

Ford laughed again, and this time, Bill didn’t restrict the feelings of jealousy.

How fun it would be if he could fuck Ford in front of that balding guy. Give to him while Ford chatted to the guy—Ford unable to formulate words properly as Bill fucked him, the table wobbling with very thrust and Ford moaning between words. The other man doing his best not to stroke his cock as he watched Ford take it. He’d make Ford tell the balding guy how good Bill felt in him in as much detail as possible.
He wanted usage to permanently mark Ford’s face; just at a glance, one would know. Know he was a man who loved to get fucked hard into the ground.

Spanking—was Ford into that? He should give the man a few welts with his own belt. He had to add that to the list of things to do to Ford.

Damn, could his mind not wander to sex for even five minutes?

Perhaps he should tie Ford up like a dog, get him nice and drugged-up; keep him as a pet for a weekend of training. He’d love to…but the man would never agree to such a thing, and everything Bill had succeeded to cultivating between them would be ruined should he force the man.

Or better yet, they could both play dog, and he could mount Ford like a bitch in heat.

Stanford Pines…

If Ford wouldn’t be his pet, he’d settle for being Ford’s pet. After all, he wasn’t the one who’d started this. Ford had been the one to call Bill ‘his darling’.

Being in Ford’s care was a dream come true, anyway. The man was so good, so gentle…and so easy to trick. And definitely harbouring something sinister deep down. To cover up the stench, you always wore your best cologne.

Ford was a virgin though. Was Ford waiting for Prince charming to deflower him? Is that what Ford wanted? Bill would love to jostle him out of that medieval fantasy. However…

Bill could be a prince charming, a gentleman. He still remembers how.

More laughter from Ford. As soon as he had Ford alone, he’d teach the man how ugly possessiveness could be. Hopefully, Ford would teach it to him, too.

With good old fashioned ultraviolence.

--

Spotting the waiter meant to bring Ford the tab, he stopped them with an enticing $50. He scribbled a little triangle with an eye in the middle, the words ‘Always watching you’ beneath it, and let the waiter be on their merry way to deliver it.

Ford would know he’d been here.

Beneath the bridge was a meet-up spot Bill and company used on occasion—one of the less used due to the disgusting state the place tended to be, but it’s horrid state was what ensured it remained available. A yellow triangle, an eye in the middle, decorated the wall behind 8ball; the eye appearing to direct its gaze at Bill and Bill alone. Jason was talented at unsettling art, all the praised deserved.

The first thing 8baller greeted Bill with was, “Nice shades, how much was that cheap-looking garbage? 2 grand?”

The sunglasses came off and were tossed at 8baller, who caught them sloppily. Butter fingers. “$4.”

“Oh…” 8baller put them on, the white clashing cheaply with the army green of his jacket. “So…oh, okay. Right. What’s with the weird outfit?”

Bill shrugged, fixing his already-perfect hair for vanity’s sake. “I can’t walk around in expensive
clothes. It’ll be a dead give-away.”

“True true…” 8baller nodded as Paci-fire joined them with a bag. Through the nearly transparent white, Bill could make out the colours of his favourite beer brand. Beer was rarely his beverage of choice, but during the daytime when they planned to do nothing but fuck around, it was the ideal drink.

“Hey Alex, what did you get you? We both know you aren’t drinking that cheap shit.”

“I’m not drinking. Not in the mood.”

“You’re pocket protector makes me want to put a bullet into your gut.” Bill said thoughtfully, eyeing the offensive accessory in question that decorated Paci-fire’s brown shirt. He turned to 8baller, and held out his phone. “Hey, take a photo of me. I wanna send it to Ford.”

“Yeah yeah…” 8baller took it and snapped a picture, Bill as photogenic as ever. First ensuring he was pleased with the result himself, he handed it back to Bill, who was naturally also pleased with the result. No re-takes needed—a combination of Bill’s good looks and 8baller’s eye for catching the best angle.

Bill sent it, figuring he’d only hear back from Ford much later. Maybe Ford would show that gross balding guy his photo? But he knew Ford was too secretive and shy to ever do such a thing.

“Sending your shitty old ass boy-toy photos of you…” 8baller grumbled, opening a beer.

“Jealous?” Bill arched an eyebrow as he lit up a cigarette; teasing 8baller never became stale.

“Why would I be? I get to see the real deal.”

An unexpected reply; Bill blew smoke in 8baller’s direction, ready to go the extra mile. “Flirting with me now that I’m taken…well, now I know what you like.”

“Man, I’m just playin‘ god damn.” 8baller took a large gulp, needing sobriety to depart if he was going to be dealing with Bill’s nonsense for the next few hours.

“I think… I’d like to see a cute girl’s lips around my dick.” Bill mused, staring up at the underside of the bridge, the traffic roaring in agreement.

“Hey don’t we all.” 8ball added, offering a beer to Bill who declined it with a head shake.

“Let’s go find one, and do that—what’s it called? Where a group of guy’s cum on a girl’s face?” Bill turned to 8ball.

“Bukkake.” Paci-fire said. “I’m down for that.”

“Ah shit. Ford threw away my shit. You still got Batz’s number, Jason?”

“Yeah somewhere.”

“Give it to me, asshole.” Bill said impatiently.

“Yeah yeah later. He threw away your what?”

“The usual.”

“How’d Ford get a hold of your shit? You still carrying it around?” 8baller lowered his can, it was
substantially lighter already.

“Yeah.”

“Poor guy.”

“I did jack shit to him. He’ll notice if he wakes up with a torn asshole.”

“Then…don’t tear his asshole.” Paci-fire cut in.

“Can we not talk about Ford? Thinking about him makes me horny.” Bill said, his mind wandering.

“Too much information, man! Jesus.” 8baller threw the now empty can on the floor and opened up a fresh one. “Where’d you even get those clothes?”


8baller’s eyes spent the next few moments sizing up the height difference between Bill and himself, a look of annoyance salting his features. Unlike Bill, who stood 6’1”, 8ball didn’t even make it to 6ft —missing the mark only by an inch or two.

“We shoulda synced our outfits.” Bill continued, grabbing a beer for himself after crushing his dead cigarette.

8baller snapped his fingers. “I’m down. We can look like a trio.” He began snapping his fingers to a beat, Bill joining him excitedly. “The boys are back in town, the boys are back in town!”

“You both are such losers.” Paci-fire sneered.

“We should get going. I wanna bet on a few fights.” Bill said checking the time on his phone. “Let’s head out.”

Paci-fire and 8ball went ahead of Bill, the latter finishing up his beer first. 8ball paused, turning to face Bill, began, “You know I—”

He stopped.

“Huh?” Bill waited, staring at him, the triangle with one eye portrait directly behind him—waiting and staring, too. It loomed threateningly, in a way 8ball knew was not the intention when he’d drawn it. His tribute to Bill no longer appeared independent of Bill, now manifesting instead as an extension of him; virtually, by definition and artist integrity, it was Bill—not his Bill, but still Bill.

But this was not the triangle with one eye 8ball had drawn. An artist recognized his own work, and this was not Jason Carter’s work.

And here it was looking at him; Bill’s figure blending into it, until where Bill began and the triangle with one eye ended had become incomprehensible as it was unimaginable. A sound 8ball could only describe as dreams breaking creaked through his mind, and he wondered if the creaking wasn’t brought about by the tossing and turning of his sleeping form upon his bed, caused by a nightmare—this was a nightmare.

What the fuck was in the beer?

“I uh…” 8ball struggled to get the right wording, knowing any combination he attempted would make him sound insane. He went for it anyway.
“For a second there…I swear…you and the…”

“Yeah?” Bill threw down his empty beer can, stomping it loudly with his foot while he encouraged 8ball to continue with a hand.

“Nothing man, let’s go.”

“Nah, hold up. Tell me.”

“You looked like the muriel.”

Bill glanced behind him, the triangle with one eye remained where it’s always been. “I looked like a fucking triangle? Are you high?”

“Nah…it just…I swear…. forget it. It’s the beer. Let’s go already.”

“What the fuck did you take with the beer that you can’t comprehend the human form anymore? I’m gonna kill you if you’re doing drugs without my permission.” Bill sounded amused, but 8ball knew the threat was no joke.

“I’d never…” Both men walked ahead of Bill, guilt easily noticeable in their walking pace.

“I know you assholes had coke at the shore.” Bill said, in no hurry to close the distance yet.

8ball and Paci-fire attempted to speed up their pace, but it had no effect on Bill’s voice’s range. There was no escaping, but it never hurt to try.

“I’m a light sleeper. I heard everything.” Bill snickered, slipping his hands into his jeans pocket. He caught up with them, putting an arm around each man and smiling in a way that usually inspired a pre-booking to the hospital.

“Maybe I oughta think up a punishment for you two? How about you guys fuck while I watch?”

The triangle with one eye gazes at him. He gazes back with two eyes.

“This place smells like piss!” 8baller yelled as Bill took a seat on a nearby cement block; perfect view of the fight but not too close to any of the other betters.

They’d moved to a secluded area, where fist fights were occasionally held this time of day. Run by guys who’d seen Fight Club one too many times. Or just looking to make a quick buck here and there by betting which guy would get his face smacked off the quickest. Pyronica loved these fights, and Bill thought it a shame she was too busy to hang out with them. Probably getting her ass kissed by cheapskates hoping for a discount on arms.

“Last guy pissed himself real bad.” Paci-fire said, standing at Bill’s left while surveying the area. The first few minutes passing as he waited for his senses to adapt to the repulsive smell were always the worst.

“Oh my god. Disgusting. This place is disgusting.” 8ball continued to complain.

“You never been hit so hard you pissed yourself?” Bill chuckled; it might have been an offer—to hit Jason until he pissed himself would definitely be going on Bill’s list.

“No, I’ve never been hit so hard I pissed myself. I never will be hit so hard that I piss myself and this
conversation is over.” 8baller said emphatically, making Bill more certain he would bring this scenario to life incredibly soon.

“You see Kryptos yet?” Paci-fire asked Bill, visually scouting the area.

“Nah.”

“He’s what? 16 now, yeah?”

“Yeah.” 8baller said, hoping he was right; Jerry was either 15 or 16.

“Still a kid…you know, he’s the only one of you all I haven’t fucked.” Bill said, almost proudly.

“Oh joy, you intend to teach the young one the ways of sodomy.” Paci-fire drawled.

“Shut up, Alex. You loved it when I fucked you up the ass.” Bill said, running his eyes lewdly across Paci-fire’s body for emphasis; the man shot him a dirty look in response.

“As if. It was the worst thing I’ve ever experienced.”

“Bullshit. You moaned like a drugged-up porn star the entire time.”

“I think those were screeches of pain, Bill.”

“Same thing.”

“You’re such an asshole.”

“I’d fuck you again if Stanford wouldn’t cry about it.” Bill said, a contemplative frown on his face, theatrics.

“Oh, you’re pussy-whipped now? Or is it dick whipped?”

Bill’s eyes thinned. “Heh. You looking to push some daisies, Alex? Or do you just really want me inside you?”

“Neither of those. Hey, if your sugar daddy says you can’t drop your pants on a whim anymore, great for us.”

“I’m his sugar daddy, since I’m the one with the cash.” Bill clarified, waving invisible dollar bills in his right hand.

“Yeah but an old guy is never gonna call a young one daddy. You ever try that? Calling him daddy? Heard old guys love that shit.”

“ Weird…” Bill spat out smoke, disgusted at the thought of using such a term to address Ford. Even if he’d done it as a joke, doing it sincerely... “You and your incest kink.”

“Listen, every man is turned on by some form of taboo. Rail on me all you want, we both know this to be true.” Paci-fire said. “It’s why anal is so big.”

“Anal is big because it’s everywhere in porn.” Bill drew two circles in the air with his cigarette, the smoke disobeying and diffusing as it pleased.

“That too.”
“Bill, why you with such an old guy anyway? Besides the whole ‘getting him to join us’ thing?”
8baller blew smoke into the sky. “Man, why can’t you date a cute girl and bring her to the mansion. Let me convince her to sketch her naked and shit. Play some titanic moves.”

“Stanford’s hot. You can’t appreciate it because you don’t like dick.” Bill said. It’d been such a long time since Bill openly acknowledged 8ball as straight that the man committed the time and date to memory instinctively.

“He’s old. Even if he looked younger, he’s old, Bill. Old men are not for fucking, they’re for old age homes.”

Bill laughed. “What?”

“I agree with Jason, on the age thing. But the fact you’re dating—is it dating? Whatever. Stanford Pines is great.”

“Yeah, yet you acted like you didn’t even know the guy, with your shitty Al Pacino impersonation.” 8baller mocked.

“The last thing I needed was for you all to tease me over my appreciation of scholars.”

“God, you’re pretentious.” 8baller said with even further disdain. “Look at me. I’m Alex the Great. I read and shit but also have an inferiority complex.”

“Oh fuck off, Jason. Go get your GED before you try to talk shit to me.”

“Now boys, let’s play nice.” Bill cut in.

“How did you even get with Ford Pines? Guy is like a modern-day Einstein.” Paci-fire inquired.

“If he’s so damn smart, why hasn’t he done anything amazing?” 8baller chipped in, not impressed with this Stanford guy in the least.

“He has. You’re just utterly oblivious to the scientific world.”

“Then why did he struggle to get funding for his portal idea?” Bill asked; Paci-fire seemed to know quite a bit about this.

“Because that rustled some jammies.”

“Heh. I can imagine. He’s pretty arrogant. Hides it real well, too.” Bill grinned.

“You aren’t gonna fuck Kryptos, are you?” 8ball asked, out of the blue.

“Why?”

“He’s like your brother, isn’t he?”

“Yeah, not blood related obviously but you get it. Not gonna put my dick in him. That’s...yeah, not big on incest.” Bill pretended to gag, sticking his tongue out further than it needed to be.

“So who you wanna bet on, Bill? The big guy?” Paci-fire asked, counting his own wad of cash.

“Of course the big guy. $500 on him.”
I’m sorry
I never should have made that comment about…
Are you there? I can see if you’ve read my messages
Turning off read notifications won’t work. I know you’re there
Bill…I’m sorry
unsubscribe
Funny
I’ll see you at the get together
Are you bringing Stanford?

Still holding the piece of paper, Ford ascended the stairs to get to his room. Stairs were better; elevators encouraged slothful behaviour and he had not exercised in a while. He thought he could use more activity that wasn’t sex with Bill Cipher.

‘Always watching you’

Bill had been spying on him, and he was torn between feeling flattered and once again, as though his privacy had been violated. It was time to have the talk with Bill. Reminders of Bill’s shadowing him brought his attention yet again to the obscurity of Bill’s motives. Still too abstruse and Ford needed more intel. Getting closer to Bill was beginning to feel like an espionage adventure, much to Ford’s delight.

He slipped his card through the slot, the buzzing and welcoming green light informing him it was now open. As he stepped inside, a few more steps towards the bed, and immediately he was greeted with Bill’s back. The boy was aware of his presence but made no effort to turn around. A bouquet of bright yellow flowers, a brown paper bag and a plastic bag with the shadow of an item in it were messily scattered on the bed.

“Bill, I was just—"

“Easy there, Fordsy.” Bill called out; his voice encompassing more than enough for Ford to know something was wrong. “Don’t come any closer. I’m not really in the mood to deal with you right now.”

Fordsy. He hadn’t heard Bill use that name in a while.

Deciding to ease into a conversation, Ford asked, “Beautiful flowers. Who gave them to you?”

Bill didn’t reply.

A bottle on the bedside table next to Bill caught his eye: alcohol. He isn’t sure what type it is, alcohol not exactly his forte; the bottle had a quarter missing, and how bad Bill’s state was depended entirely on its alcoholic percentage. Ford had never been in Bill’s presence when the boy drank, but he knew Bill brought alcohol with him when he’d stayed at Ford’s house. Bill had remained sober though, from what Ford could tell at the time.

“You’ve been drinking?”

An unmistakably sottish laugh. “Of course.”

Ford took a step forward and again, Bill yelled out, “Are you fucking deaf? Get the fuck out of here.”

The voice was too harsh; aggressive Bill had returned for an uninvited visit. Ford, as incisive as ever,
decided he first had to mollify the boy’s temperament. But how to go about it was beyond his expertise—drunk Bill was a stranger to him.

“What’s wrong?” Ford asked, hoping the concern in his voice was clear enough.

“Fuck off, Ford.”

“Don’t speak to me like that.” Ford said obdurately, not willing to be pushed around. “This is my room as much as it is yours. Could you please have some respect when you address me?”

“Respect? What are you going on about?” Bill’s back remained toward Ford, a harder edge having taken to his slightly slurred voice.

“Respect, Bill. The decency to talk to me without using crude language.”

“Who the fuck do you think you are?” Bill still hadn’t bothered to face Ford and it was beginning both agitate and worry him. “My father?”

“No. Asking for respect does not make me your father. Could you look at me when you speak to me?”

“Ford, you’re making me angry. You really do not wanna make me angry right now. Trust me.” Ford nearly wavered, but decided a temper tantrum would not intimidate him again.

“Bill. I’d like an apology. Please look at me when you’re talking to me.” Ford took a step forward and Bill finally turned his upper body towards Ford, a gold gun revealed to be in his left hand.

Oh no. It was one thing for Bill to be armed, another for the weapon to be out of its holster and within Bill’s hands—ready. Ford stepped back instinctively. Trigger happy, as usual. The boy hadn’t changed.

“Do you get it now? Leave, Ford.”

Although Ford’s self-preservation instinct lectured him, he couldn’t ignore the rush of concern for Bill. Shooting him in the hotel room would be incredibly unwise, even for someone as spoilt and well-connected as Bill. “Why are you drinking with a gun?”

“Why the fuck not?”

Squinting to get a clearer look at Bill’s face, Ford noted it was wet. Particularly around the eye area.

“Are you…Have you been crying?” Ford asked, unable to conceal the obvious worry in his voice.

“Nah, I rinsed my face—see? My hair’s wet too.” Bill tugged a strand of now very blonde hair. It was indeed wet as well. Not entirely convinced, Ford decided instituting further might provoke Bill.

“And you’ve been drinking.”

“Yeah…clearly. We covered that.” Bill stood up, facing Ford and the man instantly feared for his life. “You really don’t know when to do as you’re told, do you?”

Bill’s eyes narrowed, body swaying somewhat; he turned around, opened the ebony drawer behind him and dropped the gun in with a loud deliberate CLANK. Eyes once again on Ford, he shrugged, “So you won’t cry.”
Relief placated the dread that churned his stomach. So, Bill didn’t mean him harm with the gun—why did he have to it begin with, then? Had he been expecting someone other than Ford?

Ford tried approaching Bill again, but the boy again, reacted with hostility—teeth bared and voice gruff. Akin to a guard dog, Ford thought.

“Ford, do you want to die? Is that it? Just tell me, if you do. I will grant your death wish. With relish.” Bill sounded convincing, Ford willing to bet this was no bluff.

This attitude…Ford had an idea what could possibly be causing it.

“You’re still armed.”

Bill laughed, Ford knowing he was right. “What makes you say that?”

“A feeling. Are you?”

Out of nowhere, with a sleight-of-hand Ford lacked the experience to see, Bill produced a knife and dropped it with a charming smile, into the draw to join the gun. The meeting of two metals resonated another clanking sound.

Bill held both hands up at his side, palms facing Ford. “Happy?”

The knife—how often did Bill carry a knife around?

“Do you always carry a knife with you?” Ford inquired, wondering if Bill had been armed the entire time he’d been at Ford’s house.

“Yeah. Gun for offence, knife for self-defence or whatever…they never see it coming, element of surprise yada yada.” Bill waved a hand dismissively.

“Did you bring that knife when you were by me?”

“No.”

A surprise.

“Why not?”

“Uh? Didn’t feel the need to.” Bill replied, as if Ford had asked the stupidest question imaginable.

Didn’t feel the need to…? Bill didn’t see Ford as a threat, then. A faint sunbow cutting through the abysmal rain of their current circumstances; scraps but it was better than nothing.

“Why not?”

“Why are you asking this? I just said. I didn’t need to.” Bill sat down, visually annoyed by Ford’s questions. He attempted reaching for the alcohol bottle but gave up midway, his motor skills having taken the brunt of his drinking. The sudden inability to control his movements told Ford Bill had begun drinking recently enough for the alcohol’s effects to only begin setting in now.

“I can’t connect the dots for you, Bill. You’re smart enough to.” Ford took a step forward and this time Bill didn’t threaten him—proving his theory that being armed affected Bill’s aggression. He made it to the boy safely. Bill had calmed down tremendously once the weapons had been put away.

“You know I’m not going to hurt you. You already know that. Even if you don’t consciously realize
it.” Ford said, hoping his words provided some comfort because upon looking closer, he thought again, perhaps Bill had been crying.

Bill pulled a childishly disgusted face. “Do you ever talk like a normal fucking person?”

“Language.” He touched Bill’s face, the boy starving as always, leaned into it. “Do I get an apology?”

Bill defiantly shook his face out of the touch. “Make me.”

Ford said nothing. A divisive attitude should not warrant any reaction; attention normally being the desire outcome.

“Hey, come here.” Bill patted the bed behind him, spreading his legs. “Do you wanna…do something with me?”

“No, you’re intoxicated. What happened?”

“So what? Come on…” Bill reached for Ford but the hand remained empty, only Ford’s reluctant gaze sat upon it.

“You aren’t in your right mind.” Ford said, and Bill’s face softened. From where he stood, Ford could hear the change in Bill’s breathing, now no longer irregular and returning to an even pace.

“Yeah…I should’ve known…I should’ve known…you’d never…hey Ford…do you like my hair?” A spacey smile accompanied Bill’s innocent question, informing Ford the danger had passed.

Ford played with a blonde strand between his fingertips. “It looks good. Your outfit too. You were following me today, weren’t you?”

Bill watched Ford’s fingers in his hair, his eyes attempting to see too close and in, making the display more comical than intended. “Only for a little bit…”

Now wasn’t the time to lecture Bill on that. The boy didn’t appear to be feeling well. This time, Ford reached again for Bill’s cheek.

“You really…” Bill hesitated but could not resist. He grabbed the hand by his cheek, holding it as if it was what he desired the entire time. “I…I’m sorry. I really am.”

Ford knelt, so that he now looked up at Bill. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” Bill squeezed Ford’s hand and Ford now could not make sense of Bill’s sudden change. “What’s wrong?”

“Why do you think something’s wrong?”

“Tell me.”

“Over stupid stuff…”

“Tell me.” Ford pushed.

“No, it’s dumb…”

“Tell me, darling.” Ford said, knowing the pet name would have an effect.
“Ugh…a minor argument thing with Evan…over…I don’t know…”

“Talk to me about what happened. And tell me, why were you drinking with a gun? You could hurt yourself.” Ford wondered if Gaspard Giordano was turning in his grave at Bill’s display of weakness. For the son of a renowned crime lord, Bill let his guard down far too often.

“Not really…can’t shoot Dreamcatcher with one hand. Won’t work.”

“Dreamcatcher? The gun?”

“Yes…desert eagle. Can’t shoot it with one hand, not strong enough.” Bill laughed sadly. “Recoil would fuck up a suicide attempt, don’t worry.”

A suicide attempt… why was that the first thought to come to Bill’s mind?

“Hey…if you ever wanna kill me…Ford…use that gun, okay? Use that one.” Bill said adamantly, pointing sluggishly to the draw.

“Sssh. Tell me, what happened?”

“Ford, I’m horny…”

“Alcohol curbs sexual desire, Bill. Let me put you to bed.” Ford said sternly, not wanting to endure a drunken Bill any longer.

“It’s so early…” Bill fought against being moved.

“If it’s not too early for you to drink, it’s not too early for bed.” Ford’s hands lingered at Bill’s collar, unsure if he should undress Bill or not. With Bill’s pushy behaviour, it might end up escalating. “Are we still meeting your friends? You’re intoxicated. I doubt you’ll be going anywhere tonight.”

“I’ll…sober up…by then” Bill said, holding Ford’s hands. His eyes lazily moved to the bed behind him. “Flowers…oh right. I bought those for you…”

Such a gesture was unexpected but not unwelcome. When was the last time he’d been courted? Not with the intention to secure a good grade either; he’d had enough of that and had never encouraged such a thing to begin with. Kids. But this act was thoughtful, and a tad cliché but Ford would not complain.

Ford reached for them, giving them a once over, making sure Bill saw. “They’re beautiful. I didn’t expect you the type to court someone.”

“You’re special…the bag, too.” Ford checked the bag in question, and an extra-large bag of jelly beans lay hidden.

“You are…really something else.” Ford caressed Bill’s cheek in gratitude, the boy’s eyes going half-lidded and pleading for more. He gave a quick kiss of gratitude to Bill, careful to ensure the boy couldn’t reel him into going further.

Onto the alcohol; Ford took the bottle for inspection. Rum. The alcohol percentage was incredibly high and Bill had consumed quite a bit—would he truly sober up by evening? He returned to Bill to get to boy to lie down.

“I don’t…wanna go to bed.” Bill muttered weakly but submitted as Ford laid him carefully on the bed.
“I’ll lie with you for a while.” He took the spot next to Bill and pulled him closer. Bill nestled up to him, seeking further closeness.

“Now you can tell me what happened.”

“You…won’t get it.”

He wrapped his arms around Bill snugly, for protection and restriction, finishing with a kiss on the forehead. “Tell me anyway.”

“I got into an argument, kinda…with Evan.”

“Over?”

“Him taking advantage of me when I’m drunk. It’s…it’s dumb shit.”

Ford’s eyes widened, anger mixing in with his concern.

“What? No, tell me. Tell me what happened.”

“It’s a long story, Ford.”

“Tell me.”

“I…ah fuck it. I’ve always flirted with him, forever. I had…such huge crush on him for the longest time…” Bill squeezed Ford’s hand. “Then, recently, he kinda…started…hinting he liked me? Like…I mean, when I’d flirt with him, he’d sometimes jokingly flirt back. Yeah, weird to imagine but he can be surprisingly sly…anyway…”

So, Evan was Bill’s type? This information was interesting, considering Bill had mentioned Evan reminded him of his father. Ford mentally filed it away for potential future use.

“…We went on vacation, and…we had a threesome with someone, one of my other friends, and as he fucked her, he kept looking at me. But like, really looking, Ford. The kinda looking you do when you’re fucking someone. But he was looking at me. In the eye. I just—I don’t know. And again, when we fucked her a second time, he let me lick his face while we fucked her. He just…he fucking led me on.”

It sounded like soap opera drama. Alcohol gave Bill quite the loose tongue. What else could he ask Bill about? Was it wrong to take advantage of this?

“I just…ugh. I don’t know…and when we got back…he told me…uh…I had a nightmare, and he told me…I was an exception to the straight thing.”

“An exception?”

“Yeah, like he likes women but he’d make an exception for me kinda thing. It was weird…and I was out of it.”

“Did he…do something to you?”

“No no…we uh, nevermind. After that…I just…I kept begging him to fuck me. You had to see how he fucks, Ford. He fucks like he’s trying to kill you. It’s…it’s…the way he fucked her…god, I wished it was me. And then he said he would fuck me…but I had to be the only person I fucked and I said no, that’s lame…”
That surprised Ford. Bill had agreed to sleep with only him yesterday, but had denied Evan, who he’d known longer? The extent of Bill’s affinity for Ford had begun to come to light.

“Then I came to see you…and we started this thing. But..with you, it’s the first time I’ve been so sober..for days. Since I returned home. I confronted him about his fucked up behaviour and turns out, he was just manipulating me so I’d make the choices he wanted me to make. He doesn’t like me. Just using me, using what I told him…”

What had Bill told Evan?

“I’m confused. Elaborate further?”

“Uh…he thought if we were together, he could control my actions better. In regards to some drama that went down…he wanted to control me, I guess..somehow.”

“How old is Evan?”

“…5…years older.”

“So 27? He’s quite young. What exactly is he to you?”

“Kinda like…a guardian? He took care of me for a while…”

“Like a big brother?”

“No…a father…because…Kryptos was so young…so he had to be more…fatherly I guess?” Bill said, and Ford replied with a humming sound.

“Who’s Kryptos?”

“My little brother.”

“You have a brother?”

“Not a real one…”

How confusing.

“And you said you haven’t been sober…since you returned home?”

“Yeah…drinking…a lot. Always drinking.” Bill took a playful bite out of Ford’s shirt.

“Why?”

“Numbing…”

“Numbing?”

“Something like that…” Bill’s voice went quieter. “Remembering… stuff…”

“You don’t drink…”

“I don’t.” Ford confirmed, Bill still doing a number on his shirt with teeth.

“Gotta remember that…you don’t drink…not like…not like nonnino…”

“Who?”
“My grandfather.”

“Oh…” Ford nuzzled his nose in Bill’s hair, unsure of what to make of that comparison.

“Thought you were him…”

“What?” Ford couldn’t stop his voice from becoming louder, the shock amplifying it accidentally.

“Thought you were him for the longest time…” Bill rubbed his nose back in forth in Ford’s sweater. “Followed you to prove it…but…but we were together…the first time… knew it wasn’t—I know you wasn’t hi—uh, you weren’t him…”

So, this was why Bill had followed him originally? Ford could never have predicted this. This motive was far too obscure, and there was nothing to even hint at it.

“Why did you think I was him?”

“I don’t know…a little like him… only a little…” Bill’s breathing had begun to became irregular once again; Ford took to rubbing Bill’s back to calm him. “But I knew it wasn’t him…when I was with you. You’re…gentle…so gentle, Ford… and those six fingers…they’re real…they’re real…”

Ford frowned.

“Bill, if you thought I was your grandfather, why did you initiate a sexual relationship with me in the beginning?”

Bill continued to ramble, ignoring Ford’s question. “He’s dead…I thought…I thought he survived… I hadn’t seen him since I came back…he was…was gone. And thought he didn’t die in the fire…but I thought…I thought he took on a new identity…I thought it was you…it was you…but it’s not. You’re not him…not at all…”

“I was so…so…delusional. Outta my head, juiced up…I don’t know Ford…I was paranoid. Was so sure he was alive…dying so easily…didn’t seem possible…it didn’t…”

“Bill…why did you attempt to sleep with me if you thought I was him? Did you think if I rejected you, I was him?” Because he obviously wouldn’t sleep with Bill, and Ford was sure Bill was used to having his charm work on older men. Or men in general.

 “…Thought you were him…right until…right until…you were so gentle, Ford…definitely not him…”

“Not like…not like…maybe like…maybe the old him…maybe…sorry…I’m so tired…”

Ford swore he felt his heart slow and blood drop several degrees.

“Bill…are you implying what I think you are?”

Jumping to conclusions did more harm than good, but what Bill was saying…

It couldn’t be…?

“Bill…?”

Bill gave a deep sigh in response.

“Do you remember Fiddleford? Did you tell the truth?”
“Yes…Papa killed him…” Bill muttered and Ford pressed him to elaborate.

“Worked him up…guy went nuts…turned to drugs…yeah? That’s probably what happened…”

So, Bill hadn’t lied about it. But Ford was running on the assumption Bill never lied when drunk, and he had no evidence for that theory other than Bill’s rambling.

“So you remember when you thought I would have sex with you as punishment? Has that ever happened to you?” Ford asked, it was now or never and a better time wouldn’t come.

“…what? Punishment or for lying…?”

“Both.”

“Yeah I guess.”

Ford brushed his lips against Bill’s forehead, letting the information digest at its own pace. Pieces were falling into place but Ford did not want to think about it at all.

“By who? People in your line of work?”

“Oh man…no…no way. No one fucks a Giordano. Even the Chinese Mafia knew better than to touch me.”

“The Chinese mafia?”

“Yeah they nabbed me…long story…” Bill yawned softly.

“Then who?”

“You.”

“What?”

Bill didn’t reply.

“Bill…?”

“Mmmm?”

“I’m going to take care of you, okay?”

He pulled his lover closer, reeking of alcohol but it didn’t matter.

It didn’t matter.

He dreams, he’s standing in the House of Mirrors. His body, instead of a head, has a yellow, lopsided triangle. A black hole in the middle—meant to be an eye? There’s no pupil.

“Oops, hang on.”

Now it’s an equilateral.

“There we go. So I got a Q for you, kiddo.”

A question…?
“Yeah, pretty dull, aren’t you? But we’ll get back to that later. So, which came first? The chicken or the egg?” His reflection spins around, a sleek, black cane materialising in his right hand.

I don’t know…why?

“Okay Einstein, let’s try this another way. Which came first? Me, or you?” He knocks the cane against the mirror, giving the impression he’s trapped inside. The thought of him breaking through scares Bill, but he’s not sure why.

What…?

“I’ll give you a hint. A super hint!”

There’s something in his ear—

“It wasn’t me.”

(it wasn’t you either, but technically…the karma and all that, technically…you came first.)

He dreams the tattoo on his hand told him reality is an illusion.

He opened his eyes to shrill throbbing in his head; steady pulsating that he knows will fade quickly once he gets his shit together. Easier said than done. Still drunk, for sure, but less. An improvement, albeit a minor one. The room light seemed too bright, his sand-dry eyes needing more time to adjust. His lips feel swollen, too, like he’d participated in a cock-sucking marathon and won. Maybe he did…? Suck Ford’s cock for hours? Ha, as if the man would let him.

“Finally awake.” Ford’s voice, as deep and smooth as ever.

Bill sat up, and regretted it instantly; Ford’s voice the only saving grace of waking up.

“Time…?”

“5pm.”

“Ah…our party is at like...seven…” Bill muttered, getting a good look at Ford, who was dressed entirely for comfort. Those clothes could come off easily, Bill thought. Hopefully they would be coming off.

“Still feeling drunk?” Bill shook his head, noting Ford sat at his laptop, the screen reflecting a cluster of black in white in his oval glasses. His hidden eyes had Bill imagining them to contain a hunger that Ford felt the need to strategically conceal by use of his laptop.

“Oh yes…but not as bad. Yeowch.” With the gawkish grace of a new-born doe, Bill crawled over to where Ford sat, plopping his head in the man’s lap; uninvited, but no complaints came.

“Hi.”

Ford laughed and the sound is lovely against the awful internal rattling of his still drunken state.

“Well, hello to you, too.”

“Watcha doing? You’re unsupervised. Watching dirty porn? Lemme see…” Bill shifted to get a good look at screen, squinting to make out its contents. Words words words.

“Yikes, this is…oh wait. It might be porn after all, Mr erotic porn reader. Let me inspect this
potentially incriminating fap material…"

It was only some science article. Words Bill has never heard of tiled the screen, and he swore his headache intensified by their mere presence.

“Okay…nevermind.” He rolled his face backward, letting it now rest directly in Ford’s tempting and surprisingly soft crotch. “Don’t get any ideas, you pervert.” Less of a threat and more of an invitation, but alcohol inhibited his ability to tap into his charm and the words came out sounding revoltingly sincere.

“I wouldn’t dream of it, dear.” Ford said, Bill groaning disappointedly into his groin.

“Dammit, start dreaming. Dream hard.” Bill’s left hand wandered to Ford’s smiling face, feeling his lover’s profile to compile the features he felt within in his mind. Lack of deep wrinkles told Bill Ford was not a sun person. The indoor nerd. “Why does your dick area smell nice. Do you spray perfume here?”

“It might be laundry detergent.”

“Thank the lords for laundry detergent, lemme tell ya…” Bill muttered as he burrowed his nose into the material dead centre at his goal, eliciting nothing more than a shy laugh from Ford. Despite his face at Ford’s crotch, the man wasn’t hard in the slightest. What self-control….

Bill turned his head again, letting the back of his head lie in Ford’s lap, bringing Ford’s face into his vision. “Hey, what’s cookin’, good lookin’?”

Ford let a finger trail across Bill’s lips, the boy attempting to nip it every time it came close to his cupid’s bow. “I’m being bothered by a half-drunken man-child.”

Smacking away the molesting finger, Bill muttered, “Hey man, no need to be rude.”

Ford leaned in, seemingly for a kiss, but withdrew before making contact. “You reek of alcohol. I’ll run you a bath.”

“No wait…wait…wait…” Bill whined. “Let’s…have fun before I get clean. Or you clean me, or whatever you’re planning. Say you’re gonna clean me. Please.”

Ford frowned, laughter breaking his attempt at seriousness. “You’re still drunk.”

“Yes, yes I am. I am drunkish and I think Stanford Pine’s dick in my mouth is what this world needs right now.”

Ford pushed him off, escaping to the bathroom before Bill could nab him. The slippery eel… The loudness of water echoed throughout the room, and Bill moaned in defeat before considering that Ford might join him in the tub. So, that’s what the man had planned?

Ford sat with him as the water filled, his headache lessening with every calming stroke from Ford’s hand in his hair; the silence intimate, and every touch even more so.

It wasn’t much a mission getting Bill into the bath; Ford was strong and despite earlier complaints, Bill readily submitted to Ford’s wishes, allowing himself to be manoeuvred as Ford pleased. His clothes came off with caution, his eyes scrutinizing Ford’s face, still yearning for some form of desire, but no lewd thoughts seemed to flicker through.

Ford helped him into the bath, steadying the boy to the best of his ability. The water was hot but
bearable; Bill relaxed, letting it soak into his skin to begin its work to unravel the coiled tension throughout his body. Ford wielded the hand faucet, wetting Bill’s hair and then purposely spraying Bill in the face twice; Bill attempting revenge by splashing Ford only for the man to evade it with far too much skill. A kiss was offered to Bill as a truce, and he accepted—but not without silently swearing vengeance.

“Ford…”

“Yes?’”

“You better not touch my lovely hair with those cheap hotel products. My hair is bleached. It’s gotta be taken care of.” Bill waved a hand around, reminiscent of a spoilt prince; Ford not minding the bratty persona in the least. “So take care of it at once!”

“My special shampoo is at my drawer.” Bill informed, and Ford left to fetch it. “Conditioner too! My hair’s wavy! I need that conditioner!”

Ford returned laughing widely, the smile another notch in Bill’s belt. Making Ford smile was accomplishment, even if the man smiled often, a Stanford Pines smile never decreased in value.

Ford lathered up Bill’s hair while humming a soft, unrecognizable tune; Bill’s eyes closed, enjoying the pampering.

“Climb in with me…” Bill cooed, a finger rubbing across Ford’s skin enticingly.

“Hmmm not tonight.”

“Tomorrow night?”

“Tomorrow night.”

“You know what Ford? I give it a week.” Bill leaned his head back, Ford instinctively moving his right hand behind Bill’s head to lessen the hardness of the porcelain, and to support his neck. Bill’s eyes closed in satisfaction, knowing he was touching Ford.

“A week?”

“Before I’m in love with you and shit.”

“You really are drunk.”

“Hey, take this seriously.”

“A week, you say?” Ford curled the hand beneath Bill’s head gently, fingers lightly massaging Bill’s scalp. “You certainly move fast. You’d be right at home in a Shakespearean play.”

“Fuck the status quo. If I wanna declare my love for 2 weeks in, I god damn will. I do as I please.” Bill’s right hand crossed over to grip Ford’s benevolent arm loosely. “I watched you for…a long time too so…it’s fine.”

“You’re so…strange when you’re drunk.” Ford let his left-hand stroke Bill’s wet, flushed face. So much touching…this must be a dream.

“Good or bad?”

“Good. I like it. You’re still cute. They say when you’re drunk, your true nature comes out.”
“Oh yeah?”

“Apparently.”

“Totally gonna be in love with you…probably am already. Hey Ford, I totally love you.”

“You are incredibly drunk still.” Ford pinched his cheek; the skin slippery, Ford needing to attempt more than twice. “No doubts now.”

“Stanford Pines, let’s get married in Vegas.”

Ford could not stifle his laughter now. “You are ridiculous.”

“No. I’m smart. If we get married and I die, you inherit all my assets. And my line of work is tough…could die any time.”

Ford dunked Bill’s head underwater, immediately relenting once the top of Bill’s head broke the surface; shocking the boy but not harming him.

“You—you—you…I can’t swim, Ford!!” Bill gasped dramatically, the reaction reminding Ford of a cat being dipped into water.

Ford did his best to restrain his laughter, but his best wasn’t enough. He laughed, with Bill giving him the evil eye. “It’s a bath, Bill. You can’t swim?”

“No!” he breathed heavily, pulling himself together; he’s sure part of his spirit already moved into the afterlife. Once composed, he returned to resting his back towards Ford.

“We’re not even married and you’re already trying to kill me for the inheritance…” Bill muttered, and Ford pinched the boy’s cheek hard enough to warrant a yelp. A band-aid kiss was given to the reddened area, Bill accepting it with a pouty, displeased face.

“I’ll buy you a ring tomorrow okay?” Bill said. “And then I’ll pay you back for this attempt on my life…”

“If you say so.”

“Who’s taking who’s surname? Lemme be a Pines. Fuck my family.”

Ford leaned into the tub to kiss Bill, but as he pulled away, he found himself unable to, Bill’s hand holding him in place by the shirt. “Oh…more please. Encore. Encore, I do declare…”

Bill held Ford’s face as he kissed the man again, hands trying to gain access beneath the selfish clothes. Thoroughly denied, however, Ford ensuring Bill’s hands never reached their target.

“Gonna…kiss you to death…” Bill slurred. “When I’m sober…ask me. Ask me if I love you. Ask me.”

A solemn gaze fixated on at Bill. “The way you look at me sometimes…I can almost believe you love me.”

“Say that to me when I’m sober.”

“I will do no such thing.”

“Boo you. Love is, like, you don’t need years, or months or weeks…when it happens, it happens. It

“I don’t wanna go anywhere…let’s go to bed after this. Let’s just…talk. Forever…” Bill murmured dreamily.

“You shouldn’t neglect your friends now that you’re…seeing someone.” Ford hesitated at the end of his sentence but went ahead.

“So it’s official?” Bill sat up in the bath and reached for one of Ford’s hands. “I’m the luckiest man ever.”

“You are.” He squeezed Bill’s wet hand.

“Yes…everyone will interview me now, asking about my alleged relationship with Stanford Pines, the Einstein of our generation.” Bill kissed the hand, smiling stupidly.

“Be quiet Bill.”

“Make me.”

Ford silenced him with a deep kiss, hearts appearing by the boy in his mind. The heat fogged up his glasses and Bill decided to draw a heart in each frame—heart eyes.

“I love you, Ford…”

“It’ll be a long time before I return that.”

“I have an eternity…I’m…I’m…so fucking drunk. Holy shit…”

Bill went back to laying in the bath. He let the man know about the bath pillow in the cupboard, and Ford fetched it, propping it up behind Bill’s head.

“You know…I think love isn’t as deep as people think it is. I mean, why’s it only valid if you know someone like, months? Or years? Or whatever? I bet you could love someone sooner. I bet you could…I bet when you first see the person…you know…you just know if you’re gonna love them or not.” Bill mused loudly, Ford wiping his neck off with a sponge.

If Bill had thought Ford was his grandfather upon first seeing him, love at first sight could be true in their circumstances. It would be an entirely different sort of love, not the type Bill had just confessed. Something about that piece of information still sat crookedly with Ford.

“Love is subjective. What you’re speaking of now is society’s idea of love and its rules regarding when it’s acceptable to love and when it’s not.”

“Fuck rules. I’m telling you now, Ford…I really do love you.”

“I’ll believe you.” Ford flicked his nose. “You are the type to love simply out of spite towards rules.”

“Will you love me too?”

“I told you…that would take time.”

“Is it because I’m so young?”

“No. It’s not.” Ford patted his head.
“Am I what your heart desires?” Bill leaned towards Ford. “I could be your ingénue, Ford.”

“What?” Ford laughed, not understanding the reference.

“It’s a song.”

“Ingénue is not what I’d use to describe you.”

“I could be your ingénue. I am already, aren’t…I?” Bill tilted his head back on the pillow and closed his eyes. “I love being…yours.”

Yawning, Bill spoke further, “What changed your mind? About…making it…official?”

“Spur of the moment. Like you once said, you only live once.” Really, Ford wasn’t sure why he’d said that. Rubbish seemed to be pouring more often from his mouth whenever he was around Bill. A sense of eagerness to pacify the boy perpetually subconsciously drove his actions.

Pausing, with new realization, he continued. “You are difficult to handle. You know that, don’t you? I have to be far more assertive than I normally am, or even thought myself capable of being.”

He dipped a hand into the bath water, swirling it around.

“I think that’s what attracts me. I have to be better than I am to be with you. It’s a challenge, one I think is good for me.”

“So, you’re using me to improve yourself?” Bill said, with fake hurt.

“Yes.” Ford smiled, the hand grazing across Bill’s hipbone beneath the water, the surprise evident in Bill’s face, particularly the lips. An eyebrow arched in response too, the boy’s mind clearly wandering off onto less than pure tangents.

“You’re going to…regret this…”

“I already do.”

“Are you a masochist?” Bill opened his eyes, a mischievous twinkle in them as he awaited Ford’s answer.

“Be quiet, Bill.”

“Make me.” He moved closer to Ford, and graciously accepted his punishment of multiple kisses. He returned to laying back once he felt he’d been punished enough.

“I didn’t want to threaten you…with the gun, I mean. It…it wasn’t really my intention.”

“What do you mean?”

“I was drunk.”

“Being drunk doesn’t excuse your actions.” Ford said, ready to lecture Bill should he attempt to worm his way out of taking responsibility.

“No…that’s—that’s not what I mean…I mean…uh…”

“Elaborate then.”
“Don’t rush me! Sheesh!” Bill scoffed. “I mean…I was drunk and…wasn’t feeling well. I had to be careful…I was…scared? A little scared…And really drunk. I can sound pretty soberish when I’m drunk with lots of effort. Practice practice practice makes perfect.”

Ford frowned. “If you’re implying what I think you’re implying…you were scared because alcohol makes you vulnerable?”

“Yeah…it’s just—you know how it is, yeah?”

“You’ve been vulnerable plenty of times around me. Now for instance.”

“Yeah but…there’s a difference between you fucking me until I’m lovey dovey and me being drunk out of my mind.” Bill said. “When you’re drunk…you don’t remember stuff. You don’t remember what happens to you, whether you said yes or no…and there’s nothing you can do about it.”

Ford reached for Bill’s hand. “I’m never going to take advantage of you.”

“Yeah you’ve demonstrated that as per earlier, Mister hero.” Bill said. “You know…I kind of…knew you wouldn’t agree to do anything while I’m drunk. But still…I…well, I like thinking about it.”

“Why?” Ford moved behind Bill and sunk both his hands into the water, letting them lace at Bill’s chest; Bill’s hands coming to rest atop them.

“It’s exciting. Hell, as you helped me in the bath…I imagined you seeing me naked and dragging me to the bed to fuck me because you’re sick of waiting. You hold me down and fuck me.”

“I don’t recall seeing you get hard when I helped you into the bath.”

“Yeah well, I didn’t think very graphically, I guess.”

“You have those thoughts of me often? Forcing myself on you?”

“All the time. It’s a favourite of mine.”

Ford wasn’t entirely surprised, considering what Bill had told him earlier, although it seemed Bill didn’t remember their conversation. Good. He was sure Bill would act out if he knew Ford had asked him such personal questions during an intoxicated state.

“If that’s what you prefer, how are you satisfied with me now?” Ford’s voice seemed closer, Bill realizing Ford’s lips were at his ear now. He turned his head to meet Ford’s face, smiling as he got an eyeful.

“I like diversity.”

“I understand that, but you don’t complain very often about it. So far, it’s only been regarding my lack of interest in actual sex.” Ford’s fingers entwined with Bill’s. “If it was something you loved, you wouldn’t tell me I was the best, or even be able to tolerate me so long.”

Ford gave a small kiss at Bill’s ear. “Instead, you love what I do. And have only ever asked me for sex.”

“Eh, maybe I just know you won’t roleplay that with me.”

“You know I won’t sleep with you but that doesn’t stop you from pressuring me.”
Bill gave a slight shrug.

“How did you feel? When you imagined me forcing myself on you?”

“Told you. Excited. And a little scared. Thrilled.”

“How? This was strange; fantasies shouldn’t bring about feelings of apprehension.

“Yep.”

“Do you ever touch yourself to these thoughts?”

“I haven’t touched myself in ages.” Bill laughed as if he’d told a world-class joke, leaving Ford confused. “Can’t stand it.”

“And you called me names for not touching myself.” Ford pretended to be upset, but his smile made his deception wholly unconvincing. “Any particular reason why?”

“Nah. It’s just…disgusting. Right now, I don’t know.” Bill’s eyes dropped, and Ford wrapped his forearms around Bill’s neck and shoulders carefully. Bill did his best not to childishly squeal in delight.

“You know…I’m starting to consider these aren’t fantasies of yours but rather intrusive thoughts.”

“Intrusive thoughts?”

“I’ll talk to you about them when you’re sober.” Ford let go and moved to the tub’s side, a hand quickly moving to cradle Bill’s cheek. “I think…if I’m right…and considering all things…you and I might be more compatible than I realize.”

“Huh? Hey, you can’t say that and not explain it to me! Tell me. Tell me…tell me how we belong together.”

“What do you think of what we do? In the bedroom? Are you satisfied? Do you like it?”

Bill took hold of the hand at his face and rubbed against it. “You’re the best I’ve ever had.”

“If that was true, despite me not fulfilling any of your fantasies, the only option left is that the fantasies in question are not fantasies.”

“You sound like a doctor. It’s creepy…like Doctor Lecter. Oh, are you gonna eat me, Ford…?” Bill licked his lips, bedroom eyes turning on at will.

“I am one.” Ford pulled a strand of blonde hair. “Did you forget, Clarice?”

“Yeah not that kind of doctor tough, smart ass.” Bill pinched his cheek, wetness living its glistening mark. “I still don’t get it…and if anyone’s Clarice here, it’s you.”

“When you’re sober.” Ford rubbed his wet hair. “I’ve never been rough with you and I’m never going to. Are you okay with that?”

Bill’s features contracted, thinking hard on Ford’s words. An assenting smile came. “I am.”

“I thought so.”

“Never say never though…I bet you will, be rough every now and again. I’m sure of it.” Bill let go
of the hand he held and pulled at the front of Ford’s sweater. “I got my cake, and I’m gonna fucking eat it, too.” It was only a matter of time before he convinced Ford to try more hardcore activities.

Ford’s hands idly explored Bill’s wet hair, ignoring the boy’s future plans. “Why do you like those fantasies? Tell me again.”

“Nice to let go. The usual. Why don’t you like them?”

“Because disrespecting your autonomy does not arouse me in any shape or form.”

Bill rolled his eyes dramatically. “You take everything so seriously.”

“What kind of man would I be if doing that to you excited me?”

“Judgemental, aren’t ya?” Bill grabbed the hand in his counting the fingers within his mind. “You say things I hate. But they always make me happy. How about you explain that, Doc?”

“It’s a mystery.” Ford smiled, thinking once again, that Bill didn’t truly want what he thought he wanted.

“Did your previous relationships happen like our one?”

“No. I was younger back then. I didn’t know what I know now.”

“Huh…hey, why did you and your ex-boy never fuck?” Bill tapped his fingers on the tub’s side while waiting for an answer.

“He struggled with personal issues regarding it.”

“So…it had nothing to do with you and your reluctance? Seriously?”

“No…” But years later, he’d sought to justify his familiar reluctance any way possible.

“What the hell, Ford?! Whatever issue that guy had, they rubbed off on you. Let’s face the facts, you’re too open-minded and weird to not want to try it.”

Ford looked away. “I can’t argue with you.”

“Will you think about it?”

“I have been thinking about it.” Ford’s eyes returned to Bill, inspecting the boy’s reaction.

“He liked it soft and slow, huh? Didn’t wanna get too primal?”

“…Yes.”

“Your first boytoy taught about tender loving care.” Bill drew shapes in the bubbled surface of the water. “Let me teach you about the darker side—what do you say?”

Bill continued, “I think…you’d like quite a lot of what I’d like to do with you. You’re an open-minded guy, Ford.”

“Not open-minded enough to a fault of my brain falling out.” Ford joked.

“Ha! I’d love to fuck you silly, so it’s as if your brain metaphorically fell out.” Bill leaned towards Ford and slipped a wet hand into his shirt. “Take your shirt off.”
“Bill…”

“Just do it.”

Ford complied easily. Bill sat upright to wrap his arms around Ford’s neck, getting Ford slightly wet. He nuzzled at Ford’s ear, moving into the warm, forever comforting crook of the man’s neck.

“How could I not love you…? You’re so…so…you’re the best.” Bill murmured at Ford’s ear, the man stroking his hair in approval.

“What was your last relationship like, Bill?” Ford slipped his hands around Bill.

“Never had one.”

“So I’ll be your first?” He tightened his arms around Bill until they were in a close-knit embrace.

“That sounded weird. But I’ll be your first, if we fuck.”

They broke the intimate embrace, Ford guiding Bill to lie back again. Bill instantly lolled his head back, and met Ford for a kiss. It lasted longer than the others, Bill pulling back to moan the man’s name.

“No, Bill…don’t do that. You’re…”

“Getting heated up? Oh Ford…Ford…” Bill purposely persisted.

“I can’t…maybe later.”

“Fine fine…. leave your shirt off so I can have easy access to your chest.” He asked shamelessly, Ford not denying the request.

“Hey Ford…I think I might have to kill Evan.”


“It’s…well, if he’s capable of that, he’s capable of a lot more.”

“Elaborate.” Ford handed Bill the soap, Bill accepted it and began lathering up his arms.

“Remember that story I told you on the phone before Christ was born? Like hundreds of years ago?”

“It wasn’t that long ago, Bill.” Ford smiled anyway. “I remember. That was…quite the tale.”

“That happens. And there’s no way gangs have that many raging bisexuals and gays, yeah? Basically, straight guys do that shit.”

Ford frowned. “Are you implying you think Evan might force himself on you?”

“That’s—well, it’s not that black and white, but kinda. That would…nobody fucks the boss, okay? Boy, do I hate that rule but people are simple minded.” Bill said. “I don’t care about rules, and I even offered to let him fuck me because I really want it, but not anymore. No way in hell. I just—have a bad feeling lately. You ever get that?”

“All the time.”

“And imagine having someone close to you so often who was potentially capable of that shit?”
Ford cleared his throat.

“Really, Ford?” Bill splashed water at him.

“I was joking, but I haven’t forgotten what you did at your office.”

“I was fooling around.” Bill grumbled. “And you remember what I told you, right? I said…we’d fuck, and it would happen the way you wanted it to and Voila, look where we are now.”

“Come here…” Ford moved closer and Bill wrapped his arms around him again. “Only you get to fuck me…” He planted kisses everywhere his lips could reach, Ford not resisting them.

“Ford…”

“Yes?”

“You really are the best…”

Ford kissed him in the neck; Bill hoping it exchanged more than just affection.

- 

Ford turned on the shower and helped Bill climb out; still wobbly and dizzy.

He waited with a towel as Bill rinsed off. When Bill turned to face him, the gushing water droplets, for those few moments only, resembled tears perpetually spilling from Bill’s eyes.

Jolting him from his fantasy, Bill pulled him in under the water, kissing him while peeling off his clothes in a hurry. He gave up, and they continued to kiss, Bill eventually washing Ford off to the best of his drunken ability.

The remainder of their time was spent with Bill in Ford’s arms, cuddling into the crook of his neck as Ford stroked his hair, the warm water continuing to blanket them.

Ford couldn’t get the image of Bill crying continuously out of his mind.

Bill had chosen to wear a charcoal suit, a pitch-black shirt beneath and a bright yellow tie that harmonized with his now fully blonde hair. Ford didn’t bother dressing up, and Bill had no complaints about it.

“Why do you dye your hair blonde?” Ford asked, as he watched Bill straighten out his tie once more; nothing less than meticulous was always given to Bill’s appearance.

Moments like these, purely superficial mind you, had Ford thinking how lucky he was to be with someone this attractive. Another thought came unexpectedly, something he’d overheard once or twice—it was always the beautiful ones that were crazy.

Bill was rather crazy; Ford wouldn’t deny that. He fit the stereotype well—attractive, allegedly kinkier in bed than Ford and insane to an extent.

Grinning with an eyebrow arched, he sauntered to Ford, leaning in for a kiss that never came. Instead, he took to circling Ford—Ford’s heart jittering at every slow step. From behind, Ford’s glasses were taken, set in the pocket of Bill’s blazer and at once, Ford’s eyes were covered with a hand; while Bill’s other hand hooked itself at the crook of Ford’s inner thigh, where it came to meet the groin. The hand rubbed up and down once before nails sunk in to claim what belonged to Bill.
Cipher. Matching the rhythm of his hands, Bill grinded into Ford until he felt the man’s body respond, and then finally replied, “Blondes have more fun.”

“Look who’s the one getting excited…” he took Ford’s ear into his mouth, hand still caressing the responsive area; Ford held the frisky hand at the wrist, letting it continue. “Want me to stop, Ford?” A reply never came, stolen by Bill’s lips.

With open eyes, he kissed Ford; the man accepting, with closed eyes.

They separated, Ford’s cheeks tainted a darker pink than usual—to become shy, at Ford’s age? After everything they’d done? It excited Bill. Ford had to be broken in and won over every time.

“My carnal knowledge is second to none. I can’t wait to teach you, Ford. I can’t wait to show you how deep you can get into someone—figuratively and literally.” Was all Bill said before taking Ford into his mouth, the man entirely unprepared. Dexterous hands had undone his pants without him noticing.

Ford came in Bill’s mouth, with nails tearing painfully into his lower back skin—the sound from his lips could’ve come from either intense sensation. As he felt his orgasm die down, Bill took his mouth, a warm mucus substance travelling between them—his own leavings. He did his best not to push Bill away, the grip at his neck telling him to swallow or else. He obeyed, swallowing and letting Bill’s tongue force itself in to ensure a job well done.

“Now…” Bill’s thumbnail tugged at Ford’s lower lip. “Let me fuck your mouth. On your knees, if you please, Fordsy.”

“Take care of me, won’t you? Just like you said you would…”

Bill ravishes his mouth, hips moving harshly—he’s barely able to keep saliva from running at the sides of his mouth; lewd words pour from Bill at a quicker pace than the oozing concoction of drool and Bill’s pre-cum. Something about ‘fucking Ford’s throat’ is heard and then Bill is pushing too deep into him; he’s choking and Bill’s moaning, pulling his hair and it feels as though the intention is to choke him.

He swallows, Bill holding his head firmly in place. His eyes are leaking, and Bill licks at the wetness as he reprimands the boy for his roughness.

“You might want to wash your mouth out unless you want to spend the rest of the night tasting like my dick.” Is all Bill said in response to Ford’s lecture.

The elevator was nearly close to their destination. The supposed party was being held at an apartment complex not far from the hotel.

“Hey, when we’re with my friends, no lovey dovey stuff, okay? No cuddling, no kissey kissey nonsense—nada. Capiche?” Bill said, watching as the level number increased.


“No. It’s not that. Just not in front of my friends, yeah?”

“I understand.” Ford pulled him closer, giving a kiss to his neck. “That side is reserved for me.”

“Are you trying to excite me? You shouldn’t be doing that.” Bill looped fingers into Ford’s belt hoops. “I’ll give it to you, if you aren’t careful.”
“Remind me we need to talk afterwards, about me funding your project. The one my father would’ve, had you accepted the deal.”

“You don’t have to.” Ford said, flattered but not looking forward to being in Bill Cipher’s debt.

“I’m interested in it.”

“If alternate universes are real, Ford, don’t you want to know who we are in other worlds?”

“Maybe there’s one where we’re the same age, and fucking like rabbits.” Bill chuckled and Ford rolled his eyes at the simple-mindedness.

“Hey…got any photos of what you looked like when you were younger?” Bill asked, looking at Ford’s face.

“A few. Would you like to see them when we get back home?”

“Oh yes…definitely…”

The elevator opened. They walked until Bill stopped at a door that was alike all the rest of the doors on the floor.

He pushed the door open, his palm bearing the triangle with one eye, leading the way.

Chapter End Notes

Keep listening.
Once Upon A Time In Chinatown

Chapter Summary

When Kryptos thinks of Bill, the poem Hollow Men by T.S Elliot comes into his mind.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Violence, rape attempt.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The man hurts and hurts and hurts him, with 6 fingers and the tattoos of his dearly beloved family. Are you really Ford? Are you really Ford? Ford says of course.

Alternate Universe: Bill Cipher connects with the wrong Stanford Pines.

Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us-if at all-not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

-The Hollow Men, T.S Elliot

Not all Once Upon A Times ended with a Happily Ever After. Kryptos was certain his family wouldn’t have had a happy ending, but surely it would’ve been more fulfilling if Bill Cipher hadn’t written himself into the story.

Whenever introspection took him, Kryptos likened his life more to a Shakespearean tragedy; a comedy people mistook for a tragedy. A tragedy people mistook for romance. Romance people mistook for comedy.

The more he thought about it, the more he considered that Bill Cipher’s, the ever-elusive highwayman, involvement was unavoidable.

Like his grandfather always said, one must be like water, and take the path of least resistance.

It took Shoi-ming too many years to understand that.

But he understands it now.

And he understands, too, that if one is bitten by a snake, one must suck the poison out.

Yet, not all snakebites contain venom. With some snakes, the damage is entirely in the bite itself.
Bill Cipher is the former.

Venom too insidious to detect, and a bite far too gentle to feel.

But a snake can only do what’s in its nature, as will Bill Cipher.

Bill delivered several loud knocks to the door while sending Ford coy side-smiles that revealed his dimples—those little dents that Ford had begun to consider not only irresistible, but one of Bill’s finest weapons when it came to persuasion. Specifically, the persuasion of Stanford Pines. It was the little things that attracted Ford the most, but having an eye for detail now left him at a disadvantage.

Not being able to resist, Bill snuck his left hand into Ford’s right, seeking a quick bout of intimacy before others came into the picture. Ford humoured him, and they held hands.

Barely any time had passed before Bill’s impatience had him trying the door, finding it unlocked. He barged in while releasing Ford’s hand simultaneously, quickly distancing himself. Ford followed him and he announced his presence with a brash, “Police! Hands in the air!”

Among the room’s occupants, only one was fooled: a short, dark-haired boy who tripped over his own feet as he ran to the back of the apartment. Ridicule came for him with loud debasing words youngsters tended to be fond of. A quick scan of the impressive room revealed only young men. Vulgarity would naturally always be present in the company of young men.

This was an expensive apartment complex, Ford noted. Larger than average, and incredibly well decorated.

Bill laughed too loudly. “Joshua? You dumb fuck. You always fall for that.”

Losing interest in the boy’s humiliation, Bill returned to the introductions.

“Guys, I introduce to you: Stanford Pines! In the flesh!” Bill announced, the accent he let slip every now and again came through unfiltered. A harsher, nastier quality now overlaid his words, one Ford was unfamiliar with. A bad feeling overcame him, inevitably setting the tone for the rest of the evening.

As Bill sought to continue, the boy from before rushed towards him, hugging him at the torso. A closer look revealed him to be short in both stature and weight, Ford would put him at 5’2, and incredibly frowzy. Bones stood out proudly at his ribcage, courtesy of a surprisingly low V-neck revealing ample skin in the front. It looked more like women’s clothing; Ford wouldn’t put it past the boy, considering the overall vibe he gave out. Dumpster-diving couldn’t be far off on this boy’s list of hobbies, the smell a testament to that.

“BOSS BOSS BILL BILL” he mumble-screamed, much to Bill’s chagrin. Pure disgust disfigured Bill’s face in a way Ford had never seen before. As if realizing whose eyes were on him, Bill’s face morphed, taking on a more attractive, annoyed expression. Ford frowned; as usual, Bill was overly appearance-orientated.

Bill appeared comically distraught, arms flailing out as they attempted to escape any potential contact with the slovenly boy. “Why are you touching me? Why is this happening right now? Get your hands off me, Joshua. You smell like week’s old piss at a truck stop bathroom.”

Fighting the boy off didn’t affect his enthusiasm in the least, he continued to cling to Bill with new found devotion; Bill too disgusted to push the boy off himself. Chuckling, Ford distanced himself, not eager to endure the boy’s repulsive smell any longer.
“Someone clean this kid up, please. Teeth, go run a bath for this guy.”

Another taller and larger boy came to pull the boy called Joshua off.

“You guys let this fucker run around smelling like a decade old cumbox. Do I have to do everything around here?” Bill spat out, cringing as he inspected his clothes for damage.

“Does he smell like cum or like piss? Which is it?” A young man seated on the far-end beige couch asked, calling Ford’s eyes to him. Around Bill’s age, possibly, and African-American. Well-dressed, similar to Bill but less formal. Features of his face were slightly obscured by the distance, leaving him a mystery.

Bill showed him the middle finger and walked further into the lounge area, pulling Ford along with embittered force. His mood had clearly soured and Ford could not fix it with a few tender touches here and there—Bill’s no-affection rules remained in place and Ford would respect them.

“So we’ll start with—”

“Heyo!! There’s the guy we’ve been hearing about!!” A deep voice greeted them enthusiastically from behind. Both Ford and Bill turned towards a young man emerging from one of the other rooms. Shorter than Ford himself, with dark skin and hair. A too-sweet smell hit Ford and he realized the man wore an extensive amount of cologne, enough to taint the area around him. The man was no doubt attractive…strong but peculiar features. Bill had a knack for picking them strange. Tattoos on both hands, Ford spotted, as the boy offered a hand. A closer look defined them as 8 balls.

“This is 8ball.” Bill said proudly, wrapping an arm around him. Seeing Bill smiling while next to a friend made Ford glad they’d come. Heaven’s knew the boy need to connect with his friends more. Perhaps then he wouldn’t be so clingy.

“His real name is Jason, since I think you might be a little too old to be interested in hip, edgy nicknames.” Bill said. He was right, Ford thought. Epitaphs of this nature were a silly concept he’d rather not concern himself with.

“Moving on…Paci-fire. Alexander. Or just Alex.”

The young man named Paci-fire didn’t shake his hand, instead choosing to offer a casual nod and salute. He held a quiet confidence, shown in his posture, that Ford thought verged on arrogance as his light eyes roamed across Ford with judgement. The smirk that tugged at his lips further supported Ford’s opinion. “I’m a big fan of you, Stanford Pines. It’s quite the honour to meet you.”

“Oh?” Ford asked, not expecting any of Bill’s friends to be familiar with his work.

“I’ve read some of your papers. I was actually the one Bill got your work from.” Paci-fire leaned forward to get a better look at Ford, allowing the other man to do the same. “Mind signing some of your work for me some time?”

“How flattering… I don’t mind at all.” Ford smiled bashfully at the underhanded praise. Bill had intellectuals in his gang. This was more than unexpected. An intellectual gangster…then again, the way Bill had described his gang, it had sounded more like a club, as he’d mentioned previously to Bill himself.

A playful tug at Ford’s hair from the back had him turning around to face a tall woman with short, flashy pink hair. She towered over Ford and over Bill, too. Her heels were high, but even without them, her height would by far exceed even Bill’s. (who was not that much taller than Ford, anyway)
“If it isn’t Stanford Pines!”

“This is Pyronica, Veronica, or just call her Ronnie.” Bill rested an arm on Ford’s shoulder as Ford offered his other hand in courtesy. She laughed, taking it with both her hands. Callouses decorated her hands—implying she worked with them often.

“No need to be shy, honey. I’ve seen you naked.”

“I uh…” Ford looked at Bill who shrugged innocently.

“Bill carries naked photos of you in his pocket. Tell’em, Bill.” Both Veronica and Bill broke out into mischievous grins. Bill bit his bottom lip and Ford wondered where his mind was wandering, and if it had wandered into the gutter. (it obviously had, the dark glimmers of lust too obvious for Ford to ignore)

“It’s true. In case I gotta rub one out on the fly.” Bill said, and Ford was unable to tell if it was a joke or not. Then again, Bill had claimed he never touched himself.

“You actually look a little different to the photos. Maybe cuter, even. I wonder.” She smiled slyly, looking at Bill, who mirrored her smile. Their synchronization began to make Ford uncomfortable but already, Bill was dragging him away to the next person.

Evan sat seated in what appeared to be the main chair of the lounge. Dressed in a plain black suit and an out of character smile on his face. The scar was as eye-catching as ever, reminding Ford it was the same one Bill’s father had worn. Or so Bill had said.

“You know Evan…but we call him Xanthar.”

“It’s good to see you again, Ford.” Evan said, offering a smile that under any other circumstance, Ford would’ve deemed suspicious. The warm welcome was unexpected, considering how aloof the man had been when he’d first met; the affable display so out of character. Bill’s earlier story popped into Ford’s mind, and he still had trouble imagining this man would have done those things.

Xanthar stood and removed Bill’s coat, leaving to place it on the coat rack. Bill tugged on Ford’s coat, pulling it off him and following Xanthar. Ford watched curiously as Bill hung it with care, paying no heed to Xanthar at his side. He spent seconds fixing his already perfect appearance, before returning to Ford.

Grinning, he beckoned no one in particular to come closer, and on command, the young boy who’d pulled Joshua from Bill came forward.

“And Teeth, our biggest disappointment. Jeremy, if you wanna get personal.”

Fairly chubby but not cause for concern. Light brown unkempt hair and a plain face. Of all of them, he stood the most as being the odd one out, lacking the confidence or strangeness the rest did. He greeted Ford shyly, apparently flustered with red cheeks. Bill leaned in and whispered that the boy had a crush on him but before Ford could respond, Teeth escaped to the furthest side of the room.

Bill laughed quietly in Ford’s neck; an adoring sound that had Ford joining him. The laughter stopped as Bill’s eyes wandered to the kitchen; in the back, stood another young man. Only the dark blue of his suit was visible as he appeared to be working on something. Bill seemed entranced. “Be right back, Ford. There’s someone else you have to meet.”

Bill left, and Paci-fire came forward, asking to discuss a paper Ford had written quite some time ago. He agreed but they barely spoke before Bill returned with the boy in question.
“This is my brother, Kryptos.” A young Asian boy, possibly early teens, stood next to Bill. Much shorter, but donning the similar fashion sense to Bill. Where Bill favoured yellow, he appeared to favour grey and blue.

“Brother?” Ford asked, not understanding until memories of Bill’s confession earlier returned.

“Unofficial brother. Kryptos, Cipher—you get the idea. His name real name is Jerry. Isn’t he just as cute as the real Jerry?”

Ford appeared not to get the reference and Bill clarified. “The mouse. Tom and Jerry. Don’t let his cuteness fool you, he can be quite the party animal.”

The boy smiled shyly, eyes roaming to Bill’s face every time Bill looked away from him. He turned his attention to Ford.

“Hi, it’s nice to meet you, Stanford…Pines? Where have I heard that name before…?” Kryptos asked. Matching his appearance, he had gentle voice that was confident but not overwhelming. The boy reminded him of Bill, when Bill and himself were alone.

Paci-fire waved behind Ford, and Kryptos understood immediately. “Oh, Alex had stuff by you, I remember now…you’re a big name in Science, aren’t you?”

“I am yes. How old are you? If you don’t mind me asking.” Ford asked, and Kryptos smiled at the interest taken in him.

“I’m 16 now.”

“Oh you’re very young…” Too young. Was Kryptos still in school? Ford would have to ask Bill about this.

“What are you doing with Bill…? If you don’t mind me asking, Mr Pines.”

“Please, just call me Ford. We’re…acquainted.” Ford said. Kryptos’s politeness was a breath of fresh air. If only Bill could pick up the habit.

“Intimately.” Bill added.

“Why?” Kryptos asked, addressing Ford only, voice suddenly hard and forceful.

Surprised at the sudden change in the boy’s demeanour, Ford answered. “Why? I—it just happened I suppose.”

“Things don’t just happen when it comes to Bill, Mr. Pines.”

“He asked me to join. I declined and here we are.” Ford said. Kryptos gave a soul-stabbing stare; Ford assumed he didn’t approve of the age difference.

“Well, that’s enough out of you…” Bill tightened the arm around Kryptos, dragging him away. “Excuse me, Ford, I have to talk to my little bro.”

“Let’s talk.” Bill pulled Kryptos into an unoccupied room—Kryptos’s bedroom. The excessive blue of the room soured Bill’s already bad mood.

“So, Jerry Jerry Jerry. You miss me, yeah? So, explain yourself.”
Kryptos sighed. “I don’t want to fight.”

“No one said anything about fighting.” Bill leaned his back against the door. “Surprised you’re hosting this.”

“Evan decided to host it here, to ensure I came, even though I already agreed to it…”

“Ahaha, listening to Evan but not to me, huh?” Bill laughed, and banged his palm against the door. The sound startled Kryptos, and he stepped back; Bill’s laughter the backing track to each step.

“So…you let Josh sit in jail huh? Or was it you set him up? I forgot.” Bill walked behind Kryptos, the boy flinching and avoiding physical contact as though Bill were aflame, and took a seat on the bed.

“It wasn’t like that. Joshua has been taking meth again and has been out of his mind. He was arrested for breaking into his neighbour’s apartment with claims Nigerians were coming to kill him.” Kryptos said, tapping on the nearby dresser, face annoyed and tired.

“Yikes…wait. Meth? He knows how I feel about drugs.” Bill unbuttoned his blazer, getting comfortable on the bed.

“That didn’t stop him. It also didn’t stop him from making up lies to Evan.”

Bill let out a chipper hum. “So…you haven’t been claiming I’m dead?”

“It’s…it didn’t happen like that.” Kryptos frowned. “I can’t believe you’d even believe that for a second. I’d never turn against you. You’re…” He sighed. “It’s good to see you again, Cas.”

“Is it? How long are you going to deceive yourself, kid?” Bill said. “Do you even know how you feel anymore?”

Bill patted his lap and Kryptos scoffed, rolling his eyes.

“Is it puberty? Your balls drop?” Bill added. “Your emotions getting all mumbled? I remember when I had my first wet dream…”

“I’m not the one who has issue with their emotions.”

“Ha. I heard you’re mad about not getting invited to the Shore.” Bill took out his silver cigarette holder.

“I was. You know I love the beach.”

“Cry me a river, kid.” Bill grinned, searching for his lighter.

“Why do you always have to be such an asshole? And no smoking in my room.”

Bill stopped his search and put away the holder. “Fine.”

They were silent, until Kryptos spoke up. “Where did it go wrong between us?”

“It was always wrong, kid.” Bill said. “That’s what you’re really thinking.”

“What is with you Asians and family shit? It’s like you wanna re-enact some kung-fu film where you hold a grudge or 10 years and then finally get revenge.” Bill crossed his legs. “You’ve always hated me, and I’ve always hated you.”
“Love is hate standing on its head.”

Bill said nothing.

“I forgive you, you know. I’ve gotten over it. I’m not blaming you anymore.”

Bill remained quiet, face unreadable.

“Time away from you made me realized…well, I guess… I don’t know.”

“I’m putting this behind us. I want a normal life.” Kryptos considered sitting next to Bill, but it seemed too risky. “I made a comment, a selfish one, saying you’re dead to me…”

“So, this isn’t about trying to take over?”

“No. I—I can’t even make one dumb comment without being called a traitor?” Kryptos said. “I…I wanna quit. I just…I just wanna go to school, like a normal kid.”

“A normal kid huh? Wanna elaborate? You have dreams now?” The lack of Bill’s anger at Kryptos wanting to quit had the boy worried. It implied when Bill lost it, it would be even uglier than it usually was. Bottling up his rage meant the result would be twice as bad.

“I want to be an architect. I spoke to Evan about it already. He said he’d help me, but I had to first get your permission.”

“So…thug life not for you kid?” Bill laughed, Kryptos joining him. The tension softening even if only for a few seconds.

“If you quit, who’s going to take care of you? I pay for everything.” Bill hummed.

“I…that’s why I’m asking. Can I?”

“You want me to let you go study and still financially support you? That’s what you’re asking me?”

Kryptos nodded, shame pricking him at ever head tilt.

“Well, what have you done for me lately? That you think you can get up here and make these outrageous requests of me! Outrageous, Jerry.”

Kryptos said nothing, avoiding eye-contact.

“You say I’m dead to you and then you stand here and ask me ‘Bill, please buy me everything and anything!’ Corpses can’t buy shit, Jerry.” Bill said, the other boy still refusing to meet his eye.

“Why was I the only one left behind?”

“Keyhole was too.”

“Yeah but he’s gross. Of course you wouldn’t want him in your lavish and posh mansion.”

“Yeah he is pretty gross.”

Their eyes locked and both boys laughed.

“Why an architect?”

“You shouldn’t even be asking me that. You know I’ve been collecting photographs of buildings
forever.”

“Yeah, thought that was just a hobby. You fawning over how romantic the designs of fucking infrastructure are. God, that was always creepy.” Bill pulled a face. Belittling Kryptos might persuade the boy to give up—he was soft like that.

“It’s more than that, you wouldn’t understand. Our infrastructure tells so much abo—"

Bill quieted him with a dismissive wave.

Ford’s offer came into Bill’s mind. If Ford had offered it to Kryptos, the boy would’ve been over the moon.

“Hey, Stanford’s been offering to tutor me, for further education. If you want, I can talk to him.” Bill offered. “You haven’t been to school, but I bet with Ford’s help, you’ll get your GED before you hit 18.” He stood up, ignoring the apprehension in Kryptos’s eyes and rubbed the back of the boy’s neck. “What do you say? Wanna come back with me?”

Sceptical, Kryptos evaded further touches. “What’s the price? The catch?”

“We grew up together. Why are you suddenly thinking the worst of me? You did a 180 since I left.”

“I’ve always felt this way. You just never caught on.”

“I thought you forgave me, hm?”

“Loving you doesn’t mean I have to like you, you asshole.”

“Oh, you love me?” Bill raised an eyebrow.

“Nah. You’re the worst, Cas.” Kryptos smiled, oblivious of the shadow darkening Bill’s face.

Bill cupped Kryptos’s face. “You’re my pride and joy, you know that, right?”

Kryptos’s eyes widened, in the same way Bill himself consciously did whenever he sought to seduce Ford. That wasn’t Kryptos’s intention, right? To seduce Bill?

It wasn’t…right?

Uncertainty clouded Bill’s eyes, Kryptos noticing. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“Oh…there’s another thing. I have to fuck Ford for him to educate me. So as long as you’re willing to suck dick, take dick, you’re guaranteed one hell of an education. Fair price, if you ask me.” Bill slithered a hand at the back of Kryptos’s neck again, this time, the touch having ulterior motives.

“What..?” Kryptos’s face dropped—he didn’t imagine Stanford to be that kind of man.

“Yeah, it’s not bad. He’s great in bed. So just put your heterosexuality away for a few months and you’re good to go.” Bill’s hand descended lower, fingertips just grazing at the top of Kryptos’s bare back, the boy’s shirt loose enough for easy access.

“I—no, I don’t want to. I never even said I was interested to begin with.” Bill was whoring himself out for education? But he had more pride than that.
“You think you’re too good for this kind of thing, huh?”

“You did too. Remember?”

“Yes, but I’m setting the example for you. You gotta be willing to do whatever it takes.” Bill pushed him against the wall, fingers surrounding his throat. Kryptos didn’t fight back, knowing better than to provoke Bill. “Even sleep with disgusting, dirty, perverted old men like Stanford Pines.”

“Bill…are you really letting that man do that to you?” Kryptos asked, concerned more for Bill than himself.

“You sound worried.”

“I am…does Evan know? He’ll kill him.”

“I can kill him myself. I don’t need Evan to hold my hand.” Bill said. “This is a transaction anyway. Don’t worry about it.”

“No, you shouldn’t be doing that.”

Bill dropped the hand and put distance between them.

“It’s not that bad. Sure, he can be really rough sometimes but the pain isn’t too bad.” Bill lied, enjoying how worried Kryptos had become.

“You’re lying, aren’t you? You’d never let a man do that to you.” Kryptos said, suspiciously, watching Bill’s face for hints of deception.

“Maybe Ford’s special.”

“Yeah right. Are you? Joking…?”

Bill laughed. “You’re so cute, kid.”

Kryptos smiled, and for the first time, Bill wondered what it’d feel like to have the boy’s lips around his cock. Jailbait. Underage. Too young. He was too young.

Bill had been too young once upon a time. Not that it made a difference.

“Let’s head out. I don’t feel like discussing this shit any further. It’s boring and I got a hot older guy waiting for me.”

Again, he wondered what it would be like if he fucked Kryptos.

Again, he thought the boy was too young.

But

that never mattered to men like Bill Cipher.

Or rather

to men like Gaspard Giordano.

When would he draw the line between the two?
Looking past Paci-fire, Ford noticed Bill and Kryptos emerge from the room. The puzzled expression Bill wore had Ford worried for unknown reasons; again, his overprotective nature for the juvenile boy bothered him. Bill looked lost, vexed by something that left him all at sea. Ford waved a light hand at Bill, the boy noticing and breaking into a sweet smile. He waved back, and went to join 8ball and Veronica.

Worry came too easily when Bill Cipher was involved—be it for Bill’s well-being or Ford’s own well-being on account of Bill’s flippant nature.

Ford resumed talking to Alexander, who had surprisingly eclectic tastes in nearly everything. He refused to reveal his age, but told Ford he had a law degree and had gone to a prestigious school. Asking how he’d become involved with Bill led to a dead end. Refusal to speak about matters regarding Bill persisted, Ford eventually abandoning the mission.

Bill came over, wearing a grin too large for his face.

“Just FYI guys, feel free to call him Sixer! It’d have been his name if he joined…” Bill said innocently, Ford oblivious as to how Bill initiated new members.

“Sixer? Are you Jewish?” Teeth asked, peeking from behind 8ball.

“I—” Ford began, but was interrupted by 8ball.

“Why the hell you asking the man if he’s Jewish? Why does that have to do with anything?”

“Well Sixer... sounds kinda Jewishy.” Teeth mused. “Hey Bill, is he Jewish?”

“He’s right here, you can ask him but his dick is circumcised so?” Bill folded his arms to like he was pondering, lost deep in thought.

“Nah, that means jackshit. People get their dicks skinned without being religious.” 8ball said. “Also, you can’t be Jewish, Ford, you’re banging a man. That’s against being Jewish.”

“Well I—”

“Let the man speak.” Bill said, quietening everyone down. “Ford, are you Jewish?”

“No, I’m not. I’m not religious.”

“I expected that.” Alex said, joining in.

“Hey fuck you, Alex. Here it comes…the inevitable atheism rant.” 8ball moaned.

“Oh I’m not atheist.” Ford interrupted. “I’m agnostic. I’m open to concept of a God, provided there is evidence for it existing. I don’t believe in ruling anything out simply on the basis of no current evidence.”

“So... atheist?” Teeth asked, not understanding the nuances.

“No, atheist is where you don’t believe in god at all and aren’t even open to it.” 8baller said. “This guy’s open to it.”

“Who else is circumcised here?” Teeth asked randomly. “Outta curiosity’s sake.”

8ball looked at Bill who shrugged. “Hey, if you were asking me about everyone’s asshole, I’d have an answer.”

Ford had watched the display, finding it humorous, in its own special way.

“Okay guys, Ford and I are gonna have some alone time.” Bill pulled Ford’s arm, and led him to the room he’d seen Bill and Kryptos emerge from.

After Bill shut the door, he turned to Ford, who seated himself at the edge of the bed, uncertain for what Bill had planned. Bill didn’t expect them to do anything here, did he? The prospect didn’t interest him in the slightest—he wasn’t a teenage boy who got hot and heavy in the bedroom at a party. But Bill was young, and no doubt had such thoughts.

Ford awaited the inevitable, but it never came.

Beaming, Bill asked, “Did you like any of them?”

“Your friends are quite charming…” Ford said. An honest remark; each had his or her own special something. He was particularly fond of Alex, but that was to be expected. Anyone who took such an interest in his work would win his favour. It had worked for Bill too, Ford still remembered their discussion at the café. Always, appealing to his ego would work.

“No, I mean did you like any of them?” Bill asked, hinting at something. “As in…wanna have a three some with anyone?”

“What? Heaven’s no.” Ford replied, in disbelief that Bill would even ask him.

“Boooring.” Bill droned, removing his blazer and setting it upon a nearby chair. Ford watched, expecting more items to be removed but the blazer was all that came off. Relief hit him, but there’s a subtle disappointment coiling inside that he chose to ignore for the best. Give Bill a hand, and he’d take your entire torso.

“Do you sleep with your members?”

“Sure, if I feel like that.”

“Who have you slept with?”

“Other than baby Kryptos, all of them.”

“…including Evan?” Ford thought back to what Bill had said about Evan. If they’d slept together, Bill wouldn’t have felt so disappointed. Not to mention Evan was straight—what had happened to that claim?

“Yeah, I fucked him pretty good. Don’t tell anyone though.”

If they slept together, why had Bill implied otherwise? Or perhaps Ford had misunderstood…or forgotten. Mentioning what Bill had told him would be unwise. To reveal Bill had blabbed about such personal occurrences might cause the boy to lash out illogically.

And Ford imagined Bill to be sexually active, but not with this many people. At once, no less.

“When last did you have yourself checked for any sexually transmitted diseases?”
“Oh wow. Okay…right off the bat huh?” Bill said, apparently not bothered. “Last time I was at the hospital. About a month ago. I was there so two birds with one stone.”

“Why were you there?”

“Had to see how I was healing up. Post-surgery.” Bill said, stretching awkwardly in what remained of his suit. The movement pleasing to the eye, but the timing was inappropriate for such thoughts.

“What did you have surgery on?”

“My face.” Bill said.

Ford beckoned him closer and he obeyed, coming to stand in front of Ford, who took hold both of his hands reassuringly.

“What happened?”

“Long story…”

“Tell me.” Ford’s hands travelled to Bill’s face, his curiosity rising.

Bill eyed him, debating with himself in silence whether to tell Ford or not.

“Darling, tell me.”

Bill shook his face out of Ford’s hold, seeming disappointed at his own actions. “That’s cheating.”

“What is?”

“Using darling…you know I like it.”

“Tell me.” A more assertive tone took to Ford’s voice and for a second, the desire to flee flickered through Bill’s eyes. Ford reprimanded himself internally; he’d forgotten how easily Bill was frightened whenever he raised his voice. Another thing he’d like to discover the root cause of.

“My dad beat me so hard, my face was ruined. So I had to have reassignment surgery. No big.”

Of all possible scenarios, that one was not the one Ford would have conjured.

“I’m sorry…” Ford pulled Bill’s face in, letting kisses of comfort say what he lacked the words for.

“If you had seen my old face, you would have known I was my father’s son. Now I don’t look like anyone anymore…” Bill said, disappointment between his words, hidden in their shadows.

“It’s alright…your new face is beautiful.” Ford’s words brightened the atmosphere, Bill puckering up visually.

“Is that so?” Bill let his lips hover at Ford’s, teasing them with promise of contact. “You dirty old man.”

Ford allowed himself to be toyed with, enjoying the close-up view. “You must hear that all the time.”

“Yeah, but it sounds nicer coming from you.” Now one of Bill’s hands had decided to wander to Ford’s inner thigh, seeking to incite a reaction. “And even a little dirtier…”

The taunting hand was prevented from venturing further with one of Ford’s one, it’s goal becoming
too close for comfort. “You’re so cute. What am I going to do with you?”

Before Ford could retaliate, Bill pushed him backwards onto the bed, straddling him while the opportunity still allowed it. Resting in Ford’s neck, he whispered, “Fuck me.”

Ford rubbed circles into Bill’s lower back, careful not to venture too low. “Now now, none of that…”

“Stop talking like an old man, old man.” Bill nipped his ear while rolling his hips in a way that would’ve excited Ford should he have had less self-control.

Enduring Bill’s assault with no complaints, Ford asked, “Why did you father hit you? Was he drunk? I’m not implying you did anything to deserve it, by the way. No one deserves that.”

“No I…” Bill went quiet, shoulders hunching in self-consciously before he dropped himself onto Ford’s chest; a hand in Ford’s hair, quiet save for subtle twitches, and conveying the slightest tinge of worry.

“You what, dear?”

“We got into an argument…” Bill muttered, climbing off Ford quickly, the man unable to stop him.

Ford sat up. “What was it about?”

“Who cares? Doesn’t matter.” Bill said, straightening his clothes idly.

“No more secrets, Bill.”

“Then consider it a cipher. You can figure it out, old man. There are plenty of reasons to slug me. Just pick one you think my dad woulda gone for.”

Remembering Bill’s hostility at the concept of respect, Ford decided that seemed like the best bet. “…disrespecting him?”

“Beep boop bop! Try again!”

“For running away?”

“Nope.” Bill came to stand in front of Ford, awaiting the next option.

 “…for liking men?”

“You’re close. Not actually close but we’re getting there. You got 2 more guesses, just cause I’m generous.” Bill pulled an imaginary slot machine with his right hand, urging Ford to guess again.

 “…did you have a career your father would be ashamed of? Maybe something in the adult industry?”

Bill laughed, eyes widening in a comical mixture of fake horror and surprise—the display had Ford laughing as well. “No…but wow, you really know how to think, don’t you?”

“I’ll save my last option, until I think of something else.”

“Suit yourself.” Bill dropped himself face first onto the bed.

“The adult industry… I’m not that kind of man, Ford. Did film a few sex tapes back in the day. Nothing too exciting.” Bill muttered against the bedding, turning on his side to face Ford. “If I did
gay porn, would you watch my videos?"

“That is…an unnecessary question but I wouldn’t. Watching you with other men doesn’t interest me.”

“Jealous? What if it was before we were together?” Bill rolled back and forth, eventually bumping into Ford.

Making eye-contact and pinching a cheek, Ford replied, “Still not interested.”

“Straight porn?”

“Definitely not.”

Bill squeezed both his lips and eyes forming a dramatic dissatisfied face. It disappeared once Ford’s lip made contact with his own. Complaints came as their lips separated, Ford surrendering further kisses to pacify his lover.

“You’re so physical for an introverted nerd. I bet you were one of those guys at college who seemed all shy and anti-social but really, you were a total slut and you just never had anyone to show that side of you to.” Bill removed Ford’s glasses and put them on. “Am I right or am I right?”

“How would you know of college life? You’ve never been to college.”

“I have. Well, not officially. Besides, I’ve seen those teen movies of college shit.”

“Elaborate? On how you’ve been to college.”

“I’m a bad guy, Ford. Try to imagine…how I’d experience college life.” Bill played with the glasses, slipping them up and down his nose bridge. “God, your eyesight is terrible. I’m getting dizzy…”

Thinking, Ford concluded he’d trespass or steal someone’s identity. The first seemed more likely, the second would be too much work and Bill didn’t appear to like making an effort.

“What did you do here? When you ran away from home?”

“Everything you’d consider bad, Ford.” There was no pride in Bill’s voice, but no shame either.

Ford kissed him, reclaiming his glasses in the process.

With eyes still closed, Bill muttered, “I repeat, you’re surprisingly in touch with your physical side for a fucking nerd.”

“People aren’t two-dimensional.”

“Not gonna defend yourself after I called you a fucking nerd? I’m using fucking as a noun. You’re a fucking nerd. A nerd who’s good at fucking.”

Ford started to laugh and Bill followed. As the laughter died, Bill scooted up, resting his head in Ford’s lap.

“Let’s go back to the party. Or do you want to…do you want to do it with me?” Bill’s fingers went to the buttons of his shirt. “Here?”

Remembering something that had been bothering him, Ford went ahead and asked. “Are all your friends bisexual, or gay?”
“No. I’m bi, Teeth is gayer than gay. Everyone else is straight.” Bill said, closing his eyes as Ford’s fingers traced the frame of his features.

“But you…slept with them?”

“Yes. Remember when I told you about fucking being a sort of initiation in some gangs…?”

“That’s rape, Bill.”

“Not really. They loved it.” Bill sat up. “If you had said yes to me, I’d be fucking you right now. Hard. Into this very bed.”

Thank God Ford had declined the deal. Giordanos seemed prone to offering bad deals.

Snaking his arms around Ford’s neck, Bill added, “You’d be moaning my name, telling me not to stop while I glide in and out of your virgin hole.”

“Bill, enou—” Ford recoiled from Bill’s embrace but the boy held on tightly; constricting him, like a Boa who’d caught its prey.

“I’m not finished. You’d be all slicked up and stretched out, but still tight because you’re nervous, it’s your first time.” Bill’s embrace broke, his hands now favouring other parts of Ford. His fingers danced across Ford’s front chest, wanting what laid beneath.

“I’d go in and out slowly, first. A decent pace, but your moaning just gets to me and I start fucking you hard, unable to control myself.” For effect, Bill moved into Ford’s ear, left hand’s fingers stroking Ford’s lips. “I cover your mouth with a hand so you can’t beg me to stop. In and out, in and out…”

“That’s enough.” Ford stood up, pushing Bill away. “You think it’s fun to describe you raping me?”

“Come on, Ford. It’s not rape.” Bill said in an obvious bored tone meant to offend Ford.

“It is, Bill.”

Bill sighed. “Whatever. Sit back down.”

Ford reluctantly sat down, hoping the boy kept his distance.

“I’m gonna jerk off tonight, when you’re asleep, thinking about giving it to you.” Bill said thoughtfully.

“I’ll make sure you’re too tired to do such a thing.” Ford decided becoming assertive was now necessary if he wanted to subdue Bill. “And you said you don’t touch yourself. Lying again, hm?”

Ford took hold of Bill’s tie, the boy’s eyes widening demurely. “We’ll have to do something about that lying nature of yours.”

The shy act dropped and Bill laughed, a hand rubbing Ford’s inner thigh. “Look at you! I love it when you talk like that. Makes me want to fuck you even more, put you in your place.”

Something was different in Bill’s voice, Ford unable to pinpoint what. Put Ford in his place?

“But it seems…you want to put me in my place. Is that it?” Bill’s voice slowed. “Making sure I’m too tired to think of fucking you silly? Letting me know it’s you who’s going to be fucking me good?”
Ford took hold of Bill’s face. “That’s not it. Enough talk.”

Bill’s eyes lost their edge, again widening in an ingenuous way that brought Ford back to Bill’s words in the bathtub. His shoulders contracted, as if he sought to make himself smaller—Ford’s seen this, somewhere. A movie? Something the heroine did during a scene with the hero.

“You’re a good actor, aren’t you?”

Bill blinked rapidly in mock confusion before his usual smirk appeared. “You seem to like it when I do that.”

“You’re deceptive.” Ford said, his smile hiding the paranoia that began giving him an earful.

“No, I’m only giving you what you want.” He shyly wrapped his arms around Ford’s neck, his body maintaining distance as though moving closer was a bad idea. “You want me to be like this, don’t you?”

“No, I told you to just be yourself.”

“And being myself means adapting to what you want.”

“Then I’ll get you so tired, you can’t fake anything.” Ford said firmly, recalling there had been times where Bill had acted this way, and he’d been certain the boy wasn’t faking it.

“I think you’ve already done that, quite a few times.” Bill mused, eyes wandering around to evade Ford.

Ford leaned in. “Can I?”

Bill’s eyes returned to Ford as he arched an eyebrow. “Can you what?”

“Kiss you.”

“You…don’t have to ask me, Doc.” Bill said, taken aback but secretly glad. Ridiculous, but another thing Ford did Bill found himself loving unexplainably. Ford always asked in some way, whether it be with touch or with words. Or he’d instigate subtly, quietly eager, and wait for Bill to make the first move.

“I like hearing you say you want me to. Do you?” Ford’s thumb patiently rubbed across Bill’s cheek.

“Yeah, sure.” Bill said, keeping his voice as aloof as possible and hoping his heartbeat would join in the deception; it fluttered wildly and he couldn’t understand why.

“Try again.”

“Oh geez…yes, Ford. I want you to kiss me. That good enou—” The rest of Bill’s words were taken by Ford’s lips.

Just like that, nothing mattered.

Ford’s strong arms around Bill, and just like that, nothing could ever matter. Not when he’s in Ford’s arms and it’s only them. The two of them were enough.

Ford pulled away far too soon and Bill began whining, “No, no not yet…more…a little longer…” Ford obliged, resuming kissing, deepening it—allowing Bill to indulge to his heart’s content. Again, he imagines hearts flapping about the boy.
“Your kisses do something to me…” Bill’s breathing had already become irregular, hands twitching restively with desire.

“What do they do? Tell me.” Ford rubbed what little skin Bill had exposed by the neck area.

“Fuck off, Ford.” Bill muttered, tilting his head in the opposite direction of where Ford rubbed, hoping Ford could gain more surface area.

“No, tell me. I want to know. For scientific reasons.”

“You’re a dirty old man.”

Tracing his fingers across tan skin visible beneath the black and captioning every mental image taken in his mind, Ford paused, and let his hand rest at Bill’s top buttons. “May I?”

Surprised at Ford’s interest but always eager, Bill nodded. “Of course…of course…you want to…? Here?”

“No no, let me just unbutton you a bit.”

Squinting an eye in annoyance, Bill allowed Ford to proceed, and his top few buttons were undone, exposing more skin to the air. The opening was just wide enough and Ford’s hands crawled in, rubbing the top area at his collarbone, slightly further down and then moving onto his shoulders. Bill closed his eyes in response to the obscure touching. Who was he to complain? Ford was touching him. That was enough.

“What are…you even doing?”

“Just touching you.”

Bill halted Ford’s movements with a firm grip on both his wrists. “No, tell me.”

Letting his hands fall limp into Bill’s grip, Ford revealed, “You calm down when I touch you. You seemed a little upset because of earlier. That’s all.”

Immediately, in what Ford assumed to be spontaneous gratitude, Bill wrapped his arms around Ford, and the man accepted the embrace. Ford seemed to accept a lot from Bill Cipher these days.

“Always so needy…” Ford gently kneaded his back and Bill, silent, tightened his arms around Ford as though he feared Ford would leave should he relent even the tiniest bit of pressure.

To an outsider, the view must be amusing—verging on ridiculous. Bill, being as tall as he was, clutching onto Ford like a child would make any spectator, at the very least, snicker.

“Hey…do you wanna get outta here? Go see a movie instead? Or just walk around for a bit…” Bill asked, voice just above a whisper and heavy with serenity.

“Your friends seem happy to have you here.”

“Yeah but…” Bill held Ford’s hand and rested his forehead against Ford’s jaw, letting out the most disappointed sigh he could muster. “Who cares about them…”

“I could’ve been in bed, in your arms right now. Instead of here.”

“We can stay an hour or two, and then leave early. Best of both worlds.” Ford said, surrendering to Bill’s neediness, yet again.
“Deal.”

Bill began burrowing into Ford’s neck by rubbing his nose back and forth, the slightest bucking of his hips becoming noticeable; Ford laughed within his mind, careful not to let it slip out—it might encourage the boy.

“Horny…”

“I noticed.”

Bill licked Ford’s neck, attempting to rile the man up, but all efforts were in vain. Again, Ford only said, “Settle down, dear,” as he stroked Bill’s hair.

“Let me button you up.”

Bill sighed warm breath into Ford’s neck, sending pleasurable shivers down his spine. “I’d rather you undressed me.”

“Not here.”

“Why not?”

“Because when we do it, it should be when we’re entirely alone, just the two of us.”

Bill gave a satisfied hum.

“If I was Kryptos’s age, would you be with me?”

“No. Not at all.”

“Why?”

“That’s far too young.” Ford said, and Bill pulled out of the embrace.

“Why’s my age different?”

“It isn’t. At the very least, you’re an adult.”

“What’s the youngest you’d ever go?”

“You’re the youngest, and the exception. After you, I won’t be dating anyone so young.” Ford began buttoning Bill up.

“Why am I always the exception?” Bill frowned slightly.

“Always? What do you mean?”

“Nothing. Let’s finish up.”

After they left the room, Bill offered to fetch Ford something to drink with claims that the lounge area only had alcohol. But before Bill could go, Pyronica stopped them, letting them know she had VIP seats at a new club if they wanted to join her later. Neither being interested, Bill declined for them.

Once Pyronica had her back turned, Bill leaned into Ford’s ear and whispered seductively, “I have a better VIP seat for you…” The man turned bright red in the most ridiculous manner possible.
Laughing, Bill headed to the kitchen to pick up something non-alcoholic for Ford. Xanthar followed him.

“I’m sorry about what I said earlier. About your grandfather.”

“Hey no big. This isn’t the mansion, right? You don’t have to respect me as much.” Bill said, picking out a soda for Ford. Too bad they didn’t have the brand Ford liked. Maybe he should send someone to pick up a six-pack of it…

“That’s not true. It was one comment that was out of line, and I regret it.”

“How you really felt came out. You think he fucked me so hard, I can’t even think straight. Is that it? Funny how you make those comments after I told you.” Bill said flatly. “What would you have said had I not told you? Would you be able to make such shitty remarks? Fuck off, Evan.”

“I was being spiteful. I said it on purpose. It’s not how I really feel.”

“Sure.” Bill said, grabbing a glass too, in case Ford didn’t want to drink out the can.

“Bill…I’m truly sorry.”

“I don’t care. I think I got the capacity for forgiveness fucked out of me too! Too bad.”

Holding both the can and glass, Bill turned to leave the kitchen but first offering a few more words to Evan. “That never happened. Do you understand? Don’t ever mention it to me. It never happened. Don’t forget your promise. God, I wish you had killed yourself, you fucking disappointment.”

He left Xanthar in the kitchen, smiling as he approached Ford. “Hey, what’d I miss? I brought you something. Sorry, it’s all we have…”

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Bill left the soda with Ford and returned to 8ball and Veronica.

Ford and Alex continued to discuss the plausibility of alternate dimensions (that concept being a hot topic ever since he’d published *that* paper. The theory was nothing knew, and why he received such flack for it eluded Ford. It was merely a different take on an age-old theory.) when Bill’s voice cut through their conversation. “—women pray to God for men like me!”

The boy was so loud. And continued to be loud, making the continuation of their conversation impossible.

“Nah really, come on. All women love an aggressive man who’ll hold him down and fuck’em. Men too. Just ask Teeth. Kid can’t get his dick hard unless I slap him around a bit, right, Jeremy?”

Teeth’s response was inaudible to Ford. The other participants spoke at a lower volume, Bill being the only one that sought to broadcast his every response.

“Fuck you, Jason. I’m the epitome of Mr Right. Tall, good-looking, rich. I dress like gentlemen and fuck like a bad boy. I know what I’m talking about! This is all kindergarten shit, man! This is why you can’t keep a girlfriend!”

Ford was intrigued and repulsed simultaneously. When boys got together, of course this sort of talk was bound to make an appearance, but the sheer vulgarity of it put off Ford more than he’d anticipated.
8ball said something too under-his-breath for Ford to catch.

“I will fuck the old man right now just to prove to you you’re talking shit.” In trepidation, Ford’s eyes rushed towards the direction of Bill’s voice. An argument transpiring between him and 8ball, the remnants of said argument disquieting Ford with every passing second.

Ford listened closely.

8ball’s voice was now louder. “Man, whatever. I don’t wanna watch you give it to a man on his deathbed.”

What had they been talking about?

Finally, Bill addressed the subject of said controversy. “Hey Ford, come here and clarify this for me.”

Ford stepped closer, Alex following.

“What?”

“Tell ‘em. I’m your dream guy, aren’t I? Even a guy like Ford, who’s a Mormon conservative, has the hots for me.”

Seemed Bill was the type to take on a different persona around his friends. This sort of spiel didn’t interest Ford in the least. He didn’t approve of it and certainly would not be encouraging it by playing to Bill’s false bravado.

Bill strolled towards Ford, summoning the man with a hand and Ford met him half-way.

“Hey…let me.” Bill whispered at Ford’s jaw.

“What?”

“Give it to you, right now. What do you say?” A hand reached for Ford’s crotch, Ford capturing it and holding it securely.

Bill got the message, but rather than annoyed, he seemed fascinated; eyes reminding Ford to a predator whose prey did something so utterly enticing, the need to strike was almost too overwhelming to bear. “Will I have to have someone hold you down…?”

Ford’s hand tightened around Bill’s, hoping to have some effect but it apparently served only to encourage Bill further. “I hope you’re joking.”

“What do you think?”

Bill dug his fingers in at the crevice between Ford’s pants and abdomen. “Think about it…Evan can hold you down while I suck you off and then fuck you. Hey, if you’re generous, maybe you can suck Evan off…”

A lick at Ford’s cheek, the cold fingers at his stomach still touching his skin and curled nails scraping roughly. “I’d love to see that…Ford.”

Leaning at Ford’s ear, Bill whispered. “I’d offer to switch places but you understand why that’s not an option, right?”

Ford shuffled, the beginning of his escape attempt and Bill grabbed him at the hips. “Play along. I’m
not actually going to...unless you want me to? Then I will...do you like the idea of people watching...?

Fed up with this behaviour, Ford pushed Bill’s hands off him. “Overcompensation is not going to inspire loyalty, Bill.”

The remark made Bill angry, his upper lip curling with distaste. “Don’t talk like you know anything, old man. You’ve never set foot outside your fucking comfort zone.”

Holding back his fear for as long as possible, Ford said, “Do you think acting like a big shot is going to impress anyone?”

The sneer disappeared in favour of a wide grin. Bill turned around, arms in the air. “Hey boys, don’t you think Ford needs the fear of God put into him?”

8ball perked up, a disgusted frown warping his face. “Hey man, no old men and no young kids. Have some standards.”

Bill shrugged and held up both hands. “Hey Ford, why did the old man do this?”

“This?” Ford imitated the action, and Bill immediately pushed against them, slamming Ford onto the table behind and pinning him down with far too much strength than Bill should be capable of. Another thing Bill had been hiding.

“See, boys? He wants to be dominated. I’m telling you, everyone’s got that primal instinct...” Bill nudged an entitled knee between Ford’s legs, forcefully parting them and ensuring they remain separated. Easy access. “To be mounted and fucked. Right, Fordsy?”

“Bill, stop. Stop right now.” He pushed against Bill, successfully interrupting Bill’s hold over him but not breaking it.

“Or what? Even if you get me off, do you really think... you’re going to leave here?” Bill laughed, Ford unable to recognize him anymore. “Che ti piaccia oppure no, lo farò.”

The foreign language added to Ford's rising fear. Bill's new grin did, too. What a grin... one Ford had never seen before.

“I’m going to really give it you. Make you scream.” Bill said, casually.

“You will do no such thing.” Ford managed to get his upper body up as Bill eased the pressure, but the boy remained in his personal bubble with no signs of relenting. He’s not sure how his voice is still steady and strong—must be all the practice he’s had dealing with Bill in the past. “I’m leaving, Bill.”

Bill laughed and gave a vertical lick on Ford’s lips—too quick for Ford to catch. “Can’t wait... can’t.”

A hard push sent Ford once more on his back. He can’t recall Bill being so strong, the strength keeps nagging at him. Why? Because during all their intimate times, the boy had appeared so harmless and docile, Ford had forgotten what he was capable of?

“So I have a nice plan. Teeth, you suck Ford off. Then I’ll fuck him while he sucks Xanthal off. 8ball, you’re our camera man. Afterwards, we can have Paci-fire shoot a load onto his face, all over those cute glasses too, while Pyronica rides him. Are we good? Anyone wanna switch with anyone else?”
It’s not Ford’s Bill, it’s the first Bill from the diner. It’s the second Bill, from Cipher’s Investigations office. It’s the Bill Ford could believe was the son of Gaspard Giordano.

“Oh thank god I don’t gotta put my dick anywhere near the old man.” 8ball said, relieved.

“What is it with you and old men? Do you have a fear of old people?” Paci-fire asked.

“I don’t like expired shit.”

Gaspard’s son let out a wicked laugh.

“No Kryptos?” 8balled asked, looking around for the boy.

“No children allowed.” Gaspard’s son said, watching Ford, then losing interest and turning his attention elsewhere.

“Bill…” No answer came. Gaspard’s son continued to have idle banter with his friends; still between Ford’s legs, each hand on a thigh, instilling submission by the quiet threats promised in the touch. Ford’s hands were deadweights at his side, not listening to his pleas to move.

“Cas.” A fleeting glance was all Ford received.

Once more, but this time, he called, “Gaspard.”

That got the boy’s attention.

“Now why would you call for that man? You a psychic now? Calling out to the dead?” Gaspard’s son continued to laugh, and it’s as vile as it was when Ford first heard it.

“That’s your name, isn’t it?”

A quiet came, everyone having somehow heard Ford make that comment.

“My name? My name? That’s a strange thing to say.” The hands on Ford’s thighs dug their claws in. Hunching over, Gaspard’s son leaned towards Ford and Ford pushed against him, causing him to stagger back, surprised but still smiling that smile.

With the speed of a cobra, Gaspard’s son cupped Ford’s face with blackened hands. “If I had my gun, I’d have shoved it up your ass for that.”

Ford believed him.

“You like it rough, don’t you? And you’re a little shy to admit it…” Nuzzling at his neck preceded sniffing, the nose dragging itself across his skin repeatedly, as if confirming it smelt what it smelt.

Gaspard’s son slowly reversed into Ford’s view, still hunched over. “You’re wearing the cologne I bought you…”

Then Gaspard’s son wasn’t Gaspard’s son anymore, it was his Bill from the past few days. It’s in the eyes, always in the eyes.

Bill timidly extended a hand to touch Ford’s flushed face, but his eyes pulled towards his own hand, something catching all his attention. His eyes darted back and forth between his hand and Ford’s face, a dire and confused look stuck to his face.

Bill’s face softened even further. “I’m sor—"
“Bill.” Kryptos interrupted.

“Not now.”

“Cas.”

“What is it? In the middle of something…”

“Don’t hurt, Ford. He’s a guest.”

“What? I’m not gonna hurt him. What the **fuck**?”

“Cas…”

Bill snapped his fingers and Evan held Ford down at the shoulders and despite flailing and fighting, the grip proved inescapable. He was so close to reaching Bill, so close…

“Interrupt me again, and see what happens.”

“Now, where was I? Oh right. I was about to fuck the virginal old man! 8ball, hand me my earlier purchase.” Bill said and 8ball tossed him a prescription container.

Ford’s eyes widened. If that was what he thought it was…

“Hmm, hey, you got any E on you? This’ll knock him out. I think getting him all lovey dovey will be better. Want him to beg for my dick.”

“Bill, stop this. Stop right now. If you carry on with this, it’s over between us.” Ford threatened, hoping it would make a difference but knowing it wouldn’t. If only Kryptos hadn’t interrupted, this would’ve ended.

“Ha! Good one, Ford. We both know you’re with me for moments like these. Where I do something terrible to you and you love it secretly.” Bill said, with too much confidence and no evidence to back it up.

“No. I don’t like this at all.” Ford said as strongly and firmly as he could.

“Then why are you with me?” Bill tilted his head, waiting.

“No for this, Bill.”

“You didn’t answer my Q, Fordsy.”

“I told you already. When you were in the bath—do you remember?”

Not listening anymore, Bill slipped a pill into a glass of alcohol. It dissolved quickly, Bill swishing it impatiently. “Okay Evan, hold his mouth open and I’ll drop this baby down.”

“Bill, I’m telling you to stop.” Ford raised his voice, but it had no effect this time. Instead, it appeared to anger Bill—the most counterproductive result Ford could imagine.

“Yell at me again, and I’m really going to hurt you, Ford.” Was all Bill said before nodding at Xanthar. Ford’s mouth was pried open, but before anything regrettable could transpire, Kryptos snatched the glass from Bill, powerwalking to the kitchen to throw it into the basin. It went down the drain faster than Bill’s patience.
Murderous intent was the only description Ford could think of as he watched Bill’s face morph. Ford now felt sympathy for Kryptos more than himself.

“You are really pissing me off, you little shit. You know what? Let’s call it off.” Bill stepped away from Ford and pointed at Kryptos. “Xanthar, I want you to fuck Jerry.”

“Let’s deal with this kid’s attitude, right now.”

Bill’s killer stare set upon Xanthar, a sneer accompanying it this time. “Wait wait. I got options for you. You fuck him. Right now, in front of everyone. Harder than you fucked Veronica. I want you to put the fear of the afterlife into this fucking kid’s ass. If you don’t, I’ll fuck him. And I’ll do it with my best impersonation of you.”

To ruin the relationship between Xanthar and Kryptos—Bill had to add this to his list of accomplishments. It was on his bucket list and everyone was busy dying. Best to tick’em off as soon as possible.

“Last option is I kill him. Pick Evan.”

“Bill, man…he’s just a kid.” 8ball tried to intervene but Bill wasn’t having that.

“So? You saying a 15 year old, or however old this fucker is, can’t take a dick?” Bill snarled, pointing an upturned finger at Kryptos. “Hey, if you’re my little brother, then you should enjoy getting fucked by your pseudo daddy dearest.” Bill looked at Xanthar to ensure the reference was successful. It was.

“I’m not doing it.” Xanthar let go of Ford, allowing him to ground his feet and scurry away. Things had escalated; Ford having no idea what could happen next and deciding it was best to maintain distance from both Bill and Xanthar.

“Even your best impersonation will pale in comparison to the real thing.” Xanthar stepped up to Bill, patience still evident in every movement. “If you touch him, I’m going to be disappointed, Cas. And you’re going to make me angry.”

“Oh yeah? Do I look scared to you? Your shitty threats don’t mean shit to me when you had my dick far up your ass.” Bill covered what little distance was left between them, their noses nearly touching now.

“Provoking me to this extent won’t end well.” Xanthar said calmly—calm before the storm, as they say.

“I’m not provoking you. What do I need you for when I have Ford?”

That remark confused Ford—what did he have to do with this?

“I’m telling you now, Cas. To back off.”

“You don’t get to tell your Boss shit.”

“I’m not addressing you as my Boss.”

Bill grinned lopsidedly, face tilting to the side. “Want me to cut up the other side your face?”

“I’m warning you.” Xanthar’s voice dropped, and Bill only laughed in the man’s face.

“Evan. Cas. Drop it. Evan, you know he’s not going to do anything.” Kryptos cut in.
“That’s not the point. The point is he thinks it’s okay to even joke about it.”

The cold nudge of a metal nozzle at Xanthar’s neck had Bill laughing again, louder this time.

“Did I mishear that there? You said you weren’t addressing Bill as your Boss?” Pyronica asked.
“Now correct me if I’m wrong, that gives me free reign to put a few into your sternum, yeah?”

“This doesn’t concern you, Veronica.”

“This concerns me if you’re threatening the man I work for.” Pyronica’s voice hardened.

Bill peeked past Xanthar and noticed her gun was double-barrelled. Closer, and he realized it was Emergency, 8ball’s gun.

“I love it when they fight over me.” Bill boasted, winking at Xanthar.

“I’ll say this again: it doesn’t concern you.” Xanthar said, not being able to face her. Too much movement and she’d shoot—Pyronica rarely hesitated.

“That tone sounded awfully threatening. Might I suggest you remember who you’re talking to?” She tapped the cold metal against Xanthar’s neck. “Don’t test my patience, you short, slanty-eyed fuck. “

“It’s okay, Ronnie.” Bill sung. “Let the dog bark a little.”

“If you say so, Bill.” She lowered the gun and tossed it back to 8ball. “But next time, I’m shooting without permission. I’ve just about had it with this asshole.”

“Shoot first, ask permission later is something I thoroughly approve of.” Bill nodded, and then leaned towards Xanthar, whispering, “I bet if you didn’t wreck her ass, she would’ve been nicer to you. You got no one to blame but yourself there, kid.”

Xanthar didn’t laugh, Bill pouting disappointing at his failed attempt.

“Huh. Why should I keep you around if you’re not even following my orders anymore?” Bill thought aloud, and Xanthar said nothing. The starting of anger held his tongue, and all energy went into preparing for the scuffle that could inevitably occur. He had never raised his hand to Bill, but there was a first time for everything.

“He’s not going to do anything, Evan.” Kryptos said. “Calm down.”

“Oh?” Bill laughed. Laughing is all he seemed to do now. “You think I won’t stick my dick into you?”

“You won’t. I know you won’t.”

“You’re begging me to prove you wrong.”

“I’m sorry… I’m not really going anywhere. I’m still part of the gang, Bill. I just want a little more, that’s all. Don’t be mad.”

“Oh my god. What the fuck is this? A therapy session?” Bill clenched his fist, both Xanthar and Kryptos ready for another violent tantrum. Only, nothing came. As Bill’s eyes sought and found Ford, the rage swallowed itself.

Because Bill was always incredibly appearance oriented.
“Fuck this.” Bill grabbed his coat. “I’m done here. Fuck you all.” Bill stormed out the apartment, shooting Ford a glance as he exited.

“Mr right, my ass. He’s Mr wrong. Wrong. Wrong.” 8ball went to take a seat, his movements sluggish with apprehension of Bill’s return. “I have made poor life choices.”

“If he blasts in here with Dreamcatcher and kills us all, just remember that I’ve always hated you, Alex.”

Paci-fire rolled his eyes, the discourse at hand being of little interest to him. “The feeling is mutual, I’m sure you’re aware.”

Bill hadn’t run away this time. He instead, stood outside, smoking. Feeling brave, Kryptos tugged at the mustard collar of the coat. “Hey.”

“Can I help you, kid?”

“I’ll come stay with you, at your house. For a little while…maybe I can talk to Ford about schooling? It’d help to have someone to help me figure out what I have to do.”

“And why would you wanna come back with me?”

“So you don’t have to be alone.”

“Do I look like I’m lonely? Do I?”

“It’s okay to say what you really feel, you know. I know things have never been that great between us, but I didn’t think you’d take it this hard.” Kryptos said. “You never say what you feel, and then take it out on everyone else. It’s getting old.”

“Too bad I don’t feel anything.” Bill dropped the still-fresh cigarette, crushing it beneath his foot.

“Anger is an emotion, Cas. Just like jealousy is, too. And hurt.”

“If you leave me, what am I going to do?” Bill blurted out, startling Kryptos. “I’m not going to survive getting fucked by Ford if you leave. I need you to stay with me.”

“I thought…you were lying…about that…”

“No.”

“When we’re alone, he’s probably going to really fucking give it to me because of what I just did. God…I shouldn’t have…” Bill said, appearing so convincingly distraught that Kryptos believed him without a second thought.

“You’re really…you’re really doing that…?”

“I’m trying to turn my life around, Jerry. This is the best way. Come on, we have a lot in common. It figures we’d both seek to get outta this shit life our parents forced us into.”

He gave Kryptos a concerned look, the other boy returning it.

“He’s not a bad man. He thinks I like him, and I kind of do. It’s just…you know. It’s not his fault, okay? Don’t think bad of Ford.”
“Don’t protect him, Bill! He sounds… disgusting. Men like that are the worst! The ones who take advantage of people around them.” Kryptos said, disturbed and repulsed. Upset too, that Bill would defend such a man. Worse: Bill was allowing that man to hurt him for the sake of education.

“No, trust me.” Bill said. “He’s… just leave him to me. And don’t… don’t leave me. That’s all.”

Before Kryptos could reply, Bill left him standing alone and entered the apartment again.

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Ford watched Bill enter; he gave a nod to Ford and went to 8ball; slipping something from the man into his pocket.

He offered a shrug to Evan, who stood up to offer his seat to Bill. Bill took the seat and once he’d gotten comfortable, he beckoned Ford to come to him. Ford hesitated but complied. Better to get this over and done with.

Bill said nothing at first, taking one of Ford’s hands into both of his own. His eyes went from the hand, to Ford’s face to something behind Ford—turning to see revealed it to be Kryptos.

Both boys held a silent conversation, using their eyes, and Ford wondered what he was doing with Bill Cipher. The boy was clearly dangerous, and this had been the final piece.

“I was never going to hurt you. I need you to know that.” Bill’s lips confessed against the skin of Ford’s hands, but Ford could no longer believe anything Bill claimed. “Don’t leave me, Ford.”

Ford let his other hand touch Bill’s cheek, and the boy took it to mean Ford agreed until Ford shook his head. “This isn’t working, Bill.”

“What…?”

“We’ll talk at the hotel, but I need—I need to have my own room. I can’t share a room with you.”

“No… you’re joking, right? Right?”

“You tried to—do I even need to explain to you what you’ve done?”

“I was joking. I told you. I told you I wasn’t going to do anything.”

“This isn’t just about me.” Ford’s eyes wandered to Evan, who bore a curious and perplexed look, regarding Ford as though it were the first time he’d seen him.

“You threatened that boy with rape, Bill.”

“It was a fucking joke.”

“No, it wasn’t.”

“Let’s talk when we’re alone.” Bill insisted, voice attempting to soften but failing.

“I think being alone with you is a bad idea right now.”

“Even Kryptos knew I wasn’t going to do anything. Ask him.”

“I’m not going to ask someone who you could easily threaten into lying for you.”

With pretend confidence, he stepped back from Bill.
Bill reclined in his chair, leaning his face up towards Evan. “Non farlo andare via.” Evan nodded and left of for the door, but was quickly intercepted by Kryptos.

The boy said something in another language; Chinese, hard and gruff—Ford recognized it as Mandarin. It had a distinctive sound when compared to Cantonese.

“Speak English, Jerry. This is America.” Bill called out, and Kryptos frowned in response; Bill’s hypocrisy not surprising Ford in the slightest.

“I guess you’re the only one who gets to speak another language.”

“Yeah.” Bill grinned shamelessly. “Xanthar can’t speak Chinese.”

“There’s no such language.” Kryptos rolled his eyes.

“Evan, can’t speak Mandarin.”

“He knows enough.”

“Pick Evan. Who will you listen to?”

“Neither of you are leaving until you” Xanthar pointed at Bill. “Apologize.”

“I’m doing no such thing.” A small, thin tablet Bill had taken from 8ball made an appearance and after opening the capsule, he snorted something down. White powder, Ford had spotted.

“Is that…? Cocaine?” Evan looked at 8ball who shrugged innocently.

“Hey, it’s a party. Of course I brought out the big guns.” 8ball said.

“Bill, you know how I feel about drugs.” Xanthar’s voice deepened, taking on a more authoritative tone.

“Well, you know how I feel about apologies, fucker.” Bill drawled. “Bill Cipher doesn’t apologize.”

“Then Casper Giordano better.”

“Who?” Bill laughed, reaching for a glass.

Evan grabbed him by the collar, the glass falling, flowering into more pieces than Bill Cipher. “Ford. I’m taking you and Bill back to the hotel. Make sure he doesn’t leave the room until he sobers up completely. Are we clear?”

Ford looked worried, taking a step back instinctively.

“I’m sure you could restrain Bill as long as you don’t let him arm himself.” Xanthar insisted, assuming Ford was worried about the potential dangers of dealing with Bill alone.


With a face as though he were spewing venom at Xanthar, Bill spat. “Kill yourself, you fucking mutt. Just kill yourself. I’m sick of looking at you.”

Xanthar’s grip faltered. “I’m sorry, Cas. I really am.”
“Fuck you. Let go of me.”

Evan loosened the grip entirely, letting Bill return to his feet. The boy staggered lightly, before standing upright.

“I trusted you. I trusted you…” Bill muttered. “And you fucked me over.”

“I really…wanted you…fuck.” He covered both hands with his face in humiliation, everything he’d said and done with Xanthar coming back to him once more.

“Ford, let’s go.” Bill rushed to the coat rack, Xanthar following him like his shadow.

“Ford, I’ll go with you. He’s taken coke and Bill gets very very aggressive on Coke.”

“Oh go fuck yourself, Evan.” Bill growled, putting on his coat sloppily.

“You.” Evan pointed at 8ball. “If you ever give Bill anything like this again, I’m going to kill you.”

“What? How is it my fault? Come on, man!”

Xanthar didn’t stick around to hear 8ball’s poor attempts at defence. He pulled Bill out, Ford following reluctantly.

Their excursion to the hotel consisted predominantly of Evan manhandling Bill whenever he protested too loudly. Ignoring the circumstances, it made for an amusing sight, akin to an older brother escorting his younger brother home. Bill, ever the rowdy one and Evan, patient until the very end. Every time Evan handled Bill a little too roughly for Ford’s taste, the boy seemed to love it, making exactly how much he loved it very obvious.

They finally got Bill into the hotel room, the other occupants they’d passed on the way here unimpressed at the undignified display they’d been forced to witness. Bill flipped every one of them off.

“So, who’s going to fuck me? Will you be taking turns?” Bill seated himself on the bed, his hands already undressing himself.

“That’s not happening.” Xanthar said quickly, hoping to smother whatever fantasies Bill hoped would be fulfilled tonight.

“Don’t make the coke go to waste. If there was ever a good time to fuck me, Evan, it’s now.”

“That is never going to happen, Bill. Never. Stop asking me.”

Bill rolled his eyes, turning his attention to Ford. “Whatever. Ford? Well? Want to…?”

“No.” Ford frowned, asking himself how Bill could beg Xanthar to sleep with him while Ford stood right beside him.

“Fine. Then I’m leaving and I’ll go find someone who wants to fuck.” Bill stood up but Evan quickly pushed him back onto the bed.

“Fuck, don’t do that. You’re exciting the hell out of me.” Bill groaned, appearing even more excited —true to his words.

“You aren’t going anywhere.”
“Great. My two favourite men and neither wants to fuck me.”

“Why are you acting like this? It’s never been this bad.” Xanthar said with concern finally cracking through into his voice.

Bill rolled his eyes. “Ew. Stop talking.”

“How long as he been like this?” Ford asked.

“4 months.”

“Keeping track of me, huh? Mind if I jerk off while imagining you two fucking?”

Both men ignored Bill.

“What happened 4 months ago?” Ford stole a quick glance at Bill.

“He came home.”

“Don’t talk about me like I’m not here.” Bill whined. “I’m right here.”

“Come on…Coke is one of the best drugs for fucking. So Ford, let’s do something.”

“I told you to stay away from Cocaine. Why do you have to be so spiteful when you’re angry? First you threaten Kryptos to provoke me, and now you take drugs. You’re acting like a child.” Xanthar reprimanded.

“I can do whatever I want.” Bill said. “I’ll stop. Just fuck me and I’ll stop.”

“No, especially not on Cocaine.” Evan said. “You once got fucked so hard, you threw up.”

“What? I don’t remember that.”

“Of course you don’t. Why would you? I’m left to pick up the pieces when you’re done.”

“It’s gonna wear off soon…not enough time to hit a bar and find someone.” Bill mused, ignoring Xanthar. “If only…I only both of you would…come on Evan.”

Bill made a grab at Evan’s sleeve. “Murder my ass like you did to Veronica. Harder than Veronica. Can you…?”

“No.”

“I miss when you’d manipulate me by touching me all the time. You know who does that without manipulating me? This guy right here.” Bill pointed at Ford. “He does everything you did and means it. Actually means it.”

“I’m happy you found someone who means well. I’m happy for you, Cas.”

“Well fuck off.” Bill stared Xanthar down, the latter’s eyes bearing no anger or hostility.

“I’m gonna fuck, Jerry. Evan. Hard. The next time I see him. I’ll make him scream. I’ll fuck him so hard, he won’t be able to speak fucking English for a week.” Bill grinned, letting his tongue sit lewdly between his teeth; his eyes fixated on Xanthar’s clenching fist—finally, a response.

“You really wanna hit me, don’t you? Why? Finally realized I’m not a cute, helpless kid anymore? When’d it dawn on you I’m a man? When my cock was tearing you open?”
“That’s enough.” Xanthar said. “You’ll always be a child to me.”

“Fuck off. There’s no such thing as too young.”

“There is.”

“No.”

“Say it.” Bill’s voice began to rise, and with every octave, it became shakier. “Say there’s no such thing as too young. Say it, Evan!”

Xanthar remained obstinate, choosing not to reply at all.

Bill trembled with rage, and again, decided to hit Xanthar’s weak spot. “I’m going to really hurt, Jerry. So, make your choice. Fuck me. Satisfy me and Jerry’s safe. Two birds with one stone.”

“You regret killing Kryptos’s father for me, don’t you? You expected a Giordano, a what? Italian Stallion? A monster? And all you got was me.” Bill shrugged, both arms raising with open palms. “Poor Xanthar.”

“I assure you, you are more like the rumours of a Giordano than you realize, Bill.” Xanthar said, the comment lighting Bill’s fuse and Xanthar all too aware of the impending explosion.

He had to prevent it.

“If I do this, will you leave Kryptos alone?” Xanthar said, rethinking his decision. If this would calm Bill down, then for Bill’s own sake, and for the sake of everyone else—he would.

Bill said nothing, an arrogant smirk decorating his face. He beckoned Xanthar closer with his index finger, and the man obeyed.

It took only 6 seconds of mutual eye contact for Xanthar to realize what was happening. He moved even closer in to Bill, scrutinizing pupils that were far too thin for someone currently doped up. Said eyes returned the stare, telling him what he needed to know, wandering to his lips occasionally as if inviting. An inked hand touched the scarred side of his face.

“Juliet.” Bill cooed, barely a whisper, raising his left eyebrow, and Xanthar knew not to interfere any longer.

Suddenly, Bill stood up. “Well, since none of you losers wanna engage in good old fashioned hardcore fucking to summon some dark deity. I’m taking this—” he grabbed the bottle of rum at the dresser. “And I’mma go party by myself in the bathroom. I’ll see you fuckers on the flip side. Buh-bye!”

He retreated to the bathroom in a hurry, evading Ford; the bathroom door locking loudly behind him.

“Was that alcohol?” Xanthar asked, standing up straight. “That’s not a good combination.”

“He’s had a habit, when he was younger, of taking coke and hurting himself in bizarre ways.” This revelation came as a surprise to Ford. Bill was more than he had bargained for, and it perhaps it was time to jump ship.

“I’ll go talk to him.” Ford said, walking towards the bathroom.

Bracing himself, and once as ready as he’d ever be, he knocked at the door.
“It’s me, darling.”

Shuffling could be heard before the door abruptly opened and Ford was pulled inside. The door shut immediately behind, locked once again.

Bill returned to his seat on the toilet, looking up at Ford who’d positioned himself in front of Bill. The only position that could work for a conversation.

“What’s cookin’, good lookin’?” Bill smiled sweetly, Ford not returning any sort of affectionate greeting. “Things were great between us. I ruined it.”

“You did.” Ford softly caressed Bill’s cheek, the boy pushing against it ardently.

“I think…you’re too much for me.” Ford idly fixed Bill’s collar, his hand returning to Bill’s skin when done. “I’m too old to be dealing with this type of thing, Bill. It’s too much.”

The words came out easily, but lacking whatever emotion should be accompanying them—sincerity? Whatever Bill’s problem was, Ford was unsure he could fix it. Why should he? Because they spent a few days together? It would take more than that for Ford to consciously jeopardize his safety to make this work. With a man a third of his age, no less.

“It’s been fun, it has. But it’s not going to work between us.”

Bill remained silent, and Ford continued.

“Was Evan right? Did you say those things to make him angry?”

“I suppose. I told you..I…didn’t mean it.”

“You tried forcing yourself on me. What am I meant to think of that?” Ford kept his voice level and face void of judgement—a trick he’d learnt when reprimanding his pupils. They responded better if they felt they were being given a fair chance at explaining themselves.

“I didn’t. You should know I’d never do that. Not to you. I told you…to play along…I told you…”

That was true, Bill had said that, and claimed it was an act. But it felt too real, far too real.

“I think you’re a pathological liar.” Ford said bluntly.

Bill laughed, disheartened. “Even you…even you think I’m a liar…of course…of course…you’re just like...” Devastation crumpled Bill’s features. “This was a mistake. This entire thing. Good-bye Ford.”

He stood up abruptly, intent on running, as usual, but Ford predicted it and gently pushed him back down by the shoulders. “You misunderstood. You don’t remember? I called you that when we met, and you laughed.”

Ford let his hands rest on Bill’s shoulders, passive force ensuring the boy didn’t try escaping again. Bill seemed to like it, any physical contact with Ford was always met with enthusiasm and it was the same even now.

“The first time you tried forcing yourself on me, I said it was an intimidation tactic. What was this?” He cradled Bill’s cheek, fingers moving further up to lock into blonde hair. “You showing off to your friends?”

Bill looked at the floor. One of Ford’s hands came to tilt his chin up, the thumb rubbing at the corner
of his lips, Bill’s eyes predictably moving to Ford’s face and lips in response.

“You were going to drug me and rape me, Bill. You want me to believe it was all a harmless joke?”

A synthetic anger hardened Bill’s eyes, the rage too easily detectable as false.

“Ford, you talk so fucking much. There’s a time where you just walk away. Maybe you oughta do that.” Bill’s said, voice callous and face desperately leaning into Ford’s hand again.

“Your pupils are still dilated.”

“It’s cause I’m looking at you.” Bill said, staring intensely at Ford, causing the man the slightest discomfort. “And what a sight you are…”

There was no sign of actual aggression in Bill’s behaviour, the boy as docile as ever. Was Evan mistaken? Ford’s confusion must have been written all over his face, because Bill noticed.

“You seem totally bamboozled, Ford. Like really, totally. Is it because of Evan’s claim I get like, so aggressive on coke?” Bill smiled, taking on a humorous valley girl accent. “But I’m not aggressive, am I?” He blinked, slowly. “Of course I’m not. Because I know you’re not going to hurt me.” A hand, inked black with deception, stroked Ford’s cheek. “If I was so bad, why am I not forcing myself on you now?”

“Because you have no audience, Bill.” Ford said, not keen on Bill’s naïve attempts at deceit.

“I really want you, Ford. They have to know you’re mine. They have to so they won’t hurt you.”

“No, Bill.” Ford said softly. “You aren’t going to justify this.”

“Explaining is not justifying. I’d do it again.” Bill took hold of the edge of Ford’s sweater, letting the fabric roll through his fingers. “If you and I were fucking, we could’ve done it. Played pretend. I could’ve fucked you, let them know you’re mine. But you have to be the biggest prude in the world.”

Bill huffed. “You give me no options and then get mad when I step out of line.”

“No. This isn’t going to work.”

“Are you scared of having sex with me?”

“I don’t think I’m the one scared.” Ford said and Bill’s eyes narrowed.

“Are you trying to make me angry?”

“Why would that comment make you angry?”

“Ford, I’m warning you.” Bill’s attempt at sounding intimidating failed hopelessly. Instead, he resembled a small animal making gruff noises at a potential threat.

“You either force yourself on me before I do it to you, or you surrender to it. Is that how you think?”

“Stop talking shit.” The anger still spurious; Ford was left wondering if Bill was aware when he faked emotions.

Schooling force into his expression and words, Ford continued. “That’s how this life works, and you’ve spent most of your life living with this mentality.”
“Shut the fuck up, Ford.”

“How can I sleep with you if you believe sex is meant to control and humiliate?”

“Ford, what the fuck are you talking about? You talk too much about shit no one will ever care about.” Bill leaned back in annoyance. “I’m not your fucking pet project to analyse. I wanted you to fuck me, not be my fucking therapist.”

Analysing the behaviour of people close to him would always be something Ford did, and nothing would change that. If they weren’t interested in assessing themselves in order to better themselves, why should he bother?

“Me trying to fix problems is not being your therapist, as you say.” Ford said. “If you were serious about this, you would encourage this.”

“I just wanna have a good time, Ford.”

“Then it’s not going to work.”

“Is that what the great Stanford Pines thinks?”

“Yes, it’s what the great Stanford Pines thinks.”

Bill laughed coldly. “You’re so fucking full of yourself.”

“And you aren’t? God’s gift to women?”

“Where’s the lie? I got into your bed, after threatening you with a gun and allegedly trying to force myself on you.” Bill said, shrugging. “Say what you want, you can’t deny I’m good at what I do.”

Ford glared at Bill, the boy delighting in the feel of the hard stare.

“Or you’re just an idiot. But that’s what happens when you think with your dick. Good men are always sticking their dicks where they don’t belong. And you’re a good man, aren’t you, Stanford?”

Ford had enough, and once more, decided to bring up something that bothered him even now.

“…why did you follow me?”

“I like you, silly.”

“No, tell the truth.”

“Where’s the lie?” Bill laughed, lightly shrugging.

“You told me you followed me because you thought I was your grandfather.”

“Now when did I say that?” Bill gave an interested and sceptical look.

“When you were drunk, earlier.”

“I was drunk.”

“And telling the truth, for once.”

“Is that what you think?” Bill reached for the rum bottle, tilting it into the sink, letting a few spoons of its contents drain.
“Oh Stanford, I’m drunk. I’ve consumed so much alcohol! Oh, dear me!”

Ford realized what Bill was implying, but refused to believe it.

“No…you were definitely drunk.”

“Prove it.” Bill stood up, closing in on Ford.

“Prove I was drunk and telling the truth. Prove it. Right now. Prove it, Ford.” Bill’s voice raised, too loud, much too loud. “Do it. Prove it. Make some incredible deduction that proves I was drunk. Do it, Ford. Do it!”

Ford kept his voice level, not seeking to engage in a screaming match. “Why are you so scared of the truth, Bill? That you would go to this length? To imply you were lying when I know you weren’t?”

“Oh fuck you, you old pervert.”

“Are you embarrassed? I don’t think less of you, if you thought so. You’re grieving for your family. I understand.”

Bill suddenly went quiet.

“Don’t make a liar of yourself when you aren’t one.” Ford held Bill’s face in his hands, the boy’s eyes looking to the side, aloofness masking his emotions.

“Look at me when I’m talking to you.”

The mask fell off, and Bill’s face softened into a demure expression, one Ford would have loved seeing under any other circumstance.

“Only you can say something like that and not make it sound threatening.” Bill muttered but not complying. Animosity had faded from his voice, and it now resembled the voice Ford heard only during the most intimate of moments. “Only you.”

“Look at me, darling.”

Bill did.

“I forget, that you lost your entire family recently. And I forget that you’ve lived a different life to me. It’s easy to forget these things in the heat of the moment. I won’t forget it again.”

Ford paused then added. “And you told me you loved me. That’s my proof you were drunk.”

Bill laughed. “You think that’s evidence? I said I love you so I must be drunk because I’d never say that, right? Do you even see how flawed your logic is? You can’t use an example of something I’d never say to verify I was drunk and telling the truth. Try again, Ford.”

Bill was right, Ford sighed, attempting to think of another way to prove it; Bill’s bout of aggression not helping.

“I know you were drunk. Keep lying and I’m walking out right now.”

“You win.” Bill flopped back on the toilet seat, defeated. “You win.”

Letting out a loud mixture of a growl and a sigh, Bill kicked the nearby wall. The act startled Ford, but he did his best to compose any visible signs of fear.
“God, I’m sick of this. The way you talk to me like I’m your fucking kid.”

“I talk to you like you’re my lover.”

“What’s the difference?” Bill asked, almost sadly.

“I wasn’t going to…I swear I wasn’t going to…you have to believe me, Ford…” Bill pleaded. “Please don’t end it like this.”

“I’m not ready to end this. It just started. It can’t end like this.” Bill rambled, his head dipping and resting backwards onto the toilet’s tank cover.

“Then you’ll have to work with me, and work on yourself.”

“So serious…so serious…” Bill mumbled, eyes closed.

“It’s time for you to be serious as well, if you expect this to continue between us.”

Bill lifted his head. “What? You looking for commitment?”

“For as long as we are together, yes.”

“I’d give you what? Another 20 years before you’re a decaying sack of meat in the ground, worms burrowing in and outta your pasty skin. Your soil oh so comforting. Leaving me again behind, as you always do.”

“What?” Ford asked. “What do you mean again?”

“And I’ll be what? 42 then? 42…as if I’m going to live that long. What a joke. You ever hear of Death Drive, Ford? You ever hear of that?” Bill added an empty, unnerving laugh at the end.

“Yes. Freud’s theory of a self-destructive urge, the drive to death.”

“That’s it. That’s it. That’s what drives men like us, right? Or men like me, because you are I are just so different, aren’t we Ford? Aren’t we.”

“That would make me Eros.”

“What?”

“You’ve never read that theory in detail? It’s also called Thanatos. The opposite of it is referred to as Eros. Maybe you should do more research on things you acquaint to yourself, Bill.” Ford stroked Bill’s cheek with a thumb, the touch pacifying whatever anger would have come.

Already accustomed to this, Ford could only smile. At Bill’s age, it was no surprise he’d have such feelings and thoughts. They might be predominantly present in teenagers, but it wasn’t unusual for a, for a lack of better term, goth phase to carry on until the early twenties. The obsession with the dark and death and all that morbid nonsense Ford was too old for.

“If you were proof death drive existed, you wouldn’t be anywhere near someone like me.” Ford said. “You’re young, how typical of you to think you’re spiralling down the dark abyss when really, it’s nowhere near that bad. You’re nowhere near that bad, darling.”

A tired smile slowly came onto Bill’s face, his cheek leaning into Ford’s touch. Despite Ford’s words, Bill didn’t appear offended in the slightest.
“Now let’s forget Freudian talk.” Ford said. “Listen. I’ll give you one more chance on one condition.”

“Don’t, Ford.”

“No drugs, no threats of rape directed at anyone—not even as a joke. Don’t ever try to force yourself on me, even as a joke. No lies and no pretending to lie.”

Bill fell back limply, as if defeated. Ford’s touch followed him.

“You said you’d do anything I asked. Does it extend outside the bedroom?”

“It does…it does.”

“Then.” Ford rubbed Bill’s upper lip. “Do this for me, darling.”

“I need you to understand, Bill. We are from different places. I’m not like your friends, or the people you work with. I can only take so much. Do you understand? I’m at my limit already.”

Ford watched Bill, hesitation coming for him again.

“Am I really supposed to believe you were joking? It felt too real.” Ford said, re-thinking things once more. To forgive this would be stupid, and he would not forgive. But he could attempt to rectify it. He had to play nice, at least until they returned home. And he needed more time to think...

“If you do something to me, I can’t even go to the police.” Ford said. The Giordano family had their muddy paws in everything. To become a victim of Bill would mean no justice.

“I won’t, Ford. Even if I did—” Bill began and Ford interrupted.

“There should be no if.”

“Even if I did, you can get your revenge. I’ll take it willingly. I promise.”

A light bulb switched on, brighter than Bill’s yellow tie.

“Are you attempting to provoke me into forcing myself on you in anger or spite? Is that your end goal?”

“What…?” Bill recoiled from Ford’s touch, confused.

Bill had to be playing dumb. This conclusion made perfect sense. Especially once Ford factored in his outburst with Evan. He’d blatantly attempted to provoke the man into sex.

“Is that why you acted out with Evan? To get him to fuck you?”

Bill’s eyes widened fearfully at Ford’s usage of fuck. He quickly sunk further back on the seat, as far as he possibly could, as though he expected Ford to reach for him. The action unexpectedly pulled at something in Ford, and sympathy for Bill flooded him.

“Bill, I’m never going to. Stop trying to make me hurt you. Me doing that is your biggest fear—I know—and one you don’t need to worry about with me.” A hand extended towards Bill, but he refused to accept it—still seemingly scared of Ford.

“I know you’ve been—I know what happened to you.”
“What?” Bill’s voice came wispy and hard. “No… who told you…?”

“You did.”

“No… when? When did I tell you? No, you can’t know about that…”

“Earlier today, when you were drunk.”

“You can’t tell anyone, Ford…you can’t… I’ll kill you if you do. I’ll kill you. I really wil—” Bill’s threats barely sounded convincing but he was trying.

“Sshhh it’s okay.” Ford attempted to rub Bill’s head but the boy withdrew again. “I won’t tell anyone. It’s not your fault.”

A sudden burst of assertiveness had Bill taking hold of Ford’s hand. “No, if you tell Evan… Don’t tell him you know. He’ll kill you.”

“Why? Was he the one who…?”

“No, of course not. I gave him strict orders to kill anyone who knew. If you so much as hint you know, he’ll kill you.” Bill’s hold tightened protectively around Ford’s hand.

“Ugh, why the fuck would I have told you? Now? Of all times?” Guttural sounds of annoyance and displeasure breathed out of Bill, and his gaze returned to Ford. “What exactly did I tell you? Did I give any details? Did I remember anything?”

“No no, you only…you only told me you’d endured…” Ford paused, breathing in confidence to continue with the touchy subject. “You told me you’d been ra—no, forced to have sex as punishment, and for lying.”

“That’s all I said?” The hold around Ford’s hand tightened, nearly painful now.

“Yes.”

With a loud sigh of relief, Bill leaned back against the base of the toilet.

“I thought—nevermind.”

“What did you think?”

“Nothing…” Bill’s eyes wandered to the floor again, body still slightly stiff and fingers still fidgety. Then suddenly, the fretting hand is at Ford’s belt.

“Ford…fuck me. Do you want to…”?

Ford took hold of the offending hand; now holding both of Bill’s hands captive. “Why do you do this? You’re a mess.”

“Sorry…” Bill dropped his head. Hoping to enhearten the boy, Ford pulled Bill’s head into his clothed stomach—ineffable absolution in the action if one squinted hard enough.

Bill tensed up. “Oh… do you want me to suck you off…?”

“No no, darling. Just rest your head against me.” Bill did, wrapping his arms around Ford, hiding his face in the man’s clothed abdomen. Ford stroked his hair, feeling more like a father than a lover and knowing he wouldn’t if Bill wasn’t so young. Bill tended to immure himself within himself, his lies a
convenient but self-destructive protective armour. Ford had to orient himself quickly with these habits, and fix them.

Any problem could be solved, with time and dedication. Bill was young, and ignoring the romantic aspect, the boy had his whole life ahead of him. If Ford could help, why not? He’d done so plenty a times with students.

But…it had only been a few days, and so much had happened between them. How would this ever last?

He had so much to think about, his thoughts are everywhere.

“I don’t want to wake up without you…” Bill muttered against the soft, red fabric.

As Bill pulled away, Ford rubbed his cheek, the boy’s eyes still pleading with Ford.

“Please don’t leave me, Ford…”

“Why are you like this?”

“Sorry…I’m sorry….”

“No, why are you so clingy towards me? We barely know each other. I’m thrice your age, Bill. You shouldn’t be with someone as old as me.”

“No…that’s not true…” Bill rested his forehead against Ford’s sweater again. “I was…I was born for you, Stanford…”

What an unsettling comment.

“That’s not true, Bill. You—nevermind. You’re intoxicated. You don’t know what you’re saying.” He patted the boy. “Evan said you used to hurt yourself. Is that true?”

“He exaggerates. But yeah. Not in the way you think. Like…in the fun way, the Angelina Jolie way. Not the depressive way.”

“The Angelina Jolie way?”

“Yeah…that’s the best I can do right now.”

“Then no more Angelina Jolie impersonations too. And the most important thing is don’t disrespect me again.”

Bill began lightly knocking his forehead against Ford’s stomach. “That really grinds your gears huh?”

“If you respected me, none of this would’ve happened.” Ford couldn’t help but smile at the childish display. “Respect is the foundation of a relationship, Bill.”

“How the fuck would I know?”

“Well, now you know.”

Bill let out a long-winded sigh, then looked up at Ford with wide puppy-dog eyes that made an exceptionally convincing argument.
“What am I going to do with you…”?

“Love me.” Bill added a pout to match his eyes and Ford laughed, ruffling the boy’s hair.

“You still have it in you to make snide comments.”

Ford met Bill halfway for a kiss, the boy covering the remaining distance. The kiss felt empty and lifeless; dead lips for a dead boy. Ford stroked Bill’s face, attempting to vanquish morbid thoughts of the boy’s current state but the heat from the tongue only came to Ford as a funeral pyre.

Another kiss, and it’s as impassive as the first.

“Ford…” Bill whispered, as their lips separated. “Make him go away…make him leave…”

“You want me to tell Evan to go home?”

“Yes…he’s so full of shit, Ford. So full of it…he always acts like this when Kryptos is involved. He was so…so obedient back home…but now…” Bill’s breath hitched. “Ford, if I don’t assert my…my status as the boss, I think…I think…”

Ford now understood. What did he know of how gangs operated? To reprimand Bill for what was most likely the boy attempting to reassure his underlings he was still in control and not Ford’s plaything.

If they knew the real Bill…the Bill he saw so frequently…he’s sure their respect would wane and disappear altogether.

“I—I think…I think it’s not the end for us. I just need time to digest all of this. I need time to think.”

He embraced Bill, the boy returning it sluggish and again, lifeless.

“Have you ever thought…of leaving this life behind? Entirely?”

“I can’t. You know that.”

“I’m sure there’s a way.”

“No thanks.”

If Ford found a way, would Bill even take it?

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“Wait…”

Bill kissed him again, pushing him against the sink.

“Give it to me, right here. “

“Bill, no. ”

“Let me in, Stanford…” Bill’s clawed at his crotch, waiting for some form of permission.


“No…” Bill spread his legs, the act seeming silly. “We can have a happy ever after. All you have to do is fuck me here, right now.”
Ford leaned down and kissed him a little too hard.

“Just wait here. Can you do that for me?”

“…Yes.”

Using his index fingers and thumbs, Bill made a triangle and peeping through it, sung. “I spy with my little eye…”

He gazes through it, and so does the triangle with one eye.

It thinks this Bill Cipher has a long way to go.

- 

Ford, satisfied with Bill’s obedience, left the bathroom.

Evan stood at the foot of the bed, waiting.

“He’s fine. You can leave. I’ll handle him.”

“Are you sure? He can be quite a handful.”

“He’s coming down already.” Ford said. “I can handle him just fine.”

“Suit yourself. Take care, Ford.” Evan turned to leave but stopped. “If you hurt him, I’ll kill you. Despite the falling out we appear to be having, Bill is my boss and I’m his care-taker.”

“I understand.”

At the door, Evan stopped once more.

“Wait. One more thing…what are you two?”

Ford hesitated before responding. “Lovers.”

“You’re lovers with a boy more than half your age?”

“We haven’t slept together.”

“You intend to.” Xanthar’s eyes remained neutral, but the sharpness came through in his voice.

“Yes, and? We’re seeing one another. He offered himself to you, too.”

“And I declined.”

“You don’t like men.”

“I’m also not attracted to children. Are you?”

Ford’s heart sped up.

“Why are you antagonizing me?”

“Is that how you feel? Do you feel attacked? Says more about you then me. Goodnight, Ford.”
Xanthar left, the door slamming behind him.

This was bad. How old was Bill, really?

Shrugging and sober, Bill downed multiple swigs of rum. Being high might’ve been a good ruse, but adding a bit of sincerity made every con perfect.

It wouldn’t take long for the rum to have an effect, if he drank enough of it quickly.

It hits him, right on time. Ford hadn’t even returned it.

He keeps drinking anyway.

Ford returned on to the bathroom. After several knocks, he announced Evan had left. Bill emerged, wobbling and seeming more intoxicated than before.

Ford led the torpid boy to the bed. “I’m going to undress you, alright?”

“Yes…please…” Bill said, upper body swaying idly like a zombie.

“Hey Ford…do you want to fuck me in front of my friends? Show them who’s in charge?”

“What…” Ford couldn’t contain the shock in his voice.

“No, Bill. Of course not.” He had to avoid being with Bill and his friends in the same vicinity. If he prevented that, then another incident could not occur. So many rules to consider in order to be with Bill…why did Ford consider him worth the effort? The boy’s charm was quite the force to be reckoned with.

Bill nuzzled lazily in his neck. “It’ll be…it’s the only way I can show you how sorry I am…for…trying to…I can’t…they can’t…sorry Ford…”

“Ford…when are you…Ford, can you please…”

“What’s wrong, darling?”

“Hurt me…a little…” Bill muttered, Ford’s neck still cradling his face.

“What do you mean hurt you?”

“Like…fuck me really hard…or even…like before maybe? Like…hit me a bit? I…I’ll take whatever you give…”

“No, Bill. I’m not interested in that sort of thing.” He stroked Bill’s hair reassuringly.

“Why won’t you hurt me? Don’t… Don’t you like me? Listen, Ford…Ford…I can take it. I promise… I deserve it…I disrespected you…go ahead…”

“Bill…no.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t need a reason not to hurt you, darling. You should go sleep.”
“Ford…but…” Bill whined and Ford pulled him into an embrace.

“We’ll talk in the morning okay? You shouldn’t be having these…nevermind.”

“Ford…I can’t remember crying…not once…” Words heaved out like slow vomit; everything Bill had once digested surfacing for judgement and to once again, soil everything close to him. “But I know I did… I know, somewhere some…where I know I did…”

Bill pulled out of the hug, and stood, staring at a spot on Ford’s sweater.

“I think it was so bad that it just… fizzles outta my memories…my head? My head…sorry…it’s outta my head, right? I don’t know…” Bill wobbled and Ford held him firmly, fingers lovingly caressing the area they sat at.

“What are you talking about?”

“Sorry…nevermind…”

“No, Bill. Keep talking. I’m listening.

“I…I can’t remember…I just…I dont know…sorry…”

“Ssshhh, don’t apologize, dear. You can tell me anything.”

“Ford, I’m drunk…and I’m… I dunno what I’m saying…” Bill began rambling.

“I fucked up…I mean, messed up…sorry language…I’m sorry…I’m sorry I won’t run away again… Ford listened in silence.

“Ford…I’m so sorry…I missed you so much…only you…it’s not the same, with other men…I missed you…”

“What’s not the same?”

“They…they don’t know how to hurt me like you do…they don’t…it’s not…it’s not the same…they don’t…they don’t…” A barely audible ‘love me’, came out.

“Bill…who are you confusing me with?”

“It was…the best…you…I miss…when you’d…sorry…”

“Bill, are you confusing me with your grandfather?”

“Sorry…I don’t know what I’m saying…I’m sorry…”

“Did he beat you? Bill, I’m never going to raise my hand to you like he did. Do you understand?”

“…Ford…no, Ford it’s not…Ford…I can’t….can’t… remember…”

“Did he—” Ford began, but Bill’s muttering silenced him.

“I missed you… so much…so much…don’t…don’t leave me…I won’t say no ever again…”

“I promise…” Bill nuzzled into Ford’s neck desperately seeking redemption from the wrong man. Deciding not to press the topic until morning, Ford said. “I’m going to put you to bed. Come…”
“Wait…please…please fuck me. I really…”

“Now now, none of that. To bed.”

“…can you stay with me?” Bill begged, submitting to Ford’s guidance.

“I’ll climb in with you.”

Once in they were both in bed, despite Bill smelling strongly of alcohol, Ford held him close.

“Bill, how old are you actually?”

“Wah…? I’m…I told you…”

“Tell me again. I have to make sure.”

“Twenty…two?…I think…”

“You think?” Ford asked, frowning hard, the wrinkles on his forehead deep.

“No birthday….sorry…have to count years…since…sorry…”

“No birthday? What do you mean?”

“…no birthday….date…no date…” Bill said, disorientated. “Maybe…twenty three…now? Sorry…I don’t know…” Bill sighed into the skin of Ford’s chest.

Ford held him tighter. What was he to make of this information? No birthdate? Was Bill adopted?

Bill interrupted him before his mind could formulate more possible solutions. “You’re the best, Ford…you’re the best…the best…”

“Go sleep. It’ll be okay.”

“I’m sorry….”

“Don’t apologize. You’ve done nothing wrong.” Not entirely true, but in this instance, Bill was innocent and only guilty of a past he could not control.

“I’m so sorry…”

“When you’re sober, you and I are going to have a serious talk, okay?”

“Sorry…don’t leave me…”

“I’m not going to.”

Ford pulled him in, the boy still apologizing in incoherent bursts that began to resemble gibberish after the first few sorry’s. Whatever happened to Bill was a lot worse than Ford first realized.

“Being with you is like a dream, Ford…it doesn’t feel real…” Bill choked out, the words sounding familiar to Ford. Bill had said something similar once before.

“Don’t go anywhere…Ford…” Bill’s hand wandered across Ford’s face, with eyes closed; Ford took it, joining their fingers for comfort.

Ford fell asleep, Bill’s body a corpse in his arms; heavy, with cold breath and even colder blood. The
blood of dead men who haunted Bill’s woods.
But the frost is only in Ford’s mind’s eye.

“What did you give Bill?” Xanthar held 8ball up by the collar.
“Man, you know already! Just a little bit of coke! What the hell Xanth—”
“He wasn’t high. What did you give him?” Xanthar demanded again.
“I don’t know. I gave him what he wanted—”
“I’m asking you one more time.” Xanthar’s voice deepened, every word being pronounced slower.
“Okay okay. Jesus Christ. I…I gave him flour, alright? Drop me.”
“Flour?” Xanthar let go of 8ball, who got to his feet while muttering every swear word that came to mind.
“Yeah, he wanted me to dope up flour and make it look like it was Cocaine.”
“What?”
“Fuck if I know, man!”
Bill wanted to pretend to be high—why? To provoke Xanthar? Or to…
Xanthar poured himself a glass, letting out an uncharacteristically laugh in the process.
He sat down, rubbing his temples to relieve the built up stress that came with Bill’s antics.
Thank God.
Because this was never about Xanthar or Kryptos.
It was always about Stanford Pines.

Chapter End Notes

Tfw when you think Kryptos is gonna be some bad ass but he’s a fucking kid bc Bill is a paranoid and jealous narcissistic drama queen. Also, Ford calling out Bill for being edgy is my fav
for: ill give you another chance
also ford: probably dumps bill the next chap
Once Upon A Time In Little Italy

Chapter Summary

I need you, Ford. But I’m weird, you know? I’m surprised ΔI’m not looking at us right now. Δ

Chapter Notes

All POV breaking, as in third person suddenly becoming first person, are entirely intentional.

Warnings: Bill describes a scenario reminiscent of Not That kind of Man.

Don't take dialogue at face value. Narrators can be unreliable. Especially when they're no-good liars.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Oh wow, pleasure to meet you, Bill!!” She’s as cute as she’s always been, and boy crazy as ever. But she doesn’t recognize him, and he’s glad—wishes deep down she did. He kisses her hand, it smells like bubble-gum (bet it tastes like it, too), and sees her shooting stars are gone.

Her shooting stars are…gone.

—Bill Cipher meets Mabel Pines, again. The near future.

When Ford awoke, Bill was still asleep, cradling his right arm like a child would to a teddy. Feelings of nostalgia came at the sight; like he’s seen this exact same image multiple times. Again, it feels like they’ve been lovers for months. But now they had finally concluded they were far too incompatible.

This couldn’t continue. Only just having begun, it now couldn’t even continue.

Tired of thinking, he rolled over carefully, and with precise movement of his body’s left side—handicapped slightly by his sleepiness—embraced Bill in a close-knit hug; taking Bill into his arms and feeling Bill’s arms move to wrap around his torso. The boy was still half-asleep, moving on motor memory.

He stroked Bill’s hair until he fell asleep.

The sound of light patter was the first thing Bill heard waking up. The same sound a laptop made when you typed on it—Ford was close to him. The man was always in front of that little black screen.

Still dazed and sleepy, he sat up, cracking opened dry eyes that sought out Ford, who sat on the other
side of the bed at his computer. Exactly as predicted.

“Good morning.” Ford greeted him first, with a smile no less. Waking up was beginning to have its perks. Any other day, he’d not want to wake up at all. Days with Ford, however, were days he never wanted to sleep. Too much to do with Ford, too much to talk about…

When had he become so sappy?

“Morning…what time is it?” Bill asked, rubbing his eyes to invoke tears, hoping to expel some of the dryness. It never worked, but at least he looked cute doing it.

“Only 11. Do you want to sleep longer?” Lovely voice…as always.

“No no…I’m fine.” Bill lied back down, turning on his left side to watch Ford, who returned his stare affably—with a soft smile and talkative eyes.

“When’s your birthday?” Ford asked.

“I don’t know.” As if disappearing from Ford’s view would stop the conversation, Bill buried his face flat into the pillow. It didn’t work but it was worth a try.

“How do you not know?”

“My birth was never registered.” He muffled, having to repeat himself after freeing his face from the soft cotton.

“Why?”

Bill shrugged. “I don’t know. Ask my dead father. Ask my dead mother. Ask those dead fucking people why they did what they did.”

Bill turned onto his right side, back now facing Ford and mood already soured.

“Don’t wanna talk about this.”

“We’re going to have to talk about this eventually.”

“Don’t wanna.” Bill said. “Come back to me when you wanna fuck or something. But fuck off with this.”

“Language. Need I remind you about respecting me?”

“Jesus Christ.” Bill muttered, regretting it instantly. An ‘I’m sorry, Ford…’ followed immediately, and hopes of Ford assuring him with a touch remained unfulfilled.

“Let’s pick a birthday for you, unless you already have one.”

“Hm?” Bill turned around straight away. “Pick a birthday?”

“Surely it crossed your mind to?”

“Uh…sometimes, but my line of work. I normally have so many birthdays, there’s no point really.”

“What do you mean?”

“Long story.” Bill said. “Yeah…yeah I’d like that.”
“What birthday is on your fake ID?”

“Hmmm sometime in August I think.”

“That’s no good. You don’t strike me as an August born.”

“Huh?”

“Let’s talk after you eat.” Ford got up, leaving for the door.

“Ford…where are you going?” A sudden concern overtook Bill’s voice.

“To order room-service.”

“You can do that right here, by me.” Bill patted the bed, then pointed to the phone. No need for Ford to leave. He might not come back…

“I was under the impression you didn’t want me near.”

“No…no, not at all.”

Bill held Ford’s hand as Ford ordered room service—curled up on his side, watching the man’s lips pronounce every word. Said lips took on an overly pouting movement when speaking; strangely erotic. He’s noticing it now. Feeling too, how warm Ford’s hands were, and recalling how warm they had always been.

Or maybe he’s just cold.

I really want you.

When Ford finished, his attention returned to where it should be: Bill.

“I’ve had time to think, and I’m not sure we can continue this.” Ford sounded almost sad, and Bill’s grip on his hand tightened for dear life.

“You said…”

Did Ford want to die?

“I know, but…”

“No…give me another chance, Ford. Think about it again.” Bill sat up, and flung his arms around Ford’s neck, cosying into the man’s exposed skin, as always. Ford accepted it, arms surrounding Bill in return—but they held him limply, no desire present. Not like Ford used to hold him. He could feel the obvious differences. If Bill Cipher could feel fear, he’d feel fear at losing Ford.

“Think about it. Wait until we get back. Just wait…” He begged to Ford, nose swiping in the man’s neck.

“You were sober for a few days, you said, until you started hanging around your friends again.” Ford rubbed his back and his grip around Ford’s body faltered.

“Stop being so easily influenced.” Ford said, and Bill doesn’t bother rectifying him. For Ford to think his friends were the culprits, indirectly, was perfect. Now, how to capitalize on this?

Interrupting Bill’s plotting, Ford said. “I’ll do as you asked. I’ll wait until I’m back home. But I don’t
“want to be near you when you’re with your friends.”

“Understood…you seemed to really like Alex though.”

“I do like him, but I can’t trust him as long as he works for you”

Good. There’d be no vying for Ford’s attention then. Competing with Paci-fire—what a joke.

Bill hummed an apology into Ford’s neck, finishing it with a myriad of ticklish kisses that had Ford squirming and laughing.

Ford’s laughter was empty. “Now settle down and wait for your food.”

“Ugh, do you have to talk to me like I’m a kid?” Bill fell backwards onto the bed and shuffled away from Ford, grabbing the remote and turning up the volume on the T.V. An old movie was on, one that looked familiar. Although most old movies looked the same. Hard to differentiate because of the superbly low quality.

“What were you watching? Looks familiar…”

“Boy in the plastic bubble.”

“Huh…” Bill murmured, focusing on the film until breakfast arrived. It hadn’t been playing for all that long. The information display confirmed it—only fifteen minutes in. Didn’t take Ford to be a retro guy, but the man was a geek. Figures he’d like old shit.

“Never comes outta his room.”

“Does he have any friends?”

“Just old people…”

“Don’t you ever wonder what it’s like in there? I mean, to be all by yourself like that?”

“Yeah, I know. But he’s weird, you know? I’m surprised he isn’t looking at us right now…”

This line sounded familiar—where had he heard it?

Rewind.

“But he’s weird, you know?”

Rewind.

“But he’s weird, you know?”

Rewind.

Bill smiled, bright-eyed, and looked at Ford who appeared focused a little too intently on him. Probably weirded out at him rewinding the scene so much. He always weirded everyone out. Ah, when fantasy imitated real life. Or rather, when real life imitated fantasy.

“But I’m weird, you know?” He said to Ford, whose face was alit with typical apprehension—save for the eyes. Curiosity had those. As always.

Oh boy, here came more psychoanalysis.

“But he’s weird, you know?”
“But he’s weird, you know?” He repeated with the girl in the movie. He didn’t know her name, didn’t care either, but she was right about him. He was weird.

Even Ford thought so and couldn’t stand being near weird. People liked weird, but they didn’t like weird.

“I like weird.” Ford said. Was the man a mind-reader? Better yet, was he delusional? Bill had showed him just a little bit of his weirdness, and shit hit the fan.

Sure, Ford, you like weird. Only when it’s plain old vanilla (not even French vanilla, mind you!) and convenient for you and everyone else to accept without your perception or beliefs being challenged. Boo hoo. Maybe to think outside your little lunch box just hurts too much. Any idiot will tell you—you gotta take the pain before you get the cake. Or something… fuck, who cares. Isn’t the cake a fucking lie, anyway?

I really want you, still.

But I’m weird, you know?

“Nah.” Bill let the movie continue its run. Hunger inspired his stomach to begin protest loudly; Ford hearing it and chuckling quietly to himself like a fucking school-girl, rousing Bill to throw the remote at him. It hadn’t been that long, but this was a five-star hotel. Surely they should be quick about these things.

“Never comes outta his room.”

“But he’s weird, you know?”

He imagined his friends saying that, behind his back.

“But he’s weird, you know?” 8ball would say, juggling those cheap sweets he loves to chew on. With those god-awful smacking noises he’d make just to rile Bill up. “He never comes outta his room.”

“Yeah, and he’s got a fondness for old people.” Xanthar will say, in a voice too high and light to be his own. “He’s weird, you know?”

Then Pyronica, shrugging, cleaning a barrel. “I’m surprised he’s not watching us right now. Always watching, never participating.”

“Well, he’s weird, you know?” Paci-fire decides to add in.

Weird…

Bill ate slowly, feeling Ford’s eyes wander to him occasionally. He didn’t meet them, too self-conscious. Did he eat weird, too? If only he had a hand-held mirror or something, to watch himself eat, to ensure he wasn’t making any weird faces. Any unattractive faces.

Was that the issue? Was he not attractive enough? No, that couldn’t be it. He was damn good-looking. Then…? What? What?

Enough was enough. He left his food and went to clean up. Even in the shower, he thought to the time he showered with Ford. Then worried…what if he had looked weird under the water? Did his
hair sit in weird places?

How weird was he? Was Ford leaving him simply an accumulation of all the weird things he’d done up until now? Was his weirdness last night the final pin in Pinhead?

He gargled mouth-wash for an extra thirty seconds. No such thing as breath that was too minty. Scrutinizing his appearance in the mirror, nothing stood out as being worthy of contempt. Skin clear, hair perfect, breath fresh. Why did Ford want to leave him? His voice? No, his moaning was top notch, cream of the crop. Amazing oral skills. Skilful hands. He’s been practicing for so long. There wasn’t anything he lacked.

So, why?

“But he’s weird, you know?”

He made sure to dry his hair properly before entering the room. Maybe wet hair looked shit on him. With only a towel wrapped around his lower half, he exited the bathroom. As he went about idly searching for his clothes, he became suddenly aware of Ford watching him (the man’s eyes burned with judgement. God, what was wrong?), Bill greeted the stare with a smirk dipped in fake confidence.

“You want to see what’s behind the towel?” He undid the knot, holding it in place, teasing Ford by letting it part to show a little more skin here and there.

Ford smiled bashfully, shaking his head as his eyes fled elsewhere.

Damn.

Wearing only pants, Bill lit up a cigarette. All other clothes were a hassle. Too coarse against his eerily sensitive skin.

“You can’t smoke in here.” Ford said, and Bill pointed to the balcony. Duh.

After taking a few drags, he went to stand outside, admiring the incredibly incredible view. Five star hotels always lived up to their rating. He wondered if Ford’s ever been in a five-star hotel before this. Probably not. One night costed as much as several weeks’ worth of groceries for the middle class.

The cigarette was nearly finished.

He left the balcony, wandering over to Ford. Ford turned red, Bill’s half-nakedness having a profoundly flustering effect. Really, the man was ridiculous.

But it pleased Bill, knowing no matter how often Ford saw him, the man seemed enamoured every time. What a romantic numbskull.

Surprise! He took a deep drag and kissed Ford, blowing the recycled smoke into Ford’s mouth, down his throat, into every corner and crevice permissible. Ford pushed him back, choking, coughing out the airy poison; Bill could only laugh. Laugh and laugh. Served Ford right.

“Is that what it’s like to be with me?” Bill asked innocently, acknowledging the question was pretty meta. “All toxic, inside you?”

“Not once did I ever imply that.” Ford said, expelling the rest of whatever smoke was left in his system. “Please don’t do that again.”
“Roger.” Bill saluted.

After composing himself, Ford glared at Bill, brown eyes still watery behind his glasses. “You know...last night makes me wonder if your true colours had finally begun to show.”

“Ah yes, because the parts of me you don’t like have to be my ‘true colours’, right? Fuck everything you do like!” Bill crushed the cigarette into his arm, Ford’s eyes widened like a doped-up owl, and he made a grab for Bill’s arm.

“Are you alright? Why are you hurting yourself?”

“Huh? I just put it out, no big.” Bill shrugged, but Ford wasn’t happy. Was the man ever happy with the things he did?

“But he’s weird, you know?” Bill laughed out as Ford pulled him into the bathroom and tended to the insignificant wound—Bill watching his face carefully. Every touch from Ford communicated unaccepted consolation. Through the ‘making it better’, Ford lectured Bill about not hurting himself impulsively. The tone used was too undemanding for Bill to get annoyed. He let it go.

Ford cared so much.

“But he’s weird, you know?”

Once Ford was done playing father, holding hands, they returned to the bed area. Ford sat while Bill stood, admiring Ford’s handy-work with comedic ‘ooohs’ and ‘aaahs’. A roll of the eyes was all he managed to solicit from the older man.

Ford cared so much. Ford was going to leave him. Just like that man did.

“So, since you’re dumping me...” Bill mused. “How about break-up sex?”

“What?” Ford pulled in Bill’s arm, inspecting it again. The wound was nothing, and Ford knew that. His attention had clearly transferred to Bill’s tattoos, and Bill allowed him to gawk.

Gawking at him like he’s a side-show freak.

“Let’s do something...one more time.” He got on his knees, between Ford’s legs and Ford’s upper body reclined backwards in protest. The prospect didn’t appeal to him but Bill had a talent for convincing Stanford Pines.

“I’m not sure...”

“Come on, we weren’t always an item when we did lewd things. Please...?” He turned on his doe eyes, hands kneading at Ford’s inner thighs. One look at Bill’s eyes, and Ford’s body language informed him of the man’s inevitable surrender.

“...What did you have in mind?” Ford asked, reluctant but curious enough. The bait had been taken.

“I want something specific from you. Something we’ll both like.” Bill continued to massage Ford’s inner thighs, swaying his upper body to the rhythm.

“Punish me. In whatever you like, for what I did. Consider it a chance to work off some steam.”

“I’m not angry anymore, Bill.”
“But I still feel guilty. Come on, Ford…” Applying pressure against Ford’s inner thighs to aid with his argument, Bill arched his back, seeking further relinquishment.

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

Standing tall, he touched Ford at the left cheek, letting his index finger rest under the earlobe while his thumb slid across the cheek to the lips, back and forth—softly, as if rubbing too hard might make the black of his hands smudge, staining Ford’s skin.

“Then punish me in a way that doesn’t hurt.”

Ford shook his head, facing the other way. Losing what little patience he still retained, Bill pushed Ford onto the bed, holding him down with a mixture of body weight and effective willpower. “I’ll take it in whatever way you give it.” His tongue begged wetly at Ford’s tightly pure lips. “Ford…come on. Fuck me. Teach me a lesson. You always say you want to teach me…teach me with this.” His hand cupped Ford’s crotch, disappointed at the lack of hardness.

Sensing a chance, Ford toppled over and, straddling Bill. Sombreness weathered Ford’s already worn face.

“Fuck yes, are you going to do it?” He pulled Ford closer by the shirt. “Come on, I was going to drug and rape you, Ford. Don’t you just wanna avenge your lost pride at nearly being my fucktoy?”

Too much sadness in Ford’s eyes, Bill thought, right before Ford leaned down and started kissing him. Instantly, Bill started struggling.

No no no no. This wasn’t what he wanted. Not this. Anything but this.

“No, not this shit. Don’t you do this shit to me again, Ford—” But Ford easily held him down with body weight (how many pounds did this fucking man way? He was so heavy…) and continued to kiss him zealously. No hunger in them; they came quick—hard sometimes, soft sometimes. But always devoid of want.

“No, fuck you, Ford. Fuck you, stop—stop this shit—” But Ford wasn’t listening or stopping. First time Ford doesn’t stop, first time Ford doesn’t listen.

There’s always a first time for everything, especially with good men like Stanford Pines.

Bill’s face was cupped firmly as Ford demanded to know: “Where did you put the lube?”

Bill froze—was Ford going to do it? Finally?

He told Ford, and queue his pants coming off—Ford pulling them off with not enough brute force. He wanted to be scared of what Ford would do, dammit. This was too tame.

A timid finger went in, and Ford began talking. “Bill, I’m disappointed in you.” The finger thrust in, cautiously, before getting a decent rhythm. “I asked you not to use violence against me.”

It was actually going to happen. Ford was definitely going to fuck him good.

“Sorry Ford…” Shit, he moaned that out. It was supposed come out a sob verging on a moan.

“Sorry isn’t good enough.” Ford’s words were cold but his rhythm and touches brought no pain. Still gentle, still kind.

“And you disrespected me.” Another finger came in, sluggishly at first, following the previous
finger’s rhythm. Was Ford going to enter a finger for each offence? If there were 6 offences, would Ford fist him? No…he hasn’t been that bad…

But what if he had? What if…?

“Think about what you’ve done.” Ford said, taking Bill’s mouth.

Strong smell of aftershave.

Ford’s fingers fucked him at a faster pace than the tongue fucking his mouth. The rough pace Ford’s tongue went at—like a famished dog lapping up water. It pushed past the threshold of passion, feeling more like Ford was attempting to eat him mouth first. Clumsy, and gross even. Slobbering all over Bill like a dog.

Still, nothing hurt. Only a rapidly rising heat could be felt alongside Ford’s mysterious remaining stubble scratching against the soft of his skin—neither sensation unwelcomed.

Pulling out of the soggy kiss, Ford said. “Say my name for me.”

“Fuck you, Ford.” Bill choked out between panting. This man’s narcissism was endless.

“Say it or I’ll stop.”

Bill gave the man what he wanted—what more could he do? What Ford asked, he’d do. He tells himself that, tells himself to obey from now on. Be a good boy.

“My full name.”

He does—Stanford. It’s a mouthful in the heat of the moment but doable.

He freed his mouth from Ford, gasping in relief at freedom. Ford, annoyed, grabbed his chin and held it as he forced his tongue in again. Keeps holding his chin there, Bill struggling weakly against him.

He expected the fingers thrusting in him to start hurting, but they don’t. As gentle as ever. Discomfort instead generating from his own writhing.

Again, he escaped, managed a ‘Ford, stop’ and Ford does. Stops. Bill changed his mind instantly.

“No no, don’t stop…”

“Make up your mind. Do you want me to or not?” The words are angry, but the voice is playful, and coupled with a smile.

“I do…”
Ford kissed him, the fingers resumed.

And he’s getting close already. Close, close, closer…

Ford stopped. A flurry of whines spilled from Bill’s mouth.

“No, I’m so close…” Bill continued to complain, not understanding why a disruption had even occurred.

“I know. That’s enough.”

“What?” Ford attempted to get up but Bill pulled him back down.
“No, we aren’t finished.”

Ford raised an eyebrow at the boy’s sudden audacity. “We are. You said this was meant to be punishment. Why on earth would I reward you?”

“No no Ford…that’s too cruel…” Bill griped but Ford regarded him impassive stare.

Determined to finish, Bill began touching himself only Ford to sternly intervene, stopping him. Not that he minded. He wouldn’t be able to endure self-service unless Ford was watching him, at least.

“You aren’t allowed to finish yourself.” Ford said, holding both of his wrists. “I want you to sit here and think about what you’ve done.”

“I said I was sorry already…”

“This isn’t about you being sorry. It’s about reflecting on what got you here to begin with.”

Bill gave Ford his best puppy dog eyes and Ford’s face softened instantly. What a sucker.

Ford rubbed Bill’s head, obviously smitten. “You want me to finish you off?”

Bill nodded. His silence a testament to his desperation to please.

“Ask me nicely.”

“Please…please Ford…” Bill kissed one of Ford’s hand to seal the deal. Ford accepted.

Ford pinned him down, left hand forcing too many fingers into his mouth while Ford swallowed as much of him as possible. He finished too quickly, and too hard; folded arms covering his face in embarrassment as he panted out leftover moans.

“You should thank me.” Ford said, pleased with himself.

He did. He thanked Ford wholeheartedly.

Ford pulled him up, curling an arm around his neck to bring him closer. The man kissed him a few times, then demanded compensation. Commanding Ford…it suited the man’s gruff, deep voice perfectly.

He took Ford into his mouth and this time, Ford thrusted in and out at an easy pace. Like a dream. It wasn’t as brutal as he’d like but it was something. All he had to do was encourage this behaviour and Ford would understand.

He swallowed emphatically, sucking moans out of Ford the man couldn’t stifle despite his dire attempts. If he had to rate himself: A+.

Once Ford’s orgasm waned, the man held him down again and kissed him repeatedly. He joked about tasting like dick. Ford said he liked it.

Fuck Stanford Pines. He called the man a pervert.

Probably a sex offender in another life time...

Thinking now was a good time, he begged Ford to fuck him, just this once but Ford didn’t reply, and continued to kiss him. Struggling again to get the man off, he pushed against Ford but it had no effect. Why did he even bother trying?
Ford stopped; with a hand, parted Bill’s legs once more, and began touching him again.

Bill became worried.

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He’s on his third orgasm and could no longer struggle. All traces of rebellion left at the beginning of the third one. The agony of Ford’s fingers dragging up and down his already spent and tumid skin, drawing out even more than he thought possible from him, was Hell. The third orgasm was unsatisfying, too. All that suffering and the payoff was weak. What a nightmare. (Ford’d fit right in Bill’s gang—why had he said no?)

He begged the man to stop pleasuring him, and it’s an entirely new reason to beg to stop, but God, the man just—

wouldn’t stop. If Bill needed recovery time, Ford simply held his legs open and waited until he was ready again. It was torturous; and the man never let Bill touch him again.

“I think you’ve reached your limit.” Ford said to the drooling, sensitive mess meant to be Bill Cipher.

“Fuck…you…fuck.”

“Your refractory period always impresses me. It’s normally around fifteen minutes for the average man, increasing with age. You’re one of the lucky ones who only need thirty seconds and sometimes more.”

Bill listened to Ford gush, sounding impressed over something Bill never had any control over to begin with. Does he feel proud? A little. But what good was it when this was the result.

And the man always had to teach him something, didn’t he? Christ.

“Stupidest…punishment…ever…” Bill muttered, his voice nearly gone from excessive moans and pleads. Legs limp. Getting up was not an option.

Of all the vices to fall victim to, why was this one Ford’s? Sadism via excessive pleasuring…

“Oh? Then write me a thousand-word essay on why your actions were wrong and how you intend to improve yourself.”

“Oh, fuck you.”

Ford laughed. “You want me to punish you more? There’s your punishment.”

“That…that…that was no punishment…that was just…you…killing me.” The tender feeling in his groin wouldn’t subside. He’d had sex marathons before, but the time between fuckings was enough to bring him back to zero. Ford, however, struck the second Bill got even the slightest bit hard. It wasn’t enough time to rest. Not enough time. It was torture. Torture.

“Then you’re welcome to consider yourself reprieved. Until another day. I consider this to be enough.”

They laid on their sides, facing each other. Bill’s face still flushed with left-over passion. Ford’s face neutral with touches of devotion—if you squinted. But still, Ford looked sad.

“How do you feel?”

“Tired…” Bill said, pulling Ford’s right hand to him and entwining it with his left, cradling the set at
his lips.

“It didn’t really…hurt…it was just annoying.” Bill muttered against Ford’s skin and Ford laughed.

“Yes, it worked quite well, didn’t it? I can tell.”

“Three times…like you said you would, you remember? Do I even have any cum left in me? Jesus…”

“You should eat healthily.”

“Huh?”

“Your cum will taste better.” Ford said.

“Guess you like to swallow.”

“You’re one to talk.”

“I consider it one of my finer talents.”

A quiet came.

“Sorry…for what I did…” Bill said, breaking it.

“I know you’re sorry.” Ford said. “Even if this can’t happen. You’re more the welcome to call me your friend.”

“Ugh friends…”

“Our arrangement seemed too good to be true. It’s natural this is the end.”

“What do you mean?”

“I considered it to be quite ideal. I have my own space during the day, and we spend nights together. I don’t feel…trapped, or such. We have our own lives still.”

“Uh? You have issues with feeling trapped?”

“Sometimes. But I rather enjoyed you spending nights only. The perks of having a lover with none of the hassle that comes with living together.” Ford’s fingers fluttered in the grasp, Bill’s hand tightening to restrict it.

Bill frowned, not entirely understanding. “Okay so…you like spending nights together like we’re living together but you don’t like the idea of living together?”

“Yes, that’s it. Sorry, I have trouble getting my thoughts to be coherent sometimes.” Ford said, lips tightening in annoyance at himself.

“Yeah clearly.” Bill forced a laughed against Ford’s hand. “No one wants to live with you, you old fool. Not when I have an expensive mansion with manservants.”

Laughing, Ford turned onto his back to stare at the ceiling. Noticing Ford’s apparent interest in the décor, Bill thought of a new angle.

“Wanna guess how much this hotel is per a night?”
“Very out of my budget range, I’m sure.”

“About $800.” Bill said. “If you were to break it off with me, let’s say now… would the bill have to be split?”

Ford’s smile fell off his face too quickly—Bill did his best not to laugh.

“What about the plane ticket? First-class, too. Would you have to reimburse me for that?”

“Bill.”

“Just a thought, yeah Ford? Just a thought.”

“Finish that train of thought.” Ford said, now entering serious-mode and Bill once again, trying not to laugh. “You want to force me to stay with you because of money.”

“Never said that.”

“That’s what you’re implying.”

Bill yawned.

“If I say no. What will you do?”

“That’s one ugly word.”

“What will you do, Bill? Why don’t you tell me?” Ford was getting huffy. It was cute.

“I’d extract payment from your body, obviously. All those thousands should secure me a nice month or two fucking you good.” Bill smiled cheerfully, knowing it would agitate Ford to no end.

“Again, you’re doing it. Attempting to provoke me into hurting you.”

“Why do you say that? Ever think I’m maybe, in fact, threatening to hurt you?”

“Your contentious behaviour is doing no good for your argument as to why I should stay with you.”

Bill laughed, giving Ford’s shoulder a light push. “See? You said you won’t hurt me. Who better for me than you?”

Ford squinted. “Say that again.”

“Huh?”

“Again.”

“You…said you won’t hurt me. Who better for me than you…?”

“Do you know what you’re saying? If you want to be hurt, how can I be a good match?” Ford took on a lecturing tone, yet again.

“You subconsciously know…” Ford’s voice sank. “Let’s talk about what I brought up yesterday. Intrusive thoughts. Do you remember?”

“Kinda. Why do you always talk like that? ‘You SUBCONSCIOUSLY know’ like I’m some freak experiment you’re observing in hopes of seeing what you want to see.”
“That’s not true. I can’t—I can’t turn that off.” Ford said, moving closer to Bill.

“Yeah yeah, intrusive thoughts?”

“I’ll explain. Everyone has intrusive thoughts. They’re mostly obscure violent scenarios and more often than not, sexual in nature. Another thing, although my memory may be a tad bit rusty…have you ever been paranoid? Or held a perpetual fear that constantly left you worried? When you’re scared and nervous, your brain thinks of your fears and imagines them. It may seem like a fantasy but it isn’t. It’s a fear. Your body will react to it. Hence why sexual intrusive thoughts are often mistaken for sexual fantasies, and then acted out on. Which is not what you want to be doing.”

Ford sure liked to talk a lot. Thank God the man had a nice voice.

“It satisfies you, yes, but it doesn’t fix anything.” Ford adjusted his glasses, pushing them up his nose bridge. “And it’s common for those who suffer from PTSD to have intrusive thoughts of past abuse and imagined future abuse.”

*Oh Ford…*

I don’t care.

“Now, let’s play a game. Describe a fantasy you have of you and me, where I force myself on you.”

Bill laid his head on their joint hands. “Why?”

“Do you not what to play?”

“No…I’ll play.”

Bill paused, took a breath and then began, as if recalling from memory. “Let’s say…we have an argument. And in anger you hit me, slap me hard across the face.”

“Bill I—” Ford said, already attempting to interrupt.

“No, let me finish. Let me finish, Ford…”

“I’m shocked. I never thought you would. You grab me by my collar, and tell me you’ve had enough of my attitude. You aren’t tolerating it anymore. I tell you to go fuck yourself and you backhand me. My lip is bleeding…as you drag me to the bedroom.”

“You force me on the bed and unbuckle your belt. You hold it threateningly in front of my face, telling me if I misbehave, you’re going to really give it to me. I get the message, and you get on top of me, ripping my shirt open, and pulling my pants off. I weakly fight back but…but…you’re so scary, Ford. I’m too scared to make you angrier…”

Bill stroked Ford’s face at the cheek as he spoke; softly and slowly.

“You have me pinned down…and you start lecturing me. Telling me I had it coming, you did your best to be patient with me…you really did…all while you stroke your dick, getting it ready to force it into me. In your mind, you’re thinking how fucking tight I must be, how you can’t wait…and how you’re actually just being dramatic. You aren’t all that mad but you want a reason to fuck me silly. I’ve had it coming, you think and who better to give it to me than you?”

“I’m quiet, my eyes wide, with that face you like… the doe eyes one, right? I’ve seen how you look at me when I have that face. You shove a wet finger into me, kind enough to add a little lube, but it
comes out and your dick thrusts into me so fast, I nearly scream your name.”

Ford’s eyes were sad again.

“I start begging you stop while you fuck me, grunting, telling me to shut the fuck up and take it. I can hear you in my head…in my ear…”

“And…I start to cry, finally. I just cry as you hurt me. I never thought you would…and I’m finally crying because it’s one of the worst things to happen to me. For Ford…for you.. to do that to me. I never thought you would…”

“I…” Bill stopped. “Fuck it, I’m done.” He rolled over, scooting all the way on the furthest side, quiet.

“Bill…Bill, come here.”

“No, I’m tired. Forget I said anything.”

“Darling…”

No answer.

“…Who did that to you?”

“Fuck you, Ford. Fuck you.”

“Tell me. Was it…your father?”

“Go fuck yourself, Ford. Don’t ever talk about my father like that…don’t ever…”

“Darling. I didn’t mean to upset you. Let’s continue talking.”

Bill stayed quiet.

Then, abruptly, he stood up and went over to his luggage.

“Where are you going?” Ford asked, worried, so very worried for Bill. As usual.

Bill dressed quickly, giving up after too little seconds, grabbing the items he needed and running out the door. Ford followed him, but he dodged the man successfully and dressed himself in the elevator. Mind shaking, like a fucking Chihuahua.

- 

He heard somewhere in a shitty stand-up show that chihuahuas shake because they’re holding in shit. And shit was what paved every cornerstone of his past and future.

Just a gutter rat from a high-class family that used designer perfumes to cover up the stench.

-Ford was sure he’d seen Bill get on the elevator.

Missed him. Only just.

He took the stairs, hoping to get there first.

But no such luck.
Reception said they’d seen Bill leave only moments before Ford had asked.

But he doesn’t see Bill anywhere.

He’s on the subway. A cute girl meets his eyes shyly. He winks and she blushes, eyes running from him.

He hates it when they run.

Bill’s phone was off.

Ford tried calling. Then he remembers Bill’s phone is dead. Still at the hotel, most likely.

He hooks his finger into the metal of the fence, the game behind it catching his eye.

Wonders if he’d played sport growing up, if things would’ve been different.

Somehow.

Maybe if all that anger had a place to go. Maybe things would be different.

Maybe.

Ford asked a man idling standing by, if he’d seen a boy in a bright yellow coat.

The man says no.

Ford turned and left, neglecting to see the yellow creep into the man’s eyes.

He watches the people past, a group of tourists loud and bustling.

A girl speaks to him, broken English, tries to flirt.

He gives a shake of the head, kisses her hand and leaves.

He stands under the bridge, the loudness of traffic throbbing inside his head.

He drops his gloves here.

The triangle with one eye watches.

Ford doesn’t know enough of New York to navigate it the way Bill could.

He walks through the bustling streets, laughter reminiscent of a banshee’s foreshadowing scream.

He thinks of Ford, thinks of Xanthar, thinks of

Nothing.
He exists the subway, jumps back through the doors and drops his coat here.

Ford thinks he spotted Bill enter a café.

He follows but it’s not Bill.

Bill crosses a busy intersection and looks up— eyes yellow enough. To greet the darkest light he’s ever seen; the anti-sun, the dark matter so cold—

time freezes.

He won’t remember this.

He smiles at his shadowy voyeur—the most winsome smile Bill Cipher can muster and will muster.

His yellow eyes meet Its borrowed ones.

_Hiya smart guy._ $\Delta$

- 

Time resumes.

Ford passed a young woman in a bright green coat.

Her eyes yellow in the right light, Ford wholly unaware of the Bill Cipher within her.

Ford returned to the hotel, Bill-less.

The loudness of the shower caught his ear, Bill was here?

Gaspard Giordano stood underneath the water, dampness darkening his thousand-dollar cream suit. The persistent water plays touch and go, unable to get through to him; his suit guarding him well, as it’s always done.

But it perseveres; the water still comes— comes, coming at him. A spark of generosity and he discarded his blazer to the side. Wetness now fully assaulting his white shirt as something black peeks through—the black upon, beneath and within his skin.

_“But he’s weird, you know?”_

Gaspard Giordano continued to let the water come, aware of the Bill Cipher inside him.

_“…I’m surprised he isn’t looking at us right now…”_ $\Delta$
It still comes at him as his lips and tongue pay tribute to the cold tile before him that supported his body weight. He turned to meet his audience with a coquettish smile, eyes sleek and conjuring thoughts of the bedroom.

“Hiya smart guy. Δ”

“You found me.”

He pulled Ford alongside him beneath the water.

Bill’s already soaking wet as he pushes Ford down, the force a sweet overwhelming gravity. As they laid upon the cold, tiled floor, Bill kissed him for all he’s worth as water continued to pour down. A flat hand swept Ford’s hair back, titling Ford’s chin upward to allow Bill to engulf more of his mouth. The water is so cold, but it’s no match the substantial heating calling him from Bill’s mouth. They kiss and kiss.

Bill’s voice comes to him like a siren’s watery and irresistible call. “Do you want to continue… talking?”

Ford says yes.

He doesn’t ask why Bill ran. What matters is that Bill returned.

To him.

Wanting to talk further.

Bill sat on the bed, a towel around his neck and chest bare. Calm, as if nothing earlier had transpired.

“You came back.”

“I did.” Bill’s voice was flat, somewhat out-of-character. Too pre-occupied. All he could think was that he’d returned, and Ford had yet to punish him for running. Would it be like those fantasies he had? Only, with Ford instead of…? That man.

Ford took Bill’s face into his hands (even now, the man’s hands were so very warm). “I like weird. Remember that.”

A shy “Oh…” was all Bill could mumble. The thumbs at his cheek swiped left, right, left, right—assuring him it was okay to continue. “I’m sorry I ran. I won’t do it again.”

“It’s alright, my darling. You came back. That’s what counts.” Ford said, prompting Bill to place his hands over Ford’s, and begin caressing himself against the homely skin.

“I won’t ever run again. I promise.” His lips muttered in the palm of Ford’s hand; Ford’s other hand brushing stray hair out of his face, then coming to rest in the crook of his neck beneath the towel. Every movement, every touch was so… loving. Is he feeling what he wants to feel? He thinks maybe. But it doesn’t matter.

“You’re so…” Ford pulled away, finishing with a ruffle of Bill’s hair that went accepted with no
protest. “Clingy.”

“I never meant to insult your father. The fantasy appeared a little too detailed, that’s all.” Ford said and Bill gave a lazy shrug, with matching half-lidded eyes.

“Why would you ask if it was my father? Have you been talking to Evan?”

“Why Evan?”

“Told him my dad fucked me for laughs.” Bill said, removing the towel and tossing it at the bathroom. It fell short of the door and lay sprawled on the floor.

“What?” Ford sounded more hurt than shocked. He took Bill’s face in his hands again, this time the hold is firm and demanding attention.

“Look at me. Look me in the eye and tell me that was a joke. That your father never hurt you like that.”

Their eyes met one another; Bill’s confidence evident in his words. “It was a joke. My dad never touched me.”

“Why on earth would you joke about something like that…?”

Bill shrugged and pulled away. “We joke about that shit all the time, me and my friends. No big.”

Ford closed the new distance between them, taking Bill's face again and this time, he's close enough for Bill to smell that strong after-shave he wore. What was that brand? Armani?

“It’s not funny. You nearly gave me a heart-attack, Bill.”

“Why? That kinda thing doesn’t mean anything.”

“You nearly gave me a heart-attack.”

“Of course it does. It’s not something to be taken lightly.”

“Okay sure. This is boring.” He shook his head out of Ford’s interrogative hold; the man could only sigh.

Ford climbed onto the bed, resting his back against the headboard, and invited Bill to sit between his legs. Bill obliged.

“Tell me…what happens afterwards? In the fantasy? Can you remember?”

“Let me think… oh yes…you reward me with kisses… telling me I did a good job taking it.” Bill said, holding the hands that supported him at the waist. At thoughts of said fantasy, there was now only emptiness.

Ford sent a rush of kisses Bill’s way. “Have some on the house. You don’t have to earn them.”

Bill laughed impassively.

“How do you feel afterwards? In the fantasy?

“Happy you’re satisfied. Little…scared?”

“Scared?”
“That you might do it again…or something. I dunno.”

“Let’s move on. Describe a fantasy of us where it’s consensual.”

Bill spent a few seconds thinking. “Okay…got it…no, no wait…”

“That one’s fine. It doesn’t matter. It just has to be consensual.”

“No…this one’s lame…let me think of another one.”

“Darling, tell me.”

“No, you’ll make fun of me.” Bill said, annoyed and wiggling his hips to irritate the man.

Ford’s embrace tightened around him. “I won’t…tell me.”

“Fine…we go out to dinner. Or something. We come back, you undress me. Then I undress you, but you take charge and undress yourself. Then we start kissing, and you’re on top. You kiss me and kiss me. And I’m tired…I end up dozing off, just for a few seconds…while you’re kissing me. Then I wake up to you kissing me. You realize I’m tired and I confirm it you kiss me a few more times, and then I fall asleep in your arms. The end.”

Ford’s face scrunched up. “That’s…all?”

“Make fun of me and I’m killing you.”

Ford laughed. “No no, it’s…unexpected. Very…unusual.”

“The first night we were together…it happened. I still remember it so clearly…waking up to you…kissing me…it was surreal. And…I don’t know. I’ve never felt so…happy? I dunno. Fuck it.”

His memory was fuzzy, sometimes unreliable, but his body never forgot. It never ever forgot. It remembers all of Ford’s touches, and all of that man’s touches, too.

Even if he doesn’t remember, his body remembers.

“I think I remember…” Ford contemplated.

Bill lolled his head back, letting Ford’s shoulders support it. “It was the best…our first night. And every night after that…but the first was…”

“I understand, darling.”

“How do you lie there and tell me you like being hurt, you like roughness and whatever else you crave, and then say you want to be with me, who has no interest and never will have, in any of those things?” Ford said. “And you have fantasies like this, where we don’t even do anything sexual. You fall asleep being kissed.”

Ford was a broken record.

“How do you not realize what you do makes no sense at all?” The air expelling from Ford’s mouth as he spoke tickled the outer shell of Bill’s ear; he laughed inappropriately.

“Why does this sound familiar?” Bill asked, stifling a growl of annoyance.

“I told you something similar, last night.” Ford said. “You attempt to act on your intrusive thoughts.
You attempt to hurt me so I’ll return it.”

“Tell me the truth. Did you do what you did to goad me into hurting you?”

“I don’t really know, Ford…” The truth. Bill never spent time analysing his actions the way Ford did. Introspection was a hassle.

“It’s clear you did that with Evan. I assume it’s the same for me.”

“Ha…Evan.” Bill laughed sadly.

“He’s a good man. I’m not sure why you think he’d ever hurt you.”

“A good man. Of course. Did you miss the part where he agreed to fuck me to save that kid?”

“You gave him an ultimatum.”

“Yeah and he took it. I know…you’d never have taken it.”

“How do you know?”

“You’d have made me give up by holding me down and kissing me.”

“Is that so? Sounds about right.” Ford kissed Bill’s neck in approval.

Bill turned his head and sought to meet the mouth that kissed his neck but failed. “And I’d give up… I give up.”

“I might want to continue this, after I’ve had more time to think.” Ford revealed, shocking Bill nearly out of his lap. “I think I’m closer to understanding you.”

“You aren’t going anywhere…? Really?”

“If you’re honest with me, Bill, there’s nothing that can’t be solved.” Ford’s nose poked the area behind Bill’s ear.

“Are you sorry?”

“Of course…”

“No, are you sorry?”

“I am.”

“You aren’t getting the point. Are you sorry?”

Bill frowned, then tilted his head back to kiss Ford.

“So, you can learn.” Ford pulled his hair gently.

“If you had a puppy, would you teach it the error of its ways, or throw it out?”

“Did you just call me your puppy?”

“I suppose that makes me an old dog…” Ford laughed.

“I’d love…love to be your pet…” Bill said, gripping Ford’s hands firmly. “I can’t believe you said
that. I never thought you would…and so bluntly…”

“Easy, Bill, it was a joke.”

“No…I want to be your pet…”

“Easy, darling…”

“You'll really give me another chance?”

“How about a nap?”

“You're forgiving me?”

“Forgiveness is a strong word. I don’t forgive very easily. But I’m willing to work with this now that you’ve given me something to work with.”

“Did finding out about…the whole fucking as punishment thing…did it make a difference?” Bill asked, sounding too much like a child seeking a parent’s approval. Part of him was aware, the other part still in denial.

“It did. I remind myself that when I’m angry, you’ll think I’m going to hurt you. I must remember to reassure you I won’t.” Ford said, touching the cigarette burn on Bill’s arm. “You act out, attempt to hurt me, and now this…with you hurting yourself.”

“To make me feel sorry for you? Or are you really just so childish?” Ford’s voice is contemplative. “Like a child spiting their parent by hurting themselves. Why would you think that would work on me? I barely know you. You barely know me. You act, Bill, like we’ve known one another for a long time.”

A pensive silence came over Bill before he spoke again.

“Ford…I did. Think you were my grandfather. I was drinking a lot then…a lot lot. But I know you aren’t him.”

“Tell me what kind of man he was.” Ford asked, having been curious for a while about Bill’s grandfather. More importantly, the relationship they had.

“Later…I’m tired.”

“We have to decide a birthday for you, too.”

“Hmmm.” Bill reclined onto Ford’s chest, the man’s arms encircling him protectively.

“Go sleep, my darling.”

A few minutes had passed before Bill spoke one more time. Ford’s lecture on intrusive thoughts still making its round inside his mind.

“Can I tell you something utterly disgusting? I mean, I guess they were intrusive thoughts… but they always made me feel like a sick fuck.”

“You can tell me anything, my darling.”

The man loved to abuse the ‘darling’ thing, but Bill was too preoccupied right now to get annoyed.
“Yeah…I can tell you. Because you’re a stranger, you know? It doesn’t mean anything if you know…” Bill breathed in deeply, Ford feeling his ribcage expand and contract.

“I’m not a stranger anymore.”

“You are.”

“Tell me.” Ford nestled at Bill’s ear.

“When I ran away from home. I’d have these fantasies…of being forced to return home. I’d imagine…my grandfather fucking me to punish me while Papa watched. And then…Papa, too. Would join in. And tell me it’s what he’s always wanted to do to me.”

Ford held his breath.

“Hey…if you hadn’t told me about this, I’d have thought I wanted to fuck my father. Right until I died, I would’ve thought I wanted to fuck him. Can you believe that…?”

Bill’s voice is nearly breaking.

“If you hadn’t told me…if you hadn’t…I’d have died, died thinking I wanted to fuck my fucking father. I’d have died like that. Thinking I’m some sick freak.” The last words were choked out, forced out by gratitude.

“When my father and I fought, I kept thinking he was gonna hold me down and fuck me. Thought I wanted it, you know?…”

“But… just an intrusive thought…? Not even real? Not something I thought I wanted? Something I’ve been scared of this entire time? I almost can’t believe it.”

Ford listened quietly.

“Sorry…I…I just can’t believe that. For so long, Ford. You don’t know…how weird…I thought I was…”

“I don’t understand…I just don’t. It’s like…like…I don’t know… I’m not who I thought I was? I can’t explain it. I just can’t. I don’t know what to say anymore.”

For the first time, Ford wondered if this was Bill at his genuinely vulnerable state. If perhaps everything else, every other vulnerable Bill he’d met, had still been hiding behind a partition too thin for Ford to detect.

“Of course…Papa would never have…”

Of course, you'd never, Papa.

“Why did you and your father fight? Can you tell me?”

“No. But I’d have done what he did.” Bill said, his voice now firm. “I’d have probably killed me. Nobody wants to hear that kind of thing…ignorance is bliss, yeah? Sorry Ford…”

“Why…why do you focus on your father? You imagined your grandfather doing it too. Why only your father?”

Bill let out a hollow laugh. “I’m weird.”
“You’re the good kind of weird.”

“Am I…?” Bill’s voice lightened with cheer.

“I appreciate you telling me this. I know it’s hard for you to talk about this kind of thing.”

“Ugh, you’re so sentimental.”

“Turn around.”

Understanding, Bill rotated; laying his face on Ford’s chest, his right hand holding Ford’s left and the other lazily lounging in Ford’s hair.

“No, move further up.” Ford’s voice was soft to the ear. Bill could only obey.

Bill did, resting his face at Ford’s neck. Ford’s right hand tugged at Bill’s hair, the boy lifting his face to see why only for Ford to steal a kiss. When it stopped, as Ford came to expect, Bill began asking for more.

And as always, he allowed the boy to indulge.

His hand roams across Ford’s face slowly, every bump and curve being exactly what the doctor ordered.

He stares, almost lovingly at Ford.
The triangle with one eye on his palm, too, stares almost lovingly at Ford.

*Almost* lovingly. Almost.

In Bill’s mindscape, he works the candy floss machine, and feeds the sweetness to an oblivious ghost of Ford.

In Ford’s mindscape, he gazes into the screen of a foreign terminal harbouring the ghost in the machine. A one-eyed triangular image returns his gaze, the keenness inhuman, offering him something too sweet. It manifests on his tongue, and he swallows, oxytocin swelling his tongue. Hearts flutter about him, as they do to the ghost.

The machine’s wiring entwines with the flower’s vines, first linking and then merging; until where one begins and the other ends is unknowable.

I need you, Ford. I’m **weird**, you know? And you **like** weird.

Chapter End Notes

I’m playing with the idea that this Bill’s weirdness is what attracts triangle!Bills to wherever he is. I literally just pulled this theory out of my ass after I wrote this chapter.
Chapter Summary

Call him Mr. Giordano. Call him Mr. Wrong. Call him Cain.

Chapter Notes

Look at Perl's cute doodles ASAP!!
http://lamerdeseslarmes.tumblr.com/post/153444599722/some-doodles-for-yourssatanboyfriends-fic-the

Warnings for non-con and character death.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

He loses his eyes, and in the dreadful dark, he looks down and sees Bill, crossing a busy intersection. Bill looks up, and their eyes meet.

—The false Ninth Paradigm.

Destroy everything you touch today
Anything that may desert you
So it cannot hurt you.

Everything you touch you don't feel
Do not know what you steal

—Destroy everything you touch, Ladytron.

He’s dreaming, and there’s nothing but the eternal dark.

“Bill.”

Who’s there…?

“You don’t recognise me?”

…who is it?

There’s warmth against his skin, a hand. He counts the fingers. Six.

Ford.

He opens his eyes, but it’s still only darkness.
He closes his eyes.

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Oooh do me do me!”

Who...who’s there?

“Cup a feel. Watch the merchandise though, prime cuisine, kid.”

He feels...he feels...a...the frame of a triangle? It’s...pulsating with life beneath his fingertips, warm and hard.

What...what is this?

“Open up those peepers and take a gander! Don’t be shy!”

He does, and sees himself.

The other him talks, “Oops, sorry. I can’t really appear appear. It’s sorta a rule that only applies to us? If I’m here, I look like you and if you’re over at my place, you’d probably look like me. I’ll invite you over some time. We can test my little theory.”

...?

“Forget it. You won’t remember this. Hey, do you like my version of Ford? Isn’t he cute?”

There’s a young man behind himself. Ford?

“So, I have a deal for you—me? Me and you. Us. I’d like to have some alone time with your slightly-past-his-due-date Ford. In exchange, you can have alone time with my ripe and in his prime Ford. What do you say?” His other self’s hand glows blue. An ugly colour.

His eyes wander to the younger Ford again.

How old is he...?

“Hmmmm thirties? You like?”

I do...

“Yeah, me too me too...I mean, I’m not one for the meat but you know how it is...wait. We’re getting off track here! Deal or no deal?” The glowing hand is forcefully extended towards him.

Why do you want to talk to Ford?

“Why wouldn’t I want to?”

He frowns.

The Ford speaks again. “If you could leave me out of this deal—“

“Oh come on, Stanford! He’s me! I get that he’s not as dashing as moi but he’s...he’s...”

“Human.”

“Right, and you like’em inhuman.” His other self clears his throat. “Amoung...other things...”
Sci-fi nerd.

“Exactly! Ha! Even in this universe, you’re a freak, Ford!”

The younger Ford’s body glitches and then it’s whole again. Only…

*His…tongue…is…on his forehead…?*

“What? Oh hot damn, Sixer. The insides are called insides for a reason! Put that sloppy slug thing back where it belongs!”

“Oh, my apologies. It’s tiring to keep this form.”

“Why don’t you gimme lip. You were meat for like, 30 years of your life. You’re just seeking attention!”

His other self snaps his fingers and a tophat covers Ford’s face past his eyes. “And I’ve made it abundantly clear if there’s attention being given, I am the sole recipient!”

The top hat disappears.

“I actually kinda liked it though… put the tongue back on your forehead—hey, that’s… a good look. I like it. *Very Avant Garde,* as they say. Try putting your eyes in your nostrils, and then flip your cheeks inside out—”

He shakes the hand while his other self is occupied.

He dreams the tattoos on his hand told him the universe is a hologram.

When Ford awoke, Bill was already awake and getting dressed; grinning brightly into the mirror, practicing faces and wholly unaware of Ford’s watchful gaze.

Checking the time revealed it to be seven pm.

“It’s late. Where are you headed?” Ford asked shaking off sleep with a few mild stretches. Bill snuck peaks at the display in the mirror, his appreciation of the view evident all over his face.

“Business stuff, cupcake.” Bill said, then gestured to a glass of juice at Ford’s side. “You want some juice? Don’t worry, I didn’t spit in it.”

Smirking uncharacteristically, Ford took the glass and said. “I’d drink it regardless.”

“Oh my god… No...I wasn’t ready for that… no…” Bill covered his face with both hands, a most dramatic act and entirely too cute for him. Not his best performance, Ford thought. Too unconvincing.

“Nooo Ford, you pervert!”

“Why are you acting so innocent? As if you don’t like it.” Ford sipped the juice. Pineapple. Of all the flavours...

“Shut up, let me have my moment.”

“Let’s agree right now, you would’ve said the same thing.”

Bill puckered his lips, tilting his chin high up. “I plead the fifth.”
“Come here.” Ford beckoned and Bill obeyed, getting pulled into a deep kiss that left the boy overly excited already.

“More more…do you wanna…do something…?” Bill said, but then straightened up. “Wait, no. I can’t play cutesy with you right now, old man. I got shit to do.”

“Also, that juice saved your ass. If you had kissed me with pure sleep breath, I’d done unspeakably dark things to you.” Bill frowned, then sneered as he appeared to think further on the topic. He paced to the mirror and back, apparently still deep in thoughts of revenge.

Ford only laughed, tugging idly at Bill’s blazer. The boy swatted his hand away and aligned his collar once more before moving to the dresser.

“I’d like you back by 12, at the latest.”

“Huh? Did you—did you just give me a curfew?” Bill seemed more amused than angry—the reaction Ford had hoped for.

“I did. I don’t want to wait up for you.”

“Then don’t.”

“I’d like us to spend the night together.”

Bill quickly spun around. “As in…you wanna stick your fingers in me, or you wanna cuddle?”

“Which will convince you to be home sooner?”

“Nice…yeah...definitely. I’ll definitely be back in time.” Bill said, now walking backwards while winking at Ford. Dreamcatcher came out of the draw Bill had bumped into.

Worry set into Ford.

“You’re taking your gun with you? Why?”

“Gonna kill someone.” Bill said, too casually.

“Are you joking?”

“No.”

Bill rummaged through the drawer, pulling out his Cobra too. Ford’s eyes widened, Bill laughing at his naivety. The man wouldn’t know he had Pyronica drop off it off earlier, while he slept. Ford didn’t know a lot of things.

“…Who?”

“Taking an interest in my work now?”

“Can’t I?”

“Nah, I like it. But it’s a secret.” Bill’s index finger went to his lips.

“What did they do?”

“Ssssh, no time for this. Gotta go.”
“Hey.” As Bill walked past the bed to the door, Ford grabbed the cuff of his blazer. “Think about your actions before you carry them out.”

“Easy there. I do.” Bill said, apparently not minding Ford’s audacity at offering advice.

“You’re acting on emotions.”

“No.”

“Then why take a life needlessly?”

“You don’t get this job.”

“I don’t.”

Bill leaned down and playfully nipped Ford’s jaw, then turned to leave.

“Good-bye, Ford. I’ll be back for the X-rated night-time activities you promised. Hey, can I get that in writing…?”

The entire drive there, in the back of a cab with the radio tuned to some trashy network, Bill thought of Ford’s words.

Intrusive thoughts…

He wasn’t a freak.

Or rather, he wasn’t that sort of freak.

Stanford Pines…

He’d have to thank the man somehow.

--

He forgot to ask Ford why Ford thought his father had done that.

Did everyone around him have some sort of sick incest fetish?

The usual warehouse they held meetings at sat abandoned during their absence. It was their territory, and enough rumours of horrific shit happening to trespassers had spread that no one was dumb enough to try and wander there.

Well, you did find an occasional squatter, but they were taken care of before Bill even learned of their existence.

Everyone was present. Xanthar held a neutral look, but Bill knew enough to detect the uneasiness.

“Nice of you all to come here—and on time, too, I might add.” Bill greeted the Nightmare gang. “I, however, am fashionably late, as always.”

They said their greetings, 8ball looking particular perky. Smoking. Bill beckoned him closer while taking out a cigarette of his own, lighting it by leaning in for what he liked to call a ‘cigarette kiss’. 8baller wasn’t happy, grumbling under his breath while Bill gave him a look that was far too lewd
for his comfort.
Once the cigarette was alive and well, he walked further, until he stood a fair distance from them.
Perfect view and easy to address them all. 8ball’s cologne was still in his nose—where the hell had
that boy picked up this new excessive perfume habit?

“Now, let me start by saying—I fucked up. Ford’s mad at me. I might have to kill him.” Bill rolled
back his shoulders, stretching his neck to the side. “Not my fault though. See, this wouldn’t have
happened if A) Keyhole hadn’t spread false information about Kryptos.”

Bill pointed at the culprit A.

“B) Teeth didn’t call him Jewish.

Bill pointed at culprit B.

“And C) Kryptos hadn’t interrupted me when I was scaring the shit out of Stanford Pines. I
would’ve fucked him good and he’d be under my thumb by now.”

Bill pointed at culprit C.

“No, Keyhole, stand a little more over here. No more, more, more, you fucking retard. There we
go.”

Keyhole now stood a fair distance from the rest; eyes nervously going back and forth from everyone
to Bill. Kid was probably suffering from withdrawal. Was he ever not high, or not r coming down or
not broke because he blew everything on getting high? So much for being a great lock-picker. Any
skill the kid had rotted away a long time ago. At least Bill managed to pick up said skills early
enough from him. Joshua was redundant now.

Lock-picking was so outdated, too. Bill thought he’d be better off investing in a hacker.

Dreamcatcher came out of its holster. “Let’s make this quick. I got a fucking curfew—can you
believe that shit?”

Both hands steady, aiming straight for Keyhole’s forehead, Bill fired.

In his mind, he imagines Dreamcatcher opening a keyhole-shaped hole in the boy’s head.

In reality, the head resembled a popped blood balloon that didn’t quite deflate all the way. Heaps of
bone and flesh splatted in every direction. A blood sprinkler. The more Bill looked, the more he
thought it kinda looked like someone with gnarly teeth had taken a huge bite out of Keyhole’s head,
and he now resembled some freak monstrosity you’d see at the night circus. Skull half off.

Shit, clean up would be awful. He nearly pitied the fool who’d be cleaning up tonight.

8ball was howling in the background, enjoying the carnage and obviously certain he wouldn’t be
next.

“Look at that. look how his brain just opens up, like a beautiful fleshy flower. Look. Isn’t that
something?” Fleshy flower was the last term Bill would use to describe the sight but what the hell.
Poetry.

Shaking the ash off his cigarette, Bill turned to face the rest.

“That’s your brain on drugs, kids.” He waved Dreamcatcher around wildly, rolling his shoulders
back and forth. “God, that shot—felt that shit in my shoulders. I gotta work out…”

He’d have dislocated something if he’d tried firing that with one hand. *Hot damn.*

“Now Teeth. Calling the man Jewish probably pissed him off. Some people don’t like being called Jewish, even if they are Jewish, you ignorant fuck.” Bill said.

With one hand, he took out his Cobra and shot Teeth in the thigh. The kid had so much fat, he probably barely felt it.

Bill rolled his eyes as the boy shrieked, cried, and wet himself. Gross. And to think he fucked this kid once upon a time. A notorious scene from a movie immediately came to mind, and Bill couldn’t resist. To pass up this opportunity would be a crime.

“*Squeal like a pig, boy.*” Bill said in his best redneck accent, and 8ball burst out laughing, the reference hitting home. The laughter infected Bill, and soon both were laughing like a couple of hyenas; the rest watching in silence, not daring to help Teeth.

Once the laughter reached its end, Bill continued with wet eyes. “I’m letting you off easy. Next time, I’m calling the riverman to send your fat ass to the Underworld.”

Culprit C.

“Jerry. Jerry Jerry. Jerry. This whole thing is your fault.” Bill pointed Dreamcatcher at the offender in question.

“I wasn’t the one who tried forcing myself on Ford Pines.”

Kryptos’s retort had Xanthar panicking silently. To provoke Bill…

“Shut the fuck up.” Bill growled. “Ford is my property. I can do whatever the fuck I want to him. You have zero right to interfere in anything.”

“Your property…right.” Kryptos’s voice took on a mocking tone at the end, Bill assuming he was thinking of what had happened yesterday, and of what they had spoken of—of him being Ford’s fucktoy.

Ha. Yeah right.

“Who cares? Who cares about this? Who? Anyone? Anyone at all?” Bill’s voice loudened, a good distraction as he switched Dreamcatcher’s clip—too quick for the untrained eye to catch.

“I don’t care about any of this. I should be in my hotel room fucking Stanford Pines. That’s where I should be, that’s where I’m going. I’m not entertaining this shit for another second.”

He shot Kryptos in the chest, a red butterfly splattered across the crispy white of the boy’s shirt. No hole, just blood. Red, all red.

The boy went down instantly, dead on impact.

“Look at that! Life is fleeting! Boy, here today, gone tomorrow! Look at that!” Bill quickly sought Xanthar, checking to see his handy work.

The rage in Xanthar’s eyes blurs its background, and Bill can only think how beautiful that rage is. How that rage had the potential to incite some very interesting things. If only…
“Look at that, Evan. Gone like the wind.”

“May my brother from another mother rest in peace. RIP Shoi-ming Yang. You were taken too soon.” Bill touched his forehead, then both shoulders—the Christian cross.

“Now…let’s get a’talkin’ about what actually matters.” Bill put Dreamcatcher back into its coffin.

“We aren’t a family, boys. I’m your god damn boss. I call you my friends but that doesn’t mean we’re like, besties, you know?” Bill said. Xanthar caught his eye. The twitch of the man’s hands implied someone wanted to draw their weapon.

“You look like you wanna say something there, Evan. Say it.”

Xanthar said nothing, his body doing all the talking. His gun never came out, but Bill knew it was crying to, begging to.

Bill laughed and laughed.

“You think your little sawed off hack can kill me? Me? Nah. Not gonna work okay? I’m…I’m never gonna die by that. I’m like…I’m like…energy, okay? I can’t die.” He bared his teeth briefly, in the midst of speaking. “Just like my family name never dies, just like Gaspard Giordano never dies, Bill Cipher transcends those dead men.”

“Bill Cipher is a concept, folks! A concept I embody. The sooner we understand Casper Giordano was nothing more than the stand-in until the real star player came into the game, the sooner we move the fuck on and actually start partying!”

“We’re here to get weird not get fucking basic. And getting basic is the only damn thing we’ve done for the past several years!” Smoke punctuated his words, the cigarette now dead, and crushed under Bill’s foot.

“Get in tune with your captain, people! Get in tune with your star player— me.”

Finally, Xanthar spoke, voice as steady as ever. “Was it worth killing your brother over?”

“Not my brother.” Bill hummed. “Don’t interrupt me when I’m giving my important lectures on important matters. GOD DAMN.”

“Was it worth it? All because your grandfather fucked you once upon a time?”

Oh. Fuck you, Xanthar. Fuck you. Fuck you.
Fuckyoufuckyoufuckyoufuckyoufuckyoufuckyoufuckyoufuckyou

Bill’s smile didn’t waver. Instead, it widened protectively, thoroughly attaching itself to Bill’s face with so much tenacity, not even King Arthur could draw it from his face.

It would not fade until the end of the night.


Shut the fuck up, Jason.

“So, THAT’S why you killed your family? Yeah? Is that it? PLOT TWIST, MOTHERFUCKER. You shoulda said something! We shoulda HAMMERED that guy before you killed him! I AM SO SICK OF THESE NASTY OLD ASS MEN! I HAD AN UNCLE JUST LIKE THAT! We——”
Bustling broke out; Paci-fire telling 8ball to shut the fuck up, Pyronica concerned but not surprised? And Xanthar—standing there in the eye of the storm, hurt beyond recognition. It’s in the eyes, the slump of the shoulders, the relaxed open palms that clench open and close.

Teeth still crying on the floor, rolling and marinating in his own piss; a roasted pig, an apple in the mouth being the only thing missing. (and something up his ass). Whining and not giving a shit about Bill’s alleged traumatic past. What a selfish piece of shit.

“Okay settle down, everyone. Settle down!” Bill bellowed, and at once, the banter died.

“Just a lie I told him to get my dick in his ass, just everyone calm yourselves.” He did a patting motion in the air with flat palms, encouraging everyone to relax.

Xanthar’s apology at the party had obviously been a fucking lie. A lie.

“What?” 8ball asked, excessively fidgety. Bill would remember his…bout of protectiveness? Or whatever it was he’d shown earlier. It was unexpected, considering recent past events.

Bill laughed. “Yeah, tricked him. He’s been elusive so I had to find a way to get him to open up nice and wide for me.”

“Bill, you’re disgusting. That is sick. High five me.” 8ball raised a hand, Bill meeting it in a loud and enthusiastic high-five. A low-five followed, and both men laughed in sync.

“Don’t lie, Bill. All those—” Xanthar begun but Bill refused to allow him to finish. Fuck him.

“Times I was sick? Not unusual for me to drink myself ‘til I’m sick. Sleeping all the time? Oh depression! Just Rohypnol, man. Makes me groggy, confused, dazed.”

He took a few steps towards Xanthar. “It was all ruse so I could fuck you, you dumb slut.”

“Had to find a way to satisfy that yellow fever you gave me ever since I saw you. Every man wants to fuck a Chinese slut, Evan. Every single man. The rumours are true, huh? All chinks are submissive when they take white man cock.”

Racial slurs. Bill never used them. Bill hated them. Bill hated anyone who used them on his members, on his property.

Bill was using them now.

And Xanthar knew he’d hurt Bill in a way Bill would never admit. Now, Bill was left bleeding out whatever insults he thought would hurt the most, to distract from the obvious wound only Xanthar could see.

Everyone knew something had snapped in Bill.

“I should’ve fucked Shoi-ming before I killed him, yeah? Heard they’re the best when they’re young. Actually, heard they stay tight because you know how Asians never fucking age or grow. You stick your dick in’em and it’s like you’re fucking a tight child. Right? Right?”

Bill thought if he could cry, he’d be crying now. But still, nothing came. Nothing came out of him except the things he hated the most. The most.

There’s only so much racial shit he can spew. He doesn’t have enough material stored away to make a dent. Fuck.
Xanthar’s eyes were sad. Just like Ford’s eyes were, earlier. Just like Ford’s…

He turned away laughing. “You’re 6 years too late to hurt Bill Cipher. You’re just dying to meet your maker, aren’t you?”

Again, he turned to face Xanthar. “I’ll grant you that wish. Leave you with no name, no face.”

“No name, no face.” He advanced slowly towards Xanthar, Dreamcatcher lips puckered. Each step paving Xanthar’s pre-determined path to Hell, and quiet Dreamcatcher destined to be his escort.

Xanthar was unresponsive.

“No face, no name.” He’s close enough for his breath to greet Xanthar’s skin—it greets happily, and is clearly more keen on saying its farewells.

“No face. No name.”

Bill Cipher turned his back The Being Whose Name Must Never Be Said.

“Now everyone fuck off outta here. My men are cleaning up tonight. Xanthar, drive everyone home.”

“I’d like to say my farewells.” Xanthar said, voice deeper than usual. Despondence depressed it. Eyes still sad. Bill thought of Ford again.

Not even a fucking apology.

“Fuck off home, Evan, before I send you off to the Underworld. Maybe you can replace Cerberus, you dumb mutt.” Bill pointed at Pyronica. “Make sure he goes with you.”

Xanthar’s face was once more, unreadable.

They left; 8baller loud, Paci-fire annoyed, Xanthar quiet and carrying Teeth and Pyronica watching, hoping to put one in him.

“I know you, I walked you with once upon a dream…” Bill sang, dragging out the words and melody.

I know you, that look in your eyes is so familiar…a gleam. And I know it’s true, Ford, that…

“Visions are…” He leaned into Kryptos’s face. “Seldom….” Closer. “What they seem…” and kissed the boy’s lips.

A hard shove sent Bill spilling backwards, laughing even when the hard cement did a number on his ass. Damn, the floor was cold. Must’ve hurt when Kryptos fell.

“Gross, Bill! What the hell are you doin—UGH! I can’t believe you!” Kryptos freaked while wiping his lips; Bill’s laughter the background track to his homo-erotic meltdown.

“Oh, come on. Nothing like a little lip action with your dearly beloved brother.”

“Gross!! Gross! Grooooss!”

Then, they were both laughing until the tears and stomach cramps came.
“It worked!” Bill grinned. “Evan was so mad! Did you see that shit?!”
He fiddled with the boy’s blood-stained shirt, thinking that the design was a little too damn artistic for a blood splatter. Kryptos must’ve set it up to explode like that and luckily no one had looked too closely.

“I can’t believe I agreed to this…” Kryptos said, catching his breath. “But hey, it worked…”

“You said you wanted to leave everything behind.” Bill ruffled his hair. “A car’s coming to pick you up soon. Then you’ll be on a flight to Italy and yadada boarding school yadada. All the junk we discussed.”

Kryptos smiled bright enough for Bill to wish he had shades. He threw his arms over Bill, the embrace being exactly what Bill needed. Bill nuzzled into the unfamiliar neck, wrapping his arms impassively around the boy’s torso.

“I was gonna kill you, actually. Break my promise.” Bill said at Kryptos’s ear.

“But you didn’t.” Kryptos smiled, assuming Bill was fooling around. “Why not? You realize you actually care?”

“You should thank Stanford Pines, the next time you see him. If you ever do.”

“Why?”

“Who knows? All I know is, I didn’t feel like killing you anymore.”

Stanford Pines…

If only Ford was here to comfort him.

But Ford wasn’t. He needed to…

He kissed Kryptos again. The boy made that face. Wide eyes, lips nearly pouting…cheeks a little red? A trick of the light?

Jerry was his brother. Of course… they’d be the same. They’d want the same things, and go about obtaining those things the same way. The exact same way.

“Bill…I…don’t…like guys.”

“Just this once, come on.”

“No…what’s wrong? You seem upset. Is it because…of what Evan said? And what you did?”

Kryptos frowned, a scolding frown. “Bill…what you did was really shitty.”

“And you slept with Evan? I can’t believe you did. That’s so weird…” Kryptos was obviously upset about what Bill had said about him, about Evan, but the boy never brought it up.

He pushed Kryptos down. The boy started rambling but Bill silenced him with a look.

*Whether it’s a cement floor or the top of an expensive antique table, being pushed down always meant one thing.*

“Tell me, if I fuck you, do you think I’ll feel better?”
“Bill…Bill this isn’t—”

“Answer me.”

Kryptos didn’t answer him.

“Evan hurt me. It’s only fair…it’s only fair…” Bill said. “I hurt what he values the most.”

*What I value most, too? Fuck this kid.*

But this wasn’t about hurting Evan. Seeking comfort in the body of another was nothing new, and he couldn’t wait.

If only he’d brought Ford with…maybe then…maybe then…

“I know you won’t. Because you’re *not that kind of man.*” Kryptos said, a sad smile, and even sadder eyes. They made him think of Ford’s sad eyes. Of Xanthar’s sad eyes. Why was everyone so sad lately…?

Kryptos was wrong.

--

Kryptos begs him to stop, but it’s not the type of stop that actually meant ‘cease and desist!’ . It was the stop that meant ‘please be gentle with me’. Because the inevitable could not be stopped. But the impact could be lessened. For some, hearing stop made them do the opposite—go harder and rougher.

Which one was Bill Cipher?

--

He didn’t bring lube, and Kryptos was the type of tight that didn’t feel good.

It didn’t matter anyway.

--

Kryptos doesn’t cry. Bill fucks him harder until he’s quite sure the boy’s crying.

Wonders if this is how he sounded all those times.

Wonders if this is what gets off men like Stanford Pines.

Wonders…why he still thinks so badly of Ford.

--

He kisses apologies into Kryptos’s neck. Begs for forgiveness in Italian until he finishes in the boy.

- (he’s crying somewhere, inside his mind. crying harder than Kryptos is.)

--

He touches Kryptos at the cheek. Touches him in the way his grandfather touched him, bearing still,
the same name and the same tattoos.

The boy closes his eyes, flinching but not running. Accepting. Hoping compliance will make everything better.

Ha. Sometimes it does. But it really depended on… what? The mood of the one fucking you?

--

He holds Kryptos, says ‘I love you. I’m sorry. I never meant to hurt you. I just love you so much.’

The love had to go in somewhere.

--

He holds Kryptos’s face, and wonders: is this how Ford saw him? Is this what Ford saw? This?

How did Ford resist fucking him? How?

He keeps his promise, sends the boy off. Tells them to stop by a doctor first.

Kryptos says he’s fine, through puffy, wet eyes and a neck mottled in dark blue with the imprints of Bill’s fingers.

He will probably never see Kryptos again.

Another person he’s alienated.

He throws up once Kryptos leaves. Isn’t sure why, doesn’t really care.

Bill Cipher is a concept he hasn’t quite grasped just yet.

He hums ‘Ain’t no sunshine when he’s gone’ to himself while waiting for a cab.

Shoi-ming...

In the cab, he fidgeted uncontrollably, wrapping his arms around himself protectively. He couldn’t wait to be in Ford’s arms. Maybe tell Ford the truth.


Ford, perceptive to the end, was desperate to know the truth, and eager to comfort Bill. So worried, always worried.

Bill had told him about those fantasies and Ford hadn’t recoiled from him, or acted weird. Instead, Ford seemed happier, and even…flirtier?

Stanford Pines…

He stopped by a diner that was still open to pick up two slices of cake. Both he and Ford had a sweet
tooth. Maybe some wine too…? Oh, Ford didn’t drink. Maybe those fizzy juices then… Or tea. Tea was supposedly good for eating with cake.

He’d buy jelly beans but the bag he’d bought Ford the previous day was big enough.

Stanford Pines…

When Bill returned to the hotel, Stanford Pines was gone. Along with his luggage.

Ford was gone.

Bill saw red.

---

This house just ain’t no home.

Any time he goes away.

Chapter End Notes

I was outside, looking in.
Chapter Summary

Beep. Δ Boop.

Chapter Notes

Read Perl's drabble 'Pathological Liar' here:
http://yoursatanboyfriend.tumblr.com/post/153967140373/pathological-liar

Warnings: Minor self harm.

The beeping terminal is a shout-out to another manipulative, nihilistic one-eyed little shit who goes by the name of Milton.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Time passes quicker than Ford ever thought possible.

The boy is 19 when it happens. He tells him ‘No no no I’m your father’
But the boy says ‘No, you aren’t. Not my birth father anyway’ before kissing him.

Where did he go wrong?

Where…?

-The false Ninth Paradigm.

“What’s wrong with him?” She asks but the doctor can only shrug—he has no fucking idea. The kid eats plenty, doesn’t over exercise (in fact, rarely exercises). The weight loss was in-explainable. Eating disorder? Maybe the kid’s teeth should be checked out. Normally left its mark—excessive vomiting. But why would the kid be…?

—Doctor Marcus Matthews, former family physician of the Giordanos.

The cake box hit the floor. So did the bag with juice cartons and the chocolate bunnies Bill managed to snag at a discount price thanks to pro-haggling. And the tattoos. How much didn’t he owe to these tattoos?

“F—Ford…hide and seek?”

The bathroom’s devoid of anything hinting Stanford Pines had ever been there. Not even a stray grey hair. (the man had so much hair, how was there nothing left behind? He checks and checks and
Not hide and seek. Of course, it wasn’t hide and seek. Who the fuck played hide and seek with their luggage?

Deep breath. Deep breath and—what did Stanford Pines want on engraved on his tombstone? Here lies Stanfuckford Pines: the man who would’ve lived if only he’d taken dick more often.

‘but I’m not that kind of man!’ Ford would say. Shut the fuck up, Ford.

Hands shaking as he selects Ford’s contact on his phone. God, that man’s smug face looking at him from his contact list. How dare he make a fool of Bill Cipher. Did Ford really think he could use him and then just throw him away? Yesterday’s trash, taken out at 7am, the garbage truck beeping—fuck you, Ford.

It wasn’t 7am, fuck you. Get your times right.


To his surprise, Ford answered. Dead men could answer phones now? Maybe he should give his grandfather a ring, ask him how’s Hell because he’ll be there sooner than expected.

Save me a good seat. Maybe one on the Devil’s dick. Do they have anal in Hell? He hoped so, after Ford had deprived him so long and—God, what the fuck was wrong with him?

“Bill. I—"

“Ford, where are you?” Fuck appearances, fuck sounding cute and hurt. Fuck this.

“Calm down. I need you to calm down, Bill.” Ford sounded really good for a man about to die. Shouldn’t he be saying holy rosaries?

“I am so fucking calm! Where are you?”

“I’m staying somewhere else.”

“Why did you leave? You said you wouldn’t! You said!”

“I said no such thing. I said I would think about it. This isn’t—it’s not about us, Bill. Well, partially… but you have the wrong idea.”

Ford’s voice was sad.

“No, you lied. You led me on. You—are you fucking kidding me? This is out of nowhere! After you went and stuck your fucking freak fingers into me! Telling me you—"

“Bill, please calm down.”


You used me.

“Look on the dresser. Just look on the dresser for me.”

“What?”
Ford insisted again and Bill checked: Ford’s return ticket lay on the dresser.

“Did you see it? I’ll be back tomorrow. That’s the guarantee.”

So what. You can buy a new ticket. How dumb do you think I am?

“I don’t see it.” He lied.

“On the dresser, is my return ticket. I left it there. I’ll be back. I just need space.”

…

“Bill, listen to me. If you listen, you’ll understand.”

Whatever explanation Ford had, it better be fantastic.

“You… tend to overwhelm me. You are very good at what you do, and it’s hard for me to think straight when you’re around.”

_Seriously?_

“Don’t blame me because you’re too busy thinking with your dick when you’re near me.”

“Bill, can we have a civil conversation, please?” Ford begged, tone becoming more stern. “This is moving too quickly.”

“You said that already.”

“And I stand by it.”

“I don’t understand what the fuck that means. Just because you’re getting all lovey-dovey over me, doesn’t mean you should punish me by fucking bailing!”

Ford’s punishments were the worst…the worst…

“I’m not punishing you. That’s…that’s the—you’ve got it wrong.”

“You’re so shit at explaining.”

Ford sighed loudly.

“If you think we’re moving too fast, it means you feel the same way. Just FYI there, big shot.”

It took two to tango—or did Ford forget?

“It’s not…”

“You gave me a curfew. I came back expecting to see you. For sure. For certain. 100% sure there’d be a Ford here, waiting for me.”

Dreamcatcher’s clip was switched to the one containing bullets meant to kill. The Cobra would be enough for Ford, but it never hurt to make sure Dreamcatcher was fired up.

Hell, it was an honour to have Dreamcatcher escort Ford to wherever the fuck he was going.

Probably purgatory.
“You think nothing of taking a life. That worries me. Not to mention your temper.”

Not this shit again.

“I won’t hurt you, Ford…”

He imagined Dreamcatcher winking at him, whispering a soft ‘yeah right’.

“After everything’s that happened, that’s a lie.”

Ford was looking for excuses. What a drama queen.

“What of Fiddleford?” Ford asked.

“Ugh, why that country bumpkin again? Who fucking cares?!”

“Once more, did you have a part in his death?”

“No! Christ, Ford! He’s dead! Let him decompose like a good little redneck to fertilize his crops and a get move on with your fucking life!”

Maybe Ford wanted to be buried in the same hole as Fiddleford.

“He was a close friend of mine. One of the few people I trusted. You told me only a few days ago that he’s dead. Do you even understand the effect that would have on me?”

“You seemed to be doing pretty fine.”

“Bill, I’m not fine.”

Ford’s sad eyes flickered in his mind. Huh.

“You’ve been a good distraction, but sooner or later, I would have to deal with this. “

“Coulda sworn you were all ‘oh, Fiddleford overdosing is totes his own fault! Let’s go party in NYC, Bill!!’

“Could you please not do this? Could you please understand?” Ford sounded so sad…

“I lost my family too, recently. You don’t see me being a whiny bitch.”

Old people loved to complain over every little thing.

“You literally told me only a few days ago, Bill.”

“So what? Let’s be real here. It’s about the gun thing, right?”

“Gun thing?”

“I take out my gun for someone else and you piss yourself? But you don’t care when I have a gun and threaten you? Gotcha.”

Dreamcatcher laughed inside his head. It's high pitched, the sound hurts.

“That was different. And…this is about whether you had a part in killing Fiddleford.”

“Ford…stop making excuses. Just tell the truth. It’s because of what I told you, isn’t it?”
“What?”

“I told you about those fantasies, of my dad and me and whatever…that…that scared you off didn’t it? That’s it?”

“No…this isn’t about that…”

“Then why would you leave after I told you them? Why didn’t you leave when I bailed during our talk? You had plenty of time then! But you left after you found out! RIGHT AFTERWARDS!” His grip around his phone tightened, and the flimsy gadget shatters inside his mind. So many pieces, then Ford can't make excuses anymore and Bill's only option to go after him.

“Bill…I never meant for it to seem that way…”

Bullshit.

“Then how else was I supposed to take that? How else? Did you even think before you left? The last thing we spoke about? The last thing I trusted you with? Ford, I trusted you.”

“I’m sorry…I didn’t…I didn’t realize it could be seen that way. I’m so sorry.” Ford sounded so fucking sincere. Why? Why was the man always like this?

“You led me on. You fucking led me on. It was all bullshit! What the fuck is wrong with you? Why not just be frank? Why even come here with me? Why not just kick me out of your house? Fuck you Ford.”

“Why must you be so dramatic? And overreact like this? I just need time alone. I’m…I just need time alone. We’ve been together almost nonstop for the past few days. Give me space.”

“Why couldn’t you tell me this shit earlier?”

“When you left, I did some thinking.”

Thinking was supposed to help you make smart decisions.

“This…I need you to understand there are consequences for your actions.” Ford said.

“No, fuck you. You can’t punish me now after being so nice, after being so—after fucking leading me on like this! Fuck you. You lied. You lied. That’s bullshit. You have no reason to leave and you’re pulling shit out your ass! Fuck you! Fuck you! Just go fuck yourself!”

“I feel drained, Bill. Just give me a night to myself.” Ford’s voice became weary. Part of Bill commended him for lasting this long; Ford hadn’t hung up yet.

“I thought you’d be here…I thought you’d be here…when I got back…”

His eyes went to the soon-to-be abused cake and its container.

“I…bought cake.”

Images of him feeding Ford cake invaded his mind theatre; the man smiling and blushing as he shyly opens to accept pastry that contained far too much sugar for any old person to be ingesting. Bill kissing him, tasting the cake, and things escalate…

If only…
“I’m sorry, darling.”

“Fuck off with your darling shit. Don’t ever call me that. I’m not your darling.” He kicked the cake box. “I’m not your FUCKING darling.”

Stomped on the cake box, pastry everywhere. His shoes are now white, pink and brown. The smell is so sweet; it’s sticky and gross. He kept stomping while imagining Ford’s stupid face. Stupid, smiling, flushed face…

“What am I even doing, Ford? Why am I even here? Why did I bother with you?”

The cake was now mush.

“You good for nothing liar. You stupid fuck. You’re a dead-man walking, Ford. I swear to God, when I see you, when I see you I’m killing you.”

Ford went quiet, but his breathing could still be heard.

“I should’ve killed you. The first time.”

He stomped the rest of the cake, splattering it everywhere. Fuck.

“I should’ve killed you. I wanted to kill you. I’ve been dying for an opportunity to put one in your ass.”

Amoung…other things.

He sat down on the bed, the sweet smell making him nauseous and agitating his nose. The smell somehow got on his tongue, too.

“I wanted to kill you, but…”

Ford’s smiling in his head; holding his hand and touching his face.

“…when you look at me…the way you look at me…”

Bill’s hands went to his cheek, to his neck, to every exposed bit of skin that had Stanford Pines’ name on it. Imagined it’s Ford’s hands…but it doesn’t work. Only five fingers. He needed six. (not that he could feel the extra but it mattered. It was the most important thing in the world.)

“…and when you touch me…” Thoughts of Ford’s gentle touches begun to calm him. Ford’s voice, Ford’s eyes, Ford’s… everything. Oh no, he really was… Ford whipped. 8ball was right.

Ford breathed in deeply, but no exhalation could be heard. Holding his breath?

“When you look at me, you always look so concerned. Like you’re worried over everything… And you smile…a lot. When you look at me, you…”

Losing Ford would be a mistake. He’s made enough mistakes, and if there was a time to prevent anymore regrets, it was now.

Bill Cipher had no regrets, but Casper Giordano did. Too many of them, in fact.

“You really… are the best, aren’t you? You really are…”

Ford was still listening. No interruptions. Just listening.
Stanford Pines…


When Ford spoke, his voice had softened immensely. “I didn’t leave because of that. Just listen to me.”

“You left because you think I’m a freak, don’t you? Don’t you?”

“No…”

“Is that what this is? Is this you punishing me? Can’t you do it the normal way?”

If only you’d just fucked me. You wouldn’t be so angry. That anger has to go somewhere, Ford. It has to.

“Bill, please just give me a night to myself. Just one night.”

“I shouldn’t have told you…about those fantasies…I’m sorry…I’m sorry I’m so weird. I really am. I won’t do it again. I promise.” Bill begged. “Tell me…what you want from me. I’ll do it.”

What would work on this man? What?

“I need you to learn self-control. Don’t look for me. Just wait there for me.”

“Wait here for you? Am I your fucking dog?” Bill said, raising his voice and regretting it immediately.

“Puppy, if I recall correctly.”

Fuck this.

…

Ford’s pet…

“Fuck off. I can’t—this doesn’t even add up. You were so nice…I don’t understand.” Bill threw in a dramatic sniffle. It’d be real if he had less self-control. “What did I do wrong…? Tell me. Tell me and I’ll fix it.”

“You know what you did. But you’re missing the point.” Ford said. “Bill, you are too clingy. Listen to yourself. You shouldn’t be acting like this with me.”

“You can’t say I’m clingy. You can’t. You—you encouraged this. You’re blaming me for what you did? Are you fucking retarded, Ford?”

Sorry, Ford…

“I- I will admit I did…I did encourage it. I was too lenient with it. You are…so difficult to handle sometimes. I don’t know what to do.”

“It’s because you’re a gross old man who likes younger men. Who likes to—”

“Bill, don’t do this.”
'It’s okay, Ford. I love gross old men. I promise. It’s okay if you’re a sicko. I’m fine with it! I swear!’

He kept stomping on the cake corpse, gritting his teeth. Fuck, why did he always have to come to this. Kissing the ass of some old fuck.

“Please come back, Ford. Don’t make me angry. I really…I really don’t want to hurt you.”

“You’re doing it again. You can’t control yourself.”

“I have impeccable self-control.”

“Then control yourself.”

“Give me a reason to.”

“I am.”

Bill let out a displeased guttural noise. If only Ford knew how much control he exercised daily over himself.

“How do I know you’ll come back?”

“I will. I need you to understand you can’t always act cute and have things go your way. What you did wa—why must I explain it to you?”

Bill’s breath was too dynamic. Fingers too twitchy—thank God for trigger control. He’s sure he’d have accidentally shot himself by now.

“Ford, don’t leave me.”

“I’m not. I told you—give me space to think.”

“No, Ford, Ford you’re making me angry.”

“Do you see? You’re threatening me. Why on earth would I want to be near you?”

Bill bit his lip, wetting them too, with his tongue. His mouth was suddenly so dry…

“You have a temper, Bill. You need to learn to control it.”

“I can’t believe you…you tricked me. You tricked me into thinking you forgave me.”

“I said I don’t forgive easily. Do you only hear what you want to hear?”

“You led me on…”

“We’re going in circles now. I can’t be honest about how I feel if you’re going to threaten me every time you hear something you don’t like.”

“No, I’d never hurt you, Ford.”

“Don’t lie to me.” Ford said, again using a hard voice. “Just behave. Do what I ask. Reassure me you can do as I ask, despite your desires. Despite your anger.”

“Giving me orders now huh?”
“You’re such a child.”

“If I’m a child, why are you fucking me huh? Why are you fucking me? Does imagining me as a child when your cock is my mouth get you off? Is that what gets Stanford Pines off?”

So, that’s Ford’s fetish. The sick fuck.

“Bill, don’t do this.”

“You’re a sick fuck, Ford.”

Ford kept quiet again.

“You’re sick. You disgust me. I—“

No, this is wrong. I’m lying. I’m—

“I’m sorry…Ford…” Bill abandoned his gun and covered his face with the now free hand.

“Ford, I’m so sorry…”

Bill flopped onto the bed, the red in him boiling violently as he cradled Dreamcatcher by his chest.

“Bill, you’re upset about our age difference, aren’t you? You always bring it up in a negative way.”

That’s…

“I’m sorry. If it bothers you, then—” Ford began, but Bill interrupted him.

“No…it’s just…Ford, there isn’t much time. We have to move quickly, as fast as possible. You—”

“Where’s nonnino? Thought he’d be here to give me an earful.”

“He’s in Italy, on a short trip seeing a doctor. They couldn’t do anything for him here.”

“Oh…”

“—don’t have that much time…”

What was he saying…? To…Ford…?

“I have plenty of time, dear.”

“No…not when…compared to me…”

“Worst-case scenario again, hm? Darling…”

Bill scoffed loudly. “I’m not…your darling.”

“You are.”

A smile cracked through and Bill hated every second of its visit.

“Then why aren’t you here?”

“I just need time to think. And I get distracted too easily by you, my darling. You know that.”
Abusing that word again.

“You know what your problem is, Ford? You can’t let go. That’s the issue. That’s why you’re bringing up old shit that we moved past. Stuff like… Fiddie Tiddie’s death.”

“Bill, you told me about Fiddleford’s death only a few days ago. How on earth can I move past it so quickly?”

“By letting go.” Bill drummed his hand on the bed.

“Just let go, Ford. Stop overthinking, stop analysing every little detail. You overthink and you make up scenarios in your head. You’re doing exactly what you claimed I do. The worst-case scenario shit.”

“Your actions prove I’m not overthinking.”

“I made a mistake and apologized. I don’t know what else I’m supposed to do.”

“I worried for my safety. I needed time to think. I needed space. If I was leaving you, I’d have taken the ticket with.”

“You can buy yourself a new ticket, asshole. Don’t fuck with me.” Bill growled. “What is there to think about?”

“Follow. I need to think about us.”

That answer wasn’t good enough.

“I’d love to come after you. I’d find you quickly, you know that right? And when I find you, I won’t be very nice to you.” Bill said, humming the end. “But I won’t. I’ll wait right here then. If you’re lying about coming back, I’ll kill you.”

“What an amazing way to convince me you aren’t dangerous.”

“I said I’d kill you if you lied. That’s all. Why would you be scared of that?” Bill continued to hum, Dreamcatcher dancing to his tune. “Unless you’re a fucking liar.”

Bill sat up on the bed.

“If you want to call this off, then just say so. Don’t lead me on.”

Ford was quiet. Why was Ford always so quiet? It’s a phone conversation. You’re supposed to fucking talk.

“Ford, come back. Everything was going so well…come back, Ford.”

“I’ll be back. In the morning.” Ford said. “But if you keep threatening me…”

“I was waiting…the entire night to see you again…the whole night. I just wanted to see you…”

Ford, I really fucked up tonight. You have to come back.

“Why?... after I told you about those fantasies—it’s okay, Ford. Admit you think I’m disgusting. It’s okay. You know what’ll fix me right up? If you fucked me.”

“Bill, when you talk like this, do you know how…how…worried you make me? For you?”
A thick silence fell. Ford’s voice cut through it smoothly.

“You think nothing of taking a life. ...Fiddleford.”

“What about that dead fucking hillbilly? Ford, you are really pushing your luck.”

“You swear you had nothing to do with his death?”

“I told you…no. Why this again? Why? Every time?”

“Because your flippancy at human life has me concerned.”

“You knew who I was when you got involved with me. Or was it that you thought my gang really was a fucking book club?”

This idiot.

“I don’t trust you fully, Bill.”

“You came to New York with me. You shared a bed and room with me. You put your dick in my mouth! How can you not trust me?”

“I—” Ford didn’t finish his sentence.

“When you like someone, you sometimes do and say stupid things.” Ford confessed.

What do you like about me? What…?

“What do you like about me?”

Shit, he asked it aloud.

“Oh…well, let me think.”

Ford didn’t take long to think at all.

“You’re spontaneous and care-free. You have a charm entirely unique to you. I’m fond of your sense of humour, when it isn’t overtly sexual. I find that you can be rather vulgar and it can be a bit much. You’re intelligent, but lazy.”

Bill could hear the smirk on Ford’s face.

“You’re pleasant to be around, when you aren’t acting aggressive. I don’t even need to say you’re good in bed. Generous, too. Very. And thoughtful. You’re affectionate, and seem to wear your heart on your sleeve. Very different to myself… You’re a very sweet boy, Bill, when you want to be.”

Oh…

He hadn’t expected that. He’d expected maybe ‘you’re great at sucking my dick’, and maybe a ‘you’re attractive’.

...

This was Ford. Of course…Ford…cared more about other things than…

“What do you like about me? I’ve always wondered that.” Ford asked, curiosity changing the tone of his voice considerably.
Bill lay back down.

“You’re…nice. You help out strangers and don’t think anything of it. I’ve seen you do it. You tip more than what you need to, and you’re always a little too nice to waiters. You say ‘have a nice day’ whenever you’re done at the convenience store—even on bad days. You go the extra mile with your students, offering after class tutoring. Most lectures don’t give a shit about their students. But you care. I think some of’em just want alone time with you…I don’t blame them.”

Bill laughed lowly. Every scene playing out once again within his mind.

“Your concept of space is wonky, you bump into things all the time. It’s funny when I see new bruises on you because you can’t avoid walking into the only chair in the room. You suck at shaving, and cut yourself often. You always have stubble. But I like how it feels against my skin.”

“Your voice is just the right kind of deep. The kinda voice you’d hear on the radio, selling shit. Despite all your niceness, you don’t mind breaking rules, or doing things for your own gain. You live how you want. Even if you try sticking to a moral code, your self-interest generally tends to overrule that.”

Bill extended an arm to the ceiling, spreading his fingers and waving it back and forth. An empty hand that would look better filled with Ford’s.

“I like to imagine…your niceness is you doing whatever the hell you want. It’s not even you trying to be nice. It’s just you. Your fashion sense sucks, a real walking disaster sometimes, but you’re good looking so most people don’t seem to care. Your nose is always red, and I sometimes call you Rudolph behind your back. You don’t really keep in touch with your family. You’re always alone, in your own world. You sometimes forget to eat, because you’re so preoccupied with whatever’s caught your interest at the time. I’ve seen you skip showering for two days straight, because you were glued to your laptop. I like those things…because it makes you seem like you exist so far from everyone else. A one-man island. I don’t know… you don’t need anyone. You’re independent, and it doesn’t bother you.”

“I—“ Bill paused.

How had…he ever confused Ford…for…

“You… really were watching me closely.” Ford said softly.

How drunk had he fucking been?

“I’m not sure what to say to that.” Ford said. “I never… I never realized the extent…I never—never knew you knew that much about me. I should’ve, but…”

Bill’s breathing became steadier at hearing Ford’s now relaxed voice. Confessing what he loved about Ford had a further calming effect. To be reminded why he liked Ford made all the difference.

“I’m sorry that I—I…” Ford laughed. “ Well, you proved me wrong, that you’re… never mind.”

“Being so isolated… I was lonely. I had Fiddleford, yes, but he had a family he went home to. I, on the other hand… well, you know. If there’s one thing I can thank you for, it’s reminding me how good the company of a lover can be.”

A smile itched itself onto Bill’s face again and he desperately tried scratching it off.

“Forgot to mention: amazing in bed. The best I’ve ever had. I… miss you, Ford. Wow, this sucks.”
Bill muttered. “Hey, what if I took…a Rohypnol? And then you came back? Not only will I not be dangerous, but you can have your way with me?”

“You know I’m not interested.” Ford reprimanded. “And what are you doing with those drugs? Didn’t I tell you never again?”

Bill ignored the last part.

“What if…I went to a bar and picked up an older guy and had him wreck me while I call him ‘Ford’ and imagined it’s you?”

“To spite me?”

“Answer the question. Would you be upset?”

“Of course. I don’t want to—”

“That’s all I wanted to know. So you really do…still like me…”

Bill turned onto his side, talking to the image of Ford on his phone.

“So…you’re…freaked out at me killing people easily, you’ve been distracting yourself so you don’t uh, grieve for Fiddleford’s death and now it’s come back to bite you in the ass and you’re still a little scared of me. Is—did I get that right?”

“So you were listening.”

“Okay…it’s better to…be with someone if you’re grieving. I won’t hurt you.”

“Perhaps, but like I said, you are very needy. I simply can’t right now. I just…I just want time alone.”

“Do you miss me? At all?”

Ford gave a forgiving laugh, and Bill accepted it gratefully.

“I do.”

“Okay…that’s good.”

“You threatened me, multiple times during this conversation. That temper of yours, Bill. And your tendency towards violence. You have to do something about it, or this won’t continue.”

“Right…right I will.”

“That doesn’t sound convincing.”

“Yeah…”

“Bill, don’t make me ask again. This really is the final straw.” Ford’s voice was all business.

Well, his nine lives are up. Scaring Ford was definitely the wrong angle.

“Hey Ford…I won’t be able to see you much when we get back. I have a lot of work to do. Can you…come back? Spend this last night with me? You can have your introvert break down thingy another time…don’t waste this last night.”
“Come on… I’m not a gangster tonight, don’t wanna be the bad guy. 😜”

I can’t decide whether you should live or die.

“That sounds familiar…” Ford said.

You’ll probably go to heaven.

“It’s a song.”

Fuck and kiss you, both at the same time…

“You love to do that, don’t you? You’re a big music fan.”

“Yeah. Obviously.”

“I’ll remember that.”

“…Okay?”

“If you had listened to me earlier, and told me this and asked me as nicely as you just did, I’d already be there.” Ford said. “You need to learn to communicate better.”

“That goes for you, too. Half the time you can’t get shit out, Ford.” Bill sighed, his phone’s screen catching his eye again.

“…You look like a human owl.”

“What?!”

“Your photo…on my phone. You’re like an owl, if it was human.”

Ford’s laughter again, and Bill thought it was definitely his favourite sound.

“If I’m a human owl, what are you?” Ford asked.

“The human personification of cheese cake.”

“You aren’t very subtle.”

Bill laughed.

“And you’ve been snooping again.” Ford said in a stern tone that softened instantly.

“Opening the fridge and seeing cheese cake is not snooping.”

“You’re just like a puppy. Barking and biting, and then you have your cute moments.” Ford mused. “Then again, you love being touched, like a cat. When you want to be touched, and you always seem to want to…”

“I’m whatever animal you’ve ever thought of sticking your dick into.”

“Bill.”

“My bark is worse than my bite… wouldn’t you say?”

“I wonder.”
Bill pictured a worried face on Ford.

“Look how easily things are cleared up when we communicate properly.” Ford said. The change in the breath of his voice had Bill assuming Ford was now laying down as well.

“God, it’s like we’re in a god damn romcom and every five minutes, there’s stupid shit happening.”

“Most of this is your fault. You know that.”

“Yeah yeah…I scared you, blah blah.” Bill said. “If you were younger…we wouldn’t have gotten this far, huh? I mean…you know…it’s just…when you talk, you’re always… like, I dunno. You know how to fix things…”

“I think I mentioned this to you, when you were in the bath.”

“Oh…”

“It helps to date someone as brilliant as myself.”

“Ewww.” They both started laughing, but Ford was right, as usual.

“I’m leaving.”

Oh…

“I’ll be there in 15min, is that alright?”

“So you’re coming back?!”

“Oh course. And there’s something I want to ask you, in person.” Ford said. “And…I want you to know that what you told me…I don’t think badly of you. I realize now that me leaving after that was unbelievably insensitive. I’m terribly sorry that I’m not good at this.”

“No…you’re great at this stuff…this…relationship stuff…?”

“I just imitate and re-enact what I know to work. When things go out of my expertise…this happens.” Ford said. “I’ll try and be more careful in the future. In return, you need to work on your temper and violent behaviour.”

“I will… Hey…Ford…”

“Yes?”

“I wasn’t really gonna kill you or hurt you. If I had gone after you… I think I would’ve just hoped you’d do that.”

“Do what?”

“You know…”

“Bill…I won’t hurt you.”

“No no, not that. That.”

It took Ford a few seconds to understand.

“Ah, of course. Then I’ll do that when I get there. As punishment.”
“Punishment huh? So you do like that kind of thing.” Butterflies—Purple Emperors—fluttered violently inside Bill’s belly.

“I have yet to comprehend how giving you what you want is punishment.” Ford said, changing his mind. “If anything it encourages this behaviour. Perhaps I’ll do something else.”

“Tell me! Tell me what!” Bill couldn’t contain his excitement. Finally, Ford was going down the right path…

“You can stand in the corner and think about what you’ve done.”

“FUCK YOU, FORD!”

Ford laughed and Bill couldn’t help but join in. How he’d missed that sound despite hearing it only a few moments ago…

“Ford… I—”

Something caught his eye. In the far wall.

“Ford..? Ford, you came back…? Already?”

“Bill, what?”

He approached the gathering dark. “Ford…it really is you.”

He reached into the dark.

--

“Bill, Bill are you there?”

There’s no response now.

The terminal began beeping.

Incoming mail…

Beep. Beep.

Boop. Δ

--

Ladies…

He fixed his bowtie

And gentleman…!

Tophat—perfect.

Introducing…

Cane—currently hitting the side of Ford’s head.
A very special guest…

--

“Bill? Bill what are you doin—”

“DEPTH PERCEPTION! Have I missed you! Seeing in 3D is wild! Gets me every time!”

“Bill…?”

“Stanford Pines! The things I had to do to get a private audience with you!” Bill’s voice continued to bellow, startling Ford. Far too loud, as though he’d had forgotten what it meant to use an indoor voice.

“Well not really private private but it’s all I can do right now! Anyway, THE ONE! THE ONLY! STANFORD PINES FROM… uh… I forgot this dimension’s name and number so… just… THE Stanford Pines! That’s good enough, right? Yeah, sounds good.”

Bill? It sounded like Bill, but it also didn’t.

A sudden shriek was heard.

“Whoa! What am I STEPPING in? What is this? What—Ford, clean this up! Chop chop!”

This appears to be… cheese cake? I’m not quite sure.

“A new spin on ‘red carpet’ huh. Not red, and not carpet!”

Snapping fingers could be heard. Who was Bill talking to…? Him? It didn’t seem like it.

Who else was there?

--

The dark reverted what the previous Bill had ruined.

You have 5 left, the dark said.

“Okay, 5 is plenty.” Bill said. “Now that the stage has been swept and polished, we can start the show!”

“Bill… are you alright?” The Ford from this dimension asked, but went ignored.

Bill Cipher admired himself in the mirror.

“A real Barbie huh? Or is it Ken? Look at him, Sixer. Ever seen one so pretty? I should enter some beauty pageants! Bet I’d take first place!” Bill pulled out pieces of hair, the pain entertaining and the hair just the right type of thick to ensure a fantastic grip to play ‘Bald the Human.’

“But that’s all momentary gain! What matters is that I’ll always be number one in your heart!”

The dark scoffed.

“Not your type huh? Yeah, figured.” Bill ran his fingers across the face, cupping feels, pinching squishy fleshy. Kid was a few centimetres away from bony. Skeletal. Body issues much?

Why not just drag Ford to the mindscape? The dark asked.
“Because I’m here and I’ve been **dying** to try out this body! I came **all this way** here and I **DEMAND THE FULL EXPERIENCE.** After all that back-breaking hard work, I require nothing less than **TOTAL SATISFACTION!**”

Bill continued to prod his body, the tie being a particular annoying accessory. “Whoooa, covers are nice but nothing beats the original, baby.”

**I think you just insulted yourself,** the dark said.

“Shut up, we’ve gone through this. **Don’t make me drill that theory into your soppy vapey vapourness.** Because I will do it twenty ways from Sunday.”

“Bill?”

Oops, nearly forgot.

--

Whatever was occurring had Ford terrified.

Did Bill have a split personality…? Multiple personality disorder? But his previous words… were addressing Ford as though they were conversing?

Was he also schizophrenic? Was this an episode? Ford had to leave quickly, in case Bill hurt himself. During episodes, it wasn’t uncommon for people to accidentally harm themselves. Xanthar’s words about Bill self-harming in ‘**bizarre**’ ways flooded his mind and began weaving themselves into what he knew of the current circumstances. Mixing a mental illness and drugs… no wonder Bill displayed such tumultuous behaviour.

How could he have known…? Or rather, perhaps he should’ve pieced it together.

It was best to first seek to calm the boy and ensure he didn’t do anything to harm himself. If he could talk to Bill, maybe even ride out the episode…

“Bill, who are you talking to?” Ford asked, playing dumb and maintaining a calm facade.

“**HAHA, hey.** You gotta give me a moment here. No sneak peeks yet. Wait til the red curtains part, kid.”

That voice… something about it. Having never met anyone with multiple personalities, Ford was left inexperienced and ignorant—a first for him. If there was one thing Ford truly couldn’t withstand, it was not knowing; to be left in the dark, especially during a time when **illumination** was needed the most.

This was why the boy seemed to be so different all the time.

He had taken advantage of Bill…

“Hey, go to the mirror in your room.” Bill said, the command accompanied by a loud drumming sound—fingers tapping against wood?

“Why?”

“Just do it, hurry! **Tick tock tick tock!**”
Ford did. Doing what Bill wanted might placate the boy, and he had to do what he could.

“Draw a $\triangle$ on the mirror. Quickly. Right in the middle.”

Asking why Bill desired this was pointless; he wasn’t in his right mind but Ford would play along for now. Ford searched for a marker he kept in his bag, and did as requested. Once the triangle was done, Bill exploded.

“I see you! I SEE YOU! I! SEE! YOU!” Bill laughed like a maniac, again thumping his fingers almost demonically against a wooden table. Scenes from The Exorcist flashed into Ford’s mind like subliminal advertising, and he hated himself for it. How insensitive… not that he could control what crossed the borders of his mind, but…(Are you scar-ed, Ford? DON’T BE)

“What…?” Ford muttered, not wanting to compete with Bill’s thundering voice.

Ford had to leave. And soon.

“Lean closer, to the mirror.” Ford did, unsure why he actually does it instead of pretending to. Authenticity of the experience, perhaps.

- 

Bill Cipher extended his hand into the air, touching what only his eyes could see.

- 

“You’re older than I expected though…and the kid is younger, too.” Bill said, further baffling Ford and adding to the disarray. (You look sad Ford, need me to tell you a joke? I got some good ones.)

“You’re on the verge of expiring and the kid's barely hit puberty! The fact he’s trying to get a leg over makes this incredibly…well, he’s a quirky one, isn’t he?”

Yikes.

“You a cradle-robber now? That the term? Lolita re-enactment? What is he? 13?”

You’re deliberately exaggerating, the dark scoffs again. I’m not a pedophile—in any universe.

“No, I bet there’s one where you get down and dirty with kids.” Bill covered his mouth with a hand.

“You…you…FIEND! I Sixer, we need to do something about those urges of yours!”

He’s clearly a man.

“I know I know, sheesh. Learn to take a joke! You stick in the mud. What crawled into your special place and jumped?” Bill frowned, widening his eyes as much as he could. ☹️

“Bill…?” Ford from this dimension asked, very afraid and very anxious. The poor guy.

“Oops…got a little carried away. You know how it is. Pets are so needy. And once you bring another special boy into the picture, they get even more needy.”

I’m not your pet.

“Want me to remind you exactly what you are?”

The dark goes quiet.
“Okay, back to business!”

…

“Fine, what term would you use to describe yourself?”

**Your other half. */\*

“Okay, Fordsy, he’s my other half.”

“Your other half? Marriage?” Ford #2 asked. “Who…who’s your other half? Bill, who are you talking to…?”

“Huh… you think if we did the ‘ol holy matrimony, I might get a few interdimensional benefits? Worth a look into. I could use a tax break or two…”

**That’s disgusting.**

“Only because you peeked into the future.” Bill pulled a cheek, the skin reddening. “Don’t blur the lines, Ford.”

“I…I don’t understand what’s happening.” Ford #2 said, reminding Bill to return to the main event: the overdue reunion of Bill Cipher and Stanford Pines.

“Do you have any idea how hard it was to track you down? Across the infinite universes, parting through the *fleshy clouds* of endless primitive meat *matrixes*…and here you are, exactly the man I expected.”

**Was that—a sexual innuendo?**

“Hey, don’t I know it…” ;)

**Enough pretentious introductions. If you sought to impress, it appears to be failing.**

“Ouch.”

“I—who are you?” Again, the poor and confused Ford #2 interrupted.

“Look at me. In the triangle, kid. Work with me here.”

Ford #2 obeyed. As he stared into the mirror, Bill found himself laughing uncontrollably. Oh, Ford always made the funniest unflattering faces. The man had no idea. He really should be practicing his facial expressions or Hollywood would not be calling him anytime soon.

“Bill?”

“Hey.” Bill said, winking at the mirror, forgetting Ford couldn’t see him. Damn. And winking had taken so much practice. “I’m from a time when you and I, Sixer, put aside our differences! Literally.”

“Well, more so than you…obviously. If anyone’s gonna compromise in our partnership, it’s going to be you. Always. And that’s a constant among all universes.” The voice lowered. “Don’t quote me on this.”

Bill pulled the hard, chapped skin of his lips, drawing blood. **Nice.**

“Except…you know…*those* ones, but no one likes to talk about those because I’m not actually in
them. Figuratively.” Bill continued idly.

The room service menu caught his eye. Oh yes. Exactly what he needed.

“Hold on…”

Shuffling could be heard on Ford’s side of the phone, and then Bill was speaking to someone on the hotel phone.

“Send me one of everything. Thanks dollhead.”

**It’s dollface.**

Ignoring his dark Ford, Bill declared loudly. “I’m living the high life! Room service to the extreme!”

Better clarify things with Ford #2 before he thought the kid was a nutter. (the kid *did* have a few screws lose but not *these* screws)

Bill cleared his throat. “Back to you, Fordsy. Your theory of alternate universes is right. Now… just gimme a sec.”

The dark moved into Bill’s ear.

“Sixer, gimme some dirty secret to tell Fordsy to prove I’m an all-powerful supreme being who’s road tripping across universes.”

The dark proceeded to pass intimate secrets through him. It hoped its former human past was somewhat similar to this Ford’s.

It seemed to work.

“Hey Fordsy, you still there?”

“Yes…”

“So, when you were 13, the first time you jazzed yourself, you jazzed it to the hot elf on the Dungeons, Dungeons and more Dungeons box cover.”

An awkward silence crashed the party.

“I…how did…” Ford began to fret, Bill could *hear* it through the phone.

“What’s that…oh? Oh. And you still beat your meat to the hot elf even today! Wow, you really do like’em pretty, don’t you? And *young*.”

Ford #2 had shut down, Bill assuming he was having a ‘I’ve been mentally violated’ crisis. In the meantime…

“So…Sixer. You turn your nose up, giving frumpy looks at this meatsuit while you go and six your one off to pretty boys? Oh my oh my oh my oh my *oh my*!” Bill slapped his own cheeks to every ‘oh my’.

**It’s not like that. Elves aren’t human.**

“They look human! You telling me pointy ears make all the differences? Get outta town!”
I’m not entertaining this conversation.

“I’ll be sure to tell the kid Stanford Pines likes him a little roleplay.”

A wicked laugh filled the room, darker than the dark that held his attention. Sixer had no skin and yet Bill still found a way to get beneath it.

“You’re…telling…” Ford #2 squeaked. (It was a squeak, I assure you, I’d be mortified too—oh like, you wouldn’t?!)

“The truth! For once!” Bill laughed again, punctuating every ‘ha’ with of his hand against the dressing table.

“How is this possible? In order for you to be here, you’d have to transcend time and space!”

Dark matter, Ford. The dark Ford said to himself, but could not be properly heard unless Bill Cipher desired so. Without permission, his words would come only as hushed whispers. Hearing it, Bill switched his light on, allowing Ford #2 to hear him clearly. A bit late for that but whatever, man.

“Yes. I can and do so every day of my life, Stanford. Every single day. When I wake up in the morning, I’ve already transcended space twice and time thrice.” The line was delivered rather defensively, and Ford couldn’t resist laughing. (So easily derailed, Fordsy. You old fool)

“What? I’ll transcend space right now!” Bill announced.

Ford kept laughing, until he felt something at his ear.

“Some sunny day…♫”

Turning around revealed nothing.

4 left, the dark said.

Ford was amazed, and smiling a smile so unbelievably big, his cheeks had begun to hurt only a few seconds in. Bill noticed. (You’re so easy, Sixer.)

“I like how you believe me right off the bat. You always were quick to believe in the supernatural! The weird, the wild, the wonderful! I always liked that about you. You’re a freak, and not just physically one either.” Bill said, still watching Ford through his symbol. He aged pretty well...

“Where’s…my Bill?”

“You Bill. Heh. I’m in his body, so he’s still here.”

“How is that possible? How are you in…him?”

“I’m not human. I can do what I want, when I want! Especially since you were so kind as to join the dark side. Literally. You literally joined the dark.”

Ford bore an intense look as he listened attentively to Bill, with the latter feeling rather chuffed. Ford’s undivided attention…always a nice thing to have. Never too early for it either.

“Physical bodies are great but the next step, of course, is omnipotence, and beyond that…well, let’s not talk about me. And let’s talk about me and you. You and me. Us.” Bill said.

“Not human…how? You said you were Bill, from another…world?”
“Yes, ‘Bill Cipher’, a.k.a me! Isn’t human, where I’m from. In your world, the universe has chosen to express Bill Cipher in human form. I will be expressed in a multitude of forms until time isn’t time any longer. Hey, bet there’s a Bill Cipher cat out there, somewhere.”

*I gotta get a selfie with it,* he whispered to the dark.

“Bet there’s a Bill Cipher string of cans, too.” Bill laughed, a laugh that left Ford’s right leg tapping on the floor with anticipation of possibilities at what all of this entailed.

“What… are you? If I may ask.” Ford sure was taking this well. Sure, Bill expected it but wow, this was quick.

“The All-Seeing Eye! A being of ultimate knowledge! Like Wikipedia except no one can edit me. Except maybe…you.”

“Fascinating… Bill is or, you are…I—never mind. And I…? I was human?” There was a smile dying to expose itself all over Ford’s face.

“You were, yes.” Bill said. “You used to worship me. A real altar boy. It was cute. I mean, you know…who doesn’t just adore someone who draws windows for them everywhere so they can spy on the neighbours…makes idols of them…dreams of them…gives them unlimited access to their body…”

“One day, I was just ‘you know, let me give this guy a chance. Let me try a good guy for once’ and I’ve never looked back.” Bill said to the talk show host of the imaginary dating show he envisioned himself to be on. He gave a little queen wave to the audience, they cheered wildly. Naturally.

“So you…an inhuman creature…fell in love with me? A human?” Ford liked that idea, Bill could see it in all the little ways his facial muscles moved.

“Uh…*sure.* Yeah, why not. That’s probably the only way your human brain can comprehend our relationship.” Bill finger gunned Ford. “But love is just hormones and what have you! I don’t have those. One could say my love is…so very pure, not driven by primal impulses left by your ancestors to get you banging and procreating.”

Despite the sheer bizarreness, Ford found himself chuckling at this Bill’s sense of humour. It was unlike his Bill, yet so very alike.

“I worshiped you…?”

“I was your lovely Muse—the m is capitalized, by the way. I inspired you. And a little *more* than that.”

Ford chose silence now, digesting the new information. Bill chewed happily (on his own fingers) on the other end, seemingly uninterested.

“Why are you here? You said you came to see me?”

“Yeah. I came here, to meet you.”

“Why…?”

“Selfish reasons. This whole thing… you know, I don’t remember, but I never forgot. You ever get that feeling? You can’t quite put your finger on it…”
Bill Cipher played with the pocket knife he’d found on himself. It was mighty sharp, and shiny. Flashy, too. Perfect for a little improvement. A chop here, slice there, dice everywhere.

He sat at the dresser, and slid the knife across his right cheek—up and down, point to point, forming a perfect triangle. Bloody snail trails were left in the pretty blade’s wake, and you know how pretty things could be—greedy and needy. It wanted a little more.

“Huh…the pain is a little numb in this body. Too…accustomed to it?” Bill mused, smearing the ruby red across his cheek. This Bill's blood wasn't as dark as he'd like.

“Hey what if I…” His hands roamed between his legs, feeling the groin and inner thigh area.

**Don’t do that. You look—it’s inappropriate.**

Bill laughed, and the knife went into his thigh.

---

Ford heard shrieking, someone(Bill?) hitting the floor, screaming, and then quiet.

“Bill? Bill? Bill, are you alright?”

“H—hey, whoa, I’m back. No worries. Just…just had a little falling out, okay. Hang on, room service is here.”

Bill disappeared again.

---

3 left the dark said, healing Bill’s wounds.

“Okay, as I was saying…came all this way to see you!” Bill stabbed into the newly acquired strange cuisine that was incredibly small for a price so high.

“You’re kinda like that great great great uncle who sends you 50 bucks every holiday season and your folks make you write them a thank you card. Then one day, you go and visit them just to say ‘thanks for being a cheapskate. I couldn’t afford college but hey, your 50 bucks yearly really helped me less miserable’ And you say it in an entirely snarky manner they don’t quite get because they’re too old and withered.”

“…I don’t understand.”

“Hey, me neither. Just because you know something doesn’t mean you understand it.”

“That’s… a contradiction.” Ford frowned, now making himself comfortable in front of the mirror.

“Whoever said I make sense?” This food was terrible. Absolutely terrible. Who could he complain to about this?

“You said…in your world…I joined you…? Can you elaborate? On how?”

“Doesn’t matter. You’ll just forget everything.”

“I’ll forget? Elaborate on that too, if you please.”
“Of course. I’ll make you forget. But I’ll say this: I’m the ghost in your machine, Stanford Pines. And you are the ghost in mine.” Bill said. “You know that theory, right? That’s all there is to it.”

“Anyway, I’m here purely for my own satisfaction! To meet you!” Bill made drumming noises with his tongue.

“You’ve been saying that. But why? You…you already have…a me?”

“Yes but you’re a special you, Fordsy.”

Bill began eating, loudly. Food spluttering could be heard on Ford’s end.

“Can’t believe I found you…”

“Why did you want to meet me?”

“Do you believe in fate? Destiny?”

“I’m…not sure.”

“What about karma, Stanford?” Bill ate while watching Ford.

“Karma?”

“Do you believe the consequences of your actions transcend this life?”

“I’m…not sure.”

“I’m a little early…I don’t feel anything from you.” Bill made a loud humming noise, as if thinking, and then resumed eating. Between mouthfuls, Bill continued.

“Okay so. For every action there is a reaction. That reaction may take occur in another time, another place, another world to another Stanford.”

Bill took a large gulp out of the expensive wine he’d ordered. Not his preferred alcoholic drink but it would do.

“You reap what you sow, Stanford Pines. Good, the bad, the ugly.”

“I’m…completely lost. Start talking sense.”

“Oooh, getting assertive. I like that.” Bill giggled, sputtering food out all over the dressing table again. “But, sense is hard to do. My tongue’s pretty twisty, ya know? And you like it that way, I might add. Especially when I twist it at a very specific angle in a very particular spot up a very special place.”

“You really are Bill.” Ford said. Although the vulgarity was far more concealed, it was still vulgar.

“HA! Maybe. Hey, there was no lechery involved so you might wanna add that to your ‘spot the differences’ list!”

“Lechery…?”

“Yeah, when you have the meat stick enter the palace uninvited.”

“Oh.”
“Your kid’s quite the fan of that, isn’t he…? Whatever gets the light brighter or… whatever. Hey, even a worm will turn.”

The kid had certainly turned—not for the better. But we can’t all be rock star gods and all powerful beings made of pure energy.

“Speaking of meatsticks, I have seen yours too much, too close. It’s like a sandworm with a beady eye. Yikes.” Bill said, chewing loudly. The chewing morphed into laugher, food again, spraying everywhere.

“I’m fooling around, Fordsy. Your organ bag is pretty boring. If you wanna get with this guy, you need to think vaporwave, baby!”

Ford laughed, the reference was rather obscure but hit home very well. The urge to... meet this Bill in person overcame him. (it had been building slowly—who didn’t want to meet an alleged supreme being of knowledge?)

Was it an option?

“You’re laughing. You adapt so quickly, always did and always will.” Bill said affectionately. “But I’m kind of tough to handle… not that my Ford has any trouble with handling a bit of angling.”

You want details, don’t you, stickybeak? ;)

“Being with me is like enduring a perpetual acid trip!” Bill declared, then took his loud voice down an octave, letting it simmer in (ersatz) chocolate velvet before offering it to Ford once more. “Hey… if you ever wanna have a little fun behind your Bill’s back, take some psychedelics—need recommendations?—draw a triangle on every surface and let go.”

“Are you flirting with me?” Ford asked, flattered and even a little excited. If this Bill really was… inhuman, a creature who could transcend time and space… to hold its affection like this. What could be more—oh no, what was he thinking? The same feeling he’d had the first night Bill and he had been together was present, and said night montaged within his mind. (Stanford, come on. You can’t seriously fall for this every single time.)

“I assure you he is not.” Someone else replied, sounding too much like Ford himself. Bill could be heard laughing in the background.

“Who is this?” Ford asked, already knowing the answer.

“Oops, sorry Fordsy!” Bill again. “He’s been fickle ever since we got here. Jealously, ETC.”

Bill slouched back in the chair, grinning at the dark who had leaned into his face while gripping the back of his neck; a tight-fisted hold, meant to convey an array of things only this Bill Cipher could understand.

“What is this? Stockholm Syndrome?” The dark leaned closer, the action meant to intimidate, but Bill only laughed.

“Want me to put you in your place? Not in the mood! Try later, after some soft-soaping.” Bill shooed the dark away.

“Also, the hand you formed had five fingers. Still self-conscious?”

No. I forgot the extra.
“Nah, that’s a lie.” Bill raised an eyebrow, the act took him 3 tries. “Once a few million years past, Ford, you won’t even be bothered by your past. You’ll forget it, just like I did most of mine. You’ll be all numb, like you’ve been stuck in the black freezer of outer space for hours. You know how time can make you forget. Look forward to it. Soon, I will be the only thing you know.”

The dark understood. Bill Cipher’s past was nothing to him now, only an occasional convenient (and very vague) sob story for manipulation. It rarely worked, anyway.

More than a trillion years had passed. Who cared about those who didn’t make it? He was Bill Cipher now, and **Bill Cipher had made himself**.

“All back to you, Fordsy. You wanna see it as flirting? Go ahead. Gotta catch’em all, baby.” Bill said, shoving baby carrots down his throat and coughing most of them up again. “Although…think you’re off limits…”

“Am I there? Your…me?”

“You are. He’s not too keen on talking with you.”

“Oh. A shame…” It was indeed a shame. Why wouldn’t his other self want to converse with him? A once in a life time opportunity? It then dawned on him that this Ford could travel across universes. He must see many versions of himself frequently; the appeal must have worn off already.

“Hmm what about Particles in love?”

“What about that theory?”

“You for it? Yay or nay?”

“It’s a theory which was later proved correct. If it’s fact, of course I won’t deny it.”

“Well, karma kinda works a little like Entanglement. I’ll leave you with that.”

“Are you sure you comprehend that theory?”

Bill cleared his throat, swearing off the infernal orange sticks. Orange was a hideous colour anyway, and you were what you ate. If he turned orange…

“You’re…a real nice guy, aren’t you? Niceness is kinda your warp-woof. Very different to my Ford. And one day, you will reap what you sow.”

“More cryptic words… you’re fond of doubletalk, aren’t you?”

“Heh. Perceptive as always, Stanford. Couldn’t pull the wool over your eyes even if I tried. Unless said wool’s make-up was kissy faces and flattery.”

“What?”

“Nothing!”

“The Bill I know is far more straight-forward.” Ford said, earning laughter that reminded him of playground bully. Only this bully appeared to taunt him due to an apparent childish crush. The very concept of obtaining the adoration of an inhuman powerful entity being nearly too metaphysical for Ford, yet worth indulging in for ego’s sake.

“If you say so, Sixer. If you say so.”
“Do you want to know…what you’ll reap? What your actions in this life will get you? You wanna know?”

“What will I reap?”

“You want me to tell you your future?”

“Tell me. It’s why you came here, isn’t it?”

“Maybe. Maybe I just felt like coming here.”

“Can I meet you in person?”

Bill breathed out a laugh.

“Nah. You wanna know? Yes or no?”

“I do.”

“My mercy.”

- 

In another universe, Stanford will be turned gold instead of stone.

---

“Your mercy?”

“Of course.”

---

In another universe, Stanford will be the only survivor of the Pines family.

---

“You’ve seen your future. And I’m in it.”

Ford struggled to breathe—the wind had been knocked out of him, somehow. What had he just witnessed? That creature…the golden thing with one eye…

Was that Bill? Was that this Bill?

“Did I blow your mind?” Bill asked, chuckling as he watched Ford’s face. It was horrified, and then it was confused and then it simply was.

“I…” Ford could not answer.

“Don’t worry, you haven’t done anything to earn that yet. Let’s hope me being here doesn’t send turn everything off course.”

“Was…that…you? The thing… I saw?” Ford huffed, every word hurt to get out.

Bill’s laugh answered the question.

“Very…Illuminati…”
The tattoo on Bill’s palm.

“I have to go now, Stanford.” Bill’s voice was now level and steady, alike to his Bill.

There’s something at his ear—

Bill is now behind him, roughly grabbing him and pulling him into a very human embrace.

*Heh. Can you believe I know how to do this…?*

Bill Cipher kissed him on the lips; it’s cold, the breath even colder and the tongue nothing more than a slab of ice.

———(Do you want to make a deal with me? Shake *my hand*, Stanford. Shake my hand.) The sensation of the kiss comes onto Ford’s skin once more; this time, he feels it beneath his skin now—inside, deep inside, a place uncharted and unknown save to Bill Cipher.

(Yes, a deal. I’ll owe you a favour, and you’ll owe me one. Well? Take my hand. Who *else* are you waiting for?)

Enchanted,

Ford did.——

As they separated, a disgusted face decorated Bill’s face; Ford, all red and flustered—

“Not as good as I imagined it to be. Then again, meat slugs and meat sticks aren’t exactly mind blowing.”

This is disgusting, the dark says. You know you shouldn’t be doing that.

“What are you railing on me for? He’s not my real dad. Or this Bill’s real dad…or whatever.”

Yes, but—

“Hey,

2 left. Wipe out, clean up and

let’s go.”

0.

———

Remember!
Reality is an *illusion!*

The universe IS A HOLOGRAM!

*BUY GOLD!*

BYE!!!!

———

The dark light kisses him, whispering

*Nothing like a little narcissism…*

———

He dreams the triangle on his palm **kissed him in the dark.**
And told him Stanford Pines likes hot elves.

In the dark, Ford forms a featureless body, Bill following his lead—only, his body is that of a certain hot elf.

Bill’s laughter vibrates through the darkness. They osculate impassively—lips meeting lips, attached to nothing. Both emitting ripples of dark that merge into one another to become one again. An attempt at an embrace sends more laughter Ford’s way, Bill dissipating into the dark Ford following.

- They dance with the dark as their stage, the dark as their music, the dark as their audience, the dark as each other.

---

In this Ford’s mindscape, the flower is monstrous, taking its rightful place at the centre of Ford’s universe. It’s vantablack, ever expanding, ever consuming; an ouroboros, Bill’s mouth swallowing all.

A black sun 🌞, emitting an iridescent yellow so bright, the shadows cast are sentient, calling themselves Stanford Pines.

The light shines selectively, and it selected Stanford Pines.

He stares at it, the petals smelling like a cologne he received once upon a time, in a universe he doesn’t belong to.

At the flower’s base, the triangle from Bill’s palm floated, waiting.

*Hiya smart guy.*

"*The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.*"
Ford didn’t greet him, offering only a smile.

Bill crawled, dedicated to reaching his target, and dumped his head into Ford’s lap. “Missed you…”

Ford rubbed his head. “Why are those there? The drugs?”

“Huh? Oh…was gonna…take one and knock out…but I changed my mind? I’m not sure…I dozed off.”

Ford shook his head, smiling, hiding his concern about Bill drugging himself to sleep. So, the boy hadn’t lied about that…

“Why do you look so sad, Ford? Want me to tell you a joke…?”

“I made a mistake.” A thumb rubbed across Bill’s pouting lips. “I made myself seem better than I really am.”

“I don’t get it.” Bill nipped the assaulting thumb.

“You were right. You did confide a lot in me. But I just don’t know how to deal with that sort of thing and I worry I might make things worse. What I did was insensitive, I realize that now.”

“Ford, you talk so much, and always so…like I’m at a TED talk. Those talks Alex watches all the time…” Bill nuzzled into his stomach. “When are you gonna stop it…”

“You might think it’s weird, but it’s been beneficial until now, hasn’t it?”

“It makes you sound like a pocket guide.”

“I came here…to tell you about an idea I had. A trial run, to see if I wanted to continue this. But now that I’m here…” Ford continued to stroke Bill’s hair as he spoke, the boy beaming brightly.

“A trial run huh…sounds okay.”

“No, now that I’m here…it doesn’t seem right.”

“What doesn’t?”

“Leaving you.”

Bill’s smile brightened even further. “Oh…aren’t you all lovey dovey…”

“No, that’s not it. It’s not because of any feelings I have for you. Bill, you need help.”

A partial lie. Ford did have feelings for Bill, but he couldn’t decipher them.

Bill’s smile darkened. “You sound like Evan. There’s not—”

“Anger management would be beneficial for you.”

Bill groaned into Ford’s lap. “Are you staying with me to play fixer upper?”

“No, I like you, but your issues can be fixed so why not? Improve yourself.”

“Hmm and if I do, I get you forever, right?”

Ford laughed but didn’t reply.
“Forever…” Bill hummed, snuggling once more into Ford.

“Bill…I want to ask you questions that might upset you. Will you let me?”

“Go ahead. As long as you kiss and make it better later.”

“Of course I will.”

“Wait… gotta ask…” Bill turned his face to look at Ford. “You never told me… why you thought my dad hurt me.”

“The nature of your fantasy implied a paternal figure. I’m sorry, again, for saying that.” Ford kissed him on the forehead and Bill smiled sadly in return.

“I’m waiting for you to tell me.”

“Huh?” Bill turned to get a better look at Ford’s face.

“I know…”

“Hm?”

“Who did that to you. It was me, wasn’t it?”

Bill’s eyes widened, retreating fearfully to Ford’s abdomen.

“You know what I mean, don’t you?”

“Nope.”

“You’re lying.” Ford rubbed his head again. “When are you going to tell me…?”

“You get frightened easily by me.” Ford pointed out.

“Not true.”

“You do.”

“When I asked you who hurt you, you said I did.”

Bill didn’t retort.

“I know already.”

Again, Bill kept quiet, and hid his face from Ford in the warm lap.

“Listen to me. I know what your grandfather did to you. I know. I’ve been thinking and it’s obvious. But you haven’t told me directly. I’m going to pretend I don’t know until you are ready to tell me, of your own choice. Then we’ll deal with it together. Until then, I’ll deal with it my own way. Is that okay?”

Bill remained quiet. The clenching and unclenching of his left fist said enough.

“I want you to feel like you have control over whether I know or not. That’s your private business, and I have no right knowing unless you tell me.”

“I’ll pretend I’m wrong then. I’m sorry.”

Bill was defensive of his grandfather, as expected. Most abuse victims defended their abuser, especially if they’d been abused for a prolonged period, or from a young age. Or both. Bill was both; now when would he tell Ford?

“Let’s get ready for bed.” Ford said, giving Bill a light push.

Bill sat up limply, dazed and nearly falling off the side of the bed. Ford took the courtesy of undressing him; a favourite activity of his, but now it left him feeling guilty.

“I’m going to go wash my face and—” Ford said, turning to leave for the bathroom, only for Bill to cling direly to his arm.

“No no, you’re going to leave again…”

“I’m not.”

“You are…”

Ford sighed.

Bill sat on the toilet seat as Ford brushed his teeth. Eyeing him with lazy eyes, like an inquisitive but sleepy cat about to doze off. Again, he thought the boy was terribly cute.

“Did you brush your teeth before you went to bed?” Ford asked, knowing the answer.

“Nope.”

“Then do it now.”

“Yessir!” Bill grinned, staggering up.

Ford sighed, laughing afterwards. He stood behind Bill, watching as the boy brushed his teeth. Bill would wink randomly at him in the mirror, the action reddening Ford’s face. The half nakedness only adding to the atmosphere.

Once they were in bed, side by side—Bill, with his arms holding Ford’s left arm captive, began. “You asked me…what your kisses do to me…”

He kissed Ford’s bicep lazily, thinking again, how nice the man’s body was. “You ever hear that song ‘Fever’?”

“They give me fever…” Moving higher, he kissed Ford warm neck. “It’s…a lovely way to burn.”

Taking the initiative and the clear hints Bill was giving, Ford climbed on top of him. The boy’s breath immediately fluttered, already excited.

“What…a lovely way to burn….”

Ford stopped and hovered over Bill; the boy looked confused, hands rubbing Ford’s skin suggestively, urging him to continue.

“I never asked you my question. Do you mind…”

“Shoot.” Bill said, ruffling Ford’s hair.
“Did you grandfather hurt you?”

Bill left Ford's hair in favour of cupping Ford's face. “Of course. You saw my back.”

“Not those. Did he do anything else?”

“I don’t remember.” Bill said indifferently, looking off to the side briefly and returning his gaze to Ford.

“I thought so.”

Ford began doing that. Kisses kisses, everywhere.

“What’re you doing…?”

“You know what I’m doing.”

Bill moaned out a sleepy ‘oh’.

“You’re close, aren’t you?” Ford asked, nuzzling at the boy's lips while the emitting rapid breaths heated his skin.

“Huh…

“To falling asleep.”

“Yeah...you...you did that on purpose, you perv.” Bill smiled, eyes still closed.

“I did.”

“Darling, you have to control that temper of yours.”

“I will.”

Ford kept kissing him; the kisses now having an ulterior motive. “And that violent behaviour.” More kisses, in his neck. They tickle, and any attempts at escape had Ford holding him gently in place.

“Can you do that for me…?” Ford kissed the side corner of his lips. “Behave yourself.”

“I—sure...yeah...I'll...do my best...Ford..” Ford hands rubbed circularly at Bill's stomach and the boy's body reacted in such a lovely manner to it. “If you’re good…”

“Then…what? Then what?” Bill interrupted.

“Then I’ll…”

Fuck you, Ford says in his mind.

“—fuck me?” He finished for Ford, hoping his mind was right.

“I was going to say…”

“Are you promising sex if I behave?”

“Will that work?”

“Maybe…”
“I don’t want sex to be a punishment or a reward. I want to be something both of us enjoy for its own sake.” Ford said, kissing him on the lips this time.

“Sorry… I know… you aren’t like that, Ford. I won’t do that anymore…” Bill pulled Ford in for another kiss. “Hey… can I lay my head on your chest and then you can stroke my hair…?”

“Of course.”

They changed positions, and Bill made himself at home on Ford’s chest. The tattoo was as ugly as ever.

“I missed you so much, Ford… sorry I’m so clingy…”

“I only feel smothered when I’m away from you. With you, it doesn’t feel bad in the least. What I say makes no sense, I know… but when I’m away, I’m suddenly overwhelmed by a need to be alone.” Ford frowned; being an introvert had more downsides than upsides.

“Then I can’t leave you ever!” Bill grinned, flicking Ford’s nose.

Caressing the exposed side of Bill’s face, Ford mused. “We’d both be… at home in a Shakespearean play.”

“Finally! You admit you got the hots for me.” Bill turned his face downward, giving a few licks on Ford’s bare skin, with Ford squirming under the wetness.

“You’re nearly dying, Ford. Let’s get married, while you still have some youth left.”

“Bill…”

“Romeo and Juliet! Take two!”

Ford smiled, looking away. The boy was too much still.

“You want to… don’t you, Ford? Why don’t you?” Bill said, his right hand rubbing at Ford’s groin. “It’ll be perfect. The dramatic reconciliation! Where after an argument we make passionate lov—”

“No, not yet.”

Bill pouted but his hand didn’t stop fondling. “What are you waiting for?”

“For you to want me to.”

“I fucking do.”

“Not like this.” Ford pinched his cheek and Bill tried biting the hand as it retreated. How childish. “I want it to be special.”

“You virgin.”

“For you.”

Bill’s eyes widened in surprise, cheeks pinking dark enough for Ford to notice.

“I’m going to take care of you.” Ford ran his fingers across Bill’s face, stroking the heated cheeks, much to Bill’s annoyances and embarrassment.

“You really like that kinda thing huh? Looking after someone.”
“Maybe. It might be my age. Maybe I do want to settle down.”

Bill grinned, raising both eyebrows as if to say ‘me, right? Me.’

“Not with you, young man.”

“Aww nooo…” Bill pouted and moved up for a kiss anyway. “I love you, Ford…”
He took Ford’s bottom lip between his teeth and pulled it, the man flinching at the sudden sharp pain.
“But I’m weird, you know?”

Consoling his abused lip with distracting licks, Ford replied. “I’m weird, too.”

“Then we’ll be weird together.” Bill said, cuddling into Ford’s neck as the man held him.

He thinks, earlier, if he’d stayed to talk to Ford longer, he would’ve controlled himself.

--

Ford outlined Bill’s scars; at what age had this happened? Should he ask…? As his mind wandered, so did his fingers, accidentally going lower.

“Hey old man, why are you touching my ass. Quit it, you perv.”

“No, I was… it was an accident.”

“Yeah right.” Bill muffled into the pillow.

“Don’t act so innocent.” Ford kissed Bill’s ear, the hand now purposely fondling the curve of Bill’s backside. “As if I’m the pervert here…”

Bill turned on his side, and Ford quickly pulled him close to his body.

“Hey hey… keep your distance. I can feel your dick poking into me.”

“Do you like that?”

“Hey get lost, you molesting creep.”

“Let’s see…”

Ford’s hands were already between his legs.

“Oh, would you look at that. You do like it…”

Bill started to laugh and struggle. “No, come on… Ford, I’m tired, come on…”

“Acting innocent while harbouring such dirty thoughts…” Ford whispered into his ear as he wrapped his hand around Bill’s waking erection, the boy gasping and squirming in response like some virgin prince. Theatrics, as always.

“Ford, quit it…oh no…wait wait, don’t stop…”

Ford’s mouth is on his again, when he finishes. The kiss never breaks; Ford can’t run away as Bill holds him tight in an embrace and continues to feverishly kiss the man. *What a lovely way to burn.* They continue until he’s very much asleep, the last feeling being the heartening warmth from Ford’s
mouth and eyes.

*What a lovely way to burn.*

--

*But he’s weird, you know?*

They both are.

---

Ford dreams of a triangular being, glowing amongst the deep dark as a sun. The light goes on and on, fading into the darkness, where it will become one with it.

It calls him into the dark.

He hesitates.

As he begins to take his first step, someone else takes it for him. An after-image of himself steps forward instead. He’s young, judging by the brown hair.

The triangle creature welcomes him with open arms, and a mass of writhing hands pull him into the lonely dark.

The triangle creature again, beckons him, but he does not move this time. It laughs, and then it’s a young man, with hair blacker than the dark behind it, and eyes as gold as its previous body’s form.

It’s a face Ford does not recognise, but something about it is nostalgic.

It tilts its head, as if to say ‘*this not doing it for you?*’

It laughs again, and returns to the dark.

--

He dreams the triangle told him *his favourite gum is coming back into production.*

---

Bill Cipher watched Ford sleep, with a cold body already post mortem and the dark whispering in his ear.

*I really want you.*

*But it’s entirely up to you, isn’t it, Ford?*

---

*Meanwhile…*

Bill Cipher pulls Stanford Pines’ cheeks. Not Ford’s own cheeks, but a Ford’s cheeks.

“*You fall for the same tricks, every single time! Bat my lashes, say some nice things…and you’re already swooning!*”

“I know…how…sad.” Ford said indifferently.

“*Happy to be back in a meat suit?***
“Of course not.”

Yellow eyes stare into pitch black ones; the black being the shadow cast by the bright yellow.

“You look possessed.”

“I am, aren’t I?”

“I wonder who’s possessing who…”

--

Bill pulls Ford’s hair, pinches his skin— “Want me to fix this meatsuit? De-age it…just a little little little? He won’t know.”

“You won’t be helping me. You’ll be helping him.”

He knocks a few years off—or rather, adds a few more years on.

“Hmm, you know what? Let’s mess with him a little. How old was he from the get go?” Bill asked, fingers still glowing blue.

“61.”

“Okay…what age did he start to go grey?”

“Seems to be…52.” Ford said, recalling memories that did not belong to him.

“Then I’ll make him… 49? I’ll keep his hair grey, so when the kid dyes it—”

“—it grows back brown.” Ford finished the line of thought.

“Exactly! It’ll totally mess with him!”

“I think if you make him that much younger, it’ll be very noticeable.”

“Yeah? That’ll make it even weirder. Let’s do this.”

He isn’t sure if this’ll affect anything in the time-line, but hey, introducing a little chaos was always good for the soul.

In Bill’s mindscape, he dances with an echo of Ford to white and red music.

-

In Ford’s mindscape, he lays on the ground, still staring idly into the great space; with the flower’s vines beginning to curl around his hand.

It’s whispering, but the sound is inaudible.

The terminal is snoozing, beeping every now and again.

Δ

Boop ;)

Chapter End Notes

I could write an essay on this triangle Bill and Ford but I’ll just say key points. Since they’re essentially inseparable, their personalities reflect this change. Bill having Ford’s company continuously has left him more playful and light-hearted (he now has a perpetual audience and partner to goof off with. Not too mention he has Ford’s intelligence, bringing more truth to his ‘supreme being of knowledge’ claim) while it’s left Ford drained; his humanity is gone, too, so he’s a little colder. Also, he’s still a dirty monster fucker. Canon!Bill comes in a little later ahem
Jeremy’s Theme

Chapter Summary

I’m no son of Aquarius. I think the world is too small for the both of us.

Chapter Notes

I’m dedicating this chapter to Perl(http://perlumi-delirium.tumblr.com/), who wrote the awesome drabble I posted in the last chapter and left me ridiculously long reviews that contain fantastic analyses. (You can peek at her reviews of chap 1 & 2 in their respective comments. They are incredible and deserve tremendous praise.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He isn’t sure how much blood has come out, isn’t sure how much blood you lose when an eye comes out. “You aren’t fit for this anymore, Bill.” He hears the man unbuckle his belt, heralding the departure of Bill Cipher and thinks this is another fucking joke. “You fucker…if you—I’ll kill you.” Fuck polite language. The pain is unbearable but he bears it. His words are useless—and laughable; he’s the punchline, the walking joke, the reason the laughing man laughs. Always has been, always will be. The sound of hard weight hitting the carpet cautions once more that it’s the end. He hopes, that blood makes a decent lube. He thinks and knows, karma is real. He hears, Stanford entering the room…yelling?

Dreamcatcher’s just out of his reach. But within Ford’s reach.

—Bill Cipher reaps what he sows, the so very distant future.

All my life I've been so different, all my life I've been resistant To that man to show I can survive in this world alone.

I got Daddy Issues, that's all that I've been hearing I got Daddy Issues, nobody bothers listening to my Daddy Issues so I'm gonna keep on living life this way. Life this way.

I'm gonna keep on living life this way.

—Daddy Issues, Trisha Paytas.

Stanford Pines.

To tell Ford would be to condemn their blossoming relationship to an early and, in Bill’s opinion, wholly undeserving grave. The truth. It had dealt the final cut on the already worn bindings to his
estranged father, and had severed the (what he believed to be) robust ties with his most loyal subordinate.

Truth. Nothing but slashed ribbons of potential futures was left its wake.

If there was any truth to the third time being the charm, Bill would not be affirming it. Because truth was a back-stabber, and he wasn’t sure how many more times he could take being hurt before it flooded and drowned him.

Awake, Bill laid still, listening to the deep breathing behind him; the warm hair making the hairs on his back bristle, alongside something else. There’s a six-fingered hand slumbering at his stomach, and he stroked it before merging with it. It’s warm, as it always was.

After cautious wiggles and squirms, Bill succeeded in turning around, greeted by Ford’s sleeping face, which—due to early morning hormones or not—looked particularly ravishing.

What colour was Ford’s hair before it greyed? Considering Ford’s eye colour, brown was the most likely, but to envision Ford as blonde was quite the treat. They’d match. He was then suddenly reminded that he’d need to dye Ford’s eyebrows, too.

He gave Ford a quick eskimo kiss but greed prevailed, and it transitioned into a full tight-lipped one; his lips as eager as ever. Morning breath prevented him from going any further and his imagination was forced to do the rest.

His needful arms encircled Ford as he closed what little distance remained between them, sighing in satisfaction as more body heat enveloped him.

Ford waking and then initiating with soft touches was the norm thus far, but this time, Bill took it upon himself to begin. At the under cusp of Ford’s jaw and neck, Bill began to rub his face; gently at first before impatience took the lead. Caressing himself against Ford like a cat did to its owner; lovingly, hungrily—and every bit as demanding. Ford stirred, and was then awake. As soon as the sides of Ford’s mouth pulled into a smile, Bill wasted no time snuggling into the embrace Ford’s arms offered. Safe and sound.

He wanted to forget about last night, and Ford’s arms were the best place to catch bouts of amnesia.

Ford locked him in a loose hold and went back to sleep.

Damn…

--

When he closes his eyes, and rubs his nose at the spot in the nape, where Ford’s baby hairs begin, following the fluffy trail up to grey curls and going past a rosy ear, he’s five again. Safe and sound. In bed with a man who’d never hurt him.

But the smell of a particular expensive cologne shackles him to the present, to remind him it’s only Stanford Pines.

And that’s even better.

--

Ford’s luggage was already packed, allowing him the privilege of staying longer in bed. Bill was not as lucky but refused to leave Ford’s arms, swearing he could pack in under thirty minutes and there was no need to rush.
They don’t rush, and Ford is as gentle as ever.

--

He lay in Ford’s arms, dreaming.

--

Bill was awake again, pasting sleepy kisses into Ford’s neck.

“What happened last night?” Ford asked, rubbing the interlocked hands at his abdomen and unconsciously leaning towards the beckoning kisses. “You had blood on your…intimate area.”

“Oh.” Bill wiggled against Ford, arms still snug around the man. “My dick caught in my zipper.”

“I see. You didn’t seem to flinch when I touched you.”

“I like pain. Told you.”

“Next time, tell me when you have an open wound on your genital area. It’s—”

“Ford, shut up and let me sleep.”

Tightening his arms around Ford, Bill refused further conservation.

--

“What about your birthday…” Ford said, and Bill groaned into his neck. The boy still hadn’t let go of him once the entire morning.

“What about the 14th of February?”

“Valentine’s day?” Bill forced a gag. “Ugh, how cliché. You can do better than that, smart guy.”

“Easy to remember.”

“Eugh. What star sign would I be? That’s important. I don’t want a lame sign.”

“Aquarius.”

“Why that one?”

“The strangest sign on the zodiac.”

“You know a lot about that stuff? What sign are you?”

“I do, a lot of great minds were interested in it so I elected to look into it. I’m a Gemini.”

“Are they compatible with Aquarius?” Bill squeezed his wrist.

“They are, very much so.”

“Then Aquarius I am. Valentine’s Day sounds great, doc.”

“You’re too easy sometimes.”

“Oh yeah?” Bill dug his nails into the skin they touched. “Want me to be more difficult?”
Ford rubbed the aggressive hands and they eased upon contact. “Depends on whether I can handle it or not.”

“Why can’t you always be in flirty mode? I like it…” Bill purred, nipping the skin closest to his mouth; Ford’s collarbone.

“Gemini…imagine you had a twin… holy shit, I’d be in heaven…”

“Valentine’s Day huh…” Bill comically gagged again, this time with his out-sticking tongue taking to licking Ford’s skin, inspiring his lover to finally take the initiative.

-

Who took the initiative didn’t mean much to Bill Cipher, however. Bill Cipher always took the reins. They lay on their sides still, with Bill idly grinding into Ford from behind. There’s a tight grip in Ford’s hair, where Bill’s left hand has made its home, while the right fondles Ford slowly beneath the cream covers.

“Just let go, Ford. You’re so tense…” Bill whispers into his ear; Ford lets out a deep sigh that might be a breathy moan.

“If you don’t relax, I’m going to make you relax.”

Oops, that sounded like a threat. Oh well.

Judging by the deeper red suffusing across his already flushed cheeks and the growing heaviness within Bill’s palm—Ford liked it.

Time passes, and then Ford lets go, leaving proof of his departure that Bill gladly swallows whole.

-

Bill continues to drip honey into Ford’s ear.

--

In Ford’s mindscape, the little flower’s roots burrow deeper.

“Why do you think I have anger issues, anyway? I’ve never gotten angry…I’ve only, uh, warned you, kinda?” Bill said, folding his arms behind his head. His hands smelt like dick, but he’s too lazy to get up. And maybe, just maybe, he might be able to get Ford to lick it clean.

“That’s…a good point.” Ford said. “But you have a temper. I know you do.”

“I control myself pretty well. I mean, isn’t anger management for those guys who flip out and lose it all the time?” Bill raised a hand into the air and began distorting it, as if making hand puppets. “Also, my grandfather never touched me. Quit doing that shit.”

“Bill…”

“Don’t ‘Bill’ me. Quit demonizing my family.”

“You ran away from home.”
“Kids do that all the time.”

“I gave you my reasons—”

“And they were absolute horseshit.”

Clearly disquieted at being rebuked, Ford only needed an opportunity, and when it came, he was straddling Bill; shimming down and parting Bill’s legs wider than usual, eyes owl-wide in preparation to find its target.

“What’s this…?” Bill aided Ford by keeping his legs open, nearly rising to attention.

Ford began inspecting Bill’s inner thighs meticulously, feeling carefully up and down for any bumpy scar tissue or other potential hints of injury. The man neglected to don his glasses, causing him to need to move much closer to Bill’s skin then if he’d worn them. Bill had no complaints.

“Watcha doing, doc?”

“Looking for scars.”

“Okidokie. You go on right ahead. Maybe when you’re done, you can…you know, just maybe…” Bill said, attempting to reach down to rub Ford’s hair and missing by one spiteful inch. “I mean, look how close you are already…”

Even with verbal and physical encouragement, lewd thoughts kept their distance from Ford. “Evan said you used to hurt yourself. Where? I’ve never seen any scars on you, other than your back.”

“Dunno.” Bill’s lips curled into a pout. “You should already know what my thighs look like. You’ve been between them quite a lot…”

Abandoning his mission for another day, Ford moved further up, allowing their faces to interact. Ford took Bill’s arms and re-positioned them flat at the sides of his head. Bill seemed to like it, and Ford was permitted, once more, to study the daedal designs branding Bill’s skin. They were as impressive as the first time he’d been allowed a closer look.

“Did…did you hurt yourself on your arms so you could tattoo over the scars?”

“I’ve had these tattoos since I was a boy, Ford.”

“Yes but…I’m not sure how tattoos work. If you hurt yourself, does the skin…still scar as it normally does? Wouldn’t you have white patches?”

“Ink penetrates deeper than the first layer of skin.”

“Oh…when did you get tattooed?”

“When I was…hmmm” Bill closed his eyes. “14. Maybe 15. I can’t say, no birthday.”

“Did your father have a birthday?”

“Yep.”

“Do you think you might’ve been adopted?”

“Nope. I looked like my dad, through and through.”
“May I… take a photo of your tattoos? I’d love to study them. The designs are so intricate with eccentricity to match.”

“If you want. You can take whatever photo you like…” Bill fingers tapped Ford’s nape as a reminder that his legs were still spread invitingly. “…of me.”

“Did it hurt…?” Ford remained unaffected by the compromising display.

“Of course. They were done in three sittings. Three sessions of… agonising pain.”

The mystery of Bill Cipher still captivated Ford and he wondered if this one why he sought to maintain this precarious relationship. Mystery implied possibility. But possibility held no alignment, and Ford might find himself on the unfavourable end. (he could argue he’s already experienced it)

“What kind of man was your grandfather?” Ford brought Bill’s legs together and made himself comfortable beside him.

“Nice. Really nice. He could do it all. A little like you.” Bill said, laying his head upon Ford’s chest. Changing his mind, he climbed atop, loosely matching his upper body against Ford’s while straddling a leg and surrounding Ford’s neck limply with both wrists. Ford approved of this new position by massaging Bill’s shoulders, earning soft hums that reminded him of purring.

The comparison brought discreet disgust to Ford. “Nice you say?” Both of Ford’s hand settled at Bill’s scars. A reminder.

“Sure. I might’ve deserved that.”

“You didn’t, Bill.” Ford rubbed across the marred skin as though it still hurt. Although there was no pain, the touch still alleviated.

“Whatever. He was a good guy. I mean, other than fucking my sister, I guess.” Bill confessed to the tattoo on Ford’s chest.

“What…” Ford felt a lung propel itself into his throat and then quickly bounce back into place.

“Sorry. Know you mean well, but you’re tryna console the wrong kid.” Bill muttered. “My sister got that shit.”

“You-you never said anything…”

“Not your business.”

Once more, Bill refused further conversation.

“I have to get up. “ After much determined struggling, Ford succeeded in unsticking a very sticky Bill off him.

“No, you don’t!” Bill acted quickly and padlocked both arms around Ford’s neck. Ford pretended to enjoy it, embracing Bill in return; but the boy was forced to let go when the dreadful tickling began. Cheerful laughter rang through the room as Ford’s fingers danced at the spots that seemed to elicit the most noise. “No no no, cheating… cheating!” Despite the on slaughter, Bill still managed to steal one of Ford’s hands.

“Don’t go…” Bill pulled him close again. “You can—huh…?” He gaped at Ford, eyes widening and narrowing as they wandered across Ford’s face as though it were unfamiliar terrain.
“You…look different. Younger…? Or…I don’t know…” Bill touched his face; pawed at it, rubbed and felt the now surprisingly suppler skin. Smoother, too. “You look really good today…”

“Holy shit Ford, I must’ve been really fucking drunk because you really don’t look as old as I…thought you looked…? I dunno. Shit.” Bill kept pawing at Ford’s face. “Seriously…why am I only noticing it now? You look fantastic for your age… I mean, I knew you looked good for it, but…”

“You could easily pass for…late thirties…? If I dyed your hair…” Bill’s hands wandered to Ford’s hair as he spoke, lost in thought of possibilities at giving his lover a make-over.

Finding the excessive superficial attention tedious (regardless of how nice it was to hear), Ford turned his head to the side to avoid Bill’s microscope gaze, and climbed out of bed. Still naked and apparently forgetting his modesty along with his clothes, he strolled towards the bathroom. Every step had Bill’s full approval.

“What are you gawking at?” Ford asked playfully.

“Nothing…” Bill squeaked, still taking in eyefuls of Ford’s naked body which seemed more radiant than usual. Forming a triangle, he peeked through it and concluded Ford didn’t skip leg day.

“Ford, you a squat kinda guy?” Bill asked, knowing the answer and having seen Ford do plenty of them during his shadowing Stanford Pines days.

“Sometimes.”

“I like your butt.”

Ford shut the bathroom door and the loud volcanic grumbling from Bill forced him to retract the action.

“Rude, Stanford!” Bill said, taking in shameless eyefuls while reprimanding. “You can’t walk around naked and not expect people to ogle you!”

“Spare me your sexual harassment.” Ford simpered.

“You will be spared nothing. Speaking of butts…when do I get to put my fingers in you?”

The disparaging sloping of Fords facial features quieted Bill.

“You’re building some nice muscle. Know what I think? Who needs muscles when you have guns?”

“Guns can’t protect you when you’re unarmed. “ Ford said as he wet his face. Not that muscle meant you could protect yourself either, but hopefully the implication was not lost on Bill.

“That is true…you could overpower me, couldn’t you? Doesn’t that sound exciting?”

Ford was no longer interested and focused on his morning ritual.

“I’m cold…” Bill rolled between the sheets, flailing his body in a way he hoped would entice Ford, but the man paid no heed. “I could use some heat. Preferably of the body variety.”

“It’s not cold at all.” Ford retorted, squeezing tooth paste onto his toothbrush. “You look ridiculous. Get up and brush your teeth.”

“If I get up and go there, brushing teeth is the last thing I’ll want to do.”
A series of looks, ranging from curious to benign came Bill’s way as Ford brushed his teeth. Bill returned them all with lewd gestures—from simulating oral sex to thrusting his finger in and out of a finger-formed circle; the latter had Ford choking on toothpaste foam. Myopia did little to save him from Bill’s obscene gestures.

Unsatisfied with the minuscule attention, Bill positioned himself on his stomach, allowing the covers to slip open at all the vital spots to reveal just enough skin. He rested his chin flat on the palm of a propped up elbow and through half-lidded eyes, watched his prey.

“Are you trying to seduce me?” Ford, stepped closer, chary but interested.

“Me? Never…” Bill’s chest dragged backwards across the bed as gradually rose to his knees while arching his back fully, similar to a cat—Ford’s wide eyes drawing to the sudden enticing curve. He pulled Ford back into the bed with very little complaints from his victim—other than an overly confused face.

“You’re such a pervert. I can’t even move without you thinking dirty thoughts…” Bill whispered. “I think I should do a little something with my mouth before I brush my teeth, hm? Or I’ll have to brush it twice…”

As his hands began their journey to Ford’s groin, a loud knock interrupted their exodus.

“Ugh…no, don’t get dressed…” Bill whined, watching Ford cover himself to answer the door. Ford was not too keen on company but being rescued from Bill’s clingingness and excessive libido was welcomed.

“I’m going to fucking kill whoever’s at that door.” Bill grumbled, covering himself partly.

The door opened and 8ball rushed in yelling while dropping a bag on the dresser. He looked energetic this morning, still elated that he had not been one of the unlucky ones to die last night. As for the unlucky ones, he couldn’t care less.

“HEYO. WAKE UP, BITCHES! I brought morning supplies! A monster energy drink! And…a pie from Ben’s.” 8ball offered a nod to Ford, who returned it with a soft smile. Hopefully Bill wouldn’t be acting out in the presence of only one of his members, but the boy was always full of terrible surprises.

Bill sneered. “I’m staying in a 5 star hotel, you think I give a shit about some pie from shitty diner?”

“Well excuse me for bringing you the best damn pie in NYC, you are so ungrateful—and are you naked? I’m seeing like, too much hip from this angle.” 8ball took a step back as he surveyed Bill’s precarious position.

“Yes, I’m in my birthday suit.” Bill opened more of the covers for emphasis. “I was just about to do things God would not approve of with Stanford Pines.”

“Should I…leave…? I’ll leave.”

“Oh nah, stay. Stay.” Bill climbed out of bed, a shameless display of nudity had 8ball spinning around and Ford face-palming.

“Boys, we all have dicks here. Save that modest shit for church.” He dressed himself— pants only. “Also, you’ve both had my dick in your mouths and hopefully I will have them on my dick in the future.”
“Fuck you, Bill! Don’t say that shit in front of Ford, god damn!” 8ball spun to face Ford, both hands up defensively. “Yo Ford. I don’t like men so…don’t…you know. I mean…hey, I have no issues with you liking dudes but this dude is off limits.”

“Shut the fuck up, Jason.” Bill laughed. “If you keep talking, maybe I will invite you to have a threesome with me and Ford. Doesn’t that sound like one hell of a good time?”

For frowned, unsure what to make of the exchange he was witnessing.

“No. No. Nope.”

“Ford, he’s still in the closet. Excuse him.” Bill hooped an arm around 8ball’s neck. “Hey, you seem kinda outta breath.”

“You should go back into the closet. And I ran all the way here. Gotta get that cardio in, brah!” 8ball eyeballed the arm around his neck suspiciously. This might escalate if he wasn’t careful around Bill, especially a half-naked Bill who liked to show-off in front of Stanford Pines.

“How did you even get in here, looking like that.” Bill asked as a hand lazily wandered across the front of 8ball’s obviously cheaply-made shirt. “Ghetto trash.”

“I am incredibly good-looking and they assumed I was a model staying here.”

“Fuck off, you retard.” Laughing, Bill gave 8ball’s head a hard shove.

“Hey, you won’t believe what I watched again last night! Spawn.” 8ball fixed his hair, frowning at the damage Bill had done.

“Without me?” Bill took the Monster can, giving it a hard cup and wary once over. It wasn’t as cold as he’d like.

“Yeah, without you. I said it once and I’ll say it again, you are the reincarnation of Violator.”

“I’m not a fat, overweight clown who shits his pants.”

“Yeah but you were, once upon a time.”

“Whatever.” Bill opened the can, surprised it didn’t fizz out. “Hey, I have an official birthday now so be sure to tell the others. 14th February.”

“Wah? Valentine’s day? What? What’s with this official shit? Come on, man. It’s cooler when we get to pick a day to celebrate your egg-hatching. You get like multiple birthday’s a year that way! Surprises! All the time! Also, you know I tend to be broke as fuck the few months past New Years, come on!” 8ball whined, taking a seat at the edge of the bed.

“Ford picked a birthday for me.” Bill beamed, sipping his drink again.

“Fuck. You. Ford.” 8ball looked at Ford and rather than feeling threatened, Ford laughed. 8ball didn’t particularly stand out as being worthy of incredulous scrutinizing. Boys tended to be more of a handful when they got together, but one or two at a time was rarely an issue. And Bill was enjoying himself. Perhaps his talk with the boy had indeed had an effect.

“Hey I burnt off the can I drank…can I have some of yours? You can’t finish that whole damn thing.”
“Sure.” Bill took a large gulp and holding the yellow liquid in his mouth, pulled 8ball into a deep kiss. The yellow over spilled and dribbled down both their chins. Even with the mess, Bill didn’t end the kiss until satisfaction had been reached—the signal being 8ball’s surrender. As soon as he felt 8ball begin to meekly return the kiss, he broke it.

8ball, despite his eventual compliance, exploded. As expected. “GOD DAMMIT! WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?!”

Bill laughed hard enough to bring him to his knees. Through the musical laughter, Bill said. “You asked for that one... you called me violator, aren’t you asking to be violated?”

”AND. YOU. HAVEN’T.BRUSHED.YOUR.GOD.DAMN.TEETH”

Bill laughed even louder as 8ball shoved him into the bathroom, proclaiming him Violator while calling him disgusting non-stop as though it were his new mantra that empowered him.

“I got hella important news, so clean yourself up. Because you are not going to like it.”

“Yeah yeah…” Bill wiped the stray liquid off his face and squeezed toothpaste onto his brush.

“What’s the news? You finally meet a girl who swiped you right on Tinder?”

“I get swiped right all day every day. No this is...uh.” He looked over at Ford, uncertain. “It’s...business stuff?”

“You can say it in front of Ford.” Bill clarified and began brushing his teeth.

“Okay...well...uh, I’ll wait til you’re done with that.” 8ball gave thumbs up to Bill, and received a look halfway between annoyance and interest. He returned to his seat on the bed, eyes ping-ponging between Bill and Ford.

“So...Ford...how’s it, uh, going?”

“Just fine.” Ford said, mildly intrigued at the relationship between 8ball and Bill. He recalled Bill had claimed to have slept with all his members, and that would no doubt nourish a type of intimacy between them. The kiss they’d shared only moments ago certainly confirmed Bill’s words. But if Bill forced them into it...he was surprised they were capable of harbouring such affection for him.

But Bill was manipulative, and Ford was certain he hadn’t seen the full extent of what Bill was capable of. It was quite a talent but Ford was immune to manipulation—allergic, even.

Bill emerged from the bathroom. “The King has returned.”

“Well sit your ass down, Simba, because the news will make you wish you’d never come back to Pride Rock.” 8ball stood up and let Bill take his place, the spot still warm.

“Dragging out the reference kills the reference.” Bill said, sitting and then stretching his shoulders while winking at Ford, who stood awkwardly to the side. He beckoned Ford to come sit by him and Ford gladly complied.

“Okay, you ready?” 8ball asked, noticeably more fidgety.

“Born ready, baby.” Bill said, making eyes at Ford while donning a coy smile that revealed much of what he was thinking. And much of what he was thinking was highly inappropriate, Ford thought.

“Teeth is dead.”
“What…?” Bill’s smile didn’t drop; 8ball’s statement sounded too much like a pathetic attempt at a joke. A joke Teeth himself would’ve tried pulling off.

“I dunno, man. He died this morning, during an operation. His heart gave out.” 8ball shrugged, and stepped back.

Bill’s smile pulled itself in. “You fuckin’ with me? Mi stai prendendo per il culo, vero?”

“No, he’s dead. They had to put him under to take out the bullet. It broke into pieces apparently. Somehow he died.” 8ball took another small step back, careful not to let Bill notice.

“That’s bullshit. That’s fucking bullshit. Teeth—no, I didn’t. I didn’t. No. That’s… you a liar now, Jason?”

“No…it’s…true…”

Bill stood up, his short fuse fully ignited. Ford had rarely witnessed a temper being lost, being not one to hang around overly emotional company. As Ford caught sight of Bill’s face, all concerns regarding Bill’s temper were validated.

“One more fuckin’ time—you lyin’?”

“No, Boss. Not at…all…”

Bill took a deep breath, running his hands tirelessly through his hair, giving fleeting pulls that looked painful. He kept breathing, every breath more erratic than the last. And then the calm came, the lit fuse frozen in time. Composed, he sat down once more at the bed.

“Who told you?” Bill’s voice came clear, concise and underlined with the promise of violence should he hear the wrong answer. Ford remembered this voice: it was the same voice Bill had used on him the second time they met. When Bill had ‘jokingly’ attempted to force himself on Ford. Seems all Bill’s rape attempts were meant to be jokes and Ford wondered if the joke was on him.

“Xanthar. He was at the hospital, taking care of Teeth and…stuff.”

“How did he tell you? When?”

“Early this morning, and uh, he called me.”

“Did he sound upset?”

“It’s Xanthar, kinda hard to gauge the guy. He sounded like his usual self.”

“Of course he did. The man’s made of steel, isn’t he?” A lick of sensuality pervaded Bill’s tone, eyes now half-lidded.

“Poor Teeth. Poor fucking Teeth.” The ice surrounding the fuse began to melt. “This better not be a fucking prank, Jason. Sarà meglio che tu non mi stia prendendo per il culo. Ti ammazzo subito, se vuoi.”

The tendency to diverge into another language—Italian—begun to stand out to Ford. The few times he’d heard Bill speak it had been what he’d consider emotional moments; the first time they were together, at the party and now.

“I’ll send you details of the hospital he stayed at, and all that…you can call’em yourself. Find out and…”
Ford watched Bill—concern overshadowing his curiosity. He stood near the drawer, and then moved before it so that Bill could not access what lay inside it without asking him to move. It was better to be safe than sorry, and having easy access to a weapon might cause Bill to choose the easiest solution to his problems.

But Bill’s deceptively calm facade brought Ford’s attention once more to how appearance orientated Bill was. If he had not been here, he was certain Bill would’ve become violent. Despite the boy’s comeliness, by now Ford was already fully aware of what he was capable of.

“Xanthar said that—”

“Jason, al diavolo il cinese.”

Bill pointed at 8ball and it didn’t register immediately that Bill had his knife pointed at the other boy.

“If you’re lying, I’m going to cut your balls into cubes and feed them to your crack whore of a mother.” Bill waved the blade up and down. “Take out your phone, call Veronica and have her confirm. Use speaker phone.”

Without a word, 8ball obliged and Veronica’s husky voice rang through the room in no time.

“Yeah, he’s dead. I was at the hospital earlier. What a fucking mess. Ruined my day having to deal with that fat fuck biting the dust.”

“Why were you even there? Xanthar would’ve taken care of it.” Bill said.

“Yeah but he wanted me to come in for some reason. I dunno. Pissed me off even further, calling me for dumb shit. Listen, that’s all you need, yeah? I have to go…” The dial tone came too soon.

Bill stood up and threw his knife onto the bed carelessly; it bounced before settling down. Bill began walking towards the dresser, needing to pass the mirror, when he noticed where Ford stood. He immediately understood the man’s intentions; rage and irritation deforming his features in response to the revelation.

He gave Ford a comprehending smile and then crashed his fist into the nearby full-length mirror—the shards jagging into skin and crevices between his knuckles. The pain was barely there, drowned out as background noise while anger took the stage. Ford was lucky enough to evade the stray sharp pieces.

Bill took 8ball by the shirt, blood still brandishing his knuckles and transferring onto the other.

“Ma come cazzo cazzo cazzo è potuto accadere?!”

“Bill…Bill…you gotta calm down, I—don’t shoot the messenger!” 8ball dared not fight back or squirm too much. Italian-speaking Bill was not the nice Bill. Nearly everyone had learnt that the hard way and 8ball did not need to be re-educated.

Bill turned on his heel, still gripping 8ball and shoved the boy hard enough to send him sprawling pathetically onto the floor, into the shards of mirror that now covered much of the carpet.

Careful not to move amongst the sharp pieces, 8ball signaled Ford to be quiet, looking absolutely terrified and yet very accustomed to this behaviour.

“Fanculo, affanculo te e affanculo me!” Bill kicked the bed, 8ball flinching at the loud thumping and Ford jittering back. This display of rage had Ford worried for the day there wasn’t anything to break
when Bill became angry at him. The boy’s violence would then be directed towards him.

“I didn’t fucking kill him! Fuck that! There’s no way that kid died so easily! That’s fucking shit. Foul play, you hear me? Someone killed him. Teeth can’t die that— that easier. Easily. EASILY. He can’t. Fuck. FUCK.” He continued to assault the bed with 8ball being grateful it wasn’t him.

Had Ford heard correctly? Bill claimed to not have killed Teeth. Was Teeth who Bill had shot last night? … One of his own members? Ford recalled Teeth as just a boy, younger than Bill even.

“My property. Someone destroyed my fucking property.” Bill ran his bloodied hands through his hair, colouring the blonde with specks of sickly red.

“Get the fuck out of here, Jason.”

“R—right, sorry boss… I’ll go.” Not needing to be told twice, 8ball was already up and on his way out, too scared to dust off any stray away shards in fear of angering Bill further. Once Bill’s temper was lost, the smallest things could escalate it further.

“8ball. Take care of yourself.”

“Yeah… I will… sorry again… Bill.”

Once 8ball left, Bill sat down, unaffected by the mess he’d created. The calm marble façade normally worn returned as he addressed Ford. Again, appearances meant everything to Bill.

“So, is it possible, doc? You’re the smart one around here. Can you explain this to me?”

The broken glass had Ford’s attention when he spoke. “If Teeth had an undetected heart issue, it’s possible the anaesthesia they gave him might’ve been too much, and his heart collapsed.”

“Huh. I see.” Bill said. “I shot him and now he’s dead.”

“One of your own members…? Why?” Ford asked bravely. Bill Cipher would not hesitate to hurt him; this was confirmation. If Bill could hurt one of his own, he’d hurt Ford.

“Kinda pissed me off. Called you Jewish. I dunno. Felt like it.”

“You felt like it.” Ford’s tone was terse and Bill could hear not only disappointment, but the beginnings of anger. A careless act had caused the death of a young boy— Bill’s careless act.

Ford. Angry? Bill attempted to suffocate the growing fear with anger but it proved steadfast.

“You felt like shooting a boy? Just because you felt like it? You felt like it? What did I tell you before you left?”

“Jesus Christ, Ford.”

“What did I tell you?” Ford kept his tone stern and commanding, but his face held a concerned look. He did not want to scare Bill, only reprimand the boy.

“Something something think about your actions, Bill!” Bill’s laughter was arrogant and disrespectful— everything Ford hated.

“Can you even think?”

“Watch your fucking mouth when you speak to me.” Bill’s eyes narrowed dangerously and Ford
hardened his features, deciding if scaring boy would be the collateral damage of teaching him a lesson, then so be it. This matter was too serious for Ford to be lenient. In fact, he’d been far too lenient thus far.

“A child is dead because of you. Because you felt like it.” As the words came out, Ford softened his features, unable to go through with potentially scaring Bill. It just didn’t seem right.

“Hey, I killed more than Teeth. Keyhole’s playing hide and seek with Jesus as we speak.”

“I’m disappointed in you. I really am. I expected better after how much I’ve tried speaking to you, but it seems you’re incapable of change.”

“A child is dead, Bill.” Now Ford’s voice had raised. Anger, then fear passed through Bill’s eyes in a repeated cycle; as if unsure which emotion should be called upon. Should he protect his pride or bend to self-preservation?

It was only Ford…

Bill’s jaw clenched, hard enough for Ford to see the very straining of the muscles through the taut skin. His fist clenched and unclenched in a strenuous ritual but Bill remained silent—his entire body speaking for him.

“You say you’ll do as I ask, and then you demonstrate the exact opposite.” Ford said, and Bill’s eyes fled from him, annoying him more than any previous time. “Look at me when I’m speaking to you.”

Bill refused to comply. “Not your fucking kid, Ford. Barking up the wrong tree.”

“I’m aware you’re not my child. But you are my lover—or are you forfeiting that role?”

“Do you have to talk like that? My god.”

Silence.

“I shot him in the leg, Ford. The fucking leg. I didn’t mean to kill him.” Bill’s face hadn’t changed—the same neutral, doll stare remained, eyes looking everywhere except Ford.

“But you did. It did kill him.”

“No, someone else killed him. It wasn’t me.” Bill had no fight in him, and Ford could hear it, could see it.

Bill stood up and avoiding the debris, advanced towards Ford, who now found himself backed against the dresser with Bill leaning over him and an unreadable expression worn on his face. Bill placed a finger over his own lips, silently shushing Ford.

“Death comes in threes—did you know that?” Bill said and Ford didn’t answer—not that Bill expected an answer. It came across as a threat, although not the intention, subjectivity couldn’t be avoided.

“I’m going to shower.” A weak kiss was left on Ford’s cheek at Bill’s departure. Ford made no effort to stop him.

Room service was called and they swiftly cleaned the mess, the damages for the wreckage was added to the tab but Ford assumed Bill would know that.

The reality of how dangerous Bill Cipher was had become more and more clear to Ford. But was
leaving him an option any longer? If he’d killed one of his own for making a harmless remark, what
would he do to Ford if Ford attempted to sincerely leave?

Last night had been testing the waters and the result had been what Ford expected: the boy had gone
crazy and vindictive. If Ford had not succeeded in calming him and mitigating the situation, he’d be
dead already.

Bill Cipher had a bite to match his bark.

Bill had been almost forty minutes in the shower, worrying Ford. All he ever seemed to do was
worry for Bill. And he hadn’t been hard on Bill, not at all. He’d done his best to not scare the boy
while simultaneously communicating this behaviour was unacceptable. And it had appeared to work.
Bill wasn’t frightened, unless he had hid it from Ford.

He found Bill standing in the shower, immobile and quiet.

Knocking on the shower door and then opening it, Ford said. “Darling, are you alright? You’ve been
in there for a while.”

Bill answered without turning around. “What? Did you miss me? Want to join me?”

“No—I…”

“That’s too bad.”

Bill stopped responding, and Ford let him be. Five minutes later, Bill emerged from the bathroom,
with red eyes and deeply pinked skin. He dragged his feet as he walked, barely taking note of his
surroundings.

“Your eyes are red.” Ford said, breaking the ice as soon as he could.

“Never gotten water in your eyes in the shower huh?” Bill sat on the bed, towel loosely tied around
his hips and hair still dripping wet that he made no effort to dry.

They lapsed into a silence, the only sound being the dribbling of water onto the sheets. Bill rarely
looked in Ford’s direction but rather than seeming lost in thought, Bill appeared lost completely.

Apologizing had occurred to Ford but he’d done nothing wrong. Bill was at fault.

“Hey…come here.” Bill’s hand beckoned Ford near. “Do you want to?”

“Want to what?” Ford stood in front of Bill, looking down at the dismal boy.

“Fuck me.”

“Dry your hair and get dressed.”

Bill sought to be punished and Ford could not and would not. But the desire was confirmation the
boy felt guilty, and Ford couldn’t help but feel grateful Bill, despite everything, still had the ability to
feel remorse.

“I’m not moving from here until you fuck me.”

“Then live the rest of your life there, Bill.”
“You’re dumping me, aren’t you?”

“We’ll talk about that when I’m back home.”

“—Safe and sound.” Bill added. “I’m not interested in talking, Stanford. But you’re aware of that.”

“Get dressed.”

“You won’t help me take my mind of this?”

“Get dressed, Bill. I’m going to order breakfast.”

“I hope you plan on paying for that.” Bill’s lip curled into a nasty smirk. “I’ll pay for it. If you reimburse me another way.”

“Sex is only going to temporarily make you feel better.” Ford turned to walk to the phone and seeking to end the conversation.

“I know, Ford. I should thank you for all the previous times you’ve helped me out.” Ford looked back towards Bill, who now used a tone meant to intentionally start a fight, but what sort of fight? Bill had confessed to sleeping with Ford during a poor mental state—something Ford had suspected but had no evidence to support. Until now, that is.

“How am I meant to interpret that? You sleep with me to make yourself feel better?”

“Of course.” Bill shrugged, grinning. “I use you. You know that.”

“Why are you lying again?”

“Where the fuck would you get that from?”

“I’m not an idiot. You think I can’t notice when you’re upset?” Ford folded his arms, dropping them again almost instantly. “Granted…there was one time…I felt as though... it was the first time. I can believe you weren’t doing well then. But every time after that...”

“I’m sure you enjoyed our time together for more than escapism.” Ford insisted.

Bill turned his face away, and Ford knew he was right. Lying again.

“What are you doing with your life, darling?”

Bill’s laughter sounded as though it would break into crying any second. “My father yells ’what you gonna do with your life?’ Oh daddy dear… ♪

He focused on Ford and kept singing softly. “You know you’re still number one. But boys…they wanna have fun…♫”

Ford added this to what he knew of Bill Cipher. Bill had trouble expressing himself, and enjoyed using music to communicate—was that it? The boy loved to speak in song lyrics, at inappropriate times, no less.

Bill’s voice became weepy and thin. “…I wanna be the one to walk in the sun. Oh boys, we just wanna have fun.”

Sudden equanimity overcame Bill.
“I didn’t threaten you. It’s a saying. Death comes in threes. Sometimes it comes in fours.” Bill stood up, fatigue in his movements. “But he was fucking dying anyway. That’s what I thought.”

“I was so scared. Can you believe it? Why would I be scared of losing him? Good fucking riddance.” Bill paced tiredly across the room, before returning to the same spot. “Autopsy reports said he was perfectly fine though. So what the fuck made him sick? Was it guilt? So what? In his old age he suddenly grew a conscious? Fuck him.”

“You’re talking about your grandfather, aren’t you?”

Bill dropped himself onto the bed like a deadweight, the sound loud. He sat up, continuing to speak, his voice now strained.

“Why am I always thinking about him? When I’m happy, when I’m sad, when I fuck up…” The marble mask cracked and Ford could see Bill again. “God, I fucking miss him. I’m weird, Ford.”

No longer wary, Ford approached Bill and touched his cheek, the boy happily leaning into it. “It’s normal to miss your family, dear. Even if they treated you badly.”

“You know…you really do remind me of him, but…when I was younger. He was really nice. Like, really nice, Ford.” Bill held Ford’s wrist and rubbed his face zealously against the hand. “I always felt safe with him. And he spoiled me…” Bill laughed from the hollowest part of himself.

If one gazed into the hollow, there’d be nothing to gaze back.

“You know the saying figlio da papa? It means, uh, Daddy’s boy, but…like, your dad spoils you…it was like that. He felt more like…my father than my father did. My father avoided me. But he was so good to me. I really was…a daddy’s boy, in a sense of the word…”

“What changed? Do you know?” Ford could now confidently affirm the feelings Bill had felt for his grandfather were now the same feelings Bill felt for him. He knew Bill felt safe with him, and considered Ford to be spoiling him. There was definite truth to that. But the comparison continued to discomfort Ford.

“Convenience? I was convenient…I did whatever he wanted, so why not take advantage of that? I don’t know. I have nothing in common with dead men.”

Those words implied Bill’s grandfather had indeed hurt him in the ways he had adamantly denied.

“… Did you lie again? Earlier? When you said it was your sister?”

“No, I didn’t. I…saw? I saw it happening to my sister, not me. I’m sure of that, Ford.”

“What do you mean you saw? You don’t sound convinced.”

“No…it’s just… nevermind. I don’t wanna talk about this,” Bill said, resting his forehead at Ford’s stomach, reminding Ford of the night Bill took cocaine and locked himself in the bathroom. Something that happened only a day ago, yet felt as though it occurred weeks prior. “Maybe…some other time…not…right now.”

“He would tell me how much I looked like my father, when my father was younger…I think that’s why he liked me so much.”

Bill sighed, covering his face with his hands and reminding Ford to bandage them when the opportunity arose.
“I’m starting to think maybe ‘talking makes you feel better’ has some truth to it.” Bill revealed his face, eyes still red and puffy. “Sorry Ford, you were right.”

Ford touched his face and he took the fingers into his mouth, slowly and suggestively. “Ti piace?”

“Scommetto che piaceva anche a lui.” Bill kissed the knuckles individually. “Dai, scopami, allora.”

“Dai, scopami di brutto come fai di solito.” Bill said, getting more needy and pulling at Ford’s shirt. “Dio, ti prego…”

“Voglio che mi scopi, Ford.” Using Ford’s wrist as a pulley, he drew Ford towards him and then Ford was atop of him, confused and worried. “Voglio che mi scopi. Tanto.”

He hooked his arms around Ford’s neck, using his weight to bring Ford closer but Ford did not budge. “What would it be like if you fucked me hard? Would you call me ‘darling’ and ‘dear’ while you did it? Would you hold my hand, maybe? Or would you kiss me the entire time?”

“Tell me, what did you do when you fucked someone hard, the first time?” A glassy look overtook Bill’s reddened eyes. “Can you tell me? Tell me.”

Ford smiled gently. “I could show you. if you weren’t so intent on doing whatever it is you’re doing.”

The glass in Bill’s eyes cracked and then broke.

“You’re exciting me, when you talk like that…” Bill smiled, and then laughed lightly, almost sadly but Ford couldn’t be sure. “So, you do…like that kind of thing…”

Ford returned to his feet, pulling Bill gently upright with him.

“It should be ‘you excite me’.” Ford smiled, cupping Bill’s cheek delicately.

“Your hands are so fucking weird. I love them…they’re just like mine. Neither of us…had any control over…” he squeezed Ford’s hand, and Ford understood.

“We were made for each other, Stanford Pines. I wish you’d get that through your thick head already…” While Bill spoke, Ford took his injured hands and ran his fingertips across the marks. “I was born a little late, but I’m here now, aren’t I…?”

“You are so strange.” Ford rubbed his cheek, choosing to ignore Bill’s previous words—the topic too obscure for him to entertain but flattering all the same. “If you want to…talk about what happened…with your family, I don’t mind listening.”

“Of course you don’t…you’re such a good listener…it’s so easy to talk to you…and you’ll…never tell anyone what I tell you…right?”

“Of course I wouldn’t.”

“You were mad at me but now you’re all nice…” Bill returned to kissing Ford’s hand.

“I wasn’t mad, dear. I was disappointed. But what’s done is done.”

“Uh…thanks…for listening? I appreciate it, after…everything…I’ve done. God, you must be sick of me.”

“Quite sick of you.” Ford said, still smiling.
“I’m sorry, Ford.” Bill sounded sincere, in a way Ford had not heard until now. “If I had listened to you, this wouldn’t have happened. You’re right, Ford.”

“What were you saying? When you spoke Italian?”

“Guess.”

“Something sexual.”

“Of course.” Ford smiled wider, and then embraced him tightly; Bill feeling like he would be swallowed, disappearing into Ford where nothing could hurt him ever again.

“Amore mio…” Bill cooed as the embrace ended. “I’ll do anything for you. And I’ll prove it this time. I guess I…nevermind. I don’t know. I’ll do whatever you want. Promise.”

Ford asked himself what he was doing with this boy. Looming threats should he leave were a factor and although the was no answer, Ford believed some things in life did not need answers. Some things you simply enjoyed and did because you desired so, and desire was rarely logical. He knew this the first time they were together, and it remained true even now.

“I have to get dressed and get going. I’ll be back in an hour.” Bill said, sniffing.

“Where are you headed?”

“Meeting someone…I’ll be back soon. Then we can maybe…go out? It’s still early…” Bill headed to the dresser to fetch his clothes.

“I’m still getting used to this… this. I’m gonna fuck up a few times, but I’ll—I’ll get there. I’ll make you happy, Ford. I promise.”

“You make it sound like we’re married.” Ford chuckled.

“Yeah? You…understand what I mean, right? I mean , I can’t…”

“—change overnight, I’m aware. At least you admitted to me being right.”

“Yep yep.”

Ford stopped Bill’s dressing routine and began to button up the shirt for him. As he went through the ritual of dressing Bill, he paid careful heed as Bill’s tension dissolved at his touches; the slowing of Bill’s breathing, the relaxing of his shoulders and the soft smile that came and never left.

“Tuck in.” Ford said, picking up the tie while Bill tucked in his shirt into his pants.

“Do you think I’m going to change? Like your grandfather did?” Ford asked, tying Bill’s tie slowly.

“Huh. Why would you ask that?”

“You’re smart. You’re looking for patterns in behaviour, aren’t you?”

“I…really don’t know, Ford. That’s out of my expertise.”

“I would, if I were you. It’s only natural.”

Bill’s tie was done.
“Dunno.”

“More and more…” Ford dragged flat hands across Bill’s shirt, smoothing out everything. “It feels like I’m taking care of you. If this was purely…romantic, I would’ve left.”

“Is that your kink? It’s not really my thing so…I’d rather not.” Bill pulled a comically disgusted face. “And you’re the one offering to dress me…”

“No no… I’m saying that I’m fond of you in a different way.” And it was true. So much had happened between them in such little time. Ford had never considered himself a bleeding heart but anything was possible provided the right pieces came together and the right events occurred—like a video game. All it took was the right input.

And Ford was beginning to suspect Bill was very good at manipulating circumstances in his favour. Allowing the boy to assume he was ignorant to the underhanded tactics was the best choice for now. Until Bill began to demonstrate complete honesty, Ford saw no reason to himself.

“Am I being friendzoned?”

“You’re all done.” Ford said. “Let me get your jacket.”

“No wait.” Bill held Ford’s wrist, preventing him from moving. “What do you mean…?”

Ford peeled Bill’s hands off him. “I mean it’s going to be okay, Bill. Now let me fetch your jacket.”

“Are you being nice so I won’t try and kill you? You don’t have to say nice shit to trick me, you know.”

“That’s up for debate.” Ford held open Bill’s jacket and Bill turned around, placing an arm in their respective holes. “As always…you respond the best when I treat you like a child.”

“Well, fuck you, too.”

“Even if you say you don’t like being taken care of, you do, Bill. And I don’t mind. It’s completely normal.” Ford made sure Bill’s jacket sat snugly and properly.

“None of us are normal, Ford. Not me, not you.”

“Darling…my darling—”

“Stopping you there. That is so cringey, I’m out.” Bill shrugged Ford’s hands off him. “Thanks for uh, the…whatever it is…you do.”

“I can tell you’re sorry. When you do something wrong, you want me to have sex with you.”

“Thanks, Freud. I’ll be sure to keep that in mind next time I gotta worm my way outta something.” Bill laughed at Ford’s unwarranted analysis. “Hold up, I ask you for sex plenty.”

“You don’t, actually.”


“I’m going to shower and wait for you.” Ford said. “I’ll occupy myself. Don’t be too long.”

Bill walked backwards out the room, not wanting to take his eyes off Ford for even a moment.
Pyronica was not in a good mood. Bill had called her out on last minute notice, despite her assertions on how god damn busy she was. As if today hadn’t been shit enough, Bill picked an outside café she hated. The location was less than ideal—near a god damn fish butchery. Who owned a fish butchery? For fuck’s sake. If that fish smell got on her clothes or into her hair…

“So, are you here to talk or you just gonna sit there trying to peek under my skirt?” Pyronica crossed her legs, denying Bill any chances of peeping underneath her mini-skirt.

“Wah? Nothing I haven’t seen before. Is that Alexander McQueen?” Bill asked, still eying her flashy shoes.

“It is.”

“Nice…so anyway.” Bill’s eyes returned to Pyronica’s clearly-annoyed face. “Teeth’s dead, as you so claim. Pretty sure someone killed him.”

Pyronica took out a cigarette, a cheap brand Bill recognized, and lit it up. “Nah, nobody gives a shit enough about the Pillsbury dough boy to wanna pull the plug.”

“You sure? Maybe someone’s pissed at me. I’ve been gone awhile and—what’s with the cheap brand? You’re wearing designer clothes but sniffing tacky tobacco?”

“How the fuck do you think I afforded Alexander McQueen? Gotta learn to tighten he budget somewhere. Anyway. The only person who most likely killed him is Xanthar.” She breathed smoke in. “Probably was him. In fact, I’ll bet a hundred that it was.”

“Oh come on, he wouldn’t kill a kid.”

“I think he thought the same thing about you there, Bill.” She offered a cigarette to him but he declined.

“He wouldn’t.” Bill’s face hardened. “He was the one who encouraged me to keep Jeremy in the first place.”

“Listen, I get it. You’re still crushing on the guy. But Bill, a tool outlives its usefulness eventually. Isn’t it about time you put Xanthar away and stopped playing with toys?” Pyronica threw out the lemon slice in her tea, muttering under her breath how she specifically said ‘no god damn lemon’.

“You know he’s more important than a toy.”

“Sure, but you don’t need him anymore. Not now that you’re in charge of your family. You could snap your fingers and have 20 Xanthars kissing your ass.”

“I couldn’t.”

“God dammit Bill, stop defending this guy. Stop fucking around! All you do lately is fuck around!” She yelled, attracting the attention of bystanders. “And what—fuck, we’re gonna talk about this, you little shit. Lying about getting fucked by your family? To apparently fuck Xanthar?”

Bill rolled his eyes as she continued. The overcast ahead caught his eye. New York weather was always so gloomy…

“You could fuck Evan if you wanted to. He does whatever you want. You lied because you wanted something else from him, right?”
“Oh, enlighten me, doctor!” Bill flailed his arms in the air theatrically.

“Bill, just fucking admit it. Admit you’re grieving for your family and admit you wanted Evan to coddle you and whatever the fuck else depressed people need.”

“What? The fuck you getting that from?”

“Because it’s what I’d do, and you and I have a lot in common. Come on, don’t beat the around the bush with me. You miss your family. And you’re taking it out on everyone around you.”

Bill groaned loudly.

“8ball is terrified of you and spends all his time kissing your ass now without trying to make it too damn obvious. Alex barely participates anymore and even mentioned he might wanna move back here since you don’t really need him and you’re going nuts. Xanthar’s getting pissed off at you and you just about killed everyone else in the vicinity.”

“Thanks for the recap. Wow, I had no idea what was happening in my own life.”

“Clearly you didn’t. Because your head is wedged too far up your ass. It’s either up your ass, Stanford’s ass or Evan’s ass but it’s always up an ass.”

Bill laughed, and that did the trick.

“It’s funny huh?” Pyronica said, impatient now. “You killed Kryptos, who was a literal fucking kid.”

“Course you’d be mad about him. He always had the biggest crush on you, didn’t he?” Bill drummed fingers idly upon the table. “He’s not dead. Faked it.”

Pyronica’s eyes widened, cigarette still between her lips. She let it drop out to exaggerate her confusion. “Huh?”

“Faked his death. He’s in Italy now, at boarding school. Or getting ready for it, or whatever…or however…school works.”

“So why… what the fuck?”

“Don’t sweat it. If you wanna talk to him, I can arrange something or whatever…this is boring.” Bill sipped his cappuccino with extra cream.

“No no, what was the point of that?”

“Doesn’t matter, Ronnie. Drop it.”

“Alright, fine whatever. Hold on... this is about Xanthar, isn’t it? Oh for fuck’s sake Bill, you are obsessed with him!”

“I am not, what the fuck!” Bill’s face contorted sourly.

“Yeah you are. Just like you’re obsessed with that Stanford guy!”

Bill groaned again, slouching back into his hair.

“Admit it. Why did you do it?”

“If it wasn’t embarrassing, you’d fucking say it.” Pyronica said. “Trying to piss off Evan huh?
Control him maybe? Dangling ignorant Kryptos over his him?”

Bill gagged. “I didn’t come here to be fucking hammered left right and centre.”

“A good fucking hammering is what you need.”

“Whatever.” Bill took a gulp of his orange juice. He always had to drink something cold alongside something hot. “Back to the topic at hand. Killing Teeth to get back at me? Makes no sense.”

“Makes perfect sense, if you think about it. Xanthar probably thought Teeth was to you what Kryptos was to him. And let’s face it, the kid was kinda just your little bell boy.”

“Huh?”

“He was fucking useless. I don’t know why you took him in. Soft spot for the kid, or something, right? Anyway, that’s probably why.”

Bill cringed. “Whoa, where would I have a soft spot for Teeth?”

“That’s what it can look like, or what it probably did to Xanthar.”

“Yikes, that’s gross.”

“Sure.” Pyronica laughed, a little too condescendingly for Bill’s taste. As if he had any such affection for Teeth. Just because he fucked the kid often?

“Even if I did miss my family and this whole thing is me being a diva, it’s pretty much your fault.”

Bill stabbed his chocolate muffin. “You’re the one who killed them.”

Shifting the blame onto Pyronica was a poor move; she wasn’t enough of a pushover to tolerate it but what the hell. She was responsible. Even if he’d given the order, she had carried it out.

“Oh fuck you. Don’t start that shit. I did what you asked. Take responsibility.” Pyronica sipped her ice tea, her nose scrunched up at the cold.

“If killing my family was such a poor move, you should’ve said so.”

“What? I’m not a fucking fortune-teller! Now you’re full of it! Fuck off.”

“Ever since that Stanford Guy’s crashed into the scene, you’ve been acting weird.” Pyronica’s voice steadied now, Bill recognized it as her business voice. “I get it—he’s cute. But I don’t like how he’s suddenly made himself comfortable in your life. Who in their right mind would be okay with dealing with you? With the shit you pulled, how has the guy not fucked off?”

Bill started laughing, hiding the insecurity Pyronica had surfaced within him.

“It’s not funny. I’m sure the guy has ulterior motives.”

“No, he’s just fucking weird.” Bill shrugged. She sought to pin the blame on Ford, who was completely innocent. If anything, Ford’s the reason he’d been feeling better.

Stanford Pines…

“Besides, he’s my new pet. I fuck with him, he fucks with me. He knows if he tries to leave, I’ll kill him.” Bill leaned back into his seat, grinning, his tongue flicking across his teeth. “All I do is make googly eyes at the guy, and he’s smitten.”
“Makes more sense now. Your new pet though? Such an old guy? He does look a little like your grandfather, I guess. And you loved him a lot, didn’t you?”

“Fuck off.” Bill said calmly. “Don’t talk about my family anymore.”

“You killed your family and now you’re trying to what? Build them again? Ford as your grandfather, Evan as daddy dearest?”

Bill threw his half-full cup at the nearest wall. The liquid splashing at everyone unlucky enough to be within its splattering perimeter. The waiter looked horrified and Pyronica waved a hand dismissively to avoid drama happening.

“You fucking bitch. Don’t you ever say anything like that to me again.” Bill’s tone reminded Pyronica why, despite her impressive background, she still held a dormant fear of Bill Cipher.

“You don’t know anything, Veronica You fucking don’t. God, I’m sick of this shit. This ‘Bill has issues, let’s all play doctor’.”

“Doesn’t take a genius to see what you’re doing. Bet Ford knows too. Bet Ford’s taking advantage of that.” Pyronica leaned back in her chair, crossing and uncrossing her long legs. The action drew Bill’s eyes beneath the table, distracting him for the second. Damn, she had great legs.

“Ha. That’s a complex train of thought for a marine.”

“Hey fuck you.” She gave him the bird.

“All brawn and no brains. “

“Fuck you, Bill. I’m trying to enlighten you.” Pyronica lit up her second cigarette. “And let’s be real: if anyone’s the bitch here, it’s you. You’re letting life fuck you in the ass and blaming everyone else for it.”

“If I didn’t like you, you’d have this fork shoved right through your cheeks.” Bill waved his fork side to side. “Upstairs cheeks and downstairs cheeks. So shut the fuck up and stick to what I pay you for.”

“Meow. Look at the claws coming out. I’m so terrified.” She blew out smoke in Bill’s direction. “Grow the fuck up, Bill.”

Softening her tone, she continued. “Listen…you have to get yourself together. I’ve told you this before but you can’t do what you’re doing, Bill. You can’t display this type of weakness around that slanty-eyed fuck.”

“Come on, he’s…”

“He betrayed his last boss, Bill. He’s going to do it to you. You ever hear once a cheater always a cheater? I don’t trust him, I never have. You are so blinded by your weird infatuation with him that you just won’t see it.”

“Betray me? Xanthar? Who gets on his knees for? Kisses my hand?” Bill waved his right hand around for emphasis. “Acts one step above a dog?”

“Bet he pulled that with his last boss, too. Easy to fuck over someone when they think they’ve tamed you nicely.”
“Why would he? He had reasons for fucking over that Chinese dickhead. Me? Not so much.”

“That’s not it. He has a thing for your family, doesn’t he?” Pyronica leaned forward. “If he gets into your good books, he gets a little bit of power, doesn’t he?”


What if Xanthar hadn’t been buttering him up for Kryptos sake? What if, as Pyronica had implied, Xanthar wanted to control him to indirectly control his family? Shit, it made sense. But was this paranoia? He had a knack for maybe getting a little eager-to-please with older men he liked, and if Xanthar intended to take advantage of that…

“Ronnie. Ronnie. Listen… fuck it, I’m gonna tell you.”

He summarised it as best he could, leaving out the embarrassing and too-private details.

She busted out laughing. “You got fucking played! Oh, fuck me. Bill Cipher got fucking played! By one of his own, no less!”

She kept laughing, smoke diffusing everywhere, then stopped, becoming still and voice lowering. “Bill, you must really be out of your mind to have let that happen.”

“Shit, I knew you were acting stupid but this? THIS? I am so fucking livid I need something stronger to smoke.” She threw her lit cigarette onto the sidewalk.

“I know. I made the mistake. I thought, you know…” Bill’s voice quieted.

“Honey, I understand. People are going to take advantage of you if you show them weakness. You know this.”

“But it’s Evan. I trust him and—”

“And that trust is misplaced.” Pyronica let out a melodramatic sigh.

“I didn’t sign up to be a baby-sitter. You’re my Boss, Bill. You have to remember that and act like it. The same applies to Xanthar. The second you begun treating him like a potential boyfriend, a boyfriend/father figure? Or whatever it is you were doing, you gave him the upper hand. He’s going to want to keep that upperhand. And if you try to take it from him, he’s going to become unhappy. That’s why what’s happening is happening.”

Bill downed his orange juice in silence.

“Listen…” Pyronica took one of Bill’s hands. “Maybe I was hard on the Stanford guy. He doesn’t officially work for you and his your pet, so you can go wild with him.”

“He wants me to go to school.”

Pyronica’s laughter was clipped and abrupt. “What?”

“Yeah…wants me to think about my future. Not do this stuff anymore.”

“Seriously? Wow. That’s…well… what did you say?”

“Not sure. Said I’d think about it.”

She seemed incredibly surprised that Bill would consider it. “And? Are you?”
“Yeah, kinda.” Bill stole her ice tea and began sipping it.

“You really like this guy, huh? I’m not going to say shit about it. I repeat: he’s fucking old, but hey, if you like him, go for it.”

“If I…go to school, how about I leave you in charge of this stuff? Wanna get married and be the stand in for me when I got to school?” Bill flashed his most charming smile, and it worked—for about five seconds.

“…What?”

“If I forfeit, my spouse would be forced to take over and—”

“No way! Your family has way too many rules. I’m flattered but I don’t want to be shackled to that.” She waved her hands side to side. “Absolutely not.”

Bill’s smile dropped. “Shackled huh?”

“You know…what I mean.”

“Yeah…”

Bill sighed and pulled his hand out of Pyronica’s grasp.

“What happened to your hands, by the way? They’re all beat up and nasty.” Pyronica’s raised an eyebrow as she scrutinized his hands.

“Punched a mirror.”

“Fuck me, Bill. Get it together.”

“I gotta go.” Bill stood up, buttoning up his blazer. “Take care of the tab, yeah?”

“Well, fuck you, too.” She said. “Also, I’m staying in New York.”

Bill turned around instantly. “What?”

“Gotta deal with some business here, You know how it is.”

“You aren’t supposed to—”

“Leave your side? Yeah that was before the full moon came and you went off your rocker.”

There was no point in arguing. He didn’t have it in him. “Fine whatever. But…If Xanthar does anything funny to me—”

“I’ll let 8ball know to keep an eye on him.”

“… shoot him. But don’t…kill him.”

“I’m gonna kill him. Jason will be told to shoot to kill. I’m sick of that guy.”

“Just because he fucked your ass a little too hard.”

“Fuck off, Bill.”

Bill shrugged, exhausted and missing Ford.
He had to get back to the hotel.

Grow up, Bill.

Grow up. It’s time to grow up.

*Non dovresti crescere così in fretta.*

I have to…I have to grow up.

No…

*Mi chiedo veramente perché tu ti rifiuti di crescere.*

You know why…

…

Perché dopo potrei finire proprio come te.

“Honey, I’m home!” Bill announced as his foot hit the inside of the hotel room. He found Ford, on the bed at his laptop and still in his bathrobe. Fears of Ford leaving while he was away appeared unwarranted and Bill sighed softly in relief.

“Are you…you’re not dressed yet?”

“Ah…welcome back.” Ford sounded happy to see him. “I showered and then got distracted. I’ll dress soon enough.”

“You’ve just been sitting her in your robe surfing the net?”

“I’ve been responding to important e-mails, I’ll have you know.” Ford said, adjusting his glasses to argue his case. Bill felt himself becoming smitten with every passing second, every little gesture and every word. “But yes, I have also been browsing the internet, which is not a crime, mind you.”

“So you’re naked...underneath there? Can I peek?” Bill grinned.

“You’ve seen me naked multiple times.”

“And people have seen the Mona Lisa everywhere and they still pay to go see her.” Bill waved a finger side to side.

“False equivalency.”

“Nah, stand up, open your robe. Let me have a look at you.”

“Bill…”

Why was Ford so shy…?

“It’s harmless. Let me just look at you.”

Ford stood, and undid his robe hesitantly, letting it part and remain parted for a measly five seconds, and counting. Bill’s face didn’t change; the same smile remained throughout, eyes never venturing to Ford’s body. Instead, they kept mutual eye contact with Ford, glimmering.
“Lovely, as always.”

“You barely looked.” Ford grumbled as he tied himself closed.

“I did, a little.”

“There isn’t much to see, really I’m an old man.”

“Who cares. I know what you are. Thanks for the reality check?” Bill smiled sweetly, an eyebrow raised. Ford avoided his eyes, suddenly shy again.

Bill threw himself down next to Ford onto his side, peeking sideways at the man who looked impossibly sexy in only a bathrobe.

“Wanna go out when you’re done?”

“Give me a moment…”

Bill stroked one of Ford’s partially exposed legs while waiting, Ford paying no heed to it as it never wandered further than his thigh.

“I think I’ve managed to obtain funding.”

“Huh…? Seriously? Wait, you don’t need me to anymore…?” Bill worried. Ford not needing him anymore was a fear he’d never thought he’d be facing so soon.

“Well, additional funding wouldn’t hurt…”

“How much are they offering? I bet I could match it.” Bill raised his head and toughened his voice, hoping Ford could hear how serious he was.

“A hundred thousand.”

“Oh…” Bill’s head hit the bed once more, disappointed. “Wow. You sure get the big ones.”

“My scholarship was worth one million plus. This isn’t unusual.”

“Oh…whoa…” Bill hadn’t come across that bit of information in his Ford files.

“Speaking of school…”

“Yikes, I suddenly can’t understand English. No Inglese???”

Ford let out deep laugh that left Bill feeling rather pleased with himself. And the thickness of Ford’s voice was a fantastic catalyst at exciting him.

“So, there’s nothing you can’t do huh… congratulations, doc. I’m proud of you.” Bill’s hand returned to rubbing Ford’s inner thigh area. “I’m in the mood for another romantic dinner and then Stanford Pines sex.”

“Stanford Pines…sex?” Ford said, apparently not minding Bill’s suggestive touches.

“Yes, it’s a type of sex where your partner makes you cum really hard while using the most mellow tactics imaginably.” He scuffled to his knees and wiggled nearer to Ford, taking hold of the man’s face. “Con-gra-tu-lations on your funding, amore mio.”

He kissed Ford, with devotion and sincerity that had always been strictly reserved for one man, and
was now reserved for Stanford Pines.

“Do you want to? Let me congratulate you…” He rubbed Ford’s inner thigh again, awaiting access. Only when Ford whispered a breathy ‘yes’ did he continue.

Off came his blazer and tie, and then he was laying atop Ford, kissing the man at the ear and neck while touching him tenderly. He touches Ford the way Ford touches him, and finds it more satisfying than imagined. It was… different.

Ford breathes him in, then breathes him out, peacefully. Then he’s simply holding Ford in his hand, both only breathing as he details Ford’s tremors during his inaudible release. He covers the man in kisses, pausing only to rub his face against Ford’s cheek and chin. He thinks if he was a cat, Ford would be his ideal owner.

Ford was attractive, but now Bill now began to think the man might be quite beautiful. Strong, masculine features but with none of the rigidity associated with them. The term ‘giant teddy bear’ came to mind, and he snuggled into Ford’s neck as he would to a large stuffed toy, finding nothing but comfort.

“I love you, Ford. You’re the greatest thing to ever happen to me…” He kept kissing Ford’s neck while being enclosed by strong arms. He felt safe, and loved. Although Ford never said those three words, his touches did and Bill believed them—whether they were honest or not.

When Ford’s hands found his pants, he declined.

“I’m fine…I wanted to make you feel good…” For the first time, he does not seek compensation from his lover. This meant more than satisfaction to him, but he was not yet sure what that truly entailed nor the effect it could have on their future.

Ford doesn’t say anything, but climbs atop Bill and begins kissing the boy, in the way he likes.

“No…you’re making me excited…” Bill whined, hoping Ford would persevere anyway.

“That’s the point, my darling.”

Bill squirmed without much effect. “No, don’t call me that…you’re…you’re…” He began undoing his shirt, only for Ford to stop him.

“Let me do that.” Ford offered, and Bill accepted, allowing Ford to begin unbuttoning him.

“You like doing this huh? Undressing me like I’m your fucking Barbie doll?” Bill mocked.

“Language. Is that what you think of me?” Ford’s nose nuzzled at Bill’s cheek as his hands continued removing Bill’s layer of clothes.

Bill didn’t answer, now feeling embarrassed and attempting to space out.

“Bill, you aren’t paying attention.”

“You sound like a teacher.”

“I am one. Would you like me to teach you something?”

Bill’s eyes widened innocently. “Are you being suggestive or…”

“Hmm wait.” Ford stopped. “Would you like to play a game?”
“A game? Yeah definitely! Wait, it’s not a share fantasies one is it?” Bill frowned, skeptical.

“No no… it’s—”

A knock at the door interrupted them.

“Whoever’s there is being sent to the fucking grave, I swear to god.” Bill growled, tidying himself up as he rushed to the door. “This is the second time today someone’s interrupted this. I’m done being nice. If I’s 8ball, I’m—”

It was Xanthar.

“What the **fuck** do you want?” Bill just about barked at the other, obviously agitated at the uninvited appearance.

“I’m here to talk to you. Ford, could you please give us a moment?” Xanthar asked, unaffected by Bill’s hostile greeting.

“Ford is half naked. Don’t barge in here an expect him to walk out half naked.”

Ford tightened his robe and quickly put on his slippers. “I’m fine…I’ll…no, I’m fine. I’ll wait outside.”

Ford left them, closing the door behind him.

A charming smile slithered onto Bill’s face. “Hi Ev—"

“No. I’m the one who’ll be talking. So you be quiet and listen.”

Bill saluted mockingly.

“I have just about had it with you.” Xanthar began, sounding tougher and harder than Bill’s heard in a while. It was his professional voice, the oh so scary one.

The one Bill thought erotic once upon a time. Now it was just that—scary.

“Who’s in the shower?” Xanthar’s eyes narrowed as they surveyed the closed door of the bathroom. He wanted to ensure they were alone.

“No one, *obviously*. Who’d be in there? Kryptos?” Bill laughed at his morbid joke, earning a cold stare from Xanthar.

“How terrible it must be to lose someone close to you, huh Evan?” Bill said, looking off thoughtfully to the side. “What does that feel like? I so do wonder.”

“What the fuck is wrong with you? You go off and kill your family and now you regret it? Is that it? Now you have to punish everyone else because you fucked up?”

“You’re acting like Ford. Spare me the psychoanalysis, if you please.”

Xanthar began to close the distance between them. “Plenty of people dealt with what you did. This family member fucking me story. It’s happened to many people, and how many of them do you think approach it the way you do?”

Bill thought Xanthar’s black suit was pretty nice. Looked expensive. He tried guessing the brand but none in particular came to mind.
“With the dramatic theatrics sob story shit? Poor me Poor me! And then you go and use it as justification for all this shit you’re doing now.”

Bill shrugged, rolling his eyes.

“I say something out of spite because of what you did. You did. And you…”

Were Xanthar’s shoes as expensive as his suit? To wear an expensive suit with cheap shoes was an absolute fashion crime.

“I genuinely felt bad for you, Bill. I did. And then what? You decided to milk it? Saw it as an angle? Did it even happen? Is it another one of your long cons? Just like your father allegedly fucking you? A lie, right? A lie you’ve invested so much into that you’ve even went and believed it yourself.”

Bill yawned, bored already. As if Xanthar could pull the wool over his eyes. The man was fucking manipulative.

“Is this what you’re doing with Ford? That’s why you fake being high? Instigate fights? Play the victim? Hinting at your traumatic past so Ford can piece it to together? Let him feel like some hero who’s going to fix you? Because he knows fuckall, I can tell. If he knew, he’d be babying you a lot more than he is now. That’s what you want. Someone to kiss your ass, tell you bedtime stories and sheath responsibility from you.”

Bill let out a deep, dramatic sigh. So much talking…

“I know that’s what you’re doing. It’s the only way Stanford would still give you the time of day after the shit you pulled. All you had to do was act cute and victimised and Ford couldn’t resist, right? That poor man. What are you doing with him?”

Poor Ford. Poor Ford? Ford was the only one he could trust, the only one he could…tell the truth to. The only one who’d call him liar without being angry. Who’d figure out the truth…without being angry…

“You’re 22. Grow the fuck up. Stop acting like a god damn child.”

“Says the man who said I’ll always be a child to him.” Bill retorted, checking his nails.

“I changed my fucking mind.”

Boo hoo. Bill realized he needed a manicure.

“And I’ll say it again, plenty of people dealt with what you do. None of them act like this. You know why? Because this is who you are, Bill. A self-indulgent narcissistic piece of shit who uses every possible thing they can to manipulate and exploit people. Because he thinks it’s funny. It’s funny. It’s funny to hurt people who care for him.”

“Pot calling the kettle black huh? You used me right back.” Bill said indifferently.

Xanthar closed the distance between them, close enough for their lips to nearly touch. Bill’s eyes widened as he pulled an exaggeratedly disgusted face.

“Whoa, personal space, straight boy!”

“If it happened, I bet your grandfather fucked you to keep your in place. I bet he knew what type of fuck you are and saw no other choice then to fuck you into submission.”
Bill started laughing and Xanthar hit him. Images of his father striking him flashed within his mind—subliminal messages. Skin at his lip tore, but nothing else hurt.

“So did it happen? Tell the truth.”

“Nah.” He licks the blood peeking out the lip’s wound. “I made it all up.”

Did he? Make it all up?

“My sister was the one who got fucked. I decided to cash in on her sob story. It worked, didn’t it?”

“Funny. I spoke to Marcus earlier. He said, guess what? That he worked for your family a long time ago. Said he knew you when you were a kid. Said you would come with injuries, and I repeat, no kid should have.”

“My sister and I looked like twins, genius. That old gremlin couldn’t tell the difference between us unless he dropped my pants.”

“You’re lying…” Xanthar said with conviction. “Why do you do this? Why do you lie? Why not tell the truth and go to fucking therapy like a normal person?”

Not the therapy thing again. Bill hated that.

“What would lying to me about this accomplish other than making me hate you? Do you have a death wish? “


“You are such a drama queen.”

“Always have been.”

So he had a natural tendency to dramatize things. Why was that so bad?

“The moment the spotlights off you, you make it about you.”

“My life is a soap opera. Wanna hear the soundtrack? It has tons of Lana del Rey on it.” Bill laughed louder. Xanthar shook his head in disbelief at Bill’s disordered behaviour and then grabbed the boy by the shirt.

Still laughing, wholly unaffected by the violence, Bill continued. “I didn’t lie, man. He fucked my sister good, and I watched.”

Xanthar let go, easing up and this time, Bill advanced to close the distance between them.

“I watched him fuck her, and maybe I even joined in? What do you think? You know me so well, don’t you?”

“Fucking her would’ve been like fucking myself, and you did say I was a narcissistic, huh?” Bill licked his lips, his tongue resting outside his top lip lewdly.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Xanthar’s voice thinned into weariness.

“What did you come here for? To scare me into behaving? No one scares Bill Cipher, especially not a fucking banana.”
Confusion rippled Xanthar’s still gaze and Bill elaborated to ensure every strike pierced. “Yellow on the outside, white on the inside. Then again, that describes your mother, doesn’t it? Yellow on the outside, white man cock inside. Well, now we know who take after.”

Bill tugged at Xanthar’s collar and tie.

“If you wanted me to fuck you, didn’t I tell you? I’m with Ford now. Unless you want us both to fuck you.” Bill twirled the tie around his fingers. “What’ll be? It’s a dream, right? Two white men in you at once! Wow!”

“You’re fucking repulsive.” Xanthar spat.

“I’m your fucking Boss. I’m the leader of this fucking gang of Nightmares. Of course I’m repulsive.” Bill said proudly. “What? Did my pretty face make you forget? Quit thinking with your dick. Or is it…that I’m only bad when that bad is directed at you, and your bunchums? Get the fuck out of here.”

“Bill… “ The voice was now lower, almost carnal. “If you keep this up, you aren’t cut out for this.”

“I’m cut out for this, more than you could ever imagine there, kid.” Bill replied, rolling his now present knife between his fingers. “Now, have you ever heard that Lady Gaga song ‘Alejandro’? There’s this lyric that goes ‘Bye Fernando’.”

Bill waved with his free hand. “I’m gonna name your tongue Fernando. And the next time you open your mouth in a way I don’t like, and it’s bye Fernando, do you understand?”

Xanthar stepped back, eyes on Bill’s knife. “The world doesn’t revolve around you.”

“You’re wrong. Your world very much revolves around me. I’ll prove it.” Bill tapped the knife against his cheek; it swung to the rhythm of a pendulum, counting down seconds until Xanthar’s doom day.

“What do I have to do convince you I’m serious?” Xanthar’s lip curled slightly, then dropped. “Do I have to fuck you? Is that the only language you speak?”

“Oh my God, you are so boring. It’s time to get you spayed, huh? What do you think? If you’re gonna be shadowing me, gotta have that libido taken care of. Can’t have you humping my leg.” Bill shook his head with a silly smile, then made a snipping motion with two fingers. “Off off come your balls. You’d be like those ancient Chinese eunuchs that took care of princesses.”

“Now, get the fuck out my sight.” Bill growled.

“We aren’t finished.”

“Oh we are. Now fuck off out of here. And… pick yourself up a muzzle. You’re going to be wearing one full time form now one.”

Bill scoffed, slipping his knife back into his pocket. “Funny how you have the nerve to act out only now. You think you can take advantage because I’m a little under the weather? Even at my worst, I’m fucking better than you, you fucking chink. Don’t forget that.”

Xanthar did not respond to the racial slur.

“And… let’s address the piglet in the room, before you go. You know, don’t you?”
A subtle tilt of Xanthar’s chin told Bill yes.

“Of course you do. Good. So let’s clear up some little stipulations. Here’s the rub: if you do anything I don’t like, Jerry’s gonna feel the brunt of your actions. Killing him isn’t the last thing I’ll do, you know that. I might just, hey, cut his balls off and sell him to some dirty fucker with yellow fever. Then he can spend the rest of his miserable life as a fuckhole for old men.”

Xanthar’s jaw clenched.

“If you try to kill me, Pyronica will kill you, and everyone who works for me will try. And Jerry will be tortured and then killed. I’ve planned everything out meticulously.” Bill snapped his fingers.

“You brought this on yourself, Evan. You really did. First you favour Jerry over me, then you lead me on, like, what did you think I was going to do? You know I can’t handle rejection! It just kills me!” A hand flamboyantly waved about before resting against Bill’s chest. “I just can’t deal with that!”

“Bill, what the fuck has gotten into you? Why would you ever think I pose a threat to you? When have I ever acted hostile towards you?”

“Uh, last night.”

“I did nothing. And I only said that comment in anger because I thought you murdered Kryptos. You know my history with him. Of course I’d be upset.”

“Yeah yeah…” Bill waved a dismissive hand. Silly excuses.

“What was the point of that? To trick me for a few hours?”

“Not to trick you, numbskull. To trick Jerry, into thinking he’s safe and sound, starting a new life! When he’s really my hostage.” Bill applauded himself, grinning wildly.

“Why are you doing this?”

“Fuck you, I just explained myself in a fantastic monologue. Are we clear?”

Xanthar’s sharp voice barely scraped the thick tension. “We are.”

“No no, are we clear?”

“Yes, Boss.”

“Great, how about a kiss?”

Xanthar’s jaw clenched hard and Bill was certain it’d shatter with that pressure. Xanthar leaned in and Bill slapped him.

“Not there, idiot.” Bill pointed down. “Undo my pants and pretend my fist is a mistletoe.”

Without another word, Xanthar did as requested, Bill laughing at the unavoidable act of submission. As long as he had Kryptos, he would be just fine and Xanthar would be perpetually allayed.

“There’s a good boy…don’t be selfish with your tongue. Selfish kids don’t get lunch money.”

Xanthar obeyed thoroughly.
As Xanthar opened the door to leave, Bill stopped him once more.

“I gave you…plenty of chances to avoid this. Even gave you one just recently.”

Xanthar looked at him inquiringly, and Bill smiled. “When we had our talk, I asked you…if you ever drugged me, do you remember? You should’ve said yes. We wouldn’t be here. I’d have accepted it and hey, even let you continue it, if that’s what you liked it.”

“What… do you like…?” Bill sat down and stared in silence at Xanthar until the uneasiness became too much for the latter.

Xanthar left, with the taste of Bill potent on his tongue and an overwhelming fear of dread at the future.

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When Xanthar emerged from the room, Ford breathed a sigh of relief; finally. Standing outside in his bathrobe had been a very stupid idea, one he regretted instantly the second he caught sight of passer-by’s.

Xanthar addressed him, only to change his mind and continue to walk away. Ford wondered what he wanted but thought no further.

“Evan!” Bill called from the hotel room and Xanthar grudgingly faced him.

“Forse perché la tua l’odio era meglio della tua indifferenza”. Bill said, waving.

Under another circumstance, Xanthar would’ve walked away. But whatever Bill had said could not be ignored. Not right now. Every word had to be taken in and locked for later analysis.

“My Italian is not that good, Bill.” Xanthar said, awaiting a translation, hopefully.

Bill grinned into a smile entirely too sweet. He passed Ford with a wink and took to adjusting Xanthar’s already perfect collar. Leaning in close, he whispered. “Your hatred…is so much better than your indifference.”

With a dust off and a smirk, Bill said. “Take care, Evan. Ciao.”

But Evan did not leave immediately, instead, he took one of Bill’s hands and just above a whisper, said. “Mi piace… quando mi chiami padre. Tu almeno ti sei succhiato il cazzo di tuo padre.”

Bill’s features warped, face now hideous.

“Fuck you! **Fuck you, you fucking fucker**! Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you!” Bill started yelling and Ford attempted subduing him by holding him back. It didn’t take much, Bill relaxed almost instantly in Ford’s hold, face still deformed and torn with hurt.

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A child, Xanthar thought, climbing into the back of the taxi. Bill was nothing more than a child, acting out for attention.

And hoping to be disciplined in the only way he was accustomed to.
If Xanthar had to, he would. With the right incentive, he might even enjoy it.

Ford had managed to calm Bill down, eventually succeeding in beginning a conversation.

“Everything go well?” Ford asked. “What did Evan say to you, that you became so angry?”

Open palms beckoned Ford closer and he stood in front of Bill who remained seated. Bill began to undo Ford’s pants but fumbling hands were halted.

“Darling, we’ve done that enough today. And you should be packing…”

Bill said nothing and continued. Before taking Ford into his mouth, he asked. “Can I stay by your place tonight? When we return. Just for tonight. I’ll fuck off in the morning.”

“I suppose, but—"

Bill didn’t wait for Ford to finish but before he could continue, Ford intercepted by taking a firm but gentle hold of his face.

“We’ve done this enough. Hurry up and pack, and then we have time, we can do something else together. But you’ve exhausted me, and you’ve already exhausted yourself.”

“Do you not like me?” Bill seemed completely hurt.

“You know that’s not the issue.” Ford said, and Bill’s hands dropped along with the rest of him—falling back onto the bed.

“What did Evan say to you? You seem…upset.”

“He said he likes it when I call him Daddy, the sick fuck.”

“…What? When did you?” Ford never imagined Evan to be like that, but appearances were always deceiving.

“Never. I was drunk when I did. I was confused, fuck him. Fuck him for taking advantage of me. Fuck me. God, what if he fucked me and I don’t know?” Bill sat up, grabbing Ford’s hand and fidgeting with it nervously. “Ford, what if he did?”

Why was Bill always surrounded by these types of men? Ford begun to wonder if Evan wasn’t the one who’d raped Bill as a form of discipline.

“Ford, Ford, should I kill him? I should, shouldn’t I?”

Ford rubbed Bill’s shoulders reassuringly. “What did he tell you, exactly?”

“It’s like…you ever see those people? Who keep like, wild animals as pets and they’re convinced it’s never going to bite them? And then one day, they like, have an open wound or some shit and the thing smells it and then fucking eats them? You ever see that? Ford, Ford, I have to put him down.” Bill rambled, still clutching Ford’s hand, his own now sweaty.

“Bill, you’re paranoid.” Ford said. He wondered why Bill had not explained what Evan had said—or perhaps he was too hysterical, and hadn’t heard Ford ask for clarity. Or perhaps Evan’s actual words had been different to Bill’s claims.

“No, Ford, you don’t know this life. You don’t get it. Tell me. Tell me it’s okay to kill him” Bill,
tamed, clutched Ford’s arms and asked his grandfather for permission.

“Calm down, dear. You’re on edge. One of your friends just died. It’s adding to your stress. Calm down.” Ford held him snugly. Bill’s stress threshold was nearly non-existent; the only possible explanation being that his current stress level was already at its peak.

“No, Ford. Ford. I’m scared…” Bill whispered, burying his face into Ford’s neck; awaiting the smell of blood from an open wound.

“Do you sincerely think Evan is a danger to you?”

“Yes…yes I’m sure…even…Ronnie said so…”

“I’ll trust your judgement on this. Next time, I won’t leave you alone with him, is that alright?”

“Yeah…”

“Settle down now, dear.” He let Bill go, and Bill sat down, upper body wobbling slightly. “I have to dress, okay? Just give me a few moments.”

Bill nodded. During the wait, he powered up his phone, glancing up at Ford during every loading screen.

- 

[GAYBABY]: Evan wants to know if you’re coming to the party?
[GAYBABY]: Let me know!
[GAYBABY]: Can you introduce me properly to Ford?
[GAYBABY]: I chickened out when I saw him………
[GAYBABY]: 🥺
[GAYBABY]: Are you mad at me?
[GAYBABY]: OH NEVERMIND
[GAYBABY]: 8ball said you’re ignoring everyone haha.…
[GAYBABY]: I don’t wanna seem…like I’m piggybacking off Jerry (no pig jokes)
[GAYBABY]: If Kryptos can go to college
[GAYBABY]: Can I too?
[GAYBABY]: If you say no, it’s fine!!!!!!!!!!!!
[GAYBABY]: 🥺
[GAYBABY]: I kinda feel like I don’t contribute much….  
[GAYBABY]: & you have Ford now so
[GAYBABY]: Sorry….
[GAYBABY]: 🥺!!!!

- 

“Hey Ford.” Bill called out. “Why did he think it was necessary to kill this stupid kid?”

“Who? Who—you mean Teeth? Someone else killed him?” Ford then assumed Bill was referring to Evan. So, Evan had been the one to kill Teeth? Everything was so confusing.

“Was it really…did it mean that much?” Bill frowned, still staring at his phone. He discarded it to the side, his wrist loose and lifeless. “This fucking kid…”

“Gaspard Giordano always keeps a pet, and he was mine.” Bill spoke to the tattoos on his hand.
“He had issues. I had to be firm with that kid. I once told him if I ever caught him skipping meals or doing that shit where you induce vomiting, I’d kill him.” Bill’s tone was dreamy. “Gaspard once told me that exact same thing.”

“Your…father?”

“Try again, Ford.” Bill reached for his phone and began punching his phone’s keyboard—replying to something, Ford assumed.

“Your grandfather? Why would he say that?”

“Because I threw up every time he was done with me.” Bill stood up, still wobbly. “You shouldn’t have to fuck old men to eat. I stand by that, Jeremy.”

He dropped his phone into the draw, the screen still on, brightly lit. “He laughed really hard…when I shot that guy up the ass, the first night we met. Then he cried, and said it must’ve hurt a lot and hated imagining that happening to him. He was a weird kid, but never liked to show it.”

“Kinda like you. You think you’re weird, so you try to be careful… on how weird you get…”

Bill dropped onto the bed, face first. He remained there for a few moments before turning onto his back. “Ford, if you don’t cry, where does it all go? Where…? Where does it go?”

Ford sat at the spot on the bed above Bill’s head and gazed down at the boy as he spoke. The new reveal left Ford much to ruminate on; Bill’s grandfather beat him regularly? And he threw up every time afterwards. But the second sentence… did Bill’s grandfather withhold food from him unless he slept with him?

It was impossible to get the truth out of Bill Cipher.

“Am I sad? I can’t tell. Am I? Maybe?”

“I never should’ve left. I bet if I never ran away, I’d have grown into such a fine young man. Would’ve learnt how to actually run my family business, instead of scraping by on the guidance of old fucks who vultured around my father.”

Bill reached for Ford’s hand and held it firmly.

“If it wasn’t for Alex, I’d have burnt through my family fortune in probably 3 months. Yeah we got accountants but I don’t trust them. How can I? They worked for that man. I can’t trust anyone.”

Bill had severe trust issues, making his assumed trust of Ford, who was technically a stranger, even more perplexing.

“Why am I always confessing to you? Why am I always talking to you about this shit? Why would you care? You’re nobody. You’re nothing.” He rubbed the hand against his cheek desperately, as if every wipe removed a past sin.

“Father Ford, is that it? Can you absolve me of everything? Can you? I fucked over 3 people, Ford. Why am I not sad…?”

“That happens to me, too. I don’t feel things immediately. It will take time.” Ford’s tone was gentle and tender as he rubbed Bill’s head.

“I should’ve…stayed home. Never should’ve run…”
“You can’t say that. Your family…staying wasn’t an option.” Ford’s finger trailed across Bill’s hairless upper lip.

“What do you know about my family? What do I know about yours?”

“My parents married young, they had me out of wedlock, my mother was 16.” Ford confessed abruptly. He’d never shared much of his personal life with anyone save for his lovers. Sharing now, despite their brief and turbulent time together, implied he was becoming far too fond of the boy. This boy who was more trouble than he was worth. Emotions were so unpredictable.

“It was hard on my parents. I grew up feeling tension and pressure. My family’s well-off now, thanks to my accomplishments.” Ford’s hand wandered loosely across Bill’s face and it attracted Bill’s cheek immediately. Starving for touch, always.

“They married young? Do you wanna get married?” Bill asked, suddenly excited. Ford shook his head, with a sheepish smile and an eyebrow raised. Give Bill a finger and he took your torso.

“Why tell me this if you weren’t going to pop the question?”

“I thought you were joking when you asked me that, but you’re serious, aren’t you? Are you that desperate to build a family again? Is that it?”

Bill frowned. “No, I just wanna own you.”

“You have the self-awareness of a material object.”


“I don’t consider you someone to care about such things…and we’ve only been together for…not even a few days. You need to stop thinking about that, darling.”

“Maybe you’re right. Maybe I do want a family again.” Bill looked to the side with an apathetic expression.

“What about your friends?”

“They’re my property, not my friends. Objects can’t be family.”

“People aren’t objects, dear.” Ford pinched his cheek, and he griped in response to the sudden pain.

“It’s a good thing I suck dick really well or you wouldn’t put up with this.” Bill closed his eyes as Ford’s hand continued to roam across his face and neck. Two fingers prodded at his mouth, entering once permitted and retreating prematurely.

“Don’t speak so lowly of yourself.”

“Stop lecturing and go do science things.”

“I plan to.”

“You know, you never really talk about yourself…except…what you just said, I guess…”

“It’s because you stalked me and already know everything.” Ford pinched him again, the pain apparently being desired this time.

“Well yeah but…”
“You didn’t even correct me on you being a stalker.” The boy was shameless.

“I bet your dick could fix everything. Fuck me.” Bill insisted, one of his own hands going to his crotch, and rubbing enticingly. Ford only found it far too vulgar.

“Not yet.”

“We’re still together…right?”

“Yes.” As if Ford currently had much of a choice.

“Can I ask you…can you…tell me what to do? What I should do? You’re so smart…”

“I think you should go to therapy. And focus on your education and really, abandon your family business, maybe. Start over.”

“I’ll do that. Step by…step…” Bill moved up to rest his head onto Ford’s lap.

“You will?”

“If you say so, I will.” He hummed into Ford’s wrist. “I’ll do anything you want, Ford. I keep fucking up and you’re the only one I trust.”

“Do you mean that?”

“I do…”

“Anything I want?”

“Yes…”

Exercising control over his own environment and personal universe was important to Ford; exercising that very same brand of control over another held no appeal to him. He was certain there were men who’d kill to be in his position, to have someone like Bill offer subordination to them, be it superficial or not. Flattering as it may be, it was not a smart move for someone like Bill, who carried his family reputation with him.

But—what if controlling Bill was the only way to guarantee Ford’s safety, at present? Could he do it?

“Darling, you should be more careful of allowing people to dictate your actions.” Ford said.

“No…I trust you.” Bill sought to feverishly bury his head into Ford’s wrist and Ford couldn’t find it in him to deny the boy.

“Then let me take advantage of you.” Bill nearly jumped back, eyes bright as he awaited further instructions. It was actually happening…

He sat up, eager.

“Let me put you in school.”

Oh.

The light in Bill’s eyes switched off, childish groaning following the sudden darkness.
“Why do you always bring the school thing up. Maaaan. Fine.” Bill dropped his head into Ford’s lap again. “Can I be in your class?”

“That’s not how it works. We’ll see.”

“I don’t wanna go to school.”

“Do you want to waste your potential?”

“What potential? I’m good at what I do.”

“Do you want to spend your life as a thug?”

“I have more money than you, more class than you. I have everything you don’t.” Bill reached a hand up to pull Ford’s hair, his pride barking out loud.

“There’s no need to get defensive.”

“I could be 70 and still…” Bill began but realization of Ford’s age halted him. Ford’s age. They would never grow old together. That was impossible.

“What’s wrong?”

“You’re…we…your…age…I…”

“It’s my age again, isn’t it? You are worrying about a future that does not exist yet. I’m not sure why you do it but it’s rather…it’s very…well, I don’t consider myself an expert but it just doesn’t suit you to worry about such things.”

“I love you, Ford…” Bill said. “If…if you weren’t around…I’d be drinking myself sick right now. Out of my mind…but I’m here, with you instead. You’re the best. I love you, you’re the best…you’re so much better than he ever was…”

While Ford rubbed Bill’s head, he came to the realization that what Bill had shared with him had never been shared with another. If it had, Bill wouldn’t have been stuck in the rut Ford had found him in.

“I’m better because I’m not him, dear.” He kissed Bill on the forehead. He had to find a way to severe the chain Bill had fastened to him and the former Gaspard. However, Ford contemplated that the chain might be what had kept Bill in check thus far. “Listen, you have to pack. We’ll have plenty of time when we get home to talk.”

“When we get home…” Bill laughed sadly. “It sounds like we live together.”

Ford squinted his eyes curiously, smiling. “We’ll go to bed early, and you can tell me whatever you like. Then we can talk about schooling.”

“Man…”

“There are alternatives, if you don’t want to attend class. Pack. Wait. Let me bandage you up first. I should have done this earlier… Then pack.”

Bill obeyed, sighing with a wide smile.

[GAYBABY]: 👑!!!
He doesn’t want to grow up. If he does, he’ll be like that man. He’ll grow up to be just like that man. Or maybe he’ll grow up to be like Ford.

Stanford Pines…

For the duration of the return trip, Bill was quiet; Ford enjoying the much needed reprieve.

Ford was in the shower while Bill got ready for bed. It was still early, but Ford had promised they’d climb in early and talk. In the meantime, he lazed around on the bed, bored. It had been awhile since he successfully touched himself, and since he was at Ford, maybe he could…? If he imagined it was Ford’s hand, that should do the trick.

No, wait. Ford said they would talk tonight. Talking…

Maybe he should. Then he could focus on talking instead of other things.

Bill wiggled out of his boxers to inspect himself. Not hard yet. What if Ford finished early…? And walked in on him touching himself? Would Ford stop him and then give him a hand? Or reprimand him for lying and then give him a hand? Before he could begin, he realized there’s already a hand around him—a strong tattooed hand. A voice in his ear accompanied it—“Ti piac?”

He watched it move up and down, with precision a child could never have, only to disappear too soon.

He looked at his own tattooed hand. They’re the same. Ford was coming out of the bathroom now but Bill did not notice. He began to hear a poor imitation of Ford’s voice inside his head…

“Bill?”

That hand…

“Bill, what’s wrong?”

That man’s hand…

“Darling… you’re crying.”

He can’t control it, it just comes out. His stomach turns on itself, expelling everything he’d eaten earlier—waffles. He can’t stop, keeps heaving until it hurts to move. Until his ribs ache. Until everything will come out and then he’ll finally just fucking die.

Ford’s in the background, panicking? But the only thing he does is continue to lurch.

No, Ford isn’t there. Ford is still in the bathroom. He’s imagining it, imagining Ford…
Rushing past Ford didn’t do much in helping to conceal that Bill was crying. It was definitely not a trick of the light; Ford had seen it clearly, despite not wearing his glasses.

Crying. Bill.

And from the sounds behind him, now violently throwing up.

As Jeremy tries to leave, the boy grabs him and puts on a pair of expensive-looking sunglasses.

“Hey, I’m talking to you. I might be a client.”

Jeremy doesn’t believe that, the boy doesn’t need to pay anyone. Just look at him. Unless he was one of those types who had…other interests…

“So, I’d ask you your life story, but I can guess.” The boy lights up a cigarette, so elegantly, thin inked fingers and wrists.

“Your folks kick you out for liking dick? Something cliché like that?”

Jeremy doesn’t reply. The boy slips his sunglasses down his nose bridge, and asks again. Jeremy responds this time.

“See, I knew it. Straight guys don’t normally think of whoring themselves out. It terrifies them beyond reason to be near dick that ain’t their own.” The boy hands him the cigarette, and Jeremy hesitates; with an encouraging shoo of his hands, the boy gets Jeremy to take a drag.

When done, the boy puts out the cigarette on his tattooed skin, throws down his shades, and crushes them beneath his shoe. “Let’s talk business.”

—Jeremy Miller meets his saviour, two years ago.

Chapter End Notes

Personally, Bill is an Aries to me and I think Ford will suggest a birthday change to the 1st of April at some point.

Ford: I'm being held hostage but I'll make the most of it, I guess???
Chapter Summary

——but we aren’t the damned, are we, Ford?

Chapter Notes

Shout-out to ludwigbeilschmitten(ludwigbeilschmitten.tumblr.com) who discussed cool TNP stuff with me, including how Bill’s culture affects his behaviour in ways I didn’t notice.

They kiss for the hundredth time, drunk on space wine; they say ‘let’s not stop’, and go all the way to Venus.

—the 2 month mark, Bill Cipher, with the help of Stanford Pines, breaks a life-long habit.

Whatever the fuck is coming out of him now is no longer quantifiable. It barely resembles food anymore, and part of him desperately hopes it’s all his vital organs. If he even has those anymore—didn’t that man fuck most of them out? Oh wait, that was a lie, right? Right?

Ford saw. Ford saw. This wasn’t part of the plan.

God, let his organs come out, too. Let everything come out. Let it out out out out.

Crying. Always fucking crying.

Bill Cipher doesn’t cry—who the fuck was he, then? Who?

Let this nightmare be over already.

Go away, Ford.

Please don’t look.

“Darling…my darling, don’t cry.” Ford said as he rubbed Bill’s back, offering what consolation he could—which wasn’t much, really. What had set Bill off this time? He couldn’t even leave the boy alone without something occurring.

“What…?” Bill coughed, meeting Ford’s eyes with red, damp ones. “No…not crying…throwing up…”

“Let me get you something.” Ford insisted; perhaps cold water?

“What? No. No Ford oh no—” Bill heaved once more, expelling more air than anything; but his grip
“Always…crying…always…throwing up afterwards…” Bill muttered, eyes squinted painfully into slits and saliva dribbling down his chin alongside fresh tears. “Don’t…worry, nothing to worry about…”

“What…?”

This was a regular occurrence for Bill?

“Don’t…don’t tell anyone, Ford…don’t tell anyone…” Bill had stopped heaving, and now his head simply hovered above the bowl as insurance. Tears continued to come and Bill expelled them all into the porcelain bowl while he took to chewing on his bottom lip, now already raw and bloody. Shivers of trepidation had him barely able to sit upright, triggering Ford to return the strong hold on his arm with a sturdy and supportive grip of his own.

“No, tell me. What do you mean? You cry and then throw up? Often?”

“Why am I crying…?” Bill rested his forehead on the rim of the toilet, rolling it back and forth horizontally. The passive tears refused to stop falling, coming as steady summer rain; Bill’s hair the veiled sun whose brightness was now muted dismally. “Fuck fuck I’m…so…fucking…angry…? Fuck, I dunno.”

“Bill, talk to me.”

“Ford…go to the room and leave me alone.” Bill attempted to toughen his voice, but the effort only produced a throaty mewl. Ford had to resist laughing; it was precious, like a frightened kitten trying to convey it meant business. Despite it all, the boy was still somehow endearing. But the circumstances were all wrong for these thoughts and Ford had to remain focused.

“Darling—” A hidden viper ready for its prey—Bill’s hands came for this throat, but a kiss from Lady Luck had Ford’s reflexes at their peak, and he managed to intercept the grapple at the wrists. Bill was stopped mid-air and appeared horrified, the actions seemingly instinctive. Despite his tan skin, the boy looked drained, as pale as Death’s horse. The only thing missing being a body-bag draped across his lovely face.

“I’m sorry… I didn’t mean to. I didn’t… I’m so sorry, Ford.” Bill was now crying fully—hiccuping included. The storm came; aggressive tears flooded out, swelling and clouding Bill’s formerly sunny eyes. The premonitory image he’d envisioned when Bill had been showering returned to Ford; the vision of Bill continuously crying. It had come true—there was no end in sight to the tears that were now coming.

Ford tightened his grip around Bill’s bony wrists and brought them down. “Calm down, dear.”

“No fuck, I didn’t mean that. I really—really didn’t.” Bill wrestled himself out of the firm grip and glued himself to Ford’s arm, head bowed low in apology. “You have to believe me… I didn’t mean that. God, I’m so fucking sorry, fordgive me… no, I mean… I mean… Ford… forgive me…”

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t… going to hurt you, I just… I’m sorry…” He coiled himself around Ford, terrified and seeking mercy. If there was one thing Ford had in abundance, it was benevolence. And what came in abundance would sooner than later, decrease in value.

“I told you that you had a temper, didn’t I? Look at what you tried to do.” Ford said and Bill leaked apologies into his neck. Ford’s own calmness surprised even himself. Always one to adapt quickly,
but never did he expect himself to be required to adapt to dealing with an unstable and violent man-child who shared his bed.
It was already getting old. But the part of Ford he wished would silence itself continued to feel for Bill. The sheer helplessness demonstrated by a boy who held too much power with no support system—he isn’t sure whether he’s flattered that he’s trusted enough to be allowed this side of Bill or worried that once Bill was done with him, the only option would be to dispose of him due to what he knew and had seen.

But Ford would deal with that when the time came.

Good thing he appeared to be physically stronger than Bill. For now, at least. Physically subduing Bill would have to become standard procedure. If not for his own safety, then for Bill’s.

“Now tell me—what’s wrong?”

“I dunno…”

“Why are you crying? What do you mean you always do this?” Ford stroked Bill’s matted hair, thinking he’d need another shower after this…

“Nothing…nothing…fuck, this wasn’t supposed to happen…fuck…”

“Talk to me. Tell me what’s wrong.”

“Everyone fucking hates me, that’s what’s wrong. You do, too, don’t you? You’re just using me to pass time, right? Like a pastime? I’m your pastime…” Bill sobbed as he continued to nestle into skin.

“Darling, you’re imagining things. What did you mean when you said you always cry and throw up?”

“Nothing…”

“You have to start being honest with me, dear. You have to. At some point, you have to. You know we can’t continue like this.” Ford strengthened his voice with warmth and severity, hoping Bill would respond positively to it. Taking control seemed necessary but it had to begin with gentle guidance, firmness and even tact—Ford’s weakness.

Bill struggled out of Ford’s embrace, face now flushed further with anger. “I fucking cry and then throw up, okay? Fuck off, Ford.”

“How long has this been happening?” Ford asked, the sudden anger disregarded.

“Fuck if I know.”

“When last did this happen?”

“Don’t wanna play 21 questions.”

“Darling, tell me.”

“God, I hate you. Last night.”

“What happened last night?”

“Don’t wanna talk about it.”
Ford wasn’t sure what to do. To help, he’d need more information, and Bill seemed reluctant to divulge anything further. If he pushed, Bill would shut down. The only option would be to wait for Bill to unveil to Ford of his own accord. He did have a notoriously loose tongue under the right circumstances. All Ford had to do was create those circumstances.

“Always…and easy to hide…crying if I throw up…” Bill said. “Maybe…a defense mechanism?”

“Like those possums that play dead…I’m a fucking possum, thanks Ford.” Bill hiccuped out a laugh.

Ford put an arm around Bill, the boy gravitating into the touch, collapsing into Ford’s arm like a dying star would into itself. Bill shook, with violent tremors overcoming him sporadically, exaggerating the stray sobs. Just like a stellar death, Bill was beautiful even now.

And soon, all that would remain once the supernovae had run its course, would be an arctic emptiness. A deathly cold residue; the baby steps of a black hole.

Looking downwards, from the corner of his eye, Ford continued to appraise Bill. Humans at their most vulnerable held a beauty that could not be delineated. But this vulnerability was not his preference. Who wanted to see their lover like this?

Lovers… Bill was so young, and so vulnerable. This wasn’t right. Ford could not justify this any longer.

“Oh Ford, it’s the funniest…thing in the world. Can I tell you? Let me tell you…”

“Tell me what?”

“That being sick always made him be nicer…but…I…had to force myself to throw up if I cried…I didn’t want him to think…I hated it. It was the worst…always…always crying…always sick…always…I was so…so…I forget the word, sorry…I…learnt not to cry eventually…. but if I hold it in, then it’s hard to stop if I start. Stopped for the longest time…and now I can’t stop anymore. I cry so easily, Ford…I hate it…” Bill continued to sob with Ford rubbing his bare back in circular motions; with every loop, Ford’s anger grew.

More lies. What Bill had told Ford earlier had been a definite lie; his sister wasn’t the only one to have endured this hell. Ford could understand the desire to hide the truth, especially a truth like this. The shame that accompanied this type of trauma kept many victims quiet and fearful. Even so, this was an origin for much of Bill’s issues, Ford was certain of it.

You could not alter someone’s origins, but you could alter their journey, their tools and how they dealt with what life had given them. How often hadn’t he helped a student here and there with their personal issues? This wasn’t any different.

*I always threw up when he was done with me.*

*I once told him if I ever caught him skipping meals or doing that shit where you induce vomiting, I’d kill him. Gaspard once told me that exact same thing.*

Bill’s grandfather must have found out.

“No no, but I didn’t hate it. I mean…he was nice. He was nice, Ford. It’s just… I don’t know…I didn’t like…acting like…the girl on the screen…”

Ford remained silent, his quiet went unmet as Bill rambled incomprehensible Italian at his ear.
He knew, now. He understood. Bill gave him enough; through the garbled mess Ford could see the picture within. Just as he saw the picture within Bill’s tattoos.

It was enough.

Good fucking riddance Bill’s family was dead.

“Vuoi scoparmi?” Bill’s words came as breathy pants upon his damp skin; sensual and needful.

“What…?”

“Mi hai sentita.” Bill clawed into Ford’s back.” Ma dai.”

“Non lo dico a nessuno, giuro.” More clawing into Ford’s back, with anxious need. “I promise… I promise…”

“What…I can’t understand what you’re saying, darling.” Then Bill’s hands were creeping into his partially open bathrobe, and the language barrier broke. He stalled Bill’s hands, holding them first at the wrist, before joining the fingers with his own. They were warm, slightly sweaty and clamouring for Ford, much like the rest of Bill.

“Now’s not the time, dear. It’s not the time, okay?”

“I knew it… tu non mi baciavi nemmeno sulla guancia senza chiedermelo.” The hands Ford held fully embraced his own as Bill cuddled listlessly into his neck; dim eyes fluttering out refugee tears, quivering, cracked lips parting and imparting with need for Ford. “You’d never…”

Then Bill’s licking him in his neck. Licking up the remaining wetness of his tears and replacing them with fevered saliva. Ford squirmed but chose to remain still and endure, deeming it for the best.

“Non puoi approfittarti di me, vecchio. It’s why…you’re the best.” The licking had progressed to his outer ear now, the voice accompanying it sultry and the alien language leaving Ford fondled in the dark of space. “Stanford, sei il migliore.”

Bill’s right hand loosened itself and slithered into Ford’s robe cautiously. Hoping it had Ford’s blessing, it rooted itself at Ford’s right hip, caressing skin shyly but with determination that could be felt in its technique. Thirsty lips nibbled at Ford’s earlobe, adding a lick and a blow at carefully timed intervals—each wave of warm air sending shivers jolting up and down his spine that sought to accumulate at his groin. But he would not concede. Ford allowed Bill to do as he pleased, neither sensation, despite the pleasantness, doing much to arouse him. Not when Bill was a crying mess and seeking comfort in the worst way imaginably.

The boy needed to learn better ways to deal with stress than jumping into the sack with the closest person. Although this was speculation on Ford’s part, it was not without its justifications.

As Bill became more assertive with his touches, to his surprise, it only took a ‘not yet’ from Ford to halt the boy. His physique lost its edge as he made himself smaller in Ford’s embrace, attempting to confine his entire frame in what limited space Ford’s arms offered.

The fragile reality of Bill’s figure now drew Ford’s attention—it wasn’t natural. Bill was unhealthy. His boniness was easy to overlook, his height able to take most of the blame: tall and lanky, as they say.

But Ford knew better now.

Keeping a child skinny and malnourished left them weaker and unable to defend themselves. What was the truth? Did Bill throw up due to anxiety or did his grandfather force him to? Everything Bill
said had to be taken with a grain of salt. He loved to defend his grandfather.

“I’m in heaven…and my heart beats so that I can… hardly speak…and I seem to… find the happiness I seek…” Bill sang; out of sync, the tune empty and drowsy.


A hand moved up to rub the back of Bill’s head as he kissed him on the forehead, snuggling his cheek against the boy’s face. His cheek was met with a weary kiss and content sigh.

“Ssshhh my darling. Don’t cry.” Ford cooed and Bill’s crying soon abated, Ford’s touches and raspy humming allaying him. Softly humming and with Bill tight in his arms, he gently rocked the boy side to side, as one would do with a distressed child. He continued, swaying like a sea anemone amidst watercolour blue, until Bill had calmed down; no longer hiccuping nor sobbing. Relaxed and cosy in Ford’s arms.

“I love you, Ford. Know why…?” Bill’s whispered to Ford’s jugular, his nose rubbing back and forth. “You’re…nothing like that man…”

Bill sniffled, earning gentle kisses on his eyelids. “I’m so sorry…I thought you were…you scared me…at first. But I know you’re not him…it’s okay.. I won’t…I won’t try and hurt you again, I promise, Ford.”

Ford wiped the remaining wetness off Bill’s cheeks. “Who else have you told about this?”

“…Only you.”

“You never told Evan?”

“He knows…I throw up a lot? ..but…he …he…I don’t wanna say…”

“What did he do to you?” Ford’s voice came out harder than he expected, his anger aching to surface. Bill’s body tense at the sudden severity.

“No...he just…told everyone…it’s complicated…”

Bill’s words earlier, at the hotel, began to make more sense. His trust of Ford, too.

“Up, my darling. Up.” He helped Bill to his feet and guided the boy to the basin. He had Bill rinse out his mouth and use mouth wash before then steering him towards the bed. He had Bill lie down, the boy still quietly shaking.

“I’m going to fetch you water.”

“No, don’t leave me…” Bill snatched his wrist, a death grip.

“I’ll be right back, dear. Right back.” Ford said reassuringly. “I promise, okay?”

Bill nodded sadly, and Ford gently unlocked Bill’s clutch.

When he returned, Bill was waiting upright, fidgeting nervously with the sheets. Colour had returned to him, the white clashing with his tanned skin.

“You didn’t run away…” He reached for Ford, taking both the water and Ford’s hand.

“I’m not going anywhere.”
Once Bill had finished the glass, he climbed onto the bed next to Bill and held him close, resolving to welcome his ever-growing protectiveness for Bill. It was warranted and justified. Whether Bill deserved it or not wasn’t a concern worth addressing. Yes, the boy had done much to Ford, but he had also endured much—much of what could have been dictating his actions subconsciously, pulling his strings in the shadows. Trauma was one hell of a puppeteer.

“It’s going to be okay. Everything’s going to be okay.” He hummed into Bill’s ear, his stubble purposely prickling the boy’s cheek, remembering that Bill had said he liked it.

“Sorry Ford…”

“No, don’t be sorry. It’s going to be okay. You aren’t alone, Bill. I’m right here.”

“You…I… I’m not ready…is that okay?”

“It’s okay.” What was Bill referring to? Therapy? School? Sex?

“Sorry… I know… I know… I said I would, but I’m scare… scared. There’s a d there… sorry, I skipped the d…the d.” Bill laughed nervously. “If… you want to, you can go ahead. I won’t do anything…but I’d rather not.”

“What are you talking about, darling?”

“Nothing… nothing…”

“You should see someone. About your anger and about your grief. And…”

“What grief?”

“You lost your family, Bill. You’re clearly not doing well.” Ford said. “And from what you told me of your sister… seeing that… knowing that… you can’t possibly be fine. Not to mention what you implied in the bathroom…”

“No… I’m fine.”

“How much do you weigh now?”

“I dunno…”

“If you’ve been throwing up so frequently, you must’ve lost a lot of weight.”

“I dunno…”

“You are… on the skinny side… now that I think about it…” Ford said, voicing his previous thoughts to see Bill’s reaction.

Bill’s arms stiffened around Ford, and he masked his face by hiding it against Ford’s chest.

“Sei così carina a prenderti cura di me.” Bill sighed into skin as his hands entered Ford’s bathrobe to wrap around his naked body. The parting of his robe had gone unnoticed, Bill as dexterous as ever.

“You lied again. You told me you… you told me your grandfather never hurt you like that.”

“He didn’t.”

Fingers at Ford’s back squeezed handfuls of skin fearfully but he let them be. It wasn’t painful,
“Why do you keep lying about it? I told you, I already know, darling. You just admitted it to me.”


“Bill…it’s not fair on me if you won’t get help. It’s not fair on us. It’s…”

“I can deal with this…I can…” Bill pleaded softly.

“That’s not going to work.”

“You really do hate me huh… you really… were just using me…”

“That’s not true.”

“Do you want to fuck? Right now?” Bill offered.

“No, darling. You should take it easy. We won’t be doing that for a very long time.”

“È solo che... è stato così bello averti qui a prenderti cura di me...” Bill said. “Adoro quando ti preoccupi per me…”

“What are you saying?”

“Nothing…”

“No, tell me.”

“Just saying it’s nice having you take care of me…you’re the only person I trust.” Bill confessed.

“Why? You hardly know me. Well, you hardly know me personally.” Ford reasoned. “Bill…you know I’m not…your grandfather, right?”

“Oh come on, Ford…of course I know…” Bill groaned. “Stop implying I like incest. God.”

“I…I never…” Ford said. “I just want you to understand I’m not him. For you to think I was for such a long time, I don’t think you’ve quite separated us.”

“It’s not that Ford, I swear…I just…” The hands on Ford’s back dug themselves into still heated skin, nails possessive. “I…could get drunk, naked and throw myself at you and you won’t do anything…you never do anything. You ask me if you can kiss me, for fuck’s sake. I trust you… why…why wouldn’t I?”

“You’re just…easy to trust, I guess. And…I—well, when you fuck me, you’re so generous? It never feels…I dunno how to explain it. You’re the only person…to say I have a choice in what I get to do. The only to suggest I do something a little more…than this life. I guess I always felt trapped, somehow, like I’d always be doing this…”

Bill went quiet.

“Man, I talk a lot, sorry.”

“No, it’s alright. Get it off your chest.”

“You’re the only one I can talk to about stuff, too. And you listen… but…I dunno what I wanna do.
I don’t think I can. I don’t know what I want to study or…whatever.”

“We can figure it out together. I have tests you can take. They help you decide what career is right for you.” Ford brushed his nose against Bill’s hair encouragingly.

“Is there anything you can’t solve…?” Bill kissed Ford’s chest a few times, growing tired quickly.

“You do want to fuck me, right? At some point.” Bill asked.

“I… did imply that.”

“Sarei fortunata se un uomo rispettabile volesse scoparmi.” Bill said, more to himself than Ford.

“Please don’t speak a language I can’t understand. It makes me nervous when you do that.”

“Why?” Bill said, sounding like a worried child.

“It just does. Do you remember when I told you I don’t date younger people because it feels as though I’m raising them?” Ford said. “You’re a prime example of that. My time with you has been primarily me acting like your father.”

“Listen, darling, I do like you, but this can’t continue. It cannot. You—we have to do something about this. You understand, don’t you?”

“Are you dumping me? Non lasciarmi, resta con me…”

“Tackling a problem does not mean I’m leaving you. My first response is not to run. It’s yours.”

“You said…you don’t mind treating me like a child. Isn’t that…you acting my father…?”

“Not at all. I don’t mind taking care of you but…” Ford stopped. Bill had a point.

“Alright then, rather, I’d prefer to think of…” Ford fumbled with his words. Not a father, but something else. “Mentor…?”

“You aren’t anything like my father, just so you know.” Bill said.

“Didn’t you say Evan was…?”

“I was kinda joking. My dad was a great man. Nothing like Evan.” Bill said, always looking down.

Ford’s thumb rubbed slowly across Bill’s throat, the rapid throbbing had calmed and so had Bill’s breathing; it came steady, at ease. Satisfied, his hand found a new position, at Bill’s back, after pulling the boy even closer to him.

“You’re right…hey…hey…I’ll do all that stuff…if you stay with me, how’s that?”

“What a unfair deal.”

“You have to…stay with me. I mean, what if while I’m doing all that stuff, someone else comes along and steals you?” Bill said.

“Unlikely…”

“Very likely.”

“Stay with me?”
“I am. No more breakdowns in bathrooms. We have to get you help.”

“Tutto per te, amore mio….” Bill nuzzled into Ford’s chest again, hands now limply tied at Ford’s lower back. “Uh…I mean…yeah, anything you want.”

“Is it easier for you to talk in Italian?”

“Um…Sometimes? When I’m upset… And angry. I…kinda inherited that…from my grandfather, I think. Whenever he got mad, he couldn’t talk English.”

“Did he get angry often?”

“Not really. He always warned me beforehand so I could prevent it.”

“So you do take after him. I mean—I don’t mean you are…you know what I mean…”

“Yeah… like that man…”

Ford kissed his forehead.

“You’re still hiding things, and still lying. Will you ever tell me the truth?”

“So che la violenza non era colpa mia…” Bill whispered. “But I’m…I don’t know…"

‘You’re the only person I’ve ever talked to this much, about this stuff…I told Evan some stuff but he fuckt me over.’ Wiggling his hips, Bill guided Ford’s hands to them, then dragged the hands further back, to settle on his rear. Ford frowned but let them remain there.

“Hey, remember…that both times you’ve been mad at me, the only thing you did is sound like a disappointed parent. The other day, I mean…you say…you know but…when you were mad, you never brought it up to hurt me? You never bring anything up you know…to hurt me or anything…”

“I’ve already learnt that’s not how to deal with anger in a relationship.”

“Of course…of course…light years ahead of me…” Bill pushed onto Ford’s hands while wiggling his hips again, encouraging the man to squeeze and caress him but once more, Ford ignored it.

“I want to apologize for what I did the other day. It was wrong of me…to touch you like that and call it punishment. Even if I was joking, I shouldn’t encourage that sort of thinking with you. It’s not good for you.” Ford said. It had been wrong. Bill brought out the worst him.

“It’s okay…you…didn’t even hurt me. Don’t get so uppity. I think…I kinda…I uh…” Bill continued struggling until he found his groove. “It…those times, kinda made me think…well, all times you were angry, you just made…you didn’t hurt me. So…it’s like…when you’re angry, I don’t feel so scared anymore? I don’t know…I’m still a little scared…but…when you touch me…not even sex stuff …just when you touch me…man, I’m tired…”

Bill sighed loudly.

“I’ve…never talked to anyone like this. I love you, Ford.”

Bill began licking Ford’s chest, still eliciting no response from the man. Unsatisfied by Ford’s lack of reaction, Bill focused on a nipple, licking and eventually grazing it with his teeth.

“S—stop that, darling. No. It’s not the time.” Ford squirmed; why was Bill always like this?
“But you’re getting excited…” Bill murmured as he continued to lick and suck, Ford eventually filling the tenacious mouth with his thumb. It did little to discourage Bill and he took to sucking on Ford’s thumb suggestively.

“Enough.” Ford hardened his voice but Bill didn’t care, and continued. “Just give up, Ford. You’ll give up eventually, why not now?”

‘No’ was again being ignored. These times, Bill never seemed to be in his right mind. When was Bill of sound mind? The obsession with sex was potentially due to Bill’s past rape and abuse, but his inability to accept rejection was an entirely different issue.

Bill grew up never having his autonomy respected—is that why he couldn’t grasp the concept of respecting everyone else’s? Spite? Or a case of ‘monkey see, monkey do’?

So many unanswered questions that had to be spared for another day. But for now, Ford had an ingenious idea, and decided he had nothing to lose by implementing it. It would work. It had worked previously—the concept, at the very least.

He carefully rolled on top of Bill, the boy’s eyes instantly widening fearfully. With his weight on his knees and palms, he hovered over Bill, and clearing his throat, he began.

“Hydrogen, it’s symbol is H. It was discovered around 1766 by a man named Henry Cavendish. It’s the most flammable of all currently known elements. The most flammable chemical, however, is chlorine trifluoride.” As Ford lectured, Bill’s eyes narrowed and a frown came, curling into a snarl. It was working; Bill was becoming annoyed. Very annoyed. More Hydrogen talk, and Ford swore by the tugging at his eyes that Bill was holding back laughter.

“Ford, what the fuck?” Bill pressed hard against Ford’s shoulders. “What’re you doing?”

“You don’t want to hear about Hydrogen? Then let me pick another element…how about Zinc? Its symbol is Zn and it’s essential to human health. There’s a surprisingly amount of—”

“Ford, stop stop, what are you doing? Get off me!” The laughter finally came and Bill attempted to catch it—missing, and still laughing.

Just as Ford had expected—Bill had snapped out of it.

“I’m teaching you about the elements.” Ford said innocently.

“Are you trying to ruin the mood? Off off, you stupid nerd!” Ford rolled onto his back, his own laughter merging with Bill’s as Bill continued to gripe, thoroughly agitated.

And still laughing.

Wheezing, Bill shoved Ford lightly. “What the hell was that?!”

“There you are.” Ford rubbed Bill’s cheek and Bill swatted it away the second he’d had his fill.

“What? And Antoine Lavoisier. Named Hydrogen, the other guy just discovered it.” Bill pinched Ford’s cheek and returned to giving him continuous playful shoves.

“What?” The surprise in Ford’s voice was impossible to suppress. Bill knowing that was not something Ford could have predicted, or would have ever thought to consider predicting.

He climbed on top of Bill again; Bill smirking mischievously, no longer afraid.
“Hey whoa…what’s going on?”

“How did you know that?”

“I remembered it from uh, I don’t know. Been awhile.”

“I’m impressed, my darling.” Ford showered him in kisses, leaving him squirming with a heated face. “That you knew that.”

Reward good behaviour with an outcome the subject desired.

“Seriously…? That gets you all hot and bothered? Science talk?” The doe eyes came but disappeared quickly; Ford assumed Bill didn’t want to express more weakness. A few more kisses and his Bill returned; wide eyed and smiling sweetly.

“Something like that.” Ford returned to his previous position, but laid on his side this time, with his left hand stroking Bill idly at the waist. The touches were wistful, caressing as though they felt the finest silk; Bill’s eyes closed peacefully in response. So fragile…

“So… if I…do that again, you might wanna do something?” Bill’s eyes narrowed seductively.

“Maybe.”

Bill’s eyes widened again—this time, puppy-dog eyes came to Ford’s mind. His face softened, cheeks puffed out, lower lip sticking out—entirely too adorable—as he began stroking the side of Ford’s face that was not smothered by pillows. Ford’s active hand did the same, moving up to fiddle with Bill’s face, rubbing across his delicate pointy chin and soft lips. The desire was there but the time was not right.

Bill’s clingy behaviour was slowly becoming the norm, and Ford was not as bothered with it—right now, at the very least. Dealing with Bill, thoughts of his partner’s death and being in a new environment had sent him into overdrive. But his recovery was steady and he was now capable of handling Bill once more.

All things considered, however…Bill was looking to replace he’d lost and cope with past trauma. This was taking advantage of him. Regardless, Bill did seem to genuinely like him, but how much of that was truth and how much was it merely Ford wanting it to be true? Why would Ford want it to be true? Bill was too much.

Before Ford realized, Bill was in his arms again.

“You’re so warm, Ford…” Bill muttered, sighing, glad and grateful for Ford’s kindness and patience. The man was a saint. Saints could absolve you, right?

“I love you, Stanford. And…I’m not…thinking of…that man…”

Ford held him. Safe and sound. No one could hurt Bill Cipher, but the times he was not Bill Cipher left him vulnerable. But now that Ford was here…

How necessary was Bill Cipher, anyway? Ford kept him safe.

Bill Cipher was maybe…a concept he should reconsider.

“Hey Ford…?”
“Yes?”

“Can you call me ‘Cas’? Just this one time.”

“I thought you didn’t like it?”

“It’s okay... if it’s you.”

Ford laughed, the grey stubble prickling him. “I’ll call you that if you like, Cas. Can I use the full variation? Casper?”

“If you want.”

“As always...” Ford held Bill’s face, leaning close enough to kiss. “This side is reserved for me.”

Ford kissed him and he felt nothing but love in the exchange. Ford must love him. And Ford was too shy to admit it because of how long they’d been together. Only a few days...

“Goodnight, Casper.”

“It’s so weird hearing that name...”

“Have you heard of Casper the friendly ghost?”

Bill bit Ford’s lip and soon, they were kissing. But it never went further.

Bill wondered if he was playing victim or is he truly was a victim.

Did it even matter?

He fell asleep, both hands holding one of Ford’s own.

Again, he dreams he’s talking to Ford.

In his dream, he tells Ford that Ford’s favourite gum is coming back into production. Ford’s delighted.

Bill was gone when Ford awoke. A letter was left behind, with beautiful hand writing, signed C.G

It said his breakfast was in the microwave.

Two weeks had passed since Ford last saw Bill. And he needed to see Bill again. Urgently.

[Bill]: Guess who?
[666er]: I was wondering when you’d text me.
[Bill]: Waiting for me all this time? Oh youuu
[Bill]: Hey can I spend the weekend by you?
[666er]: I don’t see why not. How are you?
[Bill]: Yikes small talk
[Bill]: Get ready because this is the weekend I DYE YOUR HAIR
[666er]: When did I agree to this?
[Bill]: In my head, same thing
[666er]: I’ll consider it. But I want compensation.
[Bill]: Ooooooooh how many dick suckings do you need
[Bill]: Say at least 6
[666er]: None. I’d like to see you with your natural hair colour.
[666er]: Black is it?
[Bill]: Huh okay
[666er]: You don’t have to dye it but when it grows out, don’t bleach it again.
[Bill]: Aye aye sir
[Bill]: What do you have my name saved as on your phone?
[666er]: ‘Bill’
[Bill]: Change it to ‘My Darling Δ’
[666er]: That’s quite sentimental.
[Bill]: Do it. Whoever peeks at your phone anyway? You nerd
[Bill]: Cooooome on
[666er]: If you insist.
[Bill]: Ha, you really like me huh?
[Bill]: Talk about try hard. Sheesh!

[My Darling Δ]: I’m outside. Come to me

Ford’s doorbell rang. Outside, Bill was waiting. With **black** hair. Dressed in *blue*.

The boy cries and cries and eventually, Ford gives in, decides to *give* the boy something to cry about.

—**Alternate Universe**: Bill Cipher connects with the wrong Stanford Pines.
Blackbody Radiation

Chapter Summary

Hot objects glow. At higher temperatures, the color of the radiation will tend towards yellow.

Chapter Notes

Art: http://ratattacksaw.tumblr.com/post/155744926664
http://antoinettesart.tumblr.com/post/15544982664
Amazing line art version: http://antoinettesart.tumblr.com/post/15544555349

Draible: Handy Lesson:
http://yoursatanboyfriend.tumblr.com/post/15558702333/handy-lesson

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I’m always watching you."

— Bill Cipher.

“Be a good boy, and always let your conscience be your guide.”

— The blue fairy, Pinocchio.

Smells like fish. Metal—copper? Blood. It’s potent enough to suffuse the air outside the antique mahogany door. Inside the lavish room, blood is on nearly every surface flanking the large desk, resembling a sloppily performed ritual sacrifice. The older man’s throat is split open—still bleeding out, still flopping about like an exhausted fish out of water. Blood not very dark; the dark kind is the prettiest.

“Oh boy, that was a rush!” Gaspard says, rubbing his future mottled neck, huffing to get life back into him. Close call. Too close.

“If there’s one thing the movies don’t teach you about carnage is how messy it really is!” He takes a swig of the amber liquid in a nearby glass. Then another. “But it’s my favourite part. Ever open a guy from the belly up? No? Wow. Imagine.”

Composed, spine bristled, he addressed his unlucky spectator. “Clean this up. Fuck these people. I wanted a civil discussion and he tries to kill me!”

His white shirt is saturated with blood. Splatters across his face, lines dripping trails down his throat, resembling veins.

“Anyone asks, I self-defenced him to death.” Gaspard drowsily crumples to the floor, still panting.
“Clean this up and call Xanthar. You know, the chink in the muzzle.”

Lucas Day had been working for Gaspard Giordano for twenty years, and counting. A well-known and esteemed detective who had been a close friend of Isaac Giordano, the previous Gaspard: a good man with a questionable occupation. Their relationship had well crossed the line of casual acquaintances; unusual but not unheard of with how firm the Giordanos tended to sticky their fingers. But he was certain he’d have chosen to remain at Isaac’s side, whether or not he continued to receive the monthly fat pay check in the mail. Bless the man for letting him put his five kids through college without worry. Since his friend’s death, Lucas chose to ensure his son be taken care of. Twenty-two was young and rarely would any Giordano be forced to take the seat at such an age—but here he was. Seated and resembling his father in nothing.

That worried Lucas. Enough to question the legitimacy of this Gaspard’s identity. Tattoos don’t lie, however. Not these ones.

“The Sinclairs expressed concern about you cutting ties with the McCelerys as well as…your removal of them.” Lucas said, hoping his tone was not too morose.

Gaspard tilted his chin up, smirking, and Lucas could see the bruises clearer now. They painted the tan neck thickly, implying Gaspard had been held down for quite some time by equally thick fingers. “Removal? You mean when I disposed of them? When I took care of them? When I put them to sleep with the fishes?”

He leaned backwards, seemingly amused by the doublespeak, and proceeded to list further euphemisms for death until he’d had his fill. Lucas listened silently. Isaac was never one to be so talkative, and from what he could recall of this Gaspard’s youth, he’d been one of few words himself. How times had changed. Not for the better.

“Frankly, I don’t care. He attacked me first. Did you make sure you let them know?” Gaspard asked.

“They insisted he wouldn’t.”

“Let them know if they intend to make a liar of me, they might find themselves joining the McCelerys for dinner.”

Gaspard tapped his long fingers rapidly on the desk. The uneven sound agitated Luca’s misophonia and his teeth instinctively gritted to steady his jumping nerves. He ran a hand through his greying hair, his other rubbing at his stubble jaw to ease the bundling tension.

“You should avoid cutting off ties on a whim. And in future, please don’t have your bodyguards abandon their posts. They are there for a reason.” Lucas suggested, speaking out of turn but Gaspard did not look up from a spot on the desk that had him entranced.

“I can do what I want.” Gaspard said. “Who even are the Sinclairs?”

Lucas avoided sighing disrespectfully. Twenty-two was too young to be doing this. He had not been educated for it either; his sister had been the one to have endured the appropriate training. What a waste.

“Who knew the McCelerys would get so pissed I cut ties with them.” Gaspard leaned back in his chair, slouching. “Why don’t they go off fuck into a salad or some shit. Celery. Fuck me, if my surname had a salad ingredient in it, I’d welcome death.”
“Well, I guess they kinda did fuck off into a salad—metaphorically.” Gaspard added.

Gaspard’s eyes thinned and then he grinned. “Hey, can you make a list of all the families mine were in cahoots with? I think I’d like to become more acquainted with them all. Personally.”

“Are you certain that’s what you want to do?” Lucas asked. The boy’s objectives were clear, displayed on his face for Lucas to see. He was creating trouble and could prove detrimental to the entire Giordano legacy. But Lucas could not speak up. This Gaspard, on top of having a short temper, had a fondness for elaborate and sadistic punishments—the sort you’d see in shock horror exploitation films. A testament to his youth and reinforcement of his ill-fit.

“Have you been in touch with your extended family? Have you considered asking a distant relative to help you until you’ve gotten the hang of things?” Lucas stood in parade rest; an old habit formed from his time with Isaac.

“You think I’m not qualified?” Gaspard’s voice was empty, but hinting at an anger spring within, ready to burst at the right shovel.

“No, I think, and this is only my opinion, that you’re having a hard time. You could use more contact with your family. What of your grandfather’s brother? He’s still alive.” Family ties were important; Isaac had always said that. "I'm sure he'd be more than happy to give you a helping hand. You need only ask."

“Fuck that man.”

Gaspard dismissed him with a wave.

If you relied on the protection of others, you were nothing more than a leech. A barnacle, even. Beg for protection. Begging for protection from Gaspard Giordano.

Oh please. This family couldn't even protect their own. How could they protect you?

More missed calls from his family. Relayed messages.

Why didn't you invite us to the funeral? Did you even have one?

Why can't we get in contact with you? We're all worried about you, Casper.

Are you alright? How are you doing? We haven't seen you in so long. You must look just like your father now.

Whine whine whining.

That man was a part of him, as he was a part of that man.

A hole sits inside, where that man had burrowed through him—all the way out, leaving an infested hollow that whispers to him as the wind blows through it. Ringing like wind chimes. Singing songs dead men sang to him once upon a time.

Fuck everyone who ever swore loyalty to him. Fuck everyone who so much as accepted a favour.

Fuck this fraternity.
When Stanford spreads his fingers out and places them atop the hole within Bill Cipher, the wind can no longer pass through and the chimes can no longer ring.

If they cannot ring, their sound can no longer guide him.

What do I do? What do I do?

I have no fucking idea what to do.

Stanford, what do I do?

Oh right...ditch this business...

The only way to do that would be for Gaspard Giordano to die, or for someone to take his place.

"Can you believe this shit?" Bill yelled, slamming his bottle of whiskey onto the floor, the liquid fluttering as though it were alive. "Antonio learnt her native tongue just so he could confess his love for her and she brushes it off like it’s nothing!" Arms flailing in the air, he continued to rant.

"God, I hate this! Why are these people so insensitive! And to top it off, she’s sleeping with Marco behind Antonio’s back! I get it! They aren’t officially together but if you gonna be playing the field, you gotta let the players know!"

Loud groaning continued to fill the room, until the drama was forced on hold as 8ball returned form the convenience store, carrying two bags—one noticeably larger than the other. Confused at Bill’s unrest, he hesitated to interrupt. "Uh…what’s going on?"

"Nothing." Bill turned the television off. "Absolutely nothing. You bring my party supplies?"

8ball threw a packet at Bill, who caught it with his right hand—his left arm in no condition to move. Jelly beans—Ford’s favourite snack. He tore the packet open with his teeth, and chugged down as many as his mouth permitted.

"I feel my power returning! My wounds healing!" Bill waved the packet around, suddenly fully energized. "The golden nectar from the God’s themselves!"

"Are you drunk?" 8ball asked, ripping open a six pack of Soda Pop. "You aren’t supposed to be drinking."

"I am drunk, yes. But—and this is a big but—I can do whatever the fuck I want." For emphasis, Bill allowed his now parted grey bathrobe to remain open, even going so far as to open it slightly wider—8ball felt karma coming back to him. Boxer shorts were underneath but he hadn’t bothered dressing further. Dressing was a pain with his wound.

"Maybe you should put on some pants."

"Maybe you should shut the fuck up."

Bill snuck a peek at his phone. Still no messages from Stanford. Didn’t the man miss him at all? Not even a message? Not even a call? Not even a dick pic?

Maybe he’d go watch Ford later.

A cigarette was lit, and Bill took a deep breath in. The doctor had said no smoking and it was his
pleasure to do the exact opposite. What the fuck did she know, anyway. It’s not like she has 12 Ph.Ds.

Stanford Pines…

Xanthar caught his eye, the man standing solemnly—quiet and without a choice in the matter.

“You can be my daddy tonight. ♫ That’s what gets you off, right?” Bill blew smoke into Xanthar’s face, the cloud diffusing, momentarily hiding more of Xanthar’s face. The muzzle shrouded quite a bit of skin.

Xanthar could not answer.

“Hey, don’t dogs sit on all fours? On the floor. Palms flat, crouching. No arching your back like you wanna get fucked. No one wants to see that.” Bill said as Xanthar obeyed, adding “Maybe later though…” under his breath. A lie. Why settle for a rancid alley-way sandwich when you could have Caviar by waiting just a little while longer? Stanford was Caviar.

“I hope it’s the pills making you say weird shit.” 8ball sputtered, mouth full of pop tart. Strawberry flavour was better than expected, but maybe a little too sweet.

“It’s the alcohol. Whiskey, expensive brand.” Bill flopped into the lavish master chair. An antique, red and gold, with intricate detail. God, his parents liked fancy shit and although he appreciated it, a lazy boy chair would be more comfortable. This chair had all the glamour, none of the comfort.

“Someone go out and buy me a lazy boy chair.” Bill drawled. “Where’s Alex? Make’em go pick me one up.”

“Hey Jason, do they make fabric spray paint? Wanna spray paint it yellow gold.” Bill waved his left hand around, the pain already dulled by the whiskey.

“Yes however.” 8ball slammed his can down, Bill’s eyes squinted lazily at the sudden sound. “That is tacky and I will have no part in the bastardization of a perfectly good chair.”

“Have some whiskey and you’ll change your mind.”

“Ronnie said I gotta stay sober. You know the drill, I know the drill.”

Laughing, Bill stood up and sauntered over to 8ball, draping an arm around the other boy; Bill’s half naked-ness adding to the suggestive nature of the action. At his ear, Bill whispered, too low and sensual for 8ball’s taste. “You always do what you’re told?”

The implication was clear. Everything had an implication with Bill. To say yes would spurn lewd requests, to say no would entice Bill’s predator side; the thrill of the chase would call to him and 8ball would wind up as dinner: stuffed. To the brim.

“You know the answer to that question, Boss.” 8ball gave slight shake of his head, eyes downcast at his soda. He could feel Bill’s harsh stare on him, on his face; waiting for the slightest tinge of weakness, of hesitancy.

“You’re the luckiest man right now, Jason. You know why?” A flick on 8ball’s nose. “Stanford Pines managed to grab my full attention. If he hadn’t, let’s just say… I got that summertime sadness.”

“Please stop quoting Lana del Rey. She’s such a babe and you’re ruining her for me.”
“Good! Next time you jerk your cock to her, you might accidentally think of me.”

8ball cringed and swooped out of Bill’s insidiously menacing hold while silently thanking Stanford Pines he evaded that. “The worst part is you both do that tongue thing! Like god damn! You ruin everything, Bill!”

8ball turned around at the right time to see Bill do that tongue thing: flicking and running his tongue across the front of his teeth. Why.

“She didn’t patent this shit.”

“She should’ve.”

Bill checked his phone again and upon seeing no messages, threw it onto the chair he’d previously occupied. It landed with a thud, screen now black.

Where was Ford?

Was Ford even thinking about him?

Paci-fire finally made an appearance, brandishing stapled papers and dropping them onto the desk closest to Bill. Whatever was on those papers would not be getting Bill’s attention any time soon. Fuck reading. “Here you go. You can’t spend any more money. You fucked the budget, Bill.”

The budget wasn’t the only thing he’d fucked, Bill thought, laughing internally at his immature humour. “Wasn’t that much.”

“It was. I’m restricting you of the next few months until you’re no longer dickmatized.”

At the utter of ‘dickmatized’, Bill laughed hard enough to spit all over himself. “Fuck me, dickmatized?! You calling me dickmatized?”

“He hasn’t given me the dick. Hey 8ball, am I was pretty as a girl?” Bill pouted at 8ball, the other boy shaking his head, ‘yikes’ written all over his features.

“I ain’t touching that question.”

“Maybe Ford is straight and just likes me because he thinks I look like a girl.”

“How’s he gonna think you’re a girl with your dick in his ass?” Paci-fire intercepted.

Bill nodded in acceptance, as if Paci-fire made a ground-breaking revelation.

“How is he still with you?” Paci-fire sneered.

“Everyone keeps asking me that.” Bill chewed on a blue jelly bean. “He’s pretty tough. And he’s arrogant. Thinks he’s so much smarter and better than everyone.”

“He is though.”

“Do you see me arguing?” Bill’s attention went back to his phone.

Fuck it. He’d make the first move.
[Bill]: Guess who?

Waiting around for someone else had never been his style, but he had to test the waters. Did Ford have any actual desire for him? Even a speck could be worked with.

But nothing…

A minute later, and Bill’s phone buzzed. A minute—so soon? Was it Ford?

[666er]: I was wondering when you’d text me.

Stanford had been waiting for him. Bill started laughing, unable to stop until there was the usual paining in his belly. The man was so shy.

[Bill]: Waiting for me all this time? Oh you

He missed Ford.

[Bill]: Hey can I spend the weekend by you?

If Ford said no, he’d show up anyway. The man could no longer say no to him, not after what he’d done. Ford knew this, too. A yes was expected, a yes was what he deserved. A yes was what he’d bought.

[666er]: I don’t see why not. How are you?

How are you?

Ford worried for him.

How are you?

Peace replaced earlier apprehension. Guided by his pride and unwilling to flatter Ford’s ego more than he had already, Bill chose to play coy. Tried and true method.

[Bill]: Yikes small talk
[Bill]: Get ready because this is the weekend I DYE YOUR HAIR
[666er]: When did I agree to this?
[Bill]: In my head, same thing

Paci-fire said he was leaving to go pack for his weekly trip, and Bill told him to fuck off.

[666er]: I’ll consider it. But I want compensation.
[Bill]: Ooooooooh how many dick suckings do you need
This was unexpected. Eyes never leaving the Ford on screen, he headed to his room and climbed into his unmade bed, cradling the phone in both hands as though it were a family heirloom. He wiggled beneath the covers, darkness consuming everything until only Stanford and he remained.

He made a note to check Ford’s phone and see if they man had really done it. Hopefully he’d remember, because soon as he’d entered his bed with Stanford, the sandman had visited.

He fell asleep with the spectre of Ford’s lips on his cheek, seeing Ford’s reply only several hours later.

He huddles over the bowl of the toilet; registering the bile, but not the tears. Tears are invisible to him. His own, anyway. Bill Cipher doesn’t cry.

If you believe something hard enough, eventually it'll become true. Reality was perception. Subjective. An *illusion*.

Standing up with a groan that turned into a frustrated growl, he dropped the toilet seat and flushed his dinner down. Alcohol’s revenge came for him and he fell to his knees once more, the tile sending a throbbing ache deep into his joints, and he swore he felt Ford’s arms around him seeking to soften the hurt. A deep, husky voice supplemented the ghost touches, telling him that everything was going to be okay.

He believes Ford.

It was eleven, and then it was twelve. The middle of the night.

Bill Cipher watched Stanford Pines on his 21inch screen decorated with thumbnails of live video, the
largest live-feed being the room that Stanford now occupied: the lounge. The older man was
sketching something that Bill could not make out from this angle, but his pen’s movements implied
an intricate drawing. Concentration constricted Ford’s features, or what he could make of them
whenever the man turned his head enough to the left. The Ford Zone.

Watching Stanford was therapeutic, with even the most mundane of activities captivating Bill.
Whatever Ford did and however he did it was the right way. The way it was meant to be done, and
the way Bill himself would one day adhere to.
Setting up the cameras had been an easy feat. Everything was done while Ford had joined him in
New York. Because rarely does Bill Cipher do anything unintentionally.

And it was necessary. Ford was now a weak link, and valuable to anyone who didn’t like Gaspard
Giordano.

That’s what he says to himself to justify his surveillance.

Ford continued to draw, wrist twisting and turning, head tilting and rolling.

It was late. What was Ford doing…?

Then Ford did something very interesting.

…

He watched Ford on the screen until he fell asleep.

He dreams he’s talking to Ford.

He dreams Ford is the blue fairy. Ford is his Jiminy Cricket.

Ford says, ‘You are made in your creator’s image. Do you want to be a real boy? You’ll lose your
current shape.’

He says yes and Ford starts by sawing through the rotting wood, cutting him open
so he can step out of the early casket.

It doesn’t hurt, and they
talk as Ford carves through. Effortlessly.

“You’re much too young for this, Bill. You’re so young. You’re too young. It’s too soon for you to
be entombed.”

Ford is warm. He sucks in the heat
and begins to faintly glow.

The triangle on his palm laughs, and keeps dreaming along with him.

“Dolcezza, do you still like the bad boys…?” Dipper swallows hard and tries to become one with the
wall; wishes it would swallow him, save him. “I assure you, they still like you. It must run in the
family, hm?” The boy blows warm on his neck—it’s a threat, he knows. “It must run in the family.”

—4 months from now, Dipper meets Bill Cipher. Again.

Chapter End Notes

Or green.
The Boy with the Triangle Earring

Chapter Summary

You’re a kind of protégé, and I know you depend on me like a young thing would to a guardian.
I know you sexualize me like a young thing would and I think I like it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“The key to manipulation is flattery. You gotta kiss ass, get your lips on’em if you ever wanna be close enough to get your teeth in’em.”

—The boy who calls himself Bill Cipher, 2 years prior.

“And I have no need of you. And you, on your part, have no need of me... But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world . . .”

- "But if you tame me, it will be as if the sun came to shine on my life. I shall know the sound of a step that will be different from all the others. Other steps send me hurrying back underneath the ground. Yours will call me, like music, out of my burrow.”

- "Men have forgotten this truth,” said the fox. “But you must not forget it. You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.”

—The Little Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

But you haven’t forgotten, have you?

Stanford Pines…

Call me a fickle thing, but I’m yours forever
because
I yearn to be kissed Δ

—Move Over, Darling—Tracey Ullman.

I love you and ‘I’m in love with you’ held important nuances that Stanford Pines could not disregard when the topic of Bill Cipher was addressed. Although the boy confessed his love for Ford on multiple occasions, he was not in love with Ford any more than Ford was in love with him. Rather, ‘I
love you’, when spoken by Bill Cipher, held incestuous undertones Ford could not overlook. There was also Bill’s emotional vulnerability. He was in a dark place, and to be with him was bordering on exploitation. Whether Bill’s previous lovers knew of Bill’s state or not did not matter. What was done was done, and Ford refused to be a fool who repeated history—out of intellect and common decency.

And Ford was certain once Bill began to successfully distinguish him from Gaspard Giordano, the frequency of ‘I love you’ would decrease. Or better yet, if Bill got bored, the outcome would be identical. Possibly fatal.

Either Ford could wait out Bill Cipher’s infatuation with him, or he could work to shatter the illusion the boy had so meticulously built around him. The latter would be equivalent to shattering a talisman that warded off the worst of evils.

But somehow, somehow, he’d become fond of the boy. Hormones, prolonged exposure to Bill and their lengthy talks. Emotions could never be controlled, as much as Ford wished they could, but it had been such a long time and the influx of romantic feelings felt like cold water in the desert.

But the guilt remained, coming always, like the cold of desert nights.

Ford had read somewhere that people sought out the ideal versions of their parents in their lovers. Incestuous might be too strong a word. It was potentially the wrong word entirely. What had been done to Bill was not his fault, nor were the lasting scars. He was only seeking to replace what he’d lost; and from Ford, he sought something specific: to invoke feelings felt during the happier times with his family. But his tumultuous relationship and history with them inevitably bled into his relationship with Ford, leaving Bill to endure history repeating itself. Unable to distinguish his grandfather from Ford had Bill acting frightened, rebellious and needy—and really, Gaspard and himself were so different. Why was Bill still confusing them?

Perhaps Bill needed more time.

Bill Cipher. This whole thing was a mess.

A mess he wanted to play in a bit longer.

Stanford Pines had meant to make a list to organize his thoughts but instead his mind had wandered, having other plans; and soon, he found himself writing about Bill Cipher. Little details, from physical descriptors to personality traits—fake and genuine. First impressions, last impressions. Change in modulation according to mood. Alleged knowledge and intelligence. Real name.

Most important were the traits that stood out as being peculiar and worth special recognition.

- Receptive to touch: very much in tune with his senses. Overwhelmingly responsive to physical touch. Associates memories with smells.(?)
- Pathological liar.
- Talented at manipulation. In turn, easily manipulated.
- Hypersexual. (Related to past abuse?) Promiscuous(?)
- Easily frightened by a raised voice. (loud noises included?)
- Overly aggressive and dominant. (self-defence mechanism?)
- Submissive and passive when alone. (Manipulation? After-effects of abuse?)
• Frequent intrusive thoughts featuring excessive violence and rape.
• Alcohol dependency(?) Drug history.
• Co-dependent(?)
• Reverts to native language when overly stressed and emotional. (grandfather did as well. Grandfather never liked English—does he revert out of habit to please?)
• Sensitive.
• PTSD/C-PTSD. (Developmental trauma disorder? Complex Trauma is more likely)
• Music used as a coping/escape mechanism? (quotes lyrics often)
• Incredibly susceptible to CC (results noticeable < the recommended min.)
• Masochist (after-effects of abuse?)

Beside the list, Ford began a sketch of the boy. The pose chosen from the ever famous ‘Girl with the Pearl Earring’. The slight parting of the lips which, when envisioned with Bill’s visage, conveyed a coquettish subtle invitation of more (again he thinks of this: receiving more from Bill). Her curious but wide doe eyes—evocative of the ones Bill offers to him during their private moments. Her fresh face and youth. But most of all, the angle at which her delicate face tilts, as though she had yearned for the spectator’s touch; but alas, none had come.

The Bill on the page looks back at Ford over his left shoulder, lips moist and parted—ready to accept Ford’s tongue. Eyes alluring and attentive—Do you want to, Ford…? —and with a single triangular earring dangling from his left ear. Gold jewellery to match equally gold eyes.

He’d touch the boy’s face, and the boy would lean into it; eager for more and eager to please. Honey-eyed, sweet-lipped. He’d snuggle into Ford’s chest, purring, rubbing his face against Ford’s own; Ford’s little kitten. (or was Bill more of a lion?)

Ford would stroke him, everywhere, softly. Then maybe even a little harder? Maybe. His darling would beg for it, and he would deny it, until the very end. Surprise the boy. Leave him panting and squirming, voice husky and lustful as he breathes ‘Ford, you’re the best…’ over and over, as he loves to do. Ford’s name belongs on Bill’s tongue.

Maybe this is the time he doesn’t allow Bill to use his mouth or hands. Maybe this is the time he allows things to escalate. With Bill on his back, legs spread, eyes half-lidded—Please, Ford… please…

Nails clawing into his back (he’s sure Bill uses nails), satisfied, warm breath in his neck that hitches at every slow thrust, pacifying the deep ache Bill always complains of. A special spot has Bill gasping; Ford swallows his breath before he can catch it. Dire moans as the budding heat builds in Bill’s core; labourued muscles sweating as they work to endure the drawn-out love-making. Sex was an experience and an experience was meant to occupy enough of one’s time to leave an impression. Preferably an impression of Ford’s lips on Bill’s.

(he would think, somewhere in his mind, that Bill is a force to be reckoned with, and is he not in control of said force?)

He’d stop thrusting, and continue with kissing. Deep breathing between every dozen, the movement stimulating Bill just a little, leaving him begging for more as Ford only kisses him. Bill would try to thrust himself against Ford, and Ford would stop him, cooing ‘no no, dear. Just relax.’

Oh Ford Ford, Stanford…please…
Not yet, my darling.

Music in the background. Soft jazz, perhaps?
They’d kiss, his lips will tell Bill’s body what to do, as they always have. They’d make love slowly, bodies merging, entwining like two snakes in love. Shedding their skin once done, a fresh start. Bill, calm and safe in his arms, no longer haunted. He’d fall asleep in Ford’s arms: content.

Sex could not mend, but tenderness and intimacy could. Something he doubted Bill had experienced before himself. He couldn’t imagine Bill making love with anyone. To be Bill’s first in that regard… and Bill would be his first save in another manner.

An old urge he rarely felt returned.

- For the first time, Stanford touched himself while thinking of Bill Cipher.

Bill Cipher watches.

He watched Stanford until he fell asleep.

When had he stooped so low? Fantasizing about a boy a third of his age…?

Masturbating… to Bill Cipher, no less.

New-born claws in him and the imprint of Bill Cipher in his bed. But the boy was so passive and sensual when he wasn’t threatening to kill Ford. Or crying and having melt downs.

But Bill Cipher was dangerous. And holding him hostage, in a manner of speaking.

... Sex with Bill Cipher.

Not yet. It would be along time before Ford considered that an option again. Fantasies were sufficient, as they’d always been. What they had now was enough: no more, no less. An equilibrium Ford could only hope would stay.

But Bill would continue to push him.

And Ford always said yes to Bill eventually.

If he must accede, then he’ll ensure the circumstances under which it occurs are perfect, and that Bill behaves in the way he deems perfect.

Finger tips traced the sketch of Bill Cipher while imagining the skin that would receive the touches: supple, smooth and greedy. Bill took care of himself, more so than Ford did, and it showed. If only the boy spent half as much time on his studies as he did on his appearance. With the right nudge and direction, however…

*I’ll do whatever you say, Ford.*

An exchange might be possible. Provided he continued to deny Bill, desperation would soon kick in and he would yield to Ford’s wishes eventually. It was a dirty method but necessary and arguably the best when dealing with one as cut-throat as Bill Cipher.

Bill’s age.
What was once a hurdle now resembled an opportunity to take hold of what was undoubtedly ripe for picking.

Receptive to guidance, easily pacified with the right touch and technique and, if Ford’s assumptions were correct and the data he gathered accurate, overwhelming susceptible to tried and trusted Pavlovian psychology. The Skinner type was worth a test, too. Especially since it appeared to be something Bill already desired.

But such things were always more effective if the subject remained unaware.

The older one became, the more in vogue it was to obtain a lover half your age. (preferably even younger. The younger the better.) This practice never resonated nor sat well with Ford; targeting children was an age-old power game: they were easy to control and take advantage of. Although Ford had no desire to control, to mentor and inspire was something he very much held an interest in, easily seen in his current choice of occupation.

Bill Cipher.

A diamond in the rough that required a gentle hand to reveal the canary only he could see.

One day, Bill will say he learnt everything he knows from Ford. His own little apprentice, following in his footsteps. Coalescing a lover, apprentice and partner all into one ideal amalgam. Wishful thinking—Bill would need a lot of work but if the potential was there, Ford would make use of it.

But first—determine if Bill had the potential and find how to get Bill to agree to being guided without resistance.

Bill Cipher: a wreck that despite all odds, was still salvageable in Stanford Pines’ eyes.

At the side of his list, he scribbled in large letters:

DO NOT HAVE SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH THIS BOY. AVOID AT ALL COSTS

Below the list, he wrote:

Goal: nurture intellectual interests and independence.

[My Darling Δ]: Are you thinking of me, by any chance?
[My Darling Δ]: Do you want to video call?
[My Darling Δ]: Too late
[My Darling Δ]: I’m going to bed
[My Darling Δ]: Fuck you too Ford
[My Darling Δ]: I miss you

[My Darling Δ]: I have something I wanna tell you

Ford lay awake thinking if the hole left by Fiddleford’s death could be filled by Bill Cipher.
He was getting ahead of himself. Again.

I'm all in a spin
About to give in
And though it's not right
I'm too weak to fight it somehow
'Cause I want you right now

The way you sigh
has me waving my conscience **bye bye**

—Move Over, Darling—Doris Day.

Chapter End Notes

when you’re so lonely, you consider taking your Stockholm Syndromesque relationship with a boy a third of your age seriously.
Chapter Summary

IT’S THE 21ST CENTURY, SIXER. PUT OUT OR SHUT UP.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I dreamt you laid me to rest in the great temple of Ra beneath the watchful gaze of the Eye. To protect me, or something. You cried the entire time.”

—William Pines

Lucas to Xanthar: The kid’s in Italy, last I recall. He’s staying with Giano and his family.

Xanthar to Lucas: Giano?

Lucas to Xanthar: Gaspard’s grandfather’s twin brother.

Xanthar to Lucas: I need you to confirm he’s alive.

Lucas to Xanthar: It’ll cost you. Gaspard gave strict orders on keeping the kid’s state on the hush hush.

Gaspard also gave orders on what to say when the chink came asking about the kid.

Uncle Giano’s English is bad, and his accent is thick, conjuring vivid images of Naples infrastructure. He remembers them still from this youth.

Uncle Giano has the face of that man, but he’s not like that man. His hands are tattooed but not up to the elbow. He’s divorced, with children who are not tattooed. Bill considers this acceptable.

His voice is warm and jolly on the phone, very Santa Clause. He asks how Bill’s doing and says he’d like to come visit. Says Bill must be lonely and he himself could use a vacation. He knows the family business but never participated in it; Gaspard was the heir and Uncle Giano was fine with that.

Everyone always said he was too flakey to be a good leader.

Bill wants to ask: “Can you take over for a while?”

So I can make a run for it.

But he isn’t sure if Uncle Giano will agree. That is, until Uncle Giano offers to help him. Mentions how broken his brother Gaspard was when he ran away and knows Bill never underwent the proper training.
What would the man seek as compensation? Is Bill going to be reduced to a fuck toy again?

As if.

He says he’ll see and let him know if he can come visit. Things are tense, Bill says.

But I miss you, Bill says. Stay safe, Uncle Giano.

Uncle Giano reminds him of Dorian Grey’s portrait in the attic. It suffers the debaucherries of Dorian, while Dorian himself remains and beautiful and pristine in the eyes of all who see him.

Forever young.

Gaspar Giordano is young today. Young and beautiful, like Dorian Grey.

Hideous and grotesque,

like the old Dorian’s portrait.

Tobacco barely tastes like tobacco anymore. A poignant taste is on the filter; reminds him of cat piss. Like that time he’s roommate had a cat that pissed on all his items, and he unknowingly huffed a pissed-stained cigarette. Good times. Any times besides these times were good times.

God, fuck these times.

The sun catches the fountain’s diffused droplets at the precise angle for rainbow colours to tremble through the air. A dreamy and romantic atmosphere, and he thinks back to his childhood. A ghost of his sister chasing Casper across the plateau catches his mind’s eye. Casper trips, and she laughs, voice a breeze in the quiet wind.

Stanford might’ve liked this view. But Stanford could not be allowed to set foot on the premises. Bad luck. Stanford might get tainted, would get tainted; the ghost of that man would no doubt possess Ford. Bill was by no means superstitious but this went beyond superstition—it was fucking facts.

Like that man had crept into him, he would creep into Ford. Possess Ford.

Stanford Pines…

A beautiful set of bright yellow flowers dropped into his lap.

“Look what I picked up for you! Favourite colour, right? No need to thank me, I know I’m good.”

8ball.

“You bought me flowers? This is gayer than sucking my dick.”

“Well fuck you too. That’s the last time I get you anything nice.” 8ball grumbles, sitting next to him on the warm cement and whistling at the spectacular view.

“What’s the occasion?” The flowers are bright but gentle on the eyes.

“Dunno. You haven’t been looking so good lately. Saw these when I was in town and thought ‘hey, what the hell’.”

“I’m just fine.”
“If you say so.”

They both settle into silence, interrupted only by the chirping of birds and occasional soft rustle of wind through the bushes near the fountain.

“I’m just gonna say it. Are you sick? What’s up with the throwing up? Maybe the pills that doctor gave you ain’t working.”

Bill snickers. “Nah. I’m fine.”

“If I looked up the definition of ‘fine’, I bet you $10 it wouldn’t have ‘frequent throwing up guts’ underneath it.”

“Nah, that always happens.” Bill says, smelling the flowers. The fragrance is soft, mild.

“You throwing up? Wah? So, you’re sick then? You see a doctor? What’d she say?”

“It’s nothing.”

One of the drawbacks of replacing Xanthar with 8ball: 8ball was nosey, and prone to asking too many questions.

“Isn’t Stanford a doctor, yeah? Maybe you should tell him. Get a second opinion. You couldn’t have trusted that last doctor anyway if you had her nicked.”

Bill offers 8ball the cigarette, and he takes it, intent on finishing it.


Everything is muted; dumpy, hazy. Senses: sluggish and thick with lethargy. Everything passes through him in choppy bits of data he can barely process; he’s here, and then he isn’t.

8ball is talking again but the sound is filtered through something dense, and he can’t understand. As though underwater, he hears chunks of reverberations barely resembling the original tune. In the womb? His mother has yet to give birth to him.

Or did she? Did she…

She shouldn’t have.

He touches and doesn’t feel. Is it the alcohol? The Screwdriver he had this morning?

“…but yeah, tell Ford. Bet he knows his shit and all.” He hears 8ball finish.

Tell Stanford Pines.

He types out:

_Do you want to run away with me?

And deletes it before sending it.

Stanford wouldn’t.

Drinking on an empty stomach.
Drinking on a full stomach.

It’s better if you don’t eat: you need less to intoxicate yourself into the void.

He swallows down the whiskey like a fire-eater swallows fire: it lights up the contours of his wasted dog-tired face, illuminating and numbing the barbed-wire dark huddling around him. It flows down his throat and enters another dark, and there, it lays itself to rest.

There’s a light at the end of the tunnel.

It’s a bonfire, with the charred-up carcasses of his family.

The heat is persuasive. Maybe a good old family reunion is in order?

Committing sati is so retro.

And he’s a 21st century boy.

He takes the flowers with him to bed, lets them inhabit the right side. Smells them goodnight.

He curls up beneath the blankets in foetal position while cradling his phone.

[Bill]: Hey hey Jerry
[Bill]: How’s Italy treating you?

Kryptos doesn’t answer him. Kryptos can’t answer him.

[Bill]: Hey, I think I might let Ford tutor me
[Bill]: If you ask me real nice, I might let you join me every so often

Teeth doesn’t answer him. Teeth can’t answer him.

Crying in this bed was something he thought he’d left behind six years ago.

Everything hurts, and then it doesn’t. He’s too exhausted to feel anymore.

He dreams he’s at a night carnival, watching a puppet show. No music; the silence is cold, matching his breath.

The red curtains part and a poorly put together Bill puppet dangles with a loud ‘Tada!’. Its eyes are too yellow—the painter’s done a poor job.

“I’m Bill Cipher! I’ve been watching you!” The mannequin dances limply, twitching as it tries to gesture in a way more human that what it’s capable of.

Another puppet drops from the top, the string pulled taut before it hits the ground; it jerks in mid-air before getting its rhythm. It’s Stanford Pines.

“I’m Stanford Pines. Let’s be partners! Only I won’t keep my end of the bargain! Also, you want
that equation? Not gonna happen!!” The voice sounds like Bill’s, as though he were attempting Ford’s voice. Yikes. It’s a terrible impersonation.

...?


“Oh Ford, I love you!” The Bill doll gushes. In a puzzling and deliberate manner, its fabric hand reaches out slowly and touches the Ford doll. A strange mark appears on the Ford doll, and the two of them continue to flail about in what was meant to resemble affectionate fondling. The backdrop’s curtain falls, revealing an odd-looking (and rather stupid) face, belonging to a creature Bill has never seen before.

The dolls continue to embrace one another amorously.

They fall to dust.

*What the fuck is this?*

Another doll, that’s only a yellow triangle with an eye and stubby black limbs drops in. Alongside it, a new Ford doll appears.

“No, Bill! I won’t give you the equation!” The Ford doll cries out.

Instantly, the doll bursts into flames, screaming with Ford’s voice. In a blink, it’s back to normal. Then it splits into two, screaming with Ford’s voice. In a blink, it’s back to normal. This continues, the puppet being brought to horrific deaths, repeatedly. It’s how Bill imagined Hell. Just countless deaths, one after the other. No rest, no sense.

“What’s your preference? I’m thinking fire, right?”

The Ford dolls burns to ash, then reassembles once more.

“I get it. You’re a real 21st century baby boy and all, but top-hats never go outta fashion!”

A snapping of fingers followed by a drum roll, and he feels something on his head.

Another snap: the Ford doll turns to gold and hovers in the air, swaying back and forth. A terrified expression worn on its face, the reflected light makes the grimace appear to move.

“Oh, I hate you…” The triangle puppet hugs the golden Ford. “I hate you…”

“Don’t go anywhere, Ford…” It clings to the Ford doll.

*I don’t get it.*

“Of course you wouldn’t! For me, this was a traumatic re-enactment! Of an astounding betrayal but a man I adored! Allegedly adored. Let the record show I stated allegedly. Allegedly!”

*Uh?*

“Look, this guy is terrible! Never keeps his promises, puts his family above his best pal! Puts his own ego above his friends! You don’t wanna get involved any further with him, kid! Trust me, I got them receipts.”
The voice deepens, distorts until it’s a nearly deafening boom.

“You don’t wanna get involved further with him, kid.”

The voice suddenly softens, as the triangle doll hugs the Ford doll tighter.

“Actually…you do…no, you don’t…well. Take everything I say with a grain of salt!”

The Ford doll floats into his hand.

“I’ll ask you what the other guy asked you. Who came first? Me…?” The mark on Ford glows. “Or you…?”

Me?
Silence.

You?

“Bingo!” A cash register DING goes off. A snap of the fingers. “That meat machine of yours can really burn the oil when it wants to, huh?”

“It’s a chicken or the egg riddle. There’s no real answer.” The mark on the Ford doll disappears.

He holds the Ford doll up, makes it dance by jerking its limbs. At his touches, the burning brand reappears.

What’s this mark?

“Cut off contact with him. For the love of pina coladas! Stop talking to him! Don’t even make eye-contact with him! Just look away, and slowly step back! Don’t even breathe in his general direction!”

The triangle doll calls the Ford doll back to it.

“My favourite disappointment…”

The triangle doll freezes, as if stuck in time. He blinks and it’s a mirror, reflecting himself, with black hair, pre-surgery.

“Hey hey! Don’t listen to that guy! He’s special. You know how it is. Every family has one of those.” The same voice says: still sounds like him, as if he were yelling.

A new doll appears: more extravagantly assembled, materials clearly expensive. Detailed. The real deal.

“So, I finally figured out what’s been putting me off about you.” The doll says. “Now that I’ve figured that out, I gotta say… I’m not as mad as you’d think I’d be. Quite the opposite. I’m intrigued and ready to party.”

“You’re not really ‘Bill Cipher’, are you? It’s just some little mask you made up to hide those human insecurities of yours. Clearly you have nothing in common with my fine-looking, three equal sided self.”

The doll laughs, loudly—a chorus of derision and contempt.

“Or do you?”
What? My name’s Bill Cipher.

“What? My name’s Bill Cipher.

“Nah. You’re borrowing that name. What’s your real name?”

...Gaspard.

“No, your real name. Let’s put it this way. Say you were a coin. You got heads, and you got tails. Heads is your Bill Cipher. What’s your tails?”

Something tells him to say: Casper.

“Nah. Wrong. Very wrong."

“Your entire existence was built around a coin toss. You know that?” The doll floats around him, movement lazy. “Who you are depends on which side of the coin faces up.”

“Just like how you tilted that coin up when you were a wee lad and became Bill Cipher, you’re letting Ford tilt that coin back over, and letting you become—what’s the name?”

The doll expands, then shrinks.

“You have to know the name! You know mine, don’t you?” The doll flicks his nose. It stings. “You’ve used a name. A name, which is it? Pick. You know.”

He doesn’t know. He goes through names, the doll unresponsive, until he says:

Andrew?

“So close! You’re so close!” The doll shakes with excitement, as though possessed by the ghost of elation. “Come on, kid. You’re so close. I can feel it in my very fibres.”

...I don’t know.

“Ah, let’s forget it. Let’s talk business.” The doll snaps a finger and a train set appears mid-air. A yellow train with two tracks it can traverse.

“The choo-choo train is you, and you got two roads you can go down! The first one leads to me! The second, well, who knows? But it leads all the way over there!” A black cloud of zero appears at the end of the right track.

“Consider...this direction.” The train is pointed towards the doll: the left track. “You and I could be besties, kid.”

The left track is gilded: enticing, and calling to him.

“If I press you any further, I’ll get into trouble. Probably. But hey, trouble’s my given name.”

“Now. Go down that way.” The doll gestures to the right track, leading to the void that whispers a name he’s unfamiliar with. “…and then make a sharp turn left into my lane. You got that? We gotta make sure we surprise our Stanfords!”

The doll slaps his nose. “You gotta make sure you let the old guy stick his jazz stick into you! Multiple times!”

What?
“Bump uglies! Mate! Let him give it to you, kid. He’s aching to split your peach! Let him! Get weird with it! Throw some freaky shit in there! Call him Papa when he drills you!”

That’s fucking disgusting.

“What’s disgusting? Imagining Ford as your dad? You think it’s gross? Oh, boy do I have news for you, my fleshy counterpart.”

With a wave of the hand, the train set flickers into nonexistence.

“What if I told you that you were his kid?”

I’m not though.

“What if you were?”

I’m not.

“We’ve established that. If you were and you knew but Ford didn’t, would you tell him?”

...No.

“You’d still wanna fuck him, right? Right?”

I... don’t know...

“Yeah, thought so. Incest is fine with you.”

That’s not true. If Ford was... I wouldn’t want him to leave me…?

“Weird. So, you’d bang Stanford if he was your dad. Got it.”

He frowns, becoming angry. Red paints his mind.

“You always fuck your relatives, kid?”

Ford isn’t—

“You want him to be.”

No, that’s gross.

“Whatever. You gotta bang the old man! I’m gonna film it and show it at the next Christmas Party in high definition!” The doll squeals. “Here’s Sixer! Fucking his—”

The lone eye slyly narrows, as though it knew a juicy secret and awaited Bill’s inevitable prying.

“We’ll be watching. Make sure it happens.”

The doll turns around, laughing loudly.

“Oh man, these Pines’! They really never learn, do they? I can’t wait to see the look on Sixer’s face when he realizes what he’s done!”

What do you mean?

“My Sixer not yours. It’s...complicated. He’s all ‘what are you even doing’ and I’m all ‘you know
I’m a whimsical fellow!’ As if it’s that simple! HA! Nothing we ever do is unintentional, right?”

He listens.

“Order disguised as chaos is such a hard art to master. One you’ve only dabbled in.” The doll waves a finger back and forth.

“Besides, you know you’re like... only half me right? You’re diluted Bill Cipher. Like those cheap drinks you mix with water: half Bill Cipher, half...” The doll’s pupil slits even further, then entire eye narrows.

“Well, that’s a whole other story. Point is, did you think there wouldn’t be repercussions for using my name?”

…?

The doll expands to a monstrous size, and with a push of a hand now three times the size of his head, he staggers back.

“My name. Bill Cipher.”

It pushes him back again, and something tells him he’s close to an edge.

“You can’t call gold gold if you dilute it with cheap solidified lemonade.”

The doll laughs.

“Did you know you’re a Gemini? Two-faced.”

The edge is here.

“See ya, kid. Don’t play pretend. And say hi to Sixer for me.”

He falls into a blackness.

An image of a rotating coin simmers into his mind.

It’s double-sided. Heads.

He hears himself laugh again.

Just fucking with you. You’re me and I’m you.

We’re also—

Yellow noise overwhelms him.

There’s something in his ear—

REALITY IS AN ILLUSION. THE UNIVERSE IS A HOLOGRAM. BUY GOLD, BYE!

He dreams the tattoo on his hand told him to—

keep talking to Stanford Pines.
[Bill]: ;)
[Bill]: Sorry, I have no fucking idea when I typed that
[Bill]: I have something I wanna tell you

“**I lied.**”

—Every Bill Cipher, in every universe.

Chapter End Notes

if u think bill is ford's son, you must think i am true sinful and unoriginal trash.
Bill Cipher's in love!

Chapter Summary

Just kidding.

Chapter Notes

It’s the 14th February!! Happy Birthday to TNP! Bill!! Little Valentines birthday boy.
♡♡

Boy With The Triangle Earring: http://antoinettesart.tumblr.com/post/156488820129
http://antoinettesart.tumblr.com/post/156628870409
SHITPOST:http://antoinettesart.tumblr.com/post/157187731094

This chapter and the next should be considered 'one chapter', in the sense that they directly follow each other and were originally written as one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You’re a smart cookie, Stanford! You know you can’t undo what’s been done! You’ve tried and tried and now you’re all outta coins, handyman. BUT I know how to fix this! Here’s where we go back back back!”

The eye flashes Bill’s scarred back and gaping ocular wound from various angles.

“You don’t have to fix what never breaks! Come on, Stanford! You and William: happily ever after! You and me! White picket fence!

Attaboy… just shake my hand.”

—Bill Cipher, the future.

“Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet."

—Samson’s riddle.

The black of Bill’s hair drew Ford’s eyes. Then the gun-metal blue of his perfectly fitted high-end suit. Then the black car in the driveway, with a man in the driver’s seat wearing an elaborate, dark-coloured restraint over the lower half of his face obscuring his identity.

8ball stood beside Bill, holding something large and rectangular, snuggly wrapped in cream paper and held tautly underneath his left arm.

“Hey hey, aren’t you gonna say hi?!” Bill chippered, dropping his infant cigarette to tug at Ford’s shirt. Ford greeted them both, stepping aside to let them in and taking this opportunity to step further outside and determine the driver—Evan? Seemed the obvious choice but why the obscure headgear?
“Who is that? That drove you here?” Ford asked, still squinting as the encumbered man took his time exiting the car.

“Evan!” Bill affirmed.

“What happened to his face?”

“Muzzle. He’ll be bringing my bags in now.”

Although Bill and Evan might’ve not seen eye to eye in New York, a falling out was no excuse to humiliate someone in such a manner. Another issue to speak to Bill about, the list seemingly endless now with none of its current contents dissipating.

(If he had joined Bill, what would Bill have done to him?)

8ball carried the rectangular item—a painting?—into the lounge, setting it on the coffee table with exaggerated care. Once the item was deemed secure enough, 8ball spun to face Ford as if ready for a brawl; the belligerent act hosed a torrent of ice-cold fear into Ford that left his heart thumping for heat. Alongside the dismay came flash memories of his turbulent weekend with Bill.

“Okay, be careful with this. I worked hard on it. Hard enough for Oxford to add my name beneath the definition of diligent and I will destroy you if you break this! DESTROY.” 8ball all but shouted, the tone too droll to perpetuate further worry.

Relieved, Ford smiled. “I’ll be sure to take care of it! Now what is it exactly?” Ford eyed it, excited at the prospect of whatever this mystery item was. Grinning, Bill draped an arm around him, nose diving into his neck.

“It’s a surprise. I’ll show you later.” Bill gleamed. “Also…uh… my left shoulder. I got shot.”

“What?!” Ford’s voice came out deeper than desired causing Bill to flinch.

Still so sensitive.

“Turns out bullets really hurt. Who woulda thought?” Bill tittered.

Ford carefully unravelled Bill’s right arm from his neck, lowering it as though it were the injured one. His hands then went to Bill’s left shoulder, touching warily as though the slightest contact would cause pain. Bill watched, glad for the concern.

“What happened? Who shot you?”

“Long story. My thingy’s gotta be changed twice a day. Tonight at 8pm. You know how to work this stuff or?”

“Of course. I’ll clean it for you.” Ford’s fingers brushed the sides of Bill’s face but before it could return to his side, Bill caught it, bringing it up once more to his face to lay at his cheek. He was warm, like the perfect cup of coffee. Nearly just as sweet, too. Ford loved his coffee extra sweet, and his Bill Ciphers, too.

Bill Cipher…

“Heh. Now Evan doesn’t have to crash our party, Mister jack of all trades. What can’t you do?” Bill turned his cheek, kissing the hand while always looking at Ford. Warm lips, too.

As if summoned, Evan came in carrying Bill’s bags. Three, a bit much; Ford assumed Bill’s shoulder
prevented him from carrying anything, but he also knew his dear fastidious Bill preferred being
catered to—the current coddling presumably a combination of both.

The muzzle looked to be a minimalistic, modern day Scold's bridle. Up close, it radiated pain and as
the bridle was meant to, completely prevented speaking—or rather, any use of the mouth. A cruel
and medieval form of torture. Ford felt as though he’d been transported several decades into the past.

“There’s a good boy!” Bill gushed at Evan, his fake smile dropping. “Now beat it, and take Jason
with you.” He produced a small pouch from his jacket and tossed it to 8ball. “Make sure he’s
wearing it when he comes to pick me up. Let him have a little vacation for now.”

“Man, don’t you damage that!” 8ball yelled before leaving, finger pointing at Ford and causing Bill
to flip him off.

Soon as 8ball was out the door, Bill slammed it shut.

“Finally alone…” Bill said, throwing both arms around Ford, flooding his ear with little ‘ow’s ow’s
ow’s’. Overly affectionate, as always, and forever desiring cossetting. Ford would allow him to
indulge, later.

“Don’t strain yourself, dear.”

Bill crooned into the crook of his neck, complementing the vibration with soft, patchy kisses.

“Why are you in pain? No painkillers?” Ford asked, patting his back; the humming in his neck
becoming louder at every dab.

“I have yet to take them… they make me woozy. I just had…some whiskey earlier.”

“Whiskey isn’t a painkiller.” Ford said, disappointed Bill was drinking again. “Let me get a good
look at you.”

They parted, and Bill lowered his eyes, raising them slowly to meet Ford’s own, conveying a sense
of modesty. Still acting but fitting the part more than usual.

“Your black hair really suits you. It looks good.” Ford fussed, well-aware Bill loved it when he
gushed over him.

“You think?” An award-winning dimpled-smile.

“It brings out your features, sharpens them. I said you could wait for your hair to grow out.” Ford
recapped. The darkened hair felt silky to the touch—freshly washed?

“Wanted to surprise you. And make sure you couldn’t get out our deal.”

“Ah yes, you…dying my hair…” Ford realigned his glasses upon his nose bridge beneath Bill’s all-
seeing gaze; the action stood out as diffident with the uneasiness displayed providing an opening for
Bill’s ever-wanting void to take sustenance.

As if invited, Bill kissed him; the exchange unusual this time. A wide smile was felt on his lips, with
a shy tongue between them, greeting him with declarations of desire and need. Bill’s hands smoothed
across his exposed neck, trekking upwards where they swam languidly through his mass of curls.
The kiss broke, and then Bill’s cuddling in his neck, filling Ford’s ear with modest confessions: I
missed you so much, I can’t stop thinking about you.
“Let me fetch you water, and you can take your pills.” Ford said, breaking their moment of intimacy. He went to the kitchen, Bill following like a lost puppy, tail-wagging and all. Ford poured a glass of cold water and handed it to Bill, who swallowed two pills with it. When done, he kissed Ford in gratitude, mouth refreshingly cold; the chill left Ford feeling more awake.

“I brought you presents…” Bill said. Holding Ford’s hand, he pecked a few more kisses across Ford’s cheek and inner wrist. Very European, Ford thought. The excessive affection.

“I’d like to hear how you got shot. Are those bruises on your neck?” Ford asked, the discolouration in question appearing even darker up close. They’d caught his eye earlier, and he assumed Bill, who loved to overshare, would elaborate on their existence before he could ask.

“Later. And yes.” Bill snuggled in Ford’s neck and then jumped back. “Okay presents time!!”

Bill led Ford to the lounge—rather, half led half dragged while complaining that Ford ‘moved too slow, like a typical old dead guy’. Ford could only laugh and move slower, simply to see his lover fret even further. The harmless sabotage went unnoticed.

“Firstly…” Bill went to a bag—the largest one. “This is the present bag and it’s filled with presents for you! Hell, you can even keep the bag!”

A bad feeling jet into Ford. Presents were exciting but presents from Bill Cipher felt more like acquired debt from a loan shark; one who didn’t hesitate to come knocking a day earlier than the due date. After much burrowing through the bag, Bill produced a small black pouch which he carefully placed in the palm of Ford’s hand. “Firstly…here you go.”

Feeling it told Ford it contained a square box. Oh no, jewellery? Dreading what may come, Ford opened it to find a custom set of Dungeons Dungeons & More Dungeons dice. An expensive looking pair. The workmanship was intricate: a black canvas embellished with explosions of romantic neon colours, making the dice resemble little galaxies. Masterful colour job; such colouring easily came across much too tawdry, but whoever had done these knew their craft.

“Custom-made in neon colours! Your favourite colours!” Bill proudly stated the obvious. “We’re gonna use them later, right? Right?”

“Oh…darling, this is…” Ford began, feeling overwhelmed. The boy had brought him presents on top of…

“Next one!” Bill waved his arms back and forth to get Ford’s attention, the verve of it leaving Ford much too smitten. His hands went into the bag again, and one after another, presents with coupled commentary avidly came at Ford.

Designer frames alike Ford’s current ones but far more elegant and adorned with gold rims. These frames were the sort Ford avoided looking at when at the optometrist—the price tag alone was enough to worsen his eyesight.

Next up: a hot chocolate maker. Of all the things…? Ford took this to mean Bill was quite nostalgic. The brand was expensive, and the warranty lasted five years.

How long would Bill and him last?
Before Bill could continue playing Santa, Ford interrupted the festivities.

“We have to talk.” Ford said, and Bill without command, took a seat on the coach, attention full on Ford and hands fidgeting—excitement no doubt the culprit.

“Darling…”

Bill’s face lit up.

“You paid off my mortgage, didn’t you?”

The *darling* smile said enough, leaving Ford with undeserved guilt at the excessive kindness. But was kindness the correct term for Bill’s actions? In retrospect, this was a fantastic strategy at cornering him. Being left in Bill’s debt would grant Bill extensive power over Ford and Bill knew that, having demonstrated this knowledge prior. Beneath Bill’s beautiful face was undoubtedly an adequate manipulator, one Ford had only caught *prismatic* glimpses off.

“Darling, you can’t do that. That is too much. Far too much. You can’t…spoil me like this.” Ford said, careful with his word choice.

“Why…why not? It’s me saying sorry and thank you for always giving me another chance.” Bill’s tone was suddenly worried and desperate, like a child who expected a harsh reprimanding.

“I’m flattered, but you can’t spend this kind of money on me.” Ford insisted, softening his voice as much as he could and Bill eased up, smiling, cheeks puffy like candy floss.

Bill stiffened up and cleared his throat. “You only had about what? A year left of payments? It’s nothing, Ford. I cut back on my designer suit budget and—actually, I blew a lot of money on you, *oh man*. Alex gave me an earful. I can’t go on vacation for a long time because of this and let me tell you, I love vacations, Ford. I look for excuses to take them but now I’m stuck here. Which is probably better since I have work to do but—”

*I’m stuck here.*

Trapped was how Bill felt. Was Ford reading too much into it? Just a slip of the tongue?

A hand took to pacifying Bill’s sudden neurotic blabbering. It quickly found company in Bill’s own, clammy—from nerves?

“Gifts are fine, but not this…not this. It makes me uncomfortable. This house is my own, do you understand? I don’t want to owe anyone anything.” Ford explained.

“But…but if I stay here weekends all the time, like we planned, then then I gotta contribute, right?”

“No, darling. You’re a guest. It doesn’t work like that.” Ford raised an eyebrow, but his consoling smile remained. “When did we decide you could stay here every weekend…?”

The rambling began once more. “No, it’s fine. I’ll even pay for renovations. Didn’t you want your own lab? By lab, I don’t mean that small thing you have currently. I mean a big one! Maybe your basement expanded into an underground lab and—”

Ford squeezed Bill’s hand, silencing him.

“You’re so generous, but…rather than say no, let me say this: it’s too soon.” Ford stroked Bill’s cheek and he nodded in acceptance, satisfied at the compromise.
“Okay…too soon. Okay that’s fine.” Bill said, rubbing circles in Ford’s hand and wrist. “But…you are happy, right? With everything?”

“Of course I am, dear. I never pegged you one to be so generous.” Acquiescing Bill’s generosity was inevitable. How long before this act of generosity became a bargaining chip?

Smiling his gratitude, Bill pulled Ford towards him, embracing him at the waist with his head bowed into Ford’s abdomen. “You’re the best, Ford. I wanted you to know that… always…”

“Doesn’t your arm hurt when you move like that?” Ford said, ruffling Bill’s hair and then neatening it once more. It would look good slicked back, Ford thought. Bill had the bone structure for it. Perhaps he should suggest that…

“Yeah…but it’s okay. Pills are working…” Bill murmured. “Presents…still got lots of presents…”

“Later. Let’s first discuss our plan for the weekend.” He pinched Bill’s cheek, making the boy yelp and then separated himself. Clearing his throat loudly, he straightened his posture to command attention; Bill’s eyes widened, interested—the effect successful.

“I’ve already planned the weekend out.” Ford began pacing like a cadet officer, voice strong, and Bill stood to attention, playing along. Ford noted Bill stood in parade rest. Smart boy. (Surely his arm must hurt?)

“Our biggest hurdle is our time constraint and the fact I’m tired from the week still. So, our activities have to remain indoors, preferably here, in my home.”

“Sir, yes sir!” Bill saluted. “Permission to speak, sir!”

Ford nodded, cheeks aching from suppressing a wide smile. “Granted!”

“Can we have pizza tonight?” Bill squeaked, bottom lip puffed out. Entirely too adorable.

“We can.” Ford said, straightening his glasses to appear serious while hoping it diverted attention from his sheepish smile. (he must’ve fiddled with his glasses multiple times and Bill surely noticed. He had to be careful to avoid looking insecure.)

“You’ll complete the tests I have printed out for you. Then we’ll move on to recreational activities. Dungeons, Dungeons and more Dungeons is affirmed. Those dice must be tested. We may or may not listen to an audio book, if I can find out we both will enjoy. A series is in order, maybe Stargate? It’s a…favourite of mine.” Ford’s persona dropped as he spoke, and so did Bill’s, confirmed by underhanded giggles.

“We can do whatever you want! As long as I get to dye your hair, Silver Fox.” Bill grinned. Said grey hair was tugged and the hand swatted away.

“Ah yes….about that…give me some more time to think on it.”

“No can do, Fordsy! It’s a signed and done deal!” Bill saluted again, earning a throaty laugh from Ford.

He couldn’t imagine anyone his own age being interested or playing along as Bill did. Age gap or not, they were compatible. Even if he was being a tad biased, it was undeniable. How he had missed Bill’s company, the magnitude of his loss during the past two weeks dawning only now on him.

Strange.
Without realizing, Ford had curved his fingers to cradle Bill’s cheek, the boy cuddling against it, eyes closed and quietly enjoying it, in a world of his own.

Was it still wrong if they were happy together? The rectitude of his desire for Bill was rooted in altruism. He’d never harm Bill, and as Bill had once said—who better for him than Ford? Thanks to him, a positive effect could clearly be seen in his young lover’s behaviour—one of many still to come now that his new-found dedication had settled in.

Mindlessly, he leaned into a kiss, Bill meeting him halfway timidly. Their hands found one another, like magnets to metal and joined steadfast. Bill’s hands broke free, encircling Ford’s waist and meeting at his lower back, his face snuggling into Ford’s neck. Always in Ford’s neck—hiding from the world in the only place safe enough. (and one of the best places to sink his teeth in)

“I love you, Ford.”

Ford’s lips and hands said ‘I love you too’.

They stayed still together, marble statues frozen in a moment of dear intimacy that scholars would write about years from now.

“I bought…casual clothes…” Bill said with uncertainty, squirming in Ford’s arms causing the hold to tighten.

“Oh?”

“Yeah…I…could never wear anything…comfortable? Always had to be ready to leave. But if I’m here, I can just relax, right?”

“Of course.”

When could he pry about Bill’s childhood? Better yet, when would Bill begin to remember clearly?

*Patience, Stanford.*

“So now I’m trying… unfashionable comfort clothing!” Bill said, sitting down. “Also, putting my suits into these shitty bags is *terrible.* It makes these creases that drive me fuckin’ nuts.”

So, Bill always wore formal clothing? Since he was a child?

“I know I said unfashionable but when you’re *this* good-looking, anything and everything looks good on you!” Bill peeped Ford through a finger-made triangle. “You don’t need to agree. I *know* you feel the same way. Ah, and now…my shoulder hurts.”

“Are you alright?” Ford asked, worried.

“Ugh, yeah yeah. Sorry Ford…these painkillers.” Bill muttered, face in his hands. “I only started taking them yesterday. Man, these side effects…”

Patting Bill’s head, Ford asked. “When were you shot?”

“Earlier this week.”

“And you only got your medication yesterday?”

“No…I had it but didn’t wanna take it. If I’m out of it, Evan might fuck me or something. Can’t take that chance.” Bill confided.
This reveal angered Ford. Bill couldn’t even take medication for pain without worrying about his well-being. Further confirmation the environment Bill spent much of his time in contributed to his behaviour and interactions with the outside world. Not that Ford needed further evidence, he’d collected enough but the more, the better.

“Darling…I’m…maybe you should…lock your room door at night? You have to find a way to keep yourself safe.” Ford said, solicitousness smothering his anger, and Bill looked up.

“Yeah…I mean, I do but…I don’t like being alone at night.”

Xanther’s behaviour had not been enough for Bill to discard him. Viscous to the very end. Getting Bill Cipher off you was a feat only those of a certain calibre could accomplish.

“Have you been throwing up?”

“Yeah….as usual.” Bill didn’t seem bothered.

“We have to do something about that.” Ford resolved, rubbing Bill’s head, the boy swaying to the touch’s rhythm. “You’ve associated crying and vomiting and we need to break that association.”

“If you say so, Dr. Pines.” Bill said, a tinge of mischief flavouring his voice. “Have I mentioned I can’t wait for your hands to be all over me?”

“I’m quite sure it’s going to hurt when I do that.”

“Even better!”

“You’re in a good mood today.” Ford noted. Bill was giddy and all smiles, an endearing sight that did wonders to fade recent memories of a tearful Bill crumbling in his arms.

“Of course! I’m seeing you! I’ve been waiting to see you for the past two whole weeks!” The grin Bill wore relaxed until only the suggestion of it remained on his lips.

“Another thing, let me get it out the way before I forget: Ford, you make a lot of money. Or have.” Bill’s gaze hooked into Ford. “Why wasn’t your mortgage paid off? You could afford it. Aren’t you a millionaire tycoon? Why are you still middle class?”

Caught off-guard, Ford stammered. “Ah…that’s…w—well…”

“What’s with the simple life?”

Ford cleared his throat, re-assembling himself with faux-composure. “My parents took quite a bit of my money, and I donated much of it.” He explained, wanting this topic to pass by before regret came for him again.

“You know you should pay your own shit off before you worry about others.” Bill griped, anger sewn thinly between the words.

“It’s nothing.”

“So, what’d your folks do with it? A million is a million, Ford. Or whatever you gave them.”

“My father invested it and then we learnt he has no talent for investing.”

A loud ‘yikes’ came from Bill, his eyes popping comically. “So, what happened? Are they still alive?”
“Yes. It took…quite a toll on them. I’d rather not discuss this right now.” Ford said, and to his surprise, Bill, nodded and then shrugged with new disinterest.

“Ford, you’re old as hell. Sixty plus and your mortgage wasn’t even paid off! How would you have retired?!”

An excellent point, but Ford had no intention of retiring any time soon. Why, he’d never felt as good as he had recently, despite being far past his prime.

“This is a new house. I mean, I moved in here…a few years ago…” A terrible excuse, but the only one on hand.

“You could’ve paid it off!” Bill said, distressed at Ford’s indifference towards his own well-being. To see Bill worried about Ford’s financial state was odd—pleasant though, in its rawness.

A sudden mood change had Bill shining. “Luckily you have me. You won’t have to ever worry about money. I’ll take care of you! Even when you’re all old and wrinkly and on life support!”

Maudlin promises of devotion until the grave were universally considered romantic, but when coming from Bill, they held a frightening element; a trick to make the receiver more pliant with his subversive behaviour? Tolerating mistreatment in fear of loneliness was common. As if Ford was that lonely, and Bill knew this. Ford had his pride. Did that imply Bill’s devotion was sincere in its profession? But it must not be taken out of context: he was confessing it to Gaspard Giordano, his grandfather whose mask Ford wore in Bill’s eyes.

And he keeps forgetting—everything is linked to Gaspard. Only once Bill stopped the association, could Ford accurately comprehend his behaviour in relation to Ford himself.

“I’ll take care of you…aren’t you lucky you’re with someone so young?” Bill’s body language: confidently slouched, eyes sleek and lips compressed, reminded Ford of Gaspard but the words and affectionate tone used conveyed an entirely different message; one of rigid devotion.

“Once you see how useful I am, you’ll never let me go.”

He’d forgotten the extent of how cute Bill could be.

“You don’t have to be useful, you only have to—” Ford began carefully, Bill’s eyebrows raising in anticipation.

A binder lay atop the table and Ford pointed to it. “Take the test. Get it out of the way.”

“Aye, sir!” Bill took the binder and sat back down; he began flipping through it with exaggerated ‘oohs’ and ‘aahhs’, making it obvious he held no interest in its contents. Ford cleared his throat, and Bill fluttered his long eyelashes with an innocent smile. Tossing both the fake interest and binder aside, he snatched Ford’s fingers, guided them to his mouth and began to suck on them; softly before ardour took over. He sucked each as though it were a Christmas candy cane, checking Ford’s face between sucks to see if he’d made the naughty list yet.

“Do you like this…?” Bill purred between sucks. Rolling his tongue around each individual finger was a favourite of his, particularly Ford’s sixth finger. It received special attention as Bill took it deep into his mouth, sending hums into the skin—but Ford’s mind refused to relent.

“It’s…strange? I’m not sure…” Ford mused.

“Want me to suck something else?” At the last two words, Bill’s eyes went to Ford’s crotch.
“Darling…finish the test, you aren’t getting out of this.” Ford lectured, and Bill groaned, pushing the hand back to Ford.

“You shove your fingers into my mouth all the time when you fuck me. What’s the big deal?”

“It’s appropriate during those times. As of now, my fingers don’t belong in your mouth.” Ford eyed the hand still-wet with saliva. An urge to put it into his mouth, simply to tease and throw off Bill, came to mind but was discarded. That would be encouragement. “I’m limiting you to three sexual remarks a day.”

Bill gagged out a laugh. “What?”

“You heard me. It’s getting out of hand.”

“Ford, you can’t be serious. Sexual remarks are the very essence of my existence you can’t—”

“You said you’d do whatever I wanted, didn’t you?”

“Well, yeah but…”

“Then?” Ford said. “I’d like to spend time with you that doesn’t involve your thoughts wandering to sex.”

Observing Bill’s reluctance, Ford added. “I’ll tell you what. For every day you go without making sexual remarks or steering the conversation towards sex, I’ll fulfil a request you have.”

“Seriously?!” Bill was one octave away from yelling. “You’ll do anything I want?!”

“Yes. But it must be within my comfort zone. It must not be something I’ve already expressed disinterest in. I won’t hurt you and no sex.”

“I already have something!” Bill tugged on his wrist as a wanting child would to their parent. “I want to attend your lectures for a day.”

Ford smiled down at Bill, abashed. “I’m sure you already have…when you were following me.”

“Yes but I want to while you know I’m there.” Bill kept tugging on Ford’s wrist excitedly, making him appear appallingly cute. Ford’s smile broadened.

“If that’s what you want.” Ford said; Bill pulled his hand to his face and kissed a few fingers.

“Wow…every day I don’t fuck around, I get you to do something. After the lectures one, I think I’d like to take a trip with you somewhere, for the weekend. Maybe a bed and breakfast? Nice and simple…” Bill mused, tilting his face to allow Ford’s hand to lay atop his cheek.

“Don’t get ahead of yourself now. Remember: no sexual remarks.”

“Got it!”

Success. But Ford would have to wait and see how fruitful it truly was. A reward system made for good guidance, but Bill believed himself entitled to things without needing to earn them.

“Okay well…then…now… I’m going to have a nap on the couch.” Bill yawned and elaborated before Ford could complain. “Pills. I’ll do the test when I wake up. Promise.”

Ford noticed his blazer had remained on and when he sought to remove it, Bill declined. The
gunshot must have him feeling defensive, Ford thought, letting it go.

“You should lay in bed.”

“No…wanna have a nap in the same room as you.”

Further attempts at convincing were halted, and Bill was soon asleep. Curious, Ford checked the bag Bill had pulled gifts from and found it still quite full. All of this was presents for him?

A peek:

A cashmere polo neck, in a dark red.
A thick black coat(?) He didn’t want to pull it out, in case Bill would find out.
A leather bound journal complete with a fountain pen from an well-known brand.
A leather wallet.
A polaroid camera(?)

How much money had Bill spent?

His eyes then wandered over to the rectangular object 8ball had left. He’d forgotten to ask about that. A look was out of the question, the wrapping paper preventing any previews.

Patience, Stanford.

An hour later and Bill had finally woken. He left for the bathroom to rinse his mouth out, complaining about sleep breath. Bill’s impressive oral hygiene would’ve come as a surprise if his superficiality had never been brought to light. But it was unfair to assume everything healthy Bill did held its roots in shallowness.

“So…did you touch yourself while I was away?” Bill spread an arm over the couch’s rim and crossed his legs. “I want all the dirty details.”

Ford switched his monitor off and spun in his chair to face Bill. “I didn’t.”

“You’re lying, Stanford.”

“I’m…not.” Ford tweaked his glasses while hoping he could evade further questioning.

“You are. I didn’t peg you for a filthy fucking liar. This is new.”

The aggression surprised Ford. Bill’s acrid voice felt ill-suited; up until now, he’d displayed no such behaviour. What had been the catalyst?

“Have you…been watching me again, Bill?” The assurance with which Bill addressed the topic was suspicious.

Bill laughed, slapping his knee. “Knew I could smoke you out! All I do is insist on something and the truth comes out! So, what did you think about?”

Oldest trick in the book and Ford had fallen for it.

“I…nothing. I focused on the physical sensations alone and—” Ford began, but Bill wasn’t having it.

“Try again, Stanford. It’s fun to smoke you out the first time, but then it’s just repetitive. Tell me.”
“Bill… did you forget our agreement?”

Once sprightly eyes darkened. “Hurry up, or I’ll make you tell me.”

Ford gave in, and told him.

“Ah, preparing yourself mentally for the big day? Making sure your dick can get hard at all the right times?” Bill’s eyes had narrowed dangerously, tone now spiteful. The sudden change offset Ford, and past circumstances had him mentally preparing himself for physical confrontation.

“You’re angry. Why?”

“I’m not.”

“You are. I can tell. What’s wrong?”

Bill stood up, looked down at Ford and said. “I’m gonna go pick up something from the store.”

He turned to leave but Ford stopped him with a quick grab at his wrist. “Tell me why you’re mad. I’m not a mind-reader, darling. What’s wrong?”

Bill hesitated until Ford placed a hand on his shoulder. A deep breath, and his posture relaxed noticeably.

“Dunno. Just felt a little antsy, no big.”

“You really are scared, aren’t you?” Ford asked and Bill quickly looked away, a defensive smile paper-bagged over his face.

“Darling, we don’t have to at all.”

“Ford, come on. Why would I be scared? As if.”

“Then what’s wrong?”

Seconds of silence passed and then Bill was on him, kissing him; the pressure used as though Bill sought to climb into Ford, into his mouth and down his throat— exiting out his belly, disembowelling him in party streamers of violent red. Tongue in, out, in—deep, deeper—Ford’s choking.

The force Bill used continued to suffuse Ford’s thoughts with distasteful violence, no happy place safe enough to escape from the killer.

“Do you want to? Right now…? We can re-enact that fantasy of yours…” Bill breathed against his lips, his words were threatening, as if daring Ford to say yes.

“N-n-o…” Ford barely managed to get out with Bill’s tongue constantly filling his mouth hoping to prevent an answer because silence, to Bill, meant yes.

Finally, Ford managed. “Darling, you don’t…you don’t have…to prove anything to me.”

Bill let go, turning away swiftly. Face hidden.

“If you’re worried or scared, tell me. I won’t think less of you. I’m not your friends.”

Bill sighed loudly and dropped back onto the couch. The confession then began. “I’m enjoying what we’re doing, you know? I mean, it’s not boring, even if I say it is but fuck, you know that. I
wouldn’t be jumping into your pants every second if you were a lousy lay.”

Bill’s leg shook anxiously.

“But, once we go a little further…it’s just, I like this, but. Is it because you hardly fuck? Is that it? You’re like a third virgin twice removed or whatever? Is that why this is okay? But once you get back into it, this isn’t going to be okay anymore, right?”

Distraught, Bill’s voice began to crack; barely audible but Ford heard it.

“Then this is off the menu entirely. And—and, fuck if I know Ford.”

This was why Bill hadn’t initiated anything sexual upon his return, despite Ford assuming he would. Bill was scared.

Ford waited a few moments before speaking. “I think I understand.”

“Do you? Then explain it to me because I sure fucking don’t.”

“Darling—”

“Uuuugh.” Bill groaned at the word. “Forget it. I’m just…I haven’t been sleeping well. You know how it is. It’s nothing.”

“Even if we… for lack of better word, consummate relationship, we don’t have to have sex all the time. I’m content with whatever you prefer. I have no qualms. In fact, we can even never do anything sexual again.”


“No, clearly.” Ford smiled, the warmth of it flushed Bill’s face with healthy colour.

Bill’s laughter was winsome this time. “I believe you… when you say we don’t have fu—uh, be intimate? You did spend several hundred years being pretty much celibate. Just like that, uh, Tesla guy yeah?”

“I’m a fan of his work.” Ford smiled broader, once more impressed at Bill’s arbitrary knowledge.

“Figured.”

“He remained celibate because he was a misogynist though. A product of his time.”

“Yikes.” Bill’s eyes darted around the room. “Save it for your students.”

“Listen…” Ford began, but stopped midsentence. Bill was drinking from a flask. “Bill, stop. I don’t want you drinking here.”

Bill paused mid sip, eyes wide and brows raised. “Oops?”

“And…why are you drinking when you take medication?” Ford fought to control his voice. How irresponsible.

“I’m not supposed to?”

“No! Let me see what you’re taking.”
Bill produced his painkillers and Ford wasted no time scrutinizing them thoroughly. Pain medication in general was not meant to be consumed alongside alcohol, but this brand even more so. Even if said mixing occurred in the stomach, Ford was certain it was dangerous. Better safe than sorry.

“You cannot drink with these. I’m keeping them. I’ll give them as directed, and you won’t be drinking while you’re here. Are we clear?”

Bill rolled his eyes and nodded.

“Madness…painkillers with alcohols…” Ford adjusted his glasses. “This reckless behaviour.”

“Sorry, dad.”

“After everything we’ve been through, can you not act so patronizing when I express concern for you?”

“Yeah yeah, whatever. I like it…when you worry about me.” Bill made a reach for Ford; Ford assumed his hands would go for his belt but they instead went for his free hand.

Clutching the hand delicately, Bill smiled. “You’re the best, Ford.”

Ford returned the smile, and slipped the vile of pills into his pocket where it would remain for the duration of the weekend.

“I’m glad to see our…heart-to-heart we had made a difference.”

“Huh?” Bill’s smile disappeared. “What heart to heart?”

“The last time we saw one another. Our whole weekend, in fact.”

“That never happened, Ford.” Bill’s voice toughened once more.

“What?”

“Everything sappy and whatever that occurred, never happened.”

“You have to eventually admit you have a problem, Bill.” Ford frowned. “You can’t keep denying things when they happen. That’s not how reality works.”

“Oh it is. Reality is subjective, Ford. Pretty much an illusion since perception is everything. If I say it didn’t happen, it didn’t happen. Don’t bring it up again.” Bill growled, losing patience.

“Darling…”

Bill’s eyes narrowed, neutral expression fading into a sneer. “Use that word again and you’ll make me angry, Ford.”

“You cannot continue like this. I warned you. If you don’t do something about this, this can’t continue.”

“IQ, I just paid off the remaining third of your house. Maybe you oughta shut the fuck up and pay me a little more gratitude.”

This again.

“What am I supposed to do with you?”
Bill stood up, and Ford’s heart backflipped into his throat, then fell into his lurching stomach. “You owe me.”

There it was. The leverage of Bill’s generosity. Exactly as predicted.

“Ford, come on. I can make your life so much better if you quit with this daddy shit you’re doing.” Bill protested, the irony of his own words lost on him considering he was the one who enjoyed being coddled like a suckling infant. (perhaps an exaggeration) The age difference made Ford a convenient scapegoat until Bill came to terms with his preferences. That is, if he ever came to terms with them.

And Bill was resisting again. Aggressively. The drinking was a strong factor. Alcohol coupled with Bill’s excessive denial made for a baleful combination. His fuse could be lit within seconds should Ford cause the slightest friction, and friction was inevitable with one as incendiary as Bill Cipher.

“We’ll talk when you’re fully sober.” Ford stated sternly.

“I am sober. I just had a few shots.” Bill smirked, smile lopsided.

“No, you aren’t.”

“You are so overreacting…” Bill’s arms wrapped round Ford’s neck, tongue dipping into Ford’s neck to test the waters. Ford recoiled from the action, angering and confusing Bill.

“Why are you giving me the cold shoulder…?”

Ford said nothing.

“Come on, Ford…” Bill pleaded, more desperate licks in Ford’s neck. Ford only squirmed, unable to find the mettle to push Bill off. It would only fan the new-born fire. And pushing Bill would hurt him, his arm still wounded.

“I-I can’t do this with you.” Ford breathed as soon as Bill eased up, stepping back until he hit the refrigerator. Bill followed with suave steps and Ford felt as though they were dancing, with Bill leading. (The tango?)

“Do what?”

“This. This isn’t right.” Ford turned his head to avoid contact with Bill’s face: to the side—right, then left, then right— but Bill kept following his movements, trapping him finally.

“Oh man, are you still hung up about the age thing?” Bill whispered.

“No…it’s…” Ford gripped Bill’s waist, hoping the pressure could subdue but Bill ignored it. “You’re intoxicated, that’s why.”

Bill nodded acceptingly. “Oh. Yeah, okay. You get hung up about that. Then later tonight…?”

“You’re injured.” Ford said, wincing as Bill’s hands became bolder: rubbing at his crotch, touches anticipatory and teasing.

Affronted, and finally accepting Ford’s disinterest, Bill pulled back. “My shoulder. What’s with you? You’re like…shrivelling up when try and touch you.”

“I told you, this isn’t right.”

“Did you find religion while I was gone or something?”
“No…it’s…it’s your…history. I can’t. It’s taking advantage of you.”

“He says while he jerked his cock off to thoughts of fucking me up the ass—only yesterday, hm? Or whenever the fuck you yanked your meat, you sick fuck.” The distaste on Bill’s tongue travelled onto Ford’s own—sour and bitter. Sex was always such a filthy topic with Bill.

Seeing Ford’s further lack of response, Bill feigned hurt.

“You know there’s no one better for me than you.” Bill cupped Ford’s face. “You know that. I bet you’d fuck me better. I bet all I need is a few good hard fucks from the great Stanford Pines.”

Turning to sex when feeling overwhelmed. Typical Bill.

Bill’s voice lowered, smile now unnerving. “I’ve been patient with you, haven’t I? Do you think you can keep making excuses as for why you won’t put out?”

There’s a hand trespassing beneath Ford’s sweater now. Bill had bought the land beneath the cotton and now had come to claim it.

“So if it’s my history…what exactly of it is making you so resistant?” Bill inquired with false naivety.

“You…know…” Ford mumbled.

Nails pushed into his skin, reddening it. “Say it.”

Ford said it, in the least amount of words possible; Bill’s marble face never changing throughout.

“So…if I force myself on you, right now. Give you a good hard fuck. And then beat the ever-loving shit out of you, will that make us even? Is it then okay for you to fuck me?”

Ford’s heart began hammering itself against his ribcage like a riled inmate, but he willed his face to show no indication of the freedom-hungry fear. Keeping a straight face, he said. “I can’t tell if you’re being serious.”

“I’m dead serious, Ford. I’ll fuck you right now and fix this issue of yours. Well? Want me inside you?” Bill offered, the threat painted black and blue in levity.

Bill was injured and Ford was still stronger than him. These threats were empty, even if Bill was not aware.

But Bill never made empty threats.

“You’re armed, aren’t you?” Ford asked.

“Of course.” Bill smiled broadly with those bed-room eyes that belonged on a cover of Vogue.

The reason Bill had not removed his blazer when he’d had a nap. Hiding the gun.

Bill continued to leer at him, waiting. Ford sucked in his stomach, calming himself, and slipped his hands into Bill’s blazer, feeling until he touched leather and then cold metal. Bill loved it, his eyes alternating between Ford’s face and hands.

Prohibiting fear to affect his expression, knowing his faltering was Bill’s end goal, Ford peeled off a very compliant Bill’s blazer, then went on to unclip the holster where the gun lay dormant—his actions fluid, void of hesitation. The gun was a different one than he recalled from the hotel. Silver,
I’ll hold onto this while you’re here. You don’t need it.” Ford said and Bill didn’t reply, still keeping Ford contained in the area between his arms and the fridge.

Thinning the thickening silence, finally, Bill said. “Keep going. I still have more items for you to remove.”

“No, Bill.”

Ford managed to place the gun on the kitchen counter, before he was pulled gently back into place by Bill.

“I’m not a little kid, Ford.” He kissed Ford, biting and pulling on the bottom lip as he parted. The throbbing now present in Ford’s lips reminiscent of the ache in Bill’s own belly—an ache notorious for its appetite and selective palette.

“Don’t feel guilty. You’ve been nothing but good for me, haven’t you?” Bill asserted. “You know you have. Including your vanilla fucking. You ever hear of magic healing cock?”

A hand rubbed Ford’s crotch and received no response. “The rumours are true.”

“Instead of doing what you think is right, what do you really want? You want to fuck me, right?”

Bill brought a hand up to smother a wicked laugh. The black of his tattoos synchronized with the new black of his hair. “You fucking perv. Just say it and do it already. Do me.”

Bill slammed an open palm into the fringe behind Ford, emitting a thunderous sound close to Ford’s ear that had his nerves jumping for dear life.

“Did I scare you?” he whispered, smiling crookedly, breathing the odd chuckle out.

“No…no, your body instinctively reacts to close ranged loud noises.” Ford’s voice was steadier than he had prepared himself for. Thank God.

“So, you do have basic human instinct, then do you? Why’s your dick not working then?”

Propping his finger under Ford’s chin, Bill smiled: empty, and finger now cold. Ford slapped it away, toughening his stare to the best of his merit.

“Bill, I’m tired of this. I’ve told you as straight forward as I could. Not yet.” Holding Bill’s tie, Ford gave a jerk, pulling the boy forward towards him. A sudden change occurred: Bill’s confidence eroded, revealing ingenuous body language; he now resembled a rabbity child more than a gangster. A child who’d overstepped his boundaries, now worried for the consequences of his rebellion.

“Don’t disappoint me with juvenile behaviour.” Their closeness allowed Ford to pull Bill into an inescapable embrace. “Everything’s going to be fine.”

Ford’s hold was protective, and caging. As long as Bill remained within the cage called Stanford Pines, he couldn’t hurt anyone. Least of all, Ford.

Bill dropped his eyes, and whispered. “What the fuck is wrong with you?” He pulled away, turning his back to Ford. “Fuck. You’re—fuck, what if someone finds out about us? And uses you to get to me? What if—what if…they take like, an arm and a leg and mail it to me. What if, fuck, what if they just kill you? What if I accidentally kill you?”

Fearful of the future. Imagined scenarios.
“Sorry Ford…” Bill repeated sorry over and over, voice breaking near the end and Ford worried he’d had begun to cry. “Fuck, ignore my rambling. I’m sorry.”

“I know you are. Just behave.” Ford placed a reassuring hand on Bill’s shoulder. “I told you multiple times: you don’t need to act aggressive with me. I won’t hurt you.”

“Those are just words.”

“My actions align with them, don’t they?”

“Yeah…” Bill’s hand touched his cheek, face morose.

“Listen, listen, alright, darling? Then we won’t have to do this ever again. So listen.” Tact was discarded—he would say it straight. No more coating or shortening his words.

“When I remember the old Bill and I look at you. They are the same to me. You’ve been raped multiple times. You act excessively dominant to protect yourself. Promiscuous to take control of your sexuality again.” Ford said, reading off the list in his mind. “You’ve become inured to that sort of treatment from…”

Pause.

Bill was becoming angry, but Ford could see him fight against it—breathing deeply, evenly, calming himself. An improvement.

“Bill, I understand. Under all of this is a very sweet boy. I’ve seen him and I’m fond of him. But what you’re doing to me has to stop. No more threatening me. I cannot stress this enough, darling. I am at my limit with you.”

Bill eased up, eyes distraint and glossy enough to reflect Ford in them. Had he inadvertently conjured up painful memories for Bill?

“Why do you always have to do this psych analysis shit, Ford?” Bill bowed his head into Ford’s neck. “I hate it when you do that, when you do this. Stop trying to quantify me, Doctor Lecter.”

“I can’t help it.”

Bill sighed.

“I don’t really get where you get that shit from, but I guess you’re the one with a doctorate in psychology…” Bill said. “Don’t…use the r word. I don’t like it.”

“It’s the truth. You were raped. By a family member no less. And I’m under the assumption Evan might’ve, too, and you aren’t telling me the truth.”

“No…Evan never did…I don’t think so.” Confusion creased Bill’s face, and he hid further into Ford’s neck.

“Bill, he’s someone that means a lot to you and you have a habit of defending terrible people.”

“I’m sorry…”

“Don’t apologize, my darling. It’s normal to feel defensive about this. But just talk to me. Tell me the truth.”

Bill brought up the hand he held, positioning it at his left cheek and leaning into it. The hold around
Ford’s wrist tightened—bit by bit, until it became painful. Ford didn’t flinch.


“Bill, that isn’t going to work.”

With a thumb Bill gestured to his gun on the counter. “I’ll fuck you with that if you bring it up again.”

“You won’t.”

Bill shoved Ford against the fridge, growling. “Try me.”

Out came his knife, as dazzling as ever, the main star, in a silver sequenced dress. He pointed it at Ford, then let the blade’s tip rest beneath Ford’s strong chin.

“Try me.”

Ford didn’t seem scared. Gift-wrapping a hand around Bill’s wrist, he easily disarmed Bill once again. The knife went into Ford’s pocket, bringing his hands to rest on Bill’s shoulder when done.

How brave he had become since interacting with Bill.

“There’s no need to be ashamed. You did nothing wrong.” Ford’s tone was sincere and melodious. Bill was frightened, that’s all. The pacifist approach would work.

Ford wasn’t scared.

Ford wasn’t scared and Ford took his knife.

Ford wasn’t scared and took his knife and gun.

“Are you listening to me, Bill? You did nothing wrong when you confided in me.”

What the fuck was Ford talking about? Why was Ford always talking? So much for being a quiet introvert. The man never shut his mouth.

“Crying isn’t shameful, Bill.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

Crying. When had Bill Cipher ever cried? It was a dream, hallucination—those fever-dreams you get when you get fucked up. He had too much to drink. A little too much vodka and—no, wasn’t it rum?

Fuck, he was gonna have to kill Ford, wasn’t he?

“You don’t need to worry.” Ford’s voice is soft, comforting. “It’ll be our secret. You like secrets, don’t you? Your surname is Cipher, after all.”

“I won’t tell anyone, and you won’t tell anyone. This will be between us.” Ford said, and kept talking but Bill stopped hearing.

Bill took a step back.

No.
What the fuck was this?

No…

*sarà il nostro segreto.*

He grabbed Ford by the shirt, the man still aloof and nearly unresponsive. “Did you fuck me? Did you? When I was out of my mind? You did, didn’t you?”

“Bill I—”

“I don’t remember. I don’t fucking remember. What did you do to me? *What did you do?*”

That’s why Ford didn’t care about fucking him. Ford had already fucked him. Probably did it on the regular whenever he was out of it. Just like Evan probably did.

They probably shared stories in secret of shit they did to him.


Definitely.


Bill let go, and Ford grabbed his wrists. Six fingers.

Oh.

“You don’t remember what happened?”

No no, I don’t. No. No.

“I…I…let me go.” Bill said, without attempting to escape the hold. Ford might get angry.

No, Ford never gets angry. Right?

“You don’t recall?”

*Don’t run away, Bill.*

“I do. I mean, kinda?”

Dazed, Bill sat down on the couch, Ford crouching in front of him.

Why aren’t you touching me, Ford? With those…

Six fingers.

“You don’t remember? When you have these episodes? The times you throw up and cry, you don’t properly remember them? Am I correct?” Ford asked.

“I guess…?” Bill muttered. “Fuck, sorry I threatened you. It’s just…”

Shit. He shouldn’t have drank before coming here.

“I…”
“You don’t know how to deal with your emotions.” Ford said. “That much is clear.”

Fuck off, Ford.

“What do you remember?”

“I remember throwing up.”

“Is that all?”

“And you helping me.”

Ford went into The Ford Zone; deep in thought, his intense stare occasionally wandering to Bill’s face. Bill felt naked, as though his skin were transparent and Ford could see through everything. Not that there was much to see.

For a guy with bad eyesight, Ford sure saw a lot.

“I’ll tell you what happened. You weren’t feeling well. You cried and threw up, and then I put you to bed. We never had sex, but you wanted to. I said no, as I always do.” Ford said, then broke his decisive expression in favour of a silly one.

“No, that’s—was I too blunt? You… you can’t trust what I say, right? You need a better way to know the truth…”

He thought of Xanthar, then of Ford, who knelt in front of him.

Evan. Stanford.

Xanthar. Sixer.

It was okay to trust Ford.

“I believe you.” Bill said. “Sorry…I’m stressed out. My memory…hasn’t been the greatest lately.”

Ford rubbed his cheek. The man loved to do that, loved touching him. “Don’t ever worry about me taking advantage of you. It won’t ever happen.”

You could tell Ford was a nerd by his hands. Soft, not having endured much manual labour.

“I’m not interested in having sex with you. It’s difficult for me to know when you are sound enough to consent. For now…” Ford kissed his forehead, then his lips, lightly. “This is the most we’ll do.”

“The most? Kissing?”

“Let’s talk about this later, in bed.” Ford said. “Now, let me remind you of our deal. No more sex talk and I’ll do something you want. Do you still want to play?”

“Yes…I do… sorry Ford…” Bill muttered. “Hey…uh…can I have… like...how about three tries per a day? Like, if I mess up three times, I can’t win a reward for the day? Just as a starter for the weekend? Afterwards, I won’t mess up at all…”

Ford planted several kisses along his face, beginning at his hairline and going downward; Bill’s eyes closed into the warmth. “You get three tries per a day.”

“Thanks…you’re the best…”
Ford was so nice, so kind.

And wanted him to shut up. Who wouldn’t? Who’d wanna listen to his sob fucking story? Over and over. Change the station.

“One more thing: if you ever want to talk to me about sex, as in, your past, something that concerns you—anything of that nature, that’s fine. What I mean when I say no sex, I mean don’t attempt to seduce me or make lewd comments towards me. We can talk about sex, if you want to. Whatever bothers you, and such.”

I love you, Ford.

Bill breathed out loudly. “Oh…okay. I thought…I thought…thanks…I was…I kinda felt like you were…trying to get me to shut up…about stuff…”

Shit, he blurted that out.

“No no, my darling. The opposite. Talk to me about anything and everything. I want to listen to you. Just don’t steer it in a way where you want to have sex with me. That’s all.”

Is this another dream? Can’t be.

He thought of Xanthar again, and the time wasted. Somewhere, he wished it was Xanthar in Ford’s place. Wasn’t he entitled to that? Entitled to Xanthar’s affection? His love? After everything they’d been through together…

More entitled than Kryptos, that’s for certain.

…

Whatever.

“So…let me…give you the rest of your presents. And…show you the thing 8baller brought.” He took Ford’s hand and led him to the lounge.

“Bill, give me your flask first.”

It was given without reluctance. Ford really did care about him. It was best to… do what Ford said.

For real this time.

The rest of Ford’s presents were given, and the polaroid camera was for them both. Bill wanted a photo of them together to keep in his wallet and Ford blushed at the idea. Red cheeks were warm to Bill’s lips. Ford was somehow always warm. Was that why his face always appeared flushed?

The item by 8ball was next.

Bill excitedly peeled off the wrapping, revealing the portrait of a face that should be somewhat familiar to Ford. A young boy, possibly Bill’s age, with stark black hair speckled blonde. He held a strong aquiline nose that decorated an oval face, full lips and sleek high cheek-bones which were softened by puffy cheeks that added a youthful varnish. The boy stood tall, eyes off to the side with a light-handed touch of a smile upon his lips.

“So have a look. A good, **hard** look.” Bill offered, gesturing like a showman to an attraction.
Ford leaned closer to the painting, enraptured. “Who is this?”

“Me! Before surgery.”

“This is you?” Ford spoke with awe, fiddling with his glasses as he leaned even closer.

“It’s okay to say I wasn’t as cute as I am now.”

“No… you were…but yes, your new face is definitely… a bit more conventionally attractive.”

Wow, Ford was sweet. A real sweetheart. The kind of sweet that if beaten with a baseball bat, candy spilled out in swarms. Piñata.

“You better believe it.” Bill grinned.

Apparently done sizing up Bill’s old face, Ford stood upright. “I like this face…it’s…strange. But looks like your father, yes.”

It looked like his father and Ford didn’t appear bothered.

Ford took Bill’s face in a hand, fingers and eyes harmonizing their movements to analyse every feature, comparing them to the Bill in the painting.

“Your lips are yours. And your cheek bones. Your nose is different and your jaw shape. Your eye area…is it a brow lift? There’s more distance between your eyes and eyebrows in your current face.”

“Yes and yes.” Bill confirmed, enjoying Ford’s examining touches. The man had an eye for detail. “Hey, now you know these lips are 100% natural.”

He puckered up his lips for a kiss and to his surprise, Ford took the offer. Why did kisses have to end? Why did kisses from Stanford Pines ever need to end?

“I could tell they were real. You have little lines on them. Fake lips have a smooth surface, as injections tend to smooth out the lips, causing the normal texture to become flatter. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule…” Ford rambled, face flushed.

“Wow, you really do know everything.” Bill said, impressed. What didn’t Ford know?

With a tap on Ford’s arm, Bill reminded him. “Quid pro quo?”

“Oh yes…” Ford left for his desk and returned with a thin bundle of polaroid photographs held loosely in his hand. “I kept these one side, knowing you’d ask for them. Here’s me, at various ages. I marked them at the back.”

Bill accepted them giving the backs a once over to confirm the dates and ages.

13, 20, 32, 40…

“You knew I’d ask huh?”” Bill arched an eyebrow and then inspected the photos themselves. The one labelled ‘twenty’ caught his eye first. “Huh…this was you at twenty?”

Stanford Pines at twenty years old. He stood awkwardly outside of what Bill assumed to be his house with an equally awkward smile. The house was forgettable, in a rustic colour, while Ford himself was strikingly attractive; chocolate brown hair, same old masculine features. Bill thought the insipidly plainness of the background did wonders to accentuate Ford’s beauty. But… this face. He’d seen it before, or one very similar—but where?
“You were really cute...for a nerd. I’m impressed. How did you even protect your virginity for so long?”

Ford laughed, blushing again.

No, he’s seen this face before. Up close and personal. He’s fucked this boy before. How is that even possible?

“Hey Ford… I’m sure I’ve dreamt of you, maybe. You look familiar…” Bill joked, while wondering if he had indeed dreamt of a younger Ford. The face felt too recognisable. The sort of recognisable you never forgot because of how intimate the encounter had been.

Bill moved onto the next photo.

Thirty-two. Less awkward; this Ford had confidence bonded to his bones, shown in his strong posture holding him tall skyward. Still handsome, but more seasoned. Arguably better this way. Bill preferred them well done.

Forty years old. Ford’s face looked nearly identical now, save for the grey hair. The man had barely aged in twenty years. What luck. Ford had to teach Bill his secrets.

Thirteen, the one that held the least interest. Young Ford was at some sort of party, dressed in a suit and held up high on a chair while faceless relatives below popped colourful confetti everywhere.

“Hey, birthday party? Your tween self.” Bill smiled.

“Oh, no. Bar Mitzvah.”

“What? Isn’t that a Jew thing?”

“I was raised Jewish.”

_Holy fucking shit._

“Seriously? You never said anything.” Bill said, seeing Ford in a new and very religious light.

“I consider it to be irrelevant. It’s not part of who I am anymore.” Ford said, with obvious disinterest and Bill opted to bring it up later again. This was too juicy to pass up.

While Bill ogled the photos, he noticed in his peripheral that Ford was fiddling with the painting. The frame was repositioned, and then Ford took out his cell phone, aimed it and with a few clicks, took multiple photos. Bill watched, intrigued.

“Watcha doing?”

Ford fumbled a bit and then showed him: his wallpaper was now the portrait of the old Bill.

Bill frowned. “I’m cuter now. Take a photo of me now and use it.”

“No, I’d like to use this one. It’s well-done.”

“8baller will be so happy to hear you’re fawning over his work.”

He would. Jason would go bonkers. He always went bonkers at the slightest bit of praise.

“He’s exceptionally talented.” Ford said, admiring the painting once more.
“Yadada… I gotta go out and buy the hair dye, now that I know your colour. Wanna come with me?”

Ford winced at the prospect of dyed hair before sighing in defeat. “I’ll drive, you’re injured after all.”

“I can drive, Ford but I’m not complaining…” Bill eskimo-kissed him, Ford seeming already tired and smothered.

“Just let me change into less conspicuous clothes.” Bill left for the room, declining Ford’s offer of help. This surprise was long overdue.

Dressing wasn’t as difficult as he expected, and the new clothes went on effortlessly, requiring far less time and hassle than formal clothing.

All ready, he stepped out to greet Ford. Standing in blue jeans and a red and white baseball jacket over a plain white t-shirt, he raised his arms for judgement. “Well?”

Ford did the owl face: eyes all wide and blinking a little too much, and then a little too little.

“You look like an entirely different person.” Ford said with an approving smile.

“Yeah? Good or bad?”

“Good. You always look good but this is different.” Ford touched his jacket while speaking. “I like it.”

Stanford Pines…

It was true; if Ford saw Bill as he was now in public, at a glance he never would think it was Bill Cipher.

Was this how Bill avoided being noticed by him in public?

Bill was in the cosmetics and toiletries section while Ford scanned the candy isle. Popcorn was a requirement, as well as jelly-beans: both kinds. A string of circular red lollypops caught his eye and he wondered if Bill would like them. Although knowing Bill, he’d attempt to seduce Ford by submitting a lollypop to deliberate vigorous sucks and licks.

He reached for a string anyway, and the young girl who stood next to him caught a glimpse of his six fingers, yelling out “Eww! What’s going on with your hand?! There’s an extra on it!”

Kids were so brutally honest; their thoughts and feelings always of luculent nature. Ford was accustomed to it, but it still stung. The encounter had Ford remembering the first time his young niece, Mabel, had seen his six fingers. As opposed to being fearful, she was enchanted and had adored it.

He smiled while thinking of his family, but it didn’t last long when he recalled what had happened to her and her brother. Lost in thought, Ford was brought back by the crispness of Bill’s voice.

“I got this, Sixer.” Bill raised a hand wielding a rolled-up newspaper and with a loud series of swats, delivered them in perfect succession to the child’s face. “Bad baby! Bad!”

Flabbergasted, Ford could only watch as Bill continued to play whack-a-mole with the child’s face.
as she tried shielding it from the blows. Eventually, the child’s mother intervened and began yelling profanities but Bill wasn’t disheartened. Rather, he seemed even more roused.

“Lady, control your children or they’ll end up victims of human trafficking!” Bill yelled. “I know a guy!”

The woman’s eyes protruded far out enough for Ford to believe they would drop out. “Sir! Learn to control your son! I’m reporting this to the manager! I could have you arrested for harassment!”

“Keep dreaming, lady! Now back off!” Bill waved the newspaper wildly. “If you think I got qualms about going toe to toe with a woman four times my age, you got another thing coming!”

The woman bubbled with rage, face redder than the lollypops Ford held in his hand. But before Ford could apologize on both of their behalves, Bill went on.

“Shoo! Shoo! Leave me and my dad alone, crazy broad!” Bill kept at it, until the woman went off, yelling for a manager.

“Be right back, Ford.” Bill said, wandering off before Ford could protest.

Within a minute or two of Bill’s disappearance, his voice blasted out of the store’s speaker. “All unattended children will be sold to the circus! I repeat! All unattended children will be sold to the circus!”

Ford laughed and laughed, until he felt wetness blur his vision and his core muscles begin to complain. He laughed: at the sheer ridiculousness of it, at the audacity of Bill, and at the gratefulness Bill had stood up for him, even if it was only to a child. (which was not something Ford personally condoned, but Bill hadn’t hurt the child. Well, not much.)

Bill reappeared with a casual. “Hey.”

“What was that?!” Ford said, still laughing and in dire need of a breather.

“Nothing. Just looking after my dad.” A playful jab that had none of the perverted undertones Bill’s words typically had. “Man, I saved you from that little gremlin like some damn hero!”

“I’m surprised you didn’t correct her.” Ford said. Clarifying that Bill and he were lovers was more in line, was more Bill.

“Nah, it’s fine. If people knew we were together, things would be weird for you, yeah? And dangerous…and whatever.” Bill shrugged.

Ford smiled, en-heartened even further. “That’s very considerate of you, Bill. Thank you.”

Bill shrugged again. “Yeah…no…big…”

When it came to paying, and dealing with the manager who’d received a waterfall of complaints and tears due to Bill’s behaviour, all Bill did was show those tattoos.

And just like that, it was over. Nothing spent and no repercussions.

This was no doubt another thing that contributed to Bill’s spoilt attitude and Ford made a note of it.

Bill loved the lollypops, and sucked enthusiastically on one the entire trip home, not a single lewd comment or gesture.
Ford reminded him of the test he had to take, and Bill groaned, saying he’d do it after they ate pizza.

Monitoring Bill’s food consumption came instinctively to Ford now that he knew of Bill’s weight issues. Bill ate quite a bit, implying he must throw up frequently to not only avoid putting on weight but to also lose weight.

Bill smiled at him, sauce at his upper lip and Ford wiped it for him.

“Test time.” Ford announced, collecting their plates and stacking them up before placing them into the sink to give them a quick rinse. He rolled his sleeves up to prevent water damage with Bill watching, captivated by the reveal and movement of Ford’s sturdy and well-defined forearms. They were quite pasty, hairy, too—he’s seen them plenty of times, but here they were, suddenly a fresh vision. Beautiful, unsullied skin; pinked at the slightest heat from the nearby water. Ford had sensitive skin, Bill guessed.

Realizing what Ford had said, he sighed as loudly and melodramatically as possible; Ford’s forearms still on his mind.

“Do I have to?”

“You do.”

“But—"

“No buts. Do it, Bill.”

Whining, Bill plopped down onto the sofa.

“You’re pretty dominant. I like that. Gives me something to break.” Bill said, watching Ford who was now at his computer.

Ford turned his attention to Bill, features addled. “Dominant?”

“Yeah, don’t play coy. You give me orders during sex all the time.”

“I don’t. I ask you to do things. That’s normal. Asking your lover.” Ford sounded offended and Bill laughed like a playground bully.

“Yeah yeah, keep denying it.”

Ford frowned. “Bill, how many people have you actually slept with? You give me the impression you aren’t as experienced as you claim to be.”

Bill scoffed loudly. “Loads. Why you questioning my history now? Because I called you a dominant? Don’t you like that?”

“It implies something I have no interest in.”

“You’re too uptight. Think of it this way: you’re good at taking the lead sometimes. Is that better? We’re both guilty of it. Some spice, some sugar…”

“That is a bit better, yes. Dominant is a word that implies something very different, Bill.”

Drumming his fingers on the sofa’s arm in agitation, Bill groaned. “Why are you going into teacher
“Because I don’t want to subjugate you. That’s the opposite of what I—nevermind. Let’s—”

“No, finish your sentence. You want to with me?” Bill’s eyes narrowed.

“I want you to get better. That sort of thing won’t do you any favours.”

“Blah blah… you’ll…still take the lead sometimes though, right? I like it when you do that. “

“Why?”

“Makes it seem like you really want me. You can be kinda aloof, Ford. Don’t know if you notice.”

“Only when compared to you, who’s overly affectionate.”

“Maybe.”

“If only you fucked as much as you talk…” Bill mused. “I’d be such a happy boy…”

Ford’s voice became harsher. “Enough, Bill. Do the test. Don’t make me ask you repeatedly.”

“Huh. Hey, go back to sucking up to me. I like it when you do that.” Bill grinned, poking at Ford’s button. “Kiss my ass in fear of your life like you used to.”

“You really have no shame, do you?”

“Did you know they make pistols that can fit in your underwear?”

“Is that a threat?”

“Depends. That do anything for you?” Bill pouted and Ford hardened his face to fit his voice.

“You’re scared of me, aren’t you? And you know running isn’t an option, but you have too much pride to submit, so the next best thing is to use what you know about me to your advantage, and ensure you exercise some form of control over what happens to you.” Bill contemplated, a hand taking out his wallet and pulling out a clump of green bills.

Finally, Bill was letting the mask slip.

“Did you know I’m really good at chess, Ford?” Bill whistled.

“You’re in check. And once you have no moves left, it’ll be checkmate.” Bill smiled sweetly, and Ford had begun to question the authenticity of said smile.

“I’ve never lost a chess match, Bill.” Ford said while Bill closed the distance between them, waving the money around.

“Neither have I. Isn’t this exciting…?” He put a note into Ford’s pants pocket. Then another. Then another. Then more while Ford answered him.

“Forcing me to stay with you will only breed contempt. You know that.”

“That’s not it. I can’t force you to stay with me, but if I cut off your options…so the only choice you can make is to pick me…well, that’s fair play as far as I’m concerned.” Bill hunched over and draped
his arms around Ford’s neck, nuzzling his nose at the man’s lips.

“Stanford. You’re mine. Wait til I check-mate you. You’re going to feel it deep inside you.”

Ford forced a short laugh, avoiding the attempts at a kiss. “You try a little too hard, darling, to be a bad guy.”

“Making you lose interest in me is how to win. You know that.” Ford said.

“I won’t though, lose interest in you…” Bill’s voice lightened with uncertainty.

Another act? It was difficult to tell. Ford continued to observe carefully.

“You will. You’re young and whimsical. This will pass.” Ford knew it would. If Bill became too much, he merely had to wait it out.

“You really can’t just enjoy things, can you? You have to pretend you’re engaging in some elaborate scheme.” Ford simpered, but internally, he knew Bill was serious. No matter how charming the boy was, it was not worth his life to continue to endure this once he reached his limit.

They stared at one another surrounded by a looming quiet.

Ford broke it. “What do you want from me?”


“You’re going to go to school. Do you understand?”

Bill laughed, stepping back. “And then?”

“Why me? Bill, I’m…”

“Why not you? And don’t give me bullshit reasons.”

“You want me to do the production, don’t you?” Ford asked, the question being a filler—he knew it wasn’t what Bill wanted.

“You already have your funding.” Bill hummed. “But a little extra never hurt you. Money can’t hurt, Ford. It only wants to love you, and love me.”

Bill casually saluted with two fingers. “I just want you. To be mine. That’s all.”

Fear suddenly evinced upon his face. “Hey Ford… I can’t lose you. You’re too important. You’re… you’re my queen. The strongest piece, the one that can do it all.” Bill dealt more onto the table like cards. “I’ve finally gotten you and I’m going to keep you. The least you could do is not be so damn selfish.”

“Selfish?! How on earth am I the one selfish?!” Ford nearly yelled and Bill didn’t react physically in the slightest. Had his previous fearful reactions been an act, too?

“You use me to get your jollies off, you old pervert.”

“Now hold on—”

“Ha! Your face! You get so defensive over that!” Bill laughed. “I’m just messing with you.”
Ford sighed; he could just murder this boy.

“You’re as cold as ice!” Bill danced, one two three, one two three, towards Ford. “You’re willing to sacrifice our love!”

“After everything we’ve been through, you intend on painting me as the villain in your story?” Ford asked, close to livid.

“That’s not it. Fuck, you’re old and uncultured. I’m the bad guy here and you’re the protagonist that has the hots for me but is having some moral dilemma because I did a few immoral shit to you.”

“Attempting to rape me and threatening my life is nothing anyone should take lightly.”

“Then attempt to rape me and threaten my life to even the score.”

“I’m not that kind of man, Bill.”

“You are. You’re just a little sneaky about it.” Bill placed his lips to Ford’s jaw and sucked hard. “You fucked yourself while thinking of me. You and I both know it wasn’t some cutesy scenario. There’s a whole lot of anger at me dying to get out, right?”

This again. Does it ever end?

“Not at all, Bill.”

“Tell me. Explain to me, in detail, what you thought of. And no cop outs with ‘oh we had sex.”’

“That’s private.”

“Fuck you, tell me.”

He held Bill’s face. “We made love. That’s all. I assure you.”

“Bullshit. I’m not playing with you, Stanford.” Bill snarled.

“Neither am I. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’d like to return to my computer.” Ford walked ahead and then paused. “Well?”

“Huh?”

“Are you not coming?”

“Oh…” Bill reluctantly followed Ford to his desk area, bemused.

“When you’re done with the test, we’ll talk further.”

Bill gagged in response.

“Darling, you have to do those. It was a stipulation for you to come here.”

“No, it wasn’t.”

“It is now.” Ford’s face said no more arguing and Bill surrendered.

Grumbling under his breath, Bill sat down on the coach. “If you’re nice to me and tolerating me because you’re scared, why don’t you just kill me, Ford?”
“You know why.”

“Not really.”

“You keep doing this. Over and over.” Ford pointed out. “Over and over. We do the same thing.”

“Let’s try and get somewhere this weekend. What do you say, my darling?”

Bill picked up the binder, saying nothing further.

“So, when you said your old boyfriend didn’t wanna fuck because of personal reasons, you were talking about yourself, weren’t you?” Bill asked, closing the binder.

Ford didn’t turn around. “Have you even started on the test?”

“I want to talk to you for a little while.” Bill said, smiling in a way that meant double trouble. “Now, did you lie?”

“No.”

“Stanford. You were raised a kike.”

That word had Ford turning around, brows curled sharply inward. An attempt at instigating a fight through contentious language—how alike Bill. And completely intolerable as long as he was underneath Ford’s roof.

“Don’t ever use that type of language in my house again.” Ford warned.

“Aye sir. You’re pretty sexy when you’re all authoritative but what the fuck ever.” Bill laughed, unaffected. “You were raised religious and boy, does that leave a mark on you.”

“It’s irrelevant to who I am. I told you.”

“You’re smarter than that, Ford. Looks like it’s left some residue on you. Your Jewish thing is probably why you don’t wanna bang me huh?”

“It has no impact on who I am today, Bill.” Ford maintained.

“Sure, keep telling yourself that. I was raised Catholic. Do your parents know you like to go both ways?” Bill’s tone took on a mocking inflection near the end.

“Yes. It…” Ford schooled his face to remain neutral but failed. The disappointment on his face escorted his words openly. “It caused some strain for a while, but we made up.”

Bill’s cocky smile stayed. “Poor baby. Religious parents huh? They hate fags.”

“Bill, don’t use that type of language here.” Ford warned again.

“It’s fucking true!” Bill bellowed. “Doesn’t matter whether you’re ambidextrous or strictly ride the dick lane, the moment you like dick, you’re a fag. Get over it, Ford.”

A tender spot in Bill had been prodded and Ford could tell. But to pick at it when it was still raw and agitated was unwise. Perhaps later tonight…

“Darling, don’t use that language. I’m asking you nicely now.”
Bill sighed then shrugged, already spent. “Fine.”

“Did your father know? About you liking men.” Ford asked gently.

“Nah. I didn’t know til much later. Hard to figure yourself out when you’re locked up.” Bill ruminated.

“Locked up? Were you never allowed out?”

“Nah.” Bill said. “Strict folks.”

Like a prince locked in a tower, Ford thought.

Bill paused, contemplating something. “I used to hang with this kid for a little while. Son of one of the guys who worked for my nonno. Had this…feeling towards him, hard to say but you know how it is when you’re young and you don’t realize how you feel might be a crush.” Bill said, lolling his head back onto the edge of the couch to look at the ceiling.

“That’s quite cute. A young you having a crush and not realizing it.” Ford smiled, envisioning the boy in the portrait younger and flustered over another boy his age. Teasing and mistreatment was undoubtedly young Bill’s method of conveying affection. Ford was quite convinced of that.

“Yeah yeah… nothing cute about it.”

Ford waited a bit before asking the next question. “Have you had sex with a man before?”

Taken aback, Bill’s lip curled dramatically as his face scrunched up. “What? Of course.”

“No, when I say sex I mean consensual sex, when you are sound of mind.”

“Oh.” Bill relaxed his face. “Uh… No drugs, alcohol, or uh…forced sex?”

“No.”

“Let me think…nope.” Bill answered with barely much thought. “Uh, maybe…once or twice? Actually, not sure but I was doing the fucking. But if I’m on the other end, I prefer to have some stimulants pumping in me while I get pumped.”

To never have been sober when having sex could only align with self-destructive behaviour. Worth noting that Bill specified a difference between giving and for lack of better term, receiving; the latter he had to consistently drug himself for.

Shifting in his seat in preparation, Ford focused his full attention onto Bill. “You’re a virgin?”

“Yikes. What? You’re using that word wrong. That word has not applied to me for ten years, Ford.”

Ten years. Bill was twenty-two. His grandfather…at twelve…? Ford would have to come back to this later. Now was not the time.

“It doesn’t count if you didn’t consent to it properly. Sex is consensual and you lose your virginity through sex.” Ford claimed.

“Fuck off. Your preachy shit is pissing me off.” Bill snarled.

“What about women?”
“Yeah,” Bill’s voice lightened. “I’ve definitely fucked women sober.”

“So, it’s only men you drug yourself for?” Ford asked, now more cautious. This question would certainly upset Bill.

“Ford, you’re making me angry.” Bill said, voice close to a whisper.

Just as expected. It was another tender spot for Bill.

“Because I’m right.” Ford kept his voice soft. “You get angry when I’m right.”

“Fuck you. Throwing that word around like it means anything.”

“Virginity doesn’t even matter.” Ford stood up, making his way slowly towards Bill and careful not to frighten him. “My darling, I want you to understand what I’m trying to tell you.”

Bill’s demeanour changed and he now sought to curl into himself to escape Ford; posture slumping and recoiling from the direction Ford stood in. It had Ford feeling guilty, but he had to persevere with this. Or nothing would change. Nothing.

“Ford, please stop saying things like this…please. I don’t want to play that game. I really don’t. It’s…I just don’t.” Panic began to slur Bill’s words. “If… y-you’re into that, can you…can you change your mind?”

“What are you talking about?” Ford asked, acting innocent.

What a fuckwad. Bill saw through it. He always saw through this shit.

“You’re into virgins, right? Is that the issue? That why you’re doing this? I’m not going to pretend I’m one so you can deflower me, you fucking pervert.” Bill spat.

Pervert pervert pervert pervert.

Ford reached for Bill’s arm and he jumped back, snarling. “Don’t touch me! God, what is with older guys and that? You always wanna feel like your dick is gonna make some profound change! Like it’s some accomplishment to be the first in my ass! Fuck off, Ford.”

Bill attempted escaping but Ford grabbed his arm, locking it in a firm, prison-like grasp. There was no way he’d get out of this. Ford was too strong…

It was happening.

“No, Ford…Do-don’t…don’t…don’t feel well…I don’t…” Those pathetic words spill out like sewerage from a broken pipe.

No knife. No gun. Fuck.

“What’s wrong?” Fake concern.

“I—I’m not feeling well…”

No knife, No gun. No knife no gun. No knife no gun.

Ford was going to force him.
“Do you need to throw up? Water? What’s wrong, my dear?” Ford continued to hold him captive.

Should he start to beg? Maybe Ford will be gentle? No…Ford won’t. Ford doesn’t love him like that man did. Ford doesn’t…

“Nothing…nothing…nothing…”

Ford held his face. Here it comes, the sweet talk.

‘It won’t hurt a lot. Just a little.’
‘Do you think you can cry a bit? I’ll be more gentle if you do.’

“Are you having those thoughts again? Those intrusive ones we spoke about?” Ford asked, voice coming out only as soft breath.

A deep breath. A beat.

“Yeah…” Bill slumped onto the couch again.

“What are you thinking of? Tell me.”

“Just…nothing…”

Ford knelt, now eye to eye with Bill. Don’t make eye-contact…don’t make eye-contact…

“Tell me.”

“I just... thought you were gonna fuck me... like... call me a virgin and then take me on the couch. I’m sorry, Ford…” Bill admitted, words tasting like the expired tuna his roommate forgot to throw out. Fuck, he was hungry that day. And high.

Ford looked worried. Ford’s worried face was cute. It was going to be okay.

Ford was different.

“Has anyone done that to you?”

“I uh…had to pretend…”

“Fuck that hurts”
“IT’s supposed to. It’s your first time, remember?”

“Who?”

“Some older guy I had a thing with for a while. He’s no one. Already dead.”

Fuck that guy. What was his name again?

Doesn’t matter. It was going to be okay. Ford was here.

Bill covered his eyes with a hand. “Why don’t you? Fuck me? Make it hurt? I’ll feel better afterwards, I promise…”

“You’ll feel better because your body will release hormones to counteract the pain, darling. That’s all. You won’t actually feel better.” Sciencey shit.

“I’m horny, can’t you tell?” Bill said, spreading his legs just a bit.
“Don’t listen to everything your body says. It’s a learnt response.”

“Lay down on the couch.” Ford ordered(?), and sweat began to form in droplets across Bill beneath his clothes, memories of past experiences reflected in their shiny surface.

Ford had waited for him to be even more vulnerable—was that it? Was it? He complied, and Ford then laid over him, pressing gentle kisses on his face.

Oh… this again.

Kissing always lasted a lifetime with Ford’s technique, as though time itself slowed to allow Ford more lip time. His mouth is Ford’s next target, and here, Ford’s lips become more impassioned. They pacify through every suck and scoop; Bill’s arms reflexively tie around Ford, knotting at his back.

His mind goes blank.

...

He relaxes and let’s Ford do the work but eventually can’t help responding—meekly at first, until he finds a rhythm that synchronizes well with Ford. More than time passes: the tension and trepidation, too, goes with the minutes that are lost to Ford’s mouth.

Ford stops, and rubs his nose at Bill’s jaw; Bill tilts his chin down to kiss the cheek and kisses until Ford’s smiling wide enough to wrinkle the sides of his eyes.

“Are you feeling better?”

“A lot better.” He welcomes Ford into his neck with a needy tug and Ford lowers to rest there, kissing once and twice, and then settling into respite. Ford’s breathing slows into sighs.

“It’s not something you can take from someone. It can only be given.” Ford whispers into his ear.

“Do you have a fetish for virgins? Is that it? You want me to pretend. Just admit it.” Bill retaliates, squirming beneath Ford but Ford was anchored, and still surrounding him like a protective chrysalis; one he would not be allowed to emerge from in his convalescent state.

“Worst case scenario. If I was interested in that, Bill, would I be with you?”

“Is that your way of saying I’m slutty?”

“No, it’s my way of saying you are incapable of being what you aren’t.”

Ford leaves his neck and meets Bill’s eyes. A stroke across Bill’s cheek, the fingers relishing the moment, the movement slow. Bill wants nothing more than to enjoy it for what’s worth, but Ford’s motives held back any hope at indulgence.

“You can’t be anyone other than who you are. That’s why I like you.” Ford clarifies one more time.

“So, you admit I’m not a virgin.”

“No, I’m admitting I never believed you to be one and under those pretences, I became involved with you. It means, I’m fine with who I perceived you to originally be.”

“You’re so preachy. You jump through hoops to try and paint me as a virgin so you can be my first. How are you different to other old men again? I forgot.” Bill bit Ford’s fingers and Ford allowed
them to remain hostage of Bill’s teeth.

“I’m teaching you that you are more in control than you realize. I’ll say it again: it cannot be taken from you. It can only be given. Because you are in control of your body. No one can take anything from you.”

Bill’s teeth loosen; Ford’s forehead presses against his cheek, eyes closed and glasses obstructing.

“No, you just think your cock is so much better than everyone else’s.” Bill snarked.

“Isn’t it?”

“Get off me.”

Ford didn’t budge.

“Ford, I’m serious. Get off me. You’re fucking with me. Fuck off.”

“Why are you upset?”

“You’re fucking sick. Get off me.”

Ford still didn’t budge.

“Fuck, you think I’m stupid? You’re doing the same shit every other old guy does. Just painting it up real pretty, right? Get off me.”

Ford sat upright, looking down at Bill, but did not climb off to allow escape.

Is this how animals felt when the fell into a trap? Only thing left to do is look up at your capturer and hope they fall for your best pouty face.

“When I’m right, you get angry.” Ford said, as if he spoke the gospel truth.

“God, you’re so far up your asshole, Ford. Even my cock couldn’t that far in.”

Ford didn’t reply. Quiet. His eyes were sad again.

Why sad? Wasn’t he happy with Bill?

Why…?

“What…what are you thinking? You look sad, Ford.” Bill’s voice shook.

“The first time we were together, part of me felt—or rather knew—I was taking advantage of you.”

“Ford, come on—”

“Let me finish. It meant nothing to the men before me to take advantage of you.”

Bill rolled his eyes.

“It meant nothing for your grandfather to—” This time it was Bill’s hand who sought Ford’s cheek, and Ford leaned into it.

“It can’t be taken from you.” Ford kissed Bill’s hand at the wrist. “If you didn’t consent, it doesn’t matter.”
“Ford, you and I both know you’re talking shit. If someone rode a car, whether that car consented to being rode or not doesn’t matter, it’s a used car. I’m fine with it, Ford. Seriously.”

What was the point of griping over this? Over virginity? Why did it matter?

“You aren’t a car, Bill. People aren’t objects. You aren’t an object.”

“You know what I mean.”

“No, I don’t. You aren’t an object.” Ford said. “I want you to think about what I’m saying one more time. It only counts if you consent to it. You must be fully sober to consent, and of legal age.”

He stopped to think. If he followed Ford’s rules, who would’ve been his first…?

“Huh…I think I get it…? If I take that approach…then my first would be you and not that man. Or any of the men I fucked while out of it. Am I…understanding this right?”

“Yes.”

“So…I get it… then…if I think about my first time, I’ll think of you instead of…”

“Exactly.”

There it was. Ford wanted to claim unclaimed land. No surprises.


Ford grabbed the offensive hand mid-air, evincing no reaction to the slap. “I want you to have memories that don’t leave you crying in my arms, dear.”

“Shut the fuck up, Ford.”

“You think often about what that man did to you. All I—”

“Ford, get off me.” Bill glared at him, lips pursed. “I don’t feel used when I fuck people. That’s something only people like you feel.”

“You never felt like your grandfather used you?”

Silence. Then

“He loved me.”

“Bill…”

“He did.” Bill sobbed, voice cracking. “What do you know? You don’t love me. What are you doing with me, Ford? Just fuck me already.”

“You don’t hurt people you love, Bill.”

“Sometimes you do. It’s normal.”

“Bill, you aren’t dirty.” Ford said, continuing at Bill’s puzzled face. “I know you think that, in the back of your mind.”

“I don’t.”
“Are you sure?”

“I really don’t, Stanford.” Bill sounded bored, as bored as his voice could will.

Ford kisses him, tries to swap saliva and Bill doesn’t have it in him to resist anymore. As Ford spoke, repulsive hot breath hit Bill’s face. “I’ve made up my mind, Bill. Now you’re the one left indecisive.”

“Fuck you.” Bill panted. More fuck you’s following until tears were coming at the same rate.

Pride—what did that word even mean? Did he have any left? Why hadn’t he brought Dreamcatcher? His cobra can’t kill him once Ford’s done with him.

It has to be Dreamcatcher. It has to.

A blackness takes his vision—Ford had covered his eyes with a hand.

It was so dark…

…

Fuck Stanford Pines.

…

“A little…” Bill gritted, pressing down on the blinding hand. “When I’m with other men, a little.”

Ford doesn’t speak but holds his hand tightly. Lovesome lover.

“It’s just…I don’t know…I dunno…”

Ford’s over him again. The man had a real presence…when he tried.

“Feelings aren’t always logical nor do they make sense. You aren’t dirty.” Ford’s voice is stable, Bill sees the father-blue waveform within his mind.

“FUCK, it’s not…not about the feeling dirty part. You’re missing the point.”

“Then what is it?”

“I…I don’t know…” He can’t articulate what he wants to say, or what he needs to say.

“Don’t worry, my darling. Baby steps. Everything starts off small.” Is this the voice of God?

Hey God, I killed Abel.

“We’ve come a long way…since the last time we were on this couch together.” Bill muttered, squeezing the hand. “If I had known it would’ve come to this…you keeping me down, demanding I call myself a virgin so you can fuck me like one…if I knew it would’ve come to this…would I still have come that night?”

He would’ve.

“Probably…”

“If that’s how you feel, we won’t have sex at all.”
“Sure, Ford.” Bill laughed. “That’s code for: ‘I’m going to fuck you when you’re out of it so you won’t remember’.”

“You aren’t allowed to drink or intoxicate yourself around me in any shape or form.”

Sure, Ford.

“He really did…love me…” Bill began, voice monotone. “I was ungrateful. I made a mistake. I shouldn’t have run. And now he’s fucking dead. He’s dead. It’s my fault.”

Karma karma karma.

“Darling…he didn’t.” Ford whispered. “It’s not your fault.”

“No, he did…I said some…I thought some terrible things about him and I regret them all…about my dad too…I never should’ve…”

Papa must be writhing in his grave.

“I never…should’ve joked over that stuff…”

The dark of Ford’s hand palliated him. It was better than nothing.

“Ford, he did. He did. You don’t understand. He really did.” He did. Love was something a nerd like Stanford Pines could never comprehend.

Nothing. Ford said nothing.

Awkward…

His silence exacerbated the sound of Bill’s next sigh.

“I’m tired of this sentimental shit. Get off me so I can do the damn test, you fuckhead.” Bill demanded.

“Language.” Ford laughed and granted Bill vision once more, pulling him up and into a short hug.

He held Bill until wet eyes dried and Dreamcatcher’s siren call abated.

My family…was the most important thing to me. They were. Weren’t they?

Stanford rubs his back.

“I’m all alone…” Slipped out.

My family’s dead. I fucked up and—

“You aren’t alone, Bill. I’m here for you.”

Bill shrunk in Ford’s hold, slithering down until he could hear the muffled throbs of Ford’s heartbeat.

Alive.

“Ford?”

“Hm?”
“Can I keep you?” Bill whispered. It took Ford shorter than anticipated to get the reference; Bill was surprised he even knew where the line came from.

“Casper.”

Ford, smiling that smile, ruffled Bill’s hair and held his face in both hands. Bill pouted, eyes thin with mischief and hands atop Ford’s own. A romantic tune began to play in Bill’s mind… the lyrics forgotten.

"I'll think about it.” Ford kissed him then let go, and returned to his computer leaving Bill in awe.

“Hey, Mister fucking progressive. Why am I only still considered a virgin if I haven’t been fucked? Why does fucking someone else not count?” Bill called out.

“It does. I mean specifically with men, though.”

“Yeah…I…”

Fucked Kryptos while sober.

Oh wait, I forced him. Forced doesn’t count…?

“I’ve never then.” I think.

Ford smiles again, with cloudland eyes and Bill shrugs.

So, blushing virgins was what Ford liked, was it? Did he want them to match? Both virgins? Disgusting.

Stanford Pines huh.

He tapped his fingers onto the binder, and then looked over at Ford, who sat plugged into the world-wide web.

Bill reached a hand out, admiring how when spread, it hid the Ford in the distance.

He keeps staring at Ford.

The triangle on his palm throws a birthday party.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY ṃ –■Z¶!!

Happy birthday to you.

Happy birthday to me.

Happy birthday dear _SCR

Doe the name ring a bell, IQ?

(The death knell sounds better with earphones. This has been a PSA.)

Chapter End Notes
Ford's POV is so repetitive. He always has to think the same shit over and over. And Bill's issues means there's a lot to overcome before they can be in a somewhat normal relationship and I hate skipping through it because then their closeness will feel unnatural and forced.
The birthday section has nothing to do with it being Bill's birthday today. It's a coincidence lmao
Keep Listening

Chapter Summary

Bill Cipher begins to see pink.

Chapter Notes

And we’ve come full circle—from Keep Talking to Keep Listening. The irony of Keep Talking being the first time Bill and Ford are sexually together to this being the chapter where Ford calls a complete stop to sexual activity.

You have to listen to Pink Floyd’s Keep Talking, then Talkin' Hawkin' and then Mother Mother’s Calm Me down, which is arguably /the/ Bill song. The relevance it has to Bill is incredible.

Feedback is appreciated! ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Speech has allowed the communication of ideas, enabling human beings to work together to build the impossible.

Mankind’s greatest achievements have come about by talking and its greatest failures by not talking.

-Stephen Hawking

And underneath the water that gushes from the mountain spring, the tattoo of the snake swims into the water and disappears deep into the spring.

—North Eastern Japanese Folktale.

As Bill’s eyes roamed across tar-black insectile words on once-pristine white paper, similarities between his own fingers and the paper manifested. Marked, branded, inked. Now useless.

Used once, then discarded.

His hands weren’t beautiful, not like Ford’s were. Ford’s were quaint, and his own. Bill’s however, were nothing more than parchment for dead men to scrawl their legacies upon so he may pass them down to his inevitably cursed kin. Old men who wanted to make history and graffiti their washed-up wives’ tales onto whatever and whoever they could.

He pictured the letters skittering across the page; alive and leaping onto his arms where they would imbue themselves to join the rest of his tattoos as epitaphs. Here lies Bill Cipher: a fucker no one loved.
No, Bill Cipher couldn’t die. Here lies Casper Giordano: Who?

You aren’t dirty, Bill.

He looked to Ford, who sat slouching at his computer.

Why had he come here? What was the point? Once this holiday was over, it would be back home, back to the graveyard, back to waiting for his own hole to open in the ground so he could crawl into it. He was cold as the dead, anyway. Just open up the fucking hole and I’ll climb in myself.

The dirt must be comfortable. None of his family members are complaining.

Nothing would change.

And he still hadn’t done the test. Fuck it.

…

--

“This wasn’t what I wanted for us, you know.” Bill began, and Ford turned around to listen—spotlight on Bill Cipher. Too much pressure. “It isn’t. Me…doing this. This isn’t what I want. Just a FYI.”

“What did you want?” Ford asked before Bill’s parted mouth could get another word out. The quick response was another weight piled on him—about 5lbs, he thinks. One of many—not the first and certainly not the last.

How much could Ford lift, by the way?

“Stanford…can we start over? From scratch?” Bill pleaded. “No more…well, no more you feeling like you have to stick with me because you’re scared. No more… no more you being over there and me over here, you know? Can we do that?”

Bill tugged at the dry skin of his left hand’s ring finger; fingertips encircling as a ring would.

“It was funny at first—you being scared of me— but now it’s…it’s…”

Lonely.

“I just…I dunno. Everything started out on a weird note. With me stalking you, and then all the shit I did. It wasn’t what I imagined… I just…I liked how this day started with you. And then I fucked it up. Again. I fuck up, all the time. I don’t know what to do. Is it okay for me to even say that? To fucking say I don’t know what the fuck to do?” He bungled through his words, cowering before the stark truth and what grim consequences would come at its reveal. History repeated itself.


Stanford Pines…

“So, what do you say? Can we just…reboot our relationship? Clean slate and all?”

Please say yes.
Ford’s studious face relaxed into unwarranted and undeserving concern, but an ostensible thought had it tensing up once more with scholar’s intuition. He studied Bill’s face, silent, then said. “Perhaps. I have a condition.”

“Anything.” Bill promised.

“Let me guide our relationship.”

“Huh?”

That was quick.

Ford’s laughter was much too patronizing and insinuating. “I’m saying…I’ll decide how fast it progresses, what we do—everything. And your compliance with what I decide. That’s what I’d like from you.”

Bill waited, listening.

“And if you threaten me again, or attempt to force yourself on me, or anything of that nature. Our relationship ends and I’d like you to never contact me again.” Towards the end, Ford’s voice hardened appropriately—the message clear and final. No more second chances; how many times had Ford claimed that? What a softie. Bill wanted to mock him for it—and thank him because no one else would offer him this many chances. No matter how pretty he was, Ford was not superficial enough to generously hand out get-out-of-jail free coupons forever. Sex didn’t work on Ford. He just wasn’t that kind of man.

What kind of man was Stanford Pines, anyway?

Ford left his computer and stood in front of Bill. With Bill sitting and Ford standing, the latter seemed impossibly tall. A titan—no, Atlas, holding the world on his shoulders. Was that why Ford slouched sometimes? The unbearable heaviness that came with his reputation, and responsibilities—a plate Bill had laid himself upon, with Ford consuming in delight. But what was sweet held a persistent sour under-taste that stayed to flavour everything that followed.

If Bill was shorter, would Ford have given him a piggy-back ride? Just like nonno did…

“I keep giving you chances because I know you can do better.” Ford said. “But it’s as though what I say rolls right off you. You never take what I say to heart, and it’s why we end up stuck in this loop. You don’t listen, Bill. Have you never noticed how you sometimes repeat yourself when you talk to me?”

“Ha, wanna attach an explosive device to my neck so if I misbehave, you can electrocute me?” Bill quipped, but Ford didn’t react. Tough crowd.

Ford looked down with a keenness reserved for his science mumbo-jumbo, and took Bill’s chin in a firm grip between his thumb and index finger. It was the first time—the first of plenty to come—Bill felt insignificant before Stanford Pines. “Don’t fight me on anything. Are we clear?”

“Sure.” With eclipsed eyes unable to stray from the moon, a hand attached itself at Ford’s left hip in reluctant encouragement. “You wanna be in charge, huh?”

“No, you misunderstand me.” Ford kissed his forehead and the tension growing in Bill melted away once the forever-warm lips touched his skin. Summer was here and Bill Cipher would soon be thawed into palatable, sweet ice-cream that Ford lips could not wait to sample.
Ford’s hands went to his pants—*it was happening*—Bill fought to keep calm but stray shudders escaped. Of course, Ford would. Of course…

He pulled out the bills stuffed there earlier, knelt and placed them into Bill’s hands. “I don’t need your money. I don’t.” Touching Bill’s face, he smiled with inconceivable gentleness. “If you want to give me additional funding, I won’t mind. I might end up needing it.”

…

“Fuck…you scared me.” Bill breathed, pride unable to filter the truth this time.

“What’s wrong?” Ford asked, taking hold of his hand. It felt like a leash. Ford wanted to tie him down, control and confine him and—

*Keep him safe.*

“Nothing, jesus. Hey, yeah, I’m fine. Anyway, uh…sorry, you were saying?”

“Now, as I was previously saying. You misunderstand why I’m asking this. Until you’re doing better, I think it’s best if you let me dictate our progress.”

“Can you explain a little more?”

“You make decisions when you aren’t thinking clearly. Leave the decision-making to me, for now.” Ford as the boss. Weird. “Okay, so what kinda decisions you looking at making, Boss man?”

“No sex. I’d prefer nothing sexual at all, in fact. Not until I can see you’re doing better.”

Bill frowned. “That’s it? That same old story?”

“For the most part, yes. There’s also the issue of school. Once you find out what you’d like to do, if you sincerely don’t want to attend school, I can tutor you. But most of the burden will fall on you as I still have my work commitments.”

“Quit and tutor me full time. I’ll pay you up front for 3 years.” Bill puffed out his cheeks, attempting to be cute and lo and behold—it worked. Ford laughed, rapt with wire-red cheeks.

“I can’t do that…” Clasping Bill at both puffy cheeks, Ford squished to let the air escape. His hand remained pinching Bill’s cheeks with the boy pulling silly faces to complement the touch.

“How about…you tutor me every night for about an hour? And then I spend the night?”

Ford squeezed his cheeks harder. “Is this your way of attempting to sneak into my bed?”

“Yes.”

Laughing, Ford sealed the deal with a kiss—Bill’s fish face reddening. A deal with Stanford Pines; finally.

“Hey…hey if I’m bad, can’t you…wanna…” Bill panted, touching his palm to his forehead.

“Never…nevermind…”

“What’s wrong?” Ford asked, already knowing and a little surprised *it* was still effective despite their two-week separation. Truth be told, he hadn’t expected it to work at all. It could be another act, too.
Bill might’ve consented to this agreement, but there was no guarantee this wasn’t another act. Bill Cipher was an actor, after all.

“Hey Ford.” Bill’s voice deepened, sounding more serious. “Come here, closer.”

Ford shuffled closer, and he took one of Ford’s hands, picturing himself in the palm he held tight. “I’ll tell you a secret, okay? To even the score between us. Give you your own little power over me, what do you say?”

“What secret?”

“You know…I miss my family. You know, don’t you?”

“I do.”

“Did you know I killed them?”

Ford’s eyes were UFO saucers. Big, and not of this world—Ford was not of this world. Men like Ford came once every blue moon, from outer space. Explained the man’s infatuation with sci-fi shit. ET go home.

He brought Ford’s hand to his cheek, and it burned like the fire that took his sister. “Reconciliation wasn’t an option. I wanted the family business. That old story…the prodigal power-hungry, money-thirsty son.”

“They had it coming. They did. Plenty of rumours I killed them. No evidence…everything was planned perfectly.”

“It was cathartic, like you couldn’t imagine…when it happened. But then time passed. Time passed and passed and what did I do, Ford? What did I do? It wasn’t going to end any other way. I could never have gone back after my father and I fought. I was already dead to my family the second my dad struck that first blow. It was already over. Don’t come back, he said. Don’t ever fucking come back.”

Casper Giordano died that night. Oh wait, you had to have been born to die. Where’s his birth certificate? I lie so much, I lied about being born, too.

An attention-seeking tug on Ford’s hand. “The truth ended it. But that’s lie, isn’t it? It’s all about shutting your fucking mouth, never complaining about what happens because who the fuck cares? Too bad. You probably deserve it. People do that. Find ways to say everything bad that happened to you—you deserved it. They look for ways to justify it. You must’ve deserved it. Bad things don’t happen to good people. You must’ve deserved it. Karma, baby.”

“I don’t know if that’s true. Who cares, really? Whether I deserved it or not. But I know I do now. I know I deserve what happened to me because of what I’ve done now. Sometimes the punishment comes before the sin—do you believe that? Effect comes before cause, maybe? Fuck who made the laws of physics. He didn’t know shit.”

Both Bill’s hands cradled Ford’s, winding upwards and around his arm like sick, pale-black vines in need of sunlight. “Listen carefully, Ford. No matter what you do it to me, I’ll deserve it. So, stop being nice…it’s okay. Really. You don’t have to pretend. I won’t pretend anymore. So why don’t you stop, too?”

Bill’s fingers continued to slide themselves cross Ford’s bare skin, seeking to entice and persuade.
Again, he finds himself taken with Ford’s forearms. When he was younger, and he’d sit upon nonno’s lap—which at the time felt like the highest he could ever be—he’d see nonno’s forearms; they looked a lot like Stanford Pines’. Those were the times before it started to happen.

Stanford was right. He had been secretly waiting for the metamorphosis—for Stanford to reveal himself as Gaspard; not in name but in action. He’d waited and waited, and nothing had occurred. Because Stanford Pines was nothing like that man.

Nothing. Right?

“Who do you pretend for? When no one’s looking? Have you gotten so used to it? Pretending? It’s okay, Ford. Really. You can do whatever you like to me. I’m okay with it. Everyone’s okay with it! A-okay!” As wide, and bright, and dandy as possible, Bill smiled. Smile the on-coming tears away.

Ford knelt again, still quiet, to look at Bill on better footing.

“When you…pretend for a really long time, it becomes part of you. You can’t turn it off anymore. You can only hide it. I hid it…for the longest time…maybe? I don’t know…but I don’t have to hide it with you, right?”

“Do whatever you want, Ford. Hurt me. It doesn’t matter. It’s okay…it’s okay… it’s okay if it’s you. I want to…”

Make you happy.

Bill swallowed, gritting his teeth, jaw sandwiching whatever else he wanted to confess.

The pestilential morass Bill found himself floundering amidst throughout his entire life left him weary and aching; Ford could now see more of the damage sustained, and where needed the most attention. Bill self-harmed and acted out as way to cope with had happened to him. To justify it.

Bill had killed his family and regretted it. If Bill sincerely had feelings for Ford, he would not kill Ford, having learnt his lesson.

An assumption with enough merit. Bill’s threats towards Ford were indeed empty.

“Everything I’ve wanted to do to you, I’ve already done. Can’t you tell?” Ford’s tone was angelic. The man was a fucking angel, wasn’t he? Wasn’t he? Every word spoken was accompanied by antiphonary supplied by a choir of cherubs resembling Teeth.

He’s died, died and gone to the wrong place. Stanford Pines belonged in heaven. Him? Not so much. Hell-o Kitty, here’s Billy.

He’s crying already and Ford’s face is now a watercolour of red, grey and nude—like one of 8baller’s stupid pretentious paintings. No hard shapes, no structure; just a wobbly mess he could stick his fingers in and smear. How many times would he cry today? It’s winter, and there’s always so much rain, so much cold, so much darkness.

Bill covered his eyes using Ford’s hand; blindfolding himself as Ford had done earlier. Waterworks, a pipe’s leaking. Someone call a plumber.

“What did you tell your father?” Father Ford asked.
“You know what I told him.”

“Why did you tell him? What made you decide to?”

“I don’t know. I wanted to come home. I wanted…I didn’t want that man…to be allowed to…I just normal.. I don’t know. Maybe I watched too many family sitcoms. Wanted that life…maybe? TV. Ruining the youth of America with false promise of their future.” Bill slumped.

I don’t know what I wanted.

“Were you and your father close?”

“No, never.” Bill’s nails clawed into Ford’s hand, releasing once he calmed. “Never…. ”

“Your mother?”

“Worked a lot, but she was good to me. Tough love but…you know… I had nothing against her.”

Father Ford petted his head, and inside his mind, he imagines Ford calling him dolcezza.

“Your sister? You said…what happened to you, happened to her?”

“I…don’t know. It’s like…I remember seeing it happen to her but….the more I think about it, the more it looks like me.”

God, those visions never made any sense. He thought himself the biggest sick fuck when he pictured his sister getting fucked like that.

But oops, it was him all along. A real M. Night Shyamalan twist. The Village was a terrible film.

“Can you elaborate?”

“We looked a lot alike. It’s like…an out of body experience? Like you ever watch something happen to you?”

“No, but I know exactly what you’re talking about. It’s very—nevermind. I understand. I do.”

“I think…I used that memory kinda as a… I dunno, it made me think, for a really long time, it never happened to me. But when I came back, I just…started remembering? God, it was awful. It came out of nowhere. You ever been on the road and some car just comes outta nowhere and nearly hammers you off your lane? I got hammed. Hammered.”

The hand in his hair moves to the naked of his face, touching the wetness thoughtfully but not wiping it. Did Ford have a fetish for tears? The sicko. Pervert.

“And everything just went outta control. I think… it was around that time I…followed you more often, and then eventually I was doing it all the time.”

“I understand.”

“I so badly wanted you to be him, Ford. I really did. I just…why am I not happy that it’s over? Why? They’re all dead. I’m okay. I’m fine. So why?”

He eliminated the problem, any potential for a problem. Why? Why?

“God, then the drinking and you know that story…”
“You’re scared I’m going to do what he did, and you’re trying to prepare yourself for it.” Ford said. “I’m not asking you, I’m telling you. That’s what you’re doing. Do you believe me?”

“…Yeah. I’ll believe you.” No longer eager to fight, Bill relented. Sincerely.

Father Ford reclaimed his hand and kissed Bill’s damp eyelids. Stubble… did Ford even know how to shave properly? Always with the stubble.

“Ugh no…come on…”

“There’s nothing wrong with crying.”

“Boys don’t cry. Crying is for pussies.” Bill grumbled.

“Then consider yourself a cat.”

Bill choked a laugh out. “No…come on. That was so lame even for you.”


Ford’s left hand cradled Bill’s cheek as new tears streamed out. They kept coming, sliding like thick raindrops down a cold windowpane—only, Bill wasn’t cold this time. He can hear his heart thumping in his chest like a finicky rabbit. A beating heart meant blood pumped through his veins—he was alive. Alive things were warm.

“You don’t need to worry.” Ford said, voice a lullaby. “Everything’s going to be fine.”

“Don’t forget…your promise…”

“Yes, I know. I’ll wait for you to tell me directly.”

Watching Bill, Dr. Pines’ face knotted with stress. Dr Pines’ eyes then went to their intertwined hands, tightening it as his brows creased deeper. Barely any wrinkles at his eyes this time.

He imagined Ford in a white coat, the kinds you saw doctors wear. Smelling like alcohol—the strong kind. The type you drank when you wanted to see the light at the end of the tunnel once you passed out. The kind you bought when you couldn’t afford actual liquor.

Next thing, he’s pulled into Ford’s arms and Dr. Pines’ smells like that expensive cologne from Jersey Shore. What is that smell…? Bill visualised purple satin sheets, spilled red wine next to chocolate bon bons and a firelit room. Snow outside the house…

“My family has this reputation…” He started to ramble. “But once you get up close with them, they’re just a bunch of fucked up people. You know, Jason used to joke about that fuckin’ movie, what was it? The Godfather, yeah? As if real life is that fucking entertaining. That fucking pristine. Just like the boogeyman. It isn’t real. Just shit people make up to scare you. ‘no one ever says no to a Giordano’ fuck him, I said no. I said no. I said no and I’m still alive so fuck him and fuck his family.”

Ford rubbed his head, as he continued to blabber.

“I hate that man. Fuck him. Fuck him. I did everything he wanted and and fuck him.”

“Xanth—Evan, he was all fucking ecstatic at my family. He…he..owed a lot..believed all that shit. Thought they were so fucking esteemed, the rumours are true, they’re so fucking amazing. Boy, did that fucker get a wakeup call.”
“Fuck him…fuck that man… fuck him.” His arms tighten around Ford so much, he wondered if Ford could still breathe. Because he can barely breathe. “Fuck him! Fuck all of them! Fuck him! Fuck him fuck fuck him. Fuck him. I made myself. Fuck…fuck…fuck Gaspard Giordano. Let that fucker rot in the ground where he belongs.”

More tears exit into Dr Pines’ neck, and he hears, “There there…”

Ford knew everything. Everything, like some oracle.

“Ford…hey Ford…” He whispered. “Did I deserve it?”

Ford doesn’t hesitate when answering. “No, you didn’t. You didn’t.”

“Fuck you, Ford. Fuck…you…”

Ford was always right.

“My darling, you didn’t deserve it.” Dr Pines cradles his face with those twelve beautiful fingers. Aphrodite must’ve had twelve fingers.

There’s nothing to say.

....

“Evan said I did.”

“Well then fuck him.”

The both laugh. Ford swearing—absurd. Ford, don’t swear… it doesn’t suit you.

He’s still laughing and Ford is smiling—rosy cheeks and nose. Again, he’s in Ford’s arms. Ford speaks to him through a filter, every word comes out perfumed and breezy, like unpolluted midsummer air.

He could listen to only this voice for the rest of his life.

The embrace broke.

“Ford…what…what do I do?”

“What I told you. Do you remember? About school and leaving your family business behind?”

“Ford…do you really think I can change my life around…? Man…I really do…I really did deserve everything. I’ve done things, Ford. You…”

Ford’s thumbs sit at the apples of his cheeks, and by the dilation of Ford’s pupils, he knows he’s the apple of Ford’s eye.

“I’m not religious, but…Jesus once said, Jesus of Nazareth, that no matter what the sinner has done, if he comes for forgiveness, he will receive it. He even went as far as to say those who come to repent are more pious than those who flaunt their virtue. Acknowledging what you’ve done is important. It’s the start.”

Bill listened.

“Jesus was very much a political figure but I won’t get into that now. Some sins can’t be forgiven,
and you might spend your life repenting for them. But what matters is if you try. And if you try to be better. You’re young. It’s too early for you to have so little hope, dear.”

Bill’s eyes dropped.

“I don’t know what you’ve done. You can tell me whatever you want to. I won’t press you for it. What I care is that you want to change and move forward. I cannot shrive you. Only those you have hurt can offer you absolution. It’s up to you to ask forgiveness of them. It’s up to you, bill.” Ford held his chin, and Bill looked at him.

“It’s always been up to you.”

What did shrive mean? Asking would make him look stupid.

“Ford…if my grandfather…if he came for forgiveness, would you give it to him?”

“No.” Ford said sharply.

“Then why do I deserve it? I’m a lot…like him, you know. I’m…just like him.” Bill said. “My dad…my dad was nothing like him. Isn’t that weird? That it was me who took after nonno? Why not my dad?”

“Your grandfather was a grown man who took advantage of his own grandson, Bill.”

“I’m just like him. You know I’ve done…you know what I’ve done. You can imagine.”

“Who do you think you would have been if he hadn’t hurt you?”

“…Huh?”

“Who would you have been if you hadn’t been hurt? If you’d grown up in a different environment?”

What?

Bill reclined. “I—you—you can make that same argument for my grandfather—”

“I can’t. Because at that age, you would’ve become self-aware. If your grandfather had been abused as you had been, at his age, he would’ve understood what was driving him to do what he did and he would’ve fought against it.”

Anger was coming again. “You have no proof.”

“I do. Your father.”

“What…?”

“Tell me a bit more about him. You said you were never close.”

“Uh…I…yeah, he always…kept his distance from me. And my sister, but me in particularly.”

“Was he physically affectionate?” Ford inquired, sounding like a therapist but lacking the stereotypical notepad.

“No…never.”

“What did he do whenever you came near him?”
“He’d…look…intrigued? Skeptical. He always regarded me with hesitancy, as if coming too close was potentially dangerous. I still remember…the face he’d make. He was… just strange, I guess.”

Papa…

“I see. Do you think your grandfather hurt your father?”

“…Yeah. I thought that…for a while. I think so…I think so…”

“And your father beat you when you told him. Defending his abuser. Your father protected you but he couldn’t admit to himself what had happened to him and to you. He could only deal with it quietly. There’s my proof. Your father was scared he’d be like your grandfather, and he kept his distance from you to protect you.”

I knew it… I knew it…

“You…you’re just making shit up now, Ford.” Bill muttered, taking Ford’s hand to snuggle his cheek into the palm.

Crying again.

“Darling…”

…

“Papa… really loved me, didn’t he?”

“I’m sure he did.” Ford used his other hand to gentle ruffle Bill’s hair. “What he did is inexcusable, but his other actions align with him wanting only what was best for you.”

“You’re… making stuff up…” Getting words out was becoming difficult.

“I’m theorising. We can’t confirm it, so why not take it as fact? It’ll make you feel better.” Ford suggested. Very out-of-character. Stanford Pines was a man of facts.

“That’s…unlike you…”

“This is unlike you.” Ford smiled, thumb rubbing across Bill’s chin.

“Where do I even start? You’re delusional.” Bill fumed, pouting. Too good to be true. He’s dreaming.

Ford stood up and led Bill by the hand towards his buzzing computer. He patted the chair and Bill sat.

“What’s this?” Bill asked. The screen held rows of questions, beginning at one and extending to an unknown number.

“The quiz I printed for you. I wanted a hard copy of your answers but let’s do this instead.” Ford guided Bill’s hand to the mouse, placing his own atop Bill’s while leaning beside him.

“Now, answer each question and explain to me why you’re selecting the option. Can you do that?”

Bill looked up at Ford, and then at the screen. White light from the screen hid Ford’s eyes and he swore within the irradiated lens, he saw his future. A tilt revealed benign eyes, offering only absolution. All he had to do was take the offer.
Yes.

“Yes, I guess.”

“Let’s go through them together.”

Another peak was attempted at Ford but proved unsuccessful; Ford had leaned over, resting his right cheek at Bill’s left cheek, eyes at the screen. His right hand still atop Bill’s own, at the mouse.

Bill will remember this image.

“The first one. Do you consider yourself to enjoy abstract art, or realistic art?”

“Easy….realism…especially if it looks like me. I like it when something is replicated perfectly.”

“Abstract doesn’t appeal to you?”

“Hmm I suppose, but realism just raptures me, you know?”

“I see. Next one then…”

“A whopping 67!” Bill yelled while stretching out his neck and shoulders. How Ford sat for hours at a computer eluded Bill. “Can…we go to bed now? I’m tired…”

“Of course.” Ford rubbed his head. “You did very well. You powered through it.”

“It was fun….kinda.”

“You did very well.” Ford continued to stroke Bill’s hair, tidying it in places he felt necessary.

“You said that already.” Bill closed his eyes, chin tilting up into the familiar touch. “Thanks…Ford.”

“You’re more than welcome.”

Bill raised his hand, looked at it pensively and then at Ford. “High…six?”

“High six?” Once Ford understood, a smile came, joined by Bill’s own.

“High six!” Bill grinned and their hands met, locking together to fill the spaces between every finger. Ford’s sixth made it seem as if his hand did the main embracing, its size overwhelming Bill’s protectively.

Bill watched, lips curling happily—he caught Ford’s eye and smiled wider, those dimples appearing.

Ford’s fingers outlined the bruises marring Bill’s neck with hesitant but inquisitive touches. Their colouring was alike to a beautiful galaxy; swirls of blues, purples, the slightest tinge of red. Ford chastised himself for finding beauty in Bill’s injuries. Yet, he can still imagine sketching this, perhaps adding in a freckle of stars…

“What happened? Who did this to you?”

“A guy I pissed off. He held me down and tried choking me. I think I let it go on longer than it had to out of pure enjoyment.” Bill said and Ford questioned Bill’s honesty.

“Is he the one who shot you?”
“Nah, that was his buddies getting revenge.” Bill said while Ford’s fingers continued to caress the dappled skin. “My grandfather, and my father, never got shot. Just me. Disappointing the family again!”

Bill’s laughter was loud, intended to disguise the discernible hurt. Ford kissed the bruises, making rounds across Bill’s neck. The boy giggled at the homeopathic treatment, and whenever Ford met his eyes, only bliss shone in them.

“You have bodyguards, don’t you? How did he get his hands on you?”

“Told them to leave the room. That I could handle it. Won’t be doing that again…” Bill returned the favour, kissing Ford in the neck following a path resembling a collar.

- 

“It went right through, you’re lucky.” Ford said, examining Bill’s wound. Still quite fresh but with definite signs of progression.

So far, cleaning had been effortless with Bill barely wincing—confirming both the dosage and the painkillers themselves were adequate. The wound itself was healing well; no sign of infection or complication. Stitches were clean and neat.

“Yeah? Might’ve died like Teeth, huh?” Bill grinned.

“I… let me get back to it.” Ford returned to cleaning, not wanting old invisible wounds to reopen.

“Wanna stick your finger in the moist hole?” Bill asked in a way Ford thought belonged in the bedroom and not their pseudo surgery.

“No. Why would I?”

“For science.”

Ford sighed.

“Besides, when last were your fingers in a self-lubricating hole that wasn’t my mouth? Not like you’ve gotten pussy recently.”

“Bill. Don’t talk like that.” Ford pulled on Bill’s hair, Bill squeaking at the sudden stinging.

“Hey! Don’t pull my hair!”

“Don’t be disrespectful.”

“Don’t bully me! I have a gun, Ford.”

“No, you don’t.” Ford pulled at Bill’s arm playfully.

There was no reason to be afraid any more.

Ford’s voice is different. What once sounded authoritative now sounded like audible cotton puff—the stuff he’d see whenever he cut up vintage teddy bears and dolls. Ford speaks and it’s as though every word is lovingly crooned. Ford was a giant teddy-bear after all, and now Bill is quite certain he’s made of cotton puff.
One day, Dreamcatcher and he will confirm it.

In bed, he lays upon Ford, his hands joined together at Ford’s head in a makeshift crown. King Stanford.

“So…I wanna tell you something.”

“I remember you told me that through text.”

“It’s…I mean…I’m ready. To tell you.”

“Don’t strain yourself.”

“No…I’m ready… I uh…how do I begin?”

“Tell me whatever you want.”

“Uh…” Bill retreated into his neck, hiding there. The crown broke.

“When I was…six…I think… yeah…six…”

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“Twelve yeah…he gave me the talk, you know? Hit puberty. Told me, when a man loves a woman… showed me. He showed me, with those…those tattooed hands. …I uh… I already…I mean, I saw…I told you, he showed me videos…but…I don’t know. Like, he said it’s what you do when you love someone…” Bill whispered, tattoos stinging. “I didn’t know any better…the videos, I mean. I didn’t know what they meant. You know… how it is… how was I supposed to know…? I thought they loved each other… whatever. The first time we fucked, it was—”

“You didn’t have sex. He raped you.”

“Ford, quit using that fucking word.” Bill barked.

“What do you think that word means?”

Bill stayed silent, macerating in his anger. Then, “He loved me.”

“Do you think that’s what it means to love someone?”

“What?” Bill seethed.

“Earlier, you said to me that I don’t love you. Why do you think I don’t?”

Bill stayed still.

“Because I won’t have sex with you? Or because I won’t force myself on you?”

“Fuck you.”

“Bill, language.”

Silence.

“Don’t shut down on me. Talk to me.”
“…Do you love me?”

Ford touches his face, the six fingers saying ‘yes’.

- 

“He said he loved me.”

“He lied.” Ford said. “Think of all the times he hurt you. You don’t do that to people you love.”

“Sometimes you hurt the people you love.”

“Not deliberately, my darling.”

Bill scoffed loudly.

“Don’t fight me on this. You said you’d do whatever I want.” Ford said, Bill shrivelling in his arms.

“Darling…”

Silence.

“Darling, you wouldn’t have run away if you didn’t hate what he did to you. Why did you run?”

Bill takes a while before he answers. “I…I… sorry. Never mind. I…never told anyone…because… we were related. I thought…I thought that’s why…it was…bad? I thought…that’s why I…kept quiet? But him fucking me…he said it was normal… said…Gaspard always kept a pet, and pets resembled their owners. I was his second heir so it fit… One day, I was going to be just like him. Fuck, it all made sense at the time. It made perfect sense. It was…it was okay…”

“You aren’t a pet. Don’t apologize for anything. This is not your fault. I’m sure…he did love you, when you were younger. When you were younger.”

“When he wasn’t hurting me…?”

“Yes.”

--

“Thinking about it now is…weird. It’s…strategic…isn’t it? When I replay those memories…”

“Now you’re catching on. You learn quickly. Your grandfather was very manipulative. You do take after him, in that regard.”

Bill let out a throaty chuckle.

“But everyone is a little manipulative.” Ford said.

Even he wasn’t innocent in that regard.

“There was a time…when I couldn’t even cum unless I was in some kind of pain. Whenever I was taking it.” Bill whispers into Ford’s ear, laying picturesquely atop him. “Things changed…a little. Slowly.”

“When you were with me, when was the last time you had sex? Or masturbated?”
“Uh…a few days? I did the fucking though. I don’t touch myself. Don’t ask me that again.”

Ford’s left hand stroked Bill’s hair with idle and tender touches, sliding lower every so often to stroke his wounded back and neck.

“Were you surprised when you came when you were with me?”

“I was more shocked…to really notice, I guess…”

“Why were you shocked?”

“You know…you were…really gentle…come on, it’s lame talking about this.”

“You started it. Let’s continue this. Do you ever have those urges still?”

“Yeah…” Bill says, burrowing his nose as much as he could within Ford’s neck, shame guiding him.

“And? You still want me to hurt you?”

“Nah. It doesn’t suit you…”

“If it did, would you want me to?”

Pleasant silence before Bill replies.

“Hey…can I tell you the truth? You won’t tease me?”

“Tell me, darling.”

“I fantasize about it still, sometimes. But if you ever did, I think…I’d… well…you know…”

“I do. You don’t really want to.”

Bill tugged strands of his silver hair, envisioning them a delectable chocolate brown colour.

“Whenever…he was really mean to me…or hurt me, he’d always be really nice to me…afterwards. Just like you are to me now. Like, there’d be this period of him being…so good to me? I used to… look forward to when he’d hurt me so he’d be nice to me again…” Bill whispered. “But…you’re always nice…you really are the best…aren’t you? Stanford…”

“You don’t have to earn that from me the way you did from him.”

“Earn it? Whatever…” Bill nips his ear timidly. “…Hey, tell the truth. Are you…do you like anything weird? Are you buttering me up for something…?”

At Bill’s worry, Ford’s arms tightened even further around him as if letting go would be detrimental to both their wellbeing’s. “No, dear. You of all people should know what I’m like. You lived in my shadow for a long time, after all.”

“Yeah but…maybe you hide it…all the time…”

“You know me better than that.”

Hitching of Bill’s voice could be heard, accompanied by smothered sniffles: Bill was crying.

“Don’t cry, darling…what’s wrong?”
“Nothing…nothing…I dunno…fuck me, this is awkward…”

“Ssshh, it’s okay. It’s okay.”

“I really missed you, Ford…” Bill sobbed quietly, wetting Ford’s neck with light drizzles while Ford continued to rub his head.

The wispy rain passed and Bill began muttering in Italian; Ford not having the heart to reprimand him. Ford wrapped both arms around Bill in a snug cocoon, allowing his lover to safely replenish through the night what life had spent tears taking from him.

One night of many nights to come. Nights of recuperation. In the chrysalis of Stanford’s arms. Where he belonged.

“He stopped holding me. Said I was too old. I think that’s why I ran. He stopped being nice. I guess…it was because I was no longer a kid. Once you aren’t a kid anymore…no one cares. You’re just…on your own. Your feelings don’t matter. You’re an adult. Fucking man up. Deal with it.”

“Human beings were never meant to be on their own. We are social creatures, after all. We need one another.”

“Says the loner.”

“I’m not a loner anymore, am I?”

The booming of thunder reminds him of the first time he heard his father yell at him. At that moment, he believed that was why his father rarely spoke: it was simply too terrifying and overwhelming for the average man to endure.

The rain that follows is his tears. The lightning the white seen when struck hard enough to blur your vision.

In the dark, he wiggles in Ford’s arms, and Ford laughs softly at the preciousness. “Scared?”

“Nope. Just thinking…”

“About?”

“I was thinking about my dad…and uh…the people on the street wo have nowhere to go in this time of weather.”

Surprised at Bill’s empathy, Ford listened further.

“Kinda…makes me think of my first time in New York. I never had anywhere to go for a while. No money. Ah, forget it.”

“No, tell me about your time in New York.”

“I told you lots already…”

“I know. I’m saying you can keep telling me.”

“Hmmm…”
“I was 15, maybe on the cusp of 16. Dunno. Had nowhere to go, so I stopped by a church. Catholic and all that. Met a priest who took me in. Didn’t last long.”

Ford rubs his head in circles while the rain patters at the window, asking for entry into their dry safe haven.

“Maybe a week. He fucked me, and let me stay with him. I swear, older guys are so easy. I turn the charm on, a little wink here touch there and dicks are falling everywhere. I know just what to do, in all the right ways. Probably all that porn nonnino made me watch. Really jacked up my skills.”

“He loved all that typical shit. ‘oh your cock is so thick fuck me fuck me blaaah’. Fuck, I hate that shit. Porn. Like don’t get me wrong, I’ll film my own. But watch it? Fuck. I hate it. Hate it. I fucking hate it. It disgusts me. Sex disgusts me. People are animals.”

Ford tensed.

“Sorry, got carried away there… anyway. So, after I seduced a priest—one way ticket to hell, mind you—and got kicked out because we had a little falling out, I—”

“You didn’t seduce a priest. He raped you. You were just a child.” Ford interrupted.

“Come on, I was 15. I knew what I was doing. He was cute.”

“Darling, would you have done it if you weren’t homeless?”

“…Ford, come on. I know what you’re playing at. I wasn’t a victim.”

“You lie to yourself, Bill. Because if you admit what that priest did was wrong, you’d have to admit what your grandfather did was wrong. There is no shame in what happened to you.” Ford said. “No shame. Now, tell me.”

Bill purposely breathes louder.

…”

“Just relax and think about it. Remember: you’re safe here with me.” Ford coos.”You can say whatever you want. Nothing bad’s going to happen to you. I promise.”

…”

“…I wouldn’t…have.”

Brief silence.

“It was disgusting.” Bill’s voice is almost a whisper. “It’s…yeah…yeah it was…it was gross.”

“He was disgusting. I hated it. I hated every second of it. But I told myself I liked it. I…Ford…Ford…I—God, I hated it. I really did. I fucked lots of older men after that…like, I dunno. When I think now, it was…like opening the gateway to all the stuff that followed. After that, I’d go to places where they’re easy to find. Easy easy…I hated it. I hated it. I don’t know, Ford. I’m weird…”

Ford kissed the skin closest to his lips: Bill’s forehead.

“I didn’t wanna go around turning tricks. I have my fucking pride. Fucking him so I had a place
seemed great, you know? I thought it was a win win: I liked it, and I got a place to crash. Hated it. Hated being some fucker’s pet. Kissing the ass of some old guy. Always. Always stuck doing that shit.”

Bill breathed in deeply. “I…really missed him…I think I always knew…I was looking for him…like I’d show up at a place one night, and nonnino would be there and I’d finally go home. God, I just wanted to go home—I thought he’d come fetch me. That he’d take me home. None… none of the other men loved me. They didn’t. They were different…”

“They don’t listen if you say no. They don’t. You gotta pretend it’s an act so you don’t feel like you got fucked over. Just pretend like no actually meant yes or else afterwards you feel…fuck, I dunno. You feel empty. I just—I dunno. Sorry, I dunno how to explain this.”

“I hated it…fuck, I hate being touched. I hate it. I hate it. I hate sex. It’s so repulsive, god. Why do people do it? It’s disgusting. I hate it.” Bill muttered. “No wait…that’s…that doesn’t make sense. Hang on, I’m just rambling. I don’t hate it. It just seems to suck most of the time. It’s never enough. You ever eaten something you love but somehow, you’re never satisfied? Or maybe it isn’t cooked the right way, so you’re like ‘ugh I hate this’ but you really don’t? Then you eat it anyway…because you’re starving. Yeah…like that. I never felt anything then. It just felt good. But I didn’t feel anything…not like I do now. Now I hate it but then, I didn’t. Okay, I’m not making sense. I… listen, Ford…I…”

“Ford…? Ford? Ford, are you crying?”

…

“Ford, don’t cry….”

---

“Ford? Hey Ford…it’s gonna be okay…don’t cry…”

…

Ford cries, hidden in the dark.

“Ford? Ford don’t cry…Ford…Ford…”

Ford apologizes.

“No, why are you crying? Ford…Ford sorry. Sorry, Ford…Ford, please don’t cry…”

“I…never should’ve touched you. I’m so sorry…” Ford choking out, every word struggling to exit his throat. “You were so young…so…so young…six…twelve…for so many years…”

Ford’s throat thickened, voice now raspier. “How? How was it so easy for you to find men who’d hurt you like this?”

Bill winces. Hearing Ford like this…

“No no…no…wait…wait till I’m done talking okay? Just wait…Ford wait…”

Bill leaves imprints of kisses all over Ford’s face, whose eyes lay hidden by a hand. He kisses to make it better, just like Ford taught him, until a smile evinces.

“Don’t cry…don’t cry….”
Ford says to continue.

“So…when I met Evan. I think I mentioned it, maybe? He took me in, surprisingly…he never…he never asked anything of me. Like…never…wanted to fuck me. Never. Never touched me like that.”

“I was…I really…liked him. I remember this…this scene…where I’m sitting on our bed. We shared a bed. A double bed. In the middle of the apartment. We had a one room apartment, and the kitchen was sectioned off. I sat watching him do the dishes. I’d always watch him. The…silhouette…like, his frame—there’s this image burned in my brain. He’s in a white shirt, slightly tight, and he’s washing dishes. And he turns his head, noticing me but does nothing. Then a few minutes later he looks at me…and smiles. It’s a really…slight smile, but it’s there, you know? In the curve of his lips, the squint of his eyes. Sometimes he’s wearing a white shirt with a picture of an island on the back. Hawaii? I don’t fucking know…”

“I just…I always…liked him… I…when I’d look at him from behind, I’d see my father…my dad who was always so quiet…. With his black hair…and his height. My dad was tall. Like me.”

“I was different when I started out…a little more like I am now. Scared all the time. He was nice… weird but nice. I’d…I mean… he’s the reason I knew for sure I liked men. Fuck, I’d get these butterflies in my stomach. I’d look at me and I’d feel all self-conscious.”

“He was really aloof. Like… he let me share his bed, dressed in front of me, and shit. Nothing phased him, and he was really compliant. Here, he was more…subservient but back home, really… he’d do anything I asked, but never seemed like a pushover. And scary when he dealt everyone else. It made me feel special. How he was an A-grade asshole to everyone else except me. And Kryptos, too. Oh…when I met Evan… around that time, although Kryptos’s dad was dead, he was still being taken care of by his grandfather. Old guy passed away soon after and he came to stay with us.”

Ford nuzzled his nose in Bill’s silky hair.

“And then he… he fucked me over. Liar. Liar…god, I feel so fucking stupid. I thought…I really thought…Ford, I thought he loved me. He wanted to fuck me. I thought he loved me. It felt like he was taking care of me. All a lie. That really…”

Bill Cipher doesn’t get hurt.

“…hurt. I cried a lot over that. Like a total wimp.”

“Okay…I uh, I’ll skip ahead… I was free? Kinda? I could do whatever I wanted. I made money by the usual: drugs, theft, running errands for bigger guys and human trafficking here and there. I used to do this thing where I’d seduce older guys, rob them and then drug them. It was great. They’re so fucking stupid. Eventually, I thought it’d be cool if I found people as fucked up as me. And my gang was born. I… did…some terrible shit, Ford. If I told you in detail, you’d hate me. So, I’m gonna skip out on that. Time passed, and I was all ‘what if I went home and killed everyone and took over?’ Great plan, right?”

“Wait, did anyone else know who you were?” Ford asked.

“As in my real identity? There were rumours, cause of the tats. I changed my identity a lot so most who knew me thought I was just faking that shit.”

“I see. Alright, carry on.”

“I come home and nonno isn’t there. He was in Italy… health issues. I…see your photo. I tell my dad. I say your father fucked me. And you knew. You knew, I told him. Because he did, Ford. I
know he did. I know I know because it happened to him. I know…I know…I KNOW. We got into an argument and he…was screaming. I’ve never heard my father yell.” Bill shrunk in Ford’s arms. “Tries attacking me, I slice his face. He beats me blah blah. He had…the same scar as Evan… afterwards. Sorry… I don’t really…wanna go into too much detail, if that’s okay.”

“It’s fine, darling. So, you suspected it happened to your father that strongly?”

“Yeah…”

“Surgery…and I get in contact with Fids. You know how that ends. Then I follow you. And… drinking. We were all drinking. Drunk all the time. I was never sober, not once.” He rubs Ford’s face to check for any new or stray tears.

“I…that night…I came to see you. That night we were together… that was the first time…anyone ever touched me like that. It didn’t feel like we did anything…sexual? Like…I can’t explain it. Every time…I was with you, before that, it felt like a dream. You reminded me of him, before…he… anyway…every time after that…the…the way you look at me, and talk to me…the way you touch me…it’s so…it’s so…I don’t know…it doesn’t hurt…it doesn’t hurt…”

“I was…a lil drunk the first time we were together, so my most vivid memories are after that. I remember…the hotel. How gentle you were then, too…how you called me dear…and darling while your fingers never hurt. And…and how you rub my head when I suck you off…it’s the best…you’re so nice…you always…you always take such good care of me…you aren’t selfish. Overly generous, actually…the best… you always hold me afterwards. Who does that? Who? You do…”

Bill sighed out a laugh.

“I lied to you, you know. When I said it doesn’t hurt. That time when you said no to sex. It normally hurts, when I take it. But I’m so used to it… and that time, that time when you were punishing me with your fingers? It didn’t fucking hurt.”

“I took advantage of you…you were…” Ford whispered with regret.

“It’s okay, Ford. It’s okay…don’t be sad…”

“Anyway…I… I don’t hate sex or anything. I’ve maybe…I mean…I’ve been with people I enjoyed, but I was always the one fucking, you know? On other end…it…it just doesn’t feel good. I like pain, but…but it…it doesn’t feel good. But I know…I know with you, it won’t hurt. I know…” He kisses into Ford’s neck. “I know…it won’t hurt. Nothing hurts with you.”

“I know…I know I’d love sex with you, I do love sex with you. Everything we do, I love. I love it when you touch me. Don’t stop touching me, Ford…” He continues to kiss Ford’s neck. “I wouldn’t be here if you hadn’t touched me…I wouldn’t be feeling better…if you hadn’t touched me…”

Composed, Ford said. “You hate sex because you’ve been raped so often and you can’t distinguish the two.”

“Ford…”

“It’s true. When you say you hate sex, you’re saying you hate being raped. The sex you do claim you enjoy are the consensual encounters.” Ford explained. “You’ve spent years re-enacting your abuse, Bill. Of course you’d hate it.”

“Oh…”
Silence once more.

“You’re…you’re right, Ford. Maybe. I had no idea what it was like when someone loved you. You’re right…he… never loved me. Not like you do. I bet…I bet if you were my dad…or my grandfather…everything would’ve been better…”

“Hey Ford…if you do wanna hurt me, I’m okay with it. Just…in case. I mean…I wouldn’t mind trying some of that with you. I bet it’d be better with you. Like it was with nonno…it’s different when someone loves you. The pain isn’t that bad or anything. You get through it…and it’s worth it, when they’re happy…”

“Just…kiss me afterwards? Yeah…I’d like that…”

...

...

“Please don’t hurt me…Ford…”

Ford’s crying again, and so is he.

--

Bill holds one of Ford’s hands while bathing him in allaying kisses.

“Don’t cry…don’t cry…”

Ford touches him in the same way his grandfather touched him, with different intentions and six fingers instead of tattooed ones.

Every touch a blessing.

Because only the damned don’t cry.

--

We aren’t the damned, Stanford.

4am, and Ford had to use the bathroom. As he got up, he felt himself pulled back as if chained to the bed.

“No, where are you going…?” Bill—the culprit—whined, half asleep.

“The bathroom, darling.”

“I’ll go with you.”

“No no—” but Bill’s already climbing out.

He relieved himself with Bill’s arms wrapped around his neck from behind, purring. They both washed their hands and he had Bill climb into bed first and then pulled him close, the boy snuggling up against him as always.

“You’re so clingy.”
Bill’s throat rumbled in response, like a little toy engine.

He kissed Bill’s forehead. “And here I am, rewarding such bad behaviour…”

A sleepy laugh, and soon, they’re both asleep.

---

“Hey Ford…wake up.”

“What time is it…?”

“Six.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing…you were…laying weird. Uh, can you lay on your right side? Just turn over…”

Ford did as requested and Bill squirmed next to him, Ford’s arms locking around him automatically.

“Oh, you can go back to sleep now.”

“So clingy…”

Bill responded with drowsy purrs in his neck.

His little kitten.

---

Twelve. Earlier than twelve it had begun, but twelve…

It explained Bill’s emotional immaturity—he had never matured past the age his abuse occurred.

No wonder Bill could barely express himself, or articulate his feelings. How could he when he had never been given the proper tools?

Ford rubs Bill’s head until he drifts away.

---

Saturday

When Stanford was young and his mother was in a good mood, he’d wake to the smell of French toast. Or rather, any egg dish that didn’t require too much work, but always an egg dish. They were easy while still requiring enough effort to demand gratitude and praise. Ford’s mother did not like to work, but she did enjoy praise.

When he smelt French toast shimmying through the air, for just a moment, he thought he was back home in Glass Shard, New Jersey. Alone during spring break, having to spend his days on the beach getting sun burnt while Stanley brought him stray litter from beach squatters. Watching the other kids play with one another, ignoring him.

He rose, and still sleepy, walked to the kitchen where he found Bill at the stove; hair dishevelled and wearing Ford’s bathrobe. Jazz music boogied through the air, Bill’s body swaying naturally to the beat.

“Morning to you, too. That smells wonderful… French toast?”

“No, Italian toast.” Bill quipped, flipping toast in the pan. “Nearly done, too. Have a seat.”


“Lavish breakfast….” Ford said, as Bill laid out everything out. A tall glass of orange juice, an omelette and a side dish of three slices of French toast. The toast was a beautiful golden yellow—cooked to perfection. The omelette was similar to the previous one Bill had cooked for him. Perfect as well. Gold experience indeed.

“What are you eating? Have you eaten already?” Ford asked, ready to dig in.

“Just gonna have coffee.”

Ford grabbed Bill’s wrist. “Darling…please eat something.”

“I’m fine, Ford!” Bill whined.

“Bring me a plate please. I’ll split my omelette and you can have half. We’ll share the toast, too.”

“Ford—”

“Please, Bill. Please eat.”

Bill put his mug down and fetched a plate with matching utensils. He frowned the entirety of Ford splitting the omelette, and Ford then realized he had to make this an enjoyable experience to ensure Bill was encouraged to eat in the future.

“What if I fed it to you?” Ford asked, and then Bill was already leaning forward, mouth open and ready.

Ford thought of the childish aeroplane and choo-choo train games adults used to feed children.

*Here comes the aeroplane! Now open up!*

The problem of how to get Bill Cipher to eat: partially solved.

Ford realized managing Bill’s diet was compulsory if he expected Bill to pick up weight. Preventing Bill’s nausea would be the most effective, but alterations to his diet would have added benefits in his overall recovery.

Ford never cared much for his own diet. But once Bill Cipher was added into the equation, setting an example was important.

Bill watched him shave.

“I’ve never seen you shave.” Ford said, tapping the blade clean beneath the running water.

“I laser.”

“Laser?”
“Yeah, I had my face lasered. My dick, too.” Bill said. “Maybe you should consider it? Burn that shit right off!”

“Lasers actually destroy the hair follicle. They don’t necessarily ‘burn’ the hair off.”

“Yeah yeah…”

“So, that’s why you’re always so…smooth.”

Bill winked at him. “Want me to pay for you to get your dick and face lasered? Maybe your under arms too?”

“Oh, no no I’m fine.” Ford replied.

“I kinda like you a little hairy…I mean, the hair, and arms part…boy, you have a lot of hair, now that I think about it.”

“I have an average amount for a man. You have quite hairy arms, too.”

“Italian. Shouldn’t you be a balding?” Bill asked as he scrutinized further.

“Good genes.” Ford said.

“Let me…shave your face.”

“I’m not letting you near me with a razor.”

“Let’s cook dinner together.” Ford suggested.

“You can cook?”

“No, but I can learn.”

Bill beamed.

Couples who cooked together, stayed together.

--

“I’m going to pick up ingredients.” Ford said, putting on his coat.

“I’ll go with you!” Bill made a rush for his coat but Ford held him back.

“I can handle this. You stay here. I’ll be right back.” Ford repeated, but Bill kept fretting.

“Darling, I’ll be right back.”

Bill gave a ‘hmph’, and surrendered.

“Have you seen my wallet?” Ford asked while checking his pockets.

“Don’t bother. Ask for a guy named Soos and tell him I sent you. He’ll put it on my tab.”

“Zeus?”

“Yeah, Soos. Looks like a giant mole rat. Tends to wear question marks on his shirts.” Bill said,
“Seating himself at the kitchen counter.

“Hmm, I think I may know of this boy you speak of.”

“Boy? Dude’s a grown man.”

“Well, in comparison to me…”

“Yeah yeah.”

“Alright. I’ll be back soon, dear. Behave.”

Bill grinned.

---

[Ford’s Darling]: Hey punto interrogativo
[Ford’s Darling]: Stanford’s coming over so give him a hand
[Ford’s Darling]: Or two
[Ford’s Darling]: And don’t call him Stanford
[Ford’s Darling]: It’s Dr Pines to you, jackass
[?]: whoa you finally broke the ice! How’d you do it?
[Ford’s Darling]: Not now, Soos

---

“How did you meet that…unfortunate looking man?” Ford asked as he unpacked the newly bought groceries. Fresh produce was always ideal for cooking.

“When I was following you in the store, he noticed.” Bill replied, nabbing a sweetie-pie treat he assumed was his. If he can see it, it’s his to take.

They spend all of Saturday watching Stargate. Ford paused their marathon to watch the Stargate movie, and during it, Bill noticed Ford’s attentiveness increased whenever a specific character appeared on screen.

---

“Hey, so…did you ever find Ra attractive?”

Ford blushed, adjusting his glasses. Guilty. “Y-yes, when I first saw the movie…”

“Don’t you think he looks a little like me?” Bill mused.

“Not particularly…”

“Oh come on, we totally…look alike…” Bill looped his arms around Ford’s neck. You have a type: tall, dark and handsome. And dangerous.”

Bill still remembers how hard Ford got the last time he ‘threatened’ him during sex. Pervert.

---

Ford’s in the bath. Bill washes his hair and makes a convincing argument as to why Ford should take the Jurassic leap and dye his grey hair.
The older man gives up and Bill dunks his head underwater in triumph.


“What do you mean?”

“You’re obsessed with my age. And you keep trying to play adult. Just let go. I watched you, for a long time, Stanford. I know what you’re like.”

Ford contemplated Bills’ words. In retrospection, they held truth. He was overcompensating. But he could not prevent it—Bill needed a strong figure to lean on.

“Hey…” Bill hunched over, upside, and waved a hand in his face. “Just be yourself, Stanford.”

“The same goes for you.”

“Let’s make a deal then. We’ll both be ourselves from now on! No more being held back by anything!” Bill threw the towel into the laundry basket. Goal!

“I like that.”

“We’re weird. Let’s be fucking weird. Let’s stop trying to be what we aren’t…” He rubbed his nose against Ford’s ear. “You’re fucking weird and it’s awesome.”

“You sound so young when you say that. Using words like ‘awesome.’”

“Shaddup.”

“He wanted what was best for me.” Bill whispers in the confessional dark.

“I want what’s best for you, dear.”

“I know…”

“Do you want to… force yourself on me? Right now? Like fuck me hard?”

“No, my darling. Where is this coming from?”

“I was just thinking about it…”


“He’d do it randomly, sometimes.”

Bill cries in his arms. Carefully, he holds Bill and rolls over, shielding Bill with his broad frame from the world that hurt him. His lover’s face is tumid and shining with tears in what scant light they had. He kisses Bill’s cheek to dispel the frost and a meek smile is born out of the parting cold. Kisses Bill’s forehead, and works his way down: eyelids, nose, cheeks again, lips, jaw.
He doesn’t tell Bill to stop crying but soon, the crying subdues on its own, replaced with giggles—the kisses ticklish and the now alleviated atmosphere uplifting them both.

One of Bill’s hands come to his face to wipe the tears but Ford detains it and wipes Bill’s face himself. As if compelled, Bill’s puffy cheek is drawn into the hand. Ford thought Bill’s face, when compared to his large abnormal hand, was incredibly diminutive. As Bill sought comfort in it, he resembled a child even more so than usual. More tears—in gratitude this time. Thumbing soft strokes across Bill’s damp cheek until it’s no longer damp, Ford’s thumb slips down only to be nipped. Bill tittered at Ford’s faux grimace, the man getting revenge by vibrating his lips at Bill’s neck until the boy is squealing and squirming for mercy.

Quiet again.

Neither of them speak. What needs to be said is being said through other means. He ensures Bill’s face is dry and they move onto their sides, with his arms wrapped protectively around Bill and Bill’s resting over his.

“Everything’s going to be okay, my darling. I’m here now.” He whispers into Bill’s ear and the hands at his clasp tightly.

--

He cries.

He cries, in the arms of a man who does not think it’s weak or befitting punishment.

Stanford Pines…

It’s still raining but Ford said he liked the rain.

--

“I miss my dad…and my mom…and my sister…” Bill whispered. "My...my friends too..."

Melancholy with regret, he shimmies further up Ford until his eyes are clouded by the salmon-pink of Ford’s nose. They share an eskimo kiss and then he lays his cheek at Ford’s collarbone to remind himself that although he’d lost what will never return, he’d found something else in its absence.

“Hey Ford?”

“Yes, my darling?”

“Hey, you’re over-using darling…” Bill blew raspberries into Ford’s skin. “I’m sorry…for everything.”

Ford lays a hand on his cheek as a blanket. He’s soon asleep.

Ford was woken by the feel of something probing his mouth—oh, Bill’s tongue.

Wait what?

The dense darkness implied it was still the middle of the night. A hand is pawing through his hair and another is lazily thumbing the contour of his right hip, nails denting into skin as if kneading dough. Aggression took reins and Bill straddled him sluggishly. Ford moved a hand to urge him off but the hand was quickly pinned against the bed, fingers joining with his.
Freeing his mouth, he manages: “Bill, darling…it’s the middle of the night…”

“Sei in vena…?” Bill breathes in his ear, and then keeps talking in strings of Italian. By the deliverance and grinding of hips into him, Ford knew he had to be saying less than modest things.

Night kissing continues; Ford still uncomfortable and Bill still hungry. Late night munchies. Bill descends into his neck, still kissing, and then stops, his entire body weight suddenly falling onto Ford.

It took Ford a few seconds to realize Bill had fallen asleep. In the midst of kissing him.

At least he wasn’t heavy, Ford thought, leaving the boy atop him.

Sunday

“Here’s a list of occupations that would suit you. Do you want to go through them now or later?” Ford asked, flapping the paper side to side.

Bill pulls Ford’s free hand onto his cheek. “…Later.”

“Okay…I’m gonna do your eyebrows and hair at the same time.” Bill declared, reading the instructions on a small green box. “They say not to use it on your eyebrows, but as long as it doesn’t get in your eyes, we’re good.”

“Bill…are you sure?” Ford asked, now anxious.

“Oh yeah. I’ll just rub Vaseline underneath your brows so it doesn’t drip into your eyes. Also, you’re gonna have to lay back, just to be safe.” Bill opened the box, taking out its contents and giving them a once over. “This is a ten-minute kit. Dye for men always takes like, a fraction of the women’s one. Probably because the chick one has a million ingredients for nice hair. Your hair is a virgin so we don’t need to be nice to it.”

Ford frowned; surely if his hair was virginal, more care was required…? To ensure it remained healthy?

“Oh!” Bill grinned. “You ready?!”

Vexed but a man of his word, Ford nodded.

- He dyes Ford’s hair brown with no complications. Before Ford can look in the mirror, the terminal begins to beep.

**Boop.**

“I’m going to knock another five years off. You okay with that, Sixer?” Bill asks, his smile so wide, the flesh at his eyes wrinkles with strain.

“What?”

“Boom! Sold to the man with the six fingers! Five years off coupon!”
Ford sees blue, and then forgets.

“Ford, how old are you actually?”

“61. I thought you knew?”

“Have you seen yourself in the mirror? Seriously, it’s not just your new do. You look like you’re in your thirties.” Bill pushes him towards the big mirror in the bathroom. “Look! Look how little wrinkles you have! You had a few just a couple weeks ago! What happened to them?!”

“I’m…not sure.” Ford said, noticing the difference himself. The man in the mirror is too young to be Stanford Pines. Was it possible for a change in hair colour to have such substantial effect? Bill was correct; he looks exactly how he looked in his thirties. He felt as young as he looked, too. What was going on?

“Bullshit! What are you using? Are like those old guys who try to look young after they get a young partner? Who knew you were so self-conscious!” Bill hugged him from behind. “Incredible! You look incredible!”

“God, how long was alcohol in my system for? Maybe you’ve always looked this way…” Bill mused, livening up once his attention returned to Ford.

“I like it! I like it a lot!” Bill assaults Ford with little kisses all over his face—glasses included.

Ford laughs, hands attempting to pacify Bill. “You really didn’t like my grey hair?”

“It’s not that… we match now. We match! You don’t look like you’re…it doesn’t matter. We match now. I love it! Come on, let’s take photos together!”

Ford’s wallet now has a credit-card sized polaroid of Bill and himself. They look like lovers, with Ford perhaps just a little older.

What was happening…?

Ford said they’ll Dungeons Dungeons and more Dungeons when Bill is feeling better. For now, they should think of what characters they’ll be using.

Ford began kissing at Bill’s earlobe, dipping into all of its little cervixes. He traces a half-moon from ear to ear, and then makes a beeline down Bill’s spine. He stamped Stanford kisses across Bill’s tense back while a hand fondled Bill’s hair.

The scars came into view and Ford kissed each, thrice this time; Bill’s hands clenched at the realisation but relaxed when Ford’s hand joined with it.

“Would you like me to design you a tattoo to cover these?”

“Seriously?” Bill muffled. “I-I’d love that…”

“What would you like?”
“Anything…anything…as long as it’s by you.”

“I always think about…how warm you are…” Bill says, while Ford kisses his neck. “Like…an electric blanket made of flesh. Fuck, I could see something like that in Hellraiser or some shit. Some dude walking around with a blanket whose also his lover. Sign me the fuck up for that.”

Ford laughs; it’s as serene as cool spring water, and then his lips are back to kissing Bill. Bill wishes he could bottle that laugh, sell it for five bucks a pop. Stanford Pines’ Laughter.

“Like I bet I could sit in the North Pole and not freeze if I had you.” He says. Ford’s lips have wandered lower, now taste-testing the skin of his collar bone. Ford’s hand begins massaging Bill’s inner thigh and Bill spreads his legs only for Ford to pull them back together. He then stroke’s the contour of Bill’s hipbone, and Bill understands—not yet.

“When you kiss me, you sometimes breathe like you’re fucking me.” Bill said.

“Is that why you like it?”

“Maybe.”

“You like to imagine me fucking you?”

“Ford what the fu—” Ford’s laughter cut Bill’s reply off. The man laughed and laughed, at Bill’s ear.

“Why are you laughing?”

Ford kept on laughing. “What am I going to do with you?”

“What so funny? What—Oh.”

He’d gotten hard.

“Don’t worry, dear. You’re young. You won’t have that much self-control.”

Ford kept laughing and Bill imagined returning all his bottles of Stanford Pines’ Laughter.

“Get off me you pervert. You…god, I hate you sometimes. Off off.”

“I’m quite certain you never acted like this when any of your other lovers.”

“Oh, whatever.”

“Am I right?” Ford asked.

“Maybe.”

“And you didn’t get scared. When I mentioned fucking you.”

“Huh?”

“Nevermind.”

“Don’t swear, Ford. It doesn’t fit you.”
“I agree. I just like to tease you a bit.”

Once Bill was comfortable on Ford, Ford said, “I want you to stay this week with me.”

“Huh?”

“The full week. And come to class with me.”

“Is it take your son to work week?”

“I want you to experience the environment. To see how you react. You aren’t by any means ready to attend school, but I want you to tell me if you enjoy it. Then we can decide on whether I tutor you privately, or if you attend school.”

“Ah yes, watch me in the wild. Take your nerd notes.”

“Exactly. I have to make sure I’m doing what’s best for you and you often say things to please me.” Ford’s tone softened, lips moving closer to Bill’s forehead where they planted kisses. “I wouldn’t put it past you to say you enjoy school when you really don’t.”

“If you say so, Fordster. It’s off to class for this guy…”

“No complaints?”

“None. Said I’d do whatever you want.” Bill nestled into Ford’s chest. “And…I get to spend another week you…I can’t believe it…”

Ford laughed.

“Wont you get into trouble? By missing out on your…work.” Ford asked.

“Nah, I’ll say I got some big things I’m doing with Stanford Pines.”

Ford hummed in response.

…

“Hey Ford?”

“Yes?”

“Thanks. For…caring? About what I want…and stuff.”

“Don’t thank me for what should be mandatory, darling.”

Bill’s sure he developed wrinkles overnight from all the smiling.

Ford’s hands slide up and down his lower back. Touches that roll over him like low-tide waves upon a shore. Lower and lower and—

“Why are you touching my ass?” Bill mumbled, wriggling his lips beneath the provocative pressure.

Ford’s laughter was breezy. “You don’t like it?”

“Don’t do this shit while you’re forcing me to sit with blue balls.”
“I’m not forcing you to do anything.”

“You know I want you to touch me…”

Ford slipped his hands into Bill’s boxers, and Bill let out a muted gasp that turned into a growl.

“Seriously. Quit feeling me up.”

“I’m not. I’m just touching you.”

“Why?”

“I like it.” Ford said, continuing the torturous touches.

“Need more spank material?”

“Bill.” Ford’s tone was terse now. “I’m only touching you. Your rear as a body part like any other.”

“Why do you always try to make perverted shit seem innocent? Is it the Jewish thing?”

Ford laughs again and it tickles.

“Uh…” Bill nuzzles in his neck. “When…I laid on him, just like this, he did what you’re doing. It was one of the first things he began doing.”

Ford’s hands freeze then flee.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to kill the mood.” Bill whispered.

Ford’s arms wrap around him, and ‘I’m sorry’ is repeated in his ear.

“---

“You aren’t him, Ford. Don’t stop …don’t stop touching me…” Bill assures. “It’s okay…if it’s you. I mean, it’s not like I think of that man or anything…it’s just…it’s one of—I just remembered, that’s all.”

“It’s alright, darling. I shouldn’t have done that.”

“No come on, you touch me weirdly all the time. I like it…”

“I don’t want to remind you of terrible times.”

“You don’t.”

“Fuck me, Ford. Fuck me. Please…please fuck me, with your thick cock, fuck me.” He grinds himself against Ford, licking at Ford’s bare chest. His tongue does tricks and twirls, lips sucking to an enthralling rhythm while his eyes convey nothing but desperate and empty need.

“You aren’t thinking.” Ford says, pinching a cheek.

“No, I—”

“Listen to me. You aren’t thinking when you talk like this. You’re repeating what you were taught to.”
“No…I really do—”

“Darling, don’t argue with me.”

Ford rubs his head for what seems like hours until he calms down.

Bill Cipher begins to see pink.

Stanford dreams he’s holding Fiddleford in his arms. Malnourished, pale and seconds away from the Fates cutting his string.

His embrace tightens as he begs Fiddleford to hold on but his former partner is quiet. Not dead yet, Ford still feels his jittering breath in the tender skin of his neck.

When he wakes, it’s Bill in his arms, with breath just as cold.

Bill was no Fiddleford. He knows this.

He blinks away the wetness in his eyes, as he does every other night.

When black sleep takes him again, once more, it’s Fiddleford in his arms.

Ford’s phone began ringing; louder than what he’d set it to.

Stanley calling…

Ford didn’t know anyone named Stanley, let alone anyone who would think it appropriate to call this time of night.

“Hello? Hello?” Ford answered but there’s only breathing on the other end; harmonious and steady. Not the heavy breathing one came to expect as per horror movies.

“Ford, what the fuck? Who are you talking to at this time of night?” Bill grumbled, rising from his beneath the covers.

“I’m not sure. I think my phone is malfunctioning.”

“Give that to me!” Bill snatched it, eyes squinting at the brightness of the screen. He screamed, “Fuck off!” into the phone and then flinched back as if struck. He rubbed his ambushed ear, moaning in pain, as Ford asked, “What’s wrong?”

“The asshole had speaker phone on! My voice went right back at me! What a motherfucker!”

Ford laughed. Might be a bug then.

“Fuck this.” Bill switched it off and laid back down. “Bed time.”

Ford sat pondering in the dark until Bill’s hands snaked around his neck.

“I shouldn’t have to tell you to put your arms around me…”

He’s pulled back down into the puffy covers and lets his budding pearl sleep in the oyster of his
Ford’s phone went off again.

Answering it only evinced breathing.

“I dreamt I was talking to you.” Bill sighed, feeling Ford’s nose rendezvous with his ear. “You didn’t know who I was…I kept trying to…tell you, and you just didn’t get it. Was weird…”

It doesn’t have to be like this. Keep Talking.
Art to look at!!

http://antoinettesart.tumblr.com/post/157692327359 The Painting from chap 29. *_-*_

And look at this great shitpost:
https://dragonshydreamer.tumblr.com/post/159369464660

Drabble on University!Bill:
http://yoursatanboyfriend.tumblr.com/post/159248586318/teachers-darling

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I dreamt I met a snake who thought it was a boy, at the bank of a timeless yellow river where a Great Dane sat beside it. It called itself Stanley.”

—Stanford Pines.

Stanley looks around, and finds nothing here.

He whistles, and waits.

Chapter End Notes

Forever and ever.
Hey guys! Kittengate is over. You can read about the drama and my embarrassing meltdown here: http://yoursatanboyfriend.tumblr.com/tagged/the-salt-saga
A summary: Someone copied minor details from TNP without giving credit.
Side note: can you believe kitten Bill and darling Bill are entirely unique to TNP? (°ᴥ°) The Billford fandom is THAT small. (the kitten/darling thing makes sense in TNP but in canon, it does not.)

I’m gonna be reporting their fic to get it removed. (no idea when since I’m really busy.) Since I have evidence of people confirming they copied me(as a way to undermine my protest, no less), I’ll win this. >:3 Don’t support fics that steal people’s ideas. If someone has never created anything too original or had their original ideas stolen, I don’t expect them to get it. :’3 It’s 2017 and people still think being copied is flattering and not disrespectful.

Anyway, thanks for breaking 500 overnight!! That’s like 20+ people?! Thanks for all the support!!
Thank you to everyone who’s ever sent me their views, whether on tumblr or here. As a newbie to the Billford fandom who rarely reads fanfiction anymore, hearing how allegedly original TNP and TNP’s Bill are really helped me bust the plagiarist! And it feeds my ego a little.

Most past and current shitpost references credited to Ludwigbeilschmitten@ tumblr.

The fingers were removed from his mouth, and panting, Bill took to licking Ford’s cheek. Muttering
“Gonna give it to me?”
“No, Bill. In fact, I’m going to **take** it from you.” Ford said. “I’m going to fuck you and you’re going to **hate** it.”

—The future, a day or two from now.


—**Bill Cipher/Casper Giordano**

I’m coming to you, if I have to come on my knees, as I am today; filthy, vile and unlovable.
I’ll come to you, brother.

“Will, like my middle name! Cipher, like the code! Cool, yeah? It’s my pen name!”

—**Will Cipher (???)**
Sad Kitten Boy

Chapter Summary

Stanford reaches out to Bill. Stanley reaches back.

Chapter Notes

To view the relevant tumblr post to chapters, go here:
http://yoursatanboyfriend.tumblr.com/tagged/tnp chapters
They contain plenty of bonus material I can't fit into chapters.

Infinite thanks to ludwigbeilschmitten who continues to inspire me. Listen to Mother Mother's Ghosting near the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man."

—Samuel Johnson

“I got a lot of skeletons in my closet. I’m one of them.” —Casper Giordano.

“It’s me or Stanley, Sixer! Pick! You can’t have both of us! You know why. You know. Now pick! Choose!”—Bill Cipher.

Eeney meeney miney—

…me?

Bill kisses Ford with an open mouth, the spit transferred conveying an enthusiasm Ford is indifferent towards. He keeps at it though; sucking, licking and even biting at Ford’s lips, as if he’s unsure the best method of communicating this gutsy and primal desire and so decides on them all. Hands everywhere, purposefully avoiding the paramount areas because he knows his zealousness can only take him so far. If not careful, Ford will stop him. He has to ease the other man into it—nice and steady. Kissing was like fucking with Stanford Pines.

But today’s different, because Ford’s hands are the ones who are greedy and lusty, grabbing at Bill hard enough to bruise. (he does bruise. Ford knows he bruises easily) Grinding against Bill as if he is rough terrain, capable of poking every sweet spot should he get the right angle.

When their lips part, Ford takes both cheeks into a grip of his hand (Bill checks that it’s six fingers, just in case), squeezes and decides today’s the day. The day, Ford says, you get fucked. And Bill laughs, of course. Ford laughs, too. They both laugh until Ford pushes Bill onto the bed; then it’s only one of them laughing.
Clothes are strange. One minute they’re here, the next they’re gone. The same way one minute Ford is himself, and the next he isn’t. It’s only when Ford’s belt comes off and that very particular sound plays through the air, that Bill begins to understand what’s happening.

Ford has finally lost his patience.

Understandable.

He’s naked and Ford isn’t. He’s trembling and Ford isn’t. Bill Cipher is a lot of things that Stanford Pines isn’t.

And Casper Giordano is a lot of things that Bill Cipher isn’t.

Ford’s fingers go into his mouth and he sucks on instinct. His body still remembers. It never forgot. It couldn’t forget; he’s spent too many years reminding it using other men.

The fingers are removed and panting, Bill took to licking Ford’s cheek. Muttering, “Gonna give it to me?” Please.

“No, Bill. In fact, I’m going to take it from you.” Ford says. “I’m going to fuck you and you’re going to hate it.”

The chill of the inevitable comes like the coldest winter imaginable. New York winter. Freezing; freezing on the streets. Freezing in some guy’s arms, in some guy’s bed.

“A—are you really Ford? Are you…really…” Bill chokes out.

“Why do you keep asking if I’m truly myself?”

“You’re not…the same guy I watched…”

“I am.”

“No…Ford…Ford is different.”

“Appearances can be deceiving, can’t they? Did you assume you knew me because you peeked once or twice at what I allowed you to?”

“Are you that man?”

“No.”

“Are you sure? Are you… are you sure?”

“I’m quite certain I’m not your grandfather, Bill.”

Then Ford does something that confirms he’s a liar, that confirms he’s that man.

He starts to speak Italian. Perfectly.


…I missed you, too.” Bill says, reciting from daydreams and nightmares alike. “I missed you a lot…” Speaking English to nonnino is weird, and complaints are forbidden. Ford smiles and shows Bill
how much he loves him.

Pain is a funny thing. It hurts and hurts and hurts and then it doesn’t. Ford’s bigger than him, so naturally, it hurts. It hurts more than anything Bill has felt in a long time. It hurts, his mind says, but there’s no real pain. No pain in his body. Just pain in his mind.

Psychomatic, isn’t it? Where had he heard that word, anyway?

No, maybe Ford’s possessed. Wasn’t that a thing? Dead possessing the living? Pathetic excuse. Because Stanford Pines has always been this kind of man.

Always.

- 

Bill wakes, screaming. The sound startles Ford awake, who rises disorientated and then suddenly alert. Acting quickly, Ford attempts restraining Bill to calm him, to no avail; Bill is implacable, lurching and convulsing violently. One of Bill’s hands fight to free themselves and once he succeeds, reaches for the alarm clock and smashes it against Ford’s head; it shatters and he manages to escape, rolling off to the side. Ford’s head is bleeding but it’s not fatal. Like hell Ford’s going to die over an alarm clock whacking.

Bill is still screaming but in Italian now. He continues to scream as he picks up the lone chair in Ford’s room and raises it to bring it down onto Ford’s bloodied head. To finally end this once and for all.
But Ford is fast and rolls to the other side just as the chair comes down; it doesn’t break, only bounces a little and then falls still.

Taking advantage of Bill’s surprise, Ford gets him at both of his wrists and holds them with a gentle grip. “Darling darling calm down.” Bill struggles until Ford’s touching him. Touching him in a way that’s too gentle for it to be anyone but Stanford Pines. His Ford. Favourite Ford.
Bill flaps his arms about, enfolded wrists bringing Ford’s hands with them as weightless chains.

“Bill? Darling, are you okay? Talk to me.”

“I—” Words stuck in his throat, kept there by the ghost of that man’s hand around his neck; choking him over the smallest things because one time he spilt the whiskey down that man’s white pants. One time. It was once—

Bill’s crying while Ford holds him.


Bill doesn’t reply; fixated on the fresh blood at Ford’s forehead. He did that, didn’t he? He hurt Ford. More tears come. He hurt Ford. What the fuck was wrong with him?

“I’m sorry…lemme…lemme…towel? Spirits…disinfect it, first, right?” Ford is blurry again, too many tears.

“I’m alright. It’s nothing, dear. Really. It’s just a clock. Only a clock.”

“Ford, Ford this one time…one time he was drunk. Angry. A meeting went really bad? I don’t know…I spilled…the whiskey on him, his pants. He was so mad Ford he was so mad—” Bill rambles, still tight-roping hysteria. “You don’t drink, right? You don’t drink?”
“I don’t, dear.”

“W-why not…”

“Studies show it can cause minor brain damage.”

“Liar…”

Ford laughed. “I have my reasons.”

“It felt so real…” Bill said, voice now calmer. “It was real. I swear…you were you…and then it was like…you were him—it was so real. I swear…real…real…” Several more jagged breaths. “Don’t kick me out…I…I didn’t mean to hurt you, I swear…”

Ford’s arms enclosed him. “I know you didn’t. I’m not kicking you anywhere.”

“I—I bet…I’ll do it again…what then?” Unbidden tears soak themselves into Ford’s neck. “What then…”

“I’ll keep the bedside clear of items.”

Bill raises his head then drops it again, and touches the fresh cut at Ford’s forehead. “You’ve got red on you, Sixer.”

Bill clung to Ford throughout the night, holding him as if he’d had been the one ailed nearly to the lips of madness.

[My Stanley]: I was so scared :
[Darling]: But you made everything better :) 
[My Darling] :)!
[Darling]: I’m going to miss you
[Stanley]: I miss you.

The text is blurry to Ford’s myopia. He strains as the letters disappear one by one, until the messages are in this world no more.

“Ford…do you ever…feel like you’re possessed sometimes?” Bill asked, eyeing Ford’s band-aid.

“What do you mean?”

“Like you’re inside looking out, like through a window. And you’re watching yourself do shit outside but you’re inside. Make any sense?” Bill said. “Wait, the opposite—outside looking in. Sometimes I see myself…but I’m not myself…sorry, I sound fucking crazy, don’t I? Forget it. What’s for dinner?”

I wonder who’s possessing whom? The triangle on his palm says. Am I possessing you? Or is it you who’s possessing me? Food for thought.

“Why am I only dealing with this now?” In the grey dark of night, Bill flapped his lips against Ford’s chest as he spoke. “I wasn’t sad or anything as a kid. Sure, I didn’t like certain stuff and cried a few times but I dunno. It’s not like…it is now.”
“You didn’t understand what was happening to you. That’s why. As a child, your body cannot process that amount of trauma, darling.”

“You got a textbook you’re reading this outta?”

Laughter.

“Hey…that man in the grey… is gonna try and kill me.” Bill said. “I can tell.” He covered Ford’s eyes with a hand. “Would you miss me if I died?”

Ford kept quiet, pretending to be asleep. Bill shoved him and moved to his side of the bed.

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Five-hour drive to wonderful Glass Shard, New Jersey. They leave early morning Friday; Ford called in sick for both Friday and Monday, which was unnecessary as he was entitled to leave now that his funding had been approved. Soon though, he’d take indefinite leave and had yet to reveal this to Bill who would be elated.

And instead of working on his ideas for the portal, he’s fooling around with a boy a third of his age. Priorities priorities, Ford tells himself, but always gives way to indulgence whenever Bill Cipher was involved.

Bill watches him throughout the car-drive as they discuss whatever came to mind. At his insistence, Ford drives the full five hours, stopping for partial rests every two hours.

- 

Ford asked him if he’s decided what career path he wants to pursue.

“Mechanical engineering.” Bill said, eyes thin and lips puckered.

Ford appeared taken aback, impressed. “Are you certain? Why that?”

“You invent, I’ll build.”

“It’ll be quite some time before you’ll be able to build anything extravagant.” Ford said in laughter.

“We have time.”

No matter the size of the hole Fiddleford left, Bill would fill it. The same way Ford had filled the hole that man left.

---

An hour into the drive and after two rounds of Word Association, Bill brought up dreams. Ford said he had trouble remembering his lately and that it was rather unusual for him. Remembering dreams was the norm; he’d even gone as far as to once have kept a dream journal.

“I had a weird dream the other day. It was pretty vivid. I saw… You were holding a baby. Like this…” Bill holds his arms as if cradling a baby; his stare glossy and distant as if he truly held one and was now enchanted by its frailty. “I can see it? You’re sad…? And singing.”

Bill dropped his arms. “Weird.” He looked at Ford. “Can you sing?”

“I’m no worse than anyone else, I suppose.”

“You better sing something for me.”
“For my darling, I love you…” Ford sings, and leans to kiss his son’s forehead. “And I always will. _Until the end of time._”

—The false Ninth Paradigm.

Bill waves around polaroids he took of Ford to document Ford’s de-aging. "Look at this…amazing. You look so young. You gotta tell me what’s going on. Have you figured it out yet?" Bill said, skimming through the photos. "Gonna surprise me with science shit?" He grinned, pushing a photo into Ford’s face and expecting the road to be ignored. "Look, I took this one a few days ago, yeah yeah you didn’t know but check it out. Don’t you look younger now? Just a little? Maybe it’s the angle?"

The first thing Bill does once they enter their room is check if the bath is big enough for two people. "You promised me ages ago…” Bill reminded him. “That we’d bath together.”

Indeed Ford had, but Bill’s wound meant his upper body couldn’t be submerged into water. There was no point in bringing that up to one as wilful as Bill though, so Ford remained quiet. The room wasn’t big but it was comfortable and that seemed to mean more to Bill than extravagance. A surprise; Bill could be satisfied with bare necessities, more testament to his hard-knock life in New York.

Once they dropped their luggage and the room passed Bill’s scrutiny, Ford gave Bill a lazy tour of his childhood neighbourhood, suppressing any painful memories that resurfaced. This place was nothing but upsetting recollections and with enough rumination and dwelling, left Ford depressed and empty. No wonder he’d had no desire to return. His darling, however, was enamoured with his origins but clearly didn’t belong in the setting of a small town despite originating from one himself. A city boy in everything he did.

"Tell me a story of Little Fordsy." Bill requested after they both placed their lunch order at a café they were resting at, one Ford had visited often in his youth. Back then, it had been owned by the current owner’s father; names eluded him. “An interesting one. Something that will move me.”

Ford laughed. “Move you? Something sad, then?”

“Sure, knock yourself out, chief. Lemme hear it.” Bill grinned, unzipping his blue jacket to get comfortable. “I wanna award you an Emmy for best Flashback scene.”

Behind Bill, a little girl chewed on a bright pink candy cane. Candy canes. Ford looked at Bill. "I have a story."

Bill leaned forward, beaming.

“When I was little, I had a rough time at school. None of the kids seemed to like me, and I was poor. I couldn’t afford necessities. I never even had a lunch box.” Ford kept his voice flat. “One day, I thought up an ingenious plan to get my classmates to like me. I asked my mother to buy me a set of Christmas cards and a pack of candy canes. I wrote each one of my classmates a card, drew a picture of them inside and attached it to a candy cane. I thought this would get them to like me.”

Bill’s smile opened into a grin.

“At the end of the day, my cards were either returned to me, found in the rubbish, or on the floor.”

Bill’s grin fell off.
“They…they kept the candy canes though.” Ford chuckled, looking down. “I felt like such a fool. I couldn’t bear to tell my mother what had happened. She would be disappointed, and tell me she told me so.” Suddenly, Bill was holding his hand, encasing it in dark skin.

“Do you remember their names?” Bill asked.

“Their names?”

“Yeah. Names.”

“Darling…it was a long time ago.” Ford said. “Everyone bullied me because I was the designated target. Children will be children.”

“Bullshit. They knew what they were doing. They wouldn’t have wanted it to happen to them, right? So they know it’s fucked up.”

“Sweetheart…”

“I’m not hungry anymore.” Bill said as their food arrived. “I’ll eat later…how long were you bullied for?”

“I was bullied throughout my life, until I left for college.” Ford said as he sliced a piece of omelette. “My father enrolled me in boxing lessons to cope, but I’m not much of a fighter.”

“You are.” Bill retorted. “You are a fighter. You definitely are.” He poked his food. “Just don’t realize it, is all…”

“Hey…you know who else…took up boxing but quit? Because he didn’t like it? Dean Martin.” Bill said. “His dad made him but all he really wanted to do was sing love songs, I guess.” He poked Ford’s food. “Guess you’re my Dean Martin…”

Bill watched Ford eat, his own food returning with them to the hotel in a doggy bag. Bill flopped on top of Ford, his hands meeting beneath Ford’s back, and Ford’s own meeting at his mid-back. “You didn’t deserve that.”

“No child does.”

“That’s why…you just let everything happen to you. People been fucking with you your whole life.” Pushover. “I’m—am I…just like them?”

Ford doesn’t reply.

“Mi dispiace…. mi dispiace tanto… dispiace mi spiace…spiace…” Bill whispers into Ford’s ear. “Ti amo tanto amore mio.”

“I…” killed Fiddleford. Took away your happiness. “I-I’m…never gonna let you go.” Without him, Ford might be hurt again. Ford was too passive, too easy to target. The lame duck in hunting season. “Never.”

“I’ll kill anyone who talks shit to you like that.” I’m sorry. “You…you don’t deserve…to be treated…like that…”

Or like this.
Guilt. A strange feeling.

He rolled to his side and curled himself around one of Ford’s arms.

“I once spent weeks in the hospital because during an oral presentation, everyone threw items at me and I ended up badly hurt.” Ford said to the ceiling, still confessing trivial memories.

“If I was there, I’d have beat them all up.” Bill’s grip on Ford’s arm tightened and Ford’s other hand reached across to rub his cheek.

“Violence isn’t the answer.” Ford said.

“Yeah, well if you never do anything, people will fuck with you forever, Ford.”

“I think I’ve passed those days.”

Liar.

“Let’s hit the beach…the place you hung out all the time.” Bill suggested. “Then we can go for a late-night swim afterwards. What do you say? Yes? Yes.”

Ford laughed. A midnight swim sounded lovely.

As always, litter covered the beach. No one else in sight save for Bill and Ford. A blue swing set on the outer lips caught Ford’s eye; he’d played there frequently as a child and it still stood strong today.

“Did you bury Stanley on the beach?” Bill asked, kicking sand and looking around, unimpressed at both the scenery and the dirt on his shoes.

“No…backyard.” Ford sat down on a swing, surprised it could hold his weight.

“Why’d you hang out in this dump?” Bill asked, pebble in hand and sending it sailing to the horizon. It skittered a few times before sinking.

“I dreamed of sailing away, on a boat, somewhere. Like an adventure.” Ford confessed. “I’d look at the horizon…and imagine being somewhere else.”

“You were one depressing kid.” Bill took a seat on the swing next to Ford and they began rocking in union; Ford forward, Bill backward. The rusted mechanism creaking with every sway they each took and the sun saying its early farewells as it headed off to bed.

“Do you miss Stanley?” Bill asked.

“Sometimes, yes. Despite my age, it’s hard to forget your childhood friend.” Ford said.

“Huh…” Bill rose then sat again. “I’ll be your puppy. Well, I guess I kinda am… wanna play fetch? You throw a ball, and I’ll fetch! Or…I guess we’d call that catch. Catch? Yeah…I’d like that…” He hummed while Ford laughed. “I’d like to play catch with you, sometime. What do you say?”

“I don’t see why not.” Ford ruffled his hair and gently tugged at an ear, finger thumbing the small, golden hoop. Bill’s head tilted into the touch, with a sweet smile and closed eyes.
After having had enough, Bills swatted the hand away. All this unnecessary reminiscing made him hungry. He rummaged through his provisions bag, pulling out an appropriate snack. The loud crisp sound of the packet opening caught Ford’s attention.

“What’re you eating?”

Bill grinned, gum nearly visible. “Toffee peanuts! They’re my favourite!” The triangle on his palm laughs loud enough for Stanford to hear. Ford brushes it off as the sea air affecting his hearing. Then he has a toffee peanut and spits it out while Bill laughs and ruthlessly teases him about having an ‘old man palette’.

They swing together until dark.

- 

The triangle on his palm keeps laughing.

The water is cold and Bill won’t stop laughing at his red speedo.

It covers what needs to be covered and does he really look that foolish? Not like he was out of shape —on the contrary, Bill had complimented him multiple times on his alleged fantastic physique. But now that he recalls those memories, Bill always complimented him wearing his trademark Mean Smile. (A smile that may or may not have meant to convey sarcasm…)

“What the fuck is that? It’s barely a swimsuit!” Bill howled. “You fucking pervert!”

“It ensures…the least water resistance…”

“What are you? An Olympic swimmer?! Get some normal shorts!” Despite the laughter, those vampy eyes roamed, waiting for a wardrobe malfunction; or perhaps a chance to cause one. Although it was night and only them, Ford had to be on guard. Circumstances were now critical—

“I knew, you know.” Bill trudges closer, body swaying hypnotically; a travelling water-snake. “I’ve peeked through your clothes. I knew you had that and that you’d wear it…”

A trap. Now self-conscious for all the wrong reasons, Ford side-rolls both his head and eyes as Bill’s arms curl around him, bringing cold weather. Cold snake scales. Bill is shivering but both the air and Ford are warm.

The coruscating sky sits in the backdrop: pale-faced anonymous party guests that seek a partake of voyeurism. Two secluded lovers could only mean one thing, after all.

“Fire hydrant.” His darling whispers, tongue far too ardent. Fire hydrant? It takes him moments to comprehend—red, upright, hard. Oh. His cheeks are now as red as his swimsuit.

Bill breathes out laughter as a hand floats atop the water then sinks between Ford’s legs. He takes a moment to ask in a tone only an octave lower, “Can I?” Whether it’s the articulation, those golden eyes or simply the aching desires of the flesh, Ford says yes, please. Pleading was necessary here. The pleas for forgiveness to a higher power he’s never believed in for doing this with such a young man.

Bill only holds him, letting the cold of the salt water pacify the uninvited guest and like that—it’s gone. Escorted away in embrace of cold, dark fingers.

“Hey, you look really…what’s the word?” Bill says. “Like you’re all dreamy.” He laughs and Ford
thinks it’s laughter than should be accompanied by a flurry of technicoloured bubbles. Bubbly laughter. The boy in the plastic bubble.

He’s *weird*, you know? They both are, of course. Perhaps more than each other had anticipated… They were each discovering new sides of themselves. Weirder sides. *Marie Richie’s Unified Theory of Weirdness*. Weirdness had increased tenfold since Bill Cipher entered his life.

“Hey hey, when you gonna design my tattoo?” Bill’s voice breaks his thought-momentum. “For my back?”

“Ah yes…soon.”

“You should get one too… I’ll design you one, and you design me one.” Bill suggested during their cool hug, rubbing his arms up and down Ford’s back while swaying his upper body side to side.

“Ah quid pro quo, is it?” Ford said then looked up to the sky. “We should return here…in perhaps… October.”

“Why?”

“We can see Orion’s Belt then.” Ford said. “It’s three large stars. You can get a perfect view here, on the beach.”

“You tryna imply we’ll still be together months from now?”

“Who knows?” Ford’s hands settle at Bill’s lower back, above his yellow swimsuit. Bill still loved yellow and it suited him even more now that his hair was black again.

Black kitty in yellow.

______________________________________________________________________________

He lies back in the bath as Ford dabbles those six fingers in the soapy water.

- Ford cleans his wound. Tears make a surprise visit, and all Ford does is wipe them, leaving a kiss in their wake.

______________________________________________________________________________

They spend the night kissing; both exercising restraint this time.

Ford calls it Kissing Therapy.

______________________________________________________________________________

“Red is really your colour, Ford…” Bill whispers, staring at the speedo dangling over the chair across the room.

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With a lot of coercing, Bill manages to convince Ford to do a little more than kissing. Bill is more vocal and playful than usual; Ford finds himself imitating Bill.

By now, Ford would be tired, and yet, he isn’t.

At Bill’s insistence, they continue for another hour. Most time spent comparing body parts, and mapping out moles. Bill had quite a few of them, while Ford had more freckles.
Near the end, they discuss sexual history; Ford refusing to give details out of respect for his previous partners and Bill spending more time interrogating Ford than sharing himself.

Then, Bill finishes in a way Ford did not expect.

“Hey, have you ever had a tongue inside you? Your other hole, Ford. No? Seriously? It's amazing. Let me show you... Just relax come on. It's only my tongue. Nah, the taste is kinda like metal most of the time. Oh, come on. Don't be self-conscious...”

Ford surrenders, enjoying it but refusing admission.

A new antagonist had appeared: Bill’s sexual curiosity.

With his little claws, his darling maps red veins into his back. Nails always appeared when a particular spot and particular cranny was caressed in a very particular way. Bill’s body never needed much persuasion; it spilled its secrets easily, as if it had waited all its life for Ford’s touch to ask.

Bill sniffed Ford’s neck. “Still wearing that cologne I bought you... you like it, huh?”

“Of course.”

“It’s the same as my dad’s.” A lick. “The lady at the counter picked it, after I told her I wanted one that matched mine.” Another lick, a wetter one. “You think that’s weird, don’t you?”

Very weird. The bad kind of weird, Ford thought. Unsurprising, however; nothing surprised him anymore regarding Bill’s paternal issues.

“It’s... alarming. But it’s only perfume.” Ford said, frowning anyway. “You want to be close to your father.”

“Daddy issues. How cliché.” Bill laughed into Ford’s neck and arms tightened around him. “You smell like Papa...” He nipped skin at the jaw. “I’m wearing the same cologne as my nonno.”

Ford doesn’t say anything.

“Ginevra would always say ‘You look like dad’.” He pinched Ford’s chiseled cheeks. “You’d make a great dad, you know.”

“You say ‘daddy’s boy’ like it’s a bad thing.” —Stanley Pines, 20 years from now.

Bill was asleep and Ford took the chance to scrounge through his belongings. Routine check that Bill was adhering to his stipulations. In a beautiful antique silver cigarette case, Ford found multiple credit-card sized photos. Not polaroids, these had been custom-printed from digital files.

They were various photos, featuring Bill and his friends. Bill with his old face. A photo of Bill and Xanthar, then one of them with Kryptos; Pyronica and Kryptos pulling faces; a blonde man Ford didn’t recognize; 8ball and Bill; Teeth looking distressed with a soda can; Paci-fire reading on a blue couch—the list continued. Thanks to their small size, Bill could keep quite a few at once.

The last two photos were older and traditional. An older man with a young boy and a young boy
with a young man. The text on the back marked them as Bill’s grandfather and father, the boy being Bill.

The older man bore a striking resemblance to Ford. The resemblance accentuated by Ford’s new glasses Bill had bought for him, which matched Bill’s grandfather’s.

And Bill bore a striking resemblance to his father, who in turn, bore a resemblance to his own father.

Ford looked once more at Bill’s old face before returning the photos to their proper place.

Bill was awake.

“I think…you should consider…staying with me. For a month at first.” Ford said, hesitantly.

“Huh?” Bill said.

Ford continued, now armed with conviction. “Move in for a month. To see if you get better. I’m certain your environment isn’t good for you.”

“You mean that…?”

“Yes, but you have to come to work with me. I want you become accustomed to going to school. I’ll take you to your therapy sessions, since I have to go with you anyway.” Ford said. “Will you be able to? What about your work?”

“I’ll see what I can do…” Bill said with uncertainty. Chances are, this was a dream. Only a dream. Doesn’t matter what he said, or what Ford said.

“Your members?”

“They all have their own thing.” Bill peeked up his head up from Ford’s chest where he’d made himself at home. “You mean it…? I can stay with you?”

“A trial run.”

Laying his head down again, Bill asked. “If it goes well?”

“You can stay with me. I’ll clean out the guestroom so you can have your own room.” Ford caressed the back of Bill’s neck, as if petting fur.

“I’d rather share…”

“Tell you what: we can sleep together but you still need your own space. I like my own, and you should have your own as well.”

“But your lab…thing…?”

“My focus will be on the portal, that lab won’t be used much anymore.” Ford said.

“You haven’t fucked me yet, and you’re already talking about me moving in.”

“This is irrespective of sex or my romantic feelings for you. Rather, it’s the best option for you to get better.”

“Surprised you didn’t tell me to just move out…” Bill said.
“That’s unhelpful. If you could’ve done it alone, you would’ve. It won’t solve much, regardless. You’ll still be on your own and unsure of what to do. With me, you have everything you need.”

“You have an answer to everything…” Bill said. “You…act a lot more like a dad, you know…”

“It can’t be helped. I am older, after all.”

“I bet…if you had been my grandfather, I would’ve enjoyed getting fucked.”

“You wouldn’t have, my darling. You wouldn’t have.”

Bill laughed; mocking laughter, genuine gratitude. “You’re so cool, Ford.”

“You’re so cool!”—Stanley Pines, 9 years from now.

Where there is no Stanley, you belong to me.”—Bill Cipher.

Bill laid in the crib of Ford’s right arm, mindlessly chewing on Ford’s left hand. He’d nibble the fingers, then push his pouted mouth into the spaces between them. Sometimes he’d lay the hand over his face like a washcloth, only to get fed up and resume chewing again. Ford watched, amused at the childish theatrics.

“How are you friends?” Ford asked, his hand breaking free to pinch a cheek.

“Dunno. Fine, I guess.”

“Just fine?”

“Like I said: dunno. Haven’t been keeping in touch with them.” Bill said.

“Why not?”

“No reason.”

Ford strained his neck to give Bill a knowing look.

“Think you’re real smart, huh?” Bill said.

“Tell the truth. I can tell when you’re lying.”

“Fine, whatever.” Bill fumed. “You think I can hang out with them? After what we spoke about? I’m supposed to just pretend like nothing’s happened?” He squeezed Ford’s cheeks together to a laughable sight. “What we spoke about. You—fuck, forget it.” He let go.

He continued at Ford’s insistence, mouth running like a late salaryman.

“Fine, Father Ford. Here I am, in confessional! I haven’t gone to confessional in about 4 years. When I do, I always flirt with the priest. They’re all closet faggots, anyway. No one’s gonna think you love a good hard one when you’ve pledged celibacy.” Bill said, both voice and smile craggy. “You know…after our talk. These past few days…us talking…I’ve been thinking. Really thinking. You’re smart, Ford. You know why…you know why talking to them is…hard now.”

“I dunno—it’s just…awkward… What do I say? They probably…see me the same way you see my
nonno…” Bill said. “Rapist, right? I raped them. If what my nonno did was rape, then I guess I raped my friends. I guess I do it on the regular. Right, right? I’m a rapist, right? You think I can just pitch up, all smiles and fucking glitter after knowing that’s how they probably see me?”

Bill climbed off the bed and stood at the side.

“Or did you deliberately tell me this shit so I’d suddenly feel oh so bad for what I do? Guilt-tripping me indirectly! You’re smart, Ford. I hate that, that shit you told me.” He pointed at Ford. “You know Jason once said I raped him. Fuck that! I own him. I own them all. I paid for them. I bought their freedoms, I provided for them. They’re mine. I can do whatever I want. Whatever the fuck I want to them!” Voice now strained, he glared at Ford. “You’re gonna say I can’t. I can see it in your smug fucking eyes.”

“You don’t own people, Bill.” Ford said, sitting up.

“Knew it—you can. They’re alive and free thanks to me. Alive and well-fed, thanks to me. They owe me.”

“You can’t put a price on a human life.”

“You don’t get anything. You don’t.” Bill said, perceptibly boiling. “I—I’m the reason they’re here today. You’re gonna take that from me, take them from me? No… no. I won’t let you.” Bill’s breathing was now thicker. “I won’t let you tell me that I’m some kinda fucking rapist. I won’t. I took care of them. They’re grateful to me.”

“Do you even hear yourself?” Ford asked, concluding by the steamed outburst that Bill had been suppressing these feelings ever since their talk. The boy kept too much in and when it all came rushing out—like it was now—it quickly swamped any rationality he still held.

“Fuck you. Fuck you for not getting it. For not—”

“Let me interrupt you, just for a moment. Can I?” Ford asked, and when Bill gestured rudely to go ahead, he did.

“When I imagine your grandfather justifying his actions, your words are what I picture form him. It’s a manipulation tactic.” Ford said. “But you—since you were young, were taught this is normal and acceptable. It’s not, dear. It’s not.” He carefully climbed off the bed, Bill watching with sniper-scope eyes. “Your grandfather had no right to touch you under the pretence of being your provider. You do not owe anyone anything. You don’t owe someone for providing for you, let alone for taking care of you when you’re their child.”

Ford’s latter words slid off Bill, overlooked entirely. “I’m like my grandfather huh? I’m like that man? So that’s what you think of me? I’m like that man? That’s what you think? That’s what you fucking think?!” Bill’s voice started low, increasing until his pitch was unbearably shrill.

“I don’t know, Bill. I’ve never met your grandfather. I don’t know him.”

“Fuck you.” Bill glared at him, stared with an intensity too miserable to brush off solely as anger.

“So you can compare yourself to him, time and time again, but I can’t make a simple remark meant to shed light on your behaviour? I’m not attacking you, dear. I’m trying to—”

“Fuck off, Ford!” Bill screamed. Multiple deep, rocky breaths passed. “If you—if you went to jail, and the bail was 50k and I paid that—I own you.” He pointed a black finger at Ford. “I’ll get you arrested. And then you’ll have no one to turn to but me. No one.”

“You don’t. You’d have done a very sweet thing, but you would not own me. You cannot buy
another human being, Bill.” Ford said, letting Bill’s last remark pass as an empty threat. “Your
grandfather abused you. Do you think his abuse is justified because he provided for you? Let’s say
he didn’t. If he paid you every time he hurt you, is that fine? Have you been compensated enough? If
evory time he raped you, he handed you money, is that fine?”

Rolling his eyes, Bill groaned. “Come on, that’s twisting what I said—”

“It’s not how life works, sweetheart. Your members do not owe you anything. We made such
progress. Why are you doing this again?”

“Because I didn’t fucking rape my friends! My friends, Ford! How am I supposed to look at them? I
don’t know what to fucking say to them anymore!” Bill yelled. “What do I say? What do I say?
Sorry? No…no. No. I will never say sorry. Never. I worked hard to get them, to get where I am.
You have no right at all to take this from me.” He choked on a breath. “You…you just wanna take
them from me—you don’t want me to be happy…away from you.”

His upper lip curled, ready to bare his teeth at Ford. “You’re just like that man.”

Ford was already exhausted. “No…you’re misunderstanding me. I spend all my time encouraging
you to keep in contact with them. And I told you…you’re practicing what you learnt.” He said,
maintaining his distance from Bill.

“Liar liar liar!” Bill screamed. “Why are you trying to ruin everything? Why did you ruin
everything? It’s your fault Jerry, Joshua and Jeremy are dead! It’s your fault Evan won’t talk to me
anymore!” He kicked the bed; the action doing more to injure himself as pain punctured his features.
“Everything was fine before you came into the fucking picture!”

“Jerry? Kryptos? He’s dead?” Ford asked. Bill had never mentioned this before—a slip of the
tongue? A lie?

Bill picked up Ford’s shoes and threw them at the small dresser in the corner, the mirror surviving the
impact and the shoes knocking off trivial items. “Your fault! Everything is your fucking fault! I’m
sick of looking at you! Sick to fucking death of you! Why don’t you just fuck off! Fuck the fuck
off!”

Ford put his hands up. “I know you are, dear. I know. He’s dead. He’s gone now. It’s just me.” He
swallowed and took small steps toward Bill. “He’s dead. It’s over, and he’s dead.”

Bill looked confused and then sad. “No…no… it’s not that easy. You don’t get it. He’s not dead,
Ford. He isn’t. Those documents were forged. He’s not dead! You really fuckin’ think—that man—
that fucking man is gonna die just like that? Just roll over? Just bweeup boop bop! Dead! I give up! I
surrender! I’ll just fucking die here!”

“He is. He’s dead.” Ford made it to Bill and held him at the shoulders, his darling seemed to shrink
in his hold. “He’s dead and there’s only you and me here.”

…

“…Promise?”

“I promise.”

Time passed as Ford’s touch calmed Bill; the latter eventually miring around Ford to put his lips into
the tense neck. “Sorry… I dunno what—I just…I’m sorry.” He nuzzled into the brown hair and
welcomed the further still that overcame him. “I bet if you had been my dad…I would’ve turned out

In silence, he pulled Ford to bed. Once they were settled, Bill’s hand reached between Ford’s legs. “I’m-I’m not in the mood…” Ford whispered, still tense from their previous predicament.

His hands changes direction—a shame but he wants to apologize somehow—so he holds Ford’s hand instead. Five dark with black conjoined to six tinted with pink.

“I’m sorry… Nighty night, Sixer. Dream a little dream of me.” Bill kissed Ford’s cheek.

Ford dreams he’s giving his oral presentation, as he did 50 years ago. Holding his little shrunken head in his hand while his classmates sneer at him. But just as his classmates begin stoning him with football memorabilia, Bill, who’s the same age and sitting in the front, shields Ford from the brunt and tackles the instigator. They get into a shuffle and then Ford and Bill are waiting outside the principal’s office.

Bill has scratches on his cheek, and a blood on his lips from where his teeth unconsciously tore through.

“I,” Bill begins and then he’s suddenly older, a teenager, “I’m not crazy.”

Ford realizes then, that he too, is teenager and bearing more similarities to Bill than just age.

Bill looks at him. “We’re gonna be together forever, aren’t we?”

Ford smiles and looks back. “We are.”

“No one messes with my brother.” Bill wraps his arm around Ford. “Two peas in a pod… high six?”

Ford is now sitting across Bill Cipher, whose tattooed hand hides his face; the triangle on his palm faces Ford, blinking rhythmically. The hand slowly closes, reverse blooming into a black fist. It shuts, and wilts into even blacker petals; Bill’s smiling face winking at him in greeting.

Ford laughs, and then they’re both laughing.

“You tricked me.” Ford admits, still laughing. “I was utterly fooled.”

“Yeah? What kinda guy would I be if I couldn’t even pull one over my own brother?”

Ford shakes his head, his smile never ending. “Stanley. I knew you were in there somewhere.”

“Missed me now you gotta kiss me!”

Stanley leans forward to claim his prize.

Ford leans in and kisses Bill. A honeymoon kiss between star-crossed lovers. Heavenly bodies have aligned just right for this kiss, Bill’s lip say into his mouth. Time and space were overcome for this kiss. Taboos were broken.

“On est fait pour s’entendre, Sixer. Whether it be lovers, brothers or even as father and son.” Bill’s freezing breath breezes on his lips. “È corretto, dobbiamo stare insieme.”
Ford sees yellow; sees blue; sees the red of ox-blood.


“Same stone, different shape.” It says.

Ford feels as though he’s known this creature his entire life; feels like they are strangers; feels nothing at all.

“My Sixer doesn’t have a brother named Stanley. Why would he, you know? Why would he.” — The triangle with one eye, on Casper Giordano’s palm.

Ford woke to Bill watching him while eating a cup of shaved ice. Bill’s lips are blue and lush.

“Hey, you seem happy. You were smiling in your sleep.” Bill said and scooped more ice into his mouth.

Ford stretched and sat up. “I… slept well. I feel much better. I had the strangest dream… but I can’t quite recall it.”

“Huh.” Bill offered him a scoop of ice. Ford declined.

He left for the bathroom. Once he finished brushing his teeth, he stepped back to peek at Bill. “You know, Stanley, I—”

Bill stood stiffened, staring at him. “Yes?”

“Sorry—I—I’m not sure why I called you that. Must… still have that name on my mind…”

“I see.” Bill said, sitting. Quiet and no tantrum.

“Are you feeling alright, dear?”

“Peachy.”

Ford splashed water onto his face and stared at the face in the mirror. Whatever he’d dreamt off had been cathartic and had left him well-rested and rejuvenated, and whatever feeling had been weighing him down was now gone.

“I think I want to see my parents.” Ford said to Bill, who’d wandered into the bathroom. “Do you want to come?”

“I can?”

“I’ll say you’re my research assistant.”

“They’ll know we’re fucking.”

“Who knows?” Ford said as Bill’s arms surrounded him.

Bill was cold to the touch.

“I’m not your Stanley.” Bill laughs in his ear.
So, Ford had lived above the Pines Pawnshop, his family business. No wonder he’d purposely avoided showing Bill this area. It was closed now but not permanently. Something something about his brother having taken over the store and having gone on vacation.

Filbrick Pines. Stanford’s father. He had a hearing aid in his left ear and thick glasses that self-tinted in the sunlight. Meryl Pines. Stanford’s mother. Probably a looker back in the day. Her hand shook when Bill took it; probably Parkinson’s.

They took to Bill like cats took to catnip. Talk about senile.

(Something about the name Meryl Pines sounded familiar—where’d he hear it before? Mabel Pines? Nah. Couldn’t be. Guess it was a common surname.)

Bill stared at his reflection in the glass of the Pines family photo-frame on the table that featured a little Stanford and his parents; no younger brother yet. He could hear Ford’s parents talking, happy to see their eldest son again after years of estrangement.

Only Ginerva gushed about seeing him again. Gushed about the blonde in his hair and the gold in his ears.

He looked past his reflection to the lonely Ford in the photograph.

“You’re more than welcome to visit again with Ford, Dean!” Ford’s mother says, waving alongside her husband. Bill waves back, his best smile on parade.

“Guess our honeymoon’s over.” Bill said in the car. “Your folks are nice. Guess all old people mellow out once they hit the dino years.”

“Yes, that’s to be expected.” Ford said, smiling and looking more alive than ever. Bill side-eyed him and parked a hand at his inner thigh.

It remained there until they returned to the hotel.

As they packed their bags, Ford decided he wouldn’t miss this place. But he’d miss his parents. And perhaps coming to visit every so often should become a habit. He could take Bill with him, too.

Bill who fit in so well.

“You look like your dad.” Bill said when the first intersection came into view. “No cliché of you having your mom’s eyes or anything. A lot like your dad.”

“I suppose.” Ford said. “He was very different when I was younger but it’s as you say, there are people who ‘calm down’ as they approach old age.”

Bill suggests they play verbal word games again to pass the time.
Beep beep beep.

Boop.

Stanford Pines sits beside Bill Cipher in the car.

“Once upon a time there was an old man who thought he could redefine the concept of Bill Cipher.”

Ford spares a glance at Bill, whose eyes twinkle a dim and dull yellow beneath a veil of blackening fog that shrouds the rest of his features, washing out their colour until they appear faded and worn against the now comparatively lively backdrop. Bill reaches over to touch his cheek and their first encounter returns to him in vintage film strips overlaid with sepia: the imagery faded with coffee stains at the bottom paired with torn, burnt-brown edges; still-frames with muted sound and flashes of a present and past that don’t belong to him.

“Do you wanna hear how that story ends?” Bill asks.

“You—I—” Ford clutches his head, hearing the noise his computer makes when it’s overloading itself. “I… it’s you.”

“Seem a little groggy there. Give it time.” Bill taps on the board, tapping to the throbbing in Ford’s head until it idles and Ford’s mind is clear again.

“How’s the wife and kids? Or wife and kid. Or wife-kid, if you will.” Bill scooted to his right, then changed his position so his back was against the car door and he faced Ford straight. His smile was fat and wide as if held taut in place by a puppeteer’s strings; gangly limbs positioned in a way that brought discomfort to Ford at the mere sight alone. An abused puppet.

“That’s not funny.” Ford’s tone is cold and unwelcoming; upside down compared to their previous interaction which had been a relatively bump-free ride. Perhaps too smooth, in fact. A rollercoaster could hardly be called fun without the threat of mortality.

The car freezes in motion. Time stops. When Ford realizes this, his face flips through various emotions before settling on annoyance. Showing off, as usual of this Bill.

“Insignificant other then. How’s that? We peachy?” Bill kept grinning.

Ford glowered with inquisitive eyes and Bill laughed. Humans were so finicky.

“Miss me? You don’t look too chipper there. How about a little sunny-side up for your old pal?” Bill fluttered his spider lashes and receiving no attention, grinded his teeth until Ford empathetically flinched at the grazing. “I thought we got along great—better than great, in fact.”

Ford continued giving Bill the cold shoulder until he could no longer contain the obvious volcanic anger boiling beneath his meaty lid. The lip blew off and the steam came: choo choo! “You tampered with my mind! My memory! I never gave you such permission!”

“Yikes. Overreaction.”

“I’m not overreacting! I have every right to be upset!”

Bill’s eyes narrowed and his lips scrunched up—then every feature promptly returned to its previous position. He carried on, disinterested in Ford’s justified complaints. “Notice anything different about me?”
Lowering his voice but keeping its hard edge, Ford demanded. “An apology is in order, Bill.”

“Not gonna happen. I was only looking out for you, best pal-buddy. Now, what do you say?” Bill drummed his fingers on the seat. “Notice anything different?”

“Do you think messing with my mind is funny?! Something to be taken so lightly?!”

Bill’s silence and grin said enough: this topic was not worth his time. Ford attempted a stare down but felt discouraged at Bill’s lack of remorse and lifeless body-language. Ford gave a hearty sigh, too worn out from driving to put up much of a fight. “God. Let me think…” A minute of unsettling silence passed. “You’re different… your speech, is it?”

“Bingo! Individuality established and all that!” Bill waved his hands around. “Surprised you picked it up so quickly! You want me to elaborate, dontcha? Dontcha?”

“Frankly, I couldn’t care less.”

Bill grinded his teeth again, relishing at how Ford’s eyes twitched at the upsetting sound of bone mashing together—pearly whites scraping.

“I had reasons you know. Important ones.” Bill said.

“I don’t like having my mind tampered with.”

“What do you like having tampered? I’ll tamper it.”

Ford sighed, then looked towards Bill. “What do you want?”

“Came to visit you… not even a little sugar huh?”

They stare at one another beneath a thickening quilt of silence. Ford’s anger is still simmering, its red smell potent and dare Bill say it—quite erotic. Something about bringing a mouthy human to capitulation… appealed heavily to his hijacked reptilian brain. The primal side of man was always a loud one, mounting at times it deems significant.

“You don’t think this is some holy act of altruism, do you?” Bill waved a hand madly in the air. “Please. You, like the rest of your spatial peeps, want someone to pass your legacy onto.”

“What are you on about now?”

“You and little Casper. You playing Daddy and all that. Not doing it because you’re just such a good guy.” Bill said. “Ever been to the capital of Sweden?”

Ford’s face squished into the lovechild of disgust and disinterest.

“That joke wet over your head.” Bill said and pulled hard on the gearstick; the car whined plaintively in protest while he continued to bully the stick, jerking it sporadically until Ford grabbed his wrist.

“You’ll damage the car.”

“Entropy, baby!” Bill widened his eyes. “It’s inevitable.” Ford kept holding onto Bill, as if the mere physical contact would subdue this Bill as it did his own Bill.

“You put the negative in negative entropy.” He leaned close to Ford until his nose bumped against Ford’s right cheek. “Boring.”
“Speaking with you is reminiscent of engaging with a broken chatbot.” Ford said side-eying him.

“Ha! Pot calling the kettle black! You’re the one sitting at your little terminal chatting to strangers online!”

“What?”

“Didn’t your parents ever give you that talk?” Bill lets go of the gearstick, worms out of Ford’s grip and flattens his right hand against Ford’s left cheek. Clearing his throat, he began narrating. “You’re standing at the terminal. You see it, don’t you? Maybe whoever’s on the other side isn’t satisfied with plain ol’ text anymore. Maybe they wanna go 3D. They wanna go 4D! 5D! Double D! They want all the Ds. Interdimensional!” Bill spread his hands wide, filling Ford’s vision. “Maybe they decided to, oh I don’t know….give you a call or two?”

Bill leaned back into his seat and found the area too cramped, his long limbs sitting uncomfortably no matter the position tried. “Is this place small or am I just big—oh yes, swarthy and spindly to the very end. Lovely.” He kicked the gloved compartment, shattering its door and creating no new space. Ford watched, the eccentricity no longer shocking.

“Maybe the person behind the screen is bored of text. Maybe they wanna hear your voice.” Bill continued.

“What exactly are you implying?”

“Lemme tell you a story called The Boy in the Attic.” Bill used his phone as flashlight, positioning it horizontally, upwards facing his chin so the light illuminated and perturbed his features. “So, one day, this guy starts getting these weird phone calls from a kid who says he lives in his attic. It’s spooky, the kid’s like ‘I’m in the attic help help” Bill imitated a child’s voice. “Spooky. So the guy tries to go check and well gosh darnit, the attic door is locked! So he does nothing, but keeps getting the calls. I’m in the attic help. I’m in the attic help.”

Ford listened attentively.

“And one day, he gets the attic open, and whatdya know! There’s no kid in the attic. There’s nada. Then he remembers! His mom used to lock him in the attic! His subconscious was unsuppressing those suppressed memories! He was the boy all along! The boy in the attic!” Bill laughed until Ford was certain an organ would come out then stopped. “I’ll admit, it’s pretty unclimactic but that’s the beauty of the truth: it’s boring and homely and the girl you take home to your parents. Or boy. Or cat, if that’s your thing.”

“What are you implying? I hallucinated these calls? Bill was present for them.” Ford said. “And unsuppressing isn’t a word.”

“You sure?”

“I’m sure.”

“Who can say?…Maybe you’re talking to yourself. Maybe you’ve always been talking to Stanley.” Bill suggested.

“I’m not mentally unstable.”

“Debatable!” Bill said. “Birds of a feather! They flock together!”

Ford’s mind began to work, seeking patterns in what little he knew of ‘Stanley’. Whoever Stanley
was, he was of some importance for this Bill to speak of him. “Stanley…Stanley…”

“Yes?”

Bill’s eyes gaped, eyeballs extending nearly outwards as glowing yellow planets—not quite suns yet. Ford thinks of decorative spherical lanterns. A silence sits between them that wears down Bill perceptibly. His shoulders slouch and his face softens, even if only a bit. He began talking again.

“Every time I’ve entered a human me, it’s the same Greek tragedy. These ten years of…ten years of longing and wandering a la Odysseus, then another thirty of *pining*. Forty.” Bill said. “Then I enter another one, and it’s the same. Now I’ve felt eighty years of longing.”

“I keep doing it…then I’m left with hundreds of years. Hundreds of this…this…ache.” Leaning his back against the window, eyes still on Ford and grinning ever broadly, Bill continued. “But I’m only stuck in The Zone when it’s a human body. My real one isn’t capable of such feelings, you understand, Sixer? None of those synapses or whatever you humans use to feel things. Don’t quote me on that—never cared much for your squiggly biology.”

Bill’s unblinking eyes wandered to the road that still stood frozen in time. “Psychosomatic huh… just need a body to plug into to run the program…” he paused, as if pondering something implausibly profound. “Why is being human so sad?”

Ford remains quiet, disregarding the question in favour of staring at the spot of road visible through the window: the same spot Bill looked to only moments previously.

“Ah, the human condition. Tragic.” Bill muses as Ford continues to think in silence. Then Ford breaks it, his thoughts slipping out.

“Stanley? Stanley…my dog? Stanley…Stanley…” The last Stanley leaves his lips louder than the others.

“Yes?” Bill asks, head tilting with a painful jerk to one side. “You seem cold, Sixer. What’s eating you alive?”

“Nothing…”

“Would you *like* to be eaten alive?”

Ford looks at Bill, and Bill looks back.

“Stanley.”

“Yes?”

“Why do you respond with yes whenever I say Stanley?”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

“You’re the one who’s been calling me.”

“Nope.” Bill said. “Well, that depends…which *me* do you make such a claim to?”

“You you.”

“Nope.”
“And if I made that claim to Bill, the one who’s body you’re in?”

“What if you did indeed!”

Ford’s face turned harsh with impatience. “See? A broken chatbot. Enough of these silly games.”

Bill laughed until the muscle spasms became too much to endure. “Come now, just because you can’t figure out who our Double Dealer is, doesn’t mean you can be nasty at your only friend in this vast and contracting universe.”

“If you’re Bill then you too must possess your own nomenclature. Is Stanley your real name? Like Casper is my Bill’s?” Ford asked, clutching the wheel for moral support.

“I’m an entity beyond your comprehension and you think my real name would be something like Stanley?” Bill rolled his eyes. “You’re really dumb.”

“Then who is Stanley?” Ford asked again, louder this time and seeking a reaction from Bill.

Bill leaned forward with a dazzling smile, an eyebrow raised: ‘pretty please?’ his face says—the first true expression he’s made since arriving. “Same stone…” he looks down to nowhere in particular then back at Ford. “Different shape.”

Ford frowned again. Always frowning. His Ford Zone face.

“Hey, you know your wife-kid, between me and him—”

“Him and me. Grammar, Bill.” Ford said. “For a being of ultimate knowledge, you lack basic syntax.”

Bill suddenly went very quiet.

“Hey Stanford…” Bill says then sings. “Hey… Hey Stanford hey…”

“I have to go.” The sky blackens. Baby stars begin to pop up one by one like holes punched by an ice-pick, and then they appear in clusters, scattered across like fairy lights. Bill does his ‘pretty please’ face again while leaning close. “That’s for you.”

“Stanford… in the sky with diamonds.” Bill says, smiling; a genuine smile that thaws Ford more than he cares to admit. “Your mind was always filled with space junk.”

“It’s not really happening, just so you know. Your perception is altered. Yes, mind-tampering. Again. Sue me.” Bill revealed.

“Bill…?”

The Eye of Amun-Ra begins to draw itself over Bill’s right eye, with slow and deliberate strokes as a Japanese calligrapher would, with a brush just as thick and the ink-black strokes just as imperfectly perfect.

“Better late than never, Stanford Pines…” Bill said. “I never said the boy in the attic was about you.”

Ford watches as the Eye of Amun-Ra completes itself.

“Arrivederci, Sixer.”

Darkness floods the car until the only light remaining is the stark glow of Bill’s eyes, flashing as two
little lighthouses across the vast dead sea. Heaven’s headlights. A darker dark, palpable to all five senses, pools into the car and rises until it’s in his mouth, cold, and on his tongue, sticky; bubbling up into his nose and inside every crook and cranny of his eyes—merging with the black of the back of his eyelids.

The last sound and vision he’s blessed with is the dark swallowing Bill and the cryptic words ‘don’t go, Stanley’ on his own lips.

“Are you listening?"

Bill’s voice. Light. Headlights.

“Sorry…I…” Ford shakes off the strange daydream and focuses on the road. “I was…thinking…”

He cannot recall about what though.


“Why is being human so sad?” Bill asks.

“What do you mean?” Ford laughs. “Being human isn’t only about being sad. I’d say it’s a kaleidoscope of emotions, sad only being one colour.”

“Huh. It’s the most prominent colour, don’t you think?” Bill says. “I don’t think ‘kaleidoscope’ is a term I’d use to refer to human emotions. A kaleidoscope’s existence can be understood, human emotions are a little more complex. Wonky, silly and not as pretty.”

“What colour do you associate me with? In your mind’s kaleidoscope. Or perhaps it’s a pattern? Tell me.”

“A tessellation pattern, perhaps.” Ford says.

“What shape? What colour?”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Alright.” Bill says.

“Something on your mind?”

“Huh. Just feeling a little wishy washy. Too much time in a human body, you know…”

“What?”

“Forget what I just said.”

Ford forgets.

They both collapsed in bed after the long drive, the droning of the engine still fresh in their minds. Bill’s car was loud, said he liked his baby to roar like the king of the ‘high way jungle’. A penchant for panache was Bill Cipher. Stanford was the opposite; having spent enough of his life ostracized, purposely inviting further rejection was inconceivable. No loud cars for him.

Bill dozed off instantly, Ford following within minutes.
They returned to bed as soon as they’d both had their fill of pizza. Now was a good time as any…

“Bill…I’ve been meaning to tell you.” Ford said, stroking Bill’s hair. “That…I’m sorry. For what happened that time in the hotel. I’m sorry…I didn’t stop.”

It took Bill seconds to register what Ford was recounting. “So?”

“I—I didn’t stop, Bill.”

Bill sat up and looked at Ford. “What are you saying, exactly? Spell it out, doc. You’re trying to say something.”

“No—it’s—it’s just—”

“Fuck you.” Bill scooted away from him. “I know what you’re doing.” Bill said, before Ford could get another word in. “You’re doing it again! I know what you’re doing! That shit you pull when you wanna look for excuses to tell me to fuck off! I’m not an idiot, Ford.”

“It’s not like that—” Ford stood up, out of bed. Guilt had gnawed him exhausted. It’d gotten worse after preaching to Bill about respecting someone’s autonomy.

“That what is it?” Bill glared.

“You’re overreacting. I’m apologizing for something I’ve done. When someone doesn’t stop, Bill, it’s—”

“OH MY GOD! Shut the fuck up! Stop making shit up! Nothing bad happened at the hotel! Why do you always do this? You make a big deal out of nothing!” Bill stormed out the room. Ford reluctantly followed him, fearing the results of his tantrum. He found Bill rummaging through his cupboards. Bill grabbed a small black bag hidden in the back of a corner cabinet and bee-lined for the couch.

“Bill, sweetheart, what’s in your hand?” Ford asked, carefully treading nearer.

“Nothing.” Whatever Bill had in the bag was now in his lap, hidden between his legs. Alcohol?

“Darling, let’s go back to bed.”

Bill stared at the floor, leg shaking anxiously. He breathed loudly before speaking.

“Ford, I know what you’re gonna say. I know. But listen listen you aren’t…aren’t a rapist, or like that man. That… would be me. You know that.” Bill said. “You know what kind of man I am. What kind of man the men in my family are. You aren’t that kind of man. Sometimes to know how pure white is, you have to put it next to black.” Bill gestured to himself. “You’re a good man, Stanford. A real one.”

“Darling, I—” Ford said, never finishing.

“Fuck you. Fuck off. I know what rape is. You know I do. You know…” Bill said, standing. The item between his legs lay forgotten and obscured from Ford’s view. “You know…don’t you? You know…by looking at me, by what I’ve told you…” He sat down again. “The shadow in the alley way…the guy who circles you and pulls you into his car…me, right? The hand around your waist, guiding you when you’ve had too much to drink.” Bill huffed. “Me. I know what rape is. I’ve done
it plenty of times.” He threw his arms up, “It’s fucking hilarious!”, and laughed. “It’s funny!” Bill forced more laughter, his face suddenly dropping. “But it isn’t funny. It’s not funny…Stanford.”

“I…” Worry greyed Bill’s face. “I…I bet I always knew…somewhere…deep down. What he did to me…I bet I knew.”

“Sometimes they give up, sometimes they don’t say no, but they struggle in a way you know means they hate it. When you’re tense, you’re tighter too. It’s a win win, really.” Bill said. “I struggled a lot, at first.”

“I did…didn’t I? I did….” He mumbled to himself. “I did…I did…” He looked at Ford. “You take something from them. If I take and take, can I take back what he took, too? No? that’s not how this works, not how any of this works. But it wasn’t about that, was it? It wasn’t…”

“Maybe I did it because—maybe—maybe I was a monster because no one believes a monster got fucked like a bitch by his own grandfather. No one would believe you if you told anyone it. No one.”

He stared at Ford as if waiting for something but once Ford showed signs of wanting to speak, Bill began again. “It wasn’t anything like that with you. It… it was scary a little at first, but—I dunno. It’s hard to stay scared with you. You’re just really good with your hands.” Bill laughed lowly. “I dunno…why? Why am I thinking about this? Why do I feel so guilty? It’s like I look at you and I just think you deserve better. Better than me? What’s better than me?”

“Apparently it’s whatever you deserve, that’s for sure.” Bill said. “Someone as blue-nosed as yourself was never gonna settle for someone like me. Apple pie and white picket fences was never gonna happen. It can’t happen.”

He spread his arms in welcoming. “There’s no one better for me than you,” Bill said, “but I know there are plenty of fish better for you than me.”

After dropping his arms, Bill reached for Ford’s hand but Ford was too far. “I would’ve…kept the card…and the candy cane…”

“But love is such a weird thing. It’s not like the movies. Not until…I met you, anyway. Love is…I love you are magic words. Open sesame. You gotta open up for them. I love you—you owe me? I love you—I owe you?”

Ford realized Bill held a gun between his legs.

“You don’t know…what it meant…for me to be with you. I’ve loved you forever…ever since I saw you on TV when I just a kid. You…were my favourite science guy. I learnt…about some of your stuff…in class. I…I attended a seminar of yours, years ago, In New York. Do you remember it? I do. I’ve loved you forever…” Bill said, now quieter. “Paci-fire gave me your papers…never…bothered with those until I was actually going to meet you. I prepared…for ages.”

“I lied…when I said your photo was the first time I saw you. When I said…I went after you because you reminded me of him. It wasn’t…it was…I… it was a chance to be close to you. But…the drinking…the drinking…and… I wanted you...to be him. I wanted… I wanted to see him in you. I wanted to go home…I wanted…I dunno… I wanted to be in your arms… like I was when I was little…”

“God, I’m not making sense, am I?! I’m not. I can’t…can’t explain it. It just…maybe you were him! Maybe, right?! Can’t rule that out! Maybe I got lucky and you were him all along. God, you remind
me so much of him. You always did. What am I fucking saying? I want you to be him. We both
know that.”

Light caught Bill’s tears, shining like clear ice.

“Whatever you burn, you can never get back. You can’t even mourn it properly ‘cause there’s
fucking nothing left. Nothing to hold in the dark—except photos.” Bill covered his face with his
hands. “I miss my family. I miss them so much.”

“Give me back my sister…my mother…give me back my father…what did I do…?” He muttered
into his hands.

“You…I think about you so much. How I feel about you. I feel like I’ve been waiting my whole life
just to meet you.” Bill said. “I had a dream you turned out to be my dad. I didn’t care and wanted
you to fuck me anyway. What does that mean? Do dreams have meanings? Do they? Why? Kryptos
was like a brother to me. So, why did I? Isn’t that a boner killer? Why?”

“I bet I’d fuck my actual father if the chance presented itself. I bet I’m that fuckling disgusting.”

“You aren’t, my darling.” Ford’s voice heated the cold and confessional atmosphere.

“Evan’s right. I always do this. If I change my name enough times, eventually who I am will scrape
off name by name until I’m a new person. Until I’m not my dad’s kid anymore. But truth is, I am. I
really am his kid. I’m still that man’s son, through and through. I proved it by coming back here.
Proved it by having that meeting go a little too well. Too well.”

Bill looked up at Ford. “I’m sorry…for what I said about Fiddleford. I’m sorry he’s dead because of
my family. I’m sorry…so sorry for everything. You’re such a good guy…you deserve…deserved to
be happy with Fiddleford. He loved you. I’m sure he did. It’s impossible to not love you, Stanford.”

“You aren’t happy with me. You’re sad all the time. I can see it…every time. Your eyes…you’re so
sad, Ford. You never looked like this before I came into your life.”

He offered up his gun to Ford. Ford took it. It was unloaded. A gun Ford didn’t recognize.

“I’m sorry…I just can’t…pretend to be happy anymore.” Bill confessed. “I don’t wanna see my
friends. Don’t wanna try and force it. Drinking makes it easier to pretend.”

“Why…why do I feel like this? I’m so…so sad all the time. Like…like my life is already over, after
having met you. Like I’ve seen what I’ve missed out on and it ends here. You’ll…Ford won’t stay
with you, I say, he won’t when he knows the truth. That you’re everything Ford hates. Ford hates
that man and he hates you, too. He’s scared of you, Cas, scared. Too scared to say he hates you. He
fucking hates you and wants you to die. Just fucking die! Thinks you should’ve died with the rest of
your family. Right? Right?”

“Stop making decisions for me.” Ford said as firmly as he could muster. “This is a lot to take in.
Let’s slow down and climb back into bed. What do you say? We can talk in the dark.” He had to be
close enough to restrain Bill if anything went wrong.

“No.”

“Darling, this thing with your grandfather. You have to understand it’s normal to have conflicting
feelings. It’s normal to want to be with him again. He wasn’t always horrible to you. Emotions are
not always black and white. In fact, they rarely are.” Ford said. He placed the gun on the counter and
approached Bill.
Ford knelt and Bill threw his arms around him, like a child welcoming a parent after a long trip. His darling was tense, trembling in his arms.

“What are you thinking?” Bill whispered. “What’s going in your head? In the Ford Zone? Tell me… You never say much. Wanna hear a dumb secret? I’m scared of what you think of me. You’re too quiet… I dunno what to do…about you. And this…” Bill sniffled at Ford’s ear. “And you’re so… you’ve changed. What’s wrong? You were more…assertive. But lately…you’re just…you’re so… sad. Is it me? Tell me…is it me? Is it…Fiddleford? Is it…the story you told me? Sorry I talk so much…”

Ford stroked his hair, cooing that it was going to be alright. Everything was going to be fine. After a minute or two, Bill pulled away. “I gotta go…” He staggered backward to the bedroom. “Gonna…get dressed and leave.” He pulled his blazer off the rack and put on it—still bare-chested and in his underwear.


“Stay away…” He masked his face with his hand, the back of it against his face and the triangle with one eye towards Ford. “Just stay away… just go—go away…”

Surrounding Bill’s wrist with a gentle grip, Ford lowered the hand and in a soft voice, said. “When have I ever judged you? There is no reason to hide.” Again, Bill shielded his face with a hand, the triangle masking his face and separating Ford from Casper.

The triangle with one eye stared at Ford. Ford stared back. Then, he joined his fingers with Bill’s, blinding the eye and taking Casper’s mask.

Casper Giordano stands before Stanford Pines.

“All I ever do is fuck up. It’s all I ever do. I should go—” sobbed the boy who calls himself Bill Cipher. “I’m so sorry…I couldn’t save Fiddleford for you… I know…I know…you miss him…”

“It’s alright, Casper. Let’s not talk about Fiddleford.”

“You hate me…” His hand clenched in Ford’s. ”I’m no fucking good. Ask anyone…go…go ask them…”

“Stop deciding for me. What I think of you hasn’t changed. You need help, dear.” Ford said. “Save your words for therapy, and if they spill out, I’ll collect them for you. I have great memory.”

Cas pulled an about-face. “Where do you get these lines from? A movie?”

Thumbing the wrist of the shaking hand he held, Ford said. “Do you want to hear a joke?”

“Really…”


Cas kept his disgusted face but much-needed laughter from both filled the room. “I’d shoot you if that gun had ammo, just so you know.”

…

“Is it okay for me to stay…” Cas whispered. "Is it....really okay?"
“I never thought you would tell me what you told me. I always knew who you were and what you’ve done, part of me did. To have confirmation…” Ford said. Makeshift words would have to do for now. “Rather than worried, I feel closure.” He rubbed the back of Cas’s head. “Isn’t confession the first step?”

“I guess…”

“I’ll tell you what I think of you. You need to give me time.”

Cas hugged Ford entirely, throwing himself into Ford’s arms in overpowering need. Ford’s arms clasped around him.

“I’ll make us hot chocolate. What do you say?” Ford asked and was suddenly machine-gunned by a flurry of ticklish kisses. Laughing, he gently put space between them. “Let’s start over. Officially.” Ford held out his hand. “I’m Stanford Pines.”

“You’ve seen too many movies.” Cas smacked the hand away. “Make with the hot chocolate before I cringe so hard, I crack my neck.” He took off his blazer and mumbled something incomprehensible.

“I didn’t catch that?”

Cas stared at Ford, half-lidded eyes that lidded further as he surveyed Ford. “Casper. My name… I guess.”

“That’s an incredibly endearing name. I like it.”

“You’re not going to call me that, are you?” Bill said, watching Ford prepare hot chocolate. “It took me… a long time to use that name in the city. Used all kinds of names before I finally squared myself up a bit. I don’t really know who I am. As weird as that sounds… I’m always trying on different names. Always changing them when things go bad. Soil your clothes, you get new ones. When I was here, I was always ‘Gaspard’s son’. Never was anyone past that title. I talk too much. What’s your favourite movie quote? And don’t call me Casper. Just Bill. I’ve gotten used to it. It rolls off your tongue nicer, anyway. Did I mention I love your tongue?”

Ford laughed, a bag of small marshmallows in hand. “My favourite movie quote? I can’t say I have an all-time favourite. But I can think of a relevant one.”

“Hit me with it, baby.” Bill opened his mouth for a marshmallow treat.

Ford put a few marshmallows into Bill’s mouth. “Nothing surprises me. I’m a scientist.”

“Huh.” Bill chewed sloppily. “Dunno that one.” He frowned. “Hey… tell me… tell me what you thought of me when you first met me. In fact, tell me about when you knew you liked me. I wanna hear your life story but only the parts that feature me.” He accepted the offered hot chocolate. “I talk a lot. What’s your deal? Do you…” he winked, “come here often?”

“Did you know Bill is short for William?” Ford said, squinting at Bill.

“Huh?”

“Just a little fact.”

Bill shrugged. “Let’s do something lewd.”

“You’re crying still, dear.”
“Even better. Or do you prefer to be the one crying?”

They held hands, the triangle with one eye left in the dark.

The screen of Ford’s phone illuminates the dark of the room.

[Bill Cipher]: Lame.

The unreal message fades into the dark.

Wearing open body language, Ford stood in the doorway to the office, looking back toward Bill in encouragement: shoulders open and angled towards Bill, his hand reaching for his reluctant darling. The office where his new therapist stood, all dolled up and with equally open body language.

He looks at the watch around Ford’s wrist, shrugs and walks in.

In Ford’s mindscape, Casper lays beside him, clinging to his arm as he explains to his dear the secrets of the cosmic world. The yellow flower sits within the palm of his other hand, asleep.

- In Bill’s mindscape, his mask dangles in his right hand while he watches Ford throw balls at a target to win a giant teddy bear.

The game is rigged. Ford does not win anything.

I'm not crazy.

“I’m sure I’m in your mind there somewhere, Bill.”—Stanley Pines.

Chapter End Notes

If you think Bill is Stanley, you’re not right. But you’re not wrong either.
Dipper screams. He screams himself out. Bill screams back with equal frustration and hurt and rue. They harmonize until it sounds like the scream of single exasperated soul. Screaming in each other’s faces until it’s twenty-past and they’ve both struck quiet. Fuck you’s follow and Dipper swears he saw Bill Cipher cry.

- (?) weeks from now.

11-year-old Stanford Pines draws a triangle with an eye in the beach sand.
“The Illuminati is real…” he whispers to himself.

William Cipher watches, and laughs.

—The ever-changing past.

Stanley inspects the tombstone and thinks yeah, he might’ve known someone named—

“He was Italian, and had dark skin and kinda-curly dark hair with bits of swirled-in blonde. Really weird highlights. You know, kinda like a round candy cane? And these pretty flower tattoos on his hands... with a spooky eye-triangle on his palms. His name was Andrew but he called himself 8ball. Like that ball in pool? Who likes pool, anyway?”

—Mabel Pines talks about the boy she met in New York.
Has anyone ever told you look just like Stanley?
Chapter Summary

Stanford Pines sees Bill Cipher across the sallow, ridged plateau. When Bill Cipher comes closer into focus, so does Stanley Pines.

Chapter Notes


Shitpost references, among other major things, credited to ludwigbeilschmitten.

You looked into my eyes, saw the strange little person I was inside.

-Female Doctor, Miniature Tigers.

"I’m feeling a little…on the fence right now.” William says as he undoes his bowtie and lets the fabric fall, swivelling into an abandoned heap on the wooden floor. “Straddling the good o’l white picket fence.”

“What do you mean…?” Ford watches, concerned and uncertain if he deserves to be on trial or not on the forthcoming accusations. “Darling…”

“Yikes, don’t use that word.” William says. “Christ, Sixer. You always fuck your relatives?”

“We aren’t related.”

“That’s your perspective.” William looks at him. “Try seeing it from mine.”

-Months from now: A lesson on never sticking your head through portals.

Plenty of kisses and all my love
Yours forever,
Stanislao

“Hey blue boy in the glasses. Yeah you, kid. Going my way?” Grins the boy-Venus with a mouth all smoke. He is magnetic, and Stanley is drawn to him—into him, as waves are to the pale mistress in the moon. (this boy was the sun, the King. oh he burns. burning. burned. be my cancer-death.)

Stanley plays it cool. “Nice tats,” he says to the boy with embellished hands and gold-beaming hair. Gold. Stanley loved gold.

“Thanks,” says the boy perceptibly charmed by flattery. “They run in the family.”
-Stanley Pines meets Bill Cipher, Providence.

Chapter End Notes

There's something about us.
Beside his destined and damned Stanley, Stanford closes his eyes beneath the earthlight.

Incredible art!!!:
http://cerisia.tumblr.com/post/166771883384
https://dragonshydreamer.tumblr.com/post/165074728555

Originally part of the previous chapter and follows it directly.

credit to the phrase 'I say, do you believe in kissing' here:
http://yesterdaysprint.tumblr.com/post/166851001604/oakland-tribune-california-july-6-
1907

“Do they know that honey, the universe, and the end are under the shirt?”

—Saadi Youssef

In the absolute dark, Stanford sees Stanley gambling in Las Vegas, bluffing his way to success. Stanley looks over his shoulder and their eyes meet.

—The Ninth Paradigm.

They lay in bed beneath quilted silence. Such a heavy atmosphere was only ever present when either one withheld his thoughts and feelings. The culprit predominantly Ford and in this case, he is guilty yet again.

Roses bloom out and within their bed to the tapping of Bill’s fingers aside the melody within his mind, interfering with the silence. “Wouldn’t it be nice to live in the kinda world where we belong…”

“You really enjoyed that song?” Ford asked.

“Yeah. I heard it before but it never really vibed with me. Feels like I’ve heard it loads of times though... huh. Maybe someone played it a lot when I was drunk.” Under the blankets, Bill rolled closer towards his lover to grab hold of stubbled cheeks, squishing them with tender caution. “Sing me Dean Martin next time. The way to any Italian’s heart is Dean Martin.”
“Is that so?” Ford said as Bill stroked the hard line of his jaw. “I’ll be sure to remember that.” He took the affectionate hand in all its delicacy and caged it at his heart.

Eyes roved below and beyond as if granted momentary X-ray vision. With a provocative flick of his eyebrow, Bill asks: “Am I gonna finally get lucky tonight?”

“I think this is enough.”

“I can take it.” He purred between given licks—extra razzle-dazzle for emphasis. Cherry on top.

“But you don’t have to.” Ford said gently, evading the precarious bear-trap set by his lover’s on-coming charms. Saying no had become easier since Bill’s night of honesty. Every declination was now confidently buttressed by the confirmation of Bill’s past trauma. Speculations had first left the area grey, but ignorance was no longer an acceptable excuse. Trauma had been the nucleus of Bill’s inappropriate behaviour all along.

Loud groaning then sob sighing followed by mumbled protesting passed as Bill wiggled besides Ford, against him suggestively to elicit further action. Ford declined the invitation.

“You said—” Bill tried reminding but Ford interrupted with a thumb on his lips. Hush hush.

“And I changed my mind.” Ford said. “Neither of us want to.”

“You clearly did—the way you look at me, seriously. You know who looks at me like that? People who wanna fuck.”

“I think you misinterpret my visible emotions.” Ford said. “Looking at you does not imply anything.”

“I can read your mind.”

“I highly doubt that.”

Once tight in his arms, Bill stilled.

“We are not stagnating, even if you feel so, dear.” Ford said and regressed to their previous position. The hand now within his own tensed prompting Ford to push their union harder against his chest, letting his slow-dancing heart calm the infant tremors of frustrated anger.

“What do ghosts eat for dinner?” Ford asked then kissed their engaged hands. “Spooketti.”

Bill snorted. “Is that an Italian jab…”

“Perhaps.”

“You know, you remind me of a time when I was very happy, as a child. A brief period that I forget on the regular, overshadowed by the stress of the present…” Ford kissed his cheek. The song playing on the vinyl skips through time. “I haven’t understood why yet…but it’s how I’ve been feeling lately.” Only memories of being reviled and ostracized festered his recent memory folder but Bill’s presence brought back disregarded memoirs of felicity and cordiality.

“And perhaps I look lustful when I’m deep in thought. I’m not sure.” Ford said. Bill was not privy to his inner monologue and so could only go by what his physical senses interpreted of Ford’s observable physical gestures.

Bill laughed. “Yeah…yeah that might be it.” He frowns thoughtfully. “Me too…about the reminding thing. I feel like…I dunno.” Like I came home, for real. My old home. The one where everyone was
nice, and summer lasted longer than geographically possible.

Bill pressed his head snugly at Ford’s armpit, smelling cologne. “I missed you.”

“I never went anywhere today.”

“Ya know, I’d normally be able to talk you into bed. I have a real talent for that.” Bill boasted. “Or used to. Can’t seem to turn it on with you. Maybe I lost my mojo.”

“I can affirm that. Your speech is often disordered now, compared to when we first met.” Ford said. “It’s clear you’ve had a notable formal education but your style of speaking switches from pervasive jargon to articulate.” He cleared his throat in shyness of his next reveal. “Hearing you speak is something I rather enjoy… which method you choose to use with each subject reveals quite a bit about you.”

“You gotta dumb yourself down a bit where I come from. Unless you’re in the big leagues. Big kahunas can get away with it.” Bill said. “You talk a little too polished and guys think you’re picking a fight.”

“I can tell when you lie, too. When you speak the truth, you sound unsure, as if you’re surprised that you can still be honest.” Ford said. “Almost…like an infant walking. It’s trying but it struggles. I hear the battle in your voice.”

“Christ, do you really overthink everything I do?”

“After we met, I spent a lot of time thinking about you. And I still spend time thinking about you.” Ford said. “You’re always on my mind.”

Ford could hear the smile in Bill’s next words distorting plain syllables into dulcet, bite-sized treats.

“We have something in common, finally.” Bill said. He honked Ford’s nose with accompanied sound effects. It turned redder, bright enough to glimpse in the pale moonlight of the ajar window. A cool breeze passed in and made a good incentive for Bill to huddle even closer to his personal heater. He deduced Ford was so often pink because he was so often warm.

“Anti-climatic…” Bill covered Ford’s eyes. “I thought for sure I was getting under your skin.”

“You were but not in the way you imagined. Increased desire doesn’t imply I want to suddenly do whatever I said I wouldn’t.” Ford said. “I imagine you’ve dealt with that plenty but you know how immutable I am with these matters.”

“You’re so selfish.” Bill joked.

“Am I?” Ford opened his eyes into dark skin. “You still…don’t understand how guilty I felt and still feel. After our time in the hotel, and then further after you told me the truth.” He put a hand atop the tan blindfold. “For even thinking about being with you… I was ashamed. That shame hasn’t lessened. It’s very…difficult for me.”

“If you feel so bad, why are you jerking me off still?”

“To make you happy.” Ford said. “To remind you that it’s possible to enjoy being touched.”

Bill rolled his eyes up until he felt discomfort inside his lids. “And that means I don’t get to touch you?”
“I don’t want you to think reciprocation is necessary. When you adore someone, you don’t seek compensation.” Ford said. “And I find great satisfaction in pleasing you.”

“Yeah, but if I wanna return the favour?” Bill asked, then closed his eyes. A lecture is imminent, so he channels his focus into listening. Time to learn.

“You already do by allowing me to touch you. I know it’s taken much out of you to be as vulnerable with me as you are.” Ford reached to touch Bill’s cheek, finding the mark despite his blindness. “Allowing me to touch you, granting me access to your body is an act of desire in itself.”

“Never really thought of it that way…” Bill said softly. His hand slipped down to Ford’s cheek, mirroring the previous movement of Ford’s hand. “Is this just with me?”

“This is similar to my first relationship, actually.”

“Lemme hear that story. I’ve been dying to hear that. Can you tell me now? Tell tell…”

Ford laughed heartily and ahemed, letting the anticipation rile Bill up a little more.

“Well, when you grow up a freak, you’re more inclined to accept strange feelings that contrast the norm. I never had an issue with my attraction to men but the first man I was with did.” Ford’s eyes move to the left of the dark. “He wasn’t comfortable with reciprocating, and I learnt I enjoy it either way.”

“So, you were the one jerking him all the time? What an asshole. Did he ever change?”

“He did. His actions were not done out of selfishness and I understood that. It’s a far more complicated matter than how you’re perceiving it, dear.” Ford thumbed across Bill’s cheek. “And it’s very black and white thinking. It’s entirely possible to receive pleasure from giving. Because you don’t find it pleasurable does not mean it can’t be pleasurable to another.”

“You keep telling yourself that.”

“You can’t relate?” Ford asked.

“I dunno…”

“I might’ve wanted to go further before, but I can’t.” Ford said. “Experimenting—I can’t. Not now. Maybe the far future. Maybe. But the more I research it, the more consider it, the less I want to try it. I can’t think of anything less erotic than possibly hurting you, even if by accident. I’m sure you can understand, dear…”

“Yeah yeah…so when do I get to jerk you off again?”

“We’ll see.”

“You know…” Bill pulls away and folds his arms behind his head. “I don’t know what to think of you. Or that. You’re guilty and all that so I can’t touch you, but you can touch me. Can’t say I’ve ever heard of that. I mean, like I said, you’re kinda dominant in your own way, and not expecting anything back… no entiendo. Non capisco.”

“Let me see if I can explain it better. When you touch me, it feels as if I’m passively using you. Even if these feelings are not logical nor accurate, we have an entire future where we can indulge ourselves. For now, let’s not rush.” Ford said. “I…I just never should’ve touched you. I took advantage of you. I know you don’t understand what I’m saying but one day you will.”
“You make yourself sound real noble after admitting you get off on servicing me like a bell-boy.”

“Well…I won’t deny that…” Ford laughed again. “Indeed, I am quite satisfied with this arrangement all the same.”

“Yeah, like I said: Selfish. Not having to pay you back is weird for me.”

“I know, dear. I know exactly what you mean.” Ford said gently and nestled together with darling. “But there is no price for tender-loving-care.”

“Oh get fucked!” Bill flared with a shove but assaulting hands were taken captive and he was pulled into Ford’s arms, back home.

“You know I won’t hurt you. And I won’t let anyone else hurt you either.” Ford kissed his ear and let Bill get comfortable on his torso.

Chest hair shook with Bill’s inappropriate laughter. “I should be saying that. You aren’t exactly a tough guy.”

“Perhaps but I can be quite efficient should the need call for it.”

“I bet you’re the kinda guy who shoots with his eyes closed.” Bill laughed again. “Yeah, I know. Kinda pathetic but I believe you, anyway.”

…

“Yeah…I believe you, I really do.” Bill repeated.

…”

“I believe you….when you say that, I believe you. I believe you…”

…”

“I feel guilty…not…and you know, fucking you back. I feel guilty because you’re so fucking nice and and…no one’s nice for nothing.”

“I know you do, dear. But you don’t have to pay for kindness, no matter what you were taught. You don’t owe me or anyone else a single thing.” Ford said.

…”

“Whatever.” Bill said.

…”

“I don’t really get you, Ford.” Bill said. “I don’t get you and it kills me. It kills me that we’re never on the same page. We’re entirely different books, different genres…”

“Well, you have to start somewhere and now’s a good time as any.” Ford tidied his hair. “What don’t you understand?”

“Everything.” Bill said as Ford held him again. In Ford’s arms he is as light as can be. Nothing can weigh him down with his dreamcatcher close to catch the oppressive nightmares. His golden dreamcatcher…his Stanford Pines.
“Nice freckles, doc.” Bill said into the chest florid from his own hot breath. Stanford hummed from his chest while massaging Bill’s backs with soft pressing.

“I was thinking…let’s get your birth registered. Get you a birth certificate, an official identity. I’m sure we can work something out.” Ford gently pushed the tension at the base of Bill’s neck. “Using your family’s name is…it’s not sustainable for where our future is going. You need to break away.”

“My own identity huh.”

“I was thinking of William. The name.” Ford said.

“Huh?”

“You don’t want to be Gaspard, do you? You need a fresh start.”

“Yeah but why William? What’s with you and that name?”

“William is my favourite constellation. I even named my childhood imaginary friend after it.” Ford confessed, fond memories visiting him in the moment.

“Really? Your favourite huh…” Bill contemplated, sold already “So, when’d you ditch William? Like, what age?”

“Ah, I don’t remember…”

“Man, you were so lonely, you had an imaginary friend. Yikes.” Bill teased. He put a hand at Ford’s outer thigh. “You know, there’s nothing imaginary about me…”

“Oh? I find you to be quite the dream.” Ford pecked his forehead. Bill suddenly broke away, rolling back to his side of the bed.

The black spot chants now; the sound maddening.

“I have this utter dread for the inevitable future.” He laughed while fencing his face behind gaunt fingers, a deranged rictus on sodden taut skin. “You never should’ve let me into your house, into your home, into your bed, Stanford! You never should’ve…” His laughter transforms into crying hysterics. “Time will divide us! Inevitable separation! For how long this time? How long? How long, Stanford?”

Tick tock. Look at the countdown. Look at the black spot on the wall. That spot…where the frigid breeze blows through…that spot…that bitter spot…

Never one to fear the future, Bill found that he was now very afraid. Of what exactly eluded him but he felt it. It bubbled alive in the cauldron of his ego, with its popping whispers of prophesies; of ‘what if’s’ and of ‘will be’s’.

Midst the creeping of cold dread at what the future foretold, Stanford settled himself over Bill, barred off the stampede of agony and chased off the chill with firelit lips.

Paranormal Psychosis takes a rain-check. Not today.

When their lips separate, Bill is calm.

“Do you want to make love?” Ford asked.

“That’s code for the usual, isn’t it?”
“It is.”

“Yeah…” Bill said. “TED talk over? Get your silver plate ready, bell-boy.”

“A salver.” Ford said as cupped Bills face and placed thumb to puckering lips that opened for expected kisses.

“A silver plate used for servicing is called a salver…” Ford continued as Bill held his wrist, licking and sucking on the thumb as if it were his favourite ice-cream-flavoured lollipop. Lips of wild honey now tamed through gentle and insidious guidance.

“I got lucky.” Bill said between licks. “We both did.”

A pall of peace spans across the dark in preparation for a divined small death. Multiple deaths, brought on by six-fingered hands.

Silent Ford meant loud, babbling hands that recited odes and archaic monologues as tribute to Bill’s skin. *Come, make me immortal with a kiss.*

—I say, do you believe in kissing?!

Kissing is the beginning and the end.

He ties his arms around Ford’s neck in attempt to merge himself, constricting as pressure builds with each passing peck. When Ford stops, his arms shift and hands clutch into Ford’s strong back.


Those armed hands work akimbo: one frolics in his hair, lovesick and high on the scent of burning honey; the other slides down and slithers up, and with a blistering grip, heats him to the quick.

But a slow-burning ascent is what Ford both specialised in and naturally preferred. Even so, Bill is churned at abrupt times, a mortifying ‘please’ falling out with each convulsive thrust of his dewy hips. Against the skin of his soft-bitten neck, the indent of Ford’s smug smile can be felt in all its detail.

Smug fucking nerd.

As foretold, darling uses nails. Nails incise the blueprint of cage bars into Ford’s back, an inch or two shy of lacerations. To draw blood is to convey the sharpest of desires; and to hold darling is to bleed. But Bill’s learnt there are plenty more languages to convey a need of such rasping bed-breaking nature that did not hurt nor discomfort his lover. Words were a good choice. A delicate choice.

Scratches down your back.

Kisses down your back.

Their lips rendezvous and now Ford goes to work on his back, lining kisses row after row. This time, Bill climaxes on his stomach with Ford’s protective body over him; hand between his legs and lips fluttering kisses to his neck, ‘darlings’ around his ear where they travel throughout his entire being. He wasn’t just any darling; he was Ford’s darling. Have you heard the phrase ‘Kill Your Darlings’? Ford asks. Did you know that ‘die’ was once a synonym that meant to climax? He stays a hand at Bill’s neck, right on the Adam’s apple, cups the whole neck that fits into his hand with room to spare.

Choking is not on Ford’s menu, it’s not in his move-set and it’s not on Bill’s mind.

Fingers mark the next target and Ford gets to work on his neck; a kiss here, a kiss there, a kiss everywhere.
The kisses don’t end. Round and round until he falls down down.

I was made for kissing you, Ford says. And you were made to be kissed.

(he breaks character and says he was made to be fucked but Ford laughs hearts into his neck and says those are words of an amateur. Whoever told you that was naïve and didn’t know a damn thing. I know everything, Ford insists, and Bill believes him. He has no reason not to believe Ford. Ford knows best.)

Touch me. Send me to outer space.

They kiss for the hundredth time, drunk on space wine; they say ‘let’s not stop’, and go all the way to Venus.

On Venus, they say ‘kissing is our sun, air and water’.

We make love with our mouths, our hands, our syllables.

To us, it’s enough.

“You’re the personification of Dreamcatcher—did you know that? If Dreamcatcher were a person, it’d be you.” Bill whispered into Ford’s ear. “When I hold it, I feel safe. When I hold you, I feel capable.”

Ford says I love you but he is half asleep and Bill knows he’s not speaking to him. He’s speaking to Stanley, to Casper but he’s not speaking to Bill Cipher.

Because Bill Cipher is not here.

3:33am

“Get…out of my body…you’re driving me nuts…” Bill mutters to the unseen thing in the dark. “I said get out…”

Get out.

Get out, Stanley.

The triangle on his palm laughs, and says ‘you talk too much to yourself’.

Ford wakes to Bill’s open palm, the triangle with one eye mere inches from his face. He joins a hand with it, putting the eye to sleep.

Bill’s eyes flicker open.

“Goodnight, Bill.” Ford whispers, strengthening their hand’s embrace. His darling’s eyes close, and Bill Cipher goes to sleep within the palm of his hand.

In Ford’s mindscape, centred in the starlight star-bright sky, he sees a waning crescent moon of ashen glow and a pearl curved smile. He stretches out his arms and turns his head to the right where his
dear Stanley lay, only to see his companion has fallen asleep.

Ford closes his eyes, too, and imagines a new moon. A moon lit only by earthshine.

“This is him. The one the only—” says Stanley stepping aside to reveal his alleged hot date for the night.
Bill Cipher stands in the front doorway of Stanford Pines’ house.
“Hey hey, if it isn’t the big daddy! Stanford Pines! Boy, have I heard so much about you.” Leers the golden-haired gilded-eyed boy; hands patterned black, face shadowed dark. Hasn’t aged a day since their first encounter, all those years ago in the diner of Oregon. But Stanford does not remember right now.

He’s forgotten, and Bill Cipher’s taken great offense to it.

-Bill Cipher and Stanford Pines meet again, 19 years from now.

Chapter End Notes

Kill your darlings.
Ra Blood

Chapter Summary

There’s a god in me, man.

Chapter Notes

I hate Ao3 because they have very dodgy practices.

Chapter link with snippets:
http://yoursatanboyfriend.tumblr.com/post/173802830048/ra-blood

Art that deserves praise until I'm blue in the face:
https://caspersgiordano.tumblr.com/post/171816241526/im-sick-and-this-is-the-only-productive-thing-i
https://caspersgiordano.tumblr.com/post/171780871641/i-did-some-digging-and-found-old-art-my-style-has
http://yoursatanboyfriend.tumblr.com/post/172758021008/gerisia-yoursatanboyfriend-i-have-the-strong
http://cersistia.tumblr.com/post/166771883384/the-ninth-paradigm-doodles-after-re-reading-this

Special thanks to ludwigbeilschmitten, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Humans are too sad to be Bill Cipher.

_A million years couldn’t cure this pain._

So,

**How about a trillion?**

_Sto... sto sognando?..................

... sto sognando._

Co-ca Cola kid— Cola cola cola!

Stanford pours him a cold glass of solid coca cola.
Stanford’s mouth dispenses runny toot and like a baby bird, impoverished and ready to grow, he opens whole and wide for it.

_Cola COLA cola!_
Stanford’s white-powdered finger wiggles under his top lip, rubs itself into his thirsty gums. Sucking yayo off freak digits, hell-o. Cuban in Nonno’s mouth, Colombian in my mouth.

Cola cola COLA!

Fix me, doc. Doc, fix me.

You promised.

"Look at my cock going into you. Do you like that?" Stanford Filbrick Pines asks in a very unFord way. Seeing is believing and he doesn’t want to see. Doesn’t need two eyes to see, Stanford decides.

I do…

“Why?”

I like—like seeing you hurt me…

“I like it too. Look how it goes in and out, stretching you—"

It hurts it hurts hurts- can I get another glass of coke?

COLA!

I’m Hal Forrester and welcome to Jackass!

Rub a little on your gums. Snort it. Make it go grey.

I’m gonna snort my whole fucking name! Spell it out! H A L!

Bloody noses dripping into blood-red sangrias. Orange lipstick, Halloween every morning, every night.

Mask of the day: _ _ _ _ _ _

Hangman tries left: 3

You got these little tablets? Orange, round?

I got something better for you, kid.

If I catch you selling to him again, the beast growls, the Big Bad Beast.
If I catch you—

Seven headed. Seven-faced. You aren’t cut out for this, Bill, says the beast to Goldilocks.

‘Goldilocks fucked by Papa Bear’. You must be 18 to view this clip.

— You better hit this or I’ll hit you.

Come up to New York city. We got pure white girl with no cuts.

Line the hole with cola, fill it with Cecil. Cecil from the down street, Cecil in the apartment round the block, Cecil in the bar, Cecil from the high school twenty minutes away. Respectable Cecil, disgusting Cecil. Cecil in a suit, Cecil in overalls. Cecil looking like Nonno, Cecil looking like the guy on the car magazine.
Gimme that white cecil, white outta cecil.
Drop’em off in the grave for Cecil.
Line with cecil, fill with cecil.
Got something real nice for you, honey.

*Life is too short not to monopolize both sexes,* Nonno says while playing dress up, a pig in blue today. *No one takes a queer seriously.*

Lies, like women, love me.

White nipples, plasma titties. Long hair like— mind if I think of my sister while you ride me?
Abbracciami, sorella. Never let me go.
Come to New York, sorella. Come come.

You came.

He holds Mabel in his arms. She laughs, “I’m not afraid to love a gangster.”

Come back to New York, Mabel.

“I’ll visit you in prison and write you letters.” She promises.

Stay, Shooting Star. You can’t go back into space, you’ve crashed dead already. Fellow stars don’t want the broken.

**Pop the cola!**

He pops a Venus into his mouth, rolls it across and under his tongue. You’re the only one who’s gonna love me, baby, he says to Venus deep in his throat.

________________________________________

*I got transferred, luv. I’ll come visit. Be a good boy.*

He hugs Nonno who’s dressed in a baby blue police officer outfit, screaming *don’t go don’t go* but Nonno is cold and dismissive as he always is unless there’s alcohol and a need to be satiated. Because he’s too old, a man now, and has become an annoyance.

As a final goodbye, Nonno’s hands limned by orange light, touches his face and pushes to it to down to crotch-level. On his knees, he accepts his parting gift.

Down between the shined-black shoes, he finds a little slip— a letter to someone called Bill Cipher with words ‘Welcome to Paradise.’

**Fuck your redemption.**

________________________________________

A speech bubble pops above Xanthar’s head with too much tiny text for Bill to read. Black ink lines fuck each other and leak everywhere. Black lines, white strips.

Like a true patriot, I love the stripes. Stripes on my jacket, stripes’s hard stripes in my mouth.
Are you gonna fuck me…?

"'Course not. You know I don’t like men."

Oh…yeah…

"You look so much like your dad. Isaac was a looker, I thought they don’t make them like your old man anymore. But here you are."

The orange light kind of hurts? Aliens and their anal probes. Aliens, Ford. I was abducted.

- "That’s right. You don’t like men, you like boys.” Bill Cipher twirls his cane then yells out, “Come to New York, Stanley! I’m waiting for you, darling!”

Happy birthday, baby! Knew you were an Aries!

Casper Giordano snorts a line of diamond-white.

You okay there man?

Bill Cipher dusts off any evidence from his nose. “Peachy!”

Hi there, Stanley. Thanks for having me.

—

Come back to New York, Stanley.

“That’s an excellent question, Stanley! Spooky activity! It’s always a subject I get asked on—”

Televisual God. God who looks like me.

Stanley, that’s an excellent question!

Rewind.

Stanley, that’s an—

Rewind

Stanley, tha—

Rewind.

Stanley.

The son of Gaspard Giordano sits in front of the television, Gaspard beside him in his accustomed chair, the one with mismatched jarring gold triangular threading on its lone decorative cushion.

- A tre lati!
Stanford stands between him and the sun, the sunlight is barred from shining on him or shining into him. Holy land shade where the reprobate of the light may not come.

Stanley, stay with me.

- 

Casper Giordano sits in front of the television, himself dressed as Nonno in the chair beside him.

è che Stanford?

“Yes.”

mio fratello… è mio fratello?

“Maybe so! Maybe so!” A pause. “Oops! Shouldn’t have said anything!”

The memory is sucked out, sucked dry until his chest is barren, and he is empty.

He looks up at the three-sided sun, God is that you?

- 

He’s Moses driven insane by the word of God.

In the old days, shamans would take drugs to communicate with gods, spirits, the underworld.

Casper snorts another line of yayo.

*Baby, your eyes were glowing under the UV!*

Gods love to fuck mortals.

Andrew Alcatraz sticks his tongue way down down Dipper’s throat.

Sun in his throat, Dipper burns inside out.

You must go to the light, Stanley, do you understand?

*A tre lati! Nonno! A tre lati!*

Go to the light.

Come to the powder-white light, the snow-white ball of eight.

Come to Gravity Falls, Stanley. I’m waiting for you.

Bill stumbles to the bathroom, Ford still sound asleep.

Looking into the mirror, he lights up a cigarette and sticks out his tongue. Leaning closer to the boy in the silver, he crushes the orange light into the fattest part, the juicy and ripe centre, then closes his mouth around the king’s body and chews; he then opens his mouth, drops his tongue out and lets the taste of dead fire and commercial self-harm fall into the sink without a sound.
I'm waiting for you.

“But they were actually communicating with their sub-conscious, another side of them, another face…” Bill says to the mirror, black on his tongue. “Maybe even another life. Just like magick. It’s just calling yourself from yourself…talking to yourself…”

I'm waiting for you, darling.

His right eye begins to bleed.

Fuck your redemption.

Stanley Pines lays back on the chair, watching the neighbourhood boys play basketball. Strained muscles, beads of sweet water pooling in robust crevices— nature’s vanity is exalted here, in the masculine form. To be the swallow who’d drink of that body-dew in the morning rise, tilting his neck back to swallow— or be swallowed, even. Whole, to the threshold, and even further, perhaps, if the human body would allow its limits tested.

Puberty was proving to be a very difficult time indeed.

Stanley continues to watch the boys.

-The false Ninth Paradigm.

Chapter End Notes

There’s a god in me, man. I can't wait for you to meet him.
Dirty Stanley!

Chapter Summary

Stanley, no cheating!

Chapter Notes

You need to have read 'Say it isn't so, Dipper' and 'He's not a gangster brobro, he's a gangSTAR!' to be familiar with the Dipper and Mabel arc. If you want to skip them, I think there's enough implication to know what happened.

Warnings for references to drugs and drug addiction, and past rape. Nothing explicit.

chap link with extras: http://yoursatanboyfriend.tumblr.com/post/174308750868/dirty-stanley

Parts of Dipper's backstory credited to cinnamxn!!

Feedback is always appreciated...♡・○・`♡

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The bathroom door ajar, Dipper sees the boy, Bill, eyeing his reflection while clutching something hidden in his gloved left hand. Bill touches his nose, a hint of red glints, then feels his audience; he looks to you, plaintive and scared, as if he worried for the catcher rather than the caught.

Your uncle never told you how much he loves you.

The door shuts on its own, the boy now out of sight. When the door opens again, Bill Cipher comes out, and the boy is out of mind.

-It’s the Great Pumpkin Dildo, Dipper Pines!, just around the Time-corner.

“Where flowers bloom so does hope.” — Lady Bird Johnson

To experience auditory hallucinations during heightened moments of stress is common occurrence. When your body is in constant flight or fight mode, it will, on occasion, imagine danger where there is. Stress can cause hallucinations; hallucinations can cause stress. It’s a regular cycle in the life of whatever it is you have. PTSD, Anxiety, Depression—you don’t know what you have. You just know you have a big scary acronym.

You decided you are more than a label. Your world has no labels now. Don’t name the problem? Don’t have the problem. Are you alright? Well, there’s no word for quite what I am so alrigh will have to do! But you know you have it. You know you have all three. Troubles come in threes. Three is an unlucky number to you. (Call out a demon’s name three times for it to manifest. Three is a key
and a curse and the number of men in the hotel room that night because yes, you remember. You remember *everything*.

So, it’s not unusual to have simple audio hallucinations, but it’s the first time it’s happened over the phone; it’s first time he’s heard such knife-shrill *realism* over the phone. Hallucinate enough and sympathetic reality begins to leave little hints for you: breads crumbs to lead you home, or a rope down the well to hoist your half-dead self up to the land of living.

This voice was all rope, frayed and coarse against the edges of his palm and apple of his cheek.

But

Mason Pines does not hallucinate. It’s not one your symptoms because you’re one of the lucky ones. A lucky one, they say. Lucky you weren’t prolapsed, lucky you weren’t horrifically injured and didn’t die of blood loss. Lucky you weren’t sold off through an underground auction because those things happen, they told you. They happen to boys, too. It could’ve happened to you. To your sister. He could’ve *killed* you. He could’ve kept you in a motel decorated in tacky vine wallpaper and rented you out to men who are marked with ink of spiders and barb wire. It’s happened, it might happen, it’s happening right now.

But not to you.

So, you’re very lucky, Dipper. Do you know just how lucky you are?

You’re so lucky, Dipper.

You remember the boy liked to talk, loved the sound of his own voice. A voice, despite all tries, you can’t forget and one you’d recognize anywhere over anything. (you know because you’ve heard him to talk to you at the last loud concert you were at. In your mind, telling you he’ll meet you in the bathroom, outside your car. Telling you he’s waiting for you, Dipper. He knows your name this time, knows where you live. He came all this way from the city to see you, pay you a nice long visit and you’re both going to be more this time because a promise is a promise——)

That voice… sharp and distinct enough that you’d know it anywhere. It’s one of the few things of the boy you remember. That gritty and smoky New York inflection to it; fast and furious. Ready for a confrontation. New York was a hard place to adapt to, but you thought you were doing well.

Social anxiety who? I don’t know him, you’d joke. But you do know him because you’re him, personified.

Back then when you still had your scholarship and your life, you'd call it the Big Apple and that made people unfriendly and colder than the air. Tourists use ‘Big Apple’, your friend Neil said. New Yorkers were apt to hate new-comers. You gotta blend in, Dipper. You gotta loosen up. You gotta come with us to this new club and we’ll hook you up with a fake I.D——

Let’s not do this right now, Dipper.

You know you dialled your uncle’s number. It’s the number saved in your phone, right under ‘Uncle Ford’. Gaunt as they were, your fingers don’t miss buttons. Phones were made for slender fingers and they don’t get much slenderer than yours. Your appetite died along with many things that week. Phone calls stress you out. Normal interactions are drudging and still cause anxiety. It’s been years. You’ve had so much time and eventually impatience supplanted everyone’s sympathy. Time, they say, mends it all and you’re intentionally being difficult. They say, in secret, that you love hosting pity parties. That you love that sweet Sympathy Pie and Powdered Pity coated in coconut.
Two for one deal. They say you and your sister are dramatic attention-seekers and you got that from your mother, Dipper. They say you had a rough encounter experimenting sexually, and you’re fucking queer, Dipper. You regret getting caught and you’re all what’s wrong with society, but we’ll pretend to sympathize— at least until it becomes socially acceptable not to. Let’s just side-eye you at the grocery and Sunday barbeques.

They say. She says. He says.

People say a lot of things about you.

People say so much but they never say the right thing, do they? What is the right thing? And when will it be said?

By the third therapist, you’d given up. A lost cause.

So, who’s surprised, really? That you can’t talk to your family over the phone anymore. You weren’t very good at it before, but you could at least bear it without imagining that boy.

You put the phone down.

You want to go home.

But you’re already home.

It’s morning but the sun was an early riser today, as if it had woken sooner to greet Bill. No visible clouds, blue as far as his third eye can see. A perfect sky one might find in a children’s book, where the concept of imperfection is brushed over in favour of idealism. Two dimensional and almost flat, as if there’s nothing beyond the span of powder blue; no outer space, no expanding universe, no almighty god, nothing. Just you, me and this panel of blue.

Clean sunlight bathes the surrounding shrubbery of their secluded house as well as the distant and mysterious shrouds of trees visible from Ford’s window. Crown shyness lets the light in so although they appear dark, to wander through them is to roam through a dark streaked in chiffon cream among fairy-tale evergreen. Bill’s walked through those trees, hand in hand, with Ford before. Boots sloppy with morning mud and palms freezing— but secretly warming through shared body heat between their hands, joint and hidden by their bulky sleeves. Crisp air, crisp light. To rise early meant more time awake and more time awake meant more time with Stanford, and he would do whatever he could to prolong this Time.

“Your phone’s been going off.” Bill drawled, slipping on his creased black blazer which he then attempted to smooth out to no avail. They were stubborn and too deep into the rigid material; though no one would notice from a distance, and no one would be getting close enough.

“Someone named Dipper. I picked up once and they hung up on me.”

“Dipper…? Ah, yes.” Ford murmured through sleep, eyes shut. “Family, don’t worry….” He snuggled his face into his pillow. “I’m staying in for a while…”

Bill adjusted himself in the mirror one final time, then wished to adjust his ill-fitting skin until it was a tad looser, specifically around the neck. This suit did not fit as well as it previously did. Or as he’d previously convinced himself it did. Lying to himself had become harder and harder until the effort was no longer worth the result.
Tell the truth: you hate yourself, right Stanley?

“Next time you should come to bed earlier…what am I gonna do with you?” Bill said, but Ford had fallen into sleep once again.

In Ford’s dream, Bill stands in the tropical water, burning in the white-hot heat. The sun as yellow as his soda on the burning tar beside the pool; the can half crushed and empty, and Bill’s swimming-bottoms lower than they should be. Somehow Ford knows how low they are. Ford knows a lot about the Bill all the way over there, in the blue-cold pool.

Bill waves at him then lowers himself into the water until like a predatory crocodile, only his eyes are out, in search of prey. He stands, splashes water in Ford’s direction then waves again, calling to Ford.

Come to me. Come…

There is a light in the dark. Now come to it, Stanford.

Amidst the blanket of perpetual grey cast over the town, the red of the upcoming traffic ahead light beamed seductively to Bill, rekindling his see-saw longing to visit red-light districts. (but this town was too conservative. No cavaleys around, who were always a bra and skirt away from birthday attire. No homeless boytoys, no toothless heaters who gave great blows, nada. Nowhere to get that fix of instant intimacy while contributing to the economy.)

Bill slowed down, the proud rumble of his engine replaced by 8baller’s scheduled whining; about how Bill he could have run the red light, and how he’d gotten soft ever since they moved to this backwards hillybilly parade of a town. And how he still couldn’t believe this was Bill’s hometown, as though someone as immoral as Bill couldn’t come from a cosy, insular place like this; this was where perfect sweet-home apple-pie American Boys were grown, not where former crackheads turned alcoholics turned Stanford Pines fucktoys came from. Not where Bill Ciphers came from, but rather where Stanley Pineses came from.

Bill has heard this all before. 8baller repeated himself often, the last Doc casually dropped it’s due to excessive drug usage. All artists did drugs. All artists had rotting brains, decomposing from plasma or mental illness or prolonged sentences of 9 to 5 cubicle jobs. We all become inured to the something.

The course of the drive, 8ball’s screaming seemed no more than a whisper compared to the thumping and clobbering in his skull, where he imagined a tiny man, trapped and fed up, banging his tiny fists against the ultra-sensitive lining of Bill’s head; every strike jingles the fountain pen in the pocket of the little homunculus’s suit, it clatters and clinks against its gold coin roomies. Sporadically, he’d hear the subway rushing through a white tunnel, into New York City.

“You all dumb yourselves down so Bill over here can feel like the smartest.” Paci-fire said, a line that caught and reeled Bill back to their conversation. An intriguing declaration.

“Anyway, you know there are no traffic lights in Italy?” Bill bullshitted. He put a hand on 8ball’s thigh. “We drive by intuition.” And 8ball believed him until Paci-fire went off.

He had spent a year in Italy, a time he prefers to forget. Gaspard Giordano was still in Italy, he sometimes brooded, living out a different and better life, and the him here in this small town was just a fictional character scribbled down in a journal by young Gaspard during the night when a creative
mood overcame him and he couldn’t sleep until he delivered it onto paper. Remembering happier moments of his life served only to extend the bridge between Casper and who he was now. Happiness was a neighbour who moved away when you were a child and never wrote you again, you have no idea what they look like today.

“If eugenics was ever a thing, Jason…” Paci-fire said.

So, the conversation went on.

Talking on the phone has not gotten any easier for him. He still stumbles over his words, breathes mid word, laughs at the inappropriate times. His voice breaks too, and he sounds twelve during those times. Mabel jokes and says he sounds like a toy dog barking—the ones that light up and do backflips after they yap. Mabel loved buying those at the clusters of stalls that would show up on weekends in their town and would sell every trinket a child could want. So many bright colours, loud noises, and people. Lots of people. Too many people for you now.

“Hi Uncle Ford.” Dipper began, reading off his mind’s teleprompter. “How are you.”

Uncle Ford sounds happy. Dipper can hear the smile in his voice. You love your uncle and his happiness is your happiness. If you repeat this to yourself, you’ll begin to feel happy, too. Empathize with others. It will aid recovery.

Uncle Ford gave the go-ahead to visit but told Dipper he’s living with someone now—temporarily. A boy Dipper’s age, who works for him. Dipper nearly cancels the visit.

But you tell yourself you can’t be afraid forever. You remember how happy and safe you felt during your endless summers spent at Uncle Ford.

You’re safe with Uncle Ford.

Everyone liked surprises. Everyone except Xanthar but what Chinese liked a good jump scare? The Japs liked their horror, the chinks liked their war and the Koreans liked their drama.

And like any normal, regular, average run of the mill human with a working raspatory system and countdown ‘til death day, Bill liked—loved, even—surprises.

Fuck this one though.

“My nephew and niece are coming to visit for two weeks.”

Closing his book, Bill slid his glasses down with a head tilt to look at Ford. “Wait what?”

“It slipped my mind entirely…” Ford looked at his phone, its cracked screen darkening midlook. “I promised them months ago…I completely forgot.”

“Kay….” Bill took his half-full ice cream bowl and had a scoop.

“One them is the nephew I mentioned to you before. The one who’s just about your age.” Ford said. “I’m sure you’ll get along. It’s only two weeks. This…certainly changes my schedule…”

“Huh…so you gotta play babysitter for a while.” Bill pointed his dessert spoon at Ford. “You keep delaying your dreams and they ain’t gonna take kindly to being stood up. You might find them ghosting you.”
“Ha! I’ll take that to heart.” Ford said, his arms held partially up as if caught red-handed by the deputy sheriff known as Bill Cipher. The spectacle made Bill laugh out ice-cream and crack a crude joke, which Ford disapproved of, regarding the white goop at the side of his mouth.

“Got any pics?”

“Yes…” Ford rummaged through his desk drawer and produced a picture frame with two little children in it. He’d put it away one day while cleaning and had forgotten its existence. A fate most of his trinkets succumbed to. Found it. “Twins.”

“Huh…” Bill took it, giving it a good eyeful. “Cute… any recent pics?”

“No, I’m afraid not. I hear Dipper, the boy,” In the frame, Ford pointed to a dorky boy with a mop of mousy-brown hair shoved beneath a blue hat, standing next to a similar-looking but bonnier girl. “Looks like me.”

Dipper…Dipper…

“Oh, and that’s his sister, Mabel.”

Mabel.

Mabel. Shooting Star.

Mabel Pines.

Mabel Pines was Ford’s niece.

“Mabel and Dipper huh. Some people shouldn’t get to name their kids. We need a public department for that. Dipper.”

Play it cool, play it ice.

Had he fucked Ford’s whole family?

“It’s not his real name.” Ford said.

Of course it’s not his real fucking name. No one names their god damn kid Dipper. No one names their god damn kid Bill Cipher. He’s dipper because he’s got that fucked up mark on his forehead, right? We had a hell of time joking about that. Got the big dipper, kid. But looks like the big dipper wasn’t very big at all.

Dipper. Fucking Dipper.

Anxiety and anger begin to fuck in Bill’s stomach and he’s sure he’s gonna birth out the bastard, mouth-first, any second onto Ford’s floor. His nice upholstery. Ruined.

YOU RUINED EVERYTHING, DIPPER.


“She’s an interior decorator.” Ford said, a proud uncle. “Doing very well for herself.”

Not bad. A little humdrum. Bill always thought she’d wind up getting knocked up by a wanna-be band junkie, popping out kid after kid because her parents disowned her and all that’s left to fill the
void is to build a rugrat collection. No one likes a wild child.

“Huh…she single? What?” Bill sipped his drink, smiling through the sudden tangible bitter taste brought on by his own bitterness: bitterness at Mabel never calling him back, at Mabel having moved on, at Mabel getting away. One that got away, we all had that tale. Dream girl that broke through the net. The one you remember whenever you look at your frumpy wife you settled for.

“Single, I think. There was a family scandal not too long ago, however…” Ford watched the tiny clusters of bubbles in his coffee. “She got married and divorced within the span of a year.”

Now that sounds more like her.

“Seriously? Wild child huh? Vegas wedding or what?”

*I’m a wild child, come and love me,* she’d sing and in return, he’d serenade her with Rocket Queen. Simpler times. She promised she’d visit him in prison and he promised he’d stay out of prison.

“I’m actually not sure…” Ford said.

“And Dipper?” Bill asked.

“He dropped out…”

“He a bum? Working?”

“It’s…complicated…” Ford looked into his coffee again, regarding it with deep concentration as if he sought its council, and now the swirls of dark liquid had miraculously begun to tell his fortune with every swish in the porcelain. And it was bad news. Seven years bad luck. Sounded more like Casper’s fortune. It began at seven, fourteen was tough, twenty-one was presque vu and may not even have happened at all.

Bill already knew what was coming for Ford. After all, he was the local Bogeyman factory; he mass-produces horror for low prices and all ages. But being the all-father of your lover’s babau was only great when it meant crazy sex and your lover wanted to play re-enactment because maybe you looked a little too much like daddy, a little too much like the ol’ abusive ex, a little too much like that one teacher who tried to fuck you and now you need to get it out of your system because the nightmares won’t go away until you’ve got what you thought was coming for so many years.

“Okay…” Bill shrugged his shoulders extra-high. “Sorry to sour the mood.”

“No, it’s not…your fault.” Ford said and took Bill’s hand. “Maybe…maybe this will be good for the both of you.”

Bill looked at the sudden intimate contact, overwhelmed with guilt he thought he’d fared well in overpowering thus far. A guilt that reminded him how fundamentally unworthy he was of Ford, of this gentle man who meant well in all that he did.

Gentle, selfish man who only gave a damn when it suited *him.*

“What do you mean?” Bill kept his voice neutral.

He’d play Mr Fixit but he lacks a fancy degree in Repair 101, like Ford probably has. Ford and his top schools and million degrees. Riches not stitches they say, but he can’t buy another Stanford Pines at his local Walmart. Can’t special order him either. Once upon a time, he thought the same for Xanther only for Stanford to be the upgraded model. Another upgrade might be in order.
Or a downgrade revealed to be an upgrade. Orange light, at the back of the room.

Stop it. I’m not going into the light.

“Nothing…nothing…” Ford smiled and shook his creeping gloom off. “Just letting you know. You’ll need to take the couch… Dipper on the floor and Mabel will use the guest room.”

Bill pulled his hand away from Ford. “These are adults, Ford. Get them a fucking hotel.”

“It’s a family thing, dear.”

“Yeah whatever. I get stuck on the fucking coach.” Bill griped, avoiding Ford’s attempts at physical contact. Fuck family. “I can pay for their hotels.”

“I know you can but as I said…”

“Fuck me, kids in their twenties bumming at their Uncle’s. That’s fucked up and pathetic.”

Ford looked at him, silent.

“So, I guess I’ll be your dirty little secret, right? That’s why I can’t share the bed with you?” Bill said, watching Ford for signs of potential relinquishing.

“I’d prefer they don’t know about us.” Ford sat at the kitchen table. “They’re…close to your age, after all. It’d be very uncomfortable.”

Bill remained standing, he looked down at Ford accusingly. “Almost like you’re acknowledging fucking a younger kid is weird.”

“Why are you starting this again?”

“Would be an issue if they walked in on me blowing you, right? Looking younger doesn’t mean shit, you know.” A lone plate that had been forgotten on the table found its way into Bill’s hand, then slammed into the table. “It doesn’t mean shit.” He pointed at Ford, finger shaking. “Pump yourself full of Botox ’til your face can’t move all you want, doesn’t make you younger, doesn’t mean shit. Doesn’t. Doesn’t change anything. Doesn’t. Fuck you.” Bill gave a thump that rattled the scattered tableware. “Fuck you!”

He left the plate on the floor in pieces. Ford, too, but Ford had never been whole to begin with.

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*Ring around the rosey. The triangle on his palm sings. Ashes to ashes, you’ll fall down.*

Time’s nearly up.

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Six fingers on a hand meander across Bill’s face. A romantic retreat; an act of meditation and sedation. Couple’s therapy, Ford calls it. There are times where Ford follows the imagined contours of Bill’s previous face, finding deeper relief when doing so. He does so now, every bump smoothing out an internal one of his own. Darling does nothing to stop him.

“You said you’d been here a few months only, correct? Including the meeting with your father?” Ford inquired, squeezing a peachy cheek. He began massaging Bill’s face beginning at the jaw, where the most tension was held; teeth still clenched tight and now loosening, reluctantly.

“Yeah.”
“Are you sure? No surgeon would operate on your face if you’d recently underwent severe trauma and you’d need a few months to recover.”

“You calling me a liar?”

“No, I’m saying I don’t think your father did as much damage as you believe. Our mind’s misinterpret things in the heat of the moment.”

“Maybe. What’s with the great defence of Papa all now?”

“It was on my mind.” Ford said. “Well, I suppose…reconstruction is cosmetic in nature…nevermind. I’m letting my partiality and paranoia affect my knowledge.”

“Heh.” Bill grinned then relaxed his body further. “Changing my hair wasn’t enough anymore, ‘suppose.” He blew lip bubbles which made Ford laugh. “Ironic though. He always wanted me to come back and whoosh—does a 180 and throws me out again.”

“Well sometimes it’s of your own accord you get thrown out.” A change came in the atmosphere, the book’s pages flipping backwards until they arrived inside a whole new book with a whole new world, one featuring estranged twins.

Bill swatted Ford’s hand away and sat up, jaw tight again. “For the last time I didn’t sabotage your stupid science device thingy.”

“You went there with the intention to!” Ford matched Bill’s belligerent tone. “Even if you ‘accidentally’ caused it to malfunction, you snuck in there with the intention for that to occur so however you look at it, you got what you wanted.”

“Oh yeah, I’m the bad guy, right?” Bill turned his body, facing forward to remonstrate mano-a-mano. “You’re the one who broke your promise!”

“It was a given. I made that promise when we were children. Eventually I’d grow up and live my own life and have my own family.”

“I ain’t family? I didn’t know being your brother came with an expiration date.”

“You haven’t changed one bit.” Ford said.

“Neither have you.”

“You went to your fancy school, Stanford. You had it made. You got it all.” Bill laid back down, anger now defunct. “And ya still miserable.” He snorted. “Didn’t even say nothin’ when dad kicked me out.”

A deep breath.

“And after enough re-runs, I get why you did it.” Bill closed his eyes. “Don’t blame you…hard to go against family, hard to say no. I get that now. I get that…never thought about it…just…never thought about it.”

I was afraid of Dad, too.

He says that. Ford countenances regret at this and at his recurring past and parallel lives. A missed connection, a lost confidante. Rancour convinced him such relations were chaff; then relationships as a whole—and then anything and everything relational.
A hand reached to Ford’s now glistening face. “Again with the crying...”

C-c-cola! C-c-cola!

He squeezes Ford’s cheap fountain pen in his left hand. He opens it and finds a half-used ink cartridge; Diamene brand, black-blue.

*Cola*, the triangle on his palm says, *they don’t make cola like they make it in the city.*

Come back to New York, Stanley.

They had decided on take-away for lunch, sandwiches from a deli Ford loved during his very recent bachelor days. Bill was the designated buyer and delivery man: a great way to make up for their earlier spat, which Bill had incited as he did with most arguments. On his way back to their home, he spotted Xanthar, haunting the peripherals of the house as he’d been doing lately for God knows what reason. Paparazzi were relentless. (as was the bedevilled Call of Cola. The Devil’s name was Charlie and to be touched by an angel was not as the television show implied it to be. All Coca Cola Kids struggled with this.)

Bill tossed the extra bag he’d been carrying through the car window onto the empty front seat. “I hope this isn’t like a revenge thing. You know how much I hate those kinda plots. Lazy. You’re fucking the director if you get that dinosaur trope to the big screen.”

Xanthar opened the bag silently, checking its contents. Egg and mayo.

Bill leaned on his forearm against the window. “Why don’t you do what these army guys do in films? Go be a mercenary in Africa or some shit.” He finger-gunned Xanthar with a two fingered barrel. “Shoot down sand niggers for a living. Yellow on black violence gets liberals riled up.”

Xanthar bit into the sandwich. Silence, save for the crinkle of paper and crunch of teeth, and the tapping of Bill’s feet.

Bill ran his tongue across his upper lip, still tapping his foot loudly. “This silent treatment isn’t doing shit, ya know.”

Zero.

“Come on, Kryptos is safe and sound. Not like I got a history of murdering my family or anything.”

That little bastard wasn’t family anyway.

Not even a side-eying was slid to Bill. Xanthar had various sorts of silences— each optimized for specific scenarios— but this silence, in its statuesque indifference that made one feel as they were if attempting conversation with a man-made structure, an anthropomorphic slab of stone, informed Bill things had finally gone home between them. Home run, straight to the end game.

Down the devil’s throat goes your king.


Xanthar took another big bite, the end of his sandwich nearing.

“Ah forget it.” Bill backed up from the window. “Suit yourself.”
Whistling, Bill went inside, never considering Xanthar’s reliable memory meant he’d remember Mabel—should he catch sight of her. And he will.

He might even remember Dipper.

But only as one of the many ‘failed merchandise’ Andrew fucked a few years back.

Following day, Bill kissed Ford good-bye and left for a meeting he claimed to have back at his house. Despite his absence, Bill still had family duties and would tend to them on occasion. That was the story spun for his lover. Visits back to the mansion were usually small get-togethers with his 8ball and Paci-fire, regarding his family’s estate and financial assets. He had a surprise for Ford.

This meeting wasn’t business or pleasure.

“BANGCEPTION! You banged his whole family! Jesus Christ, Bill!” Was the first thing 8ball screamed out on hearing the revelation, torn between feeling pride and abject disgust. “Do I congratulate you?” He mused aloud. “Do I read you extracts from the bible or do I beat you with the bible?”

“Not his whole family, just his nipoti.” Bill said. “Could be worse, I guess. Imagine I got his brother, too.” He laughed, holding one of Teeth’s scrapbooks in his hands, which contained much of his personal history, primarily photos, from his time in the city. He tossed it to Paci-fire who had wanted to see Mabel. “God, if I had his brother, I should apply for a deed to the Pines family. Stamp it with the Giordano crest. Bring back forced assimilation.”

This was the worst thing to occur since the death of his family. This was a death, too, in its own right. The death of his relationship and future with Ford. Yesterday was spring, today was autumn. Next week would be winter and with it would come the demise of all they’d grown together. Demolition of their home, their hand-built safe-haven. Goodbye mirror oasis in the dead desert. Hello nuclear winter. (The only visible thing in such a darkness would be That Light.)

So much death, always and everywhere.

“I wanna know, mathematically, Alex, what the chances are of her being related to Ford.” Bill asked, he watched Paci-fire page through the A3-sized book with thick ring-binding, its front cover wore a series of miscellaneous photos which ranged from magazine cut-outs to polaroids of city scenery during the day and night, various cities in various time periods. While Teeth wasn’t a great photographer, all his photos held a special touch only his fat shutter-finger could produce.

“Hey, it’s a small world.” Paci-fire stopped paging. “Are you aware Jeremy kept photos of your old face?”

“Fucker.” Bill knew already but now it angered him.

“There’s two photos here during the supposed time period.”

“What’s my hair look like?”

“Shaved and then black with blonde. Heh. Shaved.” Paci-fire decided shaved didn’t suit Bill at all.

“Black. Burn the shaved one.”

“You look like a skinhead with a tan.” Paci-fire said and was told to fuck off. Then he added, “This Mabel…is not what I expected. Thought she’d be more of a looker.” 8ball agreed after viewing the
“Whatever. Need to figure out if she'll recognize me. Probably not.” Bill paced, pulling on his fingers as he did. “I mean, she didn’t even know what 8ball meant.”

“Where’s this chick from? Venus?” 8ball chided.

“Maybe. Surprised they’re related.” Bill said. “Ford’s conservative. I told you guys he doesn’t fuck men, yeah?”

“That’s because he was alive during the AIDS epidemic.” Paci-fire said. “Naturally, he would be hesitant.”

Bill paused mid-pace. “The what?”

“Nevermind.”

8ball and Bill began arguing over the likelihood of Bill being identified. 8ball claimed he would recognize Bill despite surgery, said his boss—or former boss—had distinct quirks and mannerism that would get him clocked instantly by anyone who’d spent enough time physically close to him. Those who’d shared his bed were especially highly suspect. Bill wasn’t convinced, confident in his skill of deception.

“Jason is right and wrong.” Paci-fire interjected, having decided this conversation was worthy of a temporary investment.

Bill looked at him. “How?”

“If you had him drugged him, he’ll recognise you by things unrelated to your physical appearance. Don’t under-estimate the mind’s capacity for remembering.” Paci-fire tapped his temple. “Your tattoos are the least of your concern. Those are guaranteed to expose you. What about everything else? Your smell? Sound of your voice? Anything could set him off. Anything and you have no idea what.”

Scoffing while tossing his blazer over a chair, Bill began rolling up his sleeves. Exposing his tattoos when both anger and powerlessness simultaneously hit was an old habit. A habit that always fixed the issue at hand. He remembered an old friend describing it as a full house dropped at the pinnacle moment of a supposed-bluff gone wrong. His power was never his own.

Should push comes to shove, Dipper would be getting an eyeful of more than just out-dated tattoos.

“Let’s bring attention to your surgery.” Paci-fire listed. “You didn’t change everything. Just enough. Same eyes and lips. You said his sister’s visiting as well, a girl you dated. She’s going to get you, Bill. You better keep your distance.”

True, women never forget the dicks they suck.

Bill simmered but did not boil yet, his surface remaining tranquil. Paci-fire’s seminar resumed. “I recommend waiting, playing it cool. Once you get solid grip on the boy’s mental state, you can decide what may or may not reveal you. Choose your monsters, Bill. Control the narrative.”

Pretentious.
“Just wait huh. Like a sitting duck.” Bill cracked his knuckles: right hand, left hand. Then he fidgeted with his buttons and sleeves, fingers skittering back and forth like frightened bread sticks evading inevitable consumption.

“And here I am, feeling generous enough to buy the Pines kid a pine condo.” He bit into his index finger for an appetizer, splitting skin and sucking out blood. He licked his lips. Metal taste. Ass tasted like metal, too; like a sweet and fresh penny from the bank. Pussy’s gold.

Something about the body had a fair amount of it tasting like metallic elements and he’s more than glad for it. That money-metal taste—he’d be lying if he said it wasn’t a confessed Pavlov trigger for him. Sniffing money has always been known to give him a silver stiffy.

Money money money. Can’t buy off the twins. Mabel won’t bite. If she won’t bite, he’ll bite.

Dipper would be the main course, Mabel for dessert.

“What about skiing?” 8baller interrupted, having been examining Bill from a safe distance.

“No.”


“Not as fucked up as you’ll look when I break my glass and stick it in your ass.”

“Why don’t you intercept him before he arrives and take care of him?” Paci-fire asked.

“I think Ford would be pretty fucking sad if his two little munchkins died.” Bill snapped. “Besides, dunno his real name.” He twisted an unlucky fountain pen that had found its way into his hands until it was in pieces. Cheap ink stained his fingers and blended into his tattoos. “Had a fake ID, too. His surname wasn’t Pines, remember that much.”

Avoiding causing Ford unnecessary pain was a goal—an unobtainable one, even. He regards the impossibility of it with delight. Ford needed a good reality check on what it meant to lose family.

Stanford Pines needed to comprehend loss. Fiddleford didn’t count.

“You know Mabel.” Paci-fire said.

“They ain’t arriving together.”

“Why are you making excuses?” Paci-fire closed Teeth’s journal. “You know you can get rid of these two now if you wanted. Do it.” He set the book down on the table behind him. “You’ve gone soft, too scared to make a move.”

“Remind me who you saved your black upper-class ass from Rikers island.” Bill tilted his head, eyes sparking. “Oh, it was me.” He spread his arms, ready for the cross. “Things that conveniently go missing can conveniently turn up again.”

“Bet there are plenty a boys who wanna have an up close talk with your puss.” Bill said, he picked his glass up, swirled the amber liquid in it. “Still got those photos of you visiting… Lady Grace, was it? I’m sure strolling into Rikers with a fat pin badge demonstrating your special sessions in full definition would be a real wild ride, huh?”

He sipped his drink.
“They’ll say ‘sucking on a dick ain’t no different to sucking on a bottle.’” They hate niggers in prison, especially ones that still end up in the pen. The orange light told him all the stories, all the juicy details and all the warnings he should heed being what he is in the city.

Bill licked his lips. “Piss me off again and you get 10%. When’ll that be done?” About the surprise he’d had for Ford, involving his family’s assets. This con was never meant to be tenable.

Paci-fire stiffened, then answered. “Next three days.”

Back to Mabel his mind goes. If only his body could follow. Seeing Mabel would be seeing his sister, out of her grave and in a new skin. She’d been one of the few women he’d had that preferred doing the holding in bed. When he was young and still shared a bed with his sister, she liked to hold him at night, too.

He should’ve been the one who took her to Vegas. Playing the tables, having her blow on dice for good luck. Getting hitched while drunk one night. Drive-through, instant marriage certificate. A little LA Ice and then the week-long wedding night in the cheapest place they could afford and she’d smell like that cherry-blossom strawberry body spritz she always carried in her over-sized purse, alongside the pepper spray she nearly used on him. His car smelt like her for the longest time after she’d left, the spot where she played on her back with him still seemed indented although he knew it was purely imagined. The upholstery remained her territory until he’d sold the car and it became another lucky sucker’s problem.

Fuck whoever took that from him.

8ball handed him a pack of parliaments. He popped a king in his mouth, mind still with Mabel, in Mabel.

He’s not jealous, to be jealous meant he cared. Bill Cipher doesn’t care.

Andrew still cared though. Andrew was alive and well and walking the earth.

Bill looked at 8ball.

Someone needed to make like Jesus and die for his sins.

“When you came here, you called yourself Bill Cipher.” Bill stirred the swizzle stick in his Old Fashioned. “You knew what you were doing.” He stabbed the end into the lonely cherry, the red imbuing the tawny until they merged into a whole new colour with its very own properties inherited from both its parents.

“I hope your little sojourn with Stanford was worth it.”

He downed the drink to the last sounds of birds in the later afternoon.

He turned the glass upside down and set the damp stick beside it.

“Hey 8ball…how about you make me a Godfather? Haven’t had one of those in a while…”

A freshly made Godfather was placed on Bill’s table. 8ball knew how to make a variety of drinks, differing in difficulty. There was at time before this when bartending was the way to go for cash. If you looked old enough, they’d hire and 8ball had always looked past his age. He’s had suspicions that Bill’s interest in him originally began due to an assumption regarding his ambiguous age.
Alongside the drink, 8ball placed his newest vision, conceptualized on paper.

“That’s me…” Bill pulled the drawing closer, recognizing his old face next to the anthropomorphized triangle. An unsettling vision. It was cartoon-styled but invoked feelings of uncanny valley inside Bill, something was a little too real, a little too close to home.

“Yeah. I changed Stanley to look like you.” 8ball shrugged and pointed to details he was particularly proud of, their elaborateness proof of his devotion. “Figured it’d be weird to use Ford anyway. Guy’s just a chump.”

“You know…one day maybe Stanley calls himself Bill Cipher…and Bill calls himself Stanley…” Jason says.

“So, every time he’s there arguing with Stanley or Bill, he’s talking to himself. I was thinking the split-personality thing is overdone so I’m tryna get a vibe for another angle.” He traced a finger across the thick chaotic lines of Stanley, then across the thinner, precise lines of Bill Cipher. Bill watched.

“How fucking meta. On a roll here, huh? A real rolling stone, just like your daddy was.” Bill winked and returned his focus to his bottle. He took a king, tore off the filter and put it in his mouth. 8ball lit it for him. As 8ball walked away, attention deprived, Bill called to him. “Who do you prefer? Stanley or Bill?”

He knew the answer.

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Too drunk for cell communication, Bill dropped onto his neglected bed.

“Blame me all you want…but you were kidding yourself…” Bill closed his eyes. “If you thought you’d changed…”

People can change, Bill slurred to himself, long as they don’t take the name Bill Cipher.

As long as they aren’t me.

The triangle on his palm says something about that being untrue, about times of changing in the past and the future and the now.

The now is all Bill knows. And the future is Stanley’s territory.

And so is the past.

--

In the coy of the summer breeze that plays touch and go with the cream curtains at the big window nearest to his bed, he smells his father’s cologne come, Ford’s cologne. Then he begins to imagine Ford was there, at the foot of his bed, coming to get him.

They’re both sixteen and ready to flee in the night together. His Catholic family and Ford's Jewish family, hating their friendship and wholly obvious to what they did in the dark and where the hand Ford used to greet them had been only hours before; in his mouth, beneath his covers, between his legs and inside him. A Midas touch. Ford would turn him a gold that even gold itself would envy.

He smells it again and he’s sure now, that Ford is there at the foot of his bed, all dressed to impress
with flowers and he’ll make this cold house a warm home.

Soon after, Ford was at the main door, fuddling with the intercom and doorbell and attempting to explain his business at Giordano mansion to the men who greeted him. Bill pushed past them, pulling Ford with him to the car while drawling nonsense between stumbles. He reeked of alcohol, but Ford said nothing on it the ride home.

At home, Bill said it was a one-time thing, a onetime relapse.

“If this is about my family coming to visit…” Ford handed Bill a glass of cold water.

Bill took it, downing half in a gulp, water running down his neck that was wiped dry before reaching his chest but if it did, his nipples would show and Ford would get hard and then finally give it to him. He poured the rest onto his face. A good baptism to cleanse his slate from past setbacks and current daydreams. He remembers his baptism, twenty-three years ago as a fresh and unsullied infant. Dark, cold water and a man clothed in too much white. Irrelevant memories, time he won’t get back, innocence long lost to the water. He still feels wet.

And what did the water give in return? Shame.

No refunds, no returns.

Ford refilled his glass and Bill drank again.

“You’ll get along fine, dear.” Ford said, touching Bill’s clammy hair. “You had a sister, didn’t you? You should be accustomed to sharing.”

Bill coughed, sputtering, and set the glass down.

“Accustomed to sharing? Accustomed to sharing.” Bill chanted, voice elevating at every repetition. “Accustomed to sharing!” He grabbed Ford up at the collar, breath spirited and joints shaky. Eyes mistrustful, as if Ford had just revealed a convict past. “Sharing. Sharing what? Elaborate on that. That sharing concept.”

Ford grabbed at Bill’s wrists, gently and with assurance. “It-it was a joke. A joke.”

“A joke! Explain it. Explain the joke. In detail. Explain your usage of the word sharing. I just can’t get complicated jokes, science boy. Explain it.”

“Sharing…attention…only—children struggle to.”


Ford fixed his collar; Bill had left it wet. “You need to stop jumping to worst case scenarios, darling. You have your reasons and I understand them. This is my family though.”

“Oh, you’re so diplomatic.” Bill slapped Ford’s arm, hard, and was now smiling wryly. “Gotta let me know you know about everything! Always gotta let me know, right? Just for supportive purposes. Nothing else. Nope. Just gotta let Bill know I know! I know! I know.”

“You’re still drunk. We’re not discussing anything until you’re sober.”

“I am plenty a sober!” Bill dropped onto the couch, tie and blazer flopping. “Just a little buzzed.”

“Did something happen? With your friends?”
“I’m so sick of hearing you talk.” Bill buried his hands in his between his knees. “Just so sick of it. I want the old Ford back. The one who knew when to shut his trap and liked to fuck.” The one in my head who fucked me right. I’d have been better by now.

He heard Ford move closer and he could now see black socks on the carpet where his eyes had fallen. Two lone feet belonging to an equally alone man.

“I’m supposed to just sit here while you parade your family in front of me…” Bill said, reminding Ford of the narrow window between the date of Bill’s family and today. “I can’t be here with your family. I can’t. I can’t. I can’t.” He held his head in his hands. “Don’t make me stay here…I can’t…”

He can’t face what he’s done to Dipper, to Mabel, to his family.

To his family?

To your family, the triangle on his palm echoes.

“Not even the same… look at you. You and your fucking make-over. I wanted to get fucked by him not whatever the fuck you’re meant to be.”

“You don’t mean that.” Ford interjected, a voice of reason. You’re upset and using bad methods to cope.”

“Again with the doctor shit. Can’t you just hold me and tell me I’ll be okay?” Bill pleaded, reaching a sweaty hand towards Ford that was accepted, reluctantly. “Do you have to just stand there…like… like a doctor giving me bad news? I’m not dead, right? I’m not.” If Ford bought a hearse, then it was time to worry.

“It’s not the end, is it? Is it the end?” Bill pleaded as if Ford was the grim reaper himself and it was now bargaining time. Use his silver tongue to get more life, but the thought of extending this life was hardly motivating enough. And Casper’s silver had long since rusted, turning out to have been cheap steel all along.

He kissed Ford’s hand, it still had old grey hair on it and smelled of hand sanitizer, a nameless brand.

“I’m sorry, dear. I’ve had a lot on my mind…” Ford said, and explained again, this, emotional comfort and the like, was not his forte but he had been trying his best. Just as he’d seen Bill’s own efforts in remaining sober.

Litany over and spirits raised, he looked up at Ford. “Can’t wait to meet your family. I bet we’ll get along, if they’re anything like you.” He delivered a plenitude of kisses to Ford’s hand. Ford rubbed his head until the tense atmosphere had dissipated, glad it had not escalated into a violent tantrum.

“There’s something else… I’ve been meaning to discuss. Dipper and Mabel’s stay will hopefully pave the way for me to bring it up.” Ford held Bill’s hand. “It’s a very… difficult subject to broach. And perhaps not yet…soon.”

“Huh. Okay.”

“Everything will be fine, dear. You’ll get along with my family.” Ford smiled, warming the air. “You are my family.”

“What…?”

“Hm?”
“What did you say?”

“I said you’ll get along with my family.”

Oh.

You were a vision of God. Father Ford. You were meant to baptise me in the water of your mother’s womb. She was to take me into her arms, both of us, and make this cold spirit a warm soul.

The sun rumbles in his stomach, everything is vertiginous. This world, this bubble, adheres to the paradigm of heliocentrism.

It does revolve around him.

At bedtime, the topic of tattoos was brought up after being recently having been forgotten in favour of more weighty activities. “There’ll be plenty of time for new tattoos.” Ford said as he rubbed Bill’s back where the skin was black from ink and white from hypopigmentation. Then he asked, with the party hat in view, “Do you share tattoos with any of your other friends?”

“No but I designed a few’ems.” Bill flipped onto his back, covers rustling with the speed of his enthusiasm. “Lemme think…Teeth had a dinosaur on the back of his neck. Ronnie has one on her hip but,” He twisted between the sheets, hand diving beneath the covers to enter the hidden cave that was Ford’s underwear. “You can only see it if you get up close and personal.”

His hand was retained with Ford’s own, barred entry. “What is it of?”

“It’s a secret.” He shook himself free, now aiming for the pillar of Ford’s neck and let his hand lay claim to it. “And 8ball’s hand ones. I designed them.”

“Those 8balls. I presume that’s how he got his name?”

“Nah. Not that kinda 8ball. 8baller type of 8ball.”

Ford looked confused.

“You know? 8ball? It’s a measurement of coke. “

I used to–

“He used to do a ton of coke. 8baller is another word for a cokehead.”

I went there so often, they gave me that name. Here’s 8baller. Been waiting for ya, kid. Got your usual right here. 8baller became 8ball.

It’s my own special name, my own legacy. One that would be a great contender for Papa’s legacy, don’t you think?

Papa, they invented a new word for cokehead in honour of me.

“Does he still take drugs?”

“He quit. Might do some on the slide though. You never really say goodbye to coke. It’s a side chick always threatening to ruin your life. One you can’t off or buy out.”

And I gave that name to Jason sometime after. He never liked coke until I introduced him.
No wonder his ma hated me. Played matchmaker and hooked her son up with the same demons that left her dumped and full of cum. Like mother, like son.

Ford petted Bill’s apple-cheeks to a ruddy lacquer, pulled him closer and let his hand rest on the party hat that had started this conversation. “You used to do cocaine.”

“I did. No more, doc.” Bill closed his eyes. “I’m clean.”

“No side chicks, as you say?”

“You’re my main squeeze and my side dish.” Bill replied, now the main ingredient in a Ford burrito. “You experimented with Fiddleford, didn’t you? College days.”

“Let’s not, dear.”

“No drugs, no drinking.” Stanford whispered. “Stay with me.”

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Cola! Cola pop!

Bill slept, smelling his father, and dreaming of him. His father’s fountain pen, brand Parker and five-grand put into it, called to him in the night. It promised him a ticket, one-way, to the city that never sleeps.

They don’t make kilos like they make’em in the city.

“Dad was scary.” Stanley whispers besides Stanford in the dark, voice low as if the father in question would barge in at the first sound of chatter and movement.

“He was. I could never…you remember.”

“Yeah. We had to be men, right? None of that pussy shit. No crying, nothing.”

“You were scared of dad, I was scared of my dad.” Casper puts his nose onto Ford’s forearm, nuzzles it. “We were scared kids. We’re still scared, because it never goes away, yeah? That fear of disappointing our dads…”

“Dad really turned you against me, didn’t he?” Stanley holds Ford’s hand. “I remember you said I looked like dad. Shit, I’d hate me too if I looked like that guy.”

Stanford and Stanley share a laugh very quietly beneath the covers.

“You leave this hole in me…no other way to put it. I try and fill it with moola but it’s…just not the same. Dad lied, y’know? Dough ain’t the end to the end.” Stanley says.

“It really isn’t. He got what he wanted from me.”

“Money.” The twins say together.

“I wanted to be successful. I wanted to be the good kid, as you say. It was all up to me when you left.” Stanford confesses.
“Golden child huh. No more a freak, no, now an exploitable freak.”

“You wouldn’t have said shit to him to defend me. That’s how you’ve always been, in your shell where no one can hurt you.” Stanley’s breath steams in the air. “He took everything you earned. You let him.”

Stanford has no defence.

“Now that I finally understand you…” Bill says. “Maybe I can finally love you.”

Lights out.

When William speaks, a strange sensation takes Ford, as though his memory and all that is him (and all that will be him and all that has been him) is being decanted into honeycomb holes. William is the beekeeper. The bees have since perished, gone extinct. Fresh honey is no longer made. William spends his time moving honey about from hole to hole, the same honey into the same holes. Honey does not expire, and time here, seemingly does not either.

“It’s a side-effect of me being here.” William says when Ford feels light-headed again, remembering memories of what has been and what will be. “Time fug. Sorry about that.”

He draws a circle in the air repeatedly. “Everything merges. I can’t switch it off, so bear with me, please.”

“The trick is to see shapes in what you want to draw.” Ford repeats from a past lecture to raise Bill’s morale. Darling expected skills to polish themselves overnight. “It takes practice…you need to train your eyes. You’ll find symbols and shapes in almost everything.”

Fire looks triangular, Bill thought. Fire in cartoons had three sides. Flat.

“So, I was thinking…” Bill began as soon as he’d stolen Ford’s glasses and put them on. “If someone uploaded a human consciousness into a calculator and it could communicate, is it human?” He gave Ford a thoughtful and grave look, with folded arms to convey the stringent mien of a scientist at work.

“I would say its consciousness is human.” Ford said and squinted to look at Bill. “If such a thing were possible, we’d need to expand our definition of human. Include sub-sections. Mechanical humans, perhaps…”

“Human on the inside, inhuman on the outside huh?” Bill added, flicking his chin up. “So…the opposite is true then, right? You can be inhuman in the mind and human on the outside.”

“I think we call that possession.” Ford laughed. “Demons and the like taking hold of us…yes, I would say it would take on a far more supernatural dictation should the opposite occur, but it perhaps depends on who’s doing the possessing… should it be something inanimate, well, then they’d be a vegetable…” Deep thought stole Ford away until Bill called him back.

“And what if you gave…say a rabbit, human memories? Or a spectre?”

“Hmmm…” Into the Ford Zone Ford went while Bill watched as his features strained with the rush
of new thoughts. “I think there is a limit to what a body can accommodate. It might drive the rabbit insane. Quite certainly in fact…it’s brain isn’t necessarily hard-wired to process the human experience. We have different body parts, of course. And the like…one must take all this into account, it’s not just the mind that differs. Some things will be inscrutable.” He smiled. “This is interesting. It’s been some time since I’ve sat down and played in the tumult waters of philosophy.”

“So, if an inhuman creature was put into a human body, it would go insane?” Bill asked.

Ford looked at him. Memories flitted through his mind like a beating rush of birds fluttering off into the bluest sky, uncatchable.

Passing Xanthar’s car as usual, Bill tossed a sandwich in threw the window but this time he was beckoned back to the car with a suspicious come-hithering. Bread had finally been thrown to the birds. They were starving.

Bill gave his best smile and Xanthar gave nothing.

“How long have you been back on cocaine?” Xanthar asked.

... 

“You gonna ask me? Really?” Bill leaned down through the window. “Breaking your oath of silence for that?”

“Are you on cocaine?”

Bill blinked slowly, shook off the accusation with a glance to the side, and then smiled, teeth out.

“Have you?”

“Nope, clean.” Bill gritted out. I don’t need this shit.

“You get a Marilyn twitch when you’re on coke. How long?” Xanthar said.

“Not on coke.”

“How long have you been doing cocaine without telling me?”

“Firstly, it’s not coke. Secondly, I’m not on any kilos and thirdly, fuck yourself.”

“Is it Jason? Did he give it?”

“Poor Jay Jay.”

“Not the alcohol, was it? You’re back on coke. I should’ve known.”

Bill shrugged.

“Why do you do this to me?”

“To you? To you! Fanculo!!” Bill shouted through the window, queen waved and ambled off to the house. In the mirror, he checked where Marilyn Monroe’s famous mole would be and noticed the aforementioned twitch doing its thing above his jowl. Scunching and teetering all over his cheek like a hustling showgirl.
He traded cocaine in for ethanol. Hadn’t touched the shit in months. Or he couldn’t recall touching it in months.

*Why do you do this to me.*

When hurting yourself becomes hurting people who love you, it becomes that much more fun. Double the pain, double the fun.

_Cola_, the starlet spasm sings and twirls, _Cola_!

“Since I’ve been clean, everything smells and tastes like shit. Fucking hate everything, hate this town.” Bill says to the Xanthar inside his head. An imaginary conversation, an exchange his pride refused to allow to occur.

“Let’s not kid ourselves here, alright? I’m never gonna be happy sober. It’s not gonna happen.”

Xanthar is quiet, as he should be.

“I could only tolerate you fucks when high. You’re shit. Lower than shit, you’re the shit a pig shits out after eating shit.”

Good riddance. To all them dying, good.

Bill stared outside the window at the car occupied by Xanthar who couldn’t be bothered with inconspicuous stalking. He seemed determined but determined to do what? Was this a feint, hiding some bigger and crueler scheme? Would he barge in one day and tell Stanford everything?

“I get a twitch when I do lots of coke and I’m getting the twitch now, but I haven’t touched the shit. Explain.”

“I’m sorry what?”

Ford looked up from his journal at Bill who’d barged in expecting an immediate diagnosis.

Bill repeated himself and Ford closed his journal and crossed his arms.

“Stress, could be.” He took Bill’s face in in hand and searched for anomalies in muscle movements or any other strange biological behaviour; odd pupil dilation or too much yellow in the eye. “Stress. Unrestful sleep might be a cause. Twitches are known to develop from poor sleep and excessive caffeine consumption.”

Ford hummed, murmured a few yes’s and then concluded, “A diagnosis of stress and shocking handsomeness.”

Bill laughed, putty in Ford’s hands.

“My cheesecake is gone.” Ford said, checking the fridge where it should be but no longer is.

“Yeah. Weird.” Bill leaned on the table counter, eyes wide in surprise.

“You’re the only person here.” Ford said. “Well? Where did it go?”

“Aliens…” Bill backed away, eyes wider with each step. “Aliens, Ford.”
“If you’re going to eat my cake, at least wash the plate when you’re done.” Ford said as Bill backed out of the kitchen, no trace of guilt in his face.

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[Ford’s Darling]: THINKING OF BUYING A WHOLE CHEESECAKE
[666er]: Capital letters. You should strive to be articulate in all methods of communication :)
[Ford’s Darling]: Yeah?
[Ford’s Darling]: WHAT IF I JUST USED CAPLOCK FOREVER

With a tongue scabbed from myriad bites, Bill sits in Xanthar’s car and says what’s been on his mind the past few weeks. Apologies don’t come easy to Bill Cipher but there’s no Bill Cipher here and he’ll accept it. You can have your name back. The triangle on his palm says, not yet.

“Who told you that? Ford?”

“Yeah.”

Xanthar lifts an eyebrow and looks out his window.

“Never considered it so. I entertained the thought, back then. Curiosity. You came on to me a few times, of course I was gonna consider it. You didn’t look or sound like those faggots at the blue bars.”

Bill had a quip prepared, he was ready to say that straight men liked being pegged by their girlfriends sometimes but were too pussy to admit it. But he can’t.

“Didn’t look or sound like those faggots at the blue bars. Didn’t look or sound like those faggots.”

Bill repeated. “Like those faggots at the blur bars. Those faggots. Didn’t look or sound like them. Like them, like those faggots.”

He scrambled out the car, dazed.

The orange light was right, had told the truth. It was right, in the very end.

“Hey Soos!” Bill greets his buddy, his pal, his friend. “Hey man, just wanted to ask you something, you busy?”

Soos says no, not at all.

“You remember that guy Andrew I introduced you to? The other day? 8ball? You remember what he looks like?”

Soos says yes, curly hair, lots of tattoos on his hands. Dark skin.

“Just asking. He might come in later this week to pick up something for me.”

Bill hung up after humdrum niceties.

Soos was a good kid but not bright and gifted with an interesting talent of mindless repetition. Bill knows that complex. All biracial kids had it. Desperate to fit in, to be part of the norm, to have a place of belonging. They made good marks.

Soos who consumes media for his age range in hopes of connecting with peers that prefer to ignore him.
Soos, who will confirm he knows an Andrew that is not Bill Cipher.

A little insurance.

“Do you remember the time you gave away your favourite toy? You thought you didn’t like it anymore. Next day, mom found you crying over it. Said you always do that. Always undervalue your things til they ain’t there no more.” Stanley says to Stanford, holding his hand so they don’t separate as they idle in the black expanse, starless and dreamless.

“Different now. Now your toys gotta be broken too, for you to give even a quarter of a damn. Think as long as it exists, you can get it again. Just there, waiting for when you feel like coming for it.”

Slated light comes in through the sudden materialization of a small window on the wall to the right, it’s half-open blinds throw white across them, leaving the rest of the room dark. Through the slits, people hustle and bustle by in the perfect image of monochromic city life. Chatter and caffeine suffuse the air and there is a perceptible infectious liveness in the atmosphere that would energize even the walking dead.

“You always been a ‘oops I got hurt and didn’t realize it’ kinda guy…always hits you too late. Maybe you just hide it real well. Mom said we were opposites, said we balanced one another out. But really, you were always too cold. Just a little too cold…couldn’t heat ya up no matter how what.”

The city’s buzzing loudens and then softens.

“You ain’t got answers, I ain’t even got questions to get me answers.”

Stanford turns his head to watch the people pass and sees that it’s predominantly men populating the outside. Tall, attractive men, perambulating everywhere and nowhere. Suddenly there’s a boy standing at the window watching these men from the city amble by, sitting on his knees upon a short stool. Circumspect in his peeping, he goes unnoticed.

“Spent a lot of time thinking, about you, and us. Guilty, too, you know. Got rid of my family so long ago and spent too many years hurting. One day, didn’t feel much of anything anymore. Don’t wanna make that mistake again, don’t wanna be that guy. Don’t wanna. Don’t wanna spend my life as Bill Cipher this time. Just wanna put it to rest already…”

Loud laughter in the city now. The boy shudders, excited by imagined prospects, then stills again.

“Hard…can’t do it without you. Don’t wanna do it without you.”

The blinds close, darkness comes again. Soon as the shadows fell, a vision infuses him; he is standing in the walkway among the mauldering crowd he’d just witnessed through the blinds; and where the boy’s little window should be there is only graffiti of the illuminati sign.

“Not supposed to…do it without you.”

Water rises and his loved one’s rocky words sink into his pockets, asphyxiating him in the icy dark; the only warmth to remain came in the hand held by his brother.

“Man, you really are always crying…” Stanley touches Stanford’s darkened face, feels the wetness sink into his own skin.

“Everything’s gonna be okay…”

In the dark on pious linen, Stanford and his darling lay together, skin touching in a symbiotic trade of
blood heat between the blood-bound. Actors backstage discussing the plot and their respective roles.

“I’m so sorry I wasn’t there for you.” Stanford muffled between wet and dry sobs. “Let’s not fight anymore. Let’s not fight anymore, Stanley. I’m sorry….” His reaches out to darling in the shallow dark, finds his face and holds it, brings it close to his own. “It’s not your fault. This isn’t your fault…”

Stanford does not stop, the sobs turn into weeping. These tears are revelatory to the All-Seeing Eye.

“Still early…still early…” Stanford squeezes out as he squeezes Darling. “I have you now.” Closer he moved, as though he were auditioning to be Darling’s second skin.

“We’ll run away, go into hiding.” Stanford suggests, weakly.

“I’ll disappear.”

Stanford knows, knows it would be futile.

“If reincarnation is real, let all my lives belong to you.” Darling says, wiping away tears, fresh and stale. The shower does not turn off, wetting them both.

As they say, in the dark all cats are grey and at the darkest as it was now, one could not tell a Bill Cipher from a Stanley Pines.

Sometimes, only sometimes, there was no difference.

Stanford falls asleep and in his dreams is greeted by a familiar flat creature, glowing gold through the rising dark.

*Heya point dexter.*

- 

Ford wraps his arms around Stanley.

Waking, Ford finds Bill in his arms.

William Cipher’s boy-hands wrap around Stanford’s toy-neck.

“But pussy and I,” Loose hands loosen further and come to hold Ford’s face so very dearly. “Very gently will play.”

“Step into the rose garden, sub rosa if you will, and we’ll talk.” William Cipher beckons Stanford to him, lightly bowing with a hand blooming out. “I’ll tell you Ra’s secret name.”

But you already know it, don’t you?

You already know.

“Million dollars…million-dollar man… like that film…hey Andrew, if I come here again, let’s say…a month from now… say I transferred here…”

– Mabel Pines has imaginary conversations with the boy from New York as he sleeps beside her.
If you remember everything then you know not to go to New York, Stanley.
He's ready for his close-up.

Surprise, bitch! I bet you thought you'd seen the last of me.
Put on lipstick.

“Now when I say possessed, I ain’t about spooks and shit. I’m talkin’ about when the serial killer stands up on that witness stand in his little pin-stripe suit and says ‘something came over me’, no one in the court room thinks fuckin’ Spooksie, Casper’s unfriendly cousin, jumped inta’him and committed those crimes. They know he’s talkin’ ‘bout that —that primal urge everyone’s got, yeah? That urge to fuck and eat your prey. It’s stronger in some than in others, yeah? That’s why these people get off the hook. Mother Nature! Hey man, fuck you. Don’t look at me like that. I’m not fuckin’ saying I got urges to commit mass murder. You missed the fucking point…”

- Andrew ‘8-Ball’ Alcatraz during a rainy night after three beers, envisions the Bill Cipher concept.

but deliver us from evil
whose presence remains unexplained.

- Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Cipher 7:14
The wicked conceive evil; they are pregnant with trouble and give birth to lies.

Stanford 7:14
I say, the possessed conceive evil; they are pregnant with trouble and give birth to lies.

Picture a church, any church, and you’ve pictured them all. Variations exist only in the levels of extravagance of the décor and the number of kids the priest has fucked. Oh, and the amount they take from the poor to bling up them fancy alters. Mary needs her Chanel and Victoria’s Secret. Let them eat cake and cock.

Only a priest could forgive you immediately after the dirty deed. With the five second rule, it was always better for his afterlife to exclusively bed holy men.
Pessimist, they say. Realism ain’t trendy no more, not since flowerchildren made their comeback.

The priest sits beside him, in the spot nonno would sit when they came to this church where everyone knew everyone. Nothing had changed except the church seemed smaller now that he was bigger. He remembers the giant spire in the distance from his bedroom window and today, it’s a tiny cone stuck onto a small building with flashy windows and gothic decorations. It’s been long since he’d considered a cross anything more than a fashion statement for Hot Topic rats.

Bill glances around. Everything so generic that this church truly could’ve been any church. Ones in the city didn’t look so different to the ones in the boonies. The only special thing was the seat next to him, the seat nonno would sit in. Always in the same row, same pew, same seat. Nonno’s seat that he would not fill were it the last seat in this church.

Jesus on the giant cross gives him the eye and he gives him the green light.
Bleeding from the eyes, the nose or the palms were interchangeable experiences. Stigmata must feel the way he feels when his nose drips red after smelling diamond powder that had been too pure. Aryan girl would kill him, *kill him*.

Body of Christ, blood of Christ. (been consuming bodily fluids of men since the start, queers were made in church)
Body of mine, blood of mine.

Wine, bread and cola were a weekday staple. Some red wine always added that last bit of class.

Question of the day: can exorcisms banish demons you’ve snorted and swallowed?

Those pesky ones who come as white powder. Or even the sun. If he told the verger that he’d swallowed the sun and then discovered his insides were all wax, would they call the men in white?

The priest asks what’s troubling him, like they do in the movies to the protagonist whenever the guy shows up seeking guidance and the Lord makes a cameo. This is a different priest to the one his nonno had been acquainted with. Cradle-robbers really did stick together, huh. What’s your kill count, your notch tally, Father? Paedophilia was a venial sin. (if it bleeds, say its haemorrhoids. I’m going to hell, I’m going to hell I’m going to hell and *you* sent me there)

This one was younger but still older, possible forties but it was hard to tell sometimes. Botox and hairdye let the ram shave its horn.

Bill says he feels lost, that he’s losing that whole metaphorical battle with his inner demons.
Truthfully, he doesn’t know what to say. Every snort was a consecration to himself. He regrets none of it.

The priest talks. His words are like the light that comes through the stained glass. All pretty but still the same light that gave you cancer and killed you after overexposure. Even a little did the trick. A small spotlight on a patch of skin and suddenly you need to get that carved out because cancer moved in and totalled your place ‘til it was unrentable. One day, God tells you that you’re beyond redemption.

But he’ll fix you up for a small donation. We take change but prefer paper.

“What’s your name, son?”

Son. *Son*. Out a little late, aren’t you, son? They always use son. Now there’s a trigger for PTSD if he ever had one. It’d be his opening one liner if he ever did stand-up.
Casper.

“That’s a good name. Casper. A wise name.”

Bill talks to the priest for a short while. Mediocre advice received—fortune cookies do it better. The priest keeps talking until nonno is the one talking, in his Italian accent that almost sounds like his father’s accent before he polished his English, spick and span.

Your legacy, Bill says to himself in nonno’s voice, my legacy. What’s yours is mine, what’s mine is yours.

What Bill Cipher knows, Stanley Pines knows.

Tell the truth, Stanley says. Just get it out, clean and done. You keep lying, you keep this up and you know you ain’t coming back from where you’re going. Where you’re going, I can’t follow. I won’t follow.

Knuckles curled in a grip, strained to snow against his black blazer. It snows in New York. It’s always so cold; on the streets, in his bed, in another’s bed.

You’ve got it all wrong, kid. No winter in New York City. The only place it snows is your fucking nose.

Ticket to New York City is in the inside pocket of his blazer, hidden within the silk lining.

A quick trip to New York would do him some good. New York misses you as much as you miss it.

“Winter who?” he thinks to himself. “Got the sun in me.”

Snorted sun, blown out pupils. Sucked up sun, blown out pupils.

White line, the tunnel to the paradise New York City.

You take that bus to the city and you ain’t coming back this time. That’s a one-way ticket in your pocket, kid. You ain’t coming back. Should’ve cremated his family and snorted them down, he thinks. (maybe he did?) You’ve come so far, just look at you, Papa says. Just look at you, how big you are. Don’t stay in the city for too long, Papa wants to spend time with you as well. Don’t you get homesick?

The light, nonno says, you need to go into it now, Stanley. The light.

The lord is always waiting for you to return to him, the priest concludes. But again, he’s hearing nonno talk about the light, about Giovanni, and this light, this hallow light—oh father, up in heaven—up in the torch of lady liberty—the light—

—the light…!

Lips of his hole spasm and widen in excitement in anticipation of accepting the light, all of it, deep inside. First God fingers you, scoops out all your grime and goo to get you nice and clean before you can accept his heavenly light. Baptisms were just enemas for the soul. Flush it all it out, it’s alright with me.

“Do you want to stay for confession?”
“No thanks.”
I’m not sucking your dick for redemption.

“Be good, don’t tell anyone.”

*And go into the light when it comes.*

- 

Where the light shines, the dark must depart.

*For the love-of-money is a root of all evils and through this craving, you were led stray and have pierced yourself with many sorrows.*

Starve to get into heaven. Suffer and you’ll be rewarded, the lord promises. Be complaisant, compliant. Your pain is your absolution, your redemption. It is your *karma.*

Bill squeezes his king and crushes it into his palm’s eye.

The ultimate scam.

**Giovanni 1:5:** *E la luce riluce nelle tenebre, e le tenebre non l’hanno compresa.*

Bill reads It out loud from the family bible, it’s lavishness would make Jesus weep for the poor.

Nonno loved to read this passage.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Not yet.

*It’s a side-effect of me being here.*

Now he realizes he’s always been talking to himself, he’s always wanted to come back to life, relive the glory days as Bill Cipher. Unready to transcend his flat state of mind and his equally flat ambitions.

Power, control, entertainment. Flat flat flatter. A walking cliché—parody of a parody. One dimensional—two dimensional is too generous.

But it’s not too late, it’s never too late to change. Because Stanford said it’s not too late.

I believe you.

It’s never too late.

He’s not dead yet.

Should he die, even then, it’s *still* not too late—

Is it, Stanley?

There’s a light in the dark, and I am punctured and torn enough so I will go to it.
A tra lati!

He looks up at the man alike Stanford Pines who reaches a darkened hand to his face and in its hollowed centre, where light shined through flesh, sees the sun in all its veracity.

*I’m going to empty you, so there’s enough room for me.*

So many lights, which one do you go to? Which one is the right light, the healing light? Which one is the light of hellfire? Welcome home, lights were all on to lead you back. Santa’s said you’ve been naughty. Keep that candy cane to yourself, Santa.

You won’t find satisfaction here.
No one’s going to forgive you because there’s no one left to forgive you.

*It’s a side-effect of me being here.*

Bill touched his right eye.

“Stanley, are you sure you want to go to New York City? It’s not like the movies, you know,” he says to himself, opening another soda.

It changes you.

Bill pressed the tines to his forearm and watched with empty wonder as it pierced the skin, slipping beneath the black patterns in a slow and steady surrender. When the blood came, he brought the punctures to his mouth for a taste. Things tasted different in New York, including blood.

- 8ball screams in the background as Bill, under the guidance of the afternoon sun, drinks water from his family’s filthy pool in a porcelain mug stained pink with watercolour petals. The poll is desecrated with murk and moss of all shades, neglected since the accident that took his family.

- Cherry Burns. Once knew an unlucky guy who’d get clusters of crepey red dots on his skin, these raised little red bumps that look like chicken pox. Said guy was a cheapskate and knew how to save a few everywhere so he’d put a nail through the rubber end of a cheap pencil then heat up the flat side of the nail and press it against each dot. They’d burn right off.

Hold it too long, he said, and you’d burn your skin.

Bill held his crafted cherry burner steady and heated the flat end—the guy used a blowtorch but all he had was a zippo: busted cap and ‘Hellraiser’ engraved on its side. A poor man’s tool. With his tongue out, full and fat, he began to press the now bright red metal into the tender skin. Reheating and repeating. Polka-dots patterned all over his pink tongue. Hope Ford likes the new decor.

Let’s leave New York City, what do you say, Stanley? No more postcards, no more phone calls no more ravens. Dump her. Let’s go cold turkey.

It’s a state of being. Let’s not—
“Be anymore,” he slurs, verging on tears.

New York changes you.

Right, Dipper?

It was always waiting for me, that light in the dark. That glittering city in a death-dealing dark that seems just \textit{endless}.

The light is the French bitch lady liberty, ready to spark up your king and flash you cause the French go commando. So, they say. Last time he went to Paris, he got the looks Southern Italians get whenever they show up at places considered too high-class for dark-skinned European hillbillies.

Come come, says lady liberty, her dress lifted higher at each word. Women in the city were easy and the biggest woman should be the easiest. Women are important, it’s good to have a string of lovers to call up on the witness stand, although it’s rare it comes to that, because Casanovas scarcely get accusations of abnormality and debauchery thrown at them. In other words, act like a tomato and no one will call you a fruit. Even if you are one. Maybe the smart ones will but the wise ones know about experience and that action is what matters.

Tomatoes don’t go in fruit salads. Men who love to fuck women are not, contrary to what smart ones think, flaming homosexuals.

Where had he heard this seminar? Papa? No, as if his father would think of let alone dare discuss such a topic. Nor would his grandfather.

Can you remember who told you to crawl into your burrow? Can you remember who claimed to see treasure in the dark hole?

8ball found Bill in the courtyard, looking towards the rotting garden and rubbishy pool in a meditative state. Just the right weather for a trip to the shooting range. After all, Bill had promised to teach Stanford how to shoot a gun, any gun would do. What mattered was self-preservation.

“You know my grandfather was a war veteran. Once it was all over, he went travelling, and stopped by a place called Gravity falls. It’s not far from here.” Bill pointed to the horizon where nothing but sun was visible. “He became so enamoured with it, he chose to settle down in this town, that which is neither too far nor too close. Midground.”

“He started an antique shop that doubled as a fence, good place for selling hot items. One thing led to another…” Bill said. “I suppose replicating former parts of past lives is something that happens unintentionally.”

8ball fumbled through his pockets for a cigarette.

“Ever get that feeling? Like you’re outside yourself? Watching yourself?” Bill asked.

“Depends on what the shrooms got mixed in’em.”

“One time, I stood right here,” Bill pointed to his feet where marked the position in question “and I looked up at the sun and saw myself looking at myself.”

8ball mumbled a ‘huh’.

“I saw me looking up at me.”
“Like from the sun’s perspective?”

“Perhaps. Yes, you could say that. I was the sun, looking down at myself,” Bill said. “Twice. It happened to me once in Jersey, too. I looked up… and the same thing happened. Both times, the sun looked,” his fingers came together in a triangle, “like this.”

“You got an obsession with triangles. Your whole family does. If I gotta see one more triangle-shaped clock—”

“I think it’s more correct to say my family has an obsession with me,” Bill said. “I’m always watching you…you are, aren’t you?” He looked at the sun as if expecting an answering to dangle down on a sunbeam.

“Hey, you feelin’ okay? You sound like you’ve been vaping after a cold session.”

Bill shrugged. “Hand me a king, will ya? I can’t be the only thing burning out here.”

Lit king in hand, Bill walked past 8ball, patting his shoulders in good sport. “Let’s go for a walk later. Just me and you.”

“Two sides of the same double-sided coin.” Bill deliberates aloud, breath misting the glass pane iced from the strange weather and even stranger times.

Dipper’s arrival weighs heavy on him, no gel can keep his hair volumized anymore. Trivialising the unavoidable has been a handy coping method since he was pocket-picker—and not a very good one.

Losing Stanford seemed inevitable, too.

*When you’re afraid, go to the light.*

È la luce. Vai verso la luce. La luce, e la luce, verso la luce…

If he’s headed toward Hell, the least, the absolute least he could do was lead Stanford to paradise.

Oh *father*, who art in paradise. Hallowed be thy name.

Veronica said she had a thing for murderous Catholics who flash their dick for discounts.

Last time someone said they’d pray for him he told them, *please do.* Think about me at night.

Someone think about me at night. Please.

**Stanford 137:1**

*By the rivers of Babylon you sat and wept when you remembered your Zion.*

You tried religion, confiding in a God. While there were many to choose from, you found none were interested in *The Sad Case of Mason Pines*. Not when there were better men’s prayers to receive and grant. Better pay-out, less deposit.

Religion had never been in your household; your parents were practical people. Intelligent, astute
folk. Mabel demonstrates these same qualities, albeit their more intuitive variations.

So, what went wrong with you?

Life is a turquoise record player jammed mid-play, looping the same split-second until it’s but a perpetual screech, barely a tune, all while where the needle stabs, hollows out.

Relying on the kindness of strangers, rather than the kindness of God might work out better for you, Dipper.

But we aren’t exactly strangers, are we?

---

**William 1:8**

He was not the light, but he came to declare the truth about the light.

---

“You come in here a lot,” says the boy as he folds up the soft bread, fresh of the oven, with even softer hands. “Got a name?”

“Adam.” His own voice is solid, surprisingly so. Those hands, he’s seen them in his dreams, buttering him like the bread they bake.

“Hey, you keep coming here and I can get my dad to give you a discount.” The boy hands Adam the brown, wrapped parcel. “He’s all about customer-loyalty.”

His name tag says Michael. Michael like the archangel, Michael. *Michael.*

-in a bakery with an almost-you boy, five years ago.

Chapter End Notes

Echoes and echoes.
Chapter Summary

F**k your anonymity.

Chapter Notes

My satin still smells like downtown Manhattan, your hometown when you were on the run.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

What might have been is an abstraction/Remaining a perpetual possibility only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been/Point to one end, which is always present.

-T.S Elliot, Burnt Norton

Axolotl 3:2

“He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light.”

Bubble boy. Round and round time goes, round and round we go. Stuck in the same time, the same place, the same wound.

Δ

Mirror mirror, he’s got an eggplant-dark shiner over his right eye cause he couldn’t pay up last time and he’s got a bleeding nose cause the aryan girl was just too Caucasian and he’s got bleeding gums and his nose is all crooked on one side—his snorting side—but there’s no pain because Charlie takes the pain away long as he promises to take him all in, line after line, inch after inch.

It’s roaring again; in hunger, in madness, in desire.
Roaring. In his ears, into his skull, in his blood: through his veins, shaking him whole and freezing him cold.

(it wants another piece of the prince, another limb, another organ, another virtue.)

The more he is, the more he is.

Δ
The fire, the light, the firelight is coming, in spades it’s coming. Coming like James Deen on your flat screen, coming like the second Christ ‘cause Jesus bailed and someone’s gotta fill up the prime time spot.

Bill Cipher holds his hands up and moves the joints in ways a pianist would in preparation for recital at nine, flexing each finger and cracking its knuckles loud enough to wake his roommate who lays nearby. This environment is alike to this body: multi-sided and multi-coloured and tangible at each surface. And this body—like this environment—is a strange new land.

To suddenly become hyper aware of one’s own three-dimensionality, despite its origin in the cradle, is a rare occurrence but one that persistently befalls scatter-brained ones; primarily in pre-adolescence.

Though he has lived this way the entirety of his life, he has not lived this way the entirety of his existence; and so returned secreted memories of his primeval self, presented as what humans proposed to be a ‘past life’.

It began as Jamais vu after a particularly nasty case of trauma, so they’d speculate: his body and its senses and all its organics became strangers midst day and night alike. But then Charlie, sweet sweet Charlie, intervened, and strangers became acquaintances, then friends and then family.

His body is not my body. Yes, it is. Yes, it is. …It is, it is. This is my body.

A few good shakes of the ol’ soft can had memories fizzing to the surface. They dilly-dallied, suds in his blood, then popped at what he now considers to be appropriate timing. Reconnecting with his history served as an anodyne to all once-indolent sorrows brought on by humanity, for he remembers a time where this pain was not pain but pleasure. A time where he’d be grateful to have felt any physical sensation in any body at any time.

When it hurts, Stanley, remember it doesn’t have to. Perception is reality and you need to perceive the past to endure the present. If your new software fails, don’t be afraid to revert to the old system: the tried and trusted system. Don’t be afraid to admit change perhaps just isn’t for you. Grab that receipt, pack it up and take it back.

This body, his body apparently, is, at times, beyond comprehension. And as he is no longer himself there will be things of all variety elusive to him. Instead, he is now this self, this human self, this… upgrade, if he’s honest, it is indeed much better than ever.

It’s quite convex. It’s quite animate. It’s quite—sad. He is sad, and angry. This sorrow and wrath, in the feared matrimony it sits, a hernia in his belly, heavy and debilitating. And cold, so cold that he must journey to the light, return to his Babylon, his paradise.

Now no longer pseudo prescient, he must blindly navigate through this bilious dark, weak and pale and mortal.

Across the sensitive and bruised skin of his neck, he drags curious fingertips which then venture towards the plump lines of lips and dainty dipping contours of a babyface strengthened by a bold nose. A familiar but unplaceable visage.

This body liked to be touched and liked to touch. So, he does all the things this body likes—

Forgetting it is his own body and mistreatment would adversely affect him and not his unlucky host as he’d so come to expect as the norm.

What I want to say is, Stanley, you weren’t always who you think you are. I want to know why you’re scared of the light when it’s who you’ve always been.
William Cipher sits opposite Stanford in the lounge, the coffee table between them occupied: one black coffee and one espresso on a double-date. Roses and fresh brew idle through the air; Casper’s fresh bouquet floating through the breeze entwined with caffeinated scents of lovebirds.

“Did you know that you are so fundamentally different from the other Stanford, if you two were to meet, there would be no reaction?” William says as he raises his mug high above his head, and without spilling a drop of its sweet dark contents, sets it back down. “You could have a conversation, touching, face to face and nada! I like to call these Stanford’s ‘Stanford Filbrick Pines’ because you rather embody your father. Chromosome clone indeed.”

He debuts his archaic smile but its familiarity belies the facade. I know you.

“I say, impressing you is quite the chore in those worlds, luckily, there is not many of them at all!” He waves his hand back and forth channelling the temper of a ringleader raising the spirits of their new audience. “You’re a different creature in those worlds, so different…can you guess what Stanford borrowed your body previously?”

Stanford stirs his black coffee languidly. There was no rush to this as there is no end to this.

“So, that’s what happened.” Prickled loathing rides the undercurrent in his distracted voice; its passenger, William, watches him. “Perhaps one molecule different is all we need to be different. H20. H2O2.”

“It’s different, in this case. Bill Cipher possessing Bill Cipher…someone’s lying about who they are.” William dips a finger into Ford’s coffee and sucks the liquid off. “I wonder who.” His face did not change throughout the spectacle, nor did Stanford’s

Stanford stayed quiet.

William set his arms down atop each other, his chin cresting the tower. “So, what do you want to know?” Before a response, he jumps up from his seat to get closer. “Oh! It’s movie night!” He points his open palm at Ford, the single eye greets Ford’s own two. “You’re gonna love this one.”

The hand is thrust into Ford’s face, allowing a new perception to engulf his partial view. “So, this guy’s no-good brother gets in touch with him ‘cause he owes some mobsters money and…”

Ford peeps into the triangle and the film begins to roll.

Lights! Camera! Action!

3….

2….

1…

**Boffin & The Bilk**

**FADE IN:**

**INT. FAMILY DINER – DAY**

There are few customers populating the mundane diner, business is slow this time of day. Their chatter is low, comfortable background noise and the large windows’ soft light combine for the perfect company to a good book.

**STANFORD PINES**, science darling and introvert, sits at a booth alone, reading. **STANLEY**
PINES, his identical twin brother, a known grifter whom he hasn’t seen in years, slides into the booth opposite him and makes himself at home.

**STANLEY**

Hey Sixer, you’re not gonna eat that, right? Let me take it off your hands.

He helps himself to STANFORD’S lunch.

**STANLEY**

Thanks, Ford.

STANFORD looks disgusted and puts his book down.

**STANFORD**

How did you—

**STANLEY**

Know where to find you? Call it twins intuition.

…

“I believe I was your cousin…yes, let’s start there.” William narrates (an entirely different scenario) at Ford’s ear.

“Stanley…” William parts his unruly fringe, pushes it up flat onto his head. Barbie boy. “The orange light was not the light I meant for you to go to.”

The fringe lurches back into position. He bobbles his head to make it sway and flop about.

“I sincerely never meant for this. Sometimes, you’re just incredibly unlucky.” William sighs his flappy fringe out his eyes. “Humans go through this kind of thing a lot. A bully once made me eat my underwear.”

William stops mid-motion, jazz hands in the mirror spread out like amphibian paws at ease. “Or was that Stanford…?” Perhaps conjoining extended beyond the placenta. Dead centre of his palm into the eye of fading triangle, he presses a finger. “Time to get this redone, don’t you think?”

◄◄

“I pushed up daisies now I’m coming up roses! La vita è bella!” Bill Cipher shares a laugh with himself as he inspects the newly purchased cut cocaine. What Charlie’s lesser half is, he never asks. If pure powder made him feel like a born-again virgin, watered-down cola made him feel like a cheap skirt. His laptop sits open inches from his workspace, an old interview of Stanford Pines plays on low volume. Everything else is out of focus, out of frame.

“And you’re doing well for yourself, aren’t you?” he says, regarding the Stanford from indefinite years ago on screen. “You must be so damn happy now that I’m gone.”

Cigarette stub burning in the ashpan, cinders from the past.

“That’s right, Stanley,” says Stanford, and Bill looks at the screen. “Although they are individual, in
a way they constitute a whole. No matter how far apart they are, knowing the state of one can essentially allow you to know the state of the other.”

He returns to his dust observation, wondering to hit it now or later.

“If I’m alone, I know my brother is out there somewhere, lost and confused and still calling himself Bill Cipher.”

Bill looks up at the screen again to find the video had ended and a new one, an uncensored compilation of the bloodiest racing accidents, had begun minutes ago.

In haste, he guides the white powder into three lines of a triangle and takes a quick snort before looking into its hollow.

“You want me…to leave New York?” He says but before further revelation could come, his breath had scattered the divinatory dust.

You don’t belong to that city, come back to me.

William 11:35

Make sure the light you have met is not actually darkness.

Stanley, you’re a loser. You’ll always come back to me.

Stanford shaves in the bathroom mirror; William Cipher behind him, watching the clumsy rise and fall of the safety razor. Hammy ham-hands, hair still grey at the knuckles. Stick to burning the hair follicles. Stanley had the right idea—lasers are the now and the future. (No, you had the right idea and Stanley just copied it.)

But you’ve changed.

“You’re negligent, you know that?” William says and Ford at first thinks he’s referring to the squeak of red emerging from a nick at his jaw until he knows it’s not that.

“You put your head through—” Stanford reminded.

William grips Stanford’s unoccupied wrist from behind, leans to and whispers: “You should’ve stopped me. The way you should’ve stopped dad when he threw me out, should’ve stopped construction when Fiddleford asked you to stop, you never know when you stop. Ironically, you never know when to start either.”

William plugs the red up (one of many still to come) with a white cotton speck and watches him finish.

The press of people press on and his devoted eyes follow each man as they collide and repel amongst themselves, bickering and bantering as they do. Tall boys, blonde ones, loud ones and ones with
earphones who are lost to the sea of music. Tight shirts with sharp architecture, loose shirts with soft mounds he’d love to climb and knead.

He sips his cappuccino as he continues to watch the American men.

Δ

Wine, bread and a newly rolled joint using a textbook that costed close to $60, kids cash, but was bought for a tenner. How kids today squandered education in the name of drunken, dead gods. Rolling marijuana in a page marked ‘with love from ma’ will make great pillow talk with the next conservative he beds so he gives thanks to those who disrespected this holy book blessed by a mother who’d worked to the bone for this white wood.

Bill Cipher butters the bread while dragging the ganja, lips berried and sweet with blood. Communion was good for the soul.

Imbibe and feast on yourself.

Δ

ixΔ

Stanley Pines looks into the mirror.

“Still here?” Stanford peeks into the bathroom before walking in and turning on the shower.

“Yeah, going in late today,” Stanley says, and watches Stanford remove his shirt and then boxers clumsily, still drowsy from sleep. His glasses are last, placed on the toilet seat. For his age, his father had a good body: toned and well-taken care of. It was Fiddleford who lacked the commitment to prolong vitality throughout old age. What Fiddleford lacked, Stanley had. His father taught him the value of a healthy body and its contributions toward a healthy mind. His father taught him a lot. Daddy’s boy title worn loud and proud.

His father. Not your real father, you know. Yeah, not my real father. Now he looks in the mirror and sees what Fiddleford sees.

He turns his head and watches his father climb into the bath, sliding the curtains close as he breaks the spray of hot water.

When Stanley looks back into the mirror, the fog has distorted the reflection.

- 

Stanford exits the shower and spots a triangle drawn on the mirror while in the other room, Stanley lays on his bed staring into the black spot on his ceiling.

ixΔ

◄◄

“He’s sensitive. He talks about his feelings.” Mabel said, nodding slowly. “And when he does, he’s
really... hands on... he gets really aggressive...” The girls giggled in union until Mabel straightened up, throat cleared and open. “But he’s not a pig okay! He’s sensual! Sensual!”

“European men are way better than American boys. The rumours are true!” Candy let out a gasp, touching her chest. Then she muttered under her breath, “My family came to the wrong country.”

“Aren’t Europeans uncircumcised?” Greta and Candy began to aggressively banter on the topic, but Mabel silenced them with a stoic hand.

“Ladies! Ladies!” She took out her phone. “I have photos!”

Bill Cipher sits in the car besides his driver, Stanford, as Fiddleford’s death plays on the radio peaking the Greatest Hits of the 21st Creaturery, its bass loud and lyrics inaudible and tune so sweet his blood pressure spikes.

As it ends, Bill hits repeat and turns up the volume.

“Am I dreaming?” Stanford asks and William laughs at him.

“Maybe.” He looks up diagonally into nowhere: an empty space in the corner of their peeling ceiling littered with the bodies of dead mosquitoes. “Perhaps it’s best if you consider this to be... transmundane, so to say. Like the place you’d find if you cracked open the television screen and looked inside, into the blackness.”

A priest once said to him the devil lived inside the television box. That to sit in front of it was to invite Satan into his living room—and into his heart, his soul and the bodies of his family made vulnerable by its very presence alone.

Don’t let men in clerical little numbers lie to you.

There’s no devil in the box. He doesn’t like squares.

Sitting at the dock waiting for the fish to bite, Stanley dozes off and dreams of New York City.

“He’s as flat as the world he came from. Two dimensional, there’s no depth to him. Never has been,
never will be. If you’ve met one creature like him, you’ve met them all.” William, with Stanford’s

gifted designer glasses dropped on his nasal bridge, leans over a bowl of steaming pasta that fog the
chunky panes.

“Stanley—” Stanford begins.

“He took the name Bill Cipher, so I suggest you leave him to it,” interrupts William. “Let him lie in
the bed he’s made for himself.” He breathes in the aromatic chicken spices. “Maybe one day, you’ll
understand just how important it is that we stay together.” His tongue descends into the dish then
flees from the heat.

“Say what you will. I see only my brother who’s gone and made a mess of his life as usual.”

“Forgotten his crimes?”

“That was you.”

“Prove it,” William says.

“I intend to. I intend to expose you deliberately sabotaged my brother’s life.”

“Good luck with that.” William chuckles. “Your brother lost his mind, irrelevant to whether I
participated or not.”

He pointed to the bowl. “Can I have some of that, too?”

Stanford 3:15

“I know your works. You are neither cold with apathy nor hot with passion. It would be better if you
were one or the other, but you are neither.”

“Why are you here?”

“Call it obsession. Call it self-insertion. Call it M. Night Shyamalaning.”

Call it dreaming.

“I’m still human, technically. I can’t do magic mumbo jumbo.” William watches the television screen
with white noise on it. Signal lost. Ford does not watch television so fixing it is not in his priorities.
If it’s not important, it has no attentive reparation assigned to it and as such we can conclude Stanley,
and by extension their estranged relationship, has never been important to Stanford.

He was better off without his organic shadow, and so was the world. An uneducated grifter, a leech
especially, was not something society required more of. Siblings were shackles and today, he is a
free man and desires to remain so. As for Shermy: born when Ford had left for college, his dreaded
coming was a fate narrowly escaped.

“So, you confirm I’m dreaming,” Stanford says.

“You wanna be dreaming so badly.” William eyeballs him. “What am I? A nightmare you want to be
over?” He juggles the remote and candy bar stolen from Ford’s secret desk stash. “You have strange
dreams, Stanford. I am forever intrigued by them.”

Stanford stares in silence.
“Do you remember what I asked you? The first time we met?” William asks. “I said ‘Do you really think it’s a good idea to let me live?’ So, I want to know, now, from you. Was it a good idea to let me live?”

Stanford is quiet.

“As I said: I’m mortal here, technically, sort of. If you killed me, well, I think something might happen although I couldn’t die. I might just be stuck backstage longer than usual.” William surveys this meatsuit, his precious and atonic liaison to Stanford. “This doesn’t even look a thing like me. Do you remember what I look like? They always said we looked alike.” He pulls at his own cheek, feels sharp bone. “I’ve visited you in dreams. You might’ve confused me for yourself. Or for your father, yes, you’ve called me ‘dad’ before. Many a times.”

“I digress….” William’s back straightens, and he looks at Ford. “Do you regret it?”

Stanford answered.

“Ah…” William’s eyes glassed yellow. “Interesting.”

“Say you’re dreaming? Hunky-dory. Say you’re not? ‘Stop mind-raping me!’ A guy can’t win, I tell ya…”

William said—
William says— William is saying—
William will say–

II

Shipwright William Cipher hovers around Stanford who works at his desk by cool-toned lamplight in the hypnagogic vein of this forevermore midnight, their time between Time. William hovers over his Stanford, Stanford slouches over his work.

“Did you know the closest person to you is always called Stanley?” William says.

William Cipher looks into the cold light, his figure throwing strict shadows on the wall of a hard profile one might confuse for Filbrick Pines.

“Did you know the closest person to you is always me?”

II

Stanley 13:8

Bill Cipher is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Stanley 13:8

Hustle and bustle of the crowd pass by; natives shoving tourists and tourists cursing at natives. The dim light bouncing off skyscrapers casts shadows of cool taupe onto eyes which peek from between blinds to watch the people go by. The men, in particular, catch his eye. More than the women.
He watches the men go by.

►►

“Promiscuous nerd,” Bill Cipher coos, black hand lit blue, “you know what I want and I got what you need.”

►►

Stanford’s phone rings, Caller ID: Stanley.
Bill answers it for him and “GET OUT OF MY BODY GET OUT GET OUT—” bangs and booms out of the speaker. He throws the phone out the window and ignoring Ford’s protesting, plants a big wet one on his lover’s neck.

“Your brother won’t mind.” Bill Cipher laughs as Ford’s GPS says to take the next turn and drive into the lake.

Stanley’s phone rings, Caller ID: Bill Cipher.
He answers it, overwhelmed immediately with an inhuman screeching from the other side: “GET OUT MY BODY. GET OUT—"

“We? Who is this?”

Impatient and disinterested, he hangs up.

Disassociate enough and you might return to find your body already occupied, Stanley.

“How did you do it?” Stanford asks William, studying the other’s expression for things that will remain unsaid.

“I spent my lives convincing people to buy things they don’t need or want. That’s how,” William says then winks. “Took candy from a baby. A big fucking baby, lemme tell you…”

“Fucked up a job. Hauled up in an abandoned joint for days, laying low cause the cops are on the lookout. Starving. No money. No chance to make any.”

Andrew looks to the side, flicking his tongue upside his teeth then across gums that have tasted many winters. “Guy has some snow. Snow makes the hunger go away.”

He laughed, covering his mouth with a hand. “Why didn’t we just sell it and buy food?”

Why didn’t we? We were just kids.
Darling kisses him and he pulls away, pleading, “No—no, you can’t—I’m your brother.”

Darling laughs, presses his front teeth into his tongue as a joke, as a threat. “Come on, you’re not my real brother.”

“Remember when you drove Fiddleford to the ER because of a drug scare after a particularly rowdy night at a party you weren’t invited to?” William paces at the barrister bookshelf, which stands tall and antiqued in stature, extensive but exclusive in subjects, searching for a diamond in the wood. “You really have a thing for hapless, helpless addicts, don’t you? Junkies who need you to take care of them. That way,” he removed a book from the shelf, “you don’t feel like an unwanted freak. That way someone wants you, needs you and would die without you.”

“I don’t need to listen to this, you know,” Ford says, recalling the ascetic life he’s lived and how hedonists seemed the ideal counterpart, the ones he should be so heroically inclined as to rectify and realign onto the correct path of prudence. Though this may be his father talking through him for most would call it a cause too quixotic for reality. Those who live in excess, die in excess.

“Fiddleford dying without you must’ve validated some part of you, am I right? ‘Ha! That shows you! Without me, you’re nothing’?!” William returns the book and swaps it for another: larger and wounded. Its title worn away but Stanford recognizes its binding and stains; each book was marked with its own history visible only to his eye.

“Part of you is glad he’s dead. If he had learnt his lesson and stayed with you, this wouldn’t have happened. You like weak people, they make you feel strong.”

“Have you been waiting all this time to insult me?”

William holds the book up and Ford sees it’s now pristine. Its identity wiped, history erased.

“Finally got you a brother you want to keep around. A brother who would die without you. I’ve seen the evidence myself. I’ve seen the suicides first hand.” He finger-gunned his head, shooting with mouthy sound effects.

“Stanley needed you but not in the right way,” William says. “He was using you, it felt that way, yes? You don’t like being used, you like being needed and wanted.”

“Conjectures based off incomplete observations don’t interest me.”

“Then tell me what you’re thinking, what you’re feeling, what you want.” William puts the book on the table in front of Ford and he sees it’s one that does not belong to him; strappy binding and title unrecognizable—even to one as well-read as himself—and in a language he cannot read. “Tell me. I want to know.”

“You’re a vile human,” says William, smiling. “As expected of Bill Cipher’s brother.”

Δ>

“She white?” Andrew asks Jerry after hearing the latter had acquired a date for an upcoming school event, then unloads his foreign god’s dogma. “Getting a white girl is the American dream, Jer-bear. It’s why your parents came to this shithole of a gutter. So, you could fuck a white woman.” He stands up, wavering then waving it’s alright. “But when I lay a Chinese girl, that’s call assimilation.”

Evan’s stance changes but there’s more space to push so he keeps pushing. Jerry picks up the bobble-head on the table covered in a mystery red sap. “Where do you get that stuff from? And what is this?”
“You’re naïve, Jerry.” Andrew gurgles Vodka and spits it out in the kitchen’s basin. “Too pure for this world.” He points to the red. “Some chick creamed herself so hard, she bled.”

Jerry runs to the bathroom while Evan tells him he better clean it up. Yussur.

“You should take me to the dance,” Andrew says to a returning Jerry, wearing a smile and a wink.

“This isn’t prom.” Jerry replies, hands bathing in hand sanitizer. “It’s just a school dance.”

Andrew quiets, lamenting on his ignorance of normality, then returns to their initial topic. “So, you want me to help pick you a suit huh? Now lemme see…”

Public schools were as forbidden and shadowed as abandoned warehouses, save he could visit the latter and never the former. Disbarment extended to more than just public schools, he thought.

Δ>

Possession ain’t easy, you know.

You fought like Pine twins! Means I could get a leg in!

“You ever notice how you’re only happy with me if you’re exerting the proverbial iron fist upon me?” Stanley shakes his head at Stanford who shakes his nutritional shake for upcoming lunch.

Stanford stands outside while William smokes. Peaking afternoon sun layers the sky in radial gradients of tropical ice pop shades, melting and mixing into further flavours courtesy of the balmy air. Sunny today, stormy tomorrow. It’s begun to feel more like reminiscent of Florida weather: unpredictable and unwelcoming. Weather where the retired go for their final retirement.

“Told ya I’m still human,” says William through a deep inhale and exhale. “Always bought me the wrong brand when you went into town.” He choot choots out a chain of smoke in Stanford’s direction, his box printed Marlboro Gold. “Feels good to be tasting the good stuff.”

Silver blue Parliaments were a runner up (and the winner if his wallet is fat enough)

Another inhale—exhale out the nose.

(did you see the sun, Stanford? did you see it? it has three—)

A loud rumble has Stanford looking toward the east direction where he sees Jason riding in upon the gravel road: in Bill’s flashy car driving so very carefully as if the slightest bump would cause the car to fall apart. William lets out a loud whistle when he sees it.

(did you see it? tell me you see it too)

(please tell me)

“I ever tell you that time we met in Vegas? I’m sure you should be remembering that far ahead by now.”

(fuck you, las vegas)

Stanford says faintly. He might’ve met a bawdy youth at the blackjack table, a time in another place. But those memories serve no purpose to revisit and so he does not let his mind venture towards them. William hums, smoking coming out of his nose.

Birds chirrup on through the afternoon.
With his third eye he now sees the three-sides of the sun, its bladed points pierce the blue sheet and out from the punctures leak shades of soft and softer yellow which diffuse, smearing like runny butter across the sky. Always blue and yellow, Ford thought. One would swear no other colours could manifest in the heavens. Maybe none could.

(Yes, I can see it.)

William watches him, then says, “Bubble boy. You’re a tough one to get to, Stanford.”

Stanford is quiet, keeping his thoughts to himself and to his other half.

(You aren’t crazy.)

“I’m not a mind reader, though I like to hint I am,” William confesses. “I really wanna know what you’re thinking.”

Stanford hesitates, then speaks, “You said my favourite bubble gum would make a come-back. It never did.”

William laughs and in the little lines of joy on his sham countenance, his sorrow becomes discernible. “I said no such thing.” He looks to the teeming green scenery on his right where buried treasure lay forgotten, ensnared in deep green and cold black. He crushes something underfoot.

“You must be confusing me for someone else.”

William 3:20-21

“Why give light to those who are miserable and life to those who find it so bitter, to those who long for death but it never comes— though they dig for it more than for buried treasure?”

“I said no such thing.” He looks to the teeming green scenery on his right where buried treasure lay forgotten, ensnared in deep green and cold black. He crushes something underfoot.

“You must be confusing me for someone else.”

──

“It’s Lucy, man,” Jackson says, sticking his leg out further so more of his tattoo gets light. “You fuckers know Lucy?”

“In the sky with diamonds?” Andrew asks, he once overs the ink of a strange humanoid monkey decked in diamond ice. Its face flirty and its pose Vargasesque. “The Beatles song?”

“No, the Tarzan chick. Y’know the whole evolution shit that hit the books years back? First monkey to walk on two legs? So, my mate, very religious, goes off and calls it propaganda so I took it upon myself to get this sweet baby to piss him off.”

“How does permanently getting an ugly bitch monkey needled down sock it to anyone?” Andrew says, laughing between drags of nicotine. “People’ll think you wanna fuck apes.”

“Pretty sure that was fake,” Isaac adds, handing out beers and keeping two for himself. “Propaganda, bitch.”

Jackson scoffs cigarette ash from his king as he tears open the cheap beer. “You all a bunch of flat
earthers now?"

Humans evolved because they were afraid, Andrew imagines, afraid of being hurt. Like those monkeys who carve tools out of rocks to fend off nature’s monsters. Fear brought about stupidity and on the rare occasion, ingenuity.

In the projection room, William holds the film of memory and circles the tattoo in red ink.

Michael has Frankenstein inside his messenger bag, and its sub-heading on the second page ‘The Modern Prometheus’ is textualized in dead-blue. Adam knows of Prometheus but begs his lover to explain the myth anyway and in his mind, re-imagines Prometheus as a mortal who sought the fire of immortality and upon gaining it, was doomed to eternal torment engendered by it.

Nebulous light caught and transformed Bill’s hair to wild metallic brown at the sofa where he sat, his back toward the source shining from through a dirty window, one of many unclean surfaces, as he paged through a car magazine that once belonged to F. At his desk, Ford scrutinized photos he’d taken of Bill’s tattoos weeks prior, compartmentalizing information he had of Bill’s family to seek patterns and discrepancies. Discernption of Bill’s family and past had been an extensive process. Bill hid information; minor details or bigger ones that changed the outcome of a theory entirely. This metaphorical Hide and seek had begun to exhaust him but the thrill of mystery energized him.

“Your family comes from Italy. Your grandfather wouldn’t have had these in the war. He was tattooed afterwards,” Ford said, looking over to Bill. “So, your grandfather was the original Gaspard?”

“Huh?” Bill looked up from the motor magazine. “Can’t be.”

“Seems likely to me. Your family came to America two generations ago,” Ford said. “It’s likely the story you were fed was meant to ease you into your family’s business. By claiming it’s been happening for generations.”

“The name doesn’t go generation to generation, sometimes it’s just person to person.”

“Who was before your grandfather?”

“Dunno.”

“So, your grandfather indeed could’ve been the original?”

“No, my grandfather and his twin brother were successors.” Bill frowned. “What’s with you?”

“I don’t believe that.” Ford came over and took hold of Bill’s bare arm, flipping it over on display. “What possesses a man to do this to himself and then demand it of his entire family?” He held Bill’s limb as if it were a dying animal he’d shot in a fit of fear, as though he were the one responsible for this death of innocence.
“You know the answer to that already.” Bill pulled out of Ford’s hold, protesting the pushiness with a scowl and a swat against Ford’s head with the rolled magazine.

“Who’s surprised Gravity Falls isn’t that far from here. Not far from where I was born.” Bill straightened his magazine. “The closer I’m born to Gravity Falls, the more likely I am to be Bill Cipher, maybe.”

Ford watched Bill’s face and all its dynamic bits.

Aware of his audience, Bill put his best lip forward. “My grandmother was a man good at making deals,” he said. “As am I.”

Ford laughed, thinking back to their first night together and all that followed. “I recall you giving me terrible deals.”

“Maybe you weren’t dealing with me.”

Bill looked up from the magazine, then flipped it to face Ford. He pointed at a pale blue car. “What about this car? I love the blue. It reminds me of you. It’s my favourite colour.”

“Isn’t yellow your favourite colour? And green?”

Bill gave a scrunched smile, the expression lines resembled holes made in dough with a blunt cylinder object.

“A light blue 1950 Cadillac, pine tree dangling from the rear-view mirror…coffee stains on the seat that don’t come out. Secret stash of cash in under the seat for emergencies…the first car you ever bought me…”

Ford turned and went to his bookshelf.

“You love blue, don’t you?” Darling said from behind him. “The colour of Fiddleford’s eyes.”

Stanford turned around to look at the abstraction of—

...You?

In Stanford’s mindscape, he sits at the terminal chatting to Stanley Pines whose username changes with each message sent and received.

“Things were different when we were young.” Stanley palms a coin, makes it disappear by a sleight of hand. He pretends the coin is in his right hand, then reveals it’s in his left. “Didn’t have to jump through hoops to make you happy.”

“People change, Stanley,” Stanford says as he ruminates the technique behind the act, recalling times as a child when his phlegmatic father would jarringly perform similar tricks; but only when the mood suited him, and business had been prolific that month. He is aware now of another him who loved those tricks and his then-brother, after extensive practice in secret, would perform them for him to raise his morale during dark days.

“Or maybe I’m the one meant to make you happy,” Stanford voices his first thought as Stanley buries his face in those tattooed hands that conceal and distort his brother across various Times.

“Show me how you do that,” Ford said, kneeling with a gentle smile. “I’ve always wanted to know.” Stanley reveals his face reluctantly. “Yeah?”
Stanford takes an inked hand. “Yes.”

You’re awake, you’re awake.
You’re dreaming, dreaming.
You’re wide awake, dreaming.

Session 9

“I thought I’d be happy if I could just get out of here. Out of this place, out of this dimension, out of this house, out of this town, out of this state, out of this country, out of this continent…” Williams voice travels up the beams of sunlight that shine, structured and almost palatable, like prison bars, in the room. “Maybe I’m asking for too much.”

At the centre of this Matryoshka doll of identities and reincarnations lay whoever, or whatever, had taken the name Bill Cipher aeons ago. A time before time had established itself and God had yet to appoint the famed light. But try as he might, William, who claims to be human, cannot recall more than crumbs as no human brain could harbour such a surplus of memory.

“Anyway,” William looks at Ford, “apocalypse, times of crises, are meant to bring people together. I thought it would work and we’d stay together. We’d have to stay together, for survival.”

“Stanley desire, Bill Cipher method,” Stanford says.

William laughs. “Exactly.” He goes quiet, fiddling with his ring finger.
“I say the light takes me but I’m the one who goes to it.”

He leans towards Stanford, over the little Ikea table, through the light’s bars. “But I don’t need the past to navigate the present, I don’t need the flaming embers of my pyre if I have you beside me, golden boy.”

2 Stanley 22:29

You, brother, are my lamp. You turn the darkness into your light.

“I saw what happened to your brother and I dreaded that. And I’d be doing myself, my other self, a favour, too. We’d both win,” William said. “Anyhow, I never saw you again, golden boy.”

William strikes a metal lock, bits of light sparking off the six fingers which were embellished as its crest.

“You wanna be a hero because you know you’re a fucker who doesn’t give a shit about his family. Overcompensation.”

You know you let me down.
“So, question. Humour me. Are you a dark white guy or a light black guy?” Andrew asks Jason Carter and promptly gets told to fuck off.

Nice to meet you, Jason.

Jason’s name makes the hole quiver quite queerly.

Thanks to me, no one would’ve ever clocked you as a queer.

Orange is the ugliest colour.

Stanley Pines clutches his 8ball cane closer to him.

Andrew’s holds Jason’s hand tightly and loosens his grasp on Charlie.

Are you a coal-burner now? The ghost of orange light teases, are you? Are you? Are you?

ARE YOU?

The dense forest north of Ford’s house, a chunky green hairball at a glance from a distance, appears to light up from within by the coming sun and everything surrounding it follows, sparking up piece by piece like a city regaining power; leaves shimmer with sunlit dew and branches slop-wet stretch to dry. But then all is compressed, and it’s as if the world is suddenly flat in both mind and actuality, a vision from a vintage picture book; saturated in stale yellows and pinks, the shading lifeless and the lines ruinous. Pages flip by, colours change, characters switch.

As the world comes to life, Stanford is illuminated by pastels in pink, then orange, then blue, like a giant projector showcasing colour transitions upon a small Stanford Screen.

“Whatever madness comes will be distinctly human,” William says, sitting on a tree stump across Ford, a bottle filled with luminescent liquid in hand. “Sobriety is different to sanity.” He takes a sip. “I sound like you. You like mystery so I’ve packaged everything up.”

He sticks his tongue out. “Unwrap anytime, Sixer.”

Moments pass as Ford regards William in a vein of careful eye, then asks, “Are you drinking mouthwash?”

“Yes. Well, I’m not the one drinking it.” William looks to his right, towards the forest wonderland. “Withdrawal is one hell of a state. A little bit of this every so often can make the time a little more bearable.”

“Alcohol in the mouthwash…”

“Bingo.” William takes another sip.

“You were supposed to embrace me in a crib built for two,” William says. “I have felt this loss and this one in particular,” he gestures to his body, “has felt it more so.” His lips aslant and again, he looks away to the right but this time at nothing exact as the chirruping
loudens with an arrival of a new family of birdies upon the tree nearest.

William sips the bottle again.

“Stop drinking that, for god’s sake!” Ford yells and momentarily seems to invoke his father’s severe intolerance. Promptly as the effects of lightning reversed, the forest’s wonderlights cut to null; returning the verdure to darkness once more. Trees surrounding them were now bare too, the harsh sound having stabbed the air, bleeding out all nearby life. William looks at Ford, seemingly both dumbstruck and nonchalant.

“I told you! I’m not the one drinking it,” he protests.

- “Hey...have you seen my mouthwash? There’s only this weird vegan brand,” Bill asked Stanford, holding up a bottle of the brand in question.

“Yes, I replaced it with a better one,” Stanford said.

“Really? This one doesn’t have any alcohol in it and that’s what kills the germs, right?”

“Yes, but this formula substitutes alcohol with another chemical that’s proven to be far more effective and less abrasive.”

“Huh...” Bill wondered back to the bathroom, none the wiser.

IX

Cheek against the mirror and best eye pressed into the triangle scribbled into the trickling condensation, Stanford peeps in and through, where he sees a vision of Stanley eating Domino’s pizza alone in Manhattan.

Done styling his freshly-bleached hair, Stanley leans close to the mirror, eye into the lipstick-drawn triangle where he sees Stanford writing into his journal.

IX

◄◄◄

“Y’know back in the day, humans did psychedelics, drugs of all kinds, to communicate with gods, spirits, monsters,” Cas says, lining up the snow, ready to blow. “There’s a god in me, man. I’ll introduce you.”

I think I’m beginning to see the light, baby!

To say I was possessed by an entity other than myself is fake, false and incorrect. I’ve only ever been myself.

◄◄◄

The purer the cocaine, the more I am.
Making love, he feels nothing.

Bill Cipher, calling himself Andrew Alcatraz, smokes at a booth while watching Mason Pines dance.

Gaspard Giordano, calling himself Bill Cipher, watches Stanford in the bookshop while smoking at a street corner.

William pages through Stanford’s sketchbook, minding the explicit nature of the occasional doodle.

“Like a southerner said, quote: ain’t that interdimensional incest?”

Check with your local pastor, boys and girls.

“Exposing mammory glads is considered obscene in this day and age!” Bill Cipher pointed the striped baseball bat at eternally modest Mother Mary. “So, let’s see them tiddies!”

His girls, his troupe of maenads, cheer, flailing themselves across the black pews like wilting flowers, with their droopy limbs angled in stiff intoxication. Drunk and drugged is how he loved his women. He loved the ladies. Stanley, not so much.

“You’re a cool girl, right?” He put his arm around Mary’s neck. “She’s cool, everyone.”

On the ptosis scale, she’s Americas next Kate Upton.

Donation box emptied. Priest out cold. A damn shame this church had no nuns. If there ever was a dream woman for him, it was one who dedicated herself entirely to her god.

While one of his girls undresses the priest, storing his clothes in a tog bag for later church roleplay, he spray-paints two perfect O’s upon the statue’s perfect cups. Virgin Mary gone wild.

“Here’s your beads, sweeting.” He kisses the statue’s cheek, making it wet and ardent.

Bill looks down at the priest all ready for his birthday party. Either he’s a grower or it’s cold in here.

“So, which one of you girls have wanted to fuck a priest?”

No camcorder might be his one mistake this night.

As they fawn over the priest, cruelly like high school mean girls taunting the bucktooth nerd about his microdick after they’ve pantsed him, Bill wonders if the guy’s a virgin. If not, the fun is already over.

“Ladies!” He takes out the ziplock bag from his blazer, holds it up and lets it unroll in the air. “Have you heard of the Cult of Bill Cipher?”

He waves the bag of white light, powdered and compressed for mass consumption.

Come into the light, baby. Let me in.
Schematics on various sorts of paper lay across and below Ford’s desk, like patients in surgery awaiting the decisive doctor’s scalpel. Stanford’s eyes glaze over them, looking but not seeing, his mind elsewhere. William stands next to him, his lower back against the desk as he loudly chews gum—its previous form a round, white ball.

“Murderer,” Ford says, soft enough to breathe and hard enough to inspire confrontation.

“What was that?” William blows a bubble until it pops. “A little louder, Fordsy.”

“You heard me.”

William shrugs, smug and dispassionate. “Poor F.”

“Not Fiddleford,” Ford says and after consideration on this mystery victim, William shrieks with laughter.

“Murderer!” The laughter loudens, spit sprinkling with each spasm. “That’s a whopper of a word!”

“You’re still the same Bill you’ve always been. Deceitful, twisted and jealous.”

“We both know that’s a lie. I’ve seen the face of murder,” William spits his gum, saturated with saliva, out onto Ford’s papers, “and it’s called Stanley Pines.”

“You already died, Bill. You were dead.”

“Ah, but the show goes on!” William grins. “Your brother, the perfect understudy!” His grin shrinks. “I’m not Bill.”

“Eventually, you’re going to have to stop hating yourself.”

“You hate Stanley, too, you know.”

“I don’t hate my brother. We simply had our differences, and upon further introspection, I’ve come to realize what I hated about him was nothing more than your shadows on the cave wall.”

“English.”

“I hate you, Bill. You.”

William chews air.

“My brother was a good man,” Ford packs up his mathematical tools into a rectangular tin, labelled appropriately, “who did his best.”

“My brother didn’t call himself by your name, you simply never changed.”

“Hm.” William observes the unconscious language of Stanford’s body. “Maybe so! Maybe so!”

“My brother isn’t here,” Stanford says. “Everything that he is, is nothing to what you are.”

“First time you’ve considered me Bill.”

“I see the real you more and more.”

“Is Stanley your imaginary friend?” William taunts.

“He may as well be,” Stanford says. “And we outgrow our imaginary friends.”
“Then why are you always crying for him in ways only I can hear?”

Stanford feigned deafness and cleaned up William’s mess.

“If you loved him so much, you wouldn’t have thrown him away!” William reminds. “Your home was filled with photos of me, not your deadbeat brother. When are you gonna admit who you really want?”

Stanford left without answer.

“Why blame the sun for Icarus flying too close to it?” William asks Stanford who had retreated to his desk once the coast became clear and was now giving his calculations another once-over, no heart in the revision and now just another chore.

“I don’t recall the sun manipulating and deceiving Icarus into flying towards it,” Ford replies, not directing his full attention to one who so desperately craves it.

“But it didn’t. It just was, as I just am. I did nothing outside my realm of normalcy!” William taps the desk, agitated and igniting. “Why are you so obsessed with your meathead brother! The Stanford I knew never gave a shit!”

“Because he had you, didn’t he?”

“Gah!” William storms off into the next room, huffing a string of strong language. Stanford notes how different this William is to the one he remembers from his childhood and dreams. There is a solvable mystery in the change, he decides.

William, the supposed non-mind reader pops back in. “Oh yeah, you oughta ask dearest mumsy about all your spooky activity. Talking to your shadow like it’s alive. Naming it.”

“If you missed me,” William says, fading in voice and presence, “you shouldn’t have thrown me away.”

“Stanley Pines is but an abstraction.” William says. “See, the thing with ideas, thoughts, is that they never cease to be present in every universe and every reality.”

On the floor, Stanford counts his eightieth crunch, his brow dampening progressively as his set comes to its first end.

“Should you have not been born, your would-be mother might’ve still had a thought that if she had a son with Filbrick Pines, she’d name him Stanford. Thus, you would still be here, but as an idea.” A blue towel in hand, William pats away Stanford’s body dew with the utmost care.

Stanford stops, lays down and closes his eyes as the sun rises, its rays pouring slowly into the room like soft water to bath him in preparation for the new day.

William closes the curtains, and they are in the dark once more.

“I never said reification was impossible.” He whispers beneath shadows, barely heard by Stanford over the loud songs of freedom sung by wild birds.

- 

Another place, another time. But it’s not this place, and it’s not this Time.
“Oh, the irony of it all!” Bill slammed his hand down. “Your break our deal—twice!” He raised both hands with a feigned innocent shrug. “And somehow I’m the one who’s the big bad villain in this flick.”

“You lied to me!” Stanford screamed, frustrated and fulminating.


“Don’t you dare conflate those actions as a form of justification.” Stanford’s voice thickened, each word hitting the air like the din of stiff wood being chopped. “Don’t you dare, not in my house.”

“God, you sound like dad! ‘Not in my house’. Well fuck I’ll do it on your damn doorstep!” Bill raged towards the door, Stanford following, his thunder matching Bill’s wildfire.

“For God’s sake, you’re so childish! Absolutely insufferable!”

Bill stood on the welcome mat and yelled ‘fuck you’ repeatedly from the open doorway until Stanford slammed it in his face.

They both stood propped against the door, separated by polished wood and a stale family feud, listening to the other’s breath for signs of absolution.

Love’s hand in his own, Stanford opens the door, coming face to face with Bill and seeing eye to eye with Stanley.

“Beauty of Venus and morals of Babylon.” Stanford jokes as he cups Bill’s face with a clean hand.

Jerry’s blood on his knuckles, whites of his eyes spiderwebbed red, with pupils like threatened mama spiders that follow Evan’s every movement.

He watched Evan tend to Jerry who lay on the floor in his best impression of ‘corpse #1’.

“You keep coddling him like that,” Bill spat, “and he’ll wind up being someone’s bitch.”

Bill Cipher ticks and tocks.

“You latched onto me because while I had a passion, you had none,” Stanford said. “You were content wasting your life away, never contributing anything to the greater good, never accomplishing more than perhaps dressing yourself.” He looked at William. “But even that I’d have to have done for you, you were so incompetent.”

William listens, eyes wide and unblinking.

“There are times I think I should’ve helped you find your passion,” Stanford said, regret sweetening his bitter voice. “But why is that my responsibility? Your co-dependency is your problem. Don’t make your problem my problem.”
“All I’m saying is you could’ve said something to dad when he kicked me out.”

“Why should I have? And jeopardized my life, too? For what?”

“Dad never would’ve kicked you out, you were his cash cow. No one throws their fat piggybank out.”

“It’s always about money to you!” Stanford yelled. “Always money! You aren’t going to find purpose in money and you aren’t going to find purpose in me!” He rose, face beet-red and heart beating redder. “Grow up, Stanley!”

For the love-of-money is the root of all evils and through this craving, you were led astray and have pierced yourself with many sorrows.

Casper reaches to Stanford’s prominent nose and pulls a coin seemingly out of thin air. He offers it, gold and untarnished, to Ford with a complementing smile. “For the Ferryman. You know, when I kill you.”

Stanford accepts it and decides to humour the impossible notion. “Two coins is the fare, actually.” To which Casper produces another gold one, significantly less clean than its predecessor.

“Put your shroud on and come with me,” Casper says with a silly grin. “Easy way out, easy way to end it. Fiddleford’s waiting.” “I’ve done it plenty of times before.” He puts a two-finger barrelled finger-gun to his temple. “Sometimes I have someone else do it. Dying’s no big deal.”

“Without you, I am very sad,” William says.

“You’re usually more eloquent than that,” Stanford says, his eyes pause mid-sentence in the book he reads.

“I am, but simple words work best to communicate pain. What I feel is very simple pain. Because pain itself is simple. I’m sad because you’re not with me.”

“Casper’s pain isn’t simple.”

“Oh, but it is.” William peaks over his shoulder, hands kneaded in the couch lip. “You’re not here.”

Being away from you does a number on me, Stanford. A big number. I don’t know if you’ve noticed. Or care.

“Oh, you have those…and yet you never managed to make it work,” William says as he inspects the schematic of Fiddleford’s proposed memory gun found hidden in Stanford’s safe. “If you did, I think…we could’ve lived happily ever after. All you’d have to do was zap Bill Cipher right out of me, like you always do and we’ll live happily ever after.”

But how will the dark take shape if there is no light?
“After you closed those curtains, you were crying and the reason, that’s all I ever wanted to know. The reason. Losing me? Or your scholarship?”

Statured in ice, Stanford sits, blue and silent.

William lays his cheek on the kitchen top. “I’m not a mind-reader, chief, help me out here...”

“I thought I wasn’t ready to change. But when I met you, I realize I was ready to change, and I that could and that, in fact, I had been changed.” William hunches his neck down and pulls his shoulders up, shivering in the morning sun. “I had changed in ways imperceptible to me and perceptible to only you.”

Stanford hands him the flask-cup with hot coffee, sweetened to his liking.

“Perceptible to you because you call me Stanley and always do. You always see that part of me, when no one ever does.” He takes the cup and reaches the other hand to Stanford. “But I know, too, that I had changed and to admit that is to admit change is possible.” I’m not afraid to go into the light, if you come with me.

I’m not afraid to return to New York, if you come with me.

- 

If I admit I changed then I admit change is possible and there’s no reason not to try.

►►

Dipper stands, staggers with the weight of hard water, his face concealed behind drapes of soggy hair. Across the body of dark water, Bill Cipher rises, wetness on his face catching light like sharpened blades, and slicks his hair back.

“What? No more fight in you? Did I fuck the man out of you? Mason? How about Mary?” He laughs, the moon backing his cruelty.

Yes, I do want to see Mother Mary’s tits.

Dipper wobbles but so does Bill.

Today, Bill Cipher is only human.

Dipper kneels feigning abdominal pain and from the wet shadows, clasps a rock. An offering to the new god, his new god, a god of his own making.

Dipper rises, steadies himself, parting his hair to look at Bill. “I like that look in your eyes kid,” calls Bill out. “You’re going places.”

The burnt god stands opposite the burning god.

Come to me, Dipper. Come to me, golden with the firelight.

Dipper steps forward, the light in him.

►►
“I’ll never let go of you.” Dark Darling end games. “So, I suggest you and Stanley learn to get along.”

“We were just kids, Stanford. Barely adults.”

Global warming has done a number on this plane and now seems to be doing a number on Stanford, who shows signs of melting and mourning, cracking through and caving in. Unnatural heat collapsing all ice and cold. There is nothing natural about him, he is a force of unnatural. Even old grudges will deliquesce, should their owner fall.

“We should’ve just left together. Gotten us a place together. You go to your fancy school, I do my thing,” William says.

“We can’t spend our lives joined at the hip.” Stanford refuses to meet his eyes, the imagined lie detector test between them zig-zags, spazzing with rebuke.

William laughed. “Now tell me how you really feel.”

Easy and steady wins the race, and gelato was best eaten only just a tad runnier and warmer than what the yanks served. Either way, ice burns one all the same as the fire.

“Like I’m wearing 3D glasses but ain’t nothing in 3D so my head just hurts all the damn time…” William mutters, pulling at his hair. “That damn fruit, like that damn fruit you like…with all the red seeds…so many…all different…all the same…” Strands rip out. “Faded lines, unconnected dots…” He wipes away the blood at his left eye.

“Anyway.” He smiles. “What was I saying?”

“I always dream I’m talking to you, in the dark, like we did when we were kids.”

“And we had to be quiet or dad would hear us,” Stanford says, he feels the other lay their head at his chest, wiggling between sheets to get comfortable.

“Happy endings never seem to occur but I’m the one who refuses to screen the reel,” William says. “Yep. There ain’t no happy endings here, roll those blues.” He looks at Stanford, through the dark. “But I’m the one too scared to play the part, too scared to cause I gotta know, I just gotta know, from my biggest critic dishing bad reviews since before I debuted—do I deserve that part?” He looks away again. “Do I deserve to be happy? You have to tell me I do.”

Quiet in the dark.

“Do I?” William asks again.

“Ask me again.”

Stanley does and Stanford answers in all his honesty.

-
“I forgave my brother and with time, I’ll forgive you, too.”

Who are you talking to?

“I’m talking to you.”

...

IX

Stanford looks into a triangle the same time Stanley does.

IX

   Who, me?
   Yes, you.


“Hm?” The edges of William’s mouth curve upwards, causing grotesque and unnatural lines in his skin, as though strings were being twisted and tugged beneath the flesh to allow diverse animation.

“I know.”

William laughs his name away. “Got you.”

“I got urges, bad habits and memories that don’t belong to me.” He looks pained and confused, his hands entwined tight to cover their prying eyes. “Sometimes all I can do is go with them.” He studied Ford a few moments. “You called me William a few times, when you were younger. It fits better than my old name, anyway.”

He stopped, pondering with scattering eyes as intrusive thoughts sojourned, then his shoulders slumped as he crumpled into himself, his stature shrinking through past belabour. “You’d agree, you called me Bill so there’s that.”

“I was blind.”

“You always are, four-eyes. All them eyes and no vision,” Stanley says. “Do you miss me as much as I miss you?”

Stanford takes Stanley’s hand, and with six fingers he covers the peepshow hole blacking its centre. “More than you’ll ever know and understand.” He cradles the hand in all twelve fingers. “You were always the hero I wanted to be.”

The hands are cold—for they are conductors, he thinks. God’s lightning is coming to end this black-out darkening his skin. But first he must first follow Edison into the rain and night, and he must, without hesitation and with the utmost trust in his father, hoist up his rod and brace for the strike of fever, to sweat out the congenital curse and allow the damp to heal festered burns.

“If only I was half the man you are,” Stanford says and despite all accounts, darling, means these words. What had been heard through the grapevine had been seasoned with flavours likened to the maddening wine so persistently consumed through great Greek tragedies of old. Now filtered and
stripped to its bareness, sobriety requites itself with brute benevolence. And what he once lost to drunken enmity has now been returned.

“That you are! We’re two halves of a big dopey whole.” Stanley puts his other hand atop Ford’s hug pile.

“I wonder…if my younger self…was so desperate to have something, anything in common with others, that I began to look at you the way everyone else did. As some burden, the lesser version of myself…” Stanford wonders. “Have I treated you the way others have treated me?”

“Nah, everyone’s got their dents and scratches,” Stanley says. “So now we can keep going in circles or we can bury this dead bull we’ve been kicking forever and move on already.” He shrugs. “Unless you wanna host your sob slumber party until thy kingdom come.”

“What do you propose?”

Stanley tilts his head, sun shining in his eyes.

“Come out of your bubble when I call for you,” Stanley says. “You gotta, you never come out. No matter what I do, you never come out. When you’re happy, you always forget about me.”

“If I don’t come, then I give you permission to come fetch me!” Stanford laughs and smiles because life is beautiful, and love is all but extinct. Love is: whether on its head or its side.

As Stanford’s words leave him, Stanley snags his hand, blue flame globed around their clasp. Eyes alive with yellow of smothered firelight, he grins. “It’s a deal.”

He blows out the blue flame. Happy Birthday!

“Come out when I call you out,” Stanley says.

Stanford pulled the hand closer, caressing the inked skin. “When are you returning from New York?”

“Never. Come back here? No one cares about me.”


“Wait the rest of your life then.”

“I’ve done it before.”

Stanley thinks about it. New York City was colder than his beseeching blood. Summer is in these twelve fingers, he thinks as he holds his brother’s hands. A southern summer, side-dished with hot hot loving. No more crying. Textured greens and runny yellows and happy blues. Why not? Go now, go fast.

Stanley 6:1

Come, let me return to my brother, for though he has torn me, he will heal me; and though he has wounded me, he will bandage me.

Stanford 44:22

"I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud. And your sins like a heavy mist."
Return to Me, for I have redeemed you."

“Return to me,” declares your brother, "so that I may return to you."

“I’m on my way,” Stanley says.

IX

Stanford waits at the bus-stop for Stanley to return from New York City.

IX

Your Zion has not forgotten you.
Its gates, its arms, are open to you.

Now,
go to him.

They are not long, the days of wine and roses:
Out of a misty dream
Our path emerges for a while, then closes
Within a dream.

- Ernest Dowson

Chapter End Notes

You were an Italian in America suffering an identity crisis.

Works inspired by this one: The Ninth Prototype by yoursatanboyfriend

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